

A BRIEF ANALYZE OF THEMES IN OTHELLO

Uma breve análise dos temas em Otelô



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Abstract

The Elizabethan era was marked by political tensions such as the Puritan movement and republicanism. However, it was also an intense period in the arts, as after her coronation, Queen Elizabeth I ordered that the arts play a central role in her reign. This occurred not only because she was a cultured queen interested in the arts, but also to appease the people through entertainment. Thus, drama had a happy marriage with English literature, and William Shakespeare became the most influential writer in the world, with an indisputable profusion of themes that he portrayed with mastery. One of the icons of this profusion is the play “Othello, the Moor of Venice,” a tragedy that was first published around 1622 and provokes interesting discussion about human nature. The entire work is centered on envy and jealousy, but secondary themes emerge, all emanating from the human being, which makes the work still contemporary today. This article, which is the result of a lecture given at the IV Cycle of Lectures on Literature – Teaching, Literature, and Cinema: Possible Intercessions, at UNIFAP, presents some discussions on themes from the play, situating the reader in the time and space of Shakespeare.

Key words: Shakespeare; english literature; human nature; theme profusion; contemporary.

Abstract

A era Elizabetana foi marcada por tensões políticas tais como o movimento puritanista e o republicanismo. Entretanto, também foi um período intenso no setor das artes, já que após a coroação, Rainha Elizabeth I ordenou que as artes tivessem papel central em seu reinado. Isso ocorreu não apenas por se tratar de uma rainha culta e interessada em artes, como também para conter os ânimos do povo através do entretenimento. Assim, a dramaturgia teve um casamento feliz com a literatura inglesa e William Shakespeare se tornou o mais influente escritor do Mundo, sendo algo indiscutível a profusão de temas que ele retratou com maestria. Um dos ícones dessa profusão é a peça “Othello, o mouro de Veneza”, uma tragédia que foi publicada pela primeira vez por volta de 1622 e provoca interessante discussão sobre a natureza humana. Toda a obra está centrada na inveja e no ciúme, mas emergem temáticas secundárias, todas emanando o ser humano, o que torna a obra ainda hoje contemporânea. O presente artigo, o qual é fruto de uma palestra proferida no IV Ciclo de Palestras de Letras – Ensino, Letras e Cinema: Intercessões Possíveis, na UNIFAP, apresenta algumas discussões sobre temáticas da peça, situando o leitor no tempo e espaço de Shakespeare.

Palavras-chave: Shakespeare; literatura inglesa; natureza humana; profusão temática; contemporâneo.

Introduction

This work is the result of a project called IV Cycle of Lectures on Literature – Teaching, Literature, and Cinema: Possible Intersections, promoted by the Department of Literature and Arts at UNIFAP. The project began with a screening of the film *Othello*, an adaptation by Oliver Parker (1995), which, through brilliant performances, managed to establish the atmosphere of tension characteristic of Shakespeare's tragedies. This was followed by a lecture with the same name as the article presented here. Thus, the essay seeks to discuss the themes that emerge in the work “*Othello, the Moor of Venice*,” as well as to analyze Shakespeare's genius in constructing characters endowed with a real human psychology that goes beyond art and transports itself to the present day. The analysis of the characters' features and their importance to the plot reveals Shakespeare's contemporaneity.

The article is divided into four topics. The first seeks to place the author in historical context to demonstrate his concern with issues relevant to his time and how this is reflected in his work, as well as briefly presenting the birth of English theater. The second topic reveals Shakespeare as a playwright, highlighting plays that made him famous and immortal. The third one provides a summary of the play to be discussed, and finally, the last topic highlights themes that stand out in the work: jealousy, envy, feelings of inferiority, racial prejudice, in short, human nature, thus emphasizing its contemporary character.

1 Shakespeare, his time and his work

Shakespeare is still considered today to be a figure who influenced various areas through his work, such as theater, cinema, and the English language itself. To understand better the greatness of his work, it is important to understand the time in which he lived, as the author managed, like few others, to express the thoughts of his era and go beyond it.

The historical setting in which Shakespeare lived was marked by another personality: Queen Elizabeth I. The controversial daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn represented a counterpoint in English history from the moment she was born. Her father, Henry VIII, faced the wrath of the Catholic Church, which did not grant divorce, in order to marry Anne Boleyn, his mistress.

