

2011

"This Rough Magic:" Imagination, Resurrection, and the Dream World Crisis in Shakespearean Tragedy

Rachel A. Selvin
Claremont McKenna College

Recommended Citation

Selvin, Rachel A., ""This Rough Magic:" Imagination, Resurrection, and the Dream World Crisis in Shakespearean Tragedy" (2011).
CMC Senior Theses. Paper 169.
http://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmc_theses/169

This Open Access Senior Thesis is brought to you by Scholarship@Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in this collection by an authorized administrator. For more information, please contact scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu.

CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE

**“THIS ROUGH MAGIC:” IMAGINATION, RESURRECTION, AND THE DREAM
WORLD CRISIS IN SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY**

SUBMITTED TO

PROFESSOR SETH LOBIS

AND

DEAN GREGORY HESS

BY

RACHEL A. SELVIN

FOR

SENIOR THESIS

FALL 2010/SPRING 2011

APRIL 25th, 2011

Table of Contents:

Introduction.....	4
King Lear and the Mask of the Imagination.....	18
Othello and Perdition's Music.....	76
Bibliography.....	141

Introduction

The worlds of Shakespearean tragedy and romance echo and challenge one another. While *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest* explore oneiric universes in which the imagination reveals and undeceives, *King Lear* and *Othello* employ fantasy to obscure, to disorient, and to evade. Reality is enhanced, uncovered, through the imagination in romance. Guided by illusion, romance's characters rise from the darkness of paranoia and vindictive revenge to embrace frailty, their inherent imperfections. The world of the imagination enlightens the characters of Shakespeare's last plays, teaching Prospero, Leontes, Posthumus, and inscrutable Cymbeline to welcome their forgotten senses of mortality and human limitation. Romance, Shakespeare urges, remains a space of imaginative spiritual rebirth—a world in which fantasy exposes life's inexorable truths, persuading characters to embrace change, deterioration, and death. Resurrections in romance spring from this newfound acceptance of weakness and transience. Disillusioned, romance's patriarchs witness their children or wives revive from death to herald their own spiritual awakenings; resurrection becomes metaphysical, announcing the play's undeceived celebration of reality—its cruelty and its impermanence.

Understanding the cataclysms of tragedy requires this insight into romance's use of the imagination. Instead of revealing and reviving, disabusing and illuminating, fantasy in tragedy serves only to obscure and to insulate. For *King Lear*, Gloucester, *Othello*, and Desdemona, the imagination hides the painful complexities of the real. It suspends characters in illusory worlds that shield them from the deadening vision of insurmountable impermanence, tarnished love, and sexual jealousy. These imaginative spaces—or dream worlds—mask the irrepressible tide of time and history that romance strives to expose. For Shakespeare, the true horror of tragedy derives from its refusal to gaze, unblinkingly, upon the tremendous fragility of the human

experience, unwilling to surrender to decay, transience, and mortality. Tragedy's dream worlds occlude the real. They entice characters to rest in the detached delusions of immortality or perfected love, and, therefore, they cannot conjure resurrection.

In his *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, Harold Goddard reads tragedy as romance. Captivated by the possibility of Lear and Othello's spiritual awakening or disillusionment, Goddard finds metaphysical resurrection where only death prevails. Tragedy, he contends, produces epiphany; it becomes romance masked, pervaded by hidden moments of transcendence and humbled realization that draw characters to celestial wisdom. Regarding both *King Lear* and *Othello* as narratives of triumphant rebirth, Goddard transfigures the dooming blindness of the tragic universe into a world of redemption. Lear, he promises, passes from obsession with the impossible specter of immortality to humbled acceptance of man's impermanence through his agonizing communion with Cordelia's death. The play's sublime harbinger of renewed spiritual awareness, Cordelia's demise becomes for Goddard a symbol of affirmed divinity. After his final, anguished cry, Lear glides with his daughter towards heaven, overcoming the cruel indifference of the play's distinctly godless landscape. The imagination in Goddard's vision of *King Lear* transcends reality and fosters resurrection. It at once obscures truth—the apocalyptic revelation of Cordelia's murder—and initiates spiritual rebirth. Yet, as romance asserts, awakening requires the unfaltering discovery of death's inexorability, its finality—an acknowledgement of mortal limitation that Lear abandons after the storm, and that Goddard wrongly imposes upon the King of the play's final act. In *King Lear*, the imagination serves only to shield the desperate monarch from the image of terrifying mortality. It hides reality, and, because it refuses to embrace death's truth, its resurrections remain painfully false, unrealized.

Indeed, *The Meaning of Shakespeare* argues that *Othello* likewise incarnates a tragic universe in which deceived characters achieve resurrection. Searching for instances of rebirth, he twists the chronology of the play back upon itself, imploring readers to regard the storm scene of the second act as Shakespeare's final judgment on Othello's power to rise, vindicated, from Iago's tempest and to embrace Desdemona and her sublime imaginative love. The radiant couple is reborn for Goddard outside the temporal borders of the play. Like Lear and Cordelia, who, he contends, were embraced by their universe's nonexistent gods only after death, Othello and Desdemona escape from Iago's nightmare into the world of transcendence, rebirth, and renewed devotion. Yet, again, Goddard finds invigorated spiritual understanding where only blindness exists. Desdemona, clinging to the beautiful idealism of her unearthly love for Othello, dies unable to contend with her husband's obvious captivation with sexual jealousy and insecurity. Her resurrection speaks more to her utter acquiescence to imaginative occlusion than to epiphany or transformation, as she perishes within the boundaries of a dream world defined by love's obscuring, though wondrous, irreality. Othello's death too symbolizes the triumph of Iago's distorting nightmare. While Goddard longs to lift the lovers above the perversion of Cyprus, Shakespeare proves that Hell has saturated the tragic cosmos. Imaginative energy at its most demonic completely dominates the real, and Othello dies, unenlightened, in surrender to nightmare.

Unlike tragedy, romance's use of the imagination nurtures disillusionment, as Shakespeare undermines and ultimately overthrows extremes that seek to deny the real—radical perspectives that assay to obscure life's harmonious suspension between the poles of beauty and sin, love and cruelty. Shakespeare dismantles blinded idealism in *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*; he deconstructs it, moving romance into an imaginative space that encounters the

contradictory tangles of reality with renewed understanding of man's limitations, his delicacy and his inescapable tendency for failure and flaw. Romance implores its characters to experience the redemptive sting of their mistakes, and fantasy crashes into the real to usher Prospero and Leontes towards painful self-knowledge.

There is something tragically beautiful about Prospero's abjuration of his magic. Poised on the precipice of cruel revenge, the aging magician instead casts aside the fantastical instruments of his art, ready at last to commune with the inexorable truth of mortality, fallibility, and frailty. Guided by his sagacious spirit, Ariel, Prospero recognizes his own potential for savagery in his usurping brother and Milanese King. Humanity, he concedes, rests somewhere in the balance between sprightly Ariels and abused, execrated Calibans. It encompasses both a tendency for sadistic vindictiveness and a hope for transcendence, both an appetite for brutality and a longing for forgiveness. Prospero touches reality through his abandonment of magic, his acceptance of Ariel's counsel. He sees himself as he truly is—approaching an inescapable end, withering into the relentless folds of history. Drawn to epiphany by Ariel's enlightening music, Prospero embraces the imagination as a guide to self-discovery; the illusion of unyielding power or authority melts away, and Shakespeare's last sorcerer steps, resignedly, towards death. "...Go, release them, Ariel./ My charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore,/ And they shall be themselves" (*Temp.*, V.i.30-32), Prospero commands, catching in Alonso and Sebastian a shared imperfection that conjures resurrection from its undeceived acknowledgement of mortal limitation, weakness, and waning generational influence. Ferdinand reunites with his humbled father, and Prospero is reborn, moving from his dream island back into the current of reality with newfound wisdom. Characters "be[come] themselves." They are awoken—they welcome life's terrible complexity, its cycles of decay and renewal.

Fantasy reveals, Shakespeare promises in romance; it functions as a mirror for the consciousness, confronting characters with the insurmountable truth of their own imperfection, mortality, and demise. Romance fosters no space for spiritual blindness, as both Leontes and Prospero learn to abandon their enthralling dreams of boundless authority or despotic control to the pull of time, to the haunting specter human weakness. Paulina's staging of Hermione's resurrection in *The Winter's Tale* exemplifies romance's power to harvest penitence and forgiveness from fantasy. Gazing at what he believes to be a statue of his (apparently) unjustly slain wife, Leontes cries:

As now she might have done,
 So much to my good comfort, as it is
 Now piercing to my soul. O, thus she stood,
 Even with such life of majesty—warm life,
 As now it coldly stands—when I first wooed her!
 I am ashamed. Does not the stone rebuke me
 For being more stone than it? O royal piece,
 There's magic in thy majesty, which has
 My evils conjured to remembrance and
 From thy admiring daughter took the spirits,
 Standing like stone with thee (*Winter's Tale*, V.iii.33-42).

The magic of the imagination shows Leontes the crushing scope of his misdeeds; it forces him to commune with the dooming inconstancies of his spirit, the misguided presumptions of his soul. Through this statue, Hermione will literally be resurrected, and yet it is Leontes who is truly reborn. At last, he encounters the complete horror of his brutal banishment of Perdita, experiencing art as a medium through which he might explore the undeceiving truths of history. Guided by fantasy, Leontes peers into the disillusioning depths of the real, as Hermione revives from her statuesque rigidity in the play's final, epiphanic gesture to learned humility. The imagination in romance pierces delusion. Transfiguring fantasy into a tool for disillusionment, Paulina and her magic destroy Leontes's captivation with his own chimerical and chaotic experiments in imaginative invention. His yearning to return back to his paradisaical past and his

obsession with Hermione's infidelity collapse beneath the undecieving weight of Paulina's "resurrection" of his wife. Leontes, like Prospero after him, misuses the imagination. Captivated by the fantasy of Hermione's illusory treachery, he employs it to compose maddening irrealities, and to inflict cruelty. "Music, awake her, strike!" Paulina calls to Hermione, reviving Leontes from his disastrous dream of unbending authority and imaginative dominion. The characters of romance are perpetually "awake[ning];" like Leontes, Prospero, Posthumus, and Cymbeline abandon their deranging preoccupations with unswerving power, grasping the imagination as a portal towards humanizing epiphany, humbled understanding.

The children of romance function as the seasonal reflection in which this vision of personal limitation or fallibility might be apprehended. Often the subjects of resurrection, romance's children move back into the play's foreground to confront their parents with the inexorable truth of waning authority and impending death. As G. Wilson Knight notes, "[h]ence [*The Winter's Tale's*] emphasi[zes]...the seasons, birth and childhood, the continual moulding of new miracles on the pattern of the old" (Knight 120). Perdita, Florizel, Miranda, and Ferdinand teach their parents to embrace fallibility, as their resurrections herald newfound acceptance of life's limitations, the consciousness's frailties. Parents, Shakespeare suggests, cannot cling to magical idealism as a path to immortality or infallibility; they are imperfect, and they are going to die. As Knight contends, the seasons of life are ever-shifting in romance. Though Prospero longs to suspend both himself and Miranda and Ferdinand in a world of eternal purity, beautifying love, and untouched innocence, his wedding play becomes instead an elegiac portrait of hopeless idealism. Performed by Iris, Juno, and Cerce, this spectacle exemplifies characters' misuse of the imagination—a yearning for isolation and infallible divinity that must capitulate to the growing influence of reality, as Prospero laments:

These our actors,
 As I foretold you, were all spirits and
 Are melted into thin air, into thin air;
 And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
 The cloud-capped tow'rs, the gorgeous palaces,
 The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
 Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
 And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
 Leave not a rack behind (*Temp.*, IV.i.148-156).

In romance, Shakespeare vanquishes the “cloud-capped tow'rs,/ the gorgeous palaces,” and the “solemn temples,” as Prospero’s fleeting wedding play symbolizes an impossible vision of innocence, perfection, and quixotic isolation that must crumble into the play’s looming acquiescence to time and decay. Miranda and Ferdinand personify this movement from blissful idealism to reality. On Prospero’s island, they linger in an unfallen paradise, and yet they must move on. They cannot stay. They belong to time, Shakespeare ultimately concludes; they must surrender, like the spirits that evaporated into nothingness, to the real. Together, Miranda and Ferdinand pass from the secluded guiltlessness of their dream island back to Milan, standing, for a moment, on the brink of knowledge, eroticism, and experience. As Kott notes: “But in spite of its artificiality the show is significant in so far as it evokes the golden age of humanity, when the earth had been free from sin and had borne its fruit without pain...On the island where the real history of the world has been performed, Prospero shows the young lovers the lost paradise” (Kott 338). Romance cannot overlook “sin” or “pain.” They remain integral parts of the human experience—of the transfiguring patterns of change, growth, and self-knowledge. The spirits of romance must abandon Eden, and children blossom from innocence to awareness to guide parents to the realization of human fragility, transience.

Resurrection in romance consecrates metaphysical transfiguration, and it derives from the unblinking embrace of the past’s sins alone. “Nothing of him that doth fade/ But doth suffer a sea change/ Into something rich and strange,” Ariel sings to Ferdinand, presaging *The Tempest*’s

confrontation of Alonso, Antonio, Sebastian, and Prospero himself with the circle of history's failures, imploring the magician at last to break the spirals of cruelty that relinquish all the island's inhabitants to unending patterns of domination and enslavement, usurpation and revenge. The characters of romance are forever exploring an adventure of liberating imaginative transfiguration. Kott comments:

Man is an animal like all other animals, only perhaps more cruel; but unlike all the other animals he is aware of his fate and wants to alter it. He is born and dies in an extra-human time, and he can never reconcile himself to that. Prospero's staff makes the history of the world repeat itself on a desert island. Actors can play that history in four hours. But Prospero's staff cannot change history. When the morality play is over, Prospero's magic power must also end. Only bitter wisdom remains. (Kott 325)

"Bitter wisdom" must always triumph over idealism in Shakespearean romance. Delusions decay, as the imagination unrelentingly propels characters towards awakening and epiphany. Leontes's mad presumptions erode, Prospero's vindictive magic vanishes, and Shakespeare's undeceived patriarchs revive in romance's dreamy half-reality to grasp the ultimate impossibility of just revenge, unbending authority, or ruthless sovereignty. The world is imperfect, Shakespeare shows his characters, and so are they. Harnessing the imagination as the sublime channel through which redemption, resurrection, and fallibility might be achieved, statues come to life; airy spirits tempt vengeful magicians towards forgiveness, empathy. Fantasy unmask reality, as Goddard neatly summarizes "The world of spirit, in other words, is not Another World at all. It is this world rightly seen and heard. From end to end *The Tempest* reiterates this" (Goddard 284). The imagination shows characters this "world rightly seen and heard," induced by fantasy back into the inescapable flow of time, faltering generational power, and mortality. Prospero's magic must be pushed aside. He must release Caliban and Ariel, transformed by the spirit's call to humbling limitation. Shakespeare's characters in romance ultimately welcome the

imagination's undeceiving truths, striving towards a disabusing acceptance of death and demise, imperfection and change, not destroyed, but unbound.

The imagination in tragedy cannot enlighten or disabuse; it does not announce characters' movement from blindness to absolution or resurrection. While the fantasies of romance sought to expose the real, the illusions of tragedy seek to conceal it, to distort it, and to escape it. The imagination and reality do not occupy the same, shared space in tragedy. Instead, Shakespeare manipulates fantasy to blur life's undeceiving truths, and he creates dream worlds to obscure the terrible passage of time, the deadening ascent of one generation above another. Tragedy's dream worlds function as imaginative plains of damning evasion. In them, characters rest above the tenacious pull of history, the bestializing cruelty of their tragic cosmos. Reality becomes ungraspable, unknowable, and dream worlds reach towards eternity; they linger in the shadows of the absolute idealism deconstructed by romance. Insulating characters from the awful, though urgent, contours of reality, tragedy's dream worlds ensnare King Lear, Gloucester, Othello, and Desdemona in the haze of beautiful delusion. They cling to reflections of themselves and their universes that remain fundamentally untrue—unfulfilled, impossible promises of everlasting love, perfected devotion, and imperishable dominion. Though they drift across the play's exterior, these characters live in imaginative worlds outside the play, beyond it; they do not belong to the real, and they nurture no aspirations to find it. From within the glow of dream worlds, the hideous truths of time and decay, hatred and bestialism, chaos and complexity fade away. Tragedy banishes illuminating Ariels. It grows numb to the epiphanic awakenings of Paulina's magic. Caught in the beautiful illusions of their imaginations, Othello and Desdemona persist within the untarnished innocence Prospero's wedding play. Lear never abjures the chimerical power of his monarchical magic. Captivated, Shakespeare's tragic protagonists labor

in landscapes that they cannot see. They become blind, and they lose their capacity for metamorphosis.

Unable to commune with the haunting realities of human weakness, frailty, and fallibility, *King Lear* and *Othello* renounce their potential for resurrection. Indeed, in romance, Shakespeare promises that rebirth blooms from embraced self-knowledge and mortal limitation alone. Resurrection functions as the supreme acknowledgement of history's inexorable tide, the inescapable truth of imperfection, decay, and death. Yet in tragedy, Shakespeare makes resurrection impossible because characters do not explore the imagination to reveal or to discover. Lost in their splendid and devastating dream worlds, Lear, Gloucester, Othello, and Desdemona shield themselves from the disabusing horror of epiphany; the real and the imagined rest, always, as separated, and transfiguration or rebirth wither beyond the blinded scope of occluding fantasy. *The Tempest*, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale* play with the conventions of false resurrection. None of the characters who return from death in romance were ever actually dead; Shakespeare's magic remains metaphysical, and not exactly necromantic. Indeed, though Ferdinand, Imogen, Perdita, and Hermione seemingly emerge from the grave, they are not the characters who are "reborn." Resurrection in romance reverberates as a kind of spiritual awakening, as fathers and monarchs witness their children or lovers' restoration to glimpse their own perversion of the imagination, their own misuse of fantasy, power, and authority. Prospero and Leontes, Cymbeline and Posthumus—not their wives and children—incarnate Shakespeare's most profound experiment in transcendental revival. They personify rebirth at its most essential, at its most primordial. False resurrection torments the characters of tragedy. Conjured during Gloucester's "fall" on the cliffs of Dover, Lear's agonizing calls to hanged Cordelia, and Desdemona's final pronouncement of eternal love for Othello from behind

the curtains of her deathbed, this crisis of false rebirth permeates tragedy. Yet while romance summoned these staged resurrections to initiate celestial revival, tragedy surrenders the grand personas of *King Lear* and *Othello* to irredeemable death to illustrate a grander, more sinister metaphysical paralysis. Imprisoned by the delusions of the imagination, the characters of tragedy must die, and they must die unenlightened, unchanged.

In *King Lear*, the imagination transfigures into a mask—one that shields the aging monarch from the vision of his own waning power, dominion, and approaching demise. Tormented by his longing for undying influence and authority, Lear weaves a dream world in which his children become reflections of realized immortality, and he crafts his love contest as an imaginative extension of this search for eternity. In Goneril, Regan, and laconic Cordelia, Lear peers into the distorting mirror of his fantastical belief in everlasting life, sovereignty, and relevance, preserved within the chimerical promises of his eldest daughters. Indeed, Lear's dream world resounds as an imaginative space constructed and nurtured by language; built upon the precarious foundation of Goneril and Regan's obsequious pronouncements, this dream world insulates the aging King inside an aloof universe preserved beyond time, outside of history. His mortal body yearns to escape the perishing touch of decay, and he—the man of flesh and blood—strives to entwine with the eternal dignity, relevance, and power of his kingly office. Unwilling to cultivate the dooming blindness of her father, Cordelia, the play's distant embodiment of reality, is banished and silenced.

The play's love contest incarnates the apogee of *King Lear*'s imaginative occlusion; the real evaporates, and the deluded monarch stands at the center of a world commanded by his fantastical search for immortality and unbending dominion. Insanity, however, will for a moment unmask the King's obscuring dream world, as the raging of the storm and the Fool's

disillusioning music draw him to an undecieving vision of his bonds to natural transience, inescapable mortality. During the storm, Lear communes with life's cruelty. He sets aside the wondrous staff and books of his dream world. He becomes a mortal man, tangled with time and death, decay and demise. Guided by the Fool's bawdy hymns, Lear at last gazes into the unadulterated truth of his enfeebled humanity. For a brief few scenes, Lear is prophetically, ecstatically mad, and he bends with the insurmountable pull of history, the crushing tide of obsolescence. The deluded creations of the imagination recede, as Shakespeare leaves his once stupendous, wrathful monarch with nothing but anguishing knowledge. Yet though he experiences this flash of cathartic understanding on the heath, Lear's shock of epiphanic insanity is, tragically, short-lived. Recovering his imaginative mask—his dream world—to protect himself from the sight of his ruined kingdom and destroyed, dissembling family, Lear implores Cordelia to live, forever, in prison with him as a testament to his inability to commune with the past, its sins and its staggering failures. Surfacing from madness, Lear returns to his dream world. He escapes, once more, from reality into fantasy. He shields himself from undecieving, devastating epiphany. King Lear's dream world reaches its horrific crescendo in the King's agonizing call to the dead Cordelia. Gazing at his hanged child as a reflection of his own yearning for immortality, Lear dies still believing in the possibility of Cordelia's revival, her resurrection; she distorts for him into an embodiment of his impossible, transcendent victory over time and history, as the monarch dies behind the mask of the imagination, unable to embrace Cordelia's death as a call to accepted mortality, frailty, and fallibility.

In *Othello*, Shakespeare utterly obliterates the real. Trapped in a tragic cosmos suffused by fantasy, characters can only struggle in the rupture between their aspirations towards perfected love and their half-realized fears of sexual jealousy, lechery, and betrayal. The

imagination dominates *Othello*, as Shakespeare relinquishes his resplendent general to a world torn between beautifying love and bestializing hatred. Indeed, Desdemona's devotion symbolizes the play's most oneiric exploration of impregnable, impervious constancy, crafting a dream world that rises beyond Venice's masked cruelty and Cyprus's raw chaos; her love is an expression of romantic idealism at its celestial apogee, and it embraces Othello as the mythical warrior of legend, heraldic lore. Together, Desdemona and Othello ascend through their love's dream world to an imaginative space of timeless devotion. Their love is inchoate, self-creating, and Shakespeare finds in them the substance of fantasy, the fabric of romantic adventure. Othello and Desdemona cannot see the complexities of sexual jealousy, hatred, or satanic manipulation from within the beautiful haze of their love. They exist beyond the play, outside of it. They gaze at one another as embodiments of imaginative freedom, untouched by the contaminations of the real or the exterior world.

While Desdemona drifts above the play, lost in the perfecting fantasies of her love's dream world, Iago burrows, terrifying, into *Othello*'s landscape, controlling it and contaminating it. Iago overthrows Shakespeare as *Othello*'s dramatic master. He is its playwright, its director, and the voices of its actors. Indeed, while the lovers strive to escape from the real—to exist, alone, in the sublime imaginative space of their devotion—Iago perverts the exterior world. Though he unites reality and fantasy, he does so to disorientate and disfigure, to dissemble and to destroy. No disillusioning epiphanies spring from Iago's imaginative manipulation, as he corrupts exterior realities with interiorized anxieties. He makes imagined barbarity seem true, obscuring the real with the vivid horror of his power to infect reality with the preoccupations of the soul, to awaken characters into the nightmare of the subconscious. Captivating the general with the demonic vision of lascivious infidelity that he conjures to the play's foreground, Iago

pulls Othello from the oneiric heights of his and Desdemona's dream world into the infernal pit of doubt, deception, and rabid jealousy. Reality disappears, invaded by Iago's masterful exploitation of fantasy. *Othello* surrenders to nightmare, relinquishing its power to discover enlightening truth, to assuage insecurity or envy, fractured instead between two, irreconcilable imaginative poles. Both Desdemona and Othello must die as testaments to fantasy's obscuring dominion. Murdering his wife as the ultimate sacrifice to nightmare's insurmountable power, Othello dies in a world of crystallized Hell. Iago's disorienting inferno at last rules the play, and Othello slays himself from within the prison of his own imagination, enthralled by the vision of himself he sees reflected in Iago's warped nightmare. Indeed, though she is briefly resurrected, Desdemona returns from death only to articulate her unwavering surrender to love's blindness. Speaking from behind her bed curtains, she dies literally from behind the imagination's veil, unable to contend with her husband's capitulation to erotic insecurity and emotional frailty.

King Lear and the Mask of the Imagination**Part I: Introduction**

Romance incarnated for Shakespeare an obvious fantasy space. *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* radiate with an organic imaginative harmony, as enchantment and reality fuse to reveal man's inexorable transience. The illusions of romance entwine and entangle with the real; these plays are themselves microcosms of dream, shaped at their primordial centers by the transforming magic of music, divinity, and illusion. Romance embraces the imagination as the undeceiving portal towards the resurrecting truth of human fallibility. Only by witnessing the mistakes of the past can characters achieve spiritual awakening, converting the folly of fantasy into the wisdom of experience. Crafted by the imagination, these oneiric spheres define for characters their relationships to mortality, history, and authority. Illusion, working to mask or to reveal, confronts each play's universe with the awful truth of human transience. Through the power of the imagination, Shakespeare explores the interaction of delusion and reality, using resurrection to negotiate dream's potential for transfiguration or insulation. Abandoned in realms of collapsing ideals and tarnished longings for eternity, the characters of tragedy and romance must choose either to pass openly into decay or to hide behind their chimerical aspirations towards imperishability. Fantasy remains the great Shakespearean medium of resurrection, realizing metaphysical rebirth when Prospero and Leontes employ the imagination's magic to commune with broken influence, imperfection, and death. Resurrection, always manipulated to bring the living back into the play's enlightened folds, represents an acknowledgment of mortal limitation.

Yet while the imagination in romance exposes life's complexity, the fantasies of tragedy serve only to occlude and obscure. Fantasy distills to an instrument of escape, shielding Shakespeare's desperate heroes from romance's austere revelations. This schism between truth

and illusion reaches its apocalyptic crescendo in *King Lear*. Unwilling to gaze upon death's certainty, Lear corrupts his experience of reality to reflect his own longing for eternity. The imagination becomes a barrier that divides Lear's consciousness from the horrific truth of ephemerality, as Shakespeare suspends the King in a fantastical sphere of delusion. Established in the play's opening love contest, language defines for Lear an identity beyond the cruel movements of time, while the imagination constructs through Goneril and Regan's dissembling promises a mask of fantasy that utterly conceals the natural seasonal shifts illuminated by romance's resurrections.

This mirror of immortality will for a moment be forgotten during the King's ecstatic communion with madness. Conjured by the Fool's prophetic music, Lear's brief shock of insanity forces the deluded King to gaze upon the impossibility of eternal relevance, authority, and life, witnessing instead illusion's collapse into the indifference of nature. Yet the shield of fantasy inexorably returns, weaving through language the false resurrections of *King Lear*'s final two acts. Gloucester, protected by Edgar's farcical retelling of his suicide, employs the imagination to escape the deadening recognition of the gods' terrific impassivity. Lear too yearns for this exemption from reality, evading even the cataclysmic destruction of his kingdom with his cry to persist forever in prison with Cordelia—to surrender to an imaginative space beyond the influence of history, empire, and death. Yet Cordelia's demise cements the insurmountable deterioration of illusion into time. Seeking the impossible herald of his own resurrection, Lear imagines Cordelia's voice to overcome the boundaries of mortality, as he dies chasing the chimerical image of eternity from behind the veil of illusion—from within his dream world. In *King Lear*, Shakespeare exposes the imagination as a mask, consigning the monarch to the blindness of an illusion that can only reflect his yearning for absolute sovereignty, power, and

love. Though romance will explore the resurrecting confluence of truth and dream, enmeshing fantasy with reality to reveal the humbling limitations of mortal consciousness, *King Lear* rejects this terrible resignation to decay, striving instead to surmount history in its furious hope to conjure rebirth from blindness.

Fascinated by the deifying possibilities of Regan and Goneril's proclamations during the love contest, Lear aspires to escape death through the timeless art of their words. This love contest represents the ultimate creation of fantasy; mirrors that guard the transfixing image of the King's immortality, the promises of these speeches exist within the imagination alone. Goneril and Regan craft for Lear an impenetrable dream world in which their father is lifted above time. Worshipping the shadow of his abdicated authority, their pronouncements deny the inexorable flow of history, masking the King's natural passage toward death beneath an illusory portrait of eternal and impossible dominion. Yet the collapse of fantasy endures even in this moment of supreme imaginative invention. Though he envisions himself as a radiant embodiment of Hecate, Lear's experiments in godly creation distill instead to the annihilation of his kingdom. Mapped, measured, and neatly divided, the ordered world of *King Lear* fractures into the chaos of nature, destroyed by the desperate monarch's longing for divinity. This breakdown is mirrored by the play's treatment of the gods, who grow silent and indistinct as the celestial visions evoked during the love contest fade into the play's landscape.

Once the furious Hecate, Lear will implore the faceless "gods" of the storm for a reflection of human empathy, tracing the disintegration of the imagination and its created forms into nature's abyss. Madness's ecstatic clarity briefly penetrates the dream world in which Lear endures. Beginning the play at fantasy's sublime apex, Lear must descend into the landscape's infernal indifference to realize the truth of mortality. Shakespeare's treatment of the gods and

language mimics this movement from imaginative evasion to insanity's prophetic clarity. Symbols of the imagination's power to impose human order upon the environment's rapacity, these illusory constructions must renounce the promises of the love contest for bleak reality. As the gods fall from the heights of Lear's fantasy, language too disintegrates into the heath's savage noise, reduced to the rude tautologies that pervade the undeceived wisdom of madness and nature.

