

19 May 2020

## *Othello*

### Resources

***Othello* (published by Oxford University Press)**. Please note that this is the text I have before me. I will use act, scene and line references rather than page numbers, as they will differ from publication to publication. Do not forget to make constant reference to the **two booklets** that were compiled for you, and which contain detailed explanations of the drama.

### Act Three

Scene 1 provides some comic relief after Othello's harsh dismissal of Cassio.

Scene 2 shows Othello in firm control, as he gives orders as the new governor of Cyprus. This is the last time that Othello will show confidence and the ability to command. Once Iago has filled his mind with doubt, Othello will lose the ability to reason, allow himself to be led by Iago and will be consumed by jealousy. Ironically, he wishes to inspect the fortification in this scene, a structure that will provide safety from attack, to the inhabitants of Cyprus. Othello lacks the mental fortification to shield him from Iago's destructive scheme.

### Scene 3

In this scene we note how quickly Iago is able to convince Othello, that Desdemona is unfaithful, and how circumstances help his plan to succeed.

Note carefully how **he exploits the virtues and weaknesses** of those around him. Iago **chooses his words and actions carefully**. In judging him, it must be remembered that everything he does is **premeditated**, but he also has "the luck of the devil" because the circumstance of Emilia finding Desdemona's handkerchief is pure luck but it is the piece in the puzzle, "the **ocular proof**" that convinces Othello.

## Overview

- Desdemona's kindness and generosity
- The trust and gullibility of various characters
- Iago's disparagement of Emilia
- The role that the female characters play in contributing to the tragedy
- The impact of Cassio's refusal to speak directly to Othello
- How Iago uses stilted speech craftily to ensnare Othello

## Quotes from Act 3, scene 3

CHARACTER	QUOTES
Cassio	"Bounteous madam" (L7)
Desdemona	"If I do vow a friendship, I'll perform it to the last article" (L21).
Othello	"When I love thee not, chaos is come again" (L 90). "She had eyes and chose me" L191. "This fellow's of exceeding honesty and knows all qualities with a learned spirit," L260. "Haply for I am black, and do not have those soft parts of conversation that chamberers have, or for I am declined into the vale of years," Lines 265 – 268. "Thou hast set me on the rack," L336.
Iago	"O beware, my lord, of jealousy: It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on" L167. "I know our country disposition well: In Venice they do let God see the pranks they dare not show their husbands" L203. "The Moor already changes with my poison," L326.
Emilia	"This was her first remembrance from the Moor...she so loves the token...she reserves it ever more about her to kiss and talk to," Lines 293 – 298. "Poor lady, she'll run mad when she shall lack it," L319.

Cassio unknowingly helps Iago with his masterplan by choosing to plead his case with Desdemona. Her generosity makes her willing to assist him. Desdemona is unable to see that Othello is annoyed.

Iago ensures that Othello is in a position to witness Cassio's departure from Desdemona. He then uses suggestive words to trap Othello in doubt:

"Ha! I like not that." L35

“I cannot think that he would steal away so guilty-like, seeing you coming.” L38

Desdemona plays right into Iago’s hands by incessantly pleading for Cassio’s reinstatement. She is almost child-like and innocent in her approach, which makes Iago’s destruction of her virtue all the more despicable.

Othello at this point is still besotted with his wife: “I will deny thee nothing.” L83. “Perdition catch my soul, but I do love thee; and when I love thee not, chaos is come again.” L90. Othello does not realise the irony of his words, as his actions will later condemn him.

Iago’s words are filled with innuendo and his deliberate choice of short sentences and repetition of Othello’s words slowly anger Othello (Lines 93-107).

Iago confesses the true nature of his character, but this goes unnoticed as he is deemed to be trustworthy: “Though **I perchance am vicious in my guess** – as I confess **it is my nature’s plague to spy into abuses, and oft my jealousy shapes faults that are not.**” Lines 146-149. Here, he admits to Othello that he has a flaw that makes him **suspicious of others**, and that he **imagines faults**. Iago emphasises that a man’s reputation is everything, the opposite of his words to Cassio: “He that filches from me my good name robs me of that which...makes me poor indeed,” L160. These words show Iago’s **two-faced** nature and anger Othello, who demands that Iago speaks plainly.

Othello denies that he is jealous. He is still able to reason and to argue against Iago’s words, that stir doubt about Desdemona: “She had eyes and chose me.” L191.

