

Chapter Four

OTHELLO

4.0 Introduction to Othello

Editor of *The New Cambridge Shakespeare: Othello*, Norman Sanders writes:

During the seventeenth century *Othello* was one of the most frequently performed of Shakespeare's plays, and, if we are to judge from the number of allusions to it, one of the most highly esteemed. Its power clearly fascinated other dramatists, for John Webster, Francis Beaumont, John Ford, Philip Massinger and John Fletcher all imitated its effects in their own work. From the Restoration to the present day it has had an unbroken stage history, never suffering from the cycles of popularity and neglect that have been the fate of other plays in the Shakespeare canon. (17)

Othello by Shakespeare is a revenge play like *Hamlet* but the birth and the execution of the former is altogether different from the latter. The play includes two revenge plots: Iago avenges upon Othello by twisting the facts and forcing him to believe that his wife is unfaithful; and Othello subsequently avenges upon his wife, Desdemona, by killing her. One of the main differences among above mentioned plays is that in *Othello* the protagonist takes his revenge way too fast whereas in *Hamlet* the protagonist takes his revenge way too slowly. In *Hamlet* case, many critics have focused their discussions on the inspirations of the characters, with some critics even hesitating in believing that the characters are logical as human beings. And here in *Othello*, few of the most problematic issues is to delineate Iago's stimulus for beginning his cruel conspiracy, Othello's vulnerability to Iago's illusory diplomacies and the viciousness of his rage at Desdemona, and Desdemona's apathy towards Othello's mishandling after her self-confidence that was to be seen in the opening of the play.

More significant than this, however, is the sense of cultural estrangement that is woven into the love itself. Othello's exoticism is deeply attractive to Desdemona- she loves him for the adventures he has passed-but it also contributes to her undoing. This sense of estrangement helps to explain what to many critics has seemed a

paradox in Desdemona's behavior: the contrast between her independence and aggressiveness in Venice and her helplessness and passivity in Cyprus. She is secure among Venetians, insecure and uneasy in her marriage to a man she does not fully understand. (Berry 321)

The main events that have taken place in the play are promotion of Cassio as a lieutenant of Othello, and Othello's marriage with Desdemona. Iago is profoundly disgusted and disturbed by these two events, and he comes forward to wreak havoc in lives of Cassio and Othello. He hatches a plan that will displace Cassio and destroy relationship of Othello and Desdemona. The reader/audience wonders about Iago's motivation as to why he is so much determined to destroy the lives of the people around him. How do these recent events affect him so much so that he had to make plans like this? Many of the questions like these are answered in the play itself. His character would be an interesting thing to start with; because it only through understanding his alienation, his estrangement, his anxieties, his fears, his objectives that we could understand his action throughout the play.

The two scenes with Roderigo in the beginning of the play show many workings into Iago's character as the playwright imagines it. In this play, we see two societies, first, the city of Venice and that of the Venetian army. The mere personality who, because he is likewise estranged from both, can replicate being similarly at home in both, is the famous Iago. (Auden 483). In this connection, Iago speaks:

O, sir, content you.

I follow him to serve my turn upon him.

We cannot all be masters, nor all masters

Cannot be truly follow'd. You shall mark

Many a duteous and knee-crooking knave

That, doting on his own obsequious bondage,

Wears out his time, much like his master's ass,

For naught but provender, and when he's old, cashier'd:

Whip me such honest knaves. Others there are

Who, trimm'd in forms and visages of duty,

Keep yet their heart attending on themselves,

And, throwing but shows of service on their lords,

Do well thrive by them, and when they have lin'd their coats,
Do themselves homage: These fellows have some soul;
And such a one do I profess myself. (*Othello* 7)

Iago believes in a radical solution; and as we can understand from this above mentioned speech, here he seems to express his ideas about human nature and values where the solution can be found. He holds the view that world is a brutal place where it has become a kind of tradition that strong exploits the weak, and it is the world where goodness has no place in whatsoever field.

Iago is so alienated from nature and society that he has no relation to time and place—he could turn up anywhere at any time—his victims are citizens of Shakespeare's Venice. To be of dramatic interest, a character must to some degree be at odds with the society of which he is a member, but his estrangement is normally an estrangement from a specific social situation (Auden 480).

