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THE STAGE INTERPRETATION OF SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDY OTHELLO IN KAZAKH THEATRE

Abstract. This article examines the stage interpretation of William Shakespeare's tragedy Othello within the context of contemporary Kazakh theatre. A survey of the current theatrical repertoire in Kazakhstan shows that Shakespeare's plays are the most frequently performed works of world classical drama. The diversity of their theatrical readings provides valuable opportunities to investigate the nature of performance, reassess approaches to the reception of classical texts, and explore new possibilities for their scenic realization. The discussion focuses on two theatrical versions of Othello: one presented by the K. Kuanyshbayev National Musical Drama Theatre and the other by the Akmola Regional Kazakh Musical Drama Theatre named after Shakhmet Kusainov. The research employs theatre and art-historical approaches, together with chronological and comparative methods. Particular attention is given to the creative visions of directors Talgat Temenov and Kuandyk Kassymov, their approaches to dramatic characterization, the representation of human behaviour, and the performers' interpretation of their roles. The two stagings are compared with regard to their aesthetic features, scenographic concepts, and visual language. Special emphasis is placed on the portrayal of Iago and on the ways in which both directors relate this character to contemporary social realities. The article further demonstrates how the themes of malice and betrayal are reinterpreted as destructive forces that continue to threaten human society. In addition, it offers a comparative evaluation of the acting styles of Nurken Oteulov and Aslanbek Shaysulthanov, who portray Iago in the respective productions. The findings indicate that Shakespeare's tragedy has acquired a renewed theatrical expression on the Kazakh stage by engaging with contemporary social concerns and establishing a meaningful dialogue with modern audiences.

Keywords: playwright, actor, director, tragedy, performance, character, persona, stage interpretation.

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У.ШЕКСПИРДІҢ «ОТЕЛЛО» ТРАГЕДИЯСЫНЫҢ ҚАЗАҚ ТЕАТРЫНДАҒЫ САХНАЛЫҚ ШЕШІМІ

Аңдатпа. Мақала қазіргі қазақ театрындағы Уильям Шекспирдің «Отелло» трагедиясының сахналық интерпретацияларын талдауға арналған. Қазақстан театрларының қазіргі репертуарына жүргізілген шоу элементі классикалық драматургия туындыларының ішінде Уильям Шекспир пьесаларының ең жиі сахналанатынын көрсетеді. Бұл шығармалардың сан алуан сахналық қойылымы театр табиғатын

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тереңірек зерделеуге, классикалық мәтіндерді қабылдау ерекшеліктерін қайта пайымдауға және оларды сахнада көркем игерудің жаңа мүмкіндіктерін айқындауға жол ашады. Зерттеу нысаны ретінде Қалибек Қуанышбаев атындағы Қазақ ұлттық музыкалық драма театры мен Шахмет Құсайынов атындағы Ақмола облыстық қазақ музыкалық-драма театрында қойылған «Отелло» спектакльдері алынды. Зерттеу барысында театртанушылық және өнертанулық талдау, сондай-ақ хронологиялық және салыстырмалы әдістер қолданылды. Ерекше назар режиссер Талғат Теменов пен Қуандық Қасымовтың шығармашылық ұстанымдарына, кейіпкерлерді көркемдік тұрғыдан ашу ерекшеліктеріне, адам мінез-құлқын сахнада бейнелеу тәсілдеріне және актерлердің рөлді сомдау шеберлігіне аударылды. Қойылымдар көркемдік ерекшеліктері, сценографиялық шешімдері мен сахналық бейнелеу тілі тұрғысынан салыстырмалы түрде сараланды. Сонымен қатар екі режиссердің Яго бейнесін қазіргі әлеуметтік шындықпен сабақтастыра пайымдау ерекшеліктері кәсіби деңгейде талданды. Зерттеу барысында зұлымдық пен сатқындықтың адамзатқа қауіп төндіретін құбылыстар ретінде көркемдік тұрғыдан қайта пайымдалатыны анықталды. Бұдан бөлек Яго рөлін сомдаған Нұркен Өтеуілов пен Асланбек Шайсұлтановтың актерлік орындаушылық ерекшеліктеріне салыстырмалы талдау жасалды. Зерттеу нәтижелері Уильям Шекспирдің «Отелло» трагедиясының қазақ сахнасында жаңа көркемдік сипатқа ие болып, қазіргі әлеуметтік мәселелермен сабақтаса отырып, көрерменмен өзекті әрі мазмұнды сахналық диалог құра алғанын көрсетті.

Кілт сөздер: драматург, актер, режиссер, трагедия, спектакль, кейіпкер, бейне, сахналық интерпретация.

