



1955

Sources of Motivation in Othello's Tragic Action

George T. Tolbert
Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Tolbert, George T., "Sources of Motivation in Othello's Tragic Action" (1955). *Master's Theses*. 1306.
https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/1306

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).
Copyright © 1955 George T. Tolbert

**SOURCES OF MOTIVATION IN OTHELLO'S
TRAGIC ACTION**

by

GEORGE T. TOLBERT, S.J.

**A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts**

January

1955

LIFE

George T. Tolbert, S.J. was born in Cleveland, Ohio, August 17, 1926.

After his elementary education at Louis Agassiz and Wilbur Wright Public Schools in Cleveland, he attended St. Ignatius High School in the same city graduating in June, 1944. In the same year he entered the Novitiate of the Society of Jesus at Milford, Ohio. During his four years there he was academically connected with Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio.

In August, 1948, he transferred to West Baden College of Loyola University, from which institution he graduated with the degree of Bachelor of Arts in June, 1949. He was enrolled in the graduate school of Loyola University in the same year where he took courses in preparation for a degree of Master of Arts in English.

After his completion of philosophy at West Baden College, he taught at St. Xavier High School, Cincinnati, Ohio from 1951 to 1954. At present he is studying theology at West Baden.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
<p>I. INTRODUCTION</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Appraisal of <u>Othello</u>--Purpose of this thesis--General procedure--Stoll's position--Bradley's opinion--Position adopted in this thesis.</p>	<p>1</p>
<p>II. MILITARY LIFE OF OTHELLO</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Othello foremost a soldier--His military qualities--Othello's judgment most predominant quality--The poet's mastery in portraying this quality--The Moor's excessive judgment--Other particular military characteristics.</p>	<p>10</p>
<p>III. COLOR AND CULTURE</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Problem of Othello's color--Position of Othello's color in this thesis--Othello shows characteristics of his race--Importance of these qualities to the play--Cultural life of Othello.</p>	<p>20</p>
<p>IV. RELIGION AND SUPERSTITION.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Othello's religion--Christianity mixed with old pagan beliefs--Paganism strong in Othello's life--Othello's superstition--Its influence on the life of the Moor.</p>	<p>31</p>
<p>V. OTHELLO'S LOVE OF DESDEMONA.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Desdemona's character--Love of opposites--Love based on mutual fascination and ideals--The part Desdemona plays in Othello's life--Military qualities guide Othello's domestic life--How this element of Othello's background answers Stoll's objection--Uncertainty of Othello's marriage.</p>	<p>40</p>

VI. IAGO UTILIZES OTHELLO'S BACKGROUND TO MOTIVATE HIS ACTIONS

54

Iago's character--Iago's character in relation to Othello--Iago's plan based solely on Othello's character--His attack on Othello's military life--Othello's judgment his main target--Utilization of cultural and racial elements in Othello's character--Iago awakens religious and superstitious elements--Fatal blow at Othello's love of Desdemona--Othello's downfall.

VII. CONCLUSION.

75

General summation--Othello's downfall his own and not Iago's--His virtue is his vice--Supreme art of Shakespeare--Stoll's and Bradley's theories answered--conclusion.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

86

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Othello . . . stands an unparagoned masterpiece of poetic art, the most sublime and finished conception of Shakespeare's muse," says William R. Turnbull, in his book Othello - A Critical Study; and few there are who would differ from this scholar's opinion.¹ Whoever has had the opportunity of seeing the play, or those many who have read it, must agree that it has a beauty all its own and is deeply human.

To produce such a piece of perfect art requires the utmost skill of the poet. He must know "all qualities of human dealings"² to the highest degree. He must be able to integrate and incorporate, yes, even create persons and situations which are real and true to life. With his mind and productive imagination, Shakespeare has shown his command, deep insight and understanding of humanity in Othello. Some have likened the play to a

1 William R. Turnbull, Othello - A Critical Study, Edinburgh, 1863, 134.

2 William Shakespeare, Complete Works, Oxford Standard Edition, ed. W. J. Craig, New York, 1943, Othello, III, 111, 259-260.

great painting wrought by Titian or Veronese,³ so perfect is it in every way. Art is the imitation of men in action.⁴ Shakespeare practiced in Othello what Aristotle held in theory in the Poetics. He took the story of the Moor and he "accepted it with all its necessary consequence."⁵ It is in the development of the story that Shakespeare's artistic genius unfolds.

The purpose of this thesis will be to demonstrate that the cultural, military, religious and sensual elements in the background of Othello lead him to a psychological state which the cunning Iago perceives and utilizes to effect Othello's tragic decision and downfall. In doing this, the author will also show how Shakespeare weaves the strands of motivation so that the bad judgment and consequent fall of a great and balanced leader, as seen earlier in the play, is not only deemed possible as the play develops but finally inevitable. In the following chapters each of the elements just mentioned will be discussed, showing how they predispose Othello to the action which he finally takes. In this method of pursuit one will be able to see the various traits

³ Frank Harris, The Man Shakespeare and His Tragic Life Story, New York, 1909, 271.

⁴ Aristotle, The Poetics, trans. W. H. Fyfe, Loeb Classical Library, New York, 1927, 1453 b, 12.

⁵ G. G. Gervinus, Shakespeare Commentaries, trans. F. E. Bunnett, 2nd. ed., London, 1875, 506.

in Othello's nature which prove beyond a doubt that his downfall is worked by his own hand and not Iago's.

Once these elements of Othello's character have been discussed, it will be shown how they motivate Othello to action, and how Shakespeare has prepared his hero for what follows. From this one shall be able to see that Shakespeare is the creator of character and that in his works "the character is made to work itself out inevitably, exhibiting and accepting in itself the consequences of its action,"⁶ or as Ralli says, "demonstrates that there is a necessary connection between the hero's actions and his inmost nature."⁷

There are scholars who do not agree with this author's point of view. They believe that Othello's actions do not flow from the character which Shakespeare has portrayed; they deny all psychological probabilities. Foremost of those who deny the probability of Othello's actions is Elmer Edgar Stoll, who says, "Despite the efforts of the psychologists to find it, there is no seed or germ of jealousy or distrust in his make-up. . . . He is brought to a pitch of passion foreign, in a sense to his nature."⁸

⁶ Bernard Bosanquet, A History of Aesthetic, New York, 1910, 359.

⁷ Augustus Ralli, History of Shakespearean Criticism, London, 1932, 108.

⁸ Elmer Edgar Stoll, Shakespeare Studies, New York, 1927, 93-94.

In an article, Source and Motive in Macbeth and Othello, Stoll says the like when discussing the character of Macbeth and Othello. He says:

Neither change is probable. In neither is there much of what can be called psychology. In life neither person would really have done what he did. . . . The hero's conduct, at the heart of the action is . . . not in keeping with his essential nature but in contrast with it.⁹

One gathers from reading Mr. Stoll's works that an author would do violence to his characters if he would have them performing actions which do not coincide with the description given of them in the earlier part of the play. Hence, because Othello is portrayed as being such a noble and grand person in the beginning of the play it is not only very impossible but most improbable that what he does at the end of the play is not due to his character. Thus, for Stoll, there could be no connection between Othello's background and his action, since the character of the play and his nature are of little importance. Stoll says, "It is not primarily to present characters in their convincing reality that Shakespeare and the Greeks have written . . . but to set them in a state of high commotion."¹⁰ The value of the play should not be judged by the character portrayal but rather by the

⁹ Elmer Edgar Stoll, "Source and Motive in Macbeth and Othello," Review of English Studies, XIX, 1943, 25.

¹⁰ Stoll, Shakespeare Studies, 94.

way the author sets his characters in motion. If this be done convincingly then the play and the author are great. To help the author do this job well, Stoll offers the theory of 'the calumniator believed'. This is a device which allows the hero to believe a person's remarks just to start a story rolling. The person must be believed because he is represented as the devil, a person entirely outside the realms of reality. There is nothing the hero can do but succumb to what the person would have him do. It makes the hero a helpless pawn in someone's possession. Commenting on his theory, Stoll states that:

The supreme instance of its effectiveness is that it serves the purpose of keeping for the Hero the sympathy which an inborn inclination to suspect or hearken to suspicion would somewhat alienate, and of involving him in closer complication, a sharper contrast. He can at the same time both love and hate more nobly and intensely than if he had come to hate gradually and naturally of himself. His passion is given depth and volume.¹¹

An opinion such as this seems to ruin the very definition of art and tragedy, namely, the imitation of men in action.¹² It would seem that a poet would be writing a play just to have commotion for commotion's sake. Of what value is it to have characters, if they are untrue? As J. I. Stewart says, commenting on Stoll's theory:

¹¹ Ibid., 94.

¹² Aristotle, Poetics, 1447 a, 11.

For it is surely no good setting characters in commotion, however high, that is simply commotion per se. In Shakespeare--and typically in . . . Othello--there is something like a deliberate omitting of clear and sufficient motives for action, there is a lack of discernible correspondence between the man and his deed. And in place of such an unimpeachable psychology we are offered the steep tragic contrast afforded by men arbitrarily precipitated into situations to which they could by no means bring themselves; we are offered this and behind it--lest we should begin inconveniently to use our wits before we are out in the street again--new external forces of irresistible evil and now a sort of finessing technique in which motives are advanced and then withdrawn before their weight can be estimated.¹³

Most critics find it rather difficult to accept Stoll's theory of characters set in commotion by a calumniator whose only purpose in the play is to start the action moving. These men naturally look for some human plausibility in the dramatis personae, some evidence which is known of the characters to give sufficient motives to their actions.

Differing from Stoll in his opinion is Professor Bradley. For Bradley the play is not so much a play of character but rather a play of intrigue or accident. Plausibility of character is had by making Othello a colossal hero. Othello's tragedy, according to Bradley, is that

his whole nature was indisposed to 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

¹³ J. I. Stewart, Character and Motive in Shakespeare, London, 1949, 87.

conceivable.¹⁴

Professor Bradley comes close to agreeing with the author of this thesis on his point of view. However, a little later in his work, Bradley goes on to say that this jealous nature found in Othello is the only thing necessary to bring about the tragedy. All the essential characteristics of Othello are not necessary to bring about the tragic action. Bradley says that these characteristics make, "a difference to our idea of him, they make a difference to the action and catastrophe, but in regard to the essentials of his character they are not important."¹⁵

It would seem that even Professor Bradley's appraisal of Othello's character is lacking all the requisites of character delineation. A man is such a man because of the numerous traits which form his background. They influence his every move. To grant that some influence his being and others do not is to overlook the psychological nature of a man's character. It is not just jealousy that motivates Othello to his action but all the essential backgrounds which compose his character incline him to his course of action.

J. I. Stewart, an eminent Shakespearean scholar, is of the opinion that there is a definite psychological pattern in

14 A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, London, 1926, 189.

15 Ibid., 190.

Othello's character. Othello does what he does and believes what he believes because there is something in him which tends towards that. Mr. Stewart remarks:

Othello . . . believes Iago's calumny neither because there is a convention that he must do so in order to start a yarn (which is Stoll) nor because he is too noble to suspect evil (which is Bradley). He believes Iago's calumny because there is something in his nature which leads him to do so.¹⁶

This would be more in keeping with the Aristotelian view of tragedy. It would demand a flaw in character, "something in the hero's nature which leads him to do what he does."¹⁷ Hence, it follows that if the poet endows his hero with various backgrounds which incline him to his particular flaw, he will be the cause of his own downfall. Stewart is of the opinion that an Othello understood in this light is much more intelligible than an Othello merely pushed around by external forces.¹⁸ Stewart is not alone in his opinion. Gervinus is of the same mind as Stewart when he says that, "with his sense of psychological truth he sought the ground work of a passion of such strength as the issue of the story of the Moor of Venice supposed."¹⁹ M. E. Prior says that

16 Stewart, Character and Motive, 103.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., 97-109.

19 Gervinus, Commentaries, 506.

there is not one incident, no matter how small, which does not throw some new light on the character of Othello throughout the play. Everything enhances the probability of his action.²⁰ Another scholar, H. Granville-Barker, is of the same opinion when he says that "the problem, then, and the essential structure of the play, will be psychological, the action primarily an interior action."²¹

In the following chapters of this thesis it will be shown that, contrary to Stoll and his school, Othello's actions are not only possible but probable; contrary to Bradley, all the elements, not just part, which make a man what he is, play an important role in his life and are the cause of his actions.

²⁰ Moody E. Prior, "Character in Relation to Action in Othello," Modern Philology, XLIV, May, 1947, 225.

