

The English Theatre of Hamburg

Established 1976

Presents

OTHELLO

by William Shakespeare

Premiere on 16 February, 2017

Preview Performances at reduced prices on 13, 14 and 15 February

Performances Tuesday to Saturday at 19.30 Hours

Matinee Performances at 11.00 Hours on Tuesdays and

Fridays beginning 21 February

The English Theatre of Hamburg

Lerchenfeld 14, 22081 Hamburg

U-Bahn Mundsburg

Telephone: 22 77 089

www.englishtheatre.de

The English Theatre of Hamburg

Established in 1976

Dear Teachers and Friends,

The English Theatre will premiere **OTHELLO** by William Shakespeare on 16 February, 2017, with the usual preview performances at reduced prices on 13, 14 and 15 February. Bookings for this famous classic have already started. See the cover of this study guide for dates and times of performances. The text of the play may be obtained at www.samuelfrench.co.uk/ or www.amazon.com. Teachers interested in being invited to a dress rehearsal of the play should contact Jasmin Pose at marketing@englishtheatre.de

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Surprisingly little is recorded in history about the life of William Shakespeare whose works, along with the Bible, have probably had the most influence on the English language and its literature. We do know that he was baptized on April 26, 1564, in Stratford and died there on April 23, 1616. His father was John Shakespeare, a tanner and public official in the small town, who suffered numerous financial reverses throughout his lifetime. It is almost certain that young William, like most boys at that time from the middle-class, attended the local grammar school where the pupils received an education grounded in the classics. At eighteen years of age he married Anne Hathaway, and their first child was baptised seven months later. By 1592 William Shakespeare had begun to write plays that were successful enough to provoke the jealousy and admiration of established playwrights. His name appears as one of the owners of the Globe Theatre in 1599, and in 1603 he and his fellow actors received a patent from King James I designating them as the King's Men. Although much is unknown and cannot be explained about William Shakespeare's life, it is generally acknowledged by reputable scholars that he did indeed write, either wholly or in part, the thirty-seven plays which have thrilled audiences for over four hundred years.

ABOUT THE PLAY

OTHELLO, written around 1604, continues to hold audiences spellbound. This suspenseful drama of jealousy and betrayal begins in Venice where Othello, a dark-skinned Moor and rising military star, has just chosen Cassio to be his lieutenant instead of the ambitious Iago, who wanted the position for himself. Iago immediately vows to take revenge on Othello for the slight. On numerous occasions he hints that Cassio is having an affair with Othello's young wife Desdemona, slowly planting doubt and mistrust in the mind of the jealous Moor regarding his wife's fidelity. Eventually, an ideal opportunity presents itself to Iago to clinch the matter: He learns that Othello has given a precious family handkerchief to Desdemona and asked her to always keep it as a sign of her fidelity to him. The clever Iago quickly sees to it that the handkerchief is found in Cassio's rooms. Now convinced that the innocent Desdemona is cheating on him, Othello decides she must die.

Summary of
William Shakespeare's
OTHELLO

ACT I

The setting is Venice where Desdemona has secretly run off with and married Othello, a dark-skinned Moor who is a general in the Venetian military. When the play begins, Rodrigo, a long-time suitor of Desdemona, has just learned of the marriage and is expressing his anger to Iago, an ensign under Othello's command. Iago is also furious, but for a different reason: He hates Othello for recently promoting Cassio to lieutenant instead of him. Iago and Rodrigo immediately inform Desdemona's father, Barbantio, of her relationship with Othello. Barbantio is enraged at the news and demands that the dark-skinned foreigner be punished for carrying off and sexually abusing his daughter.

Iago, wishing to appear innocent of any wrongdoing in Othello's eyes, warns him that he will soon be arrested. Instead of fleeing, however, the Moor allows himself to be brought before the Duke of Venice to defend his marriage to Desdemona. At the meeting, Barbantio accuses Othello of using black magic and drugs to seduce his daughter into marriage. Othello replies by describing the love he and Desdemona have for each other. Finally, Desdemona is brought in to speak for herself. When she confirms her true love for Othello, the Duke advises Barbantio to accept the marriage. The irate father submits to the Duke's counsel, but he vows to have nothing more to do with his daughter.

