

Othello Book Notes

Othello by William Shakespeare

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Author/Context

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

William Shakespeare was born to Mary Arden and John Shakespeare in a small British town outside of London called Stratford-on-Avon. His exact date of birth is unknown, however, Shakespeare is believed to have been born on either the 22nd or 23rd of April in 1564. He was educated at the King's Free School of Stratford, where he studied the Bible and Latin. At age 18, he married the older Anne Hathaway, at which point he began writing poetry professionally to support his family. They had a daughter Susanna, and twins, Judith and Hamnet. He began writing and finding different groups to perform his work, including the Admiral's Men, The Queen's Men, Pembroke's Men, and Lord Strange's Men. However, the Chamberlain's Men was the group of players for which he composed, produced, and performed many of his plays in the now-famous Globe Theater. He was compared to contemporary "scholars" such as Ben Jonson and Christopher Marlowe; the former would be one of his greatest actors and the latter one of his greatest playwrighting rivals.

Shakespeare has produced an incredibly large library of work, including 38 plays and countless sonnets. His plays are divided into four main sections: the Histories, the Tragedies, the Comedies, and the Romances. *Othello* falls under Tragedy, as it ends with the death of numerous characters, including the principals. Shakespeare's work has been produced since the Renaissance in all artistic mediums from the original theater to opera, symphony, film, and ballet. It has also been consistently revisited countless times by the same artistic medium because it is said to be timeless. *Othello*'s main topics are love, murder, jealousy, miscommunication, chastity, history, and even magic. The play encompasses the classic elements of Shakespeare's tragedies, pulling in a bit of history and military strategy. It opens in Venice, a widely-known city of artistic and military strength and moves to Cyprus, a small island in the Mediterranean. The majority of the play takes place in Cyprus, where the typical Shakespearean motifs of miscommunication and vengeance for disloyalty are explored. Many of Shakespeare's comedies and romances focus around this problem of communication between lovers and friends. *Othello*, however, takes this quandary to the tragic level, as he presents intricate plots of revenge and primitive murder on the basis of unfaithfulness.

This play attacks many serious issues, often ignored during the times. The title character is a Moor, an outsider, someone differentiated by skin color and culture. Dr. Samuel Johnson, an eighteenth century Shakespearean scholar "found in the representation of *Othello*, *Iago*, and *Desdemona* 'such proofs of Shakespeare's skill in human nature, as, I suppose, it is vain to seek in any modern writer'" (Bloom, 1).

Othello was written in 1604, the same year as *Measure for Measure*, and was performed at Court in the old banqueting house at Whitehall on All Saints Day.

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Plot Summary

Iago complains to Roderigo that he was not named Lieutenant by Othello, but rather Ensign. Othello, the Moorish general, made Cassio Lieutenant. Iago is enraged at his misfortune and declares his hatred for the Moor. Roderigo, a Venetian gentleman is in love with Desdemona, the daughter of Senator Brabantio. Iago awakens Brabantio in the middle of the night to notify him of his daughter's elopement with Othello, much to everyone's surprise and disapproval. The Duke oversees the case between Brabantio and Othello, whom he believes to have bewitched his daughter with magic. Desdemona informs her father that she is in love with Othello and has married him.

Othello leaves for Cyprus and Desdemona soon follows him there. In Cyprus, Iago begins his devilish plan of destruction. During a festive evening celebrating the nuptials of Desdemona and Othello, Iago sends Roderigo to stir Cassio. A typically sober Cassio takes to the bottle at Iago's generosity, and then falls into duel with Roderigo. Because of the chaos, Cassio's reputation is seemingly smeared and his relationship becomes troubled with Othello. Iago tells Cassio to ask Desdemona to speak with Othello on his behalf. By doing so, Iago will plan the seed of jealousy in Othello's mind that Cassio and Desdemona are having an affair. Cassio befriends Desdemona, who does, in fact, attempt to sway Othello in his behalf. As she speaks with her beloved husband, however, Iago infers that her words are not platonic, but amorous. Othello slowly transforms into a jealous monster. Despite this meaningless talk, Othello demands proof and evidence of such an affair.

During one of their conversations, Desdemona drops her treasured handkerchief on the floor. Emilia picks it up and gives it to Iago at his request. The handkerchief is an Egyptian heirloom that Othello gave to Desdemona as the first symbol of his love for her. Iago plants it in Cassio's room so that he may show Othello proof of his relationship with Desdemona. Upon realization of such a fact, Othello becomes mad with rage. Bianca, the common seamstress mistress of Cassio, also becomes jealous when she sees the handkerchief in Cassio's room, for she also believes him to be having an affair.

Iago and Roderigo continue to pursue Iago's destruction of Othello. Roderigo, however, is in the way of Iago's evil, so Iago kills him in the dark and blames others for Roderigo's death. Othello is torn between his love for his wife and his jealousy and hatred of such a possible 'whore,' so he smothers Desdemona to death. Emilia enters and witnesses her dying mistress. She tells Othello that he is misled and that Desdemona was never unfaithful. Iago enters and tries to persist with his plan, yet his wife disrupts his action. As Emilia tells Othello the truth behind Iago's trickery, Iago stabs and kills her. Montano, Lodovico, Gratiano, and Cassio enter the bedroom to bring news. They have found letters in Roderigo's pocket explaining Iago's entire scheme. Othello stabs Iago, leaving him to live in pain, and then, before banishment, from Cyprus, kills himself.

