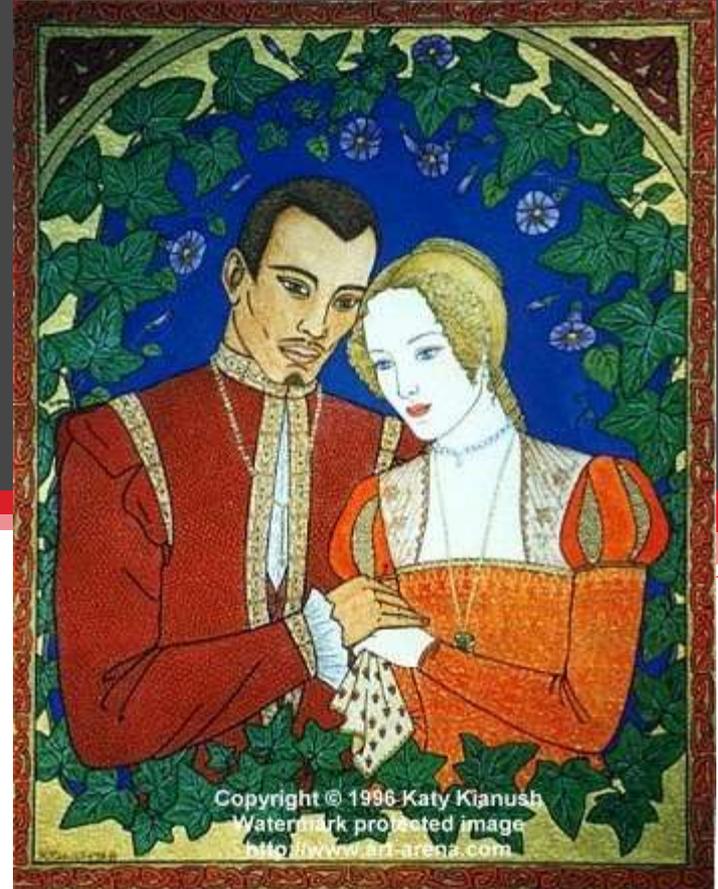


Othello by William Shakespeare

Summarization of the Plot, the
Characters, and Major
Themes/Symbols/Motifs





Act I Summary



ACT I

Scene I

- ❖ Roderigo and Iago have an argument
- ❖ Reason for Iago's hatred is Othello's recent promotion of Michael Cassio to the post of lieutenant
- ❖ Iago is serving Othello only for his own interests
- ❖ They seek revenge by rousing Desdemona's family against the general
- ❖ Roderigo and Iago inform Brabantio of Desdemona's secret marriage to Othello
- ❖ Enraged, Brabantio sets out in search of his daughter

ACT I

Scene II

- ❖ Scene takes place near Othello's house
- ❖ Iago warns Othello that Brabantio is searching for him
- ❖ Cassio brings a summons from the duke demanding Othello's presence on a matter of urgent state business
- ❖ Brabantio accuses Othello of abducting Desdemona and wants him to be arrested
- ❖ There is almost a fight between Othello's and Brabantio's men but Othello brings the confrontation to a halt

ACT I

Scene III

- ❖ The duke is told about the threatened Turkish invasion of Cyprus
- ❖ He listens to Brabantios accusation and Othello's defence and sends for Desdemona to find out who is right
- ❖ Othello is ordered to go to Cyprus and Desdemona may join him
- ❖ Roderigo is desperate because he realizes that he'll never win Desdemona's love, but Iago has a plan to help him.

