

Study guide

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DOMINION

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BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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Creative Team

Director: Michael Grandage

Michael is Artistic Director of the Donmar Warehouse.

For the Donmar: *John Gabriel Borkman*, *Don Juan in Soho*, *Frost/Nixon* (also Gielgud & Broadway), *The Cut* (also UK tour), *The Wild Duck* - Critics' Circle Award for Best Director, *Grand Hotel* - Olivier Award for Outstanding Musical Production & Evening Standard Award for Best Director, *Pirandello's Henry IV* (also UK tour), *After Miss Julie*, *Caligula* - Olivier Award for Best Director, *The Vortex*, *Privates on Parade*, *Merrily We Roll Along* - Olivier Award for Best Musical & Critics' Circle Award for Best Director, *Passion Play* - Critics' Circle & Evening Standard Awards for Best Director, *Good*.

For the West End: *Evita* (Adelphi), *Guys and Dolls* - Olivier Award for Outstanding Musical Production (a Donmar production at the Piccadilly).

As Artistic Director of Sheffield Theatres (1999-2005) work included: *Don Carlos* (also Gielgud) – Evening Standard Award for Best Director & German British Forum Award, *Suddenly Last Summer* (also Albery), *As You Like It* (also Lyric Hammersmith) – Critics' Circle & Evening Standard Awards for Best Director, South Bank Show Award for Theatre. He has been given Honorary Doctorates by Sheffield Hallam University and Sheffield University where he was also a visiting professor.

For the Almeida: *The Jew of Malta*, *The Doctor's Dilemma* (also UK tours).

Designer: Christopher Oram

For the Donmar: *Parade*, *Frost/Nixon* (also West End & Broadway), *Guys and Dolls* (Piccadilly), *Don Juan in Soho*, *Grand Hotel*, *Henry IV*, *World Music*, *Caligula* – 2003 Evening Standard Award for Best Design, *The Vortex*, *Privates on Parade*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, *Passion Play*, *Good*, *The Bullet*.

Theatre: *King Lear/The Seagull* (RSC), *Evita* (Adelphi), *Macbeth*, *The Jew of Malta*, *The Embalmer* (Almeida), *Stuff Happens*, *Marriage Play/Finding the Sun*, *Summerfolk*, *Power* – 2004 Olivier Award for Best Costume Design (NT), *Oleanna* (Gielgud), *Loyal Women*, *Fucking Games* (Royal Court), *The Caretaker*, *All My Sons* (Bristol Old Vic). For Sheffield Crucible: *Suddenly Last Summer* (also Albery) – Critics' Circle Award for Best Design, *The Tempest* (also Old Vic), *Richard III*, *Don Juan*, *Edward II*, *The Country Wife*, *Six Degrees of Separation*, *As You Like It* (also Lyric Hammersmith).

Film: *The Magic Flute* (dir. Kenneth Branagh).

Lighting Designer: Paule Constable

Paule read English and Drama at Goldsmiths' College, London, and trained in lighting design while working in the music business. She won the 2006 Olivier Award for Best Lighting Design for *Don Carlos*, 2005 Olivier Award for Best Lighting for *His Dark Materials*, 1999 LA Critics' Award for *Amadeus* and had further nominations for *The Street of Crocodiles* (Complicité), *Amadeus*, *Uncle Vanya* (RSC) and *Play Without Words* (NT).

For the Donmar: *Absurdia*, *The Cut*, *The Little Foxes*, *Proof*, *Bondagers*.

Theatre: Paule's work is seen regularly at the NT (most recently *War Horse*, *St Joan* and *Women of Troy*), RSC, Royal Court and Theatre de Complicité. West End productions include *Evita* (Adelphi), *Don Carlos* (Sheffield Crucible & West End), *Amadeus* and *The Vagina Monologues* (New Ambassadors).

Opera: Numerous productions at the ROH, Glyndebourne and ENO. Also productions throughout Britain, Europe and North America.

Dance: *Seven Deadly Sins*, *Pinocchio*, *Highland Fling*, *Play Without Words*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*.

Composer and Sound Designer: Adam Cork

For the Donmar: *Frost/Nixon* - 2007 Drama Desk Award nomination (also Gielgud & Broadway), *John Gabriel Borkman*, *Don Juan in Soho*, *Caligula*, *Henry IV*, *The Wild Duck*, *The Cut*.

Theatre: *Macbeth*, *Don Carlos* (Gielgud), *Suddenly Last Summer* - Olivier Award nomination for Best Sound Design (Albery), *The Glass Menagerie* (Apollo), *Speaking Like Magpies*, *The Tempest* (RSC), *The Late Henry Moss*, *Tom and Viv* (Almeida), *On the Third Day* (New Ambassadors), *Underneath the Lintel* (Duchess), *On the Ceiling* (Garrick), *Scaramouche Jones* (Riverside Studios & world tour), *Troilus and Cressida* (Old Vic), *Sunday Father*, *Faustus* (Hampstead), *Paradise Lost* (Headlong), *Nine Parts of Desire* (Wilma, Philadelphia), *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Lear*, *The Cherry Orchard* (Sheffield Crucible), *Romeo and Juliet* (Manchester Royal Exchange), *The Government Inspector* (Chichester Festival), *Macbeth*, *The Waltz of the Toreadors*, *King Lear* (Chichester Minerva), *My Uncle Arly* (Linbury Studio), *The Field* (The Tricycle), *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* - 2005 TMA Award (Bristol Old Vic).

Film & Television: *Frances Tuesday*, *Re-ignited*, *Imprints*, *The Three Rules of Infidelity*, *Bust*, *Sexdrive*, *Tripletake*.

Radio: *Losing Rosalind*, *The Luneberg Variation*, *The Colonel-Bird*, *Don Carlos*.

