

THE SOURCE OF *OTHELLO*

NED B. ALLEN *

In discussions of the sources of Shakespeare's plays, the statement is usually made that for the plot of *Othello* Shakespeare went to the seventh novel of the third decade of the *Hecatommithi* by Giraldi Cinthio, or to a French translation of the work by Gabriel Chappuys. After mentioning both Cinthio and Chappuys, however, most critics speak thenceforth as if Shakespeare used the Italian version and not the French. In fact, the Italian version alone has been reprinted for English and American readers, and it has been used as the basis for all translations of the story into English.

A consideration of the facts, however, points to Chappuys' translation rather than to Cinthio's original version as Shakespeare's source. In the first place, Shakespeare does not elsewhere indicate that he could read Italian,¹ while he does reveal a knowledge of French—in *Henry V* with its French scenes, in the *Sonnets* with their reminiscences of Ronsard, and in many passages throughout his plays which prove that he knew Rabelais and Montaigne. In the second place, Chappuys' translation had appeared recently (in 1584) and was therefore available to Shakespeare. It is perhaps significant, too, that in the Folio version of *Othello* Shakespeare frequently refers to the heroine, not as *Desdemona* but as *Desdemon*, a form of the name similar in pronunciation to the French *Disdemone* of Chappuys.²

* Department of English.

¹ The similarity between Iago's speech beginning "Who steals my purse steals trash" (III, 3, 157-61) and an Italian stanza by Lodovico Guicciardini probably does not indicate that Shakespeare knew Italian. As A. H. Krappe observes in his note on the passage (*Modern Language Review*, January, 1928, pp. 44-5), in the absence of other evidence that Shakespeare could read Italian, our assumption must be that he became acquainted with this in English translation—quite possible in an older English play.

² Since all the instances of *Desdemon* occur in the latter part of the play (after the opening of Act III), it seems possible that Shakespeare, influenced by Chappuys, first used that form of the name throughout. Then, deciding that since the character is Italian she should be called *Desdemona*, he began to make the change, rewriting the lines of blank verse when necessary, but completed the work only to the end of Act II. In the last three acts, *Desdemona* appears only in situations where the change from *Desdemon* would have been easy—

The only modern reprinting of the French version of the story is that of Victor Hugo, in an appendix to his French translation of *Othello*.³ There are apparently only two copies of Chappuys' original edition in the United States, those in the Princeton and Harvard University libraries.

It is commonly observed that Shakespeare does not follow his source closely. Critics who discuss the matter usually make a great deal of Shakespeare's originality in all the elements of the play.⁴ And it is true, of course, that *Othello* owes less to its source than do *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Shakespeare did not find so much of a dramatic and poetic nature in Chappuys' translation as he did in that of North. But the statement so often made that he took only the outline of the plot from his source does not give a correct picture of his debt.

usually in prose passages or in lines of blank verse which end with the name. Where *Desdemon* occurs, it seems to have been retained because a change would have necessitated a rewriting of the line of blank verse—or would at least have made it less regular.

Desdemona is used in the stage directions and in the following lines: I, 2, 25; I, 3, 120; I, 3, 146; I, 3, 248; I, 3, 292; I, 3, 296; I, 3, 299; I, 3, 347-8; II, 1, 73; II, 1, 80; II, 1, 213; II, 1, 220; II, 1, 299; II, 3, 15; II, 3, 55; II, 3, 257; II, 3, 336; II, 3, 346; II, 3, 360; III, 1, 37; III, 3, 87; III, 3, 225; III, 3, 308; III, 3, 419; III, 4, 35; IV, 1, 107; IV, 2, 188; IV, 2, 200; IV, 2, 221; IV, 2, 228; IV, 2, 230; IV, 3, 5; V, 1, 17; V, 2, 23; V, 2, 121. *Desdemon* is used in the following lines: III, 1, 56; III, 3, 55; IV, 2, 41; V, 2, 25; V, 2, 204; V, 2, 281. (Here and in what follows the lineation of the Cambridge edition has been followed.)

In the Quarto version *Desdemon* is changed to *Desdemona* throughout, though in the cases in which *Desdemon* occurs in the other text no effort has been made—with one exception—to regularize the meter. The one exception is the last instance—V, 2, 281. The Folio has:

Oh Desdemon! dead Desdemon: dead. Oh, oh!

which the Quarto makes:

O Desdemona, Desdemona; dead, O, o, o.

If my theory is correct, the presence of *Desdemon* in the Folio is an indication that it is based on an earlier text than the Quarto, though the absence of oaths in the Folio show that it was later revised.

³ *Oeuvres Complètes de Shakespeare* (Paris, 1860), Vol. V, pp. 429-45.

⁴ Other so-called sources of *Othello*, such as *Leo Africanus* and the Byzantine epic of *Digenes Akritas*, are not important. A. H. Krappe, in an article on the second of these works, makes the claim that the elopement of Othello and Desdemona and his smothering her indicate that Shakespeare knew the Byzantine epic, but he is not at all convincing. Shakespeare's play is certainly much closer to Chappuys' translation than it is to the epic—even judging by Krappe's account. His weakest claim is that Shakespeare must have followed the epic rather than Cinthio because Othello strangles Desdemona—as the hero of the epic does. But in the epic he does so because he loves her so much that he doesn't want her to survive his own death. In Shakespeare (and Cinthio) the Moor kills Desdemona because he thinks her guilty of adultery. (See A. H. Krappe, "A Byzantine Source of *Othello*," *Modern Language Notes*, XXIX (1924), pp. 156-161.)

II

The character of Iago shows that Shakespeare made important changes, but that he did not forget the details of the original story. The changes have been often noted. The *Porte-enseigne* of Chappuys does most of his wicked deeds himself, stealing the handkerchief⁵ and having a part in the murder of Disdemone, instead of cleverly persuading others to take the risks, as does Iago. The *Porte-enseigne*, moreover, is moved to his wickedness by anger at Disdemone's refusal to encourage his amorous advances, while the chief cause of Iago's villany is the fact that Cassio has been promoted above him. Iago, too, because of his anger at being denied an opportunity to command, takes especial delight in directing the acts of others through his plots, and he leaves much less to chance than does the *Porte-enseigne*. Iago arranges the fight which causes Cassio to be cashiered and keeps the gulled Roderigo at hand to aid him, at this time and later in the final attempt on Cassio's life.

But Iago still owes a great deal to his source. The main fact about him—that he is wicked but successful in concealing his wickedness—is made clear there, when the *Porte-enseigne* is first introduced; and this is the germ of all Iago's pride in the fact that he doesn't wear his heart upon his sleeve. Moreover, many of the subtle tricks by which he misleads Othello are in the source, too. Iago is like the *Porte-enseigne* when he pretends not to want to accuse Desdemona, when he finally agrees to do so because of his duty to his master, when he suggests that Othello's blackness may be the cause of Desdemona's infidelity, and when, upon Othello's threatening him, he berates himself for having been too honest. And his language, though usually not so close to the source as when Shakespeare is following North or Holinshed, is at times almost a translation. Perhaps the most surprising similarity between Iago and the *Porte-enseigne* is that they both love Desdemona, since that fact is not made use of by Shakespeare again after Iago mentions it early in the play. Even Iago's soliloquies, by which Shakespeare effects one of his most dramatic characterizations, seem to have been suggested by the statement in the tale that the *Porte-enseigne* gave

⁵ It should be observed that Cinthio and Chappuys make it quite clear that the standard bearer himself steals the handkerchief from Disdemone's girdle, as he places his child on her lap, though Hardin Craig and G. L. Kittredge both make the statement that the child does the stealing. See Craig's *Shakespeare* (New York, 1935) p. 714, and Kittredge's *Sixteen Plays of Shakespeare* (New York, 1946) p. 1216.

a great deal of time to wicked and evil thoughts about his plot against the Moor.

