

Othello

Literature, Russian Literature



William Shakespeare's play Othello is one of his four great tragedies written during the early part of the seventeenth century. In this play, he writes about adultery, jealousy, and deception; as a result, a triangle forms around three primary characters: Othello, Iago, and Cassio. Their lack of communication causes a rivalry among the three men which leads to betrayal at the hands of one man, Iago. Iago is the villain of the play whose hunger for power motivates him to betray others.

He is upset with Othello's decision to give the honor of lieutenant to Cassio who he describes as an inexperienced and unproven man far removed from the grit of battle. His feelings of resentment escalate into a plan to destroy the bond between Othello and Cassio, with the intention of winning Othello's trust. Othello's vulnerable nature allows him to trust Iago and not think for himself; furthermore, he believes Iago gives him even more power and control over his thoughts.

Iago speaks of Othello this way: "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 the nose / As asses are" (I. 3. 381-84). The one thing Iago does not do is ask Othello why he did not choose him for his Lieutenant. Instead, he sees that the only way to succeed is to destroy Cassio's reputation. Iago's plan is to destroy Cassio by implicating him in an adulterous affair with Othello's wife Desdemona; the idea stems from a rumor that Othello has slept with Iago's wife. Iago will place the same suspicions into Othello's mind hoping to break the bond.

Iago says, "The better shall my purpose work on him. / Cassio's a proper man. Let me see now— / To get his place, and to plume up my will / In double knavery—How, how? —Let's see— / After some time, to abuse Othello's ear / That he is too familiar with his wife" (I. 3. 374-78). Cassio is a naive character who plays into everything Iago wants him to do without even realizing he is being betrayed. Iago convinces Cassio to drink; through this simple action—by allowing himself to get drunk—he makes a fool of himself and subsequently has his title as Lieutenant stripped.

Iago advises Cassio to recover his rank by going to Desdemona. She is kind, he knows, and will accept the opportunity to sway her husband to make amends with his Lieutenant. Iago uses Othello's jealous nature and personal insecurities to convince him of Desdemona's infidelity. Iago questions Othello as to why she is defending Cassio, and the reader finds that Iago will betray anyone he can in order to carry out his plan. In order for Iago's plan to be successful, he needs ocular proof of an affair between Desdemona and Cassio.

With proof, Othello will finally realize his suspicions of his wife's disloyalty are real. Iago's planting of the handkerchief in Cassio's room is the ultimate betrayal. When Othello demands visible proof of Desdemona's infidelity, Iago insists that he has seen Cassio with the handkerchief. Othello vows revenge and, in return, Iago vows to Othello "I am your own forever," expressing his love and desire to serve him (III. 3. 482). Iago again shows that he will do anything for Othello's love and respect. Iago is a manipulator of people who betrays the trust of others.

He forms a triangle between Othello, Cassio, and himself. He portrays himself as the mediator and Cassio as the object of desire to destroy. The handkerchief that Othello gives to Desdemona as a token of his love is also used to prove her guilt. Thus, Iago provides the reader with a number of motives for his anger to include not being chosen as Othello's lieutenant and rumors of a sexual affair with Iago's wife. Shakespeare's play brilliantly shares with the reader the outlook on one man's obsession for a title.