ELABORATION OF SETTING IN OTHELLO AND THE EMPHASIS OF THE TRAGEDY

JULIA GRACE WALES

I

THE SETTING

The Significance of the Study of Place for this Play

The sense of place is one of the major factors in Shakespeare's imaginative appeal, though not place, necessarily, in any scientific, geographical signification. That he is no realist interested in facts for themselves, must not be allowed to obscure the complementary truth that he is no classicist either, but a romantic. There is nothing abstract about his scene. It is individualized through homely detail. His airy nothing is always given name and habitation; and largely from these obtains its interpretation and emphasis.

In a study of Othello from this point of view it would be instructive, did space permit, to bring together all the concrete detail of the play, whether English, foreign, or neutral, and to examine and classify it for its significance in creating atmosphere and building up a sense of locality. The cumulative effect of this detail would be greatly enhanced could we gather and place beside it all the notes and illustrations, collected by editors of the play or scattered through learned articles, which

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1 We can only refer the reader to the various annotated editions of the play and cite a few significant passages that have not yet found their way into these editions.

See, for example, Variorum, p. 5 for C. A. Brown's comment, and p. 8 for Staunton's, on the mercantile associations of Florence; p. 46 for Knight's note on Luciole; pp. 39-32, a long note on “as double as the duke's” (I. ii. 11-17), with quotations from Contareno and Thomas on the power of the Duke in relation to the rest of the Council. Again, see Variorum, pp. 28, 29, for a long and interesting note, including Malone's famous illustration from Lewkenor on Venetian officers especially charmed with protecting the city by night.


2 One passage must be quoted from the researches of Sir Edward Sullivan, "Shakespeare in Italy," The Nineteenth Century (1908), pp. 329-330. "The word Verona shows an intimacy with Italy in two distinct directions; first, it is a correctly formed feminine adjective, meaning 'of, or belonging to Verona'; and secondly, it implies an acquaintance with the fact that Verona (which was in the Venetian State) furnished war galleys to Venice, or that the Venetians kept a portion of their own fleet at or near Verona. . . . The importance from a naval point of view of the Adige, which flows through Verona, may be appreciated by reading in pre-Shakespearian Italian histories the account given of the fleet of ships sent by the Venetians up the river to the Lago di Garda to assist their army in that district against Filippo Visconte, Duke of Milan. The distance was about two hundred miles, and the flotilla consisted of twenty-five banks and six galleys under the command of Zeno." He refers in a foot note to Alberti. F. Leonardi, Descrizione di Tutta Italia, Venice, 1586, p. 397, "who cites Biondo and other writers. See also Hazlitt's History of the Venetian Republic (1860), where a full account is given of this remarkable expedition."
have extended its temporal and local significance and deepened its imaginative connotation. To do this, however, would entail too much repetition of accessible material.

The valuable researches of Mr. J. W. Draper, three too recently before us and too extended to be reviewed here, are evidence enough that the subject of Italian local color in Othello had been by no means exhausted by earlier writers and that useful material is still coming in.

The more general works on the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are constantly throwing new light on the subject; and continued search into the materials of history, such

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Especially interesting is the wealth of new illustration, given in these articles, of army life in England and on the Continent and of conditions in England and Italy having to do with the freedom of will.

4 See "Shakespeare’s Venice" by Violet M. Jeffrey, Mod. Lang. Rev., vol. 27 (1932), pp. 24-35, in which the problem of the identity of "the Sagittary" is reopened.

5 Perhaps it is sheer coincidence that a passage in Hazlitt’s Venetian Republic seems to illuminate Iago’s figure of speech (I. I. 75-77): I’ll call aloud.

Do; with like timorous accent and dire yell. When as, by night or in the dire, the fire is spied in populous cities.

The dread of fire like that of plague was common to all the countries of Europe. Hazlitt gives an account of a great fire in Venice in 1577: "The damage was incalculable, and speculative reports were soon spread over Europe of the amount of the loss." (The Venetian Republic, 1680, Ed. 1915, Vol. II, p. 133.) Disastrous fires occurred in 1479, 1483, 1574, 1577. (Ibid., pp. 496-497.)

In Shakespeare’s England (Oxford, 1916, I. Ch. VI. pp. 170-171) we find, on the general background, a passage of the utmost interest:

"For the characters and events of old-time plays, Shakespeare’s Europe is concentrated upon Athens and Rome, but is extended to the easternmost recesses of the Mediterranean. In the Tudor period the Turks had pushed the frontier of Europe westward: Rhodes (1522) and Cyprus (1571) had fallen; Greece and its islands had already become Asiatic; and there was a redistribution of forces. Accordingly in the modern-Mediterranean plays of Shakespeare—"Much Ado, Two Gentlemen, The Winter’s Tale, Twelfth Night, Othello, Romeo and Juliet, and The Merchant of Venice—Athens is not named, and Rome is named only twice (Tas. Sh. IV. ii. 75, March. of V. IV. i. 153); and the scenes are laid in Verona, which is misdescribed as a tibital port (Two Gent. of Verona, II. iii. 40), Venice, Padua, Milan, Mantua, Florence, Marseilles, Illyria, Sicily, or Messina; and of these only the last two figure in the old-Mediterranean plays. The eastern Mediterranean is only once to the fore. In Othello Rhodes and Cyprus are physical and political storm centers, where the Turks and Venetians would have fought had not all the Turks been drowned; at Cyprus the Furies which watch over family life overwhelm all the leading characters in the play. With this exception—if it is an exception—the modern plays show little of the eastern Mediterranean. Greece, Middle Italy, and all the principal places in the old-Mediterranean plays. The sea is the same sea as old, and swarms with pirates (March. of V. I. iii. 24), like those of old. Pompom wanted to rid it (Ant. & Clop. II. vi. 36); and Italy is still the place where Spaniards, Neapolitans, Frenchmen, Englishmen, Scotchmen, Germans, and Polish Counts Palatine meet (March. of V. I. ii); and an occasional Moor (Mohammedan) lends an Asiatic or an African tinge. Italy is still cosmopolitan and dominates the Mediterranean, but the center of political gravity has shifted, and for Shakespeare, whose instincts draw him to places where life is rich and full, Italy and the Mediterranean mean different things in ancient and modern times."

See also an interesting note on "guards of the ever-fixed pole." I. p. 153; also a note on "scurvy." I. p. 153, which should be compared with the note on "lawful prize" in Variorum, p. 37—these comments afford an excellent illustration of Shakespeare’s method of piecing out foreign information with English detail for the general purpose of realism in the sense of substantiality. The present writer has endeavored to examine this composite process in two studies: "Shakespeare’s Use of English and Foreign Elements in the Setting of The Two Gentlemen of Verona," Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters, vol. 27 (1932), pp. 85-126, and "Shakespeare’s Use of English and Foreign Elements in Much Ado about Nothing," Ibid., vol. 28
as the travel books of the period and of slightly earlier and later decades, is still rewarded with new and pertinent matter.  

