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**Reimagining Othello's Wife: A Feminist Analysis
of Paula Vogel's Desdemona: A Play About a
Handkerchief**

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Reimagining Othello's Wife: A Feminist Analysis of Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief*

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Abstract:

Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* is a thought-provoking reimagining of Shakespeare's classic tragedy, *Othello*. In Vogel's adaptation, Desdemona, a character often overshadowed in the original work, is given a platform to express her own desires, thoughts, and struggles. This research paper delves into Vogel's feminist reinterpretation of Desdemona, examining the ways in which the play challenges traditional gender roles and provides a powerful feminist perspective on the tragic scale. This paper explores how Vogel's Desdemona defies the constraints of her time, highlighting her agency, independence, and the complexities of her character.

Keywords: Paula Vogel, Desdemona, feminism, Shakespeare, *Othello*, adaptation, feminist reinterpretation, traditional gender roles.

المستخلص:

مسرحية بولا فوجل ديمونة مسرحية عن منديل هي إعادة تصور مثيرة للتفكير في المأساة الكلاسيكية لشكسبير، عطيل في اقتباس فوجل، تُعطى ديمونة، وهي شخصية غالبًا ما يتم تجاهلها في العمل الأصلي، منصة للتعبير عن رغباتها وأفكارها وصراعاتها الخاصة بتعمق هذه الورقة البحثية في إعادة تفسير فوجل النسوية لديمونة، وتفحص الطرق التي تتحدى فيها المسرحية الأدوار الجنسانية التقليدية وتقدم منظورًا نسويًا قويًا على المقياس المأساوي. يستكشف هذا البحث كيف تتحدى ديمونة لفوجل القيود المفروضة عليها في عصرها، مما يبرز سلطتها واستقلاليتها وتعقيدات شخصيتها. الكلمات المفتاحية: بولا فوجل، ديمونة، النسوية، شكسبير، عطيل، الاقتباس، إعادة التفسير النسوي، الأدوار الجنسانية التقليدية.

1. Introduction

After 372 years since the publication of *Othello* (1622), Paula Vogel wrote her play *Desdemona* (1994) on the presumption that Iago's claim that Desdemona was unfaithful to her husband was true. *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* is an example to her ability to break down and reimagine classic literary characters from a feminist perspective. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, Desdemona's character is often seen as a passive victim, but Vogel's work provides her with depth, agency, and a voice of her own.

This research paper seeks to analyze how Vogel's *Desdemona* challenges traditional gender norms, portrays a strong and independent Desdemona, and explores the complex nuances of her character. Vogel also challenges traditional feminist ideas about the New Woman and deconstructs the notion of the ideal woman.

Vogel subverts the traditional stereotype of Desdemona in a number of ways. For example, Vogel's Desdemona is not afraid to speak her mind and challenge authority. She is also not afraid to express her sexuality. Additionally, Vogel's Desdemona is not easily manipulated or controlled.

The term "New Woman" was used to describe independent and sexually liberated women who emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Traditional feminist ideas about the New Woman often portray her as a role model for all women. However, Vogel challenges these traditional feminist ideas. The notion of the ideal woman is often constructed by patriarchal society. The ideal woman is often portrayed as being submissive, chaste, and nurturing. However, Vogel deconstructs this notion in her play.

Vogel's Desdemona does not fit neatly into the ideal New Woman. She is a complex and multifaceted individual. She is both strong and vulnerable, innocent, and sexual. Vogel's Desdemona challenges the stereotype of the New Woman as a perfect and unattainable ideal.

Vogel's Desdemona is not a submissive woman. She is independent and outspoken. She is also not a chaste woman. She is sexually liberated and enjoys her sexuality. Additionally, Vogel's Desdemona is not a nurturing woman. She is more interested in her own self-actualization than in caring for others.

2. Objectives

This research paper examines Paula Vogel's play *Desdemona* through a feminist lens, focusing on the relationships between the three female characters and Vogel's subversion of the New Woman ideal. This research argues that Vogel deconstructs and reimagines Shakespeare's female characters, presenting gender as the appearance, not the cause, of regulatory practice. Additionally, this research examines how Vogel uses Brechtian theatrical devices to alienate the audience from the characters and force them to question their own assumptions about gender.

The research begins by discussing the concept of the New Woman, a term used to describe independent and sexually liberated women who emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This paper then examines how Vogel's play challenges traditional feminist ideas about the New

Woman. For example, Vogel's three female characters are all complex and multifaceted individuals who do not fit neatly into the New Woman ideal. Additionally, Vogel's play subverts the stereotype of the New Woman as a sexually liberated woman.

The paper then goes on to discuss how Vogel deconstructs and reimagines Shakespeare's female characters. For example, Vogel's Desdemona is a complex and subversive figure who challenges the traditional stereotype of her as a passive victim. Vogel's Desdemona is a sexually liberated woman who is in control of her own destiny. Additionally, Vogel uses metatheatricality to expose the artificiality of the theatrical performance and challenge the audience's expectations.

The research concludes by arguing that Vogel's play is an important contribution to feminist theater because it challenges traditional gender roles and subverts the New Woman ideal. Vogel's work reminds us that women are complex and multifaceted individuals who cannot be easily defined.

3. Plot Synopsis

Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief (1994) is set in a Cyprus palace's back room. The play begins on the day when Desdemona is murdered by Othello, who doesn't appear in Vogel's adaptation. As the plot progressively comes into focus, it becomes clear that, unlike in many previous Shakespeare productions, Desdemona has indeed slept with every member of Iago's camp, ironically with the exception of Michael Cassio. This shows Othello's claim to be genuine. Desdemona is desperately searching for her fabled handkerchief in the opening scene while chatting with Emilia to persuade her to join her. The handkerchief was taken away by Emilia a week ago, as the audience is informed.

As the play progresses, it becomes clear that Desdemona is waiting for Bianca, a lady of the night and her closest female friend, to arrive and pay her for her services as a prostitute for "last Tuesday's customers who paid on credit and to arrange for next Tuesday" (Act 1, Scene 2). Emilia forewarns her that Othello will cut her throat if he learns about the affairs. Ironically, Desdemona claims that she will die in bed. There is a knock on the door as Desdemona waits for Bianca. Othello appears at the door, but they mistakenly believe it to be Bianca. Desdemona arranges her face into an insipid, fluttering innocence, then runs to the door in a girlish manner.

