

OTHELLO SYNDROME IN HAROLD PINTER'S *THE LOVER*HAROLD PINTER'İN *SEVGİLİ* OYUNUNDAKİ OTHELLO SENDROMU**Dr. Ajda BAŞTAN**Sivas Cumhuriyet University, Department of Translation and Interpretation/ Turkey
ORCID: 0000-0001-8171-8644**Abstract**

This study focuses on Othello syndrome-an imaginary sexual jealousy in Harold Pinter's *The Lover*. English playwright William Shakespeare (1564-1616) not only contributed to literature and language, but also continues to inspire other branches of science. Characters such as King Lear, Hamlet, Ophelia, and Othello in Shakespeare's works have been named for syndromes in psychology. Shakespeare's play is about the tragedy of Othello as a result of his jealousy. Considering he was cheated on by Desdemona, Othello first kills his innocent wife and then commits suicide. The common themes both in Shakespeare's *Othello* and Harold Pinter's *The Lover* are marriage, love, betrayal, madness and jealousy. Both Shakespeare's Othello and Pinter's Richard are sexually jealous of their wives and cannot escape the irrational infidelity fantasies they have created in their brains. These husbands start to go mad thinking that their spouses are cheating on them at every moment of the day. In Pinter's 1963 play, Sarah and Richard have been married for ten years and own a small house. Every day when Richard leaves for work, he asks when Sarah's lover is coming today, what she is going to do with him, how he is doing, and when he comes home from the office in the evening he asks how their afternoon together was. Thus, *The Lover* demonstrates us an abnormal marriage in which the wife is unfaithful and the husband without jealousy. However, as Pinter's play progresses, we understand that the couple has created an imaginary male character who is in love and relationship with the wife. Over time, Richard becomes jealous of this fictional character and at the end of the play he imaginary kills both himself and his wife.

Keywords: Harold Pinter, Jealousy, Madness, Othello Syndrome, The Lover, William Shakespeare.

Özet

Bu çalışma, Harold Pinter'in *Sevgili* oyunundaki hayali bir cinsel kıskançlık olan Othello sendromuna odaklanmaktadır. İngiliz oyun yazarı William Shakespeare (1564-1616) sadece edebiyata ve dile katkıda bulunmakla kalmamış, diğer bilim dallarına da ilham vermeye devam etmektedir. Shakespeare'in eserlerindeki King Lear, Hamlet, Ophelia ve Othello gibi karakterler psikolojideki sendromlara isim babası olmuşlardır. Shakespeare'in oyunu Othello'nun kıskançlık nedeniyle başından geçen trajediyi konu alır. Desdemona tarafından aldatıldığını düşünen Othello, önce masum karısını öldürür ardından da intihar eder. Hem Shakespeare'in *Othello*'sunda hem de Harold Pinter'in *Sevgili* oyununda ortak temalar evlilik, aşk, ihanet, delilik ve kıskançlıktır. Hem Shakespeare'in Othellosu hem de Pinter'in Richard'ı, eşlerini cinsel olarak kıskanırlar ve beyinde yarattıkları mantıksız aldatılma fantezilerinden kaçamazlar. Her iki erkek kahraman günün her anında eşlerinin kendilerini aldattığını

düşünerek gitgide delirmeye başlarlar. İngiliz yazar Pinter'ın 1963 yapımı eserinde Sarah ve Richard on yıllık evlidirler ve küçük bir evde yaşamaktadırlar. Richard her gün işe gitmek için evden ayrıldığında, Sarah'nın sevgilisinin bugün ne zaman geleceğini, onunla ne yapacağını, onun nasıl olduğunu merak etmektedir ve akşam ofisten eve geldiğinde onların birlikte geçirdikleri öğleden sonralarının nasıl geçtiğini sormaktadır. Böylece *Sevgili*, bize kadının sadakatsiz ve bunu bilen kocanın kıskançlıktan uzak olduğu anormal bir evliliği yansıtır. Ancak Pinter'ın oyunu ilerledikçe bu çiftin evli kadına âşık ve ilişkisi olan hayali bir erkek karakter yarattığını anlıyoruz. Zamanla Richard bu kurgusal karakteri kıskanır ve oyunun sonunda hayali olarak hem kendini hem de karısını öldürür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Harold Pinter, Delilik, Kıskançlık, Othello Sendromu, Sevgili, William Shakespeare

