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The Theme Of Revenge In Othello

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I would like to express my thanks to my supervisor for helping me to write this research and to my teaches who taught me throughout my study in English department.

Dedication

To my supervisor

To my family

To my teachers

With Love and Respect

CHAPTER ONE

(1 – 1) Introduction

Although Othello , unlike Coriolanus , is generally considered one of the great Shakespeare tragedies , it is also quite widely thought to be the most limited of them . For anyone like myself who does not share that limiting view of it , the prime critical task must therefore be to explain why not to explain how the play is tragic in the fullest sense of the word , and why its alleged limitedness is actually the reflection of the reader s own rather cramping moral and artistic preconceptions

.

We can see clearly enough the disabling effect of such preconceptions in the views of earlier times – Rymer 's is only most notorious case – yet it is probably no less in our own . To a quite peculiar extent , the growing mass of commentary about Othello in recent decades seems to have become stuck in old ruts , old debates and circularities . Particular aspects of the play have been written about very finely , of course ; nevertheless , we do not seem to be much closer to any generally shared understanding of it as a whole . As with no other of Shakespeare 's tragedies , criticism of this one seems to have become arrested or split into two intransigent camps – not , I think , because of any special daftness in Othello 's very various readers , but because of certain essential features of the play itself . At any rate , the critical stalemate suggests that as well as reviewing the common arguments and counter – arguments about it , we need to re – consider the tragedy in a rather more fundamental way . Hence this book : it is an attempt to turn back to the play again and ask why has it proved so hard for critics to reach even a rough general agreement about its basic tenor , about what we make of its hero , and about the kind , depth and – scope of the demands it makes on us .

(1 – 2) LIFE AND WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE

With the epithet ' Dear Son of Memory ' , Milton praised Shakespeare as one constantly in our memories and brother of the Muses . Certainly no other author has held such sway over the literary world , undiminished through some three and a half centuries of shifting artistic tastes . Shakespeare's plots and his characters have continued to be a living reality for us ; as his well known contemporary Ben Jonson wrote , in a familiar tribute , ' Thou . . . art still , while thy Book doth live , / And we have wits to read , and praise to give . ' (COLES , 1994 , 1)

(1 – 3) What do we know about Shakespeare ?

Imagine for a minute you are Shakespeare , born in 1564 , the son of a businessman who is making his way in Stratford – upon – Avon . When you are thirteen , Francis Drake sets off on a dangerous sea voyage around the world , to prove that it is round , not flat , and to bring back riches . The trades people who pass in and out of your town bring with them stories of other countries , each with their own unique culture and language . You learn in school of ancient heroic myths taught through Latin and Greek , and often , to bring these stories a live , travelling theatres pass through the town acting , singing performing and bringing with them tales of London . But , at the age of fourteen your own world shifts a little under your feet ; your father has got into serious debt , you find yourself having to grow up rather fast .
(LONGMAN , 1993 , 4)

(1 – 4) Who Was Shakespeare ?

At this point we might mention a problem that has plagued Shakespeare study for over a century : who was Shakespeare ? Those who would like to make the author of the plays someone else – Francis Bacon or the Earl of Oxford or even Christopher Marlowe (dead long before most of the plays were written) – have used the lack of information of Shakespeare ' s early years and the confusion in the evidence we have been examining to advance their candidate . But the major arguments against Shakespeare show the source of these speculators ' disbelief to be in classonscious snobbery and perhaps in a perverse adherence to minority opinion .
(COLES , 1994 , 5)

(1 – 5) Shakespeare 's Works

For twenty – four years , from 1588 to 1612 , Shakespeare was writing actively and with few breaks . His first plays , as in the case of all beginners , reveal signs of immaturity and lack of experience , but even those first plays are greater than the best work of any other of his contemporaries , or of any who had gone before him . In his further career , he attained perfection , as far as man can ever be said to do this , In the final stage of his writings , while the grandeur persists , there are signs , according to the reading of some critics , of incipient decay .

(W . TURNER , 1817 , 14)

(1 – 6) His Comedies , Tragedies and Histories ?

When Shakespeare died , his players brought together the works he had written , and had them published . Before this some of the plays had only really existed as actors' scripts written for their parts alone . Many plays in Shakespeare's day and before were not written down at all , but spoken , and kept in people's memories from generation to generation . So , making accurate copies of Shakespeare's plays was not easy and there is still much dispute over how close to the original scripts our current editions are . Ever since they were first published people have tried to make sense of them .

