Seeing Othello:
Othello and the field of the visible

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Let us begin neither with an in-depth analysis of a Shakespearean text nor with an elaborate examination of the cultural context in Renaissance England, but with a rather coarse consideration of a stereotype we meet with in everyday life: a beauty and a beast. A girl meets a boy. Though there is a minor problem that his appearance is extremely ill-matched with her beauty, of course she knows better than to be bothered by such superficies and comes to love the beauty of his heart. So far, so good. A boy should be judged not by his appearance but by his heart, his deed, his intelligence, something that reflects his inner virtue, whatever it is. From the children's story of a princess and a frog to Woody Allen's films, the story seems to be holding a stable position in Western love fantasies. Surely, we do not have to be ardent feminists to notice that there is no opposite gender version of the story, at least nothing as widespread as this: a girl should be beautiful to catch a prince's eye. What happens, however, if it is not only a girl that has to attract the lover's eye? What happens if a boy desperately needs to be seen and admired by a girl's eye in order to be a prince? In fact, the children's story is crueller in this sense than Woody Allen's films: a frog, or a beast, should finally be changed (or changed back) into a handsome prince as a condition of the happy ending. He should appear in her eyes as a suitable love object. What happens, then, if a girl decisively continues to fix her eye to his heart, not to his appearance? Quoting from the play I am going to look at, what if a girl will only see his 'visage in his mind'? What happens to his 'visage', his face and body, in this seemingly benevolent gesture to sever 'mind' from 'visage'? What happens, above all, if his 'visage' cannot be magically changed? In this essay on *Othello*, I would like to focus on the 'visage' and the eyes that see it, and suggest that the appearance is one of the central themes around which the play is structured. It is often pointed out that the play is obsessed with the visible.[1] At the same time, it is remarked that Othello 'internalises' the cultural prejudice against his blackness.[2] I would like to combine these two arguments and investigate his blackness specifically in relation to the visible: how it is, or is not seen; what consequence it brings about; how the obsession with the visible functions there; what power relations are at work. I will start with focusing on the internal world of the play and look at how the obsession with the visible pushes him toward demanding the visible evidence for the invisible narrative and how this demand damages his narrative self-construction. I will then explore how the blackness is seen and constructed in the specific cultural look of Shakespearean stage. Finally, I will show that the play reveals the culturally restricted nature of the field of the vision itself, as well as the violence of its function.

If Othello is not described as ugly in the play, still his appearance makes him an improper lover of Desdemona in the eyes of the people who are hostile toward him.

Brabantio: If she in chains of magic were not bound,
Whether a maid so tender, fair, and happy. . .
Would ever have, t'incur a general mock,
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
Of such a thing as thou — to fear, not to delight. (I.ii.65–71)[3]

This does not deny the fact that Othello is referred to in the play as having a considerable sexual attraction.[4] Rather, the combination of the fearful appearance and the attraction he has on Desdemona serves to exaggerate his inadequacy as her man. Precisely because his bodily feature, is something 'to fear, not to delight', his sexual attraction is considered unnatural, magically or inhumanly excessive:

Iago: Even now, now, very now, an old black ram
Is tupping your white ewe. (I.i.89–90)
Brabantio: For nature so preposterously to err,
Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense,
Sans witchcraft could not. (I.iii.62–4)

One can make such an 'unnatural' choice only if there is some fault with one's sensory perception. There is no way, in Brabantio's mind, that one with a sound sense of perception sees the 'sooty bosom' and loves it. Since Desdemona can see, and since her sense of perception is not 'lame', she must have been corrupted by witchcraft. The sootiness, the bestiality, the magical, and the unpleasantness to the eyes are 'naturally' combined here and make Othello an improper lover in all senses.

If Brabantio and Iago see Othello as an inappropriate lover, of course that is not the way Desdemona sees him. However, the word 'see' might not be appropriate here, for, refusing to see him in the way they do, she makes a strange choice of not seeing him at all. She declares before her lover's face:

Desdemona: I saw Othello's visage in his mind . . . (I.iii.248)

Here it is important to consider not so much what she saw as what she did not, or tried not to, see. Her eyes that pass through his surface 'visage' to see it only 'in his mind' implicitly confirms Brabantio's words that his 'visage' is not what she can see and love: Othello's appearance cannot make an appropriate object of love. The only difference is that while Brabantio sees the inappropriateness of Othello, his daughter kindly and politely turns her eyes away from his 'visage'.[5] Keeping this in mind, we could detect in the following lines an unbridgeable gap between the lovers:

Othello: Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw
The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt,
For she had eyes and chose me. (III.iii.188–91)

His rejection of the doubt about her chastity sounds desperately ironic and almost tragic, as it is based on a false belief that he has been chosen by her 'eyes', which, in fact, were not looking at him.

We could find other benevolent eyes that try not to see Othello except in his mind:

Duke: If virtue no delighted beauty lack,
Your son-in-law is far more fair than black. (I.iii.285 - 6)

Exactly in the same manner as Desdemona, the Duke attempts to see Othello's fairness in his 'virtue' and not in his 'black' body. In order to see Othello as having appropriate 'virtue' and beauty, the Duke has to decolorize his 'black' body. The Oxford English Dictionary suggests that the word 'fair' means not only 'beautiful' but 'light as opposed to dark' in regard to 'complexion and hair'. If virtue does not lack delightful beauty, it should be light-coloured; virtue and beauty should go hand in hand in their visible whiteness. Here, then, the gesture of decolorization of Othello does not only drive the 'dark' body out of sight, but plainly preserves the binary opposition of fairness and blackness, and, as Jyotsna Singh puts it, 'perpetuates the negative connotation of the word "black"'.[6] Though friendly to Othello, neither Desdemona nor the Duke sees his body properly: it is no more appropriate to them as it is to those people who are hostile to him. He can be appreciated only as far as the visible bodily features do not count in front of the invisible 'virtue'.

Stephen Greenblatt argues that Othello's identity 'depends upon a constant performance . . . of his "story", a loss of his own origins, an embrace and perpetual reiteration of the norms of another culture', and shows how this norm, the Christian doctrine of sexuality that has been incorporated into his psychic structure, tears him up into an advocate of Christianity and an adulterous pagan.[7] As Karen Newman aptly points out, Greenblatt seems to imply here 'as somehow anterior to identity-as-performance an essential self, an ontological subjectivity, an Edenic moment of black identity prior to discourse': the origins of his own that are 'lost'.[8] Newman argues that Othello's origins are only accessible through European colonial desire, and that he is at once a speaking subject and 'the object of his "Travellous historie" by virtue of his blackness'. Her focus on 'his blackness' is important, for, although I agree with Greenblatt in thinking that the narrative that constructs Othello as an appropriate lover of Desdemona is at the same time impeaching him for inappropriateness, I suspect that his emphasis on the linguistic construction of inner psyche tends to neglect the issue of the 'outer' bodily appearance that may not be fully constructed by discourse.[9] It is not my intention to assert that there is a prediscursive and ontological black body that is visible, but still I believe that it is worth while taking Homi Bhabha's formula for the colonial subject literally in the analysis of this play: 'almost the same but not quite / not white'.[10] It is the fact that Othello is 'not white', his visible blackness, that keeps him in the status of 'not quite'. In *Othello*, even when, as Greenblatt argues, the invisible narrative accuses Othello as an inappropriate lover, that accusation comes via constant recourse to the visible. In fact, Othello's appropriateness as a lover is questioned in the play's emphasis on the evidential power of the visible over the invisible words.

