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Dimensions of Rebellion in Shakespeare's Othello

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Introduction - The tragedy of Othello is the tragedy of a free and lordly creature taken in the toils and writhing to death. In one of his sonnets, Shakespeare has spoken of some fierce thing replete with too much rage whose strength's abundance weakens his own heart. Such a fierce thing made weak by his very strength is Othello. There is a barbaric grandeur and simplicity about the movements of his soul. He sees things with a large and generous eye, not prying into the curious or the occult.He is a liberal acceptor of life and, with a careless magnificence, wears about him the ornament of strange experience; memories of 'Antres vast and deserts idle, Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven, memories of disastrous chances of moving accidents by flood and field.

Othello is that caricature of Shakespeare that is neither vaguely universalised nor deliberately mechanised and utilised by the poet's philosophic plan. It commences with a serene flight of a warrior that could be continued as the mighty Moor's earlier accomplishments; instead, it stumbles and eventually leads towards the suspicious rebellion of the protagonist, where Othello asks for his story to be told truthfully and without rebellious emotion of malice.

The rightful grace of Othello is explicitly surfaced at the beginning, where he is ready to confront Desdemona's father despiteIago's hidden manipulation:

Not I; I must be found:
My parts, my title, and my perfect soul,
Shall manifest me rightly." (1.2.31-32)

The above words showcase his self-assurance and innocence. His denial of Iago's advice to hide himselfis an unintentional rebellion against Iago's evil purposes. At the very beginning of the play, Shakespeare portrays Othello as possessing noble qualities of both head and heart, which exalt him above the common run of mankind. He is also of noble birth, an important individual occupying a high place in society.

Having truthful feelings in his heart, Othello never succumbs to Desdemona's father when Brabantio imposes the charge of overpowering his daughter. As a Moor and outsider, he marries a white noblewoman and defies the Venetian ancestral racial and class expectations. This act of confrontation comes out as a challenge to the social order and encapsulates the sacred emotion of love that rebels against any established norms of a distinct society.

His initial trust in his own moral compass and military honour provides him to represent himself with dignity and grace:

"That I have taken away this old man's daughter
It is most true;
The very head and front of my offending
Hath this extent,
No more rude am I in my speech,"
(1.3.78-81)

Othello asks to represent Desdemona's opinion by herself:

Let her speak of me before her father. (1.3.115)

This action of Othello reveals his full faith and love not only in Desdemona but in his own intentions as well.This valiant defiance of Brabantio's charges by him portrays his just rebel. To make Desdemona's assertion more illicit,Othello sketches the whole incident before the arrival of Desdemona in the court.

Othello's rich poetic imagination creates rebellion in the Duke's heart against his previous decision:

I think this tale would win my daughter, too." (1.3.171)

Othello surmounts Brabantio's charges, which were further supported by Desdemona's confession before the Duke:

" I am hither to your daughter: but here is my husband
And so much duty as my mother show'd
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor, my lord." A 1 S 3 L 185-189.

Eventually, after becoming victorious in his rebellion, Othello obeys the Duke's order as well, and in his efforts to maintain the decorum of his country, he rebels against his emotion of love and wedding vows. HE decides to leave Cyprus as his country's honour is more essential than his marriage.

Before leaving for Cyprus, Othello rejects Brabantio's proclamation that Desdemona would cheat him in the same

way as she has cheated her father. He rebels:

"My life upon her faith."

These words encapsulate Othello's firm belief in Desdemona. In his worst of dreams, he could never imagine the deception from Desdemona, as they are truly in love with each other, a love that is firm, sacred, and loyal.

Desdemona, moving to and fro at her house affairs, or listening with grave wonder, and eager, restrained sympathy to the story of his adventurous life, became to him, at first in an unconscious way the type of beauty, gentleness, repose and the tender womanhood and Desdemona in her turn brought up amidst the refinements and ceremonies of venetian life, watching each day the same gondolas glide by hearing her father's talk of some little new law of the Duke, found in the Moor strangeness and splendour of strong manhood, heroic simplicity, the charm of one who had suffered in solitude and on whose history compassion might be lavished.

Othello never rebels and questions the very nature of truth, love and identity. After his return from Cyprus, he is full of warm love for Desdemona and exchanges the tokens of love with her.

O my soul's joy!
If after every tempest come such calms,
May the winds blow till they have Waken'd death."
(2.1.184-186)

The immediate reply of Desdemona suffices to express her equally affectionate gesture of love.

"But that our loves and comforts should increase,
Even as our daysdo grow." (2.1.194-195)

This flame of sacred love suddenly started to rebel and diminish after the arrival of Iago in Moor's life. The reasonable, valiant, and truthful Moor gradually loses his rationality. Iago's insinuationsregarding the leaving of Cassius from Desdemona's roomsow the seeds of doubt inside the Moor.

