

Beyond Personality in Othello by William Shakespeare

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Abstract:

Othello, one of the richest cult work by Shakespeare like other works weaves around many themes like mistrust, sexual jealousy, deception and hypocrisy emerging from racial discrimination. When the tragic hero's love for Desdemona is poisoned by the antagonist Iago, he kills his lover. But justice has to be brought and it is the duty of the authority to serve justice in the state. But is state only a piece of land or it can also refered to the inner state of the human mind leading to the destruction of the country state. Hubris led to the downfall of a pure love and suspicion led to the destruction of many relationships. After the death of the hero the offbeat characters served justice. It may be compared to modern works in various aspects. If we consider Hamlet, it was about Oedipus complex and Macbeth was about succession of throne. On the other hand King Lear is about ruining relationship between father and daughter due to conflicting loyalties in marriage. A fantastic work had been done by Shakespeare which has served and will serve readers through ages.

Keywords: wish and will, state and body, modern tragedy

The first recorded performance of Othello was on November 1 1604, in the Banqueting House of Whitehall before King James I. Scholars believe that Othello was written no earlier than 1604, because it serves that Shakespeare took the matter of the Turkish invasion of Cypress which is the cause of the midnight convocation of the Venetian Senate in the first Act of Othello, from Richard Knolles History of the Turks published at the end of 1603. The underlying story of Othello can be found in the Italian collection of tales of Hecatomithi, by Giambattista Cinzio Giraldi in 1565. Shakespeare added the figures of Roderigo, Desdemona, hapless Venetian suitor and Iago's gull, Brabantio, Desdemona's father and Bianca, Cassio's mistress, Richard Burbage a partner in Shakespeare's acting company, played Othello. The force of his performance, in addition to a statement of the plot is indicated by these lines from a eulogy after Burbage's death in 1619.

...But let me not forget one chiefest part
Wherein beyond the rest, he moved his heart,
The grieved Moor, made jealous by a slave.
Who sent his wife to fill a tireless grave.

An extant letter of 1610, written in Latin, offers a review of a performance given by Shakespeare's company in Oxford that year. The players, it says, drew tears not only by their speech, but also by their action. Indeed Desdemona though always excellent, moved us especially in her death when, as she lay on her bed, her face itself implored the pity of the audience (Marvin Rosenberg, The Masks of Othello 5).

The writer's line suggests, too, that the story and characters of the play were already familiar by 1610. In fact, Othello has been from the first one of Shakespeare's most popular and frequently performed plays. The play was first published in 1622 in quarto format. Another version of some 150 lines more—and with various expletives, such as “zounds”(by God's wounds) and sblood (by God's blood), expurgated in accordance with a parliamentary act of 1606 forbidding the profane references to God—was printed in the First Folio edition of plays in 1623.

Shakespeare in this play calls them supersubtle Venetians. And the account he gives of the Noblemen and Senate, can only be calculated for the latitude of Gotham.

The story originates from an instructive fable—this may be a caution to all Maidens of Quality how, without their parents consent , they run with Blackmoors. This may be a lesson to Husbands that before their Jealousy be tragical, the proofs may be Mathematical.

This could be delineated as a tale of more of the dance of the indecision induced misfortune than conflicting wishes and indignation of will and fatal conclusion, disrupting loyalties. A tragedy that as usual demolishes normalcy interrogating the very origin of the follies operating within the plane of thoughts, jeopardising the free will, which being the prime source of astuteness. Othello lacked the permanence of his sustenance for his love of life during the villainy of the antagonist but not till the end and justice is accomplished when he sacrifices his precious life and dedicates the same to his pure love and beloved through purification called death.

This sabotaging of the free will, running the state, became the will of the superior and swapped the “normal” functioning of the freedom in the society dweller's inner state. But at the doomsday the question is remnant- what was the healthy functioning of the society mind? Was the free will sabotaged? Who was the superior? Was there any issues in the state or the body?

