

JEALOUSY IN *OTHELLO*

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This paper was written for Dr. Brevik's English 1102 class.

Shakespeare is prominent in his use of recurring themes throughout his works, particularly those of love, death, and betrayal. All these themes are present in *Othello*. Most paramount, however, is jealousy. Jealousy runs the characters' lives in *Othello* from the beginning of the play, when Roderigo is envious of Othello because he wishes to be with Desdemona, and to the end of the play, when Othello is furious with envy because he believes Cassio and Desdemona have been engaging in an affair. Some characters' jealousy is fashioned by other characters. Iago is involved in much of this, creating lies and implementing misleading situations. He is consumed with jealousy of Cassio and masked with hatred of Othello because he was not chosen as lieutenant, Cassio was. Iago is selfish in that he wants everyone to feel as he does so he engineers the jealousy of other characters. Iago is a man blinded by envy and anger, with a goal in mind for everyone to become equally jealous, which aim he completes through his betrayal and manipulation of characters, specifically Othello.

Shakespeare's *Othello* begins with the confinement of Roderigo in Iago. Roderigo so desperately loves Desdemona and he pays Iago to woo her away from Othello. This scene is significant in that it immediately portrays Iago as a villain. Along with his actions, what Iago says also conveys him as a manipulative character. Iago has constructed a plan to exploit Othello as a thief by saying that Othello has stolen Desdemona's heart using witchcraft. Iago persuades Roderigo to confront her father, Brabantio. He tells Roderigo, "Call up her father, Rouse him...poison his delights...do, with like timorous accent and dire yell," (I. i. 64-65, 72). Iago is actually not particularly concerned with what is in Roderigo's heart at all, meaning Iago does not care that Roderigo loves Desdemona and wishes to be with her. His intentions are not to help Roderigo seek Desdemona but to have Brabantio after Othello because it will cause him, Othello, distress.

Iago is very good at saying the right things to people, misleading them to get the reaction he wants out of them. He is clever in his diction to avoid confrontation that can easily erupt. Haim Omer and Marcello Da Verona in their article "Doctor Iago's treatment of Othello" provide an example of Iago's manipulation when he and Roderigo confront Brabantio about his daughter. Brabantio does not believe what the two say about Desdemona, calling it absurd, and he becomes angry because he has been woken up in the middle of the night. Omer and de Verona recognize that Roderigo immediately starts to explain and justify his accusations, which only angers Brabantio even more. Iago, on the other hand, responds by actually complimenting Brabantio (1). Brabantio yells, "Thou art a villain" to which Iago responds, "You are a senator" (I. i. 115-116). The father is taken aback by this surprising comment and it causes him to step back and re-examine the situation, which eases his anger and causes him to believe the two storytellers, especially when he finds Desdemona missing from her bed chamber (Omer 1).

Along with his word choice, Iago is clever at the timing of what he says. He knows exactly what to say and when to say it to get a rouse out of whomever he wishes. He exercises this particularly well with Roderigo and Othello. Marcia Macaulay in her article "When Chaos Is Come Again: Narrative and Narrative Analysis in Othello" says that "[Iago] commences with an imperative, follows with a question in which he answers himself, and ends with a bold assertion" (3-4). An example of Iago's timing is when he speaks to Roderigo of the suspicions regarding Desdemona's love for Othello. "Mark me with what violence she first loved the Moor but for bragging and telling her fantastical lies. To love him still for prating? Let not thy discreet heart think it. Her eye must be fed" (II. i. 230-234). In this excerpt Iago represents Othello as a liar and Desdemona as a believer of those lies, which Iago then uses to manipulate Roderigo into believing that he can distinguish the relationship between Desdemona and Othello. Manipulating Roderigo is actually masked by the animosity that Iago feels for Othello, however.

Iago and Othello act upon what each other says and does. The two of them both have a goal in mind to have the upper hand over the other one. Othello wants answers and Iago wants to manipulate those who have hurt him. Thus, Iago turns conversations around to lead Othello to come up with conclu-

sions that Iago wants. By doing this, Iago waits for what Othello says to figure out how to respond to increase Othello's jealousy. For example, Othello asks Iago about Cassio being with Desdemona when the two see them together in private. "Was that not Cassio parted from my wife?" questions Othello to Iago, to which Iago responds, "Cassio, my Lord?" Othello answers back, "I do believe 'twas he" (III. iii. 37-38, 40). Here, Iago has avoided the question proposed by Othello and thus asks another question, turning things around so that Othello actually answers his own question to which Othello believes. "[Othello's] discourse with Iago is an attempt to ascertain this fact, and failing this, Othello confidently asserts what he sees," comments Marcia Macaulay (5).

Haim Omer and Marcello Da Verona accurately depict Iago in their article, writing that "[Iago] uses suspicion, hints, affirms by denying, cover his traces, forestalls criticism, and blurs the contours of reality" (3). Iago creates the tale of Desdemona and Cassio's involvement by convenience. Iago so desperately wants Othello to become insane with jealousy, and he initiates this envy and rage by creating lies of Desdemona's unfaithfulness. The chance comes when Iago and Othello see Cassio and Desdemona together. He makes a sly comment of the two's intentions, which actually causes Othello to stop and wonder about what Cassio and Desdemona's intentions actually are. When further interrogated by Othello, however, Iago does not elaborate, which causes Othello to become even more suspicious. "Ha, I like that not" mumbles Cassio. Othello asks, "What dost thou say?" Iago answers, "Nothing, my lord" (III. iii. 34-40). This excerpt is of Iago and Othello's conversation about Cassio and Desdemona and further demonstrates Iago's manipulation. "This short initial exchange also shows how Iago seeds ideas by implied communications," comment Omer and Verona (4). To Iago's satisfaction, in this instant he has changed Othello's perception of Cassio. Furthermore, Iago leaves Othello desiring to know more. Othello now becomes obsessed with knowing whether Iago is right in his accusations of Desdemona's unfaithfulness.

