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“Tainted Love” in *Othello*, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, and Today

“All human activity is directed toward procuring satisfaction for needs that have no other purpose than prolonging our miserable existence.”¹ Werther, the protagonist of Goethe’s classic work, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, thus asserts the futility of human lives governed by selfishness rather than selfless love. When the fulfillment of desires becomes the driving force of human life, rather than concern for all who inhabit this planet, feelings of dissatisfaction, loneliness, and emptiness result—realities all too familiar in the world today. According to Pope Benedict XVI in *Deus caritas est*, love is central to creating a fulfilling existence for human beings, but can be distorted by selfish human desires. The analytical power of Pope Benedict’s encyclical is demonstrated by its applicability to relationships in classic literary works, such as Shakespeare’s *Othello* and Goethe’s *Sorrows of Young Werther*. Far from purely fiction and fantasy, the fallibility of these relationships is all too recognizable in real relationships today.

In Shakespeare’s tragedy, a general in the Venetian army, Othello, falsely suspects his wife of adultery, prompted by his malicious aide, Iago. Known among the Venetian nobility for her beauty, intelligence, and moral purity, Othello’s wife, Desdemona, remains faithful to her husband, despite his accusations of her affair with his most trusted officer, Cassio. Iago exploits Othello’s feelings of inferiority as a racial outsider of the Venetian elite, poisoning his loving trust of Desdemona. Consumed by a desire for righteous vengeance, Othello smothers his wife to death out of his distorted sense of justice, and then ends his own life after learning of her innocence. With skyrocketing divorce rates, the modern world witnesses daily such jealous

¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, trans. Elizabeth Mayer and Louise Bogan (New York: Vintage Classics, 1990), p. 11. All subsequent references to this edition will be indicated by page number. Also, I wish to thank Professor Brad Gregory for his invaluable suggestions regarding the revision of this paper.

relationships in which fears of infidelity consume irrationally the imaginations of one or both partners, thus tainting the possibility of true love.

In *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Goethe depicts the devastating effects of obsessive infatuation in the life of Werther, a young artist sojourning in a country village who writes a series of letters detailing his daily thoughts and activities. Plagued by unrequited “love,” Werther pines for the kind-hearted, beautiful Lotte, engaged to the devoted Albert. Though Lotte deeply values her friendship with Werther, she does not return his romantic adoration, yet he craves greater intimacy. Unable to cope with the reality of Lotte and Albert’s marriage, Werther sinks into further depression, ultimately shooting himself. However, far from glorifying the killing of oneself to escape unkind realities, Goethe suggests the ignominious nature of Werther’s suicide, rooted in a selfish fixation with his desires and detached from the well-being of others. Likewise, the competitive nature of today’s industrialized world fosters blind self-interest, making human beings impatient for gratification and less inclined to love.

The model of true love presented in *Deus caritas est*, a union of both the passionate love of *eros* and the selfless love of *agape*, suggests how wayward forms of love lead to destructiveness in human lives. Pope Benedict discusses both modern and historic concepts of love and their implications, and the application of the commandment to love one’s neighbor, particularly through the Catholic Church. The first part of Pope Benedict’s letter notes God’s unconditional love for Creation, most profoundly manifest by His incarnation, as the model of perfect love for human beings’ relationships with each other and with God. When individuals form relationships rooted in self-gain or for bodily pleasure, they fail to imitate God’s love, which is both passionate and forgiving. The second part of Pope Benedict’s encyclical discusses the role of the Church in manifesting this love to the world, particularly through the application

of Catholic Social Teaching. Through the ministry of the worldwide Catholic family, only the practice of loving charity and the promotion of justice can establish loving relationships and the well-being of humankind.

