

Characterization in *Othello*

The passage below, from the beginning of Act I, scene i, is the audience's first introduction to Iago. Analyze how Shakespeare uses such elements as diction, tone, and figurative language to characterize Iago.

IAGO:

O, sir, content you.

I follow him to serve my turn upon him:

We cannot all be masters, nor all masters

Cannot be truly follow'd. You shall mark

Many a duteous and kneecrooking¹ knave,

That doting on² his own obsequious bondage

Wears out his time, much like his master's ass,

For naught but provender;³ and, when he's old, cashier'd.⁴

Whip me such honest knaves. Others there are,

Who, trimm'd in forms and visages⁵ of duty,

Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves,

And throwing but shows of service on their lords

Do well thrive by them; and when they have lined their

coats

Do themselves homage.⁶ These fellows have some soul,

And such a one do I profess myself.

For, sir,

It is as sure as you are Roderigo,

Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago.

In following him, I follow but myself;

Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,

But seeming so, for my peculiar end.⁷

For when my outward action doth demonstrate

The native act and figure of my heart

In complement⁸ extern, 'tis not long after

But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve

For daws⁹ to peck at: I am not what I am.

¹kneeling

²loving

³feed

⁴dismissed

⁵appearance

⁶favor

⁷personal

⁸form

⁹crows