

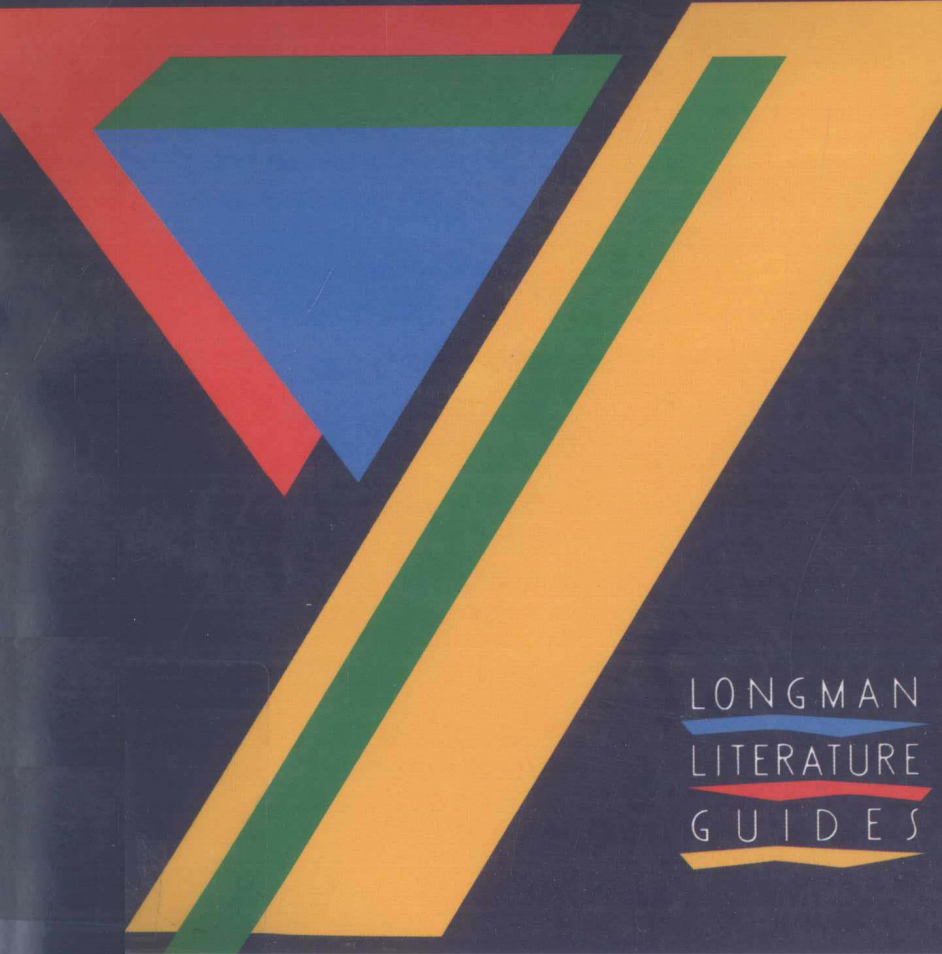
长亮文学作品辅导丛书

YORK NOTES ON

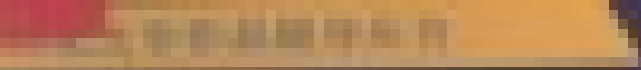
OTHELLO

奥赛罗

William Shakespeare



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LITERATURE
GUIDES



FOR NOTE ON

OTHELLO

奧賽羅

William Shakespeare



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
LONDON, ENGLAND

YORK NOTES

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William Shakespeare

OTHELLO

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LONGMAN
YORK PRESS

世界图书出版公司
北京·广州·上海·西安

《约克文学作品辅导丛书》介绍

《约克文学作品辅导丛书》(York Notes)系 Longman 集团有限公司(英国)出版。本丛书覆盖了世界各国历代文学名著,原意是辅导英国中学生准备文学课的高级会考或供英国大学生自学参考。因此,它很适合我国高校英语专业学生研读文学作品时参考。

丛书由 A. N. Jeffares 和 S. Bushrui 两位教授任总编。每册的编写者大都是研究有关作家的专家学者,他们又都有在大学讲授文学的经验,比较了解学生理解上的难点。本丛书自问世以来,始终畅销不衰,被使用者普遍认为是英美出版的同类书中质量较高的一种。