In analyzing the relationships of Othello and Desdemona, Werther and Lotte, applicable to real relationships, one must consider the characters of Othello and Werther and their treatment of their “loves,” both of which demonstrate a failure to espouse the love prescribed by Pope Benedict. Othello’s feeble love for Desdemona, quickly abandoned with accusations of her infidelity, and Werther’s alleged love of Lotte, characterized by obsessive desire for an unattainable woman, both contrast with Pope Benedict’s prescription for genuine Christian *eros* and *agape*. Ultimately, Othello’s murder of his wife and Werther’s suicide, rooted in their respective insecurities and self-love, reflect the utmost distortion of true love.

The Dehumanization of Desdemona and Lotte

Othello’s romantic adoration for Desdemona reflects his fundamental inability to love her as human being. He views his wife as an icon of perfection towards which he directs his highest esteem. Granted, Desdemona possesses the virtues of a noblewoman, including “duty, beauty, wit, and fortunes,” as her unsuccessful suitor, Roderigo, attests to her father.² However, Othello magnifies his image of her admirable nature to one of idealized perfection—an unrealistic standard of virtue that no mortal being could uphold. After Iago falsely convinces Othello of Desdemona and Cassio’s affair, Othello regards his wife as “a thousand times” worse for her supposed infidelity because the image of ethereal perfection which Othello has superimposed on his wife has crumbled (4.1.187). Othello no longer loves his wife, whom he discovers is made of mere flesh and blood—fallible like the rest of humanity.

² William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. Edward Pechter (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004), Act 1, Scene 1, lines 131-134. All subsequent references to this edition will be indicated by act, scene, and line numbers.

Despite references to his wife as “dear love” (2.3.8) and “sweet Desdemon” (3.3.55), and his promise to “deny [her] nothing” (3.3.76), Othello’s affection belies a shallow love mainly directed toward her idealized beauty, wit, and skill. Furthermore, Othello reveals to his wife the rosy, “content[ed]” feelings of his insubstantial love, accurately characterized as infatuation, when he attests his fear that “My soul hath her content so absolute / That not another comfort like to this / Succeeds in unknown fate” (2.1.189-191). This “absolute” contentment of the soul, which is not merely completed by, but draws its sustenance from another, cannot provide permanent fulfillment. Instead, relationships comprised of fallible human beings entail happy developments and letdowns, preventing a perpetual state of contentment for those involved. Thus Othello’s infatuation, drawing upon insubstantial adoration rather than true love, sets the stage for his inability to cope with any threat, whether fabricated or actual, to the idealized image of his wife. Devastated by the idea of his wife’s infidelity, Othello dramatically and ominously proclaims, “Perdition catch my soul / but I do love thee! and when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again” (3.3.90-92). Can Othello’s love be perpetual and true if he can “love thee” and subsequently “love thee not”? His contented soul is quickly replaced by chaos when his infatuation crumbles under false allegations of Desdemona’s infidelity.

In *Deus caritas est*, Pope Benedict criticizes the “warped and destructive form of *eros*” which “strips it of its dignity and dehumanizes it.”³ Othello merely values the idealized image of his wife, effectively dehumanizing her to a mere compilation of her noble status and accomplishments. His “love” is mere infatuation, providing only “fleeting pleasure” and ecstasy at best (§ 4). Thus, when Iago plants suspicions in the mind of Othello regarding Desdemona’s fidelity, suddenly Othello’s pleasure, his so-called “love,” is lost because Cassio, it appears, has

³ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, Encyclical Letter, (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 25 Dec. 2005), § 4. All subsequent references to this encyclical will be indicated by section number.

stealthily won over his wife. Othello manifests the destructive nature of his irrational, passionate *eros* in his plotting and ultimate murder of his wife—a development that arguably would not have come to pass had he loved her with the time-tested love of a mature marriage.