Point by point these researches may seem merely curious. But they have a cumulative and critical value. They prove beyond a doubt that in Othello Shakespeare is building up a sense of place, and that deliberately, for an artistic purpose. What that purpose is becomes evident when we realize that the local color of the play is not homogeneous but consists of two elements in sharp contrast with each other, and that this contrast is in vital relation to the tension of the tragedy.

The Italian background and the world of Othello's memories may to our imagination have come to be merged romantically in the general impression of the play. Yet in trying to get the tragedy before us as a whole, it is of first importance to distinguish the two and to keep the contrast between them vividly in mind.

**Venetian Color**

The detail of Venetian color used in this play is less opulent than that used in the Merchant of Venice, more economical, yet adequate. We are left in no doubt how to visualize these backgrounds. To see how richly they are filled in, we have only to

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(1933), pp. 363-398. Mr. J. W. Draper stresses the process as a conscious method in his "Desdemona, a Compound of Two Cultures." (See note 3 above.)

So it was in England also in earlier times. In the sword of Spain (I. p. 152):

"In Othello (V. II. 252) we have 'It is a sword of Spains, or an ice brook's temper.' So the modern version, but in the earliest printed edition, 1622, it was 'The Ice Brokkes temper.' Isebrook was the English name for Innsbruck in the Tyrol, whence some of the best steel was imported into England from the early part of the sixteenth century until the Civil War. This steel was used for the manufacture of armour in England, and 'Isebrook' and other variants of spelling can be found in documents quoted in the Calendars of State Papers from April 1517 to April 1595. Moreover warm water of various degrees of heat was used here, as in Japan, by the famous swordsmith Musamatsu, for tempering the blades. Othello's expression merely means a Spanish blade of the best Innsbrook temper." If, by this interpretation, the passage loses one element of poetry, it has, on the other hand, gained slightly in exotic suggestion.

James Howell in his *Survey of the Signe de Venice*, London, 1615, gives an elaborate account of the government of the Republic. Though not available to Shakespeare, the following passage is of interest:

"The Generall in warr upon the Continent is commonly som forren Prince; He is not chosen either of the Scouterian or patrician order: he hath an ample salaries, viz. ten captaines pay, and 4000 crownes a yer, ther goes along with him two Legals or Provediteers, who are Gentlemen of Venice, and of the Senatorian order, and without the concurrence of their advice he neither acts nor decrees anything himself without their intervention. These Provediteers are perpetually assistants to the Generall and they pay the Soldiers Salaries, and their main care is that nothing be done rashly to the detriment or dishonor of the Republic."

I regret that I have not this page reference; nor have I been able to check the passage. Howell also mentions (p. 17) the "Proovets of the night." Cf. *Veriourum*, p. 47, for more immediately pertinent illustrations: Malone's statement supported from Contareno (trans. by Lewkenor, 1596) that it was against the policy of the Venetian State to entrust the command of the army to a native; also a passage cited by Reed from Thomas's *History of Italy* to the same effect.

For an account of the travel books of the time, see Clare Howard, *English Travellers of the Renaissance* (1914), with bibliography.

Fynes Moryson, writing in 1611, says after speaking of Italian love of revenge and skill in making poisons (Shakespeare's *Europe*, Glasgow, 1907, pp. 405-406): "For which treasons the Italians are so wary, especially having a quarrell, as they will not goe abroade nor yet open their doores to any knocking by night, or somuch as put their head out of a windowe to speake with him that knockes."
look at the meager setting of Cinthio's story, of which the following passages are the most significant as bringing out the contrast:

The Venetians resolving to change the garrison which they maintain in Cyprus, elected the Moor to the command of the troops which they destined for that island . . . he was extremely pleased with the honour proposed to him (as it is a dignity conferred only on those who are noble, brave, trusty, and of approved courage).

He had in his company an ensign of a very amiable outward appearance, but whose character was extremely treacherous and base . . .

Had he not feared the strict and impartial justice of the Venetians he would have put him openly to death . . .

The Venetian magistrates, hearing that one of their fellow-citizens had been treated with so much cruelty by a barbarian, had the Moor arrested in Cyprus and brought to Venice, where, by means of the torture, they endeavored to find out the truth. But the Moor possessed force and constancy of mind sufficient to undergo the torture without confessing anything.7

In the play, on the other hand, we have in the first scene the chiaroscuro of a street by night, the taper at the window, flaring torches and gleaming swords; in the second, the stateliness of the Council Chamber and the gravity of the discussions going on there, the stir of arriving messengers, and the background of war and critical action. And it is worth noting that the theatrical interest of the two scenes, the suspense which gives to each a focus and unity of its own, its own rise and fall of intensity, is largely dependent upon the skillful use of setting. Similarly in Act II the suspense arises out of the realization of place—the seaport and citadel, the storm—"than which a fuller blast ne'er shook our battlements,"—the relief and serenity of a safe landing; the merry-making passing into cal.our "in night and on the court and guard of safety"," in a town of war, yet wild, the people's hearts brimful of fear," "the clink and fall of swords," voices "high in oath," the clanging of a dreadful bell.

When the main action in finally under way in the third act, the sense of place is less immediate than indirect. It is the background of Venice of which we are again made conscious—and not now of its justice and dignity, of power worthily held, but rather of palaces where "foul things" "intrude", of hypocrisies

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7 Shakespeare's Library, II, pp. 256, 306, 307. Cf. the comment of Violet Jeffrey (see note 3 above), "Giraldi Cinthio, in his version of the tale, supplies no details whatsoever of the town: yet the scenes of the play set in Venice are packed with local color."
too subtle to be divined save by one versed in the ways of the world, who “knows all qualities with a learned spirit of human dealings.” In the end we return to the earlier impression and feel that the honor of Venice has remained inviolate.

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8H. N. Maugham (The Book of Italian Travel, London, 1903) pronounces Shakespeare’s Italy uniformly that of the Italian novelists as far as local color is concerned, but adds in a footnote “except in the character of Iago, who is a typical Renaissance Italian”.

The fact is that Shakespeare, as we should expect, reflects in his plays both contemporary attitudes, the romantic lure and educational advantages of Italian travel and the patriotic and to some extent even the protestant and puritan condemnation of its evil influences.

But although he reflects the two aspects of Italy, Shakespeare does not of course subject them to any sort of scientific historical study. In fact he cheerfully combines and mixes them. In this respect it is worth while to contrast Othello with the Duchess of Malfi. In Webster’s play there is a more fully developed Italian atmosphere, as it was thought of in England—for instance, in the corruption of the church, of government, the preponderance of evil, the misuse of the law, wholesale bribery, the tendency to use crime freely as a means to an end and to make life one long crime, for theatrical purposes, Webster uses also many trappings, conventionally associated with Italy, but far more than in Othello, such as the control of marriage by the family, the emphasis on banishment, on passion and the easy Pezonean of the corner, the invention of the characters, superstitions about drugs and charms, the ancient abbey and the echo, etc. Also he brings in natural references to place and time, the new fortifications at Naples, “I knew him in Padua”, “I know not what I make more bad faces by his oppression than ever Michael Angelo made good ones”, the baths at Pisa, the Duomo of S. Benet, etc. But chiefly Webster seeks to get an Italian effect by emphasizing the intellectual attitude of the Italian renaissance, the will, force, intellect of his villains, the intellectual doubt of Antonio and the Duchess.

