

Othello

[Literature](#), [Character](#)



Race in Othello Race is one of the most prominent themes in William Shakespearean Othello. The titular character is a black man in a predominantly white society and one of the first black heroes of English literature. At the time the play was written, black people were treated poorly by white people and were referred to as "moors" as they were considered to be barbaric and brutal just like the area of the moors in northern England. The main character is one of few exceptions to this as he is a high ranking officer in the Venetian army.

However, this does not prevent indirect discrimination behind his back. The theme of race and racism is displayed using analogistic imagery, allusions to the occult and straight out racist language. It is not only black people discriminated against in the play, women and even different Italian nationalities are discriminated against. At the time of the play this would have been acceptable but in today's society this mind-set is not politically correct. Othello is the play's primary protagonist. However, because he is black he is the subject of a lot of the characters' ridicule.

At the beginning of the play, Brabantio is angered that his daughter, Desdemona, is about to marry Othello. Interracial marriage would have been frowned upon at the time. Brabantio describes this as "too true an evil" expressing his anger at it. However, the thing that sets Othello apart from the other Moors is his military background. He serves in the Venetian army which makes him superior to other people of his race. His military service leads people to see him as superior as opposed to other Moors. Despite this, he is not spared from the discrimination of other characters.

Iago frequently refers to him as "black Othello". This singles him out from the others. At that time black would have also been associated with sin and evil, another reason why the moors were looked down upon by others. This imagery of the occult is linked into the context of the play. Iago makes references to Othello being involved with black magic many times. He believes that because of his exotic origins, Othello has links to Satan and the dark arts and that he used this magic to win over his daughter. "Against all rules of nature and must be driven to find out practices of cunning hell. Iago does not like the idea of having mixed-race grandchildren and uses many absurd excuses as to why his daughter fell for Othello. At the time, races such as black people and Jews were accused of working with the devil using black magic. In reality these were just stories fabricated from rumor and legend to spread fear into people. Othello is even compared to the devil himself numerous times. At one point, Iago says that Desdemona will soon grow tired of being married to a Moor. He says "Her eye must be fed and what delight shall she have to look on the devil?" He is comparing Othello to the devil himself.

He later goes on to say "have you not hurt your head?" This may initially seem like an innocent comment but he is actually suggesting that Othello has horns beginning to grow from his forehead. As the play progresses, Othello becomes more paranoid and has evil tendencies. The metaphorical horns growing represent his growing internal evil and the stereotype of Moors being evil monsters. Othello himself fears that he will succumb to this evil and says "a horned man's a monster and a beast." By the end of the play, Othello has almost become the stereotypical or feared by white people.

A violent murderer blinded by vengeance and insanity. This demonic imagery can be closely linked to the beastly imagery in the play. Another racial stereotype towards moors was their supposed annalistic tendencies. They were thought to be a beastly race and along with the previous satanic imagery, there is a lot of beastly imagery as well. Early in the play, Ago says to Abrogation that " an old black ram is tipping your white ewe. " He uses the word " black" to put emphasis Othello race and provoke Abrogation by telling him that that he and

Desman are making " the beast with two backs. " Ago knows that a black man having sex with his daughter will enrage him so he chooses his words carefully to full fill his motives. Later on Ago describes Othello transition into the stereotypical annalistic moor. He says that " he foams at the mouth and by and by breaks out to savage madness. " This is almost like a savage animal that foams at the mouth and snarls which represents what Othello has become. Towards the end of the play, Othello beats his chest in a similar fashion to a gorilla.

This is a prime example of his ruinations from a noble general to the fear that had been pumped into the white population at the time. He is now the physical manifestation of what people think of his kind and is reinforcing the racial stereotype of moors. As you can see, black people were perceived as barbaric monsters that practiced black magic at the time the play was written. Although initially he was nothing like this, Othello slowly becomes this image of the typical moor. Racism towards black people is evidently the

predominant example of race in the play. However, it is not the only example.

Venetians regarded themselves very highly at the time of the play so practically any sort of 'outsider' was discriminated against. Michael Cassia is a Florentine and at the time, people from Florence were regarded as academics and scholars. This gives Cassia a reputation as such. Ago says that Cassia " never set a squadron in the field" which makes him out to be meek. He also says that Cassia displays " mere prattle without practice" meaning that he is all talk without actually acting on his words. The typical stereotype for Florentine at the time was that they were not made for fighting UT for being scholars.

However, later in the play Cassia goes on to disprove this stereotype when he gets in a drunken brawl. This display of violence is a contradiction of the Florentine stereotype and makes people see Cassia in a different light for the rest of the play. Women are also frequently discriminated against in the play. There are three female characters in the play and at the end of it all of them have been referred to as a " where" at least once throughout its course. At the time of the play women were expected to obey and serve their husbands and treat them with the utmost respect regardless of how they were treated.

Emilie and Desman are both beaten by their respective husbands at least once and Bianca is mocked frequently by Cassia. He calls her a " poor caitiff" and even a " monkey". She appears to love him yet he only uses her for his sexual desires. He brags to Ago about how " she falls thus about (Caddis neck" and they both laugh at her. Emilie is aware of how women are

mistreated and is a feminist of sorts amongst the more submissive female characters. She says "(men) are all but stomachs and we all but food to eat us angrily and when they are full they belch us. This shows she is aware of how men used women at that time and how she opposed it. In reality, the women have the ability to bring the men to their knees. Othello spirals into insanity at the thought of Desdemona's infidelity is a prime example of this. Although they are mistreated and seen as mere objects by most men they have the potential to manipulate men to cater to their every need. Race is evidently an important theme in Othello. At the time, people tended to be slightly narrow-minded or prejudiced towards people whom they perceived as different.

Different races or genders are heavily discriminated against by other races or genders using crude metaphors and absurd stereotypes. However, the play seems to contradict these stereotypes. The black character was initially more civil and moral than the others and the women indirectly bring down many of the male characters. It shows how looks can be deceiving and how stereotypes and race can affect our judgment of people. Even in today's society this can be seen. Othello is a prime example of how judging people by their race can be wrong.