"Ha ! I like not that" (3.3.35)

Othello's suspiciousnessturns intense when Desdemona, in her gullibility,starts talking about Cassio. His jealousy rebels against his faith in Desdemona.

"I will deny thee nothing:
Whereon, I do beseech thee, grant me this,
To leave me but a little to myself." A 1 S 3 L 90-92.

Othello dismisses his power of reliance, a source that granted him good fortune and worldly pleasures. The rebellion,fuelled by jealousy, deteriorates his position from a composed husband to an impulsive one.

Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul,
But I do love thee! and when I love thee not,
Chaos is come again." (1.3.90-92)

The profound, grave love suddenly started diminishing in the livesof Othello and Desdemona. While Iago was the person who poisoned Othello's mind against Desdemona, Othello himself could not rebel against the evil persuasion. His jealous demeanour compels him to perceive Iago's exact thoughts:

I prithee, speak to me
as to thy thinkings as thou dost ruminate and give thy worst of thoughts
The worst of words." (3.3.133)

The readers find Othello in a rebellious situation where he appears devastated and ready to surrender before Iago's mischievous plan. His denial of being jealous of Cassio before Iago is the affirmation of his rebellious deeds.

We still find Othello reluctant to believe his mind over his doubt about Desdemona. With the further insinuating comments from Iago, Othelloappears unsure of himself. His reasoning power seems clouded. He considers Iago an honest person. Filled with fury and rage, Othello decides to renounceDesdemona.

The above lines of Moor depict his degradation not only in self-confidence but in his valour too. The realisation that he is black, middle-aged, and does not possess the sparkling wit of the courtiers looks odd, for this is only the second day of his marriedlife with Desdemona. Othello rebels against the sacred vows of marriage, where his lack of faith in marriage brings his fatal doom. Othello is seen so overwhelmed and overpowered by Iago's treacherous seduction that he rebels against all women.

"O curse of marriage
That we can call these delicate creatures ours,
And not their appetites."
(A 3 S 3 L 268-269)

His doubtful, rebellious instinct so dominated his mind that he would rather be a toad than have an immoral wife. His composed disposition gets substituted with a perplexed mental status.

"O, now, forever
Farewell the tranquil mind! Farewell content!
Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars,
That make ambition virtue! O farewell!
…Othello's occupation gone." (A 3 S 3 L 348-357)

Even in his worst condition, his bewilderment does not allow him to rebel against Desdemona's pure love. He asks for 'ocular proof'against Desdemona otherwise, he readies himself to suffer his wak'd wrath.

"Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore;-
Be sure of it. Give me the ocular proof.
……Thou hadst been better have been born a dog
Than answer my wak'd wrath." (A 3 S 3 L)

Othello's conscience does not permit him to distrust Desdemona. He sways between.

"By the world,
I think my wife be honest, and think she is not;
I think that thou art just and think thou art not." A 3 S 3l

AfterIago's extensive psychological manipulation, Othello succumbs and rebels against his love.

"Look here, Iago;
All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven:
'Tis gone". A 3 S 3 L

The final call of betrayal from Iago overpowers Othello immensely when, with the help of a petty handkerchief, Iagoconvinces Othello of Desdemona's betrayal as a wife. With a simple yet subtle article, a handkerchief, Shakespeare manipulates one of his greatest tragedies. The doubt gives way to conformity, the swaying finds a stationary point, and the brutal pangs of agony begin to hover everywhere. The final call of doom appears when Othello asks Desdemona to return the first gifted token of love. The answer suffices to fill him with more jealousy and hatred:

"I have it not about me." A 3 S 4 L 52.

It further aggravates with the demand of his innocent wife to restore Cassioto his post. Bereaved and annoyed,Othello, in his confused state of mind, leaves Desdemona in her chamber alone. The handkerchief serves as a catalyst for emotional rebellion. After being assured of Desdemona's fidelity, Othello rebels against his former self, where he was a persona of a noble, composed and rational being. Othello consents to the advice of Iago to kill Desdemona not by poisoning but by choking.

"Good, good: the justice of it pleases: very good." A 4 S 1 l 210.

Othello's suspicious, rebellious instinct makes him work rashly without even considering the pros and cons of his actions. When he makes a decision, he never deviates from pondering it again. The root cause of his tragedy lies deep in his own demeanour. His sincere, deep love for Desdemona could not restrict him from rebelling against Desdemona. The thought of the physical pollution of the beloved's body is the most agonising of spiritual tortures, and it is this thought that throws him into a fainting fit. While making one of the most heinous decisions of his life, Othello, in a fit of fury and rage, strangles the beautiful neck of Desdemona. As a Moor in Venetian society, Othello's position is already precarious and is eyed with inferiority. The finding of the handkerchief in Casio's hand instigates the Moor to rebel against the norms of civility and justice, culminating in Desdemona's strangulation and finally emerges as a tragic revolt against the very values he once upheld.

