

## *Othello*

### Act 5, scene 2

At this stage of the play, Othello has accepted Desdemona's betrayal. **He attempts to justify why she must be killed.** Her adultery is "the cause". There are still moments when he is still overwhelmed by her beauty – lines 3 to 5.

His wounded pride makes him feel that her death will be a service to other men – Line 6: "Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men." He fails to reason.

**He is very aware of the consequences of his actions** – lines 7 to 13: "Put out the light...relume." Unlike the artificial light or torch that he carries which he could easily rekindle once it burns out, he will not be able to bring Desdemona back to life once she is dead. L12 – Prometheus in Greek mythology had stolen fire from the gods to create the first humans. Othello will not have that power.

Like a rose, once cut, Desdemona will die – Line 13.

This is a poignant scene, with Othello showing tenderness towards the sleeping Desdemona.

The constant reference to "light" which signifies goodness and enlightenment, contrasts with Othello's clouded mind, which has been darkened by Iago's villainy - "Hell and night must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light."

**Do you pity Othello? Give a reason for your answer.**

Othello is still level-headed enough to allow Desdemona to repent for any sins – Line 27: "If you bethink yourself of any crime...solicit for it straight."

His mind is so consumed by jealousy that he does not want to believe her response to his accusation about the handkerchief. He does not stop to consider that Cassio did not actually confess to adultery – L68: "He hath confessed."

Lines 78 to 85 sees Desdemona pleading for her life. When Emilia interrupts, it is still an opportunity for him to stop – Line 86.

Lines 98 to 102 show a glimmer of regret. Othello feels that there should be a sign that the world has ended.

Lines 124 to 126 – Desdemona's last act of love is to not identify Othello as her murderer, but Othello still misinterprets this as a sign of dishonesty.

Lines 140 to 150 – Emilia's repetition "my husband?" emphasises her disbelief.

Despite her knowledge of Iago's nature, Emilia is still shocked that Iago could be guilty of such villainy, and perhaps that Othello would place his absolute trust in Iago – "My husband say that she was false?" Line 151.

Othello's words contain sustained irony – "My friend...honest, honest Iago," Line 153.

Emilia's words, from one who is worldly wise about the masculine world confirm that she had no knowledge of Iago's intention, and make the death of "divine" Desdemona all the more heinous. Desdemona's only weakness was to love too well and to be generous to all who needed her help. She was the antithesis (opposite) of Iago.

**Refer to lines 154 to 166: "If he say so, may his pernicious soul rot...filthy bargain...murder!" How would you direct the actress who plays Emilia at this stage in the play? Consider the physical and emotional reaction, the body language and facial expression that the actress would show. Emilia is in extreme distress – the anguish at the senseless death of Desdemona, the fact that her husband is responsible, her inability to foresee Othello's actions, all take their toll.**

**This has been a typical examination question over the past few years, always for four marks, so please do not dismiss this type of question.**

Think back to Act 4, where Iago asked Othello to be "a man". What was your definition of "a man"? Emilia now asks Iago: "Disprove this villain, if thou be'st a man." She is unable to accept that Iago could be responsible – "Thou'rt not such a villain."

But, can we really blame Iago? "I told him what I thought, and told no more than what he found himself was apt and true." Othello's behaviour was rash, he did not have to commit murder!

After Iago kills Emilia, Othello realises the enormity of what he has done, and is prepared to be damned – lines 270 to 279.

**Consider Lodovico's assessment of the situation. He refers to Othello as a "rash and most unfortunate man." Do you agree with his point of view? Lodovico feels that Othello has "fallen in the practice of a damned slave (Iago)," while Othello contends that he did "naught in hate, but all in honour." Can you empathise with Othello?**

**Refer to lines 334 to 352 – "Soft you; a word or two before you go...and smote him thus."**

- Line 338 – Othello requests that no excuses are made for his behaviour.
- Lines 340 to 342 – He confirms that he loved too passionately and not wisely, that he was not easily made jealous, but became extremely confused.

**Do you agree with Othello's summary of events? Is he a tragic hero?**