

who most deserves comfort and the husband would not let his wife accompany him into danger. It is Desdemona's tragedy that, herself the spontaneous voice of natural love, she should find no residence where love has its voice, for she has only leaped dreamily from one part to another of an invisible battle-field where everybody is in desperate need of something on which to trust his tomorrow but vainly seeks it by force, that is, "by old gradation" (1. 1. 37) of power inspired by fear and guarded by jealousy and threatened by its own motive but always peopled anew by hopeful but ill-starred recruits from "domestic" life where nature keeps its old gradation of love and valor in sympathy.

NOTES

1. Quotations from Shakespeare are all from W. G. Clark and W. A. Wright ed., *The Works of William Shakespeare* (London, MacMillan : 1956).
2. M. R. Ridley, "Introduction" to *Othello*, the Arden Edition (London, Methuen : 1962), p. xlviii.
3. T. S. Eliot, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," *Selected Essays* (London, Faber and Faber : 1958).
4. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

Desdemona as his due, Iago lets his sense of wrong decay into jealous contrivances against whoever possesses what he does not and into proud contempt for foolish obedience. But he shares with everybody else the inability to recognize the common predicament of the power-ridden society which vexes its law-abiding constituents who trust their mortal frailty on their collective efforts. Thus, Iago represents most flagrantly the common self-centered bias which makes people feel, in Lear's phrase, "more sinn'd against, than sinning." Collectively, this seemingly virtuous bias supports "the king's government," as is ironically testified by treacherous Iago, who just aims to exploit the fixed order of things. And the invisible infiltration of the self-righteous bias into otherwise noble souls is attested by Othello, who, for all his claim for Desdemona's affection, puts down his love to the "hint" (1. 3. 116) of his "lady," his marriage to "fortune" (1. 2. 23), and then both to her tempting lust.

If Othello's ready response to the pitying lady's unexpected hint exposes a proud soul too human not to be tormented by the restless necessity of armed struggle for survival and too natural not to be delighted by love, Brabantio disturbed in sleep stands for the fallacy of protective possession supposed to guard peaceful culture from annihilation. The kind "senator" is surprised by the natural tenor of fertile youth represented by his daughter, which, if not restrained by the "duty" of class consciousness, proves inclined to love and respect the courageous and pity the stricken and accordingly to create its own future rather than be confined within the tentative hierarchy created by the passing generations. It is the old man's tragedy that he should remain forbidden, by his fidelity in his own way of life, to acknowledge his fatherly success in having let his daughter's natural vivacity grow and flower without being intimidated and damaged by the deadly vision of fearful life, just as it is Othello's professional misery that he should not find, in the free soul of his tender wife, his small share of the dear achievement hard won with the collective efforts of interdependent men to protect their fertility from harms. Otherwise, the father would congratulate the daughter for loving one

(1. 3. 230) of "the flinty and steel couch of war" (231) , but then the awareness would annihilate his self-identity as the Moor of Venice. Just as, if Hamlet knew what his inner struggles are all about, he would not be the the Prince of Denmark.

So, just as Hamlet's inherited sense of order makes him susceptible to his dear father's call for revenge, Othello's inability to measure his wife's clear music of pity over the human scales of value leaves him to accept his trusty ancient's interpretation of her conduct and to jump from bliss to disgust. For, again like Hamlet's "Frailty, thy name is woman," Othello's ready acceptance of the "curse of marriage" presupposes womankind's utter immorality. His ingrained contempt for women, from which his delight has singly and innocently excepted his "lady," now claims itself, simply because he now can see his own marriage which was performed in courtly secrecy, with eyes identical to the exasperated father's. Iago's jealous version of Venetian women's sexual life, though treacherously partial, is materially grounded on the common secret anxiety conceived by men about women. Hence, the retrogression to the male tie with "honest Iago." What men innocently forget is that, where women sin, there men sin. If men have reason to believe in their sincerity, so do women in theirs. The only factor that saves Othello from ignominious debasement is his perfect faith in his moral innocence as a representative of orderly life. He will neither commit any treachery, nor suspect any conduct of his to be one. His predicament in this connection is : he has to strike an impossible compromise between his contempt for "housewives" (1. 3. 272) and his "soul's joy" (2. 1. 184).

