

# ***The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice***

## **Plot Synopsis**

The play opens as Iago and his follower Roderigo are engaged in conversation regarding Othello's appointment of Michael Cassio, rather than Iago, as his chief of staff. Iago angrily slurs Cassio's inexperience in battle but declares he will serve Othello for his own purposes. Roderigo is also upset because he had been a suitor of Desdemona. In their desire to retaliate against Othello, Iago and Roderigo hasten to the home of Desdemona's father, Brabantio, a Venetian senator, to inform him of Desdemona's secret elopement with Othello. As Iago craftily plies Brabantio's anger and sense of dishonor at his daughter's elopement, he couches his words in racially and sexually charged language. An incensed Brabantio leads his serving men to confront Othello.

Cassio informs Othello that the Duke and Senators have summoned Othello. Brabantio and his men arrive and surround Othello. Brabantio cries, "Damned as thou art, thou hast enchanted her" [...] to (your) sooty bosom." Othello affirms that he has married Desdemona. Brabantio questions whether his daughter would "fall in love with what she feared to look on [?]." Othello then relates the story of how Desdemona came to love him for the dangers he had encountered and he grew to love her that "she did pity" his stories.

The attention then shifts to the military crisis of Cyprus. The Duke orders Othello to immediately sail with his military forces. Othello arranges for Desdemona to sail under the care of Iago and his wife Emilia. As Brabantio leaves, he neither gives his daughter his blessing nor bids her goodbye. Instead, his final words are addressed to Othello: "Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see; She has deceived her father and may thee."

As all leave, Iago tells Roderigo that Desdemona will not love Othello for long; Roderigo should sell his assets and travel to Cyprus immediately. When Roderigo leaves, Iago meditates about his intended villainy against Othello.

After the loss at sea of all the Turkish ships, Othello and the Venetians arrive safely in Cyprus. Othello orders Cassio, his trusted lieutenant, to stand guard for the night. Iago arranges for Cassio to get drunk and for Roderigo to engage him in a drunken brawl. As the disturbance grows, Othello is awakened and he strips Cassio of his position. Iago then arranges for Cassio to speak to Desdemona alone to plead for his case. At Cassio's request, Desdemona agrees to speak to Othello on his behalf. Meanwhile, Iago craftily begins to ply Othello's jealousy as he says, "[L]ook to your wife, observe her well with Cassio." After one of her conversations with Cassio, Desdemona finds her husband agitated, withdrawn, and complaining of a headache. Desdemona attempts to bind Othello's throbbing head with her handkerchief and in doing so, drops it. Emilia picks it up and gives it to her husband as he "hath a hundred times wooed me to steal it." Iago arranges for the handkerchief to be placed in Cassio's lodging. He then tells Othello of overhearing Cassio in his sleep cry out for Desdemona. Iago says he saw Cassio wipe his brow with the handkerchief, the first gift Othello gave Desdemona. A frenzied Othello cries out to Iago that Cassio shall be killed in three days; he also contemplates death for his wife.

Desdemona, meanwhile, relays a message to Cassio that she will speak to Othello on his behalf. On her return, Othello notes her hand is moist; he associates it with her unfaithfulness. He asks Desdemona for her handkerchief. Confused and upset by his growing agitation, Desdemona lies, saying she has not lost it.

Cassio arrives with Iago and requests once again that Desdemona intercede on his behalf. Desdemona requests Cassio to be patient; Othello's mood is greatly altered and she has been unable to speak to him. Soon thereafter, Cassio encounters Bianca, his mistress, and gives her the handkerchief he has found at his lodging.

Iago tells Othello he will engage Cassio to "tell the tale anew [...] how long ago, and when He hath and is again to cope your wife" while Othello is to observe, concealed some distance away. Instead, Iago engages Cassio in laughter and conversation about Bianca. Bianca arrives and Othello sees her with the handkerchief.

At Lodovico's arrival from Venice, Desdemona speaks of the breach between Othello and Cassio. In the presence of Lodovico, Othello rages at Desdemona and strikes her. Later, the wrathful Othello is unable to accept Emilia's account of Desdemona's "chaste and true" disposition." Othello privately asks Desdemona, "Why, what art thou?" To her pleading words of loyalty, he lashes out that she is a "cunning whore of Venice [...]." Emilia wonders, "[W]hy should he call her whore? Who keeps her company? The Moor's abused by some most villainous knave, [...]."

In the meantime, Iago tells Roderigo that he will soon have Desdemona, and engages him to kill Cassio. Roderigo and Iago wait in the darkness for Cassio. Roderigo thrusts his sword at Cassio; Iago, from behind, stabs Cassio's leg. In the commotion that ensues, Iago mortally stabs Roderigo.

Othello orders Desdemona to bed. "Think on your sins," he bids her. He again asks her about the handkerchief and tells her she is "on thy death-bed." Desdemona cries out that she never gave Cassio her handkerchief; he tells her Cassio has confessed and that the "honest Iago" has arranged for the silencing of Cassio. Othello then smothers her. Emilia appears at the door with news that Roderigo has been killed and Cassio wounded. She discovers the dying Desdemona and learns of her husband's treachery. Emilia cries out to Othello that Iago begged her to steal the handkerchief. Iago tries to silence Emilia and stabs her. Othello admits to his consent for Cassio's death and learns of Cassio's innocence. Othello is stripped of his power and command of Cyprus. Maddened with anguish, Othello kisses Desdemona and then stabs himself and dies. As the play ends, Cassio is empowered to censure and punish Iago.