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Rough Seas and Blast of Wind in Shakespeare's Othello

Куртулуш Гюль. Бурхливе море й шквальний вітер у «Отелло» В. Шекспіра.

Поряд із темами руйнування, раси та обману, чільне місце у фоновому контексті Шекспірового «Отелло» посідають образи моря та пов'язаних із ним природних стихій. Море описується як хаотична і руйнівна стихія. Зображення персонажів п'єси та їхній розвиток ґрунтуються на природних конотаціях, зокрема на мотиві моря. Образ моря пов'язаний із військовою силою, ієрархічним дисбалансом між расами та хтивим коханням, яке закінчується загибеллю: все це передається через образи Отелло, Яго, Кассіо та Дездемони. Образ моря сприяє їхньому емоційному розвитку та експресії. Символ моря і прив'язаність Отелло до нього точніше розкривають емоції головного героя, артикулюючи їх через міцний зв'язок між ним і морем. У статті море розглядається як справжній персонаж, який допомагає розкрити справжню сутність Яго, який прагне влади та високої репутації. Шлях Кассіо від успіху й задоволення до розчарування й тривоги описується за допомогою морської символіки. Образ Дездемони як справедливої, невинної, вразливої та неповторної жінки пояснюється за допомогою образів моря. Ця стаття розглядає стосунки між Отелло, Яго, Кассіо та Дездемоною крізь призму морської образності.

Ключові слова: «Отелло», Шекспір, море, руйнування, довілля, катастрофа, раса.

Introduction

We live in an age of global disasters and pandemic and try to find ways of sustaining a harmonious relationship with nature. More than ever, perhaps, mankind is pushed to a corner and left alone, literally this time because of social distancing and

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lockdown. Yet, man's consumption and destruction of nature never cease. Despite the measures taken to prevent ecological disorder, the balance is disturbed, and it upsets the living styles of species of various kinds, transforming the shape and structure of all organisms in uneven amounts. Nature's evolution directly effects the destiny of human beings, and all living beings. In Shakespeare's time, human beings are placed in the middle of the great chain of being, above non-living things, plants and animals, below celestial beings, and God. The great chain of being that creates a clear hierarchical order between animals and men, giving the ultimate priority to men and above them to divinity.

Shakespeare's plays render nature, human beings, and environment in a recurrent relationship. Elizabethan worldview dictates that nature is God's art, perfection, and reflection. God has created the natural world according to a certain order positioning man below the celestial beings and above animals and plants. E.M.W. Tillyard¹ in *The Elizabethan World Picture* outlines the desire of the Elizabethans to find patterns and connections between animate and inanimate elements in nature and highlights Elizabethan concept of the Great Chain of Being, which binds everything together in unity and harmony. Man lacks control over nature as opposed to God's domination over it. Yet, it is man who harms the unity and distracts the ideal social and universal order. This type of ideology justifies "the human exploitation of natural resources, animal and vegetable, earth and sea, as a God-given right."² Amid unremitting transformations and evolutionary procedures, humans are involved in a mutual contact with non-human and other than human creatures that reinforce humans' social responsibilities and bring their social conscience to a higher degree than before. Indeed, all forms of life are interconnected since the very early ages of the world's creation and it leaves little freedom for the living organisms in the sea, air, or on earth to act freely and individually. This interconnectedness encompasses all those that inhabit the universe and makes all of us part of a whole.

¹ Tillyard E. M. W. *The Elizabethan World Picture: A Study of The Idea of Order in The Age of Shakespeare, Donne and Milton*. Vintage. 1959.

² Bushnell R. *Shakespeare and Nature*. *Shakespeare in Our Time* / Ed. by Dympna Callaghan and Suzanne Gossett. Bloomsbury, 2016. P. 327–334.

In our age, the interdependent relationship between nature and man forms a more chaotic and confusing hierarchical order than ever. In our age, human beings and nature are more related, symbiotic, and inseparable from each other during and after Covid-19.

