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**PORTRAYAL OF REAL AND DARKER SIDE OF LOVE IN OTHELLO: A  
CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MAIN CHARACTERS**

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**Abstract**

Othello is an example of one of the masterpieces of Shakespeare's great tragedies. The plot of Othello revolves around an African general in the Venetian army who has become the victim of Iago's tricks for suspecting his wife of adultery. Othello is a tragedy of dark love and sexual jealousy. The tragedy is an example of racial prejudice that leads to darker side of love. The root of negative love is connected to Othello's complex and misunderstanding as to why a beautiful character like Desdemona could love an African soldier. The present article is based on the critical analysis of three leading characters: Othello (tragic hero), Desdemona (heroine) and Iago (the jealous villain).

**Introduction**

Much has been continuously written on different aspects of Shakespearean drama in general and tragedy in particular. Othello has not been an exception. Shakespeare has successfully depicted two sides of love in 'Othello'. Right from the portrayal of an example of

strong bond between Desdemona( the heroine) and Othello ( the hero) at the start of the play which leads to the culmination as a tragic hero, Othello has become victim of dark form of love, mixed with hateful jealousy throughout the play. Shakespeare has been popularly known as the playwright of tragedies. It does not mean he has not attempted comedies or sonnets. He has been a versatile writer. Othello is a wonderful example of 'romance' basically between Othello (the hero) and Desdemona (the lead heroine). They are in serious love, but Othello can't remove the root of his doubt as to why such a pretty woman would love a man like him (who is not good looking at all). The initial doubt has been increased by the poison of the villain (Iago) which the hero can't understand despite the fact that she has done nothing wrong.

In order to develop a deep understanding of the concept of Shakespearean characters and elements of love through the characters, it is inevitable to delve deep into the socio-psychological analysis of each of the main characters.

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However, prior to the character-analysis, it is also required to understand the concept and philosophy of love put forth by the greatest tragedy writer of all the times.

It is quite important to know that the playwright in Othello focuses private life rather than public life Boyce (1990:477). The author finds his final compensation to Desdemona's love and commitment in the form of suicide completely useless for her, however readers and fans of Desdemona might be somewhat satisfied with this act. On the other hand, Rymer (2003) complains, 'If this be our end, what boots it to be virtuous?' Johnson (1959) found the last scene unendurable. In addition, Bradley (1905:151) too opined that the tragedy's whole nature was indisposed to jealousy the play evoked feelings of depression. On the other hand, Granville-Barker (1969) declared that it was a tragedy without meaning.

**Shakespeare and the Concept of 'Love' In Othello**

Shakespeare uses 'love' as a central theme in most of his plays and tragedies. Despite the fact that Shakespeare generally does not much emphasis 'love' in his tragedies, Othello can be considered as an exception due to the reason that the playwright quite tactfully creates 'love' as central theme.

Othello is a general in the Venetian army. Though he is very strong on the battlefield, Othello is portrayed as a lover of Desdemona, the heroine who later became his wife. The differences in the two characters have been presented in many ways. Othello is a moor of African root initially a slave from Cyprus while Desdemona is a Venetian noble family member who is extremely beautiful. They love each other; hence the moor suffers from a complex which later on develops into suspicion when he was tricked by Iago and Cassio. However, Desdemona does not suffer from any complex that she loves an African moor. Moreover, their love finally became the victim of hatred of at least one, the villain (Iago).

The romance in Othello is great, but it did not end up nicely. There is a need that Othello and his wife must settle down issues of social or racial kind despite the blame that Iago considers this relationship as nothing but the beginning of a violent relationship. Desdemona was so much in love that she eloped with her love in an unfavorable circumstance. Othello's suspicious grew further due to Desdemona's rank and beauty as against Othello humble racial background despite he was a strong moor.

Love has been the prime focus in the drama, and it finally triumphs, however in a bitter way. It is interesting to note that Desdemona never stops loving her husband

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despite the fact that Othello accuses her of cheating on him. She tolerated even slapping in public. Othello once calls her a whore, and finally kills her for no reasons.