OTHELLO: an introduction to the play, cast and characters

OTHELLO cannot be dated precisely, but **Michael Grandage**, artistic director of the Donmar and director of this production, has set the play in the year we believe it was written – 1604.

Act I of the play is set in **Venice**, whilst Acts II to V are set in **Cyprus**. The opening three scenes that make up the first act set up the facts that drive the action for the remainder of the play: the news of **Othello's** secret marriage to **Desdemona**; the midnight session of the Senate to take quick and decisive action to counter the threat of the Turkish fleet; the malevolence of the play's villain, **Iago** as he declares his hatred of Othello.

The subsequent storm that threatens the Venetian fleet as they head for Cyprus acts as a theatrical metaphor for the transition from the encoded social and military order of Venice, to the exposed isolation of the characters as they arrive on the island of Cyprus. Although everything appears well at the opening of Act II, as all arrive safely on the island after the effects of the storm, and the Turkish fleet is in retreat, there is now a more implicit threat in their midst: the duplicitous Iago's plan for the destruction of Othello.

The world of the play that Shakespeare creates in these locations would have spoken to seventeenth century Elizabethan England in terms of the issues that preoccupied them at that time: the military and religious threat from a foreign power; issues of the public versus private concerns and the manifestation of evil.¹

Characters in speaking order



Roderigo EDWARD BENNETT

Roderigo is a Venetian gentleman who is taken in by **Iago**. He is under the impression that Iago is laying the foundations for him to seduce **Othello's** wife, **Desdemona**. The exploitation of Roderigo by Iago is set up in the opening scene of the play, which helps establish Iago as the villain of the piece.

Roderigo's susceptibility to Iago's duplicitous nature foreshadows Othello's trusting acceptance of Iago later in the play.

Observation point

In the Donmar's production of OTHELLO, observe the role that Roderigo plays in Iago's scheme against Othello.



Iago EWAN MCGREGOR

Iago is **Othello's** villainous aide, whose objective in the play is to destroy Othello's life. He finally achieves this by convincing Othello that **Desdemona** is having an affair with **Cassio**, his lieutenant.

The human quality that Iago lacks, and that he destroys in Othello, is trust, the fundamental quality that bonds people together. The play's central motif, jealousy, is the potent manifestation of distrust.

The motives for Iago's actions are laid down by Shakespeare in the soliloquies that he gives this villainous character. These are examined in more detail in Section 3.



Brabantio/Gratiano JAMES LAURENSEN

Brabantio is a Venetian senator and father of **Desdemona**. He is outraged in the opening scene of the play by **Iago's** news that Desdemona has married **Othello** in secret. His racial prejudice and enmity towards Othello is clearly communicated in the language that he uses against the Moor.

Brabantio disappears from the play after Act I, Scene iii. In Act V, Scene ii the audience is told that he has died of grief at Desdemona's marriage.

This enables the performer playing Brabantio, JAMES LAURENSEN to take on the role of **Gratiano**, a Venetian nobleman who is also Desdemona's uncle. He is part of the delegation from Venice that comes to Cyprus at the close of the play and witnesses the dramatic climax of Othello's madness.



Othello CHIWETEL EJIOFOR

Othello is the title character of the play. Shakespeare subtitles his play 'The Moor of Venice', the term Moor alluding to Othello's North African roots. When the play first opens, we learn that Othello, a general serving in the Venetian army, has just married the much younger **Desdemona**. The play's central dynamic focuses on Othello's shift from noble general to jealous murderer under the malevolent influence of his aide, **Iago**, who convinces him that Desdemona is having an affair with his lieutenant, **Cassio**.

The audience observe Othello's moral disintegration as, unable to trust his wife, he embarks on a course of destructiveness which culminates in her murder and his own suicide when he realises his fatal error.

Section 3 examines some of the key speeches that chart the shifts in Othello's character from Act I to Act III.



Cassio TOM HIDDLESTON

'Reputation, reputation, I ha' lost my reputation! I ha' lost the immortal part, sir, of myself, and what remains is bestial; my reputation, Iago, my reputation!'

Cassio, Act II, Scene iii, 254-7.

Cassio is a Florentine officer serving under **Othello**. His appointment as Othello's lieutenant arouses **Iago's** professional jealousy; it is a post that he coveted for himself. This jealousy motivates Iago to set a plan in action whereby Cassio gets drunk and goads **Roderigo** to confront him in a sword fight. His drunken behaviour leads Othello to demote him.

As the plot develops, Iago convinces Othello that **Desdemona** has taken Cassio as her lover. He does this by planting a handkerchief, that was a special gift from Othello to Desdemona, in Cassio's lodgings. The enraged Othello orders Iago to kill Cassio. Cassio survives the attack and discloses Iago's villainy.

See section 5 for an interview with Tom Hiddleston where he talks about the role of Cassio.



1st Officer/Messenger/1st Cyprus Gentleman ALASTAIR SIMS

1st Senator/2nd Cyprus Gentleman DAVID MARA

The **1st Officer, Messenger, Senator** and **Cyprus gentlemen** offer support to the narrative by reporting offstage action, such as the news that Turkish fleet is approaching Cyprus in Act I, Scene iii.

Duke of Venice/Lodovico MICHAEL HADLEY



The **Duke of Venice** is the ruler of Venice and the highest status character in the play. The Duke proffers wise judgements, both on the impending assault by the Turkish fleet on Cyprus, and on the protestations made by **Brabantio** on his daughter **Desdemona's** marriage to **Othello**.

The Duke only appears in the opening act of the play, allowing Michael Hadley to take on the role of **Lodovico** in Act V. Lodovico serves a similar role to that of the Duke: as an emissary from Venice to Cyprus, he is the symbol of normal society that the characters have left behind.

See section 5 for an interview with Michael Hadley where he talks about the roles of the Duke of Venice and Lodovico.