Major Characters

Othello: Othello is a Moor, who has risen to high military prestige in Venice, after defeating the Turks and other enemies in battle. He is well-liked and honored, despite his racial difference. Othello becomes a general and moves to Cyprus after marrying the white daughter of a Venetian senator. He is the object of Iago's cruel plan of destruction and is slowly tricked into believing himself a cuckold. He falls victim to Iago's chicanery, becomes insanely jealous of Cassio and Desdemona's supposed relationship, and ultimately smothers his wife to death. When he realizes that Iago has tricked him and that his beloved Desdemona has always been faithful and chaste, he stabs Iago, leaving him to a life of pain, and then kills himself.

Desdemona: Desdemona is the beautiful maiden daughter of Brabantio, a Venetian senator. She falls in love with and marries the Moor, Othello, disappointing her father and Roderigo, a man desperately in love with her. She moves with her husband from Venice to Cyprus, where she befriends Othello's lieutenant, Cassio. Desdemona is the innocent victim in Iago's plan of destruction: he causes Othello to believe his wife has cuckolded him with Cassio. Consequently, Othello smothers her to death. Desdemona always loved Othello, remained faithful, and died loyal to her true love.

Cassio: Cassio is Othello's lieutenant and the object of Iago's hatred. He befriends Desdemona and asks her help to mend his relationship with her husband. Iago schemes and makes Othello believe that Cassio is having an affair with Desdemona. In fact, he has no such relationship with her; he does, however, have a mistress named Bianca for whom he cares little. Cassio is injured at the end of the play, but lives to become the new General and leader of Cyprus after Othello's death.

Iago: Iago is Othello's Ensign, and the perpetrator of evil and fallacy in this play. He finds pleasure in destroying happiness and therefore plots to ruin many lives. He despises Othello for making Cassio his lieutenant instead of himself; yet always presents himself as honest, amicable, and faithful. Because he illustrates himself in such a way, he is able not only to complete his scheme, but to kill men and frame others for his actions. The once 'honest Iago' is revealed as a horrific villain at the end of the play by his wife, Emilia, whom he later stabs. Iago is left alive, yet injured, as the play concludes, for death is too easy an exit for such a cruel man.

Emilia: Emilia is Iago's wife and Desdemona's maidservant. She is strong, forthright, and honest. Iago treats her with disdain and annoyance, as opposed to the benevolent love of a true husband. Emilia has difficulty believing that her husband could enact such cruelty upon others, but ultimately reveals the truth to all of Cyprus. Because she is the heart of truth, Iago kills her. She desires to be placed next to her dying mistress, Desdemona, as she dies.

Brabantio: Brabantio is Desdemona's father and a senator of Venice. He is horribly distraught when he discovers that his beloved daughter has married the Moor Othello. He brings her to the Duke of Venice; while in front of the court, she confirms that she is



in love with Othello. Brabantio believes Othello to have used magic and witchcraft to summon Desdemona from her home.

Roderigo: Roderigo is a Venetian gentleman who is in love with Desdemona. He is also one of Iago's pawns in the plot to destroy Othello. He delivers information, hoping to be rewarded. Roderigo starts a brawl with Cassio that destroys Cassio's reputation, and then continues to implement Iago's plan. Iago kills Roderigo in the dark, pretends that someone else was the perpetrator of the murder, and then feigns concern for his friend. A letter found in Roderigo's pocket tells all of Cyprus and Venice of the truth behind Iago's plot. Although he dies, Roderigo is the vehicle of truth.

Minor Characters

The Duke of Venice: The Duke of Venice runs the city and delegates order. Brabantio brings Othello and Desdemona before him to decide the truth behind the marriage. The Duke sends Othello to Cyprus and allows Desdemona to meet him there.

Bianca: Bianca is a seamstress; the mistress of Cassio. She is often referred to as a whore and a harlot, for she is of lower class than both Desdemona and Emilia. She becomes jealous of Desdemona and Cassio, as well. She follows Cassio around and hangs on his every word. Iago uses her as another innocent victim in his scheme.

Gratiano: Gratiano is Brabantio's brother and Desdemona's uncle. He comes to Cyprus towards the end of the play and brings the news of Brabantio's death. He cannot believe that Iago would draw his sword upon a woman. Later, he cleans up after Othello's murder of Desdemona and suicide.

Lodovico: Lodovico is one of Gratiano and Brabantio's kinsmen and aids them in their trials throughout Venice and Cyprus. He comes to Cyprus with Gratiano at the conclusion of the play, when he reveals the letters written by Cassio and Roderigo that expose Iago's devious scheming. He informs Othello that he must leave Cyprus to Cassio's rule, and has the final words of the play.

Montano: Montano is the governor of Cyprus who always attempts to help out those in need. He supports Cassio in his attempted reconciliation with Othello, and tries to make peace between Cassio and Roderigo in their early duel. He is in shock, as is the rest of Cyprus, to discover Iago's cruel intentions.

Objects/Places

Venice: Venice is a large city in the north of Italy and the setting of many of Shakespeare's plays. Only the first act of Othello takes place in Venice, giving expository information on the relationships and conflicts within the play. Significant events in Venice include Brabantio's discovery of his daughter's love for the Moor.

Cyprus: Cyprus is an island in the far eastern Mediterranean Sea, south of Turkey and to the west of Syria. The majority of the play takes place in Cyprus, where Othello is sent to live after defeating the Ottomans. Desdemona joins him on the island. It seems, at first, to be a place of joy and victory, but soon turns into an isolated land of death and despair. Montano is the governor of the land and, after the tragedy, rules with a stronger will.

Duke's palace: Only a short scene in the beginning of the play takes place in the Duke's palace in Venice. It is here that Brabantio learns of Desdemona's love for Othello, and Othello decides to leave for Cyprus.

