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## Creating The Role Of Iago: An Analysis Of The Pre-Rehearsal Process

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CREATING THE ROLE OF IAGO: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PRE-REHEARSAL PROCESS

by

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Bachelor of Arts, Jamestown College, 2007

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of the

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for the degree of

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This thesis, submitted by Jordan Brent Wolfe in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Theatre from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done, and is hereby approved.



Head of Thesis Committee

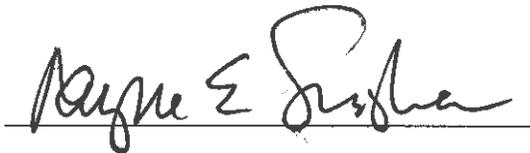


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Jordan Wolfe

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## ABSTRACT

The process of creating a character entails much more than memorizing a few lines, learning blocking, and repeating them on stage. An important aspect for an actor passionate about improving their craft as an artist comes during the pre-rehearsal process. Before the audience enters the theatre, or the director has taken control of the actors on stage, it is important, as an actor, to begin to develop the many aspects of the character that he or she will bring to the play. This thesis is a character study of Iago, from *Othello*. The first chapter will explore a textual analysis of *Othello*. The second chapter is an exploration of Iago through a detailed character analysis. The third chapter will be an exploration of the pre-production of the character and how I would create Iago. Through this creative process it will be shown that Iago is a manipulative, duplicitous antagonist that drives the action of *Othello*.

## Introduction

The process of creating a character entails much more than memorizing a few lines, learning blocking, and repeating them on stage. An important aspect for an actor passionate about improving their craft as an artist comes during the pre-rehearsal process. Before the audience enters the theatre, or the director has taken control of the actors on stage, it is important, as an actor, to begin to develop the many aspects of the character that he or she will bring to the play. This thesis is a character study of Iago, from *Othello*. The first chapter will explore a textual analysis of *Othello*, which includes protagonist, antagonist, and the actions important to the tragedy of *Othello*. The second chapter is an exploration of Iago through a detailed character analysis, showing how he manipulates characters through many differing means to achieve his super-objective of destroying Othello. The third chapter will be an exploration of the pre-production of the character and how I would create Iago as an actor. Through this creative process it will be shown that Iago is a manipulative, duplicitous, antagonist that drives the action of *Othello*.

## Chapter I

### *Othello* Text Analysis

*The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice* is a play by William Shakespeare, believed to have been written in approximately 1603. The work revolves around four central characters: Othello, a Moorish general in the Venetian army; his wife, Desdemona; his lieutenant, Cassio; and his trusted ensign, Iago. By analyzing the text of this great work this chapter will provide insight into how Iago fits into the play. The analysis will show that Othello is the protagonist and Iago is the Antagonist. It will then discuss the major conflict these two characters create between them. Next, the intrusion, rising action and climax will be explored to support the claims aforementioned. Finally, by discussing the major themes of the play this chapter will show that Iago is the driving force behind the show.

The stasis of *The Tragedy of Othello* is exposition given during first act of the play. *Othello* opens with Roderigo, a rich and dissolute gentleman, complaining to Iago about the secret marriage between Desdemona and Othello.

RODERIGO: (Tush), never tell me! I take it much unkindly

That though, Iago, who hast my purse

As if the strings were thine, shouldst know of this.

IAGO: (S'blood,) but you'll not hear me!

If ever I did dream of such a matter, Abhor me.

RODERIGO: Thou toldst me thou didst hold him in thy hate.

IAGO: Despise me if I do not. (*Othello*, 7)

This exchange shows Roderigo upset over the marriage of Othello and Desdemona, but it also presents the friendship and relationship of the two men. It is clear that Roderigo believes that Iago is a confidant and a true friend. This explains why Roderigo is so upset having not been informed of the marriage. The reason Roderigo is upset is because he has loved Desdemona and pursued her for some time. For Roderigo to learn after the fact that Othello has secretly married her puts his friendship with Iago into question. This exchange also establishes that both men hate Othello. This information is vital to gather as it is the first inclination of trouble between Iago and Othello.

As the conversation continues, it is established that Iago believes he has been wrongfully passed over for the lieutenantcy of Othello's army for Cassio, an untested tactician. Iago explains to Roderigo,

Three great ones of the city  
In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,  
Off-capped to him; and by the faith of man,  
I know my price, I am worth no worse a place.

.....

For "Certes", says he

"I have already chose my officer."

And what was he?

Forsooth, a great arithmetician,

One Michael Cassio, a Florentine... (*Othello*, 7)

Iago believes that he had the noble's support his rise to lieutenantancy. However, Othello had already made a decision based on no actual battle experience. This information represents that Othello is impulsive in his decisions. Ken Jacobsen, in his article "Iago's Art of War: The "Machiavellian Moment" in Othello", supports this idea when he discusses how Iago,

dismisses Cassio (in the same soliloquies) as a mere "counter-caster" or accountant, an armchair general whose military knowledge comes exclusively from texts, not experience. Similarly, with the air of an oratorical connoisseur, he mocks Othello's inflated, militaristic rhetoric, just as he later characterizes Cassio as a slippery sophist. (Jacobsen, 2)

Iago insults the men who he believes have wronged him. Iago does this to gain the support of Roderigo. Shortly after this Iago confesses to being given the rank of "Ancient", which is the aide-de-camp or lowest ranking officer. It is obvious that Iago feels slighted for being given such a low rank.

As the exposition continues, Iago reveals that he is living a double life. He has convinced Roderigo that he does not love Othello for the wrongs committed upon Iago. "I follow him to serve my own turn upon him. We cannot all be masters, nor all masters cannot be truly followed" (*Othello*, 9). This confession shows that Iago is pretending to love Othello, but in reality he is only serving under him to enact his revenge. Iago is not only lighting Othello for not promoting him, but also questioning his leadership by

insinuating, “that Il masters cannot be followed”. Iago’s plan to enact revenge uon Othello gains support from Roderigo. The love that Roderigo has for Desdemona is what makes it possible for Iago to gain his support.

Iago explains that he is a two-faced individual to Roderigo to convince him of his hatred of Othello,

It is as sure as you are Roderigo,  
Were I the moor I would not be Iago.  
In following him, I follow myself.  
Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,  
But seeming so for my peculiar end.  
For when my outward action doth demonstrate  
The native act and figure of my heart  
In complement extern, ‘tis not long after  
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve  
For daws to peck at. I am not what I am. (*Othello*, 11)

Iago’s monologue is the first inclination that he is a liar and the antagonist of the play. He labels his own actions that he is going to commit as ones that only God can judge, for men would not understand why he committed such heinous acts. He admits that he is showing one persona which is an honest man and friend to all, but in reality he is something completely different.

The last bit of exposition that is given in the first act is Othello has married Desdemona. Iago informs Brabantio that his daughter has fallen for Othello, and they

have secretly been married. This action is the catalyst to all of Iago's future plans against Othello. "Sir you're robbed. For shame, put on your gown! Your heart is burst. You have lost half your soul. Even now, now, very now, an old black ram is tupping your white ewe" (*Othello*, 13). Iago is betraying Othello and this adds support that Iago is the force opposing Othello's happiness and love with Desdemona.

The definition of protagonist that will be used in this analysis of *Othello* is the character that changes the most but does not always advance the plot. The definition of Antagonist will be the character that represents the opposing force against the protagonist. Using these definitions it can be inferred that Othello is the protagonist and Iago is the Antagonist.

Othello is the protagonist of *Othello*, because he is one of the few characters to change throughout the show. The evil actions of Iago manipulate and shape him. Othello begins the play as a just man who would rather diffuse a situation through conversation and fair trial than responding to answers by brute force. This is seen when Brabantio comes to Othello's house with murderous intent,

BRABANTIO: Down with him, the thief!

[they draw swords]

OTHELLO: Keep up your bright swords, for dew will rust  
them.

Good signior, you shall more command with years  
Than with your weapons.

In a battle Othello could forcibly win over Brabantio and end the matter here and now. However, he is a just man who would like to hear out what Brabantio is angry about and give himself a chance to defend against it. Othello also loves Desdemona and tries to keep her from harm.

Honest Iago,  
My Desdemona must I leave to thee.  
I prithee let thy wife attend on her,  
And bring them after in the best advantage.  
Come, Desdemona, I have but an hour  
Of love, of (worldly matters,) and direction  
To spend with thee. We must obey the time. (*Othello*, 49)

Othello charges Iago to keep Desdemona in Venice until it is safe to bring her to Cyprus, where Othello will do battle in order to show how much her love means to him. The final part of the monologue shows how much he wants to be with her with whatever time they have. He spends his last hour before leaving devoted entirely to her. The change Othello goes through by the end of the play allows jealousy to warp his mind and drive him to become irrational and murderous. This irrationality and bloodlust is seen in the murder of Desdemona.

By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in 's hand!  
O perjured woman, thou dost stone my heart  
And (mak'st) me call what I intend to do  
A murder, which I thought a sacrifice!

I saw the handkerchief! (*Othello*, 241)

Othello has been so consumed with rage and jealousy he is blinded to the innocence of his wife. He has become fixated on the murder of Cassio and Desdemona. No matter what they say or do Othello has changed so much that he will not listen to reason.

