

Iago

Some Key Exchanges

ACT I, Scene i

The play opens with an upset Roderigo, who has been paying Iago, for help to win the hand of Desdemona, becomes upset because of her commitment to Othello. Iago placates him and we learn of his reasons and his own plans to bring down Othello.

Roderigo. Thou told'st 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,
Off-capp'd 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 stuff'd with epithets of war;
And, in conclusion,
Nonsuits my mediators; for, 'Certes,' says he,
'I have already chose my officer.'
And what was he?
Forsooth, a great arithmetician,
One Michael Cassio, a Florentine,
A fellow almost damn'd in a fair wife;
That never set a squadron in the field,
Nor the division of a battle knows
More than a spinster; unless the bookish theoretic,
Wherein the toged consuls can propose
As masterly as he: mere prattle, without practise,
Is all his soldiership. But he, sir, had the election:
And I, of whom his eyes had seen the proof
At Rhodes, at Cyprus and on other grounds

Christian and heathen, must be be-lee'd and calm'd
By debtor and creditor: this counter-caster,
He, in good time, must his lieutenant be,
And I—God bless the mark!—his Moorship's ancient.

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
Stood heir to the 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:
We cannot all be masters, nor all masters
Cannot be truly follow'd. 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,
For nought but provender, and when he's old,
cashier'd:
Whip me such honest knaves. Others there are
Who, trimm'd in forms and visages of duty,
Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves,
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;
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,
But seeming so, for my peculiar end:
For when my outward action doth demonstrate
The native act and figure of my heart
In compliment extern, 'tis not long after
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at: I am not what I am.

Iago and Roderigo call on Desdemona's father in the middle of the night and slander her, enraging the father, Brabantio.

Iago. Call up her father,
Rouse him: make after him, poison his delight,
Proclaim him in the streets; incense her kinsmen,
And, though he in a fertile climate dwell,
Plague him with flies: though that his joy be joy,
Yet throw such changes of vexation on't,
As it may lose some colour.

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

Iago. 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!

Iago. Awake! what, ho, Brabantio! thieves! thieves!
thieves!
Look to your house, your daughter and your bags!
Thieves! thieves!

Roderigo. Signior, is all your family within?

Iago. Are your doors lock'd?

Brabantio. Why, wherefore ask you this?

Iago. 'Zounds, sir, you're robb'd; for shame, put on
your gown;
Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul;
Even now, now, very now, an old black ram
Is topping your white ewe. Arise, arise;
Awake the snorting citizens with the bell,
Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you:
Arise, I say.

Roderigo. Most grave Brabantio,
In simple and pure soul I come to you.

Iago. 'Zounds, sir, you are one of those that will not
serve God, if the devil bid you. Because we come to
do you service and you think we are ruffians, you'll
have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse;
you'll have your nephews neigh to you; you'll have
coursers for cousins and gennets for Germans.

Brabantio. What profane wretch art thou?

Iago. I am one, sir, that comes to tell you your
daughter
and the Moor are now making the beast with two
backs.

Brabantio. Thou art a villain.

Iago. You are—a senator.

(stage directions). [Exit above]

Iago. Farewell; for I must leave you:
It seems not meet, nor wholesome to my place,
To be produced—as, if I stay, I shall—
Against the Moor: for, I do know, the state,
However this may gall him with some cheque,
Cannot with safety cast him, for he's embark'd
With such loud reason to the Cyprus wars,
Which even now stand in act, that, for their souls,
Another of his fathom they have none,
To lead their business: in which regard,
Though I do hate him as I do hell-pains.
Yet, for necessity of present life,
I must show out a flag and sign of love,
Which is indeed but sign. That you shall surely find
him,
Lead to the Sagittary the raised search;
And there will I be with him. So, farewell.

(stage directions). [Enter OTHELLO, IAGO, and
Attendants with torches]

Iago. Though in the trade of war I have slain men,
Yet do I hold it very stuff o' the conscience

To do no contrived murder: I lack iniquity
Sometimes to do me service: nine or ten times
I had thought to have yerk'd him here under the ribs.

ACT I, Scene iii

When Roderigo learns that Othello and Desdemona have secretly married he is depressed and ready to go home. We see Iago at how manipulative he is. We also get a look at the twisted moral code Iago appears to live by.

Roderigo. What should I do? I confess it is my shame to be so fond; but it is not in my virtue to amend it.

