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On the Witcraft of Iago:
« Diuinitie of Hell »:
How to lie while saying the Truth

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ON THE WITCRAFT OF IAGO
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by
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The purpose of this essay is to attempt to show how some insights from that area of confluence of linguistics and linguistic philosophy referred to generally as *pragmatics* might be applied to the examination of some aspects of a particular dramatic text: Iago's strategies for deception, in William Shakespeare's *The Tragedie of Othello, the Moore of Venice*. We trust that this apparent intrusion into such hallowed territory (none more so than the « Shakespearian City ») no longer needs any justification, in theory at least¹; we hope that, in practice, our suggested mode of analysis will be considered fruitful, bearing fresh and perhaps more systematically delineated insights², and that it might, for

¹ Worth mentioning, however, for similarity of approach suggested, are the contributions in G. Aston et al. (eds.) (1983) *Interazione, dialogo, convenzioni: il caso del testo drammatico*, Bologna, C.L.U.E.B.; and also M. Coulthard's analysis of a section of *Othello* itself in *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*, London, Longman, 1981, pp. 170 ff. — see note 6 below.

² The commentaries to be found reported in the annotations in H. H. Furness, edition of *Othello* (H. H. Furness (ed.), *Othello. A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare*, (Lippincott, 1886), New York, Dover Publications, 1963) are often very similar to our interpretations, however they are usually only occasional remarks and seldom based on more than intuitive analytical tools with resultant vague descriptions such as Heath's « artful hints and half-sentences » (quoted in Furness (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 166); Hudson's and Booth's are somewhat more detailed and therefore more interesting (cf., for example p. 167 ff where Act III scene iii is the object of commentary.) A. Serpieri's sustained analysis (A. Serpieri (1978) « *Otello* »:

the (pragma-) linguist, also constitute the discovery of a rich yet compact mine of data in which to test his instruments.

We hope that an intrinsic justification both for our choice of a dramatic text and for our particular model of analysis will emerge. *Acting*, in our model (i.e., briefly, non-deceptive feigning-see 2.2.iii below) has particularly close family ties with *pretending* (deceptive feigning-see 2.2.i, and note 3) which is at its core and, is, as we hope to show, not only Iago's leitmotiv, but also the very foundation on which he builds all his strategies for deception. Further-

L'Eros Negato, Milano, Il Formichiere) is unique and especially noteworthy, both for its completeness and coherence and the use of a specific set of tools (from semiology and psycho-analysis); his linguistic analysis, however, essentially based on the reduction of Iago's ploys to the rhetorical figure of litotes, we feel tends to sacrifice detail to his interpretative key; it is, nonetheless, one of the more insightful and illuminating commentaries we have seen on the play in general, and specifically, for example, on Othello's character and assumptions, thus providing more clues to Iago's choice of strategy and to his success than the reductive traditional view of him as self-important and slow-witted (cf. the T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis school of thought as discussed, for example, by J. Wain in his Introduction to J. Wain (ed.) *Shakespeare: Othello*, Casebook Series, London, Macmillan, pp. 11-33; and by H. Gardner (1955) «The Noble Moor», reprinted in J. Wain ed. *op. cit.*, pp. 147-168, and H. Gardner (1968) «'Othello': A Retrospect: 1900-19667» in K. Muir ed. *Shakespeare Survey 21*, Cambridge, C.U.P., pp. 1-11) or even the more romantic Bradleyian view of Othello's character (as discussed again in J. Wain and H. Gardner (*ops. cit.*). Incidentally, J. Wain's own metaphor of Othello and Iago as the bull and the matador does not imply an essentially different view to Leavis' although he does allow the matador a lithe cunning.) As we shall see there are also many points of similarity in some of the conclusions reached here and by Serpieri (*op. cit.*). Sister M. Joseph's comments are also very illuminating, although unfortunately few on Othello and Iago and perhaps not as detailed as they might have been: viz. «subtle devices», «insinuation and deceit» (M. Joseph (1962) *Rhetoric in Shakespeare's Time*, New York, Harbinger, p. 235); furthermore, Coulthard's commentary (*op. cit.*, p. 171 ff) on Act III scene iii, also has many convergent points both in approach and results. Although there is no attempt here at completeness, we hope that our work might fit in with and complement that of others.

more, another characteristic of Iago is that he is not only a « good actor » within the play to his immediate interlocutors but that he also directs his acting from within the text outwards towards the spectator: a theatrical personage 'par excellence'³.

Moreover, Iago's games of acting and pretending are so enmeshed that we might suspect that on occasion he is not acting for, but rather pretending to, and therefore deceiving, the spectator, too.

³ A comment by Booth (in Furness (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 214) on how Iago must be a good actor (in sense 2(a), see below) (and cf. J. Wain, *op. cit.*, p. 14) and the actor who represents him on stage, doubly so, is well worth quoting: « To portray Iago properly you must seem to be what all the characters think, and say, you are, not what the spectators know you to be; try to win even *them* by your sincerity. Don't act the villain, don't look it or speak it (by scowling and growling, I mean), but think it all the time. Be genial, sometimes jovial always gentlemanly. Quick in motion as in thought; lithe and sinuous as a snake. A certain bluntness... should be added to preserve the military flavour of the character; in this particular I fail utterly, my Iago lacks the soldierly quality ». Needless to say, perhaps, at this point, when we talk of Iago acting for the audience we are, of course, not referring to what Burbage or Kean, or Forrest or Booth or Finlay have done, but rather to what Iago himself does. Serpieri (*op. cit.*) also has some related points in his section « teatro dentro il teatro » (p. 149 ff); but even more closely related is M. Joseph's, comment concerning his ironical dramatic ethos (*op. cit.*, p. 282, and note 45 below) and N. Coghill's consideration of the function of his soliloquies (cf. N. Coghill (1964), *Shakespeare's Professional Skills* chapter VI, reprinted in J. Wain ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 227-237). We are however more concerned with his *acting* for the spectator while he *pretends* to the others. A further word of caution might be in order, at this point, on the polysemy of the term « acting » in English (many thanks to Susan George and Stephen Parkin for pointing out the need for it). It can be helpful to note that Italian, for example, distinguishes lexically between: 1) « agire, fare, comportarsi », 2)a) « fingere, simulare » and 2)b) « recitare, rappresentare », which correspond, roughly, to 1) « doing, behaving » (as in « (inter-)act, action, -actant, agent, actor » in the action theory and pragmatics sense, cf. sections 1 and 2 here); 2) feigning, a) deceptively (i.e. our technical use of « pretending »), and, b) non-deceptively (i.e. our « acting »).

Iago's behaviour, whether acting or pretending, is a continuous playing with the deceptiveness of appearances, and/or on how to manipulate them so that they be deceptive: « diuinitie of hell » (II.ii, 381).

And, although he tells Roderigo that he will rely on his « wits and all the Tribe of hell » (I.iii, 386), he knows full well that Witcraft alone can turn true into false, or « vertue into pitch » (II.ii, 405: « Thou know'st we work by Wit, and not by Witchcraft »).

It is our aim here then to attempt to examine some of the strategies employed by Iago to deceive Othello, and his other interactants, within the play (and without?) We shall not here be able to examine them exhaustively and rather choose to limit ourselves to a sketchy illustration of one particular class of strategy, (as indicated by our sub-title) albeit one of Iago's preferred ploys, and to some even more sketchy illustrations of how our model and basic categories might be used to analyze some sample exchanges between Iago and his victims.

Incidentally, as we have already hinted, our choice of focus may help to further illustrate what seems to be one of Shakespeare's major themes in *Othello* (cf. also Coghill, 1964; Gardner, 1964, 1971): what *seems* to be is not necessarily what *is*: « I am not what I am »⁴, « By Janus! ».

⁴ Iago to Roderigo (I i, line 71) the culmination of an apologia for those « fellowes » who keep their « hearts attending on themselves » and « throwing but showes of Service on their Lords / Do well thriue by them », rather than being an obsequious « knee-crooking knaue » who dotes upon his bondage. « These Fellowes have some soule / and such a one do I professe my selfe » His self-image is that of the « dritto », or even the « picaro ». Cf. again, also N. Coghill (*op. cit.*) on his soliloquies (Any way the function of his little speech here is presumably to tell Roderigo not to think he really loves Othello, even though he will be seen to be doting on him; Roderigo must think Iago would want to help him cuckold Othello). Cf. also Warburton's comment in Furness, *op. cit.*, p. 35 on Iago's « By Ianus, I thinke no » (I ii 38). Janus, the two-faced. Cf. also A. Serpieri (*op. cit.*) again on Iago as the « regista dell'Immaginario » (p. 29).

In our first section we shall attempt to make some of the major premises of our chosen approach explicit; in the second section we shall introduce our model and categories for analysis with some sample illustrations; in our final section we shall briefly examine some exemplary extracts of dialogue, from Act III scene iii.