This jealous rage is also seen in the attempted murder of Iago. Othello has already been disgraced by his murder of Desdemona. Yet, when he sees Iago he has an uncontrollable urge to kill him. "I look down towards his feet; but that's a fable.—If that thou be'st a devil, I cannot kill thee" (*Othello*, 259). Othello has lost control of his ability to approach a situation peaceably and with understanding. He has become an irrational man with a lust for blood. Whether that bloodlust be directed at the people who have wronged him or, in the end, his own.

The changes that Othello goes through are caused, in part, by his super-objective, that he wants the untainted love of Desdemona in order to find peace of mind. At the beginning of the play all of Othello's actions can be claimed to be in the protection and love of Desdemona. However, the more that Desdemona's love is brought into question, then the more impulsive and irrational Othello becomes.

There are three instances during the play that can support this claim that Othello needs the love of Desdemona. One of these moments is when Othello and Desdemona are reunited in Cyprus. "If I were to die, 'twere now to be most happy, for I fear my soul hath her content so absolute that not another comfort like to this succeeds in unknown fate" (*Othello*, 73). Othello confesses that if he were to die today, then he would die happy just being with Desdemona. "Unknown fate" is also foreshadowing to his

unfortunate end. It represents how Othello has no idea of how he would survive without her love. His actions are done to keep Desdemona safe and, in turn, keeping her love. Another instance that shows how his actions are ruled by his want of the love of Desdemona comes after Cassio and Montano have brawled in the street. "Look if my gentle love be not raised up! I'll make thee an example" (*Othello*, 99). In this instance it is the fact that they allowed Desdemona to see such barbarism. This causes Othello to lay down an even harsher punishment upon Cassio. Her love is dictating his decisions. When it is inferred that her love is tainted, Othello's peace of mind starts to waver. "Yet 'tis the plague (of) great ones; Prerogative are they less than the base. Tis destiny unshunnable, like death. Even this forked plague is fated to us when we do quicken" (*Othello*, 123). In this short phrase Othello explains how he feels that even those of the greatest status can have the sin of infidelity imposed on them. It also shows how he is willing now to kill to avenge the loss of Desdemona's love.

The definition of an antagonist is the force that is opposing the protagonist, it is clear that the force that opposes Othello is Iago. Everything Iago does is to ruin the relationship Othello has with Desdemona. Iago's super-objective is to destroy Othello's relationship with Desdemona in order to gain revenge for wrongs committed against him. In the beginning of act two Iago explains this to Roderigo,

But partly lead to diet my revenge  
For that I do suspect the lusty Moor  
Hath leaped into my seat—the thought whereof  
Doth like a poisonous mineral gnaw my inwards,

And nothing can or shall content my soul  
Till I am evened with him, wife for wife,  
Or, failing so, yet that I put the Moor  
At least into a jealousy so strong  
That judgment cannot cure. (*Othello*, 79)

This monologue supports the claim that every action from this point forth will be to bring the Moor to ruin through his wife Desdemona. It also shows one of the reasons Iago believes he is in the right to oppose the Othello. The reason is that Iago believes the Moor slept with his wife. This passage also brings to light Iago's villainous resolve that he does not care if he dies, just as long as Othello is brought to a disgraceful or fatal end.

This villainous vow made by Iago only confirms his actions made at the end of act one.

After some time, to abuse Othello's (ear)  
That he is too familiar with his wife.  
He hath a person and a smooth dispose.  
To be suspected, framed to make woman false  
The Moor is of free and open nature  
that thinks men honest that but seem to be so,  
And will as tenderly be led by th' nose  
As asses are.  
I have't. It is endgendered. Hell and night

Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light. (*Othello*, 55)

Iago is fighting to ruin Othello's relationship with Desdemona and in turn destroying Othello. This is the major conflict of the show because Othello is fighting to keep the untainted love of Desdemona. Every problem Iago creates for Othello is based on Desdemona's love feigning away from him. Iago sets up Cassio to be shamed. Then he has Cassio use Desdemona to get back in the good graces of Othello. However, it is then seen as an adulterous relationship. A relationship that Iago set into motion in Act Two, Scene 1, "He takes her by the palm. Ay, well said, whisper. With as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio. Ay, smile upon her, do" (*Othello*, 71). At every turn Iago invents a new lie that brings Othello closer to madness. Iago will deceive anyone to accomplish his goals.

The intrusion brings the major conflict into the world of the play. Iago introduces the conflict in Act One Scene Two when Iago informs Roderigo where Othello is. His plot is supported when his villainous dual persona is shown in the next scene.

But I pray you, sir,  
Are you fast married? Be assured of this,  
That magnifico is much beloved,  
And hath in his effect a voice potential  
As double as the Duke's. He will divorce you  
Or put upon you what restraint or grievance  
The law (with all his might to enforce it on)  
Will give him cause. (*Othello*, 21)

Iago is two-faced in supporting the marriage of Othello. Iago is gaining the trust of both sides of this argument and using them both to bring about the ruination of Othello. This is the first time we see why Iago is having Roderigo bring Brabantio. He is hoping the man's influence will sway the nobles of Venice to tear Othello from Desdemona. Iago manipulates the characters of the play to his will. He is the character that advances the plot. Iago leads Othello towards his unfortunate end. These moments of rising action build the tension and suspense towards the climax of the play. These moments allow Iago to have influence in the decision making of Roderigo and Othello, Cassio and Desdemona, and influence over Emilia.

Other such moments that affect Othello are the situations Iago creates in order to disgrace or influence Othello's judgment. One such plot Iago creates is that Desdemona gave Cassio a handkerchief that was a gift from Othello. When Othello asks to see the handkerchief his decision making is influenced by his rage and jealousy,

OTHELLO: The handkerchief!

DESDEMONA: I pray, talk to me of Cassio.

OTHELLO: The handkerchief!

DESDEMONA: (I' faith), you are to blame.

OTHELLO: (zounds) [Othello exits] (*Othello*, 159)

When Desdemona is not able to give Othello the handkerchief and all she can talk about is Cassio, then it confirms to Othello that she has committed adultery. The moment of realization leads to Iago being able to manipulate Othello to commit his most heinous act.

When Othello is at his most vulnerable and believes that he can never have the untainted love of Desdemona his peace of mind leaves him and is replaced with a bloodlust that must be satiated.

OTHELLO: I will chop her to messes! Cuckhold me?

IAGO: O, tis foul in her.

OTHELLO: With mine officer.

IAGO: That's fouler

OTHELLO: Get me some poison, Iago, this night. I'll not expostulate with her lest her body and beauty unprovide my mind again. This night, Iago

IAGO: Do it not with poison. Strangle her in her bed, even the bed she had contaminated.

OTHELLO: Good, good. The justice of it pleases. (*Othello*, 185)

The rage inside of Othello is boiling over in this exchange. This moment is important because it shows Othello still wants the love of Desdemona, but he cannot have it while it is tainted with another man. The only way he can truly move on is to destroy the woman he needs to find peace.

All of these events are leading up to the climactic moment. Before the climax is reached there must be a turning point. In *Othello*, the turning point comes when Othello smothers Desdemona. This moment shows how far Othello has changed. Othello's mind is tainted by lies about Desdemona's love and he is driven to kill her.

DESDEMONA: But half an hour!

OTHELLO: Being done there is no pause

DESDEMONA: But while I say one more prayer!

OTHELLO: It is too late. [he smothers her] (*Othello*, 243)

Othello has lost all sense of justice and peace of mind. He kills the woman he loves on the accusations of one man. However, he is still in struggle with Iago for the truth of the love of Desdemona.

This struggle to hold on to the untainted love is fought for through the act of Othello killing himself. Othello is thrown into a rage by Iago when he learns of his treachery. He attempts to kill Iago, “[He stabs Iago] IAGO: I bleed sir, but not killed” (*Othello*, 259). His rage and bloodlust has not been satiated. This is the moment that Othello realizes the only way for him to have Desdemona’s untainted love is to join her in death. Only there will he find peace of mind.

then must you speak  
Of one that loved not wisely but too well;  
Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought  
Perplex'd in the extreme; of one whose hand,  
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away  
Richer than all his tribe;

.....

Set you down this;  
And say besides, that in Aleppo once,  
Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk  
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,

I took by the throat the circumcised dog,

And smote him, thus. [Stabs himself] (*Othello*, 259)

Othello's death ends the conflict for the love of Desdemona. Othello realizes there is nothing in life that can forgive him for the deeds he has done. He realizes that his loss is far greater than he would have ever known. Othello would rather die than live in shame.

In the play *Othello* there are many themes that are brought up by multiple characters. These themes include love, prejudice, reputation, and jealousy. They are prevalent to the play *Othello* because of the influence they have on the characters actions during the play. Love provides Othello with intensity but not direction and gives Desdemona access to his heart but not his mind. Types of love and what that means are different between different characters. Othello finds that love in marriage needs time to build trust, and his enemy works too quickly for him to take that time. The immediate attraction between the couple works on passion, and Desdemona builds on that passion a steadfast devotion whose speed and strength Othello cannot equal.

Iago often falsely professes love in friendship for Roderigo and Cassio and betrays them both. "Who's that which rings the bell?—Diablo, ho! The town will rise: God's will, lieutenant, hold! You will be shamed forever" (*Othello*, 121).

