

Othello

SYNOPSIS

The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice

Othello the Moor, a general employed by the Venetian state, has secretly married Desdemona, daughter of the senator Brabantio. Iago is Othello's standard-bearer, but is resentful because he hoped to be made lieutenant, a job which has gone to Cassio. He gets help from Roderigo, who is in love with Desdemona, and together they wake Brabantio and tell him what has happened. Brabantio complains to the Duke, particularly as Othello is much older than his daughter, but under questioning it becomes clear that they really love each other. Othello is immediately ordered to go to the Venetian colony of Cyprus to defend it from a threatened Turkish invasion.

A storm disperses the Turkish fleet, but Othello, Iago, Desdemona, Iago's wife Emilia, Cassio and Roderigo all arrive safely in Cyprus. There, Iago plants a suspicion in Othello's mind that Desdemona has been unfaithful with Cassio. Iago engineers a drunken fight which Cassio is involved in, and Othello dismisses him. Iago advises Cassio to get Desdemona to ask her husband to give him his job back. Now that she frequently asks him about Cassio, Othello sees this as evidence that he is her lover.

When Emilia finds a handkerchief which Desdemona has dropped she is pleased, because Iago has often asked her to steal it. This handkerchief is a special present which Othello gave to Desdemona. When Othello asks for it, Desdemona cannot find it. Iago gives the handkerchief to Cassio, who gives it to a girl he is seeing. Iago makes Othello believe that Cassio had it from Desdemona.

Driven mad by jealousy, Othello tells Iago to kill Cassio, but Iago persuades Roderigo that he must do this in order to obtain Desdemona. Desdemona talks to Emilia about husbands' and wives' infidelity, and has a strange feeling of unease, but still does not suspect anything until Othello says she will die. He strangles her, but before she is dead Emilia brings the news that there has been a fight and that Cassio is wounded and Roderigo dead. Emilia discovers the dying Desdemona and reveals to Othello what happened to the handkerchief. Othello, in grief and remorse, kills himself. Iago kills his own wife to try to stop her telling the full story, and is left to the justice of the Venetian state, represented by Brabantio's relatives Lodovico and Gratiano, who have come to visit Desdemona.

Media:

DVD:

A Double Life (1948), dir. George Cukor (an actor playing Othello finds theatre and reality merging)

Othello (1952), dir. Orson Welles

All Night Long (1961), dir. Basil Dearden, with Patrick McGoohan (a retelling of the story in the London jazz-club milieu)

Othello (1965), dir. Stuart Burge, with Laurence Olivier

Othello (BBC TV Shakespeare 1981), dir. Jonathan Miller

Othello (1990), dir. Trevor Nunn, with Willard White and Ian McKellen

Othello (1995), dir. Oliver Parker, with Laurence Fishburne and Kenneth Branagh

O (2000), dir. Tim Blake Nelson (a retelling involving a US high school basketball star)

Othello (2001), dir. Geoffrey Sax (a retelling of the story in modern London)

Stage Beauty (2004), dir. Richard Eyre (about the first woman to play Desdemona in the 1660s)

Omkara (2006), dir. Vishal Bhardwaj (a retelling of the story set in India)

Othello (Shakespeare's Globe 2007), dir. Wilson Milam

Shakespeare: The Animated Tales Act 6 (2007) *Othello and The Winter's Tale*

Unavailable believed lost:

Catch My Soul (1972), dir. Patrick McGoohan (Rock opera based on Othello by Jack Good)

CD Audio:

Othello (BBC Audiobooks) with Lenny Henry

Othello (Donmar)

Othello (Arkangel Complete Shakespeare)

[Michael Mitchell]