1. *Background props.*

To begin with it might be worth clearing the ground of one possible equivocation. Although we shall often refer to our « text », we are of course not referring to *Othello* as a written text to be pondered over at our desks as readers, but rather as the « transcription »⁵ of a spoken text or dialogue, albeit with certain particular characteristics, to which it is legitimate to apply discourse or conversational analysis⁶. Our type of analysis, looks not so much at the surface structure of exchanges, as at *what is being done* by interactants: which goals are being pursued and by which means. Specifically, we shall here be looking for the strategies Iago uses to pursue his fixed super-goal of deceiving Othello.

⁵ The « transcription » we work from is the one referred to as the first Folio (F₁) by editors of Shakespeare; we have had access to it through Furness' invaluable annotated edition. We reproduce the spelling and punctuation of F₁ although we substitute modern *s* for all cases of *f* in the original.

⁶ See W. Dodd « Parametri per l'analisi del dialogo nel testo drammatico », and G. Aston « L'applicabilità dell'analisi conversazionale allo studio del testo drammatico » in G. Aston et al. (eds.) (*op. cit.*) for pertinent discussions; cf. also M. Coulthard (*op. cit.* pp.171-177) where he analyzes III iii in terms of question/answer pairs also appealing to Gricean principles of conversation and mutual knowledge of interactants. His analysis has the following premise: « I want to suggest that Iago rouses Othello's suspicions by a sequence of unanswered questions (...) avoided apparently but in fact deliberately, clumsily, which suggests to Othello that Iago is concealing something » (p. 173), akin to our our comments on Iago's reticence, or rather, feigned reticence.

Two points may derive from this: one, that our present interpretation of what is happening or being done by Iago with his strategies might simply take a place alongside the other commentaries to be found throughout literary criticism of Othello, and especially alongside those which view it as a text to be represented on the stage⁷. Secondly, this implies the fact that we see Shakespeare's discourse as having « human veracity »⁸, in terms, not only of the emotions portrayed but, more importantly for us here, in terms of the behaviour portrayed; Iago's is (unfortunately) a « commonplace cunning »⁹ and his conversational rhetoric is in everyday use. This is not to slight Shakespeare, of course: quite the contrary.

Furthermore, conversation analysis also provides us with a possible key to examine the representational aspect of the discourse; the spectator may, indeed, for some purposes, be likened to the third person, not only as on-looker or over-hearer but as indirect addressee, the oblique interlocutor, of whom speakers are conscious and by whom they may be influenced.

Our model for analysis, then, is one which concerns itself with conversational rhetoric¹⁰ and implies that our

⁷ Cf. J. J. Gumperz (1982), *Discourse Strategies*, Cambridge, C.U.P. and on the problem of the interpretation of data, it being dependent on the assumed shared socio-cultural and psychological contexts of the interactants and of the on-looker or interpreter. By imagining or seeing the dialogue in action one can respond to it as to true interaction. Apart from Booth's valuable comments which project us into the action and into what is being done, one might also recall Ezra Pound's comment as quoted by Gardner (1955, *op. cit.* in J. Wain ed., *op. cit.*, p. 149). « The medium of drama is not words but persons moving about on a stage using words », and cf. also H. S. Bennett (1964) « Shakespeare's Audience » in P. Alexander ed., *Studies in Shakespeare*, London, O.U.P., pp. 56-70.

⁸ Cf. H. Gardner (1955, *op. cit.*, p. 148).

⁹ Cf. J. Wain (*op. cit.*, p. 15).

¹⁰ As G. Leech terms it, cf. G. Leech (1981) « Pragmatics and Conversational Rhetoric » in H. Parret et al. eds. *Possibilities and Limitations of Pragmatics*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, pp. 413-422; also G. Morpugo-Tagliabue (1981) « Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric in a Pragmatic Perspective », in H. Parret et al. eds. *op. cit.*, pp.

everyday dealings with each other are to do with « doing things with words »¹¹. This involves the effects that our utterances can, and are meant to, have on hearers: conveyed, rather than, or as well as, literal meanings. Our pragmatics model or approach sees human behaviour, including linguistic activity, of course, in terms of interactants' assumptions and goals or intentions; it is thus at the confluence of linguistics, linguistic philosophy, social psychology and cognitive science today¹².

We have already mentioned how sociolinguistics and conversation analysis have brought relevant insights to the field; it has also been shaped by speculations by philosophers of language and social psychologists as to the conventions operative in social interaction¹³.

Now, pragmatics can be profitably employed in the study of deception for several reasons:

In our opinion, it is correct to view deception as intentional, as do Augustine and Thomas Aquinas¹⁴. Our

493-50 and also D. Parisi and C. Castelfranchi (1979), « La retorica come scopistica della comunicazione » in F. Albano-Leoni and M. R. Pigliascio eds., *Retorica e scienze del linguaggio*, Società di Linguistica Italiana, Roma, Bulzoni pp. 5-9 and indeed, many of the other contributions in both H. Parret et al., eds., *op. cit.*, and F. Albano-Leoni and M. R. Pigliascio eds., *op. cit.*

¹¹ A reference to Austin's seminal *How to Do Things With Words*, London, O.U.P., 1962, which might be said to mark the birth of what is known in linguistics as speech act theory.

¹² We can refer the interested reader to H. Parret et al. eds., *op. cit.*, and to P. Cole ed., *Syntax and Semantics 9: Pragmatics*, New York, Academic Press, 1978, for some fairly recent readings in the general area of pragmatics in linguistics, and from which he/she can then enter the literature. Cf. also Leech (1982), *Semantics*, Harmondsworth Penguin, especially chapter 16: « Semantics and Pragmatics », pp. 319-320, for a simple, clear introduction.

¹³ Cf. H. P. Grice (for example « Logic and Conversation » (1967) reprinted in P. Cole and J. Morgan eds. *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts*, New York, Academic Press, 1975, pp. 41-55).

¹⁴ Cf. « mendacium est enuntiatio cum voluntate falsum enuntiandi » (quotation from Saint Augustine « De Mendacio » chapter IV), in note 9, p. 775. In J. M. Vincent and C. Castelfranchi « On the Art of Deception: How to Lie While Saying the Truth » in H. Parret et al. eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 749-778.

concern should be with what a speaker intends to do with or by a linguistic act, and not with ontological truth. It is the truth as far as the speaker is concerned which interests us: his sincerity, or indeed, his « honestie ». Deception, for us, means, to put it briefly, deceiving one's interlocutors as to one's beliefs or assumptions and intentions.

Pragmatics concerns itself, among other things, with speaker intentions and assumptions and the adequacy of linguistic acts with respect to the goals a speaker is pursuing through them; it is concerned with those conventions and contexts which link actions (including verbal actions) to their potential effects and the mechanisms which allow us as social agents to have justified rational expectations regarding the effects of our utterances or actions. The « art of deception » (a common enough social grace) simply manipulates these conventions; as we see it, it simply involves pretending that, or behaving as if, the conventions for cooperative human intercourse were in operation for all parties concerned at the time of utterance¹⁵.

The basic premise for Iago's deception strategies lies, of course precisely in this aspect: he sets it up and strengthens it but also exploits it where it already existed. We are referring to everybody's assumption that he is « honest » (in all of the senses Empson suggests)¹⁶. Iago is so successful in deceiving everyone because he is misunderstood by everyone, while he goes around understanding them (Wain, indeed, sees this as a drama of misunderstanding)¹⁷. His

¹⁵ Cf. W. H. Auden's « Joker in the Pack » (reprinted in J. Wain ed., *op. cit.*), for an informal statement on this (p. 206); cf. also Grice (*op. cit.*, pp. 45-46) on the Cooperative Principle and sincerity conditions; mention of these are to be found practically anywhere in the early and even recent literature on pragmatics and interaction so basic are they as notions in the field. Cf. also Leech (1982), *op. cit.*, pp. 331 ff. for a clear introduction.

¹⁶ Cf. W. Empson (1951) « Honest in 'Othello' » *The Structure of Complete Words* Chatto Windus, reprinted in J. Wain ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 98-122.

¹⁷ Cf. J. Wain in his Introduction to J. Wain ed., *op. cit.*, p. 12.

understanding of the others enables him to tailor his strategies to suit the individual victim, and his correct assumptions concerning the other's assumptions on his assumptions (or beliefs, or character, or personality, or role,) are ever evident in his choice of ploy as we shall see. We need only quote his comment on Othello:

« He holds me well,/The better shall my purpose work on him ». (I.iii, 414-415)

We shall now very briefly introduce our elemental categories or analytical tools (2.1) within the general picture we have just described, then our basic deception categories (2.2), followed by an exposition of those cases of indirect deception which may be termed lying while saying the truth (2.3).

