

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE; 1564-1616**Personal History**

Many books have assembled facts, reasonable suppositions, traditions, and speculations concerning the life and career of William Shakespeare. Taken as a whole, these materials give a rather comprehensive picture of England's foremost dramatic poet. Tradition and sober supposition are not necessarily false because they lack proven bases for their existence. It is important, however, that persons interested in Shakespeare should distinguish between facts and beliefs about his life.

From one point of view, modern scholars are fortunate to know as much as they do about a man of middle-class origin who left a small country town and embarked on a professional career in sixteenth-century London. From another point of view, they know surprisingly little about the writer who has continued to influence the English language and its drama and poetry for more than three hundred years. Sparse and scattered as these facts of his life are, they are sufficient to prove that a man from Stratford by the name of William Shakespeare wrote the major portion of the thirty-seven plays that scholars ascribe to him. The concise review that follows will concern itself with some of these records.

No one knows the exact date of William Shakespeare's birth. His baptism occurred on Wednesday, April 26, 1564. His father was John Shakespeare, tanner, glover, dealer in grain, and town official of Stratford; his mother, Mary, was the daughter of Robert Arden, a prosperous gentleman-farmer. The Shakespeares lived on Henley Street.

Under a bond dated November 28, 1582, William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway entered into a marriage contract. The baptism of their eldest child, Susanna, took place in Stratford in May, 1583. One year and nine months later their twins, Hamnet and Judith, were christened in the same church. The parents named them for the poet's friends, Hamnet and Judith Sadler.

Early in 1596, William Shakespeare, in his father's name, applied to the College of Heralds for a coat of arms. Although positive proof is lacking, there is reason to believe that the Heralds granted this request, for in 1599 Shakespeare again made application for the right to quarter his coat of arms with that of his mother. Entitled to her father's coat of arms, Mary had lost this privilege when she married John Shakespeare before he held the official status of gentleman.

In May of 1597, Shakespeare purchased New Place, the outstanding residential property in Stratford at that time. Since John Shakespeare had suffered financial reverses prior to this date, William must have achieved success for himself.

Court records show that in 1601-1602, William Shakespeare began rooming in the household of Christopher Mountjoy in London. Subsequent disputes over the wedding settlement and agreement between Mountjoy and his son-in-law, Stephen Belott, led to a series of legal actions, and in 1612 the court scribe recorded Shakespeare's deposition of testimony relating to the case. In July, 1605, William Shakespeare paid four hundred and forty pounds for the lease of a large portion of the tithes on certain real estate in and near Stratford. This was an arrangement whereby Shakespeare purchased half the annual tithes, or taxes, on certain agricultural products from parcels of land in and near Stratford. In addition to receiving approximately 10 percent income on his investment, he almost doubled his capital. This was possibly the most important and successful investment of his lifetime, and it paid a steady income for many years.

Shakespeare is next mentioned when John Combe, a resident of Stratford, died on July 12, 1614. To his friend, Combe bequeathed the sum of five pounds. These records and similar ones are important, not because of their economic significance but because they prove the existence of William Shakespeare in Stratford and in London during this period.

On March 25, 1616, William Shakespeare revised his last will and testament. He died on April 23 of the same year. His body lies within the chancel and before the altar of the Stratford church. A rather wry inscription is carved upon his tombstone:

**Good Friend, for Jesus' sake, forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here;
Blest be the man that spares these bones
And curst be he who moves my bones.**

The last direct descendant of William Shakespeare was his granddaughter, Elizabeth Hall, who died in 1670.

These are the most outstanding facts about Shakespeare the man, as apart from those about the dramatist and poet. Such pieces of information, scattered from 1564 through 1616, declare the existence of such a person, not as a writer or actor, but as a private citizen. It is illogical to think that anyone would or could have fabricated these details for the purpose of deceiving later generations.

Shakespeare's Work

In similar fashion, the evidence establishing William Shakespeare as the foremost playwright of his day is positive and persuasive. Robert Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit*, in which he attacked Shakespeare, a mere actor, for presuming to write plays in competition with Greene and his fellow playwrights, was entered in the Stationers' Register on September 20, 1592. In 1594, Shakespeare acted before Queen Elizabeth, and in 1594-1595, his name appeared as one of the shareholders of the Lord Chamberlain's Company. Francis Meres in his *Palladis Tamia* (1598) called Shakespeare "mellifluous and hony-tongued" and compared his comedies and tragedies with those of Plautus and Seneca in excellence.

Shakespeare's continued association with Burbage's company is equally definite. His name appears as one of the owners of the Globe (a theater) in 1599. On May 19, 1603, he and his fellow actors received a patent from James I designating them as the King's Men and making them Grooms of the Chamber. Late in 1608 or early in 1609, Shakespeare and his colleagues purchased the Blackfriars Theatre and began using it as their winter location when weather made production at the Globe inconvenient.

Other specific allusions to Shakespeare and to his acting and his writing occur in numerous places. Put together, they form irrefutable testimony that William Shakespeare of Stratford and London was the leader among Elizabethan playwrights.

One of the most impressive of all proofs of Shakespeare's authorship of his plays is the First Folio of 1623, with the dedicatory verse that appeared in it. John Heminge and Henry Condell, members of Shakespeare's own company, stated that they collected and issued the plays as a memorial to their fellow actor. Many contemporary poets contributed eulogies to Shakespeare; one of the best known of these poems is by Ben Jonson, a fellow actor and, later, a friendly rival. Jonson also criticized Shakespeare's dramatic work in *Timber: or, Discoveries* (1641).

Certainly there are many things about Shakespeare's genius and career that the most diligent scholars do not know and cannot explain, but the facts that do exist are sufficient to establish Shakespeare's identity as a man and his authorship of the thirty-seven plays that reputable critics acknowledge to be his.

Shakespearean Tragedy

Nature and Definition: Tragedy is a very difficult concept to define. Despite what modern critics have labored on the subject, Aristotle's definition of tragedy in his Poetics, still remains the best and comprehensive with some minor difference in the 21st century. Tragedy is a representation of an action which is serious, complete in itself, and of a certain magnitude; it is expressed in speech made beautiful in different ways in different parts of the play; it is acted, not narrated and by exciting pity and fear gives a healthy relief to such emotions.

However, A.C. Bradley most perceptively comments the Shakespearean Tragedy: A tale of suffering and calamity conducing to death. Although this remark captures what is common to Shakespearean Tragedies. It must be noted that ever Shakespearean Tragedy is unique in its way. There are very few observations which one may make about one of them which are applicable to others.

The Tragic Hero: Shakespeare's tragedies are built of a single man who towers above the other characters. So Shakespeare's major tragedies such as Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth are all tragedies of character. The central character, for the most part, may be regarded as a double entity. Shakespeare's tragic heroes have many qualities in common. One of the qualities are their intense concern for someone, some thing or some aspect of life. In the case of Othello, we find the character to be deeply concerned about Desdemona. It is doubtful whether Shakespeare knew Poetics; all his heroes except the possible exception of Macbeth are good. His tragic heroes are of an extremely sensitive and poetic nature. Hamlet being the most intellectual and Othello being the most poetic and romantic of them. They also belong to the higher order of society. The lowest in rank is Othello who is at least general whose progeny may be traced to kings. Still he is no common man. In every one of Shakespeare's tragedies, the hero is either faced with making a moral choice of grave consequences or initiating some action which has far-reaching consequences.

The Tragic Flaw: Shakespeare's tragedy is above all a tragedy of character, though environment, coincidences and chance play their parts. However, it is some flaw in the tragic hero which causes his tragedy. The example being Othello whose tragic flaw is jealousy. The tragic flaw is not always a shortcoming in itself. It is only in the particular situation in which the hero is placed that the particular quality of the hero becomes damaging to him. For example, Hamlet's habit of carefully weighing the pros and cons of everything before taking action would have proved an asset to Othello, while precipitateness of action would have cut-short Hamlet's agonies.

The Role of Chance and Fate: Chance and fate, the latter sometimes in the form of supernatural, also play their part in Shakespearean tragedies. However, they are never the starting point of tragedies, but are led into when the story has taken a definite course. The incident of handkerchief in Othello is an example of pure chance which is exploited by the villain, but this chance crops up when the seeds of jealousy in Othello's mind have become strong trees

Theme and Action: Shakespearean tragedies have well-defined themes which are also capable of being expressed in moral terms. For example, the theme of King Lear is regeneration while that of Othello is one of making a choice. His stories involve themes

such as murder, madness, duels etc. Shakespeare doesn't conform to the classical view of tragedy which insisted on the purity of genres and the unities of time and space. For Shakespeare, the prime unity is the tragic effect created by a strong sense of inevitability.

Characterization: Shakespearean tragic hero is the only and the one in the play; however, there is at least one character near him which is also highlighted. In his tragedies, male characters have a dominant role and female characters, although unforgettable, usually play little action. Shakespeare also uses double plots and comic scenes for comic relief.

Tragic Effect: Even without knowing the Poetics, Shakespeare is able to arouse strong pity and fear in the minds of his readers and theatre viewers. In Shakespearean tragedies, only these emotions are not aroused; but according to A.C. Bradley, the characteristic emotion aroused by Shakespeare's tragedies is a profound sense of waste. This is derived from the idea of human worth and dignity which the plays express and the missed opportunities or wrong choices which lead to man's defeat without affecting his essential dignity. Shakespearean tragedies embody a sense of profound suffering and sadness and some of them end in a number of deaths which enhance Shakespeare's intended tragic effect. For example, Hamlet and King Lear end in so many deaths that the stage is littered with dead bodies in the last scene.

Passion versus Reason: The predominantly tragic conflict in the minds of Shakespearean heroes is between passion and conflict. The opposition between reason and passion, first isolated – through Othello and Iago - in a dramatic conflict of personalities and then projected in Macbeth and Lear, beyond the original hero to the state and universe which surround him in an eternal fight between good and evil.

Shakespeare's Personal Views: Many books have been written on subjects such as 'Shakespeare's Religion', but there's nothing definitely coming from his own plays. On the whole, Shakespeare is the most impersonal writer. That's perhaps what makes him the greatest writer in the world. Shakespeare was greatly religious and compassionate; but we don't know his brand of Christianity. It is, however, very difficult to get insight into Shakespeare.

Othello : Background

The plot of Shakespeare's Othello is largely taken from Giraldi Cinthio's Gli Hecatommithi, a tale of love, jealousy, and betrayal; however, the characters, themes, and attitudes of the works are vastly different, with Shakespeare's play being a more involved study of human nature and psychology. There are, however, a few deviations from Shakespeare's source, one of which being the motivations of the Iago figure. Cinthio's Iago was driven to revenge when Desdemona refused to have an affair with him; Iago's motivations are not nearly so plain in Shakespeare's version.

Othello also touches upon a major issue in Europe of this time period; the intermingling of Muslim religion and culture with the West. Written just a century after the Muslims were driven out of Spain as a part of the Reconquista, there are obvious threads of hostility within the play about Othello's Moorish origins, and his differences in religion and culture. The hostility between the West and the East is also shown in the conflict between Venice and the Turks; the Christian Venetians want to protect Christendom from the influence of the Muslim Turks, and ironically, Moorish Othello is the one sent to complete this mission.

Othello is considered to be a prime example of Aristotelian drama; it focuses upon a very small cast of characters, one of the smallest used in Shakespeare, has few distractions from the main plot arc, and concentrates on just a few themes, like jealousy. AS such, it is one of the most intense and focused plays Shakespeare wrote, and has also enjoyed a great amount of popularity from the Jacobean period to the present day.

The character of Iago is a variation on the Vice figure found in earlier morality plays; he deviates from this model because of his lack of a clear motivation, and because of his portrayal as a very malignant figure. However, Iago is less of a character than a changeable device for the plot, and in this sense, he is a clear descendant of the omnipresent "vice" figure. Iago's great cunning, manipulative abilities, and almost supernatural perception mean that he is a very formidable foe, and this makes Othello's fall seem even more inevitable and tragic.

One reason for the overwhelming popularity of the play throughout the ages is that it focuses on two people who defied society in order to follow their own hearts. Shakespeare scholar Walter Cohen cites the popularity of Othello during times of great rebellion and upheaval; the play was most popular during the European wars of the mid-19th century, the fall of Czarist Russia, and also during World War II in America. These productions tended to emphasize the nobility and love of Othello and Desdemona, and made their fall seem more tragic and ill-deserved.

Othello : Summary

Act I:

Othello begins in the city of Venice, at night; Roderigo is having a discussion with Iago, who is bitter as being passed up as Othello's lieutenant in favor of the Venetian gentleman Cassio. Iago says that he only serves Othello to further himself; he is playing false, and admits that his nature is not at all what it seems. Iago is aware that Desdemona, the daughter of Brabantio, a Venetian nobleman of some stature, has run off with Othello, the black warrior of the Moors. Brabantio and many others know nothing of this coupling; Iago decides to enlist Roderigo, who lusts after Desdemona, and awaken Brabantio with screams that his daughter is gone.

Roderigo is the one speaking most to Brabantio, but Iago is there too, hidden, yelling unsavory things about Othello and his intentions toward Desdemona. Brabantio panics, and calls for people to try and find his daughter; Iago leaves, not wanting anyone to find out that he betrayed his own leader, and Brabantio begins to search for her.

Iago joins Othello, and tells him about Roderigo's betrayal of the news of his marriage to Brabantio. Cassio comes at last, as do Roderigo and Brabantio; Brabantio is very angry, swearing that Othello must have bewitched his daughter, and that the state will not decide for him in this case. Othello says that the Duke must hear him, and decide in his favor, or else all is far from right in Venice.

Brabantio and Othello address the assembled Venetian leaders, who are discussing this military matter, and Brabantio announces his grievance against Othello for marrying his daughter. Othello addresses the company, admitting that he did marry Desdemona, but wooed her with stories, and did her no wrongs. Desdemona comes to speak, and she confirms Othello's words; Brabantio's grievance is denied, and Desdemona will indeed stay with Othello. However, Othello is called away to Cyprus, to help with the conflict there. Othello and Desdemona win their appeal to remain together, and Desdemona is to stay with Iago, until she can come to Cyprus and meet Othello there.

Roderigo is upset that Desdemona and Othello's union was allowed to stand, since he lusts after Desdemona. But Iago assures him that the match will not last long, and at any time, Desdemona could come rushing to him. Iago wants to break up the couple, using Roderigo as his pawn, out of malice and his wicked ability to do so.

Act II:

A terrible storm has struck Cyprus, just as the Turks were about to approach; this bodes badly for Othello's ship. A messenger enters, and confirms that the Turkish fleet was broken apart by the storm, and that Cassio has arrived, though Othello is still at sea. They spot a ship coming forth; Iago, Desdemona, and Emilia are on it. Somehow, Iago and Desdemona enter into an argument about what women are, and Iago shows how little praise he believes women deserve. Othello arrives at last, and is very glad to see his wife arrived, much earlier than expected. Iago speaks to Roderigo, convincing him that Desdemona will stray from Othello, as she has already done with Cassio. He convinces Roderigo to attack Cassio that night, as he plans to visit mischief on both Othello and Cassio.

Iago and Cassio are on the watch together; Iago gets Cassio to drink a bit, knowing that he cannot hold his liquor at all. Iago also tries to make Desdemona seem tempting to Cassio; but Cassio's intentions are innocent and friendly, so this approach fails. Iago says that he intends to get Cassio drunk, which will hopefully cause a quarrel between Cassio and Roderigo, who has been stirred up against Cassio. Iago wants to see Cassio discredited through this, so that he might take Cassio's place. Montano and others come, and Iago entertains them with small talk and song. Cassio fights offstage with Roderigo, and comes forth, chasing him; Montano tries to hinder Cassio, but Cassio just ends up injuring him. All the noise wakes Othello, who comes down to figure out what has happened. Montano tells what he knows of it all, and Iago fills in the rest making sure to fictionalize his part in it all too.

Cassio laments that he has lost his reputation along with his rank, which is very dear to him. Iago tries to convince him that a reputation means little; and, if he talks to Desdemona, maybe he can get her to vouch for him with Othello. Iago then gives a soliloquy about knowing that Desdemona will speak for Cassio, and that he will be able to turn that against them both.