Comparably, Werther writes of his excessive adoration for Lotte, admiring her beauty, intelligence, and the striking character of her words (p. 24). However, in contrast to Othello, Werther also embraces Lotte as an individual, valuing “her innocent, candid soul” (p. 46), the “gentle light of her exquisite spirit,” her “expression of warmest sympathy, of the sweetest compassion,” and her displays of motherly affection toward her younger siblings whom she raises (p. 118). But despite his adoration of Lotte’s entire being, Werther’s extreme emotions reflect not a true love, but rather an obsession—an extreme infatuation and inversion of a healthy, tempered *eros* inseparable from selfless *agape*. His obsession with Lotte is fed by his inability to attain her. Even Lotte herself recognizes this: “I am afraid, very much afraid, that it is only the impossibility of possessing me that attracts you so much” (p. 138). Lotte’s engagement to Albert fails to deter Werther. He instead ignores this reality, feels emboldened to pursue her, and fantasizes that Lotte is devoted to him.

Such a self-centered, unrealistic perception of his relationship with Lotte destroys the sincerity of Werther’s claim that Lotte is “sacred” to him (p. 47). According to Pope Benedict, one should treat the object of one’s love with concern for his or her happiness, not desire for receiving the beloved’s exclusive affections. Werther’s lack of respect for Lotte as an engaged woman demonstrates that only his obsessive desire is “sacred” to him. Werther adores Lotte completely, writes constantly of her perfection, but he dehumanizes and objectifies her as an unattainable possession. Pope Benedict concedes that “a sentiment can be a marvelous first

spark”; however, “it is not the fullness of love” (§ 17). Thus, Werther’s heartfelt emotions, the only part of the world that he considers real, do not constitute a selfless love of Lotte.

Hindrances to Love: Othello’s Insecurity, Werther’s Obsession

Despite his successes as a general, Othello’s insecurities as a Moor hinder his confidence and ability to trust in his wife’s love for him. Even Iago testifies to Roderigo that “[t]he Moor, howbeit that I endure him not, / Is of a constant, loving, noble nature, / And I dare think he’ll prove to Desdemona / A most dear husband” (2.1.281-285). But despite his many virtues, for which others hold him in high esteem, Othello succumbs to Iago’s manipulation of his insecurities.

Iago vows to “[practice] upon his peace and quiet / Even to madness,” demonstrating that Othello is initially content and confident in his relationship with Desdemona. But their relationship crumbles when Iago exploits the Moor’s insecurities by suggesting that Desdemona’s sympathies for Cassio belie an affair between the two (2.1.304-305). Othello is painfully conscious of his inferiority with regards to the social conventions of the Venetian elite, despite his superior martial skills and knowledge. Thus, despite Desdemona’s reassurance of her obedience and loyalty to Othello, he reasons, “Haply for I am black, / And have not those soft parts of conversation / That chamberers have, or for I am declined / Into the vale of years—yet that’s not much— / She’s gone, I am abused, and my relief / Must be to loathe her” (3.3.265-270). Othello agonizes over his wife’s alleged disloyalty, which he assumes to be the effect of his race, coarse speech, and elder age. Following Pope Benedict, Othello’s relationship with Desdemona is “a love that is still insecure, indeterminate and searching,” which characterizes immature *eros*, for he is distrustful of her devotion due to his insecurities (*Deus caritas est*, § 6).

Just as Othello abandons his “best judgment,” choosing to follow his passions by irrationally punishing Cassio and later smothering Desdemona (2.3.196), so too does Werther relinquish rationality, embracing his emotions as the only true reality. However, Werther’s lack of genuine love for Lotte is rooted in his hyper-emotional, sensitive, unstable character, rather than the insecurities which prompt Othello’s failure truly to love Desdemona. Werther recognizes the “sick” power of his heart over his mind, but does nothing to temper his emotions; instead, he yields to and feeds off them. Just as Desdemona’s beauty and talent provide for the complete contentment of Othello’s soul, the loss of which threatens chaos, so too does Werther make Lotte the source of his every hope and pleasure.