Desdemona **KELLY REILLY**

'I do love thee, and when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again'

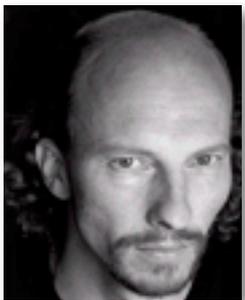
Othello addressing Desdemona, Act III, Scene iii, 92-3

Desdemona's secret marriage to **Othello** preoccupies the opening scenes of the play. She demonstrates a nobility and strength of spirit as she justifies her marriage before the Duke in Act I, Scene iii. She confidently confronts the racial prejudices of Venetian society, as exemplified by her father's attitude towards her marriage to the Moor. Desdemona's loyalty to Othello imbues the character, and is a striking counterpoint to Iago's malice.

The crisis point in the play for Desdemona comes in Act IV, Scene ii, when she is publicly defamed by Othello. The scene stands in strong contrast to the earlier defamatory remarks said against her by male figures in the play, said in private and in her absence.

'Commend me to my kind Lord.'

Desdemona's dying words to Othello, Act V, Scene ii, 126



Montano **MICHAEL JENN**

Montano is the governor of Cyprus who is replaced by **Othello** because of his skills as a war general. He accepts the new appointment, understanding the reasoning behind it. The drunken Cassio in Act II, Scene iii, wounds Montano and it is this deed, the malicious injuring of a former governor and a man who still commands a high status, that makes the implications of Cassio's actions so serious.

In Act V Montano is part of the group who observes the aftermath of Othello's murder of **Desdemona**, and it is he who pursues and captures **Iago**.



Emilia **MICHELLE FAIRLEY**

Emilia is viewed through her dual role as loyal and loving lady-in-waiting to **Desdemona** and manipulated wife of **Iago**.

When she discovers that Othello has murdered Desdemona, she boldly and fearlessly confronts him in his misguided actions. She valiantly exposes Iago's role in the events, which results in him stabbing and killing her in order to silence her.



Bianca **MARTINA LAIRD**

Bianca, a courtesan, is **Cassio's** lover. She demonstrates a genuine love and concern for Cassio. The play's central theme of jealousy cascades down into their relationship: in Act IV, Scene i she rages at Cassio, suspecting him of having another lover. Although, deep down, she knows that trust can never be a given in the relationship between a soldier and a courtesan.

Driving the narrative: the practical exploration of a sample of key speeches, soliloquies and scenes



Listed below are some of the key speeches, soliloquies and scenes that chart the shifts in Othello's character from Act I to Act III in the play, driven by Iago. Read through the extracts and consider the exercises which appear after the text.

Practical exercise: Act I, Scene iii

Othello contests the accusations made against him by Desdemona's father, Brabantio, that he stole her away through witchcraft.

Othello Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors,
 My very noble and approved good masters:
 That I have ta'en away this old man's daughter
 It is most true; true, I have married her.
 The very head and front of my offending
 Hath this extent, no more. Rude am I in my speech
 And little blest with the soft phrase of peace.
 And therefore little shall I grace my cause

In speaking for myself. Yet, by your gracious patience,
I will a round unvarnish'd tale deliver
Of my whole course of love, what drugs, what Charms,
What conjuration and what mighty magic—
For such proceeding I am charged withal—
I won his daughter.

I. iii.76-94

Later in the same scene, Othello confides in the Duke of Venice and the Senate, revealing the 'back story' to his proposal to Desdemona.

Othello Her father loved me, oft invited me,
Still question'd me the story of my life
From year to year — the battles, sieges, fortunes
That I have passed.
I ran it through, even from my boyish days
To th'very moment that he bade me tell it,
Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by flood and field,
Of hair-breadth scapes i'th' imminent deadly breach,
Of being taken by the insolent foe
And sold to slavery; of my redemption thence
And portance in my travailous history;
Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle,
Rough quarries, rocks and hills whose heads touch heaven
It was my hint to speak,—such was the process—
And of the cannibals that each other eat:
The Anthropophagi; and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders; This to hear
Would Desdemona seriously incline,
But still the house affairs would draw her thence,
Which ever as she could with haste dispatch
She'd come again, and with a greedy ear
Devour up my discourse. My story being done
She gave me for my pains a world of sighs,
She swore, in faith, 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange,
'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful;
She wish'd she had not heard it, yet she wish'd
That heaven had made her such a man
She loved me for the dangers I had pass'd
And I loved her that she did pity them.
This only is the witchcraft I have used.

I.iii.128-170



Practical Exercise

- Stand in a circle and read through the speech as a group, using all the punctuation marks - commas, semi-colons, colons and full stops - as indications of when the next person should take over. Do not worry about the full meaning of the speech at this stage, but just take a moment to share what you notice about Othello's use of language in the speech.
- Now repeat the exercise, this time just observing the semi-colons, colons and full stops. Repeat the exercise twice more, firstly just observing the colons and full stops, and finally just the full-stops. What does the structure of the language tell you about Othello's character and status within the Senate?
- Consider Othello's summary of his wooing of Desdemona, and the effects that it had on the two of them, in the lines: 'She loved me for the dangers I had pass'd/ And I loved her that she did pity them.' What does this communicate to an audience about his character and his understanding of Desdemona's character?
- Consider Iago listening to this speech in the shadows of the Senate room. What does the overall speech tell him about Othello's character? Is there a hint of weakness in it that he can capitalise on in the pursuit of his plans to destroy Othello?
- When you see the Donmar's production of OTHELLO, consider how Desdemona's defence of her decision to marry and her conduct in the scene compares with Othello's depiction of her in this speech.

Practical exercise: Iago's soliloquies

'It is as though Iago conceives of the world as a play, and himself as a stage-manager or dramatist, manipulating characters who do not know they are figures in a play he has devised.'