Shakespeare makes use of images of nature in his plays. In *Macbeth*,³ which was first published in the First Folio of 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, and seventeen years after the play's first performance, the concept of nature is quintessential to the reading of the play. It is the image of "plant" that offers an insight to Macbeth's growth and decline throughout the play. When King Duncan starts talking about his reliance and faith in Macbeth, he says, "I have begun to plant thee, and will labor / To make thee full of growing" (1.4.28-29). Duncan aims to reward both Macbeth and Banquo for their loyalty and bravery. In particular, he indirectly points out that Macbeth deserves to be named as the Thane of Cawdor. Therefore, 'to plant' in King's speech suggests Macbeth's recent title and his empowerment and promotion. When Macbeth kills the king in his sleep, the growing plant image becomes more important. By killing the king, Macbeth does not act patiently and wisely. Growing a plant requires time and patience, for it takes time for the "plant" to ripen. Macbeth's impatient and unreasonable action to get the crown decreases his power and within time Macbeth becomes unable to control the events as well as his passion. At the very end of the play, we hear Malcolm saying, "What is more to do / Which would be planted newly with the time" (5.7. 94-95). The image of plant and the act of planting do not only stand for Malcolm's growth but also for Macbeth's decay and corruption. Getting back to the point, Shakespeare's nature elicits all aspects of rational, emotional, natural, and racial subjects in a subtle balance. Changes in nature add more complexity to characters' identities in Shakespeare's plays, their understanding of themselves, and their world.

³ Shakespeare W. *The Oxford Shakespeare Macbeth* / Ed by Nicholas Brooke. Oxford : Oxford UP. 1990.

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Therefore, I aim to offer some insight to the modern reader about Shakespeare's *Othello*⁴, highlighting the importance of the natural elements used in the play to delve into the characters' psychological developments which shape their decisions and therefore their predicaments as depicted in the play. Like many plays by the bard, *Othello* is rich in presenting the indispensable, unbreakable, and continuous bond between man and nature. In our day, environmental concerns are ever more important than they have been in the past and Shakespeare's *Othello* offers invaluable intuition into human awareness and sensitivity about the link between nature and man. Along with the theme of the nature's impact on the characters, racial concerns are very relevant to the reading of the play. In my article, I blend the idea of the use of sea imagery and the theme of miscegenation to offer an alternative analysis of the play.

Nonhuman Compassion and the Heave of the Sea

In *Othello*, known to be written a year after Queen Elizabeth's death in 1603–1604 and published in 1622, man and nature relationship is established through sea imagery. The play entails close consideration of the theme of race. The concept of miscegenation is depicted in the play through the interracial relations, embodied by the romantic yet tempestuous relationship between Othello and Desdemona. Shakespeare's analysis and critique of racism is astutely observant. In *Othello*, exploration of racism derived from the relationship between Othello and Desdemona is a relevant topic to be considered along with the representations of nature and sea imagery and this paper intends to consider representations of miscegenation and the use of sea imagery in Shakespeare's *Othello*.

The play's title aptly puts forth the issues raised in the play. Fully titled, *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*, the rostrum of the play is already metaphorically set. Othello, the Moor is described as "of Venice," a European city, dominated by the Caucasian race. Othello is an African in the city of Venice and

⁴ Shakespeare W. *Othello*. / Ed. by E. A. J. Honigmann. Bloomsbury. 2016. All references to Shakespeare's *Othello* are taken from the Bloomsbury edition, edited by E. A. J. Honigmann (UK: Bloomsbury, 2016).

he belongs to the place. Yet in the first act he is not warmly accepted when Iago goes to warn Brabantio about Othello's relationship with his daughter, Desdemona. By providing home to the Moor, the city registers the theme of racism and as a coastal city, it holds the sea metaphor. The play is set in Venice and Cyprus, two important ports and surrounded by the sea both literally and figuratively the characters of the play are captivated by it. The sea, its images and the maritime language are important in the understanding of the concept of nature, characters, and their interdependent connection. Othello, Iago, Cassio, and Desdemona with their naval backgrounds associate everything with the sea and their naval language reflects their characteristics. Oscillations in their emotional world contribute to the mood of the play. The sea is also used metaphorically to symbolize themes of mystery, deception, change, alienation, with reference to Othello and the Turks as the Other figures, and sexuality.

Sea imagery is central to *Othello* as the settings of the play are the cities of port and navy, Venice, and Cyprus. The hero, the villain, and the honorable lieutenant of the play, Othello, Iago, and Cassio sail from Venice to Cyprus and the language they embody entails maritime language. They express their ideas and emotions through natural images drawn from the sea. The maritime language which constitutes the core of their speeches also contributes to the themes of the play, signifying obscurity, othering, and sexuality. In *Shakespeare's Imagery and What it Tells Us*,⁵ Caroline F. E. Spurgeon emphasizes the power of imagery in accordance with the characters. In *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery*,⁶ Wolfgang Clemen argues about Desdemona's vulnerability with the help of the images and ways in which innocence end up with facing the danger. Moreover, in *Imagery of Othello*,⁷ Steven Croft reveals the parallelism between the sea imagery and the psychology of Othello. Marcia Macaulay discusses the relationship between the chaos in the sea and the chaos in the mind of Othello in *When Chaos Is Come Again*:

⁵ Spurgeon C. F. E. *The Subject-Matter of Shakespeare's Images. Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us.* Cambridge : Cambridge UP, 1935. P. 43–56.

