

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

OTHELLO

This interactive sample PDF file contains
the contents pages plus Act 1, Scene 3.

FULL TEXT & STUDY NOTES

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Act 1 Scene 3

A Council-Chamber.

The DUKE and Senators sitting at a table; with lights and attendants

DUKE

There is no composition in these news
That gives them credit.

FIRST SENATOR

Indeed, they are disproportion'd
My letters say a hundred and seven galleys.

DUKE

And mine, a hundred and forty.

SECOND SENATOR

And mine two hundred;
But though they jump not on a just account –
As in these cases where the aim reports
'Tis oft with difference – yet do they all confirm
A Turkish fleet, and bearing up to Cyprus.

DUKE

Nay, it is possible enough to judgment:
I do not so secure me in the error,
But the main article I do approve
In fearful sense.

SAILOR

[Without] What, ho! What, ho! What, ho!

FIRST OFFICER

A messenger from the galleys. **Enter a SAILOR**

DUKE

Now, what's the business?

SAILOR

The Turkish preparation makes for Rhodes;
So was I bid report here to the state
By Signor Angelo.

DUKE

How say you by this change?

FIRST SENATOR

This cannot be,
By no assay of reason. 'Tis a pageant
To keep us in false gaze. When we consider

[1–2] **There is . . . credit:** These reports are too inconsistent to be credible.

[2] **disproportioned:** inconsistent, not adding up

[5] **[5] jump not on a just account:** don't agree on a true account

[6] **where the aim . . . difference:** Where the reports are based on guesses or estimates, there are often differences between them.

[8] **bearing up to:** approaching

[10] **[9–11] I do not . . . sense:** I know that there are discrepancies in the accounts we're hearing, but I accept the central concern (i.e. that the Turkish fleet is approaching).

[15] **[14] preparation:** force that is ready for war

[17] **How say you by:** What do you make of . . . ?

[19] **assay:** test

[19] **pageant:** show, deceitful spectacle, diversion

[20] **[20] To keep us in false gaze:** to keep us looking in the wrong direction

Th'importancy of Cyprus to the Turk,
 And let ourselves again but understand
 That as it more concerns the Turk than Rhodes,
 So may he with more facile question bear it,
 For that it stands not in such warlike brace,
 But altogether lacks th'abilities
 That Rhodes is dressed in. If we make thought of this,
 We must not think the Turk is so unskilful
 To leave that latest which concerns him first,
 Neglecting an attempt of ease and gain
 To wake and wage a danger profitless.

DUKE

Nay, in all confidence he's not for Rhodes.

FIRST OFFICER

Here is more news. *Enter a Messenger*

MESSENGER

The Ottomites, reverend and gracious,
 Steering with due course towards the isle of Rhodes,
 Have there injointed them with an after fleet.

FIRST SENATOR

Ay, so I thought. How many, as you guess?

MESSENGER

Of thirty sail; and now they do re-stem
 Their backward course, bearing with frank appearance
 Their purposes toward Cyprus. Signor Montano,
 Your trusty and most valiant servitor,
 With his free duty recommends you thus,
 And prays you to believe him.

DUKE

'Tis certain, then, for Cyprus.
 Marcus Luccicos, is not he in town?

FIRST SENATOR

He's now in Florence.

DUKE

Write from us: wish him
 Post-post-haste dispatch.

FIRST SENATOR

Here comes Brabantio and the valiant Moor.
Enter BRABANTIO, OTHELLO, IAGO, RODERIGO, and Officers

DUKE

Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you
 Against the general enemy Ottoman.
To BRABANTIO I did not see you: welcome, gentle signor;
 We lacked your counsel and your help tonight.

- [24] **So may . . . bear it:** For the same reason, the Turkish fleet can more easily win it.
- [25] **in . . . warlike brace:** in readiness to defend against an attack
- [26] **th'abilities:** the forces, military strength
- [27] **dressed in:** equipped with
- [29] **latest:** last
- [30–1] **Neglecting . . . profitless:** failing to mount an easy and profitable attack only to risk a dangerous undertaking that brings no benefit
- [32] **not for:** not bound for; not headed towards
- [34] **reverend and gracious:** The messenger addresses his audience in this respectful manner because they are senators.
- [36] **in jointed:** joined up with
- [38–9] **do re-stem . . . course:** are retracing their course backwards
- [40] **bearing . . . Cypress:** making it clear that they are heading to Cypress
- [42] **free duty:** freely given loyalty
- [42] **recommends you thus:** gives you this report

[45]

- [50] **straight:** immediately
- [51] **general enemy Ottoman:** The Turkish Ottoman empire was regarded as a threat to the whole of Christian civilisation.
- [52] **gentle:** noble

BRABANTIO

So did I yours. Good your grace, pardon me:
Neither my place, nor aught I heard of business,
Hath raised me from my bed; nor doth the general care
Take hold on me; for my particular grief
Is of so flood-gate and o'erbearing nature
That it engluts and swallows other sorrows
And it is still itself.

DUKE

Why? What's the matter?

BRABANTIO

My daughter! O, my daughter!

SENATORS

Dead?

BRABANTIO

Ay, to me.

She is abused, stolen from me, and corrupted
By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks;
For nature so preposterously to err,
Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense,
Sans witchcraft could not.

DUKE

Whoe'er he be that in this foul proceeding
Hath thus beguiled your daughter of herself
And you of her, the bloody book of law
You shall yourself read in the bitter letter
After your own sense, yea, though our proper son
Stood in your action.

BRABANTIO

Humbly I thank your grace.

Here is the man: this Moor, whom now it seems
Your special mandate for the state affairs
Hath hither brought.

All

We are very sorry for't.

DUKE

What in your own part can you say to this?

BRABANTIO

Nothing, but this is so.

