

Othello and Oroonoko: As Noble Heroes with Similar Tragic Ends

Alpaslan Toker¹

¹(Department of Foreign Language Teaching, Canik Basari University, Turkey)

ABSTRACT: William Shakespeare's tragic play, *Othello*, and Aphra Behn's short novella, *Oroonoko*, are two literary pieces that basically deal with the narratives of *Othello* and *Oroonoko* who share common African origin and are characterized by a natural-born talent that allowed them to excel on the battlefield and secured them a higher social status in their respective communities. Although these heroes enjoyed high social positions, exuded admiration for their martial skills and have enjoyed admiration and respect in their communities, they have never been considered socially equal to a white member of the society. They both remain trapped within the unbreachable confines of the stereotypical Moor. This article attempts to discover similarities and differences between Shakespeare's *Othello* and Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* by delving into their racial backgrounds, social positions, marital unions and their tragic ends.

KEYWORDS : black, racial background, social position, marital union, tragic end.

1. INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare's *Othello* and Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* are two literary works in which issues of racial prejudice, internalized ideology of dominant culture, unrestrained jealousy and unconsummated love are most vigorously described. *Othello*, in the words of Abdullah Al-Dabbagh, "has always been one of the clear-cut of Shakespeare's tragedies. More limited in scope and apparently less provocative of grand, philosophic themes, it is usually classified as no more than a domestic tragedy based on the theme of jealousy" (Al-Dabbagh, 2010, p.15). However, Marjorie Garber, in her book entitled *Shakespeare After All*, expresses the following about the play: "*Othello* is not reducible to a political tract, but its richness records and responds to a world in crisis, a crisis figured in part through emergent categories like race, class, gender—and sexuality" (Garber, 2005, p.589). On the other hand, Behn's *Oroonoko*, one of the earliest English novel, was constantly considered as an outcry and objection for slavery. Wilbur L. Cross stated that "*Oroonoko* is the first humanitarian novel in English" (as cited by Moulton, 2011, p.409). Similarly, Anita Pacheco focuses on the humanitarian aspect of the novel when she states that:

Numerous scholars have made claims for *Oroonoko* as a kind of proto-abolitionist tract, some seeing the novella as a genuinely humanitarian statement of the evils of slavery, while others, more circumspect about casting Behn in the role of abolitionist, have insisted that *Oroonoko* did make an early contribution to antislavery thought, whether through its alleged criticisms of Western civilization or through its ennobling and humanizing of an African (Pacheco, 1994, p.491).

It is the first English novel to portray dark-skinned Africans in a thoughtful and affectionate way. Even though Behn never directly criticizes the slavery, the victimized hero's point of view endorses a criticism of subjugation. Elliot Visconsi, in his article called "A Degenerate Race: English Barbarism in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*" and "The Widow Ranter," stated that "*Oroonoko* has been read as an abolitionist tract, a critique of European colonialism, a meditation on Behn's status as a professional female author, and as an allegory for the regicide of Charles I or the deposition of James II" (Visconsi, 2002, pp.681-2). The novel has been regarded as a significant symbol for the development of the 'noble savage,' a term invented by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and furthered by Michel de Montaigne. The recent criticism on *Oroonoko* mostly concentrates on the examination of the text in terms of colonialism, alienation and exoticism.

Even though Shakespeare's *Othello* and Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* are two works written in two different literary genres, the former being written for theatrical purposes and the latter being composed with the aim of providing financial income in the form of a novella, the similarities between the main characters in both these literary works cannot be overlooked. Despite 85 years of difference between their respective times of

publications, it is a well-known fact that Aphra Behn had a deep admiration for Othello and identified similar elements in her novel. Oroonoko and Othello possess many common attributes. They both share an exotic background, have great military skills, fall as an easy mark due to their naïve nature, and both murder their wives with their own hands. This article attempts to expose these similarities and differences between these works of literature.

