



UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF LOVE THROUGH SHAKESPEARE

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ABSTRACT

This paper will evaluate the major characters in Shakespeare's "Othello" through the Triangular Theory of Love proposed by Robert Sternberg. Othello who was madly in love with Desdemona killed her on their night of consummation due to his jealousy and the preconceived thought that she was cheating on him. It will also try to evaluate the psychology that led his love to turn into hostility through this theory.

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As Shakespeare rightly observed, "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind." Well, almost every person in his/her lifetime experiences the feeling of love but still we are not able to find the reason why we fell in love with that particular individual or soul or why a love lasts forever while the other ends in heartbreak. A dozen movies, novels and books dedicated to the idea of physical or spiritual love yet psychology tries to give an answer to this question through various psychological events that cause us to feel what we know under an umbrella term as "LOVE". Today in this paper, I will try to analyze the psychology that drives the major characters in Shakespeare's famous play "Othello" through the "Triangular Theory of Love" proposed by Robert Stenberg.

Robert Sternberg in his Triangular Theory of Love states that there are three important elements essential in love—Intimacy, Passion and Decision/Commitment. Through these three elements, he proposed seven types of love—Nonlove, Liking/friendship, infatuated love, Empty love, Romantic love, Companionate love, Fatuous love and Consummate love. With the help of this theory I would like to evaluate the relationship that

exists between various characters in this play. As we all know the story of Othello is about a black Moor who was in love with Desdemona and kills her out of his jealousy that is imposed upon him by his trusted friend Iago. The reason why Othello does not trust Desdemona is in his mind not in the words or situation that Iago said or created. As Iago rightly says to Othello, "O beware, my lord, of jealousy; It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock / the meat it feeds on" (3.3.163.2-165).

The first essential element in Love according to the theory is Intimacy. In other words, when you start to feel close or attracted to someone or when you start to understand the ideology or thinking process that leads the other person's life that phase is called Intimacy. Othello was not from the Venetian city and he was a slave in the past; though he holds a respectable position as a general in the Venetian army, still he was never able to forget his past. He used to narrate stories of adventure, war, and slavery to Desdemona, which she hears attentively. While he narrates his stories, Desdemona feels pity for the hardship he faced in his past. The word 'Pity' plays a major role in their relationship because he has constantly been subjected to harsh things while being a slave or

while fighting wars, which get soothed by the pity of Desdemona. That is why when Desdemona no longer holds pity for him in the end of the play due to which their relationship flourished he says to himself "I will kill thee And love thee after" (5.2.19)

Thus, he does not understand Desdemona but feels attracted because of the factor that her pity pacifies his past. Had he understood Desdemona's nature he would not have got convinced so easily when Iago says to him that the Venetian women are famous for duping men and Desdemona is doing the same thing by loving Cassio and not Othello. No evidence that Iago gave to Othello might have worked if he had known the basic nature of Desdemona. The jealousy was in the mind of Othello, which is confirmed by Iago, it was not Iago who imposed it upon Othello. In the end of the play Iago also says that he did nothing the jealousy was already present in the mind of Othello he just justified it.

Othello accepts whatever Iago says because he has a preconceived notion in his mind that he is black and does not have the right courtly language of the Venetian gentlemen and because of this reason Desdemona despises him. "Haply, for I am black, /And have not those soft parts of conversation/That chamberers have; or for I am declined Into the vale of years – yet that's not much"(3.3.268-271). He was in a state of Hybridity in which he left his culture long ago and is not being able to cope with the new culture and because of this, he thinks himself to be inferior than the other Venetian noble persons.

