

“Iago’s special relationship with the audience unbalances the morality of the play and comes close to turning the villain into a villain hero.” Discuss this interpretation of Iago’s role in the light of the critical views you have read.

Iago is one of the main characters in this Shakespeare play. Shakespeare presents him as a compelling villain, who seems to revel in his ability to destroy. His role leads to the deaths of Othello, Desdemona, Emilia and Roderigo and according to D.R. Godfrey, is one of “the most completely villainous characters in all literature.”

In this play Iago is the external force according to Aristotle’s definition of tragedy. He uses the weaknesses of Othello – the hero of the tragedy – to get his revenge after Othello gave the job of lieutenant to Cassio and not Iago.

Jealousy is one of the main motives in his role. Iago is eaten up by sexual jealousy. He hates the Moor because he thinks the Moor has slept with his wife and yet there is no evidence that Othello takes any interest sexually in his wife. “Twixt my sheets he’s done my office” (1.3.379). Here, we know that Iago doesn’t understand love or loving relationship as he is eaten up with sexual jealousy. This does make him a fascinating character as he telling Roderigo and the audience that Othello slept with his wife but he doesn’t care. Jealousy is his initial motive for disgracing Cassio. He wants Cassio’s reputation and wants to revenge on both Cassio and Othello. I also think that we have all wished for revenge at some time. We don’t envy Iago because he is amoral and we are always fully aware that he is the villain because his role leads everyone to death.

Racism is another of the important themes which Iago emphasises in his role. In act one scene one (39), for example Iago refers to Othello as the Moor (which refers to the Berbers who lived in North Africa. This is a racist comment about Othello’s skin. In act three scene three, (385-387), Othello himself describes his disappointment at the dishonesty of his wife, put into his mind by Iago. “I’ll have some proof. Her name, that was as fresh as Dian’s visage, is now begrimed and black as my own face”. Iago uses the fact of his skin colour to destroy his mind and control him. Yet, he is clever to do this and make us fascinated by what he is doing.

Iago has a special relationship with the audience, and his soliloquies make the audience interested. Iago soliloquies have the effect of making the audience, seems audience powerless. For example, Iago says, “I hate the Moor” (1.3.). Iago hates Othello but we don’t have a clue that the Moor is at that time. Iago’s soliloquy, his speech is rhythm at the end of the scene. “Hell and night must bring this monstrous birth to the world’s light” (1.3.395-396). In this line, hell and night is referring to Iago, he is devilish and had subtle up his plan. However, this adds to his sense of villainy which in my opinion makes him appear a less believable character. Coleridge described Iago as a ‘motiveless malignity’. There is no reason why he couldn’t call him motiveless malignity therefore he is not believable. However, Honigsmann, says “Iago as artist is sometimes seen as a matador toying with Othello, the bull, or as a dramatist, the creator of much of the plot, who finds fulfilment in it. Pleasure and action make the hour seem short”. He describes that Iago were a play as a part of dramatic extension of a human behaviour. He did not think that Iago is actually evil, he been play as a part of evil.

In Act two scenes one, the audience feels relax throughout the scene, but it is impossible because of Iago’s asides, “But I’ll set down the pegs that make this music, as honest as I am”. His soliloquy seem very powerful, when he is most ‘honest’, we lead to know that he is disbelieved and to be entertaining to us. In Act two scene one (208 – 213), he manipulate

Roderigo, he told him that he can get Desdemona to fall in love with him. It's unbelievable, however Iago is a villain so he can do everything that he want.

In his soliloquies, he says "That Cassio loves her, I do well believe it.....Now I do love her too" (2.2.276-281). He speaks of lusts, promotion and profit. Some of his words surprisingly are of the word 'love' and for this is fascinating. We could recognise that the word love does not suit him. He then immediately gives the further details of his plan and his revenge on Othello. "But partly led to diet my revenge.....Till I am evened with him, wife for wife" (2.2.284-289). He is eaten up with sexual jealousy; he wants Othello to suffer the same condition as rage inside him. Here, we immediately lose sight of the essential evil of his action.

Furthermore, in Act two scenes three, he questions the audience about his villainy. He has advised Cassio to ask Desdemona to speak to Othello about getting his job back, but the audience know that he is a villain. "How am I then a villain" (331-337). He revels in his own acting abilities. His attitude is very crude and materialistic but he doesn't care if he is a villain. This is fascinating; and yet, he enjoys himself by asking the audience how is he a villain when he knows the answer.

Throughout the play, Iago's treatment to Roderigo and his persuasive powers are also cruel. "By th'mass, 'tis morning; pleasure and action make the hours seem short.....Nay, get thee gone" (2.3.356-359). Iago continues to control Roderigo smoothly; he is confident with his plan and opposes Roderigo's complaint. However, his behaviour toward Cassio and his moment about reputation is very comic. "Cassio hath beaten thee and thou by that small hurtyet fruits and blossom first will be ripe" (2.3.361 -364).