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СЦЕНИЧЕСКАЯ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯ ТРАГЕДИИ У.ШЕКСПИРА «ОТЕЛЛО» В КАЗАХСКОМ ТЕАТРЕ

Аннотация. Статья посвящена анализу сценических интерпретаций трагедии Уильяма Шекспира «Отелло» в контексте современного казахского театра. Анализ современного театрального репертуара Казахстана показывает, что среди произведений мировой классической драматургии пьесы Уильяма Шекспира являются наиболее востребованными на сцене. Многообразие их сценических прочтений открывает новые возможности для осмысления природы театрального искусства, переоценки подходов к восприятию классических текстов и поиска современных способов их художественного воплощения. Материалом исследования послужили постановки «Отелло», осуществлённые в Казахском национальном музыкально-драматическом театре имени К. Куанышбаева и Ақмолинском областном казахском музыкально-драматическом театре имени Шахмета Қусаинова. В работе использованы методы театроведческого и искусствоведческого анализа, а также хронологический и сравнительно-сопоставительный методы исследования. Особое внимание уделено творческим концепциям режиссёров Талғата Теменова и Қуандық Қасымова, их подходам к художественному раскрытию образов, способам сценического воплощения человеческого характера и актёрской интерпретации ролей. Постановки сопоставлены с точки зрения их художественных особенностей, сценографических решений и сценического языка. Особое место в исследовании занимает анализ трактовки образа Яго и способов его соотношения режиссёрами с современными социальными реалиями. Установлено, что темы зла и предательства в спектаклях переосмысливаются как разрушительные явления, представляющие угрозу человеческому обществу. Кроме того, проведён сравнительный анализ актёрского мастерства Нуркена Өтеуілова и Асланбека Шайсұлтанова, исполнивших роль Яго в рассматриваемых постановках. Результаты исследования свидетельствуют о том, что трагедия Уильяма Шекспира «Отелло» получила новое сценическое прочтение в казахском театре, органично соединившись с актуальными общественными проблемами и превратившись в содержательный художественный диалог с современным зрителем.

Ключевые слова: драматург, актер, режиссер, трагедия, спектакль, персонаж, образ, сценическая интерпретация.

1. Introduction

In contemporary theatre studies, William Shakespeare's oeuvre is widely recognized as a universal artistic framework for exploring the profound contradictions of human existence, the complexities of moral choice, and the tragic consequences of human fallibility. In this regard, T. V. Kovalevskaya observes that "The relevance of this research is determined by Shakespeare's place and significance in world culture, as well as by his role as a source of paradigms for interpreting human existence" (Kovalevskaya, 2024: 675). This observation highlights the scholarly importance of examining *Othello* within the framework of contemporary Kazakh theatre. On the Kazakh stage, the play extends far beyond its conventional perception as a tragedy of jealousy, emerging instead as a multifaceted dramatic work that addresses such fundamental issues as trust and suspicion, authority and anger, manipulation, and moral responsibility.

Since Kazakhstan gained independence, the country's theatrical culture has undergone substantial transformation, creating favourable conditions for new interpretations of world classical drama. At the same time, direct translations of English-language plays into Kazakh have strengthened cultural exchange and expanded scholarly interest in Shakespeare's dramatic heritage. Today Shakespeare's plays continue to occupy a prominent place in the repertoire of Kazakh theatres, where they are increasingly reinterpreted in response to contemporary artistic and social concerns.

Interest in Shakespeare's dramatic legacy emerged in Kazakhstan with the establishment of the country's professional theatre. Prominent Kazakh writers and intellectuals, particularly Mukhtar Auezov and Gabit Musrepov, translated Shakespeare's plays into Kazakh and played a decisive role in introducing them to the national stage. Their work was continued by subsequent generations of translators, ensuring that Shakespeare's dramas became a permanent part of the national theatrical repertoire. Since their first staging in Kazakhstan in 1927, these plays have remained among the most frequently performed works of world classical drama.

Over the past decade, Kazakh theatre has been distinguished by innovative directing, original aesthetic concepts, and increasingly sophisticated acting techniques. These developments have encouraged new interpretations of classical drama, with Shakespeare's plays being continually reimagined in response to changing artistic and social contexts. The directorial reading of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Taming of the Shrew* demonstrate the enduring significance of Shakespearean dramaturgy within contemporary Kazakh theatre.

Despite numerous studies devoted to Shakespeare's reception in Kazakh theatre, comparative research examining contemporary stage interpretations of *Othello* remains limited. This article addresses that gap by comparing the directorial concepts of Talgat Temenov and Kuandyk Kassymov. Particular attention is paid to their artistic vision, scenographic solutions, and approaches to character construction, revealing how Shakespeare's tragedy has been reinterpreted within the context of contemporary Kazakh theatre.

