
LOVE AND APPEARANCE VERSUS REALITY IN SHAKESPEARE'S OTHELLO AND KING LEAR

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Abstract: *Don't judge a book by its cover* is an idiom meaning that people should not judge the worth or value of something or somebody by its external appearance. People are used to judge other people by their physical appearance, however there are lots of people who are overestimated (Iago) and sometimes underestimated (Cordelia). William Shakespeare's plays, especially *Othello* and *King Lear*, are the best examples how people can hide the reality and confuse others with their appearance. Love plays a huge role in those conclusions since people mostly make mistakes when they love or believe someone the most. This research deals with the theme of love and appearance versus reality in Shakespeare's *Othello* and *King Lear*. Certainly, Shakespeare wrote about love in other plays too, such as in *Hamlet*, the love is indicated in a strong way that people lead to commit suicide or go mad for it or as in *Romeo and Juliet* where they both die. But the reason why we chose these themes in these two plays is because they differ from the other plays and there are some interesting things that draw our attention. The purpose of this research is to show how Shakespeare represents love and the act of trying to be someone they are not. In *Othello*, women appear more naïve and men significantly appearing more intelligent, sometimes because of their position in the society, for instance Iago who is known for his cleverness in treachery and villainy. If in *Hamlet* the question is "To be or not to be", in *Othello*, the real question is "To believe or not to believe" or obviously "To kill or not to kill." All the same, in *King Lear*, the main villains of the play are King Lear's two older daughters Goneril and Regan, and Gloucester's illegitimate son Edmund. They, for the sake of heritage and ambition for wealth dare to betray their "beloved" fathers. That's why power easily corrupts them morally, leading them to their own destruction. However, King Lear's youngest daughter, Cordelia goes against the flow when she opposes to flatter her father with words since she believes that the love she has for her father cannot be described with words. Later in the play we see that she is ready to sacrifice her life for her father. That is why we say that Cordelia is more than just a good daughter. Our aim is to show Shakespeare's view of the good and the bad through his protagonists and antagonists in both plays. In addition, all of this and the conclusions will be clear and helpful for all those reading this research paper.

Keywords: Appearance, reality, intelligence, villains, betrayal, ambition, etc.

People say that you cannot bring back the dead even if he turns out to be a great character but we believe that this is not true because Shakespeare is not one of them. He is irreplaceable and we also know that every time we want to take an example of a piece of work we call upon his name. Why? Well, this is because when you take his books at the moment you begin to read the lines you can immediately feel the classical air in your lungs, and you can feel his presence inside you. At this moment you can just close your eyes and imagine as if his spirit walks around you and helps you to understand his ideas and thoughts. Why not? We believe it can happen because even if you remember someone just for a second it means that he lives inside of you, somewhere deep in your heart. His presence will always be with us and this is the significant reason why we decided to study some of his masterpieces. We want to bring him and his memories back in this modern life despite the fact that some of his topics are already present nowadays as if he knew that they will actually be.

Everyone has a favorite masterpiece from Shakespeare or according to them they have specific reasons why they might like *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, etc. But our favorite masterpieces from Shakespeare are *Othello* and *King Lear*. Starting from *Othello* we see that Shakespeare makes a great liaison of love, hate, jealousy, and betrayal. The themes, characters, and attitudes of the work are different in Shakespeare's plays being a more involved with the study of human psychology. Desdemona falls in love with Othello not caring about his race, but it's his honesty and bravery.

On the other hand, the characters of *King Lear* are as much ambitious as Iago. In this play, Shakespeare tells us that for the sake of heritage and wealth people betray their parents. For the sake of love, their jealousy leads them to be killers as in this case we have Goneril killing her sister Regan for loving Edmund. According to the several plays, Shakespeare makes an incredible affiliation between people that sometimes is hard to understand or usually ask you how he came up with that. When we read *Othello* the first thing drawing my attention was Othello himself not

because of his bravery but because he was a Moor and he is the only character that is remarkable from the others because of his looks and that is what makes him special.

By appearance versus reality, Shakespeare refers to the characters real personality who they really are. In most of Shakespeare plays appearance versus reality is common because of characters in order to reach something they want they have to be someone they are not. The ambition is beyond the limits that attract them. They seek power because they want to have everything that they can for themselves.

Othello is a tragedy that views the darker aspects of human existence and focuses us as an audience to contemplate what is to be a human. In this play, Shakespeare privileges and challenges the Elizabethan attitudes and values towards the prejudices of race and gender also presenting his contextual theme chaos versus order. *Othello* is a story of a black and white, and Shakespeare represents the battle as racial on an interesting level, calling the battle good versus evil which is always seen in black versus white. It is the character of Othello that Shakespeare privileges and challenges the idea of the prejudice of racism.

