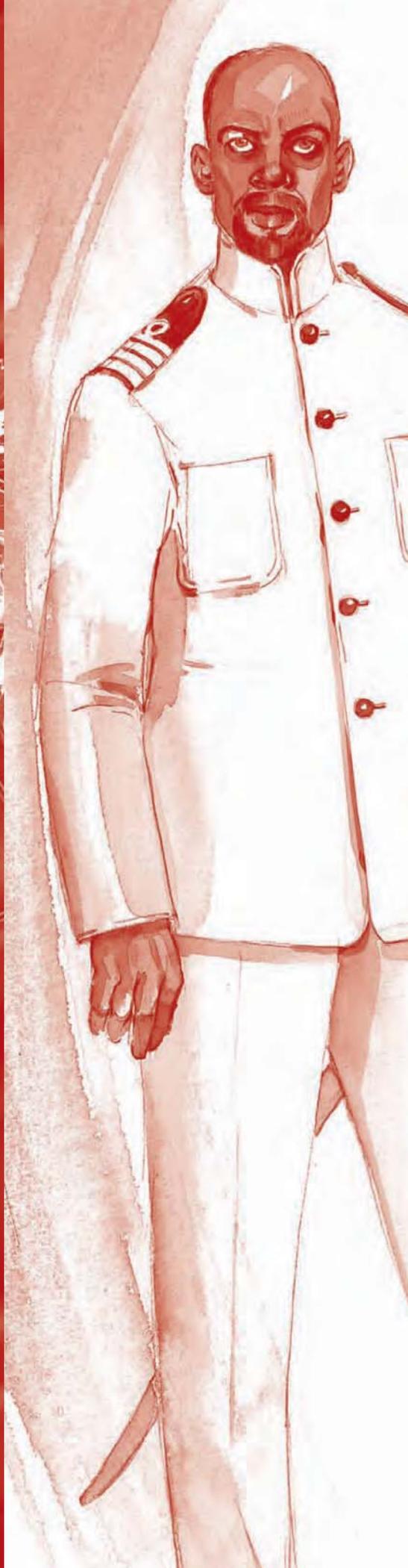


# Othello



chicago  
shakespeare theater  
on navy pier



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# Teacher Handbook

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Cover illustration: Original rendering by Costume Designer Christina Poddubiuk for CST's 2008 production of *Othello*.



# chicago shakespeare on navy pier theater

Barbara Gaines  
*Artistic Director*

Criss Henderson  
*Executive Director*

Chicago Shakespeare Theater is Chicago's professional theater dedicated to the works of William Shakespeare. Founded as Shakespeare Repertory in 1986, the company moved to its seven-story home on Navy Pier in 1999. In its Elizabethan-style Courtyard Theater, 500 seats on three levels wrap around a deep thrust stage—with only nine rows separating the farthest seat from the stage. Chicago Shakespeare also features a flexible 180-seat black box studio theater, a Teacher Resource Center, and a Shakespeare specialty bookstall.

In its first 20 seasons, the Theater has produced nearly the entire Shakespeare canon: *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *As You Like It*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Cymbeline*, *Hamlet*, *Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*, *Henry V*, *Henry VI Parts 1, 2 and 3*, *Julius Caesar*, *King John*, *King Lear*, *Love's Labor's Lost*, *Macbeth*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, *Pericles*, *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Tempest*, *Timon of Athens*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and *The Winter's Tale*.

Each year Chicago Shakespeare receives widespread critical acclaim for artistic excellence and its accessible, creative approach to Shakespeare's work. Chicago's Jeff Awards year after year have honored the Theater, including repeated awards for Best Production and Best Director, the two highest honors in Chicago theater.

Since Chicago Shakespeare's founding, its programming for young audiences has been an essential element in the realization of its mission. Team Shakespeare supports education in our schools, where Shakespeare is part of every required curriculum. As a theater within a multicultural city, we are committed to bringing Shakespeare to a young and ethnically diverse audience of 50,000 students each year. Team Shakespeare's programming includes free teacher workshops, student matinees of mainstage shows, post-performance discussions, comprehensive teacher handbooks, and an abridged, original Shakespeare production each year, which is staged daily at the Theater on Navy Pier and on tour to schools regionally. Team Shakespeare offers a region-wide forum for new vision and enthusiasm for teaching Shakespeare in our schools.

We hope that you and your students will enjoy our work—and Shakespeare's creative genius brought to life on stage.

Marilyn J. Halperin  
*Director of Education*

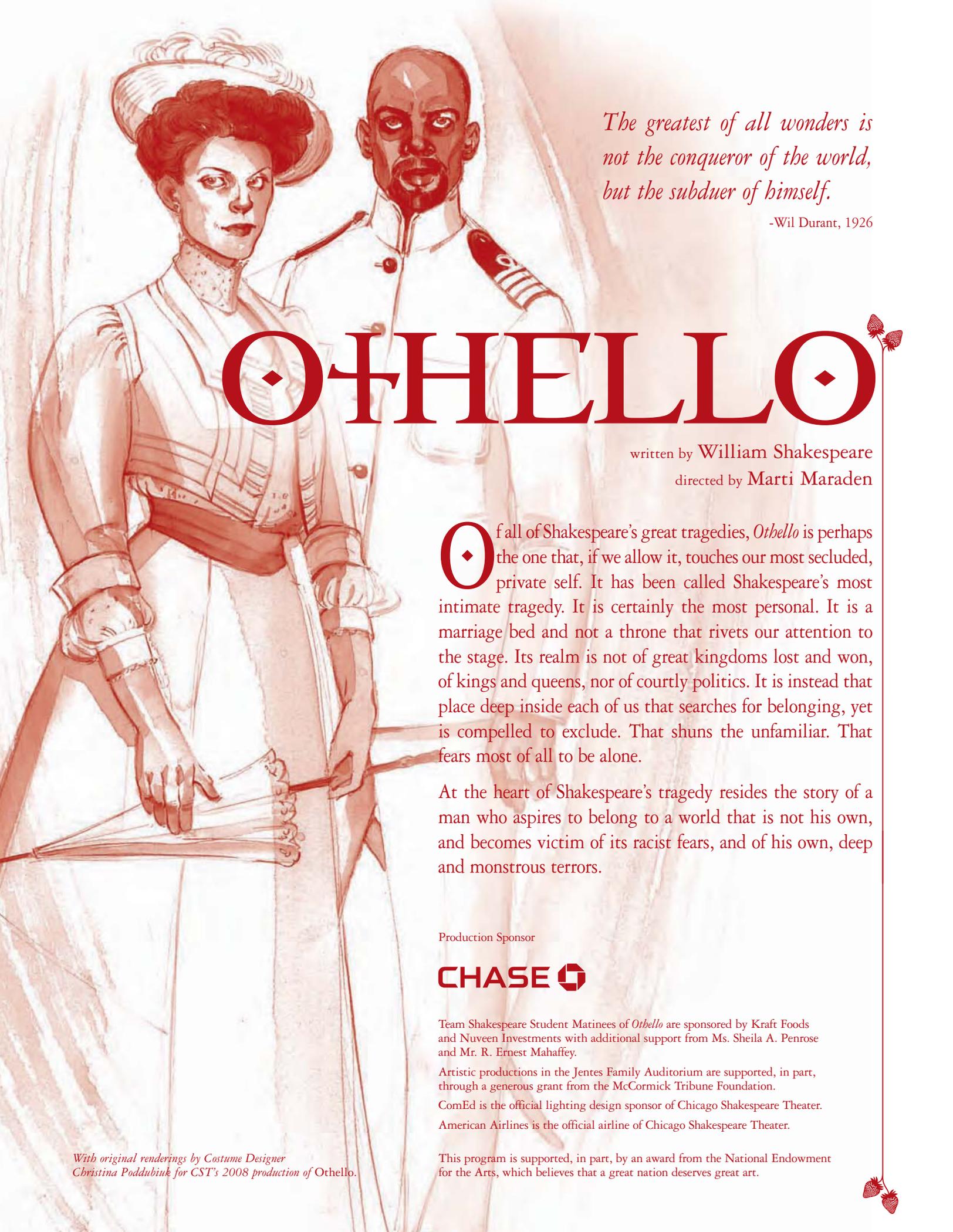
Beatrice Bosco  
*Associate Director of Education*

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*Team Shakespeare Manager*

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*Learning Programs Manager*

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A red-toned illustration of Othello and Desdemona. Othello is on the right, wearing a white military-style uniform with epaulettes and a high collar. Desdemona is on the left, wearing a white dress with a high collar and a large, ornate hat. They are standing close together, looking towards the viewer.

*The greatest of all wonders is  
not the conqueror of the world,  
but the subduer of himself.*

-Wil Durant, 1926

# O+HELLO

written by William Shakespeare

directed by Marti Maraden

Of all of Shakespeare's great tragedies, *Othello* is perhaps the one that, if we allow it, touches our most secluded, private self. It has been called Shakespeare's most intimate tragedy. It is certainly the most personal. It is a marriage bed and not a throne that rivets our attention to the stage. Its realm is not of great kingdoms lost and won, of kings and queens, nor of courtly politics. It is instead that place deep inside each of us that searches for belonging, yet is compelled to exclude. That shuns the unfamiliar. That fears most of all to be alone.

At the heart of Shakespeare's tragedy resides the story of a man who aspires to belong to a world that is not his own, and becomes victim of its racist fears, and of his own, deep and monstrous terrors.

Production Sponsor

**CHASE** 

Team Shakespeare Student Matinees of *Othello* are sponsored by Kraft Foods and Nuveen Investments with additional support from Ms. Sheila A. Penrose and Mr. R. Ernest Mahaffey.

Artistic productions in the Jentes Family Auditorium are supported, in part, through a generous grant from the McCormick Tribune Foundation.

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*With original renderings by Costume Designer  
Christina Poddubiuk for CST's 2008 production of Othello.*

This program is supported, in part, by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts, which believes that a great nation deserves great art.

## ART THAT LIVES



**D**rama, like no other art form, is a living art. It is written to be performed live before a group of people who form an audience and together experience a play. Ancient cave paintings depict men disguised as animals. Since ancient times, impersonation and imitation have served man in his effort to express himself and to commu-

nicate. The drama of western civilization has its roots in the ancient Greeks' religious rituals and observances. Until the Renaissance, when Shakespeare wrote, drama was closely tied to religious beliefs and practice.

Drama not only depicts human communication, it is human communication. In theater, unlike television or film, there is a two-way communication that occurs between the actors and their audience. The audience hears and sees the actors, and the actors hear and see the audience. We are used to thinking about the actors' roles in a play, but may find it strange to imagine ourselves, the audience, playing an important role in this living art. Because the art lives, each production is guaranteed to be different, depending in part upon an audience's response. Live drama is the sharing of human experience, intensely and immediately, in the theater, which momentarily becomes our universe.

A live theater production depends upon its audience. The best performances depend upon the best actors—and the best audiences. When the actors sense a responsive, interested audience, their work is at its best—full of animation and energy. When the actors sense disinterest, they, too, are distracted, and the play they create is less interesting.

One actor described the experience of live performance as a story told by the actors and audience together. In this sense, you are also a storyteller in the experience of live theater. We hope you'll enjoy your role—and help us give you a dramatic experience that you'll always remember.

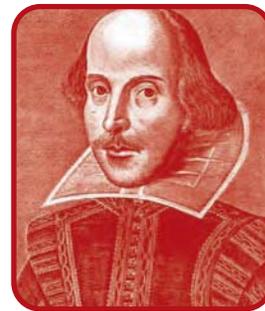
*(Theatrical performance) is essentially a sociable, communal affair. This is important. To resist this is, I think, to ruin one of the very important parts of the theatrical experience. Let the play and let the fact that temporarily you are not your private self, but a member of a closely-fused group, make it easy for the performance to 'take you out of yourself.' This, I suggest, is the object of going to a play...to be taken out of yourself, out of your ordinary life, away from the ordinary world of everyday.*

—Tyrone Guthrie, 1962

## HOW CAN YOU HELP US GIVE YOU THE BEST PERFORMANCE WE CAN?

- Please don't talk during the performance. Talking distracts the actors as well as the people sitting nearby.
- Respond naturally to our play. Emotions are part of drama. We hope that you'll laugh, cry and even gasp—but as a natural response to the story, and not in order to distract attention from the stage.
- Please keep all “noisemakers”—food, gum, cell phones, iPods, etc.—back at school or on the bus! In a quiet theater, wrappers and munching are heard by all, the actors included.
- No photographs of any kind, please! Flashbulbs can make the actors lose their focus and can be dangerous. Digital cameras, along with all other kinds of recording devices, are prohibited, as is text-messaging.

## BARD'S BIO



**T**he exact date of William Shakespeare's birth is not known, but his baptism, traditionally three days after a child's birth, was recorded on April 26, 1564. His father John Shakespeare was a tanner, glover, grain dealer and town official of the thriving market town of Stratford-upon-Avon. His mother Mary Arden was the daughter of a prosperous, educated farmer. Though the records are lost, Shakespeare undoubtedly attended Stratford's grammar school, where he would have acquired some knowledge of Latin and Greek and the classical writers. There is no record that Shakespeare acquired a university education of any kind.

