

**18 August 2020 ONWARDS**

***Othello***

**Act 4, scene 1**

- Confirmation of Iago's villainy
- The consequences of jealousy, wounded egos and the desire for revenge
- "Chaos is come" – for Othello, Iago now in control.
- Othello the "noble moor" is now controlled by his ancient. Refer to "Would you bear your fortune like a man," Line 61 and L66 – "Good sir, be a man". We consider the expectations of society on men – they should never allow their pride to be wounded and are expected to act to restore their pride. Look at the many times Iago reminds Othello to be a man. Consider how their body language reflects their emotional states.
- Passion overwhelms reason- anger, sexual jealousy, and the desire for revenge (all strong emotions) cloud judgement in both Iago and Othello. Note the similarities between them in the final stages of the play.

Line 19 onwards, Iago reminds Othello about the handkerchief to provoke him further.

Line 24, Iago comments about men who blab and joke about their sexual conquests – reminding Othello that he is probably the butt of public ridicule.

It is the knowledge of being the source of public humiliation that provoked Iago to desire revenge – "Betwixt my sheets he hath done my office" and he creates the same deplorable desire in Othello, reminding Othello that he is like "millions" -L67, whose wives have cheated on them, but adding that Othello is better off because he actually knows the "truth".

[Lines 29 to 34, Iago is thinking about further lies, but his stilted response is effective, Othello is confused, seen by his repetitive reference to the handkerchief, until he finally falls in a trance, the mental anguish is too much.

Lines 44 to 47 – Iago is aware of the detrimental effect of his actions. We cannot doubt his evil nature here. This is his chance to stop, but he chooses not to do so. His passion for revenge outweighs the ability to reason.

When Cassio arrives Iago creates a picture of Othello as a savage monster – Line 54, but does not allow Cassio to assist. Othello has literally and figuratively been brought to his knees by Iago – demoralised and degraded. The irony of line 62, “A horned man...beast, “is that both men are now beasts.

L76 to 89. Consider the extreme cunning and joy at this point, if you were Iago; you have easily destroyed a once valiant general and a loving husband. You have an absolute sense of control and are no longer the “ancient” who was overlooked.

“A passion most unsuited such a man,” he skilfully reminds Othello of his humiliation. The final straw- remember Othello’s gullibility- “The Moor is of a free and open nature that thinks men honest that but seem to be so,...and will as tenderly be led by the nose as asses are,” is to have Othello listen to a conversation between Cassio and Iago, in which they mock Bianca, but Iago tells Othello that Cassio will be mocking Desdemona. Iago should reason and not proceed any further; he has achieved enough – “As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad,” L100. **Do you agree that this is predetermined malice and that Iago is to blame for the deaths that will occur?**

Bianca may not be a significant character, but the manner in which both Cassio and Iago belittle her, emphasises the deplorable attitude to women – as products to be owned or to serve the needs of men. **Was Shakespeare inadvertently a feminist?**

Previously we have seen Cassio speak in a respectful manner towards women, now we see a dislikeable side. Bianca is mocked because she is a prostitute.

Think back to Act 3, scene 4, lines 97 to 100 (page 84) – Emilia’s assessment of men is that they use women. **What is the difference between Desdemona and Emilia, even though both are victims of abuse?**

L171 (page 96) Iago deliberately taunts Othello about the handkerchief. Despite his anger, Othello holds on to the fact that Desdemona is classy, beautiful and kind – L174. Iago skilfully removes these thoughts; he cannot

allow Othello to focus on the reasons why he loves Desdemona. Refer also to lines 179 to 186. In a short space of time, Iago has managed to destroy the virtue of “divine Desdemona”. The irony in line 185, is that Othello is now the “savage bear”. **Can you feel the emotional turmoil in Othello – “The pity of it...?”**

Contrast Othello’s words in Lines 195 to 201, to his description of Desdemona’s virtuous qualities.

Othello knows that Desdemona’s nature is rare, and her sweetness and beauty are enough to win over an emperor. He hesitates between accepting her betrayal and thinking about her “divine” qualities – “Let her rot and perish...my heart is turned to stone,” Line 178.

