

## ENGLISH ADVANCED

### Othello

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Othello is a Shakespearean tragedy, centring on the themes of racism, gullibility and manipulation, through the portrayal of the main characters, Othello and Iago. Othello is aware of the racism against him, making him gullible to Iago's insinuations. Iago uses his knowledge of Othello's gullibility to manipulate him. This is explored through Act 3 Scene 3 of Othello, as well as other scenes in the play.

Racism is a major theme of Othello. Othello himself is referred to as "thick lips" (I.i.66), "lascivious Moor" (I.i.125) and "a Barbary horse" (I.iii.397). In fact, Othello is not referred to by his actual name until Act 1, Scene 3.

Racism is used to stir up Brabantio against Othello and Desdemona's marriage. Iago uses racist imagery to depict the marriage between Othello and Desdemona, saying, "Even now, very now, an old black ram is tupping your white ewe"(I.i.88-89). This derogatory comment is degrading Othello into a wild, untamed beast.

Brabantio tells Othello that Desdemona would never "run from her guardage to the sooty bosom of such a thing as thou—to fear, not to delight...thou hast practiced on her with foul charms...with drugs or minerals that weakens motion (I.ii.70)." Brabantio stereotypes Othello as an uncivilised foreigner embroiled in witchcraft, who Desdemona should fear, not love.

Othello and Desdemona's elopement tells us that Othello is aware of the prejudices against their marriage. If Othello had instead sought permission from Brabantio, he would have been rejected, as Brabantio says, "I here do give thee that with all my heart, which, but thou hast already, with all my heart I would keep from thee."

When Othello starts to believe that Desdemona has committed an affair with Cassio, he uses imagery to describe her saying, "Her name that was as fresh as Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black as mine own face." (III.iii.397). By projecting the negative image of his face onto Desdemona's reputation it suggests that Othello is aware of the racism against him.

In Act 3, Scene 3, when Othello is convinced of Desdemona's infidelity, he says, "Haply, for I am black, and have not those soft parts of conversation that chamberers have." (Line 265) He is convinced that it was his race, and the fact that he is not like other Venetians that contributed to Desdemona's preference for Cassio, a man of the same race as herself. He is accepting that due to his race, Desdemona would soon change her love for him.

Iago is able to manipulate and deceive Othello due to his gullibility. This gullibility is Othello's tragic flaw. In his book, Poetics, Aristotle describes a term called 'hamartia,' which has been interpreted as a mistake that causes the character's tragic downfall. In Othello's case it is his gullibility in Act 3 Scene 3 when he puts too much faith in Iago's honesty. Othello constantly praises Iago, saying- "Iago is most honest." (II.iii.7) and "for I know thou 'rt full of love and honesty, and weigh'st thy words before thou giv'st them breath." (III.iii.122)

Othello is gullible to Iago's insinuations about Desdemona's infidelity due to Othello's trusting nature and also his awareness of the racism against their marriage. Iago exploits Othello's "free and open nature that thinks men honest but seems to be so and will as tenderly be led by the nose as asses are." (I.iii.380). Iago is portraying Othello as a weak willed animal, as if having a trusting nature is a flaw.

He is gullible towards implications about Desdemona's affair as he has been told repeatedly that it is "against all rules of nature" (I.iii.98) for Desdemona to love him. Othello is not truly convinced of

Desdemona's love for him. Othello begins to echo Brabantio when he says, "And yet how nature, erring from itself—" (III.iii.229).

Iago is a calculating and devious character. This is portrayed through dramatic irony. The audience is aware of Iago's manipulation, and it makes Othello seem foolish when he falls into Iago's trap. From the very beginning of the play, Iago's intentions to manipulate Othello are revealed- "I follow him to serve my turn upon him." (I.i.44).

Iago manipulates Othello by seeming to be honest when really, he is deceitful. He admits this himself, saying, "When devils will the blackest sins put on, they do suggest at first with heavenly shows, as I do now." (II.iii.318)

In Act 3, Scene 3, we get a clear glimpse of Iago's manipulation, when he sees Cassio and Desdemona, and says to Othello "I like not that" and "I cannot think it that he would steal away so guilty-like," suggesting that Cassio has something to hide. His tone seems to suggest that "there were some monster in his thought, too hideous to be shown." By speaking in cryptic comments and asking seemingly innocent questions about Cassio and Desdemona's friendship, Iago manipulates Othello into thinking that Iago is trying to protect Cassio's reputation.

He also manipulates Othello by taking advantage of his awareness of the racism against his marriage to Desdemona. In line 235, Iago suggests to Othello that Desdemona shunned "all things nature tends". He describes her love for Othello as a "foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural." After that, Othello seems convinced, saying "She's gone, I am abused, and my relief must be to loathe her." All Iago needs is circumstantial evidence to convince Othello because Iago knows that "Trifles light as air, are to the jealous confirmations strong as proofs of holy writ." (III.iii.323) Iago uses this to his advantage when he describes explicit images of Desdemona's affair, knowing that Othello's gullibility will take them as proof.

When Othello says to Iago, "I am bound to thee forever," it is through tragic irony that the audience realises the significance of this statement. Othello means that he is indebted to Iago, but the audience realises that he is unwittingly acknowledging that Iago is actually controlling him.

In conclusion, Othello centres on the themes of racism, gullibility, and manipulation through the portrayal of Othello and Iago. Othello is aware of the racism against him causing him to be gullible to Iago's insinuations. Iago uses his knowledge of Othello's gullibility to manipulate and deceive him. This is explored through Act 3 Scene 3 of Othello, as well as other scenes in the play.