Othello’s **gullibility** stems from his lack of knowledge of Venetian social customs. By his admission, he has only ever known the world of battle: “**Rude am I in my speech and little blessed with the soft phrase of peace...these arms of mine...have used their dearest action in the tented field; and little of this great world can I speak more than pertains to feats of broil and battle,**” Act 1, scene 3, Lines 81-87. “Honest Iago” is able to use this to his advantage, to awaken Othello’s insecurity and jealousy. He encourages Othello to be suspicious of Desdemona and convinces him that all Venetian women lack morality – refer to lines 195 to 207 of Act 3, scene 3. **Iago craftily repeats Brabantio’s words as proof that Desdemona has the potential to deceive: “She did deceive her father, marrying you,”** L208. These words convince Othello that Iago is trustworthy because they are true. He reminds Othello that

Desdemona had refused to marry those “Of her own clime, complexion and degree,” L232, and that she may realise that she has made a mistake, “recoiling to her better judgement, may fail to match you with her country forms and happily repent,” L238.

### **TASK 1**

**Read Othello’s soliloquy: “This fellow’s of exceeding honesty...I’ll not believe it,” Lines 260 to 281. Assess Othello’s feelings at this time. Consider how he feels about Iago, Desdemona and himself. Comment on his diction at this time. Does he still have the capacity to reason, and to not be overwhelmed by passion? Write a paragraph in response and remember to quote to support your answer.**

Iago’s plan is aided by circumstance. Emilia discovers the handkerchief and decides to give it to Iago. She knows that it is a precious memento for Desdemona. Emilia will confess too late that it was she who took the handkerchief.

### **TASK 2**

**Read carefully the conversation between Iago and Emilia: “How now...leave me,” Lines 302 to 321. What do we learn about their relationship? Do you blame Emilia for the tragedy that ensues? Write a paragraph in response and remember to quote, to support your analysis.**

There can be no doubt that Iago deliberately plans every move and word. In evaluating his actions, it must be considered that he perseveres even when the effects of his actions are visible. He knows that little things assume great significance to a jealous mind, unaware that he too is a victim of the “green-eyed monster”: “Trifles light as air are to the jealous confirmations strong as proofs of holy writ,” L323. He states that things imagined, can be dangerous enough to put the mind into a hellish state, if they are allowed to fester. The

doubt he has stirred in Othello will torture Othello: "Dangerous conceits...with a little act upon the blood, burn like the mines of sulphur," L327-330. Watching Othello suffer, is something Iago relishes. Iago has the opportunity to stop at this point, but he is bent on totally destroying others. **The speed with which he has changed Othello from a confident general to an insecure wreck, is astounding:** "Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world, shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep which thou owed'st **yesterday**," L332. Othello states that it would have been better if he had been unaware of Desdemona's "infidelity". He is in turmoil: "Farewell the tranquil mind...**Othello's occupation's gone.**" Lines 349-358. His anger is visible, but he still requires more proof, as Desdemona is his world: "**Villain**, be sure thou prove my love a whore; be sure of it. Give me the ocular proof." L360. "Her name, that was as fresh as Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black as mine own fate." L388.

### TASK 3

**Can Iago be regarded as a villain? Can Othello's misery be blamed on Iago? Consider that there is an opportunity to pause before every action. Read lines 411 to 427 – "I do not like...gave thee to the Moor." Iago thrives on Othello's suffering, reminding us of his earlier reference, to using Roderigo for "sport and profit" – Act1, scene 3, line 377. He now lies deliberately, and forces Othello to visualise Cassio and Desdemona in intimacy. The desired result is achieved and "hell and night" has brought a "monstrous birth to the world's light."**

**Write a paragraph in response. Quote to support your point of view.**

**Othello allows "passion to have his best judgement collid"**: "I'll tear her all to pieces!" L432. The skilful Iago knows that the final nail in Othello's coffin will be the "ocular proof", the handkerchief, and he mentions it at the precise moment that Othello is enraged: "Arise, black vengeance..." L448. "My bloody thoughts with violent pace shall never look back, never ebb to humble love..." L458. He gives Iago the instruction to kill Cassio: "Within these **three days** let me hear thee say that Cassio's not alive." L473. Othello makes hasty decisions once his pride is wounded and he is consumed by jealousy: "O, damn her...I will ...furnish me with some swift means of death for the fair devil. Now art thou my lieutenant." L476. He does not take the time to reason because the desire

for revenge consumes him. At this time, he forgets the reasons he had chosen Cassio as his second in charge over Iago; he forgets his reasons for loving Desdemona. These weaknesses lead to his downfall. Iago is undoubtedly convincing and skilful, but it is Othello who makes the fatal choices.



#### **TASK 4**

**What is your opinion of Othello at this point in the play? Do you pity him or lack empathy? Consider what you would have done, at this time, if you were Othello.**

**Write a paragraph in response to these questions. Quote to support your response.**

**All tasks must be completed in your English notebooks and dated!**