"Fallen in the practice of a damned slave" (5.2.288–89). That slave, unlike Othello and Cassio, is Venetian.

Othello's final speech and culminating suicide is civilization's last victory over the Turk. In those famous lines, Othello exhorts the Venetians who surround him:

> Set you down this;
> And say besides that in Aleppo once
> Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
> I took by th'throat the circumcised dog
> And smote him thus. (5.2.347–52)

On the microcosmic level Othello reasserts the myth of Venice; his rational and virtuous self confronts and destroys the irrational and cruel Turk within.

It is not surprising that so many great actors – Kean, Salvini, Aldridge – ended the play with Othello's final words. The moral dichotomies aroused in Othello's psyche seem reconciled with his death. It is in some ways a more comfortable ending. But the other enemy within the city does not die. Though he is destined to be tortured, Iago remains on stage, silent and presumably unrepentant.[62] By destroying Venice's protector, he may have left the Republic vulnerable to external, military enemies. Even more terrifying, his relentless destruction of Othello has drastically undercut the myth of Venetian governance that Lodovico's final ordering of affairs seeks to reimpose. His silent presence reminds us that, whether societal or personal, human self-fashioning is fragile, that the constructs upon which we base our identity are precarious, that, in Greenblatt's words, "the chaotic can slide into the demonic."[63]

If Venice, the ideal commonwealth based on a rational government of checks and balances, could be subverted so easily, might not England in 1604, beginning a new dynasty with an unfamiliar Scottish king, be equally vulnerable? Few, perhaps, in *Othello*'s original audience would have grasped that thought, yet the precariousness of a nation's identity – not just an individual's – lurks behind the tragedy of Othello and his wife, infusing the drama with much of its power.

[62] By costume and casting – doublets, facial hair, and build – Iago can be made to resemble the other Venetians, a visual similarity that emphasizes his evil as a symbol of the city's corruption.

[63] Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 9.

CHAPTER 2

Military discourse: knights and mercenaries

> For I have served him, and the man commands
> Like a full soldier.
>
> (*Othello*, 2.1.35–36)

Global confrontation between Turk and Christian worried sixteenth- and seventeenth-century military theorists perhaps more than court politicians. The Turks were renowned for courage, skill, and cruelty on the battlefield. In 1578 Thomas Procter argued in his treatise, *Of the Knowledge and Conduct of Warres*, that by the exercise of arms and by virtue of "the huge monstrous multitudes of barbarous Scithyens, the Turkes in no longe time, haue subdued so many kinges and countreyes, and extended their Empyre so farre, into all the three partes of the worlde, & yet prosecuteth and thrusteth the same further daylie." To counter this threat, Procter admonished all noble Englishmen to renew their knowledge and practice of arms, "to be a wall and defence for their countrye."[1]

Procter's concern is symptomatic of Renaissance Europe's awareness of warfare as both art and science. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in historian Michael Mallett's words, "European warfare was passing through a transitional stage between the feudal hosts of the Middle Ages and the permanent professional armies of modern times."[2] A *condottiere* who fights by contract for the Venetian Republic, Othello reflects what European warfare would become. But his self-fashioned image of a romantic, chivalric hero who fights the infidel and wins fair damsel is a remnant of a medieval ideal. Confusion between the two constructs was inevitable. And

[1] Thomas Procter, *Of the Knowledge and Conduct of Warres* (London: Richard Tottell, 1578; repr. New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), p. iii of the Preface. I have removed the original italics for the reader's convenience.

[2] Michael Mallett, *Mercenaries and their Masters: Warfare in Renaissance Italy* (London: The Bodley Head, 1974), p. 4.

both images are defined to a certain extent by the military man's relationship to the female Other.

With the increasing frequency of military conflict in Renaissance Europe, war became more secular, more of an art to be mastered, a science to be studied. Soldiers were perceived as a different sort of men, separate from civilian society by training and by their legitimized resort to violent aggression. In the wars of the Middle Ages the peasant had temporarily exchanged his plow for his longbow; in the Renaissance, the soldier stayed armed and frequently joined the mercenary bands that moved around Europe.[3] Historian J. R. Hale notes that German and Swiss Renaissance artists realistically depicted soldiers with "the sexually aggressive strut, the bulging codpiece, the suggestive sword-hilt, the mixture of touseled peasant hairstyle with flamboyant costume that marked them as defying civilian morals."[4] Such dress signified that these men considered themselves – and were considered – a class apart from the normal confines of society; the bulging codpieces also suggest that they related masculine sexuality to fighting prowess.

