

# Example of the nature of evil and iago essay

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Evil is a force that has been at work in the world since the very beginning of time. Some of the very first deeds in recorded history show the influence of this budding corrosion that began to grow within the human heart almost immediately after creation. The Old Testament tells the story of Adam and Eve, placed in a paradisaical garden and given access to every blessing, only to eat from the only tree forbidden to them. One of their sons (Cain) would kill the other one (Abel) in a simple argument over the acceptability of sacrifices to God. Much of human evil has to do with jealousy; Adam and Eve were tempted by the possibility of being like God, and Cain was jealous of the fact that God had appeared to like Abel's offering more. It was through these simple jealousies that the evil in the world came forth. In Othello, Iago begins as the trusted lieutenant for the Moor. However, his jealousy twists him out of his own character, to the point where the jealousy has taken over him completely. Because of this drastic change, Iago becomes evil, to the destruction of himself and those around him.

If you take the character of Iago out of Othello, all of the conflict falls away. Othello marries his beloved, Desdemona. The entire band of soldiers moves on happily. Instead, a whole host of characters meets an untimely end: Othello, Desdemona, Cassio, Roderigo and Emilia. All of these deaths come from the lies, manipulation, treachery and hatred that Iago spews forth. Ironically, he wants to be known as "honest Iago"; the reality, though, is that he is anything but honest. Each act of the play contains an act of evil that Iago either commits himself or has set up for someone else to commit. One view of evil has to do with a profound lack of morality. Whether or not one views this as a supernatural force or not depends on one's own religious

faith; in the Christian tradition, for example, Satan is viewed as the example of evil, the adversary of God. In the Book of Job, Satan and God take part in a wager to see if a righteous man (Job) will turn his back on God if his prosperity and health are threatened. Because God accepts the wager and kills Job's family (except his wife) and ruins his possessions - not to mention covers him with a rash of sores that itch him so profoundly that he sits and scratches them with shards of pottery. However, Job does not waver, maintaining his faith in God throughout the process. In other paradigms, evil is seen more as a random corollary for human existence. Evil simply happens to people, a sign that life is arbitrary. According to the existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre, hell consists of other people; in his play *No Exit*, Sartre features a room with four people; no one may leave for eternity. The time spent with those others, in close quarters, is what makes hell what it is for the existentialist.

The evil begins at the start of Act I, in which Iago shows his hatred for Othello. Because Othello made Cassio his lieutenant, Iago emerges early on in the play as jealous, feeling that the position should have gone to him instead. His first act of revenge is to tell Roderigo (who had formerly pursued Desdemona) that his former love is marrying Othello. Then he takes Roderigo to visit Desdemona's father (Brabantio) to tell him that the happy couple have eloped. This infuriates Brabantio, who rouses a gang to chase the Moor. Interestingly, when the gang finds Othello, Iago - who had instigated the "grand scheme" (I. i.) - intervenes on Othello's behalf. "Iago's redefinition of love as 'a lust of the blood and a permission of the will' (I. iii. 334) is [not] adequate to the complexity and variety of possibilities

in love," because Iago has a difficult time reconciling the power of lust with the grace of the feminine ideal of the day (Greene). This delusion is just one of the motivations for Iago to unleash evil in the play.

Iago's ultimate plan is to get Othello to believe that Cassio has fallen in love with Desdemona. Then, Othello is supposed to get enraged at Cassio and remove him from his place. The (then) simpering Iago would be in prime position to swoop in and take Cassio's place as Othello's lieutenant.

However, as the play goes on, Iago becomes more and more insistent that the transition take place, and he becomes more and more ruthless to ensure it. He also becomes increasingly subservient to Othello (when he is in his presence). He even tells Othello to beware of jealousy, making one of the crowning ironies in all of Shakespeare: " Oh, beware, my lord, of jealousy! It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock / The meat it feeds on. That cuckold lives in bliss / Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger, / But oh, what damned minutes tells he o'er / Who dotes, yet doubts - suspects, yet soundly loves!" (III. iii. 170-175). The irony, of course, is that jealousy is consuming Iago from within. It will also consume Othello, but Iago is shown to be anything but the calm source of solace that he pretends to be.

Of course, the ruse works. Othello is enraged and jealous of his wife, but he first turns his wrath on Iago. When Iago finds himself at the wrong end of Othello's wrath, he quickly comes up with the story of a special handkerchief. Othello's wife drops this special handkerchief, which is all the evidence that Othello needs to believe his wife to be an adulteress. Iago receives his position of lieutenant and then goes to kill Cassio, while Othello goes to kill his wife. The conflict between Othello and Desdemona is the most complex

of the play. Even though some of the other men in the play have divided the feminine persona into the sexual and the ideal, unable to conceive of a woman as being able to contain both elements. Because of Othello's "marriage and integrity, he cannot assert Desdemona's chastity and corruptibility simultaneously" (Nelly). This means that Othello should be able to see that the same woman can be both sexual and clean, but Iago's machinations blind him to that possibility. The crowning irony is "that Othello himself is the instrument of punishment" for his wife (Newman 153). Ultimately, Othello kills her, but Cassio survives. Once Othello finds out what really happened, he kills himself. Iago, the only villain when the play began, survives (although he now has a death sentence proclaimed upon him by Lodovico).

The evil character has been a source of fascination throughout the history of literature. Whether it is Cain, the brother of Abel who committed the world's first murder on his own brother; Helen of Troy and Paris, whose self-centered love affair results in the burning of an entire city; and such present-day characters as Norman Bates and Hannibal Lecter, whose sheer evil is more a source of intrigue than a source of shame to those who encounter them (and happen to survive). Iago fits squarely within this tradition of characters who commit a mostly inexplicable evil, a series of events incomprehensible and caustic to those around them. This is a common result when evil spreads, though, without the proper sort of counter-argument from those around them. Evil corrodes trust - had Othello simply trusted his wife to be true to him, none of the tragedy would have happened. Iago did use his wiles to lure

allies; Satan is an alluring figure. This is a story as old as time itself; unfortunately, this is a story as new as today's newspaper.

## Works Cited

Bradley, A. C. "Othello." <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/othello/iagochar.html>

Crawford, A. W. "Othello's Relationship with Iago." <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/othello/othelloessay3.html>

Greene, Gayle. "'This That You Call Love': Sexual and Social Tragedy in Othello. In *TITLE OF BOOK*, *EDITOR'S NAME*, ed. *CITY OF PUBLICATION*: *PUBLISHER*, *YEAR OF PUBLICATION*.

Neely, Carol Thomas. "Women and Men in Othello." *William Shakespeare's Othello*, Harold Bloom, ed. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987, pp. 79-104.

Newman, Karen. "'And Wash the Ethiop White': Femininity and the Monstrous in Othello. In *TITLE OF BOOK*, *EDITOR'S NAME*, ed. *CITY OF PUBLICATION*: *PUBLISHER*, *YEAR OF PUBLICATION*.

Vivian, Percival. *A dictionary of Literary Terms*. London: G. Routledge & Sons, 2000.