

**Worksheet 21 – Act 5, Scene 2: Othello kills himself**

**Review: Lecture 20**

In our penultimate lecture, Prof. McRae discussed the scene where Othello kills Desdemona, and then Iago murders Emilia.

- ✓ How does Othello kill Desdemona?

**Recall: Lecture 21**

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

1. Which characters survive at the end of the play?
- |           |            |              |
|-----------|------------|--------------|
| a) Bianca | b) Othello | c) Desdemona |
| d) Cassio | e) Iago    | f) Roderigo  |

**Analysis**

2. Reread Othello's speech, which Prof. McRae discusses from 6:44 – 10:38.
- a) How does Othello's final speech affect the audience's understanding of him as a character?
  - b) What is the significance of Othello referring to himself in both the first and third person?
  - c) What is the effect of his final anecdote about the Turk?

**Othello**

Soft you; a word or two before you go.  
I have done the state some service, and they know't.  
No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,  
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,  
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,  
Nor set down aught in malice: then must you speak  
Of one that loved not wisely but too well;  
Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought  
Perplex'd in the extreme; of one whose hand,  
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away  
Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,  
Albeit unused to the melting mood,  
Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees  
Their medicinal gum. Set you down this;  
And say besides, that in Aleppo once,  
Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk  
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,  
I took by the throat the circumcised dog,  
And smote him, thus.

**Evaluation**

3. You are going to write an essay, bringing together your learning from this lecture series.

Choose one of the essay questions on the following page to focus on.

Follow these steps to write the essay:

- a) Mind map your initial ideas, checking back through your work from previous worksheets to help you.
- b) Create an essay plan, deciding on the order of your points and your overarching argument.
- c) Write your essay out in full, remembering to use formal language. **Challenge:** incorporate some of the vocabulary from the **Glossary** section of each worksheet into your essay.

**Essay questions:**

- Analyze Desdemona's role in the play. To what extent is she merely a passive victim of Othello's brutality? How does her character change when she is not with Othello?
- Russian writer, Tolstoy, wrote of Iago: 'There are many motives, but they are all vague' Beginning with Act 1, Scene 1, and linking out to the play as a whole, explore the idea that racial hatred is the prime motivator behind Iago's plot to bring down Othello.
- Compare and contrast the roles of Desdemona, Bianca and Emilia.
- Thomas Rhymer (1697) dismissed Desdemona as a 'silly woman' and later critics have been no kinder. Examine the view that a hatred of women, as opposed to love of a woman is the real driving force behind the tragedy of *Othello*.
- The critic F.R Leavis said in 1952 that 'Othello has a propensity to jealousy and possess a weak character: the stuff of which he is made begins at once to deteriorate and show itself unfit. His love is composed largely of ignorance of self as well as ignorance of Desdemona'  
To what extent do you agree with this statement?
- 'Despite his apparent good nature, Cassio plays a significant part in Othello's downfall.' By exploring the presentation of Cassio in *Othello*, evaluate this view.
- In what ways do you think reputation and honour are significant concerns in the play *Othello*? In the course of your answer:
  - Explain clearly how characters in the play regard reputation and honour
  - Comment on the importance of these concerns in the world of the play.
- Read Act 2 Scene 3 from 'Now, by heaven, / My blood begins my safer guides to rule' to 'But never more be officer of mine.' What does the passage add to your understanding of the relationship between Othello and Iago? In the course of your answer:
  - Look closely at the language and tone of the speeches
  - Comment on what the play suggests about honesty.
- **Challenge question:** Compare Othello's speech (V.ii.7-22) with Macbeth's speech (V.v.17-28).

## Glossary

- **Aria** – a song.
- **Levant** – a term referring to countries east of Italy. The term Levant appears in English in 1497, and originally meant the East or "Mediterranean lands east of Italy". It is borrowed from the French levant "rising", referring to the rising of the sun in the east.
- **Machiavellian** – cunning and scheming, especially in politics.