

**Poetry and the Arts (ENG 266)**  
**Professor Jeff Dolven**

**Readings for Monday (2/21)**

Hart Crane, *The Bridge* (excerpt)  
Photographs of the Brooklyn Bridge by Walker Evans (see our website for links)

**Readings for Wednesday (2/23)**

Elizabeth Bishop, "Casabianca"  
Robert Browning, "His Last Duchess"  
Felicia Hemans, "Casabianca"  
William Shakespeare, *Othello* (3.1)

Plus:

Henry Sayre, "Performance"

**Exercise (due 5 PM Sunday 2/20)**

This week, **make a digital photo of a poem** we have read in the last two weeks. As with last week's assignment, construe that "of" as you wish: you might want to explore something that the poem itself pictures (that it is "about"); you might want to render something in its structure, its sound, its associations. You could incorporate text, or not. The scale of the representation is also up to you: your photo might be of the poem as a whole, of a line, of a word. Feel free to use digital shenanigans to shape the image but keep faith with its occasion. Your image should be submitted by email by 5 PM Sunday and accompanied by a short essay (300-500 words) describing what you have done and how it relates to the questions of the course. Please send the essay as a pdf (converted from Word or whatever your word processor is), and name both files (the image file and the pdf) YOURLASTNAME EX 1.

# ONE · THE BRIDGE

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*From going to and fro in the earth,  
and from walking up and down in it.*

THE BOOK OF JOB

## TO BROOKLYN BRIDGE

---

How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest  
The seagull's wings shall dip and pivot him,  
Shedding white rings of tumult, building high  
Over the chained bay waters Liberty —

Then, with inviolate curve, forsake our eyes  
As apparitional as sails that cross  
Some page of figures to be filed away;  
— Till elevators drop us from our day . . .

I think of cinemas, panoramic sleights  
With multitudes bent toward some flashing scene  
Never disclosed, but hastened to again,  
Foretold to other eyes on the same screen;

And Thee, across the harbor, silver-paced  
As though the sun took step of thee, yet left  
Some motion ever unspent in thy stride,—  
Implicitly thy freedom staying thee!

Out of some subway scuttle, cell or loft  
A bedlamite speeds to thy parapets,  
Tilting there momentarily, shrill shirt ballooning,  
A jest falls from the speechless caravan.

## THE BRIDGE

Down Wall, from girder into street noon leaks,  
A rip-tooth of the sky's acetylene;  
All afternoon the cloud-flown derricks turn . . .  
Thy cables breathe the North Atlantic still.

And obscure as that heaven of the Jews,  
Thy guerdon . . . Accolade thou dost bestow  
Of anonymity time cannot raise:  
Vibrant reprieve and pardon thou dost show.

O harp and altar, of the fury fused,  
(How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)  
Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,  
Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry,—

Again the traffic lights that skim thy swift  
Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,  
Beading thy path — condense eternity:  
And we have seen night lifted in thine arms.

Under thy shadow by the piers I waited;  
Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.  
The City's fiery parcels all undone,  
Already snow submerges an iron year . . .

O Sleepless as the river under thee,  
Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,  
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend  
And of the curveship lend a myth to God.





are thrown to the ground, the wind  
the rain forces everything. Noise—

even the night is drummed  
by whippoorwills, and we get

80 as busy, we plow, we move,  
we break out, we love. The secret

which got lost neither hides  
nor reveals itself, it shows forth

tokens. And we rush  
85 to catch up. The body

whips the soul. In its great desire  
it demands the elixir

In the roar of spring,  
transmutations. Envy

90 drags herself off. The fault of the body and the soul  
—that they are not one—

the matutinal<sup>o</sup> cock clangs  
and singleness: we salute you

*morning*

season of no bungling

1960

## ELIZABETH BISHOP

1911–1979

### Casabianca<sup>1</sup>

Love's the boy stood on the burning deck  
trying to recite "The boy stood on  
the burning deck." Love's the son  
stood stammering elocution  
5 while the poor ship in flames went down.

Love's the obstinate boy, the ship,  
even the swimming sailors, who  
would like a schoolroom platform, too,

1. Cf. Felicia Dorothea Hemans, "Casabianca" (p. 899), line 1 of which is "The boy stood on the burning deck." The boy had remained on the burn-

ing ship during the 1798 Battle of the Nile (a decisive defeat for Napoleon), thinking that his father, the admiral, had not released him from duty.

10 or an excuse to stay  
on deck. And love's the burning boy.

1946

### The Fish

I caught a tremendous fish  
and held him beside the boat  
half out of water, with my hook  
fast in a corner of his mouth.  
5 He didn't fight.  
He hadn't fought at all.  
He hung a grunting weight,  
battered and venerable  
and homely. Here and there  
10 his brown skin hung in strips  
like ancient wallpaper,  
and its pattern of darker brown  
was like wallpaper:  
shapes like full-blown roses  
15 stained and lost through age.  
He was speckled with barnacles,  
fine rosettes of lime,  
and infested  
with tiny white sea-lice,  
20 and underneath two or three  
rags of green weed hung down.  
While his gills were breathing in  
the terrible oxygen  
—the frightening gills,  
25 fresh and crisp with blood,  
that can cut so badly—  
I thought of the coarse white flesh  
packed in like feathers,  
the big bones and the little bones,  
30 the dramatic reds and blacks  
of his shiny entrails,  
and the pink swim-bladder  
like a big peony.  
I looked into his eyes  
35 which were far larger than mine  
but shallower, and yellowed,  
the irises backed and packed  
with tarnished tinfoil  
seen through the lenses  
40 of old scratched isinglass.<sup>2</sup>  
They shifted a little, but not  
to return my stare.

2. Mica in thin, transparent sheets; originally prepared from the air bladders of certain fish.



Twenty-nine distinct damnations,  
 One sure, if another fails:  
 If I trip him just a-dying,  
 Sure of heaven as sure can be,  
 55 Spin him around and send him flying  
 Off to hell, a Manichee?<sup>8</sup>

## 8

Or, my scrofulous<sup>o</sup> French novel  
 On gray paper with blunt type! *morally corrupt*  
 Simply glance at it, you grovel  
 60 Hand and foot in Belial's<sup>9</sup> gripe:  
 If I double down its pages  
 At the woeful sixteenth print,  
 When he gathers his greengages,<sup>o</sup> *greenish plums*  
 Ope a sieve and slip it in't?

## 9

65 Or, there's Satan! one might venture  
 Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave  
 Such a flaw in the indenture  
 As he'd miss till, past retrieve,  
 Blasted lay that rose-acacia  
 70 We're so proud of!<sup>1</sup> *Hy, Zy, Hine*<sup>2</sup> . . .  
 'St, there's vespers! *Plena gratiâ*  
*Ave, Virgo!*<sup>3</sup> Gr-r-r—you swine!

ca. 1839

1842

My Last Duchess<sup>4</sup>*Ferrara*

That's my last duchess painted on the wall,  
 Looking as if she were alive. I call  
 That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands  
 Worked busily a day, and there she stands.  
 5 Will't please you sit and look at her? I said  
 "Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read

8. The Manichean heresy, which the speaker hopes to lure Brother Lawrence into accepting, claimed that the world was divided between forces of good and forces of evil.

9. Hebrew personification of lawlessness, hence one of the names for the Devil.

1. The speaker seems to say that, if all else fails, he might secure Brother Lawrence's damnation by pledging his own soul to the Devil in return—but being careful to leave a flaw in the contract that would invalidate it.

2. Possibly an incantation used in calling up the Devil.

3. Full of grace, Hail, Virgin! (Latin). The speaker

mixes up the opening words of the *Ave Maria*: "Ave, Maria, gratia plena."

4. The events of Browning's poem parallel historical events, but its emphasis is rather on truth to Renaissance attitudes than on historic specificity. Alfonso II d'Este, duke of Ferrara (born 1533), in Northern Italy, had married his first wife, daughter of Cosimo I de' Medici, duke of Florence, in 1558, when she was fourteen; she died on April 21, 1561, under suspicious circumstances, and soon after he opened negotiations for the hand of the niece of the count of Tyrol, the seat of whose court was at Innsbruck, in Austria. "Frà Pandolf" and "Claus of Innsbruck" are types rather than specific artists.

Strangers like you that pictured countenance,  
 The depth and passion of its earnest glance,  
 But to myself they turned (since none puts by  
 10 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)  
 And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,  
 How such a glance came there; so, not the first  
 Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not  
 Her husband's presence only, called that spot  
 15 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps  
 Frà Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps  
 Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint  
 Must never hope to reproduce the faint  
 Half-flush that dies along her throat": such stuff  
 20 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough  
 For calling up that spot of joy. She had  
 A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,  
 Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er  
 She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.  
 25 Sir, 'twas all one! My favor at her breast,  
 The dropping of the daylight in the West,  
 The bough of cherries some officious fool  
 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule  
 She rode with round the terrace—all and each  
 30 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,  
 Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked  
 Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked  
 My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name  
 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame  
 35 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill  
 In speech—which I have not—to make your will  
 Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this  
 Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,  
 Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let  
 40 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set  
 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,  
 —E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose  
 Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,  
 Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without  
 45 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;  
 Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands  
 As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We'll meet  
 The company below, then. I repeat,  
 The Count your master's known munificence  
 50 Is ample warrant that no just pretense  
 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;  
 Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed  
 At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go  
 Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,  
 55 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,  
 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Not as the conqueror comes,  
 10 They, the true-hearted, came;  
 Not with the roll of the stirring drums,  
 And the trumpet that sings of fame;

Not as the flying come,  
 In silence and in fear;—  
 15 They shook the depths of the desert gloom  
 With their hymns of lofty cheer.

Amidst the storm they sang,  
 And the stars heard and the sea;  
 And the sounding aisles of the dim woods rang  
 20 To the anthem of the free!

The ocean eagle soared  
 From his nest by the white wave's foam;  
 And the rocking pines of the forest roared—  
 This was their welcome home!

25 There were men with hoary hair  
 Amidst that pilgrim band;—  
 Why had *they* come to wither there,  
 Away from their childhood's land?

There was woman's fearless eye,  
 30 Lit by her deep love's truth;  
 There was manhood's brow serenely high,  
 And the fiery heart of youth.

What sought they thus afar?  
 Bright jewels of the mine?  
 35 The wealth of seas, the spoils of war?—  
 They sought a faith's pure shrine!

Aye, call it holy ground,  
 The soil where first they trod.  
 They have left unstained what there they found—  
 40 Freedom to worship God.

1826

Casabianca<sup>4</sup>

The boy stood on the burning deck  
 Whence all but he had fled;

4. "Young Casabianca, a boy about thirteen years old, son to the Admiral of the *Orient*, remained at his post (in the Battle of the Nile) after the ship had taken fire, and all the guns had been abandoned; and perished in the explosion of the vessel,

when the flames had reached the powder" [Hemans's note]. In the Battle of the Nile (August 1, 1798), British admiral Horatio Nelson captured and destroyed the French fleet in Aboukir Bay. Cf. Elizabeth Bishop, "Casabianca" (p. 1515).

The flame that lit the battle's wreck  
Shone round him o'er the dead.

5 Yet beautiful and bright he stood,  
As born to rule the storm;  
A creature of heroic blood,  
A proud, though childlike form.

The flames roll'd on—he would not go  
10 Without his father's word;  
That father, faint in death below,  
His voice no longer heard.

He call'd aloud:—"Say, Father, say  
If yet my task is done?"  
15 He knew not that the chieftain lay  
Unconscious of his son.

"Speak, Father!" once again he cried,  
"If I may yet be gone!"  
And but the booming shots replied,  
20 And fast the flames roll'd on.

Upon his brow he felt their breath,  
And in his waving hair,  
And look'd from that lone post of death  
In still, yet brave despair.

25 And shouted but once more aloud,  
"My Father! must I stay?"  
While o'er him fast, through sail and shroud,  
The wreathing fires made way.

They wrapt the ship in splendor wild,  
30 They caught the flag on high,  
And stream'd above the gallant child,  
Like banners in the sky.

There came a burst of thunder sound—  
The boy—oh! where was he?  
35 Ask of the winds that far around  
With fragments strew'd the sea!—

With mast, and helm, and pennon<sup>o</sup> fair,  
That well had borne their part,  
But the noblest thing which perish'd there  
40 Was that young faithful heart!

*long narrow flag*

BRABANTIO                    How? The Duke in council?  
 In this time of the night? Bring him away!  
 Mine's not an idle cause: the Duke himself,                    95  
 Or any of my brothers of the state,  
 Cannot but feel this wrong as 'twere their own;  
 For if such actions may have passage free,  
 Bondslaves and pagans shall our statesmen be.     *Exeunt*

**I.3**     *Enter Duke and Senators, seated at a table, with lights,  
 Officers, and attendants*

DUKE

There is no composition in these news  
 That gives them credit.

FIRST SENATOR                Indeed, they are disproportioned:  
 My letters say, a hundred and seven galleys.

DUKE

And mine a hundred forty.

SECOND SENATOR                And mine two hundred.

