

## ***Othello* – Aspects of Tragedy**

### Act 5 Scene 1

- Scene mirrors other key scenes in the play
  - Opening scene
    - = similar to this Iago and Roderigo are plotting at night
    - = creates the impression that the play has come full circle and the end is inevitably drawing near
  - Act 2 Scene 3 – the other ‘fight scene’ – BUT: Othello’s differing reactions are significant
    - Act 2 Sc 3 – Othello interferes with the fight, appeals to the soldiers’ morality
    - Act 5 Sc 1 – Othello stands back and watches the fight, is part of the plot to kill Cassio
    - = reminds us how far he has fallen and that he has lost his previous nobility and ‘greatness of soul’
- Scene is framed by Iago drawing attention to the importance of this night
  - *It makes us or it mars us*
  - *This is the night that either makes me, or fordoes me quite*
  - Effects:
    - = creates anticipation in the audience to find out the result for Iago
    - = creates anticipation for the climax of the play – the killing scene
    - BUT – also the first time that Iago even considers the opportunity that he might fail – the parallel constructions in both sentences (e.g. either...or...) suggest that events could go either way and that he no longer has the control to make his own fate
- Setting – night time – symbolic
  - = creates a sense of confusion and inability to see – this is reflected in the repeated short questions and fragmented conversations that reveal the evident confusion of the characters during the fight
  - = fitting for the confused fight that ensues
  - = also fitting to remind audience that the villain’s dark purposes that are mirrored in the setting are at play here
- Iago – opening suggests he is in control and manipulates R one more time
  - Abundance of imperatives – suggest I’s dominance in the relationship
  - *Every way makes my gain* – I identifies himself as the Machiavellian villain who does not care what the means are (in this case the deaths of two men!) to achieve his ends
- Othello’s short monologue:
  - = increases the impression that he is growing mad – like in Act 4 Sc 1, Othello views killing as an act of justice (*brave Iago, honest and just, that hath such noble*

*sense of thy friend's wrong!* – mirrors *The justice of it pleases* when O refers to killing D in their marriage bed)

- *Thy bed, lust-stained, shall with lust's blood be spotted*
  - = **image of extreme violence** – *lust's blood* refers to O's thirst and passion for revenge, reminding us that he applies his skills as a soldier to solve his problems as a husband as he can no longer differentiate between both
  - = **image also resembles the key symbol of the handkerchief** that is spotted with red dots – the prop that has wrenched O and D apart
- Iago – again presented as a **stage manager and actor**
  - = first makes use of the confusion of the fight to wound Cassio, then swiftly exits
  - = when he re-enters, he acts innocent and uses props to appear more convincing
    - *Enter Iago, with a light* (= as if he has just got out of bed and wishes to see what is going on)
    - *Comes in his shirt, with lights and weapons* – Iago has adjusted his dress to create the impression that he has been undressed and asleep
  - = in the later part of the scene – Iago cleverly incriminates Bianca to divert attention from his own involvement in the scene and from killing R
    - = immediately **states her involvement as fact** – *I do suspect this trash to be a party in this injury*
    - = he uses **leading questions** to convince the bystanders of her guilt – *Look you pale? Do you perceive the gastness of her eye?* – he instructs his onstage 'audience' (Ludovico, Gratiano, Emilia) how to read Bianca's looks and manipulates them
- **Heavy irony** in the scene
  - Ludovico: *These may be counterfeits* – he refers to the people fighting, but is unaware that Iago is indeed a fraudster who has created the whole scenario
  - Iago: *What villains have done this?* – Cassio: *I think that one of them is hereabout*
    - Cassio – refers to Roderigo
    - BUT – Irony – it is indeed Iago, the tragic villain, who is also present and who has in fact 'done this' – Cassio is totally unaware of how close he has come to the truth
- **Role of women in this scene – underlines their helplessness and their role as victims**
  - Bianca – *I am no strumpet, but of life as honest as you that thus abuse me*
    - = she is absolutely correct – like Emilia, the only purpose of her presence is to support her man (Cassio)
    - BUT – nobody believes her – instead she is false accused of dishonesty and plotting
    - Iago's **crude insults** to her are accepted by all bystanders without question – reminder that in a patriarchal world, women become the puppets and objects of men
  - Emilia's reaction – she immediately supports her husband in his accusation of Bianca (*O, fie upon thee, strumpet!*)
    - = sign that he has successfully manipulated her over time and that despite her level-headedness she has fallen prey to him?

- = particularly striking after her passionate speech about gender equality in the previous scene
- BUT – more signs that Iago's plans are beginning to unravel
  - He fails to orchestrate Cassio's death – suggestion that his luck is running out? Only manages to injure Cassio – this leads to C being able to explain his possession of the handkerchief in Act 5 Sc 2!
  - Roderigo – although too late, he is the first character who sees Iago for what he is: *Inhuman dog!*