2.1. *Basic notions in goal analysis*

Moves or utterances can be viewed as regulated by hierarchies of goals; the first level goal, or direct goal, is, not to put too fine a point on it, that of communicating the propositional content; or, as some might say, the literal meaning. Higher order or super-ordinate goals work as means or mediating goals towards the top goal or objective of the speaker in making a particular utterance or move¹⁸.

Top-goals of utterances are essentially requests for a change in the hearer's belief structures or assumptions.

The goals at the different levels in the hierarchy can be communicated, and/or communicative, or neither, i.e. when they are deliberately concealed.

A communicated goal is one which a speaker intends his hearer to understand him as having, while a communicative one is one which a speaker intends to reach through

¹⁸ For a fuller exposition, cf. D. Parisi and C. Castelfranchi (1979) *op. cit.*, and (1981), « A Goal Analysis of Some Pragmatic Aspects of Language » in H. Parret et al eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 551-568.

his hearer understanding that he, the speaker, means to communicate it to him; communicating it is the means to reaching it. The speaker counts on his hearer deciding to adopt or adhere to his goal. Adopting a goal means letting yourself be regulated by your interlocutor's goals because you know or realise it is his goal, while adhering to it implies adopting his goal after realizing that he is asking or meaning you to adopt it.

Quite normally utterance super-goals are conveyed indirectly through inferences based on mutual assumptions and on assumptions concerning the conventions underlying what is assumed to be the nature of the interaction at the time.

Adhering to one's interlocutors' goals is one of the conventional assumptions underlying cooperative interaction, i.e. in other words, interaction where the interactants act on the assumption that they are both being sincere.

A further convention, or fixed (i.e. permanent or basic) goal, is that speakers will only give relevant information¹⁹, that is, information which might be important or useful to, a goal of, their hearer, and that this information be, furthermore, adequate to their goals; the manipulation of this underlying convention results in such strategies as insinuation and halftruths, for example.

Deception may occur when one of the interlocutors breaches this faith, the underlying assumption of sincerity, withholds his cooperation while yet letting the other assume that it still holds: he pretends it still holds, he behaves *as if* it still held.

We come now to our basic or elemental categories of deception.

¹⁹ For the notion of relevance, cf. especially N. Smith (ed.) *Mutual Knowledge*, London, Academic Press, 1982, and J. M. Vincent and C. Castelfranchi, *op. cit.*, note 7, p. 774.

²⁰ Cf. C. Castelfranchi & J. M. Vincent, and J. M. Vincent & C. Castelfranchi (*ops. cit.*), for a fuller treatment, especially for the definition of «*false for A*». Cf. especially p. 753 in J. M. Vincent & C. Castelfranchi (*op. cit.*).

2.2. *Basic deception categories*

We may talk of deception, then, when something false, i.e. false for *A*, or « different from *A*'s assumptions » or more or less than what the speaker assumes to be « the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth » is somehow made to be assumed by a hearer.

This « somehow », the means, can be classified or divided into two broad types: deceiving by commission and deceiving by omission (cf. J.M. Vincent & C. Castelfranchi; R.M. Chisholm & T.D. Feehan), i.e. one can deceive by withholding the truth (if one assumes it is relevant) as much as by asserting or otherwise positively offering a falsehood. Either way one is pretending to assume something which one does not.

Two further sets of distinctions must be made: a) that between those strategies which involve communicative speaker goals and those which do not. (The highest order or top goal, of course, is never communicative if there is to be deception); and b) that between direct and indirect strategies.

2.2.i *Pretending*

Pretending is a non-communicatively achieved direct strategy for deception. It involves counterfeiting or mimicking the symptoms of that which the hearer is intended to assume (*x*); the speaker's goal that the hearer (*B*) assume (*x*) (i.e. that *B* assume *x* is true, when he the speaker (*A*) assumes *x* is false) is non-communicative: *B* must not assume that *A* intends him to assume *x*, i.e. *B* must not assume that *A* is intentionally sending a message, communicating. By limping one can pretend one has hurt one's leg: a natural symptom of having hurt one's leg is limping. Othello did not realize or assume Iago had been pretending when he told him:

« And did'st contracte and purse thy brow together,/ As if thou then hadd'st shyt vp in thy Braine/ Some horrible Conceite » (III.iii).

Iago's pursing and contracting of the brows were meant to be taken by Othello as natural symptoms of internal turmoil, and this, in the context, was meant to be the index of being worried because he was harbouring thoughts or suspicions which he could not voice; just, indeed, as Othello interpreted them.

Now it is true of course that Iago did have some horrible Conceite (x) shut up in his brain, only it (x) was false. If Othello had assumed Iago was pretending or understood that he was, he would also have understood that the « conceite » or cause of the symptom was false because he would have realised that Iago was inducing him, intentionally underhandedly, to assume it, and the only reason someone would do that would be because he wanted to trick him. As we know, Othello tragically misunderstood Iago; he had no reason to mistrust him or think Iago would want to trick him; Iago knew this and could thus deceive Othello in this way most of the time.

2.2.ii *Lying*

Lying, on the other hand, is a deceptive move obtained by means of a communicative goal. Furthermore, the term is reserved for deception by commission, of the sub-type positive deception simpliciter²¹ obtained through assertion. One goal is communicative: that B assume A intends B to assume x (which is a true assumption of course) the top goal being that B thence assume x , which is a deceptive goal if A does not assume x . It is a double deception, however, because there is also implicit in the assertion a lower order and instrumental act of pretending: if one asserts something which one does not assume to be true, then one is pretending to assume it, one is behaving as if one assumed it, since an utterance carries a speaker's conventional commitment to that which one asserts.

Lying is, thus, an act of insincerity, since it involves pretending to express something one assumes.

²¹ Cf. Chisholm & Feehan (1977) «The lulent to deceive», in *Journal of Philosophy*, 74:3, pp. 143-146 for their four basic types.

Pretending is, thus, at the base of any strategy for deception, and so, understandably and rightly, Iago's theme song.

Although Iago usually prefers to deceive by more complex and indirect means, there are also many straight lies to be found among his utterances; their interest lies, rather than in themselves, in their function within the larger structure as Iago's discourse strategies unfold.

2.2.iii *Acting*

We distinguish *acting* from *pretending*, forcing perhaps a little the everyday use of the terms in English; where *pretending* is deceptive, *acting* is not. It involves communicating, directly or indirectly to one's hearer that one is pretending, and by so doing one annuls the counterfeit and no deception can occur: by disclosing that one is pretending that x , one discloses one does not assume x and thus cannot presume to have B assume x through it.

A and B are thus accomplices in a game which involves the simultaneous entertainment or assumption of two contradictory worlds: one, the « real world » where x is false (a pretence), and the other, a fictional or imaginary world where x is true.

It is in this sense that we think it might be possible to consider not only acting between friends at the expense of a third person, but also the relationship between a dramatic representation and the spectator or oblique addressee.

Within our text itself, Iago, in the unmasking scene by Emilia, is actually desperately *acting* for her, although he is, of course, *pretending* towards the others present. She refuses to be his accomplice: his one miscalculation of his interactants' assumptions, and that which brings about his downfall.

Acting, thus, as we define it, is not a deceptive strategy in itself; *pretending to be acting* would, however, qualify to be such. The pairs *joking* and *pretending to be joking*,

being ironic and *pretending to be being ironic* share the characteristics of *acting* and *pretending to be acting*, respectively. The common saying: « Many a true word is spoken in jest » testifies to the unexceptionality of these indirect strategies.

Iago, of course, plays with these schemes. He is often ironic with his oblique addressee, or included third person, the spectator, at the expense of Othello.

This brings us to the more complex strategies which involve what we have generally termed indirect deception, and more specifically to how it is that Iago can be both true yet false to his direct interlocutors (i.e., be pretending and/or lying) and false yet true (at one remove) (i.e. ironic) to his oblique interlocutor (i.e. be acting).

As we shall see in the third section below, the following lines not only constitute indirect lies to Othello but also private jokes with the spectator, or at least attempts to make him his accomplice; they, therefore, are also cases of his acting for the spectator²².

« Why say they are vild and false? », (III.iii, 169)

« Though I perchance am vicious in my guesse

²² We do not maintain, of course, that the spectator has necessarily been a willing accomplice of Iago's, although see Halliwell-Philips' note reported in Furness ed. *op. cit.* p. 397 that at least in the 17th century Iago's part was sometimes played by a popular comedian. Nor can we suggest that all spectators would have reacted in the same way remembering just how heterogenous the audience was in Shakespeare's time, (cf. Bennett) and even now. It is certainly not hard, anyway, to imagine a deal of audience participation, from the « penny stinkards » at least, whether they saw him as Vice or Devil (cf. Leah Scragg's « Iago- Vice or Devil? » in K. Muir (ed.)), as Joker (cf. W. H. Auden *op. cit.*) or as Zanni (cf. Barbara Heliodora C. De Mendonça's « 'Othello': A Tragedy built on a Comic Structure », also in K. Muir (ed.)). De Mendonça's thesis is particularly attractive for it allows us to see that the spectator could be induced to see Iago as winking at him and *acting* for his benefit; he would thus be able to enjoy the sport, afforded by Iago's witcraft, in mock horror until this turns into real horror and he realizes that Iago has been deceiving him all along too, that he was only *pretending to be acting* for him, *pretending* to be a Zanni.

