

Geraldo De Sousa. *At Home in Shakespeare's Tragedies*.

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This ambitious interdisciplinary study draws from anthropology, architecture, art history, social history, theater history, and gender studies to explore the connection between tragedy and domestic life in the works of Shakespeare, with particular attention to materiality and place and the effect of tragedy on “home”—houses, families, and households. Home is, for de Sousa, both a specific and imagined location, one defined not only by location but also by emotions, memories, and experiences. In four substantial chapters focusing on dwelling space in Shakespeare’s major tragedies, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*, de Sousa shows that “scenery, in the strict sense of lived space and living space, does

indeed become an integral and indispensable part of Shakespeare's vision of the tragic experience" (4), and argues that representing the house on the early modern stage necessitates understanding the connection between place and character and, using Foucault, that staged domestic space becomes a focal point for tragic relations. His central question is, "how do early modern playwrights, especially Shakespeare in the tragedies in question, localize the characters' living places and ground the tragic experiences in the material world?" (13)

The first two chapters, on *King Lear* and *Othello*, investigate the consequences for a house of the erosion of the ideals of security and stability where erasure and disappearance become, instead, the central phenomena. In the first chapter de Sousa links Lear's puzzling vanishing castle to a change in housing conditions that produces a crisis of authority and alters longstanding patriarchal traditions. The disappearance of his domestic space and shift to his daughters' houses shows a changing social order. Chapter 2, on *Othello*, also uses material and cultural housing conditions to juxtapose European (Venetian) sedentary, home-centered living with Othello's North African, nomadic "unhoused" (1.2.26) condition. It reveals through comparison with Caravaggio that the play's use of lighting effects, especially the persistent use of dark and dimly lit spaces (many scenes depend on darkness and call for torch or candlelight), where the destruction of the household is simultaneous with its descent into darkness, "blurs boundaries of perception, reconfigures architectural space, and racializes and redefines family life in the play" (95). The last two chapters focus on imagined and embodied as opposed to actual space, exploring the "habit and gaps, distortions, and voids associated with the concept of home" (12). Chapter 3, on *Hamlet*, examines the body in space as Hamlet's return to Elsinore shows the concept of home as fragile. The castle is an emotional space and domestic battleground that both Claudius, who asserts pleasure, and Hamlet, who inscribes the place with pain and grief, define through their own experiences and perceptions and seek to control. Chapter 4, on *Macbeth*, uses architecture, adjacency, and the partitioning of space (interior versus exterior, above versus below) to show the domestic household staged in the play as bordering on a "wild, fantastical world" (143) where the Macbeth's belief in home as a fortress is a fatal mistake. The disappearance, in each play de Sousa examines, of home as a safe harbor exposes a changing patriarchal system and unsettles notions of household security and impregnability. His recognition that in Shakespeare's major tragedies, "the tragic experience hinges on the emplacement of embodied tragic subjects in houses and home space" (169) forces a consideration of place, both physical and imagined spaces, as deeply entwined with a culture in transition and with the tragic journey itself.

This book offers detailed, insightful readings of each play that are thoroughly informed by de Sousa's careful attention to the material (most often aesthetic, artistic, and architectural) conditions of space and place. It is compelling, as well, for the implications it has for the staging of the plays as it builds upon recent groundbreaking work on stage directions and early modern theatrical conditions to foreground Shakespeare's ability to take advantage of the bare platform as a flexible

and vibrant canvas. For scholars, students, and performers of Shakespeare, *At Home in Shakespeare's Tragedies* is most engaging in that it offers a fresh approach to familiar plays through a multifaceted consideration of "home."

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