

2013

## Othello as an enigma to himself: a Jungian approach to character analysis

Eric Iliff  
*Eastern Washington University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.ewu.edu/theses>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Iliff, Eric, "Othello as an enigma to himself: a Jungian approach to character analysis" (2013). *EWU Masters Thesis Collection*. 138.  
<https://dc.ewu.edu/theses/138>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research and Creative Works at EWU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in EWU Masters Thesis Collection by an authorized administrator of EWU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [jotto@ewu.edu](mailto:jotto@ewu.edu).

Othello as an Enigma to Himself:  
A Jungian Approach to Character Analysis

---

A Thesis

Presented to

Eastern Washington University

Cheney, Wa

---

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Master of Arts (Literary Studies)

---

By

Eric Iliff

Spring 2013

THESIS OF ERIC ILIFF APPROVED BY

---

Dr. Grant Smith, Chair, Graduate Study Committee

Date

---

Dr. Philip Weller, Graduate Study Committee

Date

---

Dr. Martha Raske, Graduate Study Committee

Date

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	1
Procedure.....	2
Examples of Non-Jungian Scholarship .....	3
The Traditional Views of A.C. Bradley.....	4
The Mistaken View that Othello is Indeed Noble .....	5
Is Iago Solely to Blame? .....	5
The Trustful Man is the most Capable of Distrust.....	6
Othello is not a Play about Fate.....	8
Mixed Marriages a Non-Factor.....	9
Othello and the Actors.....	10
The Mistaken Idea of Othello's Sexual Insecurity.....	11
Approaches to Jungian View.....	12
Othello's Obsession with Fame and Reputation.....	12
The Natural and the Supernatural.....	13
In Incompatibility of Justice and Love.....	15
Shakespeare's Unheroic Hero.....	16
Othello's Final Speech as Weakness.....	18
Iago and his Cold Reason.....	19
The Nature of Evil.....	20
Iago as the Embodiment of Evil.....	21
Othello's Lofty Expectation of Human Behavior.....	22
Othello's Transformation.....	23
Evil and Otherness.....	24
A Coda on Previous Scholarship.....	25
Othello as the Jungian Primitive.....	25
Jung's Description of the Extrovert.....	29
Othello as Extrovert.....	30
Iago as Introvert.....	33
The Importance of Self-knowledge.....	38
The Difficult Pursuit of Self-knowledge.....	39
The External Environment and the Individual.....	40
Shakespeare's Imagery and Jungian Shadows.....	41
Summary and Conclusion.....	42

## Othello as an Enigma to Himself: A Jungian Approach to Character Analysis

### Introduction

There have been many explanations for Othello's downfall. Perhaps he has a savage nature within him, just waiting to be exposed; perhaps it is his disposition towards self-deception, that his ability to coldly murder his wife is only possible because he has the ability to fool himself and see what he wants to see rather than what is really there; perhaps it is a fear of loss of reputation and pride that drives him towards evil; perhaps he truly is noble, but is driven by intense passion which overcomes his reason. I will argue Othello's lack of self-knowledge is what causes him to turn evil, becoming a completely different person than what he was in the beginning of the play, and it is this lack of self-knowledge and his capability for evil that cause him to so easily accept Iago's "poisonous" whisperings and suggestions.

The key to understanding a mind like Othello's is through the work of the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung. For Jung, "man is an enigma to himself," and our key need is the ability for introspection. Jung pursued his research and published *The Undiscovered Self* in 1958 after the rise and fall of dictators such as Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini. Jung observed entire nations slowly becoming prone to the evil influences around them. To explain this problem, he posited that we all have the capability for evil within ourselves, and it is only by recognizing this capability that we can escape and see through the sometimes evil influences around us. Our fear of the unknown interior prompts the individual to constantly attempt to deceive oneself into thinking that he or she is always in the right. In *Othello*, Jung's ideas cannot be clearer than what we see in the outward influence Iago has over Othello.

Othello, a thorough extrovert, has no genuine capability for the introspection that Jung speaks of; it is his outward focus that makes it only too easy for Iago to control and manipulate

him. Othello is incapable of recognizing his capability for evil. He is completely ignorant of his tendency towards self-deception; of his absolute need for certainty that drives him to the brink of madness; of his tendency towards making excuses for his actions, especially in his final speech; of the contradictions within him, and of his overwhelming passion that drives him to murdering his innocent wife. As a voice from the outside, Iago essentially does Othello's thinking for him, driving Othello, ironically, into believing that it is Desdemona and Cassio who are evil, while Othello himself is slowly turning into a monster. If we are to apply Jung's ideas directly, Iago functions like civilization: he creates chaos; he implants ideas into the individual's mind, thereby influencing the individual, and turning Othello's own hidden nature against himself. Some critics even believe that Iago is a projection of Othello's hidden self due to his complete control over Othello's mind. Othello's final speech is itself a form of self-deception: he blames fate, he blames Iago, but he never blames himself except for loving "too well." He turns an obvious negative into a positive, further reinforcing the defenses that he uses to direct responsibility elsewhere as opposed to his own psychological make-up.

## **Procedure**

To clarify this thesis, I will begin by outlining traditional views of Othello advanced by a number of notable scholars. I will then describe Jungian ideas of human nature, the differences between the extrovert and the introvert, Jung's descriptions of our tendencies toward self-deception and our difficulties in recognizing hard truths about ourselves. I will then apply these concepts to previous interpretations by scholars and to Shakespeare's characterization of Othello in the play itself. I will conclude by stating that Othello is not simple or stupid, as some critics have suggested, but rather a man driven by pride and a need to maintain his own reputation, a man given to passion and self-deception, a man easily led by influences in the form of Iago, and

a man unable to recognize his own capability for committing violent and evil acts. *Othello* is essentially a play about human nature and its ability to turn against itself, and a man whose inability to obtain self-awareness drives him towards an evil act that destroys not only his earthly salvation, but his eternal salvation as well.

Jungian analysis is appropriate for *Othello* because the play focuses on psychological themes. The most important themes center around Othello's and Iago's relationship as it develops in the play. To gain an accurate understanding of *Othello*, it is necessary to understand Othello's interior make-up. Other than soliloquies, we gain little access into his reasons and motivations that lead to his downfall. Jung's notion of psychological types gives us an accurate understanding of Othello's extroverted nature. We understand why he is so easily manipulated, and how it could have been avoided if he were to gain a better understanding of himself. Self-knowledge, elements of the introvert personality type, the ability for introspection, are all traits that Jung believes to be of the upmost importance, but they are also traits that Othello cannot, or never does possess.

### **Examples of Non-Jungian Scholarship**

A review of previous scholarship on *Othello* will help clarify my Jungian approach. There are several views on why Othello becomes jealous enough to murder his wife. Some believe that it is insecurity about his race and his place outside of Venetian society. Some believe that it is a deep-rooted sexual insecurity that drives him to murder. Another more cynical theory is that Othello is a kind of "noble savage," and that underlying his noble image is a capability for extreme violence due to his country of origin. Although a critic can select evidence that supports each of these theories, they do not present a coherent view of human nature as portrayed by Shakespeare.

## The Traditional Views of A.C. Bradley

A.C. Bradley has written many analyses of Shakespeare now considered classics. In his article “Othello: A Noble Soul Overcome by Passion,” he begins by rejecting an old idea that Othello is some kind of “noble savage” who reverts to his primitive state by the end of the play. Othello’s issue is that his very nature holds within it a proclivity toward jealousy, and because of his willingness to trust others, he is able to be manipulated into an intense state of passion, which is “likely to act with little reflection, with no delay, and in the most decisive manner conceivable” (Bradley 88). Intense passion is something inherent within him, separate from his race or place of origin. Bradley acknowledges that Othello is one of the greatest poets of all Shakespeare’s characters, but despite that fact, Bradley argues that his soul is very simple. Othello’s viewpoint tends to be only directed outwards, with little capability for introspection. Emotion can excite his imagination, but dulls his intellect and reason. However, Bradley does not solely blame Othello’s inner nature.

As Bradley points out, Othello’s opinion of Iago mirrors everyone else’s, that Iago is honest, trustworthy, and apparently warm-hearted in dealing with others’ affairs. Furthermore, Bradley observed that Othello did not fully know his wife. Othello knew that she abandoned her father for him; so in his mind, this might suggest that she might abandon him for another. They had not known one another for very long or learned the inner components of each other, but their very love was guided by pure passion. Bradley acknowledges Othello’s imaginative properties, stating that “The consciousness of any imaginative man is enough, in any such circumstances, to destroy his confidence in his powers of perception” (Bradley 92). By the fourth act, the Othello that we saw in the beginning is a changed man, chaos has taken place within his mind, “a blackness suddenly intervenes between his eyes and the world; he takes it for the shuddering



testimony of nature to the horror he has just heard, and he falls senseless to the ground” (Bradley 93). By the end of the play, as Bradley argues, Othello’s rage has finally turned into sorrow, and although Othello’s soul is still pure, the passion inherent within him has clouded it.

