In Venice, Rodriguez complains to Iago that, despite the money he's given Iago to help him woo Desdemona, she's eloped with the Moorish general Othello. Iago responds that he too hates Othello, for whom he works as a standard-bearer: Othello chose Cassio, rather than Iago, to be his lieutenant. The two men go to the home of Desdemona's father, the senator Brabantio, and rouse him with graphic descriptions of his daughter having sex with the Moor. Brabantio, enraged, interrupts Othello as he receives an urgent message from the Duke of Venice, and accompanying Othello see the Duke. In front of the Duke, Brabantio accuses Othello of having used magic to seduce Desdemona. Othello responds that it was stories of his exciting life history and military bravery that won Desdemona. When summoned, Desdemona supports Othello's story. Brabantio grudgingly agrees to Desdemona's marriage, but demands that Cassio be merciful to Cassio to make Othello suspect that Desdemona was cheating on him with Cassio. Othello, takes the bait, repeatedly praising Iago for his honesty. Later, when Desdemona accidentally drops a handkerchief that Othello had given to her as a love-token, Emilia gives it to Iago, who had long ago asked her to steal it for him. Iago then plants it in Cassio's room.

Othello, upset, demands that Iago show him proof of Desdemona's infidelity. Iago responds that he has heard Cassio fantasize lewdly about Desdemona in his sleep and that he has seen Cassio wipe his mouth with Desdemona's handkerchief. Iago promotes Cassio to the status of lieutenant and orders him to kill Cassio within three days. Othello then goes to Desdemona's room, and asks her for the handkerchief. Desdemona, who had been searching for the handkerchief, admits she can't find it. Othello storms off. Meanwhile, Cassio's mistress, the prostitute Bianca, comes to his quarters. Cassio asks her to make a copy of a handkerchief he's recently found in his room, because he admires it. Iago continues to spur Othello's jealousy. When he reports that Cassio has admitted to sleeping with Desdemona, Othello falls into an epileptic fit. Iago urges Othello to hide while he questions Cassio about Desdemona. In fact, he asks Cassio about Bianca, causing Cassio to laugh. Watching from afar, Othello grows increasingly furious. Then, Bianca shows up, and throws Desdemona's handkerchief at Cassio, accusing him of having it from another whore. After Cassio and Bianca leave, Iago easily persuades Othello to kill Desdemona. Iago promises to take care of Cassio himself. He then convinces Rodriguez that Cassio were to die, Othello would have to remain in Cyprus, leaving Desdemona in Venice for Rodriguez. Iago then convinces Rodriguez to wait outside Bianca's house that night and kill Cassio when he leaves.

That night, Iago sets Rodriguez up to kill Cassio as planned. When Cassio exits Bianca's house, Rodriguez attacks him; both are wounded. Overhearing Rodriguez's cries for help, Othello believes that Cassio is dead and is impressed by Iago's loyalty. Meanwhile, Iago goes to Bianca's; finding Cassio wounded, he stabs Rodriguez, killing him (and thus assuring that his secret will not be revealed). Iago then calls the others, including Bianca, whom he arrests, accusing her of having conspired with Rodriguez. While this is going on, Othello arrives at Desdemona's chamber. Enchanted by her beauty, he nonetheless resists her pleas to spare her life, and he smoothes her with a pillow. Emilia arrives to tell Othello that Rodriguez is dead and Cassio alive, when she hears Desdemona's dying cries. When Emilia demands why Othello has killed Desdemona, Othello explains how Iago proved to him that Desdemona slept with Cassio. As Montana, Iago, and Gratiano, a relative of Brabantio's all arrive, Emilia accuses Iago of lying and explains that she stole this from Desdemona at her husband's behest. Othello attacks Iago. In the uproar, Iago stabs and kills Emilia, then flees. Montana and Gratiano disarm Othello, then chase down Iago. When he is dragged back in their custody, Othello wounds him before being disarmed again. Letters found on Rodriguez's corpse reveal the full extent of Iago's plots; he himself refuses to explain himself. Othello draws a hidden dagger and, after a speech, kills himself.

Catholic sentiment in England and English fears of invasion by the Spanish. In fact, England maintained independent trade relationships with “Moorish” Northern Africa, despite Spanish and Portuguese protest. The English slave trade also brought blacks to Europe, from mid-sixteenth century onward. Queen Elizabeth herself founded The Barbary Company, formally institutionalizing this trade; in addition, she received a delegation of Moroccan diplomats in 1600. However, the English still felt a strong suspicion of Islam: Elizabeth issued a decree expelling Moors from Africa and Spanish “Moriscos” from the boundary of England in 1599 and 1601.

Extra Credit

Moor or less? In Elizabethan England, the term “Moor” could be used to refer to a wide range of non-European persons, including black Africans, North Africans, Arabs, and even Indians. References to Othello’s origins throughout the play are contradictory and ambiguous. Iago calls Othello “a ‘Moorish’ Captain” (1.1.110). Barbary was an area in Africa between Egypt and the Atlantic Ocean. Rodriguez, however, calls him “thick-lips” (1.1.65-6), suggesting that he may come from further south on the African continent. Brabantio calls him “sooty” (1.2.70). Othello, along with numerous other characters, refers to himself as “black.” It is impossible to know now exactly what Shakespeare or his audience would have thought a “Moor” is.

Author Bio

William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, on April 23, 1564. He died in London on April 23, 1616. Shakespeare is regarded as the greatest writer in the English language, and his plays and sonnets are considered some of the finest works of literature ever written. His plays were first performed in the Elizabethan era, and his most famous works include Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Macbeth, and Othello. Shakespeare was a prolific writer, and his works continue to be performed and studied today. His legacy is a testament to the enduring power of the human spirit and the universal themes of love, death, and human nature.
Michael Cassio – A young, charming, and handsome soldier, whom Othello promotes to the rank of lieutenant, over the more experienced Iago. Cassio is loyal to Othello and friendly with Desdemona, though he’s unkink to the prostitute Bianca, who seems to love him. While intelligent, he is not cunning, and Iago easily ensnare the unwitting Cassio in a plot to convince Othello that Desdemona has cheated on him with Cassio.

Roderigo – A long-rejected suitor of Desdemona, who seeks to woo her with jewels through the Iago as. Like Othello, Roderigo trusts Iago and is duped by him. Otherwise, Roderigo shares none of Othello’s noble characteristics.

Brabantio – A senator in Venice and Desdemona’s father. At first enraged by Desdemona’s elopement with Othello, he does eventually grant a grudging blessing to their marriage. But his blessing never seems heartfelt, and he dies of grief shortly after their departure for Cyprus (and before any of the tragedies of the play occur).

Emilia – Iago’s wife and Desdemona’s friend and serving woman. Although Emilia is far less idealistic about marriage and the world in general than Desdemona is, she is loyal to her mistress. Though she steals Desdemona’s handkerchief for Iago, she doesn’t know else anything about Iago’s plot. In fact, when she learns of his plot, she reveals Iago’s duplicity, and he kills her for it.