The Fool's chants accompany Lear's exploration of inescapable mortality, as he becomes the play's messenger of unbounded eroticism, mutability, and death. He is *King Lear*'s prophet whose grotesque songs eulogize a world renounced by God and the image of human dominion over nature fostered by the imagination. This excruciating night on the heath represents *King Lear*'s single break with the insulating shield of fantasy. Plunged into the enlightened darkness of unadorned nature, the faltering monarch abandons his yearning for deifying reflection, drawn towards an epiphany of mortal limitation illuminated by incisive madness. The storm of *King Lear* reverberates as the play's only true, if fleeting, instance of disillusionment; Lear is transformed by the Fool's music, renouncing the splendid robes of court—of the love contest—for the terrible nakedness, loneliness, and insight of a natural world impenetrable to the inventions of fantasy. Shakespeare strips the humiliated King of the illusory grandeur that attended him after his abdication, forcing him to experience the brutal truth of a reality transcended by the imagination.

Lear's shock of insanity represents for Shakespeare the ultimate breakdown of imaginative constructions, washing away the projections of gods and language—their hope to lift humanity above the cruelty of nature. Yet though he witnesses life's tremendous and inescapable transience, Lear staggers from the depths of madness yearning to cleanse himself of mortality's

stain. The phantom of illusion returns during *King Lear*'s concluding two acts, as Shakespeare laments the ultimate impossibility of redemption or resurrection in a world blinded by its longing for divinity and imperishable authority. Fantasy—delusion's insulating mask—invariably reemerges to protect Lear and Gloucester from the gruesome vision of destroyed order illuminated by the storm. Surrendered to reality, the gestures of the imagination lose their once captivating significance. Though Gloucester implores the gods for forgiveness, absolution, and salvation, his suicide resounds through *King Lear*'s universe as an absurd, empty sacrifice to the sweeping dominion of deteriorated fantasy. Edgar strives to imbue his father's suffering with redemptive significance, cultivating an illusory resurrection that pivots upon language's lost power to protect the spirit from the savage flow of time. Unlike the rebirths of romance, however, Gloucester's "revival" endures as an exercise in sublime obfuscation, preserved by fantasy from the meaningless farce of his failed attempt at metamorphosis through death. Like the gods, language reduces to a shadow of imaginative creation, and because it serves only to obscure, it cannot alter the real.

This crisis of false resurrection plagues the characters of *King Lear*. Though madness teaches the broken King to gaze undeceived upon mortality, its memory leaves Lear with a tremendous fear of nature's indifference. Awakening in the French camp, Lear imposes an aggrandizing vision of hellish judgment upon his encounter with Cordelia, protected by illusion from the realization of his own terrible mistakes. While Cordelia embodies the banished voice of unflinching realism, the King's revival symbolizes the play's surrender to the chimerical mask of fantasy. If he is at all "reborn," Lear's revival incarnates his utter capitulation to the power of delusional evasion; he does not see Cordelia at all, fractured from romance's rejuvenating communion with sin by his unwillingness to confront the truth of failure. This abandonment of

reality rings through *King Lear*'s final scene. Blindness transfigures into his last, faltering refusal to gaze upon the inexorability of decay, impermanence, and waste, as the inventions of the imagination shield the dying King from the apocalyptic realization of Cordelia's death. Unable to accept life's unconquerable transience, Lear pretends to hear Cordelia's silenced voice as an echo of his faith in language's power to preserve the spirit beyond the tide of history and the capricious shifts of empire. Yet in a world purged of the gods, death has lost its potential for redemption, bound instead to the senseless annihilation of nature. Shakespeare collapses both language and divinity into the awesome abyss of human ephemerality, forsaking reflections of eternity for the impermanence's austere reality.

Part II: The Love Contest

King Lear begins in a world of apparent absolutes. An experiment in blinding fantasy, the opening love contest symbolizes the monarch's dooming attempt to impose imaginative authority over a landscape governed by the seasonal shifts of time and decay. Charted by borders, boundaries, and the promise of dynastic inheritance, the carefully sectioned land of this kingdom remains for Shakespeare the play's grand synecdoche of civilization. It is an image of partitioned reality—an illusion of order fractured from the chaos of nature, history, and death. The love contest reveals the King's captivation with the deifying power of reflection, as Lear demands that his children preserve him and his waning authority through the immortalizing force of language. Seeking an eternal relevance that defies the deterioration of nature, Lear is lifted by the love contest into the realm of the divine, using illusion to escape the terrible obsolescence of mortality. Within the love contest, language and the gods exemplify the constructed forms of the imagination; they are the play's manifestations of absolute human order, imposed upon a landscape unbounded by the yearnings of fantasy. Yet the love contest likewise reveals the terrific emptiness of Goneril and Regan's illusory promises of imperishable relevance. Forsaking

his kingdom for the mere symbolism of authority, Lear embraces the spectral nothingness of imaginative invention. Though the King commands his children to exempt him and his fear of deterioration from the natural progression of life towards death, his preoccupation with empty fantasy predicts the ultimate collapse of delusion into nature's harrowing indifference.

Stephen Greenblatt, in his *Shakespeare's Freedom*, captures King Lear's furious desire for absolute love, relevance, and dominion preserved beyond the influence of time. Indeed, Greenblatt argues that Shakespeare collapses imaginative absolutes to explore human limitation unclouded by the dream world of infinite authority. *King Lear* denies the singularity, imperfection, and individuation that echoes through romance's reviving acknowledgement of inevitable change. Conjured by the promises of Goneril and Regan, the play's love contest embodies the imaginative zenith of this longing for immortality and imperishable filial affection: "[Shakespeare] had begun with a king who wished to withdraw from power and to reassure himself with comfortable falsehoods, public affirmations of his own limitless importance and value and generosity that he demanded of his children" (*Freedom* 93). These "comfortable falsehoods" construct the faltering dream world of Lear's imagination. Captivating and consoling, the imagination incarnates for King Lear a world of boundless possibility—a realm of unyielding influence that Shakespeare will prove unattainable within tragedy's cosmos. An exploration of fantasy's inventions, the love contest divides Lear's kingdom from reality; it is a splendid portrait of lofty human order, impervious to the landscape's rapacious cruelty. Trading his realm for the spectral symbolism of authority, Lear retains the trappings of kingship to avoid the terrible realization of inexorable transience and mortality.

The specter of time haunts Lear. Nature's unremitting pulse, time threatens to erode the insulating absolutes with which he builds his limitless dream world; it creates and destroys

blindly, weaving a reality unmoved by the desperate impositions of the imagination. Lear's preoccupation with time radiates through his relationships to Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. While the older generations of romance confront through their children the inexorable waning of authority, surrendering the imagination's magic to the relentless surge of history, Lear searches for the image of deification in the words of his daughters. Yearning to gaze upon the impossible realization of immortality, Lear challenges his children to compose speeches that preserve him beyond time's deadening influence. Language is called on in the love contest to construct a world beyond the withering movements of age, irrelevance, and death. Goneril and Regan's promises of imperishable love emblemize Greenblatt's unattainable absolutes. Projecting the image of illusory eternity upon the faltering King, they dismiss reality's natural decay, mirroring the abstracted idolization of the sonnet. The longing for immortality cemented into the love contest's absolutes rings through Greenblatt's discussion of the Shakespearean sonnet. Described as an "exquisite mirror made of language," the sonnet creates an imaginative world raised above the current of time. It is a transfixing portrait of love that beautifies its object, reflecting an image of sublime eternity defiant to mortal ephemerality. Though Miranda, Perdita, and the dying Mamillius embody romance's pivotal recognition of transience that yields power from one generation to the next, Lear's love contest strives to supersede nature with fantasy. Describing Sonnet 18, Greenblatt comments:

The dream of the child as a mirror image, projected into the future, has been shouldered aside by "this"—this love poem, this exquisite mirror made of language, this far more secure way of preserving perfect beauty intact and carrying it forward into future generations, Shakespeare has in effect displaced the woman he was urging the young man to impregnate; the poet's labor, not the woman's, will bring for the young man's enduring image. (Greenblatt 238)

Language in the sonnet resounds as an imaginative projection. It recreates its object anew, shielding Lear through poetry from the inexorable deterioration of wonder, love, or fecundity.

Captured at the splendid apogee of power and beauty, the sonnet's object renounces the cruelty of time for the enthralling inventions of fantasy. Nature is for a moment subsumed by the reshaping force of illusion; warped to an "enduring image," the subject becomes the personification of language's ability to suspend the brutal influence of reality. Because he transfers the power of creation from woman to poet, Shakespeare imagines through the sonnet a new world of fantastical reinvention ungoverned by time. This exemption from time's disintegration incarnates the eternity that Lear seeks during the love contest, transforming his children to vessels of everlasting life that might exempt him from age's decline. Longing to evade the truth of human weakness and impermanence, he turns to language as a medium of artificial immortality; like the poet, he might construct, through illusion, a world that overcomes the certainty of death.

The mask of imagination, worn at its most stately during the love contest, traps the characters of *King Lear* in a series of constant and distorting reflections. Lear's love contest is an unequivocal world of absolutes, binding identities to the images seen through the immortalizing mirror of language. Garber notes the King's blinding desire to partition reality, as Shakespeare transfigures Lear's court into a metonymic embodiment of fantastical human order: "[i]t is a scene, above all, of 'accommodated man,' of humanity surrounded by wealth and power, robes and furs, warmth, food, and attendants—the radical opposite of the vision the play's third act will supply" (*After All* 652). Garber locates *King Lear*'s polar imaginative planes, contrasting the illusory comfort of the civilized kingdom with the storm's barren chaos. This solemn court, like language and the gods, remains for Shakespeare a construction; it is an imposition of the imagination upon the primordial disorder of nature.

Shakespeare suspends Lear in this obscuring imaginative world, broken by fantasy from the seasonal shifts of time. As Garber notes, Lear begins the play at the insulating height of imposed order. Surrounded by the resplendent pomp of his court, the furious monarch calls upon the language of his children to preserve the image of his own longing for eternity. Lear divides his kingdom as he does reality, hoping to escape death through the creations of the imagination:

Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.
Give me the map there. Know that we have divided
In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age,
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
Unburthened crawl towards death (*Lear* I.i 38-43).

Lear's reference to the map reverberates through the love contest. An artificial silhouette of an immense landscape, the map becomes the play's supreme imaginative embodiment of civilization; it is an emblem of human control exerted over the vast, unknowable, and incoherent rhythms of nature. Even the King's imperious command, "give me the map there," exposes the object's bonds to the courtly splendor of the imagination. The map reveals Lear's phantasmal power to impose absolute sovereignty over the landscape's cruel movements. Yet his abandonment of the royal "we" betrays the King's dooming conflation of the temporal body with the immortal creations of imaginative control. Suddenly, this "me"—a self of perishing flesh and blood, of nature and time—entwines with the deifying illusions of fantasy. Lear's "me" longs for the eternity of kingly power, as the faltering monarch binds his corporeal identity to the map and its magical rejection of decay, crafting an enduring dream world that transports the mortal self beyond history's relentless disintegration. Shakespeare plays with this confusion through the King's austere allusion to "age." Though it implies an ostensible recognition of his waning influence and obsolescence, "age" likewise possesses doubled implications of history in general. Lear seeks an identity lifted above time—an agelessness that "shakes all cares and business"

from the terrible inexorability of abdication, irrelevance, and death. Enconced in a timeless office, Lear must try and fail to apply the everlasting power of kingly authority to the body's "me," shielded by fantasy from romance's epiphanic realization of withering mutability. Indeed, even Lear's use of "crawl" captures the inexorable failure of the imagination in a world pinioned by time. While it guards obvious undertones of rediscovered childhood, "crawl" predicts the King's bestialized communion with nature, shattering Lear's oneiric immortality into the landscape's animalistic violence.

Goneril and Regan likewise employ the mask of imagination to hide the environment's brutality—a savage will for the dominion and power that they themselves personify. Yet though their father surrenders to fantasy to evade life's movement towards death, Goneril and Regan twist the imagination to hide their utter fascination with nature's consumption. Savagery incarnate, Goneril and Regan construct the dream world of the love contest to feed their own bonds to the landscape's annihilating force. As Novy notes, the monarch's eldest daughters reduce to embodiments of callous nature, disguising the landscape's awesome brutality beneath their grand proclamations of metaphysical love: "Goneril and Regan are much less psychologically complex than most Shakespearean characters of comparable importance. Few of their lines carry hints of motivations other than cruelty, lust, or ambition, characteristics of the archetypal fantasy image of the woman as enemy" (Novy 87).¹ Novy's attention to their psychological superficiality predicts the collapse of civilization into the landscape's ferocious indifference. These characters guard a one-dimensional thirst for consumption that mimics the terrible, subsuming energy of nature. It is precisely Goneril and Regan's simplicity that renders

¹Novy, Marianne. "Patriarchy, Mutability, and Forgiveness." *Modern Critical Interpretations of King Lear*. Chelsea House Publishers, 1987. Pg. 87.

them significant to the cosmos of *King Lear*, as their rudely sketched personas foreshadow the disintegration of language and fantasy into the tautologies of Lear's insanity.

The supreme instrument of evasion and dissemblance, fantasy empowers Goneril to create an image of eternity that captivates her blind father with its suggestions of immortality. Indeed, the promises of the sonnet resound through Goneril's enthralling proclamation of undying allegiance and deference, conjuring through language an impression of love that endures beyond the corporeal realm. Poetry that preserves its subject above the cruel rhythms of deterioration, this speech channels the sonnet's immortalizing magic, uniting the fading monarch with the sublime intransience of kingship. While the children of romance expose their parents to the inescapable truth of fallibility and impermanence, Goneril suspends Lear beyond the decay of his historical moment, broken from nature by the reflections of poetry:

Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter
 Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty;
 Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare;
 No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honor:
 As much as child e'er loved, or father found;
 A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable:
 Beyond all manner of so much I love you (*Lear* I.i 58-64).

Unfolding with measured end-stopping, Goneril's speech reveals her acute sensitivity to language's power to mask chaos. Her allusion to "life, with grace, health, beauty, honor" epitomizes the dream world through which Lear longs to escape the looming presence of death. This vision of existence, entwined to the splendor of youth and everlasting dignity, denies the entirety of experience for the comforting, though impossible, image of life untouched by time. "Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare," Goneril's supposed affection overcomes the mundane shifts of history to bind Lear with the sonnet's undying eternity. The child in *King Lear* distorts to a chimerical mirror that preserves the parent from the horrific truth of decay. Captured at the very summit of paternal power, Lear's authority continues forever in Goneril's promise, "as

much as child e'er loved, or father found." Goneril admits no passage of power from old to young, suspending the King in a mirage of imagined absolutes that shields him from the realization of irrelevance and death. Yet while she conjures for her father an image of deifying immortality, Goneril's ominous allusion to "breath poor" and "speech unable" portends the ultimate collapse of this fantastical portrait into the strident noise of nature. Brutality remains inescapably present even within this ennobling mirror; the ferocious deterioration of language, history, and absolute allegiance lingers in the delusion of Lear's love contest, piercing fantasy with the inevitability of disintegrating order.

Only Cordelia embodies reality during the love contest, destroying Lear's insulating hopes for eternity with her unflinching recognition of natural deterioration, disintegration, and change. She alone speaks truth to the delusions of obscuring dream worlds, confronting Lear instead with a portrait of time in which parents falter and fade, passing from authority to impotence with the seasons of life. While Goneril and Regan reflect the contrived vision of immortality that Lear chases through language, Cordelia denies the identity her father has crafted for her. She is a mirror of the real, collapsing fantasy into the disabusing truth of nature. Leggatt captures this crisis of broken reflection, recognizing Cordelia's power to reject the projections of the imagination in favor of a reality fastened to the austere limitations of romance:

Lear has at the beginning a clear image of Cordelia. She is the daughter who loves him best, who will make the best speech, who will get the biggest share of the kingdom and the privilege of his company for the rest of her life. But this fantasy, no less than a curse, annihilates Cordelia herself. It allows her no space for her own decisions, her own needs, her own life. From the start, she is not real to Lear; he has constructed a version of her in his own mind, as Othello does with Desdemona. Othello's fantasy is that Desdemona has betrayed him. Lear's fantasy is that Cordelia loves him totally. In the service of fantasy Lear constructs a rigged, artificial love test in which Cordelia's victory is foreordained. (Leggatt 145)

Cordelia remains for Lear the great portal to immortality, trapped in his imagination as the personification of unyielding love that must overcome the devastating truth of human transience.

Lear saves the final, fecund third of his empire for his favorite daughter, waiting to reward her saving image of deification with a bounteous kingdom that answers the radiance of her portrait. “[W]hat can you say to draw/ a third more opulent than your sisters? Speak” (*Lear* I.i 87-88), Lear demands, framing Cordelia even before her speech in the opulent excess of fantasy. Dream worlds in *King Lear* are universally constructed by language, as the monarch’s command to “speak” anticipates the insulating mirror of eternity crafted by Goneril and Regan. Indeed, Leggatt’s contention that “[Cordelia] is not real to Lear” could be pushed further. The love contest seeks to destroy the real, to overwhelm it and to overpower it with the fantasy of everlasting life. Yet when Cordelia refuses to bend to the imagination’s deluded will, she is banished—annihilated by the King’s blinding allegiance to illusion. Garber too acknowledges Cordelia’s blunt connection to the inexorable shifts of time; acutely conscious of the waning of generations, she defines “the natural” in a tragic universe warped by fantasy’s obscuring impositions:

Cordelia—whose name comes from the word for “heart” (the Latin *cor*, *cordis*)—declares that she loves her father according to the bond of parent and child. This is the quintessence of the “natural.” But Lear, whose language, like that of his eldest daughters, has been sprinkled throughout the scene with legalisms, with cares and business, interest of territory, worth, deeds, and property, mistakes the natural for the unnatural, the bond of love for the bond of financial contract. (Garber 655)

Like the Fool, whose chants transfigure for the maddened Lear into reality’s disillusioning anthem, Cordelia confronts her father with the terrible realization of death. Yet truth in *King Lear* must be constantly masked by fantasy, pushed to awareness’s borderlands to preserve, unyieldingly, the dream of immortality. Cordelia never truly becomes real for King Lear. Though she shatters the chimerical mirror of eternity crystallized by Goneril and Regan’s speeches, her blinded father must avoid the awesome image of mortal impermanence, as her spectral memory—the phantom of decay and demise—haunts Lear just below the surface of

consciousness. Unlike the humbled parents of romance, who cast aside the bewitching magic of the imagination to embrace life's transience, Lear can never grasp the epiphanic truth of Garber's "natural," waning generational influence. In *King Lear*, fantasy must always triumph over truth, distorting even Cordelia's apocalyptic death into a reflection of impossible redemption, eternity, and resurrection.

Lear rebuffs Cordelia's prophetic message of decay with the imagery of immortality and deification. The love contest persists for Shakespeare as an imaginative space of absolute fantasy. A metonymic embodiment of the King's final denial of his daughter's disillusioning slaughter, this dream world distorts and obscures reality's truths with the blinding inventions of the imagination. Indeed, Cordelia alone confronts her father with the austere mirror of reality, challenging the love contest's occluding illusions with the inevitability of change and transience. Called to echo the transfixing eternity of Goneril and Regan's dream world, she bluntly replies:

You have begot me, bred me, loved me. I
 Return those duties back as are right fit,
 Obey you, love you, and most honor you.
 Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
 They love you all? Haply, when I shall wed,
 That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
 Half my love with him, half my care and duty.
 Sure I shall never marry like my sisters,
 To love my father all (*Lear* I.i 97-106)

The movement of time reverberates through Cordelia's unblinking acquiescence to decay. This balance between love and clear-eyed acceptance of mortality endures within the syntax of her contention that Lear "begot [her], bred [her], loved [her];" life remains for Cordelia a series of interlocking and ever-shifting seasons that progress in fluid harmony from birth to death, from fecundity to impotence. Cordelia's speech significantly lacks the metaphorical splendor of her sister's proclamations. While Goneril and Regan projected their father into the ungraspable eternity of illusion, preserved in the sonnet's sublime irreality from the surge of history, Cordelia

acknowledges no escape from time in her stark reflection of transient authority, influence, and youth. Partition reemerges in this vision of insurmountable decay. Yet though Lear strives to fracture his faltering mortal self from the pull of time, Cordelia plans to cede to her future husband, “half [her] love with him, half [her] care and duty” as a sacrifice to history’s inexorable progression. The deconstructed Shakespearean signifiers of reality, the tautologies that pervade the storm and its aftermath ring through Cordelia’s stark repetition of “half” and her rhetorical reliance upon unembellished lists (“obey you, love you, and most honor you”). Cordelia’s speech conjures no dream world for the undying “all” of Goneril and Regan’s obsequious promises. It is an unblinking concession to the shifts of empire, resigned to the natural accession of youth, the inescapable death of the old.

Yet Lear can only engage with this disillusioning encounter with truth through the blindness of fantasy. Warning Kent that “[t]he bow is bent and drawn; make from the shaft” (*Lear* I.i 145), Lear transfigures into a timeless symbol of force, authority, and crushing dominion. “Bent and drawn,” this bow, like the King of the love contest, is captured through metaphor at the stupendous apex of its power. Lear searches for an imaginative space that transcends the grotesque deterioration of human ephemerality, crying, “[c]ome not between the Dragon and his wrath” (*Lear* I.i 124). Reshaped by illusion into a metonymy of mythic strength and ancient England, Lear denies Cordelia’s laconic prophecy of change for the immortalizing splendor of fantasy. The guardian of a world before time, the Dragon exemplifies Lear’s furious search for an eternal nobility beyond decay; he lives forever in the imagination of kings and legends, uniting Lear’s fading “me” with the unyielding power, prestige, and everlasting authority of his mighty office.

This ferocious desire to entangle the mortal self with the fantastical eternity of gods and mystic beasts peaks in the King's meditation upon Hecate. Banishing Cordelia from his occluded sight, Lear reimagines himself as the divine embodiment of witchcraft and magic, transformed through the splendor of his speech into majestic Hecate:

Let it be so, thy truth by thy dower!
 For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,
 The mysteries of Hecate and the night,
 By all the operations of the orbs
 From whom we do exist and cease to be,
 Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
 Propinquity and property of blood,
 And as a stranger to my heart and me
 Hold thee from this for ever (*Lear* I.i 110-118).

Illusion is indeed the spirit “for whom [Lear] do[es] exist and cease to be.” Entrenched within a dream world built by the insulating delusions of an impossible eternity, Lear's warped experience of reality pivots upon the inventions of the imagination. Lear is for a moment united with the chimerical deification of “the sacred radiance of the sun,” lifted above life's waxing and waning generations by the force of fantasy. The King moves inside the impenetrable mysteries of nature, bound to an eternity above the changeable “night” and “sun” of life. Fused with divine immortality, he abjures his “parental” bonds to the waning movements of time. Though Shakespeare begins Lear's speech with an emphatic use of the royal “we” in line 114, it soon dissipates within this prayer to the blinding promises of fantasy. Once again, Lear tangles his mortal self—the image of human fallibility and frailty honored by Cordelia—with the sublime magic of Hecate. “By all the operations of the orbs,” he cries, “...I disclaim all my paternal care.” Lear admits no distance between himself and the everlasting dominion of kingship—its power to command the orbs, to dictate the course of history, and to surmount human capitulation to death. Captivated by the imagination's enchantments, Lear breaks himself from the terrible truth of transience, denying the necessary decline of parenthood for the mask of godliness. This

“I” reverberates as the self-same “me” who called for the map; they are personas of mortal weakness transplanted to the stage of eternity, clinging to the dream of divinity to escape decay’s looming sovereignty. Yet the danger of this divided self, split between the pull of time and the enthralling phantom of imperishability, echoes in Lear’s ominous allusion to “stranger.” Lost in this magnificent, obscuring dream world, the image of the “stranger” foretells the King’s terrible alienation from himself and from reality. Though his communion with the magical divinity of Hecate incarnates *King Lear*’s most resplendent engagement with divine consciousness, calling upon the gods’ intervening empathy to overcome the truth of time, Shakespeare isolates this moment of supreme imaginative invention within the love contest’s fantastical irreality. The gods, thrust into the storm’s blind fury, must inexorably dissolve with the King’s awful epiphany of history, impermanence, and deterioration, confronting Lear with the unadorned image of his own mortality—his estrangement from the horrors of the real.

Part III: The Storm and the Fool

Enmeshed in a world of imaginative creation, the storm represents for Shakespeare *King Lear*’s most profound engagement with reality. Cast into the austere indifference of nature, Lear must commune with the collapse of Goneril and Regan’s dream world, briefly penetrating the haze of illusion to appreciate his own weakness, fallibility, and insurmountable mortality. The storm commands the breakdown of the absolutes defined by Greenblatt and chased, desperately, by Lear—it thunders through this once fantastical cosmos as the play’s great chthonic messenger, binding all characters to the disillusioning truth of human transience. Relinquished to the undeceiving cruelty of the storm, the Fool exposes Lear to the harrowing impossibility of transfiguration through language, cultivating for the King a reflection of grotesque human fallibility that destroys the illusory magnificence of Goneril and Regan’s promises. Lear witnesses his daughters’ pontifications of infinite love crumble into the vast and impenetrable

insentience of nature, forced beyond the insulating boundaries of his court and the reassuring inventions of fantasy. The Fool's music is a portal to enlightenment that recalls Cordelia's vision of transience after her banishment, as his infernal chorus leads Lear to an epiphanic understanding of the earth's unflinching eroticism, consumption, and death. "This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen" (*Lear* III.iv 76), the capering prophet laughs, watching his crazed master confront the hopelessness of an existence beyond time. The Fool personifies the ecstatic madness that radiates through the seer—a madness that ruthlessly harnesses the real, dispelling the sublime projections of the imagination in its pursuit of undeceiving truth. While Goneril and Regan's grandiloquent speeches sought to raise their father beyond the decay of temporal mutability, the songs of the Fool remain rooted in reality's gross corporeality. His bawdy humor, his incisive plainness, and his unwieldy poetry follow the King's descent into the illuminating night of a godless universe, imbuing Lear with terrible understanding of the mortality worshiped by "fools and madmen." Language, plummeting from the spectacular embellishment of the love contest, disintegrates to the rough rhythms of the Fool's songs, exuding the sexuality, savagery, and ephemerality of nature untouched by fantasy.

Greenblatt proves that these fantastical extremes, lifted by the imagination beyond the real, must inevitably fall into nature's disillusioning equilibrium. The landscape of *King Lear* pulsates with the chaos of a world impervious to the impositions of fantasy, drowning the blinding symbolism of the love contest in its epiphanic vision of human weakness: "Lear lurches instead toward the conviction that there is no significant moral distinction between judges and thieves...All that secures the difference between them is a monopoly of violence (Greenblatt 92). Nature in *King Lear* is indeed a "monopoly of violence." Permeated by decay and death, the storm relinquishes the King to the bestialized corporeality revered by his Fool, melting

chimerical absolutes into the landscape's awesome indifference. Man is but an animal upon the heath, as the mask of imagination drops to reveal humanity's ultimate debt to fallibility, imperfection, and mortality. Lear's communion with the storm represents the dissipation of the love contest's longing for reflected deification, reducing language to the raw noise of brutal nature and dissolving the furious gods into its blank impassivity. King Lear's meditation upon this world's competition and cruelty shatters the mirror of eternity crystallized during the love contest. "The dream of the absolute with which the play opens, whether absolute power or absolute love, has been destroyed forever" (Greenblatt 94), Greenblatt concludes, abandoning the dream of everlasting sovereignty to the landscape's rapacious darkness. Shakespeare orchestrates the breakdown of imaginative authority, as he attempts to liberate the characters of *King Lear* from the phantom of immortality that haunts the love contest's cultivated delusion. Instead of idolizing, Shakespeare humanizes; instead of working to transform and refine, to perfect and protect, the imagination should strive simply to reveal.

The dream world of the love contest is indeed short-lived. Seeking asylum from the specter of mortality for himself and his train of knights, Lear turns to Goneril and Regan to fulfill the promises of their grandiloquent pronouncements—to preserve him through the illusion of authority above history's cruel movements. Yet beyond the insulating bounds of the love contest, time surges on, unaffected by the imagination's impositions. Though he longs for the eternity woven into the language of Goneril and Regan's speeches, Lear must journey through his encounter with the storm to an epiphany of transience that overwhelms the mirror of immortality crafted by his dissembling daughters. Goneril and Regan strive to strip away the illusions that they once conjured; they are above all creatures of history, commanded by the brutal shifts of empire and the approach of their father's inescapable death. "I gave you all" (*Lear* II.iv 249), the

broken monarch cries to Regan, watching his daughters slowly disband the empty symbols of sovereignty that attended him after his abdication. Lear before the storm still believes in this possibility of “all.” It is an imaginative space apart from time—one that mimics the sonnet, transfiguring children into a reflection of undying love suspended in the eternity of language.

However, the monosyllabic beats that permeate the rhythms of insanity endure even in Lear’s laconic lament to Regan. Despite the King’s yearning for deification and exemption from decay, the strains of nature invade Lear’s crumbling dream world, warping the splendid poetry of the love contest into the storm’s rude tautologies. “And in good time you gave it” (*Lear* II.iv 250), Regan callously replies, as Shakespeare reveals her fascination with deterioration through an emphatic allusion to “time.” At last the daughters peel back the mask of the imagination to confront their father with the truth of impermanence, catapulting *King Lear* into the horrific revelation of mortality that can recall the blindness of illusion only as a shield against apocalyptic visions of death. Regan endures as a personification of time untouched by fantasy, devouring and devastating, reminding her father of necessary acquiescence to the pull of irrelevance, impotence, and frailty.

Unlike the children of romance, Goneril and Regan are cruel and conniving—they dwell in an infernal universe utterly separated from the paradisaical innocence of Miranda and Ferdinand, from the oneiric love of Florizel, Perdita, and Mamillius. Yet while Shakespeare touches them with a demonic wickedness unknown in the dreamy realities of romance, Lear’s eldest daughters mirror the children of *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest* in their willingness to relinquish their deluded father to the terrible certainty of impermanence, fallibility, and demise. Trapped within the illusions of tragedy, Lear refuses to abjure the magic of the imagination, unable to conjure resurrection from his fear of nature’s deadening indifference. Though he consigns his soul to the

siren song of fantasy, Lear's awesome dread of madness's clarity echoes through his confrontation with Goneril and Regan before the storm scene. Purged of his attending train, Lear fights insanity's insidious epiphanies—his mortal body falls away from the sublimity of kingship, and the realization of transience lingers at the gates of epiphany. Lear must inveigh against this revelation of mortality, as he screams to betraying Goneril:

I prithee daughter, do not make me mad.
 I will not trouble thee, my child; farewell.
 We'll no more meet, no more see one another.
 But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter,
 Or rather a disease that's in my flesh,
 Which I must needs call mine. Thou art a boil,
 A plague-sore, or embossèd carbuncle
 In my corrupted blood. But I'll not chide thee.
 Let shame come when it will, I do not call it.
 I do not bid the Thunder-bearer shoot,
 Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove (*Lear* II.iv 217-227).

