



EVERYMAN
OTHELLO
 William Shakespeare

Edited by John F. Andrews
 former editor of the *Shakespeare Quarterly*
 Foreword by James Earl Jones

*The Everyman Shakespeare is the most authoritative,
 up-to-date paperback edition of the plays and poems.*

Uniquely among existing editions it provides:

- face-to-face text and notes
- a chronology of Shakespeare's life and times
- a rich selection of critical and theatrical responses to the play over the centuries
- text derived from the earliest printings, often preserving puns and wordplay otherwise lost
- foreword by an actor or theatre director describing the play in performance
- up-to-date commentary on the structure, atmosphere and content of the play and on its sources and influences

Cover photograph: David Slater
 Cover design: The Tango Design Consultancy

UK £3.99
 USA \$3.95
 CAN \$5.99



OTHELLO



THE EVERYMAN SHAKESPEARE



Text © 1991 by Doubleday Book & Music Clubs, Inc.
 Textual revisions, revisions to notes, introduction, note on text, chronology, and all end matter © J. M. Dent 1995 and Charles E. Tuttle Co. 1995

First published in Everyman by J. M. Dent 1995
 Published by permission of GuildAmerica Books, an imprint of Doubleday Book and Music Clubs, Inc.

All rights reserved
 J. M. Dent
 Orion Publishing Group
 Orion House
 5 Upper St Martin's Lane
 London WC2H 9EA
 and
 Charles E. Tuttle Co.
 28 South Main Street, Rutland
 Vermont 05701, USA

Typeset by Deltatype Ltd, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire
 Printed in Great Britain by
 The Guernsey Press Co. Ltd, Guernsey, C.I.

This book if bound as a paperback is subject to the condition that it may not be issued on loan or otherwise except in its original binding.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication-Data is available upon request

ISBN 0 460 87517 5

CONTENTS

Note on the Author and Editor vii
Chronology of Shakespeare's Life and Times viii
Foreword to Othello by James Earl Jones xiii
Editor's Introduction to Othello xvii
The Text of the Everyman Shakespeare xxi

OTHELLO I

Perspectives on Othello 270
Suggestions for Further Reading 320
Plot Summary 325
Acknowledgements 329

FOREWORD TO *Othello*

Othello is usually thought of as a play about jealousy. But it's not that simple. Unlike Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*, Othello never reaches the point where you could describe him as obsessed with jealousy. Confused, yes; jealous, no. He has one conception of Desdemona: his portrait of the wonderful, lovely lady he married. Then Iago holds up to him the picture of another creature: a deceiving wanton. There's no way that Othello can put these two images together in a single woman. So he goes mad. His confusion drives him insane.

This doesn't mean that Othello is a simpleton, a buffoon. He's sometimes played that way, but it's a terrible mistake to do so. What we must always remember is that *Othello* is the tragedy of a great man. He's of royal descent, and he is a noble exemplar of the culture that built the magnificent Alhambra in Granada.

The Moors were a proud, highly educated people, with a tradition of learning and intellectual achievement that placed them ahead of many European societies. They were anything but savages or barbarians, and their strength is conveyed through the commanding presence of the General we meet in the opening acts of the play.

Much of the grandeur we observe in Othello is a reflection of the marvels he has witnessed and the extraordinary adventures he has endured. His travels have carried him to every corner of the known world. A comparable hero today would have tales to tell about his expeditions to the Moon, to Mars and Venus. With his trusted ensign Iago, Othello has visited the most exotic settings imaginable. He has gained rich insights and benefited from special revelations; he has an understanding of cosmic forces. In the process he has acquired unbounded confidence in his own abilities. And he has learned to put complete trust in the brother-in-arms who has shared so many of his experiences.

But now he's attempting to break into the most exclusive circle of the super-subtle Venetians. He rightly feels that he deserves the best, and without a moment's hesitation he simply draws on his personal charisma to woo and win the love of the most desirable woman in this most sophisticated of European capitals. It's a bold move, but he carries it off with the same aplomb he's always brought to his martial exploits.

