

OTHELLO AS HIS WIFE'S ENCHANTED ENCHANTER. A STUDY OF THE TRADITION OF THE TALES ABOUT SUPERNATURAL HUSBANDS' AND WIVES AS IT APPEARS IN SHAKESPEARE'S *OTHELLO*

It seems possible to think of Shakespeare's *Othello* as a story with folktale roots. In the underlying folktale, Othello would be an enchanted being whom his wife, contrary to the usual folktale standards, fails to disenchant. Harold Bloom refers to this aspect of Othello in saying: «To some degree he is a self-enchanter, as well as the enchanter of Desdemona. Othello desperately wants and needs to be the protagonist of a Shakespearean romance, but alas he is the hero-victim of this most painful Shakespearean domestic tragedy of blood»¹. It should be observed that Shakespeare's romances, known also as his late plays, are particularly rich in all kinds of parallels with the folktale and wondertale tradition. Desdemona's failure is clearly related to the fact that she has to deal with two demonic enchanted enchanters, instead of one, that is, her husband, and Iago, Othello's evil spirit and his alter ego. The «romantic» and positive side of Othello is, however, a constant and latent alternative. The present paper attempts to bring this potential out by studying the involvement of Shakespeare's play with the world of the fairy tale and romance.

What should we make of *Othello*'s plot in terms of the folktale tradition? In Cynthio's Italian version, which is called *Disdemona and the Moor*, being part of a collection of stories titled *Hecatommithi*, it is a story based, to a large extent, on a considerably transformed motif of Potiphar's wife. Instead of a villainous and scheming woman, we have

1 HAROLD BLOOM, *Shakespeare. The Invention of the Human*. Riverhead Books, New York 1998, 447.

there an evil man, who conceives hatred for the woman who has rejected his advances, and accuses her of marital infidelity with another man, the so-called Captain, in Shakespeare's play appearing as Cassio. So Cynthio's Iago, who is just called the Ensign, wants to avenge himself on Desdemona (or rather Disdemona) rather than on Othello, called simply the Moor, and eventually he murders Desdemona in complicity with the Moor, who only later discovers that his wife was innocent. The Ensign also hates the Captain, whom he imagines to be, quite falsely, Desdemona's successful lover². Shakespeare certainly made this story more concentrated and intense by changing Iago's motivation and focusing it on Othello himself, rather than on the Moor's wife. Shakespeare's Iago hates, first of all, Othello, who, apparently, passed him up for a promotion, and, in the second place, he hates also Cassio, who received the promotion that Iago wanted, and which he thought he rightfully deserved. Desdemona at first does not seem to enter into this circle of hatred at all.

Later, it turns out that Iago considers other possible motivations for his actions, namely that his wife Emilia betrayed him with both Othello and Cassio, for which he would willingly turn Othello into a cuckold by having sex with Desdemona. This is how he expresses his suspicion:

I hate the Moor,
And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets
He's done my office: (1.3.368-370)³
and later:
For that I do suspect the lusty Moor
Hath leaped into my seat; the thought whereof
Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards;
And nothing can or shall content my soul
Till I am evened with him, wife for wife; (2.1.276-280)
and also with reference to Cassio:
For I fear Cassio with my night-cap too – (2.1.288)

And this is how he verbalizes his feelings for Desdemona:

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- 2 My knowledge of Cinthio's story is based on WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Othello*, Edited by NORMAN SANDERS, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge *et al.* 1989, 2-9.
3 In my quotations from W.Shakespeare's *Othello* I follow: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Othello*, Edited by NORMAN SANDERS, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge *et al.* 1989.

Now, I do love her too;
 Not out of absolute lust – though peradventure
 I stand accountant for as great a sin –
 But partly led to diet my revenge, (2.1.272-275)

It seems characteristic of Iago that he does not look for any evidence of his suspicions, he is not interested in the truth, fiction satisfies him:

I know not if't be true
 Yet I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
 Will do as if for surety. (1.3.370-372)

In this fictional reality, the principle of sexual infidelity rules supreme, and it is mainly women who are considered responsible for this situation. Iago's view on women is, as can be expected, cynical and hostile, which he does not hide even in a seemingly polite conversation with Emilia and Desdemona, who is not only a woman but also his social superior:

