

Core 312 Forms of Literature: Tragedy

UNIT 03 :Play

*** 'Othello' ***

- *by Shakespeare*

01. About the Author:

Δ ***Born: 23 April 1564,*** Stratford-upon-Avon, United Kingdom

Δ ***Died: 23 April 1616,*** Stratford-upon-Avon, United Kingdom

Δ William Shakespeare was a renowned English poet, playwright, and actor born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Δ His birthday is most commonly celebrated on 23 April (see When was Shakespeare born), which is also believed to be the date he died in 1616.

Δ He is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist.

Δ He is often called England's national poet and the "Bard of Avon" (or simply "the Bard").

Δ His extant works, including collaborations, consist of some 39 plays, 154 sonnets, three long narrative poems, and a few other verses, some of uncertain authorship.

Δ His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright.

Δ Sometime between 1585 and 1592, he began a successful career in London as an actor, writer, and part-owner (sharer) of a playing company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, later known as the King's Men.

Δ At age 49 (around 1613), he appears to have retired to Stratford, where he died three years later.

Δ Shakespeare produced most of his known works between 1589 and 1613.

Δ His early plays were primarily comedies and histories and are regarded as some of the best works produced in these genres.

Δ He then wrote mainly tragedies until 1608, among them Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth, all considered to be among the finest works in the English language.

Δ His Tragic Works:

- *Romeo and Juliet (Romantic Tragedy),*

- *Othello,*

- *Hamlet,*

- *Macbeth, and*

- *King Lear, etc.*

Δ His Achievements:

- However throughout his short life, Shakespeare accomplished a lot of things. ***He wrote 154 sonnets*, *38 plays and 2 narratives.* *Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Nights Dream, Hamlet and Macbeth are amongst his most famous work.*** He wrote about issues that are apparent in society which also include tragedies and comedies.

02. About the Play:

Δ The play is set in motion when Othello, a heroic black general in the service of Venice, appoints Cassio and not Iago as his chief lieutenant. Jealous of Othello's success and envious of Cassio, Iago plots Othello's downfall by falsely implicating Othello's wife, Desdemona, and Cassio in a love affair.

Δ Shakespeare's classic play Othello is about a man who falsely accuses his wife of cheating on him, and believes this lie so strongly that he eventually takes her life.

Δ Some of the major themes in this play include racial prejudice, manipulation, and jealousy.

Δ But Othello is also unusual: he is the first black hero to be represented on stage.

Δ Othello is a Moorish (African) general in the Venetian army and an eloquent storyteller who is respected, but often treated as an outsider.

Δ Othello falls in love with Desdemona and they secretly marry; later, he leaves for Cyprus to stop the Turks.

Δ Othello is possibly the most famous literary exploration of the warping powers of jealousy and suspicion.

Δ At the same time, it's among the earliest literary works dealing with race and racism.

Δ Othello is a play that is a mainstream Shakespearean tragedy.

Δ Othello (full title: The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice) is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare, probably in 1603.

Δ The story revolves around two characters, Othello and Iago.

03. Characters:

(1) Othello:

The play's protagonist and hero. A Christian Moor and general of the armies of Venice, Othello is an eloquent and physically powerful figure, respected by all those around him. In spite of his elevated status, he is nevertheless easy prey to insecurities because of his age, his life as a soldier, and his race.

(2) Desdemona:

The daughter of the Venetian senator Brabantio. Desdemona and Othello are secretly married before the play begins. While in many ways stereotypically pure and meek, Desdemona is also determined and self-possessed. She is equally capable of defending her marriage, jesting bawdily with Iago, and responding with dignity to Othello's incomprehensible jealousy.

(3) Iago:

Othello's ensign (a job also known as an ancient or standard-bearer), and the villain of the play. Iago is twenty-eight years old. While his ostensible reason for desiring Othello's demise is that he has been passed over for promotion to lieutenant, Iago's motivations are never very clearly expressed and seem to originate in an obsessive, almost aesthetic delight in manipulation and destruction.

(4) Cassio:

Othello's lieutenant. Cassio is a young and inexperienced soldier, whose high position is much resented by Iago. Truly devoted to Othello, Cassio is extremely ashamed after being implicated in a drunken brawl in Cyprus and losing his place as lieutenant. Iago uses Cassio's youth, good looks, and friendship with Desdemona to play on Othello's insecurities about Desdemona's fidelity.