Iago, on the other hand, is victimized by his acute sense of the too obvious discrepancy between his natural desire to be like any other and his duty to be ruled out of hope. In this respect, he is less privileged and more clear-sighted, though in a perverted way, than those complacent "masters" he is determined to cheat. Deprived by birth of any such naive self-assurance of royal blood as unconditionally supports Othello's sense of merit and allows him to demand

and indirectly because, according to the army code represented by the captain, Cassio is not supposed to complain, even if he feels his situation rather forced than reasonable. This is what Iago himself once attempted in vain as we learn at the very start of the play, and now he makes his hated rival repeat after him. The ancient makes the most of the dismissed officer's furtiveness to give it an erotic interpretation, but again his most convenient inspiration is his genuine perception of feminine attraction coupled with his knowledge of the common furtive practice to let feminine charm have precedence behind the back of the rigorous facade of social morality. Desdemona falls into his trap when she pities Cassio's pain and, in the name of love, flatly contradicts the most trusted expert of war, a thing which no one else could dare, not Cassio with his "reputation" nor Iago with his "curse of service."

To Othello, who is enamored by the newly-discovered bliss of life and who at the very moment of dismissing Cassio distinguished his personal feeling from his government by saying "I love thee,/But..." (2. 3. 248-249), Desdemona making her womanly petition for his poor officer's sake is amiability itself, but it is amiability and nothing else, and that so long as she remains within her bound as a joy-giving wife. That is, Othello's pleasure in this ought to remain "domestic." The renowned protector of peace will not allow any one to criticize his obedience to the rule of military government, be it so austere, though he may try to strike an expedient compromise when possible provided it is agreeable to *his* sense of honorable protectorship. "I'll deny thee nothing," (3.3.76) is said within the domestic bound, but it proves to have been too easily said, and precisely there he unknowingly copies Desdemona's dilemma. For the loving and respecting wife little dreams that she is undermining the very foothold of her brave husband. Neither one of them is conscious of the real problem before them, the dark gulf between love and duty.

If Othello were aware of the fundamental ethical bearing of Desdemona's unrestrained sympathy, he would know why her existence has been so like rare grace to him after his "tyrant custom"

choices caused by the immediate interests of daily life, it must be neither practicable nor wise to take an attitude of surrender and adopt a set of commonplaces, stoical or Christian, prepared for self-negating moments of checkmate to call to a providence, be it heaven or destiny. Errors are always imminent, but they are errors because human nature is not content with them. If there is a despair at the root of Eliot's philosophy, Othello is the one who desperately refuses despair, and, what is most significant in this respect, he is allowed to die satisfied that his heart's wish is not a forsaken dream but is founded on human possibility. We seem to be led to the conclusion that what is lacking in Othello is not the sense of faith which demands self-surrender but a bit of technical and moral precaution against possible defects in his own methodology which fails to help human grace bear fruit.

Fidelity is no proof of its adequacy; a heart that loves does not necessarily accompany a suitable action. For between motive and action there is custom with its form and idea. Othello's blind spot lies in his inability to make this distinction. But a blind spot is a blind spot because it can never be recognized as such. Therefore, in our evaluation of Othello's demeanor, his inability to understand things rightly ought to be distinguished from his inability to anticipate his fallibility, although they are reciprocally combined. The former is exploited by Iago, but the latter is the chief agent of Othello's own revengeful justice. And this is how the warrior acquires the genuine identity of a Shakespearean tragic character involved in destruction for an authentic cause for good enveloped in an allegedly good form.