But though they jump not on a just account—                    5  
 As, in these cases where the aim reports,  
 'Tis oft with difference—yet do they all confirm  
 A Turkish fleet, and bearing up to Cyprus.

**I.3]** F (*Scena Tertia*); not in Q O.1–2 Enter . . . attendants] after Q (*set at a Table with lights and*); Enter Duke, Senators, and Officers. F I There is] Q; There's F these] Q; this F 4 forty] F; and forty Q 6 the aim] F; they aym'd Q1; they ayme Q2

95 **idle cause** trivial case

96 **brothers . . . state** fellow potentates

98 **have . . . free** be freely allowed

99 **Bondslaves and pagans** i.e. men who are *both* slaves and heathen. On Othello's past enslavement, see I.3.138. Although the Atlantic slave-trade was well established by the early 17th century, slavery at this time was by no means confined to African, or even to pagan peoples (see above, pp. 124–5). Othello, moreover, often speaks as though he were a Christian. Nevertheless underlying Brabantio's contemptuous phrase seems to be the assumption of a 'natural' connection between colour, paganism, and enslavement.

**I.3.O.1** **seated** The Q direction is ambiguous: the Duke and senators may be discovered

seated around a table, placed either in a 'discovery space' in the tiring-house façade, or perhaps in the same curtained booth that may have been used for the 'bulk' in 5.1 and the bed in 5.2 (see 5.1.1 and 5.2.0.1); but since 'sit' and 'set' are often alternative spellings of the same word, it could be equally that they are meant to enter and seat themselves.

1 **composition** consistency, congruity (the only example of this usage in *OED*)

2 **credit** credibility

**disproportioned** numerically inconsistent

5 **jump** precisely agree, tally

**just account** exact estimate

6 **aim** conjecture (cf. *Hamlet*, 4.5.9: 'They aim at it')

DUKE

Nay, it is possible enough to judgement:

I do not so secure me in the error,

10

But the main article I do approve

In fearful sense.

SAILOR (*within*) What ho, what ho, what ho!*Enter Sailor*

OFFICER

A messenger from the galleys.

DUKE

Now, the business?

SAILOR

The Turkish preparation makes for Rhodes—

So was I bid report here to the state

15

By Signor Angelo.

DUKE How say you by this change?

FIRST SENATOR This cannot be,

By no assay of reason. 'Tis a pageant

To keep us in false gaze: when we consider

20

Th'importancy of Cyprus to the Turk,

And let ourselves again but understand

That, as it more concerns the Turk than Rhodes,

So may he with more facile question bear it,

For that it stands not in such warlike brace,

25

10 in] F; to Q 11 article] F, Q2; Articles Q1 12 SAILOR] F; *One Q 12.1 Enter Sailor] F; Enter a Messenger. Q (after 'sense', l. 12) 13 OFFICER] F, Q2; Sailor Q1 galleys] F, Q2; Galley Q1 Now,] Q; ~? What's, F 16 By . . . Angelo] F, Q2; *not in* Q1 25–31 For . . . profitless] F, Q2; *not in* Q1*

9 **to judgement** in the light of careful consideration

10–12 **I . . . sense** the confusion about the details does not make me so overconfident that I fail to recognize the fearful implications in the main thrust of this news

13 **Now** F's 'Now? What' creates an extra-metrical syllable; but since 'now' and 'what' are more or less interchangeable in a question of this kind, it may be that 'what', which chimes rather awkwardly with the sailor's repeated 'what ho', was meant to be cancelled in the manuscript from which F derives.

14 **preparation** a force or fleet fitted out for attack or defence (*OED n.* 3a)

16 **Angelo** Presumably the commander of the Venetian fleet (rather than the Gover-

nor of Cyprus, as Honigmann suggests). The name seemingly derives from that of the naval captain Angelus Sorianus (Angelo Soriano) who in Knolles carries the Turkish ultimatum regarding Cyprus to the Venetians (Bullough, p. 213).

17 **How . . . change** A metrically amphibious line.

**How . . . by** what is your opinion of

19 **assay** weighing up, test; endeavour

**pageant** mere show

20 **in false gaze** looking in the wrong direction

24 **more . . . it** capture it with an easier struggle

25–31 **For . . . profitless** Another almost certain cut from Q: not only is it difficult to see why any reviser would feel the need to pad out the Senator's part by adding

But altogether lacks th'abilities  
 That Rhodes is dressed in. If we make thought of this,  
 We must not think the Turk is so unskilful  
 To leave that latest which concerns him first,  
 Neglecting an attempt of ease and gain 30  
 To wake and wage a danger profitless.

DUKE

Nay, in all confidence he's not for Rhodes.

OFFICER Here is more news.

*Enter a Messenger*

MESSENGER

The Ottomites, reverend and gracious,  
 Steering with due course toward the isle of Rhodes, 35  
 Have there injointed with an after fleet.

FIRST SENATOR

Ay, so I thought: how many, as you guess?

MESSENGER

Of thirty sail; and now they do re-stem  
 Their backward course, bearing with frank appearance  
 Their purposes toward Cyprus. Signor Montano, 40  
 Your trusty and most valiant servitor,

32 Nay] F, Q2; And Q1 33.1 Messenger] F; 2. Messenger Q 36 injointed] Q1; inioynted them F, Q2; injoin'd ROWE 37 FIRST . . . guess?] F (1 Sen.), Q2; not in Q1 38 re-stem] F; reterine Q1; reterine Q2 40 toward] F; towards Q

such strictly unnecessary information, but the removal of these lines damages the logic of the speech by removing the explanation for Cyprus's vulnerability.

25 **For that** because

**brace** state of defence (*OED n.*<sup>2</sup> 1c, citing only this example); presumably adapted from *brace* = armour (esp. for the arms), or from *brace*, v.<sup>1</sup> 5, = summon up resolution for a task, brace oneself.

26 **abilities** power, capacity27 **dressed in** equipped with31 **wage** contend with

32 **Nay** Q's 'And' is exactly the kind of small alteration we should expect if the previous lines had been cut, making the Duke's dismissive 'Nay' no longer appropriate: but the effect is to turn the Duke into a somewhat improbable seconder of the Senator; so we can be fairly confident that the lines are not an addition in F.

34 **Ottomites** Ottoman Turks (earliest citation in *OED*)

**reverend and gracious** Addressed to the Duke (or perhaps to the senators generally).

36 **injointed** linked up. Since this is the only use of *injoint* recorded in *OED*, and since F's 'them' is extra-metrical (though a judicious slurring of the line might accommodate it), Rowe may have been right to suppose that Shakespeare originally wrote 'injoined them': a common form of the verb *enjoin* (= join together), which was frequently reflexive.

36 **after** following

38-9 **re-stem . . . course** turn their course back again, once again turn their prows on course (for)

39-40 **bearing . . . purposes** steering with apparently quite open intentions

With his free duty, recommends you thus  
And prays you to believe him.

DUKE

'Tis certain then for Cyprus.

Marcus Luccicos, is not he in town?

45

FIRST SENATOR He's now in Florence.

DUKE

Write from us to him—post-post-haste, dispatch.

FIRST SENATOR

Here comes Brabantio and the valiant Moor.

*Enter Brabantio, Othello, Cassio, Iago, Roderigo and  
Officers*

DUKE

Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you  
Against the general enemy Ottoman.

50

(*To Brabantio*) I did not see you: welcome, gentle  
signor—

We lacked your counsel, and your help tonight.

BRABANTIO

So did I yours. Good your grace pardon me:

43 believe] F, Q (beleeue); relieve JOHNSON (*conj.* T. Clark) 45 he] F, Q2; here Q1 47 us to him—post] F (vs, | To him, Post), Q2; vs, wish him post Q1 48.1 *Cassio, Iago, Roderigo*] F; Roderigo, Iago, Cassio, Desdemona Q; *Iago, Roderigo* CAPELL 52 lacked] F (lack't), Q2; lacke Q1

42 **free duty** unstinting service  
**recommends you** informs you (*OED* v.<sup>1</sup> 1e, citing only this example); but perhaps it means only 'commends himself to you'.

43 **believe** Clark's conjectural emendation 'relieve' has won some favour on the grounds that, as the subsequent dialogue suggests, it is not Montano's credibility that is at stake but his urgent need for reinforcement; and both Walker and Honigmann treat it as one of the 'common errors' that suggest 'contamination' of F by Q (see below, Appendix B pp. 413, 416, 422–3). But the Duke and Senators are sifting the reliability of different reports and conjectures concerning Turkish intentions, and Montano's despatch conflicts with Angelo's.

45 **Marcus Luccicos** Presumably intended as a Greek name, though (following Capell's 'Lucchese') a number of attempts have been made to substitute a more Italianate version.

48.1–2 **Enter . . . Officers** Q's inclusion of Desdemona may be a survival from an earlier plan for the scene in which Desdemona was present from the beginning. Capell and a number of later editors assume that the same is true of Cassio, who is given nothing to say in this scene; but since he was sent to fetch Othello to the Duke (1.2.36–8) his presence here seems natural. Q's suggestion that Iago should enter before the newly promoted Cassio may be worth preserving (cf. 1.1.0.1).

49 **Othello** In this respectful address by the Duke, the hero (hitherto referred to only as 'the Moor') is called by name for the first time.

**straight** immediately

50 **general** i.e. the enemy of all Christendom

51 **gentle** i.e. of gentle birth



- Neither my place nor aught I heard of business  
 Hath raised me from my bed; nor doth the general care 55  
 Take hold on me. For my particular grief  
 Is of so flood-gate and o'er-bearing nature  
 That it engluts and swallows other sorrows,  
 And it is still itself.
- DUKE Why? What's the matter?
- BRABANTIO  
 My daughter; O, my daughter!
- SENATORS Dead?
- BRABANTIO Ay, to me: 60  
 She is abused, stolen from me, and corrupted  
 By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks.  
 For nature so preposterously to err—  
 Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense—  
 Sans witchcraft could not. 65
- DUKE  
 Whoe'er he be that in this foul proceeding  
 Hath thus beguiled your daughter of her self,  
 And you of her, the bloody book of law  
 You shall yourself read in the bitter letter  
 After your own sense—yea, though our proper son 70

54 nor] Q; hor F 56 hold on] F; any hold of Q1; hold of Q2 grief] F (griefe), Q2; griefes Q1  
 59 Why?] F; ~, Q 60 SENATORS] F (Sen.); All. Q; HONIGMANN reads I SENATOR  
 64 Being . . . sense] F, Q2; not in Q1 65 Sans] F, Q1 (corr.) (Saunce), Q2; Since Q1 (uncorr.)  
 70 your] F; its Q yea] F, Q2; not in Q1

- 54 **place** official position (as a senator)  
 55 **general care** concern for the public interest  
 56 **particular** personal  
 57 **flood-gate** torrential (i.e. like the water suddenly released from sluice-gates)  
 58 **engluts** devours  
 61 **abused** Cf I.I.I72.  
**corrupted** The word had a much more strongly physical sense, suggesting that Desdemona's body is literally tainted, poisoned, or putrefied by the Moor's 'spells and medicines'.  
 62 **mountebanks** charlatans. As Jonson's *Volpone* (2.2) suggests, Italy (especially Venice) was seen as being the particular home of such quackery.  
 63 **preposterously** monstrously, perversely, contrary to the order of nature. The

- literal sense of the word is arsy-versy: on the preposterous in *Othello*, see Parker, *Margins*, pp. 48–52.  
**err** Desdemona's supposed errancy links her with the 'extravagant' and 'erring' Othello (I.I.I35, I.3.348).  
 65 **Sans** without  
**could not** ('be' is understood)  
 67 **beguiled** cheated, stolen by fraud  
 68 **bloody . . . law** i.e. that part of the law which prescribed capital punishment for witchcraft  
 69–70 **You . . . sense** you shall pass sentence according to the harshest letter of the law as you yourself interpret it. F's Duke offers Brabantio much more arbitrary licence than Q's.  
 70 **our proper son** my very own son (the Duke employs the royal 'we')

Stood in your action.

BRABANTIO Humbly I thank your grace.

Here is the man: this Moor, whom now it seems

Your special mandate for the state affairs

Hath hither brought.

ALL We are very sorry for't.

DUKE (*to Othello*)

What, in your own part, can you say to this? 75

BRABANTIO

Nothing, but this is so.

OTHELLO

Most potent, grave, and reverend signors,

My very noble and approved good masters;

That I have ta'en away this old man's daughter,

It is most true; true I have married her— 80

The very head and front of my offending

Hath this extent, no more. Rude am I in my speech,

And little blessed with the soft phrase of peace;

For, since these arms of mine had seven years' pith,

Till now some nine moons wasted, they have used 85

Their dearest action in the tented field:

And little of this great world can I speak

82 extent, no] Q2; extent; no F; extent no Q1 83 soft] F; set Q

71 **Stood . . . action** were the object of your legal suit

75 **in . . . part** on your own behalf

78 **approved** proved; esteemed

**masters** Othello's deferential language picks up the emphasis on servants and masters in I.I.

81 **head and front** summit, highest extent (*OED*, *head*, n. 42, citing this as the earliest example of the phrase). There is subdued word-play on *front* = 'forehead' and probably on *front* = 'affront', or 'effrontery' (though *OED* does not record the latter sense before 1653).

