

The RSC Shakespeare

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Othello

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The RSC Shakespeare

William Shakespeare

OTHELLO

Edited by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen

Introduction by Jonathan Bate



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QUARTO PASSAGES THAT DO NOT APPEAR IN THE FOLIO

Following 1.3.367 (after "errors of her choice"):
she must have change, she must.

Following 1.3.388:

RODORIGO What say you?

IAGO No more of drowning, do you hear?

RODORIGO I am changed:

Following 2.1.89:

And bring all Cyprus comfort!

Following 3.1.25:

CASSIO Do, good my friend.

Following 3.1.48:

To take the safest occasion by the front

Following 3.4.98:

DESDEMONA I pray, talk me of Cassio.

OTHELLO The handkerchief!

Following 4.2.185:

And he does chide with you.

Following 5.2.100:

DESDEMONA O, lord, lord, lord!

SCENE-BY-SCENE ANALYSIS

ACT 1 SCENE 1

Lines 1–84: The action begins *in medias res*, establishing the pace of the play. As Iago and Rodorigo hurry along, they reveal events prior to this point. The audience is initially excluded from some key information, however, establishing the themes of secrecy and misunderstanding: Rodorigo complains that, although he has been giving Iago money, Iago has not told him "of this," although we are not told what "this" is. He claims that Iago said that he hated someone, referred to by both of them as "him," and, later, "the Moor"; no one refers to Othello by name in the first scene: he is identified chiefly by his racial "otherness," and "labeled" by pronouns or epithets, creating a negative sense of his identity (another theme) and establishing the power of language. The latter is particularly significant to Iago, who manipulates others through his linguistic skills, evident in his placation of the gullible Rodorigo and description of his hatred for Othello. Iago claims that he is bitter because Othello promoted Cassio to be his lieutenant and made Iago his ensign. Iago complains that he is an experienced soldier, while Cassio's "soldiership" is "Mere prattle without practice," creating tension between words and action. Rodorigo comments that if he were Iago he would not continue to follow Othello, but Iago explains that he is doing it so that he can get his revenge. He explains that he is only "trimmed in forms and visages of duty," establishing the themes of deception and appearance versus reality. Iago declares his false nature: "I am not what I am," a paradoxical statement that emphasizes the ambiguity of his identity. Despite this, Rodorigo continues to trust him, showing his lack of perception.

They arrive at Brabantio's house and Iago instructs Rodorigo to rouse the sleeping household, establishing that it is nighttime. This reinforces the sense of secrecy and introduces the recurring image of

darkness, part of the structure of oppositions that run through the play, including dark/light, black/white, words/actions, good/evil, and male/female. Both men shout to wake Brabantio, but Iago's language is more dramatic, alarmist, and effective.

Lines 85-195: Brabantio appears above, demanding to know "the reason of this terrible summons." Rodorigo politely inquires whether all Brabantio's family "is within," but Iago takes over, warning Brabantio that "an old black ram / Is tugging [his] white ewe." His sustained use of base sexual imagery further dehumanizes Othello and enrages Brabantio. Rodorigo identifies himself, but Iago remains anonymous, secretly manipulating events as both "actor" and "director." Rodorigo has previously tried to court Brabantio's daughter, Desdemona, and Brabantio accuses him of coming full of "distempering draughts" to see her. With inflammatory interjections from Iago, Rodorigo explains to Brabantio that they have come to warn him that Desdemona has eloped with "a lascivious Moor." Brabantio rouses his household and Iago leaves, explaining that he cannot appear to be against Othello. Brabantio confirms that Desdemona is missing. His disjointed speech reflects his distress and anger as he suggests that magic has been used on her. Rodorigo offers to take him to Othello and Desdemona.