Some skeptical scholars have raised doubts about whether Shakespeare, due to his relatively average level of education and humble origins, could have possibly written what has long been considered the best verse drama composed in the English language. But not until 1769, 150 years after Shakespeare's death, did these theories arise—and, to all appearances, Shakespeare's contemporaries and immediate successors never seemed to question whether William Shakespeare wrote the celebrated works attributed to him.

At 18, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior. They had one daughter Susanna, followed by twins, Hamnet and Judith. Hamnet, Shakespeare's only son, died at age 11. From 1585, the year in which the twins were baptized, until 1592, when he is first referred to as a dramatist in London, we know nothing of Shakespeare's life. Consequently, these seven years are filled with legend and conjecture. We may never know what brought Shakespeare to London or how he entered its world of theater. The first reference to Shakespeare as an actor and playwright appears in 1592 and was made by Robert Greene, a rival playwright and pamphleteer, who attacked Shakespeare as an "upstart crow" for presuming to write plays (when he was only a mere actor) and copying the works of established dramatists.

Subsequent references to Shakespeare indicate that as early as 1594 he was not only an actor and playwright, but also a partner in a new theatrical company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which soon became one of London's two principal companies. The company's name changed to the King's Men in 1603 with the accession of James I, and it endured until the Puritans closed the theaters in 1642. From 1599 the company acted primarily at the Globe playhouse, in which Shakespeare held a one-tenth interest.

During his career of approximately 20 years, Shakespeare wrote or collaborated in what most scholars now agree upon as 38 plays. His earliest plays, including *Love's Labor's Lost*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Richard III*, *King John* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, were written between 1589 and 1594. Between 1594 and 1599, Shakespeare wrote both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar* as well as other plays, including *Richard II*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *As You Like It*. His great tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, were composed between 1599 and 1607, and were preceded by his last play traditionally categorized as comedy, *Measure for Measure*. The earlier histories, comedies and tragedies made way for Shakespeare's final dramatic form—the so-called "romances" which were written between 1606 and 1611 and include *Cymbeline*, *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. These were the plays of a playwright no longer bound by the constraints of his earlier historical and tragic forms. Although single volumes of about half his plays were published in Shakespeare's lifetime, there is no evidence that suggests he oversaw their publication. It was not until 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, that 36 of his plays were published in the first Folio. Drama was only just beginning to be understood as "literature" as we understand it today, and so it is not at all surprising that so little attention was given to Shakespeare's plays in published form until seven years after

his death. However, we do know that Shakespeare did oversee the publication of three narrative poems and a collection of 154 sonnets.

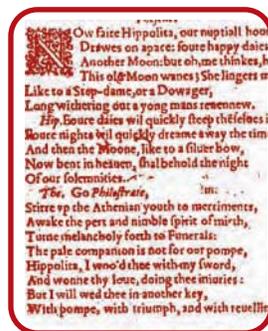
Shakespeare seldom devised his own plots for his plays, but creatively borrowed here and there from histories, prose romances, poems, and plays of his own and others. Shakespeare was an ingenious dramatic artist with a vast imagination. He created masterpieces out of conventional and unpromising material. In Shakespeare's time, ancient stories were told and re-told. The important thing was not the originality of the plot but how the story was told. In the telling of a story, there are few writers who rival Shakespeare in theatricality, poetry, and depth of character.

By 1592, Shakespeare had emerged as a rising playwright in London, where he continued to enjoy fame and financial success as an actor, playwright and part-owner of London's leading theater company. After living life in the theater for nearly 20 years, in 1611 he retired to live as a country gentleman in Stratford, his birthplace, until his death on April 23, 1616.

*Shakespeare was the man, who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily; when he describes any thing, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards, and found her there.*

—John Dryden, 1688

## THE FIRST FOLIO



Shakespeare wrote his plays for the stage, not for the printed page. In Shakespeare's day, plays were not considered "literature" at all. When a play was printed, it was printed inexpensively in a small book, called a "quarto," the sixteenth-century equivalent of our paperback editions. It was not until 1616, the year of Shakespeare's

death, when a contemporary of his, dramatist Ben Jonson, published his own plays in an atlas-size book called a "folio," that plays were viewed as literature worthy of publication. Jonson was chided as bold and arrogant for his venture.

Two of Shakespeare's close colleagues decided to ignore tradition and gather his plays for publication. In 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, the first Folio, a book containing 36 of his 38 plays, was published. The first Folio was compiled

from stage prompt books, from the playwright's handwritten manuscripts, from various versions of some of the plays already published for use in the theater—and from the memory of his actors. Its large format (much like a modern atlas) was traditionally reserved for the “authority” of religious and classical works.

Shakespeare's first Folio took five “compositors” two-and-one-half years to print. The compositors manually set the type by first memorizing the text line by line. There was no copy editor, and the compositors frequently altered punctuation and spelling. Errors caught in printing would be corrected but, due to the prohibitively high cost of paper, earlier copies remained intact. Of the 1,200 copies of the first Folio that were printed, approximately 230 survive today, each slightly different. Chicago's Newberry Library contains the Folio in its rich collections (and it can be reviewed in small groups by appointment).

Chicago Shakespeare Theater's use of the first Folio as its script and “blueprint” is unusual. The first Folio serves as the most authentic and effective manual available to

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*Who, as he was a happie imitator of  
Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it.  
His mind and hand went together.*

—John Heminge and Henrie Condell, 1623

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Shakespearean actors nearly 400 years after its publication. Its punctuation gives clues to our actors about what words to emphasize and about what ideas are important. In Shakespeare's own theater company, with only a few days at most to rehearse each new play, these built-in clues were essential. Today, they still help actors make the language much easier to understand—even though you're hearing language that's 400 years younger than ours.

*A key to understanding Shakespeare's language is to appreciate the attitude toward speech accepted by him and his contemporaries. Speech was traditionally and piously regarded as God's final and consummate gift to man. Speech was thus to Elizabethans a source of enormous power for good or ill... Hence the struggle to excel in eloquent utterance.*

—David Bevington, 1980

## SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLAND



Elizabeth I ruled England for 45 years from 1558 to 1603 in a time of relative prosperity and peace. “Few monarchs,” says Shakespearean scholar David Bevington, “have ever influenced an age so pervasively and left their stamp on it so permanently.” The daughter of Henry VIII and his second wife Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth was regarded by many Catholics as an illegitimate child and an illegitimate monarch. The politics of religion constantly threatened Elizabeth's reign even though it was one of the most secure that England had known for hundreds of years. Religious conflict during the Tudors' reign pervaded every aspect of English life and, most particularly, its politics. Elizabeth had no heir, and so throughout her reign the matter of succession was a real and disturbing threat to the nation's peace (and a recurrent subject of Shakespeare's plays). While Shakespeare was writing *Julius Caesar*, one of the Queen's favorites, the Earl of Essex, rebelled against her government. Shakespeare's portrayal of the enforced abdication of a king in *Richard II* was censored in performance during Elizabeth's reign.

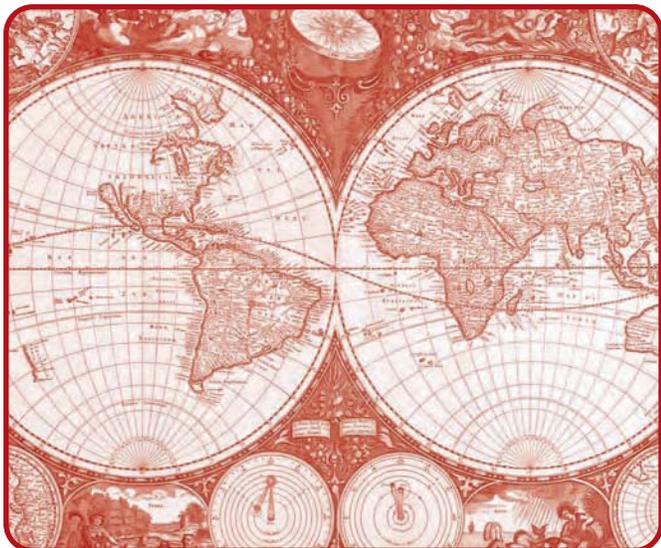
Elizabethan England was a smaller, more isolated country than it had been previously or would be later. It had withdrawn from its extensive empire on the Continent, and its explorations of the New World had barely begun. There was a period of internal economic development as Elizabeth ignored the counsel of her advisors and kept out of war until the attempted invasion by Spain and the Great Armada in 1588. England's economy was still, however, based in agriculture, and its farmers were poor and embittered by strife with rich landowners who “enclosed” what was once the farmers' cropland for pastures. Uprisings and food riots were commonplace in the rural England surrounding Stratford-upon-Avon, where Shakespeare grew up. London, then the largest city of Europe, was a city of contrasts: the richest and the poorest of England lived here, side by side. While many bettered themselves in a developing, urban economy, unemployment was a serious problem. It was a time of change and social mobility. A rising middle class for the first time in English history aspired to the wealth and status of the aristocracy.

Under Elizabeth, England returned to Protestantism. But in her masterful style of accommodation and compromise, she incorporated an essentially traditional and Catholic doctrine

into an episcopal form of church government that was ruled by the Crown and England's clergy rather than by the Pope. Extremists on the religious right and left hated her rule and wanted to see Elizabeth overthrown. She was declared a heretic by Rome in 1569, and her life was endangered. "Her combination of imperious will and femininity and her brilliant handling of her many contending male admirers have become legendary," says David Bevington, and resulted in a monarchy that remained secure in the face of religious and political threats from many sides. In choosing not to marry, Elizabeth avoided allying herself and her throne with a foreign country or an English faction which might threaten her broad base of power and influence.

Throughout Renaissance Europe, governments were centralized, assuming the power that once belonged to city-states and feudal lords. The rule of monarchies, like Elizabeth's, was absolute. Elizabeth and her subjects viewed the monarch as God's deputy, and the divine right of kings was a cherished doctrine (and became the subject of Shakespeare's history plays). It was this doctrine that condemned rebellion as an act of disobedience against God. However, this doctrine didn't free Elizabeth from occasional rebellion at home—even from her closest advisors—or from challenges from abroad.

Childless, Elizabeth I died in 1603. The crown passed to her cousin James VI, King of Scotland, who became England's King James I. James, who ruled from 1603 to 1625 (Shakespeare died in 1616), clearly lacked Elizabeth's political acumen and skill, and his reign was troubled with political and religious controversy. He antagonized the religious left, and his court became more aligned with the Catholic right. It would be James' son, Charles I, who would be beheaded in the English civil wars of the 1640s.



## EARLY MODERN THEATER



A man who would later become an associate of Shakespeare's, James Burbage, built the first commercial theater in England in 1576, not much more than a decade before historians think Shakespeare first arrived on the London theater scene. Burbage skirted rigid restrictions governing entertainment in London by placing his theater just outside the city walls, in a community with the unglamorous name of "Shoreditch." The name reflected the position of his theater, on the shore of the Thames River and just beyond the ditch created by the walls of London.

Burbage was not the only one to dodge the severe rules of the Common Council by setting up shop in Shoreditch. His neighbors were other businesses of marginal repute, including brothels and bear-baiting arenas. Actors and playwrights in Shakespeare's day were given officially the status of "vagabond." They were considered little better than common criminals unless they could secure the patronage of a nobleman, or better still, the monarch.

Shakespeare and his fellow actors managed to secure both. They became popular entertainment at Queen Elizabeth's court as the Lord Chamberlain's Men and continued to enjoy court patronage after King James came to the throne in 1603, when they became the King's Men. Their success at Court gave Shakespeare and his fellow shareholders in the Lord Chamberlain's company the funds to build the Globe playhouse in 1599. The Globe joined a handful of other theaters located just out of the city's jurisdiction as the first public theaters in England.

Shakespeare may have developed his love for the theater by watching traveling acting troupes temporarily transform a courtyard into a theater. When he was a boy growing up in rural Stratford-upon-Avon, acting troupes traveled around the countryside in flatbed, horse-drawn carts, which did triple duty as transportation, storage for props and costumes, and stage. Their horses pulled the cart into an inn yard or the courtyard of a country estate or college. People gathered in the courtyard to watch, some leaning over the rails from the balconies above to view the action on the impromptu stage below.

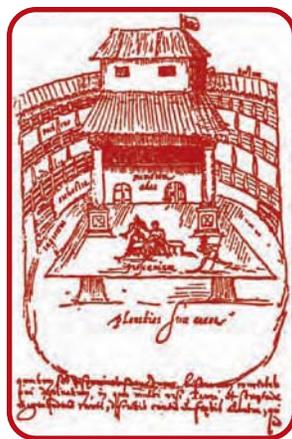
Many of these traveling performances staged religious stories, enacting important scenes from the Bible. During the

Renaissance, the stories enacted in these performances became more secular. Public officials scorned the theater as immoral and frivolous. The theaters just outside London’s walls came to be feared as places where physical, moral and social corruption were spread. They were frequently shut down by the authorities during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when the city was menaced by the plague, or by political and social rioting. Even when the theaters were open, the Master of the Revels had to read and approve every word in a new play. The show could not go on until he gave his permission.

