

Othello and iago analysis



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In Shakespeare's Othello, the character of Iago is constructed to demand the audience's complicity despite the corrupt nature of his actions. An Elizabethan audience may have responded in a negative fashion to Iago's manipulative behaviour but in contrast with this, the post-Freudian audience would be fascinated by the psychological aspect of his character. Iago is undoubtedly the most psychologically intriguing character carefully presented by Shakespeare through his exploitation of the other characters in order to compliment his master plan.

In the opening of Othello, Iago convinces Roderigo to join him in plotting against Othello by using Roderigo's love for Desdemona to provoke ill feelings towards Othello. However, he reveals his own motivation, "I follow him to serve my turn upon him" as a result of Othello's decision of promoting Cassio over Iago. Despite admitting his own motives to Roderigo, he promises Roderigo that in helping him, it will gain him the hand of Desdemona. Of course, this is merely a technique Iago uses to gain Roderigo's service as he successfully exploits Roderigo's emotional insecurities.

The audience becomes aware that Desdemona is a chaste, pure "jewel" that would never betray Othello or pursue Roderigo, heightening Iago's empty promise to Roderigo. As the play progresses, Roderigo becomes doubtful of Iago but in response to this, Iago gives Roderigo false hope as well as urging him to "put money in thy purse" whereby Iago doesn't just exploit him emotionally but financially too. The materialistic side of Iago is not only highlighted here but also supports his envy for Cassio and his new position of wealth.

The modern audience cannot help being fascinated by Iago because he exploits Roderigo emotionally for the hopes of his own materialistic gains. He plots against Othello as a result of the lack of self satisfaction not only socially but materialistically. He constructs a plan whereby he manipulates characters such as Roderigo who are intellectually inadequate and tackle their emotional issues to solve his own which almost evoke sympathy from the audience as this evil villain is humanised.

Iago does not only manipulate characters that are intellectually inadequate to him but also exploit emotional issues of those who are intellectually adequate which almost comes across as impressive. Iago is aware of Othello's admiration of Desdemona and provokes his emotional insecurities by convincing him that Desdemona has had an affair with Cassio. However, instead of directing changing Othello's opinion, he cleverly sets a trap whereby Othello immediately relates Cassio's alleged "dreams" to the "foregone conclusion" of adultery.

In addition to this, as Othello becomes more paranoid with the possibility of Desdemona and Cassio's affair, Iago evokes Othello's insecurities further by presenting the image of "who steals my purse steals trash" hinting that Desdemona has become contaminated by other men. Even though Othello's mental health deteriorates as a result of this and eventually murders Desdemona and himself, the audience cannot help being fascinated by Iago's ability to destroy such a strong character and transform him into a weak and vulnerable character.

The audience is suppose to sympathise with Othello but through this Iago demands the audience's complicity as we're almost put in the same position as Iago. Much like Iago, the audience are watching the events unfold as Iago is watching his own plan unfold. He cleverly remains detached and but uses the other characters as pawn pieces which as villainous as it might be, we cannot help but admire his ability to manipulate the everyone else to do his own dirty work. Iago is not only manipulative but very deceptive especially when attempting to gain others' trust.

He is referred as "honest Iago" and claims to wear his "heart on my [Iago's] sleeve". The irony is that he is the most dishonest character in the play but at the same time he does not deliberately hide his plan as he confessed to Roderigo earlier that he wants to take down Othello. Although he claims to be honest, he associates this with "for daws to peck at" implying that the day would never come for him to be straight forward with his peers. His consistent deceptive game playing makes him a psychologically interesting character.

However, the inconsistency of his motivations in contrast with the consistency of his deception is perhaps even more interesting. In the opening scene of the play, he claims to be angry with Othello for promoting Cassio over himself. As the play progresses, he displays a suspicion for the possibilities of Othello sleeping with his wife Emilia. His lack of solid consistent motivation makes the audience a victim of Iago's deception as we allow and accept his evil plan to unfold without even knowing his true motivations.

This level and ability of deception makes him a fascinating character as he demands the audience's complicity by being deceitful as we become a pawn piece in his master plan. Iago is a complex character who comes across as ruthless but through this his own insecurities are highlighted. His hatred for Othello is initially generated from his insecurity about his own social status. He stresses "we cannot all be masters" emphasising his priorities and disagreement with his ranking.

This shows that his ruthless deceptive ways are as a result of his emotional insecurities and that despite his ability to manipulate murder, he is not a heartless villain. Another point to back this up is his jealousy towards Othello when he becomes suspicious of him and Emilia. "He has done my office" drives Iago into a trance whereby he is desperate to make both Othello and Emilia pay for their supposed actions. However, his murder of Emilia could also be as a result of his permanent hatred of women as he refers to women as "villainous whore" which shows his need to attack others in order to make himself feel better about himself.

All of these factors contribute towards his ultimate insecurity which is his jealousy of Cassio and most importantly Othello. He himself personifies the "green eyed monster" which drives him into becoming the villainous character he is. Whilst Iago comes across as a fascinating character, some might argue that it's the other characters' reaction to him that makes the audience more aware of him. However, Iago physically demands the audience's complicity as he has the most soliloquies out of all the other characters.

Shakespeare cleverly presents this by deliberately having Iago as the only character on stage, maximising his stage presence to draw the audience in. As a result of his complex characteristics and insecurities he is able to gain sympathy from the audience as well as successfully demanding the audience's complicity. It is his ability to appear emotionally attached and manipulative but at the same time possess human feelings that makes him a very fascinating character.