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## Identity in William Shakespeare's Othello, Moor of Venice

The quest for identity or the fight to be recognized in certain positions is one of the central themes on which Shakespeare build his play Othello, Moor of Venice. This theme is explored in various categories by different characters. The main purpose of this paper will be to discuss the different character quest of identity and the effects of their quest.

- Othello, Othello has been a successful fighter since his childhood, In his discussion with the duke we come to realize that he is a fierce soldier as he says

“Wherein I spoke of most disastrous chances,

Of moving accidents by flood and fields;

Of hairbreadth scapes I' th' imminent deathly breach;

Of being taken by the insolent foe

And sold to slavery; of my redemption thence” (Act 1 scene 3) (Meyer, m (2012). The compact Bedford Introduction to Literature. Boston/ST. Martins pg. 1082)

This passage reveal a lot about Othello's identity. He is a black moor who has gone through fierce encounters and life threatening adventures, a formers slave who had his freedom. His successes in life has made him a man of high reputation in his society. Othello is a character that deserves his title as a general in the army because he has worked so hard to be at the position he holds. Othello can also be identified as a character full of trust. His death is as a result of the trust he has for Iago. Because he beliefs in Iago so much over his wife, he does little or no investigation to know if actually his wife Desdemona is cheating on him with Cassio. As a general that he was he should have investigated the case properly before any necessary actions. Othello killing his wife makes him an individual who values his honor over love. He thinks his wife is a cheat and so that will bring down his reputation in the society. For that reason, he rather kills her and maintain his honor. Even though at the end he realizes that the killing of his wife was a mistake on his part and as a result he kills himself.

- Iago; this is the character in which most of the play centers around. Iago is a careful master planner of evil who plots evil and uses a lot of evidences to support his acts. His actions in the play leads to the death of most of the characters. Iago's identity can be view as an individual with the quest for position. The play gives no clear motives for his actions except of the fact that

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Othello gave the lieutenant position to Cassio instead of him Iago. He decides to tarnish the image of Cassio so that Othello might not find him worthy to be his lieutenant then fires him, with this Iago will have a higher chance of claiming the position of a lieutenant. Iago's identity is viewed as a racist individual. In his encounter with Desdemona's father, we find some aspect of racism in Iago as he describes Othello as an old black ram. His intentions for being racist in this contest will probably be to raise Brabantio's rage over the fact that her daughter is married to a black man. His choice of words in his encounter with Brabantio is to instill rage in Brabantio so that he will take action. This he succeeded due to his manipulative skills. Iago is also an exploitative character. In Act IV, Scene III, Rodrigo says, "I have wasted myself out of my means. The jewels you have had from me to deliver to Desdemona would half have corrupted a votary" (Meyer, m (2012). The compact Bedford Introduction to Literature. Boston/ST. Martins pg.1136) He understands that Rodrigo is rich and can do anything to win Desdemona, Iago decides to use that as an opportunity to extort money from him and also leads him to fight Cassio which was his intention to make Cassio to be reaped off his position as lieutenant.

- Rodrigo; this is one of the characters in the play who thinks money can buy him love. Rodrigo is a rich young man with a lot of fortunes. He loves Desdemona so much that he will do anything to be in love with her. He falls victim to Iago's manipulations due to his blind nature to love. Rodrigo decides to use Iago as a middle man between him and Desdemona. To this effect, Iago collects expensive jewelries from him, and promises him that Desdemona is responding positively. Iago keeps the lies of assuring Rodrigo of Desdemona's love in order to gain access to more of his wealth. To an extent, Rodrigo's character is a representation of some present-day wealthy class individuals who believe their money can get them whatever they want. Maybe Shakespeare's message about the character of Rodrigo is that money or expensive gifts can't buy love.

- Cassio; Cassio's identity at the beginning of the play is that of Othello's lieutenant. Iago is not happy with Cassio because of his position as a lieutenant. This is because Iago thought the position of a lieutenant will be conferred to him by Othello but rather Othello gave it to Cassio. For this reason Iago plots a fight between Rodrigo and Cassio. As a result of the fight, Cassio loses his identity as a lieutenant. Because of the love Cassio has for his position as a lieutenant, he decides to plead with Desdemona to plead with her husband Othello on his behalfs so that he can be reinstated in his position as lieutenant. Iago uses this opportunity to plot another dispute as he tells Othello Cassio is having an affair with his wife Desdemona. Iago makes Othello believe him by providing evidence like the handkerchief scene. The effects of this is the death of Desdemona.

- Desdemona; she is first identified as Othello's pretty wife, and Brabantio's daughter. She marries Othello against the wish of her father. Desdemona is an epitome of a true loving and caring wife. But Iago plots her to be an unfaithful wife in the eyes of her husband which leads to her death. She represents the characteristics of a good wife but falls victim to a flaw that she is

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not responsible for. Due to his marriage with Othello, Cassio thinks she will be the soft spot he can use to convince Othello to reinstate him in his position as lieutenant of his army. But this only leads to her doom as Iago manipulated it to look Cassio is having an affair with her which leads to her death. Through Rodrigo we realize that Desdemona identity as a very pretty lady. For this reason Iago tends to exploit him with the intention that he will work things out between him Rodrigo and Desdemona.

- Brabantio; this character appears just at the beginning of the play. He is Desdemona's father and Othello's father-in-law. One striking thing about his identity is that he is racist. He is not happy that his daughter wants to marry a black person. He views this as a degradation of his family prestige. But he is left with no choice when her daughter says she will marry Othello.

From the above characters and their identity traits, we can say Shakespeare Othello, the Moor of Venice is a play that explore various identity traits in characters. There are other minor characters in the play with identity traits like Emilia Iago's wife who is a loyal and truthful character and the prostitute Cassio had.

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