Iago. Virtue! a fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners: so that if we will plant nettles, or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs, or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness, or manured with industry, why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions: but we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts, whereof I take this that you call love to be a sect or scion.

Roderigo. It cannot be.

Iago. It is merely a lust of the blood and a permission of the will. Come, be a man. Drown thyself! drown cats and blind puppies. I have professed me thy friend and I confess me knit to thy deserving with cables of perdurable toughness; I could never

better stead thee than now. Put money in thy purse; follow thou the wars; defeat thy favour with an usurped beard; I say, put money in thy purse. It cannot be that Desdemona should long continue her love to the Moor,— put money in thy purse,—nor he his to her: it was a violent commencement, and thou shalt see an answerable sequestration:—put but money in thy purse. These Moors are changeable in their wills: fill thy purse with money:—the food that to him now is as luscious as locusts, shall be to him shortly as bitter as coloquintida. She must change for youth: when she is sated with his body, she will find the error of her choice: she must have change, she must: therefore put money in thy purse. If thou wilt needs damn thyself, do it a more delicate way than drowning. Make all the money

thou canst: if sanctimony and a frail vow betwixt an erring barbarian and a supersubtle Venetian not too hard for my wits and all the tribe of hell, thou shalt enjoy her; therefore make money. A pox of drowning thyself! it is clean out of the way: seek thou rather to be hanged in compassing thy joy than to be drowned and go without her.

Roderigo's spirits are lifted and we find Iago alone offering his reasons and methodology. His stated hatred is completely unfounded and seems to come from his need for justification for his devilry.

Iago. Thus do I ever make my fool my purse:
For I mine own gain'd knowledge should profane,
If I would time expend with such a snipe.
But for my sport and profit. I hate the Moor:
And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets
He has done my office: I know not if't be true;
But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do as if for surety. He holds me well;
The better shall my purpose work on him.
Cassio's a proper man: let me see now:
To get his place and to plume up my will

In double knavery—How, how? Let's see:—
After some time, to abuse Othello's ear
That he is too familiar with his wife.
He hath a person and a smooth dispose
To be suspected, framed to make women false.
The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by the nose
As asses are.
I have't. It is engender'd. Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.

ACT II, Scene i

A dishonored Cassio following Iago's advice pleads his case to Desdemona hoping she will speak for him to Othello. This, however, is part of Iago's scheme to inflame the jealousy of Othello.

Iago. [Aside] He takes her by the palm: ay, well said, whisper: with as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio. Ay, smile upon her, do; I will gyve thee in thine own courtship. You say true; 'tis so, indeed: if such tricks as these strip you out of your lieutenantry, it had been better you had not kissed your three fingers so oft, which now again you are most apt to play the sir in. Very good; well kissed! an excellent courtesy! 'tis so, indeed. Yet again your fingers to your lips? would they were clyster-pipes for your sake!

[Trumpet within]

The Moor! I know his trumpet.

In another soliloquy, Iago reveals his deep understanding of human nature and we see his arrogant skill as a manipulator.

Iago. That Cassio loves her, I do well believe it; That she loves him, 'tis apt and of great credit: The Moor, howbeit that I endure him not, Is of a constant, loving, noble nature, And I dare think he'll prove to Desdemona A most dear husband. Now, I do love her too; Not out of absolute lust, though peradventure I stand accountant for as great a sin, But partly led to diet my revenge, For that I do suspect the lusty Moor Hath leap'd into my seat; the thought whereof Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards; And nothing can or shall content my soul Till I am even'd with him, wife for wife, Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor At least into a jealousy so strong That judgment cannot cure. Which thing to do, If this poor trash of Venice, whom I trash For his quick hunting, stand the putting on, I'll have our Michael Cassio on the hip, Abuse him to the Moor in the rank garb— For I fear Cassio with my night-cap too— Make the Moor thank me, love me and reward me. For making him egregiously an ass And practising upon his peace and quiet Even to madness. 'Tis here, but yet confused: Knavery's plain face is never seen tin used.

ACT II, Scene iii

Iago plots to get Cassio drunk and disgraced in order to gain his military position. We see again as he offers an aside to the audience, ever mindful that we applaud his cleverness.

Iago. Well, happiness to their sheets! Come, lieutenant, I have a stoup of wine; and here without are a brace of Cyprus gallants that would fain have a measure to the health of black Othello.

Cassio. Not to-night, good Iago: I have very poor and unhappy brains for drinking: I could well wish courtesy would invent some other custom of entertainment.

Iago. O, they are our friends; but one cup: I'll drink for you.