**Sexuality in *Othello***

In *Othello*, however, Shakespeare successfully demonstrates that fear attached with sexuality can lead to can lead to tragic end. Undoubtedly the issue of sex causes disaster for both Othello and Desdemona. Right in the beginning, ago (the cold blooded villain) and Roderigo awoke Brabantio to let him know that Desdemona has eloped with Othello. Their language they use to report the event is vulgar and even racial in nature: "An old black ram / Is topping your white ewe," Iago shouts, "Your daughter / and the Moor are making the beast with two backs.

**Courtly love in Shakespeare's tragedy**

Courtly love prevails as a primary theme in the relationship of discovering and understanding motives and actions in William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Othello*. Othello's personality transformation has been tremendous in phases: from a more to a lover, to scorned lover, and finally a murderer. His journey tarts from a respectable soldier to a suspicious lover full of falsified jealousy and finally the fear of being socially ridiculed. (Act 1, scene 3).

It has been noticed that in the first two scenes of Act 1 what has happened off stage before the play begins, the most important piece of information being the elopement of Desdemona and Othello, which upholds one courtly principle: their relationship has survived into marriage because of its secrecy, but the publication of the elopement starts the first initial rift in the play as Brabantio feels that his daughter has been "abused," "stol'n," and "corrupted" (1.3.72). Therefore, a loving father does not blame her beloved daughter rather blames the black moor of tricking her into marriage. (1.3.122). The lovers are both given equal opportunities to speak of their courtship and to defend the elopement to the Senators and Duke, yet their answers are not equally weighted in the conventions of courtly love.

Othello's speeches demonstrate the actual wooing of the courtship. First he states: "It is most true; true I have married her" (1.3.94)—a noble and open confession. Honesty is the most important characteristic to Othello and any courtly lover.

Hestates, "I will a round unvarnished tale deliver / Of my whole course of love [...]"(1.3.106-07) and "'Tis my breeding / That gives me this bold show of courtesy"(1.3.110-11).

Betteridge writes, "Othello's feeling of foreignness leads to his desire to belong to the Venetian society, is based upon an

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awareness of the precariousness of his social identity in Venice" (147); therefore, the Moor, who is not native to Venice, must explain that he certainly has roots in Venetian history and society.

On the topic of Capellanus, C.S. Lewis writes, "The definition of love presented in the play from the beginning to the end rules out the possibility of platonic love.' In this regard, the character of Andrea can be an apt example of actual fruition [...]" (33). The lovers who uphold courtly values do not strive for spiritual or ideal beauty in love, but visible beauty. However, in the wooing scene Othello never describes Desdemona's features and beauty. (5.1.4-5). His description places her beauty equal to a monument or sculpture and is essentially classical and eternal.

Capellanus also lists that "No man can be bound by a double love" (42) as another governing principle. The plot of the play focuses on Othello's struggle to balance his subjection to and responsibility for Desdemona with his duty as a "knight" of Venice, but not as a beloved or husband. That's the poor side of Othello's personality. On the other hand, he has been presented a professional moor and heartless companion.

As mentioned earlier that jealousy and pride have been portrayed on the part of Othello and jealousy in particular by Iago. But, both kinds of jealousy are

different. In this regards, Capellanus explains, "He who is not jealous cannot love" (42). In addition he explains, "A man who is vexed by too much passion usually does not love" (43). Jealousy, as usual, is anatural consequence of love. It has been noted that excessive jealousy and possessiveness seems to have spoiled his relationship with his wife. In Act 2, scene 2, Othello,who has been reunited with Desdemona in Cyprus, rejoices in his passion for hiswife:

O, my fair warrior![...]It gives me wonder great as my content To see you here before me. O my soul's joy (2.1.197-209)

**Analysis of the Hero and Villain**

Coleridge and his fellow critics blamed Iago for everything that happens in the play regardless of the fact that it is Othello who is supposed to be the leading character of the play and it should be him and not Iago or anybody else that is the controlling factor of the play. It was only after Eliot, that the critics started seeing the character from a different angle. Then on, for the first time, critics brought a new view to reader that Othello the hard-hearted and hot-headed hero of the play is responsible for the tragic events in the play.

**Desdemona's character and love**

Desdemona is truly a strong and bold character against her hero (Othello). Her

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feeling and love is evident in the following quote:

"But here's my husband,  
And so much duty as my mother showed  
To you, preferring you before her father,  
... Due to the Moor my lord."  
(*Act One, Scene Three*)

The text above shows Desdemona's strength and bravery as strong and bold features of her personality. Her father appears to be a controlling figure, but she stands up to him. It is revealed that he has previously warned Roderigo of his daughter, saying "My daughter is not for thee," (Act One, Scene One), but finally she took the lead as she speaks for herself rather than allowing her father to represent her feeling.

