

ACT
1SCENE
2

Another street

Enter OTHELLO, IAGO, and Attendants with torches

IAGO Though in the trade of war I have slain men,
Yet do I hold it very stuff o' the conscience
To do no contrived murder: I lack iniquity
Sometimes to do me service: nine or ten times
I had thought to have yerk'd him here under the ribs.

OTHELLO 'Tis better as it is.

IAGO Nay, but he prated,
And spoke such scurvy and provoking terms
Against your honour
That, with the little godliness I have,
I did full hard forbear him. But, I pray you, sir,
Are you fast married? Be assured of this,
That the magnifico is much beloved,
And hath in his effect a voice potential
As double as the Duke's: he will divorce you;
Or put upon you what restraint and grievance
The law, with all his might to enforce it on,
Will give him cable.

OTHELLO Let him do his spite:
My services which I have done the signiory
Shall out-tongue his complaints. 'Tis yet to know –
Which, when I know that boasting is an honour,
I shall promulgate – I fetch my life and being
From men of royal siege, and my demerits
May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune
As this that I have reach'd: for know, Iago,
But that I love the gentle Desdemona,
I would not my unhoused free condition
Put into circumscription and confine
For the sea's worth. But, look! what lights come yond?

IAGO Those are the raised father and his friends:
You were best go in.

OTHELLO Not I – I must be found:
My parts, my title and my perfect soul
Shall manifest me rightly. Is it they?

IAGO By Janus, I think no.

Enter CASSIO, and certain Officers with torches

OTHELLO The servants of the Duke, and my lieutenant.
The goodness of the night upon you, friends!
What is the news?

CASSIO The Duke does greet you, general,
And he requires your haste-post-haste appearance,
Even on the instant.

OTHELLO What is the matter, think you?

3 *contrived*: premeditated

3 *iniquity*: sin, evil (crime)

5 5 *yerk'd*: struck

6 *prated*: babbled

7 *scurvy*: insulting, contemptible

11 *fast*: firmly

12 *magnifico*: Brabantio's title

13-4 *hath in his effect a voice potential / As double as the Duke's*: has a voice potentially as influential as the Duke's, which is worth twice that of any other senator.

17 *give him cable*: give him rope (scope)

18 *Signory*: Venetian government

19 *out-tongue*: speak louder than

21 *promulgate*: to make known, a public declaration

22 *siege*: rank

23 *unbonneted*: without my hat on, with all due modesty

27 *circumscription and confine*: restriction and restraint

29 *raised*: roused from sleep

31 *parts*: talents

33 *Janus*: Roman god. Traditionally represented as two-faced, he is an appropriate deity for the shifty Iago to invoke.