82 **Rude** rough, unrefined. The self-deprecation may indicate something of Othello's sense of himself both as a 'barbarian' outsider (see l. 349) and as a soldier untrained in the civilian arts; but in the context of his characteristically eloquent (and even slightly orotund) public manner it is clearly hyperbolic. In fact Othello's ensuing speeches are them-

selves syntactically elegant and larded with choice terms: *portance* (l. 139), *antres* (l. 140), *incline* (l. 146), *discourse* (l. 150), *dilate* (l. 153), and *distressful* (l. 157), which *OED* describes as 'literary and chiefly poetical'.

83 **soft** pleasing, relaxed, melodious; ingratiating; effeminate. Q's 'set' (= conventional) is, however, a genuine (if less complex) alternative, since 'soft' might have resulted from a misreading of manuscript 'sett'.

84 **since . . . pith** i.e. since I was seven years old ('pith' = strength)

85 **Till . . . wasted** until nine months ago

85–6 **used . . . action** whose most glorious deeds have been confined to the world of military encampments and battlefields (with a quibble on the erotic sense of 'dearest')

86 **tented** covered with tents (*OED* a. 1a; earliest citation)

- More than pertains to feats of broil and battle;  
 And therefore little shall I grace my cause  
 In speaking for myself. Yet, by your gracious patience, 90  
 I will a round, unvarnished tale deliver  
 Of my whole course of love: what drugs, what charms,  
 What conjuration, and what mighty magic—  
 For such proceeding I am charged withal—  
 I won his daughter.
- BRABANTIO                    A maiden never bold, 95  
 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?  
 It is a judgement maimed and most imperfect 100  
 That will confess perfection so could err  
 Against all rules of nature, and must be driven  
 To find out practices of cunning hell  
 Why this should be. I therefore vouch again  
 That with some mixtures powerful o'er the blood, 105  
 Or with some dram conjured to this effect,  
 He wrought upon her.

88 feats of broil] CAPELL; Feats of Broiles F, Q2; feate of broyle Q1 91 unvarnished] Q; vn-  
 varnish'd u F 94 proceeding] F; proceedings Q I am] F; am I Q 95-6 bold . . . so] Q2;  
 bold: | Of spirit so F; bold of spirit, | So Q1 99 on?] Q; ~; F 100 maimed] Q (maimd);  
 main'd F imperfect^] Q (~); imperfect. F 101 could] F; would Q 107 wrought upon] Q;  
 ~ vp on F

- 91 **round** blunt, plain  
**unvarnished** plain, unadorned (earliest  
 citation in *OED*)  
 92-5 **what . . . daughter** The syntax  
 appears to require 'with what', but as Fur-  
 ness notes (p. 51) the omission of the  
 preposition in such adverbial construc-  
 tions is not uncommon in Shakespearian  
 English.  
 96 **motion** emotion, desire. The play on 'still'  
 (= motionless) is enabled by the fact that  
 early modern physiology described the  
 activity of the emotions in kinetic terms.  
 97, 102 **nature** Brabantio's reiteration of  
 this term emphasizes what he (like Iago)  
 sees as the monstrous unnaturalness of  
 miscegenation (see I.I.88-9).  
 98 **years** The disparity in years between  
 Othello and Desdemona is often seen (not  
 least by Othello himself; cf. 3.3.268-9) as  
 another ground of incompatibility. The

- yoking of an elderly man to a young wife  
 was a stock ingredient of comic plotting;  
 and part of the shock-effect of this  
 'domestic' drama depends on the way  
 in which it turns traditionally comic  
 material to tragic ends (see Introduction,  
 pp. 4-6).  
**credit** reputation  
 100 **maimed** F's 'main'd' represents variant  
 spellings (mained, mayned) still common  
 in Shakespeare's time.  
 101 **err** Cf. l. 63.  
 103 **practices** evil trickery, machinations,  
 plots  
 105 **blood** sexual desire  
 106 **dram** small medicinal draught  
**conjured . . . effect** produced for this  
 purpose (with a hint of magic). *Conjured* is  
 accented on the second syllable.  
 107 **wrought upon her** worked up her  
 feelings

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. 110

FIRST SENATOR  
 But, Othello, speak:  
 Did you by indirect and forcèd courses  
 Subdue and poison this young maid's affections?  
 Or came it by request and such fair question  
 As soul to soul affordeth?

OTHELLO I do beseech you, 115  
 Send for the lady to the Sagittary,  
 And let her speak of me before her father:  
 If you do find me foul in her report,  
 The trust, the office I do hold of you  
 Not only take away, but let your sentence 120  
 Even fall upon my life.

DUKE Fetch Desdemona hither.  
*Exeunt two or three attendants*

OTHELLO  
 Ensign, conduct them—you best know the place.  
[Exit Iago after them]  
 And till she come, as truly as to heaven  
 I do confess the vices of my blood,  
 So justly to your grave ears I'll present 125

DUKE] Q; *not in F* vouch] F, Q2; youth Q1 108 wider] F; certaine Q overt] Q (ouert); ouer F 109 Than these] F (Then these); These are Q 110 seeming do] F; seemings, you Q 111 FIRST SENATOR] Q (1 *Sena.*); *Sen.* F 116 Sagittary] F (Sagitary), Q2; Sagittar Q1 119 The trust . . . you] F, Q2; *not in Q1* 121.1 *Exeunt . . . attendants*] Q (*Exit two or three.*); *not in F* 122.1 *Exit . . . them*] ROWE (*subs.*); *not in F, Q* 123 till] Q; tell F truly] F, Q2; faithfull Q1 124 I . . . blood] F, Q2; *not in Q1*

107 **vouch . . . proof** Cf. Dent S1019, 'Suspicion (accusation) is no proof'.

108 **wider** more ample or extensive, fuller  
**overt** apparent, manifest; from which criminal intent can be inferred (*OED a. 2*)  
**test** evidence (*OED n. 3 2*)

109 **thin habits** insubstantial appearances  
 109–10 **poor . . . seeming** feeble conjectures based on observation of superficial commonplaces

112 **indirect . . . courses** crooked and forcible means

114–15 **such . . . affordeth** such candid and unblemished conversation as two

souls will allow one another (*OED, fair, a. 9–10; question, n. 2a*). However, in this play the term 'fair' (like 'foul') is probably never without a racial loading (whether or not the speaker is assumed to be conscious of it); see I.2.66, and cf. I. 126 below.

118 **foul** wicked, guilty; and see above, ll. 114–15 and I.2.62.

124 **blood** fleshly nature; sexual desire. In this context, however, the term is also likely to carry the suggestion of 'race' (i.e. 'the vices peculiar to my nature as a Moor').

125 **justly** faithfully

How I did thrive in this fair lady's love,  
And she in mine.

DUKE                      Say it, Othello.

OTHELLO

Her father loved me, oft invited me,  
Still questioned me the story of my life  
From year to year: the battles, sieges, fortunes                      I30  
That I have passed.

I ran it through, even from my boyish days  
To th' very moment that he bade me tell it—  
Wherein I spoke of most disastrous chances:  
Of moving accidents by flood and field,                      I35

Of hair-breadth scapes i'th' imminent deadly breach,  
Of being taken by the insolent foe  
And sold to slavery; of my redemption thence,  
And portance in my travailous history,  
Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle,                      I40  
Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch  
   heaven,

I30 battles] Q; Battaile F    fortunes] Q; Fortune F    I34 spoke] F; spake Q    I35 accidents by] F, Q2; accident of Q1    I38 slavery; of] F (slavery. Of), Q2; slauery, and Q1    I39 portance in my travailous] HONIGMANN (*conj.* Proudfoot); portance in my Trauellours F; with it all my trauels Q1; portance in my trauels Q2    I40 antres] THEOBALD; Antars F, Q2; Antrees Q1    I41 and hills] Q; Hills F    heads] Q; head F

**present** A legal term, meaning 'to lay before a court' (*OED* v. 8).

I29–45 **story . . . shoulders** Othello's account of his 'travailous history' seems to draw on John Pory's description of Leo Africanus in the epistle 'To the Reader' which prefaces his translation of Leo's *Geographical Historie of Africa* (1600). See above, pp. 18–19.

I29 **Still** continually

I35 **by . . . field** by sea and land. But in Othello's case 'field' will inevitably suggest 'battlefield'; so perhaps the phrase is really shorthand for 'in sea and land battles'.

I36 **scapes** escapes

**imminent . . . breach** gap (in the wall of a besieged town or castle) which may prove deadly at any moment

I39 **portance** bearing; conduct

**travailous history** Proudfoot's suggestion that F 'Trauellours' resulted from a misreading of 'Travellous' seems plausible, since 'travailous history', with its

quibble on 'travel' and 'travail', is exactly the kind of slightly pompous, *recherché* phrase that Othello favours. Given the exotic nature of Othello's tales, it may be worth recalling the proverb 'A traveller may lie with authority' (Dent T476).

I40 **antres** caverns (apparently Shakespeare's coinage from Latin *antrum* = cave: *OED*). On caves as a conspicuous feature of Leo's African landscape, see Whitney, p. 479; Pory's addendum detailing 'places undescribed by John Leo' includes a section on *Africa Troglodytica*, 'in old times inhabited by the Troglodytae, a people so called because of their dwelling in caves under the ground' (p. 10).

**vast** From Latin *vastus*, whose meanings include 'empty' as well as 'immense'.

**idle** useless (and therefore encouraging the idleness attributed to the nomadic denizens of such places). The original sense of the word was 'empty', which is probably also present here, as Honigmann suggests, though *OED* offers no examples later than 1450.

It was my hint to speak—such was my process—  
 And of the Cannibals that each other eat,  
 The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads  
 Do grow beneath their shoulders. This to hear 145  
 Would Desdemona seriously incline;  
 But still the house affairs would draw her thence,  
 Which ever as she could with haste dispatch  
 She'd come again, and with a greedy ear  
 Devour up my discourse; which I observing 150  
 Took once a pliant hour, and found good means  
 To draw from her a prayer of earnest heart  
 That I would all my pilgrimage dilate,  
 Whereof by parcels she had something heard,  
 But not intently. I did consent, 155  
 And often did beguile her of her tears  
 When I did speak of some distressful stroke  
 That my youth suffered. My story being done,  
 She gave me for my pains a world of sighs:

142 hint] F, Q2; hent Q1 my process] F, Q2; the ~ Q1 143 other] Q; others F 144 Anthropophagi] Q (*Anthropophagie*); *Antropophague* F 145 Do grow] Q; Grew F this] Q1; These things F; these Q2 147 thence] Q; hence F 148 Which] F, Q2; And Q1 154 parcels] F; parcell Q 155 intently] Q; instinctively F 157 distressful] F, Q2; distressed Q1 159 sighs] Q; kisses F

142 **hint** occasion, opportunity; implication (*OED* n. 1a, 2a; earliest example of either use)

**process** story; drift of (my) narrative

143 **Cannibals . . . eat** The description is not redundant, since *Cannibal* (a variant of Carib, originally coined by Columbus) was still a proper name referring to warlike (and supposedly cannibalistic) Caribbean peoples. See App. F(ii) for notes on the sources of Othello's exotic ethnography in ll. 143–5.

144 **Anthropophagi** (literally) man-eaters

145 **This to hear** in order to hear this

146 **seriously** earnestly, keenly

**incline** Probably suggests physical as well as mental *inclination*; Desdemona would lean close to hear him.

151 **pliant hour** opportune moment; but *pliant* may also be a transferred reference to Desdemona's susceptible and yielding disposition at that moment.

153 **my . . . dilate** relate (or enlarge upon) the whole story of my journeying. Othello's life-journey is perhaps imagined

as a 'pilgrimage' because it brought him finally to Christian Venice (and to the 'divine' Desdemona?).

154 **by parcels** piecemeal

155 **intently** with full attention

156 **beguile her of** charm her out of. Othello plays ironically with the same word (with its connotations of fraud and magical deceit) that the angry Duke used at l. 67.

159 **pains** Equivocates between 'my sufferings' and 'my trouble' (in telling the story).

**sighs** Not only does the Q reading seem appropriate to the delicacy of Desdemona's situation and the elliptical 'hint' with which she conveys her feelings (l. 166), it neatly introduces the following four lines, which become amplifications of her sighing protestations. *Kisses*, however, is scarcely a plausible misreading for *sighs*, and its presence in F is, in Ridley's words, 'almost as difficult to account for as it is to accept'. Whether the variants reflect systematic revision by Shakespeare

She swore 'in faith 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange, 160  
 'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful!  
 She wished she had not heard it, yet she wished  
 That heaven had made her such a man; she thanked  
 me,  
 And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,  
 I should but teach him how to tell my story 165  
 And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake.  
 She loved me for the dangers I had passed,  
 And I loved her that she did pity them.  
 This only is the witchcraft I have used.  
 Here comes the lady: let her witness it. 170  
*Enter Desdemona, Iago, and attendants*

160 in faith] F; Ifaith Q 166 hint] F; heate Q 170.1 attendants] F; and the rest Q; after 'pity them' (l. 168) OXFORD; after 'used' HONIGMANN

or a change made (with or without his endorsement) in the theatre, there is no means of knowing. With the exception of Oxford (which suggests that 'Desdemona may be thought of as impulsively affectionate': *TC*, p. 479), almost all editions, regardless of the general preference for F as a copy-text, print *sighs*. It was Pope who first questioned the propriety of F: '[t]he lady had been forward indeed, to give him a world of *kisses* upon the bare recital of his story.' However, as Furness points out, noting the openness with which Cassio kisses Emilia in 2.1, 'kissing in Elizabeth's time was not as significant as it is now'. Moreover, because of their prominence amongst the expressive conventions of Petrarchan love-poetry, sighs could sometimes be as erotically charged as kisses. Olivier, evidently thinking even 'a world of sighs' suggestive enough, delivered 'upon this hint' with an ironic chuckle.