The character of Othello is equally close to that of Chappuys' Moor. Shakespeare's chief change is, as always, in making Othello a man of speech as well as of action; and Othello's strangling of Desdemona and his suicide are, of course, very different from the way in which the Moor of the source devises his revenge and meets his own death. But Chappuys' ending seems out of keeping with the character of the Moor as he has described it earlier, and it is this earlier description which influences Shakespeare throughout.

The bravery and dignity of Othello, so clearly shown at the beginning of the play are to be found in the tale, where the Moor is called "fort vaillant," and where there is reference to his "vivacité d'esprit" and to his having won the respect of the Venetian Senate through his "actes vertueux."⁶ The seriousness and depth of Othello's love for Desdemona are also described in the source. Chappuys takes special pains to show that the lovers are not like the lascivious and adulterous men and women of many of the other tales in the *Hecatommithi*.

Othello's great confidence in Iago is also like the confidence of Chappuys' Moor in the *Porte-enseigne*,⁷ and the struggle which takes place within Othello between his love for Desdemona and his trust in Iago, causing him to threaten Iago with punishment if he does not prove his story, is especially close to the source. Othello's agony when he is finally convinced that Iago's claims are true and his angry reaction to Iago's suggestion that he "give her patent to offend" are also influenced by Chappuys.

⁶ Critics often overlook this fact. In the preface to his edition of *Othello* (New York, 1879) W. J. Rolfe declares that Cinthio's "savage moor" has scarcely anything in common with Shakespeare's character. Brander Matthews, though he seems to have made an unusually careful study of Cinthio, observes that in Cinthio's tale the moor is "a barbarian and a violent brute" (see *Shakespeare as a Playwright*—London, 1913, pp. 240-3). C. H. Hereford, in his preface to the Arden edition, calls him "gross and simple."

⁷ Elmer E. Stoll, in "Othello: An Historical and Comparative Study" (*Studies in Languages and Literature*, No. 2, the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1915), does not recognize the importance of this fact. Professor Stoll examines the literature of all times and languages to show that "the convention of the calumniator credited" is common, but says almost nothing about the calumniator's being credited in Cinthio's tale. In fact, he makes the statement (pp. 69-70) that the problem is not found in Cinthio but is created by Shakespeare—that it is "of the poet's own making."

It is perhaps worthwhile noting, too, that in the case of all the plays in which, according to Stoll, Shakespeare is most influenced by the convention of the calumniator credited—*Much Ado About Nothing* and *Cymbeline* as well as *Othello*—one needs look no further than the stories from which Shakespeare took his plots to find the source of this influence.

It should be observed that the Moor of the source is called black, not brown, since this may have something to do with Shakespeare's conception of Othello. As many critics have pointed out, Shakespeare refers several times to Othello's blackness and even to his thick lips—that is, he gives him some of the characteristics of a negro.⁸ Here, as in the case of the seacoast of Bohemia, Shakespeare has apparently borrowed his error from his source.

Desdemona is closer to the source than are Iago or Othello. The combination of strength and sweetness in her character are strikingly present in Chappuys' Disdemone. Desdemona is like Disdemone when she declares her love for Othello before he declares his, and marries him in spite of her father's objections; when she insists on going to Cyprus with him; when she ingenuously continues to implore Othello to reinstate Cassio; when she conceals from Othello the loss of the handkerchief; when she asks Iago to help her win back her husband's love (though in the source she is speaking to the villain's wife, who is there privy to his wickedness); and when, just before dying, she calls on Heaven to have mercy on her. Shakespeare has, of course, added greatly to Desdemona's sweetness; for instance, he does not allow her to make such statements as the one by Disdemone that she would walk through fire in her underwear to be with her husband,⁹ and he stresses her innocence. But to a certain degree he forms her in the spirit of the source.¹⁰

Cassio and Emilia exist in the tale as the *Caporal* and the wife of the *Porte-enseigne*. The *Caporal* is literally not characterized. Shakespeare first gives life to Cassio by having him antagonize Iago

⁸ "Thick lips," I, 1, 66; "black ram," I, 1, 88; "sootie bosom," I, 2, 70; "I am black," III, 3, 263; "black/As mine own face," III, 3, 387-8.

Some of these expressions, if they were not supported by the others, could be disregarded as the exaggerations of characters antagonistic to Othello. For example, Roderigo's epithet "thick lips," if it stood alone, might be intended to be taken no more seriously than Iago's "Barbary horse." But there is enough other evidence throughout the play to convince us that Shakespeare thought of Othello as black, and the reason he stresses Othello's blackness so much more than that of the Prince of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice* (who is called "tawny") may be its importance in Chappuys.

⁹ See below, p. 81, l. 30. As indicated in my footnote to this passage, Shakespeare gives a similar speech to Emilia, whose character it fits.

¹⁰ Nearly all critics ignore the similarity between Shakespeare's Desdemona and the source character. Georg Brandes, for example, though he notes the importance of Cinthio's tale (*William Shakespeare, A Critical Study*—New York, 1935—, pp. 438-9) fails to observe how it influenced Desdemona's character. He even declares (p. 447) that the source of her sweetness—and that of Ophelia and Cordelia—must have been a young and charming woman whom Shakespeare had encountered.

by his grace and gentlemanly manners when he greets Desdemona on her arrival in Cypres, there being no suggestion for this scene in Chappuys' tale. Shakespeare also adds life to Cassio by the drinking scene. This explains his striking Montano—in the tale no reason is given for the *Caporal's* sudden loss of self control. Nor is there any suggestion in Chappuys for Iago's advice to Cassio to ask Desdemona to intercede for him, nor for Cassio's action based on that advice.

The wife of the *Porte-enseigne* is very different from Emilia. She is a friend of Disdemone, and she knows all about her husband's plot. Shakespeare makes Emilia, on the other hand, a contrast for Desdemona, a servant rather than a lady, and one who is wise in the ways of the world. At the same time, however, she is ignorant of her husband's wickedness and completely out of sympathy with him; and Shakespeare ennobles her by allowing her to die with her mistress. Both Emilia and Cassio are examples of how Shakespeare's creative energy often works with minor characters, making living mixtures of good and evil out of little more than mere names.

One more or less important character remains, Roderigo, who does not exist in the source. Shakespeare's reason for putting him into the play seems to have been that he is necessary to the new conception of Iago, a man who seeks an outlet for his repressed ego by arranging plots in which others take the chances; and at the beginning of the play Roderigo's recriminations give occasion for Iago's magnificent characterizing speech in which he explains why he hates Othello. Roderigo's function is comparable to that of Mercutio, a character not present in the source of *Romeo and Juliet*. In the earlier play, as Coleridge observed, Shakespeare provides Romeo with a clever, attractive friend, so that when Tybalt kills him Romeo will be justified in killing Tybalt (as Romeus of the source was not). Here he gives Iago a gullible tool to make possible a complete revelation of his egotism and dishonesty.

