

**THE EFFECTS OF TRAGIC FLAWS  
ON OTHELLO AND THE OTHER CHARACTERS  
IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAY, OTHELLO**



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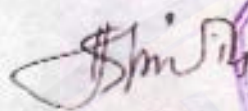
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APPROVAL SHEET

Approved and received by the Examination Committee of the English Department, Faculty of Letters, Jember University.

Jember, 27<sup>th</sup> August 2002

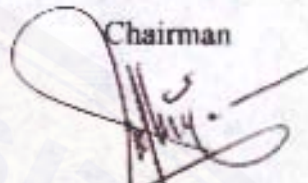
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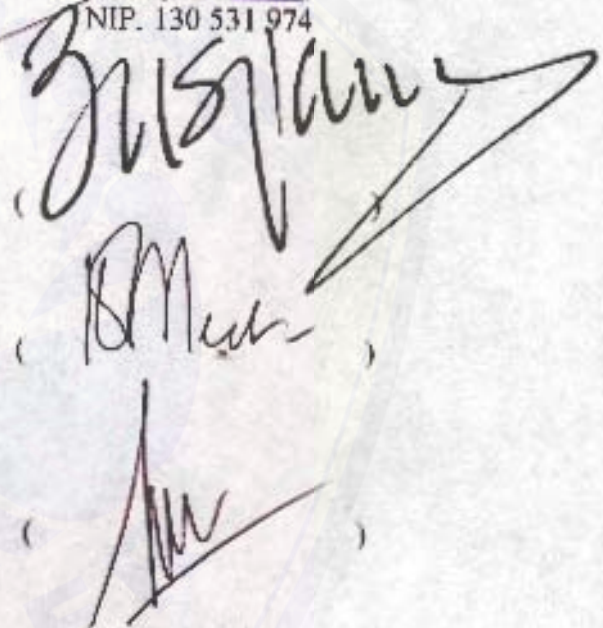
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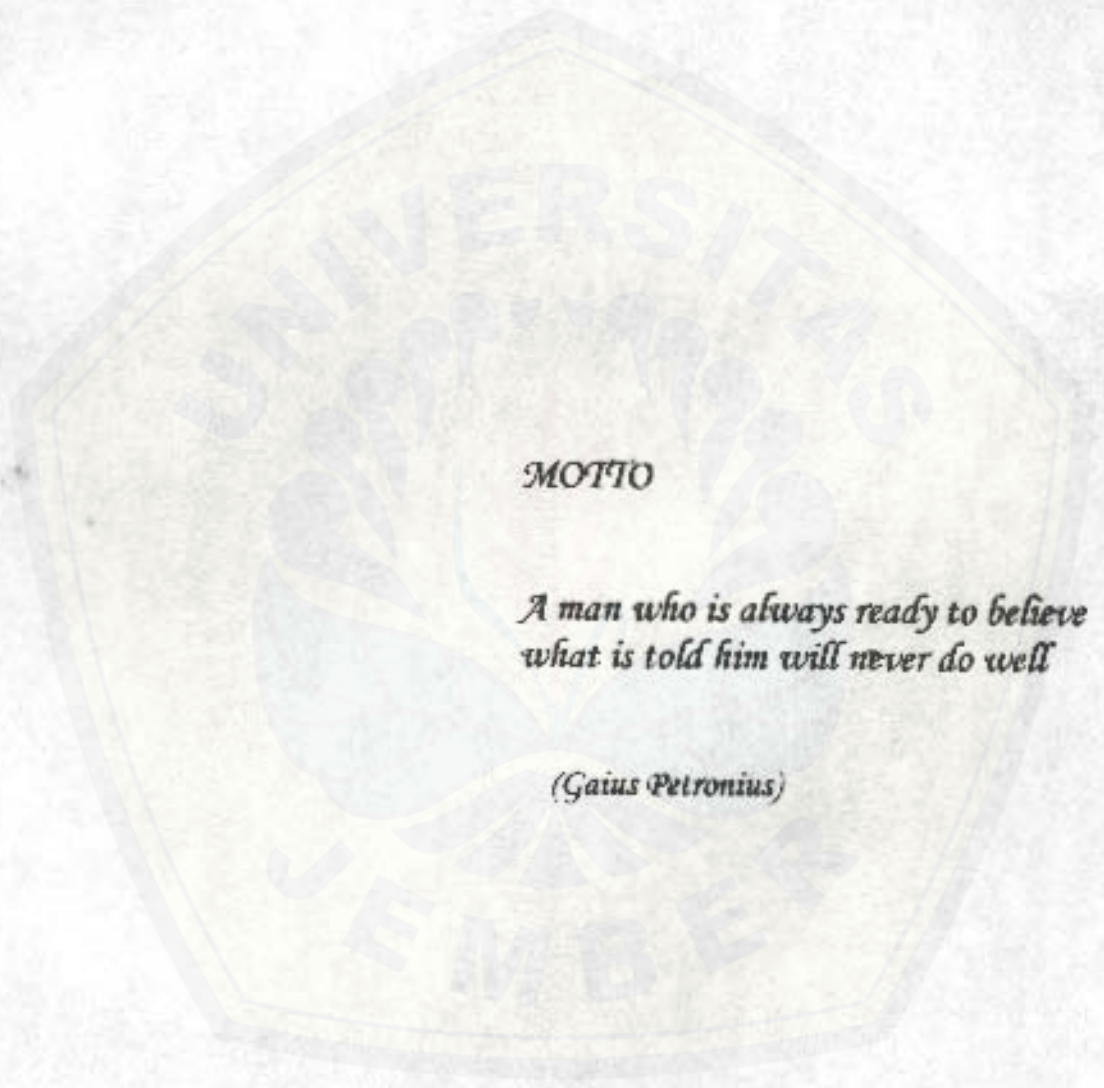
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*This thesis is dedicated most especially to :*

- *My beloved parents Hj. Muhartini and Ir. H. M. Djafari, who have given me their never-ending love and affection.*
- *My lovely younger sister and younger brother Eva and Doni, who have been the most adorable.*
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*Thank you very much for your attention for me.*



*MOTTO*

*A man who is always ready to believe  
what is told him will never do well*

*(Gaius Petronius)*

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Evy Andriantin J

## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Rationale

Reading literary works is amusingly enjoyable. The readers not only get an amusing enjoyment but profound knowledge as well particularly the one dealing with the problems of daily life.

Literary works reveal the reflection of the life of human beings. Literature is believed to be the imitation of life of human beings. Welleck says that literature is a reflection of human life and it deals with life whether it concerns with happiness or human sorrow (Welleck, 1956:44). For that reason, studying a piece of literary works and connecting it with the reader's daily experience, are expected to attain some more visions about life.

Hudson, the author of Introduction to Study of Literature reveals that :

"Literature is a vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and left about those aspects of it which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all of us. It is thus fundamentally an expression of life through the medium of language" (1965:10).

Literature is truly the reflection of life revealing what men feel and think. Human emotions, interests, loves, dislikes, desire along with their activities present the fundamental sources of literature.

Literature conceals particular meaning and message of the author. Each author owns an essentially different way in revealing the message. Therefore, any attempt to grasp a certain message in a certain literary work requires a deep knowledge about literary works.

Drama is one of literary works which can be used as a means of interpreting human life. It deals with human activities in life. In accordance to this, Reaske states that drama is a work of literature or a composition which delineates life and human



activity by means of presenting various actions and dialogues between a group of characters (1966:5).

Drama, is like the other literary works, whether it is a poem, or a novel is aimed at offering pleasant impression to its reader. Each will give an interesting subject of discussion especially for literary men readers in general.

Drama represents the experience or the picture of human life. By enjoying drama or play we also get a study of human character. Reaske in How to Analyze Drama state that, drama besides an entertainment, is also representation of human life and character through dialogue and action (1996:5).

### **1.2. The Problem to Discuss**

The characters who receive the effects of Othello's tragic flaws are Desdemona, Cassio, Emilia, Iago and Othello himself.

In relation with the statement above the problems that need to discussed are: the effect of Othello's tragic flaws upon Othello himself and the other characters either or indirectly and whether the tragic flaws bring fatal effect to the characters involved.

### 1.3 The Scope of The Study

There must be a limitation on the problem of the discussion in order to focus the analysis.

The Scope of the Study in this thesis is Othello's tragic flaws and the other characters concerning with the tragedy in this drama. Tragic flaws are discussed to experience the tragic characters.

### 1.4. The Hypothesis

Before coming to the real study, there is a hypothesis to show what things that will appropriately be studied in this thesis. A hypothesis is a prediction that may be true or false. It would be refused, if it is wrong, and it will be accepted if the fact is approved (Sutrisno Hadi, 1989:27).

The hypothesis of this thesis is whether or not Othello's tragic flaws cause some effects to certain characters particularly the destructive ones.

### 1.5. The Approach to Use

There are so many approaches that can be applied in analyzing literary works. The approach that is used to analyze a literary work depends on the matter or subject to discuss.

Scott, in Five Approaches of Literary Criticism states:

"The application of psychological knowledge to art provides a more precise language with which to discuss its creative process. A second application goes back to the study of the lives of authors as a means of understanding their art. Third, psychology can be used to explain fictitious character (1962:3).

It is important to use a certain approach to analyze a literary work. In this regard, the most appropriate approach to use is the psychological approach especially the third aspect of Scott's theory, which says that psychology can be used to explain fictitious character.

The approach is applied by searching the motivation and the characteristics of Othello that lead to his tragic flaws, which cause the misfortunes and downfalls of some characters of the play.

#### **1.6. The Method of Analysis**

The analysis of this thesis is conducted by means of library research. The data are collected from several sources among others are the books about Othello and the other references. The analysis is carried out by collecting the literary theories that concern with the concept of fiction, some books about Shakespeare and Othello, and some dictionaries and other references that are relevant to the topic.

The inductive method is applied to analyze the data that are dug out from the play and some theories from the experts. In inductive method the conclusion is drawn from particular understanding to general opinion.

The inductive method is used to search particular events and actions of the characters of the play. Afterwards, the particular events and actions of certain characters that lead to the tragedy are taken as evidences of the tragedy. Finally these events and actions are used to make the conclusion.

#### **1.7. The Goals of the Study**

This study intends to analyze how Shakespeare creates tragic flaws. In the play that finally brings effects on the characters.

Further more, it also aims to enlarge our knowledge about the elements of drama especially in which tragic flaws belong to.

### **1.8. The Organization of the Study**

This thesis divided into five chapters, the first chapter is introduction, which includes the rationale, the problem to discuss, the scope of the study, the hypothesis, the approach to use, the method of analysis, the goals of the study and the organization of the study.

The second chapter is the biography of the author and the synopsis of the play. While the third chapter is the meaning of the terms. The fourth chapter analysis the play related to the effects of Othello's tragic flaws to some other characters and to Othello himself. The fifth chapter is the conclusion.



**CHAPTER II**  
**THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR**  
**AND THE SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY**

**2.1 The Biography of the Author**

William Shakespeare is known as a poet, an actor, and a playwright. He was born in Stratford upon Avon on April 26, 1564. He was the third child and the eldest son of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden. His father was one of the most prosperous men of Stratford. His mother was of gentle birth, the daughter of Robert Arden of Wilmcote.

When he was six years old he entered to the Stratford Grammar School. About seven years later in his thirteen years old, he left his Grammar School. He helped his father's business, because of the financial decline of the family. In December 1582, Shakespeare married with Ann Hathaway, the daughter of a farmer of Shottery, near Stratford; their first child, Sussana was baptized on May 6, 1583 and the twins, Hamnet and Judith, on February 22, 1585.

Shakespeare began his literary career in 1586. He left his family to go to London and join the group of actors and playwrights, and he wrote for the Lord Chamberlain Men. From this literary career he got the financial success. In 1610 he retired and backed to his native town. He died on April 23, 1616.

As a playwright, Shakespeare is unlike most other dramatists. He does not reveal his own mind. His inspiration is not his experience, but mankind. He is quite responsive to the situation of his time. Thus his works are more refined art, deeper insight into human nature, and more exalted imagination.

Shakespeare's plays are written to be acted not to be read in printed. He derives his plays from many stories, he has read in his Grammar School. After Shakespeare became a famous writer, he wrote more some comedies; All's Well that Ends Well and Measure for Measure which were followed by Othello, Machbeth and



King Lear, then he returned to roman themes with Anthony and Cleopatra and Coriolanus.

Before 1594, Shakespeare's first period began with the revision of old plays, which he did for his company. The literary works that belong to this period are : Henry VI, Titus Andronicus and the comedies such as The Comedy of Errors and The Taming of the Schrew.

1594 – 1600, the second period Shakespeare shows an advanced treatment of plot, characters, and style. This period deals with comedies such as: Midsummer Night's Dream, Much A Do About Nothing, As You Like It, Yulius Caesar and the historial plays deals with King ships from Richard II to Henry V and two tragedies Romeo and Juliet and Troilus and Cressida.

Since 1601 there have been a number of rival dramatists introducing new styles of drama, particularly Ben Jonson (whose first successful comedy, Every Man in His Humour, that was acted by Shakespeare's company in 1598), Chapman, Dekker, and Beaumont, and Fletcher who began to write in 1607. In 1608 The King's men acquired a second playhouse, an indoor private theater in the fashionable Quatre of the Black Friars. At those private theaters, the plays were played indoors; the prices charged were higher than in the public playhouses and the audience consequently was more selective. Shakespeare seems to have retired from the stage about this time: his name does not occur in the various list of players after 1607.

The years from 1601 – 1608 is the period of great tragedies, and the more severe comedies. It is known as the greatest time of Shakespeare as a dramatist. The plays written in this period are: Hamlet, Othello, Twelft Night, All's Well that Ends Well, Machbeth, King Lear and Anthony and Cleopatra.

The years from 1608 – 1612 this is the last period. Shakespeare comes into the age of maturity. He moves his mood in calmness and cheerfulness. The plots are weaker and the style becomes obscure in some places and prose in the others. He wrote four of these : Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and The Tempest,

which were acted at court in 1611. For the last four years of his life in retirement, his son Hamnet died in 1596; his two daughters were then married.

Shakespeare was a productive playwright in his life time, he retired to Stratford. He died in Stratford on April 23, 1616.

## 2.2 The Synopsis of the Play

There is a street of Venice, at night, where a conversation is taking place between Iago and a stupid gentleman, Roderigo. Iago, a soldier, is telling him his reasons for hating his general so much. The general is a Moor named Othello. Iago thinks he will be chosen as his lieutenant. However, Othello has given the honor to an inexperienced soldier, Cassio.

Iago admits frankly that he is staying at the Moor service only because he is planning a revenge. The path leading revenge has already opened up in his imagination. Othello has secretly married that night to a young and lovely lady of Venice. She is Desdemona, the daughter of senator Brabantio. Roderigo also falls in love with Desdemona and only too glad to do what he can spoil the marriage.

Desdemona loves the moor, though he is black, and devotes her heart and fortunes to his qualities so her heart surrenders to the man she has selected for a husband.

Desdemona's father is angry shouting under the window that a black man has stolen his daughter. Since her father is a senator of Venice, Roderigo hopes that somehow he will be able to destroy the marriage. Desdemona's father comes out of his house lamenting. He searches for Othello until he finds him in the street. Brabantio wants Othello to be imprisoned. Othello explains with perfect courtesy and dignity that he cannot be imprisoned since he is on his way to the council hall. The old senator hears for the first time that the Duke has called a meeting. Then he goes at once to present his case against his daughter's husband.

Their marriage which is privately carried out cannot be kept a secret. It comes to the ears of the old Brabantio, who appears in a solemn council of the senator as an accuser of the Moor Othello.

The aged and senatorial Brabantio demands a most patient hearing from that serious assembly but the father gets very angry when Othello is called upon for his defence. Telling the whole story and delivering his speech with nobility, the Duke who acts as a chief judge, can accept Othello's reason to get married with Desdemona.

The Duke and the council are disturbed by the rumors that the Turkish army are leading an attack on the island of Cyprus. They discuss a plan to send Othello to defend Cyprus. Of course they cannot give much help to Brabantio. They pay much attention to the attack of the Turk on Cyprus.

In this play, Othello is confirmed by the testimony of the Lady Desdemona herself, who appears in court.

The Duke puts Othello in command of the defence of Cyprus and he can give Desdemona permission to accompany him there, but unfortunately Othello must entrust his wife to the care of Iago who will follow after.

All of the Desdemona's thought is fixed on the rough sea that threatens her husband's safety. However, as she has been trained as the daughter of a senator, she does not show her feelings and she spends much of her time exchanging humours with Iago. She draws Cassio into the conversation since he is one of her husband's close friends. Iago watches happily as Cassio takes her hand because Iago's plan is to make Othello think that she and Cassio are lovers.

Iago is artful, and has studied human nature deeply and he knows all the disturbances which influence the mind of man, the pains of jealousy as the most intolerable and the most painful pain. He tries to make Othello jealous of Cassio. He thought that it would be a beautiful means of revenge and might end in the death of Cassio or Othello or of both of them.



Iago comes up to Cassio at the early night in friendly way that they drink together to Othello's health. He wants to make Cassio sufficiently drunk so that Roderigo will be able to incite a quarrel with him. Iago successfully makes Cassio drunk and makes a quarrel with Roderigo. In the fight Roderigo is wounded, but soon Iago sounds the alarm to warn Othello. Othello comes and manages to find the cause of the quarrel. He is learning that Cassio is guilty, soon Cassio is dismissed from his post by Othello. Iago pretends to be kind to Cassio and points out that he can get back into Othello's favor if Desdemona intercedes with Othello for Cassio. Othello loves his wife so much that he will not refuse her intercession for Cassio. Iago suggests Desdemona to help Cassio. In another situation, Iago tells Othello that Cassio and Desdemona become lovers. Moreover, he boasts that he heard Cassio talking in his sleep an imagination of love scene with Desdemona. Othello however will not believe this unless there is a proof.

It is a silk handkerchief embroidered with strawberries, the first gift Othello has given to his wife, and she used to kiss it and talked to it when he was away. For some time Iago has been trying to persuade his wife, Emilia, to steal it from her mistress and when Emilia finds it lying on the floor, she picks it up and gives it to Iago. This handkerchief reminds Iago that Othello wants a proof or evidence of his wife's recent behaviour. Therefore, Iago plans to drop it somewhere in Cassio's lodging where the innocent young man will be sure to find it. In fact, Iago poisons Othello's mind by telling him a lie that Desdemona has given that handkerchief to Cassio. Othello becomes angry and Iago notices that his bad plan has influenced Othello's mind so that Othello and Iago will make an alliance to take revenge on Cassio, Othello will kill his wife and as sign of gratitude, Othello will promote Iago to be his lieutenant.

When Desdemona tries to solve Cassio's problem, Cassio finds the handkerchief in his lodging and gives it to his lover, Bianca. Cassio gives Bianca the handkerchief and tells her it has a magical power, so it is not to be lost. When Othello asks Desdemona about the handkerchief that it is still with her, but it is a pity that

Desdemona cannot show the handkerchief at the moment. This makes Othello very angry.

The handkerchief is now really in Cassio's hand. Cassio finds it in his lodging and gives it to his lover Bianca. Cassio asks her to make him a copy for the embroidery but Bianca refuses to do this. Iago strengthens Othello's suspicion by telling him that Cassio boasts of himself, telling everyone that he is proud of being Desdemona's lover. Othello becomes very furious. Being told that Othello is having an attack of epilepsy, Cassio withdraws and makes a talk with Iago about his success to have Bianca to be his lover. Othello who has recovered from his anger, misunderstands this conversation and believes that it is not Bianca but Desdemona that Cassio is speaking about.

Bianca suddenly appears and returns the handkerchief to Cassio. She says that the handkerchief is another woman's gift to Cassio. Hearing this Othello becomes more convinced of Desdemona's unfaithfulness. At last, Othello decides to kill his wife in bed as suggested by Iago who also wants to kill Cassio.

Not long after, Desdemona comes with Lodovico bringing a letter from the Duke of Venice and appoints Cassio to be governor of Cyprus instead of Othello.

Othello is not satisfied though Emilia, Iago's wife, swears that his wife is faithful to him but still he will not believe her innocence.

Desdemona asks the help to Iago, whom she supposes to be a good man in order to overcome her problem with Othello. Iago advises her to be patient since Othello has to face his problem in official matters that have influenced his mind.

To carry out his plan to murder Cassio, Iago joins with Roderigo in the duel. In the fight, Iago is successful in wounding Cassio and trickily kills Roderigo from the back.

When Desdemona nearly falls asleep, Othello enters and really kills his wife, but at the moment he learns from Emilia's confession that Iago, Emilia's husband, is a big liar and she says that she has stolen the handkerchief from her mistress for her husband.

Just then Iago comes in with Montano and Gratiano. Iago kills his wife right away as she has told the truth. At this moment, Othello gets a chance to wound Iago before he stabs himself with a dagger. Othello, at last dies kissing his wife.



## CHAPTER III THE MEANING OF THE TERMS

In order to get a comprehensive analysis of the play, it is important to clarify the terms of the title of the thesis. This chapter profoundly explains the definition of effect and tragic flaw.

The precise definition of those words are gotten from some dictionaries and some experts' arguments that are closely related to the discussion.

### 3.1 The Meaning of Effect

The New Grolier Webster International Dictionary defines effect as:

1. <efficere (pp effectus) bring about effect. That which is produced by some agency or cause a result a consequence.
2. The power to produce result force validity; the result intended; purport or intent tenor or significance the state of being operative operation or execution accomplishment or fulfilment.
3. To bring about accomplish fulfil produce or make for effect for the mere impression on the mind of others as to talk for effect. In effect, in result or consequences as : the two methods are the same in effect. In fact or reality: it is no other in effect than what it seems. (1974:79)

According to Harry Shaw, in Dictionary of Literary Term, the meaning of effect is:

the mental, emotional and spiritual impression an author attempts to create in and upon his readers mind and hearts. See cause and effect, controlling emage, dominant impression. (1972 :94)

The meaning of effect is also available in the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English. The dictionary states effect as:

- (n) in phrases of degree or extent, result, outcome
  - a. In fact, really for practical purposes.
  - b. (of a rule, law etc.) In operation: The rule is still in bring/carry/put sth into ~ cause it to operate: The plans will

soon be carried into ~ come into ~ reach the stage of being operative: The new tax regulations came into last week.

2. Impression produced on the mind of a spectator, hearer, reader etc : Wonderful cloud -s, impression produced by light on clouds e.g: at sunset (1984:277)

In conclusion of all the quotations above the word effect means the consequence of one deed to himself or others. Relating to the thesis, effect means a consequence or consequences of the main character's deed to he himself and to other characters.

### 3.2 The Meaning of Tragic Flaw

Before coming to the definition of the term "Tragic flaw," it is important to define the word "tragic" and the word "flaw" separately. It is intended to get clearer meaning of each word, those words, then will be explained in its unity in literary term.

The New Grolier Webster International Dictionary defines the word tragic as follows:

- a. (Latin : tragicus) pertaining to of the nature or character of tragedy; lamentable; dreadful  
(1974 : 1045)

While the meaning of flaw according to the above dictionary is:

any imperfection; a defect; a fault; a crack or fissure; a defect in a legal document that may make it invalid.  
(1974 : 372)

Heritage Dictionary of English Language defines the word tragic as :  
(adj) or tragical . having the elements or tragedy; calamitous; disastrous, a tragic accident.  
(1971 : 1361)

While the meaning of flaw in the above dictionary as follows:

An imperfection; a blemish or defect.  
(1971 : 500)

Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English denotes tragic as:  
(adj) of or related to tragedy; vevy sad; unfortunate etc  
(1983:1174)

While this dictionary also gives the definition of the word flaw as follows:  
(n) a small sign of damage, such as a mark or crack, that makes an object not perfect.

(1983:420)

The meaning of tragic flaw is also available in the New Grolier Webster International Dictionary of English Language as follows :

the characteristics fault or defect of a tragic protagonist, often ambition or pride that leads to his downfall, although it may also have led to his rise.

(1974:1045)

To get some clarification of the word tragic flaw in literary meaning is given below:

The Dictionary of Literary Terms defines tragic flaw as:

the principle defect (weakness in character) which leads to destruction.

(Shaw, 1973:382)

Abrams in the Glossary of Literary Terms gives definition of the term tragic flaw as follows:

such a man is exhibit as suffering a change in fortune from happiness to misery because of mistaken act, to which he is led by his hamartia-his error of judgement or, as it is often thought less literally translated, his tragic flaw.

(1981:202)

While in How to Analyze Drama Reaske cites Aristotle's statement:

Tragic flaw or hamartia is that a character is led into death, despair, or misery through some sort of error, either in himself or his action; the most often cited flaws is hubris, which means excessive, self destructive pride. (1966:6)

Essentially, all the statements above indicate that tragic flaw is an action or deed of the main character that causes great unintended suffering, the main character makes some sort of great mistakes that lead him to his downfall and destruction.

In brief, the effect of Othello's tragic flaw in tragedy of Othello means the actions or deeds of Othello that causes great unintended suffering in the play. The main character makes some great mistakes that lead him to his downfall and destruction.

## CHAPTER V CONCLUSION

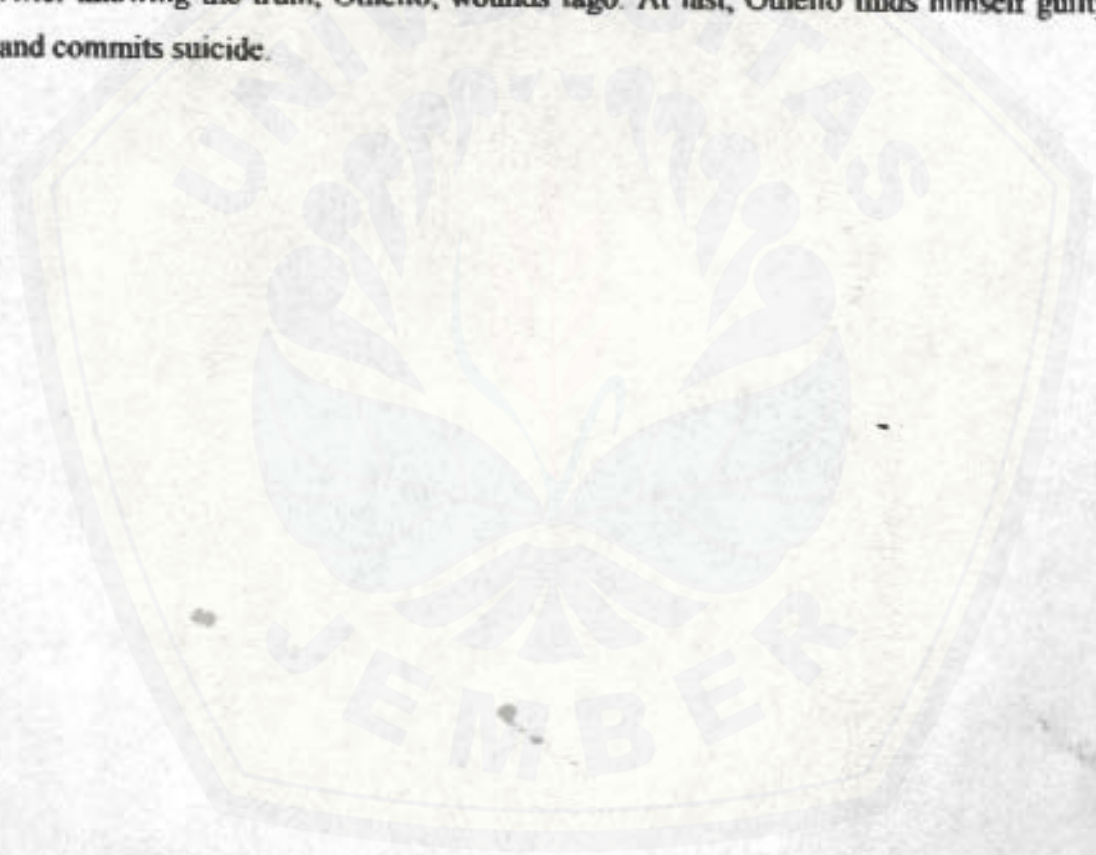
Othello is a play that tells about tragedy within jealousy. The main problem of this thesis is the effects of Othello's tragic flaws upon other characters and Othello himself. Studying the effects of tragic flaws in the tragedy, certainly, is also studying about the causes of the tragedy. Because if there is a cause (causes), of course, there is also an effect (effects). These are two unseparated things.

Tragic flaw or hamartia is error in judgement that causes the destruction and death of some characters of the play. The other causes of the tragedy are the weaknesses of some characters of the play. The main causes of the tragedy are Othello's credulity and Othello's excessive jealousy.

Othello's credulity leads him to believe all kind of information without considering whether the information is right or not. So that, Othello easily influenced by other. He also believes Iago's information about his wife, Desdemona, and Cassio. Iago tells him that Desdemona has an illicit love with Cassio. Unfortunately, Othello believes this information without any attempt to prove whether the information is true or not, so this information arouses Othello's jealousy.

Othello's excessive jealousy, then, leads him to kill his beloved wife, Desdemona. Othello's jealousy arouses since he is a credulous man who easily believes Iago's insinuation that his wife is unfaithful to him. Moreover, his jealousy arouses because he thinks that he is a black and an ugly Moor so he is afraid that his beautiful wife will leave him some day. His jealousy makes him become mad and loss his self-control. He never tries to find proofs himself that show Desdemona's unfaithfulness. Though Emilia confesses that Othello's wife, Desdemona, is a faithful wife, Othello does not believe her. Because of his excessive jealousy, Othello does not believe anything that proves Desdemona's faithfulness. He is so sure that Desdemona has done a sin, and loved another man. So he kills his wife.

Othello's credulity and his excessive jealousy bring fatal effects to other characters and he himself either directly or indirectly. Because of his credulity and his excessive jealousy he kills his innocent wife, Desdemona. Then, these weaknesses also bring a bad effect to Cassio, his lieutenant. He dismisses Cassio's position as his lieutenant. He and Iago make a plan to kill Cassio because he thinks that Cassio has an illicit love with his wife, Desdemona. Further, Othello's weaknesses also bring a fatal effect to Emilia, Desdemona's servant, indirectly. Emilia is killed by her husband, Iago, because she tells Othello about Desdemona's faithfulness and the truth about the handkerchief that is used by Othello to prove Desdemona's unfaithfulness. After knowing the truth, Othello, wounds Iago. At last, Othello finds himself guilty and commits suicide.





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