²¹ H. Granville-Barker, "Othello," Prefaces to Shakespeare, Fourth Series, London, 1945, vi.

CHAPTER II

MILITARY LIFE OF OTHELLO

To draw a conclusion concerning the characteristics of a man from one's first impression of him is superficial and mediocre. There is but one way to come to a deep and true knowledge of any man and that way is closely to analyze his words, thoughts and actions. This will help to draw a picture which is much more true to life and accurate.

To understand Othello, the man, it will help to study the various sources of motivation which compose his character. The first element of Othello's background or source of motivation is his military life. Whatever can be gathered about Othello, the man and soldier, will shed more light on the difficulty of whether or not the noble Moor's deed is in keeping with his character. Much can be gathered from a careful study of this phase of Othello's life.

What type of man is Othello? Foremost, Othello is a soldier by profession whose life has been spent in deeds of military prowess and adventure, but who has had little experience either in the way of society or of the intrigues of men. He himself says:

For since these arms of mine had seven years pith,
Till now some nine moons wasted, they have us'd
Their dearest action in the tented field;
And little of this great world can I speak,
More than pertains to feats of breil and battle.¹

His prowess has raised his stature to that of a leader of men, both as general of an army and as governor of Cypress in spite of his ancestry. He was "all-in-all sufficient."² To have risen to such a position as this required that he have outstanding qualities which others saw in him. A leader of men must be shrewd, just, good, courageous, and, above all, a man's man. No doubt the Venetians recognized his great courage and stamina, his justice and goodness, his thorough masculinity. He is, because of this, the valued servant of the Venetian state.

Perhaps one of the military and executive qualities to which Othello frequently had recourse was his judgment. As a soldier and, especially as a general, he had to make quick, sure judgments in time of battle. A hurried appraisal with his eyes surveying the situation was all that time would allow him. Without hesitation and on the spot, then, his military mind made judgments. Granville-Barker says, "in judgment he was swift and uncompromising."³ Really, Othello knew of no other way to judge.

1 Othello, I, iii, 83-87.

2 Ibid., IV, i, 275.

3 Granville-Barker, "Othello", Prefaces, 177.

To sit down and deliberate was well nigh impossible to his nature since his military life had never allowed him to experience the time necessary for deep thought. Othello's judgment, one learns from the play, never betrayed him. For this reason self-confidence was to be found in his military character. Since his quick and sure judgments had never been wrong and were the basis of all the success he had achieved, Othello was inclined to believe that his judgment was perfect. As a soldier he was open and frank; he could see no guile in himself. Since he was so confident and trusted himself to such a high degree, he judged most men to be honest who but seemed to be so; he thought things true which but seemed to be so. Life in the army had tempered his disposition in this way. It was only natural that Othello, whose life for the most part had been spent on the battle field, should, as a civilian, act in the same manner as he did when he was a soldier. In society it was hard for him, although he did not realize this, to understand and judge men and their actions other than in his military capacity. Indeed, he is one who "generous in his views of men and things, could understand the maneuvers of an army, but not the movements of man."⁴

Since Othello trusted his judgment so highly, when he chose someone to do a deed he placed full confidence and faith in

⁴ James H. Cotter, Shakespeare's Art, Cincinnati, 1903, 120.

that person. Once established, his confidence was without limit. This is in evidence from the very beginning of the play. For some good and sufficient reason, Othello had picked Cassio for his lieutenant over Iago. He had judged that Cassio better fulfilled the requisites necessary for the vacated military post. His judgment placed full confidence in Cassio.

Again, in the second act of the play, Othello displays his swift judgment. Once more it has to do with Cassio. On the spot, Othello on hearing of Cassio's offence dismisses him from his service. "Cassio, I love thee; but never more be officer of mine."⁵ This demonstrates a definite procedure in Othello. Once he had made up his mind, once he had judged, nothing could sway him. Duty came first; personal feelings were secondary.

Not once but twice does Shakespeare underline the Moor's specific judicial capacity in the early moments of the play. Undoubtedly Shakespeare, being the genius he was, wished to show what seeds of danger might be dormant in a man whose judgment was so inflexible. If that mind which judged so quickly and surely were once upset, if the confidence that Othello had in himself and others was shown to be false, composure would be hard to regain. This judgment had been one of the most outstanding virtues which

5 Othello, II, 111, 242-243.

Othello, the soldier, had possessed. Herein lies Othello's tragedy, for that judgment which to him was a virtue and in which he took great pride will prove to be his downfall; his virtue will, in reality, be his vice. Immediately one can see the great significance of this judicial capacity. Can the soldier, Othello, exercise a judgment as Othello the man, which separates his military from his domestic duties?⁶ When Desdemona begs to go with Othello to Cypress, the Moor states that it is impossible that his domestic life should interfere with his military life. His virtue, of which he is so confident, makes him say:

. . . No, when light-wing'd toys
 Of feather'd Cupid seal with wanton dulness
 My speculative and offic'd instruments,
 That my disports corrupt and taint my business,
 Let housewives make a skillet of my helm,
 And all indign and base adversities
 Make head against my estimation.⁷

From Othello's own words one can see that

the collection in his speech of images in the paired terms 'skillet' and 'helm' represents a new development. They suggest to Othello's mind an impossibility so gross that he can visualize it only as an absurd spectacle, namely, his war helmet converted to kitchen uses. In other words, he is confident that his judgment is adequate to separate his domestic

6 G. R. Kliger, "Othello, Man of Judgment," Modern Philology, XLVIII, May, 1951, 221-224.

7 Othello, I, 111, 270-276

and military obligations.⁸

Once more, Othello had exercised his judgment; without delay he had judged, as he undoubtedly did so often in battle, that he would have the situation well in hand.

Here the dramatic genius of Shakespeare can be detected. It was foremost in the poet's mind to have his hero fall because of his own characteristic traits. Little by little he is making it clear to the audience that Othello's judgment is not always what the hero thinks it to be. By so doing, Shakespeare shows that "the chief attraction to his work is not in reality the story but the psychological development and delineation of character."⁹

That Othello is over-confident in his judgment, the hero himself tells the audience in the final act:

then must you speak
Of one that lov'd not wisely but too well;
Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,
Perplex'd in the extreme.¹⁰

From this it can be seen that when the Moor does exercise his judgment and can separate his military from his domestic duties he has command of any situation. Since he would seldom contemplate things, Othello's soldier-mind, always ready to make a decision at a moment's notice, must grasp things from the beginning or else he would not be able to comprehend them at all. When something comes

8 Kliger, "Othello," Modern Philology, XLVIII, 221.

9 Turnbull, Othello - A Critical Study, 121.

10 Othello, V, 11, 342-345.

to his attention which he cannot immediately grasp, then his emotions are aroused, his mind becomes confused and he is perplexed in the extreme. This is not too hard to understand of so grand a man as Othello when one recalls that most of his life had been spent in an army and he had had little or no experience of the ordinary man of his day. It is not surprising, then, to find Othello judging his wife and her actions in the same manner as he judged his army. If he could judge immediately of her and her actions he was content, but when he could not his life was a turmoil.

Othello has merged his whole life, as soldier and lover both, and he consequently has lost his particular judicial capacity; he is indeed perplexed. In perplexity, he becomes jealous and eventually a murderer.¹¹

Othello's greeting of Desdemona, "O, my fair warrior,"¹² on her arrival at Cyprus indicates the Moor's incapacity for separating his military and domestic lives.

Besides this military quality, Othello displays other elements which round out the perfect soldier. Theodore Spencer says that, "in presenting the character of Othello to his audience Shakespeare emphasizes very strongly his grandeur, self-control

11 Kliger, "Othello," Modern Philology, XLVIII, 222.

12 Othello, II, 1, 185.

and nobility."¹³ Indeed, the Moor lives before the audience's eyes as a soldier in command of all situations. By word or gesture he holds all in sway. To Barbantio, when well he might have just cause for anger, he is mild and obedient; to Cassio, on learning of his supposed offence, he is stern but kind. Othello's rebuke of Cassio shows this. "Cassio, I love thee, but never more be officer of mine."¹⁴ To this nobility and self-control of Othello, Theodore Spencer adds that, "this control, and the nobility that goes with it, are reflected in the rhythm of his speech; in his lines there is an assured grandeur, and exalted authority, as he rises without effort to any emergency."¹⁵

Indeed, if there is one quality which stands out in Othello's character and is almost as predominant as his judgment it is the rich imagination and rhythm of expression with which he is endowed. The colorful images rise naturally out of his emotions. They seem to come almost unconsciously whenever he is talking. In a sense, it is part of his very nature to use such colorful language. This imagery shows that Othello's "emotional nature is highly sensuous, easily kindled and interprets everything through

¹³ Theodore Spencer, Shakespeare and the Nature of Man, 2nd. ed., New York, 1949, 127.

¹⁴ Othello, II, iii, 249-250.

¹⁵ Spencer, Nature of Man, 128.

the senses."¹⁶ The temptation scene (III, iii) is enough to point out how true this is. However, it must be remembered that although his imagination makes him very sensitive, tender and considerate, not one of these qualities detracts from Othello's masculinity and virility. Very often masculinity and virility are had in a man's character but with a loss of the sensitive side; and it often happens that a man with a very sensitive nature finds himself deprived of his masculinity and virility. This is not the case of Othello. He has both qualities well blended in his person.

Also adherent to this man is the characteristic trait of a swift temper. Once aroused, that temper will stop at nothing. It seems as though his very being tends in that direction; and Shakespeare would not have this any other way.

. . . Now, by heaven,
 My blood begins my safer guides to rule,
 And passion, having my best judgment collid,
 Assays to lead the way. If I once stir,
 Or do but lift this arm, the best of you
 Shall sink in my rebuke.¹⁷

Is it any wonder then that one could rightly say of Othello that, "hesitation is almost impossible to him, that he is extremely self-reliant, and decides and acts instantaneously, that if stir-

¹⁶ T. H. Clemen, The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery, London, 1951, 124.

¹⁷ Othello, II, iii, 206-211.

red to indignation he answers with one lightning stroke"¹⁸

Is it any wonder then that Othello has been called, "a colossal hero, sure of pre-eminence when in repose, but as terrible as an earthquake when disturbed"¹⁹

Beyond a doubt, Shakespeare has given us a romantic hero, a warrior and a leader of men. A man in the world but not belonging to it. The romance of war has filtered into his blood which, one might say, gives him a grandeur of which he himself is unaware. Though by his own admission he is rude of speech, his imagery and poetry does not betray the fact that he spent most of his years in a soldier's camp. Above all he is a soldier went to find his way through countless situations with his sharp sword and keen judgment. But this noble being finds, when he cannot do things his way, that he is lost in the world in which he lives.

Here, then, is Othello, the man and soldier; here is but one of the elements in his background which make him the man he is. Indeed, Shakespeare has begun to mold Othello in such a fashion that one can even now say with Granville-Barker that "the story is of the very essence of man; the conflict, victory and defeat is innate and inevitable in what the character is."²⁰

18 Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, 191.

19 Hardin Craig, An Interpretation of Shakespeare, New York, 1948, 196.

20 Granville-Barker, "Othello," Prefaces, 8.

CHAPTER III

COLOR AND CULTURE

Just as government, the progress of science, morals, manners and customs tend to influence the age in which a man lives, so also do the various elements of his background influence his entire being. Man is composed of many elements which fused together produce the complete man. These elements produce a man's habits, his way of thinking and acting. One element alone is not responsible for man's over-all actions; but all the elements together give the reason why a man is what he is. This is no less true of Othello.

One must consider Othello's ancestry and culture to help him arrive at a better understanding of the finished product of Othello, the man. This will by no means be the final step in reproducing the entire Othello. However, it will give the reader a greater insight and deeper understanding of Othello's character.

A problem must first be solved before one can understand Othello's character completely. From what race is the noble Moor descended? It is important that this question be considered here and now. Once it has been established that Othello belongs to a certain race it will be an invaluable aid in showing

one how the traits of that race are to be found in Othello. At the same time it will show that, contrary to Professor Bradley's belief, race does play an important role in Othello's character.¹

This question has been discussed time and time again by the numerous critics of Shakespeare. Naturally there are two groups, those who deny that Othello was a Negro and those who affirm it. George Brandes is such a one who uncontestedly holds that "it is quite unreasonable to suppose that he (Shakespeare) thought of him (Othello) as a Negro."² It would seem that Mr. Brandes' argument for his case comes to this, namely, that if Othello were actually a Negro he could not have attained the position he held in Venice when the play begins. Moreover, it is only through envy of Othello, according to Brandes, that the other dramatis personae refer to him as "thick-lips," "sooty bosom" and "a Barbary horse."³ Even when Othello speaks of himself as black he only means that he is dark. Because of this, Mr. Brandes concludes that Shakespeare meant Othello to be brown, to be a Moor.⁴

1 Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, 187.