Bianca – A prostitute in Cyprus, who expresses real affection for Cassio. He, however, only mocks her.

Duke of Venice – The official authority in Venice, the Duke has great respect for Othello as a military man and, unlike the other residents of Venice, does not betray any racial prejudice against Othello and, in fact, is unsurprised that Desdemona fell in love with him. It is the Duke who sends Othello to lead the Venetian mission to defend Cyprus against the Turks.

Lodovico – A relative of Brabantio’s, Lodovico acts as an emissary, bringing letters from Venice to Cyprus. He is present on the island for the full unfolding of the tragedy.

Montana – The governor or Cyprus before Othello’s arrival.

Gratiano – Akinsman of Brabantio who accompanies Lodovico from Venice to Cyprus.

Clown – Othello’s fool/servant. Although he appears in only two short scenes, his riddling language reflects Othello’s own language as the Moor descends into jealous madness.

### Themes

In LitCharts, each theme gets its own corresponding color, which you can use to track where the themes occur in the work. There are two ways to track themes:

- Refer to the color-coded bars next to each plot point throughout the Summary and Analysis sections.
- Use the ThemeTracker section to get a quick overview of where the themes appear throughout the entire work.

#### Prejudice

The most prominent form of prejudice on display in Othello is racial prejudice. In the very first scene, Roderigo and Iago disparage Othello in explicitly racial terms, calling him, among other things, “Barbary horse” and “thick lips.” In nearly every case, the prejudiced characters use terms that describe Othello as an animal or beast. In other words, they use racist language to try to define Othello not only as an outsider to white Venetian society, but as being less human and therefore less deserving of respect. Othello himself seems to have internalized this prejudice. On a number of occasions he describes himself in similarly unflattering racial terms. And when he believes that he has lost his honor and mankind through Desdemona’s supposed unfaithfulness, he quickly becomes the kind of un-rational animal or monster that the white Venetians accuse him of being.

Yet racial prejudice is not the only prejudice on display in Othello. Many characters in the play also exhibit misogyny, or hatred of women, primarily focused on women’s honesty or dishonesty about their sexuality. Several times, Othello’s age is also a reason for insulting him. In all of these cases, the characters displaying prejudice seek to control and define another person, or group who frighten them. In other words, prejudice works as a kind of strategy to identify outsiders and insiders and to place or group who frighten them. In other words, prejudice seek to control and define another person, or group who frighten them. In other words, prejudice seek to control and define another person, or group who frighten them. In other words, prejudice seek to control and define another person, or group who frighten them. In other words, prejudice seek to control and define another person, or group who frighten them. In other words, prejudice seek to control and define another person, or group who frighten them.

#### Jealousy

Iago refers to jealousy as the “green-eyed monster.” As this metaphor suggests, jealousy is closely associated with the theme of appearance and reality. For instance, at one point Othello demands that Iago provide “ocular proof” of Desdemona’s infidelity—he demands to see reality. But Iago instead provides the circumstantial evidence of the handkerchief, which Othello, consumed by his jealousy, accepts as a substitute for “ocular proof.” Othello’s jealousy impedes his ability to distinguish between reality and appearance. While the prejudiced characters display their prejudice in a black and white manner, based on their race, Othello’s obvious honor and intelligence makes these attacks obviously ridiculous. Yet when Othello is overcome by jealousy, he does become beast-like, falling into epileptic fits that rob him of the ability to speak intelligibly.

Othello is also not the only character in Othello to feel jealousy. Both Iago and Roderigo act to destroy Othello out of jealousy, with disastrous consequences.

#### Womanhood and Sexuality

Two contrasting images of womanhood dominate Othello: the virtuous and loyal woman, or Madonna, embodied by Desdemona; and the whore, embodied, to a certain extent by Bianca. Yet over the course of the play, it becomes clear that these two different ways of describing women don’t actually apply to real women. Instead, they are male fantasies imposed on women—ideals that men want women to fulfill, and roles that women therefore purposefully play for men. For instance, Desdemona often describes her devotion to Othello in front of other people, underscoring that, even though she does love him very deeply, she is to a certain extent playing the role of the virtuous wife. Iago then stokes Othello’s jealousy in part by forcing Othello to realize that there is no way for a man to tell the difference between a truly virtuous wife and one who is just playing the role of virtuous wife while actually acting as a whore and being unfaithful.

Meanwhile, Iago’s wife, Emilia, complicates the simple contrast between the Madonna and the whore. Initially, she wants to please her husband—and does so by stealing Desdemona’s handkerchief, knowing that he has long harbored it. Yet she is not wholly loyal, and even tells Desdemona in 4.3 that she believes many women, including herself, would cheat on their husbands except in certain circumstances. And, finally, she proves her own independent virtue by defending Desdemona’s virtue and revealing her husband’s crimes in the process. So while Othello’s image of womanhood is, therefore, often defined by men in terms of pure virtue or voracious and deceptive sexuality, the play ultimately shows that real women are far more complex.

#### Symbols

Symbols are shown in red text whenever they appear in the Plot Summary and Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

### The Handkerchief

In European medieval and renaissance love poetry, the handkerchief is typically a symbol for a woman’s romantic favor. For instance, there was a particular ritual in which a lady would drop her handkerchief for a knight to pick up and keep as a token of her regard. The handkerchief that Othello gives Desdemona is, similarly, a love-token and therefore a symbol of their love. But the handkerchief, which originally belonged to an Egyptian sorcerer, also comes to symbolize the illusions that Iago is “casting” through his plotting and subterfuge.
Summary and Analysis

The color-coded bars in Summary and Analysis make it easy to track the themes through the work. Each color corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section. For instance, a bar of indicates that all five themes apply to that part of the summary.

Act 1, scene 1

On a street in Venice, Italy, Rodrigo, a nobleman, and Iago are in the middle of an argument. Rodrigo has paid Iago a lot of money to help him win the hand of Desdemona. Yet he has just learned that Desdemona has eloped with Othello, the Moorish (North African) general under whom Iago serves.

Iago assures Rodrigo that he hates Othello, and explains that Othello recently passed him over for a promotion to lieutenant despite the fact that he was Othello’s ancient (standard bearer) and had the recommendations of three leading men of Venice. Instead, Othello promoted Michael Cassio, a man who in Iago’s estimation is just a “splicer” (1.1.23) military theorist with no practical experience in fighting or leading men.

Iago then adds that while he currently pretends to serve Othello, he is in fact just looking out for his own self-interest: “In following him I but follow myself [...] I am not what I am” (1.1.57, 64).

Iago and Rodrigo go to the house of Brabantio, a senator and Desdemona’s father. They shout from the street that Brabantio has been robbed. Brabantio comes to the window, but at first doesn’t believe them because he recognizes Rodrigo, whom he has recently told to stop hanging around his house and pursuing Desdemona. But then Iago, who doesn’t give his name and whom Brabantio doesn’t recognize, graphically describes Othello and Desdemona having sex—he says that “an old black ram is tupping your white ewe” (1.1.88-89), calling Othello a “Barbary horse” (1.1.110), and adds that “your daughter and the Moor are making the beast with two backs” (1.1.118).

