

Social context of othello

Literature, Russian Literature



In Othello many issues are undertaken. According to the time that the play was written, men hold all the power and women are considered to be of low intellect. Throughout the play Desdemona is a symbol of innocence and helplessness. At first she appears to be mature and quite perceptive of events around her. Iago often tells Othello that she is unfaithful. It seems that she refuses to accept what is happening and her views are impartial.

She has a tendency to be sympathetic towards other people's situations, like Cassio. This is what triggers Othello's jealousy when Iago pointed out they were speaking in privacy. She often pays attention to other people's thoughts yet remains cynical if they differ to her own. She has loyalty to her husband in all aspects of life, whether it is mental or physical.

Othello shows us how a woman's character, reputation and power can be manipulated and distorted by men. The relationship between Desdemona and Othello is very peculiar, and would have been considered even more so at the time at which Shakespeare was writing, it therefore stands out in the play, not least because it is a mixed-race marriage but also because at the start of the play they appear to be on an equal standing, they have a mutual "respect" for one another.

We are presented with a very powerful image of women at the start of the play; Desdemona has disobeyed her father and taken her chosen husband, although Desdemona does acknowledge that Othello is her "Lord" and that it is her "duty" to obey him. However, in that state, Desdemona does act as a dramatic device, bringing Othello into a domestic situation where he is inexperienced. This causes his obsession with Desdemona to grow because

she has become his whole world; Iago finds it easy to manipulate this situation because Othello is unfamiliar to life only in the domestic side.

Although Desdemona was rational in trusting, her trust was often misplaced, for example Iago. As well as this regardless of her intellect of what goes on around her in some cases, this was not enough to rise up in society, as women had no opinion in the time of the play. Although Shakespeare undertook many modern day ideas, he did not do this for a modern day society, as it would not have allowed so many events to occur, and it would not have been considered realistic by the public.

When Othello talks of wooing Desdemona he is portrayed as an eloquent storyteller and lover: " She gave me for my pain a world of sighs. " It is through her relationship with Othello that his failure is shown not only by her spoilt opinion of him, he was previously an ideal to her, but by the end of the play she has realised that " men are not gods", but also by Othello's swift dismissal of her as a " fair devil" and a " lewd minx" after his view of her where he would " deny her nothing" has been destroyed by Iago.

The downfall of Othello is marked by the destruction of their once close and trusting relationship, which Iago has convinced Othello that it is a " foul disproportion. " Desdemona's physical and vocal absence from the opening scenes speaks about women's place in the Venetian society. It is through Desdemona's absence that we are able to conjure up our own mental image of her based on what we have heard.