And though it was not enough. The revelation by Emilia,to establish a rebellion against patriarchal control and marital loyalty, ultimately opens the truth before Othello. He acknowledges the gravity of his crime, and a tormenting rebel makes him cry out,

"O Desdemona! Dead, Desdemona! Dead! Oh! Oh!

Life without Desdemona is not possible for him, so as soon as he discovers his mistake, he sacrifices himself too at the altar of justice. Instead of assuming Desdemona as a betrayer, Othello looks at himself as the betrayer of love, justice, and truth. This reversal is a rebellion against the false narrative he once embraced.

The character of Othello is comparatively simple, but, as I have dwelt on the prominence of intrigue and accident in the play, it is desirable to show how essentially the success of Iago's plot is connected with this character. Othello's description of himself as one not easily jealous, but, being wrought perplexed in the extreme, is perfectly just. His tragedy lies in this that his whole nature was indisposedto jealousy, and yet was such that he was unusually open to deception and, if once wrought to passion, likely to act with little reflection, with no delay and in the most decisive manner conceivable.

Othello's final deed of wounding Iago and uncovering his villainous plan showcases his moral rebellion, where he seeks to restore the sacrednesshe terminated. He considers his death as a way of restoring the purity that was twisted, destroyed and corrupted by the world. He reclaims dignity,

"I kissed thee ere I killed thee: no way but this, killing myself, to die upon a kiss."

When we peruse the character of gullible Desdemona, we find a personification of serene beauty destined to meet a pathetic end. Born in a rich and esteemed family, she has all those graces and refinements that captivate the heart of man. This was the reason that many 'curled darlings' of Venice are suitors to her hand. Roderigo loves her and carries the emotion even after her marriage. Othello too sacrifices his 'unhoused free condition' out of his love for her.

Such delineation of grace and beauty functions as a rebellious element for Desdemona as the valiant Moor himself appears astonished and enamoured with her beauty that arises doubt and jealousy inside him.

Desdemona's child like innocence, gentle and passive nature and incapability to defend herself against any false charges cater to her pathetic doom. Othello strikes her in public, asks her to go out and after some time calls her again, and Desdemona follows the words of Othello as obediently and dutifully as any slave. She admits that she is a 'child to hiding'. Her innocence never permits her to surmise any woman being corrupt and unfaithful to her husband.

Tell me Emilia,-That there be women do abuse their husbands.' A 4 S 3 L 60-61.

Desdemona loved Othello for his character rather than his physical appearance. She saw 'Othello's visage in the mind; pitied him for all that he had suffered in the course of his chequered life, and pity soon changed into love.

Her life seems to be rebelling without her husband, so she silently accepts Othello's misbehaviours and succumbs to the strangulation action of her husband. Tofree her husband of all blame, she takes all the blame for her strangulation on herself:

'Nobody- I myself. Farewell:

Command me to my kind lord: O, Farewell!" A 5 S 2 L 126.

This rebellious deed of Desdemona depicts her love for her husband. Her life is a sacrifice to love; her death is

a testimony to her undying love.In defiance of patriarchal norms, she elopes with Othello and marries her, choosing love over obedience boldly in front of the dukes and senators, following Othello into a war zone, not as a silent wife but as an engaging political and emotional arbitrator of truth, her consistent pleading for Cassio's reinstatement and in her final hours her decision not to accuse Othellodepict her a symbol of emotional and ethical rebellion against societal norms. Her character also challenges the Elizabethan ideal of female passivity.

He is guided in the course of his life by intellect and not by emotions. His reason has overcome all his emotions and functions as a rebellious catalyst for all the prominent characters of the tragedy. His soliloquies assert that he is capable of accurate logical reasoning. Any good or sacred passion is absent in his character. Reputation for him is an idle and most false imposition, and love a lust of the blood and permission of the will. He cherishes the use of lustful imagery and often uses lewd and voluptuous language in his remarks.

He poisons the mind of Roderigo against Cassio and Desdemona and excites maddening jealousy in Othello.

The divorce of intellect from conscience or sense of morality makes Iago a thoroughly rebellious villain. Evil in him is not mixed with any good; his nature is homogeneously evil; he is the essence of wickedness, the embodiment of evil, the devil incarnate." Edward Dowden P 240.

His rebellious motive is explicit from the very beginning:

"Others there are'
Who, trimmed in forms and visages of duty,
Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves.
And, throwing but shows of service on their loards;
Do well thrive by them, and, when they have lined their coats,
Do themselves homage." A 1 S 1 L 48-53

It appears there are two motives for his enmity-Cassio's appointment as lieutenant in preference to him, and his suspicion that both Cassio and the Moor have illicit relations with his wife. But after critically analysing the fact, we find that there are no motives at all. Othello's choice of Cassio as lieutenant is justified by his appointment as Governor of Cyprus later in the play. At the same time, Shakespeare has never portrayed Iago as having superior military ability. The second motive turns out to be merely a suspicion, a rumour.