****(5) Emilia:****

Iago's wife and Desdemona's attendant. A cynical, worldly woman, she is deeply attached to her mistress and distrustful of her husband.

****(6) Roderigo:****

A jealous suitor of Desdemona. Young, rich, and foolish, Roderigo is convinced that if he gives Iago all of his money, Iago will help him win Desdemona's hand. Repeatedly frustrated as Othello marries Desdemona and then takes her to Cyprus, Roderigo is ultimately desperate enough to agree to help Iago kill Cassio after Iago points out that Cassio is another potential rival for Desdemona.

****(7) Bianca:****

A courtesan, or prostitute, in Cyprus. Bianca's favorite customer is Cassio, who teases her with promises of marriage.

****(8) Brabantio:****

Desdemona's father, a somewhat blustering and self-important Venetian senator. As a friend of Othello, Brabantio feels betrayed when the general marries his daughter in secret.

****(9) Duke of Venice:****

The official authority in Venice, the duke has great respect for Othello as a public and military servant. His primary role within the play is to reconcile Othello and Brabantio in Act I, scene iii, and then to send Othello to Cyprus.

(10) Montano:

The governor of Cyprus before Othello. We see him first in Act II, as he recounts the status of the war and awaits the Venetian ships.

(11) Lodovico:

One of Brabantio's kinsmen, Lodovico acts as a messenger from Venice to Cyprus. He arrives in Cyprus in Act IV with letters announcing that Othello has been replaced by Cassio as governor.

(12) Graziano:

Brabantio's kinsman who accompanies Lodovico to Cyprus. Amidst the chaos of the final scene, Graziano mentions that Desdemona's father has died.

(13) Clown:

Othello's servant. Although the clown appears only in two short scenes, his appearances reflect and distort the action and words of the main plots: his puns on the word "lie" in Act III, scene iv, for example, anticipate Othello's confusion of two meanings of that word in Act IV, scene i.

04. Theme:

- (1) Main Theme of Othello is ***Racism. ...***
- (2) Theme of ***Jealousy*** in Othello. ...
- (3) Theme of ***Power*** in Othello. ...
- (4) Theme of ***Identity*** in Othello. ...
- (5) Theme of ***Manipulation*** in Othello. ...
- (6) Theme of ***Love*** in Othello. ...
- (7) Theme of ***Manhood and Honor*** in Othello. ...
- (8) Theme of ***Womanhood and Sexuality*** in Othello, etc.

05. Setting:

****Othello takes place in Venice, the famous Italian city, and Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean Sea colonized by the Venetians at the time.**** The play is set during the early modern period, roughly Shakespeare's time in history.

06. Conflict:

Major conflict is ***Othello and Desdemona marry and attempt to build a life together, despite their differences in age, race, and experience.***

07. Dialogues:

(1) Othello:

"O, beware, my lord, of jealousy! The meat it feeds on." Sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds."

(2) Iago also mentions that he is attracted to Desdemona himself:

"I do love her too."

(3) Here, Desdemona pleads for her life in the moments before Othello kills her,

"Kill me tomorrow; let me live tonight."

(4) Cassio:

"Oh, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself and what remains is bestial."

****08. Style:****

Othello is written in ***blank verse and prose***.

Blank verse consists of unrhymed iambic pentameters, with five stressed syllables and five unstressed syllables to each line.

****09. Critical Appreciation:****

****ACT 01:****

Before Othello begins, Roderigo has been pursuing Desdemona, a Venetian noblewoman. One night, he hears from his soldier friend, Iago, that Desdemona has secretly married his General, the Moorish Othello. Iago bears a grudge against Othello for overlooking Iago for a lieutenant position.

Instead, Othello chose Michael Cassio, leaving Iago only at the low rank of ensign. Iago urges Roderigo to continue his pursuit of Desdemona. He knows Senator Brabantio, Desdemona's father, will dislike having Othello as a son-in-law. So late at night, Iago and Roderigo wake Brabantio and tell him the news of Desdemona. Brabantio angrily summons the militia to arrest Othello. At that moment, officers arrive to summon Brabantio to an urgent meeting of the Senate. The Senate is concerned about the imminent threat of a Turkish invasion fleet on Cyprus. Full of fury, Brabantio goes to the council.