All kinds of people came to plays at the Globe, and they came in great numbers. A full house in the Globe numbered about 3,000 people. Though the same dimensions as the original structure, the reconstruction of the Globe holds 1,500 at maximum capacity—an indication of just how close those 3,000 people must have been to one another! They arrived well before the play began to meet their friends, drink ale and snack on the refreshments that were sold at the plays. From start to finish, a day at the theater could take half the day. It was more like tailgating at a football game, or going with friends to a rock concert than our experience of attending theater today.

Affluent patrons paid two to three pence or more for gallery seats (like the two levels of balcony seating at Chicago Shakespeare Theater) while the “common folk”—shopkeepers and artisans—stood for a penny, about a day’s wages for a skilled worker. They were a demanding, diverse group and Shakespeare depicted characters and situations to appeal to every level of this cross-section of Renaissance society. The vitality and financial success of the Elizabethan theater is without equal in English history.

There was no electricity for lighting, so all plays were performed in daylight. Sets and props were bare and basic. A throne, table or bed had to be brought on stage during the action since Elizabethan plays were written to be performed without scene breaks or intermissions. When the stage directions for *Macbeth* indicate that “a banquet is prepared,” the stage keepers prepared the banquet in full view of the audience. From what scholars can best reconstruct about performance conventions, Shakespeare’s plays were performed in “modern” dress—that is, the clothes of Shakespeare’s time—regardless of their historical setting. The actors wore the same clothes on the stage as their contemporaries wore on the street. Hand-me-downs from the English aristocracy provided the elegant costumes for the play’s royalty.



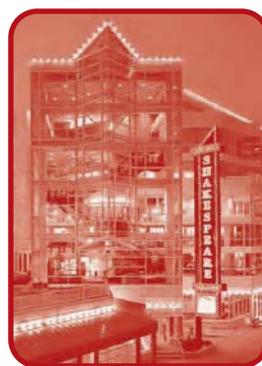
*An Elizabethan traveler's sketch of the original Swan*

Most new plays were short runs and seldom revived. The acting companies were always in rehearsal for new shows but, due to the number of productions, most plays were rehearsed for just a day or two. It was not until 1660 that women would be permitted to act on the English stage. Female roles were performed by boys or young men. Elaborate Elizabethan and Jacobean dresses disguised a man’s shape and the young actors were readily accepted as “women” by the audience.

In 1642, the Puritans succeeded in closing the theaters altogether. They did not reopen until Charles II came to the throne 18 years later. A number of theaters, including the Globe, were

not open very long before the Great Fire of London destroyed them in 1666. During these years when the English theaters were closed, many of the traditions of playing Shakespeare were lost. The new theater of the Restoration approached Shakespeare’s plays very differently, rewriting and adapting his original scripts to suit Restoration tastes. It is left to contemporary scholars to reconstruct the traditions of Elizabethan theater from clues left behind. ■

## CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE’S COURTYARD-STYLE THEATER



**D**avid Taylor of Theatre Projects Consultants has devoted a great deal of energy and imagination to the question of what kind of space is best suited to presenting Shakespeare’s plays. Taylor, who worked as one of the primary consultants on the design of the new Chicago Shakespeare Theater, feels that this unique performance space

reflects elements of both the Globe playhouse and the courtyards-turned-theaters, in which the young Shakespeare might first have acquired his love of the stage.

The interior of the Globe playhouse, opened in 1599, was simple and similar to that of Chicago Shakespeare Theater—a raised platform for the stage surrounded by an open, circular area with three galleries, one above the other. Both theaters use a thrust stage with an open performance area upstage; basically, the entire performance space is in the shape

of a capital “T.” The audience sits on three sides of the thrust stage, so the play is staged in the middle of the audience—much like the Elizabethan Swan Theatre’s design, for which a traveler’s careful sketch still remains. This immersion of the stage and the action performed on it into the audience creates a three-dimensional theater that demands three-dimensional directing and acting.

The people sitting in the side seats have the closest interaction with the performers, and the performers with them. The play unfolds between the audience members seated on the sides, and the actors draw upon the responses of the audience (laughter, gasps, nervous shifting in chairs when tension mounts) as they perform. “The backdrop and the scenery for Shakespeare is the human race,” Taylor notes, “so we’re putting Shakespeare into its proper context by making human faces the backdrop for those sitting in any seat in the theater.”

“This close, close relationship with the performers on stage is the very essence of the courtyard experience,” according to Taylor. “The courtyard experience was about leaning out of windows. It was about throwing open the windows in the courtyard when the stage was brought through on a cart and leaning out and interacting.” Audience members seated in the galleries at Chicago Shakespeare Theater are encouraged to use the “leaning rails” to watch the players below—much like those watching from courtyard balconies might have done centuries ago when a traveling troupe set up their temporary stage.

The actors and the audience share the experience of seeing and interacting with one another. Taylor thinks that actors benefit tremendously from the courtyard design: “They’re not looking at people sitting in straight rows, disconnected from everybody around them in big seats. There’s a sense of community in the space, a sense of embracing the performer on stage.” Actors are always “fed” by the energy generated from their audience. The design of Chicago Shakespeare Theater offers a feast of feedback to the actors on its stage.

As an audience member, your facial expressions and body language serve both as the focal point of the actors’ energy and the backdrop for the other audience members seated across from you. “It’s important that we don’t lose the performer



*The Jentes Family Auditorium at  
Chicago Shakespeare Theater*

among the faces, but it’s essential to understand that every single face is a live piece of scenery reflecting and framing what’s going on,” Taylor reflects. “That’s the reason why the courtyard theater shape is such a wonderful historical springboard for modern theater design.”

Speaking of his experience directing on the open stage in Stratford, Ontario, Tyrone Guthrie once said: “Theatrical performance is a form of ritual; the audience is not asked to subscribe to an illusion but to participate in the ritual . . . The attraction for me

of the ‘open stage’ as opposed to the proscenium is primarily this: that it stresses the ritual as opposed to the illusionary quality of performance.”

Other theaters have been modeled upon the Elizabethan experience of courtyard theater, perhaps most notably the Royal Shakespeare Company’s Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. The Swan served as an important model for Chicago Shakespeare Theater. An important element in both theaters are the brick walls that surround the audience. Brick is an aesthetic choice, but, due to its particular design, it also serves as an acoustical choice. The angle of the bricks in the side walls help diffuse sound, sending it in different directions throughout the theater. The sound, lighting and rigging systems are all state-of-the-art. Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s design allows for a wide array of possibilities for structuring and using the performance space. Performers will

enter from surprising places, set pieces will emerge seemingly from nowhere, and parts of the stage that seem permanent and solid may prove not to be so!

Leaning out of your courtyard “window,” you can enjoy not just what is happening on stage, but also the responses of the people sitting across from you. Shakespearean theater is

about people. As Taylor concludes, “You’re the scenery. You’re the special effects. And the people you see performing this play are performing it in front of, and out of, you.” ■

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*It’s essential to understand that every single face is a live piece of scenery reflecting and framing what’s going on.*

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# TIMELINES

## 1300

- 1326 Founding of universities at Oxford and Cambridge
- 1348 Boccaccio's Decameron
- 1349 Bubonic Plague kills one-third of England's population
- 1387 Chaucer's Canterbury Tales
- c.1440 Johannes Gutenberg invents printing press
- 1472 Dante's Divine Comedy first printed
- 1492 Christopher Columbus lands at Cuba
- 1497 Vasco da Gama sails around Cape of Good Hope

## 1500

- 1501-4 Michelangelo's David sculpture
- 1503 Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa
- 1512 Copernicus' Commentariolus published, theorizing that earth and other planets revolve around sun
- 1518 License to import 4,000 African slaves to Spanish American colonies granted to Lorenz de Gomizot
- 1519 Ferdinand Magellan's trip around the world
- 1519 Conquest of Mexico by Cortez
- 1522 Luther's translation of the New Testament

## 1525

- 1531 Henry VIII recognized as Supreme Head of the Church of England
- 1533 Henry VIII secretly marries Anne Boleyn, and is excommunicated by Pope
- 1539 Hernando de Soto explores Florida
- 1540 G.L. de Cardenas "discovers" Grand Canyon
- 1541 Hernando de Soto "discovers" the Mississippi

## 1550

- 1558 Coronation of Queen Elizabeth I
- 1562 John Hawkins begins slave trade between Guinea and West Indies
- 1564 Birth of William Shakespeare and Galileo
- 1565 Pencils first manufactured in England
- 1570 Pope Pius V excommunicates Queen Elizabeth
- 1573 Francis Drake sees the Pacific Ocean

## 1575

- 1576 Mayor of London forbids theatrical performances in the City
- Burbage erects first public theater in England (the "Theater" in Shoreditch)
- 1577 Drake's trip around the world
- 1580 Essays of Montaigne published
- 1582 Marriage license issue for William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway
- Daughter Susanna Shakespeare christened

## SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

### c. 1592-1595

#### COMEDIES

The Comedy of Errors  
The Taming of the Shrew  
Love's Labor's Lost  
The Two Gentlemen of Verona  
A Midsummer Night's Dream

#### HISTORIES

1, 2, 3 Henry VI  
Richard III  
King John

#### TRAGEDIES

Titus Andronicus  
Romeo and Juliet

#### SONNETS

probably written  
in this period

# TIMELINES

- 1585 Christening of son Hamnet and twin Judith
- 1587 Mary Queen of Scots executed
- 1588 Destruction of the Spanish Armada
- 1592 Shakespeare listed with the Lord Chamberlain's Men
- 1593-4 Plague closes London playhouses for 20 months
- 1595 Coat of arms granted to Shakespeare's father, John
- 1596 Death of son Hamnet, age 11  
Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*
- 1597 Shakespeare, one of London's most successful playwrights, buys New Place, one of the grandest houses in Stratford-upon-Avon
- 1599 Globe Theatre opens, as home to the Lord Chamberlain's Men, with Shakespeare part-owner

## 1600

- 1602 Oxford University's Bodleian Library opens
- 1603 Death of Queen Elizabeth, coronation of James I;  
Lord Chamberlain's Men become the King's Men upon endorsement of James I
- 1603-11 Plague closes London playhouses for at least 68 months (nearly 6 years)
- 1605 Cervantes' *Don Quixote Part 1* published
- 1607 Marriage of Susanna Shakespeare to Dr. John Hall;  
Founding of Jamestown, Virginia, first English settlement on American mainland
- 1608 *A true relation of such Occurances and Accidents of Note as hath passed in Virginia* by John Smith  
Galileo constructs astronomical telescope
- 1609 Blackfriars Theatre, London's first commercial indoor theater, becomes winter home of the King's Men
- 1611 The Authorized Version "King James Version" of the Bible published
- 1613 Globe Theatre destroyed by fire
- 1614 Globe Theatre rebuilt
- 1615 Galileo faces the Inquisition for the first time
- 1616 Judith Shakespeare marries Thomas Quinney  
Death of William Shakespeare, age 52
- 1618 Copernican system condemned by Roman Catholic Church
- 1619 First African slaves arrive in Virginia

## 1625

- 1623 The first Folio, the first compiled text of Shakespeare's complete works published
- 1625 James I dies, succeeded by Charles I
- 1632 *Ai due massimi sistemi* of Galileo
- 1633 Galileo recants before the Inquisition
- 1636 Harvard College founded at Cambridge, Massachusetts
- 1642 Civil War in England begins
- 1642 Puritans close theaters throughout England until the Restoration of Charles II, 18 years later
- 1649 Charles I beheaded
- 1649 Commonwealth declared

### c. 1596-1600

#### COMEDIES

*The Merchant of Venice*  
*Much Ado About Nothing*  
*The Merry Wives of Windsor*  
*As You Like It*  
*Twelfth Night*

#### HISTORIES

*Richard II*  
*1,2 Henry IV*  
*Henry V*

#### TRAGEDIES

*Julius Caesar*

### c. 1601-1609

#### COMEDIES

(The "Problem Plays")  
*Troilus and Cressida*  
*All's Well That Ends Well*  
*Measure for Measure*

#### TRAGEDIES

*Hamlet*  
*\*OTHELLO*  
*King Lear*  
*Macbeth*  
*Antony and Cleopatra*  
*Timon of Athens*  
*Coriolanus*

### c. 1609-1613

#### ROMANCES

*Pericles*  
*Cymbeline*  
*The Winter's Tale*  
*The Tempest*  
*The Two Noble Kinsmen*

#### HISTORIES

*Henry VIII*

# OTHELLO

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

### OTHELLO

*the Moor, a general in the service of Venice*

### DESDEMONA

*Othello's wife and daughter to Brabantio, a Venetian*

### IAGO

*Othello's ensign (standard-bearer)*

### EMILIA

*Iago's wife and lady-in-waiting to Desdemona*

### CASSIO

*Othello's lieutenant*

### BIANCA

*a courtesan in love with Cassio*

### DUKE OF VENICE

### BRABANTIO

*father to Desdemona and a senator*

### RODERIGO

*a Venetian gentleman and suitor to Desdemona*

### LODOVICO

*kinsman to Brabantio and a Venetian nobleman*

### GRATIANO

*Brabantio's brother and a Venetian nobleman*

### MONTANO

*governor of the isle of Cyprus*



## SETTING

### VENICE AND THE ISLE OF CYPRUS

## THE STORY

In the street shadows of night, two men discuss the news: Desdemona, a young aristocrat of Venice, has just eloped with Othello, a hired general in the Venetian army—and a Moor. Iago assures the heartsick Roderigo that he, too, harbors hatred for the Moor, who has promoted Cassio over him as lieutenant.

