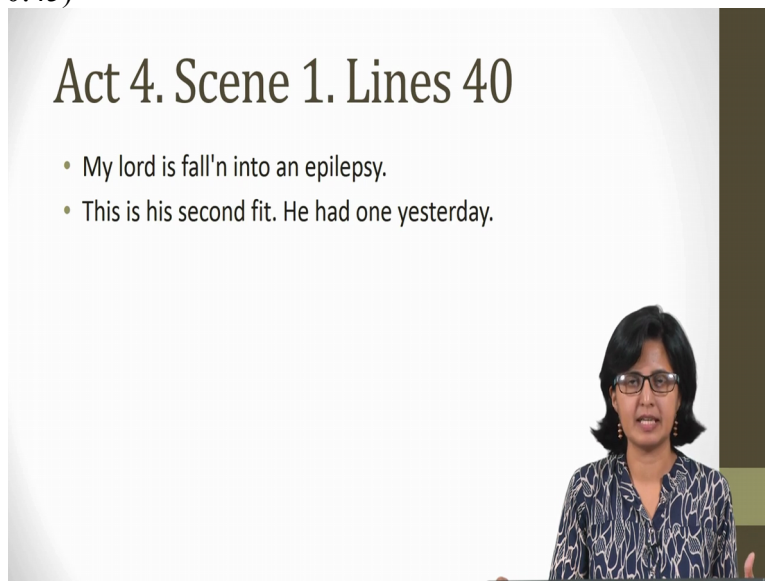


**Introduction to World Literature**  
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**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology Madras**  
**Othello – 3**  
**Othello – Part 3**

Hello and welcome to today's session of the NPTEL course, Introduction to world literature. Today we continue discussing, the iconic play by William Shakespeare, Othello, the significant tragedy written by him in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the last 2 sections where we have been discussing this play, Othello, we were trying to do a close reading of at least some of the important acts and scenes where we find the characters at their best and also be find a plot unfolding.

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**Act 4. Scene 1. Lines 40**

- My lord is fall'n into an epilepsy.
- This is his second fit. He had one yesterday.

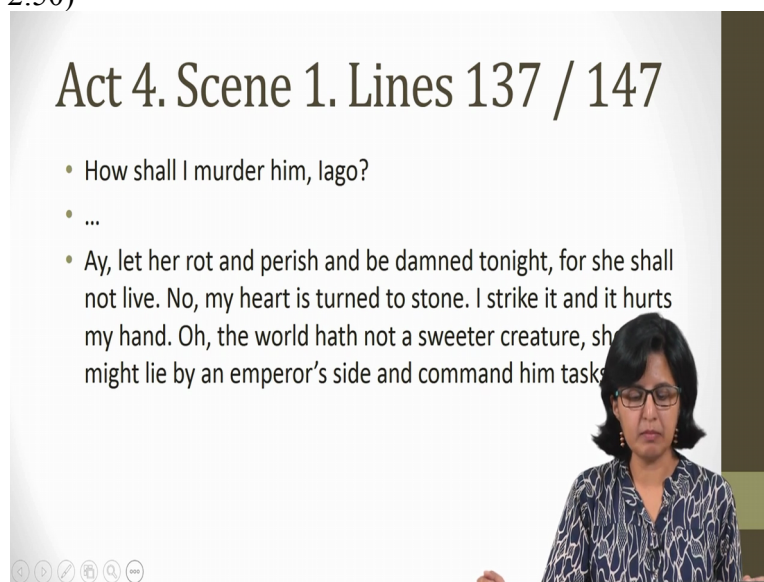
Today having completed the first 3 series, we look at act 4, scene 1. And here we find Iago trying to tell that my Lord is fallen into an epilepsy. This is his 2<sup>nd</sup> fit. He had one yesterday. We find that Othello is going through a very tough time not just emotionally but this is also beginning to affect him physically. And interestingly, according to the way in which the tragic hero is being shaped with a tragic flaw, with a hamartia, we find that this is also one convenient way in which Shakespeare presents Othello as someone who also has been in weaknesses.

First of all, he is susceptible to whatever Iago is telling him. He is unable to use his own rational, his own thinking power, his own experience, his own wealth of knowledge about the world to

filter out the information that Iago is giving him and secondly we also find him getting extremely weak during these situations and this in the light of and this becomes all the more acute when we look at Othello in the light of the wealth of experience that he had, remember the first act where he himself narrates the kind of audience that he went through in his life.

The adventurous life that he had been narrating to Brabantio and how Desdemona got attracted to him through that, the kind of fearful situations that he had overcome with such resilience and such courage. And we find the same man, this general become extremely weak even physically when faced with such a trial situation. We do not find him even making an effort to overcome this or even trying to address this directly with Desdemona and resolve the issues.

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Act 4. Scene 1. Lines 137 / 147

- How shall I murder him, Iago?
- ...
- Ay, let her rot and perish and be damned tonight, for she shall not live. No, my heart is turned to stone. I strike it and it hurts my hand. Oh, the world hath not a sweeter creature, she might lie by an emperor's side and command him tasks

And now we find that gradually but in a very firm way, Othello is headed towards his own doom and even the doom of the loved ones around him. In act 4, scene 1. How shall I murder him, Iago? So it has come to this. He comes to know about this supposed infidelity between Desdemona and Cassio. There is hardly any reason for him to believe that they have been having an affair behind his back except that Iago showed him this handkerchief, this napkin that he had gifted Desdemona and Iago says he had found Cassio wiping his beard with this napkin.