Desdemona was able to marry anyone in the vicinity but she chooses Othello, even despite his racial difference. That can be considered as a positive side of her personality. In marrying a Moor, Desdemona breaks the conventional norms and faces criticism for her traditional disobedience. Moreover, she does not bother about any criticism on this. She does not even feel shy when she faces her father. She makes it clear that she loves Othello and is loyal to him:

"That I did love the Moor to live with him,  
My downright violence and storm of  
fortunes  
May trumpet to the world: my heart's  
subdued  
Even to the very quality of my lord:  
... And I a heavy interim shall support  
By his dear absence. Let me go with him."  
(*Act One, Scene Three*)

Desdemona's pure feeling for her husband is evident in the following line: "I hope my noble lord esteems me honest".

**Othello's character**

Othello being a soldier might be very impressive on the battlefield, but there are flaws in his character due to insecurity caused by his humble background or some other reasons despite the fact Desdemona never consider any such criteria. And the feeling of insecurity leads to the tragic end. Shakespeare has been successful in portraying the human psyche in a splendid manner. Though he loves and admires his wife, but he hardly believes that he can be loved by such a beautiful lady. In the back of his mind, he is well aware that he does not deserve Desdemona. And this negative feeling leads to disaster.

Othello explains that Desdemona took initiative for falling in love with him. (Act One, Scene Three). This is another demonstration of her bold and decisive

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nature as she decided she wanted him, and she tried and finally succeeded despite many odds. At the same time, it shows that Othello was not confident of proposing Desdemona for love as he was well aware of his humble racial background and even position against the rank and beauty of Desdemona. As mentioned earlier that Othello was suspicious about a few things, Desdemona is not insecure or ashamed at all for any reasons. She was even called a "whore", but she never reacts otherwise "rather she shows her full devotion and complete loyalty to Othello. Therefore, she tries to resolve the dispute caused by misunderstanding between the two leading characters. As Othello mistreats her, Desdemona's feelings are unwaning: "My love doth so approve him" (Act Four, Scene Three).

It was portrayed nicely by Shakespeare that Othello's devotion to his militaristic and social images that outweighs his love for Desdemona. Instead of separating from his wife on the account of falsified doubts, the Moor feels decides to finish his wife and to win the game rather than leaving her to live a free life. It shows a dark side of love that Othello has had for his wife as he claims in Act 5, scene 1, to "sacrifice her."

**Iago's character**

Iago is such a central figure in the Othello that sometimes he overpowers the main hero as he perfectly portrays the

character of a negative man who is full of jealousy against Othello despite his claim that he also loves Desdemona. In Act 2, Scene 1, Iago has master plans to trick Othello. Perhaps his negative personality is confident that Othello can be beguiled easily and carried away. Iago's negativism is mainly an outcome of jealousy with Othello, but it is not initially caused by love or sexuality but for power and position and racial feeling. Therefore, he insists on Roderigo to believe that Desdemona is in love with Cassio. His ironical tone is expressive of his nature: "As honest as I am", 2.1.193).

Iago is so professional that his real intentions are never exposed to other characters in the play. It is not even clear when he gives an account of Desdemona's character that she is lustful, desperate to barter Othello with Cassio who is more refined. It is again a sign of non-platonic love. The villain (Iago) is so negative and jealous that he never calls Othello as his name but by 'moor', 'devil' and 'defective' which is itself indicative of jealousy and negative rivalry. (2.1.216; 2.1.220)

Iago's misogyny has stooped to the lower level when he conceptualized that young women are foolish, having an innately sexualized 'nature' (2.1.222-23) and considered whorish even for touching hands.

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Iago considers Desdemona like any ordinary woman can indulge herself indulge in ordinary pleasure-seeking techniques. Shakespeare's food imagery expressed the nature and hatred of Iago when he is found commenting: 'Blest fig's end!' (2.1.238). This is the best example of vulgarity and obscenity as 'figs' weirdly symbolize female vulva.

