

# Othello themes essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



Othello remains relevant to a modern audience through the human experiences of thematic issues such as jealousy, duty and honour, and racism. All three themes intertwine to convey the power and effect on different characters. Jealousy is used to highlight its immense self-destructive power, whilst duty and honour reflects the importance of one's reputation. Racism is also present throughout the play, conveying the fears of being an outsider. Shakespeare successfully portrays these themes through honest or conceited characters, especially Othello and Iago by creating human experiences that fully portray these timeless themes.

Jealousy has the power to cause the downfall of an honourable individual, proving the timeless nature of human experiences. The Great Chain of Being dictated a strict hierarchical structure that limited class mobility, and once disobeyed generated a fusion of chaos and revenge. Othello initially portrayed as a reputable and honest personality, with the self-assured tone 'my services ... shall out-tongue his complaints' reflects his honourable and confident character prior to the corruption caused by his personal jealousy. This effect of jealousy is further emphasized with Iago ironically foreshadowing himself as the 'green-eyed monster,' highlighting the immense effects of jealousy, even though Iago is not aware of it himself. Mirrored in Othello's reactions when discovering his wife's apparent unfaithfulness, the metaphorical sensory imagery of 'my heart is turned to stone,' and simile 'she was as false as water,' reinforces the complete destruction of Othello's trust in her, leading to the erosion of his confidence and masculinity. His final downfall due to him being utterly consumed by personal envy, is exposed in the repetition of 'O cursed, cursed slave.'

Helen Gardner (1955) describes Othello as an ‘ immediate appeal to the moral imagination,’ stressing the timeless characteristics of jealousy, enabling intrigue to a modern audience. The destruction of one’s reputation, stems from professional or personal jealousy, usually concerning duty and honour. The Catholic views in Shakespeare’s time increased the fear of being ‘ cuckolded,’ which is shown to destroy a man’s reputation and self-confidence. The importance of an individual’s prestige is heavily emphasized with Cassio’s repetition of ‘ reputation, reputation, reputation,’ clearly portraying that he is reliant upon his honour. Othello similarly evokes a tone of desperation in the recurring motif of sight and proof ‘ give me the ocular proof,’ as he is horrifically afraid of being ‘ cuckolded.’ This fear of losing his honour, stems from his wife’s infidelity with the handkerchief acting as a motif of her faithfulness. His anecdotal dialogue ‘ she lost it or made a gift of it; my father’s eye should hold her loathed,’ further implies the control his wife had over his confidence, and the importance of his reputation.

Dr. Samuel Johnson refers to Othello as an ‘ magnanimous, artless and credulous, boundless in his confidence...inflexible in his resolution,’ showing his personality before his reputation is destroyed. Shakespeare conveys the importance of reputation through human experiences, and is able to remain relevant to audiences of the modern world. Racial elements stimulate the human experience of being an outsider, represented by Othello’s character. The xenophobia in Elizabethan England times, is represented by Othello, reflecting on the movement between outsiders and British colonies during the imperialistic times. Iago’s initial offensive sexual remarks with the strong

sensory imagery ‘making the beast with two backs,’ imply the lack of respect for Othello.

The fear instilled in Brabantio further adds to this lack of respect where he stubbornly exclaims with a defiant tone that Othello must have used ‘black magic,’ to have Desdemona fall in love with him, showing the immense objection he has of Othello. This is further reinforced with Roderigo’s descriptive imagery of ‘thick lips ... gross clasps of lascivious Moor,’ emphasizing the derogatory nature of comments that Othello endures.

The juxtaposition of Emilia calling Othello by his name, and her repeatedly defining him as ‘the Moor’ when she does not agree with his actions, bring to light the racial undercurrents that were present in Shakespeare’s time. Othello is never accepted as a human, but only as a warrior and this exclusion is relevant to modern day society as this outsider conduct is experienced to this day. The timeless nature of these thematic issues are conveyed through human experiences of jealousy, duty and honour and racism which support each other to form a completed text that remains relevant to modern society. Shakespeare adopts honourable and egotistical characters to demonstrate a clear understanding of these themes.