It can also be said that in the Elizabethan era there would be no one who would look favorably on a “black” man yet. Indeed, Shakespeare has placed him in one of the highest positions as the general of the Venetian army in Cyprus. Othello is considered a man of nobility, confidence, and he is inferior because of his color as can be seen through Iago who refers to him as “The Moor”. At that time even the Queen expressed her discontent of the people that were “black” as we know that black moors that are crept into the realm. But with Othello’s character, Shakespeare wants to change the stereotypical ideology of “The Moor” by making him an Elizabethan hero. As the play begins, Othello shows himself as a true hero.¹⁸

King Lear was written when the monarchy was in the center of the importance in that period, and the role of the monarch was under constant scrutiny and subject to the endless theorization. As the title refers, *King Lear* is a play about kingship and he theorized the political role of the monarch as an absolute ruler with divine right. Queen Elizabeth to justify her rule she marked the reign with continued efforts – both as a result of gender and of her uneasy familial claim to the throne – including the theory of the king’s two bodies, whereby her person should be divided between body natural and the body politic. These two theories were not just abstraction but had so much effect on life in Shakespeare’s England. The spiritual and politic division of such an event symbolizes the degree to which the monarch’s personal desires and actions could affect the destiny and structure of an entire country. Shakespeare seems to tackle the issue of the patriarchal monarchy in *King Lear*, where the king is figured as head of both his own family and of the state. *King Lear* expresses contemporary concerns about the power of early modern kings.¹⁹

The tragedy of *Othello* is said to be one of the most aesthetic and poetical of Shakespeare’s tragedies. Like the other tragedies, *Othello* is dominated by its protagonist. From the beginning of the play, the Moor commands our interest, as we see Iago referring to Roderigo his hatred for the Moor. As a strong character, Othello is given to loving his own pride and purposes. Roderigo also talks in a mean way about him calling him “the thick lips”, and by this, we can create the image of Othello as sensual, boastful and hateful. As we mentioned above the character of Othello is portrayed by Elizabethan attitude toward Moors. The association between the black color and evil and conversely, that between white and virtue is almost universal and was alive in Shakespearean time. The Queen saw The Moors as evil, black, ugly, cruel, pagan and barely human, and the picture which Iago and Roderigo paint of Othello in the play exactly complies with this stereotype. But when it comes to Othello, we are greatly surprised.

Shakespeare’s skill has allowed him to make Othello as one of the greatest characters by breaking the stereotype that existed during Elizabethan time. Othello’s coming to Venice brings with him different values from those of this purely commercial society; Othello is a nobleman, idealistic and very trusting. He is a type of a gallant soldier, he is virtuous, audacious and totally without guilt. Othello is seen as an outsider in the republic because of his skin, even though he chose to serve Venice. He is more than respected but he still provokes deeper feelings of doubt and insult among his Venetian. Othello thinks that he is lower than his wife because of his race, and his insecurities stir his mind. Unfortunately, Othello’s insecurities make him kill his wife because of the insane jealousy.

Haply, for I am black

And have not those soft part conversation

That chambers have...Act III, scene III²⁰

Iago’s character is central as well, and understanding him is the key to understanding Shakespeare’s entire play *Othello*. Iago is consumed fully of jealousy and hatred. He is jealous because Cassio took the place as a lieutenant, he is jealous of Othello believing that Othello had an affair with his wife Emilia, and jealous of Othello’s position.

¹⁸ <https://freebooksummary.com/elizabethan-era-and-othello-70890>

¹⁹ The Norton Shakespeare, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katherine & Eisman Maus

²⁰ <https://www.thoughtco.com/othello-character-analysis-2984779>

As Othello is considered to be an outsider, Iago is the typical insider, a native of the city, and very trusted by everyone. Iago seems to be the best person that tries to help Othello but in fact, he is more of an outsider than Othello himself. According to us, Iago is one of Shakespeare's greatest villains. Critics have always discussed Iago's character because there is not a final agreement concerning his motivation. Iago is very eager, and his ambition leads him to make different plans destroying everyone starting from Othello. He has the ability to make people believe his charm and loyalty, but the audience is well informed about his intentions. He acts as an advocate for Othello by showing that he is noble but comes across more villainous and well prepared to ruin Othello's life. Iago shows the evil soul and represents cruelty for his own sake.