2 George Brandes, William Shakespeare - A Critical Study, New York, 1927, 448.

3 These quotations are from Othello, I, i, 66; II, iii, 69; I, i, 112.

4 Brandes, A Critical Study, 439.

If this argument is true then it follows that characters when speaking in the play mean other than what they actually say. Therefore, nothing significant can be held concerning them. Neither Mr. Brandes nor his school nor those who hold that Othello is a Negro could come to any conclusion since there is no evidence left by Shakespeare, other than the play, as regards Othello's ancestry. Because of this, the author of this thesis finds it difficult to agree with Mr. Brandes. He holds that "Othello's race is of paramount importance to the play"⁵ and that Othello is uncontestedly black. Othello's blackness gives Iago burning medicine to pour into the aged Barbantio's ear. The thought of a black man marrying a white girl makes him say, "Even now, now, very now, an old black ram is tupping your white ewe."⁶ Later Barbantio tells the senate that nature has preposterously erred in this union.

in spite of nature,
Of years, of country, credit, everything—
To fall in love with what she fear'd to look on!
It is a judgment main'd and most imperfect,
That will confess perfection so could err
Against all rules of nature.⁷

These examples and those which were quoted a few line previous to this must be taken at their face value. They explain why Barban-

⁵ Margaret Webster, Shakespeare Without Tears, New York, 1942, 237.

⁶ Othello, I, i, 90-91.

⁷ Ibid., I, iii, 98-103.

tio is so upset on hearing of the marriage. They give Iago and Roderigo ample and juicy opportunity enough to appeal to the repugnance of a white girl marrying a black man. Margaret Webster says that for almost two centuries after the play was first presented Othello was represented on the stage as black. It was only after nice minds considered that it was rather unladylike for Desdemona to do such a thing that Othello's color was changed.⁸ Miss Webster goes on to say:

They cannot have been more horrified than Barbantio, her father, who thought that only witchcraft could have caused 'nature so preposterously to err,' or more convinced of the disastrous outcome of such a match than Iago, who looked upon it as nothing but a 'frail vow between an erring Barbarian and a supersubtle Venetian,' and declared, with his invincible synicism, that 'when she is sated with his body, she will find the error of her choice.'⁹

However, this is the very idea which the poet wished to convey to the reader. He wanted the father of this white girl to be scandalized at the marriage, the reason being that Shakespeare could show that color meant nothing to Desdemona. Besides this, it also could bring out why Desdemona was so truly loved by the Moor. She was the first one whom he had ever met who loved him as he was. Evidently, Othello was well aware of what people would say concerning his marriage. It is this point that Iago

8 Webster, Shakespeare Without Tears, 237.

9 Ibid., 237-238.

will use later in the play to show that Desdemona is unfaithful. No, Shakespeare's genius realized all of this when he wrote the play and had very definite ideas as to Othello's color. This color, the author concludes, is black. "To scamp this consideration in the play is to deprive Othello of his greatest weakness."¹⁰

Another argument in favor of Othello's being black is offered by Harold Goddard. Mr. Goddard draws his opinion on an analogy of the three leading characters. He says:

Othello and Iago must have been conceived at the moment that the analogy struck the poet, one black without and white within, the other white without and black within. And to these two a third was inevitably added, Desdemona, white both without and within. . . . To the imagination, black, not brown, represents the shadow, evil, death. On the level of poetry that settles it beyond appeal. Othello is black.¹¹

Evidence points to Othello's being black, a Negro, and as such he had many of the characteristics of his race. Perhaps the most striking trait of the Negro race to be found in Othello is the way they regard their women. It is true that this is not a prime factor upon which the play depends, but it is every present and contributes to Othello's character.

Throughout the entire play the atmosphere is steeped in

¹⁰ Ibid., 239.

¹¹ Harold C. Goddard, The Meaning of Shakespeare, Chicago, 1951, 459-460.

sensuality. Othello's color, his apparent unknown origin, the many strange places to which he has traveled and in which he has waged war, the frequent scenes that take place at night, and the numerous remarks of sensual passion all give evidence of this element as found in the play. In his book, Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, August Schlegel considers Othello to be "of the wild nature of that glowing zone which generates the most raging beast of prey, the most deadly poisons."¹² How true this statement is in regard to Desdemona can be seen from the play. The thought that some other man has had an affair with his wife and that she has been unfaithful to him can make Othello say:

If I do prove her haggard,
 Though that her jesses were my dear heart strings
 I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind,
 To prey at fortune.
 O the curse of marriage!
 That we can call these delicate creatures ours,
 And not their appetites. I had rather be a toad
 And live upon the vapour of a dungeon,
 Than keep a corner in the thing I love
 For other's uses.¹³

As soon as the poison which Iago has poured into the Moor's ear about his wife takes hold there soon rages through Othello's Negro blood a sexual jealousy which "is of that sensual kind from which in burning climes, has sprung the disgraceful ill

¹² August Schlegel, Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, trans. J. Black, ed. A. Morrison, London, 1902, 401.

¹³ Othello, III, iii, 259-273.

treatment of women and many other unnatural usages."¹⁴

It is commonly supposed that Othello does mistreat Desdemona when he is convinced of her infidelity and thus Mr. Schlegel's statement is true in showing that Othello's character is fashioned after that of his race. However, it must be remembered that Othello was civilized and far from displaying the base savageness which Schlegel's statement suggests.

Throughout the third act, third scene, this sexual trait is kept ever before the reader's mind. Any hint or innuendo of Desdemona's infidelity brings Othello's tropical blood to a boiling point of savage frenzy. There can be no doubt that, although Othello is spoken of as "the noble Moor,"¹⁵ he has been made by Shakespeare to embody all the intense distrust and jealousy of colored people where their womenfolk are concerned.¹⁶ Once convinced of his wife's unfaithfulness, Othello would have it in his mind's eye that an unfaithful wife had soiled the honor of a wronged husband, and because of that there was but one vindication possible; death to the disloyal wife and the lustful lover. In this element "Shakespeare reveals Othello as true to type, follow-

14 Schlegel, Lectures, 402.

15 Othello, IV, 1, 275.

16 Cumberland Clark, Shakespeare and Psychology, London, 1936, 100.

ing his racial instincts."¹⁷

Shakespeare ever mindful of his task of portraying a true to life character has also endowed Othello with colorful and vivid language which is associated to his race. This trait is most natural in Othello for with one possessed of such an imagination as his, which must see concrete things and not abstract; the language spoken should be rich and colorful. One of the most beautiful parts of Othello's speech in the play comes at the very end. It demonstrates that his mind cannot deal with abstractions and that his language is just as rich as his imagination. When describing himself he says:

Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdu'd eyes
Albeit unused to the melting mood,
Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their med'cinable gum.¹⁸

Indeed, with Othello

the images rise naturally out of his emotions. They come to him easily and unconsciously whenever he is talking. He is a character endowed with rich imagination, it is part of his very nature to use imagery.¹⁹

The importance of these traits as portrayed in Othello cannot be stressed too strongly for on them hinge some of the

17 Ibid., 102.

18 Othello, V,11, 346-350.

19 W. H. Clemen, The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery, London, 1951, 120.

play's prime factors. It is here in this background of Othello's that Iago finds material to arouse the "noble Moor"²⁰ whom at first sight seems to have mastered most of the traits attributed to his race. Truly can Van Doren say of him:

The jungle in Othello is ever enemy to his garden. The ordered rows of his princely manner are in constant danger of being overwhelmed by a wild-beast growth, savage in its strength and monstrous in its form.²¹

Once aroused, the wild savagry which lies dormant in him will awaken such deeds and thoughts that were almost considered impossible for him to do; once aroused, Othello would be like an African lion trying to acclimate itself to the air of Venice and Cyprus.

If "race in regard to the essentials of Othello's character is not important,"²² as Professor Bradley maintains, then Othello's character loses all its meaning. One cannot imagine that Shakespeare would paint a portrait of a man and have no intention of endowing that picture which he has painted with the essentials necessary to make it real, true to life. Iago, it must be remembered, uses Othello's color and race to plant the seed of Desdemona's infidelity in his mind. To have Othello be-

20 Othello, IV, 1, 275.

21 Mark Van Doren, Shakespeare, New York, 1939, 235.

22 Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, 187.

come suspicious about a trait which does not have a thing to do with the essentials of his character, is to make Shakespeare a thoughtless writer. W. R. Turnbull, the author believes, has the best answer to the Bradley problem. He says of Othello:

He cannot emancipate himself from the beliefs and traditions, still less from the influence of those unreasoning impulses that are peculiar to his race, so as to see things around him in their real relations. He is subject to the bias of race. His opinions are warped, and his judgment is distorted by inherited emotion. And his virtues, incapable of extricating themselves from ancient abuses and excesses, are gradually transformed by credulity, superstitions and fanaticism into fatal infatuations.²³

Race, then, does have a definite part to play in Othello's character.

Besides being a stranger in Venice because of his race and complexion, Othello is also a stranger to the habits and the natural disposition of the state. His nine years of military life have hampered him from gradually acquainting himself with the daily customs and practices of the people with whom he associates. In his speech to the senators of Venice, Othello tells them that he is ignorant of the world and its customs. "Little of this great world can I speak."²⁴ Little wonder then that the "simpler amenities and its customary household comforts are luxuries which he has only come to know in the last nine moons since his military

23 Turnbull, Othello - A Critical Study, 5.

24 Othello, I, iii, 86.

occupation brought him to Venice."²⁵ This was most natural for, besides being a soldier and having spent most of his life in a military regime, another factor in his ignorance of the customs and habits of the people was undoubtedly the fact that the indelible mark of his birth was ever present to remind him and others of his origin. It is true that his bravery had made others, for a time, forget his color but his war-like deeds and even his royal birth could not liberate him from the prejudices of the people with whom he associated. This is the reason why Othello was so diffident and unsure of himself in his dealing with others and it is the reason why he remained ignorant of the times. His sensitive nature could not understand the way others lived, and try as he may, he could not become accustomed to them.

That Iago should also use this factor to arouse Othello is evident. He was well aware of Othello's ignorance and of the various dispositions peculiar to Othello's race. Knowing this, it is a foregone conclusion that Othello's tragic ruin naturally comes from his being an alien not only as regards his race but also as regards the customs, habits, land, and the spirit of his day.

²⁵ H. B. Charlton, Shakespearean Tragedy, Cambridge, 1948, 134.

CHAPTER IV

RELIGION AND SUPERSTITION

If Shakespeare's play, like all true tragedies, is to be a "tragedy of character"¹ he cannot fail to endow his hero with all the elements which will produce the complete man. Thus far attention has been, more or less, on the exterior of the man, his habits, his acts; but what of his beliefs? Iago's words, "Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus,"² point out that a man is what he is according to his beliefs. By considering Othello's creed now it will help give a more understanding picture of the entire man because Othello's religion flows naturally from his ancestry. Even in this phase of portraying the Moor's life, one will find that Shakespeare is no less deliberate than he was before. If Othello's tragic downfall is to be not only possible but probable there must be evidence of the hero's action in his entire character.

What was Othello's religion? By birth he undoubtedly was a Mohammeden. His tilte, "The Moor," tells one that. How-

1 Granville-Barker, "Othello," Prefaces, 9.

2 Othello, I, iii, 323.

ever, it is known from the play that Othello was a convert to Christianity. Iago's words:

And what's he then that says I play the villain?
 When this advice is free I give and honest,
 Probal to thinking, and indeed the course
 To win the Moor again? For 'tis most easy
 The inclining Desdemona to subdue
 In any honest suit. She's framed as fruitful
 As the free elements. And then for her
 To win the Moor, were't to renounce his baptism,
 All seals and symbols of redeemed sin,
 His soul is so enfetber'd to her love,
 That she may make, unmake, do what she list,
 Even as her appetite shall play the god
 With his weak function.³

show that Othello was not too strong in his acceptance of his new religion. In fact, Iago speaks these words to Cassio when telling to implore Desdemona to aid him in being reinstated in the Moor's good graces. His indication is that the one person who could influence Othello to denounce his faith is Desdemona.