⁶ Clemen W. *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery.* Methuen. 1977.

⁷ Croft S. *Imagery of Othello.* Nelson Thornes Shakespeare. 2004.

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Narrative and Narrative Analysis in *Othello*⁸. In Act 2, scene 1, Othello resembles himself as “a laboring bark” which climbs “the hills of sea.” Othello’s strength and weakness in his psychological and life journey are conveyed through the sea images and with the images of storm and wind in the play.

The sea is a place of animosity in *Othello* and therefore it is hostile and dangerous. It is the battleground for the Venetian and the Turkish navies, and they never have a chance to clash due to the storm. Shakespeare’s nature is violent and carnivorous rather than simply beautiful and harmonious in many of his plays, like in *King Lear* and *Troilus and Cressida*⁹. In *Troilus and Cressida*, Cressida’s depiction of her self- image via wild animals exhibits the obscurity of human nature relations. As the animals are related to trickery and “falsehood” it implies that nature serves uncertainty and misperception to humans rather than simple order and beauty. In *King Lear*, the storm in the climactic third act creates a chaotic and inhospitable setting and takes the power away from Lear, in other words from man, forcing him to act according to nature and eventually his wandering in nature enhances his madness as he realizes his powerlessness in the face of nature’s supremacy. He is unable to control it, and likewise he could not control his own daughters’ movements. Nature, human beings, and ecology are in a recurrent relationship and human order is fragile but less cooperative with the natural order. In *Othello*, although the sea seems hostile combined with the tempest, it becomes a supernatural aid, supporting the Venetians’ side as “the desperate tempest hath banged the Turks,” (2.1.21) which helps the Venetians defeat the Turks and become victorious over them. On the other hand, the sea and the tempest do not support Othello’s advance and prevent him from proving his military skills at the sea fight. Due to the tempest the Venetian navy and the Turkish navy do not encounter at a fight. The Turks are drowned to the tempest. In Cyprus, Othello is subject to Iago’s schemes of demolishing

⁸ Macaulay M. When Chaos is Come Again: Narrative and Narrative Analysis in *Othello*, *Shakespeare and Others*. 2005. Vol. 39. Issue 3. P. 259–276.

⁹ Shakespeare W. *The Oxford Shakespeare Troilus and Cressida*. / Ed. by Kenneth Muir. Oxford : Oxford UP. 1982.

himself with jealousy, envy, and unjust penalty that he exerts on Desdemona.

The first scene of the second act is rich in sea images, and it contributes to the themes of the play. As Montano and two other gentlemen look at the sea and try to understand what the sea-storm has caused, they cannot figure it out. One of the gentlemen says he understands “nothing at all,” (2.1.2) and that he “cannot ’twixt the haven and the main” (2.1.3). Since “looking at the sea means being bounded by something you cannot understand,”¹⁰ the uncertainty, mentioned above refers to the theme of deception and obscurity, and Othello’s vague, fluttering ideas. Moreover, Othello takes a sea journey from Venice to Cyprus which evokes an incoming change with it. It suggests that Othello’s faith in Desdemona and Cassio, and his position as the last person to arrive at the port are going to change. As Cassio says, “the great contention of the sea and skies / Parted [their] fellowship” (2.1.89-90). Also, the tempest “creates a crisis of meaning that hastens the play’s insistent drive toward violence”¹¹ and foreshadows the incidents that will cause the deaths in the end. Shakespeare calls our attention to the sea imagery with the repetition of “A sail, a sail!” (2.1. 90) as stage directions indicate and uses it “as a conspicuous, clearly isolated image when the people of Cyprus cry.”¹² Othello, Iago, Cassio, and Desdemona include naval terminology in their discourses.

Othello employs maritime language. His speeches manifest his emotions and ideas in a parallel mode to that of the fluctuations in the sea. There are a few instances in the play where Othello’s speech is full of sea images and which come “naturally, for on each occasion they mark a moment of intense emotion.”¹³ One of these moments is when Othello meets his wife, Desdemona, on the shore in Cyprus. He expresses his “soul’s joy” (2.1.182) by likening it to the happiness that comes after a storm: “If ever

¹⁰Mentz S. At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean. London : Continuum. 2009. P. 22.