The conflation of children and ephemerality plagues both tragedy and romance. Repulsed by Goneril's banishment of illusion—her unwillingness to continue the pantomime of eternity beyond the love contest's fantastical borders—Lear distorts his eldest daughter into the hideous metonymy of natural decay. The reality of death persists in Lear's very flesh, embodied in the withering exterior world by Regan and Goneril's acquiescence to mortality. "I prithee daughter, do not make me mad," he begs Goneril, avoiding the terrible reflection of impermanence incarnated by his daughters' refusal of his courtly train. This plea rings with the King's longing to endure forever in the obscuring delusions of his dream world; it is a prayer to the blindness of fantasy, as Lear turns away from the image of broken influence to escape madness's incisive clarity. "We'll no more meet, no more see one another," the monarch declares, feverishly avoiding the cruelty of time personified by his rapacious children.

Yet the tautologies of insanity endure even in this oath to eternity. Shakespeare's nimble repetition of "no more" reveals the willful blindness that surrenders the play's universe to the

mask of fantasy, precluding redemption, transfiguration, and resurrection through its absolute refusal to gaze upon the real. The characters of *King Lear* “no more see one another” after the maddening insight of the storm passes, plunged instead into the night of insulating illusion that forever divides them from romance’s reviving clarity. The reality of transience remains inescapably present in *King Lear*—a tormenting phantom that hovers at the edges of the imagination, constantly threatening to erode entrancing dream worlds into the piercing cruelty of nature. Death is a “disease” trapped in “[his] flesh, [his] blood, [his] daughter;” it is both inside and outside, both the inescapable history and the harrowing future of humanity. Indeed, Shakespeare marks Lear’s protest against the withering decay of time with the gross physicality that radiates through the Fool’s music. A contorted mess of “boil[s],” “plague-sore[s],” and “embossèd carbuncle[s],” even the King’s furious rejection of death has been infected by deterioration—the “corrupted blood” of man’s weakness and vulnerability.

Outside the love contest, the gods become powerless—the ancient and wistful fixtures of a lost nobility. Lear’s allusions to Jupiter likewise incarnate his subconscious movement towards insanity’s acknowledgement of human limitation. For a moment, the King recognizes his distance from the gods’ eternal and omnipotent realm, no longer projected by the imagination into the commanding resplendence of Hecate. “I do not bid the Thunder-bearer shoot,/ Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove,” he assures Goneril, glimpsing his own subordination to the swiftly fading deities. Impotence reverberates in Lear’s invocation of Jupiter, as their power to intervene in man’s doomed affairs surrenders to the brutal energy of nature. The gods belong to a chimerical dream world above time, as Shakespeare echoes the King’s imprecatory threat to “tell tales” of Goneril and Regan’s cruelty to divinity in his plea to Cordelia that they will pass time in prison, “tell[ing] old tales” (*Lear* V.iii 12). Like the desperate monarch’s supplication to Cordelia

after the destruction of his kingdom, the gods of *King Lear* exist in a fantasy suspended within language, unable to unite with reality to overcome the horrors of the past or to convert characters to the indomitable truth of fallibility. Silent and indistinct, they can only bear witness to the collapse of the imagination into the storm's barren indifference, unmoved by Lear's ferocious call for justice:

You see me here, you gods, a poor old man,
As full of grief as age, wretched in both.
If it be you that stirs these daughters' hearts
Against their father, fool me not so much
To bear it tamely; touch me with noble anger,
And let not women's weapons, water drops,
Stain my man's cheeks. No, you unnatural hags (*Lear* II.iv 262-268).

Harold Bloom describes the Lear of the play's opening acts as "a falling divinity...bewildered and bewildering" (Bloom 482). Divinity itself is falling in the deteriorating reality that follows the love contest. As the majesty of Lear's prayer to Hecate dissipates into the cold impersonality of "you gods," Shakespeare plays with the utter collapse of fantasy from the first act's oneiric absolutes. Dream worlds are fracturing in the moments preceding the storm, chasing the phantasmal memory of intervening justice that might vindicate the King's outraged suffering.

Indeed, Lear's call of "you see me here, you gods, a poor old man" endures among the play's most tragic instances of irony. No one but Cordelia and the Fool can truly "see" Lear through the veil of imagination, as the King implores faint, unknowable deities to rescue him from the undecieving truth of human transience—to shield him from Goneril and Regan's unmasking with insulating blindness. Lost in the rupture between the love contest's dream world and the storm's appalling reality, Lear seeks the reflection of justice in the impassive gods, as he cries, "[f]ool me not so much/ to bear it tamely." Shakespeare's obvious pun on "fool" rings with cruel significance. Though he longs for the divine inventions of the imagination to intervene in Goneril and Regan's rapacity—to transfigure the blank brutality of nature into fantasy's

redemptive eternity—Lear must instead be “fool[ed]” to commune with the storm’s disillusionment. “Fool[ing]” in *King Lear* represents the undeceived acknowledgment of mortality that destroys the possibility of redemptive, “noble anger” in a universe forgotten by God. Shakespeare will indeed save Lear from “bear[ing]” his daughter’s revelation “tamely.” Thrust beyond the civilizing boundaries of the love contest’s stately pomp, the broken King becomes for a moment an element of wild nature, temporarily liberated from occluding fantasy.

The Fool incarnates for Shakespeare the play’s most grotesque embodiment of reality. *King Lear*’s resignation to death personified, the Fool endures as an apocalyptic messenger who ushers in the collapse of imaginative form explored by Kott and Caldwell. Discarding biblical and hierarchical order, this prophetic madman dismisses Lear’s longing for salvation through suffering or redemption through fantasy with the infernal satire of his songs, proving that broken divinity remains the last absolute in this fractured kingdom: “...the Fool does not desert his ridiculous, degraded king, and accompanies him on his way to madness. The Fool knows that the only true madness is to regard this world as rational. The feudal order is absurd and can be described only in terms of the absurd. The world stands upside down” (Kott 167). Humanity’s impositions of “feudal” order deteriorate beneath the ecstasy of this incisive insanity. Nature, ungraspable and indifferent, thunders in the discordant strains of the Fool’s entralling music, luring the King towards his undeceiving realization of mortality and fallibility. This awakening into the horror of nature embodies for Shakespeare *King Lear*’s most successful experiment in resurrection. Like Prospero and Leontes, who must cast aside the charms of the imagination to experience human frailty, the King’s maddened prophet dispels fantasy to unite Lear with the terrible epiphany of his own weakness. The Fool drags language from the perfecting heights of the love contest, warping the grandiloquent speeches of the first two acts into the gnarled verse

of his chants. These songs ring through *King Lear* as prayers to the dominion of impermanence, change, and death. Abandoned in the breakdown of imaginative reflection, Lear is forced to gaze upon the image of his own failed yearning for immortality, emblemized by the Fool's lascivious corporeality.

The Fool endures as *King Lear's* unequivocal mirror of mortality. Like Cordelia, who confronted her father with a vision of life unadorned by the imagination's impositions, the Fool eulogizes the impossibility of Lear's longing to bind himself with kingship's eternity. The mortal body remains the Fool's supreme fascination. Relinquished by Shakespeare to this world of broken deification, he summons reality from the shattered inventions of fantasy, fusing the deluded King with the inescapability of history, change, and death. Madness distorts to clarity in *King Lear*. Just as the children of romance reflect for their parents the inexorable waning of generational influence, the Fool attends his master to the enlightening exploration of humanity's limitations. "Now thou art an O without a figure" (*Lear* I.iv.199), the Fool once teased his King, gazing upon the truth of age and obsolescence without the blinding mask of illusion; the Fool cannot fear nothingness—it defines and contours the blank reality woven by his music. Yet in him Shakespeare found a prophetic guide who acknowledged the absence of God with an openness to decay and emptiness that for a moment beckons Lear back into the illuminating folds of nature.

In a kingdom corroded by illusion, the Fool proves that the only reality endures in ecstatic insanity. As Kott comments, "[t]he greatest fool is he who does not know he is a fool: the prince himself. That is why the clown has to make fools of others; otherwise he would not be a clown" (Kott 164). At times, the Fool's madness seems to approximate sanity, as Shakespeare plays with the absurd delusions of fantasy that render the insane the lone voices of reason in a

kingdom surrendered to Lear's unattainable yearning for immortality. Music endures as the Fool's captivating instrument of awakening. Mimicking the resurrections of romance with his hymns, the Fool's songs celebrate humanity's unbreakable ties to the landscape's gross eroticism, brutality, and impermanence, as he cries:

The codpiece that will house
 Before the head has any,
 The head and he shall louse:
 So beggars marry many.
 The man that makes his toe
 What he his heart should make
 Shall of a corn cry woe,
 And turn his sleep to wake (*Lear* III.ii 27-34).

The Fool's chant rejects the lofty iambic pentameter of civilized verse, bound instead to an unruly trimeter that better incarnates the staccato beats of savage nature. The codpiece reduces for Shakespeare to the synecdochic embodiment of fantasy's impotence. An illusion and an artificial creation, this codpiece echoes both the chimerical beauty of Goneril and Regan's poetry and the imaginary authority guarded by Lear after his abdication. It is a mask of constructed fecundity, hiding, like the dream word of the love contest, history's natural deterioration. The Fool's captivation with animalistic eroticism rings through his song. Transfiguring the eternal dominion chased by the King in the play's opening acts to an absurd, ornamental, and powerless object, the mad prophet distills the dreams of the love contest into the beggar's gross corporeality. Nowhere does Shakespeare manifest this fall of fantasy more clearly than in the song's rhymes. Pairing "house" and "louse," the Fool traces Lear's inexorable movement from the imagination's insulating constructions to vile baseness. Fantasy's built inventions are collapsing into the landscape's repugnant and overwhelming lowliness; what was once high has become vulgar. Likewise, the Fool's nimble couplet of "make" and "wake" juxtaposes the oneiric reveries of the imagination with the stark vision of reality awaiting the King in the storm.

The realm of constructions—an obvious space of dream and artificial creation—must escape the sleep of delusion through the Fool’s undeceiving music, for a moment confronted by the epiphanic indifference of nature. “[T]he rain it raineth every day” (*Lear* III.ii 74-77), the Fool sings to his master, as the characters of *King Lear* struggle and fail vanquish the ghost of death or obsolescence—they are an elemental part of life’s fabric, Shakespeare proves his prophetic madman, insurmountably present in the landscape’s consciousness.

Dream worlds cannot survive in the barren realism of the heath. They distort to expressions of animalistic consumption and sexuality, drawn back to the truth of mortal limitation by the wild rapacity that courses through nature. For Kott, the world of *King Lear* has forfeited its gods—its sublime imaginative spheres—to the savagery of the heath. There is no room in this play for dream worlds after the love contest. Plunged into the disillusioning truth of nature, the characters of *King Lear* must accept the ultimate and undeceiving dominion of nothingness, mortality, and forsaken imaginative projections: “Man [is] nothing but man,” Kott observes, “[a] nobody, who suffers, tries to give his suffering a meaning or nobility, who revolts or accepts his suffering, and who must die” (Kott 155). Forced beyond the comforting bounds of the love contest, Lear abandons the dream of eternity through madness’s ecstasy. The fantastical creations that once lifted man above history into the illusory space of divinity melt; all that remains is mortal humanity, forsaken to the terrible crush of time:

In Shakespeare’s play there is neither Christian Heaven, nor the heaven predicted and believed in by humanists. *King Lear* makes a tragic mockery of all eschatologies: of the heaven promised on earth, and the heaven promised after death; in fact—of both Christian and secular theodicies; of cosmogony and of the rational view of history; of the gods and the good nature, of man made in “image and likeness.” In *King Lear* both the medieval and the Renaissance orders of established values disintegrate. All that remains at the end of this gigantic pantomime, is the earth—empty and bleeding. On this earth, through which tempests has passed leaving only stones, the King, the Fool, the Blind Man and the Madman carry on their distracted dialogue (Kott 147).

Prospero too will confront this loss of spiritual purity through *The Tempest's* wedding play (Kott 338). Acted by the sublime Ceres and Juno, this play incarnates both the magician's and Lear's desperate search for an imaginative space untouched by the shifts of empire, preserved from the horrors of history through fantasy's rejuvenating divinity. Yet the imagination cannot surmount the inescapable presence of fallibility or mortality, layering its trifling inventions over time's ruthless surge. Though Prospero renounces his oneiric magic as the play's wistful sacrifice to the inexorable dominion of death, Lear, Gloucester, and Edgar persist in Kott's deluded "pantomime." While the romances teach their furious patriarchs to acknowledge the majesty of the earth, "empty and bleeding," Lear can only briefly penetrate the haze of illusion. Though the phantasmal imaginative structures of the love contest disintegrate during the storm, Lear still yearns in the play's concluding acts for a world defined by creative hierarchy—divided between a Heaven and a Hell, between the righteous and the wicked. *King Lear* exemplifies the grandest and cruelest Shakespearean "pantomime." Stripped of their redemptive significance after the tempest, language and the gods continue to haunt characters with their tarnished promises of salvation and transformation. Unable to conjure resurrection, the inventions of the imagination reduce to the empty gestures of a lost world—the phantasmal memory of man entwined to divinity.

Indeed, Kott's note of Lear and Gloucester's "distracted dialogue" exemplifies the blinding powers of language after the storm. Though they must deteriorate to nature's howling tautologies, monologues, poetry, and imagined dialogues continue to captivate the King and his Duke with the dream of forsaken divinity. James Calderwell synthesizes Kott's repudiation of the gods in *King Lear* into a collapse of imaginative form itself. By abandoning his King in the darkness of pagan England, Shakespeare draws his audiences back to a realm uncorrupted by the

projections of Medieval or Renaissance Christianity, exploring a nature before it became the mirror through which man chased his longing for immortality:

It is almost as though, abdicating from his task of presenting his audience with made meanings and fashioned forms, [Shakespeare was] requiring us to return with him to a point of creative origin, the unshaped, meaningless stuff with which he began. If so, then this regressive undoing of the play seems to accord with its historical regression to ancient England—to a primitive period before Christianity imposed its forms and meanings on the presumed chaos of pagan times (Calderwell 125).²

Lear's kingdom endures in this formless void, desperately constructing the shadows of human order that bow, inexorably, to the maddening terror of a realm untouched by divinity. Though Lear and Gloucester seek the redemptive reflection of divinity in the landscape's movements, nature in *King Lear* endures as a soulless entity, utterly devoid of God's image. A "tragic mockery of all eschatologies" (Kott 147), Shakespeare's voyage backwards through time strives to crumble the imagination's inventions into the violence, ephemerality, and indifference of an environment forgotten by divinity. "Crack Nature's molds, all germains spill at once,/ That makes ingrateful man" (*Lear* III.ii 8-9), the King rages to the insentient skies, calling upon the storm's ferocious energy to erode dream worlds into the landscape's cruelty. Nature's molds have indeed cracked in this tempestuous moment of fantastical breakdown, relinquished to the "meaningless stuff" of a kingdom before the gods. "All bonds, all laws, whether divine, natural or human, are broken" (Kott 153), Kott summarizes; Pagan England represented for Shakespeare a realm divorced from form—one in which the constructions of fantasy could serve only to occlude the astonishing brutality of a natural space without God or the gods.

If disillusionment in *King Lear* pivots on characters' power to commune with the insentience of nature, the Fool—his bawdiness and his astonishing realism—personifies the disintegration of fantasy invoked by Kott. The Fool believes in no imaginative space beyond the

²Caldwell, James. "Creative Uncreation in *King Lear*." *Modern Critical Interpretations of King Lear*. Chelsea House Publishers, 1987. Pg. 125.

storm. He is the prophet of unadorned nature, bending to the indifference of reality alone. As Garber notes, Shakespeare imbues his Fool with obvious bonds to the fools of Psalm 14, which proclaims: “‘The fool hath said in his heart, [there is] no God’” (Garber 673). Kott proves that the universe of *King Lear* rejects the fantastical creation of divinity; God distills to an imaginative invention, woven by desperate characters to protect themselves from the realization of inescapable transience. Alone in this forsaken cosmos, the Fool cries out against Lear’s aggrandizing visions of deifying authority, conjuring instead a mirror of impermanence that shines in the King’s insanity. He is the ultimate Shakespearean nonbeliever, fracturing oneiric dream worlds into the wild rapacity of nature. Appropriately labeled by Garber as a “biblical fool” (Garber 673), he embodies the “impious” undertones ascribed to him by the OED. The antithesis of poetic, constructed immortality, Lear’s professional madman does indeed personify “Death in disguise” (Garber 673); through his crude sexuality, his sensitivity to emptiness, and his fascination with chaos, this Fool embodies and reflects the sinister indifference of a world abandoned by God. An awakening into the naked austerity of lost illusion—of communion with the impossibility of exemption from time—the Fool’s chants confront the crazed Lear with the disillusioning truth of nature’s indomitable bestialism.

King Lear’s nakedness symbolizes the play’s most primordial communion with the bestial heart of nature. While the resurrections of romance are attended by the dressing of characters in fresh clothes, Lear casts off the trappings of the love contest to experience the ultimate (though short-lived) Shakespearean communion with human frailty, impermanence, and deterioration. Lear becomes an elemental force of undeceived humanity, confronting at last the natural shifts of history that entwine man and beast in shared decay. The splendid mirrors of the love contest have fractured. Life on the heath leads inexorably towards death, as parents, once

deluded by their conflation of self with immortal office, yield to the spectral truth of impotence. Time has triumphed, and the chimerical realm of the gods acquiesce to the landscape's withering transience.

Relinquishing fantasy's ennobling promises of redemption, justice, and mercy, Lear embraces apocalypse. This acceptance of broken illusion grows gradually with the illuminating onset of madness. Indeed, Lear's first encounter with unadorned mortality endures entirely his imagination, as the King laments the unseen beggars of fantasy who weather the storm exposed to nature's supreme indifference: "[h]ow shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,/ Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you/ From seasons such as these?" (*Lear* III.iv 30-32). The love contest was a creative space of plenty. As Garber noted, it was furnished with trumpets and furs, maps and coronets; it exemplified a world of material abundance whose austere absence rings through Lear's astonished outrage for the "unfed sides" of the mendicant. These beggars are relentlessly defined by the King's lingering allegiance to civilization. Drawn by Lear with "houseless heads" and "windowed raggedness," they bear the unmistakable remnants of the love contest's dream of insulation from nature and time. Lear can only dwell on the terrible dissipation of courtly or imaginative inventions in the storm's wasteland. Unable to peer past the constructions of illusion, the King founders in a "looped" and illusive quest for impossible justice: "[e]xpose thyself to feel what wretches feel,/ That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,/ And show the heavens more just" (*Lear* III.iv 34-36). This yearning for righteousness plagues King Lear before his utter surrender to the spell of insanity. Still believing in nature's power to reflect divinity, he chases the phantom of redemption through suffering in his hope to resurrect broken human order by "feel[ing] what wretches feel." Yet the projection of justice has dissipated in this world of shattered mirrors. Man is alone on the heath, forgotten by the

intervening empathy of the gods, the immortal dreams of the love contest; in *King Lear*, Shakespeare proves, suffering cannot transcend cruelty.

Through his encounter with the naked Edgar (disguised as Poor Tom), Lear must learn to abandon his haunted fascination with the redeeming “heavens,” casting away the trappings of civilization to cultivate his resurrecting acknowledgement of insurmountable human weakness:

Thou wert better in a grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies. Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! Here's three on's are sophisticated. Thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here (*Lear* III.iv 103-111).

How far from the majestic Hecate speech has the disillusioned King traveled through madness. Lear takes the Fool's diabolical trimeters farther than the prophet himself, diverging from the imaginative opulence of verse to experiment with the plain wisdom of prose. The imagery of infernal resurrection attends Lear's journey into the naked clarity of madness. Observing that Edgar would be “better in a grave than to answer [the storm] with [his] uncovered body,” Lear witnesses Poor Tom's humbled acceptance of demise; he is, at his primordial essence, the walking dead. Edgar as Poor Tom has surrendered to the inexorability of inglorious deterioration, as his nakedness embodies the unblinking acquiescence to mortality eulogized by the Fool's music.

Lear too will negotiate life beyond the grave. Yet though he awakens in the French camp as if resurrected, the mask of fantasy returns in these late scenes to preclude true rebirth. Instead, this moment of nakedness, of communion with life's astonishing and awesome ephemerality, represents *King Lear*'s sole instance of true spiritual disillusionment. While he once passively received an identity lifted above time from Goneril and Regan's dissembling answers, Lear's insanity empowers the enlightened King to seek truth for himself—a truth derived from the

corporeality of the physical world, not the illusive splendors of language. Lear answers his own questions (“Is man no more than this?”), as Shakespeare abandons the imagery of civilization for the wild liberty of nature’s beasts. Nakedness returns humanity to creation’s chaotic and undeceiving equilibrium; he owes no debt to the worm, the sheep, the beast, or the cat. He endures among them—one of them, surrendered to the instinctive current of time that pulls all mortal life towards deterioration. Suddenly, Lear sees clothing itself as an imaginative construction. Like poetry and the gods, it warps nature, abusing and contorting humanity beyond the bounds of its rightful, animalistic sphere. At last, Lear has encountered death—“the thing itself”—at its most primeval essence.

Part IV: Madness and Gloucester’s False Resurrection

Madness represents *King Lear*’s epiphanic moment of clarity. Pushed by his children’s allegiance to time beyond the comforting bounds of the love contest, Lear is stripped on the heath of all imaginative pretensions. He becomes a primordial piece of nature, bending with the cruel rhythms of death, decay, and inexorable change elucidated by the Fool’s transfixing music. The mask of imagination has surrendered to reality. The King no longer chases his image in the mirror of immortality, breaking his earthly body from his office’s splendid eternity. Abandoning his humbled monarch in this world of instinctual change, Shakespeare relinquishes the once sublime inventions of the gods and language to the landscape’s indomitable energy.

Yet while Lear briefly realizes the undecieving truth of insurmountable deterioration, this shock of incisive madness is challenged, contradicted, and ultimately overwhelmed by the resurgent force of fantasy. Even after the thunderous disillusionment of the storm, Gloucester, Edgar, and Lear himself still long for the reflection of divinity and redemption in nature. Blinded by language’s power to construct dream worlds beyond the relentless pull of time, they mask the horror of inescapable death beneath the imagination’s feeble and diaphanous creations. Romance

will teach Leontes and Prospero to embrace life's humanizing transience, as the furious magician and the disillusioned king renounce the imagination's magic to grasp the unyielding reality of mortal limitation. The last acts of *King Lear* can accept no such visions of broken illusion. Gloucester, punished for his captivation with Edmund's distorting lies, yearns to imbue his farcical suicide with transcendent profundity; invoking the mercy of empathic divinity, he calls upon the gods to amend the sins of the past—to transform the unforgiving chaos of time into salvation. In a kingdom of broken absolutes, however, the gods have vanished. Death cannot rewrite history, Shakespeare illuminates through the Duke's gruesome hope for metamorphosis. Life and decay persist as the tangled halves of the same natural experience, collapsing characters' ennobled searches for justice into the landscape's austere equilibrium. The storm has fractured fantasy's mirror, and though Edgar feverishly reassembles the scattered shards of imaginative invention to protect his father from the truth of impotence, fallibility, and death, his illusory tale rings through *King Lear* as Shakespeare's most terrible tribute to the occluding power of desperation. Edgar's retelling of his father's botched suicide crafts a dream world—one that derives entirely from the obscuring power of language. Yet it endures beyond reality, untouched by the shifts of history that have banished the gods' redemptive sympathy. Gloucester, like humanity in *King Lear*, is alone on the cliffs, crying into the vast indifference of nature for the impossible realization of divine absolution, transfiguration, and resurrection.

King Lear too will experiment in the failed magic of imaginative resurrection. Though the Fool's music draws him towards the enlightening truth of human frailty, Lear stumbles from the illuminating depths of madness yearning to be cleansed of this revelatory transience. Insanity's insights remain too terrible and too awesome for the King; they dissolve the oneiric wonders of dream worlds, forcing the broken monarch to consign his soul to mortality with an

openness to decay unattainable in the blinded realm of tragedy. Lear cannot abandon the love contest's promises of undying influence, authority, and life. As madness wanes, the inventions of fantasy return, protecting the King from the image of his own fallibility and enslavement to history. Even during Lear's "resurrection" in the French camp, the broken monarch must project the infernal illusion of eternity upon his encounter with Cordelia to shield himself from mortality's epiphany. Suspended in this supernatural dream of heaven and hell, Lear blinds himself to Cordelia and her disabusing acknowledgement of time and generational descent. The gods linger in this fantasy, dividing the righteous from the wicked, the saved from the unsaved. Yet Gloucester's failed attempt at metamorphosis through death has already proved that divinity has forgotten the austere reality of *King Lear's* cosmos. Time remains the only soul of nature, hurtling characters towards the deaths that they blur with the fantasy of resurrection. Longing to be lifted above the ruthless flow of history in prison with Cordelia, Lear's plea for exemption from time resounds as the play's concession to the blindness of the imagination and its dream worlds. Unwilling to confront the terrible image of his own frailty and fallibility, Lear can only pretend that the dead Cordelia awakens to preserve his impossible yearning for eternity through her silenced voice. Resurrection requires the unblinking acceptance of mortality—it is a channel to the humbling epiphany of limitation; Lear, after his spell of illuminating madness, never again grasps the power of weakness, transience, and death, as Shakespeare suspends him in dream world of delusion that forever precludes the appreciation of reviving self-knowledge.

Gloucester's longing for intervening divinity haunts his attempts at suicide. At times imploring spirits for saving empathy, at others railing against their cruelty and silence, Gloucester yearns for a reflection of human consciousness in the gods that would lift his suffering beyond nature's blank indifference into the realm of the divine. The Duke no longer

cares whether or not the gods are sadistic or compassionate; it matters only that they exist, bearing witness to sublunary drama and imbuing it with significance beyond the cruel shifts of history. The characters of *King Lear* cannot accept their utter isolation in this tragic cosmos. They need the gods to refute the horror of absolute mortality, seeking the image of eternity captured, for a moment, by the love contest. “As flies to wanton boys, are we to th’ gods/ They kill us for their sport” (*Lear* IV.I.36-37), the blinded Duke mourns, while the savagery inflicted upon him by Goneril and Regan—embodiments of brutal nature—becomes a false attestation to the consciousness of wrathful deities. Though they butcher and betray, the gods signify a system of justice above the landscape’s chaotic murder. Yet even Gloucester’s lament hints at the impotence of fantasy in this universe after the storm. Employing simile to distance mortal man from his imaginative creations, Shakespeare excavates through his fatal “as” the desperation that builds deifying dream worlds to insulate humanity from nature with impossible, ungraspable divinity. Indeed, time is inescapably present in this prayer to the gods’ cruel and imagined dominion, as the Duke’s ominous allusion to “flies” heralds the inescapable presence of decay, deterioration, and death. The gods remain the thunderous keepers of *King Lear*’s dream worlds, promising to save humanity from the reality of transience and alienation through their wrath or their solicitude, their fury or their transforming empathy. The Duke’s yearning for this illusory space above time reverberates through his call for absolution moments before his farcical suicide. Poised at the precipice of an imagined cliff, Gloucester implores:

O you mighty gods!
 This world I do renounce, and in your sights
 Shake patiently my great affliction off:
 If I could bear it longer and not fall
 To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,
 My snuff and loathed part of nature should
 Burn itself out. If Edgar lives, O bless him!
 Now, fellow, fare thee well (*Lear* IV.vi.34-41)

The longings of the love contest echo through this passage. Parroting Lear's desire to "shake all cares and business from our age" (*Lear* I.i 41), the Duke consigns his soul to the emptiness of fantasy—to the dooming hope for resurrection through blindness, escape, and occlusion. In this realm of tarnished dream worlds, the tragic grandeur of Gloucester's invocation, "O you mighty gods" distorts to an ironic apostrophe. Enmeshed in his blinding illusion, the Duke cries out into the stupendous nothingness of nature, projecting upon his suffering a hope for redemption or salvation proved impossible by the King's incisive madness. The "mighty gods" disintegrated during the storm. Alone on the heath, the characters of *King Lear* are continually trapped in "this world"—a terrible and indifferent world conducted by the relentless flow of time. "This world I do renounce," Gloucester promises the absent divinities, tracing Lear's unattainable hope to evade the brutal decay of history through the imagination. Yet Shakespeare traps his Duke even syntactically between the two realms, pinioning his "I" at the purgatorial intersection of "this world" and the dream of escape, renunciation, and metamorphosis. Resurrection cannot stem from Gloucester's yearning to "shake patiently [his] great affliction off." Humanity in *King Lear* becomes an elemental piece of nature, tethered through its shared mortality and frailty to the insurmountable "affliction" of failure, deterioration, and change. Surrendered to this obscuring dream world, Gloucester mistakes the "opposeless will" of time for the vanquished gods, striving to reimagine death into the chimerical manifestation of lost justice and absolution.