For Iago, love is leverage. He can use the love he professes as friendship towards Cassio and Roderigo and influence their actions to his will. Desdemona's love in friendship for Cassio is real but is misinterpreted by the jealous Othello as adulterous love. The true friendship was Emilia's for Desdemona. It is shown when she stood up

witness for the honor of her dead mistress, against Iago, her lying husband, and was killed for it.

O thou dull Moor! That handkerchief though speak'st of  
I found by fortune and did give my husband;  
For often, with a solemn earnestness,  
More than indeed belong'd to such a trifle,  
He begg'd of me to steal it. (*Othello*, 225)

Emilia is the one individual to see past the lies and treachery of Iago. She was also the one with the most steadfast love to her friend Desdemona. She unravels the mystery of the handkerchief, but in doing so she kills Othello just as effectively as Iago does. Throughout the play both Othello and Cassio defend the idea that reputation is the essence of one's existence. Othello explains to Iago that even if Brabantio tries to divorce Desdemona from him, his reputation is going to save him.

Let him do his spite:  
My services which I have done the signiory  
Shall out-tongue his complaints. 'Tis yet to know,—  
Which, when I know that boasting is an honor,  
I shall promulgate—I fetch my life and being  
From men of royal siege, and my demerits  
May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune  
As this that I have reach'd: (*Othello*, 27)

Othello is defending the fact that his honor and reputation are more powerful than the threats that any man could make. This is because of the love he has for Desdemona.

Cassio laments losing his reputation when he disgraces himself for fighting,

Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost  
my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of  
myself, and what remains is bestial. My reputation,  
Iago, my reputation! (*Othello*, 135)

Reputation is so important to these men it drives much of the actions that they take.

Cassio would never have gotten into the fight if Roderigo had not challenged his honor off stage. Cassio also rebukes the idea of marrying Bianca when talking to Iago. "His reputation would plummet if Venice found out that he was sleeping around, especially with an alleged whore" (*Othello*, 123). Othello, through Cassio's conversation with Iago, believes he has been made a cuckold. Cassio was removed to, in part, help keep the reputation of the army, and Othello's, strong; being a cuckold, other than the embarrassing point where one finds out their wife is cheating on them, strips the masculinity from a man in a patriarchal society. Othello could not be lowered to this level.

Another major theme in *Othello* is the underlying atmosphere of racial prejudice in Venetian society. Desdemona's relationship with Othello is one of love, and she is deliberately loyal only to her marriage. Othello, however, is not aware how deeply prejudice has penetrated into his own personality. This absorbed prejudice undermines

him with thoughts akin to "I am not attractive," "I am not worthy of Desdemona," "It cannot be true that she really loves me," and "If she loves me, then there must be something wrong with her" (*Othello*, 141) Because Iago is manipulating Othello he believes that he is worse because of his skin color. These thoughts, inflamed by Iago's hints and lies, prevent Othello from discussing his concerns and fears directly with Desdemona. He acts on panicked assumption in order to survive the combined onslaught of internalized prejudice and the directed venom of Iago. Othello would have had to be near perfect in strength and self-knowledge to survive such prejudicial attack.

Prejudice is seen in the way the characters address Othello as "the Moor".

According to Marvin Rosenberg in his book, *The masks of Othello*, discusses that "A Moor, were and are North Africans, Shakespeare used the term rather loosely to include anyone with dark skin" (Rosenberg 76). It is a slang term used to separate people of a darker complexion. The fact that Othello would deny Iago his rightful place of military stature is unacceptable and Iago has no problems slighting Othello for being black. In fact, Iago refers to Othello as "the Moor," throughout the entire play. He only calls Othello by his name eight times. Harold C. Goddard comments, in his Book *The Meaning of Shakespeare*,

Iago keeps reminding us of Othello's color just as Desdemona causes us to forget it. To him Othello is 'an old black ram', or worse. He loses no opportunity to keep him conscious of his supposed inferiority and he makes the most of the unnatural character of his union with Desdemona" (Goddard 76).

Iago's racism towards the Moor is a major driving factor in the actions that he takes. His mind cannot fathom being turned away for a promotion or being cuckolded, and that an inferior man, by race, is at the root of it all. Othello is referred to as a devil, a black ram, a horse, a simple beast. In the opening, Iago tells Brabantio to "awake the snorting citizens with the bell, or else the devil will make a grandsire of you," (*Othello*, 15). He warns him that "even now, now, very now, an old black ram is tupping our white ewe," (*Othello*, 17). Iago uses animal imagery in relation to nearly everyone around him. The terms he uses against the Moor indicate prejudice is a part of his hatred for Othello, especially his outrage at a Moor marrying a white Venetian lady.

Iago is even so bold as to criticize Desdemona's choice when he is speaking to Othello. That she would turn down a Venetian for marriage and then choose a Moor becomes a part of his evidence that she may be false to Othello:

Not to affect many proposed matches  
of her own clime, complexion, and degree  
Whereto we see in all things nature tends—  
Foh! One may smell in such, a will most rank  
Foul disproportions, thoughts Unnatural. (*Othello*, 133)

It is in these lines Iago tells Othello bluntly that she is unnatural to have chosen him over a man of her own degree and race. Earlier in this same scene Iago has also pointed to Othello's forgiveness by assuming his own knowledge of Venetian manners over Othello's. Iago says,

look to't. I know our country disposition well:

In Venice they do let [God] see the Pranks

They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience

Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unkown. (*Othello*, 127)

Iago being from Venice and Othello being an outsider to this place gives him the chance to deceive the Moor on the cultural expectations. Othello does not know anything to the contrary and, after all, as Iago points out, Desdemona did deceive her father in marrying him.

Jealousy is the theme that appears to destroy Othello's mind. It is the emotion implanted into his brain by Iago in Act 3, Scene 3.

O, beware, my lord, of jealousy;

It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock

The meat it feeds on; that cuckold lives in bliss

Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger;

But, O, what damned minutes tells he o'er

Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet strongly loves! (*Othello*, 133)

This speech is justly famous, not only for its description of jealousy, but also for the cunning of its psychological destructiveness. The meat that the monster feeds on is a person's heart, which it eats away. At the same time, the monster mocks that person's heart, so that he or she feels shame. And the he is insatiable, always gnawing away, so

that the jealous person is never at peace. In comparison to all of this pain of suspicion and doubt, it's "bliss" to just be angry. Thus Iago tempts Othello to make the jump from suspicion to anger, without pausing to determine if the suspicion has any basis in fact.

Iago thinks he knows jealousy, having rehearsed it in his relationship with Emilia to the extent that Emilia believes jealousy is part of the personality of men, but Iago's jealousy is a poor, weak thought compared to the storm of jealousy he stirs up in Othello. In a soliloquy at the end of the first scene in Cyprus, Iago speaks of his own motivations. He says of Desdemona,

Now, I do love her too;

Not out of absolute lust, though peradventure

I stand accountant for as great a sin,

But partly led to diet [feed] my revenge" (*Othello*, 75).

He wants revenge for his own suspicion that Othello has gone to bed with Emilia. It's eating at his gut and he won't be satisfied, "Till I am even'd with him, wife for wife (*Othello*, 79). The phrase "even'd with him, wife for wife," seems to mean that he has some notion that he might have sex with Desdemona, or that he will ruin her in the eyes of Othello. Othello must feel that same poisonous jealousy that Iago feels, and Iago's jealousy is so strong that he also suspects Cassio of wearing his "night-cap too" (*Othello*, 83). Jealousy controls the actions of the men of this play. Frank Rand in his article "The Over-Garroulous Iago" discusses jealousy as

Certainly these references have a reason for being there. Shakespeare must have wanted us to think either that Jago is actually jealous or that he is making an effort to make himself think that he is. Of course whether Othello or Cassio or Emilia has given him just cause is beside the point. Jealousy is not dependent upon an overt act. (Rand, 154)

Jealousy does not need to be supported by fact. In the case of Iago and Othello the simple mention of it by themselves or each other to set them off into a rage that must be satiated for the men to seem at ease. The women, on the other hand, see it as a weakness that men have.

When Desdemona can't find her special handkerchief she feels guilty, and she's glad that,

My noble Moor

Is true of mind and made of no such baseness

As jealous creatures are,

.....

because otherwise the loss of the handkerchief

might be enough to put him to ill thinking (*Othello*, 135).

Emilia seems to have a doubt about Othello not being jealous, but Desdemona says confidently, "I think the sun where he was born drew all such humours from him" (*Othello*, 137). Emilia is correct. She knows that man's jealousy can rot his brain and ruin him. Jealousy is the emotion that ties all of Othello's actions that lead to his

destruction together, together. The themes of this play intertwined and this is what causes the downfall of Othello. When one theme becomes unraveled the rest come with it.

Behind all of these themes, major conflict, rising action, intrusion, and recognition of protagonist is one man, Iago. As the antagonist of *Othello*, Iago, moves the plot along, and he is always one step ahead of Othello. He is leading Othello along the path that will eventually destroy him. He is the force standing in the way of Othello's happiness. Through analysis of *Othello* it is clear to see how Othello is the protagonist of this play. However, Iago, as the antagonist, is the mastermind that keeps the play interesting and exciting. He uses prejudice, love, jealousy, and reputation to manipulate the other characters of the show, and ultimately leads many of them to their death. When creating the role of Iago, all of this information is vital to building this character. Iago is a villain, an antagonist, and a very intelligent man who will stop at nothing to see Othello fall.

