

THE ANNOTATED SHAKESPEARE

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Othello

FULLY ANNOTATED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY BURTON RAFFEL

WITH AN ESSAY BY HAROLD BLOOM

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For Stephen Pride and, of course, Shifra

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ABOUT THIS BOOK



Written four centuries ago, in a fairly early form of Modern English, *Othello* is a gorgeously passionate, witty, and complex text. Many of the play's social and historical underpinnings necessarily need, for the modern reader, the kinds of explanation offered in the Introduction. But what needs even more, and far more detailed, explanation are the play's very words. Here is Iago, as he so often is, complaining that he did not get the job he deserved:

Three great ones of the city,
In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,
Off-capped to him, and by the faith of man,
I know my price, I am worth no worse a place.
But he, as loving his own pride and purposes,
Evades them with a bumbast circumstance,
Horribly stuffed with epithets of war,
Nonsuits my mediators.

(I.I.7–14)

In twenty-first-century America, “suit” tends to mean a legal action. Here, however, it means a request.

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“Off-capped” is founded on the fact that everyone wore a hat and that to “doff,” or remove, one’s hat was a sign of respect.

“The faith of man” is not some vaguely humanistic doctrine but a simple reference to what Renaissance Europe regarded as *the* faith, Christianity.

In twenty-first-century America, again, “price” means the cost of something. Here, however, it refers to Iago’s self-evaluation, his “value.”

“Place” is for us almost entirely spatial, locational. We go to a “place,” we live in a “place.” But here it means post or position.

The construction “as loving” means “being someone who loves.” Prepositions were very much more elastic, in Shakespeare’s day.

In the phrase “pride and purposes,” the first word remains clear to us. But we tend to hesitate at “purposes,” which here means intentions.

And as “evades them” indicates, pronouns and their antecedents are also employed more loosely. “Them” refers to the “great ones of the city.” Verb tenses, too, have changed: “evades” is clearly a present tense, today. But here, “evades” is in the historical present tense, which effectively means the past rather than the present.

We might be able to guess at the meaning of “bumbast,” but certainty is preferable to supposition. It is indeed the ancestor of our word “bombast.” But “circumstance” would be impervious to guessing, for it means circumlocution, or beating around the bush.

“Horribly stuffed” has nothing to do with warfare: it means dreadfully padded.

“Epithet” has considerably shifted, in our time, having come to

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mean words of insult or scorn. Here, however, “epithets” refer only to vocabulary or verbal terms.

“Nonsuits” means to rebuff or turn aside.

And “mediators” refers, not to arbitration cases, but to go-betweens.

In this very fully annotated edition, I therefore present this passage, not in the bare form quoted above, but thoroughly supported by bottom-of-the-page notes:

Three great ones¹ of the city,²
In personal suit³ to make me his lieutenant,
Off-capped⁴ to him, and by the faith⁵ of man,
I know my price,⁶ I am worth no worse a place.⁷
But he, as loving⁸ his own pride and purposes,⁹
Evades¹⁰ them with a bumbast circumstance,¹¹
Horribly stuffed¹² with epithets¹³ of war,
Nonsuits my mediators.¹⁴

1 persons

2 three GREAT ones OF the City

3 petition, request

4 respectfully doffing/taking off their hats

5 the faith = the true religion (Christianity)

6 value

7 post, position

8 as loving = being one who loves

9 intentions

10 evades them = avoided answering “the great ones” (historical present tense = past tense)

11 bumbast circumstance = puffed out/inflated/empty circumlocution/
beating about the bush

12 horribly stuffed = exceedingly padded

13 the vocabulary, terms

14 nonsuits my mediators = turns back/rebuffs my go-betweens

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The modern reader or listener of course will better understand this brief exchange in context, as the drama unfolds. But without full explanation of words that have over the years shifted in meaning, and usages that have been altered, neither the modern reader nor the modern listener is likely to be equipped for full comprehension.

I believe annotations of this sort create the necessary bridges, from Shakespeare's four-centuries-old English across to ours. Some readers, to be sure, will be able to comprehend unusual, historically different meanings without glosses. Those not familiar with the modern meaning of particular words will easily find clear, simple definitions in any modern dictionary. But most readers are not likely to understand Shakespeare's intended meaning, absent such glosses as I here offer.

My annotation practices have followed the same principles used in *The Annotated Milton*, published in 1999, and in my annotated edition of *Hamlet*, published (as the initial volume in this series) in 2003. Classroom experience has validated these editions. Classes of mixed upper-level undergraduates and graduate students have more quickly and thoroughly transcended language barriers than ever before. This allows the teacher, or a general reader without a teacher, to move more promptly and confidently to the non-linguistic matters that have made Shakespeare and Milton great and important poets.

It is the inevitable forces of linguistic change, operant in all living tongues, which have inevitably created such wide degrees of obstacles to ready comprehension—not only sharply different meanings, but subtle, partial shifts in meaning that allow us to think we understand when, alas, we do not. Speakers of related languages like Dutch and German also experience this shifting of

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the linguistic ground. Like early Modern English (ca. 1600) and the Modern English now current, those languages are too close for those who know only one language, and not the other, to be readily able always to recognize what they correctly understand and what they do not. When, for example, a speaker of Dutch says “Men kofer is kapot,” a speaker of German will know that something belonging to the Dutchman is broken (“kapot” = “kaputt” in German, and “men” = “mein”). But without more linguistic awareness than the average person is apt to have, the German speaker will not identify “kofer” (“trunk” in Dutch) with “Körper”—a modern German word meaning “physique, build, body.” The closest word to “kofer” in modern German, indeed, is “Scrankkoffer,” which is too large a leap for ready comprehension. Speakers of different Romance languages (French, Spanish, Italian), and all other related but not identical tongues, all experience these difficulties, as well as the difficulty of understanding a text written in their own language five, or six, or seven hundred years earlier. Shakespeare’s English is not yet so old that it requires, like many historical texts in French and German, or like Old English texts—for example, *Beowulf*—a modern translation. Much poetry evaporates in translation: language is immensely particular. The sheer *sound* of Dante in thirteenth-century Italian is profoundly worth preserving. So too is the sound of Shakespeare.

I have annotated prosody (metrics) only when it seemed truly necessary or particularly helpful. Readers should have no problem with the silent “e”: whenever an “e” in Shakespeare is *not* silent, it is marked “è” (except, to be sure, in words which modern usage always syllabifies, like “tented,” “excepted,” “headed”). The notation used for prosody, which is also used in the explanation of Elizabethan pronunciation, follows the extremely simple form of

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my *From Stress to Stress: An autobiography of English prosody* (see “Further Reading,” near the end of this book). Syllables with metrical stress are capitalized; all other syllables are in lowercase letters. I have managed to employ normalized Elizabethan spellings, in most indications of pronunciation, but I have sometimes been obliged to deviate, in the higher interest of being understood.

I have annotated, as well, a limited number of such other matters, sometimes of interpretation, sometimes of general or historical relevance, as have seemed to me seriously worthy of inclusion. These annotations have been most carefully restricted: this is not intended to be a book of literary commentary. It is for that reason that the glossing of metaphors has been severely restricted. There is almost literally no end to discussion and/or analysis of metaphor, especially in Shakespeare. To yield to temptation might well be to double or triple the size of this book—and would also change it from a historically oriented language guide to a work of an unsteadily mixed nature. In the process, I believe, neither language nor literature would be well or clearly served.

Where it seemed useful, and not obstructive of important textual matters, I have modernized spelling, including capitalization. I have frequently repunctuated. Since the original printed texts of *Othello* (there not being, as there never are for Shakespeare, any surviving manuscripts) are frequently careless as well as self-contradictory, I have been relatively free with the wording of stage directions—and in some cases have added brief directions, to indicate who is speaking to whom. I have made no emendations; I have necessarily been obliged to make choices. Textual decisions have been annotated when the differences between or

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among the original printed texts seem either marked or of unusual interest.

In the interests of compactness and brevity, I have employed in my annotations (as consistently as I am able) a number of stylistic and typographical devices:

- The annotation of a single word does not repeat that word
- The annotation of more than one word repeats the words being annotated, which are followed by an equals sign and then by the annotation; the footnote number in the text is placed after the last of the words being annotated
- In annotations of a single word, alternative meanings are usually separated by commas; if there are distinctly different ranges of meaning, the annotations are separated by arabic numerals inside parentheses—(1), (2), and so on; in more complexly worded annotations, alternative meanings expressed by a single word are linked by a forward slash, or *solidus*: /
- Explanations of textual meaning are not in parentheses; comments about textual meaning are
- Except for proper nouns, the word at the beginning of all annotations is in lower case
- Uncertainties are followed by a question mark, set in parentheses: (?)
- When particularly relevant, “translations” into twenty-first-century English have been added, in parentheses
- Annotations of repeated words are *not* repeated. Explanations of the *first* instance of such common words are followed by the

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sign ★. Readers may easily track down the first annotation, using the brief Finding List at the back of the book. Words with entirely separate meanings are annotated *only* for meanings no longer current in Modern English.

The most important typographical device here employed is the sign ★ placed after the first (and only) annotation of words and phrases occurring more than once. There is an alphabetically arranged listing of such words and phrases in the Finding List at the back of the book. The Finding List contains no annotations but simply gives the words or phrases themselves and the numbers of the relevant act, the scene within that act, and the footnote number within that scene for the word's first occurrence.

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Over the past four hundred years, neither the text of *Othello*, nor the “true” understanding of that text, has been fully settled. We lack manuscript copies of any of Shakespeare’s plays, and different printed sources frequently provide quite different readings. Given the nature of this annotated edition, however, and the fact that *Othello*’s textual issues are more or less resolvable (especially in the light of Scott McMillin’s extremely helpful edition of the play’s *First Quarto*), I want to deal first with interpretation and more briefly, and only thereafter, with textual issues.

The primary focus of interpretive disagreement has become the character Othello. Who and what he is meant to be—his origins, his nature—have recently been intensely disputed. Traditionally, Othello was taken to be a black African. But the fact that he is described by Shakespeare as “the Moor” has led to the contention that, knowing pretty clearly what a “Moor” was, but not being anything like so well informed as to black Africans, Shakespeare must have intended Othello to be a dark-skinned non-Negroid Muslim, a good deal more Arab than Ethiopian.

However, “as late as the 17th century,” records *The Oxford En-*

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glish Dictionary, under “*Moor* 1,” “the Moors were commonly supposed to be mostly black or swarthy (though the existence of ‘white Moors’ was recognized), and hence the word was often used for ‘Negro.’” Still, the play’s repeated references to Othello as “black,” it is argued, are no more definitive than the early-seventeenth-century meaning of the word “black” itself. And the definition under “*black* 1c” explains that, though “strictly applied to negroes and negritos, and other dark-skinned races . . . [the word is applied] often, loosely, to non-European races, little darker than many Europeans.” The play’s reference to Othello as “thick-lipped” has been similarly debated.

What had earlier been understood as racial and cultural differences in Othello’s psychology and behavior are therefore, it is contended, simply personal to Othello, like the epilepsy from which Iago (but no one else in the play) says he suffers. Accordingly, whether Othello is indeed black in the current meaning of the word is a matter of basic importance in understanding both the character and the play that bears his name.

Shakespeare’s Knowledge of Black Africans

“I will not say,” wrote A. C. Bradley a hundred years ago, “that Shakespeare imagined him [Othello] as a Negro and not as a Moor, for that might imply that he distinguished Negroes and Moors precisely as we do.”¹ In fact, there were highly visible Moors in Shakespeare’s London; there can be small doubt that he knew quite well what Moors looked like. He may well not have known a great deal about them, at least at firsthand; he seems unlikely to have met or had any dealings with Moorish ambassadors and other such lofty folk. Yet on the evidence, he appears to have known black Africans a good deal better. “By 1596 [ten years be-

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fore the probable date of *Othello's* composition] there were so many black people in London that Queen Elizabeth I issued an edict demanding that they leave. . . . When Shakespeare wrote *Othello* he was not . . . particularly 'confused' about racial identities. . . . [He] would have seen black people on the streets of London for most of his adult life, and so would his audience. Racial jokes and word play were well within their experience and understanding."²

London's black population of perhaps five or ten thousand was to some extent created by upper-class fashions. Starting with Queen Elizabeth herself, "black people were seen as fashionable accessories . . . and the use of black servants and entertainers by royalty and nobility filtered down to much less affluent households and establishments. . . . Whites 'blacked up' for roles as Africans in plays and masques."³

But apart from the dictates of fashion and the upper classes, and distinctly "within Shakespeare's lifetime," London had become deeply involved in "the exchange of goods and slaves between Britain, Africa and the Americas. [This] was a trade which permanently transformed the economies of all three areas." Black sailors appeared on streets and in pubs; "planters returned home with their black servants."⁴ We are now aware—there having been a surge, in the past few decades, of British historical investigation into these matters, clearly caused by the massive post-World War Two in-migration of black people from British colonies—that the chronological start of this earlier, more limited, but still significantly sized in-migration began as early as 1555 (before Shakespeare's birth) and no later than 1588.⁵ Shakespeare's demonstrable familiarity with the sweep of daily life in England's teeming capital city, and his fairly detailed knowledge

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of many trades and professions, across a wide-ranging social scale, enhances the likelihood that he may well have socialized with, and even more probably seen close up and conversed or spent time with, a good number of black Africans.

This is of course not a certainty, but only a preponderance of evidence, supporting the likelihood of Shakespeare's personal knowledge of black Africans and Othello's racial origins. To counterbalance these probabilities, there is Iago's reference to Othello as a "Barbary [Arabic] horse" (1.1.110) and also Iago's bald lie that, after leaving Cyprus, Othello and his wife will proceed, not to Venice, but to Mauritania, the Moorish "homeland" (4.2.221). The historical evidence as we now have it seems a good deal more reliable than the perpetually untruthful Iago.

Othello: Social and Psychological Factors

Black Africans lived in a wide variety of landscapes, spoke a great many different languages, yet tended to share certain basic social characteristics. "It is important to stress the traditional nature of Africa," writes the Ghanaian W. E. Abraham.⁶ That is, rather than transcontinental political unity, black African societies were structured around relatively fixed customs and practices, transmitted as intact as possible from generation to generation. This was not an existence formed or governed either by electoral choices or by externalized hierarchies. "We know that such societies," explains Eli Sagan, "though lacking a state, did not live in social chaos. . . . Custom and the power of custom, reinforced by the inexorable pressure of the kin, maintained order." Though inevitably affected by outside forces, and local group rivalries, this remained an essentially stable way of life. Not surprisingly, the attitude of traditional societies toward individualism in thought or action was

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“cool, if not downright hostile.”⁷ All the sacred, unsolvable matters of life were dealt with not by personal decisions but by magic.

These circumstances, in turn, fostered what Bronislaw Malinowski has called a “clear-cut division” between conditions which are known and natural and, on the other hand, “the domain of the unaccountable and adverse influences, as well as the great unearned increment of fortunate coincidences. The first conditions are coped with by knowledge and work, the second by magic.”⁸ As Sagan puts it, “Witchcraft, not a moralistic religion, made the world go round.”⁹ Accordingly, it is not that the fundamental cause-and-effect stance of modern Western societies is absent from traditional societies, but rather that it is only selectively relevant. “Magic, which is so important in the religious and moral life [of traditional cultures], is probably the most effective means of social control.”¹⁰

Nor are these matters that have changed a great deal, over the past five hundred years. “The persistence of [traditional] culture is indicated by the similarity of twentieth-century traditions . . . and sixteenth-century reports . . . [In southeast Africa, for example,] they eat the same kind of seed cakes, wear the same dress at military dances, follow the same pattern of symbolic dancing, live by the same type of social organization, and practice the same economy that characterized their different groups when [in the early sixteenth century] the Portuguese first encountered them.”¹¹ Traditional cultures being, by definition, group-oriented, someone born into such a social setting necessarily adheres to and depends upon the group for both social and inner psychological stability. Deprived of the group, the individual inevitably lacks many basic resources, and most especially those for dealing with adverse circumstances.

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These are enormously important matters for understanding Othello. He is likely to have been born and raised in a traditional society; he also claims to have been of royal descent, and we know nothing to the contrary. Kidnapped, enslaved, he literally fought his way to ascendancy, ending as a valued, powerful general in the hired service of the Venetian state. Along the way, he became a believing and practicing Christian, and acquired much of the manners and mores of the Christian West. (It is worth nothing that, had he been a Muslim, conversion to Christianity might have been more problematical.) That is, in the process of struggling with the urgent strictures of his difficult, uprooted existence, but drawing on the deep strengths of his apparently innate physical and military abilities, Othello created both an impressive career and, within its bounds, a stable, well-functioning personality. The Othello we see in act 1 is strong, forceful, contained—an admirable, profoundly functional commanding officer.

Yet as the play plainly shows, the twin forces of traditional, custom-ruled society, and the magic which controls it, cannot help but be persistent, even if for the moment dormant. Othello's immensely successful military career thus remains a structure of narrow focus; the bright polish of success remains a relatively thin veneer. As long as he continues to follow his military path, he is secure and will likely continue to be successful. The Othello we see in act 1, however, is a man already in the early stages of being drawn past the boundaries of a purely military sphere. The soldier's world, as he so eloquently explains, is all-male, rough and perpetually isolated from the non-traditional world of sophisticated, westernized Venice—which is of course, for Shakespeare and his audience, the world of early Jacobean England and, most particularly, of swirling, cosmopolitan London.

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Before the start of act 1, Othello has eloped with a young, wealthy, and white heiress, a native Venetian. He is newly married and about to take on domestic and a host of other social involvements that, in this non-traditional western world, he has never before had to face. The excitement of new and understandably rich satisfactions for a time sustains him. “O my fair warrior!” he greets Desdemona, when in the first scene of act 2 they are reunited on Cyprus. “O my soul’s joy!” (lines 177, 179). Even in act 2’s third scene, which would appear to involve—but does not—the strictly military matter of a drunken fight between soldiers, Othello remains solidly in control.

But the drunken fight, like a runaway wagon, has with Iago’s shoulder at the wheel begun to roll the world away from Othello. When in act 3, scene 4, Othello expatiates at some length about the magical powers of his handkerchief—a treasure given him, he says, by his mother, before his abrupt and violent removal from his own culture—we need to pay extremely close attention. Desdemona no longer has the handkerchief; Othello no longer has the absolute trust he once had in both Cassio and Desdemona. The whole origin for Othello’s disquisition, here, is that the mover and shaker of the play, Iago, has begun to plant his poisonous speculative suspicions. Desdemona has been unable to produce the magical handkerchief. “That is a fault,” Othello says, and terribly seriously, just before the first words quoted below (3.4.52). The handwriting is on the wall. Once magic has been set into motion, Othello knows in his bones how desperately powerful and how powerfully real are the consequences. He is a genuine Christian, to be sure. But he cannot escape from the world that created him, cannot help sensing that Desdemona’s unfaithfulness would destroy the very fabric of his existence. By the end of the scene—

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not in the lines quoted below, but immediately thereafter—his inner collapse is not only well under way, but starkly visible. Othello becomes stentorian, pounding out his demand that his wife produce the magic handkerchief, and ends by shouting “Away!” and stalking off. This is emphatically not the Othello of act 1.

Othello That handkerchief
Did an Egyptian to my mother give.
She was a charmer, and could almost read
The thoughts of people. She told her, while she kept it
'Twould make her amiable and subdue my father
Entirely to her love. But if she lost it,
Or made a gift of it, my father's eye
Should hold her loathèd, and his spirits should hunt
After new fancies. She, dying, gave it me,
And bid me, when my fate would have me wive,
To give it her. I did so, and take heed on't,
Make it a darling, like your precious eye.
To lose't or give't away were such perdition
As nothing else could match.

Desdemona Is't possible?

Othello 'Tis true. There's magic in the web of it.
A sibyl, that had numbered in the world
The sun to course two hundred compasses,
In her prophetic fury sewed the work.
The worms were hallowed that did breed the silk,
And it was dyed in mummy, which the skillful
Conserved of maiden's hearts.

Desdemona Indeed? Is't true?

Othello Most veritable, therefore look to't well. (3.4.53–74)

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Note that, for Shakespeare and his audience, “perdition” was more than mere ruin or destruction. It evoked the ultimate threat of *final* ruin, the eternal incarceration of the human spirit in hell. In our world, “damnation” has become an imprecation and very little more. In Renaissance England, it had terrible and universally known significance. And Othello’s steep descent, which I will briefly examine in a moment, is clearly hell-bound: “Blow me about in winds, roast me in sulphur,” he cries (late in the play’s final scene). “Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!” The devils he invokes to “whip me” are not meant to be metaphorical.

When Othello next appears, at the start of act 4, we see him firmly ensnared in Iago’s web, engaged in an elaborate discussion of the entirely imaginary “details” of Desdemona’s entirely imaginary adultery with Cassio. Three dozen lines later, his unraveling is complete:

Othello Lie with her? Lie on her? We say lie on her, when they belie her. Lie with her. That’s fulsome. Handkerchief – confessions – handkerchief! To confess, and be hanged for his labor, first to be hanged, and then to confess. I tremble at it. Nature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without some instruction. It is not words that shake me thus. – Pish – Noses, ears, and lips. Is’t possible? Confess – handkerchief! O devil! – (4.1.35–42)

Othello then falls to the ground, in a trance. But his psychosocial dissolution is not, as Iago tells Cassio that it is, the result of epilepsy. The disease was not even so well understood, in Shakespeare’s time, as it is today (and it remains at best uncertainly explainable). But Iago’s bold, pseudo-diagnostic lie is preceded by a more than sufficient rebuttal, out of his own mouth: “My medi-

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cine works!" he exclaims, looking down at the unconscious, just-fallen body of Othello (4.1.44). Iago is in truth a "medicine man," though his is completely black medicine, as he himself is a witch rather than a healer.

And Othello is doomed. The slide into hell has become a rout, and Othello lacks the reserves or the strategic knowledge to deal with forces that, in the end, emerge out his own being. Acts 4 and 5 present some of the saddest, most profoundly pitiful moments of human destruction ever recorded.

Desdemona

Aristotle's definition of "tragedy" is supremely applicable to both Othello and to his wife. "The change from prosperity to adversity should not be represented as happening to a virtuous character," Aristotle explained. Nor "should the fall of a very bad man from prosperous to adverse fortune be represented."¹² In other words, no one who is consistently "virtuous" can be the central figure in a true tragedy, but neither can anyone who is utterly without virtue play such a role. Aristotle spoke of the virtuous figure's downfall being caused by "some error of human frailty"; this has come to be called the "tragic flaw." And, again, there can be no doubt that Othello, like King Oedipus and a host of tragic heroes after Oedipus, presents a striking instance of exactly that nature. Oedipus is arrogant, wrathful, rash, but has no awareness that he suffers from any of these fatal imperfections. Othello is a social simpleton, a military bull in a civilian china shop, and similarly has no idea of these crucial deficiencies. Both men are resplendent heroes, and both fall like broken statues.

But Desdemona? "Almost all children until the end of the sixteenth century were so conditioned by their upbringing . . . that

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they acquiesced without much objection in the matches contrived for them by their parents. . . . [Indeed,] the accepted wisdom of the age was that marriage based on personal selection, and thus inevitably influenced by such ephemeral factors as sexual attraction or romantic love, was if anything less likely to produce lasting happiness than one arranged by more prudent and more mature heads.”¹³ We have no idea what Shakespeare’s personal views were, on this or on any other subject, but paternal control of marriage was a basic component of his time’s culture.

It is not the whole story. Tudor and Stuart England clearly took a relatively flexible approach. “Gentry marriages were not all heartlessly commercial or mere dynastic arrangements. . . . The woman had the option of being more or less tractable, of offering or withholding affection, of generally signaling her inclinations. The woman’s role was passive, but not entirely passive.”¹⁴ *Othello* being an English play, it is less relevant that “the power of the Italian patrician family over its daughters during the sixteenth century could be described as absolute.”¹⁵ Shakespeare’s audience was not composed of modern historians, nor did they react as anything but what they were, Renaissance Englishmen. Nevertheless, “a well-born woman was always defined and identified by her relation to . . . men: daughter to her father, wife to her husband.”¹⁶ Desdemona refers to both her father and her husband as her “lord,” for “according to tradition as old as the laws and customs of the Roman, Hebrew, Celtic, and Germanic peoples, by her marriage a young woman passed from the guardianship of one male to the guardianship of another.”¹⁷

Seen through these lenses, rather than those of the twenty-first century, Desdemona is virtuous but not entirely innocent, “free from moral wrong, sin, or guilt.”¹⁸ It is her father who presents

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her with her first opportunity, in the play at least, for less than innocent behavior:

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. (1.3.128–31)

Proper young women, especially of prosperous descent, were secluded, kept from contact with non-familial males. Brabantio makes Othello a friend of the family, and Desdemona listens as Othello rehearses “the story of my life.” Though actively concerned with “house affairs,” and drawn away from Othello’s enchanting tales, “These things to hear / Would Desdemona seriously incline” (1.3.145–46). There is of course nothing directly sinful about listening: it is in what follows that the girl strays. Othello notes her “greedy” ear and, taking “once a pliant hour, . . . 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” (1.3.151–55). Carefully following the forms of proper behavior, Othello leads her to ask for more—that is, more stories. “I did consent,” he says (1.3.155).

But he is an unattached man (his precise age is unknown to us, though clearly he is older than Desdemona), and “more” of his life’s story leads, as Othello plainly desires that it would, to other kinds of “more”:

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 kisses. (1.3.155–59)

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This much intimacy of male and female is likely to lead to still greater intimacy, as here it does. As Othello himself describes the proceedings, from the perspectives of Shakespeare's audience such heightened intimacy clearly involves Desdemona in "forward" behavior—presumptuous, bold, immodest:

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,
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.
(1.3.160–68)

In a strictly formal sense, to be sure, Desdemona may seem to be playing not an active/improper role, here, but a passive one. But as François Hotman observed, in 1573, "If you loose the reins with women, as with an unruly nature and an untamed beast, you must expect uncontrolled actions."¹⁹ Hotman takes the narrowest road, and Shakespeare's audience surely knew that "even the exigencies of law, of moral prescription, and of social convention, when joined to behavior modification, could not wholly stifle women's wit, wisdom, shrewishness, and wantonness."²⁰ "I spake," says Othello, indicating that he, not she, proposed marriage. Aside from strict formality, however, it is plainly she who has, from the first, taken the initiative.

Nor does either her "boldness" and therefore her culpability stop there. In both custom and law, a woman did not "own" herself. Before marriage, she belonged to her father. After marriage,

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she belonged to her husband. Desdemona's father had the "right" to award his daughter to whatever man he chose for her, and Desdemona plainly anticipated that he would exercise that right and veto her marriage to a black man. She therefore arranged matters, with to be sure Othello's participation (the play does not specifically inform us of such details), so that the marriage would be clandestine. In a word, she eloped. And having become her husband's property, as she wishes to be, she "boldly" rejects her father's claim:

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 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. (I.3.180-89)

It is a noble speech, to our ears. But four hundred years ago, it surely rang differently in many men's hearts, as we see that it did for Brabantio. "God be with you," he responds heavily. "I have done" (I.3.190).

It is impossible to present Shakespeare as an advocate of virtually any clear social or religious position. But on the evidence, as I have argued elsewhere, Shakespeare is the very farthest thing from anti-woman. Indeed, his portraits of women show us, far more often, creatures of much higher intelligence and general capability than the men around them. As an individual, however, Desdemona *is* inclined to what her time considered boldness, and as a

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married woman seeking to influence her husband's judgment she once again displays that capacity. "I give thee warrant [guarantee]" of thy place, she declares to Cassio in act 3, scene 3:

Assure thee,
If I do vow a friendship, I'll perform it
To the last article. My lord shall never rest,
I'll watch him tame, and talk him out of patience.
His bed shall seem a school, his board a shrift,
I'll intermingle everything he does
With Cassio's suit. Therefore be merry, Cassio,
For thy solicitor shall rather die
Than give thy cause away. (3.3.20–28)

She of course means to speak metaphorically, when she vows to "rather die" than abandon his suit for reinstatement. Yet quite as much as any causative factor, it is her "bold" persistence in arguing for Cassio that brings about her death. Human beings are of a piece, Shakespeare shows us in his plays, over and over and over. Desdemona is unrelenting in her way, as Iago is in his. Their ways are very different, as Othello's way, too, is different from either of theirs. But they are all consistently who they are, for better and for worse.

Iago

Shakespeare's plays, especially when named for their heroes, generally give those heroes primary stage exposure. In the three later plays bearing their heroes' names, all of roughly the same vintage, Hamlet is on stage approximately 66 percent of the time (the king, no hero he, is second with 37 percent); Macbeth is on stage just under 60 percent (Lady Macbeth is second, at 30 percent); and Lear is on stage roughly 48 percent of the time (Kent and

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Gloucester both being just under 40 percent) However, *Othello* is structured very differently. It is Iago who has the most on-stage time, at approximately 64 percent, and Othello who comes second, with 59 percent.

There is absolutely nothing heroic about Iago. He is not noble, or generous, or kind. He has extraordinary talents—quick wits, high-order verballity, and an infallible nose for other peoples' weaknesses—but does nothing but evil. His malignity is universal; no one is spared. Morally, he measures at 0 percent on any scale. Nothing and no one, no matter their sex, age, or position, merit his respect. Fanatically self-centered, he is a boaster, a liar, and at the same time a whiner and, remarkably, both a total coward and an incompetent swordsman. Plodding Cassio, even when dead drunk, mercilessly whips Rodrigo, sword in hand, but Iago, face-à-face with Rodrigo, does not so much as scratch him. When he kills Rodrigo, it is in the dark, with the seriously wounded man lying helpless on the ground. Iago is even unable to kill his wife until the other men in the room are preoccupied with Othello, who has tried to run Iago through.

Like many sociopaths, Iago is quixotically fascinating, even at times extremely charming. Measured by the time-honored standard, "Does it hold the stage?" Iago's ever-restless driving urge to nothingness leaves him, as stage character, smelling of roses. Not only is he non-heroic, and non-moral, but he is also unpredictably irrational. No scheme is ever enough, no goal is ever the final one, since in truth there *is* no goal. A sociopath does not seek anything except the venting of his malignancy. On the verge of having successfully ruined Othello, Desdemona, and Cassio, Iago declares at the end of act 5, scene 1, "This is the night / That either makes me or fordoes me quite" (lines 128–29). Yet what suc-

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cess, what fortune, can he conceivably attain to? He had begun by wanting, he says, to despoil Rodrigo and displace Cassio. He has in fact long since done both, and the fact is, for him, of no significance. At the end of act 5, scene 1, he is preparing to have Desdemona killed, a murder which will have to destroy Othello. What possible gain is there for Iago, either in Desdemona's death or Othello's destruction? He cannot replace either one of them, as he has declared he wanted to do with Cassio; he cannot inherit from either of them. Indeed, without Othello as temporary governor of Cyprus, Iago will be left without any post at all and would, presumably, be obliged to return, jobless, to Venice. What has he done with Roderigo's money? We are never given so much as a hint—because, to this consummate villain, all such considerations are irrelevant. At age twenty-eight (as he says), he has nowhere to go but down, and that is the only direction he knows. Like the prototypical serial killers of our own time, he lives exclusively for the evil he does. Compared to Iago, King Kong is a romantic, Holofernes a good soldier with a tad too much testosterone, and Attila the Hun a restless rambler. Only the white whale, *Moby-Dick*, matches him in an inexorable drive toward destruction. And like *Moby-Dick*, Iago is utterly fascinating, completely compelling.

How can we resist watching this matchless spinner of wickedness weave his webs? Iago richly deserves the prime time his author (no dramatic fool, he!) has given him, as Iago will richly deserve everything that happens to him once the stage goes dark.

The Text

There are two almost exactly contemporaneous printed versions of *Othello*, a separate Quarto edition that appeared in 1622 and

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the collective Folio edition of 1623. The play was written somewhere between 1601 and 1604 and performed many times, over the next two decades (though we do not have a full record). Shakespeare died in 1616. Half of his plays, more or less, appeared in print during his lifetime, but he seems to have played no role in those publications. There is no detectable pattern in which plays were published, before 1623, and which were not. Publication would not have been of much importance to him: neither his professional life nor his literary reputation was dependent on books, except as a source of plots.

Shakespeare's longtime theatrical associates were responsible for the 1623 Folio, which appears to have been compiled from documents long in possession of the acting company. It is not known from what resources the 1622 Quarto was printed. The Quarto is a significantly shorter version, particularly in the last two acts, and there are also a good many differences in wording.

I am fully persuaded that Scott McMillin's carefully cautious "solution" to *Othello's* textual uncertainties is as close to a definitive formulation as we are likely ever to have. After an exceedingly close and knowledgeable examination, Professor McMillin believes that

1. The 1622 Quarto was of relatively late date;
2. The Quarto was written, in the first place, by a professional scribe ("stenographer") who had only his ears to guide him—this being, on the evidence, a fairly common practice, though we have no idea who the scribe was or who employed him;
3. The Quarto was thereafter "corrected," though we do not know when or by whom;

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4. Many of the Quarto's longish cuts conform to theatrical practice and do not represent Shakespeare's text;
5. Many, even most of the verbal changes correspond to actor-originated alterations in Shakespeare's text; and
6. There may well be compositor ("printer") errors in either or both printed versions of the play, but printer error cannot be the sole or the major cause of textual differences.

I have therefore used the 1623 Folio as my "copy" text—that is, the basic source of the play. I have occasionally, in small verbal matters, chosen the Quarto text, and so indicated in a footnote. Brian Gibbons, general editor of the Cambridge series in which McMillin's Quarto edition appears, puts the editorial process into a blunt, clear perspective: "There is no avoiding edited Shakespeare . . . there is no direct access to Shakespeare's play-manuscripts—there is only print, and this implies editing," given the nature of our printed sources.²¹

Notes

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3. Gerzina, *Black London*, 4.
4. Gerzina, *Black London*, 5.
5. Gerzina, *Black London*, 205nn. 2, 3, 7.
6. W. E. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 36.

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7. Eli Sagan, *At the Dawn of Tyranny: The Origins of Individualism, Political Oppression, and the State* (New York: Knopf, 1985), xvi–xvii.
8. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion, and Other Essays*, Selected and with an Introduction by Robert Redfield (Boston: Beacon Press, 1948), 29.
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10. Harold K. Schneider, “Pakot Resistance to Change,” in William R. Bascom and Melville J. Herskovits, eds., *Continuity and Change in African Cultures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 158.
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12. Aristotle, *Poetics*, Everyman Library (New York: Dutton, 1934), 25.
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15. Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, 1500–1800* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 105.
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19. David Englander et al., eds., *Culture and Belief in Europe, 1459–1600: An Anthology of Sources* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 412.
20. Lena Cowen Orlin, “Three Ways to Be Invisible in the Renaissance: Sex, Reputation, and Stitchery,” in *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, ed. Patricia Fumerton and Simon Hunt (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 199.
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SOME ESSENTIALS OF THE
SHAKESPEAREAN STAGE



The Stage

- There was no *scenery* (backdrops, flats, and so on).
- Compared to today's elaborate, high-tech productions, the Elizabethan stage had few *on-stage* props. These were mostly handheld: a sword or dagger, a torch or candle, a cup or flask. Larger props, such as furniture, were used sparingly.
- Costumes (some of which were upper-class castoffs, belonging to the individual actors) were elaborate. As in most premodern and very hierarchical societies, clothing was the distinctive mark of who and what a person was.
- What the actors *spoke*, accordingly, contained both the dramatic and narrative material we have come to expect in a theater (or movie house) and (1) the setting, including details of the time of day, the weather, and so on, and (2) the occasion. The *dramaturgy* is thus very different from that of our own time, requiring much more attention to verbal and gestural matters. Strict realism was neither intended nor, under the circumstances, possible.
- There was *no curtain*. Actors entered and left via doors in the

back of the stage, behind which was the “tiring-room,” where actors put on or changed their costumes.

- In *public theaters* (which were open-air structures), there was no *lighting*; performances could take place only in daylight hours.
- For *private theaters*, located in large halls of aristocratic houses, candlelight illumination was possible.

The Actors

- Actors worked in *professional*, for-profit companies, sometimes organized and owned by other actors, and sometimes by entrepreneurs who could afford to erect or rent the company’s building. Public theaters could hold, on average, two thousand playgoers, most of whom viewed and listened while standing. Significant profits could be and were made. Private theaters were smaller, more exclusive.
- There was *no director*. A book-holder/prompter/props manager, standing in the tiring-room behind the backstage doors, worked from a text marked with entrances and exits and notations of any special effects required for that particular script. A few such books have survived. Actors had texts only of their own parts, speeches being cued to a few prior words. There were few and often no rehearsals, in our modern use of the term, though there was often some coaching of individuals. Since Shakespeare’s England was largely an oral culture, actors learned their parts rapidly and retained them for years. This was *repertory* theater, repeating popular plays and introducing some new ones each season.
- *Women* were not permitted on the professional stage. Most

female roles were acted by *boys*; elderly women were played by grown men.

The Audience

- London's professional theater operated in what might be called a "red-light" district, featuring brothels, restaurants, and the kind of *open-air entertainment* then most popular, like bear-baiting (in which a bear, tied to a stake, was set on by dogs).
- A theater audience, like most of the population of Shakespeare's England, was largely made up of *illiterates*. Being able to read and write, however, had nothing to do with intelligence or concern with language, narrative, and characterization. People attracted to the theater tended to be both extremely verbal and extremely volatile. Actors were sometimes attacked, when the audience was dissatisfied; quarrels and fights were relatively common. Women were regularly in attendance, though no reliable statistics exist.
- Drama did not have the cultural esteem it has in our time, and plays were not regularly printed. Shakespeare's often appeared in book form, but not with any supervision or other involvement on his part. He wrote a good deal of nondramatic poetry as well, yet so far as we know he did not authorize or supervise *any* work of his that appeared in print during his lifetime.
- Playgoers, who had paid good money to see and hear, plainly gave dramatic performances careful, detailed attention. For some closer examination of such matters, see Burton Raffel, "Who Heard the Rhymes and How: Shakespeare's Dramaturgical Signals," *Oral Tradition* 11 (October 1996): 190–221, and Raffel, "Metrical Dramaturgy in Shakespeare's Earlier Plays," *CEA Critic* 57 (Spring–Summer 1995): 51–65.

Othello



CHARACTERS (DRAMATIS PERSONAE)

Othello (the Moor)

Brabantio (Senator of Venice, Desdemona's father)

Gratiano (Brabantio's brother, Desdemona's uncle)

Lodovico (Desdemona's cousin)¹

Duke (of Venice)

Senators (of Venice)

Cassio (Othello's lieutenant)²

Iago (Othello's ancient)³

Roderigo (Venetian gentleman)

Montano (Governor of Cyprus, Othello's predecessor)

Sailors

Clown

*Herald*⁴

Desdemona (Brabantio's daughter, Othello's wife)

Emilia (Iago's wife, Desdemona's maid)

Bianca (courtesan, Cassio's mistress)

Officers, Gentlemen, Messenger, Musicians, Attendants

1 Gratiano's son?

2 second in command*

3 ensign, standard-bearer*

4 ceremonial message-bearer

Act I



SCENE I

Venice. A street.

ENTER RODERIGO AND IAGO

Roderigo Never¹ tell me, I take it much unkindly²

That thou, Iago, who hast had my purse

As if the strings were thine, shouldst know of this.³

Iago But you will not⁴ hear me. If ever I did dream⁵

Of such a matter, abhor⁶ me.

Roderigo Thou told'st me

5

Thou didst hold him⁷ in thy hate.⁸

Iago Despise⁹ me

1 don't (emphatic)

2 much unkindly = with great dissatisfaction/resentment

3 Desdemona's elopement with Othello

4 will not = don't want to

5 but you WILL not HEAR me if EVER I did DREAM

6 loathe, hate

7 hold him = keep/bear Othello

8 THOU toldst ME / THOU didst HOLD him IN thy HATE

9 have contempt for, scorn

ACT I • SCENE I

If I do not. Three great ones¹⁰ of the city,¹¹
In personal suit¹² to make me his lieutenant,
Off-capped¹³ to him, and by the faith¹⁴ of man,
10 I know my price,¹⁵ I am worth no worse a place.¹⁶
But he, as loving¹⁷ his own pride and purposes,¹⁸
Evades them¹⁹ with a bumbast circumstance,²⁰
Horribly stuffed²¹ with epithets²² of war,
Nonsuits my mediators.²³ For “Certes,”²⁴ says he,
15 “I have already chose my officer.”
And what²⁵ was he?
Forsooth,²⁶ a great arithmetician,²⁷
One Michael Cassio, a Florentine,
A fellow almost damned²⁸ in a fair wife,²⁹

10 persons

11 Venice, then an independent state (IF i DO not. three GREAT ones OF the City)

12 petition, request*

13 respectfully doffing/taking off their hats

14 the faith = the true religion (Christianity)

15 value, worth*

16 post, position*

17 as loving = being one who loves

18 intentions*

19 evades them = avoided answering “the great ones” (historical present tense = past tense)

20 bumbast circumstance = puffed out/inflated/empty circumlocution/ beating about the bush

21 horribly stuffed = exceedingly padded

22 the vocabulary/terms

23 nonsuits my mediators = turns back/rebuffs my go-betweenes

24 in fact, in truth*

25 who

26 truly, indeed

27 number-juggler, bookkeeper (aRITHmeTicseeYUN)

28 doomed, cursed

29 a reference no one has ever understood, since Cassio is unmarried

ACT I • SCENE I

That never set³⁰ a squadron³¹ in the field, 20
 Nor the division³² of a battle³³ knows
 More than a spinster,³⁴ unless the bookish theoretic,³⁵
 Wherein³⁶ the togèd consuls³⁷ can propose³⁸
 As masterly as he. Mere prattle,³⁹ without practice,⁴⁰
 Is all his soldiership. But he, sir, had th' election,⁴¹ 25
 And I, of whom his⁴² eyes had seen the proof⁴³
 At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds,⁴⁴
 Christian and heathen, must be be-lee'd and calmed⁴⁵
 By debtor and creditor,⁴⁶ this counter-caster.⁴⁷
 He, in good time,⁴⁸ must his⁴⁹ lieutenant be, 30

30 that never set = who never placed/positioned

31 (1) relatively small military grouping, (2) a square military formation

32 methodical arrangement

33 army

34 more than a spinster = any more than someone of either sex (usually a woman) who practices the craft of spinning

35 unless the bookish theoretic = except as a matter of book-learned theory

36 in which*

37 wherein the togèd consuls = in which advisers/councillors? wearing formal gowns/togas (TOged)

38 put forward

39 idle talk/chatter

40 experience, actual doing*

41 choice

42 of whom his = whose own

43 proven results, tests, experience*

44 soil, lands

45 be-lee'd and calmed = like a ship cut off from the wind and thereby detained/kept motionless

46 debtor and creditor = an account book

47 someone who casts/keeps accounts

48 in good time = if you can believe it, amazingly enough

49 Othello's

ACT I • SCENE I

And I, God bless the mark,⁵⁰ his Moorship's⁵¹ ancient.

Roderigo By heaven, I rather would have been his hangman.⁵²

Iago Why, there's no remedy. 'Tis the curse of service,⁵³

Preferment⁵⁴ goes by letter and affection,⁵⁵

35 And not by old gradation,⁵⁶ where each second⁵⁷

Stood heir to the first.⁵⁸ Now sir, be judge yourself

Whether I in any just term⁵⁹ am affined⁶⁰

To love the Moor.

Roderigo I would not follow⁶¹ him, then.

Iago O, sir, content you,⁶²

40 I follow him to serve my turn upon⁶³ him.

We cannot all be masters, nor all masters

Cannot be truly⁶⁴ followed. You shall mark⁶⁵

Many a duteous⁶⁶ and knee-crooking knave⁶⁷

50 bless the mark = save us from the (1) event, happening, (2) fool, ninny, naive incompetent, (3) people like him (Cassio)

51 Othello's (a sarcastic pun on the then familiar usage, "bless his worship," his "honor")

52 (Roderigo, fancying himself Othello's rival for Desdemona's hand, swears that he would rather have killed than served Othello)

53 serving a master/ employer*

54 promotion

55 letter and affection = rules and influence

56 old gradation = the former tradition of length in service and stage-by-stage progress

57 number two in rank

58 number one in rank

59 just term = correct/honorable* sense of the word

60 bound

61 serve

62 content you = be satisfied

63 my turn upon = my own needs/purposes on/by means of

64 loyally, faithfully*

65 note, notice, observe*

66 submissive, obedient

67 knee-crooking knave = bowing and scraping rascal* (Many a DOOTyus AND knee CROOKing KNAVE)

ACT I • SCENE I

That, doting on⁶⁸ his own obsequious bondage,⁶⁹
 Wears out his time,⁷⁰ much like his master's ass,⁷¹ 45
 For nought but provender,⁷² and when he's old, cashiered.⁷³
 Whip me⁷⁴ such honest knaves! Others there are
 Who, trimmed⁷⁵ in forms and visages⁷⁶ of duty,⁷⁷
 Keep yet their hearts attending on⁷⁸ themselves,
 And throwing but⁷⁹ shows⁸⁰ of service on their lords, 50
 Do well thrive⁸¹ by them, and when they have lined their
 coats⁸²
 Do themselves homage.⁸³ These fellows have some soul,⁸⁴
 And such a one do I profess myself.
 For, sir, it is as sure⁸⁵ as you are Roderigo,⁸⁶
 Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago. 55
 In following him, I follow but myself.
 Heaven is my judge, not I for⁸⁷ love and duty,

68 doting on = foolishly infatuated by

69 obsequious bondage = dutiful/submissive servitude

70 wears out his time = wastes his life

71 donkey (in British usage, "arse" = the rear end of a human being)

72 food/fodder

73 is dismissed

74 whip me = as for me, whip/flog (whipping subordinates was more or less universal)

75 prepared, skilled

76 forms and visages = patterns/methods and appearances

77 respect, deference, submission*

78 attending on = doing service to

79 throwing but = casting/tossing/delivering only*

80 appearances*

81 flourish, prosper*

82 do WELL thrive BY them and WHEN they've LINED their COATS

83 do themselves homage = declare allegiance to themselves (do THEMSELVES HOMAge)

84 intellectual/spiritual power ("life in them")

85 certain, trustworthy*

86 for SIR it IS as SURE as YOU are roDRiGo

87 on account of

ACT I • SCENE I

- But seeming so for my peculiar end.⁸⁸
 For when my outward action doth demonstrate⁸⁹
 60 The native act and figure⁹⁰ of my heart
 In complement extern,⁹¹ 'tis not⁹² long after
 But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
 For daws⁹³ to peck at. I am not what I am.⁹⁴
Roderigo What a full⁹⁵ fortune does the thick lips owe,⁹⁶
 If he can carry't⁹⁷ thus!
 65 *Iago* Call up⁹⁸ her father,
 Rouse him,⁹⁹ make after¹⁰⁰ him, poison his delight,
 Proclaim him¹⁰¹ in the streets. Incense her kinsmen,
 And though he¹⁰² in a fertile climate¹⁰³ dwell,
 Plague¹⁰⁴ him with flies.¹⁰⁵ Though that¹⁰⁶ his joy be joy,
 70 Yet throw such changes of vexation on't¹⁰⁷

88 peculiar end = private/independent* goal/purpose

89 make known, manifest (deMONstrate)*

90 native act and figure = natural/unadorned deed and attitude/bearing

91 complement extern = outward fullness/completion/totality

92 'tis not = it will not be

93 jackdaws, a type of crow

94 seem to be

95 solid, large

96 own, possess*

97 can carry't = could carry it off

98 call up = wake up

99 rouse him = stir him up

100 make after = pursue

101 proclaim him = make his name known

102 Brabantio

103 a fertile climate = an environment of abundance (he is rich and lives richly)

104 afflict, torment

105 winged insects

106 though that = even if

107 changes of vexation on't = on its variations/modulations of harassment/
 distress

ACT I • SCENE I

As it may lose some color.¹⁰⁸

Roderigo Here is her father's house, I'll call aloud.