Handkerchief: The handkerchief is a small object of great importance in this play. It facilitates plot development as a symbol of love and betrayal. This special handkerchief was the first gift given by Othello to Desdemona, illustrating his love for her. It is of Egyptian origin and possesses sentimental value for both Othello and Desdemona. The handkerchief is the physical evidence that convinces Othello of his wife's faithlessness. Desdemona drops the handkerchief innocently, allowing it to fall into the wrong hands. Emilia gives it to Iago, at his request, and Iago plants it in Cassio's room, cultivating jealousy in both Othello and Bianca.

Quotes

Quote 1: "Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago:
In following him, I follow but myself.
Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,
But seeming so for my peculiar end:
For when my outward action demonstrates
The native act and figure of my heart
In compliment extern, 'tis not long after,
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at. I am not what I am." Act 1, Scene 1

Quote 2: "Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters' minds / By what you see them
act. Are there not charms / By which the property of youth and maidenhood / May be
abused?" Act 1, Scene 1

Quote 3: "And till she comes, as truly as to heaven
I do confess the vices of my blood,
So justly to your grave ears I'll present
How I did thrive in this fair lady's love,
And she in mine." Act 1, Scene 3

Quote 4: "And noble signior,
If virtue no delighted beauty lack,
Your son-in-law is far more fair than black." Act 1, Scene 3

Quote 5: "I have it. It is engendered. Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light." Act 1, Scene 3

Quote 6: "He takes her by the palm. Ay, well said, whisper. With as little a web as this
will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio. Ay, smile upon her, do. I will fetter you in your
own courtship." Act 2, Scene 1

Quote 7: "I do suspect the lusty Moor
Has leaped into my seat: the thought whereof
Doe, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards,
And nothing can, or shall, content my soul
Till I am evened with him, wife for wife.
Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor
At least into a jealousy so strong
That judgment cannot cure." Act 2, Scene 1

Quote 8: "You will be shamed forever!" Act 2, Scene 3



Quote 9: "Reputation is an idle and most false imposition; often got without merit and lost without deserving. You have lost no reputation at all, unless you repute yourself such a loser. What, man! There are ways to recover the General again." Act 2, Scene 3

Quote 10: "I [he] never knew a Florentine more kind and honest." Act 3, Scene 1

Quote 11: "Oh, beware, my lord, of jealousy!
It is the green-eyed monster, which does mock
The meat it feeds on. That cuckold lives in bliss
Who certain of his fate loves not his wronger;
But O, what damned minutes tells he over,
Who dotes yet doubts, suspects yet fondly loves!" Act 3, Scene 3

Quote 12: "O, curse of marriage!
That we can call these delicate creatures ours
And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad
And live upon the vapour of a dungeon
Than keep a corner in the thing I love
For others' uses." Act 3, Scene 3

Quote 13: "The Moor already changes with my poison.
Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons,
Which at the first are scarce found to distaste,
But, with a little act upon the blood,
Burn like the mines of sulphur." Act 3, Scene 3

Quote 14: "But jealous souls will not be answered so;
They are not ever jealous for the cause,
But jealous because they're jealous. It is a monster
Begotten upon itself, born on itself." Act 3, Scene 4

Quote 15: "Work on,
My medicine, work! Thus credulous fools are caught,
And many worthy and chaste dames even thus,
All guiltless, meet reproach." Act 4, Scene 1

Quote 16: "Ay, let her rot and perish, and be damned tonight, for she shall not live! No, my heart is turned to stone: I strike it, and it hurts my hand." Act 4, Scene 1

Quote 17: "Most villainous knave,
Some base notorious knave, some scurvy fellow." Act 4, Scene 2

Quote 18: "But I do think it is their husbands' faults
If wives do fall. Say that they slack their duties,
And pour our treasures into foreign laps;
Or else break out in peevish jealousies,
Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us,
Or scant our former living out of spite -



Why, we have galls, and though we have some grace,
Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know
Their wives have sense like them; they see and smell,
And have their palates both for sweet and sour
As husbands have. What is it that they do,
When they change us for others? Is it sport?
I think it is. And does affection breed it?
I think it does. Is it frailty that thus errs?
It is so too. And have not we affections,
Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?
Then let them use us well: else let them know
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so." Act 4, Scene 3

Quote 19: "This is the night
That either makes me, or undoes me quite." Act 5, Scene 1

Quote 20: "It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul:
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!
It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood,
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
And smooth as monumental alabaster.
Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
Put out the light, and then put out the light." Act 5, Scene 2

Quote 21: "O cursed, cursed slave! Whip me, ye devils,
From the possession of this heavenly sight!
Blow me about in winds! Roast me in sulphur!
Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!
O Desdemon! Dead Desdemon! Dead! O! O!" Act 5, Scene 2

Quote 22: "I kissed you, ere I killed you: no way but this,
Killing myself, to die upon a kiss." Act 5, Scene 2

Topic Tracking: Jealousy

Jealousy 1: The play opens with a discussion of jealousy. Iago is upset because Othello selected Michael Cassio as his lieutenant. He is jealous of Cassio's position both in the military and with Othello's service. This initial jealousy is the catalyst for the play's sequential plot of mixed jealousy and destruction.

Jealousy 2: Brabantio is partially jealous of the Moor for stealing his daughter's love. He no longer may be the most important man in Desdemona's life. Furthermore, Roderigo is in love with Desdemona, and is slightly jealous of her relationship with Othello.

Jealousy 3: The lovesick Roderigo has trouble with his hidden feelings for Desdemona and is jealous watching the two in love. He follows Iago's directions easily, perhaps partially because of his jealousy of Othello's relationship with Desdemona.

