
The Green-eyed Monster: A Shakespearean Analysis of Jealousy and Its Impact on Modern Masculinity and Domestic Ethics

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Abstract

The concept of the "Green-eyed Monster," a metaphor for jealousy coined by William Shakespeare, the greatest dramatist who is not of an age but for all time. It remains a chillingly relevant psychological phenomenon in the twenty-first century. While modern civilization prides itself on technological advancement and intellectual willpower, the primal instinct of jealousy continues to manifest as a destructive force, particularly within gender dynamics and domestic spheres.

This paper attempts to explore the trajectory of jealousy from the Elizabethan stage to the modern era, using Shakespeare's *Othello* as the primary lens besides trying to examine the internal conflict and the "tragic flaw." The study analyses how Iago's manipulation of Othello's insecurities mirrors contemporary issues of toxic masculinity, domestic violence, and the fragility of trust. The paper also highlights the persistent lack of true female emancipation in the face of male inferiority complexes comparing the tragedy of Desdemona with modern instances of femicide and acid attacks.

Further, the role of mass media and the erosion of ethics in contemporary society are identified as catalysts for these behavioural patterns. The paper argues that the solution to such pervasive atrocities lies in a shift toward "Value-Based Education" and "self-renunciation." By integrating literary analysis with sociological observation, the research concludes that unless individuals are taught to navigate their internal emotional landscapes with moral clarity, the "Green-eyed Monster" will continue to claim innocent victims, proving that humanity's progress is often undermined by its oldest, most venomous traits.

Keywords: Jealousy, Shakespeare, Othello, masculinity, value-based education

Modern man vehemently believes that he has achieved unusual progress in each and every known field through his knowledge and will-power forgetting the truth that he still retains the traits that ultimately lead to his doom. Often, he surrenders himself to jealousy, knowing or unknowingly, which is referred to as ‘Green-eyed Monster.’ The twentieth century women easily become a victim to jealousy who are living under the control of fear from men. This ‘monster’ is not merely a literary device but a biological and psychological reality that transcends time. Neuroscientists have observed that romantic jealousy activates the same regions of the brain associated with physical pain and social exclusion. Despite our skyscrapers and space travel, the human heart remains susceptible to the same rot that plagued the ancients, proving that emotional evolution has not kept pace with technical innovation.

Though the feminists talk about emancipation of women, it doesn’t exist in reality. One can take the recent incidents as examples how many a woman is brutally murdered at the hands of their husbands. Men kill women out of jealousy and inferiority complex which they develop in their mind. Similarly, there are a good number of incidents in which a young man pours acid on a girl for rejecting his love. These acts of violence are the physical manifestations of the "Green-eyed Monster." In many cases, the perpetrator views the woman not as a partner with agency, but as an object of possession. When that possession is threatened—either by her success or her refusal—the resulting ‘ego-injury’ leads to a violent reassertion of control. The ‘inferiority complex’ mentioned is often rooted in a fragile sense of masculinity that cannot tolerate a woman's independence or brilliance.

This concept of ‘jealousy’ is not new today as it was already elevated by William Shakespeare, English poet and playwright, recognized in much of the world as the greatest of all dramatists. He is a versatile genius gifted with great powers of creative imagination who portrayed human characters in a realistic manner. Though he wrote plays in the Elizabethan period, they are still read by the people as they reflect the human nature and the temperament of the twentieth century man. Through his works he successfully portrayed the life and internal conflicts of a man. So, Ben Jonson aptly said that “Shakespeare was not of an age but for all times.” Shakespeare’s brilliance lies in his ability to identify "universal truths"—emotions like ambition in *Macbeth*, indecision in *Hamlet*, and the corrosive nature of envy in *Othello*. These plays serve as mirrors, reflecting the darker corners of the human psyche that we often prefer to ignore.

Othello, the Moor of Venice is one of the four great tragedies written by Shakespeare that portrays the growth of unjustified jealousy on the part of the protagonist, Othello, a Moor (= North Africa) serving as a general in the Venetian army. The innocent object of his jealousy is his wife, Desdemona. He always lived a life of adventure and romance. Though he was born in a royal family, he has seen the ups and downs of life. While narrating his adventurous life story to Senator Brabantio, his daughter Desdemona overhears and deeply falls in love with him for the dangers he underwent. Slowly the love between Othello and Desdemona leads to their secret marriage. This makes Brabantio furious as the valiant soldier is a Moor. He also warns Othello, “Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see; She has deceived her father, and may thee.” These lines of Brabantio sow the seeds of suspicion in

the mind of Othello. They also have an impact in the later part of his life. According to G.B. Harrison, this remark is a "warning, threat, prophecy, and curse." This initial seed of doubt is crucial; it suggests that Othello's vulnerability to jealousy was present long before Iago began his machinations. It highlights the "outsider" status of Othello, who, despite his military prowess, feels fundamentally insecure in the sophisticated, white society of Venice.