*The Moor, howbeit that I endure him not,
Is of a constant, loving, noble nature.
And I dare think he'll prove to Desdemona
A most dear husband (Act II, Scene I)²¹*

The character of Desdemona is portrayed by her spirit and intelligence, she is the most direct and honest person in the play. Her speeches are short but have a lot of meaning. Desdemona was faithful to Othello, she was very kind and all she did was being honest and nice towards men characters. Actually, Desdemona was naïve too she never understood Iago's true intentions. Although Desdemona may seem powerful and outspoken, she was still a weak character who is easily manipulated in both ways whether it is by her emotions or by Iago. Desdemona was too blind to see the truth and she behaved as Iago wished, she wasn't capable to defend herself in front of her husband's claims and anger at the end of the story. She didn't realize that it is her behavior towards Cassio that makes Othello jealous. On the other hand, Desdemona made a decision that was against her father's will by marrying Othello. She fell in love with the life histories of Othello, not with Othello as a person. She was obsessed by his stories and for what he had been through. She fell in love with young Othello, not with the current one she met. This marked her end because she wasn't mature enough to deal with a strong person like Othello.

*My noble father,
I do perceive here a divided duty.
To you I am bound for life and education.
My life and education both do learn me
How to respect you. You are the lord of duty.
I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my husband.
And so much duty as my mother showed
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor my lord. Act I, scene III²²*

Desdemona's first appearance in the play is all fireworks from her bravery to get in front of her father and defend her marriage. There is no line where she disrespects her father, she told she loved him and was obedient to him, from now on she would be obedient to Othello. By comparing her mother's obedience to her father made it clear that she was not under a black magic charm nor taken by force, but instead, she loved Othello.

Appearance versus reality is a common theme in *Othello* because Shakespeare gave characters two sides of personality. Iago the antagonist of the play is a clear example of the idea that the difference between reputation and honor is the difference between appearances versus reality. Iago embodies the theme of people aren't always what they appear to be as he egregiously misleads Othello as well as other characters into a treacherous world composed of deceiving truths where they find themselves unable to distinguish what seems to be real and what actually is real. As Othello is known best for his jealousy towards Desdemona, Iago is known best for his villainy. He is very manipulative and nobody had the ability to understand that. From the beginning of the play, we see Iago's true intentions when he attempts to convince Roderigo to help him to take revenge on Othello.

*Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago,
In following him, I follow but myself.
Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,
But seeming so, for my peculiar end.
For when my outward action doth demonstrate
The native act and figure of my heart*

²¹Spark Notes Editors. (2002) "Spark Note on Othello." Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/othello/page_84/

²²Spark Notes Editors. (2002) "Spark Note on Othello." Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/othello/page_42/

*In compliment extern, 'tis not long after
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at. I am not what I am.*
Act I, scene I²³

Right away we understand that Iago is not manifesting the true nature of his character because he wants to destroy Othello's life by portraying himself as a good servant. When his master plan is in motion Othello will not suspect anything and instead, will listen to his thoughts and hunches; subsequently, allowing Iago to control his mind and feelings by distorting his perspective. When Iago is alone, he delivers a speech showing his intense hate towards Othello.

*I hate the Moor,
And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets
He's done my office. I know not if 't be true
But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do as if for surety*
Act I, scene III²⁴

He hates him because Othello chose Cassio as a lieutenant and he believes the rumors that Othello has slept with his wife Emilia. Even though he isn't sure about this he still believes and will act as if it is true. He wants to take Roderigo's money as he promised him that if he gives Iago money he will help him woo Desdemona; he lied Roderigo and later convinced Othello that his wife Desdemona had an affair with Cassio. Iago suggests that Othello's weakness is that he doesn't understand that appearance can hide reality. Iago just uses prejudice against Othello when it is helpful to him.

*The Moor is of a free and open nature
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by th' nose
As asses are.*
Act I, scene III²⁵

In Act 2 as Cassio was moved from his position as a lieutenant because he was put into a fight, Iago's plan is well working and he sees this as a good point of destroying Othello even more. His plan now is to convince Cassio to talk with Desdemona to get back in his position. Iago thinks that when Othello will see Desdemona talking to Cassio he would get very jealous and that actually happens.

