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IAGO OTHELLO DESDEMONA EMILIA CASSIO RODERIGO BIANCA LODOVICO OTHER

OTHELLO

RACE AND PLACE

Race is often seen as competing with the strength of Othello and Desdemona's love – race is even the basis of their love (see Othello's monologue from 1.3.129).

Iago: "A Florentine" [1.1.19] [Bv]

Just like Othello, Cassio is also an outsider of Florentine descent – parallel to Othello, yet given exception for he is white. His Florentine origins may also allude to the origins of Niccolo Machiavelli – a political figure generally condemned by the Jacobean audience for the 'wickedness' of his radical politic – Machiavellian intent in his self-serving ambition for the restoration of his reputation.

Iago and Roderigo: "Thick lips," "Sooty bosom" "Black ram is tugging your white ewe." "Barbary horse." "Lascivious moor" [1.1]

Racial epithets all intended to undermine Othello's personhood; the eponymous Othello is not mentioned once by name in the first scene, but ambiguously referred to as "He."

Play uses discriminatory descriptions regarding Othello's race in order to reinforce cultural ideas of Black Africans being excessively sexual; these prejudices against Black African residents in England and the growing European participation the slave trade is reflected in Iago and Roderigo's comments towards Othello. Othello's sexual relationship is seen as unnatural, establishing a black-white binary from the beginning.

The animalistic description ('Barbary horse') creates imagery of Othello as non-human and depicting racial miscegenation as a grossly obscene.

Othello: "My parts, my title, and my perfect soul shall manifest me rightly. Is it they?" [1.1.31] [Bv]

Ordinarily, we might accuse such certainty of his services to the state as being hubristic, but his racial status relieves him of such a label.

Duke: [To Brabantio] "I did not see you: Welcome, gentle signior, we lacked your counsel and help tonight." [Bv] / Duke: "Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you against the general enemy Ottoman," [1.3.49]

The issue of race is temporarily subdued due to practical and military necessity. The portrayal of Othello as a hero reflects the contemporary ethnic diversity of Venice in which the interchange between Europe, Africa, and Asia became common – in Venice, many African moors achieved the highest ranks in society, such as Allesandro de Medici who ruled Florence.

Undermining of Brabantio's social position by Iago's impudence ('Thou art a senator!'), Roderigo's description of Desdemona's 'gross revolt' and the elopement of Othello to Desdemona. His utterances increasingly contain rhetorical questioning, threats, and alarming signifying the subversion of his authority that culminates in the above moment in scene 2. Instead of directing his social inferiors, Brabantio finds himself acting in response to them.

Whilst Othello's race, physical appearance and history demarcate him as an outsider to the Venetian state, he is also an essential component of its survival; the adjective 'valiant' when addressing him stresses heroism and dignity. There is, however, a darker element to this relationship for this is not an equal dynamic, rather the duke seeks to 'employ' Othello that might allude to a renewed, if glorified form of the slave trade.

As both a physical and political presence, Othello overshadows Brabantio – inversion of typical hierarchies of race and status (?). To the white, contemporary audience, this is a very strange dynamic.

The implications of the "trial scene" extend throughout the play. Iago carries forward Brabantio's attack upon Othello, with better success, and once the Turkish threat is removed, Othello is left vulnerable both within and without, prey to the complex interaction of psychological and social forces that occasion his downfall.

Duke: "Your son-in-law is more fair than black"

Othello's character is seen as loyal, trustworthy, and honest – all valued in the Venetian court. As the play progresses, these are the very characteristics that Iago exploits to make him comply to racially stereotyped mannerisms.

Brabantio: "She is abused, stolen from me and corrupted by spells and medicines brought of mountebanks." [1.2.60]

Belief in the subversion of the natural order by elopement. Racial fears of miscegenation and choice of her own husband, most especially a moor, is 'treason of the blood.' Brabantio suggests his daughter is a passive victim, 'abused, stolen [...] and corrupted.' This idea reflects the Renaissance stereotype of the black man as a sexual predator.

Reasons for wanting the arrest and prosecution of Othello is purely racist – he cannot believe that Desdemona would be attracted to the Moor unless reason was blinded. He requires an infraction so serious that the Duke could not overlook it.

Duke: "What in your part can you say to this?" [1.3.75]

The first monologue of the play is given at the duke's discretion, implying that Othello requires permission in the public sphere to speak at will. This makes an interesting parallel to how Desdemona is permitted to speak, 'I pray you, hear her speak,' here emerges a complicated intertangling of gendered and racial hierarchies. Both Othello and Desdemona are marginalized from the public sphere by nature of their ascribed statuses.

