

Themes in othello

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Jealousy is a major theme of the play. The imagery surrounding jealousy makes it a monster which controls the characters. Othello represents how jealousy is one of the most corrupting and destructive of emotions. “ Othello jealousy overpowers him, as he trembles, at the idea of Desdemona and Cassio together. His statement about nature means that he believes he would not feel such powerful emotion and his mind would not be filled with images of them together, if it weren't really happening.

Othello takes the intensity of his own emotional jealousy to the thought of Desdemona being unfaithful.

It is also jealousy that prompts Iago to plot Othello's downfall, and jealousy is also the tool that Iago uses to arouse Othello's passions. Roderigo and Bianca demonstrate jealousy at various times in the play, and Emilia demonstrates that she too knows the emotion well, describing jealousy as “ a monster/Begot upon itself, born upon itself”. Othello's flaw is that he cannot understand human nature and he therefore cannot recognize the fact that he is jealous.

Only Desdemona and Cassio, the true innocents of the story, seem beyond its clutches.

Racism is an extremely important theme as it has a great amount of influence on how people regard Othello. For those, such as Iago, who distrust black people, based merely on looks, never like Othello. Racism also determines how Othello perceives himself as a rough outsider, though he is nothing of the sort. Othello's race sets him apart, and makes him very self-

conscious; it makes him work hard and look carefully after his reputation, so he is regarded as equal to the white people that surround him.

Iago's racist values toward Othello are revealed when he says, " Even now, now, very now, an old black ram/ Is tupping your white ewe" (1. 1. 87-88).

This statement is both racist and degrading towards Othello as Iago is comparing Othello to a black ram. As black people were associated with demons during Shakespearean times because of their dark skin, the origins of Iago's racism is revealed. Animal imagery is used consistently throughout the play to depict Iago's racist values toward Othello, telling Brabantio that his daughter and Othello are " making the beast with two backs.

Another example of this is when Iago says, " Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys,/ As salt as wolves in pride, and fools as gross/ As ignorance made drunk. (3. 3. 404-406) Iago's close references to animals convey a sense that the laws of nature, rather than those of society, are the primary forces governing the characters in this play. When animal references are used with regard to Othello, as they frequently are, they reflect the racism both of characters in the play and of Shakespeare's contemporary audience. In this particular statement Iago is talking about Cassio and Desdemona.

He refers to them as goats, monkeys and wolves as these animals were thought to be lustful creatures. Iago is doing this to push Othello past the point of sanity so that Othello is about to go mad and cannot get the idea of killing Desdemona out of his head. The contrast of good versus evil is created by all the other contrasts revealed in Othello. Desdemona can be seen to represent everything which is good while Iago represents everything

which is evil. Though there is much gray area between good and evil, Iago's battle against Othello and Cassio certainly counts as an embodiment of this theme.

Iago and his evil battle to corrupt and turn the flawed natures of other characters, and he does succeed to some extent. By the end of the play, neither has won, as Desdemona and Emilia are both dead, and Iago revealed and punished. When Desdemona says, "... your Lieutenant, Cassio. Good my lord,/ If I have any grace or power to move you,/ His present reconciliation take. / For if he be not one that truly loves you,/ That errs in ignorance, and not in cunning,/ I have no judgment in an honest face. / I prithee call him back" (3. 3. 44-51).

Desdemona represents all that is good in the play. Thinking Cassio a good man and unaware of Iago's plan to manipulate Othello, Desdemona tries to convince Othello to reinstate Cassio, as he had never before failed Othello, and it was due to his moment of ignorance that he neglected his duty. When Othello says, " I look down towards his feet, but that's a fable. / If that thou be'st a devil, I cannot ill thee. " (5. 2. 291-292). Here, Othello says that he looks down to see if Iago's feet are cloven like the devils, but realises that, that's just a story with a moral.

Then says that if Iago is not the devil then he cannot kill him and stabs Iago with his knife. This statement refers to the evil that Iago has created, and compares Iago to the devil. In addition to referring to Iago as the devil, Othello also adds that if Iago is the devil then he would have cloven feet, but realising that that was just a story, Othello tries another way of proving Iago

is the devil, and stabs him. This imagery of hell and damnation reoccurs throughout Othello, especially toward the end of the play, when Othello becomes preoccupied with the religious and moral judgment of Desdemona and himself.

After he has learned the truth about Iago, Othello calls Iago a devil and a demon which refers to his earlier illusion of “some monster in thought” which ironically refers to Iago. Appearance and reality is a theme which reoccurs throughout Othello, and plays a crucial role. This theme has its most potent and dramatic realization in the character of Iago. Iago fools everyone in the play into believing he’s honest, for although he is called ‘honest’ by almost everyone in the play, he is treacherous, deceitful, and manipulative. No one even suspects him of treachery, until the final act when Roderigo first realizes how badly he’s been fooled.

In short, Iago proves that evil intentions can be masked behind a facade of honesty. The theme emerges in other characters: Brabantio is deceived by Desdemona’s reaction to Othello, assuming she fears him when she truly loves the Moor. Othello suspects that Desdemona is deceitful and impure, although she is really blameless and innocent. Othello also feels he’s being deceived by Cassio, whom he trusts and who appears loyal. Emilia’s exterior suggests salty indifference, but she turns against her husband and dies in defiance of Desdemona. Even Bianca, who is suspected of dishonesty, is ultimately seen as a sincere and caring woman.

Also Othello, who was considered a barbarian by many in the play, is gentle and noble until driven to near-madness by the cruel manipulations of his

most trusted ' friend'. It is the military values, such as honesty, trust and friendship, which are supposed to exist between soldiers allow Iago to full manipulate the characters. Iago states " He holds me well,/ The better shall my purpose work on him" (1. 1. 389-390) This shows how conniving Iago is. He says that he will use the fact that Othello trusts him to get his revenge on Othello. This type imagery throughout the play reveals the fact that appearances are deceptive.

Iago mentions the Roman God Janus who has two faces and even tells Othello " men should be what they seem" despite the fact that he has already said " I am not what I am". Othello himself does not understand what people are like, he doesn't see past Iago's mask. When Iago says, " My lord you know I love you", Othello replies saying, " I think thou dost. / And for I know thou'rt full of love and honesty/ And weigh'st thy words before thou giv'st them breath" (3. 3. 120-123). This shows that Iago's appearance is extremely unlike his character. Othello trusted Iago in every respect, often calling him " Honest Iago".

Othello believes Iago to be his personal friend. Othello's statement reveals how well Iago is at manipulating people into seeing him as a good and decent individual. Othello doesn't even know what Desdemona is really like, and she is his wife. He admits he knows only of the " tented field". Having said this none of the other characters understand Desdemona either, Brabantio says she is a " maiden never bold" and Roderigo thinks that she can be bought with presents. Iago's downfall proves to be the fact that he

does not understand women, and so he can never truly be in control of Emilia.