In the meantime, the Duke has received news that the Turks are about to attack Cyprus. He orders Othello to go there right away and take charge of the war against the enemy. Before leaving, Othello asks the trusted Iago to follow in a few days with Desdemona and her maid Emilia, who is Iago's wife.

Later alone, Iago, who has served Othello loyally for years, vows to get revenge on the Moor for promoting the novice Cassio to lieutenant over him. He knows that the general is a passionate, loving man. His plan, therefore, is to drive Othello crazy with jealousy by

insinuating that Desdemona is having an affair with Cassio.

ACT II

Everyone has arrived in Cyprus except Othello. Desdemona is worried that her husband's ship may have sunk in the recent storm. Cassio assures her that Othello will arrive safely, which he finally does, to Desdemona's great relief. Upon arrival, Othello announces that the Turkish fleet was completely destroyed by the storm and is no longer a threat to Cyprus. Delighted to be together again, Othello and Desdemona go off to their lodgings.

Iago wants to discredit Cassio so that Othello will demote the young officer and make him (Iago) his lieutenant. To achieve this, he enlists the help of Rodrigo who still hopes to win Desdemona's favour. Iago convinces Rodrigo that the young Desdemona will soon tire of the older Othello and then turn her complete attention to the young, handsome Cassio, whom she really desires. Therefore, all Rodrigo has to do is kill the young lieutenant, and Desdemona will be his.

Iago instructs Rodrigo to attack Cassio that night after he (Iago) gets the young lieutenant drunk. During the fight that follows, the drunken Cassio wounds Rodrigo as well as Montano, the Governor of Cyprus, who tries to pull the combatants apart. Iago sees to it that Othello is called to the scene. When the general is told that Cassio is responsible for the bloodshed, he strips the young officer of his rank as lieutenant, as Iago hoped would happen. Later, the distraught Cassio wonders how he can ever get back into Othello's good graces. Iago advises him to visit Desdemona and ask her to speak on his behalf to the general. Once Cassio has done this, Iago intends to poison Othello's mind by hinting that his wife is seeing Cassio due to her lust for him.

ACT III

Iago directs his wife Emilia to arrange the meeting between Cassio and Desdemona. At the meeting, Desdemona promises to urge her husband to re-instate Cassio as his lieutenant. The clever Iago makes sure that Othello sees Cassio leaving the meeting. Then, pretending reluctance to say it, Iago suggests that the young man could be having an affair with Desdemona. Just the thought of such a

possibility depresses Othello so much that, when Desdemona speaks to him later on Cassio's behalf, he abruptly sends her away. As she leaves, Desdemona accidentally drops the handkerchief that Othello gave her as a keepsake. Emilia picks it up and gives it to Iago, who has already asked her to steal the handkerchief for him. Iago soon plants the handkerchief in Cassio's lodgings where the young man is sure to find it. Unaware of its origin, Cassio gives the handkerchief to the whore Bianca, whom he visits occasionally.

Othello, suspicious of his wife's meeting with Cassio, demands that Iago give him absolute proof of her infidelity. Iago claims that he once heard Cassio talking in his sleep of his love for Desdemona. He also tells Othello that he recently saw Cassio wipe his brow with the handkerchief that Othello gave her. The Moor immediately goes to Desdemona and demands that she show him the handkerchief. When she cannot produce it, he is beside himself and leaves the room.

ACT IV

Iago continues to feed Othello's distrust of Desdemona. He tells the Moor that Cassio admitted to him that he was sleeping with Desdemona. Trembling with rage and jealousy, Othello falls into an epileptic fit. When he recovers, Iago arranges that Othello, unseen, hear Cassio bragging about his sexual activities with the whore Bianca. Othello believes, however, that Cassio is speaking of his activities with Desdemona. To make matters worse, Bianca suddenly appears with the handkerchief that Cassio gave her. Having come to the conclusion that it is a love token from another woman, she throws the handkerchief in Cassio's face and storms off. Othello, now convinced that Desdemona and Cassio are having an affair, decides that both of them must die. He intends to strangle Desdemona and orders Iago to kill Cassio.