Though Lotte’s engagement precludes such completion for Werther, he still believes that his heart creates its own happiness by abandoning objective reality for subjective fantasy. In fact, his greatest happiness comes from “stagger[ing] under a benign delusion” (p. 43). Werther thus demonstrates his unconcern for the realities of the world outside himself, his emotions, and those in his immediate locale. Werther’s question—“Are these delusions if they make us so happy?”—reveals his inability to distinguish between his joyful fantasies and the depressing reality of his futile pursuit of Lotte (p. 48). Such a stark abandonment of reason reflects the Romantic tradition in which Goethe wrote the *Sorrows*, directly contradicting Pope Benedict’s emphasis on reason in his Regensburg address in September 2006, and his call for human beings to temper the passions of *eros* with an understanding of reality and concern for others’ needs in *Deus caritas est*.⁴

Perhaps the most poignant example of Werther’s willful repudiation of reality occurs after he illicitly kisses Lotte, desperately demanding, “And what does it mean that Albert is your

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University*, Lecture of the Holy Father, (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 12 Sept. 2006).

husband? Husband! That may be for this world” (p. 157). Werther disregards the reality of Lotte and Albert’s sacred bond—the “love between man and woman, where body and soul are inseparably joined” (*Deus caritas est*, § 2). In the Catholic tradition upheld by Pope Benedict, husband and wife are one in a permanent and indissoluble unity. However, Werther fantastically believes that in a transcendent afterlife of his own imagining, he and Lotte will be one because of his overwhelming desire for her, regardless of her obvious love for her husband.

The extremity of Werther’s obsession with Lotte reflects the blinding, ecstatic “intoxication” of *eros* that perverts true love and provides merely “fleeting pleasure” (*Deus caritas est*, § 4). In a sacrilegious reference to Lotte as his only deity, Werther writes, “I have no prayers left except prayers to her; my imagination calls up no other image than hers, and I see everything in the world only in relation to her” (p. 69). Though Pope Benedict concedes that love between men and women offers “an apparently irresistible promise of happiness,” he asserts that this so-called love cannot survive without God, for His example of *agape*, that is, self-sacrificial love, provides meaning and sustenance to relationships (§ 2). Werther values only his emotional connection with Lotte, neglecting any such spiritual reality or a loving respect for Lotte in God. The fleeting pleasure that results from a “love” which lacks *agape* is manifested by Werther’s uncontrollable, unpredictable behavior: he acts on emotional impulses ranging from abject depression due to Lotte’s inaccessibility to a happy indulgence in the transient bliss of his infatuation. Werther manifests his unbridled passion for Lotte in his recollection of an erotic, though fictitious, dream, emphasizing her “love-murmuring lips,” which would satisfy his selfish desire for Lotte to return his sentiments (p. 135). Pope Benedict warns against the failure of such relations of pure *eros* in which one partner attempts to “take” love without any reciprocation (§ 7).

In Greek culture, rightful *eros* was viewed “as a kind of intoxication, the overpowering of reason by a ‘divine madness’ which tears man away from his finite existence and enables him, in the very process of being overwhelmed by divine power, to experience supreme happiness” (*Deus caritas est*, § 4). This ideal of *eros* was actually manifest, however, through the practice of temple prostitution, involving a “love” based solely on pleasure—strikingly parallel to the vivid, physical nature of Werther’s dream. Pope Benedict qualifies the notion of the extreme rapture of *eros*, for “Love is indeed ‘ecstasy,’ not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery” (§ 6). In contrast, Werther makes no attempts at sacrifice by silencing his desires to respect the marriage between Lotte and Albert. Instead, he is perpetually “inward-looking,” intentionally ignorant of all external realities beyond those which he seeks for himself. Pope Benedict concludes that “[a]n intoxicated and undisciplined *eros*, then, is not an ascent in ‘ecstasy’ towards the Divine, but a fall, a degradation of man” (§ 4). Likewise, Werther refuses to discipline his infatuation, temper his emotions, or make his visits to Lotte’s home more infrequent. Instead of purifying his “love,” renouncing excessive passion, and allowing it to mature into a concern for Lotte’s well-being, Werther remains in selfish and childlike yearning.