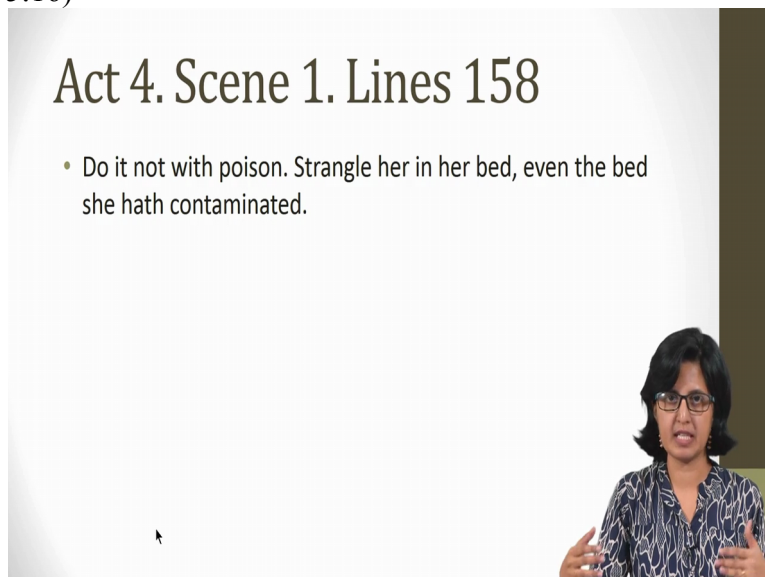
And Othello chooses to believe him. This is his most significant flaw. And the kind of jealousy inside him, the rage inside him is so powerful that he just wants to murder him for that. And remember at the beginning of the play, it has also been told to us that Cassio had already, Cassio

was actually favoured over Iago to be appointed at to the position of lieutenant and Cassio was also a close friend of Othello. And the fall now from such an elevated position also indicates the kind of power that Iago has over Othello and also about his absolute lack of perception that Othello himself has.

The rage we find is now detected against Desdemona as well. Look at this. Ay, let her rot and perish and be damned tonight, for she shall not live. No, my heart is turned to stone. I strike it and it hurts my hand. Oh, the world hath not a sweeter creature, she might lie by an emperor's side and command him tasks.

He has entirely changed and in these 10 lines between these 10 lines, from initially having to murder Cassio and then wishing that Desdemona herself will rot and perish and be damned and then also deciding to refuse her the right to live any more, we find Othello being transformed in such a way that there is no coming back for him.

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Act 4. Scene 1. Lines 158

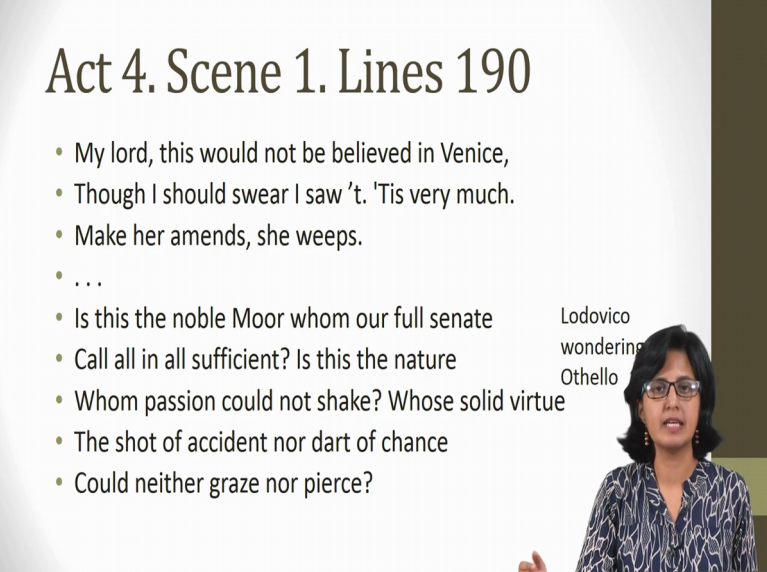
- Do it not with poison. Strangle her in her bed, even the bed she hath contaminated.

And it is almost strange when Iago tries to give him advice. He is trying to supplement him with a lot of ideas about how he can do this. And in act 4, scene 1, do it not with poison. Strangle her in her bed even the bed she hath contaminated. Here we see how vengeful Iago is. His malice is unbelievable. And even when Othello begins contemplating murder because he is now in a fit of rage, because he is unable to think clearly because he is now in this condition where jealousy has

overtaken everything, jealousy has taken control of his life altogether and Iago just feeds this emotion and he says, strangle her in bed even the bed she hath contaminated.

And this also appears as the right kind of revenge for Othello as if like trying to pay back in the same way that she had halted and she had corrupted.

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Act 4. Scene 1. Lines 190

- My lord, this would not be believed in Venice,
- Though I should swear I saw 't. 'Tis very much.
- Make her amends, she weeps.
- ...
- Is this the noble Moor whom our full senate
- Call all in all sufficient? Is this the nature
- Whom passion could not shake? Whose solid virtue
- The shot of accident nor dart of chance
- Could neither graze nor pierce?

Lodovico  
wondering  
Othello

The slide features a list of seven bullet points in a serif font. To the right of the list is a small video inset showing a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a patterned blue and white top, speaking. The text 'Lodovico wondering Othello' is overlaid on the video inset.

