

The process of change in othello

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The tragic significance of the entire play revolves around the fact that the greatness and goodness of any man, his achievements in his profession and his success can be swiftly and utterly undone; that he could sink not only from bliss to despair but from the heights of human excellence to the very baseness of our animal instincts. We are first introduced to Othello from the thoughts of Iago and Roderigo. These comments in the opening scene have a mostly racist nature and Othello is described as barbaric and a Negro — he is referred to as “the thick lips” in the opening act. He is also full of “his own pride and purposes” (Iago — Act 1, scene 1, line 12) Racist innuendoes are continued when Brabantio is awakened. Iago cruelly says: “an old black ram is tupping your white ewe” (Act 1, Scene 1, line 80-90) and tells Brabantio that his nephews will “neigh to you”. (Act 1, Scene 1, line 113) The contrast then surprises the reader in Scene 2 of the same act where Othello is seen to act very noble. He will not run and hide but will defend himself. The Moor is revealed as an honest and distinguished member of Venetian society, who not even the noble Brabantio can go against. With his calm and superior poetic speech he is depicted as a well respected military commander. Othello accepts the challenge to defend himself and with his declaration, Othello manages to prove himself. The duke in fact says: “Your son-in-law is more fair than black”. (Act 1, Scene 3, line 287) In his declaration, Othello hints that this charm and poetic speech is what also drew Desdemona to him; “she loved me for the dangers I had passed” (Act 1, Scene 3, line 166). In fact she had told him that if he knew a friend, he should teach him this story in order to woo her. We tend to warm up to the character of Othello, especially when we see the evil in Iago’s plans and therefore tend to

disregard the racist comments of the first scene. Iago turns cruel and uses the good characteristics of Othello to manipulate him to his advantage. Without someone of profound evil and cunning, the task of making Othello's change believable and credible would be impossible. We see that for Iago this is a sport when he says "pleasure and action makes the hour seem short" (Act 2, Scene 3, line 368) What is new to the trusting Othello is the hell of a jealous man which Iago conjures up so powerfully: the notion of Venetian society where wives are skilled adulteresses and where lust would prompt a young woman to marry a black man and leave when her desire is sated. Iago exploits a friendly love, the kind of love which imposes the painful duty of being "direct and honest". Iago uses Othello's high regard for him to trick and betray Othello who believes Iago to be "man of exceeding honesty". (Act 3, Scene 3, line 258) As Othello grows in certainty of the love affair between Cassio and his wife, he begins to fall off the pedestal; he loses his grace and becomes reduced to nothing but another commoner. It is Othello's misplaced trust that is his major tragic flaw; he should trust his wife's fidelity over the concerns of a friend. In fact we observe that Othello is torn between negative thoughts and fond memories of Desdemona. At first he utters "not a jot, not a jot" (Act 3, Scene 3, line 114) but with further insistence he comes to a point where he cries "why did I marry?" (Scene 3, Act 3, line 240). Othello becomes very confused about his opinion on his wife, "I think my wife be honest, and think she is not;" (Act 3, Scene 3, line 384). It is when the evidence he has been asking for begins to surface that Othello's character begins to change. He is emotionally hurt and in his anger he loses his poise which made him an

admiration among friends. Othello's transformation is seen clearly in Act 4, Scene 1. Iago is the first to point out " Othello shall go mad" (Act 4, Scene 1, line 100). He becomes more savage. Othello physically loses control falling into " epilepsy" (Act 4, Scene 1, line 50) and striking Desdemona. The decision to eavesdrop is cowardly and contrasted with his previous openness " I must be found". (Act 1, Scene 2, line 30) Apart from losing his position in disintegration of his person as a whole, Othello also loses his sense of authority. This downward spiral is connected to Iago's work. This is mostly seen in the choice of speech — his former poetry disappears and his lines are sharper, shorter and harsher. On the contrary, Iago's speech becomes more eloquent — he is gaining power. We notice that Othello has started asking questions rather than commanding Iago " How shall I murder him? "(Act 4, Scene 1, line 169). Rather than a military commander he has become a common soldier, a follower and puppet on Iago's strings. Because he lacks his normal sensible judgement, his friends lose confidence in him. " Is this the noble Moor, whom our full senate call all-in-all sufficient? "(Act 4, Scene 1, line 265-266) When Othello kills Desdemona he has reached the base of Venetian society. But Othello has yet to experience another change, when Iago confesses to the crimes he has committed. Othello, realising his grave mistake, becomes calm and restores his previous poetic speech. He bitterly announces That's he that was Othello: here I am. (Act 5, Scene 2, line 284) This is an acknowledgment of total self betrayal that comes upon him at the end of the play, as he returns to his noble self. He makes his last confident judgement, realising the enormous extent of his crimes and then kills himself. " Like the base Indian threw his pearl away/ richer than all his

tribe" (Act 5, Scene 2, line 343) The process of change in Othello makes for the entire plot line and is Shakespeare main motif. One can also notice, that with the change in Othello, a change in other characters is noted, example how Iago becomes more powerful and Desdemona more vulnerable as Othello changes. This makes the drama such a beauty to read, as it is dynamic and so full of the emotion that we go through in our daily lives. We can relate to Othello's human instinct — jealousy. It is his tragic flaw and it makes it easy for Iago to use it to shape the direction the story takes, and the process of change that Othello goes through.