¹¹ ditto. P. 25.

¹² Stevenson R. Sea Change in Shakespeare’s Othello. *The Nature and Function of Water, Baths, Bathing, and Hygiene from Antiquity through the Renaissance* / Ed. by Anne Scott and Cynthia Kosso. Brill. 2009. P. 453–461.

¹³ Spurgeon C. F. E. The Subject-Matter of Shakespeare's Images. *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us*. Cambridge : Cambridge UP, 1935. P. 337.

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tempest come such calms / May the winds blow till they have wakened death, / And let the labouring bark climb hills of seas” (2.1.183-5). Moreover, when he is suspicious of his wife due to Iago’s agitation, he expresses his state of mind and desire for revenge with maritime language: “Like to the Pontic sea / Whose icy current and compulsive course / Ne’er keeps retiring ebb but keeps due on / To the Propontic and the Hellespont” (3.3.456-9). In the final act, before stabbing himself Othello implies that he is going to kill himself by referring to a sea object. He says, “here is my journey’s end, here is my butt / And very sea-mark of my utmost sail,” (5.2.265-6) and the sea image gives “the sense of finality, of completion.”¹⁴ Othello expresses himself with sea images, which help him reveal his emotions while contributing to the setting of the play.

Underwater World Binds Othello and Iago

Othello can be associated with Turks because they are both ostracized as the other and both are surrounded by the sea. Othello is despised and ostracized because of his skin color and called as an “old black ram,” (1.1.87) “black Othello” (2.3.29), “a Barbary horse,” (1.1.112) and accused of “witchcraft” (1.3.170). When Iago informs Brabantio about Othello’s relationship to his daughter Desdemona, he says, “Zounds, sir, you’re robbed, for shame put on your gown! / Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul, / Even now, now, very now, an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe! Arise, arise, / Awake the snorting citizens with the bell / Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you, / Arise I say!” (1.1.84-91). Iago’s narrative is disdainful. Othello’s relationship to Desdemona is described as shameful and illegal because Brabantio has been “robbed.” Although Othello serves the state and neutralizes or ignores the race problem by marrying Desdemona, the Venetians do not accept him. He is the other, sharing the similar position of the other with the Turks in the play. When the news arrives that the Turkish fleet are “drowned,” (2.1.19) people on the shore celebrate this as they get rid of the outsiders and prevent the threat against the island. In this context,

¹⁴ Edwards P. *Sea-Mark: The Metaphorical Voyage, Spenser to Milton*. Liverpool : UP. 1997.

the sea is hostile to both Othello and the Turks. While sea drowns Turks, it separates Othello and Desdemona and destroys their lives. Therefore, the sea in *Othello* is victorious and dominates those recognized as the others.

In addition, the sea imagery that prevails in *Othello* refers to Iago's deception of Othello. As Othello is surrounded by the sea, he is also surrounded by the mysterious motives of Iago, who represents the destructiveness of the sea. He is besieged in the middle of the sea, which foreshadows that he will be trapped by Iago. However, "if the sea is around us, it is also always outside us,"¹⁵ which refers to Othello's alienation as the outsider. He's stuck in the sea while all the others are secure on the shore. It is Othello's "free and open nature" (1.3.398) that makes Iago abuse him. His "desperate longing for calm after tempest, port after storm represents an attempt to pass through oceanic disorder into a calm world."¹⁶ However, he cannot succeed in arriving at a calm world but rather is lost "on a dangerous sea," (2.1.46) and he becomes the victim of Iago's power.

The villain of the play, Iago, embraces the sea imagery and uses the naval language frequently in his speeches. He not only refers to everything around him using naval vocabulary, but he is also associated with the sea in many respects. His language and his affiliation to the sea reflect both his personality and the mood of the play. The first time he uses naval terms is the opening of the play when he talks to Roderigo about Othello and his union with Desdemona. He associates Othello with "fathom" (1.1.150) referring to Venice's need for him in Cyprus war. Iago is angry at Othello because he has chosen Cassio as a lieutenant instead of him and he expresses his strategy against Othello which is "to show out a flag and sign of love" (1.1.153). Besides, he likens his so-called friendship and intimacy with Othello to "cables of perdurable toughness" (1.3.338-39). Iago talks about Cassio's lust for Desdemona and this time he associates the sea with sexuality. He implies that Cassio hides his "salt" (2.1.238), meaning that he hides his "loose affection" (2.1.239). In their long discussion with

¹⁵ Mentz S. *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*. London : Continuum. 2009. P. 5.