Dost thou think we shall know one another In th’other world? . . .
O that ‘were possible we might
From them I should learn somewhat, I am sure,
I never shall know here. I’ll tell thee a miracle:
I am not mad yet, to my cause of sorrow.

This is the miracle. She does not go mad—nor does Antonio—nor Bosola. They have strong heads—these skepticism. Julia the “great woman of pleasure” is likewise typical. She too dies like an intellectualist:

"‘Tis weakness
Too much to think what should have been done: I go
I know not whither.

In his intellectual attitude Bosola is unlike Iago, less convincing, though in some ways more interesting. He knows doubt of his own philosophy. The growth of his doubt is gradual; however, because of over-confidence for us to follow satisfactorily. Throughout the play, evil is the norm of action and the sphere of the good is rare and stands alone. The characters struggle with evil as an intellectual problem, not a single issue. At the end it is not so much the active triumph of good that we feel as the proved futility of evil. Nothing is gained by any means, so you may as well be good if you prefer it.

Shakespeare gives us no such amount of genuine human depravity. Even in Othello, good appears as the norm; the evil, though real and unconquered, is presented as most entrenched.

Fynes Moryson in Shakespeare’s Europe (1617, p. 408), expresses the popular view of the Italian character: “Thus the Italians being by nature false dissemblers in their own actions, are as much distrustful of others with whom they deal or converse, thickning that no man is so foolish as to deal playfully, and to mean as he speaks.” For earlier comments cf. Maugham, p. 14: “Young Englishmen did not always come back entirely improved by this southern experience. Aschem, the gentle master of Lady Jane Grey, was only nine days in Italy, but he tells us that he saw ‘in that time, in one city, more liberty to sin, than ever I heard tell of in our noble city of London in nine years.’ Robert Greene, the dramatist, admits that he saw ‘a great many villains as it is abomination to describe.’ Sir Philip Sidney has admitted the dangers of Italy, but remarks that he is acquainted with ‘divers noble personages . . . whom all the sires of Italy could never untwine from the mast of God’s word’.

See Einstein’s account of The Subtility of the Italian, by F. G. B. A., 1591, a book which argues that the Italians ought “to be shut up from all access or entrance into other countries. If such means were adopted, we no more shall be exposed to the lamentable miseries into which they were wont to bring us headlong at their own lust and pleasure.”—Einstein, The Italian Renaissance in England, pp. 170-172. See also Ibid., p. 150—a quotation from Gascoigne: “George Cassage in his lines to a friend about travel in Italy, advised him to beware of poison when invited to dines, never to drink before another had tasted the beverage, to be on the lookout for poisoned soup, and take care lest the tailor stuff his doublet with what might bring on a deadly sweat. The Italian art of poisoning impressed itself on the Elizabethan imagination and furnished endless material to the dramatists.” He also quotes Nash, Piers Penniless (C. 38): “The Italy academy of manelaphines, 71. of Lord of London poor pack of murder, the apothecary shop of all nations!” How many weapons hast thou invented for malice!

On the subject of infidelity and private vengeance, Fynes Moryson says: “Adulteries (as all furies of Jelousy, or signs of making love, to wives, daughters, and sisters)
The elements of Venetian setting which receive the most emphasis thus group themselves about four aspects of the story: the romantic elopement, Othello’s official relation to Venice, the

are commonly prosecuted by private revenge, and by murder, and the Princes and Judges, measuring their just revenge by their own passions proper to that nation, makes no great inquiry after such murthers besides that the reuenging party is wise enough to doe them secretly, or at least in disguised habitts.”—Shakespeare’s Europe, p. 160.

Einstein says (Tudor Ideals, 1921, p. 123): “The frequency of vengeance on the stage suggests that this motive as an incentive to crime was rather a topos, but Desdemona’s experiences more with Italy where the absence of central authority and the inadequacy of the law, favored the wronged individual taking the remedy into his own hands. . . . Perhaps one reason why the Elizabethan drama saved in the greater Shakespearian masterpieces remains so dead to us, is the lack of contact between modern life and private vengeance. The Englishman of the Sixteenth Century had still enough associations with former recollections to make the crimes of Italy appear not altogether remote.”

Similarly, Boulting says (Tasso and his Times, 1907, pp. 182-3): “The Italian gentleman of the sixteenth century felt certain stains as keenly as wounds; and the growing respect for female relatives and family pride had this consequence, that any unfaithfulness on the part of a wife or any unchastity on the part of a sister were visited by the speedy removal of the suspected lover, and in time it became de rigueur that she also should pay for her fault with death. The restriction of the power of the senate, the power of the pope for the protection of the church, provided the world with the terrible series of Catholic tragedies which struck the imagination of our English dramatists and gave us ‘Othello’ and ‘The White Devil,’ and ‘The Duchess of Malfi.’”

Mr. J. W. Draper (cf. note 3 above) finds a similar attitude among English army officers of the period.

9 On the subject of Othello’s marriage, some passages from Boulting’s Woman in Italy (1910, pp. 72, 74) are worth quoting:

“In the middle of the sixteenth century, the Council of Trent published the decision De Sacramentis Matrimoniis, which insisted on ecclesiastical marriage and the prior publication of banns. . . . Not merely was marriage subjected to family interests, but the State also had a word to say. . . . By reason of the peculiar patrickian government of Venice a noble marrying a plebian woman was excluded from the Venetian Council, until the contract was submitted to the Government and allowed.”

That Desdemona’s difficulties were not unparalleled is seen in the story (given by Boulting, Woman in Italy, pp. 77-79) of Giulietta Spinola (Genoa, 1645), who somewhat independently married the man of her choice. An official inquiry was instituted as to whether she had been forced into wedlock. She declared that she wished to return to her husband. “The Vicar vainly endeavored to get her uncles and trustees to accept the marriage, and the question of its validity was referred to the Archbishop, who decided that it was valid, and, therefore, a sacrament. The trusted not to be balked, then appealed to Pope Paul III himself. . . . Meantime Giulietta was removed, first to another convent, where it was deemed impossible for her husband to hold any communication with her, and then to the house of a lady of the Spinola family, where she was again interrogated by the Vicar. . . . But the spirited girl, determined not to be thwarted, contrived to make her escape, gained her spouse’s castle and had consummated the interrupted honeymoon.”

Mr. J. W. Draper (cf. note 3 above) says of Desdemona:

“Her hybrid origin is such a secret we are not intended to explore; and so may future critics continue as heretofore to find her only ‘angelic’ and ‘innocent’ and ‘shy’ and forget, as Shakespeare wished us to forget, that she wroug a husband for herself, deceived a father and his child of bitterness, and then stepped back into child-like innocence at the dramatic beshet of four acts of mighty tragedy.” We are inclined to wonder, however, whether it is not the shy and innocent girl that might do with simplicity of what Desdemona does. Is it not because she is simple and acts “all of a piece” that she can do it and so sincerely? A more complex woman would have thought twice. Even Juliet is more complex by nature—though younger.