160 **passing** extremely

163 **That . . . man** Usually glossed 'that she had been born a man like that'; but the alternative sense ('that heaven had destined such a man for her') seems more likely in view of her subsequent lines. Again editors are offended by what they see as the inappropriate forwardness suggested by the more obvious sense.

166 **hint** Muir is almost certainly right to insist that 'hint' must have its original

meaning of 'opportunity' or 'occasion' here (as at l. 142), rather than 'covert suggestion' (*OED n.* 2, citing this as the first example), since Desdemona's behaviour (even if we read *sighs* rather than *kisses* at 159) seems to go well beyond hinting. But the modern meaning was certainly available by 1609 and (as Honigmann recognizes) is difficult to exclude, with the result that audiences easily laugh at this line. Q's *heat* has been universally rejected, even by editors like Ridley and Honigmann, who argue for Q as a copy-text. If the Q1's copy read 'hent' (a variant spelling of 'hint') as it presumably did at l. 142, then 'heat' would of course be an easy misreading. But the misreading could be in either direction, and the Q reading is defensible as a genuine alternative: *Upon this heat* = 'at this [display of] ardour or feeling'. In the context of Q's 'sighs' it may be worth noting that lovers' sighs were conventionally hot (*Twelfth Night*, 1.5.245; *Romeo*, 1.1.196; *Cymbeline*, 1.6.67–8, etc.).

169 **This . . . used** Probably echoing, as E. H. W. Meyerstein suggested, the response of a former bondsman in Pliny, who, when accused of acquiring wealth by corrupt means, pointed to his agricultural implements and declared 'these are the sorceries, charms, and all the enchantments that I use' (letter in *TLS*, 1940, p. 72; cited in Bullough, p. 211).

DUKE

I think this tale would win my daughter too—  
 Good Brabantio, take up this mangled matter at the best:  
 Men do their broken weapons rather use,  
 Than their bare hands.

BRABANTIO I pray you hear her speak!

If she confess that she was half the wooer, 175  
 Destruction on my head if my bad blame  
 Light on the man! Come hither, gentle mistress,  
 Do you perceive in all this noble company  
 Where most you owe obedience?

DESDEMONA My noble father,

I do perceive here a divided duty. 180  
 To you I am bound for life and education;  
 My life and education both do learn me  
 How to respect you: you are the lord of duty,  
 I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my husband;  
 And so much duty as my mother showed 185  
 To you, preferring you before her father,  
 So much I challenge that I may profess  
 Due to the Moor my lord.

BRABANTIO Goodbye, I've done!

Please it your grace, on to the state affairs.  
 I had rather to adopt a child than get it. 190

176 on my head] F; lite on me Q 183 the lord of] F, Q2; Lord of all my Q1 188 Goodbye]  
 This edition *after* Q (God bu'y); God be with you F I've] *after* Q (I ha); I haue F

172 **take . . . best** Cf. Dent B326, 'Make the best of a bad bargain'.

177 **gentle mistress** From a father to a daughter this honorific will sound sardonic.

180–8 **duty . . . bound . . . lord** Desdemona, as befits a child of the patriarchal family, conceives of her relationship to both father and husband in the language of service and deference to a master or 'lord'.

181 **education** upbringing

182 **learn** teach (survives in expressions such as 'that'll learn you')

186 **preferring . . . before** elevating you above

187 **challenge** lay claim to, demand as a right

188 **Goodbye** Q's 'God bu'y' (like 'God by

you', 3.3.377) is simply a contracted form of F's 'God be with you', the style of dismissal or farewell which by the early 18th century came to be rendered 'Goodbye'. It appears elsewhere in Shakespeare as 'God be wy you' (*LLL*, 3.1.146), 'God b'uy' (*I Henry VI*, 3.5.32), 'God buy'ye' (*Hamlet*, 2.2.551), the degree of contraction being largely determined by metrical considerations. Here it will have been phonetically almost indistinguishable from the modern form; however, it is possible (given the play's preoccupation with damnation and redemption) that the meaning may be coloured by the false etymology implicit in the Q contraction ('God buy you' = God redeem you).

189 **Please it** if it pleases

190 **get** beget



Come hither, Moor:  
 I here do give thee that with all my heart  
 Which, but thou hast already, with all my heart  
 I would keep from thee. For your sake, jewel,  
 I am glad at soul I have no other child; 195  
 For thy escape would teach me tyranny  
 To hang clogs on them. I have done, my lord.

DUKE

Let me speak like yourself, and lay a sentence,  
 Which as a grece or step may help these lovers  
 Into your favour. 200  
 When remedies are past, the griefs are ended  
 By seeing the worst, which late on hopes depended.  
 To mourn a mischief that is past and gone  
 Is the next way to draw new mischief on.  
 What cannot be preserved when Fortune takes, 205  
 Patience her injury a mockery makes.  
 The robbed that smiles steals something from the thief;  
 He robs himself that spends a bootless grief.

BRABANTIO

So let the Turk of Cyprus us beguile—  
 We lose it not so long as we can smile: 210

193 Which . . . heart] F, Q2; *not in* Q1 197 them] F; *em* Q 200 Into . . . favour] Q; *not in* F  
 204 new] F; *more* Q 205 preserved] Q (*preseru'd*); *presern'd* F

193 **Which . . . heart** Probably omitted from Q as a result of compositorial eye-skip, since both 192 and 193 end in 'heart'.

**but . . . hast** if you did not already possess it

194 **For your sake** thanks to you

197 **hang clogs** shackle them to heavy logs of wood to prevent their escape (as practised with slaves as well as animals)

198 **sentence** maxim, aphorism

199 **grece** stairway, step. This more usual form of the archaic noun better represents its pronunciation than F *grise* (cf. Q *greese*).

200 **Into . . . favour** Q's half-line marks a convenient pause before the Duke launches into the formal advice whose sententious apothegms are pointed up by the use of rhyming couplets.

201 **When . . . ended** Cf. Dent R71, 'Where

there is no remedy it is folly to chide'; C921, 'Past cure, past care'; C922, 'What cannot be cured must be endured'.

202 **By . . . depended** by our actually experiencing the worst eventualities, which were hitherto dependent on the outcome of our hopes

203 **mischief** misfortune

204 **next** most immediate

205–6 **What . . . makes** when chance robs us of what we cannot in any case hope to keep, the exercise of patience will enable us to make light of the blows. The Duke's figure imagines a familiar allegorical contest between Patience and Fortune.

208 **spends** wastes

**bootless** pointless, beyond remedy

210 **lose** The F spelling 'loose' suggests a bawdy quibble from animal husbandry no longer available in modern English (*loose* = release the female to the male; cf. 'loose her to an African', *Tempest*, 2.1.131).

He bears the sentence well that nothing bears  
 But the free comfort which from thence he hears;  
 But he bears both the sentence and the sorrow  
 That, to pay Grief, must of poor Patience borrow.  
 These sentences, to sugar or to gall, 215  
 Being strong on both sides, are equivocal.  
 But words are words: I never yet did hear  
 That the bruised heart was piercèd through the ear.  
 I humbly beseech you proceed to th'affairs of state.  
 DUKE The Turk with a most mighty preparation makes for 220  
 Cyprus. Othello, the fortitude of the place is best known  
 to you; and though we have there a substitute of most  
 allowed sufficiency, yet opinion, a more sovereign mis-  
 tress of effects, throws a more safer voice on you. You  
 must therefore be content to slubber the gloss of your 225  
 new fortunes with this more stubborn and boisterous  
 expedition.

218 piercèd] Q (pierced); pierc'd F; pieced THEOBALD (*after* WARBURTON) ear] Q; eares F 219  
 I . . . state] F; Beseech you now, to the affaires of the state Q 220 a most] F; most Q 223  
 more sovereign] F; soueraigne Q

211–12 **He . . . hears** anyone can respond well to such maxims who doesn't have to put up with anything more than the cheap consolation which is all he can derive from them (with quibbles on *sentence* = moral maxim; judicial punishment; and *free* = generous, lavish; without cost).

214 **That . . . borrow** that to deal with his grief must seek support from no richer resource than patience. Brabantio plays sardonically with the Duke's allegory (ll. 205–6).

215 **gall** bile; poison; bitterness

216 **equivocal** equally appropriate

217 **words are words** Dent W832 (and cf. W833, W840.1).

218 **bruised** crushed, mangled, smashed  
**piercèd** penetrated, touched, affected; lanced, and so cured (Sanders). Some editors prefer Theobald's 'pieced' = mended, restored. Brabantio's figure ironically anticipates Iago's strategy of poison through the ear (see e.g. 2.3.341).

219 **I . . . state** Q (allowing for the normal elision, 'th'affairs') preserves the metre

here. But in F Brabantio seems to initiate the switch to prose continued in the Duke's speech. As Honigmann notes, the abrupt switch from stylized couplets to prose, as the discussion turns from philosophic generalizations to the hard reality of public affairs, is a deliberate stylistic effect; though whether it makes Othello's return to verse rhythms (ll. 228 ff.) 'sound self-indulgent' is open to question.

220 **preparation** Cf. l. 15.

221 **fortitude of the place** strength of the citadel (*OED, place, n. 5c*)

222 **substitute** deputy; i.e. the Governor, (presumably) Montano

223 **allowed sufficiency** approved or recognized competency

**opinion** public opinion

223–4 **a more . . . effects** a more powerful determinant of what happens

224 **more safer** Cf. I.I.96.

225 **slubber** soil; darken

226 **stubborn and boisterous** fierce and rough

227 **expedition** The context suggests 'haste' or 'speed' as well as 'military enterprise'.

## OTHELLO

The tyrant custom, most grave senators,  
 Hath made the flinty and steel couch of war  
 My thrice-driven bed of down. I do agnize 230  
 A natural and prompt alacrity  
 I find in hardness, and do undertake  
 This present wars against the Ottomites.  
 Most humbly therefore bending to your state,  
 I crave fit disposition for my wife, 235  
 Due reference of place and exhibition,  
 With such accommodation and besort  
 As levels with her breeding.

## DUKE

Why, at her father's!

BRABANTIO I'll not have it so.

## OTHELLO

Nor I.

DESDEMONA Nor would I there reside 240  
 To put my father in impatient thoughts

228 grave] F (graue), Q2; great Q1 229 couch] Q (Cooch); Coach F 231 alacrity] Q;  
 Alacartie F 232 do] F, Q2; would Q1 233 This . . . wars] F (This . . . Warres), Q1;  
 This . . . warre Q2; These . . . wars MALONE 236 reference] F, Q2; reuerence Q1 237 With  
 such accommodation] F, Q2; Which ~ Accomodation? Q1 239 Why . . . father's] F (Why at  
 her Fathers?); If you please, bee't at her fathers Q I'll] Q (Ile); I will F 240 Nor would I] F;  
 Nor I, I would not Q

229 **flinty and steel couch** 'The allusion is to sleeping on the ground in armour' (Sanders).

230 **thrice-driven** i.e. the very softest down, from which the heaviest feathers have been separated by three winnowings.

**agnize** acknowledge, confess

231–2 **A . . . hardness** that I find myself naturally eager to undertake hardship

233 **This . . . wars** For the use of *wars* as a singular collective noun, see *OED*, *war*, n.<sup>1</sup> 1c; cf. *Troilus*, 5.3.51, and *All's Well*, 2.3.288.

234 **bending . . . state** deferring to your authority. But since *bend* can also mean 'bow' and *state* 'throne', Othello may bow to the enthroned Duke as he speaks the words.

235 **fit disposition** suitable arrangements

236 **Due . . . place** proper respect for her rank (*OED*, *reference*, n. 3)

236 **exhibition** maintenance, support

237 **accommodation** lodgings (*OED* 7; earliest recorded use here or *Measure*, 3.1.14)

**besort** suitable retinue. The word seems to be a Shakespearian coinage and exists elsewhere only in *Lear*, where it is a verb: 'such men as may besort your age' (*Trag. Lear*, 1.4.229).

238 **As . . . breeding** as befits her station

239–40 **Why . . . reside** The Q version of this passage is metrically complete, which suggests the possibility of corruption in F. On the other hand, the incomplete lines could be used to signal tense pauses after *breeding* and *Nor I*.

