



SARTREAN FREEDOM AND ANGUISH IN *OTHELLO*

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ABSTRACT. This article presents an existentialist reading of Shakespeare's *Othello* through the lens of Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy, concentrating on the notions of freedom (ontological and practical), bad faith, and existential anguish. While *Othello* has been widely investigated through historical, social, and psychological frameworks, its connection with Sartrean perspective remains underexplored. By analyzing how key characters –Othello, Desdemona, and Iago– grapple with the heavy burden of freedom and the anxiety of choice, this research exhibits how existential dynamics affect the play's moral and emotional conflicts. Drawing on Sartre's distinction between ontological and practical freedom, the study evaluates fundamental scenes and soliloquies to show how each character copes with the issues of agency, responsibility, freedom, and self-deception. In doing so, it not only displays the philosophical depth of Shakespeare's tragedy but also offers a more cohesive model of reading that creates a balance between theory and textual analysis.

Keywords: Sartre, ontological freedom, practical freedom, anguish, Othello, bad faith, decisive choice.

LIBERTAD Y ANGUSTIA SARTRIANAS EN *OTELLO*

RESUMEN. Este artículo presenta una lectura existencialista del *Otelo* de Shakespeare a través de la perspectiva de la filosofía de Jean-Paul Sartre, concentrándose en las nociones de libertad (ontológica y práctica), mala fe y angustia existencial. Aunque *Otelo* ha sido ampliamente investigado a través de marcos históricos, sociales y psicológicos, su conexión con la perspectiva sartriana permanece poco explorada. Al analizar cómo los personajes clave —Otelo, Desdémona y Yago— lidian con la pesada carga de la libertad y la ansiedad de la elección, esta investigación muestra cómo las dinámicas existenciales afectan los conflictos morales y emocionales de la obra. Basándose en la distinción de Sartre entre libertad ontológica y práctica, el estudio evalúa escenas fundamentales y soliloquios para mostrar cómo cada personaje afronta los temas de la agencia, la responsabilidad, la libertad y el autoengaño. Al hacerlo, no solo exhibe la profundidad filosófica de la tragedia de Shakespeare, sino que también ofrece un modelo más cohesivo de lectura que crea un equilibrio entre la teoría y el análisis textual.

Palabras clave: Sartre, libertad ontológica, libertad práctica, angustia, Otelo, mala fe, elección decisiva.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the long history of examination of Shakespeare's tragedies through myriad critical perspectives, Walter Kaufmann's book *From Shakespeare to Existentialism* (1980) is a significant contribution in existential philosophy. In this work, Kaufmann argues that long before the advent of existentialism, Shakespeare's tragedies portrayed characters who are deeply modern in their confrontation with freedom, personal responsibility, and the weight of choice. These are exactly the concerns of later existentialists such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, or Sartre. Kaufmann's analysis of Shakespeare as a precursor to existentialism opens a new means of interpreting the psychological and moral struggles faced by his tragic characters.

Nowhere are these existential concerns and notions more manifest than in *Othello*, a play that depicts the unraveling of a man confronted with the heavy demands of freedom, trust, and identity. His tragedy lies not only in his extreme manipulation by Iago, but also in his incapacity to embrace the ambiguity of the world and the burden of self-definition. Torn between his social status as a respected general and his hidden insecurities as a black outsider, he wavers between self-assertion and self-doubt without being able to compromise the two. His downfall is a sort of existential crisis: he is devastated by the anguish of freedom and the responsibility it involves. In this sense, *Othello* dramatizes and embodies Sartre's notions of freedom, bad faith, and anguish long before their actual introduction by Sartre.

Sartre's own dramatic engagement with Shakespeare in his play *Kean* can be seen as another fundamental example for the possibility of application of existential notions for a dramatic work. In this play, Sartre reimagines the popular Shakespearean actor Edmund Kean, and portrays him as a character torn between his roles on the stage and the elusive nature of his authentic self exactly like Othello. He is caught in the existential dilemma of shaping his identity in a world which lacks any fixed meaning. Sartre's play becomes a mirror to Shakespeare's tragic heroes such as Othello who are similarly faced with tormenting freedom to define themselves and its accompanying and perhaps unbearable anguish.

Building on Kaufmann's philosophical thoughts and Sartre's own dramatic rendering of existential philosophy in *Kean*, this article intends to explore how *Othello* can be viewed through the lens of Sartrean existentialism. By concentrating on the interplay of ontological and practical freedom, anguish, and bad faith within the characters of Othello, Iago, and Desdemona, this analysis aims to deepen our understanding of the play's lasting philosophical and psychological resonance, situating it within the more comprehensive intellectual discourse that links Shakespeare with existential thought.

Sartrean philosophy presents a more suitable ground for examining Othello's tragic anguish than either Kantian or Augustinian notions of freedom, because of its fundamental existential concentration on the individual's experience of responsibility and freedom. Kantian freedom is basically anchored in rational agency (the capability of the will to act based on the universal moral law), and presumes a stable, rational subject guided by duty and reason. Othello's crisis is not a rational moral choice at all but a deep existential confrontation with identity, social roles, and emotional tumult. Sartre's idea of freedom as a condition of being "condemned to be free" (*Being and Nothingness*, 567) encapsulates this struggle more precisely, stressing the anguish and despair that emerge when one faces the need for self-definition in an unpredictable and often hostile world. Unlike Kantian autonomy, which glorifies moral law and reason, Sartrean freedom incorporates the paradoxical and socially constrained aspects of Othello's experience, and thus makes it a more nuanced and appropriate perspective for the play's tragic dynamics.

Furthermore, Augustinian freedom, which is theological and defined as liberation through divine grace and agreement with God's will, is quite at odds with Sartrean freedom and its focus on ontological and existential dimensions. Augustinian thought places freedom in a spiritual framework of salvation and sin, while Othello's struggle takes place in a social and secular context dominated by alienation, racial assumptions, and interpersonal betrayal instead of divine redemption. Sartre's distinction between ontological and practical freedom better clarifies Othello's collapse. While he is ontologically free to choose his lot, he is practically confined by race, military code of honor, and Venetian social expectations, a tension that creates his deep anguish. Neither Kantian nor Augustinian grounds deal with this complicated interaction of freedom and limitation with the same rigor.