II. RACIAL BACKGROUND

William Shakespeare's Othello and Aphra Behn's Oroonoko share a similar racial identity. They both emerge from Africa and bear similar dark skin color. Othello has generally been regarded as a black or dark-skinned African despite the ongoing debate on the question of his exact race. Critics as well as historians have had difficulties in determining Othello's true racial identity. Shakespeare even calls the play *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*. In the play, he is referred to as a "Barbary horse" (1.1.113) and a "lascivious Moor" (1.1.127). Iago addresses him as "Moor" several times. Othello provides clues about his skin color when he declares: "haply, for I am black" (3.3.263). The word 'Moor' is a term that was commonly attached to the 'Moors', 'blackmoors', 'Negroes', 'Indians', or 'Muslims' in England during Medieval and Renaissance periods. These terms were interchangeably used in 17th and 18th centuries even though English people could clearly make distinctions between different types of blacks (Barthelemy, 1987, pp.5-17). On the other hand, Emily C. Bartels states the following on the uses of Moor: "Renaissance representations of the Moor were vague, varied, inconsistent, and contradictory. As critics have established, the term "Moor" was used interchangeably with such similarly ambiguous terms as "African," "Ethiopian," "Negro," and even "Indian" to designate a figure from different parts or the whole of Africa (or beyond)" (Bartels, 1990, p.434). However, Shakespeare disregards the prevalent conventional views of Europeans on black people by portraying Othello as a noble and valiant general of the Venetian army rather than a stereotypical evil black character like Aaron in *Titus Andronicus* and Caliban in *Tempest*. Welker Given highly praises Shakespeare for his courage to portray his protagonist as black. He states that "it is a bold thing to bring a coal-black Moor on the stage as the husband of a delicate, loving white bride" (Given, 2010, p.13). On the other hand, Laurence Lerner is of the opinion that "Shakespeare has suffered from colour prejudice" (Lerner, 1959, p.358). Eldred Jones thinks "in the end Othello emerges, not as another manifestation of a type, but as a distinct individual who typified by his fall, not the weakness of Moors, but the weaknesses of human nature" (Jones, 1965, p.87). G.K. Hunter approaches the issue from a different perspective and states that "Othello may be the devil in appearance, but it is the 'fair' Iago who gives birth to the dark realities of sin and death in the play" (Hunter, 1986, p.193). It may be asserted that Othello is the black man with the white soul while Iago is the white man with the black soul.

On the other hand, in Aphra Behn's short novel, the title character, Oroonoko, is a man with African origin who initially begins his life as a prince and puts an end to it as a slave. Behn describes him as a black noble prince with the looks and acts of a European-English aristocrat. Laura Brown provides more details for Behn's description of Oroonoko's physical features. The author portrays Oroonoko as a character with European features "by which the native 'other' is naturalized as a European aristocrat... [and] in physical appearance, the narrator can barely distinguish her native prince from those of England" (Brown, 1990, p.20). Instead of identifying Oroonoko with physical features that are native to Africa, the narrator associates Oroonoko as a great man who looks and acts like a European-English aristocrat. He is admired and esteemed by his people as a resolute leader which is particularly demonstrated when he and his people are captured and sold into slavery. The other captured slaves prefer to starve rather than to eat when Oroonoko is in chains. Behn describes him in the following words when she lays eyes at him for the first time:

His Face was not of that brown, rusty Black which most of that Nation are, but a perfect Ebony, or polish'd Jett. His Eyes were the most awful that cou'd be seen, and very piercing, the White of 'em being like Snow, as were his Teeth. His Nose was rising and Roman, instead of African and flat. His Mouth, the finest shap'd that cou'd be seen; far from those great turn'd Lips, which are so natural to the rest of the Negroes. The whole Proportion and Air of his Face was so noble, and exactly form'd, that, bating his Colour, there cou'd be nothing in Nature more beautiful, agreeable and handsome. There was no one Grace wanting, that bears the Standard of true beauty (Behn, 2004, p.15).

Here, Behn does not identify Oroonoko with the most traditional traits of the Negro in Africa (the nose and the lips), but rather portrays him with characteristic features related to physical appearance and behavior of European-English aristocrat. Behn distinguishes Oroonoko from the people of his own native country, removes the character traits which are common in native Africans and which would make him 'inferior' in the eyes of Europeans, and bestows him agreeable and handsome physical features that invite respect and admiration from the onlookers. "In order to be the hero," Jacqueline Pearson states, "Oroonoko has to be Europeanized,

presented as 'more Civilized', according to the European mode and given not only mastery of European languages and cultures, European manners and a European tutor, but even European facial features ..." (Pearson, 2009, p.231).