When Iago, being the Ensign feels unaccustomed to his own designation, plots to dismantle Othello's dignity, question arises of the conflict of unity and duality in Iago's overall existence. Hence the derision of Othello was not of his being the Moor or black-skinned but stability disrupted within the eternal mastery in the mind of society, which in turn frames the society through ages. Othello was ever loyal to Iago and the state rather married to them. It is not the conflict of race but unknowing of race. Which unknowing originates within the psyche of the sturdy and dying mode of tranquil life.

My story being done,

She gave me for my pains a world of sighs:

She swore, in faith, twas strange, 'twas passing strange,

Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful:

She wish'd she had not heard it, yet she wish'd

That heaven had made her such a man: she thank'd me,

And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,

I should but teach him how to tell my story.

Othello's love for Desdemona seemed eternal and more of like sweet sixteen, more of like giving and make giving, for them it was very emotional- “twas wondrous pitiful”. We can consider the purity of their courtship, and their world such as-“yet she wish'd that heaven had made her such a man: she thank'd me” and “if I had a friend that loved her, I should teach him how to tell my story”—you can no doubt consider this projection towards any of the wrongdoer or harmful person—may be Iago or other personality in the world. It could be considered as mature love too—being both spiritual and sexual. It is a play fraught with improbabilities.

This story could be considered both as “dying” of the “undying” wish. Othello being the Moorish general in the Venetian army was dutiful and utmost loyal and an able official. Desdemona being his lover, their love being a fairy tale had to establish honour and valour—even though racial discrimination being the precarious destructor could be endured but Iago plays the main role of hubris in “suffering and calamity conducting to death”, when Iago falsely accuses Desdemona of adultery with Cassio and raises sexual jealousy in her lover Othello.

Self-respect in the women is vividly portrayed in the play. Emilia chooses to expose her husband in the climax as she believes adultery to be a woman’s only weapon against a bad husband. Bianca’s jealousy for Cassio when she thinks he has been given Desdemona’s handkerchief is justified but she is not a parasite. Iago and Emilia’s marriage is loveless as he time and again remarks her adultery for the Othello. Needless to say the heroine’s selfless endurance of mistrust of her lover is mention worthy. Nothing is there in the noble Desdemona, that is not below any Country Chamber-maid. “The world’s a huge thing: it is a great price. For a small vice” : these lines has been said by Emilia to Desdemona, when she found the burden of guilt in her friend implies that sin of adultery is minor compared to the wideness that power and wealth provides.

The first significant critical attention given to Othello was by Thomas Rymer in his 1693 study *A Short View of Tragedy*. It is a mocking attack on the play calling it “a bloody farce” and asserting that it “may be a warning to all good wives , that they look well to their linen”.

The offbeat characters support the delivering of the play swiftly. The justice brought about at the end by Gratiano and Lodovico is noteworthy. They showed Othello their loyalty to kill Iago by their hands and not by Othello.

It is worth delving into the enigmatic “close dilations”, if only because the term “dilate” itself appears in two other highly significant contexts in Othello, both as “to speak at large’ and as a form of dilatoriness or delay. The former sense – the rhetorical tradition of the dilation of discourse which Shakespeare had already explicitly evoked when Egeon in *The Comedy of Errors* is asked to “dilate at full” the story of his life—figures prominently in the scene in which Othello appears accused of witchcraft before the Senate in Act 1 and tells of Desdemona’s similar entreaty(“That I would all my pilgrimage dilate,/ whereof by parcels she had something heard”). The later—postponement and delay—appears when Iago calms an impatient Roderigo and says (we work by wit, and not by witchcraft/ And wit depends on dilatory time.) If we resort to *Dramatism* of Kenneth Burke as our outlet, he says that every human action is a dramatic event, which serves as a major tool for purgation we get the core parts: the dramatistic pentad (act, scene, agent, agency, purpose); identification/consubstantiality, and the guilt-purification-redemption cycle. Handkerchief being the agency If we put Iago’s crime and Othello’s relying on him, which is his hamartia, we get that Othello did not choose the path of scapegoating, fuelling the search for the truth, which in turn deducts the binary opposition between state and body, racism being the destructor of the social order accelerating personal sacrifices in the life of a victim ultimately making the tale immortal through ages. It is definitely the jealous of every flesh to become the supreme played on the part of Iago. He wanted Othello to kill Desdemona and lose the latter’s mental balance, where the conflict of state and body arises, and is like a geopolitics going negative and unfulfilled. Michel Foucault argues, "the body is the inscribed surface of events", highlighting the ways in which power is exercised through the body. It is a perfect blend of modern day tragedy. It is worthy of considering the first ever tale for questioning the role of culture and body and the role of culture as a tool in geopolitics. Like in other Shakespearean plays, state politics (such as succession of throne) demanded conflict, but in this play ‘personal’ jealousy led to the

