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Creating Infidelity and Jealousy from Nothing: Iago's Rhetoric in *Othello*, 3.3.29–261

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1. Introduction

Iago's intelligence may be best demonstrated in his ability to capture the characteristics of the surrounding people, to manage them to act as his wishes, and to arrange the course of events totally for his own purposes. His seduction of Othello in Act 3 Scene 3, however, shows his capability with no less ruling power. After he has seduced Othello, the general shows a different personality, losing all his dignity and steadfast love for Desdemona. Iago's insinuating passage is composed of just 232 lines altogether (from the time when Iago and Othello appear on stage where Cassio asking for help from Desdemona, to the point when Othello leaves Iago), and it is performed within approximately ten minutes. It shows Iago's incredible capability to control others' minds with his words. The aim of this essay, therefore, is 1) to analyse Iago's facility to delude Othello's judgement with mere words, and, by doing so, to explain his fiendish, but also efficient, nature from the perspective of his skilful command of language; and 2) to show how the audience appreciates Iago's malignant tactics by being given an advantageous viewpoint.

J. E. Tiles insists in "Logic and Rhetoric: An Introduction to Seductive Argument" that a "successful seducer need not lie: it may be sufficient to control selectively the seduced's attention in such a way that the victim

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connects the truth to a desired pattern,” and he gives Iago’s seduction of Othello as an example.¹ Iago selects the truth for his end and lets “his victim draw the desired inference.”² Tiles’ view is very suggestive, capturing an important facet of Iago’s way of doing things: Iago never speaks of Desdemona’s unchastity explicitly, and he always makes Othello guess himself by giving clues. But if we scrutinise Iago’s concrete use of language, we will see that his tactics are much more complex and cunning than Tiles suggests.

2. Dramatic Device by Which Each Character’s Amount of Knowledge is Regulated and the Audience’s Sympathy is Controlled

On an apparent level, Shakespearean drama is composed merely of the characters’ speeches. However, there is embedded in the text the dramatic device by which each character’s amount of knowledge is regulated and the audience’s sympathy is controlled.

There are three perspectives in the seduction scene, Othello’s, Iago’s, and the audience’s. Othello is convinced of Iago’s honesty and believes that his suggestion is totally for his good. On the other hand, Iago shows his true nature to the audience in his soliloquy:

IAGO Divinity of hell!
 When devils will the blackest sins put on
 They do suggest at first with heavenly shows
 As I do now. (2.3.345-48)³

He believes in the “Divinity of hell,” compares himself to “devils,” and what he intends are “the blackest sins.” To pursue his design, he is to behave as if he were an agent of heaven. He then reveals his detailed scheme, supported by his precise analysis of the characteristics of the involved people:

IAGO For whiles this honest fool

Plies Desdemona to repair his fortune,
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 unto 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. (2.3.348–57, emphasis added)

The audience, by being given this preliminary information, understands both Othello's perspective (how he understands Iago's words) and Iago's intrigue (what poison he is to administer to Othello). Thus, it sees the very process in which Othello's judgement is damaged little by little not knowing Iago's deeper intention. And by this procedure, the audience's sympathy for Othello is controlled, because each member sees his nobility and his confidence in Desdemona's love for him shattered step by step by Iago's fiendish rhetoric.

3. The Background in Which Iago's Strategy Works

So that Iago's strategy to abuse Othello can work properly and efficiently, Othello's situation is manipulated on the dramatic design level. One facet of this is Cassio's characterisation as a gallant aristocrat, and another is the probability that the marriage of Othello and Desdemona might not be sexually fulfilled.

