

# Coursework on 'othello'

Literature, Russian Literature



A tragic event is a disastrous and dreadful event. A tragedy is usually when someone is killed. A hero is usually a man who is courageous and displays noble qualities; he is perceived by people to be very muscular and strong. So a tragic hero is a person who is an exceptional person, but has a fatal flaw. This is normally exposed and then twisted by the villain. To the audience he is amazing, and so when he is killed it is a tragedy for the audience as the world has lost such an outstanding person, the hero then can no longer contribute to society. In this play the tragic hero is Othello.

He is a tragic hero as he has achieved a lot. He is an outsider, and also is not very young; in addition he is not white, but black. Even though he is all of this he still becomes a general and attracts a very beautiful seventeen year old girl. But he has a flaw; this is his jealousy. This flaw is twisted and exploited by the villain of the play, Iago. As the play goes on we see how jealousy corrupts the mind of Othello, resulting in his death. In this play there are many different themes shaped and formed. These are jealousy, men and women and race and colour.

The main theme represented in this play, is jealousy. There are three main types of jealousy in this play they are professional, sexual and racial.

Professional jealousy is portrayed by Iago in this play as he is jealous of Michael Cassio. This is because he was promoted to lieutenant by Othello and Iago was not. Iago calls Michael Cassio a 'great arithmetician' he shows that he is jealous of Cassio as he is doing better than him even though he is also an outsider. He may have become Othello's lieutenant as he, like Othello, is an outsider.

When Iago says 'A fellow almost damned in a fair wife' he is showing that he is sexually jealous of Cassio as he is more sexually attractive than him and many women like him. This makes Iago feel more hate and jealousy for Cassio. When Iago is talking to Brabantio he says 'An old black ram is tugging your white ewe' this is showing that Iago is racially jealous of Othello. Therefore this shows that Iago is jealous that Othello has married a beautiful and noble, young girl. All of these various types of jealousy felt by Iago in the play lead to terrible tragedies.

The opening scene creates a build up of atmosphere with political and social aspects. The scene begins at night in Venice. Venice was infamous for political intrigue. There were many Machiavellian characters around. It was known to be an amoral place, where the people could not be trusted as they were cunning and sly. The scene is set at night where dark and underhand deeds are covered up, and not seen by the light of day. It begins with two characters, Roderigo and Iago, disputing. Roderigo is fervent to possess Desdemona, with the help of Iago.

They talk about another character who has been appointed by the council, general of the Venetian army. We learn that he is a Moor and an outsider. Also we find out that one Michael Cassio is the lieutenant, a position which Iago craves. Othello in this scene is not referred to by name, and we soon learn that he is hated by Roderigo and Iago. All of this talk about Othello makes the audience anxious to find out about him and meet this quite exceptional person. This causes a mood and atmosphere of curiosity and dramatic tension. In the first scene of 'Othello' Iago is introduced.

This scene is very important as it lays the foundations for the tragedies which develop later in the play. As he is introduced he has a big impact on the audience. He is portrayed in the first scene to be a person who is in control of what he does, and someone who has control over others, and seems to be someone who is ambitious. Iago is brought into the first scene talking to Roderigo. Roderigo begins the dialogue with Iago. In his few opening lines he says 'Iago, who hast had my purse as if the strings were thine, shouldst know of this.'

This shows that Roderigo does not trust Iago about him being able to procure Desdemona, from Othello for him. Also this shows the audience that Iago's services can be bought with money, revealing that he is mercenary.

Furthermore the name Iago sounds Spanish, so to the Stuart audience this would show instantly that he was a malevolent character, as at this time to England the Spanish people were enemies. Following Roderigo's few words, Iago replies with a blasphemous 'sblood' meaning God's blood. This shows his derision for Christ and for Christian values.

This single word would have shocked and surprised the Stuart audience, who were religious. Iago asserts his hate towards the 'Moor' Othello. He says in great detail about Othello 'off-capped to him; I am worth no worse a place. But he, as loving his own pride and purposes, evades them with a bombast circumstance, horribly stuffed with epithets of war.' Here he is telling Roderigo how he despises Othello for not letting him become a lieutenant, instead passing him over for 'one Michael Cassio, a Florentine. Iago then calls Cassio 'a great arithmetician' this is Iago being sarcastic; he is implying

that Michael Cassio has no experience or idea of war. Iago speaks on talking about Michael Cassio by insulting where he is from, saying that he is a 'Florentine'.