Before starting the main discussion on Sartre's existential notions in *Othello*, it is vital to take a brief look at the definitions of the key concepts that are going to be utilized in this study. Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), a principal figure in twentieth-century existential thought, offered a nuanced theory of human freedom that has deeply affected contemporary thinking. Sartre famously notes that "man is condemned to be free, and cannot choose not to be free", stressing that freedom is not a choice or a privilege but the very being of human consciousness, a thing that it cannot escape from (*Being and Nothingness*, 567). "Ontological freedom" is not solely the capacity to act but a kind of ontological condition that defines what it means to be human. Sartre also declares that "existence precedes essence", which means that humans first exist in the world and then define their essence through choosing different options (*Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 22). Ontological freedom involves the capacity of the consciousness to transcend one's facticity (the given conditions like biological, social or historical circumstances) and to project oneself into a future that one actively builds by one's choices and actions. This freedom is radical and absolute; it applies to all humans regardless of social, historical, or physical limitations. Thus, this kind of freedom exists independently of external constraints, and is a sort of agency.

Sartre also introduces another kind of freedom called "practical freedom". It refers to the concrete lived experience of freedom as it unfolds within social, historical, and psychological limitations. These constraints such as racial identity, societal roles, or gender norms restrict the range of our possible choices and thus complicate the exercise of freedom. For instance, Othello's practical freedom is influenced by his identity as a black Moor in Venetian society, by military and social hierarchies, by his rigid code of honor, and by others' manipulations. While due to his ontological freedom he remains free to define himself in any ways he would desire, in reality, his practical freedom determines which choices he can actually make in the play's context. Therefore, ontological freedom remains at the level of consciousness, while practical freedom is at the level of outside reality and what actually happens in our choices and actions.

The ontological freedom results in an experience of "anguish". Sartre defines anguish as the "feeling of the absolute freedom that we find ourselves invested with" (*Existentialism is a Humanism*, 29). It is a vague feeling of discomfort that is created due to our knowledge that there is no external authority or pre-determined essence that can guide, justify, or excuse our choices. Anguish is different from fear which has a definite object. It is a pervasive mood which is related to the "vertigo of possibility": the awareness that the only person responsible for our choices is ourself and not anyone else. The open-ended nature of future, the weight of choice, and our lack of knowledge of the possible consequences of our choices are the causes of anguish.

Since this anguish is not something desirable, we tend to flee from its experience through what Sartre calls "bad faith". It is a kind of self-deception or denial of freedom when we lie to ourselves about our freedom to evade the unease of absolute responsibility. It occurs when we pretend that we are restricted by our

emotions, external forces, or social functions, and so we evade the freedom that constitutes the core of our being. Anguish and bad faith are not the same; bad faith is the direct consequence of anguish. Anguish is an authentic engagement with our freedom, while bad faith is a refusal to accept it.

Othello dramatizes these Sartrean notions through the protagonist's moral and psychological conflicts. Othello perfectly illustrates the tension between ontological and practical freedom: while all through the play he has ontological freedom to choose and define himself, his practical freedom is severely constrained by his own insecurities, social dogmatic ideas, and Iago's deceit. He exhibits profound anguish in moments of emotional agitation (such as jealousy, doubt, or despair) which shows his awareness of the responsibility for his choices. However, Othello is also afflicted with bad faith by trying to evade this responsibility and by accusing either Iago or the rigid notions of honor as responsible for his wrong choices. He refuses to confront his own freedom honestly. This interaction between the realization of freedom and flight from it corroborates the existential core of this tragedy. Through the interpretation of *Othello* by Sartre's philosophy, we can expose the existential strains that lead to the character's downfall and also Shakespeare's consideration of human responsibility. This procedure elucidates the way the play dramatizes the sophisticated challenges of accepting freedom amidst social limitations and personal fears.

2. SARTREAN FREEDOM, ANGUISH, AND BAD FAITH IN *OTHELLO* AND *IAGO*

The tragedy of *Othello* has been investigated through perspectives of race, jealousy, and power, but it also presents very fertile ground for existential survey. The application of Sartre's notions like ontological or practical freedom, anguish, and bad faith to Othello's tragic arc can provide us with a deep background for reflecting on human freedom and the heavy burden of choice. Sartre asserts that "we are condemned to be free" (*Being and Nothingness*, 567), meaning that while we are not free from our situated conditions, we are always free to assume any response toward them. Viewed from this angle, Othello is not just a victim of Iago's manipulation, but a man who misuses his freedom and refuses to own it. His tragic outcome emerges not from outside pressures alone, but from his internal failure to own his choices and to endure the anguish of uncertainty of the consequences. Read via this framework, *Othello* becomes a tragedy of freedom; a narrative in which the issues of autonomy, responsibility, and insecurity converge.

Othello's journey throughout the play is an interesting illustration of Sartre's existential motifs of freedom, anguish, and bad faith. From the start, Othello displays himself as a man who chooses to define himself beyond social and especially racial limitations, manifesting ontological freedom. He behaves like a strong man who possesses his own freedom and resists against the external limiting pressures. Despite the systematic social pressures imposed by his status as a black Moor, Othello consciously enacts his ontological freedom by demonstrating his valor in battle, thereby obtaining the trust of Venetian officials who appoint him as the commander of their army. Sartre argues that "existence precedes essence"

(*Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 22), and here, Othello vigorously shapes his essence through this achievement which can be viewed as an act of defiance against the rigid racial attitudes of his society. He defines himself according to his own standards, not the dictations of his society.

Othello's marriage with Desdemona further complicates this web of freedom and constraint. His choice to marry a white woman of higher social rank questions the deep-rooted racial hierarchies of Venetian society. Although the Duke and Senate ultimately consent to their union, it is not without resistance, especially from Desdemona's father, Brabantio, who accuses Othello of enchanting his daughter:

She is abused, stol'n from me, and corrupted
By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks;
For nature so prepost'rously to err –
Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense –
Sans witchcraft could not. (1. 3. 73-77)

This accusation emphasizes the racial skepticism surrounding Othello's freedom to love and wed Desdemona. His power to choose freely is thus constantly undercut by the prejudices of the people around him, stressing the tension that exists between ontological freedom and the social forces that try to dictate one's identity.

