



Leaving Cert English

Free Notes

Othello

Act 1 – Scene 1

Summary Act I

Scene 1

The play Othello is set in Venice and in the opening scene we are introduced to two arguing figures – Roderigo and Iago. The wealthy Roderigo hired Iago to help him win the love of Desdemona, but has been making no progress at all. We discover that he has just found out that Desdemona has married Othello, a general whom Iago serves as ensign. Iago reveals that he hates Othello for many reasons, the chief among them being that he passed over Iago for a promotion. The position of lieutenant was instead awarded to Michael Cassio, who had no previous experience in leading men. Iago is only pretending to serve Othello, so that he might be in the perfect position should an opportunity to serve his own self-interest arise.

Iago, a manipulative character who delights in his villainy, convinces Roderigo to alert Desdemona's father of the wedding. Her father is a Venetian senator by the name of Brabantio. The two men go to stand under his window and call out to him that he has been robbed by "thieves". Brabantio appears and is furious with them for disturbing the peace. He initially refuses to believe them. He assumes Roderigo is merely scheming to see Desdemona, and the audience discovers that he has told him to stay away from his daughter before. Iago speaks up at this point, and tells the senator vulgarly that his daughter and Othello are having sex by saying that they are "making the beast with two backs". Brabantio begins to take what he hears seriously and decides to search for his daughter. Seeing the success of his plan, Iago leaves Roderigo alone and goes to attend on Othello, as he cannot have it discovered that he was speaking against him. Like Brabantio, Othello has no idea that Iago convinced and helped Roderigo to make the accusation. Once Iago departs, Brabantio comes out of his house, revealing that Desdemona is nowhere to be found, and furious at her disappearance. He claims that she must have been stolen away with magic, and he and his men follow Roderigo to confront Othello.

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