

# A Rather Dead Fellow Speaks About Othello



At the heart of this play is a character who embodies the very essence of the evil that lies within human nature.

William Shakespeare dishes about his classic tragedy ... and more.

By Bryon Cahill

The play that you are about to read is an adaptation of one of William Shakespeare's finest works. It is *Othello*, *The Moor of Venice*. The subject matter is intense. On the surface, we have Othello, an upstanding citizen and Venetian military man who is slowly being driven mad by his **ensign**, Iago. Lying underneath Iago's trustworthy facade is a driving force of hate tinged with jealousy, racism, and blind power lust.

**William Shakespeare:** Bravo, sir. You have managed to spoil my careful plot. Perhaps you would care to come to my resting place and spoil my bones?

**READ:** Oh, Mr. Shakespeare, hello. I didn't see you come in. Are you referring to your **epitaph**, which reads "Blessed be the man that spares these stones, and cursed be he that moves my bones"?

**WS:** Aye, those same words grace my grave. But didst thou wake me with thy blather to talk of dust and bones? Or wilt thou grill me on *Othello*?

**READ:** Very well, Will. Let me throw the most difficult question I have at you.

**WS:** Reach into thine bag of tricks and pull out a gem.

**READ:** Our readers are of middle school and high school age. Do you think a play about racism, **infidelity**, and murder is appropriate? How are they supposed to relate?

**WS:** To be honest, I did not have your readers in mind or at heart when I penned *Othello*. However, when presented with the mature themes that grace these pages (and many stages), I would urge students to see through the violent acts to understand how they came to be. At the heart of this play is a character who embodies the very essence of the

**\* vocab**

**ENSIGN:** the lowest commissioned officer in a military unit

**EPITAPH:** an inscription on a tomb or gravestone about the person buried at that site

**INFIDELITY:** the act of cheating on one's spouse

evil that lies within human nature. By the final curtain, blood shall be spilt upon the floor. That is tragedy! What's vitally more important, though, is the question of *why*. Could it all have been prevented? Who are the true villains, and what are their motives? There's the rub!

**READ:** Oh, now you're just quoting yourself.

**WS:** If I have not earned the right, who has? *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *A Tale of Two Cities* ...

**READ:** Actually, um, that last one was Dickens.

**WS:** Ah, thou dost have a brain in thy head after all. Good man! My point is this: You, sir, are speaking to a playwrighting god.

**READ:** And one with modesty to boot!

**WS:** No, I am that I am, and they that level at my abuses reckon up their own. And yet, it cannot be denied that every playwright who has walked in my shadow HAS walked in my shadow! I have set the stage for comedy and history and tragedy alike. I have woven the most fantastic of stories, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard III*, and *Julius Caesar*, with such gorgeous language that they can bring grown men to tears. If it were not for me, I daresay your little magazine would not even have a complete issue devoted entirely to playwrighting. Dost thou mark me well?

**READ:** Aye, I do sir.

**WS:** Alas, my apologies. I lose myself in ego. I do not intend to sound so pompous! I blame circumstance. You have to understand ... I have been dead for nearly 400 years. My brain is wishy-wobbly.

**READ:** That's quite all right, Will. Truth be told, in most circles, you *are* considered to be the premier playwright of your (and all) generations. That's why we feature you in *READ* at least once every year! Remember? We resurrected you last year and interviewed you for our electronic issue at [www.weeklyreader.com/shakespeare](http://www.weeklyreader.com/shakespeare).

**WS:** Ah, yes. You know, I tried to go there recently, and it denied me access.

**READ:** That's because everything in *READ* is exclusive to *READ* teachers and their students. The teachers have access. Find a teacher.

**WS:** The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard, but I will better the instruction.

**READ:** Excellent! ... I think? ... At any rate, *Othello* rocks! And I think it exhibits the most important quality of playwrighting: rich character development through tragic flaws.

**WS:** Thou art kind.

**READ:** Can you stick around a little longer and check out the additional playwrighting instruction we have after your play? I assume you have nothing better to do than go back to being dead?

**WS:** I shall always have time for the discussion of plays! Besides ... life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more.

**READ:** Alrighty then! ■