240 **Nor . . . reside** In Q Desdemona echoes Othello's defiant refusal of the Duke's suggestion: 'Nor I, I would not there reside . . .'; the F version seems to soften the vehemence of her response.

By being in his eye. Most gracious Duke,  
 To my unfolding lend your prosperous ear,  
 And let me find a charter in your voice  
 T'assist my simpleness—

DUKE What would you, Desdemona? 245

DESDEMONA

That I did love the Moor to live with him,  
 My downright violence and scorn of fortunes  
 May trumpet to the world. My heart's subdued  
 Even to the very quality of my lord:  
 I saw Othello's visage in his mind, 250  
 And to his honours and his valiant parts  
 Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate;  
 So that, dear lords, if I be left behind  
 A moth of peace, and he go to the war,

243 your prosperous] F; a gracious Q 245 T'assist my simpleness—] Q2 (simplenesse.—); ~ ~ simplenesse. F; And if my simplenesse.—Q1 you, Desdemona?] F, Q2; you—speake. Q1 246 did] Q; *not in* F 247 scorn] Q1 (scorne); storme F, Q2 fortunes] F, Q; fortune KEIGHTLEY 249 very quality] F, Q2; vtmost pleasure Q1

243 **unfolding** disclosure, revelation  
**prosperous** favourable

244 **charter** grant of privilege or pardon

245 **simpleness** innocence, naivety

247 **violence** vehemence of personal feeling or action; extreme ardour or fervour (*OED n.* 5). Sanders suggests 'violation of the norm', and Honigmann 'violent rupture with conventional behaviour'.

**scorn of fortunes** disdain for any consequences. Many editors follow Q2 in preferring F's *storm*: the two words could easily be confused, since *c* and *t* were difficult to distinguish in Elizabethan hands (cf. *Troilus*, I.I.37, 'sun doth light a scorn', where Rowe's emendation of QF 'scorn' to 'storm' has been widely accepted); and 'storm of fortune' was a phrase with almost proverbial currency, which the compositor might be encouraged to recall by the juxtaposition with *violence*. But *scorn* makes better sense here, since, while Desdemona has clearly defied Fortune, she can scarcely be said to have suffered its storms yet.

248 **subdued** reduced to obedience, brought into spiritual subjection (*OED v.* 1e, 2a–b)

249 **very quality** true character, nature. The suggestion of sexual desire in Q's

'utmost pleasure' is absent from F, a difference consistent with its slightly softened and more passive presentation of Desdemona in Act I. For a vigorous defence of the F reading's 'rich fusion of submission and self-assertion', see Snow, pp. 407–8. The greater iambic regularity of the Q version suggests a possible actor's substitution (cf. App. B, pp. 430–1).

250 **visage** Often has the sense of 'countenance', i.e. the face as 'expressive of feeling or temperament' (*OED n.* 3); but it can also mean 'assumed appearance . . . a pretence or semblance'. Both senses are probably in play here: Desdemona implies that the blackness of Othello's face is merely a deceptive outward show, and that his true countenance is to be discovered in his mind. Cavell suggests, however, that the line 'more naturally says . . . that she saw his visage as he sees it' (p. 129).

251 **valiant parts** military virtues

253–8 **So . . . voice** Closely based on Giraldi, where, however, it is the Moor who first expresses his reluctance to part from Desdemona (see App. C, p. 437).

254 **moth** Usually glossed 'an idle, useless creature'; but 'moth' normally denotes 'clothes-moth' and its connotations are

The rites for why I love him are bereft me, 255  
 And I a heavy interim shall support  
 By his dear absence. Let me go with him.

OTHELLO

Let her have your voice.  
 Vouch with me, heaven, I therefore beg it not  
 To please the palate of my appetite, 260  
 Nor to comply with heat the young affects

255 rites] F, Q; rights WARBURTON why] F; which Q 258–9 Let . . . heaven] F; Your voyces  
 Lords: beseech you let her will, | Haue a free way Q1; Your voyces Lords: beseech you let her  
 will | Haue a free way: | Vouch with me heauen Q2 260 my] F, Q; me CAPELL (*conj.* Upton)

more destructive; cf. ‘moth to honour’  
 (*Revenge’s Tragedy*, I.4.31).

255 **rites** Since ‘rites’ and ‘rights’ were  
 interchangeable spellings as well as  
 homonyms, it is difficult to be completely  
 certain which is meant here; and though  
 Warburton’s emendation to ‘rights’ provoked  
 Styan Thirlby to exclaim ‘Why, thou  
 goose’, an audience will probably hear  
 both meanings. *Rites* picks up the  
 sacramental suggestion of *consecrate* (l.  
 252); but ‘rites of love’ is also a stock  
 term for both sexual fulfilment and the  
 affectionate indulgences of friendship (cf.  
*Romeo*, 3.2.8; *Henry VI*, I.3.92; *Richard  
 III*, 5.5.54 [‘rights of love’, Oxford]; *Much  
 Ado*, 2.1.335; *All’s Well*, 2.4.41). ‘Rights’  
 in the sense of the ‘privileges (due to a  
 wife)’ is arguably less probable in the  
 mouth of a woman who boasts of her  
 ‘downright violence’, though it is perhaps  
 better fitted to F’s slightly more decorous  
 treatment of Desdemona’s character.

256 **heavy** weary; full of grief  
**support** ‘endure (with a quibble on prop-  
 ping up something heavy)’ (Honigmann).

257 **dear absence** (a) the absence of him  
 who is so dear to me; (b) his costly, grievous  
 absence

258–9 **Let . . . heaven** The omission of any  
 reference to Desdemona’s *will* (whose  
 meanings include ‘sexual desire’) leaves  
 only Othello’s *appetite* at issue; this is  
 consistent with F’s generally more conser-  
 vative treatment of her character. The  
 metrically incomplete l. 258 suggests  
 some tampering with the text, which, in  
 light of the slightly awkward repetition of  
*Let* from l. 257, may not be authorial (see  
 App. B, pp. 431–2).

258 **voice** approval

259 **Vouch with me** bear witness

259–63 **I therefore . . . mind** The general  
 sense of what Othello is saying is clear  
 enough: he is not asking that Desdemona  
 be allowed to accompany him simply to  
 gratify his appetite or because he is driven  
 by his desires in a way that would be inap-  
 propriate to a man of his age, but because  
 he responds generously to her mental  
 qualities. However, the detail of his  
 speech is harder to explicate, and editors  
 generally suspect corruption in ll. 261–2.  
 Numerous attempts have been made to  
 emend the passage, the debate running to  
 nearly four pages in Furness: the most  
 widely accepted solution is Upton’s, sub-  
 stituting ‘me’ for ‘my’ and assuming a  
 parenthetical construction: ‘nor to indulge  
 the heat of desire—my youthful passions  
 being now dead—and the allowable [or  
 “personal”] physical satisfactions (of  
 marriage)’; but this is syntactically awk-  
 ward, and a well-favoured alternative is to  
 treat ‘defunct’ as a misreading, usually  
 (as Theobald proposed) for ‘distinct’ (=  
 individual). If, however, *defunct* is under-  
 stood as a Latinism, no emendation is  
 necessary.

259 **I . . . not** I don’t beg it in order to

261 **comply with** Several alternatives are  
 possible: (a) ‘fill with’ (*OED*, *comply*, v.<sup>1</sup>  
 from Latin *complere* = fill up); (b) ‘enfold  
 in’ (*OED*, *comply*, v.<sup>2</sup> from Latin *complicare*  
 = enfold, embrace); (c) ‘urge on with’ (cf.  
*OED*, *apply*, v. 17; *ply*, v.<sup>2</sup> 4b).

**heat** erotic excitement, appetite

261–2 **young . . . satisfaction** the youthful  
 passions [expressed] in the natural  
 performance and satisfaction of marital  
 desires





My Desdemona must I leave to thee:  
 I prithee let thy wife attend on her,  
 And bring them after in the best advantage. 295  
 Come Desdemona, I have but an hour  
 Of love, of worldly matter and direction  
 To spend with thee. We must obey the time.

*Exeunt Othello and Desdemona, [attended by Cassio]*

RODERIGO

Iago.

IAGO What sayst thou, noble heart?

RODERIGO

What will I do, think'st thou?

IAGO Why, go to bed and sleep. 300

RODERIGO

I will incontinently drown myself.

IAGO If thou dost, I shall never love thee after. Why, thou silly gentleman?

RODERIGO It is silliness to live, when to live is torment; and then have we a prescription to die, when death is our physician. 305

IAGO O villainous! I have looked upon the world for four times seven years, and, since I could distinguish betwixt a

295 them] F; her Q 297 worldly] Q; wordly F matter] F; matters Q 298 the] Q; the the F 298.I *Exeunt . . . Cassio*] This edition; *Exit Moore and Desdemona. (after 'Iago', l. 299) Q; Exit. F 302 If] F; Well, if Q after] F; after it Q 302-3 Why . . . gentleman?] F (Why thou silly Gentleman?); Why, thou silly Gentleman. Q1; Why thou silly Gentleman. Q2; Why, thou silly gentleman! ROWE 304 torment] F; a torment Q 305 have we] F; we haue Q 307 O villainous] F, Q2; *not in* Q1 have] F; ha Q 308 betwixt] F; betweene Q*

295 **in . . . advantage** at the most convenient juncture

297 **direction** instructions

298 **obey the time** comply with present necessity (Dent T340.2)

298.I **attended . . . Cassio** If Cassio's entry with Othello at 48.I is not a 'ghost' direction, then he should exit either with the Duke (as Sanders, following Capell, assumes) or with Othello and Desdemona; as the Duke has said farewell to Othello's party, it seems more likely that Cassio would accompany his commander.

299-301 **Iago . . . myself** It is not clear from either F or Q whether these lines are meant to be in verse. Editors generally print them as prose, but if l. 300 is treated as a hexameter, they conform to the

metre, and a dramatic point can be made by Iago's shifting to prose in his burst of sardonic irritation beginning at l. 302.

297 **thou** Iago's shift to the singular pronoun marks a subtle alteration in his relationship with Roderigo (cf. I.I.2, 118).

301 **incontinently** immediately

303 **silly** A number of meanings are probably in play: (a) deserving of pity; (b) weak, feeble; (c) ignorant, foolish, simple-minded.

304 **silliness** First example cited in *OED*.

305 **prescription** (a) ancient right; (b) doctor's order

307 **O villainous!** what a shameful, detestable idea

307-8 **I . . . years** Iago is significantly younger than Othello; though, given the much shorter life expectancy of



benefit and an injury, I never found man that knew how  
to love himself. Ere I would say I would drown myself for 310  
the love of a guinea-hen, I would change my humanity  
with a baboon.

RODERIGO What should I do? I confess it is my shame to be  
so fond; but it is not in my virtue to amend it.

IAGO Virtue? A fig! 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus, or 315  
thus. Our bodies are our gardens to the which our wills  
are gardeners; so that if we will plant nettles or sow  
lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one  
gender of herbs or distract it with many—either to have it  
sterile with idleness or manured with industry—why, the 320  
power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills.  
If the beam of our lives had not one scale of reason to  
poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of  
our natures would conduct us to most preposterous  
conclusions; but we have reason to cool our raging 325

309 man] F; a man Q 316 are our] F; are Q 322 beam] THEOBALD; braine F; ballance Q

Jacobeans, he is hardly in the prime of youth; hence his condescending attitude towards the 'young quat' Roderigo (5.1.11).

311 **guinea-hen** (female) turkey or guinea-fowl; (in slang) a prostitute (*OED* 2b, citing this as the earliest example). In context, the connection with Guinea (West Africa) seems significant, especially when linked with 'baboon'.

312 **baboon** Sometimes used (like *ape*) as a synonym for fool or buffoon. Honigmann, citing *Kinsmen*, 3.5.134 ('the babion with long tail and eke long tool'), notes that baboons were thought to be especially lecherous.

314 **fond** foolish; besotted

315 **virtue** power, strength of character  
**fig** On the sexual significance of *figs* see Williams, *Dictionary*, pp. 480–1; Florio glosses *fica* ('fig'): 'Also used for a woman's quaint, and women in Italy use it as an oath to swear by.' The oath was usually accompanied by an obscene gesture (sometimes known as the 'Spanish fig') in which the thumb was thrust between the fingers of a clenched fist, or into the mouth.

316 **bodies . . . gardens** As Honigmann notes, this is a theological commonplace, appropriate to a speech that is constructed as a kind of mock-sermon. On Iago's fetishization of individual will as a characteristic of corrupt Italianate inwardness, see Floyd-Wilson, pp. 143–4, 151–2.

317–18 **nettles . . . thyme** These plants were complementary opposites, nettles and hyssop being 'dry', and lettuce and thyme 'wet'; for this reason they were thought, when planted together, to aid one another's growth.

318 **set** plant

319 **gender** kind  
**distract it with** divide it between

321 **corrigible . . . this** power to correct this

322 **beam** bar from which the two scales are suspended, or (by extension) the instrument itself. In the light of Q's *balance*, Theobald's suggestion that F's 'braine' resulted from a misreading of 'beame' is entirely plausible.