¹⁶ ditto. P. 19.

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Iago, Roderigo compares Othello to a “gondolier” (1.1.123) who has transported Desdemona to his own port. Iago contributes to Roderigo’s image of Desdemona as a naval object and calls her a “carrack” (1.2.50). Likewise, Desdemona’s father, Brabantio, asks where his daughter has been “stowed” (1.2.63) as if she is a cargo in a ship. Indeed, Iago has a good expression of his environment by using his naval background. It is “his ability to reshape himself at every moment,”¹⁷ by sticking around sea images and, also inspiring other characters for using a similar language. His frequent use of sea vocabulary helps him express his feelings indirectly in a way, reveals his insidious manner. In “Shakespeare Without Nature,”¹⁸ Mentz focuses on the uncontrollable waters and how the constant fluctuation is effective on human perception and thought. To him the “blue waters” provide “a fundamental challenge, because the sea always represents disorder [and] oceanic nature challenges stability and orderliness.” The disorder and change caused by the sea challenge Iago’s perception of order and stability and force him to idealize or desire power and control over the uncontrollable.

Indeed, Iago’s association with the sea is important as it reveals his personality and his position in the play. Associated with the power and obscurity of the sea, Iago not only manages to hide his malicious motives, but also highlights his power. While complaining about Othello, he says he is “be-leed and calmed,” (1.1.30) like a ship left without wind. In fact, he regards himself as a small boat in the sea because of Othello’s challenge to his progress. However, as the play progresses, he gets more powerful as he says, “my boat sails freely, both with wind and stream” (2.3.60). It emphasizes Iago’s power both over the sea and, symbolically, over Othello and the other characters. The sea is associated with mystery because of its depth, it symbolizes Iago’s mysterious and deceptive actions. As discussed above, Iago’s “maritime vocabulary underlines his opacity,”¹⁹ helps him easily deceive other characters without letting them understand his

¹⁷ Mentz S. *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*. London : Continuum. 2009. P. 25.

¹⁸ Mentz S. *Shakespeare Without Nature*. *Shakespeare in Our Time*. / Ed. by Dymphna Callaghan and Suzanne Gossett. New York :Bloomsbury. 2016. P. 337.

¹⁹ Mentz S. *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*. London : Continuum. 2009. P. 25.

intentions. In addition to this, the sea has the symbolic meaning of power, which is very important to understand the play's villain, Iago. Through his mischief he manipulates and provokes Othello. He uses this power to create chaos and destroys everybody's life. He makes Othello grow suspicious of his wife and uses Desdemona's handkerchief to make Othello charge her with adultery, which he does. The play ends with a reference to Iago's cruelty as Lodovico says he is "a Spartan dog, / More fell anguish, hunger, or the sea!" (5.2. 359-60), again comparing him to the sea. Therefore, Iago's power is destructive and catastrophic and the sea he represents "embodies lust and disorder."²⁰ As Mentz points out, "the sea in *Othello* has its own God, or rather its anti-God: Iago."²¹

In Act 2, Iago is engaged in a conversation with Desdemona and Emilia, telling the women that his words are true, "or else [he is] a Turk" while talking to Desdemona and Emilia (2.1.115). His remark on being a Turk, or turning Turk is associated with deceitfulness and blasphemy. Turks are considered as heathens and barbarians and "turning Turk" is the loss of faith and cultural and national identity, therefore, the one who turns Turk by embracing all the negativity embodied in this phrase, becomes the social outcast²². By the end of the play, Othello becomes the social outcast, the unwanted as he murders Desdemona, losing his trust in her and faith in her love.

Cassio and Desdemona Go Ashore

Cassio, like Othello and Iago uses maritime vocabulary. His utterances, laden with the sea imagery are about sexuality. He talks about Othello's expected arrival and reunion with Desdemona. He says, Othello "may bless this bay with his tall ship, / Make love's quick pants in Desdemona's arms, / Give renewed fire to our extincted spirits" (2.1.79-81). Like Iago who refers to Cassio's lust for Desdemona as "salt" (2.1.238), Cassio's speech with reference

²⁰ ditto. P. 26.

²¹ ditto. P. 23.

