

Othello – Theme of Jealousy

AOIFE O'DRISCOLL

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Central Theme

- ▶ Driving force in the play
- ▶ Irrational
- ▶ Corrupts
- ▶ Destroys lives



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Types of Jealousy in the Play

Sexual

Personal

Professional

Iago and Roderigo – Personal jealousy



Jealous of those who are his social superiors



Exploits Roderigo: 'Thus do I ever make my fool my purse'

Iago and Cassio – Professional jealousy

Calls Cassio 'a counter-caster' who
'never set a squadron in the field'

Bitterly jealous of Cassio's promotion

Iago must remain 'his Moorship's
ensign'

Determined to destroy Cassio's
career

“

I hate the Moor,
And it is thought abroad that
'twixt my sheets
He has done my office

”

IAGO - REFERRING TO OTHELLO

Does Iago really believe this?

Iago - Sexual jealousy

Claims Othello has slept with Emilia

Option A: Cuckold Othello by sleeping with Desdemona

Option B: Send Othello into a frenzy of jealousy

Suspects Cassio of having worn his 'nightcap too'





“

And nothing can or shall content my soul
Till I am evened with him, wife for wife –
Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor
At least into a jealousy so strong
That judgement cannot cure

”

Iago outlines two possible responses to his suspicions of Othello

Brabantio

Vindictive and bitter form of
jealousy



Warns Othello that Desdemona
could betray and abandon her
husband, as she did her father



“

Look to her, Moor, if thou hast
eyes to see.

She has deceived her father and
may thee.

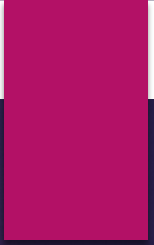
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Brabantio to Othello

Othello – Initially trusting and loving

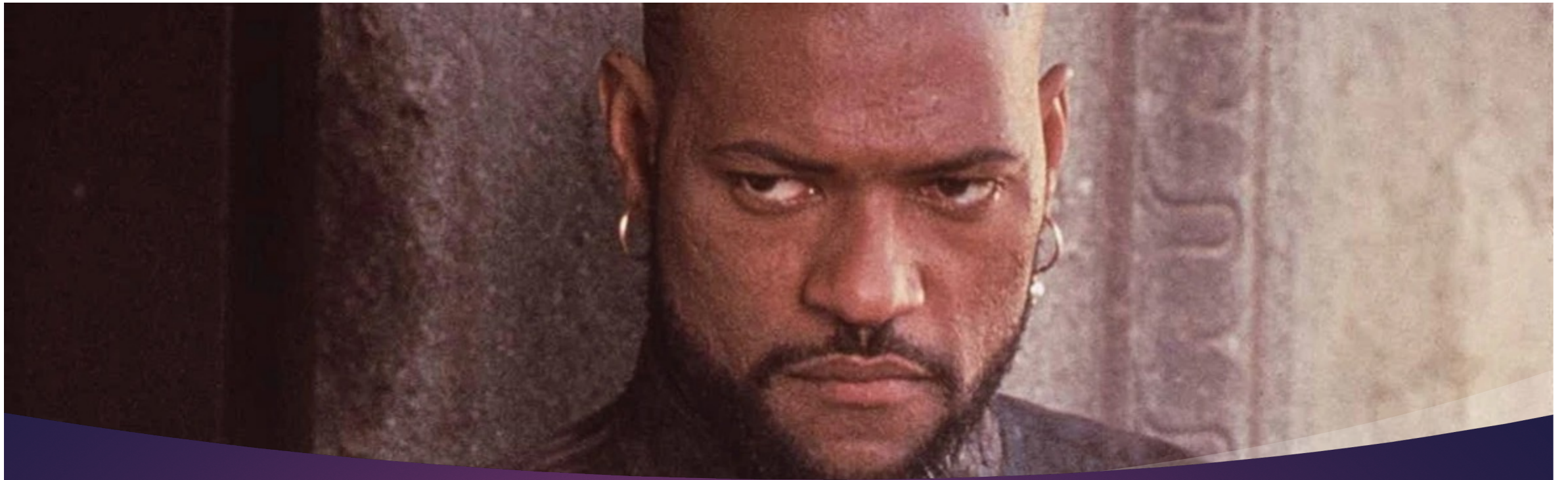
Proud of his wife

Admires her
accomplishments



“ ‘Tis not to make me jealous
To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves
company,
Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances
well. ”
Where virtue is, these are more virtuous

Othello to Iago – Act 3 Scene 3 – ‘The Temptation Scene’



Hint of dangers to come

Although Othello says he will not entertain jealous thoughts, he makes it clear that if he were to have doubts, he would take swift action.