1. INTRODUCTION

Harold Pinter (died 2008) was born in 1930 in London as the only child of a Jewish family. He is one of the most notable playwrights of the twentieth century because of his distinct style. Peter Raby (2009:1) declares that Pinter is one of the highest extensively performed and best-known dramatists in the modern world, based only on statistics. Raby also adds that in the United States, there is an active Pinter Society which publishes an annual *Pinter Record*. The playwright is a member of a post-war movement that sought to reject the problems of the twentieth century by presenting a fresh perspective on mankind.

Pinter wrote his first play *The Room* in 1957 at the age of twenty-seven. The one-act play takes place in a warm, inviting room in a vast, unspecified house. Nonetheless, despite the fact that this room is secure and does not exhibit any signs of unwelcome isolation, danger lurks beyond. As the play proceeds, Riley arrives at the house where Rose and her husband Bert live comfortably. The couple's life is portrayed in such a way that any interference is interpreted as a danger to them. Rose is sixty years old, whereas Bert is fifty, resulting in a ten-year age disparity that is evident in their relationship. Rose continues to believe that she will be evicted by an outsider. As a result, she is plagued by feelings of insecurity, so she isolates herself in her room to deal with her absurd feelings. The themes and techniques Pinter applied in his first play *The Room* were intensively used in his following works. For instance, marriage is depicted as an authentic difficult issue in numerous Pinter plays in which the wife and husband strive to gain control that is irritating for both partners.

During his career Pinter created around thirty plays for the theatre, virtually all of which have been produced in a variety of performances around the world. As Esslin (1976:10) states, Pinter's place among the world's leading playwrights is now firmly established and remains unchallenged. His extraordinary silences, hesitations, uncertainties, words, intrusions, threats, repetitions, darkness, and questioning aspects in the plays have earned him a worldwide reputation. Moreover, Pinter's characters are generally in conflict and collusion with each other in the personal, societal, and psychological dimensions of human action and awareness. In this sense, Pinteresque is a term used to describe how he uses language in his own distinctive way. It is a kind of dialect full of tricky procedures, delays and pauses, and persistent unessential short talks. Pinter uses carefully prepared words to demonstrate how language maybe function as a painful tool in a conversation, sometimes with catastrophic effects over someone else.

Despite his reputation as a playwright, he was trained as an actor and has appeared in plays, movies, and teleplays throughout his career. Moreover, Pinter has earned several awards, along with the prestigious Nobel Prize in Literature in 2005.

Baldick (2001:1) underlines that Harold Pinter is associated with the theatre of absurd—a term composed by the critic Martin Esslin in 1961. Absurdity in general may be defined as ridiculous behaviours that many people take part in their lives which they notice when they see it from the outside. Sometimes individuals may not recognize absurdity at all, or it might be suddenly distinguished when people are inside the circumstance. The conversations in absurd theatre are utilized in arrange to appear the fundamental depression of the human condition where there is a consistent distraction with disappointment, fear, and passing the time. Thus, the world shown within the absurd plays is frantic, mutilated and odd, the characters are secretive, and their activities unimaginable. It portrays genuine life situations, now and then indeed making fun of genuine issues and hence it creates a power in dramatization.

2. OTHELLO SYNDROME

The *Mirable Dictionary* (2012: 834) defines syndrome as some physical characteristics or changes that suggest the presence of an illness or an uncommon situation. Othello syndrome also called as pathological jealousy “refers to psychoses in which delusions of infidelity predominate” (Crichton, 1996). In short, Othello syndrome is an individual's disease-like sexual jealousy of the person towards the loved one. Butler (2000) in his article declares that the most significant subject in this syndrome is sexual partner betrayal. Thus, the person with Othello syndrome constantly imagines of being betrayed sexually. Besides, Othello syndrome has the potential to result in violence towards the spouse (Strobbe-Barbat et.al, 2020). The phrase is, of obviously, derived from Shakespeare's tragic stage-play *Othello's* central character. In the play, Othello became mad and killed his innocent wife Desdemona and then executed himself because his mind was corrupted by jealousy which he could not escape. Iago, one of the *Othello* characters, compares jealousy to a green-eyed monster:

IAGO.

