

## *Othello*: Character in Focus – Iago

### Activity 1

Read the extract from III.iii. Questions for class discussion:

- How many people are involved in this scene? How does this compare to the rest of it?
- Are there any implicit stage directions in the text?
- Are there moments that pose particular challenges or questions for the actors?
- How does the use of verse (iambic pentameter) contribute to the way the scene might be delivered?

### Activity 2

*In groups of two or three*

Read the extract and find all the instances of the below words (or concepts) and discuss their significance:

- Jealous / jealousy
- Eyes / looking / seeing
- Thoughts
- Love

### Activity 3

*Look at the prints from the Royal Collection showing various actors in this play*

*In groups of two or three, each taking a pair of prints:*

- What decisions have been made regarding:
  - o Costume
  - o Pose
  - o Props
  - o Accompanying quotations

## Activity 4

*For discussion as a group:*

- Do any of these prints give clues about the setting for the associated performance?
- What can we glean from them about the actor's gestures and facial expressions?
- Which of these Iagos best matches how you imagine the character?
- How do these images create atmosphere?
- How do they impact our reading of the play?
- What do they tell us about how Shakespeare was consumed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?
- The final print shows Edmund Kean in 'blackface' as Othello. How does this print compare to the image showing the same actor as Iago? What can it tell us about how this actor approached these different roles? Consider: costume, pose and facial expression, mood, and use of colour.
- Is *Othello* a racist play? Are there racist and non-racist ways to perform it?

<https://sharc.kcl.ac.uk>

[sharc@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:sharc@kcl.ac.uk)

**OTHELLO**

Thou dost conspire against thy friend, Iago,  
If thou but think'st him wronged, and mak'st his ear  
A stranger to thy thoughts.

**IAGO**

I do beseech you –  
Thou I perchance am vicious in my guess  
(As I confess it is my nature's plague  
To spy into abuses), and oft my jealousy  
Shapes faults that are not – that your wisdom yet,  
From one that so imperfectly coniects,  
Would take no notice, nor build yourself a trouble  
Out of his scattering and unsure observance.  
It were not for your quiet, nor your good,  
Nor for my manhood, honesty, and wisdom,  
To let you know my thoughts.

**OTHELLO**

What dost thou mean?

**IAGO**

Good name in man – and woman – dear my lord,  
Is the immediate jewel of their souls;  
Who steals my purse, steals trash: 'tis something nothing;  
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands.  
But he that filches from me my good name

Robs me of that which not enriches him,  
And makes me poor indeed.

**OTHELLO**

By heaven, I'll know thy thoughts!

**IAGO**

You cannot, if my heart were in your custody...

**OTHELLO**

'Swounds!

**IAGO**

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 soundly loves!

**OTHELLO**

O misery

**IAGO**

Poor and content is rich, and rich enough,  
But riches fineless, is as poor as winter,

To him that ever fears he shall be poor:  
Good God the souls of all my tribe defend  
From jealousy!

**OTHELLO**

Why? Why is this?  
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 once to be resolved. Exchange me for a goat  
When I shall turn the business of my soul  
To such exsuffilate and blown surmises,  
Matching thy inference. '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 –  
Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw  
The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt,  
For she had eyes and chose me. No, Iago,  
I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove:  
And, on the proof, there is no more but this:  
Away at once with love or jealousy!

**IAGO**

I am glad of this; for now I shall have reason  
To show the love and duty that I bear you  
With franker spirit. Therefore – as I am bound –  
Receive it from me. I speak not yet of proof:

Look to your wife, observe her well with Cassio;  
Wear your eyes thus: not jealous, nor secure—  
I would not have your free and noble nature  
Out of self-bounty be abused – look to't.  
I know our country disposition well:  
In Venice they do let God see the pranks  
They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience  
Is not to leav't undone, but keep't unknown.

**OTHELLO**

Dost thou say so?

**IAGO**

She did deceive her father, marrying you:  
And when she seemed to shake and fear your looks,  
She loved them most.

**OTHELLO**

And so she did.

**IAGO**

Why, go to, then!  
She that so young could give out such a seeming  
To seal her father's eyes up, close as oak –  
He thought 'twas witchcraft!—But I am much to blame;  
I humbly do beseech you of your pardon  
For too much loving you.

**OTHELLO**

I am bound to thee for ever.

**IAGO**

I see this hath a little dashed your spirits.

**OTHELLO**

Not a jot, not a jot.

**IAGO**

I'faith, I fear it has.