## Chapter II: Character Analysis of Iago

Before creating a character such as Iago on stage it is important to have done a thorough character analysis. This chapter will re-examine Iago's super objective and discuss minor objectives he has in Acts II and III. Next, Iago's social status and military background will be explored and how they can give insight to Iago's physicality. Then the morality of Iago will be discussed along with his relationships with Roderigo, Emilia, Desdemona, Cassio, and Othello. This character analysis will portray Iago as a manipulative and calculated soldier who will do anything and use anyone to accomplish his goal of destroying Othello.

Iago's super objective, as stated in Chapter I, is to destroy the relationship between Othello and Desdemona in order to gain revenge for wrongs committed against him. To accomplish this objective Iago creates smaller objectives in each act that aide him in accomplishing his main objective. In each Act, Iago succeeds or fails in his plans, whichever happens, it shapes and changes how he moves on in his attempt to bring Othello to his tragic end. Within each Act there is an objective being pursued and by using textual evidence it will be shown how Iago attempts to achieve these minor objectives to reach his super objective.

Iago's Super objective, as stated in Chapter one, is shown in the late soliloquies of Act I, Scene iii and the beginning of Act I

Till I am evened with him, wife for wife,

Or, failing so, yet that I put the Moor

At least into a jealousy so strong

That judgment cannot cure. (*Othello*, 79)

This monologue supports the claim that every action from this point forth will be to bring the Moor to ruin through his wife Desdemona. Iago though cannot bring about the ruination of Othello without manipulating the other characters such as Cassio.

Iago's deception and manipulation of others can be seen in his goals of Act II and III. In these two acts Iago manipulates Cassio and Desdemona so that they seem to be in an adulterous relationship. In Act Two and Three, Iago is disgracing the reputations of Cassio and Desdemona. He is tearing them down so he can manipulate them into creating what would look like an adulterous relationship in the eyes of Othello.

In Act II Iago creates a fantasy that Cassio is going to sleep with Emilia, "Besides, the knave is handsome, young, and hath all those requisites in him that folly and green minds look after: a pestilent complete knave; and the woman hath found him already" (*Othello*, 63). Iago feels slighted by the three characters he is using to bring about the tragic end of Othello. These slights show the lack of power and sexual impotence Iago has, so by disgracing Cassio, Desdemona, and Othello he gains power and revenge over the three of them.

Iago lets his empathy-less pursuit of Othello twist Roderigo's love of Desdemona to help him in disgracing Cassio: "Do find some occasion to anger Cassio, either by speaking too loud, or tainting his discipline, or from what other course you please, which the time shall more favorably minister" (*Othello*, 77). This is the beginning of Iago's pursuit that, "nothing can or shall content my soul/Till I am even'd with him, wife for wife" (*Othello*, 79). This shows Iago's use of those closest to Othello to bring him to ruination and disgrace. Iago will do everything in his power to see this goal accomplished.

In Act II, Scene iii Iago tempts Cassio into disgracing himself by getting Cassio to become inebriated. Cassio says of himself, "I have poor and unhappy brains for drinking" (*Othello*, 83). Cassio knows he cannot hold his liquor; however, Iago continues his temptation of Cassio by saying "One more cup" and "If I can fasten but one cup" (*Othello*, 87). Showing a good-natured side to Cassio, Iago convinces him to drink. When Cassio has had too much to drink and begins to exit Iago shows his true nature and commands Roderigo, "I pray you after the lieutenant, go" (*Othello*, 91). This leads to an open brawl in the streets between Cassio and Montano. After Cassio is dismissed by Othello and is lamenting over his lost "reputation", Iago returns to his false persona and counsels Roderigo to speak to Desdemona. "Our general's wife is now the general: I may say so in this respect, for that he hath devoted and given up himself to contemplation, mark, and denotement of her part and graces. Confess yourself freely to her" (*Othello*, 107). Iago is setting in motion the first part of his plot to show Cassio and Desdemona in an adulterous relationship. He has used his wit as a tactician and his

duplicitous nature to bring himself closer to destroying Othello. At the end of Act Two Iago reveals his actions for the Act III,

Two things are to be done.

My wife must move for Cassio to her mistress.

I'll set her on.

Myself the while to draw the Moor apart

And bring him jump when he may Cassio find

Soliciting his wife. Ay, that's the way.

Dull not device by coldness and delay. (*Othello*, 107)

Iago has gained the trust of Othello and is one step closer to destroying the relationship between him and Desdemona. He has successfully disgraced Cassio and will now use him, through feigned friendship, to disgrace Desdemona.

In Act III Iago's objective is to disgrace Desdemona and plant the seed of doubt of her loyalty in Othello. Iago's manipulation of Othello and two-faced nature is most seen in this Act. He has to feign friendship to every character important to his plot, he subordinates those of inferior status, and completes the web of lies that will from this Act on. Iago will manipulate Othello's emotions and cause them to spiral out of control and lead to the death of almost everyone involved.

Scene i is short, yet it allows Iago to manipulate Cassio's feelings toward him. Iago shows a loving friendship to Cassio when he says, "I'll send her to you presently and I'll devise the Moor out of the way, that your converse and business may be more free"

(*Othello*, 113). Iago is giving Cassio a chance to speak frankly with Desdemona and is using Emilia to help him accomplish it. Unbeknownst to them Iago is setting the two up.

In Scene iii, Iago begins to implant the seed of doubt and betrayal into Othello's mind:

OTHELLO: Was not that Cassio parted from my wife?

IAGO: Cassio my lord? No, sure, I cannot think it

That he would steal away go guiltylike,

Seeing your coming.

Iago is setting Cassio and Desdemona up while playing the friend to Othello. He is hinting that there is something more than friendship between the two. He goes on to create curiosity in the matter by asking questions like, "Did Michael Cassio when you wooed your lady, know of your love?" and when questioned as to why respond with, "But for satisfaction of my heart, no further harm" (*Othello*, 123). Iago knows that curiosity will lead Othello to brooch the subject and Othello will have to drag the confession out of Iago. This is exactly what Iago is hoping for. As Othello continues to press the matter, Iago plays the role of innocent friend who does not want to disgrace anyone:

IAGO: It were not for your quiet nor your good,

Nor for my manhood, honesty, or wisdom,

To let you know my thoughts.

OTHELLO: 'Zounds, what dost thou mean?

IAGO: Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,

Is the immediate jewel of their souls.

Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;

'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands:

But he that filches from me my good name

Robs me of that which not enriches him

And makes me poor indeed. (*Othello*, 129)

Iago pronounces that he does not want to disrespect Cassio or Othello. He is using his falsely earned reputation to warp Othello's mind and have him become fixated on the moment that Cassio and Desdemona shared. Finally Othello breaks down Iago's false wall and Iago begins to plant the seed of adultery into Othello's mind. Iago uses the fact that, "she deceived her father" in marrying the Moor. He also lets his prejudice of Othello's race factor into her deception:

Not to affect many proposed matches

Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,

Whereto we see in all things nature tends—

Foh! one may smell in such, a will most rank,

Foul disproportions, thoughts unnatural. (*Othello* 133)

He is insinuating because she is white and Othello is black there is no way she would ever stay faithful. For Desdemona to want to stay with Othello is unnatural and would not be in the character of such a woman. However, Cassio who is also white would seem a suitable way for her to release these urges. Before Iago exits, so Othello may talk with Desdemona, he instructs Othello, "not to ponder on such things" for they will drive him mad. This madness is exactly what happens as Othello becomes more and more suspicious.

As the scene progresses Desdemona drops her handkerchief and in this Iago has found his catalyst to disgracing her. When Emilia retrieves the dropped handkerchief Iago takes it from her and shows his evil intentions when he says,

I will in Cassio's lodging lose this napkin,  
And let him find it. 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: (Othello 141)

He has seen how his words are already changing Othello's outward action. Othello's mind is being warped by Iago's web of lies and is beginning a spiral of rage and aggression that will ultimately destroy him.

Iago uses Cassio as his ultimate tool to disgrace Desdemona. This is seen when Iago informs Othello that Cassio talks in his sleep and has said, "Sweet Desdemona,/Let

us be wary, let us hide our loves";/And then, sir, would he gripe and wring my hand,/Cry "O sweet creature!" and then kiss me hard"(Othello, 147). This is enough to throw Othello into madness. However, to truly disgrace Desdemona Iago must use the most powerful weapon he has, the handkerchief. This handkerchief is the token of affection first given to Desdemona by Othello: "I know not that; but such a handkerchief/I am sure it was your wife's—did I today/See Cassio wipe his beard with" (Othello, 149). By revealing that Cassio has Desdemona's handkerchief Iago has, at this moment, completely disgraced Desdemona and thrown Othello into a murderous rage. This leaves Othello in an emotional state that allows him to say,

Damn her, lewd minx! O, damn her!  
Come, go with me apart; I will withdraw,  
To furnish me with some swift means of death  
For the fair devil. (Othello, 153)

Iago uses these small objectives in each Act to manipulate the characters of the play to his will. It is in these minor objectives that Iago sets in motion his plan to destroy Othello through Desdemona. Iago uses these objectives to dictate decisions in each Act. This allows Iago to focus on one specific character to manipulate in each Act, thus allowing Iago to accomplish his super-objective one step at a time.