O, beware, my lord, of jealousy;

It is the green-ey'd monster which doth mock

The meat it feeds on: that cuckold lives in bliss

Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger;

But O, what damned minutes tells he o'er

Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet strongly loves! (Shakespeare, 2005:82).

Ann Weber (2019) describes jealousy as a “complex of several emotions whose central theme is the fear of losing to someone else what rightfully belongs to one”. She adds that jealousy in intimate relationships is motivated by the fear of losing the other. Likewise, Hansen (1991:213) defines jealousy as “a protective reaction to a perceived threat to a valued relationship”. Moreover, Hoaken (1976) characterizes jealousy as a mental and emotional condition defined by resentment directed against another person or area of interest as a result of known or suspected competition in a triadic connection comprising a subject, object, and rival.

Shakespeare's *Othello*, one of the most dramatic and tragic plays in world literature, is set in 16th-century Venice as well as Cyprus. In the plot, Othello is a Moorish general who leads his army into a fight with the Ottoman Turks for the island of Cyprus. The great black warrior in the Venetian army, married a beautiful white beautiful and rich woman named Desdemona, the daughter of a powerful senator named Brabantio, in secret. When he discovers the truth about his daughter, he becomes enraged and chooses to reject Desdemona. Othello emphasizes that Desdemona is virtuous and innocent, and that she preferred him after all.

As the play proceeds, because a soldier called Lieutenant Cassio has been placed in front of Othello, Iago has a secret anger and hatred towards him, and he also believes Othello of having an affair with his wife Emilia. Iago plots a cunning retaliation while waiting for revenge, planting suspicions in Othello's mind that Desdemona is possessing a love affair with Cassio. He decides to instigate a street brawl, which Cassio is held responsible for, so Othello dismisses him from his position. Desdemona brings Cassio's situation to her husband's attention, which confirms his suspicions that the two are lovers. While all of this is going on, Iago manages to locate a priceless, family heirloom handkerchief given to Desdemona by Othello. Realizing that she has lost the handkerchief, Desdemona is aware that her husband will go mad about it:

DESDEMONA.

Where should I lose that handkerchief, Emilia?

EMILIA.

I know not, madam.

DESDEMONA.

Believe me, I had rather have lost my purse

Full of crusadoes: and, but my noble Moor

Is true of mind and made of no such baseness

As jealous creatures are, it were enough

To put him to ill thinking. (Shakespeare, 2005:98).

Actually, Iago slips the handkerchief onto Cassio in such a way that Othello notices it, and he believes that the possession is proof of the affair. Othello instructs Iago to assassinate Cassio because of his jealousy and then Desdemona is strangled by him. Her innocence is proven shortly after, and Iago's deceit is exposed. Othello kills himself in a fit of sadness and regret, and Iago is apprehended by the authorities. To such a degree, audiences and readers are plunged into a web of a world intertwined with deceit, jealousy, and finally tragedy in Shakespeare's *Othello*.

We observe tragically how Iago single-handedly ruins Othello's marriage to the lovely Desdemona. He accomplishes this by a whirlwind of deception and cunning, preying on one of the most powerful human emotions, jealousy. Iago tells his master Othello a narrative of treachery, which traps his soul in a furious wrath of adultery. As Othello's mind was poisoned with jealousy and could not overcome this feeling, he murdered his innocent wife Desdemona and then committed suicide. In this context, Keskin and Hashemipour (2020:73) underline that Othello syndrome is more common in men which may include physical, emotional, sexual, and

economic violence directed towards women. Since Othello loved his wife deeply by heart and therefore was against everyone in order to be with her, he was able to feel the desire to kill her with his own hands because of sexual jealousy.

