Is Othello A Racist Play?

Although several events occur within the play that might suggest that "Othello" is a racist work, racism does not actually dominate the play. The play was written at a time when blacks were not accepted in English society and therefore, the romantic union that occurs between **Othello**

and Desdemona cannot last and is destroyed. Most racist remarks in the play are spoken by people who are angry or upset. For example, when Emilia finds out that **Othello** killed Desdemona, she calls Othello a "Blacker devil". This is the only time in the play that she says anything racist about Othello. Other characters that have racist attitudes towards Othello are Iago, Brabantio, Roderigo and Emilia.

Iago is the most racist character of all and his hatred towards Othello begins when Othello chooses Cassio to be his lieutenant. Iago feels slighted, as he has more experience in warfare than Cassio. This feeling precipitates his scheme against Othello and he begins by saying many negative things about him behind his back. His scheme to destroy Othello, also includes Cassio and Desdemona. The first time we hear one of his racist comments is when he's talking to Brabantio about **Othello** and Desdemona, " Even now, very now, an old black ram is tupping your

white ewe".

Iago says this to try and turn Brabantio against Othello. He never says anything racist to Othello's face, but rather pretends to be his best friend. Iago is jealous of Othello for many reasons, one being that Othello has a higher rank in the army than he, and he has a good marriage with Desdemona which Iago does not have with his wife, Emilia. These are the main causes of his hatred for Othello and the reason he adopts such a racist attitude.

Roderigo is another one of the racist characters in the play. He is Iago's accomplice and will do anything for him. He does this because of the way Iago can twist a situation to make it sound as if Roderigo would benefit from it. One of the racist names he calls Othello behind his back is

"Thick-lips". He hates Othello because he's jealous of him as he also loves Desdemona but cannot have her.

Brabantio is also a racist character, and is enraged when he finds out that his daughter, Desdemona, has been seeing "the moor" behind his back. Brabantio is so angry that he

sends out his guards to catch Othello and put him into prison. Brabantio views Othello as a " foul and dirty no good black". Unlike Iago and Roderigo, Brabantio will openly make racist comments about Othello to his face such as, " lascivious moor", "Wheeling stranger". Brabantio can do this because he is the Senator of Venice and is higher in rank than Othello.

The other character who is racist towards Othello is Emilia, the lady in waiting to Desdemona. When she finds out what Othello has done, she expresses her feelings about him: "O, the more angel she, and you the blacker devil!" Although this is the only time she says what she thinks of

him, she never really approved of the relationship.

The theme of the play is about a black and white union, which was later destroyed. Shakespeare feels that the union between the two is right, but the relationship would never be accepted by society at that time and had to be destroyed. He portrayed the union between Othello and

Desdemona as a good thing, and the people who destroyed it, mainly Iago and Roderigo as evil. This indicates that the playwright approved of a black and white relationship and was not a racist. Although the play has a racist undercurrent, the play was not written with that intent and is not a racist play.