In *Othello* there is no textual evidence directly relating to Iago's physicality. However, by exploring his social status and military background conclusions can be

drawn on how he may have conducted himself physically. Evidence for Iago's military affiliations and social status are brought up frequently in the first two acts of the play.

Military rank and status go hand in hand, the higher your rank the more respected and influential you are. This idea of military advancement is exceedingly important in Iago. Sarah Hemming, in her article "Villain of the Piece", explains how Rory Kinnear believes that,

For him, the military context is very important in getting to grips with Iago. He suggests that being denied promotion, for a life-long soldier such as Iago, must rankle bitterly. More importantly still, the military context may explain Iago's lack of restraint. Iago's destructive zeal begins to make sense, perhaps, if you consider what he may have seen. And the tragedy may resonate afresh for an audience increasingly familiar with post-traumatic stress disorder in today's military. (Hemming, 1)

This background without recognition textually provides a lot of insight as to why Iago approaches each situation in the way that he does.

Iago states almost immediately that he was vying for the lieutenancy of Othello and in his mind had all the right attributes to fill this role.

That never set a squadron in the field,  
Nor the division of a battle knows  
More than a spinster; unless the bookish theoretic,

Wherein the toged consuls can propose  
As masterly as he. Mere prattle, without practise,  
Is all his soldiership. But he, sir, had the election:  
And I, of whom his eye had seen the proof  
At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds  
Christened and heathen. (*Othello*, 7)

Iago has been in many wars and has survived them all. This alone should have given him an edge over the arithmetician Cassio. This is also the only idea that is given about Iago's knowledge and ability in battle, so it must be taken as truth that Iago is a good soldier with great field experience and is a sufficient at battle tactics. John McClosky describes Iago as,

Possessed by a keen intellect and a cold emotional nature, a practical knowledge of psychological processes and an ability to manipulate men, an opportunistic boldness and an unmoral attitude towards things, he had precisely the qualities best fitted to success in battle. For in action moral scruples are a hindrance to success; so Iago merely ignores them.

(McClosky, 27)

In battle Iago's tactics are lauded and praised. Iago's deeds are, in reality, nothing but the application of military tactics to private and personal affairs by a professional soldier without private ethics. McClowsky goes on to explain, "for practical, efficient military man in action moral scruples are a hindrance to success; so Iago merely ignores them" (McClowsky, 29). However, in the civil world of the play they come off as heartless and

evil. These actions appear jealous and envious, because Iago was denied a position that he felt entitled to. In *Iago—An Extraordinary Honest Man*, Weston Babcock explains that Iago's military background and promotional slight sets the rest of the pieces in motion to destroy Othello,

It shows, I am convinced, that Shakespeare conceived of Iago as a man who, endowed with a cold shrewdness and intelligence, was constantly embittered by recognition of his social inferiority in a rank-conscious society. This corroding awareness of how others looked upon him put a galling chip on his shoulder; it forced him to prove his superiority- to "plume up [his] will", as he puts it-by manipulating his social betters, to show that they could as "tenderly be led by the Nose, As Asses are.

(Babcock 300)

These slights are preventing Iago from rising in status. Since Iago is living in a "rank-conscious society", it is unacceptable that Othello would hold him back. This social slighting is not only done by Othello, but by Cassio as well.

CASSIO: For mine owne part, no offense to the General, nor any man of qualitie; I hope to be saved.

IAGO: And so do I too Lieutenant.

CASSIO: I: (but by your leave) not before me. The Lieutenant is to be saved before the Ancient. (*Othello*, 32)

This slight shows Cassio's consciousness of the rank superiority that exists in the play *Othello*. Cassio saying that he should be saved before Iago because of their rank in the military shows the ideal that is held by the society that they are living in. Iago only has status and importance over few characters of the play because of his reputation.

Babcock explains that, "Only one who lacks inner assurance and so is constantly on guard against any hint of his inferiority could so confess himself. As Earle says, "it concerns him to be called honest, for if he were not this, he were nothing" (Babcock, 329-300). It is Iago's reputation for being an honest gentleman that gives him any sway in society. If he had not earned his reputation, he would have no status at all.

Iago receives another slight later in the play in Act Four, Scene One, when Iago tries to curry favor for himself: "I am very glad to see you, Signior: Welcome to Cyprus." Lodovico replies, "I thanke you: how do's Lieutenant Cassio?" Lodovico has no time to deal with a soldier of such a low rank. Babcock explains that,

Iago's hurt at the curtness of the reply is shown in his monosyllabic answer: "Lives Sir." This ever-present sense of social inferiority forces Iago into compensating by manipulating his superiors: and it explains why Iago expresses jealousy of both Othello and Cassio. The fear that one is inadequate to retain another's love is part of the cause of jealousy.

(Babcock, 329)

Iago believes he should have never been slighted, and in this case he is always struggling to retain superiority over all the other characters in the show.

Social status is prevalent in determining how Iago would act physically around men of higher rank and status of him. Iago must play the part of a good soldier to maintain his reputation as an honest and loyal man. He would strive to seem physically fit, always at attention, never slouch in sight of these men, and always maintain an image that is worthy of a soldier that is in position for promotion. Only in his soliloquies would Iago allow himself to seem something other than the attentive soldier.

Iago uses reputation and status as a tool in bringing down Cassio, Desdemona, and eventually Othello. Iago creates scenarios that tarnish the reputation and status of those closest to Othello in order to gain reputation for himself as well as rise in status. This is best seen after he has indirectly disgraced Cassio. He speaks of reputation and status as if it means nothing. Jacobsen explains that, "Iago likewise dissociates identity and character. Reputation, he tells the recently demoted Cassio, is not "the immortal part of [oneself]" (2.3.263–64) but simply the public reception of one's character, the rhetorical construction and projection of the self" (Jacobsen, 508). Cassio is lamenting both the reputation and status he has just lost and Iago uses it as a weapon against him. Iago later goes on to say, "Reputation is an idle and most false imposition; oft got without merit, and lost without deserving. You have lost no reputation at all, unless you repute yourself such a loser" (*Othello*, 77). This confirms the monologue in Act I, scene i when Iago says to Roderigo,

Others there are

Who, trimm'd in forms and visages of duty,

Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves,

And, throwing but shows of service on their lords,  
Do well thrive by them and when they have lin'd their coats  
Do themselves homage. (*Othello*, 13)

Iago is saying that by not caring about the men that are served then the reputation that men create can never be taken from them. However, Iago is completely dependent on both his status and his reputation. Jacobsen discusses how Iago already has shown how important these ideas are to him and how they allow him to manipulate the other characters.

Despite this dismissive comment, Iago carefully cultivates a reputation appropriate to both orator and general: “A man he is of honesty and trust” (1.3.284); “I never knew a Florentine more kind and honest” (3.1.40); “a very valiant fellow” (5.1.52); “An honest man he is, and hates the slime / That sticks on filthy deeds” (5.2.148–49). One crucial element in this persona is the impression of devotion; this is conveyed both through speech—“I humbly do beseech you of your pardon / For too much loving you” (3.3.212–13).  
(Jacobsen 508)

Jacobsen is explaining that without Iago’s reputation or status he would have never been able to manipulate the other characters.

This manipulation is what makes Iago so powerful. John Draper in his article, “Honest Iago”, supports this opinion when he says,

Until the very end of the play, the talk and actions of all the other characters constantly imply that Iago has always been all that one could

wish in a courageous soldier, an esteemed companion and a man of honor. Lodovico calls him “a very valiant fellow; Othello reiterates that he is honest, and entrusts him to his wife. (Draper, 726)

Reputation and status are the most important tools in Iago’s arsenal of tricks. They allow him to manipulate and influence the rest of the character’s to assist him, unknowingly at times, in the destruction of Othello.

Iago’s lust for status and redemption is what causes his downfall. By underestimating his wife, because she is of a lower status than himself, Iago allows her to insinuate, “I will be hanged if some eternal villain some busy and insinuating rogue, some cogging, cozening slave, to get some office, hath not devis’d this slander” (*Othello*, 133). Emilia has uncovered part of the plot Iago has set in motion. Because status is so important in Venetian society Emilia is able to suspect her husband of such heinous actions. Bernard Spivak in his book, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*, elaborates more on Iago’s need for status and position, “late in the play he plots the destruction of Cassio and Roderigo, do not his reasons for it, as he expresses them, grow out of the inescapable logic of his position” (Spivak, 5)? The two driving factors seen in Iago are his need for revenge and duplicitous nature. Both of which are seen in his military background and gives insight to Iago’s need to rise in status as well as why he acts in the manner that he does.

Iago’s soliloquies, and small interactions with Roderigo, are when his psychological and moral truths are shown to differ from what he shows to the other characters of *Othello*. In Act I, Scene iii Iago describes how by serving the Moor he is

serving himself, and is better off so that none may judge him but God alone. He admits to only personifying a moral idea when, in reality, he believes in something completely different.

Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago  
In following him, I follow myself;  
Heaven is my judge, not for love or duty,  
But seeming so, for peculiar end;  
For when my outward action doth demonstrate  
The native act and figure of my heart  
In compliment extern, it is not long after  
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve  
For daws to peck at; I am not what I am (*Othello*, 35).

Iago is entitled to act the way he will, lie to the Moor to gain favor, and he feels he should be praised for it. He wants Roderigo to trust him, but also to admire him for his intelligence and superiority. Everything Iago does is a self-indulging fantasy, making him seem better and more powerful than anyone around him.

Iago has seven soliloquies in *Othello*. In these moments Iago shows that he has no care for the well-being of those standing in his way of destroying Othello. By discussing two of these soliloquies it will be shown that Iago is personifying a good person to the other characters, but in his soliloquies he portrays an evil persona.

Good, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is “virtuous, right, commendable <a good person> <good conduct> kind, benevolent loyal <a good party man> close <a good friend>” (Good). Evil, as defined by Merriam-Webster, “is morally reprehensible: sinful, wicked, arising from actual or imputed bad character or conduct” (Evil). These definitions will be used in defining Iago’s actions and morality as good or evil in his soliloquies.

The first soliloquy that will be explored is at the end of Act I. It is the monologue where Iago confesses his plan to the audience and shows his true morals. Iago says,

After some time, to abuse Othello’s (ear)

That he is too familiar with his wife.

He hath a person and a smooth dispose

To be suspected, framed to make woman false

The Moor is of free and open nature

that thinks men honest that but seem to be so,

And will as tenderly be led by th’ nose

As asses are.

I have’t. It is engendered. Hell and night

Must bring this monstrous birth to the world’s light. (*Othello*, 55)

Iago he feels nothing for the characters that he is going to commit evil actions toward. He is determined to bring these evils into reality and turn Desdemona and Cassio against Othello through a false adulterous relationship. This plan will help Iago gain admiration and bring him closer to Othello and in the process, closer to ruin.

The second soliloquy that will be explored to show Iago's questionable morals is in Act II, scene three,

And what's he then that says I play the villain?

When this advice is free I give and honest,

Probal to thinking and indeed the course

To win the Moor again? For 'tis most easy

The inclining Desdemona to subdue

In any honest suit: she's framed as fruitful

As the free elements.

.....

When devils will the blackest sins put on,

They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,

As I do now: for whiles this honest fool

Plies Desdemona to repair his fortunes

And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor,

I'll pour this pestilence into his ear,

That she repeals him for her body's lust;

And by how much she strives to do him good,  
She shall undo her credit with the Moor.  
So will I turn her virtue into pitch,  
And out of her own goodness make the net  
That shall enmesh them all. (*Othello*, 104-105)

This soliloquy is one Iago's most well-known and brings to light the most of truthful description of himself and the lack of morals he portrays. He openly admits that he is using the "goodness" of Desdemona's heart as a weapon against her. Iago is also using words such as "virtue" and "goodness" to describe Desdemona and Cassio. At the same time he is using such words as "pestilence", which means poison, "devils", and "villain" to describe himself. Iago in his soliloquies shows the audience his evil nature and denounces good morals because they stand in his way. He will use the "goodness" in the other characters to poison Othello's thoughts and actions. This shows that Iago is an evil man by his own understanding and by the definitions provided.

Iago's morals change with each character he encounters. Iago changes his attitude and speech patterns depending on the status and gender of who he is talking to. When talking to a gentleman of non-military affiliations such as Roderigo he speaks as if he is superior to them and they are only worthy of his time if they can provide aid in his personal goals. This is seen with the treatment of Roderigo throughout the show. Iago consistently uses "you" with Roderigo, and Roderigo "thou" to Iago, until, in the final lines of Act one, scene three. Iago sees Roderigo utterly downcast at his loss of

Desdemona and persuades him to follow under Iago's command. Babcock explains the change of how Iago addresses Roderigo as this,

to use a colloquialism, Iago has Roderigo where he wants him; and from this point to the end of the play Iago always addresses Roderigo with thou, or uses its variants. Roderigo has subordinated himself, and Iago takes every opportunity to insult him. (Babcock, 228)

Iago is never allowed to openly degrade or insult Roderigo; however, in private he will impose his will and his superiority over Roderigo at every chance that he gets. Iago also uses his military affiliations as an excuse when coming across troubling situations with Roderigo. When he convinces Roderigo to awake Brabantio and inform him of his daughters marriage to Othello. Before Brabantio exits the house to talk with them Iago says, "Farewell; for I must leave you: It seems not meet, nor wholesome to my place, to be produced — as, if I stay, I shall — against the Moor" (*Othello*, 15). Iago is using his military affiliations to save face. He cannot openly accuse Othello of any wrong doing in the event his plans fail. The gentleman of the play are used as tool's and scapegoats for Iago to manipulate in bringing Othello to his tragic end.

The other characters that are treated with a disdain by Iago are the women of the play. When speaking with Emilia he puts on a false persona of a loving husband, yet whenever any other character says a kind word about her, Iago insults her.

CASSIO : Good ancient, you are welcome.

*[To Emilia.]*

Welcome, mistress.

Let it not gall your patience, good Iago,  
That I extend my manners; 'tis my breeding  
That gives me this bold show of courtesy.

*[Kissing her.]*

IAGO: Sir, would she give you so much of her lips  
As of her tongue she oft bestows on me,  
You would have enough.

This is Iago's way of remaining powerful over his wife. Women are not as important as men in Venetian society and Iago has no problem insulting them regardless of his affiliation with them. Iago imposes his power over Emilia in Act III, scene iii when she is giving him the handkerchief,

IAGO: A good wench; give it me.

EMILIA: What will you do with 't, that you have been so earnest  
To have me filch it?

IAGO: *[Snatching it.]* Why, what's that to you?

EMILIA: If it be not for some purpose of import,  
Give't me again: poor lady, she'll run mad  
When she shall lack it.

IAGO: Be not acknown on 't; I have use for it.

Go, leave me.

In just a few seconds Iago shifts from complimenting Emilia to insulting and throwing her out of the room. When Emilia tries to oppose Iago, or his plans, in anyway he insults her and eventually will kill her.

Iago's disdain with Desdemona is even greater than that he displays to his wife. In their first interaction in Act II, scene i Iago uses chauvinistic rhymes to insult women, Desdemona specifically,

IAGO: I am about it; but indeed my invention  
Comes from my pate as birdlime does from frieze;  
It plucks out brains and all: but my Muse labors,  
And thus she is deliver'd.  
If she be fair and wise, fairness and wit,  
The one's for use, the other useth it.

Iago is insinuating that Desdemona is beautiful and naive. She uses her beauty to gain respect and the love of men, but as soon as an intelligent man comes along he will use her naivety against her. The two continue in this manner until,

IAGO: She that in wisdom never was so frail  
To change the cod's head for the salmon's tail;  
She that could think and ne'er disclose her mind,  
See suitors following and not look behind,  
She was a wight, if ever such wight were, —

DESDEMONA: To do what?

IAGO: To suckle fools and chronicle small beer.

DESDEMONA: O most lame and impotent conclusion! Do not learn of him, Emilia, though he be thy husband.

Iago uses these rhymes to make women out to be little more than tools for sex and servants. To him women are nothing and Desdemona insults him in return by calling him impotent, or sexually lacking. This fuels Iago's hatred and disdain for Desdemona.

The characters that Iago is most attentive and kind to are Othello and Cassio because they are men of a higher status than him. He cannot seem disdainful and mean, for it would ruin his chances for advancement. In every moment Iago has with Othello he is subservient to Othello's needs. Iago must become as close as possible, if he is to bring about the downfall of Othello, before he ever becomes aware. When speaking to Othello, the language is a game of cat and mouse. Iago is always gracious and respectful when addressing Othello. "Think, my lord" (*Othello* 127)? Or "my lord, you know I love you (*Othello* 129)". The only times he more than two lines to Othello is when he is asked to give an explanation or to help the Moor to plan his revenge. In these moments, Iago is comforting, almost to the point of apologetic. Iago's words lead Othello to destruction and an example is when Iago says,

Good my lord, pardon me.

Though I am bound to every act of duty,

I am not bound to (that all slaves are free to.)  
Utter my thoughts? Why, say they are vile and  
False—As where's that palace whereinto foul things  
Sometimes intrude not? Who has that breast so pure? (*Othello*, 127)

Iago has to seem honest so that Othello does not suspect him of the evil he is actually committing. Iago cannot seem as if he is controlling Othello. He has to be the “ancient” giving solemn advice to a man who is slowly losing control of the world around him.

There are times when Iago does gain power over Othello. When Iago knows he has the upper hand he allows his more disdainful and disrespectful self to be shown. A moment that shows this change in Iago's interaction with Othello is when he says,

Good sir, be a man!

Think every bearded fellow that's but yoked  
May draw with you. There's millions now alive  
That nightly lie in those unproper beds  
Which they dare swear peculiar. Your case is better. (*Othello*, 177)

Iago uses his opportunity to insult Othello as a way to get closer to him. He is using his honest label to gain power over Othello's emotions and seem as if he is being a friend. Iago asserts his power by guiding Othello into a state of depression. When he has Othello in this state, Iago is able to take his place of superiority.