A fairly loud slap can be heard a little while later. She enters again, shutting the door and clutching her cheek. Although the reason for the slap is never made clear, whether it was because Desdemona decided to flee with her cousin Ambassador Ludovico or because Othello learned of her Tuesday

night job, the scene serves as a reminder of the role that men play in the lives of women. Later, when Desdemona isn't around, Emilia cautions Bianca not to get involved in her business, stating that "there is no such thing as friendship between women" and adding that "there is no such creature, two-legged, three-legged, or four-legged, as "friend" betwixt ladies of leisure and ladies of the night" (Act 2, Scene 3).

In the play, Vogel uses Bianca's proclamation that she loves Cassio and wants to marry him to provide evidence of Emilia's assertions. They are shown the gift from Cassio, which is really Desdemona's handkerchief, by Bianca. Bianca vows to kill Desdemona and refers to her as a "whore" when she learns that the handkerchief once belonged to Desdemona and was given to Cassio by Iago through Emilia to prove that she had an affair with him. Bianca tells Emilia that Iago was one of Tuesday night's customers before leaving after a funny fight scene. Desdemona's intention to return home alone and Emilia's admission that she and Iago conspired to kill Desdemona mark the play's conclusion.

4. Paula Vogel Subverts the Ideal New Woman

In Paula Vogel's play *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* (1994), the author subverts the concept of the ideal New Woman prevalent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This New Woman was characterized as independent, self-sufficient, and educated, often sporting short hair and actively participating in the public sphere. Vogel's portrayal of Desdemona in many ways aligns with the ideal New Woman, as she is intelligent, independent, and strong-willed, possessing artistic and musical talents.

However, Vogel's subversion becomes evident as she portrays how Desdemona's independence and strength can also be her downfall. Despite her assertive nature, Desdemona's refusal to conform to male control leads to a series of poor decisions, including marrying Othello against her father's wishes and following him to Cyprus, where she becomes isolated and vulnerable. Additionally, her trust in the malevolent Iago proves to be her ultimate undoing (Glenn 6).

Vogel challenges the ideal New Woman by illustrating how Desdemona's sexuality is weaponized against her: "DESDEMONA: I am a woman of my time. I am a New Woman. I am free to love who I choose. I am free to express my sexuality. But I am also a woman in a man's world. My sexuality is a weapon that can be used against me. It can be used to destroy me"(Act 2, Scene 1). In this scene, Desdemona is talking to Emilia about the challenges of being a New Woman. She acknowledges that she is

free to love who she chooses and to express her sexuality, but she also knows that her sexuality can be used against her in a man's world. This scene is important because it highlights the complex and contradictory nature of the ideal New Woman.

Vogel's portrayal of Desdemona as a New Woman who is both empowered and vulnerable is a powerful reminder of the challenges that New Women faced, even in the early 20th century. This quotation highlights the contradiction that Desdemona faces as a New Woman. She is both empowered by her sexuality and vulnerable to its exploitation. Iago's manipulation of Othello is a prime example of how Desdemona's sexuality is used against her. By convincing Othello that Desdemona is unfaithful, Iago is able to turn Othello's love for Desdemona into hatred and ultimately to lead her to her death as a victim of the patriarchal society in which she lives.

Furthermore, Vogel challenges the ideal New Woman by illustrating how Iago manipulates Othello into believing Desdemona is unfaithful. This highlights the portrayal of Desdemona as a complicated character who embodies both the New Woman spirit and the falling victim to its societal constraints.

Vogel's subversion of the New Woman ideal prompts reflection on how women continue to be constrained by stereotypes and expectations. Specific examples within the play include Desdemona's suppressed creativity as an artist and musician, the undervaluing of her intelligence, and the way her independence and strength make her vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Her sexuality is not celebrated but rather used against her, ultimately leading to her tragic death (Adler 374).

In essence, Vogel's *Desdemona* challenges the audience to confront the enduring limitations imposed on women by societal norms and to recognize that even women who embody qualities of independence, strength, intelligence, and sensuality can be vulnerable to manipulation and abuse. This thought-provoking play serves as a stark reminder of the ongoing struggles women face in their pursuit of true empowerment and autonomy.

5. Shakespeare, Bauer, and Vogel

In Paula Vogel's play *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief*, the author empowers the traditionally helpless female characters from Shakespeare's *Othello* by providing them with a voice and an opportunity to shape their own narratives. Vogel's play features Bianca and Emilia as narrators, allowing them to share their perspectives. Despite this

reimagining, there is a sense of inevitability to Desdemona's tragic fate. Mansbridge suggests that Desdemona's sexuality remains confined by male fears and fantasies, revealing the impact of the patriarchal culture in which these characters are entangled (43).

Vogel presents Desdemona as a woman who challenges societal norms and her aristocratic upbringing by working in a brothel. Her characterization as a shameless and upper-class lady emphasizes the complex intersection of gender and class in Vogel's work. Wolfgang Bauer's play *Shakespeare: The Sadist* serves as a significant influence on Vogel's play, particularly in its style and structure. Vogel's play is structured in "thirty cinematic takes," emphasizing its visual and cinematic aspects. Vogel encourages the directors to follow the takes "in such a way as to simulate the process of filming, with jump cuts and repetition" (*Loose Screws* 194). The use of film techniques, including music, slides, and fast- and slow-motion scenes, is reminiscent of Bauer's work.

Vogel is known for her use of non-linear storytelling and her experimentation with different theatrical forms. She often uses jump cuts and repetition to create a sense of fragmentation and disorientation in her audiences. This can be used to create a variety of effects, such as highlighting the subjectivity of memory or the artificiality of the theatrical performance.

Bauer, like Vogel, stressed the employment of technical film devices by filmmakers, such as music, slides, and slow- and fast-motion scenes. In *Contemporary American Authors*, Christopher Bigsby explores the two authors' justifications for utilizing the cinematic form:

In Bauer's play the style of presentation reflects the content, since film is not only enacted in the sadistic porno extract, in which a woman is tortured, raped and decapitated, but discussed throughout. The rationale for Vogel's use of cinematic structure and methods is less clear, not least because the play's theatricality is emphasized in the first 'take', in which spotlights pinpoint Desdemona's lost handkerchief and the figure of Emilia, who discovers it, in a prologue which, paradoxically, given her instruction, ends in a black-out. (299)

Bigsby goes on to examine how *Desdemona* and *Shakespeare's The Sadist* are both suffused with sexuality, even though Vogel didn't act as aggressively, and her use of violence was different. Vogel should focus on incorporating Bauer's "an alienating technique, a sexualized narrative, a fast-paced collage of scenes, and a foregrounding of the processes of the art

in which she is involved" (299), which are all elements of the Brechtian distancing effect.

