

Othello's Nature and Iago's Craft of Deception

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Introduction

In Shakespeare's *Othello*, Othello, a Moorish general, is misled by Iago, his ensign, into a belief that Desdemona, Othello's bride, is in adulterous relationship with Cassio, Othello's lieutenant. Iago deludes Othello to such a degree that out of jealousy Othello kills her, and Othello, overwhelmed at the realization of his unjust act, takes his own life. How does Shakespeare make the deception plausible? In other words, what is the logic of deception which underlies the plot of the play? Shakespeare's success in this matter derives from the way he characterizes the two main figures, the deceiver and the deceived, and the way he has them interact with each other. Othello, the deceived, is of a vulnerable nature: he is a successful public figure but with some sense of inferiority, and with an impaired ability to apprehend reality. Iago, the deceiver, is an instinctive plotter: he has great insight into human nature and masterful skills in the creation of semblances of reality. Iago possesses a thorough knowledge of Othello's nature and, taking advantage of the latter's utter trust in him, makes use of every opportunity to reduce Othello from a sense of well-being to absolute misery. Many critics have discussed the tragedy along these lines. However, they have overlooked several significant aspects of Othello's nature and Iago's strategies. The purpose of this paper is to take another look at how Othello is portrayed and trace once again Iago's actions, applying those new observations to present a picture of how the deception is executed. I will first analyze Othello's nature as described in the early scenes of the play and discuss its implications. I will then discuss the stages of deterioration in Othello's mind along with Iago's craft employed to cause and hasten that deterioration.

Othello's character presented in the early scenes and its implications

In the early scenes of the play, Othello shows signs of gullibility in his interaction with Iago.¹ At the very beginning of Act I, Scene I, Iago, angered at Othello's decision to appoint not him but Cassio lieutenant, vows in his malevolence vengeance upon Othello by deceiving him with a false presentation of himself. But when Iago, who harbors such malice, speaks his first words to

Othello at the beginning of the next scene :

Though in the trade of war I have slain men,
Yet do I hold it very stuff o' th' conscience
To do no contrived murder. I lack iniquity
Sometimes to do me service. Nine or ten times
I had thought t' have yerked him here under the ribs.²

(I, 2, 1-5)

Othello's reply is "'Tis better as it is" (I, 2, 6) as he does not see that Iago is only counterfeiting good nature. In Scene 3 of the same act, we hear Othello calling Iago "A man he is of honesty and trust" (I, 3, 285) in Othello's first words referring to Iago. Thus, Shakespeare shows us that Othello is not aware of such malignant and deceptive qualities in Iago. And Iago is well acquainted with such weakness in Othello since he explicitly refers to it earlier in the same scene, when Iago soliloquizes his initial scheme for entrapping Othello: "The Moor is of a free and open nature/That thinks men honest that but seem to be so" (I, 3, 393-394).

This soliloquy is the only fully explicitly stated account of Othello that the play offers, and I believe that this particular trait of equating appearance with reality represents the core of his nature and it entails other characteristics, besides being gullible. Taking this trait as a starting point, we can plausibly construct for ourselves the following type of person: one who values appearance, thus wanting to present himself favorably in the eyes of others. And in order to do so, he wants to acquire qualities which are valued by other individuals or society. Seen in the light of this character model, what Othello says or does can be taken to reveal characteristics reflecting a nature so conscious of external impressions. For example, Othello, already a successful public figure, a commander of the Venetian military forces, much valued by the Duke at a time of crisis, is naturally proud, confident, and self-assured: at Iago's suggestion that Othello might hide when they are expecting to encounter Brabantio, Desdemona's father, and his company of intimates, who are against the marriage of Othello and Desdemona, Othello says, "Not I; I must be found/My parts, my title, and my perfect soul/ Shall manifest me rightly" (I, 2, 30-32). Also such a person would naturally need people to applaud his success. This tendency shows itself when Othello explains to Brabantio, Lodovico and others how he has come to love Desdemona: "She loved me for the dangers I had passed/And I loved her that she did pity them" (I, 3, 167-168). To Othello,

Desdemona is a kind of gift of approval which society presents to him for contributing so much to it, a symbol of the culmination of his success, as Othello himself claims when he deflects the criticism which he expects to be directed against him by Desdemona's father:³