(LONGMAN , 1993 , 8)

(1 – 7) Historical Background

In *Othello* the dramatist is not concerned with current political affairs as he was in *Hamlet* . He has distanced the action of the play by making distant Venice and Cyprus its setting . *Othello* is not a historical figure , but the Turkish attack on Cyprus is a historical event . In 1487 Cyprus came to Venice from the Turks by right of conquest . Ever afterwards the Turks tried to regain it , till it was taken by them during the reign of their glorious King Salim I I , about the year 1570 . We learn from the play that there was a junction of the Turkish fleet at Rhodes , for the invasion of Cyprus : that it came sailing to Cyprus , then went to Rhodes , there met another squadron , and then resumed its way to Cyprus .

(Raghukul Tilak , 1987 , 80)

CHAPTER TWO

(2 – 1) Plot Summary

Othello opens in the great and powerful city – state of Venice . It is late at night . Roderigo , a young gentleman and former suitor of Senator Brabantio 's daughter , Desdemona is angry with Iago , a soldier in the Venetian army . Iago knew about Desdemona 's elopement with the leader of the Venetian forces , a Moor named Othello , yet , complains Roderigo , Iago did not tell him . Roderigo reminds Iago that he has said he hates the Moor , although he serves him . Iago agrees ; he is burning with jealousy and hatred , for even though he has been Othello 's ensign , he was passed over when Othello chose a lieutenant

. The post has gone to a young man from Florence , Michael Cassio , whom Iago holds in great contempt because all he knows of soldiering he has learned out of books . Iago , on the other hand , is a veteran of many hard – fought campaigns him that she has ran off with the Moor.

The two stand before Brabantio 's house and call to him . When he appears at a window , Iago takes great pleasure in telling him the news . But , before the old man comes running down . Iago leaves very quickly ,telling Roderigo that as the Moor 's trusted ensign it is not right that he should be involved . He must still pretend love and loyalty to Othello , who is about to embark for Cyprus with the army to fight the Turks .

(COLES , 1994 , 15)

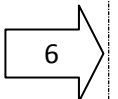
(2 – 2) Othello begins on a street in Venice , in the midst . of argument between Roderigo , a rich man and Iago . Roderigo has been paying Iago to help him in his Suit to Desdemona has married Othello , a general whom Iago begrudgingly serves as ensign . Iago says he hates Othello , who recently passed him over for the position of lieutenant in favor of the inexperienced Soldier Michael Cassio . Unseen , Iago and Roderigo Cry out to Brabantio that his daughter Desdemona has been stolen by and married to Othello , the moor . Brabantio finds that his daughter is indeed missing , and he gathers some officers to find Othello . Not wating his hatred of Othello to be known , Iago leaves Roderigo and hurries back to Othello before Brabantio sees him . At Othello 's lodgings , Cassio arrives with an urgent message from the duke : Othello help is needed in the matter of imminet Turkish invasion of cxprus . Not long offerward , travel with Othello . By the time they reach Cxprus the foreign threat has gone . Iago manipulates cassio to make him drunk and gats Roderigo to draw him into astreet Fight .

(WWW . Spark notes . Com)

(2 – 3) In the opening scene , Iago complains to Roderigo that Othello , has passed him over to Promote the handsome young Cassio to be his Lieutenant . He vows to get revenge . Iago first asks Roderigo to tell Desdemona 's Father , Brabantio , that his daughter has left to marry Othello , a marriage Brabantio opposes because Othello is a Moor . Brabantio confronts Othello , and they take their argument to the Duke , who has summoned Othello to ask him to sail Cyprus to stop a Turkish invasion . Convinced by Othello and Desdemona that they love each other deeply despite their differences , the Duke gives Desdemona permission to travel with Othello . By the time they reach Cyprus the foreign threat has gone . Iago manipulates Cassio to make him drunk and gets Roderigo to draw him in to a street fight . Iago has his revenge on Cassio when Othello strips Cassio of his rank for misbehavior . Then Iago decides to ask Desdemona to plead with Othello to be reinstated . Iago suggests to Othello that Desdemona is Cassio 's lover . Trusting Iago , and mad with Jealousy , Othello promotes Iago and asks Iago to help him to kill Cassio and Desdemona .