Act III:

Iago enters, and Cassio tells him that he means to speak to Desdemona, so that she may clear things up with Othello. Emilia comes out, and bids Cassio to come in and speak with Desdemona about his tarnished reputation. Desdemona believes Cassio is a good person, and has been wronged in this case; she pledges to do everything she can to persuade her husband to take Cassio back. Cassio leaves just as Othello enters because he does not wish for a confrontation. Iago seizes on this opportunity to play on Othello's insecurities, and make Cassio's exit seem guilty and incriminating. Desdemona expresses her concern for Cassio; she is persistent in his suit, which Othello is not too pleased about.

Iago then gets Othello to believe, through insinuation, that there is something going on between Desdemona and Cassio. Othello seizes on this, and then Iago works at building up his suspicions. Soon, Othello begins to doubt his wife, as Iago lets his insinuations gain the force of an accusation against her. Desdemona enters, and they have a brief conversation; Othello admits that he is troubled, though he will not state the cause.

Desdemona drops the handkerchief that Othello gave her on their honeymoon; Emilia knew that her husband had wanted it for something, so she doesn't feel too guilty about

taking it. Emilia gives it to Iago, who decides to use the handkerchief for his own devices. Othello re-enters, and tells Iago that he now doubts his wife; Othello demands "ocular proof" of Desdemona's dishonesty, so Iago sets about making stories up about Cassio talking in his sleep, and says that Cassio has the handkerchief that Othello gave to Desdemona. Iago knows how important this handkerchief is to Othello; it was his first gift to Desdemona, and was given to him by his mother. Othello is incensed to hear that Desdemona would give away something so valuable, and is persuaded by Iago's insinuations and claims to believe that Desdemona is guilty. Othello then swears to have Cassio dead, and to be revenged upon Desdemona for the non-existent affair.

Desdemona is looking everywhere for the handkerchief, very sorry to have lost it. Othello enters, and asks for Desdemona's handkerchief; she admits that she does not have it, and then Othello tells her of its significance and alleged magical powers. Desdemona interrupts Othello's inquiry by bringing up Cassio's attempt to get back into Othello's favor; Othello becomes angry, and storms out. Desdemona and Emilia both note that Othello is much changed; he is unkind and seems jealous, and they are suspicious of the change in him.

Cassio then enters, with Iago; he laments that his suit is not successful, and that Othello does not seem likely to take him back. Desdemona tells Cassio and Iago that Othello has been acting strange, and is upset, and Iago goes to look for him, feigning concern. Emilia thinks that Othello's change has something to do with Desdemona, or Othello's jealous nature; they still cannot fathom what has happened, and exit, leaving Cassio. Bianca comes in, and Cassio asks her to copy the handkerchief that he found in his room; it is Desdemona's handkerchief, though Cassio has no idea. He claims he does not love her, and gets angry at her for allegedly suspecting that the handkerchief is a gift of another woman. But, Bianca is not disturbed, and leaves with the handkerchief.

Act IV:

Othello is trying, even after swearing that Desdemona was unfaithful, not to condemn her too harshly. He is talking with Iago about the handkerchief still, and its significance in being found; but, soon, Iago whips Othello into an even greater fury through mere insinuation, and Othello takes the bait. Othello falls into a trance of rage, and Iago decides to hammer home his false ideas about his wife. Iago calls Cassio in, while Othello hides; Iago speaks to Cassio of Bianca, but Othello, in his disturbed state, believes that Cassio is talking of Desdemona, which is the last "proof" he needs before declaring his wife guilty.

Now, Othello is resolved to kill Desdemona himself, and charges Iago with murdering Cassio. Lodovico, a noble Venetian whom Desdemona knows, has recently landed; Desdemona and Othello welcome him there. But, when Desdemona mentions Cassio, Othello becomes very angry and slaps her in front of everyone; she rushes off, very upset. Ludovico especially is shocked at this change in Othello, and has no idea how such a noble man could act so cruelly.

Othello questions Emilia about Desdemona's guilt, or the chance she has had an affair with Cassio. Emilia swears that she has seen and heard all that has gone on between Cassio and Desdemona, and that Desdemona is pure and true. Othello believes that Emilia is in on all this too; he accuses Desdemona, and her insistence that she is innocent only infuriates him further. Emilia thinks that someone has manipulated Othello into accusing Desdemona, and has poisoned his mind; however, Iago is there to dispel this opinion. Upon leaving the women, Iago comes across Roderigo; he is not pleased with how Iago has failed to deliver on his promises regarding Desdemona. Iago quiets him by making him believe that if he kills Cassio, then he will win Desdemona; Roderigo decides to go along with it, but Iago is coming dangerously close to being revealed.

Othello tells Desdemona to go to bed, and dismiss Emilia; Emilia regrets Desdemona's marriage, although Desdemona cannot say that she does not love Othello. Desdemona knows that she will die soon; she sings a song of sadness and resignation, and decides to give herself to her fate. Desdemona asks Emilia whether she would commit adultery to win her husband the world. Emilia, the more practical one, thinks that it is not too big a price for a small act; Desdemona is too good, and too devout, to say that she would do so.

Act V:

Iago has Roderigo poised and ready to pounce on Cassio, and kill him; if either of them is killed, it is to Iago's benefit, so that his devices might not be discovered. Roderigo and Cassio fight, and both are injured badly. Iago enters, pretending that he knows nothing of the scuffle; Gratiano and Lodovico also stumble upon the scene, having no idea what has happened. Roderigo is still alive, so Iago feigns a quarrel, and finishes him off. Bianca comes by, and sees Cassio wounded; Iago makes some remark to implicate her; Cassio is carried away, and Roderigo is already dead.

Othello enters Desdemona's room while she is asleep; and though she is beautiful, and appears innocent, he still is determined to kill her. Desdemona awakens, believes there is nothing she can do to stop him from killing her, and continues to assert her innocence. Othello tells her that he found her handkerchief with Cassio, though Desdemona insists it must not be true; she pleads with Othello not to kill her right then, but he begins to smother her. Emilia knocks, curious about what is going on; Othello lets her in, but tries to conceal Desdemona, who he thinks is already dead. Emilia brings the news of Roderigo's death, and Cassio's wounding.

Emilia soon finds out that Desdemona is nearly dead, by Othello's hand; Desdemona speaks her last words, and then Emilia pounces on Othello for committing this horrible crime. Othello is not convinced of his folly until Iago confesses his part, and Cassio speaks of the use of the handkerchief; then, Othello is overcome with grief. Iago stabs Emilia for telling all about his plots, and then Emilia dies; the Venetian nobles reveal that Brabantio, Desdemona's father, is dead, and so cannot be grieved by this tragedy now. Othello stabs Iago when he is brought back in; Othello then tells all present to remember him how he is, and kills himself. Cassio becomes temporary leader of the troops at Cyprus, and Lodovico and Gratiano are supposed to carry the news of the tragedy back to Venice.

Battle of Good vs. Evil in Othello

Shakespeare presented the classic battle between the deceitful forces of evil and the innocence of good in Othello. The forces of evil ultimately lead to the breakdown of Othello, a noble Venetian moor, well-known by the people of Venice as an honourable soldier and a worthy leader. His breakdown results in the murder of his wife Desdemona who is representative of the good in nature.

The evil contained within the play is represented by the character of Iago who is cunning, untrustworthy, selfish, and plotting. He uses these traits to his advantage by slowly planning his own triumph while watching the demise of others. It is not only his own nature of evil that he succeeds but also the weaknesses of the other characters. He uses the weaknesses of Othello, specifically jealousy and his devotion to things as they seem, to conquer his opposite in Desdemona. From the start of the play, Iago's scheming ability is shown when he convinces Roderigo to tell about Othello and Desdemona's elopement to Desdemona's father, Brabantio. Confidentially Iago continues his plot successfully, making fools of others, and himself being rewarded. Except

Roderigo, no one is aware of Iago's plans. This is because Iago pretends to be an honest man loyal to his superiors.

The fact that Othello himself views Iago as trustworthy and honest gives the evil within Iago a perfect unsuspecting victim for his schemes. The opportunity to get to Desdemona through Othello is one temptation that Iago cannot refuse. He creates the impression that Desdemona is having an affair with Cassio in order to stir the jealousy within Othello. It is this jealousy and the ignorance of Othello that lead to the downfall of Desdemona; the one truly good natured character in the play.

Iago has been appointed the position of servant to Othello instead of the more prestigious position of lieutenant. Michael Cassio has been appointed this position. Iago feels betrayed because he considers himself more qualified than Cassio to serve as lieutenant. Iago then foreshadows his plans for Othello to Roderigo,

**"O, sir, content you;
I follow him to serve my turn upon him"**

Iago already realizes that Othello thinks about him as an honest man. Roderigo is used by Iago as an apprentice and someone to do his "dirty" work. Roderigo is naively unsuspecting. As the play shifts from Venice to Cyprus there is an interesting contrast. Venice, a respectful and honourable town is overshadowed by the war torn villages of Cyprus. It could be said that Venice represents good or specifically Desdemona and that Cyprus represents evil in Iago. Desdemona has been taken from her peacefulness and brought onto the grounds of evil. Iago commits his largest acts of deceit in Cyprus, fittingly considering the atmosphere. Ironically, the Venetians feel the Turks are their only enemy while in fact Iago is in hindsight the one man who destroys their stable state. Act II Scene III shows Iago's willing ability to manipulate characters in the play. Iago convinces Montano to inform Othello of Cassio's weakness for alcohol hoping this would rouse dissatisfaction by Othello. Iago when forced to tell the truth against another character does so very suspiciously. He pretends not to offend Cassio when telling Othello of the fight Cassio was involved in, but Iago secretly wants the worst to become of Cassio's situation without seeming responsible. Cassio is relieved of his duty as lieutenant. With Cassio no longer in the position of lieutenant, this gives Iago the opportunity to more effectively interact with and manipulate Othello. By controlling Othello, Iago would essentially control Desdemona.

To reach Desdemona directly is unforeseeable for Iago considering that Othello is superior to him. It is for this reason that Iago decides to exploit Othello. If Iago can turn Othello against his own wife he will have defeated his opposition. Act III Scene III, is very important because it is the point in the play where Iago begins to establish his manipulation of Othello. Cassio feels that it is necessary to seek the help of Desdemona in order to regain his position of lieutenant and therefore meets with her to discuss this possibility. Iago and Othello enter the scene just after Cassio leaves, and Iago wistfully tries to make it look like Cassio left because he does not want to be seen in the courtship of Desdemona. Iago sarcastically remarks:

**"Cassio, my lord! No, sure, I cannot think it
That he would steal away so guilty-like,
Seeing your coming."**

When Desdemona leaves, Iago takes the opportunity to strengthen Othello's views of honesty and trust towards him by saying ironically,

"Men should be what they seem;

Or those that be not, would they might seem none!"

This cleverness by Iago works upon one of the **tragic flaws** of Othello. **Othello has a tendency to take everything he sees and everything he is told at face value without questioning the circumstances.** Iago wonders why someone would pretend to be something they are not, while in fact that is the exact thing he represents. Finally, after hearing the exploits of Iago and witnessing the events surrounding Cassio, Othello for the first time is in conflict about what is the truth. This is the first stage of Iago's scheme to control Othello. As Emilia becomes suspicious about Othello's development of jealousy, Desdemona defends her husband by blaming herself for any harm done. This once again shows Desdemona's compassion and willingness to sacrifice herself for her husband. Othello begins to show his difficulty in maintaining his composure:

**"Well, my good lady.
[Aside] O, hardness to dissemble --
How do you, Desdemona?"**

Act IV, Scene I is a continuation of the anxiety and indifference Othello is undergoing. Iago takes advantage of this by being blunt with Othello about his wife Desdemona. Iago suggests that she is having sexual relations with other men, possibly Cassio, and continues on as if nothing has happened. This suggestion put Othello into a state of such emotional turmoil that he is lost in a trance. Iago's control over Othello is so strong now that he convinces him to consider getting rid of Desdemona and even suggests methods of killing her. Iago, so proud of his accomplishments of underhandedness:

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

As a result of Desdemona's mention of Cassio, Othello commits his first act of violence against Desdemona by hitting her. This shows now Othello's other tragic flaw. He made himself susceptible to Iago and the jealousy within him begins to lead to the demise of others. By his actions Othello has isolated himself from everyone except Iago. This gives Iago the perfect opportunity to complete his course of action. Iago does not tolerate any interference in his plans, and he first murders Roderigo before he can dispel the evil that Iago represents. Finally, Othello is so full of the lies told to him by Iago that he murders his wife. Desdemona, representative of goodness and heaven as a whole blames her death on herself and not Othello. Iago's wife, Emilia, becomes the ultimate undoing of Iago. After revealing Iago's plot to Othello, Iago kills her. This is yet another vicious act to show the true evil Iago represents. Othello finally realizes after being fooled into murder:

**"I look down towards his feet; but that's a fable
If that thou best a devil, I cannot kill thee."**

Iago says: **"I bleed, sir, but not killed,"**

This is the final statement by Iago himself that truly shows his belief in evil and that he truly thinks he is the devil. That is the destruction of all that is good. Hell over heaven and black over white.

Iago has one major motivational factor that leads him to lie, cheat, and commit crimes on other characters. This motivation is the destruction of all that is good and the rise of evil. This contrast is represented between Iago and Desdemona. Desdemona is described frequently by other characters as "she is divine, the grace of heaven", while Iago in

contrast is described as hellish after his plot is uncovered. Iago uses the other characters in the play to work specifically towards his goal. In this way, he can maintain his supposed unknowingness about the events going on and still work his scheming ways. Iago's schemes however at times seem to work unrealistically well which may or may not be a case of witchcraft or magic. Iago's major mistake, ironically, is that he trusted his wife Emilia and found that she was not as trustworthy as he thought. Although not completely victorious at the conclusion of the play, Iago does successfully eliminate the one character representative of heaven, innocence, and honesty. Finally, everything Iago pretended to be led to his demise: Honesty, Innocence, and Love.

Othello as a Tragedy of evil : Evil in Iago

In Othello, **evil** it is **personified** in one character who wears the mask of seeming virtue. In the character of Iago, we see evil as deception and as a direct challenge to the order and harmony of the universe. Iago's superficial brilliance and self-control is the 'reason' for renaissance skepticism which in Shakespeare's day was challenging the great vision of harmony and order.

Despite his hypocrisy, **Iago** reveals himself to the reader as an **active force of evil** right from the first scene of the play. It is Roderigo alone who is given the insight into Iago; but he is foolish and doesn't understand the implications of Iago's plans. Iago stands for **social disintegration**. He is not one of the servants who get paid by their masters for their service and are loyal to them. He is the wicked one whose loyalty is a mask.

The supreme **egotism of Iago** is a manifestation of the code of 'reason' by which he lives. True human reason in terms of Renaissance Christian humanism was a reflection of the supreme wisdom of God and it consisted in submitting one's will to the purposes of Go. **Iago's reason is the sin of pride**, for it **denies the supremacy** of God and sees man as the sole author of his destiny, able to control himself and others by the power of his mind. It is expressed in his speech to Roderigo which begins the words "**Virtue! A fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus.**" In denying the purposes of the power of God, Iago strikes at the very roots of Christian Humanism. He has a lust for the blood and a permission of the will. He is conceited and excessively proud of his intelligence and wisdom which ultimately cause the fall of his personality.

Iago's **betrayal of himself** is quite expected and possible despite Bradley's wonder that how his supreme intellect should finally betray him into such colossal errors as his misjudging the relationship between Othello and Desdemona and the character of his own wife, Emilia. But it is in the very nature of Iago's intellect that he should be so. He sees that Desdemona's love for the Moor was only animal lust and nothing else. He can perceive only the outward appearance of Othello; he can't see the qualities for which Desdemona married him; and thus their relationship seems only a product of lust which lust must destroy. Out of Iago's failure of perception will come his own destruction, but his failure is inherent in the very 'reason' by which he lives.

The **audience** doesn't have the same **views about Iago** as the other characters in the play do. The audience knows him to be a Semi-devil, the very incarnation of Devil and the negation of moral values. To the audience, he is devil; but to Othello, he is 'Honest Iago.' Honest is very much like that of Claudius in Hamlet. He stands for false appearance and it is fitting that Shakespeare should give the celebrated lines:

**Who steals my purse steals trash
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him**

And makes me poor indeed.

Such a concern for reputation is a manifestation of pride

Iago personifies evil in the guise of good whereas in **Othello** himself, we have a **depiction of true virtue** which seems to be wearing many of the signs of evil. As in Cinthio's story, Othello's wedding with Desdemona was unnatural. Cinthio doesn't mention the blackness of the Moor, mentioning it only once in the story. In the Renaissance, the color black was a symbol of lechery. It was so commonly used in the books that it was also the color of the devil whose redness is a fairly recent innovation. To Shakespeare's audience, Othello would have all the outward appearance of the blacker devil which Amelia calls him. His marriage to Desdemona would appear as aberration in nature. Iago awakens Brabantio with a description of the marriage in these terms, punctuated by images of brute sexuality - comparing Othello to a black ram that is going to take advantage of Brabantio's white ewe.

