

## The Mad Othello: A Psychological Perspective

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**Abstract:** General Othello's trustworthy companion and advisor Iago makes the Moor 'mad' in William Shakespeare's *Othello*. He causes the ruin of quite a few characters in the play because of his uncontrollable jealousy and a feeling of revenge. Iago takes the help of his ally named Roderigo in order to translate his own destructive dreams into reality. Once Othello is in Cyprus, Iago decides to work on his central plan. He wants to make Othello believe that his wife is in an adulterous relationship with the new lieutenant, Michael Cassio. Iago keeps on playing with Othello's mind through the process of having Othello listen to Cassio speak generously about his mistress, Bianca, even as Othello thinks that the mistress must be Desdemona. Othello blindly sees coincidences as evidences. It is true that the fire of jealousy in Othello's heart and his unjust trust in Iago lead him towards insanity and ultimate tragedy where he is found murdering Desdemona and committing suicide.

**Keywords:** Cassio, Desdemona, Handkerchief, Iago, Mad, Madness, Murder, Othello, Shakespeare, Suicide

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Othello is not jealous by nature. However, the cunning Iago makes him extremely jealous and mad. He makes the Moor believe that his wife has an illegal affair with Cassio. Iago uses the conspiracy of the handkerchief and becomes successful in turning Othello into an insane person who murders his innocent wife and takes his own life away in the end.

Hence, *Othello* is a "Shakespearean tragedy, drawn to madness perhaps because of its inherent theatricality, represented madness by a conventionalized speech that was successful (and imitated) by virtue of its excessiveness, its rich imagery and associations, its verbal inventiveness, its theatrical. By providing multiple functions: a language psychological, thematic, satiric" (Neely, 1991, p. 337). Iago's sly manipulation of Othello "...gives rise to a history of madness and thereby makes" the crime "possible" (Derrida, 1994, pp. 231-232).

Iago "is cynical and self seeking. He uses every opportunity that comes his way to his advantage; he is totally amoral. He is nonetheless a man of intelligence. His kind of intelligence is incapable of doing good; it is diabolic in its functioning. 'Virtue' to him is but a 'fig'. He cannot imagine that there could be a lasting love or lasting relationship..." (Chatterjee, 2014, p. 59). In other words, "the juice in the heart of" Iago "is evil" and his "...heart hath lost the name of heart and is become the nature of that it holds, a lump of evil". In other words, he is "...evil by nature" (Adams, n.d., pp. 261-267).

He looks more cunning than the Satan in the Garden of Eden! As the Satan convinces Eve to commit sin by eating the fruit from the forbidden tree, similarly, Iago persuades Othello and make him commit sin as the Moor doubts and murders the virtuous Desdemona. In short, Iago

...sees evil, he likes it, he dares it, he does it, he lives in it; and his heart, like a hydropic stomach, is not quiet till it be full (Adams, n.d., p. 266).

Notably, "man was created happy, but he found out tricks to make himself miserable" (Adams, n.d., p. 262). Similarly, we can say that Othello was 'happy' earlier but Iago has made his life 'miserable' later:

Iago is actually at the center of the whole tragedy. He injects the poison of jealousy and on the process incites Othello to murder Desdemona and, therefore, destroy his happiness. (Simour et al., 2016, p. 13)

## II. THE INNOCENT OTHELLO IS TURNED MAD BY IAGO

Certainly, Othello, a North African Moor and a senior general in the Venetian army, is not instinctively jealous. For instance, Cassio calls him 'great of heart'. Besides, even Iago cannot but appreciate Othello by saying that the Moor:

Is of a constant, loving, noble nature,  
And I dare think he will prove to Desdemona  
A most dear husband. (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 925)

"Jealousy is not simply a matter of reversing the positive into the negative, but brings out in its pure state the agglutination of an excess of signifiers. Such a condensation remains silent in love or is untied only in the syntagmatic chain of the innumerable qualities of the love-object that are interposed between the desire of the subject and the phantasy of union with him" (as cited in Chun, 2006, p. 101). Desdemona knows it well that Othello is such a person who can never become envious. As she self-assuredly opines:

My noble Moor  
Is true of mind and made of no such baseness  
As jealous creatures are. (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 935)

