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January 2001

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French Language and Literature Papers. 5.
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Prévert Reads Shakespeare: Lacenaire as Iago in *Les Enfants du Paradis*

RUSSELL GANIM

First impressions seem to suggest little more than a casual link between *Othello* and the film *Les Enfants du Paradis* despite multiple references to Shakespeare's tragedy in Jacques Prévert's screenplay.¹ Many glaring differences present themselves with respect to both works. The Elizabethan drama appears to have little in common with a film made and released in France during the Occupation that focuses on a troupe of actors, a petty criminal, and an aristocrat in early nineteenth-century Paris. Yet, Prévert's numerous appropriations of Shakespeare are crucial to the film's meaning. Edward Baron Turk, who mentions the film's allusions to Shakespeare, argues that "parallels" between the two narratives are "recognizable," and briefly outlines these similarities with respect to character.² Turk rightly contends that "variants" (230) of *Othello* are to be found in *Les Enfants du Paradis*, but it is not his aim to analyze them at any great length. By contrast, my goal is to examine why Prévert chose to place such emphasis on *Othello*, and to probe the ways in which Prévert and director Marcel Carné both imitate and deviate from Shakespeare in order to explore issues such as character motivation, plot adaptation, and the aesthetic and historical contexts in which the film is situated.

The incorporation of *Othello* into the movie's structural and thematic framework allows Prévert and Carné to extend and deepen the dramatic import of *Les Enfants du Paradis*, as it is through Shakespeare that the picture goes beyond its primary schema as an imitation of the Harlequinade and defines itself as an exploration of pathological jealousy and obsession that culminates in fatalistic expressions of despair and destruction.³ Space will not allow a full discussion of how Prévert's

male characters Baptiste Debureau, Frédéric Lemaître, the Count Edouard de Montray, and the female lead Garance, correspond to Othello and Desdemona. The principal focus will be on Prévert's imitation of Iago through Pierre-François Lacenaire. Key scenes recast the relationship between Iago and Othello by literalizing particular aspects of their conflict. The result, in part, is an expansion of Shakespeare's drama where particular dimensions of the characters and plot which are not revealed in Shakespeare find expression in *Les Enfants du Paradis*. For example, one sees in Prévert an Iago who makes no effort to hide his hatred of Othello, and who enters into a directly adversarial relationship with him. Lacenaire's violent, personal "victory" at the end of *Les Enfants du Paradis* not only signals a departure from Shakespeare, but reflects the cynicism, if not the chaos of the era in which the film was made. The gratuitous, "anarchic" (Turk 253) havoc Lacenaire wreaks on the world he inhabits suggests in microcosm the sadistically cataclysmic forces unleashed in Europe during the mid-twentieth century.⁴ To a degree, Lacenaire's destructiveness has a nihilistic dimension, not so much in an early nineteenth-century epistemological sense of the inability to know or believe in anything, but in an early twentieth-century sense of the alienation and exclusion of the self that finds aggressive expression in wanton violence against society. Contrary to Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus who, among others, sought in various ways to counteract the despair attendant in recognizing the "affliction" (Thielicke 54) that is the "nothingness" of life, Prévert intimates that art and intellect provide no refuge from the drive to destroy and to self-destruct.⁵ For the purposes of this essay, nihilism will refer to the impulse to annihilate the self and/or the other that stems from a drive to assert violent authority over others in the absence of any moral or political imperative to thwart this will. From a political perspective, the nihilistic aspect of Lacenaire's character comes to mirror the situation of a divided France during the Occupation. Lacenaire displays Fascistic traits, but at the same time exhibits tendencies that identify him as "resisting" what one may term an established and oppressive authority. Prévert sets forth such an ambiguous portrait not only to win the approval of German censors, but to depict France's internal struggle through the film's most belligerent and conflicted character.

Basic Similarities: Misanthropy and Envy

It is probably no coincidence that the resemblance between Iago and Lacenaire begins with something as simple as age. Iago tells Roderigo

that he has “looked upon the world for four times seven years” (I.iii.306–07).⁶ At the time the narrative of *Les Enfants du Paradis* takes place (1828), the historical figure that was the author/criminal Pierre-François Lacenaire (1800–36) would have been twenty-eight years old as well.⁷ Given their relatively young ages, the misanthropy that characterizes both men seems rather startling. Symbolically, misanthropy at an early stage of life suggests an inveterate hatred of humanity that in these cases degenerates into social pathology, or, as Alvin Kernan remarks when describing Iago, “an anti-life spirit.”⁸ The danger of these sociopathic tendencies lies in the deliberate manner in which they are applied. At the same time Iago reveals his age, he states his disdain for all humanity, including his own (II.308–311), and implies that all love must be tempered by reason (II.321–327). Similarly, Lacenaire tells Garance at the beginning of the film, “Je ne suis pas un homme comme les autres. Mon coeur ne bat pas comme le leur . . .” (34) [“I am not a man like other men. My heart does not beat as theirs . . .”] (30–31). He has “declared war on society for a long time,” and remarks that this hatred of “ugly” humankind comes not from “cruelty,” but from the “logic” he displayed as a precocious, but rebuffed child (33, all translations mine).⁹ Both are seemingly confident in themselves, as Iago states, “I follow but myself” (I.i.55), and Lacenaire exclaims, “Et je suis sûr de moi, absolument sûr!” (38) [“And I am certain of myself . . . absolutely certain”] (32), as they prepare their respective attacks on human existence. Iago is more clear about his intentions than Lacenaire, who merely states to Garance that he is “preparing something extraordinary” (34, translation mine). But the sense of inevitable downfall that dominates Shakespeare and Prévert makes it clear that the machinations of Iago and Lacenaire will culminate in disaster for others, if not possibly themselves.