OTHELLO

Most potent, grave, and reverend signors,
My very noble and approved good masters,
That I have ta'en away this old man's daughter,
It is most true; true I have married her;

[55] **[55] my place:** my position as a senator
[56] **the general care:** the matter that is now worrying everyone
[58] **flood-gate:** overpowering like the water released when a floodgate is opened
[59] **engluts:** consumes, swallows up

[60] **And it is still itself:** And remains what it is (i.e. this terrible sorrow isn't lessened by the other troubles that arise).
[62] **abused:** deceived, wronged
[63] **mountebanks:** quack doctors, charlatans

[64-6] **For nature . . . could not:** Unless witchcraft had been used against her, Desdemona, who isn't lacking in common sense or perceptiveness, couldn't have gone astray in such an unnatural or uncharacteristic way.

[64] **preposterously:** unnaturally

[67] **proceeding:** course of action

[70-2] **You shall . . . your action:** You may yourself determine how the law is to be applied in this case, and I'd say that even if my own son were the one accused.

[75] **Your special . . . hither brought:** Your orders have brought here on state business

[77] **in your own part:** on your own behalf

[75]

[80]

The very head and front of my offending
 Hath this extent, no more. Rude am I in my speech
 And little blessed with the soft phrase of peace;
 For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith
 Till now some nine moons wasted, they have used
 Their dearest action in the tented field;
 And little of this great world can I speak
 More than pertains to feats of broil and battle;
 And therefore little shall I grace my cause
 In speaking for myself. Yet, by your gracious patience,
 I will a round unvarnished tale deliver
 Of my whole course of love: what drugs, what charms,
 What conjuration and what mighty magic –
 For such proceeding I am charged withal –
 I won his daughter.

BRABANTIO

A maiden never bold;
 Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion
 Blushed at herself: and she, in spite of nature,
 Of years, of country, credit, everything,
 To fall in love with what she feared to look on!
 It is a judgment maimed and most imperfect
 That will confess perfection so could err
 Against all rules of nature, and must be driven
 To find out practises of cunning hell
 Why this should be. I therefore vouch again
 That with some mixtures powerful o'er the blood,
 Or with some dram conjured to this effect,
 He wrought upon her.

DUKE

To vouch this, is no proof,
 Without more wider and more overt test
 Than these thin habits and poor likelihoods
 Of modern seeming do prefer against him.

FIRST SENATOR

But, Othello, speak:
 Did you by indirect and forced courses
 Subdue and poison this young maid's affections?
 Or came it by request and such fair question
 As soul to soul affordeth?

OTHELLO

I do beseech you,
 Send for the lady to the Sagittary,
 And let her speak of me before her father.
 If you do find me foul in her report,
 The trust, the office I do hold of you
 Not only take away, but let your sentence
 Even fall upon my life.

[84] **rude:** uneducated, rough, uncultivated

[85] **pith:** strength

[90] **broil:** conflict, turmoil

[93] **round:** plain, blunt

[94–7] **what drugs . . . daughter:** [I'll tell you] what drugs, enchantments . . . I used to win his daughter. Othello is speaking ironically. In reality, the only 'drug' involved in their courtship was that of love itself.

[98–9] **that her motion . . . herself:** that the slightest feeling caused her to blush

[100] **credit:** good reputation

[105] **practises:** tricks, deceitful schemes

[107] **mixtures:** potions, medicines

[109] **vouch:** claim, allege

[110] **more wider:** fuller, more substantial

[112] **modern seeming:** of commonplace appearance

[112] **prefer:** suggest, put forward

[115] **fair question:** pleasing conversation

[117] **affordeth:** grants, gives freely

[120] **If you . . . her report:** If she speaks badly of me

DUKE

Fetch Desdemona hither.

OTHELLO

Ancient, conduct them: you best know the place.

Exit IAGO and attendants

And till she come, 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.

[125]

DUKE

Say it, Othello.

OTHELLO

Her father loved me, oft invited me,
Still questioned me the story of my life
From year to year – the battles, sieges, fortunes
That I have passed.
I ran it through, even from my boyish days
To th'very moment that he bade me tell it:
Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by flood and field,
Of hair-breadth scapes i' th'imminent deadly breach,
Of being taken by the insolent foe,
And sold to slavery; of my redemption thence,
And portance in my travels' history:
Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle,
Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven,
It was my hint to speak – such was the process:
And of the Cannibals that each other eat,
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders. This to hear
Would Desdemona seriously incline:
But still the house-affairs would draw her thence,
Which ever as she could with haste dispatch
She'd come again, and with a greedy ear
Devour up my discourse; which I observing
Took once a pliant hour, and found good means
To draw from her a prayer of earnest heart
That I would all my pilgrimage dilate
Whereof by parcels she had something heard,
But not intently. I did consent,
And often did beguile her of her tears
When I did speak of some distressful stroke
That my youth suffered. My story being done,
She gave me for my pains a world of sighs:
She swore, in faith, 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange,
'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful;
She wished she had not heard it, yet she wished
That heaven had made her such a man. She thanked me,
And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
I should but teach him how to tell my story,

[130]

[131] **Still:** continually

[135]

[137] **accidents:** events

[138] **th'imminent deadly breach:** the gap made by artillery in fortifications

[140]

[141] **portance:** conduct, behaviour

[142] **antres:** caves

[144] **process:** story, narrative

[145]

[146] **Anthropophagi:** man-eating creatures

[150]

[153] **pliant:** suitable

[155]

[155] **dilate:** expand upon; relate at length

[156] **parcels:** small parts

[157] **intently:** with close attention, attentively

[158] **beguile her of:** coax [her tears]

[160]

from her

[159] **distressful stroke:** painful blow or setback

[162] **passing:** exceedingly, extremely

[165]

And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake:
 She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
 And I loved her, that she did pity them.
 This only is the witchcraft I have used.
 Here comes the lady: let her witness it.