Come on, come on; you are pictures out of doors,
 bells in your parlors, wild-cats in your kitchens,
 saints in your injuries, devils being offended,
 players in your housewifery,
 and housewives in your beds. (2.1.108-111)

Such opinions are naturally based on stock anti-feminist phrases and proverbs of those times, but Iago's summarizing verdict on women: «You rise to play and go to bed to work » (2.1.113) seems to suggest that women are generally sexual maniacs because the word «to play» may mean «engage in sexual dalliance or activity, have sexual intercourse»⁴, and «working in bed» also clearly implies sexual intercourse. In such a world, being here a figment of Iago's unhealthy imagination, all kinds of sexual unions are possible, but they are unions that imply no sentimental attachment, as Iago puts it himself: «merely a lust of the blood and a permission of the will» (1.3.326).

This leads us to one of the basic perceptions about the represented world of the fairy tale, namely that it is based on the mutually complementary aspects of «isolation» and «universal interconnectedness», and

4 *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary On Historical Principles*. Edited by LESLEY BROWN. Oxford University Press, Oxford et al. 1993, 2244.

their combination is something that characterizes, first of all, the fairy tale hero. The Swiss scholar Max Lüthi, the discoverer of this principle, describes it as follows:

The gift the hero receives is the means by which he is linked to otherworld beings and human beings. The fact that it is given so regularly and that it is received by the hero so effortlessly demonstrates his capacity for establishing any kind of relationship whatever. If the folktale prefers to have its protagonists attain their objectives only through a chain of helpful measures, it does so not only as a means of prolonging, intensifying, and varying the plot, but also as a visible image of the way in which all things are interconnected. With ease, as though it were a matter of course, the hero establishes contact with any number of helpers. At the same time, however, gifts reflect the hero's isolation. His ties to the outer world are not direct or lasting but are based on a gift, preferably a distinctly visible, isolated object that does not become part of him but that he receives, uses, and subsequently discards as something external. In all essentials the folktale hero handles even intangible gifts as if they were objects. Personal characteristics, abilities, and injuries do not become part of his or her overall personality but play a role only if the external situation calls for them.⁵

The motif of gift is naturally very important in the context of Shakespeare's *Othello*, but in Iago's perverse, but to some extent realistic, vision of the world it is sexuality itself, or perhaps the woman herself, that is such a gift, but it is a poisoned gift, like the Trojan Horse. It leads to death and destruction because the world of Iago is not that of «free love», or a free circulation of (sexual) goods, but rather that of exclusive possession. In other words, within Iago's world, the price of universal interconnectedness is not merely isolation, but death, which can only be avoided if the transmission of the (sexual) gift is kept secret.

Iago may not seem a particularly isolated figure, he is often called «honest», on one occasion (2.3.245) even by himself, (cf. 1.3.280, 1.3.290, 2.3.7, 2.3.158, 2.3.228, 2.3.245, 3.3.5, 3.3.119, 3.3.244, 5.2.73, 5.2.153) or «good» (4.2.147), and «good friend» (4.2.149), so it may be safely said that he enjoys a good reputation, and he seemingly belongs to the Venetian establishment. On the other hand, he does not seem to have

5 MAX LÜTHI, *Das Europäische Volksmärchen. Form und Wesen (The European Folktale. Form and Nature)* (1947), Francke Verlag, Tübingen 1985, 54. The translation of this passage, and the following passages, from the German is mine.

any genuine friends, and there is no tenderness or mutual understanding between him and his wife Emilia, even though she is fatally slow in seeing through his evil character. Roderigo, who might be taken for Iago's closest friend is, in fact, only his passive instrument, and Iago consistently looks down on him (calling him, for example, «my sick fool Roderigo» – 2.3.43), so we cannot be particularly surprised when he eventually kills Roderigo, fearing that he might testify against him. Iago seems then to represent an uncommonly dark side of the principle of «isolation» and «universal interconnectedness». He can relate almost to everybody and everything, while being indeed, in a sense, very lonely, but this, contrary to Lüthi's assumptions, does not make him a hero, but rather an anti-hero.

