

Topic Page: [The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice](#)

Definition: **Othello** from *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*
Tragedy by William Shakespeare, first performed in 1604–05. Othello, a Moorish commander in the Venetian army, is persuaded by Iago that his wife Desdemona is having an affair with his friend Cassio. Othello murders Desdemona; on discovering her innocence, he kills himself.

documents

Shakespeare, William: Othello, the Moor of Venice, from I iii

Shakespeare, William: Othello, the Moor of Venice, from III iii

Shakespeare, William: Othello, the Moor of Venice, from V ii

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Othello

Summary Article: **Othello**

From *Dictionary of Shakespeare*, Peter Collin Publishing

One of Shakespeare's later tragedies (see tragedy) written around 1602-04, it was first published in a quarto edition of 1622 and performed at Court in November of 1604. The principal source of the play was a story by an Italian writer, Giraldi Cinthio (1504-73). The play explores themes of jealousy and suspicion, deception, revenge, racism, and uncontrolled passions. The action, in which tragic irony plays a big part, is fast-moving.

SYNOPSIS :

Desdemona has secretly married the Moor, Othello, in defiance of her father's wishes. Soon after, Othello, a military commander from Venice, is sent to defend Cyprus against the Turks accompanied by his lieutenant, Iago. Iago has been overlooked for promotion and is consumed with hatred and envy, both for his rival for the post, Cassio, and for Othello. Pathologically ruthless, Iago vows to ruin them both, and his scheming fuels the plot. Iago boasts of his evil intentions to the audience, but maintains the pretence of being an honest and true friend to those whom he is working to destroy. He tries to blacken Othello's name by telling Desdemona's father that Othello used witchcraft to win her. He discredits Cassio by exploiting a weakness for wine, and getting Cassio so drunk that he ends up in a brawl. Iago cleverly and subtly sows seed of doubt and suspicion in Othello's mind, hinting that Desdemona is having an affair. He arranges things so that it is Desdemona who pleads with Othello to show mercy to the disgraced Cassio, further undermining Othello's trust of her. Iago takes a handkerchief, which Othello had given to his wife as a keepsake, and plants it on Cassio, as supposed evidence of Cassio and Desdemona's guilt. Tragically, Othello is all too easily convinced of his wife's guilt. Overwhelmed by feelings of jealousy, he insults Desdemona in front of important visitors and later goes to her room and orders her to say her prayers. Despite her protestations of innocence, Othello smothers her. When Iago's plot is exposed by his wife Emilia, Othello realizes the horrific consequences of his lack of belief in Desdemona's goodness and he kills himself. When Iago's villainy is

exposed he tries to make his escape, but he is arrested to be sent back to Venice for punishment.
See *also* black characters.

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Othello. (2000). In L. McConnell, *Dictionary of Shakespeare, Peter Collin publishing*. London, UK: Peter Collin Publishing. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/the_tragedy_of_othello_the_moor_of_venice



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