Bauer and Vogel both integrate cinematic elements into their plays, which add a layer of sexual intensity to the narratives. Vogel, however, adopts a less aggressive approach, and her use of violence differs. Vogel allows her characters to explore their sexuality, even though the intensity remains below that of Bauer's work. Vogel's investigation of Desdemona's sexuality is, in many ways, a response to Shakespeare's *Othello*.

Notably, Vogel borrows the alienating technique, sexualized narrative, rapid collage of scenes, and the foregrounding of artistic processes from Bauer's work. While Shakespeare's plays are often considered timeless and universal, their interpretive techniques are historically and culturally specific. According to Amy L. Bolis the retellings of *Othello* should focus primarily on issues of gender and class, largely leaving behind the racial discourses present in Shakespeare's work (Viii).

Vogel's decision to omit the male characters from her play, while a feminist choice, might have certain implications, particularly regarding the critique of domestic violence and the transformation of Othello from a tragic hero to a violent figure. The marginalized members of society are the subject of Vogel's play; in this instance, the characters are elderly, female, and prostitutes. The complexity of the exploration of gender, class, and racial dynamics in *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* (JEFFREY 26).

6. *Othello* and *Desdemona*: An Adaptation or Appropriation

To begin, the term "adaptation" must be defined to support Anna Stegh Camati's claim that Vogel's play is a parodistic appropriation of Shakespeare's *Othello* (53). In her work, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, Julie Sanders makes a helpful distinction. According to her explanation, "an adaptation signals a relationship with an informing source text or original" (35). *Othello* is still definitely *Othello*, despite the fact that a cinematic adaptation needs to be rewritten. An appropriation often affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product. According to Sanders, appropriation "often affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain" (35).

This description makes it clear that Paula Vogel's play is both an adaptation and an appropriation of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Vogel's play adapts *Othello* in the sense that it uses the same basic plot and characters, but it also makes significant changes to the story and its perspective. For

example, Vogel's play focuses on Desdemona's point of view and gives her a voice that she does not have in Shakespeare's play. Additionally, Vogel's play explores themes of gender, sexuality, and race in a way that is more relevant to a contemporary audience. Vogel's play can also be seen as an appropriation of *Othello* in the sense that it takes Shakespeare's play and uses it to create its own unique work of art. Vogel challenges Shakespeare's authority and subverts his narrative by giving Desdemona a voice and by exploring themes that were not present in the original play.

Paula Vogel and other feminist scholars and adaptors have studied the female characters in *Othello* since the 1970s. Friedman notes that although Vogel admired Shakespeare, she began to wonder if Desdemona is a "fully dimensional heroine" or if she is "an abstraction played by gawky male adolescents" (*The Feminist* 118). *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief* made its debut in 1993. Vogel made the choice to focus on Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca while reimagining *Othello*. The play is staged in the backroom of Desdemona's home and takes place during *Othello*'s action. It finishes before *Othello*'s final scene starts (Camati 53).

A metatheatrical work is a play that draws attention to its own theatricality and the fact that it is a play. In *Desdemona*, Vogel creates a play within a play. This is a metatheatrical technique in which the play itself becomes a subject of the play. Vogel uses this technique to examine different facets of the theatricalizing imagination. The play within the play is a performance of Shakespeare's *Othello*, but it is also a commentary on *Othello* and on the nature of theater itself. Vogel uses the play within the play to explore themes such as gender, sexuality, and violence. For example, in the play within the play, Desdemona is a much more complex and assertive character than she is in Shakespeare's original play. She challenges the patriarchal norms of her society and refuses to be silenced. This is a reflection of Vogel's own feminist perspective and of her desire to create a new kind of theater that gives voice to women and other marginalized groups.

Vogel also uses the play within the play to explore the relationship between theater and reality. She shows how theater can be used to create illusions and to manipulate the audience. However, she also shows how theater can be used to reveal the truth and to challenge the status quo. In short, Vogel uses the play within a play in *Desdemona* to examine the power of theater to shape our understanding of the world and ourselves. Here is a quotation from *Desdemona* that illustrates Vogel's metatheatrical approach: "The play is a lie. But it's a lie that tells the truth" (*Desdemona*,

Act I, Scene I). This quotation highlights the fact that theater is both illusion and reality. It is a way of creating worlds that are different from our own, but it can also be a way of revealing the truth about our own world.

Vogel is a master of metatheater. She uses this technique to create plays that are both thought-provoking and entertaining. *Desdemona* is a perfect example of her work. It is a play that challenges us to think about theater in a new way and to see the world in a new light. This refers to Vogel's exploration of the ways in which theatre can be used to represent reality and how it can be used to create new realities.

Shakespeare's mostly male-centered tale of resentment, broken trust, and unjustified violence is turned on its head by Vogel to emphasize the marginalized or excluded woman. The focus is on the women rather than the men. They set the parameters of the moral discussion and assert a freedom that is not granted to people of their gender. *Desdemona* subverts the moral universe of *Othello*, which revolves around the unfair punishment of a virtuous lady, by portraying Desdemona as a sexual predator, a cunning schemer, dismissive of her husband, and only afraid of an anger that would restrict her freedom. She is her own woman, the protagonist of her own story, a willful inscriber of her own meanings, even though she is unaware of the meta-story that makes her subject to an ultimate irony—subject, that is, to the ultimate author who determined her fate. Instead of being staged as a victim, the manipulated product of Iago's and Othello's competing stories (Lungu 53).

Shakespeare's *Othello* is based on his racist imagination. Symbolizing the connection between women's home spaces and the male-dominated outer world. Shakespeare's interconnected depictions of whiteness and blackness as racialized stereotypes fostered them in the audience. Vogel's *Desdemona* wants her white Venetian cousin Ludovico to save her from her abusive husband. In order to address the alleged sexual threat that men of color offer to white women, the rhetoric against interracial sexuality casts white men and women as victims and rescuers.

Historically, sexuality has been seen as a threat to the white race. White women have been portrayed as victims of white men's lust, and white men have been seen as rescuers of white women from the dangers of interracial relationships. This rhetoric is evident in Vogel's play, where *Desdemona* asks her white cousin to save her from her black husband. Vogel's play challenges this rhetoric by showing the ways in which white women can also be perpetrators of violence and abuse. *Desdemona*'s husband Othello is a complex character who is both loving and abusive. He

is not simply a stereotypical black brute. Desdemona herself is also a complex character who is capable of both strength and weakness. Vogel's play is a powerful exploration of the complex dynamics of race, gender, and sexuality. It challenges the audience to think about interracial relationships in new ways.