²² Holland P. Travelling Hopefully: The Dramatic Form of Journeys in English Renaissance Drama. *Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time* / Ed. by Jean-Pierre Maquerlot, Michèle Willems. Cambridge: UP. 2006.

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to the sea imagery emphasizes Othello's lust and passion for Desdemona.

Cassio gives us the image of the shore beaten by the waves and rain. Rather than telling the chaos in the sea from a sailor's view, he turns his attention to the shore. The tempest and the sea provide background for Desdemona's glorious landing on the shore, who is safe on the shore with Cassio and other people, accompanying her on the land. On the other hand, the tempest and the sea drowning the Turkish fleet never allow Othello to prove his strength and become the hero in Cyprus. Creating the huge gap between him and Desdemona, the tempest and the sea establish the background for Othello's heathenism at the end of the play.

The theme of separation between Desdemona and Othello is brought in with the Duke's decree that announces Othello's responsibility in Cyprus to defend the islanders against the raids of the Turkish fleet. Desdemona and Othello travel in separate ships, which indicates that there has always been a gap between Desdemona and Othello. The tempest widens the gap between the two. Desdemona safely arrives on the Cyprus shore before Othello and Cassio hails her when she gets off the ship, "the grace of heaven." (2.1.85). Upon seeing her, Montano inquires, "what is she" rather than "who is she," (2.1.74) creating the divine image of Desdemona and despising that she is an earthly, terrestrial creature. While Desdemona is given a divine image, Othello becomes a "savage" at the end of the play as he murders Desdemona viciously. Therefore, Othello turns a heathen, indeed a Turk by murdering a divinity, Desdemona, at the end of the play. Desdemona is presented as the perfect lady who is innocent, divine and warmly human in the play. For the analysis of her character, Spurgeon claims "as is fitting, with a setting of two famous seaports, the sea, its images and language, play an important part throughout."²³ Clemen presents an example how Desdemona's vulnerability is emphasized by the highness of the sea and her hopelessness when she has faced with the dangerous sea (p. 96). In

²³ Spurgeon C. F. E. The Subject-Matter of Shakespeare's Images. *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1935. P. 337.

Act II, scene i, Cassio tells the story of Desdemona's rescue by saying,

“Tempests themselves, high seas and howling winds,
The guttered rocks and congregated sands,
Traitors ensteeped to clog the guiltless kneel,
As having sense of beauty, do omit
Their mortal natures, letting go safely by,
The divine Desdemona.” (II, i, 68-73)

The image reveals details about Desdemona's character. There is no question about how beautiful Desdemona is as can be gathered from the lines. She is not only beautiful, but she also has good manners and decency. “The divine Desdemona” is extraordinary because Shakespeare creates the character as the lady of perfection without any stain on her. Moreover, it can also be understood that although Desdemona is a divine character, she is vulnerable because of her inexperience, sensibility, and wisdom when she has been encountered by the sea. The emphasis on the power and danger of the sea discloses Desdemona's frailty. Wolfgang Clemen claims that with the usage of sea imagery, Shakespeare also conveys the idea that innocence without experience and resentment can turn into a disadvantage.²⁴ According to Cassio, Desdemona has been set free, safely. Indeed, Desdemona lacks the power to fight against the sea and she is at the mercy of it. Instead of rescuing herself from the storm and the sea, it lets her go. Furthermore, what Desdemona means for Othello is also expressed with the sea imagery. Othello says, “Oh my soul's joy / If after every tempest come such calms / May the winds blew till they have waken'd death” (2.1.169-171). Othello refers to Desdemona as his calm harbor, positioning her in a passive, motionless status. While Othello is constantly in action, Desdemona calmly waits for him. What is expected from her is to please the sailors by her gifts.

In all these descriptions about the sea, the sea is never seen in full form although the characters have been sailing between Venice and Cyprus. We witness Desdemona's and Othello's arrivals on the shore, but never see them on board. Cassio, who has

²⁴ Clemen W. *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery*. Methuen. 1977.