III. SOCIAL POSITION

Shakespeare's Othello and Behn's Oroonoko hold high social standing as well as military power. They are both men of noble birth. Oroonoko is a prince next in line for the Coramantien throne, but Othello does not have a royal lineage. He is characterized by a natural-born talent that allowed him to rise through the ranks of the Venetian military and to be the commander in chief. Othello managed to obtain the respect and admiration of Venetian people and has been conferred the position as the Commander of Venetian army. His reputation as a dexterous warrior and military leader earns him a command of the Venetian army in its military campaign against the Turks in Cyprus in order to defend it against the "General enemy Ottoman" (1, 3, 49). Othello, born of noble blood, was sold into slavery, has lived most of his life in military camps, has become a professional soldier and has risen to the rank of general. He participated in numerous battles, tactfully led his men into the battle and acquired a reputation as a distinguished and honorable warrior. He also travelled extensively and encountered different types of dangers. He was a frequent guest in Brabantio's home and his stories enchanted Brabantio's daughter, Desdemona. Othello is a strong leader and self-confident in dealing with the matters of military combat, but he fails to display this self-confidence in the matters of love. He feels insecure and unsure about why Desdemona would pick him as a husband and can only offer the following explanation, "She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd" (1.3.167). However, Brabantio, although he gratefully welcomed Othello at his mansion before his elopement with Desdemona, assumes a discriminatory attitude and accuses him of using witchcraft in order to win his daughter's heart in front of the Senate.

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,
Whether a maid so tender, fair and happy,
So opposite to marriage that she shunned
The wealthy curled darlings of our nation,
Would ever have, to incur a general mock,
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
Of such a thing as thou, to fear, not to delight.
Judge me the world, if 'tis not gross in sense
That thou hast practised on her with foul charms (1, 2, 63-72).

Brabantio respects Othello as a skilled commander and well-behaved noble man but he will never accept him as a son-in-law. Iago expresses his disgust for Othello's marriage with a white woman: "an old black ram/ Is tupping your white ewe" (1,1,87-88) and "your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs" (1,1,114-15). Both Brabantio and Iago express the widespread opinion of the Venetians because the marital union between a black man and a white woman is not tolerable in the city. Janette Dillon states the following: "We are made to understand that, while Othello's service in arms may be welcome to the state of Venice, he is not a welcome son-in-law for a Venetian senator. He can never truly become a Venetian" (Dillon,2007, p.78). Similarly, Margaret Webster captures the constructive opinion of modern audiences in such words: "Here was a great man, a man of simplicity and strength; here also was a black man. We believed that he could command the armies of Venice; we knew that he would always be alien to its society" (Webster, 1955, p.236).

Oroonoko, on the other hand, also enjoys a high social status as the grandson of the Coramantien king and a skillful general leading in the army. He is a prince and heir to the throne of Coramantien. He is a man of noble standing, good-natured, well-educated and charming young man. Although a native of Africa, Oroonoko entices his nobility and dignity from the fundamental principles of European culture such as "morals, language, and science" which he was taught by a "Frenchman of wit and learning." He also "admired the Romans" and is bestowed with finesse and refinement of somebody who received his education "in some European court" (Behn, 2004, p.14-15). He manages to establish close relationships with people of his native country as well as people in the New World. He is a well-qualified and efficient ruler and is well-informed about political matters of the state. Behn states that "Oroonoko was as capable even of reigning well, and of governing as wisely, had as great a soul, as politic maxims, and was as sensible of power as any prince civilized in the most refined schools of humanity and learning, or the most illustrious courts" (Behn, 2004, p.15).

Here, the author openly emphasizes the fact that Oroonoko is a perfect example of the ideal sovereign since his aristocratic distinction or the greatness of the soul does not escape the attention of his own people as well as people from Europe. He immediately captivates respect and admiration. Prince Oroonoko, due to this sophisticated magnanimity, readily believes a man upon his word and unconditionally trusts the English sea captain's honor as if it was his own and, thus, fell an easy victim to the captain's deceitful nature. He simply considered Oroonoko as a potential commodity. Oddvar Holmesland, in his article called "Aphra Behn's 'Oroonoko': Cultural Dialects and the Novel," voices Oroonoko's disappointment and predicament when he states "Oroonoko is victimized by civilized brutality against which he pits the honesty, honor, and loyalty nurtured in a seemingly more natural order" (Holmesland, 2001, p.61). When they finally landed in Surinam, Oroonoko, renamed as Caesar, enjoys the status of 'royal slave' and other slaves in the plantation hail him as their king despite the fact that he could be responsible for their current state of slavery. Noticing his nobility and dignity, the English place him in a graceful residence and do not let him suffer the usual hardships of slavery because of his royalty.

