**Act V**

Out in the street, Iago readies Roderigo for the part he will play in what must be a climax in the drama Iago has directed: Cassio's murder in a street brawl. Iago plans Roderigo's, too, out of fear that Roderigo might try to regain the sums he gave Iago and tell what he knows of Iago's machinations. Cassio passes by. Roderigo lunges out at him, sword drawn. Cassio responds with his sword. They fight. Roderigo is injured; Cassio, cut in the leg and maimed. Othello enters to survey the results of the fight and is pleased to hear "The voice of Cassio" crying out, "I am maimed forever. Help, ho! Murder! Murder!" Othello blesses Iago's "noble sense of thy friend's wrong" and leaves for Desdemona's bedchamber, where he vows, "Thy bed, lust stained, shall with lust's blood be spotted."

After Othello withdraws, Lodovico and Gratiano pass by and hear Cassio's and Roderigo's cries for help. Iago then enters, carrying a light and a weapon, an irreproachable representative of authority. He is the first to put forth a question. "Who's there?" he demands. "What noise is this that cries on murder?" Hearing Cassio's voice, he asks him who has done this. Cassio does not know but says he thinks that one of them is nearby. Iago asks Lodovico and Gratiano for help. Seeing the wounded Roderigo, Iago falls upon him, crying, "That's one of them," and, stabbing Roderigo, calls "O murd'rous slave! O villain!" Roderigo, only upon being fatally wounded, fully realizes how he has been abused. "O Damned Iago! O inhuman dog!" he curses. After he dies, attention is then paid to Cassio, whose wound is bound. When Bianca passes by and hears Cassio's cries, she approaches him with comfort, but Iago apprehends her, saying she is a strumpet, a prostitute who may somehow be involved in the crime. Cassio is removed in a chair, and Iago follows to see him cared for. He orders Emilia to hasten to the Citadel to tell Othello and Desdemona of the night's events.

Scene 2, the final scene of *Othello,* is breathtaking for its dramatic and verbal poetry. Othello enters to find Desdemona asleep beside a still-burning candle and, with great delicacy, grieves over what he is about to do. He is convinced he is impelled by honor, not by a base impulse. He realizes the weight of a human life: He can relight a candle he snuffs out, but he cannot make breath he has stopped breathe again. He kisses Desdemona in her sleep, torn between his love for her and his diseased sense of love and justice, which demands her death. She wakes. With a sense that he is performing a holy action, he asks Desdemona if she has prayed. She says she has, and he asks her to remember "any crime / Unreconciled as yet to heaven and grace," so that she may add it to her prayers because he "would not kill thy unprepared spirit . . . / I would not kill thy soul." Alarmed, Desdemona says, "Talk you of killing?" His acknowledgement triggers her cry of "heaven / have mercy on me!" He replies, "Amen, with all my heart." She then begs him not to kill her. He tells her to remember her sins. She protests, "They are loves I bear to you." "For that thou diest," he answers. Desdemona pleads with him, but he tells her to "be still." Saying she will, nevertheless, she asks him, "What's the matter?" He tells her: "The handkerchief which I so loved and gave thee, / Thou gav'st to Cassio." He responds to her denial by warning her that she is on her deathbed and, therefore, must not perjure herself. Her protestations have no effect. He is beyond believing anything she says. He saw the handkerchief in Cassio's hands, he says. "He found it then," she counters. She swears she never gave it to him and implores Othello: "Send for him hither. / Let him confess the truth." Othelloresponds that Cassio has confessed "[t]hat he has used thee," and Iago has killed him. When Desdemona groans, "Alas, he is betrayed, and I undone,"Othello storms, "Out strumpet! Weep'st thou for him to my face?" Enraged, he then strangles her as she struggles. As Desdemona's resistance melts and she lies dying, Emilia calls from outside the bedroom door. Othello hears her and guesses she has come "to speak of Cassio's death." He hesitates to admit her to the bedchamber, for "If she come in, she'll sure speak to my wife." And then the enormity, finality, and horror of what he has done hit him:

My wife! my wife! what wife? I have no wife.  
O insupportable! O heavy hour!  
Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse  
Of sun and moon, and that the affrighted globe  
Should yawn at alteration.

