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## KÖNIGS ERLÄUTERUNGEN

Band 75

William Shakespeare, **OTHELLO**

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## PRÜFUNGSAUFGABEN MIT MUSTERLÖSUNGEN

In Ergänzung zu den Aufgaben im Buch (Kapitel 6) finden Sie hier zwei weitere Aufgaben mit Musterlösungen. Die Zahl der Sternchen bezeichnet das Anforderungsniveau der jeweiligen Aufgabe.

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### Aufgabe 5 \*\*

**Describe how Iago plants suspicion in Othello (III, 3, ll. 200–242). (content)**

#### Model answer

ANALYSE/  
INTERPRETATION

In the given extract from William Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello, the Moor of Venice*, Act III, scene 3, lines 200–242, Iago advises Othello to check what his wife and Cassio are doing together. He admits that this advice is speculative and suggests that Othello need not believe it. He proceeds to confirm that he knows well what people in their country (Venice) are like: They betray their husbands. Then Iago reminds Othello that Desdemona was unfaithful to her father when she married him and that she loved Othello especially when she was afraid of him, which Othello confirms. Desdemona, so Iago argues, is a good cheater since she was capable of securely concealing her marriage secret from her father, so that he thought there was witchcraft involved in the match.

Iago excuses  
himself

Right after that, Iago excuses himself for having given Othello this information. He says he only did it because he loves Othello too much. Othello is grateful for the information. Still, Iago observes that it has made Othello feel uneasy, which Othello denies (and does so again later in the scene), and Iago insists twice that it probably has. He reaffirms that he only told Othello of this because of his affection for him and that it is suspicion only. Othello assures that he considers Iago's words as purely speculative, and Iago expresses his satisfaction with that because, so he says, he is Cassio's good friend and has not intended to create wrong suspicion.

Iago excuses  
himself again

When Othello claims that he believes in his wife's faith, Iago replies that she should be faithful ("Long live she so", l. 230) and Othello should believe it, upon which Othello starts to wonder how nature can make mistakes. Immediately Iago takes up the idea to state that Desdemona, which he says is unnatural, refused partners of her own social status and race. Finally, Iago excuses himself again, arguing that he is not accusing Desdemona directly, but that she might regret having married Othello when she compares him to her country's conventions/standards.

### Aufgabe 6 \*\*

**Analyse the way Iago influences Othello in this part of the so-called "temptation scene", considering, for example, language, argumentative technique and content. (III, 3, ll. 200–242) (analysis)**

#### Model answer

ANALYSE/  
INTERPRETATION

In this part of the so-called "temptation scene", Iago tempts Othello to doubt his wife's faithfulness. At the end of the scene, Othello, who was convinced that his beloved and loving wife is one hundred percent virtuous, actually starts to believe that she has an affair with Cassio. First of all, Iago claims to be Cassio and Othello's close friend (e.g. l. 227), and he seems to reveal the information he gives only very reluctantly, as if betraying one of his supposed friends by doing so. In the lines before the extract, Iago had Othello begging him to tell what is on his mind.

Black foreigner

Apart from that, Iago makes use of Othello's status as a black foreigner in Venice, an outsider in society, to make him feel weak and insecure and to believe what he is told. When Iago, for example, says that he knows their "country disposition well" (l. 205), he indirectly states that Othello does not, thus making himself look like an expert and Othello like an ignorant and dependent outsider. Hence, Othello becomes a gullible victim. The statement on how Venetians cheat on each other and almost make a sport of it (cf. ll. 206–209), is used by Iago as an argument for Othello's ignorance of the country he moved to. Othello's question "Dost

thou say so?" (l. 209) can be interpreted as proof that it has affected Othello. Furthermore, Desdemona's love and passion for Othello is re-interpreted by Iago to make it seem as if she loved Othello most when she had a guilty conscience (cf. ll. 211/212). At the end, Iago uses racist ideology to support his subtle assertions when he interrupts Othello: "[Othello:] And yet how nature erring from itself- / [Iago:] Ay there's the point" (ll. 231/232). Someone who has unnaturally refused suitable matches (of equal social status and race), so Iago says, must have an evil spirit and is likely to betray others. When Desdemona compares Othello to her fellow countrymen, she will regret ("happily repent" l. 241) having married him, Iago asserts.

Food for suspicion

Another successful strategy Iago uses to convince Othello, is that he gives him "food" for suspicion and at the same time takes it back in some way or seems to doubt it (cf. "I speak not yet of proof", l. 200), which makes Othello believe that Iago is honest and that he himself arrives at the conclusion Iago hints at and seems to doubt. Iago always pretends that he is only giving the information because Othello wants him to and that it causes him severe pain and discomfort to "betray" his friend Cassio. Iago cynically mentions that he does not want to see Othello (his openness and kindness) abused (cf. ll. 203/204), while foully abusing him. Likewise, Iago hypocritically blames himself (cf. l. 215; introducing his "reproach" with a contrasting "but") for loving Othello "too much" (l. 213; also irony/cynicism). He reassures that he has only supplied the information given out of love and, as mentioned before, that it is only suspicion (cf. l. 224). There is double irony in this "game" of Iago because what he says here is actually true. Similarly, Iago clearly speaks of Desdemona when he says how unnatural it is to refuse a partner of one's own race and social rank. Afterwards, however, he says he is not directly speaking of Desdemona (l. 238). Yet, the word "though" (l. 239) right after "I do not... / Distinctly speak of her" (l. 238/239) makes it obvious that he is.

Next, Iago succeeds in convincing Othello by repeatedly asserting that what he has told Othello, has influenced him in a negative way (has made him sad; e.g. "I see this hath a little dash'd your spirits." l. 218 – understatement; "I'faith I fear it has" l. 219; "but I do see you are mov'd" l. 221; "I see you are mov'd" l. 227). Although Othello refuses at first (cf. l. 219), it does work on him, steadily "rubbing" it into his soul (like a constant drop of water can leave a dent in a rock). Finally Othello admits that he is moved a little ("not much mov'd" – l. 228) but confirms that he still believes in Desdemona's faith, which Iago cleverly picks up with the slogan and anaphora "Long live she so, and long live you to think so" (l. 230). This play on the word "think" again allows doubt and tempts Othello to think Desdemona is unfaithful, after all.

Warning of Desdemona's father

Another point is that Iago's first warning ("Look to your wife" l. 201) and its repetition ("look to't" l. 204) echoes the warning of Desdemona's father, adding force to the accusation that Desdemona is betraying her husband. After all, it must seem to Othello then that there are at least two people already mistrusting his wife (his "honest" friend Iago and his father-in-law). Iago later reaffirms this warning with "proof" (cf. ll. 212 –215), reminding Othello of how Desdemona has cheated her father (He applies the simile of sealing "her father's eyes up, close as oak" l. 214).

To sum up, in this part of Act III, scene 3 Iago's skilful evil tactics of tempting Othello to believe Desdemona has an affair with Cassio are revealed in much detail. He uses irony, repetition as well as the "home advantage", claims to be Othello and Cassio's friend and echoes the warning words of Desdemona's father. Othello's character traits are probably not to blame for the tragic hero's downfall, but the cunning strategies of the white "devil" Iago. The process is delicately visualized in Parker's film *Othello* from 1995 where the scene (with relatively few text cuts) is set in an ordnance depot (german "Waffenlager") with close ups of Iago (Kenneth Branagh) pouring his verbal "poison" into Othello's (Laurence Fishburne) ear and insights into Othello's mind with Cassio (Nathaniel Parker) and Desdemona (Irène Jacob) dancing, laughing and kissing together.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yg4B8H9ZWM> (Oct 2014)