

***Othello* – Aspects of Tragedy**

Act 2 Scene 2

- Herald's proclamation of peace and celebration
- Establishes the peace in Cyprus
 - = ironic – Iago's final words of the last scene make the audience wonder how long this peace will last
 - = ironic for Shakespearean audience in 1604 – they knew that Cyprus was taken by the Turks the following year
- **Intermingling of love and war**
 - Celebration of military success is also the celebration of O and D's wedding
 - = suggestion that matters of love and war can be combined
 - BUT – next scene holds violent interruption of wedding celebration – suggests otherwise

Act 2 Scene 3

- Opening: **Love and war continue to be intermingled and heighten the sense of impending tragedy** – O first instructs Cassio to meet him the next day to discuss professional matters, then leaves with D to consummate their marriage
 - *Michael...tomorrow with your earliest / Let me have speech with you*
 - – *Come, my dear love*
 - **Hyphen symbolises the inseparability of the two themes**
- **Irony** of opening
 - O and C's comments on Iago – reveal their gullibility and naivety to Iago's scheming
 - O: *Iago is most honest* – **intensifier** suggests O's complete trust in his ensign
 - C: *Iago hath direction what to do; / But notwithstanding with my personal eye / Will I look to't*
 - = implies that C will check on Iago and control his actions/rein in his behaviour if necessary
 - BUT – audience knows that Iago is in fact in control of Cassio – he has already singled him out as his victim
- Consummation of the marriage
 - *The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue / That profit's yet to come 'tween me and you*
 - = counters Iago's accusations of bestial sexuality in Act I – they have not focused on the sexual aspect of their love yet
 - = highlights the mutual affection of O+D

- Conversation of Cassio and Iago – **two contrasting images of Desdemona emerge**
 - Iago:
 - *She is sport for Jove* (god known for his sexual prowess) – implies her lascivious nature
 - *I'll warrant her full of game* (= sexual tricks)
 - *It [her eye] sounds like a parley to provocation*
 - = image of a promiscuous whore, focus on sexuality
 - Cassio:
 - A most exquisite lady
 - A most fresh and delicate creature
 - A inviting eye, and yet methinks right modest
 - *She is indeed perfection*
 - = positive image of a virtuous, faithful lover
 - = the **repetition of the superlative most** underlines her superior virtue
 - = **foreshadows the choice Othello will have to make about his view of D when Iago poisons his mind**
 - = **sets up the tragic fall of Othello** – audience knows that at this point he shares Cassio's image of his wife, but we have witnessed enough of Iago's scheming that we know he will succeed in corrupting O's faith in D
- Iago's first soliloquy
 - = likens him to the **Machiavellian villain** – he reveals his scheming to the audience
 - my sick fool Roderigo
 - *fool* = shows that Iago only uses R as his puppet and abuses his gullibility for his own ends
 - **possessive pronoun my** – suggests that I views R as an object in his possession, underlines the power I has over R
 - References to the *warlike isle*
 - = reminder of the **symbolic setting**
 - = **ironic**
 - = island's potential for conflict is turned into a personal conflict by Iago at this very moment
 - = he will make the currently peaceful island *warlike*
 - Reinforces the sense that **fate** is on Iago's side
 - If consequence do but approve my dream / My boat sails freely, both with wind and steam
 - = uses the **metaphor** of a boat that is favoured by the wind to refer to Iago's plan of revenge
 - = creates a **link to Iago's arrival on Cyprus** – on this occasion fate literally helped his boat to sail more quickly
 - = creates a **sense of inevitability** around Iago's plan bearing fruits – **enhances the sense of tragedy**

- Drunken episode between Cassio and Iago – a **device of comedy that evokes laughter** but also **dreadful anticipation of tragedy**
 - Comic devices:
 - Iago's ridiculous drinking song – C's response: *'Fore God, an excellent song.*
 - Genre context: resembles the secret merry drinking and revelling of the clownish characters in Olivia's house in Shakespeare's comedy *Twelfth Night*
 - Iago's callous language
 - C's protestations of his soberness while we can imagine a performance that will prove the opposite (we know from Iago's comments that C only needed one more drink to get drunk) – *you must not think then that I am drunk*
 - BUT – comic interlude increases the tension and audience's dreadful anticipation – we know of Iago's plan and are awaiting the moment when the comedy will turn into a serious fight and lead to C's fall from grace
- Iago's manipulation of Montano
 - Description of Cassio: *He is a soldier fit to stand for Caesar*
 - **Contrast to Act 1 Scene 1** – here Iago compared C to a prattling spinster who has no knowledge of affairs of war
 - = reveals I's **skills of deception**
 - *I fear the trust Othello puts in him [...] will shake this island*
 - = **Irony** – the audience in fact fear the trust Othello puts in Iago!
 - = **Foreshadowing tragedy** – Othello's initial trust in Cassio is subverted into suspicion by Iago and will *shake* Othello's mind into conflict
- **Conflict and fight** between Cassio, Roderigo and Montano
 - = **a dramatic device that adds pace and impact** – a sudden, shocking event for the audience
 - = interrupts the consummation of the marriage, the only time that O and D have been alone in the play so far – **war and love have become entangled**
 - O enters from his bedroom and restores order
 - *Look if my gentle love be not raised up!* – even D enters
 - *'Tis the soldier's life / To have their balmy slumbers waked with strife* – line states the **inseparable nature of private and professional matters**
 - Iago: *The General's wife is now the General* – boundaries between worlds of love and war are beginning to blur
 - BUT: Couple still remain happy at this point
 - *All's well now, sweeting; come away to bed* – tender, affectionate
 - **Contrast to Act 4 Scene 3: *Get you to bed on th' instant. Dismiss your attendant there.*** – brutal, inconsiderate – he is about to murder her
- Presentation of Othello – **TURNING POINT**
 - At start: we see his noble, civilised self
 - *Are we turned Turk?* – **Rhetorical question** points to his incredulity at his subjects' loss of their civil manners