3. HAROLD PINTER'S *THE LOVER*

Shakespeare's use of central ideas, notably those of love, death, and infidelity is evident throughout his works. All of these issues, especially jealousy, are present in Pinter's *The Lover* as well. In 1963, *The Lover* was first released as a television film in London and after a few months, it was transferred to the theatrical stage. According to Baker (2008:59) the play focuses on the destructive results of routine and boredom. Pinter's play starts in the morning in Sarah's and Richard's detached house located in Windsor. Sarah, in a cool and dignified dress, is cleaning their home by emptying the ashtray in the living room and dusting it. Her husband Richard enters bedroom from the bathroom on the left (Pinter, 2013:5), picks up his briefcase from the closet in the hall, walks to Sarah, and kisses her on the face. They both look at each other in an adoring and pleasant manner:

RICHARD (amiably). *Is your lover coming today?*

SARAH. *Mmnn.*

RICHARD. *What time?*

SARAH. *Three.*

...

RICHARD. *Have a pleasant afternoon.* (Pinter, 2013:5).

Pinter's play appears to be about a love triangle involving Sarah, Richard, and Sarah's lover, based on the initial dialogue between the two characters. As Esslin indicates (1976:37) although the conversation and people are genuine in Pinter's plays, the overall impact is one of mystery, doubt, and poetic ambiguity. Likewise, when Pinter's play starts with the above conversation between the husband and wife, we are faced with a situation that is not seen in a normal marriage. It is understood that Richard is a successful businessman who spends most of his time in the office. Sarah, on the other hand, is a housewife who attempts to have fun with her lover with Richard's approval. Whenever Richard goes to work, Sarah meets her lover at home. As Sarah openly states that she is going to meet her lover, Richard is not jealous of his wife at all and moreover he wishes them a good time for the afternoon.

The absurd beginning of the play creates an extraordinary surprise and shocking on the readers and audiences, confusing their minds. In the evening, when Richard returns home, he asks his wife for the details of the hours she spent with her lover. We also learn from Sarah that her lover is an adaptable and respectful married man. Later, when Richard also mentions that he is having an affair with a "whore" (Pinter, 2013:11) it appears that the husband and wife do not interfere in each other's private lives in their marital relationship. After a short time, Pinter confuses us again when jealousy is rising from Richard's statement as he examines his wife:

RICHARD. *Does it ever occur to you that while you're spending the afternoon being unfaithful to me I'm sitting at a desk going through balance sheets and graphs?*

SARAH. *What a funny question.* (Pinter, 2013:9).

Richard questions Sarah whether she imagines him at work at his office while entertaining her lover. Sarah, surprised by her husband's inquiry, confesses that she does, to a degree, noting that it is Richard whom she really loves. Richard exposes himself as the victim, constantly interrogating Susan with repeated accusations of cheating and searching for evidence. Despite the fact that Richard has another relationship, he, such as Othello, is preoccupied with learning more about his wife's lover and is more disturbed by the idea that his wife prefers the other man.

When Sarah informs Richard that she is expecting her lover again the next morning, Richard is taken aback. So, Richard tells her that he will not be home early and after that he goes to work. After tidying the house, Sarah excitedly begins to prepare herself for the lover. She gets dressed in a black costume with a low-cut neckline and high-heeled shoes. As the doorbell rings a few moments later, the circumstance is guessed that it is Sarah's lover, yet the man on the door is a milkman. This approach, which can be seen repeatedly in Pinter's several works, is used deftly to influence the audience's rising curiosity.

A second time the doorbell rings again and we await the arrival of the much-mentioned Sarah's lover with great excitement. As Sarah welcomes him, she says "Hallo, Max" (Pinter, 2013:19), however it's just Richard dressed differently. Since the dramatic tension is over, we can detect that Max is, in fact, Richard. It becomes obvious that Richard enters as a lover every day in his own home, where Sarah is already waiting for him as mistress Dolores or whore Mary. Actually, the couple which has been married for ten years, has invented a game within their marriage. Since Pinter's *The Lover* is pretty confusing, it is necessary here to give some information about the married couple because the characters in the play take multiple roles. Along these lines, to make it clear:

Sarah's roles and outfits:

- Richard's wife
- Richard's whore named Mary
- Richard's mistress named Dolores
- Max's lover
- As Sarah she wears low-heeled shoes and a modest dress
- As whore or mistress she wears high-heeled shoes and low-cut black dress

Richard's roles and outfits:

- Sarah's husband
- Has relationship with a whore
- Has a mistress
- Max
- As Richard he wears suit and tie
- As Max he wears casually