Jealousy 4: Iago openly divulges his plan of destruction, which incorporates jealousy as the key factor. He intends to create a strong sense of jealousy in Othello by setting up the mirage of an affair between Desdemona and Cassio.

Jealousy 5: Iago plants seeds of jealousy in Othello and then speaks of the 'green-eyed monster' as a force to be feared. Jealousy is personified as a monster.

Jealousy 6: When Iago tells Othello of the handkerchief, he has the evidence necessary to prove Desdemona's unfaithfulness. It is now that the jealousy sinks deep into Othello's soul and starts to vividly destroy his psyche.

Jealousy 7: Bianca, Cassio's common lover, also becomes sick with jealousy. She sees the planted handkerchief in Cassio's room and believes him to also have taken a lover. Her jealousy exists on a much smaller scale, but illustrates that the sentiment is universal.

Jealousy 8: As the play concludes, all causes of jealousy are proved false. Desdemona was never unfaithful, but Othello realizes the truth too late. Jealousy is the source of pain and death for these tragic characters; the green-eyed monster has succeeded in killing them.

Topic Tracking: Miscommunication

Miscommunication 1: Iago initially tells Brabantio that his house is being robbed. This cry is the first piece of intended miscommunication. He is overtly lying, or communicating misinformation to another, in order to gain personal satisfaction. Iago also tells the audience that he plans to mislead the other Venetians to believe that he loves Othello. While he deeply despises the Moor, Iago will put on an air of loyalty and love for him.

Miscommunication 2: Brabantio has trouble believing that his daughter escaped with the Moor. He believes this fact to be a miscommunication, and attempts to prove it false through the Duke's adjudication.

Miscommunication 3: Othello views Cassio's conversation with Desdemona and mistakes it an amorous exchange.

Miscommunication 4: Iago leads everyone to believe that he is honest and caring, while he is truly a conniving evil spirit. He intentionally misrepresents his feelings to everyone in Venice and Cyprus.

Miscommunication 5: Iago, once again, intentionally communicates false information to Othello about Desdemona. He implants the idea of Desdemona's disloyalty, pointing to her relationship with her father, Brabantio.

Miscommunication 6: Othello's proof of Desdemona's disloyalty lies in the handkerchief. As soon as he is misled to believe that the napkin is in the hands of Cassio, Othello immediately believes all lies and miscommunications betold him by Iago.

Miscommunication 7: The miscommunication between Desdemona and Othello, due to Iago's intentional lies, manifests in this scene as Othello strikes Desdemona. His anger results in violence because of the information discovered through miscommunication.

Miscommunication 8: Emilia tries to discover the truth behind the violence and troublesome relationship of Othello and Desdemona. Othello manifests his anger once again, this time cursing Desdemona. The cursing and insults would not occur had communication been healthy and true.

Miscommunication 9: Iago kills Roderigo in the dark, so that there will be a false attribution of guilt. He can pretend to be innocent and question others, overtly illustrating intended miscommunication. Most of the miscommunication in the play is planned, like Roderigo's murder, and not a product of happenstance.

Miscommunication 10: This final confrontation between Desdemona and Othello centers around the jealousy existing because of a miscommunication. Othello still believes Desdemona to have had an affair with Cassio. She pleads with him that she is chaste

and knows nothing of the missing handkerchief. Again, the handkerchief is supposed proof of adultery, yet is truly a misplaced evidentiary prop.

Miscommunication 11: The play concludes with a final revelation of the miscommunication explored throughout. Roderigo's note explains Iago's plan, exposing the true villain of the play and source of miscommunication. All the jealousy is and was a manifestation of Iago's intent to cause miscommunication between lovers. When it is revealed, the only solution for those involved is death or pain.

Topic Tracking: Revenge

Revenge 1: Iago's plot against Othello is partially motivated by revenge. He feels wronged because he was not made lieutenant. He is bitter and upset and wants to hurt Othello and avenge his name.

Revenge 2: Brabantio craves revenge for the loss of his daughter. He takes revenge by bringing Othello before the Duke to request his imprisonment.

Revenge 3: Iago develops his elaborate plot of revenge. He will implant a false sense of jealousy in Othello, thereupon destroying Othello's relationship with Desdemona.

Revenge 4: Again, Iago explains his plot. He describing his plan of action as a web in which he will catch a fly. The intricate deception all comes down to revenge.

Revenge 5: Iago plans to enlist his wife, Emilia, in his plot of revenge, unbeknownst to her. The web is growing to involve more family and people of importance.

Revenge 6: Emilia and Desdemona touch upon the theme of revenge lightly in this eloquent discussion. They discuss the necessary actions to take when husbands and wives are unfaithful...perhaps revenge is the appropriate course of action.

Revenge 7: Othello ponders his decision to kill Desdemona, partially motivated by revenge. He believes himself to be cuckolded by Desdemona and must defend his honor. At the same time, he feels that he must defend mankind and all other men from a woman who would betray her husband so. He ultimately decides that he must end her life.

Revenge 8: Othello is revenged when he injures Iago and forces him to live a life of pain. Othello avenges himself by committing suicide. He must die once he realizes what he has done. Roderigo is ultimately avenged, despite his death, when his letters are read aloud. Cassio is avenged through his promotion to General.

Act 1, Scene 1: "Venice. Before Brabantio's house."