Brabantio goes to search his house for his daughter, worried because he has had a dream (1.1.140) anticipating these events. Iago takes the chance to leave in order to keep his plot against Othello secret. Brabantio emerges from his house without finding Desdemona. Furious, lamenting his life as wasted, Brabantio and his men arrive. Iago, a nobleman, and Othello’s ancient (standard bearer) and had the recommendations of three leading men of Venice. Instead, Othello promoted Michael Cassio, a man who in Iago’s estimation is just a “splicer” (1.1.23) military theorist with no practical experience in fighting or leading men.

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As discussion turns back to fighting off the Turks, the Duke says that Othello must go to Cyprus to lead its defense. Though the Duke at first suggests that Desdemona stay in Venice with her father, Brabantio, Othello, and Desdemona all object, and the Duke says that she may go with Othello.

Brabantio exits, but not before warning Othello to watch Desdemona—since she disobeys her father, she might disobey her husband.

Because Othello must leave for Cyprus that night, he decides that Desdemona should follow after him in the care of Iago, and asks Iago to have his wife attend Desdemona. Othello and Desdemona then exit to spend their last few hours together before Othello must depart.

The men turn out to be Cassio and servants of the Duke of Venice, sent to bring Othello to meet with the Duke regarding an urgent military issue in Cyprus (an island protectorate of Venice).

Iago then mentions to Cassio that Othello has married. But before he can say who Othello has wed, Rodrigo along with Brabantio and his men arrive. Brabantio states that Othello must have enchanted Desdemona, or else why would she have gone “to the sooty bosom of such a thing as thou” (1.2.70-71). He orders his men to seize Othello.

Othello is unfazed, tells everyone on both sides to put up their arms, and informs Brabantio that he has been called to meet with the Duke on state business. Brabantio decides to accompany Othello to the Duke and air his grievance there.

Act 1, scene 3

The Duke of Venice meets with his senators about a Turkish invasion of Cyprus. They manage to see through a Turkish ploy to make it look as if the Turks will attack Rhodes instead of Cyprus. Then the Duke and the Senators discuss how to repel the Turkish attack on Cyprus.

Othello and Brabantio enter along with their men. Othello demands that they cease discussing state business and instead deal with the fact that his daughter has been corrupted by spells and potions so that she would marry a man she would never otherwise have considered. The Duke promises to help Brabantio prosecute the man who has seduced Desdemona, but when he learns that the accused man is Othello he gives Othello a chance to defend himself.

Othello admits that he married Desdemona. But he denies using any magic to win her love, and says that Desdemona will support his story. They send for her. As they wait for Desdemona to arrive, Othello says that Brabantio used to invite him to his house to hear his life story, with all its dramatic tales of travel, battle, and valor. These stories, Othello says, won Desdemona’s love. The Duke comments that he thinks his own daughter might be won over by Othello’s story.

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Iago and Roderigo are left alone. Roderigo, convinced his chances with Desdemona are now hopelessly lost, talks of drowning himself. Iago mocks Roderigo for such silly sentimentality. Roderigo responds that he can’t stop himself from feeling so miserable, but Iago disagrees, saying that a person can control himself by sheer force of will. He tells Roderigo to follow them to Cyprus, where he will make sure that Desdemona will end up with him—for a price. Roderigo exits.

Alone, Iago delivers a soliloquy in which he says again that he hates the Moor. He notes that there are rumors that Othello has slept with his wife, Emilia, and while he isn’t at all sure that the rumors are true, he’ll act as if they’re true. He says that he will take Roderigo’s money, and decides that he will convince Othello that Cassio is having an affair with Desdemona, and in so doing also get the position of lieutenant. He adds that Othello has a “free and open nature” and therefore thinks that anyone who seems honest actually is honest, and that he will use this trait to lead Othello by the nose.

Iago lays out his plans to deceive the other characters, putting him, self in the role of “director” of a kind of play within the play. While he suspects that Othello has slept with his own wife, he seems relatively indifferent to whether or not this is true. Iago derives his sense of self, his manhood, from his ability to manipulate others, rather than sexual pride. He suggests that Othello’s weakness is that he doesn’t understand that appearance can hide reality. Not also that Iago seems to hold no racial prejudice against Othello at all. He just uses prejudice against Othello when it’s helpful to him.

Iago tells Rodgerio that Desdemona is bound to tire of Othello, and wants instead someone younger, more handsome, and better-mantered. He says that it is obvious who this man will be—Cassio, whom he describes to Roderigo as a knave and posturer who is likely to do exactly what he wants.

In fact, Iago says, Desdemona already loves Cassio, and he asks if Roderigo noticed them touching hands. Roderigo didn’t, but says it was just courtesy. Iago convinces him otherwise, and further advises Roderigo to provoke Cassio into a fight with him that night. He says that the people of Cyprus will then demand that Cassio be replaced, and in the process remove an obstacle that separates Roderigo from Desdemona. Roderigo agrees to do it, and exits.

Alone, Iago delivers his second soliloquy. He says that he thinks it likely that Cassio does indeed love Desdemona, and believable at least that she might love him. He says that he himself loves Desdemona, though mainly he just wants to sleep with her because he wants revenge on Othello for possibly sleeping with Emilia. If he’s unable to sleep with Desdemona, though, he reasons, at least the confrontation he’s engineered between Rodgerio and Cassio will cause Othello to suspect Desdemona of infidelity and drive him mad.

In the early scenes of the play, Othello is completely in command of himself, and the idea that someone could manipulate him seems almost laughable. But Othello’s self-possession is based on his knowledge that his military leadership is needed by the state. But the storm that destroys the Turks also means that Othello’s military leadership, the source of his manhood, is no longer necessary.

Desdemona again demonstrates her loyalty and love toward her husband.

Othello puts Cassio in charge during the celebration. He instructs Cassio to make sure that the men on guard practice moderation and self-restraint despite the party. Cassio says that Iago knows what to do, but that he will make sure to see it to himself. Othello and Desdemona leave to consummate their marriage.

When Othello and Desdemona are gone, Iago praises Desdemona’s beauty while also slyly suggesting that she might be a seductress. Cassio agrees that Desdemona is beautiful, but believes her to be modest.

Iago then turns the conversation to the revels, and tries to convince Cassio to take a drink. Cassio declines, saying he has no tolerance for alcohol. Eventually, Iago convinces Cassio to let the revelers who are at the door. Cassio exits to do just that.

Alone, Iago addresses the audience: the revelers are Rodrigo and three men of Cyprus, who are all touchy about their honor and whom he has made sure to get drunk. Once he has also gotten Cassio drunk, he will create some event that results in Cassio offending the people of Cyprus.