At first sight, Othello in the first act seems to be successfully constructing himself through narrative performances as an appropriate lover of Desdemona and an indispensable soldier to Venice. We can hear this narrative self-fashioning from the very first scene that he appears:

Othello: My service which I have done the signiory
Shall out-tongue his complaints. 'Tis yet to know —
Which, when I know that boasting is an honour,
I shall provulgate — I fetch my life and being
From men of royal siege, and my demerits
May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune
As this that I have reached. (I.ii.18–24)

The words that constructively point out his merits simultaneously reveal the extent of Othello's faith in the confirming power of the invisible narrative. His merits will 'out-tongue' the complaints, will 'boast' and 'speak' in his support. The faith in the spoken narrative seems to be approved and confirmed as he forcefully 'present[s]' to the 'grave ear' of the Duke how he has won Desdemona's love by telling the 'story' of his life to her 'greedy ear'. As is often pointed out, in spite of his self-description ('little shall I grace my cause / In speaking for myself' I.iii.88–9), his speech is so powerful and eloquent that it charms the Duke as it has Desdemona and makes him confirm the marriage. The narrative performance seems to establish the truth of the speech without any proof besides the invisible words themselves. It is this self-evidential power of the narrative that enables it to bring about what is narrated and founds the basis of Othello's self-fashioning.

Remarkable as it is in Othello's speech, however, the evidential and constructive power of the narrative is not without challenge throughout the first act. In fact, the invisible narrative and what is visible to the eye are contending with each other for the evidential power. The Duke turns down Brabantio's accusation against Othello, saying that it needs 'overt' proof:

Duke: To vouch this is no proof
Without more wider and more overt test
Than these thin habits and poor likelihoods
Of modern seeming do prefer against him. (I.iii.106–9)

Though he knows better than to have implicit faith either in mere words or in a mere appearance ('poor *likelihoods*', 'modern *seeming*'), it is the 'overt test' that has the power to finally prove the statement. Even Brabantio himself seems to have more faith in what he sees than in what he hears. When he confirms with his eyes ('Strike the tinder, ho! / Give me a taper. . . / Light, I say, light!' I.i.139–43) what he was told (that Desdemona has left his house to be with Othello), the first question he asks Roderigo sounds as if he were trying to re-seize the lost sight of his daughter: 'Where didst thou see her?' (I.i.162). He comes to completely lose his faith in words after his 'vouch' without proof is rejected:

Brabantio: These sentences, to sugar or gall,
Being strong on both sides, are equivocal.
But words are words; I never yet did hear
That the bruised heart was pierced through the ear. (i.iii.214–8)

The words are 'equivocal', prove nothing and, as a result, produce no meaningful effect.

Above all, Desdemona's love for Othello, inspired with his invisible narrative, cannot escape the spiteful eyes of those who make repeated reference to the inappropriateness of his visible appearance:

> Othello: I will a round unvarnished tale deliver
> Of my whole course of love: what drugs, what charms, . . .
> I won his daughter.
> Brabantio: A maiden never bold;
> Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion
> Blushed at herself; and she, in spite of nature,
> Of years, of country, credit, everything,
> To fall in love with what she feared to look on? (I.iii.90–9)

No matter how Othello tries to justify their love in the narrative field, Brabantio refuses to leave the field of the visible. Though Othello has won Desdemona's love in spite of his appearance, the very declaration of love by her ('I saw Othello's visage in his mind') testifies both to the inevitability of the act of seeing and to its impossibility in this love. This quiet confirmation will of course be followed by Iago's far more outspoken and hostile comments:

> Iago: And will she love him still for prating? . . . Her eye must be
> fed. And what delight shall she have to look on the devil? (II.i.214–6))

Othello's narrative performance is not powerful enough to make him *look* appropriate and is constantly undermined by this failure in the field of the visible.

It becomes, therefore, highly important that his appropriateness as Desdemona's lover should be proved in a visible form. However, he is cruelly deprived of an opportunity to show his 'fair' virtue in the play, so that we can only hear it narrated: his fairness is literally invisible. His eminent ability as a soldier whom the state 'Cannot with safety cast (I.i.147)' is repeatedly mentioned but never put into a visible form. Desdemona follows the line we have seen above by saying that what she loves is his military honour and virtues:

> Desdemona: And to his honours and his valiant parts
> Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate. (I.iii.249–50)

However, all she knows about his military virtues seems to have been gathered from his 'discourse' that she 'devour[ed] up' 'with a greedy ear' (I.iii.148–9). The play hides a sneaking suspicion against this love aroused by the narrative even in the very lines of Othello:

> Othello: She thanked me,
> And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
> I should but teach him how to tell my story,
> And that would woo her. (I.iii.162–5)

It is true that she was indirectly encouraging him to propose to her, but still the reference to an anonymous 'friend' at this moment is rather suggestive, if not ominous. Here the story is treated as something that does not need to be endorsed by Othello himself and it is this transferable narrative that has won her heart. By severing the narrative from the narrator and referring it to an unspecified friend, Desdemona seems to be reducing Othello, a narrator with singularity, to one of the exchangeable friends who happens to own the narrative.

While Othello as a linguistically constructed appropriate lover is being undermined by his lack of visibility, Othello as an inappropriate black man is kept under hostile eyes. In fact, his dark body is posited in this play to form a remarkable contrast with the 'fair' bodies of the other characters. It is often pointed out that he does not appear on the stage until the second scene, nor is his name mentioned in the first scene. He is only mentioned as the Moor, 'an old black ram', a 'Barbary horse' and a 'devil' (which is regarded as black), so that when he finally appears on the stage our eyes are inevitably led to his blackness. It is the only thing he can show to our eyes in the first few scenes of the play, even if he has much to tell to our ears. We might follow Desdemona and try not to see but to hear him, but when we do see him, we are invited to see his blackness as sooty, bestial, devilish, in a word, as inappropriate to look at. It is this visible, inappropriate blackness that is consistently brought up as the proof against the image of an appropriate lover constructed discursively by his 'speech'. The visible body comes to function in the play as 'the proof' that narrative self-fashioning cannot reach, and therefore derides and nullifies it.

It is quite understandable, then, why Othello becomes so obsessed with the 'ocular proof' of the infidelity of his wife. Asked to believe what he was told, he demands precisely what he himself is being asked for: the visible evidence:

Othello: I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove . . . (III.iii.191–2)
Othello: Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore;
Be sure of it. Give me the ocular proof . . . (III.iii.360–1)
Othello: Make me to see't; or, at the least, so prove it
That the probation bear no hinge nor loop
To hang a doubt on . . . (III.iii.365–7)

The handkerchief he gave to Desdemona serves exactly as this 'ocular proof' that he demands and fears, and Iago gradually leads him to believe the infidelity of his wife through the manipulation of this visible evidence. As he makes the handkerchief 'the ocular proof', however, Iago simultaneously turns the body of Othello himself into the visible proof of his unworthiness of her love.