Roderigo, a gentleman of Venice, and Iago discuss their obedience to the Moor. Iago is bitter because Cassio was selected as Othello's Lieutenant instead of himself. He does not think he must be loyal to Othello, therefore, and plans to cause trouble. He only has faith in himself:

Topic Tracking: Jealousy 1

*"Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago:
In following him, I follow but myself.
Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,
But seeming so for my peculiar end:
For when my outward action demonstrates
The native act and figure of my heart
In compliment extern, 'tis not long after,
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at. I am not what I am."* Act 1, Scene 1

The two men wake up Brabantio, an older senator, to tell him that his house has been robbed. As the disheartened Roderigo makes mention of his love for Brabantio's daughter, Iago makes crude remarks about his daughter stealing away with the Moor. Iago vows to himself that he hates Othello with all his might, but that he must present a façade of love in order to fully follow-through on his plan of destruction.

Topic Tracking: Miscommunication 1

Topic Tracking: Revenge 1

Brabantio comes down to the street to greet Roderigo alone. He declares that his daughter is, in fact, missing, and is most likely with the Moor. He expresses a wish that she were with Roderigo after all. He is miserable with the course of actions. "Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters' minds / By what you see them act. Are there not charms / By which the property of youth and maidenhood / May be abused?" Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 2: "A street"

Iago puts on an air of friendship in order to discover the truth behind Othello's affairs. He declares his love for Desdemona and cares not what others think of the relationship. Cassio and other Venetian attendants walk to Iago and Othello, summoning Othello to the Duke. Iago tells Cassio that Othello is married. Brabantio and Roderigo walk into the street seeking Desdemona and cursing Othello for stealing her from her home. Brabantio accuses Othello of drugging her and bringing his tender, maiden daughter away, and plans to put him in prison under the order of the Duke.

Topic Tracking: Revenge 2

Topic Tracking: Miscommunication 2

Topic Tracking: Jealousy 2

Act 1, Scene 3: "The Duke's palace"

The Duke and his senators discuss the current military problems with the Turks and the Ottomites at the Duke's palace. The Duke is revered for his military skill and sought to answer questions of war. Othello, Iago, Brabantio, and Roderigo enter the palace, warmly welcomed by the Duke. Brabantio rants about the loss of his daughter to the Moor, to which Othello responds with the story of their seven-year love affair. The senators doubt Othello's malicious intentions. Othello claims that if Desdemona confirms his guilt, then he submits his life to their hands.

*"And till she comes, as truly as to heaven
I do confess the vices of my blood,
So justly to your grave ears I'll present
How I did thrive in this fair lady's love,
And she in mine." Act 1, Scene 3*

Othello tells the Duke of his benevolent and adoptive relationship with Desdemona's father, Brabantio. He took him in and listened to his life's history. Desdemona cared for him and begged to help, as well. He claims that the only witchcraft used was love.

As Desdemona enters the palace, Brabantio claims that if she is a partial wooer in the relationship, then he wants personal destruction. Desdemona declares her love for Othello, and upon hearing these words, Brabantio gives her away mercilessly. Othello must leave the limits of Venice for military action against the Turks and requests lodgings for his new wife. She begs to go with him to Cyprus, for she does not desire to stay alone while he may be at war. He plans to leave in the morning, yet brings his assign, Cassio, to look over his affairs and his wife. The Duke still holds Othello in as high respect as possible: "And noble signior, / If virtue no delighted beauty lack, / Your son-in-law is far more fair than black" Act 1, Scene 3. Othello leaves with Desdemona to spend their final hour together in bliss.

Roderigo wants to drown himself in misery because of his unrequited love for Desdemona, while Iago declares his everlasting hatred for the Moor. Iago devises a plan that will help both men. He will create the illusion of Desdemona's faithlessness through the innocent Cassio. He tells Roderigo to raise money, and confesses that he finds sport in destroying lives. "I have it. It is engendered. Hell and night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light" Act 1, Scene 3.

Topic Tracking: Revenge 3

Act 2, Scene 1: "Cyprus. The port."

Montano, the governor of Cyprus talks with a gentleman about the end of the Turkish wars and of the Venetian victory by the brave and gallant Othello. They speak of him highly and rush to the seaside to greet him. There they meet his lieutenant, Cassio, who has just survived a violent tempest and is waiting for Othello's ship to port. Cassio prays that Othello is still alive and informs the gentlemen that Othello's wife, Desdemona, has been left in the hands of Iago.

Iago, Desdemona, Roderigo, and Emilia, Iago's wife, enter the port, to the delight of Cassio and Montano. They all eagerly await Othello's arrival, while Iago and Emilia playfully exchange witty remarks. Desdemona interrupts Iago's poor compliments of Emilia and requests her own, to which Iago seemingly fails. His compliments and remarks on good womanhood give Desdemona reason to pity Emilia. Cassio takes Desdemona aside to comfort her. Iago witnesses this exchange of so-called affection and finds fuel for his malice. "He takes her by the palm. Ay, well said, whisper. With as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio. Ay, smile upon her, do. I will fetter you in your own courtship" Act 2, Scene 1.

Topic Tracking: Miscommunication 3

Topic Tracking: Revenge 4

Othello arrives with a fanfare of trumpets and attendants thrilled to see his beloved wife waiting for him. He vows to show her the love that he has been showed in Cyprus and they exit in joyful communion. Iago and Roderigo are left to conspire. Iago, again, declares his hatred for the Moor and his intentions to destroy him through the façade of love and loyalty. He plans to make Desdemona slowly abhor Othello and to use Cassio as a means of cuckolding him, bringing nothing but hatred and dishonor to Othello's world. Iago claims to have also fallen in love with Desdemona - yet for adventure and sin alone.

*"I do suspect the lusty Moor
Has leaped into my seat: the thought whereof
Doe, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards,
And nothing can, or shall, content my soul
Till I am evened with him, wife for wife.
Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor
At least into a jealousy so strong
That judgment cannot cure."* Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 2: "Cyprus. A street."

