

THE TRAGEDY OF OTHELLO

Shakespeare

Close Reading Sample

This scene is an example of the ISC Readers' Editions of the plays that are designed for close reading. Just jump in with a friend or two! Be sure to have someone read stage directions as well.

This is the beginning of Act 4 of *Othello*. To catch you up to this point: Desdemona, a young woman of noble birth, has eloped with a charismatic and noble black Moor, Othello, a lifelong warrior and now general. An officer in the regiment, Iago, is insanely jealous (of exactly what is a worthy discussion) and is intent on destroying Othello. Preying on Othello's love for his beautiful and honest wife, Iago plants vicious seeds of doubt into Othello's mind.

Iago has gotten another (higher-ranking) officer, the handsome and dashing Cassio, into big trouble; Othello stripped Cassio's title and refuses to speak to him. Cassio is devastated. Iago suggests that he appeal to Othello through Desdemona, asking her to plead for him. Iago twists this situation in Othello's mind to make him believe that Desdemona is having a lurid affair with Cassio.

Othello has asked for "ocular proof"; he wants to see it with his own eyes. This sample scene is where Iago provides the illusion of ocular proof—he earlier managed to get hold of a handkerchief embroidered with strawberries that was Othello's first gift to Desdemona. Iago planted it in Cassio's room and insinuates to Othello that Desdemona gave it to Cassio as her lover. Outrage ensues.



edited, design, and produced by

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The Tragedy of Othello, Shakespeare

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ISC Press *Readers' Edition*

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Published by the ISC Press

7 Sweet Swan Lane

Santa Fe, NM 87508

505.424.796 (SWAN)

The ISC Press and iReadShakespeare are divisions
of the International Shakespeare Center Santa Fe

www.iReadShakespeare.org

www.InternationalShakespeare.center

The text in this book is from the First Folio, the first collected works of Shakespeare, printed in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare died. With a few minor exceptions, this edition uses the punctuation and capitalization found in the First Folio; it also maintains the original spellings of words such as *my self* and *to day*. Explanations of words reflect the meanings they had at the time they were written, using the Oxford English Dictionary (OED).



THE TRAGEDY OF OTHELLO

Act 4 • Scene 1: In the citadel on Cyprus (328 lines)

[Enter Othello and Iago.]

IAGO

1 Will you think so?

OTHELLO

2 Think so, Iago?

Othello has picked up a verbal technique of Iago's, as when Othello responded to Iago on page 85:

"Think, my Lord?"
Alas, thou echo'st me,
As if there were some
monster in thy thought
Too hideous to be shown.

IAGO

3 What, to kiss in private?

OTHELLO

4 An unauthoriz'd kiss?

IAGO

5 Or to be naked with her friend in bed,
6 An hour, or more, not meaning any harm?

OTHELLO

7 Naked in bed, Iago, and not mean harm?

It is the opposite of hypocrisy if they seem to be sinful when they are actually innocent.

8 It is hypocrisy against the Devil:

9 They that mean virtuously, and yet do so,

10 The Devil their virtue tempts, and they tempt Heaven.

*toward
this kind of thing
tests*

IAGO

11 If they do nothing, 'tis a venial slip;

12 But—if I give my wife a handkerchief—

pardonable

OTHELLO

13 What then?

IAGO

14 Why, then 'tis hers, my Lord, and being hers,

15 She may (I think) bestow 't on any man.

Iago's taunting insinuations seem so obvious to us. Why might Othello be oblivious to Iago's deviousness?

OTHELLO

16 She is protectress of her honor, too:

17 May she give that?

IAGO

18 Her honor is an essence that's not seen;

19 They have it very oft, that have it not.

20 But for the handkerchief—

Does Iago recognize that he describes himself in line 19?

enjoy a reputation for

OTHELLO
 21 By heaven, I would most gladly have forgot it:
 22 Thou saidst (oh, it comes o'er my memory,
 The **raven** is an omen of misfortune or even death. Take a moment to visualize this image.
 23 As doth the raven o'er the infectious house, *plague-ridden*
 24 Boding to all) he had my handkerchief. *ominous*
IAGO
 25 Ay: what of that?
OTHELLO
 26 That's not so good now.
IAGO
 27 What if I had said, I had seen him do you wrong?
 28 Or heard him say—as knaves be such abroad, *like this*
 29 Who, having by their own importunate suit, *persistent; begging*
 What is **voluntary dotage**? *or by the*
 30 Or voluntary dotage of some Mistress,
 31 Convinced or supplied them, cannot choose
 The men have **convinced**/ *the knaves*
 32 But they must blab—
 seduced women **or** the woman was willing (due to her doting) and **supplied**/ satisfied him. Iago implicates Desdemona.
OTHELLO Hath he said any thing?
IAGO
 34 He hath, my Lord, but be you well assur'd,
 35 No more than he'll un-swear.
OTHELLO What hath he said?
IAGO
 37 Why, that he did—I know not what he did.
OTHELLO
 38 What? What?
IAGO
 39 Lie.
OTHELLO
 40 With her?
IAGO
 41 With her? On her: what you will.