Thus, Henry VIII established the Anglican Church and was able to fulfill his desire, conceiving his daughter Elizabeth with his mistress, now his wife. She ruled for 45 years and suffered several attempts on her crown, as she represented all the theological and political conflicts that separated Roman Catholics (Papists), Calvinists (Puritans), and those who followed the official English religion, the Anglicans. One of the most notable attempts occurred in the episode involving Mary Stuart, Elizabeth's cousin. At that time, Mary Stuart was sheltered in England after being suspected of her husband's death in Sweden. Taking advantage of the situation, the queen's opponents conspired to have Mary Stuart succeed her to the throne. The plan got exposed, and Elizabeth ordered her cousin to be beheaded, which turned Mary Stuart into a Catholic martyr and made things even more tense in the English kingdom. Pope Pius V responded by issuing a papal bull of excommunication, giving any Catholic permission to take part in Elizabeth's deposition and even her death.

This fact left the queen even more exposed, and so Spain, using religious arguments but with the intention of maintaining its hegemony as a landowner, launched its armada to take the island, in an episode known as "The Invincible Armada." However, this naval operation failed, and inspired Shakespeare to create the play *Cymbeline*, as we can see in the excerpt below (Act III, Scene 1):

[...] Remember, sir, my liege,
The Kings your ancestors, together with
The natural bravery of your isle, which stands
As Neptune's park, ribbed and paled in
With rocks unscalable and roaring waters,
With sands that will not bear your enemies' boats,
But suck them up to the topmast.

This persecution of the kingdom sparked a patriotic outcry and inspired Shakespeare's historical plays, peaking with *Henry V*. The drama recounts the young English king's daring triumph at the 1415 Battle of Azincourt, where he defeated France's powerful cavalry with only a small force of archers and horsemen.

It can therefore be observed that there was fertile ground for Shakespeare to gather material for his works, and he did so. The reality of Shakespeare's England was one of war and an oppressed people living in extreme poverty and precarious conditions. Queen Elizabeth I saw entertainment as a way to calm tempers, thus promoting the arts and culture during that period. They played a special role in her kingdom, and so, even though there were already several traveling actors in England around the 15th century, during the reign of Henry VIII, it was during Elizabeth's reign that they gained prominence. It so happened that the acting profession was not regulated, and actors were seen as vagabonds in society, except for those who were connected to noble families. Franca Neto (2009, p. 56, my translation) reflects on this period:

Legally, actors were first recognized in a statute of 1572, which stated that all actors must obtain a license from either a nobleman or two justices of the peace. In 1574, however, a law granted the Master of Revels, who was a court official, the right to examine all plays and grant licenses to companies, which placed control of English theater in the hands of a central government.¹

It can therefore be observed that during this period there was a recognition, albeit limited, of the acting profession and, consequently, of theater. The queen played an important role in the development of theater, since without her approval it would have remained the preserve of idle people. Amidst the disapproval of some who considered that theater contributed nothing to society, theaters and companies flourished. Among them, the Admiral's Men and the company that Shakespeare was a part of, Chamberlain's Men, stood out.

Shakespeare's company initially performed at the Curtain Theater, but when it was demolished, they began performing at "The Globe," which had a distinctive 20-sided polygon-

¹Legalmente, o ator foi reconhecido pela primeira vez num estatuto de 1572, que afirmava que todos os atores deviam obter licença ou de um nobre ou de dois juizes de paz. Em 1574, porém, uma lei assegurava ao Master of Revels [Mestre das 'diversões'], que era um funcionário da corte, o direito de examinar todas as peças e de conferir a licença às companhias, o que passava o controle do teatro inglês às mãos de um governo central".

shaped open-air architecture that provided ample viewing for spectators. In 1613, the theater burned down during a performance of Henry VIII, but it was rebuilt in 1614 and closed in 1642. However, in 1997, the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre was built 200 meters from the original site.