(As I confesse it is my Natures plague
 To spy into Abuses, and of my iealousie
 Shapes faults that are not)... », (III.iii, 170-172)
 « I am glad of this... », (III.iii, 222)
 « I speake not yet of prooffe: » (III.iii, 225)
 It is impossible you should see this (III.iii, 463)

2.3. *How to lie while saying the truth*

2.3.o *Indirect deception*

We come, thus, to a brief exposition of some indirect deception strategies used by Iago, with particular emphasis on those which might be said to involve the speaker using the truth to deceive; in other words, on those strategies where the speaker intends both to deceive the hearer as to *y*, and also that what he says or conveys at the first level, *x*, be true.

2.3.i *Indirect lies*

Indirect lies are that sub-set of deceptive moves where a communicative sub-goal may be either truthful or deceptive but which have at least one super-goal which is deceptive and achieved communicatively. We shall, however, be concentrating exclusively on the second type where the sub-goal is true and the super-goal false.

This, we submit, is essentially the strategy that Iago uses when he says to Othello:

« I know not that: but such a Handkerchiefe
 (I am sure it was your wiues) did I to day
 See Cassio wipe his Beard with ». (III.iii, 499-501)

(We shall ignore, for the present, the straight lie, of his opening: « I know not that » (cf. III.iii, 358-359).

Iago does assume, (he knows), that the handkerchief in question belongs to Desdemona, so here he can safely,

²³ Cf. C. Castelfranchi & J.M. Vincent, and J.M. Vincent & C. Castelfranchi (*ops. cit.*), for the complete set.

and ironically, assert the truth, and, although we do not know whether it is true that he actually saw Cassio wipe his beard with it (although we might suspect he is lying here)²⁴, one of the presuppositions of what he says: that Cassio has the handkerchief in his possession, is, of course true: Iago engineered it so that Cassio would come to have it in his possession — he left it in Cassio's quarters himself. And, furthermore, it is possible that Cassio could have wiped his beard with it since he had no idea of its special significance²⁵ and so had no reason to treat it any differently from any other handkerchief (the fact that he gave it to Bianca for her to copy the pattern only means he thought it was particularly attractive. Shakespeare's Cassio, unlike Cinthio's Capo di Squadra²⁶, did not recognize it as Desdemona's), and someone else might have been able to see him wipe his beard with it, even Othello.

So far we have three certain truths: *it is Desdemona's handkerchief*, (asserted in the subordinate); *Iago is sure it is*, (asserted); *Cassio does have it*, or has at some time during the day had it, (presupposed); one possible truth: *Cassio wiped his beard with it in public*, (asserted in the

²⁴ There would not, it seems, have been time to have done so since he has only just been given it by Emilia; however, the question of time in *Othello* is notoriously problematic so we cannot base ourselves on this too much. (cf. Allen for the time question, for example).

²⁵ For this see *Othello's* lines in III iv 68-81:

« That Handkerchiefe/ Did an Ægyptian to my Mother giue:/
She was a Charmer, and could almost read/ The thoughts of people.
She told her, while she kept it,/ 'Twould make her Amiable, and
subdue my Father/ Intirely to her loue: But if she lost it,/ Or
made a Giufft of it, my Fathers eye/ Should hold her loathed, and
his Spirits should hunt/ After new Fancies. She dying, gaue it me,/
And bid me (when my Fate should have me Wiu'd)/ To giue it
her. I did so; and take heede on't/ Make it a Darling, like your
precious eye:/ To loose't, or giue't away, were such perdition,/ As
nothing else could match. »

²⁶ As quoted in Furness ed. (*op. cit.*), p. 383; Shakespeare's main source for the plot of the play was Giouanbattista Giralaldi Cinthio's *Novella VII* of his 'Hecatommithi' (1565).

subordinate); one probable lie: Iago saw him doing it (asserted).

Let us look now further²⁷ below the surface assertions and examine the other presuppositions and implications²⁸ of what Iago says which are none other than his intended super-goals: that which he intends Othello to assume by following a chain of reasoning with some intentionally fallacious links, some logical and some suggested by the context (i.e. what Iago assumes Othello assumes): If Cassio has the handkerchief someone must have given it to him (not necessarily true, i.e. fallacious, and in this case false anyway); since the handkerchief is Desdemona's, that « someone » must be Desdemona (again not necessarily true, and anyway false here); since Desdemona, as Othello knows, knows its special significance, then if she gave it to him (fallacious and false as we have just seen) it was as a love-token (not necessarily true and anyway false here because the premise is false). This would signify that they have a very intimate relationship (false anyway). Furthermore, since Cassio wipes his beard with it he treats it with little respect (fallacious, and false because the premises

²⁷ Apologies to the quicker-witted reader for what is to follow; however, we think that in at least one case it might be useful to spell out a little more clearly the inferential steps. This, of course, is not in anyway rigorously nor, indeed, completely done; we hope only that it have some correspondence to common-sense and be not too far from a rough natural logic, which is, after all, what we as interactants use. Cf. G. Lakoff (1971), « Linguistics and Natural Logic » in D. Davidson and G. Harman eds. *Semantics of Natural Language*, Dordrecht, Reidel, pp. 545-665, and cf. also G. Leech (1981) *op. cit.*, chapter 9 « Logic in Everyday Language » pp. 150-177 for a simple exposition.

²⁸ The details of the notions of presupposition and implicature are not totally clarified as yet in the semantics and pragmatics literature; so we shall merely indicate some recent debates on the subject from which the interested reader might begin (cf. Oh & Dineen (eds.), and some introductions to Semantics, although not so elementary, where the notions may be found: G. Leech (1981) *op. cit.*, chapter 14 « Presuppositions » pp. 277-300; J. Lyons (1980) *Semantics*, Cambridge, C.U.P.; and R. Kempson (1975), *Presupposition and the Delimitation of Semantics*, Cambridge, C.U.P.

are all false anyway), so he does not even respect her (fallacious, and false anyway, as we see when Iago tries to draw Cassio into prurient appreciation of her (II.ii, 31-41)).

Iago, not unusually, thus accomplishes several objectives simultaneously: the principal one of making Othello suspect, or, at this point in the discourse, believe that Desdemona and Cassio are having an affair, and this he does communicatively. Othello is meant to understand that he is implying it. He also accomplishes we believe, at least one collateral fixed goal: that of causing Othello the maximum amount of distress possible. All this, moreover, as we have seen, he accomplishes by expressing some propositions which he assumes to be true, and at worst, others which are certainly possible and anyway not disprovable.

This example allows us to introduce some of the means by which Iago can be seen to deceive Othello and at the same time be seen to be uttering the truth: insinuation, allusion and reticence, everyday terms now, handed down to us from classical rhetoric²⁹, are indeed three of the principal means or strategies he uses.

2.3.ii *Insinuation*

Insinuation is a communicative move with a communicative supergoal which consists in an (inferential) assumption with, attached to it, a deliberate pejorative value-judgement of someone or something which is somehow significant to the hearer. (Insinuations are not always necessarily mendacious or calumnious, of course, they can simply be sneaky ways of conveying something nasty but true). Iago uses this strategy mostly, however, in order to simultaneously convey falsehoods relatively under-cover, and to be able to elaborate more freely on the pejorative aspect. It is, in other words, a vehicle for calumny, which

²⁹ For our definitions of the terms and of what we believe they involve cf. C. Castelfranchi & J.M. Vincent and J.M. Vincent & C. Castelfranchi (*ops. cit.*).

we define as: a lie involving a negative value judgement of someone.

Examples of insinuation whose outcome is calumnious are rife in Iago, and among the better known and most widely commented aspects of Iago's deception of Othello³⁰.

We shall thus limit ourselves to the following single, though rich, extract where he perpetrates calumnious insinuation on Othello of Desdemona:

- I: « Look too't:
 I know our Country disposition well:
 In Venice, they do let Heauen see the pranks
 They dare not shew their Husbandes.
 Their best Conscience
 Is not to leaue't vndone, but kept vnknowne.
- O.: Dost thou say so?
- I.: She did deceiue her Father, marrying you,
 And when she seem'd to shake, and feare your lookes,
 She lou'd most
- O.: And so she did
- I.: Why go too then:
 Shee that so young could giue out such a Seeming
 To seele her Fathers eyes vp, close as Oake,
 He thought 'twas Witchcraft » (III,iii,229-243)

Iago's first statement that Venetian women are immoral and devious insinuates that Desdemona, who is Venetian, will also, therefore be immoral and devious, will commit "pranks" and hide them from her husband (a fallacious syllogism based on argument from general to specific)³¹.