Iago Do, with like timorous accent¹⁰⁹ and dire¹¹⁰ yell

As when, by night and negligence, the fire¹¹¹

Is spied in populous cities.

75

Roderigo What ho, Brabantio, Signior Brabantio, ho!

Iago Awake, what, ho, Brabantio! Thieves, thieves, thieves!

Look to your house, your daughter, and your bags!¹¹²

Thieves, thieves!

BRABANTIO APPEARS ABOVE, AT A WINDOW

Brabantio What is the reason of this terrible summons?¹¹³

80

What is the matter there?

Roderigo Signior, is all your family within?

Iago Are your doors locked?

Brabantio Why, wherefore¹¹⁴ ask you
this?

Iago Zounds,¹¹⁵ sir, you're robbed, for shame, put on your
gown,¹¹⁶

Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul,

85

Even now, now, very now, an old black ram

108 tone, character, virtue

109 like timorous accent = the same fearful/dreadful voice/sound

110 horrible, dismal

111 the fire = fire

112 money bags (money meant coins; paper currency was not used)

113 terrible summons = dreadful/violent call/command

114 for what purpose/reason??

115 by God's wounds

116 (1) loose shirt-like garment, (2) senator's gown, (3) dressing gown (from stage direction in the Quarto, line 157)

ACT I • SCENE I

Is tugging¹¹⁷ your white¹¹⁸ ewe. Arise, arise,
 Awake the snorting¹¹⁹ citizens with the bell,
 Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you.

Arise, I say.

90 *Brabantio* What, have you lost your wits?¹²⁰

Roderigo Most reverend¹²¹ signior, do you know my voice?

Brabantio Not I. What¹²² are you?

Roderigo My name is Roderigo.

Brabantio The worser welcome.

I have charged¹²³ thee not to haunt about my doors.

95 In honest¹²⁴ plainness thou hast heard me say

My daughter is not for thee. And now, in madness,¹²⁵

Being full of supper and distemp'ring draughts,¹²⁶

Upon malicious knavery¹²⁷ dost thou come

To start¹²⁸ my quiet.¹²⁹

100 *Roderigo* Sir, sir, sir –

Brabantio But thou must needs be sure

My spirit¹³⁰ and my place have in them power

To make this bitter to thee.

Roderigo Patience, good sir.

117 copulating with

118 innocent, virginal

119 snoring

120 minds*

121 respected

122 who

123 ordered

124 decent

125 folly

126 distemp'ring draughts = deranging/disordering/intoxicating drinks

127 malicious knavery = wicked roguery/dishonest tricks

128 (1) attack, (2) startle

129 peace, repose?

130 disposition, attitude, character

Brabantio What tell'st thou me of robbing? This is Venice,
 My house is not a grange.¹³¹

Roderigo Most grave¹³² Brabantio, 105
 In simple and pure soul I come to you.

Iago Zounds, sir, you are one of those that will not serve
 God if the devil bid you. Because we come to do you service,
 and you think we are ruffians, you'll have your daughter
 covered¹³³ with a Barbary¹³⁴ horse, you'll have your nephews 110
 neigh to you, you'll have coursers¹³⁵ for cousins and gennets
 for germans.¹³⁶

Brabantio What profane wretch¹³⁷ art thou?

Iago I am one, sir, that comes to tell you your daughter and
 the Moor are now making the beast with two backs. 115

Brabantio Thou art a villain.¹³⁸

Iago You are – a senator.

Brabantio This thou shalt answer.¹³⁹ I know thee, Roderigo.

Roderigo Sir, I will answer anything. But, I beseech¹⁴⁰ you,
 If't be your pleasure¹⁴¹ and most wise consent,
 As partly I find¹⁴² it is, that your fair¹⁴³ daughter, 120
 At this odd-even¹⁴⁴ and dull watch¹⁴⁵ o' the night,

131 country/farm house

132 respected, worthy

133 having sexual intercourse

134 North African

135 racehorses

136 gennets for germans = Spanish horses as first cousins

137 profane wretch = ribald/blasphemous* vile/despicable person

138 scoundrel*

139 be held responsible for*

140 entreat, beg*

141 choice, desire

142 discover, perceive*

143 beautiful (often used conventionally, politely)*

144 in-between, neither night nor morning

145 dull watch = slow/sluggish/tedious division/portion

ACT I • SCENE I

Transported¹⁴⁶ with no worse nor better guard
 But with a knave of common¹⁴⁷ hire, a gondolier,
 To the gross clasps¹⁴⁸ of a lascivious Moor –
 125 If this be known to you, and your allowance,¹⁴⁹
 We then have done you bold and saucy¹⁵⁰ wrongs.
 But if you know not this, my manners¹⁵¹ tell me
 We have¹⁵² your wrong¹⁵³ rebuke. Do not believe
 That, from the sense¹⁵⁴ of all civility,¹⁵⁵
 130 I thus would play and trifle¹⁵⁶ with your reverence.
 Your daughter – if you have not given her leave,
 I say again – hath made a gross revolt,¹⁵⁷
 Tying her duty, beauty, wit,¹⁵⁸ and fortunes¹⁵⁹
 In¹⁶⁰ an extravagant and wheeling stranger¹⁶¹
 135 Of¹⁶² here and everywhere. Straight¹⁶³ satisfy yourself.

146 conveyed (well-born women went out of their homes only with male escorts)

147 public, general*

148 gross clasps = monstrous* embraces

149 approval, sanction

150 bold and saucy = presumptuous/audacious/shameless* and wanton*

151 good manners/behavior/morals

152 have been given

153 unjust, mistaken

154 from the sense = departing from (“abandoning”) the proper understanding*

155 principles of good/orderly behavior

156 play and trifle = frolic/amuse myself and fool about

157 casting off of allegiance, rebellion*

158 mind, intelligence

159 (1) position, (2) prosperity, wealth, (3) possibilities, luck*

160 into, to

161 extravagant and wheeling stranger = vagrant/irregular and whirling/
 reeling alien/foreigner

162 who comes from/belongs

163 immediately, without delay*

ACT I • SCENE I

If she be in her chamber, or your house,
 Let loose on me the justice of the state
 For thus deluding you.

Brabantio Strike on the tinder,¹⁶⁴ ho!
 Give me a taper,¹⁶⁵ call up all my people!¹⁶⁶
 This accident¹⁶⁷ is not unlike my dream, 140
 Belief of it oppresses¹⁶⁸ me already.
 Light, I say, light!

EXIT BRABANTIO FROM ABOVE

Iago (to *Roderigo*) Farewell, for I must leave you.
 It seems not meet,¹⁶⁹ nor wholesome¹⁷⁰ to my place
 To be produced,¹⁷¹ as if I stay I shall, 145
 Against the Moor, for I do know the state,¹⁷²
 However this may gall¹⁷³ him with some check,¹⁷⁴
 Cannot with safety cast¹⁷⁵ him. For he's embarked¹⁷⁶
 With such loud reason¹⁷⁷ to¹⁷⁸ the Cyprus wars,

164 tinderbox (containing readily lightable materials)

165 candle

166 attendants, servants, etc.

167 event, occurrence*

168 crushes, overwhelms

169 appropriate, fitting*

170 salutary, beneficial

171 brought forward as a witness

172 Venice

173 vex, harass, oppress

174 reprimand, rebuke, rebuff*

175 discard, dismiss

176 engaged

177 statements, talk (by the Venetian authorities?)

178 into ("sailed ... into": a metaphor most apt, since Cyprus is an island)

ACT I • SCENE I

Which even now stands in act,¹⁷⁹ that for their souls
150 Another of his fathom¹⁸⁰ they have none,
To lead their business.¹⁸¹ In which regard,
Though I do hate him as I do hell's pains,
Yet, for necessity of present life,
I must show out¹⁸² a flag and sign of love,
155 Which is indeed but sign.¹⁸³ That you shall surely find him,
Lead to the Sagittary¹⁸⁴ the raised search,¹⁸⁵
And there will I be with him. So farewell.

EXIT IAGO

ENTER BRABANTIO AND SERVANTS WITH TORCHES

Brabantio It is too true¹⁸⁶ an evil. Gone she is,
And what's to come of my despised time
160 Is naught but bitterness. Now Roderigo,
Where didst thou see her? O unhappy¹⁸⁷ girl.
With the Moor, say'st thou? Who would be a father?
How didst thou know 'twas she? O, she deceives me
Past thought. What said she to you? (*to Servants*) Get more
tapers.
165 Raise¹⁸⁸ all my kindred. (*to Roderigo*) Are they married, think
you?
Roderigo Truly, I think they are.

179 stands in act = remains/continues ongoing/in process

180 ability

181 BIZINESS

182 show out = display, unfurl

183 but sign = only a pretense

184 house/inn marked by the sign of Sagittarius, a centaur (SADgiTAreE)

185 raised search = roused-up search for Othello and/or Desdemona

186 certain, genuine

187 ill-fated, unlucky, miserable in lot

188 rouse*

ACT I • SCENE I

Brabantio O heaven! How got she out? O treason of the
 blood!¹⁸⁹
 Fathers, from hence¹⁹⁰ trust not your daughters' minds
 By what you see them act. Is¹⁹¹ there not charms¹⁹²
 By which the property¹⁹³ of youth and maidhood 170
 May be abused?¹⁹⁴ Have you not read, Roderigo,
 Of some such thing?

Roderigo Yes, sir, I have indeed.

Brabantio (to Servants) Call up my brother. (to Roderigo) O, would
 you had had her!¹⁹⁵
 Some one way, some another. Do you know
 Where we may apprehend¹⁹⁶ her and the Moor? 175

Roderigo I think I can discover¹⁹⁷ him, if you please
 To get good guard,¹⁹⁸ and go along with me.

Brabantio Pray you,¹⁹⁹ lead on. At every house I'll call,²⁰⁰
 I may command²⁰¹ at most. (to Servants) Get weapons, ho,
 And raise some special officers of night.²⁰² 180
 On, good Roderigo. I'll deserve your pains.²⁰³

EXEUNT

189 passions*

190 from hence = henceforward, from this time on

191 (Renaissance English syntax is often unlike that of the 21st c.)

192 spells, magic

193 character, nature

194 wronged, deceived, violated*

195 had had her = been given her in marriage

196 seize, lay hold of

197 find

198 escort, protection

199 pray you = please*

200 I'll call at every house

201 ask with authority (for armed men to join with him)

202 special officers of night = special deputy police, for nighttime emergencies

203 deserve your pains = pay/reward* you for your troubles/efforts*

ACT I • SCENE 2

SCENE 2

Venice. Another street.

ENTER OTHELLO, IAGO, AND ATTENDANTS WITH TORCHES

Iago Though in the trade¹ of war I have slain men,
Yet do I hold it very stuff² o' the conscience³
To do no contrived⁴ murder. I lack iniquity⁵
Sometimes to do me service.⁶ Nine or ten times
5 I had thought to have yerked him⁷ here, under the ribs.
Othello 'Tis better as it is.
Iago Nay, but he prated,⁸
And spoke such scurvy⁹ and provoking terms
Against your honor, that with the little godliness¹⁰ I have,¹¹
I did full hard forbear¹² him. But I pray you, sir,
10 Are you fast¹³ married? Be assured of this,
That the Magnifico¹⁴ is much beloved,
And hath in his effect¹⁵ a voice potential¹⁶

1 course (“way of life”)

2 substance

3 moral sense, inner knowledge of right and wrong

4 cleverly/artfully planned (CONtrived)

5 wickedness, sinfulness

6 help, benefit

7 yerked him = struck Roderigo (with a dagger or knife)

8 chattered*

9 contemptible, shabby, discourteous

10 piety, devoutness

11 (lineation uncertain: this edition follows the Folio)

12 endure

13 firmly, securely

14 Venetian noble title (Brabantio)

15 influence, power

16 as powerful/strong (an adjective; modern usage would be “potentially”)

ACT I • SCENE 2

As double as¹⁷ the Duke's. He will divorce you,¹⁸
 Or put upon you what¹⁹ restraint and grievance²⁰
 The law, with all his²¹ might to enforce²² it on, 15
 Will give him cable.²³

Othello Let him do his spite.²⁴
 My services which I have done the signiory²⁵
 Shall out-tongue²⁶ his complaints. 'Tis yet to know²⁷ –
 Which,²⁸ when I know that boasting is an honor,
 I shall promulgate²⁹ – I fetch³⁰ my life and being 20
 From men of royal siege,³¹ and my demerits³²
 May speak unbonneted³³ to as proud a fortune
 As this that I have reached. For know, Iago,
 But³⁴ that I love the gentle³⁵ Desdemona,
 I would not my unhousèd³⁶ free condition³⁷ 25

17 as double as = twice as much as

18 divorce you = have you divorced, dissolve your marriage

19 whatever

20 restraint and grievance = limitation/constraint and oppression/hardship

21 (although "his" can mean "its," here it means his, Brabantio's)

22 strengthen, intensify

23 rope

24 insult, reproach, injury

25 signiory = Venice's governing council (in Italian, *signoria*)

26 exceed

27 yet to know = as yet unknown

28 something that

29 declare publicly

30 obtain, get

31 rank, class

32 merits

33 speak unbonneted = (?) declare respectfully

34 except

35 well-born*

36 bachelor

37 life, mode of being, state*

ACT I • SCENE 2

Put into circumscription and confine³⁸

For the sea's worth. But look, what lights come yond?³⁹

Iago Those are the raised father and his friends.

You were best go in.

Othello Not I. I must be found.

30 *My parts,*⁴⁰ *my title, and my perfect*⁴¹ *soul*

Shall manifest⁴² me rightly. Is it they?

Iago By Janus,⁴³ I think no.

ENTER CASSIO AND OFFICERS WITH TORCHES

Othello The servants of the Duke? And my lieutenant?

The goodness of the night upon you, friends!

What is the news?

35 *Cassio* The Duke does greet⁴⁴ you, general,

And he requires⁴⁵ your haste – post-haste⁴⁶ – appearance

Even⁴⁷ on the instant.⁴⁸

Othello What is the matter,⁴⁹ think you?

Cassio Something from Cyprus, as⁵⁰ I may divine.⁵¹

38 circumscription and confine = restraint/limitation and confinement

39 yonder, over there

40 qualities, character*

41 completely prepared/ready, pure

42 reveal, be evidence of, prove

43 Roman god of entrances and exits, two-faced, his heads looking in opposite directions (DJEYnis)

44 does greet = greets (do = an intensifier)

45 requests, desires

46 all possible speed

47 precisely, exactly*

48 on the instant = instantly (even ON the INstant; "even" was often pronounced EEN)

49 issue, substance

50 as far as

51 make out, guess

ACT I • SCENE 2

It is a business of some heat.⁵² The galleys⁵³
 Have sent a dozen sequent⁵⁴ messengers 40
 This very⁵⁵ night, at one another's heels.
 And many of the consuls, raised and met,⁵⁶
 Are at the Duke's already. You have been hotly called for,⁵⁷
 When,⁵⁸ being not at your lodging to be found,
 The Senate hath sent about⁵⁹ three several quests⁶⁰ 45
 To search you out.
Othello 'Tis well I am⁶¹ found by you.
 I will but spend⁶² a word here in the house,⁶³
 And⁶⁴ go with you.

EXIT OTHELLO

Cassio Ancient, what makes he⁶⁵ here?
Iago Faith,⁶⁶ he tonight hath boarded⁶⁷ a land carack.⁶⁸
 If it prove⁶⁹ lawful prize,⁷⁰ he's made forever. 50

52 excitement, intensity

53 low, flat-built Mediterranean ship, with both oars and sails

54 following one on the other

55 exact, same

56 having met/assembled

57 hotly called for = ardently/eagerly requested/required

58 at which point

59 out (as in "out and about")

60 several quests = separate search parties

61 have been

62 speak, say

63 (where Desdemona, now his wife, is lodged)

64 and then

65 makes he = is he doing

66 truly

67 attacked

68 large ship (galleon), often employed in the rich trade with the East

69 turn out to be*

70 capture, seizure

ACT I • SCENE 2

Cassio I do not understand.

Iago He's married.

Cassio To who?

ENTER OTHELLO

Iago Marry, to – Come, captain,⁷¹ will you go?

Othello Have with
you.⁷²

Cassio Here comes another troop⁷³ to seek for you.

Iago It is Brabantio. General, be advised,⁷⁴
He comes to bad intent.

ENTER BRABANTIO, RODERIGO, AND OFFICERS
WITH TORCHES AND WEAPONS

55 *Othello* Holla,⁷⁵ stand⁷⁶ there.

Roderigo (*to Brabantio*) Signior, it is the Moor.

Brabantio Down with him,
thief!

BOTH SIDES DRAW SWORDS

Iago You, Roderigo, come sir, I am for you.⁷⁷

Othello Keep up⁷⁸ your bright swords, for the dew will rust
them.

Good signior, you shall more command with years

71 general (military terms were not so standardized as they are now)

72 have with you = let's go ("I will go with you")

73 party, company, group

74 warned

75 halt (exclamation)

76 stay, stop*

77 am for you = am ready to fight with you

78 keep up = put back, confine

Than with your weapons. 60
Brabantio O thou foul thief, where hast thou stowed⁷⁹ my
 daughter?
 Damned as thou art, thou hast enchanted her,
 For I'll refer me to⁸⁰ all things of sense,⁸¹
 If she in chains of magic were not bound
 Whether a maid⁸² so tender,⁸³ fair,⁸⁴ and happy,⁸⁵ 65
 So opposite⁸⁶ to marriage that she shunned
 The wealthy curlèd darlings⁸⁷ of our nation,⁸⁸
 Would⁸⁹ ever have, to incur a general mock,⁹⁰
 Run from her guardage⁹¹ to the sooty bosom⁹²
 Of such a thing as thou – to fear,⁹³ not to delight. 70
 Judge me the world,⁹⁴ if 'tis not gross in sense⁹⁵
 That thou hast practiced⁹⁶ on her with foul charms,
 Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals⁹⁷

79 lodged, put

80 refer me to = put my trust in

81 perception, awareness

82 unmarried/virginal young woman*

83 (1) delicate, soft, sensitive, (2) youthful, immature, (3) dearly loved

84 reputable, unstained, pure

85 fortunate, favored (having good "hap")

86 against, hostile

87 curlèd darlings = favorites with artificial curls

88 ("nation" had cultural and racial rather than political meaning; Venice was
 not a nation but a city-state)

89 whether she would

90 general mock = common/universal* derision/contempt*

91 sheltered existence ("guardianship")

92 breast, heart*

93 a thing to be afraid of

94 judge me the world = let/may the world judge me

95 gross in sense = obvious

96 worked

97 mineral-derived drugs/poisons*

That weaken motion.⁹⁸ I'll have't disputed on⁹⁹ –
 75 'Tis probable, and palpable¹⁰⁰ to thinking.
 I therefore apprehend¹⁰¹ and do attach¹⁰² thee
 For an abuser of the world, a practicer
 Of arts inhibited¹⁰³ and out of warrant.¹⁰⁴
 Lay hold upon him. If he do resist,
 Subdue him at his peril.

80 *Othello* Hold your hands,¹⁰⁵
 Both you of my inclining¹⁰⁶ and the rest.
 Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it
 Without a prompter. Where will¹⁰⁷ you that I go
 To answer this your charge?¹⁰⁸

Brabantio To prison, till fit¹⁰⁹ time
 85 Of law and course¹¹⁰ of direct session¹¹¹
 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 present¹¹² business of the state,

98 activity of body and mind

99 disputed on = contested, challenged

100 plain, obvious

101 arrest

102 indict

103 arts inhibited = forbidden studies/learning

104 out of warrant = unlawful

105 hold your hands = desist/keep back* your hands

106 party, following

107 wish*

108 accusation

109 proper, appropriate*

110 procedures*

111 direct session = a court in regular (not specially summoned) session

112 urgent, immediate*

ACT I • SCENE 2

To bring¹¹³ me to him?

Officer 'Tis true, most worthy signior. 90

The Duke's in council, and your noble self,

I am sure, is sent for.

Brabantio How? The Duke in council?

In¹¹⁴ this time of the night? Bring him away.¹¹⁵

Mine's not an idle cause.¹¹⁶ The Duke himself,

Or any of my brothers of the state, 95

Cannot but feel this wrong as¹¹⁷ 'twere their own.

For if such actions may have passage free,¹¹⁸

Bond slaves¹¹⁹ and pagans shall our statesmen be.

EXEUNT

113 conduct, lead, escort*

114 at

115 bring him away = escort/convey Othello on to the Duke

116 idle cause = frivolous/groundless* legal case/suit

117 as if

118 passage free = rights ("movement") that are unrestricted*

119 bond slaves = slaves by contract rather than capture

ACT I • SCENE 3

SCENE 3

Venice. A council chamber.

DUKE AND SENATORS AT COUNCIL TABLE.
OFFICERS AND ATTENDANTS

Duke There is no composition¹ in these news
That gives them² credit.³

Senator 1 Indeed, they are disproportioned.⁴
My letters say a hundred and seven galleys.⁵

Duke And mine a hundred and forty.

Senator 2 And mine two hundred.

5 But though they jump⁶ not on a just account⁷ –
As in these cases, where the aim⁸ reports,
'Tis oft with difference – yet do they all confirm
A Turkish fleet, and bearing up⁹ to Cyprus.

Duke Nay, it is possible enough to judgment.¹⁰

10 I do not so secure me in¹¹ the error,
But the main article¹² I do approve¹³
In fearful¹⁴ sense.

1 order, arrangement

2 “news” is plural

3 believability, credibility, trustworthiness

4 inconsistent

5 Turkish/enemy ships (though both sides employ galleys)

6 coincide/agree exactly*

7 just account = equal account

8 conjecture, guess

9 bearing up = keeping/sustaining a course

10 come to a conclusion/decision/deliberate opinion

11 secure me in = feel entirely safe* about

12 chief/most important/leading portion/part/matter

13 pronounce to be good, accept*

14 in fearful sense = with a dreadful/frightening* perception/sensation

ACT I • SCENE 3

Sailor (Within) What ho, what ho, what ho!

Officer A messenger from the galleys.¹⁵

ENTER SAILOR

Duke Now what's the
business?

Sailor The Turkish preparation¹⁶ makes for Rhodes.¹⁷

So was I bid report here to the state 15

By Signior Angelo.¹⁸

Duke (to Senators) How say you by¹⁹ this change?

Senator 1 This

cannot be,

By no assay of reason.²⁰ 'Tis a pageant²¹

To keep us in false gaze.²² When we consider

The importancy of Cyprus to the Turk, 20

And let ourselves again but²³ understand

That, as it²⁴ more concerns the Turk than Rhodes,

So may he²⁵ with more facile question bear it,²⁶

For that²⁷ it stands not in such warlike brace,²⁸

15 Venetian ships

16 expedition, fleet

17 island in the Aegean Sea, W/SW of Turkey

18 first name of the interim Governor of Cyprus, Montano (?)

19 how say you by = what do you say about

20 assay of reason = process/trial* of thought/good sense

21 trick, deception

22 false gaze = looking in the wrong direction

23 again but = further/once more/moreover just

24 Cyprus

25 the Turk

26 more facile question bear it = easier strife win/carry/conquer it (O.E.D.,
s.v. "question," 4)

27 for that = because

28 preparation/defense

ACT I • SCENE 3

25 But altogether lacks the abilities²⁹
That Rhodes is dressed in.³⁰ If we make thought of this,
We must not think the Turk is so unskillful
To leave that latest³¹ which concerns him first,
Neglecting an attempt of ease and gain,³²
30 To wake³³ and wage³⁴ a danger profitless.

Duke Nay, in all confidence,³⁵ he's³⁶ not for Rhodes.

Officer Here is more news.

ENTER MESSENGER

Messenger The Ottomites,³⁷ reverend and gracious,
Steering with due³⁸ course toward the isle of Rhodes,
35 Have there injointed them³⁹ with an after⁴⁰ fleet.

Senator 1 Ay, so I thought. How many,⁴¹ as you guess?

Messenger Of thirty sail.⁴² And now they do re-stem⁴³
Their backward course, bearing with frank⁴⁴ appearance
Their purposes toward Cyprus. Signior Montano,
40 Your trusty and most valiant servitor,

29 strengths, power

30 dressed in = equipped/provided with

31 to the last

32 advantage, profit

33 to wake = in order to exert himself (were the Turks to attack Rhodes)

34 risk

35 certainty, assurance

36 the Turk

37 Ottomans, Turks

38 straight

39 injointed them = joined, united

40 second

41 many in the second fleet

42 ships

43 re-trace (turn back and re-sail in the direction they had just come from)

44 open, undisguised

ACT I • SCENE 3

With his free⁴⁵ duty recommends⁴⁶ you thus,
And prays you to believe him.

Duke 'Tis certain, then, for Cyprus.

Marcus Luccicos,⁴⁷ is not he in town?⁴⁸

Senator 1 He's now in Florence.

45

Duke Write from us to him, post-post-haste despatch.⁴⁹

Senator 1 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 enemy⁵⁰ Ottoman.

(*to Brabantio*) I did not see you. Welcome, gentle signior,
We lacked your counsel and your help tonight.

50

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 care⁵¹

Take hold on me. For my particular⁵² grief

55

Is of so floodgate and o'erbearing⁵³ nature

That it engluts⁵⁴ and swallows other sorrows,

And it is still itself.

45 (1) great, (2) voluntary, willing, open

46 reports, informs

47 the Greek name suggests someone of Cypriot origin, with useful on-site information

48 MARcos luCHicos IS not HE in TOWN

49 speed

50 general enemy = universal enemy (for Christian Europeans)

51 concern, anxiety

52 personal, private

53 floodgate and o'erbearing = strongly streaming/torrential and verwhelming, overpowering

54 gulps down

ACT I • SCENE 3

Duke Why, what's the matter?

Brabantio My daughter! O, my daughter!

Duke and Senators Dead?

60 *Brabantio* Ay, to me.

She is abused, stol'n from me,⁵⁵ and corrupted
 By spells and medicines⁵⁶ bought of mountebanks.⁵⁷
 For nature⁵⁸ so preposterously⁵⁹ to err,⁶⁰
 Being not deficient,⁶¹ blind, or lame of sense,
 65 Sans⁶² witchcraft could not.⁶³

Duke Whoe'er he be that, in this foul proceeding,
 Hath thus beguiled⁶⁴ your daughter of herself,
 And you of her,⁶⁵ the bloody book of law⁶⁶
 You shall yourself read in the bitter letter⁶⁷

70 After⁶⁸ your own sense, yea, though our proper⁶⁹ son
 Stood⁷⁰ in your action.⁷¹

Brabantio Humbly I thank your grace.

55 stoln FROM me

56 drugs

57 itinerant quacks/charlatans

58 a character/disposition

59 irrationally, monstrously, perversely

60 go astray

61 defective

62 without (French)

63 could not = could not be, is impossible

64 cheated, deceived*

65 (fathers had legally recognized possession of unmarried daughters; after marriage, possession passed to husbands)

66 bloody book of law = bloodshed-imposing legal code/set of laws

67 read in the bitter letter = interpret/declare the hard/dire/severe words/statutes

68 according to

69 our proper = my own (the royal "we")

70 were the accused person

71 legal proceeding

ACT I • SCENE 3

Here is the man, this Moor, whom now, it seems,
Your special mandate⁷² for the state affairs⁷³
Hath hither⁷⁴ brought.

Duke and Senators We are very sorry for't.

Duke (to *Othello*) What, in your own part,⁷⁵ can you say to
this? 75

Brabantio Nothing, but this is so.

Othello Most potent,⁷⁶ grave, and reverend signiors,
My very noble and approved⁷⁷ good masters.⁷⁸
That I have ta'en away this old man's daughter,
It is most true; true, I have married her. 80
The very head and front⁷⁹ of my offending⁸⁰
Hath this extent,⁸¹ no more. Rude⁸² am I in my speech,
And little blessed with the soft⁸³ phrase of peace,
For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith,⁸⁴
Till now some nine moons wasted,⁸⁵ they have used⁸⁶ 85
Their dearest⁸⁷ action in the tented field.⁸⁸

72 special mandate = particular/distinct* command/order

73 the state affairs = affairs of state

74 here*

75 in your own part = in your own interest, on your own side

76 powerful, mighty*

77 esteemed

78 chiefs, rulers ("employers")

79 head and front = summit, highest extent

80 offense, transgression

81 size

82 unsophisticated, unlearned, barbarous, rough*

83 pleasant, agreeable, smooth*

84 substance, strength

85 moons wasted = months past/unused (he has not been engaged in war for
the past nine months)

86 performed, carried on

87 most honorable/worthy

88 tented field = battlefield (where soldiers live in tents)

ACT I • SCENE 3

- And little of this great world can I speak,
More than pertains to feats of broil⁸⁹ and battle,
And therefore little shall I grace⁹⁰ my cause
90 In speaking for myself. Yet, by your gracious patience,
I will a round⁹¹ unvarnished tale deliver⁹²
Of my whole course of love, what⁹³ drugs, what charms,
What conjuration,⁹⁴ and what mighty magic –
For such proceeding I am charged withal⁹⁵ –
I won his daughter.
- 95 *Brabantio* A maiden never bold,
Of spirit so still⁹⁶ and quiet that her motion⁹⁷
Blushed at herself, and she, in spite of nature,
Of years,⁹⁸ of country,⁹⁹ credit, everything,
To fall in love with what she feared to look on!
100 It is¹⁰⁰ judgment maimed¹⁰¹ and most imperfect¹⁰²
That will confess¹⁰³ perfection¹⁰⁴ so could err
Against all rules of nature, and¹⁰⁵ must be driven

89 turmoil

90 embellish, adorn

91 full, complete

92 speak*

93 with what

94 invoking of spirits

95 likewise, moreover

96 (1) habitually silent, subdued, meek, (2) calm, unruffled

97 emotions, desires

98 the difference in years

99 race, culture*

100 it is = only a

101 deficient, crippled

102 incomplete

103 declare, concede, admit

104 completeness, finished/grown/matured excellence

105 and therefore

ACT I • SCENE 3

To find out practices of cunning¹⁰⁶ hell,
 Why this should be. I therefore vouch¹⁰⁷ again,
 That with some mixtures¹⁰⁸ powerful o'er the blood, 105
 Or with some dram conjured¹⁰⁹ to this effect,
 He wrought¹¹⁰ upon her.

Duke To vouch this is no proof,
 Without more wider and more overt test¹¹¹
 Than these thin habits¹¹² and poor¹¹³ likelihoods
 Of modern seeming¹¹⁴ do prefer¹¹⁵ against him. 110

Senator 1 But, Othello, speak.
 Did you by indirect and forcèd courses¹¹⁶
 Subdue and poison this young maid's affections?
 Or came it by request, and such fair question
 As soul to soul affordeth?¹¹⁷

Othello I do beseech you, 115
 Send for the lady to¹¹⁸ the Sagittary,
 And let her speak of me before¹¹⁹ her father.
 If you do find me foul in her report,

106 skilled/clever/crafty*

107 assert, allege, bear witness*

108 compounds

109 dram conjured = draught/drink magically corrupted

110 worked, acted, operated

111 overt test = open/plain examination/evidence

112 thin habits = tenuous/flimsy/slight traits/usages

113 scanty, insufficient

114 modern seeming = ordinary/commonplace appearance

115 lay (one lays a charge against a person)

116 indirect and forcèd courses = corrupt/deceitful and imposed/unnatural
 actions/practices*

117 yields, furnishes

118 at

119 in front/the presence of

ACT I • SCENE 3

The trust, the office¹²⁰ I do hold of¹²¹ you,
120 Not only take away, but let your sentence¹²²
Even fall upon my life.

Duke Fetch Desdemona hither.

Othello Ancient, conduct¹²³ them. You best know the place.

EXEUNT IAGO AND ATTENDANTS

And till she come, as truly as to heaven
I do confess the vices of my blood,¹²⁴
125 So justly¹²⁵ to your grave ears I'll present¹²⁶
How I did thrive in this fair lady's love,
And she in mine.

Duke Say it, Othello.

Othello Her father loved me, oft invited me,
Still¹²⁷ questioned me the story¹²⁸ of my life,
130 From year to year – the battles, sieges, fortunes,
That I have passed.¹²⁹
I ran it through, even from my boyish days
To th'very moment that he bade me tell it.
Wherein¹³⁰ I spake of most disastrous chances,¹³¹

120 post, employment, service, duty*

121 from

122 judgment

123 guide, lead

124 vices of my blood = moral defects/sins of my disposition/emotions
(Othello here, as elsewhere, declares himself a practicing Christian)

125 truthfully, correctly

126 describe, set forth

127 always*

128 the story = about the story/history

129 experienced, gone through

130 in telling that story

131 disastrous chances = unfortunate/ill-fated events/circumstances*

ACT I • SCENE 3

Of moving¹³² accidents by flood and field,¹³³ 135
 Of hair-breadth scapes i' the imminent¹³⁴ deadly breach,¹³⁵
 Of being taken¹³⁶ by the insolent¹³⁷ foe
 And sold to slavery; of my redemption thence¹³⁸
 And portance¹³⁹ in my traveler's history,
 Wherein of antres¹⁴⁰ vast and deserts idle,¹⁴¹ 140
 Rough quarries,¹⁴² rocks, and hills whose heads touch
 heaven,
 It was my hint¹⁴³ to speak. Such was my process.¹⁴⁴
 And of the cannibals that each other eat –
 The anthropophagi¹⁴⁵ – and men whose heads
 Grew beneath their shoulders. These things to hear 145
 Would Desdemona seriously incline.¹⁴⁶
 But still the house affairs would draw her hence.
 Which ever as she could with haste dispatch,¹⁴⁷
 She'd come again, and with a greedy ear
 Devour up my discourse. Which I observing, 150

132 affecting to feelings/mind

133 by flood and field = on water and land

134 threatening, close at hand

135 breakthrough, assault

136 captured

137 proud, arrogant, imperious

138 from that/there*

139 my behavior/conduct

140 caves, caverns

141 empty, vacant

142 rough quarries = wild/broken/uneven masses of stone

143 occasion, opportunity

144 (1) course, manner of proceeding, (2) narrative, story

145 ANthroPOfaGIY

146 seriously incline = earnestly bend/lean toward

147 settle, dispose of, finish

ACT I • SCENE 3

Took once a pliant¹⁴⁸ hour, and found good means¹⁴⁹
 To draw from her a prayer¹⁵⁰ of earnest¹⁵¹ heart
 That I would all my pilgrimage dilate,¹⁵²
 Whereof by parcels¹⁵³ she had something heard,
 155 But not intently.¹⁵⁴ I did consent,
 And often did beguile her of¹⁵⁵ her tears,
 When I did speak of some distressful stroke¹⁵⁶
 That my youth suffered. My story being done,¹⁵⁷
 She gave me for my pains a world of kisses.¹⁵⁸
 160 She swore, in faith, 'twas strange, 'twas passing¹⁵⁹ 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,
 165 I should but teach him how to tell my story,
 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 pity¹⁶⁰ them.
 This only is the witchcraft I have used.

148 suitable, apt

149 methods, ways*

150 request, petition

151 of earnest = made with serious/ardent

152 pilgrimage dilate = travels describe/set forth at length

153 parts, units

154 with full attention

155 beguile her of = win/draw/charm from her

156 blow, painful/injurious occurrence

157 finished*

158 light touch of the lips, as still practiced in Continental greeting (Quarto: sighs)

159 surpassingly, extremely

160 feel sorry/grieve/compassion for

ACT I • SCENE 3

Here comes the lady. Let her witness¹⁶¹ it. 170

ENTER DESDEMONA, IAGO, AND ATTENDANTS

Duke I think this tale would win my daughter too.
 Good Brabantio,
 Take up this mangled¹⁶² matter at the best.¹⁶³
 Men do their broken weapons¹⁶⁴ rather use
 Than their bare hands.

Brabantio I pray you, hear her speak. 175
 If she confess that she was half the wooer,
 Destruction on my head if my bad¹⁶⁵ blame
 Light¹⁶⁶ on the man. Come hither, gentle mistress.¹⁶⁷
 Do you perceive in all this noble company
 Where most you owe obedience?¹⁶⁸

Desdemona My noble father, 180
 I do perceive here a divided duty.
 To you I am bound¹⁶⁹ for life and education.¹⁷⁰
 My life and education both do learn me
 How to respect you. You are the lord of duty,
 I am hitherto¹⁷¹ your daughter. But here's my husband, 185
 And so much duty as my mother showed

161 testify to

162 chopped up, confused

163 at the best = in the best way possible

164 (meaning that he remains, at least, her father?)

165 defective, faulty, incorrect

166 descend, fall

167 (before her elopement and marriage, he would have addressed her as "miss";
 mistress = the full original form of the modern abbreviation, "Mrs.")

168 oBEEDyuns

169 obliged, indebted

170 rearing, bringing up

171 until now

ACT I • SCENE 3

To you, preferring¹⁷² you before her father,
 So much I challenge¹⁷³ that I may profess
 Due to the Moor, my lord.

190 *Brabantio* God be with you. I have done.

Please it¹⁷⁴ your grace, on to the state affairs.
 I had rather to adopt a child than get¹⁷⁵ it.
 Come hither, Moor.

I here do give thee that with all my heart
 195 Which, but thou hast¹⁷⁶ already, with all my heart
 I would keep from thee. (*to Desdemona*) For your sake,¹⁷⁷
 jewel,
 I am glad at soul I have no other child,
 For thy escape¹⁷⁸ would teach me tyranny,
 To hang logs¹⁷⁹ on them. (*to Duke*) I have done, my lord.

200 *Duke* Let me speak like yourself, and lay a sentence¹⁸⁰
 Which, as a grise¹⁸¹ or step, may help these lovers
 Into your favor.¹⁸²
 When remedies are past, the griefs are ended
 By seeing the worst, which late¹⁸³ on hopes depended.¹⁸⁴

172 setting

173 assert, claim*

174 please it = may it please

175 beget, father

176 but thou hast = except that you have it

177 for your sake = because of what you have done (sake = blame, offense, guilt)

178 outrageous transgression (*O.E.D.*, s.v. "escape," 7)

179 blocks of wood hung on prisoners

180 lay a sentence = submit / present an (1) opinion, (2) maxim, aphorism

181 flight of steps, stairway

182 approving/kind regard, goodwill

183 recently

184 (1) hung, were suspended, (3) relied/were counted on

To mourn a mischief¹⁸⁵ that is past and gone 205
 Is the next¹⁸⁶ way to draw new mischief on.
 What cannot be preserved when fortune takes,
 Patience her injury¹⁸⁷ a mockery makes.
 The robbed that smiles¹⁸⁸ steals something from the thief.
 He robs himself that spends¹⁸⁹ a bootless¹⁹⁰ grief. 210

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 comfort¹⁹¹ which from thence¹⁹² he hears.
 But he bears both the sentence and the sorrow 215
 That, to¹⁹³ pay grief, must of¹⁹⁴ poor patience borrow.
 These sentences, to sugar or to gall,¹⁹⁵
 Being strong on both sides, are equivocal.¹⁹⁶
 But words are words: I never yet did hear
 That the bruised heart was pierced through the ears. 220
 I humbly beseech you, proceed to th'affairs of state.

Duke The Turk with a most mighty preparation makes for
 Cyprus. Othello, the fortitude¹⁹⁷ of the place is best known

185 evil, misfortune

186 shortest, most direct

187 loss, harm

188 the robbed that smiles = he who, being robbed, smiles

189 expends, wastes words/time on

190 remediless, incurable, useless

191 free comfort = (1) noble/generous, (2) unrestricted, allowable
 encouragement/support* (Brabantio speaks carefully tongue-in-cheek)

192 then on

193 that, to = who, in order to

194 from

195 bile, bitterness

196 ambiguous

197 strength, fortified state

ACT I • SCENE 3

- 225 to you. And though we have there a substitute¹⁹⁸ of most
 allowed sufficiency,¹⁹⁹ yet opinion,²⁰⁰ a sovereign²⁰¹ mistress
 of effects,²⁰² throws a more safer voice²⁰³ on you. You must
 therefore be content to slubber the gloss²⁰⁴ of your new
 fortunes with this more stubborn and boisterous²⁰⁵
 expedition.²⁰⁶
- 230 *Othello* The tyrant custom, most grave senators,
 Hath made the flinty and steel couch²⁰⁷ of war
 My thrice-driven²⁰⁸ bed of down. I do agnize²⁰⁹
 A natural²¹⁰ and prompt alacrity²¹¹
 I find in hardness,²¹² and do undertake²¹³
- 235 These present²¹⁴ wars against the Ottomites.
 Most humbly, therefore, bending to your state,²¹⁵
 I crave²¹⁶ fit disposition²¹⁷ for my wife;

198 deputy (Montano)

199 allowed sufficiency = satisfactory competence

200 judgment, belief

201 authoritative, governing, supreme

202 results

203 judgment, vote

204 slubber the gloss = stain/smear the glow/luster

205 stubborn and boisterous = difficult/intractable and unyielding/truculent

206 warlike enterprise

207 flinty and steel couch = rugged and hard bed

208 thrice-driven = feathers that have been three times dried with a fan, and
 thus made soft enough to lie on

209 confess

210 instinctive, inherent, innate

211 prompt alacrity = ready willingness

212 rigor, difficulty

213 take on, agree to carry on

214 current ("aforesaid")

215 bending to your state = bowing to your (the Duke's) lofty status/rank/
 position

216 ask, request

217 arrangements, living conditions

ACT I • SCENE 3

Due reference of place and exhibition,²¹⁸
 With such accommodation and besort²¹⁹
 As levels²²⁰ with her breeding. 240

Duke Why, at her father's?

Brabantio I will not have it so.

Othello Nor I.

Desdemona Nor would I there reside,
 To put my father in impatient²²¹ thoughts
 By being in his eye. Most gracious Duke, 245
 To my unfolding²²² lend your prosperous²²³ ear,
 And let me find a charter²²⁴ in your voice
 T'assist my simpleness.²²⁵

Duke What would you, Desdemona?

Desdemona That I love the Moor to live²²⁶ with him,
 My downright violence²²⁷ and storm of fortunes²²⁸ 250
 May trumpet to the world. My heart's subdued²²⁹
 Even to the very quality²³⁰ of my lord.
 I saw Othello's visage in his mind,²³¹

218 reference of place and exhibition = assignment of residence and maintenance/support/allowance

219 accommodation and besort = lodgings and suitable company/attendance

220 is equal/matches

221 uncomfortable, irritable

222 statement, explanation?

223 favorable

224 grant of privilege

225 innocence, guilelessness

226 to live = to the point/with the desire/purpose of living

227 downright violence = out and out/positively/thoroughly vehement/intense/passionate conduct

228 storm of fortunes = disturbance/tumult of events

229 conquered, overcome, overpowered

230 profession, business

231 in his mind = as he sees himself (a backhanded reference to Othello's blackness, which he himself is not required to see, and does not see?)

ACT I • SCENE 3

And to his honors and his valiant²³² parts
255 Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate.²³³
So that, dear lords, if I be left behind,
A moth of peace,²³⁴ and he go to the war,
The rites²³⁵ for which²³⁶ I love him are bereft²³⁷ me,
And I a heavy²³⁸ interim shall support²³⁹
260 By²⁴⁰ his dear absence. Let me go with him.
Othello Let her have your voice.
Vouch with me, heaven, I therefore beg it not²⁴¹
To please the palate²⁴² of my appetite,²⁴³
Nor to comply with heat²⁴⁴ – the young affects²⁴⁵
265 In me defunct²⁴⁶ – and proper²⁴⁷ satisfaction,
But to be free and bounteous²⁴⁸ to her mind.²⁴⁹
And heaven defend your good souls, that²⁵⁰ you think
I will your serious and great business scant²⁵¹

232 strong, brave, bold

233 dedicate, devote

234 moth of peace = fluttering insignificant/calm creature (?)

235 practices (it has been suggested that Shakespeare meant “rights”: the words were virtual homonyms)

236 for which = because of which

237 taken from

238 gloomy, dark*

239 shall support = must endure

240 because of

241 therefore beg it not = do not ask it in order

242 liking, pleasure

243 desire, cravings

244 comply with heat = fulfill/satisfy passion/sexual excitement

245 desires, feelings

246 are extinct/dead

247 personal

248 free and bounteous = honorable/open-minded and generous

249 judgment, intention, wishes

250 if

251 diminish, neglect

ACT I • SCENE 3

For²⁵² she is with me. No, when light-winged toys²⁵³
 Of feathered²⁵⁴ Cupid seel²⁵⁵ with wanton dullness²⁵⁶ 270
 My speculative and officed instruments,²⁵⁷
 That my disports corrupt and taint²⁵⁸ my business,
 Let housewives make a skillet of²⁵⁹ my helm,²⁶⁰
 And all indign and base adversities²⁶¹
 Make head²⁶² against my estimation.²⁶³ 275
Duke Be²⁶⁴ it as you²⁶⁵ shall privately determine,
 Either for her stay or going. The affair cries²⁶⁶ haste,
 And speed must answer²⁶⁷ it.
Senator 1 You must away tonight.
Othello With all my heart.
Duke At nine i'the morning, here we'll²⁶⁸ meet again. 280
 Othello, leave some officer behind,

252 because

253 light-winged toys = evanescent/vaporous amorous entertainment/trifles

254 winged

255 blind, hoodwink (as a hawk with eyes stitched closed, for falconry/hunting training)

256 wanton dullness = undisciplined/self-indulgent sluggishness/stupidity

257 speculative and officed instruments = investigative/visual and (other) specially functioning organs

258 that my disports corrupt and taint my business = so that my pastimes pervert and tarnish/injure

259 out of, from

260 helmet

261 indign and base adversities = disgraceful/unworthy and despicable/low misfortunes/afflictions

262 make head = rise up, advance

263 reputation (ESTiMAYseeON)

264 let it be

265 you both

266 affair cries = business/matter calls/cries out/demands

267 undertake, be responsible for

268 we = Duke and Senators

ACT I • SCENE 3

And he shall our commission²⁶⁹ bring to you,
With such things else²⁷⁰ of quality and respect²⁷¹
As doth import²⁷² you.

Othello So please your grace, my ancient,
285 A man he is of honesty²⁷³ and trust.
To his conveyance²⁷⁴ I assign²⁷⁵ my wife,
With what else needful your good grace shall think
To be sent after me.

