

Othello Synopsis

PROLOGUE

Alone and miserable, Othello, an escaped slave, is found by a pair of Venetian soldiers, Iago and Cassio. He joins their army, battling the Turks - the sworn enemy of Venice - and quickly rises through the ranks by virtue of his bravery and cunning. After the Duke of Venice promotes him to General, Othello in turn promotes Cassio to be his lieutenant. Overcome with jealousy at Cassio's promotion and suspicious that his wife Emilia is having an affair with Othello, Iago resolves to destroy his new commanding officer. Soon after, Othello meets the powerful Senator Brabantio and his daughter Desdemona. Othello and Desdemona fall in love and secretly marry, and Othello gives Desdemona a treasured handkerchief that was given to him during his captivity.

ACT ONE

Iago reveals to his friend Roderigo, hopelessly in love with Desdemona, that Othello and Desdemona have eloped and persuades Roderigo to tell Brabantio about his daughter's marriage. Enraged, Brabantio confronts Othello, but the Duke quickly intervenes. Desdemona steps in, publicly declaring her love for Othello as news arrives that the Turks are staging an invasion of Cyprus. By order of the Duke, Othello leaves Venice to halt the Turkish threat, accompanied by Cassio, Desdemona, Iago, and Emilia, serving as Desdemona's attendant. Before they leave, Iago convinces Roderigo to join the expedition so he can continue his pursuit of Desdemona.

ACT TWO

The party arrives in Cyprus to find that a storm has destroyed the Turkish fleet. Othello orders a general celebration. A local girl, Bianca, dances for the soldiers, showing particular interest in Cassio, and Iago takes the opportunity to prompt Roderigo to engage Cassio in a fight, getting Cassio drunk and triggering a brawl. Othello steps in and quells the disturbance, stripping Cassio of his rank for his drunken and unprofessional behavior.

ACT THREE

Cassio is distraught, but Iago suggests that he importune Desdemona to act as an intermediary between himself and Othello and persuade her husband to reinstate him. Iago then warns Othello to be suspicious of Cassio and Desdemona, planting the first seeds of doubt in Othello's mind. Desdemona finds Othello, already overcome with suspicion. She unwittingly drops the handkerchief, Othello's first gift to her. Emilia, swayed by Iago into stealing Desdemona's handkerchief, finds it and, after some persuasion from Iago, gives it to him. Iago then plants the handkerchief in Cassio's lodgings as evidence of his and Desdemona's supposed affair.

ACT FOUR

Othello, now tortured by doubt and uncertainty, demands Iago provide him with proof of Desdemona's infidelity. Iago reveals that Bianca is in possession of Desdemona's handkerchief - that Desdemona must have given it to Cassio as a token of her love and Cassio has, in turn, given it to Bianca. Now thoroughly convinced, Othello resolves to kill his wife and orders Iago to kill Cassio. Othello demands that Desdemona produce the handkerchief he knows she no longer has and even slaps her in front of the visiting Duke. Roderigo, having seen no progress in his plans to win Desdemona despite Iago's promises, confronts Iago and threatens to reveal their scheme. Iago instead convinces Roderigo to kill Cassio.

ACT FIVE

That night, Roderigo attacks Cassio. They fight, and Roderigo is wounded. Iago cuts Cassio's leg from behind and conceals himself in the shadows as others arrive to investigate the commotion. Iago then returns, "discovering" the wounded men and pretending to help Cassio. He murders Roderigo to prevent him from confessing.

Meanwhile, Desdemona rushes to her chambers to ask Emilia, who is preparing the room for the night, to place her wedding sheets on her bed. Othello enters, waking the sleeping Desdemona and openly accuses her of having an affair with Cassio. She vehemently denies his accusations, but he kills her. Emilia returns and discovers the murdered Desdemona. She calls for help as Iago and others hurry in. Othello justifies Desdemona's murder, using the handkerchief as proof, but, on hearing this, Emilia exposes Iago's deception, revealing that it was not Desdemona but Bianca with whom Cassio had been having an affair. Iago kills Emilia, and Othello, realizing Desdemona's innocence, attacks Iago but does not kill him. Othello then stabs himself, hoping the rest will remember him as "one who loved not wisely but too well."