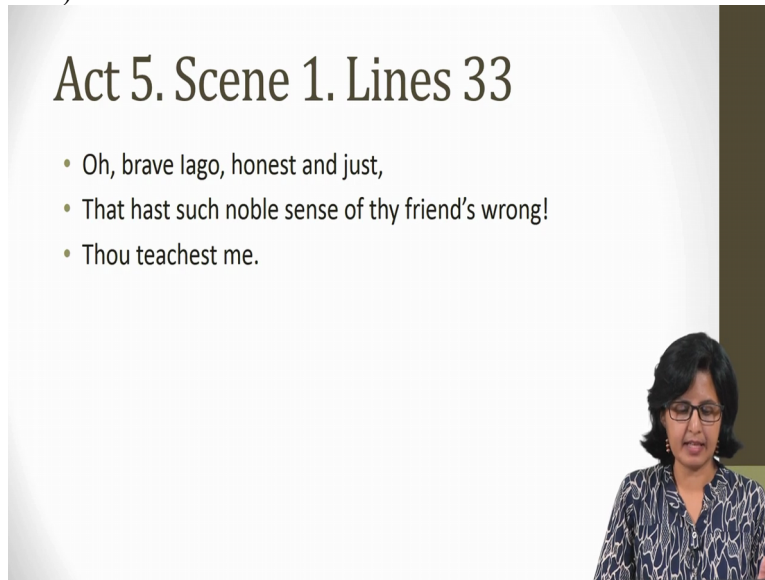
It is not as if the change that Othello is going through is not noticeable to the others. Lodovico, when he is visiting Venice, he is found wondering, my lord this would not be believed in Venice. Though I should swear I saw it. It is very much. Make her amends, she weeps. Is this the noble moor whom our full Senate call all in all sufficient? Is this furniture whom passion could not shake? Whose solid virtue. The shot of accident nor dart of chance could neither graze nor pierce.

Lodovico is completely surprised seeing the kind of change has come about in Othello. So we now get to know that the fall, it is not just personal, it is not just emotional, it is physical we saw, this, the bouts of epilepsy, it is also professional. He is unable to function well and he who was seen as this all sufficient man, in possession of the nature whom passion could not shake is now completely devastated. Lodovico perhaps does not understand the role played by Iago, no one does.



But people do notice the kind of change that has come about in Othello's demeanour, in the way in which he goes about his work, his inattentiveness rather towards his work and at one point this Lodovico also says he was considered to be all sufficient and very very efficient and we also saw that working out in the first few scenes.

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Act 5. Scene 1. Lines 33

- Oh, brave Iago, honest and just,
- That hast such noble sense of thy friend's wrong!
- Thou teachest me.

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Now we come to the final act, act 5. And this is the act which finally undoes Iago but not before people continuing to believe that he is still this honest, brave, just friend who also is willing to help people out, willing to help friends out during their misery.

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Roderigo

- O damned Iago! O inhuman dog!

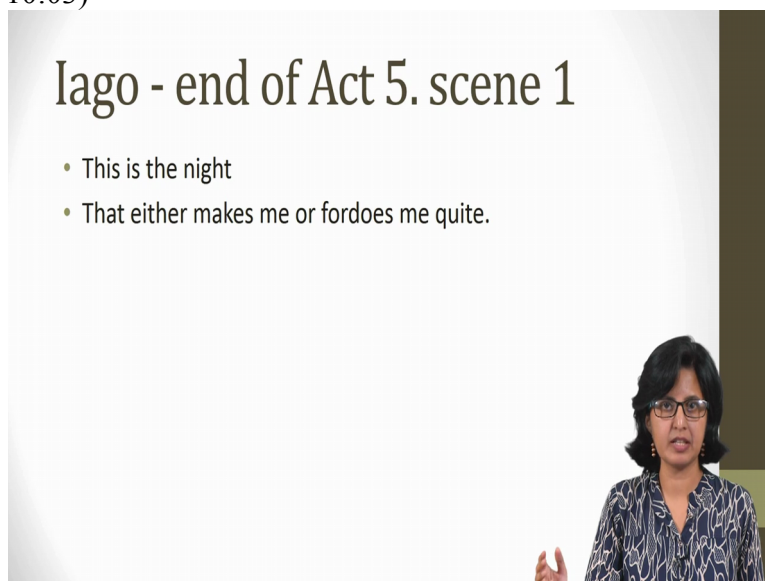
The slide features a white background with a dark vertical bar on the right. A video inset in the bottom right corner shows the same woman as in the previous slide, speaking.

And the first person to realize that Iago is not what he is, is unfortunately Rodrigo. Rodrigo also gets killed in this process. This happens as an accident. The intention was to kill Cassio but instead of that, Rodrigo gets killed and Rodrigo dies saying, O damned Iago, O inhuman dog! And the way Rodrigo gets murdered and the role played by Iago in this exposes him completely. And by this time, the audience, the ones who are reading the play, they also get to know that the malice which is there, the rage which is inside Iago, it is not just that he keeps talking about it but he is actually capable of committing murder.

He does not just instigate people. But he can actually actually see murder being committed, he can live with it. There is not a single moment of remorse in spite of the ways in which Iago had been actually taking money from Rodrigo and spending time with him extensively. In fact when the play opens, we find Iago with Rodrigo. He has been there almost throughout and we find that Rodrigo, he may have certain unholy intentions.

Maybe he continues to desire Desdemona even after her marriage with Othello but other than that, we find him coming across as more honest and naive and that is a way in which Iago successfully manipulates him through this and finally this is the first revelation in act 5 about the violent capacity, about the lengths to which Iago could go in terms of his violent capacity.