2. Methods and materials

2.1. Methods

The principal aim of this research is to examine the stage interpretations of William Shakespeare's *Othello* in Kazakh theatre, identify the distinctive aesthetic features of

two contemporary productions, and evaluate the semantic and artistic significance of the directors' creative decisions.

As theatre scholar Bakyt Nurpeis observes, "Directing has brought about profound transformations in the development of theatrical art, the advancement of acting, creative methodology, the theory of stage analysis, and the artistic criteria of performance" (Nurpeis, 2014:17). This observation underscores the decisive role of directing in shaping theatrical expressio.

The research employs theatre studies, comparative, systematic classification, and scholarly synthesis methods. Accordingly, the present study examines directorial approaches. Together, these methods provide a comprehensive framework for examining the the aesthetic structure of the stage production, directorial strategies, scenographic concepts, and acting techniques.

2.2. Materials

The study is based on two productions of Othello: one staged at the National Musical Drama Theatre named after Kalibek Kuanyshbayev and the other at the Akmola Regional Kazakh Musical Drama Theatre named after Shakhmet Kusainov. These performances constitute the primary research material for a comparative examination of the artistic concepts developed by Talgat Temenov and Kuandyk Kassymov, with particular attention to character interpretation, scenographic design, and acting performance.

The theoretical foundation of this study is based on the scholarship of both international and Kazakh specialists who have examined Shakespeare's dramatic heritage. In particular, the analysis draws upon Alexander Anikst's *The Theatre of Shakespeare's Era* (1965), Alexei Bartoshevich's *A Contemporary to the Universe: Shakespeare in the Theatre of the Twentieth Century* (2002), and Peter Brook's *Threads of Time* (2005), which provide the principal conceptual and methodological framework for the present research.

The study also draws upon the works of leading Kazakh theatre scholars, including Kazhykumar Kuandykov (2022), Bagybek Kundakbayuly (2001), Ashirbek Sygai (2004), Akhmedzhan Kadyrov (2007), Bakyt Nurpeis (2014), and Maman Baiserkeuly (2020). Collectively, these publications examine Shakespeare's reception in Kazakhstan, the development of directing practices, and the evolution of national acting traditions.

Additional critical perspectives are provided by the cultural scholar Aliya Bopezhanova, the French theatre historian Béatrice Picon-Vallin, and the Lithuanian theatre director Jonas Vaitkus, whose reviews concern Othello as staged by the National Musical Drama Theatre named after Kalibek Kuanyshbayev. The research corpus also includes articles by theatre scholar Meruert Zhaksylykova devoted to the production presented at the Akmola Regional Kazakh Musical Drama Theatre named after Shakhmet Kusainov.

Scholarly publications, theatre reviews, interviews, and other materials relating to Kazakh theatrical versions of Othello were collected, systematised, and comparatively analysed. Particular attention was paid to directorial concepts, scenographic design, and acting interpretation in order to identify both the shared and distinctive characteristics of the two productions. This comparative analysis also makes it possible to define the principal features of the contemporary Kazakh interpretation of Shakespeare's Othello.

3. Discussion

The twentieth century witnessed the establishment in England of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre – later incorporated into the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) – with the aim of developing innovative approaches to staging William Shakespeare's dramas. Within this institution, some of the most influential directors of the period left an enduring imprint on the history of world theatre. Among them were Peter Brook and Peter Hall, who defined the company's creative identity during the 1950s and 1960s, followed by Trevor Nunn and Terry Hands in the 1970s and 1980s, and subsequently Adrian Noble, Michael Boyd, and Gregory Doran.

Several performances presented in Stratford achieved canonical status in twentieth-century theatre history, including Peter Brook's *King Lear* (1962) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1970), Peter Hall's *The Wars of the Roses* (1963), Trevor Nunn's *Macbeth* (1976), Adrian Noble's *King Lear* (1982), and Gregory Doran's *Hamlet* (2008). These landmark stagings not only transformed the theatrical understanding of Shakespearean drama but also exercised a lasting influence on the evolution of acting practice. Moreover, the creative vision of these directors contributed significantly to the formation of a distinguished Shakespearean acting tradition extending from David Garrick and John Gielgud to leading performers of the present day.

Peter Brook's approach to Shakespearean tragedy profoundly shaped the work of Peter Hall, Trevor Nunn, Robert Lepage, Gregory Doran, and many other directors whose theatrical readings present contemporary culture as a complex and interconnected network. Within postmodern aesthetics, canonical texts acquire a dynamic and open-ended character, enabling Shakespeare's dramas to generate new meanings through recurring motifs, intertextual dialogue, and continuous processes of transformation that transcend rigid structural boundaries.

