

# The role of irony in shakespeare's "othello" assignment

[Art & Culture](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The Role of Irony in Shakespearean "Othello" The most captivating elements of Othello are Shakespearean clever use of literary devices, such as symbolism (I. E. The handkerchief, a symbol of faith and fidelity) and metaphor (Sago's vulgar animal references- Ago tells Barbarian: "... An old black ram is tipping your white ewe" (1. 1. 88)). However, the most prominent literary device throughout the play is Irony, especially surrounding the play's villain, Ago.

The central Irony of the play lies in that Othello, Cassia, and other characters befriend and trust Ago, who, unbeknownst to them, will destroy their lives. Yet, the audience is aware of Sago's malicious intent and the stark contrast of what Ago says versus what he thinks and does. Throughout the piece, while Othello continuously praises Ago for his honesty, Ago manipulates him into believing that Desman has been unfaithful, and the tragic irony of the circumstances lead to Othello murdering his own wife.

Almost most immediately, within the first few scenes of Othello, Sago's deceitful, conniving manner becomes evident. In the opening scene, as Othello asks Sago questions here Sago's loyalties lie, with him or Othello, Ago responds that he must appear to be faithful to Othello, "for love and duty" (1. 1. 62), but, in truth, harbors much hate for him. Ago explains: "I follow him to serve my turn upon him" (1. 1. 35). This is foreshadowing of Sago's plans to betray Othello.

The first instance in which the irony of the play and Sago's treachery become evident to the audience is when Ago convinces Othello to shout beneath Barbarian's window and inform him of his daughter's secret

marriage to Othello. From Rodeo's point of view, Ago is making a bad name for Othello, and if he angers Barbarian enough, he would force Desman to leave Othello, giving Ordering the opportunity to seduce her. However, in truth, Ago shouts crude remarks, yet conceals his identity, making Ordering look like a less than suitable suitor for Barbarian's daughter.

Although Ago was, in fact, the one insulting Othello, essentially referring to him as a sex-crazed beast, once in Othello's presence he lies and states that this was the work of Ordering. On top of that, Ago proclaims his loyalty to Othello by telling him that he was so infuriated with Reordering's insults that he almost killed him. However, Ago claims that he is too good-natured to do such a thing, as he explains his predicament to Othello: "Though in the trade of war I have slain men/ Yet do I hold it very stuff to my service" (1. 2. 1).

Ago attempts to anger Othello by telling him about Redesign's foul name-calling but Othello is not concerned with such trivial matters. This is one of the many scenes which depict the importance of irony in Othello, particularly in relation to these two main characters and who they seem to be and how they are seen by others versus who they truly are. Ago is indeed a villain, finding joy from stroking the egos of those who trust him, yet in his dialogue with others, he makes himself out to be an upright, respectable citizen of society.

While no one doubts what Ago says, his words are only actually truthful in his soliloquies, in which he informs the audience of his true motives. Othello, on the other hand, is a skillful soldier and an admirable man, but is often looked

down upon because he is different than most Venetians, who are of fair complexion. Although Othello doesn't seem to be bother by this, Ago furtively provokes his feelings of inferiority and misleads him to live that Desman has been unfaithful.

Based solely on Othello convictions that Ago is his honest ensign, it makes sense that he would believe Lagos conspiracy- that Desman was in fact having an affair with Cassia. However, this ultimate conviction is ironic based on Othello outstanding faith, at least throughout the first part of the play, in his marriage with his wife. This is evident in Othello conversation with Abortion at the end of Scene 3, when Abortion warns Othello: " Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:' She has deceived her father and now may thee (1. 3. 286)".

Othello responds: " My life upon her faith (1. 3. 286)," meaning that he so strongly believes in Adhesion's loyalty to him that he would stake his life on it. This statement is certainly ironic because Othello does end up dying, taking his own life due to his conviction of Adhesion's betrayal and his ruined reputé as a creditable leader. Many more ironic parallels concerning Othello relationship with Desman occur as Sagas scheme grows more and more vivid and Othello quickly transforms from a powerful, respectable general, into a Jealous, enraged man.