Cassio returns with Montano and other revelers. Cassio, in good spirits, says that they have already forced him to take a drink. The revelers drink and sing. Eventually, Cassio, who is drunk but loudly protesting that he is in fact not drunk, exits offstage.

Iago continues to play on Othello’s jealousy. Rodrigos had in fact correctly interpreted the briefly touching hands of Desdemona and Cassio as just courting, but Iago is able to use Rodrigos jealousy to warp his understanding, to mistake appearance for reality.

Once again, Iago directly addresses the audience, laying out his plans to the audience and once again taking on the role of “director.” In fact, nearly all of the rest of the action of Othello involves the character’s “acting out” the “play” that Iago is “writing.” Also note how clear it is to Iago that if Othello suspects he has been unable to control his wife that he would lose his sense of manhood and his mind.

From Cyprus, Montano, the governor of Cyprus, watches as a storm rages at sea. He states that he does not think the Turkish fleet could withstand the storm, and a moment later a gentleman enters with news that Cassio has arrived at Cyprus. Cassio saw that the Turks lost so many ships in the storm that Cyprus need not fear a voyage to Cyprus, Cassio says. Roderigo returns with a note, and says that this little courtesy of his has actually correctly interpreted the briefly touching hands of Desdemona and Cassio as just courting, but Iago is able to use Rodrigos jealousy to warp his understanding, to mistake appearance for reality.

A herald reads a proclamation that Othello has called for a night of revelry to celebrate the annihilation of the Turkish fleet as well as his recent marriage.

In a military situation, where facts and actions are crucial, Othello is dominant. But in a domestic world of interpersonal relationships, facts can be fudged and Iago is in his element.

Unable to manipulate Cassio only with words, Iago progresses toward more directly bodily means: alcohol. Cassio, however, knows himself and refrains.

Cassio, courtesous as always, takes Desdemona’s hand and speaks with her privately for a moment. Iago notices, and says that this little courtesy of Cassio taking Desdemona’s hand will be enough of a web to ensnare as great a fly as Cassio” (2.1.169) and strip Cassio of his position as lieutenant.

Othello arrives, in triumph. He is overjoyed to see Desdemona, and says that he is so happy and content he could die now. She responds that, rather, their love and joy will only increase as they age. Othello then thanks the people of Cyprus for their hospitality. He asks Iago to oversee the unloading of his ship, and he, Desdemona, and all but Iago and Rodgerio head to the castle to celebrate their victory over the Turks.

Both Othello and Cassio wildly misjudge Iago, revealing just how duplicitous Iago is. Also notice that Othello and Desdemona did not have sex until they were married, in contrast to the graphic imaginings that the other characters have indulged in.

Act 2, scene 1

Act 2, scene 2

Act 2, scene 3
While Cassio is gone, Iago speaks with Montano, telling him that Cassio is a great soldier, but that he has a terrible drinking problem and may not be able to handle the responsibilities Othello has given him. Montano says that they should report this to Othello, but Iago says that he cares too much for Cassio to do that. Meanwhile, Iago secretly sends Roderigo off to pick a fight with Cassio.

Seconds later Cassio chases Roderigo on stage, cursing at him. They are about to fight when Montano tries to intervene, noting that Cassio is drunk. Cassio is offended, and he and Montano fight. During the fighting, Iago sends Rodrigo to raise an alarm. Cassio injures Montano.

Othello enters with his attendants. He immediately puts an end to the fighting, and demands to know how the fighting began. Iago and Cassio say they do not know, while Montano says that he is too injured to speak, but he adds that Iago does know the full story.

Iago speaks, saying that it pains him to cause any harm to Cassio, but that he must tell the truth as Othello commands. He explains that as he and Montano were talking, Cassio chased in some unknown fellow (Iago does not identify him as Roderigo) with sword drawn. He says that Montano then stepped in to stop Cassio, while Iago went after the unknown man but could not catch him. When Iago returned, Cassio and Montano were fighting. Iago then adds that the first unknown man must have offended Cassio in some way to make him behave as he did.

When Iago finishes his story, Othello says that he can tell that, out of love for Cassio, Iago tried to tell the story in a way that made Cassio look as good as possible. He says that he loves Cassio as well, but that he must dismiss Cassio as an officer.

Cassio despair at his lost reputation: “O, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial” (2.3.251-3). Iago asks if Cassio knew who he was chasing after, but Cassio says that he can’t remember anything distinctly. He adds that he plans to ask Othello to return him to his position. Iago, however, counsels him to approach Desdemona for help. Desdemona is so kind and generous, and Othello so in love with her, that she is sure to help Cassio if he asks for it and just as sure to help him to his former position. Cassio thanks Iago for his counsel, and exits.

Iago delivers another soliloquy, in which he says that his advice to Cassio is actually good advice, and that enlisting Desdemona’s help is the best way for Cassio to regain his position. But he adds that when devils want to do evil they make it seem as if they’re trying to do good. Iago says that as Desdemona tries to help Cassio, Iago will convince Othello that she does not see and treat Cassio as a beast, using the kind of animality that other racist characters had used only to describe Othello. Meanwhile, Iago moves his plot into its second phase: to twist two noble traits—Desdemona’s desire to regain her honor and Desdemona’s generosity—to prove Othello’s double of Desdemona and sexual jealousy of Cassio.

Othello is just as decisive as he was in earlier scenes, but now he, too, has been tricked by Iago and his actions only further Iago’s plot. Even so, Desdemona’s arrival and then exit with Othello shows her continued obedience to Othello, and, more importantly, her confidence in that obedience.

Cassio sees his reputation, his honor, as what makes him human. Without it, he sees himself as a beast, using the kind of animal imagery that other racist characters had used only to describe Othello. Meanwhile, Iago moves his plot into its second phase: to twist two noble traits—Desdemona’s desire to regain her honor and Desdemona’s generosity—to prove Othello’s double of Desdemona and sexual jealousy of Cassio.

Iago once again plants seeds of doubt in Cassio’s mind. Cassio understands this moment, Othello has always trusted him, and Cassio asks whether it was Cassio who just departed. Iago responds that it seems unlikely, because why would Cassio “steal away so guilty-like / Seeing your coming” (3.3.38-39)?

When Othello reaches Desdemona, she asks him to reinstate Cassio. Othello promises to do so soon, but doesn’t give a definite time, much to Desdemona’s annoyance. Othello says that he will deny her nothing, but asks for some time to himself. Desdemona exits, saying “I am obedient” (3.3.90).

Othello and Iago are now alone. Iago starts asking vague but leading questions about Cassio, until Othello finally demands that Iago make clear his suspicions. Iago then makes a show of saying that his suspicions must be wrong because Cassio seems so honest, but in the process plants the idea of an affair between Cassio and Desdemona in Othello’s mind.

Iago again says that his suspicions are likely false. He warns Othello against the dangers of “the green-eyed monster” (3.3.165-7) of jealousy, while at the same time noting that Desdemona did successfully deceive her father. Othello claims not to be jealous, though it is obvious from his manner that this is untrue. Finally, Iago counsels Othello to trust only what he sees, not Iago’s suspicions. Othello tells Iago to have Emilia watch Desdemona, and Iago tells Othello to watch how Desdemona acts regarding Cassio.

