
The Portrayal Of Human Baseness In Shakespeare's Tragedy Othello

Shakespeare's tragedy Othello (1604), resonates with contemporary audiences through the significant extent of the portrayal of human baseness influenced by insecurities, that exposes the potential for moral corruption which exists within all individuals and their societies. Influenced by the xenophobia in his Elizabethan era, Shakespeare forewarns the destructive inner ramifications of a racist and insecure society by displaying how the resultant marginalisation manifests in the degeneration of the individual's identity. Additionally, Shakespeare makes the audience question their understanding of morality through the vile deceptions that exploit insecure individuals in order to achieve immoral motives. The enduring value of Othello derives from how susceptible humans are to vile base instincts due to their insecurities irrespective of context, which therefore questions the audiences' perception of morality.

Shakespeare's Othello is timeless because he depicts the detrimental self ramifications of a xenophobic society upon an individual's identity through the exploration of the baseness that exists within society's prejudices due to their own insecurities. In Shakespeare's Elizabethan society, African people were not socially accepted and were perceived as dangerous and uncivilised, reflecting orientalist views. Racism is a psychological defense mechanism that the Venetian society uses in response to their insecurities of not being in power, emphasising the society's human baseness. Their power controlling insecurities are disclosed when Brabantio warns the Venetian Senate, "For if such actions may have passage free,

Bond-slaves and pagans shall be our statesmen be", perceiving that if the society treats their 'inferiors' equally, there's nothing to stop the outcasts from having power over them. The immoral extent to which the Venetian society will go to, to protect their power emphasises the evil baseness that exists in racism. As a result of such despicable beliefs and actions, Othello who is African and holds a high military rank is degraded through animalistic imagery of "the Moor" and "an old black ram is tupping your white ewe", linking him to bestial African stereotypes. In the sheep analogy, the dichotomy between the 'black' and 'white' imagery reinforces Othello's alienation from his white society. These pejoratives emphasise Othello's degradation as an outcast which causes him to have extreme insecurities about the colour of his skin and his race. Othello's racist society exacerbates the vile baseness within him as due to his insecurities and desire to be accepted he conforms to Iago's language and degrading beliefs about women. Othello's change in character is portrayed through his language where initially he is a respectful and loving husband who declares, "But that I love thee gentle Desdemona" and later he is a detestable husband who describes his wife as "impudent strumpet". Othello's insecurity and vulnerability conforms him to adopt Iago's derogatory language exposing the vile baseness of degrading others within him. Thus, Shakespeare resonates with modern audiences as he forewarns the consequences of a racist society through the portrayal of human baseness within racial prejudices and stereotypes

Through Othello, Shakespeare engages audiences through its portrayal of the universality of deceit and deception, that permeate the human experience and prey upon insecurities, significantly portraying human baseness in all contexts. Influenced by pre-Christian political

philosophy where power is prioritised over relationships, Shakespeare shapes Iago as the perfect Machiavellian villain who is manipulative and lacks morality. Iago epitomises human baseness as he resorts to deceiving and exploiting other characters' insecurities in order to manipulate them. Iago's ambiguous motivation for his manipulation over Othello is because Othello promoted Cassio instead of him, even though Cassio 'never set a squadron in the field' and has much less experience. However motive or no motive, Iago ultimately aims to bring Othello to his downfall for his own entertainment using his outstanding knowledge of humans. Iago's intelligence and knowledge is revealed when after informing Brabantio of Desdemona's elopement, he cunningly disappears so that he cannot be accused of disloyalty to Othello. Iago deceives Othello and the other characters through the mirage of his good natured self, as he gets others to do his dirty work, thus keeping his reputation unsullied. Iago cleverly examines Othello's racial and marital insecurities and places doubt in Othello's mind through "She did deceive her father, marrying you". Iago refutes Othello's insistence that Desdemona is honest and psychologically manipulates Othello's mind, using the couple's love to increase the distrust between them, emphasising Iago's human baseness. As Othello's language and mentality depletes throughout the play, the audience comes to understand the vile baseness of Iago's capabilities through his success in manipulation. Iago's ultimate success in his deception and manipulation is where Othello recognises Iago as "Iago is most honest" because the dramatic irony of Othello's true beliefs enforce Iago's manipulative capabilities portraying vile baseness. Shakespeare's Othello continues to engage audiences through motiveless deception and manipulation which portrays human baseness as it preys upon insecure individuals.

As Shakespeare's Othello exposes the potential for moral corruption through the exploration of human shortcomings that magnify human baseness, it forces modern audiences to examine their morals and attitudes. Othello is able to retain its transcendental value after 400 years through the ramifications of racial prejudices, deception, and manipulation upon vulnerable individuals portraying the vile baseness that questions morality.