Desdemona on the other hand was a Senator's Daughter and is usually involved with household chores. She rejected many suitors and noble persons of Venetian origin but accepts Othello despite the fact that he was not a noble man and also not from Venice because the adventure stories which Othello narrates to her liberates her mind. Through the medium of his stories, she has pleasure, which she did not get while being a household woman. Hence, she was not able to understand Othello's mind completely or the other side of Othello which Iago understands completely and uses him accordingly. That is why when she lost her handkerchief she said to Emilia that Othello was

not a jealous type of person. Had he been jealous of her, the loss of handkerchief would be a big deal for him. On the contrary it was the loss of handkerchief which confirms Othello's doubt that Desdemona is cheating upon him. Desdemona is not able to understand the inferiority and lack of self-knowledge in Othello.

The second most important element in love is passion, which is sexual feeling towards any person. While in the play, it was not clear, whether they are highly passionate towards each other or not but one occasion Othello did say that he did not have explicit sexual feelings for Desdemona because he thinks himself to be too old for her but he still wants to marry her. While ironically, their passion too was not fulfilled in the play. At the time of their consummation, he murdered her. The internal war, which Othello is fighting in his mind, kills the love or passion, which he feels for Desdemona.

Roderigo's love on the other hand for Desdemona is only passionate kind of love that is based on sexual feeling also known as Infatuated love which Iago understood and due to this reason he continuously tells him that though she is Othello's wife but he can have her. Psychology says that men are more prone to sexual jealousy and Iago uses this factor very well while manipulating Othello. He always points towards the passionate bond that Desdemona and Cassio share and not on the emotional bond that they might share. Othello does not stand even the idea of Desdemona being physically involved with any other person than he himself.

While on the other hand a woman loves her friend and her beloved in the same manner but she does not have any passionate feeling towards her friend, which is prevalent in her love life. Hence, Desdemona cares for Cassio as a friend is prominent during her conversation with Lodovigo when she says, "I would do much/T' atone them, for the love I bear to Cassio" (4.1.177-187). She bears the same respect for both Othello and Cassio and due to this; she was not able to identify Othello's jealousy and irritation when she comes to appeal to Othello on Cassio's behalf.

The third essential element in love is Decision/Commitment. Your mind decides that you

are in love with a person or you feel intimacy or passion towards that person, but deciding to love someone is different from committing to be with him or her forever. Commitment is not only between lovers, it can also be shared between any relationship whether it is of a parent-child, husband-wife or between friends. While parents are committed towards their children from the time he/she was born, on the other hand when you marry someone you choose to form a commitment willingly with that person. Othello loves Desdemona but he was not committed towards her because when Iago tries to convince him that she loves Cassio he started to think of reasons why he married her. Desdemona too abominates her love for Othello when he hits her and behaves indifferent to her for no reason. She said to Emilia that she has "no lord" and absolutely no idea of what has happened to Othello.

Barbantio, father of Desdemona, also lacks commitment towards her. As soon as she announces her love for Othello, he despises her. Barbantio condemns the outspoken love of Desdemona towards Othello. Out of anger, he says "Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see: She has deceived her father, and may thee" (1.3.288-89) but he did not realize that his words would penetrate Othello's mind and confirm his preconceived doubt of infidelity by Desdemona. He thinks that if Desdemona can cheat her father she can also cheat him. Still Desdemona forgives him when Emilia asks who is responsible for her condition by saying "Nobody. I myself" (5.2.138). Hence, the love of Desdemona and Othello, which could have become Consummate Love having intimacy, passion and commitment actually turns into NonLove lacking all the qualities and what is worse is that Othello stabs Desdemona.

Othello and Desdemona's love combined after death with her act of forgiving Othello of whatever he had done to her. Her act of forgiveness brings back the pity, which she used to show him in the beginning of their love. Othello's last words, "then must you speak/Of one that loved not wisely but too well;/Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought/Perplex'd in the extreme; of one whose hand,/Like the base Indian, threw a pearl

away/Richer than all his tribe;" (5.2.360-66) conveys his love and regret for whatever he has done. Thus, it combines their love together maybe in other world. As Anaïs Nin rightly said, "What is love but acceptance of the other, whatever he is" (A Literate Passion: Letters of Anaïs Nin & Henry Miller, 1932-1953). Maybe in the other world they have accepted the real self of each other.

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