Othello and the Grammar of Evil.

''There is some soul of goodness in things evil / Would men observingly distil it out - '' [1]

''Now I find true / That better is by evil still made better''. [2]

How do we explain the presence and activity of evil in the world? There are several possible answers to this question in early modern England. I argue that in *Othello* (c.1604), Shakespeare engages with competing accounts of what evil is, where it comes from, how it works, and why it is permitted.[3] Revising a critical commonplace, I suggest that Iago's evil is neither Manichean nor an expression of non-being. Rather, Iago works in and around the epistemological grey areas found in the privative theology of evil, and between conditional and indicative grammar. He implies causality where none exists; encourages agency where it should not be asserted; and claims a sham providential control over Othello. In this way, the play examines an early modern theodicy that asks humans to act ''as if'' they are in full epistemological possession of ontological truth.[4] This article seeks to build on Joel Altman's brilliant study of *Othello*. For Altman, everyone in this play understands themselves and others only ''probably.'' The probable

> is in one sense an ontological category, consisting of the contingent, the variable, the ever-becoming. Human behavior falling within the purview of the probable, probability is therefore the material cause of understanding. It is a psychological category insofar as things are probable to *persons*. This makes it the efficient cause of understanding.[5]

Altman traces this formulation of probability to the ontology of ancient rhetoric and to the persuasive, performative ''rhetorical self'' inculcated by early modern humanism.[6] This self finds its ways into dramatic representation, allowing playwrights to trace ''the psychological axis of the probable from the merely contingent to the heuristically commonplace to the conceptually identical''.[7] Altman is also

sensitive to theology, elucidating rightly Protestantism's skepticism that fallen human actions are

''morally conformable to God's will''.[8] My analysis pursues further the relationship between theodicy

and grammar. Like early modern playwrights, the theologians examined in this article are trained in the

rhetorical arts analyzed so expertly by Altman. In these discussions of evil, a rhetorically-derived

ontology of probability is used repeatedly, especially by those Protestants for whom God's final decree –

election or reprobation – cannot be known definitively by fallen humanity.[9] It is this grammar of evil that

extends throughout *Othello*, infecting rhetoric and *ethos* alike.

Evil is, of course, a metaphysical problem. This is because evil is not, according to conventional

theological thinking in the early modern period at least, matter. Rather, evil is understood as *privatio*

boni, a privation or distortion of the good.[10] In this privative theory, evil and sin are insubstantial and

immaterial: they are "not any thing created, and existing; but rather the absence of that good which ought

to be in the creature."[11] Evil acts through the will of secondary agents such as Satan or individual sinners.

God as prime mover created the world and human nature good. The corruption of evil comes later with

the fall of the wicked angels, the serpent's work in Eden, and Original Sin.[12] In his influential account of

evil in the *Enchiridion* and in Books 11 and 12 of *De Civitate Dei*, Saint Augustine says that it is futile to

seek "the efficient cause of an evil will". Privation is a failure to move the will towards the "*immutabile*

bonum", the unchanging good that is God and all his works.[13] Evil is the product of a "deficient" will and

it is here, rather than in nature, that sinners err.

As recent scholarship on Shakespeare and religion has shown, his engagements with theological ideas are

far-reaching and they inflect his theatrical rhetoric in numerous ways.[14] Shakespeare could have found

the preceding account of causality and evil in his grammar school catechisms, in sermons, in the Book of

Common Prayer, or in his own reading.[15] Take the first sentence of the Creed, which Shakespeare would

have learned as a child – ''I believe in one God, the father almighty, maker of heaven and earthe, and of

all thynges visible and invisible.''[16] This statement provokes questions of causality: are those ''invisible'' things, like grace or evil for instance, the creation solely of God, or can humanity bring them into being? Moreover, Shakespeare finds common ground between theodicy and theater in the rhetoric used to discuss evil and its causes. As my analysis of *Othello* outlines, the play's grammar of causality bears comparison with early modern theological discussions. Causality is, after all, of foundational importance to theodicy and theater alike: both deal in cause and effect.[17] In post-Reformation England, Protestants and Roman Catholics debated fiercely the nature of God's providence and the extent to which he or humans are responsible for evil. These debates inflect other dramatic depictions of causality: we might think here of Marlowe's Faustus or of Middleton's Vindice, both of whom question daringly God's providential power. *Othello* refers directly to predestination, alludes to Biblical passages concerned with causality, uses numerous religious terms associated with evil, and addresses some of the same controversies found in contemporary polemical debates. Shakespeare does not set out in *Othello* to write theatrical theology. Yet the cumulative recurrence of these religious ideas in the play is notable and, I argue, it represents a far-reaching account of the presence of evil in the world, its origins, and its agents.

Evil, Causality, and Grammar

Iago embodies the play's most intense exploration of the causality of evil and of how it is willed into language: indeed, ''will'' is one of his favorite words.[18] ''Our bodies are our gardens to the which our wills are gardeners'' (1.3.316-317), he says to Roderigo, asserting the claims of volition over nature.[19] Iago even says that the will has independent ''power and corrigible authority'' (1.3.321), the ability to correct errant humanity, an idea that anyone versed in Reformed thinking would likely find suspect.[20] Later he changes tack, crudely impugning to Othello Desdemona's capacity to will rightly: "One may smell in such a will most rank, / Foul disproportions, thoughts unnatural –'' (3.3.236-237).[21] Dangling the possibility of ocular proof in Act Three, scene three ("You would be satisfied?"), Iago elicits this

response from Othello: "Would? Nay, and I will!" (3.3.395): the indicative ''will'' should possess more epistemic commitment than the subjunctive ''would''. Repeatedly, Iago proves himself to be a master of implicature. Pragmatic linguists define this concept as an ''additional unstated meaning that has to be assumed'' between speakers if a dialogue is to progress.[22] Indeed, Iago's use of this mode turns vicious as he mocks Othello's desire to know if Cassio has slept with Desdemona: "With her, on her – what you will" (4.1.32). Othello's will simply cannot parse this excess of implicature and it prompts his physical collapse.

Reformed theology takes from Augustine the idea that the fallen will is insufficient to reach God unaided. The will is seen often as a solipsistic faculty. John Calvin notes that the will is "so bound to wicked desires that it cannot strive after the right". Willing is a kind of "vanity" that chases "empty and worthless things", such as the thoughts of others or misplaced handkerchiefs.[23] An ungoverned will shapes its own reality, one that may have very little moral truth in it; a point that Iago's flippant "what you will" drives home cruelly. Desdemona's indicative desire to help Cassio – "What I can do, I will; and more I will / Than for myself I dare" (3.4.126-127) – is pitted against the deficient will of her husband, and his Ancient. In Act Four she forswears "Comfort" (4.2.159) in trying to understand how "my will did trespass 'gainst his love" (4.2.152) but by now, Iago's conception of will is rampant. The subject of Desdemona's song (4.3.36-52), the willow, evokes volition and its negation: ''wíllow'' is a trochee, the stressed "will" of the first syllable counterbalanced by the falling aural "oh" of the second, a sigh of futility perhaps, or even mourning.[24] By the time we reach the bedchamber, we are fully in the realm of the deficient will. "I will kill thee / And love thee after" (5.2.18-19) Othello says to his sleeping wife, a perversion of Christian *benevolentia*. Emilia challenges Othello and Iago by rejecting the patriarchal will ("Be wise, and get you home") and she dies for it ("I will not", 5.2.222-223), singing her own refrain of the willow song.