Russell Jackson in the programme note for OTHELLO

Iago's manipulative efforts to destroy Othello occupy the play's central action. He convinces Othello that his wife, Desdemona, is having a sexual affair with Cassio, his lieutenant.

Shakespeare lays down the motives for Iago's actions in the soliloquies that he gives this villainous character. Read through the soliloquies that are printed below to gain an understanding of how Iago's scheme to destroy Othello develops and drives the action of the play forward. After you have done this, refer to the practical exercises printed after the text.

Soliloquy 1: Iago reflects on how easy it is to get money from the fool, Roderigo. He goes on to plot his revenge against Cassio and Othello, motivated by military ambition: Othello has passed him over in favour of Cassio to be his lieutenant.

Iago Go to, farewell, put money in thy purse.
 Thus do I ever make my fool my purse:
 For I mine own gain'd knowledge should profane,
 If I would time expend with such a snipe
 But for my sport and profit. I hate the Moor
 And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets
 He's done my office. I know not if't be true,
 But I for mere suspicion in that kind
 Will do as if for surety. He holds me well,
 The better shall my purpose work on him.
 Cassio's a proper man: let me see now,
 To get his place, and to plume up my will
 In double knavery. How? How? let's see:
 After some time to abuse Othello's ear
 That he is too familiar with his wife.
 He hath a person and a smooth dispose
 To be suspected, framed to make women false.
 The Moor is of a free and open nature
 That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
 And will as tenderly be led by th' nose
 As asses are.
 I have't. It is engender'd! Hell and night
 Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.

Act 1, Scene iii, 380-402

Soliloquy 2: Iago develops his plan: he will 'abuse' Cassio to Othello and get credit from the general.

Iago If this poor trash of Venice, whom I trash
For his quick hunting, stand the putting on,
I'll have our Michael Cassio on the hip,
Abuse him to the Moor in the rank garb—
Make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me.
For making him egregiously an ass,
And practising upon his peace and quiet
Even to madness. 'Tis here, but yet confused:
Knavery's plain face is never seen till used.

Act II, Scene i, 298-307



Soliloquy 3: Iago plans to get Cassio drunk and disgrace himself and his rank.

Iago If I can fasten but one cup upon him,
With that which he hath drunk tonight already
He'll be as full of quarrel and offence
As my young mistress' dog. Now my sick fool, Roderigo,
Whom love hath turn'd almost the wrong side out,
To Desdemona hath tonight caroused
Potations pottle-deep, and he's to watch.
Three else of Cyprus, noble swelling spirits
That hold their honours in a wary distance,
The very elements of this warlike isle,
Have I tonight fluster'd with flowing cups,
And they watch too. Now 'mongst this flock of drunkards,
Am I to put our Cassio in some action
That may offend the isle. But here they come.
If consequence do but approve my dream
My boat sails freely, both with wind and stream.

Act II, Scene iii, 44-57

Soliloquy 4: Cassio, having disgraced himself and been demoted by Othello, has been persuaded by Iago to solicit the help of Desdemona in regaining his affection with Othello. Iago celebrates the success of the execution of his plans, and plots how Othello will witness, and jealously misconstrue, Desdemona's interest in Cassio.

Iago And what's he then that says I play the villain?
When this advice is free I give and honest,
Probal to thinking and indeed the course
To win the Moor again? For 'tis most easy
Th' inclining Desdemona to subdue
In any honest suit. She's framed as fruitful
As the free elements: and then for her
To win the Moor, were't to renounce his baptism,
All seals and symbols of redeemèd sin,
His soul is so enfetted to her love
That she may make, unmake, do what she list,
Even as her appetite shall play the god
With his weak function. How am I then a villain
To counsel Cassio to this parallel course
Directly to his good? Divinity of hell!
When devils will the blackest sins put on
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows
As I do now.

And by how much she strives to do him good
She shall undo her credit with the Moor—
So will I turn her virtue into pitch
And out of her own goodness make the net
That shall enmesh them all.

Act II, Scene iii, 327-353

Soliloquy 5: Iago takes possession of Desdemona's handkerchief.

Iago I will in Cassio's lodging lose this napkin
And let him find it. Trifles light as air
Are to the jealous confirmations strong
As proofs of holy writ. This may do something.
The Moor already changes with my poison:
Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons
Which at the first are scarce found to distaste
But with a little art upon the blood
Burn like the mines of Sulphur.

Act III, Scene iii, 326-334

Soliloquy 6: Iago convinces Othello that Cassio has been having an affair with Desdemona, causing Othello to fall in a trance.

Iago Work on,
My medicine, work! Thus credulous fools are caught,
And many worthy and chaste dames even thus,
All guiltless, meet reproach. — What ho! my lord!
My lord, I say! Othello!

Act IV, Scene i, 44-8



Practical Exercise

'He [Iago] is dangerous precisely because he doesn't appear evil, and doesn't judge his own actions. Use your imagination to connect to the language from Iago's point of view and you will quickly uncover his uncluttered, yet topsy-turvy view of all the qualities most of us value.'

Patsy Rodenburg²

- Divide into groups and each chose a soliloquy from 1-4 to work on.
- Read through the soliloquy, one line at a time, to familiarise yourself with the language.
- Now repeat this exercise, but just read the last two words in each line aloud. What does this tell you about Iago's thoughts?
- Go back to the soliloquy. Underline any words that are repeated and then circle the pronouns that appear. Also consider any rhyming words, single syllable words and complicated sentences in the soliloquy.

Take your findings back to the whole group. What discoveries have you made, as a class, about the progression of Iago's thought processes during these first four soliloquies?

As a class, repeat the process for soliloquies 5 and 6.