Othello's own declaration of his honor and freedom before the Senate reflects his autonomous self-assertion in resisting against these constraints and defying them. Rather than apologizing for his marriage, which crosses racial and cultural boundaries, he confidently explains, "My services which I have done the signiory / Shall out-tongue his [Brabantio's] complaints" (1. 2. 18-19). He defends his choice by recounting the way he won the love of Desdemona: "She loved me for the dangers I had passed, / And I loved her that she did pity them. / This only is the witchcraft I have used" (1. 3. 193-195). He confidently claims ownership of his love and choices by delivering Desdemona to Iago's care with trust and serenity:

My life upon her faith!
Honest Iago,
My Desdemona must I leave to thee:
I prithee, let thy wife attend on her;
And bring them after in the best advantage. (1. 3. 335-339)

These moments confirm Othello's autonomy and self-assertion since he chooses to assess himself by his own criteria rather than by racial or social perceptions. However, as the play progresses, this sense of freedom starts to crumble under the weight of doubt and manipulation, exposing the fragility of self-assertion when not deeply owned.

The way Iago asserts his ontological freedom is peculiar to himself. The play opens with Iago, who declares his free choice to manipulate and ruin Othello and Cassio, motivated by envy, ambition, and suspicion. He dislikes Othello's command and Cassio's position as his lieutenant and fosters a dark suspicion concerning

Othello's relationship with his wife Emilia. He displays his calculated spitefulness in his soliloquies, asides, or his dialogues with Roderigo, the only person in the play who is aware of his hidden thoughts. He admits:

I hate the Moor
And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets
He has done my office. I know not if't be true;
But I, for mere suspicion in that kind, will do as if for surety. (1. 3. 384-387)

This confession underlines his "motiveless malignity" (Bloom 109), a sheer self-driven evil without any obvious reason. Since Iago is not a reliable character, critics debate over the nature of his wickedness: some regard him as an agent of anarchy driven by spite, others as a genius who exploits others' vulnerabilities in a perfectly corrupt way. Despite their many differences, Iago and Othello share a profound similarity. As Honigsmann states:

The play's two principal characters, who repeat each other in their stated motives, as jealous husbands bent on revenge, also resemble each other in their secret motives. Iago's resentment of class privilege makes him as much the outsider in society as Othello's Moorishness; both men want to be accepted, and both react with a quite irrational 'malignity' when they think themselves rejected. (96)

This duplicity underscores the sophisticated interplay of social and individual factors that define their freedom and tragic choices.

Iago is a perfect embodiment of Sartre's idea of bad faith, as he has selected it consciously as a mode of being. Reversing the biblical statement "I am that I am" (1 Corinthians 15: 10), Iago discloses his chilling commitment to deception, not just of others but of himself. He declares:

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
In complement 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. (1. 1. 63-71)

He devises and maintains a false identity (that of an honest benevolent man) manipulating Othello and others while denying an authentic self. While he may uniquely embody Sartrean freedom in his radical autonomy, he is devoid of one essential aspect: Sartre's concept of authentic freedom also involves recognition of others' freedom and a moral dimension which Iago clearly disregards by objectifying and dominating those around him. Hence, his freedom is actually a meaningless and distorted type of freedom, characterized by monstrous agency. He adeptly exploits the inauthenticity of others, especially Othello, whose susceptibility to doubt and

racial shame Iago realizes and takes advantage of. In fact, Othello, Desdemona, and Emilia are better embodiments of Sartre's central existential tension between anguished freedom and the temptation to evade it through bad faith, or between authentic selfhood and the ease of accepting fixed social roles. Iago feels no anguish and refuses to take any responsibility for the absolute chaos he has created at the end of the play: "Demand me nothing. What you know, you know. / From this time forth I never will speak word" (5. 2. 355-356).

Despite his powerful assertion of ontological freedom beyond the social boundaries at the start of the play, Othello fails to sustain it at the later stages. In the conflict between his existential agency (how one interprets the world to make choices) and the external limiting factors, his practical freedom begins to crumble under the heavy weight of those very racial perceptions he once firmly resisted. His freedom, as Rappoport declares, "is destroyed by Iago's destructive freedom" (11). Hidden behind a mask of honesty, assuming the "guise of a sober Horatio-like friend" (Ferne 155), and using innuendo rather than outright statements, Iago takes ample advantage of Othello's internalized racial vulnerability to incite his jealousy and to make him suspect Desdemona's fidelity. Othello is so confident of Iago's honesty that he asserts: "Why did I marry? This honest creature doubtless / Sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds" (3. 3. 283-284). Therefore, Othello trusts in Iago and begins to surrender his freedom to the false narrative he has devised. The man who once said "my life upon her faith" (1. 3. 335), now denies his earlier convictions and yields to the racial prejudices of his society, uttering his feeling of inferiority and unnaturalness of his marriage:

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. (3. 3. 304-309)

The last two lines are significant since they demonstrate his early retreat into a simplified emotional *certainty* of her betrayal instead of confronting the uncertainty of trust and appreciating the ambiguous nature of reality.

In Act 3, Scene 3, Othello begins to find himself inside a context of decisive choice and heavy anguish of freedom: he must choose between the "polar opposites of Iago and Desdemona" or between "the steadfast loyalty of the former" and "his ardor and passion for the latter" (Ansari 142). He vacillates between doubt and love, and experiences a severe internal conflict reflected in his capricious statements:

I had rather be a toad
and live upon the vapor of a dungeon
than keep a corner in the thing I love
for others' uses. [denoting doubt]
...

If she be false, heaven <mocks> itself!
I'll not believe it. [denoting love] (3. 3. 311-14, 319-320)

This uncertainty or self-doubt experienced by Othello precisely signifies the kind of existential anguish Sartre describes. He communicates it to Iago as "thou hast set me on the rack" (3. 3. 385) and particularly in the famous farewell quotation where he notes his forcible divorce with his former comfort and honor, because now he deems himself a dishonored betrayed man:

Farewell the tranquil mind! Farewell content!
Farewell the plumed troops and the big wars
That makes ambition virtue! O, farewell!
...
Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone! (3. 3. 400-409)

The above lines denote Othello's severe concern for his military code of honor which has been damaged by Desdemona's supposed betrayal, and later in the play, he articulates similar worry when he says to Desdemona that he cannot "keep [his love] as a cistern for foul toads / to knot and gender in" (4. 2. 71-72). This honor code, like other social prejudices, further limits and erodes his practical freedom and his capability for making the right choice. He still retains terrible anguish when he addresses these doubtful statements to Iago:

I think my wife be honest and think she is not.
I think that thou art just and think thou art not.
I'll have some proof! Her name, that was as fresh
As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black
As mine own face. (3. 3. 439-443)

Again, the last three lines display Othello's total surrendering of his freedom to dogmatic racial outlooks as if they are part of his own mindset; he regards the denigration of her name as foul as the blackness of his skin.