First, Cassio's characterisation is significantly contrasted with Othello's. When Othello accepts Desdemona's "infidelity" after Iago's insinuation, he talks of some probable reasons for her betrayal, such as his black face, his lack of elegant aristocratic demeanour, and his advancing age:

OTHELLO Haply for I am black

Soon Cassio greets Iago and Emilia. In this short welcome speech, Cassio's playboy aspect is attractively packed:

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. [*He kisses Emilia.*]

IAGO

Sir, would she give you so much of her lips
As of her tongue she oft bestows on me
You'd have enough. (2.1.96–102, emphasis added)

There is no stage direction for Cassio's kiss to Emilia in the First Folio, but Iago's speech supports the fact that Cassio kisses Emilia. Cassio is more gallant than courteous, and his attitude sometimes oversteps the ordinarily acceptable level as his phrase, "I extend my manners," suggests. He also acknowledges the possibility of arousing Iago's jealousy ("gall your patience"), but he dares to display his customary behaviour which is too "bold." This characteristic of Cassio's functions in two ways in 3.3: Iago discerns it and uses it for his machinations, and it also increases Othello's anguish.

Another situation in which Iago's strategy works effectively is the possibility that the marriage of Othello and Desdemona might not have been sexually fulfilled. In the probable source of the play, "Gli Hecatommithé" by Cinthio, the Moor and Desdemona spend some happy time in Venice after their marriage:

So propitious was their mutual love that, although the Lady's relatives did all they could to make her take another husband, they were united in marriage and lived together in such concord and tranquillity while they remained in Venice, that never a word passed between them that was not loving.⁵

In *Othello*, however, double-time scheme works. While the play gives the audience a natural feeling about the time duration of events (the elopement, going to Cyprus, the mutiny caused by Roderigo and Cassio, and so forth), everything in the play happens within a few days. The elopement is revealed on the night of the first day, it takes some days for them to get to Cyprus, and by the time they arrive in Cyprus separately, they have not enjoyed each other as Othello's speech indicates:

OTHELLO Come, my dear love,
The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue:
That profit's yet to come 'tween me and you. (2.3.8-10)

Iago also knows this, as he unfolds it soon after this with his gross expression:

IAGO Not this hour, lieutenant, 'tis not yet ten o'th' clock. Our general
cast us thus early for the love of his Desdemona—whom let us not
therefore blame; he hath not yet made wanton the night with her,
and she is sport for Jove. (2.3.13–17)

There might be the possibility of their lovemaking between the time Othello orders the night's guard to Cassio and the time Othello appears on stage after the mutiny, or between the settlement of the mutiny and the next morning. But there is no apparent reference to their intercourse. Rather, the lack of it is emphasised by the two speeches of Othello's and Iago's which I have cited above.

This situation works keenly on Othello in the whole course of Iago's seduction, for Othello must acknowledge that Cassio has already enjoyed enough what he has not tasted, and that maybe he cannot for the time to come as well. It is also significant that Iago knows the situation. He carries out an assault on Othello audaciously, feeling no remorse for his pain. This reinforces his diabolic character all the more effectively.

4. Cinthio's Case for Comparison

In Cinthio, although some details are different from those in *Othello* (for example, the Ensign's love for Disdemona and its change into hatred), the essential element, that the Ensign is going to deceive the Moor and make him believe that his wife and the Corporal (the equivalent to Cassio) are in love with each other, is the same. However, the very way that the Ensign in Cinthio seduces the Moor is quite different from Iago. The Ensign manifests clearly that she has sexual relations with the Corporal. After the sword fight, Disdemona grieves the dismissal of the Corporal, and she entreats her husband to reconcile with him many times. The Moor tells the Ensign that he is obliged to reinstate him. This becomes a cue to the Ensign and he says, "Perhaps Disdemona has good cause to look on him so favourably! . . . I do not wish . . . to come between man and wife, but if you keep your eyes open you will see for yourself."⁶ Then, another earnest solicitation by Disdemona follows. The angry Moor goes to the Ensign, and he *declares*, although reluctantly, "You must know therefore that it is hard for your Lady to see the Corporal in disgrace for the simple reason that she takes her pleasure with him whenever he comes to your house. The woman has come to dislike your blackness."⁷

5. What Iago is Doing with his Words

5.0 Iago's Preparation for the Seduction

After Cassio is dismissed by Othello, Iago advises him to ask Desdemona for help to "splinter" between Cassio and her husband (2.3.318). At the end of this scene, he makes us known his concrete plan in his soliloquy anticipating the seduction:

IAGO 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. . . (2.3.377-82)

At the beginning of 3.3, his plan works precisely as he intends: Desdemona willingly accepts Cassio's entreaty with Emilia's support, and Iago leads Othello to the very spot.