Finally, the **unnaturalness** and **Appearance** plays a vital role in the play. The first two acts of the play these themes, the evil of the unnatural marriage and that of Iago's mask of seeming virtue. Othello has the blackness of Satan, Iago the whiteness of truth and virtue. True virtue bears the mark of evil and evil is marked with the semblance of honesty. Shakespeare assures the audience that of the falsity of these outward sign, that Iago is seemingly honest and that Othello, despite his appearance, is a man of true nobility whom Desdemona can love for his 'honours and his valiant parts'. We see his dignity before the consul where he denies the very lechery which his outward color represents. Shakespeare's deliberate reversal of normal appearance is so shocking that the audience must be left till incredulous, with an uncertain fear that appearance be still be truth. This fear is supported by Brabantio's warning:

**Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see
She has deceived her father, and may thee**

Upon this seeming violation of nature, Iago will work his temptation of Othello and under Iago's influence; Othello will see Desdemona exactly Brabantio has seen her. So we can conclude that the play is filled with the combat between good and evil and the heinous acts of evil to dominate the good are exposed beautifully by master dramatist William Shakespeare.

Othello: Shakespeare's Aristotelian Tragedy

Aristotle described a tragedy as "an imitation of an action of high importance, complete and of some amplitude: in language enhanced by distinct and varying beauties...by means of pity and fear effecting its purgation of these emotions". William Shakespeare's famous play Othello is concerns the downfall of a Moorish general having the elements of jealousy, suspense, intrigue, murder, and suicide to create a magnificent tragedy of the highest Aristotelian order. Aristotle prescribed three main ingredients for a tragic drama recipe: **hamartia**, or a **tragic flaw** in the **tragic hero's character** that brings about his downfall; **catharsis**, or a **purgation** of the audience's emotions so that they feel that they have learned something from the play; and anagnorisis, or the character's revelation of some fact not previously realized.

Shakespeare's protagonist Othello fulfills all of Aristotle's requirements for a **tragic hero**, as Othello is a character of noble status who falls from that position of power to one of shame because of his hamartia. Moreover the **plot** of Othello contains a powerful **catharsis** through its **climax** and conclusion, and an anagnorisis when Othello realizes that Iago and Desdemona are not who they seemed to be.

First of all, the Moorish general Othello, fits Aristotle's definition of a tragic hero. Aristotle states that a tragic hero must have three dominant qualities: he must be a **person of high estate**, he must **fall from that position into unhappiness**, and his downfall must be **brought about by his hamartia**, or his **tragic flaw**. Othello is not only a successful general in the Venetian army but is also well respected, admired, and well liked. Since Othello enjoys a position of power and happiness at the beginning of the play, this status makes his **downfall** from beloved general to despised murderer infinitely more tragic and moving.

According to Aristotle, however, the tragic hero's collapse cannot be a simple deterioration from success to misery. The most distinctive feature of the Aristotelian tragic hero is **hamartia**; his downfall must be brought about by a character flaw or flaw in judgment that leads to his destruction. Hamartia is more than a moral weakness; it is a crucial mistake on the part of the tragic hero that causes him to plunge from greatness to grief. Othello's mistake as a tragic hero is that he **believes Iago's treacherous lies about Desdemona's unfaithfulness**. Instead of investigating the matter further, he rashly jumps to the worst conclusions about his wife and believes every lie that Iago whispers into his ear.

Iago recognizes that he can use these weaknesses of Othello's to hasten his downfall. Therefore Othello fits Aristotle's description of a tragic hero who has descended from high estate to destruction because of his **hamartia**.

A true Aristotelian tragedy also contains what the Greeks called a **catharsis**, or a **purgation** that leaves the audience feeling justified and uplifted. In a tragedy like Othello, where almost all of the characters wind up dead, the audience is certainly not expected to feel happy or cheerful about the play's conclusion, but they do feel a sort of justification at the lessons learned by the play's characters and satisfaction in the villain's punishment. Aristotle said, "The tragic pleasure is that of pity and fear, and the poet has to produce it by a work of imitation". The drama must arouse feelings of pity and fear in the audience and then expunge those feelings through a satisfactory conclusion. In Othello, Shakespeare certainly moves the audience to feel pity for Othello, for Desdemona, for Cassio, and even for Iago. They also fear for the fate of the happy couple, and realize their worst fears when Othello smothers his innocent wife in a jealous rage. Once more the audience pities Othello when he recognizes afterwards that Desdemona is innocent and stabs himself in remorse. Even though the play does not end "happily ever after," the deaths of the unhappy couple and the punishment of the villain Iago bring a sort of closure to the drama.

The **ultimate purpose of catharsis in a tragedy** is to purify our feelings, refining them into something more ennobling. The audience certainly feels as though they have learned something important and witnessed an epic drama that has affected them morally and spiritually. This is the purpose of tragedy – to dramatize the weaknesses, despair, and failings of the human spirit and to demonstrate how to better ourselves through this experience. Through this emotionally charged plot filled with intrigue and conflict, Shakespeare has certainly met all of Aristotle's requirements for catharsis.

The **last element of Aristotelian tragedy** found in Shakespeare's Othello is **anagnorisis**, a fact that was previously unknown to the tragic hero. Aristotle's literal Greek definition of **anagnorisis consists of two parts**; "The first part of the definition characterizes **recognition as a change from ignorance into knowledge, leading either to friendship or enmity**". Shakespeare brings out this particular feature of anagnorisis towards the end of the play when Othello realizes that his **trusted friend Iago has trapped him in a web of lies and has deceived him into thinking Desdemona is unfaithful**. Iago's wife Emilia cries out before she dies,

**"Moor, she was chaste. She loved thee, cruel Moor.
So come my soul to bliss as I speak true" (5.2.258-259)**

and suddenly Othello understands that it is Iago who has misled him, not Desdemona. This anagnorisis causes Othello to cry,

**"Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!
O Desdemona! Dead, Desdemona! Dead! O! O!" (5.2.289-290),**

to stab and wound the villain Iago, and then to kill himself in remorse.

The **second aspect of the Greek word anagnorisis** is its more superficial, general connotation. Anagnorisis usually involves revelation of the true identity of persons previously unknown, as when a father recognizes a stranger as his son, or vice versa". It is the simple epiphany experienced by the tragic hero as he realizes something significant, like the fact that he has killed the woman he loves for no reason.

This **moment of revelation** for Othello is the **climax** of Shakespeare's play as everything comes together before the tragic hero's eyes and the full extent of Iago's treachery and deceit is made clear to him. For the audience, the moment is especially climactic, because we have known the truth all along. In the tragedy of Othello, we witness an imitation of an action. The audience knows that Desdemona is innocent; thus, Othello's baseless accusations and crime against her arouse special pity and loathing. This makes the Othello's anagnorisis at the end of the play exceptionally touching.

Shakespeare's great play depicting the downfall of a Moorish general through jealousy and deceit is such a tragic drama. Aristotle's influence upon the sixteenth-century English playwright is evident in Othello. Through the character of Othello as a tragic hero with a fatal flaw, the purgation of emotion through the couple's deaths and the punishment of Iago, and the epiphany Othello experiences at the end of the play, Shakespeare demonstrates with eloquence each and every one of Aristotle's qualifications for tragedy. Othello is a tragic drama of epic proportions that has stood the test of time and continues to move audiences with its powerful themes of jealousy, intrigue, betrayal, faithfulness, death, and remorse.

Othello as a Tragic Hero

In Shakespeare's Othello, Othello can be considered a tragic hero because he follows Aristotle's six elements of a tragedy. Based on Aristotle's six elements of a tragedy, position, flaw, prophecy, recognition, catastrophe, and reversal, the character of Othello from Shakespeare's Othello can be considered a tragic hero.

The first element of tragedy is **position**, or status, that the hero is in. In Othello, Othello is the leader of the Italian army and is very important to the people of Italy. "Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you against the general enemy Ottoman." This quote shows how important Othello is to the army and to the war. When Othello is chosen to lead the army overseas, he also makes Brabantio mad by marrying his daughter, Desdemona, without his permission.

"And, noble signior, if virtue no delighted beauty lack, your son- in-law is far more far than black (17)."

This quote shows that Othello is so respected that the Duke of Venice can see through the color of Othello's skin and gives him praise.

The second element of tragedy is **prophecy**, which can be seen when Othello is telling Desdemona the story about when he received the handkerchief.

"She told me her, while she kept it't would make her amiable and subdue my father entirely to her love, but if she lost it or made a gift of it, my father's eye should hold her loathed and his spirits should hunt after new fancies (56)."

This quote lets the reader know that the handkerchief is not only important to Othello and Desdemona but it is also important to the play because it's the reason why Othello gets jealous. This prophecy leads to the downfall of the tragic hero. Another incident where prophecy occurred in the play was when Desdemona tells the story of Barbara, Desdemona's mother's maid, who sang a song of "willow". "An old thing 't was, but it express'd her fortune, and she died singing it: that song to-night will not go from my mind (75)." This quote is an example of prophecy because it's foreshadowing that Desdemona will die because she won't let the song go from her mind.

The third element of a tragedy is **flaw**. Flaw can be either hubris or anger. "By heaven, that should be my handkerchief (64)!" This quote shows the jealousy that Othello has over the fact that Desdemona is being unfaithful to him. In Oedipus the king anger can be seen when Tiresias tells Oedipus that he is the evil that haunts the town. "Good riddance too! You're nothing but a nuisance here, and one I can do without." This is an example of how powerful anger can be because of the anger that Othello feels, he can't even stand to look at the woman that he loves. Once Othello finds out that Desdemona is being unfaithful to him, he approaches her looking for an explanation. "O devil, devil! If that the earth could teem with woman's tears, each drop she falls would prove a crocodile. Out of my sight (67)!" This quote shows how Othello's jealousy has turned into rage, a form of anger.

The fourth element of a tragedy is **recognition**, which can be seen when Emilia hears Othello mentions the handkerchief, after he killed Desdemona. "with that recognizance and pledge of love which I first gave her; I saw it in his hand: It was a handkerchief, an antique token my father gave my mother (87)." Once Othello says this, Emilia knows that Iago is the person who set up Desdemona and Othello isn't the one to blame. Recognition can also be seen in Oedipus the King after the shepherd tells the story of the baby. "For if you are the one he says you are, make no mistake: you are a doom-born man (Sophocles 67)." At this point in the play, Oedipus knows that he is the one who is causing the problems in Thebes because the Tiresias was right.

The fifth element of a tragedy is **catastrophe**, which can be seen when Othello dies. "I kiss'd thee ere I kill'd thee: no way but this, killing myself, to die upon a kiss (91)." This is the last thing that Othello says before he dies which is the catastrophe in the play. Oedipus' catastrophe happens when Jocasta kills herself after she finds out that the prophet of Oedipus was true. "He frees the noose and lays the wretched woman down, then rips from off her dress the golden brooches she was wearing (Sophocles 70)." This quote shows the severity of the fact that Jocasta kills herself because it leads right into reversal.

The sixth element of a tragedy is **reversal** which can be seen when Desdemona kills herself. "Whip me, ye devils, from the possession of this heavenly sight! Blow me about in the winds! Roast me in sulphur! Wash me down in steep-down gulfs of fire! O Desdemona! Desdemona! Dead! Oh! Oh! Oh (88)!" This quote shows the pain that Othello felt when everything turned bad. In Oedipus the King, Oedipus went through the same kind of pain when he went through reversal. "Aah! A nightmare mist has fallen adamant black on me-abomination closing. Cry, cry, oh cry again (Sophocles 72)!" Oedipus and Othello are in so much pain and suffering that they both inflict severe wounds upon themselves. When Othello finds out that Desdemona was being faithful to

him, he asks for forgiveness. "I do believe it, and I ask your pardon. Will you, I pray, demi-devil why he hath thus enslaved my soul and body (90)? This quote shows that Othello is in so much pain that he feels enslaved in his own body.

Othello can be seen as a tragic hero because he follows all of Aristotle's six elements of tragic hero. These are the same six elements that define Oedipus as a tragic hero. The six elements of a tragedy can be seen throughout the plays Othello and Oedipus the King. That is why Othello is seen as a tragic hero through the eyes of the reader.

Othello's Hamartia

A Shakespearean tragedy is one that encompasses many different elements. Shakespeare presents all of these elements spectacularly in Othello. For a tragedy to occur there are five conditions. The protagonist, Othello in this case, must experience a death or a total loss of ranking in society. The audience must also be captured by the actors and feel some sort of connection to them. This is known as **catharsis**. In Shakespearean tragedies the protagonist always has a character defect or a **tragic flaw**. This tragic flaw along with pride will cause the protagonist to make an error in judgement leading him to his downfall and eventual death. These two elements are called hubris and hamartia. The unities of time, space, and action must also be followed. This means that the play must take place in a very short period of time, occur in one general area, and follow one main character throughout the play. Shakespeare orates for us a tragic occurrence in the life of a man who once had it all, throws it all away in a fit of jealous rage.

The **downfall of the central character** is the main concept of the tragedy. Without the main character's downfall there is no reason for the reader to **feel pity**, therefore, no tragedy. **The downfall of the protagonist in Shakespearean tragedies always originates from their tragic flaw.** Othello's **tragic flaw** is his **jealousy**, which Iago constantly reminds him about. This is first brought about in act III, scene 3 when Iago asks Othello if he has seen a handkerchief spotted with strawberries. At this point Othello is jealous at Cassio for having won the heart of Desdemona and earned the handkerchief. Upon hearing this Othello flies into a mad fit by saying: **O, that the slave had forty thousand lives! (III, 3, 439)**. By his jealousy Othello makes himself very prone to many attacks on him by Iago.

Catharsis is the part of the play that moves the audience and attempts to put them in the actor's shoes. Shakespeare does this by attacking the issue of love. It is a very touchy and emotional subject. Anyone who has ever fallen in love can relate to Othello and Desdemona. They are viewed as the perfect newly-weds who have each other as compliments. Desdemona shows us this by protesting to the Duke and her father that she saw Othello's visage in his mind, **"And to his honor and his valiant parts Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate"**. The **love** between **her** and **Othello** is one of **great passion and breaking barriers**. They were many years apart, came from different races, and were different colors of skin, something that was unheard of in their time. Obstacles such as these, even in our day, are very difficult to overcome. When reading or watching Othello one cannot help but to feel envy for the love they have. In this tragedy, catharsis presents something the audience cannot avoid.

Hubris and Hamartia are two components of a Shakespearean tragedy that are very much intertwined because of their basis on pride. Hubris is when the protagonist is consumed with pride and believes that fate can be beaten. Evidence of Othello's pride is based on the thought; **No one messes around with Othello!** This becomes his eventual downfall. The reader remembers in act III, scene 3 when Iago had planted false evidence of Desdemona's unfaithfulness; Othello reacted in a very calm way, mostly in disbelief. In act IV, scene 1 when Iago brings more evidence of Desdemona's infidelity

Othello reacts in a very different and violent way. **Let her rot, and perish, and be damned tonight; for she shall not live** (IV, 1, 183-184). This statement stems from Othello's pride in being a man of high standing who will not be cheated on. Hamartia also comes into play where Othello believes that **fate can be beaten by killing Desdemona**. Even if Othello had escaped death here he would have been removed of his high military status and thrown in jail. Othello was truly a man consumed with pride and wrongly believed that he could defy fate and come out on top by killing what he loved most.

Othello could be considered not to be a tragedy because of its **violation of the unities of time, space, and action**. The unities of time, space, and action state that the story must take place in one city, occur in a short period of time more than 24 hours, and must follow one central character throughout the entire play. Othello does not occur in one city through the entire story. Othello went to war in Cyprus and spent most of his time living in Venice. Although there is very little time spent in Cyprus Othello, the story, does not work along the same lines as Hamlet. In Hamlet almost the entire story took place between the castle walls. As for the unity of action we see something quite different here. The play we studied is titled Othello; therefore, the reader assumes that Othello is the central character. If the book were not named this, it would be quite possible that many readers would believe the title could be Iago and not Othello. Although, Iago is not the good guy but he is in the play just as much or even more than Othello. At the beginning of the play Iago is present and Othello is absent. This is how it is many scenes are in the play.