Once Iago's actions are exposed, Othello cannot address him directly. Othello's volitional powers are exhausted by his antagonist as he allows his will be subsumed by others: "Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil / Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?" (5.2.299-300). Iago's reply - "Demand me nothing: what you know, you know; / From this time forth I never will speak word" (5.2.301-302) – is often read as an affirmation of solipsism and nullity.[25] The potential activity encoded in the modal verb "will", is forestalled by the modifying negative adverb ''never''.[26] It is - in miniature - a fine example of Iago's rhetorical ability to set deficient activity in motion in others whilst locating his own efficient agency at one remove from responsibility. Iago's reply is a distorted inversion of one of his preferred rhetorical figures, *paralipsis* or *occultatio*.[27] This figure "occurs when we say that we are passing by, or do not know, or refuse to say that which precisely now we are saying". Moreover, "it is of greater advantage to create a suspicion [*suspicionem*] by Paralipsis than to insist directly on a statement that is refutable."[28]*Paralipsis* in rhetoric is implicature in grammar. Iago embodies the possibility of "some proof" (3.3.388) in language which never quite materializes. Perpetually hinting at a plenitude of knowledge beyond perception, Iago parodies the all-knowing, providential deity who accommodates himself to our fallen capacities.[29] In Altman's words, "it is not the illusion of a unified, transcendent identity that is threatening, but the intimation that it is an illusion."[30] The key word here is "intimation". As Altman notes, *Othello* examines relentlessly the "as if" (1.3.279), the conjunction of conditional probability, "that region of variegated grayness between the light of certain knowledge and the darkness of nescience in which men and women, for the most part, manage their lives."[31] I agree with this argument up to a point. But it does not allow us to explicate fully the workings of evil through the play's grammar: Altman's view of evil follows in a critical tradition that requires some modification.

Writing of Iago's "I am not what I am" (1.1.65) - his negative inversion of God's words to Moses in Exodus 3:14 - Altman calls it "Iago's unembarrassed confession of inherent wickedness, in the Augustinian and Thomistic tradition that defines evil as the privation of being. But this emphasis does

not take us far enough, for Iago most certainly exists – and as a human being, not as a cloven footed devil."[32] Like A.C. Bradley before him, Altman draws a distinction between evil as negative, non-being, non-existence - what Bradley calls "mere evil" - and those willfully human qualities that we may acknowledge as "admirable things" in Iago.[33] Similarly, Daniel Vitkus sees in Iago's words an expression of "evil as absence, silence, non-being", and Terry Eagleton places Iago in a long line of Shakespearean villains who ''take their cue from themselves rather than from God.''[34]

These critics are right to read Iago within the tradition of privative theology. But in distinguishing between the evil of non-being and the good of being, such criticism closes off a more troubling theological terrain, one that enables a fuller understanding of how Iago does what he does. For one thing, in the privative account of evil the distinction between being and non-being is not absolute. As Augustine writes, the good ''may exist alone, but so cannot evil''.[35] Evil is not an independent substance: it is a deficient privation that is parasitic on the essential substance that is the good. Nor can there be an essential evil nature, "mere evil". That would be complete non-being or non-existence, an idea that contradicts the Augustinian anthropology of self and the Platonic physics upon which it draws.[36] Non-being still exists as a deficient image of the good. In the Aristotelian, neo-Scholastic terminology used commonly by early modern theologians, the *summum bonum* is the first cause of all activity in the universe. Here is Peter Martyr Vermigli:

> God is (as the Philosophers acknowledge him) *Primus actus*, the first agent. Unlesse he be the upholder, there can be no agent: wherefore sinne dependeth on God, as upon the cause efficient. Sinnes for the most part be motions; and motions haue an order, so as the inferior dependeth vpon the superior: therefore the cause of sinne, so far-foorth as it is a motion, is directed vnto his owne moouer.[37]

Vermigli calls sins ''motions'': the sense here relates generally to the ''Power or capacity of movement'' and specifically to ''An inner prompting or impulse [...] a stirring of the soul, an emotion; passion.''[38] Sin

moves. It must have an efficient and deficient cause in metaphysical terms; a subject and an object in grammatical terms.[39] This principle enables theologians to avoid the Manichean heresy. Sin is not chaotic. It is rationally explicable because it is part of a universe made by a God who cannot create anything completely lacking in the good.[40] A first mover who *only* deals in the good suggests a Manichean universe in which good and evil are two separate, indeed competing entities. I will return to the theological problems posed by this account later.

Iago's evil is many things but it is not Manichean. This is why Samuel Taylor Coleridge says that Iago has ''the lonely gaze of a being next to devil, and only not quite devil''.[41] His evil is relational. Coleridge's understanding of Iago has its roots in the privative theology outlined previously and in Calvin's anti-Manichean argument that "in man's perverted and degenerate nature some sparks still gleam."[42] The depravity of human nature is certainly stressed here but that nature still retains a faint impression of the divinity that was once replete within it - the ''bright eminence'' (IV: 44) that John Milton's Satan likens to the beams of the sun in *Paradise Lost*.[43] Iago moves towards the non-being of his antagonist relentlessly but he can only do so by occupying the space of being. His trick is to make ''Trifles light as air'' (3.3.324) into motile forms in the wills of others, creating a deficiency where the good would otherwise reside. He operates, dangerously, on the causal cusp between ''something nothing'' (3.3.161). This is why Othello cannot locate Iago grammatically or morally: "I think that thou art just, and think thou art not" (3.3.387). The evil that Iago does extends through his use of negation.[44] Take his seemingly throwaway line in Act Three, scene three ''I like not that'' (3.3.33), or his apparently fuller explanation to Othello of what he has seen - ''Nothing, my lord; or if – I know not what.'' (3.3.33-35). Gradually Othello becomes the grammatical and moral receptacle of Iago's privative ''nothing''. As a noun, ''nothing'' can be a euphemism for vagina or virginity and it is typical of Iago's punning efforts to provoke Othello's sexual rage that he alludes to these polysemic semantic possibilities.[45] Yet ''nothing'' can also be used as a transitive verb meaning ''to reduce to nothing; to consider or treat as

worthless or unimportant.''[46] This is the other semantic possibility that Iago's ''nothing'' implies, one

that takes us closer to the operations of evil. A transitive verb always has an object. But Iago gives

Othello a subordinating conjunction ''if''. Typically followed by a subjunctive verb, this ''if'' points to

conditional or counterfactual possibilities as yet unexpressed - a kind of *aposiopesis* or stopping in one's

verbal tracks – before performing a similar rhetorical trick of affirming and negating verbal knowledge:

''I know not what.''[47] The object of Iago's will to ''nothing'' is Othello and so it is only in the tragic

hero's physical death that Iago's ''nothing'' finally becomes transitive, finding its proper object.

Othello's spiritual fate remains, as we will see, less clear. Before this point, the concept of ''nothing''

resides in the subjunctive, operating dangerously between transitive and intransitive grammatical forms.

Indeed, Iago admits his traffic in nothing to Othello a little later - ''yet we see nothing done'' (3.3.433) -

acknowledging that Othello lacks material proof, whilst also implying that a privative nothing may

indeed ''do''. In the last two acts, Othello's agency extends further into a proxy grammatical and moral

agency that Iago's rhetoric activates but never embodies fully.