At The Globe, the English people can experience all the undeniable genius of Shakespeare, yet little is known about his life. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon on April 23, 1564. He must have attended good schools, given his knowledge of Latin and Greek. He married Anne Hathaway when he was 26 and she was 16. They had a daughter named Susanna and twins Hamnet and Judith. By 1592, he had moved to London and become a prominent actor and playwright. He also wrote poetry, inspired by the Greek myths that influenced the poetry of the time, including "Venus and Adonis." He became famous for his sonnets, published in 1609. His work as a poet includes 154 published poems on various subjects, such as love, beauty, and politics, among others. Regarding the themes of Shakespeare's sonnets, there are studies that point to the possibility of presenting a little of the poet's biography. In this regard, Franca Neto (2009, p. 71, my translation) comments that:

Generally speaking, if Shakespeare's sonnets develop the conventions of gender with unprecedented success, they are also expressions of particular concerns of the poet, especially concerning his relationship, whether real or imaginary as a young and pretty noble, and with a 'Dark Lady famous or even infamous.'²

It can therefore be observed that Shakespeare's life was always shrouded in mystery, and it is not possible to confirm the presence of such people in his life. It would not be appropriate to discuss this situation here, since this work does not focus on the analysis of Shakespeare as a poet.

2 Shakespeare as a playwright

The first period of Shakespeare's production as a playwright was marked for his historical plays, and it can be said that he was strongly influenced by the turbulent period in England. Therefore, he composed Henry the sixth, parts I, II, and III, as well the sequence in Richard III. The use of historical names itself reveals that Shakespeare is concerned to mark his position in face of historic facts. As a result:

These initial plays compose the first historical cycle of Shakespeare. The plays which succeed like Richard II, Henry IV in two parts, and Henry V, all written in 1599, represent and advance because they reveal Shakespeare's capacity of transcending the apparent them of the play, in order to suggest a greater vision of life. These eight plays cover a period of almost a century, and Shakespeare used the famous history of the Lantagenetas [...] in their struggle for the crown, to show the transmission of the evil to one generation to another, offering then not only a chronicle of the medieval dynasty but contributing with the general debate about the best form of government in the renascence (Franca Neto, 2009, p. 73, my translation)³.

² "De um modo geral, se os sonetos de Shakespeare desenvolvem as convenções do gênero com um êxito sem precedentes, eles também são expressões de preocupações particulares do poeta, concernentes, sobretudo, a seu relacionamento, quer real quer imaginário com um nobre jovem e belo, e com uma 'Dark Lady' [Dama Morena] famosa ou mesmo infame."

³ "Essas peças iniciais compõem o primeiro ciclo histórico de Shakespeare. Peças que se sucedem, como *Richard II*, *Henry IV*, em duas partes, e *Henry V*, todas escritas em 1599, constituem um avanço, pois revelam a capacidade que Shakespeare tem de transcender o tema aparente da peça, a fim de sugerir uma visão de mundo maior. Essas oito peças cobrem o período de quase um século, e Shakespeare se valeu de famosas histórias dos reis lantagenetas – sobrenome de um

According to the excerpt, the historical plays are the result of Shakespeare's necessity to show the world and the tension of his time. Nevertheless, Franca Neto (2009, p. 66) still says that Shakespeare gives us not only his personal vision of life but also "a variety of visions of the world, sometimes mutually contradictory and excluding, changing from a play to another."

The famous playwright also presented us with funny comedies like "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in which the playwright let himself go through daydreaming rounded by mythological creatures. There is also "The Taming of the Shrew," "The Comedy of Errors," and "Much Ado About Nothing," among others. Franca Neto (2009, p. 74) points out as one of the most important characteristics of Shakespeare's comedies is the fact that "in many of them the comic action passes through the shadow of any tragic thing, or it hangs in the air of a kind uncertain, especially when it is about love. Besides certain suggestion of the transitory character of the human happiness."

All things considered, it seems reasonable to say that Shakespeare's comedies are outstanding, but in this article, they were only mentioned since the discussions proposed here try to highlight the tragedies, which are considered by many authors and researchers the peak of all Shakespeare's work. The tragedies show the intimacy of human beings, emphasizing a hero which evolved in plots that lead to death. The tragedies show us how deeply Shakespeare understood human nature and it also reveals his genius in elaborating scripts involving both human and supernatural actions. In this phase of his production, we found classics like "Hamlet," "Prince of Denmark," "Romeo and Juliet," "King Lear," "Macbeth" and, the play that will be analyzed in this article: Othello, the Moor of Venice.