5.1 Poison 1: Some Secret between Desdemona and Cassio

Enter OTHELLO and IAGO.

EMILIA
Madam, here comes my lord.

CASSIO
Madam, I'll take my leave.

DESDEMONA
Why, stay and hear me speak.

CASSIO
Madam, not now; I am very ill at ease,
Unfit for mine own purposes.

DESDEMONA
Well, do your discretion. *Exit Cassio.*

IAGO Ha, I like not that.

OTHELLO
What dost thou say?

IAGO
Nothing, my lord; or if—I know not what.

OTHELLO

Was not that Cassio parted from my wife?

IAGO

Cassio, my lord? no, sure, I cannot think it

That he would steal away so guilty-like

Seeing you coming.

OTHELLO

I do believe 'twas he. (3.3.29–40)

The key to analysing this passage is the distance between Cassio and Othello/Iago. In the Globe Theatre, it is from the entry door of Othello and Iago to the exit door of Cassio, and they *do see* each other. Cassio regrets that he has hurt the Governor of Cyprus, and thinks that it is inappropriate to ask for his reinstatement (2.3.273–75): his feeling is expressed in “I am very ill at ease, / Unfit for mine own purposes.” On the other hand, Iago’s goal is to make Othello believe that Desdemona and Cassio have a sexual relationship. Hence, his “Ha, I like not that.” is “why these two are together to be shown to Othello? I do not like this situation discovered by him, if I consider his heart’s ease.” Because Iago sees Cassio, he can use the situation for his end, and because Othello sees Cassio, this speech disturbs him. Othello cannot understand Iago’s deeper meaning at this point, and his suspecting words come, “What dost thou say?”: that is, “Is there something ill about Desdemona and Cassio being together?”. Iago’s answer to this is very tricky. He first rejects his own ultimate goal of “adultery” by saying “Nothing,” but quickly he rejects this “Nothing” by “or if” suggesting that there may be the possibility of something, though he does not name it: “I know not what.” When Othello says, “Was not that Cassio parted from my wife?”, he sees that Cassio has departed from his wife. Therefore, he wants to ask Iago why he dislikes the situation and why he does not say the reason for it. When Iago says, “Cassio, my lord? no, sure, I cannot think it / That he would steal away so guilty-like / Seeing you

coming.” Iago twists the real reason of Cassio’s departure—his uneasiness to entreat his reinstatement—into some plausible feelings of guilt towards Othello. As a result, Othello wonders why Iago denies that it was Cassio, and why Cassio feels guilty towards him.

At this first stage of poisoning, Iago succeeds in making Othello think that there might be some secret between Cassio and his wife which Iago does not like, and that Cassio feels guilty towards him. The poison already begins to work on him, as his plea to his wife shows:

OTHELLO

Whereon I do beseech thee, grant me this,
To leave me but a little to myself. (3.3.84-85)

5.2 Poison 2: Cassio as an Intermediary of Othello’s Marriage Suit

IAGO

Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady,
Know of your love?

OTHELLO

He did, from first to last.

Why dost thou ask?

IAGO

But for a satisfaction of my thought,
No further harm.

OTHELLO

Why of thy thought, Iago?

IAGO

I did not think he had been acquainted with her.

OTHELLO

O yes, and went between us very oft.

IAGO

Indeed?

OTHELLO

Indeed? Ay, indeed. Discern'st thou aught in that?

Is he not honest?

