

How and why does iago convince othello of desdmona's infidelity?

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Shakespeare is often referred to as the greatest playwright that ever lived. His comedies have made many laugh, his tragedies many have cried over and romances that have touched millions. Shakespeare's writing although hundreds of years old are always relevant to our lives because that is what they are about, life. Shakespeare deals with all aspects of human nature and flaws. He greatly exaggerates a particular flaw in each of his tragic heroes. This flaw brings about their downfall.

In the course of one conversation Iago convinces a man who loves his wife completely that she is in fact having an affair with one of his most trusted subjects without using one shred of proof or any real basis. This is a man who can make the most innocent of people guilty and the most loved, hated. He uses many tactics to persuade Othello that Desdemona is cheating on him with Cassio, the reason, is revenge. Iago is a very cunning and manipulative man. He is also often irrational and erratic. He will go to any means to get what he wants and in this case he doesn't mind ruining three people in the process.

At the beginning of the play we hear of Iago's rage at the fact that Cassio was made lieutenant instead of him. Iago feels that he was the better candidate and deserves the position. Iago isn't hard pushed to find a way of getting revenge. Othello often says that without Desdemona he would be in chaos, " But I do love thee; and when I love thee not, chaos is come again. " Iago uses this, because he wants to create chaos, which is one of the major themes of the play. Other major themes include relationships, jealousy, love and deceit.

Luck provides him with the opportunity to stage an affair between Cassio and Desdemona, driving Othello to insanity and resulting in the death of Desdemona and Othello. Iago becomes very jealous of Othello because of his position in the Venetian Army. He is also sexually attracted to Desdemona but that is not a real reason for hating Othello, his mind concocts stories which he believes are true and thus making himself think acceptable to take revenge on Othello by sleeping with his wife. Iago believes that Othello has slept with his wife Emilia, "leapt into his seat", he wants revenge for this too, "not out of absolute lust".

He wants to sleep with Desdemona for revenge not just for pleasure. He appears to be sexually frustrated as he also presumes that Cassio has also slept with Emilia, "I fear Cassio with me nightcap too". Throughout the play he often refers to sex as lustful and nothing to do with love. This is emphasised in his disbelief that Othello and Desdemona's relationship is based on love. Through this we have to consider the reasons why he feels this way. Can he not love someone? He finds it easy enough to kill his own wife at the end of the play, yet is constantly reaffirming his "love" for Othello.

We know he uses this as a tactic for Othello to gain faith in Iago, but could there be more? This plot is an obsession for Iago, his jealousy rules him. Could this mission be his only love? To understand how Iago convinces Othello that Desdemona is having an affair with Cassio we must look at the events beforehand which Iago directs to his own advantage. It starts when Cassio and Desdemona greet each other; Iago forms the plan that Cassio will

be target. Cassio and Desdemona are friendly to each other and Iago can see how this could appear to be more than just friendship.

Didst thou not see her paddle with the palm of his hand? " In Elizabethan times this was deemed as highly intimate and personal, this would have been an activity that only a couple would engage in. By claiming that Cassio was stroking Desdemona's hand, he is suggesting that they are a couple or intimate with each other. Iago sees the opportunity and uses his knowledge of Cassio to get him into a fight with Roderigo. Iago knows that this will outrage Othello and Cassio will want to redeem himself. Iago has planted the circumstances for Cassio to plead with Desdemona so that she will speak to Othello on Cassio's behalf.

Iago knows that Desdemona will take up Cassio's plight for she is a good person. " I will beseech the virtuous Desdemona to undertake for me". Desdemona doesn't realise that Iago is abusing her goodwill so that it will bring about her own downfall. Othello doesn't see it as strange that Desdemona is supporting Cassio for he knows what type of person she is. It is Iago that uses this as a basis for an affair between Cassio and Desdemona. Iago fools many of the main characters. He only gets away with this because they trust him and this protects him from any questioning. His cunning means that the events can occur, building the play.

He uses this to his own benefit, talking Cassio into pleading with Desdemona and inducing Othello to believe that Desdemona is having an affair.

Throughout the play Iago is described as an " honest" man, which to the

audience seems ironic because really everything the man says they know to be a lie. Desdemona describes as, " o that's an honest fellow", Othello thinks " This fellow's of exceeding honest," and Cassio too sees him as honest, "... honest iago. " It surprises the audience that the characters are so blind to iago's faults but then we must understand that he has never done anything that could make them doubt him.

