

# The shakespeare's use of imagery in villainy and deceit portrayal in othello

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



Othello is an exploration of the villainy and deceit of one's own mind and its power to manipulate the psyche to be overcome by jealousy and motivated to take devastating and irreversible actions. Shakespeare deals with these ideas through the representation of Iago as a poisonous alter-ego of Othello and symbolic of his insecurities. Through this parasitic imagery Shakespeare deconstructs the root causes of the villainy and deceit of one's own mind and examines the manipulative nature of the subconscious which can often not be realised until too late. This message is communicated to audiences throughout all contexts effectively, via an array of literary devices especially imagery, which increases audience interaction by captivating them. Iago and Othello are individual characters in the traditional sense, having individual roles, motivations and emotions which are clearly delineated. This is however perhaps only for dramatic necessity as they can also be interpreted as a composite character later on in the play, when the contrasting natures of Iago and Othello - especially their weaknesses - fit into each other like a two piece jigsaw puzzle. Iago is the devil within Othello, the voice of his insecurities who he increasingly listens to as the "pestilence" progresses to dominate his psychology. Indeed in some reproductions of the tragedy, Iago and Othello are cast by two actors perched on each others backs, like a two-headed monster. Shakespeare provides sufficient evidence that allows this interpretation: Iago proclaims "I am your own forever" to Othello after the schemes of killing Desdemona and Cassio hints at something far more fundamental than duty. As Iago gradually "pours this pestilence into his ear", the dialogues between the two characters overlap and interrupt to such

an extent that it seems to be the performance of the ravings of a singular mind at war with itself.

This is most noticeable in the beginning of Act 4 where the tone of the conversation between the two lends itself to being read as a madman dealing with his own inner turmoil. This tone primarily comes about through Iago and Othello finishing each other's sentences and frequently interrupting each other, as well as the duality of the content each character - or now alter-ego - mentions. The passage reflects Othello's persistently changing perspective as he gradually becomes consumed by jealousy. It is representative of someone who has lived too long in his own mind, surrounded by insecurities which leads to forming a false view of reality ending ultimately in the villainous act of murder. On one level Iago is a villain who plays with Othello's insecurities, on another he is a part of Othello's brain where those insecurities are housed. Iago subtly brings up to the conscious mind of Othello that he is an outsider, a trigger which approximates the subconscious self-doubts of Othello.

For example Othello is first unaware of any existing racism, declaring " my perfect soul/Shall manifest me rightly". He does not believe that discrimination will have any determination on his fate. However Iago starts planting seeds of doubt about Desdemona's nature. He says " Her will ... may fall to match you with her country forms" implying that she is comparing Othello to white venetian men such as Cassio and regretting her marriage. This fits perfectly with Othello's fear of not being smooth talking like other venetians . These poisonous, deceitful seeds of jealousy grow to

become what takes over Othello. Shakespeare explores this power of insecurities even to becoming one's own villain. This is expressed through Othello's shift from verse to prose, most noticeable in act 4 scene 1, where just prior to falling into a trance he starts speaking in prose. This signifies his demise and fall from the status he held previously, which is caused by the dominance of negative emotions.

This corruption of the mind is also expressed with the motif of poison and pestilence, the ever increasing reference to this theme is significant in portraying the power of one's own mind to manipulate behaviour. Imagery like the metaphor " dangerous conceits are in their natures poison" provides an accurate analogy for what Shakespeare is describing and is a form of logos which helps the audience in understanding the situation and prompts them to examine their own life to determine if they too have become victims of manipulation by any hidden and lingering villainous and deceitful thoughts. As modern readings of Othello have shown, issues such as racism which the play brings up have only become more relevant to today's society. The play therefore has a textual integrity which resonates in both modern and Elizabethan contexts.

Iago is portrayed throughout the tragedy as a duplicit villain, as he himself admits " I am not what I am". He is not the " Honest Iago" as he is often referred to, rather he is the manifestation of evil, the villain: the monsters of Othello's mind that imply and discreetly bring up his worst nightmares. Iago represents the manipulative nature of the subconscious. Shakespeare's use of dramatic irony and oxymoronic statements, such as in the aforementioned

quotes and when Othello states in a soliloquy “ This fellow’s [Iago] of exceeding honesty” to highlight the importance of the mind tricking itself. Shakespeare’s use of imagery, especially the creation of two characters who represent a single mind is an effective tool in portraying unusual ideas about villainy and deceit and allows for audiences to gain a better understanding of their own psychic frailty.