The anger and hatred in Lacenaire’s character, much like Iago’s, are defined by criminal exploits and by manifestations of overwhelming jealousy. His extortionary threat against Frédéric at the beginning of Part Two shows Lacenaire’s envy of the actor’s fame, as well as his rancor over Frédéric’s prior relationship with Garance. Though Frédéric’s affair with Garance ended years earlier, Lacenaire sees himself on a mission either to kill, or at least menace all of Garance’s former or current love interests. Lacenaire’s relationship with Garance is platonic, but not without an erotic undercurrent from Lacenaire’s point of view. Many critics, as well as Carné himself, have indicated that the character Lacenaire is homosexual.¹⁰ At the same time, however, the film is ambiguous about his sexual orientation, as evidenced by his repeated interest in Garance, and his belief that Frédéric, Baptiste, and the Count should be consid-

ered his rivals for her affection. What becomes clear is that Lacenaire is a tortured figure whose status as a social, and perhaps sexual outsider causes him to direct his antagonism towards others. Janet Adelman's characterization of Iago as a villain who "attempts to rid himself of his interior pain by replicating it in Othello" (127), corresponds to Lacenaire in that at one point or another in the film, he seeks to disrupt or destroy the lives of all the other major characters. Questions of rivalry, revenge, and envy are of particular importance with respect to Prévert's adaptation of *Othello*. In linking Lacenaire to Iago, one can mention his calculating nature, as well as his jealousy, as readily apparent points of comparison. Implicitly, however, issues of envy are also related to the question of "race" in the depiction of Lacenaire.

Throughout *Les Enfants du Paradis*, "race" and its attendant allusions to "blackness" and "whiteness" refer not to ethnic struggle, but to perceptions in which individuals are considered, or consider themselves, as "inferior" or "superior" to one another. Lacenaire, for example, is often motivated by a sense of superiority and/or inferiority to those around him. On the one hand, Lacenaire sees himself as above the actors Baptiste and Frédéric by virtue of his intelligence and cruelty. On the other, the fact that Garance continues to refuse him while entering, or eventually entering, into relationships with these men clearly makes him feel inferior. The result is that Lacenaire vilifies an entire category, or "race" of people, e.g., actors, berating them as unworthy of Garance.¹¹ Dismissing Garance's affection for the mime Baptiste, Lacenaire calls him, "l'homme blanc, votre ami le funambule" (274) ["... the man in white, your friend the acrobat"] (178). For Lacenaire, Baptiste's "whiteness" as represented by his greasepaint, ironically becomes a mark of derision that renders the mime an absurd and insignificant "acrobat" that Lacenaire "... avai[t] l'idée saugrenue de tuer" (274) ["had the outrageous idea of killing"] (translation mine). The mockery extends to Frédéric as well. After Lacenaire informs Garance of his successful extortion of Frédéric, Garance sardonically replies, "Vous voyez, il y a tout de même des gens désintéressés" (275) ["You see, there are some kind people"] (179). Incensed that Garance would even consider actors as "people," Lacenaire ripostes, "Des gens! Les acteurs ne sont pas des gens. C'est tout le monde et personne à la fois, les acteurs" (275). ["People... actors aren't 'people,' they're everybody and nobody at the same time... actors!"] (179). For Lacenaire, lowly actors have no business associating with, much less sleeping with, the woman he calls his "guardian angel." Ideas of "race," and the concomitant notions of superiority and inferiority, clearly reflect the Fascistic overtones of the era in which the film was made. Specifically,

Lacenaire embodies a lower and middle class resentment of those who are regarded as culturally or historically inferior, but who enjoy a measure of superiority either through chance or favoritism of some kind. For Lacenaire, mere stage performers such as Frédéric and Baptiste are to be despised and destroyed because they have risen too high too quickly. In the manner of Iago, Lacenaire's conception of human relationships is determined by rigid ideas of taste and presumed original condition. Similarly, Lacenaire's animosity toward actors is particularly representative of the nihilistic overtones in Prévert's film because in Lacenaire's mind, art and artists, far from transcending ideas of "nothingness" and destruction, incite them. Lacenaire's sense of insult resembles Iago's in that he feels humiliated, and has thus been rendered inferior, by those to whom he feels intellectually, and therefore naturally, superior.¹²

It is the idea of superiority that draws Lacenaire to the Count. To Lacenaire's mind, it is Montray and his kind who constitute "people" of quality. Adelman's remark that "Othello . . . becomes Iago's primary target in part because Othello has the presence, the fullness of being, that Iago lacks" (127), speaks to certain aspects of Lacenaire's hostility toward Montray. The term "presence" becomes a key factor in Lacenaire's motivation. Montray has the prestige and renown Lacenaire dreams of acquiring in his initial dialogue with Garance. The Count is "present" in society by virtue of his title and money, while the petty thief Lacenaire must remain anonymous (Lacenaire has had so many aliases by the beginning of Part Two that he does not respond right away when Garance calls him by his first name), if not "absent" altogether. Montray's wealth and influence set him far above Lacenaire's smaller rivals Baptiste and Frédéric. Though Lacenaire is indeed jealous over the affair between Montray and Garance, he begrudgingly suggests that in the Count, Garance had found someone worthy of her:

Des gens! Des gens du monde, ça, c'est des gens! Le comte Edouard de Montray, par exemple, un des hommes les plus brillants et les plus riches de France. (275)

[People . . . society people, those are people! Count Edouard de Montray, for example, one of the richest and most brilliant men in France.] (translation mine)

One could argue that Lacenaire's statement is fraught with sarcasm. But in Montray, Lacenaire has found a superior in terms of wealth and love, and at least an equal in terms of the intelligence that comes with cynicism.

That the two men show a similar degree of perspicacity and distrust is evident in their conversations which display a unique balance of eloquence and calumny. The shrewdness and skepticism of both men eliminate any possibility of Lacenaire gaining Montray's confidence in order to deceive him and bring about Montray's demise. In no way does Lacenaire constitute a lieutenant who "seduces" Montray, then betrays the Count's trust. Unlike Othello, who gullibly accepts "honest Iago's" counsel, Montray is immediately suspicious of Lacenaire, and aware of the threat he presents. Like Iago, Lacenaire no doubt believes he will eventually outwit Montray, but for the moment, he has no choice but to accept that the Count has the upper hand because of his birth and station in life. Therein lies the challenge to Lacenaire: to orchestrate the downfall of someone equal to, or above him in all categories. It is in Lacenaire's struggle against Montray that the viewer discerns traits of "resistance" in his character because he is the only figure who actively combats those who control society. Of course, Lacenaire has no organized social agenda. But when one considers the political context in which the film was made, a character such as Lacenaire, who strives to ruin representatives of authority, reflects, albeit subtly, an element of resistance that existed in French culture at the time of the Occupation.

