

# 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

*Robin Williams*

***The Tragedy of Othello, Shakespeare***

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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?

	<b>IAGO</b>	
	18 Her honor is an essence that's not seen;	
Does Iago recognize that he	19 They have' it very oft, that have it not.	enjoy a reputation for
describes himself in line 19?	20 But for the handkerchief—	
	<b>OTHELLO</b>	
	21 By heaven, I would most gladly have forgot it:	
	22 Thou saidst (oh, it comes o'er my memory,	
The <b>raven</b> is an omen	23 As doth the raven o'er the infectious' house,	plague-ridden
of misfortune or even	24 Boding' to all) he had my handkerchief.	ominous
death. Take a moment to		
visualize this image.	<b>IAGO</b>	
	25 Ay: what of that?	
	<b>OTHELLO</b>	
	26 That's not so good now.	
	<b>IAGO</b>	
	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 <b>voluntary dotage</b> ?	30 Or' voluntary dotage of some Mistress,	or by the
The men have <b>convinced</b> /	31 Convinced or supplied them, cannot choose	
seduced women <b>or</b> the	32 But they' must blab—	the knaves
woman was willing (due to		
her doting) and <b>supplied</b> /	<b>OTHELLO</b>	
satisfied him. Iago	33 Hath he said any thing?	
implicates Desdemona.	<b>IAGO</b>	
	34 He hath, my Lord, but be you well assur'd,	
	35 No more than he'll un-swear.	
	<b>OTHELLO</b>	
	36 What hath he said?	
	<b>IAGO</b>	
	37 Why, that he did—I know not what he did.	
	<b>OTHELLO</b>	
	38 What? What?	
	<b>IAGO</b>	
	39 Lie.	
	<b>OTHELLO</b>	
	40 With her?	
	<b>IAGO</b>	
	41 With her? On her: what you will.	

	<b>OTHELLO</b>	
<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>
<b>Zounds</b> rhymes with wounds; <i>it’s a swear word that means “God’s wounds.”</i>	44 Lie <i>with</i> her. Zounds, that’s fulsome’:	<i>repulsive</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 if Nature (one’s life-giving force) didn’t know something.</i>	48 I tremble at it—Nature would not invest her self	<i>foreshadowing</i>
	49 in such shadowing’ passion	<i>basis in fact</i>
	50 without some instruction.’	
	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 of this visual image.</i>	<i>[Othello falls in a trance. Iago stands over the fallen and incoherent Othello.]</i>	
	<b>IAGO</b>	
	54 <i>[aside]</i> Work on,	
	55 My medicine,’ work. Thus credulous fools are caught,	<i>aural poison</i>
<i>Does this say something about Iago’s view of the world, of men?</i>	56 And many worthy and chaste dames even thus,’	<i>in this way</i>
	57 (All guiltless) meet reproach’:	<i>scandal and disgrace</i>
	58 <i>[aloud]</i> What hoa? My Lord?	
	59 My Lord, I say—Othello.	
	<i>[Enter Cassio.]</i>	
	60 How now, Cassio?	
	<b>CASSIO</b>	
	61 What’s the matter?	
	<b>IAGO</b>	
	62 My Lord is fall’n into an epilepsy;	
	63 This is his second fit: he had one yesterday.	
	<b>CASSIO</b>	
	64 Rub him about the temples.	
	<b>IAGO</b>	
	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?	
	<b>OTHELLO</b>	
<i>Othello takes the reference to his head to imply cuckold’s horns.</i>	73 Dost thou mock me?	

**IAGO**

74 I mock you not, by Heaven:  
 75 Would' you would bear your Fortune like a man. *I wish*

**OTHELLO**

76 A hornèd man's a monster, and a beast.

**IAGO**

*Consider the multiple meanings of **civil**.*

77 There's many a beast, then, in a populous city,  
 78 And many a civil monster.

**OTHELLO**

79 Did he confess it?

**IAGO**

*A **yoke** also implies horned oxen **drawing** a plow.*

80 Good Sir, be a man:  
 81 Think every bearded fellow that's but yok'd' *married*  
 82 May draw' with you. There's millions now alive *align*  
 83 That nightly lie in those unproper' beds, *previously shared*  
 84 Which they dare swear peculiar.' *to be their personal property*

85 Your case is better.

*Let me know that I am a cuckold.*

86 Oh, 'tis the spite of Hell, the fiend's arch-mock,  
 87 To lip' a wanton in a sècure' couch, *kiss; carefree*  
 88 And to suppose her chaste.' No, let me know, *faithful*  
 89 And knowing what I am, I know what she shall be.