If part of the lure of the soldier's life was its freedom from civilian restraint and its adventurous lifestyle, another attraction was a socially acceptable legitimation of masculine aggressiveness. Barnabe Rich, for example, who frequently wrote about his military experiences, voiced in *Opinion Diefied* (1613) the soldier's opinion of peacetime:

> it infeebleth the mindes of young men, it maketh them become *Hermaphrodites*, halfe-men, halfe harlots, it effeminates their minds.[5]

Sir W. Segar directly linked a soldier's prowess to his sexuality, arguing that no eunuch or gelded man should bear arms, because "gelding did take from men the courage and viuacitie required in warre."[6]

To be most effective, a soldier must channel his sexual energies toward martial prowess. Hence the dire warnings about having women in camp.[7] Among Giles Clayton's rules to be observed in

[3] In addition to Mallett's study of Renaissance mercenaries in Italy, see J. R. Hale's *War and Society in Renaissance Europe, 1450–1620* (New York: St. Martins, 1985), esp. pp. 69–74; J. R. Hale, *The Art of War and Renaissance England* (Washington, DC: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1961); and Henry J. Webb, *Elizabethan Military Science: The Books and the Practice* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965).

[4] Hale, *War and Society*, p. 127.

[5] Barnabe Rich, *Opinion Diefied* (London: Printed for Thomas Adams, 1613), p. 27.

[6] Sir W. Segar, *Honor Military, and Ciuile, Contained in Foure Bookes* (London: Robert Barker, 1602), p. 9.

[7] See Hale, *War and Society*, p. 161.

military garrisons was: "that no man carry any woman to the Leaguor, or keepe her in the Towne, except she be his lawfull wife, upon paine to be punished as a vile person, or a vagabond, and neuer to be accounted a Souldier in any seruice."[8] Sometimes the rules were more stringent, prohibiting wives as well as prostitutes; in fact, most English regulations were firm against the presence of *any* women in camp. Yet, human nature was such that the rules were often more honored in the breach than the observance.[9]

A central change in the composition of armies during the sixteenth century was the increasing use of mercenary soldiers. Some theorists opposed the practice, Machiavelli, for example, argued in *The Arte of Warre* (translated into English as early as 1560) that "the straunge[r]s defence, shall hurt moche soner the common weale, then their owne: bicause thei be moche easier to be corrupted ... The same citee that useth straungers power, feareth at one instant the straunger, which it hireth."[10] Procter also contended that mercenaries were dangerous because, "being money men, by corruption or for a greater paye, they lightlie leaue their mayster in his greatest neade."[11] Lodowick Lloyd wrote in his 1602 historical survey of military practices that "seldome is found any constancie or soundnesse in mercenary souldiers, as by too many examples the Romanes and others found."[12] Despite these caveats, the practice of using mercenaries was nearly universal, and as I have indicated in chapter 1, Venetian state policy required the use of a foreign Captain General in times of national crisis.

Hale contends that what made a soldier a mercenary was "his dependence not on a political authority but on a contractor who had negotiated his own bargain with the government."[13] The English veteran Sir Roger Williams insisted that such duty was perfectly moral so long as one did not join the enemies of his native country. He wrote in 1590, "Thus did I enter into the *Spaniards* warres, and doo think it no disgrace for a poor Gentleman that liues by warres, to serue any estate that is in league with his owne."[14]

During the sixteenth century English writers began to translate

[8] Giles Clayton, *The Approoued Order of Martiall Discipline* (London: Printed by I. C. for Simon Watersonne, 1591), p. 35.

[9] See Mallett, *Mercenaries*, p. 189.

[10] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Arte of Warre* (London: n.p., 1560), p. 14r.

[11] Procter, *Of the Knowledge*, fol. 35r.

[12] Lodowick Lloyd, *The Stratagems of Jerusalem* (London: Thomas Creede, 1602), p. 237.

[13] Hale, *War and Society*, p. 147.

[14] Sir Roger Williams, *A Briefe Discourse of Warre* (London: Thomas Orwin, 1590), p. 30.