3

Iago is unbearably unkind, but he has his own good cause, which is grounded on his insufferable pain. It is his clear perception of Cassio's pitiable bewilderment and Desdemona's tenderness that enables him to contrive to combine them into a plausible picture. His trick is grounded on the simple fact that the supplicant should go furtively

And this is where T. S. Eliot's Christian criticism of Othello's last speech shows its wholesome insight and dogmatic irrelevance.³ The critic cannot help pointing out the poor warrior's lack of faith because his suicide is too self-centered to fulfill the possibility of human perception in the face of the tragic experience. But Eliot opposes this deep insight of his against the whole tragic sequence resulting in the final suicide, because, one suspects, he defines the tragic situation as a negative inevitability; he deplores the want of any standard moral vision that would clarify the negative as negative. Behind the poet of *The Waste Land* is a dualistic dogma which declares that man's belief in himself will not save him. But it is incorrect to say that Othello about to kill himself is thinking only of himself. The blunt soldier's terms may be inadequate, but with them he reveals his faith in selfless nobility with which he has always wholeheartedly lived. One wonders if, under any religious auspices of humility, man has anywhere proved better trained than Othello to dedicate life to the cause of mutual trust even to the disregard of physical survival with moderate love and moderate jealousy. At least in that respect Othello is his own saving factor. The trouble is that this selfless nobility of his is combined with a futile inclination for destruction which emerges when his sense of order is challenged. If Othello's sensibility shows a "Senecan" bias at the time of his suicide, it must be said that he is at the mercy of the same bias when he kills his wife. If so, since the author, and Othello at the time of death, cannot have been in favor of the murder morally, religiously, or philosophically, it would be unjust to trace the bias back, through the playwright's sense of art, to his age with its "muddled scepticism."⁴ The age may or may not have been muddled, but the artist's silent technique with which the self-annihilating element in the protagonist's belief in himself is so disastrously exposed does not seem to support the idea that the age had little wisdom to pinpoint the "pride" in Othello's "bloody period" where "All that's spoke is marr'd" (5.2. 356).

As a matter of fact, under the incessant necessity of moral

wishes for their best future. Although Othello kills his wife, he behaves as one who knows the bliss of love and values it most. That is why, when he discovers that his act of justice has been an irrevocable error, he has "no way but this" (5. 2. 358) self-dedication by self-punishment. But, though he sincerely accepts his moral responsibility for the unreasonable situation he has caused, Othello remains unable to grasp his logical responsibility in harming the bliss of love. He ascribes the whole misery to Iago's intrigue, even trying to find in him the irresistible Devil. This, in flat terms, is to claim that, but for Iago, he would have held the eternal happiness of one who loves only "too well" (5. 2. 344). What is lacking here is a realization that his failure lies, certainly not in subjectively loving too well, but in practically not loving as love should. The proudly autonomous causer of the grievous calamity asserts that he could not have done otherwise. Terrible blindness is combined with utter sincerity.

Othello's limited idea about his own error affects our idea about the same and determines what we find in the play. For instance, it is more than possible to keep scandalized at the machinating Iago and, by so doing, to keep intact our basic affection toward the mutual love of the couple. One also may well be tempted to wrap up Othello's gullibility in his straightforward honesty and understand it as a matter of character about which logical analysis is irrelevant. Still, what seems pivotal to me is the moral consistency with which the proud soul whose job it has been to kill enemies in the name of justice directs his sharp dagger at himself who has destroyed his dearest one. The bloody formalism of this moral consistency exposes its fatal defect if we pay attention to the fact that it is in accord with his righteous sense of just mission that Othello finally gets over his scruples and deprives Desdemona of every possible chance of vindication. The error is all the more marked because with her last breath which somehow slips out of the strong hand of justice Desdemona proves her unfailing love and sympathy and absolves him of her own murder. Is Othello's idea of justice in harmony with his expectation in love? That is where my questioning focuses.

nature.

And, however impressed we may be by Caesar's power to re-establish order, we know we cannot help being attracted by Antony because his attachment to Cleopatra is a precarious but persistent struggle to escape from the cold military efficiency of the Roman government.

