

# OTHELLO

## Character Notes

### OTHELLO

A Christian Moor and renowned general of the armies of Venice. He is educated, eloquent and well respected as a soldier. Indeed, his age and race are never mentioned in matters pertaining to the state. Nonetheless Iago masterly manipulates his insecurities: the age difference between Othello and his young bride, and his dark skin. Othello has married Desdemona without her father's permission before the play begins and he is consumed by jealousy at the thought of transferring her affections to a younger man.

### DESDEMONA

The daughter of a Venetian senator, Brabantio. She is self assured and determined and demonstrates this by deceiving her father and marrying Othello. Her commitment to Othello is never in doubt. She is a rounded character: she has a genuine and affectionate relationship with Emilia her waiting lady; she jokes bawdily with Emilia's husband Iago, and responds with dignity and poise to Othello's jealousy. After killing her, Othello realises his mistake and that she was, what he had always believed: chaste and pure.

### IAGO

Othello's ensign (lower than his deputy) and the two-faced villain of the play. He famously tells the audience - "I am not what I am." The "demi-devil" Iago spends a vast amount of time confiding in the audience – telling them his devious plan to manipulate the trusting Othello. His motivation is never very clearly expressed. He is humiliated when Cassio is promoted by Othello to be his deputy instead of him, at the start of the play. Nonetheless he's a character who seems to delight in manipulation and destruction with or without provocation.

### EMILIA

Iago's wife and Desdemona's attendant. She has a caring, loving relationship towards Desdemona and is deeply aggrieved when she Iago insists that she hand over to him a precious handkerchief dropped by Desdemona. She has a cynical life view about marriage and is untrusting of her husband.

**CASSIO**

Michael Cassio is promoted to Othello's lieutenant at the start of the play. Cassio is a young and inexperienced soldier, a mathematician, whose status is resented by Iago. He is truly devoted to Othello, and is extremely ashamed after his "reputation" is tarnished in a drunken brawl and he is stripped of his position by Othello. Iago plays on Cassio's youth, good looks, and friendship with Desdemona to ensnare Othello and make him believe he has been cuckolded by him. Cassio is seeing a courtesan called Bianca and is completely unaware that Iago has linked his name with Desdemona.

**RODERIGO**

A young, rich Venetian gentleman who is in love with Desdemona. He is putty in Iago's hands. Iago convinces him to hand over all of his money, in return for which Iago promises to help him win Desdemona's hand. Iago does no such thing. Iago urges Roderigo to kill Cassio, maintaining that he is a rival for Desdemona's love. In fact Iago is simply using Roderigo to engage Cassio in a fight so that Othello can dismiss Cassio for unseemly behaviour. In order to ensure that Roderigo does not incriminate him, Iago kills Roderigo pretending that he is doing so to punish him for attempting to kill Cassio.

**BRABATIO**

Desdemona's loving father, and a self-important Venetian senator. A friend and confidante of Othello, Brabantio feels betrayed when the general marries his daughter in secret.

**DUKE OF VENICE**

The Duke is the official authority in Venice. He has great respect for Othello as a general.

**MONTANO**

The governor of Cyprus.

**LODOVICO**

A noble Venetian who is a kinsman to Brabantio. He acts as a messenger between Venice and Cyprus.

**GRATIANO**

Brabantio's brother who accompanies Lodovico to Cyprus.

## **BIANCA**

A courtesan, or high-class prostitute, in Cyprus. Bianca's favourite customer is Cassio, who teases her with promises of marriage. She is implicated in Iago's complicated plot to convince Othello of Cassio's affair with Desdemona. Iago gives Cassio Othello's handkerchief. Cassio likes the design so much that he gives it to Bianca to have a copy made. Othello sees Bianca with the handkerchief and is convinced of Cassio's guilt.