To conclude, we can say that Othello is Shakespeare's most perfect tragedy because it encompasses all of the elements of a tragedy so wonderfully. The love shared between Othello and Desdemona at the beginning of the play is so much more spectacular than that of Claudius and Gertrude in Hamlet or Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in Macbeth. The guilt and wrong felt by Othello after he realizes his errors in judgement are incomparable to the drama in Shakespeare's other tragedies. Any audience viewing Othello for the first time would be captured by the characters because of their relation to the audience. Any experienced Shakespeare reader would have no problem giving Othello the title of most perfect tragedy because it covers all of the elements of a tragedy so wonderfully.

The Themes of Othello

The play Othello is one of the works written by William Shakespeare. It is written approximately in 1603 and was published in 1622, whereas the first performance of this play is in November 1604 (Wikipedia, Chronology of Shakespeare's play). The main themes of Othello revolve around the issue of love, jealousy, fidelity, the incompatibility of military heroism and love and also pride. But as the play unwraps, much more issues come to visible and these will be discussed in details throughout this essay.

The first theme that can be found in this play is **jealousy**. This theme can be said act as the backbone of the entire play. All the events that happen in the play until that leads to Othello's downfall are actually triggered by this form of mischief- jealousy. In this play, jealousy portrays by three characters which are Iago, Roderigo and Othello. Iago's jealousy originates from his dissatisfaction towards Othello who happens to promote the lieutenant post to Michael Cassio, the less experience soldier, instead of him (line 8-22). This then drives Iago to plan revenge on Othello in order to gain back his reputation. Iago's jealousy is actually the most critical issue in this play. Things would go differently if Iago has responded in positive way about the promotion and Othello and Desdemona would have lived happily with their marriage.

In Roderigo's case however, his jealousy is derived from his disappointment of watching Desdemona (his first love) fall into Othello's hands. In comparison to Iago, Roderigo's

jealousy basically is harmless because looking back at Roderigo's ability, he is incapable to plan or even to perform evil tricks on his own. His jealousy is mostly fuels up by Iago who uses him as a pawn in order to play his evil tricks. For instance, in Act II, Iago purposely provokes Roderigo by telling him about Cassio's feeling towards Desdemona so Roderigo will take action and create a trouble that he knows will put Cassio's reputation at risk.

Still, Roderigo is not the only person who is affected by Iago's jealousy. Jealousy is like a disease that will spread from one person to another which if not prevent can cause destruction to all. This is exactly what happens in this play. Iago's hatred and jealousy towards Othello drives him to deceive many people around him including Othello. As part of his evil plans, Iago cunningly uses both Roderigo and Othello's weakness which is Desdemona to entrap them in his wicked schemes. The story he makes up to Othello about Desdemona and Cassio results to another form of jealousy in the play which at the end leads to the death of Desdemona and finally Othello himself. These events show that Iago's character plays as the main contributor to the theme jealousy.

Besides jealousy, the second theme of this play is **reputation** which also relates to **pride**. This play has abundance of characters that progress alongside the theme reputation. This includes Othello, Brabantio, Cassio and last but not least Iago. All of these characters depicts their reputation is as important as their pride through the way they reacts towards the situations that comes up to them. For examples, in the first act we have been introduce to Brabantio who much worries that his daughter's elopement will mark him as a careless father despite his rank as a senator (191-197), while Othello on the other hand becomes depress after suspecting he has been cheating by his wife. The more obvious event that conveys the importance of reputation as one's pride can be found in act II. In this scene, Cassio is at dismay after losing his rank as a lieutenant (253-256). For Cassio, his reputation is what makes him feels better about himself because it let people see him in positive ways.

But, above all the three characters, Iago relatedness with reputation is much stronger than the others. His jealousy, hatred, betrayal and the dark mischievous he creates are all arouses from the idea of reputation. In fact, as part of his revenge's scheme, Iago trickily plays with words and actions to cover up his real intentions in order to gain and maintain his reputation in people's eyes. Iago's action conveys to us that reputation means a lot to him and he is willing to do anything to gain it. From these situations, it suggests that the theme reputation is importance in both domestic and political level.

The third important theme in this play is **fidelity**. In analysing this theme, it is crucial to understand the underlying keys of 'what it is' and 'what is perceived to be' (Maurer, K. 2000) because this is what actually the play Othello is all about. In Othello, fidelity can be analyse between husband-wife, father-daughter, friends and general-servants relationship. For example, in Desdemona's case, although she is wrong by turning away from his father and elope with Othello, but she is the most faithful character of all. Desdemona's love towards Othello is real but if only Othello has faith in her, she would not have become the innocent victim of Iago's evil tricks.

Fidelity would not be complete without thrust and vice versa. Lacks of one of these elements will not promise a strong relationship. This for instance relates to Cassio-Othello-Iago of general-servants relationship. In scene II, Othello thrusts Iago more than Cassio, while as a matter of fact, Iago (the Janus faces) only pretends to be loyal to him. Although Cassio is the truly faithful servant to Othello yet Othello shows that he lacks of faith in Cassio when he easily thrust Iago's words and unprofessionally removes Cassio from his Lieutenant rank without further investigation. It is indeed an irony that someone with military skill like Othello fails to differentiate between the real enemy and friend. His careless at the end brings about to his own destruction.

Other theme that can be found in this play is **woman status**. In this play, the woman status is represented by two characters which are Desdemona and Emilia where both are similar in the way they are married. In Othello, women have lower status and are always powerless than men. What is worse, the unmarried woman is often regarded as a property to her father. This is actually proved in Act I where Iago and Brabantio indicate Desdemona as if she is one of the properties "Look to your house, your daughter, and your bags!" (80- Act I scene I) and "she is abused, stol'n from me and corrupted (60- Act 1 scene III). Besides, men's thought of women is always weak and powerless can also be traced in this play. During the hearing at the court, it is Othello who voices up to call upon Desdemona and let her speak on her behalf. Desdemona proves that men are wrong and she actually is braver and confident in voicing up her thought even though the truth will hurt her father.

Last but not least, the **incompatibility of military heroism and love** is also a notable theme of the play. Before and above all else, Othello is a soldier. From the earliest moments in the play, his career affects his married life. Asking "fit disposition" for his wife after being ordered to Cyprus, Othello notes that

**"the tyrant custom ...
Hath made the flinty and steel couch of war
My thrice-driven bed of down".**

While Desdemona is used to better "accommodation," she nevertheless accompanies her husband to Cyprus. Moreover, she seems unperturbed by the tempest or Turks that threatened their crossing, and genuinely curious rather than irate when she is roused from bed by the drunken brawl in Act II, scene iii. She is, indeed, Othello's "fair warrior," and he is happiest when he has her by his side in the midst of military conflict or business. The military also provides Othello with a means to gain belonging in Venetian society. While the Venetians in the play are generally fearful of the prospect of Othello's social entrance into white society through his marriage to Desdemona, all Venetians respect and honour him as a soldier. Mercenary Moors were, in fact, commonplace at the time.

Othello predicates his success in love on his success as a soldier, wooing Desdemona with tales of his military travels and battles. Once the Turks are drowned—by natural rather than military might—Othello is left without anything to do: the last act of military administration we see him perform is the viewing of fortifications in the extremely short second scene of Act III. No longer having a means of proving his manhood or honour in a public setting such as the court or the battlefield, Othello begins to feel uneasy with his footing in a private setting, the bedroom. Iago capitalizes on this uneasiness, calling Othello's epileptic fit in Act IV, scene I, "[a] passion most unsuited such a man." In other words, Iago is calling Othello unsoldierly. Iago also takes care to mention that Cassio, whom Othello believes to be his competitor, saw him in his emasculating trance.

Desperate to cling to the security of his former identity as a soldier while his current identity as a lover crumbles, Othello begins to confuse the one with the other. His expression of his jealousy quickly devolves from the conventional—"Farewell the tranquil mind"—to the absurd:

**Farewell the plumed troops and the big wars
That makes ambition virtue!
O, farewell, 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!"**

One might well say that Othello is saying farewell to the wrong things—he is entirely preoccupied with his identity as a soldier. But his way of thinking is somewhat justified by its seductiveness to the audience as well. Critics and audiences alike find comfort and nobility in Othello's final speech and the anecdote of the "malignant and ... turbaned Turk", even though in that speech, as in his speech in Act III, scene iii, Othello depends on his identity as a soldier to glorify himself in the public's memory, and to try to make his audience forget his and Desdemona's disastrous marital experiment.

Like any others of Shakespeare's works, the themes in Othello is equally revolves around the issues of human life. Besides love, jealousy, and pride are the common themes that can be found in his work. In conclusion, in Othello, jealousy is the main theme that is proves to be very harmful and can leads to destruction in one's life. It is almost as disastrous as men greediness in gaining reputation. Men willing to do anything to secure their reputation but it still do not promise them that they will get it in the end. What is best is to always be grateful in what one has. The third theme is fidelity which is important in a relationship either between husband and wife, father and daughter, friends or servant and his master. Last but not least, woman has very low status in society compare to men. Their powerless state makes them the easy target to be use by men and easily been discriminate as unchaste which explain why Othello and Iago could be so suspicious with their wife.

Theme of Jealousy in Othello

Throughout Shakespeare's Othello, the major theme of jealousy is apparent. The tragedy Othello focuses on the doom of Othello and the other major characters as a result of jealousy. "Othello" represents jealousy as one of the most corrupting and destructive of emotions. It is jealousy that prompts Iago to plot Othello's downfall; jealousy, too, is the tool that Iago uses to arouse Othello's passions. Roderigo and Bianca demonstrate jealousy at various times in the play, and Emilia demonstrates that she too knows the emotion well. Only Desdemona and Cassio, the true innocents of the story, seem beyond its clutches.

Like a classical tragic hero in the tragedy Othello falls from his position due to his 'tragic flaw' jealousy. **Jealousy** is the main **tragic flaw** that brings about Othello's misfortune, suffering, and death. Though this flaw is fuelled by the external force like the witches in Macbeth, but jealousy seems to have a deep root in Othello's character. It is the main factor that appears to destroy Othello. Iago is the initiator of the chain of events that sparks jealousy in Othello, and eventually leads to the downfall of not only the main character, but also of most of the significant characters of the play.

In Othello Shakespeare presents us with the tragic spectacle of a man who, in spirit of jealous rage, destroys what he loves best in the entire world. We will be able to best realize the tragic effect of jealousy if we consider first the **nature of the relation between Othello and Desdemona**. The marriage between Othello and Desdemona is a real 'marriage of true minds', a true love based on a mutual awareness and a true appreciation of each other's worth, a love that has in it none of the element of sensual lust. The love of Othello and Desdemona transcends the physical barriers of colour, nationality and age. But this love is destroyed as soon as jealousy enters into the mind of Othello.

It is **Iago** who **plants the seeds of suspicion and jealousy in Othello's mind**. In Act III: Scene 3, Cassio speaks to Desdemona, asking her to intercede with Othello on his behalf. Desdemona willingly agrees, knowing that Cassio is an old friend of Othello's. She promises to speak of him with her husband repeatedly until the quarrel is patched up and Cassio is recalled.

In the meantime, Othello and Iago enter and Cassio, who is embarrassed because of his antics the previous night, embraces Desdemona and departs. Iago seizes the opportunity to make an undermining comment — "Ha, I like not that" — that rankles in Othello's mind. Iago further insinuates that Cassio was not just leaving, but that he was "steal[ing] away so guilty-like" (39). Iago's words here are filled with forceful innuendo, and as he pretends to be a man who cannot believe what he sees, he introduces jealousy into Othello's subconscious.

Desdemona greets her husband and, without guilt, introduces Cassio's name into their conversation. Here, fate plays a major role in this tragedy; not even Iago wholly arranged this swift, coincidental confrontation of Othello, Desdemona, and Cassio, and certainly the pathos of Desdemona's position here is largely due to no other factor than fate. Desdemona speaks of Cassio, and Othello, to please her, agrees to see him, but he is distracted by his private thoughts. As Desdemona leaves, Othello chides himself for being irritated by his wife. Lovingly he sighs,

**"Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul,
But I do love thee! and when I love thee not,
Chaos is come again" (90–92).**

A **conversation** follows between **Othello** and **Iago**, in which Iago continues to imply that he knows something that he refuses to divulge, Othello denies that he would give himself over to jealousy. In his denial, he shows himself most vulnerable. He is consumed with doubt and suspicion. Othello voices his old fears that Brabantio was right, that it was unnatural for Desdemona to love him, that he was too horrible to be loved, and that it could not last. Iago leaves, and Othello contemplates his situation: He could be tricked, married to a woman who is already looking at other men, and he fears that he must wipe her out of his heart. He tries to tell himself that it is not true.

Iago also **urges** Othello to **recall** that **Desdemona deceived her own father** by marrying Othello. To Brabantio, Desdemona pretended to be afraid of Othello's dark looks; she pretended to shake and tremble at Othello's exotic demeanor, yet "she lov'd them [Othello's features] most" (207). The implication is clear; Iago does not have to state it: If Desdemona deceived her own flesh and blood, she might just as naturally deceive her husband.

When Desdemona re-enters, Othello's aspect is changed; he watches her intently, looking for signs, and brushes away her handkerchief when she seeks to sooth him. They go in to dinner, and Emilia picks up the fallen handkerchief, one that her husband, Iago, often urged her to steal from Desdemona. Emilia decides to have a copy made to give to Iago, but he enters, sees the handkerchief, and snatches it from her.

When Othello enters, Iago sees that Othello cannot regain his peace of mind. His speech is fevered, sweeping and frantic; he believes that his wife has been unfaithful to him. Othello then turns on Iago with savage intensity and demands to see the proof of Desdemona's infidelity. Cornered, Iago produces the dream story: Cassio spoke in his sleep, embraced him, called him Desdemona, and cursed the Moor. Iago tells Othello that he has seen Cassio wipe his brow with a handkerchief embroidered with strawberries; Othello recognizes this handkerchief as the one he gave to Desdemona.

Othello **dismisses love** and **calls for vengeance**. Certainty has freed his mind from doubt and confusion. Now he swears action, and Iago swears to help him. Othello wants Cassio dead, Iago agrees to do it, and then Othello wonders how to kill Desdemona.

The **fire of jealousy** is further inflamed in Othello **in Act III: Scene 4**. When Othello enters, he claims a headache and asks her for a handkerchief to bind his head, but he

will have only the embroidered strawberry handkerchief. Desdemona cannot produce the handkerchief and tries to deflect his questions about the handkerchief, speaking again of Cassio. Othello walks out in fury.

But Othello is totally **engulfed by his jealousy in Act IV:** Scene 1, in which he sees his wife's **handkerchief** in the hands of Cassio's mistress Bianca. It is, for Othello, the "ocular proof" he sought. He is now convinced of Desdemona's infidelity and knows he must kill both Cassio and Desdemona that very night. This is the second time Othello has sworn to kill both Cassio and Desdemona.

Othello goes directly to the point: "How shall I murder him, Iago?" Othello swears also to kill his wife this night, he curses her and weeps over her at the same time, mingling love and murder: "for she shall not live; no, my heart is turned to stone . . ." (178–179).

Still Othello knows the **pull of love and asks for poison** so that he might kill her at a distance, but he sees justice in Iago's idea of strangling her in her bed, imagining that she has dishonored that bed. Again the agreement is made: Iago is to kill Cassio, and Othello is to kill Desdemona.

Thus we see how the **passion of jealousy**, which **derives from pride and breeds anger, gradually gains control over Othello**. The decline in the moral and spiritual stature of Othello goes hand in hand with the destruction of his love for and faith in Desdemona. The theme of jealousy is prominent throughout the play as it motivates the characters' actions.

The dramatic irony is that the most **jealous indignation is expressed over offenses that did not happen**: Othello **jealous** about his **wife**; Bianca **jealous** about **Cassio**; **Iago** formerly **jealous** about **Emilia**. Each character attempts to cope as an individual, except Emilia, who has a theory that jealousy is a constituent part of masculinity. The evidence before her own eyes backs up her assessment.

The theme of 'otherness' in Othello

In this post-colonial context it is impossible to read Shakespeare's Othello without considering the issues of race, color and hegemonic ideologies as they are presented in the play. As we go through the play we see a complex relation between a black man, a white woman and the state.

The **racial conflict** in Othello is evident from the very beginning of the play. Othello is depicted as an 'other' or outsider from the beginning of the play. Within the opening lines of the play, we see how Othello is distanced from much of the action that concerns and affects him. He is ambiguously referred to as "he" or "him" by Roderigo and Iago for much of the first scene and when they do begin to specify just who they are talking about, they use racial epithets, not names.