Along the way, unfortunately, without realizing it, he has grievously offended the man on whom he has come to depend for assistance and counsel.

So long as he remains in the field as a soldier, Othello's role in Venetian affairs is clearly and securely defined. But once he alters that role by eloping with the daughter of a prominent Senator, the Moor subjects himself to a new set of challenges. For all his majesty as a warrior, Othello is regarded as an outsider by at least some members of the society he seeks to join through marriage to Desdemona. He is thus in no position to ignore the observations and advice of a guide he accepts as an insider.

Iago knows his Venice very acutely. He's a man of keen intelligence and proven ability, but he doesn't have the status or the family connections of a Cassio. As a result, he gets passed over for the promotion that would give him the recognition he believes himself to merit.

That turns him into a bitter cynic. He's not a petty man, and his is not a petty tragedy. But as he broods upon the way he's been mistreated, he plots the kind of retaliation that only a mind made petty by disillusionment would undertake.

The key to Iago's success as an avenger is the degree to which he manages to combine the personalities of two different people. To those he manipulates upon the stage, he must come across at all times as a truly good man. Meanwhile to the audience he must be evil personified.

An actor portraying Iago must be careful not to overplay the calculation that goes into his character. Iago is always thinking, always plotting. But he doesn't have everything planned out from the beginning. At first he has only a vague notion of how he'll achieve his purposes. He gets more inventive as he discovers, often to his own surprise, how trusting and believing everyone else is.

What the actor playing Iago must bear in mind is that the ensign's actions are motivated by real pain. He's not being a villain just for the fun of it. He's a man who has been deeply wounded – so much so that he's become a borderline schizophrenic – and he's striking back in a rage that allows him to seem quite calm even as he stokes the white-hot flames that seethe within his breast.

Iago's wife Aemilia is sometimes blamed for her role in the tragedy. But even she is for a long time taken in by her husband. And once she finds herself in a compromising situation, she initially acts in accordance with the teaching that a wife has no right to disobey her husband. Like Iago, she is trapped in a social role, and it is only at the end of the play that she rebels and speaks out against the mate she'd vowed to cherish as her lord and master.

Desdemona doesn't always hold her own in a production of *Othello*. She can be played as a weak innocent. It's very important, however, for her purity to be communicated as a kind of strength, because in many ways Desdemona (whose name means 'disdemon', or the negation of the demonic) is the real centre of the drama. What she represents are what modern audiences tend to think of as archaic moral values, but she and the virtue she stands for are what the men in the play are fighting over. Desdemona and her spiritual qualities are what *Othello* is all about. If her presence is not as intensely felt as that of Othello and Iago, then, a performance of Shakespeare's tragedy is severely diminished.

The most successful renderings of *Othello* in my experience have been directed by women. They've had powerfully realized Desdemonas. And I think they've also drawn out more of the emotional range and depth – including the agony – of the play's male characters.

I've been asked if I'd like to direct the play. Probably not. But I hope to keep doing the role of Othello until I'm satisfied that I've gotten it right.

JAMES EARL JONES and the New York Shakespeare Festival were launched simultaneously and in alliance nearly four decades ago. For Joseph Papp and the Festival, Jones played his first of seven 'Othellos' in 1964, one year after he made his film debut in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove*. Jones was nominated for a best actor Oscar for *The Great White Hope*, for which he'd won a Tony on stage. He will be long remembered for his film part as the voice of Darth Vader in the *Star Wars* trilogy, and for his roles in *Field of Dreams* and *The Hunt for Red October*.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TO *Othello*

Othello is usually defined as a domestic tragedy. In its exposure of the fragility of those ties that bind a man and woman in marriage, it can be as heart-rending as *Romeo and Juliet*. In its exploration of the agonies of doubt, it can be as gripping and every bit as terrifying as *Macbeth*. In its interrogation of the inadequacies of earthly justice, meanwhile, it can be as disturbing, and in its own terms as theologically and philosophically unsettling, as *King Lear*.

