

# Hamlet vs othello

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



How the protagonists deal with their difficulties: Hamlet vs Othello In William Shakespeare Hamlet and Othello, the author creates two similar yet vastly different protagonists. The major source of contrast lies within each characters approach to decision making and premeditated action. As David Nichol Smith puts it, Hamlet “ is not a character marked by strength of will or even passion, but by refinement of thought and sentiment. ”(Smith 288) This very refinement of thought is what characterizes both Hamlet’s indecision and forces him to act when he renounces indecision.

In contrast Everything about Othello’s mind, on the contrary, is direct, healthy, objective; with an openness and docility of childhood he loses himself in external things; his thoughts are occupied with objects, not with themselves and he reproduces in smooth transparent diction the truth as revealed to him from without; his mind, in short is like a clear even mirror which, invisible itself renders back in its exact shape and colour whatever stands before it; so that we get from him not so much his impressions of things as the things themselves that impress him. Hudson 316-317) This child-like and gullible thought process unveils to us the true nature of Othello, the expert at war but the novice at life, who like a mirror believes and acts on the will and impressions of others rather than contemplate both the true reality of things and the people who speak against them. These distinctions allow the reader to see that “ in Hamlet grace and reason are jangles. In Othello the mildness that complements a soldier’s courage is baffled. ”(Howarth 14) Here is the essence in the difference between Hamlet and Othello.

Hamlet makes his decision through prolonged self reflection that continues to the point where action is never done in an expedient fashion, while Othello makes his decision through the ideas given to him by others which leads to rash, emotionally charged action. These differences in decision making can be seen through the different difficulties that each protagonist faces with their lovers, friends, and antagonist. In both literary works, the protagonist falls in love with the daughters of two politicians. Both fathers have the power to influence the fate of the main characters.

Unfortunately, the fathers are very protective of their daughters and also have a formal relationship with the protagonist which causes them to interfere with the young lovers. Upon finding out about his daughter's relationship with Hamlet, Polonius informs King Claudius in hopes of creating a better position in the court. Hamlet discovers Polonius' plot to use their relationship as a means to obtain a higher position with the King, thus suspects Ophelia of being untrue in her love and devotion for him therefore ending said relationship. Without knowing so, Polonius has interfered in their relationship.

In Othello's case, Barbantio interferes by warning Othello of Desdemona's unfaithfulness by foreshadowing, " Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see: She has deceived her father, and may thee. " (Shakespeare 50) Like Polonius, Barbantio has also indirectly interfered with the new lover's relationship serving as reinforcement to Iago's later deception. In contrast, the protagonists deal with the fathers in different ways. Hamlet sees Polonius

as a selfish and ignoramus, Othello, to a certain extent, respects Barbantio because of his seniority and service to the state.

When dealing with Polonius, Hamlet drives a rapier through a curtain and kills the old statesman without remorse. This is one instance when we see Hamlet act uncharacteristically by using force rather than rational thought. In contrast we see Othello have the same change from normal action as he uses calm reason and his words to deal with Barbantio and not his usual rash, emotional, and physical action that characterizes him later in the piece. So in this case we see both protagonists acting differently from both their natural character and from each other.

This shows that both characters are capable of acting outside of their perceived personalities to deal with people of seniority that are so close to their lovers and have such a profound effect on their love. Both protagonists have friends whose loyalties are questioned in the plays. For Hamlet, his friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, return from university upon the request of King Claudius. While for Othello, his second in command, and best friend Cassio is accused of infidelity with Desdemona. For both plays, the friends are originally perceived by the protagonist as trustworthy and loyal but the events of the play reveal otherwise.

This deception causes the protagonists to question their allegiances. Hamlet maintains his application of trust and thought and reason by keeping his friends in a state of ignorance to his true motives. While Othello, instead, acts rashly, inflamed with the fury of his passion and committed to the death of his once loyal friend. Othello stays true to his character while we see

Hamlet's progressing willingness to violence over rational thought while sentencing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their death.

In both cases we see the protagonists unwillingness to commit these acts of violence themselves and feel contempt to delegate these extremely actions to others. Love is a fickle thing. William Shakespeare holds true to this statement in both plays as both protagonists struggle to maintain their relationship with their lovers. Both Hamlet and Othello are considered to be tragic heroes, in which their actions and decisions lead to their eventual downfall. In this case, their decisions have led to the inevitable deaths of both Ophelia and Desdemona.

