

Act two is set within a public scene, with lots of characters waiting. This places the action thoroughly within a public framework from the outset. The setting of Cyprus is also significant as it removes Desdemona and Othello from the social structure and security of the Venetian environment in which their loved developed.

Storm not in Cinthio's source text: Shakespeare deliberately foreshadows Othello's emotional 'storm' and the passions that will be unleashed in the new setting.

Chaos is external at the start: 'chidden billow seems to pelt the clouds.' God's division of land, water and sky is undone by the chaos of the storm, just as Othello himself will be undone by the chaos within.

No personal memories are attached to Cassio's description of Desdemona: it is not personal, but courtesy. Cassio behaves within the courtly lover convention. Despite this, Iago will be able to manipulate Othello into believing otherwise.

Desdemona's cool response to Cassio brings down the exalted tone of his compliments (she merely thanks him for his kind words.) Her first thought is with Othello (what tidings can you tell me of my lord?), showing her concern and affection for him.

There is a contrast in how Cassio treats Emilia and Desdemona: Emilia only receives a quick two worded 'welcome mistress' in juxtaposition to the exalted flattery that Desdemona is offered. He does offer a 'bold show of courtesy' (a kiss) but this is all. Perhaps this is a symptom of the social hierarchy of the time (Desdemona is nobility, Emilia the ancient's wife.)

Emilia 'has no speech': this is significant in that it is not only symbolic of the passivity of women in the Jacobean era, but it also foreshadows how both Emilia and Desdemona will die (particularly since it is Desdemona who makes this remark.) In addition, it shows the distance between Emilia and Desdemona.

Arguments for Desdemona's dishonesty: she tricked Brabantio; hid her concern for Othello ('I do beguile/the thing I love by seeming otherwise' - with the enjambement reflecting the distance between her true self and her outer portrayal); lies about the handkerchief.

Iago and Emilia serve as a foil for Othello and Desdemona: the bitter relationship ('in faith too much') and the idealised relationship. Ultimately, both women die at the hands of their husbands.

Iago as a 'morally grey character': he is not wholly good or wholly evil. He presents reasons for his attack on Othello and even gives genuine advice to Cassio, but still goes too far. His outspokenness supports his portrayal as 'honest' ('I am nothing if not critical.')

Desdemona's engagement in the bawdy exchange emphasises her sexuality, which is narratively important to the plot. It also contradicts Brabantio's depiction of her as pure etc.

'You may relish him more/in the soldier than in the scholar': it is ironic that when Iago is at his most honest, he is disregarded as entertaining and foolish. Iago is called 'honest' some forty times in the play.

Othello's reception of Desdemona: all encompassing nature of love prepares us for the absoluteness of his jealousy later. Phrases such as 'wakened death' and 'Olympus high' refer to absolute extremes, contributing to vision of 'chaos is come again' when Desdemona leaves him: overwhelming emotions.

Iago as a social statistician who applies statistics to individuals and targets them through his knowledge of their character (e.g. targets Othello's impulsive personality and insecurity.)