FORM: In Cyprus, we witness a clashing of empires. The island releases the violence lurking beneath the surface of the Venetian defenders of the Christian faith (Othello, Cassio). Play asks if the violence was inherent to them in the first-place or if there was something about that made them change. Cultural, religious and racial divides collapse at the 'Willow Song.'

Othello: "Are we turned Turks, and to ourselves do that which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?" [2.3]

Othello, typically, the 'other' in Venetian society calls attention to the potential for all external threats to become internal – a division that Iago will consistently exploit.

Iago: "Not to affect many proposed matches of her own clime, complexion and degree, whereto we see, in all things nature tends" [3.3.235] [Bv]

Iago awakens Othello's mind to the alien nature of his relationship, of early prejudices to racial miscegenation as a gross betrayal of a 'natural order' – Othello's fragile self-image, inextricably tied to how Desdemona validates him, collapses at thought of his social inferiority. Iago exposes Othello to realizing the gap in age, sympathy, and manners between him and Desdemona – this incongruity lends some credence to the insinuation that the marriage cannot last. According to the racialized prejudices of the Jacobean audience, which stress the supremacy of white characters, Othello's very presence as a military commander, sitting at the top of the social strata and married to a white woman of high wealth and esteem would all appear very 'unnatural' – the tragedy of Othello meets at this intersection of race and class.

Othello: "Haply for I am black and have not those soft parts of conversation that chamberers have, or for I am declined into the vale of years." [3.3.270] [Bv]

Othello showcases an uncanny awareness of the precarious position in the social hierarchy of Venice; that he is black, old, and relatively uncultured by the standard of 'chamberers.' In these lines Othello struggles to evade the deepest source of his anxiety. That he goes on to trivialize this impediment, equating it syntactically with his inadequacies in the "soft parts of conversation" or in years, is deeply irrational. He cannot probe the real cause of his anxiety because to do so would be utterly destructive, leaving him with only two options:

1. To embrace his blackness and hurl its beauty and power in the face of his enemies
2. To internalize their image of him and yield to self-loathing.

Either choice would proclaim his complete alienation.

Emilia: "Is he not jealous?" / Desdemona: "I think the sun where he was born drew all such humours from him." [3.4.30]

Reference to the Galenic system of the four humours: key to elaborate on the minds of characters, like Othello, allowing for greater depth of character and psychological realism (AIMS OF RENAISSANCE HUMANISM). Four humours were implemented psychologically as melancholic (black bile), choleric (yellow bile), phlegmatic(phlegm) and sanguine(blood).

1. Melancholic - pragmatic and introspective
2. Choleric - jealous, ambitious and vengeful.
3. Phlegmatic - cowardly, sluggish and pallid
4. Sanguine - impulsive, optimistic and extroverted

Peoples' personalities were judged based on their imbalance leaning towards one of the humours. This imbalance of the humours made them unique when compared to others.

Both Desdemona and Emilia possess a sanguine temperament as their impulsiveness and optimism leads to their eventual downfall.

Desdemona is tragically unaware of the dangers of the masculine ego: she maintains that her husband is better than such a base emotion, even when faced with the violence of his fury. Her naïve outlook on married life is dichotomized with the incredulity of her female counsel, Emilia.

Racial tension of some kind thus affects Othello's relationship with every character in the play ranging from Iago's blatant racism to Desdemona's naïve and uncertain assimilationism. One possible response to racial antagonism in Othello is an aggressive assertion of one's own identity.

CRITICAL QUOTES

“[Othello] is a stranger, a man of alien race.” – Helen Gardner

“Ideologies...only work because they are not entirely external to us.”– Ania Loomba

“Woman and Blacks exist as the other” – Ania Loomba

“The crucial fact of her marriage is not that she elopes but that she, a white woman, weds a black man.” – S.N.Garner

APPEARANCE AND REALITY

Iago: “I follow him to serve my turn upon him. We cannot all be masters, nor can all masters be truly followed.” [1.1.41] [Bv]

Iago has a keen understanding of the hierarchical relations of the play, more so than any other character; it is this knowledge of the social order that allows him to deftly subvert and sabotage the existing hierarchy from the beginning of the play that makes the black Othello a “master.”

FORM: It is also night-time at the beginning of act one and the stage placements (Brabantio at window/ Roderigo concealed in the darkness of the street below) signifies disruption, confusion and demonstrates the environment in which Iago thrives.

Iago: “Outward action doth demonstrate the native act and figure of my heart.” [1.1.60] [Bv]

Iago revels in the falseness of his performance, of “outward action,” but his self-identification as the villain of the play immediately tips the audience’s favor in Othello’s direction (despite any existing racial prejudices of the Jacobean audience). However, due to being held audience to his dramatic monologues, we are caught in his schemes even as passive spectators; the dramatic irony of the play forces the audience into an uneasy complicity with Iago’s villainy.