(WWW . nosweat Shakespeare . com)

CHAPTER THREE



(3 – 1) The theme of Revenge in Othello

The Theme of Revenge in Othello is a constant theme throughout the play Othello . It is portrayed through the character Iago . Iago is determined to destroy Othello and his loved ones . This retribution is a result of Othello promoting Cassio to the position of lieutenant . The theme of revenge is the motivation of Iago 's hatred toward Othello . In the beginning of the play , Iago feels betrayed by his good friend , Othello . Through many years of loyalty and service Iago is "[is] on a personal quest to make [himself] [Othello 's] lieutenant" (39) . When Othello has to choose his lieutenant , he appoints Cassio . Iago feels hurt and betrayed , and realizes "there [is] no remedy" (40) except for

revenge . He ... hate [s] the Moor ... ” (63) and comes to the conclusion that “... nothing can or shall content [his] soul [t] ill [he is] evened with [Othello] ... ” (76) . In an attempt for revenge , Iago publically humiliates Brabantio at Othello 's expense . In the middle of the night , Iago calls outside Brabantio 's house to inform him that his daughter Desdemona has run away and eloped with Othello . Coming from two different backgrounds , Desdemona 's father takes offense to their interracial marriage . This demeans Othello and causes him to prove to Brabantio that he did not use any witchcraft or black magic to win Desdemona 's heart . When Desdemona professes her true love for Othello , her father disowns her . Iago 's first attempt to destroy Othello is successful , yet he still craves revenge . He devises a plan to make Othello believe that Cassio is having an affair with his wife Desdemona . This will cause Othello to regret appointing Cassio as his lieutenant and simultaneously destroy Othello 's life . He knows that he “ must bring this monstrous birth to the world 's light ” (64) if he wants to avenge Othello 's betrayal . Iago is successful in convincing Othello ...
(WWW . Mega essays . Com)

(3 – 2) conflict between appearance and reality .

The conflict of appearance and reality runs through the plays of Shakespeare and Othello is no exception in this respect . Throughout the play we are aware that characters , situations and incidents are not what they appear to be . It is Iago who states this theme in as clear words , as possible when he tells Roderigo in the very first scene of the play ,

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

This conflict of appearance and reality which the play keeps before us , extends also , in an unusual way , to Othello himself . Ironically , up to the point where Iago persuades him otherwise , he assumes that outward appearance and action is a clear reflection of human personality . When counselled by Iago to hide himself from Brabantio 's anger , Othello responds with :

No , I must be found :
My parts , my title , and my perfect soul ,
Shall manifest me rightly :

Later , though by this time a little less certain , he asserts that ' men should be what they seem ' . But throughout . Othello 's own appearance raises some doubts about the validity of this assumption . His perfect soul is not openly reflected in his face which is , of course , black . As if to lend support to this anomaly , Iago 's evil is not reflected in the honesty of his face . By direct contrast , Desdemona is both perfect in her soul , and fair in her outward appearance .

(Raghukul Tilak , 1987 , 136 – 137)

(3 – 3) The setting of the play : its symbolic significance .

The Dual setting

“Othello ”is unique among Shakespeare tragedies in as much as its action is not all confined to a single place or to places which are near to one other . Its Act I takes place in Venice and then Act II moves on to Cyprus where the rest of the action takes place . There is no violation of the unity of atmosphere because the tumult and bustle of Act I is carried over to scene I of Act II which takes place in Cyprus . Moreover the marriage of Desdemona in Cyprus . Both Venice , and Cyprus have symbolic significance . Venice symbolises civilised behaviour , law and order , while the reverse is symbolised by Cyprus . The point would become clear if we examine it in some detail .

(IBID . 138)

(3 – 4) Venice : Its Symbolic Significance

It is in Venice that the play opens . In the very opening scene Iago and Roderigo awaken Brabantio and he says angrily ,

**What , tell 'st thou me of robbing ? this is Venice
My house is not a grange .**

Brabantio ' s surprise indicates that robbery and law – breaking in Venice are unusual . Even after having established to his limited satisfaction that Iago 's and Roderigo 's story has some truth in it , he goes to confront Othello with the Venetian law : 'To prison , till fit time / Of law; and course of direct session / Call thee to answer '

In the scene which follows this confrontation , we observe the working of Venetian law at two levels . first , the Duke of Venice , in whose authority the law is vested , has to deal with an external threat to the stability and peace of Venice .