“

Think'st thou I'd make a life of jealousy,
To follow still the changes of the moon
With fresh suspicions? No! To be once in doubt
Is to be resolved.

”

Othello to Iago – Act 3 Scene 3 – 'The Temptation Scene'

Iago's cunning reveals a truth about himself

Iago provokes Othello by hinting at a relationship between Desdemona and Cassio

By refusing to elaborate, Iago fuels Othello's jealousy

Iago says it is probably his own 'nature's plague' which leads him to 'spy into abuses' and that his jealousy 'Shapes faults that are not'

Insight into Iago's character: he convinced himself of 'faults that are not' when he suspected Emilia of infidelity

Famous Speech

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 fondly loves!

Psychological destructiveness of jealousy

Jealousy feeds the
'meat' of a person's
heart

Mocks the person by
making him or her
ashamed and
miserable

The 'green-eyed
monster' is never
satisfied

It gnaws away so that
the jealous individual
will never know
peace again

Compared to this
horror, the person who
is merely angry at
having been cheated
on is in 'bliss'



Encourages Othello to leap from suspicion and jealousy to certainty and anger



Iago does not want Othello to have time to stop and think rationally about what he has been told

Iago's
genius

Othello's pride



Iago's warnings have the desired effect: Othello denies he is jealous



This suits Iago perfectly



Othello claims he would never fall prey to jealousy, but would instead learn the truth and resolve the issue immediately: 'to be once in doubt / Is once to be resolved'



All that remains is for Iago to convince Othello of Desdemona's guilt

How can Othello resolve his doubt?

He cannot

Tells Iago that he will not concern himself with 'such
exsufflicate and blowed surmises / Matching thy inference'

Iago has – cunningly – not accused Desdemona of
anything specific

Othello makes the inferences but continues to deny he is
jealous

Othello points out that Desdemona is virtuous, pure and
chose him of her own free will

Why does he need to remind himself of this if he is not
jealous?

“

And on the proof, there is no more but this:
Away at once with love or jealousy.

”

Othello claims not to be jealous and says if he has any doubt, he will seek proof at once, and then act on it.

Othello's poor judgement

Othello clearly
has suspicions

He believes
Iago is
innocent

He does not
recognise his
own capacity
for jealousy

Advises Othello to watch Desdemona and Cassio together

Worries aloud that Othello's 'free and noble nature' may be abused

Tells Othello not to be jealous but warns him that if he is not, Desdemona will probably take advantage of his good nature

Iago's reverse psychology

Irony

The person who abuses Othello's free and open nature is the very person who warns him that this may happen



The Handkerchief



Iago reveals his intention to plant the handkerchief in Cassio's room



Such a tiny thing will be enough to
destroy Othello and Desdemona's
lives

'Trifles light as air
Are to the jealous confirmations strong
As proofs of holy writ

Desdemona does not see Othello's jealousy

Tells Emilia that she is glad her husband 'Is true of mind,
and made of no such baseness / As jealous creatures are'



Emilia is sceptical



Desdemona says of Othello, 'the sun where he was born
Drew all such humours from him'

'Is not this
man
jealous?'

Emilia realises the
cause of Othello's
anger about the
handkerchief

Desdemona is
shocked: 'Alas the
day, I never gave
him cause'


Emilia compares
jealousy to a
monster 'Begot
upon itself, born
on itself'

Desdemona
cannot believe
her husband
might be jealous,
hoping that
heaven keeps
'that monster from
Othello's mind'

Othello is overwhelmed by the emotion, but Bianca is not



Othello falls into a trance when Iago insinuates what Desdemona and Cassio might be doing in bed



Bianca confronts Cassio and says she will not copy the design on the handkerchief, but she still wants Cassio to join her for dinner later

Othello and Bianca - Contrast

Othello and Iago are angry

Othello turns on Desdemona and calls her a whore

Emilia suspects someone has been poisoning Othello's mind

Iago tells Emilia to be quiet, but she astutely says it was some such man who 'made you to suspect me with the Moor'

Iago is angry at the mention of his sexual jealousy

Iago is envious of Cassio



CASSIO'S CHARM AND GOOD
LOOKS MAKE IAGO JEALOUS



HE SAYS CASSIO HAS 'A DAILY
BEAUTY IN HIS LIFE / THAT MAKES
ME UGLY'

Othello suffers the most

Tormented by jealous thoughts



Says he should be spoken of as
'one not easily jealous but, being
wrought, Perplexed in the extreme'

“ His tragedy lies in this – that his whole nature was indisposed to jealousy, and yet was such that he was unusually open to deception, and, if once wrought to passion, likely to act with little reflection, with no delay, and in the most decisive manner conceivable. ”

A. C BRADLEY

A man who was not naturally jealous but whose passion, open nature and decisiveness were abused by Othello