However, great leader and stress are similar to the body and the shadow. He has much tension on him. But, only stress does not drive Othello towards 'madness'. Indeed, the combination of the stress, envy, and loss of honour act as catalysts in making Othello insane. Therefore, he does not hesitate to murder his wife. We see a mad Othello when he cries:

thou hast set me on the rack.  
I swear 't is better to be much abus'd  
Than but to know a little. (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 933)

Obviously, we do not find the direct reference to the stress of battle in *Othello*, but the negative impact of stress on Othello is apparent when he utters:

Her father loved me; oft invited me;  
Still question'd me the story of my life  
From year to year, the battles, sieges, fortunes  
That I have pass'd. (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 920)

Iago is suspicious that Othello is having an illegal affair with his wife named Emilia. Obviously, there is no logic in this motive and Iago presents no proof in support of his suspicion:

I hate the Moor,  
And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets  
He's done my office. (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 922)

Besides, Cassio gets what he rightly deserves. We find no reference in the tragedy that indicates Iago's superior military aptitude. Cassio is far better in skill as compared to Iago and it is proved for the second time when Cassio replaces Othello as the Governor of Cyprus. Another interesting fact is that Iago never behaves like a jealous person in the play and this has attracted the attention of Coleridge who mentions, "The motive haunting of a motiveless malignity." Regarding Iago's motives, Bradley (2005) states:

The first contains views which reduce Shakespeare to commonplace. In different ways and degrees they convert his Iago into an ordinary villain. Their Iago is simply a man who has been slighted and revenges himself; or a husband who believes he has been wronged, and will make his enemy suffer a jealousy worse than his own; or an ambitious man determined to ruin his successful rival—one of these, or a combination of these, endowed with unusual ability and cruelty. These are the more popular views. The second group of false interpretations is much smaller, but it contains much weightier matter than the first. Here Iago is a being who hates good simply because it is good, and loves evil purely for itself. His action is not prompted by any plain motive like revenge, jealousy or ambition. It springs from a 'motiveless malignity,' or a disinterested delight in the pain of others; and Othello, Cassio and

Desdemona are scarcely more than the material requisite for the full attainment of this delight. This second Iago, evidently, is no conventional villain, and he is much nearer to Shakespeare's Iago than the first. (pp. 208-209)

Therefore, it would be perfect to make a reference from Genesis 6:5 to shed light on Iago's cunning mentality- his "wickedness...and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (*Bible Hub*, n.d.). Since "...works distinguish of a good or bad man", Iago's harmful works are enough to call him a "bad" person (Adams, n.d., p. 265).

"With characters such as Kent or the Duke in *Measure for Measure* suspending the revelation of their identity for as long as possible, and with others uttering such aporetic remarks as 'I am not what I am' (*Othello*, I.i.65; *Twelfth Night*, III.i.132), we are repeatedly confronted with selves which are dislocated from what they are. In short, for Shakespeare, selfhood is more accurately articulated as the displacement of identity" (Keys, n.d., p. 54).

Iago "is cynical and self seeking. He uses every opportunity that comes his way to his advantage; he is totally amoral. He is nonetheless a man of intelligence. His kind of intelligence is incapable of doing good; it is diabolic in its functioning. 'Virtue' to him is but a 'fig'. He cannot imagine that there could be a lasting love or lasting relationship..." (Chatterjee, 2014, p. 59). In other words, "the juice in the heart of" Iago "is evil" and his "...heart hath lost the name of heart and is become the nature of that it holds, a lump of evil". In other words, he is "...evil by nature" (Adams, n.d., pp. 261-267). He looks more cunning than the Satan in the Garden of Eden! As the Satan convinces Eve to commit sin by eating the fruit from the forbidden tree, similarly, Iago persuades Othello and make him commit sin as the Moor doubts and murders the virtuous Desdemona. In short, Iago

...sees evil, he likes it, he dares it, he does it, he lives in it; and his heart, like a hydropic stomach, is not quiet till it be full (Adams, n.d., p. 266).

