

THE TRAGEDY OF OTHELLO THE MOOR OF VENICE

ACT I

Scene I. [Venice. A street.]

Enter *Roderigo* and *Iago*.

Rod. Tush, never tell me! I take it much unkindly
That thou, *Iago*, who hast had my purse
As if the strings were thine, shouldst know of this.

Iago. 'Sblood, but you'll not hear me!
If ever I did dream of such a matter,
Abhor me.

5

Rod. Thou told'st me thou didst hold him in thy hate.

Iago. Despise me if I do not. Three great ones of the
city,

In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,
Off-capped to him; and, by the faith of man,
I know my price, I am worth no worse a place.
But he, as loving his own pride and purposes,
Evades them with a bombast circumstance,
Horribly stuffed with epithets of war;

10

And, in conclusion,
Nonsuits my mediators; for, "Certes," says he,
"I have already chose my officer."
And what was he?

15

20. arithmetician: a student of tactics as revealed in military books, which were filled with arithmetical tables of organization.

22. almost damned in a fair wife: it is uncertain whether Shakespeare originally intended for Cassio to be married and forgot to delete this passage when he developed his plot otherwise, or whether this is a reference to Bianca's unsuccessful matrimonial pursuit of him. "Damned in a fair wife" reflects a proverbial attitude that a handsome wife was a source of trouble for her husband.

25-7. unless the bookish theoretic,/ Wherein the togged consuls can propose/ As masterly: except in book theory, in which the statesmen of Venice are as adept. The toga (robe of state) symbolized peace.

28. had th' election: was chosen

29. of whom his eyes had seen the proof: whose ability he had witnessed

31. be-leed and calmed: "stopped in my course"

32. debtor and creditor: a man who keeps accounts, a contemptuous reference to Cassio's familiarity with books rather than experience; **counter-caster:** another term for "accountant"

33. in good time: a fine piece of luck for me

34. ancient: ensign

38. letter and affection: influence and personal liking

39. gradation: seniority

41. affined: bound by any ties

47. shall mark: must notice

Forsooth, a great arithmetician, 20
One Michael Cassio, a Florentine
(A fellow almost damned in a fair wife),
That never set a squadron in the field,
Nor the division of a battle knows
More than a spinster; unless the bookish theoric, 25
Wherein the toged consuls can propose
As masterly as he. Mere prattle, without practice,
Is all his soldiership. But he, sir, had th' election;
And I (of whom his eyes had seen the proof
At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds 30
Christian and heathen) must be be-leed and calmed
By debtor and creditor, this counter-caster.
He (in good time!) must his lieutenant be,
And I (God bless the mark!) his Moorship's ancient.

Rod. By heaven, I rather would have been his hang- 35
man.

Iago. Why, there's no remedy; 'tis the curse of service.
Preferment goes by letter and affection,
And not by old gradation, where each second
Stood heir to the first. Now, sir, be judge yourself, 40
Whether I in any just term am affined
To love the Moor.

Rod. I would not follow him then.

Iago. O, sir, content you.
I follow him to serve my turn upon him. 45
We cannot all be masters, nor all masters
Cannot be truly followed. You shall mark
Many a duteous and knee-crooking knave
That, doting on his own obsequious bondage,
Wears out his time, much like his master's ass, 50
For naught but provender; and when he's old, cashiered.

52. **Whip me:** whip, for all I care

53. **trimmed in forms and visages of duty:** suitably but hypocritically simulating duty in their behavior and appearance

56-7. **lined their coats:** lined their pockets

58. **Do themselves homage:** serve themselves (instead of their masters)

61. **Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago:** "since I am Iago it is not to be expected that I will behave with as much devotion to Othello's interests as though I were Othello himself," with the added implication that anyone would prefer to be the master rather than the servant.

62. **follow but myself:** follow my own interest

63-4. **not I for love and duty,/ But seeming so:** I do not act so because of sincere love and duty but only to give that appearance; **peculiar:** personal

66. **act and figure:** functioning and motivation

67. **compliment extern:** external appearance

68. **But:** that

69. **daws:** jackdaws; **I am not what I am:** I am not what I appear to be.

71. **carry't thus:** get away with this

72. **Call up:** that is, from his bed

75-6. **though he in a fertile climate dwell,/ Plague him with flies:** though he is enjoying good luck, plague him with petty irritations.

77. **throw such changes of vexation:** inflict such vexing misadventures

78. **As:** that

80. **timorous accent:** terrifying outcry

Whip me such honest knaves! Others there are
Who, trimmed in forms and visages of duty,
Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves;
And, throwing but shows of service on their lords, 55
Do well thrive by them, and when they have lined their
coats,

Do themselves homage. These fellows have some soul;
And such a one do I profess myself. For, sir,
It is as sure as you are Roderigo, 60
Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago.
In following him, I follow but myself.
Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,
But seeming so, for my peculiar end;
For when my outward action doth demonstrate 65
The native act and figure of my heart
In compliment extern, 'tis not long after
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at. I am not what I am.

Rod. What a full fortune does the thick-lips owe 70
If he can carry't thus!