### **The Mistaken View that Othello is Indeed “Noble”**

Bradley makes many great points: that it is Othello’s inability for introspection, his interior make-up, his tendency towards jealousy and rage, and a deep-seeded passion that causes him to murder Desdemona. However, Bradley places too much emphasis on Iago as a central part of the problem. He is correct in observing that virtually every character in the play mistakenly thinks of Iago as honest, which leads to Othello’s deception. Obviously, if he did not have this reputation, it would have made it harder for Othello to believe him. But Othello’s murder of Desdemona cannot be done by a man who is truly noble. It is a mistake to make any kind of excuse for him. Nobility implies a proclivity for doing what is “right,” for having sound judgment, for having a moral center that prevents one from committing a heinous act like murder. As Bradley observes, Othello has little capability for introspection, and it is this trait, that should be blamed for his tragic mistake as I hope to show later.

### **Is Iago Solely to Blame?**

Unfortunately, Bradley is not the only critic who has taken the view that Othello is “noble,” and that it is exterior forces, usually Iago, that are to blame for the hero’s fall. In his article “*Othello*: Tragedy of Effect,” E.E. Stoll argues that Othello’s murdering of his wife is not due to some psychological defect that comes from within, but rather is a tragic occurrence brought about by circumstance and Iago’s manipulative arts. Stoll asserts that Othello’s change comes from a complete delusion that is created by Iago; that Othello is a man of virtue; and that Shakespeare would never allow the hero to have a dangerous and wrongful nature underneath his

noble and capable appearance. He is respected by everyone around him, and “the dramatic preparations [in the play] are emotional, not analytical and psychological, primarily for the situation, not the character” (150). It is true that Iago and the environment in the play (brought about by a bit of luck for Iago) may be the catalyst, but Othello is still responsible for the act. However, Stoll does not take into account that if one is to blame solely Iago, then one is overlooking integral themes in the play. Othello might be considered a hero, but a heavily flawed one that should be looked at critically instead of being sympathized with.

### **The Trustful Man is Most Capable of Distrust**

Although Stoll takes what I believe to be a flawed view in this instance, he also makes several outstanding points in his book *Othello: An Historical and Comparative Study*. Stoll begins by highlighting the answers critics have attempted to find that explain Othello’s fall. The first is that Othello is not noble, but that there is an underlying capability for horrendous violence:

In the beginning of the play Othello is a marionette fairly well shaped and exceedingly picturesque; but as soon as his jealousy is touched upon the mask is thrown aside; Othello the self-contained captain disappears. (3)

The key theme Stoll touches on, and a very interesting theme, is that the most trustful man is also the man who is most capable of distrust. His innocence “inclines to a belief in guilt, rather than a belief in innocence and that the most trustful man is most capable of distrust” (4). This theme is periodically referred to throughout Stoll’s book, and will be extremely useful in my thesis because it is Othello’s trust and lack of self-awareness that lead him into committing a truly evil act, bringing the real self to the surface. By the end of the temptation scene he is a man who is completely different from the man he was at the beginning of the play.

Stoll also believes that Othello essentially becomes a man without a self; that he is so simple that Iago comes do his thinking for him. Iago's counsel always seems good in his eyes, but Stoll asserts that "if we know our selves, the entrenchment of character and personality are not at all so lightly leaped over, and the simplest body could long have baffled a more cunning fiend..." (20). Once again, Stoll touches upon Othello's lack of self-awareness, which breeds his capability for evil. Othello's mistake is also one of an un-noble character; he trusts the counsel of a man whom he knows only shallowly rather than the petitions of his best friend and his innocent wife. If one were to take another of Shakespeare's heroes such as Hamlet, despite also being heavily flawed, his extreme capability for self-awareness makes it difficult to believe that he would fall for Iago's tricks, and instead, his loyalty would be directed towards Cassio and Desdemona, rather than the whisperings of an impersonal acquaintance.

Othello's faults of character, trusting only in Iago's poisonous whisperings, make Iago capable of slowly turning Othello from a man into a monster. Iago never gets angry on Othello's behalf. A true friend would become angry at recognizing adultery in his best friend's marriage, but Othello, lost in his own passion, never recognizes the absence of anger in Iago. Proof, in the form of the handkerchief, is not offered until the latter part of the play, and all Iago has to do is spill suggestions and words to deceive him. However, Stoll emphasizes the power of Iago's deceit:

Jealousy and cuckoldom, the falseness of Venetian women, his wife's deception of her father, the unequal and unnatural union, flaunting those inflammatory images before his eyes as the bullfighter does his cloak. (Stoll 25)

Stoll thereby places too much importance on Iago for Othello's fall; tragedy demands a weakness; it is a defect of character, a lack of self-knowledge, gullibility, and a hidden anger that carries with it violent consequences.

### ***Othello* not a Play of Fate**

Stoll is on much better ground when he argues that *Othello* is not essentially a play about fate. Emilia's finding of the handkerchief, Cassio's appearance during Othello's spell, and Desdemona's promise to help Cassio regain the favor of Othello all suggest that there is something more than Iago's luck at work. But Stoll argues against the idea of fate:

Fate or fortune, how many critical crimes have been committed in thy name! Brabantio's final warning, Othello's foreboding on the quay, and his outcry 'who can control his fate' in the bedchamber, are hardly more than bits of constructive and rhetorical furniture, imitated, indirectly, from the classics, and designed to focus interest and lend tragic state and emphasis. (30)

Although Iago is certainly a bit lucky, to attribute all that happens in the play to fate denies the moral dimension of tragedy. Iago's luck is a way to advance Othello's fall in a quicker fashion. The whole play takes place over just a few days, and a little bit of luck, which provides an appearance of truth to Othello, is all that's needed for his fall to be completed.

Stoll is also correct in focusing on Othello's simplicity as a reason for his fall. Othello can only deal with "obvious facts," Iago's every word must be "absolute truth," he cannot bring his intellect to object to Iago's temptations and only argues a minor point: "why is she false?" (32). Once again Othello's lack of self-awareness is brought to light and he cannot recognize jealousy or bias within himself. However, Stoll places essential blame on Iago's manipulation of virtually everyone, and says that *Othello* becomes a "tragedy of fools" (42). In pursuing this

argument, Stoll focuses on external action. “Fools” is a strong word, and only if we assume that Othello’s fall is due to purely internal forces, a lack of *self-knowledge*, might the label fit.

### **Mixed Marriages a Non-Factor**

Stoll makes a good point in objecting to an old argument that *Othello* is a commentary on the precarious state of mixed marriages, or that love grounded in disparity is always unstable. He begins by stating various critics’ assertion that the marriage “seems extraordinary or unnatural to everybody” (44). However, Stoll asserts the only one who is truly shocked is Brabantio. Iago’s provocation of Brabantio is done by bringing up sexual imagery of Othello and Desdemona fornicating. Iago’s comments in this opening scene might suggest implications about the racial differences in marriage, but his opinions can by no means be representative of the other characters in the play. The court in the beginning of the play and Lodovico and Gratiano at the end still show respect for Othello, despite his horrible crime. If race were to be a factor in Othello’s murder of Desdemona, the evidence is a matter of reality vs. appearance, which Shakespeare always treats ironically.

Finally, Stoll also deals with Othello’s and Desdemona’s relationship and the possibility that it is the short time they have known one another that prompts Othello’s suspicion. Stoll, rightfully, objects to this view:

And what good in the world would it do Othello to have known Desdemona longer, seeing that he puts his faith in Iago, who has not been his friend, rather than in his friend and the wife of his bosom. (48)

Once again, it must be argued that external circumstances, especially in such a vague conjecture, *cannot* be blamed for Othello’s fall. If Othello had self-awareness and introspection, Iago, even with his miraculous powers of manipulation, could never succeed in deceiving Othello. Othello

would only have to ask the question “Why is he so adamant about telling me this? Why does this man care?”

### ***Othello* and the Actors**

Rosenberg’s *The Mask of Othello* takes a different stance in defense of Othello.