Oroonoko proves to be a natural leader from the beginning of the novel. As a young and heroic warrior, he manages to attract admiration and respect from people of his own country in general and soldiers that he fights side by side with in the battlefield in particular. Behn does not only portray her protagonist as the successor of the Coramantien throne upon the death of the old king, but also as a proficient and competent warrior and general; the true leader of his native people who carries out deeds of gallant heroism and bravery. The narrator describes Oroonoko's valor in following words: "he fought as if he came on purpose to die, and did such things as will not be believed that human strength could perform" (Behn, 2004, p.35). However, he is trapped in a complicated dilemma of either keeping his honor intact or giving up the woman he loves. Anita Pacheco explains Oroonoko's dilemma thus: "Oroonoko's honor collides with the absolute power of the king, his grandfather, who claims the prince's betrothed for himself" (Pacheco, 1994, p.497). Oroonoko has no option, but to accept the situation since he cannot go against the wishes of his grandfather. However, he conspires a meeting with Imoinda through his friends at the court, but the old king comes to discover about it and decides to sell Imoinda into slavery because of her betrayal and disloyalty. He was also betrayed by an English captain and was sold in a plantation in Surinam. After he was reunited with Imoinda and discovers about her pregnancy, Oroonoko becomes even more concerned about his enslaved situation despite the promises given to him by Trefry and the narrator. He leads a rebellion to secure their liberty, but it fails due to the lack of resolve among the other slaves. Slaves readily give into the deputy-governor's promises and for amnesty and his assurances for Oroonoko's and his family's freedom and their safe return to Africa. The narrator describes their surrender in following words: "being of fearful cowardly dispositions, and hearing the English cry out, 'Yield, and live! Yield and be pardoned!' they all run in amongst their husbands and fathers, and hung about them, crying out, 'Yield! and leave Caesar to their revenge'; that by degrees the slaves abandoned Caesar, and left him only Tuscan and his heroic Imoinda" (Behn, 2004, p. 65). Having been deserted by his companions in rebellion and being persuaded by Trefry and Byam, Oroonoko surrenders himself to the Governor after demanding a ratification of his demands in writing.

VI. MARITAL UNION

Othello and Oroonoko show certain similarities in their respective marital unions. They both marry women of noble birth and high social standing. Othello marries with Desdemona, a beautiful white maiden in the city of Venice, whereas Oroonoko falls in love with Imoinda, a daughter of the general in king's army. Shakespeare's protagonist, Othello takes Desdemona's hand in marriage without consenting to her father, the Venetian senator Brabantio. Othello and Desdemona were truly in love, decided to elope and get married in secret. Their union is a union of different races and colors that would never obtain the approval either in Venice or in England of Shakespeare's time. When their elopement becomes public, Iago and Roderigo wake up Brabantio from his sleep and deliver the news of Desdemona's elopement. Iago utters the following lines to describe the situation: "an old black ram / Is topping your white ewe," (1,1, 94-95), "you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse / you'll have your nephews neigh to you," (1,1,121-123), and "your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs" (1,1, 126-127). Brabantio feels shocked because a possible marital union between Moor and Venetian, between a black and a white is absolutely outrageous and impossible in his own eyes. He charges Othello with sorcery for seducing his beloved daughter even though Othello had been a frequent guest in his house and wonders how a beautiful white maiden, who is "tender, fair, and happy," marries with "the sooty bosom / Of such a thing as thou" (1,2, 290-1). Here, no doubt, Brabantio does not only reflect his personal opinion on inter-racial marriage, but also voices the widespread opinions of the citizens of Venice at large.

into safe hands, with order they should be both sold off as slaves to another country, either Christian or heathen, 'twas no matter where (Behn, 2004, p.31).

The king falsely informs Oroonoko that she has been honorably put to death, but, in fact, she was sold to slavery at another country since death was considered to be more fitting than slavery. But, they reunite again in Surinam under the new Christian names, Caesar and Clemene: "From that happy day Caesar took Clemene for his wife, to the general joy of all people; and there was as much magnificence as the country would afford at the celebration of this wedding" (Behn, 2004, p. 48). Having been reunited with his beloved Imoinda and, especially after the news of her pregnancy, Caesar had become very restless and anxious for freedom. Khary Polk voices this predicament of Oroonoko: "Oroonoko does not have his primary life-changing encounter until his wife becomes pregnant. The realization that his child will follow the "condition of the mother" and be enslaved jolts him out of his classist ideology" (Khary, 2000, p.157).