He is saying that Cassio the Florentine knows nothing of war. This displays Iago of being racially prejudiced to foreigners and outsiders. This is the same for Othello; there may be a reason to why Cassio was chosen over Iago as Cassio and Othello are both outsiders. Iago comments on Cassio, of being 'a fellow almost damned in a fair wife. This reveals that he may be sexually jealous of Cassio, as many women are attracted to him. Iago continues on, to again insult Cassio even more saying 'that never set a squadron in the field, nor the division of a battle knows more than a spinster, unless the bookish theoretic. ' This shows that he may be upset about being passed over for promotion, and his abhorrence for Cassio. I believe from what I have seen from what Iago says about Cassio, he may feel intellectually inferior to Cassio as he says 'as masterly as he is' suggesting that Iago may feel he has been challenged by someone better and more academic than him.

This is the audience's first sign of professional jealousy. Iago then finally ends this speech with a sardonic phrase of 'his Moorship' this is a derogatory connotation, which is a play on the phrase 'his worship. ' Iago proves to Roderigo just how much he hates Othello, by insulting him and by slandering Cassio. With all of this hatred Iago has he causes the demotion of Cassio, the murder of Desdemona, the suicide of Othello and the downfall of himself. Our visions of Othello are all shaped by what Iago says in his dialogue with

Roderigo. The audience may become doubtful of what Iago says as his views are amoral.

There are important lines from this long speech revealing Iago's real character. But the main theme of this speech is how he hates Othello, and his lack of true loyalty and integrity. Moreover he tells Roderigo his plan and how it will affect him; Roderigo follows Iago foolishly not seeing that he is being used because of his desire to possess Desdemona. This speech also shows how Iago is able to ingeniously manipulate people. He begins to say 'I follow him to serve my turn upon him' this is basically showing how he is only serving Othello to help himself and using it for his advantage.

This shows that Iago is ambitious as he knows what he wants, and does anything to get it. Also he is disloyal and self-serving as he is just getting what he wants out of his actions, and is betraying his so called friend Othello. In addition he is cunning and sly getting exactly what he wants, by deceiving people. He says an important line which is 'heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty' this shows that Iago is not interested in love and does not really care about it. He has no concept of love. This leads to the later point of his attitude towards women in general.

He also says the blasphemous phrase of 'I am not what I am' this shows that he is going against God's words of 'I am what I am.' This shows that he once again is disrespectful of Christian values and of Christ. But this line could also be showing that Iago may have a layer to his character, which is unseen by other people. We can see that what Roderigo says is an echo of how Iago speaks, especially about Othello. We witness Roderigo say a racist comment

about Othello, 'the thick-lips owe. ' This is a phrase which is mirrored from the way Iago addresses Othello.

Iago is manipulating people to become like him, evil. Iago feels he needs to instigate his plan and tells Roderigo to 'rouse Brabantio, make after him, poison his delight, proclaim him in the streets. ' This shows that Iago delights in causing trouble and enjoys stage managing chaos. Roderigo is polite and kind in talking to the senator, getting them nowhere so it is Iago's crude and disgusting descriptions of 'an old black ram, is tugging your white ewe' which make Brabantio irate. The animal imagery here is representing the sexual connection between Desdemona the noble woman with the 'Moor' general Othello.

This sexual reference is then linked with the suggestion of Cassio being 'a fellow almost damned in a fair wife,' and with his job to help match up Roderigo and Desdemona. This shows that Iago thinks of women to be objects, and disregards love. He is unable to understand love, or the relationships between men and women. We can see from this scene that Iago is able to control and manipulate people to his own advantage. From this scene altogether we see that Iago is a cynical malcontent. He is malicious in his acts and crude with his language, he is able to manipulate people for his own needs, and exaggerates situations to his own advantage.

We see how he despises men who wear their hearts on their sleeves, and who don't look out for their own interests. He likes people, who are self-serving, and people who do evil deeds for money, people who are untrustworthy and who pretend to be honest. His speeches in these scenes

are energetic and shocking to many audiences, they are full of egotistical disgust. Furthermore Iago has an underhand way of being absent when actions which he has instigated come to head. Iago is a compelling and sophisticated villain. In this play there are two main scenes where Iago puts his Machiavellian plans in to operation.

Iago's plans are malicious; he puts his plans into action in act 2 scene 3, and in act 3 scene 3. In act 2 scene 3 all of Iago's tactics and ideas become reality. Upon arrival in Cyprus Iago persuades Cassio to have a drink by saying 'come, lieutenant, I have a stoup of wine. ' Cassio keeps on refusing Iago's offers, as he has 'very poor and unhappy brains for drinking. ' But Cassio is not able to resist it, and takes some wine, causing him to become 'full of quarrel and offence. ' Iago perceives this as his chance to instigate his plan. Continuing to manipulate Roderigo effortlessly, he makes him start off a quarrel and a brawl with Cassio.

