

Shakespeare's *Othello* – *The Moor of Venice*

Elements of analysis and interpretation

- ◇ You are now to work with a specific element of *Othello*.
- ◇ The work requires focus, close reading, interpretation and secondary literature.
- ◇ You are to work in groups; and each group are required to publish their work in a fashion where it can serve as exam notes to the rest of the class.
- ◇ You have the next three lessons to produce your examination, and prepare for the presentation that will follow in the fourth lesson.

Get thee gone!

1)

OTHELLO, FROM HERO TO MURDERER: Othello is the protagonist and hero of the play. However, from living a lush life among the Venetian elite as a respected general he prematurely ends the lives of himself and his one true true love. How does the play explore Othello's tragic development? Analyse and comment on his language, behaviour, and character. Discuss to what degree Othello himself is to blame for his faith.

You are now to organize notes that investigate and discuss that issue. Examples from the play must support your findings and references are vital.

Feel free to be (re)search for inspiration online and other sources – But do start by looking at the notes in the shared google folder:

14, *Othello*

27, *Otherness*

60, *Stereotypes*

2)

IAGO, A SHARP-TONGUED VILLAIN: Iago's language is closely connected to his sinister character. Analyse and comment on what Iago's way of speaking, vocabulary, thematic references and style reveal about his nature? Discuss his intelligence in contrast to the other characters' gullibility.

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Feel free to be (re)search for inspiration online and other sources – But do start by looking at the notes in the shared google folder:

31, *Iago*

49, *Sex and love*

3)

IAGO, THE PUPPETEER: How it is possible for Iago to orchestrate all the other characters in order to benefit himself and his master plan? Connect his ability to do so with his character, and comment on how he speaks of himself and others as the puppeteer of the play? Discuss the issue of luck and chance in connection to the master plan.

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31, *Iago*

47, *Relationships*

62, *Plot*

4)

FEMINISM: The play is centred around men and masculinity. However, women play a key role both the hero's downfall and in the villain's master plan. Analyse and comment on how is the issue of feminism explored in the play through the two lead female characters, Emilia and Desdemona? Discuss what view the play offers on women.

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Feel free to be (re)search for inspiration online and other sources – But do start by looking at the notes in the shared google folder:

41, *Desdemona*

43, *Emilia*

54, *Feminism*

5)

A PLAY OF JEALOUSY AND REVENGE: The pivotal point of *Othello* is jealousy and in effect, revenge. The majority of characters, major and minor are to some degree driven by the universal and very human emotion. Account for all the relations tainted by jealousy and wish for revenge. Furthermore, analyse and discuss how these emotions are expressed by the various characters and to what degree it controls their lives and destinies.

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14, *Othello*

31, *Iago*

43, *Emilia*

48, *Morality*

6)

OTHELLO ← PROTAGONIST/ANTAGONIST → IAGO:

Two primary interpretations of Othello's character have emerged among students and critics of the play: that he is virtuous, strong, and trustful; and that he is guilty of self-idealization and overweening; pride. Both views find support in the change in Othello's behavior. Although he is initially presented as a strong, confident character using typical heroic vocabulary, as he succumbs to jealousy and rage he becomes more like Iago and employs the villain's animal and diabolic imagery. According to critics who regard Othello as essentially noble, this change shows the innocent hero falling victim to Iago's schemes and being corrupted by his evil. Others, however, argue that Iago's actions merely cause Othello's noble facade to crumble, releasing his inherent savagery. The first interpretation places most, if not all, the responsibility for Othello's fall on Iago; the second puts much of the burden on the Moor himself.

With your point of departure in the lines above analyse and discuss the relationship between the two main characters, the protagonist Othello and the antagonist Iago. Comment on how they influence each other, and discuss to what degree the two are intertwined and connected.

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49, *Sex and love*

7)

IRONY AND FORESHADOWING:

Harmon and Holman in *A Handbook to Literature* define irony as "a broad term referring to the recognition of a reality different from appearance." *Othello* is an essentially ironic play in that Shakespeare creates such a wide divide between what appears to be real to the characters in the play and what appears to be real to the audience in the theater. He does this through several devices. In the first place, Shakespeare offers Iago some of the best language in the playwright's whole body of work. Consequently, Iago appears to the other characters as well spoken, appealing, and attractive. His language makes him someone they trust. This is evident from the number of times a character (particularly Othello) refers to Iago as "honest." Iago does not look like the villain he is. In this, Shakespeare deviates from the traditions of the Middle Ages in which evil characters always exhibit some degree of the evil on the surface. Indeed, in medieval romance, characters are as they appear: an ugly character is inevitably evil. Shakespeare plays with both audience and character horizon of expectation here. The first gap, then, is between what the characters and audience expect from such an attractive and well-spoken character and what he really is.

With your point of departure in the lines above analyse and discuss how Shakespeare uses and explores the issue of irony in the play. Moreover, comment on how irony often foreshadows the destiny of the characters.

You are now to organize notes that investigate and discuss that issue. Examples from the play must support your findings and references are vital.

Feel free to be (re)search for inspiration online and other sources.

8)

SEX(UALITY), LOVE AND GENDER: Sexuality, Love and Gender plays not only a vital part in the driving the plot forward, but it also serves as a key to understanding and analysing the characters and the play in the general. How does the play explore the issues of sexuality, love and gender through the various characters? Analyse and comment on how different characters represents different views on the issues, through their language. Discuss, based on this single play, whether you believe Shakespeare himself had a specific take on the matter?

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31, Iago

43, Emilia

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48, Morality

49, Sex and love

9)

DECEPTION, MISCOMMUNICATION, APPEARANCE: REALITY? The contrast between deception and reality is obvious to viewer and reader from the very first scene of the very first act. But how is the issue of deception / miscommunication / appearance explored in the play? Analyse and comment on how Shakespeare is able to create one reality for the characters on stage and a more honest one for the viewer? Discuss the significance of the play's *soliloquies* and *asides*.

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