

Othello in Twenty Quotations

The play begins in Venice, Italy, land of love and water, and Ms. V's favourite city in the world (which has nothing to do with anything, but still). We join two men, **Iago**, one of the best villains ever, and **Roderigo**, an idiot, in the middle of a conversation. Iago is angry at **Othello** – aka "the Moor" – because Othello, who is a general in the Venetian army, just chose another man, Michael **Cassio**, to be his lieutenant, even though Iago feels *he* should have got the job. Iago tells Roderigo he is going to *pretend* to admire and love Othello only to get what he really wants.

1. Iago to Roderigo:

I follow him to serve my turn upon him (1.1)
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at. I am not what I am. (1.1)

Iago convinces Roderigo to help him get back at Othello. They make a night-time visit to **Brabantio**, the father of **Desdemona**, Othello's new bride. Iago and Roderigo tattle on Othello for marrying Desdemona without her father's permission. Also, and this is important, Othello is black, which leads to a lot of racist comments in this play. Iago loves making very lewd comments about Othello and Desdemona, which incenses Brabantio. Brabantio rushes to his daughter's room and discovers that she is missing. He decides this must mean that "the Moor" somehow "tricked" his daughter into marrying him and vows revenge. Iago leaves the scene and rushes to Othello to "warn" him about Brabantio. Othello isn't worried. Brabantio shows up with Roderigo and various henchmen, ready to kill Othello. But Cassio also arrives and informs all that the Duke of Venice needs to see Othello right away because of some military action going down in Cyprus. Off they go. While there, Othello speaks in his own defence. He says Desdemona was an equal participant in their courting, and there was no trickery involved. They're now very much in love and married.

2. Othello to everyone:

She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them.
This only is the witchcraft I have used. (1.1)

Our woman in question, i.e. Desdemona, finally arrives and confirms the whole story. At this, the Duke tells Brabantio to stop whining and sends Othello to fight the battle in Cyprus. Desdemona states that she's joining her husband – she chooses him over her father. Brabantio's parting shot to Othello is,

3. Brabantio to Othello:

Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see.
She has deceived her father, and may thee. (1.3)

Not exactly foreshadowing, but sort of. You see, Iago is a pathological liar and he plans to convince Othello that Desdemona is lying to him. He and Roderigo have a chat during which Roderigo complains about being lovesick for Desdemona, and Iago says he'll get them together as soon as they bring down Othello. Once alone, Iago reveals a rumour that Othello was having sex with his wife, **Emilia**. (The rumour is totally untrue and it's not even clear that Iago believes it.) To get revenge, he'll take out Cassio and Othello by convincing Othello that Cassio is having sex with Desdemona. He thinks it will be easy because Othello is so gullible.

4. Iago to himself:

The Moor is of a free and open nature
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by th' nose
As asses are. (1.3)

Arrivederci Venice. Our cast of characters gets transported to Cyprus, where the military battle takes place off stage, but the battle for revenge is in full swing. Iago watches and waits and starts plotting exactly how he will ensnare his victims. He is like a puppet master manipulating his puppets. He gets so carried away he seems to be manipulating himself in the bargain, as he convinces himself that Cassio slept with HIS wife, too.

5. *Iago to himself:*

**I'll have our Michael Cassio on the hip,
Abuse him to the Moor in the rank garb
For I fear Cassio with my nightcap too,
Make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me
For making him egregiously an ass (2.1)**

Iago decides the best way to get the ball rolling is to get Cassio drunk so he will start a fight in the streets, which is against the law. At first Cassio refuses.

6. *Cassio to Iago:*

**Not tonight, good Iago. I have very poor and
unhappy brains for drinking. (2.2)**

Think that's enough to stop Iago? He pulls the old "let's drink together but I'll pretend I'm drinking with you glass for glass but really I'm dumping out my booze while you're getting drunker and drunker" trick, and indeed, Cassio gets really drunk. And he's sort of a mean drunk. Roderigo shows up as planned to provoke Cassio, which of course leads to a fight. In walks Othello to put an end to this nonsense. He asks Iago who started it, and Iago, ever the master liar, rats out Cassio but makes it seem like he doesn't want to.

7. *Othello to Iago and Cassio:*

**I know , Iago,
Thy honesty and love doth mince this matter,
Making it light to Cassio. Cassio, I love thee,
But nevermore be officer of mine. (2.3)**

Iago: one; everyone else: zero. Cassio is devastated, but Iago tells him to cheer up – he has a plan! He tells Cassio to ask Desdemona to convince Othello to give Cassio his job back. Desdemona is a paragon of virtue, so of course she'll help Cassio. Doesn't sound that sinister, but remember, Iago is also going to convince Othello that Desdemona and Cassio are having an affair. So dastardly!

8. *Iago to himself:*

**So will I turn her virtue into pitch,
And out of her own goodness make the net
That shall enmesh them all. (2.3)**

Phase one goes into effect as Cassio slinks off, not wanting to have an awkward moment with the guy who just fired him, and Desdemona pleads with Othello on Cassio's behalf. Othello agrees to think about it, because he will deny his lovely Desdemona nothing because he loves her so damn much.