**OTHELLO**

*What's **certain**?*

90 Oh, thou art wise: 'tis certain.

**IAGO**

*At what point (since line 53) does Othello stand up?*

91 Stand you a while apart,  
 92 Confine your self but in a patient list.' *limit*

*Iago is speaking so differently to Othello than he used to. What might that imply?*

93 Whilst you were here, o'er-whelmèd with your grief  
 94 (A passion most unsuiting such a man)  
 95 Cassio came hither. I shifted him away,  
 96 And laid good 'scuse upon your ecstasy,' *epileptic fit*

*Shakespeare invented the word **encave**. You can guess what it means.*

97 Bade him anon' return, and here speak with me, *soon*  
 98 The which he promis'd. Do but encave your self,  
 99 And mark the fleers,' the gibes,' and notable scorns *sneers; scoffs*

*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.*

100 That dwell in every region of his face.  
 101 For I will make him tell the tale anew—  
 102 Where, how, how oft, how long ago, and when  
 103 He hath, and is again, to cope' your wife. *engage with*  
 104 I say, but mark his gesture. Marry, patience,' *have patience*  
 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: *expert*  
 109 But (dost thou hear) most bloody.

**IAGO**

110 That's not amiss,  
 111 But yet keep time in all: will you withdraw?  
*[Othello withdraws and hides himself from Cassio,  
 as Iago earlier hid himself in the play.  
 The audience can still see Othello.]*

*If we believe that Bianca  
 is a **whore** simply because  
 Iago tells us so, then we are  
 as gullible as Othello.*

112 *[to the audience]* Now will I question Cassio of Bianca,  
 113 A huswife' that by selling her desires *hussy*  
 114 Buys her self bread and cloth. It is a creature  
 115 That dotes on Cassio (as 'tis the strumpet's' plague *whore's*  
 116 To beguile many, and be beguil'd by one).  
 117 He, when he hears of her, cannot restrain  
 118 From the excess of laughter.

*Enter Cassio.*

*How does Shakespeare's  
 invented word, **unbookish**,  
 apply here?*

119 *[still to the audience]* Here he comes.  
 120 As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad:  
 121 And his unbookish jealousy must construe  
 122 Poor Cassio's smiles, gestures, and light behaviors  
 123 Quite in the wrong. *[to Cassio]* How do you now, Lieutenant?

**CASSIO**

124 The worser, that you give me the addition,' *title of Lieutenant*  
 125 Whose want' even kills me. *lack*

**IAGO**

126 Ply Desdemona well, and you are sure on 't.' *getting your title back*  
*[Iago lowers his voice so Othello won't hear him.]*

127 Now, if this suit' lay in Bianca's pow'r, *entreaty*  
 128 How quickly should you speed'? *prosper*

**CASSIO** *[laughing]*

129 Alas, poor caitiff.' *miserable wretch*

**OTHELLO** *[aside]*

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*]  
 140 Do ye triumph, Roman? Do you triumph?  
*Romans had triumphal processions to show off their conquests.*

