

Essay for othello

Literature, Russian Literature



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How Marginalization and Racism Destroy Othello

It is very hard for someone's identity to not falter when they face bias and discrimination. Staying true to one's roots requires a large amount of willpower which Othello has unfortunately lacked. In Othello by William Shakespeare, Othello's Moor background and the subsequent racism and marginalization he receives, results in his eventual downfall. Initially, Othello's background affects his identity, making him easily manipulated by Iago.

Furthermore, Iago manipulates Othello into several situations where Othello is discriminated. This results in the progressive growth of Othello's feelings of suspicion and jealousy. Finally, Othello is marginalized by the society, which ruins his manhood and this inevitably leads to his tragic fate.

To begin with, Othello is a black Moor and he has courageous and noble qualities. However, his Moor background increasingly alters his perspective of himself, allowing Iago's manipulation to ultimately work out. First of all, Iago exploits Othello's physical appearance as a black man to intervene his relationship with Desdemona.

Iago states that " Thieves! Thieves! / Look to your house, your daughter, and your bags! / Thieves! Thieves!" (Shakespeare 1. 1. 81-83). It demonstrates that Iago considers Othello as a thief because Othello has eloped with Desdemona and this elopement is seen as an evil and immoral deed, a

miscegenation at that time. The quote also reveals that Iago is using Othello's background to cause internal conflict within Othello, reflecting the start of Iago's manipulation of Othello. In addition, Brabantio is strongly against the marriage between Desdemona and Othello because of Othello's background. Brabantio interrogates Othello that:

To fall in love with what she feared to look on?

It is a judgement maimed and most imperfect

That will confess perfection so could err.

Against all rules of nature. (Shakespeare 1. 3. 100-105)

This quote illustrates that because Othello is a black Moor, hence Brabantio rejects his daughter's marriage to Othello. It reflects Brabantio's strong bias against Othello. Also, Brabantio mentions that the intermarriage of Othello and Desdemona violates the natural norms which shows that Brabantio has a negative perspective towards Othello and this contributes to the significant changes of Othello's identity. Lastly, under the manipulation by Iago, Othello undergoes a remarkable change in his own perception of himself, which leads to his collapse at last. Othello exclaims that:

Farewell the tranquil mind! Farewell content!

Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars

That make ambition virtue!

...Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone! (Shakespeare 3. 3. 356-365)

This demonstrates that Othello is experiencing the transformation of his identity, where he gradually abandons his valiant and noble traits and becomes weak and green-eyed. Overall, it is his Moor background that makes him self-conscious, which eventually crushes his masculinity and

paves the way for his deterioration. In conclusion, Othello's identity is influenced and altered by his background, which brings about significant changes in his character and this inevitably leads to his downfall.

Secondly, subjected racism from Iago and Brabantio makes Othello progressively jealous and suspicious, allowing Iago to manipulate Othello's flaws to destroy Othello's life. First of all, Iago uses uncivilized animal images to insult the relationship between Othello and Desdemona. Iago says that "Even now, now, very now, an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe" (Shakespeare 1. 1. 90-91). Iago is a racist who holds a prejudice attitude towards Othello. Later, Othello is racialized by Iago, which stirs up feelings of jealousy and suspicion in Othello and this finally ruins Othello's dignity. Also, after Brabantio finds out about the marriage between Desdemona and Othello, he discriminates Othello and accuses him of stealing his daughter. Brabantio mentions that "O thou foul thief, where hast stowed my daughter? / ...Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom / Of such a thing as thou" (Shakespeare 1. 2. 64-73). Brabantio directly calls Othello a black thing and this illustrates the strong negative preconception Brabantio has towards Othello. This is the first time Othello faces prejudice from other characters based solely on his race and this shatters his confidence, resulting in him being increasingly influenced by his surroundings. This makes him unable to escape his own feelings of enviousness and skepticism. Finally, the racism from Iago makes the flower of jealousy and suspicion blossom in Othello's mind. Othello is completely caught in Iago's manipulation and this eventually leads the tragic end of both Othello and Desdemona. Iago tells Othello that:

Not to affect many proposed matches

Of her own clime, complexion, and degree,
Whereto we see in all things nature tends—
...Foul disproportions, thoughts unnatural.
...though I may fear Her will, recoiling to her better judgment,
May fall to match you with her country forms
And happily repent. (Shakespeare 3. 3. 234-243)

This is the point where Iago implies that it is inappropriate for Desdemona to marry a man of different skin color. Othello's racialized situation successfully ignites his enviousness, which ruins his relationship with Desdemona and eventually results in Desdemona's death. Also, the broken relationship ultimately makes Othello commit suicide. To summarize, racism from Iago and Brabantio plants the seeds of jealousy and suspicion in Othello's mind. In addition, Othello is at the mercy of Iago's manipulation, being unaware of it and this accelerates Othello's fall from grace.

Last but not least, Othello's marginalization by the whole society makes him reflect about his own social status and understanding of himself. The process of being marginalized brings about Othello's insecurity and destroys his inner defense, which eventually leads to his downfall. Firstly, Othello's marginalization comes from him having a different social status. Othello's position as a general should have given him a high social status but because of his Moor background, Othello is made to be an outsider. Iago states that:
When the blood is made dull with the act of sport,
there should be a game to inflame it and to give satiety a
fresh appetite, loveliness in favor, sympathy in years,
manners and beauties. All which the Moor is defective in. (Shakespeare 2. 1.

228-231) Iago marginalizes Othello because he is jealous of Othello's position and wants to take Othello's place. Furthermore, Othello has different skin color as compared to other characters in society. Therefore, Othello is isolated by society, which prompts him to be an outsider. Secondly, Iago takes advantage of Othello's unfamiliarity of Cyprus females to marginalize Othello. Iago says to Othello that:

I know our country disposition well.

In Venice they do let heaven see the pranks

They dare not show their husbands.

Their best conscience

Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown. (Shakespeare 3. 3. 205-208)

This illustrates Othello's marginalization by Iago, as a result of Othello's lack of understanding of the women in Cyprus. Throughout the conversation, Othello becomes increasingly worried about Desdemona's infidelity and this also accelerates his downfall. Lastly, marginalization makes Othello the dominated individual, which contributes to his demise. Othello says to Iago that:

Ay, let her rot and perish

... Oh, the world hath not a sweeter

creature, she might lie by an emperor's side and command

him tasks. (Shakespeare 4. 1. 172-176)

Iago's marginalization causes Othello to repeatedly doubt himself and this results in his own personality completely faltering. While Othello used to be a dominant individual, believing the rumors from Iago causes his honor and confidence to fall apart. This transforms Othello into a dominated minority

who lives under the manipulation of Iago. To conclude, marginalized positioning not only crumbles Othello's confidence and manhood, but it also drives feelings of insecurity and uncertainty in Othello's mind which gives rise to Othello's tragedy and downfall.

By and large, Othello's racialized and marginalized situation contributes to his downfall. Othello's Moor background influences and alters his identity, while subjected racism brings about feelings of suspicion and jealousy in Othello. Lastly, marginalization results in the destruction of Othello's manhood and leads to his collapse. Overall, Othello's tragedy and his downfall give readers some ideas about the impact of marginalization and racism. It is very difficult for someone's values and world views to not alter if their surroundings are filled with preconception and discrimination.

Therefore, people in society need to abandon their views of racism in order to develop a harmonious society.

Work Cited

Shakespeare, William. *Othello*. Ed. John Crowther. New York: Spark Publishing. 2003. Print.