Lodovico, an official from Venice, arrives with orders commanding Othello to return home. Lodovico is also Desdemona's uncle. When she speaks to him about Cassio's problem with her husband, Othello strikes his wife and sends her away. Lodovico is shocked by Othello's

strange behaviour and wonders if he is losing his mind. Afterwards, Desdemona asks her husband why he is so angry with her. Othello finally reveals to Desdemona the source of his rage: her affair with Cassio. She pleads her innocence, but Othello refuses to believe her. Later, Emilia and Desdemona speak about the matter. Emilia is sure that someone has poisoned Othello's mind with the false rumour. While getting ready for bed, Desdemona sings a sad song about a young girl unjustly wronged by her lover.

ACT V

Iago persuades Rodrigo to try again to kill Cassio. During the fight, Cassio stabs and almost kills Rodrigo. Then Iago, from behind, stabs Cassio in the leg and runs off without being seen. Cassio cries out for help. In a few moments, Iago reappears pretending to come to Cassio's aid. Later, Iago kills the wounded Rodrigo to prevent him from speaking about their crimes.

Othello finds Desdemona asleep in her bedroom. As he kisses her for the last time, she wakes up. Sensing what Othello intends to do, Desdemona begs for her life. Once more, she denies giving Cassio the handkerchief and sleeping with him. Othello, refusing to listen, strangles her.

Emilia comes in and sees that Desdemona is dead. She learns from Othello that he killed his wife based on lies from Iago. In horror, she runs to the door and calls for help. When Iago and Lodovico enter, Emilia reveals that she gave the handkerchief to Iago, who then put it in Cassio's rooms. Iago is furious with his wife for denouncing him. He stabs and kills Emilia. Othello realizes now that he was tricked by Iago and that Desdemona was innocent all along. In a rage he stabs and wounds Iago.

Lodovico, who has witnessed the deadly spectacle, takes charge of the situation. He condemns Iago to torture until he confesses his crimes, and strips Othello of his rank and command. Othello, after describing himself as a manipulated man who loved too much, stabs himself. He then kisses Desdemona and dies over her body.

Multiple Choice Exercise

1. Desdemona secretly (a. runs off with Othello, b. meets with Rodrigo, c. flirts with Cassio).
2. The Duke of Venice advises Barbantio, Desdemona's father, to (a. accept his daughter's marriage, b. never see Desdemona again, c. arrange for Desdemona and Othello to get a divorce).
3. Iago wants revenge on Othello for (a. eloping with Desdemona, b. promoting Cassio over him, c. sending him to Cyprus).
4. Iago insinuates that Desdemona is having an affair with (a. Rodrigo, b. Montano, c. Cassio).
5. Iago tricks Rodrigo into trying to kill (a. Cassio, b. Emilia, c. Lodovico).
6. Cassio asks (a. Desdemona, b. Iago, c. Emilia) to persuade Othello to forgive him his bad behaviour).
7. Iago plants Desdemona's handkerchief in (a. Rodrigo's, b. Cassio's, c. Montano's) rooms.
8. Othello kills Desdemona as a result of (a. Rodrigo's, b. Cassio's, c. Iago's) lies about her fidelity to him.
9. Emilia reveals to Othello that Desdemona (a. was unfaithful to him, b. was innocent of any wrong-doing, c. was only considering having an affair with Cassio).

Answer Key:

1. a, 2. a, 3. b, 4. c, 5. a, 6. a, 7. b, 8. c, 9. b

Interpretative Exercise

1. Describe a few things that Iago does to trick Othello into believing that Desdemona is having an affair.
2. Have you ever personally experienced jealousy or observed the effects of jealousy on another person? What was the reason for the jealousy? Was the result positive, or negative as in the case of Othello?
3. Give a few examples of how we, personally or as a society, can be manipulated into believing that something is true or false without realizing it.