Let him do his spite.
My services which I have done the signiory
Shall out-tongue his complaints. 'Tis yet to know —
I shall promulgate—I fetch my life and being
From men of royal siege; and my demerits
May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune
As this that I have reached

(I, 2, 17-24)

In spite of all he has accomplished and the rewards he has gained, Othello has a latent weakness—his sense of inferiority as a man of 'base' origin. He is a Moor and not a Venetian, let alone a member of the Venetian court. In the Elizabethan period, there was no distinction between Negroes and Moors. As there existed prejudice against Negroes, so it was directed against Moors.⁴ It is expressed, for example, by Brabantio who, holding a grudge against Othello for taking his daughter away from him, brawls at Othello:

Damned as thou art, thou hast enchanted her!
For I'll refer me to all things of sense,
If she in chains of magic were not bound,
Whether a maid so tender, fair, and happy,
So opposite to marriag that she shunned
The wealthy curled darlings of our nation,
Would ever have, t'incur a general mock,
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
Of such a thing as thou—to fear, not to delight.
Judge me the world if 'tis not gross in sense
That thou hast practiced on her with foul charms,
Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals
That weaken motion. I'll have't disputed on;
'Tis probable, and palpable to thinking.
I therefore apprehend and do attach thee
For an abuser of the world, a practicer
Of arts inhibited and out of warrant.

(I, 2, 63-79)

Indeed Othello himself admits his lack of courtly manners: "Rude am I in my speech/And little blessed with the soft phrase of peace" (I, 3, 81-82). Society's prejudices against Moors and his lack of proper courtly attributes, however, do not hurt him at that moment because he is at his zenith in his career and his weaknesses are outweighed by his merits.

We can conclude from the above discussion that Othello's self-perception encompasses two extremes: the factor which leads to his self-esteem is his proven success in terms of his enjoyment of society's recognition and rewards, while the factor which leads to his low self-esteem is the hostility he encounters for being a Moor, a member or a minority against which society is biased. Othello's self-esteem then totally depends on how society regards him, well or ill. It is potentially unstable; extreme imbalance could cause a disturbance in the nature of his psyche. Iago knows these workings of Othello's mind and he ruthlessly manipulates them in the latter half of the play.

Stage 1

Based on the knowledge which he possesses of Othello, Iago sets out to create an illusion that Desdemona is in adulterous relationship with Cassio in Act 3, Scene 3. In the initial stage, the language Iago uses for that purpose is abstract, consisting of concepts and lies or quasi-facts.

Before Act 3, Scene 3, Iago has contrived Cassio's blunder of getting drunk, involved in a fight, and hurt, which led to Othello's decision to deprive him of his lieutenantcy. Iago also has advised Cassio to ask Desdemona to mediate between Cassio and Othello. In this scene, Iago and Othello appear on the stage together and from a distance see Cassio taking leave of Desdemona after requesting her to intercede for him. Iago seizes this chance to arouse suspicion in Othello: "Ha ! I like not that" (III, 3, 35), "I cannot think it / That he would steal away so guilty-like / Seeing you coming" (III, 3, 37-39). Next Iago devotes some forty-five lines hinting in a very tantalizing manner that there is something reprehensible going on between Cassio and Desdemona, of which Iago disapproves, and that Cassio, who seems trustworthy, might not really be so. I suggest that by interposing fragments of seemingly meaningful information, Iago is preparing here to implant the concept of jealousy into Othello's mind:⁵

O, beware, my lord, of jealousy !
It is the green-eyed monster, which doth mock
The meat it feeds on. That cuckold lives in bliss
Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger ;
But O, what damned minutes tells he o'er
Who dotes, yet doubts—suspects, yet strongly loves!

(III, 3, 165-170)

What Iago is trying to accomplish is to establish in Othello's mind the semblance

of an interrelationship of Othello, Desdemona, and Cassio, in which Cassio and Desdemona are illicit lovers and Othello a cuckold. Generally speaking, the introduction of such a fixed concept defines a circle of meaning through which reality is interpreted. What was first a vague suggestion of adultery is now a clear-cut picture to Othello, whether he chooses to believe it or not.

At the introduction of the concept, Othello's trust in Desdemona is apparently not shaken.