Cassio. I have drunk but one cup to-night, and that was craftily qualified too, and, behold, what innovation it makes here: I am unfortunate in the infirmity, and dare not task my weakness with any more.

Iago. What, man! 'tis a night of revels: the gallants desire it.

Cassio. Where are they?

Iago. Here at the door; I pray you, call them in. [Exit Cassio]

Iago. If I can fasten but one cup upon him, With that which he hath drunk to-night already, He'll be as full of quarrel and offence As my young mistress' dog. Now, my sick fool Roderigo, Whom love hath turn'd almost the wrong side out, To Desdemona hath to-night caroused Potations pottle-deep; and he's to watch: Three lads of Cyprus, noble swelling spirits, That hold their honours in a wary distance, The very elements of this warlike isle, Have I to-night fluster'd with flowing cups, And they watch too. Now, 'mongst this flock of drunkards, Am I to put our Cassio in some action That may offend the isle.—But here they come: If consequence do but approve my dream, My boat sails freely, both with wind and stream.

ACT II, Scene iii

The famous reputation speech by Iago to a distraught Cassio.

(stage directions). [Exeunt all but IAGO and CASSIO]

Iago. What, are you hurt, lieutenant?

Cassio. Ay, past all surgery.

Iago. Marry, heaven forbid!

Cassio. Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial. My reputation, Iago, my reputation!

Iago. As I am an honest man, I thought you had received some bodily wound; there is more sense in that than in reputation. Reputation is an idle and most false imposition: oft got without merit, and lost without deserving: you have lost no reputation at all, unless you repute yourself such a loser. What, man! there are ways to recover the general again: you are but now cast in his mood, a punishment more in policy than in malice, even so as one would beat his offenceless dog to affright an imperious lion: sue to him again, and he's yours.

Exit all but Iago

Iago. And what's he then that says I play the villain? When this advice is free I give and honest, Probal to thinking and indeed the course To win the Moor again? For 'tis most easy The inclining Desdemona to subdue In any honest suit: she's framed as fruitful As the free elements. And then for her To win the Moor—were't to renounce his baptism, All seals and symbols of redeemed sin,

His soul is so enfeather'd to her love,
That she may make, unmake, do what she list,
Even as her appetite shall play the god
With his weak function. How am I then a villain
To counsel Cassio to this parallel course,
Directly to his good? Divinity of hell!
When devils will the blackest sins put on,
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,
As I do now: for whiles this honest fool
Plies Desdemona to repair his fortunes
And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor,
I'll pour this pestilence into his ear,
That she repeals him for her body's lust;
And by how much she strives to do him good,
She shall undo her credit with the Moor.
So will I turn her virtue into pitch,
And out of her own goodness make the net
That shall enmesh them all.

ACT III, Scene iii

Iago turns his attention upon Othello. Notice the sudden change in view regarding reputation. The final exchange drips in irony.

Othello. Thou dost conspire against thy friend, Iago,
If thou but think'st him wrong'd and makest his ear
A stranger to thy thoughts.

Iago. I do beseech you—
Though I perchance am vicious in my guess,
As, I confess, it is my nature's plague
To spy into abuses, and oft my jealousy
Shapes faults that are not—that your wisdom yet,
From one that so imperfectly conceits,
Would take no notice, nor build yourself a trouble
Out of his scattering and unsure observance.
It were not for your quiet nor your good,
Nor for my manhood, honesty, or wisdom,
To let you know my thoughts.

Othello. What dost thou mean?

Iago. Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls:
Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something,
nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands:
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him
And makes me poor indeed.

Othello. By heaven, I'll know thy thoughts.

Iago. You cannot, if my heart were in your hand;
Nor shall not, whilst 'tis in my custody.

ACT IV, Scene iii

Othello, now thoroughly enraged in jealousy, falls into an epileptic seizure. We hear Iago in another aside.

Iago. Work on,
My medicine, work! Thus credulous fools are caught;
And many worthy and chaste dames even thus,
All guiltless, meet reproach. What, ho! my lord!
My lord, I say! Othello!

ACT V, Scene ii

One the final scene of the play, Iago's mischief has been revealed but only after exacting the deaths of most of the cast. Shortly before his suicide, Othello confronts Iago, comparing him several times to the devil. In his final act of manipulation Iago speaks, or does he?

Othello. I do believe it, and I ask your pardon.

Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil
Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?

Iago. Demand me nothing: what you know, you
know:
From this time forth I never will speak word.