Act II Scene 1

- ▮ A terrible storm has struck Cyprus, just as the Turks were about to approach.
- ▮ This might mean that the Turkish attack will not happen; but it also bodes badly for Othello's ship.
- ▮ A messenger enters, and confirms that the Turkish fleet was broken apart by the storm, and that Cassio has arrived, though Othello is still at sea.
- ▮ They spot a ship coming forth; but Iago, Desdemona, and Emilia are on it, not Othello.
- ▮ Cassio greets them all, especially praising Desdemona; somehow, Iago and Desdemona enter into an argument about what women are
- ▮ Iago shows how little praise he believes women deserve.
- ▮ Othello arrives at last, and is very glad to see his wife arrived

Act II Scene 2



- ▮ Othello's herald enters, to proclaim that the Turks are not going to attack
- ▮ All should be joyful, and Othello is celebrating the happiness of his recent marriage.

Act II Scene 3

- Iago tries to convince Cassio that a reputation means little
- Iago suggests talking to Desdemona, maybe he can get her to vouch for him with Othello.
- This will help Iago get the impression across that Desdemona and Cassio are together
- Iago then gives a soliloquy about knowing that Desdemona will speak for Cassio, and that he will be able to turn that against them both.

ACT III

SCENE I

- ❖ Cassio brings musicians to serenade Desdemona
- ❖ He asks Emilia to help him get access to Desdemona

ACT III

SCENE II

- ❖ Iago, Othello, and a gentleman walk together at the citadel
- ❖ Othello gives Iago some letters to deliver to Venice
- ❖ He then leaves his quarters to inspect the island's fortifications

ACT III

SCENE III

- ❖ Desdemona promises Cassio that she will intercede for him
- ❖ Desdemona asks Othello to and reinstate Cassio as lieutenant
- ❖ Iago sows suspicions in Othello's mind until the Moor is convinced that Desdemona is unfaithful to him
- ❖ Emilia gives Othello's handkerchief to her husband, who places it in Cassio's room
- ❖ Othello finds it and flies into a rage, but asks for clearer evidence
- ❖ By the end of the scene he swears that he will be revenged and orders Iago to kill Cassio
- ❖ Iago is promoted to lieutenant by Othello

ACT III

Scene IV

- ❖ Othello asks Desdemona for his handkerchief, but she wants to talk about Cassio
- ❖ Othello leaves in a rage
- ❖ Cassio and Iago enter, and Cassio immediately continues with his suit to Desdemona for help
- ❖ Cassio shows Bianca the handkerchief he found in his room and asks her to copy its embroidery

Act IV Scene 1

- Othello is trying, even after swearing that Desdemona was unfaithful, not to condemn her too harshly.
- He is talking with Iago about the handkerchief still, and its significance in being found
- Iago whips Othello into an even greater fury through mere insinuation, and Othello takes the bait.
- Othello falls into a trance of rage, and Iago decides to hammer home his false ideas about his wife.
- Iago calls Cassio in, while Othello hides
- Iago speaks to Cassio of Bianca, but Othello believes that is talking of Desdemona
- This is the last "proof" he needs before declaring his wife guilty.
- Bianca comes in, and gives the handkerchief back to Cassio, since she swears she will have nothing to do with it.

Act IV Scene 2

- Iago is there to dispel this opinion, so that Emilia does not inquire further into her theory.
- Iago comes across Roderigo; he is not pleased with how Iago has handled things, and knows that although Iago is promising him Desdemona's favor, he has done nothing to indicate that he has worked to achieve this.
- Iago quiets him by making him believe that if he kills Cassio, then he will win Desdemona

ACT V

Scene I

- ❖ Roderigo lies in wait for Cassio
- ❖ In the fight both, Roderigo and Cassio, are wounded
- ❖ Othello hears them and thinks that Iago has murdered Cassio as promised
- ❖ Now he wants to do the same to Desdemona
- ❖ Lodovico and Gratiano hasten to see what is the matter, Iago appears as well and stabs Roderigo
- ❖ "This is the fruits of whoring"
- ❖ Iago takes control of the situation, sending Emilia back to Othello and Desdemona