Observation point

When you see the Donmar's production of OTHELLO, consider the following points:

- How does Iago (Ewan McGregor) use pause in soliloquy 1 and what is his purpose, as a performer, in doing this? How is the impact of Iago's last line 'Hell and night/ Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light' magnified in significance in the Donmar's production?
- In soliloquy 4, how is Iago's success in shifting the fortunes of Cassio exemplified as he delivers the opening lines? How does Iago involve the audience in this soliloquy?
- How many times is Iago positioned on the outside of the action that he has set up? What is the cumulative effect of this?
- How many times is Iago complimented by other characters on the perceived virtues of his character during the play?
- Iago's character is however, also funny. The American actor, Edwin Booth (1833-1893) insisted that actors playing Iago should 'not sneer and glower', suggesting that 'the "light comedian" ... not the "heavy man" should play the part.'³ When watching the production, can you identify key scenes and moments when there is humour and a jocular spirit in the behaviour of Iago?



Practical exercise: Act III, scene iii

Othello and Iago have just seen Cassio and Desdemona leave the stage together. Iago begins to ask seemingly innocent questions about Cassio and warns Othello that he must be wary of jealousy, 'the green-ey'd monster'.

Within 250 lines of Othello's speech that opens this extract, Iago manages to inflame Othello by planting the idea in his mind that Desdemona and Cassio are having a sexual affair. Read through the extract and consider the exercises which appear after the text.

Othello Why — why is this?
Think'st thou I'd make a lie of jealousy
To follow still the changes of the moon
With fresh suspicions? No: to be once in doubt
Is once to be resolved. Exchange me for a goat,
When I shall turn the business of my soul
To such exsufficate and blown surmises,
Matching thy inference. 'Tis not to make me jealous
To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,
Is free of speech, sings, plays and dances well:
Where virtue is, these are more virtuous.
Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw
The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt,
For she had eyes, and chose me. No, Iago,
I'll see before I doubt, when I doubt, prove,
And on the proof, there is no more but this:
Away at once with love or jealousy!

Iago I am glad of this, for now I shall have reason
To show the love and duty that I bear you
With franker spirit: therefore, as I am bound,
Receive it from me. I speak not yet of proof:
Look to your wife, observe her well with Cassio.
Wear your eye thus, not jealous nor secure;
I would not have your free and noble nature
Out of self-bounty be abused: look to't.
I know our country disposition well—
In Venice they do let God see the pranks
They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience
Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown.

Othello Dost thou say so?

Iago She did deceive her father, marrying you,
And when she seem'd to shake, and fear your looks,
She loved them most.

Othello And so she did.

Iago Why, go to then:
 She that so young could give out such a seeming
 To seel her father's eyes up, close as oak—
 He thought 'twas witchcraft. But I am much to blame,
 I humbly do beseech you of your pardon
 For too much loving you.

Othello I am bound to thee for ever.

Iago I see this hath a little dash'd your spirits.

Othello Not a jot, not a jot.

Iago I' faith, I fear it has.
 I hope you will consider what is spoke
 Comes from my love. But I do see you're moved;
 I am to pray you not to strain my speech
 To grosser issues nor to larger reach
 Than to suspicion.

Othello I will not.

Iago Should you do so, my lord,
 My speech should fall into such vile success
 As my thoughts aimed not at: Cassio's my worthy friend.
 My lord, I see you're moved.

Othello No, not much moved.
 I do not think but Desdemona's honest.

Iago Long live she so; and long live you to think so.

Othello And yet how nature, erring from itself —

Iago Ay, there's the point: as, to be bold with you,
 Not to affect many proposèd matches
 Of her own clime, complexion and degree,
 Whereto we see, in all things, nature tends—
 Foh! one may smell in such a will most rank,
 Foul disproportion thoughts unnatural.
 But pardon me, I do not in position
 Distinctly speak of her, though I may fear

And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad
And live upon the vapour of a dungeon
Than keep a corner in the thing I love
For others' uses. Yet 'tis the plague of great ones,
Prerogated are they less than the base;
'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death—
Even then this forkèd plague is fated to us
When we do quicken.

Act III, Scene iii, 180-283



Practical Exercise

- Who and what is driving this scene?
- To what extent does Iago's manipulation of the rhythm of the lines in the scene mirror his manipulation of Othello?
- Note how many 'split lines' there are in the exchanges, that are shared by both characters. What is the dramatic effect of these split lines?
- Experiment with staging the scene to further communicate the ability of Iago to manipulate Othello.



Practical exercise: Act IV, Scene iii, The Willow Scene

During this scene, Desdemona prepares for bed with the assistance of her lady-in-waiting, Emilia. The cast and creative team of OTHELLO call this sequence the 'willow scene', because of the willow song that Desdemona sings during it. The song offers a foreboding of the forthcoming tragedy of Desdemona's murder: it is a song that was sung by an abandoned woman while she died.

During the scene Emilia offers the following speech on her view of the relationship between husbands and wives.

Emilia I do think it is their husbands' faults
If wives do fall: say, that they slack their duties,
And pour our treasures into foreign laps;
Or else break out in peevish jealousies,
Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us,
Or scant our former having in despite,
Why, we have galls: and though we have some grace,
Yet we have some revenge. Let husbands know
Their wives have sense like them: they see, and smell,
And have their palates both for sweet and sour
As husbands have. What is it that they do
When they change us for others? Is it sport?
I think it is. And doth affection breed it?
I think it doth. Is't frailty that thus errs?
It is so too: And have not we affections?
Desires for sport? and frailty, as men have?
Then let them use us well: else let them know,
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.