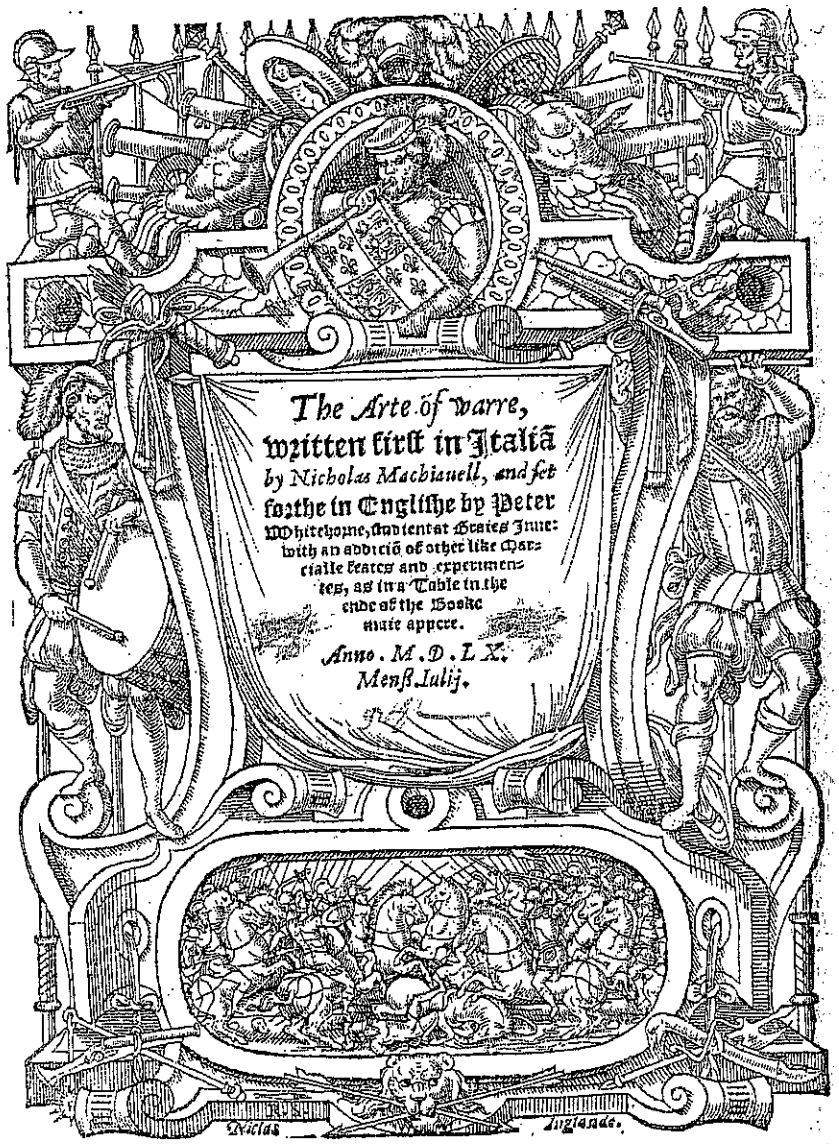

Figure 2: The frontispiece to Machiavelli's *Arte of Warre*, translated into English in 1560.

Classical military texts into English and to codify for their readers "the ancient disciplines of the wars."[15] Implicit in their emphasis on codification is fear of the fluid and changing nature of military life. The commentaries bemoaned the lack of order in many military camps; to them, argues Paul Jorgensen, the authority on Shakespeare's use of the military, the violation of the "ideal orderliness" of war seemed potentially barbarous.[16] Such concern was understandable, for disciplined, scientific military practices were not fully established until well into the seventeenth century. Not only that, the "want of discipline and good guyde of warre" was, to use Procter's word, "effeminate."[17]

Hale notes that the "swift savagery of military justice" was both the cause and effect of numerous articulations of Ordinances and Articles of War.[18] Thomas Styward's *The Pathwaie to Martiall Discipline* (1581) lists more than sixty articles to be followed by army personnel. In 1591 William Garrard borrowed Styward's regulations in his treatise on *The Arte of Warre*, adding some extra regulations of his own. Both authors were particularly fearful of mutiny within the ranks. Styward's item 14 (Garrard's item 23) reads:

> no souldier shall be suffered to be of a ruffianlike behauiour, either to prouoke or to giue any blow or thrust, or otherwise wilfully strike with his dagger, to iniurie any [of] his fellow souldiers with any weapon, wherby mutinies manie times ensue, vpon paine of the losse of his life.[19]

There were also rules against drunkenness on duty. Styward and Garrard proclaimed that "In Sobrietie consisteth great praise to the souldiers, who vsing the same are euer in state of preferment, such regard their dueties, and reproue the rash busibodies. Drunkerds, etc. are euer in danger of punishment."[20]

The reasons for such concern are obvious. Thomas Digges' *Stratioticos* makes it quite plain: "dronkennes doth turn men into beasts, and makes them many times vtter words tending to mutinies

[15] Webb, *Elizabethan Military Science*, provides a good summary of English treatises in pp. 3–50.
[16] Paul A. Jorgensen, *Shakespeare's Military World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1956), p. 35. Jorgensen's study remains the most comprehensive analysis of the military material used by Shakespeare, and my discussion is greatly indebted to him.
[17] Procter, *Of the Knowledge*, fol. 2r. [18] Hale, *War and Society*, p. 170.
[19] Thomas Styward, *The Pathwaie to Martiall Discipline* (London: Printed by T. E. for Myles Jenyngs, 1581), p. 51, and William Garrard, *The Arte of Warre* (London: Printed for Roger Warde, 1591), p. 39. Quoted from Garrard.
[20] Styward, *Pathwaie*, pp. 46–47; Garrard, *Arte*, pp. 30–31. Quoted from Garrard.

