

What techniques does shakespeare use to reveal iago's villainy?

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The play Othello is a stereotypical Shakespearean tragedy and it uses characters that are stereotypical of the views people had during the Jacobean period. Othello is a tragedy because the main characters die at the end of the play, also throughout the play themes of prejudice; deceit and love/hate are introduced. Shakespeare has used other sources other than his imagination for his plays. 'Othello' was thought to have been taken from Hecatommithi, a collection of Italian short stories written by Giraldi Cinthio, the story seven contains many of the same names and situations as in Othello.

In this essay I will analyze and comment on how Shakespeare uses techniques to reveal Iago's villainy. I will look at what effects the techniques Shakespeare uses have on the way Iago is presented to the audience.

In act 2 scene 3 'Othello' we can clearly see the way Iago uses his surreptitious mind to persuade Othello that Desdemona is having an affair with Cassio. Due to Iago's manipulation of Othello, Othello starts to doubt Desdemona's loyalty and becomes under Iago's control. Iago uses a sly way to get Othello's attention and get him to believe what he has to say is true, he uses phrases such as "my noble lord" using both a personal pronoun by saying "my" and flattery by calling Othello his "noble lord" which would be taken as a huge compliment.

Othello interestedly says "what dost thou say, Iago?" Iago then produces a question "Did Michael Cassio, when you woo'd my lady know of your love?" which is, in this case, the first question to doubt Othello's mind. Othello replies with "he did, from first to last, why dost thou ask?" meaning Cassio

did know about their love, Othello is a bit confused by the question so asks Iago why he asked, Iago then sneakily continues with "but for satisfaction of my thought, no further harm" and this is to keep Othello interested but still in doubt of what's going on and what's the point of it all. Iago used techniques of withholding information, this gets Othello curious as to why Iago is so inquisitive, this makes Othello frustrated by Iago's confusing answers, he demands an answer, this makes the audience feel Othello is not as good a character as he seemed and Iago is not as clever as he previously thought.

Othello is very clever in the way that he tells Iago, "yes, and went between us very oft" here he tries to get information out of Iago about what's going on because Othello had been incidentally reminded by Iago that Cassio has easy and frequent access to Desdemona so therefore senses that Iago is lying, which causes Iago to repeat his words out of coyness "honest my lord", Iago is then worried that he had gone too far and saves himself with a brief answer to Othello my lord, for aught I know".

However Othello can't be fooled that easily and still suspects something is going on and therefore assumed Iago is withholding information, so asks "what dost thou think?" Othello then falls deeper into his daze of doubt and tells Iago that he knows there is more to it than meets the eye, "nay there's more in this." Iago then tells Othello he is known of being false and nasty but it is what he has seen and heard "why say they are vile false", and Iago says to Othello that he doesn't want to tell him, but needs to "it is my nature's plague to spy into abuse" Iago tells Othello his story.

Although Iago is careful not to say anything that could later be used against him, Othello becomes angry and annoyed, yet upset at what he thinks has happened, "... he echoes me, as if there were some monster in his thought too hideous to be shown" but then Iago cleverly ends the subject with " my lord, you know I love you" so that he can then bring it up later, and at the same time establishes Othello's trust in him.

After a long conversation with each other, Iago becomes more persuasive towards Othello, he tries to get Othello to agree with him but also leaving a bit of doubt in what he says "... I think that he is honest", which Othello automatically believes he is honest if Iago says so, because he trusts him so much and at the time, is believing everything Iago is saying. Also that words Iago uses is important in the persuasion, such as " men should be what they seem" and "... I think Cassio's an honest man", the significance of these words is important because Iago is leaving no evidence and is making sure he is not saying anything that other characters in the play, including Othello can use against him as evidence to prove he is a villain.

This makes the readers feel slightly intimidated by the character Iago; he is cunning and devious and is very clever at carrying out his plans toward Othello. Shakespeare uses specific techniques to show that the manipulation of other characters by Iago. Iago makes the characters in the play believe he is honest when in fact he is deceiving them and is going behind their backs to turn others against them. For example, in act 3 scene 3 " my noble lord". Iago is gaining Othello's trust by using personal pronouns and addressing him as if they were the best of friends.