ACT V

Scene II

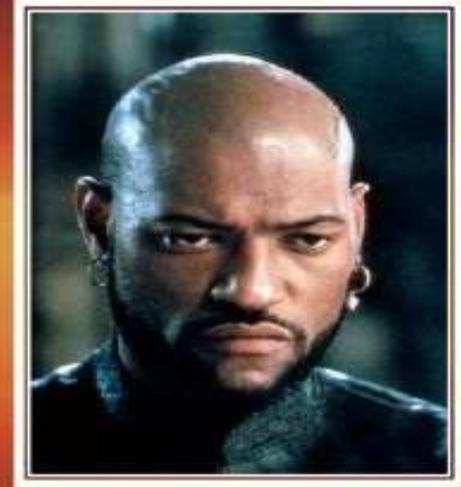
- ❖ Othello comes to Desdemona's bed-chamber, determined to kill her
- ❖ Desdemona pleads for innocence but Othello doesn't believe her
- ❖ He covers her head with a pillow and suffocates her
- ❖ Emilia comes in and brings the news of the death Roderigo and the fighting
- ❖ When she sees the dead Desdemona she raises the alarm
- ❖ Iago, Gratiano and Montano enter the room
- ❖ Emilia denounces Iago, who draws his sword on her and escapes
- ❖ Othello stabs himself, Iago is taken away to be tortured

THE HANDKERCHIEF



OTHELLO

- ❖ Play's protagonist and hero
- ❖ Moorish prince living in Venice
- ❖ General in the Venetian Army
- ❖ Very powerful and respected figure
- ❖ However, he is very insecure and jealous
- ❖ Kills Desdemona in the end because of jealousy
- ❖ Commits suicide



EXPOSITION



The play takes place in Venice. The Moorish General, Othello, secretly marries a nobleman's daughter, Desdemona.

CONFLICT



Othello and Desdemona are attempting to build a life together. However, their relationship is sabotaged by the envious friend, Iago, who convinces Othello that Desdemona is unfaithful to him.

RISING ACTION



Othello is sent to defend the island of Cyprus from Turkish invaders. Iago tells the audience his plan to split up Desdemona and Othello. Part of the plan includes getting Cassio, a lieutenant, fired from his position.

CLIMAX



Iago plants a handkerchief of Desdemona's in Cassio's room to make it appear that the two have been together. Othello finally believes Iago, and vows that he will not stop until he has his revenge.

FALLING ACTION



Othello smothers Desdemona with a pillow, and Iago attempts to kill Cassio. However, Emilia, Iago's wife, exposes his plan.

DENOUEMENT



Othello kills himself and Iago is taken away to be tortured. The audience is left with disbelief and despair, but some satisfaction that Iago is found out.

- **Shakespeare drew the plot from *Othello* from Giraldi Cinthio's "Tale of the Moor," a sixteenth-century Italian tale. Just a glimpse at the original elevates our appreciation for Shakespeare's genius and vision, as he transforms a mediocre tale into one of the world's great works of art.**



- **Consider the changes:**

— In Cinthio only *Disdemona* is given a name, which Shakespeare changes to *Desdemona*. Shakespeare's Iago is identified as the Ensign and his Cassio as the Captain. More importantly, Shakespeare deepens his characters with psychological complexity.

Othello plot

- **MAJOR CONFLICT** · Othello and Desdemona marry and attempt to build a life together, despite their differences in age, race, and experience. Their marriage is sabotaged by the envious Iago, who convinces Othello that Desdemona is unfaithful.
- **RISING ACTION** · Iago tells the audience of his scheme, arranges for Cassio to lose his position as lieutenant, and gradually insinuates to Othello that Desdemona is unfaithful.
- **CLIMAX** · The climax occurs at the end of Act III, scene iii, when Othello kneels with Iago and vows not to change course until he has achieved bloody revenge.
- **FALLING ACTION** · Iago plants the handkerchief in Cassio's room and later arranges a conversation with Cassio, which Othello watches and sees as "proof" that Cassio and Desdemona have slept together. Iago unsuccessfully attempts to kill Cassio, and Othello smothers Desdemona with a pillow. Emilia exposes Iago's deceptions, Othello kills himself, and Iago is taken away to be tortured.