A herald announces the beloved General Othello's proclamation for Cyprus of celebration, bonfires, store openings, and joy in honor of the victory and his nuptials.

Act 2, Scene 3: "The citadel."

Othello and Desdemona celebrate their love, while Iago offers Cassio some wine. He turns it down, stating that he does not drink, and then summons the married couple. Iago states, in soliloquy, his intentions to frame Cassio for making passes at Desdemona, and complains of watching the lovesick Roderigo sad with loneliness. Iago manages to get Cassio drunk and the gentlemen all sing songs of valor and joy to one another and in praise of Othello. Cassio mumbles that he, the Lieutenant, must be saved before the Ensign. Iago, the Ensign, is silently angered by this. Cassio leaves the festivities proclaiming his soberness in an overtly drunken fashion, allowing Iago to tell Montano of his worries about Cassio's ability to govern. Iago tells Roderigo to follow the drunken Cassio.

Topic Tracking: Jealousy 3

As Montano and Iago discuss their concern about Othello's rule during the drunken festivities, Cassio and Roderigo enter enraged. In a futile attempt to keep order, a drunken Cassio strikes Montano, injuring him to the death, and causing a grand scene for all of Cyprus to see. Iago tells him slyly that "You [Cassio] will be shamed forever!" Act 2, Scene 3. Othello enters and witnesses the raucous brawl, asking "Honest Iago" what occurred. Iago plays along amiably with the conversation, allowing Cassio to admit his guilt and Montano to die gracefully and with honor. Othello painfully dismisses his beloved lieutenant from office and requests his exit.

Cassio complains that he is mortally injured because he has lost his reputation, to which Iago replies, "Reputation is an idle and most false imposition; often got without merit and lost without deserving. You have lost no reputation at all, unless you repute yourself such a loser. What, man! There are ways to recover the General again" Act 2, Scene 3. Iago tells him that, instead of begging Othello to return him to his post, that he must befriend Othello's beloved wife, Desdemona. In harboring a close relationship with her, he will be reunited with the General Othello and reclaim his station.

Iago proclaims that he will set a trap for Cassio, Othello, and Desdemona, in which he plans to make Othello jealous of Cassio and Desdemona, for she is a weak female body and thus easily manipulated. Roderigo tells Iago that he will return to Venice, and Iago plans to bring his wife to Cyprus to unknowingly aid in his scheme.

Topic Tracking: Jealousy 4

Topic Tracking: Revenge 5

Act 3, Scene 1: "Before the Citadel."

Cassio is entertained by musicians and a clown. Iago asks Cassio if he has spoken yet with Desdemona, to which Cassio replies negatively. Iago tells him that he will send for her and hide Othello in the meanwhile, and Cassio declares that "I [he] never knew a Florentine more kind and honest" than Iago Act 3, Scene 1. Everyone thinks Iago to be kind and honest, even as he schemes to destroy their lives.

Topic Tracking: Miscommunication 4

Emilia enters to calm Cassio's fears, stating that his master does still love him, but simply must take proper action. She sets up his meetings with Desdemona.

Act 3, Scene 2: "The Citadel."

Othello gives Iago letters to deliver to the senate. They plan to look at the action in Cyprus.

Act 3, Scene 3: "The same."

Emilia sets up a meeting between Desdemona and Cassio, in which Desdemona advises him that she will mend his relationship with her husband. Everything that she says to Othello will be of the good and kind and loyal Cassio. Immediately before Iago and Othello enter the citadel, Cassio steals away, as if evading sight. Iago plants jealous seeds in Othello's mind about Cassio's presence with Desdemona. Desdemona then urges her beloved husband to listen and pardon Cassio within three days. Othello agrees, for he repeatedly claims that he would do anything for his dear wife. After the women leave, Iago baits Othello with images of Cassio and Desdemona's intimacy. Othello claims to have no jealousy and that he loves Cassio and believes him to be an honest man. Iago states:

*"Oh, beware, my lord, of jealousy!
It is the green-eyed monster, which does mock
The meat it feeds on. That cuckold lives in bliss
Who certain of his fate loves not his wronger;
But O, what damned minutes tells he over,
Who dotes yet doubts, suspects yet fondly loves!"* Act 3, Scene 3

Topic Tracking: Jealousy 5

Iago claims that he loves Othello so dearly that he must tell him of such unpleasant news. He reminds Othello that Desdemona did lie to her father in order to marry him, so she is in fact capable of deception. He advises Othello to watch Cassio and Desdemona closely and Othello declares his loyalty and love to Iago forever. Iago leaves Othello to contemplate this new unsettling information.

*"O, curse of marriage!
That we can call these delicate creatures ours
And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad
And live upon the vapour of a dungeon
Than keep a corner in the thing I love
For others' uses." Act 3, Scene 3*

Topic Tracking: Miscommunication 5

Desdemona enters, concerned about her husband's well-being, for he looks ill. He tells her that he simply has a headache. He pulls out his handkerchief and she drops it on the floor as she moves to aid in his pain. The couple exits as Emilia picks up the napkin. She informs the audience in soliloquy that the handkerchief was the first gift Othello gave to Desdemona and that she treasures it with all her soul. She plans to give it to her husband, Iago, for he will know what to do with it, and claims that all of her actions are to help and serve him. Iago takes the handkerchief from Emilia, who tries to explain its importance to Desdemona. With typical cruelty, he tells Emilia to leave him alone. He plans to plant the napkin in Cassio's room and allow him to find it, giving even more

credence to his plan. "The Moor already changes with my poison. / Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons, / Which at the first are scarce found to distaste, / But, with a little act upon the blood, / Burn like the mines of sulphur" Act 3, Scene 3.