Although Othello initially boasts of his immunity to jealousy and of acting wisely, "No, Iago. I'll see before I doubt. When I doubt, prove" (3. 3. 190-191), his desperate demand for "ocular proof" reflects an increasing anxiety about acting without certainty. But the problem is that adultery cannot be proved:

It is impossible you should see this,
Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys,
... but yet I say,
If imputation and strong circumstances
Which lead directly to the door of truth
Will give you satisfaction, you might have 't. (3. 3. 459-465)

As the last three lines suggest, Iago knows he cannot provide any firm evidence for Desdemona's guiltiness, but he exploits this tension in Othello by staging situations and using the handkerchief as supposed evidence, knowing that Othello

will internalize the implications instead of investigating the source. For example, consider his first proof and its extreme triviality (Cassio's dream in which he declares his love to Desdemona) but Othello's reaction, revealing his approximate certitude: "Iago: Nay, this was but his dream. / Othello: But this denoted a *foregone conclusion*. / 'Tis a *shrewd doubt*, though it be but a dream" (3. 3. 485-487). As Othello starts to rely on Iago's narrative, he steepens deeper into anguish, trapped between the fear of betrayal and the burden of choice. Othello appreciates Desdemona's love as a kind of order in his life without which "chaos is come again" (3. 3. 102), so choosing is a burdensome act for him:

Ay, let her rot and perish and be damned
Tonight, for she shall not live. No, my heart is turned
To stone, I strike it, and it hurts my hand. O, the
World hath not a sweeter creature! She might lie by
An emperor's side and command him tasks. (4. 1. 202- 206)

Despite deciding to kill her, he cannot subdue his passionate love for her and he still despondently acknowledges the high merit he discerns in her personality.

Othello still maintains his freedom but starts to misemploy it, not because it has been taken from him, but because he permits uncertainty and fear to dictate his choices. Sartrean anguish (the realization that one is radically free and thus entirely responsible) becomes unbearable for Othello. As he becomes consumed by doubt, he deserts the freedom to define reality for himself, and instead he blindly accepts Iago's false narrative: Sartre describes this shift as a fall into the pitfall of bad faith. It occurs when a person denies his freedom by accepting a fixed identity or explanation imposed from outside, and so evading the anguish of choice and its responsibility.

Othello, who once boldly asserted his love and integrity, starts to abandon this responsibility. Rather than confronting Desdemona directly and demanding she unbiasedly provide a reasonable justification, or considering any other possible explanation, he prefers to trust solely in Iago's insinuations. He treats her not as free subject but as an object whose value is merely determined by his perception. He chooses to believe in betrayal because doing so simplifies the ambiguity of human relationships. As a proof to this claim, we can examine Act 4, Scene 2, where he does not allow her to defend her innocence and accuses her of "whoredom", deeming every piece of her defense as a sort of duplicity:

Othello: Are not you a strumpet?
Desdemona: No, as I am a Christian!
If to preserve this vessel for my lord
From any other foul unlawful touch
Be not to be a strumpet, I am none.
Othello: What, not a whore?
Desdemona: No, as I shall be saved.
Othello: Is 't possible?
Desdemona: O, heaven forgive us!

Othello: I cry you mercy, then.
I took you for that cunning whore of Venice
That married with Othello. (4. 2. 94-105; our emphasis)

In the last two lines, Othello scornfully refers to Desdemona's dishonesty, and it echoes Iago's previous claim that Venetian women including Desdemona "do let God see the pranks / they dare not show their husbands" (3. 3. 233-234). Similarly, in Act 4, Scene 1, when Iago arranges a plan to trigger Cassio into confessing his supposed guilt, being watched by Othello from a far place, Othello relinquishes his freedom and judgment to whatever Iago claims:

Iago: <Faith,> the cry goes that you marry her.
 Cassio: Prithee say true!
 Iago: I am a very villain else.
 Othello: Have you scored me? Well.
 Cassio: This is the monkey's own giving out. She is persuaded I will marry her out of her own love and flattery, not out of my promise.
 ...
 Cassio: She was here even now. She haunts me in every place. ...
 Othello: Crying, "O dear Cassio," as it were; his gesture imports it.
 Cassio: So hangs and lolls and weeps upon me, so shakes and pulls me. Ha, ha, ha!
 Othello: Now he tells how she plucked him to my chamber. – O, I see that nose of yours, but not that dog I shall throw it to. (4. 1. 144-163)

Rather than meeting directly with Cassio to eliminate his own misunderstanding, Othello is conjecturing at the possible meanings of his gestures from a hidden distance, always interpreting them in the worst conceivable way without being aware that Iago and he are actually talking about Bianca, not Desdemona.

Through surrendering his interpretive control, Othello, as Sartre would say, refuses to live authentically. He has lost the ability to create meaning for himself and, instead, he absorbs the role of the betrayed, dishonored husband that Iago has made for him. Even his language starts to echo Iago's, further disintegrating his moral autonomy: "a horned man's a monster and a beast" (4. 1. 77). This sentence uttered by Othello reminds us of the "green-eyed monster of jealousy" expressed by Iago before, and the reality of the monster Othello has turned into now. Othello's tragedy lies not just in his deception by Iago, but in his tragic cooperation in this deception by striving to gain moral refuge in certainty, even when it is false. He does not think even for a moment that maybe the person who is in the wrong is Iago not Desdemona. Embracing the dominant racial justification illustrated in "how nature erring from itself" (3. 3. 267) is easier for Othello than investigating the truth. He cannot recognize action based on fear from decisive freedom and, as a result, becomes detached from the moral weight of his choices. As Sartre contends,

freedom is never *lost* but just *evaded*. Thus, Othello's descent is not into passive victimhood but into willful self-betrayal. By Act 5, Othello's internalization of Iago's outlook has resulted in a full retreat from self-determination.