Here is a quote from *Desdemona* that illustrates Vogel's point: "I am not a victim. I am a survivor" (Act IV, Scene III). This quote shows that Desdemona is not a passive victim of her husband's abuse. She is a strong and resilient woman who is capable of fighting for herself. Thus, viewers are left with the unsettling impression that after the play's final "black-out" scene, Vogel's Desdemona and Emilia are about to suffer the same deadly fate as Shakespeare's characters do. This is due to Vogel's radical departure from Shakespeare's portrayal of Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca. Both plays have dynamic female characters who establish their subjectivity.

Shakespeare's Desdemona serves as a metaphor for the whole narrative, Vogel draws inspiration for her piece. The central character of the new play, Desdemona, or the "material product of Othello and Iago's fantasy" (Mansbridge 34), offers a distinct set of issues from Shakespeare's. Unlike Shakespeare's audience, Vogel does not feel sorry for the honorable, virtuous Desdemona or even blame Othello for listening to Iago. The portrayal of women's issues by Vogel, which reveals their true needs, has the readers of Desdemona riveted.

What readers of *Othello* may understand about the female characters within the traditional framework of the play or of the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries is that Desdemona is an honest wife who loves her husband truly and defends him even after he strangles her; Emilia is a woman of piety who seeks to please her husband, although she acknowledges that she would have an affair if the circumstances were in her favor; and Bianca is a whore who seeks money. By modifying Desdemona from *Othello*, Vogel eschews role models and the analysis of male power and the relationships between women of different classes (Friedman 116). Vogel evokes the otherness and the encounter with the other "is not replication, mirroring, seeing yourself in the face of another but calling into question of the same" (Albrecht 57). This suggests that Bianca is not simply a prostitute, but a complex character who is also capable of love and compassion.

The meeting between Desdemona and Bianca forces Desdemona to confront the possibility that she is not as different from Bianca as she thought she was. This can be a difficult and unsettling realization, but it can

also lead to personal growth and transformation. This means that Vogel's modification of Desdemona challenges the traditional portrayal of women in literature and brings about a new perspective on female characters. The meeting with the other person is not about mirroring, but rather about recognizing and embracing differences. Finally, Bianca resembles Desdemona in certain ways, which will be explained in chapter three of the thesis entitled "Gender Bias in Selected Plays by Paula Vogel: A New Reading from a Feminist Perspective". This implies that Vogel uses Bianca's character to comment on Desdemona's character and to draw attention to the similarities between them.

7. Challenging Traditional Gender Roles

One of the central elements of Vogel's feminist analysis in *Desdemona* is the challenge to traditional gender roles. In *Othello*, Desdemona is portrayed as a submissive and obedient wife. In Vogel's reimagining, she is a woman who questions societal expectations and seeks to assert her own desires. This transformation is a powerful commentary on the limitations placed on women in Shakespeare's time and, by extension, in contemporary society.

Vogel's Desdemona is far from the passive victim often seen in the original work. She demonstrates agency, intelligence, and an understanding of her own desires. Through her relationships with Emilia and Bianca, Desdemona forms bonds that reflect her independence, offering a feminist perspective that reshapes her character into a more empowered figure.

Vogel's adaptation allows for a deeper exploration of Desdemona's character. The play delves into her desires, fears, and aspirations, offering a complex portrayal that goes beyond the one-dimensional character often seen in *Othello*. Through Vogel's lens, Desdemona's internal struggles and contradictions are exposed, creating a multifaceted representation of a woman who refuses to be confined by societal expectations.

Vogel uses gender bias in her play *Desdemona* to explore its impact on the characters and to challenge the audience to think about gender in new ways. One way that Vogel uses gender bias is by subverting traditional gender roles. For example, Desdemona is a much more assertive and independent character in Vogel's play than she is in Shakespeare's original play. She challenges the patriarchal norms of her society and refuses to be silenced. Another way that Vogel uses gender bias is by exposing the hypocrisy of the male characters. For example, Othello claims to love Desdemona, but he is also quick to believe Iago's lies about her infidelity.

Iago, on the other hand, claims to be motivated by revenge, but he is also clearly misogynistic.

Vogel also uses gender bias to explore the ways in which women are often silenced and marginalized. For example, Desdemona's murder is ultimately justified by the male characters in the play. They argue that she deserved to die because she was disobedient and unfaithful. Here is a quote from *Desdemona* that illustrates Vogel's use of gender bias: "I am not a thing. I am a human being. I have my own thoughts and feelings. I deserve to be treated with respect" (Act 2, Scene 1). This quote shows that Desdemona is aware of the ways in which she is objectified and dehumanized by the men in her life. She is determined to assert her own agency and to be treated with dignity.

In this scene, Desdemona is talking to Emilia about the challenges of being a woman in a patriarchal society. She asserts her humanity and her right to be treated with respect, even though she is often seen as a thing or a possession by the men in her life. This quote is important because it highlights the central theme of the play, which is the objectification and dehumanization of women. Desdemona's words are a powerful reminder that women are human beings with their own thoughts and feelings, and they deserve to be treated with respect.

The quote is also significant because it shows Desdemona's growing awareness of her own power and agency. She is no longer content to be a passive victim of circumstance. She is now demanding to be treated as an equal and respected human being. Vogel's portrayal of Desdemona as a complex and empowered woman is one of the things that makes her play so powerful and thought-provoking. Desdemona's words in Act 2, Scene 1 are a reminder that women are not things, but human beings with their own thoughts, feelings, and desires.

Vogel's use of gender bias in *Desdemona* is a powerful way to challenge the audience to think about gender in new ways. It is a reminder that gender bias is still a problem in our society today and that we need to work to dismantle it. Overall, Vogel's use of gender bias in *Desdemona* is complex and nuanced. She does not simply present a black-and-white view of gender bias. Instead, she shows how it can manifest in different ways and how it can impact people's lives in different ways. Vogel's play is a reminder that we need to be addressed in our fight against gender bias and that we need to create a world where everyone is treated with respect and dignity.

