

Review of "Odell's Fall"

By Norman Bacal

Reviewed by John J. Kelly

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What would you be willing to do for love and success? And what is the price for blind ambition? These questions lie at the core of acclaimed author and noted speaker Norman Bacal's intriguing and heart-pounding first novel, "Odell's Fall." Based structurally on Shakespeare's tragedy, "Othello," the novel is a lightning-fast-paced look into the hearts of darkness of its characters. It's an edge-of-your-seat murder mystery packed with countless heroes and victims, plot twists and turns and insight into how the decisions we make define us. Tracing the career machinations of the members at TGO, a fictitious high-level law firm in Manhattan, it is sure to please both fans of the classic Shakespeare play and encourage others to give The Bard another look. This first book in a planned trilogy of novels, each based on different plays by Shakespeare, is a thrilling and, at other times, heart-breaking story of the dangers of deceit, and, ultimately, the power of love to conquer all.

Odell Moore is Bacal's Othello, a trusted leader. The talented African-American lawyer, nicknamed "the General," is a highly successful and powerful partner at this Manhattan law firm. Odell must cross racial lines to elope with and marry Dee Brabant, the novel's Desdemona. This prize catch is the daughter of a Southern senator who opposes the marriage from the start and has a heritage steeped in discrimination. Meanwhile, the Iago-like figure is a young, ambitious and scheming underling named Jackson Sherman who is willing to do anything to succeed. He conjures up a plan to cause divisiveness in Odell's marriage and catapult his own career at TGO. At first seemingly successful, the scheme eventually unravels and new truths are discovered by several of the key "players," about their true selves and tragic pasts.

Bacal, the author of a previous best-selling work of nonfiction, a memoir titled "Breakdown" about the rise and sudden fall of top Canadian law firm Heenan Blaikie, brings his unique, insider's knowledge of litigation and human behavior at the highest levels of the legal profession, specifically entertainment law. The author was the founder of the Toronto office of Heenan Blaikie and a managing partner for that firm for nearly two decades. His experience working with major film studios gives him the knowledge and perspective necessary to paint a highly believable storyline. Bacal's literary voice is strong and meticulous, perfect for this literary endeavor. His ease with dialogue and narrative structure has created a modernization of "Othello" that is intricate, intense and illuminating. And it is a story that is never predictable. (The plot twists and turns are sure to have you staying up late reading "Odell's Fall.") Touching on topics like child abuse, racism, and the blind ambition that leads to treachery, this is a sweeping murder-mystery that will keep you guessing until the final page.

"Odell's Fall" takes us deep and distant into the minds of each of the characters and examines their motives and actions. This is an auspicious and tantalizing first novel aimed at making Shakespeare more accessible and enjoyable for all. It's a thought-provoking and pitch-perfect foray into the always mysterious and sometimes corruptible human heart and mind.