**poise** counterbalance

323 **blood** passion

324 **preposterous** See l. 63.

325 **conclusions** results

motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts—whereof  
I take this that you call ‘love’ to be a sect or scion.

RODERIGO It cannot be.

IAGO It is merely a lust of the blood and a permission of the  
will. Come, be a man! Drown thyself? Drown cats and 330  
blind puppies! I have professed me thy friend, and I  
confess me knit to thy deserving with cables of perdurable  
toughness. I could never better stead thee than now. Put  
money in thy purse; follow thou the wars; defeat thy  
favour with an usurped beard. I say, put money in thy 335  
purse. It cannot be long that Desdemona should continue  
her love to the Moor—put money in thy purse—nor he  
his to her. It was a violent commencement in her, and  
thou shalt see an answerable sequestration—put but  
money in thy purse. These Moors are changeable in their 340

326 our unbitted] Q; or vnitted F 329 permission] F, Q; perversion KELLNER *conj.*  
331 have professed] F; professe Q 333 than] F (then), Q (then) 334 thou the] F; these Q  
336 It . . . continue] F; It cannot be, that *Desdemona* should long continue Q 337 to] F; vnto  
Q 338 his] F, Q2; *not in Q1* in her] F; *not in Q*

326 **motions** emotions, impulses

**unbitted** unbridled. The horse was a  
stock emblem of desire.

327 **sect or scion** cutting (Latin *sectum*) or  
slip (for grafting)

329–30 **permission of the will** Something  
licensed by either (a) the rational will of  
which Iago has just been speaking (ll.  
316–27) or (b) sexual desire. An unusual  
phrase whose unsatisfactoriness is per-  
haps indicated by Honigmann’s slightly  
desperate conjecture: ‘perhaps allud-  
ing to God’s “permissive will”, which  
tolerates the existence of evil (see *Paradise  
Lost*, 3.685)’. Given the easy misreading  
of *m* for *u/v*, it is tempting to accede to  
Kellner’s ‘perversion’.

330 **be a man** This injunction, with its  
implicit challenge to the masculinity of  
Iago’s victim, illustrates what will emerge  
as one of his most characteristic tools of  
manipulation; see 3.3.376, 4.1.57, 61,  
73, 85; and cf. his drinking song, 2.3.65.

332 **knit . . . deserving** committed to  
achieving what you deserve

**perdurable** indestructible

333 **stead** help

333–4 **Put . . . purse** sell everything you  
can to raise cash. The story of the feckless  
heir who mortgages his estates to pursue

his amours is a standard theme of 17th-  
century satire.

334–5 **defeat . . . beard** spoil your looks  
with a false beard (or perhaps, by growing  
a beard which would suit a soldier, but  
not a refined young gentleman like  
yourself)

339 **answerable sequestration** corre-  
spondingly violent separation. There may  
be a quibble on *commencement* = taking a  
degree (in divinity) and *sequestration* =  
excommunication.

340–1 **These Moors . . . wills** Iago’s use of  
the demonstrative *these* implies that he  
possesses a comprehensive knowledge of  
African *mores*; but, whilst his claims  
could be supported by reference to the  
writings of travellers such as Leo  
Africanus, the stereotype of the irrational  
and sexually insatiable black man was  
by no means so well established in  
Shakespeare’s time as it would become  
in the 19th century. Indeed, Galenic  
humoral theory maintained that the cool,  
dry constitution of southern peoples, and  
the predominance of black bile in their  
temperament, inclined them to con-  
stancy; see, for example, Bodin, p. 124;  
and cf. Floyd-Wilson, chap. 6. See also  
below, 3.4.28–9, and App. F(iv).

wills: fill thy purse with money. The food that to him now  
 is as luscious as locusts shall be to him shortly as acerb as  
 coloquintida. She must change for youth: when she is  
 sated with his body she will find the errors of her choice.  
 She must have change, she must. Therefore, put money 345  
 in thy purse. If thou wilt needs damn thyself, do it a more  
 delicate way than drowning: make all the money thou  
 canst. If sanctimony and a frail vow betwixt an erring  
 barbarian and a super-subtle Venetian be not too hard for  
 my wits and all the tribe of hell, thou shalt enjoy her— 350  
 therefore make money. A pox of drowning thyself! It is  
 clean out of the way. Seek thou rather to be hanged in

342 acerb] Q1; bitter F, Q2 as] F, Q2; as the Q1 343 She . . . youth] F, Q2; not in Q1 344  
 errors] F; error Q 345 She . . . must] Q; not in F 349 a super-subtle] Q (a super subtle);  
 super-subtle F 350 of ] F; a Q 351 thyself] F; not in Q It is] F; tis Q

341 **wills** Iago again equivocates on the meanings of 'rational intention' and 'sexual desire'.

342 **luscious as locusts** Cf. the description of John the Baptist's desert sojourn in Matthew 3: 4: 'his meat was also locusts and wild honey'. Ridley cites Gerard's *Herball* (1597): 'The carob groweth in Apulia and other countries eastward, where the cods are so full of sweet juice that it is used to preserve ginger. . . . Moreover both young and old feed thereon with pleasure. This is of some called St. John's bread, and thought to be that which is translated *locusts*.' Cf. also Revelation 10: 10: 'It was then in my mouth as sweet as honey: but when I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.'

**acerb** bitter. Despite Q2's preference for F *bitter*, Q *acerb* is clearly preferable. Not only is it a characteristically Shakespearian coinage, but one that derives directly from the play's Italian source where the Moor's love for Desdemona is transformed to '*acerbissimo odio* [bitterest hate]' (Honigmann, p. 374). It is not easy to see why the dramatist would have substituted the more commonplace word; unless, perhaps, he had come to think of *acerb* as too exotic for the generally plain-spoken, 'honest' Iago. Thus the F reading probably indicates some editorial sophistication of Shakespeare's text, or even an unconscious substitution (perhaps prompted by the echo

of Revelation in the phrasing of the sentence: see above) on the part of a scribe or compositor who found the original difficult.

343 **coloquintida** colocynth, bitter apple. Native to the southern Mediterranean and Sinai regions and valued for its purgative properties (Gerard's *Herball*, 1597).

**for youth** for someone younger

347 **delicate** pleasant

348 **sanctimony** holiness of life, perhaps with a suggestion of hypocrisy (*OED* I, 3).

**erring** (a) wandering; (b) sinning. Cf. I. I. I.36, I. 2. 26, I. 3. 63, 341.

349 **barbarian** (a) foreigner; savage; (b) inhabitant of Barbary, a 'Barbary Moor' or Berber. Cf. Leo Africanus: 'The tawny people of the said region were called by the name of *Barbar*, being derived of the verb *Barbara*, which in their tongue signifieth to murmur: because the African tongue soundeth in the ears of the Arabian, no otherwise than the voice of beasts, which utter their sounds without any accents. Others will have *Barbar* to be one word twice repeated, forso much as *Bar* in the Arabian tongue signifieth a desert' (I. 5–6).

**subtle** (a) delicate, refined; (b) cunning.

350 **and . . . hell** Perhaps an aside (Honigmann).

352 **clean . . . way** completely out of the question

- compassing thy joy than to be drowned, and go without her.
- RODERIGO Wilt thou be fast to my hopes, if I depend on the issue? 355
- IAGO Thou art sure of me—go, make money!—I have told thee often, and I re-tell thee again and again, I hate the Moor. My cause is hearted; thine hath no less reason: let us be conjunctive in our revenge against him. If thou canst cuckold him, thou dost thyself a pleasure, me a sport. There are many events in the womb of Time which will be delivered. Traverse! Go! Provide thy money! We will have more of this tomorrow. Adieu. 360 365
- RODERIGO  
Where shall we meet i'th' morning?
- IAGO At my lodging.
- RODERIGO  
I'll be with thee betimes.
- IAGO Go to, farewell.

355–6 if . . . issue] F, Q2; *not in* Q1 358 re-tell] F; tell Q 359 hath] F; has Q 360 conjunctive] F (conjunction), Q2; communicative Q1 362 me] F, Q2; and me Q1

- 353 **compassing** (a) achieving; possessing; (b) embracing
- 355 **be fast to** support steadfastly
- 359 **hearted** fixed in the heart
- 360 **conjunctive** united, mutually supportive
- 362–3 **events . . . delivered** Iago plays with the proverb ‘Truth is child (or daughter) of time’ (Tilley T580).
- 363 **Traverse** A military command (cf. 2 *Henry IV*, 3.2.268; *Merry Wives*, 2.3.23) whose exact significance has been debated by editors; it seems, however, to involve a dodging movement from side to side (*OED* v. 5, 15).
- 367 **betimes** early
- 367–71 **Go . . . your purse** Neither Q nor F seems entirely satisfactory here. F’s omission of Iago’s teasing references to Roderigo’s threats of drowning leaves ‘Do you hear?’ (l. 368) a little unmotivated, so that some scribal or compositorial error

- seems a more likely explanation than revision—though that cannot be excluded. Alternatively, since the passage occurs near the bottom of the page in F, poor casting off may be to blame (Honigmann, *Texts*, p. 47). The omission of l. 371 might result from eye-skip caused by the repetition of *purse* in l. 372, if that repetition did not in any case make 371 sit rather awkwardly in Q, where it may have been meant for cancellation; at the same time, the opening of Iago’s soliloquy in Q seems less than adequately prepared for, at least in the absence of some reassurance like ‘I’ll sell all my land’. Honigmann conjectures that the Q compositor, having reached the end of his page and run out of text, may even have interpolated padding of his own to fill up the space (*Texts*, p. 47).
- 367 **Go to** Exclamation of humorous impatience.



After some time to abuse Othello's ears  
 That he is too familiar with his wife; 385  
 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 th' nose 390  
 As asses are.  
 I have't! It is engendered: Hell and Night  
 Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.

*Exit*

**2.1** *Enter Montano, Governor of Cyprus, with two  
 other Gentlemen*

MONTANO

What from the cape can you discern at sea?

FIRST GENTLEMAN

Nothing at all: it is a high-wrought flood;  
 I cannot 'twixt the heaven and the main

384 ears] F; eare Q 386 hath] F; has Q 388 The . . . nature] F, Q2; The Moore a free and open nature too Q1 389 seem] F (seeme); seemes Q 393.1 *Exit*] Q; F omits

**2.1**] F (*Actus Secundus. Scena Prima.*), Q (*Actus 2. Scena 1.*) 0.1–2 *Enter . . . gentlemen*] Q (Montanio); *Enter Montano, and two Gentlemen.* F 3 heaven] F, Q2; hauen Q1

385–6 **he** i.e. Cassio

386 **person** 'body with its clothing and adornment as presented to the sight of others' (*OED n.* 4a (b)).

**dispose** external manner

388 **free** generous, frank, spontaneous

390–1 **And . . . are** Q prints this as one line but with three dashes after *nose*, suggesting that F's lineation is meant to signal a similar pause before Iago completes his simile.

390 **tenderly** gently, easily

**led . . . nose** Proverbial (Dent N233, and cf. Tilley T221).

392–3 **engendered . . . birth** Iago gives a diabolical twist to the proverb he alluded to at ll. 362–3. Cf. also the related 'Time brings the truth to light' (Dent T324).

**2.1.0.1 Enter . . . Gentlemen** Q's stage direction gives the clearest indication of Montano's rank in the play, and this will affect the way this (and subsequent scenes involving this character) are to be played. However, because neither Cassio nor Othello appears to treat him as though he

were the outgoing Governor, Sanders (p. 197) speculates that 'first and second authorial thoughts' may have been involved. Honigmann (*Texts*, p. 37) also takes the direction as evidence of authorial first intentions; but, as McMillin points out, it is just as likely to have a theatrical origin, related to the requirements for Montano's costuming (Q, p. 13).

**2 high-wrought** furiously agitated (earliest citation in *OED*). Like the Turkish threat to Cyprus, the storm, with all its symbolic suggestiveness, involves a significant alteration to Giraldis's story, in which the Moor and Disdemona cross to Cyprus 'with a sea of utmost tranquillity'.  
**flood** sea

**3 heaven . . . main** i.e. the Gentleman vainly scans the sea for sails outlined against the sky. Honigmann (following Malone) prefers Q's *haven*; but in Shakespeare's time the two words (often linked by associative word-play) were easily confused by both spelling and pronunciation.

# Performance

*Henry Sayre*

**I**N ORDINARY usage, a *performance* is a specific action or set of actions—dramatic, musical, athletic, and so on—which occurs on a given occasion, in a particular place. An artistic performance—as opposed, for instance, to an athlete’s performance or a student’s performance on an examination—is further defined by its status as the single occurrence of a repeatable and preexistent text or score. Thus there is *Hamlet*, and there are its many performances; the play itself, and its interpretations. Such a “commonsense” definition of performance contains within it one particularly important assumption, namely, that the work itself is not only distinct from its actual or possible realizations but in fact *transcends* them. That is, it anticipates, even *authorizes*, its many occurrences and somehow *contains* their variety.