It is indeed worth noting just how fond Iago is of the conditional conjunction ''If''.[48] The second thing

that he says in the play is ''If ever I/ Did dream of such a matter, abhor me'' (1.1.4-5). The matter of this

in media res conversation emerges from a counterfactual and Iago's ''hate'' for Othello is elucidated in

related terms: ''Despise me if I do not.'' (1.1.7) He then uses the conjunction when insulting Brabantio:

''you are one of those that will not serve God if the devil bid you.'' (1.1.108-109) Pointedly, Brabantio

calls Iago a ''profane wretch'' (1.1.114), probably because the insult alludes to Christ's temptation in the

wilderness by the devil: ''All these will I giue thee, if thou wilt fall downe, and worship me.'' (Matthew

4: 9)[49] Iago implies slyly that - unlike Christ - Brabantio would take the devil's bargain. Christ's

temptation is also a key scene for early modern theologians interested in the causality of evil. Writing of

the devil's use of the conditional conjunction ''if'' in his temptations of Christ, Lancelot Andrewes

explains its effect by moving from the subjunctive to the indicative: ''in Rethoricke it is a poynt of

chiefest cunning, when you would out-face a man [...] to presse & vrge him with that, which he will not, or cannot for shame, denie to be in himselfe; as by saying; If you haue anie wit, then you will doo thus and thus: if you be an honest man or a good fellow, doo this''.[50] The repeated use of the ''if - then'' grammatical construction is a marker of devilish cunning, ironically apt for "Honest Iago" (1.3.292). William Lily notes that the subjunctive mood of a verb ''hath euermore some Coniunction ioyned with him [...] bicause it dependeth of another Verbe in the same sentence, either going afore, or comming after''.[51] Here we might think of Iago's riddling, causal logic: ''In following him, I follow but myself'' (1.1.58). Iago is the eternal conjunction. He goes before and after Othello, rhetorically positioning his antagonist's agency between the *protasis* of ''if'' and the *apodosis* of ''then''.[52] This is a rhetorical usage that ''seekes to bind us fast'' to a devilish agency, placing the antagonist in a position of continual, unsatisfied dependency: "I am your own for ever." (3.3.479) Milton's Satan plays a similar game. Here is part of his temptation of Eve in Book Nine: ''Of good, how just? Of evil, if what is evil / Be real, why not known, since easier shunned? / God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just'' (9: 698-700)[53] The devil uses these grammatical constructions not to affirm or deny knowledge, but to ''make it out of question or doubt, that wee are not the sonnes of God: that by & from *Si sis* he may bring it to *Ne sis*; and so we may be like himself.''[54] Relentlessly pivoting between divine causality and human agency, the devilish use of the subjunctive is privation in action.

This grammar underscores the ''doubt'' (3.3.182) that Iago engenders so fatally in Othello later in the play. Altman says that ''Iago's capacity literally to influence the indicative with the subjunctive results in an overflow, whereby Othello's awareness is flooded with parallel possibilities''.[55] I agree but would also note that this function is central to the theology and grammar of evil that I am exploring here. Early modern theologians commonly draw a neo-Scholastic distinction between God's permission and the commission of a sin by a willing agent. Here is the Protestant William Burton writing in 1594: 'So may God bee the author of an action, and not of the corruption of the action.'[56] Or as Anthony Maxey explains

in a 1605 sermon: ''Verbes that signifieth to doe, they often expresse a suffering and not a doing [...] Euerie action hath his qualitie from the roote of the affection, and from the intention of the *Author* [...] Touching sinne, God hath no *Positiue* will, but onely in regard of former sinnes a *Priuation* of his grace.''[57] These accounts of privation locate agency not in indicative, transitive verbs and agents but in the subjunctive grammatical mood and intransitive verbal forms that open up a grey area between first cause and agent. This is the privative grammatical space that Iago occupies. In Jonathan Hope's words, the ''effect is to efface, or downplay, grammatical subjects, and agency.''[58] We see this in Brabantio's parting shot at the Duke's palace, a deductive enthymeme in which the major premise is missing: ''Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see: / She has deceived her father, and may thee'' (1.3.290-291); in Iago's dismissal of Roderigo: ''If thou wilt needs damn thyself, do it a more delicate way than drowning'' (1.3.346-347); and, most disturbingly of all, in Iago's claim that Othello may have slept with Emilia: ''I know not if't be true, / But I, for mere suspicion in that kind, / Will do as if for surety.'' (1.3.377-379)[59] Racialized fears of patriarchy; the threat of damnation; sexual jealousy and revenge: in each case, the subjunctive raises hypothetical possibilities which, in the absence of proof, constitute the ''reality'' that characters exist within and respond to.[60] *Othello*'s tragic grammar of evil is impelled chiefly by things that might, could, or should be; rarely by things that are.[61]

Desdemona offers a further case in point. In Act Three, ''if'' punctuates her discussions of Cassio's predicament. She tells him that ''If I do vow a friendship I'll perform it / To the last article'' (3.3.21-22). The final word has legal and theological meanings and it can also denote ''A moment in time which joins two successive periods''.[62] She will attempt to conjoin Othello and his erstwhile lieutenant as an article of faith. Here is Desdemona's plea to her husband:

> If I have any grace or power to move you,
>
> His present reconciliation take;
>
> For if he be not one that truly loves you,

> That errs in ignorance and not in cunning,
>
> I have no judgment in an honest face. (3.3.46-50)

Desdemona repeats the conditional ''if-then'' locution to press her case. Indeed, her rhetorical methods regularly, hauntingly, mirror those of Iago's. Good and evil rely on similar rhetorical forms because they are interrelated metaphysical entities. Once Desdemona leaves, Othello is caught between heaven and the monster. He demands that Iago move from the conditional to the affirmative: ''If thou dost love me, / Show me thy thought'' (3.3.119). Yet Iago refuses, defiantly, to oblige:

> Utter my thoughts? Why, say they are vile and false –
>
> As where's that palace whereinto foul things
>
> Sometimes intrude not? – who has that breast so pure
>
> Where no uncleanly apprehensions
>
> Keep leets and law-days, and in sessions sit
>
> With meditations lawful? (3.3.140-145)

Iago's use of *hypophora* here - asking and answering his own rhetorical questions (with further rhetorical questions) - implies, but never directly affirms, the causal connection between good and evil. It leaves Othello moored between doubt and proof: ''If she be false, O then heaven mocks itself: / I'll not believe't.'' (3.3.281-282)

Iago's rhetoric creates in Othello an overwhelming desire for a clear affirmation: ''If imputation and strong circumstances, / Which lead directly to the door of truth, / Will give you satisfaction, you might have't.'' (3.3.408-410)[63] The affirmative is a grammatical mood that neither character occupies consistently. The business with the handkerchief turns on *anaphora*, the repetition of the conditional "if" clause:

> IAGO I know not that; but such a handkerchief –
>
> I am sure it was your wife's – did I today

> See Cassio wipe his beard with.
>
> OTHELLO   If it be that –
>
> IAGO If it be that, or any, it was hers.
>
> It speaks against her with the other proofs. (3.3.438-442)

Iago weaves the ''if-then'' locution into his circumstantial case, stacking the burden of rhetorical ''proof'' against Desdemona.[64] By Act Three, scene four, the mere use by Desdemona of a qualifying conditional clause with a subjunctive ''were'' agitates Othello out of reason:

> DESDEMONA It is not lost; but what an if it were?
>
> OTHELLO How?
>
> DESDEMONA I say it is not lost.
>
> OTHELLO   Fetch't, let me see't.
>
> DESDEMONA Why, so I can, sir; but I will not now (3.4.82-85)

Desdemona tries desperately to take refuge in the affirmative "I can" and in the main clause – ''it is not lost'' - but the repetition has no effect. The conjoining proof - rhetorical or material - that Othello wants lies indefinitely out with Desdemona's grasp.[65] ''But if I give my wife a handkerchief - '' muses Iago at the start of Act Four. The *aposiopesis* signaled by the editorial dash - the refusal to complete the sense of the line - provokes Othello's desperate question ''What then?''? (4.1.10) There is no answer to Iago's implicature. ''What then?'' is rather an invitation to delve further into the realm of privation.