Up until the point in the narrative where Lacenaire enters Montray's house, Lacenaire has only preyed on those (the owner of the Rouge-Gorge for whose death Lacenaire is supposedly responsible, the debt collector, and Frédéric), whom he considers to be of lower status. In defining themselves as viable antagonists, both Lacenaire and Iago must prove their skills by conspiring against their superiors. Garance remarks that Lacenaire's fixation on the Count, and on her other lovers, constitutes a significant change in him, saying, "Autrefois vous parliez surtout de vous et rarement des autres" (275) ["In the old days, you spoke always of yourself and rarely of others"] (179). Lacenaire's obsession with others can be interpreted as an extension of his own fears of self-doubt and inadequacy. Like Iago, Lacenaire has been lost in the ranks. Others, greater and smaller, have surpassed him to the point where he must dramatically make a name for himself if for no other reason than risking oblivion if he does not.

From a critical perspective, W.H. Auden's description of Iago as a "practical joker" seems especially relevant in portraying the pathology of Iago and Lacenaire:

The practical joker despises his victims, but at the same time he envies them because their desires, however childish and mistaken, are real to them, whereas he has no desire which he can call his own. . . . If the word motive is given its normal meaning of a positive purpose of the self like sex, money, glory, etc., then the practical joker is without motive. Yet the professional practical joker is certainly driven, . . . but the drive is negative, a fear of lacking a concrete self, of being nobody.¹³

It is difficult to imagine Lacenaire as a “practical joker” in every sense of Auden’s analysis, especially when discussing the self because Lacenaire assures us of his unflinching confidence in his abilities. Yet for much of *Les Enfants du Paradis*, Lacenaire represents a self in search of a goal. His life of large dreams but small exploits seems generally “motiveless,” until he decides to kill Montray.¹⁴ It is this decision that gives shape to the idea that he is indeed “preparing something extraordinary,” and renders him the most influential figure in Part Two. In large measure, the nihilistic drive to destroy the Count forms the basis of Lacenaire’s existence in the film’s final scenes.

While it would be anachronistic to label Iago’s behavior in *Othello* “nihilistic,” it is worthwhile to note that recent critics have followed Auden’s lead by interpreting Iago’s character through the related concepts of “nothingness” (Adelman 128), “non-existence” (Greenblatt 235–36), and the “absence of self or meaning” (Melichor 79). In all these cases, readers claim that Iago’s sense of exclusion and alienation prompt his psychological violence against Othello and Desdemona.¹⁵ Prévert intensifies this sense of alienation in Lacenaire by making exclusion, then annihilation (of the other and of the self), the goals of Lacenaire’s existence. At the beginning of the film, Lacenaire remarks to Garance that his chief wish is to “N’aimer personne. Etre seul. N’être aimé de personne. Etre libre” (36) [“To love no one. To be loved by no one. To be free”] (31). Exclusion of the type Lacenaire describes amounts to a kind of “nothingness” in that it signifies absolute emotional detachment from others and from oneself. Lacenaire strives to destroy that part of himself that creates any bond with humanity. However, because of envy and the need to accomplish something worthy of his grandiose sense of self, Lacenaire’s desire for exclusion turns to aggression against those whose destruction would give him the “greatness” he seeks. Like Iago, Lacenaire foists his

own sense of internal nothingness upon others, and in so doing, reduces the other to nothing by inflicting death or complete turmoil.

Lacenaire, Iago, the Heroine, and the Whore

Before examining how the direct conflict between Lacenaire and Montray both corresponds to, and deviates from *Othello*, it is important to note how Lacenaire's view of Garance resembles the way in which Iago sees Desdemona. Initially, one observes that the resemblance between Garance and Desdemona is only partial, with the basic difference being that Garance does not exhibit Desdemona's purity and fidelity, at least in the conventional sense of the term. One could argue that to a certain extent, Garance is incapable of being "unfaithful" because of her unapologetically hedonistic behavior. She may not be untrue, but as is the case with Desdemona, the men who display affection for her fear the possibility of her "infidelity" because of their own possessiveness and paranoia. Male hubris and insecurity thus help explain the belief in Garance's and Desdemona's whoredom. With respect to Iago and Lacenaire, both men carry ambiguous feelings toward their respective heroines, seeing them alternately as beauties and as trollops. During the scene in Montray's house, Lacenaire glorifies Garance, not only by repeatedly calling her his "guardian angel," but also by referring, in Iago-like fashion, to her "whiteness" as a symbol of her near-divinity.

Garance's whiteness is a motif that runs throughout the film. In Part Two, Lacenaire wonders if Garance's "virtue" has been compromised since her departure with the Count. Stating his desire to encounter Montray, Lacenaire confesses to Garance, "J'aimerais connaître cet homme qui a posé la main froide de la richesse sur la blanche épaule de mon ange gardien" (276) ["I'd like to know this man who has placed the cold hand of wealth upon the white shoulder of my guardian angel"] (180). This quote signals Lacenaire's ambivalence about Garance. On the one hand, she occupies the status of a goddess, but the question arises as to whether or not her seeming "purity" or "whiteness" has been corrupted by money. Garance herself admits she has been bought, but reassures Lacenaire that while she has "sold" herself to Montray, she has done so without "conditions," and thus retains her "freedom." Ironically, this is what disturbs Lacenaire the most. He is crushed not so much because Garance has been enticed by the Count's money, but because in the end her essence as a seductive, self-possessed, yet gentle woman has remained intact. Lacenaire remarks:

Vous ne pouvez pas savoir, Garance, combien cela m'est pénible de vous avoir retrouvée, et surtout que vous n'avez pas changé. J'aurais tellement préféré vous voir abîmée, soumise, déçue, crétinisée par l'argent! (277)

[You can't imagine, Garance, how painful it is for me to have found you again, and above all that you haven't changed! I would have been so much happier to see you spoiled, cheapened, disappointed, turned into an idiot by money.] (180)

Lacenaire's chagrin in seeing that Garance retains her "whiteness" ironically reinforces the fascist/racist tendencies of his character. Here, the conflicted Lacenaire comes to view Montray's wealth as a sign of the Count's inferiority in that the latter seduces women not through the superior means of wit and guile, but via much baser methods such as money and its influence. Of course, Lacenaire still admires Montray and remains jealous of him, but at the same time he seeks to denigrate the Count by attacking the very root of his social standing. As a result, Lacenaire casts aspersions on the Count's opulence in an attempt to "blacken" Montray as well as Garance.