Cassio gets wound up by Roderigo, as Roderigo gives witty remarks like 'beat me? ' These comments from Roderigo and the fact that he is drunk cause Cassio to get aggravated, and therefore fight. Othello gets alerted by the brawl, and finds Montano and Cassio fighting. Montano is hurt, 'zounds I bleed still. ' Othello asks 'honest Iago' to find out what happened. This is dramatic irony as Othello thinks that Iago is an honest person, whereas the audience knows that he is not, that he is crude and evil. This puts the audience in the position of knowing more than the characters, increasing tension.



Othello dismisses Cassio from his position, and he is demoted, just as Iago wanted. As Cassio is dismissed, Iago gets the chance to take his place, and get access to Othello so he can poison and corrupt his mind with his words. Iago speaks and acts in this scene as if he always has someone else's interests at heart. He enjoys presenting himself in the best possible light. In this scene as Othello is being informed on the brawl by Iago, Iago acts as if he wants to help Cassio, he says to Othello 'I had rather have this tongue cut from my mouth than it should do offence to Michael Cassio. This is all part of Iago's plan to make himself look trustworthy and loyal, towards Othello. He here seems to be reluctant to accuse Cassio.

This is not only to make Iago look loyal, but also to make Othello see how disgracefully his lieutenant has acted. Othello likes to hear the direct truth, even though he appreciates the false 'protection' of Cassio, given by Iago. We see Iago's ingenious and spiteful ideas when he decides to use Desdemona, who is innocent, and who he has no quarrel with, to 'enmesh them all. ' We see how pleased he is in his speech, that he has the intelligence and power to turn Desdemona's 'virtue into pitch. As before we see how Iago dislikes honesty and innocence. Even Iago's wife Emilia, is fooled in thinking that Iago wants to help Michael Cassio. Iago's only loyalty is to himself. Iago's imagery is crude, he will convince Othello that all the meetings that Iago and Desdemona are having, is an affair. He is planting the seeds of jealousy into Othello's mind. He tries to convince him that his wife wants Cassio, and that she will 'undo her credit with the Moor. ' In this scene Iago disrupts Othello's wedding night, and Iago turns Othello against the people he trusted and loved.

Act 3 scene 3 is the pivotal scene where Iago puts his Machiavellian plans into operation. Iago wants Othello to perceive that Cassio is having an affair with Cassio. Iago in this scene once again is pretending to be friends with Cassio. Iago knows exactly how Othello operates, and so he knows how to get inside his head. Iago tries to avoid answering Othello's questions directly. He does this as he knows this builds up suspicion in Othello's mind. He also often imitates Othello's questions as he Othello says 'is he honest. '

Subsequently Iago avoids the question and says 'honest my lord! This is another technique that Iago uses to raise suspicion from 'Othello. Iago when talking to Othello about Desdemona repeatedly reminds him how she had deceitfully behaved, and the painful reminder that he is an outsider. Iago tells Othello that she could have made other 'natural' choices. Iago keeps angering Othello by manipulating and poisoning his mind. Iago tells Othello 'look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio; where your eyes thus, not jealous nor secure. ' He essentially tells Othello to see his wife neutrally, and not to get angry when looking upon her with Cassio.

Another way that Iago tries to persuade Othello is by saying 'she did deceive her father, and when she seem'd to shake and fear your looks. ' Iago here tries to show Othello that she is not loyal and noble, as she already deceived her father by marrying him, because of what she wanted. So Iago is questioning Othello, on what is stopping her from doing it again. Iago pretends to care about Othello as he says 'trust me I fear it has. I hope you will consider what is spoke comes from my love. ' He is telling Othello that he has his best interests at heart.

After Iago knows that the poison he gave to Othello through words has held, and once Othello has become vengeful, he knows he must take the role of being a noble and loyal friend. There is irony here as Othello is seeking to kill Cassio; he is carrying out Iago's revenge for him. WE find out from this scene that Othello is weak and insecure, as the emotion of love that he has for Desdemona loses against Iago's crude language. Othello left alone he wonders 'Why did I marry? ' This shows that he already knows that his wife is false.

He begins to speak of 'the curse of marriage. ' Although he resists Iago's version of Desdemona, it is the fake story of Cassio having a dream about her which breaks him. He returns angry much more angry with his words, but still does not know what to believe 'I think my wife be honest, and think she is not. ' But we see from the crude images conjuring in his mind, and the violence of his speech that Iago is winning. He speaks violently of 'poison, or fire, or suffocating streams. ' He curses 'death and damnation' and says ferociously 'I'll tear her all to pieces. We see here that Iago has fully corrupted his mind, and Othello like Roderigo is beginning to talk with crude and malicious language, just like Iago. Iago's plans in act 3 scene 3 are successful, as he is able to demote Cassio from his position. Iago is able to successfully play a number of roles, and is able to adapt his tone and style to suit any occasion. In this scene Iago acts apparently loyal, and as if he has everybody else's interests at heart. He presents himself as a noble friend to Cassio, and in the best possible light. From discrediting Cassio, Iago is able to get close to Othello.

