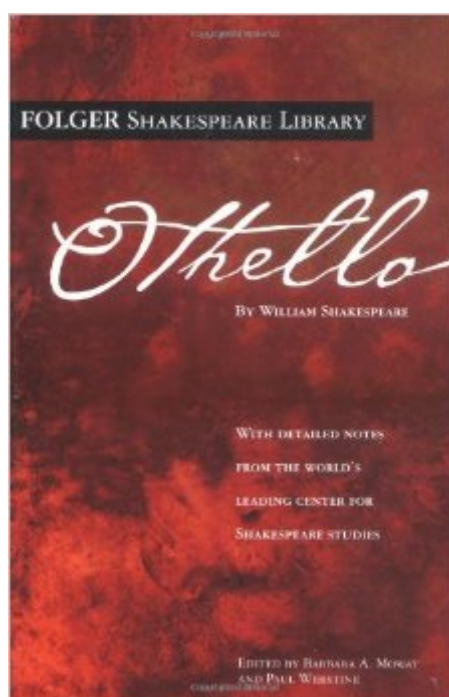


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Othello (Folger Shakespeare Library)



Synopsis

In *Othello*, Shakespeare creates powerful drama from a marriage between the exotic Moor Othello and the Venetian lady Desdemona that begins with elopement and mutual devotion and ends with jealous rage and death. Shakespeare builds many differences into his hero and heroine, including race, age, and cultural background. Yet most readers and audiences believe the couple's strong love would overcome these differences were it not for Iago, who sets out to destroy Othello.

Iago's false insinuations about Desdemona's infidelity draw Othello into his schemes, and Desdemona is subjected to Othello's horrifying verbal and physical assaults. The authoritative edition of *Othello* from The Folger Shakespeare Library, the trusted and widely used Shakespeare series for students and general readers, includes:

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Essay by Susan Snyder

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Customer Reviews

As a play, "Othello" encompasses many things but more than anything else it is a study of pure evil. Although Othello is an accomplished professional soldier and a hero of sorts, he is also a minority and an outcast in many ways. As a Black man and a Moor (which means he's a Moslem), Othello has at least two qualities, which make him stand out in the Elizabethan world. He is also married to a Caucasian woman named Desdemona, which creates an undercurrent of hostility as evidenced by the derogatory remark "the ram hath topped the ewe". Othello's problems begin when he promotes one of his soldiers, Michael Cassio as his lieutenant. This arouses the jealousy and hatred of one of his other soldiers, Iago who hatches a plot to destroy Othello and Michael Cassio. When Cassio injures an opponent in a fight he is rebuked, punished, and subsequently ignored by Othello who must discipline him and teach him a lesson. Iago convinces Desdemona to intervene on Cassio's behalf and then begins to convince Othello that Desdemona is in love with Cassio. This is actually one of the most difficult Shakespeare plays to watch because the audience sees the plot begin to unfold and is tormented by Othello's gradual descent into Iago's trap. As with other Shakespeare plays, the critical components of this one are revealed by language. When Othello is eventually convinced of Cassio's treachery, he condemns him and promotes Iago in his place. When Othello tells Iago that he has made him his lieutenant, Iago responds with the chilling line, "I am thine forever". To Othello this is a simple affirmation of loyalty, but to the audience, this phrase contains a double meaning.

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