His second statement that she deceived her father insinuates that she is a habitual deceiver and is therefore deceiving Othello now (fallacious: argument from specific to general); and his third, on how she seemed to be, not coinciding with what she was in reality, provides another support for believing that she is good at concealing her

³⁰ Cf. for example Joseph, Coulthard, and Serpieri (*ops. cit.*).

³¹ A simple reference work on rhetorical devices was found to be Lanham (1968). But cf. Joseph; Vickers; and Bennett p. 61, note 4 for an idea of what Shakespeare's rhetorical education might have included as well as that of his audiences.

true nature and passions and is therefore now also feigning a decent, chaste nature. Othello admits the truth that she loved him seemingly despite his roughness and frightening exterior (he believes he is rough, and is not terribly sure he understands why Desdemona's gentle sensibility chose him, so his insecurity³² on this make him vulnerable to Iago's insidiousness). Iago then goes on through allusion (« *such a Seeming* ») and more insinuation by suspension or ellipsis: if her father thought it was through witchcraft that she fell in love with you, so surprised was he at this, she must have been very skillful indeed at dissimulating her true nature.

2.3.iii *Allusion*

Allusion is yet another common instrument of Iago's which is "germaine" to insinuation. It consists in referring, without directly naming, to something which one's hearer is meant to already know, and this, through textual or contextual inference; and it involves letting the hearer understand that one intends him to infer it, that is, that one is purposely not referring to it openly, the supergoal being to imply its unmentionableness and one's own tactfulness. Iago, in his exchange with Montano as they watch Cassio who is pathetically the worse for drink, after having insinuated (mendaciously) that Cassio has a chronic drink problem (« And do but see his *vice*,/'Tis to his *vertue*, a iust Equinox,/The one as long as the'other. Tis pittie of him: ») (II.ii, 140-142) — (with an embedded compliment in the allusion to Cassio's *vertue*, which Iago does not assume but throws in for good measure with the fixed super-goal of reinforcing everybody's view of him as a generous, loyal soul) he then continues to touch upon it

³² Cf. for example, Fiedler (1973) *The Stranger in Shakespeare*, London, Croom Helm, on Othello's status as an outsider; Rymer's comments as discussed by Alexander (1968) ;and Serpieri's comments on « l'opposizione antropologica » (*op. cit.*, p. 219 ff.).

through allusion: « his infirmitie » (144), « I do loue Cassio well: and would do much/ To cure him of *this euill* » (164-165). He does, also, certainly come close to a straight lie when he says: « 'Tis euermore a prologue to his sleepe, He'le watch the Horologe a double Set,/ If Drinke rocke not his Cradle » (146-149), but this is presumably because he has been asked a straight question by Montano: « But is he often thus? », and allusion is superfluous at this point or indeed so is any other more indirect strategy.

The other straight lie: « I do loue Cassio well » is necessary here presumably because Iago needs to give this assumption quite quickly and unequivocally, they have only just met and Iago needs the assumption for his further goals.

Iago uses allusion on other occasions to rub salt into Othello's wounds, as it were, although he simultaneously is pretending to be tactful: « Would you would beare your Fortune, like a Man » (IV.i, 73). Allusion, might however, of course, not always have more than simple textual, anaphoric function, apart from its continuing to re-iterate a falsehood.

In « Have you not hurt your Heade? » (IV.i, 70), there would certainly seem to be a mocking, and rather daring, allusion to Othello's horns, the horns of the cuckold. The entire dialogue thereafter openly discusses the Cuckold's plight with Iago permitting himself facetious quips on the theme and finally culminates in another daring calumnious allusion, through textual inference to Desdemona: « Your case is better. Oh 'tis the spight of hell, the Fiends Arch-mock,/ to lip a wanton in a secure Cowch;/ And to suppose her chaste. » (82-85). The term « wanton » attaches itself to Desdemona; Iago has not yet dared to be more direct with his calumny yet; only later, after the scene which finally convinces Othello, when he sees Cassio and Iago supposedly discussing Desdemona, does he allow himself to say:

« the foolish woman your wife » (IV.i, 193)

« Oh, 'tis foule in her » (IV.i, 219)

« strangle her in her bed/Euen the bed she has contaminated »
(IV.i, 226)

Such directness would have been far too dangerous for him if he had attempted it when Othello was not so distraught and more himself, before Iago's subtle « poyson » had « changed » him.

2.3.iv *Reticence*

Iago makes ample and extremely effective use of this strategy throughout, but most notably in the opening exchanges of III iii where he first sows the seeds of suspicion; indeed it is ideally suited to this purpose. Reticence or rather, perhaps, feigned reticence, consists, in our view, in letting one's hearer understand that one is concealing or holding back from saying something; the hearer must understand that there is a particular reason for this and what this goal is, he has to understand that the speaker wants him to understand that he means to hold back on something and the reasons for doing this, over and above getting him to understand just what he might be trying to conceal and that he wants the hearer to understand that he wants him to realize what it is.

Now, if what he is pretending to be concealing yet wants to be understood is false, then we naturally have a case of indirect lying (our general category); if it is such that it involves a pejorative value-judgement, then it is an insinuation (i.e. it is a means which serves to insinuate), and if it involves something which the speaker assumes might already be known or suspected by the hearer, and which he wishes to recall or re-iterate, and let him understand that this is what he wants to do, then it is an allusion. (i.e. a means which serves to allude).

Iago, as we have said, is particularly fond of these strategies, as many commentators have already remarked³³. We shall, therefore, limit ourselves to merely indicating

³³ Cf. for example again M. Coulthard (*op. cit.*) as quoted in note 6 above, and Sister M. Joseph's hints: « seeming reluctant and thereby more convincing » (*op. cit.*, p. 235).

those passages or sections of dialogue where it is most significant.

To be more precise, Iago pretends to be being reticent or he uses reticence intentionally to pretend to seem loyal, worried, to make Othello believe even more in what he apparently has to prise out of him. Of course apart from being a continuous pretence, his reticence is almost always mendacious:

- O.: « Hath he said anything?
 I.: He hath (my Lord) but be you well assur'd
 No more than he'le vn-swear
 O.: What hath he said?
 I.: Why that he did: I know not what he did.
 O.: What? What?
 I.: Lye
 O.: With her?
 I.: With her? On her: what you will » (IV.i, 35-43)

Iago, for example, although he answers affirmatively to Othello's first question then does not satisfy its illocutionary force; (it is like asking someone if they know the time and they answer back « yes » and leave it at that; « indirect » reticence then, followed by a half-truth or deliberate ambiguity (see below) used for feigned reticence.

Then when Othello is forced to ask directly, he pretends to start to tell him, then reins in with a very obvious reticence where he even pretends to be pretending to lie (see below, section 2.3.ix), « I know not what he did ». A brief look at the dialogue in III.iii will serve to further illustrate several of our points:

- 109 I.: Did Michael Cassio
 (a daring, noseey question from an inferior)
 When he woo'd my Lady, know of your loue?
 O.: He did from first to last:
 Why dost/thou aske?
 I.: But for a satisfaction of my Thought,/no further harme
 (Reticence through a polite refusal to answer, with an
 insinuation slipped in: « harme »)
 115 O.: Why of that thought, Iago?
 I.: I did not think he had bin acquainted with hir
 (obvious lie)

- O.: Oh yes, and went betweene us very oft
 I.: Indeed?
(Another chance to insinuate)
 O.: Indeed? Indeed. Discern'st thou ought in that?
(Iago has manipulated Othello into asking him questions which allows him to put on reticence to further provoke Othello's curiosity and annoyance):
- 130 Is he not honest?
 I.: Honest, My Lord?
 O.: Honest? I, honest
 I.: My Lord, for ought I know
 O.: What do'st thou thinke?
 I.: Thinke, my Lord?
 O.: Thinke, My Lord? Alas thou ecchos't me;
 As if there were some Monster in thy thought
- 128 Too hideous to be shewne. Thou dost mean something:
 132 thou cried'st Indeede?
 And did'st contract, and purse thy brow together
- 135 If thou do'st loue me,
 Shew me thy thought.
(It is here that we see that Othello has been deceived by Iago's feigned reticence)
- I.: My Lord you know I loue you
(Iago continues his reticence, with an indirect lie: presupposition faking, see below, 2.3.viii)
- O.: I think thou do'st
 And for I know thou'rt full of Loue, and Honestie,
- 140 And weigh'st thy Words before thou giu'st them breath
 Therefore these stops of thine, fright me the more:
 For such things in a false disloyall Knaue
 Are trickes of Custome: but in a man that's iust,
 They're close dilations, working from the heart,
- 145 That Passion cannot rule »

So, it is clear that Othello, is deceived, not because he is a slow-witted dupe, as some commentators would have it³⁴; it is merely that he is mistaken in his first basic assumption that Iago is « honest » and that he « loues » Othello, that he's « loyall » and « iust »; Othello we see also

³⁴ Cf. again for example Gardner (1968), « 'Othello': A Retrospect 1900-1967 » for a discussion of this school of thought, and for a very useful overview of the critical literature on Othello in general. Cf. also Wain's (ed.) collection of readings, and especially, his Introduction.

assumes that Iago is a straightforward, down-to-earth archetypal soldier, a practical not a thinking man³⁵; everyone's rather patronising attitude towards him on this would certainly bother Iago who would thus delight to turn it back against his superiors.

