

# Bradley vs leavis, notes on othello essay



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- Othello's description of himself as, " one not easily jealous, but, being wrought, / Perplexed in extreme," is perfectly just. His tragedy lies in this - that his whole nature was indisposed to jealousy, and yet was such that he was unusually open to deception, and, if once wrought to passion, likely to act with little reflection, with no delay, and in the most decisive manner conceivable.

- But up to this point, where Iago is dismissed (III, iii, 238) Othello, I must maintain, does not show jealousy.

His confidence is shaken, he is confused and deeply troubled, he feels even horror; but he is not yet jealous in the proper sense of the word.

- Iago's soliloquy—the motive-hunting of a motiveless malignity—how awful it is! Yea, whilst he is still allowed to bear the divine image, it is too fiendish for his own steady view,—for the lonely gaze of a being next to devil, and only not quite devil,—and yet a character which Shakespeare has attempted and executed, without disgust and without scandal! (S. T. C)

- Finally, let me repeat that Othello does not kill Desdemona in jealousy, but in a conviction forced upon him by the almost superhuman art of Iago, such a conviction as any man would and must have entertained who had believed Iago's honesty as Othello did. (S. T. C)

- To compare Iago with Satan of Paradise Lost seems almost absurd, so immensely does Shakespeare's man exceed Milton's fiend in evil. The Othello who enters the bed-chamber with the words, " It is the cause, it is

the cause, my soul," is not the man of the Fourth Act. The deed he is bound to do is not a murder, but a sacrifice.

He is to save Desdemona from herself, not in hate but in honour; in honour and in love...there is almost nothing here to diminish the admiration and love which heighten pity. As he speaks those final words in which all the glory and agony of his life seem to pass before us, like the pictures that flash before the eyes of a drowning man, a triumphant scorn for the fetters of the flesh and the littleness of all the lives that must survive him sweeps our grief away, and when he dies upon a kiss the most painful of all tragedies leaves us for a moment free from pain and exulting in the power of " love and man's unconquerable mind.

- Othello has from the beginning responded to Iago's ' communications' in the way Iago desired and with a promptness that couldn't be improved upon, and has dismissed Iago with these words, " Farewell, farewell: / If more thou dost perceive, let me know more; / Set on thy wife to observe. "

- With such resolute fidelity does Bradley wear these blinkers that he can say, ' His trust, where he trusts, is absolute,' without realising the force of the corollary: Othello's trust, then, can never have been in Desdemona. However, to anyone not wearing these blinkers it is plain that no subtilization and exaltation of the Iago-devil can save the noble hero of Bradley's devotion. And it is plain that what we should see in Iago's prompt success is not so much Iago's diabolic intellect as Othello's readiness to respond.

- Othello, in his magnanimous way, is egotistic. He really is, beyond any question, the nobly massive man of action, the captain of men, he sees

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himself as being, but he does very much see himself, " Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them. In short, a habit of self-approving self-dramatisation is an essential element in Othello's make-up, and remains so at the very end.

- When he discovers his mistake, (the murder of Desdemona) his reaction is an intolerably intensified form of the common ' I could kick myself,' - V, ii, 275-79 - But he remains the same Othello; he has discovered his mistake, but there is no tragic self-discovery. The tragedy is inherent in the Othello-Desdemona relation, and Iago is a mechanism necessary for precipitating tragedy in a dramatic action... His self-centredness doesn't mean self-knowledge: that is a virtue which Othello, as soldier of fortune, hasn't had much need of. He has been well provided by nature to meet all the trials facing him now that he has married this Venetian girl with whom he's ' in love' so imaginatively (we're told) as to outdo Romeo and who is so many years younger than himself - the trials facing him are of a much different order.