Because *Othello* anatomizes the follies occasioned by jealousy, there is something to be gained from setting it beside a comedy like *The Merry Wives of Windsor* or a romance such as *The Winter's Tale*. In many respects, however, it seems closer to *Hamlet*. Like the Prince of Denmark, its protagonist begins as a man of 'Free and Open Nature' (I.iii.406). He endeavours to act nobly. He places a premium on the maintenance of his 'Good Name' (III.iii.152). And even more than the melancholy Dane, he proves susceptible to those who know how to play upon the zeal with which he safeguards his treasured honour. As a consequence, the action of this tormented drama has many affinities with history's most celebrated revenge tragedy.

To the degree that Iago, the malefactor who undermines Othello, is impelled by something more specific than what Samuel Taylor Coleridge labelled 'motiveless malignity', what drives him is a determination to prove the General 'an Ass' (II.i.324) for selecting the more refined but supposedly less experienced Michael Cassio as his Lieutenant. Iago's contempt is directed primarily at the commander who has passed over the more senior candidate for an important position. But it also extends to the rival who has won the post that Iago himself coveted. And not only does Iago resent what he regards as an undeserved promotion for Cassio; he also harbours suspicions that Othello and his

new deputy have both 'leap'd into' his 'Seat' and enjoyed the intimacies of his wife Aemilia. In response to these presumed insults, Iago vows to be 'even'd' with the two of them (II.i.310-14).

The 'Poison' (III.iii.315) Iago uses to advance his purpose is administered in successive doses. First he takes advantage of Cassio's weakness for alcohol to cast him out of favour with his superior. Then he persuades the cashiered Lieutenant to solicit the Moor's own 'General' (II.iii.325) in the expectation that Desdemona will plead with her new husband for Cassio's reinstatement. Through these and other schemes Iago places himself in a position to do what he can to turn Desdemona's 'Virtue into Pitch, / And out of her own Goodness make the Net / That shall en-mash them all' (II.iii.372-74).

Iago now proceeds to a series of 'Proofs' (III.iii.314) that will lend plausibility to his insinuation that the Moor should 'look to' his wife. Reminding Othello that he remains an alien in the 'super-subtle' Venetian society he has sought to enter surreptitiously (I.iii.361), Iago gradually unravels the self-confidence of the 'all in all sufficient' Moor (IV.i.269) until he is able to twist a man 'of Royal Siege' (I.ii.22) into a recidivist barbarian who thinks himself the laughing-stock of a vaunting 'Roman' (IV.i.120). It is humiliating enough for the mighty warrior to believe that his own assistant has cuckolded him; what makes his plight even more unbearable is Iago's assertion that Cassio now scorns the 'foolish Woman' he has seduced as if she were no more to be prized than a common whore (IV.i.179-81).

Once Othello becomes persuaded that Desdemona is indeed guilty of infidelity, his untutored reaction is to exclaim, 'But yet the Pity of it, Iago: oh Iago, the Pity of it, Iago.' Recognizing the danger that his prey might be moved to mercy rather than malice, Iago alertly steps in to divert the Moor's sympathy with a remark that is guaranteed to rekindle wrath. 'If you are so fond over her Iniquity,' he says, 'give her Patent to offend, for if it touch not you, it comes near no body' (IV.i.201-5). Here as elsewhere, Iago's method is to make Othello focus not on Desdemona but on his own sense of injured merit. By stressing that the Moor's 'Honour' is part and parcel of Desdemona's, Iago eventually spurs him

to a 'rash and most unfortunate' act that proves his undoing (V.ii.276).

It is a sign of Othello's worthiness that to the end he retains the magnanimity that initially made him vulnerable to Iago's cunning. For all his machinations, Iago is never able to reduce the Moor entirely to a blunt instrument of his tormentor's vengeance. Before Othello can bring himself to execute Desdemona he must first delude himself into believing that he is a minister of divine justice. And even in that role his innate generosity constrains him to offer his wife a moment to prepare her soul for Heaven. When Desdemona refuses to confess to a crime that would have been inconceivable to her, her husband becomes furious again. But one of the things that makes what he does pathetic rather than culpably malicious is the fact that he continues to express devotion to his bride even as he forces himself to snuff out her life. In that as well as in a more cynical sense that accords with Iago's strategy, Othello becomes 'an honourable Murderer' (V.ii.288). No matter how we judge the Moor's final speech and 'bloody Period', then, we have to concur with Cassio's assessment that the hero was 'great of Heart' (V.ii.351-55).