And Iago the Zanni shaves another private jote with the spectator.

2.3.v *Half-truths*

The half-truth is yet another strategy we can isolate in Iago's repertoire; although it is a vague everyday label we think it might be useful to define it as a type of indirect lie, one where one deceives while saying the truth, or at least part of the truth. The other omitted part of truth must obviously be a relevant goal of the hearer's, i.e. it must somehow be significant to the hearer.

The half-truth is misleading, and it is so because the hearer assumes he is being given fully relevant information (the « whole truth ») since he would assume that something like the Gricean conversational maxim of Quantity³⁶ is being adhered to by his interlocutor.

An example might be found in Iago's remarks to Roderigo when, for example, he tells him that Cassio must be eliminated otherwise Othello (who has been replaced by Cassio as Governor of Cyprus) will be leaving, taking Desdemona with him of course, and (according to Iago anyway) they would not be going back to Venice; so, unless some accident retain Othello in Cyprus, Roderigo will have no chances left to « enjoy » Desdemona:

I.: « Where-in none can be so determinate, as the / remouing of Cassio »

R.: How do you mean remouing him?

I.: Why, by making him vncapable of Othello's place: knocking out his braines » (IV.II, 259-264)

³⁵ Cf. Empson; and Booth's description again (note 3 above), and also Alexander on the faithfulness of Shakespeare's characterizations.

³⁶ Cf. Grice, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

The whole truth is revealed to us in Iago's soliloquy afterwards³⁷:

« Now, whether he kill Cassio,
Or Cassio him, or each do kill the other,
Eevery way makes my gaine » (V.i, 15-17)

Continuing, now, in our exposition of some of the more elemental or basic types one can use, and Iago uses, for lying while saying the truth, we come to what we have elsewhere³⁸ termed deliberate ambiguity (2.3.vi), embedded lies (2.3.vii), presupposition faking (2.3.viii) and lastly to pretending to be pretending and pretending to lie (2.3.ix).

2.3.vi *Deliberate ambiguity*

Iago's patterning of his strategies on the « Diuinitie of hell » involves as we have said, manipulating appearances³⁹, playing the « seems/ is » game, that is making what are real and innocent events appear in a false and damaging light. In other words, he manipulates contexts, shuffling the cards which carry his various interlocutors' contextually determined expectations, based on their assumptions. He thus can be said to exploit the inherent ambiguity or multiple interpretations of any event or sentence — it is the contexts which disambiguate and give meanings to utterances; different people often have quite different contexts in their heads (or can be induced to have).

Iago induces a context and thus an interpretation, when, for example, he convinces Roderigo that Desdemona and Cassio are not just-good-friends:

³⁷ Cf. again N. Coghill, (*op. cit.*) for example, on the function of Iago's soliloquies, not always totally trustworthy in Iago's case, although here one would not need to doubt him.

³⁸ C. Castelfranchi & J.M. Vincent, and J.M. Vincent & C. Castelfranchi (*ops. cit.*); although « embedded lies » is coined here.

³⁹ Cf. C. Castelfranchi & J.M. Vincent (*op. cit.*, pp. 10-11) on how appearances can be deceptive.

- « I.: Didst thou
not see her paddle with the palme of his hand? Didst not
marke that?
R.: Yes, that I did: but that was but curtesie.
I.: Leacherie by this hand: an Index, and obscure prologue to
the History of Lust and foule Thoughts » (II.i, 285-289),

(as he had previously announced he would do:

« With as little web as this, will I ensnare as great a Fly
as Cassio » (II.i, 192-193))

He does this also when he advises Cassio to ask Desdemona to plead for him to Othello (good advice), and then uses the appearances for his (non-good) ulterior motive of proving that Desdemona is over-fond of Cassio.

- I.: « And what's he then,
That saies I play the Villaine?
When this aduise is free I giue and honest,
Proball to thinking, and indeed the course
To win the Moore again.
..... How am I then a Villaine,
To Counsell Cassio to this parallel course,
Directly to his good? Diuinitie of hell,
When diuels will the blackest sinnes put on,
They do suggest at first with heauenly shewes,
As I do now,
So will I turne her vertue into pitch, ... »
« ...And out of her owne goodnesse make the Net,
That shall en-mash them all ». (II.ii, 365-393)

His speech is an explicit enough treatise on the subject.

He does this also most notably in the scene where he gets Cassio to talk about his mistress, Bianca, yet making Othello believe that they are talking about Desdemona; Iago tells him he will ask him to talk about their affair and he tells him to:

« ... marke the Fleares, the Gybes and notable Scornes
That dwell in euery Region of his face.
For I will make him tell the Tale anew.
Where, how, how oft, how long ago, and when,
He hath, and is againe to cope your Wife.
I say but marke his gesture: » (IV.i, 98-101)

So, Othello is primed to interpret what he is about to witness as concerning Desdemona. We know what to expect because Iago tells us that Bianca is a « Huswife, ... a Creature/ that dotes on Cassio... He, when he heares of her, cannot restraine/ From the excesse of Laughter ». (IV.i, 109-115), « As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad/ ... And his vnbookish Iealousie must construe/ Poore Cassio's smiles behaviours and light gestures/ Quite in the wrong ». Thus Iago is quite conscious of and quite explicit about his strategy of using appearances to deceive.

We assume Iago thinks Othello might be able to overhear him and Cassio, also, since he makes a point of getting Desdemona's name in at the beginning (123-124) (we assume in a slightly louder voice) and then, (probably lowering it a little) he mentions Bianca's; this is a banal enough ploy. His second linguistic ploy is slightly more refined. Assuming Othello can hear⁴⁰:

« She giues it out, that you shall marry her./ Do you intend it? »
(134-135)

would perhaps be a case of deliberate linguistic ambiguity. One based on the indeterminacy of reference of the pronouns « she » and « her » which can thus be seen to be interpreted in two ways here according to the two different contexts Iago has been careful to create in his two different hearers. Assuming that is possible, if not true, of Bianca, it is certainly false of Desdemona, and so we think it might well be classed among indirect lying strategies, although here the two messages, the one true the other false, are in parallel, as it were, rather than one being an inferentially reached implicature or super-goal of the other.

⁴⁰ Some commentators, such as Serpieri, assume he cannot hear them and that it is all based on Iago's use of Cassio's facial expressions and gestures; but cf. also the annotations in Furness, (*op. cit.*, p. 243) where it is clear that others assume he can hear.

2.3.vii *Embedded lies*

An interesting example of what might be called the embedded lie is Iago's:

« I thinke you thinke I loue/you » (II.ii, 339, to Cassio),

is a case of a true statement with an embedded false subordinate proposition (« I loue you »); it implies the truth of the subordinate. However, it is true that Iago thinks that Cassio thinks that Iago loves him; it is true that Cassio thinkss that Iago loves him; but it is not true that Iago loves him.

Such a round-about way of saying « I love you » could only, in normal circumstances evoke suspicion on the part of the hearer but Iago knew that Cassio did not have his wits about him at the time and so could afford a little « sport » to himself and for us, presumably.

2.3.viii *Presupposition faking*

A seemingly similar sentence he reserves for Othello:

« You know I loue you » (III.iii, 137).

This is not, however a simple case of an embedded lie, but rather one which also involves presupposition faking. To say « you know I love you » commits oneself by the factive presupposition carried by « know »⁴¹ to the truth of its embedded complement proposition: I love you. So, by saying « you know I loue you » Iago is lying by faking a presupposition, that is, by pretending that a presupposition holds, since it is the case that he does not assume

⁴¹ Cf. P. Kiparsky and C. Kiparsky (1970) « Fact » for the classic first treatise on this in the proto-pragmatics literature (in M. Bierwisch and K. Heidolph eds., *Progress in Linguistics*, The Hague, Mouton, pp. 143-173, and also G. Leech (1981) *op. cit.*, chapter 15 « Factuality » pp. 301-318.

the truth of the embedded proposition: I (Iago) love you (Othello).

« 'Tis pittie on him » (II.ii, 143),

said by Iago to Montano of Cassio in the drinking scene mentioned before, also involves a lying presupposition: the truth (i.e. falsity) of what is alluded to (Cassio's Vice) and Iago's compassion/ friendship.