Iago. Call up her father:
Rouse him, make after him, poison his delight,
Proclaim him in the streets, incense her kinsmen,
And though he in a fertile climate dwell, 75
Plague him with flies; though that his joy be joy,
Yet throw such changes of vexation on't
As it may lose some color.

Rod. Here is her father's house. I'll call aloud.

Iago. Do, with like timorous accent and dire yell 80
As when, by night and negligence, the fire
Is spied in populous cities.

Rod. What, ho, Brabantio! Signior Brabantio, hol



"The description of Venice."

From Fynes Moryson, *Description of Venice* (1617), the travel diary of an English traveler of the late sixteenth century.

- 93. **Zounds:** God's wounds
- 96. **Even now . . . very now:** at this very instant
- 97. **tupping:** covering
- 98. **snorting:** snoring
- 109. **distemp'ring:** intoxicating
- 110. **Upon:** inspired by
- 111. **start my quiet:** disturb my peace

Iago. Awake! What, ho, Brabantio! Thieves! thieves!
thieves!

85

Look to your house, your daughter, and your bags!
Thieves! thieves!

[Enter] *Brabantio* above, at a window.

Bra. What is the reason of this terrible summons?
What is the matter there?

Rod. Signior, is all your family within?

90

Iago. Are your doors locked?

Bra. Why, wherefore ask you this?

Iago. Zounds, sir, y'are robbed! For shame, put on
your gown!

Your heart is burst; you have lost half your soul.

95

Even now, now, very now, an old black ram

Is tuppung your white ewe. Arise, arise!

Awake the snorting citizens with the bell,

Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you.

Arise, I say!

100

Bra. What, have you lost your wits?

Rod. Most reverend signior, do you know my voice?

Bra. Not I. What are you?

Rod. My name is Roderigo.

Bra. The worser welcomel

105

I have charged thee not to haunt about my doors.

In honest plainness thou hast heard me say

My daughter is not for thee; and now, in madness,

Being full of supper and distemp'ring draughts,

Upon malicious knavery dost thou come

110

To start my quiet.

Rod. Sir, sir, sir—

118. **grange**: isolated farmhouse
126. **gennets**: horses of Spanish breed; **germans**:
relations
127. **profane**: foul-mouthed
137. **odd-even . . . watch**: midnight, neither night
nor morning
141. **your allowance**: with your knowledge and
permission; sanctioned by you



Habito di Gentilhuomo d' estate

A Venetian man of property.
From Giacomo Franco, *Habiti d'huomeni et donne Venetia* (1626).

Bra. But thou must needs be sure
My spirit and my place have in their power
To make this bitter to thee. 115

Rod. Patience, good sir.

Bra. What tell'st thou me of robbing? This is Venice;
My house is not a grange.

Rod. Most grave Brabantio,
In simple and pure soul I come to you. 120

Iago. Zounds, sir, you are one of those that will not
serve God if the devil bid you. Because we come to do
you service, and you think we are ruffians, you'll have
your daughter covered with a Barbary horse; you'll have
your nephews neigh to you; you'll have coursers for 125
cousins, and gennets for germans.

Bra. What profane wretch art thou?

Iago. I am one, sir, that comes to tell you your daughter
and the Moor are now making the beast with two
backs. 130

Bra. Thou art a villain.

Iago. You are a senator.

Bra. This thou shalt answer. I know thee, Roderigo.

Rod. Sir, I will answer anything. But I beseech you,
If't be your pleasure and most wise consent 135
(As partly I find it is) that your fair daughter,
At this odd-even and dull watch o' the night,
Transported, with no worse nor better guard
But with a knave of common hire, a gondolier,
To the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor— 140
If this be known to you, and your allowance,
We then have done you bold and saucy wrongs;
But if you know not this, my manners tell me
We have your wrong rebuke. Do not believe

145. **from:** in spite of

148. **gross:** great

150. **extravagant:** (obsolete) "wandering beyond bounds"; **extravagant and wheeling stranger:** a wandering stranger with no fixed place of residence

151. **Straight:** immediately

161. **meet:** fitting; **wholesome to my place:** "healthy" for my job

164. **However this may gall him with some check:** even though he may suffer a reprimand

165. **Cannot:** that is, the state cannot; **cast:** discharge, dismiss

166. **loud:** great, important

168. **fathom:** capacity

174. **Sagittary:** probably a public inn by that name; **raised search:** the men called out to search

That, from the sense of all civility, 145
I thus would play and trifle with your reverence.
Your daughter, if you have not given her leave,
I say again, hath made a gross revolt,
Tying her duty, beauty, wit, and fortunes
In an extravagant and wheeling stranger 150
Of here and everywhere. Straight satisfy yourself.
If she be in her chamber, or your house,
Let loose on me the justice of the state
For thus deluding you.