*And what's he then that says I play the villain?
When this advice is free I give and honest,
Probal to thinking and indeed the course
To win the Moor again? For 'tis most easy
Th' inclining Desdemona to subdue
In any honest suit. She's framed as fruitful
As the free elements. And then for her
To win the Moor, were to renounce his baptism,
All seals and symbols of redeemed sin,
His soul is so enfeathered to her love,
That she may make, unmake, do what she list
Even as her appetite shall play the god
With his weak function. How am I then a villain
To counsel Cassio to this parallel course,
Directly to his good? Divinity of hell!
When devils will the blackest sins put on
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows
As I do now. For whiles this honest fool
Plies Desdemona to repair his fortune
And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor,*

²³Spark Notes Editors. (2002) "Spark Note on Othello." Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/othello/page_6/

²⁴Spark Notes Editors. (2002) "Spark Note on Othello." Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/othello/page_56/

²⁵<https://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/othello/quotes/theme/appearance-vs-reality/>

*I'll pour this pestilence into his ear:
That she repeals him for her body's lust.
And by how much she strives to do him good
She shall undo her credit with the Moor.
So will I turn her virtue into pitch
And out of her own goodness make the net
That shall enmesh them all.*
Act II, scene III²⁶

In this speech we are clearly informed of Iago's villainy; by his logical advice is the right course to win the Moor over, because it would be easy to commit the kindhearted Desdemona to any good cause. How could he be a villain when he is giving such good advice? That's the kind of argument you would expect from the devil. When devils want to do their biggest sin, they put on their most heavenly faces, just as Iago does. And when the fool Desdemona begs him, Iago will poison the Moor's ear against her, hinting that she is only talking to Cassio because of her lust for him, and that is how he will turn her good intentions into a big trap to snag them all.

The climax of Iago's villainy is when he proves Othello the handkerchief he took from Desdemona. We see that he is a master of doing bad deeds that he no longer cares about his wife either. He never does everything alone; he makes other people do everything for him. First he used Roderigo, then he used Cassio and in the end, he used his naïve wife Emilia to steal the handkerchief. Iago's actions are very cowardly by sending Roderigo ahead of him and then attacking Cassio from behind. He reveals the full extent of his treachery, killing the characters with whom he had plotted on stage from the beginning of the play because he has no honor to lose. Iago refers to himself by saying, "*This is the night, That either makes me or fordoes me quite.*" (Act V, scene I)²⁷ At the end of the play, everything is revealed when Emilia shows her independence and loyalty to both Desdemona and the truth, and Othello stabs Iago and he ends up as a spectator to his own misdeeds.

Othello

*I look down towards his feet, but that's a fable.
If that thou be'st a devil, I cannot kill thee.*

Iago

I bleed, sir, but not killed.

Othello

*I am not sorry neither. I'd have thee live,
For in my sense 'tis happiness to die*

Act V, scene II

The story of *King Lear* was generally believed to be based on historical fact because it was a familiar tale in Elizabethan England, having been taken from ancient British history. The play that generated extensive publicity, two daughters Goneril and Regan attempted to have their father insane so they could seize his estate. The younger Cordelia objected. The name and plot of the play might have sparked some interests in resurrecting a familiar plot. However, the causes of *King Lear* surface in several texts which Shakespeare may have turned to other sources as well in exploring the ancient story. Goneril is the eldest and one of Lear's wicked daughters and she is married to the Duke of Albany. She is rewarded with a third of the kingdom to rule over with her husband when Lear asks, "*Which of you shall we say doth love us most?*" (Act I, scene I)²⁸, Goneril makes a flattering speech declaring her love for her father,

*Sir, I do love you more than words can wield the matter,
Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty,
Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare,
No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honor,
As much as child e'er loved or father found—
A love that makes breath poor and speech unable.
Beyond all manner of so much I love you.*

²⁶Spark Notes Editors. (2002) "Spark Note on Othello." Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/othello/page_114/

²⁷Spark Notes Editors. (2002) "Spark Note on Othello." Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/othello/page_268/

²⁸Spark Notes Editors. (2002) "Spark Note on King Lear." Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/lear/page_6/

Act I, scene I²⁹

This increases to half the kingdom as her younger sister is disinherited by Lear. Even though she is married to Duke Albany, she later falls in love with Edmund and together they plot to get rid of him because Albany doesn't support her in the arguments with Lear about how his knights behave in their house. She also kills her sister Regan for wanting Edmund and in the end, she stabs herself.

Lear's middle daughter's name is Regan and she is married to the Duke of Cornwall. In the division of the kingdom, she makes a speech trying to outdo her sister Goneril in expressing her love for her father,

*Sir, I am made of that self mettle as my sister,
And prize me at her worth. In my true heart,
I find she names my very deed of love
Only she comes too short, that I profess
Myself an enemy to all other joys,
Which the most precious square of sense possesses.
And find I am alone felicitate
In your dear highness' love.*

Act I, scene I³⁰

Regan follows Goneril's lead in refusing to accept their father bringing his 50 knights to stay in her home. She supports her sister sending Lear off without shelter in stormy nights. Regan regards Gloucester as a traitor for helping Lear to escape to Dover, and urges on her husband to pluck out Gloucester's eyes, then falls in love with Edmund after Cornwall's death. In the end, she is poisoned by her sister when she threatens to tell Albany the plotting of his death.

