

Racism in othello essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



The Shakespearean tragedy, Othello, was written and set during the mid 16th century. The play has set in Cyprus and Venice. Shakespeare intends to break the stereotype of black characters through this play. He represent the black hero of outstanding qualities, and it was hard on Shakespeare's audience to appreciate the out standing figure of black, as they were familiar with the character of the black man as a villain. Moreover, Shakespeare expressed his desire for social by doing this play. Through out the play, considering the point of how a black mans kindness and honestly has been destroyed by the racism and sling of whites but it has yet be be proven beyond doubt that Shakespeare sympathises for blacks and this is my hypothesis.

The quote " I may profess due to the Moor my lord" by Desdemona. In this scene Othello shows his heroic nature when he stand up to Brabantio about his marriage to Desdemona. Here he proves that to be a noble character. People are more shocked by Othello's appearance on the stage. When Brabantio says, " Where hast thou stowed my daughter", Othello remains calm. This shows that he respects Desdemona's dad and he thinks that her dad will stand by his decisions. " Her farther loves me; often invited me; from year to year - the battle, siege, fortunes that I have passed. There was a lot of difference between the ways he has described at the start to now. Although he has been accused by Brabantio and almost by the whole Venetian society he still pay attention to the tradition.

As well as he is confident in what he says. Compare to Othello, Brabantio was out of control this is known by his broken language, when he speaks.

Even though he treats Othello with the lack of respect, once Othello got married to his daughter, he also turned to be a racism man. This has been proved when he loses his control. Shakespeare shows audience that Othello is contrast with the stereotypical view of blacks in Elizabethan times so now doubt this created considerable force from a racial point of view and the audience clearly stood by this. (WWW. Ebscohost. com) As Othello perform to be a very noble, charm and dignify character whereas the black people at that time expected to be villains with characters such as untrustworthy and anger. (WWW. Ebscohost. com) Othello's good character only corrupted when Iago puts his plan of revenge into actions. Iago has mainly ruled with racism.

It's not hard to imagine that *Othello* was probably Shakespeare's most controversial play. In the play, Othello Shakespeare's shows the audience a transformation of a barbarous black man into a respected soldier and nobleman. At the time this play was written, black people were only known as slaves. That is why there is a clear theme of racism throughout the play and it captures the audience's imagination. Society rejects the marriage of Othello and Desdemona, sees it as an act "against all rules of nature" (act 1. 3, line 102). Society has no real reason to reject the marriage of Othello and Desdemona. Othello matches or even exceeds the other men trying to win Desdemona hand in marriage. Nothing separates Othello from "the wealthy, curled darlings of our nation" (act 1. 2, line 68) except his skin-color. Iago, Brabantio, Roderigo and Emilia are all main characters that have racist feeling toward Othello. Out of these main characters Iago shows the most racist in the play.

In the play *Othello*, Iago is a character that obviously has a plan to bring Othello down from his high place in society. Iago hates Othello because when Othello chose his lieutenant, he chose Cassio and not him. Iago believes he should have been the lieutenant because he has war experience and Cassio doesn't. In the play, Iago is the catalyst of all the destructive events within the play. Iago is able to use Othello's insecurities about being black to play Othello against Desdemona until the marriage fails. Iago is a representative of the white race, who is informing the public of the impurity of the marriage between Othello and Desdemona. The play starts out with Iago and Roderigo witnessing the marriage of Othello and Desdemona. Roderigo also hates Othello because he loves Desdemona and now he can't have her. After witnessing this they go to the residence of Brabantio. Once there, Iago and Roderigo tell Brabantio of the marriage by using racist language to appeal to the senator's traditional beliefs. Iago uses such language as,

IAGO: Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul.

Even now, now, very now, an old black ram

Is tupping your white ewe. Arise, Arise!

Awake the snorting citizens with the bell,

Or else the devil will make you a grandchild of you. (act 1. 1, lines 84-89)

Iago even goes so far as to tell Brabantio's grandchildren will be animals.

IAGO: ...you'll have

Your daughter covered with a Barbary house,

You'll have your nephews neigh to you, you'll have

Coursers for cousins, and jennets for Germans. (act 1. 1, lines 109-112)

Roderigo also calls Othello racist names such as "thick-lips" (act 1. 1, line 63 Shakespeare, 2004). Playing on prejudices, Iago provoked Brabantio to take action against Othello by sending out guards to catch him and put him in prison. Othello tells the audience later, "Her father loved me, oft invited me" (act 1. 3, line 128 Shakespeare, 2004). All it took to change that was a few crude words from Iago to make a respected figure turn against a close friend of equal stature simply because of skin color.