According to Iago, Othello is given to "loving his own pride and purposes" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 916). Roderigo also talks of him viciously- "the thick-lips"- (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 917), and we begin to build up a picture of Othello as boastful, sensual, and hateful. "In the *Moor in English Renaissance Drama* (Univ. of Florida Press, 1991), Jack D'Amico points out that many sixteenth century travelers depicted Moors as belonging to an exotic world, enhanced by the notion of great riches, but also often as a physical type with certain characteristics such as dark skin colour, woolly hair, thick lips, flat nose, pinched belly, broad chest and thin legs. Darkness of complexion was almost automatically associated with uncouthness and ugliness, and therefore was somewhat frightening. Moors were often depicted as being sexually unrestrained, though not necessarily passionate:

The conventional European judgement [was] that black cannot be beautiful and that a dark-complexioned individual... [was] by nature dangerously sensual." (as cited in Cockin, 2003, pp. 92-92)

"Such a picture is obviously reinforced by our knowledge of the Elizabethan attitude towards the Moors and Negroes. The association between the colour black and evil and, conversely that between "white" and "virtue" is almost universal and was very much alive in Shakespeare's time. To the Elizabethan, the Moor or Negro was black, ugly, cruel, evil, pagan, sexually rampant, and barely human-and the picture which Iago and Roderigo paint of Othello in the first scene of the play exactly coincides with this stereotype" (Rocha, 1980, p. 68).

However, Othello is never suspicious about 'honest' Iago. Everything is so skillfully managed by Iago that Othello cannot see reality for even a single moment. He sees what Iago wants him to see. The more Othello believes Iago, the more he moves towards jealousy and madness. Iago tries to convince Othello by saying that Cassio and Desdemona are having an illegal affair. As Iago utters:

In his sleep I heard him say 'Sweet Desdemona,  
Let us be wary, let us hide our loves!' (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 934)

Nevertheless, Iago's plan with the 'handkerchief' is the deadliest one. Iago influences his wife Emilia to steal Desdemona's handkerchief. Iago even involves Cassio and Bianca in the conspiracy without even letting them know about it. After the piece of cloth falls to the ground, with Desdemona and Othello exiting, Emilia

finds it and, knowing Iago has asked her “a hundred times” to steal it says: “I am glad I have found this napkin” (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 933). The piece of cloth named three times, is now divided ambiguously.

Othello’s “reason and judgment, though never diseased, he allows to become clouded by the deep passions stirred up within him by this evil genius”, Iago. (Kellogg, 1866, p. 184). Iago tells Othello:

Such a handkerchief  
Did I to-day  
See Cassio wipe his beard with, (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 934)

“Iago not only refers to the eyes, but also stresses their relationship with “the proof,” a very important notion related to the handkerchief...It seems hard to distinguish which drive (or instinct) is primary, the scopoc or the sceptic. In “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality”, Freud (1905) suggests that the instinct (the German *Trieb*, perhaps more appropriately, the drive) for knowledge and the drive for seeing (the “energy of scopophilia”) are not necessarily separate” (as cited in Chun, 2006, p. 97). Freud writes while arguing about “the instinct for knowledge,”

Its activity corresponds on the one hand to a sublimated manner of obtaining mastery, while on the other hand it makes use of the energy of scopophilia. Its [the instinct’s] relations to sexual life [...] are of particular importance, since [...] the instinct for knowledge in children is attracted unexpectedly early and intensively to sexual problems and is in fact possibly first aroused by them. (as cited in Chun, 2006, p. 97)

Now, Iago’s plan of using the handkerchief is to present an “ocular proof” (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 933) to Othello so that the Moor becomes entirely certain about the illegal affair between Cassio and Desdemona. Afterwards, Iago injects the ‘germ’ in Othello’s head. Iago wants to make Othello believe that Desdemona has given the handkerchief to Cassio as a gift.

So, he is eagerly waiting for the right moment to provide Othello with a proof. “Iago manipulates the handkerchief so that Othello translates it into Desdemona herself— her loyalty and integrity. By taking possession of it, he is able to convert it into evidence of her infidelity. Obviously, both Iago and Desdemona come to know about the importance of the handkerchief from Othello. He tells Desdemona that a 200year-old sibyl or female prophet wove it by using silk from sacred worms and dye taken out from the hearts of the mummified virgins” (Ziaul Haque, 2013, p. 141):

There’s magic in the web of it  
A Sybil, that had numbered in the world  
The sun course two hundred compasses  
In her prophetic fury sewed the work (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 935).