A distant parallel to Desdemona’s story is found in the story of Bianca Cappello, given by W. C. Hazlitt, The Venetian Republic (1915), Vol. II, pp. 139-140. “Bianca, sole child and heiress of Bartolommeo Cappello, a noble Venetian” yielded “to the advances of Pietro Bonaventura, a young Florentine of good but poor family, employed as a bookkeeper at the Salviati bank, resided in a house near the Casa Cappello at S. Apollinaire, adjoining the Ponte Soto. Love letters were exchanged; and Bonaventura, allured by the beauty of the girl and her probable fortune, . . . persuaded her to elope with him on the night of the 28th November 1563. The fugitives had engaged the services of a gondolier named Girolamo, and had taken into their confidence the uncle of Bonaventura and three or four others, whose silence or aid they deemed imperative. They crossed the frontier and reached Tuscany in safety. Bianca carried with her all her jewellery.”

“The amazing news was spread over the city the next morning. The Council of Ten and the Avogadores took immediate proceedings; prices were set on the heads of the principals. . . . The afficted parent added a reward of 6,000 lire to that of the government for the recovery of his misguided child, who was only sixteen years of age at this time.” The rest of Bianca’s story differs widely from Desdemona’s. The warning “she has deceived her father and may thee”, unjust in Desdemona’s case, would have been just in Bianca’s.
Wales—The setting of Othello

corrupt side of Venetian life, and on the other hand, the dignity and integrity of the Venetian State. 10

Othello's Memories

As already indicated, Venetian color is, however, not the only significant element of the setting; another kind of detail is used in profusion in building up a remoter background to be seen in the mind's eye only—a world of memory and imagination.

We would fain hear Othello "run through" the continuous story of his pilgrimage, the "distressful strokes" that his youth suffered, the "disastrous chances" of his later years. But (like Desdemona as she went about her house-affairs) we have only snatches—besieged cities, capture, slavery, and redemption; his mother receiving the enchanted handkerchief from the ancient sybil who devised her thoughts; 11 the pomp of war, the Pontic sea and its icy current; 12 the encounter with the turbaned Turk at Aleppo; 13 curious peoples in their own lands, caves, deserts,

10 For an account of the official machinery of Venice in the sixteenth century, cf. W. C. Hazlitt, The Venetian Republic, Vol. II, Chapter XLVIII: "The provision for the public service was at once exhaustively comprehensive and jealously minute. No labor, ingenuity or cost was spared in rendering all the departments of the state, spending and administrative, efficient and adequate to current wants. A brief survey of the offices and magistrates engaged in the management of affairs suffices to impress on us the magnitude of the responsibility and charge, which gradual conquest and aggrandizement had laid on Venice, as well as the corresponding genius, which manifested itself for the control and protection of a dominion so extensive and so scattered, no less than of a territory at home beyond everything precious." (pp. 448-9.)

Lloyes, The Venetian, p. 43. Lloyd: "Central in the First Act is the scene in the Council Chamber; and the consideration, by the Duke and Senators, of the news from Cyprus is no mere surmise; it strikes a tone of dispassionate appreciation of evidence and opinion that dominates all the succeeding scenes of agitation and disorders. From inconsistent intelligence, the main point of agreement is carefully adopted for further examination, notwithstanding predisposition to understate its importance. In other words: the Senate, with all the critical circumstances once understood, action follows at once. Othello is dispatched that very night. The same solid perspicacity distinguishes the reception of the complaint of Brabantio;"

11 In Shakespeare's England (II, 485-6) we have an account of the gypsies in England in Shakespeare's day:

"It was in the beginning of the sixteenth century that they made their first appearance, and the mystery of their coming and going was still unsettled. Though they were called Egyptians, or in derision, Moon-men, there were few who believed in their eastern origin. 'Ponmy, I warrant,' says Dekker, 'never called them his subjects, no, nor Pharao before him.' And the same writer, declaring that their complexion is filthier than the tawny face of a red-ochre man, is sure, in defiance of the truth, that 'It is not their own.' Yet are they 'not born here,' says he, 'neither has the Sunne burnt them so, but they are painted so.' . . . They lightly deceived the common people, 'wholly addicted and given to noveltyes, toys and newe fangles;' whom they delighted with the strangenes of their headgear, and of whose credulity they took an easy advantage. Wherever they went they practiced legerdemain, or fast and loose, they professed a knowledge of physick, pharmacy, and other abused sciences, and by wondring in the hand destines, deaths, and fortunes, they robbed poor country girls of money and lives.'

Shakespeare may have had in mind the gypsies of his own country; but in Othello's words he characteristically utilized their Oriental suggestions to contribute to an Oriental atmosphere.

12 See Veriours, pp. 210, 211, for the passage in Holland's Pliny on which this is based; also Swanburne's eloquent comment.

13 These regions made a strong and familiar appeal to the English mind.

The malignant and turbaned Turk was a real person to the Englishman as well as to the Venetian. We have for example an account of the escape of John Fox from the captivity of the Turks in Alexandria. See C. R. Beazley, Voyages and Travels mainly during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Arber's English Garner), 1903. I. 139-149. Even Englishmen knew what it meant to be taken captive and "sold to slavery." See also Ascham's account (1552) of ex-
and mountain passes, with rocks sharp against the sky.
Though the lines beginning
Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle
are among the most familiar in literature, they never lose their
power to take us by surprise. Shakespeare never saw these
things or anything like them. Whence is the peculiar quality
and coloration of this landscape? The most satisfactory answer
is that given by Professor H. B. Lathrop,14 who quotes a strik-
ing passage from a sixteenth-century translation into English
of de Changy's summary of Pliny's Natural History:

Towards the west there is a people called Arimaspı, that hath but one
eye in their foreheads, they are in the desert and wilde Countrey. The
people called Agriphagi, live with the flesh of Panthers and Lyons: and
the people called Anthropophagi which we call Canibals, live with hu-
maine fleshes. The Cinamolgi, their heads are almost lyke to the heads
of Dogges. Africa aunciently called Libia, doeth containe the Moorees, and
the pillers of Hercules, (among the floudes) there is Onylus that doth in-
gender Cocodrils. There are goodly Forrests with vnownen trees, some
of the which trees beare threades, of the which is made clothing of cotton.
Cyrenes and Syrtes, make their houses of salt stones cut out of the moun-
taines, there is the mountaine of Civy, the which doth ingender and bring
forth many precious stones. In Libia, which is at the end of the Ethiopes,
there are people, differing from the common order of others, they have
among them no names, and they curse the Sunne for his great heate, by
the which they are all black sauing their teeth, and a little the palme of
their handes, and they never dreame. The others called Trogloiotes have
causes and holes in the grounde, & have no other houses. Others called
Gramantes, they make no mairriages, but all women are common. Gampha-
santes they go all naked. Blemmyes is a people so called, they have no
heads, but have their mouth and their eyes in their breasts.

changes of Turkish and Christian atrocities: The English Works of Roger Ascham, Cambridge,
1904, pp. 130, ff.

