***Othello, the Moor of Venice***

Characters

* The minor characters in this play have almost no range, nor does Desdemona; only Iago and Othello permit – and, indeed, require – interpretation. The more nearly Iago is played as mad, the more everyone’s response to him becomes incredible; therefore he is in some sense both rational and evil. Othello can’t be unbalanced before he falls into jealousy or balanced afterward, so it is vital that his fall is credible; Iago’s rationality is essential to that credibility.
* Roderigo gets in trouble on account of his vices, and he gets killed.

Cassio gets in trouble on account of his mixture of vices and virtues, and he gets wounded.

Othello gets in trouble on account of his virtues, and he kills himself.

* The reader’s or viewer’s judgment of Othello should be heavily influenced both by his own closing speech and by the eulogies spoken of him after his suicide.

Setting

The subtitle “the Moor of Venice” and the island of Cyprus have in common a tendency to focus our attention both on a polarized opposition – Christian v. heathen, white v. black, female v. male, innocence v. experience – and on relationships between the apparent opposites. For example, Othello himself has been heathen and is now Christian, and his marriage to Desdemona unites a black man with a white woman; likewise, Iago is both “honest” and untruthful. Cyprus itself is a borderland where contraries mingle. Also, like all islands, it is a space where land and sea meet, and a very isolated place.