Rudely awakened out of sleep by the report of his daughter's marriage, Brabantio seeks the full justice of Venetian law. At the moment, however, the Duke and senators of Venice are concerned with more pressing affairs of state: the Turks are threatening Venetian interests in Cyprus, and the Moor's capable service is required. Granted permission to be accompanied by his bride, Othello prepares to embark for Cyprus.

Iago conceives his plot—he will make the general believe that the young Venetian officer Cassio is Desdemona's lover—and so begins his work. Ensnaring Cassio in a drunken brawl, Iago looks on as Othello predictably dismisses his new lieutenant. Iago urges Cassio to seek Desdemona's aid in recovering Othello's favor, then suggests to Othello that his wife's interest in Cassio's misfortunes may signify her infidelity. Demanding "ocular proof," Othello is convinced when his first gift to Desdemona—a handkerchief embroidered with strawberries that his mother had given him—is misplaced and, with help from Iago's wife Emilia, ends up in Cassio's possession. For service to his general, Iago is appointed Othello's new lieutenant.

Stunned by her husband's accusations, Desdemona pleads with Othello—first for his compassion, then for her life. As Emilia comes to understand her husband's crimes, she is murdered for the truth she speaks. Tormented by remorse and grief, Othello takes his own life, and Iago, silent at last, is taken into custody.



## ACT-BY-ACT SYNOPSIS

### Act I

It is night in Venice. On a street near Signior Brabantio's house, Iago and Roderigo discuss the scandalous news: Senator Brabantio's daughter, Desdemona, has just eloped with Othello, a general hired by the Venetians—and a Moor. Iago, Othello's ensign, complains bitterly to his companion Roderigo, who is one of Desdemona's rejected suitors. Othello has passed over Iago for promotion and instead has appointed the less-experienced Michael Cassio as his lieutenant. The two men rouse Brabantio and his household to deliver the news of Desdemona's elopement. Horrified, Brabantio seeks out the Moor to bring him to justice before the Duke of Venice.

At the moment, however, the Duke and his senators are concerned with more pressing affairs of state. The Turks threaten Venetian interests in Cyprus, and therefore Othello's services are required by the state immediately. Desdemona begs the Duke that she be allowed to accompany her husband to his post. As Othello and his new bride prepare to depart Venice in haste, Iago reveals to the audience that he has more than one reason to hate the Moor: it is rumored, he claims, that Othello has bedded his own wife, Emilia. For this and the perceived insult of being overlooked for promotion, he plots revenge—to make Othello believe his Venetian lieutenant Cassio and Desdemona are lovers.

### Act II

At a port in Cyprus, several men gather on shore. Much to the relief of Signior Montano and the other assembled gentlemen, a terrible storm has stopped the advance of the Turkish fleet, but they anxiously await news of the fate of the Venetian ships. Michael Cassio's vessel is the first to arrive ashore. He and his men have inflicted heavy damage to what was left of the Turkish fleet. Iago's ship docks next, bringing with him Desdemona and her lady-in-waiting, Emilia, who is also Iago's wife. Finally, Othello disembarks triumphant with the news that the Turks are all drowned and the battle is won. While the others celebrate victory, Iago discloses further details of his plot to avenge himself on the Moor.

A herald announces Othello's proclamation of this night's celebration of the Turkish defeat and his own nuptials. At the citadel before he retires with Desdemona, Othello leaves

Cassio in charge of the guard for the night. Iago persuades Cassio and his men to toast Othello, and incites the inebriated Cassio to quarrel with Iago's accomplice, Roderigo. Montano attempts to stop the drunken brawl, but is himself wounded in the fray. Othello dismisses Cassio for his dereliction of duty and leaves to tend Montano's wounds.

Iago urges the disgraced Cassio to regain Othello's good favor by pleading his case to Desdemona, all the while plotting to use their meeting for his own machinations—to convince Othello of his wife's infidelity with the lieutenant.

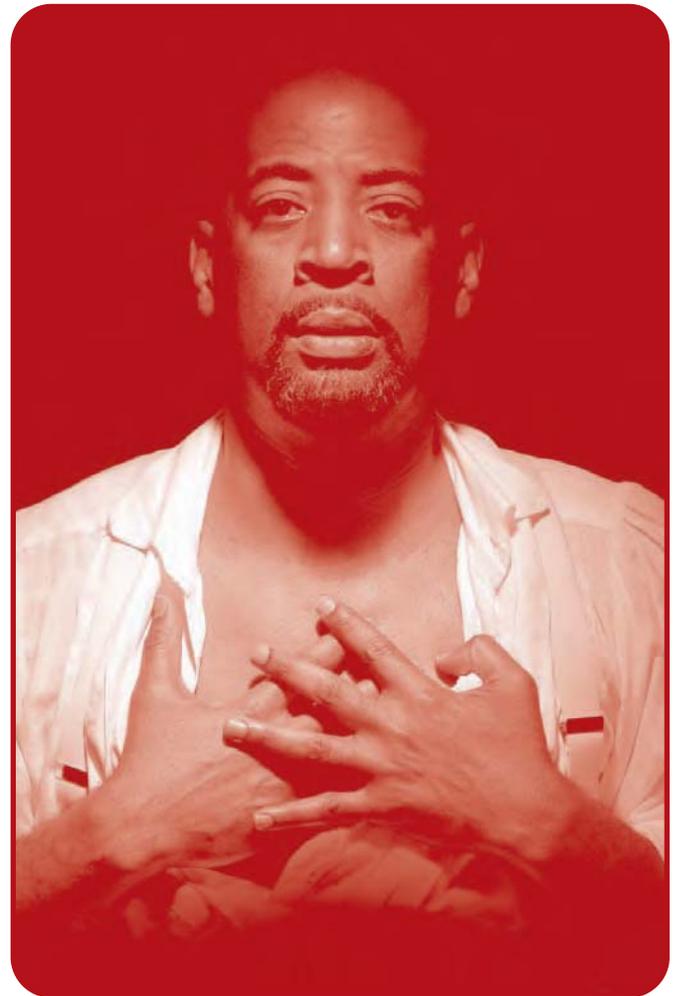


photo: Bill Buntingham

Derrick Lee Weeden in CST's 2008 production of *Othello*, directed by Marti Maraden

# OTHELLO

## Act III

At Othello and Desdemona's residence, Michael Cassio enlists the help of Emilia to gain access to Desdemona while Othello tends to business elsewhere at the citadel. As he returns home, Othello observes Cassio's hasty departure. Moved by the lieutenant's pleas, Desdemona implores Othello to return Cassio to her husband's good favor. Iago takes this opportunity to insinuate to Othello that her interest in Cassio may be proof of her infidelity. And so Iago's poisonous suggestions begin to plant suspicions in Othello's mind.

When Desdemona returns to bring Othello in to dinner with his guests, she accidentally drops her handkerchief embroidered with strawberries—the first keepsake given her by her husband, who charged her to keep it with her always. Othello's mother had given it to him, believing it to be charmed. Finding the handkerchief, Emilia hands it over to her husband, who has often pestered her to filch it for him. Iago reports to the audience that he intends to plant it in Cassio's lodgings and thereby set in motion the rest of his plot to provide Othello with "ocular proof" of Desdemona's unfaithfulness.

The distressed Desdemona bemoans the loss of the handkerchief to Emilia, who offers up no information about its disappearance. When Othello demands that his wife produce the handkerchief and she cannot, his suspicions grow. He is even more certain of her guilt when she continues to press Cassio's suit. Meanwhile, Cassio has found the stolen handkerchief in his bedchamber. He cajoles his mistress Bianca to copy the fine embroidery for him and promises to visit her later in the night.

## Act IV

Iago persists in convincing Othello of Desdemona's infidelity. His lewd insinuations work on the Moor's imagination until Othello falls into a seizure. Othello awakes to observe Bianca returning the handkerchief—Desdemona's handkerchief—to Cassio. Othello presumes the worst: Desdemona has given it to her lover and he in turn has given it to his whore. Othello vows to kill Desdemona that night.

Lodovico, Desdemona's kinsman, arrives from Venice bearing news that, with the Turkish threat diminished, Othello is to return to Venice at once and leave Cassio in command in Cyprus. Confronted with this unexpected news, Othello lashes out, striking Desdemona and demanding her to leave his sight. She obeys, with all around bewildered by this sudden and violent change in Othello.

Now Iago convinces Roderigo that Othello departs not for Venice, but Mauretania—where Desdemona will be forever beyond Roderigo's grasp. The only way to stop them from leaving is to remove Cassio from command, permanently.

## Act V

Night falls, and near the shop stalls on the streets of Cyprus from a dark corner Roderigo strikes as Cassio approaches. In self-defense Cassio stabs Roderigo, wounding him. Out of the darkness, Iago slashes Cassio on the leg, and then disappears again into the shadows. When the alarm is sounded, Iago kills Roderigo to silence him, and implicates Bianca in Cassio's injury.

As Desdemona sleeps, Othello comes to their bed. She awakes. Stunned by her husband's accusations, Desdemona pleads first for understanding and then for her life before Othello smothers her to death. When Emilia discovers the body of her dying mistress, Desdemona refuses to incriminate Othello. Emilia at last understands and reveals her husband's complicity. Iago stabs his wife, silencing her forever.

It is Cassio who opens Othello's eyes to the truth that Desdemona was a chaste and faithful wife. Suddenly grabbing a hidden dagger and stabbing himself, Othello dies upon Desdemona's body. A silent Iago is taken by Venetian soldiers, his final censure left to Michael Cassio.

## WHO'S WHO

### BIANCA

a courtesan and Michael Cassio's mistress, has a love for the newly appointed lieutenant that he does not return.

### BRABANTIO

a respected Venetian senator and father to Desdemona, who in the past often invited Othello to his home. He is convinced the Moor has used witchcraft to woo his young daughter into marriage.

### CASSIO

a handsome, young Florentine working in the service of the Venetians with fine manners and courtly gestures, but little experience in actual battle. As the play begins, he is Othello's newly appointed lieutenant. This promotion especially galls Iago, who regards Cassio with disdain and suspicion.

### THE CLOWN

a comic servant of Othello's household in Cyprus. He appears only briefly to banter with some musicians hired by Cassio to impress the general. Shakespeare named most of his clowns and fools but, like the Fool in Lear, he is simply named for his role.

### DESDEMONA

daughter to Brabantio, is the Venetian senator's only child. She is young, sheltered, and very much in love with Othello whom she has just married in secret and against the wishes of her father.

### THE DUKE OF VENICE

holds Othello in high esteem for his past military service, and appoints him leader of the forces that must defeat the Turks at Cyprus to protect Venetian interests there. Brabantio appeals to him following his daughter's secret marriage.

### EMILIA

Iago's wife and Desdemona's lady-in-waiting. Her husband suspects her of infidelity.

### GRATIANO

a noble Venetian and Desdemona's uncle.

### IAGO

Othello's ancient, the lowest ranking officer in his fleet. As the play begins, Iago is already plotting revenge: against Cassio, who has been promoted instead of him; against Othello, his commander who has passed him over for promotion; and against his wife, Emilia, whom he suspects has been unfaithful with Othello.

### LODOVICO

a kinsman to Desdemona, and a noble Venetian.

### MONTANO

the governor of Cyprus. He once served under Othello and eagerly awaits his arrival in Cyprus to help defend the island against the Turkish fleet.

### OTHELLO

a Venetian general originally from Barbary, which is part of North Africa between Egypt and the Atlantic Ocean. By his own account, Othello has been a warrior since the age of seven, was sold into slavery, escaped, wandered the desert, encountered cannibals, converted to Christianity, and finally came to fight in service of the Venetians. He has just married Desdemona and chosen Cassio as his lieutenant when the play begins.

### RODERIGO

a Venetian nobleman and rejected suitor to Desdemona. Roderigo is easy prey to Iago who uses the unhappy man as a pawn in his plotting.