Iago uses racism in the opening scene of the play as a spark to inflame Desdemona's father, Senator Brabantio, against Othello. After Iago and Roderigo raise a clamour outside Brabantio's house late one evening, the senator awakens and comes to a window. Iago then uses vulgar animal imagery to slur Othello, telling Brabantio that the black Moor has seized his greatest treasure, his daughter, and at that very moment is defiling her.

Iago shouts to Brabantio

... now, very now, an old black ram

Is tugging your white ewe. Arise, arise!

There is an obvious racism in this quote. When Brabantio reacts with incredulity, Iago replies with a metaphor that this time compares Othello to a horse: 'you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse'

Roderigo, whom Iago uses as a cat's-paw, supports Iago's story. Iago then says, **"I am one, sir, that comes to tell you, your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs"**. Roderigo adds that Desdemona is indeed in the "gross clasps of a lascivious Moor".

Brabantio, now convinced of the truth of the story, tells Roderigo to summon help. Roderigo also refers to Othello as 'Thick lips' and Iago continually uses the word 'slave', which are both racist terms.

The use of **animal imagery** is used to help convey **Othello as a monster** and the choices of animals shows the underlying racism: "Old Black ram" and "Barbary horse". The references to witchcraft and the devil also help to emphasize Othello's differences: "The devil will make a grandsire of you", "the beast with two backs". The playwright uses these characters to paint a picture of Othello as the embodiment of the black stereotype held by people at this time, labeling him as "different" to everyone else.

By and by, Brabantio and others appear. The senator, after denouncing Othello for taking Desdemona to his "sooty bosom", accuses the Moor of having used "foul charms" and "drugs or minerals" to weaken Desdemona's will.

The **marriage between Othello and Desdemona** was an **inter-racial marriage**. Previously Othello was a favourite to Brabantio and he along with Desdemona had had dinner many times with Othello. But why does he instantly react to the news of the marriage of Othello and Desdemona? It is because Othello is a Black. Instantly the matter becomes an issue in the Venetian council chamber, where the Duke and other senators are preparing for war against the Turks.

There is a clear **theme of racism** throughout, one which was firmly embedded in the Venetian society which rejects the marriage of Othello and Desdemona as wrong, 'against all rules of nature'. Nothing separates Othello from, 'the wealthy curled darlings of our nation,' except skin-colour. Iago, Roderigo, and Brabantio combine to give us a portrait of Venetian racism.

After Othello speaks eloquently of his love for Desdemona and she speaks on his behalf, the Duke exonerates Othello. But in doing so, the Duke obliquely denigrates Othello because of his race—apparently unintentionally, in a Freudian slip—telling Brabantio, **"Your son-in-law is more fair than black"**, implying that **fairness is superior to blackness**. Brabantio reluctantly accepts the ruling.

The racial conflict becomes clearer when we consider of **Iago's 'motiveless malignity'** against Othello. Iago seems to have few motives for his devious actions. Although he resents Othello being promoted before himself, it seems that from his speech that the thing he hates most about Othello is the colour of his skin. Because of this he uses unintelligent and colloquial racism to insult Othello. He refers to Othello as, "Thick lips,".

Essentially, **Iago is a representative of the white race**, a pre-Nazi figure who tries to inform the public of the impurity of Othello and Desdemona's marriage. He demonstrates how this miscegenation is threatening to the existing social order.

Having lost a battle, **Iago** continues to plot to win the war, still **using racism** as one of his **weapons**. Consider that in referring to Othello, he sometimes inserts the word black to remind listeners that the Moor is different, a man apart, a man to be isolated. For example, after referring to Othello in Act 1 as a "**black ram**," he tells Michael Cassio in Act 2, Scene 2, "**Come, lieutenant, I have a stoup of wine, and here without are a brace of Cyprus gallants that would fain have a measure to the health of black Othello**" (25).

Iago's scheme would not have worked without the **underlying atmosphere of racial prejudice in Venetian society**, a prejudice of which both Desdemona and Othello are very aware. Shakespeare's Desdemona copes with prejudice by denying it access to her own life: Her relationship with Othello is one of love, and she is deliberately loyal only to that.

The **Jealousy** and **racism** are both **inter-connected**. The thing that fuelled Othello's jealousy was his belief that he is black and Desdemona is white. That he is unfit to retain her attention for long. Othello, in a fundamentally ethnocentric and racist society, finds himself confronted with the horrible reality of this **self-contempt** when there is cause to believe that Desdemona, whose loved had been the shield against his self-contempt, now betrays him too. Thus, Shakespeare's Othello is a psychoanalytic view of a self-loathing man and his doomed attempts to defend himself against a painful reality.

The **society** and culture, Othello finds himself, is one where **racism** and **ethnocentrism** prevailed and **prejudices** abounded. Othello, however, is not aware how deeply prejudice has penetrated into his own personality. This absorbed prejudice undermines him with thoughts akin to "**I am not attractive**," "**I am not worthy of Desdemona**," "**It cannot be true that she really loves me**," and "**If she loves me, then there must be something wrong with her**." These thoughts, inflamed by Iago's hints and lies, prevent Othello from discussing his concerns and fears directly with Desdemona, and so he acts on panicked assumption. In order to survive the combined onslaught of internalized prejudice and the directed venom of Iago, Othello would have had to be near perfect in strength and self-knowledge, and that is not a fair demand for anyone.

Thus racism plays a significant part in bringing the tragedy of Othello. Shakespeare is also sending an anti-racist message through his play Othello. Those who discriminate people racially are the truly devious characters and Shakespeare shows this clearly through Iago and Brabantio. Iago is portrayed as the most evil villain and also the hateful racist. By presenting the main villain of the play to have such deep-rooted racism, Shakespeare is denouncing those who attack people purely on the basis of the colour of their skin or their nationality.

Theme of Honesty in Othello

Shakespeare's well-known play Othello, first performed in 1604, explores the theme of honesty in detail. The words 'honest' and 'honesty' themselves are used 52 times in the text. On a deeper level, the characters in this play and their actions help to support the theme of honesty. The play's villain, Iago, is the epitome of dishonesty and his untruthful nature is contrasted with the innocent Cassio and Desdemona. Emilia, Iago's wife, is neither fully honest nor fully dishonest in her actions and dialogue, providing an interesting role in the play. The central theme of honesty is linked to motifs in the play, including reputation and irony.

Iago is an extremely manipulative character and a very good liar. He uses his skills in deception to lie to almost every other character in the play – in particular Othello, but

also to Roderigo and Cassio. It is only the audience that knows of Iago's true intentions and feelings. Iago tells the viewers in a soliloquy – **"I do hate [Othello] as I do hell's pains"** and **"nothing can... content my soul till I am even'd with him"**.

Despite his consistent lying, he holds a **reputation for being honest**. It is this reputation that makes Othello believe every word Iago says, even calling him "honest Iago". Othello's appointment of Iago as an officer (because "a man he is of honesty and trust") and also him giving Iago the duty of transporting his beloved wife to Cyprus clearly show that Othello had full trust in Iago. This ultimately leads to Othello's death. Although certain aspects of Othello's personality played a part in his downfall, Iago's skill and care in his dishonest deeds could have fooled the biggest disbeliever. The original Elizabethan audience of Othello would have known that Satan is called 'the father of lies', so Iago's dishonesty increases his villain status. The Elizabethan connection between the devil and lying is also seen when Othello "look[s] down toward [Iago's] feet" when he discovers the truth about him – Othello was seeing whether or not Iago had devils hooves (the foot of a horse, deer, cow, or similar animal, covered with horny material) for feet. **Iago is a main character whose dishonesty results in several main events** in Othello. His personality emphasizes the central theme of honesty because his complete lack of it highlights the truthfulness of other characters.

Honesty in the 21st century is usually defined as telling the truth, but in the context of Othello is also means chastity. **Desdemona is honest in both senses of the word**. She remains completely faithful to her husband Othello and never tells a lie in the play. However, her secret marriage to Othello can be seen as deceptive. One can assume that she may have had to lie, or at least hide the truth from certain people, in order for her marriage to be carried out. She redeems herself somewhat when she whole-heartedly professes her love towards Othello in front of her father and the court. Still, the cunning Iago uses the fact that Desdemona betrayed her father to his advantage when trying to convince Othello of Desdemona's unfaithfulness – "she did deceive her father, marrying you". The one thing that Desdemona does which is somewhat untruthful is used by Iago, in a way that eventually leads to her murder. There is much irony in the fact that Othello chooses to believe everything the lying Iago says, while not believing anything the truthful Desdemona has to say. Furthermore, the more Desdemona tells the truth, the less Othello is inclined to trust her. When she repeatedly tries to convince Othello to reinstate Cassio, she thinks that she is doing a good thing, when she is really just increasing Othello's suspicions. Shakespeare shows in Othello that though honesty is a worthy trait to have, there are many other factors that will affect other's opinions of oneself. In the case of Desdemona, her honesty was not enough to save her life.

Iago's dishonesty is contrasted with Desdemona, but is also contrasted with the character of **Cassio**. The word honest is used several times to describe Cassio. Although Cassio considers Desdemona to be "indeed perfection" he never pursues Desdemona, knowing that she and Othello are in a loving relationship. He is also the only attendant at their wedding. The **differences in Iago and Cassio** in terms of **honesty** relate well to the **motif of reputation**. Despite his lying ways, **Iago** retains his **honest cover-up** right until the end of the play. On the other hand, **Cassio's reputation is ruined** when he takes part in a drunken fight, costing him his esteemed military position. From this point onwards, Othello no longer fully trusts Cassio. This demonstrates the importance of reputation, whether one's reputation is actually valid or not. Othello continued to trust Iago throughout the play because Iago was still seen as a very honest man. If Othello

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ever doubted Iago, the play could easily have been very different. Iago may not have been honest but his honest reputation served him well and allowed him to carry out his scheming plans.

Emilia is an **interesting character** in Othello in regards to **honesty**. She did take Desdemona's handkerchief and give it to Iago, which he then used to fully convince Othello of Desdemona's infidelity. As Iago's wife for a number of years, one assumes that she must have had some idea of Iago's dishonesty. However, we must remember that in Shakespeare's time women were always inferior to their husbands, and if Emilia were to risk her marriage she would also risk any hope of leading a respectable life. When Emilia does find out that Iago lied about Desdemona and Cassio, she is horrified – **"My husband say that she was false?..If he say so, may his pernicious soul rot half a grain a day! He lies to the heart."** Despite threats from Othello she is the one that tells everyone that of Iago's lies and that Othello killed Desdemona. There is irony when she speaks of the consequences of dishonesty in front of the most dishonest character in the play, Iago. She says that the person who lied about Desdemona is an **"eternal villain, some busy and insinuating rogue, some cogging, cozening slave"**. Emilia is important to the central theme of honesty in Othello because while she was technically, though unknowingly, Iago's accomplice, she clearly did not stand for deceitfulness and was brave enough to tell the truth, even when it cost Emilia her life.

In Othello, the stark **contrast** between the **innocence** of **Desdemona** and **Cassio** and the **double nature** of the **villainous** Iago promotes the central theme of honesty. Through Iago's plans, much tension is created as Othello continues to trust Iago due to his honest reputation, while holding his disbelief in the honest characters, Cassio and Desdemona. The irony of this situation keeps the audience engaged, while the role of Emilia as the truth teller of the play provides interest and also is another contrast with her lying husband Iago. The interactions between honesty and dishonesty are vital to the play Othello because they lead to the occurrence of significant events, most notably the event that makes this play a tragedy, the suicide of the protagonist Othello.

The Role of Women in Othello

In Othello by William Shakespeare, the role of Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca portray how women were during the 15th century. Women were portrayed as being **loyal** to their **husbands; doing what they are** told, and **not going against their husband's judgment or actions**. These women represent three different characteristics in which women are being recognized in Othello. The women in Othello represent various levels of **class, virtue, and intelligence**. **Desdemona** is aristocratic, virtuous, and makes her own decisions; **Emilia** is the middle **class**, a **maid, manipulated** by Iago and loyal to Desdemona; and **Bianca** is the **bottom** of the line, being represented as a **strumpet** (prostitute). Iago states how women are weak, lazy, and inane and only desire physical pleasure.

Throughout the play **Desdemona symbolizes innocence and helplessness**. The first encounter with Desdemona, Shakespeare describes her as being mature and quite perceptive of events around her, especially when we meet Desdemona and how mature she is when she defends her love for Othello to her father Brabantio. Iago often tells Othello that she is unfaithful because Iago is implementing into Othello's head that Desdemona is committing adultery with Cassio. She has a tendency to be sympathetic towards other people's situations, like Cassio. This also further inspired Othello's jealousy when Iago pointed out they were speaking in privacy. She often pays attention

to other people's thoughts yet remains cynical if they differ to her own. She's loyal to her husband in all aspects of life, whether it is mental or physical.

Desdemona is like a **peacemaker** because when Othello wanted to "fire" Cassio, she wanted peace between them. Therefore she talks to Cassio in private, which this leads to her husband accusing her of cheating. After the fight between Othello and Cassio, Desdemona wants to make peace between them. In today's society, Desdemona is known as a housewife who cares for her husband and is behind him every step of the way. However, when it comes to the arguing with Othello, she becomes a woman being emotional abused by her husband, leading her death by her own husband at the end.

Emilia is Iago's wife, which says something about her **submissive** character already. She is also Desdemona's handmaiden; this is a vital part in her role in the play. She is the wife of pure evil, Iago, and the maid of the most kind, Desdemona. Emilia unknowingly plays a large role in Iago's plan and is never suspicious. Emilia is, in some cases, the opposite of Desdemona. Even though women should be faithful and loyal to their husband, she considers that women should have a voice; be more independent and not relying on their husbands' all the time.

Emilia gets angry at the fact that Othello calls Desdemona an unfaithful wife, hence her stating, in Act 4, Scene 3, "But I do think it is their husbands' faults/ If wives do fall. Say that they slack their duties, /And pour our treasures into foreign laps; /Or else break out in peevish jealousies, /Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us, /Or scant our former having in despite: /Why, we have galls; and though we have some grace, /Yet have we some revenge..." (217). Here Emilia is questioning men and how men can't be without women. Yes, men say that women are lazy and this and that, but women have more of a saying in this world than men do. The speech that Emilia gives talks about how women should not be a "slave" to their husbands. All women have a voice and that we should be independent and be respected.

Bianca is very **obedient** and **sweet-tempered**, leading her to have a good number of suitors. Bianca is the strumpet who Cassio is with; her role seems small but significant. Bianca, even though called a strumpet, she is also considering as a woman with a goal. Her goal is to feel love and trusted by a man, but she is deceived as a whore, especially from Emilia. Bianca is brought into this play as Cassio's jealous mistress; he gives her Desdemona's handkerchief, not realizing whose handkerchief it really was. She was aware of the great risk involved when she married a moor. All three characters feel that they, as women, should not be judge nor treated with any less respect as a man does because women have a voice and they need to be heard.

Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca live in a society where women can't do the thing men do. Desdemona generously nature tries to help Cassio retrieve his spot as Lieutenant back. Emilia had illusions about men or love or marriage vows, even after Desdemona explains the importance of the handkerchief. But, these three women live by their own wills. As Iago reminded Othello in Act 3, Scene 3 the faithless wife is a well-known member of Venetian society. Somewhat like Iago, Othello also see women as strumpets and unfaithful after the Iago convinces Othello in the adultery that Desdemona is committing. In Act 4, Scene 2, Othello says "Was this fair paper, this most goodly book, /Made to write "whore" upon? What committed? /Committed? O thou public commoner. /I should make very forges of my cheeks, /That would to cinders burn up modesty, /Did I but speak thy deeds" (197). As mentioned in this quote, Othello see women as being unfaithful and mostly consider them as whores, especially his wife.

Both Desdemona and Emilia are **loyal to their husbands**, however, Desdemona is more of a person who hides her true self because she feels that a women should not argue with her husband, the one she loves because during the Renaissance women were seen

more as being the house wife and do agree to every decision and action their husband make. Hence the reason why she doesn't defend herself as well as she supposed to when Othello believes that she has committed adultery. Emilia is also respectful and loves her husband Iago, but when Othello calls Desdemona a whore we see another side of Emilia in which she thinks that calling his own wife a whore, is basically crossing a line. She questions the role of men because once you're married a trust and loyal bond is born; there shouldn't be any type of disrespect within "soul mates". Bianca is just a woman who is looking for some affection, but is independent to be with whoever she wants because she is not really committed with anyone.