The storm banishes the gods from *King Lear*'s forsaken universe. Submerging the King's consciousness in the horrible truth of impermanence, decay, and death, the storm dissolves the love contest's illusions. Time remains the only deity of this disabused world, relinquishing the dreams of the past to history's inexorable movements. Romance will affirm the resurrecting power of communion with the demise of divinity and fantasy, as the characters of

The Tempest and *The Winter's Tale* embrace revival as a symbol of acquiescence to the insurmountable dominion of waning generational influence. Yet the final acts of *King Lear* seek to shield characters from this epiphanic glimpse of mortal limitation. Transfixed by the imagination's promises of immortality, eternity, and unyielding sovereignty, Gloucester and Lear chase the lost reflection of divinity, yearning to ascribe a metamorphosing redemption to death—one that has been sacrificed to nature's chaotic indifference. Kott comments:

Gloucester's suicide has meaning only if the gods exist. It is a protest against undeserved suffering and the world's injustice. This protest is made in definite direction. It refers to eschatology. Even if the gods are cruel, they must take this suicide into consideration. It will count in the final reckoning between gods and man. Its sole value lies in its reference to the absolute. But if the gods, and their moral order in the world, do not exist, Gloucester's suicide does not solve or alter anything. It is only a somersault on an empty stage. It is deceptive and unsuccessful on the factual, as well as on the metaphysical plane. Not only the pantomime, but the whole situation is then grotesque. It is waiting for a Godot who does not come (Kott 150).

The gods no longer dwell in the play's disillusioned heath, and Lear's maddened vision of human transience broken from the inventions of the imagination cannot be forgotten. The fantasy of divinity transforms for Shakespeare into a mask, protecting Gloucester, Lear, and Edgar from the looming realization of terrible insignificance. Humanity in the final acts of *King Lear* is itself trapped in a continual, "somersaulting" quest for this vanished divine presence. Blinding illusion lends Gloucester and Lear the chimerical power to project their suffering onto the stage of eternity; fractured from austere reality, their deaths, their irredeemable mistakes, garner a fantastical significance that obscures the insentience of godless nature. "Gloucester did fall, and he got up again. He made his suicide attempt, but he failed to shake the world. Nothing had changed" (Kott 151), Kott concludes. Death cannot transfigure characters who deny the dominion of mortality. The only path to Shakespearean resurrection demands that great Kings and Dukes gaze upon life's horrific entirety, bowing to the shattered absolutes of dream worlds in surrender to the inescapable authority of impermanence. Gloucester's suicide undoubtedly

conjures its own dream world; crafted by language's magical power to distort death into an enthralling portrait of immortality, his illusory resurrection seeks, like the love contest before it, to triumph over the real. Yet the storm has forever crippled the imagination's reviving energy. It seared history and time into the play's very landscape, and the universe of *King Lear* has bent with Cordelia's promise of seasonal change. Characters can only move through Kott's desperate "pantomime" of fantastical creation—one that has lost its transfiguring significance, serving only to obscure, distort, and mask reality's awful ephemerality.

King Lear's distortion of children into mirrors of immortality reverberates in Edgar's cultivation of false resurrection. Shielding Gloucester from the farcical absurdity of his suicide, Edgar binds him to an imagined landscape of rebirth that derives entirely from language's metamorphosing power. Yet though he strives to hem Gloucester into a dream world beyond the cruel shifts of history, time, and death, Edgar's resurrecting magic is interrupted by the mad King's ferocious apparition. Guided by the Fool's haunting music, Lear emerges from the heath at the apex of prophetic clarity. For a moment, he abandons the mask of imagination; reality suffuses his consciousness, and the dream of eternity capitulates to the indomitable force of time. Lear's madness dissolves the transfixing promises of poetry into nature's strident tautologies. Though language remains for Edgar the grand Shakespearean instrument of fantastical salvation, the harsh wisdom of insanity collapses illusion into the landscape's undeceiving noise. Gloucester's resurrection remains an exercise in delusion. Gruesome and grotesque, it serves only to obscure, enveloping the Duke in a meaningless "pantomime" (Kott 150) that chases the vanquished ghost of human order. Death no longer guards redemptive significance in a world without gods. Suffering, untouched by the ennobling projections of justice, transforms into the

natural condition of man, as Edgar's retelling of his father's failed attempt at metamorphosis serves only to blur the inevitable truth of mortality:

Hadst thou been aught but gossamer, feathers, air,
 So many fathom down precipitating,
 Thou'dst shivered like an egg: but thou dost breathe;
 Hast heavy substance; bleed'st not; speak'st; art sound.
 Ten masts at each make not the altitude
 Which thou hast perpendicularly fell:
 Thy life's a miracle. Speak yet again (*Lear* IV.vi.49-55).

The frailty of fantasy persists even in Edgar's reassurance to Gloucester. This dream world, like *King Lear* after the storm, has been invaded by the indomitable energy of nature. Indeed, the imagery of "gossamer, feathers, air" at once captures the chimerical strength of the imagination and its infection by the landscape's elemental dominion. This diaphanous resurrection endures as nothing more than a crumbling mask, braced against the vision of corroded divinity, order, and salvation. Fantasy reduces to "aught but gossamer," battling the epiphany of human limitation seething beneath the surface of *King Lear*'s disintegrating dream worlds. Edgar's allusion to "feathers" likewise incarnates the lurking presence of nature in this illusion, as the very substance of dream distorts to a fractured portrait of the bestialism encountered by Lear on the heath. Even at this zenith of imaginative invention, Shakespeare describes Gloucester as "shiver[ing] like an egg"—the primordial symbol of life's terrific fragility and impermanence. Like this "egg," Gloucester lingers in a sheltered space of perpetual imaginative isolation, and he cannot be reborn because he refuses to pass into the harrowing knowledge of experience. The Duke's trembles radiate backwards through the play's history to bind him with the exposure, alienation, and cold of the storm. *King Lear* endures in a fallen world; its characters, poised on the precipice of disillusioning knowledge and recognized mortality, can only craft fantasies already permeated by the landscape's cruelty.

The rhythms of nature accelerate with Edgar's desperation to conjure an imaginative space beyond time. Affirming that Gloucester "bleed'st not; speak'st; art sound," Edgar's words become epigrammatic and staccato, anticipating the rough tautologies of the King's madness. The dream of man's sovereignty over nature has failed. Shakespeare leaves Edgar and Gloucester utterly alone on their imagined cliff, weaving this illusion to occlude, feebly, the environment's consumption, wildness, and brutality. The playwright emphasizes this sense of human limitation in Edgar's allusion to the "ten masts" that could not scale the tremendous heights of bluff. An obvious symbol of human innovation against the seas' capricious patterns and savage strength, the mast still cannot match the unassailable dominance of natural structures. "Thy life's a miracle," Edgar promises his destroyed father, longing for the gods' redeeming magic in a world surrendered to the fury of nature. Language remains the last escape into the insulating realm of illusion, as Edgar commands his father to "speak again," desperately trying to recall the love contest's lost power to preserve parents above the crushing movements of time. Yet there can be no miracles in this world of broken reflection. When children refuse to confront their parents with the inescapable truth of death, shielding them instead behind fantasy's clumsy and artificial conjurations, resurrection warps to an absurd exercise in evasion, precluding romance's reviving acceptance of impermanence.

Irrelevance and age, impotence and decay command the chaotic shifts of experience, carrying Kings and Dukes indifferently through time's inexorable march towards death. Even Edgar's exuberant description of the fiend—this resurrection's most tangible and vivid invention—remains tethered to the brutal elements of nature; he becomes a gross amalgamation of land and sea, beast and man, as Edgar Gloucester:

As I stood here below, methought his eyes
Were two full moons; he had a thousand noses,

Horns, whelked and waved like the enridged sea:
 It was some fiend; therefore, thou happy father
 Think that the clearest gods, who make them honors
 Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee (*Lear* IV.vi 69-74).

The fiend remains for Shakespeare sense incarnate. Sketched with eyes like “two full moons,” he looms, unblinking, over this scene of insulating delusion, personifying the indomitable energy of nature that cannot be overcome by fantasy. These eyes reject the imagination's blinding creations. They gaze and they absorb, ingesting the landscape's ferocious will with his “thousand noses.” Cruelty without conscience, sentience without divinity, the fiend persists as *King Lear's* phantasmal harbinger of madness's bestializing clarity. “Look, where he stands and glares” (*Lear* III.vi 24), Edgar (as Poor Tom) once cried, articulating the monarch's fear of incisive limpidity that knocks man from the love contest's insulating heights, returning him, “horn[ed],” naked, and animalistic to the inglorious equilibrium of nature. The fiend endures for the characters of *King Lear* an inescapable ghost, contaminating even the wavering dreams of the imagination with the spectral presence of decay, deterioration, and brutality. Just as he guided Lear to the epiphanic truth of death during the storm, threading Poor Tom's words with the tautological incoherence that echoes in the King's insanity, the fiend revives in this new dream world to confront both Edgar and Gloucester with the impossibility of fantastical evasion. Nature permeates illusion, as characters cling to the blindness of fantasy in a world abandoned to time's insurmountable dominion. Indeed, Shakespeare suffuses the very cadence of Edgar's promise with the environment's energy, inflecting the cruel alliteration that binds “whelked and waved” with the dauntless churning of the sea.

Yet the dream of resurrection beyond the fiend's corrosive influence lingers, as Edgar's allusion to the “happy father” remains especially significant. Evocative of the Christian God's paternal authority, Edgar yearns to impose divine justice over the impervious shifts of history,

supplanting nature with the shadow of a deity who saves and redeems, revives and reprieves. The “happy father” is the ultimate vanquisher of chaos, death, and infernal brutality. He alone will punish the wicked and resurrect the virtuous, repressing the landscape’s savagery with the force of his godly commands. He is, however, only a spirit of Shakespearean dream worlds, suspended in the imagination’s sublime irreality. *The Tempest* too will confront this longing for divinity, as Ferdinand enthusiastically exclaims: “[l]et me live here ever! So rare and wondered a father and a wise/ Makes this place paradise” (*Temp.* IV.i 122-124). Admiring the wedding play that brings deities down to the level of men, Ferdinand consigns his spiritual allegiance to the demi-god and magician Prospero, whose enchantments envelope him in an oneiric world of perfected love, fecundity, and eternity. Yet while Prospero watches his incarnation of divinity melt into history’s bloody circles, Edgar clings to the illusion of compassionate gods, preserving his own “happy father” in the splendid embrace of sacred consciousnesses “who make them honors/ of men’s impossibilities.” Yet while the gods of Edgar and Prospero’s enchantments have been relinquished to the impotent world of fantasy, the fiend is everywhere in *King Lear*. Resurrection pivoted for Shakespeare upon the willingness to embrace this terrible presence—to return the stare of the Fiend’s luminous eyes and to watch the transfixing inventions of the imagination dissipate into nothingness.

Though Edgar yearns to trap his “happy father” in an aloof sphere of broken absolutes, Shakespeare proves through *King Lear*’s maddened apparition the impossibility of resurrection beyond the influence of time or history. Staggering upon the father and son garbed in the weeds of the field, the King incarnates the play’s terrible image of humanity surrendered to nature. He becomes the barbaric visitation of enlightened consciousness, speaking madness’s prophetic nonsense incarnated by the Fool’s chants. The dream of resurrection is broken by Lear’s

undeceiving meditations; briefly unmasked by insanity's clarity, the King infects Edgar's failed magic with the deadly promises of nature:

When we are born, we cry that we are come
To this great stage of fools. This' a good block.
It were a delicate stratagem, to shoe
A troop of horses with felt: I'll pull it' in proof:
And when I have stol'n upon these son-in-laws,
Then, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill! (*Lear* IV.vi 184-189).

The order imposed upon the landscape by divinity and kingship has dissipated. Garlanded with the flowers of the field, Lear resigns himself to the transient shifts of nature—its patterns of birth and death, fecundity and impotence. Dream worlds stand little chance against the brutal austerity of this vision. Dependent upon occlusion and willful blindness, they cannot survive encounters with the shrieking lucidity of the King's madness. Lear personifies resurrection at its most primordial, collapsing Edgar's insulating fantasy into the play's illuminating communion with deterioration, decay, and death. The dream of eternal love, authority, and immortality that permeated the love contest fades, as Shakespeare transfigures *King Lear* into a universal "stage of fools" on which the longings of humanity are chased, rehearsed, and proved ultimately impossible. Lear alone can peer past the creations of the imagination to recognize this tragic joke, while his language abandons the promises of the love contest for nature's rude tautologies. Crying out into the landscape's indifference and savagery, Lear's chant of "kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill" rips through Edgar's cultivated resurrection as an anthem to time's unyielding dominion. Life for *King Lear* is death, and the characters that strive for ungraspable eternity must realize its insurmountable ephemerality—embrace it and understand it, gazing with pellucid eyes upon the apocalyptic collapse of human order.

The reflections of grandiloquent speeches cannot preserve Gloucester or Lear. They are parents of flesh and blood who must step back from center stage, allowing a new generation to

learn to submit to nature's overwhelming shifts, insentience, and demise. Shakespeare needs only six monosyllabic beats to capture the cosmos's cruel pulse; language, once the magical instrument of transfiguration, distorts to articulate existence's unadorned patterns of cruelty and punishment. "Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thy own back;/ Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind/ For which thou whip'st her" (*Lear* IV.vi 162-164), the furious monarch commands the unseen spirits of madness. Society has crumbled into nature. The last laws of humanity persist in its enduring fascination with sensuality and animalistic consumption personified by Poor Tom's fiend. Even Lear's order to "strip thy own back" exemplifies the King's undeceived willingness to pull away the veil of the imagination and to encounter man—his sins and his bestialized fury—at his most essential. Yet Shakespeare proves that the terrible clarity of madness remains fleeting in *King Lear*'s perpetually obscured universe. Refusing Gloucester his hand, Lear cries, "[l]et me wipe it first; it smells of mortality" (*Lear* IV.vi 135). The King's fear of insanity that radiated through his invectives before the storm thunders in this furious rebuff. Though he has listened to the music of fools and spoken the staccato redundancies of nature, Lear emerges from the heath's tempest still harboring the love contest's longing for immortality. Briefly forgotten during madness's ecstatic insights, the mask of imagination has returned, yearning to banish the "smell" of rude corporeality, transience, and death worshipped by broken dream worlds.

V. Conclusion

In his *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, Harold Goddard contends that Gloucester, Lear, and Cordelia achieve resurrections fostered by the enlightening powers of the imagination. Illusion for Goddard remains the medium through which the characters of *King Lear* perceive reality; it is the play's conductor of metamorphosis, guiding the King towards a vision of forgiveness, redemption, and love that overcomes the horrors of history and the cruelties of nature. Goddard notes:

From *Julius Caesar* on, Shakespeare's faith in the existence of spiritual entities beyond the range of ordinary consciousness, and hence objective to it, increases in steady crescendo...But in *King Lear* more unequivocally even than in *Othello*—however embryonically from the merely human point of view—he asserts the reality of a celestial spirit. The debased current use of the word “imagination” must not be permitted to confuse us. The imagination is not a faculty for the creation of an illusion; it is the faculty by which alone man apprehends reality. The “illusion” turns out to be the truth. (Goddard167)

Goddard, like Gloucester and Edgar on the cliff, seeks the reflection of divinity in *King Lear*'s abandoned cosmos—the redemptive image of “a celestial spirit” who witnesses, guides, and empathizes with the trials or disasters of humanity. Lear has chased this dream beyond the insulating bounds of civilization, screaming into heavens for the saving intervention of the gods and imploring divinity to rescue him from the truth of his own impermanence. Yet Goddard's argument contradicts Shakespeare's fundamental meditation upon mortality in *King Lear*. This universe remains untouched by the vindicating hands of deities. Man alone—terribly and completely alone in nature—must try and fail to uncover the lasting revelation of frailty that conjures the resurrections of romance. God cannot be a “reality” in *King Lear*. Instead, reality remains acutely, devastatingly physical; it throbs in Regan's deadening attention to time—it rings in the strident tautologies of madness. It is everywhere, and yet it does not transcend temporal boundaries, as Shakespeare unrelentingly fastens his characters to the movements of history, proving that there can be no world outside the past. Fantasy changes nothing; the gods heard no prayer for impossible redemption, and Cordelia finishes the play dead, trapped, as ever, in a realm commanded by nature's indifference. None of *King Lear*'s “illusions tur[n] out to be true.” Illusion persists as the great obfuscator, concealing, contorting, and contradicting the realities that characters must face in order to wield the magic of resurrection. Kott proves that the gods disintegrate during the storm, lingering at the cliffs and in the scenes that follow as the

austere relics of lost imaginative control. They remain the phantoms of a forsaken creative power, rendered impotent by insanity's incisive clarity.

Indeed, Goddard's reading of *King Lear* resounds as a misplaced projection of romance upon the unseeing visage of tragedy. While Gloucester, Edgar, Edmund, Goneril, Regan, and Lear at some point employ fantasy to blur the truth of transience, romance uses the imagination to reveal—to confront Leontes and Prospero with the inexorability of death and demise. Fantasy in romance is undoubtedly “the faculty by which...man apprehends reality.” It teaches, and it tames, cooling the incredible hubris and delusions of this grand King and magician to accept the boundaries of mortal authority. Romance too pivots upon the obvious existence of gods, spirits, and appalling monsters—the imagination transforms into a creative space unto itself, counseling the earthly sphere above which it endures. Yet Goddard is mistaken when he applies this system of revelatory illusion to the chthonic brutality of *King Lear*. Dream worlds in tragedy cannot expose the real; they mask it, or they destroy it. After the mortifying silence of divinity throughout the play, it is difficult to imagine that “...in *King Lear* at least, humanity did not devour itself, and King Lear and his child were lifted up into the realm of the gods” (Goddard 170). Though they watch the banishing of Cordelia, the blinding of Gloucester, and the stupendous abandonment of the fallen King, the gods remain throughout aloof and quiescent. Humanity is the only consciousness in this world—a consciousness that ends with death and that can be changed or enlightened only by the awful acceptance of fragility, fallibility, and insurmountable decay.

Lear haplessly searches for Goddard's vision of life beyond death from behind the shield of fantasy. Awakening in the French camp after his epiphanic night of madness, Lear reassumes the mask of imagination, protecting himself from the unadulterated vision of his past sins,

transgressions, and mistakes. A father of romance would be forced to confront Cordelia. He would encounter her honestly, taught by the wisdom of illusion to embrace the humbling realization of his own imperfection. Yet King Lear cannot mime the reviving openness of romance, and his experiments in resurrection warp instead to dooming exercises in blinding self-defense. Without the gods to vindicate his suffering—to imbue his pain with ennobling reverberations beyond the world of ubiquitous mortal torture, demise, and deterioration—Lear must invent them anew, projecting upon his reunion with his daughter a vision of hellish judgment that exempts him from reality. Stumbling from the illuminating depths of madness, Lear cries to his daughter:

You do me wrong to take me out o'th'grave:
 Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
 Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
 Do scald like molten lead (*Lear* IV.vii 45-48).

Lear is indeed “bound/ upon a wheel of fire.” Though this scene approximates the conventions of romance’s resurrections, the King can only retrace the crimes of the love contest, again forsaking the image of his frailty to fantasy’s captivating delusions. History repeats itself, as the occlusion of the imagination rises once more to protect the broken monarch from the revelation of mortality, fallibility, and waning influence. Madness was itself a type of “grave;” the apparition of death incarnate, it taught Lear, though briefly, to commune with the enlightening truth of inescapable demise. To be sure, Shakespeare’s use of the “grave” metaphor remains especially apt through its emphatic binds to the horrific depths of the earth. Like graves, insanity in *King Lear* plunged the human soul and the human body into the ferocious darkness of nature, surrendering both to the landscape’s silent indifference. Even Shakespeare’s syntax, entangling “o’t’h’grave” into one condensed, monosyllabic beat, recalls the sharp tautologies of madness that accelerated the play towards the King’s confrontation with Edgar and Gloucester. The

lessons of insanity, however, are distorted and devalued in this vision of grotesque supernatural misrepresentation. Suddenly, Lear awakens into a world of resurrected absolutes, fractured between the good and the wicked, the infernal and the angelic. “Thou art a soul in bliss,” he calls to Cordelia, refusing to contend with the seasonal shifts, natural decay, and human transience that his daughter personifies. The Cordelia of the love contest acknowledges no world beyond the temporal realm of broken authority, looming obsolescence, and cavernous graves. She personifies instead a humbled acquiescence to time, acutely and painfully aware of her place in a universe unchanged by the longings of the imagination.

“Bliss” cannot derive for Shakespeare from the deliberate masking of death. It stems from characters’ courageous willingness to welcome frailty, acknowledging the “wheels” of history that bind them to the past. The King’s consciousness of guilt rings in his allusion to “molten lead.” Pushed beneath the mind’s surface, the terrors of sin—of fault and failure—are repressed by the yearnings of the imagination. While in the grave of madness, Lear communed with this stifled epiphany of transgression; he accepted it and embraced it, grasping the pain of imperfection through the incisive clarity of insanity. Yet above ground, lost in this deluded space between heaven and hell, the King rejects his natural bonds to sin, lamenting it as that “scalds” instead of instructs. At last, the mask of the imagination prevails, as Cordelia mourns: “[s]till, still far wide” (*Lear* IV.vii 49). Shakespeare places his deluded monarch and his daughter in two, utterly separate creative spheres. While Lear hides behind the broken illusion of shattered divinity, invoking the useless model of demonic punishment to absolve himself from confrontation with the misjudgments of the play’s first two acts, Cordelia strives to locate her father in reality. Lear, however, is “still far wide;” he has consigned his soul to delusion,

forevermore alienated from the real in his furious yearning to escape the horrible truth of imperfection and impermanence.

The King's utter surrender to the irreality of fantasy crescendos in Lear's plea to Cordelia to pass eternity with him in prison. The supreme embodiment of human order asserted over the vast, incoherent cruelty of nature, this prison incarnates for Lear a space suspended above time and above the deadening shifts of empire that haunted him during the love contest. This speech endures for Shakespeare as a portrait of immortality crafted entirely by language, as the oneiric beauty of romance plagues Lear's dream with its promises of resurrecting reunion, absolution, and salvation. Romance's half-realities permeate this passage, and yet it persists in an imaginative space completely removed from the unblinking revelations of Prospero or Leontes. For a moment, Lear transports himself back into the love contest, spared by language from the capricious shifts of time that threaten to relinquish the King's mortal self to inexorable death and tarnished authority. The mask of imagination, worn in this scene at its most desperate, shields Lear from the vision of his destroyed kingdom. Edmund has triumphed, and his eldest daughters' brutality has prevailed. Though the King assays to supersede the course of history—to overcome time through his retreat into fantasy—the rough sounds of nature resound even in this prayer to the insulating powers of illusion. The pulse of reality remains continually present, thinly veiled beneath the dreams of disorienting fantasy that can only pantomime the wondrous resurrections of romance:

No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison:
 We two alone will sing like birds i'th'cage:
 When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
 And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,
 And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
 At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
 Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,
 Who loses and who wins, who's in, who's out;

And take upon's the mystery of things,
 As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,
 In a walled prison, packs and sects of great ones
 That ebb and flow by th'moon (*Lear* V.iii 8-19).

The tautologies of nature have invaded even this elegiac prayer to eternity. The King is lost in the rupture between reality and dream worlds, trapped forever at the precipice of insanity's incisive consciousness, fighting the recurrent epiphany of human weakness and transience. Shakespeare's simile that compares Lear and Cordelia to "birds i'th'cage" captures the King's awareness of unrestrained cruelty and his tragic longing for civilization. The birds, like the court of the love contest, remain in their cages above the influence of time or natural decay, preserved instead in the aloof eternity of fantasy. Suspended in the dreams of poetry, they become beautiful and impotent, magical and alienated. Yet Shakespeare's use of simile once again emphasizes the impossibility of this exemption from time. Language, used to distance its object from the imaginative world created by grandiloquent speeches, drives a wedge between the court's reality and the promises of illusion. Lear can only hope to be "like" the birds; he remains apart from them, tethered to the ferocious surge of history. Though the King pleads to endure "alone" with Cordelia, resurrection requires characters to embrace the entirety of experience, welcoming the chaos, confusion, and contaminations of realities peopled by sinners.

Prospero's island reduces to the oneiric Shakespearean metonymy for this "alone." The magician, however, conjures rebirth only when his remote paradise becomes the meeting place of history, flooded by the haunting mistakes of the past. Romance's unblinking acceptance of guilt still eludes the King, as he again hyperbolizes the confrontation with Cordelia, crying, "when thou dost ask me blessing/ I'll kneel down/ And ask of thee forgiveness." Once projected upon the mythic stage of heaven and hell, this revised portrait of reconciliation clings to the grand gestures of fantasy. It remains distinctly unreal, bound to the sublime pronouncements of

court that have haunted the King since the love contest. Indeed, Lear's allusion to the "talk of court news" exemplifies his masked longing for a return to the first act's poetic mirrors. As Kermode in his *Shakespeare's Language* comments: "Lear is given the kind of fantastic poetry Shakespeare had long known the trick of: Lear's thoughts are on the court he has lost; he cannot hope to have another, but he remembers, in a gently satirical way, the customary talk of courtiers" (Kermode 199). Lear's note of courtly talk threads backwards through time to unite him once more with the longings of the love contest—the lost power of language to surmount the wild movements of nature, to preserve him in the glimmering irrealities of fantasy. The shifts of empire pulse in Lear's distracted mention of "[w]ho loses and who wins, who's in, who's out." This dream world is above time, and yet it is still captivated by it, as the memory of irrelevance and looming death infects the King's hymn to immortality.

There are few more poignant invocations of divinity than Lear's desperate allusion to "God." The gods have failed this furious monarch and his forsaken Duke. They have ignored their calls for justice, for redemption and for salvation. They have watched indifferently as resurrections fail, crumbling fantasy into the landscape's insentient noise. Yet in Lear's final appeal to the faltering dominion of dream, a more definite, almost Christian incarnation of God rises from the despair of Lear's dream world. Calderwell argued that Shakespeare places *King Lear* in pagan England to transport his audience back to the point of creative origin—to explore a reality untouched by the forms of the imagination, bent and broken with the cruel rapacity of nature. Through this invention of "God," Shakespeare seems to imply that form itself derives from man's terrible awareness of fantastical breakdown. "God" becomes a new mask, the product of loneliness and abandonment. He is an invention of the desperate mind—one that has seen the creations of the imagination falter and fade, longing to imbue human catastrophe once

more with redemptive significance. Humanity in *King Lear* is doomed to “ebb and flow by th’ moon.” Suggestive of the fiend’s unblinking and protuberant eyes, Lear’s allusion to the moon juxtaposes to this newly designed vision of “God.” Nature triumphs once more over divinity, commanding the capricious shifts of man—his life and history—as God looks on, suspended in the soul’s impotent, though indomitable, yearning for reflected empathy beyond the cruelties of time.

Surrendered to the mask of the imagination, Lear cannot appreciate Cordelia’s death as the awful apparition of his own mortality, frailty, and enslavement to the brutality of nature. Though he has communed with the incisive clarity of madness, Lear’s fear of death commands his hapless attempts at resurrection, crafting the dream world that breaks him from the apocalyptic truth of his shattered kingdom. Lear refuses to see Cordelia after his awakening at the French camp. Distorted to an angelic spirit, her presence cannot call forth a purifying confrontation of reality that might yield romance’s rebirths. The King warps his child into the image of his own yearning for eternity, and even her body cannot recall him to the truth of reality’s decay and deterioration, as he emerges into the wreckage of his court crying:

Howl, howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones:
 Had I your tongues and eyes, I’d use them so
 That heaven’s vault should crack. She’s gone for ever.
 I know when one is dead and when one lives;
 She’s dead as earth. Lend me a looking-glass;
 If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,
 Why, then she lives (*Lear* V.iii 259-265).

The dream of the child as a mirror of immortality reverberates through Lear’s call for the looking-glass. Though Goneril and Regan have betrayed him, exposing the disillusioned King to the landscape’s strident noise and austere insentience, he still peers towards his last daughter as the play’s final symbol of possible eternity. Cordelia might yet “stain the stone” with her breath—she might awaken the stupendous indifference of nature to at last reflect the human

longing for divinity and transcendence rendered impossible in this world forgotten by the gods. Shakespeare again plays with the conventions of the royal “we” in the King’s desperate command, “[l]end me a looking-glass.” Evocative of his call for the map during the love contest, the King’s mortal self is once more enveloped in the dooming quest for immortality. Lear’s “me” cannot abandon this search for earthly divinity, as the dream world of undying influence, authority, and love reigns once more, precluding the illuminating resurrections of romance.

Lear cannot entirely shake insanity’s deadening consciousness. Invaded by the bestialized tautologies of nature that leave Lear literally yowling like an animal into the tarnished ruin of his kingdom (“howl, howl, howl, howl!”), the monarch vacillates wildly between the delusions of fantasy and the spectral realization of death. “She’s dead as earth,” the King laments, at last acknowledging Cordelia’s unyielding bonds to transience and decay through the exclamation’s four monosyllabic beats. Like his reticent daughter, these staccato syllables excavate the insubstantiality of dream in *King Lear* after the storm; riddled with the numbed cadences of nature, the imagination can only strive to partially mask the looming epiphany of mortality. All the characters of *King Lear* must contend with the inexorability of becoming “men of stones.” Though dream worlds aspire to blur the mortifying dominion of reality, “heaven’s vault” has already “cracked.” Lear and his daughter remain alone within the universe, relinquished to the fiend’s blank stare in which the image of human compassion, empathy, and dignity has been sought, yet never found. Entangled with the landscape’s awesome rapacity, man endures for Shakespeare as nothing more than a collection of “tongues and eyes”—a beast in the storm, an old King, poised on the precipice of disillusionment.

Dream worlds that serve only to mask cannot weave resurrection from denial. They can only approximate the conventions of romance, as Lear remembers Cordelia’s voice as a

transfiguring tool of rebirth that he once yearned to employ as a portal to immortality: “What is’t thou say’st? Her voice was ever soft,/ Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman” (*Lear* V.iii 272-273). Lear recalls Cordelia’s voice as a type of silenced music. “Gentle and low,” it promised to sing the imagined songs of metamorphosis that might have preserved the father above time, captured at the absolute apogee of his power through language. Yet unlike the Fool’s grotesque chants, which guided the broken King towards the resurrecting, undeceiving lesson of human decay, the dream of Cordelia’s lost melodies chases a forbidden eternity. Indeed, the Fool and Cordelia remain inextricably linked in Lear’s fogged imagination. Both marginalized messengers of reality, they personify a vision of seasonal deterioration steadfastly denied by the King in the play’s final scenes. Searching for the impossible sign of resurrection and redemption in his dead child, Lear calls:

And my poor fool is hanged: no, no, no life?
 Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
 And thou no breath at all? Thou’lt come no more,
 Never, never, never, never, never
 Pray you, undo this button. Thank you, sir.
 Do you see this? Look on her. Look, her lips,
 Look there, look there (*Lear* V.iii 306-313).