Desdemona, Cassio, and Emilia enter. Desdemona assures Cassio that she will help him regain his position. Just then, Othello and Iago enter. Cassio feels so ashamed that he feels unable to talk with Othello, and exits. Othello asks Iago whether it was Cassio who just departed. Iago responds that it seems unlikely, because why would Cassio “steal away so guilty-like / Seeing your coming” (3.3.38-39)?

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Iago exits. Othello, alone, now voices worry that perhaps it’s unrealistic for him to expect Desdemona to love him when he is black, not well mannered, and considerably older than she is. He cursets marriage and laments that it is the fate of “great ones” to be cuckolded (3.3.277).

Desdemona and Emilia enter to tell Othello it is time for dinner. Desdemona tries to soothe him with her handkerchief, but Othello says it is too small and drops it to the floor. They exit to go to dinner. Emilia then picks up the handkerchief, noting that Desdemona treasures it since it was the first gift that Othello gave to her, and also that Iago is always asking her to steal it for some reason. She decides to make a copy of the handkerchief for him.

Iago enters. To his delight, Emilia shows him the handkerchief. He grabs it from her hand. She asks for it back unless he has some important use for it, but he refuses to give it back and sends her away. Once he’s alone, Iago plots to place the handkerchief in Cassio’s room, so that Cassio will find it.

Othello enters, frantic and furious, and says to Iago that he would have been happier to be deceived than to suspect. He shouts farewell to war and his “occupation’s gone” (3.3.357). Othello then grabs Iago by the throat, and commands him to come up with “ocular proof” (3.3.360) that Desdemona has been unfaithful or else be punished for causing Othello to lose his appointment as a new lieutenant.

When the clown exits, and to ask him to come speak with her. Cassio holding the handkerchief. Othello is better.

Iago and Cassio enter. Cassio asks about his suit, but Desdemona tells him that he must be patient—for some reason Othello seems not himself and her advocacy of Cassio only made Othello angrier. Iago promises, to look into Othello’s anger.

Desdemona surmises that Othello’s bad temper must arise from some affair of state. Emilia wonders again whether it might be jealousy. When Desdemona says he can’t be jealous, since she gave him no reason to be, Emilia answers that jealousy needs no reason—it is a monster that grows by feeding on itself. Emilia and Desdemona exit to look for Othello.

As Cassio waits alone, a prostitute named Bianca enters. She says that he does not visit her enough. He apologizes and says he has been worn out with troubled thoughts. He then asks Bianca to make a copy of a handkerchief that he hands to her. Bianca thinks that the handkerchief must be a gift to him from another mistress, but he says that her jealousy is for nothing—he found the handkerchief in his room and doesn’t know whose it is. Though Bianca wants to stay with Cassio, he says that he has to see Othello and that they’ll have to meet later. Bianca grudgingly accepts.

Iago responds that it’s probably impossible to actually catch Desdemona and Cassio in the act of infidelity, but that he can provide circumstantial evidence. He says that one recent night he and Cassio slept in the same bed, and that Cassio, while asleep, called out Desdemona’s name, kissed Iago, lay his leg over Iago’s thigh, and cursed fate for giving Desdemona to him. Iago tells Othello that Cassio passed by during Othello’s fit and that Othello immediately thinks that he will take revenge on Cassio and Desdemona.

Iago continues to handle every new lie he makes a copy of the handkerchief to please him. Emilia’s making a copy of the handkerchief echoes the jealousy the plantings of the handkerchief, which Othello dropped, in Cassio’s room shows how jealousy produces the effect it fears. Othello here states that the uncertainty of jealousy is actually worse than the possible crime, and expressly connects his worry—by seeing reality.

Iago responds to Othello’s demand for visible proof with the most circumstantial, unverifiable evidence. And Othello, overcome by jealousy, accepts it. Notice also that Othello immediately thinks of killing Desdemona. He believes that he has ruined her manhood, so he feels he must destroy her.

Yet again, Iago is most deceitful precisely in the moments in which he pretends to be most moderate. And, once again, he follows a moment of backing off with an insinuation calculated to drive Othello still madder with jealousy—all carefully staged.

This highly theatrical moment of wool-taking reflects the climax of Iago’s plan. He has become lieutenant, and destroyed Othello’s sense of his own honor in the process.

In her quarters, Desdemona sends the clown to tell Cassio she has made entreaties on his behalf to Othello, and to ask him to come speak with her. When the clown exits, Desdemona wonders what has happened to her handkerchief. Emilia, who is also present, says she doesn’t know.

Othello enters. He takes Desdemona’s hand, and notes that it is moist. When Desdemona tries to bring up Cassio’s suit, Othello says he has a headache and asks for the handkerchief he gave her. When Desdemona admits she doesn’t have it at hand, Othello tells her that the handkerchief is magic, was given to his mother by an Egyptian sorceress, and that a woman who loses it will lose her husband.

The sudden shift to Desdemona emphasizes just how innocent and virtuous she actually is.

In response to Desdemona’s frank question Emilia exhibits some of her husband’s duplicity.

Othello obsessively tries to find evidence of infidelity. The handkerchief’s origins with an Egyptian sorceress connects it to Othello’s non-white background; illusion, such as those Iago uses the handkerchief to create, and to a threatening woman, hinting that, to men, all women are threatening.

Uncomfortable, Desdemona says she doesn’t have the handkerchief with her, but that it isn’t lost. When Othello demands that she go get it, she tries to change the subject back to Cassio’s suit. This enrages Othello, who exits. Emilia wonders if Othello is jealous, then comments on how fickle men are towards women.

Under Othello’s pressure, the typically honest Desdemona is herself forced to equivocate. Bringing up Cassio in good faith, she plays right into Iago’s hands. Emilia, who is less effusive and more worldly than Desdemona, immediately understands that Othello’s behavior stems from jealousy.

Othello continues to handle every person involved in the unfolding drama carefully. The others remain cluetless.

Like Othello, Desdemona doesn’t understand that a skillful liar can twist reality to look like something else. She thinks that if she is virtuous, then Othello and the world will see it. Emilia, however, understands that jealousy can warp a person’s vision, so that they see what isn’t there.

Bianca’s jealousy of Cassio provides a contrast for the jealousy that Othello feels for Desdemona—demonstrating that women are also subject to the jealousy that Emilia, earlier in this scene, attributes only to men. Bianca also serves as a contrast to Desdemona: Bianca is where, while Desdemona’s virtuous wife. But the depiction of Bianca as a jealous woman who truly cares for Cassio complicates the contrast.

Although Cassio shows real concern for Othello, Iago skilfully maintains exclusive control over his situation.

Act 3, scene 4

In her quarters, Desdemona sends the clown to tell Cassio she has made entreaties on his behalf to Othello, and to ask him to come speak with her. When the clown exits, Desdemona wonders what has happened to her handkerchief. Emilia, who is also present, says she doesn’t know.