Rosenberg begins by examining the various critics, beginning with those who have not believed Othello to be “noble” at all, but rather an insecure man, fearful of humiliation, overly arrogant, and a hero who is capable of enormous amounts of self-deceit. Othello is presumably too ready to believe and respond to Iago’s influence, failing to see his own corrupt nature within until it is too late. However, Rosenberg’s goal is not to prove Othello as an “un-noble savage,” but to defend him and prove otherwise. In order to do so he interviews a number of various notable actors who have played Othello and describes their views on his character. Their views tend to be much more positive than those of the critics, some believing him to be a “noble” hero but one whose downfall is due to factors outside of his interior nature.

Rosenberg, offering his own opinions at times, asserts that Othello is self-aware, like other of Shakespeare’s heroes,

One of the finest, one of the noblest of men. But to be the best of men is still to be frail, to be subject to vanity, pride, insecurity, credulity, and the other marks of mortality...his tragic flaw is that he is human (202).

According to Rosenberg, Othello is something of an Everyman; his flaws, as exposed in the play, are things that could emerge from any of us. He is “human,” and therefore he is susceptible to human weakness as Othello shows in the play. His flaws should not be looked at negatively, but as something that makes him more sympathetic.

My thesis by contrast, holds that the idea of being “human” is no excuse for murder. According to Jung’s views, man *is* capable of both good and evil, but it is through introspection, through self-awareness, that we can be assured that outside influences, whether they be governments, societies, or a single individual like Iago, cannot guide us towards evil. Othello is simply blind, an enigma to himself, and his flaws and actions should be viewed from the most critical standpoint possible. His flaws are not shared by Everyman. They are internal, and even Iago, one of the most evil of all villains in English literature, is merely an outside influence that should have been exposed well before the final murder scene.

### **The Mistaken Idea of Othello’s Sexual Insecurity**

One of the most mistaken views in examining Othello’s behavior is that it is done out of sexual insecurity. Pechter’s book *Othello and Interpretative Traditions*, revolves around Othello’s sexuality, his insecurity regarding it, its foreignness even to himself, and whether it might contribute to his “bestial” behavior in the latter half of the play. Iago essentially drives Othello to his actions by bringing up various images of Cassio and Desdemona performing sexual actions together. It is unclear, as many critics note, as to whether Othello and Desdemona have “done the deed,” and whether it is this lack of physical intimacy that makes Othello so suspicious, and disturbed at the thought of Desdemona being with another man.

It is true that Iago, as Pechter argues, successfully manipulates Othello by bringing up images of Desdemona fornicating with Cassio, but the mistake such critics make is in assuming that Othello is sexually insecure. It is far better to assume that Othello is normal, particularly as portrayed in the opening scenes. He is not an “everyman,” but being bothered by these images is due to his animalistic jealousy, not because he is insecure with his sexuality. That is to say, being disturbed at images of a spouse being with someone else is normal; all of us would be disturbed.

However, Othello differs in the intensity of feeling that comes with these images. Othello's extreme reaction is because he has already concluded that Desdemona's supposed love affair with Cassio is indeed real, while a self-aware Othello, even though disturbed, would not allow fear to turn into truth. He would maintain a distinction between his fantasy and the world in which he inhabits.

### **Approaches to Jungian View**

I have touched upon a number of viewpoints that stand in opposition to my views concerning the character of Othello. I will now turn to scholars who support my thesis in one way or another. Some only offer partial support, and others nearly mirror my own views. All of them are integral to an accurate study of Othello, as were the articles previously touched upon, even if they coincided very little with my own views.

### **Othello's Obsession with Fame and Reputation**

In their article "Othello's Loss of Fame and Reputation Leads to his Self-Destruction," David Jeffrey and Patrick Grant emphasize Othello's need for a positive reputation. It is this loss of reputation that leads to his suicide. His suicide is not over remorse for his murder of Desdemona, but rather a selfish act, an act done out of remorse for his reputation, probably compromised, after his death. To reach this conclusion, Jeffrey and Grant make the distinction between Othello's marriage to Desdemona at the beginning of the play and his murder of her in the end: "Othello is protected in the beginning because he knows his good fame, and the fact that he did not break the law will protect him against the senate" (141). Othello is simply overly concerned with reputation in his interactions with others. Othello will not speak or reconcile with Cassio as he won't talk with a man whose reputation has been wrecked. Othello's definition of others as well as himself is entirely dependent on fame and reputation. When this reputation is



taken away, the man is worth little. Jeffrey and Grant also point out that one of the means Iago uses in corrupting Othello is by constantly referring to his reputation as if he indeed has been “cuckolded.” Othello’s “human nature becomes perverted...until finally he cuts himself off from salvation by the crime of self-murder” (143). Not only does Othello lose his earthly salvation through his suicide, but his spiritual salvation as well. Othello values his earthly reputation so much that he is willing to condemn himself for eternity due to its loss.

Although this article focuses on external factors such as fame and reputation, these same factors also reveal much about Othello’s internal make-up and what drives him. Othello is proud, egotistical, concerned with his self-deluded image of himself and of the outside world’s image of him. If Othello were more aware of his internal traits, he would probably be not so concerned with his fame and reputation. His emphasis would be on his relations with those he is most close, rather than any external worries about how he is viewed. Maintaining a strong relationship with his closest friends like Cassio and Desdemona would become far more important than the image he casts in the eyes of others. It is impossible, even if we were to take the view that everything that motivates Othello is internal, to disregard this article because it shows the lack of Othello’s internal reflection. Othello is driven to murder by the possibility of shame; outward shame awakens the evil that lies within him, and potentially lies within everyone according to Jung. So by pointing out Othello’s outward focus, this article makes an important contribution.

### **The Natural and the Supernatural**

In a much different vein, Elias Schwartz, in his article “Stylistic Impurity and the Meaning of *Othello*,” argues that the play operates on two levels: the natural and the supernatural. Schwartz describes the naturalistic aspect of *Othello* as the “destruction of a noble simple-souled man by an envious loveless rationalist” (297). The supernatural aspect of Othello

is reflected in his damnation for his senseless murder of Desdemona. This article centers on the way Othello is characterized and interpreted in terms of these dual aspects. In order to accurately judge Othello, Schwartz examines the contradictions that exist within his character. He is magnanimous, loyal, “boundless in his confidence,” but also imbued with a “childlike egotism.” However, one cannot examine the character of Othello without examining his antagonist Iago.

On one hand, Schwartz defines Iago as an individual who is incapable of love and therefore attempts to destroy it. At the same time, he symbolizes the evil in human nature due to his ability to turn human nature against itself. He can even be looked at as a projection of Othello’s egotism, as it is this egotism that leads to his damnation after killing Desdemona. Othello “is an image of this natural human impulse raised to the level of monstrosity” (299). Schwartz then gives detailed accounts of different aspects of Othello’s and Desdemona’s personalities that make them susceptible to manipulation—Othello’s jealousy and Desdemona’s willingness to bring Cassio back into the favor of her husband. Reverting back to the notion of the natural and the supernatural, Schwartz states:

When the roots of Othello’s personality come into view, the play begins to take on a general or supernatural meaning. Othello becomes the everyman, because everyone in him has the very same passions and tendencies that are uncovered in the barbaric, strange, and exotic Moor. Because of our underlying passion, ineradicable egotism, and prone to self-doubt, we all want to love and be loved. (301)

Schwartz makes a number of valuable points. Perhaps the most important is that there are similarities between Iago and Othello; he even goes so far as to call Iago a “projection” of Othello. Othello has a “childlike egotism,” which shows in his infatuation with fame, reputation, and his lofty image of himself, a result of his blindness to his own nature. I differ, and yet also

partially agree with Schwartz, about the idea of Othello being an “everyman.” Jungian psychology might consider him so, insofar as we all have the capability for evil. However, Othello differs from everyman in that he has no ability for introspection, and possesses an outward passion where introspection is very much needed.

### **The Incompatibility of Justice and Love**

Winifred Nowottny pursues an important distinction in her article “Justice and Love in *Othello*,” postulating that Othello is essentially a drama geared towards the idea of justice, a culmination to which the play is destined to lead. As a major theme, jealousy is divided between “belief in evidence and belief in the person we love,” an opposition that proves to be incompatible within the world of the play. The theme is prevalent throughout, and Nowottny views the opening court scene as an attempt by Brabantio to bring love under jurisdiction of the law, an attempt that fails. Furthermore, one cannot use reason to understand or find love. According to Nowottny, *Othello* is a play that warns against the pitfalls of admitting testimony towards love. It is Othello’s constant attempt to find proof or evidence that makes him so susceptible to Iago’s lies. In the end, the uncertainty of Othello’s mind must be conquered by violent action. Othello’s murder of Desdemona is the logical conclusion of everything that has come before it. Nowottny calls it a play about “the error of judgment, the error being in the application of judgment to love” (179). The murder is a way for Othello to finally possess Desdemona, when it was the fear of not possessing her that drove him into a state of homicidal madness. The killing symbolizes all the pent up emotions, the uncertainty, the conflict within Othello, “express[ing] at once all that Desdemona means and all that he means” (181). Othello is driven by the obligations of justice, and once again, justice and love cannot be inter-mixed.