... If any man drink dronk, he shalbe chastised as an infamous person with a *Banne*, that shal publish his fault."[21] Drunkenness was thus, as Cassio finds out, an enemy to reputation. Even more threatening to the fighting man was drink's power to rob him of his manhood. Sir John Smythe, a prominent but idiosyncratic sixteenth-century military strategist, viewed drunkenness as the "mother and nurse of effeminacy, of cowardice, of sensuality, of rebellion, of covetousness, and all other vices that can be imagined." Smythe decried the customary drinking of toasts: our men of war, he claimed, "drink to the health and prosperity of princes, to the health of counselors, and unto the health of their greatest friends both at home and abroad, in which exercise they neuer cease till they be dead drunk."[22] Such behavior was a disgrace to what Smythe believed was an honorable calling.

The sixteenth century was also a time of transition in the categorization of military rank. Definitions of the various offices were in flux,[23] and as Jorgensen concludes in his analysis of *Othello*, Shakespeare exploited this lack of clarity to heighten the tension between Cassio and Iago. Othello as general, Cassio as his lieutenant, and Iago as the ensign, are consistently represented as field-grade rather than company officers. But since Elizabethan officers often had a different company rank, it was perfectly consistent for Shakespeare to depict the appointment of Cassio and Iago on a company level. The field-grade level lends Othello his supreme authority over Cyprus; the company level makes his choice of his second in command legitimate. Like the double time-scheme, this military ambiguity looms much larger to armchair critics than to theatre audiences.[24]

As part of their efforts at codification, Elizabethan military writers carefully defined the duties of company officers, and despite the diversity of the treatises, they show remarkable agreement. The General (or Captain General in Venice) should be a patriarchal

[21] Thomas Digges, *An Arithmetical Warlike Treatise Named Stratioticos* (London: Richard Field, 1590), p. 288.
[22] Sir John Smythe, *Certain Discourses Military*, ed. J. R. Hale (Ithaca: Cornell University Press for the Folger Shakespeare Library, 1964), pp. 27–28.
[23] Procter, for example, uses the terms "general" and "captain" interchangeably. See *Of the Knowledge*, throughout.
[24] This is a summary of Jorgensen, *Shakespeare's Military*, pp. 100–18. See also Henry J. Webb, "The Military Background in *Othello*," *Philological Quarterly*, 30 (1951): 40–52, and John Robert Moore, "Othello, Iago, and Cassio as Soldiers," *Philological Quarterly*, 31 (1952): 189–94.

figure. In Sir W. Segar's words, "The office of a soueraigne Commander, may be compared vnto the skill of him that gouerneth well a priuate house: which is to command things fit, to make men obedient, to reward the good and punish the euill."[25] Sir John Smythe argued that a captain should lead by example, "not only by instruction but also by action in their own persons, accompting of their soldiers as of their own children."[26] Obedience was crucial to avoid barbarous disorder: "upon any transgression of orders it is lawful for the captains & higher officers to correct, reform, and punish according to the laws and ordinances military."[27]

To exact his soldiers' willing obedience, a General had to set an example. If they were to control their passions, he must control his. Claimed Styward, "A Generall ought to bee temperate, continent, and not excessiue in eating and drinking." If his men suffered hardship, he should share it with them; "in the time of turmoiles of the war," he should "bee the last that is wearie."[28] Garrard argued that the Captain (or General) "ought alwaies to lodge with his band, and remain with the same both in good and euill, and continually shewe himselfe louing and courteous, and take such as the souldiers do: for contrariwise, taking his ease, and suffering them to bee lodged or fed miserably breedeth his hatred or contempt."[29] Othello fits the ideal of a commanding officer when he finds "A natural and prompt alacrity ... in hardness" (1.3.229–30).