Traditionally, then, the work of art itself possesses an a priori status in relation to its manifestations, and performance is itself an event of the second rank. It would be fair to say that in actual performance the audience expects to experience a range of possible imperfections, misreadings, or outright mistakes that in a hypothetical “perfect” performance would never occur. Each member of the audience, in other words, possesses some idea of what the “master” work ought to sound or look like, and each performance is measured against this theoretical standard. The analogy to performance in sports is useful in this regard. Each member of the audience judges a particular performance against his or her ideal of how the “master” work should be performed in a manner comparable to a gymnastics, skating, or diving judge measuring the performance of a given athlete against the standard of perfection represented by the score of 10.00.

The assumption, of course, is that the audience is in a position to make such judgments, that it somehow knows or understands what the “master” work is in its ideal realization, as distinct from its individual performances. There are two opposing ways an audience might “know” what it expects of a given performance. The *subjective* view is essentially a version of the famous phrase, “I don’t know much about art, but I know what I like.” Such a model can reach degrees of considerable sophistication, as it did, for instance, in Richard Wagner’s fa-

mous interpretation of the opening of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, an interpretation powerfully poetic in its own right but having little or nothing to do with what might be anticipated from a reading of Beethoven's score. As a conductor, Wagner impressed upon the Beethoven symphony his own wildly romantic sensibility. An *objective* point of view, on the other hand, would want to determine Beethoven's intentions and would reject Wagner's interpretation because, among other things, it holds the metronomic determinations of the score in complete disregard. A more objective interpreter of the Beethoven symphony—say, Toscanini—would thus maintain a more consistent tempo and a more even dynamic range than would Wagner, and he would imagine his rendition to be very close to the way Beethoven himself would have conducted the work.

There seems to be some justification for the objective point of view, at least insofar as Beethoven is concerned. In 1816, when Karl Czerny made indiscriminate use of the pedal, transposed certain sections from the first and second octaves above middle C to the third and fourth, and made other additions and emendations to a Beethoven chamber work, Beethoven, who was present at the performance, exploded in outrage. He quickly apologized in a letter to Czerny: "I burst out with that remark yesterday and I was very sorry after I had done so. But you must forgive a composer who would rather have heard a work performed exactly as written, however beautifully you played it in other respects." This dialectic between the *intentions* of the composer or author of a work and the *interpretations* to which it is submitted by its performers has traditionally been the critical crux around which the idea of performance has turned in literary, as well as musicological and art historical, studies. It is important to note that Beethoven does not himself state his intentions. Rather, he insists that his intentions are manifest in the score—he wants Czerny to play the piece as it is written.

In this model, then, a good performance will result from careful attention and scrupulous fidelity to the score or text. It presupposes that the artist's intentions are embodied in the work itself. The effort to determine the intentions of a work, in fact, accounts for a great deal of traditional literary history and criticism. The aim of *Endeavors of Art*, Madeleine Doran's classic study of Elizabethan drama, for example, is "to define and examine the problems of form that Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists had to face and try to solve." Her book, Doran says more precisely, is an effort "to reconstruct imaginatively some part of the context of artistic ideas, attitudes, tastes, and interests in which they worked, and to define their problems in light of these" (Doran 1963, 23). Literary history, in other words, is naturally disposed toward the objective interpretation of the work. It seeks to understand the work's intentions and provide the means for its performance with these intentions in mind.

In the work of the major modern avant-garde art movements, particularly in the public "manifestations" of the futurists in the 1910s and in the dada cabaret



in the 1920s, the idea of performance began to assume a different set of connotations, culminating in the rise, since the mid-1960s, of an interdisciplinary, often multimedia kind of production which has come to be labeled “performance art.” Some of the ways in which this new kind of performance can be distinguished from more traditional usages are directly addressed in a performance work from the early seventies by Vito Acconci called *Learning Piece*:

Playing, on tape, the first two phrases of a song (Leadbelly’s “Black Betty”). Repeating the two phrases and singing along with them, until I have learned them and gotten the feel of the original performance.

Playing the next two phrases; repeating four phrases until I have learned them. Continuing by adding, each time, two more phrases until the entire song is learned. (Meyer 1972, 6)

At first glance, *Learning Piece* seems an almost sublimely silly exercise, a tedious rehearsal and rendition of a far superior original work by a conspicuously untalented and amateur imitator. But it immediately raises a question about what the “actual” work of art is here, Leadbelly’s “Black Betty” or Acconci’s *Learning Piece*? In fact, the work seems to be defined in terms of the active relation between the two, as our attention is divided between the song as an art object in its own right and Acconci’s remaking of it. In the overt amateurishness of Acconci’s efforts, interest in the work as product, as a “finished” whole, is de-emphasized. It is the *process* of learning upon which we are forced to focus our attention. This new work, *Learning Piece*, is the direct result of Acconci’s engagement with a preexistent work, the Leadbelly song. But Acconci’s performance is not merely a traditional performance, occurrence, or interpretation of the prior work: a transformation of the original has taken place. The private, repetitive exercise of rehearsal has become the work of art itself.

“What I was doing,” Acconci told an interviewer in 1979, “was making blatant what it seemed like any artwork does—private person doing work, putting it into a public space” (White 1979, 20). Furthermore, the action, he has said, “was done not as a private activity . . . but as an exemplar, a model” (Kirshner 1980, 10) for the potential activity of the audience. *Learning Piece*, in more precise terms, is a model for our relation to all art. Its difference from traditional performance is comparable to the distinction made by Roland Barthes in *S/Z*, his essay on Balzac’s story “Sarrasine,” between “readerly” and “writerly” texts. *Readerly* texts, according to Barthes, “are products (and not productions)” (Barthes 1974, 5). They represent “a kind of idleness” in which the reader becomes “intransitive,” a passive receiver. The goal of the *writerly* text, on the other hand, “is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text” (Barthes 1974, 4).

Performance, then, has come to refer to a kind of work from which the au-

thority of the text has been wrested. The concept of the “original,” the self-contained and transcendent masterwork, containing certain discernible intentions, has been undermined, and a plurality of possible performative gestures has supplanted it. As a result, performance art often seems to be extraliterary or even antiliterary in nature. It seems to exist, that is, in domains other than the textual, or at best the texts that it produces seem incidental to a larger, more interdisciplinary kind of work. Acconci, for instance, began working in the late 1960s as a poet. He considered the page to be “a field of action,” a phrase he borrowed from the poet William Carlos Williams. He soon realized, however, that “if I was using the page as a field for movement, there was no reason to limit that movement, there was no reason not to use a larger field (rather than move my hand over a page, I might as well be moving my body outside)” (Kirshner 1980, 6). Walls, galleries, public spaces soon began to function as pages for a form of “writing” that included not only the transcription of language but also the physical gestures of voice and body in space.

A good way to think of performance is to realize that in it the potentially disruptive forces of the “outside” (what is “outside” the text—the physical space in which it is presented, the other media it might engage or find itself among, the various frames of mind the diverse members of a given audience might bring to it, and, over time, the changing forces of history itself) are encouraged to assert themselves. This is different from traditional performance, in which, for instance, an unruly audience might completely wreck one’s enjoyment of a symphony or in which, more subtly, bad acting might ruin *Hamlet*. It is, instead, upon the dynamics of such intrusions that performance has come to focus its attention.

This interest in an art which draws attention less to itself than to what is “outside” it can be traced to dada, and particularly to Marcel Duchamp’s notorious 1917 “sculpture” entitled *Fountain*. Walking down the street one day, Duchamp spied, in the window of a plumbing fixture shop, a porcelain urinal. He purchased it, signed it “R. Mutt, 1917” and submitted it to the Independents Exhibition where, despite the “open” nature of the show, which technically allowed everyone to submit whatever they pleased, it was promptly refused. When rumors began to circulate that “R. Mutt” was actually Marcel Duchamp, it was circumspectly readmitted to the exhibition. Duchamp’s point was simple and devastating: many things determined the relative artfulness (or artlessness) of *Fountain*, but few of them had much to do with anything inherent in the piece of porcelain itself, with its own formal properties. What made it a work of art rather than a urinal? Was it the fact that Duchamp selected it, recognized its aesthetic potential? Or was it that until Duchamp’s name was attached to it, as long as it remained the work of R. Mutt, it remained a urinal as well? Or was it that in the context of the exhibition, the museum, it suddenly appropriated the aura of art, demanded that we approach it in a different light? One’s judgment



“outside” literature proper. And though one is tempted to call it music, as its structural terminology suggests, it exists outside the framework of traditional music as well. It is—and remains—noise, as Duchamp’s *Fountain* remains a urinal, but it is transformed in performance into poetry.

This transformative potential of performance is one of its chief attributes and one of the primary reasons that so many contemporary artists and writers are intrigued by the dynamics of performance proper. One of the most interesting demonstrations of this potential is a short piece of “music” composed by John Cage and first performed by his colleague, the pianist David Tudor, in Woodstock, New York, in 1951. Called *4'33"*, the work consisted of Tudor sitting himself at a piano in front of an audience and raising and lowering the keyboard cover three times over the course of four minutes and thirty-three seconds in order to indicate the three separate “movements” of the work. Otherwise he remained motionless throughout, and he did not play a single note of music proper. The work, as it turned out, consisted completely of what was “outside” it—at Woodstock, the sound of the wind in the trees, raindrops on the roof, and, finally, the irritated and baffled musings of the audience itself. Our attention is drawn to such “noise” as music, not because it is inherently musical but because the performance situation transforms our attention, requires us to address it as music.

This eruption of the outside into the work, and the transformative potential such an intrusion possesses, becomes particularly interesting in light of the theatrical aspects of performance art. Performance artists distinguish themselves from actors and actresses, for instance, because the latter “pretend” to be someone else in a time different from the real time of the event. Sir Laurence Olivier, for instance, “becomes” Hamlet. But in a performance—as opposed to a production of *Hamlet*—performers maintain their own identities. In the words of Julian Beck, speaking of *Paradise Now*, a work by the late-1960s experimental group the Living Theater, the desire is “to make a play which would no longer be an enactment but the act itself[,] . . . an event in which we [the actors] would always be experiencing it [the play] not anew at all but something else each time” (Schechner 1969, 25). Ruth Maleczech, of Mabou Mines, another experimental performance group, puts it this way:

It wasn’t interesting to play parts in other people’s plays anymore. Also, it probably wasn’t interesting for directors to do new interpretations of often-done plays either. Something else had to happen. . . . It’s not just due to performance art, but to [writer/director Jerzy] Grotowski’s idea that it was no longer necessary for the actor to realize the author’s intention when he wrote the part. Once that became clear, then a piece becomes the story of the lives of the performers. So the context is changing and within that

changing context, you see the life of the performer. We're not really working with any material except ourselves. (Howell 1976, 11)

In this sense, *if* a performance group were to perform *Hamlet*, it would be as an arena in which to discover themselves, and in fact several groups which exist on the borderline between theater proper and performance art have tried just this, notably Charles Ludlum's Theater of the Ridiculous in *Stage Blood* (1974), a play about a family of actors performing *Hamlet* in a small town. Ludlum, who plays the actor playing Hamlet in the Theater of the Ridiculous production, has explained his play this way: "My father in the play has recently died, and my mother, who plays Gertrude, is marrying the guy who plays Claudius, and so on. After a certain point, it's hard to tell which scenes are from *Hamlet* and which aren't. The actors keep quoting from the play, so it's sort of open-ended" (Tomkins 1976, 92). By the time one arrives at the famous "play-within-a-play" scene, the levels of distinction between theater and reality, already at issue in *Hamlet* itself, are so thoroughly confused that it is hard to tell which scenes are from *Stage Blood*—let alone *Hamlet*—and which are, instead, "actual" involvements among the members of the cast of the Theater of the Ridiculous. Such framed actions allow Ludlum to ask questions about the world *outside* the frame, because, metaphorically at least, they incorporate that world into the world of the stage—they *admit*, that is, its possibility. *Hamlet* is no longer some inviolable masterwork but, instead, a vehicle for investigating the lives of its performers.

It is of course important to understand that in the late 1960s and early 1970s this new idea of performance, this opening up of the work to forces outside it, occurred within a broader politicization of art as a whole, tied to developments such as the Vietnam War, Watergate, and the burgeoning feminist movement. This politicization manifested itself in direct opposition to the predominantly formalist inclinations of criticism at the time. The strongest statement of a formalist position had occurred in art criticism, with Clement Greenberg's insistence that each medium must discover the properties unique to itself and develop those properties to the exclusion of any others it might share with other media. This had led to a kind of painting devoid of referentiality—that is, a painting which deliberately eschewed "literary" elements—offering instead a purely formal or nonobjective kind of art. In his book *The Performing Self*, Richard Poirier discovered the same sorts of tendencies at work in the fiction of such writers as Jorge Luis Borges, John Barth, and Iris Murdoch, all of whom shared, he felt, the "debilitating assumption" that "it is interesting, in and of itself, to make the formal properties of fiction [or poetry] into the subject matter of fiction [or poetry]." For them, literature "creates a reality of its own," and it must

avoid, at all costs, “a confusion of realms”—that is, it must not confuse its own workings with “life, reality, and history” (Poirier 1971, 31, 28, 29). But there is, Poirier argues—and he is writing in 1971—a distinct confusion of realms:

Where does Nixon’s fictional self-creation end and the historical figure begin? Can such a distinction be made about a man who watches the movie Patton for the third or fourth time and then orders an invasion of Cambodia meant to destroy the Vietcong Pentagon, which he told us was there, but which has never been found?