I hope you will consider what is spoke  
Comes from your love. But I do see you're moved.  
I am to pray you not to strain my speech  
To grosser issues, not to larger reach  
Than to suspicion.

**OTHELLO**

I will not.

**IAGO**

Should you do so, my lord,  
My speech should fall into such vile success  
As my thoughts aim not at. Cassio's my worthy friend--  
My lord, I see you're moved.

**OTHELLO**

No, not much moved:

I do not think but Desdemona's honest.

**IAGO**

Long live she so! and long live you to think so!

**OTHELLO**

And yet, how nature erring from itself,--

**IAGO**

Ay, there's the point: as--to be bold with you--  
Not to affect many proposed matches  
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,  
Whereto we see in all things nature tends--  
Foh! one may smell in such a will most rank,  
Foul disproportion thoughts unnatural.  
But pardon me; I do not in position  
Distinctly speak of her; though I may fear  
Her will, recoiling to her better judgment,  
May fall to match you with her country forms  
And happily repent.

**OTHELLO**

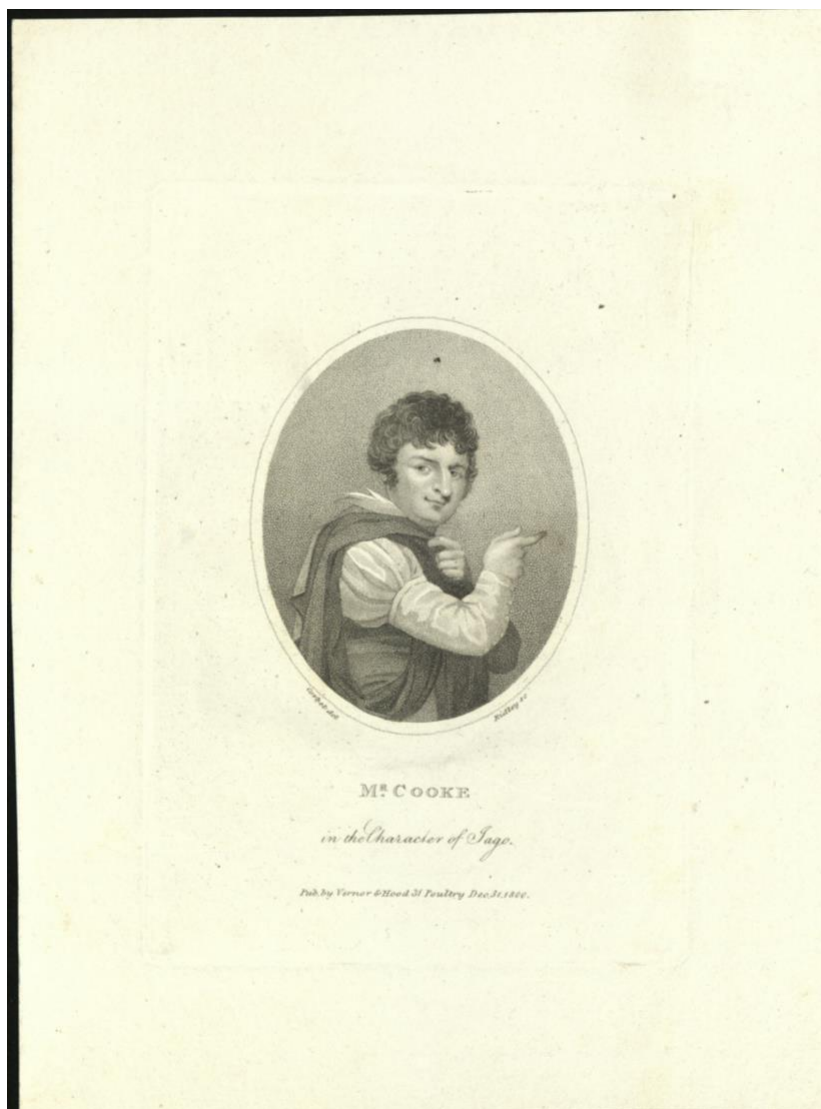
Farewell, farewell:

If more thou dost perceive, let me know more;  
Set on thy wife to observe: leave me, Iago:

**IAGO**

My lord, I take my leave.

*Othello*, III.iii.146-244



1.



2.

Act III OTHELLO Scene I



M. BENSLEY in the Character of IAGO  
O beware my Lord of Jealousy!

Published for Bell's Edition of Shakespeare Nov. 1st 1775.

3.