Iago exhibits a similar mixture of admiration and animus with respect to Desdemona. Early in the play, Iago admits his passion for Desdemona, and its role in his attack on Othello:

And I dare think he'll prove to Desdemona
 A most dear husband. Now I do love her too;
 Not out of absolute lust, though peradventure
 I stand accountant for as great a sin,
 But partly led to diet my revenge,
 For that I do suspect the lusty Moor
 Hath leaped into my seat; the thought whereof
 Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards;
 And nothing can or shall content my soul
 Till I am evened with him, wife for wife. . . . (II.i.290–99)¹⁶

Clearly, Iago does not woo Desdemona in that manner that Lacenaire tries to win Garance. But what happens in both cases is that unrequited affection on the part of these women prompts Iago and Lacenaire to seek, or at least wish, their eventual humiliation and destruction. In Iago's

mind, Desdemona becomes a whore who must be punished, if not eliminated, not only because she has been seduced by Othello's race and rank, but because she has not been seduced by him, Iago. Alessandro Serpieri's description of Iago as the "artificer of a destructive projection" (Adelman 134), befits Lacenaire who projects his frustration over Garance onto Garance herself; first by intimating that her affection comes with a price, and secondly by expressing his anger that Garance's "whoredom" has not exacted its toll on her.¹⁷

Similarly, Iago's bitterness toward Desdemona is increased by the fact that her sense of identity, especially as it relates to Othello, remains steadfast—uncorrupted by the presumably despicable Moor. Desdemona's essence, like Garance's, stays the same despite Iago's and Lacenaire's manipulative efforts. The brunt of Iago's and Lacenaire's violence is directed toward their male superiors, but part of their fury is aimed at the women whom they feel have betrayed them personally and culturally. To be sure, the white heroine Desdemona shows no interest in Othello's lieutenant, but commits the unthinkable in Iago's mind by marrying a black man. It is her "perceived identification with the alien," (Dollimore 157), along with her refusal of a supposed equal, that incurs Iago's wrath. Likewise, in *Les Enfants du Paradis*, the marginal Garance associates with the equally marginal Lacenaire but does not sleep with him, opting at different moments to pursue affairs with actors, and to become the regular companion of one of France's most powerful men. Garance has thus identified herself with "aliens," or at least those alien to Lacenaire. Consequently, Lacenaire believes that Garance's actions degrade both of them. Ignominy of this sort can only be corrected by a plot that will bring injury to these women. Iago and Lacenaire thus share between them a misogyny that borders on the murderous and the nihilistic. Desdemona, of course, is killed in large measure because of Iago's hatred of her, and although Garance is alive at the end of *Les Enfants du Paradis*, Lacenaire's slaying of Montray will leave her world disrupted to the point where the life she knew will end. In both instances, Iago and Lacenaire calculate, if not indirectly execute, the ruin of the women they desire.

Direct Enmity: Iago Engages Othello

If neither Shakespeare nor Prévert actualizes Iago's hostility toward Desdemona, Prévert's depiction of the relationship between Lacenaire and Montray can be accurately described as the literalization of Iago's contempt for Othello. As noted, much of Lacenaire's antagonism is predicated on notions of superiority and inferiority, and therefore on concepts

of "race." Yet, in studying the Count as an Othello figure, the broader semiological and social concepts of "race" alluded to earlier need to be applied.¹⁸ Although skin color does not factor explicitly into Montray's relationship with Garance, the Count is, in the French sense of the term, of a different "race" from Garance given his noble birth and deportment. Accordingly, Montray's relationship with a marginal figure such as Garance creates a class disparity as significant as the racial "incongruity" between Othello and Desdemona. Because of the large cultural gap in the union of the Count and Garance, Montray, like Othello, is an outsider to his lover's milieu. The Count, though enticed by the subculture of the theater, particularly the *Funambules*, can by no means be assimilated by it, just as Othello cannot be incorporated into the white world whose difference has attracted him. Unlike Othello, however, Montray need not remain prisoner to his lover's background, as his influence is such that he can lure others to his world, if not impose it on them. Nonetheless, the circumstances under which Garance and Desdemona bond with Montray and Othello weaken these powerful men to the point of vanquishing them.

Within the comparison between Montray and Othello, Garance and Desdemona have much in common. Like Desdemona, who leaves Venice by following Othello to Cyprus, Garance abandons Paris and the *Funambules* to accompany Montray to India and other exotic destinations. The Count's "Orientalness" is signaled by Frédéric who calls Montray a "nabab" (243) who seduced Garance and made off with her.¹⁹ The term "nabab" merits attention because it suggests not only Montray's wealth, but a kind of Oriental otherness as well. A Hindi word, a "nabab" is a title given to officers of sultans, and also denotes Europeans who have amassed fortunes in the East (Robert 1135). Both women integrate their lovers' worlds, foreign and familiar, into their own, but nonetheless become outsiders to the milieux their mates occupy: Desdemona in the company of military men in Cyprus, and Garance in the rarefied atmosphere of the French aristocracy in the nineteenth century. While Othello and Desdemona are formally married, Garance can also be considered Montray's "spouse" not only because she has spent the last six years with him, but because, like Desdemona, she has to a significant degree consigned her life to that of her "husband." It is this *de facto* spousal union between Garance and Montray that in part inspires the envy that Frédéric, Baptiste, and Lacenaire bear toward the Count. Garance may have "loved" Baptiste, lived momentarily with Frédéric, and flirted with Lacenaire, but she gave up no part of her life to be with them. Montray's attachment to Garance is most like that between Othello and Desdemona

because, at least with respect to Garance, it is the closest relationship to a “marriage” that the film portrays.²⁰