He is an idyllic picture, a man who is loyal and trustworthy, they could never imagine that he is capable of deceit. iago's effectiveness at noticing innocent situations and making them look suspect is another way in which he gets Othello to believe in Desdemona's unfaithfulness. When Othello first enters the room at the start of Act III Scene III, Cassio hurriedly leaves the room after speaking with Desdemona. Cassio does this completely innocently, he leaves because he doesn't want to annoy Othello any more than he has already, he feels disgraced and is ashamed, and he cannot face Othello.

iago successfully twists this situation- " That he would steal away so guilty like- seeing you coming. " iago explains Cassio's guilt as that he has been sleeping with Desdemona. Of course the reader knows that is not true, but to Othello, the way that he hurries away, once pointed out to him by iago, does look very suspicious. This is even more enhanced in Othello's mind when immediately afterwards Desdemona starts defending Cassio and pesters Othello to re-instate him. This combined with iago's perverting of the situation looks very abnormal to Othello.

Iago convinces Othello that Desdemona is sleeping with Cassio by very through very calculated steps. In each instance he builds on Othello's insecurities and his trust in him. He is successful in commanding the lack of evidence to his own advantage. Othello trusts Iago as he sees him as a loyal subject. Iago starts by questioning Cassio and Othello's relationship. He does this by asking suggestive questions, " Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady know of your love? " By doing this he is making Othello consider their past and what effect it could have on the present.

When Othello questions him further he refuses to answer a question directly. " Honest my lord? " By doing this it is as if he is trying to protect Othello, by keeping something from him. This will make Othello want to know the truth even more as it is human nature to be curious; after all we all want to know details especially if you know that really you shouldn't hear it. For Othello to believe in what Iago is about to tell him Othello must trust him. Iago needs to know that his news will not be instantly dismissed, he does this by the affirmation of his love. " My lord you know I love you".

This is his basis, if you genuinely trust someone you believe in what they tell you. Othello and Iago had fought together in wars and it is most likely that they had often held each other's lives in their hands. So Othello would never believe that Iago would turn against him so suddenly, especially as for the large majority of the play, Iago looks to be nothing more than a completely loyal servant to Othello. He refuses to tell Othello what he's thinking. " Utter my thoughts? Why say they are vile and false? " He doesn't want to say

anything bad or untrue, after all he is Othello's loyal servant and would not want to hurt him.

He also doesn't want to leave himself out for blame by playing this way he can say that Othello pressurised the information out of him even when he wasn't sure it was true. Iago is good at planting ideas. "O beware my lord of jealousy". Iago suggests what Othello should be thinking and feeling. Even if Othello wasn't previously jealous because maybe he didn't believe fully, now Iago has told him exactly what he should be feeling. By warning Othello has in fact put it in his utmost mind. Iago plays on the fact that Othello is not of Venetian society.

He explains that there are differences in social attitudes. "In Venice they do not let God see the pranks they have not shown their husbands". Othello cannot question this as he is from a different background and already feels compromised. Although when in Venice, he appears to be a strong-minded character, proves to have low self-esteem, this low opinion of himself may stem from being racially self-conscious. But some may argue that race would not have been an issue, it is more to do with the fact that he comes from a different society, an outsider who knows little of how their expectations.

Although no mention is ever made of it, Othello views himself as different, which he is, from the rest of Venetian society. It was shock to everyone and probably even Othello that one of the most eligible women in Venice has fallen in love with him. So when Iago starts telling Othello of a relationship between Cassio and his wife, the rumours about Desdemona and the fact

that she had refused men of higher status than Othello, " Not to affect many proposed matches of her own clime, complexion and degree... " he believes it may be true.

Also he reminds Othello of what her father said when he first found out about Desdemona planning to marry Othello without his consent- " Look to her Moor, if thou hast eyes to see: She has deceived her father and may thee". To which Othello replies " My life upon her faith". Much of Othello deals with pride and reputation, for Othello now to hear about Desdemona's unfaithfulness, after he replied so convincingly that he trusts her completely, would certainly start to worry him. After all, if what Iago had been telling Othello was true, then Othello had been made to look a complete fool by Desdemona in a very short period of time.