Iago also believes that there lies a great deception in the relationship between a master and a servant. The relationship is based on the faulty philosophy of faithfulness. The ruling class is required to take care of their subordinates in return for the services. However, what happens is that they return the least possible favors and they even go to the extent of abandoning them where they find servants are no more useful. Iago addresses "I am not what I am," which can be understood as "I am not what I seem." It is also reminds us a passage from Bible which Shakespeare obviously would have known. In Exodus, God prescribes certain laws to Moses on Mount Sinai, and Moses asks God his name. God answers: "I am that I am" (Exodus, iii, 14). McCulloch and Carey assert that if:

"I am that I am" stands for God, then Iago's self-description, "I am not what I am" is the direct opposite. Iago is the opposite of God, that is, he is the Devil. Iago in this play, has the qualities of the Devil in medieval and Renaissance morality plays: He is a liar, he makes promises he has no intention of keeping, he tells fancy stories in order to trap people and lead them to their destruction, and he sees other's greatest vulnerabilities and uses these to destroy them. Iago does all this not for any good reason, but for love of evil. (78-79)

Behind his alienation and animosity of Iago towards others, lies an extreme thirst for power. A person like him, as Karen Horney says, "cannot tolerate anybody

who ... achieves more than he does, wields more power, or in any way questions his superiority. Compulsively he has to drag his rival down or defeat him. Even if he subordinates himself for the sake of his career, he is scheming for ultimate triumph. Not being tied by feelings of loyalty, he easily can become treacherous. What he actually achieves with his often indefatigable work depends on his gifts” (Horney 198). She further states that people like Iago are “extremely proud, consciously or unconsciously, of his faculty of fooling everybody—and in his arrogance and contempt for others believe that he actually succeeds in this” (Horney 193). Through his deceitful trickery, he takes good control of his dealing with his superiors. It may seem that others are giving him orders but in reality he manipulates them in such a way, he makes his own decisions and gets them signed by his superiors.

Writing about the play, Daniel Roux says that:

The play engages narrowly with Early Modern humanism, with Renaissance constructions of an occidental, individuated self, and that Othello’s alienation and self-division, potently signaled by his blackness, is an inexorable aspect of this process. Categories that seem so effortlessly to describe the predicament of the postcolonial subject are in fact born out of Western self-definition: not, as the academic cliché goes, by serving as its Other, but in fact as an absolutely integral aspect of self-definition, one of the superimposed templates through which Western individuality has come to recognize and contemplate itself. The self as split, hybridized, deracinated and alienated exists in a dialectical relationship with the celebrated autonomous subject of humanism. (Roux 2)

What people designate as ‘love’, Iago understands it as only “a lust of the blood.” He fails to care for anyone besides his own self. He believes that relationship between men and women can only be grounded upon physical craving and desires. This is why he could convince himself, that Othello and Desdemona will soon get tired of each other and that Desdemona is absolutely enthralled by Cassio. The following lines make it clear:

These Moors are changeable in their wills. Fill thy purse
with money. The food that to him now is as luscious as
locusts shall be to him shortly as acerb as the

coloquintida. She must change for youth.

sated with his body, she will find the error of her choice.

She must have change, she must. (Shakespeare, *Othello* 45-46)

Iago, to some extent is right in his understanding regarding this matter. Sex devoid of love becomes a severe problem. According to Iago, the only unadulterated and steady love an individual can have is for herself.

4.1 Alienation in Othello

Shakespeare's Othello, in course of the play, turns out to be an alien in another alien world, being a Moor he tried to stay put with his earlier identity that was later on weakened by discriminatory constructions of what it meant to be a Moor in an alien land.

To stand apart from both nature and culture means that both world and language are sites of alienation; that the subject is at best imperfectly translated into lived situations, infinitely malleable because no signifier can arrest her subjectivity or bring it into full presence. There is a point of occlusion, a darkness where form collapses, that represents the shadow-side of the Western subject. Renaissance playwrights were fascinated by strangeness and Otherness at least partially because the autonomous self is predicated on destitution and estrangement, because a kind of strangeness had emerged at the center of self-definition. (Roux 3)

Lodovico talking to Iago, towards the fourth act of the play, enquires:

Is this the noble Moor whom our full senate
Call all in all sufficient? Is this the nature
Whom passion could not shake? Whose solid virtue
The shot of accident nor dart of chance
Could neither graze nor pierce? (*Othello* 154)

The answer to this query is obviously in negative – this 'other' Moor is greatly estranged from his own self and is vastly alienated from his own identity. It is completely conceivable that this play puts Othello back to his label in order to close the gates of the possibility of black, Moor, and other power in a European world. In

either way, Othello is alienated and estranged from his own self and the society. Regarding this notion, Daniel Roux says this:

In other words, Othello's Otherness really describes or invokes a sense of self-estrangement essential to the humanist notion that the subject cannot be reduced to his place in culture or to the signifiers through which she is made present to others. The so-called 'unified self' of modernity is born in this gesture of self-alienation, a kind of aesthetic and philosophic certainty that there is something in the self that is more than or other than the self, a homeless, deracinated kernel that escapes all attempts to name it and essentially places the subject on a profoundly individual and interiorized path. There can be no fantasy of individual autonomy without such a concomitant fantasy of alienation from culture. Moreover, the fantasy of alienation and estrangement is not in itself subversive of social orthodoxy, or even at war with the notion of the unified subject. (Roux 6)