It is known that the “words inform our mind, caress and comfort our feelings, excite and thrill our spirit, or warm and kindle the flame of our hearts. Now, Iago’s spiteful words against Cassio and Desdemona “slap” Othello’s “face”, “punch” him “in the stomach”, “rattle” his “nerves”, “kill” his “desire”, or “destroy” his “self-confidence”.” (Behera & Patra, 2011, p. 32).

“Now, the translation of the object (handkerchief) appears in a new way before Desdemona’s mind. Othello’s insane reaction makes her consider the piece of cloth as something equivalent to” (Ziaul Haque, 2013, p. 143) “wonder” and she feels “most unhappy in the loss of it” (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 936). Othello gives the handkerchief another equivalent expression when he imagines that “the piece of cloth has committed an unspeakable act, as if the handkerchief/napkin is an animistic object capable of sexual desire and moral outrage, contrition and confession after the act” (Ghisalberti, 2011, p. 28). Othello calls Desdemona:

This is a subtle whore,  
A closet lock and key of villainous secrets;  
And yet she’ll kneel and pray; I have seen her do’t. (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 934)

“To be jealous is to be in the state of *méconnaissance*, that is to say, using a Lacanian word, of “misrecognition.” To be jealous is to misread the signifiers given from the Other”. What Othello needs is not just an “ocular proof,” but a sign, or a signifier, like the handkerchief (as cited in Chun, 2006, p. 101). Now, he

is certain that Desdemona is adulterous; she is betraying him. In addition, she is making him look like a fool. Besides, Iago is so sly that he has even smoothly planted the germ of 'gender ideologies' of the then time. In other words,

Just as certain racist ideologies are presented early in the play, so are certain ideologies concerning gender and especially femininity. Iago and Brabantio construct Desdemona and women in general as naturally changeable and deceptive. They also construct women as property, the ownership of which reflects on a man's masculinity (Quin, 2008, pp. 3-4)

"Out of this root of envy" in Othello's mind, "spring those feral branches of faction, hatred, livor, emulation, which cause the like grievances, and are, *serræ animæ*, the saws of the soul, *consternationes plenæ affectus*, affections full of desperate amazement; or as Cyprian describes emulation, it is "a moth of the soul, a consumption to make another man's happiness his misery, to torture, crucify, and execute himself, to eat his own heart"" (Burton, 2009, p. 229).

In "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," Freud (1984) proposes that "instincts may undergo a process of reversal into their opposite", for example, Othello's "masochism is actually sadism turned round upon" his "...own ego, and that exhibitionism includes looking at his own body". The procedure gives rise to "a turning around upon the subject's self without an attitude of passivity towards another person" and Othello's "...desire to torture has turned into self-torture and self-punishment, not into masochism..." (as cited in Chun, 2006, p. 99). The thought of revenge has made him crazy:

...my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,  
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,  
Till that a capable and wide revenge  
Swallow them up. (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 934)

Othello's 'ego', representing "reason and common sense" is defeated by his 'id' "which contains the passions" (Smith, 2010, p. 3959). His "...rapid succumbing to Iago's suggestions seems surprising, but is explicable if we see Othello as an insecure outsider" (Quin, 2008, p. 3). "This then is part of Othello's tragedy. Part of his *hamartia* is his acceptance of the ideology of race espoused by Iago and Brabantio. All else leads from this (and his succumbing to pernicious gender ideologies...) - his acceptance of the belief that a white woman could not truly love a black man, that blackness must equate with ugliness and lack of attractiveness. Part of the poison with which Iago infects Othello is the poison of racism. In Marx's term, Othello becomes a victim of false consciousness" (Quin, 2008, p. 3).

Othello cannot tolerate the unknown. He wants to see the "ocular proof". The Moor repeatedly insists Iago on proving "[his] love a whore" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 933). It seems to us that Othello's only desire now is to prove that Desdemona is unfaithful. But, "the handkerchief as an ocular proof is not sufficient. It operates as a signifier in the sense that a signifier points to the absence of the signified, the meaning" (Chun, 2006, p. 102).