2.3.ix *Pretending to be pretending and pretending to be lying*

The final class of strategy we shall mention here as comprising deceiving while saying the truth, and which we have called elsewhere also « feigned deception »⁴², is based on the assumption that the speaker thinks the hearer suspects that he is not saying the truth.

First an extract from the text where we believe Iago is using this strategy:

« I.: More of this matter cannot I report,/ But Men are Men:
the best sometimes forget,/ Though Cassio did some little wrong
to him,/ As men in rage strike those that wish them best,/ Yet
surely Cassio, I beleeve receiu'd/ From him that fled, some strange
Indignitie,/ Which patience could not passe ».

« O.: I know Iago. / Thy honestie and loue doth mince this
matter, / Making it light to Cassio... » (II.ii, 267-276)

This extract comes at the end of Iago's description of the brawl to Othello which instilled the suspicion in Othello that he is trying to protect and justify Cassio, so he is primed now to assume that whatever Iago says will not be the truth if that would damage Cassio, thus, Iago, must actually say the truth if he wants Othello to come to assume differently.

⁴² C. Castelfranchi & J. M. Vincent, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

Iago then is saying what he believes to be the truth (my italics) letting Othello, however, believe that he is pretending to be saying the truth and that, therefore, he is not saying the truth; in other words Iago is pretending to be pretending to be saying the truth or pretending to be lying. Now the reason why he should want Othello to think that he is lying or not saying the truth is obviously instrumental to a further goal; by pretending to be concealing the truth he implies that this truth must be damaging, since the basic assumption is that he is a loyal friend of Cassio's. So, through it, Othello comes to assume that Cassio did not probably need much provocation or even that he was the one who did the provoking, and anyway that he did not behave in a way fitting his duty at the time: to « looke to the guard ». Furthermore, this strategy also serves to reinforce the assumption of Iago's « honestie » and loyalty at the same time.

The exchanges between Othello and Iago which preceded these last mentioned lines and which laid the way in part for them as we said, consisted on the other hand, in the use of a related but reverse strategy: pretending to mean to pretend or to lie, or pretending to be pretending to be lying, or even pretending to be pretending to be pretending to be saying the truth (also called the manifest lie)⁴³. It consists in saying something false this time and letting the other think you are saying something false and therefore that you intend to deceive him; in order to avoid being deceived the hearer thinks he must assume the opposite, which is indeed the speaker's goal when that truth would be either damaging to someone else, or instrumental to him, as here:

« I do not know... I cannot speake / Any beginning to this
pescuish oddes... ». (II.ii, 204... 209)

is false for Iago and obviously meant to strike Othello as false (a sub-routine he uses here is of course reticence);

⁴³ C. Castelfranchi & J.M. Vincent, *op. cit.*, p. 25-27.

since he assumes Iago would only deceive him for benevolent reasons, to hide something damaging to a friend, he both assumes the true state of affairs and that it must be damaging.

Iago uses this strategy because he has other interlocutors or hearers to think about: Cassio and Montano who must at all costs be kept believing he is a good loyal friend. They know, like the spectator does, that Iago is lying « to protect his friend », the spectator, however, is one-up on them, because he knows that Iago is doing this to deceive them too, since Cassio is not a friend and since his goal is to actually ruin Cassio.

This scene, then, is particularly interesting because of the number of interlocutors Iago is feeding messages to simultaneously of at least three different types — one to Othello with the goal of seeming to be wanting to protect Cassio and thereby ruining Cassio; one to Cassio and Montano, obliquely, who know what happened and therefore only see that Iago is lying to protect his friend perhaps rather clumsily but well-meaningly; another message is meant for the spectator who sees all this feint on Iago's part. As far as the spectator goes he is *acting* for him and he is *pretending* to Othello and to Cassio and Montano; as far as Cassio and Montano *think*, he is *acting* to *them*, but *pretending* to Othello.

3. « *Not Poppy, nor Mandragora...* »

In this section we shall consider some more complex exchanges between Iago and his various interlocutors in order to see how the above illustrated strategies or routines function and interplay in Iago's witcraft and how they fit together in the unfolding discourse.

Perhaps the most studied scene in Shakespeare, and certainly in *Othello*, Act III scene iii, begins with Cassio and Desdemona, in Desdemona's rooms; she is reassuring Cassio that she will do everything she can to help him be reconciled with Othello; Cassio sees Othello and Iago

arriving and in his embarrassment leaves hurriedly without greeting them; this is a chance happening which Iago is quick to take advantage of with his « Ha! I like not that! », and thus begins slowly but surely to work his « poyson » through reticence, insinuation, allusion and presupposition feigning as we have seen.

So Iago finally manages to bring Othello to the point of *asking him* to utter his thoughts (his « worst » thoughts, even) and Iago has achieved this by means of his main basic strategy (and favourite theme): pretending or feigning, that is, deceiving as to his assumptions, feelings and intentions, and reinforcing his interactants' image of him as « honest ». Iago answers:

« Good my Lord pardon me;
 Though I am bound to euery Acte of dutie,
 I am not bound to that: All slaves are free:
 Vtter my Thoughts? Why say they are vild and falce?
 As where's that Palace, where in to foule things
 Sometimes intrude not? Who ha's that breast so pure,
 Wherein vncleanly Apprehensions
 Keepe Leete and Law-dayes and in Sessions sit
 With meditations lawfull

O.: Thou dost conspire against thy friend (Iago)
 If thou but think'st him wrong'd and mak'st his eare
 A Stranger to thy Thoughts

I.: I do beseech you,
 Though I perchance am vicious in my guesse
 (As I confesse it is my Natures plague
 To spy in to Abuses, and of my iealousie
 Shapes faults that are not) that your wisdome
 From one, that so imperfectly coniects
 Would take no notice, nor build your selfe a trouble
 Out of his scattering and vnshure obseruance ». (III.iii, 157-176)

Iago begins by pretending to be reticent, or, rather by pretending to not want to answer and at the same time insinuating that his thoughts are « foule » and « vncleanly »; furthermore he justifies his reticence by pretending to be pretending that he's a person who « shapes faults that are not » (he knows he is such a person) and therefore that

his thoughts could be « vild » and « falce »; the hypocrite's false modesty ⁴⁴.

O.: « What dost thou meane?

I.: Good name in Man, & Woman ...

O.: Ile know thy Thoughts

I.: You cannot, if my heart were in your hand,
Nor shall not, whil'st 'tis in my custodie.

O.: Ha?

I.: Oh, beware my Lord of iealousie,

It is the green e-ey'd Monster, which does mocke
The meate it feeds on. That Cuckold liues in blisse
Who certaine of his Fate, loues not his wronger:
... » (III.iii, 180... 196)

Othello comes to assume that he's pretending to be such a dishonest person and so asks « honest » Iago to continue: « What dost thou meane? » (an intelligent man's asking for the point or super-goal, or illocutionary force, also one who likes things straight), « Ile know thy Thoughts ». Iago rejoinders with a very explicit case of reticence, or it might be better to say, refusal, which is the stronger because of the implications carried on what is being withheld, coming as it does from an inferior to a superior: if he dares say « you shall not » to his superior Iago must have a very serious reason, Othello must assume. He is thus allowed by Othello to arrive at a very strong and effective insinuation where he finally gives a name to the topic for the first time: « jealousy », « Cuckold ».

⁴⁴ Cf. also Hudson's comment in Furness, ed. (*op. cit.*), p. 173 « So men often prate about, and even magnify, their own faults, in order to cheat others in to persuasion of their rectitude and candour »; and if a further authority is needed to testify to this strategy, Quevedo in his *Los Sueños* provides an astute description in this vein, of hypocrites and false modesty (quoted in Italian in Castelfranchi & Vincent also: « proprio mentre dicono di essere indegni e perfidi peccatori ed i peggiori uomini della terra, mentre si chiamano bestie e somari con finta umiltà, non fanno che ingannare pur dicendo il vero, perché siccome sono ipocriti, son proprio come dicono »).

Furthermore, Iago also has something for his ever present second interlocutor or oblique addressee: the spectator. His « Why say they are vild and falce? », and his « Though I perchance am vicious in my guesse/ (As I confesse it is my Natures plague/ To spy into Abuses, and of my iealousie/ Shapes faults that are not) » do indeed correspond with Iago's assumptions, i.e. they are true for him; Othello is meant to assume that they are false, he does, and is thus deceived into believing a falsehood since they are true. The spectator sees the deception perpetrated on Othello, he sees Othello thinks Iago is pretending to be a not very reliable person, that he is being modest about himself, in other words that he is lying, while he also knows that Iago knows this and that Iago on the other hand is merely pretending (to be pretending to think he is unreliable, to be modest etc.) i.e. that Iago knows it is true of himself. This sharing of secret knowledge (secret with respect to Othello) creates a complicity between Iago and the spectator, so while he can be said to be pretending with Othello he is acting (joking, being ironic) for the spectator⁴⁵.