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| CASSIO | Something from Cyprus as I may divine: It is a business of some heat: the galleys Have sent a dozen sequent messengers This very night at one another's heels, And many of the consuls, raised and met, Are at the duke's already: you have been hotly call'd for; When, being not at your lodging to be found, The senate hath sent about three several guests To search you out. | 39 <i>divine</i> : guess 40 <i>heat</i> : urgency 41 <i>sequent</i> : successive 45 |
| OTHELLO | 'Tis well I am found by you. I will but spend a word here in the house, And go with you. | 47 <i>several</i> : distinct; separate |
| <i>Exit</i> | | |
| CASSIO | Ensign, what makes he here? | 50 |
| IAGO | 'Faith, he tonight hath boarded a land carack: If it prove lawful prize, he's made for ever. I do not understand. | 51 <i>carack</i> : large ship |
| CASSIO | | |
| IAGO | He's married. | |
| CASSIO | To who? | |
| IAGO | Marry, to – | |
| <i>Re-enter OTHELLO</i> | | |
| | Come, captain, will you go? | |
| OTHELLO | Have with you. | 54 <i>Have with you</i> : Let's go together |
| CASSIO | Here comes another troop to seek for you. | 55 |
| IAGO | It is Brabantio. General, be advised; He comes to bad intent. | 55 <i>seek</i> : look |
| <i>Enter BRABANTIO, RODERIGO, and Officers with torches and weapons</i> | | |
| OTHELLO | Holla! stand there! | |
| RODERIGO | Signior, it is the Moor. | |
| BRABANTIO | Down with him, thief! | |
| | <i>They draw on both sides</i> | |
| IAGO | You, Roderigo! come, sir, I am for you. | 60 |
| OTHELLO | Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them. Good signior, you shall more command with years Than with your weapons. | 60 <i>come, sir, I am for you</i> : Iago pretends to fight Roderigo |
| BRABANTIO | O thou foul thief, where hast thou stow'd my daughter? Damn'd as thou art, thou hast enchanted her; For I'll refer me to all things of sense, If she in chains of magic were not bound, Whether a maid so tender, fair and happy, So opposite to marriage that she shunned The wealthy curled darlings of our nation, Would ever have, to incur a general mock, Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom Of such a thing as thou, to fear, not to delight. Judge me the world, if 'tis not gross in sense That thou hast practised on her with foul charms, Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals That weaken motion: I'll have't disputed on; 'Tis probable and palpable to thinking. I therefore apprehend and do attach thee For an abuser of the world, a practiser Of arts inhibited and out of warrant. | 64 <i>foul</i> : wicked, ugly, loathsome 65 68 <i>fair</i> : beautiful 69 <i>opposite</i> : opposed 70 72 <i>her guardage</i> : safety and guardianship of her father 74 <i>gross in sense</i> : obvious to any observer 75 78 <i>palpable</i> : clear, obvious 79 <i>attach</i> : arrest 80 81 <i>arts inhibited</i> : the black arts |

Lay hold upon him: if he do resist,
Subdue him at his peril.

OTHELLO

Hold your hands,
Both you of my inclining, and the rest:
Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it
Without a prompter. Where will you that I go
To answer this your charge?

BRABANTIO

To prison, till fit time
Of law and course of direct session
Call thee to answer.

OTHELLO

What if I do obey?
How may the Duke be therewith satisfied,
Whose messengers are here about my side,
Upon some present business of the state
To bring me to him?

First Officer

'Tis true, most worthy signior;
The Duke's in council and your noble self,
I am sure, is sent for.

BRABANTIO

How! The Duke in council!
In this time of the night! Bring him away:
Mine's not an idle cause: the Duke himself,
Or any of my brothers of the state,
Cannot but feel this wrong as 'twere their own;
For if such actions may have passage free,
Bond-slaves and pagans shall our statesmen be.

*Exeunt*84 *inclining*: party, faction

85

88 *course of direct session*: due process of an immediate court sitting

90

95

100 *may have passage free*: be freely allowed101 *Bond-slaves and Pagans*: men who are both slaves and heathen

IAGO AND OTHELLO

TALK ABOUT IT

In the opening scene we heard a lot about Othello from Iago and Roderigo. Do their descriptions match the character we meet in the second scene?

Iago tells Othello that Roderigo has been saying unpleasant things about him and that Brabantio now knows of his marriage to Desdemona. Othello says that he has nothing to be ashamed of and that his good character will ensure that the senator cannot harm him. Cassio comes to tell Othello that he is urgently needed at the Duke's – a situation is brewing in Cyprus and a council has convened to decide what action is required. Brabantio and his men find Othello and seek to arrest him, accusing him of using witchcraft to lure Desdemona. Othello tells Brabantio that the Duke has called upon him to attend an urgent meeting and it is best they go there to address any grievance the senator might have.

ACTION

LINE BY LINE

▶ LINES 1-28: IAGO AND OTHELLO SPEAK

Iago is with Othello on a street in Venice. He tells Othello that Roderigo has been saying unpleasant things about him: 'he prated,/ And spoke such scurvy and provoking terms/ Against your honour' (6-8). Iago claims that when he heard these insulting comments he felt like stabbing Roderigo: 'I had thought to have yerked him here under the ribs' (5). However, though he has killed many times in battle, premeditated murder is not something he is capable of: 'I hold it very stuff o'th' conscience/ To do no contrived murder' (2-3). He tells Othello that he lacks the necessary wickedness sometimes to do what is necessary: 'I lack iniquity Sometimes to do me service' (3-4).