For interesting passages on these regions, including Aleppo, see the narration of John Eldred,
"the first Englishman who reached India, overland, 1583-1589." (See Besant I, 293-303). See
also Shakespeare's England, I, Chapter VI, par. 8; also the bibliography of this chapter. See
also C. H. Hart's introduction to the Arden Edition of the play (1903, 1928) for the parallels in
Holland's Pliny.

Among the many books listed in the bibliography of Clare Howard, English Travellers of the
Renaissance (1914) is that by George Sands' published in London in 1615, entitled A relation of a jourey begun An. Dom. 1610. Four bookees, Containing a description of the Turkish Empire,
of Egypt, of the Holy Land, of the Remote Parts of Italy and Islands adjoyning. This book is
too late of course to be a source of any of the allusions in Othello. But it testifies to the popular
interest in the regions which were the obscure background of Othello's adventures. Sands
describes the Euxine Sea (pp. 39-40) and tells how the Bosphorus "setteth with a strong current
into Propontis." He describes the habits and dress of the "turkand Turks." He tells of the
slave markets. Their slaves are Christians taken in the warres, or purchased with their money.
Of these there are weekly markets in the Citie, where they are to be sold as horses in Faires;
the men being rated according their faculties, or personal abilities, as the women for their
youths and beauties." He says (p. 69) that with their aspects of pity and affectious" they
"endeavour to allure the Christians to buy them, as expecting from them a more easy servitude
and continuance of their religion ... But gally-slaves are seldom released, in regard of their
small number, and much employment which they have for them."

14 Henry Burrowes Lathrop, Translations from the Classics into English, from Caxton to Chap-
“Here,” says Professor Lathrop, “within the spaces of two pages, is everything whereof it was Othello’s ‘hint to speak’.”\(^{15}\) Everything, we answer as we read, except the perspective of the picture. Could it have been from the flat surface of these pages that Shakespeare lifted up his eyes to its depths and distances? Mr. Lathrop promptly answers our question: “Nothing is omitted but the loftiness of the hills, ‘whose heads touch heaven.’ And even this omission is but natural. The region named—though the geography extends further—is Africa, which ‘doth contain the Moors’—Othello’s own country, and the hills whose heads touch heaven, as Shakespeare’s Ovid would suggest, are the summits of Mount Atlas itself, bearer of the skies, the loftiest mountain in the land of the Moor, Othello.”

Let us not forget, however, that the scope of the pilgrimage includes not only strange and shadowy lands, but a world more tangible, if no less romantic: one familiar to Venetian traders, travellers, and warriors. And so in the final allusion to Aleppo\(^{16}\) the two main elements of the setting come suddenly and sharply into relation, and the sweep of memory is indissolubly linked with Othello’s loyalty to Venice.

**II**

**THE EMPHASIS**

*Two Noble-Barbarian Theories*

It is usually best to appeal first to the structure of a play for light on its emphasis.

Professor Bradley says

Of all Shakespeare’s tragedies, . . . Othello is the most painfully exciting and the most terrible. . . . Othello is not only the most masterly of the tragedies in point of construction, but its method of construction is unusual. And this method, by which the conflict begins late, and advances without appreciable pauses and with accelerating speed to the catastrophe is a main cause of the painful tension just described.\(^{17}\)

\(^{15}\) See also his earlier article: “Shakespeare’s Anthropophagi. The Source of the Travel’s History of Othello.” *The Nation.* 100. Ja. 21, 1915. 76-77.

The scattered parallels with Holland’s Pliny noted by Hart, *Arden Edition,* 1903, pp. 26, 39, etc., though in themselves significant, are much less convincing than this massing of the material within two pages. For the well-known passage from Sir Walter Raleigh (*The Discoveries of Guiana,* 1596; p. 85, Ed. Hakluyt Soc.) usually associated with the lines, see *Variorum,* p. 56.

\(^{16}\) And here we must recall to the reader’s mind a note provided by Professor Parrott in the *Tudor Edition* of the play (1928, p. 168):

“The Venetians had special trading privileges in this town. If the Turkish law that the Christian who struck a Turk must either turn Turk or lose his right arm prevailed there, Othello risked his life to uphold the honor of Venice.”

Professor Bradley lays a very considerable stress on Othello's jealousy; at the same time he does not overlook the importance of disillusionment as a primary factor in the tragedy; and he makes much of the point\(^\text{18}\) that Othello is not easily jealous, but, being wrought, perplexed in the extreme.

Professor Bradley vigorously dissent from the theory that the play is "primarily a study of a noble barbarian, who has become a Christian and has imbibed some of the civilization of his employers," and that the last acts "depict the outburst" of his Moorish passions "through the thin crust of Venetian culture". Moreover, while admitting that Othello's race has its importance in the play, he says,

But in regard to the essentials of his character, it is not important; and if anyone had told Shakespeare that no Englishman would have acted like the Moor, and had congratulated him on the accuracy of his racial psychology, I am sure he would have laughed.\(^\text{19}\)

In the next paragraph, however, he goes on to say,

He [Othello] does not belong to our world, and he seems to enter it we know not whence—almost as if from wonderland. There is something mysterious in his descent from men of noble siege; in his wanderings in vast deserts and among marvellous peoples. . . . And he is not merely a romantic figure; his own nature is romantic. . . . He has watched with a poet's eye the Arabian trees dropping their med'c'nable gum, and the Indian throwing away his chance-found pearl; . . . So he comes before us dark and grand, with a light upon him from the sun where he was born . . . grave, self-controlled, . . . at once simple and stately in bearing and in speech, a great man naturally modest but fully conscious of his worth, proud of his services to the state, unawed by dignitaries and unrelated by honours, secure, it would seem, against all dangers from without and all rebellion from within.\(^\text{20}\)

But do not these glowing phrases of Professor Bradley put before us again the idea of the noble barbarian which we were bidden to discard?\(^\text{21}\) We cannot of course accept any view which

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\(^{18}\) Op. cit., p. 186, p. 194. Cf. Sir Walter Raleigh, Shakespeare (English Men of Letters Series) 1907, p. 204: "Jealousy and suspicion, as Desdemona knows, are foreign to his nature; he credits others freely with his own noblest qualities."

\(^{19}\) pp. 186, 187.

\(^{20}\) pp. 187-189.

\(^{21}\) The words

Like the base Indian cast a pearl aside
Richer than all his tribe

may be of considerable significance. For a discussion on which reading Indian or Judean is right, see Variorum, pp. 327-331. See also a note in the Yale Edition, p. 143, and a note in the Tudor Edition, p. 167. Obviously the view presented in the present paper accords best with the reading Indian.
would make Venetian civilization responsible, broadly speaking, for the good in Othello, and his Moorish blood responsible for the evil. May it not be possible, however, to make the idea of a noble barbarian the basis of an almost opposite theory,—namely, that the good in Othello is a native good, and that his temporary overthrow comes from the failure of a mistakenly idealized civilization?