ACT 1 SCENE 2

Lines 1-64: Iago, feigning loyalty to Othello, expresses concern that Brabantio will try to force a divorce, but Othello assures him that he will "out-tongue" Brabantio's complaints, emphasizing the theme of language. He assures Iago that he genuinely loves "the gentle Desdemona." They see torches approaching and assume that Brabantio has come. Iago urges Othello to go indoors, but Othello is not afraid, reminding Iago of his "parts," "title," and "perfect soul," introducing another opposition in the play, that of the physical versus the spiritual. It is not Brabantio, however, but Cassio and his officers, who have come to tell Othello that the Duke wishes to see him "haste-post-haste" on military business. Othello leaves briefly to "spend a word" in the house and Iago informs Cassio that Othello is married,

again describing the event through coarse sexual innuendo. Brabantio and Rodorigo arrive.

Lines 65-117: Brabantio accuses Othello of being a "foul thief" who has "enchanted" Desdemona. He dehumanizes Othello, referring to him as "a thing," and tries to arrest him as a "practiser" of illegal magic. Othello explains that the Duke has summoned him, and Brabantio decides that he will go as well, certain that the Duke will sympathize with his complaint against Othello.

ACT 1 SCENE 3

Lines 1-134: The Duke and his senators discuss reports that the Turkish fleet is heading for Cyprus. A sailor brings news that they now appear to be traveling toward Rhodes, although a Senator suggests that "'tis a pageant, / To keep us in false gaze," emphasizing the theme of deception. A Messenger reports that the Turkish fleet has united with reinforcements and that they are once again heading for Cyprus. Brabantio and Othello arrive, accompanied by Iago, Cassio, and Rodorigo. The Duke assumes that Brabantio is there to discuss the urgent military business, but Brabantio is concerned with his own worries, creating tension between political and personal concerns. He tells the Duke that his daughter has been "stolen" and "corrupted / By spells and medicines." The Duke promises that whoever is involved in "this foul proceeding" will be punished.

Brabantio names Othello. Othello admits that he has "ta'en away" Desdemona and married her, but insists that this is his only offense. He offers to explain, warning that he is "Rude" in his speech, being only a soldier, and can only tell "a round unvarnished tale," but his claims that he is "little blessed with the soft phrase of peace" are belied by his careful and persuasive arguments. Brabantio maintains that Desdemona was "never bold" and of a "still" spirit, reinforcing the passivity evoked by Othello's description of her as "gentle Desdemona" in the previous scene and emphasizing the play's concern with the way identity can be created by others, through repeated use of words and phrases in association with a character. Othello sends for Desdemona so that she may speak for herself.

Lines 135–320: Othello describes how Brabantio used to invite him to his house and how he would tell Brabantio tales of “moving accidents by flood and field” and “hair-breadth scapes i’th’imminent deadly breach.” He tells them that Desdemona loved him “for the dangers” he had undergone and that, in turn, he loved her because “she did pity them.” He claims that his words are the only “witchcraft” that he has used, again emphasizing the power of language. The Duke urges Brabantio to make the best of the situation. Desdemona arrives, and Brabantio asks her, of all the assembled “noble company,” whom she owes the most obedience to. Desdemona answers that she has a “divided duty” between her father and husband, but points out that, like her mother before her, she must put her husband first. While this speech emphasizes that Desdemona is subject to male authority, it also shows that she is confident and articulate. Brabantio unhappily resigns himself and the Duke tries to encourage him, saying that “To mourn a mischief that is past and gone / Is the next way to draw new mischief on,” reminding us of Iago’s desire for revenge.

The discussion turns to the military situation and the Duke tells Othello that he must go to Cyprus, suggesting that Desdemona return to Brabantio’s home. In a moving speech, Desdemona requests to be allowed to go with Othello. The Duke agrees and leaves with the senators and Brabantio. Othello assigns Iago to escort Desdemona to Cyprus, believing him to be a man “of honesty and trust,” a comment that shows Othello’s lack of perception and introduces the motif of honesty. Othello and Desdemona leave to prepare for his departure.