# OTHELLO

## SOMETHING BORROWED, SOMETHING NEW

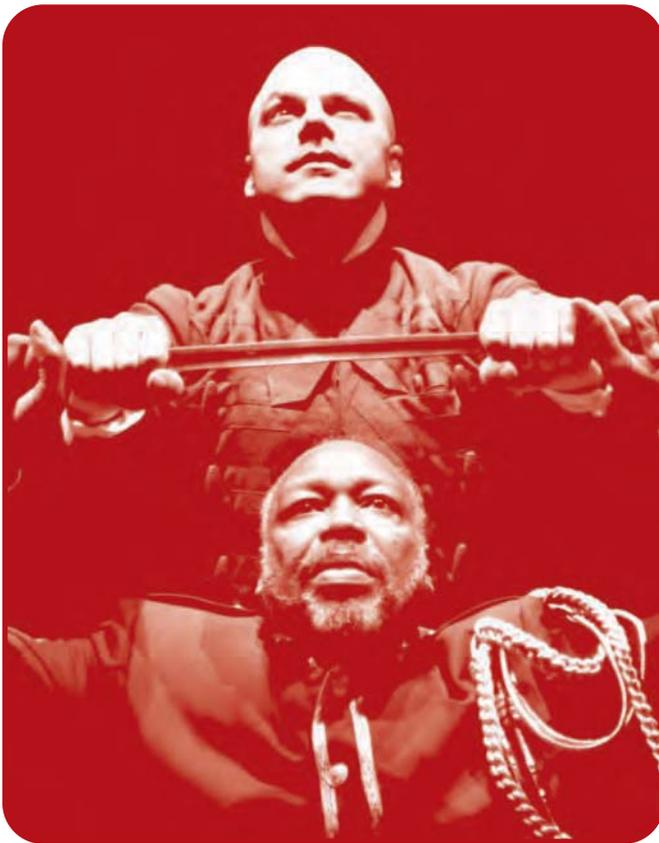
Shakespeare often crafted his plays from a fabric of old—and sometimes not-so-old—stories well known to his audience which, though largely illiterate, was far better versed in a *narrative* heritage than we are today. In the Early Modern period when Shakespeare wrote, stories did not “belong” to an individual. There were no copyright laws and material was borrowed freely. But more important was the fact that stories were *meant* to be told and retold—as they had been for centuries before. Because so few people were yet literate (the printing press was invented only a century before Shakespeare’s lifetime), much of history and the tales that people knew were passed from one generation to another by spoken word. Stories belonged, in a sense, to a common pool for all to reach into and make their own. Creativity was based not upon new stories but rather on new ways of telling them.

Shakespeare never hesitates to alter a source—even the “facts” of history—to tell the story he wants to tell. Many of Shakespeare’s later plays, including *Othello*, interweave stories from familiar folk tales and myth with contemporary Elizabethan topics. The primary source for the story of *Othello* appears to be Italian author Giraldi Cinthio’s 1565 collection of tales. (Shakespeare used this source for *Measure for Measure*, too.) In Cinthio’s story, the “Moro,” or Moor, was a distinguished soldier, highly valued in Venice. The young Venetian “Disdemona” (the only character to whom Cinthio gives a name) falls in love with the Moor. Despite her family’s strong objections, they marry and live happily in Venice for some time. When the Moor is assigned to take command of the garrison in Cyprus, Disdemona pleads to accompany her husband.

In Cinthio’s tale, the Moor’s Ensign is simply named “Alfiero,” which means ensign or standard-bearer in Italian. The Ensign’s Wife is Disdemona’s closest friend. The Moor respects his Ensign, unaware of his villainy. The Ensign desires Disdemona, but fearing the Moor, does not openly pursue her. When Disdemona rejects his advances, the Ensign imagines that she loves a young captain, the “Capo di Squadra,” later to become Cassio in Shakespeare’s play.

The Captain wounds another soldier while on guard, and is dismissed for his action by the Moor. Disdemona pleads on the Captain’s behalf. The rebuffed Ensign suggests to the Moor that his wife, disgusted by his looks, is attracted instead to the dashing Venetian Captain. The Moor is deeply troubled by his Ensign’s story, and demands ocular proof of his wife’s infidelity. And so the Ensign steals Disdemona’s embroidered handkerchief, a wedding present from her husband, and drops it in the Captain’s bedroom.

The Ensign arranges to have a talk with the Captain in sight of the Moor, but out of his earshot. He reports back to the Moor that the Captain admitted his adultery and the gift of the handkerchief. When the Moor questions Disdemona, she seems guilty to her husband. Disdemona confides her fears to her best friend, but the Ensign’s Wife, fearing her husband, cannot divulge her husband’s plan to Disdemona. The Ensign brings the Moor to the Captain’s window to see a woman there copying the embroidery of the lost handkerchief. At the Moor’s impassioned request, the Ensign attacks the Captain as he returns home from the house of a prostitute, but succeeds only in cutting off the Captain’s leg, not in killing him.



Steve Pickering and Paul Butler in CST’s 1995 production of *Othello*, directed by Barbara Gaines

The Moor considers stabbing or poisoning as retribution for his wife's infidelity. But the Ensign suggests instead that she be beaten to her death with a stocking filled with sand. The men cover their tracks by staging the collapse of the ceiling upon the bed where they've placed Desdemona's body. Only after the murder does the grief-stricken Moor demote his Ensign. In retaliation, the Ensign charges the Moor with the attack upon the Captain. The Moor is sentenced to torture but, denying all knowledge of the crime, he is banished from Venice. Desdemona's family murders him in exile. The Ensign, later imprisoned for another crime, dies from torture he receives in prison.

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*Stories belonged, in a sense, to a common pool for all to reach into and make their own. Creativity was based not upon new stories but rather on new ways of telling them.*

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The similarities to Cinthio's story are striking, but are not as remarkable as the alterations Shakespeare made to tell his own story of *Othello*. While Cinthio's tale is a moralistic and forbidding sermon against an unacceptable marriage, Shakespeare's story is told with compassion, "as if," writes Marvin Rosenberg (1961), "Shakespeare had deliberately adapted this brutal murder tale to dare himself to find sympathy in the farthest extreme of human error." Cinthio mentions nothing about his Ensign's hatred for the Moor prior to Desdemona's murder. There is no mention of a passed-over promotion which fuels his hatred. The Turkish attack upon Cyprus and the violent storm are Shakespeare's additions to Cinthio's tale, as is the story Othello tells of the couple's courtship. Shakespeare has taken pains to place his dramatic story in "fast-time": a marriage that experienced years of happiness in Cinthio's tale lasts no more than weeks in Shakespeare's retelling. And of course, Desdemona's murderer is Othello alone. In Cinthio's version, there is no Iago lurking (at least physically) at the death scene, and Roderigo, whom Shakespeare introduces into the story, is absent entirely from the original source.

Why does Shakespeare use such old sources—and then add, subtract and modify? We are left to speculate on what purpose Shakespeare had in mind in altering Cinthio's tale. Such questions can only be answered by piecing together what we know about the playwright and his work. Like the clues of a good mystery, examining Shakespeare's possible source materials and discovering contemporary events that shaped Shakespeare's world allows us to piece together possible answers.

While all agree that Cinthio's story is a main literary source for Shakespeare's *Othello* (which some scholars think he may have read in a French translation published in 1584), several other published works may have provided Shakespeare with political, social and geographical context for his play. Among these works, scholars frequently point to three sources: Sir Lewis Lewkenor's translation of Contarini's *The Commonwealth of Venice*, published in 1599; John Pory's translation of Leo Afrfricanus's *The Geographical History of Africa*, published in 1600; and Knolles's *The General History of the Turks*, published in 1603. All these works appeared in print in the years just prior to the first known performance of *Othello*, which is recorded in the Revels Accounts for the court on November 1, 1604, after Elizabeth's death and following the accession of James I to the throne of England.

We don't actually know when *Othello* was written or first staged, making it more challenging still to identify with certainty which written sources and current events may have influenced Shakespeare. The play was first published in 1622—six years after Shakespeare's death—in quarto (a small volume about the size of a modern paperback) and again a year later in the first Folio (a large, atlas-sized collection) in 1623—nearly 20 years after the first known performance of the play at court. While scholars traditionally date the composition of the play to 1603 or 1604 (just prior to its appearance at court), some have convincingly argued that Shakespeare may have written *Othello* as early as 1601 or 1602, on the heels of the visit of the Moorish Ambassador for the King of Barbary to Queen Elizabeth in 1600. The ambassador stayed in London for six months, and Shakespeare and his company played before him during the Christmas season.

The visit of the Moorish Ambassador is not the only contemporary event Shakespeare incorporated into his work. As Peter Ackroyd, in *Shakespeare: The Biography*, points out:

# OTHELLO

*There are other contemporary matters that must be seen in the context of Othello, if only because they would have been known to every member of the audience who witnessed the first production.... There was... a well-attested story publicized throughout Europe that the previous king of Spain, Philip II, was an insanely jealous husband who had strangled his wife in her bed. What is more, he had become suspicious of her when she had inadvertently dropped her handkerchief. These parallels are too close to be coincidental. The fact that Cyprus becomes the scene of the tragic action of Othello is also explicable in these terms. Cyprus was once a Venetian protectorate but had had been occupied by Turkish forces for more than thirty years.... Othello was a very modern drama, refracting all the circumstances of the period.*



## 1604 AND ALL THAT

1604—the year of the first recorded performance of *Othello*—was pivotal in English history. In 1603, Queen Elizabeth’s forty-five year rule came to an end. Elizabethan England became Jacobean England with the accession of the new king, James I. It was a momentous period—a time of transition, uncertainty, and unsettled apprehension about England’s future.

James I became the royal patron of Shakespeare’s acting company, renamed “The King’s Men.” The most successful playwright was, in 1604, at the height of his creative genius. *Hamlet* was written. *King Lear* and *Macbeth* were soon to follow. *Othello* takes its place among the “best” in a period of transition and historic change—from which it is said that great art is often born.

The traditional picture of a highly ordered, stable society—for centuries a romanticized view looking back upon Elizabethan England—is one that modern scholarship has essentially overturned. Instead, the turn of the seventeenth century is now understood to have been a time when old certainties and assumptions were undermined by a “new philosophy” that perceived values as no longer absolute, but relative and in flux. Fundamentally incompatible social thoughts stood uneasily side by side. One of the primary functions of drama has always been to mediate between such divergent and incompatible points of view within society.

Like *Hamlet*, *Othello* reflects the shifting values of a world once steeped in chivalry and honor, now fast learning the language of rationalism, commerce and imperialism. *Don Quixote*, published in 1605 just one year after *Othello* was perhaps first staged, marked a watershed. The Don, trying desperately to recreate a world of magic, inhabits a world in which things are not what they seem.

*The Renaissance cosmos has dissolved. In its place the empire of fact is emerging and language is retreating into a special domain {of} literature...*

—Mark Rose, 1985

*Othello*, like the Don, speaks the language of chivalry; Iago speaks the language of commerce that is about to conquer the developing world.

Following the dissolution of the great monastic estates that began around 1535, about one-sixth of English land changed owners during the 1500s. Land shifted hands: out of the hands of the old nobility and clergy, into the hands of those who now possessed the money to buy it—the industrialists and merchants of an emerging capitalist society. Land was no longer a symbol of birth, but a symbol of wealth, something that could be obtained with enough money. “A medieval nobleman in good standing” writes James Calderwood (1989), “would no more have thought of selling his land than the governor of Connecticut would think of selling a few counties to the governor of Rhode Island.” But all that was changing. Property, what one could own and possess, was fast becoming the cornerstone of identity.

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*One of the primary functions of drama has always been to mediate between such divergent and incompatible points of view within society.*

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Unlike many of his other works, Shakespeare does not distance his story of *Othello* to an earlier historical period. The Turkish attack on Cyprus, recounted in the play, took place in 1570—and in the memory of most of Shakespeare’s theatergoers. By the time Shakespeare wrote *Othello*, the English had been exposed to Africa and Africans by continuous contact that stretched over more than half a century. By 1555, books appearing in English described the Moors of Africa.

# OTHELLO

Sixteenth-century writers referred to any dark North African as a Moor or “blackamoor.” And though Shakespeare’s contemporaries might not have differentiated a North African Moor who was “white” or “tawny” from an African who was “black” (as did many scholars and productions of *Othello* in the centuries to follow), the Moors as a whole represented “the Other,” the non-Christian, heathen world that lay outside the boundaries of Western and Christian civilization. Clearly, *Othello* was a modern story: a modern story, specifically, centered on the relationship between a black man and a white woman.

It is probable that Elizabethan England, prior to centuries of imperialist relations with Africa and without centuries of economic, political and sexual conflict in a competitive capitalist society, did not know racism as we know it now. But because of less association then between nations, those who fell outside the borders of the known, white world were viewed as “barbarians.” The term “Moor” might have existed as a vague description in terms of color, but not in terms of its position of antithesis to the white, civilized Christian

world. “*Othello* is a play full of racial feeling,” writes scholar Michael Neill (1985):

*perhaps the first work in English to explore the roots of such feeling; and it can hardly be accidental that it belongs to the very period of English history in which something we can now identify as a racialist ideology was beginning to evolve under the pressures of nascent imperialism.*

Jerry Brotton explains that the ambivalent attitude of the Elizabethans towards the Moors “can be partly explained by the extensive and amicable relations that were established between Elizabethan England and the kingdom of Morocco.” It is not insignificant that Shakespeare’s own Moor of Venice made his appearance soon after the visit of the Moorish Ambassador, al-Annuri, to Elizabeth’s court. Writes Brotton:

*Al-Annuri’s highly visible presence in London appears to have influenced Shakespeare in his portrayal of Othello—a charismatic, sophisticated but also troubling presence.... What this all suggests is that we can no longer see Othello as the simple, barbaric, jealous figure of 19th and 20th-century stage productions; the Elizabethans had a far more ambiguous and complicated understanding of the Moor than we have today, hampered as we are by contemporary ideas of racism and Islamophobia.*

Still, by 1601, the numbers of Africans living in London prompted Queen Elizabeth’s edict for the transportation of “negars and blackamoors which are crept into the realm” out of England. Clearly, their increasing numbers were causing alarm. There were additional domestic concerns contributing to the environment of upheaval in Elizabeth’s final years. In 1601, the Queen’s one-time favorite, the Earl of Essex, staged an unsuccessful rebellion against the Crown, for which he was executed. Some scholars hold this event to have affected the nation more deeply than even the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1598. The mood of the country was uncertain. The mood of its artists and political thinkers was skeptical. Around this time a “paper war” against society was launched, and a “brutal examination of man’s deepest commitments—personal, marital, sexual” (Rosenberg, 1961) became the subject of dramatic and social discourse.