VII. TRAGIC END

Othello and Oroonoko also have similar tragic ends. Othello chooses to put an end to his life when he discovers that his wife, Desdemona, had been faithful to him. On the other hand, Oroonoko suffers a cruel death in the hands of Byam and his men. Shakespeare's Othello is a man with low self-confidence on the matters of social relations. He manages to earn respect and admiration with his bravery and dexterity on military matters and battle strategies and Shakespeare distinguishes him from the Venetian society almost in every respect. He is set apart with his skin-color, his exotic past, his stance, and, most importantly, with his language which is laden with extraordinary rhythms, grandeur and exoticism. But, he is insecure and hesitant on personal and social levels. Harold Bloom, in his introduction to *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Othello*, aptly stresses both Othello's skills as a warrior and insecurity in personal matters:

Othello, like Lear, has never known himself well. A fighter since childhood, he has fully earned his professional eminence. His gift is for commanding others, and for maintaining the separation of war from peace. Serene in his own sublimity, he believes in the honor of arms, and cannot believe that his trust is ever wrongly bestowed. Affinities abound with Antony and with Coriolanus, two other sad captains who fall apart as the contradictions in their own natures encounter overwhelming stress (Bloom, 2010, p.2).

Iago, a vengeful soldier who was passed over for the position of lieutenantcy, takes note of Othello's these sensitive weaknesses and devises a careful and meticulous plan to manipulate Othello into believing Desdemona's infidelity. Brabantio has already warned Othello about deceptive nature of Desdemona: "Look to her, Moor, if thou has eyes to see. / She has deceived her father, and may thee" (1.3.292-3). The following lines, uttered by Iago, seem to remind the audience similar lines voiced by Desdemona's father: "She did deceive her father, marrying you, /And when she seemed to shake and fear your looks /She loved them most" (3,3, 210-2). Thus, Iago manages to plant first seeds of jealousy in Othello's mind and even warns him against 'the green-eyed monster' that gnaws people inside and takes over all of their powers of reasoning and judgment. Leo Africanus, in his *The History and Description of Africa*, stresses the widespread jealousy among the nations of Africa and he states that "No nation in the world is so subject unto jealousy; for they will rather lose their lives, than put up any disgrace in behalf of their women (Africanus, 2010, p.183). Iago dwells on potentially sensitive issues such as Othello's unbridled love for Desdemona, immense age gap, cultural and racial disparities and women's tendency to go astray and pushes his buttons. Othello, once convinced that he had no reason to feel jealous because Desdemona 'had eyes and chose me', now expresses his doubts on the nature of marriage as well as women:

Haply, for I am black
And have not those soft parts of conversation
That chamberers have, or for I am declined
Into the vale of years,—yet that's not much—
She's gone. I am abused; and my relief
Must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage,
That we can call these delicate creatures ours,
And not their appetites! (3,3,263-70).

Othello takes in these beliefs from Iago and begins to question Desdemona's nature of love for him. Seizing this opportunity, Iago deceives Othello into believing that Desdemona is having an affair with young lieutenant, Cassio. Iago discloses Othello's vulnerability at personal and social level and manipulates him with a blend of

lies and unfounded inclusive evidence. Having been convinced of Desdemona's infidelity and embittered with destructive jealousy, he confronts his wife and smothers her in bed. When Emilia walks in, Othello attempts to defend and to rationalize his actions by accusing Desdemona of committing adultery and he undertakes the task of taking his own life upon his discovery of Desdemona's innocence and purity. Edward Perry offers the following justification for Othello's murder of Desdemona:

Desdemona is the pure source of Othello's being: his current runs from her fountain. He cannot dissociate himself from her corruption, therefore, for he takes his life from her. The ultimate horror for Othello is that this pure fountain should become a dark and loathsome place, full of repulsive, bestial sensuality. The knotting toads bring to mind Iago's repulsive image of the beast with two backs, the very nightmare of black sensuality that haunts the imagination of Venice and that Othello has tried to repress" (Perry, 1990, p.329).

