

Some Technical Features of Shakespeare's Literary Style in Othello

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الملخص

يتناول هذا البحث تحليل لاسلوب شكسبير الادبي في مسرحية عطيل، كيف يتعامل مع المسرحية ويقسمها الى اجزاء صغيرة من حيث دخول وخروج الممثل الى المسرح. قام باستخدام بعض المصطلحات الادبية مثل "تناقض الشخصيات" و "اللغة والخيال" لتطوير الحبكة الدرامية والشخصيات في مسرحية عطيل. ومن خلال هذه المصطلحات استطاع شكسبير ان يخلق رائعة ادبية في عطيل.

Abstract

This present research deals with an analysis of Shakespeare's style in Othello. He divides a play into smaller subdivisions, Marked by exits and entrances of actors. He has used some technical terms such as "Character-Contrast" and "Language and Imagery" to develop the dramatic action and characters in Othello. So by means of these literary terms, Shakespeare has managed to create a real dramatic Masterpiece in Othello.

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1. Introduction

A play as a work of art exists to the full only when performed . it must hold the audience's attention through out the performance, and, unlike a novel, it can not be put down and taken up again.

Therefore, it is important to experience the play as one is seeing it on the stage for the first time. Shakerpear builds a play in a form of dramatic units which may be divided into smaller subdivisions, marked by exits and entrances of actors and lasting as long as the same actors are on the stage.²

Basically speaking , the first unit provides the exposition which is deigned to put the audience into the picture . in the second unit we see the forward movement of the play as one situation charges into another.

And finally, the last unit in a tragedy will bring a catastrophe, and in a comely – and some of the history plays – an unraveling of the complications, or what is called a denouement³.

Shekespear's language is just as diverse . quick – live dialogue is followed by long speeches , and verse changes to prose. Furthermore, there is a wide range of speech – formal, colloquial, dialect and the broken English of foreigners . songs, instrumental music , an the noise of battle, all extend the range of dramatic expressions⁴.

By these means and methods Shekespeare's people are brought vividly to life and eleverly individualized . Though they have

² Bojour, A. S. , The Structure of Shekespeare Plys (Liverpool Univ. Press, 1967), P. 76.

³ Palmer, J. , Political Xharacters of Shekespeare (Macmillan Press, 1978), P. 135.

⁴ Van Doren, Shekespeare (N. Y: Henry Holt Publishers, 1963), P. 243.

much to tell us about human nature, we must not forget that they are characters in a play, not in real life⁵.

Shakespeare groups his characters so that they form a pattern, and it is useful to draw a diagram showing this.

The reader may determine first what manner or type of play he is reading, because in Shakespeare's day the distinctions were rather kept carefully in mind although Shakespeare tended to mix his forms⁶. However, the basic division into tragedy, comedy and history is made by the conventional grouping in the usual editions. However, such division does not go far enough, for example, Henry V and Richard II are both history plays, but the first is an epic and the second is tragic in character, likewise, As You Like It and Twelfth Night are both romantic comedies, the first is a pastoral comedy, whereas the second is not⁷.

The following paper will discuss some technical features, but mainly juxtaposition, character-contrast and language and imagery in Shakespeare's play Othello.

Juxtaposition

It is a major technique used in Shakespeare's work as a whole for purpose of contrast, comparison or connection. The first part of Othello gives a number of oppositions or antitheses .. darkness and light, black and white, devil and angel.

⁵ Reese, M. M., Shakespeare-His world and his work (London: Arnold 1980), P. 30-36.

⁶Waston, G. J. , Drama: An Introduction (London: Macmillan, 1987), P. 145.

⁷ Brooks, Harold, The Arden Edition of Shakespeare (London; Methuen, 1980, P. 375).

a. one Part of a Scene set against another part:

A good example of this is shown in Act II, scene I, in which Cassio's speeches about Desdemona before she enters are set against the dialogue between Desdemona and Iago that follows, which is itself set against Othello's reunion with his wife. What characterizes Cassio's speeches is an estimation for Desdemona as a creature of spiritual worth. This is set against the cynicism of Iago's talk about the type of woman, which presents a contrast to Othello and Desdemona's expression of their love in terms of high poetry⁸.

b. Verse and Prose:

Verse and prose are used in a great deal in Shakespeare's work. In addition, there is always a sudden shift from verse to prose. For example, the dialogue of Iago is a mixture of prose and rhyming verse.