There can be no distinction between the life of “a dog, a horse, a rat” and the life of a King in the play’s destroyed cosmos after the storm. Goddard’s theory of an existence beyond death through the imagination has collapsed into this furious half-acknowledgement of mortality’s inescapable dominion. *King Lear* has reached its apocalypse, as the Fool’s prophecy of death and disillusionment rings through Lear’s terrified admission that “[his] poor fool is hanged.” Indeed, the rhythm of “no, no, no life?” incarnates the King’s hesitant and halting movement towards an unfulfilled realization of inexorable demise. The mask of the imagination forbids the true recognition of insurmountable fragility and fallibility; Lear must remain trapped in the ever-shifting rupture between delusion and devastating epiphany.

The promises of the love contest's reflections have at last fractured, subsumed by the fierce tautologies that infect fantasy with nature's savage noise. In this final lament for the ruined potential of revival, Shakespeare holds the landscape in tenuous equilibrium with fantasy, and yet the phantasmal promises of dream worlds triumph. Tautology mars the King's feverish hopes for redemption, piercing through the haze of the imagination in Lear's ferocious chant of "never, never, never, never;" romance's yearning to truly see Cordelia disfigures to an exercise in willful blindness, as Lear cries with his dying breath, "look, her lips,/ Look there, look there." The King consigns his soul to the delusions of fantasy, gazing upon a reflection that shattered and dissipated into the wildness of the storm. Cordelia cannot recover from nature the King's majestic vision of immortality that rang through the promises of the love contest. "Her lips"—the reticent Shakespearean source of disillusionment—do not articulate an eternity recalled by obscuring dream worlds. The last remaining reflection endures in the accumulated bodies that litter the stage to witness Edgar's tepid elegy for history. Unless characters commune with this terrible certainty of human decay, they remain doomed for Shakespeare to trace the damning circles of the past, ensnared in the dream worlds that distort tragic blindness to incarnations of immortality.

T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" thunders with the terror of unadulterated sight that comes to define *King Lear*. "Let me be no nearer," the poet calls, "In death's dream kingdom/ Let me also wear/ Such deliberate disguises." Lear's is indeed "death's dream kingdom," one in which the fantastical mask of imagination hides the true and desperate nothingness of creation, fallen from civilization's splendid order in its infernal yearning for impossible immortality. Though King Lear chases the transcendent eternities of romance, his misuse of imagination—mistaking fantasy as the great Shakespearean mirror in which the horror of imminent death might be

hidden—surrenders him to the inexorable brutality of nature. Lear must die behind the illusory curtain of fantastical irreality, too afraid of tragedy's spectacular emptiness to gaze upon the ruin of his own invention.

Othello and Perdition's Nightmare**Part I: Introduction**

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare creates a distinct space for reality. Madness draws the hysterical monarch to an epiphanic, though brief, glimpse of his own impotence, mutability, and frailty; the storm, for a moment, frees Lear from his illusions. This recognition of time and decay rests in opposition to the fantasy of immortality. The real and the imagination rest in two, distinct universes, broken between illusion's promises and the undecieving truth of death. Yet *Othello* becomes Shakespeare's most terrifying hall of mirrors, as the poet relinquishes his heraldic Moor to a tragic cosmos in which competing fantasies utterly obscure reality. The crisis of self-knowledge reverberates through *Othello*. Captivated by the militaristic pride, glory, and stiff ceremony of his generalship, Othello seeks the reflection of his own super-humanity in Desdemona's love. Spirits of the imagination, they descend from the strange beauty of their dream world into the play's corrosive reality; Othello and Desdemona become for Shakespeare the shadows of a distant fantastical space, hopelessly tracing their way back to a realm above the grotesque bestialism, violence, and chaos of Venice and Cyprus through love. They enter the play from this splendid world of the imagination—the faint impressions of romantic dream in a tragic cosmos relinquished to vivid horror. Love endures as the sublime creative force in *Othello*, and the doomed couple engages with the real from across an imaginative chasm. They linger in the dream world of their love, preserved at the magical apogee of nobility, legend, and dignity.

Significantly, the play provides little insight into the interior Othello before it has been corroded by Iago's demonic lies. Desdemona too, laconic and often absent from the play's tempestuous foreground, remains aloof, ungraspable. Imaginative power incarnate, they transfigure into the half-shaped material of dream, creating and recreating one another in the wondrous mirror of their love. This fantastical energy yearns to triumph over the cruel

movements of reality. It masks the terrors of the soul beneath fantasy's oneiric haze, suspending the lovers in the dream world of perfected and devastating devotion. Othello and Desdemona long to transcend austere truths through the imagination. They are the inventions of legend and lore, distant battles and lost heroism. In them, Shakespeare finds the divine substance of dream given flesh and blood—a tragic idealism that must be sacrificed to the play's inexorable surrender to nightmare. *Othello* can only vacillate, helplessly, across the waves of imaginative extremes, as the play endures in the rupture between the dream world of the couple's affection and the inferno of Iago's protean hatred. Heaven and hell, men and monsters, virgins and whores: reality, the lost channel towards resurrection and epiphany, collapses into the play's irreconcilable absolutes, utterly occluded by the derisive force of fantasy.

Romance teaches its characters to embrace reality as an uplifting integration of imaginative poles. Life encompasses both lowliness and sublimity, *The Tempest* reveals—it moves with the rhythms of both birth and death. In romance, the imagination serves to deconstruct absolutes. Characters learn to abandon the captivations of dream, abjuring fantastical magic for disillusioning confrontations with their own fallibility, frailty, and mortality. Humanity lingers somewhere in the balance between the ethereal and the grotesquely corporeal, as resurrections blossom from the power to embrace the mistakes of the past. Leontes, Prospero, Posthumus, and the enigmatic Cymbeline all encounter this revelation of transformative weakness, reunited with lost family members through their newfound willingness to commune with the undeceiving truth of imperfection or death. *Othello* never achieves this equilibrium. In his love for Desdemona, he longs to remain within the oneiric irreality of Miranda and Ferdinand's chaste courtship. Their devotion transfigures into the reflection of his disputed nobility, sheltered above Venice's hatred in an imaginative space of wonder. Together,

Desdemona and Othello craft a dream world that strives to veil the complexities of sex and violence, hatred and chaos. Love becomes their method of occlusion; it denies and banishes the real, abandoning the beguiled lovers, for a moment, in a realm of illusionary purity divided from the play's otherwise decidedly postlapsarian landscape. Like Miranda and Ferdinand, poised on the precipice of knowledge, eroticism, and discovery, their dream world suspends them in the heavenly isolation of unbroken illusion.

Yet while *The Tempest's* lovers must return to Milan—enveloped once more by the world of experience and disillusioning reality—Othello and Desdemona's love is absorbed into the terrible disorientation of Cyprus. There can be no ennobling restoration of the real in *Othello's* fractured universe, as the general quits the dream world of his love for Iago's infernal fantasies. Undoubtedly, movement from islands in both *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* represents characters' capitulations to undeceiving truth—the renunciation of the imagination for disabusing encounters with human weakness, frailty, and inescapable death. Disembarking at Sicilia, Perdita and Florizel catapult Leontes into the terrible realization of fallibility, confronted afresh with the crushing death of Mamillius and Hermione's ostensible sacrifice to her king's fanatic paranoia. *Othello's* relocation to Cyprus provides no such clarity. Relinquished to the island's disorientation and distortion, Othello and Desdemona's love can only collapse from the splendid heights of dream into horrific nightmare. The play's relocation to Cyprus does not trace the triumph of a regained reality; it does not incarnate Othello and Desdemona's enlightenment, their epiphanic reintroduction into a space aware of sexual jealousy, self-discovery. Instead, it maps Othello's fruitless descent from absolute love into absolute hate. In Cyprus, interior fears tangle and distort exterior realities. The imagination corrodes truth, as fantasy infects love's once

majestic dream world with the hellish anxieties of the soul—not a tool or revelation, but devastation.

The entwinement of music and dream worlds permeates *Othello*. In romance, Shakespeare perfects the theatrical trick of music that can only be heard by certain characters. Captured at its enlightening zenith in *The Tempest*, this music reverberates through romance as a call to disillusionment and resurrection. It is the undeceiving anthem of epiphanic dream worlds, crescendoing with Ariel's mesmerizing songs. Yet while music in romance announces the dawn of newfound awareness, accompanying the resurrection of Hermione and Prospero's recognition of inexorable mortal limitation, in *Othello*, it signifies characters' unyielding captivation with the impossible promises of fantasy. Shakespeare imbues Othello and Desdemona's dream world with its own, enthralling music. From Knight's "Othello Music" to Desdemona's willow song, the haunting presence of music defines the beautiful irreality of Othello and Desdemona's love—their dream world and their brief existence in a paradisaal imaginative space above the thinly-masked chaos of Venice. Music in *Othello* weaves dream worlds, and when it becomes inaudible, it prophesizes the deterioration of love into maddening, murderous horror. Shakespeare defines the borders of dream worlds through the rhythms of music in *Othello*. Surrendering the harmony of his love for Desdemona to Iago's maddening lies, Othello relinquishes the beauty of his poetry to jealousy's incoherent noise. He renounces his music, and he becomes estranged from his dreamy nobility. Desdemona lingers alone at the imaginative zenith of their love's dream world in Cyprus; her constancy to Othello never wanes, and she persists through the play as a relic of the devotion tortured and tarnished by demonic fantasy. Music for Desdemona traces her tragic inability to encounter the painful complexities of the real in a play broken between hellish and heavenly illusion. Desdemona listens to the beautiful songs

of her love alone—the only form of “reality” she embraces, still yearning to transfigure the hideous truths of experience through her dauntless devotion. Though she recounts the tragic history of her love in the elegiac willow song, Desdemona literally cannot hear the dire warnings of her own music. She persists as painfully, damningly innocent—a Miranda blind to the urgent new world of experience and corruption that surrounds her. In Desdemona, Shakespeare finds the Edenic naiveté that must be tarnished by romance’s disabusing revelations. Othello and Desdemona become lovers in a paradise spoiled by the play’s satanic onlooker, and their dream world persists among Shakespeare’s most beautiful and devastating. Alone in the occluding realm of fantasy, Desdemona clings, even during her strange half-resurrection, to the chimerical dream of Othello’s absolute uprightness, honor, and dignity. Yet this false resurrection, conjured from the borderlands of life and death, rings through the play as a final testament to Desdemona’s enduring captivation with illusion. She dies still believing in her husband’s heraldic divinity, as Othello banishes her to hell with vitriolic cruelty that reveals the play’s dooming schism between love’s paradise and doubt’s perdition.

While Othello and Desdemona long to escape the alienating realities of Venice through their love, Iago destroys the dream world of devotion with his insidious, infernal magic. Iago alone guards the power to transfigure dreams into nightmares. Infecting Othello’s chaste affection with the licentious lie of Desdemona’s infidelity, Iago distorts the purely spiritual into the wholly corporeal. In Iago, Shakespeare locates the ultimate capacity of illusion to contort and to contaminate truth. He becomes the demonic stage manager to the play’s rapidly deteriorating sense of reality, twisting the couple’s beautiful reflections of idealizing love into visions of betrayal, abandonment, and nightmarish treachery. Iago’s genius seems to see all, peering into the depths of Othello’s soul to expose the tragic hero’s relentless preoccupations—the haunting

fears that rest, for a moment, buried beneath the dream world of his love. It would be difficult to label Iago's command of hellish possibility as a Shakespearean dream world. Though the ultimate instrument of deception and dissemblance, fantasy for Iago is an imaginative space of maddening horror. Othello and Desdemona chase perfected love through the imagination; they seek transcendence—an escape from reality beyond alienation, physicality, and human fault. Yet Iago's nightmare celebrates the tormenting possibilities that dream worlds seek to blur. Iago's magic remains a type of distorting illumination. He understands and he manipulates, he exposes and he disfigures. Iago understands Othello more completely and more terribly than the general himself. He alone guards the knowledge that will corrupt the play's paradisaic universe, calling Othello's agonizing anxieties of unworthiness and dehumanization to the general's consciousness. Hellish fantasy personified, Iago's nightmare harnesses the tormenting insecurities that the dream world of Othello's love strove to obscure. Suppressed fears entangle with reality under Iago's spell, charmed into distorting light of illusion. He represents the opposite imaginative pole, dragging the play from the heights of heavenly devotion to the infernal depths of doubt, forsaking reality in the chasm between the two.

The specter of bestialism plagues Venice. Yet like Brabantio's fear of Desdemona's elopement, it endures in a twilight underworld, hidden beneath the civilizing varnish of society. Venice endures for Shakespeare as a space of controlled chaos, nurturing, though never unleashing, the anxieties, suspicions, and doubts that come to dominate the play. Estranged from this neutralizing world of courtly assemblies or hierarchical order, the goats, horses, rams, and monkeys of the imagination become free to answer Othello and Desdemona's ethereal love with a reflection of grotesque inhumanity. In Iago's nightmare, Othello sees his deepest anxieties given dehumanizing life, captivated by the bestializing lies that warp exterior reality with the

savage terrors of his soul. Othello's grandeur as a soldier—as an element of dream—is only skin-deep. Stripped of his bewitching speeches and imperial authority, he remains damningly alienated from himself. Cyprus incarnates this metaphysical estrangement—an imaginative space where poetry grows silent and love decays. While Prospero's island becomes for Shakespeare a space of revelatory epiphany, Iago transfigures his isolated wasteland into a playground for deception and disorientation.

Emilia endures as *Othello's* lone channel to reality. An unabashed realist, she witnesses Desdemona's fatal idealism with sadness and trepidation. In her, Shakespeare finds the play's unacknowledged voice of reason. Subordinated to both Iago and Desdemona's magnetic fantasies, Emilia can only struggle in the wake of destruction, ultimately powerless against her husband's storm of creative obliteration. Reality, unknowable and ungraspable, has been sacrificed to Othello's enchantment with Iago's lies. Seduced, the once grand Othello descends into Iago's contrived inferno, vacillating helplessly between the reflections of himself he sees in his love for Desdemona and Iago's transfixing illusions. Murder becomes the general's last gesture towards the dominion of nightmare; he can only reconcile Desdemona's oneiric purity and her supposed lasciviousness through death, slaughtering her to cement Iago's inferno and the bestialized vision of himself in which he has come to believe. Death distorts to an instrument that makes fantasy real, consummating the fusion of exterior reality and nightmare—a consummation damningly absent from Othello and Desdemona's aloof love. Murder reveals the power of nightmarish fantasy to infect the general's tempestuous soul, reducing him to the brutal outsider he feared he might have been.

Othello—Shakespeare's fallen embodiment of mystical dream—cannot embrace the horrible truth of reality thrust upon him by Emilia. In tragedy, reality cannot be apprehended. It

endures inexorably beyond the play's universe, and when it teeters on the brink of revelation, the imagination must obscure truth beneath the insulating shield of fantasy. *Othello* cultivates no space for the real; the play becomes a series of mirrors—one in which Othello sees love and hatred, order and chaos, supreme humanity and degrading bestialism. Exterior realities have been irredeemably polluted by the impositions of the imagination, lost in the apocalyptic tug-of-war between nightmare and dream. Romance teaches its characters the enlightening limitations of the imagination, as resurrection derives from their power to banish the distortions of fantasy, the vindictive idealism of magic. In *Othello*, the lovers can only waver in the rupture of conflicting illusory poles, condemned to blindness and irredeemable death through their damning inability to locate the real.

Part II: Defining *Othello's* Dream World

Desdemona and Othello become for Shakespeare the creatures of dream worlds, suspended above the brutality and bestialism that constantly threatens to overwhelm Venice. Through the imaginative wonder of their love, Othello and Desdemona metamorphose into the dreamy spirits of romantic legend; too strange and too ungraspable for the borders of reality, they seem to linger in a fantastical space beyond the play itself. Iago's magic crystallizes identities. It reduces the spirit, its potential for love and sensuality, to a grotesque parade of rams and monkeys, carrack ships and handkerchiefs, whores and murderers. At its crux, Iago's is a nightmare of inescapable definition, as he forces characters to peer into the mirror of his imagination in which they see only the reflections their lowliest selves. It contorts and it contains, maniacally striving to tangle Brabantio and Othello in the hellish web of their most primordial fears. Othello and Desdemona's love remains a reflection of the infinite. While Iago's nightmare world enslaves, their love liberates, cast against the timeless background of chivalric legend and epic battles. A dream world of oneiric splendor, Othello and Desdemona's devotion

crafts an emotional plain beyond the corrosive preoccupations of corroded Venice—one conjured and mapped by the magic of music.

Through Desdemona's love, Othello surmounts the alienation forced upon him by Venice's cruelty. He communes with a hidden, though cherished, self, tracing his way back to the nobility and the heroism of dream preserved within his imagination. Love in *Othello* resounds as the play's ultimate tool of abstraction. Condemned to struggle through a reality infected by the insidious hatred and savagery of Iago's fantasies, love promises to lift the couple above the chaos of the physical world, as poetry incarnates the fabric of this realm of escape and imaginative exploration. Iago's nightmare too derives from the creative powers of language. Yet while he employs poetry to fuse fantasy to the real, eventually reducing his general's majestic verse to the rude noise of prose, Othello and Desdemona's devotion searches through language for a separate space—a fantastical world unto itself, one insulated from society's half-masked brutality.

Shakespeare imbues Othello's language with a transcendent poetic power that captures exactly this beautiful, wistful estrangement from reality. Though he denies his talent for bewitchment or enchantment, Othello's ability to craft sublime imaginative spaces through language remains legendary. Indeed, G. Wilson Knight labels this unique poetry as "the Othello music," hearing in the doomed general's metaphorical detachment and restraint a harmony that imitates the rhythms of song. Music permeates *Othello's* dream world, as poetry weaves the lovers into an imaginative realm above nightmarish Venice. Captured forever in the transfixing divinity of language and legend, Othello (and "the Othello Music") worship a world of sublime fantasy. Through his poetry, Othello traces his way back to an imaged persona, annihilating the

real in his undaunted quest to live forever in the impossible, idealistic super-humanity of his dream world. Knight comments:

Othello is dominated by its protagonist. Its supremely beautiful effects of style are all expressions of Othello's personal passion. Thus, in first analyzing Othello's poetry, we shall lay the basis for an understanding of the play's symbolism: this matter of style is, indeed crucial, and I shall now indicate those qualities which clearly distinguish it from other Shakespearean poetry. It holds a rich music all its own, and possess a unique solidity and precision of picturesque phrase or image, a peculiar chastity and serenity of thought. It is, as a rule, barren of direct metaphysical content. Its thought does not mesh with the reader's: rather it is always outside us, aloof. This aloofness is the resultant of an inward aloofness of image from image, word from word. The dominant quality is separation, not, as is more usual in Shakespeare, cohesion. (Knight 98)

Knight's attention to the "aloofness" of Othello's language remains critical. Shakespeare gives the play's perplexing outsider a poetry that is equally detached, inflecting his verse with a lonely beauty that incarnates his longing for a separate imaginative universe. Just as images and metaphors persist as strangely isolated within this "Othello Music," lacking the sweeping, metaphysical scope of *Macbeth* or *King Lear*, the general lingers in the wondrous solitude of his chivalric dream world. Othello defines himself by his isolation. If his elegiac language "is always outside us, aloof," Othello himself rests beyond the tedious confines of reality in the play's opening scenes, celebrating, through poetry, his ties to a fading, though glorious, history. Othello and Desdemona's love reverberates as the play's most devastating embodiment of this detachment; it is a world woven by poetry, raised by fantasy above Venice's burgeoning savagery.

Through poetry, Othello lives in the imagination. If Venice seethes with infernal hints of looming catastrophe, breakdown, and dehumanization, the Othello of the first act seems to linger above even the possibility of fault or frailty; his suspicions and his jealousies have yet to appear—they glide silently below the grandiloquent confidence of his affirmations. Interiorized fears hide easily beneath the glow of dream worlds, and love, for Othello, surmounts disorder.

Savagery and cruelty cannot find a home in Othello's affection, as Shakespeare suspends his lovers in an imaginative, romantic world untouched by the hellish chaos that constantly threatens to engulf Venice. Othello remains aloof, mystical. In him, Shakespeare finds the personification of dream and its potential for wonder, adventure, and beauty. He is possibility incarnate, defying the restrictive alienation thrust upon him by Brabantio and, secretly, Iago through the sublimity of his imagination. Simply stated, Othello does not live in reality. Called to explain his courtship with Desdemona before the Venetian counsel, he muses:

Most potent, grave, and reverend signors,
 My very noble and approved good masters,
 That I have ta'en away this old man's daughter
 It is most true; true that I have married her.
 The very head and front of my offending
 Hath this extent, no more. Rude am I in speech,
 And little blessed with the soft phrase of peace;
 For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith
 Till now some nine moons wasted, they have used
 Their dearest action in the tented field;
 And little of this great world can I speak
 More than pertains to feats of broils and battle;
 And therefore little shall I grace my cause
 In speaking for myself (*Othello* I.iii.76-87).

Few Shakespearean characters guard the vast imaginations that permit them only to see themselves as the resplendent narrators of their own mythologies. Poetry for Othello is a mirror, and he is an eager gazer. In the sublime reflections of his love, Othello communes with a self that has no place within the mundane boundaries of the real. His poetry is not “the soft phrase of peace;” it is the song of the epic, the strange, and the heroically magnificent. The heraldic language of warfare permeates this passage. Captivated by the movements of soldiers and the patterns of battle, Othello transfigures even his marriage into the metaphor of “the very head and front of [his] offending.” Shakespeare leaves Othello in this oneiric realm of loftiest romantic lore—one in which even time is abstracted and beautified in the translation of years into the

elegiac image of “nine moons wasted.” He speaks to the council from across an imaginative divide, lingering in the remembered glory of the “tented field,” enveloping his love for Desdemona with the splendor of a dream world beyond Venice’s masked brutality. “And little of this great world can I speak/ More than pertains to feats of broils and battles,” Othello contends, blinding himself to the complexities of physical reality with the haunting memory of his legendary past. Significantly, line eighty-five contains twelve beats, as the glorious “feats of broils and battle” grow too large and too sublime to be constrained within the bounds of pentameter lines. “The great world” of *Othello* rests in the general’s imagination. Conjured by the enchanting harmony of the “Othello Music,” this dream world resounds as a portal back to a lost, treasured self.

Othello and Desdemona’s love represents the love of dream worlds. While other characters strive for order and cohesion, Shakespeare’s lovers aspire towards the infinite, descending into the play as the half-shaped inventions of the imagination. Their devotion incarnates a shared longing for the boundless, and they foster a dream world blinded to the stagnation, brutality, and looming bestialism of Venice. Together, Othello and Desdemona become castaways in an imaginative space all their own; love for them remains incorporeal and ethereal, it forgets the physical for the wholly spiritual. Poetry is the architect of this new, fantastical world. The medium through which the lovers surmount cruel reality, the beauty of poetry commands an enchanting music that binds them to the timeless world of legend and lore, dauntless valor and heroism. This dream world cannot interact with the real; it nurtures no lines of intersection with the vulgar eroticism, savagery, and materialism that pervade and pervert Venice. Othello and Desdemona remain alone for Shakespeare at the apogee of imaginative self-

creation, as the general's recitation of his courtship reverberates as a testament not only to his love of Desdemona, but also to the power of dream:

I ran it through, even from my boyish days
 To th'very moment that she bade me tell it.
 Wherein I spoke of most disastrous chances,
 Of moving accidents by flood and field;
 Of hairbreadth scapes i'th'imminent deadly breach;
 Of being taken by the insolent foe
 And sold to slavery. Of my redemption thence
 And portance in my traveler's history,
 Wherein of antlers vast and deserts idle,
 Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven,
 It was my hint to speak... (*Othello* I.iii.132-142).

Love for Othello represents a dream world of the ideal. The entirety of Othello's existence endures in this tale. Through the force of the imagination, he rises from Venice's darkness as a figure of romantic legend, animated by a history at once vague and beautiful, at once strange and familiar. Shakespeare's nimble repetition of "of" at the beginning of each anecdotal phrase in this passage is especially significant. Drawn through love into the world of dream and adventure, Othello seems to wade deeper and deeper into the enchanting folds of fantasy, stepping closer with each impressionistic flash to the captivating phantom of a faded self. The repeated "of" imbues his speech with the solemn cadence of elegiac music. Through each isolated image, Shakespeare suffuses Othello's poetry with the aloofness and the isolation noted by Knight. Language transports Othello with an enthralling strength beyond the movements of ships and tempests—for a moment, he roams the glorious plains of the imagination, once more enveloped by the "hairbreadth scapes i'th'imminent deadly breach," as Shakespeare's elastic contractions exemplify the wistful force of his longing.

This dream world, like Lear's love contest, rests distinctly above time. Utterly surrendered to the beauties of illusion, he sees only "flood[s] and field[s]," "insolent foe[s]" and his "traveler's history." Indistinct and enigmatic, these imagines unite Othello and Desdemona

with an imaginative wonder distinctly outside temporal reality. Details melt away, and the couple become like the “hills whose heads touch heaven,” as mortal too commune with the wonder of divine, heroic glory. Love symbolizes a kind of “desert idle,” preserving the lovers beyond reality within the remote and majestic substance of dream, commanded by fantasy’s magnetic pull:

And of the cannibals that each other eat,
 The anthropophagi, and men whose heads
 Do grow beneath their shoulders. These things to hear
 Would Desdemona seriously incline;
 But still the household affairs would draw her thence,
 Which ever as she could with haste dispatch,
 She’d come again, and with a greedy ear
 Devour up my discourse (*Othello* I.iii.143-150).

Desdemona does not belong to the tedium of Brabantio’s “household,” as the passage’s use of enjambment mirrors the rigorous structure of reality and the fluid sweep of dream. While lines one hundred and forty three and one hundred and forty four glide into one another with the fluent ease of the imagination, Othello’s description of his wife’s duty to her father’s household is commanded by vigorous end stopping. Dream is a space of self-creation, of continual change, and ennobling timelessness; the lovers seem to drift between “cannibals” and “anthropophagi” with the ease of thoughts flowing, seamlessly, into each other. Indeed, the passage’s oneiric reliance on enjambment reaches its crescendo with the lines “...and men whose heads/ Do grow beneath their shoulders...,” as Shakespeare’s gnarled syntax embodies the shapes of these mystical men, pushing one line beneath another to mirror their disfiguration. Shakespeare accentuates the dreamy cadence of these lines through his careful use of monosyllabic words, balancing the beautiful polysyllables of “anthropophagi” with the staccato rhythms echoed in “men whose heads do grow.” Likewise, the inversion that resounds through “the cannibals that each other eat” imbues Othello’s language with musical harmony; finishing this line with the

monosyllabic “eat” (instead of “other”), the phrase lands on an easy, unencumbered rhythm that slides gracefully into the image of the “anthropophagi.” The fantastical beauty of these lines dissolves in Othello’s description of Brabantio’s household. Moving from the boundless plains of the imagination to the stagnation of the real, Othello’s verse becomes awkward and unremarkable in phrases like “household affairs” and “with haste dispatch.” Othello’s is not the poetry of reality. Here, the “Othello Music” is at its most mellifluous—a music to which Desdemona remains acutely sensitive.

In Othello’s love, Desdemona sees the reflected splendor of dream. Defying the hierarchy, patriarchy, and materialism of Venice, she unites herself with Othello to fearlessly explore the possibilities of the imagination. Love in *Othello* becomes an adventure, as the couple commits itself to one another in an act of liquid self-creation and self-definition. Imbued with a dauntless courage that mirrors the valor of her warrior husband, Desdemona remains blind to reality through the strength of her beautiful idealism. Her devotion is an imaginative space all its own—one in which Othello is recreated, purged of the blackness that fascinates and repulses Venice, fused with his essence, his heraldic, chivalrous pith. Desdemona and Othello do not see one another in the harsh light of reality within their dream world. They become reflections of the unyielding wonder and beauty that permeates dream, upsetting the rigid boundaries of normalized society through their fierce desire to commune, alone, with the promises of the imagination. Yearning to follow Othello to battle, she calls:

That I did love the Moor to live with him,
 My downright violence, and storm of fortunes,
 May trumpet to the world. My heart’s subdued
 Even to the very quality of my lord.
 I saw Othello’s visage in his mind
 And to his honors and his valiant parts
 Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate.
 So that, dear lords, if I be left behind,

A moth of peace, and he go to the war,
 The rites for which I love him are bereft of me,
 And I a heavy interim shall support
 By his dear absence. Let me go with him (*Othello* I.iii.248-259).

Desdemona's love challenges and overcomes the derisive barricades of society. Pervaded by the images and sounds of revolution, her description of love entangles with Othello's to suspend the couple in a world of distinct imaginative isolation. Enjambment dominates this passage, too, as the accelerated, spiraling lines incarnate Desdemona's desire for escape from the cruel barriers of reality. Her love resounds with the "downright violence" of the imagination and its longing for transcendence, "trumpet[ing]" her defiance of the real for the glory of dream. Desdemona's devotion endures as the play's most oneiric channel to metamorphosis. "I saw Othello's visage in his mind/ And to his honors and his valiant parts/ Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate," she asserts, and the dream world of love again reverberates as a portal to beautifying abstraction. Love obliterates the ugliness that Venice sees in Othello's "visage." It cloaks it beneath the splendid infinity of the ethereal—the "mind." Desdemona's devotion to Othello can acknowledge no propensity for jealousy or insecurity, no notions of egotistical frailty or anxiety. This sense of absolute imaginative separation thunders through Desdemona's ominous use of "consecrate," as her love assumes religious significance, set aside from the corrosion of reality in the beautiful deification of dream. Othello and Desdemona become the gods of a dream world untouched by the corrosion of Venice—its capitulation to Iago's nightmare. Indeed, Desdemona's supple allusion to the "rites of marriage" entwines sex in their dream world to the wonder of the imagination; dream is sacred, and sex is a medium of communion.