Othello is accused of using black magic to seduce Desman. He denies this claim, and convinces the Duke that he won Adhesion's heart with stories of bravery and his love for her. Later in the play, Othello personality transformation is unmistakably evident when, in regards to the handkerchief

he gave Desman, he states that " Its true, there's magic in the web of it" (3. 4. 81). Othello statement is quite ironic - now he outwardly credits the handkerchiefs magical powers for maintaining his relationship with Desman.

Iago uses the handkerchief as his main evidence in proving to Othello that Desman and Cassia are having an affair. He understands that Othello is becoming more Jealous, and thus more vulnerable, and acknowledges that: " Trifles light as air/Are to the Jealous confirmations strong/As proofs of holy writ. This may do something. /The Moor already changes with my poison" (3. 3. 331). As a result of Iago's trickery, Othello begins to truly believe that Desman gave the handkerchief to Cassia. However, the audience knows that Emilia stole the handkerchief and gave it to Iago, who then planted it in Cassia's quarters.

To begin with, Othello is actually the one who pushes the handkerchief out of Desman's hands. Caught with the handkerchief, Othello is actually the one who is responsible for its loss. Cassia is, unsuspectingly, one of Iago's primary pawns in assisting with Othello's demise. The dialogue in Act 2, Scene 3, in which Cassia is dismissed from service by Othello due to the drunken fight, is full of irony. After Othello asks Iago to explain how the quarrel between Cassia and Othello happened, he says: " I know, Iago/ Thy honesty and love doth mince this maintaining it light to Cassia" (2. 3. 255). Ironically, everyone believes that Iago cares for Cassia when, in fact, Iago was utterly responsible for the destruction surrounding her. Soon after, Cassia says to Iago: " O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains" (2. 3. 297). Cassia believes that alcohol was the primary cause of the brawl with

Montana and his demotion, when in fact it is Ago who was responsible. Ago knew that Cassia tended to act foolishly when he was drunk, and thus, by convincing him to continue drinking throughout the night, was the cause of his demise.

Cassia becomes quite upset about his reputation and discusses this with Ago, who responds: " As I am an honest man, I had thought you had received some bodily wound; there is more sense in that than in reputation.

Reputation is an idle and most false imposition; oft got without merit, and lost without deserving" (2. 3. 256). Lagos comment is filled with irony. Not only does the audience know that Lagos ruse is the cause of Cassia's problems but also, it has already become entirely clear that Ago is not an honest man.

What is most ironic about this phrase is that Ago is trying to convince Cassia that reputation isn't important. However, Ago initially develops hatred for Cassia because he feels that his own reputation was affected when Cassia, not he, was promoted by Othello. Once having consoled Cassia, Ago is able to convince him to speak to Desman in order to get back in Othello good graces, a necessity so that Ago can begin to convince Othello of the affair between Cassia and Desman.

Emilie, Lagos wife, offers a quite ironic statement when asking Desman to speak with Cassia, as she says of the issues between Othello and Cassia: " I warrant it grieves my husband/As the cause were his" (3. 3. 19). Desman does in fact, speak with Cassia and promise him that she will discuss the

issues with Othello. However, when Desman talks to Othello about Cassia, it just makes him rather convinced of their affair.

Ironically, at the same time that Othello is most suspicious of the affair, Desman believes Othello is not a Jealous man and she says to Emilie: " But my noble Moor/I's true of mind and made of no such baseness/As jealous creatures are, it were enough/To put him to ill thinking" (3. 4. 23).

Throughout Othello, Ago uses deceit to manipulate all the characters, especially Othello and Cassia, whose lives are completely shattered by Lagos exploitations. Shakespearean use of irony makes the piece exciting, in that although the audience knows of Lagos devious and cunning schemes, the characters see him as an honest and trustworthy friend.

We are reminded of this ironic twist throughout the play, as Othello repeatedly refers to Ago as honest (I. E. " Ago is most honest"(2. 3. 8)).

Unfortunately it is Othello superfluous trust in Lagos honesty that leads to his scenes, as Othello only learns the truth about Desman after he has already killed her. Tragically, only then does Othello realize that Desman was sincerely a faithful wife and Ago was, in reality, manipulating him to believe a considerable lie.