丛书每一册都按统一格式对一部作品进行介绍和分析。每一册都有下列五个部分。

① 导言。主要介绍:作者生平,作品产生的社会、历史背景,有关的文学传统或文艺思潮等。

② 内容提要。一般分为两部分:a. 全书的内容概述;b. 每章的内容提要及难词、难句注释,如方言、典故、圣经或文学作品的引语、有关社会文化习俗等。注释恰到好处,对于读懂原作很有帮助。

③ 评论。结合作品的特点,对结构、人物塑造、叙述角度、语言风格、主题思想等进行分析和评论。论述深入浅出,分析力求客观,意在挖掘作品内涵和展示其艺术性。

④ 学习提示。提出学习要点、重要引语和思考题(附参考答案或答案要点)。

⑤ 进一步研读指导。介绍该作品的最佳版本;版本中是否有重大改动;列出供进一步研读的参考书目(包括作者传记、研究有关作品的专著和评论文章等)。

总之,丛书既提供必要的背景知识,又注意启发学生思考;既重视在吃透作品的基础上进行分析,又对进一步研究提供具体指导;因此是一套理想的英语文学辅导材料。

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Part 1

Introduction

The life of William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, a small town in Warwickshire. He was christened in Holy Trinity Church on 26 April 1564, and patriotic enthusiasts, eager to have his birth coincide with the celebration of St George's day (St George is the patron-saint of the English) have suggested that he was born on 23 April 1564. Shakespeare's father, John, had married Mary Arden, the daughter of a local land-owner from the village of Wilmcote to the north-west of Stratford, and by 1564 he had built up a successful business as a glover and merchant. He bought land and houses in Stratford, and in 1568 he was made Mayor. But after 1575 his fortunes declined and he was forced to mortgage some of his property in order to pay his debts.

Little is known of Shakespeare's early life. He probably attended the King's New School in Stratford where he learned to read and write, as well as the rudiments of Latin grammar. In 1582, and at the age of eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a farmer who lived in the small village of Shottery not far from Stratford. Anne was some seven years older than her husband. On 26 May 1583 Shakespeare's eldest daughter, Susanna was christened, and some eighteen months later on 2 February 1585, his twin children Hamnet and Judith were christened.

The years 1585 to 1592 are usually described by biographers of Shakespeare as 'the lost years' since nothing is known about this period of his life. He may have become a schoolmaster for part of this time, and he may have been arrested for poaching. These are speculations based on hearsay evidence, but it was sometime during these years that he left Stratford for London and for a career in the theatre. Periodically companies of touring players passed through Stratford, and it is possible that Shakespeare joined one of them. We know that, in 1587, one such company, the Queen's Men, were short of an actor, although we have no certain evidence that the person they recruited was indeed Shakespeare.

The first reference to Shakespeare as a professional dramatist is in 1592 when the writer and dramatist Robert Greene referred disparagingly to him as 'an upstart crow' who was 'in his own conceit the only

Shake-scene in a country'. By this time Shakespeare had already written the *Henry VI* plays (from which Greene had quoted in his insulting remarks). In 1593 the narrative poem *Venus and Adonis* was published, and it was dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, the third Earl of Southampton. In 1594 *The Rape of Lucrece*, another narrative poem, was published and dedicated to the same person. It was also probably during the period 1592-4, when the London theatres were closed because of the outbreaks of the plague, that many of the sonnets were written, and some commentators have suggested that Wriothesley is the mysterious 'Mr. W.H.' to whom they were dedicated when they were published in 1609.

By 1594 Shakespeare was a member of the company of actors known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which numbered among its ranks actors like the clown William Kempe, and the famous Richard Burbage. We know too that, in addition to writing plays for this company, Shakespeare also acted himself. For example, he acted in Ben Jonson's comedy *Every Man in His Humour* in 1598, a play he was to remember when he came to write *Othello*, and later in Jonson's *Sejanus* (1603) where he may have played the part of Tiberius. Although there is no evidence for it, it has been suggested that he played the role of Adam in his own *As You Like It* (1598-9), and the Ghost in *Hamlet* (1600-1).

The regular playhouse of the Lord Chamberlain's Men was The Theatre, situated in Shoreditch outside the northern boundaries of the City of London, and which had been built by Cuthbert and Richard Burbage in 1576, long before Shakespeare arrived in London. In 1598 this playhouse was dismantled and its timbers taken across to Southwark on the south bank of the River Thames in order to build the Globe Theatre. This is the theatre with which we most associate Shakespeare. He owned a tenth share in the new enterprise, and was thus entitled to receive ten per cent of the profits.