To consider the broad outlines of the plot, Shakespeare's chief departures from Chappuys' translation are his reduction of the duration of the action from many months to a few days—almost exactly the same amount of compression as in *Romeo and Juliet*—and his change in the ending which was made necessary by this shortened time; and even here Shakespeare fails to depart completely from Chappuys. As has been often observed, he seems to

forget this shortened time when he has Iago convince Othello that Desdemona and Cassio have committed adultery frequently. Even allowing for the exaggeration of frenzy, Othello could not refer to their having committed the act of shame "a thousand times" were Shakespeare not thinking of Chappuys' time scheme, and when Iago first soliloquizes about his plan against Othello, he declares that he will carry it out only "after some time." Nineteenth century critics, moved in some degree by the spirit of Shakespeare worship, tried to explain these contradictions by supposing that Shakespeare was subtly arranging a complicated effect—using the short time to maintain the tension of passion, the long time to make Iago's stories credible.¹¹ The best way of explaining this double-time sequence, however, is to suppose that Shakespeare wrote the parts of the play which are in accord with Chappuys' time scheme first, and then, when the shortened time scheme developed in his mind, failed to rewrite them. He must have been conscious of the

¹¹ John Wilson, whose articles in *Blackwood's Magazine* for November, 1849, April, 1850, and May, 1850 were reprinted in substance in the *Transactions of the New Shakespeare Society*, 1875-76 and 1877-79, was the first exponent of this double time, and he was supported by Nicholas J. Halpin, who applied the theory to *The Merchant of Venice*. Later scholars, while most of them have not agreed with Wilson and Halpin, have hesitated to accuse Shakespeare of carelessness. P. A. Daniel first objects to Wilson's theory. In his "Time Analysis of the Plots of Shakespeare's Plays," published in the *Transactions of the New Shakespeare Society*, 1877-79, he declares (pp. 224-32) that the contradictions in the time scheme of *Othello* can be explained partly by supposing a long time in Venice before marriage and partly by errors and omissions which crept into the play after Shakespeare wrote it. In "Time in Shakespeare's Plays" (*Atlantic Monthly*, LV, April, 1885), Henry A. Clapp solves the difficulty by supposing that a long period of time passes between the end of Act II and the beginning of Act III, and this solution has become popular. A. C. Bradley in his note, "The Duration of the Action in *Othello*" (*Shakespearean Tragedy*, London, 1905, pp. 423-29), scoffs at Wilson's "doctrine of Double Time, Short and Long" but admits that he can find no satisfactory solution of the difficulty. He makes two suggestions: (1) that the double time is caused by someone's having tampered with the play and having removed a gap of six weeks between Cassio's arrival in Cyprus and the brawl (note that this gap comes earlier than the one introduced by Clapp), or (2) that while writing the play Shakespeare merely changed his original time plan, but decided not to revise what he had written, since his theatre audience wouldn't notice the contradictions. This explanation (with which I concur) does not please Bradley, however. He merely mentions it as a possibility. Mabel Buland, in *The Presentation of Time in the Elizabethan Drama* (Yale Studies in English, Vol. XLIV, New York, 1912) is careful not to contradict any theory outright. She declares (p. 54) that Shakespeare probably introduced the double time into *Othello* unconsciously, but she still insists that it was "art," and she observes later (p. 134) that it is possible that Shakespeare consciously evolved a system of art by which he might use these inconsistencies as a means of dramatic effect. Here she seems to be joining the school of Wilson until she adds (p. 135): "On the other hand, one may hold that . . . it was without full consciousness of its subtlety that Shakespeare let the double-time movement slip into his plays."

flaw and have decided that it would not disturb his audiences, but that he planned it seems impossible. A comparison between the time sequences of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* is one of many evidences that Shakespeare grew careless about certain details during the second decade of his productive years.¹² In the earlier play the new chronology is carefully organized and carefully adhered to. Here there is a double time, not merely in *Othello's* mind, but in the minds of other characters.

The most surprising way in which Chappuys has influenced Shakespeare is not in the characters nor in the structure of the plot, but in the poetry of the play. This influence does not loom so large as in many of his other plays, but it is there, as the comparison which is to follow between the tale and certain lines in the play will show. Shakespeare's transmutation of the uninspired prose of Chappuys into the poetry of *Iago* and *Othello* is perhaps as surprising as his rewriting of Brooke's doggerel in *Romeo and Juliet*.

III

Chappuys' translation is reprinted below.¹³ Chappuys followed Cinthio closely, and no very serious misconception has therefore been suffered by those who have read only Cinthio's Italian.¹⁴ But it seems likely that Chappuys' version is the one Shakespeare used.

The lines in Shakespeare's drama which seem most clearly influenced by the source are given in footnotes. Many of the lines

¹² As Mabel Buland says (*op. cit.*, p. 134), the plays in which Shakespeare's double time is most striking are *The Merchant of Venice*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *Othello*.

¹³ The copy of Chappuys' translation in the Princeton library is followed here. The errors of the original have been retained.

¹⁴ Furness' version of the tale is not entirely satisfactory for other reasons than his using Cinthio instead of Chappuys. In the first place, Furness has slightly abridged Cinthio, by omitting the introductory paragraph of the story (from which Shakespeare got one or two ideas), and by using Taylor's translation, which leaves out two parts of sentences found in the original. The first of these is the translation of the statement that Disdemona loved her Moor "non da appetito donnesca," Cinthio's way of saying that she was not like the women of many of his other tales. The second is the translation of Disdemona's statement that she would follow her husband anywhere "in camiscia." Taylor also makes another error, that of translating "una donna" (by which term Cinthio refers to one of the servants of the *Capo di squadra*, Cassio's parallel) as "a wife," though Cinthio capitalizes the word when it means "wife."

Collier also omits the first paragraph of the tale. Parr's English translation, which Collier uses, leaves out the English for "in camiscia." Parr translates "una donna" correctly as "a woman." Collier does not even mention Chappuys.

quoted are immensely changed from the tale. Some of them (the last one, for instance) are spoken by different characters than in Chappuys, and, usually, of course, they are vastly more poetic and dramatic than Chappuys made them. No one can choose such lines without realizing that it is impossible to be sure just what should be included. Shakespeare himself—with the help of a psychoanalyst—couldn't have been sure in every case. The footnotes will, at any rate, show that Shakespeare's debt to the tale is greater than is often supposed.

Vn Capitaine More prend à femme vne citoyenne de Venise: vn sien porte-enseigne l'accuse d'adultere à son mary: il tasche que le porte-enseigne tue celuy qu'il pensoit l'Adultere: le Capitaine tue sa femme: il est accusé par le porte-enseigne: le More ne confesse point, mais y estans certains indices, il est banny: & le méschant porte-enseigne pensant nuire à autruy, se pourchasse à soy-mesme miserablement la mort.

NOUVELLE VII.

Les dames eussent eu grande pitié de l'accident de la Florentine, si l'adultere par elle commis ne l'eust faite sembler digne de toute peine, & trouuerent que la patience du gentil-homme auoit esté grande, & qu'il auoit sagement faict, surce Curtio dist, son tour de parler estant venu, ie ne croy point qu'il soit en la puissance des hommes & des femmes de fuir la passion d'amour, pource que la nature humaine y est tant disposée, que souuent elle se fait sentir tres-puissante, malgré nous, en noz coeurs. Ce neantmoins croy-ie bien estre au pouuoir d'une femme honneste, quand elle se sent enflammée d'un tel feu, de choisir plustost la mort, que par une des-honeste volonté, tascher la pudicité, que les femmes doiuent soigneusemēt garder. Et croy que celles errent moins, lesquelles deliures & exemptes du saint lien de mariage, exposent leurs corps, au plaisir de chacun,¹⁵ que la femme mariée, qui commet adultere, avec un seul. Mais comme la susdite receut peine digne de sa faute, ainsi aduient il aucunesfois, que sans aucune faute, une loyalle & aimable femme, par les embusches d'un meschāt coeur, & par une

¹⁵ Othello, III, 3, 345-7:

I had been happy, if the general camp,
Pioners and all, had tasted her sweet body,
So I had nothing known.

trop grande credulité, reçoit la mort d'un fidele mary¹⁶ comme vous verrez manifestement, par ce que ie vous raconteray.

Il y auoit à Venise vn More fort vaillant, lequel pour auoir démontré aux affaires de la guerre vne grande prudence, & viuacité d'esprit, estoit fort aymé des seigneurs de Venise, lesquels surpassent toutes les republiques qui furent onques, à recompenser les actes vertueux.¹⁷ Auint qu'une vertueuse dame de grande beauté appelée Disdemone, attirée non pas d'un desir ou appetit¹⁸ feminin mais de la vertu du More, s'enamoura de luy: ¹⁹ & le More vaincu de la beauté & de la noble pësee de la dame, s'enflama aussi

¹⁶ *Othello*, IV, 1, 45-48:

My medicine work! Thus credulous fools are caught;
And many worthy and chaste dames even thus,
All guiltless meet reproach.