It is often pointed out that the handkerchief represents Desdemona's sexuality.[11] What is important in my argument is, however, that 'it makes the invisible visible', as Patricia Parker puts it.[12] The attempt to know her invisible sexuality is projected on the gesture of seeing (or not seeing) the handkerchief:[13]

Iago: Her honour is an essence that's not seen:
They have it very oft that have it not.
But for the handkerchief — . . . (IV.i.16–8)

Since chastity is invisible, Iago argues, any woman can be credited with it, whether she is chaste in reality or not. The claim of chastity is based on the claim itself and not on any visible evidence, and therefore can be neither verified nor completely refuted. 'But', he goes on: the handkerchief is visible, and *therefore* makes unquestionable proof. Though there is no logical connection between the visible handkerchief and the invisible sexuality of Desdemona, Iago presents his argument in such a way as to produce the impression that the handkerchief must be proving the truth *because* it is visible. Othello is too familiar with the cruel evidential power of the visible not to swallow the argument:

> Othello: Thou said'st — O it comes o'er my memory,
> As doth the rave o'er the infected house,
> Boding to all! — he had my handkerchief. (IV.i.20-2)

The term 'boding' gives a stronger sense of almost predestined irresistibility to the visible proof, which is clearly implied and yet not explicitly mentioned by Iago. Othello eventually yields to this irresistible evidential power of the visible, but with great agony:

> Othello: Handkerchief — confessions — handkerchief! . . . It is not words
> that shakes me thus. Pish! Noses, ears, and lips. Is't
> possible? — Confess? Handkerchief? O devil!
> *[He] falls in a trance.* (IV.i.36-41)

It is not words, not even the words of Cassio's confession fabricated by Iago, that shake him. Rather, he is struck by 'the handkerchief' surrounding the 'confessions', the bodily features such as noses, ears and lips, in a word, *the visible* which is unquestionable and irreversible. He is literally falling to the overwhelming power of the visible.

Not only does his obsession with the 'ocular proof' lead him to erroneously believe the infidelity of his wife, but it forces him to find the truth of himself not so much in his narrative performance as in his bodily appearance that is only seen as devilish, bestial and inappropriate in the play. When he makes recourse to the evidential power of the visible, he is following the very lines of Brabantio, who cast a doubt on Desdemona's love for the man she 'feared to look on'. In this sense, Brabantio's last lines serve as an unintended trap for his son-in-law:

> Brabantio: Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:
> She has deceived her father and may thee. (I.iii.288-9)

Filled with indignation against the sexuality of his daughter, who bypassed the normal procedure of being handed over from a father to a future husband, the warning is sinister enough in itself.[11] Though Othello denies the anxiety on the spot, it does not disappear and will reverberate in Iago's lines: 'She did deceive her father, marrying you . . . (III.iii.208)'. As much destructive to Othello as this anxiety is, however, the demand that he should 'look' if he has 'eyes to see'. It is this very demand to see that overthrows the linguistically constructed man of 'fair virtue' and foregrounds the dark Othello. Iago is fully conscious of this and conceives his plot on the demand:

> Iago: And bring him jump when he may Cassio find

Soliciting his wife. Ay, that's the way: (II.iii.351–2)

Though he does not, in reality, make Othello see Cassio 'soliciting' his wife, still he knows that the plot will get started when Othello 'find[s]' the scene:

Iago: Look to your wife, observe her well with Cassio;
Wear your eyes thus. (III.iii.199–200)

What Othello sees is less important for Iago's plot compared with the fact that he sees, that he puts himself in the position to see, not to narrate. As Othello the narrator gives way to Othello the viewer, he inevitably begins to see himself as well. If his narrative was full of exotic charm when he won Desdemona, which has already shifted him slightly from the fair Venetian ideal, still the narrative itself did not refer directly to his dark bodily appearance.[15] However, as soon as he is urged to see, his eyes are turned to his blackness and see it exactly the same way as Brabantio does, as inappropriate to, and unworthy of, Desdemona's love:

Othello: Haply for I am black,
And have not those soft parts of conversation
That chamberers have, or for I am declined
Into the vale of years — yet that's not much —
She's gone . . . (III.iii.265–9)

His blackness is the first thing he can think of as the reason for her supposed infidelity. The negative perception of his own bodily image grows as the play goes on:

Othello: Her name, that was as fresh
As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black
As mine own face. (III.iii.386–8)

It is worth noticing that this happens in the same scene where Othello obsessively demands the 'ocular proof' against the chastity of his wife. Even if this demand arises from his unwillingness to believe what Iago has told him, the recourse to the evidential power of the visible only serves to make him see its probability. If he looks inappropriate and unworthy, probably he is. The more he clings to the belief in the evidential power of the visible while he can only *see* himself as black and begrimed, the more he has to admit that he *is* begrimed and black as he looks.

Othello thus begins to describe himself as a dark, bestial and magical figure contrastive to the fair Venice, as if he were speaking through the mouth of Brabantio. He calls for 'black vengeance'(III.iii.447), talks about the handkerchief which was sewed by a 'sibyl . . . in her prophetic fury' and was 'dyed in mummy, which the skilful / Conserved of maiden's hearts'(III.iv.67–71), and calls himself 'a monster and a beast'(IV.i.59–60). Of course, this does not in any way mean that he reveals, or goes back into, his dark nature. Rather, it is the blackness made up in the eyes of the Venetians which is now shared by Othello. As his narrative self-fashioning has ended in failure because of the lack of visible proof, he is now attempting an inverted performance of narrative self-construction according to the existing visible proof. The

obsession with the 'ocular proof' of Desdemona's unchastity and of his own dark inappropriateness leads him finally to the murder of Desdemona, the 'monstrous act', where he is found to be the black monster most unworthy to the fair alabaster-white lady. When he is accused of the deed, once again we can hear the echo of Brabantio's voice:

Emilia: O, the more angel she,
And you the blacker devil! (V.ii.131 - 2)
Emilia: She was too fond of her most filthy bargain. (V.ii.156)
Emilia: This deed of thine is no more worthy heaven
Than thou wast worthy her. (V.ii.159 - 60)
Montano: O monstrous act! (V.ii.189)

Though the terms of accusation do not change much from those of Brabantio, there is a shuddering difference. Even if Othello could not be appreciated as an appropriate lover of Desdemona because of his bodily appearance, in a sense his inappropriateness originated in the eyes of the others. Now we see, however, that he *is* an inappropriate lover, that the accusation does not come from how they see him but from what he is and does. Providing his narrative performance with the visible proof, he has embodied the inappropriateness and has made himself the proof.[16] In this sense, the visible has not only the evidential but constructive power as well. The black body, which seems to be beyond his narrative self-fashioning, conversely fashions his narrative, and, subsequently, himself, according to what it signifies. This is why he has to put an end both to his last narrative and to his body with the same 'bloody period'. The narrative and its 'ocular proof', which he has struggled to combine at such a high cost, should not be separated. Ironically, however, as he has adjusted his narrative to his visible bodily appearance and not the other way round, and as his body is always regarded as something inappropriate to look at, what he has achieved will be kept out of sight again:

Lodovico: The object poisons sight;
Let it be hid. (V.ii.360 - 1)

Thus far, I have tried to show how, in the play, the visible surpasses the invisible narrative in both its evidential and constructive power. Since not a few Shakespearean plays can be interpreted as having metatheatrical reference, the obsession with the visible might not be considered, in a sense, as a peculiar feature of *Othello* in itself. As far as it is a theatrical work, it cannot be fully negligent of the question of the visible. Though I focused only on the internal world of the play I should now, therefore, consider the issue of visibility in larger contexts and see how the play's particular feature, that is, having a black soldier as the hero of a tragedy, affects, and is affected by, that issue. What is it that makes it so important for Othello to be *seen* as appropriate that he comes to take it as an unquestionable requirement to fulfil? Why is it that Desdemona's benevolent declaration that she decides to see 'Othello's visage in his mind' should have so little power to support him? How is it that Othello's dark skin colour, before everything, catches the eyes of the beholders and achieves an evidential power deadly to him?