3 Summary of the play Othello, the Moor of Venice

Othello is a tragedy that had been probably written in 1603 and it is based on the story "A Moorish Captain," by Cinthio, a disciple of Boccaccio's. The story revolves around the characters Othello, an honorable Moor general who won important battles and became a kind of hero, even though he was a humble black man; Iago, a soldier who has fought with Othello and, became Othello's trusted but unfaithful advisor; Desdemona, his sweet and innocent wife, and Cassio, a tenant who was Othello's trusted man. The plot starts when Iago plans revenge against Othello because he judges himself wronged by the Moorish captain that promoted Cassio to tenant instead of him. Iago considered Othello's attitude a dishonor because he has fought with Othello for several years more than Cassio, so he deserved being a tenant, besides it was what the hierarch demanded.

In this way, Iago convinces Roderigo, a Venetian knight who loved Desdemona, to tell Brabantio (an honor senator) his daughter Desdemona married secretly Othello. However, his plan goes wrong because the senator instead of condemning the Moor to death permit the marriage. That night Othello receives the order to go to Cyprus with his army and, Desdemona goes with him. The couple goes in separate boats and because of a storm, Desdemona arrives in Cyprus before Othello.

conjunto de monarcas britânicos – em sua luta pela coroa, a fim de mostrar a transmissão do mal de uma geração à outra, oferecendo, assim, não só uma crônica da dinastia medieval, mas contribuindo com o debate comum na Renascença acerca da melhor forma de governo."

In Cyprus, Iago plans to use his knowledge about human nature, and he decided to play with Othello's jealousy to destroy his enemy.

Cassio was in addition to Othello's man trust, a confidant in his relationship with Desdemona. Othello's lieutenant was an eloquent and handsome man with some qualities that attract women easily. Iago knew all Cassio's virtues and believed the destruction of this trustful relationship would be the first step in his plan. Iago still knew all the weakness and immaturity of Cassio and one night he leads him to get drunk and after he stimulates the lieutenant to take part in a fight. After this, Othello had to dismiss him from his position, and this was the first Iago's victory. Following this, Iago induces Cassio to ask to help from Desdemona and she tries to intervene with Othello in favor of Cassio.

After that Iago feels that it is time to suggest to Othello a possible romantic relationship between Desdemona and Cassio. Iago inflates Othello's jealousy all the time creating some situations and, encouraging Othello to misinterpret some conversation between Cassio and Desdemona. Othello distrusted his wife and friend and to put an end to all his doubts he articulated a plan which included a handkerchief that was especially important for them. This handkerchief was taken by Iago's wife Emilia, and the untruthful man hid it where Cassio would find it. The Moor finds the handkerchief with Cassio and Iago articulates a conversation in which Cassio talks about his lover Bianca, but Othello thought he was talking about Desdemona. Tormented by his jealousy, Othello kills his wife, and after this Emilia reveals all Iago's plan and she tells Desdemona was never an unfaithful woman. Iago kills his wife, but he is arrested by Othello. The Moor, realizing his terrible mistake, stabs himself and dies on the body of his beloved.

4 The themes in Othello, the Moor of Venice

The tragedy Othello impresses the spectator because it essentially works with the human condition, and it leads the antagonist – Iago – to emerge as the personification of evil. Nevertheless, this evil tries to justify itself in the injustice that it would have suffered. Thus, the preference that Othello shows for Cassio results in all Iago's revenge actions. It is possible to observe this in the passage that Iago talks to Roderigo, persuading him to see Othello as a selfish and unfair man, as it follows:

Despise me, if I do not. Three great ones of the city,
 In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,
 Off-capp'd to him: and, by the faith of man,
 I know my price, I am worth no worse a place –
 But he; as loving his own pride and purposes,
 Evades them, with a bombast circumstance
 Horribly stuff'd with epithets of war;
 And, in conclusion,
 Nonsuits my mediators; for, 'Certes,' says he,
 'I have already chose my officer.'
 And what was he? Forsooth, a great arithmetician,
 One Michael Cassio, a Florentine,
 [...]
 That never set a squadron in the field,

Nor the division of a battle
[...]
[...] But he, sir, had the election:
And I, of whom his eyes had seen the proof
At Rhodes, at Cyprus and on other grounds
Christian and heathen, must be be-lee'd and calm'd
By debtor and creditor: this counter-caster,
He, in good time, must his lieutenant be,
And I—God bless the mark!—his Moorship's ancient

In the cited excerpt, Iago tries to justify his actions, placing Othello as the greatest responsibility for all the things that would come. It is tempting to exempt his own attitudes because he considers himself as a person condemned unjustly and hunger for justice. However, Polidório (2011, p. 482) states that Iago acts coldly because the only thing that matters is his own good. He builds a world of lies and he first believes in his lies and, after he has the power to convince the other characters.