Leggatt notes that Desdemona's love reverberates through *Othello* as a rejection of Venice's stagnation, arguing that her marriage to the general represents a serious disruption of

social norms. Through love, Desdemona and Othello surmount the stifling rigidity of reality, as

Leggatt comments:

She has left her father's home to marry a man who has no home. As a nature rite of passage that confirms social order, marriage is a transition from one house to another; that patten cannot work here. Desdemona's rejection of her origins is followed by a flight into the unknown. (Leggatt 116)

Leggatt's attention to "the unknown" remains especially significant. Undoubtedly, Desdemona has taken a substantial political risk in her marriage; she has bound herself to a foreigner and an outsider—to some degree, a stranger. Shakespeare likewise emphasizes that Othello is much older than Desdemona, and his military career draws him beyond the constricting bounds of Venice and normalized society. She has moved from the mundane tedium of Brabantio's house into the tumultuous imaginative sphere of romantic lore. Yet Othello and Desdemona's love, captured at its sublime apogee within the dream world of the play's first acts, represents more a plunge into the boundless, and not exactly the "unknown." Othello and Desdemona become reflections of one another's consciousness—a shared longing for dream and eternity that betrays their extraordinary spiritual confluence. If Othello, as Bradley contends, does "not belong to our world, and he seems to enter it we know not whence—almost as if from wonderland" (178), Desdemona too is not entirely descended from the real. Her love, the most innocent and idealistic of the Shakespearean universe, seems too immense for the borders of reality—a dream world in which faults and failures transfigure into the substance of godly strength. United through their unearthly devotion, Othello and Desdemona cultivate and define a new imaginative space that liberates them from the restrictions of the real, its grotesque captivation with hierarchy, patriarchy, and racial hatred.

Venice incarnates an exterior world almost immediately infected by the disorientation, brutality, and bestialism of Iago's infernal imagination. Venice, as Garber notes, represents a

suppressed version of Cyprus (Garber 590); nightmare is present here—it calls into the darkness, confusing and magnifying the rigid absolutes that permeated Brabantio’s once well-ordered world. Indeed, if Othello and Desdemona’s love symbolizes heavenly abstraction from the cruel movements of this strange half-reality, Iago’s nightmare represents their hideous disorientation. Love reduces to bestialized sex, purity warps to lascivious infidelity, and lies distort to courageous honesty. Venice for Shakespeare is a blossoming nightmare. The real, its hatred, its patriarchy, and its materialism, fuses with the irrepressible energy of Iago’s genius, perverted by his indomitable power to make white black, to make peace war. The looming influence of Iago’s nightmare over Othello and Desdemona’s dream world is present even in these early scenes, as he summarizes for Cassio: “Faith, [Othello] tonight hath boarded a land carrack./ If it prove lawful prize, he’s made forever” (*Othello* I.iii.50-51). Already, love becomes an exercise in vulgar sexual conquest, while Othello’s entrance of the “land carrack” evokes the brutal physicality of rape and piratical plunder (Kermode 169). Characters cannot escape the penetrating gaze of Iago’s interpretive magic. Fascinated by the hideous reflections of themselves they see captured in his nightmare, they fall, inexorably, beneath the light of Iago’s incisive enchantment. Identities are crystallizing even in these moments of incipient inferno, and Brabantio’s final renunciation of Desdemona rings with this sense of accomplished stagnation, as he laments:

God be with you! I have done.
 Please it your grace, on to the state affairs.
 I had rather to adopt a child than get it.
 Come hither, Moor.
 I here do give thee that with all my heart
 Which, but thou hast already, with all my heart
 I would keep from thee. For your sake, jewel,
 I am glad at soul I have no other child,
 For thy escape would teach me tyranny,
 To hang clogs on them (*Othello* I.iii.189-198).

Surrender to Iago's nightmare symbolizes a kind of prison—one in which the “clogs” of the imagination force characters into the rigid identities that deny the oneiric fluidity of Othello and Desdemona's dream world. Indeed, Brabantio's command, “[c]ome hither, Moor,” is significantly a defective pentameter line; poetry, like the splendid freedom of love's imaginative space, erodes into chaos. Indeed, even the brutal simplicity of this command incarnates the oppressively restrictive nature of identities in this burgeoning nightmare world. Othello, the play's (and perhaps Shakespeare's) grandest figure of the imagination, of poetry, and of romantic splendor, reduces for Brabantio to the grotesque simplicity of a “Moor.” Desdemona too, dragged from the fluent heights of her and Othello's dream world, reduces to a mere “jewel”—a static object that will be echoed in Othello's final lamentation for her skin “smooth as monumental alabaster” (*Othello* V.ii.5). Iago's nightmare literally defines the characters that it envelops. It destroys the beautiful fluidity of the imagination, pushing characters into the extremes so ardently obscured by the dream world of Desdemona and Othello's love.

Part III: A Brief Musical Interlude

Othello's movement to Cyprus traces the tragic evaporation of music. The beautiful pulse of the lovers' dream world, poetry's music permeated *Othello's* first act. It incarnated the essence of isolated and immaculate love, unconsummated and virgin in the heaven of perfected devotion. Music in *Othello* symbolizes the fantasy of uncorrupted spiritual union, and when Othello ceases to hear it, when he renounces it and purges it from his own poetry, he hovers over the precipice of perdition. Undoubtedly, the dream world of *Othello* cannot be regarded as a channel to resurrection or enlightenment; it and Desdemona's willow song remain damningly unaware of the complexities of sex, jealousy, and imperfection that cast the valiant general into the nightmare of his own soul. It masks the urgent shades of hatred and violent sexual insecurity

that have distorted reality—it does not undeceive, it does not disabuse. Music’s silence cannot call Othello to recover the real. Instead, its extinction mirrors his descent into the imagination’s inferno, forsaking the dreamy heights of love for the torture of his exteriorized anxieties. Shakespeare’s careful manipulation of music in *Othello* can only guide characters in the rupture between the heaven of detached devotion and the depths of hellish doubt, as Desdemona will cling, even to the moment of her death, to her willow song as a fruitless, impotent embodiment of her devotion to the impossible innocence of her love’s dream world. Indeed, Goddard notes the play’s recurrent reliance upon wind—its music, its fluidity, and its bonds to heavenly incorporeality—as the element of Othello and Desdemona’s devotion (Goddard 100). Wind is the medium of *Othello*’s dream world, as the lovers emerge from the storm at the stupendous heights of poetry and music:

It gives me wonder great as my content
 To see you here before me. O my soul’s joy!
 If after every tempest come such calms,
 May the winds blow till they have waked death!
 And let the laboring bark climb hills of seas
 Olympus-high, and duck again as low
 As hell’s from heaven! If it were now to die,
 ‘Twere now to be most happy, for I fear
 My soul hath her content so absolute
 That not another comfort like to this,
 Succeeds in unknown fate (*Othello* II.i.182-192).

In romance, tempests deliver revelation. They conduct characters to the reflections of their own fallibility and mortality, confronting Prospero, Alonso, Pericles, and Thaisa with the image of human limitation or imperfection. Resurrection blooms from these moments of accepted weakness, as characters learn to regard their place in the cosmos as somewhere in the balance of heaven and hell, perfection and damnation. Desdemona and Othello’s love surfaces from their tempest with no such epiphany. “O my soul’s joy,” Othello calls in delighted reunion with his wife, abstracting her once more beyond the realm of the physical, imbuing her with the fluency

of an airy spirit. She becomes an element of wind—the play’s last vessel of song on an infernal island deaf to the music of dream worlds (Goddard 100). As Goddard notes, Desdemona’s music in the storm scene remains inaudible; it does not derive from bursts of trumpets or clangs of drums, and the lovers alone can hear the chimerical music of their devotion: “Here,” Goddard comments, “the music in this play may not be heard [by other characters]” (Goddard 100). This moment of ecstatic rediscovery echoes as the sublime pinnacle of *Othello*’s angelic devotion. The couple endures in an imaginative space of celestial innocence; their love, metamorphosed into the beautiful music of wind, rings all around them, and they rest, together, at the apogee of perfecting devotion.

Like Desdemona’s after him, Othello’s suspension in the dream world of his love allows him to unconsciously narrate his own demise, as he promises the burgeoning chaos of Cyprus, “not another comfort like to this,/ Succeeds in unknown fate.” Othello speaks an excruciating, though ungraspable, truth. The play will trace Iago’s “storm whose crest and trough should literally touch heaven and hell” (Goddard 82), plunging the proud general from the zenith of love into the depths of hate. “If after every tempest come such calms,/ May the winds blow till they have waked death!” Othello begs the elements, while Shakespeare points to the impotence of tragic dream worlds to foster resurrection. No rebirth will flow from this music or its silence. No realization of equilibrium comes to Cyprus with these doomed lovers. Instead, music’s blustering beauty incarnates blinded innocence, its silence promises capitulation to nightmare. All too soon, Othello will abandon Desdemona—their love and their dream world—for the confusion, hatred, and deafness of hell. Though here he is in heaven, in coming to Cyprus, Othello resigns himself to infernal torture. Indeed, as Goddard notes of Desdemona’s love, the couple’s devotion often mirrors the imagery of Sonnet 116 (98), and this parallel resounds in Othello’s allusion to the

storm's "laboring bark." Othello and Desdemona's constancy does not belong to the real. It, like the sonnet itself, is a reflection of perfected and devastating affection above the corrosive movements of reality. Yet while Desdemona's love, tragically, "look[s] on tempests and is never shaken" (Sonnet 116, ln. 6), Othello can only struggle through the play's disorienting waves of divine devotion and demonic antipathy, trapped helplessly between the heaven of his love and the hell of his hatred.

Silence, as the play's final scene will reveal, becomes the ultimate symbol of Iago's accomplished destruction. Iago's dominion is unbeatable, inexhaustible. If music for Shakespeare absorbs the idealism of Desdemona's celestial dream world, its haunting absence suggests Othello's abandonment of her love for the imagination's inferno. Iago, watching the couple like a satanic outsider to devotion's paradise, promises: "O you are well tuned now! But I'll set down the pegs that make this music,/ As honest as I am" (*Othello* II.i.198-200). Standing at the ports of Cyprus, Othello and Desdemona are indeed "well tuned." Their love peaks in its blissful innocence, its majestic fluidity, and its ennobling ethereality. They disembark, triumphantly, at the island, and yet they seem beyond it, still outside the constricting borders of the play. Iago's magic, however, must inexorably drag Othello into appalling doubt, stripping his poetry and his love of the beauty that entangled him to Desdemona's constancy. The splendid language of dream worlds inexorably surrenders to nightmare. Even Iago's metaphor ("set down the pegs") prophesizes the disorienting solidification of identities that will reduce Othello to a murderer, Desdemona to a whore, and himself to the reluctant messenger of truth.

Thus, when Shakespeare arrives at the play's third act, it is as if the poet stands with Othello before the gates of hell, and this brief opening scene—nothing more than an interlude in its steady devolution towards death—serves as the subtlest harbinger of looming disaster. As

Goddard comments, Act three, scene one serves as an “allegory of that sudden interruption of the music of Othello’s love which is to be subject of the act” (Goddard 100). Goddard’s association of Desdemona with wind reverberates through this scene, and the Clown implores the musicians: “Marry, sir, by many a wind instrument that I know. But, masters, here’s money for you; and the general so likes your music that he desires you, for love’s sake, to make no more noise with it” (*Othello* III.i.10-13). Shakespeare, in a single, unremarkable comment, entwines “love,” “wind,” and “music” with Othello’s consciousness—his mounting aversion to the tunes of devotion. Desdemona, invisible and incorporeal like music itself, lingers in this fleeting scene, sensed in the silenced instruments that must be rebuffed, cruelly, by the captivating enchantments of Iago’s deception. Shakespeare moves from dream worlds to nightmares through the play’s relocation to Cyprus, as Othello wavers, hopelessly, in the horrific rupture of love and jealousy. As Goddard comments:

The passage emphasizes the fact that it is upon wind instruments that the musicians are prepared to play, and the Clown himself plays on that idea when he tells them to “vanish into air.” Vanish into your proper element, he might have said. The other thing that might be stressed is the idea of inaudible music.” (Goddard 100)

Goddard reads wind as Desdemona’s proper “element” and glances back to the storm scene from the play’s end as a kind of strange resurrection—a “sixth act” (103) that promises the reunion of the betrayed couple in a heaven liberated from Iago’s treachery. Iago—the Turk, as Goddard labels him—drowns in the storm, as the couple emerges from the tempest suffused in the inaudible music of their love. The dismissed instruments of the Clowns reappear; the harmonies of love crescendo, and *Othello*’s universe redeems itself, at last liberated from the deafened prison of Iago’s lies.

When she dies, clinging to the beautiful idealism of her unheard though never abandoned devotion, Goddard contends, Desdemona passes backwards through theatrical time to the storm

scene; she emerges, triumphant and resurrected, from the chaos of Iago's gale, embraced by Othello once more at the majestic apogee of their love: "If Iago went down under water, Desdemona might well have been lifted up into air. If her end was silence, hers should be harmony" (Goddard 99), Goddard argues. Undoubtedly, Goddard believes in victorious revival of this "inaudible music." Desdemona's love becomes the ethereal fabric of resurrection; though unheard and unacknowledged, "vanishing" with her husband's cruel dismissal, it surfaces from the storm into eternity:

This is what I have long been in the habit of calling *The Sixth Act of Othello*. Here is music played on the wind instruments of the storm, which, like the storm itself, reaches the stars. Here, as surely as music is harmony, is music that may not be heard. Here is form that, like the form of Keats's urn, does "tease us out of thought/ As doth eternity" (Goddard 104).

Yet while Goddard asserts the ultimate triumph of inaudible music over the dehumanization and demonism of Iago's magic, he again sees resurrection where only death prevails. Othello smothers Desdemona in a tragic gesture to his utter desertion and alienation from the dream of their love. It is a sacrifice, not an experiment in resurrecting salvation—a resignation to his own sense of unworthiness, not an escape back to a devotion that has been utterly silenced and tarnished. Iago's contamination of his mind is already complete; the play cannot circle back upon itself, as Desdemona and Othello, like Lear after them, remain inexorably trapped in time. If this storm scene becomes the sixth act, Othello has already, tragically, abandoned his love and its windy cadences. His poetry, renounced, has crumbled into Iago's incoherent cruelty. From the third act's "marriage" scene onwards, *Othello* bows to the inescapable hell of doubt—one in which the resurrecting transcendence explored by Goddard remains impossible. Iago "set[s] down the pegs." Love evaporates, and it cannot be recovered through death. Shakespeare leaves *Othello* to an apocalypse of silence that inclines no reason to swerve backwards towards the storm to grasp for displaced rejuvenation or revival. Identities have crystallized, and the

characters of *Othello* surrendered to the irredeemable wasteland of satanic genius, trailing, helplessly in the wake of Iago's storm.

Likewise, inaudible music in *Othello*'s final act incarnates a source of lethal danger, rather than a vehicle of resurrection. Lingering too long in the impervious ardor of her love, Desdemona and her willow song symbolize a brand of inaudible music that heralds death, and not redemption. Resurrection in romance unwaveringly derives from epiphany. Prospero gazes upon the truth of his instinct for revenge and cruelty; Leontes communes with the ostensible irreversibility of his manic paranoia, haunted by Hermione's "statue" as a poignant reminder of his own stupendous fallibility. Yet Desdemona, suspended forever in the oneiric idealism of her occluding dream world, reveals through her willow song the terrific disconnect between herself and illuminating reality. Reality, romance teaches, persists as the lone Shakespearean channel towards resurrection. Goddard, quoting Shelley, observes that romance "lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world and makes familiar things as if they were not familiar" (Goddard 285). Simply stated, Desdemona never "lifts the veil." Her love cannot embrace complexity. It cannot negotiate the inferno that rages around her, and her willow song—a song that literally prophesizes her impending slaughter—echoes, impotently, through the play as a relic of her idealizing love, deaf even to its dire own warnings. Inaudible music, struck up in the storm's wind and in Desdemona's song, reverberate with the play's insurmountable denial of the real, less a "vanishing" than an imaginative banishment.

Part IV: Incipient Chaos

Though *Othello* and Desdemona's exotic dream world sought to suppress the hidden chaos that permeated Venice, Iago's nightmare releases it, infecting reality with the preoccupations of the consciousness. Once hidden beneath the haze of dream worlds, the real decays to hellish fantasy. In Venice, dream transfigured for Desdemona and *Othello* into the

ultimate tool of occlusion. The imagination lifted them beyond the hatred, cruelty, and bestialism of the exterior world, preserving the couple, for a glorious moment, in the ethereal beauty of their love. Yet dream in Cyprus no longer serves to cloak the hidden fears of Othello's once placid mind; instead, it exposes and it disorients, it reveals and it magnifies. Cyprus itself becomes a kind of Shakespearean nightmare. Reality disappears, and Iago relinquishes Othello to an inferno in which purity is treachery, black is white, and the beauty of his love is murderous hatred. There can be no separation between the soul and the exterior world in Cyprus; reality deteriorates, torn between the yearnings of dream worlds and the horrors of the imagination. If Venice represented for Shakespeare nightmare concealed, Cyprus is hell unmasked, tainting the lost clarity of the real with the soul's damning anxieties. Othello and Desdemona's love remains a kind of dream. They coast above Venice's half-hidden chaos, flying the nets of patriarchy and bestiality that rage, restlessly, in the darkness. They are the play's majestic dreamers, conjuring a new imaginative space by adventure, romantic conquest, and chivalry. Yet while the dream world of their love strove to overcome the tumultuous disorder that seethed beneath Venice's crumbling façade, Iago's use of nightmare represents Shakespeare's most diabolical experiment in false awakening. His nightmare corrupts reality; it does not seek to obscure it, as Othello finds himself waking from the dream of insulating love into the vivid terror of his soul's materialized anxieties. In *Othello*, nightmare represents the imaginative perversion of epiphany—a realization of internalized preoccupation made hideously external.

Iago charms the tormenting horrors of Othello's soul into Cyprus's corrupted reality—one in which subconscious fears reflected and distorted. He crystallizes identities, transfiguring the splendid abstractions of Othello and Desdemona's love into grotesque absolutes, reducing their devotion to a maddening battle of lascivious physicality, treachery, and jealousy. Iago

understands Othello's entanglement with the magic of dream, music, and the imagination more completely and more terribly than the general himself. Through his nimble manipulation of language, ensnaring Othello into a trap of exteriorized anxieties that reflect his own repressed suspicions of sexuality, brutality, and bloody insecurity, Iago drags Othello from the heights of his dream world to the abyss of nightmare. Music is silenced, and poetry deteriorates. Iago's word magic flows from his supple manipulation of subconscious cues that draw the soul's hidden fears into the foreground of a violated reality. Indeed, if language for Desdemona and Othello crafts an imaginative space apart from the tumultuous chaos of the exterior world, Iago's diabolical poetry entwines the mind with the hideous confusion of the physical realm, dissolving into incoherence.

Few characters understand the power of inversion as Iago does, and he rests as the play's master of disorientation and disfiguration. Under the influence of Iago's corrosive magic, the incorporeal becomes bestial, the dreams of pure love become proof of lecherous betrayal. Absolutes are reversing under his satanic influence. Transfiguration in *Othello* remains, inexorably, a process of misrepresentation, as love crystallizes to hatred and chastity withers into repulsive prurience. In romance, opposites define the human position within the play's cosmos; Prospero drowns his books in a gesture of recognized limitation, and his renunciation of magic permits him to see both his appetite for cruelty and his potential for compassion. Yet in *Othello*, Shakespeare condemns his tragic hero to wander impotently between imaginative poles, trapped in the brutal persona of murderer and stranger he sees reflected in Iago's Cyprus—his diabolical playground. Indeed, if Desdemona and Othello's dream world was a space of sublime non-definition—a world beyond the severe "houses" and "granges" of Venice—Iago's inferno

reduces devotion to hatred, and spirituality to wanton sexuality. Poised at the play's entrance to Cyprus, Iago articulates the calculus of his imprisoning magic:

...Divinity of hell!
 When devils will the blackest sins put on,
 They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,
 As I do now. For whiles this honest fool
 Plies Desdemona to repair his fortune,
 And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor,
 I'll pour this pestilence in his ear,
 That she repeals him for her body's lust;
 And by how much she strives to do him good,
 She shall undo her credit with the Moor.
 So will I turn her virtue to pitch,
 And out of her own goodness make the net
 That shall enmesh them all (*Othello* II.iii.338-350).

Iago's use of "enmesh" rings through his soliloquy and through the final three acts of the play itself. Reality and fantasy are becoming one—the mind and the exterior world "enmesh" in the chaos of the imagination, as lines of definition collide and contradict. Iago's magic does indeed worship the "divinity of hell," or, rather, its introduction into the real—the leveling of earth into the spirit's inferno. "I'll pour this pestilence in his ear,/ That she repeals him for her body's lust," Iago promises, as the anxieties of the interior trickle into the world of bodies and bestiality, sex and sensuality. Even Iago's reference to "pestilence" symbolizes the reduction of infinite dream worlds into the grossly physical. Here "devils" command "heavenly shows," while Shakespeare answers the polysyllabic complexity of "[t]hey do suggest at first with heavenly shows" with the stark, chilling simplicity of "[a]s I do now." These four, austere syllables presage the play's final silence that incarnates accomplished apocalypse. Likewise, the image of the "net" and its bonds to Desdemona's inexhaustible "goodness" foreshadows the transfiguration of her handkerchief— itself described as a "web" by Othello (*Othello* III.iv. 69)—into the ultimate snare for jealousy's damnation. Cyprus persists as the supreme world of reversals. Virgins are becoming whores. "Virtue" is becoming "pitch," dream worlds decay into nightmare unbounded.

The conscious remains for Shakespeare an intricate union of divine and demonic, righteous and vengeful, sexual and spiritual. It is a polyphonous mosaic of competing instincts, touched by both sensuality and spirituality, love and hatred. Yet in *Othello*, these overlapping extremes have been damningly disoriented and confused, called to the play's foreground by Iago's distorting magic. To be sure, Garber notes the similarities that bind Iago with the satanic "light-bearer" or Lucifer figure who, through fantasy, conjures mayhem to the surface from beneath the mask of order. Iago is the diabolical Shakespearean master of constructed epiphany. Under his influence, suppressed fears infect the real. They overwhelm the mind; they corrode the conscious. Dream worlds too operate upon the level of the absolute. Yet while they strive to occlude reality—to blur complexities and contradictions with the longings of the imagination—Shakespeare imbues Iago nightmare with the ultimate power of revelation and disfiguration, as Garber comments:

In all of these scenes Iago pretends to be the light-bringer, providing order and clarity, although he is in fact the source of chaos. There is an allusive glance here at Lucifer, literally the "light bringer," a name for the rebel archangel often used in the early modern period as synonymous with Satan or the Devil. Iago brings light in order to enforce darkness. (Garber 592)

Iago is indeed the "light bearer" of *Othello*. Able to discover the repressed anxieties that haunt and torture the characters around him, he becomes the conductor of the ruinous "psychomachia" (593) or "struggle for the soul" noted by Garber. Boundless creative energy incarnate, Iago employs the imagination to penetrate the fears of Brabantio and Othello: "For this is Iago's practice and his strategy: again and again he leads Othello to express his own suspicions, suspicions he has already had, for which Iago's trumped up 'evidence' comes as both unwelcome and entirely convincing 'confirmation'" (Garber 606). Reality and the subconscious elide in *Othello*, as Iago traps his general in a nightmare of his own soul.

Iago's protean command of language fuels his distorting magic. In his hands, words become mirrors, reflecting and contorting the minds they describe, explore, and infect. Iago imbues his meticulously crafted phrases with terrifying duality—the possibility of duplicity lurks in honesty, the promise of defiling licentiousness permeates chastity. Each word, each gesture, garners a half-hidden meaning that beguiles Othello's interior self, drawing his fears into a rapidly deteriorating exterior world. Just as anxieties hide in Othello's mind, each word is masked, confounded, by Iago's interpretive spin. They lose their undefiled meanings, vacillating, like Othello, between the poles of the imagination. Indeed, filtered through Iago's genius, language becomes a kind of metonymy for reality. It too surrenders its objectivity to his magnetic fantasies. Garber comments:

[W]hen Iago echoes Othello, he turns the meaning of the word against itself...The monster, the green-eyed monster, is in Othello's thought as much as it is in Iago's. Otherwise, Iago's insinuations would have no effect. This is one reason it is possible to maintain that Iago is inside as well as outside Othello. Put another way, he is the devil Othello deserves. The same kind of temptation directed at the sexually confident Cassio would have no effect. (Garber 607)

Garber's attention to Iago as an "echo" remains critical. Iago's use of language resounds as its own version of Lucifer-like illumination. He alone can charm the horrors of Othello's soul into the physical world of flesh and blood, blending the real and the fantastical alike with the ferocious paranoia of the "green-eyed monster" that crouches, terrifyingly, within every human soul. Iago mimics Lucifer because what he discovers derives from truth; a sort of spiritual archeologist, he scrutinizes the mind's terrain, feeling for tensions in the layers of emotion that connect the rational consciousness and the imagination. Yet while the anxieties he discovers may indeed endure within the folds of Othello's thoughts, his power to corrode exterior space incarnates the disorienting power of his magic. Language becomes this magic's essence, and the

“echo,” systematically confronting Othello with the image of his own horrific suspicions, facilitates the damning confluence between the real and imagined, the exposed and concealed.

Nowhere in *Othello* does Iago more skillfully employ this “echo” method than in his initial observations of Cassio and Desdemona’s increasingly suspect relationship. Though he merely asks questions, Iago’s use of repeated words deconstructs reality. Language allows Iago to become an element of Othello’s consciousness, corroding the real with familiar doubts. Nightmare’s already realized horror lurks in Iago’s every question, answered by the false epiphany of betrayal that springs, fully formed, from Othello’s mind:

Iago: Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady,
 Know of your love?
 Othello: He did, from first to last. Why dost thou ask?
 Iago: But for a satisfaction of my thought;
 No further harm.
 Othello: Why of thy thought, Iago?
 Iago: I did not think he had been acquainted with her.
 Othello: O, yes, and went between us very oft.
 Iago: Indeed?
 Othello: Indeed? Ay, indeed! Discern’st thou aught in that?
 Is he not honest?
 Iago: Honest, my lord?
 Othello: Ay, honest.
 Iago: My lord, for aught I know.
 Othello: What dost thou think?
 Iago: Think, my lord? (*Othello* III.iii.95-105)

Iago’s questions require no answers. They dismantle reality, pulling words like “think,” “honest,” and “thought” into the disorientation of his magic. They lose their meaning, and Iago traps them, like Othello, in the hellish uncertainty of his questions. Kermode succinctly summarizes the infectious power of these echoes: “Here we are only at the beginning of the storm; no high colours, no blasts of rhetoric; the words ‘honest’ and ‘think,’ ‘thinking,’ ‘thoughts’ have to do all the work” (175). The repetition of these words defamiliarizes their meanings. Cast into the confusion of Iago’s genius, they hover over Cyprus like strangers;

Othello no longer understands their intrinsic value—they become indefinite, unclear. Each time Othello asks to have an idea affirmed—Cassio’s honesty or the certainty of his friend’s uprightness—Iago can only reflect his general’s haunting doubt, repeating the critical word to conjure the mind’s dread into the real. Indeed, Iago’s word magic garners its most damning influence through its manipulation of the question form. Iago does not require the grandeur of his soliloquies to penetrate Othello’s mind. Through questions like “[t]hink, my lord?” and “[h]onest, my lord?,” Iago casts the interrogation into the play’s rapidly deteriorating universe, calling into doubt the very meaning and tenor of the word itself. The word is on trial, and Othello watches on as it is obscured and redefined. Broken from their definitions, “honest” and “think” fall into the torturing equivocation of Iago’s inferno.

Suddenly, words, like the characters who speak them, have no inherent identity—no clear relationship to one another or their dramatic cosmos. Destabilized, language and Othello wait to fall together into the new world order established of Iago’s reversal. “Honesty” moves towards treason; “thoughts” are becoming real. The false epiphany of betrayal looms. Reality, once obscured by the beautiful haze of love’s dream world, blends horribly with the demonic anxieties of the imagination; it becomes an expression of personal hatred and confusion, forever marred by the furious exteriorization of Iago’s nightmare. Othello stands on the precipice of condemning epiphany:

By heaven, thou echo’st me
 As if there were some monster in thy thought
 Too hideous to be shown. Thou dost mean something:
 I heard thee say even now, thou lik’st not that,
 When Cassio left my wife. What didst not like?
 And when I told thee he was of my counsel
 In my whole course of wooing, thou cried’st “Indeed?”
 And didst contract and purse thy brow together,
 As if thou then hadst shut up in thy brain
 Some horrible conceit. If thou dost love me,

Show me thy thoughts (*Othello* III.iii.106-116). Othello, however, has already seen Iago's thoughts; they are his own, exposed by his laconic questions and hideously fused to the exterior world. Indeed, Othello's phrase "some monster in thy thought/ too hideous to be shown" incarnates vividly metaphorical description of the general's mind, capturing with artistry the anxieties that haunt his marriage. Shakespeare's use of enjambment mirrors nightmare's approaching epiphany. Othello frantically digs through his thoughts, discovering the figure of this ghastly fear in the reflection of Iago's words. Othello's grasping, vague assertion that Iago "mean[t] something" calls the entire play into the gravitational pull of hell's doubt. Reality, already lost in Venice's darkness, capitulates to Iago's magic, relinquishing Othello to the anguishing "something" that moves, horrifically, from his subconscious to his conscious. Doubt was indeed once "too hideous to be show." It sank beneath the wonder of Othello and Desdemona's dream world, utterly occluded by the sublimity of their devotion.

