

Discuss the role of women in the play othello

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



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The three women in the play are all victims of some kind, regarded by most of the men as 'only good for one thing'. It is also true to say that the women fall into one of two categories or stereotypes – the innocent saintly women and the whoreish seductress. Bianca – the first of the women I will discuss in the essay, fits easily into the latter category.

Bianca is a prostitute and very fond of Cassio, who tends to ignore her and treat her badly.

We get a clear picture of how Bianca is regarded by the men in the play when Cassio says to Iago about marrying her (act4 scene1) –

'I marry her? What? A customer! Prithee bear some charity to my wit; do not think it so unwholesome. Ha, ha, ha!'

He clearly does not love her or ever intend on marrying her and is using her only for sex, but it is obvious that Bianca loves him as her distress at his absence shows –

'...lovers' absent hours

More tedious than the dial eight score times?

O wearily reckoning'

She is also extremely upset when she thinks the handkerchief has been given to Cassio by another lover –

'Let the devil and his dam haunt you.'

What did you mean by the same handkerchief you gave me even now? I was a fine fool to take it'

She refuses to copy the embroidery on the handkerchief.

Cassio does not think it necessary to inform Bianca that his attraction to her is purely physical. He allows her to go on thinking that he loves her back calling her ' Sweet Bianca' and ' most fair Bianca' when this is clearly not how he thinks of her.

Iago regards Bianca in much the same way as Cassio as is shown in Act5 Scene 1 when Cassio is stabbed. He says –

' O notable strumpet.'

Thus dismissing her as a well-known whore. He even blames her for Cassio's stabbing –

' Gentlemen all, I do suspect this trash

To be a party in this injury.'

This further shows how badly women in the play are regarded by the men, and that their role is purely to love the men and be obedient to them. Bianca is not the only one to be treated badly and disrespected by her lover.

Emilia is Iago's wife. As we have already learned Iago does not respect women at all and Emilia is constantly subject to his verbal abuse.

'(to Cassio) Sir, would she give you so much of her lips

As of her tongue she oft bestows on me,

You would have enough.'

He cruelly shows her up in front of everyone(Act2 Scene1). Iago's opinion of women is made blatantly obvious when he says -

' You (women) rise to play, and go to bed to work.'

Although Emilia married to this man must put up with this kind of abuse regularly she is by no means quiet or timid. Emilia is direct and confident, she speaks her mind in standing up to Iago and Othello. Emilia is one of the most sensible characters in the play and she is fiercely loyal to her mistress, betraying her husband and revealing his foul plans to split up Desdemona and Othello. When she finds out that Othello has killed Desdemona she says -

' O more the angel she, And you the blacker devil.'

She defends Desdemona until she herself is killed by her husband for revealing all that he has done. She is told by Iago to ' charm your tongue' to which she replies

' I will not charm my tongue; I am bound to speak:

My mistress here lies murdered in her bed.'

Although it is the woman's role to obey their husbands Emilia's sense of loyalty towards her mistress is stronger. Emilia though must pay the ultimate penalty for her defiance in her death.

The women of the novel must be obedient and faithful to their husbands, else suffer severe consequences. This consequence is also suffered by Desdemona.

Desdemona is Othello's wife and is clearly the innocent romantic heroine of the play. Although she appears to be strong willed and independent at the beginning in defying her father and standing up to Iago's abuse of women, it is clear that she is devoted to her husband. It is as if her one goal in life is to please her Othello, and she stands by him no matter what, even to her father when she says –

‘ To you I am bound for life and education.... I am hitherto your daughter. But here is my husband. And so much duty as my mother showed to you, preferring you before her father’

she is completely obedient towards him.

‘ You indeed may say so, For t'was that hand that gave away my heart. ’

Desdemona willingly accepts her death by Othello, and does not try in anyway to correct him in his thought that she has cheated on him. She infact probably is not fully aware of why her husband wants to kill her but still she does not protest, she even defends her husband by saying that he did not kill her. Desdemona's dying words are –

‘ Nobody. I myself. Farewell

Commend me to my kind lord. O farewell.’

She does not question anything Othello does. Desdemona's role is clearly to obey and please her husband.

It is clear that in the times that this play was set the woman's place in society was to obey their husbands, and be faithful and pure. It is somewhat ironic that women like Desdemona are preferred by the men because she is godly and pure, yet Bianca is not respected because she is a whore although Cassio is free to sleep with who ever he wants with no respect lost.

In both cases above the women's disobedience to their husbands resulted in their death. Although we do not discover what becomes of Bianca it is safe to assume that she continues her life in the same fashion with a continued amount of disrespect from the male characters.

It is sad to conclude that the role of the women in the play was as objects to their male partners, and that they depend completely on their male husbands and partners to maintain their status. Desdemona and Emilia's deaths in the end are all at the hands of the husbands to whom they were faithful and obedient.