

## Worksheet 17 – Act 4, Scene 2: Othello confronts Desdemona

### Review: Lecture 16

In Lecture 16, Prof. McRae explored Act 4, Scene 1, where Othello publicly accuses Desdemona of being unfaithful. He also examined the role of Bianca as a character.

- ✓ What was the definition of “Machiavellian”?

### Recall: Lecture 17

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

1. Complete the missing words from the quotation:

**Othello**

Was this fair paper, this most \_\_\_\_\_ book,  
Made to write '\_\_\_\_\_' upon?

### Analysis

2. Reread Othello’s speech and dialogue with Desdemona, below.
  - a) What seem to be his main concerns about Desdemona’s “infidelity” in this section of the scene?
  - b) How does Othello’s aggression towards Desdemona in Act 4, Scene 1 (where he hits her), continue through his use of violent language?

**Othello**

Had it pleased heaven  
To try me with affliction; had they rain'd  
All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head.  
Steep'd me in poverty to the very lips,  
Given to captivity me and my utmost hopes,  
I should have found in some place of my soul  
A drop of patience: but, alas, to make me  
A fixed figure for the time of scorn  
To point his slow unmoving finger at!  
Yet could I bear that too; well, very well:  
But there, where I have garner'd up my heart,  
Where either I must live, or bear no life;  
The fountain from the which my current runs,  
Or else dries up; to be discarded thence!  
Or keep it as a cistern for foul toads  
To knot and gender in! Turn thy complexion there,  
Patience, thou young and rose-lipp'd cherubin,—  
Ay, there, look grim as hell!

**Desdemona**

I hope my noble lord esteems me honest.

**Othello** O, ay; as summer flies are in the shambles,  
That quicken even with blowing. O thou weed,

Who art so lovely fair and smell'st so sweet  
That the sense aches at thee, would thou hadst  
ne'er been born!

3. After Othello attacks her, Desdemona begins to blame herself, saying:

**Desdemona**

'Tis meet I should be used so, very meet.  
How have I been behaved, that he might stick  
The small'st opinion on my least misuse?

- a) What does Desdemona mean by these lines?
- b) Why does she re-examine her own behaviour looking for some fault? What do her views show about both her character and the society in which she lives?

**Evaluation**

4. By this scene, Othello and Desdemona's relationship has completely changed. Could these changes have been predicted earlier in the play?

Find three quotations from earlier in the play that foreshadow the violence and anger shown in this scene and provide an explanation of their significance.

**Glossary**

- **Steep'd** – steeped; soaked in liquid.
- **Garner'd** – garnered; gathered or collected.
- **Cistern** – a tank for storing water.
- **Gender (verb)** – an old way of spelling “engender”, which means to create offspring.
- **Cherubin** – a type of angel who is often represented as a winged child.
- **Shambles** – a butcher's slaughterhouse; a state of disorder.
- **Quicken** – give life to; stimulate.