Othello's background becomes one of the main factors that lead him to his alienation and this alienation and estrangement makes him believe that his wife, Desdemona, can trick and cheat him. As Özen accentuates the fact that the main character's alienation is directly connected to his 'ethnicity and culture', and his roots make "him feel alienated by the 'white Venetian' society as a result he does not thrust Desdemona considering that he is not well enough for her" She adds:

Othello's blindness on love is due to his lack of self-knowledge as well as self-confidence for he is a Moor," that is to say as a beautiful Venetian woman's appealing to a Moor is not natural according to society, Othello more 'strengthens his belief in his wife's infidelity': "Haply, for I am black...She's gone. (III.iii.263-9). (qtd. in Mutlu 139-140)

Race seems to be an important factor in case of Othello, the character in particular and the whole play in general. A lot of critics don't take it as an issue of importance in connection with the concept of alienation and estrangement. However, there are critics who talk about the race of Othello in different context. For example, for Albert Gerard, "Othello's negroid physiognomy is simply the emblem of a difference that reaches down to the deepest levels of personality. . . Othello is, in actual fact, what Iago says he is, a 'barbarian.'" (qtd. in Muir and Edwards 13).

Similarly, Laurence Lerner is of the opinion that *Othello* is “the story of a barbarian who (the pity of it) relapses” and even says that Shakespeare “suffered from colour prejudice” (qtd. in Berry 316). Whatever the case but it more relevant here to see the consequences of Othello belonging to some other race and place. Othello is not merely complex character but an individualized and totally different from the Venetian society in almost all the aspects. He is different in color complexion, his past is different, his roots are different, he had been in altogether different culture, his language and his mannerisms are very much in contrast with the Venetians. “This is why ‘blackening’ Desdemona to Othello’s inward eye is so important to Iago: it simultaneously sullies the source of Othello’s identity, darkens him, estranges him from his wife, and opens the way for Iago to enjoy Othello’s liberated blackness in her stead.” (Altman 329)

When we read the play carefully we come to know realize that Othello’s pride, at times, is fully ostentatious and at times, it is presented in the defense of self-respect. The nature he has acquired from his roots results in horrible violence, which by the way is very much useful in the field of war but the same quality turns out to be harmful in the field of peace. Othello’s reactions which are full of frustration are result of the wicked tricks played by Iago. These reactions bring forward the repressed, inherent Moorishness of Othello. He shows overwhelming passion, his superstitious beliefs and ritualistic fashion of murdering his wife Desdemona. Edward Berry interestingly writes:

To understand Othello’s predicament, one must appreciate not only his “Africanness,” but also his position as a black man in Venetian society; he is the Moor of Venice. The fact of Othello’s alienation is the play’s most striking visual effect . . . Othello’s blackness is not only a mark of his physical alienation but a symbol, to which every character in the play, himself included, must respond. The potential impact of his physical appearance upon audiences is suggested by Charles Lamb’s frank admission that although he could find Othello admirable in the reading he was only repelled by the figure of a “coal-black Moor” on stage; he concluded that the play should be read, not seen. According to Margaret Webster, modern audiences were stunned more constructively by the first appearance of Paul Robeson in the role:

Here was a great man, a man of simplicity and strength; here also was a black man. We believed that he could command the armies of Venice; we knew that he would always be alien to its society. (Berry 318-319)

There is a cultural difference between Othello and Desdemona, which eventually leads to alienation. One of the apparent and obvious signs regarding the alienation of Othello in the play is concerned with his name. Most of the times characters refer to him as “the Moor” rather than Othello. The former title represents the alienation and the latter tells us about the assimilation he has acquired in the Venetian circles.

“Even the play’s sympathetic characters tend to label Othello “the Moor” betrays the pervasiveness of his alienation. Iago’s malicious “I hate the Moor” (I.iii.366) is a far cry from Desdemona’s loving, “the Moor, my lord.” But even her phrase implies an awareness of difference that estranges. Throughout the play, the naming of Othello keeps an audience subtly conscious of the impossibility of Othello's complete assimilation and gives to his numerous self-references. . .” (Berry 322).

