

In william shakespeare's play "othello" the use of

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In William Shakespeare's play " Othello" the use of animal imagery was evident throughout the telling of the story. Shakespeare explained several characters actions by comparing them to similarities in animals. The characters in " Othello" were often depicted as having animal-like characteristics. Some characters were even compared to animals by other characters in the play. By defining characters in terms of these characteristics one can get a clear description of what the character is doing or saying as compared to certain animals. In this paper I hope to give examples of animal imagery used in " Othello" that assist in explaining the play. The specific examples I present will describe a character either as seen by himself or by a fellow character. The first use of animal imagery I noted occurred came in Act One when Iago, Othello's standard bearer, has awoken Brabantio, who was a Venetian senator and the father of Desdemona, to tell him that Othello has taken his daughter Desdemona, and as they speak is making love to her. Iago was attempting to instigate a fight between Othello and Brabantio, using Desdemona as the bait. Iago stated, " Your heart is burst. You have lost half your soul. Even now, now, very now, and old black ram is tugging your white ewe" (p. 13). In that statement Iago was comparing Othello to an old black ram by comparing Othello's skin color to that of the black ram's, and the white ewe, a young female sheep, to Desdemona. Shakespeare was trying to illustrate in his writing the act of an old black man making love to a young white woman. The use of a black ram and a white ewe to compare Othello and Desdemona helped in the visualization of their affair. Shakespeare displayed animal imagery again in Act Two when Cassio was explaining to Iago that if he had as many mouths

as Hydra, a many headed monster slain by Hercules, he could silence the many questions asked of him. In this Shakespeare presented Cassio as being burdened by many questions that he could not answer all at once, but if he had as many mouths as Hydra it would be more accessible for him to do so. Cassio said, " I will ask him for my place again; he shall tell me I am a drunkard! Has I as many mouths as Hydra, such an answer would stop them all" (p. 101). Cassio was explaining to Iago that if he went to Othello now to speak with him, Othello would call him a drunk because he had been drinking all night. This is exactly what Iago wanted. His plan was to get Cassio drunk and have him mutter words of hate and disgust to Othello, a person who Cassio had great respect for, until he was drunk and then fed him lies told to him by Iago. Shakespeare's animal imagery in this paragraph helps one to understand Cassio's burden of having too many questions and not enough answers. In using the comparison of Hydra, the many headed monster, to Cassio explained how Cassio's burden would be lifted if he only had more mouths to explain everything he had to say at one time. In Act Three Iago once again tries to manipulate another character in the play. This time he told Othello of an alleged affair that Cassio and Desdemona were having. The affair that Iago spoke of was a complete lie, for the two were nothing more than friends. Upon hearing of this alleged affair though, Othello went into a fit of rage yelling, " Arise, black vengeance, from hollow hell! Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne To tyrannous hate! Swell, bosom, with thy fraught, for ' tis of aspics' tongues" (p. 149). Shakespeare was attempting to illustrate a man, who was torn between his good friend, someone who he respected, and his lover. Shakespeare portrayed a man

going through an almost metamorphosis of emotions into this animal that he could not control. Othello yelled for this side of him to rise from hell, which had aspics' tongues, a tongue from a poisonous snake. Shakespeare's depiction of a man changing from good to evil provided a very vivid description of animal imagery. One can only imagine Othello, who is generally of calm and collective nature, turning into this ravaging beast. Finally, in Act Four Othello slapped Desdemona because he felt that she had wronged him. Desdemona began to explain to Othello that she had not wronged him and thus does not deserve this treatment. Othello nevertheless, yelled at her and continued to call her the devil. Othello believes that her tears are not of true nature, and that she is only crying to cover something up. He believes that she was crying to make him feel that she was truly sorry, or that she had not done anything wrong. Othello proclaimed, " O, devil, devil! If that the earth could teem with woman's tears, Each drop she falls would prove a crocodile" (p. 189). The crocodile was a creature thought to shed hypocritical tears. This statement that Othello made referring to a crocodile meant that the tears she shed were deceptive tears. Desdemona, in the eyes of Othello, was not sorry, but was rather hiding something from him. Shakespeare's use of animal imagery here was similar to his earlier uses. Shakespeare was trying to display a woman, who in the mind of her husband, was crying tears of deception. Othello had let his mind be so altered by Iago's lies, that he had even began to believe everything he said. This action of Othello was fueled by his earlier animal-like change caused by Iago. In conclusion, Shakespeare's use of animal imagery in " Othello" was crucial to the description of the story. In " Othello" certain

scenes would have been harder to understand or relate to if it was not for the animal imagery related to it. Shakespeare's comparison of characters to certain animals is unlike any other's. Shakespeare's portray of a character's emotions and thoughts through animal imagery helped in the understanding of that particular scene. Lastly, without the vivid comparisons of animals and characters, this play would undoubtedly have been more complicated to both interpret and understand.