Justice denies the inner feelings on which love is based. Thus, Othello's suicide is much like his life; from the beginning to end, he is the judge.

Although this article does not lead directly into my thesis, it is far too notable to be ignored. Love, undoubtedly, is a major theme in the play. While Iago views love as carnal and animalistic, Othello and Desdemona's love is based in pity: she loves him because of the pain he's been through, and he loves her because she pities him. Othello indeed seems intent on justice in his murder of Desdemona, however twisted this form of justice may be. If Othello had the ability for introspection, he might have seen that his form of justice is not only heavily misguided but unfair. Nowotny makes a valid point in that justice and love are indeed incompatible in the play, something that Othello cannot, or refuses to see.

### **Shakespeare's Unheroic Hero**

Othello's habitual self-deception and his overt sense of pride is the focus of Robert Heilman's article "Othello: The Unheroic Tragic Hero." It is these defects that cause Othello's downfall, rather than just the environment or because of Iago's poisoning of his mind. This poisoning would not be so easy to achieve if Othello did not have these defects. However, Heilman objects to the notion that Othello is by nature just a simple person as many critics have thought but is actually much more complex. Othello cannot be reduced to "one term." Heilman dispels the notion that *Othello* is a treatise on mixed-marriages, but rather "a drama about an everyman, with the modifications needed to individualize him" (186). Heilman also labels Othello as a judge. Othello's murder of Desdemona at the end of the play is his authoritative judgment on her, the penalty that he placed upon her. However, Othello is not only the judge but the executioner as well. The evidence against her is supposedly a handkerchief, and upon finding out from Emilia the true nature of the handkerchief, Othello discovers the ultimate irony, it "does

have evidential value—but the reverse of what Othello has supposed” (189). Othello, though quick to condemn and pass ultimate judgment, can only deceive himself into believing that his condemnation and punishment is valid and not a defect within his inner character.

In the end, Heilman notes that Othello is quick to condemn and curse Iago, but this is merely an “impulse to blame the outer agency of evil and thus avert recognition of inner responsiveness to it” (190). Othello, a clear extrovert, has to find an exterior evil to justify his act. He is incapable of self-reflection, a trait that might have saved both Desdemona and himself. Returning to the idea of Othello as judge, justice can only occur with the death of the judge, which Othello takes the liberty of doing. Othello’s “incompetence” in the earlier case can only be purged by sentencing himself. Heilman states that Othello understands suffering as that of the body rather than that of the spirit, a preference which he would rather take, as suggested by his inability to find his act dishonorable, rather than honorable as he implies in his final speech. Finally, Othello’s last self-deception occurs as he asks the Venetians to remember him as a “hero of both state and religion.” Even after his murder of Desdemona, he is mostly concerned with his own image after death, leading Heilman to conclude that Othello is the least heroic of all Shakespeare’s heroes.

Thus, Heilman touches upon many of the same ideas as in the other articles mentioned: Othello’s apparent “nobility” or lack thereof; the function of Othello as judge; and Othello’s proclivity for self-deception. However, Heilman is harsher in his assessment of Othello than other critics. Where he differs greatly is his assessment that Othello, rather than being simple, is a much more complex hero than what other critics give him credit for. This is similar to the Jungian approach which reveals Othello as a complex character, filled with psychological nuances that dictate his behavior. Heilman approaches the idea of Othello as judge, but unlike

Nowotny, he sees Othello's final judgment as a "penalty" placed upon Desdemona, an unfair and unfounded punishment that leads to the destruction of both. Othello's blaming of Iago depends on his extroverted nature; he is unable to blame and place responsibility upon himself. He is capable of self-deception as Heilman states, a flaw that differentiates himself from the "Everyman" described by many critics.

### **Othello's Final Speech as Weakness**

In his short essay "The Hero Cheering Himself Up," T.S. Eliot asserts that out of all of Shakespeare's heroes, Othello is by far the weakest, that his final speech is a way of "cheering himself up" for a truly heinous act. Eliot has "always felt that I have never read a more terrible exposure of human weakness—of universal human weakness—than the last great speech of Othello" (153). In his great speech, Othello is attempting to escape reality through an act of blatant self-deception. Othello is not thinking of Desdemona as he should, but rather only of himself. Eliot asserts that Othello suffers from an intense egotism, that "Humility is the most difficult of all virtues to achieve; nothing dies harder than the desire to think well of oneself" (155). "Humility" is something that is impossible for Othello to obtain due to his egotism. Othello is willing to go to extreme lengths to maintain his lofty self-image, but indeed if he were truly as noble as he thinks, he would recognize the errors of his ways and grieve for Desdemona rather than just himself. He is never able to achieve "humility," and his egotism continues even when faced with death.

Eliot focuses on an important characteristic of Othello: his ability to deceive himself. Another characteristic is his "intense egotism," an egotism that he is unaware of, and because of that fact, he is able to hide from his act of murder through ignorance of himself. Another characteristic is his selfishness. Eliot points out that at the end, he can only speak of himself and

an appeal for his reputation to remain intact after his death. The fact that his completely innocent wife has been murdered seems to escape his mind in favor of his own self-obsession, a kind of obsession and egotism that allows him to engage in such a blatant instance of self-deceit. Again with introspection, he would recognize this self-deceit within himself, and his thoughts, hopefully, would turn to Desdemona.

### **Iago and his Cold Reason**

Any analysis of Othello's character must also consider the character of Iago. In his article "Cold Reason Overcomes the Power of Love," Heilman explores the nature of Othello's and Desdemona's love which provokes Iago's attempt to destroy it due to his own inability to love. Iago views love as a form of witchcraft, something that he cannot understand or control. Iago possesses little emotion other than bitterness and hate, "Good sense, hard sense, common sense, no nonsense, rationality—all these terms we may suppose, are ones which Iago might consider as defining his perspective" (133). It is Iago's use of reason that drives Othello's passion, leading to Desdemona's death. Iago exists to create chaos, which he instinctively seeks. Above all else, Iago recognizes that cold, objective rationality can be used to create irrationality in others, an irrationality that is necessary to love, but also to jealousy. Heilman asserts that Iago views witchcraft in unison with love. "The magic in the web" of the handkerchief is an extension into the entire drama of the play. For Iago, reason and wit must be used to conquer the irrationality of witchcraft. However, Iago's vow to never speak a word after being detained in the final scene is symbolic of the end of this wit, as it can no longer be used against the inner nature of man. Desdemona's final speech after death demonstrates the end of worldly wit; love and witchcraft will overcome wit and reason, despite the tragic consequences of the play. Heilman ends the article by listing the similarities that Othello and Iago share:

An inadequate selfhood that crops up in self-pity and an eye for slights and injuries, an un-criticized instinct to sooth one's own feeling by punishing others (with an air of moral propriety), the need to possess in one's own terms or destroy, an incapacity for love that is the other side of self-love. (136)

The main point of the article is the contrast between love and reason: that cold reason can overcome the power of love, but that love can continue after death, while reason cannot. Othello and Iago both share a capability for evil, and therefore it becomes necessary to explore theories of evil in order to find differences between the two characters.

### **The Nature of Evil**

The point of Heilman's article most relevant for my thesis is that Iago and Othello do share many similarities, and they both have the capability for evil. It is easy to see why so many critics of *Othello* assume Iago to be a projection of Othello due to their similarities. It is never really clear whether Iago has any kind of self-awareness other than the awareness of his ability to hate. What is most frightening about Iago is that even if he did have extreme amounts of self-awareness, it is likely, highly likely, that he would still commit evil. He is the epitome of evil; and in examining the nature of evil, it is necessary to keep Iago in mind in comparison with Othello.