Act IV, Scene iii, 86-1003





Practical Exercise

- In pairs, read through the speech, underlining any key words or phrases that grab your attention. Read back those words and phrases to each other as a list. What do they tell you about Emilia's preoccupation in the speech?
- What is Emilia's view of the relationship between the sexes during the speech?
- Try staging the speech. Find a physical action for Emilia while delivering the speech.
- When you see the Donmar's production of OTHELLO, note the way that the willow scene is played in relation to real time. What does this bring to the scene for an audience?
- Consider the following quotation:

'In Othello three women, of three distinct social ranks, figure prominently in the plot. Desdemona is the daughter of one of Venice's most senior and influential citizens. Bianca is a Venetian courtesan – a woman of substance who supports herself and her household by her liaisons with men of rank (notably Cassio, Othello's second-in-command). Emilia is the wife of Othello's third-in-command, Iago, and personal maid to Desdemona. As women playing active roles in the community the three are occupationally distinct. All three are wrongfully accused of sexual misdemeanour in the course of the play; all three, though unequal in their rank-power, are equally vulnerable to a sexual charge brought against them.'

Lisa Jardine⁴

- When you see the Donmar's production of OTHELLO, consider how Desdemona (Kelly Reilly), Emilia (Michelle Fairley) and Bianca (Martina Laird) actively make a stand against the charges brought against them.



The play's setting and elements of design

'Be mindful that the Elizabethans knew that in Shakespeare the action was actor led.'

Michael Grandage

Act I of the play is set in Venice. Othello's place in Venetian society is important. Venice is a closed society, racist in its distrust of Othello as Brabantio's response to Desdemona's marriage demonstrates. This racial bias is exemplified through Brabantio's conviction that Desdemona could not possibly love 'the sooty bosom/ Of such a thing' (I.ii.70-71) because this would be 'against all rules of nature' (I.iii.101).

When Iago and Roderigo discuss Othello's marriage to Desdemona, they use offensively racist language, labelling Othello as 'an old black ram' (I.i.88), 'a Barbary horse' (I.i.111) and 'lascivious Moor' (I.i.126). The racially intolerant Venice that Shakespeare creates could be said to reflect the biases of English society at the time. In 1601 the government attempted to deport all of the 'Negars and Blackamores which [have] crept into this realm.'⁵ However, through Shakespeare's use of the Duke and the Senators, the audience are offered a society that offers a model of trust and humanity. The Duke orchestrates a collective response to the Turkish threat and offers Othello the opportunity to defend himself against Brabantio's accusations. This is a democratically organised senate where Iago will not thrive. By transporting the remaining acts of the play to Cyprus, Shakespeare offers us an environment isolated from the social and political codes of Venice, in which Iago can freely operate.

The Donmar's OTHELLO is effectively a bare stage production. The set is kept as simple as possible. Creative ways have been found to help the audience identify the two countries visited in the play.

The production is set in the year that it was believed to have been written, which is 1604 (there is a debate as to the actual year that Shakespeare wrote the play).

Michael Grandage believes that when a director sets an historical play in a period subsequent to its authorship, it is difficult for an audience to 'think back'; the mind doesn't work in this way. At the same time the production has been given its own modernity to make it feel right for our time. It has also been made to feel right for the time in which it has been set, and all the time in between.

Paul Constable, the production's lighting designer, has played a significant role in bringing the production alive. For the scenes set in Venice, a cold, dark effect has been created, making it a severe, austere place. There is a trough at the back of the stage containing water, and the light gives a sense of place by reflecting the water. This is drained away when the setting moves to Cyprus. The Senate scene is not staged, as it is traditionally, around a table. This scene is the first time that practical lighting is used, creating symmetry and order. A number of the characters, particularly Iago, stand on the outside – in the shadowy areas.

The setting for Cyprus has a colour palate of golds and bronzes and a flagstone floor, to create a sense of classicism. Whereas Venice is a tall, narrow place, lit dimly from below, Cyprus is blasted with light. The environment is one that the actors create by bringing on their own furniture and props.

The first big scene change is the move to Cyprus. A 'valarium' is used to transport us from Venice to Cyprus. The valarium is used to help us understand the nature of the journey; it is a large, canvas, sail like structure. The back wall of the Donmar, treated with gold and bronze, is seen for the first time when the light floods into this scene.

The valarium becomes the Roman awning that would have been used to enclose the Coliseum. The hot baking sun on the Mediterranean streets is created by a blast of light from above. This is a much brighter, more open and exposing world.

The play leads inexorably to Othello and Desdemona's bed chamber, which becomes scenically more specific in this production. After the fluidity of the previous scenes, the setting is dictated by the necessities for the scene: the bed is the first piece of essential furniture required in this production. It is the production's final resting place, and a tomb as well as a marital bed.

Period costume is used in this Donmar production. The majority of the costumes have been constructed for the production, with a few found pieces filtered in. To control the look of the world, the costume has been pared down. Bold patterns and colours have been avoided to create a clean palate. The costumes have been deliberately 'broken down' to appear lived in. In rehearsals, substitutes were used, then the actual costumes were introduced towards the end of the rehearsal period. Bronzes and golds are used in Cyprus; blacks in Venice.



Practical Exercise

The table below begins to list some of the design choices that have been made to show the contrasting worlds of Venice and Cyprus and to emphasise the production's central concerns and ideas. Read through the table and add further details to it after you have seen the Donmar's production of OTHELLO.

OTHELLO: Elements of design

	Venice	Cyprus
Setting	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Solid wooden doors2.3.4.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Moroccan style screens and soft furnishings2.3.4.
Lighting	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Dark, narrow, dimly lit2.3.4.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Blast with light, hot Mediterranean sun2.3.4.
Costume	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Predominantly black2.3.4.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Bronzes and golds2.3.4.
Sound and music	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Echoing effect of actors' voices2.3.4.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Penetrating sound of cicadas2.3.4.

Observation point

When you see the Donmar's production of OTHELLO, consider how do the elements of design, from set and costume to lighting and sound, contribute to the evocation of religion, in particular Christian notions of heaven and hell, sin, damnation and redemption, throughout the play.