For some authors, Iago is simply a bad person who causes a terrible tragedy for a clumsy reason. On the other hand, there are other studios who consider Iago as a "Prince of evil." Dezan (2001, p. 53) highlights that Iago, seems to direct himself as an actor and he defines himself as a fake under covered by a mask of dishonesty. It is also important to point out the power of Iago's speech because it is because of it that he can manipulate the characters and even the audience with whom he talks all the time. About Iago's discourse Dezan (2001, p. 53, my translation) analyzes that:

In his speech, Iago uses the art of pretending in alleged defense of honor, good manners, and morals in order to disqualify the loving couple. He tries to remove all the feelings and spirituality from his opponents, reducing them to complete animalism. By attacking an alleged libidinous, and immoral act, Iago believes that he will be able to unmake the virtuous image [the other characters] have in society. In this way, he adopts the strategy of evil and acts according to what befits and pleases.⁴

It can be mentioned, however, that Iago's speech needs susceptible interlocutors to his abilities to convince and conceal. That is why Cassio is one of these people, and he becomes the key to all Iago's plans. Cassio is a young white man, which goes exactly in the opposite direction to Othello who is no longer so young and he is a black man. Cassio's characteristics put him closer to Desdemona, and it is perceived by Iago. Thus, Iago, as an expert observer of human nature, sees the possibility of using Cassio's immaturity in his favor. So, he observes Cassio as an interlocutor easy to be manipulated, which really occurs. Iago plays with the feeling of inferiority that marks Othello in relation to Cassio, and he provokes Othello's jealousy. About this, Polidório (2012, p. 228, my translation) says:

Consequently, the fact of Desdemona and Cassio being white and, Othello a black man appears as an

⁴ Em seu discurso Iago emprega a arte do fingimento numa pretensa defesa da honra, dos bons costumes, da moral, para desqualificar o casal amoroso. Ele procura retirar todo sentimento e toda espiritualidade dos adversários, reduzindo-os a uma completa animalidade. Ao atacar um suposto ato libidinoso e imoral, Iago acredita que conseguirá aniquilar a imagem de virtuosos que ambos possuem na sociedade. Nesse sentido, ele adota a estratégia do mau que age de acordo com aquilo que lhe convém e que lhe agrada.

important element for the uncontrolled jealousy caused by the feelings of inferiority and, insecurity. Jealousy is directly related to the inferiority complex. We feel jealous of those who feel superior to us. That is what happens to Othello. Because of this Iago observes very well all the characteristics of Cassio, and say he was molded to make women unfaithful.⁵

The whole plot is developed from jealousy, and to this feeling, another one is added: inferiority. What makes a person feels jealous of another is the fact that this person thinks there is a level of inequality between them. Here is an important mark in Shakespeare: the recognition of human nature in the construction of these characters. About the psychological nature of Shakespeare's characters, Santos (2005, p. 65) says that "the Shakespearean character is frequently someone different in the struggle for affirmation in the world, which is related to individualism and psychological naturalism." This is perceived in all the plays focused on in this paper.

Othello is essentially a man who seeks the respect of society through his conquests as a warrior. Apparently, he tries to transfigure strength that indeed he does not have since he shows weakness with all his doubts, including about he has been truly loved by Desdemona. Santos (2005, p 66, my translation) argues that although Othello initially appears strong, his weakness is revealed by how easily Iago manipulates him. In the cited author's words:

Othello met conditions of diverse order which became him vulnerable to jealousy: first, for Shakespeare and for the spirit of time the play was written, the race. It was a black man among the whites. This difference is frequently emphasized in the play, sometimes through Othello's feeling of inferiority in relation to the others, sometimes through the rest of the characters who do not understand the marriage of Desdemona with Othello. Second, Othello is a man of advanced age (according to the standard of Shakespeare's time).⁶

Another key to remember is that the racial prejudice against Othello is present in the entire work. It can be seen in characters' speeches, like When Iago, hidden in the darkness of night, tries to awaken Brabantio so that Roderigo tell him about the relationship between Othello and Desdemona (Act I, scene I):