Lines 321–390: Rodorigo melodramatically claims that his life is “torment” now that he has lost Desdemona. Iago argues that it “cannot be long that Desdemona should continue her love to the Moor” and claims that Othello will soon tire of Desdemona because “These Moors are changeable in their wills,” reinforcing the popular opinion of Othello’s otherness (although it is uncertain whether Iago believes this, or is merely using the idea to his own ends). Constantly urging Rodorigo to “put money in thy purse,” he claims that he can destroy the “frail vow” between “an erring barbarian and supersubtle Venetian” and promises that Rodorigo will soon “enjoy” Desde-

mona. His references to money and sex show Iago’s preoccupation with the physical rather than spiritual aspects of human existence. He suggests that Rodorigo “cuckold” Othello. They arrange to meet the next day.

Lines 391–412: Alone, Iago reveals his contempt for Rodorigo, commenting: “Thus do I ever make my fool my purse.” He reiterates his hatred for Othello and reveals another possible motive: he believes that Othello has slept with his wife, Emilia, although he is not sure. He is willing to act on “mere suspicion,” however, suggesting that Iago’s desire to destroy Othello is based on something more complex and inherent than simple revenge. Iago outlines his plan to convince Othello that Cassio is having an affair with Desdemona and comments that Othello’s “free and open nature” makes him gullible.

ACT 2 SCENE 1

Lines 1–187: In Cyprus, Montano and two gentlemen discuss the storm at sea, a metaphor for the turmoil that Iago is about to create. News arrives that the storm has destroyed the Turkish fleet and that Cassio has arrived, but that his ship was parted from Othello’s. Cassio arrives and starts to report when cries of “a sail!” are heard. He sends to find out if Othello has arrived and begins to tell Montano of Othello’s marriage, clearly showing his admiration for Desdemona, “a maid / that paragons description.” Iago enters with Desdemona, Rodorigo, and Emilia, and Cassio immediately kneels before Desdemona, chivalrously greeting her as “The riches of the ship.” Desdemona thanks him briefly, but is more concerned for the safety of her husband. As he describes how they were parted, another ship is sighted and Cassio sends once more for news. As they wait, everyone talks lightheartedly. Iago shows his quick wit but, even though the tone is light, his negative, perhaps aggressive, attitude toward women is revealed, particularly his own wife, whom he does not hesitate to criticize in public. Desdemona makes it clear that she is joining in out of politeness and demonstrates her own wit, but her chief concern is Othello. Cassio draws her apart and they talk, observed by Iago. He is pleased at the attention that Cassio pays to Desdemona:

although Cassio is only being courteous, Iago reveals that "with as little a web as this" he will "ensnare as great a fly as Cassio." The use of aside emphasizes the secrecy and deception of his character, and the change in language is also interesting as he shifts into prose. He is interrupted by the trumpet announcing Othello's arrival.

Lines 188–290: Othello and Desdemona are reunited. Othello ironically sends "good Iago" (who is plotting aside how he will destroy their happiness) to oversee the disembarking of his ship. Alone with Rodorigo, Iago tells him directly that Desdemona is in love with Cassio. Again shifting into prose and using coarse sexual imagery, Iago argues that Desdemona is already tiring of "the Moor" and is looking for a younger "second choice" in Cassio. Rodorigo is skeptical at first, but Iago easily convinces him and reveals a plan to destroy Cassio. He tells Rodorigo to find Cassio when he is on watch that night and to "find some occasion to anger" him. He claims that Cassio is "rash" and will "strike at" Rodorigo, which will give Iago the weapon he needs against him.

Lines 291–317: Iago's soliloquy reiterates his hatred for Othello and his suspicions that Othello has slept with Emilia. He declares that he will be revenged, "wife for wife." He also suspects Cassio of sleeping with Emilia, suggesting a jealous and irrational side to his character. He intends to disturb Othello's "peace and quiet / Even to madness."

ACT 2 SCENE 2

The Herald announces a feast in celebration of Othello's marriage.