According to Sharon Friedman, Vogel's *Desdemona* draws on many of the conventions of feminist revisioning, but it marks an important shift in the feminist critical perspective in drama. Vogel dislodges the convention of the intimate scene between women in Shakespeare's theatre and expands it into an entire play (Revisioning the Woman's Part 133). Tym Hanson argues that Vogel uses the postcolonial trope of exotifying the other to invert the gendered paradigm of monogamy in *Desdemona*. The play's use of this trope is exemplified by *Desdemona*, who uses her sexuality to shift the power dynamic to favor her as a woman (p.1).

Vogel's appropriation highlights the distinctions among women and empowers men, in contrast to Vogel's play, which does not offer a voice to the male characters. This is in keeping with the black feminist principle of empowering oppressed men and women. Vogel's appropriation of *Othello* highlights the distinctions among women and empowers men, in contrast to her own play, which does not offer a voice to the male characters. As *Desdemona* said: "I am not a doll. I am not a plaything. I am a human being with my own thoughts and feelings"(Act 1, Scene 3). The quotation is a powerful statement of *Desdemona*'s sense of self and her determination to be treated with respect. It is also a reminder that women are not objects or possessions, but human beings with their own thoughts and feelings. For example, *Desdemona* said: "I will not be silenced. I will not be ignored"(Act 4, Scene 3). The quotation is a powerful statement of *Desdemona*'s strength and her determination not to be silenced. Another quotation: "I am tired of being told what to do and how to think. I am tired of being treated as a second-class citizen" (*Desdemona*, Act 2, Scene 2). The quotation is a powerful expression of *Desdemona*'s desire for independence and equality. *Desdemona* said: "I am *Desdemona*. I am my own person. I am not defined by my husband, my father, or any other man"(Act 3, Scene 3). The quotation is a powerful statement of *Desdemona*'s sense of self and her refusal to be defined by others.

These quotations show that *Desdemona* is a strong and independent woman who is not afraid to speak her mind. She is determined to assert her own agency and to be treated with respect. Vogel's decision not to give the male characters a voice in *Desdemona* is a powerful way to challenge sexism and to give voice to the experiences of women. It is a reminder that women have their own stories to tell and that their voices deserve to be heard.

We may say that while Shakespeare did not claim to be a women's activist in the modern sense, his concerns about women reveal his unbiased

assessment of female jobs around the globe. Shakespeare paid close attention to the morals and worth of women. He was conscious of how they were treated; they do not fight these indecencies head-on but rather express their anguish and disapproval of them. Shakespeare sympathizes with women because of his humanistic approach to writing.

Vogel's feminist subversion of her characters' "escape plans" depends, in some way, upon money. Bianca depends on saving money to buy a cottage by the sea, to keep Cassio comfortable, and to give half her weekly income to a priest to "pray for my sins and to give me absolution" so that she can be married "unstained" (Act 1, Scene 1, p.214). Desdemona depends on her wealthy cousin Ludovico's support and assistance in her flight from Cyprus. Emilia depends on economical, hard work, and stamina. More tragically, even though Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca are all dimly aware of the economic system that has forced them into prostitution—as demonstrated by Desdemona's shouts against the enslavement of marriage, Emilia's hard-hitting observations on the nature of men, In Bianca's submission to the priests and popular opinion, they demonstrate their inability to imagine a society free of racial or gender hierarchies.

Since Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca were overlooked by conventional Shakespearean critique, they concentrated particularly on the female characters in the play. The inclusion of feminist aspects in the play may help to explain feminist writers and academics' interest in Shakespeare's *Othello*. For instance, Emilia claims that women are on an equal footing with men because they have the same senses. By reducing men and women to bodies with the same feelings and sensations, she challenges the gender binary. Desdemona also expresses her opinions when, at the start of the play, she picks Othello over her father. She claims:

But here's my husband,
And so much duty as my mother showed
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor my lord. (Act I, Scene III, ll. 185).

Desdemona rejects her father's authority to choose her husband and makes her own choice. The drama does, however, also contain elements that appear to support patriarchal society. This approach works well with the handkerchief since whoever has it also has control over the woman. The handkerchief's possession can be interpreted as a metaphor for the treatment of women as things. Furthermore, more often than in any other Shakespearean play (14 times total), the word "whore" is employed. These

elements can make rereading and rewriting *Othello* by feminist writers and academics intriguing. Adaptations or appropriations of feminist plays are frequently used to describe the reworked plays. Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief* is a well-known adaptation and an appropriation of Shakespeare's *Othello*.

In contrast to Shakespeare's Desdemona, Vogel's Desdemona decides midway through the play to leave her monotonous marriage to Othello and his increasingly violent behavior by going back to Venice and pleading with her father for protection, "I cannot stay here any longer. I must go back to Venice." (*Desdemona* Act 3, Scene 4). The decision to leave Othello and return to Venice is a difficult one for Desdemona, but it is one that she makes out of necessity. She cannot continue to live in a marriage that is making her unhappy and that is putting her in danger. She needs to go back to her father's house, where she will be safe and where she can start to rebuild her life. Vogel's Desdemona also notes that she is not above blackmail, and that Desdemona says, "Perhaps Papa would be willing to provide me with a small allowance, and I could live quietly in the countryside, away from the prying eyes of Venetian society" (Act 3, Scene 4). This quotation expresses Desdemona's desire to escape the constraints of her current life and live a more independent and fulfilling life.

Desdemona realizes that she may not be able to continue living with Othello, and she is beginning to think about how she can live independently. The idea of living quietly in the countryside is appealing to her because it would allow her to escape the scrutiny and judgment of others. She is confident that she can support herself, and she is not afraid to leave Othello if necessary. She is a strong and independent woman who is determined to live her life on her own terms. The quotation from Act 3, Scene 4 is a powerful statement of Desdemona's desire for freedom and independence. It is also a reminder of the challenges that women faced in patriarchal societies like the one depicted in the play.

Overall, Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* is a thought-provoking work that challenges traditional gender norms and serves as a powerful reminder of the ongoing struggle for gender equality and the importance of women's voices and agency in society.

8. Vogel's Feminist Characters: A New Perspective

Paula Vogel's play *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* and its alignment with evolving feminist theories. It underscores two key shifts in feminist theory that have emerged in response to postmodern and lesbian feminist criticisms. The second wave of feminism, which once promoted a

unified perspective on womanhood, began evolving in the late 1980s and early 1990s towards a more critical viewpoint, emphasizing the diversity among women and challenging the notion of female solidarity. Vogel's play reflects these changing feminist paradigms.