The handkerchief represents 'unfaithfulness' indirectly especially when the prostitute, Bianca, holds it. It does signify unfaithfulness straightforwardly once Desdemona loses it. So, the absence of it signifies the individual who owns it. Green (1979) argues in *Othello: A Tragedy of Conversion* that "the handkerchief is a signifier of desire whose signification is apprehended only when it is missing" (as cited in Chun, 2006, p. 101). In Othello's eyes, Desdemona turns into a prostitute by losing the handkerchief. Iago leads Othello to such a stage that he desires to see the infidelity of Desdemona:

Because of this structure of jealousy, the green eye of the jealous man reads and misreads the sign. The "cure of jealousy" might be the ability to read the sign doubly, not to be restricted to one reading of the sign, so as not to be trapped by the signifiers. (Chun, 2006, p. 102)

Othello is looking for the 'absolute truth' about Desdemona from Iago but "...there is no absolute truth to be found for Foucault. Similar to Foucault, Jacques Derrida also denies the existence of an absolute truth. Truth and reality are formed by historical experiences. As historical constructs, reality and truth are again confined to human experiences and cannot extend beyond humanity" (Robey, 2012, p. 5).

"Shakespeare himself seems to surrender to the popular contemporary ideas about the black man as a savage and vengeful beast. Towards the end of the play, he shows us an ugly Othello, demented with jealousy

and rage, murdering his innocent wife...But we must not forget that Othello is brought to this pass against his own nature by the villainous Iago, a white man". If Othello trusts someone, he trusts entirely! There is no feeling of hesitation in his character and "Iago was certainly quick in perceiving this peculiar trait of Othello's character, and he knew how to use it for the success of his plan" (Rocha, 1980, p.70).

Iago is the "enigmatic...figure" who causes "Othello's downfall... and the problem becomes really acute in the temptation scene (Act 3, Scene 3), where our sense of what is going on in Othello's mind and of why...he cracks quickly, depends partly on our sense of how powerful his temper is. If, like Leavis, we think of Iago as a mere mechanism, it is only logical to conclude that Othello needed very little pushing; if we think of him as a potent figure, it follows that Othello can scarcely be blamed for falling under his spell" (French, 1972, p. 86). In *The Common Pursuit*, "Leavis talks about Othello's 'self-pride' and says that by the end of III.iii it has become 'stupidity, ferocious stupidity, an insane and self-deceiving passion'. Moreover, in *Angel with Horns*, "Rossiter talks about how Othello's self-pity changes to an 'insane self-love'; and talking of Coleridge's jealousy so as to explain why he saw Othello's as he did, he refers to Coleridge's as at one point touching 'the "insane" or delusional kind"' (as cited in French, 1972, p. 110). Now, in *Shakespeare's Tragedies of Love*, Mr. Mason remarks that

somewhere along the line Othello did go to the devil in the sense that his moral coherence disintegrated beyond the possibility of restoration. (as cited in French, 1972, p. 110)

The "critics have always discussed Iago's attitudes never quite coming to an agreement concerning his motivations. Some echo Coleridge's famous phrase- "the motive-hunting of motiveless malignity"- arguing that Iago does not really understand his own motivations and merely rationalizes his behaviour" (Rocha, 1980, p.70-71). Indeed, people have motives to harm others in the society but there are some people who do not need any particular motive to destroy others. They just enjoy hurting others. Normally, humans feel good after helping others, conversely Iago feels joyful after harming Othello, his victim! In a word, Iago is nothing without Othello!

Iago could only have a sense of his own self through the existence of others (especially Othello, his "double")... (Rocha, 1980, p.80)

"Iago's machinations" turn "black to white as he serves his turn upon the tumbled mind of Othello..." (Langley, 2009, P. 22). When Iago is with Othello, the former uses malicious language about Cassio and Desdemona "to achieve a variety of purposes"; his "obvious purpose" of such poisonous "language use is to persuade" Othello (Behera & Patra, 2011, p. 32). If Othello thought logically and brought Desdemona and Cassio face to face, then all the confusions would disappear. Their language would certainly lead Othello "to enlightenment and realization of soul" (Behera & Patra, 2011, p. 36). Desdemona strongly focuses on a face to face conversation with Cassio:

Othello

That handkerchief which I so loved and gave thee  
Thou gavest to Cassio.

