*Othello* Act 2

Close Reading Guide

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| **Directions: Answer the following questions fully and in complete sentences to receive credit.** |

**Scene 1:**

1. How does the setting change from Act 1 to Act 2? What are some possible symbolic meanings of this change?

2. Compare and contrast the ways that Iago and Cassio treat Desdemona in this scene. What inferences can you make about each character based on his behavior?

3. Give a synopsis of Othello’s speech to Desdemona when he arrives (2.1.179-189).

4. How might some of Othello’s lines foreshadow trouble?

5. What does Iago tell Roderigo about Desdemona at the end of this scene? Is this believable? Explain.

6. Translate Iago’s soliloquy at the end of Scene 1 (2.1.281-308):

That Cassio loves her, I do well believe ‘t;

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 leaped 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 evened 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 trace\*

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 nightcap too),

Make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me

For making him egregiously an ass

And practicing upon\* his peace and quiet,

Even to madness. ‘Tis here, but yet confused:

Knavery’s plain face is never seen till used.

**Scene 3:**

1. Find an example of dramatic irony at the beginning of Scene 3. Cite it and explain how it is dramatic irony.

2. Compare and contrast how Iago and Cassio refer to Desdemona in this scene. Why do you think they describe her differently? What does this tell you about each man?

3. What does Iago tell Montano about Cassio? Why do you think he spreads these rumors?

4. What emotion does Iago play on to get Roderigo to provoke Cassio? Of what weaknesses of Cassio’s does Iago take advantage? What do these actions reveal about Iago and his methods?

5. Find two examples of dramatic irony after Othello arrives on the scene. Cite and explain them.

6. What does Cassio mean when he says, “I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial” (2.3.227-8). What is he referring to, and what does this tell you about Cassio? How does Iago react to this, and what does that tell you about him?

7. Translate Iago’s soliloquy below (2.3.327-353):

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

Th’ inkling 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 seams and symbols of redeemed sin—

His soul is so enfettered 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 fortune,

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.

8. Locate all of Iago’s uses of imagery of hell, darkness, disease, and traps in the soliloquy above. Why do you think Shakespeare associates Iago with this kind of imagery?

9. How does Iago describe Desdemona in this scene? How will Iago use Desdemona’s personality/ character traits against her? What does this tell you about Iago?

10. At the end of Act 2, Iago gives his plan (2.3.373-9). Translate his plan below:

**Iago**

Two things are to be done:

My wife must move\* for Cassio to her mistress;

I’ll set her on;

Myself awhile to draw the Moor apart

And bring him jump\* when he may Cassio find

Soliciting his wife. Ay, that’s the way!

Dull not device by coldness and delay.