Othello

William Shakespeare

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With an essay by Harold Bloom

THE ANNOTATED SHAKESPEARE

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CHARACTERS (DRAMATIS PERSONAE)

Othello (the Moor)
Brabantio (Senator of Venice, Desdemona’s father)
Gratiano (Brabantio’s brother, Desdemona’s uncle)
Lodovico (Desdemona’s cousin)¹
Duke (of Venice)
Senators (of Venice)
Cassio (Othello’s lieutenant)²
Iago (Othello’s ancient)³
Roderigo (Venetian gentleman)
Montano (Governor of Cyprus, Othello’s predecessor)
Sailors
Clown
Herald⁴
Desdemona (Brabantio’s daughter, Othello’s wife)
Emilia (Iago’s wife, Desdemona’s maid)
Bianca (courtesan, Cassio’s mistress)
Officers, Gentlemen, Messenger, Musicians, Attendants

¹ Gratiano’s son?
² second in command
³ ensign, standard-bearer
⁴ ceremonial message-bearer
Act 1

Scene 1
Venice. A street.

Enter Roderigo and Iago

Roderigo  Never¹ tell me, I take it much unkindly²
          That thou, Iago, who hast had my purse
          As if the strings were thine, shouldst know of this.³
Iago     But you will not⁴ hear me. If ever I did dream⁵
          Of such a matter, abhor⁶ me.
Roderigo  Thou told'st me
          Thou didst hold him⁷ in thy hate.⁸
Iago      Despise⁹ me

¹ don’t (emphatic)
² much unkindly = with great dissatisfaction/resentment
³ Desdemona’s elopement with Othello
⁴ will not = don’t want to
⁵ but you WILL not HEAR me if EVER I did DREAM
⁶ loathe, hate
⁷ hold him = keep/bear Othello
⁸ THOU toldst ME / THOU didst HOLD him IN thy HATE
⁹ have contempt for, scorn
If I do not. Three great ones of the city,
In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,
Off-capped 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 bumbast circumstance,
Horribly stuffed with epithets of war,
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 damned in a fair wife.
That never set\textsuperscript{30} a squadron\textsuperscript{31} in the field, Nor the division\textsuperscript{32} of a battle\textsuperscript{33} knows More than a spinster,\textsuperscript{34} unless the bookish theoretic,\textsuperscript{35} Wherein\textsuperscript{36} the togèd consuls\textsuperscript{37} can propose\textsuperscript{38} As masterly as he. Mere prattle,\textsuperscript{39} without practice,\textsuperscript{40} Is all his soldiership. But he, sir, had th’election,\textsuperscript{41} And I, of whom his\textsuperscript{42} eyes had seen the proof\textsuperscript{43} At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds,\textsuperscript{44} Christian and heathen, must be be-lee’d and calmed\textsuperscript{45} By debitor and creditor,\textsuperscript{46} this counter-caster.\textsuperscript{47} He, in good time,\textsuperscript{48} must his\textsuperscript{49} lieutenant be,

\textsuperscript{30}that never set = who never placed/positioned  
\textsuperscript{31}(1) relatively small military grouping, (2) a square military formation  
\textsuperscript{32}methodical arrangement  
\textsuperscript{33}army  
\textsuperscript{34}more than a spinster = any more than someone of either sex (usually a woman) who practices the craft of spinning  
\textsuperscript{35}unless the bookish theoretic = except as a matter of book-learned theory  
\textsuperscript{36}in which*  
\textsuperscript{37}wherein the togèd consuls = in which advisers/councillors? wearing formal gowns/togas (TOged)  
\textsuperscript{38}put forward  
\textsuperscript{39}idle talk/chatter  
\textsuperscript{40}experience, actual doing*  
\textsuperscript{41}choice  
\textsuperscript{42}of whom his = whose own  
\textsuperscript{43}proven results, tests, experience*  
\textsuperscript{44}soil, lands  
\textsuperscript{45}be-lee’d and calmed = like a ship cut off from the wind and thereby detained/kept motionless  
\textsuperscript{46}debitor and creditor = an account book  
\textsuperscript{47}someone who casts/keeps accounts  
\textsuperscript{48}in good time = if you can believe it, amazingly enough  
\textsuperscript{49}Othello’s
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 followed. 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, cashiered. Whip me such honest knaves! Others there are Who, trimmed 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,