Duke Let it be so.
Good night to everyone. (*to Brabantio*) And noble signior,
290 If virtue no delighted beauty²⁷⁶ lack,
Your son-in-law is far more fair than black.

Senator 1 Adieu, brave²⁷⁷ Moor, use²⁷⁸ Desdemona well.

Brabantio Look to her,²⁷⁹ Moor, if thou hast eyes to see.
She has deceived her father, and may thee.

EXEUNT DUKE, SENATORS, OFFICERS

295 *Othello* My life upon her faith. Honest Iago,
My Desdemona must I leave to thee
I prythee,²⁸⁰ let thy wife attend²⁸¹ on her,

269 document certifying appointment and containing orders, instructions, etc.

270 things else = other* things

271 quality and respect = rank/title* and deference/courtesies

272 involve, relate to

273 honor, respectability, decency*

274 escorting

275 designate, consign

276 delighted beauty = delightful beauty (applicable to men as well as women)

277 worthy, excellent*

278 treat*

279 look to her = keep watch on/beware of her

280 pray thee

281 accompany, watch over, serve

ACT I • SCENE 3

And bring them after in the best advantage.²⁸²
 Come, Desdemona, I have but an hour
 Of love, of worldly matters and direction²⁸³ 300
 To spend with thee. We must obey²⁸⁴ the time.²⁸⁵

EXEUNT OTHELLO AND DESDEMONA

Roderigo Iago.

Iago What say'st thou, noble heart?²⁸⁶

Roderigo What will I do, thinkest thou?

Iago Why, go to bed and sleep. 305

Roderigo I will incontinently²⁸⁷ drown myself.

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

Roderigo It is silliness to live when to live is torment. And then
 have we a prescription²⁸⁸ to die when death is our physician. 310

Iago O villainous!²⁸⁹ I have looked upon the world for four
 times seven years, and since I could distinguish betwixt a ben-
 efit and an injury, I never found man that knew how to love
 himself. Ere²⁹⁰ I would say I would drown myself for the love
 of a guinea-hen,²⁹¹ I would change²⁹² my humanity with a 315
 baboon.

282 in the best advantage = at the most favorable opportunity* (as soon as possible)

283 guidance, instruction

284 submit to, comply with, act according to

285 age, era*

286 heart = familiar term of endearment (surely ironic)

287 straightway, at once

288 explicit instruction/order

289 what bad manners, how shameful/atrocious/horrible*

290 before*

291 whore

292 exchange

Roderigo What should I do? I confess it is my shame to be so fond,²⁹³ but it is not in my virtue²⁹⁴ to amend it.

Iago Virtue? A fig!²⁹⁵ 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or
 320 thus. Our bodies are gardens, to the which our wills are
 gardeners. So that if we will plant nettles or sow lettuce, set
 hyssop²⁹⁶ and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender²⁹⁷
 of herbs or distract²⁹⁸ it with many, either to have it sterile
 with²⁹⁹ idleness or manured with industry,³⁰⁰ why, the power
 325 and corrigible authority³⁰¹ of this lies in our wills. If the
 balance³⁰² of our lives had not one scale³⁰³ of reason to
 poise³⁰⁴ another³⁰⁵ of sensuality, the blood and baseness of
 our natures would conduct us to most preposterous
 conclusions. But we have reason³⁰⁶ to cool our raging
 330 motions,³⁰⁷ our carnal stings,³⁰⁸ our unbitted³⁰⁹ lusts,
 whereof I take this, that you call love, to be a sect or scion.³¹⁰

Roderigo It cannot be.

293 infatuated, foolish, silly*

294 power

295 a fig = fiddlesticks, nonsense (contemptuous, and accompanied – as in *Romeo and Juliet* – by gestures very like today’s “giving the finger”)

296 set hyssop = set out / plant small bushy aromatic herb (HISSup)

297 kind

298 confuse, spoil, disorder

299 either to have it sterile with = either have it unproductive / barren from

300 manured with industry = cultivated / tilled diligently

301 corrigible authority = correctable power / right

302 (1) scale (in modern usage), (2) metaphorical balance

303 one pan of the two pans employed in a balance scale

304 balance, steady

305 another scale

306 rationality, logic, thought

307 emotions

308 irritations, pains

309 unrestrained

310 sect or scion = class or shoot / twig / descendant

ACT I • SCENE 3

Iago It is merely a lust of the blood and a permission³¹¹ of
the will. Come, be a man. Drown thyself? Drown cats and
blind puppies. I have professed³¹² me thy friend, and I confess 335
me knit to thy deserving³¹³ with cables³¹⁴ of perdurable³¹⁵
toughness. I could never better stead³¹⁶ thee than now. Put
money in thy purse,³¹⁷ follow³¹⁸ thou the wars, defeat³¹⁹ thy
favor³²⁰ with an usurped³²¹ beard. I say, put money in thy
purse. It cannot be that Desdemona should long continue her 340
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 sequestration³²² – put but³²³ money in thy purse.
These Moors are changeable in their wills.³²⁴ Fill thy purse
with money. The food that to him now is as luscious as 345
locusts³²⁵ shall be to him shortly as acerb³²⁶ as the
coloquintida.³²⁷ She must change³²⁸ for youth. When she is

311 license, liberty

312 declared

313 knit to thy deserving = tied/knotted to your merit

314 heavy ropes

315 permanent, everlasting

316 assist, be of use/profit to

317 put money in thy purse = get cash (“make yourself liquid”)

318 go forward with, accompany

319 nullify

320 face, appearance*

321 borrowed, false

322 answerable sequestration = responsive/proper/suitable separation/
disjunction

323 put but = just put

324 desires

325 sweet fruit of the carob tree

326 sour, bitter

327 a bitter fruit (koLAKwinTEEda)

328 exchange him

ACT I • SCENE 3

sated with his body, she will find³²⁹ the error of her choice.
 She must have change,³³⁰ she must. Therefore put money in
 350 thy purse. If thou wilt needs³³¹ damn thyself,³³² do it a more
 delicate³³³ way than drowning. Make all the money thou
 canst. If sanctimony³³⁴ and a frail vow betwixt an erring³³⁵
 barbarian and a supersubtle³³⁶ Venetian be not too hard³³⁷
 for my wits (and³³⁸ all the tribe of hell),³³⁹ thou shalt
 355 enjoy³⁴⁰ her. Therefore make money. A pox of³⁴¹ drowning
 thyself! It is clean³⁴² out of the way.³⁴³ Seek thou rather to
 be hanged in compassing³⁴⁴ thy joy than to be drowned and
 go without her.

Roderigo Wilt thou be fast³⁴⁵ to my hopes, if I depend³⁴⁶ on the
 360 issue?³⁴⁷

Iago Thou art sure of me. Go, make money: I have told thee

329 understand, discover

330 a substitution

331 necessarily

332 damn thyself: suicide was considered a grave sin

333 delightful, pleasant

334 hypocritical holiness

335 wandering, roaming*

336 over-subtle

337 difficult

338 and also for

339 (?) tribe = population; Iago pretty clearly is referring to demons, etc.; but why? Is this a remark to himself or to Roderigo?

340 possess, have sexual intercourse with

341 on

342 completely

343 out of the way = off the proper path,* out of the question, mistaken ("not done")

344 encompassing, achieving, devising

345 firm, unshaken, steadfast

346 rely, count on

347 outcome, result*

ACT I • SCENE 3

often, and I re-tell thee again and again, I hate the Moor. My
 cause is hearted;³⁴⁸ thine hath no less reason. Let us be
 conjunctive³⁴⁹ in our revenge against him. If thou canst
 cuckold him, thou dost thyself a pleasure, me a sport.³⁵⁰ 365
 There are many events in the womb of time which will be
 delivered.³⁵¹ Traverse.³⁵² Go, provide thy money. We will
 have more of this tomorrow. Adieu.

Roderigo Where shall we meet i' the morning?

Iago At my lodging. 370

Roderigo I'll be with thee betimes.³⁵³

Iago Go to,³⁵⁴ farewell. Do you hear, Roderigo?

Roderigo What say you?

Iago No more of drowning, do you hear?

Roderigo I am changed. I'll go sell all my land. 375

EXIT RODERIGO

Iago Thus do I ever³⁵⁵ make my fool my purse,
 For I mine own gained³⁵⁶ knowledge should profane³⁵⁷
 If I would time expend³⁵⁸ with such a snipe³⁵⁹
 But³⁶⁰ for my sport and profit. I hate the Moor,

348 fixed/established in the heart

349 united

350 amusement, recreation, entertainment*

351 determined, resolved

352 move along, act

353 at an early hour

354 go to = go on ("oh yeah")*

355 always

356 acquired

357 violate, desecrate

358 consume

359 marsh bird (a common insult)

360 except

ACT I • SCENE 3

380 And it is thought abroad³⁶¹ that 'twixt my sheets
 He has done my office.³⁶² I know not if't be true,
 But I, for mere³⁶³ suspicion in that kind,³⁶⁴
 Will do³⁶⁵ as if for surety.³⁶⁶ He holds me well,³⁶⁷
 The better shall my purpose work on him.
 385 Cassio's a proper³⁶⁸ man. Let me see now;
 To get his place, and to plume up³⁶⁹ my will³⁷⁰
 In double knavery – How? How? Let's see.
 After some time, to abuse Othello's ear
 390 That he³⁷¹ is too familiar with his³⁷² wife.
 He³⁷³ hath a person,³⁷⁴ and a smooth dispose,³⁷⁵
 To be suspected, framed³⁷⁶ to make women false.³⁷⁷
 The Moor is of a free and open nature,
 That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
 395 And will as tenderly³⁷⁸ be led by the nose
 As asses are.

361 widely

362 function (as a husband)

363 pure, sheer, downright*

364 in that kind = of that sort

365 act

366 certain

367 holds me well = thinks well of/esteems me

368 (1) respectable, (2) handsome*

369 adorn (with metaphorical feathers)

370 desire, inclination

371 Cassio

372 Othello's

373 Cassio

374 semblance, appearance

375 smooth dispose = pleasant/affable/plausible external manner/air

376 fashioned/made*

377 unfaithful, deceptive, deceiving

378 gently, softly

ACT I • SCENE 3

I have't. It is engendered.³⁷⁹ Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.

EXIT

379 begotten, generated

Act 2



SCENE I

*Cyprus*¹

ENTER MONTANO AND TWO GENTLEMEN

Montano What from the cape² can you discern at sea?

Gentleman 1 Nothing at all. It is a high-wrought flood.³

I cannot, 'twixt the heaven and the main,⁴

Descry⁵ a sail.

5 *Montano* Methinks the wind hath spoke aloud at⁶ land,
A fuller⁷ blast ne'er shook our battlements.⁸

1 (editorial conjectures have Gentleman 1 placed (1) above, (2) to the side, or (3) to the back. But not only do Montano's first words make it uncertain whether Gentleman 1 is at the moment seeing or reporting what he has previously seen, but in line 36 Montano suggests that they now go "to the seaside.")

2 projecting headland/promontory

3 high-wrought flood = (1) very agitated sea, (2) sea casting up very high waves

4 mainland

5 get sight of, perceive, detect

6 spoke aloud at = sounded/reverberated loudly on

7 stronger, larger

8 fortifications built on top of defensive walls

ACT 2 • SCENE I

If it hath ruffianed so⁹ upon the sea,
 What ribs of oak,¹⁰ when mountains melt¹¹ on them,
 Can hold the mortise?¹² What shall we hear of this?

Gentleman 2 A segregation¹³ of the Turkish fleet. 10

For, do but¹⁴ stand upon the foaming¹⁵ shore,
 The chidden billow¹⁶ seems to pelt¹⁷ the clouds,
 The wind-shaked surge,¹⁸ with high and monstrous main,¹⁹
 Seems to cast water on the burning Bear,²⁰
 And quench the guards²¹ of th'ever-fixèd pole. 15
 I never did like molestation view²²
 On the enchafèd²³ flood.

Montano If that²⁴ the Turkish fleet
 Be not ensheltered and embayed,²⁵ they are drowned.
 It is impossible to bear it out.²⁶

9 ruffianed so = blustered/raged so violently

10 ribs of oak = curved oaken frame timbers of a ship's hull

11 mountains melt = mountainlike waves of water break (as clouds melt into rain)

12 joined beams

13 a segregation = what we shall hear is a breakup/dispersion

14 for, do but = because, just

15 covered with foam (modern usage: "foamy")

16 chidden billow = blast-driven swelling waves

17 strike

18 waves, water

19 power, force

20 star constellation Ursa Minor ("Little Bear"): starlight as metaphorical "fire"

21 stars, though just which stars is unclear

22 like molestation view [adjective, noun, verb] = such troubled/agitated waves to see ("seeing such agitated waves")

23 furious

24 if that = if it turns out that

25 ensheltered and embayed = protected/screened and enclosed in a bay or other recess

26 bear it out = sustain/endure

ACT 2 • SCENE I

ENTER GENTLEMAN 3

- 20 *Gentleman 3* News, lads.²⁷ Our wars are done.
The desperate²⁸ tempest hath so banged²⁹ the Turks
That their designment³⁰ halts. A noble³¹ ship of Venice
Hath seen a grievous wrack and sufferance³²
On most³³ part of their fleet.
- Montano* How!³⁴ Is this true?
- 25 *Gentleman 3* The ship is here put in, a Veronessa.³⁵
Michael Cassio,
Lieutenant to the warlike Moor, Othello,
Is³⁶ come on shore. The Moor himself at sea,³⁷
And is in full commission here³⁸ for Cyprus.
- 30 *Montano* I am glad on't.³⁹ 'Tis⁴⁰ a worthy governor.
Gentleman 3 But this same Cassio, though he speak of comfort⁴¹
Touching⁴² the Turkish loss, yet he looks sadly,⁴³
And prays the Moor be safe, for they were parted
With foul and violent tempest.

27 spirited men*

28 extreme, hopelessly bad/awful, highly dangerous

29 violently beaten, knocked about

30 undertaking, enterprise

31 large

32 wrack and sufferance = disaster/destruction/ruin and damage

33 the largest/greatest

34 (exclamation)

35 a vessel from Verona

36 has

37 at sea = is at sea

38 is in full commission here = will be here in complete command/authority

39 of it

40 it/he is

41 of comfort = comfortingly

42 about

43 grave, sober

ACT 2 • SCENE I

Montano Pray heavens he be.
 For I have served him, and the man commands 35
 Like a full⁴⁴ soldier. Let's to the seaside, ho!
 As well to see the vessel that's come in
 As to throw out⁴⁵ our eyes for brave Othello,⁴⁶
 Even till⁴⁷ we make⁴⁸ the main and the aerial blue
 An indistinct regard.⁴⁹

Gentleman 3 Come, let's do so. 40
 For every⁵⁰ minute is expectancy⁵¹
 Of more arrivancy.⁵²

ENTER CASSIO

Cassio Thanks, you the valiant of this warlike isle,⁵³
 That so approve⁵⁴ the Moor. O let the heavens
 Give him defense against the elements, 45
 For I have lost⁵⁵ him on a dangerous sea.

Montano Is he well shipped?

Cassio His bark⁵⁶ is stoutly timbered,⁵⁷ and his pilot⁵⁸

44 solid, satisfying, complete

45 throw out = look outward (to sea)

46 as TO throw OUT our EYES for BRAVE oTHELlo (n.b. as scanned, for prosodic purposes, but not as spoken)

47 as far as (ee'n TILL)

48 reach the point, produce/create a visual prospect in which

49 indistinct regard = indistinguishable view/prospect/sight

50 at any

51 is expectancy = there is the expectation

52 arrival

53 thanks YOU the VALyant OF this WARlike ISLE

54 commend

55 been separated from

56 comparatively small ship

57 stoutly timbered = strongly/solidly* constructed

58 helmsman, steersman, guide

ACT 2 • SCENE I

Of very expert and approved allowance,⁵⁹
50 Therefore my hopes, not surfeited to death,⁶⁰
Stand in bold cure.⁶¹

Voices within A sail, a sail, a sail!

ENTER GENTLEMAN 4

Cassio What noise?⁶²

Gentleman 4 The town is empty.⁶³ On the brow o'⁶⁴ the sea
Stand ranks⁶⁵ of people, and they cry, "A sail!"

55 *Cassio* My hopes do shape him⁶⁶ for the governor.⁶⁷

CANNON WITHIN

Gentleman 2 They⁶⁸ do discharge their shot of courtesy.⁶⁹
Our friends at least.⁷⁰

Cassio I pray you, sir, go forth,
And give us truth who 'tis that is arrived.

Gentleman 2 I shall.

59 expert and approved allowance = experienced/skillful and proven/tested/
esteemed reputation

60 not surfeited to death = so long as they are not pushed too hard ("fed to the
point of killing them")

61 stand in bold cure = remain in fearless anxiety ("confident but
concerned")

62 what is that loud outcry/clamor/shouting

63 vacated

64 brow o' = hill/cliff overlooking

65 rows/lines

66 shape him = picture it (the approaching ship)

67 Othello

68 (1) Cyprus cannon, in welcome, or more probably (2) the arriving ship, as a
signal of peaceful intent

69 shot of courtesy: cannon (often a specified number) were fired as a
welcoming salute

70 (not that is the Turks, or any other enemy)

ACT 2 • SCENE I

EXIT GENTLEMAN 2

Montano But good lieutenant, is your general wived?⁷¹ 60
Cassio Most fortunately. He hath achieved⁷² a maid
 That paragons⁷³ description and wild fame,⁷⁴
 One that excels⁷⁵ the quirks of blazoning⁷⁶ pens,
 And in th'essential vesture of creation⁷⁷
 Does tire the ingeniver.⁷⁸

ENTER GENTLEMAN 2

How now? Who has put in? 65
Gentleman 2 'Tis one Iago, ancient to the general.
Cassio Ha's⁷⁹ had most favorable and happy speed.⁸⁰
 Tempests themselves,⁸¹ high seas, and howling winds,
 The guttered⁸² rocks, and congregated⁸³ sands,
 Traitors ensteeped⁸⁴ to clog⁸⁵ the guiltless keel,⁸⁶ 70

71 married

72 won

73 surpasses

74 wild fame = uncontrolled/extravagant public report/celebrity

75 is superior to, outdoes

76 quirks of blazoning = quibbles/tricks of portraying/descriptive

77 essential vesture of creation = inherent/intrinsic garb/raiment/clothing of
 the imagination/wit/intelligence

78 tire the ingeniver = exhausts/wearies/fatigues the contriver (verbal
 "engineer": Cassio himself)

79 ha's = he has

80 favorable and happy speed = agreeable/pleasing and lucky (1) good fortune,
 or (2) rapidity

81 tempests themselves = even tempests

82 grooved, worn away

83 clustered, massed

84 stationed underwater

85 obstruct, hamper

86 ship's bottom

ACT 2 • SCENE I

CASSIO AND THE OTHERS KNEEL

Hall to thee, lady, and the grace of heaven, 85
Before, behind thee, and on every hand¹⁰⁰
Enwheel¹⁰¹ thee round!

Desdemona I thank you, valiant¹⁰² Cassio.
What tidings can you tell me of my lord?

Cassio He is not yet arrived, nor know I aught
But that he's well, and will be shortly here. 90

Desdemona O, but I fear – How lost you company?¹⁰³

Cassio The great contention¹⁰⁴ of the sea and skies
Parted our fellowship.¹⁰⁵ But, hark!¹⁰⁶ A sail.

Voices within A sail, a sail!

SOUND OF CANNONS WITHIN

Gentleman 2 They give their greeting to the citadel.¹⁰⁷
This likewise is a friend.

Cassio (to *Gentleman 2*) See for¹⁰⁸ the news. 95

EXIT GENTLEMAN 2

(to *Iago*) Good ancient, you are welcome. (to *Emilia*) Welcome,
mistress.

Let it not gall¹⁰⁹ your patience, good Iago,

100 on every hand = from every quarter, on all sides

101 encircle, surround

102 stalwart, brave, bold (a conventional/polite usage)

103 companionship (sailing together)

104 strife, quarrel

105 parted our fellowship = divided/broke our partnership/company

106 a cry of excitement

107 fortress commanding the city/port*

108 see for = look for, try to find

109 chafe, vex, harass

ACT 2 • SCENE I

That I extend¹¹⁰ my manners.¹¹¹ 'Tis my breeding¹¹²
That gives¹¹³ me this ¹¹⁴ show of courtesy.

CASSIO KISSES EMILIA

100 *Iago* Sir, would¹¹⁵ she give you so¹¹⁶ much of her lips
As of her tongue she oft bestows¹¹⁷ on me,
You'd have enough.

Desdemona Alas, she has no speech.¹¹⁸

Iago In faith, too much.
I find it still when I have list¹¹⁹ to sleep.

105 Marry, before your ladyship, I grant
She puts¹²⁰ her tongue a little in her heart,
And chides¹²¹ with thinking.

Emilia You have little cause¹²² to say so.

Iago Come on, come on.¹²³ You¹²⁴ are pictures¹²⁵ out of
doors,
Bells¹²⁶ in your parlors,¹²⁷ wild cats¹²⁸ in your kitchens,

110 stretch out, widen, enlarge

111 polite behavior

112 parentage, rearing, training

113 grants, bestows on

114 audacious, presumptuous

115 if she would

116 as

117 confers*

118 has no speech = can't/won't reply

119 desire, wish

120 sets, places

121 scolds, complains*

122 reason, motive*

123 come on: an expression of challenge/defiance

124 you women ("you're")

125 images/symbols (unreal representations)

126 (?) chattering noisemakers

127 private/domestic rooms

128 wild cats = savage, ill-tempered

Saints in your injuries,¹²⁹ devils being offended, 110
 Players¹³⁰ in your housewifery, and housewives¹³¹ in your
 beds.

Desdemona O, fie upon thee,¹³² slanderer!

Iago Nay, it is true, or else¹³³ I am a Turk.¹³⁴
 You rise to play,¹³⁵ and go to bed to work.

Emilia You shall not write my praise.

Iago No, let me not. 115

Desdemona What wouldst thou write of me, if thou shouldst
 praise me?

Iago O gentle lady, do not put¹³⁶ me to't,
 For I am nothing if not critical.¹³⁷

Desdemona Come on, assay.¹³⁸ – There's one¹³⁹ gone to the
 harbor?

Iago Ay, madam. 120

Desdemona (*aside*) I am not merry,¹⁴⁰ but I do beguile¹⁴¹
 The thing I am, by seeming otherwise.
 (*to Iago*) Come, how wouldst thou praise me?

Iago I am about it,¹⁴² but indeed my invention¹⁴³

129 in your injuries = when you are insulted/offended/injured
 130 actors
 131 hussies (women of low/improper behavior)
 132 fie upon thee = for shame
 133 otherwise
 134 (1) cruel/tyrannical barbarian, (2) bad-tempered/unmanageable man
 135 perform, frolic/fool about
 136 urge, push, propose, suggest*
 137 censorious, fault-finding
 138 try
 139 someone
 140 cheerful
 141 divert attention from
 142 about it = busying myself/trying
 143 inventiveness, powers of mental creation, imagination*

ACT 2 • SCENE I

- 125 Comes from my pate¹⁴⁴ as birdlime¹⁴⁵ does from frize,¹⁴⁶
 It plucks out brains and all. But my Muse labors,¹⁴⁷
 And thus she is delivered:
 “If she be fair and wise, fairness and wit,
 The one’s for use,¹⁴⁸ the other¹⁴⁹ useth it.”
- 130 *Desdemona* Well praised. How if she be black¹⁵⁰ and witty?
Iago “If she be black, and thereto have a wit,
 She’ll find a white¹⁵¹ that shall her blackness fit.”
Desdemona Worse and worse.
Emilia How¹⁵² if fair and foolish?
Iago “She never yet was foolish that was fair,
 135 For even her folly helped her to¹⁵³ an heir.”
Desdemona These are old fond paradoxes to make fools laugh i’
 the alehouse.¹⁵⁴ What miserable praise hast thou for her that’s
 foul and foolish?
Iago ”There’s none so foul and foolish thereunto,
 140 But does foul pranks¹⁵⁵ which fair and wise ones do.”
Desdemona O heavy ignorance. Thou praisest the worst best. But
 what praise couldst thou bestow on¹⁵⁶ a deserving woman

144 head

145 birdlime = sticky plant-derived substance, spread on twigs/branches to snare birds

146 does from frize = comes / can be taken off coarse woolen cloth

147 is in labor / childbirth (the nine Muses were female)

148 wit, intelligence

149 beauty

150 foul, unattractive (foul: the opposite of fair)

151 a pun on “wight,” meaning “person”?

152 what

153 to capture / marry a man who will inherit a fortune

154 pub (“bar,” “saloon”)

155 infamous / wicked tricks

156 bestow on = apply to

ACT 2 • SCENE I

indeed?¹⁵⁷ One that, in the authority¹⁵⁸ of her merit, did
justly put on¹⁵⁹ the vouch of very malice¹⁶⁰ itself?

Iago “She that was ever fair and never proud, 145
Had tongue at will and yet was never loud.
Never lacked gold and yet went never gay,¹⁶¹
Fled from her wish, and yet said, ‘Now I may.’
She that, being angered, her revenge being nigh,
Bade her wrong¹⁶² stay¹⁶³ and her displeasure fly.¹⁶⁴ 150
She that in wisdom never was so frail¹⁶⁵
To change the cod’s head for the salmon’s tail.¹⁶⁶
She that could think and ne’er disclose her mind,
See suitors¹⁶⁷ following and not look behind¹⁶⁸
She was a wight,¹⁶⁹ if ever such wight were – ” 155

Desdemona To do what?

Iago To suckle fools¹⁷⁰ and chronicle small beer.¹⁷¹

Desdemona O most lame and impotent¹⁷² conclusion! Do not

157 a deserving woman indeed = a woman indeed deserving

158 power

159 justly put on = correctly/rightfully/with good reason urge/encourage/
entrust herself

160 vouch of very malice = declarations/statements of true/real wickedness*

161 too free in her conduct

162 (noun)

163 remain as it was

164 fly off/away

165 weak, easily overcome

166 cod’s head for the salmon’s tail = the ugly, edible part of a common fish for
the beautiful, inedible part of an expensive fish

167 wooers

168 back

169 creature

170 babies were often referred to as “fools”

171 chronicle small beer = keep track/a record of trifles/trivial matters (i.e., be
in charge of household affairs)

172 lame and impotent = unsatisfactory/defective and ineffectual/powerless/
decrepit

ACT 2 • SCENE I

learn of¹⁷³ him, Emilia, though he be thy husband. How say
 160 you, Cassio? Is he not a most profane and liberal¹⁷⁴
 counselor?

Cassio He speaks home,¹⁷⁵ madam. You may relish¹⁷⁶ him
 more in the soldier than in the scholar.

Iago (*aside*) He takes her by the palm. Ay, well said, whisper.
 165 With as little a web as this, will I ensnare as great a fly¹⁷⁷ as
Cassio. Ay, smile upon her, do. I will gyve¹⁷⁸ thee in thine
 own courtship. You say true, 'tis so, indeed. If such tricks¹⁷⁹ as
 these strip¹⁸⁰ you out of your lieutenantry, it had been better
 you had not kissed your three fingers so oft, which now again
 170 you are most apt¹⁸¹ to play the sir in. Very good, well kissed,
 an excellent courtesy.¹⁸² 'Tis so, indeed. Yet again, your
 fingers to your lips? Would they were clyster pipes¹⁸³ for
 your sake!¹⁸⁴

TRUMPET WITHIN

(*to the others*) The Moor. I know his trumpet.¹⁸⁵

Cassio 'Tis truly so.

173 from

174 licentious, unrestrained by decorum (can also mean bountiful, generous, not
 its meaning here)*

175 to the heart of the matter

176 take pleasure, enjoy

177 great a fly = large and insignificant creature (?)

178 fetter, shackle

179 stratagems, shams, semblances*

180 deprive, divest, remove

181 ready, likely, disposed*

182 polite elegance

183 clyster pipes = enema tubes/syringes

184 for your sake = on account of your offenses (?)

185 trumpeter

ACT 2 • SCENE I

Desdemona Let's meet¹⁸⁶ him, and receive¹⁸⁷ him. 175

Cassio Lo, where¹⁸⁸ he comes.

ENTER OTHELLO AND ATTENDANTS

Othello O my fair warrior.

Desdemona My dear Othello.

Othello It gives me wonder great as my content
 To see you here before me. O my soul's joy.
 If after every tempest come such calms, 180
 May the winds blow till they have wakened¹⁸⁹ death,
 And let the laboring bark¹⁹⁰ climb hills of seas
 Olympus-high,¹⁹¹ and duck¹⁹² again as low
 As hell's¹⁹³ from heaven. If it were now¹⁹⁴ to die,
 'Twere now to be most happy, for I fear 185
 My soul hath her content so absolute¹⁹⁵
 That not another comfort like to this
 Succeeds¹⁹⁶ in unknown fate.

Desdemona The heavens forbid
 But that¹⁹⁷ our loves and comforts should increase
 Even as our days do grow.

186 go to meet

187 greet, welcome*

188 there

189 stirred into action, aroused

190 laboring bark = pitching/rolling/struggling ship

191 Olympus-high = as high as Mt. Olympus, at the summit of which lived the
 Greek gods

192 plunge

193 hell is

194 if it were now = if this was the time

195 perfect, consummate*

196 follows, comes after

197 but that = anything but/except that

ACT 2 • SCENE I

190 *Othello* Amen to that, sweet powers.¹⁹⁸
I cannot speak enough of this content,
It stops¹⁹⁹ me here.²⁰⁰ It is too much of joy.
And this,²⁰¹ and this,²⁰² the greatest discords be

HE KISSES HER

That e'er our hearts shall make.

Iago (aside) O, you are well
tuned²⁰³ now!
195 But I'll set down²⁰⁴ the pegs²⁰⁵ that make this music,
As honest as I am.

Othello Come, let us to the castle.²⁰⁶
(greeting Cypriots) News, friends, our wars are done, the Turks
are drowned.
How does my old acquaintance²⁰⁷ of this isle?
(to Desdemona) Honey, you shall be well desired²⁰⁸ in Cyprus,
200 I have found great love amongst them. O my sweet,
I prattle out of fashion,²⁰⁹ and I dote
In²¹⁰ mine own comforts. I prithee, good Iago,

198 the "heavens"

199 closes, plugs up

200 his heart

201 may this

202 (1) two separate references, one to his heart, one as he reaches down to kiss her, or (2) repetition as emphasis, and both references being to kissing

203 well tuned = you're singing the right song, you've got the correct melody

204 slacken

205 tuning pins (on which the strings of a musical instrument are wound)

206 come LETS to the CASTle

207 does my old acquaintance = are my old friends/acquaintances

208 well desired = in demand, popular

209 out of fashion = impolitely, contrary to customary standards/rules

210 dote in = am infatuated by

Go to the bay and disembark my coffers.²¹¹
 Bring thou the master²¹² to the citadel.
 He is a good one, and his worthiness 205
 Does challenge much respect. Come, Desdemona,
 Once more well met at Cyprus.

EXEUNT OTHELLO, DESDEMONA, AND ATTENDANTS

Iago (to *Roderigo*) Do thou meet me presently at the harbor.
 Come hither. If thou be'st²¹³ valiant – as they say base men
 being in love have then a nobility in their natures more than 210
 is native to them – list²¹⁴ me. The lieutenant tonight
 watches²¹⁵ on the court of guard.²¹⁶ First, I must tell thee
 this. Desdemona is directly²¹⁷ in love with him.

Roderigo With him? Why, 'tis not possible.

Iago Lay thy finger thus (*across his lips*), and let thy soul be 215
 instructed. Mark me with what violence²¹⁸ she first loved the
 Moor, but for bragging, and telling her fantastical lies. And
 will she love him still for prating? Let not thy discreet²¹⁹
 heart think it. Her eye²²⁰ must be fed. And what delight shall
 she have to look on²²¹ the devil?²²² When the blood is made 220

211 disembark my coffers = bring ashore my boxes/chests (“luggage”)

212 pilot or captain

213 be'st = are (second-person singular of “be”)

214 listen to

215 is to be a guard/watchman

216 court of guard = body of military men posted on guard (corps de garde)?

217 absolutely, entirely

218 extreme/excessive ardor/passion

219 sage, prudent

220 eyes?

221 at

222 wretched/ugly fellow (Othello)

ACT 2 • SCENE I

dull with the act of sport,²²³ there should²²⁴ be a game²²⁵ to
 inflame it and to give satiety a fresh appetite. Loveliness in
 favor, sympathy in years, manners, and beauties, all which the
 Moor is defective in. Now, for want²²⁶ of these required
 225 conveniences,²²⁷ her delicate tenderness²²⁸ will find itself
 abused, begin to heave the gorge,²²⁹ disrelish²³⁰ and abhor
 the Moor. Very nature²³¹ will instruct her in it, and compel
 her to some second choice. Now sir, this granted – as it is a
 most pregnant and unforced position²³² – who stands so
 230 eminent²³³ in the degree²³⁴ of this fortune as Cassio does?
 A knave very voluble,²³⁵ no further conscionable²³⁶ than
 in putting on the mere form of civil²³⁷ and humane²³⁸
 seeming, for the better compass of his salt²³⁹ and most
 hidden loose affection?²⁴⁰ Why, none, why, none. A slipper

223 dull with the act of sport = sluggish/slow by amorous dalliance/sexual intercourse

224 must

225 amusement, fun*

226 lack*

227 suitabilities, comforts, advantages

228 delicate tenderness = voluptuous/self-indulgent weakness/fragility/
 womanishness

229 heave the gorge = vomit (gorge = throat)

230 dislike

231 very nature = sheer nature, nature itself

232 pregnant and unforced position = weighty/compelling and natural
 proposition/assertion

233 prominent, high, conspicuous

234 process (the steps/stages up or down), standing, rank*

235 (1) glib, ready of speech, (2) volatile, inconstant

236 scrupulous, conscientious

237 form of civil = fashion of civilized/orderly/refined

238 kindly, courteous, compassionate

239 pungent, excessive

240 loose affection = unattached/ roving lust/passion

ACT 2 • SCENE I

and subtle²⁴¹ knave, a finder out of occasions,²⁴² that has an eye can stamp²⁴³ and counterfeit advantages,²⁴⁴ though true advantage never present itself. A devilish knave. Besides, the knave is handsome, young, and hath all those requisites in him that folly and green²⁴⁵ minds look after.²⁴⁶ A pestilent complete knave, and the woman hath found him already. 235
Roderigo I cannot believe that in her, she is full of most blessed condition.²⁴⁷ 240
Iago Blest fig's end.²⁴⁸ The wine she drinks is made of grapes. If she had been blessed, she would never have loved the Moor. Blessed pudding.²⁴⁹ Didst thou not see her paddle²⁵⁰ with the palm of his hand? Didst not mark that? 245
Roderigo Yes, that I did. But that was but courtesy.
Iago Lechery, by this hand.²⁵¹ An index²⁵² and obscure²⁵³ prologue to the history²⁵⁴ of lust and foul thoughts. They met so near²⁵⁵ with their lips that their breaths embraced together. Villainous²⁵⁶ thoughts, Roderigo. When these 250

241 slipper and subtle = slippery and elusive/clever/crafty/sly

242 opportunities

243 can stamp = which can fabricate

244 opportunities

245 unripe, immature

246 look after = pursue

247 state of being

248 see act 1, scene 3, note 295

249 (1) pudding, (2) animal guts/intestines

250 play fondly

251 by this hand: an oath (compare "by my foot," "by my head," "by my nose," etc.)

252 table of contents

253 dark, elusive

254 narrative, tale, story

255 close

256 wicked, depraved

ACT 2 • SCENE I

mutualities²⁵⁷ so marshal²⁵⁸ the way, hard at hand²⁵⁹ comes
the master²⁶⁰ and main exercise,²⁶¹ th'incorporate²⁶²
conclusion. Pish! But, sir, be you ruled²⁶³ by me. I have
255 brought you from Venice. Watch you tonight. For²⁶⁴ the
command,²⁶⁵ I'll lay't upon you.²⁶⁶ Cassio knows you not.
I'll not be far from you. Do you find some occasion to anger
Cassio, either by speaking too loud, or tainting²⁶⁷ his
discipline,²⁶⁸ or from what other course you please, which
260 the time shall more favorably minister.²⁶⁹

Roderigo Well.

Iago Sir, he is rash, and very sudden in choler,²⁷⁰ and
haply²⁷¹ may strike at you. Provoke him, that he may, for
even out of that will I cause these of Cyprus to mutiny, whose
265 qualification²⁷² shall²⁷³ come into no true taste²⁷⁴ again but
by the displanting²⁷⁵ of Cassio. So shall you have a shorter
journey to your desires, by the means I shall then have to

257 intimacies

258 arrange, guide, point out

259 hard at hand = close behind

260 governing

261 practice, exertion

262 united in one body

263 guided, governed

264 as for

265 commend [noun] = telling you what you're to do

266 lay't upon = give it to

267 insulting

268 military skill

269 supply

270 anger, irascibility

271 perhaps, maybe

272 character, nature

273 must thereafter

274 liking

275 supplanting, replacing

ACT 2 • SCENE I

prefer²⁷⁶ them. And the impediment most profitably²⁷⁷
 removed, without the which there were no expectation of
 our prosperity.²⁷⁸ 270

Roderigo I will do this, if I can bring²⁷⁹ it to any opportunity.²⁸⁰

Iago I warrant²⁸¹ thee. Meet me by and by²⁸² at the citadel.
 I must fetch his²⁸³ necessaries ashore. Farewell.

Roderigo Adieu.

EXIT RODERIGO

Iago That Cassio loves her, I do well believe't. 275

That she loves him, 'tis apt,²⁸⁴ and of great credit.

The Moor, howbeit that²⁸⁵ I endure him not,²⁸⁶

Is of a constant, loving, noble nature,

And I dare think he'll prove to Desdemona

A most dear²⁸⁷ husband. Now, I do love her too, 280

Not out of absolute lust – though peradventure²⁸⁸

I stand accountant²⁸⁹ for as great a sin²⁹⁰ –

But partly led to diet²⁹¹ my revenge,

276 advance, promote

277 advantageously, beneficially

278 success

279 lead, conduct

280 timeliness, seasonableness

281 guarantee, promise

282 immediately, at once*

283 Othello's

284 appropriate

285 howbeit that = although

286 endure him not = cannot stand him

287 worthy, loving (is there a pun on "dear" as "costly"?)

288 perchance, perhaps

289 responsible

290 (the revenge he immediately proceeds to speak of?)

291 feed

ACT 2 • SCENE I

For that I do suspect the lusty²⁹² Moor
 285 Hath leaped into my seat.²⁹³ The thought whereof
 Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards,²⁹⁴
 And nothing can or shall content my soul
 Till I am evened with him, wife for wife,
 Or, failing so, yet that I put the Moor
 290 At least into a jealousy so strong
 That judgment²⁹⁵ cannot cure.²⁹⁶ Which thing to do,
 If this poor trash²⁹⁷ of Venice, whom I trace²⁹⁸
 For his quick hunting,²⁹⁹ stand³⁰⁰ the putting on,³⁰¹
 I'll have our Michael Cassio on the hip,³⁰²
 295 Abuse him to the Moor in the rank garb³⁰³
 (For I fear Cassio with³⁰⁴ my night-cap³⁰⁵ too),
 Make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me
 For making him egregiously³⁰⁶ an ass
 And practicing³⁰⁷ upon his peace and quiet

292 lustful, libidinous

293 place (as a husband)

294 guts ("insides")

295 discernment, critical thinking, reason

296 cure it

297 worthless/disreputable person

298 pursue

299 for his quick hunting = in order to rapidly catch/fleece him

300 will/can endure

301 putting on = driving, incitement

302 on the hip = at a disadvantage (as in wrestling)

303 rank garb = lustful/licentious* style/manner/fashion

304 might be wearing

305 men and women slept with their heads covered, for warmth

306 remarkably, grossly

307 plotting, scheming, conspiring

ACT 2 • SCENE I

Even to madness. 'Tis³⁰⁸ here, but yet confused.³⁰⁹ 300
Knavery's plain³¹⁰ face is never seen till used.³¹¹

EXIT

308 the idea/plan is
309 not as yet in order/fully clear
310 open, direct, bare
311 employed

ACT 2 • SCENE 2

SCENE 2

A street

ENTER A HERALD WITH PROCLAMATION, PEOPLE FOLLOWING

Herald It is Othello's pleasure, our noble and valiant general, that upon certain¹ tidings now arrived, importing² the mere perdition³ of the Turkish fleet, every man put⁴ himself into triumph,⁵ some to dance, some to make bonfires, each man
5 to what⁶ sport and revels⁷ his addiction⁸ leads him. For besides these beneficial⁹ news, it¹⁰ is the celebration of his nuptial. So much¹¹ was¹² his pleasure should be proclaimed. All offices¹³ are open, and there is full liberty¹⁴ of feasting from this present hour of five till the bell have told eleven.
10 Heaven bless the isle of Cyprus and our noble general Othello!

EXEUNT

1 reliable, precise

2 signifying, meaning*

3 destruction, ruin*

4 is to put

5 joyful celebration, public festivity

6 whatever

7 noisy mirth/merry making

8 inclination, leaning

9 advantageous

10 this

11 so much = thus

12 was it

13 kitchens, stores of food

14 unhindered authorization/opportunity/permission ("license")

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

SCENE 3

The Citadel, Cyprus

ENTER OTHELLO, DESDEMONA, CASSIO, AND ATTENDANTS

Othello Good Michael, look you to the guard tonight.

Let's teach ourselves that honorable stop,¹

Not to outsport discretion.²

Cassio Iago hath direction³ what to do.

But notwithstanding, with my personal⁴ eye

5

Will I look to't.

Othello Iago is most honest.

Michael, good night. Tomorrow with your earliest,⁵

Let me have speech with you. (*to Desdemona*) Come, my dear love.

The purchase⁶ made, the fruits⁷ are to ensue:

That profit's⁸ yet to come 'tween me and you.

10

(*to Cassio*) Goodnight.

EXEUNT OTHELLO, DESDEMONA, AND ATTENDANTS

ENTER IAGO

Cassio Welcome, Iago. We must to the watch.⁹

1 check, restraint, holding back

2 outsport discretion = indulge/amuse ourselves beyond reasonable/rational limits

3 instructions/guidance*

4 own

5 with your earliest = as early as you can make it

6 acquisition, capture, bargain

7 revenue, consequences, enjoyment

8 profit's = benefit/gain is

9 guard duty

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

- Iago* Not this hour,¹⁰ lieutenant, 'tis not yet ten o' th' clock.
 Our general cast¹¹ us thus early for the love of his
- 15 *Desdemona*, who let us not therefore blame. He hath not yet
 made wanton¹² the night with her. And she is sport for Jove.
- Cassio* She's a most exquisite¹³ lady.
- Iago* And, I'll warrant her, full of game.
- Cassio* Indeed, she is a most fresh¹⁴ and delicate creature.
- 20 *Iago* What an eye¹⁵ she has! Methinks it sounds a parley to¹⁶
 provocation.¹⁷
- Cassio* An inviting¹⁸ eye. And yet methinks right modest.¹⁹
- Iago* And when she speaks, is it not an alarm²⁰ to love?
- Cassio* She is, indeed, perfection.
- 25 *Iago* Well. Happiness to their sheets.²¹ Come, lieutenant, I
 have a stoup²² of wine, and here without²³ are a brace²⁴ of
 Cyprus gallants²⁵ that would fain²⁶ have a measure²⁷ to the
 health of black Othello.

10 not this hour = not yet

11 shed, sent, got rid of

12 amorously sexual*

13 excellent, beautiful

14 invigorating, untainted, not faded/worn*

15 an eye = a look

16 sounds a parley to = gives a call/summons to a conference/discussion
 leading to

17 incitement, stimulus

18 alluring, tempting, attractive

19 right modest = altogether/completely decorous, proper

20 call to arms, signal

21 sexual activity in bed

22 jar (alcohol was not bottled)

23 outside*

24 pair

25 Cyprus gallants = local fashionable/polished gentlemen

26 be pleased/glad to*

27 tankard ("quantity," "some")

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

Cassio Not tonight, good Iago. I have very poor and unhappy²⁸
brains for drinking. I could well wish courtesy²⁹ would 30
invent some other custom of entertainment.

Iago O, they³⁰ are our friends. But one cup. I'll drink for you.

Cassio I have drunk but one cup tonight, and that was craftily
qualified³¹ too. And behold, what innovation³² it makes
here.³³ I am unfortunate in the infirmity,³⁴ and dare not 35
task³⁵ my weakness with any more.

Iago What, man, 'tis a night of revels. The gallants desire it.

Cassio Where are they?

Iago Here at the door. I pray you, call them in.

Cassio I'll do't, but it dislikes me.³⁶ 40

EXIT CASSIO

Iago If I can fasten but one cup upon him,³⁷
With that which he hath drunk tonight already
He'll be as full of quarrel and offense
As my young mistress'³⁸ dog. Now, my sick³⁹ fool Roderigo,
Whom love hath turned almost the wrong side out, 45

28 poor and unhappy = deficient/feeble and unfortunate/miserable/
wretched

29 polite cultivated society

30 these Cypriots? all Cypriots?

31 skillfully/cleverly restricted/restrained/measured out

32 alteration, change

33 in me

34 limitation, weakness

35 strain, stress

36 it dislikes me = it displeases/annoys/offends me

37 fasten . . . upon him = induce him to accept

38 Desdemona (wife of his master)

39 deeply affected by longing ("lovesick")

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

To⁴⁰ Desdemona hath tonight caroused⁴¹
Potations pottle-deep,⁴² and he's to watch.⁴³
Three lads of Cyprus, noble swelling⁴⁴ spirits,
That hold their honors in a wary distance,⁴⁵
50 The very elements⁴⁶ of this warlike isle,
Have I tonight flustered⁴⁷ with flowing cups,
And they watch⁴⁸ too. Now, 'mongst this flock⁴⁹ of
drunkards,
Am I to put⁵⁰ our Cassio in some action⁵¹
That may offend⁵² the isle.

ENTER CASSIO, WITH MONTANO AND GENTLEMEN

55 But here they come.
If consequence⁵³ do but approve my dream,⁵⁴
My boat sails freely, both with wind and stream.
Cassio 'Fore⁵⁵ heaven, they have given me a rouse⁵⁶ already.

40 in pledge/as toasts to

41 drunk freely/repeatedly, swilled

42 potations pottle-deep = drinks/draughts measuring two quarts (one pottle)
down to the bottom

43 he's to watch = he is assigned to guard duty

44 proud, haughty, pretentiously pompous

45 in a wary distance = at a careful/cautious fixed interval ("aloofness")

46 basic substances

47 made half-tipsy

48 are on guard duty

49 band, company

50 am I to put = I am going/planning to push/propel/drive

51 in some action = into some deed

52 transgress/sin against, anger*

53 the results

54 approve my dream = confirm/make good my fancies/vision

55 by ("before")

56 full draught/bumper

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

Montano Good faith, a little one. Not past⁵⁷ a pint, as I am a soldier.

Iago Some wine, ho! 60

HE SINGS

And let me the cannakin⁵⁸ clink, clink,

And let me the cannakin clink.

A soldier's a man,

O, man's life's but a span,

Why then let a soldier drink. 65

(*calls to servants*) Some wine, boys!