(IBID . 138 - 139)

(3 – 5) Deception and self – deception

Iago : The Arch – deceiver

Characters in Othello are sharply divided into two groups . On the one hand , there are characters who are self – deceived or are the victims of deception practised on them by others . In the second group , there are characters which deceive others and cause tragedy in their life . Iago is the arch – contriver and deceptor and the other characters in this play are his dupes . He deceives them and uses them to achieve his own ends .

(IBID . 140)

(3 – 6) Brabantio : Victim of Self – deception

Take , for example , Brabantio . He is a character who is entirely self – deceived . He is of the view that his daughter Desdemona 'is a maiden never bold ' , who blushes at her own motion .

Numerous gallants of her own country have paid court to her , but she has not listened to any of them . He , therefore , cannot believe that she would love the black Moor Othello , elope with him and marry him secretly . But this is exactly what happens . When awakened by Roderigo , he is furious at having been awakened at such an odd hour . He does not believe even a single word of what Roderigo tells him . But when he searches his home he discovers the truth . He finds that his daughter has actually eloped . His disillusionment is complete , when before the duke and his council , she freely acknowledges her love for the Moor and boldly declares that Othello did not use any charm or magic – potions to win her love . Rather she was ‘ half the wooer ’ and she loved him because she saw his nobility and generosity reflected in his face . She loved him for his noble soul and his exterior did not come in the way of her love .

(IBID . 140)

(3 – 7) Soliloquies in Othello : their significance

In Othello most of the soliloquies are given to Iago , a villain . Critics have objected to it and have pointed out that Iago is a villain and a villain is never likely to admit his villainy to himself . But as a critic has well said , ‘ A study of Iago ’s soliloquies is of much interest . It is a device which Shakespeare has used more powerfully in Othello , perhaps , than elsewhere . I mean his scene – ending soliloquies which develop the plot . ’

(IBID . 143)

(3 – 8) Iago : His Soliloquies

In his first soliloquy at the end of Act I , Iago tells us of his hatred for the Moor and reasons thereof . He wants to have his revenge upon him but as yet he does not know how :

Let me see now ;

**To get his place , and to make up my will
A double knavery .**

The audience thus knows that he intends to cause the dismissal of Cassio , take his place and also have his revenge upon the Moor through some act of double knavery . He will now use his powerful brain to devise some means of achieving his aim .

In his second soliloquy which comes at the end of Scene I , Act II , Iago turns to the audience and explains to them his tool . Through his quarrel with Cassio , he would cause the latter's downfall . He intends to put the Moor ,

**Into a jealousy so strong
That judgment cannot cure .**

But how ? the idea is there in his mind , but all is yet confused ; nothing is clear for ,

'Knavery's plain face is never seen till used .'

(IBID . 143 - 144)

CHAPTER FOUR

11

Characters in the play

(4 – 1) Othello , the Moor of Venice

His perfect Soul

According to Drakakis , Othello is one of Shakespeare's most unusual tragic heroes , a combination of opposites in that he is a 'black' man with a 'perfect soul . ' In this way , the theme of appearance versus reality is stressed from the very beginning . So long as his perfect soul rules his actions , he is the noble Moor , but once he falls victim to his passions then this relationship is reversed and he seems to be as black in his soul as he seems to be in appearance .

A Romantic to the Core

‘Othello’ says Bradley is by far the most romantic figure among Shakespeare’s heroes. He has not been born and bred in familiar, prosaic England, but comes from a remote, wonderland – the distant, unknown Morocco. He has always lived a life of adventure and romance. He has travelled to distant lands and strange are the tales of his travels which he relates.

A Born Poet

His life has been romantic, and he also possesses the imagination of the most sensitive romantic poet. His speeches reveal him to be a born poet. Even his casual phrases are full of poetry. For example here is the impassioned expression of his love for Desdemona

O my soul’s joy

If after every tempest comes such joy,

May the winds blow till they have wakened death.

