

# "othello" by william shakespeare essay sample

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



Evaluate the ways in which Shakespeare's representation manipulates his audience and provokes insights into the text you have studied. William Shakespeare wrote many of his famous plays during his 'great tragic period', he wrote them with an aim to not only entertain his audience but to educate them through a social and political reflection using literary and staging techniques. Othello was in approximately 1603, to do exactly this. Shakespeare was known for pushing the boundaries and this play was no exception with the plays central character being an African man in a position of authority. As Aristotle explains, an audience's pleasure consists of not merely observing the play but evaluating and making comparisons. It is using this that Shakespeare stimulates an intellectual engagement with his audience in order to assist them in reaching a deeper understanding of a topic. In Othello this is done through a variety of themes that are evident throughout the play including racism, misrepresentation appearance vs. reality and jealousy vs. pride.

The play is set against the back drop of the wars between Venice and Turkey, therefore embracing the context of the time. Racism was a serious issue at this time and it was known that throughout the 16th century there was a lot of racism towards Africans through the transatlantic slave trade, these Africans were treated less than human, like "animals". This is shown directly in the first scene where Roderigo and Iago are discussing their dislike for Othello, yet they never mention his name thus dehumanising him. In this scene the audience is presented with a mood of intrigue and confusion as his name is no longer mentioned, yet they remain curious to as what is so wrong about this man that they cannot bear to use his name. This

is Shakespeare's first use of manipulative techniques, as he is drawing the audience into his play, and when it is revealed that Othello is a coloured man, the audience will either accept the fact that he is treated that way by the other characters or will be outraged and begin to consider that, this is the way society behaves towards these people.

While Moor characters abound on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, none are given so major or heroic a role as Othello. Othello is a noble figure of great authority, respected and admired by the duke and senate of Venice as well as by those who serve him, only Iago voices an explicitly stereotypical view of Othello, depicting him from the beginning as an animalistic, barbarous, foolish outsider. As Shakespeare depicts the impassioned rage of the first 'noble' black man in Western literature, the audience is shocked as up until this time, blackness was associated with evil and, in the period Othello was written London was experiencing an influx of Moorish refugees who were fleeing persecution in Spain and this created racial tension between the cultures. As with most of Shakespeare's play the majority of Othello is written in a form of verse and with a fixed rhythm. This creates a general flow throughout the text and when this rhythm is broken is it a direct indication that a significant event is taking place.

For example when Iago attempts to insult Othello by calling him a "Barbary horse" to Brabantio (Act One, Scene One) the verse relapses to prose and alerts the audience to the evil behind Iago's deeds. This changing form of the play is also seen as a manipulative technique as Shakespeare is producing a reaction in his spectators. Shakespeare's sympathetic portrayal of a 'black'

man may have been typical of his persuasion in running against the mainstream views of English society. Through doing this he is also provoking insights from his audience members by assisting them to achieve greater understanding of racism in their society of the time. During the play there is also a large focus of misrepresentation and appearance vs. reality. A professor of philosophy at Brandeis University states that the play has "preoccupation with ethical questions" which proves accurate about all of Shakespeare's plays, as Shakespeare's 'preoccupation' with these questions also demonstrate that he aims to answer them and so make a comment regarding human behaviour. Appearance vs. reality is a huge part of Othello, especially regarding the character of Iago, who is the text's key manipulator.

Iago is fake towards Othello in order to gain his trust which is necessary for his plan of revenge. Iago's misrepresentation allows him to appear 'honest' to his characters, which is a quality he does not possess. Shakespeare's manipulation is evident in the way that he allows his audience to see Iago's fake and truthful side. He does this in order for the audience to see that as humans there will always be a false side of us, someone we show to the public to either protect ourselves, or similar to Iago, manipulate. Appearance vs. reality is a large issue concerning Othello's relationship with Desdemona, as Othello is manipulated by Iago, to believe that she is deceitful and impure, when in reality she is innocent. By showing Iago's true colours, Shakespeare is casting Iago's view of Othello in a very low estimation and showing the ugly truth of the way the society of the early 1600's treats African men. An example of Iago's manipulation is shown when Iago plots to

make Othello think his wife is having an affair with Cassio " Cassio's a proper man.

Let me see now: To get his place and to plume up my will/In double knavery-how? how?-let's see/After some time, to abuse Othello's ear/That he is too familiar with his wife/He hath a person and a smooth dispose/To be suspected, framed to make women false/The Moor is of a free and open nature/That thinks men honest that but seem to be so/And will as tenderly be led by th' nose/As asses are." (Act 1, Scene 3). Othello and Roderigo are not able to distinguish between what seems to be true and what really is true. They are being manipulated by Iago. Othello is completely unaware that Iago is not loyal to him and leaves Desdemona in his care while he is away. When the audience sees this scene take place on stage they are presented with the horror that Shakespeare believes exists in human nature. This also provokes insights as the audience are confronted with the evil that human beings can possess. Jealousy vs. pride also begins to be the cause of the tragic events that occur at the end of the play.

The entire storyline of the play unfolds because of Iago's jealousy of Othello's promotion, and it is Iago's jealousy which enables him to provoke the same feeling in others, to use them to his own advantage, or at to their disadvantage. Iago felt as though he did not have power over anything. The only thing he had power over was his emotions. He says " 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to which our wills are gardeners (Act, 1 Scene 3)." In translation: only we have control over our internal selves. His intense jealousy can also be shown through the quote

where the staging technique of aside is used, Iago states " He hath a daily beauty in his life/that makes me ugly" (Act 4, Scene 1). Iago soon puts his scheme into action; he causes Othello to feel this same feeling of jealousy. As Othello is panicked about his new wife being unfaithful to him, he begins to question everything, which is also a result of his pride.

Because of Othello's high rank, he develops an ego throughout the play and this comes crashing down when he thinks Desdemona would prefer to have relations with Cassio. Othello is defensively proud of himself and his achievements, and especially proud of the honorable appearance he presents. The allegations of Desdemona's affair hurt his pride even more than they inflame his vanity and jealousy; he wants to appear powerful, accomplished, and moral at every possible instance, and when this is almost denied to him, his wounded pride becomes especially powerful. Shakespeare uses the staging techniques in his play to develop the characterization of the main characters. He also provokes insight in the audience through his social commentary. In conclusion, Shakespeare will be known not only as a fantastic playwright, but as an extraordinary manipulator. He triggered the understanding in his audience in order to entertain and educate.