whole massacre of the kingdom. The story is entirely a conflict between ‘wish’ or ‘will’ which is evident from Othello’s mistake he wishes her lady love be immaculate and he is unable to control his destructive will to kill her, which is undoubtedly raising the question of state and body with the wish and will of Iago to annihilate the demeanor of Othello, hence his mental stability.

Coleridge challenged Samuel Johnson’s assertion that if the first act of Othello were cut, the play would be a “regular tragedy”, following the traditional “unities” and therefore superior. “in all acts of judgement Coleridge wrote, it can never be too often recollected, and scarcely too often repeated, that rules are means to ends, and consequently, that the end must be determined and understood before it can be known what the rules are or ought to be”.

We genuinely arrive to the inference that T.S Eliot’s theory of impersonality by the sacrifice of Desdemona. She is worried about her own part played and also the total tragedy occurred due to the ignorance or demur in recognition of the truth and hubris of Iago. If the story is read in intricately we can find the hidden disturbance of the play and here lies the difference between play and novel reading as when we read a novel many things are concealed in the beginning but revealed at the end.

According to Charles Lamb—“nothing could be more soothing, more flattering to the nobler parts of our natures, than to read of a young Venetian lady of highest extraction, through the force of love and from a sense of merit in him whom she loved, laying aside every consideration of kindred and country, and colour, and wedding with a coal-black Moor... it is the perfect triumph of virtue over accidents, of the imagination over the senses... But upon the stage, when the imagination is no longer the ruling faculty, but we are left to our poor unassisted senses, I appeal to everyone that has seen Othello played, whether he did not... find something extremely revolting in the courtship and wedded caresses of Othello and Desdemona.

Victor Hugo, famously compared Othello to night and Iago to evil, the other from darkness. In fact the play had permeated the French cultural imagination so effectively that it also became subject matter for the for other types of artists, who in effect provided their commentary via a different medium.

In 1809, August Wilhelm Schegel, said that “ if Romeo Juliet shines with the colours of dawn of morning, but a dawn whose purple clouds already announce the thunder of a sultry day , Othello is on the other hand, a strongly shaded picture: we might call it a tragical Rembrandt. What a fortunate mistake that the Moor (under which name in the original novel, a baptized Saracen of the Northern coast of Africa was unquestionably meant) has been made by Shakespeare in every respect a negro! We recognize in Othello the wild nature of that glowing zone which generates the most ravenous beasts of prey and the most deadly poisons, tamed only in appearance by the desire of fame, by foreign laws of honour, and by nobler and milder manners.

Iago had played a fatal hoax which uninterpreted by Othello, made the mistake in the latter’s part. He should have been more solicited regarding his actions. He should not have been unfair to Desdemona and bring the doomsday and should have made investigations regarding the rumours instead of blindly following the Ensign Iago.

Can he be angry? I have seen the cannon,
When it hath blown his ranks into the air,
And, like the devil, from his very arm
Puff’d his own brother:--and can he be angry?
Something of moment then: I will go meet him:
There's matter in't indeed, if he be angry

The image of Othello towards white Iago is prominent in various dialogue of his throughout the play, he does not leave any stones unturned to abuse Othello. To be appropriate with the depiction the story is all about the insecurity of Iago with his wife, his profession and future existence.

Bharati Mukherjee's novella Jasmine, she was told by an astrologer that she will be widowed and live in exile among aliens. She had an interracial marriage in the New York after death of Prakash in the bomb. Jane, at the end of the story follows Taylor, leaving Bud's memories, and said "watch me reposition the stars", that was her choice in the 20th century. That is the tide of the time. But in case of Othello and Desdemona had to establish their truth, hence this is definitely a successful tragedy.