Iago, thus, insists that Othello not think about the possible adulteries, which of course only causes Othello to think of it more constantly. Othello is easily persuaded by Iago. Othello never actually goes and asks his wife and/or Cassio of their affair. He only takes into consideration what Iago says and the

premeditated evidence that is presented to him, such as Desdemona's handkerchief found in Cassio's bed chamber. Othello has become completely obsessed with jealousy and only trusts Iago, because Iago's actions make him seem like he is the only one who cares. Iago now works behind the scenes, pushing Othello in the direction he wants him to go and then he hides innocently. This plan depicts Iago as being sympathetic towards Othello. An example of Iago's deceiving actions appears when Iago says to Othello, "She did deceive her father, marrying you" (III. iii. 206). By pointing Desdemona's previous actions out, Othello now disregards her because it is true that she did disobey her father to marry him. Othello uses this in the sense that he believes that she would act in such a way which again which totally changes his attitude towards his wife.

Desdemona is only a pawn to Iago. In the first part of the play Iago does not pay too much attention to her. He only uses references to her in regards to Othello and their suspicious relationship. Later in the play, however, Desdemona becomes a threat to him when she asks him about his regards to women and how he portrays them. "In posing her challenges, Desdemona places Iago in a situation...of being required to express affection at someone else's request" explains Karl Zender in his article "The Humiliation of Iago" (325). Iago fails miserably which causes him to become angry at Desdemona for the first time, which will remain until her death. "Anger at Desdemona vies with anger and Cassio and Othello as Iago's primary motive in the remainder of *Othello*; and this anger...decides Desdemona's fate," concludes Zender (330). Iago uses Desdemona to push Othello over the edge in jealousy and in rage by lying about her unfaithfulness to him.

Iago uses misleading situations to his advantage by implementing false reasons for why characters would act in such a way, specifically with Desdemona. Iago then manipulates Othello into thinking the same thing which leads him to acting upon it. An example of Iago's deceitfulness is the death of Desdemona and the events leading up to it. Haim Omer and Marcello Da Verona explore the events of Desdemona's death in their essay. Othello has become mad with rage and jealousy and Iago tries to redirect these powerfully strong emotions in false images which he constructs (10). Iago says to Othello, "I hear [Cassio] say, 'Sweet Desdemona...let us hide our loves!'" and "Such a handkerchief I am sure it was your wife's -did I today see Cassio wipe his beard with" (III. iii. 416-417, 434-436).

This imagery that Iago illustrates, especially about the handkerchief, sends Othello over the edge. Othello is outraged and yells, "I'll tear her all to pieces!" (III. iii. 428). "Iago displays here his mastery over human irrationality," explain Omer and Verona because symbols are very significant in everyone's life (10). The handkerchief is symbolic in Othello's life because it was the first gift he ever gave to Desdemona. Omer and Verona conclude that "The handkerchief is the attention-narrowing hypnotic symbol of profaned love" (11). Iago tries to play the innocent instigator again by consoling Othello about his plans for killing Desdemona. He says "Patience, I say. Your mind may change," to which Othello immediately responds "Never, Iago...my bloody thought, with violent pace, shall nev'r look back, nev'r ebb to humble love, till that a capable and wide revenge swallow them up" (III. iii. 449-450, 454-457).

Iago's motivation for his evil acts is never specifically revealed in the play. He is upset and jealous that Cassio was chosen as lieutenant over him even though he, Iago, had more experience in the service. This causes an utmost hatred for Othello. His rejection of lieutenant is not really the reason for Iago's rampage of manipulation, however. It is more about the fact that Iago wants everyone to feel as he does. He wants everyone to be as jealous and angry as he is. Iago believes that *he* is the victim in all this. According to Marcia Macaulay, Iago "is consumed by a desire to best those whom he feels rightly or wrongly have wronged him" (4). Haim Omer and Marcello Da Verona explore this idea in their article, saying that "[Iago] stirs up emotions not to make [Othello] take out from his soul the excessive burden of real past events, but to make him take in the burden of imaginary ones" (7-8). Iago's goal is not to be sympathetic and helpful towards Othello but to destroy him, a goal which Iago successfully attains by using manipulation.

Iago is probably the most famous villain in all of Shakespeare's work. What makes him such is his behind the scenes work where he instigates much of the trouble that happens and then he acts innocent and blameless so that no one suspects him. Iago makes this all possible with manipulation which he uses to betray everyone. He conveys lies that send people over the edge with fatal consequences, but he's the one who is sympathetic and always there for someone to confide in. There really is no indication of why Iago acts in such a way which causes him to be even more frightening. He is masked with jealousy to which he wants everyone else to feel. In doing so, Iago causes the deaths of many and the downfall of himself.

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