The conception of the noble barbarian as in some ways superior to the more civilized and less natural man was current to some extent in the Renaissance, and is found in explicit form in Montaigne’s essay on Cannibals—an essay with which we have other reason to believe Shakespeare was familiar.

“There is nothing in that nation,” writes Montaigne, “that is either barbarous or savage, unless men call that barbarisme which is not common to them. . . . Those nations seeme therefore so barbarous unto me, because they have received very little fashion from humane wit, and yet are neere their originale naturalitie. . . . The very words that import lying, falsehood, treason, dissimulation, covetousness, envie, detraction, and pardon, were never heard amongst them,” etc.22

Thos. Palmer has an interesting passage bringing in the idea of “the noble barbarian”:

So also is it to be understood, that no nation in the world, how Court-like soever, but hath the dregs and lees of barbarous incivility; and that many heathen people, by the light of nature meerly inscribed in their hearts, rest for ensamples and reproofoes to many civill nations governed by a diviner knowledge, in points of civil actions & conversation.23

Montaigne’s essay expresses the appeal of New World discovery to the Renaissance imagination. The most striking product of this appeal in Shakespeare is The Tempest. Yet is it not possible that we find it in another and in some ways a more vital aspect, in Othello? As we have elsewhere24 emphasized, the Englishman of Shakespeare’s day was reacting to two diverse influences, the stimulus that came from Italy, of a riper

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22 Essay of Cannibals, Florio’s Translation.
Mr. George Coffin Taylor (Shakespeare’s Debt to Montaigne, 1925, p. 32) makes this significant observation: “In Othello, written in 1604, when one would naturally expect to find Montaigne’s influence at its height, it is scarcely discernible. . . . The scant influence on Othello is more easily accounted for by the nature of the particular play, in which Shakespeare seldom introduces matter not germane to the plot or situation.”

23 Thos. Palmer, An Essay of the Meanes how to make our Travels into Foreign Countries, the more profitable and honourable. London 1606, p. 62.

culture and a more self-conscious society, and that which came from the unknown world beyond the Atlantic, and perhaps the most curious and thought-provoking aspect of these two influences is that of the impact of one on the other. 26 Do we perhaps discern something of this aspect in the tragedy of Othello?

It is not necessary of course to assume any direct connection between Montaigne's essay and Shakespeare's play, nor by any means to insinuate that Othello was after all neither a Moor nor a Blackamoor, but a North American Indian. So far as any special barbarian race is concerned, we must agree with Professor Bradley that Shakespeare had no idea of attempting a study of racial psychology. Yet is it not possible that Montaigne's essay, together with the plot of Cinthio's novel, may have suggested to Shakespeare the character of Othello, the general conception of a noble barbarian, the type of a strong and in some ways mature man, who was, nevertheless, in the presence of the complex and more or less corrupt civilization of sixteenth century Europe, a child and a stranger?

While he says that "we must not call the play a tragedy of intrigue as distinguished from a tragedy of character," Professor Bradley is struck by the fact that "Iago's intrigue occupies a position in the drama for which no parallel can be found in other tragedies . . . ." 26 "The part played by accident in this catastrophe," he says again, "accentuates the feeling of fate." And again, "It confounds us with a feeling . . . . that . . . . there is no escape from fate, and even with a feeling . . . . that fate has taken sides with villainy." 27

For further light on these impressions let us turn back to Professor Bradley's lecture on the substance of tragedy.

"How is it," he asks, "that Othello comes to be the companion of the one man in the world who is at once able enough, brave enough, and vile enough to enslave him? By what strange fatality does it happen that Lear has such daughters, and Cordelia such sisters? Even character itself contributes to these feelings of fatality. How could men escape, we cry, such vehement propensities as drive Romeo, Anthony, Coriolanus, to their doom?

See also, Robert Ralston Cawley, "Shakespeare's Use of the Voyagers in The Tempest," PMLA, XLI (1926), pp. 688-726.
28 Shakespearian Tragedy, p. 179.
27 pp. 181, 182.
And why is it that a man’s virtues help to destroy him, and that his weakness or defect is so intertwined with everything that is admirable in him that we can hardly separate them even in imagination?" If these questions indeed have a rational answer at all it would seem to be: Because the world is so constructed that all men must learn; it is not enough to say—as Professor Bradley himself does say—that the vital principle of growth is destructive of all that is evil; it is destructive of all that is incomplete, or rather, of all incompleteness. Therefore it is artistically true to place beside Othello that being who—for the purpose of dramatic condensation—is best fitted to destroy Othello’s ideal. Professor Bradley touches this concept, though with a difference.

These defects or imperfections are certainly, in the wide sense of the word, evil, and they contribute decisively to the conflict and catastrophe. And the inference is again obvious. The ultimate power which shows itself disturbed by this evil and reacts against it, must have a nature alien to it. Indeed its reaction is so vehement and “relentless” that it would seem to be bent on nothing short of good in perfection, and to be ruthless in its demand for it.

Whether the imperfections are to be called good or evil would seem to depend, however, on the direction from which they are approached—whether from an inferior or a superior plane. An identical act or attitude may represent either ethical progress or ethical retrogression.

The moral nature of a man grows by the process of the failure of inadequate desires or ideals and the construction of larger ones. The collapse of an ideal is sometimes attended by moral prostration. Each of Shakespeare’s tragedies presents the failure of an ideal or attitude to life and the attendant moral prostration—these being expressed through the dramatic medium of crime or error and outward calamity. To many minds some at least of Shakespeare’s tragedies imply also a sense of moral triumph or the foreshadowing of the reconstruction of the individual ideal.

“Nor . . . are the facts ever so presented,” says Professor Bradley, in speaking of the sense of fate in Shakespeare’s plays,
“that it seems to us as if the supreme power . . . had a special spite against a family or an individual.”

No; on the contrary it would seem that the supreme power finds it worth while to complete the individual—never to let him off without putting him through the painful process of the destruction of his illusions. In the various tragedies of Shakespeare we feel varying degrees of sympathy for the central figure and of blame for his mistakes. The essential point is this: that Shakespeare—like natural law—does not seem to distinguish in his catastrophes between sins of ignorance and more deliberate crimes. Othello merely stands as Shakespeare’s extreme instance of disaster which must sometimes come upon even those who have acted in accordance with the dictates of a perfect—though limited—soul.

Granted this general view of the play, it is obviously no accident that the construction is peculiar—that is, that the tragedy begins late—or that the action and catastrophe depend upon intrigue. Since this is a tragedy of character, since it not what Othello does that is his ruin, but what he is, it is all-important that we be made to grasp his normal character. Hence the long exposition. As for the intrigue, it is a dramatic concentration of forces that are bound to act sooner or later for Othello’s enlightenment. The enlightenment may come suddenly or by degrees,—through the untruth of one man, or of many. In any case, and this is the point to be borne in mind, it must be, as far as Othello is concerned, in a sense accidental,—not due to his deliberate fault, but in the nature of the universe, inevitable. Hence the tragedy of Othello has quite as much universal truth as the other tragedies, since it is an example of well-intentioned human nature adjusting itself to the knowledge of good and evil. It is preëminently the tragedy of disillusionment—the disillusionment of a noble barbarian with a somewhat decadent civilization which he had simple-mindedly venerated. If Montaigne’s noble barbarian were transferred to civilization, what would become of him? At what terrible price would his adjustment be made? He would believe in the world too much at first; he would be bitterly disappointed, losing all faith; then he would find that after all what he had loved best was true. Confidence in himself

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32 p. 29.

and the world; disillusionment; reconstruction: that is the tragedy of Othello.