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

(III, 3, 183–192)

In order to make the notion of adultery between Desdemona and Cassio seem more probable, Iago tries to 'prove' that Desdemona is deceitful. Othello claims, "I'll see before I doubt." But Othello only sees appearance. If he can be deceived by a certain kind of appearance, he can also be deceived by another kind of appearance which negates the former. Iago knows this aspect of Othello's nature and tells him a lie about Desdemona's attitude toward chastity:

I know our country disposition well:
In Venice they do let God see the pranks
They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience
Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown."

(III, 3, 201–204)

Following hard upon these lines, Iago tells more lies, this time, more elaborate:

She did deceive her father, marrying you;
And when she seemed to shake and fear your looks,
She loved them most.

(III, 3, 206–208)

First of all, Desdemona did not mean to deceive her father; it was her father Brabantio who felt deceived over her match. It is a matter of point of view whether she 'deceived' her father or not; however, Iago, ignoring the problem, relates the incident in order for Desdemona to appear immoral. Also Desdemona did not shake, or fear Othello's looks: neither Othello nor Desdemona attests to it. But, Iago, taking Brabantio's remark "A maiden never bold...To fall in

love with what she feared to look on" (I, 3, 94-98), presents it as if a fact. Iago completes his presentation of the false Desdemona theme by another lie to the effect that she can skillfully pretend to be otherwise: "She that, so young, could give out such a seeming/To seal her father's eyes up close as oak-/He thought 'twas witchcraft-" (III, 3, 209-210).

Iago's lies begin to take effect. We hear Othello quite at a loss: "I do not think but Desdemona's honest" (III, 3, 225), "And yet, how nature erring from itself-" (III, 3, 227). Iago seizes this chance to tell another lie, attacking Othello's sense of inferiority to argue that Desdemona has run to Cassio because of Othello's 'base' qualities:

Not to affect many proposed matches
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,
Whereto we see in all things nature tends—
Foh! one may smell in such a will most rank,
Foul disproportions, thoughts unnatural—
...
Her will, recoiling to her better judgment,
May fall to match you with her country forms,
And happily repent.

(III, 3, 228-238)

Othello, now goaded into such distrust of Desdemona, regrets their marriage: "Why did I marry?" (III, 3, 243), and directs his indignation to her: "She's gone. I am abused, and my relief/Must be to loathe her" (III, 3, 267-268).

Stage 2

Othello is now beginning to believe that Desdemona has revolted against him because of his racial origins. 'Desdemona's betrayal' is a severe blow to Othello's high self-esteem because it means a loss of social acceptance which she symbolizes, and also because his 'inferior' qualities, which, he thought, seemed negligible in comparison with his outstanding military career, now loom larger than his fame. Although Othello tries to justify 'Desdemona's adultery,' "Yet 'tis the plague of great ones/Prerogated are they less than the base,/ 'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death,/Even then this forked plague is fated to us/Where we do quicken" (III, 3, 273-277), Othello's mind begins to deteriorate, and Iago, aware of this deterioration, tries to hasten it by elaborate use of descriptive and argumentative language.⁶

As his positive self-image is gradually shattered, Othello's first reaction is to try to veer away from the false reality Iago created:

What sense had I of her stol'n hours of lust?

I saw't not, thought it not, it harmed not me;
I slept the next night well, fed well, was free and merry;
I found not Cassio's kisses on her lips.
He that is robbed, not wanting what is stol'n,
Let him not know't, and he's not robbed at all.

(III, 3, 338-343)

Then his confidence as a career officer collapses:

Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, th'ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
And O you mortal engines whose rude throats
Th'immortal Jove's dread clamors counterfeit,
Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone!

(III, 3, 351-357)

In Othello's mind, however, there yet remains some doubt of Desdemona's disloyalty. He wants stronger 'proof' to confirm it. So he demands, like a man who takes appearance at its face value, "the ocular proof" (III, 3, 360), "Make me to see't; or at the least so prove it/That the probation bear no hinge nor loop/To hang a doubt on..." (III, 3, 364-366). Since there exists no adultery between Desdemona and Cassio, and, thus, no 'ocular proof,' what Iago does is to create imaginary pictures or illusions, embodying them with images and direct speech to make Desdemona's adultery appear more real to Othello's degenerating mind:

Iago: ... how satisfied, my lord?
Would you, the supervisor, grossly gaped on?
Behold her topped?"