	OTHELLO	
<i>Othello lapses into prose. Why?</i>	42 Lie with her? Lie on her?	
	43 We say "lie on her" when they belie' her.	<i>slander</i>
Zounds rhymes with wounds; <i>it's a swear word that means</i>	44 Lie <i>with</i> her. Zounds, that's fulsome':	<i>repulsive</i>
<i>"God's wounds."</i>	45 Handkerchief: Confessions: Handkerchief:	
	46 To confess, and be hang'd for his labor—	
	47 first, to be hang'd, and then to confess.	
<i>He wouldn't tremble</i>	48 I tremble at it—Nature would not invest her self	
<i>if Nature (one's life-giving</i>	49 in such shadowing' passion	<i>foreshadowing</i>
<i>force) didn't know something.</i>	50 without some instruction.'	<i>basis in fact</i>
	51 It is not words that shakes me thus (pish),	
	52 Noses, ears, and lips: is 't possible?	
	53 Confess? Handkerchief? O Devil.	
<i>Consider the implications</i>	<i>[Othello falls in a trance. Iago stands over</i>	
<i>of this visual image.</i>	<i>the fallen and incoherent Othello.]</i>	
	IAGO	
	54 <i>[aside]</i> Work on,	
	55 My medicine, work. Thus credulous fools are caught,	<i>aural poison</i>
<i>Does this say something</i>	56 And many worthy and chaste dames even thus,'	<i>in this way</i>
<i>about Iago's view of the</i>	57 (All guiltless) meet reproach':	<i>scandal and disgrace</i>
<i>world, of men?</i>	58 <i>[aloud]</i> What hoa? My Lord?	
	59 My Lord, I say—Othello.	
	<i>[Enter Cassio.]</i>	
	60 How now, Cassio?	
	CASSIO	
	61 What's the matter?	
	IAGO	
	62 My Lord is fall'n into an epilepsy;	
	63 This is his second fit: he had one yesterday.	
	CASSIO	
	64 Rub him about the temples.	
	IAGO	
	65 No, forbear,	
	66 The lethargy' must have his' quiet course:	<i>coma; its</i>
	67 If not, he foams at mouth, and by and by	
	68 Breaks out to savage madness. Look, he stirs:	
	69 Do you withdraw your self a little while;	
	70 He will recover straight': when he is gone,	<i>right away</i>
	71 I would, on great occasion, speak with you.	
	<i>[Exit Cassio.]</i>	
	72 <i>[to Othello]</i> How is it, General? Have you not hurt your head?	

	104	I say, but mark his gesture. Marry, patience,	<i>have patience</i>
<i>Passion is based in the spleen; the vapors, when heated, rise to the brain and make us impulsive. This is more common to women, making Othello less than a man.</i>	105	Or I shall say y' are all-in-all in spleen,	
	106	And nothing of a man.	
		OTHELLO	
	107	Dost thou hear, Iago,	
	108	I will be found most cunning' in my patience:	<i>expert</i>
	109	But (dost thou hear) most bloody.	
		IAGO	
	110	That's not amiss,	
<i>Keep time = be reliable, as a watch.</i>	111	But yet keep time in all: will you withdraw?	
		<i>[Othello withdraws and hides himself from Cassio, as Iago earlier hid himself in the play. The audience can still see Othello.]</i>	
		<i>[to the audience]</i> Now will I question Cassio of Bianca,	
	112	A huswife' that by selling her desires	<i>hussy</i>
	113	Buys her self bread and cloth. It is a creature	
<i>If we believe that Bianca is a whore simply because Iago tells us so, then we are as gullible as Othello.</i>	114	That dotes on Cassio (as 'tis the strumpet's' plague	<i>whore's</i>
	115	To beguile many, and be beguil'd by one).	
	116	He, when he hears of her, cannot restrain	
	117	From the excess of laughter.	
		<i>Enter Cassio.</i>	
	118	<i>[still to the audience]</i> Here he comes.	
	119	As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad:	
<i>How does Shakespeare's invented word, unbookish, apply here?</i>	120	And his unbookish jealousy must construe	
	121	Poor Cassio's smiles, gestures, and light behaviors	
	122	Quite in the wrong. <i>[to Cassio]</i> How do you now, Lieutenant?	
	123	CASSIO	
	124	The worser, that you give me the addition,	<i>title of Lieutenant</i>
	125	Whose want' even kills me.	<i>lack</i>
		IAGO	
	126	Ply Desdemona well, and you are sure on 't.	<i>getting your title back</i>
		<i>[Iago lowers his voice so Othello won't hear him.]</i>	
	127	Now, if this suit' lay in Bianca's pow'r,	<i>entreaty</i>
	128	How quickly should you speed'?	<i>prosper</i>
		CASSIO <i>[laughing]</i>	
	129	Alas, poor caitiff.	<i>miserable wretch</i>
		OTHELLO <i>[aside]</i>	
	130	Look how he laughs already.	