It is not by chance that Shakespeare chose Venice in which to set his story. To Shakespeare’s countrymen, Venice embodied the height of Western civilization. It was the Italian city viewed as London’s counterpart, the seat of art and commerce



photo: Eric Y. Exit

Paul Butler and Deborah Staples in CST’s 1995 production of *Othello*, directed by Barbara Gaines

# OTHELLO

in a Western world growing ever more commercial. And, as A.J. Honnigmann notes in his introduction to the Arden Shakespeare edition of *Othello*, “Students of *Othello* need to know one other fact that was taken for granted by Shakespeare—that Venice was the pleasure capital of Europe, especially in its sexual tolerance.” So in Venice, a city celebrated for its sexual permissiveness, a story of a “civilized” society excluding a nonmember, an Other from outside its borders, could be depicted and explored at a safe distance from the England of Shakespeare’s audience.



## SHAKESPEARE, TRAGEDY AND US

We all know something about tragedy: we lose someone we love; we must leave a place we don’t want to leave; we make a mistake of judgment that leads to consequences we never imagined. Tragedy is a part of our lives as humans, though we long to be rid of it and its pain. So why read tragedy? Why come to see a tragic play at the theater? What point is there in entering, by choice, so dark a world? Clearly, it’s more fun to watch Conan O’Brien than to read *Othello*. So why do it?

We respond to stories that show us people who are somehow *like us*, versions of ourselves under different circumstances. In other words, we can understand characters who bear some resemblance to us. And because they are somehow like us, we become interested in them, and often sympathize with them. But when a story is communicating to us, it goes one step beyond touching our sympathy. As we come to understand its characters, we can also reach some understanding about our own world—about ourselves and the people we know—and about the tragedies *we* have to face.

Shakespeare’s tragedies, like our own lives, are stories that interweave opposites—joy and sorrow, farce and harsh reality. How often in a day do we experience both of these extremes? *Othello*, a play dealing quite literally with life and death, contains moments of lightness. The joy of Othello and Desdemona’s newly made vows is tempered by the rage and betrayal felt by Brabantio, Desdemona’s father. Shakespeare is

a master of juxtaposition; of holding his “mirror up to nature” and showing us that there is very little black and white and many more shades of gray in our lives than we like to admit. Cassio can be an honorable man, esteemed by Othello, and also keep Bianca as his whore. Iago can maintain for much of the play the outward appearance of an honorable man, while secretly plotting at every available moment. We know from our own lives that two extremes can often live simultaneously within one person; Shakespeare personifies this truth with a mastery few writers can hope to attain.

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Where and how do we find our story in theirs? To begin to answer this, we might first look at some of the common threads in what we call “tragedy.” Often the characters face some very difficult choices; and the story follows them as they wrestle with making their decisions. In tragedy, the hero often faces some “fearful passage” (as mentioned in the Prologue of *Romeo and Juliet*)—a path traveled for the first time where old answers and old behaviors are suddenly not sufficient. The stakes are very high, and the risk to the individual, to the family—and sometimes to an entire community, as in *Othello*—is great.

There is much discussion in literature about the tragic hero and his inherent “tragic flaw.” Shakespearean scholar Russ McDonald warns that in labeling the hero as inherently weak and not up to the challenge, we’re inclined to judge him critically. But the heroes of tragedy typically display great strengths, says McDonald. Their tragedy lays not so much in a weakness of character, but in a “kind of tragic incompatibility between the hero’s particular form of greatness and the earthly circumstances that he or she is forced to confront.” McDonald points out how differently the heroes of Shakespeare’s tragedies speak, not only from us, but also from all the other characters around them. Their poetic language, he says, expresses their “vast imaginations.” They see the world more completely than the rest of us.

# Othello

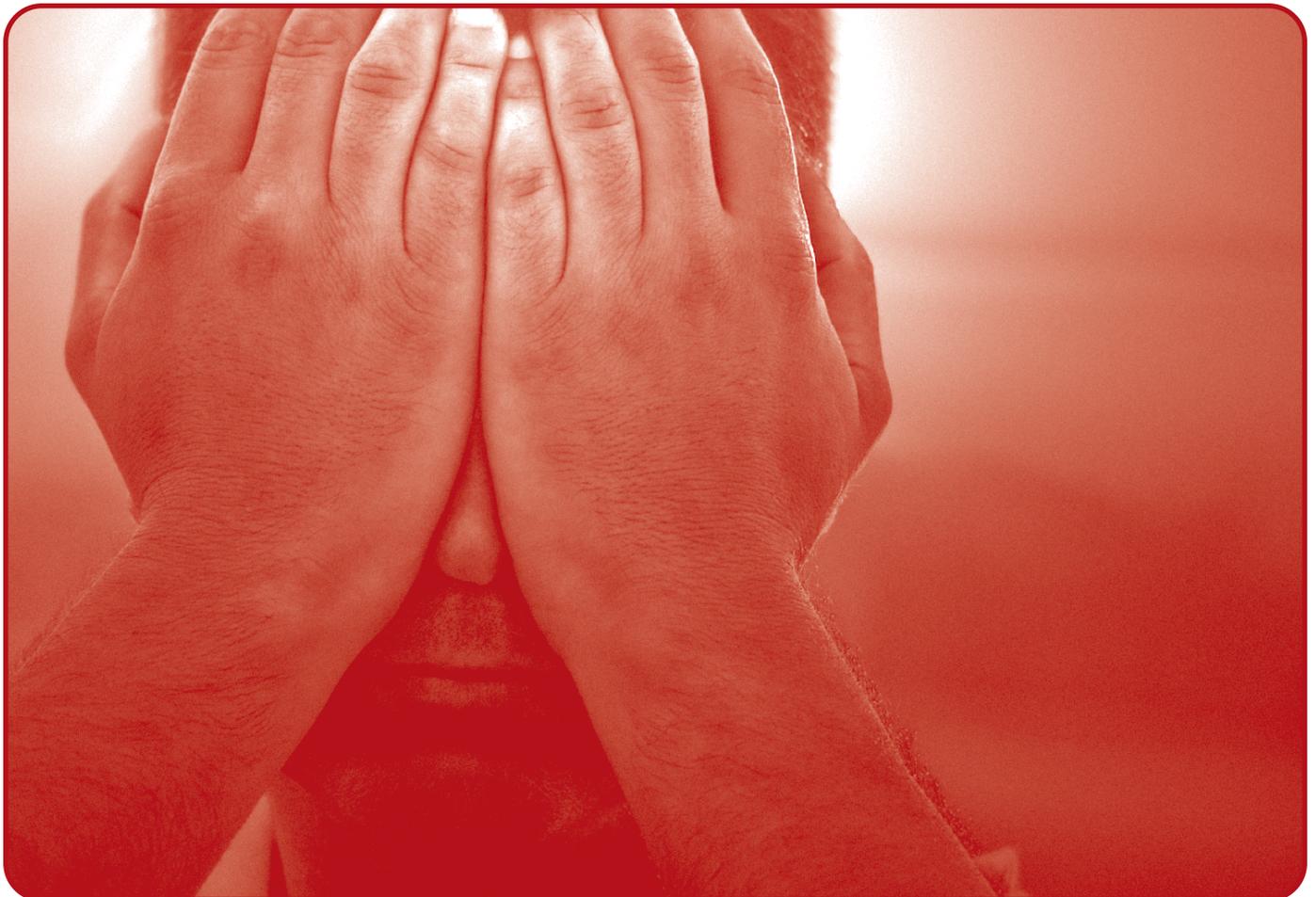
Tragic figures imagine something extraordinary, and seek to transcend the compromises of the familiar; we both admire that imaginative leap and acknowledge its impossibility. The contest between world and will brings about misery, insanity, and finally death; it also produces meaning and magnificence.

Through their journeys, the tragic hero and heroine learn something about themselves and about their lives. It is understanding that comes, however, from a great deal of loss and pain. Desdemona, with her dying breath, still tries to assume the best of her husband, in the same moment that she becomes the proof of his capacity for destruction, even of something he loves so deeply. It takes Desdemona's death for Emilia to recognize the depth of her husband's deception; Emilia must die too before Othello can face his own realization.

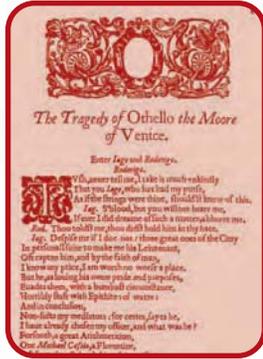
In our own lives, we may never face the same choices that Othello must. But it is very likely that we will face choices that seem too big for us to handle. We will be required to go

through some "fearful passage" of our own, where old ways of thinking and behaving don't work. We will face head-on the consequences of choices we've made—and wish desperately that what's done might be undone.

What makes art different from life is exactly that. What's done can be undone—and even prevented when it comes to our own lives. This tragedy is temporary. We close the book. We leave the theater. If we enter that world and come to know its characters, we come to know ourselves. We learn. The damage that is permanent and irreversible to tragedy's heroes is reversible and temporary for us as witnesses. And when our own "fearful passage" comes along, we will have learned along the way about ourselves and the nature of others, and be able to make our choices with the benefit of their experiences. We will utilize what we've seen through our heroes' and heroines' eyes, and be wiser and stronger for their journeys. ■



# OTHELLO



## FROM A SCHOLAR'S PERSPECTIVE

## POISONOUS COMMONPLACES

Carol Thomas Neely is Professor of English Emerita at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. These scholar notes were first published in Playbill, written for CST's 1995 production of Othello.

The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice was first performed in 1604, around the time of *Troilus and Cressida* and *Measure for Measure*. Like them, it is the stuff that current headlines are made of. In it, status hunger mixes with racial and sexual fears and prejudices to corrupt love and justice. *Othello* begins with Iago's racist, sexist taunt to Brabantio: "An old black ram is tupping your white ewe." It concludes on a bed covered with wedding sheets where a murderous consummation enacts Iago's fantasies. With no extraneous character, no subplot, no comic diversion, the play is relentless. Like the characters, the audience wants justice and relief; we want to blame someone else and absolve ourselves.

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*With no extraneous character, no subplot, no comic diversion, the play is relentless.*

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As the play begins, Othello and Desdemona display extraordinary courage, self-assurance, and love. He eloquently asserts his authority: "My parts, my title, and my perfect soul shall manifest me rightly." She boldly defends her elopement before the Venetian Senate:

*That I did love the Moor to live with him,  
My downright violence and storm of fortunes,  
May trumpet to the world.*

But the different expectations they bring to this cross-cultural match create potential for divisions within and between them. Desdemona is a dutiful, white Venetian daughter who chooses to disobey her father and move *outside* her house, her milieu, her city, seeking adventure. Othello, long an adventurer, is a freed slave, a black African in white Europe, a converted Christian and Venetian general who fights Turks, aliens like himself. An outsider who has moved *inside*, he seeks security and contentment through love for Desdemona:

*And when I love thee not,  
Chaos is come again.*

Iago corrupts Desdemona's and Othello's virtues by catalyzing their vulnerabilities—as he does to all those he exploits. By promulgating sleazy racial, sexual and cultural stereotypes, Iago triggers insecurities. Then he offers satisfactions: to the impotent Roderigo, Desdemona; to the proud Cassio, his reinstatement; to the agonized Othello, proof of infidelity and opportunity for revenge. Iago finds or plants in his victims his own deepest compulsion: to elevate himself by putting down others, to "plume up my will in double knavery." He exults in his plot to deface beauty by spreading filth:

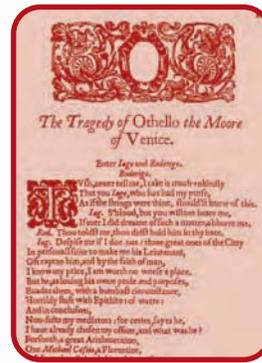
*So will I turn her virtue into pitch,  
And out of her own goodness make the net  
That shall enmesh them all.*

The audience, made confidante to his scheme, may be seduced into unwitting participation.

At the center of Iago's web is the handkerchief, which, as it passes from Desdemona to Emilia to Iago to Cassio to Bianca, is transformed from a symbol of one woman's passionate fidelity to a mark of all women's inevitable promiscuity. Replacing his vision of Desdemona with Iago's, Othello takes her for a commonplace "whore of Venice," who must be sacrificed to the cause of justice. But Desdemona, although baffled by Othello's raging jealousy, refuses to reduce him to "the Moor." She seeks instead a strategy which will reverse Iago's and bring good out of bad. Desdemona dies affirming her love, but it is Emilia who uses the handkerchief, once proof of guilt, to reveal innocence. As Emilia dies for her mistress, the audience has found its hero.