Following Kazakhstan's independence, national interest in Shakespeare's classical heritage increased considerably. Contemporary reinterpretations of his dramas have broadened the creative horizons of Kazakh theatre while encouraging innovative approaches to presenting canonical texts on stage. Written around 1604, *Othello* was based on Giraldi Cinthio's *The Moor of Venice*. The tragedy explores enduring themes of love and trust, betrayal and infidelity, loyalty and treachery, as well as the moral conflict between good and evil. It was first performed at London's Globe Theatre in 1604 and has since become a permanent part of the international theatrical repertoire. As the distinguished theatre critic Ashirbek Sygai aptly observed, "The inexhaustible problems embedded in the classical repertoire have never ceased to occupy the theatrical agenda" (Sygai, 2004: 246). His observation highlights the timeless relevance of classical drama, whose artistic and philosophical concerns continue to resonate across generations.

On 11 April 2018, the State Academic Kazakh Musical Drama Theatre named after Kalibek Kuanyshbayev (now the Kazakh National Musical Drama Theatre named after Kalibek Kuanyshbayev) premiered *Othello* at the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation. The staging was directed by the People's Artist of Kazakhstan and Professor Talgat Temenov. By undertaking one of the most psychologically complex masterpieces of world drama, he sought to offer a fresh reading of Shakespeare's tragedy within the context of Kazakhstan's national theatre. Temenov recontextualized the work by foregrounding its enduring themes of love and betrayal and demonstrating their continued relevance to contemporary society.

His interpretation successfully connected Shakespeare's universal exploration of the human condition with present-day social realities. In Temenov's artistic vision, Othello emerges not simply as the tragedy of an individual but as a profound meditation on power, freedom, and the inner conflicts that shape human existence.

Director Talgat Temenov condensed Shakespeare's original five-act tragedy into a single act, introducing carefully considered structural reductions while preserving the dramatic integrity of the work. By selectively abridging the dialogue, he adapted the poetic text to the conventions of theatrical performance, creating a more concentrated dramatic rhythm and greater scenic dynamism. The production's aesthetic coherence was further reinforced through a carefully conceived musical score that became an essential component of the overall theatrical composition.

Following the First World Astana Theatre Festival, Lithuanian director Jonas Vaitkus described the staging as follows:

"The directing of this production is exceptionally compelling. The cast is remarkably strong, demonstrating outstanding physical expressiveness. Iago is presented in a particularly engaging manner. The tragedy is interpreted through a distinctive cinematic language, employing close-up effects with remarkable precision. The performance generates extraordinary energy that is fully transmitted to the audience, allowing the director to maintain complete control over spectators' attention" (Vaitkus, 2019).

One of the defining features of Temenov's interpretation is the centrality of Iago. Nearly every major dramatic event unfolds through his presence, establishing him as the principal manipulator whose psychological influence drives the action. As Aliya Bopezhanova observes:

"Perhaps the most compelling interpretation in the scenic realization is Nurken Oteuilov's portrayal of Iago. Intelligent, purposeful, psychologically perceptive, and highly skilled in communication, he controls virtually every event unfolding on stage, employing all these qualities in the service of evil. Unlike the Korean Mulgyel Theatre's interpretation, where demonic shadows surround Othello, Temenov introduces Iago's alter ego (A.Adilgereyeve), who accompanies him during decisive moments of the action. Consequently, it is Iago – not Othello – who ultimately becomes responsible for the deaths of both Desdemona and Othello himself" (Bopezhanova, 2018).

By placing the antagonist at the centre of the dramatic conflict, Temenov transforms betrayal into the production's dominant theme. Carefully integrated music, expressive lighting, and visual effects intensify the dramatic tension, while every narrative line is structured around the villain's manipulative influence. His ultimate triumph becomes a symbolic representation of the contemporary dominance of evil, encouraging audiences to reflect on the moral dilemmas of modern society.

The scenography, designed by Kanat Maksutov, Honoured Worker of Culture of Kazakhstan, relies on black drapery, metal constructions, expressive shadow lighting, period-inspired columns, a military alarm bell, and an iron bed. This restrained, minimalist visual environment intensifies the tragic atmosphere while foregrounding the actors' psychological expression rather than decorative spectacle. Such an approach reflects a defining characteristic of Kazakh theatre: "The devotion to the actor's psychological game remains one of the main traditions of the Kazakh theatre" (Mayemirov, Khalykov, Nurpeis, 2015).