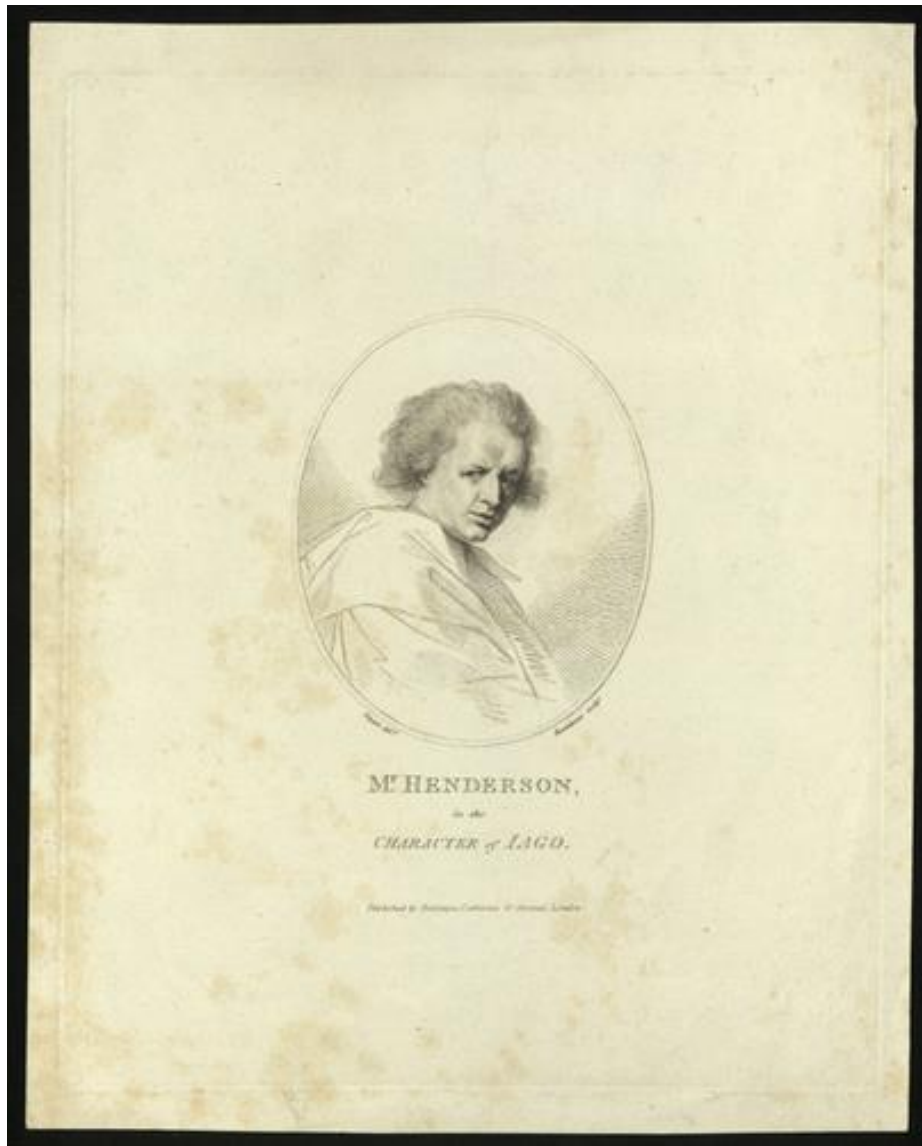


MR. YATES.  
AS IAGO

Drawn & engraved by G. Kneller for the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden 1775.

4.