In order to answer these questions, I would like to look at two other works of Shakespeare in addition to *Othello*; *Troilus and Cressida* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Although the two plays do not always fall into the same genre as Othello (while *Othello* is considered as a tragedy,[17] *Antony and Cleopatra* is usually seen either as a tragedy or a 'Roman' play, and there seems to be no definite agreement as to whether *Troilus and Cressida* is a comedy, a tragedy, or a 'problem play') and although the scenes are set in different times and places, I believe they still share the same problem of theatricality that makes them worth considering here. All of the them, while dealing with a military hero, put more emphasis on the course of his love than on his military achievement, or more precisely, depict his love as having a direct and powerful effect on his military achievement (or, his failure in it). This invariably causes an anxiety of masculinity in the play, which, quite interestingly, always appears as an anxiety about theatricality.

Laura Levine, in her influential book on Renaissance masculinity, argues that the anti-theatrical tracts in those days share with Shakespearean plays the same underlying notion of gender, especially masculine gender, as having no essence in itself and capable to exist only by its incessant enactment, which she persuasively proves through her reading of both *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Troilus and Cressida*.[18] She suggests that in these plays Shakespeare is offering 'no moral or ethical defense of theatre, but rather what is virtually an ontological defense', that is, he is offering a worldview that theatricality is 'the constitutive condition of existence itself'[19]. The lack of real or essential existence puts masculinity in the sate of 'powerlessness', which is 'just the opposite of the "improvisational power" we have come to associate with the insights of New Historicism'.[20] While I agree with her in that masculinity in these plays is regarded as something that should be enacted to exist, I think her argument misses the point that the very need of enactment is inextricably entangled with the 'powerlessness'. In her argument, the 'powerlessness' results not from the enactment but from the lack of essential existence itself. However, if masculinity, lacking any essential existence, still can be constructed, then it is more likely that the power of the constructive enactment should be felt. The ground of the 'powerlessness', therefore, should be found elsewhere. I would like to suggest that we can find it in the radical dependence on the other inherent in the theatrical enactment itself. It is the need of the beholders that divides theatrical performance from other forms of acts: it should *be beheld* in order to *be*. In this sense, what is most important for masculinity to be theatrically constructed is that it is observed by others. The moment theatricality becomes 'the constitutive condition of existence', the possibility of existence falls into the hands, or rather the eyes, of the audience, the beholders. The notion that the self is theatrically constructed thus causes anxiety: not because it implies the non-existence of the essential self, but because it leaves the possibility of the self's existence to the other's eyes. Whether Shakespeare believed in the essential self or not, what is at stake, at least both in *Troilus and Cressida* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, is, quite naturally to a playwright, the possibility of constructed existence, 'the constitutive condition' of theatricality itself.

It is often noticed that in *Troilus and Cressida*, love is often seen as effeminising, especially by distracting a soldier from military action in the battlefield. From the very opening of the play, we see Troilus describing himself as effeminately keeping himself from the field:

Troilus: Why should I war without the walls of Troy,
That find such cruel battle here within?

Each Trojan that is master of his heart,
Let him to field; Troilus, alas! hath none . . .
But I am weaker than a woman's tear . . .
Less valiant than the virgin in the night. (I.i.2 - 11)[21]

Even Hector can lose his military masculinity when he is away from the field, for Helen's 'white enchanting fingers' can 'do more / Than all the island kings — disarm great Hector (III.i.150-3)'. Under this threat of easy effeminisation, 'masculinity must be enacted, acted out, actually performed in order to exist', and the love that keeps a man away from the field can do serious damage to it.[22] This view of love as harmful to masculinity can also be seen in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Accusing Antony of his dotage on Cleopatra, Pompey suggests, in Levine's word, that Antony 'ceased in effect to *act* the part of a soldier'[23]:

Pompey: Mark Antony
In Egypt sit at dinner, and will make
No wars without doors; (II.i.11 - 3)[24]

When Enobarbus tells in the next scene what he ate at the first dinner they had together, these lines come to imply something more than the now familiar power of love to keep a soldier off the field:

Enobarbus: Our courteous Antony . . .
Being barbered ten times o'er, goes to the feast,
And, for his ordinary, pays his heart
For what his eyes eat only. (II.ii.232 - 6)

What is suggested here is that the 'dinner' that distracts Antony from battlefield is the dinner for his eyes. It is by playing a part of a beholder that he loses his masculinity. In fact, the play expresses that the beholding position contradicts the military masculinity:

Philo: Those his goodly eyes,
That o'er the files and musters of the war
Have glowed like plated Mars, now bend, now turn
The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front. (I.i.2 - 6)

His eyes, which once 'glowed', are now viewing his love, and by viewing, draw him from the field he should be. Achilles also stays in his tent watching Patroclus's pageant of the Greek generals when he is supposed to be in the field. To be in the position of the beholder in these plays is closely associated with being out of the battlefield and losing masculinity.

In fact, masculinity should be in the position of the beheld in order to exist. Antony frankly admits it as he goes out for his attempt to re-construct his masculinity:

Antony: That thou couldst see my wars today and knew'st

The royal occupation, thou shouldst see
A workman in't. (IV.iv.16–8)

Clearly his wish is above all that Cleopatra sees him as 'a workman', which is what is needed for him to be 'a man of steel (IV.iv.33)'. Her betrayal in the war, therefore, derives him both of his masculinity and visibility in one blow:

Antony: Here I am Antony,
Yet cannot hold this visible shape . . .
She has robbed me of my sword. (IV.xiv.13–23)

The lost of his 'visible shape' is at the same time the lost of his 'sword', the symbol of military masculinity. In the famous scene of the pageant of Greek generals, Achilles also admits the importance of others' beholding eyes:

Achilles: what the declined is
He shall as soon read in the eyes of others
As feel in his own fall . . . (III.iii.76–8)

Following this remark, Ulysses goes further to declare that one does not only know oneself but does not own anything without being recognised by others:

Ulysses: That no man is the lord of anything,
Though in and of him there be much consisting,
Till he communicate his parts to others; (III.iii.115–7)

About fifty lines later, he makes clear what was meant by the word 'communicate':

Ulysses: The present eye praises the present object. . .
Since things in motion sooner catch the eye
Than what not stirs. The cry went once on thee,
And still it might, and yet it may again,
If thou wouldst not entomb thyself alive
And case thy reputation in thy tent . . . (III.iii.180–7)

By keeping himself in his tent and thus failing to catch 'present eye', Achilles has become unable to own anything. Just as Antony cannot be Antony without his 'visible shape', so Achilles can be Achilles, who owns the military 'reputation', only in so far as the beholders' eyes confirm it. Here again, then, masculinity of a soldier is considered indivisible from the need to be beheld.