Iago’s prompting reminds him of his wounded ego and Othello’s thoughts become violent, “monstrous” – L195, “I will chop her into messes.” The image is too horrible to contemplate. In line 200, Othello still hints at the hold or power Desdemona had over him. Recall Cassio’s words at the beginning of the play – “She is our great captain’s captain,” Act 2, scene 1, Line 76; Iago’s wounded pride, sense of inferiority and jealousy, gave “birth to” the same qualities in Othello. Othello will become the man in rage who strikes out at the one who loves him the most. His actions will shock the “inclining” Desdemona into submission.

Refer to lines 199 to 204. In choosing the violent manner in which Desdemona should be killed, both men prove that they fail to reason because of jealousy and wounded pride. Iago can stop at this point, Othello is an emotional and mental wreck – Iago does not have to have death on his hands, but here he transcends deeper into the depths of evil, knowing that his actions will lead to Desdemona’s death.

Othello will misconstrue every word spoken by Desdemona because “Chaos is come”. His “better judgement is collid” and much to Lodovico’s shock, he publicly strikes Desdemona, leaving Lodovico to wonder if Othello is insane.

#### Act 4, scene 2

Othello interrogates Emilia, to find evidence of Desdemona’s infidelity, but refuses to believe Emilia – “For if she be not honest, chaste and true, there’s no man happy,” L16. Othello’s disparagement of Emilia “she’s a simple bawd,” is now similar to Iago’s misogynistic attitude.

L11-12, Emilia is prepared to stake her life on Desdemona's honesty. Even Othello's instinct tells him that something is not right – "That's strange," L10. Othello continues to refer to Desdemona as a "whore" – "This is a subtle whore". His acknowledgement of Desdemona's spirituality, the proof of which he has actually seen, contrasts to images of infidelity conjured up by Iago, which Othello has never witnessed, yet he cannot reason that Iago could be lying.

L106 sees an emotionally drained and submissive Desdemona. Her acceptance of Othello's deplorable conduct at this point is difficult to accept. She seems to have an unwillingness to accept the danger in which she finds herself, as she seems to meekly accept this treatment. Desdemona cannot even utter the word "whore" as it goes against her nature.

Emilia's description at this point fits Iago's nature – Lines 129 to 133, although she ironically does not realise his villainy. The rhetorical questions she asks – lines 135 to 137, are questions Othello should ask himself, before accepting Iago's "truth". To Emilia, the one responsible for besmirching Desdemona's character should be hanged. She refers to Iago's suspicious nature – L 143.

Desdemona's plea to Iago, "Oh good Iago...win my lord again...go to him," L158, where she insists on her innocence and love for Othello emphasise Iago's ugly nature. He knows that he has filled Othello with jealousy and that Desdemona will soon be dead.

But such is Iago's two-faced nature, that his knavery will never be seen until it is too late. He even continues to dupe the gullible Roderigo who admits – "Every day thou daff'st me with some device," line 174 that Iago is the master of manipulation. He skilfully gets Roderigo to agree to kill Cassio – L 226.

### Act 4, scene 3

Desdemona mentions the tale about her mother's maid, whose love had gone mad, ironically Desdemona finds herself in exactly the same situation. She sings the Willow song; the tree is a symbol of mourning, associated with loss and death. Desdemona has a sense of impending doom.

**Line 60, Desdemona finds it difficult to accept that women can be capable of cheating on their husbands. Emilia admits that she could be capable of infidelity – L65 to 75, in order to make her husband a king.**

**Emilia blames men for their wives' amoral behaviour -lines 82 to 89. Ironically, she lists the negative qualities recently displayed by Othello – jealousy and violent behaviour. Emilia believes that men should realise that women have feelings, and though forgiving can also desire revenge.**

**The scene ends with a wish from Desdemona that she will learn from her suffering and not get worse. Unlike Emilia's belief that men cause women to engage in wrongful deeds –“The ills we do, their ills instruct us so”, Line 100 Desdemona blames herself for the change in Othello.**