

Analyzing iago in shakespeare's othello

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Shakespeare portrays iago's character in the play ' Othello' with villainous content by using dramatic effects and specific representations of speech in order to engage the audience to witness this deceitful, dishonest and disturbing man. iago portrays himself as an innocent and rejected man with the use of powerful and emotive language such as ' despise me' and ' abhor me. ' The abrupt language used by iago enables the audience to witness his disgust after Roderigo accuses him of withholding some information from him about his own finances.

iago acts the innocent and threatened character by stating ' if ever I did dream of such a matter, / Abhor me. ' The phrase ' abhor me' is a use of hyperbole used by iago, where he exaggerates the issue of not being trusted by Roderigo. Here, the audience is able to see how iago exaggerates things to a great level and it allows them to believe iago will behave in this way for the majority of the play.

Connotations of jealousy are revealed frequently throughout the play, especially within iago's first speech between himself and Roderigo, of how he was dismissed as lieutenant in favour of ' Michael Cassio, a Florentine-/ A fellow almost damned in a fair wife. ' Here, iago claims that Cassio will have a wondering eye and is likely to stray from his job, proving how untrustworthy he is. He claims Cassio ' nor the division of a battle knows/ More than a spinster, unless the bookish theoretic. Shakespeare's powerful use of imagery and asyndetic listing here, when iago refers Cassio to a ' spinster,' reveals connotations of him being an inexperienced soldier as much as a spinster woman is inexperienced in love. The use of asyndetic listing also infers jealousy as iago is listing the many reasons why Cassio

should not have been promoted. The term 'bookish theoretic,' refers Cassio to be an inexperienced and unknowledgeable man on the battlefield, except from the theory he learnt about war in books.

Here, the audience can witness Iago's jealousy, which foreshadows the vengeful acts he performs later on upon certain characters within the play. Juxtaposition is also used when Iago describes to Roderigo the many reasons why Cassio should not be lieutenant, as he claims Cassio's soldiership is 'Mere prattle without practice' compared with he who is 'worth no worse a place,' claiming he deserves no lower rank than lieutenant and subordinate to Cassio. This, as well as showing jealousy, reveals Iago's blunt arrogance towards being cast aside for the promotion. This may enable the reader to both take pity on him and understand his upset of being overlooked, or disagree completely and believe he is too confident for his own good. Shakespeare introduces Iago as a master of manipulation in the sense that he dominates the conversation when speaking to Roderigo.

This may be because Roderigo is seen as Iago's right hand man and is easily manipulated into believing and sympathising with Iago because of the way Othello treated him. In response to Iago's speech that is full of connotations of jealousy and deceit about the dismissal of the promotion, Roderigo responds by stating 'by heaven, I rather would have been his hangman. This enables the audience to see how honourable and trusting Roderigo is to Iago as he does not question the latter of how he may be wrong and also does not judge Iago's aggressive nature towards Cassio and his experience in battle. The metaphorical use of the phrase 'I rather would have been his hangman,' is largely ironic as this, again, foreshadows Iago's actions later on within the

play upon those who, in particular Othello, deceived him. Aswell as the manipulation iago empowers over Roderigo, he also has a financial hold upon him.

Roderigo uses the simile 'as if the strings were thine,' where he states that iago has been using his money as if it were his own. In response to Roderigo's accusation, iago replies by saying 'Sblood, but you will not hear me.' Instead of apologising to Roderigo for abusing his trust in looking after his money, he accuses Roderigo of not listening to him. It is here that iago begins his long speech revealing his jealousy and he was betrayed, allowing the topic of the theft of the money to be forgotten.