Another notable achievement is the stage combat choreographed by Russian fight director Mikhail Vishnevsky. Reflecting on this collaboration, Nurken Oteuiloov remarked:

"The actors gained invaluable experience through stage movement and combat training. His methods of instruction, professional dedication, and approach to choreographing combat scenes were truly impressive" (Alpysbayeva, 2018).

Vishnevsky's contribution is particularly evident in the confrontations involving Rodrigo and Cassio as well as in the ensemble scenes. Equally important is Saltanat Sungat's choreography, whose work encompasses the celebratory dances following the war, the wedding scenes, the lyrical duets of Othello and Desdemona, the expressive movement of the protagonists in the finale, and the symbolic choreography associated with the central manipulator's Shadow. The visual unity of the performance is further enhanced by Shynar Elembayeva's costumes, whose refined design contributes significantly to the overall aesthetic integrity.

Portrayed by Kuandyk Kystykbayev, Othello appears from the outset as a courageous commander and a man of unquestionable integrity sincerely devoted to Desdemona. This characterization is particularly evident in his confrontation with Brabantio, where he explains that Desdemona chose to leave voluntarily. Aliya Bopezhanova notes:

"Kuandyk Kystykbayev creates a convincing image of a courageous military leader whose dignified appearance conceals profound personal insecurity. Honest, trusting, and guided by an uncompromising moral outlook, Othello and Desdemona ultimately become victims of tragedy" (Bopezhanova, 2018).

Kystykbayev further emphasizes Othello's excessive trust by portraying his unwavering confidence in Iago, whom he regards as his most loyal companion.

The performance opens with the appearance of the schemer and the Shadow. While Nurken Oteuiloov presents Iago as an emotionally charged figure, Aikorkem Turanova's Shadow embodies his inner consciousness and destructive impulses. Explaining the symbolic function of this figure, Oteuiloov states:

"We introduced the Shadow to show that good and evil always coexist, and that evil sometimes prevails. The second figure encourages the audience to recognize that the same destructive impulses exist within themselves. Rather than simply identifying Iago as a villain, spectators begin to see him as a reflection of their own inner conflicts" (Alpysbayeva, 2018).

The opening sequence immediately establishes Shakespeare's antagonist as the principal architect of the tragedy. His hostility toward Othello is established from the outset through carefully structured stage action. This is particularly apparent in the episode where he and Rodrigo (Nursultan Yesen) awaken Brabantio (Tilektes Meiramov) to announce Desdemona's flight with the Moor. Nurken Oteuiloov convincingly conveys Iago's psychological acuity by carefully observing Brabantio's reactions and subtly redirecting the conversation whenever necessary, thereby maintaining complete control over the situation.

Although Nursultan Yesen portrays Rodrigo as entirely dependent on Iago and willing to sacrifice everything for his goal, his affection for Desdemona remains less convincing. Certain exaggerated gestures also make the character appear unnecessarily coarse, reducing the credibility of his romantic motivation. While the opening scenes establish considerable dramatic momentum, the arrival of Brabantio noticeably slows the overall rhythm.

The interaction between Iago and Rodrigo further exposes Iago's duplicity. After preventing Rodrigo from drowning, he immediately places a chain around his neck and leads

him across the stage like a dog – a striking visual metaphor for psychological domination. By persuading Rodrigo that Desdemona can still be won back, he secures his unquestioning obedience. Rodrigo's acceptance of the apple likewise functions as a symbolic gesture, representing both moral transgression and surrender to temptation.

When left alone, the character's inner state is expressed primarily through movement rather than dialogue. The Shadow silently proposes that Cassio should be encouraged to drink, initiating a carefully calculated sequence of manipulation. Although Cassio initially resists, he gradually succumbs to temptation, revealing Iago's ability to conceal calculated strategy beneath an appearance of sincerity.

Such an approach reaches its culmination during the banquet scene. While publicly honouring Cassio with celebration and hospitality, Iago secretly orchestrates his downfall. Rodrigo provokes the quarrel, Cassio is discreetly armed, and every stage of the conflict unfolds according to Iago's design. When Montano (B.Shalkar) is wounded, Iago immediately instructs Rodrigo to summon Othello, demonstrating exceptional strategic precision while remaining virtually invisible behind the events he controls.

Zhanat Ospanov convincingly portrays Cassio's emotional collapse after his demotion. The symbolic removal of his military uniform and his expressive monologue effectively communicate the loss of honour and personal dignity. At the same time, Iago carefully cultivates the image of a loyal friend by consoling Cassio and helping him restore his composure. This apparent compassion, however, becomes another instrument of manipulation. Exploiting Cassio's emotional vulnerability, he persuades him to seek Desdemona's assistance while similarly exploiting Rodrigo's weaknesses. Significantly, no one within the performance recognises Iago's deception or openly questions his intentions.