In depicting the Iago figure's relationship to Othello, *Les Enfants du Paradis* dispenses with any falseness on the part of Lacenaire in part to underscore his role as the Count's mortal adversary. The reasons for this more straightforward approach are numerous. First, Carné's and Prévert's film has a greater number of characters and subplots than Shakespeare's play. As a result, expediency plays a role in rendering the Lacenaire/Montray relationship more immediately combative. Secondly, and more importantly, by changing the nature of the relationship, Prévert renders his adaptation of the *Othello* tradition unique from an artistic point of view. *Les Enfants du Paradis* gives its public an Iago-like figure who is just as ruthless and mentally astute as Shakespeare's, but who is bereft of his predecessor's hypocrisy. Prévert's Iago is shameless about his sadism, and unlike Shakespeare's character, seeks to make a huge spectacle of himself in order to revel publicly in his crime and punishment. After murdering the Count, Lacenaire refuses to flee, preferring to wait for the police in order to begin what he hopes will be the scandal of his imprisonment, trial, and execution. Lacenaire's character reflects the nihilism of the World War II era because his desire for the destruction of himself and others is wanton, and is founded upon a terroristic belief in violently undermining social and moral principles. His desire to kill is not limited to those against whom he has a vendetta. One recalls the scene with Frédérick at the beginning of Part Two where Frédérick states that he will fight a duel with an “imbecile” the following morning. Lacenaire expresses his hope that Frédérick will kill him, and adds that the world would be a much simpler place if all imbeciles were put to death.²¹ Once more, fascistic/racist element of Lacenaire's character is brought to light in the belief that life for the “naturally superior” would be markedly improved if only the presumed “refuse” of human existence were exterminated. To a significant extent then, Lacenaire comes to personify the worst aspects of the world Prévert and Carné depict on the *Boulevard du Crime*. In a representational sense, this world is nihilistic in that it is amoral and anarchic. The illicit sex and the general delinquency of the *Boulevard* create a kind of lawless, destructive counterculture. In Part One of the film, Lacenaire's acts of coercion against common citizens (such as his accomplice Avril's robberies) and against representatives of authority (the debt collector) serve as a foreground to the more explicit violence he commits in Part Two. Lacenaire seeks to destroy the weak, while rebelling against the strong. He thus mirrors aspects of both Fascism and Resistance in French society during the Occupation. As a re-

sult, his criminality is shaded with political contradictions that reflect the upheaval in France at the time. Although Lacenaire cannot clearly be defined as either a Fascist or Resistor, Prévert enhances the complexity of his character by establishing patterns in Lacenaire's lawbreaking, giving him a distinct *modus operandi*.

Lacenaire operates according to the self-description he gives at the beginning of the film as a "petty thief by necessity, and a murderer by vocation."²² His approach combines surprise, eloquence, and threats. Lacenaire arrives at the Count's mansion much in the same manner as he arrives at Frédéric's apartment at the beginning of Part Two: anonymously and surreptitiously, as if staging a kind of break-in. Here, however, the intrusion is for psychological purposes since in both instances, Lacenaire's primary goal is to rob the victim of his sense of security. In Montray's case, Lacenaire attempts to unnerve the Count not only by his unexpected presence, but by his elegantly crafted retorts in response to the simplest of questions concerning who he is, and what he is doing in Montray's house. That Lacenaire succeeds in unsettling Montray is evident by the fact that toward the end of their confrontation, the Count progressively recoils from Lacenaire, moving to the safety of the landing a few steps at a time, while Lacenaire holds his ground, fixing a hateful stare in Montray's direction.

Orchestrating his assassination of Montray in phases, Prévert's Iago subsequently lays the foundation for his murder of the Count at the same time as Frédéric's performance in *Othello*. Carné's camera work illustrates the link between Lacenaire and Iago, as well as Lacenaire's stiffened resolve against Montray. As if to draw the link between Iago and Lacenaire, the camera moves forward to train its gaze on Lacenaire, who seems to pay special attention to Iago as the latter advises, "Do it not with poison. Strangle her in bed, even the bed she hath contaminated" (IV.i.206–07). Turk claims that Lacenaire is "galvanized" (253) in this scene, as he is no doubt inspired by the conspiracy and murder he sees on stage. Nevertheless, it is in the lobby of the theater following the performance that Lacenaire's determination is put into practice. Lacenaire continues his verbal assault on Montray as the onslaught ends in the Count's humiliation when Lacenaire reveals Baptiste and Garance kissing behind the curtain. In many respects, Lacenaire's goal is the same as Iago's; to steal the king figure's dignity, and to crush the ruler's impression that the woman he loves remains passionately faithful to him.

Staging his abasement of Montray, Lacenaire states that he is putting the finishing touches on a play that he alternately labels a "vaudeville," a "farce," and a "tragedy." However, Lacenaire ultimately refrains

from calling his work a “tragedy” because it does not meet his definition in which “a king is betrayed not by his wife but by fate” (310 trans. mine). Lacenaire is careful not to define his play as a tragedy so as not to elevate its protagonist Montray to the level of a tragic hero. He gives the following explanation of his drama to the Count:

Oui, la fatalité! Mais s’il s’agit d’un pauvre diable comme vous ou moi, Monsieur de Montray, et quand je dis moi, c’est une façon de parler, alors ce n’est plus une tragédie, c’est une bouffonnerie, une lamentable histoire de cornard. (311)

[Yes, fate. But when we’re dealing with a poor devil like you or I, Monsieur de Montray, and when I say “I,” it’s just a figure of speech, then it’s no longer a tragedy . . . it’s a music hall joke, the pathetic tale of a cuckold.] (203)

Prévert’s Iago differs from Shakespeare’s because Lacenaire declares himself the equal of the Count (“un pauvre diable comme vous ou moi” [a poor devil like you or I]), in order to challenge Montray’s authority directly. The declaration of equality acts as a rhetorical precursor to the insults that seemingly place Lacenaire above the Count, whom he calls a “buffoon” and a “cuckold.” Without question, Shakespeare’s Iago seeks to reduce Othello to a similar state of disrepute. But Iago only indicates these desires clandestinely, either in the form of monologues, or confidential discussions with Roderigo. As Prévert’s Iago, Lacenaire verbalizes, in Montray’s presence, the crimes he will commit against him. Artistically, Prévert imagines the circumstances and consequences of an actual confrontation between Othello and Iago. In Prévert’s adaptation, Lacenaire, unlike Iago, will not count on Montray/Othello to do himself in. Prévert, like Shakespeare, relies on psychological manipulation, but Prévert gives his Iago the more tangibly prurient satisfaction of actually berating and killing the Othello figure. As Lacenaire gleefully draws the curtain and exposes Montray as a cuckold, he thereby provides the “ocular proof” (III.iii.357) so crucial to Shakespeare’s plot. In a manner that reinforces the dramatic coup Lacenaire has just executed, Prévert substitutes the curtain for the handkerchief in order to underscore the theatricality of Lacenaire’s gesture. Ever aware of the structure and technique of the drama he, as an erstwhile “Public Writer” composes, Lacenaire precedes his physical annihilation of Montray with a theatrical one.²³ Prévert

again literalizes the Shakespearean antecedent by actually depicting the Desdemona figure with another man.

