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Othello Response

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Othello and his Murder: Saving Grace or Savage Act?

Murder between men are common themes in the Early Modern period and in many texts we have read in this class, as a reader we get used to the trope. We witness murder and we move on. What makes Othello anything different? What makes Othello so distinct and impressive is the fact that we witness a male on female murder, husband on wife, not behind the scenes but directly on stage. Motives become clear and the privacy of the bedroom is now open to the public eye.

Anyone that has read Othello knows that their love is pure and something that many may envy. Within the text there is much proof of this, however Othello's mind is easily corrupted with negative thoughts that the villain Iago plants in him. In Act 5 scene 2 we get to see the damage that these corrupted thoughts cause and the obsession Othello has with restoring Desdemona's pureness. However what I find even more interesting is the way he decides to kill her by smothering her. Othello states "Yet I'll not shed her blood, Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow, And smooth as monumental alabaster" (3-5). This idea of not shedding her blood is almost pointing towards not corrupting her further, since it is believed that she has been corrupted by having a change of heart towards Cassio. This is important because it hints at her physical self being the pureness and her soul being what has been blackened. Also, it shows that Othello still cares about her (or her beauty) enough to not want to damage it. He further states "Yet she must

die, else she'll betray more men." which reminds me vaguely of the Changeling (6). Once a whore always a whore. Although Desdemona unlike Beatrice has done no true wrong. He then proceeds by stating "Put out the light, then put out the light. If I quench thee, thou flaming minister, I can again thy former light restore", not only does he refer to physically dimming the light to restore privacy and secrecy towards his horrible acts, but he refers to Desdemona's soul as light (7-9). He wants to take her blackness away and make it light, white and pure again. He wants to cleanse her soul just like a priest would do in a confession. In a sense Othello wants to be the hero that condemns the evil that Desdemona succumbed to. According to the article *Unproper Beds: Race, Adultery, and the Hideous in Othello* written by Michael Neill it states "For Coleridge the idea of a black hero was unacceptable because blackness was equivalent to savagery and the notion of savage heroism an intolerable oxymoron" (392). It's interesting to think this because if Othello wanted to be the hero and save Desdemona (although in a very unethical way), he would have already been corrupted himself due to the color of his skin. It all takes away the purity of his intentions, pointing towards an underlying savagery that Othello innately has due to the color of his skin.

Keeping this in mind there could be two ways to read his following lines in the play. For example when he states "I would not kill thy unprepared spirit. No, heaven forbid! I would not kill thy soul." he directly refers to Desdemona's soul (33-34). This could completely disregard my past argument of him wanting to save her soul. In other words, this portrays her body as the place of corruption and not her blackened soul. This is where I'd like to turn to see Desdemona's responses to what Othello has to say. He pinpoints her as someone pure yet corrupted, but do her words point towards the same? A line that stood out to me was "Since guiltiness I know not; but yet I feel fear" (40). Here she is quite literally showing the audience that her conscience is clean.

That she has done nothing wrong. Since we have seen almost every side of the story, the audience should know how truly horrific this whole scene actually is. Mostly all of her responses hint towards her innocence and her lack of guilt and confusion. She even goes so far as to saying in regards to her sins that “They are loves I bear to you” showing her fidelity and true care towards Othello (42). Up until this point she didn’t even know what she did wrong. Othello further pushes the issue and bids her to stay still to which she responds “I will so” (50). Even in moments like this she is still putting his desires before her own. Showcasing this way that yes, she is innocent. She even goes as far as to confess that she didn’t give him the handkerchief. Othello, already convinced that he is in the right, will not have his mind changed, so where does this leave Desdemona? Obviously in the dark with a blackened soul and corrupted body (mostly because the handkerchief could possibly symbolize her virginity although I personally don’t see it as such). What is even more interesting are her two last lines “A guiltless death I die” and “Nobody; I myself.” (126-128). What makes these quotes interesting is that even in death, after learning why she is being murdered she still has no guilt, mostly because she has done no wrong. Also, when Emilia asks who did the deed, she responds with the second line, leading the audience to believe that even in death she puts Othello first and defends him until the very end. Indeed her love was pure and she didn’t deserve death.

In conclusion, one can believe that the blackened soul is indeed Othello’s and this could be racially charged with the idea of him trying to portray the black hero of the play, thinking he is doing right when actually doing wrong. However, it all lies within the lines of mental manipulation from others and truly although the murder is indeed savage his race has nothing to do with it. In the end Desdemona and Othello both acted out of love and one can say that they both got the short end of the stick.