By 1597 Shakespeare had made enough money to buy the house known as New Place, the second biggest house in Stratford. This was the first of a number of purchases of land which he made during the period 1597 to 1605, and records of his various business dealings in Stratford still survive. In 1596, at the age of eleven, his son Hamnet died, while in 1601 his father John also died. In 1607 his eldest daughter Susanna married John Hall, and they may have lived for some time in the cottage now known as Hall's Croft (which currently houses the Stratford Festival Club). After Shakespeare's death in 1616 the Halls moved into New Place.

By 1603, when Queen Elizabeth I died, Shakespeare had written some twenty-four plays and the Chamberlain's Men had become the leading acting company of the time. Indeed, it has been suggested that the play *The Merry Wives Of Windsor* (1600), was written at the request

of Elizabeth herself. After the Queen's death the company changed its name to the King's Men, and was in receipt of the patronage of the new king, James I. A year after the King's accession to the throne *Othello* appeared, and was acted before him at the Christmas festivities of that year. It was during the period 1600 to 1607 that Shakespeare wrote the major tragedies, beginning with *Hamlet* in 1600-1, and ending with *Coriolanus* in 1607-8.

In 1608, Shakespeare, along with his business associates the Burbages, John Heminges and Henry Condell (who later jointly edited the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays in 1623), Thomas Evans, and William Sly, leased a small indoor theatre in the City of London called Blackfriars. Some critics have felt that this new building, different in its structure from the Globe, played a large part in the noticeable alteration of Shakespeare's dramatic style at this time. It is argued that plays like *Pericles* (1607-8), *Cymbeline* (1609), *The Winter's Tale* (1610), and *The Tempest* (1611) are the result of Shakespeare's artistic response to a new and more intimate kind of theatre. Unfortunately this argument does not hold, since the first record of a performance of *The Winter's Tale* in 1611 intimates that it took place at the Globe. Also it is known that one of Shakespeare's very last plays, *Henry VIII*, was performed at the Globe because during an actual performance the firing of a cannon set the theatre alight, and burned it to the ground.

After 1613 Shakespeare seems to have written no more plays. His last few years were spent in retirement in Stratford, where he died on 23 April 1616. Popular legend has it that Shakespeare caught a fever after a drinking bout with Ben Jonson and the poet Michael Drayton.

Unfortunately, we do not know the circumstances of his death, but his will survives, and biographers have sought to infer much from its contents. For example, the bequest of his 'second best bed with the furniture' to his widow Anne has prompted speculation about matrimonial disharmony in the Shakespeare household. But his latest, and possibly most reliable, biographer, Professor Samuel Schoenbaum* has suggested that in any event Anne would have been entitled to one-third of Shakespeare's estate, and that the bed may well have had sentimental associations. It seems more than likely that the best bed was reserved for visitors to New Place.

In 1623, some seven years after Shakespeare's death, two of his former partners John Heminges and Henry Condell gathered together his plays in one impressive volume, known as the First Folio. Of the thirty-five plays that this volume contains some sixteen had never before appeared in print.

* *William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life*, Oxford, 1977.

The Elizabethan theatre

Shakespeare was a professional dramatist, and his life therefore revolved very much around the public theatre of his day. In order to understand how his plays work on the stage, we need to have some idea of the kind of theatre for which they were originally written. The Prologue in Shakespeare's history play *Henry V* (1599-1600), tells us what actors and dramatist expected in the way of cooperation from their audiences; spectators are urged to:

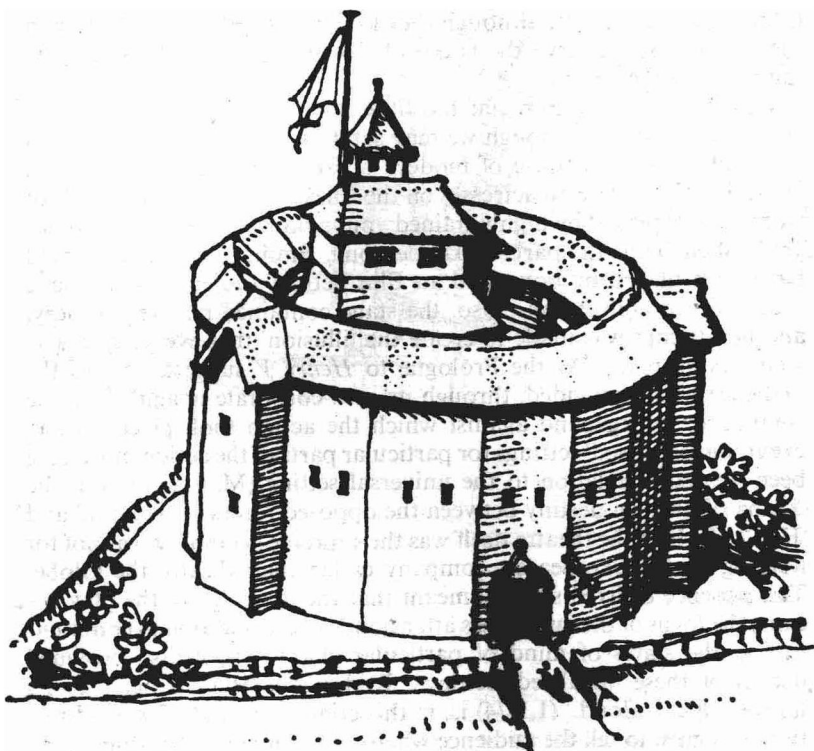
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts:
 Into a thousand parts divide one man,
 And make imaginary puissance;
 Think when we talk of horses that you see them
 Printing their proud hooves i'the receiving earth;
 For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
 Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,
 Turning the accomplishment of many years
 Into an hour-glass;

(Prologue: lines 23-31)

What kind of theatre could permit so complete an engagement of the imagination? Let us begin by looking at the physical measurements of such a building. The builder's contract for the Fortune Theatre which was erected outside the northern boundary of the City of London in the parish of St Giles' in Cripplegate in 1600, still survives, and is fairly exact in its information. Though the Fortune was a square building, it was modelled in certain crucial respects upon Shakespeare's own theatre, the Globe, and was erected by the same builder, Peter Streete. It contained a rectangular stage which jutted out into 'the yard' of the theatre, and which measured $27\frac{1}{2}$ feet deep by 43 feet wide, similar to that of the Globe. We usually refer to this type of theatre as 'theatre-in-the-round'. In both theatres the 'yard' was open to the sky, providing standing room for part of the audience, while the remainder sat in the more expensive, but covered, galleries set in the outer walls of the building. The stage itself was covered by a large canopy supported by two stout pillars, and usually referred to as 'the heavens'. On the underside of the heavens (that is its ceiling) were probably painted the signs of the zodiac, and the entire cosmological layout of the universe as the Elizabethans understood it. Clearly, Heaven and its position in the universe was not left to the imagination of the audience. Similarly, because the stage stood about four feet off the ground, there was a place for Heaven's opposite, Hell, which was usually reached through a trap-door in the floor of the stage. Thus, the decline of a character like Othello would take place on a stage where both 'Heaven' and 'Hell'

were already physically represented, thus adding by implication, a further dimension to the tragic action of the play.

The actors made their entrances and their exits through one of a number of doors situated at the back of the stage. It seems likely that at stage level there were two small doors—one each side of the stage—and a large pair of double-doors in the centre of the back-wall of the stage which, when opened, could be used as an 'inner stage'. It was at the back, and behind these doors, in what is called the 'tiring-house' that the actors changed their costumes, or kept their stage properties. Above the tiring-house was a balcony which was often used in particular