Following the meeting between Cassio and Desdemona, Othello (K.Kystykbayev) enters the stage. When he asks whether the departing figure was Cassio, Iago casually denies it. At that precise moment Cassio disappears from sight, subtly planting the first seed of suspicion in Othello's mind. Reflecting on his collaboration with Kystykbayev, Nurken Oteuilov remarks:

"When two actors work together, there are scenes in which one inevitably assumes the dramatic lead. At such moments your partner must be equally strong; otherwise everything you have carefully built loses its effect. In the scene where Iago informs Othello about their return to Venice, Kuandyk and I constantly complement one another. Sometimes I can shape his character's thoughts simply through my reactions while watching him. In that respect, I am deeply grateful to my partners on stage" (Alpysbayeva, 2018).

The subsequent episodes depict Othello's gradual submission to the suspicions carefully cultivated by Iago. Rather than imposing conclusions directly, Iago subtly guides the general's thinking while consistently presenting himself as his most loyal and trustworthy companion. A particularly revealing moment occurs when Othello kneels in prayer as Iago quietly murmurs behind him, "May your race be spared from jealousy," creating the illusion of sincere concern while further poisoning Othello's mind. Nevertheless, the transition from complete confidence in both Iago and Desdemona to overwhelming suspicion appears somewhat abrupt, making Othello's psychological transformation less fully developed.

French theatre scholar Béatrice Picon-Vallin likewise identifies this shift in dramatic emphasis: "In my view, Othello is staged according to the principles of a musical. There is no doubt about the excellence of the actor portraying Othello; however, the production

places its primary emphasis on Iago. Rather than reflecting on Othello himself, I found myself contemplating Iago and the extent of the evil he is capable of unleashing. The director makes highly effective use of cinematic techniques, presenting events through foreground, middle ground, and close-up perspectives, thereby creating remarkable spatial depth. Musical expression is likewise employed with considerable effectiveness" (Picon-Vallin, 2018).

Indeed, virtually every dramatic episode is ultimately organised around Iago's influence. This concept is further reinforced in the episode where Emilia (A.Zhetpisbayeva) hands Desdemona's handkerchief to her husband. Iago's determination to obtain the handkerchief immediately reveals its importance within his scheme. After the Shadow seizes it from Emilia, Iago ignores his wife's attempts to gain his attention. Like Rodrigo before her, Emilia also accepts the apple, symbolically becoming another participant in his destructive design. For Iago, the handkerchief represents the decisive piece of fabricated evidence upon which Othello's judgment ultimately depends.

In the following sequence, Othello approaches Desdemona and Emilia as Desdemona grieves over the missing handkerchief. Simultaneously, Iago and the Shadow tear open a pillow, scattering its feathers across the stage. This striking visual metaphor externalises the destruction of Othello and Desdemona's relationship while identifying Iago as the source of the discord between them. It may equally be interpreted as symbolising the irreversible loss of innocent love.

Another noteworthy directorial device occurs during the confrontation between Rodrigo and Cassio. Initially remaining an observer, Iago intervenes only after Rodrigo is wounded, secretly stabbing Cassio before immediately returning in the guise of a sympathetic companion. He then kills Rodrigo himself, eliminating the final witness capable of exposing his crimes. The sequence vividly demonstrates his strategic calculation and ability to manipulate events while concealing his own responsibility.

The consequences of Othello's jealousy have long attracted scholarly attention, giving rise to the widely recognised concept of "Othello syndrome". Nevertheless, many researchers maintain that jealousy alone does not constitute the central idea of Shakespeare's tragedy. In the original play, Othello personally sees the handkerchief, making his tragic conclusion appear logically motivated by what he perceives as tangible evidence. In Temenov's staging, however, his psychological collapse is driven largely by suggestion, leaving the motives behind his final judgment somewhat less convincing.

Addressing this issue, Tatyana Vyacheslavovna Kovalevskaya argues:

"...Such is Othello's tragic flaw: in his anger, the Venetian Moor passes judgment on Desdemona, on Iago, and ultimately on himself, condemning them all to death. Othello's judgment recognises no other sentence. The tragic flaw shared by both Hamlet and Othello is characteristic of virtually all the protagonists of Shakespeare's tragedies – individuals who presume to determine the fate of the entire world according to their own will and judgment" (Kovalevskaya, 2024: 680).

Kovalevskaya therefore interprets Othello's downfall not simply as the result of jealousy but as the consequence of moral absolutism that compels him to assume the role of supreme judge, denying both others and himself any possibility of redemption.