He should not be, however, confused with the category of the anti-hero as it is well known in folklore studies. As Lüthi has put it: «[...] the folktale hero hits upon the right course of action as unerringly as the antihero (*der Unheld*) hits upon the wrong one»⁶. Iago, instead of «hitting unerringly on the wrong course of action», hits unerringly on the most evil one and the most likely to cause maximum harm. Unlike the fairy tale anti-heroes, he is not a lame duck or a loser, even though his tricks are eventually exposed, and he is no doubt going to die soon a very painful death. Yet he has successfully carried out his revenge on Othello, if, indeed, his evil actions can be interpreted as revenge. The 19th c. English critic William Hazlitt thought that Iago's villainy was «without a sufficient motive», and that his behavior should be attributed to a pure «love of power», which is merely «another name for the love of mischief»⁷. It is true that, instead of being satisfied with one motive, he multiplies them, and even states that he is not convinced of their truth. But it was, I think, a mistake on the part of Hazlitt to dismiss those motives. They give us an insight into the functioning of Iago's mind, where, contrary to the assurance he gives to Desdemona, that «all things shall be well» (4.2.170), almost everything is the opposite to what it should be. The formula of «universal interconnectedness» seems useful here because Iago sees the world around him as a massive conspiracy directed against him. Where the fairy tale hero is infinitely trustful because he believes, subconsciously, that the forces governing the world act in his favor, Iago believes the opposite, and does not trust anybody.

6 LÜTHI, *Das Europäische*, cit. (n. 4), 16.

7 FRANCIS GRIFFIN STOKES, *Who's Who in Shakespeare. Characters, names and plot sources in the plays and poems*. Bracken Books, London 1996. 162.

Max Lüthi was, in fact, not only a folklore scholar, his other specialization was English studies, and Shakespeare studies in particular. He was therefore well aware of and keenly interested in the functioning of the principle of «isolation» vs. «universal interconnectedness» in Shakespeare. Lüthi generally believed that it is Shakespeare's comedies, and the so-called romances, that are particularly close to the spirit of the fairy tale, while his tragedies owe more to the spirit of the «local legend». The distinction between the fairy tale and the local legend is of fundamental importance:

In legends otherworld beings are physically close to human beings. They dwell in his house, in his field, or in the nearby woods, stream, mountain, or lake. Often they do work for him and he gives them food. But spiritually these house kobolds, nixes, fangen, alpine spirits, and wild men inhabit a world of their own, and human beings encounter them as the Wholly Other. In folktales exactly the opposite is true.⁸

Thus, the world of the fairy tale is that of surmountable differences, in the local legends the same differences are usually shown as insurmountable, or as only apparently and temporarily surmountable. In fairy tales, the human heroine can marry a monster, and they can live happily ever after, even though the monster usually has to be «disenchanted», that is, has to lose his monstrous aspects. In local legends, a union between an ordinary mortal and a supernatural being, if it is attempted at all, will usually end in a traumatic separation and mutual disappointment. Talking in Shakespearian terms, someone like the *Winter's Tale* king Leontes, in spite of his nasty character, will eventually make a good husband for the unjustly accused Hermione, provided he mends his ways, while someone like Hamlet will be too absorbed in his own affairs to notice the desperate plight of his (unjustly accused) innocent Ophelia, and someone like Othello will even viciously, and for no rational reason, turn on his (unjustly accused) faithful Desdemona, and both will only too late realize that a great harm has been done.

But Lüthi could also notice the effect of «isolation» vs. «universal interconnectedness» in some Shakespearean tragedies:

Just as the fairy tale always and repeatedly isolates its characters and exactly by doing this makes them capable of making all kinds of relationships, so also Shakespeare repeatedly makes his charac-

8 LÜTHI, *Das Europäische*, cit. (n. 4), 10.

ters get increasingly lonely and only then they become capable of establishing an authentic relationship with themselves and with other people: this concerns not only Cordelia, whose banishment liberates her from a false sutor and makes it possible for her to become the one who can offer help, but also Lear, Coriolanus, Imogen, Viola and many others – above all it concerns those in love, who are almost always distant and alienated from each other, and who, exactly for this reason, manage to find each other: Romeo and Juliet belong to mutually hostile clans, while Othello and Antonius belong to other races and cultures than their partners: Desdemona and Cleopatra.⁹

This may strike the reader as a somewhat strange statement. In what sense do Romeo and Juliet, or Antony and Cleopatra, or Othello and Desdemona, «find each other»? Clearly, they do find each other in the sense that they become lovers (and spouses), in spite of very serious obstacles. But, in all those cases, they find each other and then (rather soon) lose each other, and, again in all three cases, their ultimate separation involves the death of them all. Another thing that can be noted is that, at some point, Lüthi replaces isolation with mutual alienation because, even though Antony and Cleopatra, or Romeo and Juliet, are indeed unlikely lovers, they are by no means isolated in the communities from which they stem and to which they belong. It is only their unlikely sexual unions that make them gradually, or suddenly, difficult to be accepted in those original communities of theirs.