Iago's implicatures corrode Othello's identity. This incremental damage is in keeping with early modern discussions of evil. Here is Vermigli: 'The will of God concurreth both to good things, and to euill; but after a sundrie maner: to euils, indirectlie'.[66] Privation's only proper vehicles are subjunctive, conditional, intransitive forms. Here is Augustine: "Let none then seek to know that of me which I know not myself, unless he will learn not to know that which he must know that he cannot know: for the things that we know by privation and not by form, are rather (if you can follow me) known by not knowing, and

in knowing them, are still unknown."[67] Augustine uses *chiasmus*, *antistasis*, and *antistrophe* - amongst

other figures - to capture an evil will.[68] The effect is rhetorically dazzling. It is also sinisterly ludic in its

periphrastic playfulness.[69] We see a similar effect in Act Four, scene one when Iago replies to

Lodovico's question about Othello's mental capacities: ''He's that he is: I may not breathe my censure /

What he might be; if what he might, he is not,/ I would to heaven he were.'' (4.1.262-264) *Paralipsis*

only serves to underline the comically privative nature of Iago's *periphrastic* reply. Like Othello,

Lodovico is left grasping for Iago's true meaning: ''What? Strike his wife?'' (4.1.264), while the latter

persists in conditional non-affirmation: ''yet would I knew / That stroke would prove the worst!''; ''It is

not honesty in me to speak / What I have seen and known'', (4.2.265-270). Affirmation slides into

apophasis, the false denial of what is actually being said. Even Iago's justification for trying to kill

Cassio – ''If Cassio do remain, / He hath a daily beauty in his life / That makes me ugly'' (5.1.18-20) – is

framed in familiar conditional fashion.[70] If sin is, in William Perkins' words, ''the absence of that good

which ought to be in the creature'' then this is perhaps the closest that Iago comes to directly expressing

his adherence to privative evil.

God's Permission, Providence, and Evil

Q. Is not GOD then the author of sinne?
A. He is, and he is not.[71]

Early modern theologians of whatever confessional stripe agree that God and his works must be

connected causally.[72] To insist on a division between God as the absolute good and evil as 'some

opposing principle, independent of the good, not created, but a First Principle like God himself', is to

diminish fundamentally God's providential power over his creation.[73] That power must extend to every

aspect of creation without exception or qualification. If it does not, then God's providence is either partial

or else compromised. Does God, then, permit evil?[74] This question – a classic of Christian theodicy – was

debated keenly in early modern England and it lies at the heart of *Othello*'s grammar of evil. In this section, I explore more fully the theology of providence and evil. This not only augments my framework for interpreting Iago's actions; it also enables me to draw some parallels between the play and polemical debates on evil and responsibility.

Protestants and Roman Catholics approach God's responsibility for evil in a variety of ways. Within Protestantism, most theologians stress God's maximal providential power, and that sins are done by secondary agents. Yet they also must account for the fact that all secondary causes require a prime mover.[75] Alexandra Walsham notes aptly that the effort to claim God as primary cause *and* somehow not responsible for evil ''demanded some elaborate theological gymnastics to absolve Him from blame.''[76] I have already discussed the commonplace distinction between permission and commission of evil. This is the Protestant Isaac Colfe: ''Persecutions come sometimes by the diuel, but not of the diuel: that is by him as the instrument, not of him as the author. We are in the hands of god, not in the hands of the diuel.''[77] For some in the original audiences of *Othello*, this distinction would have made logical sense: Iago and Othello act because of God's permission but they alone are culpable for the commission of evil. Others - while accepting this logical distinction - may have wondered whether it absolves God from ontological responsibility for evil.

Many Reformed thinkers confront this last point head on, drawing a straighter line that Colfe does between first and second cause. They dislike the argument made by Roman Catholic theologians that God's permission is ''bare'' because it suggests some aspects of creation over which divinity's control does not extend.[78] God's permission must be instead ''effectual'': ''God doeth not onely barely permit afflictions to be, but also he *effecteth* them, and brings them into execution [...] *I make peace* (saith the Lord) *and I create euill*''.[79] This is Perkins drawing on Isaiah 47: 5 and Amos 3: 6. In this theodicy, a deficient will may carry out evil acts but God has to be efficiently responsible for corruption. Causality -

even when expressed conditionally as Perkins does in the first two clauses - implies permission and thus responsibility. Theodore Beza grants that God ''doth vse the woorke of Sathan, and the concupiscence of men, either for the punishment of sin with sin, or for the chastisement of his children'', and Vermigli notes that ''the subiect of deformitie or priuation is of God: and the moouing of God sometime passeth through the mind corrupted.''[80] The first clause here is clear; the second is more ambiguous. Vermigli also says that God's ''permission is a certaine kind of will'', a claim that returns us to Iago's corrupt and corrupting will.[81] Viewed within this standard theological framework, Iago can only do evil because he has been permitted to do so. Moreover, Iago's evil may serve the ends of divine justice. Andrew Willet observes that God "is the orderer of euill wills" who "not onely permitteth, but leadeth into temptation those whom in iustice he deliuereth vp to Sathan [...] for how is it possible, that God being omnipotent, should permit or suffer any thing to be done in the world, contrary to his will?"[82] If evil is done then it is only because God wills it for his own ends: he ''leadeth'' the sinner from the passive to the active subject. Here is another Protestant divine: God 'doth not onely permit sinnes, but also by his infinite wisedome, and almightie power, draweth good out of them, and directeth them to his glorie.'[83] Some of the more extreme Calvinists pursue God's permissive agency to its logical conclusion without linguistic hedging. They say that ''God is the cause we do evil'' and that the ''punishment or reuenge'' that God exacts on sinners may be turned ultimately to the good.[84] This is ''good'' understood not as an ethical principle but as an expression of divine justice: it is ''good'' that God uses evil to condemn sinners to damnation and to save the righteous.

For Roman Catholics, even a moderate Protestant theodicy goes too far. As Matthew Kellison notes in indicative terms: ''to saye that hee is the autour of sinne, is to make him an euill God, and of a malitious nature, as Cerdon and Manicheus did, and so no God at all: for God and good must of necessitie go together.'' [85] God cannot use evil to affirm his decree. Evil is a sinner's moral decision to turn from the good, thereby choosing to not co-operate willingly with God in attaining grace and salvation. On this last

point, Roman Catholic polemicists often single out the Protestant translation of the New Testament by Beza for attack. The following is a commentary note in the Douai-Rheims translation of the New Testament on the passage ''Lead us not into temptation'' from the *Pater Noster*: God

> tempteth no man: though for our sinnes, or for our probation and crowne, he permitte vs to be tempted. Beware then of Bezaes exposition vpon this place, who (according to the Caluinists opinion) saith, that God leadeth them into tenptation [sic], into whom him selfe bringeth in Satan for to fill their harts: so making God the author of sinne.[86]

This Roman Catholic position (based on Canon 6 of the Council of Trent) also draws a distinction between permission and commission.[87] God does the first but never the second. The idea that God leads sinners from passive to active agency is rejected. The Jesuit Gregory Martin argues that Beza's translation of a verse in James' Epistle rests mistakenly on a passive grammatical construction. Martin notes that in Greek the grammar of this verse permits of ''both an actiue and a passiue'' construction and claims that Beza chooses the passive translation deliberately in order to affirm the heresy that God is the author of evil. Where the Roman Catholic prefers ''*God is no tempter to euil*'', the Protestant has ''*God cannot be tempted with euil*''.[88] Despite these attempts at theological differentiation, two problems remain with the Roman Catholic argument.