Up to this point in the film, the Count suspects Garance of infidelity but it is only through Lacenaire's trap that suspicion becomes fact. Montray retains his characteristic demure, but the scandal leaves him no choice but to avenge his honor by soliciting a rendezvous with Lacenaire. Prévert differs from Shakespeare in that he does not have Montray pursue Garance/Desdemona once the "infidelity" is revealed. Instead, Prévert renders his Othello more aware of where the real menace lies. At the same time Montray suffers the torment that comes from insecurity and loss of love, he also sees himself as part of a zero-sum game where his existence depends on the annihilation of his adversary. Prévert's Othello can perhaps reassert mastery over his wayward Desdemona, but he must eliminate Iago in order to ensure his survival. The "ocular proof" of the drawn curtain underscores the Count's vulnerability not so much in terms of Garance's faithlessness, but because it shows the degree to which someone as powerful as Montray is susceptible to the attacks of sworn enemies such as Lacenaire.

This vulnerability is best exemplified by the Count's death in the Turkish bath.²⁴ One question that arises in Montray's assassination is why and how the Count allows himself to remain defenseless against Lacenaire. The basic problem is as follows: why would Montray, acutely aware of Lacenaire's murderous designs, even permit Lacenaire and Avril to enter the bath only to find him unarmed and completely open to attack? The situation becomes even more problematic when one considers the combative stance that Montray previously adopted toward Lacenaire the night before. The answer is found in the Count's Othello-like attachment to Garance that, as in Shakespeare, ends in suicide. Montray's obsession with Garance is evident from Part One, where he attends her nightly performances at the *Funambules* before finally introducing himself and pledging his devotion. During this first encounter, Montray speaks, in a rather nihilistic manner, of the way in which Garance has completely altered his existence. He explains, "Je n'existe plus, je suis anéanti, lié, aucune volonté" (172) [I don't exist any longer. I'm reduced to nothing, bound hand and foot; I have no will of my own] (108). Although the Count could, at this early juncture, be feigning a portion of his misery in order to seduce Garance, Montray's lines prove portentous in that they foreshadow the Count's fall into "nothingness" because of his love for Garance. This first encounter suggests the power that Garance wields over Montray, a power that becomes nearly absolute at film's end.

When Lacenaire exposes Garance with Baptiste, the Count's public, e.g., "noble" persona manifests itself in a way as that is forceful, but one that respects established codes of conduct. However, the confrontational mode of behavior seems to disappear in private. Almost reduced to begging Garance for her love when she admits her long-time affection for Baptiste in Part Two, Montray capitulates once he realizes this love is not forthcoming. The private space of the bathhouse does not require the belligerent posturing necessary in the lobby of the theater. Like Othello at the conclusion of Shakespeare's play, he realizes that the love that gave his life meaning is gone, and that the only recourse is death. Montray, perhaps groping for a last measure of dignity, does not directly take his own life, but freely allows his enemy Lacenaire to take it for him in what amounts to a suicide. Unlike Shakespeare's Othello, Montray does not vent his anger against the Desdemona figure in part because killing Garance, like directly killing himself, would rob him of any remaining self-respect. He thus chooses the most artistically viable option in terms of his own drama: annihilation in light of his romantic despair.

From a political and historical standpoint, the Montray/Lacenaire relationship presents a number of problematic, but equally plausible interpretations that reflect the circumstances in which France found itself during the Occupation. If one holds that Lacenaire incarnates certain racist and terroristic traits consonant with the rise of Fascism in the mid-twentieth century, then the Count comes to represent the Old Guard in Europe, helpless in the face of the chaos brought on by world conflict. No longer capable of annihilating the threat, the once established authority acquiesces to its own annihilation. Montray, much like the figures of De Boieldieu and von Rauffenstein in Jean Renoir's *Grande Illusion* (1938), represents a traditional, but fading power unable to overcome changes in a New Europe such as those brought about by the grass-roots despotism of the Nazi regime. Nonetheless, Lacenaire cannot be called a complete Fascist in the modern sense of the term because he proposes no order to supplant that of the current power structure. Turk correctly points out that after killing the Count, Lacenaire merely waits for the police to arrest him, meaning that "even independent and defiant French persons were obliged to acquiesce before an increasingly totalitarian government" (249). Lacenaire seems too content to fight the government in place without asserting any power other than his personal will. As a result, one could, in the manner of Turk, simply call Lacenaire an anarchist and leave it at that (247).

However, within the context of Occupied France, Lacenaire's continuous efforts to subvert the dominant social structure imply a resis-

tance of some sort. Despite his haughtiness, there exists a popular element in Lacenaire's self-proclaimed "war on society." Although he clearly believes that his intelligence and capacity to inflict harm distinguish him from the masses, he still lives among them. Similarly, he directs his most virulent aggression against those who wield true power. In addition, Lacenaire's accusation that the Rag-and-Bone man Jérico acts as a spy for the police, and therefore the government, indicates a desire to controvert the law not simply because the authorities thwart his own criminal activity, but because, in a larger representational sense, the network of state-sponsored informants represents a repressive force in society as a whole. While we can agree with Turk that it would be difficult to equate Montray with Germany, or with the Collaborationist government of Pétain (247), the Count does embody those who benefit the most from society's power apparatus. Consequently, Lacenaire the rebel who fights the police, as well as those who direct and employ the police, also symbolize a segment of Occupied France that sought to affirm some measure of autonomy by undermining the entities who would forcibly dominate a fundamentally helpless population. Prévert's symbolism is purposely problematic, and even contradictory, because France itself was irrevocably torn between its inclinations toward Fascism and Resistance.

In the abstract, Lacenaire represents an upstart, either from the right or the left, who expresses individual and seemingly popular will in the face of a corrupt and oppressive regime. In a more concrete sense, Lacenaire stands for France through the significantly limited nature of his success as manifested in the Count's murder. Whether one considers Lacenaire a figure of Nazism or of the Resistance, his assassination of Montray brings about no social change; only self-destruction that evokes the nihilistic void. This is so because Lacenaire does not have the strength to overcome those who exercise power outside his immediate sphere of influence. Likewise, France's political divisions before and during the Occupation led to internal collapse, leaving the country to submit itself to external powers, be they members of the Axis or the Allies. The individual and the collective selves are annihilated by virtue of being overwhelmed by superior forces. France, much like Lacenaire and Iago, is impotent; and vents the frustration over this impotence through self-extermination.