Othello: Death and damnation! O!

(III, 3, 394-397)

Iago relates to Othello an incident:

Iago: In sleep I heard him (Cassio) say, 'Sweet Desdemona, Let us be wary, let us hide our loves!'
And then sir, would he gripe and wring my hand,
As if he plucked up kisses by the roots
That grew upon my lips; then laid his leg
Over my thigh, and sighed, and kissed, and then
Cried 'Cursed fate that gave thee to the Moor!'

Othello: O monstrous! monstrous!

(III, 3, 419-427)

Then, Iago, trying to make sure of the effect of his account of this incident, reasons with Othello to make its interpretation more favorable to his malicious intent:

Iago : Nay, this was but his dream.
 Othello : But this denoted a foregone conclusion :
 'Tis shrewd doubt, though it be but a dream.
 Iago : And this may help to thicken other proofs
 That do demonstrate thinly.
 Othello : I'll tear her to pieces !
 (III, 3, 427-431)

Here Iago finds it good timing to tell a lie to Othello about the handkerchief Othello has given to Desdemona. Iago testifies to Othello that he has seen Cassio wipe his beard with a handkerchief similar to Desdemona's. Then Iago reasons again with Othello to lead to the conclusion that if the handkerchief Cassio has is that particular handkerchief, their adultery is confirmed :

Othello : I gave her such a one ; 'twas my first gift.
 Iago : I know not that ; but such a handkerchief—
 I am sure it was your wife's—did I to-day
 See Cassio wipe his beard with.
 Othello : If it be that—
 Iago : If it be that, or any that was hers,
 It speaks against her with the other proofs.
 (III, 3, 436-441)

After an intervening scene, Iago comes back to the handkerchief theme and argues with Othello once again to remind Othello of the apparent link between the handkerchief and Desdemona's chastity :

Iago : But I give my wife a handkerchief—
 Othello : What then ?
 Iago : Why, then 'tis hers, my lord ; my lord ; and being hers,
 She may, I think, bestowe't on any man.
 Othello : She is protectress of her honor too ;
 May she give that ?
 (IV, 1, 10-15)

Iago gives Othello yet one more, but the most forceful thrust at Othello's vulnerability, saying that Cassio has told Iago that Cassio has slept with Desdemona. Iago makes his account effective by using vivid imagery :

Othello : What hath he said ?
 Iago : Faith, that he did—I know not what he did.
 Othello : What ? What ?
 Iago : Lie—
 Othello : With her ?
 Iago : With her, on her ; what you will.
 Othello : Lie with ? lie on her ?—We say lie on her
 when they belie her.—Lie with her ! Zounds, that's fulsome.
 —Handkerchief—confessions—handkerchief !
 (IV, 1, 33-40)

Othello then is overwhelmed and falls into a trance, and for the first time Iago

is sure that his machination is taking effect beyond redemption: "Work on/My med' cine, work ! Thus credulous fools are caught ..." (IV, 1, 44-45).

Stage 3

Othello is now almost convinced of Desdemona's betrayal but not yet completely. Othello cannot be positive of her adultery until he sees for himself that the handkerchief is in Cassio's possession. At this stage, as Othello's mental state worsens, so Iago's action becomes bold. He treats 'Desdemona's adultery' as beyond doubt to emphasize 'its factuality.' He also contrives a situation in order for Othello actually to observe and interpret it for himself, knowing that Othello would spontaneously misinterpret it.

When Othello wakes from his trance, he, who cannot avert his mind from the matter of the handkerchief, asks Iago, "Did he (Cassio) confess it (having the handkerchief) ?" Iago, seemingly cheering up Othello, speaks as if it is an established fact that Othello has been cuckolded :

Good sir, be a man.
Think every bearded fellow that's but yoked
May draw with you. There's millions now alive
That nightly lie in those unproper beds
Which they dare swear peculiar: your case is better.
O, 'tis the spite of hell, the fiend's arch-mock,
To lip a wanton in a secure couch,
And to suppose her chaste ! No, let me know ;
And knowing what I am, I know what she shall be.
(IV, 1, 65-73)

This statement by Iago, whom Othello still implicitly trusts, must have made his affirmation yet more credible.

