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Othello and Desdemona – presentation of the relationship by Shakespeare

Desdemona is the daughter of Brabantio, who had been looking for a suitable man for his daughter to marry and is shocked to find out that Desdemona has chosen Othello, the moor, over all other men. From the beginning of the play it becomes apparent that this relationship is under pressure as society including Desdemona's father do not approve of their marriage. Shakespeare's use of Iago as a character and his opinions on the relationship such as "An old black ram is tupping your white ewe" let the audience know of the prejudice already faced against Othello, though now we would find this shocking, at the time Othello was written this would have been more acceptable meaning it would not have the same effect on the audience.

Othello's colour is used by Shakespeare as a symbol of how unique he is and echoes the unique choice which Desdemona has made. People find it unbelievable that Desdemona could have chosen Othello with free will as they see this decision as impossible, so see black magic as the only possibility. Shakespeare wrote the hero in as a moor at a time when a black character was more likely to be a villain shows that Shakespeare had some purpose in his hero being black. In Shakespearean times racism was more distinct than it is expressed in Othello making this play quite different for its time even in modern day scenarios race is still a major issue.

Through the first acts and other characters' opinions of Othello we come to believe that he is a savage beast that has forced Desdemona into marriage, it comes as a shock when we first meet his character to see that he is actually quite the opposite and the idea of Othello and Desdemona's relationship coming from black magic is shattered through Shakespeare's presentation of Othello as a well-mannered, gracious man. In Act I scene 2 "I fetch my life and being from men of Royal siege, and my demerits may speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune as this that I have reached" removes any idea of their relationship not being true. Shakespeare conveys Othello's character through the use of verse which gives an authority and power to his voice without him being presented as arrogant. It also says that Desdemona was seduced by his story telling with the Duke saying "I think this tale would win my daughter too." His measured and poetic words show confidence without him being arrogant and rude.

Desdemona's choice has created controversy and objection in the play because of it being an inter-racial marriage but she immediately puts to rest the idea that black magic caused the marriage in the way she reacts to Brabantio. "I saw Othello's visage in his mind" meaning that she unlike her father got past the colour of his skin and found something which she loved about Othello, which shows her willingness to be with Othello.

Shakespeare's use of colour, mainly black and white creates a theme throughout which emphasizes separation between the two colours, a possible echo that eventually Desdemona and Othello will separate as it appears that the two cannot be mixed. For example 'an old black ram is tupping your white ewe' expresses the idea of innocence for the colour white, and an almost beast-like image

is associated with black, as is black magic thus leading to the idea that Desdemona could not enter into a marriage which Othello in any other way.

As we know that Othello is a tragedy, the presentation Shakespeare creates of an indestructible relationship leaves the audience wondering what it is that will break them apart.