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Iago - end of Act 5. scene 1

- This is the night
- That either makes me or fordoes me quite.

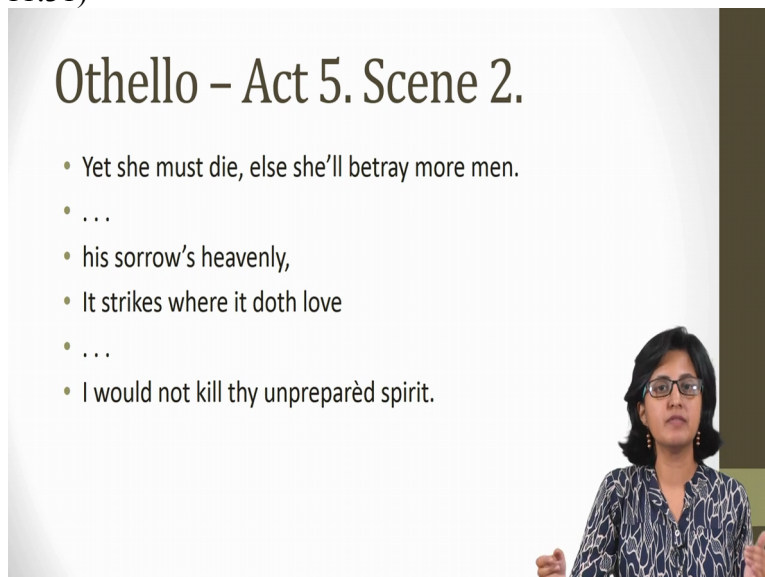
And by the end of act 5, Iago also realizes that it is a dangerous game. Not that now he wants to back off, not that he regrets it but he realizes that this is a dangerous game and he says this is the

night that either makes me or fordoes me quite. And in spite of this realisation, he wants to go on and this is what makes Iago such a precious and such a brilliant piece of artistic work. The character of Iago, the villainous character of Iago has been sketched out to perfection.

One would say that this motiveless malice that he carries within him and the way he goes about it consistently persistently without faltering even for a moment, planning meticulously, not getting confused at any point and also not having any remorse, significantly not regretting that even for a moment even when he knows that this is the night which would either make him or completely undo him. And he knows that if he loses out, there is no way of getting out of this alive and then he still chooses to go on and take the risk but what is all that for?

That is something that they would never get to know even after the play ends. That is perhaps the beauty of this character, Iago. That is perhaps the ironical charm that the character of Iago also has.

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Othello - Act 5. Scene 2.

- Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
- ...
- his sorrow's heavenly,
- It strikes where it doth love
- ...
- I would not kill thy unprepared spirit.

The slide features a video inset in the bottom right corner showing a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a patterned blue and white shirt, speaking and gesturing with her hands.

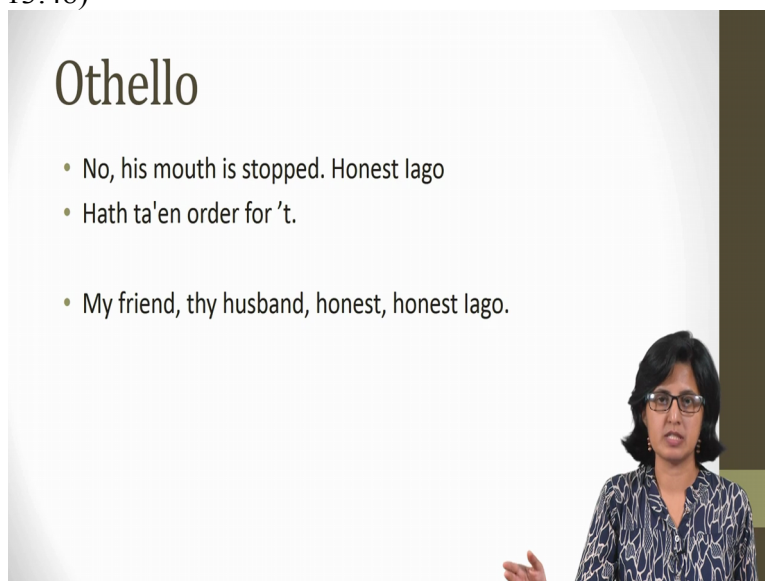
And in act 5, scene 2, we find Othello already to commit the murder. Yet she must die, else she will betray more men. His sorrows are heavenly. It strikes it doth love. I would not kill thy unprepared spirit. Othello is ready to kill Desdemona in her bed. She asks for some time to pray. She is totally confused. She did see that things were not really going right but she obviously had not seen this coming. And look at this, this is very interesting.

This is the reason that Othello gives. If she does not that, she may betray more men. This also makes it present like a larger right of humanity, a larger act of kindness that Othello is performing for the rest of the world. And this does not, he does not present that as a result of petty jealousy about petty gossips. He rather presents that as a very honourable thing and he even brings in this divine intervention to justify his act. It strikes where it doth love. And there is the strong illusion to the biblical ideas of the Christian God striking the ones whom he loves in order to discipline them.

So here, Othello is also being equated, till that position, Othello himself is doing that and by this and by appearing to be very very generous by saying I will not thy unprepared spirit, the violence of this at least in the mind of Othello, it is undermined completely. Instead, he glorifies this act, he presents that as an honourable thing that a man of his stature would do. We find that even towards the end, he is actually a prisoner of those images himself.

That is the way in which he wants to position his act of murder and not present that as a murder out of jealousy, out of pettiness but present that as a murder to savour the men, to discipline this wayward woman and more importantly, to liberate her from the wayward life that she has been leading.

