



# Emilia

CHARACTER SUMMARY

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## Who is she?

- ▶ Iago's wife
- ▶ Desdemona's lady-in-waiting
- ▶ Like Iago, she is lower class than the majority of the characters in the play.

Worldly-wise  
and  
pragmatic

Cynical view of relationship between  
men and women



'They are all stomachs and we are all  
but food; / They eat us hungrily and  
when they are full, / They belch us'



She believes men treat women poorly  
and once they have enjoyed them,  
soon forget about them.

# More experienced than Desdemona

- ▶ Desdemona has led a sheltered life but Emilia has not.
- ▶ Emilia is prepared to believe that women can be unfaithful: 'And have not we affections, / Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?'





Believes men are responsible for their wives' unfaithfulness

'The ills we do, their ills instruct us so'.

Refuses to accept the double standards which say women must be pure, but men are allowed to have many lovers.

# Did she sleep with Othello?

Iago claims she did

'And it is thought abroad / That 'twixt my sheets he has done my office'

There is no proof

Emilia denies it

'Some such squire he was / That turned your wit the seamy side without / And made you to suspect me with the Moor'



# Understands Jealousy

Accepts human frailty in other areas too

Believes jealousy can appear without real cause

‘Tis a monster / Begot upon itself, born on itself’

Rationality can not defeat jealousy

‘They are not ever jealous for the cause / But jealous for they’re jealous’

# Astute and quick-witted

Sees immediately that Othello is jealous and tries to warn Desdemona

'Is not this man jealous?'

Suspects that someone is poisoning Othello's mind





However, she does not suspect Iago until the very end.

Is shocked to discover he has told Othello that Desdemona was unfaithful

'He says that thou tolds't him his wife was false, / I know thou dids't not, thou'rt not such a villain'

# Kind-hearted and devoted to Desdemona

Tries to convince Othello that there is nothing between Cassio and Desdemona

'But then I saw no harm, and then I heard / Each syllable that breath made up between them'

'If she be not honest, chaste and true, / There's no man happy: the purest of their wives / Is foul as slander

# Protective

Outraged by Othello's treatment of his wife

'He called her 'whore'; a beggar in his drink / could not have laid such terms upon his callat'

Wishes Desdemona had never married Othello

'I would you had never seen him'

# The Handkerchief

- ▶ Knows how the loss of it will affect Desdemona:  
'Poor lady, she'll run mad / When she shall lack it'



No evidence that she knows how Iago will use it

'What will he do with it, heaven knows, not I'

At this stage she is still loyal to her husband

Her guilt when she realises what she has done may well make her so determined to defend Desdemona at the end

# Brave

Defies both her husband and Othello at the end

Is not afraid of Othello even though he has just murdered his wife

'I care not for thy sword, I'll make thee known'

# Independent

Defies societal norms and disobeys her husband

Refuses to be silent when she realises the role Iago has played in Desdemona's death

'Tis proper I obey him, but not now'

# Steadfast



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Defends Desdemona to the end

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'the sweetest innocent / That e'er  
did lift up eye'

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Asks to be laid beside  
Desdemona as she dies




# A.C. Bradley on Emilia

Till close to the end she frequently sets one's teeth on edge; and at the end one is ready to worship her.



Othello



Terror and pity are here too much to bear; we long to be allowed to feel also indignation, if not rage; and Emilia lets us feel them and gives them words. She brings us too the relief of joy and admiration,—a joy that is not lessened by her death. Why should she live? If she lived for ever she never could soar a higher pitch, and nothing in her life became her like the losing it.