First, if God ''barely'' permits and is never responsible for the commission of sin then this means that there are aspects of creation over which he has no control or else events that he does not will. Second, even if we accept the permission/commission distinction as valid, God still sets evil in motion. The theological imperative to explain the causal connection between permission and commission is felt more keenly in Protestantism because it has a maximal understanding of God's providence. This habit of thought is the result of Reformed theology's neo-Augustinian focus. Yet even Aquinas who relies more explicitly on Aristotelian categories and who sees the good as the *telos* of all being ends up in the subjunctive mood: ''A subject preserves an accident that naturally inheres in it. But evil is not in good as

naturally inhering in good. And yet evil could not exist, if good were totally destroyed.''[89] Evil may be a privative, accidental, non-substance; but it cannot exist without substance and being, nor without the *summum bonum*. In early modern Protestant theology, conditional grammar is used to describe the workings of evil at both a causal and agentive level: ''All these will I giue thee, if thou wilt fall downe, and worship me.'' *If* God is responsible for everything, *then* he must be responsible for evil.

In the eighth reason of his *Rationes Decem* published in 1581, Edmund Campion calls this last argument a ''monstrum'' [monstrosity].[90] This claim stung Protestant apologists. Rebuttals of Campion rarely miss the opportunity to turn this particular term back on its originator. William Whitaker refers to Campion's ''monstrous opinions'' on the matter; William Fulke - disputing with Campion in the Tower - observes of his opponent that ''you might as well say, when hee speaketh of God, hee meaneth the deuill, by such monstrous interpretations, all heresies may be defended''; and John Kinge notes the accusation that Protestants make God the author of sin charges ''our reformed churches with the conception and birth of so vile a monster, [it] is as vnrighteous a calumniation against vs, as God''[91] Campion hit a nerve because he was right: there is something monstrous about a theology that allows - even when expressed conditionally - that God is the author of evil. It is, to borrow a phrase, a ''Divinity of hell!'' (2.3.335)

When Iago hatches his plan at the end of Act One, scene three, he says: ''I have't! It is engendered: Hell and Night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.'' (1.3.392-393) Although the trope of the monstrous birth is commonplace, the association between monstrosity and an evil causality in *Othello* is persistent, echoing these polemical debates.[92] The monster that Iago engenders emerges from, and works towards, privation. Like evil, this monster is unseen, inessential, indicative: ''By heaven, thou echo'st me, / As if there were some monster in thy thought / Too hideous to be shown. Thou dost mean something'' (3.3.109-111). This monster is self-authorizing and self-consuming: ''O beware, my lord, of jealousy! / It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock / The meat it feeds on.'' (3.3.168-170) There is

something abject and self-loathing about this creature but it continues nevertheless to feed on its victims. Consider, too, Emilia's comment on the jealous: ''They are not ever jealous for the cause, / But jealous for they're jealous. It is a monster / Begot upon itself, born on itself.'' (3.4.155-157)[93] This monster permits and commits its own actions, a strange mirror-image of the self-authorizing Protestant God who begets both good and evil in the one entity. The ''civil monster'' (4.1.60) that haunts the play finds its object in the ''monstrous act'' (5.2.187) of the last scene. Yet, as we will see, even here the ontological *telos* of this act remains conditional.

Predestination and *Othello*

If God permits the evil that Othello does, does that then mean that he is a reprobate and thus damned? Perhaps.[94] When Brabantio tries to arraign Othello in Act One, scene two, the latter says: ''Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.'' (1.2.59) Many editors of the play draw attention to the parallels between this moment and Judas's betrayal of Christ in the garden when a group come to arrest him ''with lanthernes and torches, and weapons.'' When Peter tries to defend Christ he tells the disciple to ''Put vp thy sword into the sheath''. (John 18: 1-11) Peter, of course, goes on to betray Christ but, unlike Judas, he is redeemed whereas the latter is damned. As the drunken Cassio says: ''there be souls must be saved, and there be souls must not be saved.'' (2.3.94-96) Is this decree fair? This question is central to early modern debates about evil. According to Campion and other Roman Catholics, Protestant theodicy fails to adequately distinguish between the works of the righteous and the damned. According to Campion, for the Protestants: ''God [...] *is the authour and cause of Sinne, willing, suggesting, effecting, commanding, working, and gouerning the flagitious counsells of the wicked: As the calling of Paul, so the adulterie [...] of Dauid, and the impietie of Iudas the proditour, was the peculiar hand-worke of God*.''[95] This is the ''monstrous Assertion" that I discussed above. Notice how Campion apes cleverly the Protestant God's conditional agency - all those present participle verbs never quite becoming finite

and thus affirmative.[96] When countering Campion, Protestant theologians have little option but to admit that it is impossible to say why David is saved and Judas is not: ''In the adultery of Dauid, and the treason of Iudas, hee founde the will eagerly prepared to iniquity; God doth but vse that will'', writes John Kinge.[97] The decree is never known fully to us. Othello's biblically-inflected words are an attempt to align himself morally with the good. But in a theological culture where God may decide equally to use the bad as the good towards his own ends, Othello's moral effort here is rendered at best provisional.

The closest that the play comes to accusing God directly of being the author of Othello's misfortunes is in Act Four, scene two. Othello says:

> Had it pleased heavens
> To try me with affliction, had they rained
> All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head,
> Steeped me in poverty to the very lips,
> Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes,
> I should have found in some place of my soul
> A drop of patience; but, alas, to make me
> The fixèd figure for the scorn of time,
> To point his slow and moving finger at! (4.2.47-55)

This speech alludes to Job 2: 3-7 where Satan asks God's permission to torment Job and God agrees so long as Satan leaves Job alive. Calvin argues that Satan can only do what he does because of God's permission. Satan is ''is fayne to serue Gods tourney'', as Calvin notes.[98] This is meant to assure us of God's protection for humanity, but if we are reminded again of Iago's ''I follow him to serve my turn upon him'' (1.1.42) then it is because in both examples a causal agent either acts on behalf of or towards the agency of a second party. The only logical conclusion in both cases is, as Calvin argues, that ''the wicked must needes be the instrumentes of his [God's] will''.[99] It is striking that Othello's speech begins

in subjunctive mood (''Had it…should''), but in the last three lines he becomes instead a ''fixed figure'', the permanent object of scorn. Job enacts a similar grammatical shift: ''I had no peace, neither had I quietnesse, neither had I rest, yet trouble is come.'' (Job 3: 26) Job blames God directly for his misfortunes. Othello uses more indirect means. In both examples, privation fixes the sinner as a present tense *exemplum* of evil's effects. Yet in Othello's case the moment is fleeting: ''either I must live or bear no life'' (4.2.58). Once more, he is caught between competing grammatical moods.