The need to be observed, however, simultaneously poses a direct threat to the very masculinity. This results from the fear that masculinity cannot even be constructed, the fear that the construction will end in failure. As far as Achilles can be Achilles, or Antony can be Antony, they are not concerned with whether their masculinity is constructed or not. This does not mean that the plays are offering 'an *ontological* defense' of the theatre, as Levine puts it. Quite

contrary, they suggest that a theatrical construction is a real being and not a mere appearance, without any ontological commitment. Real masculinity can be constructed without any essential masculinity, but only in so far as it is observed as such. What is threatening here is that there is no guarantee for the beholding eyes, that masculinity is so much dependent on the eyes of others that are too inconstant to count on. At the Battle of Actium, when Antony desperately needed to be observed, Cleopatra turns away and flies. He asks her for a compensative look in order to secure the little masculinity left:

> Antony: O, whither hast thou led me, Egypt? See
> How I convey my shame out of thine eyes. . . (III.xi.51 – 2)

Ironically, however, all that has been left for him to offer as the object of her eyes is himself in the effeminised position of a beholder, for the line continues:

> Antony: By looking back what I have left behind. (III.xi.53)

We could say, then, that masculinity of these soldiers depends on a theatrical gamble on the eyes of the beholders, where its own existence is at stake: they might be looked at, or they might not. There is no controlling the eyes. This uncertainty inherent in the very condition of existence is what threatens both their masculinity and the theatricality itself. [25]

Slavoj Žižek points out that the Western metaphysics from Plato onward has been trying to deny the disturbing function of the gaze that is determinative for us and still beyond our mastery[26]:

> "Metaphysics" resides precisely in the notion of a self-mirroring seeing that would abolish the distance of reflection and attain the immediacy of "hearing oneself speaking".[27]

It is the attempt to ignore the unbridgeable gap between how one is seen beyond one's control (that is, how one *is* in the scopic field) and how one wants to be seen (that is, how one wants to see oneself): the self-contained gesture of '*I see myself seeing myself*'.[28] This quest for the imaginary independence of the subject from the gaze of the other becomes, in our context, the denial of theatricality, which is a typical masculine reaction to the anxiety of theatrically constructed masculinity that can be seen in both *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Troilus and Cressida*. As Levine demonstrates convincingly, Caesar in *Antony and Cleopatra* is depicted as 'the mouthpiece of anti-theatrical rhetoric in the play'.[29] He shares with the anti-theatrical tracts the repudiation of effeminising appetite and idealisation of 'hypermasculinity' that can withstand appetite altogether. When he rages at the ceremony that enthroned Cleopatra as the 'Absolute Queen', it is the theatricality of the ceremony that is unbearable to him, rather than the fact of enthronement itself:

> Maecenas: This in the public eye?
> Caesar: I'th' common showplace where they exercise. . .
> She
> In th'habiliments of the goddess Isis

That day appeared, and oft before gave audience . . .
(III.vi.11–18)

His attempt to repudiate theatrical performance, however, is still based on his belief in the constructive power of 'the public eye' that makes Cleopatra's performance real. As Levine puts it, 'at the core of Caesar's anti-theatricality lies a deeply theatrical way of organizing the world'.[30] Troilus, on the other hand, goes further to reject the whole idea of the theatrical reality that is constructed by being seen. Betrayed by Cressida, he furiously rejects the power of the eyes:

Troilus: Sith yet there is a credence in my heart,
An esperance so obstinately strong,
That doth invert the attest of eyes and ears,
As if those organs had deceptious functions,
Created only to calumniate. (V.ii.118–22)

Whereas Caesar repudiates theatricality because of his belief in the power of the visible, Troilus is trying to deny the reality of the visible itself, which is always already open to the uncontrollable other, and prefers the invisible 'credence in my heart'. It is an impossible attempt to seal up the gap between how he is seen and how he wants to be seen, the attempt to absorb the otherness in the visible field, which, as Lacan points out, leads to the annihilation of the subject, and, in this case, of Troy.

Though Othello no less needs to be seen than Troilus or Antony, it is more difficult for him to achieve the appropriate masculinity than for the other two: it is not only masculinity but whiteness as well that has to be constructed. There has been considerable disagreement as to whether Othello is meant to be a black African or a 'tawny' North African, and I do not think that we can ever be certain which was the intention of the playwright.[31] Whether he is 'coal-black' as Aaron in Titus Andronicus or 'tawny' as Cleopatra, however, what is important for my argument is that he is depicted as having a skin whose colour is visibly different from the others, and that this difference is conceived in the framework of black-white distinction. As far as he is seen as 'black', he cannot *be seen* as, and *be*, the legitimate lover of a white lady in this society. Is whiteness, however, regarded in the world of the play as that which can be constructed? Does the distinction of blackness and whiteness work in Shakespearean plays as unstable and can be blurred?

For both Caesar and Troilus, the repudiation of theatricality arises from the belief that the constructive power of theatricality is closely connected to the reality of what is beheld: Caesar believes in both and therefore tries defensively to repudiate them; Troilus chooses to believe his own 'credence' and rejects the reality of the visible. However, Othello's reaction to the anxiety of theatrically constructed masculinity takes a different form. He rejects theatrical performance but still holds on to the belief in the reality of the visible, or, to put it precisely, the visible truth: the 'ocular proof'. He cannot accept either Caesar's conviction that theatrical performance *is* the reality or that of Troilus that what is beheld has nothing to do with the reality. He wants the reality to be seen but not performed, that is, the visible and unmediated truth. What is worth noticing in Othello's rejection of theatricality is, however, that it makes him 'monstrous' and the 'ocular proof', as I have pointed out in the first chapter. Patricia Parker reminds us that the word

'monster' is derived from a word meaning 'to show' and a word meaning 'a sign'.[32] Othello, through his denial of theatricality, ironically becomes something that is 'shown'. What is it, then, that makes Othello a sign to be shown and at the same time makes him seek after the visible and unperformed truth?

Dympna Callaghan points out the difference in the manipulative power of a performer between theatrical performance and exhibition:

> [In] exhibition, people are set forth for display as objects, passive and inert before the active scrutiny of the spectator, without any control over, or even necessarily consent to, the representational apparatus in which they are placed. . . Theatrical mimesis, however, involves the active manipulation of the body of the actor in the process of representation, and . . . acting finally involves an embodied performance, in the actor's interpretation of the role.[33]

Concluding that the 'actor . . . has more power than the exhibit', she points out at the same time that while the white male actors performed both 'white' female and 'black' male characters, '[neither] Africans nor women perfomed on the public stage in Elizabethan and Jacobean England although both were present in other forms of cultural display'[34]: they can only be 'the exhibit'. The distinction she makes here between the performance and exhibition, and the association of blackness with the latter, are highly suggestive and I would like to come back to them later. However, I think she is too hasty in equating blackness and white femininity on the Renaissance stage as the 'races' that can be re-presented by white male actors.[35] Apart from the fact that, as Orgel argues, boy actors in those days were not regarded as 'men' but rather shared with women the position of the object of desire, the ways they are represented in Shakespeare's plays, especially in terms of their capability for theatrical performance, are quite different.

There are plenty of examples in Shakespeare's plays where female characters disguise themselves and pass as men. In fact, some of the most attractive female characters, such as Viola, Rosalind and Portia, appear on stage cross-dressing, and, though staying a considerable time in their disguise, their gender is hardly seen with a suspicious eye. They can perform a different gender from their own, perhaps not the gender of a 'man' but at least of a youth. At least inside the world of the plays, it seems that women are represented as having the power of performance, the power to manipulate the eyes of the spectators. Even Desdemona can make herself appear to be what she really is not:

> Dedemona: I am not merry, but I do beguile
> The thing I am by seeming otherwise. (II.i.121-2)

On the other hand, as we can see in *Othello*, black characters can never perform whiteness. It is true that the 'coal-black' character, Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, is represented as a powerful deceiver who reminds us more of Iago than of Othello. However, even he admits the impossibility of turning blackness into whiteness:

> Aaron: Coal-black is better than another hue,
> In that it scorns to bear another hue;

For all the water in the ocean
Can never turn the swan's black legs to white,
Although she lave them hourly in the flood. (IV.ii.101 - 5)[36]

Even if black characters may not be incapable of deceptive performance, it is certainly impossible for them to construct whiteness. It is also worth noticing that, while female characters occasionally attract our attention to the fact that the characters are played by boy-actors, black characters never mention the existence of white actors who play the parts. When Cleopatra mentions a boy actor impersonating her and thus foregrounding the ambiguity of her/his own gender (as a boy actor playing the female role), the fact that it is a white boy that is playing the role of the 'tawny' queen is completely neglected:

Cleopatra: I shall see
Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
I'th' posture of a whore. (V.ii.218 - 20)

Black characters represented by white actors cannot either construct, or even return to, whiteness in the same way as the female characters played by boy easily turn into, or turn back into, boys. Whereas the gender for female characters is so unstable as to allow them to move back and forth between a woman and a boy, the skin colour allows only one-way move, from whiteness to blackness, and never the other way round.