In his article "Evil Characters," Daniel Haybron attempts to define evil in order to make a judgment on whether a character is truly evil in fiction. He begins by suggesting that the evil character judges how people are supposed to think, act, and behave. To be truly evil, one must have a need to commit evil on a regular basis. More so, the evil character "takes pleasure in seeing people do evil to one another" (134). He enjoys witnessing and contributing to "the pain of others," he does not possess an "active conscience," he has no better nature, "evil permeates



his character right down to the marrow” (132-138). The evil person does not wish to change even if he is aware of good morality; he chooses to be evil willingly; he does not even have to bother to justify his acts. Haybron’s article focuses on extreme cases of evil. Therefore it is easy to turn to Iago as an example of what is evil.

### **Iago as the Embodiment of Evil**

Iago has the ability to turn man’s inner nature against itself, to extrapolate the bad and eradicate the good. Iago is a man without an “active conscience;” he has no capability for guilt or remorse for his actions. He has no better nature; his evil extends all the way to his very core. He takes pleasure in manipulating others so that they will harm one another. In *Othello*, Iago fits all of Haybron’s descriptions. He is the very embodiment of what Haybron defines as evil, and there are many scenes where this evil is highly apparent.

Iago’s most famous soliloquy takes place in Act 2 Scene 3. In the beginning of the soliloquy, Iago ironically asks how he can be a villain; however, he then states:

Divinity of hell!

When devils will the blackest sins put on,

They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,

As I do now. (2.3.350-353)

Iago compares himself to a “devil;” he is aware of his own evil, aware that he is dismissing the natural state of morality, but he chooses to be evil anyway. He is at the very core an evil person, and this bothers him little. Furthermore, in his scheming he takes pleasure in watching Othello, Desdemona, and Cassio unknowingly hurt one another. Later on in the soliloquy he states:

For whiles this honest fool

Plies Desdemona to repair his fortune,

And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor,

I'll pour this pestilence into his ear—

That she repeals him for her body's lust,

And by how much she strives to do him good,

She shall undo her credit with the Moor.

So will I turn her virtue into pitch,

And out of her own goodness make the net

That shall enmesh them all. (2.3.353-362)

Iago takes sadistic pleasure in his schemes; there are no good qualities in his nature. He understands Desdemona's loyalty to Cassio, turning her "virtue into a pitch," using her positive traits to bring out the most negative traits in Othello. Given the extreme kinds of evil mentioned in Haybron's article, it is difficult to apply any one of them to Othello. But Othello does carry one quality that Haybron mentions; he carries strict expectations of how people should behave, and when they do not behave according to these expectations, he is quick to carry out punishment.

### **Othello's Lofty Expectations on Others Behavior**

In order to examine the idea of evil further, we once again must return to Othello's emphasis on reputation. After Cassio is tricked into getting drunk, and as a result, gets in a fight with Roderigo, Othello is quick to remove him from his position as his lieutenant, despite his close personal friendship with him: "Cassio, I love thee,/ But never more be an officer of mine" (2.3.248-249). Othello judges Cassio based on one incident, and is quick in punishing him for not living up to his expectations on how people should act and behave. Cassio's reputation has been lost as he himself states:

Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial. My reputation, Iago, my reputation! (2.3.262-264)

Othello values his own reputation and his opinion of others is based on their reputation. If they do not have a good reputation, he simply dismisses them no matter how close they are.

Othello is once again the judge; he dismisses Cassio after his behavior does not live up to

Othello's lofty standards that he himself creates. He passes his judgment, and removes Cassio as his lieutenant as a penalty.

### **Othello's Transformation**

In his book *Sin and Evil*, Ronald Paulson expounds upon the notion that to escape thinking of ourselves as evil we need to blame an exterior source for our actions. It is necessary to "blame not your deity, but another human being, a scapegoat for your misfortune, so that it is the misfortune that is evil" (9). Paulson also states that evil is the pursuit of good in some way.

Paulson examines the nature of corruption:

The turning of something sound to unsound condition is intransitive and transitive; intransitive in that it is limited to the subject, a vice or a sin; transitive in that it is passed onto another person, rendering her morally unsound, in effect defiling her. (12)

Anyone is susceptible to transformation, for the need to find a "scapegoat" for one's own actions, and Othello's transformation mirrors Paulson's ideas.

Each of the attributes Paulson mentions applies directly to Othello in various instances. Othello cannot blame himself for his murder of Desdemona, so he in turn decides to place all the blame on Iago, "a scapegoat" for his "misfortune," before attempting to kill him: "Are there no stones in heaven/ But what serves for thunder?—precious villain," (5.2.234-235) going on then to blame fate: "Who can control his fate?" (5.2.265). Othello is unable to place blame on himself,

but only on “the misfortune that is evil” (Paulson 9). Othello believes he is performing the “right” choice in murdering Desdemona, but it is merely an example of evil emerging out of the pursuit of good. Even after her death, he still attempts to condone his actions as something right:

Why, anything:

An honourable murderer, if you will;

For nought I did in hate, but all in honor. (5.2.293-295)

He commits an evil act, believing himself to be doing something that is “good.” Othello is not just a judge after the murder of Desdemona, but the executioner as well. Throughout the play, Iago infects Othello with his “poison,” rendering him into an “unsound condition.” The poison is “passed on” from Iago to Othello, a “transitive” corruption that renders Othello “morally unsound.”

### **Evil and Otherness**

Fred E. Katz’s book, *Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil*, examines the idea of how we naturally assume and label those people who commit evil as “monsters.” This “otherness” we create allow us to negate any possibility of evil within ourselves. Thus, we can maintain the view we hold of ourselves as harmless, inherently good, and most of all, that we are not capable of evil. Katz also explores the idea that even when we commit evil we still think of ourselves as “right;” we can then justify whatever actions that we commit as “good.” He addresses the ways in which one can commit evil:

One can be caught in a process of beguilement by evil, of seduction into doing evil by the immediate circumstances in which one finds oneself. This can happen when we find ourselves in a social setting where the immediate circumstances dominate our entire field of moral vision. (6)

Lastly, Katz explores the idea of why we tend to ignore evil as it is something that we cannot truly understand—it is the unknown.

### **A Coda on Previous Scholarship**

Before moving into the Jungian psychological ideas that I will be working with in the latter part of this essay, it is worthwhile to dispel Katz's idea of evil coming out of "immediate circumstance." Yes, there are many factors that contribute to Othello's fall. But the key factor is the "pestilence" that Iago is constantly pouring into Othello's ear. Both Othello and Iago can be held accountable for his final heinous act, but as I have stated before, one must only look to Othello's psychological make-up in order to place blame. It is not the "immediate circumstance" that clouds Othello's "moral vision," but the interior flaws that are accountable for his fall. It is Othello's inability for introspection that is to be blamed, his inability to ask "why?" as Iago is constantly filling his head with images and words that bring out the dark nature existing within him. By bringing up these various theories on evil, I am not trying to assert that Othello is evil, but rather that he has numerous evil qualities by the end of the play. He is not evil to his core like Iago, but, as Jung outlines in his theories, we all have the capability for evil, and it is this capability, and his inability to resist it that contribute to his fall.

### **Othello as the Jungian "Primitive"**

Although Othello's actions, as I will examine later, may come from an inherent psychological state, it is impossible to examine Jungian theories on personality types without noting the possible biases that Jung might have possessed regarding the "primitiveness" of the non-European man. In his book *A Jungian Study of Shakespeare*, Matthew Fike addresses Jung's theories on the "primitive" man: "The European brain being more evolved has access to the history of the primitive by plumbing its own depths, but the brain of the primitive being less

developed has no such access” (91). In Jung’s view, the European man has a greater capability for self-knowledge, therefore allowing him to “plumb” his brain’s “own depths.” Furthermore, as Fike notes, the problem of the primitive mind is not just psychological, but has sociological implications as well: “Othello, a black man who has travelled through primitive lands, finds himself in Venice where his psychic limitations prove to be stronger than Europe’s civilizing influence” (94). Othello, because of his blackness, possesses such a powerful primitive nature that the more “civilizing” European influence cannot change him. Othello is a man of irrationality and violence, prone to lashing out in war and in day-to-day relations with others. However, Othello’s supposed primitiveness does not just carry with it violent and uncivilized behavior, but also in his perception of reality as well.

According to Jung, a key behavioral aspect that the primitive man possesses is the inability to distinguish between the subjective and the objective. Fike focuses on this point-of-view in his book as applied to Othello:

It is this projection, or non-differentiation between subject and object or between the perceiving mind and the perceived object, that characterizes a primitive mind as opposed to a civilized mind. To him [the primitive] the world is a more or less fluid phenomenon within the stream of his own fantasy, where subject and object are undifferentiated and in a state of mutual interpenetration. (97)

In this sense, Othello is unable to distinguish between his fantasies regarding Cassio’s and Desdemona’s relationship as brought about by his jealousy, and the actual truth. He cannot recognize the difference between subjective fallacy and objective truth. Both are blended together. Furthermore, as a consequence of the primitive mind being unable to differentiate the

subjectivity of the mind from the objectivity of the outer world, he is prone to superstition as a result.

