

Othello - Gender and Sexuality

Overview

Men hold the power – stereotypical attitudes

Women: virginity and purity closely aligned; men's possessions.

Men: ideally strong, brave and honorable, demand obedience.

Emilia breaks the mould – shows women do not have to be passive - disobedient yet admirable.

Points and quotes

1. Women – obedient to male authority figure - possessions
Iago to Brabantio: 'Look to your house, your daughter and your bags.'
Brabantio to Othello: 'foul thief, where hast thou stowed my daughter?'
Othello to Desdemona: 'The purchase made, the fruits are yet to come.'
Othello (soliloquy): 'O curse of marriage, / That we can call these delicate creatures ours; And not their appetites.'
2. Men – expected to conform to societal norms of strength, bravery and honour
Othello to Duke and senators: 'And little of this great world can I speak / More than pertains to feats of broils and battle.'
Duke: 'I think this tale would win my daughter too.'
Iago to Roderigo (speaking of Cassio): 'a great arithmetician ... That never set a squadron in the field / Nor the division of a battle knows / More than a spinster.'
3. Women's sexuality – ideal was chaste and pure
Iago to Desdemona and Emilia: 'You rise to play and go to bed to work.'
Cassio calls Bianca a 'bauble' and a 'fitchew.'
Iago repeatedly interrupts Othello and Desdemona at night: do they consummate their marriage? Desdemona dies the epitome of saintly goodness, purity and obedience
4. Emilia – obedient, but only to a point – cynical and dislikes double standards
Emilia to Iago: 'He called her whore. A beggar in his drink / Could not have laid such terms upon his callet.'
Emilia to Desdemona: But I do think it is their husbands' faults / If wives do fall ... The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.'
Emilia to Desdemona: 'who would not make her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch?'
Emilia to Othello: 'Thou art rash as fire / To say that she was false. O, she was heavenly true!'
Emilia (when Iago orders her to go home): 'Tis proper I obey him, not now.'
Emilia (when Iago orders her to be silent): 'I will speak as liberal as the north. / Let heaven, and men, and devils, let 'em all, / All, all cry shame against me, yet I'll speak.'