Enter DESDEMONA, IAGO, and Attendants

DUKE

I think this tale would win my daughter too.
 Good Brabantio, take up this mangled matter at the best:
 Men do their broken weapons rather use
 Than their bare hands.

BRABANTIO

I pray you hear her speak.
 If she confess that she was half the wooer,
 Destruction on my head, if my bad blame
 Light on the man! Come hither, gentle mistress;
 Do you perceive in all this noble company
 Where most you owe obedience?

DESDEMONA

My noble father,
 I do perceive here a divided duty:
 To you I am bound for life and education;
 My life and education both do learn me
 How to respect you. You are the lord of all my duty,
 I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my husband;
 And so much duty as my mother showed
 To you, preferring you before her father,
 So much I challenge, that I may profess
 Due to the Moor, my lord.

BRABANTIO

God bu' y! I have done.
 Please it your grace, on to the state affairs.
 I had rather to adopt a child than get it.
 Come hither, Moor:
 I here do give thee that with all my heart
 Which, but thou hast already, with all my heart
 I would keep from thee. For your sake, jewel,
 I am glad at soul I have no other child,
 For thy escape would teach me tyranny
 To hang clogs on them. I have done, my lord.

DUKE

Let me speak like yourself and lay a sentence
 Which as a guise or step may help these lovers
 Into your favour.
 When remedies are past, the griefs are ended
 By seeing the worst, which late on hopes depended.
 To mourn a mischief that is past and gone
 Is the next way to draw new mischief on.
 What cannot be preserved when fortune takes,

[168] **hint:** indication, sign

[170]

[174] **take up . . . best:** make the best of this messed-up (or confused) situation

[175]

[175–6] **Men do . . . bare hands:** A broken weapon is better than none.

[178] **bad:** wrong, unfair

[180]

[183] **education:** upbringing

[184] **learn:** teach

[185]

[189] **challenge:** claim

[190]

[192] **get:** beget or father [a child]

[195]

[195] **but:** were it not that

[199] **clogs:** wooden blocks that were fastened to the neck or legs to prevent escape

[200] **speak like yourself:** speak as you would do if you were in your right mind

[200]

[200] **lay a sentence:** give an opinion

[201] **grise:** step

[203–4] **the griefs . . . hopes**

depended: Our distress comes to an end when we realise that our situation can't get any worse.

[205]

[204] **late:** recently

Patience her injury a mockery makes.
The robbed that smiles steals something from the thief;
He robs himself that spends a bootless grief.

BRABANTIO

So let the Turk of Cyprus us beguile,
We lose it not so long as we can smile;
He bears the sentence well that nothing bears
But the free comfort which from thence he hears;
But he bears both the sentence and the sorrow
That to pay grief must of poor patience borrow.
These sentences, to sugar or to gall
Being strong on both sides, are equivocal.
But words are words; I never yet did hear
That the bruised heart was pieced through the ear.
I humbly beseech you proceed to th'affairs of state.

DUKE

The Turk with a most mighty preparation makes for Cyprus. Othello, the fortitude of the place is best known to you: and though we have there a substitute of most allowed sufficiency, yet opinion, a sovereign mistress of effects, throws a more safer voice on you. You must therefore be content to slubber the gloss of your new fortunes with this more stubborn and boisterous expedition.

OTHELLO

The tyrant, custom, most grave Senators,
Hath made the flinty and steel couch of war
My thrice-driven bed of down. I do agnize
A natural and prompt alacrity
I find in hardness; and do undertake
These present wars against the Ottomites.
Most humbly, therefore, bending to your state,
I crave fit disposition for my wife,
Due reference of place and exhibition,
With such accommodation and besort
As levels with her breeding.

DUKE

If you please,
Be't at her father's.

BRABANTIO

I'll not have it so.

OTHELLO

Nor I.

DESDEMONA

Nor I; I would not there reside
To put my father in impatient thoughts
By being in his eye. Most gracious Duke,
To my unfolding lend your prosperous ear,
And let me find a charter in your voice
T'assist my simpleness.

- [208] **Patience . . . mockery makes:** Patience laughs at what cannot be helped (thereby lessening the harm or loss).
- [210] **bootless:** pointless, useless
- [211] **beguile:** cheat, steal
- [214] **He bears . . . nothing bears:** It's easy to say such things when you're not the one who is suffering.
- [215] [217] **to pay grief . . . borrow:** must rely on endurance (rather than words) to cope with grief
- [218–9] **These sentences . . . equivocal:** Such sayings are as sweet as they are bitter, which means that they work either way.
- [221] **That . . . through the ear:** that a broken heart was healed or repaired by words alone
- [223] **preparation:** military force
- [225] **most allowed sufficiency:** well-known ability
- [225] **opinion . . . mistress of effects:** public opinion, which is a powerful factor in deciding what to do
- [226] **slubber the gloss:** smear/tarnish the shiny appearance
- [227] **boisterous:** rough, violent
- [230] [230] **thrice-driven:** having been softened three times over by repeatedly sifting the feathers
- [230] **agnize:** acknowledge
- [231–2] **A natural . . . hardness:** My nature is such that I'm always ready to face hardship.
- [235] **fit disposition:** suitable arrangements
- [236] **Due reference . . . exhibition:** Appropriate allocation of lodgings and financial maintenance
- [237] **accommodation:** provision of what is necessary
- [237] **besort:** company,
- [238] **levels with:** matches, befits
- [240] [243] **unfolding:** explanation, revelation
- [243] **prosperous:** favourable, well-disposed

DUKE

What would you? Speak.

[245]

DESDEMONA

That I did love the Moor to live with him,
 My downright violence and storm of fortunes
 May trumpet to the world. My heart's subdued
 Even to the very quality of my lord.
 I saw Othello's visage in his mind
 And to his honour and his valiant parts
 Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate.
 So that, dear lords, if I be left behind
 A moth of peace, and he go to the war,
 The rites for which I love him are bereft me,
 And I a heavy interim shall support
 By his dear absence. Let me go with him.