4.2 Othello’s Estrangement

Studying the play through the prism of alienation and estrangement is important because the issue that comes forward is the relationship of Othello and Desdemona. A lot of analysis has almost neglected this question that arises from this relationship. Rather many have focused on the psychological advancement born from jealousy. A deep study will reveal the fact that this jealousy is of no use until the man who suffers it is taken into consideration. And it must also reveal the issue as to why Othello is so much susceptible to the manipulation. In the play we see them as a couple who have married under strange conditions and they love each other so much. However, this relationship does not last long they get separated and eventually die because of the hostility of the people around them. Berry in this regard, has to say this:

Othello tells Desdemona stories. . . through his stories Othello attempts to shape an image of himself that will win acceptance in Venice and, by his own admission, awaken Desdemona’s love. Paradoxically, this image does not

dramatize difference but identity; it reduces alienation to adventures. Othello presents himself not as an African but as an exotic Venetian. As Stephen Greenblatt has argued, Othello's 'identity depends upon a constant performance ... of his 'story,' a loss of his own origins, an embrace and perpetual reiteration of the norms of another culture. (Berry 326)

We get to know that the epitome of strength and justice (*Othello*) is transformed into a beast driven by jealousy and manipulation. This does not only concern jealousy. There is more to this than the mere concept of jealousy. Almost all men, at some point of time come across the problem of jealousy but they don't act in the way Othello does. Even the superficial reader is confused how Othello is convinced of her wife's infidelity by slight 'evidence.' Is not he a mature person who has fought for such a long time and has the vast experience of the battlefield as the battles all about tricks and manipulations? "Shakespeare's most penetrating insight into the nature of alienation, however, does not arise from his characterization of Othello as a Moor, which is inevitably deficient in cultural depth and resonance, but in the way in which the racial atmosphere that Othello breathes determines his own responses to his tragic predicament. The most disastrous consequence of racial alienation for Othello is not the hostility or estrangement of the Venetians but his own acceptance of the framework within which they define him. In his incapacity to break free of this mental construct, to affirm his own identity, as do Shylock and Aaron, Othello becomes a double victim of the early colonial imagination, an alien to others and himself"(Berry 331).

Going through the play reveals important information that Othello is not so well established in the society as he falsely appears. This thing turns out to be main cause that adds to his alienation. It can be said that each and every society is a closed community with own secrets and certain peculiarities which might be hidden from other foreigners or might be unintelligible for them. Similar is the case with a family; it does not share certain things with the people outside its members. Othello is a foreigner trying to appear as the local but fails to do so. The evidence of this is his fate towards the end of the play. Just as person cannot become a real member of a community he is not born in, no one can attach himself fully to a city that is not his own. A man is fully rooted only to his own city. His whole life is related and

governed by it. And this how he feels a sense of belonging to this place. Berry remarks that:

Othello's alienation goes much deeper than Shylock's, for he is estranged not only from Venetian society but, as a "wheeling stranger," from his own. Perhaps because of this Othello defines his identity from the outside, drawing upon images created by Venetian society images which, as we have seen, reproduce Todorov's dichotomies. Throughout the play, Othello sees himself either as an exotic Venetian, a convert in the fullest sense, capable of complete assimilation, or he sees himself as a barbarian, worthy of destruction. His failure to break free of this constricting framework, to achieve a true sense of personal identity, is one of the play's most powerful sources of tragic feeling. (323)

Othello seems apparently to be at peace in Venice but that is not the case. How could he act as a local being a total outsider? There can be many answers to this question. He asserts that he murdered Desdemona for the sake of honor and that his roots/backgrounds are quite commendable like other Venetians. He is a proud man who finds himself to be above from petty concerns of private stuff. He wants to do good for the public. Berry says:

Othello's alienation, then, is central to the play. It is important not merely because Shakespeare portrays Othello as a Moor or because racial tension and anxiety pervade the atmosphere of Venetian society, affecting Othello's relationship with every character and increasing his susceptibility to Iago's appeal; it is important because Othello himself, in his aspirations towards assimilation and anxieties about his blackness, internalizes a false dichotomy that can only dehumanize him. (Berry 330)

Othello is essentially a mercenary and mercenaries according to a general view are considered to be a low part of the community. They sell their strength and valor to the highest bidder in the market. They don't have any special ties to a single man or nation. This quality is taken to be a virtue if it is found in a true citizen but this becomes a vice if it is to be found in an outsider who happens to be a mercenary. A citizen risks his own life to achieve the status which is beyond life. He respects laws above his own life which in turn provides him the dignity. With a mercenary it is

opposite. He does not care, in real sense, for what he fights or defends. Nevertheless, Othello is a mercenary with a different mindset altogether. He demands respect for his actions and gets assimilated into the Venetian society by the help of Christianity. The war against Turks was considered to be directly a religious duty and whosoever did it was taken to be a hero and a noble man. This defender of Christianity deserved respect and appraisal. Now the question arises that whether Othello was as much respected as he believed or not. He is shown to believe that he is given the same care as other citizen and that there are no double stands for justice among an outsider and an insider. "At the beginning of the play, Othello does not participate in the discourse of alienation, though it is evident from the racist talk we hear before he enters that he is attempting to integrate a Venice not substantially different from Shylock's. The question that arises immediately upon his appearance, however, is whether he transcends the discourse of blackness surrounding him or whether it has penetrated him and he is simply defending against it, and as the play proceeds it becomes clear that the latter is more likely. In which case, the player's enactment of his own improbable flux has an added dimension. It is no longer simply a matter of growing to identify with a publicly acknowledged devil who is proved to be (Aaron) or becomes (Shylock) the monster he is believed to be"(Altman 323).

