

The psychoanalytic perspective in relation to iago essay sample

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There are a number of perspectives that a critic can use to interpret a work of literature. One perspective, the psychological approach, deals with interpreting the text by using what is known about psychology. Some critics will try and understand the writers while, “ still other critics employ methods of Freudian psychoanalysis to understand not only the writers themselves such as Shakespeare but the literary characters they create” (DiYanni 635). In Shakespeare’s play, “ The Tragedy of Othello,” a critic might want to use the psychoanalytic approach to help understand Iago. To do this, one might look at the characters and their wants, needs, and desires. The will also look at the character relationships to help come up with a psycho-analysis for the characters. The main goal of this approach is figure out why the characters are the way they are, and make assumptions about why they acted the way they did according to psychology.

In Othello, many characters take various actions that might strike the audience as disturbing or odd. Iago is one of the main characters who continually takes stunning actions. In this paper I plan to demonstrate the psychoanalytic approach by analyzing Iago and trying to explain why he might have made some of the actions that he did. I also plan on discussing possible motives for his actions.

Iago is a main character who continuously acts on other characters throughout the play. He could be viewed as a “ master-manipulator.” He continuously tries to make people believe what he wants them to believe. He will make up lies and twist stories for

reasons that sometimes are hard to figure out. Using the Freudian concepts of the conscious and the unconscious I will analyze Iago's behavior throughout the play.

According to Freud, "The unconscious contains all those drives, urges, or instincts that are beyond our awareness but that nevertheless motivate most of our words, feelings, and actions" (Feist 23). Unconsciously, Iago may be taking some of his actions because of some homosexual tendencies. He admits to loving Othello and cries with Othello when he wants Iago to replace Cassio. Iago announces, "Witness that here Iago doth give up the execution of his wit, hands, heart to wronged Othello's service!"

(III. iii. 462-64). This statement helps the reader understand that Iago loves Othello and is willing to give up everything to serve him. Iago also shows little compassion for male-female relationships including his own. He even makes comments about him recently sleeping with Cassio and about Cassio's actions to Othello. Cassio proclaims, "And then, sir, would he gripe and wring my hand, cry 'O sweet creature!' Then kiss me hard, as if he plucked up kisses by the roots that grew upon my lips; laid his leg o'er my thigh, and sigh, and kiss,," (III. iii. 418-22). In reality, Iago could have been fantasizing about being in bed with a man. With these homosexual tendencies, he could have a motive to win over Othello's love.

In contrast to the unconscious, the conscious "can be defined as those mental elements in awareness at any given point in time" (Feist 25).

Consciously he is out to get Cassio because he feels Cassio stole his position

as lieutenant. Therefore, he wants Cassio out of the way and wants Othello to like Iago, himself. He also admits to loving Desdemona and maybe because of this wants Othello and Desdemona's marriage to be doomed. Iago is also aware of Othello's downfalls and personal needs. Iago uses Othello's own psychology to manipulate him, and in response, Othello falls easily to Iago's suggestions. Because of Othello's need for affection and love, Iago puts special attention on this emotion. Iago knows he can enrage Othello by telling him of Desdemona's unfaithfulness. Knowing that Othello had given Desdemona the handkerchief, Iago acts ignorant and tells Othello, "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" (III. iii. 434-46). Iago knows that picturing the sacred handkerchief in Cassio's hands will set Othello into rage. Also Iago gives Othello love and affection to make Othello believe him and to receive Othello's love in return.

Iago tells Othello, "I am your own forever" (III. iii. 476). Othello is also insecure about his heritage, so Iago is sure to play Othello's "blackness" up when shouting outside Barbantio's house. Iago also is aware of Othello's "outside" feeling. Othello feels he is an outsider because of his background and is used to this. Knowing this, Iago keeps Othello outside and acts as a messenger "manipulating messages" to get the response he wants from his prey, Othello. Through Iago's conscious and unconscious motives he takes action to completely manipulate Othello.

Because of Iago, the character of Othello has been manipulated from a noble-warrior to a jealous, outraged savage. Iago used what he knew about Othello's own psychology to make Othello fall so easily to his suggestions. If it wouldn't have been for Iago, Othello may have never killed Desdemona, and the whole plot and theme of the play may have been completely different.

The psychoanalytic approach is especially effective in looking at Iago because he continuously takes action throughout the play and engages in dialogue that can be analyzed to help determine his motives. He acts certain ways to purposely help himself and for a variety of other reasons that may not be seen until looking at his individual psychology.

Bibliography

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