Hall (2001) claims that Sarah and Richard probably have invented a sexual game, to escape from the monotony of monogamy. Furthermore, Quigley (2009:17) points out that Sarah and Richard's relationship is ever-evolving which may be a reason of creating a game. Both Sarah and Richard have created a character for the other. Accordingly, Richard turns into

Max and Sarah into a whore or mistress who seem attractive. In their game we can notice and distinguish the multiple characters with their clothes. Richard in the marriage usually wears a sober suit with a tie, whereas Sarah always wears low-heeled shoes and a modest dress. However, in the role-play their outfits alter when they switch personas to mistress and Max. Yet, Sarah is dressed as a mistress in high-heeled shoes and a beautiful black dress, whereas Max is dressed casually. Their conversation continues as in the following:

MAX. *Where's your husband?*

SARAH. *My husband? You know where he is.*

MAX. *Where?*

SARAH. *He's at work.*

MAX. *Poor fellow. Working away, all day.* (Pinter, 2013:23-24).

Presumably, Richard changes his outfit in his own car to become Max while returning from work. When Max enters the house, he starts conversing with Sarah and asks where her husband is. Richard, like Othello, in particular surprises his wife by showing sudden emotional and personality changes. As Sarah states that her husband is at work, Max describes Richard as a poor fellow. According to Max, Richard is a loser because his wife cheats on him in their own house while he is busy at work. On the other hand, Max's job is not mentioned, yet it becomes clear that his working hours are not as long as Richard's.

In the rest of Pinter's play, we feel the presence of an illogical jealousy and madness like Othello that directs the life of Richard triggering his doubts and fears at home. In the game, Richard instantly transforms into Max or treats his wife as a prostitute or mistress. Moreover, Richard demonstrates irrational behaviours and starts to get jealous of his own double Max, or he gets jealous of Richard when he is Max. Keskin and Hashemipour (2020:61) state that jealousy may even be defined as a worry of being compared to another person. In *The Lover* since Richard becomes madly jealous of Max, he constantly asks about him which is a sign of comparison and rivalry.

Highly possible, Richard had been the founder of their game because he was afraid of losing the person he loved. As a practical solution, while Richard was at work, Sarah as a housewife would be prevented from finding a real lover. That way, Richard will be sure of what his wife is doing at home while he gets things done in his office. Nevertheless, it gets more complex because the lover and Richard are the same person. At the beginning of Pinter's play, when he asks Sarah if her lover will come today, his main goal is to keep her under control because people with Othello syndrome have an extreme fear of being cheated on. Therefore, like Othello, Richard loses control of his emotions and begins to act irrationally:

RICHARD. *Perhaps we could all meet for tea in the village.*

SARAH. *Why the village? Why not here?*

RICHARD. *Here? What an extraordinary remark.*

Pause.

Your poor lover has never seen the night from this window, has he? (Pinter, 2013:15).

As seen in the conversation above, Richard offers his wife to meet up in a village with Max and her for tea, knowing it is his own. His wife opposes Richard's illogical behaviour and proposes to meet at home. It is apparent to notice from Richard's speeches that he is madly jealous of Max because his mind, like Othello's, is filled with imagines of his wife's lover. Furthermore, Richard is covered with the belief that the person his wife Sarah loves is Max:

RICHARD. *I'm rather moved by that remark, in a strange kind of way. I think I can understand why you like him so much.*

SARAH. *He's terribly sweet.*

RICHARD. *Mmn-hmmnn.*

SARAH. *Has his moods, of course.*

RICHARD. *Who doesn't?*

SARAH. *But I must say he's very loving. His whole body emanates love.*

RICHARD. *How nauseating.* (Pinter, 2013:16).

Like Desdemona in Shakespeare's *Othello*, Sarah is in love and loyal to her husband. In the above conversation, when Sarah tells Richard how much she loves her lover, Richard finds it disgusting. Actually, Richard's jealousy has grown to a such a degree that he now sees Max as his rival. Day by day, Richard's mind is engaged with more and more jealousy, like Shakespeare's Othello. When Sarah realizes that Richard is jealous of Max, she begs her fictional lover to go since she is expecting her husband. As the play progresses, both Richard and Max become jealous and hate each other. Richard asks about Max when he is with Sarah, and he asks about Richard when he is Max, so Richard can no longer avoid being jealous of himself:

MAX. *Why does he put up with it?*

SARAH. *Oh, shut up.*

MAX. *I asked you a question.*

Pause.