IAGO

Honest, my lord?

OTHELLO

Honest? Ay, honest.

IAGO

My lord, for aught I know.

OTHELLO

What dost thou think?

IAGO

Think, my lord? (3.3.94–108)

Now Iago broaches the subject of Othello's wooing of Desdemona. When he says, "But for a satisfaction of my thought, / No further harm," the word "harm," which is an irrelevant term to Othello's case, must disturb him. Thus, the negative form of "No further harm" cunningly hints at the contrary possibility. By this trick, Iago makes Othello think that there might have been something harmful in his suit, by Cassio being the intermediary. When Othello admits the fact that Cassio was the go-between, Iago's reply is "Indeed?". Here he makes use of Othello's trust in him and urges him to guess the meaning of Iago's "Indeed?". Because Othello has trusted Cassio so far, he asks, "Is he not honest?". Iago does not answer the question, but replies in an interrogative form, "Honest, my lord?". In this case, too, he does not say that Cassio is insincere, but by using the questioning form, he suggests that Cassio may not be honest. Iago's next restrictive phrase, "for aught I know," accepts Cassio's honesty under the condition that it is only true as far as Iago knows. He creates a negative sense in the affirmative sentence by imposing a condition.

In this passage, there is a discrepancy between the grammatical forms Iago uses and the sense he intends. In the negative expression, “No further harm,” Iago suggests the opposite case of danger. By using interrogative forms, “Indeed?” and “Honest, my lord?,” he implies that Cassio may not be honest, and that it might have been unwise for Othello to rely on Cassio, although he does not mention it. The expression “for aught I know” creates a negative impression of Cassio’s insincerity in the affirmative sentence.

The effect of Iago’s poisoning 2 on Othello is seen in the following speeches:

OTHELLO

Think, my lord! By heaven, thou echo’st me
As if there were some monster in thy thought
Too hideous to be shown. (3.3.109–11, emphasis added)

OTHELLO

And when I told thee he was of my counsel
In my whole course of wooing, thou criedst ‘Indeed?’
And didst contract and purse thy brow together
As if thou then hadst shut up in thy brain
Some horrible conceit. (3.3.114–18, emphasis added)

Othello realises that Iago’s thought is dreadful, and we can perceive the depth of his fear by the words, “monster,” “too hideous,” and “horrible.” The subjunctive mood in the two sentences of “As if...” shows Othello’s painful wish that it should remain false.

On the other hand, the audience always understands what is going on in the conversation between Othello and Iago, because it is given sufficient knowledge to judge things correctly. Othello trusts Iago from the heart:

OTHELLO

And for I know thou’rt full of love and honesty
And weigh’st thy words before thou giv’st them breath,

Therefore these stops of thine fright me the more.
For such things *in a false disloyal knave*
Are tricks of custom, but *in a man that's just*
They're close delations, working from the heart,
That passion cannot rule. (3.3.121–27, emphasis added)

In this speech, he counterposes two kinds of people, a dishonest man and an honest man. He misunderstands his own case the other way round. His lack of insight into Iago's true vicious nature will irritate the audience: each member is quite sure of his malignancy, while Othello trusts him as the most reliable fellow ever.

5.3 Poison 3: Reassessment of Cassio's Honesty

IAGO For Michael Cassio,
I dare be sworn, I think, that he is honest.

OTHELLO
I think so too.

IAGO Men should be what they seem,
Or those that be not, would they might seem none.

OTHELLO
Certain, men should be what they seem.