In his dialogue with Desdemona about the type of woman, Iago uses verse while when he talks with Rodrigo, he uses prose style. And as it is known, prose does not involve a regular rhythmic structure and it is, therefore, an ordinary speech. Whereas verse suggests patterns have intensity and resonance as a result of the chosen words, phrase and images⁹.

C. Contrast between sets of relationships:

Throughout the play of Othello, we find Shakespeare contrasting the relationship of Othello and Desdemona, Iago and

⁸ Admson, Jane, Othello as Tragedy (Cambridge; Cambridge Univ. press, 1980), P. 37-44.

⁹ MacLauchlan, Juliet, Shakespeare's Othello (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), P. 92.

Emilia and Cassio and Bianca as a mean of developing the audience understanding of the main concerns of the play. Furthermore, Shakespeare sheds light on the type of such relationships, especially, that between Othello and Desdemona.

1. Iago and Emilia:

Shakespeare provides suggestions about the relationship between Iago and Emilia but he does not give direct comment. However, from reading the action of the play, one gets the feeling that the relationship between Iago and Emilia is not satisfactory or happy. From time to time, Iago is very critical of his wife. In his soliloquies, in Act I, scene iii, and in Act II, scene i, he reveals his suspicion, though no proof available, of Emilia's infidelity with Othello, but we know that he lies deliberately to give himself a motive for hating the Moor¹⁰.

2. Cassio and Bianca

The relationship between Cassio and Bianca is based on physical satisfaction, Bianca is Cassio's mistress. However, what characterizes this relationship is jealousy, but this time the jealousy is from the part of woman rather than the man.

For example, when Cassio gives Bianca the handkerchief to copy, she immediately believes that Cassio has a relationship with another mistress (III, iv). Cassio's attitude towards her contrasts strongly with his respect for the "divine

¹⁰ Holloway, John, *The story of the night*, (N. Ratledge print, 1987), P. 237.

Desdemona". He shows no respect or love for Bianca; laughing and mocking at her infatuation for him as he tells Iago prior to her entrance (IV, i), just as Iago shows no respect or love for Emilia¹¹.

3. Othello and Desdemona:

Shakespeare establishes connection and contrasts between the three sets of relationship by making the handkerchief important to each of them, and by presenting jealousy as a dominant feature affecting each. The relationship of Iago/ Emilia, and Cassio/ Bianca seem to be chiefly physical in their basis. However, the love of Othello and Desdemona has an elevated quality.

For Othello, his wife is his "Soul's Joy" and "The fountain from which his current runs". Furthermore, "When I love they not, choose is come again". It is a sort of complete and absolute love. Through the love of Othello and Desdemona, we are given a view of human nature which transcends the purely physical and material; it is capable of transforming the world to the sublime. What Iago destroys is the human potential for goodness and for harmony which the relationship of Othello and Desdemona expresses¹².

¹¹ Elloway, D., *Shakespeare's Tragedy* (London: Macmillan, 1986), P. 21-35.

¹² Tony, B., *Othello* (London: Macmillan, Masler guides, 1990), P. 117.

Character Contrast:

Contrast is a literary technique used by writers to shed lights on the characters themselves in order to achieve a better understanding.

a. Rodrigo and Cassio:

Rodrigo and Cassio are clearly different in certain respects. Iago uses Rodrigo as a means to an end- "Thus do I ever make my fool my purse" (Act I, iii), but Cassio has qualities which Iago has privately to acknowledge – "He hath a daily beauty in his life- / That makes me ugly" (Act V, i).

However, these two characters are contrasted in their responses to Desdemona . Rodrigo seems a type of a foolish and unsuccessful lover who it is clear that it is hopeless. He is fooled and deceived by Iago who takes his money and jewels promising him that Desdemona will be his wife. However, we are given little indication that his feelings for Desdemona have any depth or that he is genuinely respectful towards her as Cassio is.