Iago's initial complaint against the General is his selection of officers. Elizabethan military treatises agree that the careful selection of subordinates is a General's most important duty. Garrard wrote that the General must "carry a speciall care to the choyse of his principall Officers, and that in the election, he haue more respect to the valour & vertue of the person, then to any particular fauour." He must take particular care in the selection of "a pollitike and practised Lieutenant, of a courageous *Alfierus* [Ensign], of a carefull Sergeant."[30] Digges maintained that a Captain "ought first to make choice of sufficient, expert, honest, paineful officers."[31] Giles Clayton echoed this theme in 1591; the commanding officer is "to haue an especiall and great care, in chusing of hys Lieuetennant, for that he ought to be a man of great experience and knowledge in seruice."[32]

[25] Segar, *Honor Military*, p. 46.
[26] Smythe, *Certain Discourses*, p. 35.
[27] Ibid., p. 11.
[28] Styward, *Pathwaie*, pp. 2–3.
[29] Garrard, *Arte*, p. 144.
[30] Ibid., pp. 347, 139.
[31] Digges, *Stratioticos*, p. 95.
[32] Clayton, *Approoued Order*, p. 3.

A commanding officer should also have the gift of eloquence. Styward contended that "the Generall ought not to be chosen that knoweth not nor hath the grace in speaking, and that lacketh the facilitie and vtteraunce of speach." For nothing can so "inflame the mindes of men to take their weapons" than "the sugred talk of the Generall."[33] Garrard agreed, concluding that "I iudge it likewise verie necessarie for him to bee eloquent, since that qualitie hath great efficacie in perswading of mens minds."[34] Othello modestly disclaims such eloquence in Act 1, telling the Venetian Senate that he is rude in speech and "little shall I grace my cause / In speaking for myself" (1.3.81–88). Yet his "round unvarnished tale" easily persuades the Senate that he is innocent of the charge of witchcraft and moves the Duke to say, "I think this tale would win my daughter too" (1.3.170). Despite his insistence that he is the plain, blunt soldier,[35] Othello's grace in speaking indicates his stature as a military commander who can move men (and women) to feel and to act.

While the General (or Captain) took primary responsibility for the success or failure of his troops, his lieutenant played a strategic role. On the company level, the lieutenant was second in command, but as Henry Webb notes in his survey of military treatises, "his major tasks were to keep peace among the men, see that the noncommissioned officers performed their duties, post the guard, and, like the captain, make the round of the sentinels."[36] The Lieutenant was also the primary conduit of information between his superior and his soldiers. Garrard observed that the Lieutenant's part "is to giue willingly and readily counsell and advise to his captaine, as often as he is demanded." The Lieutenant was especially charged "to carie with him a diligent care of concord, for that particularly the pacification of discords & difference amongst ye souldiers of his company," which must be accomplished "without choler or passion."[37] The Lieutenant should also consult frequently with the Ensign. Garrard maintained that the Lieutenant must be careful "to avoide all stomaking and strife that might arise betwixt him and the *Alfierus*, for therby oftentimes great scandales haue falne out, and the diuision of the company, a thing aboue all other to be carefully forseene and shunned."[38] As Jorgensen indicates, Shakespeare's creation of tension

[33] Styward, *Pathwaie*, pp. 3–4.
[34] Garrard, *Arte*, p. 145.
[35] See Jorgensen's discussion of Shakespeare's use of the type in *Shakespeare's Military*, pp. 259–65.
[36] Webb, *Elizabethan Military Science*, p. 84.
[37] Garrard, *Arte*, pp. 68–69.
[38] Ibid., p. 71.

between the Lieutenant and the Ensign would not have surprised any Elizabethan soldier in his audience.[39]

Readers of *Othello* have long noted how the verbal irony in the phrase "honest Iago" reverberates throughout the play.[40] The phrase entails more than verbal irony, however. The Ensign, Elizabethan military treatises agree, must be selected for his honest, upright character. As the bearer of the company's standard, he must be a man the soldiers will trust and follow into battle. Barnabe Rich wrote in *A Path-Way to Military Practise* that "As the Ensigne in the fielde is the honour of the bande, so the Ensigne bearer in like use shoulde bee honoured by his company, and this reputation is best attained, by his owne curteous demeanour towards ye souldiours."[41] Garrard insisted that "The *Alfierus* must be a man of good account, of a good race, honest and vertuous, braue in apparell, thereby to honour his office."[42] Digges urged the Captain to bring all his company together and "deliuer the *Ensigne* to a chosen man for courage and honestie." The Ensign, he wrote, must be "a man of good account, honest and vertuous, that the Captaine may repose affiance in."[43] Clayton repeated this motif: "For that the Ensigne in the fielde is to be honoured of all men, so ye Bearer thereof ought to be a man of good courage, [and] knowledge, sufficient to discharge his duetie."[44] In sum, Renaissance military discourses reveal that the honor of the regiment was particularly dependent on the ensign who carried its flag.

