

Othello

Act 1 Scene 1

'Horribly stuff'd with epithets of war' - Iago

- Always talking about his war stories. Using his exotic tales and experiences to create a place for himself, to build credibility in a highly stratified society.

'I follow him to serve my turn upon him' - Iago

- Establishes Iago as a villain explicitly at the start of the play, thereby building tension as Iago is represented to be one who takes delight in his villainy and is skilful with manipulation.

'I am not what I am' - Iago

- Corruption of the line from the Bible "I am that I am". Right off the start, Iago is established explicitly as a duplicitous villain with ill intent towards Othello, building tension as readers understand his jealous mentality, his insatiable craving for revenge and chaos as one who takes delight in his villainy, foreshadowing conflict and chaos that is to come.

'Even now, now, very now, an old black ram is tugging your white ewe' - Iago

- Represents Othello's sexuality as animal-like. Iago's choice of diction is coarse, crude and does not fit into the conventions of the polite, civilized Venetian society. By likening Othello to a black ram, it diminishes him to a beast, to a position below humanity, and that by describing Desdemona as 'white ewe', a contrast in colour is established, representing her as corrupted by a bestial figure. Iago's speech incites fear by representing Othello as the stereotypical bestial, highly charged black man, specifically designed to appeal to Brabantio's fear and disgust.
- Shakespeare's use of antithesis: 'black ram' against 'white ewe' expressing conflict, which is at the heart of all drama

'Thieves! Thieves! Look to your house, your daughter, and your bags!'

- The repeated use of possessive pronouns 'your' accentuates how these are all belongings of men. The use of parallelism in 'your house, your daughter and your bags' further highlights how these three things (the house, the woman and the bags) are considered of the same class, of the same type and with the same rights. This reflects how the daughter is perceived as property, such as bags and houses.

'Your daughter, if you have not given her leave, I say again, hath made a gross revolt' - Roderigo

- Since the daughter is expected to be a possession of the father with no autonomy, Desdemona's act of not residing under the command of men and enacting her own free will is viewed as a disgusting act of rebellion. This demonstrates how women are not considered people with their own choices, but rather, they have to be given permission by men to do things.

'Thick lips' 'Gross clasps of a lascivious Moor'

- The language of racism in the play is established by Iago and Roderigo in the first act, referring to the 'lascivious Moor' with 'thick lips', conforming to the stereotypical image of a savage, highly charged black man. Blatant and intentional racist abuse in Iago and Roderigo's dialogue

'How now! What do you here alone?' 'Why, what's that to you?' - Iago

She is treated with contempt by Iago. *'How now! What do you here alone?'* Iago demands full control and knowledge of what she is doing, seen as the way he interrogates her. When Emilia asks what Iago will do with the handkerchief, Iago responds with *'why, what's that to you?'* The expectation of transparency in the relationship between Emilia and Iago is unilaterally granted. Emilia must reveal everything, but Iago can do anything under secret.

'Ha, ha, false to me!'

- Othello's own self image: He feels that Desdemona's marriage is personal.
- Othello as the agent of his own destruction - the fact that he says he rather not know about infidelity rather than claiming that there was no act of infidelity indicates that he does not think Desdemona is innocent at any point.

'Farewell the tranquil mind! Farewell content! Farewell the plumed troops, and the big wars that makes ambition virtue - O farewell!' - Othello

- Othello peels himself off layer by layer. His self image was predicated on his military prowess. Betrayal is existential to Othello, who feels that he is no longer a man, no longer a general and not himself anymore. Iago successfully deconstructs Othello.

'Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore'

'I think my wife be honest, and think she is not; I think that thou art just, and think thou art not.' - Othello

- Tension within Othello: His dichotomy, on the one hand he is jealous, on the other hand sceptical. Captures the dichotomy of Othello in a transition state.
- He seeks confirmation - feels that it is logical that she betrays him for another man due to his insecurities

'Her name is now begrimed and black as my own face.' - Othello

- Othello looks for an image of corruption, something tainted and intrinsically foul and comes up with his own face. Reflects how he actually has low self worth, once he is betrayed, he doubts himself and feels inferior.

'Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys' - Iago

- Adds a layer of visual imagery planted in Othello's mind
- Effective creation of visual imagery - portrays their animalistic, gruesome behavior

'Sweet Desdemona, let us be wary, let us hide our loves' - Iago

Iago tells Othello how Cassio cries *'Sweet Desdemona, let us be wary, let us hide our loves'* in his sleep and kisses his hand. Othello in turn absorbs this narrative because of his feelings of inferiority. To Othello, his race, age and visuals all contribute to make him a weak candidate for Desdemona, a beautiful and aristocratic woman. Under the impression that he does not meet Desdemona's sexual needs, Othello absorbs this narrative, as it appeals to Othello's insecurity. To the part of Othello that is insecure, thinks it is natural that Desdemona and Cassio are in love, and it is not natural for Desdemona to love someone like him. Once Othello accepts this lie, he is weakened: *'O monstrous, monstrous!'* Here, we see that Othello is turning into the worst version of himself, his language demonstrates a sense of loss of control - he is turning into the stereotypical savage black man he had tried to make himself out not to be.

'Nay, this was but his dream' 'I know not what' - Iago

'And yet I fear you, for you're fatal then when your eyes roll so.' *'Send for the man and ask him'* - Desdemona

- Replies that her only sin is in loving him.
- Reminiscent of Act 1, when Brabantio accuses Othello of abduction, and in that case the Duke agreed to send for Desdemona, who was able to corroborate Othello's story. Here, Othello does not allow for Cassio's corroboration, and merely accuses Desdemona of perjury. His view of justice and evidence has changed throughout the course of the play due to jealousy.

'It is the very error of the moon.. [that] makes men mad' - Othello

- Blames his actions on the moon. Iago manipulate and was the stage director, but it was Othello who was wallowing in self pity. It was Othello who smothered Desdemona.

'My husband?' *'He lies to th'heart. She was too fond of her most filthy baggage. Do thy worst'*

- 'My husband!' Expresses her utter disbelief, as her perspective of her husband immediately changes. She does not let her marital duty interfere with morality. Upon discovering murder, she defies power imbalance, speaking out in spite of Othello's threat to keep peace.

Iago's loss of control

'I told him what I thought, and told no more than what he found himself was apt and true' -Iago

- Iago is not driving the narrative and instead being asked direct questions and interrogated by Emilia. He is also cornered, he is unable to speak to people one to one and target their weaknesses, concerns or nitpick evidence to form his own narrative. Just like how he was in Venetian court, there is power in the room which he has to respond to and he is unable to escape from his accusations.

Emilia's role as a truth teller

- In Act 5, when Emilia realises what her husband has done, she becomes completely independent and exposes him. When Iago commands her *'I charge you, get you home,'* she disobeys. The diction *'charge'* indicates that it is a direct command in the same vein *'go to.'* in act 4, yet Emilia ignores it.
- Instead, she turns to the Venetian authority *'Good gentlemen, let me have leave to speak. 'Tis proper I obey him, but not now. Perchance, Iago, I will ne'er go home'* The way she says *'tis proper I obey him but not now'* demonstrating self-awareness of her position. Although she was going to betray her husband, she still feels a need to explain her deviation for social conducts, reflecting how society weighs heavily on women.
- However, her empowerment is shown as although she has no power herself as a woman of a low social status, she takes advantage and relies on the power of the Venetian authority to speak up and expose her husband. And through piggybacking the power Venetian authority lends her, she proceeds to expose her husband's evil doings. Just like Desdemona, she demonstrates wits in the manner she speaks. She addresses the men of Venetian society, as she understands that in a patriarchal society, men have the most power, so she appeals to men of higher social status and of the highest form of authority as a pillar to support her as she destroys her husband. Although it is unable to reverse the tragedy, it demonstrates a progression in Emilia's character from being blindly obedient to destroying her husband
- Emilia speaks in her own right *'My mistress here lies murdered in her bed'* dismiss Iago and highlights the severity of the situation, bringing attention to her own cause. Iago resorts to gaslighting, only defense mechanism left *'What are you mad? I charge you, get you home'* This is completely unlike the Iago we've seen in past four acts, who is cunning and precise in his manipulation of others psychology
- Through the play, he deemed as *'honest Iago'*, Realise that no one truly knows who Iago is except readers when he breaks the fourth wall. So when Emilia speaks out bravely, she exposes him completely and leaves a defenseless, naked Iago. Hence, Iago left with no choice but to kill the truth teller.