That Othello "adopts all Christianity's major articles of belief"⁴ is easily discernible. His belief in the immortality of the soul is seen in the very last act when about to slay his wife. He will destroy her body but not her soul. "I would not kill they unprepared spirit; No, heaven forfend, I would not kill thy soul."⁵ His acceptance of confession may also be found in the

3 Othello, II, 111, 327-339.

4 Charlton, Shakespearean Tragedy, 119.

5 Othello, V, 11, 31-32.

last scene when Othello speaking to Desdemona says, "therefore confess thee freely of thy sin."⁶ His words:

you, mistress,
That have the office opposite to Saint Peter,
And keep the gate of hell,⁷

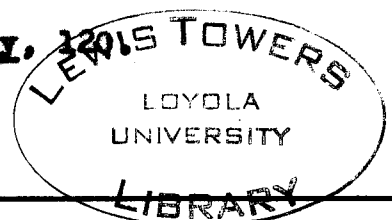
are pronouncements enough of Othello's Christianity.

However, on a careful study of the play, it would seem that these Christian beliefs are but skin deep no matter how sincerely Othello holds them. H. B. Charlton, in his book Shakespearean Tragedy, says of Othello's adopted religion that, "these pronouncements of accepted Christian doctrine spring vitally to his mind only in the stress of agitated feeling, and most often in immediate connection with some crucial action."⁸ When emotionally disturbed Othello does remember his Christianity but not in the way one would expect of an ordinary Christian. When he is about to kill Desdemona, his Christian belief will not allow him to confess the act until he is sure that his wife has repented of her sin, for he would not condemn her soul to hell. And yet he goes about her murder as though it were a sacrifice. Othello's Christianity is such that in time of stress he recalls its major

6 Othello, V, 11, 52.

7 Ibid., IV, 11, 89-91.

8 Charlton, Shakespearean Tragedy, 120.



doctrines and would have others remember and practice them. However, these doctrines do not seem to hold command over him. He himself does not benefit nor take consolation from them as he would that others should. Thus, Charlton can say that in crucial action the Christian doctrine springs to his mind, not so much as regards his practice and belief of Christianity but as regards others' practice and belief.

This is indeed verified in the lines quoted on the preceding page and also can be seen in Othello's threat of everlasting damnation to Iago when compelling him to be honest in his exposing of Desdemona's infidelity.

If thou dost slander her and torture me,
Never more pray; abandon all remorse;

.....
For nothing cans't thou to damnation add
Greater than that.⁹

It would seem that Othello mainly finds a code to moral goodness and noble conduct in his Christian religion.

Why, how now, ho! from whence ariseth this?
Are we turn'd Turks, and to ourselves do that
Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?
For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl
He that stirs next to carve for his own rage
Holds his soul light; he dies upon his motion.¹⁰

In other words, there is a definite pattern for goodness in the

9 Othello, III, iii, 369-374.

10 Ibid., II, iii, 172-177

religion which he likes and accepts. Although he has accepted Christianity completely and was sincere in his devotion to it, it seems, as has been said before, that it was only skin deep. When disturbed from within, when once his tropical blood becomes heated, he does not seek refuge and comfort in his adopted religion but rather flees to a more pagan cult, everlasting lights, elements and the like. To these does he pray when in distress. The devotion and practice Othello would have others have are not to be found in his acceptance of Christianity. "When his innermost being is stirred to its depths, he breaks out into utterances of a remoter and more mystically articulated religion . . . which belongs better to dim pagan cults than any form of Christian worship."¹¹

After Othello has decided to revenge himself of Desdemona's wrong, it is an African paganism which receives his homage and reverence.

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

 Now by yond marble heaven,
 In due reverence of a sacred vow
 I here engage my words.¹²

Othello looks to the great beyond for solace and aid and not to

11 Charlton, Shakespearean Tragedy, 120.

12 Othello, III, 111, 257-262.

his adopted religion. Again, this paganism can be found in the culmination scene of the tragedy. Othello, proceeds with Desdemona's death as though it were a sacrifice, an oblation. Charlton says that the death of Desdemona, "is wrapped about with a cold atmosphere of solemn sacrifice; but its solemnity is that of some universal rite, in reverence to the chaste stars, and belonging to a religion whose sacraments are not those of a Christian origin."¹³

However, it must be gathered that Othello was sincere in his effort to accept Christianity but that its hold on him was rather shaky. Try as he might he could not "emancipate himself from the beliefs and traditions which were peculiar to his race."¹⁴ His confused mind intermingles his Christianity with his deeply rooted pagan beliefs. In the last scene when about to sacrifice his loyal wife, his Christian beliefs are still to be found burning within him. Even in his own final moments when the truth has been too clearly seen this strange combination of Christianity and paganism racks his poor mind with torment, with a "piercing anticipation of the fate in the after-world wherein the Christian elements are confusedly mixed with the cruder old-world dreads."¹⁵

13 Charlton, Shakespearean Tragedy, 120.

14 Turnbull, Othello - A Critical Study, 448.

15 Charlton, Shakespearean Tragedy, 120.

To this quasi paganism which flows naturally from his lineage another trait is closely allied; namely, Othello's superstition and his belief in the art of magic. That this quality is closely allied to Othello's race is evident from Barbantio's charge on finding his daughter married to the Moor. Othello is accused by the angry Barbantio of having won Desdemona by spells, medicines and witchcraft. No other reason does the aged father have for nature to wander from its course. He says:

She is abus'd, stol'n from me, corrupted
 By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks
 For nature so preposterously to err,
 Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense,
 Sans witchcraft could not.¹⁶

Of course, Othello denies that it was witchcraft that won Desdemona for him. It cannot be denied that Desdemona was attracted to Othello because of his mysterious life. His witchcraft was the tale of his life's toil and dangers. However, deny it as he might, Othello was overly superstitious. This folly is found in the play in Othello's attaching vital importance to the handkerchief, his wedding present to his wife. It is clear that Othello believes that it has charms which a sibyl cast on it and that with it the possessor could always calm the irate feelings of a distraught husband. When demanding the handkerchief from Desdemona in the third act of the play it seems as though this

16 Othello, I, iii, 60-64.

were the one big factor in determining Othello in his course of action. When confronting Desdemona in the garden he does not seek to find out if she has been unfaithful to him but wishes to see the handkerchief. In telling the history of the gift:

She dying gave it me;
And bid, me when my fate would have me wive,
To give it her. I did so: and take heed on't;
Make it a darling like your precious eye;
To lose 't or give't away, were such perdition
As nothing else could match.¹⁷

Desdemona can only gasp, "Is't possible?" It is only now that she fully realizes the great significance it has for him.

Othello's reply to her is ever filled with strangeness and the magic art in which he believes.

'Tis true; there's magic in the web of it;
A sibyl, that had number'd in the world
The sun to course two hundred compasses,
In her prophetic fury sew'd the work;
The worms were hallow'd that did breed the silk,
And it was dy'd in mymy which the skilful
Conserv'd of maidens' hearts.¹⁸

There, indeed, was wonder in the handkerchief but one is inclined to think that it is not so much the magic that upsets Desdemona so but the realization of what belief in the handkerchief had done to her angry husband. As H. H. Horne so aptly put it, Desdemona now knows that "he believes both in Egyptian magic lodged

17 Ibid., III, iv, 64-69.

18 Ibid., 70; 71-75

in the web of the handkerchief, in the fate controlling destiny."¹⁹

There are other passages in which Othello credulously speaks of the omen of a "raven o'er the infected house," and the influence of the moon upon the spirits of men.²⁰ When he speaks of Desdemona's eyes as charms he certainly means everything that modern convention has forgotten in the term. As Mark Van Doren says of Othello's superstition and of its presence in the play:

an infusion of magic does tincture the play--even Iago can call his jealousy of the Moor "a poisonous mineral" that gnaws his inwards--and its source is somehow in Othello. Without his presence it would not be here; his presence, and his extraordinary susceptibility to any suggestion of it.²¹

Beyond a doubt Othello's belief in mysterious powers is deeply rooted in his character. It flows from the pagan religion to which he has recourse when aroused.

Is it any wonder, then, that in Othello's character the reader finds him falling into deep superstition at the least hint from Iago? Little by little the artistic mastery of Shakespeare begins to unfold before one's eyes.

¹⁹ H. H. Horne, Shakespeare's Philosophy of Love, Raleigh, N. C., 1945, 132.

²⁰ Othello, IV, 1, 21.

²¹ Van Doren, Shakespeare, 229.

CHAPTER V

OTHELLO'S LOVE OF DESDEMONA

Anyone who writes on Othello's character and fails to give time to Desdemona would not have entirely discussed the Moor's complete background. It is their union, a union of opposites, upon which the play depends. It is this union from which springs the tragedy and Othello's final destruction.

The question as to whether a man could raise himself to such a frame of mind as to commit the heinous crime has been a question discussed time and time again by most of the Shakespearian critics. They seek to answer whether it is possible to portray a man, who possesses normal faculties, capable of such a deed. In the case of Othello, most of the critics will say that the answer to the question must be that a man, given all the requisites necessary, not only could do such a deed, but undoubtedly would. It is here, then, that the artistic mastery and skill of Shakespeare is to be found. Here, in Othello's and Desdemona's love for each other, Shakespeare executes his supreme power of character delineation and by it shows that Othello's actions and downfall are not only possible but highly probable. In the poet's delineation of the hero and heroine of his play

rests the crux of the problem of his character portrayals. Either they are true to nature or they are not.

But before one can discuss the love life of Othello and Desdemona it will be well to consider for awhile the object of Othello's love, Desdemona herself, for "in the delineation of this woman the poet has sketched a character of extraordinary truth and naturalness."¹ Once it has been seen how the love background of Othello and Desdemona was composed, one will know that the union of two such people could only end the way it did.

Immediately on hearing of Desdemona one learns that she is the exact opposite of Othello. She was:

A maiden never bold;
Of spirit so still and quiet, that her motion
Blush'd at herself.²

Desdemona possessed all the qualities which could make her loveable to the Moor. Shakespeare has given her a beauty which in Othello's words "paragon's description and wild fame."³ In the rapid courtship, if courtship it can be called, Desdemona is the charming housewife, "delicate with her needle, and an admirable musician whose voice could sing the savageness out of a bear."⁴

1 Gervinus, Commentaries, 515.

2 Othello, I, iii, 94-96.

3 Ibid., 98.

4 Ibid., IV, i, 197-198.

She had all the power to sooth Othello, and this although he cared little for music.

Other qualities to be found in this lovely creature are seen in Iago's response to Desdemona's inquiry on a modest maiden. In the picture which Iago paints it is quite evident that he is using Desdemona as his model. To what characters in the play other than Desdemona do Iago's words apply when he paints the maiden as "ever fair and never proud," that she had "tongue at will and yet was never loud"? Both these qualities are easily discernible in Desdemona's character. As Iago continues he says this maiden could "see suitors following, and never look behind, and she could think and ne'er disclose her mind."⁵ These are but paintings of her modesty and patience. But Desdemona's character would not be complete without mentioning her heroic quality of freedom from revenge. In her last moments she does not curse her calumniator but rather blesses him, and to her dying breath, she witholds the truth of her murderer.

Desdemona was a simple pure soul who was ignorant of the world within which she lived, possessing all the fine qualities which one would wish to find in the human heart. Othello and Desdemona are alike in their simplicity. Yet, with all these fine points, Desdemona lacked an active mind and deep insight in-

⁵ These quotations are taken from Othello, II, 1, 148-157.

to human nature. Brandes says that the "figure of Desdemona is one of the most charming Shakespeare has drawn. She is more womanly than other women."⁶ One cannot disagree with this.

To Othello she appears intelligent, gentle and prudent; this comes from the fact that her good conscience is her guide. He admires her reserve and modesty, her sincerity and timidity. One feels that her simplicity was one of the attractions that drew her to Othello for in this characteristic trait they are both alike. Othello's plain open nature undoubtedly would have been repulsed had she been other than what she was. To such a man as Othello the society of a girl like Desdemona would come almost as a revelation. Had Desdemona been a Pertia, she would never have attracted the Moor who would have felt overawed by her intellectual superiority. To a Beatrice he could never have been a Benedict. But in Desdemona he recognizes his complement. Her homelike virtues attracted the habitue of the camp. Indeed, there was nothing in her wit to alarm him, while her womanly pity went to his heart. To such a true man as Othello, the nature most attractive was that of the true woman, and in Desdemona he found it in perfection. Moreover, there was something that must have been specially attractive in Desdemona's sacrifice of herself. As a necessary servant of the state, Othello was doubtless

6 Brandes, A Critical Study, 447.

accustomed to flattery but to love for his own sake he had hitherto been a stranger, and to find that he had almost unwittingly inspired such a passion in the mind of a beautiful Venetian girl must have been specially soothing to his vanity. Nor would this feeling be lessened by the fact that he was already somewhat advanced in age, a veteran to whom the sight of himself preferred before younger men must have been doubly delicious.

