

The theme of love in othello

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In Othello, William Shakespeare presents the tragic story of Othello, a Moorish general of Venice. Iago, Othello's ensign, is indignant about Othello promoting Cassio to lieutenant instead of him. To avenge this perceived offense, Iago deceives Othello, convincing him that Cassio slept with Othello's wife, Desdemona. Consumed with jealousy, Othello kills Desdemona. Throughout this narrative, Shakespeare uses diction and metaphor to portray the dark and dangerous facet of love.

When the play begins, the reader discovers that Desdemona's father, Brabantio, does not approve of her marriage to Othello. Indeed, Othello and Desdemona elope without informing Brabantio. Learning about the secret and unapproved marriage, he angrily declares that Desdemona "is abused, stol'n from me, and corrupted by spells..." In this outburst of passion, Shakespeare uses diction to subtly comment on the sorcerous power of love. Brabantio's claim evokes negative connotations associated with witchcraft and black magic.

Indeed, lovers are often described as under one another's spell. Under the influence of a spell, a lover loses all control over his or her behavior. Shakespeare observes that this characteristic of love exposes the lover to "corruption," foreshadowing the corruption into which Othello descends because he loves Desdemona "not wisely, but too well." Later in the narrative, Iago performs the first important step in his plot for revenge. He suggests to Othello that Venetian women, such as Desdemona, are notoriously unfaithful.

After Iago leaves, Othello laments, “ O curse of marriage, that we can call these delicate creatures ours, and not their appetites! ” Describing marriage as a curse, Shakespeare reinforces love’s association with sinister witchcraft. Furthermore, Othello’s implicit desire to possess both Desdemona’s body and mind reveals an alarming insight about the nature of love; specifically, that lovers wish to possess their partner entirely. Because absolute ownership and control is not achievable, they must develop trust, or suspicion will torture them.

Approaching the climax of the drama, during which Othello kills Desdemona, he tells her that he would tolerate “ all kinds of sores and shames,” but he cannot endure the pain in his heart, “ the fountain from the which my current runs or else dries up. ” Shakespeare uses two layers of metaphor in this speech – a fountain as a metaphor for the heart, and the heart as a metaphor for love. Positioning love within the heart is significant because the heart is a vital organ.

Othello implies that he either lives or dies according to love. In a literal sense, if the heart stops pumping blood like a fountain, then Othello’s veins will dry up and he will die. Figuratively, because Othello incorrectly believes that Desdemona slept with Cassio, she obstructs the flow of his heart’s fountain, drying up both the love and desire-to-live within him. By likening love to a vital organ such as the heart, Shakespeare highlights the tremendous suffering which can arise when love is wounded.

Before “ honest Iago” deceives Othello, love intoxicates Othello to the point of euphoria. Speaking of his happiness with Desdemona, he states, “ I cannot

“I speak enough of this content... it is too much of joy.” However, he cannot avoid the hazardous snares which love arranges for us all. As we all seek that euphoric and ineffable emotion termed “love,” Shakespeare reminds us of the darker side of love – a side which can render us powerless by its magic, a side which can fill us with jealous fury, and a side which can even drain us of life itself.