Cassio 'Fore God, an excellent song.

Iago I learned it in England, where indeed they are most potent⁵⁹ in potting.⁶⁰ Your Dane, your German, and your swag-bellied⁶¹ Hollander – Drink, ho! – are nothing to your English. 70

Cassio Is your Englishman so exquisite⁶² in his drinking?

Iago Why, he drinks you – with facility⁶³ – your Dane dead drunk. He sweats not to overthrow⁶⁴ your Almain.⁶⁵ He gives your Hollander a vomit⁶⁶ ere the next pottle can be filled. 75

57 more than

58 small can/drinking vessel

59 mighty

60 drinking

61 pendulous-paunched (“beer-bellied”)

62 excellent, cultivated

63 with facility = easily

64 sweats not to overthrow = does not work/labor to defeat/demolish/ruin

65 German

66 gives ... a vomit = makes ... vomit

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

Cassio To the health of our general!

Montano I am for it, lieutenant. And I'll do you justice.⁶⁷

Iago O sweet England!

IAGO SINGS

80 King Stephen was and-a⁶⁸ worthy peer,⁶⁹
His breeches cost him but a crown,⁷⁰
He held them sixpence all too dear,⁷¹
With that he called the tailor lown.⁷²
He⁷³ was a wight of high renown,⁷⁴
85 And thou⁷⁵ art but of low degree.⁷⁶
'Tis pride that pulls the country down,
Then take⁷⁷ thine auld⁷⁸ cloak about thee.

(*to servants*) Some wine, ho!

Cassio Why, this is a more exquisite song than the other.

90 *Iago* Will⁷⁹ you hear it again?

Cassio No. For I hold him to be unworthy of his place that
does those things. Well, God's above all, and there be souls
must be saved, and there be souls must not be saved.

Iago It's true, good lieutenant.

67 do you justice = drink it down just as you do

68 and-a = balladic rhetorical and metrical device

69 nobleman

70 gold coin (worth 5 shillings; 1 shilling = 12 pence)

71 all too dear = too expensive

72 a rogue / rascal

73 King Stephen

74 fame, distinction

75 the tailor

76 social position / rank

77 then take = so wrap

78 old

79 do you wish to

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

Cassio For mine own part, no offense to the general, nor any 95
man of quality, I hope to be saved.

Iago And so do I too, lieutenant.

Cassio Ay, but, by your leave, not before me. The lieutenant
is to be saved before the ancient. Let's have no more of this.
Let's to our affairs. Forgive us our sins. Gentlemen, let's look 100
to our business. Do not think, gentlemen, I am drunk. This is
my ancient, this is my right hand, and this is my left. I am not
drunk now. I can stand well enough, and I speak well enough.

Gentlemen Excellent well.

Cassio Why, very well then. You must not think, then, that I 105
am drunk.

EXIT CASSIO

Montano To the platform,⁸⁰ masters. Come, let's set⁸¹ the
watch.

Iago You see this fellow that is⁸² gone before,
He is a soldier fit to stand by Caesar
And give direction. And do but see his vice. 110
'Tis to his virtue a just equinox,⁸³
The one as long as the other. 'Tis pity of⁸⁴ him.
I fear the trust Othello puts him in,
On some odd⁸⁵ time of his infirmity
Will shake⁸⁶ this island.

80 level place for cannon

81 station (verb)

82 has

83 just equinox = equal balance (of the length of day and of night, as the sun
crosses the equator)

84 concerning, about

85 singular, unusual

86 agitate ("destabilize")

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

- 115 *Montano* But is he often thus?
Iago 'Tis evermore⁸⁷ his prologue to his sleep.
He'll watch the horologe⁸⁸ a double set⁸⁹
If drink rock not his cradle.
Montano It were well
The general were put in mind⁹⁰ of it.
120 Perhaps he sees it not, or his good nature
Prizes⁹¹ the virtue that appears in Cassio,
And looks not on⁹² his evils. Is not this true?

ENTER RODERIGO

- Iago* (*aside*) How now, Roderigo?
I pray you after the lieutenant, go.

EXIT RODERIGO

- 125 *Montano* And 'tis great pity that the noble Moor
Should hazard⁹³ such a place as his own second
With one of an ingraft⁹⁴ infirmity:
It were an honest action to say
So to the Moor.
Iago Not I, for⁹⁵ this fair island.
130 I do love Cassio well, and would do much

87 always

88 clock (HOARaLOWDGE)

89 a double set = two passages from 1 to 12, or 24 hours (i.e., be unable to fall asleep)

90 put in mind = made aware

91 values, esteems*

92 at

93 risk

94 fixed, attached

95 not even for

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

CRY WITHIN, "HELP, HELP"

To cure him of this evil. But, hark,⁹⁶ what noise?

ENTER CASSIO, PURSUING RODERIGO

Cassio You rogue! You rascal!

Montano What's the matter, lieutenant?

Cassio A knave teach me my duty? I'll beat the knave into a
twiggen⁹⁷ bottle. 135

Roderigo Beat me?

Cassio Dost thou prate, rogue?

STRIKES RODERIGO

Montano Nay, good lieutenant. I pray you, sir, hold your hand.

Cassio Let me go, sir, or I'll knock you o'er the mazard.⁹⁸

Montano Come, come, you're drunk.

Cassio Drunk? 140

THEY FIGHT

Iago (*aside to Rodrigo*) Away, I say, go out and cry⁹⁹ a mutiny.

EXIT RODERIGO

Nay, good lieutenant – Alas, gentlemen¹⁰⁰ –
Help, ho! – lieutenant – sir – Montano – sir –
Help, masters! Here's a goodly¹⁰¹ watch indeed.

96 hear, listen*

97 wickerwork

98 head ("bowl, cup")

99 shout, exclaim, proclaim

100 Cassio and Montano

101 splendid, admirable, proper

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

BELL RINGS

145 Who's that which rings the bell? Diablo,¹⁰² ho!
The town will rise.¹⁰³ Fie, fie, lieutenant,
You'll be ashamed forever.

ENTER OTHELLO AND ATTENDANTS

Othello What is the matter here?

Montano Zounds, I bleed still,
I am hurt to th'death. He dies!¹⁰⁴

MONTANO LUNGES AT CASSIO

Othello Hold, for your lives!

150 *Iago* Hold, ho – lieutenant – sir – Montano – gentlemen –
Have you forgot all place¹⁰⁵ of¹⁰⁶ sense and duty?
Hold! The general speaks to you. Hold, for shame!

Othello Why, how now, ho? From whence ariseth this?

Are we turned Turks, and to ourselves do that
155 Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?¹⁰⁷
For Christian shame, put by¹⁰⁸ this barbarous brawl.¹⁰⁹
He that stirs next, to carve for¹¹⁰ his own rage,
Holds his soul light.¹¹¹ He dies upon his motion.¹¹²

102 the Devil

103 take up arms, rebel

104 he dies = he must/will die

105 location, where you are (*O.E.D.*, s.v. "place," 5c, cites a 1704 lexicon: "Place in Fortification usually signifies the Body of a Fortress")

106 with respect to

107 Islamic law forbid Moslem soldiers to fight with one another

108 to the side

109 squabble, quarrel

110 carve for = cut/slash because of

111 holds his soul light = considers his life of little importance

112 dies upon his motion = will die the moment he moves

Silence that dreadful¹¹³ bell, it frights the isle
 From her propriety.¹¹⁴ What is the matter, masters? 160
 Honest Iago, that looks dead¹¹⁵ with grieving,
 Speak. Who began this? On thy love,¹¹⁶ I charge thee.
Iago I do not know. Friends all,¹¹⁷ but now,¹¹⁸ even¹¹⁹ now,
 In quarter,¹²⁰ and in terms¹²¹ like bride and groom
 Devesting them¹²² for bed. And then, but now – 165
 As if some planet¹²³ had unwitting¹²⁴ men –
 Swords out, and tilting¹²⁵ one at other's breasts
 In opposition¹²⁶ bloody. I cannot speak¹²⁷
 Any beginning to this peevish odds,¹²⁸
 And would,¹²⁹ in action glorious,¹³⁰ I had lost 170
 Those legs that brought me to a part of it!¹³¹
Othello How comes it, Michael, you are thus forgot?¹³²
Cassio I pray you, pardon me, I cannot speak.

113 inspiring dread/fear

114 her propriety = its proper state/condition

115 benumbed, insensible

116 devotion, regard

117 friends all = everyone was friendly, all were good friends

118 but now = until now

119 precisely, exactly

120 in quarter = in this guard period

121 in terms = in (1) mutual relations, (2) words

122 undressing themselves

123 astronomical influence

124 deprived of their brains/wits

125 thrusting, striking

126 antagonism, hostility, combat

127 state

128 peevish odds = foolish/senseless/mad/perverse strife/disturbance (a noun in the singular)

129 I wish, I had rather

130 action glorious = fighting which was full of glory

131 to a part of it = to be involved ("a party") in it

132 lost yourself/sight of your duty/position

- Othello* Worthy Montano, you were wont to be civil.¹³³
- 175 The gravity and stillness¹³⁴ of your youth
 The world hath noted, and your name is great
 In mouths of wisest censure.¹³⁵ What's the matter
 That you unlace¹³⁶ your reputation thus,
 And spend¹³⁷ your rich opinion¹³⁸ for the name
- 180 Of a night-brawler? Give me answer to it.
Montano Worthy Othello, I am hurt to¹³⁹ danger.
 Your officer, Iago, can inform you –
 While I spare speech, which something¹⁴⁰ now offends¹⁴¹ me –
 Of all that I do know, nor know I aught
- 185 By me that's said or done amiss¹⁴² this night,
 Unless self-charity¹⁴³ be sometimes a vice,
 And to defend ourselves it be a sin
 When violence assails¹⁴⁴ us.
- Othello* Now, by heaven,
 My blood begins my safer guides¹⁴⁵ to rule,¹⁴⁶
- 190 And passion, having my best judgment collied,¹⁴⁷

133 wont to be civil = in the habit* of being polite

134 gravity and stillness = sobriety and calm/tranquillity

135 opinion, judgment

136 destroy, undo

137 give away, exhaust, consume, destroy

138 reputation

139 almost to, to the point of

140 to a degree (in British usage, "rather")

141 hurts, pains

142 wrongly, out of order

143 charity = love

144 attacks, assaults

145 safer guides = more cautious guidance/sense of direction/control

146 control, dominate

147 darkened

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

Assays to lead the way. If I once stir,¹⁴⁸
 Or do but lift this arm, the best¹⁴⁹ of you
 Shall sink¹⁵⁰ in my rebuke.¹⁵¹ Give me to know
 How this foul rout¹⁵² began. Who set it on,¹⁵³
 And he that is approved¹⁵⁴ in this offense, 195
 Though he had twinned¹⁵⁵ with me, both at a¹⁵⁶ birth,
 Shall lose¹⁵⁷ me. What, in a town of war
 Yet wild,¹⁵⁸ the people's hearts brimful of fear,
 To manage¹⁵⁹ private and domestic¹⁶⁰ quarrel,
 In night, and on the court and guard of safety?¹⁶¹ 200
 'Tis monstrous.¹⁶² Iago, who began 't?
Montano (to Iago) If partially affined, or leagued in office,¹⁶³
 Thou dost deliver more or less than truth,
 Thou art no soldier.
Iago Touch¹⁶⁴ me not so near.¹⁶⁵
 I had rather have this tongue cut from my mouth 205

- 148 act, take action
 149 best swordsmen/fighters
 150 go under/to hell, be swallowed, perish
 151 reprimand (often, then, given by blows)
 152 riot, disturbance, uproar
 153 set it on = instigated/incited/set in motion/started it
 154 proved, convicted
 155 been born as one of a pair of twins
 156 at a = at one and the same
 157 be separated from, deprived of
 158 unruly, turbulent, highly excited
 159 carry on, conduct
 160 internal
 161 protection
 162 absurd, outrageously wrong, atrocious
 163 partially affined, or leagued in office = unfairly/in any biased way related/
 connected, or joined in duty/service
 164 strike, beat at, affect*
 165 deeply

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

Than it should do offense¹⁶⁶ to Michael Cassio.
 Yet I persuade myself, to speak the truth
 Shall nothing wrong him. Thus it is, general.
 Montano and myself being in speech,
 210 There comes a fellow crying out for help,
 And Cassio following him with determined¹⁶⁷ sword,
 To execute upon¹⁶⁸ him. Sir, this gentleman
 Steps in to¹⁶⁹ Cassio and entreats his pause.
 Myself the crying¹⁷⁰ fellow did pursue,
 215 Lest by his clamor¹⁷¹ – as it so fell out¹⁷² –
 The town might fall in¹⁷³ fright. He, swift of foot,
 Outran my purpose, and I returned the rather¹⁷⁴
 For that I heard the clink and fall¹⁷⁵ of swords,
 And Cassio high in oath.¹⁷⁶ Which till tonight
 220 I ne'er might say before. When I came back,
 For this was brief, I found them¹⁷⁷ close together
 At blow and thrust, even as again they were
 When you yourself did part them.
 More of this matter cannot I report,
 225 But men are men. The best sometimes forget.
 Though Cassio did some little wrong to him,¹⁷⁸

166 harm, injury

167 unwavering

168 execute upon = (1) use/wield it on, (2) kill

169 steps in to = comes forward to, intervenes with

170 roaring, shouting

171 noisy utterance

172 fell out = happened, came to pass

173 fall in = yield to

174 the rather = all the more quickly

175 clink and fall = sharp ringing sounds and downward strokes

176 high in oath = forcefully/strongly/loudly swearing

177 Montano and Cassio

178 Montano

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

As men in rage strike those that wish them best,
Yet surely Cassio, I believe, received
From him that fled some strange indignity,¹⁷⁹
Which patience could not pass.¹⁸⁰

Othello I know, Iago, 230
Thy honesty and love doth mince¹⁸¹ this matter,
Making it light¹⁸² to Cassio. Cassio, I love thee,
But never more be officer of mine.

ENTER DESDEMONA, ATTENDED

Look, if my gentle love be not raised up.
(*to Cassio*) I'll make thee an example.¹⁸³ 235

Desdemona What is the matter, dear?

Othello All's well now, sweeting.¹⁸⁴
Come away to bed. (*to Montano*) Sir, for your hurts,
Myself will be¹⁸⁵ your surgeon.¹⁸⁶ Lead him off.

EXIT MONTANO, ATTENDED

Iago, look with care about the town,
And silence those whom this vile¹⁸⁷ brawl distracted.¹⁸⁸ 240
Come, Desdemona, 'tis the soldier's life,

179 strange indignity = uncommon/exceptional/extreme dishonor/disgrace

180 accept, allow, tolerate

181 diminish, lessen, minimize

182 of reduced weight/importance

183 warning*

184 sweetheart, darling

185 myself will be = for my part ("on my side/as for me"), I wish to be responsible for

186 medical man, doctor*

187 disgusting, depraved

188 carried away/into disorder

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

To have their balmy¹⁸⁹ slumbers waked with strife.

EXEUNT ALL BUT IAGO AND CASSIO

Iago What, are you hurt, lieutenant?

Cassio Ay, past all surgery.¹⁹⁰

245 *Iago* Marry, heaven forbid!

Cassio Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost my reputation. I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial.¹⁹¹ My reputation, Iago, my reputation.

250 *Iago* As I am an honest man, I thought you¹⁹² had received some bodily wound. There is more sense¹⁹³ in that than in reputation. Reputation is an idle and most false imposition,¹⁹⁴ oft got without merit and lost without deserving. You have lost no reputation at all, unless you repute¹⁹⁵ yourself such a loser. What, man! There are ways to recover¹⁹⁶ the general again. You are but now cast¹⁹⁷ in his mood,¹⁹⁸ a punishment more in policy¹⁹⁹ than in malice,²⁰⁰ even so as one would beat his offenseless dog to affright²⁰¹ an imperious²⁰² lion. Sue²⁰³ to him again, and he is yours.

189 delightful, soothing

190 medical treatment

191 mere animal

192 you were saying that you

193 (1) capacity for sensation, (2) common sense, intelligence

194 ascription, bestowal, placing on

195 consider, think, reckon

196 regain, win back

197 discarded, cashiered, thrown off*

198 anger, temper

199 a stratagem

200 ill-will

201 frighten, intimidate

202 overbearing (?), majestic (?)

203 appeal, petition (verb)

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

Cassio I will rather²⁰⁴ sue to be despised than to deceive²⁰⁵ so good a commander with so slight,²⁰⁶ so drunken, and so 260
indiscreet²⁰⁷ an officer. Drunk? And speak parrot?²⁰⁸ And squabble? Swagger?²⁰⁹ Swear? And discourse fustian²¹⁰ with one's own shadow?²¹¹ O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee devil.

Iago What was he that you followed with your sword? What 265
had he done to you?

Cassio I know not.

Iago Is't possible?

Cassio I remember a mass²¹² of things, but nothing distinctly. A quarrel, but nothing²¹³ wherefore. O God, that men should 270
put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains? That we should, with joy, pleasance, revel, and applause, transform ourselves into beasts.

Iago Why, but you are now well enough. How came you thus 275
recovered?

Cassio It hath pleased the devil drunkenness to give place to the devil wrath. One unperfectness shows me another, to make me frankly²¹⁴ despise myself.

Iago Come, you are too severe a moraler.²¹⁵ As the time, the

204 will rather = would prefer to

205 betray

206 feeble, foolish, worthless, insignificant

207 lacking judgment, imprudent

208 senselessly

209 bluster, act superior

210 gibberish, rant, bombast

211 someone/something completely fleeting/ephemeral/delusive

212 amorphous lump, a quantity

213 nothing about

214 unreservedly, unconditionally

215 moralizer

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

280 place, and the condition of this country stands, I could
heartily wish this had not befallen.²¹⁶ But since it is as it is,
mend it for your own good.

Cassio I will ask²¹⁷ him for my place again, he shall tell me I am
a drunkard. Had I as many mouths as Hydra,²¹⁸ such an
285 answer would stop²¹⁹ them all. To be now²²⁰ a sensible man,
by and by a fool, and presently a beast. O strange! Every
inordinate²²¹ cup is unblessed, and the ingredient²²² is a
devil.

Iago Come, come. Good wine is a good familiar²²³ creature, if
290 it be well used. Exclaim no more against it. And, good
lieutenant, I think you think I love you.

Cassio I have well approved it, sir. I drunk?

Iago You, or any man living, may be drunk at a time,²²⁴ man.
I'll tell you what you shall²²⁵ do. Our general's wife is now
295 the general. I may say so, in this respect,²²⁶ for that he hath
devoted and given up himself to the contemplation,²²⁷
mark,²²⁸ and denotement²²⁹ of her parts and graces. Confess

216 happened, occurred

217 if I ask

218 mythological many-headed snake, whose heads grew back as fast as they
were cut off

219 plug, close up

220 first

221 immoderate, intemperate

222 substance that enters into it

223 (1) friendly, tame, congenial (2) ordinary, everyday

224 a time = some time

225 must

226 connection

227 beholding/thinking about

228 attention, notice

229 indications, appearances*

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

yourself freely to her. Importune²³⁰ her help to put you in
your place again. She is of so free,²³¹ so kind, so apt, so blessed
a disposition, she holds it a vice in her goodness not to do 300
more than she is requested. This broken joint²³² between you
and her husband entreat her to splinter.²³³ And, my fortunes
against any lay²³⁴ worth naming, this crack of²³⁵ your love
shall grow stronger than it was before.

Cassio You advise me well. 305

Iago I protest,²³⁶ in the sincerity of love and honest kindness.

Cassio I think it freely.²³⁷ And betimes in the morning I will
beseech the virtuous Desdemona to undertake²³⁸ for me. I
am desperate of²³⁹ my fortunes if they²⁴⁰ check²⁴¹ me here.

Iago You are in the right. Goodnight, lieutenant, I must to the 310
watch.

Cassio Good night, honest Iago.

EXIT CASSIO

Iago And what's he, then, that says I play the villain?

When this advice is free²⁴² I give, and honest,

230 solicit, ask for, urge, press*

231 generous

232 connection

233 fix with a splint

234 wager, bet

235 in

236 affirm/declare it*

237 unreservedly, readily

238 commit herself, enter upon this

239 desperate of = in despair about

240 his fortunes

241 stop, retard

242 (1) honorable, generous, (2) unrestricted, unforced, plain-spoken

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

315 Probal²⁴³ to thinking, and indeed the course
 To win the Moor again? For 'tis most easy
 The inclining²⁴⁴ Desdemona to subdue²⁴⁵
 In any honest suit.²⁴⁶ She's framed as fruitful²⁴⁷
 As the free elements.²⁴⁸ And then for her
 To win the Moor – were't²⁴⁹ to renounce his baptism,
 320 All seals²⁵⁰ and symbols of redeemèd sin –
 His soul is so en fettered to her love
 That she may make, unmake, do what she list,
 Even as her appetite²⁵¹ shall play the god
 With his weak function.²⁵² How am I then a villain,
 325 To counsel Cassio to this parallel²⁵³ course,
 Directly to his good? Divinity of hell!
 When devils will²⁵⁴ the blackest sins put on
 They do suggest²⁵⁵ at first with heavenly shows,
 As I do now. For whiles this honest fool²⁵⁶
 330 Plies²⁵⁷ Desdemona to repair²⁵⁸ his fortune,
 And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor,

243 reasonable

244 well-disposed, willing

245 get the better of, persuade

246 petition (noun)

247 generous

248 free elements = abundant basic matter (earth, water, air, fire)

249 even if it were/meant

250 authenticating tokens/signs

251 desire, inclination

252 moral/intellectual powers

253 in appearance, having the same direction as good advice would advise

254 want to

255 propose, put forward, insinuate

256 Cassio

257 works hard at (“leans on”)

258 recover

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

I'll pour this pestilence²⁵⁹ into his ear
 That she repeals²⁶⁰ him for her body's lust.
 And by how much she strives to do him²⁶¹ good, 335
 She shall undo her credit with the Moor.
 So will I turn her virtue into pitch,²⁶²
 And out of her own goodness make the net
 That shall enmesh them all.

ENTER RODERIGO

How now, Roderigo!

Roderigo I do follow here in the chase, not like a hound that 340
 hunts, but one that fills up the cry.²⁶³ My money is almost
 spent, I have been tonight exceedingly well cudgeled, and I
 think the issue will be, I shall have so much experience for
 my pains. And so, with no money at all and a little more wit,
 return again to Venice. 345

Iago How poor are they that have not patience!
 What wound did ever heal but by degrees?
 Thou know'st we work by wit, and not by witchcraft,
 And wit depends on dilatory²⁶⁴ time.
 Does't not go well? Cassio hath beaten thee, 350
 And thou by that small hurt hast cashiered Cassio.
 Though other things grow fair against²⁶⁵ the sun,
 Yet fruits that blossom first, will first be ripe.

259 mischief

260 (1) calls upon him, (2) urges the withdrawal of his cashiering of Cassio

261 Cassio

262 black tar

263 baying and barking of the hunting pack

264 slow, delaying

265 in the light of, when exposed to

ACT 2 • SCENE 3

Content thyself awhile. In troth,²⁶⁶ 'tis morning,
Pleasure, and action, make the hours seem short.
355 Retire thee,²⁶⁷ go where thou art billeted.²⁶⁸
Away, I say, thou shalt know more hereafter.
Nay, get thee gone.

EXIT RODERIGO

Two things are to be done.
My wife must move²⁶⁹ for Cassio to her mistress.
I'll set her on,
360 Myself a while²⁷⁰ to draw the Moor apart,²⁷¹
And bring him jump when he may Cassio find
Soliciting his wife. Ay, that's the way.
Dull not device²⁷² by coldness²⁷³ and delay.

EXIT

266 (exclamatory remark: troth = truth)

267 retire thee = withdraw*

268 quartered

269 speak, urge

270 at the same time ("the while": while = a block/bit of time)

271 to the side, away*

272 dull not device = let the plan not be held back/blunted

273 apathy, indifference

Act 3



SCENE I

A street

ENTER CASSIO AND MUSICIANS

Cassio Masters, play here, I will content¹ your pains,
Something that's brief, and bid² "good morrow, general."³

MUSIC

ENTER CLOWN

Clown Why, masters, have your instruments been in
Naples,⁴ that they speak⁵ i' the nose thus?

Musician 1 How, sir? how?

5

1 compensate, remunerate ("satisfy")

2 will offer/present

3 (Furness, ed., *Othello: A New Variorum Edition*, 154n, cites Brand, *Popular Antiquities* (1873): "The custom of awaking a couple the morning after the marriage with a concert of music, is old standing")

4 (Italy was then – and for almost 300 years more – much divided, politically and linguistically; northern Italian like that of Naples is still stigmatized: compare *napoletanismo*, "Neapolitan way of talking," and *napoletanamenta*, "in the style of Naples")

5 speak = (1) talk, (2) emit musical sound

ACT 3 • SCENE I

Clown Are these, I pray you, wind instruments?

Musician 1 Ay, marry, are they, sir.

Clown O, thereby hangs a tale.

Musician 1 Whereby hangs a tale, sir?

10 *Clown* Marry, sir, by many a wind⁶ instrument that I know.
But masters, here's money for you. And the general so likes
your music, that he desires you, for love's sake, to make no
more noise with it.

Musician 1 Well, sir, we will not.

15 *Clown* If you have any music that may not be heard, to't
again.⁷ But, as they say, to hear music the general does not
greatly care.

Musician 1 We have none such, sir.

Clown Then put up your pipes in your bag, for I'll away.⁸

20 Go, vanish into air, away!

EXEUNT MUSICIANS

Cassio Dost thou hear, mine honest friend?

Clown No, I hear not your honest friend. I hear you.

Cassio Pr'ythee, keep up⁹ thy quilllets.¹⁰ There's a poor¹¹
piece of gold for thee. If the gentlewoman that attends the
25 general's wife be stirring, tell her there's one Cassio entreats
her a little favor of speech. Wilt thou do this?

Clown She is stirring, sir. If she will stir hither I shall seem¹²

6 farting ("tail")

7 to't again = go to it/play again

8 (meaning uncertain)

9 keep up = stop

10 verbally based jokes

11 small, inadequate

12 deign

ACT 3 • SCENE I

to notify unto her.

Cassio Do, good my friend.¹³

EXIT CLOWN

ENTER IAGO

In happy time,¹⁴ Iago.

Iago You have not been a-bed, then? 30

Cassio Why no. The day had broke before we parted.

I have made bold, Iago, to send¹⁵ in to your wife.

My suit to her is that she will to virtuous

Desdemona procure¹⁶ me some access.

Iago I'll send her to you presently. 35

And I'll devise¹⁷ a mean¹⁸ to draw the Moor

Out of the way, that your converse and business

May be more free.

Cassio I humbly thank you for't.

EXIT IAGO

I never knew

A Florentine¹⁹ more kind and honest. 40

ENTER EMILIA

Emilia Good morrow,²⁰ good lieutenant. I am sorry

13 (line from the Quarto)

14 in happy time = well met

15 send a message

16 if her name is here pronounced desDEYmona, proCURE; if pronounced
DEZdeMOna, then PROcure

17 arrange, invent

18 means (French *moyen*)

19 even someone from my own city (Cassio is a Florentine)

20 morning, day

ACT 3 • SCENE I

For your displeasure.²¹ But all will sure be well.
The general and his wife are talking of it,
And she speaks for you stoutly. The Moor replies
45 That he you hurt is of great fame²² in Cyprus
And great affinity,²³ and that in wholesome²⁴ wisdom
He might not but refuse you.²⁵ But he protests he loves you
And needs no other suitor²⁶ but his likings
To bring²⁷ you in again.

Cassio Yet I beseech you,
50 If you think fit, or that it may be done,
Give me advantage of some brief discourse
With Desdemona alone.

Emilia Pray you, come in.
I will bestow²⁸ you where you shall have time
To speak your bosom freely.

Cassio I am much bound²⁹ to you.

EXEUNT

21 trouble, sorrow

22 reputation, honor

23 relationship, kinship (“connections”)

24 sound

25 might not but refuse you = had no choice except to reject

26 petitioner, suppliant

27 fetch

28 place, bring, locate

29 obliged

ACT 3 • SCENE 2

SCENE 2

The Citadel

ENTER OTHELLO, IAGO, AND GENTLEMEN

Othello These letters give, Iago, to the pilot,¹
And by² him do my duties³ to the Senate.
That done,⁴ I will be walking on the works.⁵
Repair there to me.

Iago Well,⁶ my good lord, I'll do't. 5

Othello This fortification, gentlemen, shall we see't?

Gentlemen We'll wait upon⁷ your lordship.

EXEUNT

1 (of the ship returning to Venice, on which his guests have arrived in Cyprus)

2 through, by means of

3 do my duties = express my respect/homage/deference

4 after you have done that

5 the works = the Citadel's fortifications

6 very well

7 wait upon = defer to, follow

ACT 3 • SCENE 3

SCENE 3

The Citadel

ENTER DESDEMONA, CASSIO, AND EMILIA

Desdemona Be thou assured, good Cassio, I will do
All my abilities¹ in thy behalf.

Emilia Good madam, do. I warrant it grieves my husband
As if the cause² were his.

5 *Desdemona* O, that's an honest fellow. Do not doubt, Cassio,
But I will have my lord and you again
As friendly³ as you were.

Cassio Bounteous⁴ madam,
Whatever shall become of Michael Cassio,
He's never anything but your true servant.

10 *Desdemona* I know't. I thank you. You do love my lord,
You have known him long, and be you well assured
He shall in strangeness⁵ stand no farther off
Than in⁶ a politic⁷ distance.

Cassio Ay, but, lady,
That policy may either last so long,
15 Or feed upon such nice and waterish⁸ diet,
Or breed⁹ itself so out of circumstance,¹⁰

1 my abilities = of which I am capable

2 affair, business*

3 amicable

4 kind, generous

5 aloofness, coolness

6 than in = than

7 prudent, wise

8 nice and waterish = delicate* and watery/dilute

9 develop

10 context, environment

ACT 3 • SCENE 3

That, I being absent, and my place supplied,¹¹
My general will forget my love and service.

Desdemona Do not doubt¹² that. Before Emilia here
I give thee warrant of thy place. Assure thee, 20
If I do vow¹³ a friendship, I'll perform it
To the last article.¹⁴ My lord shall never rest,
I'll watch¹⁵ him tame, and talk¹⁶ him out of¹⁷ patience.
His bed shall seem a school, his board a shrift,¹⁸
I'll intermingle everything he does 25
With Cassio's suit. Therefore be merry, Cassio,
For thy solicitor shall rather die
Than give thy cause away.¹⁹

Emilia Madam, here comes my lord.

Cassio Madam, I'll take my leave. 30

Desdemona Why, stay, and hear me speak.

Cassio Madam, not now. I am very ill at ease,
Unfit for mine own purposes.

Desdemona Well, do your discretion.²⁰

EXIT CASSIO

11 filled up

12 fear

13 declare, affirm, assert

14 detailed item/part

15 guard, be vigilant/alert, keep awake (as one keeps a hawk from sleeping, in taming it)

16 talk to

17 out of = beyond, past

18 board a shrift = eating/food a penance

19 give . . . away = concede, sacrifice

20 your discretion = as you think best

ACT 3 • SCENE 3

ENTER OTHELLO AND IAGO

- 35 *Iago* Ha? I like not that.
Othello What dost thou say?
Iago Nothing, my lord. Or if – I know not what.
Othello Was not that Cassio parted²¹ from my wife?
Iago Cassio, my lord? No, sure, I cannot think it
40 That he would steal away²² so guilty-like,
Seeing you coming.
Othello I do believe 'twas he.
Desdemona How now, my lord?
I have been talking with a suitor here,
A man that languishes²³ in your displeasure.
45 *Othello* Who is't you mean?²⁴
Desdemona Why, your lieutenant, Cassio. Good my lord,
If I have any grace or power to move²⁵ you,
His present reconciliation²⁶ take.
For if he be not one that truly loves you,
50 That errs in ignorance, and not in cunning,
I have no judgment in²⁷ an honest face.
I prythee, call him back.
Othello Went he hence now?²⁸
Desdemona Ay sooth,²⁹ so humbled

21 gone away, leaving

22 steal away = secretly/stealthily withdraw

23 droops, wastes away, pines

24 (is it really possible that Othello does not know this?)

25 change your mind

26 return to favor

27 judgment in = discernment/faculty of judging about/of

28 just now

29 truly

ACT 3 • SCENE 3

That he hath left part of his grief with me

To suffer³⁰ with him. Good love, call him back. 55

Othello Not now, sweet Desdemon, some other time.

Desdemona But shall't be shortly?

Othello The sooner, sweet, for³¹ you.

Desdemona Shall't be tonight at supper?

Othello No, not tonight.

Desdemona Tomorrow dinner then?

Othello I shall not dine at home.

I meet the captains at the Citadel. 60

Desdemona Why then tomorrow night, on Tuesday morn,

On Tuesday noon, or night, on Wednesday morn.

I prythee, name the time, but let it not

Exceed three days. In faith, he's penitent.

And yet his trespass,³² in our common reason – 65

Save that, they say, the wars³³ must make examples

Out of their best – is not almost³⁴ a fault³⁵

To incur a private³⁶ check. When shall he come?

Tell me, Othello. I wonder in my soul

What you would ask me, that I should deny, 70

Or stand so mamm'ring on?³⁷ What? Michael Cassio,

That came a-wooing with you? And so many a time,

When I have spoke of you dispraisingly,

30 endure

31 because of

32 sin, offense

33 the wars = warfare

34 for the most part, usually

35 defect, imperfection, flaw

36 personal

37 mamm'ring on = hesitating about

ACT 3 • SCENE 3

- Hath ta'en your part – to have so much to-do³⁸
75 To bring him in? Trust me, I could do much –
Othello Prythee, no more. Let him come when he will.
I will deny thee nothing.
Desdemona Why, this is not a boon.³⁹
'Tis as I should entreat you wear your gloves,
Or feed on nourishing dishes, or keep you warm,
80 Or sue to you to do a peculiar profit
To your own person. Nay, when I have a suit
Wherein I mean to touch your love indeed,
It shall be full of poise,⁴⁰ and difficult weight,
And fearful to be granted.
Othello I will deny⁴¹ thee nothing.
85 Whereon,⁴² I do beseech thee, grant me this,
To leave me but a little to myself.
Desdemona Shall I deny you? No. Farewell, my lord.
Othello Farewell, my Desdemona. I'll come to thee straight.
Desdemona Emilia, come. (*to Othello*) Be as your fancies⁴³ teach
you.
90 Whate'er you be, I am obedient.⁴⁴

EXEUNT DESDEMONA AND EMILIA

Othello Excellent wretch.⁴⁵ Perdition catch my soul,

38 to do = fuss

39 favor, gift

40 importance, gravity

41 say no to, refuse

42 whereupon

43 moods, imaginings, judgment

44 dutiful, submissive

45 miserable/unfortunate person/little creature

But I do love thee. And when I love thee not,
Chaos is come again.

Iago My noble lord.

Othello What dost thou say, Iago?

Iago Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady, 95
Know of your love?

Othello He did, from first to last. Why dost thou ask?

Iago But for a satisfaction of my thought;
No further harm.⁴⁶

Othello Why⁴⁷ of thy thought, Iago?

Iago I did not think he had been acquainted with her. 100

Othello O yes, and went between us very oft.

Iago Indeed?

Othello Indeed? Ay, indeed. Discern'st⁴⁸ thou aught in that?
Is he not honest?

Iago Honest, my lord?

Othello Honest. Ay, honest.

Iago My lord, for aught I know. 105

Othello What dost thou think?

Iago Think, my lord?

Othello Think, my lord? Alas, thou echo'st me,
As if there were some monster in thy thought
Too hideous to be shown. Thou dost mean something.
I heard thee say even now, thou lik'dst not that, 110
When Cassio left my wife. What didst not like?
And when I told thee he was of⁴⁹ my counsel

46 evil

47 is it

48 perceive

49 in

In my whole course of wooing, thou criedst, “Indeed?”
 And didst contract⁵⁰ and purse⁵¹ thy brow together,
 115 As if thou then hadst shut up in thy brain
 Some horrible conceit.⁵² If thou dost love me,
 Show me thy thought.

Iago My lord, you know I love you.

Othello I think thou dost.

And for⁵³ I know thou’rt full of love and honesty
 120 And weigh’st thy words before thou giv’st them breath,
 Therefore these stops of thine fright me the more.
 For such things in a false disloyal knave
 Are tricks of custom.⁵⁴ But in a man that’s just,
 They’re close dilations,⁵⁵ working from the heart,
 That passion cannot rule.

125 *Iago* For⁵⁶ Michael Cassio,
 I dare be sworn, I think that he is honest.

Othello I think so too.

Iago Men should be what they seem,
 Or those that be not, would they might seem none.

Othello Certain, men should be what they seem.

130 *Iago* Why then I think Cassio’s an honest man.

Othello Nay, yet there’s more in this?

I prythee speak to me as to⁵⁷ thy thinkings,

50 draw together, knit

51 wrinkle

52 thought, idea

53 because

54 usual, ordinary, habitual

55 close dilations = hidden/private/secret postponements/delays

56 as for

57 as to = about

As thou dost ruminatē,⁵⁸ and give thy worst of thoughts
The worst of words.

Iago Good my lord, pardon me.
Though I am bound to every act of duty, 135
I am not bound to that⁵⁹ all slaves are free to.⁶⁰
Utter my thoughts? Why, say they are vile and false?
As where's that palace,⁶¹ whereinto foul things
Sometimes intrude not? Who has a breast so pure
But some uncleanly apprehensions⁶² 140
Keep leets and law-days,⁶³ and in session⁶⁴ sit
With meditations⁶⁵ lawful?
Othello Thou dost conspire against thy friend,⁶⁶ Iago,
If thou but think'st⁶⁷ him wronged and mak'st his ear
A stranger to thy thoughts.
Iago I do beseech you, 145
Though I perchance am vicious⁶⁸ in my guess –
As I confess it is my nature's plague
To spy into abuses,⁶⁹ and of⁷⁰ my jealousy

58 ponder, consider, chew over

59 that which

60 from (an old German song declares that, though tyrants may jail us, *Die Gedanken sind frei*, "Our thoughts are free")

61 palatial/heavenly mansion

62 uncleanly apprehensions = impure/wicked thoughts/feelings

63 leets and law-days = courts convened by the lords of manors and the sheriff ("local courts")

64 conference, meeting

65 contemplation, conversation

66 thy friend = Othello himself

67 but think'st = so much as/even think

68 depraved, wicked

69 deceits, wrongs

70 out of, from

ACT 3 • SCENE 3

- Shape faults that are not⁷¹ – that your wisdom
 150 From one⁷² that so imperfectly conceits⁷³
 Would take no notice, nor build yourself a trouble⁷⁴
 Out of his scattering⁷⁵ and unsure observance.⁷⁶
 It were not⁷⁷ for your quiet nor your good,
 Nor for my manhood, honesty, or wisdom,
 To let you know my thoughts.
- 155 *Othello* What dost thou mean?
- Iago* Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
 Is the immediate⁷⁸ jewel of their souls.⁷⁹
 Who steals my purse steals trash. 'Tis something, nothing,
 'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands.
- 160 But he that filches⁸⁰ from me my good name
 Robs me of that which not⁸¹ enriches him
 And makes me poor indeed.
- Othello* By heaven, I'll know thy thoughts.
- Iago* You cannot, if⁸² my heart were in your hand;
- 165 Nor shall not, whilst 'tis in my custody.⁸³
- Othello* Ha?
- Iago* O, beware, my lord, of jealousy,

71 are not = (1) do not exist, (2) are not faults

72 someone (himself)

73 perceives, thinks, imagines

74 worry, distress, misfortune

75 erratic, rambling

76 observations, watching

77 were not = would not be

78 primary

79 is THE imMEDyut JEWel OF their SOULS

80 steals, robs

81 does not

82 even if

83 care, safekeeping, protection

ACT 3 • SCENE 3

It is the green-eyed⁸⁴ monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on. That cuckold⁸⁵ lives in bliss
Who, certain of his fate,⁸⁶ loves not his wronger.⁸⁷
But O, what damnèd minutes tells⁸⁸ he o'er 170
Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet strongly loves?

Othello O misery!

Iago Poor and content is rich, and rich enough,
But riches fineless⁸⁹ is as poor as winter
To him that ever fears he shall be poor. 175
Good heaven, the souls of all my tribe defend⁹⁰
From jealousy!

Othello Why? why is this?⁹¹
Think'st thou I'd make a life of jealousy,
To follow still the changes of the moon
With fresh suspicions? No. To be once in doubt 180
Is to be resolved.⁹² Exchange me for a goat
When I shall turn⁹³ the business of my soul
To⁹⁴ such exsufflicate and blown⁹⁵ surmises,
Matching thy inference.⁹⁶ 'Tis not to make me jealous

84 green: traditionally associated with either (1) growth, health, or (2) putrid matter, fear, sickness, jealousy

85 man whose wife has been unfaithful

86 what has happened

87 the wife who wrongs him

88 counts

89 unlimited ("without end")

90 tribe defend = family avert/ward off/repel

91 why is this = why are you saying these things?

92 settled, convinced, free from doubt

93 center, revolve, construct

94 on

95 exsufflicate and blown = inflated/windy/puffed up and whispered/hinted

96 implied/suggested conclusion

ACT 3 • SCENE 3

185 To say my wife is fair, feeds⁹⁷ well, loves company,
 Is free of speech,⁹⁸ sings, plays, and dances well.⁹⁹
 Where virtue is, these are more¹⁰⁰ virtuous.
 Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw
 The smallest fear, or doubt¹⁰¹ of her revolt,
 190 For she had eyes and chose me. No, Iago,
 I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove;
 And on the proof, there is no more but this,
 Away at once with love or jealousy.

Iago I am glad of it. For now I shall have reason

195 To show the love and duty that I bear you
 With franker spirit. Therefore,¹⁰² as I am bound,¹⁰³
 Receive it from me. I speak not yet of proof.
 Look to your wife, observe her well with Cassio,
 Wear¹⁰⁴ your eyes thus, not jealous nor secure.
 200 I would not have your free and noble nature,
 Out of self-bounty,¹⁰⁵ be abused. Look to't.
 I know our country disposition¹⁰⁶ well.
 In Venice they¹⁰⁷ do let heaven see the pranks

97 eats

98 free of speech = (1) well spoken, ready (2) unrestrained, spontaneous, frank

99 is FREE of SPEECH sings PLAYS and DANces WELL (sings PLAYS: a prosodic convention, not to be confused with how the line was actually spoken)

100 even more

101 uncertainty

102 in that way

103 obliged in duty

104 use

105 out of self-bounty = from its own goodness/kindness/virtue

106 our country disposition = (1) my native country's (Venice's)? or (2) the rural/rustic arrangement/manner? (the former parallels the next line, but the latter is in contrast to it)

107 women

ACT 3 • SCENE 3

They dare not show their husbands. Their best conscience¹⁰⁸
 Is not to leave undone,¹⁰⁹ but keep unknown. 205

Othello Dost thou say so?

Iago She did deceive her father, marrying you,
 And when she seemed to shake and fear your looks,
 She loved them most.

Othello And so she did.

Iago Why, go to then. 210
 She that, so young, could give out such a seeming,
 To seal her father's eyes up close¹¹⁰ as oak,
 He thought 'twas witchcraft. But I am much to blame.¹¹¹
 I humbly do beseech you of your pardon
 For too much loving you.

Othello I am bound to thee for ever. 215

Iago I see this hath a little dashed¹¹² your spirits.

Othello Not a jot,¹¹³ not a jot.

Iago Trust me, I fear it has.
 I hope you will consider what¹¹⁴ is spoke
 Comes from my love. But I do see you're moved.
 I am to pray you not to strain¹¹⁵ my speech 220
 To grosser issues, nor to larger reach¹¹⁶
 Than to suspicion.

Othello I will not.

108 idea, conviction

109 leave undone = refrain from doing

110 dense

111 to blame = to be censured/criticized

112 cast down, depressed, discouraged

113 the least little bit

114 that what

115 push, force, stretch, extend

116 range, application

- Iago* Should you do so, my lord,
 My speech should fall into such¹¹⁷ vile success
 Which¹¹⁸ my thoughts aimed not. Cassio's my worthy friend.
 My lord, I see you're moved.
- 225 *Othello* No, not much moved.
 I do not think but¹¹⁹ Desdemona's honest.
- Iago* Long live she so, and long live you to think so.
- Othello* And yet, how nature erring from itself –
- Iago* Ay, there's the point. As, to be bold with you,
 230 Not to affect¹²⁰ many proposed matches,¹²¹
 Of her own clime,¹²² complexion,¹²³ and degree,
 Whereto we see in all things nature tends.
 Foh! One may smell¹²⁴ in such a will¹²⁵ most rank,
 Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural.
- 235 But pardon me, I do not in position¹²⁶
 Distinctly speak of her, though I may fear
 Her will, recoiling¹²⁷ to her better judgment,
 May fall to match you¹²⁸ with her country forms,
 And happily¹²⁹ repent.
- Othello* Farewell, farewell.

117 the kind of

118 at which

119 do not think but = I think only that

120 seek, choose, like

121 marriages*

122 (1) region, (2) climate

123 (1) character, disposition, (2) skin color, appearance, face*

124 perceive, suspect, find

125 (1) nature, inclination, (2) passion, carnal appetite

126 affirmative statement/assertion

127 returning, going back

128 fall to match you = decline/descend to link/pair/compare you

129 perhaps ("haply")

ACT 3 • SCENE 3

If more thou dost perceive, let me know more. 240

Set on¹³⁰ thy wife to observe. Leave me, Iago.

Iago My lord, I take my leave.

EXIT IAGO

Othello Why did I marry? This honest creature doubtless
Sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds.

IAGO RETURNS

Iago My lord, I would I might¹³¹ entreat your honor 245

To scan¹³² this thing no farther. Leave it to time,

Although 'tis fit that Cassio have his place,

For sure he fills it up with great ability.

Yet if you please to hold him off awhile,

You shall by that perceive¹³³ him, and his means. 250

Note if your lady strain his entertainment¹³⁴

With any strong or vehement importunity.¹³⁵

Much will be seen in that. In the meantime,

Let me be thought too busy¹³⁶ in my fears,

As worthy cause I have to fear I am, 255

And hold her free, I do beseech your honor.

Othello Fear not my government.¹³⁷

Iago I once more take my leave.

EXIT IAGO

130 set on = direct, arrange for, urge

131 I would I might = I want to, let me

132 analyze, test, examine

133 (1) become aware of, understand, (2) see through, recognize

134 his entertainment = her support of him

135 excessive zeal

136 (1) active, diligent, (2) meddling, nosy

137 (1) conduct, behavior, (2) discretion

Othello This fellow's of exceeding honesty,
 And knows all qualities,¹³⁸ with a learnèd spirit,
 260 Of human dealings. If I do prove her haggard,¹³⁹
 Though that her jesses¹⁴⁰ were my dear heartstrings,
 I'd whistle her off,¹⁴¹ and let her down the wind¹⁴²
 To prey at fortune.¹⁴³ Haply for¹⁴⁴ I am black,
 And have not those soft parts of conversation
 265 That chamberers¹⁴⁵ have, or for I am declined¹⁴⁶
 Into the vale¹⁴⁷ of years – yet that's¹⁴⁸ not much –
 She's gone.¹⁴⁹ I am abused, and my relief¹⁵⁰
 Must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage,
 That we can call these delicate creatures ours,
 270 And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad,
 And live upon the vapor of a dungeon,
 Than keep¹⁵¹ a corner in the thing I love
 For others' uses. Yet, 'tis the plague of great ones,
 Prerogated¹⁵² are they less than the base.
 275 'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death.