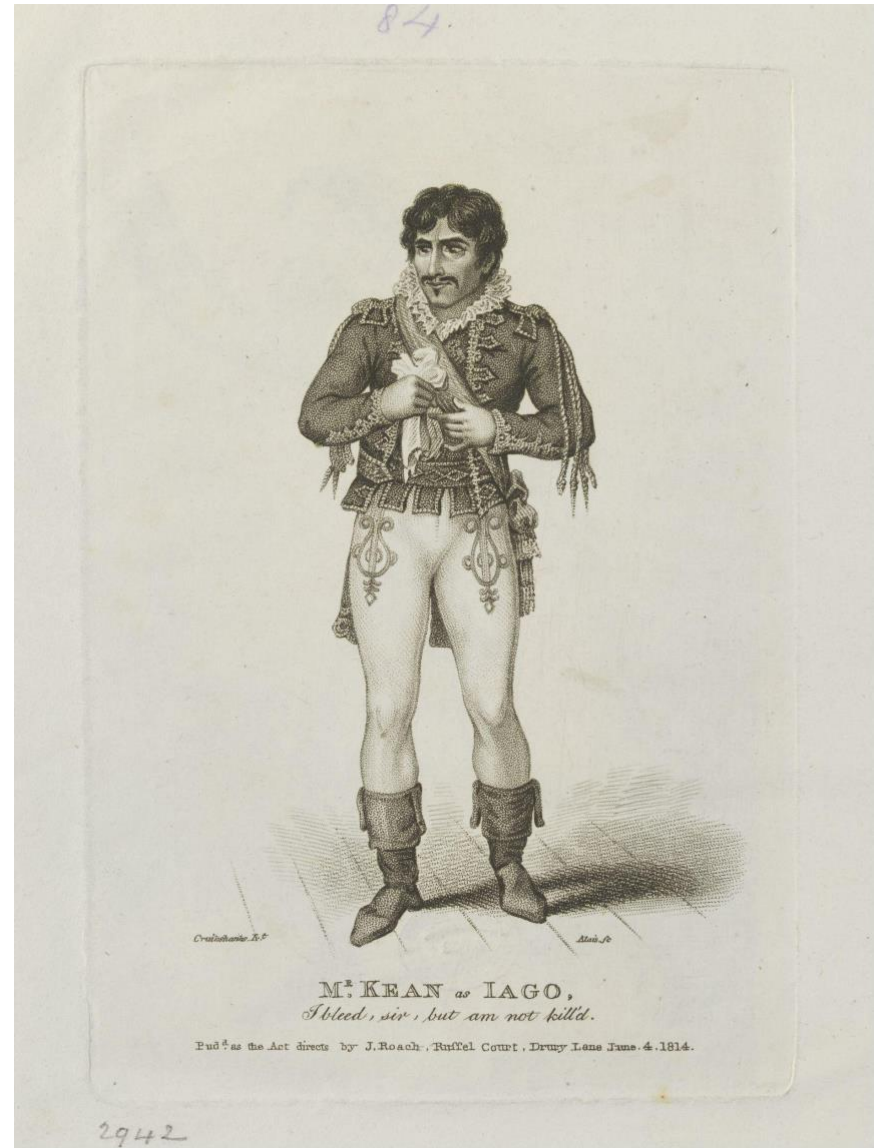
5.



6.



7.



8.



*Drawn by J. C. Becher*

JOHN KEAN.  
as OTHELLO  
*Keen to know my kind of jealousy.*

*Engraved by J. C. Becher*

Image captions:

1.

Mr Cooke in the character of Iago  
William Ridley and John Corbett, published  
by Vernor & Hood  
Published 31 December 1800  
RCIN 652870  
Stipple with etching  
23 x 17.1 cm (sheet); 16.2 x 11.1 cm (plate)  
Possibly acquired by George IV when  
Prince of Wales

2.

James Green and James Ward  
G. F. Cooke, Esqr.  
Published 21 April 1807  
RCIN 652872  
Mezzotint  
51.2 x 36.5 (sheet), 50.5 x 35.5 cm  
Acquired by George IV either in 1808  
or 1817

3.

James Warren Childe after Roberts  
Mr Yates as Iago  
Published 1819  
Stipple with etching  
27.3 x 19.7 cm  
Perhaps acquired by George IV when  
Prince Regent  
RCIN 664379

4.

James Warren Childe after Roberts  
Mr Yates as Iago  
Published 1819  
Stipple with etching  
27.3 x 19.7 cm  
Perhaps acquired by George IV when  
Prince Regent  
RCIN 664379

5.  
Francesco Bartolozzi after  
Gilbert Stuart  
Mr Henderson in the Character  
of Iago  
c.1810  
Stipple  
29.5 x 23.4 cm (sheet); 27.0 x  
21.8 cm (plate)  
RCIN 656159

6.  
John Thornthwaite after Johann Heinrich Ramberg  
Mr Henderson in Iago  
Published 24 November 1785  
Engraving and etching with stipple  
RCIN 656162  
Probably acquired by George IV

7.  
Thomas Woolnoth after Thomas  
Charles Wageman  
Mr Young as Iago  
Published 1823  
Stipple with etching  
13.6 x 8.1 cm (sheet)  
RCIN 664461

8.  
John Alais and Isaac Robert  
Cruikshank  
Mr Kean as Iago  
Stipple with etching  
Published 4 June 1814  
17 x 12.2 cm (sheet); 15.2 x 10.4 cm  
(plate)  
RCIN 657232

9.  
E. F. Lambert and William Sheldrick  
Mr Kean as Othello  
Lithograph with hand-colouring  
1823  
29.4 x 21.4 cm (sheet)  
RCIN 657223