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been aboard during the tempest talks of it, “Tempests themselves, high seas, and howling winds, / The guttered rocks and congregated sands” (2.1.68-9). He employs the images of land along with the sea. Cassio’s speech seems to support the idea regarding sea imagery in the play, that

these images are... far more general than [Shakespeare’s] nature ones, and the subjects which chiefly interest [Shakespeare] are those which might be noted by any landsman: storm and wrecks and rocky shores, the boundless and fathomless depth of the ocean, the ebb and flow of the tide, the inrushing tide pouring into a breach or covering over muddy flats.²⁵

Miscegenation and Its Impact

Like the sea imagery, racism and self-alienation are central to the play. Racism and self-alienation are apparent throughout the play. The issue of miscegenation and interracial marriage become significant in the opening act. In the first scene, Iago and Roderigo awake Desdemona’s father at midnight to tell him the secret interracial marriage of his daughter and their manners reflect the Elizabethans view of miscegenation. Iago and Roderigo eroticize the idea of interracial marriage, to provoke Brabantio’s fear of miscegenation. Roderigo calls Othello, “a lascivious Moor” (1.1.121). At first, Brabantio tells Roderigo that he cannot be a suitable husband for his daughter. However after learning about the secret relationship of his daughter, he completely swallows his words as he prefers Roderigo to Othello. Socially speaking, Othello is in a better situation. He is the general of the Venetian armies and highly esteemed by the Duke. Roderigo has something that outweighs Othello’s better qualities and social positions, which is his national identity. The threat of miscegenation is critical of Brabantio’s decision for him. The issue of miscegenation is less-accepted than the growing appearance of black people in the Elizabethan England. Brabantio accuses Othello for witchcraft because he strongly believes that it is

²⁵ Spurgeon C. F. E. The Subject-Matter of Shakespeare’s Images. *Shakespeare’s Imagery and What It Tells Us*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1935. P. 47.

impossible for Othello or anyone to make his daughter fall in love with someone from a different nation.

In spite of the fear of miscegenation portrayed in Brabantio's fierce response to Desdemona's and Othello's love affair, and racist comments made by Iago, Roderigo and Brabantio throughout the play, Shakespeare does not characterize Othello as a reflection of racist stereotypes. His downfall as a tragic character does not come as a result of his race, or because of his interracial relationship with Desdemona, but rather it starts with false self-perception as a result of racist comments. In his article, Ian Smith (2016, p. 109) talks about the self-conflict that grows inside Othello, "conflict continues as a major issue but in the form of an internal 'race war' initiated by the play's resident racist, Iago."²⁶ Main conflict that is caused by Iago and Roderigo instigates Othello's "internal war," that becomes the reason for Othello's downfall and crimes. Like Ian Smith, Janet Adelman sees the play as a representation of "Othello's experience of race as it comes to dominate his sense of himself as polluted and polluting, undeserving of Desdemona and hence quick to believe her unfaithful."²⁷ Othello is not guilty because of his skin color, and he does not commit crime because he is a black moor. He suffers from self-alienation, and he becomes defenseless against provocative Iago. His insecurities grow as he starts to see his blackness as a deficiency in his relationship with Desdemona.

Othello is described as a savage and violent man because of his blackness from the beginning of the play. Audience encounters ideas about racism in early modern and modern context. Othello does not only represent his racial identity, but he also portrays the characteristic features of a tragic hero. His insecurity and alienation mainly come from his relationship with Desdemona that is considered to be unnatural. Although Othello acts in a corrupted way in some cases, it doesn't come from his blackness, but rather his flaw is because of the machinations of Iago's mind.

²⁶ Smith I. We are Othello: Speaking of race in Early Modern Studies. *Shakespeare Quarterly*. 2016. Vol. 67. Issue 1. P. 104-124.

²⁷ Adelman J. Iago's Alter Ego: Race as projection in Othello. *Shakespeare Quarterly*. 1997. Vol. 48 Issue. 2. P. 126.

I. Историко-літературний процес

The issue of miscegenation is important since the play's first performance, more than four hundred years before our time and because of the Elizabethans' interest in it. In her article "Making the Beast with two Backs" – Interracial Relationships in Early Modern England," Miranda Kaufmann emphasizes the possibility of seeing a black (or related) person in Elizabethan London.²⁸ In reading the play, it is significant to understand the interracial relationships, and black people's experiences resulting from racism. It is predictable that there were not a lot of black people in England at that time and although multiracial relationships were considered peculiar, black people did not receive a treatment different than white people, for example in case of fornication. Punishments were common to the whites and the blacks. Kaufmann says, "It is vital that this new archival evidence is read in the context of the wider patterns of social behavior in early modern English society."²⁹ Shakespeare's Othello is a black person with high social and military position. Through Othello, Shakespeare depicts the possibility of transcending the stereotypical prejudices and makes Othello a noble man. Othello's character does not only represent racial ideas, but also one's alienation from his own physical identity. With this alienation, he quickly believes in Desdemona's adultery. In the second scene of the first act, Othello enthusiastically tells Iago about his love:

But that I love the gentle Desdemona
I would not my unhoused free condition
Put into circumscription and confine
For the sea's worth. (2.1.25-28)

Othello suggests that if he did not "love the gentle Desdemona," he would not limit his "free condition" and adds that he would not even limit his freedom "for the sea's worth." Implying that his intense feelings and love for Desdemona is even more powerful than the sum of the value of his freedom with the significance he puts on the sea, Othello makes use of the sea metaphor to suggest that Desdemona's worth for him is priceless. After Iago deceives him and makes him believe in Desdemona's

²⁸ Kaufmann M. Making the Beast with Two Backs: Interracial Relationships in Early Modern England. *Literature Compass*. 2015. Vol. 12 Issue 1. P. 22–37.

²⁹ ditto. P. 25.

being deceived into believing that Desdemona is unfaithful to him by Iago, Othello declares:

Even so my bloody thoughts with violent pace
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up. (3.3.460-463)

Comparing his revengeful and violent feelings for his wife, Desdemona, to the stream of a sea that constantly keeps going on its route, Othello suggests that he is not willing to abandon his murderous intentions. Steve Mentz claims, "Othello's larger fantasy here remakes the sea, emblem of inconstancy and change, into a constant stream."³⁰ Othello's comparison of his violent intentions to the sea that just streams constantly reveals that he is determined to kill his wife out of revenge. The sea metaphor that alludes to constancy sheds light on Othello's emotional state that is prone to sudden changes which predominated his connection to the sea at the beginning of the play, now turns into a feeling of a fierce kind of hatred for Desdemona.

Conclusion

The way Othello is introduced and portrayed in the play becomes ultimately significant to understand his growing self-hate and falling action. Before encountering him on stage, the audience listens to Othello's ensign, Iago's portrayal of him with his words. Iago and Roderigo show the racial traits by describing Othello rather than his true personality, rooting the theme of alienation in the audience's mind. Iago already hates Othello because of his decision about Cassio, and Roderigo wants to be with Desdemona but has to overcome Othello who is the obstacle on his way. They have distaste against the Moor. In the play, Roderigo is the first to reflect the racist ideas while he refers to Othello as "the thicklips" (1.1.65). However, it is interesting to acknowledge that Iago's and Roderigo's hatred do not stem from Othello's race or ethnicity. Even though they use racist comments to emphasize their abhorrence of him, they have their reasons, the former relates to the military hierarchy, and the latter to love.

³⁰ Mentz S. *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*. London: Continuum. 2009. P. 30.

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Shakespeare characterizes Othello and universalises the character by making him deal with the issues of self-acceptance and alienation, as Edward Berry states, “Othello is not a stereotype, he tends to lose his individuality as a Moor and to become a representative of humanity.”³¹ Shakespeare’s final description of Othello is made by Cassio as “he was great of heart” (5.2.358). In the end Othello is portrayed as an honorable character who punishes himself as a result of his guilt.

In conclusion, Shakespeare’s portrayal of Othello as a representation of humanity is based on universal terms, underscored with the images extracted from the sea. He is not portrayed as a racist representation, rather as a character who alienates himself and suffers from the outcomes of racism, and the fear of miscegenation. The idea of internal war develops and ends with the hero’s self-punishment. Othello’s view of his blackness as a “stain” on his “white” wife Desdemona turns him to a murderer and Desdemona to the innocent victim. The play raises interest in the racist issues that come with the fear of interracial relationships. Racial topics are mixed with the sea imagery in *Othello*, and they have an impact on the main characters. The play draws a parallelism between the sea and Othello, Iago, Cassio, and Desdemona as discussed above. Sea’s destructive power and the tempest establish a bond between characters’ and particularly the main character Othello’s unsteady life and challenges he faces. The sea imagery emphasizes the differences between Iago and Othello pertaining to their psychological and emotional status. The sea and Othello’s connection to it holds the idea that Othello is the victim of a game that is knitted cruelly and patiently by Iago and his lust for vengeance. Othello’s and Iago’s commitment to the sea shows how these two characters are different from each other; one is the villain, Iago, the other is the victim, Othello, and the victim struggles against human and nonhuman forces in a heroic manner.

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³¹ Berry E. Othello’s Alienation. *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*. 1990. Vol. 30. Issue. 2. P. 316.

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