Eros contra Agape

Agape, the purely selfless love that Pope Benedict asserts is critical to tempering the passions of *eros*, directly contrasts with the selfish character of the romantic “love” of Othello for Desdemona and Werther for Lotte. Othello and Werther’s affections fail to transcend the covetous, pleasure-seeking nature of an immature *eros*, because their devotion lacks union with *agape*, a concern for the beloved (§ 7).

Othello demonstrates his selfish “love,” primarily concerned with the physical aspect of his marriage, as he “damn[s]” Desdemona as a “lewd minx” with greater indignation towards her body’s alleged impurity than towards the effect of her supposed infidelity on their relationship (3.3.475). Pope Benedict asserts the need to respect every human being’s body-soul union, for “should he deny the spirit and consider matter, the body, as the only reality, he would likewise lose his greatness” (§ 5). By contrast, “it is man, the person, a unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves,” and deserves love in return (§ 5). When plagued by suspicions of her affair, Othello considers Desdemona’s body as her only reality, objectifying her as a sexual object. Her body’s alleged importance belies her husband’s treatment of it as “the purely material part of [her], to be used and exploited” at his will (*Deus caritas est*, § 5). Using extreme language, Othello professes, “I had rather be a toad / And live upon the vapor of a dungeon / Than keep a corner in the thing I love / For others’ uses” (3.3.272-275). Expressing the warped form of “*eros*, reduced to pure ‘sex,’” he makes his wife a commodity, “a mere ‘thing’ to be bought and sold,” or rather used by other men (*Deus caritas est*, § 5). Neither does Desdemona have the power to use her body “as an arena for the exercise of [her] freedom” (§ 5). Instead, Othello dictates her body’s function as “both enjoyable and harmless” to satisfy his selfish desires characteristic of a perverted *eros* (§ 5). Othello does not love Desdemona with the unconditional love of a husband for a wife. He selfishly views the alleged affair as damage to his possession, rather than a problem in their relationship requiring remedy.

Werther likewise makes Lotte a commodity, referring to making her “his” own, and using possessive language to describe her in letters to his friend. With clouded reason, Werther ponders, “Sometimes I cannot understand how another *can*, how he *dare* love her, since I alone love her completely and devotedly, knowing only her, and having nothing in the world but her!” (p. 102).

His seemingly romantic words of pure devotion belie a false supposition that Lotte's own husband could not match Werther's love for her. The language of possession, "having nothing in the world but her," reflects his infatuated *eros*, rather than *agape*, the latter of which would never cause Werther to selfishly claim another human being—particularly one who is not his spouse—as his own. Instead, one who manifests *agape* expresses concern for the entire well-being of his or her beloved. Werther's constant reference to "attaining" or "possessing" Lotte reflects a fundamentally warped notion of true love. Perhaps most ominously, after reading a moving poem and kissing Lotte passionately, Werther writes with an air of victory, "She is mine! You are mine, Lotte, forever!" (p. 157). Because he has imposed himself physically on Lotte, suggesting an unrestrained, ecstatic *eros*, Werther asserts his claim to a married woman. This inversion of *eros* is concerned with what can be selfishly "taken" from, rather than "offered" to a relationship (*Deus caritas est*, § 11). Werther's empty declaration also foreshadows his suicide, a rash act rooted in his selfish desire for happiness through attainment of Lotte, without concern for her established happiness in marriage. Because Lotte does not yield to Werther's selfishness, instead remaining faithful in her relationship with Albert and sharing a marital love of both *eros* and *agape*, Werther selfishly ends his discontented life.