Lear's youngest daughter Cordelia is known to be his favorite, and he arranges for her to marry either the Duke of Burgundy or the King of France. She has a pure love and meticulously honorable, even to the point of facing terrible hardship in order to keep her integrity. When called upon to make a public expression of love for her father, Cordelia refuses to answer Lear's demand for a public demonstration and she says "nothing." King Lear is expecting her to speak more opulently, berates her:

Cordelia

Nothing, my lord

Lear

How? Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again

Cordelia

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave

My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty

According to my bond, no more nor less.

Act I, scene I³¹

Lear is angry at her and disinherits her, but the King of France sees virtue and offers to marry her without a dowry. Banished after the division of the kingdom she returns to Britain with a French army to help her father. In the end, Cordelia is imprisoned with her father and pays the ultimate price for her father's moral blindness, murdered in prison.

Edmund is the illegitimate and younger son of the Earl of Gloucester and he is the type of person who uses any kind of opportunity to achieve his goals. He resents being treated differently to his older legitimate brother Edgar so he conspires to turn his father against Edgar by falsifying a letter and planting ideas of the plot to remove his father. In order to convince Gloucester for Edgar's "guiltiness", he tricks Edgar into running away. Cornwall rewards Edmund by making him Duke of Gloucester in place of his father because Edmund impresses him when he shows his father up as a traitor for secretly receiving letters about French invasion. Edmund's lust for Goneril and Regan grows and when Cornwall dies, Regan puts him in charge of her troops and intends to marry him. After the battle against French, Edmund is challenged to a duel by Edgar, he wounds him mortally and dies.

²⁹Spark Notes Editors. (2002) "Spark Note on King Lear." Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/lear/page_6/

³⁰Spark Notes Editors. (2002) "Spark Note on King Lear." Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/lear/page_8/

³¹Spark Notes Editors. (2002) "Spark Note on King Lear." Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/lear/page_8/

*Well then,
Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.
Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund
As to the legitimate.—Fine word, "legitimate"!
Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed
And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
Shall top th' legitimate. I grow, I prosper.
Now, gods, stand up for bastards!*
Act I, scene II³²

Edgar is the legitimate son of Earl of Gloucester, honest and light, he is tricked by his jealous brother Edmund into running away and disguises himself as “Bedlam beggar” called “Poor Tom”, that enabled him to reinvent himself by staying close to Lear, Kent, and the Fool. Compared to Cordelia, Edgar is innocent as well, yet stubborn but goes further by drawing himself into the lowest form of human existence. Dressed as “Poor Tom”, Edgar takes care of Gloucester and guides him to Dover.

In order to give his father hope, Edgar tricks Gloucester into believing he has fallen from the high cliff. After Gloucester's death, he defeats Edmund and at the end of the play, he is asked to rule the kingdom with Albany. Having debased himself in order to recover his humanity it is convenient that Edgar delivers the speech at the end of the play, offering shaft of hope amongst the devastation,

*The weight of this sad time we must obey.
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.
The oldest hath borne most. We that are young
Shall never see so much, nor live so long.*
Act V, scene III³³

The theme of appearance versus reality is the theme that reoccurs one through the play of *King Lear*. As Shakespeare demonstrates, nothing is as it seems, there is an evident difference between realities as opposed to appearance. Reality is for sure what it is, as opposed to what it seems to be. Appearance is the reflection of what is observed, it shows the image of interpretation. Appearance is an imagination, while the reality is the real existence. In *King Lear* there are many characters that appear to be what in reality they are not. Since it's hard to see into another's character, you can never identify someone who they truly are. Some of the characters present themselves falsely, either to gain an advantage or to reveal truth; Goneril, Regan, Edmund and The Fool appear to be what they are not. The two evil sisters Goneril and Regan first appear as loving daughters that in reality they are selfish daughters who deceive their father for their own personal gain. They both trick King Lear into believing they love him the most when in reality it is Cordelia who truly loves Lear.