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The plan works perfectly: as Cassio laughs and gestures, Othello grows angrier and angrier. Then Bianca herself enters, again accuses Cassio of having another mistress, throws the handkerchief at him, and exits. Othello recognizes the handkerchief. Cassio races after Bianca.

Alone, Iago explains to the audience that he will actually speak with Cassio about Bianca, who’s doping pursuit of Cassio never fails to make Cassio break out in laughter. This laughter will drive Othello mad.

At the play’s beginning, Othello was the center of the action, the military hero. Now, his honor gone, he skulks around the periphery, a kind of peeping tom. Cassio, by the way, is rather nasty to Bianca.

With Bianca’s appearance, which Iago doesn’t seem to have planned, his scene takes on a life of its own. Again, Bianca’s jealousy provides a foil to Othello’s own, while also further confirming Othello that Iago is telling the truth.

Othello’s fit robbs him of his ability to speak, the trait that distinguishes humans from animals. Consumed by jealousy, without his honor, he has become the animal that the prejudiced characters have described him as being.

Up until now, Iago has staged events and then enjoyed them as a spectator. Now he sets up a staged event with Othello as the spectator.
Othello comes out of hiding and promises to kill Cassio. But it is less easy for him to think about killing Desdemona. He keeps remembering what a kind, beautiful, talented, and delicate person she is. But Iago convinces him that these qualities make her unfaithful all the worse. Othello, at Iago’s prodding, says he will strangle Desdemona in her bed. Iago promises to kill Cassio.

Just then, Desdemona enters with Lodovico, an envoy who is carrying orders from the Duke of Venice that Othello is to return to Venice and leave Cassio behind to govern Cyprus. Desdemona mentions to Lodovico the falling out between Othello and Cassio, and how much she wants to heal it. This enrages Othello, and he strikes Desdemona and commands her to leave. Lodovico is shocked, and asks that Othello call Desdemona back. Othello complies, but then condemns her as a loose woman and sends her away again. He promises to obey the Duke’s commands, and then exits himself.

Lodovico can’t believe that Othello, renowned for his unshakable self-control, would act this way. He asks Iago if Othello has gone mad. Iago refuses to answer, but clearly implies that something seems to be terribly wrong with Othello, and advises Lodovico to observe Othello for himself.

Desdemona asks Emilia to fetch Cassio, and also implicates Bianca as being in on the plot to take Othello’s place as defender of Cyprus. Iago scoffs at this, and says that Othello is just upset by affairs of state. Trumpets sound, and “eternal villain” who is looking “to get some office” makes Othello more angry—he calls her a whore, and, after giving Emilia money for guarding the door, adds a lie: that Othello, rather than returning to Venice, intends to have Desdemona come out of hiding and promises to kill Cassio in her bed.

Lodovico enters with Graziano (Brabantio’s brothers). They hear the cries of pain from Cassio and ask Iago what has happened. Iago, meanwhile, makes a show of recognizing Cassio’s attacker as Roderigo of Venice, and also implicates Bianca as being in on the plot to kill Cassio by getting her to admit that Cassio had dined with her that night.

Cassio enters. Roderigo attacks, but Cassio’s armor turns away the thrust. Cassio counterattacks, wounding Roderigo. From behind, Iago darts in and stabs Cassio in the leg, then runs away. From a distance, Othello hears Cassio’s shouts of pain and believes that Iago has killed Cassio. Moved by Iago’s loyalty to him, Othello steels himself to go and kill Desdemona in her bed.

Lodovico enters with Graziano. Desdemona remains as faithful here in her love as in 1.3, despite the fact that Othello has berated her and that she even seems to sense that he might kill her. Her devotion to Othello even should it cast her her life could not contrast more strongly with the graphic, misogynistic picture of female sexuality Iago has described throughout the play. Othello is so threatened by the possibility of having been cuckolded that he can’t see the reality of his incredibly faithful wife.

Emilia presents a cynical view of marriage, in which one bad deed inspires another. Though it should be noted that Emilia seems to think that men always cheat first, while the men suspect the women will cheat first. Once again, Desdemona displays her incredible virtue and faithfulness, which in his jealousy Othello can no longer see.

In the street, Iago and Roderigo wait to ambush Cassio as he emerges from his visit to Bianca. Iago convinces Roderigo to make the first attack, and promises to back him up if necessary. In an aside, Iago comments that he wins either way: if Cassio kills Roderigo, he gets to keep Roderigo’s jewels; if Roderigo kills Cassio, then there’s no danger that Cassio and Othello will ever figure out his plot.

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Despite naively playing into Iago’s hands earlier by giving him the handkerchief, Emilia shows her earnest loyalty to Desdemona.

Now that Othello suspects that Desdemona’s virtue is just a cover for whomsoever-behavior, her denials of his accusation just makes him more certain of its truth. Jealousy feeds on itself. By making him more certain of its truth, Iago’s reference to the night as a “damsel of honor” underscores his self-consciously depraved. He doesn’t just want to cheat first, while the men suspect the women will cheat first. Once again, Desdemona displays her incredible virtue and faithfulness, which in his jealousy Othello can no longer see.

Here Iago shows that he is both perceptiveness about the entire situation. Once again, Iago refuses to answer questions in such a way that makes him look loyal while at the same time inspiring the admiration for Iago, coupled with his newly misogynistic and violent plans for Desdemona, contrast poignantly from his declarations of love in 1.3.

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Desdemona then asks Emilia whether she would commit adultery. Emilia responds that woman are just like men, and will cheat on their husbands or that their husbands cheat on them. Desdemona responds that she does not want to learn how to emulate bad deeds, but instead how to avoid them. She dismisses Emilia and goes to bed.

Iago quickly assumes control of this new dimension of the situation. Once again, Iago refuses to answer questions in such a way that makes him look loyal while at the same time inspiring the admiration for Iago, coupled with his newly misogynistic and violent plans for Desdemona, contrast poignantly from his declarations of love in 1.3.

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Roderigo enters, angry that he still does not have Desdemona despite all the jewels he’s given to Iago to pass on to her. He says he is ready to give up his effort and ask her to return his jewels.

Iago responds that he’s been working diligently on Roderigo’s behalf and can promise that Roderigo will have Desdemona by the following night. He then tells Roderigo about Cassio being promoted by the Duke to take Othello’s place as defender of Cyprus. But he adds a lie that Othello, rather than returning to Venice, is being sent to Mauritania along with Desdemona. Iago persuades Roderigo that the only way to stop Desdemona from slipping forever beyond his reach is to kill Cassio, which will keep Othello in Cyprus.

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For the first time, Roderigo asserts a free will, and wants to do something that would not benefit Iago.