Even when Iago's ''proof'' is taken as fact in Othello's mind, absolute affirmation eludes him: 'It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul - / Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars: / It is the cause.' (5.2.1-3) The grammar of the ''cause'' is now indicative but its semantic meaning remains ambiguous: what does the anticipatory pronoun 'It' refer to here?[100] Othello falls back on the Iago-esque ''if'' clause. When he asks Desdemona to confess her sins – ''If you bethink yourself of any crime / Unreconciled as yet to heaven and grace, / Solicit for it straight'' – she is perplexed: ''Alack, my lord, what may you mean by that?'' (5.2.26-29) Othello speaks here not as a husband but rather as a minister at the bedside of a dying sinner, persuading her to repent of sins in the hope of salvation. Instead of trusting to God for the salvation of her soul, the ministering Othello perverts this Christian rite: ''Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.'' (5.2.6) In the absence of divine indicative cause, Othello casts himself as exemplary defender of masculine honor. Once Desdemona has been strangled, Emilia tries to gain entry to the bedchamber. Othello says: ''If she come in, she'll sure speak to my wife - / My wife, my wife! What wife? I have no wife.'' (5.2.98-99) The repetitions (*diacope*) of ''wife'' underscore Othello's extreme emotional state as he realizes that he has made the body that he calls ''wife'' into an object (and noun) with no agency. Othello has acted *as if* he knows the truth of the divine decree, dealing in damnation and salvation with impunity: ''She's *like* a liar gone to burning hell''. (5.2.129, my emphasis)

It falls to Emilia to disabuse him of this fallacy, and she does so in familiar terms, denying Iago's accusations of falsehood against Desdemona with his favored ''if'' clause: ''If he say so, may his pernicious soul / Rot half a grain a day! He lies to the heart''. (5.2.153-154)[101] Emilia no more knows the destination of souls than does Othello (c.f. 5.2.158-159; 276-279), but she can at least confirm Iago's lies, and she does so affirmatively in the indicative mood: ''thou hast killed the sweetest innocent/ That e'er did lift up eye.'' (5.2.197-198) Emilia's assertions come as a rhetorical shock both to the characters and to the audience. The conditional grammar of evil; the negations that commonly precede or follow modal auxiliary verbs; all of these are displaced in a shift from the counterfactual to the indicative mood and volitional will: ''Let heaven and men and devils, let them all, / All, all, cry shame against me, yet I'll speak.'' (5.2.220-221) She continues in this vein (I found; I gave; He begged; I found; I gave – 5.2.225-230) piling indicative verbs on top of one another in a dizzying blast of truth and agency. Iago's only resort is to kill his wife, thus making himself the object of indicative, accusative grammar: '' 'Tis a notorious villain.'' (5.2.238) Yet he and Othello remain where they have always been.

When Iago is brought back into the bedchamber, Othello says: ''I look down towards his feet – but that's a fable: / If that thou be'st a devil, I cannot kill thee.'' (5.2.284-285) If Iago was a cloven-footed devil then Othello could act. But Iago is a "demi-devil", one who uses implicature, the subjunctive mood, and negation to manipulate the moral grey areas between definitive categories of being, between good and evil. His relentless occupation of this ground renders Othello's agency deficient. Othello wounds, rather than kills, his assailant. When Othello is asked what should be said to him he replies: ''Why anything - / An honourable murderer, if you will, / For naught I did in hate, but all in honour.'' (5.2.291-293) Othello's pathetic *oxymoron* is undercut further by the conditional clause ''if you will'', an acknowledgement that his actions and his moral state cannot be reconciled. Fittingly the final use of the word 'nothing'' is Othello's as he asks of those who remain that when the time comes to tell his story, they ''nothing extenuate'' (5.2.341). He does not want anyone to mitigate his guilt. The word

''extenuate'' can also mean to thin a substance out or make it less dense. In fact, Othello uses the noun ''nothing'' as a modifying adverbial here, a somewhat unusual formulation and one that marks this statement out stylistically and thematically. Parasitic on substance, ''nothing'' has reached its object – the tragic hero's physical destruction – and cannot be extenuated beyond this point.[102] Othello will die soon but his reputation - like his spiritual status - rests on the as-yet-unknown views of posterity and of God's decree. Even the last use of the conditional ''if'' in the play is prospective rather than affirmative. Lodovico says of Iago: ''If there be any cunning cruelty / That can torment him much and hold him long, / It shall be his.'' (5.2.332-334) Punishment will be forthcoming, prolonging the villain's eventual death; but not quite yet.

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By the end of the play, ''nothing'' has indeed served its turn. Its secondary effects are the dead bodies on and by the bed. Non-being is where the tragic hero ends but tragedy concludes invariably with the words of those who remain.[103] Life continues, affirming the interconnectedness of being and non-being. To reduce evil to non-being is to understand only partially the plenum between being and non-being that Iago traverses in the play. Iago needs the good; he feeds off it, is reliant upon it. His devilishness is "demi" because he still retains within him that "spark" of divinity mentioned by Calvin and that connects the *summum bonum* to all his works, good and evil alike. This point does not diminish Iago's culpability, nor does it excuse Othello's actions. It does, however, raise a more troubling, appropriately conditional, possibility. If God enables all causality without exception then logically he must be responsible for the evil that humans do. But, like Othello, we cannot confirm definitively divine culpability. As with Iago's privative grammar, the object of God's decree is not accessible fully to fallen humanity. Early modern theodicy teaches that in order to live a morally good life, we must act ''as if'' we have access to that decree. It is the conditional, probable nature of this moral imperative that Iago exploits remorselessly

through his linguistic manipulation. His penultimate line 'Demand me nothing: what you know, you know'' (5.2.301) affirms both his silence and his privative method. ''What you know, you know'' is another implicature, grammatically indicative but semantically subjunctive.[104] Iago infects the tragedy with this grammar of evil, perverting the probable epistemic basis for knowing agents and actions to fatal ends.

[1] An early version of this paper was given at a Symposium held at Shakespeare's Globe, December 2018: I am grateful to delegates for discussions and suggestions. Thanks to Patricia Canning, Indira Ghose, Jeremy Smith, Richard Stacey who all read and commented generously on the essay, and to Paul Simpson for encouraging me in a more linguistic direction. I am also indebted to the anonymous readers and to Jeremy Lopez for his editorial guidance.

[2] Henry in *Henry V*, 4.1.4-5, and Sonnet 119, 9-10, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1997).

[3] Important discussion of evil in *Othello* include A.C. Bradley, "Lecture VI" in *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1971), 169-198; Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to his Major Villains* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958); Stanley Edgar Hyman, *Iago: Some Approaches to the Illusion of his Motivation* (London: Elek Books, 1970), esp. 29-60; Alexander Gonzalez, "'The Infection and Spread of Evil:' Some Major Patterns of Imagery and Language in *Othello*", *South Atlantic Review*, 50, 4, 1985, 35-49; Daniel J. Vitkus, "The "O" in *Othello*", in *Othello: New Critical Essays*, ed. Philip C. Kolin (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 347-362; Barbara A. Schapiro, "'Psychoanalysis and the Problem of Evil: Debating *Othello* in the Classroom'", *American Imago*, 60, 4, 2003, 481-499; Richard Raatzsch, *The Apologetics of Evil: The Case of Iago* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009); and Paul Cefalu, "'The Burdens of Mind Reading in Shakespeare's *Othello*:' A Cognitive and Psychoanalytic Approach to Iago's Theory of Mind", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 64, 3, 2013, 265-294.

[4] See Joel Altman, *The Improbability of Othello: Rhetorical Anthropology and Shakespearean Selfhood* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 1-30.

[5] Altman, *The Impossibility*, 10.

[6] Altman, *The Impossibility*, 20.

[7] Altman, *The Impossibility*, 10.

[8] Altman, *The Impossibility*, 349.