Iago: “I will wear my heart upon my sleeve for daws to peck at: I am not what I am.” [1.1.63] [Bv]

Iago is a metacharacter in that he undoes the typical expectations of an actor: that is to create a convincing illusion of reality by converting dialogue into speech, script into natural behavior. Instead, he turns his ostensible impromptu speech back into dialogue and script – note his inversion of biblical verse, “I am not what I am.” It is appropriate, therefore, for him to swear “by Janus” because his Janus-like profile reveals knavery to us but “honesty” to his Venetian fellow” – artifice vs. reality. Iago, as a character, emblemizes the pervasive duplicity of Shakespeare’s work, that of making a play that matches life.

Iago: “Though I do hate him as I do hell-pains, yet for necessity of present life I must show a flag and sign of love.” [1.1.153] [Bv]

SOLILOQUY: In his soliloquies, he muses silently in Venice, but publicly in the context of the theatre. Implication of a soliloquy is to suggest depth and inwardness of character, lending him a certain substance as a real ‘person’ not given to any other characters within the play. He sabotages his reality, declaring his realness as a ‘person.’

Othello: “Rude am I in my speech and little blest with the soft phrase of peace,” [in blank verse] / “Feats of broil and battle” [Bv]

Despite his hesitation, Othello speaks with a measured calm in blank verse, typically reserved for civilized conversation – clashing of confidence (“My parts, my title and my perfect soul shall manifest me rightly”) and uncertainty about his status and his abilities – outsider to the refinement of Venice. Othello is more characterized as a corporeal, dynamic force from his ‘feats of broil and battle.’

Cassio: "Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost my reputation, I have lost the immortal part of myself and what remains is bestial. My reputation, Iago, my reputation!" [2.3.260]

Desperate repetition of 'reputation' – importance of one's reputation, social standing as a man of status – long-living, more so than the corporeal body. Self-interestedness of the personal pronoun, 'my.' Exclamative – devastation at loss of his status. This loss of respectability is mirrored in Shakespeare's choice of prose rather than traditional meter.

Essential part of reputation in Venetian life – delegates power, respectability, and morality. In this way, Iago defrauds the corruption inherent to even Venetian society, forming a microcosm for the larger social landscape through Othello's Venetians. Reputation is a greater quality than the merit of one's character or achievements – Iago implies Cassio was promoted through corrupt favoritism, not merit.

Shakespeare portrays Cassio's belief that respectability is the barrier to animalistic barbarity. Qualities of character, like morality or wisdom, are bestowed upon a person by their peers rather than one developing by themselves. Without, one suffers a damned fate, ostracized by high society; without his reputation, Cassio sees himself as a beast, a symbol of poverty and depravity. Thus, from this point in the text onwards, he has the purely personal motivation of regaining his good standing. However, he fails to claim ownership over his error, rather passing responsibility to Desdemona: "I do beseech you / that, by your virtuous means, I may again / Exist and be a member of his love (3.4) At its core, reputation is hollow and meaningless.

In a less obvious way than Iago, Cassio curates his outward appearance and reputation with an audience in mind.

Act 2 forms a turning point for Cassio's character when Othello publicly demotes him. Previous to this, Cassio was depicted as arrogant, self-assured man to one faced with an emasculating loss of power – crisis of identity.

Othello: "If thou dost love me, show me thy thought." [3.3.118]

Othello: "Certainly, men should be what the seem." / "Why then I think Cassio's an honest man." [3.3.130]

Iago's remarkable ability to convince Othello of Desdemona's infidelity and his own honesty conveys the power of male homosocialism and male solidarity in society: he manipulates Othello's doubts and weaknesses for his own need. Alternatively, this can be read as an allegory for colonialism: Iago, the white man, destroys Othello's identity and replaces it with his own.

Othello: "Let me see your eyes. Look in my face." / Desdemona: "What horrible fancy's this?" [4.1.25]

Othello's false belief in Desdemona's treachery is reflected in a semantic field of seeing and knowing. Reliance upon Desdemona's eyes is unnervingly ironic. Desdemona chose Othello not because but in spite of her eyes, sublimating spiritually the visage Brabantio previously claims she feared to look upon. Perhaps, Othello's allusion to Desdemona's eyes conveys the inner truth of a Freudian slip: He sizes for his defense a subject of deep anxiety. Something that Iago seizes upon by turning the matter to Othello's alienation.

Iago: "O me, lieutenant! What villains have done this?" / stabs Roderigo / Roderigo: "O damned Iago! O inhuman dog!" [5.1.63]

Just as in the opening scene of the play, we open to the street at night – chaos and confusion.