But Iago manages to maintain control of the situation by once again playing on Roderigo’s jealous desire for Desdemona. Once he has convinced Roderigo to stay, he then weaves him even more fully into his plott.
Act 5, scene 2

Othello enters Desdemona’s quarters, holding a candle. Standing over Desdemona as she sleeps, he admires her beauty, kisses her, and is almost moved to let her live—noting that, like a flower, once plucked, she cannot be given “vital growth” (5.2.14) again. But, finally resolving to kill her, he moves to do so.

Just then, Desdemona wakes. She calls out to Othello, who answers, and then tells her to pray in preparation for her to death. Terrified, Desdemona begs to know why Othello is going to kill her. He tells her that he has seen Cassio with her handkerchief. When Desdemona denies giving Cassio the handkerchief, Othello tells her that Cassio has confessed to sleeping with her and, in punishment, has been killed by Iago. Desdemona begins to weep, which only infuriates Othello because he believes she is crying for Cassio. He struggles with Desdemona as she begs to be first banished instead of killed and then allowed to live just a few minutes more. Othello is implacable, though, and smothers Desdemona with a pillow.

Emilia calls from the doorway. Othello mistakes her calls as noises made by Desdemona, and smothers Desdemona again.

Finally, Othello realizes that it is Emilia who is calling. He draws the curtains back around the bed to hide Desdemona’s body. Then he goes to speak with Emilia, expecting her to tell him of Cassio’s death. Othello is shocked to learn from Emilia that Cassio killed Roderigo but is himself still alive. Then, suddenly, Desdemona calls out that she has been murdered.

Emilia opens the curtains and to her horror sees Desdemona, who with her dying breaths says that she is innocent, but then denies that she was. Emilia, who has been directed by Iago to keep quiet, now is shocked, and says that it is a good thing that Brabantio died from grief at Desdemona’s marriage to Venice. In response, Othello asks that when they get to Venice, he must give up his command and return with them. Lodovico admits once more, this time to Graziano, Desdemona’s uncle, that he smothered Desdemona. Graziano is shocked, and says that it is a good thing that Brabantio died from grief at Desdemona’s marriage so that he did not live to see this.

Montano, Graziano, and Iago enter. Othello admits that he has seen Cassio with Desdemona’s handkerchief, that he smothered Desdemona. Graziano is shocked, and says that it is a good thing that Brabantio died from grief at Desdemona’s marriage so that he did not live to see this.

Meanwhile, despite Iago’s efforts that demand that she obey him and be quiet, Emilia begins to piece together what happened. Othello insists again that Desdemona was unfaithful and brings up the proof of the handkerchief. Now Emilia explodes in anger, and explains that she was the one who found the handkerchief and gave it to Iago.

Realizing that Iago lied to him, Othello attacks Iago, but is disarmed by Montano. In the uproar, Iago stabs Emilia and flees. Montano chases after Iago while Graziano stays to guard the door. Othello is left with the body of Desdemona and the dying Emilia. Emilia sings a verse of the song “Willow,” and dies while telling Othello that Desdemona was faithful to him.

Othello searches his chamber and finds a sword. Graziano enters to find Othello armed and mourning Desdemona. Moments later Lodovico and Montano enter with Iago, whom they’ve captured. Cassio also enters, carried in on a chair. Othello immediately stabs Iago, who is injured but not killed. Othello is disarmed by Lodovico’s men. Othello then begs to know why Iago did what he did, but Iago refuses to speak at all. Lodovico, however, has found two letters in Roderigo’s pocket that reveal all of Iago’s schemes.

Now Lodovico turns to Othello, and tells him that he must give up his command and return with them to Venice. In response, Othello asks that when they speak of what has happened they “speak of me as I am ... as one that loved not wisely but too well” (5.2.344). Then Othello tells a story about a time when he once defeated and stabbed a Muslim Turk who had killed a Venetian, and as he describes the stabbing he takes out a hidden dagger and stabs himself. He falls onto the bed next to Desdemona and dies while giving her a final kiss.

The speed with which Othello is transformed from respected general to reviled outsider reveals the strength of prejudices more or less repressed by other characters throughout the majority of the play. Once there’s reason to exclude him from the social group, Othello quickly is diminished to the status of outsider among the Venetians.

Iago tries to control Emilia, commanding her as his wife to be silent. But she shows her independence and loyalty to both Desdemona and to the truth. Othello, meanwhile, in his crime stems from him in the face, now can only preserve his honor by insisting that Iago’s version must be the truth.

Othello kills Desdemona because he thinks he has betrayed her. Iago kills Emilia because she did betray him. But she betrayed him for the greater good, and Iago’s version of events is more graphic and terrible than the smothing of Desdemona, bringing home his full villainy.

Cassio’s relative restraint, despite having been wounded by Roderigo and Iago and maimed by Othello, reveals his strength of character, which contrasts with Iago’s increasingly sadistic make as the extent of his plot is revealed. By refusing to speak, Iago retains some of the directional control of events that he has strenuously sought; he never reveals his inner reality to the other characters.

Othello, now comprehending everything, shows Frank, deep remorse. His curious final anecdote both asserts his rightful membership in Venetian society. In a gesture reminiscent of how other characters (Iago, Roderigo, Brabantio) have drawn on racial stereotypes to exclude Othello and cement their own relationships, he here defines himself as an “insider,” a Christian, against the “outsider” or enemy, the Turk. Yet, at the same time, when he tells of stabbing the Turk, he also stabs himself. In effect, he is defining himself as both an insider and an outsider, someone who defended Venice but was nevertheless seen as both a possible enemy and an animal by other Venetians.

In the final moment of the play, Iago, who has directed action throughout, ends up as a specta- tor to his own madness.
"If I were now to die, Twere now to be most happy, for I fear My soul hath her content so absolute That not another comfort like to this Succeeds in unknown fate." — Othello, 2.1.188-91

"Her eye must be fed." — Iago, 2.1.224

"I’ll [...] make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me For making him egregiously an ass." — Iago, 2.1.302-6

"Notwithstanding, with my personal eye Will I look to’t." — Cassio, 2.3.5-6

"Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial." — Cassio, 2.3.251-3

"How poor are they that have not patience! What wound did ever heal but by degrees? Thou know’st we work by wit and not by witchcraft, And wit depends on dilatory time." — Iago, 2.3.357-60

"I am your own forever." — Iago, 3.3.480

"Her honor is an essence that’s not seen; They have it very oft that have it not." — Iago, 4.1.16-7

"A horned man’s a monster and a beast." — Othello, 4.1.62

"Upon my knee, what doth your speech import? I understand a fury in your words But not the words." — Desdemona, 4.2.31-3

"O thou weed Who art so lovely fair, and smell’st so sweet, That the sense aches at thee, would thou hadst never been born!" — Othello, 4.2.67-9

"Tis neither here nor there." — Emilia, 4.3.58

"It makes us or I mars us — think on that And fix most firmly thy resolution." — Iago, 5.1.4-5