The Human Destructiveness of Wayward Love

Ultimately, Othello's tainted love, rooted in his insecurities and dehumanization of Desdemona as an ideal of bodily and social perfection, leads him to moral confusion and murder of his wife. Upon being erroneously informed of Desdemona's infidelity, Othello concludes with a distorted sense of nobility that "she must die, else she'll betray more men . . ." (5.2.6). Rather than focusing on the pain he feels as a result of his own wife's betrayal and devising a method of remedy, Othello expresses irrelevant concern for other men who could be betrayed by

Desdemona, and chooses to take rash action by murdering his wife whom he should love unconditionally. Othello even refers to himself in his final speech as an “honorable murderer,” who justifiably strangles Desdemona, “[f]or naught I did in hate, but all in honor” (5.2.299-300). A suspicion of infidelity cannot be cause to destroy a “love,” had it actually existed between Othello and Desdemona. However, Othello actively seeks to incriminate the wife he allegedly “loves,” all too ready to reject her at the first sign of culpability, for “[i]f I do prove her haggard, / I’d whistle her off and let her down the wind / To prey at fortune” (3.3.262-265). Othello lacks all wisdom and prudence in his love of Desdemona, idealizing her to the unrealistic status of icon, creating a relationship based on insubstantial sentiment. Such a distorted *eros* does not realize the “eternal[ity]” of love but demonstrates its transitory nature when easily overcome by jealousy (*Deus caritas est*, § 6). No longer filled with the rosy sentiments of infatuation, Othello smothers his “beloved” wife, an action completely incongruous with a lasting love that transcends doubts, insecurities, and possessiveness.

Upon learning of Desdemona’s honesty from Iago’s wife, Othello is overcome with self-loathing for murdering her. Preparing to stab himself, Othello wishes that the fiends of hell would torture him for destroying the most precious part of his life. Othello expresses great remorse for his jealousy and loss of trust in his wife, which suggests elements of *agape* in his grieving love for Desdemona. With the act of suicide, Othello demonstrates his realization of the utter irrationality and destructiveness of his prior *eros* for Desdemona, and his inability to live with the shame of failing to love her fully. Othello chooses to end his life rather than to exist apart from the woman with whom he did not allow a relationship of united *eros* and *agape* to develop.

Like Othello, Werther demonstrates a twisted understanding of good and evil. Instead of justifying his motives in daily interactions with Lotte as innocent, Werther's fundamentally warped values prompt him to desperation. Even his suicide is motivated by selfish aims. His inability to make Lotte return his "love" prompts the tormented Werther to commit suicide, demonstrating his infatuation with Lotte as the ultimate antithesis of true love. Frustrated by Lotte's failure to reciprocate his affections, Werther writes, "I often feel like tearing open my breast or knocking out my brains when I think how little human beings can do for one another" (p. 112). By contrast, Pope Benedict notes in the second half of his encyclical that individual lives are changed for the good when human beings espouse genuine interpersonal love and wholehearted concern for others. Werther cannot offer true love to anyone, for self-love prevents him from anything resembling altruism. Just as he exalts a life under "benign delusion," Werther asserts that "the happiest people" are those "who, like children, live for the day only" (p. 12). Like a child who remains ignorant of realities external to his wants, needs, and emotions, Werther focuses only on his present feelings, failing to consider the negative effects of his suicide on those he will leave behind. He considers their reactions strictly in relation to himself. True love, however, "promises infinity, eternity—a reality far greater and totally other than our everyday existence" (*Deus caritas est*, § 5). Werther craves the everyday realities of Lotte's glance directed towards him, and consequently cannot transcend the present pain and frustration he suffers. Finding no end to his "misery" besides death, he "weep[s] bitterly in view of a hopeless future," instead of channeling his passions and desires elsewhere (p. 67).

In the ultimate inversion of selfless *agape*, Werther claims that his suicide is not from self-pitying depression but rather for Lotte herself: “It is not despair; it is the certainty that I have suffered enough, and that I am sacrificing myself for you” (*Werther*, p. 141). Parallel to Othello’s perverse logic of justly murdering his wife, Werther professes, with sensationalism, that one of the three—either Werther, Albert, or Lotte—must die in order to resolve the “love” triangle, and that Werther will sacrifice himself. Nevertheless, Werther’s profession of altruism contradicts his death wish that “[o]n Christmas Eve you [Lotte] will hold this piece of paper in your hand, trembling and covering it with your sweet tears” (p. 143). Craving more than the platonic affections that Lotte exhibits towards him, Werther relishes the image of Lotte crying over his suicide note. This reflects a perverse desire for recognition and adoration, regardless of the pain of another human being.