Yet the once hidden horror of the mind is fusing with the real, and Othello echoes the savage screams that awoke Brabantio into the nightmare of his realized fears. As Garber notes, Othello's echo of "[e]ven now" parrots Iago's bestializing taunt of "[e]ven now, now, very now, an old black ram/ Is tuppung your white ewe" (*Othello* I.i.96-97) (602). Iago's obloquy invades Othello's poetry. Dream worlds crumble into nightmare. This "even now" serves as a metonymy for the seed of terror, jealousy, and insecurity that waits to overwhelm the general's vulnerable imagination. Three, unremarkable syllables in the flurry of Othello's astonished reaction, this "even now" lurks in the shadows of the conscience. Time and thought are combining—reality and the imagined, the mind and the exterior, "even now," coalesce, crashing into one another with fiendish paranoia.

Iago's echo slowly becomes Othello's own voice. Peering into the once obscured depths of his soul, Iago drags the terrors of Othello's imagination into reality. Indeed, Iago's word magic empowers him to subvert the boundaries between himself and Othello's mind. Plunged into nightmare, the self blends with its environment. Recalling Brabantio's final, dire words to Othello, Iago reflects the general's suppressed fears, brought to the false illumination of hellish illusion. Undoubtedly, Iago cannot be reduced to a mere figment of Othello's imagination; he is not a hallucination, and he exists, terribly, within the play's rapidly deteriorating sense of reality. Yet, as Garber notes, he likewise embodies an awakening voice within Othello's own soul. He fuses with Othello's conscience, speaking aloud the thoughts that haunted, though never fully permeated, the general's mind: "Iago and Desdemona are real dramatic characters, not hallucinations, although the roles they play are inevitably inflected by Othello's own fantasies, not only about them, but also about himself" (Garber 593). Iago awakens Othello into the hell of his own subconscious fears; he is the voice of Othello's doubt, his blossoming suspicions, as the general, like Brabantio before him, revives into the deadly space of Iago's imaginative horror. "She did deceive her father, marrying you;/ And when she seemed to shake and fear your looks,/ She loved them most" (*Othello* III.iii.206-208) Iago reminds Othello, as he becomes less an exterior character than a tormenting spirit of the general's memory. Othello's subconscious speaks to him in this moment of prompting horror.

Significantly, Iago's reminder does not explicitly implicate Desdemona in infidelity. It slithers through Othello's imagination, reminding him of the fears that come to dominate the play's exterior world. "Seeming" persists as the critical word in this diabolical suggestion, as *Othello* transfigures from this moment onward into a maze of appearances and suspicions, half-truths and dooming lies. Love, Iago reminds Othello, once looked like fear, and, again,

imaginative poles are reversing—dauntless devotion begins to resemble lecherous betrayal, treachery mirrors steadfast friendship.

Iago coaxes and inveigles; his magic of manufactured epiphany allows his victims to do much of the persuasive work, articulating for themselves the known, though never fully recognized, terrors of their own thoughts. “And yet, how nature erring from itself—” (*Othello* III.iii.227), Othello concludes, moving slowly towards the “net” of Iago’s infernal enchantment. Corrosive realization menaces, while the ominous caesura that finishes Othello’s rumination serves as a syntactic embodiment of his building conversion to Iago’s nightmare—what Greenblatt labels as a “placeholder for silent thinking” (Greenblatt 281). *Othello* drifts ever closer to its hero’s internal machinations, and the play’s landscape tangles with the maddening snares of doubt. Nature itself has surrendered to imaginative hell; it too crystallizes identities into the rigid absolutes that define Iago’s inferno, pulling the lovers from the inchoate dream of their love into the prison of unyielding interpretation. Within the feverish search for self-definition of *Othello*’s third act, the ethereal love of Othello and Desdemona’s dream world solidifies, as Iago again reminds his plagued general of the once superficial differences that must now, tormenting, divide him from his wife:

Ay, there’s the point! As (to be bold with you)
 Not to affect many proposed matches
 Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,
 Whereto we see in all things nature tends—
 Foh! One may smell in such a will most rank,
 Foul disproportions, thoughts unnatural—
 But pardon me—I do not in position
 Distinctly speak of her; though I may fear
 Her will, recoiling to her better judgment,
 May fall to match you with her country forms,
 And happily repent (*Othello* III.iii.228-229).

Indeed, Iago’s phrase “[a]y, that’s the point” illuminates the epiphanic power of his magic, pulling the mind’s precarious uncertainties further and further into the disintegrating, degraded

space of the real. Iago pinpoints Othello's own articulation of his nightmare, while the play plunges into an imaginative realm of cruel definition, distinction. Dream worlds are decaying, and the imagination transforms into an instrument for demonic captivity rather than for quixotic liberation. The light of Iago's genius has penetrated Othello's consciousness; his prison walls are rising all around the ensnared general. To be sure, this passage too makes ample use of the caesura, as Iago skillfully drags Othello's once cloaked fears into the play's exterior world. Invading Iago's syntax as hideous suspicion does Othello's mind, each caesura incarnates the monstrous growth of horror—the unspoken, though maturing, specter of Iago's general's most intimate preoccupations. The language of dream worlds constructed an imaginative space beyond the real; it was the sublime, poetic music of love, and it sang of a fantastical realm blissfully removed from the tormenting pinions of black and white, civil and savage. Yet Iago's word magic defines and defiles identities—ones entrapped within a tarnished reality—carefully divided by “clime, complexion, and degree.”

Even Iago's hidden assertion of “(as to be bold with you)” crouches, lethally, behind the mask of parenthesis. Again, Iago becomes an echo. This passage symbolizes his renegotiation of Brabantio's description of his daughter's perplexing rejection of the “curlèd darlings of our nation” (*Othello* I.ii.68). Indeed, Iago's suggestion that Desdemona should have preferred someone of “her own clime, complexion, and degree” paraphrases the patriarch's reverberating “our own nation”—an exclusionary space that utterly rejects Othello, confining him to the persona of Moor and alienated, mistrusted outsider. Significantly, Iago interrupts his mention of “whereto we see in all things nature tends—” with the onomatopoeic “[f]oh!” that predicts the collapse of Othello's love poetry into incoherent hatred. Enjambed with the pensive halt, this line crashes “nature” into the bestialized, repulsed noise of Iago's exclamation, mimicking the

imposition of cruel identities that must plunge dream worlds into the imagination's grotesque inferno. "Foh!" is echoed by the next line's beginning "[f]oul," as Iago puns on "rank" to at once underscore the gross bestialism of his Hell to emphasize the social structure that raises white Desdemona above black Othello. The incorporeality of Desdemona and Othello's dream world "falls" to answer Iago's "country forms"—the constricting shapes of definition and distinction.

Othello awakens; nightmare dominates. The beautiful fluidity of love's dream world is capitulating to the Iago's furious, restrictive magic. Imaginative poles have completely reversed, as Iago transfigures into the embodiment of honesty, ethereal Desdemona reduces to a lascivious whore, and Othello, the splendid composer of love's most oneiric poetry, becomes a bestialized murderer. The music of dream worlds grows faint. As Goddard suggests, the first scene of Act III exemplifies the transition from love's paradise to perdition's hell—a transition by the silencing of music (Goddard 100). At last, the sounds of love's dream world recede, tempered by infernal fantasy, as Othello wonders:

This fellow's of exceeding honesty,
 And knows all qualities, with a learned spirit
 Of human dealings. If I do prove her haggard,
 Though that her jesses were my dear heartstrings,
 I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind
 To prey at fortune. Haply, for I am black
 And have not those soft parts of conversation
 That chamberers have, or for I am declined
 Into the value of years—yet that's not much—
 She's gone. I am abused, and my relief
 Must be to loathe her... (*Othello* III.iii.338-348).

Goddard's theory of triumphant resurrection cannot sustain Iago's diabolical silencing of Othello's music. As identities crystallize, confining each lover in a separate imaginative world of prurient treachery or ferocious hatred, Othello renounces wind; he falls from its paradisiacal dream world, abandoning Desdemona, alone, in the lonely isolation of blinding devotion. Time cannot twist backwards upon itself in *Othello*; the lovers cannot reemerge, unscathed, into the

mellifluous wind of the play's second act, as Goddard contends. As *King Lear* will prove, history is inescapable, and Iago, his magic already potent in the play's third act, unleashes a nightmare that utterly precludes resurrection. Indeed, "Honesty"'s meaning hardens into the perverted reversal crafted by Iago. The play's satanic villain has become its truth-teller, the prophetic herald of light, and Othello converts to the bestial outsider he sees reflected in Iago's fantasies.

Othello becomes the passive observer of his elegiac imaginative love, ready to surrender his music, his wind, to infernal silence. Indeed, Othello's allusion to Desdemona's "jesses" is especially significant, as the language of Iago's hell infects the once fluid dream of his imagination. Her identity becomes static for him, forever tied to the damning labels of whore, temptress, and betrayer. Corrupted, he must abandon her; he must relinquish her to wind, "whistl[ing] her off" with a cruelty that predicts his growing deafness to the beautiful music of her imagination. Already Othello begins to move outside himself, convinced of his unworthiness to read the "human dealings" that instruct the movements of Venice's "curlèd darlings." Desdemona has indeed been "let...down the wind/ To prey at fortune." *Othello's* dream world shrinks, relinquishing Desdemona to the deadly solitude of unyielding idealism. Enjambment dominates this passage. As if caught in a second storm of competing dream worlds and nightmares, Othello speaks from inside a whirlwind—he is abjuring his magical love, embracing hellish tempest. With little exception, Shakespeare supplements enjambment in these lines only with the harrowing halts that signify looming epiphany, poisoning them just before Othello's deadly pronouncement, "[s]he's gone." Othello acquiesces to satanic nightmare, and his language decomposes with his dream world, as his laconic promise, "I am abused, and my relief/ Must be to loathe her" reverberates with the monosyllables that herald the defilement of his once

sublime poetry. Even the long, descending vowel sounds of “loathe” seem to trace Othello’s journey from the heaven of his devotion to doubt’s inferno.

Remarkably, Othello, not Iago, becomes the soliloquist in this moment of surrender, parroting even the villain’s expressive form to fully inhabit his diabolical imaginative space. Echoes of the past whisper through this declaration of faith in Iago’s demonism, as Othello paraphrases himself in his “[h]aply, for I am black/ And have not those soft parts of conversation/ That chamberers have,” recalling his rejection of occult enchantment in his courtship of Desdemona. Yet while that speech entwined him with the world of legend, romantic lore, and unearthly devotion, this renunciation reduces Othello to the oppressively bestialized identity of “black,” isolated and silent in a nightmare in which “value[s]” are constantly disoriented, distorted, and decaying. As defined by the OED, “chamberer” can mean either “a concubine” (definition 2) or “a servant who attends the bedchamber of a nobleman or gentleman” (definition 1). Othello’s allusion to “chamberers” exemplifies this degradation of the spiritual to the corporeal, the animalistic.

Disgusted by the “soft” sounds of love, Othello can neither hear the music of Desdemona’s devotion nor escape from the magnetic insinuations of Iago’s transfixing lies—he becomes their servant, captivated by the “bedchamber” in which the preoccupations of his soul, he believes, are defiled and defined. Music grows silent as Othello descends from the dream world of his affection into Iago’s nightmare:

I had been happy if the general camp,
 Pioners and all, had tasted her sweet body,
 So I had nothing known. O, now forever
 Farewell the tranquil mind! Farewell content!
 Farewell the plumèd troops, and the big wars
 That makes ambition virtue! O, farewell!
 Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,
 The spirit-stirring drum, th’ear-piercing fife,

The royal banner, and all quality,
 Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
 And O you mortal engines whose rude throats
 Th'immortal Jove dread clamors counterfeit,
 Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone! (*Othello* III.iii.338-357).

The predominance of musical instruments in this passage remains critical. Renouncing the beautiful dream of the “neighing steeds,” the “shrill trump,” the “spirit-stirring drum,” and “th’ear-piercing fife,” Othello’s “farewell” to the dream world of love reverberates with the irrevocable contamination of Iago’s magic. There can be no turning away, no turning back, from Othello’s abandonment of his oneiric devotion. “Farewell,” Othello repeats again and again, renouncing the beautiful illusions of his love’s dream world. Love’s innocence has been forever corrupted. Its resplendent imaginative space, broken from the chaos of nightmare, crashes into Iago’s Hell; from this moment on, Desdemona is alone in the untarnished garden of their devotion, as Othello plummets from bliss to doubt’s inferno, silencing his mellifluous music as he descends. “I had been happy if the general camp,/ Pioners and all, had tasted her sweet body,/ So I had nothing known,” Othello laments, longing for the lost innocence of his dream world—the blindness that lifted the lovers beyond the masked cruelty that haunted Venice. Yet even the gross corporeality of Othello’s phrase “tasted her sweet body” rings with the infecting bestiality of Iago’s magic, as the wondrous remoteness of his love corrupts to crude physicality.

Othello peers back at his dream world from outside it in this elegiac goodbye, speaking of himself in the estranged third-person (“Othello’s occupation’s gone”) in a gesture of tragic alienation from his essential self—the wondrous creature of imagination who must pass from the self-creative riches of the soul into the crystallized torture of perdition. Indeed, Othello’s doleful repetition of “O” and “farewell,” his rhythmic coupling of two items per line, imbues his language with the cadence of music. For a moment, Othello rests in the rupture between the play’s two, contradictory fantasies, admiring the doubled “plumèd troops, and the big wars,”

“royal banner, and all quality” as he moves from Heaven to Hell, from love to hate, from spiritual purity to utter corruption. These are the relics of dream; they were the magnificent witnesses of Othello and Desdemona’s love—the fabric of their imaginative space. Indeed, Othello’s allusion to the “spirit-stirring drum” rings with especial significance. Recalling his ebullient cry to Desdemona that the storm’s winds might “blow till they have wakened death” (*Othello* II.i.185), Othello once more articulates his fleeting yearning for transcendence through the magic of dream worlds.

Subdued by Iago’s infernal power to exteriorize internal fears, the drum quiets; the hope for escape and dreamy blindness retreats, and, deaf, Othello surrenders to Cyprus’s erupting nightmare. Othello enters Iago’s diabolical inferno as a supreme outsider, as his reference to the “royal banner” echoes, fleetingly his proud allusion to his ancestors of “royal siege” (*Othello* I.ii.25). Even they—the spirits of Othello’s dream world—reduce beneath the invasion of nightmare to a mere symbol of forgotten heroism. The beautiful fluidity that swept through the lovers’ dream world resolves into horror, abandoning Othello as the lonely stranger, the bestialized foreigner, he feared he might have been.

It is remarkable that the only “marriage” Shakespeare shows in the play’s actual foreground is that between the Othello and Iago. While Desdemona elopes into darkness, fleeing the rough divisions of Venice that elevate white above black and houses above granges, Iago and Othello “marry” in the distorting light of nightmare. Othello and Desdemona’s love belongs to this offstage world, as Shakespeare’s shadowy positioning of their marriage speaks to the ungraspable fluidity of their romantic devotion. Though they move across *Othello*’s infernal landscape, their love endures somewhere in the aloof kingdom of the imagination; mystery becomes their native element, and even the consummation of their marriage rests unresolved,

unknowable. Their dream world floats beyond reality. Yet Iago now commands Othello's poetry. Enthralling the general with his contrived memory of Cassio's invented dream, he reduces the resplendence of the "Othello Music" to the barbaric tautologies, "O blood, blood, blood" (*Othello* III.iii.452) or "O monstrous! Monstrous" (*Othello* III.iii.427). The savagery of Iago's genius has become Othello's own voice. Cruelty calls Othello from the sublime heights of dream, and his poetry sinks into the incoherence of this bestializing inferno. Iago and Othello's marriage cements the transition from ungraspable love to absolute hatred—it solidifies the reversed identities that pervade nightmare, casting, forever, Iago as bringer of light, Othello as the murderous fiend of darkness. Iago and Othello's marriage transfigures for Shakespeare into an articulation of reality's fusion with fantasy, and, unlike the dream world of love, it will not remain unconsummated. Desdemona's murder reverberates through *Othello* as the play's terrible sacrifice of love to the insurmountable dominion of nightmare, slaying her in the blinded isolation of her beautiful, though dooming, idealism. Renouncing the sublime fluency of dream worlds, Othello proclaims his undying allegiance to incipient horror, swearing:

All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven.
 'Tis gone.
 Arise, black vengeance, from the hollow hell!
 Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne,
 To tyrannous hate! Swell, bosom, with thy fraught,
 For 'tis of aspic's tongues! (*Othello* III.iii.445-450).

Iago no longer needs the clever "echo" technique that called internalized anxieties into the exterior world within earlier scenes. The interior at last distorts to the exterior; fantasy has at last conquered the real. Iago's voice literally is Othello's voice, as his imperious summons of "[a]rise, black vengeance" mimics his calls that led Brabantio to hellish awakening in Act one. Othello calls himself to epiphany, and the imperative verbs that once dominated Iago's screams into Venice's night invade his verse. "Yield up," "[a]rise," and "[s]well," Othello commands,

while the detached dream world warps to a savage inferno of brutal action. Othello revives himself into the prison of imaginative hell, pinioned within the cruel identity of bestialized outsider and satanic murderer—“black vengeance” personified. Significantly, Othello employs the present tense to describe the overthrow of his devotion (“[a]ll my fond love thus do I blow to heaven”), entangling, “even now, now, very now” (*Othello* I.i.97), reality and infernal fantasy.

The freedom of Desdemona and Othello’s love is swallowed into wind, “blow[n] to heaven” in the general’s ultimate gesture to forsaken dream worlds. Shakespeare’s manipulation of defective iambic lines in Othello’s covenant with Iago articulates his abandonment of devotion’s beautiful cadences. How far from the flowing lines of “cannibals” and “deserts idle” has Othello traveled through his raw proclamation, “[t]is gone.” In two lines, the present tense collapses into the past—the pact is sealed, Heaven becomes “tyrannous” Hell. Images of postlapsarian corruption pervade this passage. Permeated by implications of satanic revolution, the “throne” of love capitulates to the dominion of hatred—irredeemable, irreparable. Shakespeare compounds this confluence with the Fall through his allusion to “aspic’s tongues,” transfiguring Iago’s verbal tempest into a demonic temptation that catapults Othello into the inferno of doubt and ultimate perdition. Once fallen, the universe of *Othello* cannot right itself. Iago’s insidious knowledge cannot be shaken off, and no triumphant sixth act can rescue the lovers from nightmare’s encompassing sovereignty, as Othello promises:

...Like to the Pontic Sea,
 Whose icy currents and compulsive course
 Ne’er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
 To the Propontic and the Hellespont,
 Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
 Shall ne’er look back, ne’er ebb to humble love,
 Till that a capable and wide revenge
 Swallow them up.
 Now, by yond marble heaven,
 In the due reverence of a sacred vow

I here engage my words (*Othello* III.iii.453-462). Identities have become static for Othello. Reality and nightmare combine. "...My bloody thoughts, with violent pace,/ Shall ne'er look back," Othello proclaims, rejecting Goddard's theory of redemption and resurrection with the "icy" resolution of Iago's magic. The beautiful fluidity of Desdemona and Othello's devotion freezes in this speech. Even heaven, once the imaginative space of air and ever-shifting self-creation, transfigures into "marble," as Desdemona is imprisoned, alone, in the abandoned glory of love's dream world. Shakespeare significantly includes the "Hellespont" in this demonic conversion to hatred—a sea in which the word "Hell" is literally contained. *Othello* is accelerating, inexorably, towards catastrophe, surrendering to the dominion of an infernal fantasy that "ne'er feels retiring ebb," surging, like the play's treatment of time, into nightmare. Shakespeare's pentameter becomes turbulent, irregular; flooded with defective lines, Othello's poetry defies the dreamy rhythms of love for the rough chaos of ferocious, murderous rage.

Part V: The Handkerchief

After the marriage ceremony, Othello abandons the splendid dream of love; he concedes to the reflection of himself he sees in Iago's distorting mirror, pulled from the sublime imaginative heights of Desdemona's devotion to bestializing hatred. Nowhere in *Othello* does Shakespeare more poignantly trace this diabolical descent than through the shifting symbolism of the handkerchief. Once the transcendent embodiment of mystical love, this handkerchief corrupts for Othello into the manifestation of Desdemona's lascivious treachery. In *Othello*'s perverted universe, white has at last become black, purity has become wanton betrayal, and dream worlds—the oneiric sphere of triumphant love, self-creation, and escape—have crashed into nightmare. Reality evaporates, as Shakespeare separates his couple across an imaginative divide.

The handkerchief radiates through the play as a tragic relic of this fantastical journey, tracing, elegiacally, Othello's descent from impossible romantic idealism to infernal hatred.

Othello renounces the handkerchief—its sublime magic and its channel to love's occluding dream world. Trapped in the hellish prison of nightmare, he must slaughter Desdemona to seal her, alone, in the dream world of her undying devotion and to consecrate himself to the frozen identity crafted by Iago. Murder for Othello transfigures into the play's ultimate renunciation of dream; through his sacrifice of Desdemona, he leaves, forever, the wondrous imaginative space of love, surrendering his wife as an offering to nightmare—the supreme object of consummated spiritual distortion. The “Othello Music” grows unsteady, cruel. Dream is abandoned, and nightmare prevails. Once the glorious medium through which Othello and Desdemona explored their shared longing for transcendence and escape, poetry warps to an instrument with which the valiant general understands his horrific displacement and disorientation. Othello's poetry forgets its sublime purpose, its yearning for magnificent abstraction, fluidity. Murder betrays for *Othello* the deadening capitulation of dream and reality to nightmare's enslaving dominion. In the play's final acts, Shakespeare finds only whores and murderers, saints and sinners, dreamers and diabolical liars. Romance's ennobling equilibrium has no place in this chaotic wasteland of pinioning identities. Indeed, even the act of smothering becomes an expression of identity's rigidity, its inescapability; personas crystallize—they solidify, irreversibly, into the savage absolutes imagined by Iago.

The handkerchief functions as a metonymy for Othello and Desdemona's magical love—its hideous distortion by Iago and the general's tragic renunciation of dream. Indeed, the shifting symbolism of the handkerchief mirrors Othello's movement from love to hatred; once the embodiment of mystical devotion, it transfigures into proof of repugnant treachery,

lasciviousness, and bestialized sexuality, decaying from the heights of love with Othello's poetry. As Leggatt notes, the handkerchief as Othello first explains it represents female power, expressing the magic of love to hold men in place—to bind them to the space of dream: “Sewed by a sibyl in ‘prophetic fury’ (74), give by a woman to a woman, it is a token of the magic power women hold over men, a love-charm that will hold a man in place” (Leggatt 132). The handkerchief embodies for Shakespeare the incorporeal world of the imagination knit into the physical world; it is a web of dream—it is an incarnation of legend, mysticism, and imagination. Yet this world remains the exclusive dominion of Desdemona's oneiric love when Othello finally explains the handkerchief's significance; he can only retrace its fading memory, its abandoned transcendence, as he warns:

‘Tis true. There's magic in the web of it.
 A sibyl that had numbered the world
 The sun to course two hundred compasses,
 In her prophetic fury sewed the work;
 The worms were hallowed that did breed the silk;
 And it was dyed in mummy which the skillful
 Conserved of maidens' hearts (*Othello* III.iv. 69-74).

Here, Shakespeare plays once more with the language of dream, exploring the “Othello Music”'s beauty and its potential for escape, transcendence, and self-creation through the imagination. Yet while this passage's poetry echoes the lyrical “Othello Music” of the play's first act, Othello significantly speaks only in the past tense; he remembers that the handkerchief was “sewed,” that its life-giving worms “were hallowed” and “did breed” as a stranger to its oneiric space. He stands outside it, beyond it, alienated in the shadows of nightmare. The dream world of love survives (“[t]is true. There's magic in the web of it”), and yet it is no longer Othello's home, as his laconic acknowledgement of its existence rings with the cold fury that froze the Hellespont into his soul.

The handkerchief becomes Desdemona's lonely kingdom—the abandoned world of women and female magic—its fading power to captivate and control men with love. Othello and Desdemona together “numbered the world” in the blaze of their devotion. They were the gods of liberating and adventurous passion, exploring a shared fascination with dream that swelled too large for the masked chaos Venice, for the blasts of Cyprus's roaring tempests. Indeed, Othello again abstracts time in the beautiful sphere of fantasy, measuring the sibyl's journey with a “sun to course two hundred compasses” that recalls the sublime dreaminess of his distant “nine moons wasted” (*Othello* I.iii.76-87). Shakespeare finds his lovers once more in an aloof empire of “maiden's hearts”—the glorious dominion of romantic legend and lore that once exuberantly defined their unearthly devotion. Here, however, their paradise reverberates with postlapsarian alienation, and Othello speaks from beyond the Fall—from the pits of corrosive, hellish knowledge. Even Othello's elegiac allusion to the dye derived from “mumm[ified]” “maiden's hearts” inflects the handkerchief's longing for metamorphosis with the imminence of decay; death looms over of the brilliant longings of idealism, sewing deterioration into the very fabric of love and imaginative transformation. The dream of half-realized metamorphosis resounds through Othello's mournful remembrance of the “hallowed” worms “that did breed the silk.” This handkerchief yearns for the impossible rebirths of dream worlds; it longs to transfigure, to make the lowly into the celestial, the ethereal. Yet this splendid space of feminine imaginative power is receding. History again fulfills itself even as Othello narrates his journey, as his tragic abandonment of love's dream world is contained, “even now,” within the general's narration:

She was a charmer, and could almost read
 The thoughts of people. She told her, while she kept it,
 'Twould make her amiable and subdue my father
 Entirely to her love; but if she lost it
 Or made a gift of it, my father's eye
 Should hold her loathèd, and his spirits should hunt

After new fancies...(*Othello* III.iv.57-63).

The influence of dream worlds fades for Othello, as the general's allusion to the Sibyl's ability to "almost read/ The thoughts of people" prophesizes the blossoming distance between himself and Desdemona—his movement to a new, infernal imaginative world. The lovers no longer share the same celestial space; there can be no reconciliation between dream worlds and Iago's nightmare in *Othello*. Shakespeare unrelentingly traps his hero between these two extreme fantasies, while the handkerchief must always be an embodiment of purest love or corrupted femininity, a symbol of mystical, devastating devotion or lecherous betrayal. It can only map catastrophe, holding the two interpretations in tension without resolving imaginative crisis until it is too late. Circles of imaginative occlusion repeat, as Othello moves from the beautiful dream of love to the depths of hatred in an unyielding cycle of delusion and deception that must "hunt/ After new fancies." Indeed, as Leggatt notes, even Emilia—the play's faltering embodiment of reality, reason, and delayed justice—participates in the corruption of the handkerchief, "making it a vehicle for falsehood" (Leggatt 133). Enjambment haunts this passage, and Shakespeare's syntax mimics Othello's spiraling descent into the prison of nightmare—the irresistible triumph of diabolical fantasy over reality. Ominously entwining his acquiescence to Iago's hell with "hunt[ing]," Othello presages the violent destruction of dream worlds with his shift of allegiance.

If *Othello's* dream world reverberates with the beauty of poetry, its nightmare remains a space of tautology, animalistic noise, and incoherence. The handkerchief's corruption charts this extraordinary deterioration of language, moving with the play into the imagination's dooming inferno. Iago becomes the supreme master of the handkerchief. Dream worlds wither under his influence—their relics and their glorious will to veil the mind's tormenting suspicions. Shakespeare at last arrives at the unbounded explosion of nightmare; the beautiful creations of dream have at last become confirmation of lowliest betrayal. Witnessing Cassio's staged

conversation with Iago, Othello loses his language as his most primordial concession to the savage vision of barbarism he sees reflected in Iago's nightmare. Garber neatly summarizes, "[l]oss of language here, as elsewhere in Shakespeare, is emblematic of loss of humanity" (Garber 612). The disgusting disorientation of Iago's fantasy replaces the real, and Shakespeare surrenders his hero to a Hell in which he can only wade through waves of maddening bestialism, screaming:

Lie with her? Lie on her?—We say lie on her when they belie her.—Lie with her! Zounds, that's fulsome.—Handkerchief—confessions—handkerchief!—To confess, and be hanged for his labor—first to be hanged, and then to confess! I tremble at it. Nature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without some instruction. It is not words that shake me thus.—Pish! Noses, ears, and lips? Is't possible?—Confess?—Handkerchief?—O devil! (*Othello* IV.i.35-43).

Suddenly, the handkerchief breaks from its sublime dream of sibyls, mummies, and maiden's hearts; Othello plunges into a world of absolute darkness and horrific dehumanization, rushing with Iago's grotesque parade of "noses, ears, and lips," "devil[s]," and savage, onomatopoeic exclamations ("[p]ish" and "[z]ounds). Language constructed Othello and Desdemona's dream world. Through poetry's unearthly promises, they rose above the seething chaos of Venice, insulated in the obscuring and abstracting haze of beautiful idealism. Yet as the handkerchief transfigures from a symbol of impossible ethereality to the tarnished reminder of Desdemona's imagined treachery, Shakespeare cements the ultimate, tragic triumph of nightmare over love's sublimity and mellifluous harmony. Iago looms as *Othello's* indomitable victor, distorting language to an incomprehensible whirlwind of sexualized body parts and wild, animalistic noises. Even Othello's exclamatory outburst, "[l]ie with her? Lie on her?" charts the play's movement from sexual or spiritual union to repugnant eroticism and savagery. Othello's meditation on the handkerchief resounds as the ghastly music of nightmare; it is the cacophonous

anthem that consigns the play to Hell's dominion, sacrificing reality in its precipitous step from dream to infernal fantasy.

Again, unnatural pauses permeate this epiphanic awakening into the imagination's inferno. "Handkerchief—confessions—handkerchief!" Othello agonizes, crystallizing his capitulation to Iago's magic with each crescendoing dash. These are not the abrupt halts of silent thinking, as Greenblatt commented (281). They are instead the ragged trail of crushing realization—the syntactic embodiments of fulfilled imaginative hell. Indeed, Shakespeare significantly imprisons the word "confessions" between the image of the handkerchief; its meaning has solidified, as *Othello* is enveloped by the cruel sovereignty of nightmare. After the marriage scene, Iago's voice becomes Othello's voice; his vision of the handkerchief functions as the general's. He ascends as the play's masterful writer, and once more Othello concedes to his violently debased interpretation of reality, swearing: "Ay, let her rot, and perish, and be damned tonight, for she shall not live. No, my heart is turned to stone. I strike it, and it hurts my hand. O, the world hath not a sweeter creature! She might lie by an emperor's side and command him tasks" (*Othello* IV.i.178-182). Othello banishes the fluidity of dream. Iago's magic dominates; the imprisoning inflexibility of rigid identities permeates the general's infected consciousness, and his poetry reduces to inglorious prose. Othello can see Desdemona only from below the dream world, gazing up at her through the distorting light of Iago's inferno. Shakespeare reduces his once sublime romantic hero to the bestial realm of the corporeal.