138 characters, natures

139 wild, untamable (from hawk training: adult females caught too late to be trained)

140 leg straps for leashing hawks

141 whistle her off = send her away, abandon her

142 down the wind = free

143 prey at fortune = hunt however she liked

144 haply for = maybe it is because

145 gallants

146 fallen, drooped, sunk

147 valley

148 yet that's = that's still/as yet

149 undone, ruined

150 (1) deliverance, alleviation, release, (2) help, assistance, support

151 maintain, preserve, retain, hold back

152 privileged

ACT 3 • SCENE 3

Even then this forkèd¹⁵³ plague is fated to us
When we do quicken.¹⁵⁴

ENTER DESDEMONA AND EMILIA

Look where she comes.

If she be false, heaven mocked itself.

I'll not believe't.

Desdemona How now, my dear Othello?
Your dinner, and the generous islanders¹⁵⁵ 280
By you invited, do attend¹⁵⁶ your presence.

Othello I am to blame.

Desdemona Why do you speak so faintly?¹⁵⁷
Are you not well?

Othello I have a pain upon¹⁵⁸ my forehead, here.

Desdemona Why, that's with watching,¹⁵⁹ 'twill away again. 285
Let me but bind it hard,¹⁶⁰ within this hour
It will be well.

Othello Your napkin¹⁶¹ is too little.

HE PUSHES THE HANDKERCHIEF AWAY, AND IT FALLS

Let it alone. Come, I'll go in with you.

Desdemona I am very sorry that you are not well.

EXEUNT OTHELLO AND DESDEMONA

153 horned (cuckolds wear horns)

154 when we do quicken = (1) when we are given life/conceived, (2) while we are alive

155 generous islanders = high-born/noble Cypriots

156 await, look forward to

157 (1) feebly, weakly, (2) almost imperceptibly

158 in

159 (1) being on guard/vigilant, (2) insufficient sleep

160 tightly

161 handkerchief

ACT 3 • SCENE 3

EMILIA PICKS UP THE HANDKERCHIEF

290 *Emilia* I am glad I have found this napkin.
This was her first remembrance¹⁶² from the Moor,
My wayward¹⁶³ husband hath a hundred times
Wooed¹⁶⁴ me to steal it. But she so loves the token¹⁶⁵ –
For he conjured¹⁶⁶ her she should ever keep it –
295 That she reserves¹⁶⁷ it evermore about her
To kiss and talk to. I'll have the work taken out,¹⁶⁸
And give't Iago. What he will do with it
Heaven knows, not I,
I nothing¹⁶⁹ but to please his fantasy.

ENTER IAGO

300 *Iago* How now? What do you here alone?
Emilia Do not you chide. I have a thing for you.
Iago You have a thing for me? It is a common thing.¹⁷⁰
Emilia Hah?
Iago To have a foolish wife.
305 *Emilia* O, is that all? What will you give me now
For that same handkerchief?
Iago What handkerchief?
Emilia What handkerchief?

162 keepsake

163 stubborn, perverse, willful

164 entreated, solicited, tempted

165 gift, present*

166 charged, constrained

167 retains, holds back

168 work taken out = needlework/embroidery copied

169 (1) do nothing, (2) wish

170 female genitalia

ACT 3 • SCENE 3

Why that the Moor first gave to Desdemona,
That which so often you did bid me steal.

Iago Hast stolen it from her? 310

Emilia No. But she let it drop by negligence,
And to th'advantage, I being here, took't up.
Look, here it is.

Iago A good wench,¹⁷¹ give it me.

Emilia (*not giving it*) What will¹⁷² you do with't, that you have
been so earnest¹⁷³

To have me filch it?

Iago (*snatches it*) Why, what is that to you? 315

Emilia If it be not for some purpose of import,¹⁷⁴

Give't me again. Poor lady, she'll run mad¹⁷⁵

When she shall lack¹⁷⁶ it.

Iago Be not acknown on't.¹⁷⁷

I have use for it. Go, leave me.

EXIT EMILIA

I will in Cassio's lodging lose¹⁷⁸ this napkin, 320

And let him find it. Trifles light as air

Are to the jealous confirmations strong

As¹⁷⁹ proofs of holy writ. This may do¹⁸⁰ something.

171 a good wench = (1) you're a good girl, (2) be a good girl

172 do you wish

173 ardent, determined

174 significance, importance

175 run mad = go crazy

176 be without, miss, need

177 be not acknown on't = do not let anyone know about it

178 leave behind, forget, drop

179 confirmations strong as = proofs as strong as

180 accomplish, achieve, cause

ACT 3 • SCENE 3

- The Moor already changes with my poison.¹⁸¹
325 Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons,
Which at the first¹⁸² are scarce found to distaste,¹⁸³
But with a little act¹⁸⁴ upon the blood
Burn like the mines¹⁸⁵ of sulphur. (*seeing Othello approach*)
I did say so.
330 Look, where he comes. Not poppy,¹⁸⁶ nor mandragora,¹⁸⁷
Nor all the drowsy syrups¹⁸⁸ of the world,
Shall ever medicine¹⁸⁹ thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou ow'dst yesterday.

ENTER OTHELLO

- Othello* Ha, ha, false to me?
Iago Why, how now, general? No more of that.
335 *Othello* Avaunt,¹⁹⁰ be gone. Thou hast set me on the rack.¹⁹¹
I swear 'tis better to be much abused
Than but to know't a little.
Iago How now, my lord?
Othello What sense had I of her stolen hours of lust?
I saw't not, thought it not, it harmed not me.
340 I slept the next night well, was free and merry.
I found not Cassio's kisses on her lips.

- 181 with my poison = from/because of my harmful/baleful influence
182 at the first = at first
183 scarce found to distaste = seldom experienced/met with dislike/disgust
184 with a little act = after brief action
185 like the mines = like mines
186 used as a sleeping potion ("opium")
187 mandrake: another much-used sleeping medicine
188 drowsy syrups = sleep-inducing liquids (herb plus sugar)
189 medicate
190 go away
191 torture rack

He that is robbed, not wanting¹⁹² what is stolen,

Let him not know't, and he's not robbed at all.

Iago I am sorry to hear this.

Othello I had been happy if the general camp,¹⁹³ 345

Pioneers¹⁹⁴ and all, had tasted her sweet body,

So¹⁹⁵ I had nothing known. O now, for ever

Farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content,

Farewell the plumèd¹⁹⁶ troops, and the big¹⁹⁷ wars,

That makes ambition¹⁹⁸ virtue! O farewell, 350

Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,¹⁹⁹

The spirit-stirring drum, th'ear-piercing fife,

The royal banner,²⁰⁰ and all quality,

Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!²⁰¹

And O you mortal engines,²⁰² whose rude throats 355

The immortal Jove's dread clamors²⁰³ counterfeit,

Farewell. Othello's occupation's²⁰⁴ gone.

Iago Is't possible, my lord?

Othello (*seizing him*) Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore,

Be sure of it. Give me the ocular²⁰⁵ proof, 360

192 lacking

193 troops*

194 infantrymen who dig, build, repair

195 as long as

196 wearing feathers on their headgear

197 great, mighty

198 make ambition = turn ambition into

199 shrill trump = sharp/high-pitched trumpet

200 ensign, flag

201 pride POMP and CIRcumSTANCE of GLORYus WAR

202 mechanical contrivances: cannon

203 loud outbursts ("thunder")

204 occupation's = calling/profession is

205 visual

ACT 3 • SCENE 3

Or by the worth of mine eternal soul
 Thou hadst been better have been born a dog
 Than answer my wakèd²⁰⁶ wrath!

Iago Is't²⁰⁷ come to this?

Othello Make me to see't, or at the least so prove it
 365 That the probation²⁰⁸ bear no hinge nor loop²⁰⁹
 To hang a doubt on, or woe upon thy life!

Iago My noble lord –

Othello If thou dost slander her, and torture me,
 Never pray more.²¹⁰ Abandon all remorse,²¹¹
 370 On horror's head horrors accumulate,²¹²
 Do deeds to make heaven weep, all earth amazed,
 For nothing canst thou to damnation add
 Greater than that.

Iago O grace! O heaven forgive me!

Are you a man? Have you a soul or sense? –
 375 God be wi' you.²¹³ Take²¹⁴ mine office. O wretchèd fool,²¹⁵
 That liv'st to make thine honesty a vice!
 O monstrous world! Take note, take note, O world,
 To be direct²¹⁶ and honest is not safe.

206 wakened

207 is't = has it

208 proof

209 no hinge nor loop = neither that which turns/moves nor that which
 contains an opening

210 again (for a faithful Christian, spiritual death)

211 contrition, repentance

212 on horror's head horrors accumulate = on top of/in addition to horror pile
 up even more horrors

213 God be wi' you = good-bye

214 remove/receive back/accept

215 himself, for trying to "help" Othello

216 straightforward

I thank you for this profit, and from hence
 I'll love no friend, sith²¹⁷ love breeds such offense. 380

Othello Nay, stay. Thou shouldst²¹⁸ be honest.

Iago I should be wise, for honesty's a fool,
 And loses that²¹⁹ it works for.

Othello By the world,²²⁰
 I think my wife be honest, and think she is not.
 I think that thou art just, and think thou art not. 385
 I'll have²²¹ some proof. My name, that was as fresh
 As Dian's²²² visage, is now begrimed and black
 As mine own face. If²²³ there be cords or knives,
 Poison or fire, or suffocating streams,²²⁴
 I'll not endure it.²²⁵ Would I were satisfied! 390

Iago I see, sir, you are eaten up²²⁶ with passion.
 I do repent me that I put it to you.
 You would be satisfied?

Othello Would? Nay, and I will.

Iago And may. But how? How²²⁷ satisfied, my lord?
 Would you, the supervisor,²²⁸ grossly gape on?²²⁹ 395

217 since

218 ought to

219 that which

220 by the world: a common oath

221 I'll have = I want to have

222 Diana: the moon

223 whether ("whatever it takes/requires")

224 suffocating streams = drowning

225 I'll not endure it = I will not go on like this

226 devoured, consumed, gnawed

227 in what way

228 spectator, observer (from the Quarto)

229 gape on = stare, watch

Behold her topped?²³⁰

Othello Death and damnation. O!

Iago It were a tedious²³¹ difficulty, I think,
 To bring them to that prospect.²³² Damn them then,
 If ever mortal eyes do see them bolster²³³
 405 More²³⁴ than their own. What then? How then?
 What shall I say? Where's satisfaction?
 It is impossible you should see this
 Were they²³⁵ as prime²³⁶ as goats, as hot as monkeys,
 As salt²³⁷ as wolves in pride,²³⁸ and fools as gross²³⁹
 410 As ignorance made drunk. But yet, I say,
 If imputation²⁴⁰ and strong circumstances,
 Which lead directly to the door of truth,
 Will give you satisfaction, you may have't.

Othello Give me a living reason²⁴¹ she's disloyal.

410 *Iago* I do not like the office.
 But sith I am entered²⁴² in this cause so far,
 Pricked²⁴³ to it by foolish honesty and love,
 I will go on. I lay²⁴⁴ with Cassio lately;

230 copulated with ("covered/tupped")

231 (1) wearisome, (2) irksome, disagreeable, painful

232 view, spectacle

233 lie on the same pillow ("have sex together")

234 any eyes more/other

235 were they = even if they were

236 in heat, sexually excited

237 salacious, lecherous

238 heat

239 glaring, total, stupefied

240 attribution, logical analysis

241 living reason = current ("valid") fact ("evidence")

242 involved

243 goaded, spurred, driven

244 shared a bed (for reasons of convenience, lack of space, etc.)

And, being troubled with a raging²⁴⁵ tooth,
 I could not sleep. There are a kind of men, 415
 So loose²⁴⁶ of soul, that in their sleeps will mutter
 Their affairs. One of this kind is Cassio.
 In sleep I heard him say, "Sweet Desdemona,
 Let us be wary, let us hide our loves,"
 And then, sir, would he gripe²⁴⁷ and wring my hand, 420
 Cry, "O sweet creature,"²⁴⁸ then kiss me hard,²⁴⁹
 As if he plucked²⁵⁰ up kisses by the roots
 That grew upon my lips, lay his leg o'er my thigh,
 And sigh, and kiss, and then cry "Cursèd fate
 That gave thee to the Moor!"

Othello O monstrous! monstrous! 425

Iago Nay, this was but his dream.

Othello But this denoted a foregone²⁵¹ conclusion.

'Tis a shrewd²⁵² doubt, though it be but a dream.

Iago And this may help to thicken²⁵³ other proofs
 That do demonstrate thinly. 430

Othello I'll tear her all to pieces.

Iago Nay, but be wise. Yet²⁵⁴ we see nothing done,
 She may be honest yet.²⁵⁵ Tell me but this,

245 violently painful

246 unrestrained, disconnected, slack, indulgent

247 grasp, clutch

248 CREEaTYUR

249 vigorously, intensely

250 pulled, gathered

251 already accomplished/occurring

252 depraved, wicked

253 fill the gaps in

254 as yet

255 still

ACT 3 • SCENE 3

- Have you not sometimes seen a handkerchief
435 Spotted with strawberries in your wife's hand?
Othello I gave her such a one, 'twas my first gift.
Iago I know not that. But such a handkerchief –
I am sure it was your wife's – did I today
See Cassio wipe his beard with.
Othello If it be that –
440 *Iago* If it be that, or any that was hers,
It speaks against her with the other proofs.
Othello O, that the slave²⁵⁶ had forty thousand lives.
One is too poor, too weak for my revenge!
Now do I see 'tis true. Look here, Iago,
445 All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven.
'Tis gone.
Arise, black vengeance, from thy²⁵⁷ hollow²⁵⁸ hell!
Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted²⁵⁹ throne
To tyrannous²⁶⁰ hate! Swell, bosom, with thy fraught,²⁶¹
For 'tis of aspics'²⁶² tongues!
450 *Iago* Yet be content.
Othello O, blood, Iago, blood!
Iago Patience, I say. Your mind perhaps may change.
Othello Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic Sea,²⁶³
Whose icy current and compulsive²⁶⁴ course

256 Desdemona? Cassio?

257 (from the Quarto)

258 deep-buried, open, empty

259 fixed in the heart

260 relentless, inexorable, overpowering

261 load, burden

262 asp's'

263 Pontic Sea = Black Sea

264 driving/forcing forward

ACT 3 • SCENE 3

Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on 455
To the Propontic²⁶⁵ and the Hellespont,
Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,²⁶⁶
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble²⁶⁷ love,
Till that a capable and wide²⁶⁸ revenge
Swallow them²⁶⁹ up. Now, by yond marble²⁷⁰ heaven, 460
In the due reverence of a sacred vow

OTHELLO KNEELS

I here engage²⁷¹ my words.

Iago Do not rise yet.

IAGO KNEELS

Witness, you ever-burning lights²⁷² above,
You elements that clip²⁷³ us round about,
Witness that here Iago doth give up²⁷⁴ 465
The execution²⁷⁵ of his wit, hands, heart,
To wronged Othello's service. Let him command,
And to obey shall be in me remorse,²⁷⁶
What bloody business ever.²⁷⁷

265 Sea of Marmora

266 speed

267 modestly satisfied

268 capable and wide = capacious/roomy and broad

269 probably (1) his thoughts, but conceivably (2) Desdemona and Cassio

270 stone-hard, inflexible

271 pledge

272 stars

273 clasp, hug, embrace

274 give up = commit, bestow, grant

275 operation, action, performance

276 without mitigation, solemn obligation

277 what bloody business ever = whatever the bloody business

ACT 3 • SCENE 3

Othello I greet²⁷⁸ thy love
470 Not with vain thanks, but with acceptance bounteous,
And will upon the instant put thee to't.
Within these three days let me hear thee say
That Cassio's not alive.

Iago My friend is dead.
'Tis done at your request. But let her live.

475 *Othello* Damn her, lewd minx!²⁷⁹ O, damn her! damn her!
Come, go with me apart, I will withdraw
To furnish me with some swift means of death
For the fair devil. Now art thou my lieutenant.

Iago I am your own for ever.

EXEUNT

278 receive, welcome

279 lewd mix = evil/worthless/lascivious woman

ACT 3 • SCENE 4

SCENE 4

A street

ENTER DESDEMONA, EMILIA, AND CLOWN

Desdemona Do you know, sirrah,¹ where Lieutenant Cassio lies?²

Clown I dare not say he lies³ anywhere.

Desdemona Why, man?

Clown He's a soldier; and for one to say a soldier lies is⁴ 5
stabbing.

Desdemona Go to. Where lodges he?

Clown To tell you where he lodges is to tell you where I
lie.⁵

Desdemona Can anything be made of⁶ this? 10

Clown I know not where he lodges, and for me to devise a
lodging, and say he lies here, or he lies there, were to lie in
mine own throat.

Desdemona Can you inquire⁷ him out, and be edified⁸ by report?

Clown I will catechize⁹ the world for him, that is, make 15
questions and by¹⁰ them answer.

Desdemona Seek him, bid him come hither. Tell him I have
moved my lord on his behalf, and hope all will be well.

1 form of address used for servants and children

2 lives, lodges

3 tells lies

4 may cause, risks

5 where I lie = what I would be telling lies about

6 made of = derived from, understood by

7 search, seek

8 informed, instructed

9 question, examine, interrogate

10 by means of

ACT 3 • SCENE 4

Clown To do this is within the compass of man's wit, and
20 therefore I will attempt the doing it.¹¹

EXIT CLOWN

Desdemona Where should I lose¹² that handkerchief, Emilia?

Emilia I know not, madam.

Desdemona Believe me, I had rather have lost my purse
Full of crusadoes.¹³ And but my noble Moor
25 Is true of mind and made of no such baseness
As jealous creatures are, it were enough
To put him to ill thinking.

Emilia Is he not jealous?

Desdemona Who, he? I think the sun where he was born
Drew all such humors¹⁴ from him.

Emilia Look where he comes.

30 *Desdemona* I will not leave him now till Cassio
Be called to him.

ENTER OTHELLO

How is't with you, my lord?

Othello Well, my good lady. (*aside*) O hardness¹⁵ to
dissemble!

How do you, Desdemona?

Desdemona Well, my good lord.

Othello Give me your hand. This hand is moist, my lady.

35 *Desdemona* It yet hath felt no age nor known no sorrow.

11 of it

12 where should I lose = where must I have lost

13 Portuguese coins (cruSEYdoze)

14 moods

15 (1) how difficult it is, (2) may I be granted the severity/rigor/endurance

Othello This argues¹⁶ fruitfulness¹⁷ and liberal heart.
 Hot, hot, and moist. This hand of yours requires¹⁸
 A sequester¹⁹ from liberty, fasting,²⁰ and prayer,
 Much castigation,²¹ exercise devout,²²
 For here's a young and sweating²³ devil, here, 40
 That commonly²⁴ rebels. 'Tis a good hand,
 A frank one.

Desdemona You may, indeed, say so,
 For 'twas that hand that gave away my heart.

Othello A liberal hand. The hearts of old gave hands.
 But our new heraldry²⁵ is hands, not hearts. 45

Desdemona I cannot speak of this. Come now, your promise.

Othello What promise, chuck?²⁶

Desdemona I have sent to bid Cassio come speak with you.

Othello (*fit of coughing?*) I have a salt and sorry rheum²⁷
 offends²⁸ me.

Lend me thy handkerchief.

16 this argues = (1) this hand, and/or (2) this feature/line of your hand indicates (Othello was surely familiar with the practice of "reading" hands by interpretation of their specific and individual characteristics)

17 fertility

18 hot HOT and MOIST this HAND of YOURS reQUIRES

19 isolation, seclusion

20 and also requires fasting

21 correction, discipline, purification

22 pious/religious activity/employment

23 (because hot and moist, as active devils are)

24 usually, ordinarily

25 method/way of showing/exhibiting rank/precedence (the rights accompanying rank)

26 term of endearment

27 salt and sorry rheum = irritating/vexatious and dismal/distressing mucous nasal discharge ("a running cold")

28 which attacks

- 50 *Desdemona* Here, my lord.
Othello (*rejecting it*) That which I gave you.
Desdemona I have it not
about²⁹ me.
Othello Not?
Desdemona No indeed, my lord.
Othello That is a fault.
That handkerchief
Did an Egyptian³⁰ to my mother give.
55 She was a charmer,³¹ and could almost read
The thoughts of people. She told her,³² while she kept it
'Twould make her amiable³³ and subdue my father
Entirely to her love. But if she lost it,
Or made a gift of it, my father's eye
60 Should hold her loathèd, and his spirits³⁴ should³⁵ hunt
After new fancies. She, dying, gave it me,
And bid me, when my fate would have me wive,
To give it her.³⁶ I did so, and take heed on't,³⁷
Make it a darling,³⁸ like your precious eye.
65 To lose't or give't away were such perdition
As nothing else could match.
Desdemona Is't possible?

29 with

30 gypsy? Egyptian?

31 enchanter, magician

32 Othello's mother

33 lovable

34 impulses, emotions

35 would necessarily/be obliged to

36 my wife

37 heed on't = careful attention/regard of it

38 object of your love

ACT 3 • SCENE 4

Othello 'Tis true. There's magic in the web³⁹ of it.
 A sibyl,⁴⁰ that had numbered⁴¹ in the world
 The sun to course⁴² two hundred compasses,⁴³
 In her prophetic fury⁴⁴ sewed the work. 70
 The worms⁴⁵ were hallowed⁴⁶ that did breed⁴⁷ the silk,
 And it was dyed in mummy,⁴⁸ which the skillful
 Conserved of⁴⁹ maiden's hearts.

Desdemona Indeed? Is't true?
Othello Most veritable,⁵⁰ therefore look to't well.
Desdemona Then would to heaven that I had never seen't! 75
Othello Ha? Wherefore?
Desdemona Why do you speak so startlingly and rash?⁵¹
Othello Is't lost? Is't gone? Speak, is it out of the way?⁵²
Desdemona Bless us!
Othello Say you?⁵³ 80
Desdemona It is not lost. But what an if⁵⁴ it were?
Othello How?
Desdemona I say, it is not lost.

39 weaving, fabric

40 prophetess, fortune-teller, witch

41 been able to count

42 run

43 circles around the earth ("years")

44 frenzy, passion

45 silkworms/caterpillars

46 consecrated, sanctified

47 generate, produce

48 medicinal substance prepared from mummified bodies

49 conserved of = preserved from

50 truthful, genuine

51 startlingly and rash = abruptly and urgently/hastily/impetuously

52 out of the way = lost, missing, astray

53 say you = what do you say/respond/answer

54 what an if = what if

ACT 3 • SCENE 4

Othello Fetch't, let me see't.

Desdemona Why, so I can. But I will not now.

85 *This is a trick to put*⁵⁵ me from my suit.

Pray you, let Cassio be received again.

Othello Fetch me the handkerchief. My mind misgives.⁵⁶

Desdemona Come, come.

You'll never meet⁵⁷ a more sufficient⁵⁸ man.

Othello The handkerchief!

90 *Desdemona* I pray, talk⁵⁹ me of Cassio.

Othello The handkerchief!

Desdemona A man that all his time

Hath founded⁶⁰ his good fortunes on your love,

Shared dangers with you.

Othello The handkerchief!

95 *Desdemona* In sooth, you are to blame.

Othello Away!⁶¹

EXIT

Emilia Is not this man jealous?

Desdemona I ne'er saw this before.

Sure there's some wonder⁶² in this handkerchief.

100 I am most unhappy in the loss of it.

Emilia 'Tis not⁶³ a year or two shows us⁶⁴ a man.

55 turn, divert

56 is apprehensive/suspicious

57 find, come across

58 satisfactory, competent, capable*

59 talk to

60 all his time hath founded = has always based

61 get away

62 some wonder = something miraculous/marvelous

63 'tis not = it is not just ("it takes more than")

64 we women

ACT 3 • SCENE 4

My advocacy⁷⁶ is not now in tune.⁷⁷
My lord is not my lord, nor should I know him
Were he in favor as in humor⁷⁸ altered.

So help me every spirit sanctified
125 As⁷⁹ I have spoken for you all my best,
And stood within the blank⁸⁰ of his displeasure
For my free speech. You must awhile be patient.
What I can do I will. And more I will
Than for myself I dare. Let that suffice you.

Iago Is my lord angry?

130 *Emilia* He went hence but now,
And certainly in strange unquietness.⁸¹

Iago Can he be angry? I have seen the cannon,
When it hath blown his ranks⁸² into the air,
And like the devil from his very arm
135 Puffed⁸³ his own brother. And is he angry?
Something of moment, then. I will go meet him,
There's matter in't indeed, if he be angry.

Desdemona I prythee do so.

EXIT IAGO

Something sure of state,⁸⁴
Either from Venice or some unhatched⁸⁵ practice

76 appeal, pleading

77 in tune = according to Othello's mood

78 mood, disposition

79 that

80 point-blank range

81 turbulence, disturbance

82 soldiers

83 blown away

84 something sure of state = surely some matter of state/government business

85 not yet begun/brought into being

ACT 3 • SCENE 4

Made demonstrable⁸⁶ here in Cyprus to him, 140
 Hath puddled⁸⁷ his clear spirit, and in such cases
 Men's natures wrangle⁸⁸ with inferior⁸⁹ things,
 Though great ones⁹⁰ are their object. 'Tis even so.
 For let our finger ache, and it indues⁹¹
 Our other healthful members even to that sense 145
 Of pain. Nay, we⁹² must think men⁹³ are not gods,
 Nor of⁹⁴ them look for such observancy⁹⁵
 As fits the bridal.⁹⁶ Beshrew me much, Emilia.
 I was, unhandsome⁹⁷ warrior⁹⁸ as I am,
 Arraigning⁹⁹ his unkindness¹⁰⁰ with¹⁰¹ my soul. 150
 But now I find I had suborned¹⁰² the witness,
 And he's indicted falsely.
Emilia Pray heaven it be state matters, as you think,
 And no conception¹⁰³ nor no jealous toy¹⁰⁴
 Concerning you. 155

86 evident, apparent

87 muddled, confused

88 bicker, argue

89 lesser, lower

90 things/matters

91 brings, introduces

92 we women

93 males

94 from

95 observance of forms/customs

96 the bridal = marriage

97 faulty, inexperienced, unskillful

98 "O my fair warrior" are Othello's first words to her to her, in act 2, scene 1

99 accusing

100 absence of affection/consideration

101 from, by the perspective of

102 unlawfully secured false testimony

103 notion, imagination

104 trifle, crotchet, fancy

ACT 3 • SCENE 4

Desdemona Alas the day, I never gave him cause.

Emilia But jealous souls will not be answered¹⁰⁵ so.

They are not ever jealous for the cause,

But jealous for they are jealous. It is a monster

160 Begot upon itself, born on itself.

Desdemona Heaven keep that monster from Othello's mind!

Emilia Lady, amen.

Desdemona I will go seek him. Cassio, walk hereabout.

If I do find him fit, I'll move your suit,

165 And seek to effect it to my uttermost.

Cassio I humbly thank your ladyship.

EXEUNT DESDEMONA AND EMILIA

ENTER BIANCA

Bianca Save¹⁰⁶ you, friend Cassio!

Cassio What make you from¹⁰⁷ home?

How is it with you, my most fair Bianca?

170 Indeed, sweet love, I was coming to your house.

Bianca And I was going to your lodging, Cassio.

What? Keep a week away? Seven days and nights?

Eight score¹⁰⁸ eight hours? And lovers' absent hours,

More tedious than the dial,¹⁰⁹ eight score times?

O weary reckoning.¹¹⁰

175 *Cassio* Pardon me, Bianca.

105 rebutted, satisfied

106 may God deliver/protect (a conventional greeting)

107 make you from = are you doing away from

108 a score = 20

109 dial of a clock

110 calculation, computation

ACT 3 • SCENE 4

I have this while with leaden thoughts been pressed,
But I shall in a more continue¹¹¹ time
Strike off this score¹¹² of absence. Sweet Bianca,
Take me this work out.

HE GIVES HER DESDEMONA'S HANDKERCHIEF

Bianca O Cassio, whence came this?
This is some token from a newer friend. 180
To the felt¹¹³ absence now I feel a cause.
Is't¹¹⁴ come to this? Well, well.

Cassio Go to, woman!
Throw your vile guesses in the devil's teeth,
From whence you have¹¹⁵ them. You are jealous now
That this is from some mistress, some remembrance. 185
No, in good troth, Bianca.

Bianca Why, whose is it?
Cassio I know not neither.¹¹⁶ I found it in my chamber,
I like the work well. Ere it be demanded,¹¹⁷
As like enough it will, I'd have it copied.
Take it, and do't, and leave me for this time.¹¹⁸ 190

Bianca Leave you? Wherefore?

Cassio I do attend here on the general,
And think it no addition,¹¹⁹ nor my wish,

111 more continue = more lasting/less interrupted

112 strike off this score = cancel/pay off this reckoning/tally mark

113 perceived, experienced

114 is't = has it

115 got

116 either

117 asked for, requested

118 this time = now

119 added honor

ACT 3 • SCENE 4

To have him see me womaned.

Bianca Why, I pray you?

195 *Cassio* Not that I love you not.

Bianca But that you do not love me.

I pray you bring me on the way a little,¹²⁰

And say if I shall see you soon at night.

Cassio 'Tis but a little way¹²¹ that I can bring you,

200 For I attend here. But I'll see you soon.

Bianca 'Tis very good. I must be circumstanced.¹²²

EXEUNT

120 bring me on the way a little = escort me along the road a bit

121 distance

122 be circumstanced = accept/be governed by circumstances/realities

Act 4



SCENE I

A street

ENTER OTHELLO AND IAGO

Iago Will you think so?

Othello Think so, Iago?

Iago What,

To kiss in private?

Othello An unauthorized¹ kiss?

Iago Or to be naked with her friend in bed,

An hour or more, not meaning any harm?

Othello Naked in bed, Iago, and not mean harm?

It is hypocrisy against² the devil.

They that mean virtuously and yet do so,³

The devil their virtue tempts, and they tempt heaven.

5

¹ illicit, unsanctioned

² with? in active opposition/resistance to? in the face/presence of? in preparation for?

³ things like this (“thus”)

ACT 4 • SCENE I

- Iago* So⁴ they do nothing, 'tis a venial slip.⁵
 10 But if I give my wife a handkerchief –
Othello What then?
Iago Why, then, 'tis hers, my lord, and being hers,
 She may, I think, bestow't on any man.
Othello She is protectress of her honor too.
 15 May she give that?
Iago Her honor is an essence⁶ that's not seen:
 They have it very oft that have it not.⁷
 But for the handkerchief –
Othello By heaven, I would most gladly have forgot it.
 20 Thou said'st – O, it comes o'er⁸ my memory,
 As doth the raven o'er the infected⁹ house,
 Boding¹⁰ to all – he had my handkerchief.
Iago Ay. What of that?
Othello That's not so good now.¹¹
Iago What if I had said I had seen him do you wrong?
 25 Or heard him say – as knaves be such abroad,¹²
 Who having, by their own importunate¹³ suit,
 Or voluntary dotage¹⁴ of some mistress,
 Convinced or supplied¹⁵ them, cannot choose

4 if

5 venial slip = forgivable/unimportant (1) error/fault, (2) evasion

6 element, substance, characteristic

7 they often have it by reputation, though not in fact

8 to, across

9 tainted/contaminated with (1) disease/infected properties, (2) evil/diseased morality

10 portending, presaging

11 now that is not so good

12 at large, all over

13 troublesome, persistent

14 foolishness, infatuation, stupidity

15 convinced or supplied = firmly persuaded or fulfilled/satisfied

But they must blab¹⁶ –

Othello Hath he said anything?

Iago He hath, my lord, but be you well assured, 30
No more than he'll unswear.

Othello What hath he said?

Iago Why, that he did – I know not what he did.

Othello What? what?

Iago Lie.

Othello With her?

Iago With her, on her, what you will.

Othello Lie with her? Lie on her? We say lie on her,¹⁷ when 35
they belie¹⁸ her. Lie with her. That's fulsome.¹⁹ Handkerchief
– confessions – handkerchief! To confess, and be hanged for
his labor, first to be hanged, and then to confess. I tremble at
it. Nature would not invest²⁰ herself in such shadowing²¹
passion without some instruction.²² It is not words that shake 40
me thus. – Pish – Noses, ears, and lips. Is't possible? Confess –
handkerchief! O devil! –

OTHELLO FALLS IN A TRANCE

Iago Work on.

My medicine works. Thus credulous fools are caught,
And many worthy. And chaste dames even thus, 45
All guiltless, meet reproach. – What ho? my lord?
My lord, I say. Othello!

16 reveal indiscreetly, tell, chatter

17 say lie on her = accuse her of lying

18 they belie = her words contradict/give the lie to

19 rank, overgrown

20 clothe, wrap, enclose

21 boding, prefiguring

22 information, knowledge

ACT 4 • SCENE I

ENTER CASSIO

How now, Cassio!

Cassio What's the matter?

Iago My lord is fallen into an epilepsy,
50 This is his second fit. He had one yesterday.

Cassio Rub him about the temples.

Iago The lethargy²³ must have his²⁴ quiet course.
If not, he foams at²⁵ mouth, and by and by
Breaks out to²⁶ savage madness. Look, he stirs,
55 Do you withdraw yourself a little while,
He will recover straight. When he is gone,
I would on great occasion²⁷ speak with you.

EXIT CASSIO

How is it, general? Have you not hurt your head?

Othello Dost thou mock me?

Iago I mock you not, by heaven.

60 Would you would bear your fortune like a man.

Othello A hornèd²⁸ man's a monster and a beast.

Iago There's many a beast, then, in a populous city,
And many a civil²⁹ monster.

Othello Did he confess it?³⁰

Iago Good sir, be a man.

23 torpor, inertness

24 its

25 at the

26 in, into

27 circumstances, matters

28 cuckolded

29 citizen? civilized? refined?

30 (?) is it certain, then?

Think³¹ every bearded fellow that's but yoked³² 65
 May draw³³ with you. There's millions now alive
 That nightly lie in those unproper³⁴ beds
 Which they dare swear peculiar.³⁵ Your case is better.
 O, 'tis the spite of hell, the fiend's arch-mock,
 To lip³⁶ a wanton in a secure couch, 70
 And to suppose her chaste. No, let me know,
 And knowing what I am, I know what she shall be.³⁷

Othello O, thou art wise, 'tis certain.

Iago Stand you awhile apart,
 Confine yourself but in a patient list.³⁸ 75
 Whilst you were here o'erwhelmèd with your grief –
 A passion most unsuited such a man –
 Cassio came hither. I shifted³⁹ him away,
 And laid⁴⁰ good 'scuses upon your ecstasy,⁴¹
 Bade him anon return, and here speak with me, 80
 The which he promised. Do but encave⁴² yourself,
 And mark the fleers⁴³ the gibes,⁴⁴ and notable scorns⁴⁵

31 consider/realize that

32 (1) coupled, with a yoke, like a draught animal, (2) married

33 pull, haul

34 (1) improper, indecent, (2) common, universal

35 their own private property

36 kiss

37 (1) and knowing what kind of man I am (bold, brave, strong), I know what she will be (dead), (2) and knowing what kind of man I am (burdened with original sin/inherently imperfect), I know what she must be (unfaithful)

38 boundary, limit

39 I shifted = by means of indirect/evasive methods, I sent

40 placed, set

41 frenzy, fit

42 enclose, cover up ("hide")

43 notable scorns = striking/obvious sneers/gibes/mockery

44 scoffing, taunting, flouting

45 notable scorns = remarkable/striking/conspicuous contempt

ACT 4 • SCENE I

That dwell⁴⁶ in every region⁴⁷ of his face.
For I will make him tell the tale anew,
85 Where, how, how oft, how long ago, and when
He hath, and is again to cope⁴⁸ your wife.
I say, but mark his gesture. Marry, patience,
Or I shall say you're all in all in spleen,⁴⁹
And nothing of a man.

Othello Dost thou hear, Iago?
90 I will be found most cunning in my patience,
But – dost thou hear? – most bloody.

Iago That's not amiss,⁵⁰
But yet keep time⁵¹ in all. Will you withdraw?

OTHELLO WITHDRAWS

Now will I question Cassio of⁵² Bianca,
A housewife that, by selling her desires,
95 Buys herself bread and clothes. It is a creature
That dotes on Cassio – as 'tis the strumpet's⁵³ plague
To beguile many and be beguiled by one.
He, when he hears of her, cannot refrain
From the excess of laughter. – Here he comes.
100 As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad,

46 abide, inhabit

47 area, part

48 have intercourse with

49 all in all in spleen = altogether/completely in a hot/capricious/peevish temper

50 wrong, out of order

51 the proper pace/speed/tempo

52 about

53 harlot, prostitute*

ACT 4 • SCENE I

And his unbookish⁵⁴ jealousy must construe⁵⁵
Poor Cassio's smiles, gestures, and light⁵⁶ behavior
Quite in the wrong.

ENTER CASSIO

How do you now, lieutenant?

Cassio The worser that you give me the addition⁵⁷
Whose want⁵⁸ even kills me. 105

Iago Ply⁵⁹ Desdemona well, and you are⁶⁰ sure on't.
Now, if this suit lay in Bianca's power, (*Iago lowers his voice*)
How quickly should you speed!⁶¹

Cassio Alas, poor caitiff!⁶²

Othello (*aside*) Look how he laughs already.

Iago I never knew woman love man so. 110

Cassio Alas, poor rogue, I think indeed she loves me.

Othello (*aside*) Now he denies it faintly, and laughs it out.

Iago Do you hear, Cassio?

Othello (*aside*) Now he importunes him

To tell it o'er. Go to, well said, well said.

Iago She gives it out that you shall marry her. 115

Do you intend it?

Cassio Ha, ha, ha!

54 unlearnèd

55 analyze, interpret (conSTRUE)

56 trivial, unimportant, venial, of no weight

57 title, "lieutenant"

58 lack

59 apply to, work away at, solicit, importune, press

60 will be

61 succeed, prosper

62 wretch

ACT 4 • SCENE I

Othello (*aside*) Do you triumph, Roman?⁶³ Do you triumph?

Cassio I marry. What? A customer?⁶⁴ Prythee, bear⁶⁵ some charity to my wit,⁶⁶ do not think it so unwholesome.⁶⁷ Ha,

120 ha, ha!

Othello (*aside*) So, so, so, so. They laugh that win.

Iago Why, the cry⁶⁸ goes that you shall marry her.

Cassio Prythee, say true.

Iago I am a very villain else.

Othello (*aside*) Have you scored⁶⁹ me? Well.

125 *Cassio* This is the monkey's own giving out. She is persuaded I will marry her, out of her own love and flattery, not out of my promise.

Othello (*aside*) Iago beckons me; now he begins the story.

130 *Cassio* She was here even now. She haunts me in every place. I was the other day talking on the sea bank with certain Venetians, and thither comes the bauble,⁷⁰ and falls thus about my neck.

Othello (*aside*) Crying, "O dear Cassio," as it were. His gesture imports it.

135 *Cassio* So hangs, and lolls,⁷¹ and weeps upon me. So shakes and pulls me. Ha, ha, ha!

63 triumphant Roman generals were welcomed back to Rome in a great parade: triumphs

64 (1) a whore (if Cassio refers to Bianca), (2) a purchaser, client (if he refers to himself)

65 profess, pretend, maintain

66 mind, reason

67 noxious, infirm, sick, corrupted

68 rumor

69 whipped me and left marks

70 (1) plaything, pretty toy / gewgaw, (2) fool

71 droops, dangles

ACT 4 • SCENE I

Othello (*aside*) Now he tells how she plucked him to my chamber. O, I see that nose of yours, but not that dog I shall throw it to.

Cassio Well, I must leave⁷² her company. 140

Iago Before me! Look where she comes.

Cassio 'Tis such⁷³ another fitchew.⁷⁴ Marry, a perfumed one.

ENTER BIANCA

What do you mean by this haunting of me?

Bianca Let the devil and his dam⁷⁵ haunt you! What did you mean by that same⁷⁶ handkerchief you gave me even⁷⁷ now? 145

I was a fine⁷⁸ fool to take it. I must take out the work? A likely piece of work that you should find it in your chamber and not know who left it there. This is some minx's token, and I must take out the work? There, give it⁷⁹ your hobby-horse,⁸⁰ wheresoever you had it, I'll take out no work on't.⁸¹ 150

Cassio How now, my sweet Bianca? How now? how now?

Othello (*aside*) By heaven, that should⁸² be my handkerchief.

Bianca An⁸³ you'll come to supper to-night, you may; an you will not, come when you are next prepared⁸⁴ for.

72 quit, give up

73 just

74 polecat

75 mother

76 identical (in a vexed sense: "that blankety-blank")

77 just

78 perfect, absolute, sheer

79 it to

80 loose woman, whore

81 on't = off/from it

82 must

83 if

84 ready

ACT 4 • SCENE I

EXIT BIANCA

- 155 *Iago* After her, after her.
Cassio I must, she'll rail⁸⁵ in the street else.⁸⁶
Iago Will you sup there?
Cassio Yes, I intend so.
Iago Well, I may chance to see you, for I would very fain
160 speak with you.
Cassio Prythee, come. Will you?
Iago Go to. Say no more.

EXIT CASSIO

- Othello* (*coming forward*) How shall I murder him, Iago?
Iago Did you perceive how he laughed at his vice?⁸⁷
165 *Othello* O Iago!
Iago And did you see the handkerchief?
Othello Was that mine?
Iago Yours, by this hand. And to see how he prizes the
foolish woman your wife! She gave it⁸⁸ him, and he hath
170 given it his whore.
Othello I would have him nine years a-killing. A fine⁸⁹ woman,
a fair woman, a sweet woman?
Iago Nay, you must forget that.
Othello Ay, let her rot, and perish, and be damned tonight, for
175 she shall not live. No, my heart is turned to stone. I strike it,
and it hurts my hand. O, the world hath not a sweeter

85 curse

86 otherwise

87 depravity, corruption

88 it to

89 (1) superior, pure, (2) delicate, exquisite, refined

creature. She might lie by an emperor's side, and command
him tasks.

Iago Nay, that's not your way.⁹⁰

Othello Hang her, I do but say what she is – so delicate with her
needle, an admirable musician. O, she will sing the savageness
out of a bear. Of so high and plenteous wit and invention. 180

Iago She's the worse for all this.

Othello O, a thousand, a thousand times. And then, of so gentle
a condition. 185

Iago Ay, too gentle.

Othello Nay, that's certain. But yet the pity of it, Iago. O Iago,
the pity of it, Iago!

Iago If you are so fond over⁹¹ her iniquity,⁹² give her
patent⁹³ to offend, for if it touch not you, it comes near
nobody. 190

Othello I will chop her into messes.⁹⁴ Cuckold me?

Iago O, 'tis foul in her.

Othello With mine officer?

Iago That's fouler. 195

Othello Get me some poison, Iago, this night. I'll not
expostulate⁹⁵ with her, lest her body⁹⁶ and beauty
unprovide⁹⁷ my mind again. This night, Iago.

Iago Do it not with poison, strangle her in her bed, even the

90 road, path, course

91 about

92 wickedness, unrighteous deeds

93 license, authority

94 food

95 remonstrate, reason/argue with

96 personal being, individuality

97 make unready/unequipped/unprepared

ACT 4 • SCENE I

200 bed she hath contaminated.⁹⁸

Othello Good, good. The justice of it pleases. Very good.

Iago And for Cassio, let me be his undertaker.⁹⁹ You shall
hear more by midnight.

Othello Excellent¹⁰⁰ good.

A TRUMPET WITHIN

What trumpet is that same?¹⁰¹

205 *Iago* I warrant something from Venice.

'Tis Lodovico, this, comes from the Duke.

See, your wife is with him.

ENTER LODOVICO, DESDEMONA, AND ATTENDANTS

Lodovico Save you, worthy general!

Othello With all my heart, sir.

210 *Lodovico* The Duke and senators of Venice greet you.

GIVES OTHELLO LETTERS

Othello I kiss the instrument¹⁰² of their pleasures.

READS

Desdemona And what's the news, good cousin Lodovico?

Iago I am very glad to see you, signior.

Welcome to Cyprus.

215 *Lodovico* I thank you. How does Lieutenant Cassio?

Iago Lives,¹⁰³ sir.

98 sullied, defiled

99 be his undertaker = take care of him

100 exceptionally

101 that same = that

102 agent

103 he lives/is alive

ACT 4 • SCENE I

Desdemona Cousin, there's fall'n between him, and my lord,
An unkind breach.¹⁰⁴ But you shall make all well.

Othello Are you sure of that?

Desdemona My lord?

Othello (*reads aloud*) "This fail you not to do, as you will."¹⁰⁵ 220

Lodovico He did not call.¹⁰⁶ He's busy in the paper.¹⁰⁷

Is there division¹⁰⁸ 'twixt my lord and Cassio?

Desdemona A most unhappy one. I would do much
To atone them,¹⁰⁹ for the love I bear to Cassio.

Othello Fire and brimstone!¹¹⁰

Desdemona My lord?

Othello (*to Desdemona*) Are
you wise?¹¹¹ 225

Desdemona What, is he angry?

Lodovico May be the letters moved him.

For, as I think, they do command him home,
Deputing¹¹² Cassio in his government.¹¹³

Desdemona Trust me, I am glad on't.¹¹⁴

Othello Indeed?

Desdemona My lord?

104 unkind breach = strange/unnatural/unpleasant rupture/separation

105 as you will = (1) as you will not fail to do, (2) in what manner/way you wish

106 he did not call = Othello did not address/speak to us (Lodovico wrongly explains away Othello's remark to Desdemona)

107 in the paper = with/reading the letters

108 separation, discord, variance

109 atone them = reconcile them (Othello and Cassio)

110 (to be found in hell)

111 sane/right in the head

112 appointing, substituting

113 office, authority, rule

114 on't = of it

ACT 4 • SCENE I

Othello I am glad to see you mad.¹¹⁵

230 *Desdemona* Why, sweet Othello –

OTHELLO STRIKES HER

Othello Devil!

Desdemona I have not deserved this.

Lodovico My lord, this would not be believed in Venice,
Though I should swear I saw't. 'Tis very much,¹¹⁶
Make her amends. She weeps.

235 *Othello* O devil, devil!
If that the earth could teem¹¹⁷ with woman's tears,
Each drop she falls would prove a crocodile.¹¹⁸
Out of my sight!

Desdemona (*going*) I will not stay to offend you.

240 *Lodovico* Truly, an obedient lady.
I do beseech your lordship, call her back.

Othello Mistress!¹¹⁹

Desdemona My lord?

Othello What would you¹²⁰ with her,
sir?

Lodovico Who, I, my lord?