CRITICAL QUOTES

- 'Iago should appear to be what all but the audience believe he is.' – Booth
- 'Shakespeare put a good deal of himself into Iago.' – A. C. Bradley
- 'Iago is Shakespeare's most extraordinary example of a "surrogate dramatist"' – Graham Bradshaw
- Othello's fatal flaw was his credulity. – Kenneth Muir
- 'Othello's tragedy is that he lives according to a set of stories through which he interprets the world...He is living the life of a chivalric warrior in a world run by money and self-interest.' – Sean McEvoy
- 'There is something very lovable about Cassio...we trust him absolutely to never pervert the truth.' – A. C. Bradley

RENAISSANCE HUMANISM

Iago: "I follow him to serve my turn upon him. We cannot all be masters, nor can all masters be truly followed." [1.1.41] [Bv]

Iago is a classic instance the janus-faced villain, a Machiavel – a villain geared to shock the audience, by adhering to the philosophy of Niccolo Machiavelli's writing in the Prince. He is also reminiscent of vice from medieval morality plays.

Iago: "In following him, I follow but myself." "Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty." [1.1.58] [Bv]

Consequence of Iago's enacting the dramatic trajectory of the play – play is orientated around Iago's schemes.

When he states 'Heaven is my judge,' the audience is placed into the position of divine providence.

Iago: "Our bodies are gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners." "Power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills." [Bv]

Iago acts a secular agent, yet with the fluidity of the divine in shaping creation, his Renaissance didacticism that 'our bodies are gardens to which our wills are gardeners' as an extended metaphor, constructed upon ironic reference to the Garden Eden calls for the allocation of free 'will' — notably, it is the notion of 'will' as an idea of self-determination to seek a balance of psychological interiority that is also a sentence to moral culpability. The prose in which he speaks denotes the blasphemic error of his speech, rejecting the Calvinist dialogue of predestination but also in a solicitation of moral repercussion.

MASCULINITY AND AGGRESSION

Cassio: "O god, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains! That we should, with joy, pleasance, revel, and applause, transform ourselves into beasts!" [2.3]

Cassio returns to the more conventional view that self-control places humans above animals in the divine order. Shakespeare suggests people seek the thrill of immorality for a source of entertainment and pleasure, purposely reducing themselves to 'beasts.' 'Revel and applause' connotes decadence, implying it is the rich who pursue an escape from moral duty even where 'applause' suggests that they are rewarded for such ill deeds.

Othello: "O blood, blood, blood!" / Othello kneels [3.3.454]

Othello's rational eye becomes blinded by rage once his "clear spirit" is "puddled" by Iago's temptation to foul jealousy: "O blood, blood, blood!" ; physically, he submits himself to Iago's mental machinations.

Emilia: He threatens her with his sword "The Moor hath killed my mistress! Murder! Murder!"
[5.2.163]

Emilia speaks against injustice and for that, she pays the price with her life – martyr.

SEXUALITY

FORM: Gradual narrowing of setting - political tragedy rapidly becomes a domestic setting. Whereas the action of the play began on the streets of Venice, it then moves into the passageways of Othello's residence on the island and ultimately ends up in his bedchamber. The close-up visually restricts the space around the tragic hero, emphasizing his blindness and imprisonment in his jealous fantasies.

Iago: "Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys, as salt as wolves in pride, and fools as gross as ignorance made drunk." [3.3.406]

Iago: "In sleep, I heard him say..." "Cry sweet creature! And then kiss me hard" "That grew upon my lips, lay his leg o'er my thigh, and sigh and kiss and then cry 'Cursed fate that gave thee to the Moor!"
[3.3.420] [Bv]

Othello: "Damn her, lewd minx: O damn her, damn her!" [3.3.477]

Once he's convinced of Desdemona's treachery, Othello projects his self-loathing upon her. In his diseased imagination she becomes, paradoxically, the stereotype of the Moor: cunning, "black," sexually depraved, and diabolic. He calls her at various times a "slave" (III.iii.442), a "lewd minx", a "fair devil", and a "subtile whore." Othello's sexual disgust, therefore, may not be a 'universal' symptom of repressed sexuality, but rather deeply implicated in the specific question of race.

Desdemona: "Do you know, sirrah, where lieutenant Cassio lies?" [3.4.1]

A great example of the sheer naivety Desdemona holds the world around her; this comic scene, and figurative emblem of 'lies' belies the disconnectedness between her and its dangerous implications. Shakespeare teases out of thought all the divers significations of the word, 'lie' its destructive force more woefully reaffirmed in the syntactical rearrangement around 'lie' in the following scene.

Othello: "Give me your hand. This hand is moist, my lady." / Othello: "This argues fruitfulness and liberal heart: hot, hot, and moist." [3.4.36] [Bv]

Othello: "Lie with her? Lie on her? We say lie on her when they belie her! Lie with her, zounds, that's fulsome! – Handkerchief! Confessions! Handkerchief!" [4.1.35]

Multiple caesurae create an Arrhythmic tone, mimicking faltering speech – note Othello's collapsing mental state.

