

Cassio

AOIFE O'DRISCOLL

WWW.AOIFESNOTES.COM

Introduction to Cassio – Courtesy of Iago

Iago tells Roderigo that Cassio has been promoted to Othello's lieutenant

According to Iago, Cassio is 'a Florentine' and 'A fellow almost damned in a fair wife' who has no experience of war but 'bookish theoretic'

'Mere prattle without practice / Is all his soldiership' (Act 1 Scene 1)

Is Iago right about Cassio?

- ▶ We cannot know at this stage
- ▶ However, in Act 1 Scene 1, we learn that Iago is not to be trusted, saying he follows Othello in order to take advantage of him.
- ▶ Cassio, like Othello, is a foreigner. Venice and Florence were independent states. Does being an outsider matter or is Iago's attitude unreasonable?
- ▶ Cassio may be an 'arithmetician' (a highly-educated person) but Othello is an experienced soldier. Having a second-in-command with a different set of skills is a wise move.



Act 1 Scene 2

Competent, trustworthy and respectful: The Duke sent him to find Othello; he answers Othello honestly about the Duke's reason for sending him and does not exaggerate his knowledge of the situation: 'Something from Cyprus, as I may divine'.

Iago tells Cassio that Othello is married but Cassio does not enter into any gossip, merely asking who the bride is. This, despite Iago's sexual innuendo and hints that Othello is 'made for ever' by this union.

First appearance contradicts Iago's description



There seems little truth in Iago's claim that 'Mere prattle without practice' is all there is to Cassio.

Act 2 Scene 1

- ▶ Polite and courteous: Tells Montano that Othello's wife 'paragons description and wild fame'. Begs Iago's pardon for kissing Emilia, assuring him that "'Tis my breeding / That give me this bold show of courtesy'.
- ▶ Gallantry makes him easy prey for Iago. As he observes Cassio taking Desdemona's hand, Iago gloats, 'With as little a web as this will I / ensare as great a fly as Cassio'.

Act 2 Scene 3

Courteous



Refuses to be drawn when Iago tries to persuade him to admit he is attracted to Desdemona. In response to Iago's crude comment that Desdemona is 'full of game', Cassio will only say that she is 'a most fresh and delicate creature'.

Not perfect

Iago uses Cassio's poor head for drink and his somewhat over-the-top gallantry against him

Cassio does not want to join the local gentlemen in drinking a toast to Othello and Desdemona but also does not want to appear rude.

Agrees reluctantly: 'I'll do't, but it dislikes me'.

Values his reputation

Is distraught when he is dismissed from Othello's service for his drunken brawl

Believes that a good reputation is the mark of a civilized man and that, without it, he is little more than an animal: 'I ha' lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial'.



Pride and
naivety
make him
vulnerable to
manipulation
by Iago

Overly desperate to
restore his reputation

Immediately agrees to
Iago's suggestion that he
should ask Desdemona to
plead his case with Othello

Is naively grateful for
Iago's advice: 'You advise
me well' and calling him
'honest Iago'

Act 3 Scene 1 - Impatient

Desperate to win
Othello's favour
but misjudges the
general's mood

Hires musicians to
play outside
Othello's rooms but
Othello sends them
away

Cannot bide
his time

Although Emilia assures Cassio that Desdemona is pleading his case and that the general is waiting for a diplomatic moment to reinstate him, Iago cannot be patient

“

But he protests he loves you,
And needs no other suitor but his likings
To take the saf'st occasion by the front
To bring you in again.

”

Emilia to Cassio – Act 3 Scene 1

Plays into Iago's hands

Poor judge of character? – When Iago agrees to send for Emilia, Cassio says 'I never knew a Florentine more kind and honest'



Cassio begs Emilia to find an opportunity for him to speak to Desdemona when she is on her own

Act 3 Scene 3 - Impatience is a weakness


- ▶ Speaks to Desdemona – still fretting impatiently at being kept waiting for Othello's answer
- ▶ Leaves immediately when Othello and Iago approach, saying he is 'very ill at ease' and does not want to listen to Desdemona plead his case
- ▶ Is it cowardly of him to leave Desdemona to speak to Othello?



Cassio's awkwardness is Iago's opportunity



Iago uses Cassio's hurried departure to plant a seed of doubt in Othello's mind: 'Ha! I like not that.'



Iago reinforces Othello's suspicion by saying he cannot believe Cassio would 'steal away so guilty-like' on seeing Othello approach.

Act 3 Scene 4 – Increases Tension

Dramatic irony – audience is aware that Othello is angry with Desdemona and jealous of Cassio



Cassio's repeated requests to have her speak to Othello for him increase the tension at this stage

Willing dupe

Cassio blindly follows Iago's advice

Do we blame him for this or bear in mind that Iago fools everyone?

Cassio and Bianca

Attitude towards Bianca shows him in an unfavourable light

Bianca is besotted by him, but he has little interest in her

Gives her Desdemona's handkerchief to copy

Tells her to leave him because he does not want Othello to see her in his company

In Act 4 Scene 1, Cassio speaks mockingly to Iago of Bianca, calling her a worthless trinket or 'bauble', and no better than a 'fitchew' (lecherous, weasel-like animal) albeit 'a perfumed one'

Laughs at Bianca
when she is upset
by his treatment of
her



Only follows Bianca
when she leaves in
distress lest she 'rail
in the streets'



Afraid she will
make a show of
him

Cassio's lack of action – do we blame him?

For the purposes of the plot, it is essential that Cassio not speak directly to Othello

He believes he is well advised by Iago

Act 5 Scene 1

- ▶ Iago and Roderigo attack Cassio – Cassio is wounded but not killed
- ▶ Belief in Cassio's death emboldens Othello to kill Desdemona
- ▶ Cassio's survival indicates that Iago's run of luck has come to an end

Act 5 Scene 2

Loyal to the end: addresses Othello respectfully even when he learns of the plot to kill him: 'Dear general, I never gave you cause'.

Fitting that Cassio should be responsible for punishing Iago – the man who tried so hard to ruin his reputation and who wanted him dead