

# How does shakespeare present disturbed characters? essay sample

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Othello is a tragic hero whose jealousy is cleverly manipulated by the maleficent Iago, transforming him from a noble figure to a disturbed murderer. In keeping with the tragic genre, Shakespeare depicts a sequence of events through which bring about Othello's decline. The playwright slowly escalates the emotional intensity of the play as Othello becomes more obsessed and less rational. The audience experience a range of emotions as the emotional escalation created is at last over.

At the beginning of the play, Othello is considered as a very respectable man and is even referred to as a Moor, which shows his strong authority. In Act 1 Scene 3 however, we find Othello in a council room in Venice in front of the Duke, senators and officers with a concern about his marriage with Desdemona. In this scene, Othello is a highly respected man who has been promoted to a high office, despite the prejudice he has encountered. In the court he states that he is not a good talker when he says 'Rude am I in my speech'; which shows that he is an honest and valued man. However he is eloquent speaking in iambic pentameter, and is in fact a great speaker. Throughout this scene, it is discovered that Othello and Desdemona had run away together to get married. Brabantio, whom is Desdemona's father, does not approve of this, and accuses Othello of drugging his daughter and using witchcraft on her to make her fall in love with her. Brabantio makes many crude comments such as "Against all rules of nature, and must be driven to find out practices of cunning hell" and "Or with some dram, conjured to this effect, he wrought upon her" and "To fall in love with what she feared to look on".

All of those negative and hurtful comments are the accusations that Brabantio used against Othello. He states that there is no real love there, and that Othello has surely tricked Desdemona into loving him. However Othello is restraint and remains calm and doesn't retaliate to Brabantio's accusations. Othello simply explains how he and Desdemona fell in love, and that what they feel for each other is true. He explained how he used to be invited round Brabantio's and would tell him stories of his tragic, yet heroic past, and how Desdemona used to listen. He explained how Desdemona came to love him for the dangers that he had survived, and he loved her for feeling such strong emotions about him. " Would Desdemona seriously incline."

He explains how he used no witchcraft and only took the subtle hints that she made. " I saw Othello's visage in his mind". This shows how strong and spiritual the love is that they share, and how it is not based on sexual desires, they are simply in love with each other's minds. Brabantio finally gives in as he is told that Othello and Desdemona are truly in love and realises that nothing he could do or say would influence their relationship. When the audience realise that Othello is true to his words, this increases their respect for him as his fundamental goodness is present. It also helps the audience to feel Othello's emotions throughout the play, such as at the end when Othello is sorrowful as these qualities diminish.

In Act 2 Scene 3 we see how Iago is trying to persuade Cassio to have a drink, knowing that he gets drunk very easily. " But one cup! I'll drink for you." Cassio is very reluctant, but then decides to have a cup. When Iago

sees that Cassio is drunk, he sends Roderigo, whom is in love with Desdemona, after Cassio. Suddenly Cassio re-enters, angrily pursuing Roderigo. Montano, (the Governor of Cyprus before Othello) try's to restrain Cassio. " Come, come, you're drunk." Cassio is enraged and strikes Montano with his sword. Othello later enters and attempts to find out how the brawl started, he deals justly with Cassio and dismisses him as his lieutenant, " Cassio - I love thee, but never more be officer of mine." Othello feels betrayed by Cassio; he has lost his friendship and support because of a shameless affray and is forced to make Cassio suffer his punishment by losing the high reputation that he has earned. Later on in the play, during Act 3 Scene 3, we see how Iago starts to undermine Othello's faith in Desdemona; Iago realises that his earlier plan was a success and how easy it was to manipulate Cassio.

He is intent on destroying Othello, and so plans to continue his cunning strategy in order to do so. Iago takes his opportunity and arouses Othello's suspicions about Desdemona and Cassio's relationship by saying that he doesn't like seeing Cassio and Desdemona together; " Ha! I like not that." Iago continues to seem reluctant to tell Othello what he is thinking; he soon introduces the subject of reputation and warns Othello to beware of jealousy, by pragmatically implying that he has something to be jealous of. This has a huge effect on Othello, and brings about his downfall; it takes only the slightest prompting on Iago's part to put Othello into the appropriate frame of mind to be consumed by jealousy.

Iago later explains to Othello that it is good to live in ignorance as a cuckold, "That cuckold lives in bliss who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger." This implies that Desdemona is in fact deceitful as substantiated by her father earlier in the play, "She did deceive her father, marrying you". After these false accusations that Iago has made about Cassio and Desdemona's relationship, Othello is deeply confused. He had never noticed there to be anything between Cassio and his wife up until now. He is very quick to believe ill of his wife and curses the day that he married her. Othello even chooses to believe Iago's words over his very own wife due to the fact that they were living in a patriarchal society, whereby men are the decision-makers and hold positions of power and prestige, they have the power to define reality and common situations.

