

Contrast of modern othello to shakesperian othello



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The strong influential themes of race and women in Shakespeare's Othello are consistently portrayed in Jeoffery Sax's contemporary film version of Othello, however the themes are greatly contrasted through the influential changes in society which undermine the values and purposes of these themes. The changes in values of these themes are expressed vividly in both accounts. It is evident throughout Shakespeare's Othello that women are portrayed through the stereotypical stance of having a 'lower status' to men, as a males dominate society in nearly all aspects. Women were displayed as being promiscuous, untrustworthy, rash decision makers and generated a lack of intellect or understanding.

Women were not respect but rather referred to as props who led less respectable lives to that of men. This is evident through out Shakespeare's Othello as Desdemona is represented as the typical wife and Emilia is portrayed as the typical female servant. The first evidence of this is demonstrated in Act one where Barbantio, Desdemona's father speaks out against Othello and Desdemona's marriage, he expresses the notion of Desdemona being 'bound to him for life and education' and he expresses her as his own property and that he must own her until he gives her to a somewhat successful powerful white noble figure. This expresses his stereotypical view of women within society and this is highly ironic due to the circumstances in which Desdemona is acting out of the typical character of women by disavowing her father and marrying a highly contrasted figure, being Othello, than her father has desired.

The stereotypical circumstance for women in Elizabethan times states that women shall remain virgins until marriage and therefore must give their

virginity to their husbands as a way of demonstrating the theory of being bound for life. This coincides with the past interpretation of Barbantio representing women as props and the ability to own them. The symbol of the handkerchief in Shakespeare's Othello is a symbol of virginity as the handkerchief is dotted with red strawberries, which strongly suggests the bloodstains left on the sheets on a virgin's wedding night. The handkerchief being a gift from Othello to Desdemona plays a significant role through Iago's method of manipulation.

By questioning Desdemona's essence of virginity Iago is able to successfully portray Desdemona as how he feels women should be perceived. "In Venice they do let God see the pranks they dare not show their husbands. Their best conscience is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown'. By alluding to God Shakespeare is ironically contrasting the purity of virginity to the defilement of promiscuous women.

This is alluding to Iago's consistent reflection of women as promiscuous whores. Othello says to Desdemona "Come my dear love, / The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue. / The profit's yet to come 'tween me and you" This metaphorical comment seems to indicate the couple has not yet made their marriage official through the act of sex. The "purchase" is the wedding and the "fruits" are the sex. This is ironic for theoretically this implies Othello's lack of control over Desdemona for he does not yet own her through taking her virginity, this also alludes to the essence of promiscuity as she could have given her virginity to someone like Cassio which adds to Othello's ability to be manipulated. However the metaphor could be

suggesting Othello to already have taken her virginity by suggesting the “purchase” is Desdemona’s virginity.

This could then suggest Othello’s unwillingness to account for his wrongdoing in unleashing her newly awakened sexuality. Emilia’s attitude to the roles of women in Elizabethan is strong and portrays an ironic sense of acting against traditions. Her views are strongly contrasted to that of Desdemona who’s attitude towards her own chastity at the end of the play represents her how males of the time would have expected of a woman, however Emilia expresses the ideal of looking for happiness elsewhere and she argues that women should have a middle ground, she demonstrates a social stance in that women are humans with needs and desires rather than virgins and whores. She expresses this through the metaphor as men are “all but stomachs, and we are all but food. / They eat us hungrily, and when they are full, / They belch us” In Jeffrey Sax’s film version of Othello women are portrayed in a different manner due to the change in the role of women within society. Women have become more powerful, living lives with proper careers and the ability to choose their lovers for themselves.

However similar to that of Elizabethan times women are still portrayed as promiscuous as they have gained the ability to have multiple partners, and it is no longer required to remain a virgin until marriage. The power of men over women however is still evident in the contemporary version and this is demonstrated in the opening silouqy of the film, through a close up shot of a dark male hand over a light female hand. This is a representation of the power of men in society and especially within this particular relationship. The

two hands do not contain wedding rings which signify the change in attitude towards marriage, and the relationship between marriage and sex.

These two figures are evidently unbound to each other for life but are engaging in sexual physical activities. The ownership of women is subtly expressed through Dessie's stereotypical views of the power struggle between men and women in relationships. "Isn't that what happens between men and women, the men talk and the women listen" This generalised statement reflects the stereotypical nature of John and Dessie's relationship and foreshadows the somewhat expected ending tragedy in which John fails to listen to Dessie resulting in her ironic death as a pure trustworthy wife. Through the metaphor "I am a blank sheet waiting for you to write your name on me" Demonstrates Dessie's lack of power in the relationship resulting in her death.

Dessie's purity and stereotypical values of innocence within women is contrasted with that of Lulu's interpretation of women within society. Lulu is far more courageous and promiscuous women when it comes to men and sex, however she is able to foreshadow Othello's actions through the mere doubt she acquires for men in general. "I used to shag people out of sheer politeness" represents Lulu's ability to sleep with men without being in love with them. This demonstrates the power Lulu acquires to be independent of men as opposed to Dessie who completely gives herself to Othello.