Othello Ay; you did wish that I would make her turn.¹²¹

245 Sir, she can turn, and turn, and yet go on,

115 out of your mind

116 very much = truly excessive ("too much")

117 bring forth, produce, swarm

118 (legends described crocodiles weeping (1) to trick men into being eaten, (2) after eating men)

119 (a frigidly distant way of addressing his wife)

120 would you = do you want

121 (1) come back, (2) change/transform/reverse positions/directions, (3) be fickle/inconstant, (4) betray, (5) infatuate/drive crazy

ACT 4 • SCENE I

And turn again. And she can weep, sir, weep.
And she's obedient. As you say, obedient.
Very obedient. (*to Desdemona*) Proceed you in your tears.
(*to Lodovico*) Concerning this, sir. (*to Desdemona*) O well-
painted¹²² passion.
(*to Lodovico*) I am commanded¹²³ home. (*to Desdemona*) Get 250
you away;
I'll send for you anon. (*to Lodovico*) Sir, I obey the mandate,¹²⁴
And will return to Venice. (*to Desdemona*) Hence, avaunt!

EXIT DESDEMONA

Cassio shall have my place. And, sir, tonight
I do entreat that we may sup together.
You are welcome, sir, to Cyprus. 255
Goats and monkeys!¹²⁵

EXIT OTHELLO

Lodovico Is this the noble Moor whom our full senate
Call all in all¹²⁶ sufficient? Is this the nature
Whom passion could not shake? Whose solid virtue
The shot¹²⁷ of accident nor dart¹²⁸ of chance 260
Could neither graze¹²⁹ nor pierce?
Iago He is much changed.

122 feigned, pretended, artificial

123 ordered

124 command

125 (*Iago's* words at 3.3.000: "as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys")

126 all in all = completely, in every respect

127 bullets, shells

128 spears, javelins

129 touch

ACT 4 • SCENE I

Lodovico Are his wits safe?¹³⁰ Is he not light¹³¹ of brain?

Iago He's that he is. I may not breathe my censure
What he might be. If what he might, he is not,
I would to heaven he were!¹³²

265 *Lodovico* What, strike his wife!

Iago 'Faith,¹³³ that was not so well. Yet would I knew¹³⁴
That stroke would prove the worst.

Lodovico Is it his use?¹³⁵
Or did the letters work upon his blood,
And new create this fault?

Iago Alas, alas!

270 It is not honesty in me to speak
What I have seen and known. You shall¹³⁶ observe him,
And his own courses will denote¹³⁷ him so¹³⁸
That I may save my speech. Do but go after,
And mark how he continues.

275 *Lodovico* I am sorry that I am deceived in him.

EXEUNT

130 sound

131 deficient

132 (?) (this speech is in outline comprehensible, but in detail obscure)

133 in faith

134 would I knew = I wish I knew

135 habit, custom

136 (1) must, (2) will

137 make known, mark

138 in such a way

ACT 4 • SCENE 2

SCENE 2

The Citadel

ENTER OTHELLO AND EMILIA

Othello You have seen nothing, then?

Emilia Nor ever heard. Nor ever did suspect.

Othello Yes, you have seen Cassio and she together.

Emilia But then I saw no harm. And then I heard

Each syllable that breath made up between them. 5

Othello What? Did they never whisper?

Emilia Never, my lord.

Othello Nor send you out o' the way?

Emilia Never.

Othello To fetch her fan, her gloves, her mask,¹ nor nothing?

Emilia Never, my lord. 10

Othello That's strange.

Emilia I durst, my lord, to wager she is honest,

Lay down² my soul at stake.³ If you think other,⁴

Remove⁵ your thought. It doth abuse your bosom.

If any wretch have put this in your head, 15

Let heaven requite⁶ it with the serpent's curse!

For if she be not honest, chaste, and true,

There's no man happy. The purest of their wives

Is foul as slander.

1 (worn to keep off the sun, protect the face from dust)

2 durst . . . lay down = dare bet

3 at stake = at risk ("as a bet")

4 otherwise, differently

5 withdraw, abandon, dismiss, change

6 repay, reward, revenge

ACT 4 • SCENE 2

Othello Bid her come hither. Go.

EXIT EMILIA

20 *She says enough. Yet she's⁷ a simple bawd⁸
That cannot say as much. This⁹ is a subtle¹⁰ whore,
A closet¹¹ lock and key of villainous secrets.
And yet she'll kneel and pray. I have seen her do't.*

ENTER EMILIA WITH DESDEMONA

Desdemona My lord, what is your will?

Othello Pray, chuck, come hither.

Desdemona What is your pleasure?

25 *Othello* Let me see your eyes.
Look in my face.

Desdemona What horrible fancy's¹² this?

Othello (to *Emilia*) Some¹³ of your function,¹⁴ mistress.
Leave procreants¹⁵ alone and shut the door.
Cough, or cry hem, if anybody come.

EXIT EMILIA

30 Your mystery,¹⁶ your mystery. Nay, dispatch.¹⁷

Desdemona Upon my knees, what doth your speech import?

7 she's = she (any woman) would be

8 simple bawd = foolish/stupid procurer (female for "pimp")

9 Desdemona

10 elusive, expert, clever

11 hidden/secret place

12 fancy's = whim is

13 give me/let me have

14 your function = the business of your trade (as a bawd)

15 those who make babies/have sex

16 hidden/secret matter

17 hurry, quick

ACT 4 • SCENE 2

I understand a fury in your words,
But not the words.¹⁸

Othello Why, what art thou?

Desdemona Your wife, my lord. Your true and loyal wife.

Othello Come, swear it. Damn thyself, 35
Lest being like one of heaven,¹⁹ the devils themselves
Should fear to seize thee. Therefore be double damned.
Swear thou art honest.

Desdemona Heaven doth truly know it.

Othello Heaven truly knows that thou art false²⁰ as hell.

Desdemona To whom, my lord? With whom? How am I false? 40

Othello Ah Desdemona, away, away, away!

Desdemona Alas the heavy day. Why do you weep?

Am I the motive²¹ of these tears, my lord?

If haply you my father do suspect

An instrument of this your calling back, 45

Lay not your blame on me. If you have lost him,

Why, I have lost him too.

Othello Had it pleased heaven

To try²² me with affliction, had they rained

All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head,

Steeped me in poverty to the very lips, 50

Given to captivity me and my utmost²³ hopes,

I should have found in some place of my soul

A drop of patience. But alas, to make me

18 (“but not the words”: from the Quarto)

19 being like one of heaven = looking as you do like an angel

20 treacherous

21 cause, reason

22 test

23 final

- A fixèd²⁴ figure for the time, for scorn
 55 To point his slow unmoving finger at!
 Yet could I bear that too, well, very well.
 But there where I have garnered²⁵ up my heart,
 Where either I must live, or bear²⁶ no life,
 The fountain²⁷ from the which my current²⁸ runs,
 60 Or else dries up – to be discarded²⁹ thence!
 Or keep³⁰ it as a cistern³¹ for foul toads
 To knot and gender³² in. Turn thy complexion there,
 Patience,³³ thou young and rose-lipp'ed cherubin.³⁴
 Ay, here³⁵ look grim as hell.
- 65 *Desdemona* I hope my noble lord esteems³⁶ me honest.
Othello O ay, as summer flies are in the shambles,³⁷
 That quicken even with blowing.³⁸ O thou weed,³⁹
 Who art so lovely fair, and smell'st so sweet
 That the sense⁴⁰ aches at thee, would thou hadst ne'er been
 born!

24 lasting, permanent

25 stored, deposited

26 have, own

27 spring, source, well

28 flowing stream ("life")

29 rejected, cast off

30 or keep = or else to maintain/preserve

31 water tank/reservoir/pond

32 knot and gender = entangle and beget/copulate

33 turn thy complexion there, Patience = look at that (complexion =
 countenance, face), Patience

34 (a description of Patience)

35 at Desdemona

36 thinks

37 meat stall/market

38 quicken even with blowing = are conceived/given life the moment the male
 fly deposits semen in the female (oviposition = blowing)

39 wild/rank plant (the blossoming of plants also = blowing)

40 the sense = perception

Desdemona Alas, what ignorant⁴¹ sin have I committed? 70

Othello Was this fair paper, this most goodly book,
 Made to write “whore” upon? What committed,
 Committed? O thou public commoner!⁴²
 I should⁴³ make very forges of my cheeks,
 That would to cinders burn up modesty, 75
 Did I but speak thy deeds. What committed?
 Heaven stops⁴⁴ the nose at it, and the moon winks.
 The bawdy wind, that kisses all it meets,
 Is hushed within the hollow mine⁴⁵ of earth
 And will not hear it. What committed? 80
 Impudent strumpet!

Desdemona By heaven, you do me wrong.

Othello Are not you a strumpet?

Desdemona No, as I am⁴⁶ a Christian.
 If to preserve this vessel⁴⁷ for my lord
 From any other foul unlawful touch 85
 Be not to be a strumpet, I am none.

Othello What, not a whore?

Desdemona No, as I shall be saved.

Othello Is’t possible?

Desdemona O, heaven forgive us!

Othello I cry you mercy⁴⁸ then.
 I took you for that cunning whore of Venice 90

41 unknowing, unconscious, innocent

42 common whore

43 would

44 plugs, blocks/stuffs up

45 subterranean cavity

46 as I am = in the name of my being

47 her body

48 cry you mercy = beg your pardon

ACT 4 • SCENE 2

That married with Othello. (*calling to Emilia*) You, mistress,
That have the office opposite⁴⁹ to Saint Peter,
And keeps⁵⁰ the gate of hell!⁵¹

ENTER EMILIA

You, you. Ay, you!
We have done our course.⁵² There's money for your pains.
95 I pray you turn the key, and keep our counsel.

EXIT OTHELLO

Emilia Alas, what does this gentleman conceive?⁵³
How do you, madam? How do you, my good lady?
Desdemona Faith, half asleep.⁵⁴
Emilia Good madam, what's the matter with my lord?
Desdemona With who?⁵⁵
100 *Emilia* Why, with my lord, madam.
Desdemona Who is thy lord?
Emilia He that is yours, sweet lady.
Desdemona I have none. Do not talk to me, Emilia.
I cannot weep, nor answer have I none
But what should go by water.⁵⁶ Prythee, tonight
105 Lay on my bed my wedding sheets – remember –

49 the office opposite = the employment/function/task directly opposed/
contrary to

50 take care of, guard, watch over

51 (as opposed to St. Peter, who is the gatekeeper of heaven)

52 bout, gallop (“what we were supposed to have done”)

53 does this gentleman conceive = what is this man thinking/imagining

54 dormant, numb, stunned

55 (in spoken English, the “who”/“whom” controversy was won, at least 300
years ago, by “who”)

56 go by water = be transmitted by tears

ACT 4 • SCENE 2

And call thy husband hither.

Emilia Here's a change indeed.

EXIT EMILIA

Desdemona 'Tis meet I should be used so, very meet.

How have I been behaved, that he might stick

The small'st opinion⁵⁷ on my least misuse?⁵⁸

ENTER EMILIA AND IAGO

Iago What is your pleasure, madam? How is't with you? 110

Desdemona I cannot tell. Those that do teach young babes

Do it with gentle means and easy tasks.

He might have chid me so, for in good faith,

I am a child⁵⁹ to chiding.

Iago What is the matter, lady?

Emilia Alas, Iago, my lord hath so bewhored⁶⁰ her, 115

Thrown such despite⁶¹ and heavy terms upon her,

As true hearts cannot bear.

Desdemona Am I that name, Iago?

Iago What name, fair lady?

Desdemona Such as she says my lord did say I was.

Emilia He called her whore. A beggar in his drink⁶² 120

Could not have laid such terms upon his callet.⁶³

Iago Why did he so?

57 stick the small'st opinion = fix/fasten/attach the most minor/trivial judgment/belief/estimate

58 wrong/wicked conduct

59 inexperienced ("unaccustomed")

60 used the word "whore" against

61 contempt, scorn, disdain

62 in his drink = when drunk

63 strumpet, lewd woman

- Desdemona* I do not know. I am sure I am none such.
- Iago* Do not weep, do not weep. Alas the day!
- 125 *Emilia* Hath she forsook so many noble matches,
Her father, and her country, and her friends,
To be called whore? Would it not make one weep?
- Desdemona* It is my wretched fortune.
- Iago* Beshrew him for't.
How comes this trick⁶⁴ upon him?
- Desdemona* Nay, heaven doth know.⁶⁵
- 130 *Emilia* I will be hanged, if some eternal⁶⁶ villain,
Some busy and insinuating⁶⁷ rogue,
Some cogging, cozening⁶⁸ slave, to get some office,⁶⁹
Have not devised this slander. I will be hanged else.
- Iago* Fie, there is no such man. It is impossible.
- 135 *Desdemona* If any such there be, heaven pardon him!
- Emilia* A halter⁷⁰ pardon him, and hell gnaw his bones!
Why should he call her whore? Who keeps her company?
What place? What time? What form?⁷¹ What likelihood?
The Moor's abused by some most villainous knave,
140 Some base notorious knave, some scurvy⁷² fellow.
O heaven, that such companions thou'dst unfold,⁷³

64 crafty/ fraudulent/sham act

65 heaven knows; we don't

66 (1) infinite, endless, perpetual, (2) infinitely disgusting

67 wily, wheedling, artful

68 cogging, cozening = cheating, fraudulent

69 (1) attention (2) post

70 hangman's rope

71 manner, way

72 shabby, worthless, contemptible

73 thou'dst unfold = you (heaven) would disclose/make clear/lay open to view

And put in every honest hand a whip
To lash the rascals naked through the world
Even from the east to th'west.

Iago Speak within door.⁷⁴

Emilia O, fie upon them!⁷⁵ Some such squire⁷⁶ he was 145
That turned your wit the seamy side⁷⁷ without,
And made you to suspect me with the Moor.

Iago You are a fool. Go to.

Desdemona Alas, Iago,
What shall I do to win my lord again?
Good friend, go to him. For by this light of heaven, 150
I know not how I lost him. Here I kneel.
If e'er my will did trespass⁷⁸ 'gainst his love,
Either in discourse⁷⁹ of thought or actual deed,
Or that mine eyes, mine ears, or any sense,
Delighted them⁸⁰ in any other form,⁸¹ 155
Or that I do not yet,⁸² and ever did
And ever will – though he do shake me off
To beggarly⁸³ divorcement – love him dearly,
Comfort forswear me!⁸⁴ Unkindness may do much,

74 speak within door = softly, so that no one outside this room hears

75 such rascals

76 follower, servant (negative connotation)

77 seamy side = under-/rough side of a garment (seams having visible, protruding hard edges)

78 sin, offend

79 course

80 delighted them = took pleasure

81 body (“man”)

82 do not yet = still do not so take pleasure

83 sordid, mean

84 comfort forswear me = may (1) support/help (2) gladness/solace abandon me if I have done such things

ACT 4 • SCENE 2

160 And his unkindness may defeat⁸⁵ my life,
But never taint my love. I cannot say whore.
It does abhor me now I speak the word.
To do the act that might the addition earn
Not the world's mass⁸⁶ of vanity could make me.

165 *Iago* I pray you, be content. 'Tis but his humor.
The business of the state does him offense,
And he does chide with you.⁸⁷

Desdemona If 'twere no other.⁸⁸

Iago 'Tis but so, I warrant.

TRUMPETS WITHIN

Hark, how these instruments summon to supper.⁸⁹

170 The messengers of⁹⁰ Venice stay⁹¹ the meat,⁹²
Go in,⁹³ and weep not. All things shall be well.

EXEUNT DESDEMONA AND EMILIA

ENTER RODERIGO

How now, Roderigo!

Roderigo I do not find that thou deal'st justly with me.

Iago What in⁹⁴ the contrary?

85 destroy, ruin, nullify

86 whole bulk

87 (this line from the Quarto)

88 if 'twere no other = if only it might be that, and nothing more

89 (?) what a great deal of noise they make

90 from

91 are coming to

92 meal, repast, dinner

93 go in = go into dinner ("join the company")

94 to

Roderigo Every day thou daffest me⁹⁵ with some device, Iago, 175
 and rather, as it seems to me now, keep'st from me all
 conveniency⁹⁶ than suppliest me with the least advantage⁹⁷
 of hope. I will indeed no longer endure it, nor am I yet
 persuaded to put up⁹⁸ in peace what already I have foolishly
 suffered.⁹⁹ 180

Iago Will you hear me, Roderigo?

Roderigo I have heard too much. And your words and
 performances¹⁰⁰ are no kin together.¹⁰¹

Iago You charge¹⁰² me most unjustly.

Roderigo With naught but truth. I have wasted¹⁰³ myself out of 185
 my means.¹⁰⁴ The jewels you have had from me to deliver to
 Desdemona would half¹⁰⁵ have corrupted¹⁰⁶ a votarist.¹⁰⁷
 You have told me she hath received them, and returned
 me¹⁰⁸ expectations and comforts of sudden respect¹⁰⁹ and
 acquaintance,¹¹⁰ but I find none. 190

Iago Well, go to. Very well.

Roderigo Very well, go to! I cannot go to, man, nor 'tis not very

95 daffest me = put me off

96 opportunity

97 circumstance, position, chance

98 up with

99 endured, submitted to

100 actions, deeds

101 no kin together = not from the same family

102 accuse

103 consumed, exhausted

104 resources

105 only a half of them

106 defiled, perverted

107 devotee ("nun")

108 returned me = given me back

109 sudden respect = speedy regard/favor

110 intimacy

well. Nay, I think 'tis very scurvy,¹¹¹ and begin to find myself fobbed¹¹² in it.

195 *Iago* Very well.

Roderigo I tell you 'tis not very well. I will make myself known to Desdemona. If she will return me my jewels, I will give over my suit and repent my unlawful solicitation. If not, assure yourself I will seek satisfaction¹¹³ of you.

200 *Iago* You have said¹¹⁴ now.

Roderigo Ay, and said nothing but what I protest¹¹⁵ intendment of doing.

Iago Why, now I see there's mettle¹¹⁶ in thee, and even from this instant do build on thee a better opinion than ever
205 before. Give me thy hand, Roderigo. Thou hast taken against me a most just exception.¹¹⁷ But yet I protest I have dealt most directly in thy affair.

Roderigo It hath not appeared.¹¹⁸

Iago I grant indeed it hath not appeared, and your suspicion
210 is not without wit and judgment. But, Roderigo, if thou hast that in thee indeed, which I have greater reason to believe now than ever – I mean purpose, courage, and valor¹¹⁹ – this night show it. If thou the next night following enjoy¹²⁰ not Desdemona, take me from this world with treachery and

111 shabby, contemptible

112 cheated

113 (1) compensation, amends, (2) a duel of honor

114 you have said = you're finished

115 declare most formally/solemnly

116 spirit, vigor, courage

117 complaint

118 shown itself, become apparent/visible

119 worth, manliness, boldness

120 possess, have sexual intercourse with

- devise engines¹²¹ for my life. 215
- Roderigo* Well, what is it? Is it within reason and compass?¹²²
- Iago* Sir, there is especial commission¹²³ come from Venice
to depute¹²⁴ Cassio in Othello's place.
- Roderigo* Is that true? Why then Othello and Desdemona return
again to Venice. 220
- Iago* O no. He goes into Mauritania,¹²⁵ and taketh away
with him the fair Desdemona, unless his abode be lingered¹²⁶
here by some accident. Wherein none can be so
determinate¹²⁷ as the removing of Cassio.
- Roderigo* How do you mean removing of him? 225
- Iago* Why, by making him incapable of Othello's place.
Knocking out his brains.
- Roderigo* And that you would have me to do?
- Iago* Ay, if you dare do yourself a profit and a right.¹²⁸ He
sups tonight with a harlotry,¹²⁹ and thither will I go to him. 230
He knows not yet of his honorable¹³⁰ fortune. If you will
watch his going thence – which I will fashion¹³¹ to fall
out¹³² between twelve and one – you may take¹³³ him at

121 plots

122 reach

123 order, instruction, command

124 appoint

125 (the population of Mauritania is largely Moorish)

126 protracted, continued

127 definitive, decisive

128 that which is proper/a duty

129 harlot

130 distinguished

131 shape, contrive

132 fall out = occur

133 lay hold of, strike, catch by surprise

ACT 4 • SCENE 2

235 your pleasure. I will be near to second¹³⁴ your attempt, and
he shall fall between us. Come, stand not amazed at it, but
go¹³⁵ along with me. I will show you such a necessity in his
death that you shall think yourself bound to put it on¹³⁶ him.
It is now high¹³⁷ supper time, and the night grows to
waste.¹³⁸ About it.¹³⁹

240 *Roderigo* I will¹⁴⁰ hear further reason for this.
Iago And you shall be satisfied.

EXEUNT

134 support

135 walk

136 put it on = attack, proceed against

137 well advanced/along to

138 grows to waste = is coming to/approaching its end

139 about it = set about it (“do it”)

140 wish/want to

ACT 4 • SCENE 3

SCENE 3

The Citadel

ENTER OTHELLO, LODOVICO, DESDEMONA, EMILIA,
AND ATTENDANTS

Lodovico I do beseech you, sir, trouble yourself no further.

Othello O, pardon me. 'Twill do me good to walk.

Lodovico Madam, good night. I humbly thank your ladyship.

Desdemona Your honor is most welcome.

Othello Will you walk, sir? O, Desdemona. 5

Desdemona My lord?

Othello Get you to bed on th' instant. I will be returned
forthwith.¹ Dismiss your attendant there. Look't be done.

Desdemona I will, my lord.

EXEUNT OTHELLO, LODOVICO, AND ATTENDANTS

Emilia How goes it now? He looks gentler² than he did. 10

Desdemona He says he will return incontinent.³

He hath commanded me to go to bed,

And bade me to dismiss you.

Emilia Dismiss me?

Desdemona It was his bidding.⁴ Therefore, good Emilia,

Give me my nightly wearing,⁵ and adieu. 15

We must not now displease him.

Emilia I would⁶ you had never seen him.

1 without delay, directly

2 quieter, softer, milder

3 straightway, without delay

4 order, command

5 clothing

6 wish

- Desdemona* So would not I. My love doth so approve him,
 That even his stubbornness, his checks, his frowns –
 20 Prythee, unpin me⁷ – have grace and favor in them.
- Emilia* I have laid those sheets you bade me on the bed.
- Desdemona* All's one.⁸ Good Father, how foolish are our minds!
 If I do die before thee, prythee, shroud me
 In one of those same sheets.
- Emilia* Come, come. You talk.⁹
- 25 *Desdemona* My mother had a maid¹⁰ called Barbary,¹¹
 She was in love. And he she loved proved mad,
 And did forsake her. She had a song of “willow,”
 An old thing 'twas. But it expressed¹² her fortune,
 And she died singing it. That song tonight
 30 Will not go from my mind. I have much to do¹³
 But to go hang¹⁴ my head all at one side¹⁵
 And sing it like poor Barbary. Prythee dispatch.
- Emilia* Shall I go fetch your nightgown?
- Desdemona* No, unpin me here.
- 35 This Lodovico¹⁶ is a proper man.
- Emilia* A very handsome man.
- Desdemona* He speaks well.
- Emilia* I know a lady in Venice would have walked barefoot

7 unpin me = hair? dress?

8 all's one = it's all one (“all right”)

9 speak trivially, prate

10 servant (a word also meaning “slave,” as in Latin *servus*)

11 (northern coast of Africa: was the maid a Moor? was she black?)

12 represented, portrayed

13 I have much to do = it is hard to keep myself from

14 bend, droop (in sadness)

15 all at one side = all the way down

16 (Lodovico is her cousin; some editors assign this line to Emilia)

to Palestine for a touch of his nether¹⁷ lip.

Desdemona (singing)

The poor soul sat sighing, by a sycamore tree, 40

Sing all a green willow.¹⁸

Her hand on her bosom, her head on her knee,

Sing willow, willow, willow.

The fresh¹⁹ streams ran by her, and murmured her moans,

Sing willow, willow, willow. 45

Her salt tears fell from her, and softened the stones,

Sing willow, willow, willow.

(to Emilia) Lay by²⁰ these.

Sing willow, willow –

Prythee, hie²¹ thee. He'll come anon.²² 50

Sing all a green willow must be my garland.

Let nobody blame him, his scorn I approve –

Nay, that's not next. Hark! who is't that knocks?

Emilia It's the wind.

Desdemona (singing)

I call'd my love false love. But what said he then? 55

Sing willow, willow, willow.

17 lower

18 green willow: symbolic of grief for loss of a lover or the failure of love to be reciprocated

19 not saltwater

20 put away, store

21 hurry

22 immediately

If I court mo²³ women, you'll couch²⁴ with mo men.

So get thee gone, good night. Mine eyes do itch.

Doth that bode²⁵ weeping?

Emilia 'Tis neither here nor there.

60 *Desdemona* I have heard it said so. O, these men, these men!

Dost thou in conscience think – tell me, Emilia –

That there be women do abuse²⁶ their husbands

In such gross kind?

Emilia There be some such, no question.

65 *Desdemona* Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world?

Emilia Why, would not you?

Desdemona No, by this heavenly light!

Emilia Nor I neither by this heavenly light.

I might do't as well i' the dark.

70 *Desdemona* Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world?

Emilia The world's a huge thing.

It is a great price for a small vice.

Desdemona In troth, I think thou wouldst not.

Emilia In troth, I think I should, and undo't²⁷ when I had

75 done. Marry, I would not do such a thing for a joint-ring,²⁸

nor for measures of lawn,²⁹ nor for gowns, petticoats, nor

caps, nor any petty exhibition.³⁰ But for all the whole world

– why, who would not make her husband a cuckold to make

23 more

24 sleep

25 foretell, predict

26 deceive, cheat

27 undo't = annul, cancel (“disregard”)

28 made of two separable halves

29 measures of lawn = a good deal of fine linen

30 gift, present

him a monarch? I should venture³¹ purgatory for't.

Desdemona Beshrew me, if I would do such a wrong for the whole world. 80

Emilia Why, the wrong is but a wrong i' the world. And having the world for your labor,³² 'tis a wrong in your own world,³³ and you might³⁴ quickly make it right.

Desdemona I do not think there is any such woman. 85

Emilia Yes, a dozen, and as many to the vantage³⁵ as would store³⁶ the world they played for.

But I do think it is their husbands' faults

If wives do fall. Say that they slack their duties

And pour our treasures into foreign laps, 90

Or else break out in peevish jealousies,

Throwing restraint upon us. Or say they strike us,

Or scant³⁷ our former having, in despite.

Why, we have galls.³⁸ And though we have some grace,³⁹

Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know 95

Their wives have sense like them. They see and smell

And have their palates both for sweet and sour,

As husbands have. What is it that they do

When they change us for others? Is it sport?

31 risk

32 having the world for your labor = earning/winning the world for the work you've done

33 your own world = the world you own/possess

34 could

35 to the vantage = more

36 stock, supply

37 diminish, limit

38 things that irritate, distress, harass

39 we have some grace = (?) we have gotten ourselves some illicit favor? made it necessary that we be divinely forgiven?

ACT 4 • SCENE 3

100 I think it is. And doth affection⁴⁰ breed it?
I think it doth. Is't frailty that thus errs?
It is so too. And have not we affections,
Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?
Then let them⁴¹ use us well. Else let them know
105 The ills⁴² we do their ills instruct⁴³ us so.
Desdemona Goodnight, goodnight. Heaven me such usage⁴⁴
send,
Not to pick bad from bad,⁴⁵ but by⁴⁶ bad mend.⁴⁷

EXEUNT

40 (1) feeling, emotion, (2) passion, lust

41 men

42 ills that we do to men (ills = sinful actions)

43 train, educate, teach

44 practices, procedures, ways

45 pick bad from bad = choose one sinful thing rather than another sinful thing

46 because of

47 improve

Act 5



SCENE I

A street

ENTER IAGO AND RODERIGO

Iago Here, stand behind this bulk,¹ straight will he come.
Wear² thy good rapier³ bare, and put it home.⁴
Quick, quick, fear nothing. I'll be at thy elbow.
It makes us, or it mars⁵ us, think on that,
And fix most firm thy resolution.⁶

5

Roderigo Be near at hand, I may miscarry⁷ in't.

Iago Here,⁸ at thy hand. Be bold, and take thy stand.⁹

IAGO STEPS ASIDE

- 1 framework projecting from a shop front
- 2 carry
- 3 pointed, two-edged sword
- 4 put it home = thrust it as far in as it will go
- 5 ruins
- 6 REsoLUseeON
- 7 be unsuccessful
- 8 I am/will be here
- 9 ambush position

ACT 5 • SCENE I

Roderigo I have no great devotion¹⁰ to the deed,
And yet he hath given me satisfying reasons.
10 'Tis but a man gone. Forth, my sword. He dies.
Iago (*aside*) I have rubbed this young quat¹¹ almost to the
sense,¹²
And he grows angry. Now, whether he kill Cassio,
Or Cassio him, or each do kill the other,
Every way makes my gain. Live Roderigo,¹³
15 He calls me to a restitution large
Of gold and jewels that I bobbed from¹⁴ him,
As gifts to Desdemona.
It must not be. If Cassio do remain,
He hath a daily beauty¹⁵ in his life
20 That makes me ugly. And besides, the Moor
May unfold me to him. There stand I in much peril.
No, he must die. But, so, I hear him coming.

ENTER CASSIO

Roderigo I know his gait, 'tis he. Villain, thou diest!

THRUSTS AT CASSIO

Cassio That thrust had been mine enemy¹⁶ indeed,
25 But that my coat¹⁷ is better than thou know'st.
I will make proof of thine.

10 dedication, enthusiasm

11 pimple, boil

12 quick, flesh

13 if Roderigo lives

14 bobbed from = fished/cheated out of

15 daily beauty = habitual graciousness

16 death

17 a mail-coat?

ACT 5 • SCENE I

CASSIO DRAWS, AND WOUNDS RODERIGO

Roderigo O, I am slain!

IAGO FROM BEHIND STABS CASSIO IN THE LEG, AND EXITS

Cassio I am maimed¹⁸ forever. Help, ho! Murder! Murder!

ENTER OTHELLO TO THE SIDE

Othello The voice of Cassio, Iago keeps his word.

Roderigo O, villain that I am!

Othello It is even so.

Cassio O, help, ho! Light, a surgeon! 30

Othello 'Tis he. O brave Iago, honest and just,
That hast such noble sense of thy friend's wrong,
Thou teachest me. Minion,¹⁹ your dear²⁰ lies dead,
And your unblest²¹ fate hies. Strumpet, I come.
Forth of²² my heart those charms, thine eyes, are blotted.²³ 35
Thy bed, lust-stained, shall with lust's blood be spotted.²⁴

EXIT OTHELLO

ENTER LODOVICO AND GRATIANO AT A DISTANCE

Cassio What ho? No watch? No passage?²⁵ Murder, murder!

Gratiano 'Tis some mischance,²⁶ the cry is very direful.²⁷

18 crippled

19 paramour, illicit mistress (Desdemona)

20 Cassio

21 miserable ("unholy")

22 from, out of

23 effaced, obliterated ("made illegible")

24 stained, disfigured

25 passersby

26 disaster, calamity

27 terrible, dreadful

ACT 5 • SCENE I

Cassio O help!

40 *Lodovico* Hark!

Roderigo O wretched villain!

Lodovico Two or three²⁸ groan. It is a heavy²⁹ night,
These may be counterfeits.³⁰ Let's think't³¹ unsafe
To come into³² the cry without more help.

45 *Roderigo* Nobody come? Then shall I³³ bleed to death.

Lodovico Hark!

ENTER IAGO

Gratiano Here's one comes in his shirt,³⁴ with light and
weapons.

Iago Who's there? Whose noise is this that cries on murder?

Lodovico We do not know.

Iago Did not you hear a cry?

50 *Cassio* Here, here! For heaven's sake, help me!

Iago What's the matter?³⁵

Gratiano This is Othello's ancient, as I take it.³⁶

Lodovico The same indeed, a very valiant³⁷ fellow.

Iago (*holding up his lantern*) What are you here that cry so
grievously?

55 *Cassio* Iago? O, I am spoiled, undone by villains!

28 two or three = there are two or three who

29 overcast, gloomy, dark

30 pretended, sham

31 think't = consider it

32 come into = go to

33 shall I = I must

34 nightshirt

35 what's the matter = what's going on

36 take it = think

37 bold, stout-hearted, worthy

ACT 5 • SCENE I

Give me some help.

Iago O me, lieutenant! What villains have done this?

Cassio I think that one of them is hereabout,
And cannot make away.

Iago O treacherous villains!
(*to Lodovico and Gratiano*) What are you there? Come in and
give some help. 60

Roderigo O, help me here!

Cassio That's one of them.

Iago (*to Roderigo*) O murderous slave! O villain!

IAGO STABS RODERIGO

Roderigo O damned Iago! O inhuman dog!

Iago Kill men i' the dark! Where be these bloody thieves? 65
How silent is this town! Ho, murder, murder!
(*to Gratiano and Lodovico*) What may you be? Are you of good
or evil?

Lodovico As you shall prove us, praise³⁸ us.

Iago Signior Lodovico?

Lodovico He, sir.

Iago I cry you mercy. Here's Cassio hurt by villains. 70

Gratiano Cassio?

Iago How is't, brother?

Cassio My leg is cut in two.

Iago Marry, heaven forbid!
Light,³⁹ gentlemen, I'll bind it with my shirt.

ENTER BIANCA

38 appraise, set a price/value on

39 give me light, hold the light up for me

- 75 *Bianca* What is the matter, ho? who is't that cried?
Iago (*mocking her*) Who is't that cried!
Bianca O my dear Cassio,
 My sweet Cassio! O Cassio, Cassio, Cassio!
Iago O notable strumpet! Cassio, may you suspect
 Who they should be that have thus mangled⁴⁰ you?
 80 *Cassio* No.
Gratiano I am sorry to find you thus. I have been to seek you.⁴¹
Iago Lend me a garter.⁴² So. O for a chair,⁴³
 To bear him easily hence!
Bianca Alas, he faints! O Cassio, Cassio, Cassio!
 85 *Iago* Gentlemen all, I do suspect this trash⁴⁴
 To be a party⁴⁵ in this injury.⁴⁶ –
 Patience awhile, good Cassio. – Come, come,
 Lend me a light. – (*looking at Roderigo*) Know we this face
 or no?
 Alas, my friend and my dear countryman
 90 Roderigo? No. Yes, sure. Yes, 'tis Roderigo.
Gratiano What, of⁴⁷ Venice?
Iago Even he, sir. Did you know him?
Gratiano Know him? Ay.
Iago Signior Gratiano? I cry you gentle pardon.
 These bloody accidents must excuse my manners

40 wounded, hacked at

41 been to seek you = gone to your lodgings in search of

42 not a leg garter, but one worn over the shoulder as a belt/sash/scarf

43 (1) a chair for sitting, (2) an enclosed chair on poles, for carrying (“litter,”
 “palanquin”)

44 disreputable/worthless person

45 participant, accessory

46 mischief, wrongful act

47 from

That so neglected you.

Gratiano I am glad to see you. 95

Iago How do you, Cassio? (*calling*) O, a chair, a chair!

Gratiano Roderigo?

Iago He, he, 'tis he. — O, that's well said.⁴⁸ The chair.

A CHAIR IS BROUGHT IN

Some good man bear him carefully from hence,
I'll fetch the general's surgeon. (*to Bianca*) For⁴⁹ you, mistress, 100

Save you⁵⁰ your labor.⁵¹ (*to Cassio*) He that lies slain here,
Cassio,

Was my dear friend. What malice was between you?

Cassio None in the world. Nor do I know the man.

Iago (*to Bianca*) What? Look you pale? — O, bear him out
o' the air.⁵²

CASSIO AND RODERIGO ARE CARRIED OUT

Stay you, good gentlemen. — Look you pale, mistress? — 105

Do you perceive the gastness⁵³ of her eye? —

(*to Bianca*) Nay, if you stare,⁵⁴ we shall hear more anon. —

Behold her well. I pray you, look upon her.

Do you see, gentlemen? Nay, guiltiness will speak,

Though tongues were out of use.⁵⁵ 110

48 (?) assayed? ("done")

49 as for

50 save you = spare you

51 exertion, trouble

52 night air was "vaporous" and dangerous to the health

53 terrified appearance

54 in astonishment?

55 were out of use = are not being used

ACT 5 • SCENE I

ENTER EMILIA

Emilia 'Las, what's the matter? What's the matter, husband?

Iago Cassio hath here been set on in the dark

By Roderigo and fellows that are 'scap'd.

He's almost slain, and Roderigo quite dead.

115 *Emilia* Alas, good gentleman. Alas, good Cassio.

Iago This is the fruits of whoring. Prythee, Emilia,

Go know of Cassio where he supped tonight.

(*to Bianca*) What, do you shake at that?

Bianca He supped at my house, but I therefore⁵⁶ shake not.

120 *Iago* O, did he so? I charge you go with me.

Emilia O fie upon thee, strumpet!

Bianca I am no strumpet, but of life as honest

As you that thus abuse me.

Emilia As I? Fie upon thee!

Iago Kind gentlemen, let's go see poor Cassio dressed.⁵⁷

125 (*to Bianca*) Come, mistress, you must tell's⁵⁸ another tale.⁵⁹

Emilia, run you to the Citadel,

And tell my lord and lady what hath happed.

(*to Gratiano, Lodovico*) Will you go on afore? (*aside*) This is the
night

That either makes⁶⁰ me or fordoes⁶¹ me quite.

EXEUNT

56 for that

57 taken care of

58 tell us

59 another tale = a different sequence of events/narrative

60 sets me up, brings me success/fortune

61 destroys, ruins

ACT 5 • SCENE 2

SCENE 2

DESDEMONA ASLEEP; A CANDLE BURNS

ENTER OTHELLO

Othello It is the cause,¹ it is the cause, my soul.
Let me not name it to you, you chaste² stars,
It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood,
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers, than snow,³
And smooth as monumental⁴ alabaster. 5
Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
Put out the light,⁵ and then put out the light.⁶
(*to candle*) If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,⁷
I can again thy former light restore,
Should I repent me. (*to Desdemona*) But once put out
thy light, 10
Thou cunning'st pattern⁸ of excelling nature,⁹
I know not where is that Promethean¹⁰ heat
That can thy light relume.¹¹ When I have plucked thy rose,
I cannot give it vital¹² growth again,

1 reason/ground for action (the "offense")

2 virtuous, innocent

3 whiter skin of hers, than snow = skin of hers, whiter than snow

4 tomb/funeral/memorial

5 the candle

6 of her life

7 servant, attendant

8 cunning'st pattern = most ingenious model

9 excelling nature = (1) a superior kind/sort, (2) surpassing/great Nature

10 Prometheus = the fire giver

11 rekindle, relight

12 living

ACT 5 • SCENE 2

15 It must needs¹³ wither. I'll smell thee on the tree.¹⁴

KISSES HER

O balmy¹⁵ breath, that dost almost persuade
Justice¹⁶ to break her sword. One more, one more.¹⁷
Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee,
And love thee after. One more, and that's the last.
20 So sweet was ne'er so fatal.¹⁸ I must weep,
But they are cruel tears. This sorrow's heavenly,¹⁹
It strikes where it doth love. – She wakes.

Desdemona Who's there? Othello?

Othello Ay, Desdemona.

Desdemona Will you come to bed, my lord?

Othello Have you prayed tonight, Desdemona?

25 *Desdemona* Ay, my lord.

Othello If you bethink²⁰ yourself of any crime²¹

Unreconciled as yet²² to heaven and grace,²³

Solicit²⁴ for it straight.

Desdemona Alack, my lord, what may you mean by that?

13 necessarily, of necessity

14 (roses were said to grow on plants/bushes/shrubs/trees: "tree" included single-stemmed bushes)

15 delicately/deliciously fragrant

16 a female goddess, holding either balanced scales or a sword, for cutting the thread of life (Justitia)

17 one more = one more kiss

18 doomed, condemned by fate

19 divine, like the punishment/revenge of God

20 remember, recollect

21 offense, sin

22 unreconciled as yet = not yet absolved/set right

23 heaven's grace/mercy

24 beg, seek ("pray")

Othello Well, do it, and be brief, I will walk by.²⁵ 30
 I would not kill thy unprepared spirit,
 No, heaven forbend,²⁶ I would not kill thy soul.

Desdemona Talk you of killing?

Othello Ay, I do.

Desdemona Then heaven
 Have mercy on me!

Othello Amen, with all my heart.

Desdemona If you say so,²⁷ I hope you will not kill me. 35

Othello Humph.

Desdemona And yet I fear you. For you are fatal then
 When²⁸ your eyes roll so. Why I should fear I know not,
 Since guiltiness I know not. But yet I feel I fear.

Othello Think on²⁹ thy sins.

Desdemona They are loves I bear to you.³⁰ 40

Othello Ay, and for that thou diest.

Desdemona That death's unnatural that kills for loving.³¹
 Alas, why gnaw you so your nether lip?
 Some bloody passion shakes your very frame.³²
 These are portents.³³ But yet I hope, I hope, 45
 They do not point on³⁴ me.

25 nearby, close by

26 forbid, prevent

27 say so = speak like that

28 then when = when

29 about

30 (her love should be directed to God; to the extent that it is not, she sins against God by loving Othello)

31 ("it is against Nature to kill what you love")

32 very frame = (1) entire body, (2) actual body (very = an intensifier)

33 omens, signs

34 at

ACT 5 • SCENE 2

Othello Peace, and be still.³⁵

Desdemona I will so. What's the matter?

Othello That handkerchief which I so loved and gave thee,
Thou gav'st to Cassio.

Desdemona No, by my life and soul!
Send for the man, and ask him.

50 *Othello* Sweet soul, take heed,
Take heed of perjury; thou art on thy death-bed.

Desdemona Ay, but not yet to die.

Othello Presently.
Therefore confess thee freely of thy sin.

55 For to deny each article³⁶ with oath³⁷
Cannot remove nor choke³⁸ the strong conception³⁹
That I do groan withal.⁴⁰ Thou art to die.

Desdemona O heaven have mercy on me!

Othello I say, amen.

Desdemona And have you⁴¹ mercy too. I never did
Offend you in my life, never loved Cassio
60 But with such general warranty⁴² of heaven
As I might love. I never gave him token.

Othello By heaven, I saw my handkerchief in 's hand.
O perjured woman, thou dost stone my heart,
And mak'st me call what I intend to do

35 peace, and be still = be silent, and stay silent

36 charge, accusation, indictment

37 an oath

38 smother, stop, kill

39 idea, opinion

40 with, from

41 have you = you have

42 authorization

A murder, which I thought a sacrifice. 65
 I saw the handkerchief.

Desdemona He found it then.
 I never gave it him. Send for him hither.
 Let him confess a truth.

Othello He hath confessed.

Desdemona What, my lord?

Othello That he hath used⁴³ thee.

Desdemona How? Unlawfully?

Othello Ay.

Desdemona He will not say so. 70

Othello No, his mouth is stopped.
 Honest Iago hath ta'en order⁴⁴ for't.

Desdemona O, my fear interprets!⁴⁵ What, is he dead?

Othello Had all his hairs been lives, my great revenge
 Had stomach⁴⁶ for them all. 75

Desdemona Alas, he is betrayed,⁴⁷ and I undone!⁴⁸

Othello Out,⁴⁹ strumpet! Weep'st thou for him to my face?

Desdemona (*trying to rise*) O, banish me, my lord, but kill me not!

Othello Down, strumpet!

Desdemona Kill me tomorrow, let me live tonight! 80

Othello Nay, if you strive⁵⁰ –

Desdemona But half an hour!

43 had sexual intercourse with

44 ta'en order = undertaken the arrangement/accomplishment

45 explains it to me

46 relish, desire, disposition

47 is betrayed = has been treacherously brought down

48 destroyed, ruined

49 (vehement, indignant exclamation)

50 struggle, fight

ACT 5 • SCENE 2

Othello Being done,⁵¹ there is no pause.

Desdemona But while I say one prayer!

Othello It is too late.

HE SMOTHERS HER

Emilia (*at the door*) My lord, my lord? What, ho? My lord,
my lord.

Othello What noise is this? (*to Desdemona*) Not dead? Not
85 yet quite dead?

I that am cruel⁵² am yet merciful,

I would not have thee linger in thy pain.

(*smothering her again*) So, so.

Emilia What ho? My lord, my lord?

Othello Who's there?

90 *Emilia* O good my lord, I would speak a word with you.

Othello (*to Emilia*) Yes. (*to himself*) 'Tis Emilia. (*to Emilia*) By
and by. (*looking at Desdemona*) She's dead.

'Tis like she⁵³ comes to speak of Cassio's death.

The noise⁵⁴ was high. – Ha, no more moving?

Still as the grave. – Shall she⁵⁵ come in? Were't good? –

95 I think she⁵⁶ stirs again. No. What's best to do?

If she come in, she'll sure speak to my wife.

My wife, my wife. What wife? I have no wife.

O insupportable!⁵⁷ O heavy hour!

Methinks it⁵⁸ should be now a huge eclipse

51 performed, executed, accomplished

52 CRUel

53 'tis like she = it's likely she (Emilia)

54 outcry, clamor

55 shall she = should Emilia

56 Desdemona

57 unbearable, unendurable

58 there

ACT 5 • SCENE 2

Of sun and moon, and that the affrighted globe 100
Should yawn at alteration.⁵⁹

Emilia I do beseech you
That I may speak with you. O good my lord.

Othello I had forgot thee. O come in, Emilia.
Soft, by and by, let me the curtains draw.⁶⁰
(*to Desdemona*) Where art thou?⁶¹ What's the matter⁶² with
thee now? 105

HE UNLOCKS THE DOOR

ENTER EMILIA

Emilia O my good lord, yonder's foul murders done.

Othello What? Now?

Emilia But now, my lord.

Othello It is the very error⁶³ of the moon,
She comes more nearer earth than she was wont 110
And makes men mad.

Emilia Cassio, my lord, hath killed a young Venetian
Called Roderigo.

Othello Roderigo killed?
And Cassio killed?

Emilia No, Cassio is not killed.

Othello Not Cassio killed? Then murder's out of tune, 115
And sweet revenge grows harsh.

Desdemona O, falsely, falsely murdered!

Emilia Alas, what cry is that?

59 yawn at alteration = break out in chasms at the / this change

60 curtains draw = close the bed curtains

61 in heaven or in hell?

62 the matter = going on

63 wandering, roaming

Othello Cassio did top⁶⁹ her. Ask thy husband else.⁷⁰

O I were damned beneath all depth in hell,
But that I did proceed upon just grounds
To this extremity.⁷¹ Thy husband knew it all.

Emilia My husband?

Othello Thy husband.

Emilia That she was false to
wedlock?⁷² 140

Othello Ay, with Cassio. Nay, had she been true,
If heaven would make me such another world
Of one entire and perfect chrysolite,⁷³
I'd not have sold her for it.

Emilia My husband?

Othello Ay, 'twas he that told me on her first, 145
An honest man he is, and hates the slime
That sticks on filthy deeds.

Emilia My husband?

Othello What needs this iterance,⁷⁴ woman? I say thy husband.

Emilia O mistress, villainy hath made mocks with love.
My husband say she was false?

Othello He, woman. 150

I say thy husband. Dost understand the word?