[9] See Adrian Streete, *Protestantism and Drama in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 99-100; Claire McEachern, *Believing in Shakespeare: Studies in Longing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 37-76; and Timothy Rosendale, *Theology and Agency in Early Modern Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 32-77.

[10] On privation and evil, see Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1952); John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985); G.R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Marilyn McCord Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

[11] William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, in *The Works* [...] (Cambridge, 1603), 10.

[12] Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. John Healey, 2 vols. (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1947), vol. 1, XII, vii, 350.

[13] See Augustine, *The City of God*, vol. 1, XI, xix, 328, and Joel Elliot Slotkin, *Sinister Aesthetics: The Appeal of Evil in Early Modern English Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 31-77. See also Paul Hammond, *Milton's Complex Words: Essays on the Conceptual Structure of Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 106-125.

[14] For a good recent overview, see the ''Introduction'' to *Shakespeare and Early Modern Religion*, ed. Loewenstein and Witmore, 1-19.

[15] See Hannibal Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 9-42. For a theological reading see Richard Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought* (Baker: Grand Rapids, 2017).

[16] *The Book of Common Prayer. The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, ed. Brian Cummings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 127. Even early modern academic interpretations of causality based on Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics* are read through a Christian lens.

[17] The *OED* gives 1603 as the first usage of "causality"; but the word is used in annotations to the 1582 Roman Catholic New Testament. See *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019) and *The New Testament Of Iesvs Christ* [...] (Rheims, 1582), 395.

[18] See Altman, *The Improbability*, 153-182, and Bradley, *Shakespearean*, p. 178; also 190-194. See too Lisa Freinkel, *Reading Shakespeare's Will: The Theology of Figure from Augustine to the Sonnets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

[19] All references are to *Othello*, ed. Michael Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[20] In Modern English the auxiliary ''will'' is usually a marker of simple futurity: in early modern English ''will'' becomes an auxiliary verbal form but still retains the older ''modal meaning of obligation or volition'' – Matti Rissanen, ''Syntax'', in *The Cambridge History of the English Language, vol. 3, 1476-1776*, ed. Roger Lass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 211.

[21] William Perkins calls the Devil "a cauiller, a slaunderer, and an accuser" – *The Combate Betwixt Christ and the Deuill*, in *The Workes* [...] (Cambridge, 1609), 377.

[22] Keith Johnson, *Shakespeare's English: A Practical Linguistic Guide* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 139, and *passim*. Johnson draws on Malcolm Coulthard's analysis of the play in his *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1985), 184-189. On implicature in linguistic analysis, see Geoffrey Leech, *Principles of Pragmatics* (London: Longman, 1983). On implicature in *Othello*, see Brian Vickers, *Appropriating Shakespeare: Contemporary Critical Quarrels* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 70-71; 82-84; and Stefan D. Keller, "Combining Rhetoric and Pragmatics to Read *Othello*", *English Studies*, 91, 4, 2010, 401-402.

[23] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2. vols. ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles (London: Westminster, 1961), vol. 1, 2.2.12, 271. The clause concludes: "as if it were groping in darkness [*in tenebris palpando*]".

[24] ''Willow'' may be a portmanteau word (will + low); see also Joel Fineman, *The Subjectivity Effect in Western Literary Tradition: Essays Towards the Release of Shakespeare's Will* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991), 156.

[25] See for example Vitkus, "The "O"", 356.

[26] I am indebted to Laurie Maguire's discussion of modal verbs in *Othello: Language and Writing* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 151-154, and to Jonathan Hope's analysis of grammatical agency and uncertainty in *Shakespeare and Language: Reason, Eloquence and Artifice in the Renaissance* (London: A&C Black, 2010), 138-169.

[27] On Iago and *paralipsis*, see Quentin Skinner, *Forensic Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 139-140; and Keller, "Combining", 403.

[28] *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan, Loeb Classical Library (London and Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), IV, XXVII, 37, 321.

[29] On accommodation see Streete, *Protestantism*, 90-98.

[30] Altman, *The Improbability*, 163.

[31] Altman, *The Improbability*, 1.

[32] Altman, *The Improbability*, 17.

[33] Bradley, *Shakespearean*, 191. Spivack's view of Iago as a hybrid figure positioned between the Vice and a more mimetically ''realistic'' understanding of character is relevant to the competing ontologies of evil that I discuss here. Spivack, *The Allegory*, 54.

[34] Vitkus, "The "O"", 353. Terry Eagleton, *On Evil* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 85. For Eagleton's comments on privation, see 124-128. See too Charlotte Spivack, *The Comedy of Evil on Shakespeare's Stage* (London: Associated University Press, 1978), 14-15. Jonathan Dollimore's claim that Calvinist theodicy is ultimately Manichean is too blunt an assessment – *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*, 2nd. ed. (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 131.

[35] Augustine, *The City of God*, vol. 1, XII, iii, 346.

[36] Hick, *Evil*, 47-53.

[37] Peter Martyr Vermigli, *The Common Places* [...] (London, 1583), 178. This is a gloss on Augustine's *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*.

[38] ''Motion n. def. 3a and 12a'', *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

[39] See Vermigli *The Common Places*, 180. See also Girolamo Zanchi, *H. Zanchius His Confession Of Christian Religion* (Cambridge, 1599), 36-37.

[40] See Raatzsch, *The Apologetics*, 88-89.

[41] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ''Notes on *Othello*'', in *Coleridge's Essays & Lectures on Shakespeare & Some Other Old Poets & Dramatists* (London: J.M. Dent, 1911), 172.

[42] Calvin, *Institutes*, vol. 1, 2.2.12, 270. See also Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 13-14.

[43] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (Harlow: Longman, 1982).

[44] In early modern English, ''the more negatives there are, the more emphatic the negation is.'' Charles Barber, *Early Modern English* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 199.

[45] ''Nothing'', in Gordon Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature*, vol. 2 (London and Atlantic Highlands: The Athlone Press, 1994), 960-961.

[46] ''Nothing, v.'', *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

[47] N.F. Blake, *A Grammar of Shakespeare's Language* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 143-145; Vickers, *Appropriating*, 84; Keller, "Combining", 401-402.

[48] See Altman, *The Improbability*, 135-140. On subjunctive grammar, see John Leech, *A Certaine Grammar* [...] (London, 1590), sig. F3r-v; Nicholas Udall, *Flowers Or Eloquent Phrases* [...] (London, 1575), sig. S2r.

[49] All biblical references are to the Geneva Bible – *The Bible* [...] (London, 1599).

[50] Lancelot Andrewes, *The Wonderfvll Combate* [...] (London, 1592), 25; see also 55; and Perkins, *The Combate*, 381.

[51] Lily is writing about Latin verbs. William Lily, *A Shorte Introduction Of Grammar* [...] (London, 1584), Sig. B5v. See also John Florio, *A Worlde of Wordes* [...] (London, 1598), 377.

[52] *Protasis* is a "hypothetical introductory 'if' clause" and *apodosis* is a consequent "then" clause "where 'then' may be stated or implied", Maguire, *Othello*, 159. See also Hope, *Shakespeare and Language*, 146.

[53] See also 9: 532-537; 629-630; 729-732 – Milton, *Paradise Lost*. On Milton and the conditional, see Hammond, *Milton's Complex Words*, 285-302.

[54] Andrewes, *The Wonderfvll*, 50. See also Isaac Colfe, *A Comfortable Treatise* [...] (London, 1592), 62, and John Udall, *The Combate betwixt Christ and the Deuill* [...] (London, 1588), sigs. C8r-C9v.

