

Examine how racism is presented in act one of the play

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



Racism is presented in a range of ways in Othello Act One, but it is mainly presented through Brabantio's reaction to the secret marriage between Desdemona and Othello. Also racism is presented through Iago's and Roderigo's comments about Othello. When Iago and Roderigo speak of Othello they call him a "Barbary horse," an "old black ram," and also tell Brabantio that his daughter and Othello are "making the beast with two backs". These phrases dehumanise Othello and make him different from the other characters.

Animal imagery is used to express prejudice against Othello's race and it is used to help convey Othello as a monster and the choices of animals show the underlying racism: "ram" and "Barbary horse". The "Moor" which is a reference to his dark skinned appearance and a reference to the race of Muslim peoples of north-western Africa to which he belongs to. However this is not a racist comment as all characters even Desdemona refer to Othello as the Moor.

The references to witchcraft and the devil also help to emphasise Othello's differences: "The devil will make a grandsire of you", "the beast with two backs". As we do not see Othello until near the end of Act One, we base our opinion on these comments from Brabantio, Iago and Roderigo and therefore we are set up to believe that Othello's character is very different to that of a typical Venetian. Desdemona has gone against social conventions by marrying Othello.

Their differences were mainly Othello's age and race; however, these linger in his mind as Iago used these differences to create jealousy and hatred

which eventually led to the death of both characters. 'The devil will make a grandsire out of you'. This simply means that Brabantio will be Othello's (the devil) granddad. Brabantio is prejudiced against Othello as a son-in-law. Brabantio cannot believe that his daughter has willingly married Othello. He tries to say that she is under control of witchcraft. 'She in chains of magic' / 'thou hast enchanted her! He considers their relationship to be an abomination against nature. "A maiden never bold, Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion blushed at herself. And she, in spite of nature, Of years, of country, credit, everything, To fall in love with what she feared to look on?" He says that their relationship is unsuitable because Desdemona has been brought up to find a suitable partner and Othello is not that partner. Desdemona had to betray her father by marrying Othello in secret because it was the only way the relationship could happen. Brabantio will never have allowed the marriage to take place if he had known about it. They also marry secretly because Othello has abused his hospitality with Brabantio by marrying his daughter and they have also broken the unwritten codes of racial separation. "Even now, now, very now, an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe". Christianity has made the white sheep a powerful symbol of innocence and purity for Desdemona whilst Othello's description as a 'devil' creates a dichotomy between the two symbols.