Zounds, sir, y're robb'd; for shame, put on your gown;
Even now, very now, an old black ram
Is rugging your white ewe. Arise, arise
Awake the snorting citizens with the bell,
Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you:
Arise, I say

It can be said Iago refers to Othello as an "old black ram" contrasting with the white color of

⁵ Consequentemente, o fato de Desdemona e Cássio serem brancos e Otelo negro aparece como um elemento importante para que o sentimento de inferioridade e insegurança gerem o ciúme descontrolado. O ciúme tem relação direta com o complexo de inferioridade. Sentimos ciúmes de quem parece ser superior a nós. É o que acontece com Otelo. É por isso que Iago observa muito bem as características de Cássio e diz que ele foi moldado para fazer as mulheres infiéis.

⁶ Otelo reunia condições de diversa ordem que o tornavam vulnerável ao ciúme: em primeiro lugar, para Shakespeare e para o espírito da época em que a peça foi escrita, a sua raça. Tratava-se de um negro entre brancos. Esta diferença é frequentemente acentuada durante a peça, por vezes, por si próprio, em termos que invocam uma inferioridade em relação aos demais, outras pelas restantes personagens que referem à dificuldade de entender o seu casamento com Desdemona. Em segundo lugar, Otelo é um homem de idade avançada (para os padrões da época).

Desdemona, whom he calls as “white ewe,” so his discourse clearly intends to expose to Brabantio how offensive and unworthy it would be to have a black man married with his daughter. On the other hand, it can be said the colors black and white represent respectively, goodness (white) against evil (black). The evil means the fear of different, represented in the play by the Moor who dares to take part in that society.

Moreover, in that London of Shakespeare, a Moor was always a black figure, but it is known that Moor people were the Muslims from the North of Africa, which means they are not necessarily black. However, at that time the Moors were seen as people with no culture, traditions, different religions, and that is why they were interesting figures for Theater. There are many works about the real color of Othello, but the fact is that Shakespeare was conscious of the real condition of a Moor as a foreigner with a different origin and culture. One of the compelling arguments is that:

There are no doubts Shakespeare knew that not all Moors would be black. In *Titus Andronicus*, the Moor Aaron is described as a “coal-black Moor” with “Fleece and Woolly hair” and a newborn son who is affectively seen by him as a “Thick Lipp slave.” With these references in mind, it is possible to say that Shakespeare would imagine the Moor Aaron as a black person. Nevertheless, when the scenic indicators that announced in “*The Merchant of Venice*” the entrance of the Prince of Morocco as a fawn Moor all dressed in white, there is the definitive proof Shakespeare really knew about the nuances of the Moor’s people colors, that means those ones from the North of Africa would be fawn, instead of black (Miranda, 2009, p. 15, my translation).⁷

In the analyzed play, however, many excerpts lead to consider the black skin of Othello, including his own speech, refers to himself as a black man when he was talking about Desdemona’s betrayal: “Her name, that was a fresh Dian’s visage, is now black as my own face.” Despite the emphasis on color, this is not the only thing that Othello is different from. Actually, he was a foreigner, and independently of his color, he represented the difference. This is pointed out by Miranda (2009, p.16, my translation):

In another excerpt of the play, using petty and selfish strategies, Iago tries to convince Roderigo that his chances to attract Desdemona’s love were still good. Then he makes an indirect reference to Othello’s origin, and consequently, to the color of his skin: *if sanctimony and a frail vow betwixt and erring barbarian and a supersubtle Venetian be not too hard for may wits and all the tribe of hell, thou shalt enjoy her.* (I, iii).⁸

⁷ Não restam dúvidas de que Shakespeare tinha conhecimento de que nem todos os Mouros deveriam ser negros. Em *Titus Andronicus*, o Mouro Aaron é descrito como um Mouro negro retinto (coal-black Moor) que tem um cabelo lanoso e encaracolado (fleece and woolly hair) e um filho recém-nascido que é visto, carinhosamente, por ele como sendo um escravo beicudo (thick lippDd slave). Tendo-se essas referências em mãos, é possível afirmar que Shakespeare tenha imaginado o Mouro Aaron como uma pessoa negra. Entretanto, quando as indicações cênicas que anunciam, em *O mercador de Veneza*, a entrada do príncipe de Marrocos, como a um Mouro fulvo, vestido todo de branco (II, i), tem-se a prova definitiva de que Shakespeare, realmente, sabia que existem nuances na cor da pele entre os Mouros, ou seja, que aqueles oriundos do Norte da África poderiam ser fulvos, em vez de negros.