When Emilia enters, she does not, at first, see Desdemona murdered on her bed but instead tells Othello that Cassio has killed Roderigo. Othello, not hearing what she actually said, responds, "Roderigo killed? And Cassio killed?" When she responds, "No, Cassio is not killed," Othello cries out, "Not Cassio killed? Then murder's out of tune, / And sweet revenge grows harsh." Significantly, almost as if it were a slip of the tongue, Othello, in his fury that Cassio has not been killed, reveals that revenge, not justice or sacrifice, was the motive for his murdering Desdemona. As he speaks, Emilia hears a dying cry from Desdemona, "falsely, falsely murdered." Emilia cries for help, and when she demands to know "who hath done this deed," Desdemona responds in her last breaths, "Nobody—I myself. Farewell. / Commend me to my kind lord," and dies, even in death maintaining her absolute loyalty to her husband. It is the only falsehood that she utters in the course of the play. Othello, at first, tries to deny his responsibility: "Why, how should she be murdered?" he asks; "You heard her say herself, it was not I." But then he confronts himself and groans, "She's like a liar gone to burning hell! / 'Twas I that killed her." His confession is not yet acknowledgment of a wrong, however, for he justifies himself by saying that Desdemona was false, "a whore." Emilia calls him a devil and says he lies. Othello insists that "Cassio did top her" and, in corroboration, she ought to "[a]sk thy husband." The exchange between them mirrors and reverses the exchange between Iago and Othello in Act III, scene 3, beginning at line 99, in which Iago echoes Othello's words to make him doubtful of what he thinks. In Act V, scene 2, when Emilia hears Othello implicate Iago in the murder of Desdemona and the attack on Cassio, she replies, dumbfounded, "My husband?"Othello repeats, "Thy husband." With each further revelation that Othello makes against Iago, Emilia repeats with greater alarm, "My husband," until Othellosays to her—as he had once said to Iago, "By heaven, thou echoest me"—"What needs this iterance? Woman, I say thy husband."

"If he say so," Emilia retorts, "may his pernicious soul / Rot half a grain a day. He lies to the heart. / She was too fond of her most filthy bargain." Provoked by her words, Othello draws his sword against her to quiet her, but she is fearless with outrage and cries out for "Help! / The Moor hath killed my mistress! Murder! murder!" Her cry brings Montano and Gratiano, two Venetian nobles deployed in the administration of Cyprus, as well as Iago. Immediately upon seeing her husband, she scolds him, "You have done well, / That men must lay their murders on your neck." She orders him to "[d]isprove this villain" [Othello] and deny that he told him Desdemona was false. Equivocation being useless under her grilling, Iago admits, "I did." Emilia cries out, "You told a lie, an odious damned lie! / Upon my soul, a lie! A wicked lie!" Her honest and open denunciation of Iago breaks the hold he has had on language throughout the play. Despite the actual horror of the events upon the stage, the audience and readers can now experience the opposite of the dread that Iago's speech invites, the relief of hearing truth proclaimed and crooked things made straight. Strengthened by the very act of speaking, Emilia asks Iago, "She false with Cassio? Did you say with Cassio?" He confesses he did but attempts to use his husband's prerogative and instructs her, "Go to, charm your tongue." She defies him: "I will not charm my tongue; I am bound to speak: / My mistress lies murdered in her bed." While the attendants in the chamber respond in amazement and Othello says, "It is true, indeed," Emilia continues to pour forth her anger and defiance, calling out "villany" and refusing to obey Iago's command to go home. In his grief, Othello attempts to explain his act and justify it, thus assuring himself, if his explanation is credited, that he has not fallen from his position of honor. He tells how a handkerchief he gave Desdemona was then given by Desdemona to Cassio. Emilia continues her magnificent aria, beginning, "O God! O heavenly God!" Iago interrupts, telling her to be quiet. She refuses, and he draws his sword. But she continues,

O thou dull Moor! that handkerchief thou speak'st of  
I found by fortune and did give my husband;  
For often, with a solemn earnestness,  
More than indeed belong'd to such a trifle,  
He begg'd of me to steal it.

Iago calls her a "villainous whore," ironically the same slander he sought to attach to Desdemona. But Emilia continues to defy him and explains that Desdemona did not give the handkerchief to Cassio; that she, Emilia, found it "And I did give't my husband." Now enlightened, complete darkness overcomesOthello. He runs, sword drawn, at Iago but is prevented from stabbing him; however, during this business, Iago stabs Emilia, joining Othello in wife murder. Emilia is laid beside Desdemona in death. Iago flees. As Emilia lies dying, singing the willow song Desdemona had sung when preparing for bed, Othellodecides to kill himself, for his "honor" ought not to outlive the "honesty" of Desdemona's chastity and the faithfulness and "honesty" of Emilia's revelation.

At this point, nearly everything that is going to happen in *Othello* has happened. Iago will be captured, refuse to speak further, and be removed to be tortured and made to confess. Cassio will be deputed in Othello's place, and Lodovico will return to Venice to make a report to the senate. The only thing remaining isOthello himself. He kills himself. But as he suffers his pre-death agony, in the most exquisite and powerful verse, Othello bares himself and finds himself unbearable. He tears himself apart, convinced that the last service he can do for the Venetian state is to kill himself as one who has offended, in his fall, the city-state of Venice itself.

**Heims, Neil. "*Othello*." In Bloom, Harold, ed. *Othello*, Bloom's Shakespeare Through the Ages. New York: Chelsea House Publishing, 2007. *Bloom's Literature*. Facts On File, Inc. Web. 24 Mar. 2015**