[250]

[255]

OTHELLO

Let her have your voices.
 Vouch with me, heaven, I therefore beg it not
 To please the palate of my appetite,
 Nor to comply with heat – the young affects
 In me defunct – and proper satisfaction;
 But to be free and bounteous to her mind.
 And heaven defend your good souls that you think
 I will your serious and great business scant
 For she is with me. No, when light-winged toys
 Of feathered Cupid seel with wanton dullness
 My speculative and officed instruments,
 That my disports corrupt and taint my business,
 Let housewives make a skillet of my helm,
 And all indign and base adversities
 Make head against my estimation!

[260]

[265]

[270]

[275]

DUKE

Be it as you shall privately determine,
 Either for her stay, or going. Th'affair cries haste,
 And speed must answer it. You must hence tonight.

DESDEMONA

Tonight, my lord?

DUKE

This night.

OTHELLO

With all my heart.

DUKE

At nine i' th'morning, here we'll meet again.
 Othello, leave some officer behind,
 And he shall our commission bring to you,
 With such things else of quality and respect
 As doth import you.

[280]

[248–9] **My heart's subdued . . . my lord:** I love him for what he is.

[251] **parts:** qualities

[256] **a heavy interim:** a difficult time of waiting [for Othello to return]

[257] **dear:** costly, deeply felt

[258] **voices:** support

[261] **to comply with heat:** to give in to sexual desire

[261] **young affects:** youthful passions

[262] **defunct:** no longer active

[262] **proper:** personal (may also mean 'real' in this context)

[263] **free:** generous

[265] **scant:** neglect; fail to do properly

[266] **light-winged toys:** Cupid's arrows

[267] **Cupid:** Roman god of love (often portrayed as a blind boy with wings)

[267] **seel:** make blind (The word originally meant the sewing up of a young hawk's eyes while it was being trained.)

[268] **My speculative . . . instruments:** my official organs of sight (i.e. my eyes)

[269] **disports:** (sexual) entertainments

[270] **skillet:** cooking pot

[271] **indign:** unworthy, undignified

[272] **Make head . . . estimation:** gather forces to attack my reputation

[274] **cries:** calls for

[280] **quality and respect:** significance and relevance

OTHELLO

So please your grace, my Ancient.
A man he is of honest and trust:
To his conveyance I assign my wife,
With what else needful your good grace shall think
To be sent after me.

[282] **conveyance:** escorting, protection

DUKE

Let it be so.
Good night to everyone. And, noble signor,
If virtue no delighted beauty lack,
Your son-in-law is far more fair than black.

[285]

FIRST SENATOR

Adieu, brave Moor: use Desdemona well.

BRABANTIO

Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see.
She has deceived her father, and may thee.

[290]

OTHELLO

My life upon her faith! *Exeunt DUKE, Senators, and attendants*
Honest Iago,
My Desdemona must I leave to thee.
I prithee let thy wife attend on her,
And bring them after in the best advantage.
Come, Desdemona: I have but an hour
Of love, of worldly matters and direction
To spend with thee. We must obey the time.
Exeunt OTHELLO and DESDEMONA

[295]

[298] **direction:** instruction

[299] **obey the time:** act in accordance with the urgency of the present situation

RODERIGO

Iago.

[300]

IAGO

What say'st thou, noble heart?

RODERIGO

What will I do, think'st thou?

IAGO

Why, go to bed, and sleep.

[303] **incontinently:** immediately

RODERIGO

I will incontinently drown myself.

IAGO

If thou dost, I shall never love thee after. Why, thou silly gentleman!

[305-6] **then have we . . . physician:**

[When life becomes unbearable,] death becomes the only doctor who can give us the prescription we need to end our suffering. ('Prescription' here may mean 'ancient right' as well as prescription in the medical sense.)

RODERIGO

It is silliness to live, when to live is torment: and then have we a prescription
to die, when death is our physician. [305]

IAGO

O villainous! I have looked upon the world for four times seven years, and since I could distinguish betwixt a benefit and an injury, I never found man that knew how to love himself. Ere I would say I would drown myself for the love of a guinea-hen, I would change my humanity with a baboon.

[310]

RODERIGO

What should I do? I confess it is my shame to be so fond, but it is not in my virtue to amend it.

IAGO

Virtue? A fig! 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus, or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners. So that if we will plant nettles or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs, or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness, or manured with industry, why the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. If the beam of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions. But we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts: whereof I take this, that you call love, to be a sect or scion.

[315]

RODERIGO

It cannot be.

IAGO

It is merely a lust of the blood and a permission of the will. Come, be a man. Drown thyself? Drown cats and blind puppies. I have professed me thy friend, and I confess me knit to thy deserving with cables of perdurable toughness. I could never better stead thee than now. Put money in thy purse; follow thou the wars; defeat thy favour with an usurped beard; I say, put money in thy purse. It cannot be that Desdemona should long continue her love to the Moor – put money in thy purse – nor he his to her. It was a violent commencement, and thou shalt see an answerable sequestration – put but money in thy purse. These Moors are changeable in their wills – fill thy purse with money. The food that to him now is as luscious as locusts shall be to him shortly as bitter as coloquintida. She must change for youth: when she is sated with his body she will find the error of her choice. Therefore put money in thy purse. If thou wilt needs damn thyself, do it a more delicate way than drowning. Make all the money thou canst. If sanctimony and a frail vow betwixt an erring barbarian and a super-subtle Venetian be not too hard for my wits and all the tribe of hell, thou shalt enjoy her – therefore make money. A pox of drowning thyself! It is clean out of the way. Seek thou rather to be hanged in compassing thy joy than to be drowned and go without her.

[325]

[330]

[335]

[340]

RODERIGO

Wilt thou be fast to my hopes, if I depend on the issue?