Othello apparently attempts to get rid of his own blackness in the murder scene. Othello tries to perform his duty as the defender of the city by assuming the role as the enforcer of justice. Justice needs to be served and offenders deserve to be properly punished, but Othello is the offender this time. When he discovers that Iago's charges against Desdemona were unfounded and understands his wife's fidelity, Othello is overwhelmed with remorse and regret and stabs himself to death. He makes sure that justice is served and perpetrator received a fitting punishment. This action of Othello reaffirms his position as a noble man and he pleads people around him to remember him as "one that loved not wisely, but too well"(5,2,394). Othello's suicide is the last service that he renders to the state as he gets rid of the only enemy he is yet to eliminate: himself. Thus, the play ends with Othello's tragic death. Behn's protagonist, Oroonoko, is a man of values who assigns special importance to codes of conduct such as honor and trust. He unconditionally places his trust on several people even though these people all ended up letting him down. Firstly, he trusted the English captain and considered him to be a friend, but he betraying him by imprisoning him and finally selling him into slavery. Behn describes the English captain's capture of Oroonoko thus: "the captain, who had well laid his design before, gave the word, and seized on all his guests; they clapping great irons suddenly on the prince, when he was leaped down into the hold to view that part of the vessel; and locking him fast down, secured him. The same treachery was used to all the rest; and all in one instant, in several places of the ship, were lashed fast in irons, and betrayed to slavery" (Behn, 2004, p.37). The second person to betray Oroonoko was Trefry. He was the overseer of the plantation. He, together with the narrator, assures the prince that he would gain his freedom as soon as the lord-governor Willoughby arrived in Surinam. Mr. Trefry failed to deliver on his promise. The last person to betray Oroonoko was Byam. He was the deputy governor of Surinam and promised Oroonoko immunity if he had surrendered, but failed to keep his promise. Oroonoko's demands for their freedom and safe passage to their homeland increase upon Imoinda's pregnancy. He began to suspect the falsehood of these promises and realize that they will never grant them their liberty. The narrator states Oroonoko's state of restlessness and uneasiness in these words:

They fed him from day to day with promises, and delayed him till the Lord-Governor should come; so that he began to suspect them of falsehood, and that they would delay him till the time of his wife's delivery, and make a slave of that too: for all the breed is theirs to whom the parents belong. This thought made him very uneasy, and his sullenness gave them some jealousies of him (Behn, 2004, p.48).

Oroonoko grows restless and jealous with the idea that they are planning to make a slave out of their newborn baby. It is when Oroonoko starts making plans for their escape. He secretly arranges a slave rebellion along with the other slaves in the plantation. They sneaked away on Sunday night when all members of white community were drunk, but they left a trail, which was easy to follow, because they had to burn the bush in order to make way as they advanced. Eventually, they were hunted down by Byam and his men and surrendered when the deputy-governor Byam gave them promises of amnesty and immunity. Once more, Byam repeats his assurances that Oroonoko and his family will be freed and returned back home. However, Oroonoko and the other slaves are punished and whipped as soon as they surrendered. awhile, Oroonoko, feeling dejected, concludes that he will never be granted his freedom and his child will be born into slavery. He informs Imoinda of "his design first of killing her, and then his enemies, and next himself," because he prefers to see his family die quickly from his own hands than perish slowly under the subjugation of slavery (Behn, 2004, p.71). Imoinda welcomes her husband's offer and expresses her gratitude for letting her die in dignity. Oroonoko carries on the task, kills Imoinda and the unborn child. Emily Kugler considers Imoinda as a model for subjecthood and further asserts that "her valor in battle and willing acceptance of death reinforce her idealized subjection to her husband" (Kugler, 2012, p.154). Oroonoko, as her lawful husband as well as king, does not only shape her fate, but he must also defend her since she is his property and subject.

