

DOVER · THRIFT · EDITIONS

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
OTHELLO



Desdemona's
Responsibility of pain
in Shakespeare's
Othello

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Thesis

In Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello* Desdemona is made to hold the responsibility of pain to show the resilience and strength of women and through her tragic demise as an innocent woman, ultimately critiques the treatment of women at the time





Elizabethan Society

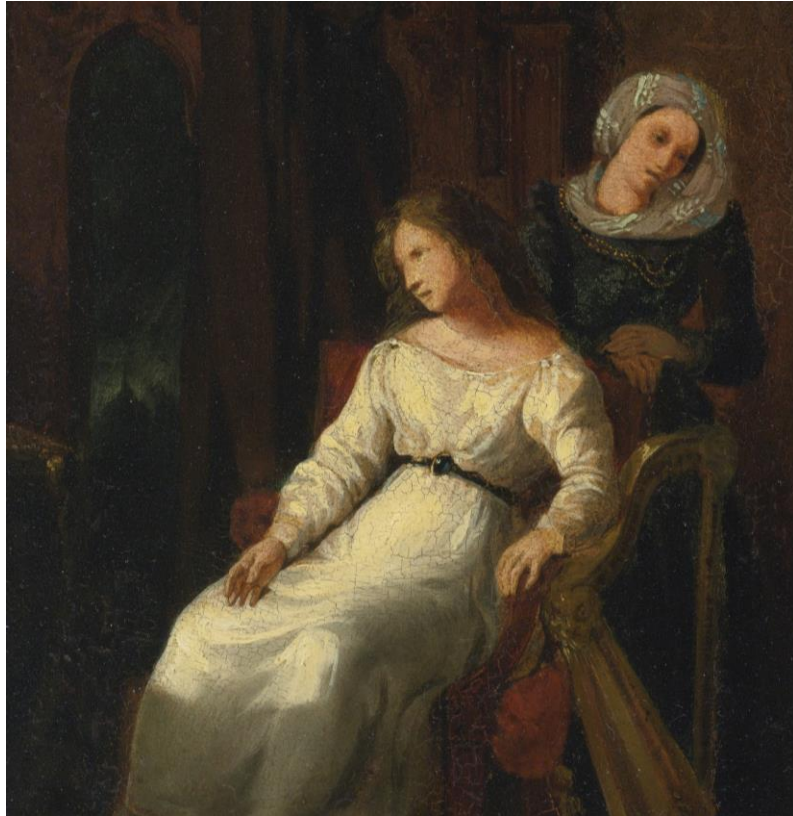
- Queen Elizabeth sat unmarried on the throne in a time when women were dominated by men
- Despite this Elizabethan values stayed the same
- Women were considered the weaker sex “not just in terms of physical strength, but emotionally too” (elizabethi.org)
- “The Elizabethan era... molded women into the form of the dutiful wife” (phillyshakespeare.org)

Desdemona's Responsibility

- Desdemona takes on the responsibility for pain as she is treated and charged with cheating on Othello
- She receives his anger and cruelty from this belief
- “Desdemona's suffering is not proportional to her faults, she is overpowered by forces that are beyond her control, and she is sacrificed for the benefit of others” (Mehta).
- The pain and suffering that Othello feels is then transferred to Desdemona despite her innocence