Iago wonders if Othello has consummated his marriage with Desdemona: 'Are you fast married?' (11). He tells Othello that Brabantio will look to have the marriage annulled if he can. If this proves impossible he will use whatever legal means he can to make Othello's life as miserable as possible: 'put upon you what restraint and grievance/ That law... Will give him cable' (15-7). Brabantio is a respected and powerful citizen of Venice and has even more influence, Iago says, than the Duke himself.

Othello is unshaken by all of this:

- He is sure that the services he has done the state in battle will outweigh any grievance that Brabantio might have about his marriage: 'My services, which I have done the signory,/ Shall out-tongue his complaints' (18-19).



- His merits make him more than worthy of marriage to Desdemona: 'my demerits/ May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune/ As this' (22-4).
- He also loves Desdemona and would not have given up the freedom of being a bachelor for anyone less than she: 'I would not my unhousted free condition/ Put into circumscription and confine/ For the sea's worth' (26-8).

► LINES 29-54: TROUBLE IN CYPRUS

A party of men is seen approaching. Iago assumes that it is Brabantio and his men and urges Othello to leave but the general stands firm and says that he has nothing to feel guilty about: 'My parts, my title, and my perfect soul/ Shall manifest me rightly' (31-2). The approaching group turns out to be Cassio and servants of the Duke who have been sent to find Othello. A situation has arisen in Cyprus and Othello must attend an urgent meeting at the Duke's: 'Something from Cyprus, as I may divine:/ It is business of some heat' (39-40). Messengers have been arriving from Cyprus all night with reports of a grave situation and those in command in Venice are now gathering at the Duke's palace to plan whatever action might be required. Othello was not to be found at his lodgings and so a number of groups were sent to search for him.

Othello re-merges from the house just in time to see Brabantio and Roderigo arrive with some officers in tow. Brabantio immediately accuses Othello of being a 'thief' and calls on his men to attack (59). Swords are raised on both sides and Iago makes as if he will fight Roderigo: 'You, Roderigo! come, sir, I am for you' (56). Othello remains perfectly calm and respectful towards Brabantio, telling him that his

OTHELLO

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

DIGNITY AND SELF-POSSESSION

Despite being provoked, insulted and threatened in this scene, Othello remains calm and self-possessed at all times:

- When Iago tries to incense him with tales of Roderigo saying terrible things about him, Othello refuses to get wound up. It is best, he tells Iago, that the ensign didn't resort to violence on his behalf: 'Tis better as it is' (6).
- When he hears that Brabantio wishes to have him divorced or make him suffer for marrying his daughter, Othello tells Iago to let him do what he wishes: 'Let him do his spite' (17).
- When it seems that Brabantio and his men are approaching, Othello refuses to run and hide, though this is what Iago tells him to do: 'Not I – I must be found' (30).
- When Brabantio and his men do arrive and swords are raised, Othello tells everyone to lower their weapons and suggests to Brabantio that his age will command more respect than the weapons he brings: 'Good signor, you shall more command with years/ Than with your weapons' (62-3).
- Though Brabantio insults him and accuses him of practicing 'arts inhibited and out of warrent' Othello never loses his temper, calmly asking the senator where he would like him to go to answer these charges: 'Where will you that I go/ To answer this your charge?' (86-7).

We also get a sense of Othello's pride and dignity in this scene. He tells Iago that it is not well known that he is descended from royalty: 'Tis yet to know...I fetch my life and being/ From men of royal seige' (19-22). This, however, is not something he wishes to broadcast or boast about: 'when I know that boasting is an honour,/ I shall promulgate' (20-1).