The earliest recorded performance of the play was in November 1604, when Shakespeare's company — by then no longer known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men but as His Majesty's Servants — presented *Othello* at court to their new patron, King James I. In all likelihood the play had been written some time before its production at Whitehall (as early as 1603, perhaps), and by the end of 1604 it was probably an established feature of the Globe repertory. It first appeared in print six years after Shakespeare's death, in a 1622 Quarto that seems to have owed something to an authorial draft of the script, and it reappeared in a fuller and smoother text a year later in the 1623 memorial volume we refer to today as the First Folio.

The principal source for *Othello* was a novella from the *Hecatommithi* ('One Hundred Tales') of Giraldi Cinthio. Cinthio's collection was first published in Venice in 1565, and Shakespeare probably read it in the original Italian. It is conceivable that he also consulted a 1584 French version by Gabriel Chappuy, but if so he appears to have derived little from that

retelling that was not present in Cinthio's rendering of the story. Our best evidence, then, is that the operatic tragedy we know as *Othello* sprang from a crude narrative about an overreaching Moor who brought his troubles upon himself by marrying a woman of different race, religion, and mode of life, and who was eventually duped into beating his innocent wife to death with a sandbag.

In Cinthio's story 'il Moro' is a pagan rather than a Christian. And the character who corresponds to Iago is motivated by jealousy over Desdemona (and the hatred engendered by her rejection of his attentions), rather than by anger over any slight by her husband. Shakespeare ennobled the title character in a number of ways. He gave Iago a much more active role as stage manager of Othello's downfall. And he made several alterations in the personality of the Moor's Lady to transfigure her into the 'divine Desdemona' (II.i.73) of the concluding scenes. As a result he metamorphosed the 'sordid story of a garrison intrigue'* into what many regard as the most touching episode in the annals of world drama.

John F. Andrews

* This phrase is from Helen Gardner's British Academy Lecture for 1955; see her comments in the 'Perspectives on *Othello*' section below. For other observations about Shakespeare's adaptation of the material he found in Cinthio, consult the excerpts from Thomas Rymer (1692), Lewis Theobald (1733), Charlotte Lennox (1753-54), G. R. Hibbard (1968), and Susan Snyder (1972) in the 'Perspectives' section.

THE TEXT OF THE EVERYMAN SHAKESPEARE

Background

THE EARLY PRINTINGS OF SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS

Many of us enjoy our first encounter with Shakespeare when we're introduced to *Julius Caesar* or *Macbeth* at school. It may therefore surprise us that neither of these tragedies could ever have been read, let alone studied, by most of the playwright's contemporaries. They began as scripts for performance and, along with seventeen other titles that never saw print during Shakespeare's lifetime, they made their inaugural appearance as 'literary' works seven years after his death, in the 1623 collection we know today as the First Folio.

The Folio contained thirty-six titles in all. Of these, half had been issued previously in the small paperbacks we now refer to as quartos.* Like several of the plays first published in the Folio, the most trustworthy of the quarto printings appear to have been set either from Shakespeare's own manuscripts or from faithful copies of them. It's not impossible that the poet himself prepared some of these works for the press, and it's intriguing to imagine him reviewing proof-pages as the words he'd written for actors to speak and embody were being transposed into the type that readers would filter through their eyes, minds, and imaginations. But, alas, there's no indisputable evidence that Shakespeare had any direct involvement with the publication of these early editions of his plays.

What about the scripts that achieved print for the first time in the Folio? Had the dramatist taken any steps to give the permanency of book form to those texts? We don't know. All we

* Quartos derived their name from the four-leaf units of which these small books were comprised: large sheets of paper that had been folded twice after printing to yield four leaves, or eight pages. Folios, volumes with twice the page-size of quartos, were put together from two-leaf units: sheets that had been folded once after printing to yield four pages.