In the final scene, Iago silently observes the lifeless bodies of Othello and Desdemona before calmly slicing and eating the apple in his hand. Throughout the performance, the

apple serves as a recurring symbolic motif. Emilia and Rodrigo likewise taste the fruit only after becoming entangled in Iago's schemes and committing moral transgressions, transforming it into an emblem of corrupted innocence and moral decline. Explaining this symbolism, the actor remarked:

"Why were Adam and Eve expelled from Paradise? Because they ate the forbidden fruit – the apple. There are boundaries that should never be crossed. Every character who tastes my apple yields to human weakness and commits sin. The apple is never exhausted. As long as human beings exist, sin and cruelty will continue to exist. That is precisely what the apple symbolizes" (Alpysbayeva, 2018).

Temenov also omits the episode in Shakespeare's original text in which Iago's crimes are exposed, concluding the performance with his apparent victory. Explaining this unconventional ending, Nurken Oteuillov stated:

"My purpose was to provoke reflection. Why do I step forward and look directly at the audience at the end? Because no one is an angel. As human beings, we all make mistakes, and desire often overcomes us. I wanted to tell the audience: 'Why are you watching so calmly? You are not innocent either. None of you is completely pure. Every one of you carries at least a small part of Iago within'" (Alpysbayeva, 2018).

This finale presents the struggle between good and evil as an unresolved moral conflict in which evil temporarily prevails. Iago emerges as an exceptionally intelligent and calculating strategist whose manipulation determines every major event. His gradual rise to dominance ultimately suggests that, without him, the tragic chain of events would never have unfolded.

Overall, Temenov transforms Othello from a tragedy centred on jealousy into a philosophical reflection on moral corruption, thereby redefining Shakespeare's dramatic conflict within the framework of contemporary Kazakh theatre.

In 2023, the Akmola Regional Kazakh Musical Drama Theatre named after Shakhmet Kusainov presented its own interpretation of Othello, directed by Kuandyk Kassymov. Like Temenov, Kassymov places Iago at the centre of the dramatic conflict, portraying Othello as an honourable commander who ultimately falls victim to calculated manipulation.

Faithful to Shakespeare's dialectical method of character development, Kassymov gradually intensifies the dramatic tension. A carefully constructed musical score reinforces the emotional progression of the tragedy, while rhythm and sound underscore the destructive impulses embedded in human nature. Through Othello's downfall, the director examines human vulnerability to betrayal and cruelty, suggesting that the roots of evil remain deeply embedded in contemporary society.

Kairat Myrzabolatov approaches the role of Othello with evident commitment, successfully conveying the hero's emotional suffering. Nevertheless, his portrayal relies predominantly on external physical expression rather than subtle psychological development. Frequent shouting, exaggerated movement, and the absence of meaningful pauses weaken the credibility of the character's inner transformation. Moments of doubt toward Desdemona would have gained greater dramatic intensity through restraint, silence, and reflective hesitation.

Meruert Zhaksylykova similarly points to several shortcomings of the staging:

"It must be acknowledged that the stage adaptation fails to convey convincingly the artistic destruction of the complex destinies depicted in the original tragedy. Because the relationship between Othello (K.Myrzabolatov) and Desdemona (A.Shaysultanova) lacks sufficient emotional depth, the entire semantic burden shifts to Iago (A.Shaysultanov). As a result, his success appears almost effortless. This stems both from the lack of clarity in the director's concept and from an unconvincing visual design that fails to support the tragic world of the characters. Furthermore, the actors' insufficient command of subtext and expressive speech considerably reduces the artistic quality of the performance" (Zhaksylykova, 2023).

Among the cast, Aslanbek Shaysultanov's portrayal of Iago proves the most compelling. His commanding stage presence, emotional intensity, and psychological credibility immediately engage the audience. A piercing gaze, confident posture, and the restrained menace of his voice effectively communicate the character's ruthlessness, while his expressive physicality lends additional complexity to the role. Further exploration of Iago's inner conflicts would make this interpretation even more convincing.

Unlike Temenov, whose staging is built upon an extensive symbolic system of recurring visual motifs and metaphorical imagery, Kassymov adopts a more restrained, psychologically driven directorial approach. His interpretation relies less on symbolic scenography than on the actors' ability to communicate the emotional evolution of the characters. Consequently, the dramatic conflict unfolds primarily through interpersonal relationships and psychological development rather than through an elaborate network of visual symbols. This approach preserves the classical structure of Shakespeare's tragedy while placing greater emphasis on acting performance and psychological credibility.

