

SYNOPSIS of the TNT theatre version of Shakespeare's tragedy
of
OTHELLO

Venice about 1550.

Iago, a mid ranking officer in the Venetian army, meets the young aristocrat Roderigo in a church. Iago and Roderigo both have reason to hate the Moorish (Black Arab) General Othello: Roderigo because he suspects that Othello is in love with the woman he wishes to possess: Desdemona, and Iago because he knows that the General favours another officer (Cassio) as his second in command. They agree to plot Othello's downfall.

They go to the house of Desdemona's father, Senator Brabantio, and warn him that his daughter has eloped with the Moor. At first Brabantio does not believe Roderigo and Iago. But when he checks if his daughter is in the house and finds her missing he sees that he has been fooled and that his daughter has indeed run off with Othello.

Brabantio is a powerful man and demands that the Doge (Ruler) of Venice rescue his daughter who he claims is bewitched by Othello. Othello arrives to defend himself. It seems Iago offers good advice, from the very first Iago deceives his general by pretending to be his friend.

Othello calls Desdemona to be his witness. She declares that she is truly in love with the Moor and they confess that they have been secretly married. The Prince (Doge) dismisses Brabantio's charges of witchcraft. The marriage stands and Desdemona and Othello kiss. But the Prince has more pressing matters and tells Othello that he has no time to celebrate his wedding, he must straight away sail to Cyprus and defend the island against the Turkish Sultan's attack. Desdemona begs to accompany her new husband and he agrees that she should follow him to the Isle.

Alone now, Iago sees the potential for a double deception. He will destroy Othello and exploit Roderigo's lust for Desdemona and so achieve both revenge and enrichment.

Othello arrives at Cyprus just as a mighty storm hits the island. The Turkish fleet is miraculously destroyed and all celebrate the arrival of the new Governor, Othello, who now has no enemy to fight.

Cassio, the second-in-command, welcomes Othello to the Island and is especially happy to see Desdemona (who he knows from Venice). Iago comes to Cyprus to, accompanied by his wife, Emilia. Iago mocks and humiliates Emilia, their marriage seems in poor shape. Iago notices the easy way in which Cassio greets Desdemona and sees that this will be the way he will exact his revenge: he will plant seeds of doubt in Othello's mind about Cassio and Desdemona having an improper relationship.

Iago uses Roderigo to test out his plan, telling him that Desdemona and Cassio are having a love affair.

Othello declares that there should be a double celebration on the Island: for defeating the Turks and for his wedding. Cassio is in charge of the Guard and must stay alert while the island parties. Iago encourages Cassio to relax and join the festivities. Cassio says he must not drink, not only because he is in charge but because he has a weakness for drink: just one glass of wine sends him into a wild state. But Iago manipulates Cassio and soon the soldiers of the Guard are singing and partying and Cassio is drinking. As he predicted, Cassio starts to become violently drunk and picks a fight with a soldier, one Montano, wounding him. Othello emerges from his bedchamber and sees the spilt wine and blood and that Cassio is to blame. Iago makes sure of this. Cassio is immediately relieved of his command and humiliated.

Roderigo is upset, he has trusted Iago, paid him money and yet is no closer to seducing Desdemona. Iago promises that he will enjoy Desdemona soon.

Cassio meets Desdemona and begs that she persuade her husband to reinstate him for this one lapse of judgement. Desdemona agrees to help Cassio.

Desdemona and Othello talk and he agrees to listen to her defence of Cassio. When Desdemona leaves Iago starts to plant the seeds of suspicion in Othello's mind. Was Cassio Desdemona's lover back in Venice? Why does she plead his cause now with

such energy? Othello is troubled, he dismisses the suggestions but believes that Iago is only being his friend to raise these suspicions.

Othello meets again with Desdemona, he has a headache and she uses a handkerchief to cool his forehead but drops the handkerchief by mistake at the end of the scene. Emilia, Iago's wife and Desdemona's lady in Waiting, picks up the handkerchief. She knows that Iago has asked for it but knows not why. As she wants to please Iago and reignite their affection, she steals the handkerchief and gives it to her husband.

