

Envy in othello essay sample

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In William Shakespeare's *Othello*, desire manifests itself in Iago, compelling readers to see him as if he were a leech; Iago drains Othello of all his moral qualities until he is sucked dry. Similarly, Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* indulges in seeing Antonio sucked dry of money. Both Iago and Shylock are compelled to see their enemies suffer through means that once deprived them, such as Iago being deprived of his rank and Shylock being deprived of money and respect. Although Iago and Shylock both expose their enemies' weaknesses in order to destroy them, Iago's tactics are more effective because Shylock becomes incapacitated by his Jewish heritage.

Iago and Shylock both despise a specific character, introducing their own motivations in the plays. Shylock speaks directly to the audience and mentions how he feels about Antonio as soon as the two characters are introduced with one another: "I hate him for he is Christian" (1. 3. 42). Readers become quickly aware that Shylock is struggling with religious values, pinpointing his explicit reason for holding Antonio in contempt. Mirroring Shylock's hatred, Iago also explicitly states his motivations, although it is directed towards another character instead of the audience, "I retell thee again and again, I hate the Moor" (1. 3. 408). In effect, whom Iago and Shylock speaks to becomes significant; Shylock speaks directly to the audience, showing how he appeals to himself and an entity that cannot help him pursue his goals. In contrast, Iago speaks with Rodrigo, causing his emotions to influence Rodrigo as well: he influences another character that can help him achieve his goals. Furthermore, Iago and Shylock have a major difference in passion; Iago emphasizes his hate through his repetition, "I

retell thee again and again.” Iago continues to intensify his hatred by explaining how his “ cause his hearted; thine hath no/ less reason.

Let us be conjunctive in our revenge/ against him” (1. 3. 409). By describing his motivation as “ hearted,” and describing how his goal is “ revenge,” Iago shows a more passionate personality than Shylock, adding to his effectiveness. He also uses the pronoun, “ us,” strengthening his tactics of bringing down Othello through sheer number. Instead of evoking strong emotions through intensive words as Iago, Shylock’s reasoning lacks passion: “ He lends out money gratis and brings down/ the rate of usance here in Venice” (1. 3. 44). Shylock lacks repetition to create a greater emphasis, and his reasons deal with a more passive reasoning versus the aggressive reasoning Iago uses. By analyzing Shylock’s and Iago’s motivations, it can be reasoned that both of these characters abhor higher powers. Shylock despises Antonio because he is Christian, and in the play, Christians have much more authority than Jews. Shylock tells Antonio of the wrongs that a Christian did to a Jew: “ You spet on me on Wednesday last...you called me a ‘ dog’” (1. 3. 135). Antonio asserts his dominance over Shylock and responds by saying, “ I am as like to call thee so again/ To spet on thee again” (1. 3. 140).

Antonio’s response shows why Shylock hates Christians; not only is it because they treat him poorly, but Christians place themselves in a higher standing to Jews. Analogously, Iago despises both Cassio and Othello because he is envious of their rank and deprived of power, “ In personal suit to make me his lieutenant... I know my price, I am worth no worse a place”

(1. 1. 10). Iago is infuriated that Othello disregards him as a choice for a promotion, and he goes on to criticize Cassio, who is now ranked higher than Iago: “ A fellow almost damned in a fair wife/ that never set a squadron in the field/ Nor the division of a battle knows/ More than a spinster” (1. 1. 22). Iago instantaneously loathes a man who is promoted beyond his rank and his jealousy becomes apparent. Since Shylock and Iago are both motivated to destroy their enemy, they construct their plots by exposing their enemies’ weaknesses. Shylock initially describes his plan by stating how Antonio lends out his money without interest, but then he exposes why he has let Antonio borrow his money, “ To bait fish withal; if it will feed nothing else it will feed my revenge” (3. 1. 52).

Shylock knows if he lends money to Antonio, it will be like bait and succumb Antonio to be at Shylock’s mercy. Shylock takes advantage of Antonio’s pompous personality, in which Antonio claims to “ expect return/ of thrice three times the value of this bond” (1. 3. 170) within two months and decides to intensify the bond, “ Be nominated in an equal pound/ of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken” (161). Not only does Shylock take advantage of his enemy and succumb his enemy to his mercy, but he also shifts the power to his side: a Jew becomes the one in control. In comparison, Iago also exposes Othello’s weakness: “ The Moor is of a free and open nature/ That thinks men honest that but seem to be so/ And will as tenderly be led by th’ nose/ As asses are” (1. 3. 442). He knows Othello is too kind in trusting every man to be an honest man, and Iago takes full advantage of this knowledge to manipulate Othello. Like Shylock, Iago also reverses the power balance, making Iago the one in control. When Othello decides to kill Desdemona, he

tells Iago to bring him poison. However, Iago reversibly commands Othello to “do it not with poison. Strangle her in her bed” (226).