Upon discovering the daunting task of avenging his father, Hamlet has deemed "the garden of his own life having now become a desert" (Hudson 95) in which he refuses to entangle Ophelia. He had established a trusting relationship with Ophelia up until the point where Polonius intrudes and breaks the final bond between them. Thus, Hamlet distances himself, isolating Ophelia and treating her crudely, as a means to cope with the loss of the love of his life. Hamlet is left to give up Ophelia because he "sees no escape for himself" (Hudson 95) and thus refuses to place her into the same desert of a life he lives.

In a sense, Hamlet treats Ophelia "rudely and unkindly in order to save her" (Hudson 111). The series of events eventually leads to Ophelia's delusional perception of reality upon losing Hamlet and her unavoidable death. Othello, on the other hand, takes a more drastic route. After hearing of Cassio and Desdemona's supposed affair, Othello decides to murder her for her infidelity

instead of banish her like she begged for. After Iago starts to spout lies about the affair, he asks Emilia to steal Desdemona's scarf and it winds up in Cassio's hands.

Othello, after seeing this "proof" of infidelity, no longer has any doubts about the affair and Iago's accusations. Therefore, Othello's motive is revenge while Hamlet's motive is protection. While we see the different ways in how each protagonist deals with characters of both minor consequence and characters as significant as lovers, one of the most revealing parts of both works is the protagonist's dealings with the antagonist. For Hamlet this is the King Claudius and for Othello it is his 2nd man Iago. Hamlet from the beginning of the piece hates Claudius and sees him as his natural enemy because he is his father's murderer.

This has a deep contrast with Othello who from the first instances of the play sees Iago as a trustworthy friend. When dealing with Claudius, Hamlet does one thing throughout the entire piece; he thinks of what to do. For a major portion Hamlet only thinks and reflects on what action to take and takes action only in the instance when he has the players perform the Murder of Gonzago. Showing to a greater extent that Hamlet "is the prince of philosophical speculators and because he cannot have his revenge perfect, according to the most refined idea his wish can form.

He declines it altogether" (Smith 289-91). Othello during the entire play does nothing at all in respect to Iago other than trust him completely. This shows "Othello's longing for passivity" which makes him only listen to Iago rather than confront both his wife and his lieutenant. (Barthelemy 79-80) Aside from

this difference in both the perception of the antagonist by the protagonist along with the type of action taken towards them, both plays are similar in that both Hamlet and Othello reach a turning point in which the way they deal with the difficulties the antagonist represents changes completely.

For Hamlet this is the image of the soldiers of Norway going to war that is marked by his soliloquy in which he swears to have bloody thoughts (thoughts of action) or to not think at all. For Othello this is the realization of Iago's deception when he has killed his wife in his home. Both protagonists take the same action, violence. While with Othello we see the opposite of what may be considered characteristic for a military leader, his nonfatal wounding of Iago shows that he wants him to suffer rather than to die an immediate death, much more thought out than his rash decision to kill his lieutenant.

This is where Othello's tragedy is "that he was unusually open to deception and, if once wrought to passion, likely to act with little reflection, with no delay, and in the most decisive manner conceivable" (Barthelemy 25), such as the murder of his wife. Hamlet also makes an uncharacteristic decision in the final part of the play. Hamlet grabs his sword and he drives it through Claudius as his last action before the poison in him takes his life. So in both plays the protagonist deal with the antagonist in the same way, with the use of violence.

In conclusion, we see in either character the image of ourselves that helps us to understand better the ways in which each character deals with the difficulties set before him. In Othello, we see the general who is deceived

coming to the realization of a betrayal that has taken what he loves the most from him. Here the reader can understand both the feeling of betrayal and loss that make Othello's final action much more understandable and allows the reader to make their final opinions of the tragic fall of the Moor, an ending as dark as his flesh.

With Hamlet, we see loss in a larger sense without the realization of betrayal, something known from the beginning of the piece. Hamlet not only loses his life or just as single betrayal but what comprises of his entire world comes to an end. In Hamlet, the reader sees the death of logic and reason that makes way for the primal action of violence that adds to a deeper meaning towards his change of character.