

# Othello by Lawrence Fishburne



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Jennifer Chapel 21 September 2006 Othello - A Tragic Tale of Unjustified Jealousy Othello is one of William Shakespeare's great tragedies. It portrays how the protagonist Othello, prompted by his evil - genius ensign allows unjustified jealousy to grow and fester like a canker in his soul, ultimately resulting in devastating consequences. The text itself is nothing short of extraordinary. This writer found it engrossing, heartbreaking and considers it as a tragedy of the highest quality.

The most striking and fascinating aspect of the text was its psychological elements and its great villain Iago. Through Iago, Shakespeare reveals his remarkable understanding of the human psyche. The villain's cold manipulation of the key players in the script like so many puppets on strings chills one to the bone. Iago uses the technique of psychological suggestion to bring about the downfall of Othello. All the characters are merely pawns in Iago's deadly mental game. Everyone calls him "Honest Iago" and no one is wise to the rot in his character. Outwardly Iago shuns violence and plays the peacemaker while in reality he is usually the catalyst responsible for setting off cataclysmic bouts of violence. He passionately refutes dark suspicions which nobody would have entertained if he had not suggested it in the first place. He exploits individual weaknesses, and appeals to the dark side in human nature skillfully undoing the restraining bonds of conscience and decency and finally unleashing the beast that is an integral part of every individual. In this manner Iago goes about bringing his monstrous plot to fruition and plays a direct role in the death of the lovers. Shakespeare's genius lies in his ability to use his understanding of human psychology in the creation of his perfect villain, Iago. It is this feat which raises the text to the lofty realms of brilliance.

The work evoked myriad emotions in this writer, pity, anger and a grudging admiration for the machinations of the villainous Iago. Desdemona is the character who evokes the most pity as it is her youth, innocence and beautiful nature which are sacrificed on the altar of Iago's treachery. Her attempt to save the husband who has murdered her so foully and without just cause from the toils of his fate even as she is dying is truly heartrending.

Othello is a character who evokes pity and anger in equal measure. Iago exploits his weakness and brings his hidden insecurities to the fore thereby clouding his reason and better judgment. He falls prey to jealousy which as Iago warns him is "the green-eyed monster which doth mock/ The meat it feeds on" (III, iii 171-172). The jealousy he is infected with acts like a slow poison which courses through his veins and soon becomes a ravaging presence that consumes him from within. Othello's integral honesty blinds him to the true nature of Iago and his vulnerability in the face of such evil tugs at the heart-strings and evokes sympathy. His brutal murder of the pure Desdemona is infuriating in the extreme as he has allowed his weakness and jealousy to destroy everything he holds dear. When he takes his own life in the final act following a touchingly eloquent speech, he once again evokes the sympathy of the reader.

Iago provokes palpable rage in the reader and few would blame this writer for wishing to strangle him. His cold-blooded manipulation and the sadistic glee he derives from the damage he has authored makes one furious. But there are moments when he becomes the recipient of grudging admiration for the simplicity and sheer brilliance of his tactical moves in bringing about the ruin of Othello. He is the supreme villain and the perfect murderer as he

always gets someone else to do his dirty work for him.

#### Works Cited

Shakespeare, William. "Othello". *Making Literature Matter: An Anthology for Readers and Writers*. Ed. Schilb, John & Clifford, John. Place of publication: Publisher, Year of publication. 722 - 813.