It was only natural, then, that Shakespeare's genius saw to it that the "most womanly of women feels herself drawn to the manliest of men."⁷ As has been said, the main attraction for Othello was the precious jewel of Desdemona's humility, modesty and innocence. It was because of this priceless gift of purity which Desdemona possessed that Othello says her name is clear and "fresh as Dian's visage."⁸ Gervinus says of her:

The genuineness of her soul and mind culminates--and this is the highest point of her nature--in perfect freedom from suspicion too deeply rooted in her for the suspicious world. This unsuspectingness is the source of all her noble qualities . . . she never needed the law, and knew no sin; she might err against many rules of conventional custom, but her heart would be pure from stain because any infraction of the eternal moral law would be impossible to her; she has no suspicion of other men, and dreams not that they could think evil of her; this ingenuousness, therefore, is the source of her happiness, and also the cause of her unhappiness.⁹

7 Ibid.

8 Othello, III, 111, 388.

9 Gervinus, Commentaries, 516.

This, then, is the woman whom Othello meets and with whom he falls in love. And yet it was only natural that this girl far younger in years than Othello, of different race and social standing should fall in love with him. She loved Othello for what he was. "I saw Othello's visage in my mind;" and he her because "she lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd, and I lov'd her that she did pity them."¹⁰ Here is the seed of their love, their marriage "was spiritual and not corporeal in its origin."¹¹ Hence, Desdemona was won not by the eye but by the imagination. She was free from that prejudice which others had held against her lover because of his color. This fact made Desdemona all the dearer to him. Hers is a love "born less of the heart than of the imagination."¹² One can say that after hearing of Othello's wonderful life, his travels, wars and hardships, Desdemona really fell in love with her idea of heroic manhood. No doubt, if her mind possessed a deep insight into human nature she would never have been attracted to the Moor, so opposite were their characters.

No less is true of Othello's love of Desdemona. For

10 Quotations are from Othello, I, iii, 253; 167-168.

11 Stewart, Character and Motive, 103.

12 F. S. Boas, Shakespeare and His Predecessors, London, 1896, 226.

Othello, then loves beauty. But in the final analysis you will find that it is the moral element of the beautiful that acts as a leadstar in all the wooing of this warlike soul. Her grace, he perceives, is grafted on something deeper, better, more abiding than symmetry and proportion of form and feature, or delicacy and refinement of manner. Her beauty is not simply an external garment but an instrument of direct spiritual instruction to him.¹³

Othello places Desdemona on a pedestal. Never before has anyone of different race and opposite sex shown such love for him. How proud he must have been actually to see that his color meant nothing to this girl, how flattered that she had turned away from other suitors of her own age and race and picked him! To Othello, Desdemona was the apex of all he believed a woman should be. In her he found a moral worth, a moral value which immediately appealed to his soul. Here, here in this one woman would he place his entire life, yes, even his soul. To such a nature as his, her restfulness, her charm, her beauty and innocence were in themselves a soothing charm. She could sing the savageness out of a beast! Indeed, since Desdemona was the first to love him for what he actually was, Othello finds a peace and solitude, a perfect harmony which he has hitherto not known. She is his sun which sheds her rays upon him blinding his past turbulent broils and feats of war. In her was all he could ever dream or hope to have. She was his god, and could exact

13 Turnbull, Othello - A Critical Study, 347-348.

from him whatever she wished, she was the precious pearl that was richer than all the other gems, she was his world, his solace in whom he was able to build up his strength, his precious warrior, in fine, his life, his heaven or his hell. He even says, "My life upon her soul."¹⁴

So true was it that Desdemona was Othello's life and world that the first thing Othello's confused mind dwells on when he is convinced of Desdemona's infidelity is that of his life's work. His whole world sinks, his life is gone.

O! now, for ever
Farewell the tranquil mind; farewell content!
Farewell the plumed troop and the big wars
That make ambition virtue! O, farewell!
Farewell! Othello's occupations gone!¹⁵

or "If this be true then heaven mocks itself."¹⁶ Othello's love was so much a part of the complete man that all the elements of his life are united in it.

A point discussed in the first chapter of this thesis again comes to the fore when discussing Othello's love of Desdemona, namely, the part his domestic life played on his military life. The fact is that they are one, for Othello so loved Desdemona that his whole life rested on it. But, alas, this is

¹⁴ Othello, I, 111, 296.

¹⁵ Ibid., III, 111, 348-358.

¹⁶ Ibid., 278.

where the noble Moor makes a sad mistake, He is certain that he can keep both lives separated but, of course, he cannot. This is why S. Kliger can say that

had he loved wisely, he could indeed have kept his military and domestic life separated; but he loves too well. In short, the particular reason why he succumbs to Iago's schemes . . . is the fact that, in Desdemona's case, precisely because he loves her too well, Othello has merged his whole life, as soldier and lover both.¹⁷

In truth, when he cannot love Desdemona then chaos is come again.

Here brief space must be given to Professor Stoll whose argument was mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis.

Stoll is of the opinion that Othello's actions need in no way flow from the character he was. The poet's aim is not to give characteristic traits to his hero to make his actions possible or probable. Stoll says:

Comprehend one does not and cannot, one but sees and hears and is swept along. He (the poet) presents no studies of love, ambition, pride, or jealousy, though he presents characters powerfully animated by such passions. And upon the causes and springs of action he is often content not to intrude.¹⁸

However, everything is explained by Shakespeare in his characterization of Othello. Granted all the characteristics of Othello, and knowing that his love was ideal, spiritual, and not too corporeal in origin, the least hint that Desdemona was not all he

17 Kliger, "Othello," Modern Philology, XLVIII, 222.

18 Ibid., 224.

had imagined her to be would be sufficient cause in Othello's case to send him from the heights of virtue to the depths of vice. As T. Spencer says, "Othello, the man of action, who is in his own world, and has given that world to Desdemona, when he finds lustfulness, as he thinks, in her can, for the time being, only grovel on the floor."¹⁹ How true this is when one considers that Othello's love was a thing of the mind, ideal in nature. That he is capable of such action, then, flows quite naturally from his character. But, lest this does not seem a sufficient reason for some, one is able to consider whether Othello's action against his wife is probable from another point of view. To do this it will be necessary to go to the very foundation of drama and tragedy to show how true to life Shakespeare has made Othello.

The object of drama, Aristotle says, is to "represent men in action."²⁰ This means that the poet must paint a picture of a man's character by means of actions which are true to life. One must admit that Shakespeare has fulfilled all the requirements necessary to allow Othello, in his love of Desdemona, to raise himself to such a state of mind that as a result his actions are inevitable as regards Desdemona.

In his Grammar of Assent, Cardinal Newman, discussing

19 Spencer, Nature of Man, 130.

20 Aristotle, Poetics, 1447 a, 11.

how the will of a man can be influenced to move him to action, gives the answer to the probability of Othello's actions, since Newman's principles can be applied to Othello also. Cardinal Newman says that there are two types of assent, notional and real, and that it is not only a man's knowledge or imagination which influence him to act, but "hope and fear, likes and dislikes, appetites, passion, affections, the stirrings of selfishness and self love."²¹ Notional assents are most common to every man. That is he can reason about the idea, contemplate it, and finally assent to its genuineness and logicalness. However, an assent of this type is not sufficient to cause a man to act. There must be real assent for it is higher than a notional one since it is stronger, more vivid and forcible, and can stimulate the emotions and will to act.

Newman goes on to say that real assent is something personal to the individual. By this he undoubtedly means that it is a complex thing composed of his entire background. A real assent must not only have knowledge and imagination, as does notional assent, but it must have the imagination made active through experience. Once the imagination is in motion it causes vivid pictures which arouse the emotions, and once the emotions

²¹ John Henry Cardinal Newman, Grammar of Assent, ed. C. F. Harrold, New York, 1947, 24-74; C. F. Harrold, John Henry Newman, London, 1945, 146.

have been stirred, then is "given to the world of men one idea of immense energy, of adamant will of the revolutionary power."²²

Othello follows this pattern of real assent. Knowing that his love was more ideal than corporeal in origin, the least mention that Desdemona was not all she should be and that she was unfaithful to him was sufficient to arouse Othello's vivid imagination which provoked his emotions. These, in turn, caused a real assent on his part that Desdemona was untrue to him. One need only read the temptation scene (III,iii) to see the vivid pictures of lust which invaded his mind and stirred it to action. In fact, so ideal was Othello's love of Desdemona and hers for him that Othello "regarded Desdemona's love for him as a dream too beautiful to be true."²³ This being the case, when his mind was convinced that that dream was not true he was moved by his emotions to act as he did.

Deny one cannot that Shakespeare has made this love match flow from the nature of the characters he has created. Already one can see and feel the uncertainty which is beneath the surface. As Turnbull so aptly says:

After having thus pointed out in Othello's and Desdem-

22 Harrold, Newman, 146.

23 Goddard, Meaning of Shakespeare, 474.

ona's nature the threads with which they spin their own fate . . . throughout let the poet himself speak, seeking the merit of explanations only in the arrangement of facts, in gathering together scattered traits of character, and in more strongly emphasizing the principal points upon which the reader and actor must throw that stress that stronger light, which gives the picture its full efficacy and truth.²⁴

Everything else tended to throw stronger light on the uncertainty of Othello's love and marriage. They did not have time to become acquainted or accustomed to the surroundings within which they lived.

The lovers knew each other's soul in its pure essence; but they were ignorant of the temporal and habitual forms in which the other's soul responded characteristically to the particular circumstances of its material environment. They needed to learn to live together in what they must perforce make their actual world.²⁵

The newly married couple really never lived together. On their marriage night Othello is called to the senate chambers, he is given solemn warning by his father-in-law to watch his new wife. The very next night he is off to war and when the couple are again reunited it is in a locality unfamiliar to both. Hence, they do not live together for a long period, and in this time Othello is occupied in affairs of the state. Fate, if the word may be used, helped keep the lovers apart. Time forbade them to

24 Turnbull, Othello - A Critical Study, 528.

25 Charlton, Shakespearean Tragedy, 134.

become domesticated and the locality only aided time. Two souls in love but utterly unknown to each other; two souls loving what their minds had pictured each other to be, living as unknown strangers and their love "remaining an ideal reaction in an ideal realm, being entirely a thing of the mind, it was exposed to the onslaught of intangible suggestion."²⁶

One can now see why such

a union based upon the mutual fascination rather than mutual knowledge of character has in it the seeds of a bitter disenchantment, a violent catastrophe! It is the disastrous fortune of Othello and Desdemona that there are those about them who are interested in quickening these seeds into precipitate growth.²⁷

One of those is Iago who must now come into consideration.

26 Ibid., 135.

27 Boas, Shakespeare and His Predecessors, 426.

CHAPTER VI

IAGO UTILIZES OTHELLO'S BACKGROUND TO MOTIVATE HIS ACTIONS

It is not the task of this author to delve too deeply into the problem of the character of Iago as to whether he is a devil incarnate or not, or as to the motives which stir him to action. These are problems which must be admitted and many there are who have written long essays on them. This author neither affirms or denies anything on these two questions. The problem of this thesis is concerned with Iago only in so far as Othello's actions are brought before our attention. Is he the cause of the hero's action, or does he merely set the action in motion so that Othello is the real cause of his own downfall? If Iago is the main cause of Othello's tragic ruin, then Othello is a pathetic and not a tragic character. It would mean that his suffering was unmerited since there was nothing within Othello's character to warrant such a catastrophe, it would also require a great passivity on the hero's part. If, on the other hand, Othello is the cause of his own downfall, then his actions must flow from what he is. The cause must be from within the man himself, if he be a tragic hero.

Granted the first opinion, Othello's character loses all probability. His actions would be the result of Stoll's theory of the "calumniator believed" which would not have the hero performing actions true to his character but merely forced into a situation by a fine literary convention which aids the author to get a good story going, and eases the audience over an apparent contradiction, namely, that so noble a man as Othello could possibly do the deed he does.¹ It would mean that Othello's character is unnatural and his motives and actions absurd.

One finds it hard to accept this opinion of Othello. Iago is not a "calumniator believed" but a very shrewd and dangerous young man out to cause a lot of trouble. J. I. Stewart has this to say of Iago as regards the action of Othello. "Iago's superhuman arts are moonshine; Othello yields with such promptness as to make it plain that the mind that undoes him is not Iago's but his own."² It is Othello, then, not Iago, who brings about the tragic ruin.

