

THE TRAGEDY OF LOVING SOMEONE IN THE SHAKESPEAREAN WORLD

William Shakespeare, mastercraftsman of playwriting, possesses a great knowledge of love and tragedy spun forth from love. This knowledge is evident in the plays that he writes. In one form or another, Shakespeare presents love in many of his plays. In the tragedies Shakespeare writes, love is sometimes the theme that destroys characters, and it is often when the characters bring this destruction upon themselves. Romeo and Juliet, Othello, and Hamlet are classic examples of Shakespeare's destructive form of love and marriage. Although stark contrasts exist between these plays, some striking similarities that shine through.

Common themes bind Romeo and Juliet, Othello, and Hamlet together in classic Shakespearean style. First of all, the six lovers, Gertrude and Claudius; Desdemona and Othello; and Romeo and Juliet, all die by direct or indirect result of their love affairs. Each of these characters start out thinking that nothing will go wrong with their relationships. They also commonly remain oblivious to trouble until it is too late. Another common element is that there are certain characters who are out to ruin these marriages. The king of Denmark, Hamlet's father,

is the murder victim of Hamlet's Uncle Claudius. Claudius marries Hamlet's mother Gertrude, and he becomes king. Hamlet, then, destroys that relationship by murdering Claudius, while Gertrude kills herself with poison. Feeling secure, Hamlet says to Claudius, "...Thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane, drink off this potion. Is thy union here? Follow my mother." (Act V Scene 2) In Othello, Iago conspires against Othello, resulting in the death of Desdemona and Othello. Romeo and Juliet have whole families who do not want them in a relationship.

In all three plays, instigators make themselves partly responsible for ending relationships and destroying lives. The instigators from Othello and Hamlet both have a common goal: to seek vengeance by ruining marriages. Hamlet's father, now a ghost, provokes Hamlet into avenging his death by killing his murderer, Claudius. The motive of vengeance also destroys Othello and Desdemona's marriage in Othello, because Iago feels unappreciated by Othello. "Tis the curse of service: preferment goes by letter and affection, and not by old gradation..." (Act I Scene 1) Othello does not honor Iago with promotion, and instead, he promotes Cassio, who has less seniority than Iago. Iago falsely informs Othello that Cassio and Desdemona are having an affair; thus resulting in Othello murdering Desdemona. The instigator in Romeo and Juliet, Tybalt, contrasts the previous instigators. Tybalt only provokes Romeo into dueling with and him, and Romeo kills Tybalt. Tybalt is a Capulet, part of Romeo's rival family. After Romeo murders Tybalt, the Capulets want Romeo dead, and this demand is one of the events that eventually leads to the deaths of Romeo and Juliet.

The three marriages all contain contrasting flaws. In Hamlet, Gertrude and Claudius actually exhibit two flaws: incest and ambition. The only reason Claudius marries Gertrude is to become king of Denmark, and it eventually leads to his death. A very horrendous flaw is the

incest that exists between Gertrude and Claudius. Claudius is Gertrude's brother-in-law, which is no big secret, but she marries Claudius anyway. In Othello, the corrupting flaw between Othello and Desdemona is jealousy, which is not totally Othello or Desdemona's fault. Iago, upset by being unappreciated by Othello, makes Othello falsely jealous of an affair between Cassio and Desdemona. This jealousy eventually leads to death of both Othello and Desdemona. Finally, a different flaw exist between Romeo and Juliet, and it is not their fault at all. Their families are caught in a long-standing feud between each other that is nearly impossible to stop. Romeo and Juliet must hide their marriage, and eventually all of the secrecy leads to both of their deaths. Romeo thinks Juliet is dead, and he says, "Here's to my love. (Drinking)...Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die." (Act V Scene 5) Romeo drinks poison and dies.

Although great differences exist between Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, and Othello, some similarities show through. Shakespeare's own experiences with the loves of his life contribute to the corruptness of the relationships in his plays. These experiences truly display the wickedness with which Shakespeare writes. Shakespeare probably feels like Othello at times, and he wants to strangle people. Instead of becoming a murderer, Shakespeare takes his frustration out within his plays.