"This is the night That either makes me or fordoes me quite." — Iago, 5.1.129-30

"Put out the light, and then put out the light. If I quench thee, thou flaming minister, I can again thy former light restore, Should I repent me; but once put out thy light, Thou cunning’st pattern of excelling nature, I know not where is that Promethean heat That can thy light relume. When I have plucked thy rose, I cannot give it vital growth again; It must needs wither." — Othello, 5.2.7-15

"Had she been true, If heaven would make me such another world Of one entire and perfect chrysolite I’d not have sold her for it." — Othello, 5.2.144-7

"I told him what I thought, and told no more Than what he found himself was apt and true." — Iago, 5.2.177-8

"Demand me nothing. What you know, you know. From this time forth I never will speak word." — Iago, 5.2.303-4

"When you shall these unlucky deeds relate, Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate, Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak Of one that loved not wisely, but too well; Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought, Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand, Like the base Judean, threw a pearl away Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdue eyes Albeit unused to the melting mood, Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees Their medicinable gum. Set you down this. And say besides that in Aleppo once, Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk Beat a Venetian and traduced the state, I took by the throat the circumcised dog And smote him—thus." — Othello, 5.2.341-56
The LitCharts ThemeTracker is a mini-version of the entire LitChart. The ThemeTracker provides a quick timeline-style rundown of all the important plot points and allows you to track the themes throughout the work at a glance.

### Theme Key
- Prejudice
- Appearance vs. Reality
- Jealousy
- Manhood and Honor
- Womanhood and Sexuality

#### Themes

### Scene 1.1
- **Roderigo** learns that **Desdemona** has eloped with **Othello**. Iago reassures Roderigo that he only is pretending to serve Othello, and actually resents Othello for promoting Cassio over him.

### Scene 1.2
- Iago, having slipped off, warns Othello that Brabantio will try to force a divorce between him and Desdemona.
- Cassio shows up at Othello's house, summoning him to see the Duke, just before Brabantio. Roderigo and their men show up and threaten Othello. Unfazed, Othello tells everyone to follow him to the Duke's court.

### Scene 1.3
- The Duke meets with senators about an imminent Turkish invasion of Cyprus. Othello arrives at court with Brabantia.
- The Duke explains that he wants Othello to defend Cyprus. Brabantio accuses Othello of bewitching Desdemona. However, Othello and Desdemona both defend their elopement as a free marriage. The Duke supports them, and Brabantio grudgingly blesses them. Othello, Desdemona, and others depart for Cyprus.

### Scene 2.1
- On the coast of Cyprus, Montano watches a storm drown the Turkish fleet.
- The Venetians arrive in Cyprus.
- Iago convinces Roderigo that Desdemona is in love with Cassio and encourages Roderigo to pick a fight with Cassio.
- Iago tells the audience: he will persuade Othello that Cassio and/or Roderigo are having affairs with Desdemona and drive him mad with jealousy.

### Scene 2.2
- Othello declares a celebration of their victory over the Turks and of his marriage.
- Cassio summons musicians to to Othello's window but is sent away.
- Cassio summons Emilia and begs her to help him get Desdemona's attention, so that Desdemona can speak with Othello on his behalf.

### Scene 2.3
- Othello gives Iago a letter to send to the Venetian senate. Othello tours the fortifications of Cyprus.
- Desdemona and Cassio talk, in Emilia's company. When Othello and Iago approach, Cassio, ashamed, hurries away.
- Pretending to defend Cassio, Iago manages to voice suspicions of an affair between Cassio and Desdemona. Othello is bothered.
- Iago gets a headache. Desdemona tries to help him by pressing a handkerchief, the first gift Othello ever gave her, against his head. Othello angrily says the handkerchief is too small and lets it fall to the floor. Emilia steals it and gives it to Iago, not knowing he plans to plant it in Cassio's chamber.
- Othello demands Iago show him proof of his accusations against Cassio. Iago tells Othello that he heard Cassio talking in his sleep about Desdemona and wiping his mouth with her handkerchief. Enraged, Othello promotes Iago to lieutenant.

### Scene 3.1
- Desdemona and Emilia look for the handkerchief. Othello questions Emilia about Desdemona's fidelity. Emilia defends her mistress, but Othello still contacts Desdemona about her supposed infidelity. Her denials only make him angrier. Desdemona and Emilia question Iago about Othello's jealousy. He says Othello is just bothered by affairs of state.

### Scene 3.2
- Iago tells Othello that Cassio admits to sleeping with Desdemona. Othello falls into an epileptic fit.
- Iago speaks with Cassio as Othello hides and watches. Iago and Cassio talk about Bianca, but Othello thinks they're laughing about Desdemona. Bianca shows up, throws Cassio's handkerchief at Cassio and accuses him of having another mistress. Othello vows to kill Cassio. Iago persuades Othello that he must also kill Desdemona.

### Scene 3.3
- Lodovico arrives, with Desdemona, bearing a letter calling Othello back to Venice and instating Cassio as the general in Cyprus. When Desdemona tries to calm Othello, he strikes Iago. Iago implies to Lodovico that Othello is going mad.

### Scene 3.4
- Lodovico asks for Cassio. Cassio tells him that Cassio will try to force a divorce between him and Desdemona. Alone, Iago tells the audience about his hatred for Othello and his plans to convince Othello that Desdemona is having an affair with Cassio in order to ruin them all.

### Scene 4.1
- Othello questions Emilia about Desdemona's fidelity. Emilia defends her mistress, but Othello still contacts Desdemona about her supposed infidelity. Her denials only make him angrier. Desdemona and Emilia question Iago about Othello's jealousy. He says Othello is just bothered by affairs of state.
- Iago convinces Rodgerido that he will have Desdemona by the next night and if he will just ambush and kill Cassio that evening.

### Scene 4.2
- Othello takes a walk with Lodovico, instructing Desdemona to go into their chamber and wait for him. Desdemona and Emilia talk about marriage and adultery. Emilia argues that a woman will commit adultery if her husband cheats on her. Desdemona thinks such behavior would be immoral.

### Scene 4.3
- Set up by Iago. Rodgerido attacks Cassio outside Bianca's house, but Cassio wounds Rodgerido. Iago sneaks in and wounds Cassio.
- Hearing their shouts, and thinking Iago has fulfilled his duty by killing Cassio, Othello resolves to kill Desdemona.
- When Lodovico and Gratiano arrive on the scene, Iago kills Cassio to cover his tracks. He also accuses Bianca of conspiring with Rodgerido against Cassio.

### Scene 5.1
- Othello smoothes Desdemona, despite her pleas for more time to prove her innocence.
- Emilia discovers the dying Desdemona. When Othello explains that acted because Iago told him Desdemona had slept with Cassio. Emilia says that Iago is lying.
- Montano, Gratiano, and Iago arrive. Emilia reveals that she stole the handkerchief on Iago's orders. Iago stabs and kills Emilia.
- Letters found on Rodgerido's corpse reveal Iago's plot. Iago, however, refuses to explain any of his motives.
- Othello entreats the others to remember him as one that loved "not wisely but too well" and stabs himself with a dagger. Lodovico leaves Iago for Cassio to judge and punish.