My friend, thy husband, honest, honest Iago.

Emilia If he say so, may his pernicious⁷⁵ soul
Rot half a grain⁷⁶ a day! He lies to th'heart,

69 have sexual intercourse with

70 if she did not

71 (1) final penalty, (2) severe/rigorous measure

72 her marriage vow

73 green-colored gem (topaz, zircon, etc.)

74 repetition

75 wicked, villainous, destructive

76 a small piece/bit

155 She was too fond of her most filthy bargain.⁷⁷

Othello Ha?

Emilia Do thy worst.

This deed of thine is no more worthy heaven
Than thou wast worthy⁷⁸ her.

Othello Peace, you were best.⁷⁹

160 *Emilia* Thou hast not half that power to do me harm
As I have⁸⁰ to be hurt. O gull,⁸¹ O dolt,⁸²
As ignorant as dirt! Thou hast done a deed –

OTHELLO REACHES TO HIS SWORD

I care not⁸³ for thy sword, I'll make thee known,
Though I lost twenty lives. Help, help, ho, help!

165 The Moor hath killed my mistress! Murder, murder!

ENTER MONTANO, GRATIANO, AND IAGO

Montano What is the matter? How now, general?

Emilia O, are⁸⁴ you come, Iago? You have done well,
That men must lay their murders on your neck.⁸⁵

Gratiano What is the matter?

170 *Emilia* (*to Iago*) Disprove⁸⁶ this villain, if thou be'st a man.
He says thou told'st him that his wife was false.

77 marriage to Othello

78 worthy of

79 you were best = it would be the most advantageous/desirable thing for
you

80 have the endurance

81 dupe, simpleton, fool

82 blockhead, numskull

83 care not = couldn't care less

84 have

85 on your neck = on your head/you

86 refute, contradict

I know thou didst not. Thou'rt not such a villain.
 Speak, for my heart is full.

Iago I told him what I thought, and told no more
 Than what he found himself was apt and true. 175

Emilia But did you ever tell him she was false?

Iago I did.

Emilia You told a lie, an odious, damnèd lie.

Upon my soul, a lie, a wicked lie.

She false with Cassio! Did you say with Cassio? 180

Iago With Cassio, mistress. Go to, charm⁸⁷ your tongue.

Emilia I will not charm my tongue, I am bound to speak.

My mistress here lies murdered in her bed.

All O heavens forfend!

Emilia And your reports⁸⁸ have set the murder on.⁸⁹ 185

Othello Nay stare not, masters. It is true, indeed.

Gratiano 'Tis a strange truth.

Montano O monstrous act!

Emilia Villainy, villainy, villainy!

I think upon't, I think – I smell't – O villainy! 190

I thought so then. I'll kill myself for grief.

O villainy, villainy!

Iago What, are you mad? I charge you, get you home.

Emilia Good gentlemen, let me have leave to speak.

'Tis proper I obey him, but not now. 195

Perchance, Iago, I will ne'er go home.

OTHELLO FALLS ONTO THE BED

87 control, subdue

88 statements, accounts, testimony

89 set . . . on = incited, encouraged, arranged

ACT 5 • SCENE 2

Othello O! O! O!

Emilia Nay, lay thee down and roar.

For thou hast killed the sweetest innocent
That e'er did lift up eye.

Othello (*rising*) O, she was foul!

200 I scarce did know you, uncle.⁹⁰ There lies your niece,
Whose breath, indeed, these hands have newly stopped.
I know this act shows⁹¹ horrible and grim.

Gratiano Poor Desdemona. I am glad thy father's dead.

210 Thy match was mortal⁹² to him, and pure grief
Shore⁹³ his old thread⁹⁴ in twain.⁹⁵ Did he live⁹⁶ now,
This sight would make him do a desperate turn,⁹⁷
Yea, curse his better angel from his side,⁹⁸
And fall to reprobance.⁹⁹

Othello 'Tis pitiful.¹⁰⁰ But yet Iago knows

210 That she with Cassio hath the act of shame
A thousand times committed. Cassio confessed it,
And she did gratify¹⁰¹ his amorous works¹⁰²
With that recognizance¹⁰³ and pledge of love

90 (custom made a spouse's relatives one's own relatives)

91 looks, appears

92 deadly, fatal

93 cut (past tense of "shear")

94 thread of life

95 two

96 did he live = were he alive

97 desperate turn = despairing change in direction ("life reversal")

98 his better angel from his side = his good guardian angel away from him

99 state of being lost in sin

100 lamentable

101 reward

102 deeds, doings

103 token, acknowledgment

Which I first gave her. I saw it in his hand.

It was a handkerchief, an antique token 215

My father gave my mother.

Emilia O heaven! O heavenly powers!

Iago Come, hold your peace.

Emilia 'Twill out, 'twill out. I peace?

No, I will speak as liberal as the north.¹⁰⁴

Let heaven and men and devils, let them all, 220

All, all, cry shame against me, yet I'll speak.

Iago Be wise, and get you home.

Emilia I will not.

IAGO TRIES TO STAB HIS WIFE

Gratiano Fie! Your sword upon¹⁰⁵ a woman?

Emilia O thou dull¹⁰⁶ Moor, that handkerchief thou speak'st of
I found by fortune and did give my husband. 225

For often with a solemn earnestness —

More than, indeed, belonged to such a trifle —

He begged of me to steal it.

Iago Villainous whore!

Emilia She give it Cassio? No, alas I found it,

And I did give't my husband.

Iago Filth, thou liest! 230

Emilia By heaven, I do not, I do not, gentlemen.

(to *Othello*) O murd'rous coxcomb,¹⁰⁷ what should such a
fool

¹⁰⁴ liberal as the north = free as the north wind

¹⁰⁵ against

¹⁰⁶ foolish, stupid

¹⁰⁷ simpleton

ACT 5 • SCENE 2

Do with so good a wife?

Othello Are there not stones¹⁰⁸ in heaven
But what serve for thunder? (*to Iago*) Precious¹⁰⁹ villain!

OTHELLO RUNS AT IAGO, WHO EVADES HIM,
STABS EMILIA, AND RUNS OUT

MONTANO DISARMS OTHELLO

235 *Gratiano* The woman falls. Sure, he hath killed his wife.

Emilia Ay, ay. O lay me by my mistress' side.

Gratiano He's gone, but his wife's killed.

Montano 'Tis a notorious¹¹⁰ villain. Take you this weapon,
Which I have here recovered from the Moor.

240 Come, guard¹¹¹ the door without,¹¹² let him¹¹³ not pass,
But kill him rather. I'll after¹¹⁴ that same villain,
For 'tis a damnèd slave.

EXIT MONTANO AND GRATIANO

Othello I am not valiant¹¹⁵ neither,¹¹⁶
But every puny whipster¹¹⁷ gets¹¹⁸ my sword.
But why should honor outlive honesty?
Let it go all.

108 missiles, thunderbolts

109 out and out, total

110 obvious

111 you guard

112 door without = door outside this room

113 Othello

114 follow, pursue

115 (1) strong, sturdy, (2) bold, brave

116 either

117 puny whipster = insignificant/inferior/little fellow/boy (whipping a top)

118 takes possession of

Than twenty times your stop.¹²⁷ But, O vain boast,
 Who can control his fate? 'Tis not so now.
 265 Be not afraid, though you do see me weaponed.
 Here is my journey's end, here is my butt¹²⁸
 And very sea-mark¹²⁹ of my utmost sail.
 Do you go back dismayed?¹³⁰ 'Tis a lost¹³¹ fear.
 Man but a rush¹³² against Othello's breast,
 270 And he retires. Where should Othello go?
 (*approaches Desdemona*) Now. How dost thou look now? O ill-
 starred¹³³ wench,¹³⁴
 Pale as thy smock.¹³⁵ When we shall meet at compt,¹³⁶
 This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,
 And fiends will snatch at it. (*touches her*) Cold, cold, my girl?
 275 Even like thy chastity.¹³⁷ (*to himself*) O cursèd, cursèd slave!
 Whip me, ye devils,
 From¹³⁸ the possession¹³⁹ of this heavenly¹⁴⁰ sight!¹⁴¹

127 obstruction, obstacle, prohibition

128 terminal point, boundary mark

129 (1) something highly visible from the sea, as a guide to navigation, (2) high tide

130 overwhelmed by fear

131 vain, groundless

132 man but a rush = (1) use only a reed-stalk (as in mock tournaments) against? (2) simply dash at?

133 ill-fated, unlucky

134 girl (familiar/affectionate)

135 shift, chemise (undergarment)

136 Judgment Day (compt = count/account = reckoning)

137 utter, devout purity (see *As You Like It* 3.4.15—17: "A nun . . . kisses not more religiously, the very ice of chastity is in them [his kisses]")

138 away from

139 physical/actual vision

140 divine

141 (hell's devils were said to whip/drive condemned sinners away from anything sanctified, which might re-sanctify them)

ACT 5 • SCENE 2

Blow me about in winds, roast me in sulphur,
Wash me in steep-down¹⁴² gulfs of liquid fire!
O Desdemon! Dead Desdemon! Dead! O! O!

280

ENTER LODOVICO, MONTANO, CASSIO IN A CHAIR,
AND, BEHIND THEM, OFFICERS WITH IAGO, PRISONER

Lodovico Where is this rash, and most unfortunate man?

Othello That's he that was Othello. Here I am.

Lodovico Where is that viper? Bring the villain forth.

Othello I look down towards his feet.¹⁴³ But that's a fable.

(*to Iago*) If that thou be'st a devil, I cannot kill thee.

285

HE STABS IAGO

Lodovico Wrench his sword from him.

Iago (*to Othello, sarcastically*) I bleed, sir – but not killed.

Othello I am not sorry neither. I'd have thee live.

For in my sense,¹⁴⁴ 'tis happiness to die.

Lodovico O thou Othello, that wert once so good,

290

Fallen in the practice¹⁴⁵ of a cursèd slave,

What shall¹⁴⁶ be said to thee?

Othello Why, anything.

An honorable murderer, if you will.

For naught did I in¹⁴⁷ hate, but all in honor.

Lodovico This wretch hath part confessed his villainy.

295

Did you and he consent in Cassio's death?

142 precipitous, sheer

143 (the Devil was thought to have a cloven foot)

144 in my sense = to my mind

145 brought low by the practices/scheming/treachery

146 ought to be

147 out/because of, with

- Othello* Ay.
- Cassio* Dear general, I never gave you cause.
- Othello* I do believe it, and I ask your pardon.
- 300 Will you, I pray, demand¹⁴⁸ that demi-devil¹⁴⁹
 Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?
- Iago* Demand me nothing. What you know, you know.
 From this time forth, I never will speak word.
- Lodovico* What? Not¹⁵⁰ to pray?
- Gratiano* Torments¹⁵¹ will ope your lips.
- 305 *Othello* (to *Iago*) Well, thou dost best.
- Lodovico* (to *Othello*) Sir, you shall¹⁵² understand what hath
 befallen,
 Which, as I think, you know not. Here is a letter
 Found in the pocket of the slain Roderigo,
 And here another. The one of them imports
 310 The death of Cassio to be undertook
 By Roderigo.
Othello O villain!
- Cassio* Most heathenish¹⁵³ and most gross!
- Lodovico* Now here's another discontented¹⁵⁴ paper,
 Found in his pocket too. And this, it seems,
 315 Roderigo meant to have sent this damnèd villain,
 But that, belike,¹⁵⁵ Iago in the interim

148 ask (French *demander*, “to ask”)

149 (continuing the sarcastic wordplay between Othello and Iago?)

150 not even

151 torture

152 must

153 un-Christian/civilized, barbarous

154 irritated, vexed

155 probably, possibly

Came in and satisfied him.

Othello O thou pernicious caitiff!¹⁵⁶

How came you, Cassio, by that handkerchief

That was my wife's?

Cassio I found it in my chamber.

And he himself confessed't but even now 320

That there he dropped it for a special purpose

Which wrought to¹⁵⁷ his desire.

Othello (to himself) O fool! fool! fool!

Cassio There is besides, in Roderigo's letter,

How he upbraids¹⁵⁸ Iago that he¹⁵⁹ made him

Brave¹⁶⁰ me upon¹⁶¹ the watch. Whereon¹⁶² it came¹⁶³ 325

That I was cast. And even but now he spake –

After long seeming dead – Iago hurt¹⁶⁴ him,

Iago set him on.¹⁶⁵

Lodovico (to *Othello*) You must forsake¹⁶⁶ this room,¹⁶⁷ and go
with us.

Your power and your command¹⁶⁸ is taken off,¹⁶⁹ 330

And Cassio rules in Cyprus. For¹⁷⁰ this slave,

156 despicable wretch, villain

157 wrought to = worked toward

158 reproaches, criticizes

159 Iago

160 challenge, defy

161 on, during

162 at which time

163 came about, happened

164 wounded? insulted?

165 set him on = attacked him? incited him?

166 withdraw from, leave

167 (1) chamber, (2) office, post

168 power and ... command = authority, rule

169 taken off = removed

170 as for

ACT 5 • SCENE 2

If there be any cunning cruelty
That can torment him much and hold¹⁷¹ him long,
It shall be his. You shall close prisoner rest,¹⁷²
335 Till that the nature of your fault be known
To the Venetian state. Come, bring¹⁷³ away.
Othello Soft you,¹⁷⁴ a word or two before you go.
I have done the state some service, and they know't.
No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,
340 When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,¹⁷⁵
Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak
Of one that loved not wisely, but too well.
Of one not easily jealous but, being wrought,¹⁷⁶
345 Perplexed¹⁷⁷ in the extreme. Of one whose hand,
Like the base Judean,¹⁷⁸ threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe. Of one whose subdued¹⁷⁹ eyes,
Albeit unuse'd to the melting mood,
Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
350 Their medicinal gum. Set you down this.
And say besides, that in Aleppo¹⁸⁰ once,
Where a malignant¹⁸¹ and a turbaned Turk

171 preserve ("keep alive")

172 shall close prisoner rest = must confined/strictly guarded prisoner remain

173 let yourself be brought/taken

174 soft you = wait

175 weaken, lessen

176 agitated

177 was entangled/bewildered

178 (Quarto: Indian; there being no specific reference, one non-Christian will do as well as another)

179 overcome

180 (a city in NW Syria)

181 malcontent, rebellious

ACT 5 • SCENE 2

Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,¹⁸²
 I took by th' throat the circumcisèd dog
 And smote him (*pulls out hidden dagger*) thus. 355

OTHELLO STABS HIMSELF

Lodovico O bloody period!¹⁸³
Gratiano All that's spoke¹⁸⁴ is marred.¹⁸⁵
Othello I kissed thee ere I killed thee. No way but this,
 (*falling on Desdemona*) Killing myself, to die upon a kiss.

OTHELLO DIES

Cassio This did I fear, but thought he had no weapon,
 For he was great of heart.
Lodovico (*to Iago*) O Spartan dog,¹⁸⁶ 360
 More fell¹⁸⁷ than anguish, hunger, or the sea.
 Look on the tragic loading of¹⁸⁸ this bed.
 This is thy work. The object¹⁸⁹ poisons sight,
 Let it be hid. Gratiano, keep¹⁹⁰ the house,
 And seize upon¹⁹¹ the fortunes¹⁹² of the Moor, 365

182 traduced the state = verbally slandered/defamed Venice

183 ending, conclusion, completion

184 that's spoke = that has been said

185 ruined

186 Spartan dog = fiercely predatory animal (Theseus and Hippolyta, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, act 4, scene 1, discuss the famous virtues of Spartan hunting dogs; Iago is clearly not Spartan-like, nor is Lodovico praising him)

187 cruel, ruthless, savage

188 loading of = load on ("cargo")

189 spectacle, sight

190 attend to, take care of

191 seize upon = take possession of

192 estate, wealth

ACT 5 • SCENE 2

For they succeed on¹⁹³ you. (*to Cassio*) To you, lord governor,
Remains the censure¹⁹⁴ of this hellish villain.
The time, the place, the torture, O enforce it!¹⁹⁵
Myself will¹⁹⁶ straight aboard,¹⁹⁷ and to the state
370 This heavy act¹⁹⁸ with heavy heart relate.

EXEUNT

193 succeed on = pass by way of heredity (Othello's deceased wife's family
being his only known heirs)

194 sentence and punishment

195 enforce it = impose/compel it, press it hard

196 will go/proceed

197 aboard ship ("sail")

198 outcome, thing done

AN ESSAY BY HAROLD BLOOM



“The character of Iago . . . belongs to a class of characters common to Shakespeare, and at the same time peculiar to him—namely, that of great intellectual activity, accompanied with a total want of moral principle, and therefore displaying itself at the constant expense of others, and seeking to confound the practical distinctions of right and wrong, by referring them to some overstrained standard of speculative refinement.—Some persons, more nice than wise, have thought the whole of the character of Iago unnatural. Shakespeare, who was quite as good a philosopher as he was a poet, thought otherwise. He knew that the love of power, which is another name for the love of mischief, was natural to man. He would know this as well or better than if it had been demonstrated to him by a logical diagram, merely from seeing children paddle in the dirt, or kill flies for sport. We might ask those who think the character of Iago not natural, why they go to see it performed, but from the interest it excites, the sharper edge which it sets on their curiosity and imagination? Why do we go to see tragedies in general? Why do we always read the accounts in the newspapers of dreadful fires and shocking murders, but for

the same reason? Why do so many persons frequent executions and trials, or why do the lower classes almost universally take delight in barbarous sports and cruelty to animals, but because there is a natural tendency in the mind to strong excitement, a desire to have its faculties roused and stimulated to the utmost? Whenever this principle is not under the restraint of humanity, or the sense of moral obligation, there are no excesses to which it will not of itself give rise, without the assistance of any other motive, either of passion or self-interest. Iago is only an extreme instance of the kind; that is, of diseased intellectual activity, with a preference of the latter, because it falls more in with his favourite propensity, gives greater zest to his thoughts, and scope to his actions.—Be it observed, too, (for the sake of those who are for squaring all human actions by the maxims of Rochefoucault), that he is quite or nearly as indifferent to his own fate as to that of others; that he runs all risks for a trifling and doubtful advantage; and is himself the dupe and victim of his ruling passion—an incorrigible love of mischief—an insatiable craving after action of the most difficult and dangerous kind. Our ‘Ancient’ is a philosopher, who fancies that a lie that kills has more point in it than an alliteration or an antithesis; who thinks a fatal experiment on the peace of a family a better thing than watching the palpitations in the heart of a flea in an air-pump; who plots the ruin of his friends as an exercise for his understanding, and stabs men in the dark to prevent *ennui*.”—William Hazlitt

Since it is Othello’s tragedy, even if it is Iago’s play (not even Hamlet or Edmund seem to compose so much of their dramas), we need to restore some sense of Othello’s initial

dignity and glory. A bad modern tradition of criticism that goes from T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis through current New Historicism has divested the hero of his splendor, in effect doing Iago's work so that, in Othello's words, "Othello's occupation's gone." Since 1919 or so, generals have lost esteem among the elite, though not always among the groundlings. Shakespeare himself subjected chivalric valor to the superb comic critique of Falstaff, who did not leave intact very much of the nostalgia for military prowess. But Falstaff, although he still inhabited a corner of Hamlet's consciousness, is absent from *Othello*.

The clown scarcely comes on stage in *Othello*, though the Fool in *Lear*, the drunken porter at the gate in *Macbeth*, and the fig-and-asp seller in *Antony and Cleopatra* maintain the persistence of tragicomedy in Shakespeare after *Hamlet*. Only *Othello* and *Coriolanus* exclude all laughter, as if to protect two great captains from the Falstaffian perspective. When Othello, doubtless the fastest sword in his profession, wants to stop a street fight, he need only utter the one massive and menacingly monosyllabic line "Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them."

To see Othello in his unfallen splendor, within the play, becomes a little difficult, because he so readily seems to become Iago's dupe. Shakespeare, as before in *Henry IV, Part One*, and directly after in *King Lear*, gives us the responsibility of foregrounding by inference. As the play opens, Iago assures his gull, Roderigo, that he hates Othello, and he states the only true motive for his hatred, which is what Milton's Satan calls "a Sense of Injured Merit." Satan (as Milton did not wish to know) is the legitimate son of Iago, begot by Shakespeare upon Milton's Muse. Iago, long Othello's "ancient" (his ensign, or flag officer, the third-in-command), has been passed over for promotion, and Cassio

has become Othello's lieutenant. No reason is given for Othello's decision; his regard for "honest Iago," bluff veteran of Othello's "big wars," remains undiminished. Indeed, Iago's position as flag officer, vowed to die rather than let Othello's colors be captured in battle, testifies both to Othello's trust and to Iago's former devotion. Paradoxically, that quasi-religious worship of the war god Othello by his true believer Iago can be inferred as the cause of Iago's having been passed over. Iago, as Harold Goddard finely remarked, is always at war; he is a moral pyromaniac setting fire to all of reality. Othello, the skilled professional who maintains the purity of arms by sharply dividing the camp of war from that of peace, would have seen in his brave and zealous ancient someone who could not replace him were he to be killed or wounded. Iago cannot stop fighting, and so cannot be preferred to Cassio, who is relatively inexperienced (a kind of staff officer) but who is courteous and diplomatic and knows the limits of war.

Sound as Othello's military judgment clearly was, he did not know Iago, a very free artist of himself. The catastrophe that foregrounds Shakespeare's play is what I would want to call the Fall of Iago, which sets the paradigm for Satan's Fall in Milton. Milton's God, like Othello, pragmatically demotes his most ardent devotee, and the wounded Satan rebels. Unable to bring down the Supreme Being, Satan ruins Adam and Eve instead, but the subtler Iago can do far better, because his only God is Othello himself, whose fall becomes the appropriate revenge for Iago's evidently sickening loss of being at rejection, with consequences including what may be sexual impotence, and what certainly is a sense of nullity, of no longer being what one was. Iago is Shakespeare's largest study in ontotheological absence, a sense of the void that

follows on from Hamlet's, and that directly precedes Edmund's more restricted but even more affectless excursion into the uncanniness of nihilism. Othello was everything to Iago, because war was everything; passed over, Iago is nothing, and in warring against Othello, his war is against ontology.

Tragic drama is not necessarily metaphysical, but Iago, who says he is nothing if not critical, also is nothing if not metaphysical. His grand boast "I am not what I am" deliberately repeals St. Paul's "By the grace of God I am what I am." With Iago, Shakespeare is enabled to return to the Machiavel, yet now not to another Aaron the Moor or Richard III, both versions of Barabas, Jew of Malta, but to a character light-years beyond Marlowe. The self-delight of Barabas, Aaron, and Richard III in their own villainy is childlike compared with Iago's augmenting pride in his achievement as psychologist, dramatist, and aesthete (the first modern one) as he contemplates the total ruin of the war god Othello, reduced to murderous incoherence. Iago's accomplishment in revenge tragedy far surpasses Hamlet's revision of *The Murder of Gonzago* into *The Mousetrap*. Contemplate Iago's achievement: his unaided genius has limned this night piece, and it was his best. He will die under torture, silently, but he will have left a mutilated reality as his monument.

W. H. Auden, in one of his most puzzling critical essays, found in Iago the apotheosis of the practical joker, which I find explicable only by realizing that Auden's Iago was Verdi's (that is, Arrigo Boito's), just as Auden's Falstaff was operatic, rather than dramatic. One should not try to restrict Iago's genius; he is a great artist, and no joker. Milton's Satan is a failed theologian and a great poet, while Iago shines equally as nihilistic death-of-God

theologue and as advanced dramatic poet. Shakespeare endowed only Hamlet, Falstaff, and Rosalind with more wit and intellect than he gave to Iago and Edmund, while in aesthetic sensibility, only Hamlet overgoes Iago. Grant Iago his Ahab-like obsession—Othello is the Moby-Dick who must be harpooned—and Iago's salient quality rather outrageously is his freedom. A great improviser, he works with gusto and mastery of timing, adjusting his plot to openings as they present themselves. If I were a director of *Othello*, I would instruct my Iago to manifest an ever-growing wonder and confidence in the diabolic art. Unlike Barabas and his progeny, Iago is an inventor, an experimenter always willing to try modes heretofore unknown. Auden, in a more inspired moment, saw Iago as a scientist rather than a practical joker. Satan, exploring the untracked Abyss in *Paradise Lost*, is truly in Iago's spirit. Who before Iago, in literature or in life, perfected the arts of disinformation, disorientation, and derangement? All these combine in Iago's grand program of uncreation, as Othello is returned to original chaos, to the Tohu and Bohu from which we came.

Even a brief glance at Shakespeare's source in Cinthio reveals the extent to which Iago is essentially Shakespeare's radical invention, rather than an adaptation of the wicked Ensign in the original story. Cinthio's Ensign falls passionately in love with Desdemona, but wins no favor with her, since she loves the Moor. The unnamed Ensign decides that his failure is due to Desdemona's love for an unnamed Captain (Shakespeare's Cassio), and so he determines to remove this supposed rival, by inducing jealousy in the Moor and then plotting with him to murder both Desdemona and the Captain. In Cinthio's version, the Ensign beats Desdemona to death, while the Moor watches approvingly. It is

only afterward, when the Moor repents and desperately misses his wife, that he dismisses the Ensign, who thus is first moved to hatred against his general. Shakespeare transmuted the entire story by giving it, and Iago, a different starting point, the foreground in which Iago has been passed over for promotion. The ontological shock of that rejection is Shakespeare's original invention and is the trauma that truly creates Iago, no mere wicked Ensign but rather a genius of evil who has engendered himself from a great Fall.

Milton's Satan owes so much to Iago that we can be tempted to read the Christian Fall of Adam into Othello's catastrophe, and to find Lucifer's decline into Satan a clue to Iago's inception. But though Shakespeare's Moor has been baptized, *Othello* is no more a Christian drama than *Hamlet* was a doctrinal tragedy of guilt, sin, and pride. Iago playfully invokes a "Divinity of Hell," and yet he is no mere diabolist. He is War Everlasting (as Jean-Luc Goddard sensed) and inspires in me the same uncanny awe and fright that Cormac McCarthy's Judge Holden arouses each time I reread *Blood Meridian, Or, The Evening Redness in the West* (1985). The Judge, though based on a historic filibuster who massacred and scalped Indians in the post-Civil War Southwest and in Mexico, is War Incarnate. A reading of his formidable pronouncements provides a theology-in-little of Iago's enterprise, and betrays perhaps a touch of Iago's influence upon *Blood Meridian*, an American descendant of the Shakespeare-intoxicated Herman Melville and William Faulkner. "War," says the Judge, "is the truest form of divination. . . . War is god," because war is the supreme game of will against will. Iago is the genius of will reborn from war's slighting of the will. To have been passed over for Cassio is to have one's will reduced to nullity, and the self's sense of power vi-

olated. Victory for the will therefore demands a restoration of power, and power for Iago can only be war's power: to maim, to kill, to humiliate, to destroy the godlike in another, the war god who betrayed his worship and his trust. Cormac McCarthy's Judge Holden is Iago come again when he proclaims war as the game that defines us:

Wolves cull themselves, man. What other creature could?
And is the race of man not more predacious yet? The way
of the world is to bloom and flower and die but in the
affairs of men there is no waning and the moon of his ex-
pression signals the onset of night. His spirit is exhausted
at the peak of its achievement. His meridian is at once his
darkening and the evening of his day. He loves games? Let
him play for stakes.

In Iago, what was the religion of war, when he worshiped Othello as its god, has now become the game of war, to be played everywhere except upon the battlefield. The death of belief becomes the birth of invention, and the passed-over officer becomes the poet of street brawls, stabbings in the dark, disinformation, and above all else, the uncreation of Othello, the sparagmos of the great captain-general so that he can be returned to the original abyss, the chaos that Iago equates with the Moor's African origins. That is not Othello's view of his heritage (or Shakespeare's), but Iago's interpretation wins, or almost wins, since I will argue that Othello's much-maligned suicide speech is something very close to a recovery of dignity and coherence, though not of lost greatness. Iago, forever beyond Othello's understanding, is not beyond ours, because we are more like Iago than we resemble Othello; Iago's views on war, on the will, and on the aesthetics of re-

venge inaugurate our own pragmatics of understanding the human.

We cannot arrive at a just estimate of Othello if we undervalue Iago, who would be formidable enough to undo most of us if he emerged out of his play into our lives. Othello is a great soul hopelessly outclassed in intellect and drive by Iago. Hamlet, as A. C. Bradley once observed, would have disposed of Iago very readily. In a speech or two, Hamlet would discern Iago for what he was, and then would drive Iago to suicide by lightning parody and mockery. Falstaff and Rosalind would do much the same, Falstaff boisterously and Rosalind gently. Only humor could defend against Iago, which is why Shakespeare excludes all comedy from Othello, except for Iago's saturnine hilarity. Even there, a difference emerges; Barabas and his Shakespearean imitators share their triumphalism with the audience, whereas Iago, at the top of his form, seems to be sending us postcards from the volcano, as remote from us as he is from all his victims. "You come next," something in him implies, and we wince before him. "With all his poetic gift, he has no poetic weakness," A. C. Swinburne said of Iago. The prophet of Resentment, Iago presages Smerdyakov, Svidrigailov, and Stavrogin in Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and all the ascetics of the spirit deplored by Friedrich Nietzsche.

Yet he is so much more than that; among all literary villains, he is by merit raised to a bad eminence that seems unsurpassable. His only near-rival, Edmund, partly repents while dying, in a gesture more enigmatic than Iago's final election of silence. Great gifts of intellect and art alone could not bring Iago to his heroic villainy; he has a negative grace beyond cognition and perceptiveness. The public sphere gave Marlowe his Guise in *The Massacre at Paris*, but the Guise is a mere imp of evil when juxtaposed to Iago. The

Devil himself—in Milton, Marlowe, J. W. van Goethe, Dostoyevsky, Melville, or any other writer—cannot compete with Iago, whose American descendants range from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Chillingworth and Melville’s Claggart through Mark Twain’s Mysterious Stranger on to Nathanael West’s Shrike and Cormac McCarthy’s Judge Holden. Modern literature has not surpassed Iago; he remains the perfect Devil of the West, superb as psychologist, playwright, dramatic critic, and negative theologian. G. B. Shaw, jealous of Shakespeare, argued that “the character defies all consistency,” being at once “a coarse blackguard” and also refined and subtle. Few have agreed with Shaw, and those who question Iago’s persuasiveness tend also to find Othello a flawed representation. A. C. Bradley, an admirable critic always, named Falstaff, Hamlet, Iago, and Cleopatra as Shakespeare’s “most wonderful” characters. If I could add Rosalind and Macbeth to make a sixfold wonder, then I would agree with Bradley, for these are Shakespeare’s grandest inventions, and all of them take human nature to some of its limits, without violating those limits. Falstaff’s wit, Hamlet’s ambivalent yet charismatic intensity, Cleopatra’s mobility of spirit find their rivals in Macbeth’s proleptic imagination, Rosalind’s control of all perspectives, and Iago’s genius for improvisation. Neither merely coarse nor merely subtle, Iago constantly re-creates his own personality and character: “I am not what I am.” Those who question how a twenty-eight-year-old professional soldier could harbor so sublimely negative a genius might just as soon question how the thirty-nine-year-old professional actor, Shakespeare, could imagine so convincing a “demi-devil” (as Othello finally terms Iago). We think that Shakespeare abandoned acting just before he composed *Othello*; he seems to have played his final role in *All’s Well That Ends Well*. Is there some link

between giving up the player's part and the invention of Iago? Between *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Othello*, Shakespeare wrote *Measure for Measure*, a farewell to stage comedy. *Measure for Measure*'s enigmatic Duke Vincentio, as I have observed, seems to have some Iago-like qualities, and may also relate to Shakespeare's release from the burden of performance. Clearly a versatile and competent actor, but never a leading one, Shakespeare perhaps celebrates a new sense of the actor's energies in the improvisations of Vincentio and Iago.

Bradley, in exalting Falstaff, Hamlet, Iago, and Cleopatra, may have been responding to the highly conscious theatricalism that is fused into their roles. Witty in himself, Falstaff provokes wit in others through his performances. Hamlet, analytical tragedian, discourses with everyone he encounters, driving them to self-revelation. Cleopatra is always on stage—living, loving, and dying—and whether she ceases to perform, when alone with Antony, we will never know, because Shakespeare never shows them alone together, save once, and that is very brief. Perhaps Iago, before the Fall of his rejection by Othello, had not yet discovered his own dramatic genius; it seems the largest pragmatic consequence of his Fall, once his sense of nullity has passed through an initial trauma. When we first hear him, at the start of the play, he already indulges his actor's freedom:

O, sir, content you,
 I follow him to serve my turn upon him.
 We cannot all be masters, nor all masters
 Cannot be truly followed. You shall mark
 Many a duteous and knee-crooking knave
 That, doting on his own obsequious bondage,

Wears out his time, much like his master's ass,
For nought but provender, and when he's old, cashiered.
Whip me such honest knaves! Others there are
Who, trimmed in forms and visages of duty,
Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves,
And throwing but shows of service on their lords,
Do well thrive by them, and when they have lined their coats
Do themselves homage. These fellows have some soul
And such a one do I profess myself.

[I.I.39–53]

Only the actor, Iago assures us, possesses “some soul”; the rest of us wear our hearts upon our sleeves. Yet this is only the start of a player's career; at this early point, Iago is merely out for mischief, rousing up Brabantio, Desdemona's father, and conjuring up street brawls. He knows that he is exploring a new vocation, but he has little sense as yet of his own genius. Shakespeare, while Iago gathers force, centers instead upon giving us a view of Othello's precarious greatness, and of Desdemona's surpassing human worth. Before turning to the Moor and his bride, I wish further to foreground Iago, who requires quite as much inferential labor as do Hamlet and Falstaff.

Richard III and Edmund have fathers; Shakespeare gives us no antecedents for Iago. We can surmise the ancient's previous relationship to his superb captain. What can we infer of his marriage to Emilia? There is Iago's curious mistake in his first mention of Cassio: “A fellow almost damned in a fair wife.” This seems not to be Shakespeare's error but a token of Iago's obsessive concern with marriage as a damnation, since Bianca is plainly Cassio's whore and not his wife. Emilia, no better than she should be, will

be the ironic instrument that undoes Iago's triumphalism, at the cost of her life. As to the relationship between this singular couple, Shakespeare allows us some pungent hints. Early in the play, Iago tells us what neither he nor we believe, not because of any shared regard for Emilia but because Othello is too grand for this:

And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets
He has done my office. I know not if't be true,
But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do as if for surety.

[1.3.380-83]

Later, Iago parenthetically expresses the same "mere suspicion" of Cassio: "For I fear Cassio with my night-cap too." We can surmise that Iago, perhaps made impotent by his fury at being passed over for promotion, is ready to suspect Emilia with every male in the play, while not particularly caring one way or the other. Emilia, comforting Desdemona after Othello's initial rage of jealousy against his blameless wife, sums up her own marriage also:

'Tis not a year or two shows us a man.
They are all but stomachs and we all but food,
They eat us hungerly, and when they are full
They belch us.

[3.4.101-4]

That is the erotic vision of *Troilus and Cressida*, carried over into a greater realm, but not a less rancid one, because the world of *Othello* belongs to Iago. It is not persuasive to say that Othello is a normal man and Iago abnormal; Iago is the genius of his time and place, and is all will. His passion for destruction is the only

creative passion in the play. Such a judgment is necessarily very somber, but then this is surely Shakespeare's most painful play. *King Lear* and *Macbeth* are even darker, but theirs is the darkness of the negative sublime. The only sublimity in *Othello* is Iago's. Shakespeare's conception of him was so definitive that the revisions made between the Quarto's text and the Folio's enlarge and sharpen our sense primarily of Emilia, and secondly of Othello and Desdemona, but hardly touch Iago. Shakespeare rightly felt no need to revise Iago, already the perfection of malign will and genius for hatred. There can be no question concerning Iago's primacy in the play: he speaks eight soliloquies, Othello only three.

Edmund outthinks and so outplots everyone else in *King Lear*, and yet is destroyed by the recalcitrant endurance of Edgar, who develops from credulous victim into inexorable revenger. Iago, even more totally the master of his play, is at last undone by Emilia, whom Shakespeare revised into a figure of intrepid outrage, willing to die for the sake of the murdered Desdemona's good name. Shakespeare had something of a tragic obsession with the idea of a good name living on after his protagonists' deaths. Hamlet, despite saying that no man can know anything of whatever he leaves behind him, nevertheless exhorts Horatio to survive so as to defend what might become of his prince's wounded name. We will hear Othello trying to recuperate some shred of reputation in his suicidal final speech, upon which critical agreement no longer seems at all possible. If the *Funeral Elegy* for Will Peter indeed was Shakespeare's (I think this probable), then the poet-dramatist in 1612, four years before his own death at fifty-two, was much preoccupied with his own evidently blemished name.

Emilia's heroic victory over Iago is one of Shakespeare's grandest ironies, and appropriately constitutes the play's most surprising dramatic moment:

Emilia O heaven! O heavenly powers!
Iago Come, hold your
peace!
Emilia 'Twill out, 'twill out. I peace?
No, I will speak as liberal as the north.
Let heaven and men and devils, let them all,
All, all, cry shame against me, yet I'll speak.
Iago Be wise, and get you home.
Emilia I will not.

IAGO TRIES TO STAB HIS WIFE

Gratiano Fie! Your sword upon a woman?
Emilia O thou dull Moor, that handkerchief thou speak'st of
I found by fortune and did give my husband.
For often with a solemn earnestness—
More than, indeed, belonged to such a trifle—
He begged of me to steal it.
Iago Villainous whore!
Emilia She give it Cassio? No, alas I found it,
And I did give't my husband.
Iago Filth, thou liest!
Emilia By heaven, I do not, I do not, gentlemen.
O murd'rous coxcomb, what should such a fool
Do with so good a wife?
Othello Are there not stones in heaven
But what serve for thunder? (*to Iago*) Precious villain!

AN ESSAY BY HAROLD BLOOM

OTHELLO RUNS AT IAGO, WHO EVADES HIM,
STABS EMILIA, AND RUNS OUT
MONTANO DISARMS OTHELLO

Gratiano The woman falls. Sure, he hath killed his wife.

Emilia Ay, ay. O lay me by my mistress' side.

Gratiano He's gone, but his wife's killed.

[5.2.217–37]

We are surprised, but Iago is shocked; indeed it is his first reversal since being passed over for Cassio. That Emilia should lose her worldly wisdom, and become as free as the north wind, was the only eventuality that Iago could not foresee. And his failure to encompass his wife's best aspect—her love for and pride in Desdemona—is the one lapse for which he cannot forgive himself. That is the true undersong of the last lines he ever will allow himself to utter, and which are directed as much to us as to Othello or to Cassio:

Othello Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil

Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?

Iago Demand me nothing. What you know, you know.

From this time forth, I never will speak word.

[5.2.300–3]

What is it that we know, beyond what Othello and Cassio know? Shakespeare's superb dramatic irony transcends even that question into the subtler matter of allowing us to know something about Iago that the ancient, despite his genius, is incapable of knowing. Iago is outraged that he could not anticipate, by dramatic imagination, his wife's outrage that Desdemona should be

not only murdered but perhaps permanently defamed. The aesthete's web has all of war's gamelike magic, but no place in it for Emilia's honest indignation. Where he ought to have been at his most discerning—within his marriage—Iago is blank and blind. The superb psychologist who unseamed Othello, and who deftly manipulated Desdemona, Cassio, Roderigo, and all others, angrily falls into the fate he arranged for his prime victim, the Moor, and becomes another wife murderer. He has, at last, set fire to himself.

Since the world is Iago's, I scarcely am done expounding him, and will examine him again in an overview of the play, but only after brooding upon the many enigmas of Othello. Where Shakespeare granted Hamlet, Lear, and Macbeth an almost continuous and preternatural eloquence, he chose instead to give Othello a curiously mixed power of expression, distinct yet divided, and deliberately flawed. Iago's theatricalism is superb, but Othello's is troublesome, brilliantly so. The Moor tells us that he has been a warrior since he was seven, presumably a hyperbole but indicative that he is all too aware his greatness has been hard won. His professional self-awareness is extraordinarily intense; partly this is inevitable, since he is technically a mercenary, a black soldier of fortune who honorably serves the Venetian state. And yet his acute sense of his reputation betrays what may well be an uneasiness, sometimes manifested in the baroque elaborations of his language, satirized by Iago as "a bombast circumstance, / Horribly stuffed with epithets of war."

A military commander who can compare the movement of his mind to the "icy current and compulsive course" of the Pontic (Black) Sea, Othello seems incapable of seeing himself except in

grandiose terms. He presents himself as a living legend or walking myth, nobler than any antique Roman. The poet Anthony Hecht thinks that we are meant to recognize “a ludicrous and nervous vanity” in Othello, but Shakespeare’s adroit perspectivism evades so single a recognition. Othello has a touch of Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar in him; there is an ambiguity in both figures that makes it very difficult to trace the demarcations between their vainglory and their grandeur. If you believe in the war god Caesar (as Antony does) or in the war god Othello (as Iago once did), then you lack the leisure to contemplate the god’s failings. But if you are Cassius, or the postlapsarian Iago, then you are at pains to behold the weaknesses that mask as divinity. Othello, like Caesar, is prone to refer to himself in the third person, a somewhat unnerving habit; whether in literature or in life. And yet, again like Julius Caesar, Othello believes his own myth, and to some extent we must also, because there is authentic nobility in the language of his soul. That there is opacity also, we cannot doubt; Othello’s tragedy is precisely that Iago should know him better than the Moor knows himself.

Othello is a great commander, who knows war and the limits of war but who knows little else, and cannot know that he does not know. His sense of himself is very large, in that its scale is vast, but he sees himself from afar as it were; up close, he hardly confronts the void at his center. Iago’s apprehension of that abyss is sometimes compared to Montaigne’s; I sooner would compare it to Hamlet’s, because like one element in the infinitely varied Prince of Denmark, Iago is well beyond skepticism and has crossed into nihilism. Iago’s most brilliant insight is that if *he* was reduced to nothingness by Cassio’s preferment, then how much more vulnerable Othello must be, lacking Iago’s intellect and

game-playing will. Anyone can be pulverized, in Iago's view, and in this drama he is right. There is no one in the play with the irony and wit that alone could hold off Iago: Othello is consciously theatrical but quite humorless, and Desdemona is a miracle of sincerity. The terrible painfulness of *Othello* is that Shakespeare shrewdly omits any counterforce to Iago. In *King Lear*, Edmund also confronts no one with the intellect to withstand him, until he is annihilated by the exquisite irony of having created the nameless avenger who was once his gull, Edgar. First and last, Othello is powerless against Iago; that helplessness is the most harrowing element in the play, except perhaps for Desdemona's double powerlessness, in regard both to Iago and to her husband.

It is important to emphasize the greatness of Othello, despite all his inadequacies of language and of spirit. Shakespeare implicitly celebrates Othello as a giant of mere being, an ontological splendor, and so a natural man self-raised to an authentic if precarious eminence. Even if we doubt the possibility of the purity of arms, Othello plausibly represents that lost ideal. At every point, he is the antithesis of Iago's "I am not what I am," until he begins to come apart under Iago's influence. Manifestly, Desdemona has made a wrong choice in a husband, and yet that choice testifies to Othello's hard-won splendor. These days, when so many academic critics are converted to the recent French fashion of denying the self, some of them happily seize upon Othello as a fit instance. They undervalue how subtle Shakespeare's art can be; Othello indeed may seem to prompt James Calderwood's Lacanian observation: "Instead of a self-core discoverable at the center of his being, Othello's 'I am' seems a kind of internal repertory company, a 'we are.'"

If Othello, at the play's start, or at its close, is only the sum of his

self-descriptions, then indeed he could be judged a veritable picnic of souls. But his third-person relation to his own images of self testifies not to a “we are” but to a perpetual romanticism at seeing and describing himself. To some degree, he is a self-enchanter, as well as the enchanter of Desdemona. Othello desperately wants and needs to be the protagonist of a Shakespearean romance, but alas he is the hero-victim of this most painful Shakespearean domestic tragedy of blood. John Jones makes the fine observation that Lear in the Quarto version is a romance figure, but then is revised by Shakespeare into the tragic being of the Folio text. As Iago’s destined gull, Othello presented Shakespeare with enormous problems in representation. How are we to believe in the essential heroism, largeness, and loving nature of so catastrophic a protagonist? Since Desdemona is the most admirable image of love in all Shakespeare, how are we to sympathize with her increasingly incoherent destroyer, who renders her the unluckiest of all wives? Romance, literary and human, depends on partial or imperfect knowledge. Perhaps Othello never gets beyond that, even in his final speech, but Shakespeare shrewdly frames the romance of Othello within the tragedy of *Othello*, and thus solves the problem of sympathetic representation.

Othello is not a “poem unlimited,” beyond genre, like *Hamlet*, but the romance elements in its three principal figures do make it a very uncommon tragedy. Iago is a triumph because he is in exactly the right play for an ontotheological villain, while the charitable Desdemona is superbly suited to this drama also. Othello cannot quite fit, but then that is his sociopolitical dilemma, the heroic Moor commanding the armed forces of Venice, sophisticated in its decadence then as now. Shakespeare mingles commercial realism and visionary romance in his portrait of Othello, and

the mix necessarily is unsteady, even for this greatest of all makers. Yet we do Othello wrong to offer him the show of violence, whether by unselfing him or by devaluing his goodness. Iago, nothing if not critical, has a keener sense of Othello than most of us now tend to achieve: "The Moor is of a free and open nature / That thinks men honest that but seem to be so."

There are not many in Shakespeare, or in life, that are "of a free and open nature": to suppose that we are to find Othello ludicrous or paltry is to mistake the play badly. He is admirable, a tower among men, but soon enough he becomes a broken tower. Shakespeare's own Hector, Ulysses, and Achilles, in his *Troilus and Cressida*, were all complex travesties of their Homeric originals (in George Chapman's version), but Othello is precisely Homeric, as close as Shakespeare desired to come to Chapman's heroes. Within his clear limitations, Othello indeed is "noble": his consciousness, prior to his fall, is firmly controlled, just, and massively dignified, and has its own kind of perfection. Reuben Brower admirably said of Othello that "his heroic simplicity was also heroic blindness. That too is part of the 'ideal' hero, part of Shakespeare's metaphor." The metaphor, no longer quite Homeric, had to extend to the professionalism of a great mercenary soldier and a heroic black in the service of a highly decadent white society. Othello's superb professionalism is at once his extraordinary strength and his tragic freedom to fall. The love between Desdemona and Othello is authentic, yet might have proved catastrophic even in the absence of the daemonic genius of Iago. Nothing in Othello is marriageable: his military career fulfills him completely. Desdemona, persuasively innocent in the highest of senses, falls in love with the pure warrior in Othello, and he falls in love with her love for him, her mirroring of his legendary

career. Their romance is his own pre-existent romance; the marriage does not and cannot change him, though it changes his relationship to Venice, in the highly ironic sense of making him more than ever an outsider.