**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*

**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.]*

		<b>OTHELLO</b> <i>[aside]</i>	
	161	Crying, "Oh dear Cassio," as it were:	
	162	his gesture imports it.	
		<b>CASSIO</b>	
	163	So hangs, and lolls, and weeps upon me:	
	164	so' shakes, and pulls me. Ha, ha, ha!	<i>like this she</i>
		<b>OTHELLO</b> <i>[aside]</i>	
	165	Now he' tells how she pluck'd him to my chamber:	<i>Cassio</i>
<i>What is Othello imagining</i>	166	oh, I see that nose of yours,	
<i>he will do to Cassio?</i>	167	but not that dog I shall throw it to.	
		<b>CASSIO</b>	
	168	Well, I must leave her company.	
		<b>IAGO</b> <i>[quietly, so Othello cannot hear]</i>	
	169	Before me: look where she comes.	
		<i>[Enter Bianca with Desdemona's handkerchief.]</i>	
		<b>CASSIO</b>	
<i>Compare Cassio's treatment</i>	170	<i>[aside to Iago]</i> 'Tis such another fitchew':	<i>stinky polecat</i>
<i>of Bianca in private in the</i>	171	marry, a perfum'd one.	
<i>previous scene, 3.4.170–204,</i>	172	<i>[to Bianca]</i> What do you mean by this haunting of me?	
<i>and this in front of Iago.</i>			
		<b>BIANCA</b>	
	173	Let the Devil and his dam' haunt you:	<i>mother</i>
	174	what did you mean by that same handkerchief	
	175	you gave me even now? I was a fine fool to take it:	
<i>Take out the work: copy the</i>	176	I must take out the work? A likely piece of work,'	<i>story</i>
<i>embroidery, as Cassio had</i>	177	that you should find it in your chamber	
<i>asked her to do earlier.</i>	178	and know not who left it there.	
	179	This is some minx's' token,	<i>mistress's</i>
	180	and I must take out the work?	
		<i>[She gives him back the handkerchief.]</i>	
<i>A hobby-horse is a stick</i>	181	There, give it your hobby-horse;	
<i>with a horse's head, a toy</i>	182	wheresoever' you had it, I'll take out no work on 't.	<i>from wherever</i>
<i>that anyone can ride.</i>			
		<b>CASSIO</b>	
	183	How now, my sweet Bianca?	
	184	How now? How now?	
		<b>OTHELLO</b> <i>[aside]</i>	
	185	By Heaven, that should' be my handkerchief.	<i>must</i>
		<b>BIANCA</b>	
	186	If you'll come to supper to-night, you may;	
<i>Come when you are next</i>	187	if you will not, come when you are next prepar'd for.	
<i>prepar'd for = like never.</i>		<i>Exit [Bianca].</i>	

**IAGO**  
 188 After her: after her.

**CASSIO**  
 189 Indeed, I must; she'll rail<sup>r</sup> in the streets else. *rant*

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

**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<sup>r</sup> 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?  
*Is he not sure? What does this imply?*

**IAGO**  
 201 Yours, by this hand: and to see how  
 202 he prizes the foolish woman, your wife:  
 203 she<sup>r</sup> gave it him, and he hath giv'n it his whore. *Desdemona*

**OTHELLO**  
 204 I would have him nine years a-killing:  
 205 A fine woman, a fair woman, a sweet woman!

**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.

*Note the pattern in lines 205–231: 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?*

**IAGO**

212 Nay, that's not your way. *way you should think*

**OTHELLO**

213 Hang her. I do but say what she is:  
 214 so delicate with her needle, *exquisitely fine*  
 215 an admirable musician.  
 216 Oh, she will sing the savageness out of a bear;  
 217 of so high and plenteous wit and invention. *intelligence; imagination*

**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? *well bred*

**IAGO**

221 Ay, too gentle. *generous (with men)*

**OTHELLO**

222 Nay, that's certain:  
 223 But yet the pity of it, Iago:  
 224 oh Iago, the pity of it, Iago.

*Ay, the pity of it is heart-breaking.*

**IAGO**

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

**OTHELLO**

228 I will chop her into messes: Cuckold me?

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

**IAGO**

229 Oh, 'tis foul in her.

**OTHELLO**

230 With mine officer?

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

**IAGO**

231 That's fouler.

**OTHELLO**

232 Get me some poison, Iago, this night.  
 233 I'll not expostulate with her, *complain of an injury*  
 234 lest her body and beauty  
 235 unprovide my mind again:  
 236 this night, Iago.

*The word unprovide is amazing—consider what Othello means.*

**IAGO**

237 Do it not with poison—strangle her in her bed,  
 238 Even the bed she hath contaminated.

*Why does Iago prefer strangling over poison?*

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

**OTHELLO**  
239 Good, good:  
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?

.....