The Problem Of Racism In Shakespeare's Othello

William Shakespeare has been hailed as one of the best plays writes in history by countless sources for hundreds of years. Known to be eccentric, Shakespeare did not shy away from provocative themes; as exemplified in his play, Othello. The tale set in the sixteenth century in Venice and Cyrus. Othello the Moor, is used and portrayed as an evil and malicious character by anti-Semitic characters that use foul and offensive language to describe him. The honorable dark warrior in the Venetian armed force has furtively hitched a wonderful white lady called Desdemona, the little girl of a conspicuous representative, Brabantio. When he discovers, he is offended, and immediately repudiates her for being married to Othello. One of the most central themes in the famous work, racism, has been overlooked for years, but its startling depth is crucial to the plot. The theme plays out in three distinct parts: how society's racism influences Othello, the racism that encompasses the main character by his close friends and Othello's self-image through the lens of racial discrimination. These three different perspectives are all important to how Othello, the protagonist, developed as a character and to the general plot as well.

One of the most obvious voices of racism is the setting's societal voice. It is clear to see how Othello already has the disadvantage of peoples' prejudice against him because of his skin color. In the first scene of the first act, Iago embarks on an angry tirade about his lack of a promotion. He repeatedly refers to his superior, Othello, as "he", never mentioning the general by anything else until the last scene where he is labeled the "Moor." This name at the time was perfectly acceptable and was widely used, though the label carried with it certain connotations. For example, when his father-in-law brought Othello before a judge, the righteous man was accused of luring a white Venetian woman through magic. Even though it was fear, anger, and emotion that drove this accusation to be made; nonetheless, the fact that it was mentioned illustrates how radical, the unfounded and prevalent racial stereotype was at this time. A similar instance of stereotyping appeared in the next scene, when Brabantio, Desdemona's father, was incredulous that his daughter would want a dark-skinned man for a husband. This feeling of shock and dismay shows how dark-skinned people were seen as a lower class, even when they occupied prestigious positions, such as Othello's status as a general. Even the judge, who showered the likable Othello with compliments upon the latter's entrance into the courtroom perhaps unknowingly, yet never the less rudely, demeans the eloquent man's race by exclaiming to Brabantio, *"If virtue no delighted beauty lack, your son in law is more fair than black" (Shakespeare, 1.3.330-31)?. This comes after the mentioned man beautifully, honestly and calmly defends himself and his marriage to the room. He tells Brabantio to not judge Othello by his skin color but rather look at his actions and practice of being a good, noble and virtuous man. This statement praises Othello for his civil demeanor as if it is not possible to be dark-skinned and well-spoken at the same time. It is made clear that society avoided any credentials and achievements to a colored person's name at the earliest opportunity. This racism does not only pertain to the society these people lived in, but the sentiments also extended to their hearts and minds.

Othello and Desdemona are married at the very beginning of the play where we encounter multiple hurdles of the issue of the race between them. The whole society including Desdemona's father Brabantio repudiate their marriage and sees it as a foul act *"against the

rules of nature” (Shakespeare, 1.3.112-124)?. Brabantio repeatedly uses language that makes Othello look atrocious. “She is abused, stolen from me, and corrupted, by spells and medicines bought of mountebanks”. (Shakespeare, 1.3. 73-74)? Othello is disdained by everyone initially even Brabantio. Racial slurs such as *“against the rules of nature”* heavily impact the audience in this era. In the 17th century, racism was very common and was not considered racist as it was a norm and slavery with black people was very common. At the outset of the book Iago uses racial slurs such as *“Even now, now, very now, an old black ram Is tupping your white ewe. Arise, arise! Awake the snorting citizens with the bell, or else the devil will make a grandsire of you.” * (Shakespeare 1.1.97-101)? He says this when he is awaking Brabantio to inform him about the news about his daughter's marriage with Othello. Referring to Desdemona (a white Venetian) and Othello (an older, black man). Othello belongs to a Christian society, where Iago uses the word “devil” to describe Othello and portray that all black men are evil and brute. The audience and the people reading see the transformation of the so-called “evil and devil-like man” to a nobleman of honor and a well-respected soldier in Venice. Iago also states that Brabantio's grandchildren will be animals if he chooses to let Desdemona reside with Othello. The use of vulgar and rude language, attempting to frighten, succeeding, and reminding Brabantio that any children the couple would have would be biracial and therefore undesirable. By filling the frantic man’s head with the stereotype of a savage, dark, mysterious heathen who stole his young daughter, Brabantio loses any rational thought that would have saved him from embarrassment.

In combat to what Brabantio said about him, Othello tells the Duke that in the past Brabantio *“loved me; oft invited me” * (Shakespeare 1.3.149-170)? proving to everyone that Brabantio was not racist and did not discriminate against Othello until Iago’s racial manipulation and oversight towards Othello. Rather than being arrogant and haughty when he is accused of using witchcraft, Othello uses his words and poetic language to justify that he has not used any magic whatsoever on Desdemona. However, Othello explains to the Duke and the Senate using iambic words how Desdemona fell for him. Othello’s downfall shows us that race and jealousy play a large role in this tragedy. The entire plot revolves around the jealousy of Iago and Roderigo and the hatred toward Othello because of his race. In the play, there is much evidence to support that there is an obvious abhorrence towards Othello’s race.

This remarkable play by William Shakespeare shows how racism affected a colored protagonist through multiple complicated relationships. How society perceived and judged Othello proved to have a lasting, built-up influence that ultimately did factor into the man’s demise. More obviously, the attacks of the villain, Iago, on Othello’s race and character break down the valiant general. Since the rest of Othello’s persona was continuously attacked, he became seriously insecure, focusing this obsessive insecurity and complete lack of confidence in his new marriage with Desdemona. Finally, all the constant outside pressure crumbles the powerful general’s psyche to the point of self-hatred and, ultimately, suicide. This play tragically displays the destructive power of racism on one person.