Women during the 15th century were considered more as being a house maid/house wife. Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca represent the three different sides of women: the **noble and loyal one**, the one who **believes in having a voice**, and the **one who wants affection from a guy who is easy** (strumpet). These stereotypes, women are still being compared to in today's society. We learn something about each of these female stereotypes. Over a period of time, women have fought for the respect and equality; even though these stereotypes still exist today, women are stronger in defending themselves and more respected. Shakespeare brings the theme of women roles because we learn how women felt during that time and how history brought women to be equal to men.

Gender and Race in Othello

In many of his works, William Shakespeare explores ideas of gender differences and racial tensions. Othello, a play whose characters are judged again and again based on appearances and outward characteristics, is one such work. The protagonist's different ethnic background provides a platform for probing ideas of racial conflict. Similarly, the presence of well-developed yet opposing female characters adds a dimension of gender conflict and feminist views. These seemingly separate themes of Othello-sexual difference and racial conflict-are closely connected because of similar ties of prejudgment and stereotype. The play's treatment of sexual difference and gender roles strengthens Othello's racist tones and complicates ethnic tensions.

Women are an integral part of Othello. The chastity of a woman is highly valued, and Desdemona's perceived infidelity helps drive the action of the play, ultimately leading to the deaths of many characters, including herself and her husband Othello. Iago's hatred of women is evident throughout the play and could be part of his motivation to lead Othello to such jealousy. Desdemona and Emilia, her waiting lady, provide the central conflict for feminist and gender ideas. Women in Othello are portrayed with complexity and an obvious tension between feminist and anti-feminist ideals.

Desdemona, Othello's wife and Brabantio's daughter, is portrayed as the ideal woman. She is beautiful, chaste, and virtuous. Cassio describes her as "divine" (2.1.74) and tells Iago that "she is indeed perfection" (2.3.25). When her father questions her about her love for Othello, she gives the acceptable answer and professes loyalty to both Brabantio and Othello, claiming that the Moor is now her lord (1.3.183-191). Desdemona is eloquent and independent. She asserts herself and boldly professes her love for Othello to her father and the duke. She is honest in her love for her husband, wishing that "our loves and comforts should increase even as our days do grow" (2.1.193-194). Desdemona does not profess any feminist ideals or notions about love or relationships. She claims she would never cheat on her husband, not even "for the whole world" (4.3.82). She also appears to be submissive and passive in her marriage. She even identifies her own "simplicity" (1.3.249). On many occasions, Desdemona obeys her husband unflinchingly and calls herself obedient (3.3.97). Even after Othello hits her, she does as bidding and leaves because she "will not stay to offend" him (4.1.250). Later after she has been abused, she asks Iago, "What shall I do to win my lord again?"

(4.2.155). Desdemona remains subject to her husband even until he murders her, going so far as to tell Emilia that she killed herself (5.2.128), an admission of guilt for a crime she clearly did not commit. Desdemona is ideal in the sense that she is chaste and virtuous throughout the entire play. She also appears to be intelligent and is willing to stick up for herself to her father and defend her love for Othello. In her relationship with Othello, however, she is passive and submissive, the stereotypical meek wife.

Emilia, Iago's wife, is a stark contrast to Desdemona. In some respects, she too seems to be obedient to her husband. She picks up the handkerchief that Othello gave Desdemona because Iago "hath a hundred times wooed [her] to steal it" (3.3.308-309), also saying that she does "nothing but to please his fantasy" (3.3.315). In the same speech, however, Emilia also calls her husband "wayward" (3.3.308). After she gives him the handkerchief, she asks Iago why he wants it and threatens to take it back if it is not for some good purpose (3.3. 333.335). Earlier in the play, Emilia talks back to Iago, asserting her independence when she says to him, "You shall not write my praise" (2.1.118). In her conversation with Desdemona about infidelity, Emilia informs her friend that she would commit adultery, giving the tongue-in-cheek response of "Nor I neither by this heavenly light; I might do 't as well i' the dark" (4.3.68-69). She professes her opinion that if the wife falls, it is her husband's fault (4.3.89) and asserts her belief that women have "some revenge" (4.3.96-97). Emilia provides the feminist voice of Othello, asserting her independence from her husband and even admitting that she would commit adultery if the price were right. Her attitude towards men is somewhat cynical, as she says "They are all but stomachs, and we all but food; They eat us hungerly, and when they are full They belch us" (3.4.106-108).

The male characters of the play view women in varied ways. Cassio often idealizes Desdemona, praising her positive characteristics, even believing that she is "perfection" (2.3.25). Iago's attitude towards women is largely critical and negative. He tells Emilia that women are "pictures out of doors, Bells in your parlors, wildcats in your kitchens, Saints in your injuries, devils being offended, Players in your huswifery, and huswives in your beds" (2.1.111-114), meaning that women are often deceptive. He later says, "She never yet was foolish that was fair, For even her folly helped her to an heir" (2.1.137-138). Iago's cynical attitude towards women continues throughout the play, as he talks of women as being foolish and unfaithful creatures. Othello's views on women are more complex than Iago's. Othello loves and praises Desdemona often in the play. He tells Iago, "But that I love the gentle Desdemona, I would not my unhoused free condition Put into circumscription and confine for the sea's worth" (1.2.25-28). Othello tells his wife that he "cannot speak enough of this content...it is too much of joy" (2.1.196-197). After he believes that Desdemona is being unfaithful, however, his attitude changes dramatically. He becomes cynical and hostile, even hitting his wife (4.1.243). He accuses her, calls her a strumpet, and murders her because of her perceived infidelity (5.2). Othello's attitudes towards women transform from idealization into hatred.

There is a conflict in Othello between traditional views of women and more feminist views, as well as a conflict between the idealization of women and the resentment of women. Emilia is a feminist, assertive, independent model of womanhood, while Desdemona plays the ideal and passive female character. Women are portrayed in a varied and complex way in Othello.

The racial tension in the play is similar to the gender role tension because of opposing views. While Othello's specific ethnic background is not clear, he is obviously an outsider to Venetian society, of Northern African or African descent. His portrayal in the play is complicated, with evidence supporting both a racist view of the text and a non-racist view.

While Othello is the protagonist of the play, he is also responsible for Desdemona's murder. Iago holds strongly racist views towards him. He describes Othello and Desdemona's consummation as "an old black ram...tupping...a white ewe" (1.1.90-91) and "making the beast with two backs" (1.1.119-120). Iago calls him "an erring barbarian" (1.3.358) and claims that he is lacking in "a fresh appetite, loveliness in favor, sympathy in years, manners, and beauties" (2.1.230-231). He also describes Othello as "rash and very sudden in choler" (2.1.273). Iago is not the only character who holds racist attitudes towards Othello. Roderigo refers to him as "thick-lips" (1.1.68) and calls him "lascivious" (1.1.129). Brabantio cannot believe that his daughter could be happy with this outsider (1.1.167), and he thinks that the only way Othello could have wooed Desdemona is with charms (1.1.175-177). He accuses Othello, calling out, "O thou foul thief, where hast thou stowed my daughter?" (1.2.63). Brabantio claims that now Desdemona is "abused, stol'n...and corrupted By spells and medicines" (1.3.62-63). Othello himself says that he is "black and [has] not those soft parts of conversation" (3.3.279-280). When Othello believes that his wife has been unfaithful he claims that he will "tear her all to pieces" (3.3.446). In Act 4, he hits Desdemona, evidence of his violent temper and proneness to abuse (4.2.242). Othello could easily be read as a racist play. Its hero is often described in racist, degrading tones, and he is portrayed as abusive, jealous, and even murderous.

This play, however, also provides a contrasting view. While Othello is portrayed as violent in some scenes, he is the victim of the evil manipulation of Iago. Many characters in the play deeply respect Othello. Cassio entreats the "heavens [to] Give him defense against the elements" (2.1.46-47) and asks Jove to guard him (2.1.79). Iago himself admits that Othello is "of a constant loving, noble nature [and] will prove to Desdemona A most dear husband" (2.1.290-292). Montano describes him as "noble," (2.3.132) and many of his subordinates admire him. Othello is eloquent, as evident in his many speeches, such as the one in Act 1, Scene 3 (1.78-96). He claims that he won Desdemona's heart through his stories and words. He is confident, professing that his "parts, [his] title, and [his] perfect soul Shall manifest [him] rightly" (1.2.31-32). Othello asserts that he has "done the state some service" (5.2.349). While Othello is an outsider to this society in many ways, he is not completely excluded. He is a Christian, meaning he has accepted the religion of his society. He is a general in the army, so he has a respectable social status, and the majority of the population likes and admires Othello, even Brabantio, until he discovers the marriage of Othello and Desdemona. He is portrayed as courageous and honorable, and his love for his wife seems to be genuine. It is obvious throughout the play that Othello's jealousy and even his violence are a result of Iago's evil.

Racial tension in Othello is complicated because there are both racist and non-racist strains in the play. Iago is the most vocal racist character, but his racism and judgments are not portrayed positively. Other characters, however, also voice negative attitudes towards Othello because of his ethnicity. Although the protagonist is thought of as a brave and noble character, he is also portrayed as rash and violent, a common stereotype of "Moors." Othello's sexual relationship with Desdemona is described in carnal, bestial terms.

The negative language used to describe Othello is far stronger than the positive language used, and the images of Othello hitting and even murdering Desdemona are highly powerful. This language portrays Othello as animalistic and not as highly civilized because he cannot control his passions. These associations serve to perpetuate stereotypes of Africans and others of different ethnic identity. While Othello is certainly a victim of Iago's evil in this play, he is not a primarily sympathetic character. His deeds and his rage are not the result of any noble motivation, but simply mad jealousy. The racist tones of Othello are overpowering and outweigh the non-racist tones of the play.

Sexual difference and racial difference are both at the center of conflicts in this play. Women are judged by some characters as unfaithful and deceptive, simply because they are women. Othello is judged harshly simply because he is black. There is tension between the traditional ideal of woman and a more progressive view, just as there is tension between a racist society and an accepting society. The play's treatment of feminist tension and gender difference only serves to add to the racial overtones.

Women are treated as harshly as Othello is by Iago and other characters in the play. Women are assumed to be unfaithful, even by Othello himself, who has no real proof with which to accuse Desdemona of infidelity. Both Desdemona and Emilia are abused, either verbally or physically or both, by their husbands and other male characters in the play. Women are prejudged as guilty and wanton in Othello. These quick conclusions add to the overall tone of stereotyping, thereby strengthening the racist strains in the play.

Feminist and anti-feminist ideas are presented very clearly, with Desdemona representing one extreme, the passive ideal wife, and Emilia representing the other extreme, a progressive, independent, assertive woman. It is Desdemona, however, who is Othello's wife. It is Desdemona who is unfairly accused, abused, and strangled. While Emilia is also murdered by her husband, Desdemona is smothered (5.2.87), which suggests that she is controlled and manipulated to a greater degree than Emilia, whose murder is more rash and passionate. The portrayal of Desdemona's and Othello's marriage plays up the stereotype of the violent Moor and the passive wife. This adds to the racial tones of the play and strengthens the racist view that Othello takes.

Gender differences and the tension between Emilia's feminist viewpoints and Desdemona's traditional ones serve to reinforce racism against Othello in this play. These tensions strengthen the view of Othello as a violent, even animalistic outsider. While Othello presents conflicting views on racism and stereotypes, the overall picture is one in which the play's protagonist is treated with an edge of racist overtones.

Role of Chance and Coincidence in Othello

Othello is, among all the tragedies of Shakespeare, one in which the role of chance and accident is the most prominent. Iago's skill was extraordinary, but so was his good fortune. Throughout the play we have instances of chances favouring Iago's plot which otherwise would not have succeeded so easily.

A chance **words from Desdemona**, a chance **meeting of Othello and Cassio**, a question which starts to our lips and which anyone but Othello would have asked, would have destroyed Iago's plot and ended his life. In their stead Desdemona drops her **handkerchief** at the moment most favourable to him, Cassio blunders into the presence of Othello only to find him in a swoon (loss of consciousness), Bianca arrives precisely when she is wanted to complete Othello's deception and incense his anger to fury. All this and much more seems to us quite natural, so potent is the art of the dramatist; but it confounds us with a feeling (that) there is no escape from fate, and even with a feeling, absent from that play, that fate has taken sides with villainy".

However all of these are not due to mere chance or accident. The dropping of Desdemona's handkerchief at the moment when it is just right for Iago's plot, Cassio's arrival in front of Othello when he is in a swoon, and Bianca's arrival when it suits Iago happen so close together that they appear as a single stroke of "the devil's luck" for Iago. They can be called coincidences, deliberately contrived.

Many of the events that seem to be "accidents" are actually due to Iago's brilliant contrivance. Brabantio is deliberately brought in, after being inflamed by both Roderigo

and Iago at Desdemona's deception, to embarrass Othello with his outcry and also to pave the way for later accusations to encourage Othello's distrust of her:

**Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:
She has deceived her father, and may thee.**

Through **Iago's skilful manipulation** Cassio gets drunk, lapses from the duty assigned to him and gets involved in a brawl and Othello comes in the middle of the night to demote him. This develops the situation further leading to Desdemona's pleas on behalf of Cassio's reinstatement, thus providing Iago opportunity for counter-insinuations regarding Desdemona and Cassio's relationship. Desdemona drops her handkerchief by accident; Emilia is there to pick it up and gives it to Iago.

From then on **Iago guides** the ensuing events. He takes the handkerchief and leaves it in Cassio's chamber, uses it as evidence with which to convince Othello, and supplies the construction Othello places upon the subsequent history of the handkerchief. Othello, beguiled as he is by Iago, at this point, has no independent judgment regarding the "evidence" provided by Iago. He does not try to investigate further the circumstances but blindly follows Iago's insinuations and suggestions.

These accidents do not in any way diminish the **importance of "character"** in the tragedy. Despite the accident, Othello carries the full responsibility of his actions on his shoulders. He allowed human reason to be over ruled by passions and the will. We see how Iago infects Othello, corrupt his power of reasoning, makes him "passion's slave" so that he commits a tragic murder without realizing his mistake. Such is the power of evil and the deliberate malice of Iago. Othello recognizes his fatal error and accepts full responsibility of the wrong he has done and the remorse he feels finally destroys him, which makes him a tragic hero.

The **role of accidents** in Othello is less significant because they are not simply the workings of fate but **situations cleverly manipulated and exploited by a human agent**-Iago. Iago plans most of the events, calculates the motives and responses of his victims, and profits with diabolical cleverness from the chances, which occur and uses them to serve his purpose. Desdemona happened to be a Venetian and woman of Venice did not have a good reputation:

**In Venice they do let God see the pranks
They dare not show their husbands, their best conscience
Is not leave't undone, but keep't unknown?**

These are Iago's words as he pollutes Desdemona's character by his vulgar insinuations. Also,

She did deceive her father, marrying you.

Iago **uses the circumstances** to his **own advantage**, which is how his evil mind works. Othello is a Moor and Iago also uses this racial difference and his advanced age to imply that Desdemona has lost interest in him. Being a man of vehement feelings he trusts Iago completely, which is his undoing. Once the doubt is planted in his mind it takes complete control over him and he is carried along in a whirlwind of jealousy and emotion. He admits,

**"No, my heart is turn'd to stone;
I strike it, and it hurts my hand".**

Iago builds a cruel hatred in his heart against Desdemona and in his agony Othello cries,

"O, blood, blood, and blood!"

Once he is resolved, there is no turning back for him. He compares his desire for revenge to the "icy current and compulsive course" of the Pontic Sea that keeps moving forward:

**"Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up".**

Othello had not known Desdemona long and she was the first woman in his life. All his life he had spent in camps and campaigns, which gave him no experience where women were concerned. Iago on the other hand, was also a professional soldier and had served with Othello so he knew how his mind worked. It was easy to plant a doubt in Othello's mind that young girl of Desdemona's beauty and gentle breeding could feel more than a passing fancy for a Moor like him, no matter how great and noble he was. Othello's jealousy rises to uncontrollable passion that blinds him making him fall into trance-like state, totally unlike his normal calm self. Iago spends much of his time, in his soliloquies, attempting to explain to us how and why it all happened. It is this element of credibility which minimizes the so-called role of chance. The end of this tragedy only vindicates human worth and dignity in the justice that Othello bravely administers to himself.

