

17 - THE WILLOW SCENE

What kind of relationship do Emilia and Desdemona have?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to watch [this clip](#).
- A copy of Act 4 Scene 3 to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Watch the video of two actors rehearsing Act 4 Scene 3, [here](#).
- Notice the variety of choices available to the actors, and how they collaborate with the director Iqbal Khan in moments of discussion.
- In Act 4 Scene 3 after Othello furiously exits after demanding Desdemona produce the handkerchief, Emilia and Desdemona have the following dialogue:

Emilia: Is not this man jealous?

Desdemona: I nev’r saw this before. / Sure there’s some wonder in this handkerchief;
/ I am most unhappy in the loss of it.

Emilia: ‘Tis not a year or two shows us a man: / They are all but stomachs, and we
are all food’ / They eat us hungrily, and when they are full / They belch us.

- Notice how the two women come to different conclusions about Othello’s behaviour. There is an awareness about the treatment of women by men, especially by Emilia.*
- Read Act 4 Scene 3, how are these opinions continued here? What are both character’s outlooks? Where do they disagree? Who has the status? Does it change? (A key moment in the rehearsal video for example is when Desdemona chooses to throw water over Emilia.)
- Read the scene from Line 24 “*My mother had a maid call’d Barbary*” until the end of the song: “*Let nobody blame him, his scorn I approve*”. What significance does this song have? How much does the song predict what is to come?

EXTENSION

- Think further about the relationship between Desdemona and Emilia. Decide on the top three qualities of each character from what you know about them.
- Create your own directorial notes. If you were directing two actors, what would you ask them? What would you be interested to see played in this scene?
- Watch the 2015 production version in performance, remembering the choices that were being discussed in the rehearsal video. Is the final performance version different? What choices were clear, and which were new to you?

*(Remember too, we have heard that Iago suspects Emilia and Othello to have had an affair).