Thus, Antony, because of his involvement with Cleopatra, starts to be seen as unpatriotic in Rome and loses his chances of winning the contest for power with Octavian, while Juliet's love for Romeo, manifesting itself as her refusal to marry the man whom her father has chosen, leads to her estrangement from her parents, and, most probably, from the whole of the Capulet family. In both cases, it is difficult to assume that Antony will make a good Egyptian, or that Juliet will be easily accepted by the Montagues. The mechanism we observe then in Shakespeare consists, to some extent at least, in a reversal of the mechanism described by Lüthi. It is not isolation that makes universal interconnectedness possible, but rather the other way round, it is the readiness to make unlikely,

9 MAX LÜTHI, *Shakespeare. Dichter des Wirklichen und des Nichtwirklichen (Shakespeare. The Poet of the Real and of the Unreal)*, Francke Verlag, Bern und München 1964, 68-69.

and naturally exogamic, relationships that leads to isolation. But, on the other hand, it is possible to argue that such an exogamous union was, first of all, possible, because those who entered it possessed a certain independence of mind which made them more than cogs in a machine, more than blindly loyal members of their caste, so that they were psychologically prepared to become «strangely connected», hence, potentially isolated from the very beginning.

Coming back now to the situation in *Othello*, we should, first of all, notice something that Lüthi does not seem to notice, namely that Othello and Desdemona are different from, for example, Romeo and Juliet or Antony and Cleopatra in that there is a fundamental lack of symmetry between them. While Desdemona is, at the beginning of the play's action, safely integrated with the Venetian upper class, Othello is already, as a Venetian officer of African origin, a fish out of water. His union with Desdemona is, from his point of view, a bold venture to become finally integrated with the Venetian society. His marriage is, again from his point of view, exogamous only in relation to what might be called the «old Othello», that is, the completely African Othello, who, presumably, was not yet Othello, but used a very different name. This bold venture, as we know, fails miserably. Othello is indeed completely isolated, though he does not realize it, having put his whole trust in the man who hates him, and having turned his back on the people who love him, or at least are loyal to him, such as his wife, or Cassio. Lüthi's «authentic relationship with oneself and with other people», achieved at the cost of isolation, is a formula that works well with such characters as King Lear, Gloucester or Cordelia, but, in the case of Othello, «universal interconnectedness» means simply death, and death, it should be added, does indeed connect us with the forces of the universe, no matter whether we understand it in a religious sense, or not.

We have not yet asked ourselves the fundamental question: if *Othello* is, in some respects, like a fairy tale, what kind, or rather type, of the fairy tale does it resemble? The answer is rather easy, or at least seems easy enough. We have to do here with a strangely truncated and pessimistic version of AT 425 (The Search for a Lost Husband) and even more particularly with AT 425A (The Monster [Animal] as Bridegroom). The best known literary version of this type is *Cupid and Psyche*, a 2nd c. tale by Apuleius, included in his novel *The Golden Ass*, but it is slightly untypical because the «monster bridegroom» in it is not really a monster, on the contrary, he is a paragon of masculine beauty, being the