ACT 2 SCENE 3

Lines 1–152: Othello places Cassio in charge of "the guard" and leads Desdemona away to bed, observing that they have yet to consummate their marriage (a fact that undermines Iago's repeated representations of their relationship as purely sexual). Iago suggests that they drink Othello's health. Cassio is reluctant, explaining that he has "unhappy brains for drinking," but Iago skillfully persuades him and sends Cassio to call in the gallants with the wine. Iago

reveals his intention to ply Cassio with alcohol, making him "full of quarrel and offence." He observes that Rodorigo and three other watchers are already very drunk, having been "flustered with flowing cups" by himself. Cassio returns, having been given a drink by Montano. Iago encourages him to have more, feigning cheery drunkenness on his own part. Cassio's increasingly confused speech shows his growing inebriation, as do his repeated, comic denials that he is drunk. He leaves, and Iago observes to Montano that Cassio is a great soldier, but his "vice" of drinking is worrying. Rodorigo arrives, and Iago sends him after Cassio. There is a cry within and Rodorigo rushes back, pursued by an angry Cassio. Montano tries to stop Cassio and tells him that he is drunk. Cassio and Montano begin to fight, and Iago, still in control, sends Rodorigo to "cry a mutiny," before beginning to call out for help.

Lines 153–252: Othello arrives and stops the fight, assisted by Iago who is now playing the role of his loyal follower. Othello asks "Honest Iago" who began the fight, but Iago claims he does not know. Cassio "cannot speak" and Montano claims that he was acting in self-defense. Frustrated, Othello claims that his "blood" begins to "rule" his reason, showing that he can be moved to anger. He demands to know from Iago "who began it." Feigning reluctance and appearing to defend Cassio, Iago blames him. Othello ironically praises Iago's "honesty and love" in defending Cassio and strips Cassio of his officership. Desdemona interrupts them, and Othello's soldierly tone is contrasted with his loving reassurances to his "sweeting" as he leads her back indoors.

Lines 253–375: Iago feigns concern for Cassio, who is devastated at the loss of his "reputation." Ironically reinforcing the distance between appearance and reality, Iago tells Cassio that "Reputation is an idle and most false imposition." He suggests that Cassio appeal to Desdemona to intercede with Othello. Cassio agrees and leaves. Alone, Iago dwells on the subtlety of his plan, pleased that no one could actually say that he "play[s] the villain," as the advice he has given Cassio is good. He adds, however, that "When devils will the blackest sins put on, / They do suggest at first with heavenly shows," reinforcing the black/white and good/evil motifs, as well as the

theme of deception. He intends to tell Othello that Desdemona is only pleading for Cassio because she desires him. Rodorigo returns, complaining that he still does not have Desdemona. Iago reassures him and sends him away. Iago decides to get Emilia to persuade Desdemona to plead for Cassio while he sets up Othello to find Cassio "Soliciting" Desdemona.

ACT 3 SCENE 1

Cassio instructs some musicians to play beneath Othello's window. In comic contrast to the events of the previous scene, the Clown engages in a series of bawdy quibbles before Iago interrupts them. Cassio tells him that he has sent to ask Emilia if she can arrange "some access" to "virtuous Desdemona." Iago offers to draw Othello out of the way so Cassio may speak more freely, and Cassio observes how "kind and honest" Iago is. Emilia brings the news that Desdemona has already spoken to Othello about Cassio. Cassio still wishes to speak to Desdemona, however, and Emilia agrees to help him.

ACT 3 SCENE 2

Othello instructs Iago to meet him later.

ACT 3 SCENE 3

Lines 1-99: Desdemona reassures Cassio that she will speak to Othello. Emilia ironically comments that her husband is as grieved by the situation "As if the cause were his," establishing her naïveté. Desdemona vows to "intermingle" everything Othello does with "Cassio's suit" and Cassio leaves. As Othello and Iago approach, Iago suggests that Cassio looked "guilty-like" as he left. Desdemona greets them and says that she has been talking with "a suitor," an unfortunately ambiguous word choice. She urges Othello to call Cassio back, but his replies to her entreaties are brief and distracted, suggesting that Iago has already begun to affect his perception. The women leave.