In his encyclical, Pope Benedict refers to the “*Song of Songs*, an Old Testament book well known to the mystics,” in which are contained poems referring to *dodium*, comparable to misguided *eros*, that is, “a love that is still insecure, indeterminate, and searching” (§ 6). In contrast, a different form of love, *ahabà*, comparable to *agape*, “expresses the experience of a love which involves a real discovery of the other, moving beyond the selfish character that prevailed earlier. Love now becomes concern and care for . . . the good of the beloved” (§ 6). If necessary, such a true love renounces inordinate passion for the good of others. This form of true sacrifice starkly contrasts with Werther’s warped sense of suicidal sacrifice, completely motivated by the passions and selfish desires for recognition after death. Furthermore, Pope Benedict’s model for *ahabà*, or *agape*, is Jesus’ incarnation and death on the Cross—the ultimate demonstration of self-sacrifice by the source of all life on behalf of the redemption of all created life (§ 6). Werther’s suicide reflects a vile inversion of Jesus’ example of true, selfless love, and

mocks the examples of true martyrs throughout the ages. In contrast with Othello's murder of Desdemona, ultimately motivated by the recognition of his inadequacies, Werther's suicide originates from an excessive love of self and voluntary imprisonment in his world of personal emotions. However, neither death manifests the true love the two men claim to profess by their actions.

Conclusion

Human beings crave love with others to dispel their insecurities and validate their worth. When Iago's lies challenge the relationship between Othello and Desdemona, Othello's "love" is plagued by jealousy, his insecurities surface, and he acts in rash revenge. Othello directly abandons what he assumes to be true love for his wife, promising that "my bloody thoughts with violent pace / Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love, / Till that a capable and wide revenge / Swallow them up" (3.3.457-459). However, Othello arguably never exhibits true love of Desdemona, for he dehumanizes her from the start, making her an idealized possession. He is shockingly quick to abandon his "love" and incriminate Desdemona for infidelity. Following his discovery of Desdemona's faithfulness, Othello commits suicide because of his shame in failing to love his wife fully. His remorse for his actions and praise of his wife's goodness after her death reflect a somewhat closer approximation of *agape*. However, his failure to love Desdemona in life because of suspicions of infidelity demonstrates the shortcomings of his marital love. Werther, likewise, craves Lotte's love, but in response to fruitless attempts to win her over, his "love" becomes increasingly obsessive and unhealthy, culminating in his ultimate, rash act of suicide. Unlike Othello, Werther does not murder anyone, but his suicide reflects the same selfish failure to love, despite protestations of his motivations and desires as pure.

In *Deus caritas est*, Pope Benedict entreats human beings to espouse both passionate *eros* and tempering, self-sacrificial *agape* in their relationships, just as Jesus manifested to the world by his ministry and death, and as God manifests to the faithful in his daily forgiveness of sins. In true love and ever-maturing relationships, “*eros* and *agape* . . . can never be completely separated,” for the covetous nature of an immature, infatuated *eros* develops to incorporate *agape*, that is, less concern for self, and increasing responsibility and concern for the happiness of another (§ 7). Such love as an integration of both *eros* and *agape* does not fail as a result of suspicions or lack of returned affections. The actions of both Othello and Werther, however, reflect an inversion of this duality in true love, and manifest a selfish *eros* that ends in the destruction of many lives—a development which, sadly, is not foreign to human relationships, especially today. Essential to the endurance of fulfilling human relationships is the adoption of a love that offers *and* receives, transcends worldly concerns, and seeks the good of those involved. In his encyclical, Pope Benedict XVI recognizes the necessity of such love and calls both the Church and the faithful to espouse it, in hope of a more just and peaceful world.