

Othello/Desdemona Lecture

1. How do you know if somebody's a virgin? Sleeping around?
Why does it matter? Fatherhood, property
2. Talk/reputation talk/looseness (swetnam quote)
3. Cosmography of body upper/lower (tongue, swetnam)
4. Discursive debate on womenhood defenses/ prescriptive/
descriptive conduct books (frontispiece)
5. Dispense of self (similar to Launcelot Gobbo's position) father's
property participation in wooing
6. Brabantio not so bad, wasn't forcing D to marry D is portrayed
as bad one WHY? would it be necessary for Shakespeare to
portray her this way?
7. Othello needs to be good, different but worthy (like Bassanio, in a
way) He has money, and military standing but not social in
status

Set grounds for suspicion WHY Othello so open to suggestion?
8. Again, different outside not part of discursive world, doesn't have
any answers

Position as Venetion threatened, gets her to improve position, but
having her threatens it 2 kinds of honor in marriage, hers
becomes his, yet he can't control
9. Question of handkerchief: his honor, explicitly, but what else, why
spots?

Discussion Questions on Othello

(Student Generated)

1. Iago is generally considered simply "evil," "villainous," etc. Try to explain why he behaves in the way he does. Suggestions: Feminism, New Historicism.
2. What can we make of the fact that Iago, who would seem to have some problems with women, is married to the "loose-tongued" Emilia?
3. To what extent can Iago be considered an "exteriorization" of some aspects of Othello's consciousness? Which aspects?
4. How is Roderigo important? Why, for example, does Iago keep telling him to "Put money in thy purse?"
5. Why is Othello so gullible? In other words, why is he so willing to accept Iago's "reading" of situations? A related question: why doesn't Othello just confront Desdemona with his suspicions? Things to consider: Feminism, Jeanne's lecture, Alice Miller.
6. In Act IV, Scene iii, Desdemona seems to foresee her own death. How is this important?
7. Why doesn't Desdemona die right away? Pay attention to what she says during her brief "resurrection."
8. When she finally does die, what "work" does Desdemona accomplish for Othello? Look at V, ii, and think of Maurice Bloch's essay. What "trash" is Othello dumping on Desdemona? How does he make her "small" so he can be "big?"
9. Similarly, what "work" has Iago accomplished through all of this? Lodovico tells Iago "Look on the tragic loading of this bed./This is thy work." (V,ii,363-64) In Bloch's terms, what, besides Othello and Desdemona, has Iago "loaded" (or tried to load) on the bed?
10. OK, so why is Othello black? Consider: how does this culture seem to treat "foreigners?" why do only Brabantio and Iago seem racially prejudiced? Alice Miller; Cultural Materialism.

Discussion Questions for *Othello*

1. Iago is generally considered simply "evil," "villainous," etc. Try to explain why he behaves in the way he does. Try to use Feminism/ New Historicism to do this.
2. What can we make of the fact that Iago, who would seem to have some problems with women, is married to the "loose-tongued" Emilia?
3. To what extent can Iago be considered an "exteriorization" of some aspects of Othello's consciousness? Which aspects?
4. In Act IV, scene iii, Desdemona seems to foresee her own death. How is this important?
5. Why doesn't Desdemona die right away? Pay attention to what she does during her brief "resurrection." When she finally does die, what kind of cultural "work" does Desdemona accomplish for Othello? Look at V, ii, and think of Maurice Bloch's essay. What "trash" is Othello dumping on Desdemona? How does he make her "small" so he can be "big?"
6. What "work" has Iago accomplished through all of this? Lodovico tells Iago "Look on the tragic loading of this bed./This is thy work" (V,ii,363-64). In Bloch's terms, what, besides Othello and Desdemona, has Iago "loaded" (or tried to load) on the bed?
7. Ok, so why is Othello black? Consider: how does this culture seem to treat "foreigners?" Why do only Iago and Brabantio seem racially prejudiced? (Ok . . . maybe Roderigo, too) Think of Alice Miller, or Cultural Materialism . . .

OTHELLO

What is the status of race in the play? What is Shakespeare's attitude toward it?

Why have Iago figure? Why does he weave this plot?

What's the point of the musicians at the beginning of III i?

Why does Emilia say in III iv (l. 23) that she doesn't know where the handkerchief is and then later expose her husband's scheme?

(PROSE/VERSE)