Later on in scene 3, we see how Othello becomes verbally aggressive towards Iago. As Iago gleefully plots to plant the handkerchief in Cassio's room, Othello enters and flies into a rage. Othello declares that his soul is torment, and that it would be better to be deceived completely than to suspect without proof. "Farewell the tranquil mind! Farewell content!" Othello is in agony after having been driven to believe that Desdemona is unfaithful, he angrily turns on Iago, demanding for proof or visual evidence that Desdemona is adulterous. "Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore!" This is the first time in the play where we actually see Othello lose control of himself and using bad language, this comes as an astonishment to much of the audience as up until this point, Othello has always been seen using refined elegant words. He shows how his mind is being demoralized

with the way in which his language has become corrupt. Later on in this scene, Iago reveals that when he and Cassio used to share a room, he often heard him saying Desdemona's name in his sleep.

This story enrages Othello, and Iago reminds him that it was only Cassio's dream. Iago then claims to have witnessed Cassio wiping his beard with the handkerchief that Othello first gave to Desdemona as a love token. Furious, Othello cries out for blood. "I'll tear her all to pieces!" He kneels and vows to heaven that he will take his revenge on Desdemona and Cassio. Earlier on in the play, Othello's rejection of Desdemona's offer of her handkerchief is an emphatic rejection of Desdemona herself. He tells her he has a pain "upon" his forehead and dismisses her handkerchief as "too little" to bind his head with, implying that invisible horns are growing out of his head. Horns are the traditional symbol of the cuckold, a husband whose wife is unfaithful to him. Othello's indirect allusion to these horns suggests that the thought of being a cuckold causes him pain but that he is not willing to confront his wife directly with his suspicions. At the end of this scene, the handkerchief is dropped on the floor and left, where Emilia, Desdemona's companion and Iago's wife, picks it up and takes it to Iago; as he had demanded her to do so multiple times.

In Act 3 Scene 4 Othello demands to see the handkerchief, which has been taken by Iago and placed in Cassio's room, as if to give the impression that Desdemona gave it to Cassio. Othello is outraged when Desdemona is not able to produce it, he storms out and is so blinded by jealousy that he accepts Iago's lie as the strongest possible evidence that Desdemona is

unfaithful. Shortly after, in Act 4 Scene 1, Othello is told by Iago that Cassio said how he had slept with Desdemona. Othello is mentally imbalanced at the thought that Desdemona is having an affair. He briefly falls down in a trance. “ Lie with her? Lie on her? – We say lie on her when they belie her. – Lie with her! Zounds, that’s fulsome!” Due to shock, he has an epileptic fit. Iago continues, and makes sure that Othello overhears a bawdy conversation about Cassio and Bianca. Othello believes that the conversation is about Desdemona and Cassio. Meanwhile, Othello is recalled to Venice, and Cassio is ordered to take over his position in Cyprus. Othello reacts violently to this news, and insults and hits Desdemona in the presence of Lodovico the Italian envoy. The jealousy that has been building up inside him has driven Othello to the brink of insanity, and his loss of self-control.

Later on in the play, in Act 4, we see how Othello has taken Iago’s advice and decided to strangle Desdemona later that night. “ Do it not with poison. Strangle her in bed, even the bed she hath contaminated.” Seeing the handkerchief and listening to Cassio had finally convinced Othello that Desdemona and Cassio were having an affair. He resolves to kill Desdemona, although he still loves her. Meanwhile Iago volunteers to kill Cassio. During Act 4 Scene 3, Othello tells Desdemona to go to bed and to dismiss Emilia for the night, as he carries out his plan to murder her. The audience can tell from this point how emotionally disturbed Othello must be if he is prepared to murder a woman whom he still truly loves. Othello enters Desdemona’s room while she is asleep; and though she is beautiful, and appears innocent, he still is determined to kill her. He justifies this with images, metaphors, and

ideas of her rebirth after death, and though his rage is softened, he is still much mistaken about her. Desdemona awakens, and he tells her to repent of any sins before she dies; she believes there is nothing she can do to stop him from killing her, and continues to assert her innocence.

Othello tells her that he found her handkerchief with Cassio, though Desdemona insists it must not be true; she pleads with Othello not to kill her right then, but he begins to smother her. Othello's farewell to Desdemona is a return to his former eloquence, though it is also a farewell to his own peace and his life. Nonetheless he believes Desdemona's soul to be black, he can only focus on her whiteness; he pledges not to ruin "that whiter skin of hers than snow," although he is determined to take her life. The metaphor highlights Desdemona's innocence, as does comparing her to a "light" to be put out. There is irony in Othello's references to Desdemona here; he describes her with words that suggest her brightness and innocence, yet he is determined to condemn and kill her. She is also "the rose" to Othello, another beautiful, innocent image to relate her with. Othello's reference to Prometheus explains his wish to put out Desdemona's light in order to restore her former innocence; even when the act of murder is drawing near, Othello seems intent upon dwelling in beautiful images and poetic metaphors to hide the ugliness and wrongness of his deed. And where before Othello felt only hatred and anger, now he is forced to feel his love, along with his mistaken determination to see Desdemona die.

In conclusion, it is evident how delusional Othello has become as he is driven to the brink of insanity by murdering his wife, whom he still feels strongly



for. It is apparent throughout the play how jealousy can lead to obsession, with the way in which Iago cleverly manipulates Othello into believing that Desdemona had been unfaithful towards him.