The subjective and the objective nature of the primitive man, and the universe in which he exists, become even more complicated when mixed with superstition. The integration of the subjective with the objection is a form of projection, something the primitive man is prone to do:

A third consequence of projection is superstition; the primitive assumes the existence of magical supra-personal powers. The primitive man has a minimum of self-awareness combined with a maximum of self-awareness combined with a maximum of attachment to the object; hence the object can exercise a direct magical compulsion upon him. (Fike 97)

The primitive man projects onto an external object his own fantasy world that he creates for himself. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the example of the handkerchief in *Othello*.

While telling Desdemonda of the supposed magical properties of the handkerchief, Othello reveals his superstitious nature:

That's a fault. That handkerchief  
 Did an Egyptian to my mother give,  
 She was a charmer and could almost read  
 The thoughts of people. She told her, while she kept it  
 'Twould make her amiable and subdue my father  
 Entirely to her love, but if she lost it  
 Or made gift of it, my father's eye  
 Should hold her loathèd and his spirits should hunt  
 After new fancies. She, dying, gave it me

And bid me, when my fate would have me wived,  
 To give it her. I did so, and take heed on 't,  
 Make it a darling like your precious eye.  
 To lose 't or give 't away were such perdition  
 As nothing else could match...  
 'Tis true. There's magic in the web of it.  
 A sibyl, that had numbered in the world  
 The sun to course two hundred compasses,  
 In her prophetic fury sewed the work.  
 The worms were hallowed that did breed the silk,  
 And it was dyed in mummy which the skillful  
 Conserved of maidens' hearts. (3.4.55-81)

Othello speaks of the Egyptian that gave the handkerchief to his mother and her ability to supposedly “read the thoughts of people.” Furthermore, Othello insists that there is “magic in the web” of the handkerchief and that its fate is tied to the one who possesses it. In this case, Othello has transferred his own superstition onto what he views as the objective world or reality as represented by the handkerchief. However, with Jung’s possible racist views being stated, Fike makes the case that Jung believed more in the possibility of the primitive being present in everyone rather than just in the non-European man.

Although Fike’s main point is to establish his own view regarding *Othello* in the book, he does bring up evidence that points to Jung’s ideas mirroring his own. Fike postulates:

If the primitive relates not to skin color but to the collective unconscious, to which all persons are linked, then everyone has a primitive inside. Jung states: “these primitive



vestiges still exist in us” and that “certain contents of the collective unconscious are very closely connected with primitive psychology...deep down in our psyche there is a thick layer of primitive processes...closely related to processes that can still be found on the surface of the primitive’s daily life.” (92)

In this passage, Jung supports Fike in the notion of the collective unconscious: that we all share the same basic instincts, “deep down in our psyche.” In this sense, we all have the primitive within, a psychological state that can emerge out of any of us under the right conditions.

Although Fike’s opinion supports the idea that it is only through self-knowledge that we can avoid a descent into evil, I believe that Othello does possess a unique psychological structure that makes him more prone to evil. It is not because of his race, or that he possesses a “primitive” side that few share, but because of his personality type as defined by Jung. Othello is the most extroverted of persons, an extroversion that prevents him from obtaining the self-knowledge needed to resist the environment, and the influences it throws at him, in order to prevent his single, heinous act of evil that results in the murder of his innocent wife.

### **Jung’s Description of the Extrovert**

According to Jungian psychology, Othello is a thorough extrovert resulting with little to no ability for introspection and self-awareness. In his essay “Reflections on Psychological Types,” Carl Jung describes the traits of both an introvert and an extrovert. His style and tone is pessimistic, rarely acknowledging the positives of each type. The extrovert is described as someone who is focused on the “object”; he sees the world by focusing on the objective:

Extroversion is characterized by interest in the external object, responsiveness, and a ready acceptance of external events, a need to join in and get “with it,”...the great

importance attached to the figure one cuts, and hence by a strong tendency to make a show of oneself...and his conscience is in large measure based on public opinion. Moral misgivings arise mainly when other people know...The extrovert as a subjective identity, is, so far as possible, shrouded in darkness. He hides it from himself under veils of unconsciousness. The disinclination to submit his own motives to critical examining is very pronounced. (108)

The extrovert possesses little self-knowledge and instead is afraid of it. He is easily influenced, integrated so much in the exterior happenings that he lacks the insight needed to think outside of the zeitgeist. Jung describes him as highly social, mixing well with others, having many friends, “none too carefully accepted” (108). His self-view comes from what other people think of him, rather than his own self-analysis, as personified by Othello throughout the play.

### **Othello as Extrovert**

Othello possesses all of the traits outlined by Jung in describing the extrovert. He “readily accepts” Iago’s schemes and suggestions concerning Desdemona’s supposed adultery. Like many critics have noted, it is almost as if he were ready to accept the possibility of Desdemona’s adulterous affair with Cassio even before Iago’s manipulation of him. In Act 3 Scene 3 when Iago first succeeds in planting doubt and suspicion in Othello’s mind, Othello’s outlook on his marriage completely changes:

I am abus’d and my relief  
Must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage!  
That we can call these delicate creatures ours,  
And not their appetites! I had rather been a toad  
And live upon the vapor of a dungeon

Than keep a corner in the thing I love

For others' uses. (3.3.267-273)

In this one extended conversation, Othello has already become suspicious and mistrustful of his wife. There is absolutely no proof of Desdemona's guilt, yet Othello is already calling marriage a "curse." He compares himself to a toad living in a "dungeon" to think of sharing possession of his wife. However, the contradictions of his character are many, and the final murder is his final attempt to gain possession over Desdemona on his own terms.

Othello is overly concerned with the "figure one cuts," and in his bombastic speeches he makes a "great show" of himself. In the beginning of the play, Othello is forced to give a speech to the court explaining his marriage to Desdemona. Although he begins humbly enough, telling of his life and the beginnings of his relationship to Desdemona, it soon turns into boasting about his accomplishments in the military:

The tyrant custom, most grave senators,

Hath made the flinty and steel couch of war

My thrice-driven bed of down. I do agnize

A natural and prompt alacrity

I find in hardness; and do undertake

These present wars against the Ottomites. (1.3.229-234)

Othello, in his epic speeches, succeeds in making a "great show" of himself, which, other than his military exploits, is perhaps the reason why he is so respected in society. But perhaps the greatest example of his concern with the "figure one cuts" is at the end of the play, in his last epic speech:

I pray you, in your letters,

When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,  
 Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,  
 Nor set aught in malice. Then must you speak  
 Of one who lov'd not wisely, but too well. (5.2.341-344)

Even after the murder of Desdemona, even before the murder of himself, Othello's last concern is with his legacy. This speech is the last "great show" of himself, his last concern is of the "figure one cuts." His actions turn into "unlucky deeds." They are not due to his interior nature, but only to "luck." Once again after his act, he does everything in his power to negate his responsibility for what occurs. From Iago, to fate, to luck, he is unable to face hard truths about himself.

Furthermore, his conscience only arises when others are present after the murder of Desdemona. It is only then that he has "moral misgivings." Returning to the last scene after Desdemona's murder, once again his main concern is his reputation. He can only view himself through the eyes of others. Because of this fact, he recognizes that he has done an evil deed. It is only after others appear that he grieves, maybe for Desdemona, but mostly for himself.

Finally, and most importantly, he hides his inner nature "under veils of unconsciousness." He is never able to examine his motives, his suspicions, his reasons for thinking the way he does. It is this blindness, being an enigma to himself, that make him capable of murder. There are several moments in the play that lend Othello an opportunity for introspection. In Act 3 Scene 3, he gets close when he states to Iago:

Why? Why is this?  
 Thank'st thou I'd make a life of jealousy?  
 To follow still the changes of the moon

With fresh suspicions? No! to be once in doubt  
 Is [once] to be resolv'd. Exchange me for a goat,  
 When I shall turn the business of my soul  
 To such [exsufflicate] and [blown] surmises,  
 Matching thy inference. (3.3.176-179)

He recognizes the horrors of living with constant suspicion; he demands proof before truly believing in Desdemona's innocence. But regardless, his passions control his thinking, his fear overcomes his reason, and if he had any kind of self-awareness, he would have recognized these attributes within himself during this crucial moment.