Iago treats Cassio as a friend and through that friendship Iago makes him a tool to use against Othello. Iago has a more relaxed and pitied attitude toward Cassio and the plight Iago drags him through. Cassio is the man who stole Iago's promotion and every action that Iago takes involving Cassio is to manipulate him into disgracing himself and the Othello. Iago's first lengthy interaction with Cassio he is tempting him with alcohol, "O they are friends! But one cup; I'll drink for you" (*Othello*, 83). He knows that Cassio has no tolerance for alcohol and when he consumes too much he is quick to a fight, Cassio has told him as much. The way Iago convinces Cassio to drink is with a jovial nature and with a guilt ridden nature. Iago is daring Cassio to drink. Giving off the impression Cassio is less of a man, and is letting Iago down for not drinking.

When Cassio disgraces himself Iago is right there to comfort him. In this way he gains his trust. When Iago says, "Come, come, good wine is a good familiar creature, if it be well used. Exclaim no more against it. And, good lieutenant, I think you think I love you" (*Othello*, 101). Iago is manipulating Cassio to see Iago as a friend. Iago uses this tactic to disgrace Cassio and then to gain his trust after he has disgraced himself. As stated earlier, Iago uses Cassio's loss of reputation and his own reputation to begin the plot of an adulterous relationship between Cassio and Desdemona.

By exploring the character analysis it has been shown that Iago is a manipulative, evil, and moral-less character. He views the world in a militaristic sense and uses his subjective view of society to demean those of a lesser status than him, while humbling himself to those of a higher status. By exploring Iago's background and military status in

the *Othello* it can be inferred that Iago's physicality would have to be very strict and militaristic when interacting with other characters. By discussing Iago's relationships with the other characters of the *Othello* it is seen in everything that Iago does he is manipulating the other characters to his will and using them to bring about the destruction of Othello. This information will be used as a basis to create an Iago that is fully realized and unique for the stage.

## Chapter III

### Creating Iago Pre-rehearsal

The process of creating a character entails much more than memorizing a few lines, learning blocking, and repeating them on stage. An important aspect for an actor passionate about improving his or her craft as an artist comes during the pre-rehearsal process. Before the audience enters the theatre, or the director has taken control of the actors on stage, it is important, as an actor, to begin to develop the many aspects of the character that he or she will bring to the play. The creative process begins the moment an actor receives their role in the play. To create the role of Iago an actor faces many challenges. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss, the examination of Iago's use of language, journaling as a tool in the creation process, and challenges that Iago presents to me personally as an actor.

The process of creating the role of Iago can take many directions depending on the actor who is approaching it. This is my personal approach to creating a character. It involves methods learned from time in under-graduate school at Jamestown College and in graduate school at the University of North Dakota.

The first aspect that I would approach, as an actor in the pre-rehearsal process, is understanding the Shakespearean language. What makes Shakespearean drama

unique from the majority of plays an actor will face in an educational setting is the language. One of the first things that an actor should do when he or she receives their script is to explore the way language is articulated by their character. Shakespeare presents language in two ways with the character of Iago, verse and prose. Ben Crystal in his book *Shakespeare's Words: A Glossary and Language Companion*, helps to explain the difference in Shakespeare's verse. There are two forms of verse rhymed iambic pentameter and blank, which is unrhymed iambic pentameter.

Blank verse resembles prose in that the final words of the lines do not rhyme in any regular pattern. Blank verse is employed in a wide range of situations because it comes close to the natural speaking rhythms of English but raises it above the ordinary without sounding artificial. Blank verse, as opposed to prose, is used mainly for passionate, lofty or momentous occasions and for introspection; it may suggest a refinement of character. (Crystal, 14)

He also explains that prose is,

used whenever verse would seem bizarre: in serious letters, in proclamations, and in the speeches of characters actually or pretending to be mad. Prose is used for cynical commentary or reducing flowery speech to common sense terms. It is used when the rational is contrasted with the emotional. (Crystal, 15)

As an actor it is important to explore why Shakespeare may have switched between verse and prose to find a better understanding of Iago. By looking at the times Iago speaks in prose and verse it can be shown how Iago uses language as a tool to manipulate the other characters of the play.

Iago speaks in verse when he is gaining the affection of the other characters of *Othello* in order to seem more enlightened and intelligent. He speaks in verse at times of heightened emotion and personal reflection. By examining Iago's interactions with Roderigo in Act I, Scene i, and his interaction with Othello in Act III, scene iii, it will be shown that Iago speaks in verse when manipulating the characters of *Othello*.

In the beginning of the play Roderigo is lamenting over his loss of Desdemona to Othello. He is also berating Iago for not informing him of the union before the two eloped. Iago is trying to calm Roderigo down and assure him that he is not supporting Othello. When Roderigo says he would "rather be Othello's hangman than Ancient", Iago responds

Why, there's no remedy; 'tis the curse of service,  
Preferment goes by letter and affection,  
And not by old gradation, where each second  
Stood heir to the first. Now, sir, be judge yourself,  
Whether I in any just term am affined  
To love the Moor. (*Othello*, 9)

Iago is speaking in verse while he is trying to convince Roderigo that he is not supporting Othello. This speech pattern raises Iago above the common man. By speaking in verse Shakespeare is presenting a character as intelligent and sophisticated. Iago continues to speak in verse until the end of Act I, scene iii. In this moment, when he has gained the trust of Roderigo, Iago no longer needs verse to raise himself above the gentleman whom he is manipulating, and allows his more common side to show to Roderigo.

Another instance that shows Iago speaking in verse is seen in Act III, scene iii. Iago is manipulating Othello, and is questioning Cassio's honor, when he says,

I am glad of it; for now I shall have reason  
To show the love and duty that I bear you  
With franker spirit: therefore, as I am bound,  
Receive it from me. I speak not yet of proof.  
Look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio;  
Wear your eye thus, not jealous nor secure:  
I would not have your free and noble nature,  
Out of self-bounty, be abused; look to't:  
I know our country disposition well;  
In Venice they do let heaven see the pranks  
They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience  
Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown. (*Othello*, 133)

In this passage Iago admits he is trying to gain Othello's affection; however, he claims to be speaking with a "franker spirit" and remains speaking in this heightened form throughout the scene. The only times Iago speaks with "a franker spirit" is when he has the power to belittle those he has already gained affection.

When exploring the language of Iago his most prominent use of prose comes when he is speaking with characters such as Roderigo and Cassio in moments of feigned friendship. In these moments Iago allows himself to seem completely honest to the characters that he is manipulating. By speaking prose Iago is not asserting his power over the other characters, but he is showing himself as an equal to gain their trust. The only character that Iago never speaks to in prose is Othello. By using two interactions Iago has with Roderigo and Emilia, it will be shown how Iago speaks in prose when he believes he has sway over a certain character and is befriending or belittling them.

The first interaction that will be discussed is Iago's belittling of Roderigo in Act I, scene iii. Desdemona has just admitted she loves Othello and has willingly married him. This causes Roderigo to become suicidal and depressed. Roderigo confesses to Iago, "It is silliness to live, when to live is torment, and then we have a prescription to die when death is our physician" (*Othello*, 49). Iago has already convinced Roderigo that he is a friend and is supportive of Roderigo's pursuit of Desdemona. Iago's response to this statement is,

O, villainous! I have look'd upon the world for four times seven years,  
and since I could distinguish betwixt a benefit and an injury, I have never

found man that knew how to love himself. Ere I would say I would drown myself for the love of a guinea hen, I would change my humanity for a baboon. (*Othello*, 49)

Iago who has spoken to every character, including Roderigo, up to this point in verse at this moment he switches to prose. Iago no longer needs to assert his power over Roderigo and can speak openly to him because there is no longer a reason to put on a façade.

Iago's belittling nature is also seen in Iago's interactions with Emilia. In Act II, Scene i Iago belittles Emilia after she insinuates he knows nothing, "Come on, come on; you are pictures out of doors, bells in your parlors, wild-cats in your kitchens, saints in your injuries, devils being offended, players in your housewifery, and housewives' in your beds" (*Othello*, 67). Iago believes, as stated earlier in chapter II, that women are lower than him and have no importance in society other than as sexual objects. After Iago retrieves the handkerchief from Emilia he has nothing to gain from her. However, because she is lower than him he doesn't feel the need to sound sophisticated to her.

These two instances show how, when Iago no longer needs to gain affection or respect from a character, Iago allows himself to become more relaxed in the way he speaks to them. As an actor this is useful in making character choices and determining how Iago feels about each character in the moment he is conversing with them. This also explains why Iago would never speak in prose when addressing Othello, for Iago never gains complete power over him. As an actor, it is important to be able to

recognize the difference between prose and verse and how it affects the relationships Iago has with the other characters of *Othello*. When these differences are addressed and analyzed it can shed light on Iago's character and how he interacts with each character at any given moment.

As an actor dealing with the Shakespearean language it can be helpful to paraphrase it into modern day language. Paraphrasing can be helpful when dealing with words with multiple meanings, for it forces the actor decide upon which meaning will be used and how it affects the character. This aides the actor to create a more specified and detailed character. By using the following monologue it will be shown how paraphrasing can be used in the creation process of Iago.