In Venice, Othello does not consider himself a tool for some means but an end. But it is a fact that he is used only for the urgent need of the city. It is important for us to emphasize that Othello is not that a great general as is believed. His apparent greatness is strengthened by a chance victory whereas he was not directly responsible for the victory. Desdemona too was interested in him because of the things he claimed to have done. He was the only evidence of these feats. Though he claimed to be no good in talks but a thorough study reveals that he was too good with his tongue. Iago also states that Othello is a great talker. However it is not to suggest that he had done nothing but there seems to be no evidence of all the things he claims. Othello is greatly respected which gives him surety and this sense of respect creates confidence in others at the times of danger. Harold Bloom comments of Othello and says:

Othello, like Lear, has never known himself well. A fighter since childhood, he has fully earned his professional eminence. His gift is for commanding others, and for maintaining the separation of war from peace. Serene in his own sublimity, he believes in the honor of arms, and cannot believe that his

trust is ever wrongly bestowed. Affinities abound with Antony and with Coriolanus, two other sad captains who fall apart. (Bloom xii)

For Othello, all this gives him a purpose in his life and if a thing is shattered, he will get lost because he has no refuge or source of confidence outside this city. He assumed that his position was well deserved and was very much secure. This understanding made him feel that he is in total harmony with Venice and that he is as much close to Venice as any local. A deep study will reveal the fact that the position like Othello's are given to people (who are foreigners) with certain conditions. Yet Othello never agrees to this fact. This unchecked self-assurance turns out to be a big fault in him and lands him in the arena of estrangement and alienation from society. The case here should have been different because of his vocation being in military. He should have never taken his friends and foes for granted. He gets manipulated by a petty 'evidence' of handkerchief that he had gifted to his wife. He listens to others and believes them instead of believing the woman who left her father for him. "Othello's insecurities are so close to the surface that a few words of hint and innuendo from Iago can tear the confident exterior and expose his fears, desires, and tendency to violence. Othello cannot stand uncertainty; it drives him to destroy his sanity. However, once he makes a decision, he is again the military man, decisive in action. Iago has only to push Othello to the belief that he has been betrayed, and Othello does the rest, judging, condemning, and executing Desdemona." (McCulloch and Carey 77)

4.3 Othello's Freedom

Although Othello presents himself as a person who is independent but the facts tell us that he is highly dependent. As stated earlier, one of the main concerns in the play is the relationship of Othello with Desdemona. He thinks that it is Desdemona who is in need of his love not the other way round. He chose the best girl in the best family of Venice and in marrying her he seemed to show that he was completely loved by Venetians. He also had this impression that he did not woo Desdemona but it was Desdemona who was lover and he was the beloved. The yearning to have another human being connotes to the fact that the qualities in beloved are such that are not found in a lover himself. In order to feel complete his self, a lover looks for missing qualities in a beloved. So a lover is dependent on a

beloved. A beloved has an upper hand here and enjoys the privilege and if the love of a lover is not returned up to the expectations, he will feel unworthy, his value is questioned, his confidence is shattered. So in clear way he is dependent on beloved for his own self-respect. Othello is mistaken in believing that Desdemona loves him and he should not worry about anything. He is unaware of his dependency. The fact is that he loves Desdemona extremely and needs her for his own existence. Iago comes to know about this dependency of Othello on Desdemona and exploits to full extent. Here was the spot that enabled Iago to conceive a plot that will put an end to the story of Othello. Iago, about Othello says:

And then for her
To win the Moor – were't to renounce his baptism,
All seals and symbols of redeemed sin –
His soul is so en fettered to her love
That she may make, unmake, do what she list,
Even as her appetite shall play the god
With his weak function. (Shakespeare, *Othello* 92)

When Othello begins to realize this situation to a certain extent, he remarks:

“But I do love thee. And when I love thee not,
Chaos is come again.” (Shakespeare, *Othello* 105)

The surroundings Othello puts in was in first place created by his love for Desdemona and is fully dependent on that love. Iago knows this and makes Othello realize this. Consequently, the glass palace which Othello has created starts to tumble down.

