

# Treachery and betrayal in othello

Life



Treachery and betrayal, they belong hand in hand, like a married couple, for they both ultimately lead to misery and sorrow. In William Shakespeare's play, Othello, acts of treachery and betrayal have great dramatic significance. They greatly contribute to the theme that appearance does not always portray reality, and reality is not what one sees but more often what one does not see. The acts of treachery and betrayal in Othello help to develop this theme through character development.

Such acts include: how Iago deceives Othello by being his friend and enemy at the same time. Othello betraying his wife's love and trust. Emilia (Iago's wife) betraying her very own husband for justice. Finally Iago's betrayal of Roderigo, using him and his money for his evil plans, and then killing him. Through all of these acts of treachery and violence and betrayal a common theme seems to be developed, mostly through the development of characters. Iago's character is a prime example of how acts of treachery and betrayal can alter people.

Iago starts off by wanting to ruin Othello's reputation as a great and wise general, as Iago says in (I, i, 44) "I follow him to serve my turn upon him". Iago tells this to Roderigo, showing that he intends to betray Othello, by pretending to be his friend and then corrupting and betraying him. As the play progresses, Iago's intentions are less driven by reason, and more driven by revenge, and blind lustful impulses, "[Othello] shall fall between us..." (IV, iii, 246). Iago says this to Roderigo, when he says it is evident that at this point Iago's character has undergone deep change.

For not only does he want to ruin Othello's reputation, but now he wants to obliterate, destroy, and crush Othello's reputation, but he also wants to obliterate, destroy, and crush Othello's entire life. This change in character is mainly due to the fact that the treacherous and betrayal acts that Iago has committed have altered his ways of thinking and have poisoned his very mind. The more of these acts that he commits, the more his character changes. The more his character changes the more deceitful and concealed Iago's actions become. The appearance of his actions are not what they seem.

His actions are twofaced, deceptive and cunning. This set of changes in his character and behaviour contribute to a common theme, the theme that appearance does not always portray reality. This theme is helped to be developed by Iago's change in character, the more acts of treachery he commits, the more deceitful he is, it is as if he grows a second face, giving him two faces. One face for deception where he pretends to be loyal and a good friend, and another where his true evil intentions are shown. All this just to get revenge on one man, Othello.

By the time Othello realizes what is going on, it is too late and his appearance of things shatter revealing the reality of the situation. Othello has already fallen into the trap, unjustly killing his wife, thanks to Iago's twofaced deception. Upon coming to this realization Othello finally knows that appearances do not always portray reality, all thanks to Iago's cunning character. Othello loves his wife Desdemona very much at the start of the play he would do anything for her, believe her every word. However this eventually changes because Othello's character changes.

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His character changes because of his acts of betrayal towards his wife. When Othello becomes suspicious that his wife is having an affair with Cassio, he does not ask his wife about it, but instead he goes behind her back and betrays her trust by asking Iago for proof "...Iago I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt prove" (III, iii, 203-204). By asking Iago for proof, and not his wife Othello is betraying his wife's trust and love. Through each act of betrayal Othello's character changes, he sees less reality and more fake appearances. He thinks less logically and more impulsively, with jealousy.

His change in character causes him to lose sight of reality and this causes him to go into further betrayal, by ultimately killing his wife, and completely betraying her trust and love and kindness. The more that Othello's character changes the less reality he sees, and the more fiction he sees, which makes him betray someone he loves, because appearances are not always true. Othello and Desdemona are not the only couple that suffer acts of betrayal from within their very own relationship. Emilia and Iago are another couple that, whose characters' change causing them to lose touch with reality.

Emilia is always suspicious of Iago but she still trusts him, for example when she gives Desdemona's handkerchief to Iago reluctantly " If [the handkerchief] be not for some purpose of import, / Give't me again: poor lady, she'll run mad / When she shall lack it" (III, iii, 156-159). Emilia does not want to give the handkerchief to Iago because she thinks he might do something to hurt Desdemona and Othello with it. Therefore she asks him indirectly to give it back to Desdemona. In doing so Emilia is betraying her husband's trust by doubting his intentions.

This small event is enough to change her view of her husband, and plant doubt in her mind as to the reality of his actions versus their appearance. Ultimately this small action has great consequences to her life. Near the end of the play, once Othello kills his wife, Emilia finds out and she confronts Othello, and she reveals that it was her husband that betrayed him. In doing so, she has betrayed all trust that she and her husband had. Making Othello see the reality of the situation, and shoving aside the illusion that Iago had woven around him.

Iago in turn kills her, rewarding her for her betrayal, as he has done before to others. Iago has betrayed many people among them a very good friend of his, Roderigo. Roderigo is a naive man who is in love with Desdemona, and he is paying Iago to set them up. Through out the play he keeps paying Iago and he believes that Iago is doing this to help him. However all is not as it appears, for in truth Iago is using Roderigo's money and using Roderigo to do his bidding all the while pretending to be his friend and helping him to get to Desdemona. I have rubb'd this young quat almost to the sense,/And he grows angry. Now, whether he kill Cassio,/Or Cassio him, or each do kill the other,/ Every way makes my gain" (IV, ii, 256-236). When Iago says this it shows how much he did not care for his friend, he was only using him for his own gain and vengeful purposes. Consequently Iago ends up killing Roderigo so that he may look like an innocent savior and a noble man. For Roderigo was instructed by Iago to kill Cassio. Through this act Iago has put on an act a mask, for he has disguised the reality of his actions through the betrayal of one of his close friends.

In doing so Iago's character has become cold and cunning, able to make reality his puppet by putting on illusions for others to see and not reality. All of the above examples: from Iago betraying Othello by being his friend and enemy at the same time, Othello's betrayal of his wife's trust and love, Emilia betraying her husband and making his evil deeds known to others and Iago's use and murder of one of his close friends. All of these acts of treachery caused the characters' of the people committing them, to change for the worst.

As the characters changed they saw less of reality and more fake appearances of things and events. This flaw in how characters see things leads to a common theme being developed that theme is: appearance does not always portray reality, and reality is not what one sees but more often what one does not see. Having eyes does not mean a person is able to see the truth, but merely means that they can observe all the illusions created by others, for to truly see the truth, one must look with their minds eye.