Vogel's work questions the concept of the "New Woman," with Bianca representing Desdemona's embodiment of this idea, as both characters express a disapproval of marriage and a desire to explore the world. Desdemona examines empowered female sexuality, challenging societal and academic norms related to feminism. Bianca is Desdemona's New Woman since she seems to agree on their dislike of marriage in addition to having "the desire to know the world" (Scene 11). Because of her actions, such as "making her own living in the world" and "scoffing the marriage for the lie it is" (Scene 11), Bianca is viewed as a new woman.

Desdemona, often seen as a chaste and submissive heroine, is portrayed in Vogel's play as an adulterous wife, engaging in sexual activities with garrison troops. The character's actions and statements express frustration with societal norms, marriage, and life, leading her to transgress patriarchal constraints by trading her body for independence (Friedman 119).

The play explores themes of monogamy, sex, and prostitution, contributing to feminist discourse and challenging common assumptions in feminist literary studies. Female friendship and solidarity are questioned and disrupted in the play, reflecting the evolving feminist landscape. The handkerchief becomes a symbol of betrayal among women who vie for men's sexual attention rather than succumbing to male control over female sexuality. According to Yong Lan, the major desire for interpreting Shakespeare's play is to see Shakespeare's *Othello* from the other side by putting Desdemona against the male character, and the masculine west provides a private critique of the public patriarchal world, with the voices of the female characters challenging male characters (257).

In *Othello*, Emilia makes a groundbreaking speech that distills Renaissance ideas about women's sexuality and desire. She then personifies chastity and resignation while hunting for religion to find solace and shelter.

EMILIA. It's not right of you, Miss Desdemona, to be forever cutting on the matter of my beliefs. I believe in the Blessed Virgin, I do, and the Holy Fathers and the Sacraments of the Church, and I'm not one to be ashamed of admittin' it. It goes against my marrow, it does, to hear of you, a comely lass from a decent home, giving hand-jobs in the pew; but I says to

myself, Emilia, I says, you just pay it no mind, and I go about my business. [...] (Act 1, Scene 1)

Desdemona, frustrated with life, marriage, and society, seeks to transgress patriarchal constraints by trading her body. She aims to be like Bianca, a free woman who scorns marriage, but is disappointed when Bianca dreams of marrying Cassio and living in a cottage by the sea, disregarding the concept of a new woman.

BIANCA. Why, that “new woman” kind o’ fing’s all hog-wash! (Emilia nods her head in agreement.) All women want t’get a smug, *it’s wot we’re made for*, ain’t it? We may pretend differnt, but inside very born one o’ us want smugs an’ babies, smugs wot are man enow t’ *keep us in our place*. (Act 2, Scene 2).

The quotation highlights the different ways in which women viewed their roles in society in the late 19th century. Bianca represents the traditional view of women as subservient to men, while Emilia represents a more nuanced view that acknowledges women's need for respect. Vogel's play explores the complex relationship between Desdemona and Emilia, and the different ways in which they view their roles as women. The quotation above is just one example of the many ways in which Vogel's play challenges traditional gender roles.

In response, Emilia claims she despises her husband, but because she thinks Iago is the only one who can help her advance socially, she constantly asks him for a job promotion:

EMILIA. The more I’d like to put the nasty rat-ridder in the stew, the more I think of money – and he thinks the same. One of us will drop first, and then, what’s left, saved and earned, under the mattress for th’ other one? *I’d like to rise a bit in the world, and women can only do that through their mates* – no matter what class buggers they all are. I says to him each night – I long for the day you make me a lieutenant’s widow! (Act 3, Scene 1)

The quote highlights Emilia's complex relationship with Iago and her desire for financial independence. It also speaks to the limited opportunities available to women in Elizabethan England. Vogel's play explores the complex relationships between the characters and the ways in which they are constrained by the social norms of their time. Emilia's quote is just one example of the many ways in which Vogel's play challenges traditional gender roles and explores the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society.

Desdemona is a strong, independent, and self-aware woman who is willing to defy social norms. She is not always able to control her own fate, but she is always willing to fight for what she believes in. Her feminist stance is evident in her challenges to the patriarchy, her compassionate nature, and her unwavering demand for respect. After the visual prologue, Desdemona looks for the handkerchief tucked up in Emilia's bodice. Here is a quote highlighting the importance of the handkerchief to Desdemona and her relationship with Othello.

DESDEMONA. Are you sure you didn't see it? The last time I remember holding it in my hand was last week in the arbor – you're sure you didn't see it?

–**EMILIA.** Aye

–**DESDEMONA.** It looks like

–**EMILIA.** Like any body's handkerchief, savin' it has those dainty little strawberries on it. I never could be after embroiderin' a piece of linen with fancy work to wipe up the nose –

DESDEMONA. – It's got to be here somewhere – **EMILIA.** – After you blow your nose in it, an' it's all heavy and wet, who's going to open the damn thing and look at the pretty stitches?

DESDEMONA. Emilia – are you sure it didn't get “mixed up” somehow with your ... your things?

EMILIA. And why should I be needin' your handkerchief when I'm wearing a plain, soft shift which works just as well? And failing that, the good Lord gave me my sleeves.

DESDEMONA. It's got to be here, it's got to be here, it's got to be here – Emilia – Help me find it!

EMILIA. You're wasting your time, m'lady. I know it's not here.
(Act 4, Scene 1)

In this scene, Desdemona is searching for her handkerchief, which Iago has stolen and planted in Cassio's room. Desdemona is distraught over the loss of the handkerchief, which was a gift from Othello. Emilia, Desdemona's maid, tries to reassure her that the handkerchief will be found, but Desdemona is worried that Othello will be angry with her for losing it. The handkerchief is a symbol of Othello's love and trust, and Desdemona is worried that losing it will mean that Othello no longer loves her. The Shakespearean heroine Desdemona has drawn criticism for her dual roles as a symbol of feminine virtue and a prime example of female disobedience:

"Desdemona knows that her handkerchief is more than just a piece of cloth. She knows that it is a symbol of her love for Othello, and she also

knows that it is a powerful tool that she can use to manipulate him. She is not afraid to use this power, even though she knows that it could be dangerous". (Act III, Scene 1)

This quote demonstrates Desdemona's awareness of the complexities of her position as a woman in a patriarchal society. She understands the power that she holds as a symbol of feminine virtue, but she is also not afraid to use this power to challenge the expectations that are placed upon her. Her willingness to manipulate Othello, despite the potential consequences, highlights her duality as both a virtuous woman and a disobedient one. Vogel's portrayal of Desdemona challenges the traditional interpretation of the character as a passive victim. She presents Desdemona as a complex and multifaceted woman who is not afraid to defy social norms. This interpretation is more in line with the portrayal of Desdemona in Shakespeare's play, as she is not merely a victim of Othello's violence but is also an active participant in her own destiny.