Conclusion: Old and New [Dis]Orders

Prominent nineteenth-century French critics of Shakespeare, among them Victor Hugo and François Guizot, admire the manner in which the trag-

edies seem to reestablish social and psychological equilibrium at their conclusions.²⁵ Hugo argues that, “the just and normal order of things which, however distorted by the evil he [Shakespeare] portrays, always succeeds in restoring itself and destroying the evil” (Haines 157).²⁶ Guizot makes similar remarks with respect to *Othello*, contending that Shakespeare, “judged Iago pitilessly, as a symptom of that unnatural evil which must fail because it is unnatural” (118). Whether one agrees with these critics or not about the resolution of Shakespeare’s tragedies, questions of moral order are intriguing, and raise issues about the end of *Les Enfants du Paradis*. To a large extent, the assumption one draws from viewing the final scenes of the film is that these last frames leave impressions of violence and chaos as opposed to a conclusion that reaffirms norms of justice and morality. For example, the closing shots of Baptiste hopelessly pursuing Garance on the *Boulevard du Crime* suggest the disarray into which the characters’ worlds have fallen. This last scene is crucial to the *Othello* fabula because many of the dancing Pierrots, seemingly assembled in sadistic mockery of Baptiste’s demise, wear black masks as if to combine the film’s two dominant theatrical motifs: the Harlequinade and *Othello*. Baptiste compares his situation to Othello’s earlier in the film, and the blackness now exhibited on the faces of the Pierrots suggests the metaphorical darkness that has overtaken a once king-like figure of the Parisian silent stage.²⁷ Having abandoned his family and career for Garance who has abandoned him, Baptiste is now engulfed in the bedlam of the street which mirrors the chaos of his mind. While the masked Pierrots do not destroy anything around them, there is a nihilistic tone to the scene in that the joy the revelers symbolically take in Baptiste’s self-destruction can also be seen as celebrating the more explicit malevolence wrought by Lacenaire’s assassination of Montray in the previous sequence. Within a political context, however, the celebration will be short-lived. Any sense of temporary “liberation” is quelled by the notion that while Lacenaire may have triumphed in his direct struggle with Montray, the established order will affirm its authority by trying and executing rebels such as Lacenaire.

If one considers Lacenaire’s status with respect to Guizot’s observation, the questions that arise are whether or not 1) Lacenaire’s evil can be considered “unnatural,” or 2) Lacenaire’s evil “fails,” and/or 3) Carné and Prévert “judge” him “pitilessly” if at all. From a general standpoint, the inclination would be to answer these questions negatively given that the film reflects the social and moral devastation of the epoch in which it was made. If Lacenaire’s evil is “unnatural,” it is only because the world itself has become perverted to the point of self-annihilation. Accord-

ingly, one observes that while Lacenaire's evil "fails" in a political sense, he seems to achieve what he wants from a personal perspective by killing Montray and by presumably receiving the notoriety that comes with murder. If anything, Lacenaire foresees his appointment with the guillotine as a criminal apotheosis that fulfills his destiny.²⁸ As a result, neither Prévert nor Carné "judge[s]" Lacenaire the way Shakespeare presumably "judges" Iago. Prévert's depiction of nihilism is unabashedly pessimistic, if not absolute, in that it offers no real alternative to chaos and despair. Renaissance-era punishment of evil is replaced by modern-era exaltation of it. Any attempt to return to normality is pre-empted by the aberration that was mid-twentieth-century Europe.

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NOTES

1. Since the film is based on an original screenplay by Prévert, one is more likely to consider him responsible for the allusions to Shakespeare than Carné. Of course, Carné's influence on the film is undeniable, and it would be unwise to downplay his contribution in the manner of François Truffaut who claimed that Carné merely "renders in images films created by Jacques Prévert" (Turk 53). In this essay, my discussion of Prévert will relate primarily to dialogue and literary precedent, while references to Carné will deal with framing, decor, and tone.

2. See *Child of Paradise: Marcel Carné and the Golden Age of French Cinema* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard UP, 1989) 230.

3. Turk makes a similar argument with respect to the Harlequinade by contending that *Othello* "provided the necessary 'lofty' counterpoint to the *commedia dell'arte* scenarios that regulate the film's melodramatic plot" (261). However, the context of this discussion is the actor Pierre Brasseur's contributions to the film in his portrayal of Frédéric Lemaître. Turk holds that one of the principal reasons for the Shakespearean intertext was that "it allowed Brasseur to brandish his extraordinary gamut of abilities" (261).

4. Turk sees Lacenaire as a "threat to the social order" (275), but this menace is more a reflection of Lacenaire's presumed homosexuality than of the political circumstances in which the film was made (276). As Carné, as well as many critics have stated, the film could not contain direct references to politics because of German censorship. Nonetheless, as the discussion of the film's nihilistic elements will show, the narrative is not without oblique forms of political and/or philosophical contextualization. For an interpretation of how *Les Enfants du Paradis* deals with the more specific issue of "France's political plight under Occupation" (249), consult Turk's chapter entitled, "Politics and Theater in Children of Paradise," 245–67.

5. Consult Charles I. Glicksberg's, *The Literature of Nihilism* (London: Assoc. UP, 1975), esp. 9, 14, and 20–27. Glicksberg refers to Thielicke's work *Nihilism*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961).

6. All quotes from *Othello* are taken from the Penguin edition, Alvin Kernan, ed. (New York: 1986).

7. In her book, *Jacques Prévert: Popular Theater and Cinema* (London and Toronto: Assoc. UP, 1990), Claire Blakeway relates that the historical Lacenaire was known as the “poète-assassin” and the “dandy du crime” (163). She also explains that the Surrealists admired Lacenaire, and that André Breton quotes him in the *Anthologie de l’humour noir* (Paris: Editions du Sagittaire, 1950), 71–73.