Iago is hardly honest. When he professes his faith to the civilian Roderigo in the opening scene, he also proclaims his lack of loyalty to his superior officer: "not I for love and duty, / But seeming so for my peculiar end ... I am not what I am" (1.1.57–66). Iago is a self-seeker and profiteer. Roderigo's first speech, "I take it much unkindly / That thou, Iago, who hast had my purse" (1.1.1–2), tells the audience that Iago sells information about his commanding officer to interested civilians. Shakespeare represents Iago from the outset as duplicitous. As Hale puts it, Iago entered military life "on a strictly

[39] Jorgensen, *Shakespeare's Military*, p. 105.
[40] See Paul A. Jorgensen, "Honesty in *Othello*," *Studies in Philology*, 47 (1950): 557–67; Karina Williamson, "'Honest' and 'False' in *Othello*," *Studia Neophilologica*, 35 (1963): 211–20; and William Empson, "Honest in *Othello*," in *The Structure of Complex Words* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967), pp. 218–49.
[41] Barnabe Rich, *A Path-Way to Military Practise* (London: Printed by John Charlewood for Robert Walley, 1587), sig. Giv.
[42] Garrard, *Arte*, p. 67.
[43] Digges, *Stratioticos*, pp. 94–95.
[44] Clayton, *Approoued Order*, p. 14.

business basis," in the hopes it would lead to "topsy-turvy fortune-making."[45]

Thus the question posed by analysts of the military in *Othello* (particularly Webb, Moore, and Jorgensen) – Would Shakespeare's audience believe Iago's complaints about his general's unwillingness to make him a lieutenant? – should be answered in the negative. Jorgensen argues that Iago has two genuine grievances against Cassio's appointment: It was attained by "letter and affection," and Cassio has no practical experience. As an experienced soldier who has fought beside Othello at Rhodes and Cyprus (if we believe him), Iago naturally resents the selection of a young theorist as lieutenant. But Jorgensen, like Webb and Moore, neglects the importance of the auditor of these opening speeches. Roderigo is a civilian, a "wealthy curled darling" of Venetian society who knows nothing about military affairs. To justify the money he has accepted from the young gull, Iago must explain why he hates Othello. His reasons satisfy Roderigo, but they do not bear scrutiny.

First, Iago himself has used influence to try to attain office. He admits that he persuaded "three great ones of the city" to make personal requests to Othello "to make me his lieutenant" but then found that Othello had already chosen his officer. Iago is just as guilty of trying to attain office by "letter and affection," as he claims Cassio to be. Roderigo believes Iago when he proclaims:

> 'Tis the curse of service;
> Preferment goes by letter and affection,
> Not by the old gradation, where each second
> Stood heir to the first. (1.1.35–38)

Roderigo doesn't notice Iago's verbal legerdemain, but we should.

Second, while Cassio may have had less practical military experience than Iago, his "bookish theoric" was deemed crucial for a successful officer. The full title of Digges' military treatise makes the commander's need for mathematical expertise quite explicit: *An Arithmeticall Warlike Treatise names Stratioticos Compendiously Teaching the Science of Numbers ... as are requisite for the profession of a souldier.* Digges provided basic instruction in addition, subtraction, multiplication, fractions, equations, and more. Then he demonstrated how arithmetic could be used to resolve military questions. Sir W. Segar was equally adamant about the need for mathematics in his

[45] Hale, *War and Society*, p. 147.

1602 treatise: "For what man vnlearned can conceiue the ordering and disposing of men, in marching, in camping, and fighting without *Arithmetique*? Or who can comprehend the ingenious fortifications or instruments apt for Offence or Defence of Townes, or passing of waters unlesse he hath knowledge of *Geometrie*?"[46] No officer could be expected to manage fortifications and siege warfare, or even to arrange his squadrons in proper formation, if he did not have considerable training in arithmetic.

As a "gulled gentleman" and a "wealthy curled darling," Roderigo represents the effeminacy of peaceful, civilian life. Though the ostensible reason he puts on a false beard with his military garb is to disguise himself, the lack of hair implies a lack of virility. Certainly he is reluctant to fight. He only raises his sword when convinced that his prey will be easy and Iago will second him. Roderigo succumbs to Iago's murderous suggestions in a vain attempt to prove himself a man of "purpose, courage, and valour" (4.2.208). Even so, he readily admits

> I have no great devotion to the deed,
> And yet he hath given satisfying reasons.
> 'Tis but a man gone. Forth my sword. He dies! (5.1.8–10)

Of course, his feeble effort at valor fails; Cassio does not die, and Roderigo faints with the cry, "O damned Iago! O inhuman dog!" (5.1.67)

Cassio is the man Roderigo might like to be. He possesses the social skills of the courtier, and he is also a brave *condottiere*, with all the sexual attraction that implies. As a Florentine, he is a foreign mercenary fighting (as his general does) for Venetian pay. He knows Othello well enough to have served as a go-between during his courtship. The Senate also trusts and respects him or they would not have made him governor of Cyprus on Othello's recall. The text provides no evidence that he is, as Webb argues, "a perfect example of an inexperienced man who has obtained his rank by affection and favor."[47] He may have less experience than Iago, but he has the requisite moral qualities plus the proper training for a lieutenant.