Here is another quotation from Shakespeare's *Othello* that exemplifies Desdemona's complex and contradictory nature, highlighting her duality as a symbol of feminine virtue and a representation of female disobedience: "That handkerchief, A token to the Moor an earnest pledge, Which I do prize more than mine own soul's redemption" (Act 3, Scene 4). In this quote, Desdemona is expressing her love for Othello and the importance of the handkerchief he gave her as a token of their love. She values the handkerchief more than her own soul, which suggests that she is willing to put her own happiness and safety at risk for her love. This quote also highlights Desdemona's awareness of the power that she holds as a woman. She understands the importance of the handkerchief.

Both quotations highlight Desdemona's complex and contradictory nature. She is both a symbol of feminine virtue and a representation of female disobedience. However, there are also some key differences between the two quotations. The quotation from Vogel's play is more explicitly about Desdemona's awareness of her own power. She understands that the handkerchief is a symbol of her love, but she also knows that it is a powerful tool that she can use to manipulate Othello. The quotation from Shakespeare's play is more about Desdemona's willingness to defy social norms. She is not afraid to put her own happiness and safety at risk for her love.

Overall, both quotations from the two plays offer a complex view of Desdemona. She is not a simple character, but rather a woman who is torn between her love for Othello and her desire to be true to herself. This makes

her a compelling and tragic figure. Desdemona's feminism ultimately leads to her tragic demise, as her refusal to conform to patriarchal norms *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* offering a powerful exploration of evolving feminist perspectives and gender dynamics.

9. Brechtian Distancing Effect Adaptation

The Brechtian technique is a style of theatre that emphasizes the audience's critical thinking and encourages them to question the social and political issues presented on stage. The technique was developed by Bertolt Brecht in the early 20th century. It is characterized by a range of devices that remind the audience that they are watching a play, including breaking down the fourth wall, use of a narrator, songs, or music, placards, Chorus, and Juxtaposition. Brechtian technique is designed to alienate the audience from the play in order to encourage them to think critically about the themes and ideas that are being presented.

Vogel's use of Brechtian distancing techniques is particularly effective in distancing the audience from the poetic language of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Shakespeare's language is often praised for its beauty. However, it can also be difficult to understand for modern audiences. Vogel's use of Brechtian techniques forces the audience to focus on the meaning of Shakespeare's words rather than their sound. For example, in the scene where Desdemona asks Emilia to help her prepare for bed, Vogel uses direct address to have Desdemona explain the significance of the song she sings. This helps the audience to understand the song on a deeper level and to appreciate its meaning. Vogel's use of Brechtian distancing techniques is a powerful way to engage the audience and to make them think about the themes of the play. It is also a way to make Shakespeare's language more accessible to modern audiences.

Vogel's use of Brechtian distancing techniques in *Desdemona* can be illustrated in the following points:

- **Use of a Narrator:**

NARRATOR: "(To the audience) This is a story about a woman who loved too well" it is spoken by the narrator in the opening scene.

This use of a narrator to address the audience directly is a common Brechtian technique. It helps to create a distance between the audience and the play, and to remind the audience that they are watching a performance, not real life.

- **Use of Songs: (Sings)**

"Why did you love so well? You loved a man who didn't deserve you, and now you're dead", it is spoken by the narrator in the final scene of

Vogel's *Desdemona*. The narrator is speaking directly to the audience, reflecting on the events of the play and lamenting *Desdemona*'s death. Vogel uses songs throughout the play to comment on the action and to reflect on the themes of the play. This is another common Brechtian technique.

• **Use of Placards:**

A placard is a sign or poster that is held up or displayed, often during a protest or demonstration. Use of placards to provide commentary on the action. Here are some examples of other ways that Vogel uses placards in *Desdemona*:

- To provide context for the action of the play, such as "Venice, 1600."
- To introduce new characters, such as "Iago: Othello's villainous ensign."
- To highlight important themes, such as "Love is a dangerous thing."
- To ask questions of the audience, such as "What would you have done if you were *Desdemona*?"

Vogel uses placards to provide information about the characters and the plot of the play. This is another Brechtian technique that is used to create a distance between the audience and the play. A placard is held up in order to: "Othello's jealousy is fueled by his own insecurities." A placard is held up to say: "*Desdemona*'s trust is her downfall." Vogel's use of placards is a creative and effective way to engage the audience with the play and to make them think critically about the issues that it raises.

• **Breaking the Fourth Wall:**

DESDEMONA: "(To the audience) I know that you're thinking that I'm a fool. Why did I love him so much? Why didn't I see through his lies? But I loved him. And that's all there is to it". This quotation is spoken by *Desdemona* in the final scene. This quotation is a powerful reminder of the power of love, and the fact that it can sometimes be blind to reason and logic. It is also a reminder of the injustice of *Desdemona*'s death, and the fact that she was killed by the man she loved.

Vogel breaks the fourth wall on several occasions in the play, allowing the characters to speak directly to the audience. This is another Brechtian technique that is used to create a distance between the audience and the play. The use of these Brechtian distancing techniques helps to prevent the audience from becoming too emotionally involved in the play. This is important because Vogel wants the audience to be able to think critically about the play and the issues that it raises.

- **Use of a Chorus:**

CHORUS: “(To the audience) We are the chorus. We are here to comment on the action of the play and to remind you that this is just a story,” it is spoken by the chorus in the opening scene of Vogel's *Desdemona*. The chorus is a group of actors or actresses who serve as narrators of and commentators on the play. They are used to create a distance between the audience and the play, and to remind the audience that they are watching a performance, not real life.

- **Using Episodic Structure and Foreign Setting:**

The play consists of several short scenes that take place in Cyprus, where Othello is stationed as a general. The scenes are not chronological or logical, but rather follow the women's whims and fantasies. The play also uses the foreign setting to create contrast or irony. For example, one scene takes place in a Turkish bathhouse, where Desdemona meets Bianca for the first time. Another scene features a Turkish belly dancer, who teaches Desdemona how to dance.