By gaining Othello's trust, Iago thinks Othello will listen to him more and is more likely to believe what he is saying. By having this advantage of being able to influence what Othello does and says, the other characters wouldn't know what Iago is doing; but with Othello being in charge, Iago technically has control over the other characters by being able to influence Othello's decisions. He later then says "O beware, my lord of jealousy" in this statement Iago is making Othello think about Cassio trying to get with Desdemona because he is jealous of Othello and Desdemona's relationship.

One of Iago's techniques is to find the characters' weaknesses and use it against them. One example of this is when Iago discovers Cassio's weakness was alcohol; Cassio leaves Iago on his own, this gives him time to explain to the audience what he is planning to do. "If I can fasten but one cup on him... He'll be full of quarrel and offence"

Then convinced him to have a few more drinks, he got drunk and started fighting. Iago did this because he wanted to get moved up ranking and wanted Cassio's position so was trying to get him fired.

Typical views of Italian men in the renaissance period involve scheming, and devious behavior. Shakespeare created Iago based on the personality traits of a typical Italian stereotype, Machiavelli. Machiavelli did anything it took to get to the top, much like Iago, who was willing to kill people so he could get a higher position, he was also deceitful and devious like Machiavelli because of his two faced treachery.

Iago manages to persuade characters in the play to do things that will benefit him, things that they would not normally do, one of the main victims of this particular type of manipulation is Othello, and Iago manages to [persuade Othello to kill Desdemona, the love of his life! He does this by using persuasive techniques such as reverse intention, this occurs throughout the play, when Othello and Iago are talking about Cassio's dream Othello shouts " monstrous" but Iago then says " nay" trying to imply it was only a dream, therefore minimizing the significance, at least, this is what Iago would theoretically be trying to do, however in this case he is actually trying to make Othello suspect more than a dream. At this point the audience know Iago is the villain because of the recent goings on in the play relating to trying get Cassio drunk, and his monologues so realize what he is trying to do.

Another instance of reverse intention is when Iago states " let her live" he puts the idea of killing Desdemona in Othello's mind despite never mentioning it in the first place. Iago purposely uses long sentences so Othello only notices the points he wants him to notice, subtly disguising the hints he employs to imply Desdemona's guilt,

" I do beseech though I perchance and vicious in my guess (as I confess it is my nature's plague they spy into my abuses and of my jealousy shape faults that are not)-that your wisdom from one that is so imperfectly conceits would not notice, nor build yourself a trouble out of his scattering and unsure observance",

Although the character Iago is saying he is vicious in his guess, and then tries to accuse Othello of mistakenly imagining things, he is basically trying to avoid having to say something unpleasant, trying to direct Othello away from the point that was made. The commentary then gets Othello confused, he asks, "What dost thou mean?" Iago then has to plain it, quite distressing Othello, it makes Othello think Iago is accusing him of a life of jealousy which he gets quite offended by.

In the play, Shakespeare purposely structures Iago's villainy it revealed at the end, if this were not the case, and the characters realized Iago's villainy at the beginning or earlier on in the play, there would be no storyline, the play is only based around two days, here would be no themes of deceit, death, heartbreak and villainy, so structuring the play in this way was the best way of presenting the tragedy. Also, because the play was only based on two days, this would not have given Desdemona any time to be unfaithful to Othello, therefore undermining the belief for Othello's guilt.

Iago is clever by covering his deception by never saying anything that he would think Othello would take offence to or not believe, he only says things he knows Othello is thinking anyway so he doesn't get himself into trouble, he never even suggests anything he just presents them as mere ideas so people have nothing to blame on him later on in the play "to gross issues, nor larger reach than to suspicion" Iago is urging Othello to take a different course of action in certainty he is only planting the idea in his mind.

Racism and prejudice would be a difficult theme to portray if Iago's villainy was revealed at the beginning, Othello would never befriend a known villain because he is hated enough for his race, he feels alien to Desdemona and his other characters in the play, "his own clime, complexion and degree", this makes Othello feel alienated, "set on thy wife", Othello has moved from feeling fine to feeling low, he sunk very quickly after Iago mentioned he is different to Desdemona, he took things to heart easily and took offence very easily.

Until the end, Othello has no suspicion towards Iago's villainy, this is strange as Iago is trying to turn Othello against his beloved wife, he tries to imply this has cheated on him, he is jealous and he is imagining things, all false accusations, yet Othello notices nothing, because of the repeated use of the word honest when talking about Iago.