IAGO

Thou art sure of me. Go make money. I have told thee often, and I re-tell thee again and again, I hate the Moor. My cause is hearted: thine hath no less reason. Let us be conjunctive in our revenge against him. If thou canst cuckold him, thou dost thyself a pleasure, me a sport. There are many

[345]

[311] **fond:** silly, infatuated

[313] **virtue:** power, ability

[313] **Virtue? A fig:** You say you lack the power to change? Rubbish.

[317] **corrigible authority:** power to correct

[321] **unbitted:** unrestrained (as a horse might be if it had not been fitted with a bit, the mouthpiece used to control horses)

[321-2] **whereof . . . or scion:** And I see this condition that you call love to be just another variety of such irrational longings and lusts.

[324] **It is merely . . . of the will:**

'Love' is nothing more than physical lust, a state in which we are controlled by desire.

[326] **knit to thy deserving:** dedicated to your getting what you deserve

[326] **perdurable:** indestructible

[327] **stead:** support, help

[327-8] **Put money in thy purse:** Get as much cash together as you can.

[331] **a violent commencement:** the beginning of the relationship between

Othello and Desdemona was sudden and spontaneous

[331] **an answerable sequestration:** the end of their relationship will be equally sudden

[334] **locusts:** the sweet fruit of the carob tree

[334] **coloquintida:** colocynth (a bitter apple used as a purgative or laxative)

[337] **delicate:** pleasant, dignified

[337] **Make money:** turn your assets into ready cash

[338] **super-subtle:** here meaning both extremely refined and extremely cunning

[345] **hearted:** dear to my heart

[346] **conjunctive:** allied, united

events in the womb of time, which will be delivered. Traverse! Go, provide thy money. We will have more of this tomorrow. Adieu.

RODERIGO

Where shall we meet i' th'morning?

IAGO

At my lodging. [350]

RODERIGO

I'll be with thee betimes.

[351] **betimes:** early

IAGO

Go to; farewell. Do you hear, Roderigo?

[352] **Go to:** go on then; get on with it

RODERIGO

What say you?

IAGO

No more of drowning, do you hear?

RODERIGO

I am changed.

IAGO

Go to; farewell. Put money enough in your purse. [355]

RODERIGO

I'll sell all my land. *Exit*

IAGO

Thus do I ever make my fool my purse:
For I mine own gained knowledge should profane
If I would time expend with such a snipe
But for my sport and profit. I hate the Moor,
And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets
He's done my office. I know not if't be true
But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do as if for surety. He holds me well:
The better shall my purpose work on him.
Cassio's a proper man: let me see now;
To get his place and to plume up my will
In double knavery. How? How? Let's see.
After some time, to abuse Othello's ear
That he is too familiar with his wife;
He hath a person and a smooth dispose
To be suspected, framed to make women false.
The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by th'nose
As asses are.
I have't. It is engendered. Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light. *Exit*

[357] **Thus do I ever . . . purse:** In this way, I always succeed in making money from a fool.

[360] [359] **snipe:** fool, dupe

[361-2] **'twixt my sheets . . . my office:** he's had sex with my wife

[363-4] **But I . . . as if for surety:** For me, mere suspicion will do in place of certainty.

[365] [364] **He holds me well:** He has a good opinion of me.

[366] **proper:** handsome, fine

[370] [367] **to plume up:** to glorify (to put a feather in my cap)

[368] **in double knavery:** doing two treacherous, deceitful things at the same time

[369] **abuse:** deceive, trick

[375] [370] **he:** Cassio

[370] **his wife:** Othello's wife, Desdemona

[371] **person:** appearance, presence

[371] **framed:** formed (for a purpose)

[377] **engendered:** begun, started



Questions and Exercises

1. Othello and Brabantio arrive at the council chamber. Brabantio quickly outlines what he believes has happened to Desdemona:
 - a. Why does Brabantio believe that ‘witchcraft’ must have been used to influence Desdemona’s behaviour?
 - b. True or false: Othello initially denies that he has taken Desdemona away from her father and that he and she are now married.
 - c. How does Othello describe his style of speech? What reason does he give for speaking in this manner?
2. Othello offers the Senate a brief version of the story of his life, a tale he would often tell at Brabantio’s house before he fell in love with Desdemona:
 - a. What details of his story would have struck his Venetian audience as exotic and fantastic?
 - b. How did Desdemona respond to hearing these accounts of Othello’s earlier life?
 - c. Why, according to Othello, did Desdemona fall in love with him?
3. Desdemona is summoned to the council chamber and is asked to give her account of events:
 - a. Why, according to Desdemona, is her true loyalty now to Othello? Does she feel any loyalty towards her father?
 - b. True or false: Brabantio eventually very begrudgingly acknowledges Othello as his son-in-law.
 - c. Desdemona requests permission to accompany Othello on his expedition to Cyprus. What reason does she offer the council for granting her request?
4. Having decided that Othello must depart immediately to lead the defence of Cyprus, the council breaks up. Iago and Roderigo remain behind in the council chamber:
 - a. Why does Roderigo say he wants to end his life?
 - b. Iago says that Othello’s marriage to Desdemona will not last long. What reasons does he give for this? Do you think he is being sincere?
 - c. Left alone at the end of the scene, Iago outlines his plan of ‘double knavery’ in a soliloquy. Discuss as a class what he proposes to do to destroy both Othello and Cassio.

Character Study



5. What do the different responses to Othello’s account of his early life suggest about the manner in which the Venetians view the Moor? Based on your reading of this scene, how do you think Othello feels about his exotic beginnings?
6. Brabantio describes Desdemona as a ‘maiden never bold’, suggesting that she is a quiet, gentle and timid girl. Does her appearance in the council chamber tie in with this description, or does Desdemona come across very differently to the kind of person her father imagines her to be?
7. ‘Iago is more an improviser than a meticulous planner.’ Would you agree with this assessment based on your reading of the play thus far?