¹⁷ *Othello*, I, 2, 18-24 and V, 2, 339:

My services 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 promulgate—I fetch my life and being
From men of royal siege, and my demerits
May speak unbonneted to as large a fortune
As this that I have reached.

I have done the state some service and they know it.

¹⁸ *Othello*, I, 3, 262-6:

I therefore beg it not
To please the palate of my appetite,
Nor to comply with heat—the young affects
In me defunct—and proper satisfaction;
But to be free and bounteous to her mind.

Shakespeare seems to have been struck by this word *appetite* (which Furness, as has been noted above, does not even translate), for he uses it again in this sense in II, 3, 353-4:

Even as her appetite shall play the god
To his weak function.

and in III, 3, 268-70:

O curse of marriage
That we can call these delicate creatures ours
And not their appetites.

The same idea is introduced figuratively when Emilia says, III, 4, 103-6:

'Tis not a year or two shows us a man.
They are all but stomachs and we all but food;
They eat us hungerly, and when they are full
They belch us.

¹⁹ *Othello*, I, 3, 167:

She loved me for the dangers I had passed.

de l'amour d'icelle,²⁰ & eurent amour tant fauorable, qu'ils se marierent ensemble, encores que les parens de la femme fissent ce qu'ils peurent, à ce qu'elle print vn autre mary, que luy:²¹ & vesquirent ensemble, es si grande vnion & tranquillité, tandis qu'ils furent à Venise que iamais ne se dirēt vn mot de trauers. Or les seigneurs de Venise firent change des gens d'armes, qu'ils ont coustume de tenir en Cypre, choisirent pour Capitaine & chef des soldats qu'ils y enuoyerent, le More, lequel estoit bien aise de l'honneur qu'on luy faisoit (qui ne se donne qu'aux personnages vaillans, nobles & fideles)²² & neantmoins n'estoit il trop content, quand il pensoit à la grande distance, & à la difficulté du chemin, duquel Disdemone se trouueroit offensée. Cete dame qui n'auoit autre bien au monde que le More, & qui estoit fort contente du tesmoignage que son mary auoit eu de sa vertu, par vne tant puissante & noble republique, ne pouuoit voir l'heure que son mary se mist en chemin, avec ses soldats, pour aller quant & luy en vn lieu tant honorable, & estoit fachée de voir le More en peine, & ne sçachant l'occasion, elle luy dist vn iour, en table. Que signifie mon mary, que depuis que la seigneurie vous a donné vn tant honorable degré, vous estes tout melancolique? L'amour que ie vous porte, dist le More à Disdemone, trouble mon contentement de l'honneur que i'ay receu, pource que ie voy necessairement que de deux choses, en doit auenir vne, ou que ie vous meine avec moy, aux dangers de la mer, ou bien, que pour ne vous mettre en malaise, ie vous laisse à Venise. La premiere me seroit fort facheuse, l'autre me seroit hair moymesme pource que vous laissant, ie laisserois ma vie. Disdemone ayant entendu cela, dist: Ah mon mary, quelles pensées auez vous? pourquoy permettez vous qu'une telle chose vous trouble l'esprit? Je vous veux faire compagnie là ou vous irez, quād bien ie deurois passer en chemise par le feu,²³ comme ie dois

²⁰ *Othello*, I, 3, 168:

And I loved her that she did pity them.

It is significant that the tale pictures Disdemone as falling in love with the Moor before he loves her, and that Shakespeare also represents Desdemona as making the first advances.

²¹ *Othello*, I, 2, 67-8:

So opposite to marriage that she shunned
The wealthy curled darlings of our nation.

²² See footnote 17 above. Note also *Othello*, IV, 1, 274-9 and I, 3, 49, where the Duke calls Othello valiant.

²³ *Othello*, IV, 3, 38-40:

I know a lady in Venice would have walked barefoot
to Palestine for a touch of his nether lip.

aller par eau avec vous, en vne nauire seure & bien garnie: & quãd bien il y auroit du dâger & des trauaux, ie n'en veux pas auoir meilleur marché que vous, & penserois que vous ne m'aymeriez gueres, si vous me laissiez à Venise, pour ne m'auoir en vostre compagnie sur la mer, ou si vous vous persuadiez que i'aymasse meux demeurer icy en assurance, qu'estre avec vous participante d'un mesme danger.²⁴ Et pour cete cause, ie veux que vous vous aprestiez à ce voyage, avec toute la ioye, que la qualité du degré que vous tenez merite. A l'heure le More tout ioyeux, ietta les bras au col de sa femme, & luy dist avec vn affectueux baiser, Dieu nous conserue long temps en cete amitié, ma femme, & bien tost apres il s'equippa pour partir, & entra, avec sa femme & tous ses gēs en vne galere, & ayât fait mettre les voiles au vêt, se mit en chemin, & s'en alla, avec vne grande bonace de la mer, en Cypre. Cétuy-cy auoit en sa compagnie vn Porte-enseigne, de très-belle presence, mais de la plus méchante nature, que iamais fut homme au monde: & le More l'aymoit fort, n'ayant aucune cognoissance de ses mechancetez.²⁵ Car combien qu'il fust de coeur tres-vile, il courrait neantmoins par ses hautes & orgueilleuses parolles & par sa presence, tellement la vilité & coüardise, qu'il auoit enfermee dedans le coeur,²⁶ qu'il se monstroît à sa semblance vn Hector, ou vn Achille.²⁷ Ce mechant auoit semblablement mené sa femme en Cypre, laquelle estoit belle & honneste ieune femme, & pource qu'elle estoit Italienne, la femme du More l'aymoit fort & setenoit

²⁴ *Othello*, I, 3, 256-60:

If I were left behind
A moth of peace, and he to go to war,
The rites for which I love him are bereft me,
And I a heavy interim shall support
By his dear absence. Let me go with him.

²⁵ *Othello*, I, 3, 405-6:

The Moor is of a free and open nature
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so.

²⁶ *Othello*, I, 1, 61-5:

For when my outward action doth demonstrate
The native act and figure of my heart
In compliment extern, 'tis not long after
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at: I am not what I am.

²⁷ *Othello*, III, 3, 118 and 242:

. . . I know thou'rt full of love and honesty
This honest creature . . .

As has been often observed, several characters in the play apply the adjective "honest" to Iago.

YASALI LARONEN JET

... ..

la pluspart du iour avec elle. En la mesme compagnie estoit vn Caporal, que le More aymoît beaucoup. Cétuy-ci alloit fort souuent en la maison du More, & mangeoit souuent avec luy & avec sa femme. Et pour cete cause, la femme, qui cognoissoit que son mary l'aymoit tant, luy monstroît signes de tres-grande amitié: dequoy le More estoit fort aise. Le mechant Enseigne ne se souciant point de la foy donné à sa femme, de l'amitié, foy & obligation qu'il auoit au More, deuint fort amoureux de Disdemone,²⁸ & s'apliqua du tout à voir, s'il en pourroit iouir. Il n'osoit pas se decouvrir, craignant que le More le tuast, s'il s'en apperceuoit: & par diuers moyens il s'efforça, le plus secrettement qu'il peut, de faire cognoistre à cete femme qu'il l'aymoit. Mais elle qui auoit tout son coeur au More, ne pensoit aucunement ny à l'Enseigne ny à autre: & tout ce que cetuy-cy faisoit pour l'enflammer de luy, ne seruoit de rien. Parquoy cetuy pensa, que cestoit, pource qu'elle estoit d'auanture amoureuse du Caporal de la compagnie,²⁹ & s'auisa de s'en desfaire, & changea l'amour qu'il portoit à la femme, en vne tres-grande haine, & se mit soigneusement à penser, comme il pourroit faire, le Caporal de la compagnie estant depesché, s'il ne pouuoit iouir de cete femme, que le More n'en iouist pas aussi.³⁰ Et pensant diuerses choses, toutes méchantes & mauuaises, en fin delibera l'accuser d'adultere, à son mary, & donner à entendre que l'adultere estoit le Caporal de la compagnie. Mais cetuy seachant l'amour singuliere, que le More portoit à Disdemone, & l'amitié qu'il auoit avec le Caporal, il cognoissoit apertement, que s'il ne trompoit le More, avec grande finesse, il estoit impossible luy faire croire ny l'un ny l'autre. Et pour cete cause, il se mit à entendre que le temps & le lieu luy ouurist le chemin à vne tant méchante & malheureuse

²⁸ *Othello*, II, 1, 300:

Now I do love her too;

²⁹ *Othello*, II, 1, 296:

That she loves him, 'tis apt and of great credit.