No wonder anyone who cares about politics now finds the claims made for literature by most critics ridiculously presumptuous. Why should literature be considered the primary source of fictions, when fictions are produced at every press conference; why should novelists or dramatists be called “creative” when we have Rusk and McNamara and Kissinger, the mothers of invention, “reporting” on the war in Vietnam? (Poirier 1971, 30)

For Poirier, performance always exceeds the formal and structural emphases of critical theory. Because performance is above all historical—that is, inevitably caught up in the social and political exigencies of the moment—the formal dimensions of an artist’s particular medium might even be said to impede the action of performance. Faulkner, Poirier argues, “needed his structurings the way a child might need a jungle gym: as a support for exuberant, beautiful, and testing flights. . . . Structure may even be the element against which he is performing” (Poirier 1971, xv).

In the feminist movement, performance provided a way for its practitioners to express very personal, sometimes astonishingly aggressive feelings about women’s place in society. It was a medium, that is, that allowed women to perform *against* the social structures and role models they felt were defined for them by society at large. Some of the earliest feminist performances occurred in Los Angeles at Womanhouse, an outgrowth of the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts, a project begun in 1971 by Miriam Shapiro and Judy Chicago. Performance, as Chicago has explained in her autobiography *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist*, “seemed to provide the most direct means of expressing anger. . . . One of the reasons performance proved to be so important in the program is that it provided a release for debilitating, unexpressed anger, thereby opening up the whole range of emotions for creative work” (Chicago 1977, 125–26). Because it seemed, furthermore, a relatively “new” medium in the early 1970s, combining whatever aspects of any of several “competing” media it might wish to engage, performance also seemed uncontaminated by many of the formal expectations of more traditional, male-dominated art forms. It offered new territory for artistic exploration that helped women to establish and define their own identities, as artists and otherwise. “It

is always a man," Chicago explains, "who embodies the human condition. From *Hamlet* to *Waiting for Godot*, the struggles of humanity are embodied in male characters, created by men, reflecting themselves and each other. . . . We told the truth about our feelings as women" (Chicago 1977, 128).

While the work of a performance artist like Laurie Anderson is not immediately recognizable as "feminist" in these terms, she chooses to work in a multi-media format precisely in order to avoid falling victim to the formal demands of any given single medium. Her work has been described as the combination of "a highly attenuated art-rock concert" and "a poetry reading writ very large indeed, with every aspect of the poetic concept amplified and counterpointed by aural and visual imagery," and she in fact invites each medium to collide with the others in her work, to disrupt and even distort one another. Her major work, *United States, Parts 1-4*, is a montage of instrumental compositions, songs—both full-scale production numbers and simpler tunes—narrative monologues, poems, dramatic skits, dances, carefully staged visual effects, films and multiscreen slide shows. It takes her roughly seven hours over two nights to perform it. Not only do the media themselves collide but so do the work's possible meanings. "In all the work I've ever done," Anderson explains, "my whole intention was not to map out meanings but to make a field situation. I'm interested in facts, images, and theories which resonate against each other, not in offering solutions" (Howell 1981, 6). This notion of the performance as a sort of "field situation" emphatically ties the audience into the problematics of the event itself, involves them in the dilemmas she presents. Anderson perpetually creates scenarios which baffle us or shows us how the landscape of our daily lives—a landscape so banal that we tend to take it for granted—can suddenly transform itself into a disorienting and mysterious terrain.

*United States* is framed, for instance, by the image of a Night Driver, windshield wipers monotonously moving back and forth before her, lost on the way home from work. Wearing goggles that light up like headlights, Anderson says, "I am in my body the way most people drive in their cars" (Anderson 1984, unpaginated). The body, that is, is a more or less mechanical conveyance for the mind that it hauls around—and yet most people drive in their cars mindlessly, or at least carelessly. At the outset we are introduced to this Night Driver in a piece called "Say Hello." It is accompanied by a drawing of a nude man and woman, the man's hand raised in a gesture of greeting, the same emblem that was drawn on the Pioneer spacecraft:

Hello. Excuse me. Can you tell me where I am?

*In our country, we send pictures of people speaking our sign language in Outer Space. We are speaking our sign language in these pictures.*

Do you think that They will think his arm is permanently attached in this position?

Or, do you think They will read our signs? In our country,  
Goodbye looks just like Hello.

*SAY HELLO.*

(Anderson 1984, unpaginated)

Anderson waves her violin bow like a windshield wiper and conducts this conversation with herself, but when she utters the text in italics she electronically manipulates her voice so that it sounds distinctly male, and to many ears distinctly like that of Richard Nixon. Though Anderson will only go so far as to say that “it’s the Voice of Authority, an attempt to create a corporate voice, a kind of ‘Newsweekese’” (Howell 1981, 8), this voice, authoritarian and, above all, male, helps us to understand the full resonance of the image from the Apollo 10 space capsule that is projected behind it. Not only are we confronted by an image which can be read in any of several contradictory ways—“In our country, Goodbye looks just like hello”—but the source of that contradictory message is male. The female is passive (“lost”), while the male takes the active, gestural role. *He* is the maker of signs, *he* is the artist. Anderson’s strategy as a performer is to expose the mechanisms of authority and power in all manner of representation—visual, verbal, gestural, musical, and technological. If, as one critic put it in an analysis of the “Say Hello” segment of *United States*, “the woman is only represented; she is (as always) already spoken for” (Owens 1983, 61), then Anderson’s discourse reverses that situation. She speaks for herself.

Anderson’s “star” status—her successful career as a Warner Brothers recording artist and, more recently, as a filmmaker—raises important questions, of course, about her complicity with the very mechanisms of authority which she seeks to subvert. But such problematics are part and parcel of the terrain she seeks to explore, part of the “field situation” with which she confronts her audience. It could be said, in fact, that she is exploring, as much as anything else, questions about success and failure in American art and about the function of the audience—the community to whom the work is addressed—in determining a work’s relative worth. Anderson’s performances take place in a recognizably rock-concert format, for instance, in order to take advantage of the sense of community attendant to that form since at least the days of Woodstock and the concerts which occurred in connection with the Vietnam peace movement, a sense of community that militates against the cult of individuality—the idolatry—that so thoroughly defines the “star” system proper. Anderson has managed to recreate the sense that, as a performer, she is not speaking for us but with us.

Probably no other performance artist has so concentrated on creating just this spirit of dialogue—that is, a community of discourse between artist and audience—than David Antin. Antin calls himself a “poet,” but his poems consist of improvised remarks, generally fifty to sixty minutes in duration, tape-recorded before live audiences and transcribed without margins left or right, without



punctuation, and without capitalization. His form is meant to suggest the “live” voice as nearly as possible on the written page, its pauses and its pace, and the improvisatory nature of the address is meant not only to insure its liveliness but also its sense of “being in the present,” its immediacy. For Antin, discourse is one of the fundamental—if not *the* fundamental—concept or activity upon which community is formed, and his relation to his audience is not unlike Anderson’s. His poems create “field situations” in which we come to recognize that we face, as a group, a common dilemma. Like the performances at Womanhouse in the early 1970s, which could be seen as the focal point of a developing feminist community, Antin’s talks are actions which help us to define both ourselves and our roles in the community proper. Furthermore, since this sort of performance is an integral part of—rather than apart from—the daily lives of both the performer and the audience, since it serves a catalytic or transformative function for them (helping them, for instance, to establish new roles and new identities), and since it helps to create a sense of collective celebration or accomplishment or to define a common task or goal, it could be said to be roughly equivalent to *ritual*.

Here is an excerpt from Antin’s 1984 book of talk pieces entitled *tuning* which relates precisely such a ritual performance.

*when roys daughter died we held a memorial at  
the center for music experiment the memorial  
readings and performances by poets and artists  
and musicians was an attempt to offer some  
fellowship to roy and marie who were in a state  
of shock over the terrible accident it was held  
in the late afternoon in the long somber wooden  
shed that had once housed a marine officers bowling  
alley been refurbished with a black ceiling much  
redwood stripping and a mauve carpet to serve as the  
university art gallery and then turned over to the  
music department in the middle 70s the readings  
proceeded quietly one after another without  
interruption for long introductions and the last piece  
on the program was a composition by pauline oliveros  
pauline was working with a small performance  
group at the time and its young men and women were  
scattered informally around the room pauline  
came to the center of the gallery to tell us how to  
perform the piece we were all to rise and form  
a large single circle joining hands with our nearest  
neighbors to listen until we heard a tone we felt  
like tuning to to try to tune to it and when we were  
satisfied with our tuning we could fall silent and  
listen choose another tone and try to tune to it*

*and go on like this listening and tuning and falling  
 silent as long as we wished until we felt that we  
 were through i was holding hands with a carefully  
 dressed young history professor and a smart looking  
 dark haired woman from a travel agency in la jolla  
 i listened for a while and could make out several  
 humming tones coming from various places about  
 the room i could hear the history professor clear  
 his throat and start to hum a tone in the middle of  
 the baritone register i thought i would join him  
 there and my partner on the left opened a lovely  
 mezzo just above us around the room soft surges  
 of sound floated up while others stayed suspended  
 or died away to be succeeded by still others in fifths  
 and octaves lightly spiked by onsets and decays that  
 underlined the simple harmonies that filled the  
 space at one point a high clear soprano tone  
 floated out across the room and i saw the history  
 professor start to cry i squeezed his hand and  
 tried to join a high tenor almost beyond my range  
 the history professor nodded and joined us there  
 our dark haired neighbor to the left opened a flute  
 like tone a fifth above us all around the room  
 people were crying and smiling and singing in  
 waves of sound that throbbed and swelled and ebbed  
 and climbed and peaked and dropped away into a  
 silence that lasted until pauline thanked everyone  
 because the piece was over*

(Antin 1984, 1–2)

What Antin describes here—it is the introductory piece to his book—is the kind of moment in which most all of us feel a certain measure of discomfort, ranging from our inadequacy in the face of death to our unwillingness to publicly perform or exercise our grief. And yet what Pauline Oliveros, a performance artist and musician herself, manages to do is allow the audience to overcome that discomfort. In fact, she transforms the group at the memorial service so that its relation to the event is no longer passive but active. It is no longer an audience but a community.

But this is by no means the only transformation that takes place here. If “tuning” becomes Antin’s metaphor for this common “coming together” of artist and audience in the activity of performance, Antin’s text requires of itself a form of “tuning.” Looking at Antin’s writing, no one feels immediately at ease. And beginning to read, this discomfort increases, as one finds oneself longing for the traditional markers of written discourse—capitalization, commas, periods, quo-

tation marks, and so on. The point, of course, is that this is not written discourse. It is something else—the transcription of a voice, the voice of “a man up on his feet talking,” as Antin himself has put it. Antin’s abnormal transcription, especially the unjustified margins both left and right, announces this performative difference. One finds oneself disoriented on his page, and in longer pieces (his normal “length” is somewhere between forty and fifty pages), unable to stop because there are almost literally no places for the eye to rest. The effect of reading him, especially at length, is to find oneself going through a transformation as a reader exactly analogous to the transformation Antin describes in the introduction to *tuning*: what begins in discomfort, even alienation, ends in a much more intensive and productive relation to the text—the *event* of the text—than normal. Antin’s writing demands *attention*—an attention, incidentally, at odds with the colloquial level of its diction—that forces its audience to *engage* it. It is as if, in order to read Antin, one were forced to *voice* him. But one is not quite sure just what it is that one is voicing. On the one hand, the writing looks a little bit like poetry. It even reads, at moments, like a poem:

around the room soft surges  
of sound floated up while others stayed suspended  
or died away to be succeeded by still others in fifths  
and octaves lightly spiked by onsets and decays that  
underlined the simple harmonies that filled the  
space at one point a high clear soprano tone  
floated out across the room and i saw the history  
professor start to cry

We can detect poetic diction (“soft surges”), hard enjambments reminiscent of the best free verse, caesuras (after “space,” for instance) that imply meaningful content. But, on the other hand, this seems to be prose. Whatever it is, the point is that it defies generic designation. It cannot be so easily contained.

Gertrude Stein once said that “a long complicated sentence should force itself upon you, make yourself know yourself knowing it” (Stein 1957, 221), and Antin’s texts are, in effect, very long sentences indeed. A whole network of transformations takes place here: in Oliveros’s performance, Antin and the others are transformed; Antin transforms the initial event into a narrative; the oral narrative is transformed into text; the typographical idiosyncracies of the page announce the text’s own transformation, requiring a different sort of reading behavior from its audience; and reading itself becomes a sort of “listening” to Antin’s voice, though the “event” of his speaking is no longer present, and Antin’s voice is transformed into our own. In these terms, finally, performance can be defined as an activity which generates transformations, as the reintegration of art with what is “outside” it, an “opening up” of the “field.”

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