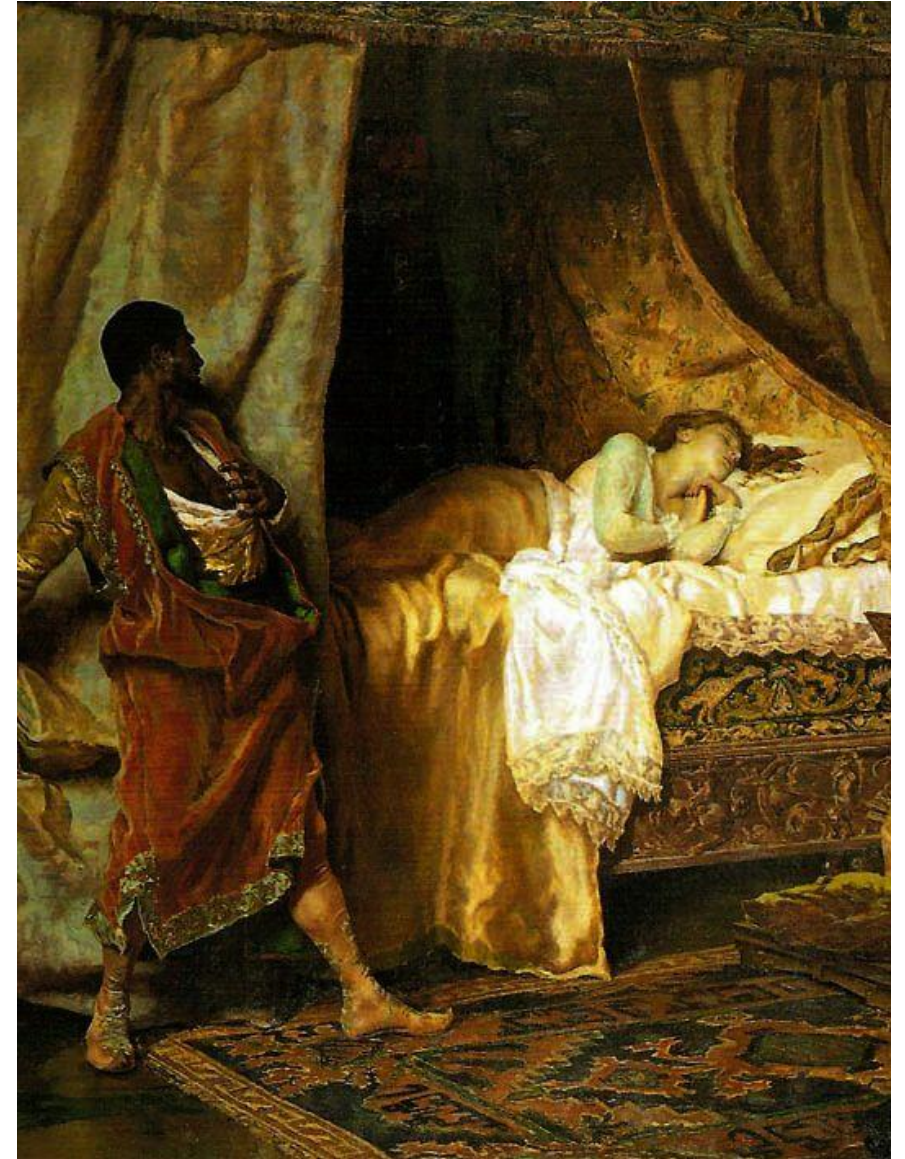
Showing the Strength in Desdemona



- Desdemona remains the “perfect” wife to Othello despite his terrible treatment
- “His unkindness may defeat my life/ But never taint my love” (4.2)
- It’s because she takes the responsibility for pain, we see her true strength

Critiquing the treatment of Women

- No matter what Desdemona does it's never enough for Othello as he murders her
- "Therefore, confess thee freely of thy sin/ For to deny each article with oath/ Cannot remove nor choke the strong conception/ That I do groan withal" (5.2.65).
- "Greene points out that Iago's manipulation of Othello - the cause of the tragedy - occurs only because of 'the views of women the moor already possessed'...Othello all-too-easily accepts a stereotypical view of his wife based on the authority of a male voice. He loses sight of the real Desdemona, allowing every action of hers, once his suspicion is stimulated, to reaffirm this stereotypical conception of her" (Baker).
- Despite her absolute devotion Othello cannot be convinced of her purity simply for the fact that she is a woman



Significance

- Desdemona is one of Shakespeare's most critiqued portrayal of female characters
- It reexamines who Desdemona is, her strength, and says despite the pain and suffering she endures, she remains strong
- Through Desdemona's continuation of pain, even when she is not guilty, strongly suggests her death critiques the treatment of women

Works Cited

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Baker, Brodie. “Shakespeare’s Women.” *The London School of Journalism*. 1991, [Shakespeare: Shakespeare's Women | London School of Journalism \(lsj.org\)](#).

Images Cited

Slide 1: [Othello: William Shakespeare: 9780486290973 - Christianbook.com](#)

Slide 2: [Desdemona Deserves to Die - Katherine Dolan Writes](#)

Slide 3: [tutor2u | Elizabethan Society](#)

Slide 4: [Othello, From The Exhibition Of The British Institution 1854 Drawing by Selous, Henry Courtney \(1811-90\), English \(pixels.com\)](#)

Slide 5: [File:Delacroix - DESDEMONA AND EMILIA.jpg - Wikimedia Commons](#)

Slide 6: ['Othello' Act 5, Scene 2 - Summary \(thoughtco.com\)](#)