

On Jose Limon's *The Moor's Pavane* Based on Shakespeare's *Othello*

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José Limón's ballet *The Moor's Pavane; Variations on the Theme of Othello* is based on William Shakespeare's play *Othello*. As the title shows, the ballet opens when the four principals, Othello, Desdemona, Iago, and Emilia, dance the Pavane. Pavane is originally a stately court dance in simple duple time; especially popular in Italy, France, and Spain during the 16th and 17th centuries. The ceremonious dignity, splendor and grave pride inherent in the steps and music of the Pavane are suggested by its name, which is derived from the Latin *pāuō* meaning "peacock." The dance brings to one's mind all the metaphors suggestive of that stately and pompous fowl. The Pavane never became much more than a simple walking, with slight variations. It was danced in a slow tempo, by one couple or many couples.

Pavane is indubitably a suitable form to express all manners of Elizabethan furbelows and the grave theme inherent in the play *Othello*. But in *The Moor's Pavane* in which the story unfolds through stylized patterning of the dancers, the form of Pavane is not always preserved as a traditional one. As dramatic episodes alternate with the stately Pavane, elegance and control are juxtaposed with passionate intensity, and the symmetry of the Pavane is often interrupted by some unusual steps for the Pavane. For example, Othello and Iago, in their stylized fight, alternate in counterpointed jumps. While fighting, the Moor begins to believe the words of his friend, and as the percussion strikes, he makes a fatal decision. This is the climax of the ballet and here the form of the Pavane is not preserved. Why did not the choreographer keep the style of Pavane?

To answer the question I will examine the text of Shakespeare and probe the relationship between the four persons. Othello and Iago are in some ways opposites or complementaries, yet at an underlying psychological level they are curiously alike at the same time. Othello and Iago suffer from the same temperament, jealousy and envy. As for their wives, for all the differences in their manners, they are intimate to each other.

Thus, it is, in a sense, natural that, Iago may want to stand on the same footing with Othello and that Emilia may have Desdemona degraded as herself. When Iago is wreaking vengeance on Othello, he uses the word "evened"

(2.1.297) to express his strong desire to be on the same footing with Othello. That is, he wishes to mount to the level of Othello himself, or he wants Othello to plunge below him. Iago feels so jealous to Othello that he wants Othello to be jealous as he is and that he wants Othello and Desdemona to be poisoned with the same mix of jealousy and lechery as well. Besides, when he begins talking slanderous tales of women, Iago, wittingly or unwittingly, includes Desdemona in his list of notorious aspects of woman.

It is quite interesting that we can find that Iago's conception about women and Emilia's about men are strikingly similar. Emilia, also, starts referring to her own marriage and marriage in general, ending up with cheekily including Desdemona in her slanderous tales in secret.

When we look at the text carefully, we can discover Iago's strong will to be evened with Othello everywhere, although the feeling is often shrewdly hidden. I think it is this bias to be evened with them all that Limón would like to express in the form of Pavane. Choreographing his ballet he may have seen the essence of *Othello* in Iago's deep-laid plot. Limón reveals Iago's hidden oppressed vigorousness in the grave, austere Pavane. I think Limón's success is owed mostly to the good choice of the form.

I think that the four principal protagonists, the drastic removal from the play, and the overall form of the Pavane may be all necessary, but to bring forth "all the passion, grandeur, beauty, all the tragedy," it was also necessary to break the form. It was danced in a slow tempo, by one couple or many couples. Through the breaking process, we can see that Iago's sinister treachery is pitted against Othello's majestic dignity, and that Desdemona's unstained innocence is counterbalanced by Emilia's complicity in the plot. In this way the drama emerges fully and carefully in dance terms with no resort to mute gesture. The piece represents a distillation of Limon's use of drama and character through an ironical way.