Consumed by remorse and agony over the loss of his beloved wife, Oroonoko attempts to take his own life. However, he changes his mind and decides to take his revenge on those who refused to grant him his freedom. Behn describes Oroonoko's hesitation and change of heart thus: "A thousand times he turned the fatal knife that did the deed towards his own heart, with a resolution to go immediately after her; but dire revenge, which now was a thousand times more fierce in his soul than before, prevents him" (Behn, 2004, p.72). Because Oroonoko has slain a part of his heart by murdering the woman who completed him as a person, he has decided to end his earthly existence in order to unite with her. Charlotte Sussman is of the opinion that the injuries that Oroonoko inflicts upon himself are distinctive tokens of his longing to restore his incompleteness by reclaiming the part he lost through his act of killing Imoinda. She states:

The marks Oroonoko makes on his body, however, mirror the injuries he has recently inflicted on Imoinda. First he cuts a piece of flesh from his own neck, just as he slit Imoinda's throat. Then, in an action that points to the underlying significance of Imoinda's murder, Oroonoko, rather than cutting off his own head, 'rip'd up his own Belly, and took his Bowels and pull'd 'em out, with what strength he could' (Sussman, 1993, 220).

Eventually, he is caught by Byam's men and endures a cruel and inhuman death by dismemberment. Oroonoko prefers to endure a noble death than to constantly suffer the shames of slavery.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Shakespeare's title character, Othello, and Behn's main character, Oroonoko, as stated above, share several striking similarities and noticeable differences despite the time span between their respective dates of publications. Both Othello and Oroonoko are blacks and both come from Africa. Othello is a Moor, which is to say African, but it is not clear what part of Africa he originally comes from. Oroonoko, on the other hand, is from the kingdom of Coramantien on the west coast of Africa. Oroonoko manages to attract admiration and respect from the people around him with his distinctive looks of a European-English aristocrat. Othello, by contrast, does not possess any distinguishing physical features and he oftentimes becomes a subject of hatred and discrimination due to his skin color. Despite of the difference in their physical looks, Othello and Oroonoko are both noble and enjoy social positions. Othello proves himself to be skilled in the matters of military strategies that earned him the position as a commander of Venetian armies. Venetian people do not fail to recognize his talent in battlefield and thus, entrusted him the command of their armies. He is also a noble man in nature and invites respect and esteem with his eloquent speeches. On the other hand, Oroonoko is the grandson of the old Coramantien king and is next in line for the throne. He is a noble man by birth, with refined manners and educated background. Similarly, he displays his courage and combative skills in the battlefield and is granted the position of general in the royal army.

Similarities in the marriages of Othello and Oroonoko are quite evident and noteworthy. Othello fell in love with Desdemona, the daughter of a distinguished member of white Venetian society. They have no option by to elope since an interracial marriage between a white woman and a black man is extremely intolerable and unacceptable in Venice. They both become the subject of criticism and anger when the news of their marriage becomes public. The Venetian society cannot approve Othello's marriage even though they handed the command of their armies over to him. Othello's marriage plays a significant role in resurfacing the racial intolerance and hatred of Venetian people. Moreover, Oroonoko cherishes passionate and romantic feelings towards Imoinda, the daughter of the general who Oroonoko fought side by side. Oroonoko and Imoinda is ideal and excellent match. Like Oroonoko, Imoinda has an aura of dignity in her manners and physical appearance. She, too, attracts respect and admiration from onlookers. They are completely compatible as a couple. Othello has a low level of confidence in personal matters contrary to his strong confidence in the matters of military. He does not consider himself to be a suitable match for Desdemona and he thinks that she liked him because of the stories he told or dangers that he experienced even though her love for Othello was pure and genuine. She is willing to go against the wishes of her father as well as her own community just to be with Othello. Oroonoko and Imoinda, as a couple, had to overcome several obstacles in order to find a chance to consummate their marriage. Oroonoko's grandfather, the old kind of Coramantien, feels fascinated by Imoinda's beauty and sends her the royal veil which she has no chance to refuse. Oroonoko gets a chance to visit Imoinda in king's otan with the help of his friend and one of the king's wives. However, the king catches them in the act, Oroonoko escapes and Imoinda is sold to slavery even though the king wrongly informs Oroonoko that she was put to death. They were re-united in Surinam when Oroonoko was betrayed by an English captain and sold to a plantation as a slave. They finally got the chance to consummate their love.