The Theory of 'Double Time' in Othello

We experience both a long and a short passage of time while reading or witnessing the play. The double impression is not troubling us while actually reading or seeing the play. In fact several plays of Shakespeare seem to produce the same effect. This is bound to be so in any powerful play because the actual time, in which a play is staged, is definitely shorter than the time required for the events in the real life. This is so in all romantic plays as compared with the 'classical' plays in which the unities of time and place are observed.

"Short time" is also needed in Othello to make the action credible. The intensity of the passion of jealousy cannot be prolonged for the reason that, if delayed, it will either cool down, or the plot of Iago will surely be revealed to Othello by Cassio who is not allowed to meet his master in the play after he (Cassio) is dismissed. For these reasons, it is necessary that the action of the play must be made to move most speedily. This is what happens in the play from scene to scene particularly from act two onwards when the main characters of the tragedy arrive from Venice to the Island of Cyprus.

It is indeed from this point onward that the tragic action begins. It is on the same day of their arrival in Cyprus that at night the marriage festivities take place. It is during these Cassio is involved in a drinking and is dismissed.

Next morning Iago makes Cassio to go and request Desdemona to plead his case to Othello. At the next meeting Iago brings Othello, and Desdemona, surprised and confused, requests Othello to restore Cassio. It is in this scene that Iago begins to poison the mind of Othello with suspicion of Desdemona's love for Cassio. It is here; too, that Desdemona drops her handkerchief, which Iago picks up. He then tells Othello that he saw Cassio whipping his lips with the handkerchief. Othello asks Iago to kill Cassio.

Next, Cassio meets Bianca and asks her to copy the design of the handkerchief, which he found dropped in his own room. Iago now proves Cassio's guilt by concealing Othello in

such a way that he could overhear Cassio's talk with Iago. In this conversation, Cassio talks of his affairs with Bianca and Othello is made to believe that Cassio is talking about Desdemona.

Soon after this, Iago gets Cassio killed by Roderigo who is himself killed by Iago. Othello then orders Desdemona to go to bed alone and smothers her in the bed. Before she dies, he learns the truth about her innocence, and thus it happens that Othello kills himself.

All these actions are shown to be done on the same night, that is to say, on the night following the arrival of Othello and party on the Island of Cyprus. The time covered by is a day and a night. This is the impression of 'short time' as dramatized on the stage in Othello.

However, this impression of 'short time' is made on us against a background of 'long time', converging several days pass before the tragic action takes place. For example, Roderigo complains that Iago has made him several promises, which have not been fulfilled. He complains that he has been following him for several days and that all his money (and all his patience too) has been exhausted. Next, Bianca complains that Cassio has not met her for more than seven days and seven nights. Besides these, we also note that some weeks should have passed before Othello was recalled from Cyprus. The voyage between Venice and Cyprus certainly took several days.

Thus we get an impression of a longer time of married life before Othello kills Desdemona. Any delay or long time would surely have brought out the truth of Desdemona or Cassio's innocence.

Such an effort reveals to us the dramatic genius of Shakespeare who is able to play astonishing tricks is played at all. This is the willing suspension of disbelief, which is the essence of artistic illusion. We are not aware of the presence of double time while we are actually witnessing the performance of the play. We are aware of it when we critically examine the details of the text. We should clearly understand that Shakespeare is deliberately compressing the action of the play in order to achieve the speed and intensity of the same, which are necessary for the powerful tragic feelings they produce. The action and passion of jealousy should be quick in order to be credible and powerful. In the case of Othello's jealousy we need to assume to have in the text of the play. The cause of his passion is evidently adultery, but there is no time during, which this could have happened during the tempestuous voyage. As we know, Cassio and Desdemona sail in different ships. And in Venice itself there was no occasion for adultery because Desdemona starts for Cyprus on the very day of marriage.

Where, then could such a crime have happened? It is to answer such a question that Shakespeare produces the impression of a longer time for the action of the play. He throws several suggestions, gives several hints and indications in the course of the text, which point to the probability of such longer time. What he does is that he presents a series of continuous and unbroken events on the stage, but these events are presented against a background of other events, which are not presented but narrated, and it is because of these events that we suppose that a longer time was needed to create the suspicion of crimes—of adultery in particular. It is not real adultery but the supposition and suspicion of it which causes the real tragedy. Iago makes Othello imagine that adultery has been committed. It is in his efforts to produce this impression that the impression of long time is suggested.

Shakespeare's dramatic art is precisely seen in taking this 'long time' story and combining it with the impression of 'short time'—without letting the audience realize that such a combination is at all made. So we conclude that there is evidently in Othello a

parallel of 'short' and 'long' time impression, and that both these are necessary for a fuller appreciation of the tragedy.

Othello as a Domestic Tragedy

The story and theme of Othello is one that comes home to the business and bosoms of mankind that again, is to say that Othello dramatizes an emotion with which we are familiar, and which some of us might very well be expected to experience, namely, the doubt and suspicion whether wives are always loyal in conjugal relations—Or husbands, for that matters, jealousy in married life is a common experience and therefore a play that deals with it might very well be regarded as a domestic one. The problem of happiness in married life is closely related with the harmony existing at home between husband and wife. And this is precisely the harmony that Iago, in his aside, intends to destroy when he exclaims. **"I will set down the pegs that make this music,"** this is what he says as he sees Othello in raptures with Desdemona, and hears him say:

**And this, and this, the greatest discords be.
That ever our hearts will make.**

That is how we also see Othello on the stage with Desdemona in his arms as they both arrive in Cyprus after the terrible stormy voyage they undertook from Venice. Othello is playfully, yet passionately, kissing Desdemona and utters these words as he does so. This is a domestic scene of exquisite joy and sweetness, and it is an emotion, which we can share.

Besides this principal theme, which is a domestic one, we meet with, in Othello the people who are not far removed from us on social position. They are not kings and queens and princes and princesses but common subjects of the state, where they serve in several capacities. In other words, we can understand and share their joys and sorrows; we are at home with them and their problems. Hence, it is that note of intimacy is struck between the dramatis persona and us. This account for the 'domestic' atmosphere of Othello. (The Moor of Venice)

It is interesting to note that **marital jealousy** was a very popular theme on the Elizabethan stage. Othello, thus, could very well be described as a domestic and private life do not rise to the heights of great tragedy and that they lack the emotive force of the latter where the figures belong to high life such of kings and queens. It may be said of this criticism that it is not sound. As Dr. Johnson long ago pointed out,

"Shakespeare is always thinking primarily on men and their emotions however exalted their lives on the worldly plane might be. Hamlet and Lear do not affect us because they are kings and sons of kings but because they are mortals with all the errors and weakness to which mortal life in there. Secondly, even if Othello and Desdemona and Roderigo and Cassio do not belong on the political plane to the same order as Hamlet and Lear do, they are still endowed with a dignity and virtue, which do distance them from the merely average human nature, which we ordinarily known. The agony and passion of Othello is jealousy, the pitiful innocence and grace of the pleading Desdemona, the beauty and frankness of Cassio, which even his worst enemy, Iago, has to acknowledge even Roderigo the fool, with his worship of beauty, which Desdemona inspires these certainly cannot be described as lacking in emotive force. If anything, their fate and fortunes affect us most powerfully because we recognize in their natures, which we share and understand. Life is life—whether lived in private or in public and in Shakespeare's tragedies in particular life is piled on life, and therefore domestic story dealing with the private lives of common human nature is capable of exciting feelings of pity and terror as powerful as those that are excited by the lives of kings and queens. It

all depends how life is dramatically presented. Shakespeare is perfect because he knows how to exploit life at all levels for the purpose of moving the hearts of his audience. Hence we conclude that private life can be as emotionally stirring and uplifting as life on any other level."

The tragedy of Othello and Desdemona is made by Shakespeare one of the most soul-stirring subjects in this play. It is not merely the story of jealous husbands but the type and symbol of fate, which causes the suffering of people who are really innocent Othello a great figure worthy of our awe and admiration on account of which we feel his tragedy as one that might as well happen to every one of us. The turning of a loving husband into a vindictive Iago as the cause of tragic misunderstanding. Iago is indeed the type of tragic fate. And his villainy is so subtle that there is an element of universality in his evil nature.

So Othello is not the type of domestic drama that appeals merely to our sense of pathos and satire but it arouses in us the true emotions of pity and terror. It is not the private life of married people that affects us in this tragedy, but the fate and fortune of true lovers turned tragic by the forces of evil embodied in Iago.

Conflict between Morality and Immorality in "Othello"

Shakespeare's drama 'Othello' is one of conflicting morals, ethics and values, and the consequences of these conflicts. Shakespeare focuses these conflicts on the character of Othello and his actions, which are the results of complex moral dilemmas. In Othello, societal influences are used as a catalyst to conflicting situations, and contribute to the character development of Othello and his actions. Through these factors, Shakespeare reveals the underlying theme of morality in conflict.

When pressured to select between two alternatives which both end negatively, the individual faces a conflict between morality and immorality, and their feelings and actions towards this conflict highlight the state of society. The quest for a moral resolution in Othello is a result and reflection of the 1570s society. Protagonist Othello is the great general of the Venetian Army, and during a majority of the duration of the play, is in Cyprus, Venice to fight the battle between the Turks. **"I swear 'tis better to be much abused, than but to know't a little"**.

Othello is in an **agonising state** of **jealousy** and **fury** after learning about his wife **Desdemona's** extra-marital affair, which is in fact a **false accusation** made by villain Iago. 'Ignorance is bliss' could be the most appropriate translation to what Othello wishes had stopped him from entering a moral conflict. Outraged by Desdemona's supposed act of infidelity, Othello decides that killing his wife would be the solution to eliminate the sources of evil in the world. To **eliminate evil, Othello commits evil**. This is a classic example of morality trapped in a conflict of epic proportions, fuelled by the war-enraged society.

The crime which had been committed would seem considerably more outrageous now than it did in the era of Shakespeare's writing of Othello. This is due to Othello being set in Cyprus which was attacked by Turks in 1570, leading to the wars between Venice and Turkey. The exposure to mass killings and lingering misery in the overall atmosphere was a major catalyst to the loss of faith and morality in society. It was perhaps this change in social behaviour which had resulted in Othello being trapped in conflict, and being able to consider even the idea of murdering his own wife. In fact war was a major catalyst to morality being questioned in literature. In Othello, the characters view the explicit nature of the wars between Venice and Turkey, leading to immoral acts being committed even in the absence of negative intentions.

The character of Othello is also one which has been interestingly developed with the leverage of Othello's morals in conflict; killing the evil he sees in his wife Desdemona in the hope of 'cleaning out evil' in the world. Protagonist Othello is depicted not as a generic, fair-skinned perfectionist, but rather in a way which defies the physical norm for a "hero". Othello is Moorish, a descendant from Northern Africa, hence the colour of his skin. He is a man of great passion, and a physique suited to his title. However, we as an audience are instantly challenged by the portrayal of Othello, whose characteristics sway well away from those of a typical hero protagonist. Shakespeare attempts to question our morality. In the sixteenth century where racial equality was far from understood, a dark-skinned man is unquestionably deemed and given the same rights as an "average" but "higher status" citizen. This challenging portrayal of Othello is further challenged when he murders his wife. It is the **"hero"** of the play who commits the **inhumane** act, bringing forward the situation of a positive character facing confusion with a negative act, hence a moral dilemma. Shakespeare suggests that the character whose morals are in conflict is uncontrollable, performing overwhelmingly immoral acts.

The internal moral conflict faced by Othello can also be observed through his change of language throughout the play. Desdemona claims to have married Othello because of his ability to tell magnificent stories of his adventures, therefore it can be seen that Othello is very good with his words.

**"But I love the gentle Desdemona,
I would not my unhoused free condition
Put into circumscription and confine
For the sea's worth" (1.2.25-28)**

Othello's language at the beginning is very powerful and heroic as he compares the nature of his love for Desdemona with the treasures of the sea. The use of dramatic imagery of the sea is successful in depicting Othello's certainty and confidence in Desdemona's love. However, this certainty and confidence is long gone in the later stages of the play after Iago has corrupted Othello's faith by making him believe that Desdemona has been unfaithful. Othello no longer speaks with pride and wholesomeness; his language becomes uncertain and chaotic - **"O misery!", "O monstrous, monstrous!"** Shakespeare makes it clear that Othello is heavily weakened by the moral dilemma through his drastic change in language. This is the result of Othello being stuck between believing Desdemona and believing Iago. The two poles of morality in this situation are so extreme, i.e. killing Desdemona or letting Desdemona live but risking a tarnished reputation, that Othello becomes engulfed by the pressure. His strong language in the initial stages shows a strong natured man, and his incoherent remarks in the later stages are the outcome of a man who has been weakened by conflicting morality.

In Othello, Shakespeare reveals conflicting morals through the character of Othello. The aspects of the play which give rise to moral dilemmas are influences of society, the portrayal of Othello, and a change in Othello's behaviour through language. Shakespeare combines these aspects to give the audience insight into deep conflicts of morality, both internal and external.

The Symbolic Meanings of the Handkerchief in 'Othello'

The handkerchief in William Shakespeare's 'Othello' is best-remembered as the damning, though circumstantial evidence of Desdemona's infidelity. Planted in Cassio's room by the scheming Iago, his possession of the handkerchief convinces Othello of Cassio's affair with Desdemona. Subsequently, Othello is driven mad by jealousy and murders his wife. In addition to this crucial function in the plot, the handkerchief serves as a powerful symbol with multiple meanings. The symbolic meaning of the handkerchief is changeable

throughout the play and is dependent on the perspectives of the characters who exchange it. Although a seemingly trivial item, the many symbolic meanings of the handkerchief play an invaluable role in Othello.

As a gift given by Othello to Desdemona during their courtship, the initial symbolism of the handkerchief is love. For Othello, the handkerchief holds sentimental value because it had belonged to his mother, making the gift of it to Desdemona even more meaningful. The spirit of Othello's gift is not lost on Desdemona, and she always has the handkerchief in her possession "to kiss and talk to" (III.iii.296). The love Desdemona and Othello associate with the handkerchief leads Iago to covet it for use in his plot to ruin Othello.

The first mention of the handkerchief comes in Act III, when following a conversation with Iago, Othello complains of a headache. Desdemona produces the handkerchief and offers to bind his head, but Othello dismisses her efforts: "Your napkin is too little:" (III.iii.287). At this time, the handkerchief is fatefully dropped and lost, falling into the hands of Emilia. Because Emilia knows that her husband Iago wants the handkerchief, in her possession the handkerchief becomes a symbol of her husband's hard-won favor. Emilia gives the handkerchief to Iago who immediately implements it into his plan. With the handkerchief in his pocket, Iago plants further suspicion in Othello's mind when he claims that he saw it in Cassio's possession. Because of the special symbolism the handkerchief holds for Othello, Iago's allegation that Cassio had wiped his beard with the handkerchief serves to further embroil Othello's jealousy.

Moments prior to this conversation, Desdemona had attempted to bind Othello's head with the handkerchief, making Iago's story implausible. Had Othello recognized this inconsistency, Iago's deceit would have been revealed. However, Othello is blinded by his jealousy and taken in by Iago's manipulation. In this way, the handkerchief is symbolic of Othello's willingness to believe the lies and blindness to the truth. Othello sees the handkerchief only when it implicates Desdemona's guilt.

Iago's accusation concerning the handkerchief causes its transition from a token of love to a symbol of Desdemona's fidelity (or infidelity). Equating Desdemona's faithfulness with the tangible handkerchief, Othello asks her for it. When she admits she does not have it, Othello tells Desdemona that the handkerchief has been given to his mother by an Egyptian charmer. Othello goes on to tell Desdemona that the handkerchief has "magic in the web of it" and the embroidery of strawberries "(III. Iv. 69) was dyed in mummy which the skilful/Conserv'd of maidens' hearts" (II.iv.74-75). Although Othello's story appears sincere, it is inconsistent with Othello's confession at the end of the tragedy that the handkerchief was "an antique token" (V.ii.216) given to his mother by his father.

The grisly mention of the embroidery being dyed with the mummified hearts of virgins is a metaphor for virginal blood and the handkerchief a metaphor for the wedding sheets. For Othello's mother, the handkerchief possessed the power to "subdue" (III.iv.59) his father "Entirely to her love" (III.iv.60), much as Desdemona's fidelity gives her power over Othello.