Othello's own death speech seems more self-serving than self-cleansing. He claims that he loved "not wisely but too well;" he blames Iago who perplexed him; he imagines that his

Venetian general self can be redeemed by killing his alien slave self now denigrated as a “circumcised dog.” The conclusion, like the play, is harrowing for the audience who wants clarity and catharsis. We may wish to remember the Othello who was “great of heart” and forget the man who murdered his innocent wife. We may wish to demonize Iago, judging him guilty and finding satisfaction in his promised torture. Or we may agree with Lodovico that the marital death bed “poisons sight” and must be hidden. But if, as audience, we are too easily satisfied with redemption, revenge, or concealment, do we not deny our own vulnerability to, our own complicity with, the poisonous commonplaces about others which circulate now as then?



## FROM A SCHOLAR'S PERSPECTIVE

## UNHOUSED

Wendy Wall is a Professor of English at Northwestern University. In her field of specialization, *Early Modern English Literature and Culture, 1500-1660*, she has taught and published extensively.

Shakespeare's most domestic tragedy, *Othello*, opens by showing what is at stake in the marriage between a white Venetian woman and a black immigrant military hero converted from Islam. The first scene makes “home” central to its exploration of “the green eyed monster” jealousy, for here Othello describes his loss of bachelorhood as the state of being “housed”:

*But that I love the gentle Desdemona,  
I would not my unboused free condition  
Put into circumscription and confine  
For the sea's worth,*

he declares. Othello announces himself as someone whose place in society is outside of it. He lives in tents on military crusades; he doesn't own property. Beneath the veneer of complaint that his marriage will limit his liberty (the old ball-and-chain protest) lies Othello's anxiety about his place and his own desires. Described as a “wheeling stranger of here and everywhere,” he finds marriage a sure way to assimilate into family and culture.

The play opens with Iago clamoring: “Awake, Brabantio! Look to your house, your daughter, and your bags!” In his ugly view of Othello and Desdemona's marriage as a pornographic bestial melding, Iago classifies progeny as material goods. In his view, guarding the house is keeping the family. And yet, “house” obviously means more than a physical structure. It signifies a lineage, group or family: “A pox on both your houses,” Mercutio cries in *Romeo and Juliet*.

The striking irony posed by the opening marriage is that Brabantio disowns his daughter after her elopement.



# OTHELLO

Desdemona's exile from the family house is established in a lengthy discussion about where she will live once Othello goes to war. As Othello houses himself in the solid affiliation she offers, Desdemona becomes unhoused, a stranger of here and everywhere. Such is the art of the first act of *Othello* where the stakes of marriage, identity and belonging are conveyed by reference to the social meaning of the household.

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*As Othello houses himself in the solid affiliation she offers, Desdemona becomes unhoused, a stranger of here and everywhere.*

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Iago succeeds in provoking Othello to doubt himself and his wife in part by trading on Othello's anxiety as a racial outsider. Othello was the first black tragic hero on the English stage, appearing at a time when England started to invest in the African slave trade. As a convert from Islam to Christianity, he exists on the margins of culture. So when Othello says of Desdemona, "When I love thee not, chaos is come again" (with chaos, for a Renaissance audience, being the ultimate nothingness), we understand what is at stake for him. When incited into jealousy by Iago's innuendos and imagery, Othello revealingly complains:

*My name, that was as fresh  
As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black  
As mine own face.*

Using his skin as the symbol for moral degradation, Othello echoes Iago and Brabantio's view of his marriage as "unnatural." In his final poignant speech, Othello's alienation causes him to split into two identities: hero and enemy. Attempting to prove himself a war hero once again (rather than a wife-killer), Othello only ends up casting himself as the infidel he has fought in his military campaigns.

Chiefly concerned with the place of theater and the imagination, *Othello* constantly shows how reality is shaped by words, performances and images—what one senator at the play's opening calls "false gazing." In making Othello conjure tortuous mental images of his wife as adulterous—

and crediting these illusions as true—Iago weaves an alternate reality for those around him. He is the consummate playwright, actor and director figure, capable of transforming a mundane and domestic stage prop—a handkerchief—into "ocular proof" of infidelity.

Yet with some poetic justice, the handkerchief is the one smoking gun that unravels Iago's web of fictions and reveals the truth at the conclusion. Framed against the tableau of Desdemona dead on the bed, Emilia stands as the play's final hero, the person calling for justice even at the risk of death. Her husband commands, "I charge you get you home." Her reply? "Perchance Iago I will ne'er go home." In a play whose first act fixates on the structuring role of home for establishing kinship and social place, the final scene appropriately shows a wife observing that home, in this poisonous world of fictions and fantasies, has ceased to function ethically and socially. Belonging, being housed, having a place: the tragedy of *Othello* is, in part, the story of the fragility and exquisiteness of such desires in a world where home is as illusory as theater. ■



# OTHELLO



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*So will I turn her virtue into pitch,  
And out of her own goodness make the net  
That shall enmesh them all.*

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# WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

## 1600s

*Nothing is more odious in Nature than an improbable lye; And, certainly, never was any Play fraught, like this of Othello, with improbabilities... The Character of that State is to employ strangers in their Wars; But shall a Poet thence fancy that they will set a Negro to be their General; or trust a Moor to defend them against the Turk? With us a Black-amoor might rise to be a Trumpeter; but Shakespear (sic) would not have him less than a Lieutenant-General.*  
-Thomas Rymer (1692)

*'Tis granted, a Negro here does seldom rise above a Trumpeter, nor often perhaps higher at Venice. But then that proceeds from the Vice of Mankind, which is the Poets (sic) Duty as he informs us, to correct, and to represent things as they should be, not as they are. After all this, Othello being of Royal Blood, and a Christian, where is the disparity of the Match? If either side is advanc'd, 'tis Desdemona. And why must this Prince though a Christian, and of known and experienc'd Virtue, Courage, and Conduct, be made such a Monster, that the Venetian Lady can't love him without perverting Nature?*  
-Charles Gildon (1694)

## 1700s

*The Groundwork of [Othello] is built on a Novel of Cinthio Giraldi..., who seems to have design'd his Tale as a Document to young Ladies against disproportion'd Marriages... That they should not link themselves to such, against whom Nature, Providence, and a different way of Living have interpos'd a Bar. Our Poet inculcates no such Moral: but rather, that a Woman may fall in Love with the Virtues and shining Qualities of a Man; and therein overlook the Difference of Complexion and Colour.*

-Lewis Theobald (1733)

*The fable of Othello is founded upon one action only, which is conducted with great skill; and if from the distress of the catastrophe it is not the most pleasing of Shakespeare's tragedies, it is undoubtedly the most perfect.*

-John Shebbeare (1771-72)

*Upon the whole, in this intercourse betwixt Iago and Othello, Shakespeare has shown the most complete knowledge of the human heart. Here he has put forth all the strength of his genius; the faults which he is so prone to fall into are entirely out of sight. We find none of his quibbling, his punning, or bombast; all is seriousness, all is passion.*

-W.N. (1791)

## 1800s

*The last speech [Iago's soliloquy], the motive-hunting of motiveless malignity—how awful! In itself fiendish; while yet he was allowed to bear the divine image, too fiendish for his own steady view. A being next to devil, only not quite devil—and this Shakespeare has attempted—executed—without disgust, without scandal!*

-Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1808-1818)

*While the Moor bears the nightly color of suspicion and deceit only on his visage, Iago is black within. He haunts Othello like his evil genius and with his light (and therefore the more dangerous) insinuations, he leaves him no rest.*

-August William Schlegel (1811)

*Othello does not kill Desdemona in Jealousy, but in a conviction forced upon him by the almost superhuman art of Iago, such a conviction as any man would and must have entertained who had believed Iago's honest as Othello did.*

-Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1813)

*We feel that the utterer is thinking of the past and the future while speaking of the instant. When he says in Othello 'Put up your bright swords or the dew will rust them,' we feel that his throat had commanded where swords were as thick as reeds. From eternal risk he speaks as though his body were unassailable.*

-Edmund Kean (who played Othello, 1817)

*The great moral lesson of the tragedy of Othello is that black and white blood cannot be intermingled in marriage without a gross outrage, upon the law of Nature; and that, in such violations, nature will vindicate her laws.*

-John Quincy Adams (1835)

# WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

*Iago is the whitewashed, hypocritical power of evil—his is a selfish, half-animal nature, which is unable to control its desires and passions simply because it has never made the attempt... With Iago, honour, even in its worldly acceptance is a mere pretence.*

-Hermann Ulrici (1839)

*I quail at the idea of his laying hold of me in those terrible passionate scenes.*

-Fanny Kemble (Sarah Siddons' niece who played Desdemona, 1848)

*In Othello, with wonderful psychological perception, [Shakespeare] created a magnificent tragic field for the passion of jealousy.*

-G.G. Gervinus (1849-50)

*By the side of Othello, who is night, there is Iago, who is evil—evil, the other form of darkness. Night is but the night of the world; evil is the night of the soul.*

-Victor Hugo (1864)

*There is no mistaking Shakespeare's intention in the delineation of [Iago's] character. He meant him for a most attractive, popular, good-natured, charming, selfish, cold-blooded and utterly unscrupulous scoundrel.*

-Richard Grant White (1885)

*To portray Iago properly you must seem to be what all the characters think, and say, you are, not what the spectators know you to be; try to win even them by your sincerity. Don't act the villain, don't look it or speak it (by scowling and growling, I mean), but think it all the time. Be genial, sometimes jovial, always gentlemanly. Quick in motion as in thought; lithe and sinuous as a snake.*

-Edwin Booth (John Wilkes Booth's brother who played Iago, 1886)

*The love of Desdemona is made to leap over quite all of the social limitations known to man; She bids defiance not only to the behests of family, but also to the feelings of nationality and to the instincts of race.*

-Denton J. Snider (1887)

*[Othello] is pure melodrama. There is not a touch of character in it that goes below the skin and the fitful attempts to make Iago something better than a melodramatic villain only make a hopeless mess of him and his motives. To anyone capable of reading this play with an open mind as to its merits, it is obvious that Shakespeare plunged through it so impetuously that he had it finished before he had made up his mind as to the character and motives of a single person in it.*

-George Bernard Shaw (1897)

## 1900s

*[Othello's] tragedy lies in this—that his whole nature was indisposed to jealousy, and yet was such that he was unusually open to deception, and, if wrought to passion, likely to act with little reflection, with no delay, and in the most decisive manner conceivable.*

-A.C. Bradley (1904)

*The player who represents Iago should, when he speaks to the Moor, be so sincere in his doubts as to put the audience also in doubt, make it admire his character, and only by degrees discover his perfidious cunning. If the actor should make the betrayer a shade too Satanic, Othello would look foolish. His insinuations should be delivered with little care, and show a great respect for his captain.*

-Tommaso Salvini (who played Othello in Italy, 1907)

*It is a tragedy of racial conflict; a tragedy of honour rather than of jealousy... It is because he is an alien among white people that his mind works so quickly, for he feels dishonour more deeply...*

-Paul Robeson (who played Othello, 1930)

*I know no character in Shakespeare which has suffered from so much misconception. The general idea seems to be that Desdemona is a ninny, a pathetic figure chiefly because she is half-baked. It is certainly the idea of those who think an actress of the dolly type, a pretty young thing with a vapid innocent expression, is well suited to the part. I shall perhaps surprise you by telling you that a great tragic actress, with a strong personality and a strong method, is far better suited to it, for Desdemona is strong, not weak.*

-Ellen Terry (who played Desdemona, 1932)

# WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

*Othello is the symbol of faith in human values of love and war, romantically conceived. Desdemona, as she appears in relation to Othello, is not so much individual woman as the divinity of love. Iago is cynicism incarnate. He stands for a 'devil-world,' unlimited, formless, negative.*  
-Maud Bodkin (1934)

*Iago's 'almost superhuman art' may properly be termed sub-human.*  
-G.R. Elliott (1937)

*[Othello] is a marvelously sure and adroit piece of workmanship; though closely related to that judgement is the further one that, with all its brilliance and poignancy, it comes below Shakespeare's supreme—his very greatest works.*  
-F.R. Leavis (1937)

*[Othello] pictures through the hero not only the destruction of an established way of life, but the birth of a new order. Othello in his final soliloquy is a man of more capacious mind than the Othello who first meets us.*  
-E.M.W. Tillyard (1938)

*Nothing that is in Iago is absent from Othello, though there is much in Othello of which Iago never dreamed.*  
-Mark Van Doren (1939)

*Othello is all of the past trying to forget itself in a moment, he is Africa trying to breathe in Venice. That is his struggle, that is what threatens his peace; and that, over and above the wiles of Iago, is the source of our feeling that explosion will follow calm.*  
-Mark Van Doren (1939)

*In [Othello] we see exemplified in the highest degree alike the spiritual greatness and the tragic weakness of men, in both of which the age of Shakespeare had a profound belief.*  
-Kenneth O. Myrick (1941)