Othello finally reaches the pinnacle of his anguish and simultaneous bad faith in Act 5, Scene 2, when he decides to murder Desdemona in her bed. His long famous soliloquy here exposes his severe internal tension:

It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul.
 Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars.
 It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood,
 Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
 And smooth as monumental alabaster.
 Yet, she must die, else she'll betray more men.
 Put out the light, and then put out the light.
 If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
 I can again thy former light restore
 Should I repent me. But once put out thy light,
 Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,
 I know not where is that Promethean heat
 That can thy light relume. When I have plucked <the>
 rose,
 I cannot give it vital growth again.
 It needs must wither. I'll smell <it> on the tree.
 O balmy breath, that dost almost persuade
 Justice to break her sword! *He kisses her.* One
 More, one more.
 Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee
 And love thee after. (5. 2. 1-21)

These lines reveal Othello's inner torment (a mind fractured by conflicting emotions like love, jealousy, guilt, and despair) as he prepares to kill Desdemona. The obsessive repetition of this statement ("it is the cause" (5. 2. 1)) is not merely rhetorical but a manifestation of Othello's attempt to repress his existential anguish by grounding his action in a supposed moral necessity. Hence, he calls it a kind of sacrifice: "O perjured woman, thou dost stone my heart / And <mak'st> me call what I intend to do / A murder, *which I thought a sacrifice!*" (5. 2. 78-80). Bradley notes: "The deed he is bound to do is no murder, but a sacrifice. He is to save Desdemona from herself, not in hate but in honor; in honor, and also in love" (169).

From a Sartrean perspective, this moment also displays bad faith: the refusal to confront the burden of freedom and its responsibility. Othello shifts the weight of his moral choice onto an external "cause", thereby evading the uncomfortable truth that he *alone* is responsible for choosing to kill Desdemona. His invocation of the "chaste stars" emphasizes the discord between his inner chaos and the perceived purity of the cosmos: it is a plea for justification from an indifferent universe but their silence reinforces his alienation reminding him of the sad fact that the moral weight of his actions belongs to him alone. His anguish here is doubled: the pain of knowing he must act freely, and the pain of attempting to deny that freedom by

accusing an external cause. Rather than facing the radical freedom of action in an uncertain universe, he retreats into self-deception, covering murder in the illusion of fate. His hesitation to harm Desdemona's body as well as his veneration of her beauty manifest his internal tension; his freedom is anguished since he recognizes the unchangeable results of his choice. The irreversible quality of his choice is also evident in the metaphor of extinguishing a light which symbolizes the murder and the extinction of both love and life. Othello knows that unlike a candle's flame, Desdemona's light cannot be restored once lost, and this reflects the immutability of his decision. His mention of "whiter skin", "snow", and "alabaster" is further evidence for his entrenched racial beliefs.

When Othello commits murder, he believes, for a while, that he has done the right and justified action: "O, I were damned beneath all depth in hell / But that I did proceed upon *just grounds* / To this extremity" (5. 2. 168-170). However, when Emilia reveals the sad truth of his deception by Iago, Othello's identity breaks down: "Lodovico: Where is this rash and most unfortunate man? Othello: *That's he that was Othello*. Here I am" (5. 2. 333-334). Othello talks about himself in third-person as if he no longer knows himself. He is confronted with the irrevocable consequence of his wrong choice. He observes how he has lost both love and military honor due to his wrong choice and out of absurd reasons:

I am not valiant neither,
But every puny whipster gets my sword.
But why should honor outlive honesty?
Let it go all. (5. 2. 291-294)

In these final moments, Othello at last, does come to a tragic recognition of what he has done, and experiences vast despair as well as existential awakening:

Here is my journey's end, here is my butt
And very sea-mark of my utmost sail.
...
Now, how dost thou look now? O ill-starred wench,
Pale as thy smock, when we shall meet at compt,
This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,
And fiends will snatch at it. Cold, cold, my girl?
Even like thy chastity. – O cursed, cursed slave! –
Whip me, you devils,
From the possession of this heavenly sight!
Blow me about in winds, roast me in sulfur,
Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire! (5. 2. 318-329)

As Fernie states:

It is the beginning of his recognition that he has disgraced himself far more absolutely than if Desdemona had really betrayed him, the tragic realization that all his former, needless shame and suffering is minimal compared with what he must now suffer. It is also the beginning of ethical recovery. (164)

This is not redemption, but the tormenting awakening to freedom when it is already too late. He finally perceives that he himself has chosen his action and no external cause or devil compelled him to do so. This moment of realized anguish is the existential reckoning Sartre describes: not sheer regret, but the intolerable awareness of having acted freely and become the sum of one's choices.

The last choice Othello makes through the enactment of his ontological freedom amidst the outside constraints is suicide. It is not merely a gesture of despair but an existential reckoning. In killing himself, Othello in fact redeems ownership of his choices and their ramifications. He no longer reprimands Iago, Desdemona, Cassio, or Venetian society. Instead, in a drastic change, he just blames himself and simply notes, "I took by th' throat the circumcised dog / And smote him thus" (5. 2. 355-356). By this statement, Othello is comparing himself to the outsider he once overwhelmed and he is actually implying that the enemy was always within and a savage part of his own self. This act is the summit of Sartre's tragic vision: the hero cannot escape freedom, even in death. When Othello demands the present people to "speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate, / Nor set down aught in malice" (5. 2. 402-403), and "of one that loved not wisely, but too well" (5. 2. 404), he is not providing any justification for his actions like before, but requesting to be seen in full: the man who once loved, suspected, murdered, and finally understood his fault.

From Sartre's outlook, Othello's act of suicide can be regarded as a tardy but authentic act. By choosing to end his life, Othello exercises absolute freedom, taking control over his own existence instead of living under the weight of guilt and anguish. Also, by finally taking responsibility for his wrong choices, he spurns the self-deceptions that have caused him to fall into bad faith. His last words are neither accusative nor self-pitying but the language of a man who finally accepts the moral burden of his own freedom though it has culminated in severe tragedy: "I kissed thee ere I killed thee. No way but this, / Killing myself, to die upon a kiss" (5. 2. 420-421). These final statements demonstrate that he meets death on his own terms, combining love and death in a meaningful choice. Viewed from this angle, *Othello* is not just a tragedy of manipulation or jealousy, but an existential tragedy in which the hero perceives, too late, that to be human means to choose, and to be condemned to the ramifications of those choices.