god of love himself, but the point is that the heroine of the story is led to believe that her husband, who is very reluctant to show her his physical appearance, and visits her only at night, may be in reality an «enormous snake, with widely gaping jaws»¹⁰. In more typical versions of this type, the heroine's bridegroom, and husband, is indeed a monster, or a rather frightening animal, such as a bear, a wolf, or a snake. In this context, of some interest is the classical Brothers Grimm version of this type, where the heroine is made to marry an Iron Stove, who naturally is usually shown as black, which could be connected with the black colour of Othello's skin. The similarities between the most typical versions of AT 425 and *Othello* may not be very numerous, but they are important enough. First of all, the heroine marries a total stranger, whose outward appearance is considered repulsive, and does so against the will of her family, particularly that of her father. Secondly, the husband, at some point, turns against his wife, usually because she breaks some kind of taboo. What follows in fairy tales is normally estrangement, the husband abandons his wife, but, unlike Othello, he does not kill her. The heroine, having gone through some difficult trials, is eventually reunited with her husband, so that a happy ending may ensue. Part and parcel of the happy ending is clearly the disenchantment, the heroine can marry a monster, but she cannot live happily ever after with a monster, so the monster or animal, owing usually to her love and devotion, or at least her sacrifice, changes into a prince charming, and this concerns also the Iron Stove.

Othello, however, seems to contain allusions to a slightly different type of tales that are, in many ways, similar to the tales about supernatural husbands. I mean the tales involving the motif of the external soul (E710). In such tales, the heroine is also married to a supernatural being, a monster or a magician, but he keeps her imprisoned, and is usually represented as rather advanced in years. Her intention is not to disenchant him, but rather to kill him, often with the help of a young lover of hers. The problem is that the monster has taken some precautions against being killed, he has an external soul, usually well hidden in some secret and unpredictable place, and he virtually cannot die unless somebody finds that soul and destroys it. Stith Thompson says the following of such tales as appearing in the American Indian folklore:

10 APULEIUS, *The Golden Ass*, trans. Robert Graves, The Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1950, 130-131.

Miscellaneous tales of bear paramours are popular in all parts of the continent. There are also other appearances of the person who can be wounded in only one place, of the person possessed of a soul which can be separated from his body, and of bodily members which rejoin the body and bring the owner back to life¹¹.

Sir James Frazer in his *The Golden Bough* devotes two chapters to the motif of the external soul and concludes as follows:

Above all, the savage lives in an intense and perpetual dread of assassination by sorcery; the most trifling relics of his person – the clippings of his hair and nails, his spittle, the remnants of his food, his very name – all these may, he fancies, be turned by the sorcerer to his destruction, and he is therefore anxiously careful to conceal or destroy them. But if in matters such as these, which are but the outposts and outworks of his life, he is so shy and secretive, how close must be the concealment, how impenetrable the reserve in which he enshrouds the inner keep and citadel of his being!¹²

Is it possible to look at Othello as if he were a similar savage? I think it is, even though Othello's putative savagery goes curiously together with his nobility. When Iago, in Act One of the play, advises Othello to hide before the angry Brabantio, Desdemona's father, who has no intention to tolerate his daughter's liaison with the Moor, Othello rejects this advice, saying:

OTHELLO. Not I, I must be found.
My parts, my title and my perfect soul
Shall manifest me rightly. (1.2.30-32)

At this stage, he appears to believe that he and his soul are perfectly amalgamated, and there is nothing he could be ashamed of. But perhaps this integration has gone too far? In front of the Duke of Venice and the Venetian senators, Othello talks about his voyages to the exotic lands inhabited by:

The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders (1.3.142-143)

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- 11 STITH THOMPSON, *The Folktale*. University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1977, 357-358.
 - 12 JAMES FRAZER, *The Golden Bough. A study in magic and religion*. Wordsworth Editions, Ware, Hertfordshire 1993, 691.

This may be treated as a meaningful symbolical image referring back to Othello himself. Is not he also a headless man, a man who cannot distinguish between his reasoning mind and the spontaneous movements of his heart?

This image of excessive integration precedes images of advanced disintegration. At first we see Desdemona represented as the uxorious Othello's external soul in which his true personality resides:

CASSIO. The divine Desdemona.

MONTANO. What is she?

CASSIO. She that I spake of, our great captain's captain,
Left in the conduct of the bold Iago, (2.1.73-75)

Desdemona is consistently shown as the content of Othello's soul in which what is apparently external to him becomes his innermost self:

OTHELLO. It gives me wonder great as my content
To see you here before me. O my soul's joy!
If after every tempest come such calms,
May the winds blow till they have waken'd death!
And let the laboring bark climb hills of seas
Olympus-high and duck again as low
As hell's from heaven! If it were now to die,
'Twere now to be most happy; for, I fear,
My soul hath her content so absolute
That not another comfort like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate. (2.1.175-184)