Overall, Kassymov's interpretation demonstrates a fundamentally different artistic strategy from Temenov's. Rather than relying on an extensive symbolic system, it foregrounds psychological realism and acting performance as the principal means of constructing dramatic tension. Although the production contains several unresolved weaknesses, many of them stem from the relative inexperience of the acting ensemble, while others result from extensive cuts to Shakespeare's text that occasionally weaken dramatic continuity and character development. Nevertheless, the staging demonstrates both the complexity of presenting Othello and the creative potential of contemporary Kazakh theatre. For the company, it represents an important stage in the artistic development of its actors through engagement with one of Shakespeare's most demanding tragedies.

4. Results

The findings of this study demonstrate that both stage interpretations of Othello shift the dramatic focus away from the conventional theme of jealousy toward an exploration of Iago's manipulative nature. In Talgat Temenov's staging, this idea is articulated through a coherent symbolic system in which the recurring motifs of the apple, the Shadow, the dark theatrical space, music, lighting, and choreographed movement function as interconnected elements of a unified aesthetic vision. By contrast, Kuandyk Kassymov's directorial reading conveys the tragic conflict primarily through the actors' portrayals rather than through an elaborate symbolic framework.

Temenov's staging achieves a remarkable degree of aesthetic coherence. The director's vision, scenographic design, musical score, and acting are carefully integrated into a

unified theatrical whole. In comparison, although Kassymov's interpretation reflects a sincere engagement with Shakespeare's classical text, several performances reveal limited psychological depth and an insufficient exploration of dramatic subtext.

Taken together, both stagings reinterpret Othello not simply as a tragedy of love and jealousy but as a contemporary reflection on the collapse of trust, the destructive force of evil, psychological manipulation, and the fragility of human nature. As the distinguished Shakespeare scholar Alexei Vadimovich Bartoshevich observes, "The world of Shakespearean theatre extends beyond the limits of human society. The entire universe is set in motion, and elemental forces become participants in human conflicts" (Bartoshevich, 2002: 10). His observation helps explain the enduring vitality of Shakespeare's dramatic legacy. Although his plays were written during the Renaissance, they continue to occupy a central position in world theatre, reaffirming their lasting artistic, philosophical, and cultural significance.

5. Conclusion

In contemporary theatre, the reception of a stage work is no longer confined to a single authoritative interpretation; rather, each staging acquires new meanings through the individual experiences and perceptions of its audience. As Romeo Castellucci observes, "Theatre is a personal discovery for every spectator. The performance is created in the spectator's mind, heart, and body. For this reason, there can be no single, correct interpretation of a performance" (Karas, 2011, p. 46). This perspective provides an important theoretical framework for examining the diverse directorial readings of Othello on the Kazakh stage.

The present study confirms that William Shakespeare's Othello continues to retain its artistic and intellectual relevance, raising enduring questions about the perpetual struggle between good and evil. The timeless nature of Shakespeare's dramatic legacy demonstrates that classical works remain inexhaustible sources of new meanings. In this regard, the prominent theatre scholar Ashirbek Sygai aptly remarks: "Classical drama elevates theatrical art. It strengthens and inspires theatre practitioners. Above all, it serves as the true measure of directorial achievement and the creative potential of the acting ensemble. The classics are a benchmark against which artistic vision, spiritual capacity, and aesthetic quality are tested" (Sygai, 2004: 246). This observation aptly illustrates the enduring significance of Shakespeare's plays in modern theatre.

Both directors reinterpret Othello as a psychological tragedy. Their stagings encourage philosophical reflection by foregrounding the complexity of human nature rather than merely recounting the external sequence of events. As Zhaksylykova, Yesenaliev, and Ospanbayeva observe: "The first two decades of the twenty-first century have already passed. Humanitarian thought continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace, in an era where each new intellectual achievement rapidly gives way to another. Theatre, as one of the major branches of Kazakh culture, has likewise undergone profound transformation. Competing with the continuous flow of information on the Internet, television, and cinema, contemporary theatre is actively searching for new artistic approaches that enable it to speak the language of today's audiences and engage them in meaningful dialogue" (Zhaksylykova, Yesenaliev, Ospanbayeva, 2023: 225).

Against this backdrop, both directors sought a renewed theatrical language for presenting Othello. Temenov's staging is particularly distinguished by its effective use of stage space,

expressive mise-en-scène, and the thoughtful integration of music and lighting. Together, these elements deepen the emotional portrayal of the protagonists and exemplify the innovative artistic experimentation currently shaping Kazakh theatre.

In conclusion, the stagings of Othello by Talgat Temenov and Kuandyk Kassymov constitute important contributions to the ongoing development of Kazakh theatre. Through original directorial vision and fresh approaches to acting, both interpretations demonstrate that Shakespeare's dramatic heritage remains a vibrant and enduring source of creative exploration on the Kazakh stage.

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