Shakespeare contrasts appearance versus reality with numerous examples in *King Lear*, in order to signify the importance of perception, and thus explore the possible severe consequences associated with it in reality. From initially powerful self-righteous King to a “foolish fond old man”, that Shakespeare best demonstrates using concise examples of how the journey from blindness to reality may lead to tragic and incurable consequences. In the play nothing is as it seems to be, the King isn't really the King anymore, the good daughters are the bad daughters, the disowned daughter is the only true daughter, and The Fool is wise and the wise are fools. We have the Fool who appears to be dumb, foolish, jester, but in reality, The Fool is very wise. He serves as Lear's inner conscience throughout the play and his role is a tutor to Lear. The Fool knows all of Lear's faults and tries to help him by offering him insight and reveal the truth. Throughout the play, The Fool observes the disorder that Lear has not only caused to himself but also to the whole kingdom, he is trying to help Lear feel better about what is going on by putting a humorous spin on the words he is saying. The Fool uses poetry and song to get his point across Lear to help him realize where he was wrong; he reveals the truth to Lear,

*She will taste as like this as a crab does to a crab.
Thou canst tell why one's nose stands I' th' middle on's face?* Act I, scene V³⁴

³²Spark Notes Editors. (2002) “Spark Note on King Lear.” Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/lear/page_28/

³³Spark Notes Editors. (2002) “Spark Note on King Lear.” Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/lear/page_310/

³⁴Spark Notes Editors. (2002) “Spark Note on King Lear.” Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/lear/page_78/

This little verse reveals the truth to Lear, by telling that if he thinks that Regan is different from Goneril, he is totally wrong. The Fool is telling that Regan's nature will be no different from Goneril's. Comparing to Cordelia, Fool is just like her because he is a truth-teller and is firmly obedient to Lear. The fatal flaw in Lear is not perhaps his arrogance, stubbornness, or his childish demand for publicly shown love, but his inability to distinguish between apparent love and loyalty, and the hidden treacherous, flattery reality.

*Put on what weary negligence you please,
You and your fellows servants. I'll have it come to question.
If he distaste it, let him to our sister,
Whose mind and mine I know in that are one,
Not to be overruled. Idle old man,
That still would manage those authorities
That he hath given away! Now, by my life,
Old fools are babes again and must be used
With checks as flatteries, when they are seen abused.
Remember what I have said.* Act I, scene III³⁵

Goneril talks about her father as a self-conceited man that reveals some serious bitterness and dissatisfaction. She calls Lear an "idle old man" who is foolish enough to think that he still owns any power now that he is retired and has given his daughters all his wealth and according to her old men are just like "babies, whiny, weak and powerless."

*This man hath had good counsel. A hundred knights!
'Tis politic and safe to let him keep
At point a hundred knights! Yes, that, on every dream,
Each buzz, each fancy, each complaint, dislike,
He may enguard his dotage with their powers
And hold our lives in mercy.—Oswald, I say!* Act I, scene IV³⁶

Goneril is sick and tired about the noisy and the riotous knights her father keeps with him, she complains that the knights disrupt her household by treating her palaces like a tavern or a brothel, and she insists that by stripping Lear of all his power, her life and political position are much safer. We see that Goneril doesn't merely kick them out because they are way too obnoxious and chaotic, but because the knights protect Lear that she even admits to her husband Albany that she doesn't like Lear's knights because they provide Lear with way too much power. Regan, on the other hand, is influenced by this attribution just like her sister and her personality is shifts over the play,

*O sir, you are old.
Nature in you stands on the very verge
Of his confine. You should be ruled and led
By some discretion, that discerns your state
Better than you yourself. Therefore, I pray you
That to our sister you do make return.
Say you have wronged her.* Act II, scene IV³⁷

By "old" Regan means that Lear is old enough that his life is almost to the end and that his old age makes him unfit to rule a kingdom. In the same manner, The Earl of Gloucester believes that Edmund has good intentions because of his outward demonstrations of love while the authentic good nature of Edgar is a disgrace in his eyes. Since Edmund is the bastard son, he has no rights on the land, like Goneril and Regan, he is ready to defend his own interests as he is prepared to do anything seen from the speech,

*Well, then, Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land.
Our father's love is to the bastard Edmund
As to the legitimate. Fine word, 'legitimate.'
Well, my legitimate, if this letter speed
And my invention thrive, Edmund the base*

³⁵Spark Notes Editors. (2002) "Spark Note on King Lear." Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/lear/page_42/

³⁶Spark Notes Editors. (2002) "Spark Note on King Lear." Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/lear/page_72/

³⁷Spark Notes Editors. (2002) "Spark Note on King Lear." Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/lear/page_126/

Shall top th' legitimate. I grow, I prosper.

Now, gods, stand up for bastards!

Act I, scene II³⁸

Even though we may feel somehow pity about Edmund still his ugly plan to fool his father into thinking that his brother Edgar wants to kill his father made up understand his real intentions. This one of his best soliloquies, as he feels discriminated by society and his father justifies his acts towards his family in the mean of “grow” and “proper” at the expanse of his father and half-brother.