This is an illustration of how difficult it is to evaluate the influence of one line upon another. Shakespeare's line would not be what it is were it not for Chappuys'. The Porte-enseigne, however, seems much nearer to believing the lady guilty (though the "d'auanture" indicates that he may be rationalizing) than does Iago.

³⁰ *Othello*, II, 1, 307-11:

And nothing can or shall content my soul
Till I am evened with him wife for wife;
Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor
At least into a jealousy so strong
That judgment cannot cure.

entreprinse.³¹ Bien tost apres, le More priua le Caporal de son degré, pource qu'il auoit mis la main à l'espée, en garde, contre vn soldat, & l'auoit fort blessé: dequoy Disdemone fut bien fachée, & auoit tasché beaucoup de fois de le remettre en grace avec son mary.³² Ce pendant le More dist au méchant Enseigne, que sa femme le fachoit tant, pour le Caporal de la compagnie, qu'en fin il seroit contraint de le reprendre.³³ Le méchant homme trouua occasion, de là, de mettre la main à la trahison par luy ourdie, & dist. Disdemone a parauanture occasion de le voir volontiers.³⁴ Et pourquoy dist le More. Je ne veux pas, respondit l'Enseigne,

³¹ As observed above, this passage (beginning with "et pensant diureses choses, toutes méchantes & mauuaises") seems to have suggested Iago's soliloquies in which he makes his wicked plans. It is particularly close to the latter part of the first soliloquy. One of the best examples of the way in which Shakespeare adds poetry and drama to an idea he borrows is seen at the end, where "... il se mit à entendre que le temps & le lieu luy ouurist le chemin à vne tant méchant & malheureuse entreprinse" becomes:

Hell and night

Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.

The whole passage (I, 3, 398-410) follows:

Cassio's a proper man: let me see now:
To get his place and to plume up my will
In double knavery—How, how?—let's see:—
After some time, to abuse Othello's ear
That he is too familiar with his wife.
He hath a person and a smooth dispose
To be suspected, framed to make women false.
The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so;
And will as tenderly be led by the nose
As asses are.
I have't. It is engender'd. Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.

The end of Iago's second soliloquy (II, 1, 314-21) is also fairly close to this passage, since it repeats many of the ideas of the first soliloquy.

³² *Othello*, III, 3, 45-7 and 60-3:

Good my lord

If I have any grace or power to move you,
His present reconciliation take:

Why then tomorrow night; on Tuesday morn;
On Tuesday noon, or night; on Wednesday morn.
I prithee, name the time, but let it not
Exceed three days. In faith, he's penitent;

³³ *Othello*, III, 3, 76:

I will deny thee nothing.

³⁴ *Othello*, III, 3, 99-101:

I did not think he had been acquainted with her.
O yes, and went between us very oft.
Indeed.

m'entremesler du mary & de la femme,³⁵ mais si vous regardez de pres, vous le verrez vous mesme.³⁶ L'Enseigne ne voulut passer outre, quoy que le More l'en sollicitast fort: trop bien ces parolles laisserent vn tant poignant éguillon au coeur du More, qu'il se mit soigneusement à penser, que vouloient signifier telles parolles, & en estoit tout melancolique. A cete cause, comme sa femme taschast vn iour d'amollir son courroux à l'endroit du Caporal, & le priast ne mettre en oubly le seruice & l'amitié de tant d'années,³⁷ pour vne petite faute,³⁸ ioint que le soldat blessé & le Caporal s'estoit accordez, le More entra en colere, & luy dist. C'est grand cas, Disdemone, que vous auez tant de soucy de cétuy-là: il n'est ny vostre frere, ny vostre parent, pour vous induire à luy vouloir tant de bien. La femme toute gracieuse & humble dist, Je ne voudrois pas que vous fussiez faché contre moy, autre chose ne m'induit, que le déplaisir que i'ay de vous voir priué d'un si cher amy, que vous a esté le Caporal, comme ie le sçay par le tesmoignage de vous mesme: il n'a, ce neantmoins commis vne si grande faute, que vous deuiez porter vne si grande haine: ³⁹ mais vous autres Mores estes naturellement tant chauds, que la moindre chose du monde vous incite à courroux & vengeance. A ces parolles le More, plus courroucé, respondit, Telle la pourroit éprouuer, qui ne le pense pas: ie verray telle vengeance des iniures que l'on me fait, que i'en seray saoul. La femme demeura toute étonnée, à ces parolles: & voyant

³⁵ *Othello*, III, 3, 133-6 and 152-4:

Good my lord, pardon me.
Though I am bound to every act and duty,
I am not bound to all that slaves are free to.
Utter my thoughts?

It were not for your quiet nor your good,
Nor for my manhood, honesty, and wisdom,
To let you know my thoughts.

³⁶ *Othello*, III, 3, 197-8:

Look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio;
Wear your eyes thus, not jealous nor secure.

³⁷ *Othello*, III, 3, 70-3:

What! Michael Cassio,
That came a-wooing with you, and so many a time,
When I have spoke of you dispraisingly,
Hath ta'en your part . . .

³⁸ *Othello*, III, 3, 66-7:

. . . not almost a fault
T'incur a private check.

³⁹ See preceding footnote.

que son mary échaufé contre elle, hors sa coustume, elle luy dist humblement. Autre chose qu'une bonne fin ne m'a induite à vous parler de cela : mais ie ne vous en parleray plus, à fin que vous n'ayez plus occasion de vous facher contre moy. Le More voyant l'instance que derechef sa femme luy auoit fait, en faveur du Caporal, pensa que les parolles que l'Enseigne luy auoit tenues, eussent voulu signifier que Disdemone fust amoureuse de luy : & s'en alla à ce mechant tout faché & triste, & commença à s'efforcer de le mettre en train de parler à luy plus apertement. L'Enseigne ententif à la ruine de cete pauvre femme, apres auoir faint ne vouloir dire chose qui fust pour luy déplaire,⁴⁰ se monstrât vaincu des prieres du More, dist. Je ne peux nier qu'il ne me face bien mal, d'auoir à vous dire chose, qui vous soit, sur toute autre, facheuse, mais puis que vous voulez que ie vous la die, & puis que le soin que ie dois auoir de vostre honneur, comme de mon Seigneur, m'incite aussi de le vous dire, ie ne veux maintenant faillir ny à vostre demande, ny à mon deuoir.⁴¹ Vous deuez donc sçauoir, que vostre femme n'est fachée de voir le Caporal en vostre mauuaise grace, pour autre chose, que pour le plaisir qu'elle a avec luy, quand il va en vostre maison, comme celle, qui est déia ennuyée de vostre taint noir.⁴² Ces parolles transpercerent le cœur du More. Mais pour en sçauoir d'auantage (encores qu'il creust vray tout ce que l'Enseigne luy auoit dit, pour ce soupçon qui luy estoit déia venu en l'esprit) il dist, avec vn mauuais visage, Je ne sçay qui me tient que ie ne te coupe cete langue tant hardie de donner tel blasme à ma femme.⁴³ A l'heure l'Enseigne dist. Je n'attendois pas autre recompense de ce mien amiable office dist l'Enseigne, mais puis que ma faute & le desir que i'ay de vostre honneur, m'ont porté si auât, ie vous redy que l'affaire va ainsi que vous l'avez entendu : & si vostre femme, faig-

⁴⁰ See footnote 35 above.