First, it will be necessary to give a brief account of Iago. On a close analysis of his presence in the play, one finds that Iago contributes very much to the total effect. If one can say this, the reader finds great delight in the careful and true

1 Stoll, Shakespeare Studies, 93-94.

2 Stewart, Character and Motive, 105.

representation of sheer malevolence. The malevolence, slowly and carefully exhibited in each selected scene of Shakespeare's, seems to be without limit. A.C. Bradley, in his work Shakespearean Tragedies, says, "Evil has nowhere else been portrayed with such mastery as in the character of Iago."³

But to say that Iago is just plain evil leaves many of his traits untouched. Were he merely an abnormal sadist he doubtlessly could not have duped Othello so masterfully as he did. From the play it can be said that he is deceitful but, at least, externally a good man. Even Othello, before Iago begins to set the wicked trap, says he is a man of honesty and trust.⁴ To make the source of evil plain, "to make its destruction effect incontrovertible, Shakespeare endows Iago's character with fine qualities."⁵ Upon a close analysis of Iago one finds that, if anything, he is consistent, certain, brave, active, possessing a very fine and accurate knowledge of the workings of the human mind. All of these qualities are admirable traits which one must admire in the man. R. G. White goes so far as to say of Iago that he

was also of that order of ability which lifts a man

³ Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, 207.

⁴ Othello, I, iii, 286.

⁵ Donald A. Stauffer, Shakespeare's World of Images, New York, 1949, 174.

speedily above his fellows. His manners and his guise were of a dashing military sort; he made himself liked by all, and was regarded not only as a man of great ability but as a warm-hearted, whole-souled man, and the very prince of good fellows.⁶

Shakespeare has left little more to be desired in his character delineation of Iago. But to these fine qualities already mentioned, another must be added which Iago possessed in the highest degree. He has a subtle mind, one which is sharp and piercing.

Virtue! a fig! 'tis in ourselves that we
are thus, or thus. Our bodies are our gardens,
to the which our wills are gardeners.⁷

Iago believes that reason can and should lead the will to action, and that both the reason and the will can master passion. Well it can be said that, "Iago's insight, within certain limits, into human nature; his ingenuity and address in working upon it; his quickness and versatility in dealing with sudden difficulties and unforeseen opportunities have probably no parallel among dramatic characters."⁸ To be sure, Iago knows his power and knows men. He knows all the subtle and complex conditions of human life. Beyond this he has a steadfast confidence in circumstance. More

264. 6 R. G. White, Studies in Shakespeare, Boston, 1886

7 Othello, I, iii, 323-325.

8 Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, 218.

than any of the other characters in the play his keen mind can sense and interpret all changes of appearances; he is able to perceive every weak and vulnerable spot in the characters of his companions. With these powers aiding his ambition, with great ease he can bend and sway the imaginations of men. He knows his target when he takes aim and he rarely misses the mark. It is just this quality, the very opposite of Othello's, that allows Iago to agitate Othello. For while Othello is naive, Iago is subtle; while Othello doubts, Iago is certain; while Othello rages, Iago is calm; while Othello is suspicious, Iago is confident, and while Othello is simple, Iago is complex. Indeed, Iago

has secretly sounded all his companions from the lowest note to the top of the compass. And knowing 'all qualities with a learned spirit of human dealing,' his instincts guide him to the frail and feeble parts of men's moral armour; his baits and bribes exactly suit the special idiosyncrasy of those to whom he offers them. . . . He knows perfectly the character and predilections of those with whom he has to deal.⁹

Thus, Iago comes before one well equipped to actuate the unrevealed, unrealized, yet potential capacity of unloosed passion in Othello's nature. He is equipped to practice on the peace and quiet of the Moor, ready to cloud his intellect, enfeeble his will, to tempt Othello to passionate self-abandonment, and force Othello's quiet into a permanent state of unrest. Iago

9 Turnbull, Othello - A Critical Study, 306.

comes prepared, if it may be said, to awaken those potential evil passions which have been dormant in Othello's character for some-time. He will awaken those evil potentials in the general through the various elements of his background. He will confuse the quick, sure judgment of Othello; he will poison his hot Negro blood and arouse traits which are traditional of Othello's race; he will play on the general's social ignorance to dim his mind, and, foremost of all, he will aim his arrow at the most precious thing Othello loves, Desdemona. All this will Iago's cunning bring about until that passionate jealousy which has long been controlled rushes up and floods Othello's very being to its own eternal scandal and destruction. For

So, oft it chances in particular men,
 That for some vicious mole of nature in them,
 As, in their birth, --wherein they are not guilty,
 Since nature cannot choose his origin, --
 By the o'ergrowth of some complexion,
 Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,
 Or by some habit that too much o'er-leavens
 The form of plausible manners; that these men,
 Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect,
 Being nature's livery, or fortune's star,
 Their virtues else, be they as pure as grace,
 As infinite as man may undergo,
 Shall in the general censure take corruption
 From that particular substance of a doubt
 To his own scandal.¹⁰

So with Othello, that "vicious mole of nature"¹¹ shall

10 Hamlet, I, iv, 23-38.

11 Ibid., 24.

take hold. Iago will, in a certain sense, but bring to light what has been hidden in Othello's character. As Turnbull says, "Iago but educes what is in his victim. Othello's mistrust, cruelty and murder are simply the definite objective realizations of that hostile principle which existed in Othello from the first."¹²

The educing which Iago sets about to accomplish is not too clear in his own mind at first. However, as time progresses his keen perceptiveness picks a plan. This plan is based solely on what Othello is. "It is built on Iago's knowledge of Othello's character."¹³

Iago knew Othello to be of a free and open nature who thought men honest who but seemed to be so.¹⁴ Iago also realized that if he were to lead the Moor around as an ass he had to strike where Othello was most vulnerable. First, he had to strike at Othello's military background. His piercing mind could see that Othello, as a general and as a man, was very self-confident. He had made decisions in war and battles; he knew his worth but above all else, he was confident of his judgment. Othello was not an egotist but he was self-reliant of the confidence he had in others.

12 Turnbull, Othello - A Critical Study, 266.

13 Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedies, 179.

14 Othello, I, 111, 405-408.

When Othello selected Cassio for the vacant military post undoubtedly he had unquestioning confidence that Cassio was more fit for the job than Iago. Iago was clever enough to realize that once this confidence which the Moor had placed in others was broken it would at the same time make Othello realize that he was not as self-confident as he thought himself to be. Besides that the seed of uncertainty would always remain in Othello's mind. Now Iago does just this as regards Cassio. When Othello is forced to dismiss Cassio he inwardly feels his confidence has been betrayed, and he can never more feel too sure of Cassio. This but makes the Moor all the more uncertain of himself. Iago arouses Othello's uncertainty in his judgment so that hence forward Othello, because he is less certain of himself, will be more attentive to Iago's ruminatings when he mentions Cassio's name. Advancing by one insinuation after the other Iago ruins the already uncertain confidence Othello had placed in Cassio.

Iago: Did Michael Cassio, when you woo'd my lady
Know of your love?

Othello: He did, from first to last; why dost thou ask?

Iago: But for a satisfaction of my thought.
No further harm.

Othello: Why of thy thought, Iago?¹⁵

The subtle insinuation being that there is some harm. Iago continues.

15 Othello, III, iii, 94-98.

Iago: I did not think he had been acquainted with her.

Othello: O! yes, and went between us very oft.

Iago: Indeed!

Othello: Indeed! ay, indeed; discern'st thou ought in that? Is he not honest?

Iago: Honest, my lord?

Othello: Honest! ay, honest.

Iago: My lord, for ought I know.

Othello: What dost thou think?

Iago: Think, my lord?¹⁶

The implication here is that Cassio is not honest and that Iago knows more than he is revealing. Othello's reply shows Iago that the confidence the general once had in Cassio is now turning into suspicion; he is uncertain, doubtful about the man. When Iago answers Othello's inquiries with "men should be what they seem,"¹⁷ he, of course, implies that Cassio is not what he seems to be. This plays havoc with Othello for his now confused mind loses the confidence it had in himself and others, especially Cassio. In his own mind he sees that he has been wrong in judgment, and, although he is uncertain of himself and Cassio, he is certain of one thing and that is Iago is honest with him.

Iago can now stir the jealous nature, long hidden in Othello, and he does it ever so gracefully by telling Othello to beware of the very passion he wants to arouse.

O! my lord, beware of jealousy;

16 Ibid., 99-105.

17 Ibid., 126.

It is the green-ey'd monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on.¹⁸

With this master stroke Iago completely ruins the faith Othello had in himself and had placed in others. All that is left is to mention Cassio's and Desdemona's names together and the general's bestial qualities will be freed from their cage. The time was ripe and Iago discerned it. After Othello speaks of his wife's fine qualities, Iago drops the hint that Desdemona is in love with Cassio. Since the general will be more reluctant to believe this than he was the news of Cassio, Iago aims his arrow at another of Othello's vulnerable spots, namely, his ignorance of Venetian customs and habits; Othello's social background.

Ridley says, " a point not always observed . . . is the dexterous and devilish skill with which Iago plays on Othello's perhaps most vulnerable weakness, his sense of social ignorance."¹⁹ Iago begins by saying:

I know our country's disposition well;
In Venice they do let heaven see the pranks
They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience
Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown.²⁰

What Iago is really saying comes to this; of course, you are na-

18 Ibid., 165-167.

19 M. R. Ridley, Shakespeare's Plays, A Commentary, New York, 1938, 162.

20 Othello, III, iii, 201-204.

turally ignorant of the social standards of Venice; perhaps if you were better acquainted with them you would not be too disturbed. After all it's an every day occurrence and there is nothing out of the ordinary about it. But to be completely sure that Othello succumbs to his own purpose, Iago pushes the point further. He uses Desdemona herself as an example of the Venetian deceits. By also hitting Othello's sense of social ignorance, Iago at the same time begins to make Othello lose his self-confidence in Desdemona. At first the Moor is not too ready to pay too much attention to this for in reply to Iago's response on Venetian customs Othello says that Desdemona "had eyes and chose me."²¹ But Iago is ready with his reply. In effect, he says of the Venetian deceit that one cannot be too certain of anyone, he especially means Desdemona for she herself is guilty of the same thing. She deceived her father and by dissimulation closed his eyes on their romance. Iago even uses Barbantio's warning which he gave Othello on his wedding night.

She did deceive her father, marrying you;
 And when she seem'd to shake and fear your looks,
 She lov'd them most.²²

All the awe-struck Othello can reply to Iago's seeming

21 Ibid., 189.

22 Ibid., 206-208.

truth is, "and so she did!"²³ Othello's imagination is now aroused. No doubt he could see his father-in-law giving him the warning and he now thinks that is true. He is dumb-founded in learning that his self-confidence is not what he thought it to be. His faith and trust in Desdemona are about to be extinguished just as they were in Cassio. One can see the Moor in silent thought. His confused mind and imagination are stirred from their very depths. He is not too sure of himself, he is suspicious and doubtful. All he can do for the time being is to thank Iago for helping him see things as he imagines they really are. Because of his love of Desdemona, Othello cannot make himself believe that nature would so err in this fair creature. He is wavering and Iago perceives this. Before Othello has had sufficient time to reflect on the matter, Iago pours his poison to the all too attentive Othello. This time since social ignorance could not move him all the way, since that could not make his hot blood boil, he would appeal to Othello's race and show how unnatural it was for Desdemona really to love him. He strikes at Othello's racial background.

In this move Iago once more shows his power of deep insight in human nature. He knows that one of the reasons the Moor's love of Desdemona is so deep is the fact that she alone of

23 Ibid., 208.

all the people of Venice had loved and admired Othello for what he was in himself. She alone had shown that his race and color meant nothing to her. Thus, with Othello so confused, Iago offers a true explanation of Desdemona's rejection of acceptable suitors, and of her strange and unnatural preference of a black man.

as, to be bold with you,
Not to affect many proposed matches
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,
Whereto, we see, in all things nature tends;
Foh! one may smell in such, a will most rank,
Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural.²⁴

It must be remembered that Iago's warnings are not given to a husband who has lived with or known his wife for any length of time. Therefore, being newly married, without the deep knowledge of one another that a long married couple would have, Othello's confidence in his own powers of perception is greatly confused and disturbed. Everything that Iago has said thus far Othello must admit is true. Slowly, ever so slowly, his suspicious nature is unclosed. He tells Iago to have Emilia watch Desdemona's actions. Further than that, Othello is convinced that his self-reliance was faulty and, henceforward, his mind is open to Iago's suggestions. In his mind Othello is convinced that Iago is

of exceeding honesty,
And knows all qualities with a learned spirit,
Of human dealings.²⁵

24 Ibid., 228-233.

25 Ibid., 258-260.

Of course, Othello's blind mind had judged wrongly. The powers which had once made him the fine man he was, these powers which had been a virtue for him on the battlefield and of which he was so confident, now bring out the baseness of his character and become his vice. A chance question to either Desdemona or Cassio at this time would most certainly have changed things. But Othello forgets that that virtue of the battle field was now out of place in his life. He can no longer weigh facts, interpret false appearances, distinguish between genuine and hypocritical counsels. His sight is dim and blind, his mind too easily perplexed. Now his vain, if it can be called that, self-confident, self-reliant virtue displays itself.