Othello: "I cry you mercy then, I took you for that cunning whore of Venice that married with Othello. You! Mistress!" [4.2.90]

Othello: "Thine eyes, are blotted, thy bed, lust-stained, shall with lust's blood be spotted." [5.1.36]

DESDEMONA

Desdemona: "But my noble moor is true of mind, and made of no such baseness as jealous creatures are," [3.3.27] [Bv]

Although Desdemona is secure among Venetians, she is insecure and uneasy in her marriage to a man she does not fully understand. She responds to Othello's jealousy with the tragically inappropriate reflexes of a Venetian lady. She attempts to win favor by coyness and indirection—teasing Othello about Cassio, equivocating about the lost handkerchief, asking Emilia to make the bed with their wedding sheets. Such gestures are intensely ironic not just because they tend to work against her but because they reflect her lack of understanding of Othello. In her struggle to comprehend, she turns not to him for explanation but to fellow Venetians—to Emilia, who responds only with cynicism, and to Iago, who responds with hypocritical sympathy.

Even her phrase (“noble moor”) implies an awareness of difference that estranges. Throughout the play, the naming of Othello keeps an audience subtly conscious of the impossibility of Othello's complete assimilation.

Juxtaposition between Roderigo's failure to marry Desdemona with Iago's failure to gain promotion, making it clear that private, domestic issues and the public professional world will collide in Othello. The end of Act 1 establishes this collision most clearly as Brabantio makes his daughter's elopement a public, politicised affair.

Desdemona: “My noble father, I do perceive her a divided duty. To you I am bound for life and education:” / “And so much duty as my mother showed to you, preferring you before her father.”
[1.3.180] [Bv]

Much like her husband, Othello, Desdemona is often placed in the middle of tensions: for instance, between Othello and Brabantio, and Othello and Cassio. Her diplomacy and empathy is brought to the forefront. She is altruistic to the extreme. And so, in these ventures, the conflicts of the play eventually meet their forceful ends at her death.

The transfer, however, is represented not as a violation or betrayal but an affirmation of traditional order. In moving from father to husband, Desdemona claims to be reenacting the movement of her own mother from her father to Brabantio himself. In this exchange of loyalty and duty, she nowhere affirms her own rights against the prerogatives of male authority and therefore does not seem to challenge but reinforce the structure of order on which Brabantio's own authority is based.

Othello: “O my fair warrior!” / “My dear Othello!” [2.1.180]

Shared lines here are structured to complete each other – marital harmony is complemented rhythmically. Irony that Othello declares Desdemona his ‘fair warrior’ – perhaps this signifies how they are each other's pillars of identity, most certainly on Othello's side.

Iago: “I'll pour this pestilence into his ear: That she repeals him for her body's lust. And by how

Othello: “I think my wife be honest, and think she is not, I think that thou art just and think thou art not.” [3.3.386]

Conditional syntax with which Iago shapes the dialogue of the “seduction” scene. “Othello cannot entertain ifs,” is necessarily at odds with Othello's own sense of self in which his poeticism invokes graceful, declarative pronouncements; unable to cope with the uncertainty of “what is possible,” Othello can only replace the certitude of his unquestioning trust of Desdemona with the certitude of her infidelity” (Madeleine Doran)

Iago: “I am your own forever” [3.3.481]

Iago gets in between and destroys the marriage of Othello and Desdemona - substitutes an imperfect ceremony, a black mass parody of a wedding in which he takes Desdemona's place and speaks fair words with devilish meanings.

Othello: "The handkerchief!" / "I pray, talk me of Cassio." [3.4.90]

Desdemona's attempt to deflect the conversation back to Cassio's redemption portrays a critical shift from the marital bliss of earlier scenes – he makes the choice of Iago's false love, note the symbolic ritualism of their allegiance, "I am your own forever."

The handkerchief might represent Desdemona's chastity (recalling the bloodstains on a wedding sheet as proof of a newlywedded bride's virginity) and her loss of it may be a sign that she has given her body away. The handkerchief holds a variety of meanings to differing characters:

- Othello – Desdemona's honour; sanctity of their marriage
- Desdemona – Transforms from a gift of affection to an object of discord and chaos
- Emilia – test of loyalty (to her husband or mistress)
- Cassio – abuse of women
- Iago – instrument for his manipulations

Desdemona: "These men, these men! Dost thou in conscience think – tell me Emilia – that there women do abuse their husbands in such gross kind?" [4.3.60]

Loving and being loved means everything to Desdemona. When she believes she has lost Othello's love, she loses herself; unlike her self-assertion in earlier scenes, she seems unsure and even infantile as she laments her lost love rather than recognizing the precarity of Othello's mental state.