Shakespeare allows the audience to witness another vengeful side to iago where he says the promotion seems to stem from favouritism and academic prowess rather than seniority, in which he believes there is no reason to love the moor. After Roderigo claims he would 'not follow [the Moor],' iago responds by saying he will 'follow [Othello] to serve [iago's] turn upon him,' meaning he will eventually get his own back and will not 'truly' follow him due to the pain and deceit this has caused him. The phrase 'Were I the Moor, I would not be iago' infers that iago would not want to be himself if he were the Moor as he is of lower status.

iago would also not be true to himself he were sucked into the Moor's ways, so he would continue to serve Othello, but will conceal his true feelings. Shakespeare also portrays iago's bitter behaviour when he declares to Roderigo, 'in following him, I follow but myself,' meaning he will look after his own interests instead of doing what is best by the Moor, which also portrays him as a self-serving character. His self-serving character is proven

in the scene two when informing Othello of Roderigo spreading foul reports about the general. He claims Roderigo ' spoke such scurvy and provoking terms against [Othello's] honour.

Iago's double dealing nature proves he is untrustworthy, deceitful and a trouble stirrer, which is ironic as previously he was speaking of how he was treated unkindly and believed Othello was the deceitful person within the issue of the lieutenant promotion. The manipulative power Iago has over Roderigo must be strong if he is unaware of the great stirring Iago is conducting behind his back. Iago's true representation is best portrayed by Shakespeare with the use of degrading, vulgar and taboo language in order to cause trouble when informing Brabantio of Desdemona's deceitfulness in order to take revenge upon Othello.

Upon arriving at his house, Iago orders Roderigo to ' poison [Brabantio's] delight... incense her kinsmen... Plague him with flies... throw such changes of vexation. ' These dynamic imperatives reveal connotations of rather harsh pain, suffering and destruction, enables the reader to visualise the two men trying to cause much distress, worry and anger to Brabantio before informing him of his daughter's disappearance. Iago can be seen as a very self-centred character as the revenge he wants to be conducted upon Othello, means another person, Brabantio, will also be hurt during this vengeful act.

It also shows how Iago enjoys causing much chaos and mayhem amongst people to witness their reactions for entertainment, and to possibly show he does not want to be the only character who has been deceived. After Brabantio calls out to the two men, Iago immediately uses his vulgar language to explain who Desdemona is with when stating ' you have lost half

your soul... an old black ram is tugging your white ewe. ' At first iago portrays his sorrow towards the senator when saying ' you have lost half your soul' as if he pities him. The vulgar description ' an old black ram is tugging your white ewe' reveals rather degrading and racist imagery.

The ' black ram' is in reference to the moor, portraying him to be a dirty, old man who is having relations with a pure and innocent ' white ewe' which is in reference to Desdemona. The audience can see that this use of zoomorphism infers rather negative qualities about the moor before he has even been introduced into the play. The use of zoomorphism occurs often throughout the first act when iago graphically describes the sexual relationship between Desdemona and Othello to her father. iago states to Brabantio that his ' daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs. The constant use of animalistic imagery and reference to specific animals, infers that the two characters are having a very sexual relationship and may not be together for love. This phrase is also a use of antithesis as the ram and ewe differ completely, similarly to how Desdemona and Othello differ in race and ethnicity. The degrading language used reveals iago's total disregard for Brabantio's feelings and status in society, proving once again the manipulative nature iago has and the enjoyment he receives when causing someone else great distress.

Shakespeare also uses religious imagery within the play when iago declares to Brabantio: ' the devil will make a grandsire of you. ' This imagery can also be seen as racial as the devil was often depicted as black, which proves he is referring Othello to the devil. Once Brabantio finds his daughter is in fact

missing from his house, iago decides this is the time to flee, showing his distrust to Roderigo by leaving him to fend for himself.

He claims ' it seems not meet, nor wholesome to my place, to be produced... against the moor,' where he means he cannot be seen by Brabantio as it may threaten his official position if he is brought forward as a witness against the Moor. iago, and his double dealing ways, tells Roderigo that he ' must show out a flag and sign of love. ' The metaphor used by iago here, conveys to the audience that iago will support Roderigo from a distance but will not support him in person, but he later informs Othello of Roderigo's supposed deceitful ways.

Shakespeare uses a variety of different language techniques in order to portray iago's villainous character with such content. Zoomorphism is used frequently when iago is referring to Othello which shows his racist and vulgar language, especially when describing the sexual relationship between Desdemona and Othello. The audience is able to see how iago revels in the mayhem and distress he causes amongst characters including Brabantio. This shows the cruel and manipulative streak he has.