All Iago's actions hitherto taken supply the foundation for his last, where Iago sets up a situation, which Othello witnesses, but his mind is so incensed against Desdemona and Cassio, he again misinterprets the scene. By this time, Iago has caused Emilia, his wife, to steal the handkerchief (III, 3) which Othello gave to Desdemona. Then Iago has purposely dropped it in Cassio's chamber and Cassio has found it there. The design on it has appealed to Cassio and he has asked Bianca, a prostitute who is in love with Cassio, to copy the design (III, 4). Then, as I have already indicated, Iago has told Othello that he had seen Cassio wipe his beard with a handkerchief and suggested that if it is Desdemona's handkerchief, it would confirm her adultery with Cassio (III, 3). In Act 4, Scene 1, Iago tells Othello of his plan to make Cassio tell about 'their illicit love affair.' Having thus prepared, Iago

takes an opportunity to talk to Cassio about the relationship between Bianca and him. Othello misinterprets the scene: "Crying 'O dear Cassio!' as it were. His gesture imports it" (IV, 1, 135), "Now he tells how she plucked him to my chamber. O, I see that nose of yours" (IV, 1, 137). Here Bianca unexpectedly appears on the stage with the handkerchief and tells Cassio to dine with her that night if he wants the handkerchief back. Iago later lies to Othello that the handkerchief was Othello's. Othello is now sure of Desdemona's revolt and thinks of killing her: "Ay, let her rot, and perish, and be damned to-night; for she shall not live" (IV, 1, 178-179).

Iago does not slacken his manipulative language over Othello: Iago, knowing what Desdemona's betrayal means to Othello, exposes it to Othello to his all-too-receptive sense of revulsion:

Othello: Hang her! I do but say what she is. So delicate
with her needle! an admirable musician! O, she will
sing the savageness out of a bear! Of so high and plenteous
wit and invention—

Iago: She's the worse for all this.

Othello: O, a thousand thousand times!

(IV, 184-189)

Othello then, showing complete conviction of Desdemona's adultery, proceeds to kill her. Iago's manipulation has reached its goal. After this scene, Iago will not speak another word with Othello.

Conclusion

As we have seen, then, Othello's nature is centered on his tendency to equate appearance with reality. From this tendency are derived his gullibility, and his values which are characterized by his desire to seek outward appearance and, ultimately, society's recognition. We have seen that the society's recognition constitutes the foundation of his self-esteem. We have also seen that it is this foundation of his self-esteem that Iago destroys by attacking Othello's weaknesses, using varied tactics according to the stages of deterioration of Othello's mind. Watching Othello at the final stage, we find that his desire to be approved of by society is paramount. Ruined as he is, Othello still clings to this desire. When he is about to kiss Desdemona, he states to himself his reason for killing: "Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men" (V, 2, 6), justifying the killing in terms of social justice, which he has always wanted to represent. Likewise, this fundamental desire is obvious also in Othello's excuse for the murder he has committed:⁷

Lodovico : O thou Othello that wert once so good,
Fall'n in the practice of a damned slave,
What shall be said to thee ?

Othello : Why anything :
An honorable murderer, if you will ;
For naught did I in hate, but all in honor.
(V, 2, 291-295)

It is ironical, then, that he deprives himself of that which, to him, is so valuable, and vital to his existence. Losing it and responsible for its loss, he feels he is doubly rejected by society. His self-esteem is helplessly low now: he is not only of no use to society but also harmful to it. He has no choice but to take his own life. He stabs himself as he once stabbed "a malignant and a turband Turk/(who) Beat a Venetian and traduced the state"(V, 2, 253-254), a figure with whom Othello must have identified himself.⁸ He dies, regretting not to have secured the possession of Desdemona: "No way but this,/Killing myself, to die upon a kiss"(V, 2, 358-359).