SARAH. *He doesn't mind.*

MAX. *Doesn't he?*

Slight pause.

Well, I'm beginning to mind. (Pinter, 2013:24).

Max continues to act erratically by constantly changing characters. He informs Sarah that he has been cheating on his wife for a long time and that he can no longer continue this situation. Pinter's play does not mention whether Sarah and Richard have any children, but Max wants to end his relationship with Sarah because he needs to spend more time with his children. Since Richard considers himself as envious, enviable, and rival simultaneously, his wife Sarah begins to think he is drunk:

MAX. *How does he bear it, your husband? How does he bear it? Doesn't he smell me when he comes back in the evenings? What does he say? He must be mad. Now - what's the time - half-past four - now when he's sitting in his office, knowing what's going on here, what does he feel, how does he bear it?*

SARAH. *Max*

MAX. *How?*

SARAH. *He's happy for me. He appreciates the way I am. He understands.*

MAX. *Perhaps I should meet him and have a word with him.*

SARAH. *Are you drunk?* (Pinter, 2013:26).

Towards the end of the play, Richard goes crazy enough to call Sarah both skinny and fat because he sees his wife as mistress, wife, and a paid prostitute. According to Richard, his wife must now lead an honourable life. Sarah is enraged by this and believes her husband is mad, so she begs Richard to reconsider. Sarah objects to Richard's words, as she is already a devoted woman to her husband. Later, Richard threatens Sarah with teething and decapitation her lover if she continues seeing him. Like Shakespeare's Othello, Richard is sexually jealous of the woman he loves and cannot escape of the fictions he imagines in his head. At the end of the play, Richard eliminates both himself and Sarah in his mind and continues their relationship as Max and a whore.

4. CONCLUSION

Betrayal, love, marriage, madness, and jealousy are the common topics in both Shakespeare's *Othello* and Harold Pinter's *The Lover*. Although Othello's and Richard's wives say they love them and do not betray them, their husbands do not believe the women because of existing an imaginary sexual jealousy. In Shakespeare's play, the main character Othello becomes madly jealous of his wife Desdemona considering that she is betraying him with Cassio. In the end, Othello turns into a criminal who has ended both his innocent wife's and his own life only because of his jealousy and madness that he could not control. Therefore, Othello syndrome, which is named after Shakespeare's play, is a disease-like jealousy that may result in violence. On the other hand, Harold Pinter's *The Lover* is so dense with truth and the false belief of human behaviour that it is complicated to distinguish between the two. In his play, Pinter uses silence, mystery and short conversations to create a tense and threatening atmosphere at Sarah and Richard's home.

Although *The Lover* is an absurdist comedy play, it contains erotic fantasies, obsession, jealousy and hate dialogues. Before Richard goes to his workplace in the first part of the day, he asks Sarah whether her lover is staying with today, which she concedes right away. Furthermore, when the husband is home in the evening, Sarah gives some information about her lover. As the play proceeds, it is revealed that both Richard and Susan have obviously been cheating for quite a long time, yet neither appears to mind. It turns out that Sarah does not actually have a lover named Max. Actually, Richard is Max who meets Sarah in the afternoons. As a result, Richard transforms into Max, and Sarah into a whore or mistress who appear attractive for the other. We may detect and differentiate the many characters in their game by their clothing. Richard generally wears a sober suit with a tie in the marriage, whilst Sarah always wears low-heeled shoes and a modest outfit.

Over the time, Richard's sexual jealousy has developed to the madness point where he views Max as his rival. Like Shakespeare's Othello, Richard's mind is consumed by jealousy on a daily basis. Moreover, both Richard and Max start to hate each other. As a result, Richard, like Shakespeare's Othello, is sexually jealous of the woman he loves and is unable to escape

the fantasies he creates in his brain. At the end of the play, Richard mentally removes both himself and Sarah, continuing their connection as Max and a whore.

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