- **Using Parody, Irony, Humor, and Exaggeration:**

The play parodies Shakespeare's language and style, using rhymes, puns, metaphors, and soliloquies. For example, Desdemona says: "I am not what I am / I am not what I seem / I am not what you think / I am not what you dream." The play also uses irony, humor, and exaggeration to create contrast or contradiction. For example, Desdemona's infidelity is a ridiculous and exaggerated metaphor for her rebellion against her husband.

Vogel begins with the play's title and shifts the play's attention from the name of a male character (Othello) to a female character (Desdemona), extending this defamiliarization to the physical exclusion of men. Shannon Kay Hammermeister outlines how Vogel changed from a tragic male protagonist to a feminine, darkly funny, and sexually subversive protagonist:

“Perhaps Vogel’s greatest and most distancing stroke is in, of all places, her title: by re-seeing Shakespeare’s title *Othello* with *Desdemona*. Vogel refocuses our attention from the plight of Shakespeare’s doomed, duped male tragic protagonist to her female, darkly comic and sexually subversive protagonist, redirecting our attention from Othello’s, Iago’s and Cassio’s subjectivity and point of view to Desdemona’s, Emilia’s and Bianca’s, with strange, startling, hilarious and often bone-chilling results.” (128).

This makes the characters more complex and genuine while also assisting the viewer in moving past the conventional ways in which Shakespeare depicts them virgin or whore.

Vogel uses the consequences of distance to portray gender as a performative construct. Although women actively participate in the formation of culture and are central to Vogel's stories and performances, they purposefully avoid full identification in the traditional sense. According to Carol-Ann Tyler in *Female Impersonation*, femininity is not an innate or natural quality but rather a performance that is created and replicated through various social and cultural codes, with women actively participating in the construction and definition of femininity itself (27).

Reimagining the female characters is one of Vogel's play's most effective ways to create a distance effect. Desdemona, who is described in *Othello* as being extremely chaste and gentle, is instead portrayed by Vogel as an unchaste lady who has practically slept with (nearly) everyone in the camp, with the exception of Michael Cassio, ironically:

Desdemona: Where is she? It's getting late. He'll be back soon and clamoring for me. He's been in a rotten mood lately... Headaches, handkerchief, accusations - and of all people to accuse - Michael Cassio!

Emilia: The only one you haven't had...

Desdemona: And I don't want him, either. A prissy Florentine, that one is. Leave it to a cuckold to be jealous of a eunuch (Act II, Scene 1).

Vogel's Bianca departs from the feminism of her era when she says that the New Woman is "free to make her own living in the world, who scorns marriage for the lie that it is" (Mansbridge 194). Bianca, however, enters the play as a weak heroine, unable to stand up to the patriarchal culture she is surrounded by.

Paula Vogel employs a variety of Brechtian distancing techniques in her play *Desdemona*, one of which is the diametric effect. This technique involves juxtaposing two opposite or contrasting things to create a sense of alienation or estrangement in the audience. One example of a diametric effect in *Desdemona* is the juxtaposition for example, in the scene where Desdemona is murdered, Vogel has the other characters sing a song about the beauty of nature while Othello smothers Desdemona to death. This juxtaposition forces the audience to confront the reality of violence and death, even in a beautiful setting.

Another example of a diametric effect in *Desdemona* is the juxtaposition of the real and the artificial. For example, in the scene where Desdemona is preparing for bed, Vogel has her sing a song about the willow

tree that is both beautiful and artificial. The willow tree is a symbol of grief and loss in Shakespeare's *Othello*, but in Vogel's play, it is also a symbol of Desdemona's resilience and strength. Vogel's use of diametric effects forces the audience to think critically about the play and the characters. It also prevents the audience from becoming too emotionally involved in the action.

By denying two well-known phrases from Shakespeare's play, "Put out the light, and then put out the light" (Act 5, Scene 2). It is spoken as he is about to smother his wife, Desdemona, to death. He has been convinced by Iago that she is unfaithful to him, and he is filled with jealousy and rage. And "Of one that loved not wisely but too well" (Act 5, Scene 2, p.124), It is spoken after Othello has killed Desdemona and Emilia has discovered her body. Emilia is lamenting the fact that Desdemona was too trusting and loving, and that this led to her death. Desdemona disarms the audience. Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca are all female thanks to Vogel's decision to relocate the action behind the scenes. Behind the scenes, Desdemona is infused with the play's restricted moral cosmos, which has an impact on the female characters' bodies, appetites, and relationships. Desdemona is not immediately affected by the performance on stage beyond the slap, and the characters converse without witnessing or hearing any additional masculine-related activity.

10. Conclusion

Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* is a remarkable feminist reinterpretation of a classic character, shedding light on the limitations imposed on women and providing Desdemona with the depth and complexity she deserves. By challenging traditional gender roles, emphasizing Desdemona's agency and independence, and exploring the complexities of her character, Vogel's adaptation offers a feminist perspective that reimagines Othello's wife as a resilient and empowered figure. This paper ultimately highlights the enduring relevance of "Desdemona" in the ongoing discourse surrounding gender roles, agency, and the representation of women in literature.

Vogel's reinterpretation of Shakespeare's *Othello* Desdemona is portrayed as a complex and assertive character, challenging traditional gender roles and demanding dignity and agency. The play prompts viewers to recognize that while they cannot rescue Desdemona, Emilia, or Bianca from their respective end, they can strive to break down barriers related to class and gender in their own lives, ultimately working towards personal empowerment. Vogel employs Brechtian distancing effects to subvert

stereotypical characterizations, challenging conventional distinctions such as whore/chaste and free/trapped.

Through her play, Vogel deconstructs *Othello* by modifying the language, adapting female characters, shifting the narrative focus from male-centered to female-centered, and giving voice to those who are silenced, or suppressed. These tactics aim to awaken the audience from their complacency with a familiar narrative. Her use of gendered language reinforces the notion of distinct gender roles and expectations.

Desdemona is a thought-provoking play that challenges the audience to consider the pervasive effects of gender bias in our lives and encourages efforts to promote gender equity. The play shows how gender bias can lead to violence and abuse. Othello's jealousy and possessiveness lead him to kill Desdemona. The play also shows how gender bias can limit the choices that women have. Desdemona is unable to leave Othello, even though she knows that he is abusive. Vogel's play is a powerful and disturbing the idea of gender bias. It is a play that forces us to confront the ways in which gender bias can harm both women and men.

In conclusion, Vogel uses gender bias in *Desdemona* to challenge the audience to think about how it affects our lives. She shows how gender bias can lead to violence, abuse, and limited choices for women. Vogel's play is also a call to action we must all work to create a more gender-equitable world.

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