A little later on in the same scene, Othello eventually says « Ile see before I doubt; when I doubt proue » (219). Iago answers:

« I am glad of this: For now I shall have reason
To shew the Loue and Duty that I beare you
With franker spirit. Therefore (as I am bound)
Receive it from me. I speake not yet of prooffe:
Looke to your wife, observe her well with Cassio, » (222-226)

« I am glad of this » is true for Iago but not quite for the reason he gives Othello, although it is true that he is glad because now he will be able to speak more frankly. He embeds the lie concerning his « Loue » for Othello as

⁴⁵ Cf. also Joseph for a similar point « Iago represents the most remarkable instance in Shakespeare of ironical dramatic *ethos*, for by the same words and acts he causes the other persons in the play to think well of him and the audience to think ill » (p. 282).

if taking it for granted (which indeed Othello does) and couples it with the «Duty» that he does indeed have towards Othello as his commander, although he is also implying a duty towards a friend he believes wronged: he is only going to mention his fears because he is bound by love and duty. It all sounds as if he is pretending to be interpreting Othello's previous words as a go-ahead to be more specific as well as expressing his gladness that Othello is not the type who is going to let a vague suspicion worry him so he can say what he thinks without upsetting his friend too much. Iago could also actually be glad to hear that Othello not only says he would need to see some proof but also that he thinks he would then not linger in love and therefore not consume himself with jealousy; he could be glad of this either because he intuits that Othello would act decisively, or more, perhaps, because he takes it as a challenge to disprove Othello's image of himself. But this is all speculation; the point is that it all seems to hinge on what we see as the deliberate ambiguity of the anaphoric deictic «this» in the first line. «I speake not yet of prooffe» is of course literally true, but is also a case of indirect lying through the presupposition implicit in «yet» that there could be some «proofes», whereas Iago knows full well that there never could be.

We have again, therefore, cases here of deceiving while using what the spectator knows Iago sees as the truth with the resultant irony, and furthermore this use of the truth was not necessary or instrumental for the deceiving of Othello. Its main role seems to be that of involving the spectator.

The dialogue then continues with those cases of mendacious insinuation we have described (in section 2.3.ii above), then several cases where Iago uses falsehoods while pretending to mean to pretend (see section 2.3.ix above) thus getting Othello to assume the reverse:

«I am to pray you, not to straine my speech
 To grosser issues, nor to larger reach,
 Then to Suspition» (254-256)
 «Should you do so (My Lord)

My speech should fall into such vilde successe,
Which my Thoughts aym'd not » (258-260)

When he exclaims, after Othello's « I do not thinke but Desdemona's honest ». (264):

« Long liue she so;
And long liue you to thinke so! » (265-266)

he pretends to pretend to be jolly as if he was pretending he wanted to dismiss the subject, no longer dwell on it, since Othello has just said he does not doubt Desdemona's fidelity; Othello cannot then dismiss it.

Next he touches upon the unsuitability of their match, prompted by Othello's « And yet how Nature erring from it selfe » (267), with great relish, managing to put in several highly charged adjectives « rank », « foule », « vnnatural » and then pretending to pretend to lie when he says:

« But (pardon me) I do not in position/ Distinctly speake of her,
though I may feare/ Her will, recoyling to her better idgement,/ May fal to match you with her Country formes,/ And happily repent ». (275-279)

He knows this is bound to undermine Othello's innate sense of security and confidence; which has already been put to the test by Brabantio, and recalled by Iago « he thought 'twas Witchcraft ». It is his vulnerability as a (black?)⁴⁶ foreigner or outsider which is being exploited by Iago, but also that of the middle-aged man married to the young girl, and perhaps even more, his belief or self-image that he is just a rough soldier, a man-of-action a fish out of water in refined sophisticated society, and — what is more — inexperienced with the ways of women from such a society.

It is, of course, vital to Iago's goals that Othello's confidence in Desdemona's feelings and sincerity be less

⁴⁶ Cf. Fiedler (*op. cit.*) for example; Serpieri (*op. cit.*) and also the section in Furness (ed. *op. cit.*) on Othello's colour, pp. 389-396.

than invulnerable from attack by corrosive agents such as his « poyson ».

Before leaving Othello with yet more feigned advice to « scan this thing no further » (289) he lays the ground for a deceptive manipulation of events and appearances by telling Othello not to reinstate the albeit deserving Cassio, just yet, so as to enable Othello to observe him the better, especially to be able to note if Desdemona is particularly interested in the matter. Then we have another case of using the truth to deceive in the pretending to be lying strategy, or rather pretending to be pretending to say the truth:

« In the meane time,/ Let me be thought too busie in my feares,
(As worthy cause I haue to feare I am) ». (296-299)

Further on in the scene, after we have seen Desdemona drop her handkerchief, Emilia pick it up and give it to Iago, and Iago tell us how he is going to use the « Trifle », we have another explicit reference by Iago to his theme, in his excited gloating:

« The Moor already changes with my poyson:
Dangerous conceites, are in their Natures poysons,
Which at the first are scarce found to distaste:
But with a little acte vpon the blood,
Burne like the Mines of Sulphure. I did say so ». (378-383)

When Othello comes back he is indeed « changed » and the shape of the dialogue between them is very different; Othello now taking practically for granted what Iago has implanted in his mind and wishing he had been able to go on living in ignorance of it. Iago only needs, in between Othello's lamentations, to insert « How now, my Lord? » or « I am sorry to heare this » or « Is't possible my Lord? » to feign surprise that Othello should get so aroused after what they had said before, or that he is shocked that Othello should say he would rather have not known; all this serves both to mock, but also mainly to lead Othello on, until he finally demands proof; Othello also threatens Iago at this point; there is no looking back after this. After

some feigned indignant hurt feelings with just a little petulance

« Take note, take note (O World) To be direct
and honest is not safe./ I thanke you for this
profit, and from hence/ Ile love no Friend, sith
Loue breeds such offence » (435-438)

(which serves to calm Othello, even to have him apologise « Nay stay: thou should'st be honest » (439)), and a little more prompting, he takes the lead again and comes back to Othello's demand for proof: « You would be satisfied? » He then brings two sets of « circumstantial proofes » Cassio's dream and the handkerchief⁴⁷ he says he saw Cassio wipe his beard with. As we have already seen in section 2.3.i above, his use of truth on the latter occasion was quite subtle. Cassio's dream is less interesting to us although it plays a role in « thickening other proofes » (491); more interesting to us here are Iago's lines after he has asked Othello if he really wanted him to provide proof.

« ... How satisfied, My Lord?
Would you the super-vision grossely gape on?
Behold her top'd?

It were a tedious difficulty, I thinke,
To bring them to that Prospect: Damne then then,
If euer mortall eyes do see them boulster
More then their owne. What then? How then?
What shall I say? Where's Satisfaction?
It is impossible you should see this,
Were they as prime as Goates, as hot as Monkeyes,
As salt as Wolues in pride, and Fooles as grosse
As Ignorance made drunke. But yet, I say,
If imputation and strong circumstances,
Which leade directly to the doore of Truth,
Will giue you satisfaction, you might haue't ». (454-469)

Here again, Iago uses the truth to cunningly both wound and deceive Othello. But first he starts off with falsehoods; the first is implied: that, if he wanted to, he could see her « top'd », although this is not meant so much

⁴⁷ Cf. Joseph (*op. cit.*) also, p. 97.

as a lie but as an emotionally loaded rhetorical question which allows him to both cruelly invite Othello to an act of voyeurism⁴⁹ and to then say that it would be very difficult; this is still a lie, because it implies it would be possible, but it allows him to suggest they are very cunning; his next step is then to actually say the truth: « It is impossible you should see this »: He has to convince Othello that it is pointless to hope to be able to catch them together and at the same time he is implying that the reason this is so is that they are very cunning indeed. The implications are doubly false, of course.

It was important to convince Othello that he would not be able to have actual « ocular profe », not only because there could be none, but also so that he would at this point accept circumstantial evidence, however slight.

By the end of this scene, of course, Othello is convinced she is false:

« Now do I see 'tis true » (507)

« Damne her lewde Minx:

... I will withdraw

To furnish me with some swift meanes of death

For the faire Diuell » (542-546)

Iago's work is mainly done; after this he is mostly concerned to twist the knife in the wound until Othello must act.

4. « *I am not what I am* » « *By Ianus* »⁴⁹

It has been our aim here with the help of our particular mode of analysis to isolate and describe not only Iago's different strategies, but also to throw into relief the essential core of both his persona and witcraft, his desire to be one (or two?) with Janus; the need to be not what he is; the freedom to be what he wants, to whom he wants; actor and director in an ever mutable play scripted by himself but inspired by the duplicity of appearances.

⁴⁸ Cf. Serpieri (*op. cit.*) p. 128-129.

⁴⁹ Cf. note 4, above.

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