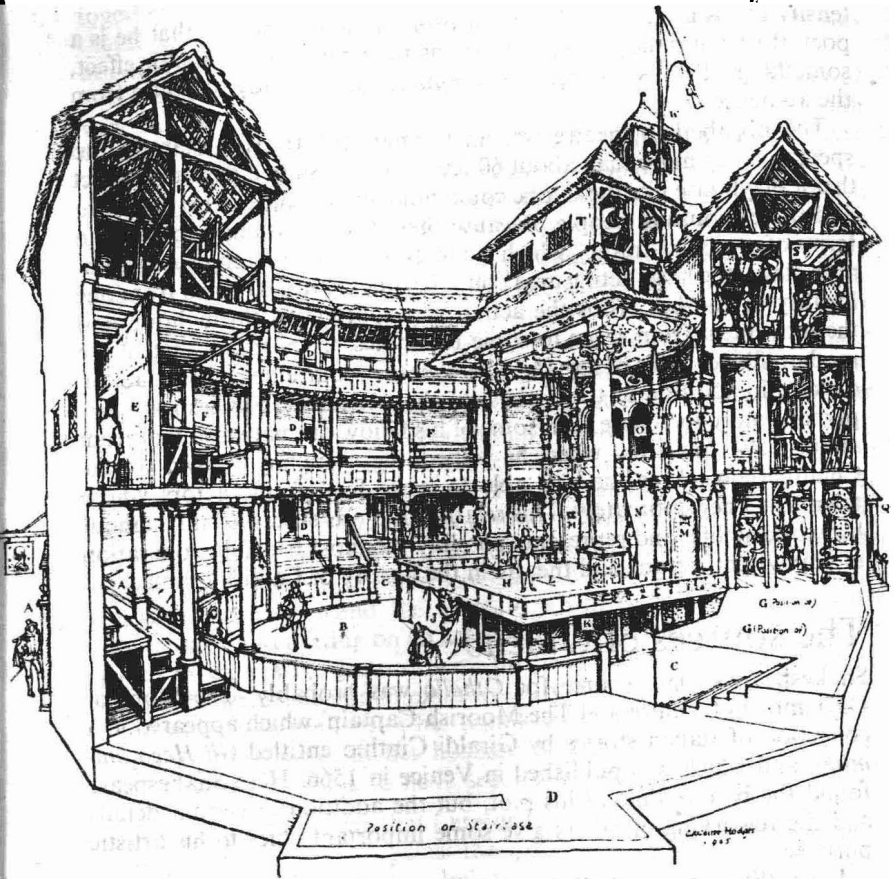
THE GLOBE PLAYHOUSE

The theatre, originally built by James Burbage in 1576, was made of wood (Burbage had been trained as a carpenter). It was situated to the north of the River Thames on Shoreditch in Finsbury Fields. There was trouble with the lease of the land, and so the theatre was dismantled in 1598, and reconstructed 'in another forme' on the south side of the Thames as the Globe. Its sign is thought to have been a figure of the Greek hero Hercules carrying the globe. It was built in six months, its galleries being roofed with thatch. This caught fire in 1613 when some smouldering wadding, from a cannon used in a performance of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, lodged in it. The theatre was burnt down, and when it was rebuilt again on the old foundations, the galleries were roofed with tiles.

scenes; for example, Brabantio's entry '*at a window*' in Act I Scene 1 of *Othello* (the Folio text simply reads '*above*') indicates that he entered through one of the doors leading on to the balcony, to look down at Iago and Roderigo in the street (that is at stage floor level). It is highly ironical that after having satisfied himself of his daughter's absence he re-enters '*in his night-gown, and Servants with torches*' at the same level as Roderigo, thus indicating in symbolic terms the speed of his own decline.

Since there were no artificial lights in the Elizabethan theatre, performances took place during the afternoons. The 'torches' which the servants carry therefore, help to reinforce the impression that the action is taking place at night, although they fulfil an added ironic function in that these torches serve the cause of deception rather than assist in illuminating the truth.

Unfortunately we know far too little about how actors moved and spoke on the stage, although we may safely assume that they did so in ways different from those of modern actors. We should also bear in mind that there were no actresses on the Elizabethan stage; the parts of women were played by highly trained young boys whose voices had not yet broken. Thus the parts of Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca would have been played by boys, and an Elizabethan audience would have accepted this convention. Also, the stage contained no fixed scenery, and no attempt was made to create the 'illusion' that everyday events were taking place. As the Prologue to *Henry V* suggests, it was the audience which provided, through its own corporate imagination, the 'setting' or background against which the action took place. In any event, the 'localised' settings for particular parts of the action must have been viewed in relation to the universal setting (Man acting out the drama of his own destiny between the opposed forces of 'Heaven' and 'Hell') of which the theatre itself was the supreme symbol. It was not for nothing that Shakespeare's company called their theatre the Globe. This absence of fixed scenery meant that the language of the play became the focus of the audience's attention, since in addition to communicating the states of mind of particular characters, it also provided details of these 'localised' settings. Roderigo's 'Here is her father's house, I'll call aloud.' (I.1.74) is, in this context, a kind of stage-direction, designed to tell the audience where he is, and what he proposes to do. Details of this kind are scattered throughout the play, and they help us to 'place' the action as well as guide our responses to the ways in which particular characters speak and behave. The sheer artificiality of the edifice of the play meant that it was not considered important to imitate closely the language of everyday speech. The intensity and concentration of expression could be varied to suit the requirements of each situation. For example, when Othello speaks poetically, the in-



A CONJECTURAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE INTERIOR OF THE GLOBE PLAYHOUSE

- AA Main entrance
- B The Yard
- CC Entrances to lowest gallery
- D Entrance to staircase and upper galleries
- E Corridor serving the different sections of the middle gallery
- F Middle gallery ('Twopenny Rooms')
- G 'Gentlemen's Rooms' or Lords' Rooms'
- H The stage
- J The hanging being put up round the stage
- K The 'Hell' under the stage
- L The stage trap, leading down to the Hell
- MM Stage doors
- N Curtained 'place behind the stage'
- O Gallery above the stage, used as required sometimes by musicians, sometimes by spectators, and often as part of the play
- P Back-stage area (the tiring-house)
- Q Tiring-house door
- R Dressing-rooms
- S Wardrobe and storage
- T The hut housing the machine for lowering enthroned gods, etc., to the stage
- U The 'Heavens'
- W Hoisting the playhouse flag

tensity of his utterance should not prompt us to conclude that he is a poet. Rather it is the playwright striving for a particular dramatic effect, something which would receive acceptance and a ready response from the audience.

The Elizabethan theatre was an intimate theatre (for example, no spectator was more than about 60 feet from the stage), despite the fact that a playhouse like the Globe could hold an audience of between two and three thousand people. Because there was no attempt to think in terms of a 'picture-frame', which is a feature of the modern proscenium-arch stage, the large acting area could be quickly transformed from one locality to another. Thus the action was continuous throughout, and the movement from scene to scene resembles, in its speed, that of the modern film capable of moving wherever the requirements of the action dictate. In addition to these physical characteristics, Shakespeare was perhaps more fortunate than some of his fellow dramatists in that from about 1594 onwards, when he joined the company known as the Chamberlain's Men, he was able to write for specific actors whose talents he knew intimately. This relationship was sustained throughout his working life, and represents possibly the most fruitful cooperation of playwright, actors, and theatre in the history of English drama.

The sources of *Othello*

Shakespeare's main source for *Othello* was probably 'The Story of Disdemona of Venice and The Moorish Captain' which appeared in a collection of Italian stories by Giraldi Cinthio entitled *Gli Hecatommithi*, and which was published in Venice in 1566. Here Shakespeare found the bare outline of his plot, but the addition of certain details and the reworking of others give some important clues to his artistic purpose.

In Cinthio's story only Disdemona is named, 'the 'Moorish Captain' (*Othello*), 'the Ensign' (*Iago*), and 'the Captain' (*Cassio*) being referred to throughout by their titles only. Moreover, the action takes place over a much longer period of time than in Shakespeare's play, allowing a sizeable gap between Disdemona's marriage and the Moorish Captain's appointment to the Governorship of Cyprus. From the outset the only objection to the propriety of their marriage comes from Disdemona's relatives who, we are told, 'did all they could to make her accept a different husband'. The Moorish Captain is characterised as 'a man of great personal courage, who, because he had every advantage of person and had given proofs of military ability and lively intelligence, had a high reputation among the nobility', while Disdemona's love for him was due 'not to an impulse of womanly desire, but to a just appreciation of his worth'. Once married, Cinthio observes that 'they lived

together in such concord and tranquillity, while they were in Venice, that there was never a word—let alone an act—between them that was not affectionate’.