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The slide features the title "Othello" in a large, dark serif font. Below the title, there are three bullet points in a smaller, dark sans-serif font. In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a small video inset showing a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a patterned blue and white shirt, speaking and gesturing with her hands.

## Othello

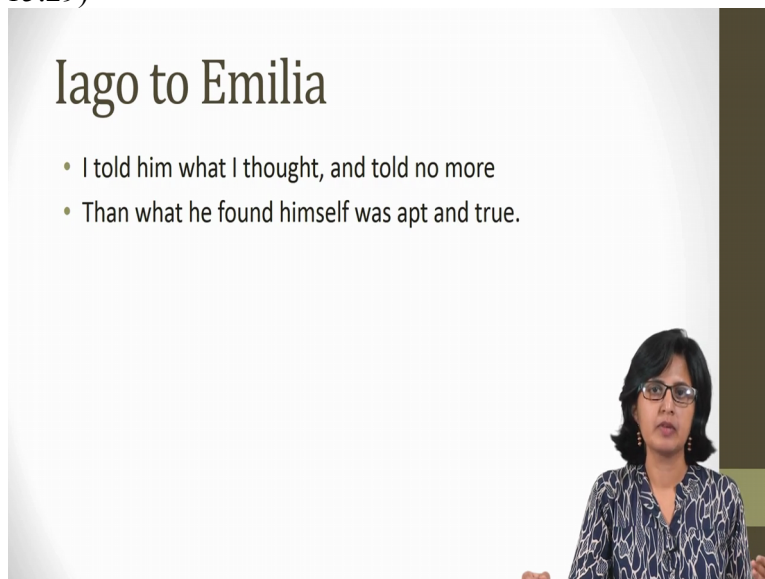
- No, his mouth is stopped. Honest Iago
- Hath ta'en order for 't.
- My friend, thy husband, honest, honest Iago.

And Emilia comes in to witness this and you can also read that entire scene where the murder takes place in Othello's and Desdemona's bedroom and after that when Emilia comes in to

witness this scene, she is horrified and she she knows that the very proof that was provided, the handkerchief which was found in possession of Cassio, only she knows that she was the one who stole it and gave it to Iago and she begins to sort of understand what went wrong and Othello is saying, no, his mouth is stopped because orders were already given to deal with Cassio but instead Rodrigo gets killed and Cassio is left alive.

Honest Iago had taken order for it. Look at the way in which even after committing this horrifying murder, we do not find Othello having any remorse either. He continues to look at, he continues to consider Iago as the honest friend. My friend, thy husband, honest honest Iago. And this is extremely important to know that it is not just Iago's villainy but that is a certain vulnerability in Othello's own personality as well, his inability to see through things, even the basic commonsense that someone like Emilia would have is entirely absent in Othello's demeanour and his (( ))(15:20) and the wealth of experience that he has in comparison with Emilia, it has come to no good, one could say.

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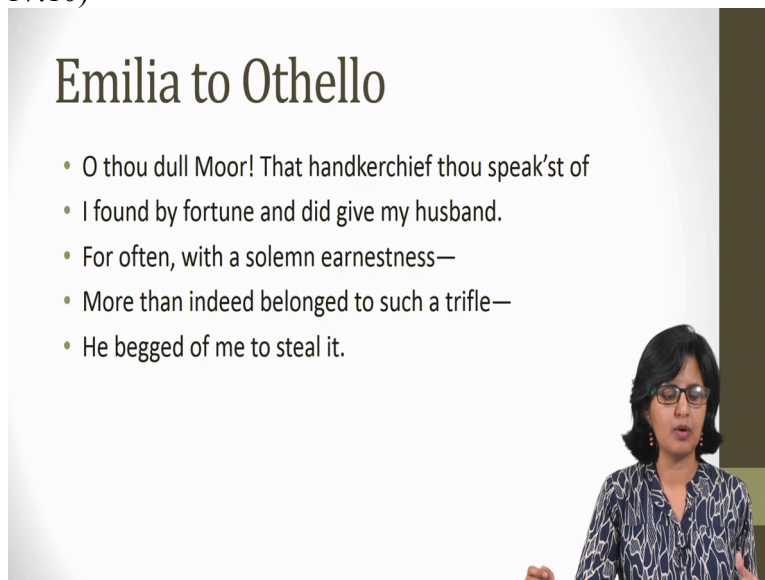
But Emilia is questioning Iago about this. The way he answers is very interesting. I told him what I thought and told no more. Than what he found himself was apt and true. It is very typical of the villainous nature of Iago. He is not taking accountability for it nor do we expect him to. He is saying, I just told him what I thought, nothing else. Now he is not talking about the proof, he is not talking about how he had verified things, he is not talking about the multiple ways in which

he tried to incinerate and instigate Othello and he is saying, I told him what I thought and nothing more and then it was entirely up to Othello.

At some level, we find this is true as well. Othello fails to exercise his choice. He fails to exercise his rationality and in a way when we look back, when we go back and try to read those sections where Iago is trying to be manipulative, whether Iago is trying to feed his emotions of jealousy. You will find that Iago sometimes does not even have to say anything. The rest of it is there in Othello's own mind. Mainly, his nature was already ready to believe these lies and to respond to such kind of unfounded gossip and lies.

And unless this was already there, unless this flaw was already there, it would not have been this easy for Iago to work it out.

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The slide features a title 'Emilia to Othello' in a serif font. Below the title is a bulleted list of five lines of text. In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a small video inset showing a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a patterned blue and white shirt, speaking.

