

PASSION'S FOOL

For actor after actor, the part of Othello proves more a trap than a triumph. Seemingly a model of uncomplicated clarity, the role is replete with opaque ambiguities and calcified misconceptions. Apart from strangling Desdemona and killing himself, Othello initiates less action than any other Shakespearean tragic hero. Indeed, he often seems like Iago's stringed puppet. His credulity makes him appear less than normally intelligent, and the rapidity with which jealousy races through his veins suggests that he is as much passion's fool as passion's slave. At the end of Hamlet, Macbeth and King Lear, the hero has discovered himself. At the end of Othello, the hero has simply unmasked Iago and uncovered

his own calamitous error. He has been tortured but not tutored by his destiny.

The American Shakespeare Festival production of Othello in Stratford, Conn., perpetuates a tradition in which the play and its hero shrink with each successive revival. Moses Gunn and his director Mochael Kahn proceed along the familiar tack that Othello is good, loving, noble, trusting and innocent until jealousy and grief tear him asunder. Gunn conveys all of these qualities admirably. His stage presence is commanding and his line delivery persuasive, though it is somewhat mannered when he elongates single words for emphasis.

Special Vanity

The trouble lies in the fact that Gunn accepts Othello's image of himself. That image is one of soldierly simplicity and unflawed purity. On those terms, he is totally undone by Iago's villainy. But in reality, he is chiefly undone by himself. A different sort of man would have been immune to Iago's innuendos about Desdemona's sexual infidelity and

the circumstantial evidence of the telltale handkerchief unwittingly supplied by Iago's wife (Jan Miner). Othello succumbs to his panicky jealousy either because he is unsure of himself or of Desdemona, or both. A psychologically astute actor must reveal to the audience that Othello is his worst enemy, and Gunn fails to do that. Othello is riddled with a special brand of vanity and pride that British Critic F. R. Leavis has called "self-approving self-dramatization." Apparently no actor, not Gunn or even Olivier, can bring himself to expose the actorish self-absorption and self-inflation that push Othello to his doom.

Gunn is not alone in psychologically violating the play. There should be a good deal of Juliet in Desdemona. After all, she is a virginal young girl swept into sexual love with the Moor, who is anathema to her father in much the same way that a Montague was to a Capulet. But Roberta Maxwell conjures up a prim housewife somewhat baffled by a hubby with a bad case of the sulks. She achieves an affecting poignance

only in her deathbed speech. As for Iago, he should be Lucifers child trailing a brimstone stench of evil, but Lee Richardson makes Othello's ensign seem more like a nimble, two-faced schemer from the ranks of middle management. Wisely and rightly, racial overtones are muted in this production, for Shakespeare was symbolically concerned with the darkness in men's souls and not the blackness of their skins.

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Sugar Ray

(Continued from page one) he turned down a million dollars in one such attempt—makes one wonder what the New York State Athletic Commission was doing at the time. There's no doubt that the big money racketeers were deeply involved in boxing and had some of the world's best fighters tied up.

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