68 doting on = foolishly infatuated by  
69 obsequious bondage = dutiful/submissive servitude  
70 wears out his time = wastes his life  
71 donkey (in British usage, “arse” = the rear end of a human being)  
72 food/fodder  
73 is dismissed  
74 whip me = as for me, whip/flog (whipping subordinates was more or less universal)  
75 prepared, skilled  
76 forms and visages = patterns/methods and appearances  
77 respect, deference, submission  
78 attending on = doing service to  
79 throwing but = casting/tossing/delivering only  
80 appearances  
81 flourish, prosper  
82 do WELL thrive BY them and WHEN they've LINED their COATS  
83 do themselves homage = declare allegiance to themselves (do THEMselves HOMage)  
84 intellectual/spiritual power (“life in them”)  
85 certain, trustworthy  
86 for SIR it IS as SURE as YOU are roDRIgo  
87 on account of
ACT I • SCENE I

But seeming so for my peculiar end.⁸⁸
For when my outward action doth demonstrate⁸⁹
The native act and figure⁹⁰ of my heart
In complement extern,⁹¹ 'tis not⁹² long after
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws⁹³ to peck at. I am not what I am.⁹⁴

Roderigo  What a full⁹⁵ fortune does the thick lips owe,⁹⁶
If he can carry’t⁹⁷ thus!

Iago  Call up⁹⁸ her father,
Rouse him,⁹⁹ make after¹⁰⁰ him, poison his delight,
Proclaim him¹⁰¹ in the streets. Incense her kinsmen,
And though he¹⁰² in a fertile climate¹⁰³ dwell,
Plague¹⁰⁴ him with flies.¹⁰⁵ Though that¹⁰⁶ his joy be joy,
Yet throw such changes of vexation on’t¹⁰⁷

⁸⁸ peculiar end = private/independent* goal/purpose
⁸⁹ make known, manifest (deMONstrate)*
⁹⁰ native act and figure = natural/unadorned deed and attitude/bearing
⁹¹ complement extern = outward fullness/completion/totality
⁹² 'tis not = it will not be
⁹³ jackdaws, a type of crow
⁹⁴ seem to be
⁹⁵ solid, large
⁹⁶ own, possess*
⁹⁷ can carry’t = could carry it off
⁹⁸ call up = wake up
⁹⁹ rouse him = stir him up
¹⁰⁰ make after = pursue
¹⁰¹ proclaim him = make his name known
¹⁰² Brabantio
¹⁰³ a fertile climate = an environment of abundance (he is rich and lives richly)
¹⁰⁴ afflict, torment
¹⁰⁵ winged insects
¹⁰⁶ though that = even if
¹⁰⁷ changes of vexation on’t = on it variations/modulations of harassment/distress
ACT I • SCENE I

As it may lose some color.  

*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!

*Iago* Awake, what, ho, Brabantio! Thieves, thieves, thieves!  
Look to your house, your daughter, and your bags!  
Thieves, thieves!

Brabantio appears above, at a window

*Brabantio* What is the reason of this terrible summons?  
What is the matter there?

*Roderigo* Signior, is all your family within?

*Iago* Are your doors locked?

*Brabantio* Why, wherefore ask you this?

*Iago* Zounds, sir, you’re robbed, for shame, put on your gown,  
Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul,  
Even now, now, very now, an old black ram
ACT I • SCENE I

Is tupping your white ewe. Arise, arise,
Awake the snorting citizens with the bell,
Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you.

Arise, I say.

Brabantio What, have you lost your wits?
Roderigo Most reverend signior, do you know my voice?
Brabantio Not I. What are you?
Roderigo My name is Roderigo.

Brabantio The worser welcome.
I have charged thee not to haunt about my doors.

In honest plainness thou hast heard me say
My daughter is not for thee. And now, in madness,
Being full of supper and distempering draughts,
Upon malicious knavery dost thou come
To start my quiet.

Roderigo Sir, sir, sir –
Brabantio But thou must needs be sure
My spirit and my place have in them power
To make this bitter to thee.

Roderigo Patience, good sir.

117 copulating with
118 innocent, virginal
119 snoring
120 minds*
121 respected
122 who
123 ordered
124 decent
125 folly
126 distempering draughts = deranging/disordering/intoxicating drinks
127 malicious knavery = wicked roguery/dishonest tricks
128 (1) attack, (2) startle
129 peace, repose?
130 disposition, attitude, character