The Second Theory and the Action

Let us briefly review the action from this standpoint. With his usual theatrical wisdom Shakespeare opens the play with a scene tending by every method of suggestion to prejudice us against Othello at the outset. We are expecting him to be a barbarian; we are prepared not to apply to him the standards of civilization. When the real Othello comes upon the scene, we at once become his advocates and tend to be over-lenient with his faults. So far from having to make allowances for him we feel that he is superior to his European surroundings. Othello's first words "'Tis better as it is"—referring to Iago's boasted wish to punish Roderigo—present him to us as a person of authority, just but generous. In answer to Iago's further insinuations, irritating as they are meant to be, he speaks calmly:

Let him do his spite:
My services which I have done the signiory
Shall out-tongue his complaints. 'Tis yet to know,
Which when I know that boasting is an honour
I shall promulgate, I fetch my life and being
From men of royal siege, and my demerits
May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune
As this that I have reached.

On the lines

Good signior, you shall more command with words
Than with your weapons

Sir Walter Raleigh makes this comment:

Fearlessness and the habit of command, pride that would be disgraced by a street brawl, respect for law and humanity, reverence for age, laconic speech and a touch of contempt for the folly that would pit itself, with a rabble of menials, against the General of the Republic and his body-guard—all this is expressed in two lines.33

To Brabantio's insulting charge he replies reasonably as to a fractious child,

What if I do obey?
How may the duke be therewith satisfied,
Whose messengers are here about my side,
Upon some present business of the state,
To bring me to him?

33 Shakespeare (English Men of Letters Series), 1907, p. 141.
His ceremonious words to the Senate—far from being a mere form—express genuine confidence and veneration. No forms are mere forms to Othello. He takes the civilized world seriously, regards its institutions with reverence, and expects of it a sincerity equal to his own. His respect for himself, his respect for others, and his modesty are all essentially related; it is of the essence of his pride to admit readily his little knowledge of the world.

Rude am I in my speech
And little blessed with the soft phrase of peace.

And little of this great world can I speak,
More than pertains to feats of broil and battle.

Yet the consciousness of his ignorance causes him no doubt of his own perfect soul. Moreover while he has the restraining sense of fitness which we noticed before, he loves the sound of his own words. His vivid imagination—a supposedly child-like and barbarian quality—takes fire the moment he begins to speak of “antres vast and deserts idle.” He is satisfied with the part he has played in these adventures. To reflect upon them gives him pleasure—a pleasure of which he does not think of being ashamed. The speech makes a favorable, even a delightful impression upon the Duke. Othello succeeds in justifying his marriage in the eyes of Venice. In the first act he comes off victorious, having behaved with tact, wisdom, decision, courage, unfailing courtesy, unruffled generosity. He has satisfied others, and in no respect disappointed himself.

By the beginning of Act II, we have advanced far in our acquaintance with Othello, having seen him face to face with circumstances which—though far from tragically serious—were fairly critical, testing his resource and self-control. His premonition of evil, early in the second act, is no misgiving of failure in himself or his world—only a superstitious dread of the irony of fate, a passing thought, natural enough to one who is happy and who has imagination enough to think of himself as bereft of his happiness. He looks forward with frank pleasure to renewing old acquaintanceships in Cyprus, but remembering his standard of good manners, checks his too enthusiastic speech and turns to give orders to his attendants, punctiliously considerate of every one, and generous and glad in his recognition of
every good quality. Professor Bradley points out that in the third scene of Act II Othello’s self-control is emphasized and that here “occur ominous words which make us feel how necessary was the self-control and make us admire it the more.”

Now, by heaven,
My blood begins my safer guides to rule,
And passion, having my best judgment collied,
Assays to lead the way.

They indicate not only Othello’s self-control, however, but also his clearly defined theory of self-control, the fact that it is a part of his deliberate ideal.

Good Michael, look you to the guard tonight:
Let’s teach ourselves that honourable stop,
Not to outsport discretion.

And later in the scene he shows again his veneration for Christian institutions, and his single-minded horror of whatever is barbaric and below the ideal of civilized life.

Are we turn’d Turks, and to ourselves do that
Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?
For Christian shame put by this barbarous brawl... How comes it, Michael, you are thus forgot?

Cassio is abashed by this reproof and can find no words. Othello’s reproof of Montano is also characteristic.

Worthy Montano, you were wont be civil;
The gravity and stillness of your youth
The world hath noted, and your name is great
In mouths of wisest censure: what’s the matter,
That you unlace your reputation thus
And spend your rich opinion for the name
Of a night-brawler? Give me answer to it.

Othello’s personal sense of the enormity of the offense—the want of consideration of the public peace—shows that he is still unaccustomed to evil, especially in civilized men, and discerns it with surprise and pain. He feels it not only his military but his moral duty to be very severe.

Give me to know
How this foul rout began, who set it on.
In the early part of Act III we have little new light on the character of Othello. In the first scene he does not appear. In the brief second scene we have a glimpse of him in his post of authority, occupied with his official duties. Not until the middle of the act does the tragedy itself begin.

Iago’s first task is to cause Othello to distrust human nature. He sows first a distrust of Cassio, a general suspicion that he is not truthful, that he is given to drink and brawling, then that his whole relation to his chief has been one of darkest duplicity. Next Iago skillfully opens Othello’s eyes to the true nature of life in Venice and the capacities for evil hidden in the bosoms of super-subtle Venetians. And after this it is easy to sow a greater doubt in the Moor’s trusting soul. He has been deceived in much, why not in more? The general fact of his ignorance of human nature, especially feminine and Venetian human nature, having once been thoroughly brought home to him, he abandons himself to Iago’s superior knowledge.

This fellow’s of exceeding honesty,
And knows all qualities, with a learned spirit,
Of human dealings.

The mingling in Othello of credulity with susceptibility to doubt is psychologically true to life. His intense imagination once at work, Othello’s suspicion becomes a part of him. The devastation is complete, not only of his recent self but of his past self as well.

O! now, for ever
Farewell the tranquil mind; farewell content!
Farewell the plumed troop and the big wars...
...Othello’s occupation’s gone!

Yet nothing is actually proved. The struggle begins again, to end quickly in despair.

