
DR JOHN KANI, Actor, South Africa

Arise, black vengeance, from thy hollow hell!

Even today Othello still makes people uncomfortable. The story of the black general turned murderer through jealousy tackles racism head on.

I was fully aware of the risk of playing this part in apartheid South Africa. But in 1987 when I was offered the role I could not refuse.

She loved me for the dangers I had pass'd, And I loved her that she did pity them. This only is the witchcraft I have used.

It was an opportunity to bring the relationship between black and white to the stage. I remember there were walkouts, the audience shouting at us as we kissed on the stage. The struggle against apartheid was bitter and violent. Dozens lost their lives. During the rehearsals there was a tense atmosphere. But Othello at the Market Theatre opened to rave reviews.

In 1994, I was 51 years when I voted for the first time in my life. I still walk about with those 51 years of war. Things have changed in South Africa.

Othello is a play which is woven into the struggle for equality in South Africa. When we look at Shakespeare, he affirms in us the equality of all human beings: black, white, male, female.

Let husbands know. Their wives have sense like them. They see and smell. And have their pallets both for sweet and sour. As husbands have.

Over this 22 years of our democracy I look back at where we've come from. Have we done enough to make a society which has space for Othello and Desdemona where they won't be persecuted?

But words are words; I never yet did hear that the bruised heart was pierced through the ear.

Despite wanting to be a non-racial society, I don't think we're there yet.

This is sometimes my fear in Othello that Iago the villain, his fate is unclear. Desdemona is murdered, Othello kills himself, but Iago is arrested and taken away. That bothers me, that somehow Shakespeare leaves racism alive.

But I have hope. It was at a moment in 1987 I realised the power of the arts, the power of theatre as a force for change.

END OF RECORDING