Perhaps it is worth recalling here what Orgel and Levine tells us about the notion of theatrically constructed masculinity in the Renaissance period. Citing cultural texts in addition to Shakespeare's works, such as anti-theatrical tracts and gynecological treatises, both of them persuasively show that in those days women were seen as an imperfect version of men, and that, while this theory of homology were required 'to justify the whole range of male domination over women', it also evoked the fear of effeminization, of the constructed masculinity being turned back into femininity.[37] We should notice, however, that this threatening notion of constructed masculinity is at the same time, at least in Shakespearean plays, what allows the play of genders and creates a space for female characters to give theatrical performance. Theatrically constructed masculinity was not without any positive power, though it certainly was, as I have argued, helpless against, and vulnerable to, the beholding eyes. What Orgel calls the 'dependence of gender on costume' could enable one to be a performer with the manipulative power, though *only in so far as* one manages to put on or take off the costume at one's will. On the other hand, blackness was something that one might be able to put on but could never take off. It was more like a tattoo than a costume: it was irreversible, unchangeable by performance. In this sense, Callaghan is right to associate blackness with exhibition as opposed to performance:

[The] physical presence of a black man is always already an exhibition of monstrosity, whereas his absence on Shakespeare's stage allowed the sign of negritude, that emblem of barbaric alterity beyond the parameters of civilization, to represent tragic humanity.[38]

Blackness was 'exhibited' but not performed, which means that the black body, deprived of the power to disguise, construct, or change itself, was regarded as revealing the truth of itself. There

was supposed to be no intervention between the white look and the black body as its object: neither the intervention of the theatrical self-construction of the black subject, nor that of the function of the cultural norms that make it impossible for the eye to gain the direct, unmediated access to the object. The black body should *be* how it was seen by the white look. This is why I do not agree with Callaghan in that the play is trying 'to represent tragic humanity' by ignoring the issue of the 'physical presence of a black man'. On the contrary, I think the play deliberately deals with the physicality of a black man, which seemed to indicate the limit of theatrical construction in such a society. Othello's tragedy does not arise from the universal problem of 'humanity' but from a specific cultural status ascribed to a specific body. In the world where the visible black body is situated beyond the limit of theatrical construction from the very start, Othello has to demand that everything visible should be the unmediated revealing of the truth to the eye, in order to overcome this ultimate disequilibrium in the scopic field. This demand, however, only serves to confirm the white look that sees his blackness as the 'ocular proof' of his monstrosity, and turns him into the monster, the 'sign' of the undisguised truth that is beyond the attempt of theatrical construction.

Othello can never be socially ratified by being seen, lacking the white body that can not be constructed in the world of Shakespearean stage. The society he lives in sorts out what is ideal and legitimate from what is not, according to the visible difference in physicality that is not subject to theatrical construction. Is the play, then, suggesting that the physicality, the skin colour of Othello, *in itself* exceeds the constructive field of the visible, something that reveals the 'truth' to the beholding eyes? Is it admitting that there is an 'ocular proof' which is so ontologically fundamental that no eye can miss the truth of it? The way the play treats the 'ocular proof' seems to be proposing a quite different reflection on the visible. In fact, depicting how Othello's blackness works as the exhibit that is inescapably exposed to the beholding eyes, the play also shows that this inescapableness derives from the narrative that discursively constructs the sight of the beholders, and not from the ontological nature of the exhibit itself.

E.A.J. Honigmann, the editor of *The Arden Shakespeare*, points out in relation to Othello's age that there are some lines in the play that hint at his 'impaired vision'.[39] These lines, however, could be read as showing how Othello is constantly counting on others to tell him what to see, especially when we notice that in most of cases it is Iago's words that substitute Othello's eyes:

Othello: But look, what lights come yond?
Iago: Those are the raised father and his friends . . . (I.ii.28–9)

Othello keeps asking Iago to help him see: 'Was not that Cassio parted from my wife? (III.iii.37)'; 'If more thou dost perceive, let me know more: / Set on thy wife to observe.(III.iii.243–4)'; 'Was that [i.e. the handkerchief] mine?(IV.i.171)' It is, after all, Iago that urges Othello to turn his eyes to the handkerchief:

Iago: Have you not sometimes seen a handkerchief
Spotted with strawberries, in your wife's hand? (III.iii.437–8)

Moreover, he deliberately discourages the Moor from believing his own eyes by suggesting that they might be 'seal[ed]' by Desdemona's 'seeming'. This impossibility of Othello to see with

his own eyes forms the foundation for Iago's plot to substitute his eyes and control his sight. In the scene where he persuades Othello into believing Desdemona's unchastity, he starts with emphasising the difficulty to see the thing at issue:

> Iago: Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on?
> Behold her topped? . . .
> It were a tedious difficulty, I think,
> To bring them to that prospect. (III.iii.398 - 401)

It is only by confirming this that his words can lead the eyes to the 'truth':

> Iago: If implication and strong circumstances,
> Which lead directly to the door of truth,
> Will give you satisfaction, you might have't. (III.iii.409 - 11)

The invisibility of the truth entitles the narrator to construct the visible 'truth' at will, which is exactly what Iago goes on to do in the scene that follows. He gives a colourful and detailed description of what Cassio did while he was dreaming, which is regarded as an evidence that 'may help to thicken other proofs (III.iii.432)', as if mere words could make the 'ocular proof'. Even when Iago says, 'this was but his dream,(III.iii.429)' it is only to make the fact invisible that the whole episode is but his story. Iago's invisible narrative, based on the invisibility of the truth, thus gains the power to construct the visible evidence for the beholding eyes. As Patricia Parker accurately puts it, the 'plot of jealousy in *Othello* . . . [is] one which substitutes such [rhetorical] unfolding for more direct seeing or "ocular proof"'.[40]

The construction of the visible by the invisible narrative can be seen clearly in the scene where Othello, witnessing Cassio having the handkerchief, takes it as the 'ocular proof' and decides to kill Desdemona. The whole scene of witnessing, where so much emphasis is put on Othello's beholding position, is situated between the conversation scenes between Othello and Iago. Iago announces to Othello in advance what he is going to see and what it means:

> Iago: And mark the fleers, the gibes and notable scorns
> That dwell in every region of his face;
> For I will make him tell the tale anew
> Where, how, how oft, how long ago, and when
> He hath and is again to cope your wife.
> I say, but bark his gesture . . . (IV.i.83 - 8)

The essential point here is that Othello sees exactly as he was told to, even though Cassio speaks nothing about Desdemona. What he sees is different from what can be seen by the audience, because his seeing is not the pure seeing *per se* but is already in a sense interpretation:

> Iago: And his unbookish jealousy must construe
> Poor Cassio's smiles, gestures and light behaviour
> Quite in the wrong. (IV.i.102 - 4)

Thinking that he is looking at the visible evidence of Desdemona's affair with Cassio, he is in fact listening to Iago's interpretation of the scene, and thus falls into a complete misrecognition.[11] Iago is fully conscious of this power of the narrative to (mis)lead the beholding eyes. When his plot finally takes shape in Act II, Iago talks about 'pour[ing] this pestilence into his [i.e. Othello's] ear' (II.iii.351): the 'pestilence' is not in what Othello will see but in what he will hear. Othello, who is made to pursue desperately after the 'ocular proof', takes what he thinks he sees as it is, never noticing that his look is already mediated, that he can only see what he is told to see:

> Iago: Did you perceive how he laughed at his vice? . . .
> Othello: O, Iago!
> Iago: And did you see the handkerchief?
> Othello: Was that mine?
> Iago: Yours, by this hand. (IV.i.168-72)

By his hand, Iago did construct the handkerchief as the 'ocular proof', the unmediated 'exhibit' of the truth in the scopic field.