Lines 100-309: Iago continues to work on Othello, creating jealousy and doubt while appearing supportive and loyal. His techniques are clever and subtle: he never makes any direct statements and is always ambiguous, seeming to praise and deny where he is doing otherwise, and always answering Othello's questions with ones of his own. He ironically warns Othello against "the green-eyed monster" of jealousy, but tells him to watch Desdemona when she is with Cassio. He reminds Othello that Desdemona is capable of deception: she deceived Brabantio to marry him. He begs Othello not to think any more about it, but suggests that if Desdemona pleads on Cassio's behalf "With any strong or vehement importunity, / Much will be seen in that." Othello, filled with pain and anger, gives his first soliloquy of the play (the audience has more access to the inner thoughts of the "villain" of the play than its eponymous "hero"). Even in so short a time, Iago has succeeded in making Othello doubt Desdemona's fidelity. As Desdemona approaches, however, we see that he still loves her, and that he finds it hard to believe that she is false.

Lines 310-528: Desdemona perceives that Othello is "not well." She offers him her handkerchief, but he pushes it away and she drops it. As they leave, Emilia picks up the handkerchief, observing that it was Othello's first gift to Desdemona. She reveals that Iago has repeatedly asked her to steal it, although she does not know why. Iago enters and Emilia gives him the handkerchief, but he will not tell her why he wants it and sends her away. Alone, he reveals his intention to leave it in Cassio's lodging. As he contemplates how he has already changed "the Moor" with his "poison," Othello returns, muttering agitatedly. Iago feigns concern as Othello contemplates Desdemona's supposed betrayal. He angrily demands that Iago prove that Desdemona is "a whore." Iago feigns hurt, ironically observing that to be "direct and honest is not safe." He asks Othello what proof he wants, using increasingly coarse sexual imagery to torture and anger him. Iago claims to have shared a room with Cassio recently and overheard him plotting with Desdemona in his sleep. Othello declares that he will "tear" Desdemona "all to pieces." Iago tells Othello that

he has seen Cassio "wipe his beard" with Desdemona's handkerchief. The calm reason we associate with Othello seems to leave him as he calls for "blood, blood, blood!" and swears revenge. He kneels before Iago, emphasizing the shift in power between them. Iago swears allegiance to "wronged Othello" and agrees to kill Cassio.

ACT 3 SCENE 4

Lines 1–104: Desdemona and Emilia search for Cassio's lodgings, accompanied by the Clown, whose bantering creates a contrast with the violent emotions of the previous scene. Desdemona sends him to find Cassio. Emilia denies all knowledge of the lost handkerchief when Desdemona questions her, complicating her characterization with a potential shift from naïveté to deceit. Desdemona is worried that Othello will be put to "ill thinking" by the loss, but reassures herself that he is not a jealous man. Othello arrives and, in an aside that marks his withdrawal from their relationship, comments on how hard it is to "dissemble" as he tries to act normally. Desdemona, unaware, continues to petition for Cassio. Othello asks for her handkerchief and tells her its history: it was given to Othello's mother by an Egyptian "charmer" who told her that "while she kept it" it would "subdue" Othello's father "Entirely to her love." If she lost it, however, Othello's father "should hold her loathed." Othello warns Desdemona that to lose the handkerchief would mean "perdition" and, noting her distress, demands to see it. Desdemona denies that it is lost and returns to the subject of Cassio. Othello leaves abruptly.

Lines 105–177: Iago urges Cassio to "importune" Desdemona. He does, but a bewildered Desdemona tells him that she has incurred Othello's "displeasure" and that "My lord is not my lord," emphasizing the apparent change in Othello's identity. Iago goes to find Othello. Desdemona convinces herself that Othello is troubled by state business, reasoning that she has never given him "cause" to be jealous. She tells Cassio to wait while she finds Othello.

Lines 178–217: When the women have gone, Cassio is approached by Bianca who flirts with him. He gives her Desdemona's handkerchief and asks her to copy the embroidery. She jealously assumes

that it is a "token" from another woman, but he denies this, saying that he does not know whose it is, he just found it in his chamber. He promises to see Bianca soon.