9. *Othello to himself:*

**Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul
But I do love thee! And when I love thee not,
Chaos is come again. (3.3)**

Ah, yes, when he loves her not - CHAOS. And that's just what Iago is about to ensure. Iago notes how suspicious it is that Cassio hurried off like that. Once the two men are alone, Iago plants (and massively fertilizes) the seed of suspicion. Cassio, he hints, is having an affair with Desdemona. At first, he warns Othello not be jealous because that will only make matters worse.

10. *Iago to Othello:*

**O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on. (3.3)**

But then he warns Othello to keep his eye out for anything suspicious, like Desdemona talking about Cassio all the time and pleading for his job back.

11. *Iago to Othello:*

Look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio. (3.3)

That sounds familiar. Remember Desdemona's father, and his warning? Poor Othello doesn't know which way is up, and he trusts Iago completely. So completely, he gets physically ill, and Desdemona, who re-enters with her lady's maid, Emilia, Iago's wife, tries to wipe Othello's sweating brow with her handkerchief – a lovely little handkerchief with strawberries embroidered on it, which I'll call THE HANDKERCHIEF OF DEATH. It falls unnoticed on the ground until Emilia picks it up.

12. *Emilia to herself:*

[picking up the handkerchief]

I am glad to have found this napkin.

This was her first remembrance from the Moor.

My wayward husband hath a hundred times

Wooed me to steal it. (3.3)

Then Emilia does something totally sketch. She *gives the handkerchief to Iago*, whom she must know will do something evil with it. And he does, but that's later. For now, Othello re-enters (this is a loooooong scene) and Iago makes up more lies (pretty funny ones, and by "funny" I mean crazy) and convinces Othello Desdemona is a whore (this word is used many many times in the play, so don't blame me). Othello decides he must kill Cassio and Desdemona.

13. *Othello to Iago:*

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. (3.3)

Iago: two, three, *and* four; everyone else: minus a hundred. In the next scene (finally) Othello argues with Desdemona while Emilia watches. He wants to know where the handkerchief is. Desdemona, oblivious, wants to talk about Cassio. Not good.

14.

Othello: The handkerchief!

Desdemona: I pray, talk to me of Cassio.

Othello: The handkerchief!

Desdemona: A man that all this time

Shared dangers with you –

Othello: The handkerchief!

Desdemona: In faith, you are to blame.

Othello: Zounds! (3.4)

Shortly afterwards, we meet **Bianca**, a prostitute who's in love with Cassio. Cassio gives her the handkerchief of death he got from Iago and swears it's not a love token from another woman. This will be important later. Then Iago continues to fill Othello's head with graphic pictures of his wife and Cassio "lying" together. This throws Othello into a fit. Seriously, he has, like, a seizure, which gives Iago no end of pleasure.

15. *Iago to himself while Othello is having a fit:*

Work on,

My medicine, work. Thus credulous fools are caught, (4.1)

After Othello pulls himself together, Iago sets up a conversation between himself and Cassio, in which he gets Cassio to speak provocatively about *Bianca*. However, Othello, whom Iago has instructed to hide in the wings, thinks he's talking about *Desdemona*. To make matters worse, for Cassio and Desdemona, Bianca shows up and flings the handkerchief of death back in Cassio's face telling him she knows it belongs to another woman. All Othello sees is *his* handkerchief, which obviously proves that Desdemona gave it to Cassio, who then gave it to another woman. Othello has had enough.

16. *Othello to Iago:*

How shall I murder him, Iago? (4.1)

Back on the other manipulation front, Roderigo is getting tired of Iago taking all his money and not delivering the goods (i.e., Desdemona), as promised. Iago tells him to cool his jets, and also to kill Cassio when the opportunity arises, which, according to Iago, will happen that night between midnight and 1:00 AM. Whatever happens, Iago realizes it's a win-win situation for him.

17. *Iago to himself:*

**Now, whether he kill Cassio,
Or Cassio him, or each do kill the other,
Every way makes my gain. (5.1)**

There is a lot of running around in the dark with swords, and people getting killed and injured, but let's join the happy couple in Desdemona's bed chamber (and by "happy" I mean doomed). Othello quite calmly tells Desdemona he is going to kill her. She, naturally, is confused, particularly about the handkerchief (*of death*). She professes her innocence and swears there is nothing going on between her and Cassio. Too late, he says, Cassio has confessed and now he's dead. Desdemona sees she is undone and asks for a bit more time, a day, half an hour more to live, but alas...

18. *Othello to Desdemona:*

It is too late. [smothers her] (5.2)

Emilia rushes in. Othello trash-talks Desdemona, mentions the handkerchief of death, and Emilia finally puts two and two together. She tells Othello he is "as ignorant as dirt" and as EVERYONE enters the bed chamber, she outs both Othello and Iago. Iago, for once, loses his cool and stabs his wife in front of EVERYONE. So long Emilia. We hardly knew you. Great name, though.

19. *Emilia to Othello:*

**Moor, she was chaste. She loved thee, cruel Moor.
So come my soul to bliss, as I speak true.
So speaking as I think, alas, I die. [she dies] (5.2)**

Othello demands to know why Iago ruined his life, but Iago refuses to give him (and us) a good reason. Othello, overwhelmed by grief, decides to end his life rather than live without Desdemona. Other stuff happens, but you'll just have to read the play to find out what.

20. *Othello to others and then to dead Desdemona:*

**Then must you speak
Of one who loved not wisely but too well; (5.2)
I kissed thee ere I killed thee. No way but this,
Killing myself to die upon a kiss [he dies] (5.2)**