Sartre's account of love presents an appropriate background to further examine the mutual relationship of freedom between Othello and Desdemona. Love, according to Sartre, is an endeavor to resolve the instability of freedom by possessing the Other and objectifying them; an act that results in inevitable conflict and bad faith. Othello's love for Desdemona declines into such possessiveness, because he tries to control her loyalty in order to strengthen his own identity. In this way, he refuses to respect her freedom as a separate subject. Desdemona's love is more authentic: her choice to love Othello opposes social and racial barriers, and originally affirms his freedom instead of negating it. But her practical freedom is confined by patriarchal and cultural system, and so the reciprocal recognition Sartrean love requires eventually fails. Othello renounces her subjectivity, and

Desdemona, powerless to assert her own freedom in a collapsing relationship, turns into a helpless victim of his bad faith.

3. SARTREAN FREEDOM, ANGUISH, AND BAD FAITH IN DESDEMONA AND EMILIA

In this tragedy, Desdemona stands as a compelling figure of steadfast love, genuine idealism, and deep suffering. Her resolute devotion to Othello, even when faced with increasing cruelty and mistrust, is not solely passive but a conscious and radical choice distinguished by hope and virtue. Viewed via the lens of Sartre's existential philosophy (especially his concepts of freedom, authenticity, and the alienation and anguish caused by "the look" of the Other), Desdemona's idealism can supply an insightful dimension: she is a free subject who adopts a positive vision of love and virtue, even as the world turns aggressively against her and crushes her. Her idealistic vision paradoxically both supports her and intensifies her anguish, particularly when we contrast it with the pragmatic realism of Emilia, her attendant and foil. The interaction between these two women exemplifies a wider philosophical struggle between idealism and realism, virtue and disillusionment, as well as existential autonomy and societal compromise.

Sartre contends that humans are "condemned to be free" (*Being and Nothingness*, 567), and they must choose the way of their life and take full responsibility for their choices. Desdemona illustrates this kind of freedom in her sincere love for Othello. She does not select him just due to passion but she freely commits herself to an ideal of love that goes beyond the barriers of class, race, and restricting social conventions. She bravely remarks before her father and the Senate authorities:

That I love the Moor to live with him,
My downright violence and storm of fortunes
May trumpet to the world. My heart's subdued
Even to the very quality of my lord.
I saw Othello's visage in his mind,
And to his honors and his valiant parts
Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate. (1. 3. 283-289)

In this bold declaration of her love, Desdemona demonstrates not only her freedom, but her idealistic stance. Her love is anchored in an honest faith in love's power to unite and survive. She loves Othello's inner virtuous qualities, and his outer qualities like blackness do not matter for her. And thus, her choice is a reflective and self-aware one. Unlike a pragmatic or skeptic view, her idealism upholds hope and righteousness, rousing her to oppose her father and her society. This idealistic thought makes her commitment authentic in the Sartrean sense: she entirely owns her choice, and she does not conceal herself behind social customs or self-deception.

Desdemona carefully expresses her loyalties in a mixture of respect and appreciation for her father and a new commitment to her husband:

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. (1. 3. 209-218)

This assertion not only demonstrates her autonomy but also emphasizes her mature moral agency, choosing to esteem both her past and present loyalties on her own terms. Also, this confession is not mere compliance but a deliberate, hopeful step into a new identity, one developed by her ideals of fidelity and love. Her honesty and virtue illuminate a hope that love can be a vehicle for sincere connection, even in a split world. However, the rigid racial and patriarchal attitudes of her society severely confine her practical freedom, seen even in the warning her own father gives Othello when they part, "Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see. / She has deceived her father, and may thee" (1. 3. 333-334). This ominous advice cultivates the first seeds of doubt in Othello's mind.

Unlike Othello, Desdemona sustains her free choice (love of Othello) up to the end of the play, and remains faithful to this cause despite the devastating external forces (such as dominant racial and patriarchal beliefs, Iago's deception, and Othello's mounting jealousy and capricious behavior) which attempt to confine her practical freedom and culminate in her anguish. Throughout the play, she retains her steadfast love toward Othello, and refuses even to suspect his jealousy or to react with mutual violence against his brutality. She views all the events in the light of her idealism, moral integrity, and resolute love, while Emilia offers more realistic comments for the same occasion. In Act 3, Scene 4, Desdemona, in response to Emilia who asks about jealousy in Othello, replies, "Who, he? I think the sun where he was born / Drew all such humors from him" (31-32), or a little later, when Othello furiously demands the handkerchief and deserts there, Desdemona interprets his rashness to be due to some political affairs while Emilia conjectures the right cause:

Desdemona: Something, sure, of state,
 Either from Venice, or some unhatched practice
 Made demonstrable here in Cyprus to him,
 Hath puddled his clear spirit; ...
 Emilia: Pray heaven it be
 State matters, as you think, and no conception
 Nor no jealous toy concerning you.
 Desdemona: Alas the day, I never gave him cause!
 Emilia: But jealous souls will not be answered so.
 They are not ever jealous for the cause,
 But jealous for they're jealous. It is a monster
 Begot upon itself, born on itself. (3. 4. 161-83)

Desdemona denies even the probability of Othello's jealousy but Emilia's statements about the monster of jealousy, besides being true, echo Iago's words. When Othello is summoned from Cyprus, and Cassio is appointed in his place, Desdemona sincerely declares her happiness, but Othello strikes her in front of her cousin Lodovico. She does not quarrel with him, and just says, "I will not stay to offend you" (4. 1. 279). She feels deep anguish because of Othello's change of behavior and her unawareness of its reason, but she refuses to accuse him or abandon her love.

Desdemona's existential anguish has a different nature from that of Othello's: she confronts her tragic fate with integrity and she has the existential courage to endure anguish and to live authentically. She suffers for her choices in a world that confines her practical freedom. As the play progresses, and Iago's manipulation poisons Othello's perception against her, she gets trapped in what Sartre calls "the Look" of the Other. She is seen not as a free subject but as an object defined by doubt and bogus imputation:

Was this fair paper, this most goodly book,
Made to write "whore" upon? What committed?
...
Heaven stops the nose at it, and the moon winks;
The bawdy wind that kisses all it meets
Is hushed within the hollow mine of earth
And will not hear 't. What committed?
<Impudent strumpet!> (4. 2. 82-92)

Using metaphors from nature, Othello notes that even natural forces are ashamed of her act and cannot bear to watch or hear it. This objectification intensifies her anguish, because it denies her the acknowledgment of her truth and freedom. She protests:

By heaven you do me wrong! (4. 2. 93)
Your wife, my lord, your true and loyal wife. (41)
Heaven doth truly know it. (47)
Desdemona: Am I that name Iago?
Iago: What name, fair lady?
Desdemona: *Such as she said my lord did say I was.* (4. 2. 138-140, our emphasis)

