

# Language: the fatal weapon in othello

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



Language is especially tricky because of all the possibilities it can manage. “Be quiet” versus “Shut up” is one example of the power that language holds. Rumors are another example of how powerful language can be when it passes through a certain set of ear lobes; some people are shattered by the rumors floating around about them. Othello is a play that takes the intricacies of language—the way something is said versus what is actually being said—to show the dire consequences put into effect when someone hears something a certain way.

The following three passages will examine how language hides and reveals something about Othello, Iago and Desdemona, and how it is ultimately the downfall of the characters. Jealous Iago uses language like a cunning fox, hiding behind his words to get to his prey. Othello in turn is easily deceived, himself jealous and paranoid because of the viral words strategically planted throughout. In the third scene of the third act, Iago’s use of language makes him very visible to the audience—by this point the audience is well aware that Iago is jealous of Othello, but eager nonetheless to hide this fact from Othello.

But it is this scene that most reveals Iago to the world, when Iago may not be at all visible to himself. Saying of jealousy, “It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock/The meat it feeds on” (166-167). Iago may be jealous of Othello by this point in the play, but he seems either unaware of it or in denial of it. To speak of jealousy in this way directly to Othello—the object of his envy—is to suggest that Iago may not be fully conscious of his own jealousy.

Perhaps if Iago were to realize what he was saying, he might have changed course and decided against pointing a finger at Cassio. Yet clearly he goes on, “ That cuckold lives in bliss/Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger” (166-168). Iago could very well be describing himself here, ignorant of his own jealousy toward Othello, whom he obviously does not truly love. He is hiding not only from Othello but from himself as well, but psychologically he is rather apparent to the audience, for which Othello will unknowingly kill.

Desdemona’s language reveals her purity even when faced with accusations, even when she is unsure of what exactly she is being accused. When Othello tells her she must die by his hand, when her sins are her love for him, and before he tells her why he must kill her, she says, “ These are portents; but yet I hope, I hope,/They do not point on me” (45-46). She knows he is accusing her of something, but in her pure love for Othello she dares to hope that he is not charging her.

Here she is hiding from herself, knowing full well that, “ Some bloody passion shakes your very frame” (44) means that Othello is indeed pointing on her for some crime. Desdemona’s purity, revealed through her speech, further enrages Othello, for in his jealousy he sees her shock and fear as further proof that he must kill her for dishonoring him and their marriage. The audience, however, is fully aware of Desdemona’s purity and honesty; honesty in the marital sense to Othello, even if she is not honest with herself at this crucial time.

This self-deception reveals how pure her love is by showing how she does become self-righteous or quick to anger and resentment. In the face of an unjustified accusation and obvious mistrust, Desdemona stands her ground in her love, taking her punishment though protesting it, “ That death’s unnatural that kills for loving” (42). Yet she dies for loving. Othello shows through his speech how utterly ignorant and blind he has been throughout the play, “ O vain boast! /Who can control his fate? tis not so now” (264-265).

Here he is resigned to his fate, to falling to his weaknesses despite his obvious strengths, “ Here is my journey’s end” (267). For killing Desdemona he feels incredible guilt, and does not wish to go on. This reveals Othello’s regret, and in turn reveals his acknowledgement of wrongdoing and sorrow at his actions. Othello could very well have stuck to Iago’s story without implicating himself, but through his jealousy he was able to see that Emilia was telling the truth, and for that he is truly sorry.

Language is the fatal weapon in Othello. Jealous Iago uses it to verbally plant seeds of doubt and jealousy into Othello’s mind. Desdemona in turn can say nothing to save herself from Othello’s jealous rage. Othello himself ultimately realizes he was duped by it into killing the woman he loved and who loved him in return. The subtle complexities of language can turn a normally level headed person into a foaming, jealous beast who mistrusts his gut, and Othello was no exception.