(Raghukul Tilak, 1987, 102)

(4 – 2) IAGO, The Villain

A Complex Villain

Iago is the villain of the piece in Othello. He is the most sophisticated and complex of Shakespeare’s villains. Many attempts have been made to explain Iago’s wickedness and he himself suggests a number of motives for his destruction of Othello and Desdemona.

An Intellectual Giant

Iago is an intellectual giant. He is all mind and no heart. He is guided by intellect and not by emotions. His soliloquies make it clear that he is capable of accurate reasoning and his intrigues are carefully worked.

Cruel and Heartless

Iago is intellectually a giant , but he is a heartless villain . Evil in him is not mixed with any good . He does not hesitate to destroy Desdemona and Cassio , for no fault of their own . He is exultant when Othello lies unconscious at his feet writhing with agony :

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

His Motives

The first motive that Iago advances for his disloyalty to Othello concerns his failure to obtain the post of lieutenant which has gone to Cassio .

(IBID , 107)

(4 – 3) CASSIO

Cassio is a secondary character much less important than Iago and Othello . But his role in the play is a crucial one . He is handsome , good natured , light – hearted . He does not drink , and is not given to the pleasures of sex . Iago fully exploits these traits of his character to achieve his ends .

Cassio is a handsome young man and is so generous and noble hearted that even Iago . his arch enemy , admits that he has a daily beauty in his life which makes him look ugly by contrast .Iago has a grudge against him . First he has doubts that he has had illicit relationship with his wife and secondly that he has been appointed to the post of the lieutenant to Othello , a post which he does not deserve and which in Iago 's opinion he himself deserves . In Iago 's opinion he has merely theoretical knowledge and no practical knowledge of warfare . In his opinion he is a man ,

**That never set a swardon in the field
Nor the division of a battle knows
More than a spinster .**

**We cannot attach any value to his words , for before Montano he
praises him as ,**

A soldier fit to stand by Caesar

**As a soldier he has a high sense of discipline and cares much for
his reputation as an officer . After his disgrace , the following pathetic
cry burst out of his lips ; ‘ Reputation ! O , I have lost my reputation ! I
have lost the immortal part of myself , and what remains is bestial . ’
These pathetic words are an indication of the best in him .**

(IBID , 109 - 110)

(4 – 4) Roderigo , His Role

**Roderigo is a rich Venetian , but he has more money in his
pocket than wisdom in his brain . He is totally foolish and so he is easily
duped and be - fooled by Iago . He is also thoroughly mean ,
contemptible and immoral . He loves Desdemona and would like to
enjoy her whether through marriage or without marriage . Brabantio ,
Desdemona’s father , has several times warned him that Desdemona is
not for him , but he does not care for this . Iago fully exploits his
weakness , uses his purse as his own , keeps him no promises that one
day he would be enjoying Desdemona , promises which are never
fulfilled . However , this fool Roderigo also becomes the means of fully
exposing the wicked plans and intrigues of Iago . When he is dead ,
certain papers are found on him which completely expose the full
villainy of Iago .**

**It is under Iago’s advice that he sells his property so that he
may have enough money to purchase gifts for Desdemona and then
follows them to Cyprus in a ‘ usurped beard ’ . In Cyprus , he is be -**

fooled by Iago . He not only extorts money from him but also uses him as a tool to bring about the disgrace and dismissal of Cassio . When Roderigo becomes suspicious and begins to doubt , Iago thinks of a clever , plan . He incites him to kill Cassio in the darkness of night as he returns from the house of Bianca . Roderigo succeeds only in wounding Cassio . Iago himself fatally stabs Roderigo , in order to avoid the exposure of his villainy . But Roderigo has certain incriminating documents on his body which completely expose the machinations and intrigues of Iago . This is a fine instance of dramatic irony , for here a fool and a dupe becomes the means of bringing doom on the most wicked and intellectually superior person in the play .

(IBID , 111 - 112)

conclusion

Shakespeare wrote many plays that contain , trickery , love , jealousy , and revenge . In Othello one of his most recognized tragedies was evolving around the central theme of jealousy and revenge . The theme of jealousy goes with love as it is with real life . Othello 's love for Desdemona has blinded him . And it corrupt him so easily . Othello 's emotion of jealousy not only resulted in the deaths of three of Othello 's main characters , it caused the sudden deaths of innocent characters as well .

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