She is not even able to *mention* the word "whore" let alone to commit the act, and these fragmented lines exhibit Desdemona in profound existential despair. Her anguish is more than personal pain; it is the existential torment of having her authentic self denied. Her idealistic faith in fidelity and love clashes violently with the distorted reality imposed on her. She struggles to reconcile who she is with how she is perceived. Sartre argues that when others define us, we are alienated from ourselves. Desdemona's desperate attempts to be understood, to reassert her identity are constantly blocked. However, this unjust accusation does not persuade her to

dismiss her love, but to retain it even to her death. She swears on her love to Othello before Iago:

If e'er my will did trespass 'gainst his love,
 Either in discourse of thought or actual deed,
 Or that mine eyes, mine ears, or my sense
 Delighted then in any other form,
 Or that I do not yet, and ever did,
 And ever will – though he do shake me off
 To beggarly divorcement – love him dearly,
 Comfort forswear me! Unkindness may
 Do much,
 And his unkindness may defeat my life,
 But never taint my love. (4. 2. 180-190)

Though accused unjustly, Desdemona protests about Othello's unkindness in innocent and loving terms, saying to Iago:

Those that do teach young babes
 Do it with gentle means and easy task.
 He might have chide me so, for, in good faith,
 I am a child to chiding. (4. 2. 129-32)

Desdemona's refusal to respond to cruelty harshly shows her innocence and the anguish of being defenseless in a relationship dominated by jealousy and doubt. Even after encountering so much unkindness from Othello, Desdemona still loves him, "My love doth so approve him / That even his stubbornness, his checks, his frown – / Prithee, unpin me – have grace and favor <in them>" (4. 3. 20-22).

Shakespeare sets this steadfast view of love and resulting anguish in contrast with Emilia's pragmatism. Emilia's view of love, marriage, and men is anchored in everyday life experience, bitterness, and harsh realism. While Desdemona regards love as holy and redemptive, Emilia sees it as defective and hierarchical. In Act 3, Scene 4, Emilia asserts this bitter fact about men: "they are all but stomachs, and we all but food; / to eat us hungerly, and when they are full, / they belch us" (121-123). This skeptical metaphor displays her awareness of male exploitation and dominance. Unlike Desdemona, she is not deceived by romantic ideals, but she views gender relations as transactional or predacious. Her world is one in which women must strive to survive, not to dream romance. This philosophical difference intensifies Desdemona's suffering: she sticks to ideals in a world Emilia knows will not respect them.

This sharp contrast continues when Desdemona puts forth her idealistic disbelief in the existence of unfaithful women and asks Emilia, "Dost thou in conscience think – tell me, Emilia – / That there be women do abuse their husbands / In such gross kind?" (4. 3. 67-69), to which Emilia replies, "Yes, a dozen; and as many to th' vantage as / would store the world they played for" (4. 3. 95-96). Her question displays not naivety but existential perplexity: she attempts to understand a world where betrayal might be real, and her love can be met with such profound mistrust. This is the anguish

of a consciousness trying to figure out a world that no longer realizes its truth. Emilia does not glorify betrayal but just acknowledges its reality. She speaks from a stance of ethical realism, realizing that moral purity is often not honored in a corrupt world. This dialogue indicates Desdemona's painful innocence, and her refusal or inability to abandon her faith in fidelity and justice, even as she is unjustly condemned. Her anguish, then, is not merely the pain of betrayal but the existential disparity between her idealistic ideology and the cruel and chaotic world that denies it. Another dialogue also demonstrates their stark contrast: Desdemona states, "Beshrew me if I would do such a wrong / for the whole world!" (4. 3. 88-89) But Emilia is ready to betray her husband for the price of the whole world since it is worth the risk: "Who / would not make her husband a cuckold to make / him a monarch? I should venture purgatory for 't" (4. 3. 85-87). This humorous reply reveals the realistic stance of Emilia towards gender relations and bears a semblance of truth. Emilia further challenges the naïve idealization of women's loyalty by saying:

Let husbands know
Their wives have senses like them. They see, and
smell,
And have their palates both for sweet and sour,
As husbands have. (4. 3. 104-108)

These statements underline her belief that women, like men, have desires and the capacity for moral ambiguity. Also, Emilia's statement, "but I do think it is their husbands' faults / if wives do fall" (4. 3. 97-98), admits the mutual nature of betrayal, indirectly condemning the social constraints and injustice that restrict women's freedom. Emilia's realism indicates a form of anguish originated from living in a world where love and loyalty are complicated and disillusioned by disloyalty and power. Finally, the solution they offer for how to confront with male exploitation differs starkly:

Emilia: ...Then let them use us well. Else let them know,
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.
Desdemona: Good night, good night. <God> me such uses send,
Not to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend. (4. 3. 114-117)

Emilia defends a practical revengeful strategy while Desdemona endorses an idealistic gentle policy.

The different nature of Desdemona's anguish from that of Othello's is further revealed in Act 5, Scene 2, when she is about to be killed by Othello. Her anguish is as profound as that of Othello but differently structured; one anchored not in the torment of choice, but in the existential susceptibility that comes with openness and authenticity. Her suffering is quiet, composed, and morally steadfast. When Othello demands that she repent for her supposed sins, she confidently states she knows no sin except her love for Othello, and this conviction similarly reflects her freedom: she does not implore for validation or fall into hysteria, but serenely expresses her truth, controlling her words and her moral constancy:

Othello: Think on thy sins.
 Desdemona: They are loves I bear to you.
 Othello: Ay, and for that thou diest.
 Desdemona: That death's unnatural that kills for loving.
 Alas, why you gnaw you so your nether lip?
 Some bloody passion shakes your very frame.
 These are portents, but yet I hope, I hope
 They do not point on me. (5. 2. 48-55)
 ...
 Desdemona: And have you mercy, too. I never did
 Offend you in my life, never loved Cassio
 But with such general warranty of heaven
 As I might love, I never gave him the token.
 Othello: By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in 's hand!
 Desdemona: He found it, then.
 I never gave it him. Send for him hither.
 Let him confess a truth.
 Othello: He hath confessed that he hath used thee.
 Desdemona: He will not say so.
 Othello: No, his mouth is stopped.
 Desdemona: Alas, he is betrayed, and I undone. (5. 2. 73-96)

