

Othello prelim essay

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



When the aspirational values of an individual become all-consuming, the relationships of those close to them are destroyed, through the corruption of loyalty and trust. Both Shakespeare's Othello and Geoffrey Sax's Othello portray many elements of tragedy, by exploring the relationship of Othello and Iago/Jago, and the way his manipulations distort Othello's mind. Iago's jealousy in Shakespeare's play Othello reflects the elements of a fatal flaw in an individual, and the disruption of the Chain of Being, both being key features of a tragedy.

Iago's words, "Men should be what they seem", are ironic, as he hides his true self from Othello, who trusts him completely, in order to gain what he desires. His rejection, and pursuit, of the job of Othello's lieutenant eventually causes his demise, hence becoming his 'fatal flaw'. Iago's continued pursuit of his goal leads to the deaths of many, which provides a metaphor for all audiences of the destruction our aspirations can cause.

The imbalance in the Chain of Being is corrected in the conclusion of Shakespeare's Othello, however, Sax's Othello results in Ben Jago becoming successful, and achieving the position of Police Commissioner. Sax's Jago psychologically manipulates and abuses his victims, in contrast to the original play, where many are physically killed. Our modern audience expects this, however, because we, as well as Jago, realise that for him to achieve his goals, he has to be subtle in order to avoid detection in our age of fingerprinting and DNA sampling.

In this way, Sax's Jago has to prepare his plans a lot more than Shakespeare's Iago, which leads to him gaining the position he wanted,

rather than being captured. However, both have very similar plans, revolving around manipulation, especially Othello's mind and emotions. Othello's trust, thereby his loyalty, relies on his knowledge of the individual, particularly their past. In both texts, his slight uncertainty with his trust in Desdemona/Dessie is due to their fast marriage and lack of knowledge of their lives before he met them.

In Shakespeare's Othello, Desdemona's and Othello's sudden marriage, which finalises their relationship, is accentuated by Iago asking Othello " But I pray sir, / Are you fast married? " This leaves us confused as to how these characters became truly familiar with each other before their marriage, and foreshadows what is to later come. Sax portrays Othello's niggling doubt towards Dessie as due to her silence about her boarding schooldays, when she met Lulu. However, Dessie defends herself against his accusations of her being secretive, by shouting, " It's always you talking and me listening!"

This frame is a close-up, overhead shot of Dessie, emphasising how vulnerable she is to Othello, and foreshadowing the circumstances of her death. Othello's distorted trust enables Iago's plan to succeed, because he puts his loyalties in the wrong hands. Sax portrays Ben Iago as a police officer, who we and also Othello, expect to be just and honest, as police uphold and enforce the law. Similarly, Shakespeare's Iago held a position that was expected to be trusted, as a part of the army who were assigned the role of protecting their country.

This fallibility of Othello's trust and loyalty allowed Iago to manipulate him such that he was able to isolate him, and destroy his relationships with others. The relationship breakdowns in both versions of Othello cause vast

amounts of chaos, because the Chain of Being is broken. Shakespeare's Othello decides that Desdemona is guilty before even consulting her, as seen when Iago tells him, " She did deceive her father, marrying you", and he replies, " And so she did."

His truncated sentence bluntly expresses his view, implying that he has made up his mind, and nothing can change it. Similarly, Sax depicts Othello as already concluded that Dessie is guilty, by him saying, " You tell me what I want to know... Tell me the truth bitch! " These words are accompanied by a low shot, looking up at a close-up of Othello's face, indicating the power Othello has over Dessie, and makes the viewer empathetic towards her, by feeling weak and insecure. However, we have recurring scenes that show how Desdemona is trying to keep their relationship together.

Sax shows this by representing Dessie as a woman in a domestic violence household, especially when she says, " He needs me. " Similarly, Shakespeare characterises Desdemona as a dutiful wife, " It was his bidding... We must not displease him. " Desdemona/Dessie's loyalty to her husband infuriates Othello more, as he believes it is more of a lie to keep the secret from him, rather than tell him outright, and it is the worst thing that Desdemona could do to him, " She's like a liar gone to burning hell."

All these little aspects of Desdemona/Dessie and Othello's relationship, in both Shakespeare's and Sax's Othello, combine to cause the destruction of it, upon which the whole play is hinged upon. The end of a relationship is caused by many varying factors, but mostly a diminished sense of trust, whether it has a basis to be there, or whether someone values it so lowly that they put their own selfish desires over it.

This is true in the case of Shakespeare's Othello, and the modern adaption Othello, directed by Geoffrey Sax. Iago/Jago's aspirations cause him to manipulate many people, with the purpose of destroying Othello's relationships, mainly with Desdemona/Dessie, to achieve the position that was "wrongly" given to someone else. This holds a mirror up to both the Elizabethan and our modern societies, critiquing our nature and values.