



Othello - A Racist Play?

Anouk Anderson

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Seminar paper from the year 2009 in the subject English Language and Literature Studies - Literature, grade: 1,0, University of Bremen, language: English, abstract: Othello already raised questions about the nature of race, its social implications and about the correlation of outer appearances and inner qualities. The matter of skin colour and racist stereotyping is evident in Othello and it is vital for the interpretation of the play. As an “extravagant and wheeling stranger/ Of here, and every where” (1.1.135-136). Othello is not just like any other man, but largely defined by his origin and colour. In this paper I want to examine the role of Othello's skin colour in the play and if we can consider the play as racist. Although these questions are today probably more relevant than ever, my main focus will be to analyse the importance of race in the context of Shakespeare's times.

In order to answer the question, whether or not Othello is a racist drama, I first have to define the term 'race'. As the concept of race has changed over time and is still changing, I will also look at Elizabethan attitudes towards race and foreigners and how strangers were portrayed on the Elizabethan stage. The play is not set in England, but in Venice, a place that serves a certain function in the play, which I will also examine. In the second part of this paper I will look at the play itself and its characters. I will analyse the different roles and their attitudes towards Othello's colour and how they influence Othello's self-perception and his personal fate. In Othello skin colour and blackness stand for more than just physical appearance or cultural background, but it is also linked to the character's inner lives and it largely determines the outcome of the play. The importance of racial concepts in Othello will be examined in the last part of this paper.

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