### **Iago as Introvert**

While Othello is a blatant extrovert, in many ways, Iago has many qualities that qualify him as an introvert. Jung describes the introvert as follows:

He is easily mistrustful, self-willed often suffers from inferiority feeling and for this reason is also envious...He therefore suspects all kinds of bad motives, has an everlasting fear of making a fool of himself...for everything must be judged by his own critical standards. He often prefers to see the worst in people rather than their better qualities.  
 (109)

Iago and Othello are completely different in this respect, with Othello being obsessed with his image in the eyes of others, and Iago's focusing on Othello's negative qualities and drawing them out through manipulation.

Iago possesses many qualities that Jung believed to be applicable to the introvert personality type. Many critics have believed that Iago is a kind of motiveless villain, but this

overlooks several key scenes in the play. In Iago's second piece of dialogue in the play, he shows envy at Othello's choice to make Cassio his lieutenant instead of him:

In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,  
 Off-capp'd to him; and by the faith of man,  
 I know my price, I am worth no worse a place

-----

One Michael Cassio, a Florentine  
 (A fellow almost damn'd in a fair wife),  
 that never set a squadron on the field,  
 nor the division of battle knows

-----

And I, of whom his eyes had seen the proof  
 At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on [other] grounds  
 Christen'd and heathen, must be belee'd and calm'd  
 By debtor and creditor—this counter-caster,  
 He (in good time!) must his lieutenant be,  
 And I ([God] bless the mark!) his Moorship's ancient. (1.1.9-33)

Like the introvert that Jung describes, Iago is easily made envious. A clear motive is his resentment at not being made lieutenant instead of Cassio; because of the battles in which he took part with Othello, Iago believes that he deserves the position. However, his envy is not the only aspect that qualifies him as a possible introvert, but a feeling of sexual inferiority as well.

In Act 1 Scene 3, Iago confesses his suspicious nature to Roderigo, worrying that Othello may be sleeping with his wife. How he came to this conclusion is unclear, but it does suggest feeling of sexual inferiority in comparison with Othello:

I hate the Moor,  
And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets  
[H]as done my office. I know not if't be true,  
But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,  
Will do as if for surety. (1.3.384-390)

Iago admits his suspicious nature, but these lines do more than just give us insight into Iago's sexual inferiority; they also portray an even more insightful view into Iago's mind—that he has some form of self-knowledge and ability for introspection, an ability that Othello does not possess. Even later Iago suspects Cassio as well:

I'll have our Michel Cassio on the hip,  
Abuse him to the Moor in the [rank] garb  
(For I fear Cassio with my night-cap too),  
Make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me,  
For making him egregiously an ass,  
And practicing upon his peace and quiet  
Even to madness. Tis here; but yet confus'd,  
Knavery's plain face is never seen till us'd. (2.1.305-312)

Iago lives in his own world, presenting a face to society that differs greatly with his real self. But once again we are presented with Iago's sexual insecurity, the duality of his nature, and his awareness of exactly who he is. He knows he is a “knave,” but he accepts it. He embraces the

darkness within; he does not fight it, but embraces it, takes pleasure in it, revels in the power he has over others because of his capability for evil and his twisted intelligence in knowing how to extrapolate the worst attributes that might be found in people.

There are numerous passages in the play that portray Iago's self-awareness. In Act 1 Scene 1, Iago professes the duality of his nature to Roderigo:

Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago.  
 In following him, I follow but myself;  
 Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,  
 But seeming so, for my peculiar end;  
 For when my outward action doth demonstrate  
 The native act and figure of my heart  
 In complement extern, tis' not long after  
 But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve  
 For daws to peck at: I am not what I am. (1.1.57-65)

Iago is aware of his dual nature, the discrepancy from his interior nature to the exterior mask he puts on for the world. Perhaps most frightening is the fact that Iago seems perfectly content with who he is. His self-awareness does no good for him morally, which illustrates a crucial distinction by Shakespeare in terms of Jungian psychology as well as the structure of tragedy. Jung states that through self-knowledge and recognizing the possibility of evil within, we can prevent ourselves from becoming evil. Iago recognizes his evil, but rather than negate its existence, he embraces it. This is where Othello and Iago truly differ, but regardless, Othello's fall is inevitable without self knowledge.

### **The Importance of Self-Knowledge**



The rest of my analysis relies on Jung's book *The Undiscovered Self*, which will illuminate basic patterns of human nature, of moral behavior, and therefore the emotional forces that lead to Othello's descent into evil. In this seminal book, Jung explains the precarious nature of human reasoning:

Since the gift of reason and critical reflection is not one of man's outstanding peculiarities, and even where it exists it proves to be wavering and inconsistent...

Rational argument can be conducted with some prospect of success only so long as the emotionality of a given situation does not exceed a certain critical degree. (4)

Jung, in a mildly pessimistic tone, outlines humanity's inability to reason accurately, in a rather "wavering and inconsistent" fashion. However, Jung does provide a solution that he returns to throughout the book, that "As with all dangers, we can guard against the risk of psychic infection only when we know what is attacking us, and how, where and when the attack will come" (8). The only way for us to not be afflicted with "psychic infection," is by recognizing what we are up against.

By applying Jung's theories to *Othello*, we can gain insight into the nature of Othello's fall and why it occurred. It is Othello's inability to reason that is partially responsible for his transformation, passion overcomes logicity, and Iago, in the guise of a friend, serves as a catalyst for what is to occur in the latter part of the play. Othello does not recognize what is "attacking" him, and this is an important reason for his fall. However, we once again return to the idea of self-awareness, that Othello is so extroverted that he has no ability for introspection, no ability to recognize Iago's attack, and is therefore at the mercy of Iago's manipulation, and more importantly, at the mercy of his own mind working against itself.

In Act 3 Scene 3, under the influence of Iago, Othello suffers from a form of dissonance; his fear of her adultery clouds his ability to reason. He comes to several contradictions in his own thought:

I think my wife be honest, and I think she is not;

I think that thou art just, and think thou art not.

I'll have some proof. [Her ] name, that was as fresh

As Dian's visage, is now begrim'd and black

As mine own face. (3.3.384-388)

This scene is important in that it is the closest Othello gets to self-awareness. He is aware of the dissonance that he suffers from, but as quickly as it comes, it then goes, the dissonance disappears, and once again he is at the mercy of his "poisoned" mind.

Even without proof other than the whisperings from a man whom he was never close to anyway, by the end of the Act 4 Scene 1, after Bianca brings Cassio the handkerchief while Othello watches in hiding, Othello is convinced that Desdemona is guilty of adultery. Othello believes that the attack is coming from his best friend Cassio and his innocent wife Desdemona, while it is actually coming from Iago. At the mercy of his passionate extroverted nature, he vows to kill Desdemona on little proof:

Ay, let her rot, and perish, and be damn'd to-night, for she shall not live. No, my heart is turn'd to stone; I strike it, and it hurts my hand. O, the world hath not a sweeter creature!

She might lie by an emperor's side and command him tasks. (4.1.181-185)

His fear of an attack upon his dignity and reputation is so strong that his passion becomes overwhelming. Even with little evidence, his fear is so great that it becomes a subjective form of truth.

## The Difficult Pursuit of Self-Knowledge

The purpose behind Jung's *The Undiscovered Self* is to show that self-knowledge can be a means of resisting outside influences. However, it is this pursuit of self-knowledge that can be most difficult. Jung talks about the fear of discoveries that we could possibly make in our unconscious:

It is this fear of the unconscious psyche which not only impedes self-knowledge but is the gravest obstacle to a wider understanding and knowledge of psychology. Often the fear is so great that one dares not to admit it to oneself. (49)

In *Othello*, there are a number of instances, or at least signs, that Othello, in his gift (or curse) for self-deceit is indeed blinding himself from his unconscious psyche out of fear of what he might find.

The most blatant example of Othello's fear of introspection comes in his final speech. In his plea for a positive reputation before he kills himself, Othello remarks:

Speak of me as I am, nothing extenuate,  
Nor set down in malice. Then must you speak  
Of one that lov'd not wisely but too well,  
Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,  
Perplexed in the extreme... (5.2.342-346).