Repeatedly, the exact reason for Iago's behaviour appears to be hidden in his innate love of Devilry.

But what is clear is that Iago is keenly sensitive to anything that touches his pride or self-esteem. It would be most unjust to call him vain, but he has a high opinion of himself and a great contempt for others. He is quite aware of his superiority to them in certain aspects, and he either disbelieves in or despises the qualities in which they are superior to him. Whatever disturbs or wounds his sense of superiority irritates him at once, and in that sense, he is highly competitive. This is why the appointment of Cassio provokes him. This is why Cassio's scientific attainments provoke him. This is the reason for his jealousy of Emilia. He does not care for his wife, but the fear of another man getting the better of him, and exposing him to pity or derision as an unfortunate husband, is wormwood to him; and as he is sure that no woman is virtuous at heart, this fear is ever with him. For much the same reason, he has a spite against goodness in men.

Roderigois one of the fashionable gallants of Venice, without any high sense of morality. His love for Desdemona is neither deep nor intense. He used to hang around her house. Very foolishly,he gets entangled in the snare of the bewitching words of Iago, where he was made to believe that he could enjoy Desdemona even after her marriage. He sells all his property and follows her to Cyprus. Roderigo's mindlessness captivates him to rebel against mindfulness. Overshadowed by Iago's manipulation, Roderigo initially resents and rebels in a passive way.His emotional impulsiveness leads him into desperation and violence. When Roderigo acknowledges Iago's treachery, he wishes to expose Iago. Here, he appears to be reclaiming agency and truth. Like the protagonist and the leading female character of the play, Roderigo also becomes a victim of Iago's treachery, and his rebellion at the end underscores the theme of innocence corrupted.

Cassio, a handsome, good-natured, light-hearted young fellow, whose physical appearance turned rebellious against his own fate, is another victim of Iago's manipulation. Cassio, as a typical young military officer, had been appointed as a lieutenant by Othello. Later, he was also appointed as a governor of Cyprus in place of Othello. He had a high sense of discipline. Having indulged in a fight before Othello, he felt shame and pleaded with Desdemona to ask forgiveness from Othello. This weakness of will rebels against his fate when Othello suspects his illicit relationship with Desdemona.

Emilia, Iago's wife, a well-versed woman in worldly matters, was a forever companion of Desdemona. She turned rebellious whenever she acknowledged the situation in its proper context. While Desdemona was of the opinion that no woman could cheat her husband, Emilia underscored the possibility in a rebellious way:

"Yes, A dozen, and as many to th'vantage as would
Store the world they play'd for." A 4 S 3 L 85-86

After witnessing Othello's atrocity, Emilia pondered over the cause of it. She rebelled:

"I will be hang'd, if some eternal villain
Some busy and insinuating rogue,
Some cogging, cozening slave, to get some office
Have not devised this slander;" A 4 S 2 l 130-133

Her bold, fearless rebellion demeanour explicitly reverberated when she found her dear mistress dead. She was filled with righteous indignation and stood and rebelled for her noble mistress. Most movingly, she rebelled even

against Othello's sword when she did not care for her own life and rebelled valiantly against Othello's threat. She also refused to follow Iago's order to 'charm her tongue' and rebelled by disclosing his villainy.

Unlike other tragedies of Shakespeare,woven with supernatural or fate or divine punishment, Othello is driven by human rebellion against trust, tradition, loyalty and inclusion-culminating in tragic self-destruction.

Such is the spiritual motive that controls the tragedy. And the validity of this truth is demonstrable to every sound conscience. No supernatural authority need to be summoned to bear witness to this reality of human life. No pallid flame of hell, no splendour of dawning heaven, needs show itself beyond the verge of earth to illumine this truth. It is a portion of the ascertained fact of human nature, and of this our mortal existence. We look upon 'the tragic loading of the bed ',and we see Iago in the presence of the ruin he has wrought. We are not compelled to seek for any resolution of these apparent discords in any alleged life to come. That may also be; we shall accept it, if it be. Butlooking sternly and strictly at what is now actual and present to our sight, we get rise above despair. Desdemona's adhesion to her husband and to love survived the ultimate trial. Othello dies 'upon a kiss. He perceives his own calamitous error, and he recognises Desdemona pure and loyal as she was. Goodness is justified in her child. It is evil which suffers defeat. It is Iago whose whole existence has been most blind, purposeless, and miserable-a struggle against the virtuous powers of the world, by which at last he stands convicted and condemned.

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