In Act Three, Scene Three (34) Iago's deceptively open a short and simple line "Ha, I like not that". He doesn't like the way Cassio walks away from Desdemona's manners, gives apparently ignoring Othello. Iago's next speech is skilfully a false view of Cassio's judgment. "Cassio, my lord? No I cannot think it, that he would sneak away so guilty-like, seeing you coming". He then repeats the question again which allows Othello himself to think of the answer. 'Guilty-like' refers to Cassio's manner. He then pretends an unwillingness to speak which enables him to gain ground swiftly. In line 116, he continues to convince Othello to believe him that he, Iago, loves him and will always be honest with him. This is another skill of Iago. "My lord, you know I love you". It is a total lie, because from the play so far we know that he hated the word 'love', but he is willing to use it to gain his revenge.

Continues through this act, further skills have been developing "It were not for your quiet nor your good, nor for my manhood, honesty, wisdom, to let you know my thoughts." Here, he did not repeat 'honestly' but his mind is dishonest about Othello. At the time, Othello's mind is opening to devastation. Iago then steadily sneaks himself into Othello's mind with the suggestions of Desdemona's unfaithfulness, and he further intensifies the situation by telling "O, beware, my lord, of jealousy! It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock.....what damned minutes tell he o'er who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet fondly loves"(3.3.164-179). From there, Iago seems to appear powerful from his speech so far, he had already controlled Othello's mind.

Moreover, from act 3.3.227-236, his speech becomes more lengthy while Othello's speech is short and uncomfortable, suggesting the Moor is powerless. "Ay, there's the point: as to bold with you.....And happily repent".

In Act 3.3.276-277, I bring in the word 'love' twice in one speech. From the play so far, we know that he hates the word love, but for his success he is willing to use it again, "I thank you..... I'll love no friend, since love breeds such honesty". This seems to work, as Othello is disarmed of 'love' and 'honesty' from him. And from that, he tells Othello that his wife and Cassio were acting secretly and compares their acting like animals "It is impossible you should see this, were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys". Shakespeare used

powerful irony to describe Desdemona and Cassio their secret acting. He continues lying about Desdemona and Cassio through the scene. Again, Iago appear at the end of the scene, it has happen for several time "I am your own for ever". Consequently, he wants his plan to happen and yet he made it easily success.

In act 3.4 Iago appear in the middle of the scene in line 132-136, Iago appear to be heroic, he try to be brave and try to get his position in front of group of soldiers, "When it hath blown his ranks into the air,.....Puffed his own brother – and is he angry?"

Then following the next act, the Shakespeare used Iago at the beginning of the scene lead him to influence all of his characters. "Will you think so?" In act 4.1.34, Iago is brilliant horror and evil, he tell Othello that Desdemona have sexual intercourse with Cassio, lead Othello to distraught that he imagine the worst, he is actually tell lies about her, "With her? On her. What you will". Othello becomes hyperactive, and falling down in a fit. While Othello on the floor he revels over him. Then in line 45, his soliloquies while Othello is on the floor, he tells the audience that he used his 'medicine' refer to his plan which is poisonous dishonour to Othello. "My medicine work! All guiltless, meet reproach". He is already mess Othello mind up.

Following through the scene, Iago call Othello as wide dog, because Othello is wadding like a dog. "He foams at mouth". Next he is viewing on women; he thinks all women in Venice were prostitute, including Desdemona and his wife. 4.1.93-35, "A housewife that by selling her desires buys herself bread and clothes; it is a creature..." He reduces down Desdemona in object. This is horrible evil. Throughout, the act, the audience realise everything that he done to Othello, Desdemona, Cassio, and Roderorigo but other character doesn't realise.

Iago appear on the next scene in line, 164-166, "I pray you be content; 'tis but his humour..... And does he chide with you". He acting this but he still has a bit of compassion. He is not all evil but realistically evil lead to dangerous. He then uses horrible ironic, "Hank how these instrument summon to supper;..... all thing share be well(168-170)". He thinks all his plan is going on well.

Iago reappear at the beinging of act 5 this shows his plan is successful, "here, stand behind this bulk;..... and fix most firm thy resolution". At the end of the scene he use rhymed couplet, he appear as evil coming and he play a high stage as a gamble. "this is the night that either makes me, or fordoes me quite". He is success in his plan.

For Shakespeare's judgement, Honigmann perhaps says that "indirectly these denunciations of Iago also help to rehabilitate Othello who's smothering Desdemona comes close to turning the hero into a villain." I would agree with Honigmann, as at the end of the play Othello kill his own wife and stab him after. Therefore, evil had won at the end of the play and I believe that good and evil is exist in the world.