

## How Does Shakespeare Make Use of Contrast in Othello to Reveal a Theme?

Contrast is a rhetorical device by which one element is thrown into opposition to another for the sake of emphasis or clearness. In Shakespeare's tragedy, *Othello*, Shakespeare's use of contrast, specifically from Iago's dialogues, reveals an important theme: isolation allows one to only process influenced and deceived thoughts which induce radical or inappropriate action. In Act 1, Iago states "I am not what I am" (1.1.67) to Roderigo. Later on, Iago says "And knowing what I am, I know what she shall be" (4.1.63) to Othello. In the first quote, Iago wants Roderigo to know that his "native" sycophantic act towards the moor is not real as that would be "for daws to peck at" (1.1.71). That leads Roderigo to trust Iago's advice of waking up Brabantio to impart the news that his daughter has eloped with Othello, or in Iago's words, "tupping [his] white ewe" (1.1.98). This would be considered an inappropriate action in Elizabethan society, since tidings are supposed to be conveyed to senates through messengers as seen in Act 1. Conversely, Iago mentions that his "native" act is real towards Othello. Iago implies that "knowing who [he] is", he knows who "she", Desdemona, is: a whore. Because Iago is perceived as an "honest" man, his "suspicions" of Desdemona should be true. Iago has almost "[won] the moor" (2.3.359) as Othello subsequently replies "thou art wise" (4.1.90). This adds more impetus towards Othello's willingness to radically murder his wife. Whereas Iago states that his native nature is not real in the former quote, he implies that he fits his epithet: "honest Iago", in the latter. The contrast reveals Roderigo and Othello's influenced thoughts, both due to isolation, to the audience. Iago's transmission of contrasted information to foster radical action is further ratified in act 2 and 3. Iago advises Cassio that "Reputation is an idle and most false imposition, oft got without merit and lost without deserving", (2.3.287-288) whereas he tells Othello "Good name in man and woman ... Is the immediate jewel of their souls. " (3.3.181-183) In the first quote, Cassio, after losing his lieutenant position, is advised that "reputation ... is an idle and most false imposition".

Iago stokes Cassio's sequestering mood by saying "I tell you what you shall do" (2.3.333) which also augurs a duplicitous subtext; hence, Iago plants his plan's seed into Cassio, which is for Cassio to "confess [himself] freely to [Desdemona]" (2.3.337-338) to create the illusion that they are in love. In addition, Cassio partially secludes himself from Othello because he feels guilt and thinks that Othello will shame him as a "drunkard" (2.3.323). Ergo, in act 3, Cassio parts Desdemona quickly when Othello arrives. This is an inappropriate conduct because not greeting a general is considered disrespectful. Oppositely, in the second quote, Iago suggests that "good name ... is the immediate jewel of their souls". Iago implies that he does not want to besmirch Cassio's "good name" but insidiously implants Cassio's false wrongs inside Othello however. The contrast lucidly reveals the deceived thought islands Cassio and Othello are sequestered. The epitome of Othello's isolation is manifest in act 4 when Othello spies on Cassio and Iago's discussion regarding Desdemona. Iago plans to "question Cassio of Bianca ... [for] he, when he hears of her, cannot restrain / from the excess of laughter ... As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad". (4.1.112-119) Othello's perspective of the event is distorted as he cannot hear the words but only see how Cassio laughs or the handkerchief which appears from Bianca. Contrast occurs from Cassio talking about Bianca, but Othello believes the chat actually concerns Desdemona. A contrast of mood is also demonstrated as when Cassio laughs: "Ha, ha, ha!" (4.1.138), Othello, sardonically broods "Crying, "O dear Cassio," as it were; his gesture imports it." (4.1.156-157) Climatically, after the discussion, Othello says "How shall I murder him, Iago?" (4.1.190-191). Iago's contrasted dialogues have finally manifested on the isolated Moor; Othello has developed deceived and influenced thoughts, and wants Cassio dead. Thus, Shakespeare's use of contrast, specifically from Iago's dialogues, reveals an important theme: isolation allows one to only process influenced and deceived thoughts which induce radical or inappropriate action.