Desdemona's incredulity about sexual promiscuity reflects the patriarchal demands of Renaissance men; she sees it as an absolute that is worth more than her life.

Emilia: "Let husbands know their wives have sense like them: they see, and smell, and have their palates both for sweet and sour as husbands have. What is it that they do when they change us for others? Is it sport? I think it is. Is't frailty that thus errs? It is too. And have we not thus affections? Desires for sport? And frailty, as men have? Then let them use us well: else let them know, the ills we do, their ills instruct us so." [4.3.100] [Bv]

Emilia gently promotes the idea that Desdemona need not suffer Othello's abuse, but seek happiness elsewhere. She claims an equality between sexes, even in the reasons for infidelity: affection for others, human frailty, and simple pleasures, 'sport.' Unlike Othello who, as Marian Cox supplies, divides female characters into 'virgins and saints or whores and devils,' Emilia takes a more nuanced understanding of human motives, advocating for a middle ground for the societal acknowledgement that women too are human with their own needs and desires.

'Othello: "She must die, else she'll betray more men." [5.2.6]

Desdemona: "O Lord! Lord! Lord!" [He] smothers her / Emilia: "My lord. What ho, my lord, my lord!" [5.2.84]

As Othello smothers Desdemona, her line that appears in the Quarto, but not the Folio, sounds like a cry of prayer much unlike Emilia's subsequent repetition of calling 'my lord, my lord!' This prayerful repetition of 'Lord' could recall the audience to the Lord's prayer that concludes in an emphasis for the human need for forgiveness.

Othello: "She'd come again, and with greedy ear devour up my discourse" [1.3.150]

Sense of cultural estrangement that is woven into the love itself. Othello's exoticism is deeply attractive to Desdemona—she loves him for the adventures he has passed—but it also contributes to her undoing.

Desdemona: "I saw Othello's visage in his mind and to his honours and his valiant parts." / "If I be left behind, a moth of peace, and he go to war, the rites for which I love him are bereft me." / "Let me go with him." [1.3.254] [Bv]

In the beginning of the play, Desdemona's love has the ability to lift her spirits and liberate her from the rigorous demands of the Venetian state. Love empowers her in this regard in the declarative that she makes to the senate: "Let me go with him." Her unconditional love endures to the very end. She is faithful to him in mind and body, rendering her a paragon of wifely virtue.

This implicit denial of physical attraction shows that Desdemona tries to separate Othello's essential humanity from his appearance, but it also shows that she is sensitive to and disquieted by the insinuations that there must be something unnatural in such a love. She does not say that she found Othello's blackness beautiful but that she saw his visage in his mind

Cassio: "Our great captain's captain." [2.1.74]

Desdemona: "Why then, tomorrow night, or Tuesday morn; On Tuesday, noon or night; on Wednesday morn! I prithee name the time, but let it not exceed three days." [3.3.63] [Bv]

Desdemona takes liberties with her husbands that refute the patriarchal standard for female subservience, a public notion as Cassio declares her 'Our great captain's captain,' that in her request for Cassio's reinstatement she oversteps her boundary – military affairs do not involve her. Her officiousness in military matters might even be interpreted as a colonial attitude. The pushiness implicit in the repeated time frames could be taken as emasculating.

Desdemona: "Good friend, go to him, for, by this light of heaven I know not how I lost him. Here I kneel: if e'er my will did trespass 'gainst his love either in discourse of thought or actual deed.." / "Beggary divorcement," / "His unkindness may defeat my life but never taint my love." [4.2.160]

Desdemona sets the example of Christian kindness for Othello regarding how to avoid hate, whether of self or other, in love that is both giving and forgiving. In so doing, she upholds Erasmus's conception of the woman warrior.

Desdemona: "If I do die before thee, prithee shroud me one of these same sheets." [4.3.24]

At the end of the play, Desdemona commits herself to the fate of martyrdom. Her dialogue increasingly becomes morose and mournful, a key departure from the colorful imagery from earlier. Her compliance with her fate might be interpreted as a surrender, or even as a strength of will. The ironic truth of her faithfulness turns her death into a call to arms for women. In death, Desdemona becomes a saint: "heavenly true." (Act 5, Scene 2)

Desdemona: "My mother had a maid called Barbary she was in love, and he she loved proved mad and did forsake her." / "The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree, sing all a green willow: Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee, sing willow, willow, willow.." [4.3.42]

The name 'Barbary' echoes Iago's racial insult of Othello as a 'Barbary horse.' 'Barbary' refers to the countries along the North coast of Africa and thus a degree of exoticism in Desdemona's history. The melancholic song portrays an attitude of fatalism regarding love –

a resigned acceptance to misfortune. The reference to the 'sycamore tree' associated with forsaken love. The 'willow' was a traditional symbol for unrequited love.