Conclusion

As we have seen, Othello's attitude is centered on his tendency for equate appearance with reality. From this tendency are derived his nihilistic and his values which are characterized by his desire to seek outward appearance and ultimately societal recognition. We have seen that the society's recognition equates the foundation of his self-esteem. We have also seen that it is the foundation of his self-esteem that Iago destroys by attacking Othello's weaknesses using varied tactics according to the state of detachment of Othello's mind. Watching Othello at the final stage we find that his desire to be approved of by society is paramount. Ruled as he is Othello still clings to this desire. When he is about to kiss Desdemona, he states to himself, "I am for killing." For the great ideal, "I am for killing more men" (V, 2, 358-359). In the final scene of social justice which he has always wanted for himself, he likewise, this fundamental desire is obvious also in Othello's excuse for the murder he has committed. "I have loved thee with my whole heart and my whole soul and my whole mind and my whole strength and my whole goods and my whole being" (V, 2, 358-359).

Notes

¹ I disagree with the view that Othello has no real flaw, which is advocated by such renowned scholars as A. C. Bradley and Helen Gardner; I believe that Othello is plagued with human weaknesses, as I shall show in this paper.

² All quotations in this paper come from the 1970 Pelican Shakespeare edition of *Othello* published by the Penguin Books.

³ For another kind of interpretation of the love between Othello and Desdemona, see Helen Gardner's "The Noble Othello," in *Proceedings of British Academy*, XLI, p. 190.

⁴ See G. K. Hunter's "Othello and Colour Prejudice," in *Proceedings of British Academy*, LIII, pp. 139-163.

⁵ To my knowledge, no critic has paid attention to the psychological effect which Iago's introduction of the concept is meant to produce in Othello.

⁶ David Zesmer notes, "Iago rarely uses images at all. When he does, it is often for the purpose of arousing disgust in others," in his *Guide to Shakespeare*, p. 312. But to my knowledge, no critic has pointed out that Iago varies his use of language according to the stages of deterioration of Othello's mind.

⁷ T. S. Eliot makes a similar remark about another statement Othello utters a little later, which I think also applies to this one: "He(Othello) is endeavouring to escape reality, he has ceased to think about Desdemona, and is thinking about himself," p. 130. in his "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1932), pp. 128-140.

⁸ I share this observation with W. H. Auden; "The Joker in the Pack," p. 219. in *Shakespeare Othello: A Selection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Wain(Hong Kong: Macmillan Education Ltd, 1971), pp. 199-223.

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論文要旨

オセロの性格とイアーゴの戦略

吉田 兼次

シェークスピアの悲劇『オセロ』の筋書は、ムーア人の将軍オセロが、彼の旗手であるイアーゴの謀略にはまり、妻のデズデモーナが副官のキャッシュと密通していると信じ込み、逆上してデズデモーナを暗殺してしまう。そして、オセロ自身も、後に謀略が発覚したとき、自害する、というものである。このような「だまし」を成立させるためにシェークスピアはどのような仕掛けをしたのだろうか。多くの研究家が、その成立をオセロの性格と、イアーゴの戦略にあると見ているが、その二つの要素についてこれまでの研究が見落とししてきた点があるように思われる。本稿においては、それらの点を指摘しながら、オセロの性格、そして、彼の精神の崩壊をもたらしたイアーゴの戦略を再分析した。

オセロの性格の中心には外見を現実とってしまう性癖があり、それは、彼のうわべを重んじる性格、ひいては、社会が評価するものを身に付け、その承認を得たいという願望となって表出している。その願望は強く、彼の存在自体もその願望を成就できるか否かにかかっているほどである。軍人としての成功も、白人のデズデモーナの愛を勝ち得ることも、ヴェニスで偏見の対象となっているムーア人の彼にとっては社会に認められる手段である。そのようなオセロの存在のあり様をイアーゴは見抜いており、彼は攻撃をオセロのその承認願望に向ける。イアーゴは、最初は抽象的な言述、そして、オセロの精神状態が悪化するのに応じて、具体的なイメージや直接話法というふうには言葉を駆使し、オセロをして、彼がムーア人であるが故にデズデモーナはキャッシュの下に走ったと信じ込ませる。社会の承認のシンボルであるデズデモーナが「不義をした」ということと、社会から敵視されている自分の素性を意識することとなったオセロは、社会から拒絶されたと思い込み、そういう事態の「原因」となったデズデモーナを絞殺する。イアーゴの嘘が発覚したとき、デズデモーナを殺害したことで、今度は真に社会から拒絶されたと思い、生きていることの意味を失い、オセロは自殺する。以上を、「だまし」成立の理論として説明した。