

## To what extent does language reflect the disintegration of Othello's character?

Throughout the play, the protagonist's language seems to be an honest portrayal of his state of mind. His language is inconsistent through the play and this reflects the characters downfall and change in nature.

In the beginning of the play Othello appears to be a noble man with a calm nature. This is apparent during Othello's disagreement with Brabantio over his marriage to Desdemona. Othello exclaims, 'Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust / them.' (Act1,2,58). His use of language demonstrates he is wise as he is being rational rather than responding to physical violence. It is through this calm and rational manner that Othello persuades the Duke to dismiss Brabantio's claims that he has used 'magic' and 'drugs' to woo his daughter. Othello even says, 'Rude am I in my speech', to apologise for any offence he may cause even though he is fully aware that he is speaking in a polite and calm manner. His language here shows control unlike Brabantio who uses abrupt and accusing language: 'O foul thief! Where has thou stow'd my daughter?' (Act1,2,62). Othello's love for his wife is portrayed through his speech: 'I therefore beg it not / To please the palate of my appetite, / Nor to comply with heat the young affects / In my distinct and proper satisfaction, / But to be free and bounteous to her mind' (Act1,3,258). Here Othello is announcing his respect for Desdemona's wishes is what motivates him and he puts his wife's needs before his own. Othello's use of heavenly imagery also helps to show his genuine love towards his wife, 'It gives me wonder great as my content / To see you here before me. O, my souls joy... Olympus high' (Act2,1,177). The actor playing Othello could reinforce these feelings of passion and love by prolonging his embrace with Desdemona for as long as possible.

From Act 3, when Othello begins to get manipulated by Iago and begins to believe of Desdemona's infidelity with Cassio, Othello's language and personality transform. Othello's language is used to show his determination and commitment to getting revenge on Desdemona and Cassio, 'Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic Sea, / Whose icy current and compulsive course / Ne'er feels retiring ebb but keeps due on / To the Propontic and the Hellespont, / Even so my bloody thoughts with violent pace / Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love, / Till that a capable and wide revenge / Swallow them up.' (Act3,3,454) The enjambment used in this speech echoes the relentless energy of the 'Pontic Sea' and the chaos associated with it. It also shows that his thoughts are in control and he can't stop them, similar to that of the current of the sea; it 'keeps due on'. A key scene in the play, which effectively illustrates Othello's loss of control, is where Othello suffers an epileptic fit. This breakdown is reinforced by Othello's language as directly before his fit he produces his only ongoing prose speech during the play. Othello's speech demonstrates fragmented language, 'It is not words that shake me thus. Pish! Noses, ears and lips. Is't possible? - Confess? Handkerchief? Oh devil!' (Act4,1,41) This use of language helps to exemplify the collapse of the protagonist's character and his loss of self control

and power. The caesura in Othello's speech breaks up the rhythm of the line and reflects Othello's physical breakdown. Another literary term used to show the newly found tension between Othello and Desdemona is when Othello speaks in blank verse. An actor playing Othello could use the rhythm of blank verse to express the tension and actions to convey the thoughts of envy and murder taking place in the character's mind.

Othello's inconsistent language is also shown in the imagery he uses. Previously Othello used images of heaven but from Act 3 he begins to use animalistic and hellish images; ones that have previously only been used by Iago. An example of the animalistic imagery used previously in the play by Iago is when he describes Othello as an 'old black ram'. He also tells Brabantio that Othello and his daughter are 'making the beast with two backs'. These images are seen as offensive and with reference to Othello are primarily racist. The repeated reference to animals suggests that the laws of nature are very important in the play. As Othello begins to apply the language previously used by Iago it shows Othello's naivety and loss of independence as he is being strongly influenced by Iago. After an argument with Desdemona Othello leaves the stage and exclaims, 'Goats and monkeys!' (Act 4, 1, 261). This reference to these lecherous beasts shows that the protagonist's passion has broken through his self-control; a trigger in the break down of his character. Images of hell, daemons and monsters are used by various characters throughout the play; both Iago ('green eyed monster which doth mock The meat it feeds on – Act 3, 3, 168) and Emilia ('Tis a monster Begot upon itself, born on itself' – Act 3, 4, 155) describe jealousy using these images. However Iago is the character which principally uses these images and this contributes to him being portrayed as a satanic figure that uses the evils of hell to corrupt Othello and consequently sends him to hell for murder and suicide. After finding out about Iago's treachery Othello directly calls Iago a 'demi-devil' in scene 5. This is followed by Othello's recognition of all the mistakes he has made and he cries out, 'O cursed, cursed slave! Whip me, ye devils... Blow me about in winds! Roast me in sulphur! Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!' (Act 5, 2, 275). The images used show Othello's wishes for eternal physical and spiritual torture in hell and represent that he is now a crushed person due to the break down of his marriage and his personality.

After Iago's manipulating comes to a climax and Othello murders his wife Desdemona, Othello's language does not drastically change from the language he previously used in acts 3 and 4. The continuation of Othello's tainted language can be seen as tragic and could possibly evoke fear within the audience as we can see how naïve and easily manipulated human beings can be. In Othello's final speech, before he commits suicide, Othello refers to himself as a 'base Indian', which is recognition of his status in life; he is a lower class to Desdemona. This choice of words could have been used to evoke pathos within the audience as he is from a different culture that is associated with evil and devilish things. But he then goes on to use romantic imagery by describing Desdemona as a 'pearl', which is a rare, pure and valuable thing. These two diverse things juxtaposed together reinforce the idea of Othello being of a lower class than Desdemona and heighten the pathos that his audience would feel.

Othello also continues to use animalistic when he refers to himself as a 'circumcised dog', however he does this in the third person, 'I took by the throat the circumcised dog / And smote him thus'. (Act5,2,351) By doing this it seems he is trying to distance himself from the mistaken and hurtful things he has done and by saying, 'I have done the state some service and they know't'; he is trying to justify his wrong doings and resurrect his former nobility. Othello's language in his final speech shows that he is no longer the noble man he was at the start of the play. His character and personality was disintegrated due to manipulation from Iago and this is evident in his language throughout the play.