As he is left alone to contemplate what has been said, Othello's blood begins to boil. If his wife were unfaithful to him he would tear her to shreds. The wild and furious passion of his race is thus seen.

if I do prove her haggard,
 Though that her jesses were my dear heart strings,
 I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind,
 To prey at fortune.²⁶

Up to this point Iago has utilized Othello's military, racial and cultural backgrounds to lay the foundations of his plot. He has hinted that perhaps Desdemona loves Cassio but he

26 Ibid., 259-262.

has not as yet mentioned any foul and sinful deed on their part. However, he has made sure that the doubting general shall change his dubious ways. Long before this he had drawn Cassio into a course of action that would lead him into a situation which could be represented to the Moor as compromising both to himself and to Desdemona.

for while this honest fool
Plies Desdemona to repair his fortunes,
And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor,²⁷

Iago will, under the deceitful guise of a friend, pour into the Moor's ear the foul notion that Desdemona's real object is a guilty love for Cassio.

by how much she strives to do him good,
She shall undo her credit with the Moor.
So will I turn virtue into pitch,
And out of her own goodness make the net
That shall enmesh them all.²⁸

Iago's plan is all the easier now that he has destroyed the trust and faith Othello once had in Desdemona and Cassio. With this as his plan he utilizes Othello's love and superstitious backgrounds to complete his venture. Since Othello's blood is fuming, he will fan the small spark into a conflagration of passion. He will use one of the most sacred vows of marriage, the giving of one's body to one's mate, to release the uncertainty which lay

27 Ibid., II, 111, 344-346.

28 Ibid., 349-353.

hidden in Othello's love, he will more than hint at Desdemona's infidelity. As usual, Iago sets the action in motion but allows the Moor to draw whatever conclusions he likes, or take whatever action seems best to his confused mind at the time.

In vivid and sensual language, Iago paints a lurid picture of sinful lust for Othello's imagination. He describes what was supposed to have happened during a dream of Cassio's.

I lay with Cassio lately,
 And being troubled with a raging tooth,
 I could not sleep.
 There are a kind of men so loose of soul,
 That in their sleeps will mutter their affairs:
 One of that kind is Cassio:
 In sleep I heard him say 'Sweet Desdemona,
 Let us be wary, let us hide our loves;
 And then, sir, would he gripe and wring my hand,
 Cry 'O sweet creature!' and then kiss me hard,
 As if he pluck'd up kisses by the roots,
 That grew upon my lips: then laid his leg
 Over my thigh, and sigh'd and kiss'd, and then
 Cried 'Cursed fate that gave thee to the Moor!'²⁹

Immediately the quick, sure judgment of Othello jumps into action. He believes that even though it were only a dream it bespeaks what actually must have happened some time before that. The thought that Cassio had tasted his wife's body gnaws at the heart of Othello. If his wife was disloyal, he would tear her limb from limb.

The time had come to arouse a trait so deeply rooted in Othello's race, his superstition. Iago seems to use this as his

²⁹ Ibid., III, iii, 414-427.

scup for at the mere mention of the handkerchief the paganism of Othello rushes to the fore. It is to be noted that of all the things which Iago has used to arouse the Moor, the breaking of his self-reliance, his social and racial ignorance, this one alone drives Othello to ask Desdemona if it is true or not that she has lost the handkerchief. One question from Othello as to the truth of the whole matter would have been sufficient to clear things. However, it is the handkerchief with its mysterious web of magic which could bring dire destruction upon its owner if it were lost, which motivates Othello to confront Desdemona. He is not interested to find out, then and there, if what Iago has been saying is true or not, his only thought is of the handkerchief. One is made to think that if Desdemona had produced the fatal wedding gift Othello's wrath would have subsided. It is clear from his actions that Othello put full trust and belief in the gift. When it cannot be produced wild revenge takes hold of him and the Christian becomes a reconverted pagan evoking a mysterious cult.

Arise, black vengeance, from thy hallow hell!
Yield up, O love! thy crown and hearted throne
To tyrannous hate. Swell, bosom, with thy fraught,
For 'tis of aspics' tongues.³⁰

A little later:

30 Ibid., 448-451.

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.

Now by yond marble heaven,
 In the due reverence of a sacred vow
 I here engage my words.³¹

Iago, sensing Othello's every motion, has raised him to a state of wild revenge which judgment cannot cure. This Moor, so noble and brave, whom all, when they first met him, might have stood up and said "to the world, This was a man,"³² now falls to the lowest depths. "His superstition and bad conscience are the agents"³³ which convince Othello of Desdemona's wrong doing. Here, then, is the pity of such a character as Othello and the horror of it. Othello now "generates his own tragic atmosphere as he goes."³⁴ It is this giant of a hero whom Iago turns into utter chaos. That passion which until this time has been under his command now masters him. "In him under the devilish machinations of Iago, the psychological hierarchy breaks down, and we find an appalling reality under the noble appearance."³⁵

Yet, Iago does not stop here in driving the Moor to his

31 Ibid., 457-462.

32 Julius Caesar, V, v, 75.

33 Gervinus, Commentaries, 537.

34 Van Doren, Shakespeare, 225.

35 Spencer, Nature of Man, 129.

own destruction. Othello must be driven further. Although Iago has turned her whose name "was as fresh as Dian's visage"³⁶ to black pitch in Othello's mind, he will make it more vile and false. He relentlessly hints at her being naked in bed with Cassio for some time and that no harm was done at all. The handkerchief and her virtue are hers to do with as she pleases. Up to this point Iago has just hinted at Desdemona's infidelity, now he states it as a certainty. He has heard Cassio talking in town about his mistress. The suspense is too much for the distraught Othello who wants to know what has been said. Iago need only say the word 'Lie' and Othello's world crumbles. Instantly he judges Desdemona to be false. She who was his world has mocked heaven, she has committed a sin of which he thought her incapable. His imagination and thought so utterly overcome him that all he can do is to fall on the ground in a trance.

Lost in his passion it is only natural that Othello mistake Cassio's remarks on Bianca as spoken about Desdemona. Chance has Bianca turn up with the handkerchief. Since he has trusted everything on a token of love, and, his swift mind not giving Desdemona an opportunity to explain, he is ready to believe the worst. No longer is he dubious, but certain. He has

36 Othello, III, iii, 388.

proof beyond all measure of Desdemona's guilt. Both she and Cassio must die; Cassio for having offended him, Desdemona lest "she betray more men."³⁷ Death must be the fate for this precious jewel which once made him exclaim in wonderous rapture:

O my soul's joy!
 If it were now to die,
 'Twere now to be most happy, for I fear
 My soul hath her content so absolute
 That not another comfort like to this
 Succeeds in unknown fate!³⁸

The idea that Desdemona was intimate with Cassio excites Othello's rich imagination it is true, the very idea of such overwhelms him and he falls into a trance; but the thought of the shameless game which virtue played with him is one of the reasons of his wrath and outbursts. Indeed, his honor has been misused. Just as Othello prefers Desdemona to himself so also does he prefer honor to her. When he comes to the dread deed of killing Desdemona it is easy to see that it is not out of revenge but rather for judicial motives that he carries out his so called duty. This judicial act is intermingled with his paganistic beliefs. He considers this act a sacrifice.

It is the cause, it is the cause my soul.
 Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!
 It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood,
 Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,

37 Ibid., IV, 11, 6.

38 Ibid., II, 1, 187-195.

And smooth as monumental alabaster.
 Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
 Put out the light, and then put out the light:
 If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
 I can again thy former light restore,
 Should I repent me; but once put out the light,
 Thou sunning'st pattern of excelling nature,
 I know not where is that Promethean heat
 That can thy light relume. When I have pluck'd the rose,
 I cannot give it vital growth again,
 It needs must wither, I'll smell it on the tree.
 O balmy breath, that dost almost persuade
 Justice to break her sword.³⁹

A further proof that revenge was not his motive for killing his wife is the fact that in the very act of killing Desdemona when Othello sees that she is not yet dead, he tries to hasten his deed so that she will not suffer. For nought did he in hate, but all in honor.⁴⁰

As the billowy mist resides in Othello's mind and the truth sheds its rays of light upon his darkened mind, Othello realizes that he has thrown away his most precious pearl just as the Indian did. As he preferred honor to Desdemona so also he prefers it to himself. No other way was left but "to die upon a kiss."⁴¹

39 Ibid., V, ii, 1-17.

40 Ibid., 294.

41 Ibid., 358.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

As grandly as Othello first comes before the reader's eyes so much the more does he leave them. But has he been consistent in his action? The problem proposed in the first chapter is still to be solved. Is Othello's change so improbable that as a result he had to succumb to the invisible and invulnerable machinations of Iago as Stoll and his school would have it? Or is Othello a colossal hero moved to action by some, but not all, of his traits as Bradley would have it? Finally, do the cultural, military, religious and sensual elements of Othello's background lead him to a psychological state which Iago perceives and utilizes to effect Othello's tragic decision and downfall so that the Moor's downfall is probable and possible?

The answer to the first two questions must be in the negative. Opinions such as these, of course, would violate all the norms of tragedy which Aristotle laid down centuries ago. It is hard to see how a playwright could write a play and have his characters performing actions which in no way arise out of their nature. The very fact that the audience feels pity for the hero demonstrates that there is an universal appeal in the play, there

is something in it which is common to all men, something which makes one realize that the action represented on the stage is true to life, something which makes one know that under certain circumstances he could do the same thing as Othello did. The old philosophical dictum agere sequitur esse is the reason behind this. A person does what he does because there is something in his nature, namely, his traits, which is the cause of the actions performed. Aristotle undoubtedly realized this when he wrote his Poetics. He says:

There remains the mean between these. This is a sort of man who is no paragon of virtue and righteousness, and yet it is through no badness or villany of his own that he falls into the misfortune but rather through some flaw of character, he being one of those who are in high station and good fortune like Oedipus and Thyestes and the famous men of such families as those. The successful plot must then have a single and not, as some say, a double issue; and the change must be not good fortune from bad, but, on the contrary, from good fortune to bad, and it must not be due to villany but to some great flaw in the character of such a man as we have described.¹

In other words, Aristotle means that there must be something within the man which is the cause of his action, or agere sequitur esse.

Now the same is true of Othello. His downfall does not come solely from Iago but from himself. "Othello's tragedy is Othello's and not the outcome of chance, which made him contem-

¹ Aristotle, Poetics, xiii, 1-6.

porary with Iago."² This means that there was something in Othello's nature which caused him to do what he did. Aristotle himself would say the same of Othello if he were present. In his Eudemian Ethics he makes it very clear when he says, "It is clear that all the actions of which a man is the first principle and controller may either happen or not happen, and that it depends on himself for them to happen or not, as he controls their existence or non-existence."³ Othello does control the existence of the actions he performs. His whole character, his military, racial and cultural, religious and love elements in his background, endows him with traits which are responsible for his actions. Iago merely brings them into the open. Othello has a flaw in his character which would not be there if it were not for the various elements of his background inherent in his nature. That flaw never would have come about had not Othello been the man he was. His military life had made him a soldier used to quick and sure judgments; his ancestry had endowed his nature with traits which, try as he might, could not be forgotten; his beliefs, which flowed naturally from his ancestry, left an indelible mark upon his soul and made him forget his adopted religion in times of stress; his love, which was so ideal and pure, not only had the power to make

2 Charlton, Shakespearean Tragedy

3 Aristotle, Eudemian Ethics, trans. H. Rackham, The Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, 1938, 1223 a, 4-8.

others suspicious of it, but, in the end, it made him as equally suspicious as the others. All these elements in the background of Othello's character bring about his flaw. Without them that flaw could never have taken place, his very nature made him do what he did. All that was needed in Othello's case was to awaken these dormant elements. Here is the task which Iago has in the play; he only makes Othello do what the various elements of his background tend to do. It is clear that Iago is successful only because these fiery elements were in Othello from the beginning. Hence, it is this inherent weakness found in Othello's nature, which tried to extremes in crisis, causes his ruin.