Othello's character has suffered the assaults of T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis and their various followers, but fashions in Shakespeare criticism always vanish, and the noble Moor has survived his denigrators. Yet Shakespeare has endowed Othello with the authentic mystery of being a radically flawed hero, an Adam too free to fall. In some respects, Othello is Shakespeare's most wounding representation of male vanity and fear of female sexuality, and so of the male equation that makes the fear of cuckoldry and the fear of mortality into a single dread. Leontes, in *The Winter's Tale*, is partly a study in repressed homosexuality, and thus his virulent jealousy is of another order than Othello's. We wince when Othello, in his closing apologia, speaks of himself as one not easily jealous, and we wonder at his blindness. Still we never doubt his valor, and this makes it even stranger that he at least matches Leontes in jealous madness. Shakespeare's greatest insight into male sexual jealousy is that it is a mask for the fear of being castrated by death. Men imagine that there never can be enough time and space for themselves, and they find in cuckoldry, real or imaginary, the image of their own vanishing, the realization that the world will go on without them.

Othello sees the world as a theater for his professional reputation; this most valiant of soldiers has no fear of literal death-in-battle, which only would enhance his glory. But to be cuckolded by his own wife, and with his subordinate Cassio as the other offender, would be a greater, metaphorical death-in-life, for his reputation would not survive it, particularly in his own view of

his mythic renown. Shakespeare is sublimely daemonic, in a mode transcending even Iago's genius, in making Othello's vulnerability exactly consonant with the wound rendered to Iago's self-regard by being passed over for promotion. Iago says, "I am not what I am"; Othello's loss of ontological dignity would be even greater, had Desdemona "betrayed" him (I place the word between quotation marks, because the implicit metaphor involved is a triumph of male vanity). Othello all too self-consciously has risked his hard-won sense of his own being in marrying Desdemona, and he has an accurate foreboding of chaotic engulfment should that risk prove a disaster:

Excellent wretch. Perdition catch my soul,
But I do love thee. And when I love thee not,
Chaos is come again.

[3.3.91-93]

An earlier intimation of Othello's uneasiness is one of the play's subtlest touches:

For know, Iago,
But that I love the gentle Desdemona,
I would not my unhousèd free condition
Put into circumscription and confine
For the sea's worth.

[1.2.23-27]

Othello's psychological complexity has to be reconstructed by the audience from his ruins, as it were, because Shakespeare does not supply us with the full foreground. We are given the hint that but for Desdemona, he never would have married, and indeed he himself describes a courtship in which he was essentially passive:

These things 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 kisses.
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,
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.

[1.3.145-68]

That is rather more than a "hint," and nearly constitutes a boldly direct proposal, on Desdemona's part. With the Venetian competition evidently confined to the likes of Roderigo, Desdemona is willingly seduced by Othello's naive but powerful ro-

mance of the self, provocative of that “world of kisses.” The Moor is not only noble; his saga brings “a maiden never bold” (her father’s testimony) “to fall in love with what she feared to look on.” Desdemona, a High Romantic centuries ahead of her time, yields to the fascination of quest, if *yields* can be an accurate word for so active a surrender. No other match in Shakespeare is so fabulously unlikely, or so tragically inevitable. Even in a Venice and a Cyprus without Iago, how does so improbable a romance domesticate itself? The high point of passion between Othello and Desdemona is their reunion on Cyprus:

Othello O my fair warrior.

Desdemona My dear Othello.

Othello It gives me wonder great as my content

To see you here before me. O my soul’s joy.

If after every tempest come such calms,

May the winds blow till they have wakened death,

And let the laboring bark climb hills of seas

Olympus-high, and duck again as low

As hell’s from heaven. If it were now to die,

’Twere now to be most happy, for I fear

My soul hath her content so absolute

That not another comfort like to this

Succeeds in unknown fate.

Desdemona The heavens forbid

But that our loves and comforts should increase

Even as our days do grow.

Othello Amen to that, sweet powers.

I cannot speak enough of this content,

It stops me here. It is too much of joy.

And this, and this, the greatest discords be

HE KISSES HER

That e'er our hearts shall make.

[2.I.177-94]

From such an apotheosis one can only descend, even if the answering chorus were not Iago's aside that he will loosen the strings now so well tuned. Shakespeare (as I have ventured before, following my master, Dr. Johnson) came naturally to comedy and to romance, but violently and ambivalently to tragedy. *Othello* may have been as painful for Shakespeare as he made it for us. Placing the precarious nobility of Othello and the fragile romanticism of Desdemona upon one stage with the sadistic aestheticism of Iago (ancestor of all modern literary critics) was already an outrageous coup of self-wounding on the poet-dramatist's part. I am delighted to revive the now scoffed-at romantic speculation that Shakespeare carries a private affliction, an erotic vastation, into the high tragedies, *Othello* in particular. Shakespeare is, of course, not Lord Byron, scandalously parading before Europe the pageant of his bleeding heart, yet the incredible agony we rightly undergo as we observe Othello murdering Desdemona has a private as well as public intensity informing it. Desdemona's murder is the crossing point between the overflowing cosmos of Hamlet and the cosmological emptiness of Lear and of Macbeth.

The play *Hamlet* and the mind of Hamlet verge upon an identity, since everything that happens to the Prince of Denmark already seems to be the prince. We cannot quite say that the mind of Iago and the play *Othello* are one, since his victims have their own

greatness. Yet, until Emilia confounds him, the drama's action is Iago's; only the tragedy of their tragedy belongs to Othello and Desdemona. In 1604, an anonymous storyteller reflected upon "Shakespeare's tragedies, where the Comedian rides, when the Tragedian stands on Tip-toe." This wonderful remark was made of Prince Hamlet, who "pleased all," but more subtly illuminates *Othello*, where Shakespeare-as-comedian rides Iago, even as the dramatist stands on tip-toe to extend the limits of his so painful art. We do not know who in Shakespeare's company played Iago against Burbage's Othello, but I wonder if it was not the great clown Robert Armin, who would have played the drunken porter at the gage in *Macbeth*, the Fool in *King Lear*, and the asp bearer in *Antony and Cleopatra*. The dramatic shock in *Othello* is that we delight in Iago's exuberant triumphalism, even as we dread his villainy's consequences. Marlowe's self-delighting Barabas, echoed by Aaron the Moor and Richard III, seems a cruder Machiavel when we compare him with the refined Iago, who confounds Barabas with aspects of Hamlet, in order to augment his own growing inwardness. With Hamlet, we confront the ever-growing inner self, but Iago has no inner self, only a fecund abyss, precisely like his descendant, Milton's Satan, who in every deep found a lower deep opening wide. Satan's discovery is agonized; Iago's is diabolically joyous. Shakespeare invents in Iago a sublimely sadistic comic poet, an archon of nihilism who delights in returning his war god to an uncreated night. Can you invent Iago without delighting in your invention, even as we delight in our ambivalent reception of Iago?

Iago is not larger than his play; he perfectly fits it, unlike Hamlet, who would be too large even for the most unlimited of plays. I have noted already that Shakespeare made significant revisions

to what is spoken by Othello, Desdemona, and Emilia (even Roderigo) but not by Iago; it is as though Shakespeare knew he had gotten Iago right the first time round. No villain in all literature rivals Iago as a flawless conception, who requires no improvement. Swinburne was accurate: "the most perfect evildom, the most potent demi-devil," and "a reflection by hell-fire of the figure of Prometheus." A Satanic Prometheus may at first appear too High Romantic, yet the pyromaniac Iago encourages Roderigo to a

dire yell

As when, by night and negligence, the fire
Is spied in populous cities.

[1.1.73-75]

According to the myth, Prometheus steals fire to free us; Iago steals us, as fresh fodder for the fire. He is an authentic Promethean, however negative, because who can deny that Iago's fire is poetic? The hero-villains of John Webster and Cyril Tourneur are mere names on the page when we contrast them with Iago; they lack Promethean fire. Who else in Shakespeare, except for Hamlet and Falstaff, is so creative as Iago? These three alone can read your soul, and read everyone they encounter. Perhaps Iago is the recompense that the Negative demanded to counter-balance Hamlet, Falstaff, and Rosalind. Great wit, like the highest irony, needs an inner check in order not to burn away everything else: Hamlet's disinterestedness, Falstaff's exuberance, Rosalind's graciousness. Iago is nothing at all, except critical; there can be no inner check when the self is an abyss. Iago has the single affect of sheer gusto, increasingly aroused as he discovers his genius for improvisation.

Since the plot of *Othello* essentially is Iago's plot, improvisation by Iago constitutes the tragedy's heart and center. Hazlitt's review of Edmund Kean's performance as Iago in 1814, from which I have drawn my epigraph for this essay, remains the finest analysis of Iago's improvisatory genius, and is most superb when it observes that Iago "stabs men in the dark to prevent *ennui*." That prophetic insight advances Iago to the Age of Charles Baudelaire, Nietzsche, and Dostoyevsky, an Age that in many respects remains our own. Iago is not a Jacobean Italian malcontent, another descendant of Marlowe's Machiavels. His greatness is that he is out ahead of us, though every newspaper and television newscast brings us accounts of his disciples working on every scale, from individual crimes of sadomasochism to international terrorism and massacre. Iago's followers are everywhere: I have watched, with great interest, many of my former students, undergraduate and graduate, pursue careers of Iagoism, both in and out of the academy. Shakespeare's great male intellectuals (as contrasted to Rosalind and Beatrice, among his women) are only four all together: Falstaff and Hamlet, Iago and Edmund. Of these, Hamlet and Iago are also aesthetes, critical consciousnesses of near-preternatural power. Only in Iago does the aesthete predominate, in close alliance with nihilism and sadism.

I place particular emphasis upon Iago's theatrical and poetic genius, as an appreciation of Iago that I trust will be aesthetic without also being sadomasochistic, since that danger always mingles with any audience's enjoyment of Iago's revelations to us. There is no major figure in Shakespeare with whom we are less likely to identify ourselves, and yet Iago is as beyond vice as he is beyond virtue, a fine recognition of Swinburne's. Robert B. Heilman, who perhaps undervalued *Othello* (the hero, not the play),

made restitution by warning that there was no single way into Iago: "As the spiritual have-not, Iago is universal, that is, many things at once, and of many times at once." Swinburne, perhaps tinged with his usual sadomasochism in his high regard for Iago, prophesied that Iago's stance in hell would be like that of Fari-nata, who stands upright in his tomb: "as if of Hell he had a great disdain." There is hardly a circle in Dante's *Inferno* that Iago could not inhabit, so vast is his potential for ill.

By interpreting Iago as a genius for improvising chaos in others, a gift born out of his own ontological devastation by Othello, I am in some danger of giving us Iago as a negative theologian, perhaps too close to the Miltonic Satan whom he influenced. As I have tried to emphasize, Shakespeare does not write Christian or religious drama; he is not Pedro Calderón de la Barca or (to invoke lesser poet-playwrights) Paul Claudel or T. S. Eliot. Nor is Shakespeare (or Iago) any kind of a heretic; I am baffled when critics argue as to whether Shakespeare was Protestant or Catholic, since the plays are neither. There are gnostic heretical elements in Iago, as there will be in Edmund and in Macbeth, but Shakespeare was not a gnostic, or a hermeticist, or a Neoplatonic occultist. In his extraordinary way, he was the most curious and universal of gleaners, possibly even of esoteric spiritualities, yet here too he was primarily an inventor or discoverer. Othello is a Christian, by conversion; Iago's religion is war, war everywhere—in the streets, in the camp, in his own abyss. Total war is a religion, whose best literary theologian I have cited already, Judge Holden in Cormac McCarthy's frightening *Blood Meridian*. The Judge imitates Iago by expounding a theology of the will, whose ultimate expression is war, against everyone. Iago

says that he has never found a man who knew how to love himself, which means that self-love is the exercise of the will in murdering others. That is Iago's self-education in the will, since he does not start out with the clear intention of murder. In the beginning was a sense of having been outraged by a loss of identity, accompanied by the inchoate desire to be revenged upon the god Iago had served.

Shakespeare's finest achievement in *Othello* is Iago's extraordinary mutations, prompted by his acute self-overhearing as he moves through his eight soliloquies, and their supporting asides. From tentative, experimental promptings on to excited discoveries, Iago's course develops into a triumphal march, to be ended only by Emilia's heroic intervention. Much of the theatrical greatness of *Othello* inheres in this triumphalism, in which we unwillingly participate. Properly performed, *Othello* should be a momentary trauma for its audience. *Lear* is equally catastrophic, where Edmund triumphs consistently until the duel with Edgar, but *Lear* is vast, intricate, and varied, and not just in its double plot. In *Othello*, Iago is always at the center of the web, ceaselessly weaving his fiction, and snaring us with dark magic: Only Prospero is comparable, a luminous magus who in part is Shakespeare's answer to Iago.

You can judge Iago to be, in effect, a misreader of Montaigne, as opposed to Hamlet, who makes of Montaigne the mirror of nature. Kenneth Gross shrewdly observes that "Iago is at best a nightmare image of so vigilant and humanizing a pyrrhonism as Montaigne's." Pyrrhonism, or radical skepticism, is transmuted by Hamlet into disinterestedness; Iago turns it into a war against existence, a drive that seeks to argue that there is no reason why any-

thing should be, at all. The exaltation of the will, in Iago, emanates from an ontological lack so great that no human emotion possibly could fill it:

Virtue: A fig! 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are 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 balance 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.

[I.3.319–31]

“Virtue” here means something like “manly strength,” while by “reason” Iago intends only his own absence of significant emotion. This prose utterance is the poetic center of *Othello*, presaging Iago’s conversion of his leader to a reductive and diseased vision of sexuality. We cannot doubt that Othello loves Desdemona; Shakespeare also may suggest that Othello is amazingly reluctant to make love to his wife. As I read the play’s text, the marriage is never consummated, despite Desdemona’s eager desires. Iago derides Othello’s “weak function”; that seems more a hint of Iago’s impotence than of Othello’s, and yet nothing that the Moorish captain-general says or does reflects an authentic lust for Desdemona. This certainly helps explain his murderous rage, once Iago has roused him to jealousy, and also makes that jealousy

more plausible, since Othello literally does not know whether his wife is a virgin, and is afraid to find out, one way or the other. I join here the minority view of Graham Bradshaw, and of only a few others, but this play, of all Shakespeare's, seems to me the most weakly misread, possibly because its villain is the greatest master of misprision in Shakespeare, or in literature. Why did Othello marry anyway, if he does not sexually desire Desdemona? Iago cannot help us here, and Shakespeare allows us to puzzle the matter out for ourselves, without ever giving us sufficient information to settle the question. But Bradshaw is surely right to say that Othello finally testifies Desdemona died a virgin:

Now. How dost thou look now? O ill-starred wench,
 Pale as thy smock. When we shall meet at compt,
 This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,
 And fiends will snatch at it. (*touches her*) Cold, cold, my girl?
 Even like thy chastity.

[5.2.271-75]

Unless Othello is merely raving, we at least must believe he means what he says: she died not only faithful to him but "cold . . . Even like thy chastity." It is a little difficult to know just what Shakespeare intends Othello to mean, unless his victim had never become his wife, even for the single night when their sexual union was possible. When Othello vows not to "shed her blood," he means only that he will smother her to death, but the frightening irony is there as well: neither he nor Cassio nor anyone else has ever ended her virginity. Bradshaw finds in this a "ghastly tragicomic parody of an erotic death," and that is appropriate for Iago's theatrical achievement.

I want to shift the emphasis from Bradshaw's in order to ques-

tion a matter upon which Iago had little influence: Why was Othello reluctant, from the start, to consummate the marriage? When, in act 1, scene 3, the Duke of Venice accepts the love match of Othello and Desdemona, and then orders Othello to Cyprus, to lead its defense against an expected Turkish invasion, the Moor asks only that his wife be housed with comfort and dignity during his absence. It is the ardent Desdemona who requests that she accompany her husband:

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.

[1.3.256–60]

Presumably by “rites” Desdemona means consummation, rather than battle, and though Othello seconds her, he rather gratuitously insists that desire for her is not exactly hot in him:

Let her have your voice.
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.

[1.3.261-75]

These lines, hardly Othello at his most eloquent, exceed the measure that decorum requires, and do not favor Desdemona. He protests much too much, and hardly betters the case when he urges her off the stage with him:

Come, Desdemona, I have but an hour
Of love, of worldly matter and direction
To spend with thee. We must obey the time.

[1.3.299-301]

If that "hour" is literal, then "love" will be lucky to get twenty minutes of this overbusy general's time. Even with the Turks impending, the state would surely have allowed its chief military officer an extra hour or two for initially embracing his wife. When he arrives on Cyprus, where Desdemona has preceded him, Othello tells us: "Our wars are done, the Turks are drowned." That would seem to provide ample time for the deferred matter of making love to his wife, particularly since public feasting is now decreed. Perhaps it is more proper to wait for evening, and so Othello bids Cassio command the watch, and duly says to Desdemona: "Come, my dear love, / The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue: / That profit's yet to come 'tween me and you," and exits with her. Iago works up a drunken riot, involving Cassio, Roderigo, and Montano, governor of Cyprus, in which Cassio wounds Montano. Othello, aroused by a tolling bell, enters with

Desdemona following soon afterward. We are not told whether there has been time enough for their “rites,” but Othello summons her back to bed, while also announcing that he himself will supervise the dressing of Montano’s wounds. Which had priority, we do not precisely know, but evidently the general preferred his self-imposed obligation toward the governor to his marital obligation.

Iago’s first insinuations of Desdemona’s supposed relationship with Cassio would have no effect if Othello knew her to have been a virgin. It is because he does not know that Othello is so vulnerable. “Why did I marry!” he exclaims, and then points to his cuckold’s horns when he tells Desdemona: “I have a pain upon my forehead, here,” which his poor innocent of a wife attributes to his all-night care of the governor: “Why, that’s with watching,” and tries to bind it hard with the fatal handkerchief, pushed away by him, and so it falls in Emilia’s way. By then, Othello is already Iago’s, and is incapable of resolving his doubts through the only sensible course of finally bringing himself to bed Desdemona.

This is a bewildering labyrinth for the audience, and frequently is not overtly addressed by directors of *Othello*, who leave us doubtful of their interpretations, or perhaps they are not even aware of the difficulty that requires interpretation. Shakespeare was capable of carelessness, but not upon so crucial a point, for the entire tragedy turns upon it. Desdemona and Othello, alas, scarcely know each other, and sexually do not know each other at all. Shakespeare’s audacious suggestion is that Othello was too frightened or diffident to seize upon the opportunity of the first night in Cyprus, but evaded and delayed the ordeal by devoting himself to the wounded Montano. The further suggestion is that Iago, understanding Othello, fomented the drunken altercation in

order to distract his general from consummation, for otherwise Iago's manipulations would have been without consequence. That credits Iago with extraordinary insight into Othello, but no one should be surprised at such an evaluation. We can wonder why Shakespeare did not make all this clearer, except that we need to remember his contemporary audience was far superior to us in comprehending through the ear. They knew how to listen; most of us do not, in our overvisual culture. Shakespeare doubtless would not have agreed with William Blake that what could be made explicit to the idiot was not worth his care, but he had learned from Chaucer, in particular, how to be appropriately sly.

Before turning at last to Iago's triumphalism, I feel obliged to answer my own question: Why did Othello marry when his love for Desdemona was only a secondary response to her primary passion for him? This prelude to tragedy seems plausibly compounded of her ignorance—she is still only a child, rather like Juliet—and his confusion. Othello tells us that he had been nine consecutive months in Venice, away from the battlefield and the camp, and thus he was not himself. Fully engaged in his occupation, he would have been immune to Desdemona's charmed condition and to her generous passion for his living legend. Their shared idealism is also their mutual illusion: the idealism is beautiful, but the illusion would have been dissolved even if Othello had not passed over Iago for promotion and so still had Iago's loving worship, rather than the ancient's vengeful hatred. The fallen Iago will teach Othello that the general's failure to know Desdemona, sexually and otherwise, was because Othello did not want to know. Bradshaw brilliantly observes that Iago's genius "is to persuade others that something they had not thought was something they had not *wanted* to think." Iago, having been thrown into a

cosmological emptiness, discovers that what he had worshiped as Othello's warlike fullness of being was in part another emptiness, and Iago's triumph is to expand that part into very nearly the whole of Othello.

Iago's terrible greatness (what else can we term it?) is also Shakespeare's triumph over Christopher Marlowe, whose Barabas, Jew of Malta, had influenced the young Shakespeare so fiercely. We can observe that Iago transcends Barabas, just as Prospero is beyond Marlowe's Dr. Faustus. One trace of Barabas abides in Iago, though transmogrified by Shakespeare's more glorious villain: self-delight. Exuberance or gusto, the joy of being Sir John Falstaff, is parodied in Iago's negative celebrations, and yet to considerable purpose. Emptied out of significant being, Iago mounts out of his sense of injured merit in his new pride of attainments: dramatist, psychologist, aesthetic critic, diabolic analyst, countertherapist. His uncreation of his captain-general, the return of the magnificent Othello to an original chaos, remains the supreme negation in the history of Western literature, far surpassing the labors of his Dostoyevskian disciples, Svidrigailov and Stavrogin, and of his American pupils, Claggart in Melville's *Billy Budd* and Shrike in Nathanael West's *Miss Lonelyhearts*. The only near-rivals to Iago are also his students, Milton's Satan and Cormac McCarthy's Judge in *Blood Meridian*. Compared with Iago, Satan is hampered by having to work on too cosmic a scale: all of nature goes down with Adam and Eve. McCarthy's Judge, the only character in modern fiction who genuinely frightens me, is too much bloodier than Iago to sustain the comparison. Iago stabs a man or two in the dark; the Judge scalps Indians and Mexicans by the hundreds. By working in so close to his prime victim, Iago be-

comes the Devil-as-matador, and his own best aficionado, since he is nothing if not critical. The only first-rate Iago I have ever seen was Bob Hoskins, who surmounted his director's flaws in Jonathan Miller's BBC television *Othello* of 1981, where Anthony Hopkins as the Moor sank without a trace by being faithful to Miller's Leavisite (or Eliotic) instructions. Hoskins, always best as a gangster, caught many of the accents of Iago's underworld pride in his own preternatural wiliness, and at moments showed what a negative beatification might be, in the pleasure of undoing one's superior at organized violence. Perhaps Hoskins's Iago was a shade more Marlovian than Shakespearean, almost as though Hoskins (or Miller) had *The Jew of Malta* partly in mind, whereas Iago is refined beyond that farcical an intensity.

Triumphalism is Iago's most chilling yet engaging mode; his great soliloquies and asides march to an intellectual music matched in Shakespeare only by aspects of Hamlet, and by a few rare moments when Edmund descends to self-celebration. Iago's inwardness, which sometimes echoes Hamlet's, enhances his repellent fascination for us: how can a sensible emptiness be so labyrinthine? To trace the phases of Iago's entrapment of Othello should answer that question, at least in part. But I pause here to deny that Iago represents something crucial in *Othello*, an assertion made by many interpreters, the most convincing of whom is Edward Snow. In a reading too reliant upon the Freudian psychic mythology, Snow finds in Iago the overt spirit that is buried in Othello: a universal male horror of female sexuality, and so a hatred of women.

The Age of Freud wanes, and joins itself now, in many, to the Age of Resentment. That all men fear and hate women and sexuality is neither Freudian nor true, though an aversion to other-

Is the immediate jewel of their souls.
Who steals my purse steals trash. 'Tis something, nothing,
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands.
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him
And makes me poor indeed.

Othello By heaven, I'll know thy thoughts.

Iago You cannot, if my heart were in your hand;
Nor shall not, whilst 'tis in my custody.

Othello Ha?

Iago O, beware, my lord, of jealousy,
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on. That cuckold lives in bliss
Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger,
But O, what damnèd minutes tells he o'er
Who dotes yet doubts, suspects, yet strongly loves!

Othello O misery!

[3.3.145-72]

This would be outrageous if its interplay between Iago and Othello were not so persuasive. Iago manipulates Othello by exploiting what the Moor shares with the jealous God of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims, a barely repressed vulnerability to betrayal. Yahweh and Othello alike are vulnerable because they have risked extending themselves, Yahweh to the Jews and Othello to Desdemona. Iago, whose motto is "I am not what I am," will triumph by tracking this negativity to Othello, until Othello quite forgets he is a man and becomes jealousy incarnate, a parody of the God of vengeance. We underestimate Iago when we consider him only as a dramatist of the self and a psychologist of genius;

his greatest power is as a negative ontotheologian, a diabolical prophet who has a vocation for destruction. He is not the Christian devil or a parody thereof, but rather a free artist of himself, uniquely equipped, by experience and genius, to entrap spirits greater than his own in a bondage founded upon their inner flaws. In a play that held a genius opposed to his own—a Hamlet or a Falstaff—he would be only a frustrated malcontent. Given a world only of gulls and victims—Othello, Desdemona, Cassio, Roderigo, even Emilia until outrage turns her—Iago scarcely needs to exercise the full range of powers that he keeps discovering. A fire is always raging within him, and the hypocrisy that represses his satirical intensity in his dealings with others evidently costs him considerable suffering.

That must be why he experiences such relief, even ecstasy, in his extraordinary soliloquies and asides, where he applauds his own performance. Though he rhetorically invokes a “divinity of hell,” neither he nor we have any reason to believe that any demon is listening to him. Though married, and an esteemed flag officer, with a reputation for “honesty,” Iago is as solitary a figure as Edmund, or as Macbeth after Lady Macbeth goes mad. Pleasure, for Iago, is purely sadomasochistic; pleasure, for Othello, consists in the rightful consciousness of command. Othello loves Desdemona, yet primarily as a response to her love for his triumphal consciousness. Passed over, and so nullified, Iago determines to convert his own sadomasochism into a countertriumphalism, one that will commandeer his commander, and then transform the god of his earlier worship into a degradation of godhood. The chaos that Othello rightly feared if he ceased to love Desdemona has been Iago’s natural element since Cassio’s promotion. From that chaos, Iago rises as a new Demiurge, a master of uncreation.

In proposing an ontotheological Iago, I build upon A. C. Bradley's emphasis on the passed-over ancient's "resentment," and add to Bradley the idea that resentment can become the only mode of freedom for such great negations as Iago's Dostoyevskian disciples, Svidrigailov and Stavrogin. They may seem insane compared with Iago, but they inherited his weird lucidity, and his economics of the will. René Girard, a theoretician of envy and scapegoating, feels compelled to take Iago at his word, and so sees Iago as being sexually jealous of Othello. This is to be yet again entrapped by Iago, and adds an unnecessary irony to Girard's reduction of all Shakespeare to "a theater of envy." Lev Tolstoy, who fiercely resented Shakespeare, complained of Iago, "There are many motives, but they are all vague." To feel betrayed by a god, be he Mars or Yahweh, and to desire restitution for one's wounded self-regard, to me seems the most precise of any villain's motives: return the god to the abyss into which one has been thrown. Tolstoy's odd, rationalist Christianity could not reimagine Iago's negative Christianity.

Iago is one of Shakespeare's most dazzling performers, equal to Edmund and Macbeth and coming only a little short of Rosalind and Cleopatra, Hamlet and Falstaff, superb charismatics. Negative charisma is an odd endowment; Iago represents it uniquely in Shakespeare, and most literary incarnations of it since owe much to Iago. Edmund, in spite of his own nature, has the element of Don Juan in him, the detachment and freedom from hypocrisy that is fatal for those grand hypocrites, Goneril and Regan. Macbeth, whose prophetic imagination has a universal force, excites our sympathies, however bloody his actions. Iago's appeal to us is the power of the negative, which is all of him and only a part of Hamlet. We all have our gods, whom we worship, and by whom

we cannot accept rejection. The Sonnets turn upon a painful rejection, of the poet by the young nobleman, a rejection that is more than erotic, and that seems to figure in Falstaff's public disgrace at Hal's coronation. Foregrounding *Othello* requires that we imagine Iago's humiliation at the election of Cassio, so that we hear the full reverberation of

Though I do hate him as I do hell's pains,
Yet, for necessity of present life,
I must show out a flag and sign of love,
Which is indeed but sign.

[I. I. 152-55]

The ensign, or ancient, who would have died faithfully to preserve Othello's colors on the battlefield, expresses his repudiation of his former religion, in lines absolutely central to the play. Love of the war god is now but a sign, even though revenge is as yet more an aspiration than a project. The god of war, grand as Othello may be, is a somewhat less formidable figure than the God of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims, but by a superb ontological instinct, Iago associates the jealousy of one god with that of the other:

I will in Cassio's lodging lose this napkin,
And let him find it. Trifles light as air
Are to the jealous confirmations strong
As proofs of holy writ. This may do something.
The Moor already changes with my poison.
Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons,
Which at the first are scarce found to distaste,
But with a little act upon the blood

Burn like the mines of sulphur. (*seeing Othello approach*) I did say so.

[3.3.320–29]

The simile works equally well the other way round: proofs of Holy Writ are, to the jealous God, strong confirmations, but the airiest trifles can provoke the Yahweh who in Numbers leads the Israelites through the wilderness. Othello goes mad, and so does Yahweh in Numbers. Iago's marvelous pride in his "I did say so" leads on to a critical music new even to Shakespeare, one which will engender the aestheticism of John Keats and Walter Pater. The now obsessed Othello stumbles upon the stage, to be greeted by Iago's most gorgeous outburst of triumphalism:

Look, where he comes. Not poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou ow'dst yesterday.

[3.3.330–33]

If this were only sadistic exultation, we would not receive so immortal a wound from it; masochistic nostalgia mingles with the satisfaction of uncreation, as Iago salutes both his own achievement and the consciousness that Othello never will enjoy again. Shakespeare's Iago-like subtle art is at its highest, as we come to understand that Othello *does not know* precisely because he has not known his wife. Whatever his earlier reluctance to consummate marriage may have been, he now realizes he is incapable of it, and so cannot attain to the truth about Desdemona and Cassio:

I had been happy if the general camp,
Pioneers and all, had tasted her sweet body,

So I had nothing known. O now, for ever
Farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content,
Farewell the plumèd troops and the big wars,
That makes ambition virtue! O farewell,
Farewell the neighing steed and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, th'ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
And O you mortal engines, whose rude throats
The immortal Jove's dread clamours counterfeit,
Farewell. Othello's occupation's gone.

[3.3.345–57]

This Hemingwayesque farewell to the big wars has precisely Ernest Hemingway's blend of masculine posturing and barely concealed fear of impotence. There has been no time since the wedding, whether in Venice or on Cyprus, for Desdemona and Cassio to have made love, but Cassio had been the go-between between Othello and Desdemona in the play's foregrounding. Othello's farewell here essentially is to any possibility of consummation; the lost music of military glory has an undersong in which the martial engines signify more than cannons alone. If Othello's occupation is gone, then so is his manhood, and with it departs also the pride, pomp, and circumstance that compelled Desdemona's passion for him, the "circumstance" being more than pageantry. Chaos comes again, even as Othello's ontological identity vanishes, in Iago's sweetest revenge, marked by the villain's sublime rhetorical question: "Is't possible? my lord?" What follows is the decisive moment of the play, in which Iago realizes, for the first time, that Desdemona must be murdered by Othello:

Othello (*seizing him*) Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore,
Be sure of it. Give me the ocular proof,
Or by the worth of mine eternal soul
Thou hadst been better have been born a dog
Than answer my wakèd wrath!

Iago Is't come to this?

Othello Make me to see't, or at the least so prove it
That the probation bear no hinge nor loop
To hang a doubt on, or woe upon thy life!

Iago My noble lord –

Othello If thou dost slander her, and torture me,
Never pray more. Abandon all remorse,
On horror's head horrors accumulate,
Do deeds to make heaven weep, all earth amazed,
For nothing canst thou to damnation add
Greater than that.

[3.3.359–73]

Iago's improvisations, until now, had as their purpose the destruction of Othello's identity, fit recompense for Iago's vastation. Suddenly, Iago confronts a grave threat that is also an opportunity: either he or Desdemona must die, with the consequences of her death to crown the undoing of Othello. How can Othello's desire for "the ocular proof" be satisfied?

Iago And may. But how? How satisfied, my lord?
Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on?
Behold her topped?

Othello Death and damnation. O!

Iago It were a tedious difficulty, I think,
To bring them to that prospect. Damn them then,

If ever mortal eyes do see them bolster
More than their own. What then? How then?
What shall I say? Where's satisfaction?
It is impossible you should see this
Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys,
As salt as wolves in pride, and fools as gross
As ignorance made drunk. But yet, I say,
If imputation and strong circumstances,
Which lead directly to the door of truth,
Will give you satisfaction, you might have't.

[3.3.394–408]

The only ocular proof possible is what Othello will not essay, as Iago well understands, since the Moor will not try his wife's virginity. Shakespeare shows us jealousy in men as centering upon both visual and temporal obsessions, because of the male fear that there will not be enough time and space for him. Iago plays powerfully upon Othello's now monumental aversion from the only door of truth that could give satisfaction, the entrance into Desdemona. Psychological mastery cannot surpass Iago's control of Othello, when the ensign chooses precisely this moment to introduce "a handkerchief, / I am sure it was your wife's, did I today / See Cassio wipe his beard with." Dramatic mastery cannot exceed Iago's exploitation of Othello's stage gesture of kneeling to swear revenge:

Othello Even so my bloody thoughts with violent pace,
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up. Now, by yond marble heaven,
In the due reverence of a sacred vow

OTHELLO KNEELS

I here engage my words.

Iago Do not rise yet.

IAGO KNEELS

Witness, you ever-burning lights above,
You elements that clip us round about,
Witness that here Iago doth give up
The execution of his wit, hands, heart,
To wronged Othello's service. Let him command,
And to obey shall be in me remorse,
What bloody business ever.

Othello I greet thy love
Not with vain thanks, but with acceptance bounteous,
And will upon the instant put thee to't.
Within these three days let me hear thee say
That Cassio's not alive.

Iago My friend is dead.
'Tis done at your request. But let her live.

Othello Damn her, lewd minx! O damn her! damn her!
Come, go with me apart, I will withdraw
To furnish me with some swift means of death
For the fair devil. Now art thou my lieutenant.

Iago I am your own for ever.

[3-3-457-79]

It is spectacular theater, with Iago as director: "Do not rise yet." And it is also a countertheology, transcending any Faustian bargain with the Devil, since the stars and the elements serve as witnesses to a murderous pact, which culminates in the reversal of

the passing over of Iago in the play's foreground. "Now art thou my lieutenant" means something very different from what Othello can understand, while "I am your own for ever" seals Othello's starry and elemental fate. What remains is only the way down and out, for everyone involved.

Shakespeare creates a terrible pathos for us by not showing Desdemona in her full nature and splendor until we know that she is doomed. Dr. Johnson found the death of Cordelia intolerable; the death of Desdemona, in my experience as a reader and theatergoer, is even more unendurable. Shakespeare stages the scene as a sacrifice, as grimly countertheological as are Iago's passed-over nihilism and Othello's "godlike" jealousy. Though Desdemona in her anguish declares she is a Christian, she does not die a martyr to that faith but becomes only another victim of what could be called the religion of Moloch, since she is a sacrifice to the war god whom Iago once worshiped, the Othello he has reduced to incoherence. "Othello's occupation's gone"; the shattered relic of Othello murders in the name of that occupation, for he knows no other, and is the walking ghost of what he was.

Millicent Bell has argued that Othello's is an epistemological tragedy, but only Iago has intellect enough to sustain such a notion, and Iago is not much interested in how he knows what he thinks he knows. *Othello*, as much as *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, is a vision of radical evil; *Hamlet* is Shakespeare's tragedy of an intellectual. Though Shakespeare never would commit himself to specifically Christian terms, he approached a kind of gnostic or heretic tragedy in *Macbeth*, as I will attempt to show. Othello has no transcendental aspect, perhaps because the religion of war does not allow for any. Iago, who makes a new covenant with Othello when they kneel together, had lived and fought in what

he took to be an old covenant with his general, until Cassio was preferred to him. A devout adherent to the fire of battle, his sense of merit injured by his god, has degraded that god into "an honorable murderer," Othello's oxymoronic, final vision of his role. Can such degradation allow the dignity required for a tragic protagonist?

A. C. Bradley rated *Othello* below *Hamlet*, *Lear*, and *Macbeth* primarily because it gives us no sense of universal powers impinging upon the limits of the human. I think those powers hover in *Othello*, but they manifest themselves only in the gap that divides the earlier, foregrounded relationship between Iago and Othello from the process of ruination that we observe between them. Iago is so formidable a figure because he has uncanny abilities, endowments only available to a true believer whose trust has transmuted into nihilism. Cain, rejected by Yahweh in favor of Abel, is as much the father of Iago as Iago is the precursor of Milton's Satan. Iago murders Roderigo and maims Cassio; it is as inconceivable to Iago as to us that Iago seeks to knife Othello. If you have been rejected by your god, then you attack him spiritually or metaphysically, not merely physically. Iago's greatest triumph is that the lapsed Othello sacrifices Desdemona in the name of the war god Othello, the solitary warrior with whom unwisely she has fallen in love. That may be why Desdemona offers no resistance, and makes so relatively unspirited a defense, first of her virtue and then of her life. Her victimization is all the more complete, and our own horror at it thereby is augmented.

Though criticism frequently has blinded itself to this, Shakespeare had no affection for war, or for violence organized or unorganized. His great killing machines come to sorrowful ends: Othello, Macbeth, Antony, Coriolanus. His favorite warrior is Sir John Falstaff, whose motto is: "Give me life!" Othello's motto

could be “Give me honor,” which sanctions slaughtering a wife he hasn’t known, supposedly not “in hate, but all in honour.” Dreadfully flawed, even vacuous at the center as Othello is, he still is meant to be the best instance available of a professional mercenary. What Iago once worshiped was real enough, but more vulnerable even than Iago suspected. Shakespeare subtly intimates that Othello’s prior nobility and his later incoherent brutality are two faces of the war god, but it remains the same god. Othello’s occupation’s gone partly because he married at all. Pent-up resentment, and not repressed lust, animates Othello as he avenges his lost autonomy in the name of his honor. Iago’s truest triumph comes when Othello loses his sense of war’s limits, and joins Iago’s incessant campaign against *being*. “I am not what I am,” Iago’s credo, becomes Othello’s implicit cry. The rapidity and totality of Othello’s descent seems at once the play’s one weakness and its most persuasive strength, as persuasive as Iago.

Desdemona dies so piteously that Shakespeare risks alienating us forever from Othello:

Desdemona (*trying to rise*) O, banish me, my lord, but kill me not!

Othello Down, strumpet!

Desdemona Kill me tomorrow, let me live tonight!

Othello Nay, if you strive –

Desdemona But half an hour!

Othello Being done, there is no pause.

Desdemona But while I say one prayer!

Othello It is too late.

[5.2.78–83]

Rather operatically, Shakespeare gives Desdemona a dying breath that attempts to exonerate Othello, which would indeed

strain credulity if she were not, as Alvin Kernan wonderfully put it, "Shakespeare's word for love." We are made to believe that this was at once the most natural of young women, and also so loyal to her murderer that her exemplary last words sound almost ironic, given Othello's degradation: "Commend me to my kind lord—O, farewell!" It seems too much more for us to bear that Othello should refuse her final act of love: "She's like a liar gone to burning hell: / 'Twas I that killed her." The influential modern assaults upon Othello by T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis take their plausibility (such as it is) from Shakespeare's heaping up of Othello's brutality, stupidity, and unmitigated guilt. But Shakespeare allows Othello a great if partial recovery, in an astonishing final speech:

Soft you, a word or two before you go.
I have done the state some service, and they know't.
No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak
Of one that loved not wisely, but too well;
Of one not easily jealous but, being wrought,
Perplexed in the extreme. Of one whose hand,
Like the base Judean, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe. Of one whose subdued eyes,
Albeit unuse'd to the melting mood,
Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinable gum. Set you down this.
And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and turbaned Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,

I took by th' throat the circumcisèd dog
 And smote him (*pulls out hidden dagger*) thus.

[5.2.337–55]

This famous and problematic outburst rarely provokes any critic to agree with any other, yet the Eliot–Leavis interpretation, which holds that Othello essentially is “cheering himself up,” cannot be right. The Moor remains as divided a character as Shakespeare ever created; we need give no credence to the absurd blindness of “loved not wisely, but too well,” or the outrageous self-deception of “one not easily jealous.” Yet we are moved by the truth of “perplexed in the extreme,” and by the invocation of Herod, “the base Judean” who murdered his Maccabean wife, Mariamme, whom he loved. The association of Othello with Herod the Great is the more shocking for being Othello’s own judgment upon himself, and is followed by the Moor’s tears, and by his fine image of weeping trees. Nor should a fair critic fail to be impressed by Othello’s verdict upon himself: that he has become an enemy of Venice, and as such must be slain. His suicide has nothing Roman in it: Othello passes sentence upon himself, and performs the execution. We need to ask what Venice would have done with Othello, had he allowed himself to survive. I venture that he seeks to forestall what might have been their politic decision: to preserve him until he might be of high use again. Cassio is no Othello; the state has no replacement for the Moor, and might well have used him again, doubtless under some control. All of the rifts in Othello that Iago sensed and exploited are present in this final speech, but so is a final vision of judgment, one in which Othello abandons his nostalgias for glorious war, and pitifully seeks to expiate what cannot be expiated—not, at least, by a farewell to arms.

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This is not a bibliography but a selective set of starting places.

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FINDING LIST



Repeated unfamiliar words and meanings, alphabetically arranged, with act, scene, and footnote number of first occurrence, in the spelling (form) of that first occurrence

<i>absolute</i>	2.1.195	<i>brave</i>	1.3.277
<i>abused</i>	1.1.194	<i>bring</i>	1.2.113
<i>accident</i>	1.1.167	<i>but</i>	1.1.79
<i>advantage</i>	1.3.282	<i>by and by</i>	2.1.282
<i>ancient</i>	Dram. Pers. 3	<i>camp</i>	3.3.193
<i>answer</i>	1.1.139	<i>cast</i>	2.3.197
<i>apart</i>	2.3.271	<i>cause</i>	3.3.2
<i>approve</i>	1.3.13	<i>certes</i>	1.1.24
<i>apt</i>	2.1.181	<i>challenge</i>	1.3.173
<i>assay</i>	1.3.20	<i>chances</i>	1.3.131
<i>beguile</i>	1.3.64	<i>check</i>	1.1.174
<i>beseech</i>	1.1.140	<i>citadel</i>	2.1.107
<i>bestows</i>	2.1.117	<i>comfort</i>	1.3.191
<i>blood</i>	1.1.189	<i>common</i>	1.1.147
<i>bold</i>	1.1.150	<i>complexion</i>	3.3.123
<i>bosom</i>	1.2.92	<i>condition</i>	1.2.37

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<i>consuls</i>	1.1.37	<i>game</i>	2.1.225
<i>country</i>	1.3.99	<i>general</i>	1.2.90
<i>course</i>	1.2.110	(adjective)	
<i>court</i>	2.1.216	<i>gentle</i>	1.2.35
<i>cunning</i>	1.3.106	<i>go to</i>	1.3.354
<i>degree</i>	2.1.234	<i>gross</i>	1.1.148
<i>deliver</i>	1.3.92	<i>hark</i>	2.3.96
<i>demonstrate</i>	1.1.89	<i>heavy</i>	1.3.238
<i>denotement</i>	2.3.229	<i>hither</i>	1.3.74
<i>deserve</i>	1.1.203	<i>hold</i>	1.2.105
<i>devise</i>	3.1.17	<i>honesty</i>	1.3.273
<i>direction</i>	2.3.3	<i>idle</i>	1.2.116
<i>done</i>	1.3.157	<i>importing</i>	2.2.2
<i>duty</i>	1.1.77	<i>importune</i>	2.3.230
<i>else</i>	1.3.270	<i>issue</i>	1.3.347
<i>ere</i>	1.3.290	<i>jump</i>	1.3.6
<i>erring</i>	1.3.335	<i>knave</i>	1.1.67
<i>even</i>	1.2.47	<i>lads</i>	2.1.27
<i>example</i>	2.3.183	<i>liberal</i>	2.1.174
<i>eye</i>	2.1.220	<i>lieutenant</i>	Dram. Pers. 2
<i>fain</i>	2.3.26	<i>maid</i>	1.2.82
<i>fair</i>	1.1.143	<i>malice</i>	2.1.160
<i>favor</i>	1.3.320	<i>mark (verb)</i>	1.1.65
<i>fearful</i>	1.3.14	<i>matches (noun)</i>	3.3.121
<i>find</i>	1.1.142	<i>means</i>	1.3.149
<i>fit</i>	1.2.109	<i>meet (adverb)</i>	1.1.169
<i>fond</i>	1.3.293	<i>mere</i>	1.3.363
<i>fortunes</i>	1.1.159	<i>minerals</i>	1.2.97
<i>framed</i>	1.3.376	<i>mock (noun)</i>	1.2.90
<i>free</i>	1.2.118	<i>nice</i>	3.3.8

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<i>offend</i>	2.3.52	<i>sense</i>	1.1.154
<i>office</i>	1.3.120	<i>service</i>	1.1.53
<i>owe</i>	1.1.96	<i>shows</i>	1.1.80
<i>pains</i>	1.1.203	<i>soft</i>	1.3.83
<i>parts</i>	1.2.40	<i>special</i>	1.3.72
<i>peculiar</i>	1.1.88	<i>sport</i>	1.3.350
<i>perdition</i>	2.2.3	<i>stand</i>	1.2.76
<i>place</i>	1.1.16	<i>still</i>	1.3.127
<i>potent</i>	1.3.76	<i>straight</i>	1.1.163
<i>practice</i>	1.1.40	<i>strumpet</i>	4.1.53
<i>prated</i>	1.2.8	<i>sufficient</i>	3.4.58
<i>pray you</i>	1.1.199	<i>suit</i>	1.1.12
<i>present</i>	1.2.112	<i>sure</i>	1.1.85
<i>price</i>	1.1.15	<i>taken out</i>	3.3.168
<i>prizes (verb)</i>	2.3.91	<i>term</i>	1.1.59
<i>profane</i>	1.1.137	<i>thence</i>	1.3.138
<i>proof</i>	1.1.43	<i>thrive</i>	1.1.81
<i>proper</i>	1.3.368	<i>time</i>	1.3.285
<i>protest (verb)</i>	2.3.236	<i>token</i>	3.3.165
<i>prove</i>	1.2.69	<i>touch</i>	2.3.164
<i>purposes</i>	1.1.18	<i>tricks</i>	2.1.179
<i>put</i>	2.1.136	<i>truly</i>	1.1.64
<i>quality</i>	1.3.271	<i>tupping</i>	1.1.117
<i>quiet</i>	1.1.129	<i>unfolding</i>	1.3.222
<i>raise</i>	1.1.188	<i>use</i>	1.3.278
<i>retire</i>	2.3.267	<i>villain</i>	1.1.138
<i>revolt</i>	1.1.157	<i>villainous</i>	1.3.289
<i>rude</i>	1.3.82	<i>vouch</i>	1.3.107
<i>saucy</i>	1.1.150	<i>want (noun)</i>	2.1.226
<i>secure (verb)</i>	1.3.11	<i>wanton</i>	2.3.12

FINDING LIST

<i>way</i>	I.3.343	<i>without</i>	2.3.23
<i>wherefor</i>	I.1.114	<i>wits</i>	I.1.120
<i>wherein</i>	I.1.36	<i>zounds</i>	I.1.115
<i>will</i> (verb)	I.2.107		