
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

Shakespeare Speaks

The green-eyed monster



Narrator

It was late afternoon. William Shakespeare has just arrived at his favourite pub, The Duck and Whistle. His actor friend Thomas Swann is already there.

Barmaid

Mr Will. Can you do something about that Mr Thomas? He's been drinking and shouting all afternoon. If you can't shut him up, I'm going to throw him out.

Thomas Swann

I'm a wonderful husband. I give the woman everything and this is how she treats me!

Barmaid

Be quiet, you silly old fool. See, Mr Will? His head's full of jealous nonsense about his wife. That Robert Harley said he saw her talking to Henry Darcy, and now he's all in a rage...

Thomas

That filthy toad... I'll burn his house down... and when I get my hands on her...

Will

Oh dear. The green-eyed monster attacks again!

Barmaid

Hmm. Jealousy: the green-eyed monster. You're right Mr Will, jealousy is a monster: it gets inside people, eats them up. Makes them think the worst, like Mr Thomas here, makes them say and do terrible things.

Will

The green-eyed monster. It's rather clever, isn't it Bess? It's in my play, Othello. The evil Iago warns his friend, Othello, about the dangers of jealousy. He says: Beware, my lord, of jealousy...

Robert Harley as Iago

Beware, my lord, of jealousy;
It is the green-ey'd monster, which doth mock
The meat it feeds on.

Barmaid

Beware the green-eyed monster... that's good advice!

Will

It is good advice indeed, but Iago's true plan is to make Othello believe that Desdemona, his wife, is cheating on him.

Barmaid

And is she?

Will

No, but Iago knows jealousy makes people do crazy things, and his plan works. Othello murders Desdemona!

Barmaid

That's terrible. Poor Desdemona! We'd better keep an eye on that Mr Thomas!

Narrator

We'll leave them there for now. In Shakespeare's day, the man was the head of the household, and an unfaithful wife was a great dishonour. The phrase **the green-eyed monster** is still used today to describe the dangers of uncontrolled jealousy in relationships. For example, Irish pop singer Ronan Keating said of his marriage:

Clip 1

The green-eyed monster rears its ugly head and brings out all my insecurities. I don't like it if Yvonne is out without me. I just can't help it.

Clip 2

I thought I'd got over my ex, but when I saw him with his new girlfriend, the green-eyed monster got me.

Will

And now I must go home: Mrs Shakespeare feels that I've been spending rather too much time in the pub. Come on, Thomas...

Barmaid

Oooh - it sounds like Mrs S has got the green-eyed monster too!

Thomas Swann

Come on, Will! Stay for another beer!

Will

Hmmm... To stay, or not to stay: that's a tricky question.