It is the Ensign who intrudes into this idyllic relationship, ‘a man of very fine appearance but of the most depraved nature that ever a man had in the world.’ The Ensign falls in love with Disdemona, but believes that she is in love with the Captain (Cassio in Shakespeare’s play). He therefore seeks to kill his rival, and vows to turn the Moorish Captain against Disdemona. Cinthio makes the Ensign’s love for Disdemona the main motive for his villainous plot, whereas in Shakespeare’s play this detail is peripheral. The Captain is deprived of his rank for brawling, and the Ensign (who in Cinthio’s story is not jealous of his rival’s promotion, and who does not engineer this incident), takes advantage of this to reveal to the Moorish Captain that his wife is adulterous. Meanwhile, the Ensign’s three-year-old daughter (who does not appear in Shakespeare’s play) steals Disdemona’s handkerchief, thus providing the circumstantial evidence which her father will use to convince the Moorish Captain of his wife’s guilt. The Captain finds the handkerchief and knowing it to belong to Disdemona, wishes to return it to her. He attempts to, but his visit is used to support the Ensign’s allegations against him. Later, the Moorish Captain overhears a conversation between the Ensign and the Captain which is used to intensify his suspicions: ‘and putting on an act of astonishment he [the Ensign] contrived by expressive gestures with his head and his hands to seem as though he were listening to extraordinary things.’ When Disdemona is confronted with the loss of her handkerchief she is confused and lies, but also, the change in her husband’s behaviour causes her, unlike Shakespeare’s heroine, to have second thoughts about the marriage:

And I very much fear that I am one who gives an example to young women not to marry against the will of their families. Italian ladies may learn from me not to link themselves to a man whom nature, climate, and manner of life separate from us.

Also, in Shakespeare’s play one character, Bianca, is asked to copy the design of the handkerchief, and is the woman whose house Cassio frequents, but in Cinthio’s story the Captain’s ‘woman at home who made marvellous embroidery on fine linen’ is different from ‘the harlot with whom he used to amuse himself’.

Roderigo does not appear at all in Cinthio’s story, where it is the Ensign who agrees to kill the Captain. He also plots with the Moorish Captain to kill Disdemona and to make the murder seem like an accident. He does not succeed in his plot to kill the Captain, but one night the Ensign hides in Disdemona’s closet and as she approaches he creeps out and hits her ‘a terrible blow in the small of the back’ with a

stocking filled with sand. After laying her on her bed he splits her head, and he and the Moorish Captain then attempt to conceal the crime by making 'the ceiling timbers of the room fall down, just as they had planned together'. Although the murder goes undetected, the Moorish Captain now begins to realise how much he loved Desdemona and he rejects the Ensign. The Ensign, for his part, seeks to revenge this rejection by informing the Captain that the Moorish Captain had tried to kill him. When the Venetian government hears about these events in Cyprus it recalls 'the Moorish Captain to Venice and tortures him to find out if they are true. 'But with great fortitude of mind he endured all his torments, and deemed everything with such constancy that nothing could be got out of him'. The Ensign is also tortured, but he ends by dying 'miserably'. The whole of Cinthio's narrative thus becomes a proof of the way in which Providence revenges evil deeds, and he ends by observing that the entire story was revealed 'after his death by the Ensign's wife, who had all along known the truth'.

Shakespeare evidently derived much of the plot, as well as the themes for his play from Cinthio's story. The 'nobility' of the Moorish Captain, and his 'reputation', Desdemona's 'innocence', the sublimity and harmony of their language and its subsequent alteration, are all echoed in the play. The introduction of Roderigo, the gulling of Brabantio, and the final apportioning of the responsibility for Desdemona's murder to Othello himself, indicate a marked shifting away from Cinthio's story as he turned it into a tragic drama.

Cinthio's narrative, however, was by no means Shakespeare's only source. The Chronicles of Hall and Holinshed gave him sufficient material to experiment in the earlier *Richard III* with a prototype of the villainous character of Iago, and with the various methods of engaging the sympathy of the audience for villainy through the judicious use of soliloquy. Also, in *The Rape of Lucrece*, a story popularised in the Middle Ages in Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women*, and in Shakespeare's own time in Painter's *The Palace of Pleasure* (1566), Shakespeare had begun to explore the kind of colour-symbolism that he later employed in a much more mature way in *Othello*.

In plays such as *Much Ado About Nothing* (1599), and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1600) he explored in dramatic terms the consequences which arise from persons interpreting evidence mistakenly; he developed themes of jealousy and suspicion, although in these two plays he gave them a distinctly comic flavour. But it was to Ben Jonson's play *Every Man in His Humour* (1598) that Shakespeare may have turned for some of the details in *Othello*. Jonson's jealous merchant Thorello may have suggested Othello's name and indeed some of the traits of his character. For example, Thorello's denunciation of the pangs of jealousy that he suffers as a result of his wife Bianca's imagined adultery,