Bra. Strike on the tinder, hol 155
Give me a taper! Call up all my people!
This accident is not unlike my dream:
Belief of it oppresses me already.
Light, I say! light! *Exit [above].*

Iago. Farewell, for I must leave you. 160
It seems not meet, nor wholesome to my place,
To be produced (as, if I stay, I shall)
Against the Moor. For I do know, the state,
However this may gall him with some check,
Cannot with safety cast him; for he's embarked 165
With such loud reason to the Cyprus wars,
Which even now stand in act, that for their souls
Another of his fathom they have none
To lead their business; in which regard,
Though I do hate him as I do hell pains, 170
Yet, for necessity of present life,
I must show out a flag and sign of love,
Which is indeed but sign. That you shall surely find him,
Lead to the Sagittary the raised search;
And there will I be with him. So farewell. *Exit.* 175



Venetian gondolas on the canal.
From Giacomo Franco, *Habiti d'huomeni et donne Venetia* (1626).

177. **despised time:** old age

182. **mo:** more

188. **Is there . . . charms:** a singular verb with plural object was common usage.

189. **property:** nature

190. **abused:** deluded

199. **I may command:** my influence is great enough to ensure assistance.

200. **special officers of night:** men specifically appointed to guard the city at night

201. **I'll deserve your pains:** I'll reward your efforts.

Enter, [below,] *Brabantio*, in his nightgown, and *Servants*
with torches.

Bra. It is too true an evil. Gone she is;
And what's to come of my despised time
Is naught but bitterness. Now, Roderigo,
Where didst thou see her?—O unhappy girl!—
With the Moor, say'st thou?—Who would be a father?— 180
How didst thou know 'twas she?—O, she deceives me
Past thought!—What said she to you?—Get mo tapers!
Raise all my kindred!—Are they married, think you?

Rod. Truly I think they are.

Bra. O heaven! How got she out? O treason of the 185
blood!

Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters' minds
By what you see them act. Is there not charms
By which the property of youth and maidhood
May be abused? Have you not read, Roderigo, 190
Of some such thing?

Rod. Yes, sir, I have indeed.

Bra. Call up my brother.—O, would you had had her!—
Some one way, some another.—Do you know
Where we may apprehend her and the Moor? 195

Rod. I think I can discover him, if you please
To get good guard and go along with me.

Bra. Pray you lead on. At every house I'll call;
I may command at most.—Get weapons, ho!
And raise some special officers of night.— 200
On, good Roderigo. I'll deserve your pains.

Exeunt.

I. ii. Iago now slyly warns Othello of Brabantio's rage at the elopement of his daughter. Othello asserts his honest love for Desdemona. Cassio, another object of Iago's hatred, now enters with a summons from the Duke of Venice to Othello calling him to an urgent conference concerning the expedition to Cyprus. At this point, Brabantio comes with his servants to attack Othello, but on news of the Duke's summons he, too, goes to the conference, determined to denounce Othello to the Duke for the use of magic in winning Desdemona.

- 2. very stuff o':** the essence of
- 5. yerked:** jabbed
- 7. prated:** spoke insolently
- 8. scurvy:** uncomplimentary, insulting
- 11. I did full hard forbear him:** I could hardly keep from attacking him.
- 12. fast:** securely
- 13. the magnifico:** Brabantio
- 14-5. hath in his effect a voice potential/ As double as the Duke's:** has as much political influence as the Duke himself
- 17. enforce it on:** force it to the limit
- 18. cable:** rope; i.e., latitude
- 20. signiory:** the governing body of Venice
- 21. yet to know:** not yet known
- 24. demerits:** deserts; no negative meaning as in modern usage
- 25. May speak (unbonneted) to:** may face on equal terms, though with due courtesy

Scene II. [Venice. Before the Sagittary.]

Enter *Othello*, *Iago*, *Attendants*, with torches.

Iago. Though in the trade of war I have slain men,
Yet do I hold it very stuff o' the conscience
To do no contrived murder. I lack iniquity
Sometimes to do me service. Nine or ten times
I had thought t' have yerked him here under the ribs. 5

Oth. 'Tis better as it is.

Iago. Nay, but he prated,
And spoke such scurvy and provoking terms
Against your honor,
That with the little godliness I have 10
I did full hard forbear him. But I pray you, sir,
Are you fast married? Be assured of this,
That the magnifico is much beloved,
And hath in his effect a voice potential
As double as the Duke's. He will divorce you, 15
Or put upon you what restraint and grievance
The law, with all his might to enforce it on,
Will give him cable.

Oth. Let him do his spite.
My services which I have done the signiory 20
Shall out-tongue his complaints. 'Tis yet to know—
Which, when I know that boasting is an honor,
I shall promulgate—I fetch my life and being
From men of royal siege; and my demerits
May speak (unbonneted) to as proud a fortune 25
As this that I have reached. For know, *Iago*,
But that I love the gentle Desdemona,



A contemporary view of the square before St. Mark's, Venice.
From Vecellio, *De gli habiti antichi* (1590).

30. the sea's worth: that is, all the treasure buried in the sea

33. You were best: it would be best for you to

35. perfect soul: clear conscience

37. Janus: the double-faced god of Roman mythology

42. haste-post-haste: immediate. The phrase was used as a direction for the quick delivery of letters.

47. sequent: consecutive

52. several: separate