Willow Song
The Willow Song, a melancholy melody Desdemona sings, is a symbol of women’s sorrows as a result of a male-dominated society; the song laments the sadness of a woman’s life when she submits herself to her husband, who then in turn ruins her.

As Emilia helps her get ready for bed, Desdemona sings the Willow Song, which she learned from one of her mother’s maids, named Barbary, whose object of affection “proved mad and did forsake her” (IV,iii,29-30); similarly, Desdemona sings, “The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree, Sing all a green willow” (43-44) now that Othello believes she has had an affair with Cassio. The lyrics are very representative of her situation for Othello, for Desdemona, the “poor soul”, sings about a “green willow” in her lament – willows traditionally represent sadness, and like a green willow, Desdemona is young, inexperienced, and naïve, and thus easily manipulated by the scheme Iago has set up.

The lyrics of the song directly mirror Desdemona’s own experience with Othello, as she sings, “Let nobody blame him, his scorn I approve” (IV,iii,56). Although Desdemona knows she has always been true to Othello, she doesn’t show much initiative in fighting back against him. Othello’s male dominance prevents Desdemona from defending herself more vocally, and thus, like the ironic lyrics say, “let nobody blame him”, for she is partially at fault, because by being passive about the situation, Desdemona has in a way “approve[d]” his scorn.

After being fatally wounded by Iago, Emilia’s last words include a line of the Willow Song: she cries out, “Willow, willow, willow. Moor, she was chaste. She loved thee, cruel Moor” (V,ii,298-299). Emilia’s dying words are still in defense of Desdemona, but her use of the Willow Song may also reveal the sadness in Emilia’s death. Emilia sings “willow, willow, willow” for Desdemona, but perhaps also in part for herself. Although she loyally defends Desdemona until the end, Emilia doesn’t speak out about Iago’s lies until right before she dies, a sign that perhaps the strong-willed Emilia also has submitted to the dominance of her husband, letting his sins steal by under her nose while she turned a blind eye.

Wedding Sheets
In Othello, Desdemona’s wedding sheets represent Desdemona’s true purity, and act as a sign of her honesty and faithfulness to Othello; however, the symbol comes too late in the play for Othello to recognize it as a sign of her love, and, blinded by his irrational rage, he ignores the wedding sheets and continues down the path for destruction Iago has crafted.

After discussing Othello’s rage over her alleged infidelity with Emilia, Desdemona tells Emilia to “remember” to “lay on [her] bed [her] wedding sheets” that night (IV,ii,122). The wedding sheets, which are probably white, are a symbol of Desdemona’s purity and chastity, two aspects which she no doubt wishes to remind Othello of. After all his fiery accusations, Desdemona probably hopes that Othello will remember her beauty and purity upon seeing the wedding sheets, which also represent their wedding night, a night when they were very much in love and made vows to always stay faithful and take care of each other.

Desdemona, Emilia, and Othello’s dead bodies all lie on Desdemona’s wedding sheets by the end of the play, but perhaps Othello’s parting words are the most haunting; he reveals that he finally realizes Desdemona was faithful all along, and right before committing suicide, he laments the fact that he “threw a pearl away richer than all his tribe” (V,ii,407-408). As he stabs himself, Othello falls onto the bed, which is covered in Desdemona’s wedding sheets; it seems that dying on her wedding sheets is a sign that he finally has acknowledged the truth of her purity and faithfulness, and that although he has made many tragic mistakes, he will once again join her on their wedding sheets, where on the night of their wedding they enjoyed an untainted love.