

Othello, the moor of venice: psychological approach

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



William Shakespeare's drama, "Othello, the Moor of Venice," may be interpreted in both a Freudian and Jungian way within the psychological criticism of literature. There are three main characters in the story: Othello, the Moor in the service of the Venetian state, his wife Desdemona, and Othello's wicked servant Iago.

From the Freudian point of view, both male characters, Othello (master) and Iago (servant) have the developed id (the part of the human mind that seeks pleasure). At the same time, they suffer from a weak ego (the part of the mind that controls the id's impulses, letting them go a normal way). The ego can not stand between the id and the superego (the part of the mind that represses the id's impulses), so the men's instincts are bare and cause them into trouble. Othello kills Desdemona and himself and Iago also murders his wife Emilia and is a few steps from being tortured severely.

Iago's superego represses his sexual desires as inappropriate for society. His id does not agree with it and is released through betrayal, thievery and lie. All these in the case of Iago become a fake sex intercourse. Deep in his soul Iago treats sex as a "bad" and shameful thing. His code of behavior and the words about women make his point clear.

For Iago the most pleasant thing is to talk badly about Desdemona and his own wife. Thus the servant acts as a ready-made sadist, a type who finds joy and satisfaction only when he makes other people unhappy. Besides he is a man who is not taught to forgive. His place in life is cheap and subordinate so Iago feels good when he oppresses and manipulates the others like Roderigo. It is curious to look closer at the personages' skin-color. "Good"

master is black and “ bad” servant is white. It creates a very interesting effect so far as Iago’s black soul matches Othello’s black skin and this makes them equal.

From the Freudian point of view, sexual motives penetrate all through the text. To begin with, sex may be the motivation for Iago to hate his master so much. Othello did not treat Iago as a candidate for the lieutenant’s position. Iago speaks about his hurt feelings but that seems a bit unnatural as the man mentions this reason only a few times.

The reader can not then make the idea of what in Othello made Iago so wild. One may even suggest that Iago and Othello are latent homosexuals and Iago’s hatred for Othello is the perverted form of love. There are some evidences throughout the play of both master and servant paying attention to women, especially on Iago’s side. But is not it a shift of his desire for the Moor onto the female characters if to scan the play through the Freudian lens?

The central female character of the play is Desdemona. She steps out as a victim of two suspected in homosexuality males, Othello and Iago. First, let us recall under what circumstances she married to the Moor. It was against Brabantio’s (Desdemona’s father) will. The girl left home in the night with Othello. He was definitely older than Desdemona and seemed to resemble a father to her in age and manners.

This is a case of Electra’s complex, when a female hates her own father and wants to hurt him. Brabantio died of grief because she married to Othello.

Desdemona wanted to find the father's twin in Othello and killed his good feelings though being unaware of it till the very end. Besides killing her own daddy Desdemona subconsciously wanted to die herself because she felt guilty for hating Brabantio and wishing him die.

Othello's attitude to the wife and his mad jealousy perfectly fit into the theory of Oedipus complex, when a man sees his mother in every woman he meets in life. The Moor often behaves as a child, for example when he speaks about his noble parents and high qualities of a soldier and does not care to look modest. Like a child he is searching for a friend and suspects that other people want to hurt him. To say more, he prefers to socialize with men mostly, because women make him uncomfortable.

In Desdemona he also wanted to find the substitute for his mother. It is intentionally that he tells Desdemona about the handkerchief his mother had left him. To go further, the story takes place on the island and the personages travel to Cyprus on board of the ship. According to Freudian theory, ship stands for a female symbol and the water usually goes with birth, the female principle, the maternal, the womb, and the death wish. Thus, getting into the storm, the personages are subjects for dying. In addition, Othello wants to join his own mother through the journey through the symbol of the ship.

According to Jungian theories, the conflicts between the personages may be interpreted as the conflicts between the general habit of a person to neglect or cynically evaluate the surroundings and the opposite habit to see the world through rose-coloured glasses. Othello and Iago act as if they are two

halves of a human soul, one is dark and the opposite is light. Iago is the evil creature, who denies all the romantic things around him, whereas Othello represents the type who tries to idealize the reality.

Yet you can not say that Iago and Othello are undeniably different, because all through the play they are communicating and spend a lot of time together. The possible reason is that they support and accomplish each other in the world vision. For example, Iago takes from his master the understanding of what should be right like friendship or admiration with a woman's beauty. It is not that the man is not able to see that Desdemona is beautiful or that Othello is a brave soldier. The wicked servant just could not believe that a beautiful woman can be loyal to her husband or Cassio, the lieutenant, is a genuine friend to Othello and Desdemona. On the opposite, Othello easily believed in Iago's roorbacking. It shows only that the Moor as an ideal type standing very close to the devil type of Iago.

To put it in a nut-shell, from the psychological point of view the master and the servant tensely link together, and Iago may be treated as the repressed side of Othello's consciousness. Desdemona does not let them join and that is why she is dead in the end of the play.