Desdemona

No, by my life and soul!  
Send for the man and ask him...

Othello

By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in's hand.  
O perjured woman! Thou dost stone my heart,  
And makest me call what I intend to do  
A murder, which I thought a sacrifice:  
I saw the handkerchief.

Desdemona

He found it then;  
I never gave it him. Send for him hither;  
Let him confess a truth. (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 945)

“Three times Desdemona tries to talk about Cassio, and three times Othello shouts “The handkerchief!” until Desdemona makes a stand and tells him that this argument is his fault. She says, “...you are to blame” (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 935). The idea that he is the one to blame is too much for Othello, and with an oath, he turns and storms out of the room. Emilia thinks he must be jealous, but Desdemona says that she’s never seen him like this before, and seems to believe that perhaps the handkerchief is indeed magical” (*The Motif of the Handkerchief in Othello*, n.d.). She says,

Sure, there’s some wonder in this handkerchief;  
I am most unhappy in the loss of it. (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 936).

Though Cassio has never directly confessed about the handkerchief, Othello angrily replies that “He hath confess’d” (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 945). In fact, Iago makes Cassio speak about the handkerchief in such a way that Othello overhears it and starts believing that Desdemona has given it to Cassio as a gift. Here, Othello thinks that his ‘love’ is lost forever. Therefore, his irrational behaviour is displayed:

...Plato saw love more as a Freudian concept, the Eros—the word that comes from the name of the first Greek god of love. Eros is considered the most ego centric, focusing on care of self. It is conceived as sensual love or bodily sex drive (Shakouri & Talif, 2012, p. 59). As said by Soble (2009) in “A History of Erotic Philosophy” that it “perennially and ubiquitously causes irrational behavior...” (as cited in Shakouri & Talif, 2012, p. 59).

As “the actions we perform do not result from single mental states, but combinations of mental states” (*Analytical Behaviourism*, n.d., p.117), Othello begins to act unreasonably because Iago causes the jealousy in his heart by the rumour of a cheating wife and makes it burn with such passion and some false proof. However, Nietzsche (1968) says in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that “each virtue is jealous of the others, and jealousy is a terrible thing. Virtues too can perish of jealousy. Surrounded by the flame of jealousy, one will in the end, like the scorpion, turn one’s poisonous sting against oneself” (as cited in Chun, 2006, p. 81). The loss of ‘honour’ leads him to the insanity that causes the murder of his wife, Desdemona, but perhaps he does or does not regain it with his own death. In fact,

Othello’s jealousy is fed by the evil Iago, and Othello through jealousy murders his wife Desdemona. Does it matter whether his jealousy was factually based or not? No, it does not. The play concludes, as often the law does, with a murder-suicide (Cummins, 2009, p. 4)

Othello is mad as far as Hegel’s “three primary forms of madness” are concerned. Firstly, he is driven by Iago into the first type of madness called “idiocy” since Othello manifests as either a ‘non-awareness of the immediate present’ or “a weakening of the power of the rational consciousness.” Secondly, he has the symptoms of “madness proper” in him. He “embodies the creation of a subjective world in order to cope with the dissatisfaction” that he “experiences with the objective world.” Thirdly, Iago leads Othello towards “mania or frenzy”, which indicates “the conflict that arises from the awareness of” his “conflicting worlds” (Robey, 2012, p. 8).

Hence, *Othello* is a “Shakespearean tragedy, drawn to madness perhaps because of its inherent theatricality, represented madness by a conventionalized speech that was successful (and imitated) by virtue of its excessiveness, its rich imagery and associations, its verbal inventiveness, its theatrical. By providing multiple functions: a language psychological, thematic, satiric” (Neely, 1991, p. 337). Iago’s sly manipulation of Othello “...gives rise to a history of madness and thereby makes” the crime “possible” (Derrida, 1994, pp. 231-232). Othello smothers Desdemona and she dies. But, his prior plan is to “...tear her all to pieces!” (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 934) or “...chop her into messes!” (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 938). Here, Othello’s violence is similar to Lacan’s (1989) term in *Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis*- ““aggressivity” in a boy who hits the other body and yet claims that he himself is being beaten” (as cited in Chun, 2006, p. 87).