Othello and Oroonoko also share similar tragic ends. They are both naïve and honest. They easily put their trust on people around themselves. Othello cannot sense the evil nature of Iago and blindly trusts him. He even calls Iago 'honest' on several occasions. Iago takes advantage of this weakness in Othello's character. He devises plans to accomplish whatever he thought to be his by right since he was passed over in promotion. He manages to make Othello jealous with the circumstantial evidences that he provides. He turns Othello against Desdemona and makes him believe that she is having an affair with Cassio. Othello, feeling wronged by Desdemona, does not listen to her pleas of innocence and smothers her in bed due to his rages of jealousy. He only comes to his senses when he discovers Desdemona's innocence and decides to impose punishment on himself. He kills himself in order to deliver justice and thus, manages to restore his honor and dignity as a noble man. Similarly, Oroonoko values honesty and unconditionally lends his trust on people. People, like English captain, Trefry, the narrator and Byam, fail to keep their promises that they give to Oroonoko. Even though he has been given assurances about his and Imoinda's freedom and their safe return to their own country, he was always let down. Feeling dejected, Oroonoko decides to kill Imoinda, together with their unborn child, because he felt jealous with the idea of bringing their child into the bonds of slavery and because he does not want Imoinda to be tortured by colonialists. Oroonoko's jealousy is different than that of Othello because Oroonoko becomes only jealous when he thinks about the fates of Imoinda and their unborn child. Othello rages with jealousy when he becomes convinced of Desdemona's infidelity. Oroonoko's death is not self-inflicted. He was captured and tortured by Byam and his men and eventually he was killed by dismemberment. Like Othello, Oroonoko manages to maintain his dignity and nobility by stoically enduring his death since he had no reason to live after the death of his beloved Imoinda. In addition to their literary value, these two pieces of literature are significant in displaying certain human characteristics such as honesty, trust, social and moral values and the determination of individuals to sacrifice their lives in order to uphold these principles of conduct.

REFERENCES

- [1] A. Al-Dabbagh. *Shakespeare, the Orient and the Critics* (Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., New York. 2010).
- [2] A. Behn. *Oroonoko*. (Penguin Classics; paperback / softback edition, 2004).
- [3] A. C. Bradley. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. (Penguin Books, 1991).
- [4] A. G. Barthelemy. , A.G. *Black Face Malignd Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne*. (London: Louisiana State University Press, 1987)
- [5] A. Pacheco. Royalism and Honor in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*. *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*. 34(3), 1994, *Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, 491-506.
- [6] C. Sussman. The Other Problem with Women, in Heidi Hunter (ed) *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory and Criticism*. (University of Virginia Press, 1993).
- [7] C.W. Moulton. *The Library of Literary Criticism of English and American Authors: 1639-1729*. (Ulan Press, 2011).
- [8] E. C. Bartels. Making of the Moor: Aaron, Othello, and Renaissance Refashionings of Race. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 41(4), 1990, 433-454.
- [9] E. Jones., E. *Othello's Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965)
- [10] E. Kugler. *Sway of the Ottoman Empire on English Identity in the Long Eighteenth Century*. (Brill, 2012).
- [11] E. Perry. Othello's Alienation. *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 30(2), *Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*, 1990, 315-333
- [12] E. Visconsi, A Degenerate Race: English Barbarism in Aphra Behn's "Oroonoko" and "The Widow Ranter." *ELH*, 69(3), 2002, 673-701.
- [13] G.K. Hunter. Othello and Colour Prejudice. in Kenneth Muir (ed.) *Interpretations of Shakespeare*. (Clarendon Press, 1986)
- [14] H. Bloom. *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Othello*. (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010).
- [15] J. Dillon. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's Tragedies*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- [16] J. Pearson. Slave Princess and Lady Monsters: Gender and Ethnic Difference in the Work of Aphra Behn, in Janet Todd (ed.) *Aphra Behn Studies*. (Cambridge University Press, 2009)
- [17] K. Polk. Reviving Oroonoko. *The Journal of Negro History*. 85(3), 2000, 154-161.
- [18] L. Africanus. *The History and Description of Africa*. (Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- [19] L. Brown. *Romance of empire: Oroonoko and the trade in slaves*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, Scholarly and Reference Division, 1990)
- [20] L. Lerner. The Machiavel and the Moor. *Essays in Criticism*. IX(4), 1959, 339-360.
- [21] M. Garber. *Shakespeare After All*. (Anchor; Reprint edition, 2005).
- [22] M. Webster. *Shakespeare without Tears*. (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1955).
- [23] O. Holmesland. Aphra Behn's "Oroonoko": Cultural Dialects and the Novel. *ELH*, 68(1), 2001, 57-79.
- [24] W. Given. *A further study of the Othello: Have We Misunderstood Shakespeare's Moor?*(Nabu Press, 2010)