8. Kernan makes these remarks in his Introduction:

“Honest Iago” conceals beneath his exterior of the plain soldier and blunt, practical man of the world a diabolism so intense as to defy rational explanation—it must be taken like lust or pride as simply a given part of human nature, an anti-life spirit which seeks the destruction of everything outside the self. (xxxiii–xxiv)

9. Lacenaire conveys these sentiments about his childhood in Part One during his initial scene with Garance: “Quand j’étais enfant, j’étais déjà plus lucide, plus intelligent que les autres. ‘Ils’ ne me l’ont jamais pardonné” (35) [Even when I was a child, I was more intelligent, more logical than the rest of them. ‘They’ never forgave me for it] (31). All references to Prévert’s dialogue come from his screenplay (Paris: Balland, 1974). Unless otherwise noted, English quotations of the script are taken from Dinah Brooke’s translation, *Children of Paradise* (New York: Simon, 1968).

10. Much critical debate exists for and against the argument that Iago is a repressed homosexual. Among the essays in support of this idea are Janet Adelman’s “Iago’s Alter Ego: Race as Projection in *Othello*,” in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48 (1997): 125–47, esp. 134, and Stanley Edgar Hyman’s book, *Iago: Some Approaches to the Illusion of his Motivation* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), esp. 101–21. In note 21 of her article, Adelman cites two major critics opposed to this notion: Jonathan Dollimore in *Sexual Dissidence* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1991), esp. 157–62, and Bruce R. Smith’s *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1991), esp. 61–63, and 75. The reasoning on both sides of the issue merits close attention, but the homoerotic dimension of Lacenaire’s character has been sufficiently explained by Turk (273–75), and any detailed comparison between Lacenaire’s supposed homosexuality and Iago’s is beyond the scope of this essay.

11. The French word “race,” while denoting ethnic difference, also carries the much broader definition of people who act in a like manner. Robert defines this general idea as a “catégorie de personnes apparentées par des comportements communs” (1445).

12. To a degree, Dollimore’s concept of race in *Othello* centers on questions of inferiority and superiority. He claims that Iago’s hatred of Desdemona comes from “the sense that the enemy [Othello] is racially and culturally inferior” (156). Likewise, Lacenaire’s antagonism toward Baptiste and Frédérick stems largely from his belief in their cultural inferiority.

13. The quote is taken from *The Dyer’s Hand and Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1962), but first came to my attention in note 6 of Adelman’s article. See 256–57 of Auden, and 127 of Adelman.

14. The term “motiveless” invariably invokes Coleridge’s well-known argument that Iago is driven by a “motiveless malignity.” See 188 of the Penguin edition, which quotes Coleridge in *Shakespearean Criticism*, 2nd ed., Thomas Middleton Raysor, ed. (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc. 1960; London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1961. 2 vols).

15. Adelman mentions these authors in note 6 of her article. She cites Stephen Greenblatt’s essay, “The Improvisation of Power,” in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980) 222–54. Bonnie Melichor is quoted

from her article, "Iago as Deconstructionist," *Publications of the Arkansas Philological Association* 16 (1990): 63–81.

16. Karl Zender suggests that Iago's animosity toward Othello is increased by the idea that Iago "imagines Othello has slept with Emilia" (323). Consult "The Humiliation of Iago," *Studies in English Literature* 34 (1994): 323–39. Adelman argues that the declaration, "the lusty Moor/Hath leaped into my seat," amounts to a homosexual fantasy on Iago's part (131).

17. See "Reading the Signs: Towards a Semiotics of Shakespearean Drama." trans. Keir Elam, in *Alternative Shakespeares*, John Drakakis, ed. (London: Methuen, 1985), 119–43. See also note 14 of Adelman.

18. See note 11.

19. Turk describes the association between Montray and the Orient during the assassination scene in the Turkish bath. Again, the emphasis is on homoeroticism. See 325–26.

20. Baptiste and Nathalie are, of course, married in a conventional sense. Yet, the one-sidedness of Nathalie's affection for Baptiste renders the relationship much less reciprocal than that between Garance and Montray. As a result, one could argue that Garance and Montray have seemingly attained a more desirable bond than have Baptiste and Nathalie.

21. The exchange between Lacenaire and Frédéric is as follows:

Lacenaire: Vous vous battez en duel? Et avec qui?
 Frédéric: Oh, avec un imbécile!
 Lacenaire: Vous allez le tuer, j'espère?
 Frédéric: Oh, s'il fallait tuer tous les imbéciles!
 Lacenaire: Evidemment. Et pourtant ça simplifierait tellement les choses! (235)

[Lacenaire: You're fighting a duel? With who?
 Frédéric: With an imbecile!
 Lacenaire: I hope you intend to kill him?
 Frédéric: Oh, if one could kill all the imbeciles!
 Lacenaire: Absolutely. And, after all, it would simplify an awful lot of things!] (155)

22. These ideas are best expressed during Lacenaire's initial scene with Garance in Part One, where he describes himself in the following manner:

Petit voleur par nécessité, assassin par vocation, ma route est toute tracée. Mon chemin est tout droit et je marcherai la tête haute . . . jusqu'à ce qu'elle tombe dans le panier naturellement (38).

[Petty thief from necessity, murderer by vocation, my way is already marked out. My road is straight ahead, and I shall walk with my head held high . . . until it falls into the basket on the other side of the guillotine, of course. . .] (32)

23. At the beginning of the film, Lacenaire's work as an "écrivain public" fulfills the practical function of supplementing his income while serving as a front for his extortionary exploits. From an aesthetic standpoint, the letter we see him writing for a man trying to reconcile with his wife highlights Lacenaire's gifts for language, as well as his overriding cynicism.

24. See Turk's interpretation of how the Count's murder becomes a homoerotic affirmation of Lacenaire's masculinity, 274–75.

25. More recent critics such as Jan Kott argue along similar lines when discussing *Othello*. See *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, trans. Boleslaw Taborski, pref. by Peter Brook (London: Methuen, 1967) 98. Dollimore mentions Kott's argument in *Sexual Dissidence*, 164.

26. I cite Charles M. Haines's work, *Shakespeare in France: Criticism from Voltaire to Victor Hugo* (London: Oxford UP, 1925) 125. Haines himself cites Guizot's 1821 French edition of Shakespeare's complete works.

27. Baptiste likens his situation to that of Othello's after his breakdown at the *Funambules* in Part Two. He seeks refuge at the Grand Relais, where, in a discussion with Madame Hermine, he describes Shakespeare's protagonist as "Un homme qui tue son amour et qui en crève" (292) [A man who kills his love, and dies of it] (193). Calling the Moor's plight "absurd and sad," like his own, Baptiste claims that Shakespeare's tragedy "would make a good pantomime."

28. See note 22.