

### Worksheet 14 – Act 3, Scene 3: The Handkerchief

#### Review: Lecture 13

In the previous lecture, Prof. McRae discussed the moment in Act 3, Scene 3 where Othello comes to suspect that Desdemona has had a relationship with Cassio.

- ✓ What does the verb 'dissembling' mean?

#### Recall: Lecture 14

**Complete this section after watching the video lecture to check how much you remember.**

1. Fill in the missing words from the three quotations below:
  - a) **Othello**  
By the world,  
I think my wife be \_\_\_\_\_ and think she is not;  
I think that thou art just and think thou art \_\_\_\_\_.  
I'll have some \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b) **Iago**  
Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on—  
Behold her \_\_\_\_\_?
  - c) **Othello**  
Damn her, \_\_\_\_\_. O damn her.
2. Why does Emilia give Iago the handkerchief?
3. What does Iago claim he overheard Cassio saying when he was asleep one night?
4. Othello asks for 'ocular proof' of Desdemona's cheating. What does Iago suggest?

#### Analysis

5. Prof. McRae mentions the term 'catharsis' in his lecture, which is a feature of tragic plays. Catharsis was first discussed by the ancient Greek philosopher, Aristotle:

'A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; ... with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.'

-- Aristotle, *Poetics*

The term 'catharsis' is derived from the medical term *katharsis* (Greek: "purgation" or "purification"). Aristotle states that the purpose of tragedy is to arouse feelings of pity and fear in the audience, and thereby help them to purge themselves of those negative emotions.

- a) Research the term 'catharsis' online and make bullet point notes.
- b) Write your own definition of 'catharsis', which should be no more than three sentences long.

6. Look at the three quotations from the scene below, and explain how each of them might make the audience feel pity and/ or fear:

a) **Iago** (*aside*)

I will in Cassio's lodging lose this napkin,  
And let him find it. Trifles light as air  
Are to the jealous confirmations strong  
As proofs of holy writ: this may do something.

b) **Iago** (*aside*)

Not poppy, nor mandragora,  
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,  
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep  
Which thou owedst yesterday.

c) **Othello** (*to Iago*)

If thou dost slander her and torture me,  
Never pray more; abandon all remorse;  
On horror's head horrors accumulate;

d) **Othello**

O, blood, blood, blood!

**Iago**

Patience, I say; your mind perhaps may change.

**Othello**

Never, Iago

### Evaluation

7. 'The tragedy of the play comes from Othello's misguided faith in Iago'. Do you agree with this statement? Why/ why not? *Make a mind map of your ideas answering this question.*

Consider:

- What makes *Othello* a tragedy?
- Does this aspect of the play create catharsis for the audience?
- Are there other possible reasons for Othello's turn to jealousy (e.g. self-doubt, racial prejudice)?

### Glossary

- **Catharsis** – the process of releasing, and thereby providing relief from, strong or repressed emotions.
- **Trifles** – things of little value or importance.
- **Holy writ** – the Bible; writings or sayings of unchallenged authority.
- **Mandragora** – the mandrake plant, used as a drug to make people sleep.

- **Slander** – making false claims about someone to damage their reputation.