Parallel to Lear’s inability to acknowledge truth over deceitful lies and flatteries is Gloucester’s blindness and credulity to trust the bad and reject his good, legitimate son Edgar. The illegitimate son Edmund confronts Edgar,

Brother, I advise you the best. Go armend.

I am no honest man if there be any good meaning towards you

Act I, scene II³⁹

Edgar immediately falls into believing the “appearance”, and the lack of perception in recognizing the ruthless, deceiving nature in “bastard” Edmund, leading to his instant self-justification, “*Some villain hath done me wrong.*” (Act I, scene II)⁴⁰ His reference to “villain”, is in fact, no one else but “lovable” brother in front of him. As the hypocrites Goneril, Regan, and Edmund disguise themselves through apparent loyalties, the good characters Kent, Cordelia and Edgar disguise their appearance in order to remain loyal.

Appearance and reality can be discussed from Edgar’s point of view as he disguised himself as a mad beggar, “Poor Tom.” In Gloucester’s eyes, Edgar is unfaithful but in reality, he is a loving son. In Act four, Edgar guides his father as Gloucester thinks he is guided by a beggar but in reality it’s Edgar. It is not until Lear goes mad and Gloucester lost his physical sight that they start to gain insight into the reality over “appearances”, as Gloucester remarks,

I have no way, and therefore no eyes.

I stumbled when I saw.”

Act IV, scene I⁴¹

As Lear wanders mad and hallucinates in the storm, he sees the true nature of his two evil daughters as their flattery speeches were merely hollow, empty tools that they employ in order to get a share of the kingdom. Gloucester too sees the reality of his son’s nature after undergoing terrible suffering. He shows unfathomable guilt and regrets for mistrusting his legitimate son wishing,

Might I but live to see thee in my touch,

I’d say I had eyes again!”

Act IV, scene I⁴²

At the end of the play looks like Edmund shows some kind of repentance.

Thou’st spoken right. Tis true.

The wheel is come full circle. I am here.

Act V, scene III⁴³

After Edmund has been mortally wounded he finally reveals his repentance by saying, “the wheel has come full circle”, he tells us that he got what he deserved as the famous quote “what goes around comes back around.”

In conclusion, both Gloucester and Lear are blinded to the appearance of their deceiving children. Their rejection of truth and reality as represented by Cordelia and Edgar is responsible for their poignant suffering and death at the end. Shakespeare cleverly employs appearance versus reality to warn his viewers that such a lack of perception to reality is likely to cause consequences on oneself, as well as people close to them. Over time critics have seen Shakespeare’s *Othello* and *King Lear* as the most painful and exciting tragic deaths. Human flaws are portrayed through the main characters Othello and King Lear that are related to today’s society. In these plays, one experiences the failure of man’s nobility towards leaders. Throughout Shakespeare’s plays, both Othello and King Lear experience different hardships due to physical appearance, which result in a similar loss of social order and end in tragic deaths. The main characters in Othello and King Lear share many of the traits essential to tragic characters,

³⁸Spark Notes Editors. (2002) “Spark Note on King Lear.” Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/lear/page_28/

³⁹Spark Notes Editors. (2002) “Spark Note on King Lear.” Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/lear/page_40/

⁴⁰Spark Notes Editors. (2002) “Spark Note on King Lear.” Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/lear/page_40/

⁴¹Spark Notes Editors. (2002) “Spark Note on King Lear.” Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/lear/page_202/

⁴²Spark Notes Editors. (2002) “Spark Note on King Lear.” Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/lear/page_202/

⁴³Spark Notes Editors. (2002) “Spark Note on King Lear.” Spark Notes LLC. Retrieved from https://www.sparknotes.com/nofear/shakespeare/lear/page_294/

yet they differ in their specific actions taken. At the start of the two plays both Othello and King Lear are presented as men of high rank and importance. Othello is presented as a courageous military war hero with a noble rank of a general which military acts give him a social status comparable to the royalty.

Like Othello, King Lear appears to be a man of wealth, power, and peace. Lear being a King has even more wealth and power than Othello; he controls the kingdom and possesses the absolute power common of monarchs during the time of the play. Although Othello and King Lear are presented as men of high degree they both are not perfect. Even though they consume much power they are still ridiculed by their appearance. In addition, Othello was ridiculed for his color, as throughout the play he is being called a “Moor.” Shakespeare never made it clear whether Othello was black or brown but some critics believe that he was black because of his description and treatment by others. Lear’s character is flawed by the fact that he is an old man who behaves somewhat childlike and rash and he is taunted by his daughters because of his old age and they think that he is too old to rule. This imperfection is shown when he banishes his advisor Kent for defending Cordelia. As a result, his daughters Goneril and Regan take advantage of their father’s love, and old age consequently stripping him of his integrity. The tragic flaws of the two characters are similar because both seem to possess a certain sense of pride that leads them to gullibility and poor judgment.