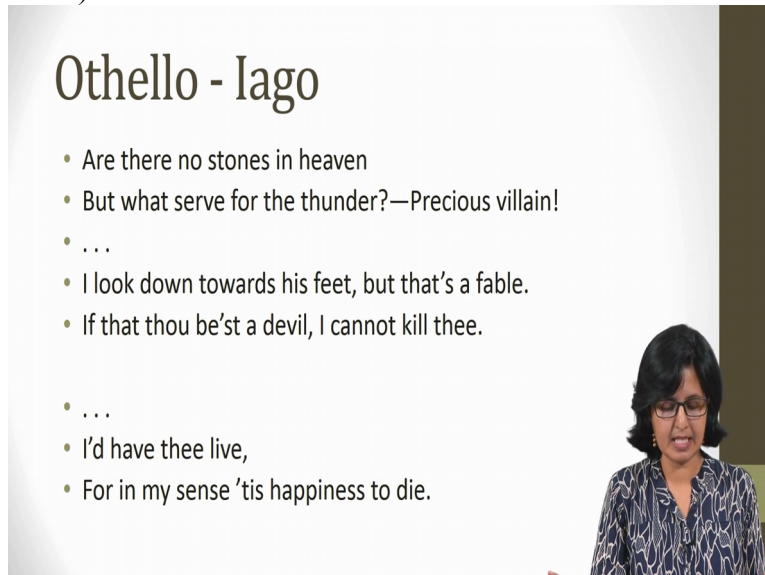
## Emilia to Othello

- 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 belonged to such a trifle—
- He begged of me to steal it.

And Emilia then talks to Othello. O thou dull Moor! This is out of desperation that she begins to abuse him. And when Emilia, someone like Emilia herself is able to see through the villainy and the cunningness of Iago but Othello who claims to know people, who claims to know war strategies, who claims to know how the nations are run, he fails to see through that completely. 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 belonged to such a trifle. He begged of me to steal it.

We find Emilia emerging here as a woman of character. She does not choose to ignore the situation. Even though it meant her own fault, she is ready to do this and she is saying, she is trying to tell Othello, trying to tell this dull Moor that the handkerchief, the proof that he speaks of was actually handed over to Iago by Emilia herself and that Iago had begged her to steal it for him.

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Othello - Iago

- Are there no stones in heaven
- But what serve for the thunder?—Precious villain!
- ...
- I look down towards his feet, but that's a fable.
- If that thou be'st a devil, I cannot kill thee.
- ...
- I'd have thee live,
- For in my sense 'tis happiness to die.

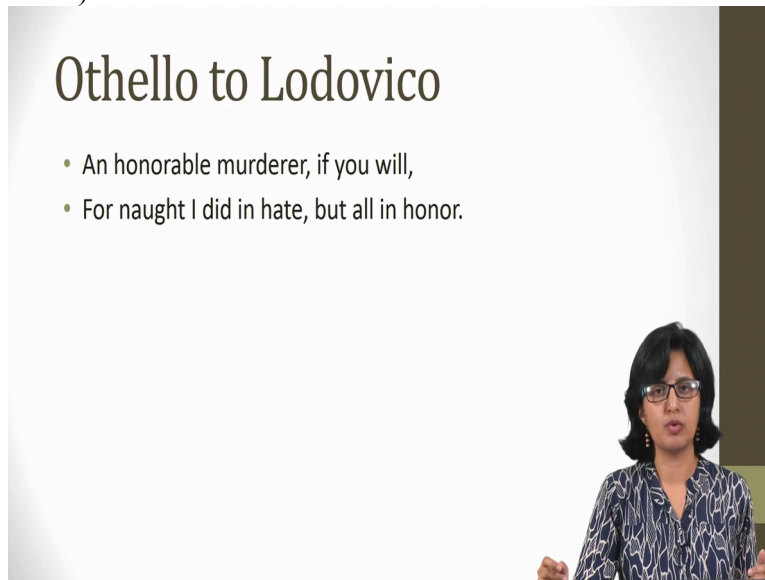
The slide features a list of quotes from Othello's speech to Iago. A small video inset in the bottom right corner shows a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a patterned blue and white shirt, speaking.

It is only at this moment that this entire picture gets clear for Othello but it is too late as we know and Othello tells Iago, are there no stones in heaven but what serve for the thunder? Precious villain. I looked down towards his feet but that is a fable. If that thou be'st a devil, I cannot kill thee. I would have thee live for in my sense it is happiness to die. Othello was heartbroken and there is no way in which he can undo what he has already done. He is wishing that stones will come and fall on him from heaven and he is now addressing Iago as a precious villain.

It took him so long to realise that Iago was not what he is. Iago is not the honest friend that he claimed to be. And this imagery is interesting. I look down towards his feet but that is a fable. what serve for the thunder? Precious villain. I looked down towards his feet but that is a fable. If that thou be'st a devil, I cannot kill thee. Here Othello is also implying that Iago is a devil and it is impossible to kill the devil but then he also says that it is better for Iago to live because after having done such things, such horrible things, the best thing left, it is happiness to die.