ACT 4 SCENE 1

Lines 1–175: Iago continues to subtly increase Othello's fury through his use of sexual innuendo as he tells Othello that Cassio has the handkerchief and implies that he has confessed to sleeping with Desdemona. Although still uncertain, Othello's disjointed language shows the breakdown of his self-control. He falls down unconscious as Cassio arrives, and Iago claims that Othello has epilepsy, warning that he breaks into "savage madness" if woken from a fit, thus further undermining Othello's reputation. He suggests that Cassio return later. Othello wakes and Iago tells him to hide and listen in while he speaks to Cassio. Othello withdraws and Iago reveals that he is actually going to speak to Cassio about Bianca, knowing that reference to Bianca's love for him will make Cassio laugh. Cassio arrives and, briefly out of Othello's hearing, Iago refers to Bianca, causing Cassio to laugh. Their bawdy conversation continues, observed by Othello, whose asides reveal he believes them to be speaking about Desdemona. Bianca arrives unexpectedly and angrily returns the handkerchief to Cassio, insisting that it must be "some minx's token." She and Cassio leave.

Lines 176–302: Othello is convinced and declares that he will kill Desdemona. Iago urges him to "strangle her in her bed" and promises that he will kill Cassio. Desdemona arrives, bringing Lodovico with news from Venice. Othello appears calm, but Lodovico inquires after Cassio and Desdemona tells him about the "unkind breach" between them, innocently commenting on her own "love" for Cassio. Othello loses control and strikes Desdemona, calling her a "devil." Once Othello has left, Lodovico expresses shock and questions Othello's reputation as the "noble Moor," whose nature "passion could not shake," showing that Iago is managing to destroy Othello publicly as well as personally.

ACT 4 SCENE 2

Lines 1–189: Othello questions Emilia, who says that Desdemona is “honest, chaste and true” and insists that she cannot have been unfaithful. Othello sends her to fetch Desdemona, reflecting that he does not have to believe Emilia as she is “a simple bawd.” Emilia shows Desdemona in and Othello tells her to guard the door. Sensing Othello’s “fury,” Desdemona is confused, especially when he asks her to swear that she is “honest.” She begs to be told “what ignorant sin” she has committed, and Othello accuses her of being a “strumpet” and a “whore.” Amazed, Desdemona denies this, but Othello is unmoved and leaves. Emilia tries to comfort Desdemona, but she replies distractedly and asks her to fetch Iago. Iago feigns concern and pretends to comfort Desdemona, while Emilia insists ironically that “Some busy and insinuating rogue” must have “devised this slander.” Desdemona asks Iago to advise her and kneels before him as Othello did in Act 3 Scene 3, emphasizing his power over them both. Iago reassures her that Othello must be troubled by some “business of state” and sends her and Emilia in to supper.

Lines 190–258: Rodorigo arrives, accusing Iago of not dealing “justly” with him, accurately observing that Iago’s “words and performances are no kin together.” Despite this, Iago manages to talk him around, promising that he will “enjoy” Desdemona provided that he kills Cassio. He outlines a plan whereby the two of them will attack Cassio as he leaves Bianca’s that night. Rodorigo seems unconvinced, and Iago leads him away, promising to explain further.

ACT 4 SCENE 3

Presenting a united front in public, Othello and Desdemona say goodbye to their visitor, Lodovico. Othello offers to escort him out, and tells Desdemona to dismiss Emilia and get to bed “on th’ instant.” The following scene is a tender exchange between the two women as Emilia prepares Desdemona for bed. Emilia has put Desdemona’s wedding sheets on her bed at her request and Desdemona prophetically asks Emilia that, if she should die before her, she will shroud her in them. Desdemona sings the melancholy willow song that

she learned from her mother’s maid, aptly named “Barbary,” who had been forsaken in love. The conversation turns to infidelity and Desdemona swears she would never be unfaithful to Othello, claiming she cannot understand why a woman would cheat on her husband. Showing a more pragmatic attitude, and perhaps advocating a more equal relationship between men and women, Emilia observes that many husbands are unfaithful and that the sexes are judged unequally.

ACT 5 SCENE 1

The setting of darkness means that the characters respond chiefly to what they hear, reflecting the role of rumor in the action of the wider play.