The handkerchief again changes hands when Iago plants the handkerchief in Cassio's room. The appearance of the handkerchief is a mystery to Cassio who gives it to the prostitute, Bianca to copy. As it does for Othello, the handkerchief inspires Bianca's jealousy and in her eyes a symbol of Cassio's infidelity: "O Cassio, whence came this?/This is some token from a newer friend" (III.vi.180-181). A later argument between Bianca and Cassio over the handkerchief is witnessed by Othello. Refusing to copy the work in the handkerchief, Bianca returns it to Cassio telling him: "This is some minx's token, and I must take/out the work? There; give it your hobby-horse:

/wheresoever you had it, I'll take out no work on't" (IV.i.153-155). Having witnessed this exchange, Othello is convinced Desdemona is the "minx" and "hobby-horse" Bianca refers to and plots the murder of his wife and Cassio.

The murder of Desdemona takes place in the bedchamber she shares with Othello. Keeping with the symbolism of the handkerchief, Emilia has made the bed with their wedding sheets as Desdemona requested. When Othello wakes and confronts the sleeping Desdemona, he throws several accusations at her, the worse of which is that she gave the handkerchief to Cassio. The weight of this accusation is found in the meaning of handkerchief to Othello - Desdemona's love and fidelity; both of which Othello believes Desdemona has given to Cassio.

After the death of Desdemona, the evidence that served to seal her fate ironically clears her name. When Emilia at last reveals the truth, the handkerchief becomes the evidence of Desdemona's innocence and the indictment of Iago's guilt:

**O thou dull Moor! that handkerchief thou speak'st of
I found by fortune and did give my husband;
For often, with a solemn earnestness,
More than indeed belong'd to such a trifle,
He begg'd of me to steal it (V.ii.225-229).**

Emilia refers to the handkerchief as a "trifle" (V.ii.228). Emilia is pointing to the absurdity of murder over a handkerchief, but her choice of words is also ironic given the many complex and weighty meanings the handkerchief represents throughout the play: love, infidelity, jealousy, deceit and so forth. Although a seemingly inconsequential item, the handkerchief's many symbolic meanings are imperative to the execution of the plot and its tragic conclusion.

Starting out as a token of love, the handkerchief in William Shakespeare's Othello becomes the fabricated evidence of Desdemona's infidelity. Exchanging hands throughout the play, the handkerchief morphs again and again into different symbolic representations. In this manner, the handkerchief ceases to be the "trifle" Emilia deems it to be and becomes a central plot device. The symbolism attached to the handkerchief makes it indispensable to the execution of Othello and earns it its reputation as an item of infamy.

Dramatic Irony in Othello

In Othello, written by Shakespeare, dramatic irony is used to develop our understanding of characters in the play. Through soliloquies and asides, dramatic irony gives the audience knowledge and information that other characters do not have. This creates tension and suspense because the audience wonders if the truth will come out in time. In Othello, Iago's soliloquies reveal his plans and also give us an understanding into his true nature that we would not get from his interactions with Othello. Through the soliloquies, we also learn how trusting and easily lead Othello is.

Dramatic irony is used to develop our understanding of Iago as a character, it reveals who he is, not the mask of an honest follower he puts up for Othello. Iago is a Machiavellian character. A Machiavellian character is deceitful, expedient and cunning. They are clever and ruled by their goals. Machiavellian characters are quite common in Shakespeare's plays with Hamlet and Richard II from their eponymous works having the same characteristics as Iago. They are all out for themselves as exemplified in Iago's own

soliloquy: **"Others there are who, trimmed in forms and visages of duty, keep yet their hearts attending on themselves... and such a one I do profess myself."** In that passage, we learn that although Iago seems that he has a duty to someone, he is really only out for himself, so he can get somewhere in life. We learn of Iago's cunningness in another soliloquy: "After some time, to abuse Othello's ear that he is too familiar with his wife; he hath a person and a smooth dispose to be suspected, framed to make woman false." The audience learns of Iago's clever plan to destroy his enemies. This teaches the audience of Iago's deceitful nature.

As a true Machiavellian character, Iago is shown to be honest, reliable and people count on him for his opinions. But, as the audience learns through his soliloquies, he embodies the opposite of these qualities, which gives the play some dramatic irony. Here the audience is hoping that Othello can see his fault in relying and trusting in Iago before it is too late. The jealous part of Iago's complicated character is revealed to the audience when he divulges to us why he detests Michael Cassio and Othello. **"I hate the Moor, and it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets he's done my office. I know not if't be true yet I, for mere suspicion in that kind, will do as if for surety."** This shows the audience that Iago suspects Othello has slept with his wife, Emilia. Iago's jealousy is displayed when Iago admits that he doesn't know for sure if Othello has done what is rumoured but he will get back at him anyway in case it is true. The audience see that he doesn't have any sustainable evidence against Othello but he will accuse him of sleeping with his wife anyway. Iago also makes it clear of his jealousy for Cassio: **"Cassio's a proper man: let me see now; to get his place and to plume up my will in double knavery."** Iago wants Cassio's placing at lieutenant and believes he is better for the job. The audience can also see through this part of the soliloquy how depraved Iago is as he wants to "plume up my will", meaning he wants to have a little fun while destroying Cassio, showing us that this is a game to him and he gets enjoyment out of his plan. Through dramatic irony, we get an understanding of Iago's evil, deceitful and jealous character.

The audience also gets a deeper understanding of the character of Othello, the eponymous protagonist, through dramatic irony. We learn how trusting Othello is of others as he relies on his ensign Iago for advice and trusts him greatly. He mentions the words **'honest'** or **'honesty'** in relation to Iago over 50 times in the play. This shows the audience how assured he is that Iago is a reliable and reputable man. But what the audience knows that he doesn't is how corrupt and untrustworthy Iago is. Through dramatic irony we know that Iago, in fact, despises Othello and the audience discovers that Othello must be very trusting not to see or want to see through the mask of honesty and companionship that Iago shows Othello. Othello is also very easily led, despite his title as Army General. Because of his fatal flaw, jealousy, he chooses to see what he wants to see. This makes him easily manipulated by Iago into believing that Desdemona has cheated on him with Cassio. The audience knew that Desdemona had been faithful and saw how easily Othello was tricked into believing that she wasn't because of the weak evidence Iago gave him. **"but such a handkerchief- I am sure it was your wife's- did I today see Cassio wipe his beard with."** And Othello was quick to believe him: **"O that the slave had forty thousand lives! One is too poor, too weak, for my revenge. Now do I see 'tis true. Look here, Iago, All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven; 'Tis gone."** Because of dramatic irony, we see how easily manipulated Othello is into believing what isn't true.

In Shakespeare's play Othello, dramatic irony creates an understanding of character. We get to understand how cunning, deceitful and jealous Iago really is while he is perceived to be very honest and trustworthy. Through dramatic irony, the audience also understands Othello as a character because we see how trusting and easily led he really is. Dramatic irony shows us parts of characters we would not get to see otherwise, through dialogue with other characters.

Stages of Iago's attempt to seduce Othello

Introduction: - Conventionally Morality drama has a temptation scene in which man is subjected to the Devil's allurements. The third act of Othello has a scene that corresponds to it. Othello is entangled in a situation where he must choose between the two, Iago's poisoning or his love for Desdemona. At the end of the scene, he is embraced by Iago in a spiritual union and Desdemona is ultimately rejected. He sees through the eyes of Iago. The tools and threads, with which he will weave his net, have already been prepared. Othello has not yet learnt to question and he will by the code of Iago and will be guided by him to the point of his devastation.

Credibility: - Although the temptation scene has been criticized as incredible, it is quite convincing in its dramatic context. Shakespeare's artistry infuses the scene with an illusion of reality which is remarkably effective in the theatre. The very speed of the action carries the audience along in Iago's spell and gives it no opportunity to consider questions of logical probability. Shakespeare has certainly provided certain elements in the first two acts which make seduction of Othello plausible. He has stressed his simple trust in Iago, his unfamiliarity with civilized life and particularly with Venetian women, his role as an alien ever potentially hostile society. Perhaps most significantly, by a series of events, Shakespeare has caused Othello to doubt his own powers of judgment and perception. His marriage to Desdemona has resulted in an accusation of witchcraft from one who has always been his friend. Cassio, the officer he has so carefully chosen, in his drunkenness has caused Othello to question the wisdom of his choice. Othello is now ready to question the goodness of Desdemona in which he had believed as firmly as in the friendship of Brabantio and the soldiership of Cassio.

Iago's Offensive: - Iago excites Othello's natural curiosity by his veiled remarks touching the honesty of Cassio and by the implication that he has secret knowledge which he will not reveal. There's no evidence of jealousy on Othello's part; however, until Iago himself raises the issue. O, beware, my lord, of jealousy. This suggestion Othello at first resists with the memory of Desdemona's virtue and with a true awareness of his own excellence for which she married him. Othello's awareness of how jealousy operates is in effect a rejection of jealousy. To this point of the scene, Iago has been unsuccessful. He has not been able to shake Othello's faith in himself and Desdemona. Now he turns to Othello's ignorance of Venus.

**In Venus they do let God see the pranks
They dare not show their husbands; their best
Conscience
Is not to leav't undone, but keep't unknown**

Here Othello's belief is shaken and he tends to doubt whether the virtue of Venetian girls is a mask seeming virtue only and not the inner one for which he married Desdemona.

**She did deceive her father, marrying you;
And when she seem'd to shake and fear your looks,
She lov'd them most.**

Here, presenting the motifs of evil wearing the mask of apparent virtue, Iago is gains his first victory, for Othello is forced to reply '**And so she did.**' It is Othello who first raises the question of Unnaturalness which had earlier been pleaded by Brabantio before the Venetian Council. He is now inseparably stuck to the point of unnaturalness and is drawn to the side of Iago. He is fully convinced of Iago's expertise in human psychology and dealing.

**This fellow's of exceedings honesty,
And knows all qualities, with a learned spirit,
Of human dealing.**

After this attack of Iago, his spiritual union with Desdemona appears to him only a sensual appetite and he begins to see things through the eyes of Iago.

Othello's Struggle: - There are moments in which, we find Othello breaking the net laid down by Iago. When Desdemona is before him, he finds her again the same beautiful and virtuous Venetian girl who saw Othello's visage in his mind and not in his face. He rejects all doubts attached to her by Iago and says,

**If she false, O, then heaven mocks itself!
I'll not believe it.**

But when she tries to bind his temples, he is overcome by the poison fed by Iago. His honour is at stake and he farewells the soldier's life. He says that he is ready to accept all evil attach to her; but hidden from him.

Othello's Surrender: - Although, Othello still demands proof, jealousy has so maddened him and benumbed his reason that he is willing to accept whatever proof and evidence, Iago has to present as truth. Iago's lie about Cassio's dream and his sensuous descriptions are all enough for Othello to dig his own grave. He renounces his love for Desdemona and accepts hatred and revenge. Iago's words have so worked upon him that Othello ends up with Desdemona as evil and Iago as his Lieutenant again and he even gives orders for the death of Cassio.

Othello's Delusion: - Despite the fact that Othello has allowed himself to be ensnared by Iago, there is awe and solemnity in the culmination of the surrender scene. Othello, in his delusion, would convert his sinful vengeance into the guise of a lawful justice and his hatred into duty. Truth will appear as falsehood, love and loyalty as lust and betrayal. Always in his delusion, Othello will see himself as the instrument of justice executing his duty his duty in a solemn ritual, although his court-room will be brothel and his act of justice the destruction of love and truth.

Iago : Evil Personified

William Shakespeare has always been known for creating notable characters, who through sheer will and perseverance greatly affect the structure of their respective story worlds; Iago is no exception. He is widely considered to be one of the most prolific villains in all of Shakespeare's plays. Iago is not only one of the greatest villains of Shakespeare but also one of the cleverest. If Iago had used his incredible abilities for good, he would most likely be considered one of the greatest heroes in all of Shakespeare, instead of the greatest villain. However, this is not the path he chooses.

Iago is considered to be one of the greatest Shakespearean villains because he uses his **incredible logic to deceive many characters** in the play, his goals never change no matter how many times his motives might, and he does not stop until everyone in his way has been eliminated.

Without a doubt, Iago possesses a gift: the **ability to instantly assess any situation** he is in and then **adapt to the situation to twist it in his favor**, thus being able to deceive anyone without much trouble. This skill is first revealed in his first soliloquy:

**"After some time, to abuse Othello's ear
That he is too familiar with his wife.
He hath a person and a smooth dispose
To be suspected, framed to make women false.
The Moor is of a free and open nature
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by th' nose
As asses are" (1.3. 338-445).**

Iago hadn't already thoroughly organized his revenge at this point. He was only beginning to plot. He exhibits masterful thinking by devising a plan to destroy Othello on the spot. His goal quickly becomes to bring Cassio's affection towards Desdemona to light. The realization that Cassio is a perfect target of Othello's jealousy only furthers Iago's enthusiasm. He understands that Cassio is a well-spoken and handsome gentleman, and it would seem completely natural that Desdemona would fall for him.

Then Iago makes a crucial **discovery: Othello's weakness**. Othello is straightforward and never thinks twice about what he believes. Iago thinks that because Othello trusts men that seem honest without question, he can easily befriend him with his ability to deceive. After Iago has spoken to Othello about Cassio and Desdemona, he has another revelation and delivers yet another soliloquy:

**"will in Cassio's lodging lose this napkin
And let him find it. Trifles light as air
Are to the jealous confirmations strong
As proofs of holy writ. This may do something.
The Moor already changes with my poison.
Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons**

**Which at the first are scarce found to distaste,
But with a little act upon the blood
Burn like the mines of sulfur" (3.3. 369-377).**

His objective here is to cause Cassio to believe that Desdemona has feelings for him. When more than one person is deceived, the truth is much harder to find. Othello wouldn't be able to detect a lie because Cassio was well convinced as well; the one person Othello believes could reveal the truth doesn't even know the truth himself. Iago knew that if Othello hadn't already been jealous, the handkerchief would not have been a successful endeavor. However, Iago points out here that the smallest thing to a jealous man can blow up in his face, leaving him scarred with hatred.

Iago is pure evil because once he loses his main motive for revenge he continues the path of destruction anyway. He begins the play jealous of Cassio because Othello promoted Cassio to Lieutenant instead of him. Iago then goes about getting Cassio drunk so that he will be seen as unfit as a Lieutenant (2.3. 40-43). Once Othello had demoted him, Iago's quest for revenge should have stopped there. Instead, Iago decides to ruin Othello. He also goes about ruining Desdemona and Cassio even further. Iago seems to be having too much fun with himself to stop at this point. He leads Othello on and convinces him that his wife is cheating on him (4.1. 190-196). This ruins Desdemona's reputation to Othello as being pure and faithful. Desdemona will eventually be ruined beyond repair when a jealous Othello finally murders her. Iago apparently didn't have enough with Cassio once he had gotten him demoted. Iago brings Cassio aside within earshot of a hidden Othello as he gets him to "admit" to sleeping with Desdemona. He is actually talking about Bianca when he says,

**"I marry her! What? A customer? Prithee bear
some charity to my wit. Do not think it so unwhole-
some. Ha, ha, ha!" (4.1. 138-140).**

He calls Bianca a whore, but Othello believes that he is talking about Desdemona. So not only does Othello believe that Cassio has slept with Desdemona, he also thinks that Cassio doesn't even respect her so he would turn around and cheat on her as well. He then vows to kill Cassio.

Iago plans to eliminate all opposition. Othello approaches Iago and says,

**"How shall I murder him,
Iago?" (4.1. 188-189).**

Othello is willing to get rid of Cassio for Iago. Othello also plots to kill Desdemona. Othello gives the task of murdering Cassio to Iago who then gives the task to his loyal and naïve friend Roderigo. Roderigo fails and is killed by Cassio, but Iago stabs Cassio and flees without being seen. When Othello tells Desdemona that Cassio has been killed, she weeps for him: **"Alas, he is betrayed, and I undone"** (5.2. 96), which is the last straw and Othello makes up his mind. He then smothers her to death. Emilia begins to realize what is going on and tells Othello that Iago only spoke of lies. To shut her up,

Iago stabs her; he kills his own wife. Only true evil could possess someone to kill their own wife only to preserve their own self-image.

There is no character more evil than Iago. He will do anything and everything to get what he wants and he does not care who he hurts in the process. He also has basically no motive for the majority of the play. He might've realized that what he was doing reached a point where it no longer had a meaning, but he simply shrugs his shoulders as if to say, "**I might as well finish what I started**". This mentality when incorporated with jealousy can only stem from a truly evil and disturbed man.