Othello tries to look for proof of love but soon realizes that it is a tricky situation. In matters of love, actions can be a lot more ambiguous. Hence, difficulty in finding the proof. A person can never know what the other person thinks of him/her. Iago again makes use of this fact and takes Othello further in his jealousy. He makes it clear to Othello that you can never be sure of other people's intentions and here in this case it was Desdemona. At this point, Othello is overpowered by jealousy. *Othello* is definitely the tale of a jealous man who consequently gets alienated from his self and the society. There are other characters – Roderigo, Iago, Bianca- who

suffer from this problem of jealousy as well. When Othello becomes a jealous husband, he loses all that he has acquired and treasured. Jealousy implies that Othello is having doubts regarding his own self. The man who is sure of his worthiness in love will never be jealous.

Othello, throughout the play, acts as a judge for the actions and emotions of others. But he has a serious problem in dispensing the right decision. Iago invites and dupes Cassio into drinking who at the end creates a scene. Othello comes and dismisses him from duties by taking into account the apparent/surface actions and not looking from other motives. Alarming, when it is about Desdemona, he neither wants to hear any explanation nor does he look at the actions but judges based on inner feelings, which can never be determined. He takes help from his jealousy and gives rash judgment. He is determined to prove that Desdemona is guilty of a crime she did not commit and regards himself as the dispenser of ultimate justice. He tells Desdemona:

This argues fruitfulness and liberal heart.
Hot, hot, and moist. This hand of yours requires
A sequester from liberty, fasting, and prayer,
Much castigation, exercise devout,
For here's a young and sweating devil, here,
That commonly rebels. (Shakespeare, Othello 129)

He wants her to spend her life in prayer and leave all worldly appetites. An ideal judge is required to have no personal interest in one he judges. But here the case is based on personal hatred based on a lie. The judge is totally blinded by the false information and he does not make any serious move to look into the matter carefully. He takes counsel from his muddled mind and takes the life of an innocent soul. His doubt increases and his life changes completely. His estrangement is not the result of his murdering Desdemona but realizing that his justice is faulty and it was no justice at all. It is important to note here what William Hazlitt says of Desdemona's character:

Her whole character consists in having no will of her own, no prompter but her obedience. Her romantic turn is only a consequence of the domestic and practical part of her disposition; and instead of following Othello to the wars,

she would gladly have ‘remained at home a moth of peace’, if her husband could have stayed with her. Her resignation and angelic sweetness of temper do not desert her at the last. The scenes in which she laments and tries to account for Othello’s estrangement from her are exquisitely beautiful. (n.p)

After he has struck her, and called her names, she says:

Alas, Iago,
What shall I do to win my lord again?
Good friend, go to him; for by this light of heaven,
I know not how I lost him. Here I kneel;
If e’er my will did trespass ’gainst his love,
Either in discourse, or thought, or actual deed,
Or that mine eyes, mine ears, or any sense
Delighted them on any other form-
Or that I do not, and ever did
And ever will, though he do shake me off
To beggarly divorcement, love him dearly,
Comfort forswear me. Unkindness may do much,
And his unkindness may defeat my life,
But never taint my love. (Hazlitt 35)

In his book, *The Properties of Othello*, James L. Calderwood writes his interesting take on Othello and his problem of identity. He says, “I have been tracing the disintegration of Othello’s identity, that seemingly indivisible, indelible, platonic self whose heroic essence dissolves under Iago’s insinuations and reforms in Othello’s imagination in the likeness of the common cuckold. Moreover, Othello has done his own share of theatricalizing, having cast Desdemona in the part of A Soul Imperiled in the Murder Scene and himself in those of Father Confessor, Judge, and Executioner, when in fact she was simply innocent Desdemona and he, as the dying Emilia said, a ‘murderous coxcomb.’(Calderwood 103). Iago on one hand does not seem to be interested in who he is. He wants to execute his plans without any diversions. “Iago’s words bear a different valence. We may hear them as “I am not (constructively) what I am (essentially),” where “what I am” refers to man’s “glassy essence,” as Isabella puts it in *Measure for Measure* (2.2.120)—the divine image in

his soul—and “I am not” refers to the self-alienating defections of that self as it departs from itself and constructs an identity that binds it to the world.” (Altman 18). Othello realizes:

Sir, she can turn, and turn, and yet go on
And turn again; and she can weep, sir, weep;
And she's obedient, as you say, obedient,
Very obedient. Proceed you in your tears.
Concerning this, sir O well-painted passion!
I am commanded home. Get you away;
I'll send for you anon. (4.1.254)
I cry you mercy, then.
I took you for that cunning whore of Venice
That married with Othello. (4.2.88) (qtd. in Calderwood 107)

