

A Quick Response to Prof. Nakata Response to My First Response to Her Paper

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I must start by apologizing for not reading your *Nabokovian* article on *TT* and Wittgenstein. For some reason, most likely my carelessness, I assumed that both your articles on the subject were in Japanese

I think you are on solid footing in treating Othello's suicide as an example of character doubling. But such doubling can also be paradoxical, when for example, Othello is and is not Othello. Paradox requires that an assertion/situation be absurd or contradictory but nonetheless true either literally or figuratively, and situations where people kill themselves are often paradoxical, with identities (or what Foucault called "subject positions") far more fluid than they are in situations not involving dying.

Shakespeare prepares for the Othello as Turk or Othello as both friend and enemy of Venetian state by having Othello give the long speech in Act I, scene iii, lines 127–168 and then by having Othello confuse the voice of dead Desdemona with that of live Emilia so that he smothers again an already smothered Desdemona yet fails to kill her since she lives long enough to tell Emilia first that she was murdered and then that she was not murdered but committed suicide.

It is no surprise then that when Lodovico asks for Othello "Where is this rash and most unfortunate man?" Othello answers "That's he that was Othello: here I am." The final paradox has to do with the kiss Othello gives dead Desdemona: "I kiss'd thee ere I kill'd thee: no way but this;/ Killing myself, to die upon a kiss." The phrasing allows the reader to read "Killing myself" as "I killed myself when I summoned enough cruelty to smother you" or even "When I smothered you I was acting as God does when He takes the lives of those he loves."

This is the passage that to me suggests such a reading:

Ah balmy breath, that dost almost persuade
Justice to break her sword! One more, one more.
Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee,
And love thee after. One more, and this the last:
So sweet was ne'er so fatal. I must weep,
But they are cruel tears: this sorrow's heavenly;
It strikes where it doth love. (5.2.16-22)

So in the end Othello is Othello that was, Othello that is, the Turk, Desdemona, and God. These are not examples of Moore's paradox, but they are significant in that these unstable identities alter Desdemona's murder as well, so that it is also "sacrifice," "sweet revenge," a rash mistake, an act of cruelty, Desdemona's suicide, Othello's figurative suicide before his real one, etc.