IAGO
Why then I think Cassio's an honest man. (3.3.127-3)

Here the theme is whether Cassio is trustworthy or not. Iago's "I dare be sworn, I think, that he is honest" is an affirmative sentence, but it induces a negative sense in two ways: by saying "I dare be sworn," to warrant Cassio's honesty requires courage; and by inserting, "I think," Cassio's honesty might be restricted only to Iago's judgement. He then says that "Men should be what they seem," and Othello admits that. Thus, Iago does not say that Cassio is dishonest, but gives Othello two clues: 1) Cassio is honest, as far as Iago knows; 2) there may be some difference between one's outward appearance and one's

true nature. And once again, Iago says “I think Cassio’s an honest man,” urging him to guess himself. The way to create a negative sense in an affirmative sentence in this passage is principally the same that we saw in the expression “for aught I know” (3.3.106). Because of this contrivance of using affirmatives with a negative impression, he succeeds in keeping his apparent stance that he is a good friend to Cassio, and hinting at the possibility of Cassio’s insincerity at the same time. Moreover, the phrase, “I dare be sworn,” is tricky: while Iago exaggerates his friendship and consideration for Cassio by the decisive expressions, “dare” and “be sworn,” his posture is only ostensible.

As the result of Iago’s poisoning 3, Othello is eager to know Iago’s thoughts and begins to think that it may be the worst for him. Iago, however, refuses to reveal it. He knows that his flat refusal will make Othello more eager to know the truth:

OTHELLO

Nay, yet there’s more in this:

I prithee speak to me, as to thy thinkings,

As thou dost ruminate, and give thy *worst* of thoughts

The *worst* of words.

IAGO

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? (3.3.133–39, emphasis added)

What really is the content of Iago’s thoughts which seems to be the worst for him? And why Iago strongly refuses to reveal it? These two questions bind together to make him more anxious.

5.4 Poison 4: Iago’s Direction Not to Suspect Any More

IAGO

I do beseech you,

Though I perchance am vicious in my guess

—As I confess it is my nature's plague
To spy into abuses, and oft my jealousy
Shapes faults that are not—that your wisdom
From one that so imperfectly conceits
Would take no notice, nor build yourself a trouble
Out of his scattering and unsure observance:
It were not for your quiet nor your good
Nor for my manhood, honesty and wisdom
To let you know my thoughts. (3.3.147-57)

It is noteworthy that here Iago reveals his true nature and what he is actually doing. In the phrase, "I perchance am vicious in my guess," the primary meaning of "vicious" which is intended for Othello's understanding is "defective, faulty, bad."⁸ But the word also includes a secondary meaning of "malicious" which the audience can grasp. It knows that Iago's jealousy (his suspicious nature) shapes "faults that are not", that is, Desdemona's infidelity.⁹ It judges correctly that Iago's advice not to pay attention to his imperfect surmise is what Othello should do. It also foresees the outcome of rejecting Iago's advice: Othello is to lose his peace of mind ("It were not for your quiet nor your good"). The audience is given these facts about Othello's situation, but what it sees is the Othello who cannot resist Iago's underhand provocation:

OTHELLO

By heaven, I'll know thy thoughts! (3.3.164)

By the end of poison 4, Iago has succeeded in making Othello believe:

- 1) there must be some secret between his wife and Cassio,
- 2) Cassio may not be trustworthy,
- 3) it might have been harmful that Cassio was the intermediary of his wooing,
- 4) Iago's thoughts could be the worst for him.

So far, Iago's strategy has been linguistic. In the second half of his poisoning, however, he selects a common idea or fabricates *generally accepted* ideas and combines them with the situation in which Othello is placed.

5.5 Poison 5: The Torment of Suspecting Adultery and an Apostrophe to Othello

IAGO *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

O misery! (3.3.167-73, emphasis added)

Iago's poisoning enters a new stage. By using the word, "cuckold," he makes it clear that the topic is adultery. The phrase, "damned minutes," powerfully describes the torment of suspecting infidelity. It is the agony *of hell* ("damned"), and by using a small unit, "minute," instead of "day" or "hour," Iago expresses that one can never escape the suffering. The chiasmus effectively presents a lover who cannot handle his own sentiment of love and suspicion.