The song, moreover, brings to her consciousness the sheltered world in which she grew up, now balanced beside the world she chose – repudiated for infidelity, she contemplates it for the first time to someone like Lodovico – 'A proper man.'

As she sings, she seems to understand that there is no world worth living in without love, and no love worth having that is immune to pain.

Brabantio: "I therefore apprehend and do attach thee for an abuser of the world, a practiser of arts inhibited and out of warrant. Lay hold upon him; if he do resist, subdue him at his peril!" [1.2.80]

Implicit comparison to Christ as Brabantio and his soldiers arrive with swords and torches, tipped to of his whereabouts by Othello's disloyal friend echoes John 18:1-11. When Othello averts imminent violence with the single sentence, "Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust 'em." He echoes Christ's comment to Peter of "Put up thy sword to the sheath." Where Christ's calm restraint is subject to resigned acceptance, Othello's is due to his sense of authority (hubris?)

Iago: "The moor is of a free and open nature that thinks men honest but seem to be so and will as tenderly be led by th' nose as asses are." [1.3.399]

To Iago, rules, norms, and principles, wherever they exist, are items of blind faith to which he issues a devilish non serviam. Only fools like Othello have such faith – 'free and open nature', and he pays dearly for it

Iago: "And what's he then that says I play the villain? When this advice is free, I give and honest," [3.1.1] [Bv]

When Iago steps forward to address the audience in soliloquy, he denies his equality with other characters, but purposively strides into the mirror of art and asserts his metadramatic discreteness from the reality of Venice and illusions from the realities of London.

Iago: "When devils will the blackest sins put on they do suggest at first with heavenly shows as I do now." [2.3.346] [Bv]

Othello: "Is he not honest?" / Iago: "Honest, my lord?" / "What dost thou think?" / "Think my lord?" / "Think, my lord! By heaven, thou echo'st me as if there were some monster in this thought too hideous to be shown." [3.3.105]

Measure of Iago's rhetorical procedure, 'redoubling' the last word of Othello's question, 'honest.' He turns the question back upon Othello and compels him to ponder its multiple significations – confusing what might be possible with what is real. It makes Cassio's honesty something questionable. Iago's interrogative echoing of 'honest' enhances simply by not dispelling. Othello has to literally pull the facts out of Iago.

Herald: "Heaven bless the isle of Cyprus and our noble general Othello!" [2.1.9]

Herald's joyful proclamation masks a return to civil order – juxtaposition of love and war – Ovidian trope of love as war.

Othello: "Are you not a strumpet?" / Desdemona: "No, as I am a Christian. If to preserve this vessel for my lord from any hated foul unlawful touch be not to be a strumpet, I am none." [4.2.84]

Despite Brabantio's characterization of her as a "maid never bold" (Act 1, Scene 3), there are key moments in the play that present Desdemona's assertiveness and self-assuredness.

Othello's obsessive repetition upon 'whore' and 'strumpet' would all suggest the extent of Iago's machinations over Othello's mind and indicates the distance from the former nobleman – he has moved past poeticism, eloquence and measured tones and imbues his language with vile images. He is far removed from any chance for sympathy – at this point, he is little more than a tyrant.

FORM: Venice worked powerfully on English imaginations during the Renaissance as an object of desire, evoking wealth, art, and Italian sophistication, but also as an object of repulsion, evoking Italianate greed and decadent sexuality.

Othello: "Are you not a strumpet?" / Desdemona: "No, as I am a Christian. If to preserve this vessel for my lord from any hated foul unlawful touch be not to be a strumpet, I am none." [4.2.84]

Desdemona is literally a warrior in the Christian sense, with faith as her shield, but figuratively a warrior in the secular sense since her tongue is her sword or her only weapon, used defensively against Othello and offensively on behalf of Othello.

Othello: "What not a whore?" / Desdemona: "No, as I shall be saved." / "Is't possible?" / "O heaven, forgive us." [4.2.87]

Rhetorical and self-referential interrogative in the exclamatory question, 'Is't possible?' calls to attention to the dramatic pass to which matters have been brought by Iago's machinations. This question, 'Is't possible?' echoes the very action of Othello as a whole. It is a drama of and about hypotheticals, about questions concerning character and conduct. The question of what is possible reverberates most strongly and destructively in the 'temptation' scene of act 3, in which the insinuations of Iago ("Ha, I like not that!") turn the loving and trusting Othello into the "green-ey'd monster" of hateful jealousy. The reflexive, pulsations of question and repetition suggest a discourse calling into awareness the scale of its power, the power to confuse 'what is real' with 'what is possible.'

