

The Power of Words: How language and narratives aid in the progression of the plot in Othello

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Abstract

Othello is not only a character with a potent amalgamation of greatness and weakness, but he is also a brave warrior and, in his own words, "an honorable murderer." But the central aspect that this paper has to discuss is a character that is well-versed in the art of oratory and understands its potency. Being a strong character who is courageous, intelligent, and has commanding abilities earned him a seat in the Senate. There are several other factors at play as well that showcase how a character from a different race reached the zenith. The most likely reason that has made him the most successful civilian among strangers is his capacity to build up and retell all the tales of his value via the art of storytelling. The purpose of this research paper is to showcase how Othello thinks about using words. According to him, abstract words symbolize nothing, but how the terms are used and uttered can create a reality. At the beginning of the play, Othello asks Iago to "give thy worst of thoughts The worst of words" because of social insecurity about his origin. And because of this, he cedes control of his narrative and destiny to Iago.

Keywords: Narration, words, storytelling, deceive, handkerchief

Introduction

At the beginning of the play, Desdemona's father, Brabantio, confronts his son-in-law in front of the Duke. Being a lonely father holding grudges against his runaway daughter, he is confident that Othello used witchcraft to coerce the young woman into an interracial marriage. Othello reveals to Desdemona that their romance began when she listened to his stories and fell in love with him through his words. Convinced that Othello is a fine man, the Duke attempts to reassure Brabantio by offering reasons why anger should be set aside and peace pursued. When Othello suggests that his stories may have won Desdemona's heart, Brabantio responds, "But words are words, I didn't hear/that the injured heart had been stabbed through the ear." Brabantio believes that the language used in

general conversation lacks prowess and is ineffective, thus rejecting every single possibility that Othello's stories of courage might have won Desdemona's love and affection.

Whereas, according to Othello, words are never empty gestures; it's an art to pursue someone. His life and identity as an army commander, renowned warrior, respected citizen, and loving husband are shaped by the spectacular tales he tells of battle, slavery, and travel.

Since Othello routinely responds to his experience by molding it as a story, "Othello's entire belief in the reliability of his account as a transparent mediator of his experiences," writes Lisa Hopkins, makes Othello's stories instances of "narrative self-fashioning."

However, Othello's trust in the power of tales is more extreme than these readings allow. Instead of just reacting to the world around him, Othello uses stories to shape his future. Othello's tragic flaw was his demand for "ocular proof" at the play's climax, where the argument was not about the loss of the handkerchief but about the story of the cloth. As a result, speech-act theory, namely J.L. Austin's idea of performative utterances, may clarify and explain the storytelling actions in Othello, as defined by Austin and Jacques Derrida. Having Othello get married is the first step in the story's tragic turn. He comes to Venice from a strange and mysterious culture, and he uses stories not only to understand his history and form his present self but also to foresee what will happen in the future. Desdemona becomes a part of Othello's present and future after she develops an understanding of his story and can relate to the emotions he describes. Because of her compassion, she becomes an integral part of his story, not only because she admires his accomplishments and wants to be like him. She starts to "see Othello's face in his memory."

Through the narrative and possessing a way to tell tales similar to Othello, Desdemona penetrates his consciousness and becomes an integral part of his existence, leading to both the present and the future. Both feel certain of their equality and are aware of their shared need as his life story narrative becomes theirs. Desdemona and her husband, while traveling to Cyprus, talk about everything, and that too freely. In contrast, others don't even dare speak to Othello and even work toward the dismissal of Cassio.

Eamon Grennan adds, "No one else speaks to Othello like this, as if they are equal." When Othello tells Desdemona, "Perdition seizes my soul, yet I love thee, and when I don't love thee, chaos returns," he realizes that Desdemona is a significant part of his existence.

In other words, if he lost his love for Desdemona, he would lose his story. It is hardly surprising that Iago seeks to alter the destiny of the Moor by concentrating on Othello's marriage. As Othello's lieutenant, he is close to his adversary and has several opportunities to recognize Desdemona's significance. In a moment of contempt, he declares that Othello's soul is so wedded to her love that she may "create, unmake, and do what she lists." With this knowledge, Iago can use the same empathic method as Desdemona, but without her good intentions, to enter Othello's head. Julia Genster states, "He is quite adept at picturing the other as oneself, but this emotive substitution may sometimes not so much bring the empathizer into the other as it does empty the other of himself."

The revelation of the past

Since Othello comes from an oral tradition, he relied on stories to make sense of the world. When Othello tells Iago, "give thy worst of thoughts The worst of words," he effectively gives up control of his tale and, by extension, his fate. Understanding the distinction between words that create reality and words that depict reality is crucial to appreciating the tragic ending. If unsubstantiated rumors fuel Othello's jealousy, he may be dismissed as insane. While we agree that Othello believes the narrative predicts future events, everything else becomes secondary, including whether Desdemona has been loyal in the past and what will happen to her if the story continues at its current pace. As the play proceeds, Iago penetrates the personal space of Cassio from his Venetian origin to the relationship between Cassio and Desdemona; he "peculiarizes his language, conjuring sexual imagery of Cassio and Desdemona in the fiction of the dreaming Cassio." The way this plot was dictated to Othello, his anger skyrocketed to a level even Iago hadn't thought of. But Othello has also been taking up Iago's lessons in Western reasoning. He now understands the value of seeing phenomena firsthand. "Give me the ocular proof," he belligerently demands of Iago since he wants to see something before acting. At the pivotal point of the play, Iago decides to concentrate all of this "evidence" on a small handkerchief because he knows he will never be able to create actual adultery out of the imagined affair. Out of so many plots that can be hatched to frame Desdemona for showing that she is disloyal, Iago chooses the only souvenir that Othello has given to Desdemona, i.e., a handkerchief. He knew she cherished this much more than anything else and protected it at all costs. The only person who could help him concoct such a scheme without even asking a single word was his wife Emilia, a personal assistant to Desdemona.