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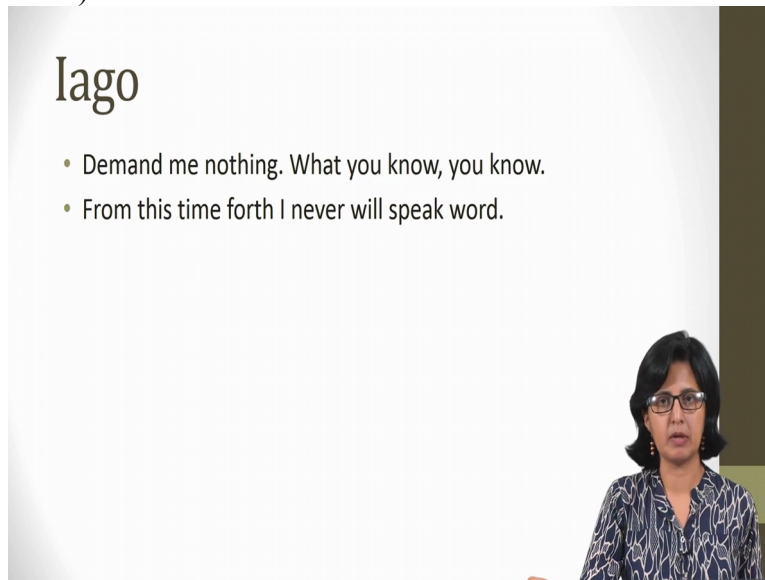


The slide features a title 'Othello to Lodovico' in a large, dark serif font. Below the title are two bullet points: '• An honorable murderer, if you will,' and '• For naught I did in hate, but all in honor.' In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset showing a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a patterned blue and white shirt, speaking.

And Othello is now asking Lodovico who initially had also noticed that the Moor's nature entirely changed and this is not the all sufficient and the efficient general that they all had witnessed in Venice. So Othello tells Lodovico, an honourable murderer if you will for naught I did in hate but all in honour. And this is his way of perhaps bailing him out of this entire situation. Not that Othello wishes to be forgiven but in his own mind, perhaps it is harder for him to continue to live if he sees him as a murderer, a vengeful, a spiteful murderer.

It just perhaps gets easier to deal with all of that if he just sees this as a murder done in defence of his honour, in defence of her honour and not out of hatred.

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The slide features a white background with a dark vertical bar on the right. The title 'Iago' is in a large, dark serif font. Below it are two bullet points in a smaller, dark sans-serif font. In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset showing a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a patterned blue and white shirt, looking towards the camera.

## Iago

- Demand me nothing. What you know, you know.
- From this time forth I never will speak word.

And Iago then refuses to say anything. We find him unbelievably calm. He remains consistent throughout as from the beginning. He says, demand me nothing. What you know, you know. From this time forth I never will speak a word. Nothing comes out of him. He is not defensive. He does not try to offer any explanation. He is not remorseful and this is what makes Iago an extraordinary kind of a villain. Here we cannot help but think about the wonderful Mastercraft craftsmanship that Shakespeare had in creating such a character.

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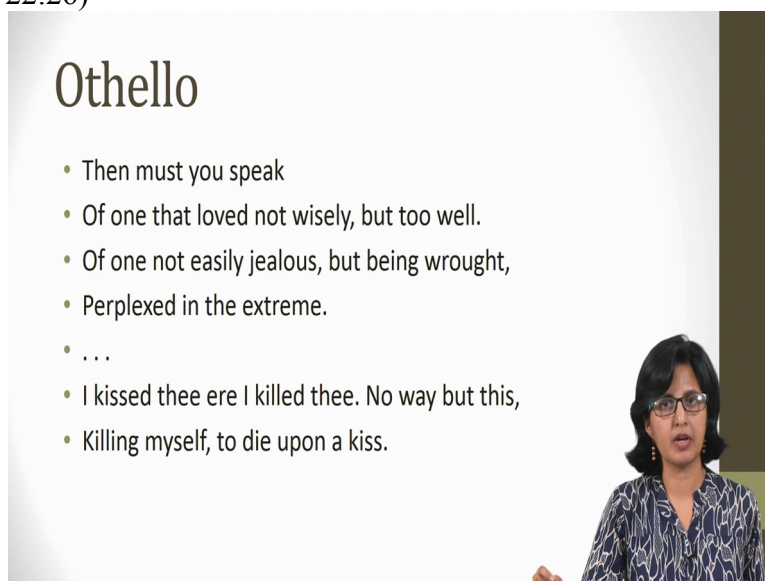
The slide features a white background with a dark vertical bar on the right. The title 'Othello - Iago' is in a large, dark serif font. Below it are six bullet points in a smaller, dark sans-serif font. In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset showing the same woman as in the previous slide, looking towards the camera.

## Othello - Iago

- For this slave,
- If there be any cunning cruelty
- That can torment him much and hold him long,
- It shall be his. You shall close prisoner rest
- Till that the nature of your fault be known
- To the Venetian state.

And Othello continues to be enraged but now we also know that it is too late and there is nothing that can be done. For this slave, if there be any cunning cruelty that can torment him much and hold him long it shall basis. You shall close prisoner rest till that the nature of your fault be known to the Venetian state. We do not know whether this is the kind of punishment that would transform Iago or would affect Iago in anyway but Othello is wishing the worst kind of punishment for him and he also and slave instantly was a term used in a very derogatory way to refer to prisoners. And here, Iago suddenly transforms from being this honest, respectable friend to a slave, to a cunning dog, to a precious villain.

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The slide features the title "Othello" in a large, dark serif font at the top left. Below the title is a bulleted list of text. To the right of the text is a small video inset showing a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a patterned blue and white shirt, speaking.

## Othello

- Then must you speak
- Of one that loved not wisely, but too well.
- Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,
- Perplexed in the extreme.
- ...
- I kissed thee ere I killed thee. No way but this,
- Killing myself, to die upon a kiss.