Discussion Point

'The further the author recedes in time, the less relevant become his original intentions, the more different will the 'message', what Dante calls the 'moral' meaning of the text, become...At one time and in one kind of society, Othello may have been regarded as guilty of marrying across the race barrier and therefore violating a moral law; at another time, and another place, he might have been seen as the innocent victim of wicked manipulation, and then again as a jealous sexist fool. And while in their own time and their own place these views may have been widely shared because of the political and social situation, some individuals in the audience may have derived radically different meanings from the events and characters in Shakespeare's drama.'

Martin Esslin⁶

After you have seen the Donmar's production of OTHELLO, consider Martin Esslin's comments quoted above. What is the 'message' or 'moral meaning' of OTHELLO to you, as a young person living in the Britain of 2007?



A discussion with Michael Hadley (the Duke of Venice/Lodovico) and Tom Hiddleston (Cassio)

Q As the play opens, Cassio has been appointed Othello's lieutenant, while Iago remains his ancient. The Duke himself has the highest status of any other military character or character of State who we meet in the play. Can you talk about the hierarchy of Venetian society of the time, and any research you may have undertaken as a cast into the roles within it?

Michael: I did research the background to the role of the Duke during this period. There was a very complicated way of voting for a Duke, with several ballots of voting involved – a bit like electing a Pope.

Tom: The ancient is the flag bearer, a bit like the ensign at the front of the advancing army. It's a bit like the equivalent of playing in the front row of a rugby match: you might be in the front, but it's not the best position for the game. Chiwetel and I talked about what it was like to be a warrior and a leader of men, who had to prove themselves to be successful. We watched *Band of Brothers*, a film which is about leaders being born, not created. I chose not to believe Iago's speech in the opening scene, where he contends that Othello has chosen 'a great arithmetician' in choosing Cassio as his lieutenant, a man who has had no experience of soldering. In my interpretation of Cassio, I wanted it to look as if Othello had made the right choice.





Michael: You can't take that speech of Iago's as true; it is his warped opinion. It is only when he speaks to the audience that you know that what Iago is saying is true. Iago projects his own rage and corruption onto everyone else. He unlocks their rage. As he says of Othello's ultimate tragedy, 'I told him what I thought, and told no more/Than what he found himself to be apt and true.'

Tom: It is important that Cassio is younger than Iago. He has been 'fast-tracked' to the role of lieutenant.

Cassio and Desdemona are from the same world, the same society. They are familiar with the courtly language of their world. It is very believable that they could be friends.

Q The Duke greets Othello as 'Valiant Othello'. Did you discuss/create a 'backstory' to cement your relationship with Othello, prior to this first meeting with him on the stage?

Michael: Othello is the pre-eminent military leader. Without him, Venice would be in a quandary; he is their saviour – the number one warrior.

Q The Duke goes on to say that Othello is to be employed against 'the general enemy Ottoman.' How important is the war to the play's narrative?

Tom: The war is a brilliant plot device. When the characters arrive in Cyprus they have a huge party to celebrate winning the war. It gives the events in Cyprus a reason for starting.

Q In Act I. Scene iii, Brabantio's story undercuts the urgent business of state that the Duke has been addressing. How much of a challenge is it as an actor to move the trajectory of a scene in such a way?

Michael: The Duke promises Brabantio that he will sort out the truth. And it is like real life, isn't it? One real dilemma followed by another. Here we have the Duke juggling the public with the personal. Shakespeare writes so brilliantly. Here is the nation state in danger and the Duke's closest advisor, Othello, is facing personal degradation.

Q The Duke's language alternates between rhyming couplets and blank verse. How, as a performer, do you approach the delivery of the varying scansion?

Michael: I tend not to think about it. The language looks after itself; it is not an issue. It is what be-devils Shakespeare – this obsession with language. As an actor, you need to look at whatever drives the scene.

Q As he closes the meeting, the Duke says to Brabantio, 'If virtue no delighted beauty lack,/Your son-in-law is far more fair than black'. One of the many lines which could be perceived as equating the blackness of Othello's skin with all that is bad, and fairness with goodness. How was this addressed in rehearsals?

Michael: We did decipher the word play on 'fair' and 'black' as it appears in Sonnet number 127, 'In the old age black was not counted fair,/Or if it were it bore not beauty's name...' The terms 'black' and fair' can be read as dark or light skinned, or can mean beauty and evil. This sonnet is very obscure, but Shakespeare's language is greater than any interpretation that we can put on it.



Fundamentally, when Shakespeare first wrote this play, it was not a play about race, as exemplified by the Duke when he says to Othello, 'I think this tale would win my daughter too, ...', i.e. you can have my daughter, I have no issue with that. What it is, is a play about jealousy.

Tom: I've had this conversation with Chiwetel, who highlights Othello's own comments about himself, 'happily I am black.'

Q How pivotal is the scene where Cassio is demoted by Othello because of his drunken behaviour, to his emotional journey in the play?

Tom: When I first discussed the part of Cassio with Michael (Grandage), he said the drunkenness needs to have a panic attack that mirrors Othello's attack. Some of the things that Cassio says about alcohol could be in today's Evening Standard. The drunkenness unlocks Cassio; he is made extremely vulnerable in front of the man he respects most in the whole world – Othello. He almost wants to be Othello. He was the go between in Othello's courtship with Desdemona; he is dependent on Othello and is his heir apparent. Cassio is the first to fall; the big tree, Othello, falls later. Both have an innate integrity which is undermined by their trust in Iago.

Q Cassio's relationship with Bianca could be considered to be an echo of the main plot. What did you discover about the relationship during the rehearsal process?