The stances in which Dessie and Lulu acquire within the contemporary version are very similar to that of Desdemona and Emilia in Shakespeare's Othello. Jago in Sax's version alludes directly to Iago in Shakespeare's

version as his view of women related directly to the view of women in Elizabethan times. Women are the same, they like it more than we think they do", through the use of sex as a tool for power and manipulation Jago is successfully able to manipulate John's trust in Dessie by means of the robe as motif representing their sexual desires for one another. The robe is the modern version of the handkerchief as it is a representation of love and sex between John and Dessie, however in the modern version Dessie gives it to John which demonstrates the contemporary changes in values and interpretations of sexual desire. Through Dessie giving it to John and the mere misunderstanding of Dessie also giving to Michael Cass the reoccurring theme of a shift in the power of women is established. The representation of race within Shakespeare's Othello is demonstrated very early on in the play as the audience is firstly introduced to him by means of conversation between two other parties in which they refer to him as the Moor, the Moor being someone of black appearance.

In the opening scene the negative perception of Othello is portrayed by Iago and Roderigo as they accuse Othello of stealing Barbantio's daughter. They directly refer to him as a "thief" and explain "Your daughter and the Moor, are now making the beasts with two backs" which allows the audience to refer to him as a devil character by directly associating Othello with animalistic qualities. Creating the imagery of Othello acquiring beast like qualities alludes to the prospect of his character enabling such savage qualities as the extremities of abduction and rape. The animalistic qualities are metaphorical for his race by means of a savage Moor. References to animals is evident throughout the play not only when referring to Othello

himself, this represents a sense of the laws of nature rather than the laws of society which primarily govern the characters in the play.

As the audience is properly introduced to the Moore, the image becomes clear in Othello's nature of speech that he does not inherit any of the stereotypical characteristics of evil qualities depicted by Iago. In act 1 scene 3 through the use of figurative language the Duke declares quietly to Barbantio "Your son-in-law is far more fair than black", this metaphor symbolises the way in which Othello inherits qualities of a white man's honesty by the dramatic contrast between colours. This is an ironic representation of foreshadowing as in the end of the play Othello becomes savage and monstrous as he is consumed by jealousy which contradicts the essence of his fair qualities. Later in the play when Othello starts to undermine Desdemona and his relationship by means of the manipulation tactics of Iago, he draws direct attention to his race "haply for I am black, and have not those soft parts of conversation that chambers have; or for I am declined into the vale of years - yet that's not much - she's gone" This is the first circumstance in which Othello himself has brought direct negative attention to his race, which demonstrates his lacking of confidence in which he so happily acquired at the beginning of the play. Comparing Shakespeare's Othello to Jeoffery Sax's film Othello it is obvious the importance of race is far less significant in Elizabethan times, which suggests race has become more of an issue in contemporary times. In Jeoffery Sax's film Othello the significance of race plays a much more significant role as it seems to create tension within every situation throughout the film.

This importance of race is so strong throughout the film and this is evident in the opening silouqy where a close up of a dark male hand is resting over a light female hand. This contrast between the pigments of skin types introduces the recurring theme of inequality within race in modern day society and the role the dark male hand plays within the relationship. Following the opening sililougy the audience is confronted with fast, handheld and diagetic shots of race riots. These shots are highly a contrasted juxtaposition with upper class white society in which the shots are slower and smoother. This suggests further inequality but through creating an image of the black race acting out in the negative sense as savage and uncontrollable.

This is similar to the audiences first introduction to the Moore, in which Rodrigo and Iago are referring to him as savage and monstrous. The consistent presence of water within the film acts a recurring symbol or motif in which it represents the yin and yang, meaning opposites as black and white as water is the opposite to fire. This further suggests the consistent battle between black and white men and women in modern society. This relates to values and representations of race from both parties.

If I could find any of them with their brains as big as their dicks” suggests the derogatory stereotypical views of black men from a white mans point of view. It symbolises the power of intellect in which the white men claim to have successfully achieved. This statement is highly ironic for during this time in the film John Othello is the only police officer who is using his ‘ brain’ and attending to the issues of the street riots in which no other police officer

has taken any initiative in resolving. This contradicts this statement through the actions of John Othello being a black police officer.

As this statement is announced during a conversation involving Jago it is interesting as later on in the film Jago declares to John " You clever big black bastard" which is suggesting John as gaining intellect or having a bigger ' brain' and therefore being of higher significance and importance. Following this Jago uses direct speech to the audience in which he displays a neurotic fit in which he describes John as a " patronising ape" the use of animalistic representation is portrayed similar to that of Shakespeare's version in which it associates John's race with the actions and qualities of animals through this extended metaphor. John Othello's approach to the inequality between black and white men and women is suggested from a far less powerful stance in which he suggests his lack of power through his past desire to be white " Your people brought my people here to work as slaves..... I wanted to be like you, wanted to be white", this suggests his reclining stance in his pride of his race as he is slowly being extracted of his power.

The direct accusation suggests the change in his character to primarily fit the stereotypical characteristics of a black man. This is similar to Shakespeare's Othello in the evidence of jealousy turning Othello into the savage Moore he so longingly resented. The themes of race and women are strongly displayed in both accounts which suggest the inability of change over time between such different societies; however there are situations which within these themes that suggest a change in attitudes through the extent and position in which these themes are portrayed. The difference in <https://assignbuster.com/contrast-of-modern-othello-to-shakespearean-othello/>

the significance of race from Shakespearian times to modern times reflects the changes in society and how individuals relate to one another through appearance versus reality. The changes in attitudes to women have also changed significantly through the acceptance of women as human beings, enabling them to run their own lives and make their own decisions, the power for women in modern day society has developed so evidently.

These as well as the similarities in times are magnificently demonstrated in both accounts.