

Optical illusion on oedipus rex and othello

[Literature](#), [Play](#)



The theme of appearance and reality is such a dominant one in Oedipus Rex and Othello, and the obsession with appearance plays such an important part in bringing them closer to Oedipus' and Othello's tragedy, that the plays can be termed a tragedies of appearance in human life, in which the opposite of appearance is truth or reality. But this theme of uncertain vision is presented through different thematic expression in both tragedies.

Sophocles takes an internal element of character into consideration whereas Shakespeare hold a mixture of internal and external elements responsible for the optical illusions of Othello and other characters in the play. At first it is on behalf of appearance that we see a battle waged in Oedipus rex. As this battle progresses we see appearance losing more and more ground. The first stage in it is the institution of the divinely-instructed enquiry into the death of Laius, which means that the appearance of it that it was the work of outland robbers-is not trusted.

Quite early in the enquiry, Oedipus is led astray by an appearance-that the robbers who were alleged to have attacked Laius must have been associated with Thebes, and the suspicion that Creon must have at their back. The question points to Creon. Creon gives the appearance of evading it. The suspicion, he says, that unavoidably arose could not be pursued after the deed. Why not? The sphinx came... for some time after this, to be sure, the suspicion seems to lie dormant. But the focus of attention is no longer on the scene of the crime, or the way it happened, but rather on those who were ultimately responsible, and Thebes.

Then suddenly, after the quarrel with the hostile and apparently malevolent prophet, the suspicion is confirmed, the connection between Creon and Teiresias is established, and the existence of a whole web of enmity stands corroborated as fact. ' Oedipus suspects that the robbers were bribed to play their part, and ultimately he thinks that both Creon and Teiresias were behind them. Thus the supposed existence of a plot to murder Laius is another appearance which leads Oedipus astray. So Oedipus is to become concerned with appearances which it becomes his life's mission to investigate, so that he may get at the underlying truth or reality.

Appearance and truth come into picture also in the discussion of faulty vision of Oedipus. Another manifestation of Oedipus' obsession with appearance is his intellectual myopia. He has a limited vision and is unable to assess the situations in a right perspective. Robert L. Kane (1975) puts this proposition in this way; " He[Oedipus] was the victim of an optical illusion". (p. 196) The juxtaposition between " outward magnificence and inward blindness of Oedipus and the outward blindness and inward sight of the prophet" (Kirkwood, p. 30) depicts two types of blindness i. e. physical and intellectual. One is related to physical sight whereas the other, the most pernicious type of blindness, pertains to insight. Teiresias is physically blind but whereas Oedipus is blind intellectually. This intellectual blindness of Oedipus also contributes greatly to his believe in appearance rather than truth and ultimately leads him to his tragic destination. Oedipus possesses faultless physical vision throughout play except in the end but he remains blind to the reality regarding himself.

At one point in the play, he has the ability to see but he is not willing to do so. Additionally it is his faulty intellectual insight make him believe in the appearance of some unknown enemy and he pronounces on him the sentence of outlawry and also uttes a curse on him. The reality of it that it is on himself that he is passing both the sentences, is umknown to him. However, we may notice that the gradual and increasing loss of Oedipus' detachment and the growing references to himself raise the suspicion that unconsciously Oedipus know what reality lies hidden behind the appearance.

Unlike Oedipus Rex, in Othello it is the machination of Iago that blurs the visiioon of Othello and deprives " noble Moor" to distinguish between reality and apprearence. Othello, together with several other characters largely depend on their visual faculties that is distorted and warped by the skillfull trickery of Iago. These character along with Othello base their conclusion about realities what appears to them and do not delve deep into the reality of the things. But unlike Oedipus their optical allusion is not result of something inherent in their charcter.

Othello is intelligent enough that he knows that looks can be decieving but Iago trciker blinds him. For example, Othello notices that Cassio walks off swiftly after having a conversation with Desdemona. Although Othello does not see incongruity in their meeting but Iago presents this meeting differently and sneakily. Iago murmurs to Othello, "...I cannot think it, that he would steal away so guilty like. " (III, iii, 42) Here the machination makes the vision of Othello illusory and he concludes erreaneously as he says, "...I do believe ' twas he. (III, iii, 44) But as a matter of fact, Cassio and Desdemona

converse about getting Cassio's job back as Desdemona says to Cassio: I know't. I thank you. You do love my lord; /You have known him long; and be you well assured He shall in strangeness stand no farther off Than in politic distance. (III, iii, 11) But Othello believes what he observed and perceived through the lenses of suspicion that Iago sowed in his mind. This led to a dilemma that becomes unfixable later and ultimately leads to the tragedy of Othello.

This is interesting to note that all characters in the play, except for Roderigo (to whom Iago sometimes shows his real face) have a high opinion of Iago and refer to him as "honest Iago". The mutual relationship between Iago and Othello is of trust and reliance on the part of Othello but it is conniving and devious on the part of Iago. Iago has the same relationship with Cassio. Cassio is also deceived by the seeming virtue of Iago and actually believes that Iago is a kind-hearted man. But at the same time Iago is a rival to Cassio in the royal court.

Unlike pride in Oedipus over his abilities, it is the element of trust that deprives Othello of his vision and makes him believe in appearance as ultimate reality. Although when Iago starts working on Othello, he suspects him and asks for evidence, yet from the beginning of the play, he seems to have put entire confidence in the honesty of Iago, who had not been his companion in arms. This confidence is misplaced but it is no sign of stupidity in Othello. He does not have a distinctive fear of him. We find this even before Iago has set a trap for him.

Othello fears the monster “ too hideous to be shown” that he discerns about Iago’s thoughts. This manifests a strange relationship based on paradoxical feelings. It is of confidence, trust and fear. But latter events show that Othello’s trust in Iago overpowers the instinctive fear. This happens due to Othello’s non-meditative nature. He does not contemplate over issues and does not weigh their motive and consequences. A. C. Bradley rightly says in this regard; The sources of danger in this character are revealed but too clearly by the story. In the first place, Othello's mind, for all its poetry, is very simple.

He is not observant. His nature tends outward. He is quite free from introspection, and is not given to reflection. Emotion excites his imagination, but it confuses and dulls his intellect. (p. 217) Above-mentioned arguments and supporting textual and extra-textual evidence clearly suggest that in Oedipus Rex, it is something habitual and internal in the character of Oedipus himself who is unable to distinguish between what seems to be and what actually is whereas it is an external element (Iago) as well as an internal element (his thorough trust on Iago) in Othello that leads to the optical illusion.