Iago and Rodorigo wait for Cassio. Iago conceals himself as Cassio arrives, and Rodorigo strikes with his sword. His blow fails, but Cassio retaliates, seriously wounding Rodorigo. As he does so, Iago, unseen, stabs Cassio in the leg. Cassio cries out and is heard by Othello, who recognizes his voice and assumes that Iago has killed him as promised. Gloating, he leaves to find Desdemona, promising that her “lust-stained” bed “shall with lust’s blood be spotted.” Lodovico and Gratiano arrive and, hearing Cassio and Rodorigo’s cries, fear for their own safety. Iago enters with light and weapons, pretending that he has come to investigate the noise. Cassio hears Iago’s voice and calls out. Feigning shock and concern for Cassio, Iago quickly finds Rodorigo and kills him under cover of the darkness, directly taking action for the first time in the play. He helps Cassio, asking Lodovico and Gratiano to assist him. They are joined by Bianca and then Emilia. As Cassio is carried out, Iago accuses Bianca of being behind the attack, saying that it is “the fruits of whoring.” He sends Emilia to tell Othello and Desdemona.

ACT 5 SCENE 2

Lines 1–123: Othello approaches Desdemona’s bed, holding a light—a visual symbol of the light/life, darkness/death imagery that runs throughout his soliloquy. He dwells on images of purity, such as

alabaster and snow, and images of death, many of which have a sexual connotation, such as the plucked rose. He kisses Desdemona and his resolve almost breaks. She wakes and he tells her that she must pray, as he cannot kill her "unprepared spirit." Desdemona pleads with Othello, repeating that she does not love Cassio and did not give him the handkerchief. Othello informs her that Cassio is dead and, misunderstanding her innocent tears at this news, he smothers her. As he does so, Emilia calls for him. His calm certainty breaks down as he fluctuates between Emilia's calls and Desdemona's body. Eventually, he lets Emilia in.

Lines 124–270: Emilia reports that Cassio has killed Rodorigo, and Othello is dismayed to learn that Cassio is not dead. As they talk, Desdemona cries out, and, parting the bed curtains, Emilia finds her. Desdemona claims that she is "guiltless" and, denying Othello's responsibility for her murder, she dies. Othello, however, sees Desdemona's final act as further evidence that Desdemona is "a liar gone to burning hell" and tells Emilia that he killed his wife because "she was a whore." Emilia argues that Desdemona was "heavenly true" and Othello tells her that her own husband told him of Desdemona's affair with Cassio. Emilia is stunned and unable to say anything except "My husband?" for some time, before scornfully telling Othello that Iago lied and that he is a "gull." She calls for help. Montano, Gratiano, and Iago enter, and Emilia tells Iago that he "told a lie, an odious, damnèd lie," a sharp contrast to the label of honesty he has been given throughout the play. She announces that Desdemona is dead and Gratiano and Montano are horrified. Gratiano reveals that Brabantio has died in grief at his daughter's marriage. Othello insists that Desdemona was "foul" and unfaithful, and tells them that she gave Cassio the handkerchief. Despite Iago's threats, Emilia bravely reveals that she found the handkerchief and gave it to him. Othello tries to kill Iago, but Iago stabs Emilia and flees.

Lines 271–416: Emilia asks to be laid by her mistress's side. Montano tells Gratiano to guard "the Moor" while he pursues Iago. Emilia's last words are to assure Othello of Desdemona's innocence and her love for him. As Othello laments Desdemona's death, Lodovico and Montano bring in Iago as a prisoner and the wounded

Cassio. Othello stabs Iago but fails to kill him. With all the remaining characters assembled, the truth is established and evidence produced of Iago's villainy, but he refuses to explain himself and vows "From this time forth I never will speak word." Othello is stripped of his command and Cassio given leadership in Cyprus. As he is to be led away, Othello begs to be remembered as "one that loved not wisely but too well" before stabbing himself. He kisses Desdemona as he dies. Iago's punishment is for Cassio to decide. Lodovico recommends the use of torture while he returns immediately to Venice to report what has happened.