Iago's narrative manipulation of the visible 'truth' is crudely emphasised in a short scene between Iago and Roderigo. Roderigo starts with blaming Iago for deceiving him, pointing out the discrepancy between what he is told and what he sees:

> Roderigo: I do not find that thou deal'st justly with me. . . Faith, I have heard too much; and your words and performances are no kin together. . . You have told me she hath received them [the jewels], and returned me expectations and comforts of sudden respect and acquittance, but I find none. . . I . . . begin to find myself fopped in it. (IV.ii.175-96)

Of course the word 'find' here does not literally mean 'to see', but after all those scenes where visibility is such an important issue, and with its apparent contrast with such words as 'tell' and 'hear', it is difficult not to notice its frequent use. Iago defends himself, suggesting that what appears to be might not be what really is:

> Iago: I protest I have dealt most directly in thy affair.
> Roderigo: It hath not appeared.
> Iago: I grant indeed it hath not appeared. . . (IV.ii.210-12)

While casting doubt on *Roderigo's* eyes, however, Iago uses Roderigo's belief in the field of the visible *in general*, by asking him to 'show' what he has:

> Iago: But Roderigo, if thou hast . . . purpose, courage, and valour . . . this night show it. (V.ii.213-6)

Then he pivots the word 'show', making himself the subject of the showing:

Iago: I wiill show you such a necessity in his death that you shall
think yourself bound to put it on him. (IV.ii.241-3)

Now it is Iago and not Roderigo that shows, and the showing will make the latter think that he is 'bound to' kill Cassio. Preserving Roderigo's belief in what he has 'found', Iago manipulates him by controlling the vital point: what he sees, and how. Roderigo, like Othello, sees what is told:

Roderigo: I will hear further reason for this. (IV.ii.245)

Having tried to find the truth with his own eyes, he only ends in listening to Iago's narrative.

What the play demonstrates by Iago's plot is, then, that the visible, which is supposed to be exposed to the eyes as revealing the unperformed truth, is in fact constructed by the invisible narrative that articulate the visibility itself. In this context, Othello's physicality, his black skin, which seems to make him 'the exhibit' that reveals the unperformed truth, can also be construed as discursively constructed. What appears to be beyond theatrical construction is posited as beyond construction, is constructed as beyond by a certain cultural discourse. The historical and cultural elements that are introduced into the field of vision not only distinguish what is ratified and what is not, but also demarcate what can be seen and how, in other words, what can be constructed in the scopic field. It is not the blackness itself that makes him inappropriate but the eyes that behold it as the irrefutable evidence of his inappropriateness, or rather, the cultural discourse that tries to expose it as such to the eyes. The invisible discourse, while requiring the visible as the unmediated 'truth', does not allow the black body any more than to reveal the 'truth' that is already approved. The irrefutable 'ocular proof' is only constructed by the very discourse that demands it in order to endorse the truth that the discourse presupposes.

Othello thus shows, as the play obsessed with the visible, how the field of the visible is restricted, determined, and foreclosed by the cultural discourse, that is, how we can see only through the cultural norms of the visible. It also shows how, since the subject needs to be constructed and ratified by being seen in this scopic field, this restriction could be violent to those who can neither be ratified nor reconstruct themselves to be approved in the field. Even though the play uses the black body as the limit case of the theatrical construction, though this black body was represented by a white actor in those days, still the play at least draws our attention to the violence of the invisible discourse that sets this limit. It is only at this point that we can fully understand Derrida's words on racism:

> The point is not that acts of racial violence are only words but rather that they have to have a word. Even though it offers the excuse of blood, color, birth — or, rather, because it uses this naturalist and sometimes creationist discourse — racism always betrays the perversion of a man, the 'talking animal.'[42]

Moreover, it demonstrates the violence of the foreclosure, the violence of the driving out of the

scopic field the very violence that the restricts the field itself. It is what Derrida calls 'a second violence', but working in the field of vision:

> There was in fact a first violence to be named. To name, to give names that it will on occasion be forbidden to pronounce, such is the originary violence of language which consists in inscribing within a difference, in classifying, in suspending the vocative absolute. . . Out of this arche-violence, forbidden and therefore confirmed by a second violence that is reparatory, protective, instituting the 'moral', prescribing the concealment of writing and the effacement and obliteration of the so-called proper name which was already dividing the proper. . .[43]

The arche-violence here can be regarded as the function of the Lacanian gaze that constructs the subject in the scopic field: no subject can escape this violence. However, this gaze is always experienced by the subject through a certain cultural or social mediation. Derrida makes this clear by calling it the 'originary violence of language': it is at the same time the violence of *any* language, *and* the violence of *each* specific language. It should be possible, therefore, to resist, criticise, or even alter the specific cultural way it works, unless the fact of violence is covered up, which is the act of second violence. The second violence confirms the first violence in its specific cultural form in moralistic gesture, by foreclosing it from the designated field of the visible. It is the gesture of Lodovigo, who tries to hide the body of Othello as the object that 'poisons sight', as the obscene / off-scene object. When the body of Othello, the visible evidence of the violent function of the cultural norms in the scopic field, is hidden from our eyes, the play makes us witness this second violence. It tries to put forward for the audience the existence similar to what Rey Chow calls 'the gaze that witnessed the native's oppression prior to her becoming image'.[44] Though it is impossible to do away with the foreclosing function in the field of the visible altogether, and though we cannot see outside the mediated 'image', we should try to imagine the foreclosed figures as, in Chow's words, 'that which bears witness to its own demolition'. Perhaps we could say that the reason that Othello's body should be hidden is not only to hide the violence from our sight but also to cut off *his* eyes that look back to us, witnessing his own demolition: the eyes that trigger the gesture of violent negation but cannot be completely covered up by it. By deliberately showing the hiding of these eyes, the play paradoxically foregrounds both its violence and the possibility of the resistance against it. It urges us not to look away from the violence in the scopic field that demarcates what we can see, not to allow the second violence, even if we cannot free ourselves from the first.

Notes

[1] See, for example, Patricia Parker, 'Shakespeare and Rhetoric: "Dilation" and "Delation" in *Othello*', in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, eds. by Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman, New York and London, Routledge, 1990, 54 - 74; Karen Newman, '"And wash the Ethiop white": Femininity and the Monstrous in *Othello*', in *Shakespeare Reproduced*, eds. Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor, New York and London, Routledge, 1987, 143 - 62.

[2] See, for example, Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, esp.chapt.1; Arthur L. Little Jr., '"An essence that's not seen": The Primal Scene of Racism in *Othello'*, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 44, 1993, 304 – 24.

[3] William Shakespeare, *Othello*, The Arden Shakespeare, third series, ed. E.A.J. Honigmann. All citations to *Othello* are taken from this edition.

[4] For the sexual attraction of the black skin in the Renaissance period, see, John Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, 31.

