

Othello

by William Shakespeare



Othello, a tragedy by William Shakespeare, explores the destructive power of jealousy, manipulation, and misplaced trust. Set in Venice and Cyprus, the play centers on Othello, a respected Moorish general in the Venetian army, whose secret marriage to Desdemona provokes resentment and intrigue. Exploiting Othello's openness and insecurity, the cunning ensign Iago weaves a web of deception that gradually poisons Othello's mind with suspicion and doubt.

As Iago's schemes unfold, appearances replace truth, and language becomes a weapon of control. Othello's noble confidence erodes under the pressure of insinuation, transforming love into obsessive jealousy. The tragedy exposes how prejudice, fear, and emotional vulnerability can be manipulated to devastating effect, not only destroying intimate relationships but also corrupting moral judgment.

Through its intense psychological insight and dramatic tension, *Othello* examines the fragility of human trust and the catastrophic consequences of unchecked passion. The play remains profoundly relevant for its exploration of power, identity, and betrayal, offering a timeless warning about the ease with which reason can be overthrown by doubt.

William Shakespeare OTHELLO

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Characters in the Play

OTHELLO, a Moorish general in the Venetian army

DESDEMONA, a Venetian lady

BRABANTIO, a Venetian senator, father to Desdemona

IAGO, Othello's standard-bearer, or "ancient"

EMILIA, Iago's wife and Desdemona's attendant

CASSIO, Othello's second-in-command, or lieutenant

RODERIGO, a Venetian gentleman

Duke of Venice

LODOVICO } Venetian gentlemen, kinsmen to Brabantio
GRATIANO }

Venetian senators

MONTANO, an official in Cyprus

BIANCA, a woman in Cyprus in love with Cassio

Clown, a comic servant to Othello and Desdemona

Gentlemen of Cyprus

Sailors

Servants, Attendants, Officers, Messengers,

Herald, Musicians, Torchbearers.

ACT I
SCENE I. Venice. A street.

Enter RODERIGO and IAGO

RODERIGO

Tush! never tell me; I take it much unkindly
That thou, Iago, who hast had my purse
As if the strings were thine, shouldst know of this.

IAGO

‘Sblood, but you will not hear me:
If ever I did dream of such a matter, Abhor me.

RODERIGO

Thou told’st me thou didst hold him in thy hate.

IAGO

Despise me, if I do not. Three great ones of the city,
In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,
Off-capp’d 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 bombast circumstance
Horribly stuff’d with epithets of war;
And, in conclusion,
Nonsuits my mediators; for, ‘Certes,’ says he,

‘I have already chose my officer.’
And what was he?
Forsooth, a great arithmetician,
One Michael Cassio, a Florentine,
A fellow almost damn’d in a fair wife;
That never set a squadron in the field,
Nor the division of a battle knows
More than a spinster; unless the bookish theoric,
Wherein the toged consuls can propose
As masterly as he: mere prattle, without practise,
Is all his soldiership. But he, sir, had the election:
And I, of whom his eyes had seen the proof
At Rhodes, at Cyprus and on other grounds
Christian and heathen, must be be-lee’d and calm’d
By debtor and creditor: this counter-caster,
He, in good time, must his lieutenant be,
And I – God bless the mark! – his Moorship’s ancient.

RODERIGO

By heaven, I rather would have been his hangman.

IAGO

Why, there’s no remedy; ‘tis the curse of service,
Preferment goes by letter and affection,
And not by old gradation, where each second
Stood heir to the first. Now, sir, be judge yourself,
Whether I in any just term am affined
To love the Moor.

RODERIGO

I would not follow him then.

IAGO

O, sir, content you;

I follow him to serve my turn upon him:

We cannot all be masters, nor all masters

Cannot be truly follow'd. 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, cashier'd:

Whip me such honest knaves. Others there are

Who, trimm'd 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. For, sir,

It is as sure as you are Roderigo,

Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago:

In following him, I follow but myself;

Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,

But seeming so, for my peculiar end:

For when my outward action doth demonstrate

The native act and figure of my heart

In compliment extern, 'tis not long after
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at: I am not what I am.

RODERIGO

What a full fortune does the thicklips owe
If he can carry't thus!

IAGO

Call up her father,
Rouse him: make after him, poison his delight,
Proclaim him in the streets; incense her kinsmen,
And, though he in a fertile climate dwell,
Plague him with flies: though that his joy be joy,
Yet throw such changes of vexation on't,
As it may lose some colour.

RODERIGO

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

IAGO

Do, with like timorous accent and dire yell
As when, by night and negligence, the fire
Is spied in populous cities.

RODERIGO

What, ho, Brabantio! Signior Brabantio, ho!