Cassio's subsequent failure is not so much caused by drunkenness as by his inability to resist peer pressure. Though he knows he cannot handle liquor, he drinks because "the gallants desire it." Act 2, scene 3 demonstrates that Sir John Smythe was right to deprecate the

[46] Segar, *Honor Military*, pp. 200–01. [47] Webb, "Military Background in *Othello*," 48.

drinking of toasts. Iago puts Cassio in a bind where he cannot refuse to drink without seeming discourteous. But Cassio is not the only one who drinks too much. By Iago's admission he has already caused Roderigo to carouse "Potations pottle deep" and "flustered" three men of Cyprus "with flowing cups." Though Cassio as a superior officer bears responsibility for the ensuing brawl, he is not the only drunk onstage.

The writers of Elizabethan military treatises would have shared Othello's outrage at the midnight disturbance on Cyprus. The general's reaction reflects any commander's fear of mutiny within an armed garrison:

> What, in a town of war,
> Yet wild, the peoples' hearts brimful of fear,
> To manage private and domestic quarrel,
> In night, and on the court and guard of safety?
> 'Tis monstrous. (2.3.194–98)

If the military theorists were to fault Othello, it would probably be for leniency. Cashiering is mild compared to Styward's seventeenth article of war:

> that no souldier or souldiers drawe his or their sword or swoords, or use anie other kinde of weapon with violence to do hurt within or without ye camp during the time of ye wars, upon paine of death.[48]

Cassio loses his lieutenancy and, for a time, his reputation. It is a mark of Othello's initial regard for him that he loses no more.

Cassio's concern for his damaged reputation is, of course, understandable. He errs gravely in going outside normal military channels by asking Desdemona to sue for him. In a chivalric context, the intercession of the knight's fair lady for a younger squire might be appropriate; in the milieu of military professionalism, the appeal must be rejected. Though she is Othello's "fair warrior," and Cassio's "great captain's captain," Desdemona's influence with Othello should have no sway on military matters which are defined by the treatises as entirely masculine.

Desdemona's and Emilia's very presence on Cyprus is laden with ambiguity. As mentioned earlier, wives were consistently discouraged from following their husbands on a military campaign. Respectable women would be content to stay at home, minding their domestic duties, in wartime as well as in peace, especially since military codes

[48] Styward, *Pathwaie*, p. 52.

seldom distinguished between wives and prostitutes.[49] Desdemona's request to follow Othello to enjoy her marriage "rites" might mistakenly imply lax morality. Like Emilia, who seems to accompany Iago wherever he goes, Desdemona subjects herself to misconstruction as a loose woman simply by being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Othello's calling as a professional officer sets him apart from the society of women. Like other combat-oriented soldiers, Othello might claim:

> War is my country,
> My armour my home,
> And in every season
> Fighting is my life.[50]

And like the growing class of mercenaries who traveled across Europe, Othello enjoyed freedom from the restraints of civilian life. He puts this "unhoused free condition" "into circumscription and confine" by marriage to Desdemona. He is willing to relinquish much of his freedom, however, in pursuit of love.

Othello's description of his courtship characterizes the military adventures he has endured:

> most disastrous chances,
> Of moving accidents by flood and field,
> Of hair-breadth scapes i' th' imminent deadly breach,
> Of being taken by the insolent foe
> And sold to slavery. (1.3.133–37)

As many commentators have noted, this is the stuff of chivalric romance.[51] Othello's narrative of strange adventures beguiles the fair maiden's tears. Pity, as Chaucer was fond of saying, runneth soon in gentle heart. Desdemona loves Othello for his heroic narrative – for the dangers he had passed. He loves her because she pities him. Her pity, in turn, validates his existence as a romantic hero.

Aside from the enemies against which he opposes himself, the chivalric knight defines himself by the approval of a female of higher social station. If this woman loses her status, his self-fashioned identity is also in jeopardy. Thus when Edmund Spenser's Red Crosse Knight discovers the fair Fidelia is really the foul whore

[49] Hale, *War and Society*, p. 161.