Othello: "It is the cause it is the cause my soul! Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars, it is the cause." [5.2.4]

The repetition of "cause" might just as readily inscribe an attempt by Othello to absolve himself from having to acknowledge and reexamine the conviction that has determined her fate, the more assuredly to pass on to her execution.

Desdemona: "O Lord! Lord! Lord!" [He] smothers her / Emilia: "My lord. What ho, my lord, my lord!" [5.2.84]

As Othello smothers Desdemona, her line that appears in the Quarto, but not the Folio, sounds like a cry of prayer much unlike Emilia's subsequent repetition of calling 'my lord, my lord!' This prayerful repetition of 'Lord' could recall the audience to the Lord's prayer that concludes in an emphasis for the human need for forgiveness.

Othello and Iago are foils to each other: Iago seeks to cause chaos; Othello seeks to resolve it. Play's action develops the tension between love and war and allows neither to emerge unscathed.

Othello: "The story of my life from year to year – the battles, sieges, fortunes, that I have passed." / "Boyish days" [1.3.131] [Bv]

Othello's image as a warrior is created only in language; however, the play is not to do with heroism but the hero is instead ensnared by love, and laid open to corruption. As a soldier, he is also a public figure

HATRED

Iago: "And I, God bless his mark, his Moorship's ancient!" [1.1.32]

Is this the root of Iago's hatred for Othello? His ambition has been overlooked for promotion, rather employed Cassio as the 'Moorship's ancient.' Whilst Iago sneers at Cassio's bookish theoretic, he is appointed to succeed Othello. Perhaps, this hints towards a latent cunning in Cassio as Machiavelli was seen as the quintessential Florentine,

Iago: "But for my sport and profit. I hate the Moor and it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets he's done my office." [1.3.385]

Is Iago consumed with a desire for vengeance because he suspects Othello and Cassio of bedding his wife? [Think of the question Coleridge posed in his famous phrase "the motive-hunting of motive-less malignity"]

Othello: "You must speak of one that loved not wisely, but too well; of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought, perplexed in the extreme." [5.2.342]

TRAGEDY

Brabantio: "Thou art a villain" / Iago: "Thou art a senator!"

Comic dramatic irony as Brabantio is unaware of the truth of his words, when he declares Iago a "Villain" – the first of multiple references throughout the play of Iago's self-awareness of his dramatic function that certainly seems to sustain the credibility of Graham Bradshaw's assertion that "Iago is Shakespeare's most extraordinary example of a 'surrogate dramatist.'" By the end of the play, Shakespeare has effectively established Iago's power in his manipulation of the play's trajectory, instigating and directing the chaos that follows.

S.D. Geographical transition from Venice to Cyprus emphasizes the licensing freedom that is enabled beyond city walls; it signifies movement from Christian civilisation to unstable outpost.

Iago: "Hell and night must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light." [Bv]

Iago is functional in the extreme as virtually every element is skillfully exploited by Iago so as to hasten the final catastrophe.

Othello: "I cannot speak enough of this content, It stops me here, it is too much of joy." / The kiss. [2.1.196] [Bv]

Iago "Now I do love [Desdemona] too, not out of absolute love – though peradventure I stand accountant for as great a sin – but partly led to diet my revenge," [2.1.299] [Bv]

Iago: [sings]. And let me the cannikin clink. A soldier's a man. O, man's life but a span, why then let a soldier drink! Some wine, boys!" [2.3.65]

Cassio: "O thou invisible spirit of wine. If thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil!" [2.3]

Cassio: "O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths, to steal men away from their brains! That we should with joy, pleasance, revel and applause, transform ourselves into beasts!" [2.30.58]

Iago: "And what's he then that says I play the villain? When this advice is free, I give and honest," [3.1.1] [Bv]

Othello: "Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul but I do love thee! And when I love thee not chaos is come again." [3.3.90] [Bv]

Contrast of those still faces conveyed in the leap of face that all love is – "And when I love thee not, Chaos is come again" – sense that what was about to be put at risk in the play to follow was the immemorial dream of creating a world in which polar opposites are held in harmony by love: black and white, male and female, warrior and "moth of peace."

Emilia: "Heaven knows, not I. I nothing, but to please his fantasy." [3.3.300] [Bv]

Othello: "You are welcome, sir, to Cyprus. Goats and monkeys!" [4.1.263]

Roderigo: "I have no great devotion to the deed and yet he hath given me satisfying reasons: tis but a man gone. Forth, my sword: he dies." [5.1.8]

Othello: "I look down towards his feet but that's a fable. If that thou be'st a devil. I cannot kill thee." [5.2.283]

Iago: "Demand me nothing. What you know, you know." [5.2.300]

Othello: "I kissed thee ere I killed thee: no way but this, killing myself to die upon a kiss." [Kisses Desdemona and dies] [5.2.356]