Othello enters, enraged by the news of Desdemona's supposed unfaithfulness. He demands living proof and evidence of such an affair, or he will take grand measures against everyone, including Iago. Iago tells him that when he slept near Cassio, he heard him mention his love for Desdemona in his sleep. He then mentions that he saw Cassio wipe his beard with a handkerchief. Othello now has his supposed proof on two levels and breaks into a fit of rage, vowing his vengeance upon Cassio and Desdemona. Iago vows to kill Cassio within three days, but leave Desdemona alive. Othello makes Iago his lieutenant.

Topic Tracking: Miscommunication 6

Topic Tracking: Jealousy 6

Act 3, Scene 4: "The same."

Desdemona asks the Clown about the whereabouts of Cassio's lodgings. The Clown runs her around in verbose circles. She frets to Emilia about the loss of her beloved handkerchief. Othello enters, immediately grilling his wife with questions concerning her loyalty. He requests the handkerchief and is aghast when she cannot give him the exact one for which he asks. He says that there is ancient Egyptian magic in it, and that the loss of it tells strongly against their love. Othello exits abruptly as Iago and Cassio enter. Desdemona tells Cassio that she is trying to win her husband's affections for him, but that he is enraged. Iago quickly leaves to find Othello. Emilia tells Desdemona that her husband is insanely jealous. "But jealous souls will not be answered so; / They are not ever jealous for the cause, / But jealous because they're jealous. It is a monster / Begotten upon itself, born on itself" Act 3, Scene 4.

As Desdemona and Emilia exit the citadel, Cassio's mistress, Bianca, enters, seeking her lover. She becomes bitter and jealous of Cassio's relationship with Desdemona and finds the handkerchief lying in his room. Cassio says he found the handkerchief and liked the pattern; he gives Desdemona's handkerchief to Bianca asking her to copy the pattern.

Topic Tracking: Jealousy 7

Act 4, Scene 1: " Before the citadel."

Iago tricks Othello further, causing him to believe that Desdemona is cheating on him, as evidenced by the whereabouts of the handkerchief. Othello faints upon hearing that his beloved may have lied with someone else. Iago excites himself with deception: "Work on, / My medicine, work! Thus credulous fools are caught, / And many worthy and chaste dames even thus, / All guiltless, meet reproach" Act 4, Scene 1.

Cassio enters and tries to help the unconscious Othello; Iago tells him to leave, that Othello must spend some time in his current state. Cassio exits and Othello awakens, still distraught with the information he had just received. Iago tells him that Cassio desires to speak with him. Othello plans to observe Cassio closely, in particular his actions with Desdemona.

As Othello watches, Iago plots to use Bianca in his fraudulent actions. Cassio puts Bianca down as Iago talks of her love for him. Othello is disturbed by his harsh, disheartening denial of love. Bianca enters, enraged with Cassio for giving her a handkerchief from such a minx. Othello recognizes it as the handkerchief he gave to Desdemona. Bianca storms out, followed by Cassio. Othello tells Iago of his rage, and plans to avenge his supposed cuckoldry: "Ay, let her rot and perish, and be damned tonight, for she shall not live! No, my heart is turned to stone: I strike it, and it hurts my hand" Act 4, Scene 1.

Lodovico and Desdemona come to Cyprus from Venice with great fanfare to deliver Othello a letter. Desdemona speaks to Othello of her friendship with Cassio and begs him to mend his relationship with Cassio, as well. Because of her kind words of Cassio, Othello believes the rumors of their affair and strikes Desdemona. Lodovico cannot believe such a violent act; he comments that it would never occur in Venice. Othello curses all womanhood and sends Desdemona away, as he must return to Venice. After Othello exits, Iago and Lodovico discuss the so-called benevolent Moor's actions in disbelief.

Topic Tracking: Miscommunication 7

Act 4, Scene 2: "The Citadel."

Emilia tells Othello that Desdemona has never been alone with Cassio, nor has she whispered, or given any indication of an affair. Othello sends Emilia to summon Desdemona and dismisses everything that she says on the basis that she is a simple woman. Iago has already convinced him that Desdemona is unchaste. Othello curses and damns Desdemona, calling her a whore and ignoring everything she says. He persistently insults Emilia, finally dismissing her from the conversation and stage. A worried Emilia questions Desdemona about the conversation, but Desdemona simply replies that she no longer has a husband, and feels faint.

Topic Tracking: Miscommunication 8

Iago enters on Emilia's despair. She is enraged and feels deeply concerned for her lady, Desdemona. She claims that whoever the man is who planted such ideas of whoredom into Othello's mind, is a "most villainous knave, / Some base notorious knave, some scurvy fellow" Act 4, Scene 2. Desdemona begs honest Iago for help, for Othello trusts Iago more than any other. After the women leave, Roderigo enters, complaining to Iago. He believes that he has received no benefits from this plan. Iago lays out his plan for the evening ahead to Roderigo: Bianca and Cassio's dinner; and Othello's plans to remove Cassio from Cyprus. Roderigo is to enter the dinner and remove Cassio himself.

Act 4, Scene 3: "The same."