⁴¹ *Othello*, III, 3, 193-6:

I am glad of this, for now I shall have reason
To show the love and duty that I bear you
With franker spirit; therefore, as I am bound,
Receive it from me.

⁴² *Othello*, III, 3, 229-30 and 236-8:

Not to affect many proposed matches
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree . . .
Her will, recoiling to her better judgment,
May fail to match you with her country forms,
And happily repent.

⁴³ See footnote 47 below.

Mais encore ne perday-ie pas l'esperance de vous pouuoir faire veoir ce que vous ne voulez pas croire: ⁴⁸ & ce dit, ils departirent. Le pauvre More s'en alla en la maison, attendant que le iour vint que l'Enseigne luy fit veoir ce qui le deuoit rendre à iamais miserable.⁴⁹ Mais la chasteté de la femme du More mettoit l'Enseigne en grande peine, pource qu'il luy sembloit ne pouuoir pas trouuer le moyen de faire croire au More ce qu'il luy auoit dit faususement: & le meschant tournant son esprit en diuers endroits, il pensa vne nouuelle malice. La femme du More alloit souuent, comme i'ay dit, en la maison de la femme de l'Enseigne, & se tenoit avec elle vne bonne partie du iour. A raison de quoy cétuy-cy voyât qu'elle portoit aucunesfois vn mouchoir, qu'il scauoit bien que le More luy auoit donné, lequel estoit subtilement ouuré à la Moresque, & que cete femme aymoit fort & le More aussi: il pensa de le luy oster secrettement, & de là preparer la derniere ruine: & comme il eust vne petite fille de trois ans, que Disdemone aymoit biē, vn iour que la pauvre femme estoit allée en la maison de ce mechant, il print la petite fille entre ses bras & la bailla à cete femme, qui la print, & la mit contre sa poitrine. Ce traître qui ioüoit excellement de la main, luy leua de la ceinture, le mouchoir, tant accortement, qu'elle ne s'en apperceut point, & s'en alla tout ioyeux. Disdemone, ne seachant point cela, s'en alla en la maison, & pensant à autres choses, elle ne s'auisa point du mouchoir. Mais de là à quelques iours, le cherchant, & ne le trouuant point, elle auoit grande peur que le More le luy demandast, comme il faisoit

⁴⁸ *Othello*, III, 3, 397-408:

It were a tedious difficulty, I think,
To bring them to that prospect; damn them then,
If ever mortal eyes do see them bolster
More than their own! What then? How then?
What shall I say? Where's satisfaction?
It is impossible you should see this,
Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys,
As salt as wolves in pride, and fools as gross
As ignorance made drunk. But yet, I say,
If imputation and strong circumstances
Which lead directly to the door of truth
Will give you satisfaction, you might have't.

⁴⁹ *Othello*, III, 3, 330-3:

Not poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou ow'dst yesterday.

souuent.⁵⁰ Le mechant Enseigne, s'en alla, en temps commode, au Caporal, & luy laissa finemēt le mouchoir dessus le liet,⁵¹ & le Caporel ne s'en apperceut sinon le matin ensuiuant, que se leuant du liet, estāt le mouchoir tombé à terre, il mit le pied dessus, & ne seachant comme il l'auoit en sa maison, le cognoissant appartenir à Disdemone, il delibera le luy bailler : & attendant que le More fust sorty de la maison, il s'en alla à l'huis de derriere, & y frappa, La fortune, qui sembloit auoir coniuré avec l'Enseigne, la morte de cēte pauvre femme, voulut qu'à cēte heure là, le More s'en vint à la maison, & entendant frapper à l'huis, il se mit à la fenestre, & tout irrité dist, Qui frappe là ? Le Caporal, ayant entendu la voix du More, craignant qu'il ne descendist à son dam, sans respondre vn mot, se mit à fuir. Le More descendit & ayāt ouuert l'huis, sortit en la rue, & le cherchant ne le trouua point. Parquoy estāt entre en la maison, plain de colere, il demanda à sa femme qui estoit celuy qui frappoit en bas. Elle respondit ce qui estoit vray, qu'elle ne le scauoit pas. Il m'est aduis que i'y ay apperceu le Caporal. Je ne sçay pas, dist-elle, si luy ou autre a frappé. Le More reprima sa fureur, combien qu'il bruslast d'ire, & ne voulut rien faire, deuant que parler à l'Enseigne, auquel il s'en alla soudainement, & luy dist ce qui estoit auenu, & le pria d'entendre du Caporal & sentir ce qu'il pourroit touchant cela. L'Enseigne ioyeux d'vn tel accident, luy promit de le faire, & parla au Caporal, vn iour que le More estoit en lieu d'ou il les pouuoit voir parler ensemble. Et luy parlant d'autre chose que de cēte femme, il rioit tant qu'il pouuoit, & faignant d'estre émerueillé, il faisoit plusieurs gestes & de la teste & des mains, comme s'il eust ouy choses merueilleuses.⁵² Aussi tost que le More les vid separez, il s'en alla vers

⁵⁰ *Othello*, III, 4, 26-9:

. . . and, but my noble Moor
Is true of mind and made of no such baseness
As jealous creatures are, it were enough
To put him to ill thinking.

⁵¹ *Othello*, III, 3, 321-2:

I will in Cassio's lodging lose this napkin,
And let him find it.

⁵² *Othello*, IV, 1, 82-8 and 94-104:

Do but encave yourself
And mark the fleers, the gibes, and notable scornes
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

l'Enseigne, pour sçauoir ce que cétuy-là luy auoit dit. Et apres qu'il se fut fait long temps prier, en fin il luy dist. Il ne m'a celé aucune chose, & m'a dit qu'il a iouy de vostre femme, toutes les fois qu'estant dehors vous luy en auez donné le loisir, & que la derniere fois qu'il a couché avec elle, elle luy a donné le mouchoir, que vous luy donnastes, quand vous la prinstes en mariage. Le More remercia l'Enseigne, & luy sembla que s'il trouuoit, que sa femme n'eust le mouchoir, il cognoistroit estre ainsi que l'Enseigne luy auoit dit. Parquoy estant entré vn iour, en diuers propos avec sa femme, il luy demâda le mouchoir. La pauvre femme, qui auoit tousiours eu grande peur de cela, deuint toute en feu, au visage, à telle demande, & pour cacher sa rougeur qui luy montoit au visage, que le More nota bien, elle courut au cofre, & fit semblant de le chercher : & apres l'auoir long temps cherché, elle dist. Je ne sçay pas comme ie ne le trouue maintenant : ⁵³ vous l'aurez parauanture. Si ie l'auois, dist-il, pourquoy vous l'eussay-ie demandé? mais vous le chercherez vne autre fois plus à loisir. Et estant party, il commença à penser, comme il deuoit faire mourir sa femme, & le Caporal aussi, de maniere qu'on ne le taxast de leur mort.⁵⁴ Et y pensant nuit & iour, il ne pouuoit faire que sa femme ne s'apperceust, qu'il n'estoit enuers elle tel, qu'il auoit coustume d'estre.⁵⁵ Elle luy dist bien souuent, Qu'aez vous, qui vous trouble ainsi? de maniere que là où vous souliez estre le plus plaisant homme du monde, vous estes maintenant si melâcolique?

He hath, and is again to cope your wife.
I say, but mark his gesture.

Now will I question Cassio of Bianca,
A housewife that by selling her desires
Buys herself bread and clothes. It is a creature
That dotes on Cassio, as 'tis the strumpet's plague
To beguile many and be beguiled by one.
He, when he hears of her cannot refrain
From the excess of laughter. Here he comes.