Othello then must you speak of one that loved not wisely but too well. This is how he wants his story to be narrated in the Venetian state. This is how Othello wants the rest of the world to look at what he has done with his life, look at how he committed the murder. Then must you speak of one that loved not wisely but too well. Of one not easily jealous but being wrought, perplexed in the extreme. But when we read through the play, we know for sure that he did not love too well and he got easily jealous.

Had he loved Desdemona dearly, had he loved her too well, he would have at least bothered to checked this charge once with Desdemona rather than believing Iago blindly and completely. There is not even one chance that Othello was willing to give to Desdemona but he gave multiple chances to Iago to prove that Desdemona is indeed not loyal to him. And when we go back to the

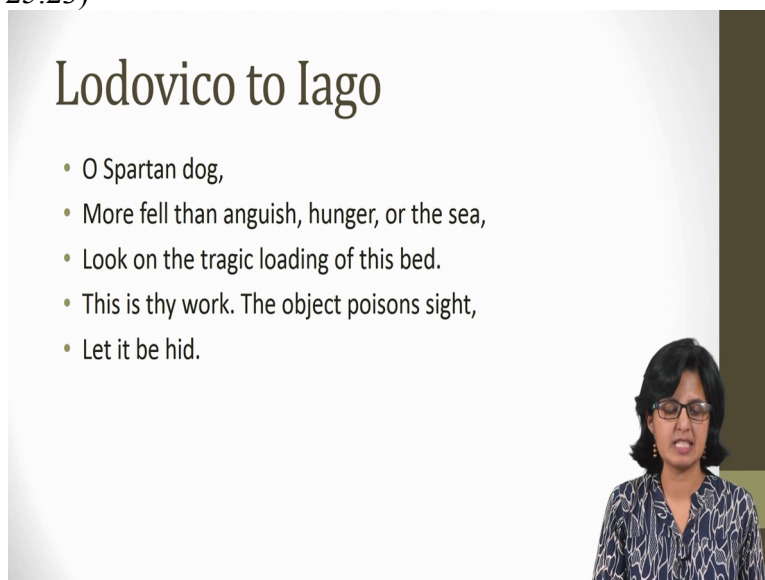
play and read through those scenes where Iago and Othello are together, we even get this feeling that it seems as if Othello was desperate himself to prove that Desdemona was unfaithful and that is what got him at the end, that is what made the soil very very fertile for Iago as well.

I kissed thee ere I killed thee. No way but this, killing myself, to die upon a kiss. He now wants to kill himself because that is the only way out he feels and he does not want to be treated as a prisoner and he does not want to lose his reputation and then continued to live. But we also begin to wonder whether he is again valuing his own reputation, valuing his own stature more than how he valued Desdemona's life itself.

We can see some interesting parallels here with the other play, (( ))(24:29) play that we had taken a look at in doll's house where the lead character, Nora tells her husband, Torvald that a woman may not place honour above her unselfish love towards her husband but for a man, the honour, the idea of honour, the idea of preserving is honour, seems to be everything. It is above family, it is above love, it is above everything.

These succinct articulations help us to draw parallels across these time periods to see how relationships, how the institutions of marriage have always been seen and how some of these works have tried to present us with a different picture or even tried to encourage us to see through the many gaps and the many cracks which are there in the traditional articulations.

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Lodovico to Iago

- O Spartan dog,
- More fell than anguish, hunger, or the sea,
- Look on the tragic loading of this bed.
- This is thy work. The object poisons sight,
- Let it be hid.

The slide features a white background with a dark vertical bar on the right side. In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset showing a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a patterned blue and white shirt, speaking.

Everyone around is of course surprised. This is something that they had never expected and Lodovico tells Iago, O Spartan dog, more fell than anguish, hunger, or the sea, look on the tragic loading of this bed. This is thy work. The object poisons sight, let it be hid. So they are now looking at this tragic sight of Desdemona having murdered by Othello and Othello having killed himself and he also falls in the same bed where we have just these 2 bodies instead of the happy couple that we witnessed in the beginning of the play.

And Lodovico is right to Iago when he says this is your work and we find that it is amazing the way in which Iago took charge of this entire play. He was the one who led everyone through and this has made to wonder whether he shares the position of the protagonists alongside Othello who is of course the lead character. As reminded earlier, Iago in this play has more lines than Othello himself and he seems to occupy the centrestage of the play in a way that no other character could.

Not only his character is very finely rounded and sketched out in a perfect way, but Shakespeare has also managed to give Iago a wonderful touch of originality. We have a villain whom we have never seen before and he also becomes a model for many other kinds of similar, many other similar kinds of villains in literature in various forms. And even as the play winds up, we do not find Iago trying to say anything or trying to defend him or even looking remorseful and this I guess is the greatest achievement as far as this play is concerned.

The consistency with which he maintains his stature and a remarkable way in which he succeeds to remain very aloof, completely unaffected by whatever is happening around him and that is perhaps one of the many greatest things which are part of this play. I strongly encourage that you take a look at the links provided and read through the play in original and you can even take help of the modern translations to understand it better. You would find a number of critical references, a number of critical readings on Shakespeare's plays and also on Othello.

But a close reading of the play will help you to appreciate those readings in a better way because it is very important that you also get a hang of the play, to get a sense of the playwright and to get a sense of how the Elizabethan stage did wonders in the context of English literature and also in transforming English literature in ways which was not seen before. I thank you for your attention, thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you in the next session.

