

10-1-2012

# Reputation: A Destructive Force

Srisha Kotlo '14

*Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.imsa.edu/fall2012>

 Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Kotlo, Srisha '14, "Reputation: A Destructive Force" (2012). *2012 Fall Semester. Paper 5.*  
<http://digitalcommons.imsa.edu/fall2012/5>

This Junior Honorable Mention is brought to you for free and open access by the Award for Excellence in Expository Writing at DigitalCommons@IMSA. It has been accepted for inclusion in 2012 Fall Semester by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@IMSA. For more information, please contact [pgarrett@imsa.edu](mailto:pgarrett@imsa.edu), [jean@imsa.edu](mailto:jean@imsa.edu).

Srishu Kotlo

Ms. Cain

Literary Explorations III

23 November 2012

### Reputation: A Destructive Force

In Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*, a soldier "[seeks] the bubble reputation even in the cannon's mouth" ("Shakespeare"). Shakespeare portrays reputation as a bubble because just as bubbles are fragile and can pop at any moment, a man's reputation is delicate and can be lost in an instant. Reputation and prestige are highly valued by characters in many stories and plays. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, Cassio and Othello strive to preserve notable reputations while Iago intends to use reputation as a tool for manipulation, and as the play unfolds they get exceedingly desperate to defend their reputations. This obsession ultimately leads to their downfall.

Iago uses his reputation as an honest man to deceive others and manipulate them to satisfy his needs. Iago makes people believe his claims by reminding them on multiple occasions of his honesty either by saying, "I am an honest man" (*Othello* II.iii.255) or by saying, "I protest, in the sincerity of love and honest / kindness" (II.iii.315-316). This honesty he claims to possess convinces Othello to listen to him and leads not only to Othello's downfall, but also Desdemona's demise.

Iago moreover uses this feigned honesty to gain Cassio's trust and manipulate him, thus leading to the loss of Cassio's reputation. After Cassio gets drunk and loses his lieutenant position, he turns to Iago for consolation. Iago advises him to ask Desdemona to persuade Othello to give him the lieutenant job back. Cassio says to Iago, "you advise me well" (II.iii.314). He agrees with Iago, saying that he "will beseech the virtuous Desdemona to

undertake for / [him since he is] desperate [for the] fortunes if they check [him]" (II.iii.318-319). Cassio desperately wants to save his reputation, so blindly trusts Iago and tells him that he will visit Desdemona to plead his case. He fulfills Iago's intentions and sets up his own manipulation by falling for Iago's "honesty."

Iago wants the lieutenant position, claiming that he has better qualifications for the job than Cassio has. He is jealous of Cassio and desires to possess the reputation as a lieutenant instead of that as Othello's ancient. Iago believes that he is the one who deserves the lieutenantcy because of his experience as a soldier. He implies that Cassio is unfit for the job, saying, "As masterly as [Cassio is], mere prattle without practice / is all his soldiership" (I.i.25-26). Iago says that Cassio does not have the experience to be a lieutenant because he has not even fought as a soldier before. Iago sarcastically says "[Cassio] (in good time) must his lieutenant be / and I, bless the mark, his Moorship's ancient" (I.i.31-32). Iago conveys that he has a better reputation as a soldier and should be selected as the lieutenant.

As Iago continues working towards attaining a marvelous reputation, he resorts to desperate actions. He cares so much about preserving his reputation as a tool for manipulation that once Roderigo finds out that his intentions are malicious, Iago kills Roderigo. If Roderigo had revealed Iago's malicious intentions, Iago would lose the trust of other characters and his entire plan would fall apart. However, towards the end of the play, Emilia accuses Iago of being a villain and Iago loses his name. Emilia tells Iago that he "told a lie, an odious, damned lie" (V.ii.181). Iago denies this accusation and threatens to kill Emilia, calling her a liar. As Emilia keeps accusing Iago of villainy, Iago stabs her.

Cassio wants others to think highly of him just as Iago desires a strong reputation. After fighting against Roderigo and getting drunk, Cassio ruins his image. People now think he is a

hopeless alcoholic. He loses his reputation and that forces Othello to take away his title as lieutenant. Othello says that he loves Cassio, but that he can “never more be officer” (II.iii.238). Cassio is devastated by the loss of the lieutenant position and screams “reputation, reputation, reputation! Oh, I have / lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of / [myself], and what remains is bestial. My reputation, Iago, / my reputation!” (II.iii.251-254). Cassio laments that he has lost his sense of immortality. To make up for this and regain a solid name, he tells some musicians to play for Othello “something [that is] brief and bid ‘Good morrow, general’” (III.i.2) to Othello. However, Othello does not accept this since he has completely lost respect for Cassio. Had Cassio not fought against Roderigo, he would still have been in power and would have had a great reputation. No matter how hard Cassio tries to change people’s perceptions, he cannot, since people are unable to erase what they just observed. Even though it was only one fight and one dreadful decision by Cassio, he meets his downfall, thereby losing his life.

Othello maintains an excellent reputation for most of the play, but loses it when he believes Iago’s claims that Cassio and Desdemona are in love with each other, and he acts out of character. This change in character prompts a surprised reaction from many characters in the play. When Othello hits Desdemona, Lodovico is astonished because he had previous perceptions of Othello’s kindness and composed nature. After the incident, Lodovico says to Othello, “My lord, this would not be believed in Venice, / Though I should swear I saw ’t.” (IV.i.236-237). At this point, Othello is beginning to lose his reputation. He is in a position of authority, so cannot stand it when he gets news from Iago that Desdemona is with Cassio. Because he possesses power, news of Desdemona’s infidelity affects his pride and drives Othello to preserve his reputation, leading to his downfall and Desdemona’s demise.

Cassio, Othello, and Iago strive for notable reputations; Iago intends to use reputation as a tool for manipulation, but Cassio and Othello want noteworthy reputations for their own pride. The desperation of these characters, after they start losing their reputations, leads to their demise. Iago originally has a reputation for being an honest man and was able to use this as a tool to manipulate others. Inevitably, when people found out about his real intentions, he revealed his true desperation. Similarly, Cassio reveals his desperation after losing his job. Cassio wants others to think highly of him, and with hopes of reestablishing his reputation, trusts all of the advice Iago gives him. Blindly trusting Iago leads to Cassio's downfall. Likewise, Othello is viewed by others as having a tremendous reputation, but once accusations pertaining to Desdemona and Cassio arise, Othello loses his mind and acts out of character. Pursuing a notable reputation can be detrimental to people, leading to their demise, and should not be the lone ambition in life.

Works Cited

"Shakespeare." *BBC Learning English*. BBC, May 2007. Web. 28 Nov. 2012.

Shakespeare, William. *Othello*. Ed. Russ McDonald. New York: Penguin Books, 2001. Print.