Othello is proud of what he has achieved and is sure that his actions will speak against any accusations or threats the senator is likely to bring: 'My services, which I have done the signory,/ Shall out-tongue his complaints' (18-9). He is not someone who runs and hides when things look set to get difficult. When Iago tells him to hide from Brabantio, Othello says that he will stay and face the senator: 'My parts, my title, and my perfect soul/ Shall manifest me rightly' (31-2). His merits also make him more than worthy of marriage to Desdemona: 'my demerits/ May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune/ As this that I have reach'd' (22-4).

age commands more respect than the weapons he brings: 'Good signor, you shall more command with years/ Than with your weapons' (62-3).

► LINES 55-61: BRABANTIO CONFRONTS OTHELLO

Brabantio is in no mood to calm down:

- He calls Othello a 'foul thief' and accuses him of stealing his daughter away: 'where hast thou stow'd my daughter' (64).
- He says that Othello is someone who practices forbidden and illegal arts: 'a practiser/ Of arts inhibited and out of warrant' (80-1). Othello used this black magic to take possession of Desdemona: 'thou hast enchanted her' (65).
- He accuses Othello of using medicines to weaken his daughter's will: 'Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals/ That weaken motion' (76-7).
- Any reasonable person, he says, will see immediately that his daughter must be under some dark spell: 'For I'll refer me to all things of sense,/ If she in chains of magic were not bound' (66-7).

Desdemona is a beautiful and fortunate girl, someone who enjoys the guardianship of a loving

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

IAGO

A BRILLIANT ACTOR

In Act 1 Scene 1 Iago tells us that his loyalty and faithfulness to Othello is merely an act – he despises the general but knows that it serves his interests for the moment to seem the faithful servant. In this scene we get to see Iago play the part of devoted ensign:

- He tells Othello that Roderigo has been saying terrible things about him and that he was so angered by the nobleman's words that he thought to defend his master's honour with violence: 'I did full hard forebear him' (10).
- He claims that he wanted to strike Roderigo with his dagger: 'I had thought t'have yerkd him here under the ribs' (5).
- He also acts as if he has Othello's best interests at heart when he tells him that Brabantio is looking for him and that the senator is a powerful man, capable of making Othello's life a misery: 'Be assured of this, That the magnifico is much beloved,/ And hath in his effect a voice potential/ As double as the Duke's' (11-4).

father. Why, Brabantio asks, would she leave the safety of her home, open herself to ridicule, to be with a man like Othello, someone inspires fear rather than delight? 'Whether a maid so tender, fair, and happy...Would ever have, to incur a general mock,/ Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom/ Of such a thing as thou – to fear, not to delight?' (68-73). After all, Desdemona was someone so opposed to marriage that she turned down offers from the wealthiest Venetian men: 'So opposite to marriage that she shunned/ The wealthy curled darlings of our nation' (69-70).

Brabantio calls on his men to arrest Othello and bring him to jail. Othello tells the senator that it would not please the Duke if he was to be taken to prison this night – he has just been called upon to attend an urgent meeting of the state. Brabantio is surprised to hear that the Duke is holding council so late at night but is not willing to let the issue of his daughter's marriage rest. He says that the Duke and other senior members of government will sympathise with him when they hear of what Othello has done. If men such as Othello are free to behave in the manner he has just described then the future statesmen of the city will be 'Bond-slaves and pagans' (101). ♦

Little does Othello know that it was Iago who spoke ill of him and helped Roderigo rouse the sleeping senator with the news of the marriage.

NO RESPECT FOR MORALS AND VALUES

In this scene Iago presents himself as a moral person, someone with strong values.

- He claims to be outraged at Roderigo insulting Othello's honour (6-10).
- He says that premeditated murder is something he abhors and would never commit: 'I hold it very stuff o'th' conscience/ To do no contrived murder' (2-3).
- He says that he is not wicked by nature: 'I lack iniquity/ Sometimes to do me service' (3-4).
- He says that he wanted to stab Roderigo for bad-mouthing Othello but was incapable of acting in this manner (3-5).

But this is all just an act, a conscious effort to present himself in a certain way to Othello. As the play progresses we will see that Iago has little or no time for the morals and values he pretends here to uphold.

TALK ABOUT IT

Do you think that Brabantio's anger is justified and his speech reasonable given the way his daughter has just behaved?