[55] Altman, *The Improbability*, 138 - drawing on the work of Madeleine Doran.

[56] Grammatically this places God in an odd position: he is the actor in a transitive construction but is not the affected entity of the action. William Burton, *An Exposition Of The Lords Prayer* [...] (London, 1594), 127. See also Robert Allen, *A Treasvrie Of Catechisme* [...] (London, 1600), 289.

[57] Anthony Maxey, *An Other Sermon* [...] (London, 1605), 9, also drawing on Augustine's anti-Manichean work. This understanding underpins the *Book of Common Prayer* and the official state *Homilies - The Book of Common Prayer*, 117, 132-133, 178-181; and *Certain Sermons or Homilies* [...] (London: SPCK, 1843), 11-19.

[58] Hope, *Shakespeare and Language*, 146.

[59] See the repetition of ''if'' in the exchanges between Desdemona and Iago at 2.1.96-174.

[60] Some scholars of racialized language in *Othello* stress an essential dualism in early modern constructions of race. Jonathan Burton writes that non-Europeans were either seen as "docile and noble savages eager to embrace the Christian empire, or menacing agents of deception irrevocably steeped in, and tempting Christians toward, satanic error" (55), showing how Iago uses this dualism to position Othello linguistically as racial and religious Other. While Burton's account would enable further consideration of how Iago racializes evil (something that I do not fully examine here), his dualistic

approach tends towards the Manichean conclusions that this article tries to avoid. Ania Loomba offers a more methodologically productive way of considering the intersections between race and evil in *Othello*, noting that in this period "The tension between black skin and a Christian interiority" is more relational, and that it "needs to me constantly negotiated, explained, addressed" (211) See Jonathan Burton, "'A most wily bird': Leo Africanus, *Othello* and the trafficking of difference", in *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, ed. Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 43-63, and Ania Loomba, "'Delicious traffick': racial and religious difference on early modern stages", in *Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Catherine M.S. Alexander and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 203-224.

[61] My approach here parallels that of J.K. Barret who in her essay on *Cymbeline* notes that "narrative possibilities (what *might* be), once discarded, exhibit staying power as what *might have been*" (441) and who draws our attention to "theater's capacity to bring onto the stage the stories that it bypasses" (444), especially in relation to the villainous Iachimo - J.K. Barret, "The Crowd in Imogen's Bedroom: Allusion and Ethics in *Cymbeline*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 66, 4, 2015, 440-462.

[62] ''Article'' is also a grammatical term that indicates whether a noun (in this case ''friendship'') is definite or indefinite – see ''Article n. def. 8 and 10'', *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

[63] See also the subjunctive in Iago's dream at 3.3.420-427.

[64] See Lorna Hutson, *Circumstantial Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 13-35. See also Lynne Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue*: *Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 172-173.

[65] Compare her appeal to Iago at 4.2.152-164 which begins with a subjunctive ''If''.

[66] Vermigli, *The Commmon Places*, 187.

[67] Augustine, *The City*, vol. 1, XII, vii, 350. Augustine may have John 8:55 in mind here.

[68] The mirrored inversion of words and phrases; repeating words in a different sense; repeating words at the end of clauses or sentences, sometimes with different or competing meanings.

[69] Hope, *Shakespeare and Language*, 148.

[70] On the ''beauty'' that Iago hates in Cassio see Slotkin, *Sinister Aesthetics*, 33-39.

[71] Burton, *An Exposition*, 124.

[72] For Roman Catholic examples, see Canon 6, *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. H.J. Schroeder, Illinois, Tan Books 1978, 43; and Thomas Wright, *Certaine Articles Or Forcible Reasons* [...] (Antwerpe, 1600), sigs. C1r-C3r.

[73] Evans, *Augustine*, 14; see more generally, 13-16.

[74] On the biblical basis of the problem see Norman Powell Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin: A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927), 3-35. See also Slotkin, *Sinister Aesthetics*, 14-15.

[75] See Vermigli, *The Common Places*, 178.

[76] Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 14.

[77] Colfe, *A Comfortable*, 19.

[78] For a Roman Catholic example, see Matthew Kellison, *A Svrvey Of The New Religion* [...] (Douai, 1603), 450-458.

[79] William Perkins, *The First Part Of The Cases Of Conscience* [...] (Cambridge, 1604), 108-109.

[80] Theodore Beza, *Propositions And Principles of Diuinitie* [...] (Edinburgh, 1591), p. 220, and Vermigli, *The Common Places*, 189. Like Perkins above, Beza uses grammatical distinctions to shield God from responsibility for evil. Slotkin observes that God is commonly held responsible for *malum poenae* – the evil of punishment – but not *malum culpae* – the evil of sin – *Sinister Aesthetics*, 150. Slotkin notes rightly that this distinction does not prevent the conclusion that God is ultimately responsible for evil, 152-153.

[81] Vermigli, *The Common Places*, 186.

[82] Andrew Willet, *Synopsis Papismi* [...] (London, 1592), 563.

[83] Edward Bvlkley, *An Apologie For Religion* [...] (London, 1602), 158.

[84] John Dove, *A Sermon preached at Paules* [...] (London, 1597), 59.

[85] Kellison, *A Svrvey*, 453.

[86] *The New Testament*, 17. See also Beza, *Propositions*, 220.

[87] *The Canons and Decrees*, 43. The Protestant Anthony Wooton finds some commonality on theodicy with the Roman Catholics in *An Answere to a popish Pamphlet* [...] (London, 1605), 125.

[88] Gregory Martin, *A Discouerie Of The Manifold Corruptions Of The Holy Scriptures* [...] (Rheims, 1582), 299-301.

[89] Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, trans. Jean Oesterle (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 17.

[90] See for example Edmund Campion, *Rationes Decem* [...] (Henley-on-Thames, 1581), 23; and Martin, *A Discouerie*, 299-301.

[91] William Whitaker, *An Answere To The Ten Reasons* [...] (London, 1606), 192, Alexander Nowell, *A true report* [...] (London, 1583), Sig. y4r, John Kinge, *Lectures Vpon Jonas* [...] (Oxford, 1599), 238.

[92] See Mark Thornton Burnett, *Constructing Monsters in Shakespearean Drama and Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

[93] On jealousy, envy, and evil in *Othello*, see Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Properties in Early Modern England* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 135-136.

[94] My reading departs from those critics who see election and reprobation affirmed more definitively in *Othello*. See Robert N. Watson, ''*Othello* as Protestant Propaganda'', in *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, ed. Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 240-242, and Maurice Hunt, ''Predestination and the Heresy of Merit in *Othello*'', in *Shakespeare's Religious Allusiveness: Its Play and Tolerance* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 97-125.

[95] Edmund Campion, *Campian Englished* [...] (Rouen, 1632), 126-127.

[96] On the present participle, see Hope, *Shakespeare and Language*, 141-143.

[97] Kinge, *Lectvres*, 239.

[98] John Calvin, *Sermons of Maister Iohn Caluine, vpon the Booke of Iob* (London, 1574), 33.

[99] Calvin, *Sermons*, 34.

[100] Compare 5.2.8-13.

[101] Compare Emilia's critique of the Fall and patriarchy at 4.3.82-88. On Emilia's rhetoric in 5.2, see Keller, "Combining", 409.

[102] ''Extenuate, adj. c.'', *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

[103] Vitkus, "The "O"", 357.

[104] Compare God's words at Genesis 3: 22 after the Fall: ''Beholde, the man is become as one of vs, to know good and euill.''