Besides this issue, Shakespeare explores love in both Othello and King Lear by sharing similarities and differences of the love for a significant other, the love a father holds for his children, and the love a daughter has for the father. Both Othello and Desdemona share the same type of love. Desdemona’s unselfish unconditional love for Othello leads to her death while Othello’s love led to his jealousy, a product of love which led to their demises. Unlike Desdemona, Goneril and Regan’s love for their husbands wasn’t loyal because they were attracted to Edmund. The sisters’ love for their husband wasn’t the same love as Desdemona loved Othello, as she fell in love with his bravery and the stories he told. Instead, Goneril and Regan only loved their husbands because of the power and wealth which they possessed. This is the reason they both found themselves attracted to Edmund because of the power he was obtaining through the deceit father. The love triangle of lust between Goneril, Regan, and Edmund leads them towards their own death.

The love of father-child is well presented in both tragedies and is tested in both Othello between Brabantio and Desdemona, in King Lear between Lear and his daughters and Gloucester with his sons. Comparing the fathers of the two plays, we can clearly see that they have so much in common as they die because of the grief for their children. Brabantio’s concern of Desdemona marrying Othello led to his demise. Lear and Gloucester’s pride causes them to trust others who plan on deceiving them, since Lear’s decease comes from his suffering of Cordelia’s death, whereas Gloucester dies from shock and joy of seeing his son Edgar revealing himself. In both plays, the plot is affected by one character’s malicious actions, which exacerbate any tensions that are already inherent in the relationships between the characters.

In *Othello* Iago is being called “honest Iago” as he claims to be honest in his words and yet ultimately, he manipulates people through his words, while Edmund in *King Lear* who appears as loyal to Gloucester by making Edgar the villain. Iago convinces Othello of a supposed illicit affair between Desdemona and Cassio, while Edmund sways his father into believing that Edgar is plotting against his life. The effectiveness behind their manipulation lies in the ability to convince Othello and Gloucester that they can be trusted alone. They used this to skew their perception of others. Both characters see themselves as outsiders to the society they belong to. Even though they are well-integrated and accepted by respected characters, they do not get rid of their motifs such as hate jealousy, greed, and revenge and these motifs seem to be the cause of the chaotic destruction. The two villains are dangerous to the stable community, because their real emotions, ideas, and plans are disguised, and only verbally expressed when they are alone. Iago and Edmund share their most intimate thoughts and analytic views with us and the audience. They both justify their evil deeds against innocent characters by their negative attitude.

Shakespeare’s works will always remain immortal just like him. Each of them has a hidden moral message, and all of his works contain a wonderful usage of language in the most rhythmic and perfect way possible. There is no doubt that his greatest works are his tragedies and on the basis of this, the aim of this research was to show the two important themes of love and appearance versus reality in the Shakespearean period in both *Othello* and *King Lear*.

Shakespeare’s heroes are physiologically individualized; they display very specific characteristics in their mental derangement. For instance, Othello is always classified within the limits of the repressed homosexuality, and in King Lear the oedipal love which can be attributed to Lear in connection with his daughters, especially Cordelia. These two tragedies somehow relate with each other in a sympathetic way as they are represented by men who are such greedy, jealous, blind, and selfish one which led them to their miserable end. Othello’s savage madness of sexual jealousy is brought about by Iago’s skillfully exploring this insecurity, and the consequences of this attitude are terrible and irreversible. Iago’s excessive coolness and rationally are also signs of his peculiar jealousy.

Lear's test for his daughters is something that brought chaos and disturbance in the play, while Gloucester's foolishness brought his blindness. It is particularly interesting to note the love/lust triangle between the two sisters and Edmund which in the end brought the death of them and Edmund's real appearance made his half-brother kill him. The eventual fates of Cordelia and Edmund are different, Cordelia dies and Edgar becomes a king, but their plot trajectories and characters, which emphasize loyalty in adversity, are similar.

Briefly, in our opinion, *Othello* and *King Lear* are Shakespeare's most profound tragedies. Both contain studies of murder, jealousy, ambition and self-consuming evil and both seem to raise the question of whether the human disorder is mirrored in the natural world. *Othello* and *King Lear*, both explore the human experience, the darker side of human nature and the complexity of the two plays which are Shakespeare's mastery of writing.

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