

The moor of venice

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



The Moor of Venice Abhimanyu Prathap Group 4. 2 Roll No. 86 English (Hons) Year 1 The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare in approximately 1603, and based on the Italian short story *Un Capitano Moro* by Cinthio. The work revolves around four central characters: Othello, a Moorish general in the Venetian army; his wife, Desdemona; his lieutenant, Cassio; and his ensign, Iago. A thrilling tale of deceit, Othello is fooled by his 'trusted' ensign into the belief that his newlywed wife Desdemona had been having an affair with Cassio. Driven by grief, Othello proceeds to murder Desdemona and subsequently, upon learning his mistake, takes his own life. Before that, however, Othello's final speech sheds light on his character that gives a whole new angle on the tragedy. Beginning with the opening lines of the play, Othello remains at a distance from much of the action that concerns and affects him. He is different from those around him, due to his origins and his life history, but he shares their religion, values, and patriotism to Venice. Most importantly, he is visibly different due to the color of his skin, so he lives constantly among, but separated from, other people. Shakespeare presents this fact in the dialogue and also in the staging of the play. Othello is a black face among a sea of white faces, and he is constantly referred to as 'The Moor'. When other characters call him "black," they refer not only to his face but also to the concept of color symbolism in Elizabethan morality: White is honor, black is wickedness; white is innocence, black is guilt. In the first scene, Roderigo and Iago refer to him with racial epithets, not his name. Apart from 'The Moor', Othello is also referred to as 'The thick-lips', 'an old black ram' and 'A Barbary horse'. Despite that, however, Othello's skill as a soldier and

leader is valuable and necessary to the state, and he is an integral part of the Venetian civic society. By the end of the First act, the Venetian government places him in full martial and political command of Cyprus. It is here at the fortress where the ensuing acts of the tragedy are staged. He is triumphant at war and in love, the hero at his greatest moment. Such triumph, in a tragedy, cannot last. Iago, jealous of Cassio for being the lieutenant and angry at Othello for not giving him the rank, decides to wreck havoc in both their lives at this point. He plans to make Othello believe that his lieutenant and his wife are lovers. He sought to strike two birds with one stone, and very nearly achieves it too. His scheme, however, would not have worked without the underlying atmosphere of racial prejudice in Venetian society. Shakespeare's Desdemona copes with prejudice by denying it access to her own life: Her relationship with Othello is one of love, and she is deliberately loyal only to that. But Othello is not aware of how deeply the prejudice had penetrated his own self. When faced with Iago's barefaced lie, Othello's inexperience undermines his confidence. Iago finds it easy to drive him to jealousy and make him think that Desdemona loves another man because he already feels that her love for him is too good to be true. These thoughts, inflamed by Iago's hints and lies, prevent Othello from discussing his concerns and fears directly with Desdemona, and so he acts on panicked assumption as he sees Cassio as the man most Venetian women in Desdemona's position would like to marry and, therefore, as the man she would turn to if she ceased to love her husband. Jealousy is what appears to destroy Othello. It is the emotion suggested to him by Iago, when he says, O beware jealousy It is the green ey'd monster, which doth mock That meat it

feeds on (III. 3, 169—170) Iago thinks he knows jealousy, having rehearsed it in his relationship with Emilia to the extent that Emilia believes jealousy is part of the personality of men, but Iago's jealousy is a poor, weak thing compared to the storm of jealousy he stirs up in Othello. Othello's insecurities are so close to the surface that a few more hints from Iago can tear his confident exterior and expose his fears, desires, and tendency to violence, which eventually does happen. Othello cannot stand uncertainty; it drives him to destroy his sanity. Iago now has only to push Othello to the belief that he has been betrayed, and Othello does the rest, judging, condemning, and murdering Desdemona. Some critics say that Othello's tragic flaw was jealousy which 'flared at suspicion and rushed into action unchecked by calm common sense'. Rather than Othello's tragic flaw was that he had internalized the prejudices of those who surrounded him. In his heart he had come to believe what they believed: that a black man is an unattractive creature, not quite human, unworthy of love. Thinking this, he could not believe that Desdemona could truly love him for himself. Her love must be a pretense, or a flawed and corrupted emotion. Iago hinted at these ideas, and Othello rushed to accept them, because they echoed his deepest fears and insecurities. Fate was cruel to Othello, like the cruel fate of ancient Greek tragedies. Like the Greek heroes, Othello can confront this fate only with the best of his humanity. In his final speech, Othello shows a flash of his former greatness: his military glory, his loyalty to Venice, the intensity of his love, and his terrible realization that, by killing Desdemona, he has destroyed the best in himself. His love, and eventual jealousy, killed Desdemona. If he had never loved or kissed her, she never would have died.

As it would fittingly seem, Othello kisses her again before he kills himself, as his personal repentance. Quoting Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous critique of Othello: Othello wishes to excuse himself on the score of ignorance, and yet not to excuse himself, -to excuse himself by accusing. This struggle of feeling is finely conveyed in the word 'base,' which is applied to the rude Indian, not in his own character, but as the momentary representative of Othello's 'Indian'-for I retain the old reading-means American, a savage in general. Finally, let me repeat that Othello does not kill Desdemona in jealousy, but in a conviction forced upon him by the almost superhuman art of Iago, such a conviction as any man would and must have entertained who had believed Iago's honesty as Othello did. We, the audience, know that Iago is a villain from the beginning; but in considering the essence of the Shakspearian Othello, we must perseveringly place ourselves in his situation, and under his circumstances. Then we shall immediately feel the fundamental difference between the solemn agony of the noble Moor, and the wretched fishing jealousies of Leontes, and the morbid suspiciousness of Leonatus, who is, in other respects, a fine character. Othello had no life but in Desdemona:-the belief that she, his angel, had fallen from the heaven of her native innocence, wrought a civil war in his heart. She is his counterpart; and, like him, is almost sanctified in our eyes by her absolute unsuspectingness, and holy entireness of love. As the curtain drops, which do we pity the most?