Brabantio challenged the marriage by accusing Othello of witchcraft in front of the court. Brabantio was unable to imagine that his daughter would willfully deceive him and could not believe she would ever "fall in love with what she feared to look on" (act 1. 3, line 99 Shakespeare, 2004) without the aid of spells. Brabantio suggests that Othello's race makes him capable of these powers of BLACK magic. We have to ask ourselves, if Desdemona had eloped with Roderigo, would he be accused of witchcraft? The answer, if you have not figured it out by now, is most obvious. This event supports the idea of white purity equals goodness and that other race, such as African-American, represents darkness and evil. When cabining the blackness of Othello and the fair whiteness of Desdemona in marriage, the audience will see nothing but chaos coming from it. This seems to be the concept that

Shakespeare was playing with. That White and Black natural can't mix, which by today's standards in society is considered very racist.

In Act 2, while conversing with Roderigo, Iago states that she will find the fault in her choice because she will notice how Othello lacks,

IAGO: love liess in favor, sympathy in years, manners and beauties. (act 2. 1, lines 226-228 Shakespeare, 2004)

Everyone seems to think that marrying Othello was not a smart thing for Desdemona to do because of Othello's skin color. All characters seem to see the marriage as becoming an inevitable failure.

In Act 3, scene 3, the audience starts to see the methods of Iago in progress to make Othello doubt Desdemona, by making him doubt himself. Following Othello's refusal of believing that Desdemona has cheated on him with Cassio. Iago reminds him of his nature as an outsider and assures Othello that " I know our country's disposition well"(act 3. 3, line 204 Shakespeare, 2004). Making Othello believe he is an outsider, Iago can also make him believe that he is lacking in the knowledge of Venetian woman. Iago is playing on Othello's insecurities of his lack of experience with woman. Doing this Iago is forcing Othello to confide in him for advice about the world of woman. Facing losing Desdemona's love to a younger white male is just too much for Othello to handle. Othello then sees the love between him and Desdemona as unnatural, " nature erring from it self" (act 3. 3, line 231 Shakespeare, 2004). The audience then sees Othello make a reference to his blackness in a negative way and starts to compare himself to Cassio.

OTHELLO: ...Haply for I am black

And have no soft part of conversation

That chambers have, or for I am declined

Into vale of years -yet that's not much-

She's gone. I am abused, and my relief

Must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage,

That we can call these delicate creatures ours,

And not their appetites!...

Despite Iago's efforts, when Othello sees Desdemona he refuses to believe Iago, but the damage has already been done. As the audience will see, Othello returns to Iago to find "ocular proof" (act 3. 3, line 363 Shakespeare, 2004). Othello is then deceived very easily by a thin illusion. After easily falling into this illusion he vows to kill Desdemona, without first confronting her. The ease at which Iago was able to trick Othello was frightening. Iago was able to do this by playing on his insecurities, which a large portion of is his race.

One of the most controversial scenes in *Othello* happens at the end of the play in the bedchambers. Othello has changed into a savage-like state as everyone had suspected. Desdemona's death was almost expected by everyone who saw the marriage between Othello and Desdemona as forbidden. After Othello kills Desdemona, Desdemona's servant Emilia

comes into the room and sees what Othello has done. Emilia expresses her feelings by saying this racist remark,

EMILIA: O, the more angel she, and you the blacker devil! (act 5. 2, line 130)

However, Othello's death is much more symbolic because it represents the other failure of Othello trying to achieve the status of the white man. Othello acknowledges the fact that he is different and realizes his faults. When choosing to take his own life, Othello's last words are to those standing around him. He tells them to speak of him as he truly is, and know that,

OTHELLO: Like the base Judean, threw a pearl away

Richer than all his tribe (act 5. 2, lines 345-346, Shakespeare, 2004).

All of this was brought about by Iago, but only because he was able to play on the insecurities that Othello had about his race.

Although Othello is not made out to be the cleverest and most cunning character in the play, he does have a certain wit about him that is uncommon among a European Moor. Othello is a romantic man who has won the heart of Desdemona, the senator's daughter, with his stories of battles. Othello is also a hero whose life is full of good deeds. With all he has accomplished, he should be able to escape from preconceived notions of his race. But the play shows all too clearly how thin the value of his reputation was, in the eyes of others and to himself. Othello is an example of a noble black man at a time when black men and woman were not known except as slaves. The racism in the play reduced a black nobleman to a

barbarous state, which everyone, at the time the play was written, expected. We can be critical towards Shakespeare's use of racism, but we have to remember that racism was part of the culture in which he was present. So, it's clear for everyone to see that the racial element of the play made the play very interesting and intriguing indeed as an issue of race was created which is rife around the world right now. Without racial issues in the play, the play just would not have been the same. Judging from the entire play I now feel that Shakespeare does indeed sympathise for black.

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