But given that even Desdemona is ignorant of the handkerchief's backstory, it seems improbable that Iago is aware of it. Iago chooses the most valuable objects to steal, whether consciously or unconsciously. To start the tragedy, Iago chooses one item related to a prophecy about the future.

Tragic fall of Othello

During the climax scene, when Othello demands to see the handkerchief from Desdemona, she realizes that it has been lost and couldn't be found anywhere. And this became the period when she and the audience learned about that handkerchief's history. When he said,

"That handkerchief

Did an Egyptian to my mother give...

Would make her amiable and subdue my father

Entirely to her love, but if she lost it,

Or made a gift of it, my father's eye Should hold her loathed."

The handkerchief was given to Othello's mother by an Egyptian woman, and she has been told that as long as she possesses the object, her husband will be in love with her, and as

soon as the thing is lost, he will be long gone in search of another. And on their deathbed, Othello's mother gave him that handkerchief. Here, Othello believed more in words, which was not just a trick played by Iago, as he did not listen to what his wife had to say but only words.

Othello considers himself and Desdemona as one, so whatever she does, he curses and loathes himself too. When he said, "It is not words that shakes me thus," he truly means it; for him, it is not the words that have been noted by any people that have to shatter to the core to collapse but the events that presage. In the initial stage, when Othello gives his full sovereignty to Iago, this leads to the destruction of Othello's narrative when the trustful bond of marriage is broken in pieces. According to Stanley Cavel, "To say he loses Desdemona's power to confirm his image of himself is to say that he loses his old power of imagination." And this is to say that he loses the grasp of his nature; he no longer has the same voice in his history. As his speech transitions from poetry to prose in Act Four and eventually becomes practically meaningless babbling, Othello's voice transforms physically. Similarly, in the same act, we see Desdemona's voice morph to reflect that of her husband.

In the third act of the foreboding scene, it can be seen that Desdemona and Emilia have spent little time together. While both were trying to set the bed, they started talking about the prospects of men and marriages. Desdemona's remarks demonstrate how closely the storyline between her and her husband, a war narrator, is knit together. For this emotional moment, seemingly characterized by an aura of closeness but mainly organized by absences and silences, Desdemona tells us a narrative of a lady who told a story instead of exposing her deepest feelings. At this juncture, it is crucial to emphasize that, in precisely the same way as Othello's narrative about the handkerchief foretells the future, so does Desdemona's story about the maid singing in the willow. Desdemona explains to Emilia that this maid "had a song of willow. / An old thing 'twas, but it expressed her fortune, / And she died singing it". Once Desdemona has finished singing, she sends Emilia away and goes to bed. Before Othello kills his wife, he tells her he loves her: "Yet she must die, lest she betrays other men."

Words and their multiple interpretations

The word "more" is used in this sentence, maybe as a pun on the word "Moor." Even if one assumes that the word choice shows his conviction that Desdemona had previously cheated on him, he adds further information a few lines later. Desdemona will quickly fade away, Othello warns as he awakens her:

"And yet I fear you, for you're fatal then
When your eyes roll, so. Why I should fear, I know not,
Since guiltiness, I know not. But yet I feel I fear."

According to the quotes above, it doesn't matter whether Desdemona committed adultery, whether she asked him to summon Cassio and demand proof, or whether her only sin is that she loves him; she will be sacrificed regardless. Therefore, Iago's thoughts must manifest precisely as they exist in his mind. To avoid such incidents, one must commit

suicide. Othello takes two lives because, as Desdemona asserts on her deathbed, he and she are essentially one person. Desdemona answers Emilia's shouts of "O, who has done this deed?" with "Nobody, I" as she comes across the murder scene.

Conclusion

In the play's final scene, the word "speak" appears numerous times, which emphasizes her ability to speak as a means by which she can bear witness to the officers who arrive at the death scene, and this is especially true of Emilia, who, in her straightforward tone, retorts to her husband and insistently says,

"I don't know what to do.
I will not charm my tongue. I am bound to speak."
Several lines later, she proclaims,
"I will speak as liberal as the north. /
Let heaven, and men, and devils, let them all, /
Ali, All cry shame against me, yet I'll speak."

Emilia uses functional language to convey information rather than fiction. In their previous interactions, she often used words to describe her genuine feelings for Desdemona. Even if she lacks sophistication, Emilia's remarks will profoundly impact her future. When Iago tells her to return to their house, she says, "Perhaps, I shall never go home." Shortly after she speaks these words, her husband kills her. Even in death, Emilia's last words, "So come my soul to bliss as I speak true, / so, speaking as I think, alas, I die," reinforce the connection between freedom of expression and personal agency. The fate of Emilia's story, unlike Othello's, was never in Iago's hands. Even if he manages to put her to sleep with a lethal injection, she will recount her murder for everyone to hear.

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