Othello was a man who "think men honest that but seem to be so."⁴ This trust, which is a virtue and of which Othello possessed to the highest degree, can be a vice if it is excessive; and excessive it was in Othello. He was too trustful and gullible. Because of this excessive credulity his fanciful imagination, with all the marks of his race, could play havoc with his mind. Jealousy, and especially false jealousy, gets its roots from the imagination. This is what happened to Othello. Without the use of his intellect his imagination played havoc with him. It made Othello see things which were not actually there, it forced his intellect to say and affirm things which

⁴ Othello, I, iii, 406.

were not true. But, it must be remembered that he did all this because it was in his nature to do so.

Augmented to his excessive credulity was the fact that Othello came from a race of dark-skinned people. His color made him diffident and unsure in society. Hence, once aroused, his jealousy would feed ravenously on his sense of diffidence and insecurity. This aroused passion could recall his mysterious beliefs and superstition so as to make him a slave to his passion. Though he was not unusually susceptible to jealousy, there was a natural degree of susceptibility in his nature. Take these two traits, his excessive credulity and his susceptibility to jealousy, and a conflict will be found in his nature. Othello is prone to regard Iago as a true friend because he seemed to be honest, yet, he is also prone to trust the virtue of his wife.⁵ One of these traits must outweigh the other to have a conflict. This Iago realized when he motivated Othello. At one and the same time Iago had to ruin the trust Othello had in Desdemona and build up this excessive credulity in Othello. Othello's confidence in Desdemona was all the more fortified by his intense love that could see no evil in the beloved. All the elements of his background led Othello to so adore Desdemona that the thought of her being unchaste and unfaithful caused excruciating agony and

5 Ibid.

an almost savage jealousy on his part. It is in his love of Desdemona that the various elements of his background lead Othello to a psychological collapse and utter ruin. He judged Iago to be honest and Desdemona to be false. All the various elements led him to that conclusion. His credulity together with all his traits made him attuned to this excess. It made him believe that his wife was not what she seemed to be and that Iago was all he seemed to be. Truly, Othello is made to do the deed and "to fall from his ideal heights to deeper damnation still, and to do the deed himself."⁶

Othello's fall comes from his vice which he thought was a virtue. It is at this, his most vulnerable spot, he errs.

Turnbull says:

But for the dullness, credulity, violence of temperament and natural susceptibility to change which combine to produce that fatal infirmity of character which one can readily comprehend, those palpably abrupt transitions from good to bad, from virtue to vice, and from love to hate which mark the sudden spiritual transformation of the general's nature, would appeal in vain both to our experience and artistic sense as being in the nature of things impossible.⁷

What must be said of the author of this work who "has set himself the task--to which Iago's task inheres--of showing us, and convincingly, the process of spiritual self-destruction

6 Granville-Barker, "Othello," Prefaces, 9.

7 Turnbull, Othello - A Critical Study, 331.

which can make Othello capable of such a deed to which his own suicide--his own physical self-destruction--is the mere sequel"⁷⁸ It can only be said that Shakespeare performed this task with consummate beauty and artistry. For in this task of producing a story by means of characters he has given one character in particular, Othello, who is human and not only highly probable but possible. Othello seems to come to life as one silently reads the play.

In Othello Shakespeare has consistently drawn attention to the Moor's most vulnerable spot. He has made this nature shine forth in all of the elements of Othello's background. Every word Othello speaks, every action he undertakes, every thought and feeling which flows from him, every decision he makes, in fine, every incident, no matter how small, which transports the Moor to his tragic downfall, is made to clarify his nature prone to jealousy. But it must be remembered that nothing could have happened unless Othello's background was what it was. One cannot help but follow the growth of that passion from its start in the Moor's mind to its crescendo of wild revenge. Every quality of greatness, tenderness and credulity, strength of will in Othello's nature is a potent factor which aids to single out his jealousy in its real form. It was Shakespeare's task "to exhibit the passion

8 Granville-Barker, "Othello," Prefaces, 9.

of jealousy to an extent in which the lover can be thought capable of destroying the object of his love . . . this required his utmost art and knowledge of human nature."⁹ No one can deny that Shakespeare discharged that task with unusual skill and deep insight of human nature. That Shakespeare's artistry has prepared Othello for his course of action, William Hazlitt, in his book Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, says:

It is in working his noble nature up to all this extremity through rapid but gradual transitions, in raising passion to its height from the smallest beginnings and in spite of all obstacles, in painting the expiring conflict between love and hate, tenderness and resentment, jealousy and remorse . . . and at last blending them in that noble tide of deep and sustained passion, impetuous but majestic, that flows on to the Propontic, and knows no ebb, that Shakespeare has shown the mastery of his genius and of his power over the human heart.¹⁰

Whether Shakespeare ever heard or knew of Aristotle and his Poetics is not certain, but one cannot deny that they are in complete agreement as to the representation of the tragic hero.

Down through the centuries critics have recognized this power which Shakespeare possessed in making men act like men. He is the painter whose canvas was the world of humanity and his themes, human nature. So realistic were his paintings that one becomes lost in his admiration of them. Truly, Othello is real,

9 Gervinus, Commentaries, 510.

10 William Hazlitt, Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, published in The World's Classics, London, 1934, 37.

his mind thinks, his heart beats, his body stirs, his eyes are brilliant with the joy of love or stern with the passion of hate.

One wonders whether Shakespeare was speaking his own mind when he had his meditative Dane of Elsinore philosophize on human nature, for the "vicious mole of nature"¹¹ is certainly found in Othello. It is no cause of amazement, then, that critics have found Shakespeare's character delineations to be one of his greatest and finest qualities as a playwright. Dr. Ulrici, speaking of Shakespeare's art, has this to say:

Shakespeare's mode of characterization, like his diction, is pervaded throughout by the historical spirit, and is equally the expression and organ of his view of the essence of drama. His profound knowledge of mankind is, as Schlegel remarks, almost proverbial. It is not, however, in his case, the result of mere shrewd empirical observation; such a knowledge of the world and of men may make a good diplomatist, moralist, or shrewd observer, but no poet. A tolerably clever hypocrite might, I think, deceive such a judge of mankind. Shakespeare's accurate descriptions of so many uncommon and irregular states of mind—such as melancholy, idiocy, madness, sleep-walking, all of which he can scarcely have learned thus accurately from his own experience—must have been founded on his rich poetic intuition of the nature of humanity. By the strength of his artistic imagination he keeps constantly before his eye, in perfect vividness, the true archetype of man; the greater he is, the purer, the clearer, the more perfect, and the more independent is he of external influences. This is the true ideal of all art. It contradicts not, it deviates in nothing from, it goes not beyond reality; on the contrary all reality is contained in it, and it embraces all conceivable varieties of individual character.¹²

¹¹ Hamlet, I, iv, 24.

¹² Herman Ulrici, Shakespeare's Dramatic Art, London, 1846, 138-139.

Turnbull adds:

His artistic virtue, indeed, is the direct issue and outcome of his deep and accurate spiritual insight. And it is the latter faculty which gives to his portraiture of the Moor a realistic verisimilitude which at once satisfies our reason and aesthetic sense and prevents us from ever questioning the probability of the events described.¹³

Those critics who hold that Othello's actions do not arise from his nature but from the devilish machinations of Iago, and Stell's theory of the 'calumniator believed' cannot, I think, be accepted. As J. I. Stewart so aptly said, "Iago's villainy draws its potency from Othello's own mind; it is invisible to others because it is, in a sense, not there. Iago is, more or less, a device of Othello's by which Othello hears an inner voice that he would fain hear and fain deny."¹⁴

Nor can Bradley's theory be accepted since it is the whole man, not just part of him, that acts. A man's actions flow from his being; every element in the background of a man's character is essential to his nature.

On the contrary, it is the military, cultural, racial, religious and sensual elements in Othello's background which lead him to such a psychological state. These Iago perceives and utilizes to effect Othello's tragic decision and downfall. Othello's

13 Turnbull, Othello - A Critical Study, 320-321.

14 Stewart, Character and Motive, 102.

actions are the result of his nature. And Shakespeare, the great dramatic technician that he was, has woven the strands of motivation for this great and balanced leader so beautifully that his fall cannot only be deemed possible as the play develops but finally in such a way that with Mark Anthony one must say of this

Meer:

His life was gentle, and the elements
So mixed in him that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, 'this was a man.'¹⁵

15 Julius Caesar, V, v, 73-75.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I PRIMARY SOURCES

Shakespeare, William, "Othello," in the Complete Works of William Shakespeare, edited with notes by W. J. Craig, New York, 1943.

Shakespeare, William, Othello, A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare, edited by Horace H. Furness, Philadelphia, 1914.
This text was consulted but not quoted in the thesis.

II. SECONDARY SOURCES

A. BOOKS

Aristotle, The Eudemian Ethics, translated by H. Rackham, The Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, 1938.

Aristotle, The Poetics, translated by William H. Fyfe, The Loeb Classical Library, New York, 1927.

Beas, Frederick, Shakespeare and His Predecessors, 2nd. Edition, London, 1939.

Bradley, A.C., Shakespearean Tragedy, London, 1926.

Bonsanquet, Bernard, A History of Aesthetic, New York, 1910.

Brandes, George, William Shakespeare - A Critical Study, New York, 1927.

Butcher, S. H., Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Arts, London, 1932.

Charlton, H. B., Shakespearean Tragedy, Cambridge, 1948.

- Clarke, Cumberland C., Shakespearean Characters, London, 1863.
- Clemen, W. H., The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery, London, 1951.
- Cotter, James H., Shakespeare's Art, Cincinnati, 1903.
- Craig, Hardin, An Interpretation of Shakespeare, New York, 1948.
- Ebrich and Schucking, A Shakespeare Bibliography, Oxford, 1931.
- Gervinus, G. G., Shakespeare Commentaries, translated by F. E. Bunnett, 2nd. Edition, London, 1875.
- Goddard, Harold G., The Meaning of Shakespeare, Chicago, 1951.
- Granville-Barker, Harley, Prefaces to Shakespeare, Fourth Series, "Othello," London, 1945.
- Harris, Frank, The Man Shakespeare and His Tragic Life Story, New York, 1909.
- Harrold, Charles F., John Henry Newman, London, 1945.
- Haslitt, William, Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, published in The World Classics, London, 1934.
- Horne, Herman H., Shakespeare's Philosophy of Love, Raleigh, N. C., 1945.
- Knight, G. Wilson, The Wheel of Fire, London, 1949.
- Newman, John H., Cardinal, Grammar of Assent, edited by Charles F. Harrold, New York, 1945.
- Ralli, August, History of Shakespearean Criticism, 2 vols., London, 1932.
- Ridley, M. R., Shakespeare's Plays, A Commentary, New York, 1938.
- Schlegel, August, Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, translated by J. Black, edited by A. Morrison, London, 1902.
- Semper, I. J., A Shakespeare Study Guide, New York, 1930.
- Spencer, Theodore, Shakespeare and the Nature of Man, 2nd. Edition, New York, 1949.

- Stauffer, Donald A., Shakespeare's World of Images, New York, 1949.
- Stewart, J. I. M., Character and Motive in Shakespeare, London, 1949.
- Stoll, Elmer E., Shakespeare Studies, New York, 1942.
- Tannenbaum, Samuel A., Shakespeare's Othello, A Bibliography, New York, 1943.
- Turnbull, William R., Othello, A Critical Study, Edinburgh, 1863.
- Ulrici, Hermann, Shakespeare's Dramatic Art, London, 1890.
- Van Doren, Mark, Shakespeare, New York, 1939.
- Webster, Margaret, Shakespeare Without Tears, York, Pa., 1942.
- White, R. G., Studies in Shakespeare, Boston, 1886.

B. ARTICLES

- Kliger, Samuel, "Othello, Man of Judgment," Modern Philology, XLVIII, May, 1951, 221-224.
- Prior, Moody E., "Character in Relation to Action in Othello," Modern Philology, XLIV, May, 1947, 225-237.
- Prior, Moody E., "A 'New' Reading of Othello, A Reply to Mr. Stoll," Modern Philology, XLV, May, 1948, 270-272.
- Stoll, Elmer E., "A New 'Reading' of Othello," Modern Philology, XLV, February, 208-210.
- Stoll, Elmer E., "Source and Motive in Macbeth and Othello," Review of English Studies, XIX, 1943, 25-30.

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by **George T. Tolbert, S.J.** has been read and approved by three members of the Department of **English.**

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Jan 9, 1955
Date

H. S. Hughes SJ
Signature of Adviser