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Othello

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

WITH DETAILED NOTES
FROM THE WORLD'S
LEADING CENTER FOR
SHAKESPEARE STUDIES

EDITED BY BARBARA A. MOWAT
AND PAUL WERSTINE

ACT I

Scene 1

Enter Roderigo and Iago.

RODERIGO

(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, 5
Abhor me.

RODERIGO

Thou toldst 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, 10
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, 15

(And in conclusion,)

Nonsuits my mediators. For "Certes," says he,
"I have already chose my officer."

And what was he?

Forsooth, a great arithmetician, 20

One Michael Cassio, a Florentine,

A fellow almost damned in a fair wife,

23. **set a squadron:** i.e., stationed even so much as a small detachment of men; **field:** i.e., battlefield

25. **spinster:** one (usually a woman) who spins; **unless:** except for; **theoric:** theory

26. **togèd consuls:** civic officials whom Iago pictures as wearing Roman togas; **propose:** talk

28. **had th' election:** i.e., was the one chosen

30. **Rhodes, Cyprus:** embattled islands that were part of the Venetian empire

31–32. **beleed and calmed:** stopped in my progress (nautical terms in which Cassio and Iago are compared to sailing ships, Cassio coming between Iago and the wind [putting Iago in the lee] and thereby stopping him)

33. **By . . . creditor:** i.e., by a mere bookkeeper; **countercaster:** one who computes with tokens

34. **in good time:** i.e., "to be sure"

35. **God bless the mark:** an expression of impatient scorn; **his Moorship's:** i.e., Othello's (a sarcastic racial slur by analogy with the title "his Worship"); **ancient:** i.e., ensign, standard-bearer (the lowest-ranking commissioned officer in the infantry)

37. **service:** military service

38. **affection:** personal preference

39–40. **old gradation . . . first:** i.e., each second officer automatically succeeded each first officer

41. **affined:** i.e., bound, obliged (literally, related)

45. **serve . . . him:** i.e., use him for my own ends

47. **mark:** observe

48. **knee-crooking knave:** bowing menial

53. **Whip me:** i.e., I'd have them whip

54. **trimmed . . . duty:** i.e., appearing dutiful in manners and looks **trimmed:** dressed

That never set a squadron in the field,
 Nor the division of a battle knows
 More than a spinster—unless the bookish theoretic, 25
 Wherein the (togèd) 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
 Christened and heathen, must be beleed and
 calmed
 By debtor and creditor. This countercaster,
 He, in good time, must his lieutenant be,
 And I, (God) bless the mark, his Moorship's ancient. 35

RODERIGO

By heaven, I rather would have been his hangman.

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 40
 Stood heir to th' first. Now, sir, be judge yourself
 Whether I in any just term am affined
 To love the Moor.

RODERIGO

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.

Whip me such honest knaves! Others there are
 Who, trimmed in forms and visages of duty,
 Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves, 55

And, throwing but shows of service on their lords,
Do well thrive by them; and when they have lined
their coats,
Do themselves homage. These fellows have some
soul, 60
And such a one do I profess myself. For, sir,
It is as sure as you are Roderigo,
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, 65
But seeming so for my peculiar end.
For when my outward action doth demonstrate
The native act and figure of my heart
In complement extern, 'tis not long after
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve 70
For daws to peck at. I am not what I am.

RODERIGO

What a (full) fortune does the (thick-lips) owe
If he can carry 't thus!

LAGO

Call up her father.

Rouse him. Make after him, poison his delight,
Proclaim him in the streets; incense her kinsmen, 75
And, though he in a fertile climate dwell,
Plague him with flies. Though that his joy be joy,
Yet throw such chances of vexation on 't
As it may lose some color. 80

RODERIGO

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

LAGO

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

RODERIGO

What ho, Brabantio! Signior Brabantio, ho! 85

LAGO

Awake! What ho, Brabantio! Thieves, thieves!

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