Throbbing with the raw physicality of images such as "rot," "perish," "heart," and "hand," *Othello*'s universe surrenders to epigrammatic and impressionistic flashes of sexualized cruelty, of unchangeable concession to Iago's inferno. Indeed, Othello's pronouncement that "[his] heart is turned to stone. [He] strike[s] it, and it hurts [his] hand" incarnates the utter

solidification of nightmare within the general's soul. Iago's reversal is complete. There can be no escape, no ennobling discovery of the real, as the hasty flow of "let her rot, and perish, and be damned tonight, for she shall not live" mirrors Othello's accelerated surrender to the dominion of fantastical nightmare and irrevocable disaster. Indeed, Othello's promise that "she shall not live" echoes Iago's god-like power to command the course of the play's history. Nightmare prevails. Othello, like Brabantio before him, peers into the darkness and sees the revelation of his soul's most excruciating anxieties. He is awake, he is living at the primordial depths of his own Hell. Identities, once fluid and ever-changing, "rot" into damning absolutes, as Othello rages at Desdemona:

Was this fair paper, this most goodly book,
 Made to write "whore" upon? What committed?
 Committed? O thou public commoner!
 I should make very forges of my cheeks
 That would to cinders burn up modesty,
 Did I but speak thy deeds. What committed?
 Heaven stops the nose at it, and the moon winks;
 The bawdy wind, that kisses all it meets,
 Is hushed within the hollow mine of earth
 And will not hear't. What committed?
 Impudent strumpet! (*Othello* IV.i.71-81).

Othello has indeed abandoned the dream world of liquid personal creation. Imagining Desdemona as "fair paper, this goodly book," Othello assays to label his once elusive love—to control it and to confine it. Iago's crushing sovereignty reverberates through this reduction of Desdemona's identity. Recalling Brabantio's allusion to her as a "jewel" (*Othello* I.iii.195), Othello's cruel willingness to capture his wife's ungraspable individuality symbolizes his full awakening into nightmare; she becomes static, fixed in the imprisoning persona of "whore" and betrayer. What was once pure, untouched, is blotted and blackened beyond recognition, inscribed with the savage rigidity of Iago's magic. Othello articulates the savage force of Iago's nightmare in his furious longing to "write" an identity across Desdemona's soul. He turns Iago's mirror

upon her, as characters are impugned and disoriented, displaced and redefined. Othello is now but an actor in Iago's play—he is a creation of his diabolical mind, bending and bowing with the furious waves of fantasy.

Othello too was once “a fair paper, a goodly book.” In the splendid irreality of love, he resisted inscription; he and Desdemona lingered in the unknowable space of sibyls and anthropophagi, refusing the real in their oneiric quest for sublimity, escape. Suddenly, the beautiful music of love becomes “bawdy,” and wind grows silent. Othello's aspersion, “[i]mpudent strumpet,” defeats the unheard cadences of devotion, as even the “hollow mine of earth” functions as a loose metaphor for the crystallized hell of the general's imagination. Othello must slaughter Desdemona to cement this transition from dream to nightmare. He must recreate her as a sacrifice to diabolical illusion, desperately yearning to transfigure the tormenting inventions of the mind into truth. She is an offering to the vision of himself he has come to accept as reality, and he smothers her in a gesture of Shakespeare's terrible suppression of the power of dream beneath the crushing weight of horrific fantasy.

Part VI: Death and Resurrection

Desdemona never awakens to the nightmare that envelops her and the play's final acts. Her love always remains beyond the scope of *Othello's* present, lost in the blinding, beautiful haze of her idealizing devotion. Indeed, Desdemona's constancy stands for Shakespeare outside the play, too grand and too resplendent for the confines of physical space; it is an expression of eternity, and it refuses, even until its dying breath, to bend with the corrosive magnetism of Iago's inferno. If Shakespeare condemns Othello to vacillate, maddeningly, between the majestic promises of his dream world and the hell of his doubts, ultimately bowing to the overpowering pull of hatred, Desdemona personifies unwavering devotion. She becomes the last, lonely guardian of dream in a tragic cosmos consumed by nightmare. Her love lingers forever at the

splendid apogee of the first act, and it alone worships the undying kingdom of dream. Consigning her soul to the wondrous occlusion of dream worlds, Desdemona literally cannot hear the dire warnings of her own music, as inaudible song—romance’s enchanting call to epiphany, disillusionment, and resurrection—exemplifies her own dooming entanglement with the mortal deafness of unfaltering idealism. Indeed, while Othello’s inability to hear the wind instruments of the third act predicted his fall to the satanic depths of Iago’s nightmare, Desdemona’s refusal to listen to the portents of her willow song incarnates her surrender to the blindness of unwavering love. Neither can trace their way back to reality, lost in the maze of infernal illusion or blissful unawareness.

In tragedy, reality rests, inexorably, beyond the grasp of the imagination, as Desdemona’s willow song eulogizes her utter alienation from the urgent movements of the exterior world. *Othello* maintains no space for self-knowledge or self-discovery. Always amazed by the creative power of fantasy, characters move from captivation with the dream of love to the horror of bestializing hatred, as Desdemona’s resurrection, reviving for a brief moment to speak from the borders of life and death, proves her relentless commitment to the unseeing ardor of her devotion. She does not see Othello; he remains for her, inexorably, an embodiment of the romantic heroism that has already capitulated to horror. Desdemona’s resurrection proves the impossibility of enlightenment in tragedy. Though she awakens to speak as if from beyond the grave, Desdemona once more professes her unswerving allegiance to the world of the imagination, dying behind the veil of a dream that precludes her from negotiating the exigent complexities of reality.

Desdemona’s love rests, irrevocably, beyond the tarnishing influence of bestialism, brutality, and hellish doubt. She remains the play’s lone protector of dream, suspended, forever,

at the oneiric heights of devotion. Her innocence is beautiful and impervious; it incarnates the essence of heaven, and the play unfolds below the splendid climbs of its incorruptible purity—postlapsarian, imperfect. Yet this extraordinary love, threaded by the tragic splendor of dauntless constancy, cannot conjure redemption or metamorphosis. It is a veil, and it does not embrace the real or the juxtaposing, demonic fantasy that has invaded her husband's consciousness. Even while surrounded by the inferno of Cyprus, Desdemona never descends from the obscuring wonder of her and Othello's love. She does not understand the corrosive new world that has infected reality; she does not see, she only dreams. From *Othello's* third scene onwards, Desdemona drifts above the play. She can commune with neither reality nor the flourishing influence of hellish fantasy. She is alone, and she cannot peer past the shine of her blamelessness, her unearthly purity.

Only Emilia encourages Desdemona to abandon the obscuring beauty of her idealism and to engage with the dire urgency of Othello's maddening obsession and jealousy, to negotiate with the exterior world. Speaking truths to the deaf ears of dreamers, Emilia personifies the play's abused and manipulated sense of the real. Yet as *Othello* divides between love's oneiric paradise and Iago's diabolical abyss, Emilia is silenced in the rupture, able to speak only when nightmare has triumphed, when the time for redemption or resurrection has expired. Indeed, *Othello* guards no space for reality, and Desdemona, enthralled by the beautiful promises of aloof dream and untarnished imaginative devotion, does not seek to find it, even as Emilia implores:

But jealous souls will not be answered so;
They are not ever jealous for the cause,
But jealous for they're jealous. It is a monster
Begot upon itself, born on itself (*Othello* III.iv.158-161).

Emilia alone understands the irrational nature of fantasy—both Desdemona’s and Othello’s. She sees the world in its terrible complexity, its elastic willingness to bend with the winds of passion and illogical suspicion. Indeed, Shakespeare plays with tautology in this passage. Yet while Iago employed the echo to destabilize words—to draw them into the disorientation and deterioration of his magic—Emilia repeats “jealousy” over and over again to impress Desdemona with its inescapable meaning, to suffuse love’s obscuring dream world with its pressing shades of nuance, intricacy. The “jealous” cannot be assuaged with fierce idealism. They occupy their own world of irrational and furious fantasy. She speaks from a space removed from the crash between reality and Iago’s hell, somewhere below the resplendent, though blinding, heights of Desdemona’s love. Deeply attuned to the movements of the tragic cosmos, she witnesses the dangers of the imagination, as her phrase “begot upon itself, born on itself” employs alliteration to mirror the monstrous, irrepressible surge of envy, inflecting the harsh “b” sounds to trace the approach of disaster. Yet even Emilia’s warning to Desdemona has been colonized by Iago’s magic. Repeating her husband’s word “monster,” she unwittingly predicts the imprisonment of her vision of reality to dauntless imaginative evil. The characters of *Othello* are trapped; infernos are descending. Emilia’s fleeting interjection of reality, however, falls on deaf ears. Desdemona, damningly, cannot surmount the beautiful haze of her love, promising instead:

...Unkindness may do much,
 And his unkindness may defeat my life,
 But never taint my love. I cannot say “whore.”
 It does abhor me now I speak the word (*Othello* IV.ii.159-161).

Lamenting Othello’s brutal castigation, Desdemona puns on the word “whore” through her to allusion “abhor” even in her plaintive longing to escape the labels of lascivious treachery. She speaks the word without hearing it; she confronts it without understanding it. This moment functions as a microcosm for the impending willow song. Desdemona speaks the word “whore”

as she flees from it. It infuses her poetry when she rejects it, and yet she cannot commune with its meaning, its layered implications. In abjuring the word, Desdemona refuses to engage with the play's looming crisis of colliding fantasy worlds; she strives to ignore "whore," to overcome it. Yet it has become a piece of the play's satanic fabric—nightmare has arrived, and it invades her poetry as a fierce harbinger of horror's impending triumph.

The imagination makes Desdemona deaf both to reality and to hellish fantasy. It lifts her, forever, above the play's foreground, abandoning her in love's beautiful dream in which she literally cannot hear the warnings of diabolical nightmare even as she herself speaks them: "My love doth so approve him/ That even his stubbornness, his checks, his frowns—/ Prithee unpin me—have grace and favor" (*Othello* IV.iii.18-20), she confesses to Emilia, striving to transfigure hideously exteriorized frailty or fallibility through the dream of unwavering perfection. Othello remains for her, forever, as the "warrior god" (Bloom 445) of their imaginative paradise. In her mind, he lingers with her in their sublime creative Eden, blind to the hatred, insecurity, and suspicion that tormented Venice's haunted streets. She never witnesses Othello's descent, his harrowing movement from devotion to devastation. She is alone, yet she does not know it, as she longing traces the memory of a ghostly love that no longer exists. Metamorphosis cannot spring from blinded idealism, Shakespeare laments in *Othello*. Refusing to commune with his "stubbornness, his checks, his frowns," Desdemona waits to die in an aloof world innocent of life's undeceiving complexities, unable to engage fruitfully with the dire challenges of the defiled exterior and to uncover, with Othello, the transfiguring light of reality.

The willow song rings as Shakespeare's elegiac gesture to the deafness of Desdemona's dream world. Indeed, while Othello's fantasy silences mellifluous sounds of love and poetry, hers ignores the building sweep of catastrophe. He cannot hear love, and she cannot hear death,

jealousy, or maddening insecurity. When Shakespeare reaches the willow song, his lovers occupy separate worlds; they no longer speak the same language. Inaudible music in tragedy hurtles characters towards destruction, as Desdemona ignores her own call to disillusionment and corrupting knowledge. If Othello has awakened into dooming nightmare, Desdemona refuses her reviving call to epiphany, noting her mother's maid's song as a mere trifle: "[s]he was in love; and he she loved proved mad;/ And did forsake her. She had a song of "Willow;" an old thing it 'twas, but it expressed her fortune" (*Othello* IV.iii.27-29). The music of dream worlds cannot uncover the real. It cannot vanquish the disorientation of horrific nightmare or the willful obscuring of impossible love. The willow song instead explores an imaginative realm in which the self remains inescapably, inexorably blind to the movements of the exterior world, as Desdemona sings:

"The fresh streams ran by her and murmured her moans;
Sing willow, willow, willow;
Her salt tears fell from her, and softened stones,
Sing willow, willow, willow."
Lay by these.—"Willow, willow."
Prithee hie thee; he'll come anon.
"Sing all a green willow must be my garland.
Let nobody blame him; his scorn I approve" (*Othello* IV.iii.44-50).

While Othello struck a rock-hard heart, Desdemona's love "softens stones." While the sea of Othello's once romantic soul froze into the icy hatred of the Hellespont, she lingers in a landscape of fluid streams, whispering winds. Desdemona sings perdition's music, worshipping an imaginative space terribly, wondrously ignorant of the urgent truths of the real. Dream, as ever in Shakespearean tragedy, remains impotent, as the eulogy of Desdemona's love cannot "soften" the imaginative barriers that divide her resplendent devotion and Othello's nightmare, forever divided from enlightening reality. This song symbolizes *Othello's* most elegiac portrait of the world of dream, and Desdemona unknowingly paraphrases herself ("[I]et nobody blame

him; his scorn I approve”) in her undying will to remain, forever, suspended above the complexities of sex and violence, jealousy and madness. Indeed, Desdemona banishes reality in this moment of supreme imaginative occlusion, commanding Emilia to “[p]rithee hie thee”—to leave her to this glorious and damning space of immaculate love, untarnished devotion. Even Shakespeare’s nimble manipulation of song and spoken verse in this moment speaks to the absolute blindness of Desdemona’s love. Weaving her conversation with Emilia into the body of the song, Desdemona further blurs the boundaries between real and imagined. Reality is absorbed, abstracted, by her music. It becomes a subordinated piece of romantic fantasy, caught forever in the irrepressible current of beautifying dream.

Desdemona’s inaudible music cannot conjure resurrection. Abandoned by Shakespeare in the lonely beauty of her dream world, Desdemona refuses to commune with the urgent nightmare unfurling about her. There can be no reconciliation between the lovers and reality; they occupy different worlds—they belong to disparate imaginative universes, dividing the play into two, contrasting fantastical poles. Indeed, Othello has likewise resigned himself to horror. Convinced by Iago’s diabolical transfiguration of the handkerchief, he irrevocably warps dream to nightmare, and Desdemona must die as a sacrifice to the ultimate perversion of reality with diabolical imaginative power. She is an offering to the dominion of nightmare. Her death seals the triumph of Hell over Heaven—the victory of ruthless hatred over impossible love, as Othello laments:

It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul.
 Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!
 It is the cause. Yet I’ll not shed her blood,
 Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
 And smooth as monumental alabaster.
 Yet she must die, else she’ll betray more men.
 Put out the light, and then put out the light.
 If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,

I can again thy former light restore,
 Should I repent me; but once put out thy light,
 Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,
 I know not where is that Promethean heat
 That can thy light relume. When I have plucked thy rose,
 I cannot give it vital growth again;
 It needs must wither. I'll smell thee on the tree.
 O balmy breath, that dost almost persuade
 Justice to break her sword! One more, one more! (*Othello* V.ii.1-17).

The fleeting memory of transcendent love moves close to Othello in this moment of eulogy for dream, and he traces his way back, falteringly, to the sublime “Othello Music.” Yet even in Othello’s last communion with the abandoned and tarnished beauty of his and Desdemona’s dream world, the vulgar rigidity of nightmare intrudes, colonizing imaginative spaces. Identities have already become static—they have renounced the fluidity of dream—as Othello transfigures Desdemona’s purity into the “monumental alabaster” of death, the frozen embodiment of lost chastity and devotion (Leggatt 139). Death infects the “Othello Music.” It has been touched by nightmare; it bends with the command of Iago’s infernal imagination. Othello imprisons Desdemona in her dream world, promising that he will “not shed her blood,/ Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow” in confession of his tragic distance from the liquidity of love, his cold alienation from the flowing embrace of their once oneiric devotion. Indeed, Othello again parrots Iago’s voice, employing his imperious imperative verbs (“let me not name it,” “put out the light, then put out the light”), as Shakespeare reveals the ultimate sovereignty of nightmare in this ruined cosmos. Darkness approaches; Hell is crystallizing, and Othello “put[s] out the light” of Desdemona’s love in gesture of broken surrender to Iago’s brutalizing inferno.

Othello’s dream of love collapses into diabolical fantasy, while reality, romance’s ever-illusory force of redemption, remains ungraspable, unknowable. Othello’s allusion to Desdemona as the “rose” of his imagination embodies the irrecoverable loss of romantic sublimity. He has moved forever outside the dream world; he cannot “relume” the sublime

idealism that once enthralled him, defined him. Othello passes from one fantasy to another, wavering inexorably between distorting visions of himself that always obscure the real. Now, he surrenders to darkness, Desdemona into the sacrifice to nightmare's insurmountable triumph—the dominion of Hell over Heaven, hatred over love. Indeed, the image of the rose likewise guards distinctly postlapsarian underpinnings, plucked to consecrate the surrender of *Othello's* cosmos to horror's irredeemable knowledge—the acceptance of fantasy as truth, and its festering penetration into the resplendent general's soul. The ghostly remembrance of dream worlds haunts Othello as he leans over the sleeping Desdemona. Her “balmy breath,” tangled with the wind instruments of the third act (Goddard 100), calls Othello back to the fading sounds of harmonious love. For a moment, he hears the lost whispers of his ruined capacity for wonder—the silenced music of devotion's dream world. He “smell[s]” it, he listens to its imploring pleas for mercy and justice, and yet it rests outside him, sealed in the world of the ideal that no longer belongs to him. “I'll smell thee on the tree,” Othello mourns, gazing at Desdemona from the fallen pits of nightmare—at last a stranger to her obscuring devotion, experiencing only the faint, estranged essence of dream. She is already a memory, transfigured in his imagination from virgin perfection to lascivious betrayer through the symbol of the handkerchief:

By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in's hand!
 O perjured woman! Thou dost stone my heart,
 And makes me call what I intend to do
 A murder, which I thought a sacrifice.
 I saw the handkerchief (*Othello* V.ii.62-66).

For Othello, Desdemona's death is indeed “a sacrifice.” It is the play's final surrender of love to Iago's inferno—the brutal consummation of imaginative perversion. Through his use of “sacrifice,” Othello betrays his utter resignation to nightmare. He stands outside the dream world, examining it from afar, gazing at its distant memory from the depths of Iago's infernal doubt. Murder becomes the only way of communing with the lost splendor of mystical love;

though he remains in hell, Othello slaughters Desdemona to suspend her, forever, in the imagination's beauty. Recalling the handkerchief with vivid disgust, Othello's reference to Cassio's "hands" echoes the disjointed and sexualized flashes of body parts that catapulted him into the frenzy of the fourth act. Once the otherworldly charm of mystical love, the handkerchief now precipitates murder. It too has changed its allegiance; it becomes the "net" (*Othello* II.iii.349) of Iago's demonic magic realized and revealed within the exterior world. Shakespeare traps the handkerchief as a trifle in the distorting and disorienting hands of nightmare, and it frames this explosive surrender to the corrosive dominion of Hell ("I saw my handkerchief in's hands...I saw the handkerchief"). Othello repeats "saw" in his desperation to fix the fantasy of Desdemona's infidelity to the real—to make imaginative perversion truth, to transfigure the exteriorized anxieties of his soul into an absolute reality. Again, Othello alludes to his heart as a "stone," as Shakespeare measures the tremendous distance between his tormented consciousness and the soft fluidity of the willow song.

Desdemona and Othello never grasp the real. They die as strangers to the undeceiving light of truth, forsaken to a tragic cosmos that cannot uncover or embrace fallibility or jealousy, the dangers of exteriorized paranoia. Banishing the possibility of disillusioning resurrection, Shakespeare relinquishes his lovers to wander, hopelessly, in the rupture of two, utterly separated imaginative universes. They have abandoned reality, and they entwine instead with the infernal or the majestic illusions of their imaginations. Tragedy proves that resurrection cannot blossom from this unseeing idolization of fantasy. The imagination's magic is never cast aside, and Desdemona clings to the impossible dream of perfected oneiric love till her dying breath, reviving for a moment to speak from the transitional half-light of life and death as the play's final testament to the horrors of blinded idealism. Instead of revealing complexity and weakness,

instead of embracing imperfection and fallibility, Desdemona and Othello worship the unreal—they consign their souls to fantasy, and Shakespeare dooms them to die unenlightened, unchanged. Though Emilia’s devastating call to disillusionment reverberates through the play’s final scene, Shakespeare subordinates her screams to the crushing dominion of Hell, and she personifies a sense of illuminating reality that has already been lost—one that must fall, impotently, into the deadly silence of nightmare’s realization.

Significantly, after her murder, Desdemona calls to the living literally from behind a veil, from the inside of the bed’s drawn curtains. Even as the victim of gruesome slaughter, she remains aloof, detached from nightmare; she persists without it, occupying a physical and metaphysical world unto herself, as she laconically laments: “Nobody—I myself. Farewell./ Commend me to my kind lord. O, farewell!” (*Othello* V.ii.125-126). Resurrection in *Othello* produces no epiphanic acceptance of mortal limitation or weakness, no encompassing movement from illusion to reality. Desdemona cannot cast aside the magic of the imagination. Her love is the substance of dauntless romantic fervor, and it passes into death’s spiraling abyss unable to metamorphosis, unable to embrace Othello’s faults and his failures—to see beyond the haze of oneiric devotion. In her imagination, Othello remains forever her “kind lord,” the ebullient commander of dream’s “cannibals” and “anthropophagi,” its “tented field” and “neighing steeds.” She dies captured, inexorably, in love’s obscuring paradise, unwilling to engage with the horrific nightmare that engulfs both her and the play’s ever-obscured reality. Indeed, even Desdemona’s repetition of “farewell” recalls Othello’s own goodbye to the sublime romantic splendor of devotion; with her death, love’s dream is banished from the play’s defiled cosmos, leaving only Iago’s inferno behind. She perishes, and so does the dream world.

Death announces the absolute division of fantastical worlds in *Othello*, as Hell at last absorbs the play's entire foreground, triumphantly dispelling love's beauty in its tide of nightmarish horror. "She's a liar gone to burning hell!/ 'Twas I that killed her" (*Othello* V.ii.130-131), Othello victoriously proclaims, consummating the sacrifice of his soul and Desdemona to Iago's inferno. He is the guardian and embodiment of demonic fantasy, the proud gatekeeper of "burning hell." Nightmare slaughters dream, turning its wrathful eyes on Emilia's short-lived vision of reality. Shakespeare plays with cruel irony in Othello's allusion to Desdemona as a "liar." Lies compose the fabric of *Othello*'s tragic cosmos; it endures as an imaginative world woven from the nets of hatred and the webs of love, the obscuring dream of perfecting devotion and the terror of exteriorized anxiety. *Othello*'s characters, Shakespeare laments, are all "liars," and they must die, unredeemed, for their unseeing worship of fantastical irrealities. "...Roast me in sulphur!/ Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!/Oh Desdemon! Dead Desdemon! Dead! Oh! Oh!" (*Othello* V.ii.280-282), Othello screams when he learns of Iago's treachery, as Hell ascends, insurmountably, to claim the play, infecting Othello's poetry with the grotesque incoherence of tormenting damnation. Iago's conquest is achieved; he is, as he always was, the commander of the play's imaginative universe.

Part VII: Conclusion

Torn between demonic fantasy and love's oneiric paradise, *Othello* nurtures no disillusioning space for reality. Emilia symbolizes *Othello*'s lone (and abruptly silenced) voice of enlightenment, of disillusionment. She functions as the play's sole herald to truth, supplicating the lovers to abandon the captivating lies of fantasy and to see one another as they truly are—to, as Prospero will command, "be themselves" (*Temp.* V.i.32). Though personified by frank Emilia, reality drowns beneath the play's furious tide of illusion, as Shakespeare unrelentingly subordinates it to and subjugates it with the imagination. *Othello* abandons its characters in a

dizzying chasm between creative extremes, unable to trace their way back to a reality dominated and defiled within the play's opening exploration of the lovers' unearthly devotion. Desdemona and Othello are perpetually deceived and distorted, ensnared and enthralled; they are the doomed captives of the imagination, refusing to liberate themselves from the prisons of blinded love or torturous doubt to uncover the real, to excavate the play's long-lost yearning for objective truth.

Resurrection and redemption, romance teaches, hangs in the balance of imaginative worlds; the enlightened soul embraces the mind's fecund potential for otherworldly devotion and infernal fantasy, ultimately recognizing mortal limitations—the impossibility of realizing, absolutely, either pole. The soul remains a mixture of both, romance and Emilia plead. Imperfect, flawed, and dangerously quixotic, characters must quench their longings for transcendence through a learned willingness to accept the layered complexity of the spirit, grasping the imagination as a liberator from delusion, not as fulfillment of ultimate creative power or perfection. Imploring Desdemona to recognize her husband's obvious failures, his clear infatuation with the deadly insinuations of Iago's nightmare, Emilia warns:

Why, we have galls, and though we have some grace,
 Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know
 Their wives have sense like them. They see, they smell,
 And have their palates both for sweet and sour,
 As husbands have. What is it that they do
 When they change us for others? Is it sport?
 I think it is. And doth affection breed it?
 I think it doth. Is't frailty that thus errs?
 It is so too. And have not we affections,
 Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?
 Then let them use us well; else let them know,
 The ills we do, their ills instruct us so (*Othello* IV.iii.92-103).

The world, Emilia promises, is vast. It is an ever-changing mixture of good and evil, constancy and betrayal, wonder and hatred. It encompasses everything, she promises; it entwines extremes and tempers them, as characters must find their own reflections of weakness and fallibility in

reality, abjuring the magic of imagination to commune with inexorable fragility. Yet, in tragedy, the imagination cannot foster the possibility of undeceiving epiphany, as Desdemona rebuffs Emilia's counsel with a characteristic dismissal of reality, "[g]ood night, good night" (*Othello* IV.iii.104). She rests forever in the impregnable dream world of her love; she is impervious to the ominous whispers of truth, standing, alone, at the Shakespearean apogee of beautiful and devastating imaginative deception.

Even Emilia's final, deadly revelation of Iago's iniquity cannot right the tragic cosmos. She cries into the darkness of a play already infected and invaded by the obscuring confusion of the imagination. Her words, the enfeebled shadows of lost reality, conjure no transformation, no resurrection. "...I will speak as liberal as the north./ Let heaven and men and devils, let them all,/ All, all cry shame against me, yet I'll speak" (*Othello* V.ii.221-223), she cries, too late illuminating her husband's diabolical manipulation of fantasy. She articulates reality, and yet she cannot fuse it to the play's universe. She speaks of a world surrendered to oneiric illusion and to demonic invention—one absorbed by the distorting power of fantasy, both its dream worlds and its infernos. An embodiment of the real confined to tragedy's blindness, Emilia must die as a testament to the impossibility of resurrecting knowledge, understanding, or clarity in dramatic universes utterly controlled by the imagination.

Works Cited

- Bloom, Harold. "King Lear." *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York, Riverhead Books, 1998.
- Bloom, Harold. "Othello." *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York, Riverhead Books, 1998.
- Bradley, A.C. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. Penguin Classics, 1991.
- Calderwell, James L. "Creative Uncreation in *King Lear*." *King Lear: Modern Critical Interpretations*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987. Ed. Harold Bloom.
- Coogan, Michael David, Marc Zvi Brettler, Carol A. Newsom, and PHEME PERKINS. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: With the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books*. 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Eliot, T.S. "The Hollow Men." *T.S. Eliot: The Collected Poems, 1909-1962*. Harcourt Inc., 1976.
- Garber, Marjorie B. "King Lear." *Shakespeare After All*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2004.
- Garber, Marjorie B. "Othello." *Shakespeare After All*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2004.
- Goddard, Harold Clarke. "King Lear." *The Meaning of Shakespeare*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1951.
- Goddard, Harold Clarke. "Othello." *The Meaning of Shakespeare*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1951.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. "Master Mistress." *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. "Laughter at the Scaffold." *Will in the World: How Shakespeare*

Became Shakespeare. New York: W.W. Norton, 2004.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Shakespeare's Freedom*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2010.

Adams and Leroy Searle. Thomson Wadsworth, 2005.

Kermode, Frank. "King Lear." *Shakespeare's Language*. New York: Farrar, Straus, And Giroux, 2000.

Kermode, Frank. "Othello." *Shakespeare's Language*. New York: Farrar, Straus, And Giroux, 2000.

Knight, George Wilson. "The Othello Music." *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearian Tragedy*. London: Routledge, 2001.

Knight, George Wilson. "'Great Creating Nature:': An Essay on *The Winter's Tale*." *The Crown of Life*. Oxford University Press, 1974.

Kott, Jan. "King Lear or Endgame." *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary*. New York: Norton, 1974.

Leggatt, Alexander. "King Lear: We Have No Such Daughter." *Shakespeare's Tragedies: Violation and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Leggatt, Alexander. "Othello: I Took You for That Cunning Whore of Venice." *Shakespeare's Tragedies: Violation and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Novy, Marianne. "Patriarchy, Mutability, and Forgiveness in King Lear." *King Lear: Modern Critical Interpretations*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987. Ed. Harold Bloom.

Shakespeare, William. *King Lear. The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. New York:

Penguin Group, 2002. Ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller.

Shakespeare, William. *Othello. The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. New York:

Penguin Group, 2002. Ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller.

Shakespeare, William. "Sonnet 116." *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. New York:

Penguin Group, 2002. Ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller.

Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest. The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. New York:

Penguin Group, 2002. Ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller.

Shakespeare, William. *The Winter's Tale. The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. New

York: Penguin Group, 2002. Ed. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller.

The Oxford English Dictionary. www.oed.com