Thus, conversely, I also imply that, if in these other plays the question of "government" presents a singularly personal show, the "domestic" appearance of *Othello* is no more than a telltale aspect of a theme of more comprehensive significance, which somehow criticism has refrained from smelling out.

2

As, in *King Lear*, the aged king represents the essential nature of the play's wide-ranged human experiences by being specifically conditioned by his age and his kingly status, so Othello is called upon to represent, according to his uncommon career, the fertility and futility of human life inside and outside Venice. To say the least, he is a medium through which the polarly-unrelated spirits of Iago and Desdemona meet to prove their interrelatedness. Not that an aged king or an esteemed stranger arouses special attention, but his condition of life is so characterized as to make painfully clear the invisible communal structure of common human failure. The height reached by a long-reigning king or by a trusted general gives the most felicitous image of possible success to men's aspiration after self-assurance. Consequently, their unexpected self-destruction must naturally stir us into questioning *their* method which *we* accept.

The main plot of *Othello* consists of the protagonist's marriage, his faulty understanding of his wife resulting in her murder, and his suicide at the discovery of the truth. The tragic impact of this series of events comes from our immediate aversion to futile, forced death all the more enhanced by our ready sympathy with love in marriage. The happy mutual attachment of Othello and Desdemona justifies our

“prophetic” with a king’s moaning gravity, the Ghost calls attention to “the royal bed of Denmark” and commissions him to do a secret task, which he must do if he ever loved “thy father,” and finally, with good conscience, tells him not to contrive against “thy mother.” Throughout, the dead monarch never demands his trusted heir to see that, however he is to do the duty, he does not forget the weighty responsibility of the royal house to meet the subjects’ trust. While the younger brother performs the regal function in order to wear the crown, the elder brother virtually sticks to his birthright of priority which let him make royal use of his “gifts” but does not possess any god-like vision to look before and after. And the son thinks that the whole court’s pledge of faith to the reigning one is a problem no philosophy can solve!

And, if we so will, we can well sympathize with old Lear dividing his vast possession (all of it, mark! how loving!) among his daughters as “dowry,” believing that he is preventing future strife, and dreaming of his peaceful rest and death in the care of his dearest daughter. This may be a ceremonious business of government, but it certainly is a business of relinquishing government, and accordingly is a “domestic” affair in a promiscuous way. At any rate, Lear shatters his rite at the very end of his long reign when, shocked by an unexpected response from a daughter, he lets his grievance as father provoke the “dragon” of his kingly pride.

Purely personal is the vision of utmost happiness brought to Macbeth by strange visitors on his triumphant way from the battlefield, however agitated his mind grows at the inevitable suggestion of its social impact. And purely domestic the vision remains as he passes it over secretly to his wife, who will reasonably dare anything in her power so as to help the best of her husband’s latent seeds grow. Macbeth has “bought” his “golden opinions” (*Macbeth*, 1.7.33), and as such they are compared with the benefit of killing his master, and government turns to be the art of fearful profit. And yet, the truth is that Macbeth and his wife would have none the less proved most royal if only they had been unnatural enough to suppress the call of

lifeless body of a daughter, oblivious of government, himself a veritable testimony of utter failure, now with no reason left to reflect on his failing, but with life enough to die a most wretched man. And still, because he has been "every inch a king," the "great thing of us" (5. 3. 236), who politically deserves to be "forgot," makes those that are young wretched by his sight, for they "must obey" the "weight of this sad time" (5. 3. 323) and sustain "the gored state" (320). What, then, are we to say, if we are to "Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say" (324) ?

Shall we, again, triumph over the minced body of the miserable King Macbeth, because he has killed an innocently trustful king who had "no art/ To find the mind's construction" (*Macbeth*, 1. 4. 11-12) of gentlemen like Cawdors, Macbeths, and Banquoes and has been a king without felicity but full of care? Because he had his fatal plunge for happiness expose the black fissure between a loyal face and a suffering body and between the royal act of generosity and the regal necessity of subjugation? It is very well to speak highly of the balmful King Edward, a beautiful image worth wishing longevity, but will he teach any art that the good King Duncan had no time to learn?