In this moment of delusion, a moment that begs for introspection, Othello excuses anything he did as bad. Ironically, he refers to one "not easily jealous," while it is extreme levels of jealousy that lead him to murder. Othello is indeed extremely jealous. Within a couple of days he becomes jealous enough to kill his innocent wife with little evidence of an affair. By the end, Othello is a monster, a completely different person than what he was in the beginning of the

play, having committed the ultimate evil act: murder. But he begs to be spoken of “as I am.” If he had any wish to look within, it is at this point. Othello is afraid to analyze himself from a critical standpoint. When the moment comes, through his fear of what he may find in his unconscious psyche, he instead turns his attention outwards, blaming Iago, fate, loving “too much,” and “being perplexed in the extreme,” but he’s never willing to look within himself because of the fear that he has indeed, become evil.

### **The External Environment and the Individual**

In *The Undiscovered Self*, Jung spends a fair amount of time on the de-individualization of a person through mass society and the church. The book was written in 1958, just years after the major dictatorships fell in Europe. Although this does not apply to Othello, it still touches upon the external environment and its effect on the individual. In speaking of the relationship between the individual and his environment, Jung states: “When surrounded by external factors, reality cannot change the nature of the inner man” (58). It is for this reason that obtaining self-knowledge is so important. Change can only take place through examining oneself internally, not by outside factors. This applies directly to my thesis. It is not Iago or his environment that changes Othello; it is the fact that he never feared any kind of evil within.

One could state that there are a number of influences that contribute to Othello’s fall. One could obviously blame Iago and his manipulative arts; one could say it may be luck because of the handkerchief and Bianca’s appearance during the temptation scene; if one is to reach even further one could also state that it is fate. But like Jung asserted, external factors cannot change the inner nature of man, and according to Jung, the potential evil that we all possess. This is why the pursuit of self-knowledge is important, and knowing that we can change. Jung emphasizes the moral choices for every individual.

He will not only discover some important truths about himself, but will also have gained a psychological advantage; he will have set his hand, as it were, to a declaration of his own human dignity and taken the first step towards the foundations of his consciousness—that is, towards the unconscious, the only accessible source of religious experience. (89)

Self-knowledge can become a “religious experience, but before this experience, the individual must look within and admit some hard truths about himself. Othello fails to do so and his lack of self-knowledge is a tragic defect that is the foremost reason for his fall.

### **Shakespeare’s Imagery and Jungian Shadows**

Another major theme that Jung touches upon is the “shadow,” a mechanism by which the individual recognizes something that they reject about themselves, and then project it onto somebody else. A normal person “does not deny that horrible things keep happening, but it is always the ‘others’ who do them” (96). Even if we do not commit a crime, thanks to our human nature, we are always “potential criminals.” It is a strange process, something that when the “ignorance of one’s self leads to projection of recognized evil into the other. Projection carries the fear which we involuntarily and secretly feel for our own evil over to the other side and considerably increases the formidableness of his threat” (97).

Othello’s nature is inherently insecure, probably exacerbated due to age, race, or his place in Venetian society. Several times Iago brings up sexual imagery to aggravate Othello, which leads him further into the “green-eyed monster.” At the very beginning of Act 4 Scene 1, Iago states: “Or to be naked with her friend in bed,/ An hour, or more, not meaning any harm” (4.1.3-4). Not only does the imagery work on Othello’s mind, but also the sexual implications that Iago suggests by mentioning Cassio and Desdemona fornicating for a full hour. This would obviously

bring up some performance anxieties for Othello, as an hour is a substantial amount of time. About thirty lines later, Iago, rather than bring up concrete and detailed imagery, works his manipulation through suggestion: “With her? On her; what you will” (4.1.34). This triggers Othello’s imagination, which leads to him having a fit and then passing out. But Iago’s gift is only due to his own sexual insecurities. Within the first act, he reveals his suspicions that both Othello and Cassio have slept with his wife. Iago can only project because he recognizes his suspicions, and acknowledges them as such. Once again, Iago’s introversion causes him to recognize his shadow, but does not prevent him from projecting it.

Iago, like many critics have suggested, may be assumed to be a projection of Othello. There are many similarities that I have listed earlier, but an important one is the need to punish others for what is deemed to be suitable or unsuitable. Throughout the second half of the play, Iago schemes with Othello about what kind of punishment is appropriate for Desdemona’s and Cassio’s behavior. In this sense, there is little difference between either other than Othello constantly thinking that he is in the right, while Iago very much knows that both he and Othello are in the wrong. They are both insecure, highly jealous, and at sometimes envious.

This does not mean that Othello is an evil character. However, by using the Jungian concept of self-knowledge we can better understand how Othello was led to do an evil thing, and how one can do evil, in real-life and in tragedy, which acts as a mirror to the reality we face everyday.

## **Summary**

Othello is one of Shakespeare’s most famous heroes, a supposedly normal person who descends into a jealousy that leads to four deaths by the end of the play. But can we really suppose Othello to be normal, to be sympathized with, as a hero? In this thesis, I have tried to

establish that Othello is not heroic. I have looked at traditional forms of criticism and stated how they either contradict or support my argument. If we are to believe that Othello is not a hero, it becomes necessary to examine traditional theories of evil in order to define Othello's character and to understand the causes of impetuous action, murder and suicide. The Othello we see in the beginning of the play is completely different than the Othello we see at the end. The ideas critics have proposed range from sociology to psychology. Some blame outside influence and others blame Othello's internal make-up. My argument is that we cannot blame Iago, fate, sexual insecurity, or Othello's role in Venetian society, as some critics have proposed. Othello's actions need to be looked at in the most critical way possible. His final suicide was a selfish act, he never does blame himself, and even in his death the last thing he is concerned with is his reputation. His view was constantly extended outward; he never questioned his behavior or motives. Like Heilman's views, Othello is the least heroic of Shakespeare's heroes; he never gained the ability for introspection; he was far from self-aware, and because of these deficiencies, he descended into the depths of passion and evil, performing the most despicable act man is capable of: murder.

### Works Cited

- Bradley, A.C. "Othello: A Noble Soul Overcome by Passion." *Readings on Othello*. Ed. Don Nardo. San Diego: Greenhaven, 2000. 88-96. Print.
- Matthew Fike. *A Jungian Study of Shakespeare*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print.
- Eliot, T.S. "The Hero Cheering Himself Up." *A Casebook on Othello*. Ed. Leonard F. Dean. New York: Thomas T. Crowell Co, 1961. 153-156. Print.
- Haybron, Daniel M. "Evil Characters." *American Philosophical Inquiry*. 36.2. (1999): 131-148.
- Heilman, Robert B. "Othello: The Unheroic Tragic Hero." *A Casebook on Othello*. Ed. Leonard F. Dean. New York: Thomas T. Crowell Co, 1961. 185-199. Print.
- "Cold Reason Overcomes the Power of Love." *Readings on Othello*. Ed. Don Nardo. San Diego: Greenhaven, 2000. 132-139. Print.
- Jeffrey, David J. and Patrick Grant. "Othello's Loss of Fame and Reputation Leads to His Self-Destruction." *Readings on Othello*. Ed. Don Nardo. San Diego: Greenhaven, 2000. 88-96. Print.
- Jung, Carl. *The Undiscovered Self*. Trans. R.F.C Hull. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1958. Print.
- . "Reflections on Psychological Types." *Who am I?* Ed: Robert Frager. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1994. 107-112. Print.
- Katz, Fred E. *Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil*. Albany, New York: State University Press. 1993. Print.



Nowottny, Winifred, M.T. "Justice and Love in *Othello*." *A Casebook on Othello*. Ed. Leonard F. Dean. New York: Thomas T. Crowell Co, 1961. 169-184. Print.

Paulson, Ronald. *Sin and Evil*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press. 2007. Print.

Pechter, Edward. *Othello and Interpretative Traditions*. University of Iowa Press: Iowa City, 1999. Print.

Rosenberg, Marvin. *The Masks of Othello*. University of California Press: Berkeley, 1961. Print.

Schwartz, Elias. "Stylistic Impurity and the Meaning of Othello." *Studies in American Literature, 1500-1900*, 10.2 (1970): 297-313. Print.

Stoll, Elmer Edgar. *Othello: An Historical and Comparative Study*. New York: Haskell House, 1964. Print

---. "Othello: Tragedy of Effect." *A Casebook on Othello*. Ed. Leonard F. Dean. New York: Thomas T. Crowell Co, 1961. 147-153. Print.

## Vita

Author: Eric C. Iliff

Undergraduate Schools Attended: Walla Walla Community College  
University of Puget Sound

Degrees Awarded: Bachelor of Arts, 2010, University of Puget Sound

Professional Experience:

\*Internship in Teaching English 170—Intro to Literature, English 695B, Eastern Washington University  
2013

\*Writing Tutor, Walla Walla Community College, Walla Walla, Wa, 2007