In the fourth act Othello reaches the lowest point in his humiliation. He loses all sense of personal dignity and of respect for others. He betrays his jealousy and strikes his wife in the presence of incredulous spectators. Professor Bradley cannot reconcile himself to the blow. Yet if the theory here put forward be correct, not only the blow, but the fact (noted by Pro-

35 Cf. Raleigh: Op. cit. p. 204: “If his were less credulous, more cautious and alert and observant, he would be a lesser man than he is and less worthy of our love.” P. 205: “There is a horrible kind of reason on Othello’s side when he permits Iago to speak. He knew Iago, or so he believed; Desdemona was a fascinating stranger. Her unlikeness to himself was a part of her attraction: his only tie to her was the tie of instinct and faith.”
fessor Bradley) that it occurs in the presence of the Venetian representative is absolutely central in the interpretation of the tragedy. Its dramatic necessity can be appreciated only by reference to the situation in the first act: Othello's confidence in himself in the presence of the Senators, his faith in his own worth and dignity as their loyal servant, his chivalry for his wife, his simple-minded emphasis on good manners. Again and again in the play we are made to realize that Othello has a simple and noble ideal of good manners as a genuine indication of high-mindedness. This is part of his worship of civilization. When he loses his faith in civilization, he loses his manners. To him manners were not merely outward accessories or matters of empty, mechanical habit. They were deliberate actions depending on a conscious state of mind. That is why he could fail in them. The civilized man receiving his conventions ready-made from tradition controls himself automatically, and a degree of outward self-control does not necessarily mean a proportionate security from inward collapse. Othello was a genuine gentleman, but not a mechanical one. Hence the blow and hence its tragedy. Jealousy and violence are mere indications of the crash of his universe. He is overthrown to the extent of failing in his consciously strongest points. In these strong points, he has placed a confidence which, even in the best of men, argues incomplete experience. Yet in one sense we are less in despair of Othello than if he had been capable of saving his personal dignity and keeping his reproaches for a private moment. Reputation and honor, hitherto his ruling passion, are forgotten in a frenzy of anguish.

In the third scene of Act IV Othello has partly recovered himself and displays the calm of definite resolution. He treats Lodovico with courtesy and speaks less harshly, perhaps even kindly, to Desdemona. Emilia observes that "he looks gentler than he did." Although in the scene of the blow he has temporarily ceased to care about his personal dignity, it is clear that one thing remains to him—a sense of abstract justice, the need to avenge that personal honor in which he still believes, to punish the wrong-doers and to vindicate the right. Though bitterly disappointed in others he still has faith in his duty and his power to perform it. Othello's belief as to what his duty was must simply be taken for granted, although it is one that we
cannot understand at the present day. When he knows Desdemona's guilt, no question enters his mind as to what is to be done next. And before we blame him for his want of reflection, we must remember that he is not, like Hamlet, amply supplied with the materials of thought. From his point of view there is nothing more to consider. Nowhere has Shakespeare entered more completely into an experience and at the same time wholly shut off from his consciousness those elements which could not enter into a mind infinitely simpler than his own. Othello's quickness of action is the inevitable result of his limited knowledge and his perfect simplicity, sincerity, and certainty of himself. Relentlessly conquering his grief and pity, he murders his wife from a conviction of right, without a qualm as to the justice and necessity of the deed.

Then comes his appalling enlightenment.

At this crisis he is not even able to avenge himself upon his destroyer. He runs at Iago, who evades the stroke. Montano, fearing that the Moor may do himself harm, wrenches his weapon from him.

I am not valiant neither,
But every puny whipster gets my sword.
But why should honour outlive honesty?
Let it go all.

As far as Othello's estimate of himself is concerned, these words mark the lowest point of his moral prostration. They are also the beginning of his triumph. He knows the world now and himself. In Iago he has had an overwhelming revelation of evil. He himself is no wise and moderate man, but one who "like the base Indian threw a pearl away, richer than all his tribe." Yet in Desdemona he has recovered all, so that he can even be just to himself. He has done naught in haste, but all in honor, and one way to vindicate that honor still remains.

Set you down this;
And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the State,
I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him, thus.

Cf. note 8 above—material from Meryon, Einstein, Beul廷g, and Draper.
Cf. Raleigh: Op. cit. p. 17. "A measure of the subtle speculative power of Hamlet might have saved Othello from being a murderer; it could not have increased Shakespeare's love for him." Compare the delineation of Hotspur and Coriolanus—also simple-minded warriors and men of action.
He will prove himself still loyal to Venice and the trust she has reposed in him, to his conception of the State and civiliza-
tion,—that which is noblest in him ready to do swift execution upon whatever has betrayed the ideal. So dies Othello, the Moor, triumphant in Desdemona’s truth and in the sincerity of his own perfect soul.

The Setting and the Total Effect

The elaboration of the setting has thus served a definite end, since against its delicate and colorful network, as against the stained fragments of a mosaic background, has been projected in boldest relief the large and simple figure of the Moor. The use of detail of place has done much to present the characters with solidity to the spectator and to create the dramatic situ-
in which they move. It has contributed to their inner life also.

Some modern critics see Shakespeare’s treatment of Othello (and of many other characters) as for the most part plastic and external, and contrast this method with what they consider to be the modern method of conscious psychological analysis. And yet we wonder whether contemporary and older dramatists alike do not at their best employ a method which is neither of these. Coleridge says, “One of Shakespeare’s modes of creating char-
acters is to conceive any one intellectual or moral faculty in mor-
bid excess, and then to place himself, Shakespeare, thus muti-
lated or diseased, under given circumstances.” The process is not deliberate or self-conscious, however, but instinctive and imaginative. Most persons who have tried to write dramatic dialogue know a little of it by experience. If all personalities are latent in any personality, can be, as it were, realized from something in oneself, and if, in order to produce a single one of these, one can check off all in oneself that is foreign to its con-
sciousness, let down shutters on the rest of one’s mind, then what remains for use and development is not a constructed, in-
organic thing, but something almost as organic as the drama-
tist’s own mind, though on a different scale. And hence in great drama, out of the issues of the heart the mouth speaketh.

The essentials of character may, as Professor Bradley im-
plies, be independent of specific time and place. Yet, however transferable, they are most easily realizable to us in a vivid set-
ing. Shakespeare has in Othello realized an alien personality
in an alien place and has somehow assimilated to Othello’s inner experience the outer details of his environment and made these symbolic to us of his inner conflict.

Thus Italy in this play serves not merely to represent romance, nor primarily a realistic contemporary background. It is the sophisticated world, rather, in its complexity, at first idealized, then found to have abysmal possibilities of evil, finally restored to its human proportions. Othello’s memories, too, stuff of poetry as they are, serve dramatic ends, being images that express to us the Moor’s simplicity and the gamut of his experiences, his sense of being equal with his world, his perplexed sense of being unequal to it, and finally, even in his humiliation and tragic remorse, his sense of repudiating its evil and being at one with its good.

Othello is a barbarian in a general rather than a specific sense. Romantically he is the Moor; but if we try to locate him more realistically, we shall find him in many lands and under many disguises. The suggestion for the type came, no doubt, from innumerable sources: indirectly, through the incidents, from Cinthio; perhaps (and if so, more directly) from Montaigne; and at once more generally and more vitally, from any honest soul trying to adjust a simple ideal to a complex environment.—Valentine at the Emperor’s court, the Englishman in Italy, Shakespeare himself going up to London.