In this passage, Iago speaks a general idea about the torment of suspecting infidelity and does not mention it as Othello's case. But by addressing Othello first, "beware, my lord, of jealousy," he makes Othello recognise it as his own. Therefore, Othello's response "O misery" shows his great fear, who takes it as his future image.¹⁰

Othello's following speech makes even clearer that he accepts Iago's words as his own situation:

OTHELLO

Why—why is this?

Think'st thou *I'd* make a life of jealousy
To follow still the changes of the moon
With fresh suspicions? No: to be once in doubt
Is once to be resolved. (3.3.179–83, emphasis added)

In this way, Iago succeeds in making Othello doubt Desdemona's inconstancy, not by stating it overtly, but by compelling him to apply a common idea to his own case.

Therefore, it is too naive to interpret Othello's flat denial of jealousy literally as he expresses:

OTHELLO 'Tis not to make me jealous
To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,
Is free of speech, sings, plays and dances well:
Where virtue is, these are more virtuous.
Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw
The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt,
For she had eyes and chose me. (3.3.186–92)

He sees her merits in the sociable aspects of an aristocratic lady. When he enumerates Desdemona's merits, he also thinks about his own demerits, such as his black face and the lack of elegant aristocratic behaviour, which he describes later (3.3.267–72). Moreover, the person whom he envies is Cassio, a young, exceedingly sociable, and amiable aristocrat. Once he talks of his "smallest fear or doubt of her revolt," he acknowledges it, and therefore, what he feels could be the reversal of his apparent words.

The audience sees that Iago's plan has been successful hitherto, and each member is able to grasp the double meaning in Iago's speech here:

IAGO
I am glad of this, 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 eyes thus, not jealous nor secure;
I would not have your free and noble nature
Out of self-bounty be abused: look to't. (3.3.196-203)¹¹

In the phrase, "I am glad of this," Iago enjoys that his plan is going smoothly. The audience knows that Iago's "love" for Othello is hatred, and that his "duty" is what he should do in accordance with his religion, "divinity of hell" (2.3.345). He is going to show this kind of "love and duty" sincerely to his evil nature ("with franker spirit"). Similarly, "I would not have your free and noble nature / Out of self-bounty be abused" has the opposite meaning: he desires that Othello's free and noble nature should be seriously damaged. Thus, the audience grasps Othello's understanding of Iago's words (Iago's ostensible concern for him) and his malice simultaneously. This system influences the audience's sympathy: each member may feel irritated that Othello's innocent and noble mind is manipulated easily by not seeing into Iago's true nature.

5.6 Poison 6: Venetian Ladies' Wantonness and Desdemona's Deception of her Father

IAGO

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 unknown.

OTHELLO

Dost thou say so?

IAGO

She did deceive her father, marrying you,
And when she seemed to shake, and fear your looks,

She loved them most.

OTHELLO

And so she did.

IAGO

Why, go to then:

She that so young could give out such a seeming

To seal her father's eyes up, close as oak—

He thought 'twas witchcraft. (3.3.204-14)

Iago fabricates a tale of the Venetian ladies' barefaced secrecy about their wantonness and claims it as a matter of fact among his countrymen, which Othello does not know as a foreigner. Then Iago combines it with the situation in which Desdemona eloped with Othello by deceiving her father. When Iago says, "She that so young could give out such a seeming / To seal her father's eyes up, close as oak," he does not say Desdemona's "deception" of Othello, but he encourages him to think in that way. Here, his use of metaphors evokes concrete images in Othello's mind: Othello's eyes cannot see the facts as if they were the sealed-up eyes of a falcon; Desdemona's secrecy would not reek as if it were packed up and concealed in an oak barrel, and everything seems like a "witchcraft." Iago converts Desdemona's faithfulness to Othello into the ground for the opposite case.

In the following passage, too, the audience discerns Iago's deeper intention which Othello cannot even imagine:

IAGO

I hope you will consider *what is spoke*

Comes from my love. But I do see you're moved;

I am to pray you not *to strain my speech*

To grosser issues nor to larger reach

Than to suspicion.

OTHELLO

I will not.

IAGO Should you do so, my lord,
My speech should fall into such *vile success*
As my thoughts aimed not at: (3.3.220-27, emphasis added)

When Iago says, “I am to pray you not to strain my speech / To grosser issues, nor to larger reach / Than to suspicion,” his design is the reversal of his words: he hopes that Othello’s suspicion would swell up. In the same way, “such vile success” is what he aims at. So far, the audience has seen Iago’s prosperity, and now it foresees the “vile success” which awaits Othello.

5.7 Poison 7: A *Natural* Tendency to Marry One’s Own Kind and Desdemona’s Refusal of it: An Oblique Assault on Othello’s Weakness
IAGO

Ay, there’s the point: as, to be bold with you,
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.
But pardon me, I do not in position
Distinctly speak of her, though I may fear
Her will, recoiling to her better judgment,
May fall to match you with her country forms,
And happily repent. (3.3.232-42)

At this stage of Iago’s poisoning, he insists that it is a natural tendency for ordinary people to marry someone of the same race and class, as if it were an accepted truth. And he condemns Desdemona’s numerous refusals of such marriage suits. Although the apparent target of censure is Desdemona, Iago makes Othello recognise his sore spots, the fact that he is a black soldier and not a white aristocrat, without mentioning them. By avoiding an apparent

attack on Othello's weakness, he maintains his posture that he is Othello's confidant, but by condemning Desdemona severely using such disgusting terms as "a will most rank" and "Foul disproportions," the assault on Othello is more violent, even though it is oblique.

Othello has been proud that he is a black, valiant soldier and that Desdemona has chosen him although he is not a white aristocrat. But Iago's indirect assault on Othello has destroyed his dignity completely. He cannot choose but leave the spot feebly:

OTHELLO Farewell, farewell.

 If more thou dost perceive, let me know more:

 Set on thy wife to observe. Leave me, Iago. (3.3.242-44)

6. Conclusion

For Iago's seduction to work properly and efficiently, situations are manipulated on the dramatic design level. First, Cassio's amiable and gallant characteristics are exaggerated in the early part of the play. This works later on Othello's inferior complex as a black soldier and not a white aristocrat. Second, the marriage of Othello and Desdemona may not be consummated by the cunning use of the double-time scheme. By this device, Othello's jealousy towards Cassio, who "has had" a sexual relationship with Desdemona, swells up. It also sheds light on Iago's fiendish character, for he knows the situation and pushes his plan forward audaciously.

During his seduction, Iago, unlike the Ensign in Cinthio, never declares that Desdemona has a sexual relationship with Cassio. He, however, gives Othello clues and makes him think himself. By these tactics, his suspicion of Desdemona's infidelity is created spontaneously. Thus, the venom becomes much stronger than that which is only given from outside. In the first half of his poisoning, his clues are linguistic. In the second half, his clues are *generally*

accepted ideas and the situation in which Othello is placed. The following is the diagram of Iago's strategy and Othello's response to it:

	Iago's clues	Othello's scope of understanding
Poison 1	Cassio leaves, seeing Othello coming. "I like not that."	What Iago does not like?
	"Nothing" "or if" "I know not what."	Possibility of something which Iago does not like
	Othello and Iago see Cassio leaving. "I cannot think it / That he would steal away so guilty-like"	Why does Iago deny that it is Cassio? Why does Cassio feel guilty?
Poison 2	"No further harm"	Possibility of harm.
	"Indeed?" "Honest, my lord?" (Correction of Othello's thought)	Cassio may not be honest.
	"For aught I know" (Conditional)	It might have been harmful that he was the intermediary.
Poison 3	"I dare be sworn, I think, that he is honest." (Requires courage, conditional) "Men should be what they seem."	Cassio may not be trustworthy, despite his appearance.
Poison 4	Do not suspect any more.	Becomes more suspicious.
Poison 5	"Cuckold" makes the topic clear. "O beware, my lord, of jealousy" A general idea about the torment of suspecting infidelity	Suspects that cuckoldry may be his own case.
Poison 6	A <i>well-accepted</i> idea about Venetian ladies' wantonness Desdemona's deception of her father (their elopement)	Suspects Desdemona of deception of himself.
Poison 7	A <i>common</i> idea that one marries one's kind Desdemona's refusal of proposals from white aristocrats Iago's criticism of Desdemona with disgusting terms	Thinks about his identity as a black soldier.

In the first half of Iago's poisoning, there is a discrepancy between his linguistic expressions and the impression he creates. When he says "nothing," he suggests the possibility of something by adding "or if." In "No further harm," he implies the possibility of harm. The conditional phrases, "for aught I know," "I dare be sworn," and "I think," to say that Cassio is honest, create a negative impression of his insincerity, even in affirmative sentences. By this trick, Iago maintains the pretence that he is a good friend to Cassio and makes Othello doubt Cassio's honesty at a time.

In the second half of his poisoning, his choice of *generally accepted* ideas and their combination with Othello's own situation is exquisite. By addressing Othello first, "O beware, my lord, of jealousy," Othello accepts Iago's general idea of suspecting one's wife's infidelity as a possibility in his own case. Then, Iago states the dubious ideas about Venetian ladies' wantonness and one's matrimony choice of one's own kind as common opinions. He then combines these ideas with the facts—Desdemona's deception of her father and her refusal of marriage proposals by white aristocrats. These clues which Iago chooses from Othello and Desdemona's background have nothing to do with her unchastity. On the contrary, they show Desdemona's true love for Othello: she has rejected all the "favourable" matches and chosen to marry Othello and to elope with him. But their combination with *generally accepted* ideas works on Othello to convince him of his wife's betrayal.

During the course of Iago's insinuation, the audience is always aware of Iago's black intention to ensnare Othello and Othello's restricted scope of understanding. Each member sees Iago who proceeds his machinations totally as he intends without damaging Othello's trust in him, and it also perceives Othello entrapped to destruction, not knowing Iago's true nature. Thus, while the audience's sympathy for Othello is controlled, it also appreciates Iago's malignant nature in his extremely efficient command of language.

Notes

This essay is based on my Japanese version of 'Fabrication of Infidelity: Iago's Rhetoric in Act 3 Scene 3', *English Usage and Style*, 38 (2021), 87–105, enlarged and elaborated by the author.

¹ J.E. Tiles, 'Logic and Rhetoric: An Introduction to Seductive Argument', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 28 (1995), 300–15 (p.308).

² Tiles, p.309.

³ All quotations from *Othello* are from William Shakespeare, *Othello*, The Arden Shakespeare, The Third Series, ed. by E.A.J. Honigmann (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

⁴ René Girard, *A Theater of Envy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.290.

⁵ Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare: Major Tragedies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), p.242.

⁶ Bullough, p.244.

⁷ Bullough, p.245.

⁸ David Crystal and Ben Crystal, *Shakespeare's Words: A Glossary and Language Companion* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), p.482.

⁹ David Crystal and Ben Crystal, p.247.

¹⁰ William Shakespeare, *Othello*, The Oxford Shakespeare, ed. by Michael Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p.293. Michael Neill says, "Some actors (including Kean and Macready) have made this the point at which Othello first glimpses his jealous destiny." Seen from the plot development of the play, this is the turning point: at this very moment Othello begins to suspect the adultery of his wife and he is to suffer a life of jealousy from now on. Michael Neill, however, adds another possible interpretation: "but it can be played as a general comment on the torment Iago has described." But Iago's poisoning steps have been so deliberately chosen and so successfully followed up to the present that it is appropriate to interpret "O misery" as Othello's own outburst of fear.

¹¹ Imperative sentences are conspicuous in this passage. It shows that Iago has gained an advantage over Othello.