

Othello – Act III Discussion Questions

1. “For thy solicitor shall rather die / Than give thy cause away” (3.3.29-30). Explain the irony of this statement.

2. Explain Iago’s strategy of “echoing” back words to Othello:

“Think, my lord?” By heaven, thou echo’st me
As if there were some monster in thy thought
Too hideous to be shown. Thou dost mean
something. (3.3.120-124)

3. Analyze the meaning of the following passage:

“For such things in a false disloyal knave
Are tricks of custom; but in a man that’s just
They’re close dilations, working from the heart
That passion cannot rule” (3.3.140–143).

4. How does Iago explain Desdemona’s choice of a husband so unlike her in “clime, complexion, and degree,” and what effect does this explanation have on Othello (3.3.270)?

5. How is the play’s most significant stage property introduced in Act III, scene iii (330)?

6. Describe Emilia’s attitude towards the handkerchief.

7. What does Iago mean by this?

“Trifles light as air
Are to the jealous confirmations strong
As proofs of holy writ.” (3.3.370-372)

8. Under what circumstances does Othello demand “ocular proof” of Desdemona’s adultery, and how does Iago respond (3.3.412)?

9. Iago declares, “The Moor already changes with my poison” (3.3.373). How do shifts in Othello’s diction and imagery—particularly in his speech beginning “Arise, black vengeance...” (3.3.507)—reflect this transformation?

10. What vows do Othello and Iago make while kneeling together (3.3.525), and what is the dramatic significance of this moment?

11. Comment on the story Othello tells of the handkerchief (3.4.65-79) and compare it to his tall tales (1.3) and his latter comment on Act 5 that it was an “antique token / My father gave my mother” (5.2.256-257). What does it say about Desdemona?

12. What do Emilia and Desdemona have to say about jealousy? And a little later, Bianca?

Lines referring to the Folger Digital Edition: <https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/othello/read/>