Or, does the imperial Antony show any orderly statecraft as his leadership makes it impossible for one most loving follower of his to *live* under him? What is the self-gnawing torture inside the sensitive rationalist, Enobarbus, if it is not a faithful mirror to reflect the basic difficulty inherent in the self-justifying glory of the Triumvirates and Caesars? Are we still obliged to regard honor as above life, as if the most renowned masters were not interested in security and happiness?

It may sound willful to concentrate upon a critic's reference to these plays when he is really talking of another distinctive work. But what I imply is that, if *Othello* is "domestic," these other plays are no less so. Listen to Hamlet describing the political expediency in the Danish court after the sudden loss of the late king in terms of "my father," "my mother," "mine uncle," "loving," "appetite," "tears," and "incestuous sheets." And, as if to make his son sound

liable." It closes our eyes to the essential similarity or identity in thematic structure of all these tragedies, *Othello* included. The Moor of Venice is certainly a domestic husband who kills his spouse, but his breach with his dear wife (and, for that matter, his passionate attachment to the "honest Iago") is occasioned indirectly and maintained directly by the woman's virtual refusal to admit the rule of the high agent of government. Just in the same way, Hamlet's all-impressive soliloquies with their personal tone disturb the note of the king's government and destroy the prince's inborn right to play the heroic role of an undaunted performer of his princely duty. In theme, there is much less difference between the Moor and the Dane than there may seem to be. And, in my view, the emotion in whose grip we accept "the king's government" as sacred prevents us from seeing it through the collective strivings of "people like ourselves" including kings and slaves alike whose "disastrous fortunes" are overshadowed by the imperative call for a powerful government at all costs.

It is strange to hear "the re-establishment of ordered government" so solemnized at the end of *Hamlet*, where the last survival of the Hamlet dynasty, "The rose and expectancy of the fair state" (*Hamlet*, 3. 1. 160), loses every grip of government and the ambition-puffed prince of the once-overpowered rival pedigree makes the most convenient use of the "fortune" (5. 2. 399) and claims his "rights of memory" (5. 2. 400) without counsels and elections, let alone any "voice" (5. 2. 403) of the perished power. Should we still swallow the dead young idealist's peaceful version of the matter and leave it at that, even if he is killed by a court intrigue and his body is borne like a soldier and the cannon fires peal? Be ruled, for the king's government must be carried on; peace is the thing and must be accepted with thanks, for power quarrels with power for stability. That was the "law" when the two proud monarchs legally fought for pre-eminence and the winner's conquest was sanctioned by "heraldry" (1. 1. 87).

Or look at the old Lear at the genuine "promised end" (*King Lear*, 5. 3. 263) of his life, more naked than dressed, clinging to the

BY THE OLD GRADATION

by Kei Maruta

Iago. Why, there's no remedy; 'tis the
curse of service

(*Othello*, 1.1.35) ¹

Othello. ...and my demerits
May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune

(*Ibid.*, 1. 2. 22-23)

1

It is noteworthy that all these other tragedies end with the re-establishment of ordered government, the note of "The king's government must be carried on." This is not true of *Othello*. It is no doubt an inconvenience for the Venetian state to be deprived of the service of its greatest general, but there is no more in it than that, and so we are left free to follow simply the disastrous fortunes of people like ourselves, and one of them caught in the cruel grip of an emotion to which we are all liable. ²

So writes a very able critic whose scholarship and balanced understanding impress me. But here I am much in doubt not so much of his sense of form as of the sense of political morality he takes for granted. It may appear that there is no harm at all in agreeing with Dr. M. R. Ridley, characterizing *Othello* with its specifically "domestic" quality and distinguishing it from *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, all of which have kings or their equivalents. I am afraid, however, that the very classification of the play as "domestic," together with the unconditional demand of general awe from the audience towards the royal prerogatives on the stage, embodies in itself "the cruel grip of an emotion to which we are all