Iago mastery of a negative character successfully traps Cassio to consume alcohol and gets Roderigo ready to fight. On the one hand, Iago takes his revenge with Cassio when Othello strips Cassio of his rank for his misbehavior. On the other hand, Iago later decides to make Othello believe his wife is unfaithful. He succeeds in his mission. He encourages Cassio to ask Desdemona to plead with Othello to be reinstated. Iago tries to misguide Othello by assuring him that Desdemona is Cassio's lady love. Iago hits many birds with one stone, and other character could not even sense the danger of his conspiracy.

**Conclusion**

From the viewpoint of psychoanalytical theory, the protagonist and antagonist of the play (Othello and Iago respectively) have been dramatically portrayed in an appropriate manner. The whole plot of 'Othello' revolves around possession, jealousy, and control. It is evident when Shakespeare states "It mocks the meat that it feeds on", meaning thereby

'jealousy' grows on jealousy. It is an agreed fact that love and jealousy are two sides of the same coin. Hence, one overpowers the others especially in the case of lack of love or excess of jealousy. Such an idea is emphasized through the character of Iago who created a little doubt in Othello's mind which became a powerful devastating factor in the relationship between Othello and Desdemona (the heroine who was loved by both Othello and Iago). However, there was a difference between the types of love both the positive and negative characters had.

The concept of love presented by the dramatist is well connected with the famous human psyche. Iago was quite a normal man but he could not control his type and amount of jealousy. Instead he tried to control the bond between the hero and heroine by exploiting his association with Desdemona which later was concluded as a device rather than a genuine feeling. Iago could not control his feelings regarding the proposed marriage of Desdemona with Othello while he exclaims in scene 2 of act 1: "I do love her too". This leads to an idea that Iago has similar feelings for Desdemona, however, it could not be guaranteed if Iago really wanted a genuine bond with the heroine or he just wanted to exploit his relationship with her. In other words, Iago has had a powerful desire of domination over Othello's wife (Desdemona), and it is also clear that his love is entirely different from that of Othello's.

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It is also quite known that people have and express love in different ways for different reasons. It is also evident that Iago's motives seem unconventional, but he longs for something entirely different from conventional lovers who mostly want to have sexual relationship with her. Not only Iago has a desire of love for Desdemona, other minor characters such as Roderigo's love for Desdemona are also of different kind.

Othello, A black man from Africa and an upper-class white woman from Venice, fall in love with a member of highly ranked family. She is extremely beautiful. Both the lover and beloved unanimously agreed to elope.

The issue of jealousy has been dealt with minute details as in the opening scene of Othello, Iago complains to Roderigo that his superior (Othello) has ignored him and promoted Casio to be his Lieutenant. He declares to take revenge. Iago tells Desdemona's father, Brabantio, that his daughter has eloped to get married with Othello. Brabantio opposes Othello, and the matter was taken to the Duke who having known from Othello and Desdemona that they love each other deeply despite their differences, the Duke permits them to travel together to Cyprus on a military mission for the moor.

In order to satisfy his dark side of personality, Iago has manipulated Roderigo

to kill Casio, but the attempt does not succeed, and in return Casio injures Roderigo instead. In another incidence, Iago stabs Casio in the leg. Othello hears Casio cry out and thinks Iago may have killed Casio.

Othello, then returns home to kill Desdemona to convey her about what has happened. He reaches to sleeping Desdemona first. He wakes her after snapping a kiss and accuses her of having affair with Casio for which she protests and says that she loves only him and that she is innocent. But in a fit of anger, Othello smothers her. Then enters Emilia and Desdemona revives for a moment declaring herself guiltless and Othello innocent in her death and dies. Emilia defends Desdemona and assures Othello saying that Iago is behind the misunderstanding and tragedy which happens. Othello tries to kill Iago after knowing the truth but Iago kills Emilia and flees. Othello condemns himself for his gruesome act and commits suicide.

The fixèd figure for the time of scorn  
To point his slow and moving finger at!  
Yet could I bear that too, well, very well.  
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  
Or else dries up—to be discarded thence!

Or keep it as a cistern for foul toads  
To knot and gender in! Turn thy complexion there,



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Patience, thou young and rose-lipped  
cherubin,—

Ay, there, look grim as hell!

In summary, although Othello ends in tragedy, love is a prevailing theme that motivates many of the play's characters into action. Love in Othello is both an exploitable virtue and a vehicle for destruction.

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