### **The Cunning Iago Makes Othello Mad**

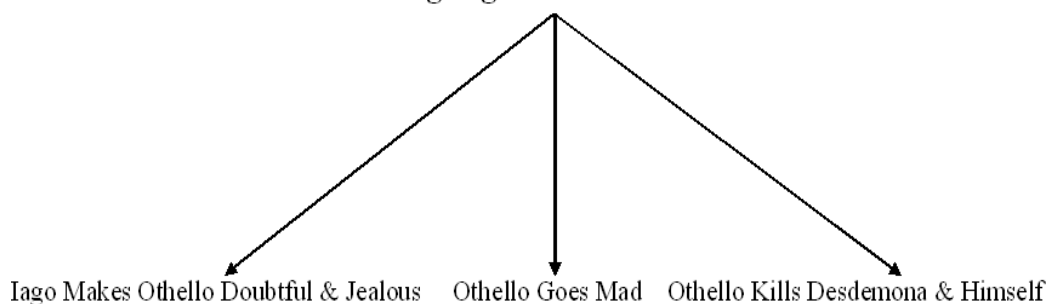


Fig. 1 The Cunning Iago Makes Othello Mad

However, Othello agrees with Iago's statement and rather decides to kill Desdemona by poisoning, "get me some poison, Iago". Then, Iago suggests to "strangle her in her bed", since both ways are "foul". Here, Iago's logic is that "even the bed she hath contaminated" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 938), and for that reason to cut Desdemona into pieces or to poison her will never look decent.

Since "punishment closely follows sin...", Iago must also suffer for his sinful actions in the long run. His "ill conscience fills us with fear" (Hazlitt, 1877). Now, regarding Othello's insanity, Pascal's comment on 'madness' may be interesting but it has no universal value. According to him, "men are so necessarily mad, that not to be mad would amount to another form of madness" (Foucault, 2001, p. xi). In association with this, we can rather oppositely say that Othello is not necessarily mad and he is turned into a crazy fellow by none but the evil Iago. Obviously, a sinner has to stop somewhere; he cannot continue sinning forever. If the humans cannot stop him, then God certainly will:

This is the precipitation of sin, if God doth not prevent, as Satan doth provoke it; it rests not till it be full. Sinful man is evermore carrying a stick to his pile, a talent to his burden, more foul water to his cistern, more torments to be laid up in his hell: he ceaseth not, without a supernatural interruption, and gracious revocation, till his measure be full. (Adams, n.d., p. 267).

During the era of Shakespeare, people valued 'honour' more than anything else. As Othello belongs to that era, he is also much conscious in protecting honour. As he says, "But why should honor outlive honesty?" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 947). It is true that Othello has never been corrupt and he does not hesitate to admit that he has murdered his wife Desdemona. His intrinsic suspicion gives birth to hatred for his wife and leads him to search for blood and vengeance. Indeed, anger is a sort of weapon:

Aristotle says that anger sometimes serves for arms to virtue and valour. That is probable; nevertheless, they who contradict him pleasantly answer, that 'tis a weapon of novel use, for we move all other arms, this moves us; our hand guides it not, 'tis it that guides our hand; it holds us, we hold not it. (Hazlitt, 1877)

The same is true when it comes to Othello's anger! He does not guide anger; anger guides him! Therefore, he murders Desdemona. After feeling utter shame and dishonour, Othello wishes that people should remember him as a dedicated warrior of the state. After going through much conspiracy, falsehood, fury and obsession, Othello makes the 'honourable decision' to protect his position and the standing of his army and takes his own life away.

Just after murdering Desdemona and knowing about her innocence (as Cassio says to Othello, "I found it [handkerchief] in my chamber/And he [Iago] himself confess'd but even now/That there he dropp'd it for a special purpose/Which wrought to his desire") Othello's sanity seems to return but only for some split seconds as he utters, "O fool! fool! fool!" (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 948).