All her arguments are met with failure since Othello has succumbed seriously to bad faith. Unlike Othello, Desdemona never yields to bad faith. She does not manipulate appearances or cheat herself to avoid pain. Her character does not vacillate or conform to the distorted perceptions of others. Instead, she illustrates what Sartre defines as good faith or authenticity, choosing to be what she is through conscious and responsible action. Even as her practical freedom is taken from her through suffocation, she retains her ontological freedom in her dignity, her values, and more importantly in her selfhood. Her anguish is existential in the most perfect sense: it is the suffering of a free person exposed to the violent abuse by another's freedom. Even in this condition, she does not treat Othello harshly, and succumbs patiently to her fate:

Desdemona: O banish me, my lord, but kill me not!
 Othello: Down, strumpet!
 Desdemona: Kill me tomorrow, let me live tonight.
 Othello: Nay, if you strive –
 Desdemona: But half an hour!
 Othello: Being down, there is no pause.
 Desdemona: But while I say one prayer!
 Othello: It is too late. (5. 2. 98-105)

Desdemona's persistence in these last moments to hamper Othello from committing murder and damning himself forever, which is faced with his equal persistence in his self-deception, ironically exhibits her love.

Even in the last moments of her life, Desdemona continues to choose love. In the most terrifying moment of the play, after being suffocated by Othello, she revives for a brief time, and claims responsibility for her death (Brown 214):

Desdemona: A guiltless death I die.
 Emilia: Who hath done this deed?
 Desdemona: Nobody. I myself. Farewell.
 Commend me to my kind lord. O, farewell! (5. 2. 150-153)

This confession has long baffled critics: why should Desdemona, falsely condemned and killed, protect her murderer? In Sartrean terms, these lines do not reveal her submission but a final radical affirmation of her freedom and even a kind of retaining of her idealism. Sartre argues that we are free even in how we encounter our death. Her idealism, far from naïve, becomes a sort of moral resistance. In refusing to cast blame, Desdemona becomes the author of her own narrative, choosing to die in love and dignity rather than in blame, fear, vengeance, or hatred. It is surely a paradox: in a world where she has been reduced to an object of mistrust, Desdemona displays her final act as her own. She does not die as an object but as a subject, a consciousness that still can choose. While Othello looks for excuses, Desdemona asserts her identity through choice, refusing to be estimated by any pre-determined role like wife or victim. Her act is also a kind of sacrifice, or a high price she pays for her love toward Othello. Kottman asserts, “the cost is a world in which killing one’s lover, being killed by one’s lover, is perhaps the only way to prove that one loves truly” (141). Her act reveals her authenticity since it involves embracing freedom and responsibility even under difficult situations. Through Desdemona, Shakespeare dramatizes the existential paradox of human freedom: its force and its flimsiness in the face of an indifferent reality.

Desdemona’s final act also clarifies the final distinction between her and Emilia. Upon finding the truth, Emilia, unlike Desdemona, does not protect Othello, nor does she defend herself. She speaks the truth very harshly and with extreme power, saying to Othello, “O, the more angel she, and you the blacker devil!” (5. 2. 161). Her realism gives her the boldness to speak truthfully; she condemns Iago, “you told a lie, an odious, damned lie! / Upon my soul, a lie, a wicked lie!” (5. 2. 216-217), and refuses to remain silent: “I will not charm my tongue. I am bound to speak” (5. 2. 220). Unlike Desdemona, Emilia’s last moments are quarrelsome and even revolutionary. She divulges Iago’s lies, censures Othello, and accepts death for telling the truth. Her commitment to honesty, even at high personal peril, underscores her fight for moral freedom amidst an oppressive world. Her courage is external and practical, while Desdemona’s courage is internal and idealistic; she dies for retaining her love.

Together, Desdemona and Emilia exemplify how the search for freedom (whether via firm love or truth-telling) can prompt anguish in a world in which deception, jealousy, and power struggles are quite widespread. Emilia’s practical courage to reveal Iago’s wickedness provides a vital, if costly, path to justice, whereas Desdemona’s idealism tragically displays the catastrophic ramifications of

virtue and innocence in a corrupt society. And Desdemona arouses our sympathy not due to her divine features, but since we regard her “as an ordinary mortal woman” (Hadfield 65) with the power of freedom and choice.

4. CONCLUSION

Viewed from Sartre’s existential perspective, *Othello* is not just a story of jealousy, deceit, or racial prejudice, but a penetrating study of human freedom and the anguish it involves. Othello’s journey, from a confident general who defines himself through action and love to the fragmented man who breaks down under suspicion and shame, vividly embodies Sartre’s ontological freedom, existential burden of choice and anguish, as well as bad faith. While Iago’s schemes fuel his downfall, Othello’s tragedy basically originates from his own failure to face the responsibilities of freedom, and his refusal to think, to interpret, to trust, and to act authentically when confronted with uncertainty. He forsakes his freedom by yielding to Iago’s bogus narrative and the social perceptions that challenge his identity and make him “ashamed of his own race and ethnicity” (Ferne 140), until he ultimately reaches this sad recognition that he, and no one else, is responsible for Desdemona’s tragic death. In his final act which is his suicide, Othello redeems his agency, not as a kind of salvation, but as a form of acknowledgement.

Shakespeare’s play thus perfectly illustrates Sartre’s attitude that human beings are “condemned to be free” (*Being and Nothingness*, 567): even when we attempt to escape from freedom, we are never absolved of the heavy burden of choosing and being responsible for those choices. Othello’s tragic collapse is not a failure of reason or honor, but a failure to endure the intolerable weight of freedom. This is what makes the play so lastingly tragic and so existentially penetrating.

Desdemona’s idealism, contrasted with Emilia’s pragmatism and viewed via a Sartrean perspective, provides us with a profound reflection on freedom, responsibility, and the cost of ethical position. Desdemona’s resolute love is a conscious embrace of a promising ideal, and her anguish arises from the severe tension between that ideal and the harsh reality that refuses to see her truth. Her ultimate death is a tragic but strong assertion of hope and freedom. Emilia portrays ethical pragmatism which is cynical and courageous in the face of betrayal and deception.

Compared together, Desdemona and Emilia show two diverse ways of encountering existential freedom: the idealist who sticks to virtue even in death, and the realist who exposes villainy and dies for truth. Though they demonstrate different voices in the existential chorus of the play, both equally remind us of the fact that freedom is always both a gift and a burden simultaneously in human life.

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