

Character of iago

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Shakespeare employs a variety of language, dramatic and theatrical techniques in shaping my understanding of the rather enigmatic yet definitely Machiavellian, character of Iago. Shakespeare reveals him to be a cunning and conniving exploiter and manipulator of other characters who become caught in his web of lies, deceit and evil schemes. Iago is forever the cold, calculating pragmatist who is cynical about anything associated with goodness, such as love, virtue, reputation and honour.

Iago constantly plays the role of 'honest Iago', which is shown by Shakespeare's constant dramatically ironic use of this phrase over twenty-three times. All characters have no hesitation in trusting every word Iago says, and taking everything he tells them to be true. The duplicitous nature of Iago is shown in conjunction with the symbolism of the Roman God, "By Janus". Janus is a two faced God, who perfectly represents the nature of Iago, the two sides, one he only displays to the public and Roderigo and one only displayed to everyone else.

This nature is further emphasised by Iago through his dialogue, "I am not what I am". Similar to this includes the dialogue, "I serve him to serve my turn upon him". The honesty that the other characters believe Iago has, allows him to adapt the personality of cunning, conniving manipulator of people, allowing him to exploit their emotions for his personal uses. He achieves his aims under the pretence of acting to help individuals but really he is egotistical and serves only for himself.

He plays on Othello's "free and open" nature, on his mission to prove Desdemona's infidelity and create the metaphor of the "green-eyed

monster", which both Othello and Iago will nurture. Iago's also gives Cassio "free and honest" advice about asking Desdemona for his position back after his fall from grace, showing again the dramatic irony Shakespeare portrays. Iago also continues to assure Desdemona that Othello's sudden change in mood has nothing to do with Desdemona herself, but instead to do with state business. This further serves him in his plan for Othello's downfall.

Poison imagery by Shakespeare refers to the poisonous effect of words that Iago has caused seen in "The Moor already change with my poison". The Machiavellian villain of Iago is constantly portrayed through the symbolism of hell or Satan throughout the play. "Hell and night/Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light". While this shows Shakespeare's symbolism of white being equivalent to good and dark to evil, it also references the fact that only Iago can bring about this action, or so he believes, and show the world of a crueller Othello.

In the intertextual temptation scene, to that of the Garden of Eden, Iago is playing the traitorous and evil snake convincing Othello to do something which he would have never thought of before. For Iago women are simply a means to an end. They are only needed to fulfil men's sexual appetites and serve the various needs of men. He believes that women are not as intellectual as men and hence their opinion should not be valued nor asked for.

It is of Iago's opinion that emotions can leave one weak and rash decisions come about from those who think with their hearts rather than their heads shown in this dialogue, "If the balance of our lives had not one scale of

reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions". Any man that becomes corrupted by their feelings or the heart in a fool, hence iago does not believe in love of another person. He does however believe in self-love, that is to say iago is the epitome of selfishness.

iago is unable to love another male or female, as a friend or lover. He describes the act of lovemaking with continuous reference to distasteful and crude animal images such as " Goats and Monkeys" or " Black ram" and " White Ewes". iago also employs the use of the symbolism of sexual ' appetites', suggesting that just like food they are something that needs to be regular or often. As seen with Emilia's dialogue " They eat us hungrily and when they are full/ they belch us" The racist iago is also obvious throughout Othello.

He feels resentment and hatred towards Othello because, not only is Othello a general or commander of the Venetian Navy, he has managed to win such a prize as the lovely Desdemona. This is shown through iago's dialogue and comparison of Othello to a " Black ram", " Barbary horse" or having " Thick lips". He also constantly refers to Othello as " The Moor". While this may not have been considered racist at the time, iago does it in such a way that he wishes to alienate Othello from white society. He rarely says the name Othello, and if he does he mentions it with venom and anger towards him. Finally in the last scenes the real iago is revealed.

Through dramatic irony in Emilia's dialogue, Shakespeare shows how the other characters innocence in regard to the man who has convinced Othello

to believe such horrible tales, " I will be hang'd if some eternal villain/Some busy and insinuating rogue/Some cogging, cozening slave to get some office/Have not devis'd this slander. I'll be hang'd else". It appears that " honest iago" no longer exists but instead has been transformed into a " villainous knave". As the situation worsens and the culprit is identified the insults develop into " demi-devil", " damned slave", " Spartan dog" and " notorious villain".

All these terms are juxtaposed to the constant positive emotive terms that have been used to describe iago throughout the rest of the play. Throughout Shakespeare's tragedy Othello, we see the cunning and manipulative character that is iago. Each scene, through Shakespeare's use of theatrical, language and dramatic techniques, as more of iago's cunning plans revealed, more evil within iago is exposed and left goodness or virtue within him. Even in iago's final lines he offers no remorse but only self-satisfaction for the deed he has caused.