Othello along with Iago at one point or the other come across the alienation that is result of various circumstances. The moment Othello questions, “Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil / Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?” (5.2.298–99), he not only points to the malignant agent who lured him into believing unlikely probabilities but also finds a scapegoat for his *own* self-alienation.. Othello's conscious subject—that which tells him who he is—is a kind of internal “writing,” in Derrida's sense: its radical self-alienation is invisible, and so Othello projects onto Iago the role of alienating agent responsible for the aberrations of “one that loved not wisely, but too well”(5.2.342).. By means of this speech he not only scapegoats Iago as the writer of his self-alienation but also tries to ward off the possibility that an inauthentic, unfathered tale may circulate about him in Venice” (Altman 51-52).It is interesting because Othello shares with Iago a peculiar position of being an outsider in Venice. Iago's alienation is based on class issue Othello's alienation is based on race issue. However, Iago possesses the power of self-consciousness (which is lacking in Othello) and this ability enables him to detect and fight the false/harmful notions in the hostile society of Venice. Iago says:

Who steals my purse steals trash. 'Tis something, nothing,
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands.
But he that filches from me my good name

Robbs me of that which not enriches him
And makes me poor indeed. (Shakespeare, Othello 108)

“As his own interaction with Roderigo reveals, a purse is a fungible asset, easily alienated to the benefit of another, whereas a good name is the public notice of one’s human nature and if lost, as Cassio laments, ‘what remains is bestial.’ This proves prophetic, for even before Iago has fully administered his *pharmakon*, Othello has concluded that, “My name, that was as fresh / As Dian’s visage, is now begrim’d and black / As mine own face” (qtd. in Altman 75).

Othello in due course of time becomes a man without an identity, losing his wife, fame and power over others. It is revealed when Lodovico in a scene asks: “Where is this rash and most unfortunate man?” to which Othello can only reply as: “That’s he that was Othello. Here I am” (Shakespeare, Othello 199). What remains of Othello is the mere substance that has been alienated even from his own name.

Othello, according to Bradley, was the greatest romantic character among Shakespeare's heroes, he says:

He does not belong to our world, and he seems to enter it we know not whence- almost as if from wonderland. There is something mysterious in his descent from men of royal siege; in his wanderings in vast deserts and among marvelous peoples. (qtd. in Davinson 38)

Various critics are of the opinion that there is no agreement regarding the race Shakespeare had in mind while creating the character of Othello. The very idea of Othello’s alienation from his people and his society is explicitly portrayed throughout the play. Similarly, Desdemona gets isolated from friends/family and hence alienating herself for the husband who is busy with his occupation of providing welfare to others. To adore someone to the extreme is to let yourself vulnerable of being immensely damaged. The person, who is expressively unavailable to every moment, as is exemplified by the character Othello, is not liable in the same way. Desdemona, who has lived in her father’s house in Venice, is immediately alienated from his father the moment she marries Othello. She too gets deported to a new distant place and finds herself in a completely different experience.

Othello's strong style may also be because of his disappearance from his own society. Othello's want seemed to be the attainment of the place that was made definite by his capabilities, in spite of the fact that he was living in a complete alien world. Military skill alone was not enough to accomplish his purpose, because he was not content to be seen only as a gifted barbarian but a perfect human in all other aspects. That is why Rosenberg even has to say this regarding his character: "Othello is rootless, histrionic, . . . self-deceiving, . . . irritable, hasty, dependent, insecure-a pathetic image who lives in a fantasy of himself and others, who shrinks from reality into a world of 'pipe dreams'" (qtd. in Paris 76). This attitude brings his downfall in respect of his identity and consciousness. When he was aggravated by the false news of his wife's alleged infidelity, he felt vulnerable in his self-respect/identity and felt the need for social approval all the way more than ever. He strived to uphold his identity and self-esteem to stay perfect in the eyes of others. He furthermore wanted to assure that he was not a pagan and barbarian anymore but a person who was thoroughly mannered and a noble Christian. Similarly, anything that endangers Iago's form of the world also endangered his consciousness and identity. Paris remarks:

Iago hates Othello not only because he has promoted Cassio, but also because he is bitterly envious of the success the Moor has achieved through his marriage to Desdemona. Iago suffers from a pervasive envy of everyone who seems to possess something that he lacks, whether it be wealth and prestige, physical attractiveness, or the love of a devoted woman. This aspect of Iago's character is described in Homey's analysis of the sadistic person. Because of his intense, though unadmitted, frustrations, the sadistic person "hate[s] life and all that is positive in it. (71)

His style was immensely repressed but his desire for power and position clearly indicated that he was ready to tread and boundary to achieve it. He would justify his cunningness by defining it as the only way that would reveal the clear-cut realization of reality. He regarded it as the only to succeed and survive. Furthermore, Othello's marriage greatly exacerbates Iago's feelings of exclusion and failure. At the very same time that he has frustrated Iago's expectations, Othello has made a brilliant match that will ensure his own position: "he tonight hath boarded a land carrack./ If it prove lawful prize, he's made forever" (I, i). Even more disturbing to Iago is Othello's fulfillment in love. His jealousy is aroused by the thought of a black man

possessing a white woman (one who is inaccessible to him, moreover); and he is envious of the affection, loyalty, and admiration that the Moor will receive from the virtuous Desdemona. The promotion of Cassio has reminded Iago of Othello's power and of his inferior position. Othello's marriage adds to his prestige and makes Iago feel his own loveless state all the more poignantly. (Paris 72).