Iago often uses very crude language and often refers to animal imagery. He belittles Othello and Desdemona's relationship, regarding it in its most instinctive form, a sexual relationship, "... you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse;" Othello however approaches it as serious and loving relationship, "... Nor to comply with heat the young affects in me defunct and proper satisfaction; But to be free and bounteous to her mind. " That is why the audience is particularly amazed that Othello resorts to animalistic images too. Othello refers to Desdemona as " haggard", a hawk that cannot be tamed.

He also refers to himself as a " toad"; this is a far cry from the man who stood in front of the Duke and other important men of Venice declaring his

love. Shakespeare uses this technique to show us that Othello has lost his confidence and is no longer self-assured. As he becomes more and more angry his control through his speech begins to slip, no longer does he speak in long flowing sentences but now in exclamations, which hints at his loss of capability to loose his temper. He is also speaking in a similar way to Iago, This may symbolise that he has come to think in the same manner.

These images show us the depth of Othello's jealousy, the woman he loved he now disparage. When Othello begins to fall into the trap that Iago has set out, there is only one thing that would convince him completely. The principal method that Iago uses to convince Othello of Desdemona's infidelity is by using one of Othello's most treasured possessions and telling Othello that his wife, Desdemona has given it away to her lover, Cassio. The handkerchief was the first gift he gave to Desdemona, so it possesses enormous sentimental value to Othello. Finding out that Desdemona has given it away shows her as inimical.

It must have hurt and angered him, after all the woman he loves and is married to has given away without a care for him, would almost certainly anger him, for in Othello's mind she has thought the handkerchief to be a meaningless piece of cloth. Iago tells Othello that he saw Cassio wiping his mouth with it, much like a rag. " I know not that; but such a handkerchief- I am sure it was your wife's- did I today. See Cassio wipe his beard with". This enough proof for Othello to be convinced that Iago is telling the truth and for him to kill both Desdemona and Cassio.

Within these three says let me hear thee say that Cassio's not alive. " And, " I will withdraw to furnish me with some swift means of death for the fair devil. " The fair devil refers to Desdemona. This oxymoron suggests that Othello still sees her as divine and yet he has lost his faith in her. Of course, the main way Iago fools Othello is by pure luck. That luck being that a lot of the things that Cassio and Desdemona say and do fall right into the trap and further convince Othello of a relationship between the two of them. When he first sees them together and Cassio scurries away, Iago jumps on the opportunity.

Another example of this is found further on in the play when by controlling the circumstances Iago gets Cassio to talk disparagingly about Bianca, while Othello thinks the conversation is about Desdemona. The luck of this situation is gargantuan; one mention of the name Bianca and Othello would realise that Cassio was really speaking about her, fortuitously for Iago, Cassio does not mention Bianca's name once in the entire conversation. Shakespeare often presents the true feelings of the characters through soliloquies.

Through Iago's soliloquy we see that Iago is an opportunist and amoral. The Moor already changes with my poison... " This line shows that Iago's plan is having the desired effect. Other characters in Shakespeare's plays have shown conscience to the fact that they are doing wrong, and have felt some remorse, we can see this in Macbeth's soliloquy, " First, as I am his kinsman and his subject, strong both against the deed; then, as his host, who should against his murderer shut the door, not bear the knife myself. " But Iago

shows no wavering, he is convinced that this is the right thing to do, " Burn like the mines of sulphur," he wants Othello to fall from grace as revenge for instating Cassio over him.

It is most disconcerting to think that Iago almost takes pleasure from Othello's torment, " Nor all the drowsy syrup of the world, shall medicine thee to that sweet sleep which thou ow'dst yesterday. " Othello is the typical " tragic hero" that Shakespeare incorporated in many of his works, a man who sets out to do his very best, but through one flaw he is brought down. This has an enormous effect on the audience. The audience know that he is a good man, but circumstances are working against him, leaving the audience frustrated at his own idiocy for not realising and making the amendments.

Often as the audience we feel like screaming at him for being so blind to the facts, we are drained of our emotions. Shakespeare intended this; he used the ancient Greek method of Catharsis. Shakespeare had to make the main character likeable enough for the audience to warm to him and suffer his pain, but still make sure that in the end his tragic flaw shone through.

Othello's main flaw is his jealousy. Othello's other flaws are pride and gullibility. Iago however can not be blamed for everything; he did not murder Desdemona nor kill Othello.