Iago starts to work on Othello, making him increasingly suspicious of his wife. Othello demands proof and Iago says that the handkerchief is proof, it is a love token that Desdemona has given to Cassio, even though it was a gift from Othello and belonged to his dead mother. Othello believes this "fake" proof. For the first time he threatens to kill Desdemona.

INTERVAL (long show only)

Bianca, a dancer and courtesan, dances for Cassio who she loves. He enjoys her company but will not return her love. She is a plaything as far as he is concerned. She begs him to dine with her that night and he laughingly agrees.

Othello confronts Desdemona and asks where the handkerchief has gone. Desdemona is worried that she has lost it. Othello tells her how important a gift it was, a symbol of married love given to him by his mother. Desdemona is deeply upset but has no answer that can satisfy her jealous husband. Before she can properly defend herself Othello storms out.

Emilia tries to comfort Desdemona, she has no idea that the handkerchief she stole is being used by her husband to destroy the Moor and his marriage.

Iago is again alone with Othello and is poisoning his mind with jealousy, backed by false proofs and exploiting Othello's fears. Iago says that Desdemona is a known liar as she tricked her father to run away and marry Othello. Othello is so confused and crazed by jealousy he accepts this and even falls into a trance as his brain is overcome with conflicting emotions. Iago senses victory.

When Othello returns to consciousness he vows to kill his wife and her supposed lover: Cassio. Iago says he will assist him.

A sudden trumpet, A senior official, Lodovico, arrives from Venice. He has come to relieve Othello of command, as the destruction of the Turkish fleet means the State do not need a warrior as governor of the island. Cassio is appointed governor in his place. Othello greets Lodovico courteously but then humiliates Desdemona and strikes her. This amazes Lodovico and the assembled crowd. Othello storms out.

Emilia tries to comfort Desdemona, who cannot understand why her once loving husband has turned against her. Emilia, who has her own poor marriage as evidence, bitterly comments that no man can be trusted to love once he has had physical pleasure from a woman.

Iago is confronted by Roderigo. It seems that Roderigo understands that Iago has been “milking” him for money without there ever being a chance to win Desdemona. Iago persuades the foolish Roderigo that there is one sure way to win what he wants: murder Cassio. With Cassio gone Othello will have to stay in Cyprus and with him Desdemona. Roderigo agrees to the murder.

Desdemona and Emilia are alone in her bedchamber. Desdemona has been ordered by Othello to wait for him that night and instructed his wife to be alone. Both women sense disaster but do not want to further enrage Othello by refusing his command. Desdemona sings a mournful song of death and love: “Willow”. Emilia sadly leaves her.

Roderigo ambushes Cassio on his way to visit Bianca, the courtesan. But Cassio is a good fighter and wounds Roderigo. Iago is in the shadows and slits Roderigo’s throat and stabs Cassio’s leg in the confusion of the fight. Cassio does not see Iago but shouts for help. Lodovico and guards rush to his assistance. They wonder why Roderigo attacked Cassio and how he died.

Othello goes to Desdemona’s bedroom. She tries to comfort her husband but he will have none of it. He is raving and accuses her of having a love affair with Cassio. She denies it. He mocks her and tells her that Cassio is murdered. She cries out which he takes

as proof of her affection for Cassio and his own betrayal. Othello strangles his wife. Desdemona is almost dead when Emilia, fearing the worst tries to enter. As Emilia enters Desdemona briefly rallies then dies. Othello justifies the murder of his wife and uses the handkerchief as proof of her infidelity. Suddenly Emilia realises why Iago wanted the handkerchief and how she unknowingly helped in the plot. She cries help and Murder!

Lodovico and Iago enter. It seems to be Iago's moment of triumph but Emilia will have none of it. She accuses her own husband. And now Iago draws his sword and kills her, she collapses by her mistress. Iago runs out but Lodovico is confident he cannot go far. Cassio arrives and they insist that Othello surrenders his sword. He does so. Othello is crushed with guilt and remorse now he realises that Desdemona was faithful and that Iago is a murderous Devil. Othello, the noble Moor, has kept a dagger hidden. He takes the knife and stabs himself over the body of his wife, kissing her as he dies.

Iago is brought in captured. Cassio takes charge of the justice that will fall upon this most evil of men.

THE END

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