- *For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl*
 - = sets Christian values of civilisation opposite *barbarous*, savage behaviour
 - **Plosive alliteration** stresses O's contempt for such behaviour
 - BUT = he begins to lose his self-control
 - *My blood begins my safer guides to rule*
 - *Passion having my best judgement collied / Assays to lead the way*
 - = O's anger takes hold of him and clouds his rational judgement
 - = **Personification of his blood and emotions – suggests that they take almost human-like control over his body and mind**
 - = also reflected in his language and sentences
 - Former **poetic, sophisticated language** – now debased by **swear words**
 - *By heaven*
 - *Zounds*
 - **Short, disjointed sentences** – suggest his beginning fracturing of his control
 - *What, how now, ho! From whence ariseth this?*
 - Number of **questions** betrays a loss of control
 - Language is **monosyllabic**, sounds basic – *Give me to know how this foul out began, who set it on*
 - AND: Othello begins to act rashly
 - Trusts Iago before his lieutenant
 - Immediately dismisses Cassio without hearing his defence and with strong finality – *But never more be officer of mine*
 - When Desdemona enters, O's anger flares up even more and he becomes savage – *I'll make thee an example*
 - = possible **hint at O's hamartia** – his trust in Iago OR his passion ruling over his rational thoughts
 - = **O's tragic development has been set in motion** – audience glean the **potential for tragedy in O's character** and get a sense of how Iago will manipulate him
- Iago's deception:
 - *I had rather have this tongue cut from my mouth / Than it should do offence to Michael Cassio*
 - = creates an image of loyalty, a guise of reluctance
 - BUT – in fact, this is a blatant betrayal of Cassio – Iago deliberately uses his 'silence' to point his finger at him
- At the same time as Othello's cool wavers, Iago's **dominance as a villain** is asserted
 - **Three soliloquies** throughout the scene
 - = give impression that I is in full control of the scene he has created on stage
 - = makes audience I's confidante – just as Iago tells characters on stage how to read events, he tells the audience and ensnares us in his web
 - **STRUCTURE: Final rhyming couplets shows Iago's progress**
 - Act I Sc 3

- *It is engendered. Hell and night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light* – the plan has been conceived, but it has yet to be put into action
- Act 2 Sc 1
 - *'Tis here but yet confused / Knavery's plain face is never seen till used* – the plan is ripening but not yet fully structured
- Act 2 Sc 3
 - *Ay, that's the way / Dull not device by coldness and delay* – Iago is now assured of what he is doing
- Different characters assert Iago's honesty
 - O:
 - *Honest Iago*
 - *Iago, thy honesty and love doth mince this matter*
 - C: *Good night, honest Iago*
 - I: *As I am an honest man*
 - = at a time when **Iago's first deception** is played out, several characters are already fooled by him
- Iago identifies weaknesses in those around him and uses them against them
 - C – uses his inability to hold a drink
 - *If I can fasten but one cup on him*
 - D – uses her goodness to destroy her
 - *So I will turn her virtue into pitch*
 - = white / innocent becomes black / spoiled
 - **Images of entrapment** – show that characters cannot escape Iago – his success is inevitable
 - *His soul is so enfettered in her love*
 - *Make the net that shall enmesh them all*
- Language suitable to a villain
 - *I'll pour this pestilence into his ear* – **language of poison, confidence in his ability to persuade verbally**
 - *When devils will the blackest sins put on, / They do suggest at first with heavenly shows / As I do now* – **likens himself to the devil**
- Roderigo – **between victim and villain**
 - Victim:
 - *My sick fool Roderigo, whom love hath turned almost the wrong side out* – a failed lover who has fallen prey because of his exaggerated love of D
 - *My money almost spent* – a wealthy landowner has been driven to financial ruin by Iago's machinations
 - *I have been tonight exceedingly well cudgelled* – he has been physically assaulted
 - = preparation for his **final display as a victim when Iago betrays and kills him**

- Villain:
 - Intentions – he plans to cuckold Othello and sleep with Desdemona, is ready to kill another person to achieve his aim
 - Lets himself be led by the play's master villain – Iago's imperatives to Roderigo abound in every encounter between them and show that R is controlled by a villain