⁸ Em outro trecho da peça, fazendo uso de estratégias mesquinhas e egoístas, Iago, ao tentar convencer Rodrigo de que suas chances para conquistar o amor de Desdemona continuavam boas, faz novamente uma referência indireta à procedência de Otelo e, consequentemente, à cor de sua pele: Se uma cerimônia e um juramento fraco entre um bárbaro errante (*an erring barbarian*) e uma veneziana super-requintada não forem demais para a minha esperteza unida a todas as tribos do inferno, há de gozá-la.

In this way, with all the discussion about Othello's color, it is important to say there is in all the play prejudice against the other, the different one. It means that the prejudice is against all who do not follow the established patterns in society, and Othello is fitted in it because he was a Moor with different customs who was accepted in the court due to his well-succeeded battles. On the other hand, it is not granted him the right to marry a woman like Desdemona. This prejudice is observed in Brabantio's speech when he affirms Othello could only conquer his daughter by using witchcraft.

"O thou foul thief, where hast thou stow'd my daughter?
 Damn'd as thou art, thou hast enchanted her;
 For I'll refer me to all things of sense,
 If she in chains of magic were not bound [...]"

Nevertheless, Shakespeare composes Othello with valuable qualities, perhaps to contrast with the bad impression of a Moor at that time. About this Miranda has the following (2009, p.18, my translation):

In any other tragedy, Shakespeare was so careful like he was in Othello when he characterizes the protagonist as a noble and respected person. Iago's dishonesty and his ability to intrigue, as well the intention of the military in depicting Othello so unfavorable as he could, enhance much more the highest category of Othello.⁹

Shakespeare provided noble characters to Othello, but contradictorily he also gave him feelings of inferiority. The fact is that Othello was an outsider who was intelligent and confident in military issues, but totally insecure socially speaking. His fears and prejudices were the armies Iago wanted to draw up his plan of revenge. It is possible to say that the center of the play is human nature, and its power to generate unthinking and tragical actions.

Moreover, the knowledge that man has about his own nature is still an uncertain field. Significantly, until now the plots in cinematography and television productions, for instance, are full of actions resulting from human passions. In these productions, like in Shakespeare's tragedies, there is always an antagonist who envies and covet something from the protagonist because he considers he deserves more than the protagonist. All things considered, it seems reasonable to say that Shakespeare was not only a great playwright but also a man conscious of the fragility of man.

Conclusion

Shakespeare's Othello masterfully explores the duality of human nature, from Desdemona's innocence to Iago's calculated villainy and Othello's fragile, opaque character. The play reveals the thin line between good and evil, as when Othello murders his wife or Cassio, once loyal, questions his general's worth. These events unfold because Iago awakens a latent element of human essence evil.

This perspective aligns with Machiavelli's view that human nature is essentially bad: although

⁹ Em nenhuma outra tragédia Shakespeare foi tão cuidadoso, como em Otelo, ao caracterizar o protagonista como uma pessoa nobre e respeitada. A desonestidade e a capacidade de intriga de Iago, como também o propósito do alferes em retratar Otelo da forma mais desfavorável possível, têm o poder de ressaltar, ainda mais, a alta categoria de Otelo..."

people aim to act rightly, they are often driven by a passion for wrongdoing. As Freitas Neto (1996, p. 100, my translation) notes, “what frequently shocks when reading Machiavelli is the cruelty with which he faces the facts and describes them,” concluding that man “would like to act in accordance with good, but invariably, he is more prone to evil.”

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli examined how individuals are shaped – and corrupted– by their environment. This is reflected in *Othello*, where characters are led not by truth but by what they believe they see. *Othello* imagines his wife’s betrayal; others, influenced by Iago’s discourse, form their own distorted realities.

Both Machiavelli and Shakespeare investigate the inner conflicts that define human behavior. As Freitas Neto (1996, p. 104) observes, “men are frightened by their own actions, but also recognize themselves in each perversity narrated.” For both thinkers, individuals are shaped by internal tensions in the search for self-understanding. Shakespeare’s enduring relevance lies in his ability to create complex characters that mirror our own nature. In *Othello*, this results in a vivid portrayal of the intricate, often contradictory impulses that define humanity.

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