THEME OF JEALOUSY IN OTHELLO

Shakespeare’s greatest quality as a dramatist is his use of repeated themes in all his works. Whether his drama is based on love, death or betrayal, he repeats his themes in all his writings. Othello can be studied under many headings because its prominent themes are racism, sex, manhood and honour and womanhood, etc. But the major theme of all these and definitely above all is “Jealousy.” It is not only the theme of Othello but of Hamlet also. Jealousy is actually a state which causes fear or threat by a real or imagined threat according to one’s possessive instincts. It may be because of many reasons including sex, love, and competition or desires i.e. negative or positive. The theme of jealousy can be observed throughout the play. Now let’s discuss how this theme dominates the play.

If we observe, we realize at the very outset of the play that the play is about jealousy. Roderigo loves Desdemona passionately. He wants to be with Desdemona at any cost. He can do anything to win her love but he asks Iago to keep her away from the Moor. Here the real working of the drama gets a start and Iago appears before us as a villain who wants to exploit the situation. He conspires against Desdemona and Othello and declares that Desdemona is innocent who has been persuaded to be in love with Othello only because Othello has used witchcraft. He convinces Roderigo to face Desdemona’s father. He shouts: “Call up her father, rose him----poison his delights----do, with like timorous accent and dire yell.” The villain, Iago has also feelings of jealousy. He expects to be chosen a lieutenant but he is not. He has also feelings of jealousy for Cassio and feelings of hatred for Othello. His inner feelings also force him to conspire against Othello and Desdemona. He has nothing to do with anyone. His intention is not to help Roderigo and Brabantio and to save them from any trouble. Rather he is cunning character throughout the play who knows how to exploit the situation and get his work done.

Another thing that makes jealousy the prominent theme of the play is Othello’s feelings of jealousy for Cassio and feelings of hatred for Desdemona. Iago’s conspiracies also work when he is successful in creating doubt in Othello’s mind against Desdemona’s unfaithfulness. The way Iago manipulates the situation is surprising to us. He says to Othello: “Oh, beware, my Lord, of jealousy!” He creates doubts in Othello’s mind about Desdemona’s relationship with Cassio. Othello asks him to explain it completely. Here, he actually has created the feelings of hatred for Cassio and feelings of jealousy for Desdemona in Othello’s mind. His cunningness is also apparent when Othello talks to Iago and asks about Desdemona and Cassio being in each
other’s company. How cleverly he handles the situation and misleads a man about his beloved wife. Othello says: “Was that not Cassio parted from my wife?” Iago says: “Cassio, my Lord?” To which Othello replies: “I do believe ‘twas he.” (Act 3, Scene 3) Further he does not care or anything and is sure that his wife is unfaithful to him. The best solution to this point was to go to his wife or Cassio and talk about this affair but he does not do so. Rather he believes in what Iago says. He says to Othello that he has heard Desdemona and Cassio saying that they should hide their love from others. Othello becomes furious and says: “I’ll tear her all to pieces.” Here Iago plays another trick and shows his cunningness to the reader. He tries to console Othello saying that his idea may get a change with the passage of time and advises Othello to have patience and not to do haste in doing anything but Othello replies: “Never, Iago...my bloody thought, with violent pace, shall nev’r look back, nev’r ebb to humble love, till that a capable and wide revenge swallow them up.” It is what makes Othello jealous of Cassio and causes Desdemona’s death at the end of the play. It also causes his own death when he knows the reality which he is unable to see earlier.

Another thing that causes feelings of hatred in Iago’s mind is Desdemona’s objection against Iago’s regard for women. Throughout the play, Iago has no grudge against Desdemona but this fact causes feelings of hatred for Desdemona. This is what makes Iago feel something loathsome for Desdemona.

To sum up, Iago is the embodiment of jealousy, cunningness and treachery throughout the play. He uses every character in the play as a tool to get satisfaction which actually he cannot get through evil designs. Though there are not specific points which may show the reader why he is so jealous of others and why he hates all the others. But one thing that dominates the play and at the very outset we observe is Iago’s jealousy for Cassio and hatred for Othello because he is not appointed a lieutenant though he is the most experienced person. This is around whom the whole play revolves. In his feelings of jealousy, he starts playing a game of revenge. All the characters become a victim of his conspiracy one by one. He wants everyone to feel as he feels in jealousy. That’s why, we see other characters also becoming jealous in different situations. At the end of the play, we see many characters losing their lives only because of Iago’s jealousy. (Words: 910)