Othello bids Desdemona to dismiss Emilia. Instead of dismissing her, Desdemona confides in Emilia and sings a song of false love. The two women discuss the possibility of such a wronged relationship in which a woman truly abuses her husband. Desdemona naively questions the nature of men's actions, to which Emilia responds in a strong female voice:

*"But I do think it is their husbands' faults
If wives do fall. Say that they slack their duties,
And pour our treasures into foreign laps;
Or else break out in peevish jealousies,
Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us,
Or scant our former living out of spite -
Why, we have galls, and though we have some grace,
Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know
Their wives have sense like them; they see and smell,
And have their palates both for sweet and sour
As husbands have. What is it that they do,
When they change us for others? Is it sport?
I think it is. And does affection breed it?
I think it does. Is it frailty that thus errs?
It is so too. And have not we affections,
Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?
Then let them use us well: else let them know
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so."* Act 4, Scene 3

Topic Tracking: Revenge 6

Act 5, Scene 1: "A street."

Roderigo and Iago prepare with their swords to kill Cassio. Roderigo worries that he may fail and Iago states that he must not fail. At first he doesn't care whether the two kill one another; upon further thought, however, Iago realizes that Cassio must die in order to protect his own reputation. Cassio walks out into the street to Roderigo's challenge. Cassio wounds Roderigo, and then Iago wounds Cassio in the leg and escapes. Roderigo believes himself slain; Cassio believes himself maimed. Othello enters from above to witness the duel below. When he sees the injured Cassio, he believes that Iago has told him the truth, and soon exits. Lodovico and Gratiano enter upon the confusion. Cassio screams 'murder,' as Roderigo believes that he will bleed to death unless someone summons a surgeon. Iago enters the street with a light to see what's going on. As Roderigo begs Iago for help, he stabs him in the dark so that nobody will see the murderer. Lodovico and Gratiano show the injured Cassio to Iago for aid, as Iago, the true perpetrator of this injury, attempts to bind his leg.

Topic Tracking: Miscommunication 9

During the confusion, Bianca enters, wondering about the noise, and cries over her injured beloved, Cassio. Iago feigns innocence and questions both duelers about the events before they are brought offstage. Emilia enters, as well, to inquire about the commotion, and finds her husband with Bianca. Iago tells his wife that this chaos is the product of whoring, and the two insult Bianca before leaving to find Cassio. Iago states that "This is the night / That either makes me, or undoes me quite" Act 5, Scene 1.

Act 5, Scene 2: "The citadel. A bedchamber."

Othello enters the bedchamber with a light and sees Desdemona on their bed. He speaks in soliloquy of his necessity to kill her, his desire to be revenged, and also of his strong love he still feels for her.

*"It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul:
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!
It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood,
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
And smooth as monumental alabaster.
Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
Put out the light, and then put out the light."* Act 5, Scene 2

Topic Tracking: Revenge 7

Desdemona awakens to an enraged man standing over her prepared for murder. Othello confronts her regarding the supposed disloyalty and affair with Cassio, whom, he tells her, can no longer speak. She defends her honesty and chastity and claims to know nothing about the missing handkerchief. As she begs for her life and prays, Othello smothers her.

Topic Tracking: Miscommunication 10

Emilia comes running in to speak to Othello frantically. Her voice frightens Othello, for he believes it to be the voice of his almost dead wife. Emilia tells him that Cassio has killed Roderigo. Othello is enraged that Cassio is not dead, as well. Emilia hears Desdemona's weak voice from behind the curtain and asks who committed such a horrific deed. She claims that nobody killed her - she killed? herself - and then she dies. Othello continues to curse Desdemona, even after her death, telling Emilia that she is a whore and that it was he who killed her. He also tells her that Iago, her husband, is the source of information. Emilia is livid with her husband, and cries out that Othello has murdered Desdemona.

Gratiano speaks for Desdemona and thanks God that her father, Brabantio, who has died of grief, is not present to see such a horror. Othello, once again, claims that Iago told him of Cassio and Desdemona's affair. Emilia cries out the truth: that she found the handkerchief and gave it to her husband, and that he lied about the entire affair. Iago calls Emilia a whore and a wretch and draws his sword on her. Gratiano cannot believe that someone would draw a weapon on a woman, while Othello comes to terms with the truth. Iago stabs Emilia and runs away. Montano and Gratiano race after Iago, the villain, in order to catch and slay him. Emilia asks to be placed next to her dying mistress, and as she dies, she tells Othello that Desdemona is innocent and chaste.



Othello looks for another sword and he finds a treasured one from Spain. He plans to end his life. He walks over to the bed to see his beloved Desdemona cold and dead. "O cursed, cursed slave! Whip me, ye devils, / From the possession of this heavenly sight! / Blow me about in winds! Roast me in sulphur! / Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire! / O Desdemon! Dead Desdemon! Dead! O! O!" Act 5, Scene 2. Lodovico, Montano, Iago, and a seated Cassio enter seeking Othello. Othello stabs Iago, but does not kill him, because he believes death is the easy route. Lodovico does not know what to do to Othello, a man who was once so good, but fell prey to a "damned slave". Othello falls prey to Iago's ploy, and his own jealousy. Othello believes himself to be an honorable murderer, for he acted in honor and not in hate. Lodovico unveils a letter found in the pocket of the slain Roderigo explaining the scheming behind his and Cassio's deaths. Lodovico banishes Othello from Cyprus and places Cassio in command. Before Othello leaves, he tells everyone that he loved Desdemona too greatly, but not too wisely. He stabs himself and falls upon the bed with Desdemona, saying, "I kissed you, ere I killed you: no way but this, / Killing myself, to die upon a kiss" Act 5, Scene 2. Cassio, Lodovico, and Gratiano have honor and compassion for the Moor and plan to hide the events of the evening.

Topic Tracking: Revenge 8

Topic Tracking: Miscommunication 11

Topic Tracking: Jealousy 8