Iago's ambition is «to draw the Moor apart» (2.3.350), that is to introduce chaos and division by setting one aspect of Othello's personality against another. Eventually, the poison of jealousy will destroy all positive aspects of the Moor's personality, but this cannot finally happen before he sees what he calls «the ocular proof» and is, in his own words, an equivalent of his soul:

OTHELLO. Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore,
Be sure of it; give me the ocular proof:
Or by the worth of man's eternal soul,
Thou hadst been better have been born a dog
Than answer my waked wrath! (3.3.360-364)

The way Othello describes the fatal handkerchief makes it clear that losing it is for him tantamount to losing his chance for happiness,

which obviously is a triumph of magical and fetishist thinking. In other words, the handkerchief is elevated to the position of Othello's external soul:

OTHELLO. That is 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 loathed and his spirits should hunt
After new fancies. She, dying, gave it me;
And bid me, when my fate would have me wive,
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. (3.4.51-64)

The handkerchief, trivial as it may seem, assumes the proportions of a guarantor of Othello's father's and Othello's own sanity. Unlike the heroines of the tales about deathless monsters, Desdemona, by destroying, in a sense, the husband's outward soul, or rather what he pretends is such a soul, seals, first of all, her own perdition, and only secondarily that of her husband. Thomas Rymer, the author of an extremely negative appraisal of *Othello*, published in 1693 as *A Short View of Tragedy*, may have had a point when he called *Othello* «the Tragedy of the Handkerchief». Rymer wanted to emphasise the alleged absurdity of Shakespeare's play, but what he failed to notice is that the handkerchief stands, at least from Othello's point of view, in a metonymic relation to Othello himself, and also to Desdemona inasmuch as she is her husband's soul.

It is time to draw some conclusions. First of all, it is clear enough that Shakespeare's *Othello* is a play steeped in the folktale tradition, and the tradition of the tale of magic. But in many ways it plays with the conventions of this highly conventional genre. This playfulness, which is very remote from comicality, is visible both on the stylistic plane and that of the plot, which is a rather remote echo of the tales about supernatural husbands in which the wives, who are usually the protagonists, embark on the arduous task of disenchanting their enchanted husbands, who may appear as animals, or even sometimes as inanimate objects. We can

also see the use, in *Othello*, of the highly transformed, but still recognizable, motif of the external soul, which fundamentally belongs to the tales in which the wife intends to kill her husband rather than disenchant him. It should also be added that the motif of flimsy, or questionable, motives for action belongs to a broadly conceived sphere of deathlessness, in which all actions are basically superfluous or at least unnecessary. As already A. C. Bradley recognized with reference to *Othello*: «To “plume up the will”, to heighten the sense of power or superiority – this seems to be the unconscious motive of many acts of cruelty which evidently do not spring chiefly from ill-will, and which therefore puzzle and horrify us most»¹³.

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13 BRADLEY, A.C., *Shakespearean Tragedy, Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*. Macmillan, Houndmills and London 1992, 196.

Ամփոփում

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ԱՆԴՐԷՅ ՎԻԽԵՐ

Կարելի է փնտռել Շէյքսպիրի Օթելլոյին արմատները ժողովրդական պատմութիւններուն մէջ: Այդպէս դիտուած, Օթելլոն կախարդուած էակ մըն է, որու կինը, հակառակ ժողովրդական պատմուածքներու աւանդութեան, չի յաջողիր զինք կախարդանքէն ձերբազատել:

Տիպարին այս երեսին անդրադառնալով, Հարոլդ Պլում կ'ըսէ որ «որոշ չափով, Օթելլոյ ինքզինք կը դիւթէ եւ միաժամանակ Տեզտեմոնան հմայողն է»: Գրագէտը կ'ըսէ, որ Օթելլոն «կատաղի կերպով կ'ուզէ եւ կարիքը ունի Շէյքսպիրի պատմութեան մը գլխաւոր կերպարը ըլլալու, բայց, ափսո՛ս, հերոս-զոհն է այս ցաւալի շէյքսպիրեան արիւնալի տնային ողբերգութեան»:

Յօդուածին հեղինակը կը փորձէ բացայայտել Օթելլոյի պատմութեան թաքուն կողմերը, ուսումնասիրելով թատերախաղին կապերը ժողովրդական հեքիաթներու աշխարհին հետ: