

**IAGO'S MOTIVES AND OTHELLO'S SUSCEPTIBILITY IN SHAKESPEARE'S OTHELLO.**

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# IAGO'S MOTIVES AND OTHELLO'S SUCCEPTIBILITY IN SHAKESPEARE'S OTHELLO.

## Introduction

Shakespeare's tragedies are colorful, worldly demonstrations of a wide understanding of classical influences, not just Renaissance. This is the case of *The Tragedy of Othello*; which takes conflicts from the ancient epic, focusing on the suffering and vicissitudes of human life. Its representation generates in the viewer an emotional response that Aristotle refers to as catharsis. The different perspectives of each theatrical company, such as time limitations of execution compel different adaptations and interpretations of this play. Its modifications are not only necessary today with a contemporary audience who might not understand the Shakespearean language, but they also go back to the Elizabethan period.

Using New Criticism and the Actantial Literary Model, this essay aims to portray Othello's susceptibility from his own vulnerability and foolhardiness along with Iago's inducement and motives in the *Tragedy of Othello, The Moor of Venice*. This play that Shakespeare apparently wrote in 1603 has many interpretations and more continue to appear, since its topics are still relevant today. Iago's incentives and motivation run parallel to Othello's susceptibility, which allows his machination to work.

The importance of *The Tragedy of Othello* in Shakespeare's work lies in the fact that unlike his other tragedies, Othello does not develop the story of a statesman in the strict sense, but of an ordinary man in a domestic environment. The play occurs not on the battlefield where Othello has shown his prowess but in indoor settings where people as Desdemona, Brabantio, Cassio and Iago who are part of his private hardship provide the simplicity of common people to the play.

Othello's acclaimed bravery and courage cannot save him from his demise. This essay considers aspects that clarify the question of Othello's susceptibility and therefore Iago's motives.

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The Moor's and ensign's denouements respond to matters of jealousy, resentment, covetousness, begrudging, religious and racial background and Venice's jaundiced eyes, the couple's distrust and the parents' reluctance to accept a newcomer of a different race.

Othello is a highly respected general who has excelled in battles against the enemies of Venice. Shakespeare portrays him as a sort of foreign mercenary, a black man of high status in Venice's glamorous society. He is often referred to as The Moor. His counterpart is Iago, a man of idle intelligence, splendidly devious, a psychopath who turns Othello into the target of his hatred. He seeks to exact revenge on Othello by persuading him of the perfidiousness of his wife. Othello is consumed by jealousy and deprived of all self-confidence until he ends his marriage in a fit of rage.

In order to analyze Iago's motives, it is essential to follow the clues that Shakespeare leaves not only in the dialogues but also in Iago's soliloquies. The language also fulfills the task of preparing the spectators for the fatality that awaits for the characters. Iago's speech and soliloquies mark an order of events by gaining strength, power and momentum.

### **I. Antecedents**

Harbage (1941) allows to portray Shakespeare in his *book "Shakespeare's Audience"* as a playwright and actor who developed his activity when the Renaissance was already established in England during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603), and then, during the reign of James I (1603 -1625).

According to Álvarez, R. (2013), the political, theatrical, and literary scene lived an unprecedented interest in the Greco-Roman antiquity with Machiavelli as relevant figure. Although his work, *The Prince* was not well received and was, in fact, banned because of its controversial ideas, it served as inspiration for the Elizabethan Theater. (P.23).

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In his first stages, Shakespeare was influenced by the playwright Christopher Marlowe, who was openly adept to the ideas of Machiavelli. Ribner (1954) mentions this influence in his article "Marlowe and Machiavelli".

On Sunday 23, October 2016, the daily British newspaper *The Guardian* published declarations of a group of scholars headed by Gary Taylor of Florida State University, who stated that eight of Shakespeare's plays are the result of shared work with other playwrights. This affirmation was backed up by John Jowett (Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham), Terri Bourus (Indiana University, Indianapolis) and Gabriel Egan (De Montfort University, Leicester). Marlowe got special attention for his contribution to the *Henry VI* plays as co-writer. (Alberge, D. Christopher Marlowe credited as one of Shakespeare's co-writers. *The Guardian*, 2016)

After 1594, Shakespeare began to separate from Marlowe and his characters adopt traits and attitudes more innate to the human condition such as in the plays *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Julius Caesar*.

Machiavellian elements from *The Prince* (1513) are used in Shakespeare's plays to structure them. *Henry IV* contains elements that are characteristic of the stories of Machiavelli in terms of how to succeed as prince. This influence is mentioned as well in *Richard III* by Kehler (1998), who says that "Shakespeare creates dramatic irony as Elizabeth plays the fox, safeguarding the princess while using a sophisticated rhetorical figure – amphibology – to deceive Richard" (*The Explicator*, Volume 56, Issue 3, p. 118).

The reference to the fox belongs clearly to the Machiavellian symbolism of how a prince should conduct his reign. Two authors reference the fox element, Kehler (1998) in her article "Shakespeare's Richard III" (P.118) and Stark (1930) in her article "Machiavelli and

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Shakespeare". (P.34). The ideas of Machiavelli in the Elizabethan theater were prevalent due to the violent times that England lived through and because of possible retaliations that Catholic Italy could take against Anglican England.

An equally significant aspect of the influence of Machiavelli on the works of Shakespeare can be found in the characters of Prince Hal and his father, King Henry. Both father and son deliver a speech that is clearly related to Machiavelli's work,

An essay titled "*Prince Hal: Shakespeare's Critique of Machiavelli*" written by professor Avery Plaw for the Political Science Department of Concordia University talks about the fact that there is an undeclared judgment from Shakespeare on Machiavelli (P.5). It says that:

"Shakespeare opens a new and fertile front of Machiavelli critique which contends that Machiavelli failed exactly where he himself thought he best succeeded: in providing a realistic account of human nature and the way in which it structures political possibilities" (p. 5).

Leaving no doubt that Shakespeare was responding to the ideas of Machiavelli is this excerpt from *Henry VI*: "I can add colours to the chameleon, change shapes with Proteus for advantages, and set the murderous Machiavel to school. Can I do this, and cannot get a crown? Tut, were it farther off, I'll pluck it down" (Part III, Act III, Scene 2).

In "El universo trágico de Calderon y Shakespeare", Vallejo (2015) states that a further influence on Shakespeare was *Oedipus*, by Seneca, based on the recurrence of elements characteristic of that tragedy, such as the division of the plays into five acts. This kind of organization is used in *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. Also, the references to supernatural elements (e.g. the ghost in *Hamlet*, the witches' predictions in *Macbeth* and the origin of the handkerchief in *Othello*) are inspired by the Greek tragedies of Seneca, as is the use of monologues and sententious rhetoric (p. 159).

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Erne (2009) mentions in the preface of his book "Beyond the Spanish tragedy", that other remarkable playwrights from the Renaissance who influenced Shakespeare were Ben Jonson and Thomas Kyd authors of the comedy *Volpone* (1606) and *The Spanish Tragedy* (1592) respectively.

The American book editor Robert Giroux commented on an article titled "The Man Who Knew Shakespeare", on February 13, 2000 in *The New York Times*; that Jonson could not stand the recognition that Shakespeare obtained from his play *Julius Caesar*. The bard of Avon helped Jonson with his play "Every Man in His Humour." However, Jonson's attitude was contradictory even after Shakespeare's death, since he manifested his fondness toward Shakespeare in his First Folio poem (1623) and then, he criticized him. This paradoxical behavior from Jonson is referenced by the writer Bertram Theobald (1932) in his book "Enter Francis Bacon: A Sequel to Exit Shakespeare. (P.52-59).

In addition, Jack (1905) says that Kyd gained relevance by the fact that he wrote a play called *Ur-Hamlet* before Shakespeare's version, with similar name and topics (*PMLA* Vol. 20, No. 4, p. 729).

Shortly, the issues that Shakespeare presents in his productions are not original; they are based on chronicles of the medieval social context, arising from previous dramas, stories and traditions of Italian origin, among others. However, the deep knowledge of his context as well as other disciplines allowed him to excel widely and to leave an indelible mark on his time and space.

As Faulkner points out, the human conflicts are timeless, but man is a mere mortal, that is why there is a constant need to treat these topics, to impinge the air of the time. This is also the reason why there is a need for writers to continue emerging.

## II. Author

Bate (2016) affirms in his online course “Shakespeare And His World”, that William Shakespeare, known as well as “The Bard of Avon,” is considered England's national poet. He was baptized on 26 April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire. The chancel of the Holy Trinity became his final resting place. This playwright, poet, and actor passed away on April 23, 1616 at Stratford, England.

Although the romantics tie Shakespeare to the Hellenistic tradition, he marks the evolution of the theatre and the novel. The works of Shakespeare can always be adapted to the present; that is, they can be temporized. The fact of not being restricted to a particular time or date is commented in the University of Birmingham online course “*Othello*” by Chouhan (2016). Like any other author, Shakespeare could not run away from the events of his time. He had no choice but to avoid offending the monarchy. His plays are the materialization of his wise observations at the court. During the Elizabethan period, he refrains from writing about Scotland and the queen’s cousin, Mary Stuart, queen of the Scots because of the antagonism between them. Once the England queen passed away, he started writing about her to delight her son.

*The Tempest*, a play from around 1610, provides evidence of Shakespeare’s distaste for royal authority. Nevertheless, he permanently composed his plays to amuse the royalty. He also had to consider paying public’s satisfaction. Bate (2016) mentions in his *course “Shakespeare and His World”* that King James, the patron of Shakespeare's acting company, plays the biggest contribution to Shakespeare’s universality since he inspires the bard to compose the play Antony and Cleopatra where King James is represented in the character of Augustus Caesar.

Motivated by the desire to please King James, Shakespeare used the world of ancient Rome world to explore his own epoch. Setting his plays outside England gives him the chance to

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talk about his monarchy and other issues related to his own country that would be dangerous to mention directly. This detachment from current events allows Shakespeare's works to find applicability, adaptability and pertinence in the centuries that have followed him.

As Bate (2016) expresses in his online course "Shakespeare and His World", the Shakespearean style is not meant to be read, but declaimed; it is fertile in rhetorical and metaphorical language. One of Shakespeare's main contributions is his shaping of the English language, since the pronunciation, spelling and grammar are not quite standardized before his appearance. Moreover, he enriched the language by adding hundreds of words and meanings. The number is unknown but many people have used those words since their coinage. (Cosgrove, A, Shakespeare's language in every day. 2015). Words such as gossip, lonely, priceless, ladybird, manager, puke, undress, and watchdog are attributed to the Bard of Avon according to the British Council. Shakespeare did not enjoy much glory during his lifetime. However, he is viewed as the most important writer in the English-speaking world.

### **III. Theoretical Framework**

New Criticism and Psychological Criticism constitute the two fundamental axes of this essay, from where the variables involved in Iago's motives and Othello's susceptibility can be approached and interpreted. That is to say, approaching the analysis of these two characters implies distinguishing elements in the text that are both internal and external to the Moor and the ensign.

This essay uses New Criticism to analyze the significance of details such as the handkerchief and the metaphor of the green-eyed monster as examples of Shakespearean symbolism. Moreover, this approach allows the comparison of Othello's psychological development in parallel with Iago's psychological motivations.

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A co-founder of the New Criticism Approach, the critic Cleanth Brooks, emphasizes the close reading and structural analysis of literature. New Criticism states that all the necessary data to interpret the essence and substance of the text is in itself.

By their side, Groden and Kriestwirth (1994) commented in their book *"The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism"* that ambiguity, paradox, irony and tension are the connecting elements which work together to infer and support the meaning of a work. (P.691-698), that is, the goal of getting the sense from the text is achieved only from the content thanks to a close reading and a total detachment from any background.

The second main axis of this essay is Psychological Criticism, with Sigmund Freud (1923) as main developer of this approach. It states that literature can be approached as a manifestation of the inner self or psyche. In *Othello*, the Moor is a victim of his jealousy as part of his unconscious sexual obsession that drives him to his terrible downfall. Freud would argue that Othello is a victim of his impulses, while Iago is a victim of his own psycho instinct.

Siegfried (2014) quotes Freud who says that there are three elements that constitute the psyche: actions, impulses and desires (P.1). Iago's Ego says to him that he can destroy Othello while avoiding the punishment of justice by plotting. The Super-Ego is something that Iago lacks completely and what comes to the surface in Othello when he becomes aware of the atrocity he commits against Desdemona. It is that part of the psyche that has to do with morals and accepted values. The Superego is manifested in Othello in the form of remorse and guilt that drives him to commit suicide.

In addition to Freud, Machiavelli is important to identify Othello's poor management of his emotions and Iago's network of deceptions that Othello is in a position to avoid if he observes certain principles. The prince by Machiavelli is very precise as it addresses individual and

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particular situations of princes and how these facts define their future in both the political and personal spheres.

### **IV. Iago's Motives and Othello's Susceptibility in Shakespeare's Othello.**

Iago's motives and incitement and Othello's sensitivity and excitability work in concert. *The Tragedy of Othello*, one of Shakespeare's most significant and oft-performed plays, represents a landmark in Elizabethan literature, revealing, beneath the characters' appearances and demeanors, their ego and inner being. Blacklisted in its era, it has spawned a variety of innovative interpretations.

Othello is a man who believes that people should be authentic. He is naïve to the fact that people are not always what they seem, and his naiveté leaves him susceptible to manipulations that transform his life and seal his fate. Parallel to Othello's susceptibility are Iago's machinations. He is a backstabber who wears a mask of fidelity to hide from his superior his true intentions. After Iago attempts to justify his motives of revenge against Othello, circumstances end up revealing the true colors of these two characters. This essay aims to examine Othello's susceptibility and Iago's motives and show that Iago is not the only person responsible for Othello's fate. Othello must also share the blame for his demise.

In order to analyze Othello's susceptibility and Iago's motives, it is necessary to discuss the facts and situations surrounding these two characters. First, Othello's chain of misguided decisions that contributes to his downfall. Second, Iago's devious plotting that turns a noble chieftain like Othello into a slayer. Third, Othello's ego and self-admiration, which prevent him from seeing the truth. Finally, Iago's motives for his manipulation of Othello.

Othello's victimization by Iago is facilitated by his own romanticism, faulty intuition, idealization of his beloved Desdemona, and love for epic journeys, empires, and everything related to the ancient world. Othello's chain of misguided decisions contributes enormously to

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his dramatic fall. Iago is responsible for the elaboration of the fateful chain of actions. However, his success is aided by Othello's inattentiveness. This is perceptible from the beginning of the play, where Iago uses Roderigo as an extension of himself. Roderigo is tasked with undermining Othello before Brabantio, the father of Desdemona.

For Iago, it is unendurable to be subordinate to a man of color. Iago cannot tolerate that a dark man like Othello enjoys a privileged position in Venetian society. During a conversation with Roderigo, Iago says, "I follow him to serve my turn upon him. We cannot all be masters, nor all masters cannot be truly follow'd" (p. 7). Iago hates to be part of a black lord's serving staff. He is resentful of being Othello's manservant. He considers that living and working for mere sustenance is a waste of time only comparable to the donkey's life, and is frustrated at his inability to attain the role of master.

Iago considers that honesty and servility deserve to be punished. He schemes to give only signs of loyalty and servility, while always striving to escape from his unfortunate condition (pp. 7-9). His main motive is not only revenge, but envy as well, since he envies Othello's exhilaration over his new wife. During this dialogue, Iago also states: "Were I the Moor I would not be Iago" (Act I, scene I, P.9). This statement illustrates Iago's false modesty, which hides his belief in his mental superiority over all the rest of the characters, especially Othello, whom he compares to a beast. His desire to stand out above others is a motive in itself for Iago and he is not scrupulous about unleashing carnage to achieve it.

Iago's conversation with Roderigo shows how he chafes at being under Othello's authority. He decides to exploit Othello's susceptibility and vulnerability by stoking Roderigo's feelings toward Desdemona. This conversation is key to understanding Iago's true nature and the

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blueprint for the way he conducts each situation from this point forward to his benefit and therefore, against Othello.

Poisoning people's minds is one of Iago's main strategies to achieve his purposes. He teaches Roderigo what to say to Brabantio about Desdemona's new husband. Iago says, "Call up her father. Rouse him, make after him, poison his delight, proclaim him in the streets; incense her kinsmen, and, though he in a fertile climate dwell, plague him with flies" (p. 9). Iago knows that Brabantio is unaware of his daughter's relationship with the Moor. He knows that such a relation will not be to Brabantio's liking because of the race of the Moor and the prejudices that reign during the Elizabethan period.

Iago realizes that these cultural and racial differences work against Othello and, therefore, they can awake his susceptibility. Iago's blatant racism is clear as he seeks to shock Brabantio by saying:

"Zounds, sir, you are robbed. For shame, put on your gown! Your heart is burst; you have lost half of your soul. Even now, now, very now, an old black ram is tugging your white ewe. Arise, arise! ram the snorting citizens with the bell, or else the devil will make a grandsire of you" (p. 11).

Racism and segregation become a recurrent topic thenceforth. In Iago's view, a dark man should not excel in a white society. He knows that by appealing to Brabantio's racism and religious beliefs, he can predispose Brabantio against Othello.

Iago cannot accept that a dark skinned foreigner commands all the glory, respect, and wealth that he wants. This, in itself, constitutes a motive for Iago: to destroy Othello's precious world by awakening prejudices and fears. Iago leaves Roderigo alone before Brabantio appears because he knows it is not advantageous to him for Brabantio to see him as Roderigo's instigator

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while he is serving as Othello's right hand. When Brabantio confronts Othello, Iago supports his boss, the General and gains his trust, only to betray him later.

Othello reveals his naivete when he declares before Brabantio that "his parts, his title, and his perfect soul shall manifest him rightly." (P. 21). He does not understand that his military glory is not enough to make him Brabantio's ideal son-in-law. Instead of belonging to the upper echelon of Venitian society, he is instead a black mercenary valued merely for his military service.

Machiavelli (1513) argues that "mercenaries are unreliable and respond only to their own economic interests" (*The Prince*, Chapter XII, p. 91). Othello wins the support of the Duke and the Senators because they need him to fight against the Turks. Noticeable in the Duke's speech is the prevailing view of Elizabethans regarding dark people. He maintains that "Othello is fairer than black (p. 47), implying his superiority over other dark-skinned people.

Othello does not court Desdemona in front of Brabantio for one simple reason: he knows that he is not the man her father expects for her. So Desdemona's union does not appear to be a result of her free will but rather a trick by Othello against social and religious rules. By shocking Brabantio with the possibility of becoming the grandfather of a monster, Iago aims to prompt Brabantio to reject his new son-in-law (p. 13).

Iago knows that this exaggeration can make Othello look like a thief who has stolen his daughter. He is aware of the psychological impact that this can produce on Brabantio as he conjures the image of having the devil as a son-in-law. Racial prejudice against dark-skinned people is evident in Brabantio's belief that the Moor uses magic to obtain the affection of his daughter. Brabantio underlines that:

"Whether a maid so tender, fair and happy, so opposite to marriage that she shunned the wealthy curled darlings of our nation, would ever have, t'incur a general mock, run from

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her guardage to the sooty bosom of such a thing as thou-to fear, not to delight” (p. 24 & 25).

Iago is not to blame for Brabantio's words that contribute greatly to the Othello's fall and Desdemona's death as Brabantio says, “Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see. She has deceived her father, and may thee” (Act I, Scene III, p. 47).

Brabantio as offended father, contributes to the murder of his daughter by leaving the seed of doubt in Othello's mind. Later, this doubt makes him question Desdemona's credibility when he discovers circumstantial evidence suggesting her perfidy.

This final comment that closes the conversation between Brabantio and Othello before the Moor leaves for Cyprus is key to understanding how Iago's slurs about Desdemona become plausible and how this contributes to Othello's susceptibility. With clever calculation, Iago casts doubt upon Desdemona's credibility by mentioning her offended father's comment in order to break Othello's faith in the purity of his wife. This part does not normally receive the attention it deserves, but Brabantio leaves an open possibility of a coming deception by his daughter Desdemona in Othello's mind. Interestingly, Iago has nothing to do with Brabantio's cunning comment. However, Iago uses it to disturb Othello's self-confidence.

Up to this point, the elements that rule Othello's misguided decisions are racism, self-admiration, and ego. By this point, the reader knows that Iago hates Othello and shows no restraints. However, nothing is clear yet about his motives to cause Othello's undoing. The trust issue appears when Othello assigns Iago to take care of Desdemona before he leaves to Cyprus. Othello is clearly wrong in what he says about his ensign, that “his ancient, he is a man of honesty and trust. To his conveyance he assigns his wife” (p. 47). That is, Iago's wife, who will attend to Desdemona.

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So far, the reader starts to see a reflexive Iago who knows how to direct the action to destroy what he hates. Iago is well aware about the effect of emotivism since he speaks on purpose to have an effect on the person he is talking to. The mastery that Iago displays to manipulate Brabantio and Roderigo against Othello, gives the sign of a person of no regrets, an innate manipulator who does not need a particular motive to hurt people around him.

During a conversation in which Iago persuades Roderigo to follow them to the war in Cyprus, Iago displays a vast knowledge of human nature. This dialogue makes clear that Iago sees women as no more than objects. He does not love or desire Desdemona since he is a misogynist but he finds unbearable Othello's happiness with Desdemona as his possession.

Iago compares the value of a woman to the value of a guinea hen. He adds that he would rather change his humanity with a baboon, characterizing men in love as at the level of animals. Iago is a married man, yet he does not seem to show tenderness toward anyone. This opens up the possibility that not only does he see women as undesirable but also that he is harboring a repressed sexuality of unknown orientation (p.49). His conversation with Roderigo before they leave for Cyprus is very meaningful because Iago opens the possibility that his revenge motives respond to something sentimental. He says that "he hates the Moor, his cause is hearted; thine hath no less reason" (p. 53).

According to this, Iago's motive to destroy Othello can be of a sentimental order comparable to Roderigo's. As Paris (1984) observes: "A number of psychoanalytic critics have tried to explain Iago's behavior, of course, usually in terms of latent homosexuality" (p. 2). Shakespeare does not provide any information about Iago's and Othello's relationship before the Moor meets Desdemona. The Bard was aware that obviousness is the worst thing for a narrative as it reflects the insecurity of the writer to trust a reader capable of reaching his own judgments.

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Iago's soliloquy after he persuades Roderigo to come with them to Cyprus provides clues to the kind of person that Iago is. He says, "Thus do I ever make my fool my purse; for I mine own gained knowledge should profane if I would time expend with such a snipe but for my sport and profit". (P. 53). His use of the word "ever" suggests that this is not the first time he has manipulated others as source of money. He says this even before he begins his revenge against Othello.

Another point to highlight is comment that he does so for his own sport. Iago feeds his ego when he tricks others and extracts an economic profit from them. Doing so makes him feel more intelligent and dominant over others. This suggests that his motivation does not respond to external but rather to inner stimuli.

Another comment Iago makes is that "He hates the Moor; and it is thought abroad that twixt his sheets. He's done his office" (p. 53), hinting at his vague suspicion that he has had relations with his wife. However, the fact that he does not mention it again weakens retribution for being cuckolded as a motive for bringing about the Moor's undoing. On the contrary, Iago's lack of interest in his own wife is part of what brings scholars to argue for the possibility of latent homosexuality.

Before the action moves to Cyprus, Iago's soliloquy announces how he can awake Othello's jealousy by using Michael Cassio. He says he intends to "abuse Othello's ear that he [Cassio] is too familiar with his wife. He hath a person and a smooth dispose to be suspected, framed to make women false" (p. 55).

Cassio fits perfectly into Iago's plans to provoke Othello's jealousy and fear about his wife. The ensign knows that working on Othello's insecurities is the best way to destroy his glory. The way he closes this soliloquy brings a new element to Iago's plot: the issue of

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appearances and how Othello is not able to see the invisible behind the visible. Iago adds that "The Moor is of a free and open nature that thinks men honest that but seem to be so, and will as tenderly be led by nose as asses are" (p. 55).

The ensign knows about tricks and hypocrisies in human nature. He recognizes how false people can be since he knows himself. He possesses a deep knowledge of those around him. Meanwhile, Othello thinks that knowledge of human nature should go no deeper than what his senses perceive.

When the characters get to Cyprus, Iago has a talk with Desdemona, Emilia, and Cassio that exposes Iago's view of women and how he intends to throw Othello's love for Desdemona into an element of discord which will lead to Othello's ruin. Iago thinks that women are simply sexual objects that he can use against their owners to arise sensibilities. He asserts that "If she be fair and wise, fairness and wit, the one's for use, the other useth it." Then he adds that "There's none so foul and foolish thereunto, but does foul pranks which fair and wise ones do" (p. 67). It is key to understand the female role in this essay because Iago manages to awake Othello's susceptibility thanks to the Moor's wife and it is Othello's fear, jealousy, and anxiety of losing her that drive his chain of misguided decisions.

Michael Cassio has nothing against Iago. However, Iago hates him because he occupies the lieutenant position he wants in Othello's army, and he has no scruples when it comes to attacking whatever he sees as an obstacle in his path. This reinforces his innate malignity. He asserts that "with as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio. Ay, smile upon her, do; I will gyve thee in thine own courtship" (p. 69).

It is clear that Iago knows how to exploit Othello's love for Desdemona as a weapon against his boss. In his soliloquy he unveils the motives for his revenge. First, Othello's selection

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of Michael Cassio as lieutenant instead of himself. Second, Othello's lack of mutual romantic attraction for Iago. Third, Iago's weak case for assuming that the Moor had relations with his wife. And finally, a Iago's motiveless pleasure in hurting people as sport while also benefitting from it financially.

Despite the comments of Iago, Shakespeare reveals elements of Othello's nature. However, it is not until Othello's first encounter with Desdemona in Cyprus when the reader begins to see how much she means to him and therefore his vulnerability to losing her. Desdemona represents the last and most relevant element in Othello's ascension to success. He claims that "if he dies at that time, he would be happy to have found his perfect complement" (p. 71) or, as Othello himself refers to her, as "Content so absolute" (P. 71). Desdemona is more important for Othello than any military victory because nothing compares to her when it comes to comforting him. Whereas Othello is a soldier of great military prowess, Iago identifies Desdemona as Othello's Achilles heel.

The General is in love and this contributes to a great extent to his misguided decisions. The essence of Machiavelli's argument is that:

"Discipline, order and a mentality on war must govern the life of every prince and leader who wishes to make his government and his position enduring. The leader cannot abandon for personal and sentimental matters the art of war. If he gives priority to the pleasures of life, it can eventually lead every prince to his own ruin. Learning to be evil is not a choice but mandatory for a prince" (*The Prince*, Chapter XIV, P. 102).

Othello's failure to observe martial tactics and his decision to remain idle in a time of peace is disastrous for him. He becomes so preoccupied with his love and jealousy that he is rendered blind to Iago's insurrection. Othello is not simply in love but exaggeratedly romantic and sentimental. This is evident when he says, "O my soul's joy, if after every tempest come such calms, may the winds blow till they have wakened death" (p. 69). Othello does not seem to

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be the most suitable for the position of leader since his speech suggests sentimentality and weakness. It provides Iago with the answer to how he can destroy all that makes sense in Othello's life.

As Iago's plot unfolds, it becomes clear that he is a liar. However, he cannot be blamed for what people such as Roderigo accept as an unarguable truth. Iago says, "Desdemona is in love with Cassio" (P.73). With this, Desdemona begins to be the scapegoat in Iago's conspiracy and therefore, in Othello's breakdown. This shows that not just Othello but Roderigo as well is a person who is not able to conquer Desdemona's heart by himself.

Roderigo and Othello are so dependent that they need Iago's help to destroy themselves. Roderigo, like Othello, is desperate for Desdemona's love and this feeling makes both of them vulnerable and prone to believe what others tell them about her. Knowing this, Iago easily gets Roderigo to follow him to Cyprus.

Up to now, Othello's idyllic world still remains unbroken. However, the ensign knows how mere friendliness between Desdemona and Cassio can make them appear guilty and doom Othello's trust in both of them. Iago says, "Mark me, with what violence she first loved the Moor, but for bragging and telling her fantastical lies. To love him still for prating?" (p. 73). It is not Iago's fault that Roderigo accepts his view of Desdemona as an easy woman who is enthralled by Othello's stories. Likewise, Iago leaves Roderigo with the opinion that Othello is a prattler who does not deserve Desdemona's love.

There is no evidence about any tension or strife between Desdemona and Iago up to this point. This makes it clearer that Iago is innately evil by victimizing the Moor's wife. Iago shows no remorse for his actions. Desdemona is someone who Iago does not care to hurt but a key element in his plan to awake Othello's susceptibility.

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As the conversation with Roderigo goes on, Iago reinforces his observations about the newlyweds. He says, "Her eye must be fed; and what delight shall she have to look on the devil?" (P. 73). Iago does not just introduce Desdemona as a lustful woman but also makes a reference about Othello's appearance. In this tragedy the topic of racism is a never-ending issue. The racial prejudice that existed during the time of the play manifests itself through the words of Iago – a clear tendency to associate dark-skinned people with the devil and all that is considered maleficent.

This conversation between Iago and Roderigo allows Shakespeare to unveil what was acceptable at this time. The fact of framing Cassio as Desdemona's perfect match according to racist and xenophobic grounds is a weapon that Iago unveils in advance for the reader to sense Othello's susceptibility. According to Iago, Othello lacks the demeanor, magnetism and comeliness that Cassio enjoys. Once the passion that Othello awakens in Desdemona cools, Cassio's attributes present a new way to awake Desdemona's lust (P73). This excerpt illustrates how Othello's age and his visage do not correspond to the concept of beauty held during Elizabethan period. Iago clearly knows that the presence of handsome Cassio can overshadow and devalue Othello as husband.

Iago portrays the sexual desire as a sport. Comparing passions with sports is a constant in Iago. Also revenge is a subject that belongs to the field of passions in Iago's view. He can stand up by himself as a character with no motives since he indicates that revenge by making Othello a cuckold is a sport that provides him pleasure (p. 53).

Iago is more than an ensign. He represents the opinion of Venetian society about interracial couples such as Othello and Desdemona: there is no future for this kind of union. Iago says, "Desdemona's delicate tenderness will find itself abused, and begin to have the gorge,

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disrelish and abhor the Moor. Very nature will instruct her in it and compel her to some second choice" (P. 73).

Iago is clear about the fact that Cassio fits very well this position of second choice. The Moor knows that other men desire Desdemona. However, she chooses to be with him. The best way Iago finds to work on Othello's susceptibility and jealousy does not have to do mainly with the fact that other men like his wife, but rather through giving Othello false signs that she likes men from her own social position.

For Othello, it is no problem that other men like Desdemona since she represents a trophy for him. This jealousy makes Othello proud of possessing a much-desired woman who is out of the reach of others. Being with Desdemona prevents Othello from feeling like an ordinary mercenary. However, this jealousy affects Othello negatively when he begins to consider that Desdemona desires another man. His self-doubt arouses his susceptibility and causes him to view Desdemona as a slut.

Iago is aware that Othello begins to compare himself with men who belong to Desdemona's social sphere. Hence, he decides to make Othello believe that he is a husband who fails to meet the requirements necessary to hold onto an upper class white woman like Desdemona. The initial conversation in Cyprus between Roderigo and Iago provides a description about Cassio that does not correspond to him but rather to Iago. In Iago's words, chances and likelihood are circumstances that Cassio knows how to shape (P.73).

Iago's modus operandi is in large measure the creation of occasions to make Othello believe that Cassio and Desdemona are cheating. He is able to create an unreality which ends up projecting itself violently on reality. Iago is a visualizer, a creator of circumstances. These skills enable him to be a recreator of stories full of intrigue. Undoubtedly Iago's role has a major

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function: he makes a crucial contribution to the intrigue thanks to his hatred and desire for revenge.

Now Iago and Roderigo are ready to get Cassio into trouble by provoking him. Iago tells Roderigo, "You have a shorter journey to your desires by the means I shall then have to prefer them, and the impediment most profitably removed, without he which there were no expectation of our prosperity" (p. 75). Iago has a deep knowledge of human nature, which allows him to know what other people want and therefore, how to control them in order to get what he wants.

Iago reveals his malignity by making Roderigo feel that he is doing him a big service. He pretends to care about Roderigo's desire for Desdemona. This establishes that Iago is quite familiar with manipulation, even before Othello decides to promote Cassio over him. It is true that they share the common goal of destroying Othello, however, Roderigo does not seem to understand that he is just a pawn in Iago's game.

Iago tries vainly to justify his revenge against Othello by suggesting the possibility that he had sexual relations with his wife, Emilia. However, even if this was true, it would not arouse in Iago any jealousy or fear of losing her. What really annoys him is feeling mocked by someone he considers a dark-skinned fool. Iago always refers to Othello as the Moor when he is not in front of him. Desdemona does not produce erotic desire in Iago, but she becomes an instrument for driving Othello along the path of jealousy and insanity without return (p. 77).

Iago does not love his wife; there is no passage referring to the affection or love that he feels for Emilia. He is only bothered about the privileges Othello can afford. This attitude reinforces the theory of his wanton revenge and innate malignity. He remains motiveless by now since he does not assume a clear stance about what he feels for Othello. Of course, Iago hates

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Othello but it is not clear why Iago helps Othello professionally in spite of Othello's race. This unanswered question takes to query Iago's sexual orientation once again.

This excerpt is very meaningful because it does not only provide information about Iago's and Emilia's relationship but also oabout Iago's wish to drive Othello mad. At the end of his soliloquy, Iago releases another element that suggest that his perversion is an inherent trait. He says, "Knavery's plain face is never seen till used" (p. 77). In this statement he openly recognizes his own villainy.

Once again, Iago's unscrupulous and wicked nature emerges with his plans to get Cassio drunk. He says, "If I can fasten but one cup upon him with that which he hath drunk tonight already, he'll be as full of quarrel and offense as my young mistress' dog" (P. 81). Liquor is a weapon that Iago uses to subdue his victims and render them vulnerable.

Iago knows how to poison others' consciences, exploit their inner ghosts, and turn their desires into real nightmares in which they hurt each other without knowing who is responsible for their misfortunes. Iago moves into a fertile breeding ground where almost all the characters are heedless and blundering creatures at the mercy of this man with a hellish mentality. Iago says, "Now, 'mongst this flock of drunkards, am I to put our Cassio in some action that may offend the isle" (p. 83). The inattentive nature of everyone around Iago results in their ruin. Iago knows that the best way to topple Cassio from his pedestal is not to confront him openly, but to involve in shameful acts unbecoming of an officer.

The importance of honor and reputation is just not present in Othello but also in other characters in this tragedy (p. 83). Iago is aware that getting Cassio involved in a fight is an excellent manner to smear Cassio's reputation in the eyes of Othello. Shortly before Cassio's fight with Roderigo and Montano, a conversation between Iago and Montano takes place. It

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serves as a clear statement about how Iago uses the technique of recognizing the merits and virtues of someone – in this case Cassio – then enlarge his flaws to emphasize how they can have adverse consequences. He wants to illustrate that Cassio's abuse of alcohol represents a huge mistake on the part of Othello when he chose him to be second in command in Cyprus. Although Cassio is a man of great military abilities, he has a vice that puts the island in peril (p.87).

Iago is someone who takes care of details. He does not leave loose ends. After baiting Cassio into a drunken display, Iago tells Montano that Cassio's vulnerability for booze remains unknown to Othello, thus calling into question Montano's suitability for his position and the adequacy of Othello's decision making in choosing him.

According to Machiavelli, Othello's mistake as a prince is to take away from Iago the prerogative and privileges that he expects from his leader. (Machiavelli, 1513, chapter IV, P. 54). Othello never pays attention to the needs of his subordinates. It is precisely this isolation from those around him that gives rise to outbreaks of insurrection.

As the play progresses, the scene between Iago and Montano is so spontaneous that it suggests that many of Iago's lies are not planned but obeying his unique sense of opportunity to slander and besmirch those who block his path. An open attack on Cassio is not a good idea since it can only expose his hatred for the man who supplanted him.

Iago pretends to be Cassio's good friend and because of that, Montano thinks that his not talking to Othello regarding Cassio's weakness for booze shows Iago as someone who will not betray a friend. He states that he is not the right one to report Othello about Cassio's faintness that can endanger the island and therefore to Othello in his position. Iago's strategy is to avoid getting involved and leave the work of discrediting Cassio to Montano (p. 87).

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Therefore, as Iago has anticipated, Montano feels obliged to intervene and the result is that Othello loses confidence in Cassio. This estrangement is Iago's first triumph since it allows him to work on Othello's susceptibility without his considering Cassio's side of the story.

Shortly after the fight, Iago makes sure that Roderigo raises the alarm across Cyprus in order to amplify and worsen the problem. One of the ensign's great talents is knowing how to delegate without getting his hands dirty. He is a master at sowing doubts and uncertainties and waiting for them to grow.

Cassio is in trouble. Othello is angry about Cassio's behavior. This provides a fertile ground for Iago's conspiracy. This point of the play marks the Moor's evolution from a noble chieftain into a slayer because Iago's actions are about to be more aggressive. The destruction of reputation is not only an Othello's concern, but Cassio's as well. Both base their lives on reputation. Iago knows that it is a weapon in his favor as a conversation between Cassio and Iago shows. Cassio claims: "My reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial" (p. 97). This clearly suggests that in Cassio's view, having no reputation turns men into beasts. In contrast, Iago does not place as much importance on reputation, asserting that "As I am an honest man, I thought you had received some bodily wound; there is more sense in that than in reputation" (p. 97). So far, everything is going as Iago has planned. Once Cassio loses his position in Othello's army, Iago convinces him that he has a strategy that will return him to his enviable position; he should ask for Desdemona's intervention. Iago says, "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 the contemplation, mark, and denotement of her parts and graces" (p. 99).

The lack of interaction between Cassio and Othello is decisive in Iago's conspiracy since it helps awake Othello's insecurities. Iago thinks that showing empathy for others and making

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them feel that he cares about their misfortunes is a great way to make them trust him. This is a posture that Iago assumes in order to know the needs of his victims and then, how to use them against those who trust him. At this point, Cassio already believes Iago's good intentions and provided assistance.

The following dialogue between Cassio and Iago is the beginning of the fatal dénouement that ends with the lives and happiness of the newlyweds. Iago asserts that the best way for Cassio to recover his position is through the great kindness and fondness for others that are innate in Desdemona. Iago invites him to be outspoken and genuine with her and achieve her effective intervention (p. 99 & 101).

Cassio's request for help in recovering his job becomes a Machiavellian puzzle that Iago designs smartly. Cassio incriminates Desdemona and himself in Iago's plot when he requests her intercession. Iago knows that the more they insist, the worse it will be for them.

Cassio remains oblivious to the role he is playing in Iago's conspiracy. Iago's soliloquy shows glitters of madness. It puts into question his sanity since he thinks at times that he is really helping to solve Cassio's problem, something that he himself has created. The ensign's mental health ostensibly affects his motives for destroying Othello, in the sense that a demented person does not need to justify his actions and therefore his motives. Iago argues, "How am I then a villain to counsel Cassio to this parallel course, directly to his good? Divinity of hell! When devils will the blackest sins put on, they do suggest at first with heavenly shows" (p. 101).

Iago shows his abnormal mindset when he insists on asking himself if he is malicious in his advice to Cassio. Iago demonstrates a certain similarity with demons as regards their ability to predict future events and human decisions. As the story unfolds, Iago confirms the enormous power that Desdemona has over the Moor. He says, "His soul is so enfeathered to her love that she

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may make, unmake, do what she list, even as her appetite shall play the god with his weak function” (p. 101). Iago is aware that this power she has over Othello is such that the mere possibility of losing her to another man can translate into Desdemona's munificent destruction. Desdemona is the most sensitive thing in Othello's life and the one that makes him vulnerable to an attack by his detractors. Iago understands this very well and knows that she is the best way to stir up insecurities that can turn Othello's life into a nightmare.

This obsessive love for Desdemona increases Othello's lack of attention. Love in this tragedy works as a veil that prevents victims from knowing what Iago is planning against them. Machiavelli (1513) posits that the leader must consider the financial remuneration that his secretaries and other subalterns expect from him. Ignoring this is a mistake since the work of the leader is not only to be boastful but also to maintain the fidelity of his close associates (*The Prince*, chapter XXII, p. 145).

Othello never shows financial largesse toward Iago. The Moor does not invest in Iago's well-being, and this makes the difference between gaining Iago's loyalty and gaining his hatred. Othello's stinginess, carelessness, and indifference toward the needs of his subjects do not exonerate Iago's guilt, but they are extenuating circumstances that mitigate his behavior.

Iago is eager to receive recognition from those who surround him and desirous of having access to new ladders of opportunity. When Othello chooses Cassio over him, he understands that Othello has no intention of helping him to overcome his condition as a servant.

In certain situations Iago's perfidious mentality acts in an unplanned manner. However, the distancing of Cassio from Othello is carefully crafted. Iago says that Desdemona's spirit of service is a vehicle to harm. That is to say, the fact that Desdemona advocates for Cassio makes

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her look guilty before Othello. Iago's intrigues and lies take shape because both Desdemona and Cassio act in the way Iago expects. (P.103)

Dementia in Iago is another mitigating factor of his perfidious actions. He is a sociopath who is well aware of the networks he weaves around others and how each element relates to the other. The labeling of others as fools is a clear indication of his delusions of grandeur. His high opinion of himself helps him to quell the frustration of not being as successful as Othello who, in spite of not being white, achieves military glories in an eminently racist and prejudiced society.

The following interchange between Roderigo and Iago shows that Iago is a hunter who knows how to wait for the right moment to annihilate his prey. Iago displays in his speech a psychopathic consistency in the way an event intertwines with another. This excerpt also exposes the stupidity of Roderigo who, despite knowing what Iago is capable of, does not question Iago's orders. He blindly obeys him in his desperation to win Desdemona's love. In Iago's view, keen intelligence depends on patience and putting certain situations off. The triumphs of those who win in the end are more enduring than of those who achieve a goal very early (p.103).

The strategy of asking his victims to be patient in order to see the fruits of his scheming is Iago's way of shaping the facts to his convenience. The suffering that Iago causes is not merely the result of revenge; it is also a delight for him to make others lose their balance. Iago's revenge can stand by itself without motives since someone who has severe behavioral problems does not need to justify his crimes.

Iago is a man with an enormous ability to create worlds and situations. He facilitates the conditions necessary for Cassio's encounter with Othello's wife where he beseeches her help. While Iago talks to Cassio, the ensign says, "I'll send her to you presently; and I'll devise a mean to draw the Moor out of the way, that you converse and business may be more free" (p. 107).

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There is no real opponent for Iago in the play. He is evil turned into a man and there is no one else to show this kind of perverse courage. This pervasive man is one of the densest and heaviest of Shakespeare's characters. He is the kind of person who victimizes all those who cross his path. Iago is slave of his own duplicity and guile, after a series of lies which brings death as fatal flaw for almost all, including himself. His premise and purpose is beyond rebuke. He is not merely an opponent, but the throbbing of the tragedy that keeps the story flowing.

**Iago arranges** the situation in such a way that Othello sees Cassio leaving in a furtive way. Othello says, "Was not that Cassio parted from my wife?" (p. 113). Of course, all these coincidences only benefit Iago. Like any literary character, Iago is not part of an empirical world, prone to being tested but part of a "possible world" where the readers simply accept the interaction and the reaction.

The reader accepts what Shakespeare tells him; that is to say, the reader neutralizes his disbelief by seeing how this world can set rules, all in Iago's favor, as a chain of facts and events that promote his intrigues. Shakespeare resorts to serendipity in order to promote and trigger Iago's actions.

To lay the foundation of a marriage on a heathen love, is to doom it to failure. This is evident in this Shakespearean tragedy. The tragedy opens with a successful Othello in the military field who is admired and reciprocated in love very quickly by Desdemona. Because of this, the aim of Othello is to excel not only in military endeavors but also to achieve acceptance in Venice's and Cyprus' upper class. Othello's need for approval and validation from others regarding his marriage to Desdemona gives evidence of his own susceptibility and unsteadiness.

Othello's eagerness to be part of the upper class of Venice is still one of the elements of this possible world called "Noble General Othello." The Moor hypothesizes that losing his wife

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could return him to an ignoble and unpleasant condition that he calls perdition. Othello says, "Excellent, wretch! Perdition catch my soul but I do love thee. And when I love thee not, chaos is come again" (Act III, scene II, p. 117).

This quote reflects Othello's naivety in focusing his destiny on another person. Desdemona brings an apparent emotional stability to the Moor's life. However, these words of the Moor denote a man who lives sustained on fragile illusions such as fidelity and love that soon end up overshadowing whatever words Desdemona says in her favor. Undoubtedly, Othello is an astonishing human almost comparable to the ancient Greek heroes who fight epic battles, tremendous as commander and ruler; however, he is completely inept in sentimental aspects.

Othello lives inside his bubble of naivety until Iago begins to subtly ask if Cassio is aware of Othello's intentions to marry Desdemona. This does not really interest Iago but this is the prelude to how Iago begins to torment and poison Othello's head with corrosive doubts which eventually trigger a terrible transformation in the chivalrous Moor. Iago's lie has an image for Othello now, that of Cassio and Desdemona talking.

This is a lie that becomes a fearsome truth for the insecure Othello. Iago destroys the good reputation that Cassio enjoys in Othello's eyes. The tone of Iago's words is perceived by the time he starts working on Othello's insecurities.

The ensign intends with his speech to show Cassio not only as a wife thief but also as a treacherous man who only pretends to be cooperating with Othello's cause. Iago makes Cassio look like someone who hypocritically mocks Othello while helping him to court Desdemona.

Iago insinuates that Cassio's cooperation hides something not so noble. He asks, "Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady, know of your love?" (Act III, Scene II, P. 117). By minimizing the importance of a comment and pretending to unwant to say something, there is in

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Iago the desire to highlight something to another person. That is to say, he demonstrates the deliberate purpose of wanting to sow uncertainty and anxiety.

The dialogues between Othello and Iago provide the tone of the ensign who pretends to agree with Othello in his opinion about Cassio but with the deliberate purpose of sowing doubt regarding the straightforwardness of the newly-promoted Cassio.

Machiavelli says, "A prince as a leader cannot allow the birth of disorder in order to avoid a conflict, since sooner or later this takes place" (*The Prince*, chapter III, p. 51). Othello never realizes what dissension and intrigues his decisions engender by marrying Desdemona and not promoting Iago to the job he thinks to deserve.

The fact that Cassio knows Desdemona while Othello courts her makes Cassio suspicious (thanks to the doubts sown by Iago). Iago makes Cassio's intercession in favor of Othello with Desdemona seem that it is not a disinterested act. Rather than asserting Cassio's loyalty and sincerity, Othello stops asking. Iago does not affirm emphatically that Cassio is honest; he just gives a weak answer without denying it. Iago says, "Think, my lord!" (p. 119). In Othello's view, Iago is a prudent man who contains himself when it comes to speaking ill about others. However, the doubt about Cassio's integrity and outspokenness has already been planted. Iago makes Othello feel that he does not want to contradict him because he is his boss. Ambiguity and tergiversation from Iago's speech are rhetorical strategies to arouse Othello's susceptibility and uncertainty regarding the truth about his beloved wife and Cassio.

Iago pretends to care about Desdemona and Cassio's honor and reputation. He artistically makes Othello feel that he wants to protect him from a monstrous truth. This understanding male attitude makes Iago succeed in gaining the trust of the naïve Moor. To further gain his trust, he affirms that he loves Othello. The Moor naively compliments the

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prudence that Iago observes while speaking. Othello considers this as a virtue of a loyal man, not a characteristic of those who are unreliable and dishonest.

Othello accepts as true what his senses tell him but he is incapable of perceiving the invisible behind the visible. Othello says that he takes seriously the fact that Iago does not finish his comment and refrains from talking about Cassio since he considers that it does not come from an intriguing scoundrel but from a reliable and fair person who reflects before making any judgment. (p. 119 & 121).

What people are expected to be, is an idea that has no room in Iago's mindset, but what men might be. That is to say, unlike Othello, Iago does not assume those around him are noble, but rather a handful of lambs enslaved by their wants, passions and power. Othello is a person who does not explore his susceptibilities and inner being. In other words, he is not aware of his own unsteadiness and weakness that will eventually destabilize his marriage with Desdemona.

Machiavelli says that collapse is the destiny of every prince who strives to be fair and benevolent when dealing with rogues. The knowledge of human nature is only achieved by analyzing people from the reality of these and not from a subjective and idealistic state of human behavior (*The Prince*, chapter XV, p. 106). So it is clear that it is not important to understand how people should be in the best version of themselves, in their ideal form, but to understand that mankind harbors evil in its heart as part of its own nature. Othello is not in a position to avoid the hell in which he himself converts his existence because he is unattentive to true human nature.

Iago contrives to have Othello ask him to share his worst thoughts about Cassio. In this way, he will be seen as the friend who provides information at the request of the interested (Othello) and under the appearance of not wanting to cause problems to others.

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Othello says, "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" (p. 121).

Othello's inclination to see the best in people does not allow him to fit completely into the society to which Desdemona belongs. His failure to maintain military discipline and instead remain idle in a time of peace is disastrous for him since his jealousy blinds him to Iago's insurrection. The essence of Machiavelli's argument is that in order to remain in power, the prince or leader must maintain a mentality of order and discipline. The warlike disposition and the military outlook must take precedence over the sentimental; therefore, being evil is not an option but an obligation in itself (*The Prince*, chapter XIV, p. 102).

Iago says that the privacy of a person's thoughts is an unchallengeable and inalienable right that even superiors in rank cannot force them to reveal. Moreover, no matter how pure someone is, he cannot keep out of the corruption of society at certain times (p. 121).

A.C. Bradley provides a deep understanding of Iago as a man of pure evil. He says Shakespeare wants Iago to be seen as a representation of a thinking, logical and especially evil man. Iago's mindset looks like a product of Neoclassicism since he seems oriented to reasoning as the basis of his knavery. Iago is aware that reason must be paramount, prevailing over passions, which can lead a man such as Othello to his doom. In Iago's view, the will has an enormous capacity to shape and change his surroundings.

Iago does not assert Desdemona's infidelity all at once; it is a slow process like erosion and Othello is the mountain that Iago wants to make collapse. Iago, as usual, tries to protect himself when he slanders others, saying that he might be wrong in his suspicions. But, in any case, the darts of Iago have their deadly effect by causing mistrust in the marriage of the newlyweds.

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Iago subtly asks Othello for time to get evidence to corroborate his suspicions, but in the meantime his goal is achieved. That is, to sow the seed that disrupts Othello. From now on, Othello cannot see his wife in the same way.

Iago awakes Othello's susceptibility by telling him that "Those who are sure of themselves, of their destiny and who hold power are not invulnerable to a bad love" (p. 123). This comment manages to submerge the Moor in uncertainties and suspicions. Iago knows that putting forward Desdemona, Othello's most precious gem, as a disloyal whore is an excellent way to torture and consume the military leader.

Iago notices that Othello is very concerned about the position he has in Venetian society and he knows that Desdemona's possible infidelity implies the loss of what the general possesses in terms of respect and honor. Venetians do not overlook Othello's dark color, he can manage their armies but he is not accepted as a true member of a society that rejects the disparate and different. Iago is part of that segregationist society and, therefore, it is a motive in itself to dislike what Othello represents.

Afterward, in order to reinforce Othello's insecurities, Iago makes reference to wealthy people's unhappiness and fear of losing their possessions. His statement involves a resentment on his part toward those who have what he lacks. This comment offers a clue about Iago's baseless hatred toward those who are successful (p. 123). The fact of referring to wealthy people in general allows Iago to work on Othello's fears without mentioning him and therefore, without becoming engaged in an uncomfortable situation with his boss.

Iago is in charge of teaching him how wrong he is about reality due to his susceptibility. Iago posits an allusion that "jealousy is like a green eyed monster" (p. 123). This comment opens to Othello the possibility that Desdemona is making him a cuckold. A furtive attack on Othello's

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psyche begins, which marks his transition as a character, from the honeyed husband to a man consumed in pain and despair for being allegedly bamboozled by his wife.

Othello initially shows himself to Iago as a man who can handle a possible deception from his wife but reaffirms that she is a woman incapable of betraying him (p. 123). Iago does not tell Othello openly that he is a man who fears losing what he has accomplished; however, he poisons Othello with that discourse that the poor, who are resigned to their economic condition, are in some way rich because they do not have much to lose, unlike Othello, who feels that his pedestal of "glory and acceptance" in the white world is in danger. This sensation of loss is fundamental in the awakening of Othello's susceptibilities since Othello finds the thought of returning to his origins unbearable.

From this point forward, Othello realizes that life is not sweet. After he pretends to take calmly a possible infidelity of his wife, he adds that the only way out is to get rid of the uneasiness that jealousy produces or abandon her (p. 125). However, Iago knows him well and he gets the idea that this can destroy the Moor. Othello does not want to show his susceptibility and fragility.

Iago pretends through his speech to be the loyal friend and servant who does not want others to deceive and abuse his master's good nature. Othello says, "No, Iago, I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove; and on the proof, there is no more but this away at once with love or jealousy" (p. 125).

Iago is very skilled in the art of making all those around him believe that he shares a common cause with them. This allows him to create empathy and a strange sense of solidarity in the cause of others. Iago manages to gain the cooperation of his victims through the destruction

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of another's reputation. He shows himself as the genie of the magic lamp who can make people's wishes come true thanks to his cunning *modus operandi*.

Othello's character changes only to the extent he loses his balance. He shows himself to be a slave of his passions, a man of poor judgments. Jealousy is the tragic flaw that causes his ruin. Othello's weaknesses as reasoner make him fail completely and this is seen in his blindness and incapability to believe his beloved.

Othello takes all that Iago says as if it is the gospel truth. Unfounded jealousy finds the perfect nest in Othello's mind and becomes his Achilles' heel. Othello's susceptibility and jealousy open the door to Othello's misadventures.

As the plot unfolds, it is time for Iago to give a basis to Othello's suspicions. He tells the Moor that "Desdemona did deceive her father, marrying him" (p. 125). Iago is so skilled that he even manages to use Brabantio's words to make his own statements credible. This comment by Iago reinforces Othello's doubts. To add further irony, Iago goes as far as to say that Desdemona is able to dupe other's perceptions (p. 125).

Iago speaks suspiciously about Desdemona and Cassio. However, he asks his boss not to weigh his comments too heavily. He makes Othello believe that he loves him and that he is only concerned with Othello's well-being. Of course, Iago does not want Othello to confront his wife to avoid her self-defense. On the contrary, he only seeks to poison Othello's conscience and destroy his mental peace. Iago says, "I humbly do beseech you of your pardon for too much loving you" (p. 127).

Iago takes great care of the tone of his words to make them sound frank. He says, "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" (p. 127).

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Othello's self-esteem is the target of Iago's malicious, racist comments. Iago surmises that "There is something abnormal and against nature in a woman who considers a man of another race as couple" (p. 127). However, he softens the comment by telling Othello to excuse him.

Iago clarifies that he does not refer to Desdemona in particular; nevertheless, he makes Othello believe that it is only a matter of time until Desdemona grows weary of Othello's exoticism. Then, she will find alluring the men of her extraction and own ethnicity (p. 127). The only aim of this racist speech is to damage Othello's faith in himself and thus awake his susceptibility.

Iago asks Othello to leave his comments about Cassio and Desdemona as they are, since what he says is merely conjecture. Iago is so cynical that he softens the comment by saying that he does not want Othello to be appalled because of the distrust this conjecture produces (p. 127). The effect of uncertainty is disastrous for Othello's tranquility and for the decisions he makes.

It is very likely that Shakespeare was aware of "The Prince" which Machiavelli writes in 1513, as only ninety years separate this from Shakespeare's play, the tragedy of Othello which was possibly written in 1603.

Machiavelli's argument is that a conspirator does not dare to seek the fall of the leader if this chief is loved by his subjects. The plotter fears the reprisals that can befall him by other citizens. Conversely, a prince who is not appreciated by his subjects is excellent fuel for every conspirator since seeing him fall is to the liking of other citizens (*The Prince*, Chapter XIX, p. 121-123). It is obvious that the only one who can truly feel Othello's misfortune is his own wife, since the others around him can simply continue with their lives under the command of a new leader.

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Machiavelli wants an Italy free of barbarians and foreigners. An Italy ruled by an Italian for the Italians and not by foreign barbarians whom he considers repugnant (*The Prince*, chapter 26, p. 159). In Iago's view, the only way to get rid of his foreign chieftain, Othello, is to turn him into a desperate husband and then, a slayer.

Othello is clearly an outsider in a strange land who finds trouble fitting in. He and Iago are clearly characters inspired by the ideas of Machiavelli. Othello represents what the Venetian society has to repudiate.

Machiavelli adds that subordinates are more afraid to aggrieve and outrage the one who they fear than the one who is dear to them. (Chapter XVII, P. 113). Iago is able to manipulate the Moor since he does not fear him. The ensign knows that poisoning Othello's mind will bear fruit sooner. That is why he asks him to not to place importance on his words. He is willing to wait.

It is important to return to Brabantio's racist speech in the beginning, since Desdemona's father's words combined with Iago's comments about Cassio fracture and crack the Moor's self-esteem. Brabantio's speech ensures that "It is impossible that Othello wins Desdemona's heart since he is what frightens her. He concludes by saying that his daughter's relationship goes against natural laws because Othello is a dark-skinned man (p. 35). Brabantio's insults contribute in large measure to Othello's insanity and, therefore, to his downfall.

Brabantio and Iago concur in asserting that only an insane woman can go against natural laws and engage in an interracial relationship. This gives a clear conception of Elizabethan England at the moment when Shakespeare composed this play (p. 127).

Othello's misfortunes are based on hesitancy and insecurities. They have a precedent that has to do with the social prejudices that reign in the Elizabethan world regarding dark-skinned people. In the consummation of Iago's plot, Othello's fatality is eventually understandable from

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a socio-historical point of view in which the Moor as military leader plays a great role until he decides to cross the invisible social boundaries that have been established. Another white woman from a lower social stratum than Desdemona or a woman who does not stand out because of her beauty would be the best way to avoid his subordinate's envy. The problem with his current wife is that she is quite beautiful and desired.

Also, in a new element not introduced by Iago, Othello begins to feel not only disadvantaged by his race but also by his age (p.129 & 131). When he compares himself with the courtiers in terms of manners and age, it is an indication that Iago is succeeding in destabilizing Othello's world by taking him to a psychological hell. Marriage is no longer a state of happiness for Othello but a state in which he has to worry that others will pull Desdemona from his life.

Iago does not cease tormenting Othello's mind with his conjectures about Desdemona's possible regret of choosing him as husband since the Moor lacks the characteristic forms and manners of Venetian society (p. 129). His constant attack ends up weakening Othello's morale and self-confidence. Shakespeare presents Desdemona as object and burden for her possessor. Desdemona is in Iago's view a vehicle onto madness to whomever possesses her.

Life in Othello's sense takes an inversion, it means, an upside-down turn in its conventional form, to become a burden and a labyrinth of jealousy that keeps him oblivious to reality. That is, to see life as the time in which he has to make sure that his wife does not end up being used by other men and here ratifies the character of object that Desdemona has for him.

One of the few occasions in which Othello is right when thinking about Iago is his recognition that his ensign is very familiar with human nature. The Moor does not think that Iago can use that knowledge to hurt him, but rather that he is mediating and helping him with the problem of Desdemona.

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In analyzing how Iago exacerbates Othello's tragic flaw, his revenge appears to be that of someone in love who decides to destroy the happiness of someone who does not reciprocate his feelings. Some critics point to Iago's possible homosexuality since he does not seem to love his wife; in addition, he says that Desdemona only serves his purposes as a link in the chain of his plot.

Desdemona seals her fatal fate when she decides to advocate in favor of Cassio since her jealous husband's mind is already poisoned. Iago seems to understand very well a type of fallacy known as "post hoc," which refers to cause and effect. It is a fallacy since the first event is not always the cause of the second one. However, Iago's modus operandi seems to combine two events, the first is to sow doubt and confusion in Othello and the second is to advise Cassio to seek Desdemona's help, which results in giving Othello's doubts regarding Desdemona an air of credibility.

The more Desdemona asks her husband to reinstate Cassio, the more her husband distrusts her. Iago highlights Cassio's ability at work, however, he cynically knows that Othello is not going to care how good Cassio's work is if he is trying to steal his wife.

Iago decides to apply what is known as reverse psychology. (Apar Psicológos, La psicología inversa: cómo usarla y por qué funciona, 2017). That is, to tell him not to do something and to stop doing the opposite. It is a way of persuading Othello without making him feel that his authority is threatened. Iago's purpose of hardening Othello against the supposed lovers ends up for being successful.

Iago eminently knows how to create an apparent reality by planting false proofs as in the case of the valuable handkerchief given by the Moor to Desdemona. Once Iago has in his

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possession the handkerchief that Emilia has stolen from Desdemona, he decides to leave it in Cassio's room as evidence of her infidelity (p. 135).

With each step, Iago does not only want to make Othello pay for not promoting him, but also to destroy others. Someone like Iago could easily simulate an accident to kill Othello, but he enjoys staining Cassio's honor and using Desdemona as a scapegoat for his perverse game of death.

Evidently, Iago is tired of having a weak lord who does not deserve the position that he occupies. In this regard Machiavelli writes, "Soldiers expect their leader to be rapacious, cruel and insolent since a greedy leader would give part of the looted items to his army" (*The Prince*, Chapter XIX, p. 125). In Othello's tragedy the military glories in which Iago has accompanied Othello are mentioned; however, Iago is in an unfavorable economic situation and this is clear by the fact that Iago's wife is employed as Othello's maid. Being surrounded by wealth without possessing it is a sign of having a weak leader; this encourages Iago to destroy the Moor.

By the time Othello demands that Iago provide evidence about his allegations, Iago plays the "poor me" by saying that his affection and frankness results in his own detriment (p. 139). This is a clear example of Iago's cynicism and innate malevolence. Once again is important to clarify that Iago derives pleasure from torturing Othello's mind as a practice that he does not need to justify.

Othello reveals his susceptibility and insecurity regarding his race in a comment about Desdemona. He says, "Her name, that was as fresh as Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black as my own face. If there be cords, or knives, poison or fire, or suffocating streams, I'll not endure it" (p. 139). This is the way how Shakespeare associates dark skinned people through Othello's speech to insecurities and vileness.

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Machiavelli writes that princes who lack a fine tact have to be careful and learn to identify the flatterers because when a prince enjoys of being flattered, he is opening the door to deception (The Prince, chapter XXIII, p. 145-146).

Yet, Othello is unable to notice his easy-led personality and aggressive nature since he is focused on his honor, tenacity, rectitude and probity. Not much effort is needed to influence and mislead the Moor. Othello is not aware of how Iago takes advantage of his malleability through a consistent brainwashing.

Othello's neurosis intensifies when he demands Iago's help to perpetrate his revenge. Othello says, "All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven. Arise, black vengeance, from the hollow hell! Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne to tyrannous hate! Swell, bosom, with thy freight ..." (p. 145). By this point, it is clear that Othello is no longer the confident chieftain in charge of the Venetian army but a potential slayer thirsty for revenge.

Iago clearly sees the chance to make Othello believe that he is his friend and ally. He uses all his talk to say that his astuteness are at the service of Othello's cause no matter how grisly it is. Iago even dares to say that Othello's vengeance is even above his own interest (p. 145).

Othello's speech suggests that factors such as racism and xenophobia play a role in the Moor's misadventures. But also his insecurities, naivety, and mental weakness show how such a strong leader is prone to be easily manipulated. It is no longer a question of asking Desdemona where the handkerchief is; Othello already knows that Cassio has it. However, Desdemona is a long way from knowing the implications that the stolen handkerchief has as "proof" of her supposed disloyalty. Iago's natural disposition to do harm appears once again. He says, "Work on, my medicine work! Thus credulous fools are caught, and many worthy and chaste dames even thus, all guiltless, meet reproach" (p. 167).

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As the conspiracy approaches its full consummation, Iago sets up a trap for Cassio in order to persuade Othello of Desdemona's betrayal. He drives the conversation he has with Cassio according to his whim while Othello observes. The Moor is prone to misunderstand Cassio's gestures since he thinks that Cassio is mocking him. The conversation is about Cassio's lover, Bianca, but Othello thinks that it has to do with Desdemona. (p. 171).

Before Othello kills Desdemona he wastes two chances during the play to confront her versión with what Iago says. First accuses her of being a deceitful whore without speaking clearly of his suspicions about Cassio. It is in the bedroom of the newlyweds where Desdemona's murder occurs. Othello and Desdemona are alone and therefore there is no one to help the wretched wife. Othello demands an explanation about how the handkerchief has ended up in Cassio's hands. However, nothing that Desdemona says persuades Othello to not kill her and the murder finally takes place.

Once Othello understands the slanders that result in Desdemona's wrongful murder, he asserts that his devotedness for her is not rational but outspoken (p. 257). Regardless of whether Othello commits suicide out of weakness or an audaciousness, this decision simply responds to an act of hopelessness at the loss of his wife.

To sum up, three factors are transcendental in the fall and ruin of Othello. The first is being confronted with a racist society, the second is his lack of objectivity, and the third has to do with his inability to manage his insecurities and lack of self-esteem which Iago masterfully exploits.

For his part, Iago gives clear signs of enjoying the pain he causes throughout the play and this makes him a villain not acting out of revenge but an innate evil. Iago's arrest and Othello's suicide are complemented by Jorge Luis Borges' affirmation (1960), that "A man only knows his

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destiny at the end of his life, and that is when he discovers that the patient's labyrinth of lines that he drew during his life is the image of his face.” (El Hacedor, P.43).

### **V. Conclusion**

In sum, Othello is not only a man lacking in intellect and reasoning ability, but a victim of his own emotional fragility since his jealousy and stormy love lead him on the path of criminality and defeat. Othello is a man with a tendency to fill affective gaps in the figure of Desdemona, who ends up paying the price of the emotional disorders and the unbalanced affective states of her husband.

Eventually, Othello's marriage serves only as a facade to a deranged and primitive mind that Iago releases through his plotting. Othello's susceptibility is seriously compromised when Desdemona, as an object that gives him pleasant sensations, seems to belong to someone else and give her affections to a man of her own social sphere. The Moor is a man endowed with physical strength but totally devoid of emotional intelligence, coherence in his actions, vision and strength of mind. This is clearly seen by the fact that Othello enjoys superficial recognition such as being envied by other men who do not have a woman as Desdemona in their lives.

Although Othello evidently loves Desdemona, he is more concerned about his image in the eyes of others. He decides to save face and protect his honor through a crime. The murder of Desdemona represents the liberation of all the tensions created by Iago, but ironically, Othello is someone incapable of enduring the remorse of the homicide to continue with his life. It is that susceptibility that serves him as a moral compass that ends in a feeling of guilt that leads him to his own self-destruction.

Othello is unable to distinguish between the truth and the plausible. What Iago says about Desdemona and Cassio is plausible and therefore true in Othello's view. He only focuses on the

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visible and not on what is behind it. This tendency joined to the feeling of guilt contributes to Othello's fateful outcome. Unlike Iago, Othello does not understand the intrigues of those European courts of the Renaissance. The Moor, in Machiavelli's terminology, does not know how to be a prince and retain control over his subjects and subordinates, among them Iago.

Othello and Iago are two parts of a whole that fit perfectly together. Iago needs a victim and Othello needs to be victimized; the ensign needs to cheat and the Moor is prone to being deceived. Othello's susceptibility and Iago's motives merge. They reveal the dark side of human behavior from a moralistic society that has just emerged from the middle Ages.

The most important determinant of Iago's motives is the fact that he finds dignity and pride in his own perversity. He knows how to hide his madness and total lack of remorse under a pretended normalcy. Othello and the rest of the characters allow the so-called "Honest Iago" to feel a strange emotion by acting maliciously. Iago enjoys and prides himself on his cunning and vision to manipulate the circumstances in his favor and against others, which suggests that the enjoyment producing suffering is his main motivation to act.

After analyzing the mechanisms that govern Iago's actions and possible motives, it is possible to affirm that his intelligence and perversity are a kind of morbid delight and addiction to the pain and suffering of others. His perversity does not lie in his actions but in his very character. This ensign with Iscariot's syndrome is knowledgeable and enjoys exploiting human fallibility. He knows that thanks to the Moor's ingenuity, he can induce him in adverse situations that would unleash the obsessive neurosis Othello hides.

In brief, Iago represents the traditions and religious beliefs previous to the Elizabethan England by disapproving an interracial marriage like the one of his lord. In Shakespeare's view, Othello represents the ugliness and primitiveness that corrupts the pure and immaculate incarnate

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in Desdemona. This is the way Iago is given a reason to destroy his boss and a Desdemona who has overlooked the conventions of her time.

To put it bluntly, Iago allows Shakespeare to channel, in the play, the specific fear of a society toward the difference that Othello represents. Brabantio, like Iago, is not interested in reflecting on the qualities that his new son-in-law might have but, on the contrary, he allows the hatred and xenophobia to invade him. Iago's motives do not represent only him individually but also the utilitarian and intransigent society that only needs the Moor to protect itself from Turkish attacks and which is not willing to become morally, culturally and affectively involved with a dark-skinned foreigner. This is evidenced by the fact that Othello never ceases to feel alienated among Venetians and Cypriots. Iago, beyond being a character with reasons to bring about the fall of Othello, is the essence of a time in the midst of renaissance. An essence that still hangs onto medieval values in decadence and which aims to set a precedent for what happens to those who try to go against what is established by religion and the social conveniences of that moment.

From this point of view, Iago finds in God an ally and in religion a justification for his betrayal and disloyalty, since at that time a marriage between people of a different ethnic and religious origin is labeled as unnatural and abominable. Shakespeare creates an evil character charged not only with pure wickedness and meanness, but also with strength, vitality and powerful intentionality.

Over the last four centuries of discussion about Iago's motives for destroying his lord, the most literal, expressed by the ensign himself, has to do with not being promoted. Besides the possibility of Othello cheating with Iago's wife, other hypotheses assert a possible frustrated

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homosexual attraction towards the Moor. Nevertheless, these statements end up not clarifying this ambiguity in Shakespeare's work.

There remains the question of what would happen if Othello had granted the coveted position that Cassio holds to Iago. It could be argued that such granting would not make much difference in the outcome since Iago shows more passion for Othello's destruction than for the pleasure of being promoted. The satisfaction of dragging his boss into madness is priceless no matter what position he is in.

By the same token, Iago knows that his execution awaits him after being caught but he is not perceived at any moment as being defeated. Othello, unlike Iago, shows remorse for his actions. The fact of not requiring mercy for his destiny shows him as unshakable, bottomless and impenetrable in his psyche. Misfortunes and the pain of others' lives are the food that provides energy and temerity until his last minute of life. Iago is someone who does not need a solid motive to hurt more than his own delight.

It can be said that Othello is a victim of his primary and animal instincts, while Iago is pure evil that does not need to justify itself. Finally, as is mentioned in the antecedents, many Italian stories inspire and serve to Shakespeare's plays. Possibly, Machiavelli's work in *The Prince* (1513) and *The Art of War* (1519) had a certain influence on the Bard. Although the lack of intuition in both the political and the sentimental in this segregationist society plays a transcendental role in Othello's ruin, his personal insecurities and mental instability generate the upwelling of Othello's susceptibility and, consequently, lead to his fatal outcome. That is to say, he is a mentally weak man who is not in condition to survive the intrigues of a society to which he does not belong.

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