

Othello

Act Scene 1

The play begins with two characters, Iago (an army officer) and Roderigo (a gentleman of Venice) arguing about the elopement of Othello and Desdemona. Roderigo had hired Iago to spy on Desdemona as he has a crush on her. Iago reports that Desdemona and Othello are a couple and have secretly wed. Iago tells Roderigo of his hatred of Othello, presumably because Othello had chosen Cassius as his Lieutenant for the Venetian army, rather than himself. Throughout his spiel against Othello, Iago shows a bigoted attitude towards Othello's race.

Iago encourages Roderigo to report this to Senator Brabantio, Desdemona's father. Roderigo does so, with the aid of very vulgar and crude language from Iago, and Brabantio asks Roderigo to show him the way to the Moor so as he can, with weapons, deal with it. The end of the scene shows the audience the devious and manipulative ways of Iago, as he tells Roderigo that he can't let Othello see that he was involved with telling Senator Brabantio.

Language of Act Scene 1

Shakespeare uses the character of Iago to show the bigoted nature of Venetian society at the time. Iago is openly racist towards Othello. Iago calls Othello an "old black ram..tupping..white ewe" (1,1:89-90)

"his Moorships" ancient- Iago refers to Othello by his race. (1,1:34)

"lascivious Moor"- Roderigo describes Othello as a rude, smutty black man taking advantage of Desdemona- shows his jealousy towards Othello. (1,1:126)

"Barbary horse"- rude metaphor describing Othello as an African stallion. (1,1:113)

"thick lips" Roderigo highlighting the stereotypical description of sub-Saharan Africans as having thick lips. (1,1:67)

Shakespeare uses METAPHOR in this scene to highlight the racism that exists towards Othello by other characters- a man who is in his employ (Iago) and a gentleman of Venice. (Roderigo)