Othello like other plays (*King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*) does not engage its readers in the ruthless questions about the humanity's relation with the rest of the world. The battle of good and evil is to be found in all but in this play this battle is found in the shape of jealousy and murder. When Othello "destroys Desdemona, as he realizes with a terrible clarity, Othello destroys himself; the act is a prelude to his actual suicide. Iago's means of temptation, then, is to persuade Othello to regard himself with the eyes of Venice, to accept the view that Othello is himself alien and that any woman who loves him does so perversely. In Othello's tainted state of mind, Desdemona's very sexuality becomes an unbearable threat to him, her warmth and devotion a 'proof' of disloyalty" (Bevington and Kastan 229).

4.4 Summing Up

Shakespeare has masterfully created the characters and scenes in such a way that the tragic themes of jealousy, murder, pride, greed, estrangement, and alienation have found a special resonance in it. When Othello is convinced of Desdemona's infidelity, he suddenly felt no interest in marital actions that earlier gave meaning to his existence:

Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, th'ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
. . . Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone. (Shakespeare, *Othello* 119)

His change from soldierly peacefulness into someone who is full of jealousy mad him unfit in his own eyes for further command or for welfare of others. "Later, resolved upon murder, he imagines all the afflictions he could have borne with constancy – sores and shames, total poverty, imprisonment, even scorn – all the afflictions, that is, other than the idea, graphically brought to him by Iago's images of

Desdemona 'topp'd', of his wife's infidelity"(Paster148).He feels that the rotten feelings for his beloved and his sense for moral corruption are both stored in his heart. This feeling was full of agony that alienated him psychologically from his own body which stored love for Desdemona and this later on took the shape of greater alienation from whole society. He no longer belonged to himself or to the society:

But there where I have garnered up my heart,
Where either I must live or bear no life,
The fountain from the which my current runs
The tragic subject and its passions
Or else dries up – to be discarded thence
Or keep it as a cistern for foul toads
To knot and gender in! (Shakespeare, Othello 158)

Robert N. Watson on this says:

Shakespeare's ambitious men rarely succeed in generating heirs, perhaps as a poetically just punishment for disdaining the condition of their own births; and they exist in a perpetual state of anxiety and self-alienation, able neither to make their achieved identity perfect and permanent, nor to retreat safely back to their humbler natural condition. The effort to expand the self often ends up dividing it. Beyond these frustrating reactions of the political and psychological systems, there remains the fact that changes made by force of individual human will and action do not stand up very well in geological time, which allows nature to erode all efforts back to ground level, by something like the laws of entropy. (Watson 163)

Othello's suffering and anxiety reaches to new heights when he comes to realize how intensely he was loved and how ruthlessly he put an end to that source of love. He comes to realization that he has destroyed what was probably the best ever achievement of his life. The frustration born from this recognition is beyond imagination because he was not only worried about his reputation among Venetians but here his own self-respect/self-esteem was in question. No other character in the play feels this much anxiety for his/her actions. Othello considered himself the receiver of eternal damnation in this life and in the life to come. He says:

“When we shall meet at compt,
This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,
And fiends will snatch at it. (*touches her*) Cold, cold, my girl?
Even like thy chastity. (*to himself*) O cursèd, cursèd slave!
Whip me, ye devils,
From the possession of this heavenly sight!” (Shakespeare, *Othello* 198)

In this play of Shakespeare, readers are on the one hand taken aback because of Othello’s baseless suspicions of his wife yet they try to consider his state of mind, which was full of insecurities owing to, is background. He stumbles into unfathomable hole of alienation and estrangement. He earlier refused to believe that his reputation had no existence beyond a defined system. In a sympathetic remark, T. MacAlindon says:

Strange and exotic though he is, then, Othello is no extraterrestrial visitor, but rather an exalted, simplified, and magnificent representative of general human nature. And it can reasonably be said that he is so mainly because the attributes of valor and love, martial fire and tender regard, striving and fellowship, self-assertion and humility, are developed in his character to a unique degree and held together in the bonds of a magical concordance. (135)

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