It goes without saying that Othello has taken pleasure in positive attention for several years. But, his military efforts now lose all the reputation surrounding his name. His last request is that none would resent him and his dying wish is that public would express sympathy for his "Perplex'd" condition of mind. He wishes that people would remember his faithfulness to the Venetian mainly and not his insanity and mad actions:



Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate...  
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; of one whose subdued eyes... (Shakespeare, 1973, p. 948)

Othello becomes mad and unreasonably decide to punish himself by committing self-murder that will certainly give him “access to the other world” but “it is not a real punishment...only the image of punishment, thus a pretense; it can be linked only to the appearance of a crime or to the illusion of a death” (Foucault, 2001, p. 29). “The suicide only allows Othello to be accepted by the patriarchal Venice, and yet his otherness is to be represented as the otherness within himself – the “turbaned Turk” and the “circumcised dog” – both are images of the other, which marks the alienation of the body as defined by the nations. Othello’s suicide is a realization of the impossible task of keeping oneself in harmony. Jealousy, in this sense, is the fear of not being able to keep oneself together” (Chun, 2006, p. 85). “With this ritual gesture,” that is to say, committing suicide by stabbing himself, Lupton continues,

Othello signs his final autobiography, exacerbating and inflaming as much as redeeming that ancient scar in the Pauline discourse of nations. (as cited in Chun, 2006, p. 85)

From the perspective of morality, it can be said that Othello’s self-murder wrong as “the Everlasting has fixed His canon against self-slaughter”: “Thou shalt not kill” (*Bible Hub*, n.d.). However, if Othello’s self-destruction is analysed from another point of view, it will be seen that his so-called suicide appears as a proper vengeance for Desdemona’s death. Perhaps, the tragedy would lose much of its significance if Othello lived after the loss of his honour and love. Definitely, the readers would not respect Othello as they did before. They would rather feel hatred towards him as he is responsible for Desdemona’s death. Nevertheless, Othello decides to destroy himself since he believes that “it is important to die honourably” (Seneca, n.d., chapter 27). As Paul O. Kristeller (1979) says in *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*, “his dignity consists in his freedom of choice, and it is fully realised when he chooses the highest possibility open to him” (as cited in Al-Qassas, 2011, p. 6). But, it should never be forgotten that Othello is made to take such a ‘sinful’ decision because of the satanic Iago!

And the hatred of Iago towards Othello and Cassio, and the hatred of Othello towards Desdemona are not necessarily pure hatred but could be love, if we follow Freud. (Chun, 2006, p. 88)

So, Othello is drowned into the ocean of insanity and faces death, which, though called ‘suicide’ by the readers, should be called a crime, a murder that is committed by Iago. “The English letter ‘O’ is similar to zero (0) in appearance. Iago’s [I am Ego = ‘I’ ‘a’m e’go’] name starts with an egoistic ‘I’ and ends with an ‘O’ or zero. His ‘ego’ and envy lead him towards nothingness or zero! On the other hand, Othello’s name both starts and ends with ‘O’. It may be interpreted as- Othello has started his career from a ‘zero’, becomes successful, Iago’s deception makes him jealous or mad and he ultimately becomes a ‘zero’ by killing Desdemona and himself. However, Othello must not be called a ‘murderer’ because Iago has used Othello as a weapon to murder Desdemona and also led Othello towards death!” (Ziaul Haque, 2017). In other words,

Iago = ‘I’ ‘a’m e’go’!  
Perfect name for a perfect egoistic devil!  
Only destruction he seeks,  
In wreck, delight he finds!

Jealousy and greed his nicknames are!  
The worst insect from hell!  
Love he hates, hatred he loves!  
Others’ lives are like child’s play to him!

The naive Desdemona passes away,  
Othello loses his life as well! (Ziaul Haque, 2017)

### III. CONCLUSION

In the end, it can rightly be said that the deceptive Iago leads Othello towards jealousy and madness. Consequently, Iago's manipulation is so cunning and strong that the Moor smothers Desdemona to death and kills himself eventually. Iago never lets Othello think wisely and logically. Therefore, Othello reaches destruction because of the damaging effects of jealousy and it is obvious especially when the Moor distrusts Desdemona, Cassio and Emilia and blindly believes Iago instead.

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