In the course of the play, Iago, an ensign serving under Othello, too refers to this remark in order to poison the mind of Othello and make him suspicious of his wife Desdemona. These seeds of jealousy having been sown, Othello begins to doubt the honesty of his wife. Iago acts as a "stage manager" of Othello's destruction, using the protagonist's own noble nature against him. He realizes that a man who loves deeply is also a man who can fear deeply. By reminding Othello of Desdemona's "betrayal" of her father, Iago frames her love not as a virtue, but as a sign of her capacity for deception.

Iago is an embodiment of evil. His malice is evident in the very opening of the play. Othello has ignored Iago's claim for promotion to the post of lieutenant and chose Michael Cassio as his chief of staff. So, he along with his follower, Roderigo, plots to trouble the valiant Moor. He stirs up the hopes of Roderigo, encouraging him to continue to pursue Desdemona despite her marriage. But he never leaves any chance to Othello to think that he is poisoning his mind. He cleverly warns his master against falling a prey to jealousy and says that it is a green-eyed monster which mock the person who surrenders his mind to its influence. On one side he advises his master not to give a room to jealousy in his mind and on the other side he makes him develop jealousy towards his wife Desdemona. This psychological manipulation is known as "gaslighting" in modern terms. Iago uses the term "Green-eyed Monster" as a feigned warning, which ironically makes the concept more vivid and terrifying in Othello's imagination.

In fact, the word 'Desdemona' literally means 'unfortunate.' This is true to Shakespeare's heroine Desdemona in Othello. She is a pathetic figure rather than the heroine of the play. Suspicion and mistrust have no entry into her mind. Having confident in the security of wedded love, she thinks that she can plead with her husband for Cassio's restitution. She doesn't realize that her pleading for Cassio might be misunderstood. Being ignorant of the ways of the world, she fails to understand her husband's displeasure when she talks to him about Cassio. She persists in pleading Cassio's case tactlessly and brings about her doom. It is this same guilelessness that leads her to make a blunder of losing the handkerchief which has been Othello's first gift to her. When she fails to explain its disappearance, Othello, at the end of play kills her because of his jealousy. Desdemona's purity and total lack of guile make her the perfect victim for a man blinded by the "monster." Her inability to even conceive of infidelity makes her unable to defend herself against the accusation of it.

Shakespeare's greatest greatness lies in his portrayal of different characters. The protagonists in Shakespearean tragedies usually hail from a noble family but meet with their tragic death due to their 'tragic flaw.' Jealousy is the tragic flaw of Othello. He suffers from an internal conflict between jealousy and love. He wages a war not only in the battle field

with his enemies but also within himself. One can see a fierce clash of feelings in his mind. Iago discovers his weak point, plays upon it by recalling the words of Brabantio. In the end Othello kills his wife but then discovers that she was innocent and kills himself. The tragedy is not just that Desdemona dies, but that Othello's noble soul is completely dismantled by an emotion he thought he was above. His suicide is a final, desperate attempt to reclaim his identity as a servant of the state, punishing the "Turk" (the monster) that he has become.

Even in the present society we still find people like Othello who suffer from jealousy and internal conflict and put an end to the lives of their wives. This kind of attitude among men is developed due to the evil effects of mass media. Modern media often romanticizes possessiveness as "intense love" and depicts female success as a threat to the traditional male hierarchy. Cinema and digital content frequently portray "revenge" as a valid response to emotional hurt, further fueling the "Green-eyed Monster." Lack of value based education is another important reason which makes people to lead a life that is devoid of ethics. In a world focused on material success and competition, the development of emotional intelligence and empathy is often sidelined.

Therefore, to curb the atrocities on women proper education should be provided including the moral values which in turn lead to the all round development of an individual. Above all self-renunciation has to come up among men which is again possible only through Value Based Education. Self-renunciation involves the ability to let go of the ego and the need to control others. It requires a realization that another person's love is a gift, not a property. The modern educational system must integrate the humanities—literature like Shakespeare—to teach students about the consequences of unchecked emotions.

By analyzing the downfall of Othello, young men can learn to recognize the "Iago" in their own minds—those whispers of insecurity and social comparison that lead to resentment. We must move beyond a society that merely tolerates women's progress to one that celebrates it without feeling diminished by it. The "Green-eyed Monster" can only be defeated when individuals possess the moral fortitude to look inward and address their own "tragic flaws" before they manifest as outward violence. Only then can we say that humanity has truly achieved "unusual progress."

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