This then means that he is able to corrupt and poison Othello's mind, with his crude words. The demotion weakens Othello's position, and gives Iago a great advantage to put his wicked plan into operation. As Iago gains access to Othello's mind from Cassio, he is able to use his skills in manipulation, to make Othello see things that are not actually happening. He makes Othello perceive that Cassio is having an affair with Desdemona, and that she is being unfaithful towards him. Also he makes Othello demote Cassio because of a brawl, which Roderigo initiated.

These events, which are stage managed by Iago all lead to the tragic denouement, Othello and Desdemona's deaths. The way he acts in this scene is similar to the way he acts in act 1 scene 1, as he pretends to have Roderigo's interests at heart in act 1 scene 1, and in act 2 scene 3 he acts as if he has Cassio's interests at heart. In both scenes he appears to be loyal to his friends, when he is actually fooling everyone and is only loyal to himself. Also in both of these scenes he is always manipulating people, just to see the downfall of Othello.

Part of Iago's success in act 2 scene 3 lies in the fact that he tells all of his victims exactly what they want to hear, or he uses arguments which would make his victims think like him, in a crude malicious manner. Act 3 scene 3 is the pivotal point in the play because Othello is convinced of his wife's corruption; Othello makes a sacred oath never to change his mind about her or to soften his feelings towards her until he acts out a violent revenge. At this point, Othello is fixed in his course, and the disastrous ending of the play is unavoidable.

Othello swears to Iago that he will kill Desdemona and Cassio. Just as the play replaces the security of peace with the anxiety of domestic strife, Othello replaces the security of his marriage with the hateful paranoia of an alliance with Iago. Iago is the one who causes Othello's downfall, as he sows the seeds of suspicion in his mind. Iago's methods in this scene are more subtle. He pretends to be reluctant to speak. Desdemona keeps irritating Othello, by asking when he will reinstate Cassio. This angers Othello as; he is already suspicious of Cassio having an affair with Desdemona.

Iago persistently acts as if he is protecting Cassio. Othello becomes more and more suspicious from what Iago tells him, and Iago uses 'key' words which get to Othello, for example 'think' and 'honest.' We can see how Iago falsely protects Cassio as he says, 'I think Cassio's an honest man.' Iago is protecting Cassio and not telling Othello the direct truth. This causes Othello to feel more suspicious of Cassio. Iago tells Othello about how Cassio and Desdemona have secretly been meeting, and so when Othello perceives it himself he becomes infuriated.

Othello gives the secret of his downfall to Iago. This is Othello's flaw. Othello says 'when I love thee not, chaos is come again.' The significance is that if Othello stops loving Desdemona he will disintegrate, and crumble to pieces. Iago now has something to act on, and can exploit this feeling, to 'poison' and destroy Othello. Iago's final words in this scene chillingly mock the language of love and marriage: 'I am your own forever.' Iago is a malicious, malevolent and crude person. He is able to manipulate, and twist people's feelings to his own advantage.

He is brilliant at stage managing events, and is capable of hoodwinking others to believe he is honest. When Iago speaks in his soliloquies he is boastful and dismissive. Iago is a very untrustworthy character, as we have seen from how he has fooled everyone to trust him. Iago is a complex character, only himself and the audience knows what he is really like. In this play we see how Iago is able to put his skills of manipulation into act. Many believe he may have a homosexual side and tries to replace Desdemona, but this is only some views as his relationship with Othello is very complicated.

Iago is highly intellectual socially. In this play he is the bringer of death and pain upon many characters, he is like the grim reaper. Iago is partly responsible for bringing death to Othello, but it is not all his fault. It is true that he used his skills to manipulate people, and his ability to 'poison' and corrupt people's minds to bring Othello's downfall, but it is also the faults of the people he manipulated, for being weak minded. Roderigo, who was firstly manipulated, followed Iago as his drive and passion to possess Desdemona got in the way.

Cassio's flaw was that he only became manipulated as he believed Iago was his true friend, and that he was there to help him, he was also too trusting. Desdemona also had a fatal flaw, which was that she could be deceitful; also she loved and trusted Othello to a great extent. Finally Iago's greatest achievement was convincing and manipulating Othello. Othello has the most significant fatal flaw; he had a high amount of jealousy. Iago was able to exploit all of these weaknesses. But the biggest was Othello's which all lead to the catastrophic deaths of Othello and his Desdemona.