(*Re-enter Cassio*)

As he shall smile Othello shall go mad;
And his unbookish jealousy must conster
Poor Cassio's smiles, gestures and light behaviour
Quite in the wrong.

⁵³ *Othello*, III, 4, 53:

I have it not about me.

⁵⁴ *Othello*, IV, 1, 178:

How shall I murder him, Iago?

⁵⁵ *Othello*, III, 4, 100:

I ne'er saw this before.

Le More trouuoit plusieurs excuses, mais elle ne s'en contentoit aucunement. Et combiẽ qu'elle sceust que le More ne deust estre faché pour aucun sien méfait, elle craignoit neantmoins, qu'il ne fust ennuyé d'elle, & disoit aucunesfois à la femme de l'Enseigne, Ie ne sçay que mon mary a trouué, il auoit coustume d'estre en mon endroit tant aimable, maintenant depuis quelque peu de iours en çà, il est deuenu tout autre, i'ay grãde peur que ie ne donne exemple aux ieunes filles, de ne se marier, contre la volonté de leurs parens, & que les femmes Italiennes n'apprennent de moy, de ne s'accompagner d'homme, que la Nature, le Ciel, & la maniere de viure rend differens de nous. Mais pource que ie sçay qu'il est amy de vostre mary, & qu'il luy communique ses affaires, ie vous prie que si vous auez entendu aucune chose de luy, de laquelle vous me puissier auiser, vous me la dissiez, & ne me refusiez vostre aide.⁵⁶ La femme de l'Enseigne, qui scauoit le tout, comme celle de laquelle le mary s'estoit voulu ayder, pour faire mourir la femme du Capitaine, mais elle n'y auoit onques voulu consentir, craignant son mary, n'osoit dire mot, elle luy dist seulement, Gardez vous de donner aucun soupçon de vous à vostre mary, & mettez peine, qu'il vous cognoisse loyalle, & plaine d'amour en son endroit. Ce que ie fais, dist elle, mais cela ne me sert de rien. Le More ce pendant cherchoit de plus en plus moyen de se certifier de ce qu'il n'eust voulu trouuer : & pria l'Enseigne de faire en sorte qu'il peust voir le mouchoir, en la puissance du Caporal, & bien que cela fust facheux au traistre, il luy promit neantmoins de mettre tout peine de l'ascertener de cela. Le Caporal auoit vne femme en sa maison, qui faisoit de merueilleux ouurages sur la toile, laquelle voyant ce mouchoir, & entendant qu'il estoit à la femme du More, & qu'il luy seroit rendu, se mit à en faire vn semblable, & en tirer le patron, deuant qu'elle l'eust :⁵⁷ & tandis qu'elle faisoit cela, l'Enseigne s'apperceut, qu'elle estoit au droit d'une fenestre, & qu'elle pouuoit

⁵⁶ *Othello*, IV, 2, 148-151:

Alas, Iago,
What shall I do to win my lord again?
Good friend, go to him; for, by this light of heaven,
I know not how I lost him. Here I kneel . . .

⁵⁷ *Othello*, III, 4, 179-80 and 189-90:

Sweet Bianca
(Giving her Desdemona's handkerchief)
Take me this work out.
I like the work well; ere it be demanded—
As like enough it will—I'd have it copied.

estre veuë de ceux qui passoiët par la rue, & pourtât il le le fit voir au More,⁵⁸ lequel estima & tint pour tout certain que sa femme qui estoit tres-honeste, fust adultere. Et arresta, avec l'Enseigne de la tuer & le Caporal aussi: & deuisans ensemble du moyen de ce faire, le More le pria de tuer le Caporal, promettant qu'il luy en seroit à iamais obligé, & comme il refusast de vouloir faire telle chose comme tres-mauuaise, & dangereuse, pourcee que le Caporal n'estoit moins accort que vaillant, apres l'en auoir bien prié, & luy ayant baillé vne bonne somme d'argent, il l'incita à dire, qu'il tenteroit la fortune.⁵⁹ Cête resolution prinse, le Caporal sortant vn soir de la maison d'une putain, estant nuict, l'Enseigne s'approcha de luy avec l'espée en la main, & luy dóna vn coup aux iambes pour le faire choir:⁶⁰ & quand il fut tombé, il se rua sus pour acheuer de le tuer. Le Caporal qui estoit courageux, ayant tiré son espée ainsi blessé qu'il estoit, s'estant dressé pour se defendre, cria à haute voix, Ie suis mort: ie suis massacré.⁶¹ Parquoy l'Enseigne entendant du peuple acourir & quelques soldats qui estoient logez là entour, il se mit à fuir; & puis retournant, il fit semblant d'estre acouru au bruit.⁶² Et se mettant entre les autres, il vid bien que du coup qu'il auoit en la iambe, il mourroit, & combien qu'il en fust tres-ioyeux, il s'en monstra contristé avec le Caporal, comme s'il eust esté son frere.⁶³ Le matin cela fut épandu par toute la ville, & Disdemone, qui ne pensoit point que de là luy deust auenir mal, se monstra bien fachée d'un tel accident:

⁵⁸ *Othello*, IV, 1, 163:

By heaven, that should be my handkerchief!

⁵⁹ *Othello*, III, 3, 472-4:

Within these three days let me hear thee say
That Cassio's not alive.

My friend is dead: 'tis done at your request.

⁶⁰ *Othello*, IV, 2, 239 and V, 1, 26:

He sups tonight with a harlotry . . .

(*Iago from behind wounds Cassio in the leg, and exit.*)

⁶¹ *Othello*, V, 1, 27:

I am maim'd forever. Help, ho! murder! murder!

⁶² *Othello*, V, 1, 45 and 47:

(*Re-enter Iago with a light*)

Who's there? whose noise is this that cries on murder?

⁶³ *Othello*, V, 1, 56:

O me, Lieutenant! what villains have done this?

de quoy le More eut d'elle vne tres-mauuaise opinion : ⁶⁴ & s'en alla retrouver l'Enseigne, & luy dist. Ma méchante femme est tant fâchée de l'accident du Caporal, qu'elle en deuindra folle. Et commēt, dist il, pouuiez vous penser autrement, veu qu'il est son ame? Son ame, repliqua le More, ie luy tireray bien l'ame du corps, ⁶⁵ car ie ne m'estimerois pas homme, si ie n'ostois cēte méchante du monde. Et deuisans ensemble, s'il la deuoit faire mourir de poison, ou du glaïue, l'Enseigne dist, i'ay trouué vn bō & seur moyē, ⁶⁶ La maison où vous demeurez est tres-vieille, & le planché de vostre chambre a beaucoup de fentes: il faut que nous battions Disdemone, avec vne chausse plaine de sablō, tant qu'elle en meure, à fin qu'en elle n'apparoisse signe de meurtrisseure & coups: quād elle sera morte, nous ferons tomber vne partie du plancher, & luy romprons la teste, faignans qu'une poutre, en tombāt, la luy ait rompue, & tuée: & en cēte maniere, personne n'aura aucun soupçon de vous: & chacun estimera qu'elle sera morte par vne infortune. Le cruel conseil fut agreable au More, & ayāt attendu le temps conuenable, estant vne nuit couché avec elle, & ayant déia caché l'Enseigne en vne garde-robe, prochaine, l'Enseigne, suiuant le mot du guet, fit ie ne sçay quel bruit, en la garde-robe, & le More l'ayant entendu, dist à sa femme, As tu ouy ce bruit? ouy, dist elle. Leue toy, dist le More, & voy que c'est. La pauvre Disdemone se leua, & aussi tost qu'elle fut aupres de la garde-robe, l'enseigne en sortit, lequel estant fort & puissant, luy donna vn grand coup de la chausse plaine d'arene, sur l'eschine, & la fit tomber, sans pouuoir à peine mettre hors son haleine. Mais elle appella le mieux qu'elle peut le More, pour luy aider: lequel estant sorty du lit, luy dist. Mechante femme, tu as le salaire de ta deshonesteté: on traite ainsi celles, lesquelles faignans aymer leurs maris, leur font des cornes. La pauvre femme entendant cela, & se sentāt arriuée à sa fin, pource q l'Enseigne luy auoit

⁶⁴ *Othello*, V, 2, 76-7:

Alas! he is betray'd and I undone.