The characters must have a motive of their own and therefore is there not a basis for Othello to be pushed into murdering his wife? Many would say that by removing Iago the couple would live happily ever after, but mustn't there be a reason for why Othello was pushed so readily into murder. Othello acts

like a confident man when in Venice, he has the support of his wife and men like Cassio. Remove the safety of that support and you would find a man alone in a foreign country which has different values and expectations, maybe in reality Othello knew that he could not belong in Venetian society and not with Desdemona.

Our view of Othello progresses as the play develops. The first mention of Othello is by Iago; he presents him to the audience as someone with poor judgement as he has promoted the wrong person and through repellent sexual images, as someone grotesque. Yet others, like the Duke see Othello as "... valiant..." From the beginning Othello is authoritative and confident, but without the knowledge that Desdemona is faithful to him, he collapses. Othello's lack of judgement is shown when he lets suspicion of Desdemona having an affair with Cassio take over his mind, stopping all rational thought.

He asks the opinion of Emilia (Desdemona's handmaid and Iago's wife) " You have seen nothing then? " Even though she replied " Nor ever heard, nor ever did suspect" he does not believe her because his poisoned mind can't accept it. This is an issue that reigned in the Elizabethan times, people of his social status could not lose their power, it disrupted the hierarchy and made those below them feel uneasy. Society was very structured and those at the top would have a ripple effect on everyone below. We also notice in Shakespeare's plays that the tragic hero is always a man of position, Kings, noble men or army officials.

This is so that they have a position to fall from, there would be no point in having an ordinary man in a story like this, the tragic hero is meant to be almost perfect, but not quite. This can be linked to the tragic hero King Lear; he is far too trusting and divides his country between his two treacherous daughters, which inevitably leads to his death. Through King Lear Shakespeare looks at madness and through the character of Othello he shows us how the people we surround ourselves with can create this.

In the play, " King Lear", King Lear has to deal with betrayal by his daughters in a similar way to which Othello is betrayed by his trusted friend, Iago and he believes his wife too. Like Othello Lear looks for justice instead of the revenge that Iago seeks. " It shall be done; I will arraign them straight. Come, sit thou here most learned justicer. "(King Lear, Act 3 scene 6) it indicates that a desire of order and justice is starting to replace the chaos and thoughts of savage revenge in Lear's mind; it marks the start of his journey away from insanity.

This insanity is similar to what Iago creates in Othello, he creates jealousy and through that chaos. All of the main themes are present in Act III Scene III. The fight of good against evil is represented in Othello's struggle with Iago. The theme of chaos versus order is shown through Othello's gradual recede in anguish. Othello's overpowering jealousy blinding him from the truth and Iago's revenge which bring about the chaos and evil. Despite wanting to kill his wife Othello's love for her still remains.

In his soliloquy before killing Desdemona he states his love for her, however Othello thinks murder is the only punishment worthy of betrayal " yet she must die, else she'll betray more men". Othello's jealousy is now at peak level, he still can't show rational thought and is blind about the true horror he is about to do. Even when he speaks to her and she denies ever giving Cassio the handkerchief he doesn't believe her, " Yes, presently; therefore confess thee freely of thy sin; for to deny each article with oath cannot remove nor choke the strong conception that I do groan withal.

Thou art to die. " It is ironic that Othello believes every lie that Iago fed him and yet cannot believe a single truth that the woman he loves tells him. " I never did offend you in my life; never lov'd Cassio but with such general warranty of heaven as I might love; I never gave him token. " After killing his bride he is brought out of his trance and realises the mistakes he has made. Iago's scheme is brought out into the open. Emilia brings out the scheme when the truth is told about the true goings on.

At this point in the play Othello's heroic qualities are put on show for the audience once more. " Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice: then, must you speak of one that lov'd not wisely but too well; of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought, perplex'd in the extreme. " Having realised the horror of the situation he takes full blame for his actions and commits suicide and lies next to his beloved bride to die.

Iago is a man who is out for his own gain, and there are many people in our society who are like him. He is a character who knows how to direct

circumstances to his own purpose, unfortunately the other character do not see this and are spun into his web of lies. By luck and tactics like planting ideas and evidence he is able to persuade Othello into thinking that Desdemona is having an affair and get his revenge. Through this catharsis we realise that in Iago Shakespeare has created that ultimate embodiment of evil and malice.