IAGO [*loudly*]

131 I never knew woman love man so.

CASSIO

132 Alas, poor rogue, I think indeed she loves me.

OTHELLO [*aside*]

133 Now he denies it faintly, and laughs it out.

IAGO

134 Do you hear, Cassio?

OTHELLO [*aside*]

135 Now he[•] importunes him

Iago

136 To tell it o'er: go to, well said, well said.

IAGO

137 She gives it[•] out that you shall marry her.

a report

138 Do you intend it?

CASSIO

139 Ha, ha, ha!

OTHELLO [*aside*]

Romans had triumphal processions to show off their conquests.

140 Do ye triumph, Roman? Do you triumph?

CASSIO

141 I, marry her? What? I prithee,

142 bear some charity to my wit,[•]

consciousness

143 do not think it[•] so unwholesome.

my judgment

144 Ha, ha, ha!

OTHELLO [*aside*]

145 So, so, so, so: they laugh, that win.

IAGO

146 Why, the cry goes that you marry her.

CASSIO

147 Prithee, say true.

IAGO

148 I am a very villain else.[•]

if I'm not telling the truth

It's fascinating how often Iago speaks the truth about himself but no one realizes it.

OTHELLO [*aside*]

149 Have you scor'd me? Well.

CASSIO

150 This is the monkey's own giving out:

151 She is persuaded I will marry her

152 out of her own love and flattery,[•]

self-flattery

153 not out of my promise.

OTHELLO *[aside]*

154 Iago beckons me:
155 now he begins the story.

CASSIO

156 She was here even now:
157 she haunts me in every place.
158 I was the other day talking on the sea-bank
159 with certain Venetians, and thither comes the bauble,^{*} *plaything*
160 and falls me thus about my neck.

*[Cassio mimics Bianca and falls about Iago's neck, but of course
Othello believes he mimics Desdemona.]*

OTHELLO *[aside]*

161 Crying, "Oh dear Cassio," as it were:
162 his gesture imports it.

CASSIO

163 So hangs, and lolls, and weeps upon me:
164 so^{*} shakes, and pulls me. Ha, ha, ha! *like this she*

OTHELLO *[aside]*

165 Now he^{*} tells how she pluck'd him to my chamber: *Cassio*
166 oh, I see that nose of yours,
167 but not that dog I shall throw it to.

*What is Othello imagining
he will do to Cassio?*

CASSIO

168 Well, I must leave her company.

IAGO *[quietly, so Othello cannot hear]*

169 Before me: look where she comes.

[Enter Bianca with Desdemona's handkerchief.]

CASSIO

170 *[aside to Iago]* 'Tis such another fitchew^{*}: *stinky polecat*
171 marry, a perfum'd one.
172 *[to Bianca]* What do you mean by this haunting of me?

*Compare Cassio's treatment
of Bianca in private in the
previous scene, 3.4.170-204,
and this in front of Iago.*

BIANCA

173 Let the Devil and his dam^{*} haunt you: *mother*
174 what did you mean by that same handkerchief
175 you gave me even now? I was a fine fool to take it:
176 I must take out the work? A likely piece of work,^{*} *story*
177 that you should find it in your chamber
178 and know not who left it there.

*Take out the work: copy the
embroidery, as Cassio had
asked her to do earlier.*

179 This is some minx's token, *mistress's*
 180 and I must take out the work?

[She gives him back the handkerchief.]