Theme and Language



8. In lines 312 to 321, Iago uses a memorable metaphor to illustrate his belief that human beings are capable of using their rational minds to regulate their emotions. Explain, in your own words, the metaphor that he uses.
9. ‘The Venice of the play is a patriarchal society in which women are ultimately considered little more than the possessions of the men in their lives.’ Write a short essay in response to this statement.
10. Are there any indications in this scene of the kinds of racial prejudice we witnessed in the play’s opening scene?

Scene Analysis



Othello stands before the council

A council of war

This scene takes place in a council chamber in the Duke's palace. The Duke and his Senators have gathered in the middle of the night to discuss a pressing military emergency. In the previous scene, we learned that a crisis has arisen in Cyprus, a Mediterranean island under Venetian rule. We now learn that this involves a Turkish fleet which seems to be headed in the direction of the island. We can imagine that the atmosphere in the council chamber is frantic and anxious as those present scramble to come up with a response to the threat.

The situation is an uncertain and chaotic one. The reports received by the Senate are disproportion'd' or inconsistent. (2) According to the Duke, the reports received to date lack the consistency, certainty and 'composition' to be fully believed. (1-2) It is unclear if the Turks actually plan to invade Cyprus or if the island of Rhodes is the real target of their fleet. (7-8)

A messenger arrives and finally brings some clarity to the situation: the main Turkish navy has joined forces with an 'after fleet' or secondary force of thirty ships near Rhodes. (36-38) The enemy, it now seems clear, is done with tricks and diversions. The entire Turkish armada is sailing with 'frank appearance' towards Cyprus, which has been revealed as its true target. (39-40)

Brabantio accuses Othello of witchcraft

Othello and Brabantio arrive at the council chamber. Othello, we remember, is here for two very different reasons. Firstly, he is here in his capacity as General, having been summoned by the Duke to attend this emergency military meeting. Secondly, he is there to answer Brabantio's charge that he has bewitched Desdemona. (Othello, we recall, willingly permitted Brabantio to take him into custody and escort him to the chamber.)

The Duke immediately greets Othello, telling the General that he will be deployed without delay to fight the Turkish enemy. (50-51) The Duke then notices Brabantio and tells him that his 'counsel' was missed at this time of national crisis. (52-53) Brabantio apologises for his absence, but tells the Duke that he is not there in his capacity as Senator. (55-56) All concern for public interest, Brabantio tells the Duke, has been swallowed up or drowned out by a 'particular', or personal, woe. (57-59)

Brabantio outlines what has happened to Desdemona, but he does not get into specifics, nor does he immediately name Othello as the allegedly guilty party. His daughter, he says, has been 'abused', or deceived. (62) She has been 'stolen' or taken against her will. (62) She has been poisoned or 'corrupted/ By spells and medicines'. (62) The Duke is horrified to learn that Brabantio's daughter has been subjected to such witchcraft. He promises the Senator swift and proper justice. Brabantio only now reveals that Othello is the man he is accusing of this serious crime. We can imagine how shocked the Duke and Senators must be at this revelation. For the very man they have summoned to defend their territories is the one being accused of these terrible crimes. (73-74)

Othello addresses the council

The Duke turns his attention to Othello and asks the General what he has to say in response to these allegations. (77) Othello addresses the council, speaking in a calm, respectful and dignified manner. He begins by stating that it is true that he has taken Desdemona away from her father. It is also true that he and Desdemona have married. (81–82) But this, he states, is the extent of his offence. (83)

Othello describes himself as a warrior rather an orator, someone whose warlike life has left his mode of speaking fairly rough and ready. 'Rude am I in my speech,/ And little blessed with the soft phrase of peace'. (84–85) That said, he is willing to give an account in plain language of his relationship with Desdemona, which will include all the 'drugs', 'charms', 'spells' and 'mighty magic' he used to woo the Senator's daughter. (94) This is a vivid example of verbal irony when someone says the opposite of what they really mean. For Othello, as we shall see, used no such enchantments when he wooed Desdemona.

Brabantio interjects at this point. It's as if he can't quite believe that the Senate is willing to entertain Othello's account of events. He claims that Desdemona once 'feared to look on' a person of colour such as Othello. She has erred 'preposterously' and has gone against 'all rules of nature' by falling in love with a man such as the Moor. (104) According to Brabantio, only someone with 'maimed and most imperfect judgment' could believe this relationship occurred naturally. (102) Othello, he reiterates, must have corrupted her with some 'mixtures powerful o'er the blood'. (106)

Othello asks the Duke to send for Desdemona so she can testify as to what really occurred. If her account of what happened casts him in poor light, he is willing to not only lose his position as General, but also his life. (120–123) Othello asks Iago to show the Duke's men the way to the Sagittary, the inn where Desdemona can be found: 'Ancient, conduct them: you best know the place'. (124)

Othello describes how he and Desdemona fell in love

While they wait for Desdemona to arrive, Othello tells his side of the story. Brabantio, he says, once held him in very high esteem. Othello, therefore, was often invited to stay in Brabantio's house and during those visits he would tell the Senator the story of his life. (130–131) Othello, as he stands before the Senate, now launches into a brief version of the very tale he told Brabantio. This allows the assembled Senators to understand who he is and where he came from, but it also, of course, provides such insight for the audience.