As Othello obeys, the play shows Iago’s rise to power from taking advantage of Othello’s weakness. Although Iago and Shylock both rise to power by exposing weakness, they vary in their tactics of destroying their enemy.

Shylock confronts Antonio about the wrongs Antonio has committed against Shylock and clearly tells him the terms of the bond, “if you repay me not on such a day/ In such a place, such sum or sums as are/ Expressed in the condition, let the forfeit/ be nominated for an equal pound/ Of your fair flesh” (1. 3. 158). Shylock does not hint or add subtle references; he confronts Antonio and tells him what conditions are agreed to in the bond. In contrast, Iago instills ideas into Othello, manipulating his moral mindset: “Othello: Is he not honest?/ Iago: Honest my lord?/ Othello: Honest-ay, honest/ Iago: My lord, for aught I know/ Othello: What dost thou think?/ Iago: Think, my lord?/ Othello: ‘Think my lord?’ (By heaven,) thou echo’st me as if there were some monster in thy thought/ Too hideous to be shown” (3. 3. 115).

Iago begins his instillation of doubt by repeating Othello’s phrase, subtly hinting as if there were something wrong. His tactics are much more effective than Shylock’s confrontation because it causes his enemy to doubt himself, causing an issue of man versus self. From Iago’s first repetition, Othello already stumbles with his words as shown by the dash in “honest-ay, honest.” Furthermore, Shylock is ultimately forced to convert to Christianity and does not receive his pound of flesh from Antonio. The fact that Iago’s method causes Othello to kill both Desdemona and himself shows his

effectiveness. In terms of desire, Shylock desires justice through the law. In the courtroom, Shylock suggests his commitment of revenge through lawful means, “ I crave the law/ The penalty and forfeit of my bond” (4. 1. 213). He uses his bond in order to seek justice through his revenge against Antonio. Differentiating from Shylock, Iago desires his idea of justice through unlawful means. Iago is also motivated by anger and frustration, amplifying his commitment to revenge.

Since Cassio was the one who stripped Iago of his desired rank, Iago commits to murdering Cassio, “ making him incapable of Othello’s place: knocking out his brains” (4. 2. 262). Iago’s aggressive approach shows his disregard for the law, emphasizing the contrast between their own ideas of justice. According to Janet Adelman’s essay, “ Iago’s Alter Ego: Race as Projection in Othello,” she mentions Melanie Klein’s theory of envy, stating that, “ in Klein’s reading of envy, the source and target of rage is not the frustrating or poisonous bad breast but the good breast, and it is exactly its goodness that provokes the rage” (136). Klein’s theory of envy applies directly to Iago, explaining how Iago’s frustration is Othello. However, Iago is not provoked by Othello’s morality, rather, he is aggravated by Othello’s choice in giving Cassio power: Iago is provoked by a loss in authority, not morality. Iago even tells the audience his clear reason why he despises Othello, “ I hate the moor/ And it is thought abroad that ‘ twixt my sheets/ ‘ Has done my office” (1. 3. 429). Othello’s morality leads to Iago’s manipulation instead of Iago’s rage.

Through the analysis of Iago's and Shylock's motivations and tactics, it becomes apparent that Shylock's "Jewishness" has a great impact on determining the success of his goals. Because Shylock is Jewish, he is haunted by it beginning with Antonio's wrongdoings. Although this becomes Shylock's motivation, he is once again incapacitated by it from the court. Portia even instills a false hope for Shylock at first, "there is no power in Venice/ Can alter a decree established/ Shylock: A Daniel come to judgment!" (4. 1. 226). In effect, the false hope creates a greater destruction for Shylock as he receives the true judgment. Not only does Portia's false decision show how Shylock's Jewishness condemns him, but it also suggests that Jews can be manipulated by a moral character as well. Portia continues her sentence by adding to her manipulation, "take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh/ But in the cutting it, if thou dost shed/ One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods/ Are by the laws of Venice confiscate/ Unto the state of Venice" (4. 1. 322).

Portia uses the word, "Christian," to describe the blood, insinuating the idea that there can only be one type of blood that cannot be spilled. Her dialogue even suggests that if the situation was reversed and Shylock's flesh was on the line, it may be acceptable for him to lose it. Adding to Shylock's condemnation of being a Jew, he is stripped of half of his property and forced to convert to Christianity. In comparison to Iago, Shylock's Jewishness is a form of weakness, in which he is powerless to act further even when he abides by the law. Envy differentiates itself from desire because being envious refers to resenting another person because of their possessions. It is significant to understand Shylock's and Iago's sources of envy, because then

it can be concluded that the play suggests envy leads to destruction.

Although their tactics of exposing weakness lead to one form of success, both Shylock and Iago were stripped of property and liberty: Shylock through his conversion and confiscation, Iago through his imprisonment. If envy becomes its purer form of desire, motivations can then be cleansed to influence moral action.

Works Cited

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