[50] Quoted from ibid., p. 139.

[51] See, for example, Mark Rose, "Othello's Occupation: Shakespeare and the Romance of Chivalry," *English Literary Renaissance*, 15 (1985): 293–311 and Michael Louis Hays, "Shakespeare's Use of Medieval Romance Elements in His Major Tragedies," unpub. Ph.D. diss. University of Michigan, 1973.

Duessa, he is totally emasculated. When Othello becomes convinced that Desdemona is equally foul, his occupation is gone. The chivalric ideal upon which he has built his military vocation is destroyed.

Although he subscribes to a medieval ideal of selfless military service – the crusading spirit that pits him against the Turk – Othello is also a practical Renaissance military leader. He administers military justice swiftly and fairly; he sees to the fortifications at Cyprus; he consults with the captains of the citadel; he sends reports home to the Senate. In the second scene he is able to prevent a street brawl simply through his commanding presence. The Senate throws "a more safer voice" on Othello to lead its wars in Cyprus (1.3.223), and even Iago admits, "Another of his fathom they have none / To lead their business" (1.1.151–52). Thus everything we see of Othello in the first half of the play – what he does and what others say about him – makes him a truly professional military leader, a man who harmoniously combines heroic standards of virtue and valor with professional knowledge and experience. According to Jorgensen, Othello is "one of the most respected and capable military executives in Shakespeare."[52]

Even the temptation scene's passionate mood swings do not fully undercut Othello's status. His decision to proceed against Cassio and Desdemona is in many respects barbarous, but the swift justice he craves accords with military protocol. Styward's articles of war, for example, decree

> that no man of what degree soeuer he be of, shal commit adulterie with maried wiues, nor inforce widdowes, maids or virgins & by violence defile them, [lest he] shall without mercie be punished with death.[53]

Othello's haste may seem to him justified, for as Procter proclaimed, "often times the greatnes of the mischiefe requireth sodaine iustice ... And therefore the Captaines dome, order, or sentence, in this case of spedie Iustice, standeth for law, and is called martial lawe."[54] On the other hand, Othello violates Styward's caution that the general meet with his warlike council to "deliberate upon euerie matter," for "if of others faithfull counsaile it be not holpen, easilie it [an individual judgment] maie beguile us, and manie times it is found full of errours."[55] Othello takes counsel with Iago whom he trusts completely. But because Cyprus is in a state of war, he treats Desdemona's

[52] Jorgensen, *Shakespeare's Military*, p. 117.
[53] Styward, *Pathwaie*, p. 55.
[54] Procter, *Of the Knowledge*, fol. 5v.
[55] Styward, *Pathwaie*, p. 5.

supposed adultery as a military matter subject to the hasty judgments of martial law. He does not consult those he might have – Montano, for example.

By Lodovico's appearance in Act 4, of course, Othello is too distracted to be reasonable. He construes Desdemona's every word and deed as proof of guilt. In the countless explanations of how Iago gets Othello to this state, one constant is Othello's inability to remain for long in a state of doubt. "No," he declares to Iago early in Act 3, scene 3, "to be once in doubt / Is once to be resolved" (181–82). He cannot believe two contradictory narratives at once; he must choose one version or another. This may serve him well in military decisions, though even there, taking counsel and sifting evidence were important. For example, further inquiry into Cassio's and Roderigo's drunken brawl might have led to recognition of Iago's duplicity, but Othello relies on one story only, Iago's. The compulsion to choose quickly serves even more poorly when he is faced with decisions about his wife's behavior.

Peter Stallybrass comments in his analysis of patriarchal territories that in *Othello* a "woman's body could be imagined as the passive terrain on which the inequalities of masculine power were fought out."[56] Nowhere were the inequalities of masculine power more apparent than in the struggle for military preferment. Iago's resentment over his rank coalesces with the desire to possess and then to destroy Desdemona's body. And rather tellingly, Othello cries in the midst of his jealous passion, "Cuckold me! ... With mine officer!" (4.1.187–88). That Desdemona should be false is one sacrilege, but that she should be false with Othello's handpicked second-in-command is far more subversive.

A military ethos thus permeates Othello's thinking and his discourse even in the depths of his seemingly private, domestic crisis. If Desdemona is Othello's pronounced "fair warrior," her betrayal is not just a private affair but a public humiliation. No wonder that once he is convinced of her infidelity, he declares his military occupation gone.

When he first discovers the truth in Act 5, scene 2, Othello bemoans, "I am not valiant neither, / But every puny whipster gets

[56] Peter Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed," in *Rewriting the Renaissance; The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 123–42, esp. p. 141.