Iago sees that it will be plausible to suggest that Cassio, an attractive and refined young man, is in love with Desdemona (I, iii). After observing Cassio's behavior with her, Iago himself believes there may be some truth in it, "that Cassio loves her, I do well believe it" (II, i). Shakespeare does not indicate to the audience whether Iago is right, but leaves us feeling that there is a Possibility that he is. Cassio maintains an honorable and

respectful attitude towards Desdemona at all time, and never expresses love for her.

b. Desdemona and Emilia:

In act IV, scene iii, Shakespeare presents a conversation between Desdemona and Emilia which establishes sharp contrasts of character and attitude as a means to emphasis. Desdemona's innocence and virtue. This is set against Emilia's speeches which suggest that the type of husband's treatment of his wife is an encouragement to her to take lovers.

Desdemona expresses an attitude of absolute loyalty and Fidelity, whereas Emilia suggest and states that she could be tempted and fall if circumstances favor¹³.

c. Desdemona and Iago:

Shakespeare establishes a very important contrast between Desdemona and Iago in terms of character and signification. Each represents value, ideas and attitudes which are different from those held and expressed by the other characters, while Othello as a character develops and changesm Desdemona and Iago remain the same throughout the play. This is indicative of the fact that they are used by Shakespeare to express the play's central conflict between life and anti life forces.

Our feeling for Desdemona is heightened by the many expressions of her own sensitivity and intense feelings. It is clear

¹³ Muri, Kenneth, *Aspect of Othello* (Carbridge:Caribridge Univ. Press, 1987), P. 179-189.

that Iago is unquestionably evil; a character who represents a spirit of negation, wishing to destroy love, virtue, trust and harmony and to turn them to their opposites.

Although Desdemona and Iago function as representatives of goodness and evil, they are given by Shakespeare individual human qualities.

Desdemona's first appearance in the play shows her as a mature, assured and brave young woman, prepared to face her father, to speak in public, to express her feeling for Othello and to make a case of accompanying him to the war. All this suggests that her endurance of suffering later on in the play is not a result of weakness and passivity or an inability to protest as much as a sign of maturity of a woman who feels responsible for her decision, a woman who is ready to face up consequences ; she has chosen Othello by her own self after all¹⁴.

Language and Imagery

Language and Imagery are exceptionally important in defining character and the tragic process in Othello. For example , Othello and Iago speak in different ways. Othello speaks constantly in verse, while Iago speaks on many occasions in prose, notably when he is talking with Rodrigo and Cassio, but he speaks in blank verse when he talks to Desdemona about woman; he speaks in rhyming

¹⁴ Ibid.

couplets. In brief Iago speaks in verse and prose within one scene according to the situation and occasion¹⁵.

Othello's speech reveals a vivid and fertile imagination for which things have symbolic significance. For example, the literal storm which accompanies Othello on way to Cyprus, and the calm that follows it are all images which express the torment and torture of being separated from his beloved, Desdemona, and his joy at being reunited with her. At the same time, the extremes of heights and depths expressed through the image of the ship climbing "hills of seas" convey the intensity of Othello's emotions and feeling which he has experienced on his journey until he reaches Cyprus safely.

¹⁵ Muir, Kenneth, *Aspect of Othello* (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), p. 128.

Conclusion:

In the light of the above discussion, it seems that Shakespeare has used the technical terms of juxtaposition, character – contrast, and language and imagery – to enhance and develop the dramatic action and characters in Othello.

Juxtaposition is used to shed light on several dramatic situations, which reflect two opposite worlds. The world of Othello stands, for example, for innocence and purity, whereas the world of Iago is a villainy and evil.

As for character, the playwright has presented a good deal of them for the sake of showing the differences and simultaneously to draw up a certain image about each character. For example, Desdemona and Emilia are two contrasting characters. The first one displays faithfulness and innocence, which the second is all deception and dishonesty.

And finally, Shakespeare functions language in a brilliant way. In Othello, language is used according to the situation and the subject the character deals with. That is why the play contains verse and prose style which gives a variety of feelings as situation changes into another. Thus, by means of these literary terms, Shakespeare has managed to create a real dramatic masterpiece in Othello.

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