

Both plays are set in a male dominated society, where women are inferior and expected to obey men. However many female characters go against these rules for the love of another person.

In Othello we are immediately presented with Desdemona's independence when she diplomatically argues with her father that she now obeys Othello. She describes how her 'mother showed to you, preferring you before her father', meaning that she has chosen, like her mother did, her husband over her father. Brabantio first reacts with resentment towards Othello for stealing his daughter, and claims that Othello used 'witchcraft' to persuade Desdemona to marry him. The dark imagery indicates the hostility towards black people in the play, and feeds into the exotic stereotype of a moor and shows how European society treated black people. Before this Brabantio recognises Othello as a good person, but believes he is not good enough for his daughter, highlighting the fundamentality of racism. Although, after Desdemona explains herself, despite still being appalled, he accepts the situation and allows the marriage to remain.

This is similar to Juliet's defiance against the arranged marriage with Paris, set up by her father. However Lord Capulet reaction is to be enraged at Juliet's defiance and threatens to disown Juliet if she refuses to obey him, which differs from Brabantio's reaction, which is, although despondent, more understanding. Lord Capulet responds with the exclamatory and derogatory phrase, 'young baggage, disobedient wretch', to emphasise his disgust. The difference between the fathers may be due to age, as Desdemona is much older than Juliet, and therefore her father has less power over her. Whereas Juliet is so submissive, being only thirteen, that the only way to escape the arranged marriage is with her death.

Although women in both plays show defiance against their fathers there is still submission in regard to their husbands. Despite our initial judgement of Desdemona's independence, she is very obedient when it comes to Othello, especially as the play goes on and her relationship with her husband diminishes. Throughout the play she continually calls him 'my lord', despite their marriage, and even with her last breath she remains obedient and refuses to confess that Othello murdered her. However Emilia, a much stronger character, and has her limits in regard to how much she obeys her husband. After Desdemona's death, she states that 'Tis proper I obey him, but not now'. The monosyllabic phrase helps to emphasise her defiance, and complete loyalty to Desdemona.

In comparison with Romeo and Juliet, the attitudes of husband towards their wives differs, from the violence seen when Othello kills Desdemona, to Romeo who worships Juliet. Romeo puts himself below Juliet both literally and figuratively in submission during the balcony scene, saying 'O, speak again, bright angel'. The use of religious and colour imagery, in 'bright angel', makes Juliet appear god-like, and therefore above Romeo.

The female protagonists in both plays are defiant against their fathers, which would have surprised the audience. However in regard to their husband we can see Desdemona's submission, reflecting attitudes towards women at that time, and their expectation to obedient.