*A hobby-horse is a stick
 with a horse's head, a toy
 that anyone can ride.*

181 There, give it your hobby-horse;
 182 wheresoever you had it, I'll take out no work on 't. *from wherever*

CASSIO

183 How now, my sweet Bianca?
 184 How now? How now?

OTHELLO *[aside]*

185 By Heaven, that should be my handkerchief. *must*

BIANCA

*Come when you are next
 prepar'd for = like never.*

186 If you'll come to supper to-night, you may;
 187 if you will not, come when you are next prepar'd for.

Exit [Bianca].

IAGO

188 After her: after her.

CASSIO

*In line 166, Cassio said
 he was going to leave her.
 Now he makes up a good
 excuse to follow her.*

189 Indeed, I must; she'll rail in the streets else. *rant*

IAGO

190 Will you sup there?

CASSIO

191 Yes, I intend so.

IAGO

192 Well, I may chance to see you,
 193 for I would very fain speak with you. *gladly*

CASSIO

194 Prithee, come: will you?

IAGO

195 Go to: say no more.

[Exit Cassio. Othello comes forward to Iago.]

OTHELLO

196 How shall I murder him, Iago?

IAGO

197 Did you perceive how he laugh'd at his vice?

OTHELLO

198 Oh, Iago.

	IAGO	
	199 And did you see the handkerchief?	
	OTHELLO	
	200 Was that mine?	
<i>Is he not sure? What does this imply?</i>	IAGO	
	201 Yours, by this hand: and to see how	
	202 he prizes the foolish woman, your wife:	
<i>Again Iago tells a truth, by this hand, that no one realizes.</i>	203 she [•] gave it him, and he hath giv [•] n it his whore.	<i>Desdemona</i>
	OTHELLO	
	204 I would have him nine years a-killing:	
	205 A fine woman, a fair woman, a sweet woman!	
<i>Note the pattern on the rest of this page: Othello says he loves and admires her; Iago tells him to stop that; Othello agrees and then finds something else he admires about her; Iago tells him to stop. Is Othello doubting? Is there still hope at this point?</i>	IAGO	
	206 Nay, you must forget that.	
	OTHELLO	
	207 Ay, let her rot and perish, and be damn [•] d to-night,	
	208 for she shall not live. No, my heart is turn [•] d to stone:	
	209 I strike it, and it hurts my hand.	
	210 Oh, the world hath not a sweeter creature:	
	211 she might lie by an Emperor [•] 's side, and command him tasks.	
	IAGO	
	212 Nay, that [•] 's not your way.	<i>way you should think</i>
	OTHELLO	
	213 Hang her. I do but say what she is:	
	214 so delicate [•] with her needle,	<i>exquisitely fine</i>
	215 an admirable musician.	
	216 Oh, she will sing the savageness out of a bear;	
	217 of so high and plenteous wit [•] and invention.	<i>intelligence; imagination</i>
	IAGO	
	218 She [•] 's the worse for all this.	
	OTHELLO	
	219 Oh, a thousand, a thousand times.	
	220 And then of so gentle [•] a condition?	<i>well bred</i>
	IAGO	
	221 Ay, too gentle.	<i>generous (with men)</i>
	OTHELLO	
	222 Nay, that [•] 's certain:	
	223 But yet the pity of it, Iago:	
<i>Ay, the pity of it is heart-breaking.</i>	224 oh Iago, the pity of it, Iago.	

IAGO

225 If you are so fond^o over her iniquity,^o *foolish; wickedness*
 226 give her patent^o to offend, *a license*
 227 for if it touch not you, it comes^o near no body. *affects*

OTHELLO

A mess is a serving of food, as in a mess hall.

228 I will chop her into messes: Cuckold me?

IAGO

229 Oh, 'tis foul in her.

OTHELLO

Cassio, his officer, is a lieutenant, which is, ironically, the deputy who stands in for a superior.

230 With mine officer?

IAGO

231 That's fouler.

OTHELLO

232 Get me some poison, Iago, this night.

233 I'll not expostulate^o with her, *complain of an injury*

234 lest her body and beauty

The word unprovide is amazing—consider what Othello means.

235 unprovide my mind again:

236 this night, Iago.

IAGO

Why does Iago prefer strangling over poison?

237 Do it not with poison—strangle her in her bed,

238 Even the bed she hath contaminated.

OTHELLO

239 Good, good:

Is it the strangling or the bed that is more just than poison?

240 The justice of it pleases: very good.

IAGO

241 And for Cassio, let me be his undertaker:

242 You shall hear more by midnight.

OTHELLO

243 Excellent good:

[A trumpet sounds from within.]

244 What trumpet is that same?

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