Brabantio interrupts the council, claiming vengeance against Othello. Othello is already there because he has just been put in command of the forces to repel the Turks. Othello explains how his stories of military prowess have helped him earn Desdemona's love (good storytelling is the most important trait in a companion, after all). Afterwards, Desdemona is called to reinforce the tale and defend her marriage. Following Desdemona's defence, her father disowns her, and she chooses to go with Othello on his campaign. She plans to travel in the care of Lieutenant Cassio and with Emilia, Iago's wife.

ACT 02:

In Cyprus, Montano, the governor of Cyprus, and his soldiers greet Cassio, Iago, Desdemona, and Emilia as they disembark. Othello soon arrives with news that storms at sea have dispersed the Turkish fleet. A night of celebration is proclaimed. Roderigo confesses doubts about his potential to woo Desdemona, but Iago assures him that there is hope. He urges Roderigo to challenge Cassio to a duel that night, since (as Iago claims) Desdemona is actually falling in love with him. When the night comes, Iago gets Cassio drunk, and Roderigo incites his anger. Montano, the governor, is stabbed during his attempt to contain Cassio. Othello is angered by the fight and blames Cassio, stripping him of his recently conferred officer status.

ACT 03:

The next day, Iago convinces Cassio to ask Desdemona for help in regaining his post. When Cassio asks, Desdemona innocently agrees. Meanwhile, Iago has sown seeds of jealousy in Othello's mind, suggesting that Desdemona is overfond of Cassio. With no reason to suspect Iago of bad intentions, Othello begins to watch his wife. Othello becomes angry when Desdemona cannot find the first gift (a handkerchief) he had ever given her. The handkerchief is embroidered with strawberries and especially important to Othello. But Desdemona had not lost the handkerchief. Iago had instructed Emilia, his wife,

to take it. Iago then hid the handkerchief where Cassio would find it. When Desdemona urges her husband to reconsider Cassio's demotion, Othello gets jealous and suspects her of infidelity.

****_O, beware, my lord, of jealousy; It is the green-eyed monster._****

— ***OTHELLO, (ACT 3 SCENE 3).***

****ACT 04:****

Iago continues to inflame this jealousy. He encourages Othello to listen in on, and misinterpret, part of a conversation between Cassio and his mistress, Bianca. Cassio and Bianca discuss how Cassio obtained the embroidered handkerchief that he then gives to Bianca to copy. Othello's agitation at what he hears brings on an epileptic fit. After recovering, he orders Iago to kill Cassio. Desdemona cannot understand Othello's change of attitude towards her. Othello even strikes her in the presence of her relative, Lodovico, who has arrived as an ambassador from Venice. As she prepares for bed, she talks with Emilia, singing to relieve the distress she feels at losing the trust of her husband.

****ACT 05:****

Meanwhile, Roderigo has begun to suspect Iago is not quite the friend he seems. Still Iago persuades him to attack Cassio that night (again, to be able to court Desdemona). In the fight that ensues, Iago goes undetected and wounds Cassio. He then enters again as himself to accuse and kill Roderigo for the act of wounding Cassio.

Othello comes to his sleeping wife's bedroom to murder her as punishment for her supposed adultery. He smothers her with a pillow as she asserts her innocence. Emilia alerts the household, causing Iago and others to come to the scene. Othello defends himself, mentioning the handkerchief as evidence. Emilia realises what has happened and betrays Iago's plots against Othello. Iago, reacting to his wife's accusations, stabs and kills her. Iago is arrested and sent to trial after Othello wounds him (he doesn't

even die). Othello, facing the inevitability of his own trial, uses a hidden weapon to commit suicide. The play ends with Cassio reinstated and placed in command as Governor of Cyprus.

10.Conclusion:

Othello involves a variety of actors. In fact, actors such as Othello, Lago and Desdemona dominate the play. In the play, the setting incorporates jealousy and gullibility while such traits rule the society. The short critical analysis examines the play from multiple perspectives. That is, how I experience it as a silent reader, and how I experience it as a text for public performance.

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