Out, strumpet! weeps't thou for him to my face?

⁶⁵ *Othello*, IV, 1, 211:

I will chop her into messes. Cuckold me!

⁶⁶ *Othello*, IV, 1, 216-20:

Get me some poison, Iago; this night. I'll not expostulate with her, lest her body and beauty unprovide my mind again. This night, Iago.

Do it not with poison . . .

redoublé vn coup, dist, Qu'elle appelloit la iustice diuine,⁶⁷ en tesmoignage de sa foy, puis qu'elle ne pouuoit auoir celle du monde : & appellant Dieu à son ayde, au troisieme coup elle demeura morte & tuée par le méchant Enseigne. Et puis l'ayans mise dedans le liet, & luy ayans depecé & brisé la teste, ils firent tomber le plancher de la chambre, & le More commença à crier à l'ayde, secours, pource que la maison tomboit : les voisins accoururent à cete voix, & ayans découuert le liet, ils trouuerent cete femme dessouz les poultries, morte : ce qui fut fort déplaisant à chacun pour la bonne vie d'icelle. Le lendemain Disdemone fut enseuelie, au grand regret de ce peuple. Mais Dieu qui regarde iustement les coeurs des hommes, ne voulut pas qu'une si grande méchanceté demeurast impunie. Car le More qui auoit aimé sa femme plus que sa vie, s'en voyant priué, commença à la desirer tant, que comme insensé, il l'alloit cherchant par tous les endroits de sa maison, & considerant en soy-mesme que l'Enseigne auoit esté cause, qu'il auoit perdu avec sa femme, toute la douceur de la vie, & encores soy-mesme, il eut le méchant en si grande haine, qu'il ne le pouuoit pas regarder, & s'il n'eust eu crainte de l'inuiolable iustice des Seigneurs de Venise, il l'eust manifestement tué. Mais ne le pouuant faire seuremēt, il luy osta l'Enseigne, & ne le voulut plus en sa compagnie, & de là suruint entre eux deux vne tres-grande inimité. Parquoy l'Enseigne s'adonna du tout à nuire au More, & ayant trouué le Caporal, qui estoit guary, & qui alloit avec vne iambe de bois, au lieu de celle que il luy auoit tranchée, il luy dist. Le temps est venu que vous pouuez vous vanger de la iambe que l'õ vous a couppée, & si vous voulez venir avec moy à Venise, ie vous diray qui est le malfaiteur : car ie n'oserois pas le vous dire icy, pour plusieurs respects, & i'en tesmoigneray en iugement pour vous. Le Caporal qui se trouuoit fort offensé, & ne scauoit pourquoy, remercia l'Enseigne, & s'en alla à Venise, quant & luy. Où quand ils furent arriuez, il luy dist, que le More luy auoit tranché la iambe, pour l'opinion qu'il auoit, qu'il couchast avec Disdemone : que pour cete mesme occasion il l'auoit tuée, & puis fait courir le bruit que le plâcher tombé l'auoit occise. Le Caporal ayant entendu cela, accusa le More à la Seigneurie, & de sa iambe couppé, & du meurtre de Disdemone, & amena pour tesmoing l'Enseigne, qui dist que l'un

⁶⁷ *Othello*, V, 2, 33-4 and 57 :

Then Heaven

Have mercy on me.

O, Heaven have mercy on me!

& l'autre estoit vray, pource que le More luy auoit communiqué tout, & l'auoit voulu induire à faire le mal; & qu'ayant occis sa femme par ialousie, il luy auoit conté la maniere qu'il auoit tenu, pour la faire mourir. Les Seigneurs Venitiens, ayans entendu la cruauté vsée par le Barbare, enuers vne leur citoyenne, firent prendre le More en Cypre, & le firent amener à Venise, & par plusieurs tourmens tascherent d'en tirer la verité. Mais surmontant par son courage, tout martyre, il nia tout, si constamment, que l'on n'en peut tirer aucune chose.⁶⁸ Ce neantmoins il fut condamné à perpetuel exil, où en fin, il fut occis par les parens de Disdemone, comme il meritoit. L'Enseigne s'en alla en son pays, & ne voulant faillir à sa coustume, il accusa vn sien compaignon, disant qu'il l'auoit requis de tuer vn sien ennemy, qui estoit Gentil-homme: à raison dequoy cétuy-là fut prins, & luy fut baillée la gesne, & niant ce que disoit l'accusateur, l'Enseigne fut aussi gesné, en telle maniere, qu'il fut tout rompu, par l'interieur, & estât sorty de prison & mené en sa maison, il mourut miserablement. Et Dieu fit telle vengeance de l'innocence de Disdemone. La femme de l'Enseigne, qui scauoit le fait, recita tout cela, apres qu'il fut mort, comme ie vous l'ay raconté.

IV

The foregoing gives abundant evidence that Shakespeare made considerable use of the tale. Why, then, is its influence so often minimized? One cause is a sort of convention which comes from the nineteenth century, lingering on in the face of the twentieth-century skeptics. It still seems like heresy to speak of the influence of Chappuys (or Cinthio) on Shakespeare when Shakespeare so far outsoars Chappuys. Most critics merely mention sources and then turn to a discussion of the purely Shakespearean part of the creation, the poetry and dramatic character portrayal for which, they feel, Shakespeare's debt is hardly worth mentioning. Even the skeptics give their energy, not to pointing out the importance of Shakespeare's sources, but to finding flaws in the unity of his characters or of his dramatic structure.

Othello is one of the best examples in English literature of a great work inspired by an insignificant one. Cinthio and Chap-

⁶⁸ *Othello*, V, 2, 303-5:

Demand me nothing; what you know you know.
From this time forth I never will speak word.

Torments will ope your lips.

puy told a crude tale in which the characters existed merely to carry out the plot. Shakespeare added life to the characters and poetry and drama to the story; yet the influence of Chappuys on Shakespeare is surprisingly great.

In fact, the chief wonder is, not how Shakespeare rose so far above his source, but how he used so much of it; and, as in the case of many others of his plays, it is hard to understand how he happened to choose such a tale to make into a play. The explanation probably is that a line or a situation in Chappuys' translation appealed to his dramatic sense, with the result that—without consciously deciding to do so—he found himself writing *Othello*. He may have started with the temptation scene, or with Iago's first soliloquy,⁶⁹ or with any one of the other situations in which the drama is close to the tale—and when he finished have been almost as much surprised by his accomplishment as we are. Certainly the evidence does not point to long considered and carefully organized composition. The double time scheme, the many close verbal similarities between the tale and the play, and the evidence that he carried out only in part his change in the name of the heroine—⁷⁰ all are in keeping with the picture of Shakespeare as a man who wrote with ease and then hurried on to other work.⁷¹

⁶⁹ See footnote 31 above.

⁷⁰ See footnote 2 above.

⁷¹ Many critics would not agree with this statement. Brander Matthews, for instance, declares (*op. cit.*, pp. 238-39) that, though Shakespeare was often careless about the details of plot construction (in *Hamlet*, for example), he here revealed the same willingness to submit to the discipline necessary to build a plot well, and the same mastery of the art of plot construction, that he had revealed in *Romeo and Juliet*. Matthews even compares the structure of *Othello* with that of a play by Scribe or Ibsen! Thomas M. Parrot, too, refers in his preface to the Tudor edition of *Othello* (p. xi) to the unusually large amount of labor which, he thinks, Shakespeare devoted to the play and to the energy he must have expended to achieve the "perfection of *Othello* as a specimen of the playwright's art."