Othello describes his country of origin as a bleak place, a rugged, mountainous land full of 'Rough quarries, rocks and hills whose heads touch heaven'. (143) According to Othello, this wilderness is peopled by bizarre and fantastic races. He mentions cannibals, headless men whose features appear on their torsos and the 'Anthropophagi', a mysterious race from Greek mythology. (144–146) From an early age, it seems, Othello was involved in 'battles, sieges, fortunes'. (132) There were times when he barely escaped with his life, avoiding death by only a hair's breadth: 'hair-breadth scapes i' th'imminent deadly breach'. (136) He suffered 'disastrous chances' and many a 'distressful stroke' of bad fortune, enduring 'accidents' caused by war and by natural disaster. (135–137) Eventually, Othello says, he was captured by his enemies and sold into slavery only to eventually win or be granted his freedom. (139–140)

Desdemona, as Brabantio's daughter, was present during Othello's visits. She would listen intently to Othello's stories. (147–148) She would rush to complete her household chores in order to hear more of his tale: 'She'd come again, and with a greedy ear/ Devour up my discourse'. (151–152) She asked Othello to stretch the story out so it lasted as long as possible. (153–154) She would often weep at some misfortune or 'distressful stroke' Othello had suffered during his youth. (159) She found his story both fascinating and moving: 'She swore, in faith, 'twas strange, + 'was passing strange,/ 'Twas pitiful, + 'was wondrous pitiful'. (162–163)

Eventually Desdemona hinted to Othello that she was in love with him. (166–168) She had fallen for him due to his life of bravery, misfortune and resilience: 'She loved me for the dangers I had pass'd'. (169) Othello, meanwhile, had fallen for her because of the sympathy with which she greeted his tales of woe: 'And I loved her, that she did pity them'. (170) This, rather than through witchcraft, was how he won Desdemona's love. (171)

Desdemona describes her love for Othello

Desdemona at that very moment enters the council chamber. Brabantio urges the Duke to listen to her account of events: 'I pray you hear her speak'. (176) He is still confident, it seems, that Desdemona will prove him right and confirm that Othello seduced her by means of witchcraft.

Brabantio addresses his daughter softly and asks her to whom she owes obedience. (181) Desdemona describes how she finds herself experiencing divided loyalties. On the one hand she is loyal to her father, her 'lord of all my duty', to whom she owes her 'life and education'. (184–186) But her greater loyalty is now to her husband, Othello. In this regard she is no different to her own mother who demonstrated such loyalty to Brabantio when they married: 'so much duty as my mother showed/ To you, preferring you before her father'. (187–188)

Brabantio has heard enough: 'I have done'. (190) The testimony of Othello and Desdemona has made it obvious that their love is real, that no witchcraft was used to beguile or seduce his daughter. He very begrudgingly acknowledges Othello as his son-in-law. (193–195)

A plan of campaign

With this domestic dispute out of the way, the council turns its attention once more to the Turkish threat. The Duke tells Othello that his experience makes him the best candidate to lead the defence of Cyprus. After all, Othello knows Cyprus's fortifications better than anyone. (222–223) He apologises that Othello must 'slubber' or soil the joy of his new marriage with war and the affairs of state. (225–226)

Othello uses a fine **metaphor** to describe the ease and comfort with which he accepts military campaigns. To him the 'flinty and steel couch of war' is a feather bed of the finest quality. (228–229) He is, therefore, happy to obey the council's commands and 'undertake/ These present wars against the Ottomites'. (231–232) Othello asks only that during his absence accommodation be provided for Desdemona appropriate to her station in life. (236–237)

The Duke suggests that Desdemona might stay with her father. (241) No one, however, is happy with this suggestion. (238–239) The Duke then asks Desdemona what she would like to do. (244) Desdemona responds by saying that when she fell in love with Othello it always her intention to live with him. (245) Her ardent desire to be with Othello is evident from her recent bold behaviour and the fact that she was willing to throw away her old life to be with him. (246–247) She has given her whole life to him because of his great honours and bravery. (250–251)

Desdemona therefore requests permission to accompany Othello on his expedition rather than remaining behind in Venice, where she would feel useless.

The Duke is happy to permit Desdemona accompany Othello on this expedition. (272) It is decided that Othello will leave for Cyprus that very night. (274) The council of war breaks up with the Senators agreeing to reconvene at nine the following morning to finalise their plans. (276) The Duke asks that Othello 'leave some officer behind', who will follow Othello to Cyprus and bring the council's orders, or 'commission'. (278–279) Othello suggests that Iago undertake this role, telling the Duke that his Ancient is an honest and trustworthy man. (281) Othello says that Iago can bring Desdemona, along with anything else the Duke deems necessary to send. (282–284)

Brabantio, as he leaves, offers Othello a stark warning. Desdemona, he says, has 'deceived' him by marrying Othello behind his back. He warns Othello that she might end up deceiving Othello himself as well. (289–290) Othello, however, is unperturbed by these words, telling Brabantio that he would stake his life upon her trustworthiness. (291) Othello and Desdemona then depart to spend an 'hour/ Of love' together before Othello must leave for Cyprus. (296–298)

Iago continues to manipulate Roderigo

Only Iago and Roderigo remain in the council chamber. Roderigo, we remember from Act 1 Scene 1, is a nobleman who has been pursuing Desdemona. Iago, we recall, has used Roderigo's desire to manipulate him and to get money from him. Roderigo is filled with sorrow because, now that Desdemona is married to Othello and has the blessing of Brabantio, he can never have her. His despair is such that he threatens to end his life. (305) Roderigo admits that it's shameful that he feels so heartbroken, but he is helpless, he states, to control how he feels. (310–311)

Iago urges Roderigo to 'be a man' and put aside all thoughts of suicide. (323–324) He declares himself Roderigo's loyal friend, suggesting that the two have an unbreakable bond. (324–325) He claims that he can be more useful to Roderigo than he has ever been: 'I could never better stead thee than now'. (326) Iago is certain that Roderigo can win Desdemona, and lays out a plan as to how this might be achieved:

- Roderigo, he says, should travel with the fleet to Cyprus: 'follow thou the wars'. (327)
- Iago is convinced he can use his clever, scheming mind, or 'wits', to drive Othello and Desdemona apart, allowing Roderigo to make his move. (338)
- Soon, he says, Desdemona will tire of her relationship with Othello. (328–329) Desdemona, he says, fell in love with Othello very suddenly and will fall out of love with him just as suddenly. (329–330) When she's bored of the relationship, she will inevitably leave him for a younger man. (333–334)
- Othello, he maintains, will also soon tire of the marriage. For people of Othello's race tend to be very fickle. (331) What seems sweet to Othello now will soon seem very bitter. (332–333)

Throughout this speech Iago repeatedly urges Roderigo to make money and to 'put money in [his] purse'. He wants Roderigo to turn his assets into ready cash that he will bring with him on the journey to Cyprus. Iago, of course, intends to manipulate Roderigo so that he can use these funds himself. Roderigo, convinced that Iago is on his side, agrees to meet the following morning and goes off to sell all his land. (349–355)

Iago's plan of 'double knavery'

Iago, left alone, launches into the play's first soliloquy, a speech in which a character addresses the audience directly, outlining their inner thoughts and feelings. Iago says he's 'profaning' or going against his own wisdom by spending time with a person such as Roderigo, whom he considers a 'snipe', a foolish and useless creature. (357–359) However, Roderigo is someone that he can easily dupe into giving him money: 'Thus do I ever make my fool my purse'. (356)

Iago also reveals more about why he hates Othello. There is a rumour circulating that Othello slept with Iago's wife behind his back. (385–6) Iago doesn't know if this rumour is true, but he's determined to act as if it were certain fact and make Othello's life a misery. (361–362) Iago also knows that Othello trusts him and holds him in high esteem. (363) This, he says, will make it all the easier to deceive him. (364)

Iago is also determined to destroy Cassio. He wants to 'get his place', to take Cassio's position as lieutenant, a position he feels should have been his to begin with. (366) What Iago desires, then, is a plan of 'double knavery' or double villainy: a plan that will take down both Othello and Cassio at the same time. (367) Iago decides that the best way to achieve this would be to convince Othello that Cassio is sleeping with Desdemona. (369–370) Iago is convinced that this plan will work. Cassio, he says, is 'proper' or handsome man, someone with a 'smooth' or charming manner. (366, 371) It would be easy to believe that Desdemona could fall for such a person. (372) Furthermore, Iago knows that Othello has a very trusting nature. (373–374) It will be easy, therefore, to lead him into such a trap. The scene concludes with Iago declaring that his terrible plan has been conceived: 'I have't. It is engendered'. (377) He calls on the forces of evil to assist him with his wicked schemes. (377–378)

ACT 1 SCENE 3: CHARACTER FILE



Iago

A Master Plotter

In this scene Iago begins to craft the master plan that will serve as the focus of the play. This is a plot that will effectively kill two birds with one stone. He will destroy both Othello and Cassio by convincing the former that Desdemona is sleeping with the latter. (369–370) However, it is important to note that Iago's plan is not detailed or complete. He is not yet sure how his ruse will take down its two targets. His plan has been conceived, fertilised, or 'engender'd'. (377) But it has not yet fully developed or been born. (377–378)

Persuasive and Manipulative

In this scene we get the sense that given enough time Iago could convince anyone of anything. His powers of persuasion are truly remarkable. It is obvious to any onlooker that Roderigo has no chance of ever being Desdemona's lover. Yet Iago convinces him that he does, and that Desdemona's new marriage will soon cool, allowing Roderigo the opportunity to make his move and 'enjoy' Desdemona himself. (329) Roderigo, having heard of Desdemona's marriage, is ready to kill himself. But Iago convinces him not only to go on living but also to sell all his land and sail to Cyprus. This is an exceptional feat of persuasion, one in which Iago repeats the phrase 'put money in thy purse', or variants thereof, again and again, as if he is hypnotising Roderigo or verbally beating him into submission.

Othello

Othello's Exotic Origins

This scene gives us a sense of Othello's exotic beginnings. This is a man whose origins lie far from the prosperous, European city of Venice. He comes from a land beyond the Mediterranean, a place his Venetian colleagues know only through rumour and legend.

To the Venetians, then, Othello is a fascinating figure and they find his account of his exotic origins irresistible. Brabantio, it seems, couldn't get enough of Othello's tales. Desdemona found his stories utterly beguiling: 'She swore, in faith, 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange, / 'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful'. (162–163) Even the Duke states that such stories would be enough to fascinate any woman. As he puts it: 'I think this tale would win my daughter too'. (173) But Othello's exotic origins mean that he will always be an outsider in Venice. Indeed sometimes, as we've seen, he will be treated with blatant and despicable racism.

Othello as Soldier

Othello is someone who has experienced war and bloodshed his whole life. Since he was seven years old he has known little but the 'tented field' of battle. (86–88) We get the sense that Othello must be a man of great bravery and resourcefulness to have endured so much fighting and killing. Othello is also an accomplished strategist and General. No sooner has Othello reached the council chamber than the Duke asks him to lead the defence of Cyprus against the Turks.

Calmness and Composure

In this scene Othello displays great calmness, dignity and self-possession. He has been falsely accused of a terrible crime, of having his way with Desdemona by means of witchcraft and black magic. However, he does not respond angrily. He does not physically or verbally attack Brabantio, his racist accuser. Instead he calmly and persuasively tells his side of the story, asks that Desdemona be brought to testify, and promises to abide by whatever decision the council reaches on the matter – even if it be putting him to death. (118–123) We shall see, however, that as the play goes on Othello's eloquence and self-possession are threatened by the jealousy that begins to consume him.

Hints of Being Rash and Impulsive

This scene also hints at Othello's tendency to be rash and impulsive, to act in private rather than public, to follow his own initiative rather than established procedure. We see this in how he married Desdemona in secret, without seeking her father's permission and without going through the proper process of courtship. This is an aspect of his personality that will emerge again later in the play, with disastrous results.