Many a duteous and knee-crooking knave,  
That, doting on his own obsequious bondage,  
Wears out his time, much like his master's ass,  
For nought but provender, and when he's old, cashier'd:  
Whip me such honest knaves. Others there are  
Who, trimm'd in forms and visages of duty,  
Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves,  
And, throwing but shows of service on their lords,  
Do well thrive by them and when they have lin'd their coats  
Do themselves homage. These fellows have some soul;  
And such a one do I profess myself. (*Othello*, 13)

When paraphrasing any lengthy monologue it is important to have already analyzed the character to create a translation that best fits the character that is being created. Since the Iago I am creating is a manipulative, evil, militaristic, and antagonist the choices will allow that side of him to be represented in this monologue. He is allowing Roderigo to see a brief glimpse of the man that will appear to the other characters in Act V. By paraphrasing this monologue I will show how paraphrasing can help to understand what Iago is saying.

In this monologue Iago is speaking of two different kinds of men. The man he is seen as, and the man he really is. He is giving the first true glimpse of his true self to Roderigo and the audience. The translation that I have created for this monologue is,

You have seen many men who fawn over and flatter the men they serve under in hopes of receiving praise. Yet when these men have finished their duty they are no better off than the donkey their master rides upon. I would whip such flattering idiots. But there are others that use intelligence and countenances in their duty to advance themselves into a better rank and status. By doing so, they create their own wealth of money and respect. I am such a man.

For Iago to put down the men who would blindly follow Othello as fools he is appealing both Roderigo, who he is trying to manipulate to help disgrace Othello, and himself. When he begins to explain the kind of man he sees himself as, it is important to use two strong words for “forms” and “visages” so that they are emphasized correctly. He is

complementing himself and use formulas for “forms” and appearance for “visages” does not give the importance to these words that they need. The creation of Iago depends on his manipulation of the other characters, yet his manipulation of the other characters, both as an actor and a character, relies on the ability to manipulate the language he uses to influence them. This monologue is used to influence Roderigo and to reveal Iago for what he truly is. It has a double meaning and to have any part of this monologue in question when speaking it on stage will cause it to lose its importance. To have an exact translation of the words and meanings of Iago’s lines will help in creating a more specific character. The more detailed and specific an actor can be on stage the easier it is for an audience member to follow along with the story being told by that character.

The character of Iago brings many challenges to any actor who plays the role. He has a duplicitous nature throughout the play until the climactic moments of Act V where his false “honest” persona is thrown aside and his evil malicious persona is revealed to the other characters of *Othello*. Throughout my career as an actor it has been conveyed that every actor is labeled with a certain type that he or she will play. These labels include ingénue, villain, hero, character and comedic actors. In my career I have been labeled a comedic character actor. I have played roles such as “Officer Barrel” from *Urinetown*, “Dogberry” from *Much Ado About Nothing*, and “Elwood P. Dowd” from the play *Harvey*. As a character actor it is difficult to approach a character as serious as Iago. It would be easy for me to create a humorous Iago playing to my strengths in

comedy. However, the problems that can arise by creating Iago as a humorous character is discussed by Marvin Rosenberg in his book, *The Masks of Othello*,

An audience watching such a rascal's crimes will leap eagerly to the relief of laughter; so Iago has been played almost as a comedy figure. The danger is spotted as surely by modern critics as by their predecessors: the play suffers because this Iago is tempted merely to make a game of Othello, thus an Iago of 1912 "tended to be impish rather than devilish . . . the real venom seldom emerged. (Rosenberg 156)

Rosenberg goes on to mention several other Iagos that have suffered because of the comedic ways in which they are played. This point is also emphasized by Martin Wine in his book, *Othello Text and Performance*, where he says of Emrys James, "But in subordinating Othello to Iago, the Royal Shakespeare Company subordinated Tragedy to Comedy, creating less of a supreme tragedy than a moving stratagem practiced by an evil spirit on a trusting loving soul" (Wine, 63). When approaching the character of Iago I have to avoid making it too comedic and focus on the seriousness of the role to uphold the integrity of the tragedy.

The key to creating the role of Iago is the balance between his false "honest" persona and the evil person that is Iago. Being able to switch efficiently and honestly from the "honest" Iago to the Iago that is shown in his soliloquys would require much practice. He would have to seem honest enough to the other characters of the play to

keep his reputation intact, and then allow his emotions to exude in his soliloquys. Jose Ferrer, whose role is said to be one of the better interpretations of Iago, explains that,

I have to manage to suggest a very careful, frank, open love and dependability about the man. The simplest, most trustworthy character I could suggest when in the presence of others. Only in the soliloquies did Iago's true maliciousness assert itself openly; only the lightest touch was necessary to make the soliloquy scenes the embodiment of evil. (Wine 59)

The balance between the two sides of Iago is the most important aspect in creating this role and it is also the hardest to achieve. There are many ways to allow the character to become too comedic or evil. Finding balance is the key to playing Iago.

An exploration of physicality is important for an actor to help with the creative process. Stanislavski explains the importance in his book, *Building A Character*,

If you do not use your body, your voice, a manner of speaking, walking, moving, if you do not find a form of characterization which corresponds to the image, you probably cannot convey its inner, living spirit. Without an external form neither your inner characterizations nor the spirit of your image will reach the public. (Stanislavski, 1)

The physical aspects of any character are so important to any actor creating any role. Bringing an array of ideas to the rehearsal process will only increase an actor's chances

of developing a more fully realized character. As Stanislavski states physicality is an integral part of building a character and should be one of the first aspects an actor should explore before moving into the other more complex and psychological aspects of that character (Stanislavski, 2).

Another approach to the character is the psychological aspects of Iago. One such idea I have had in the pre-rehearsal process is the idea of playing Iago with a mental disorder. When exploring the psychological side of Iago I have searched mental disorders that could possibly be affecting his decision making.

One such disorder that I came across in the process is narcissistic personality disorder. With narcissism there is a sense of entitlement, of being more deserving than others based solely on their superiority. The symptoms of this psychological disease are, “a pattern of grandiosity, an excessive need for admiration, and sense of entitlement. Often individuals feel overly important and will exaggerate achievements and will accept, and often demand, praise and admiration despite worthy achievements” (Narcissistic). This description of the disorder represents Iago in an accurate way. He constantly needs to feel empowered and admired. This can be seen in Iago’s first words of *Othello*,

Three great ones of the city,

In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,

Off capped him; and by the faith of man,

I know my price, I am worth no worse a place. (*Othello* 7)

Iago lets Roderigo know that he is worth more than to he is being given. He has to boast how notable men in the city wanted him to be Othello's lieutenant, yet he was passed over for a man who knows little of war. In Act one, scene one, Iago displays the overcompensation and envious reactions toward Cassio through interactions with Roderigo.

A fellow almost damned in a fair wife,  
That never set a squadron in the field,  
Nor the divisions of a battle knows  
.....  
And I, of whom his eyes had seen the proof  
At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds  
Christened and heathen, must be led and calmed  
By debtor and creditor. This counter-caster,  
He in good time, must be his lieutenant be,  
And I, (God) bless the mark, his Moorship's ancient. (*Othello* 9)

Even though Iago has proved through his prowess on the battlefield he is envious of Cassio for receiving the mark of lieutenant, while he is only given the lowly title of ancient. Ancient is the lowest commissioned officer. This is not the praise and admiration that Iago wants for the good he has done for the Moor, and so it becomes the catalyst of Iago's evil plot to bring Othello to ruin. Iago's final words truly represent his indignation of maintaining power, even when he has no power to realistically attain. "From this time forth I never will speak a word (*Othello*, 261)." This short phrase

maintains the illusion of hierarchy for Iago. He may be caught, he may be killed, he will for sure be tortured, but he will never let them have the satisfaction of knowing why he did it. They will never have the power to force him to speak. He maintains his superiority over them as long as they seek that truth. Iago's narcissistic features highlight his main motives for destroying the life of those closest to him.

In chapter III I have explored many aspects involved in the pre-rehearsal process of creating the character of Iago. I have explored the language of Shakespearean drama, such as prose, verse, and paraphrasing as they help in the creation process. Then by discussing challenges that are presented for me as an actor, I have discussed how I would approach the role of Iago and the portrayals of Iago I would try to avoid, such as playing him too comedic or evil. Finally, by discussing Iago's psychological aspects the culmination of research will help in creating a multi-layered, well-thought out character to bring to the rehearsal process.

This thesis has explored, through analysis, that Iago is the antagonist of *Othello* and he uses societies, as well as his own, prejudice, Desdemona, and manipulation of the other characters to try and destroy Othello. In Chapter II a detailed analysis of Iago explored his minor objectives in Acts II and III, Iago's social status and military background and how it gives insight to his physicality, and Iago's morality and relationships with Roderigo, Emilia, Desdemona, Cassio, and Othello. This character helped to reveal Iago as a manipulative and calculated soldier who will do anything and use anyone to accomplish his goal of destroying Othello. Chapter III explored how I would begin the creative process using the analyses created in the first two chapters.

These chapters together present my personal process in creating Iago as a duplicitous, evil, militaristic character that manipulates the other characters and drives the action of *Othello*.

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