Tom: It is interesting that Bianca exists. It shows that as a naval officer on the move, Cassio has sexual needs. In the text, it is clear that Bianca is a prostitute, and that she has fallen for Cassio. This strand is fed into the creative mix of the character of Cassio. We have made the relationship between them healthy and grounded. It is jealousy on a grounded level, rather than the ferocity of Othello's distorted jealousy that we see in the previous scene.

Q An emissary from Venice to Cyprus, Lodovico appears towards the end of the play, arriving in Cyprus just as Othello's madness approaches its climax. What is his function in the play?

Michael: Lodovico comes in as the voice of reason, a representative from the Venetian court. In Cyprus, Iago's influence can work its poison free of social or political affairs that might engage Othello's attention, and Desdemona cannot seek advice or intervention from other Venetian aristocrats. Lodovico is unable to prevent the catastrophe of Desdemona's murder, but in the final scene after Iago's duplicity has been exposed and Othello has committed suicide, Lodovico assumes the mantle of leadership.

Q Are there any key discoveries that you have made about OTHELLO during the rehearsal process?

Michael: The evilness of Iago. He suspects everyone of every sexual demeanour. It suggests that awful things have happened to him. Also, as in any Shakespeare play – you can't ever mine it enough, and any one group will mine it in a different way.

Tom: The sheer momentum of it. It's like starting to push a huge boulder down a hill. Once you've done that, an inexorable process takes place and you can't stop it.

Footnotes and bibliography

Footnotes

- 1 These ideas are explored by Russell Jackson in his programme note to OTHELLO
- 2 *Speaking Shakespeare*, Patsy Rodenburg, (Methuen, 2002), p. 290
- 3 *Quoted in Encyclopedia of Shakespeare*, Charles Boyce, Roundtable Press, 1990, p. 307
- 4 'Why should he call her Whore?: Defamation and Desdemona's case', *Reading Shakespeare Historically*, Lisa Jardine, (Routledge, 1996), p. 25)
- 5 *Quoted in Encyclopedia of Shakespeare*, Charles Boyce, Roundtable Press, 1990, p. 476.
- 6 *The Field of Drama*, Martin Esslin, (Methuen, 1987), pp 168-9

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Appendix

The Donmar schools matinee of OTHELLO is supported by the Noël Coward Foundation.

Chiwetel Ejiofor, who plays Othello, last performed at the Donmar in Noël Coward's THE VORTEX in 2002.

Noël Coward

Noël Coward was born in Teddington, Middlesex on 16 December 1899. He was born just in time to see the last Christmas of the old century, and it's due to his festive arrival that he was christened 'Noël'.

Despite his flamboyance in later life and his apparent ease amongst the top tier of society, Noël Coward actually had humble beginnings. He was brought up in suburban south London, the son of a failed piano salesman, Arthur Coward. His younger brother was a very ill child and died very young, and as a consequence Violet, his mother, was utterly devoted to the young Noël.

Depending on which source is consulted, Coward began his professional acting career between the ages of 9 and 12. It is clear however that he enjoyed performing from a very young age. Community concerts, school prize giving events and even for house guests (he would apparently fly into wild tantrums if he wasn't asked to perform in front of guests!). By the time he appeared in Peter Pan (1913) at the age of 12, Noël had established a modest reputation as a child actor. One reviewer described him as "bursting with remarkable talent". However, in later life Noël described himself as "one of the worst boy actors ever inflicted on the paying public".

Noël spent his late teens performing in touring theatre and in occasional West End roles. He had been writing and co-writing scripts since the age of 19, but it wasn't until 1920 that he found some success. His play I Leave it to You opened in the West End and even though it was a brief run the play, and Noël's lead role performance in it, were given encouraging reviews. Unfortunately, his age meant that producers were unwilling to take a risk with him. He also made a visit to America where he hoped to sell some of his early scripts to Broadway producers. This was an unsuccessful trip. Tired, and low on money Noël returned to England, thankfully to see his luck change. A producer of a small theatre in Hampstead was very interested in producing one of Noël's two new plays, Hay Fever and The Vortex, but he couldn't decide which one. According to Noël, Norman Macdermott, the producer, favoured Hay Fever. However, in Noël's own words "...as there was no good part for me in that, I managed to steer him over to The Vortex".

It wasn't until after World War Two that Noël Coward's work began to be unfashionable. He became seen as a playwright disconnected from the new post-war, serious world, a theatrical world that demanded more 'realism'. His plays were viewed as silly and light-hearted affairs. Coward took the opportunity to buy a house in Jamaica and indulge in his love for painting, as well as reinventing himself as a popular Las Vegas Cabaret star, but he certainly didn't retire. He still continued to pen plays, books, poems, songs and musicals, as well as appearing in the occasional film.

The 1960's saw a renewed interest in Coward and his work. No one enjoyed this peak more than Noël himself. He was suddenly in demand once more, on both sides of the Atlantic. This is a trend that remains today. Constant revivals of Noël Coward's work allow us to re-examine the beauty and wit of one of the century's greatest writers. The writer John Osborne memorably once said "the 20th Century would be incomplete without Noël Coward: he was simply a genius, and anyone who cannot see that should kindly leave the stage."

Noël Coward died on 26 March 1973 at his home in Jamaica.

For further information, visit www.noelcoward.com.



About the Donmar Warehouse

The Donmar Warehouse is an intimate (not for profit) 251 seat theatre located in the heart of London's West End. The theatre attracts almost 100,000 people to its productions a year. Since 1992, under the Artistic Direction of Michael Grandage and his predecessor, Sam Mendes, the theatre has presented some of London's most memorable theatrical experiences as well as garnered critical acclaim at home and abroad. With a diverse artistic policy that includes new writing, contemporary reappraising of European classics, British and American drama and music theatre, the Donmar has created a reputation for artistic excellence over the last 12 years and has won 25 Olivier Awards, 12 Critics' Circle Awards, 10 Evening Standard Awards and 10 Tony Awards for Broadway transfers.

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