[5] Frantz Fanon's acutely describes this seemingly benevolent attitude as follows: 'When people like me, they tell me it is in spite of my color. When they dislike me, they point out that it is not because of my color. Either way, I am locked into the infernal circle'. See, Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Charles Lam Markmann, London, Pluto Press, 1986, 116.

[6] Jyotsna Singh, 'Othello's Identity, postcolonial theory, and contemporary African rewritings of *Othello'*, in *Women, "Race," & Writing*, eds. by Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, 287 – 99, 288.

[7] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, London and Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980, 245.

[8] Karen Newman, '"Ethiop"' (as note 1), 150. For the similar criticism on Greenblatt's description of the 'deep' psychic structure, see, Laura Levine, *Men in Women's Clothing: Anti-theatricality and effeminization, 1579 – 1642*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1994, 11.

[9] Though Greenblatt does point out the 'the scandal of Desdemona's marriage consists . . . in her husband's blackness', his argument is based on 'Othello's permanent status as an outsider', to which his blackness is 'he indelible witness', rather than on the issue of his visible black body itself. See Greenblatt, *Renaissance* (as note 7), 240.

[10] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, 89. Though some critics are opposed to regarding Othello as a colonial subject, it seems to me that the formula is still useful whether or not Othello is 'in fact' a colonial subject. For those arguments, see, Dympha Callaghan, '"Othello was a white man": properties of race on Shakespeare's stage', in *Alternative Shakespeares*: Vol. 2, ed. Terence Hawkes, London and New York, Routledge, 1996, 192 – 215; Daniel J. Vitkus, 'Turning Turk in *Othello*: the Conversion and Damnation of the Moor', in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 1997, 145 – 76.

[11] For the handkerchief as representing Desdemona's sexuality and the threat it presents to Othello, see, Newman, '"Ethiop"' (as note 1); Patricia Parker, *Shakespeare from the Margins: Language, Culture, Context*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1996, esp. Chapter 7; Peter Stallybrass, 'Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed', in *Rewriting the Renaissance*, eds. by Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy J. Vickers, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1986, 123 – 44. For the strawberry embroidery, see, Lawrence Ross, 'The Meaning of Strawberries in Shakespeare', *Studies in the Runaissance*, 7, 225 – 40.

[12] Parker, *Margins* (as note 11), 248.

[13] For the desire to see/know what is invisible through the visible, see, Parker, 'Shakespeare and Rhetoric' (as note 1).

[14] For the anxiety and reproach her choice of the husband causes in the patriarchal society in the play, see Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Desdemona's Disposition', in *Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender*, eds. by Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1996, 171 – 92.

[15] Ania Loomba suggests that Othello's linguistic charm, which places him within 'the discourse of cultural excess', is 'another kind of non-European-ness' than Caliban's, who represents the New World natives embedded within 'the discourse of primitivism'. See, Ania Loomba, 'Shakespeare and Cultural Difference', in *Alternative Shakespeares: Vol.2*, ed. Terence Hawkes, London and New York, Routledge, 1996, 164 – 91.

[16] For his embodiment of the inappropriate blackness, see, Little, '"An essence" (as note 2).

[17] It is true the play was once called 'a Bloody Farce', but I think it is now generally regarded as a tragedy. For the analysis of the problem of genre and gender in *Othello*, see, Timothy Murray, *Drama Trauma: Sepcters of Race and Sexuality in Performance, Video and Art*, London and New York, Routledge, 1997, 57 – 77.

[18] Levine, *Men* (as note 8).

[19] Levine, *Men* (as note 8), 46.

[20] Levine, *Men* (as note 8), 46.

[21] William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, The Oxford Shakespeare, ed. Kenneth Muir, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1982. All citations to *Troilus and Cressida* are taken from this edition.

[22] Levine, *Men* (as note 8), 39.

[23] Levine, *Men* (as note 8), 48.

[24] William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, The Arden Shakespeare, ed. John Wilders, London and New York, Routledge, 1995. All citations to *Antony and* Cleopatra are taken from this edition.

[25] It is worth noticing that, for both Antony and Troilus, the expected beholder is a woman, which again is the shared issue with the Shakespearean theatre. Stephen Orgel argues that there seems to have been a large female audience at English Renaissance theatres, which implies that 'the success of any play was significantly dependent on the receptiveness of women'. The similarity of the theatre and military masculinity, however, becomes more suggestive as we take into account Orgel's analysis of the anti-theatrical tracts. He shows that, by lusting after 'the youth beneath the woman's costume', male spectators were said to be 'playing the woman's role themselves'. At the same time, however, in those days 'boys were, like women — but unlike men — acknowledged objects of sexual attraction for men'. In this sense, both the beholders and the beheld lose masculinity to a certain degree in the theatre. There is no possibility for military masculinity that should be constructed theatrically can sustain its own masculinity. See, Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1996.

[26] Žižek uses the term 'the gaze' in the Lacanian sense of the word. Lacan states: 'What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside'. The gaze should be strictly distinguished from the look, which belongs to the subject that is only situated as the subject by the gaze: 'It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects'. We can never assimilate it to our look and control it, nor can we assimilate our look into it. It is always elusively at the point where the subject can never be, 'the presence of others as such'. See, Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concept of Psycho-analysis*, translated by Alan Sheridan, London, Vintage, 1998 (First published in France by Editions du Seuil, 1973), 84, 106.

[27] Slavoj Žižek, '"I Hear You with My Eyes"; or, The Invisible Master', in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*, eds. by Renata Salecl and Slavoj Zizek, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1996, 90 – 126, 95.

[28] Lacan, *Four* (as note 26), 80.

[29] Levine, *Men* (as note 8), 57.

[30] Levine, *Men* (as note 8), 65.

[31] For the problem of the reading of *Othello* in terms of 'race', the notion which is subject to historical change, see, Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (as note 4); Margo Hendricks, '"The Moor of Venice," or the Italian on the Renaissance English Stage', in *Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender*, eds. by Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelo Sprengnether, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1996, 19 – 34; Vitkus, 'Turning Turk in *Othello*' (as note 10).

[32] Patricia Parker, 'Fantasies of "Race" and "Gender": Africa, *Othello*, and bringing to light', in *Women, "Race," &Writing*, eds. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker, London and New York,

Routledge, 1994, 84–100. For the analysis of the word 'monster', see also, Newman, '"Ethiop"' (as note 1).

[33] Callaghan, '"Othello"' (as note 10), 194.

[34] Callaghan, '"Othello"' (as note 26), 194.

[35] Callaghan, '"Othello"' (as note 26), 198.

[36] William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, The Arden Shakespeare, third series, ed. Jonathan Bate, London and New York, Routledge, 1995.

[37] Orgel, *Impersonation* (as note 25), 25.

[38] Callaghan, '"Othello"' (as note 10), 209.

[39] William Shakespeare, *Othello*, The Arden Shakespeare (third series), ed. E.A.J. Honigmann, Thomas Nelson & Sons, Surrey, 1997, 19.

[40] Parker, 'Shakespeare and Rhetoric' (as note 1), 64.

[41] Lisa Jardin argues that the narrative of defamation is substantiated by publicly being heard and that it is this substantial defamation, not the 'ocular proof', that misleads Othello to believe his wife's unfaithfulness. I would rather say that the 'ocular proof' is the defamation which is substantiated and made visible. See, Lisa Jardin, *Reading Shakespeare Historically*, London and New York, Routledge, 1996, 19–34. For the relation between the visible evidence and the defamatory narrative in the play, also see, Hendrics, '"The Moor"' (as note 31).

[42] Jacques Derrida, 'Racism's Last Word', translated by Peggy Kamuf, in *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1985, 329–38, 331.

[43] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, 112.

[44] Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1993, 51.