*Othello's... is a story of blindness and folly, of a man run mad. As the play is planned, evil works all but unquestioned in him until it is too late. Of battle between good and evil, his soul the battleground, even of a clarifying consciousness of the evil at work in him, there is nothing.*  
-Harley Granville-Barker (1945)

*Shakespeare usually works as a romantic, raising his audience to the cosmic significance of his theme by setting it in remote ages and in the courts of kings. In Othello he goes differently to work, showing that the old war of Good and Evil has its centre everywhere, not least in the private household.*  
-S.L. Bethell (1952)

*Othello is thus a true, and sublime, love tragedy—not a true-love romance with a tragic ending brought about chiefly by a heavy villain. It is Romeo and Juliet matured and recomposed. In writing the earlier play Shakespeare was aware, though not deeply aware, that the tragedy of love, when supreme is also the tragedy of hate. In Othello those two passions comparatively superficial in all of his previous stories are intensified to the uttermost and deeply interwoven... Othello is Shakespeare's, and surely the world's, supreme secular tragic poem of 'human love divine.'*  
-G.R. Elliott (1953)

*Although the characters never achieve understanding and although our response to them—as theirs to each other—shifts with the successive and conflicting pulls of emotion and analysis, so that we see Othello through his own eyes and Iago's as well as our own, yet if we wait for the fullness of what the play has to offer we do reach a state of tragic comprehension; we are left with a greater insight into the passions and the will and how they operate to cut us off from each other and from ourselves.*  
-John Bayley (1960)

*Iago hates Othello because he is a Moor. This irrational but powerful motive, underlying the obsessive intensity of his feelings, and the improvised reasons with which he justifies it, continually presses up towards the surface of his language... Iago's mind broods constantly over Othello's colour.*  
-G.M. Matthews (1964)

*Just as no one can become truly a member of a family into which he was not born, no one can set his roots deeply in a city that is not his own. In a sense, the brotherhood of man does not extend beyond the walls of the city. Or there are two brotherhoods of man—one as men are universally and other as men are in their practical lives—the two being incommensurable. A man can be fully at home only in his own city. Men know themselves from their place in the city... A being who was completely indifferent to such a world, who had no need of any particular place, would either be a beast living on unconscious passion or a superman, a sort of deity, who could receive his laws and his aspirations from the silent vastness of the universe.*  
-Allan Bloom (1964)

# WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

*Our natural partisanship with love and lovers causes us to see only Iago's wickedness in destroying the love of Othello and Desdemona; we like to believe that, without his intervention, all would have been well... Iago is only a mirror or an agent that causes the unseen to become visible. Lived over and over again, the love of Desdemona and Othello would end the same way.... Iago's speeches, read dispassionately, shows that he is the clearest thinker in the play. 'Honest Iago' is not merely a tragically misplaced epithet. Iago does tell more of the truth than any other character.*  
-Allan Bloom (1964)

*The massiveness of his self-assurance in the face of the tenuousness of his real position shows that his life is based on a critical lack of self-knowledge. Othello, though radically dependent, represents himself as completely independent; and the myth of his independence seems to be less for his own benefit than for the sake of those who made him. They could not trust him if they knew him to be their own creation.*  
-Allan Bloom (1964)

*Othello is about the wanton destruction of happiness—something so precious and fragile that its loss is felt as quite irredeemable. This, I think, is the fundamental source of the peculiar sense of pain and anguish that this tragedy, more than any of the others, leaves in the consciousness of a spectator or a reader.*  
-G.R. Hibbard (1968)

*Othello presents, in extreme form, the situation of the alien (including the class-alien) in a hierarchical, predatory and therefore not yet fully human society. Othello's colour is thus representative of a much wider human protest than concerns race alone...*  
-G.M. Matthews (1974)

*Iago knows something essential that Othello does not know; the audience shares the knowledge and so are implicated with Iago whether they like it or not. Iago's knowledge is not objective knowledge of real human relations... but the power it confers is real enough, and this is why the audience find themselves tied to Iago by a bond of complicity. The effect is intentional; Othello is not a play for making consciences comfortable.*  
-G.M. Matthews (1974)

*In Othello, [Shakespeare] imagines a world in which internal grace may not exist and the mind of man is free to make the choices that will result in the shaping of its own ends. The implications of man's freedom turn out to be at least as tragic as the implication of man's bondage.*  
-Robert G. Hunter (1976)

*Instead of being, like the other tragedies, a play of expansion, Othello is a play of contraction. The action does not widen out, it narrows down as public business is increasingly excluded from it until it finds its catastrophe, not on the battlefield, nor in the presence of a court, but in a bedroom at night where two people, united by the closest of ties, speak at cross purposes and misunderstand each other disastrously... The pattern of this tragedy is that of a whirlpool, with its centre in the poisoned mind of the hero which reshapes, distorts, and degrades objective reality.*  
-Stephen Greenblatt (1980)

*Much of the power of Othello as a tragedy, I believe, is to make us acutely aware of our own needs for emotional and moral certainty, simplicity and finality—our own impulse... to categorize people as fair or foul in accordance to our own hot feelings about them. In revealing the web of self-strung delusions in which its characters trap themselves, the play forbids us (unless we delude ourselves) to judge its characters absolutely in terms of moral 'debit and credit,' as angels or devils, virtuous victims or hellish villains.*  
-Jane Adamson (1980)

*Throughout the play Shakespeare is exploring the capacity of the human heart to break or be broken... The last scene presents many deaths, each of which symbolically reinforces the play's stress on the necessary link between loving and vulnerability: Brabantio, Emilia, Desdemona, Othello—they are all killed, emotionally and physically, solely because they were willing to love.*  
-Jane Adamson (1980)

*Shakespeare's presentation of Iago challenges us to dare not to shield ourselves from what the drama shows: that Iago's inhumaneness is itself the clearest sign of his humanity. It cannot be safely fenced off into a category labelled 'devilish,' 'unhuman.' Despite its best (or its worst) efforts, Iago's will cannot enclose itself totally and permanently in protective armour-plating.*  
-Jane Adamson (1980)

*At the heart of the play, and centered in its full realization of both Desdemona's and Othello's anguish, is Shakespeare's insight into the dire necessity for, and the often impossible difficulty of sustaining, a life open to doubt and uncertainty and therefore always at risk.*  
-Jane Adamson (1980)

# WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

*It would be impossible for Iago to seduce Othello if Othello did not already share Iago's value structure. Othello is not dense or blind, he is not a noble savage. He is a male who lives and thrives in a masculine occupation in a 'masculine' culture, the assumptions of which he shares.*  
-Marilyn French (1981)

*Othello is fascinating as a historical document because of the way it inscribes a transitional moment in Western culture. In it we can almost see the supernatural realm receding. The feudal world of honor, fidelity, and service is becoming the bourgeois world of property and contractual relations. Heroic tragedy is turning into domestic tragedy. It was Shakespeare's fortune to partake of two worlds without belonging completely to either.*  
-Mark Rose (1985)

*The sexes, so sharply differentiated in the play, badly misunderstand each other. The men... persistently misconceive the women; the women fatally overestimate the men. Each sex, trapped in its own values and attitudes, misjudges the other.*  
-Carol Thomas Neely (1985)

*What happens in this play is that in fact the military calling is hideously domesticated; the fury and terror of the field, having no outlet in action, settle into the bedroom, and 'honour' is grotesquely fought over, ambiguously won and lost.*  
-Anthony Hecht (1986)

*Although Othello intensely wishes not to be a typical stage Moor, he finds himself in exactly that position. He is the black man who provokes a crisis by his sexual relationship with a white woman.*  
-Anthony Gerard Barthelemy (1987)

*[Othello's] precarious entry into the white world is ruptured by his relation with Desdemona, which was intended to secure it in the first place...*  
-Ania Loomba (1989)

*The play thinks abomination into being and then taunts the audience with the knowledge that it can never be unthought: "What you know, you know." It is a technique that works close to the unstable ground of consciousness itself; for it would be almost as difficult to say whether its racial anxieties are ones that the play discovers or implants in an audience as to say whether jealousy is something Iago discovers or implants in Othello.*  
-Michael Neill (1989)

*It doesn't 'oppose racism,' but (much more disturbingly) illuminates the process by which such visceral superstitions were implanted in the very body of the culture that formed us. The object that 'poisons sight' is nothing less than a mirror for the obscene desires and fears that Othello arouses in its audiences—monsters that the play at once invents and naturalizes, declaring them improper, even as it implies that they were always 'naturally' there.*  
-Michael Neill (1989)

*The point is that the Senate hired Othello. He is there merely on business—killing business, which happens to be his occupation. You would not expect the 'wealthy curled darlings of our nation'... to bloody their doublets and muddy their hose fighting Turks, not when there are, as we Americans say, 'freedom fighters' available. Freedom fighters and barbaric mercenaries do for us what we are too civilized to do for ourselves. If we contract with them to kill our enemies, it does not mean that we are alike.*  
-James L. Calderwood (1989)

*To be a black in Venice is to be a stranger, wherever you come from, even if you are a Venetian. Othello's case may seem unique, but the mirror he looks in reflects a universally human face. We are all trapped by accident inside bodies that misrepresent us, making us strangers in Venice to everyone but the Desdemonas who love us.*  
-James L. Calderwood (1989)

*I don't mean that Iago is an allegorical sign of Othello's unconscious. He is that in some degree, but he is also the unconscious of the play itself; or, in dramaturgical terms, he is all that Shakespeare the playwright felt obliged to exclude when he fashioned characters like Othello, Desdemona, and Cassio. That means that Iago is somewhat within them by virtue of being kept outside of them; or at least he is indispensable to them, since they are nobly what they are by virtue of not being ignoble like him. He is a kind of theatrical residue of Shakespeare's creation of nobility. A romantic playwright might have discarded this residue entirely, but Shakespeare not merely retains it but makes it into a character with enormous theatrical vitality, the conscious unconscious of the play...*  
-James L. Calderwood (1989)

# WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

*Iago is not interested in who he is; he can live without the myth of the I. The rest of us are not so hardy. Like Othello, we need to have faith in the roles we play, especially when we are playing ourselves. Otherwise we could never act or speak.*

-James L. Calderwood (1989)

*Being human means accepting promises from other people and trusting that other people will be good to you. When that is too much to bear, it is always possible to retreat into the thought, 'I'll live for my own comfort, for my own revenge, for my own anger, and I just won't be a member of society any more.' That really means, 'I won't be a human being any more.'*

-Martha Nussbaum (1989)

*Derrida writes; 'There's no racism without a language.' I take this to mean that racism—and all the violence historically associated with it—is generated by language. Racial difference is not genetically 'real' nor is it grounded in real experience but is a product of verbal conditioning. Racism cannot long survive without the verbal and symbolic apparatus that generates and sustains it: the names, the jokes, the plays, the speeches, the casual exchanges, the novels. In short, racism is a cultural virus that is verbally transmitted and its antidote must therefore be verbally transmitted as well. Othello—along with the many African American texts it has inspired—provides a running record of Western civilization's attempt to confront what Paul Robeson called 'the problem of my own people.' Othello, he said, 'is a tragedy of racial conflict, a tragedy of honor, rather than jealousy.'*

-James Andreas (1992)

*Like many tragic heroes, Othello is greater than those around him. He is, in Aristotle's term *spoudaios*: excellent in character, intense in thought, elevated in feeling. But the forces assayed against him are immense—not superhuman forces... but all of human society. Everywhere he turns, Othello confronts racism. Its different faces or masks—not only enmity, disdain, abuse, but friendship, admiration, love—serve to make it more insistent, compelling, inexorable. In the end, he succumbs to the racist vision of those around him.*

-Patrick Hogan (1998)

*Shakespeare's tragic characters are visionaries, purists, idealists. Believing in a strict correspondence between the way things are and the way things appear to them, they commit themselves imaginatively to the fulfillment of an ideal, whether personal or political or both. This is what Alfred Harbage notices when he remarks on 'their unworldliness, their incapacity for compromise,' and speaks of them as 'imperfect ones torn by their dreams of perfection, mortals with immortal longings in them.'*

-Russ McDonald (1993)

*Othello provokes us with something new, something that many view as more dangerous than an unruly daughter wooing and wooed by an exotic storyteller. Othello taunted Englishmen of the 17th century and later readers to abandon their fears of the other, to accept an African's humanity, to correct centuries of theatrical and literary history that equated black men with the devil.*

-Anthony Gerard Barthelemy (1994)

*We may not be black or from Africa, but we have come from somewhere. And we have known profound loneliness. Othello's unconscious is my own. Shakespeare has given us a black man, but he speaks of the entire human condition. Shakespeare uses the metaphor of a black man, but Othello is the stranger—the stranger that lives in each of us.*

-Barbara Gaines (1995)

*Othello talks of love, not of sex... We must not suppose that there is only one kind of love, or even that Othello's exactly matches Desdemona's. Lovers tend to assume this equivalence, as indeed do bystanders who commend the intercourse that 'soul to soul affordeth.' Othello and Desdemona use the same language of love, as if intending theirs to be a mating of souls; yet, as Virginia Woolf once remarked, when one wants to concentrate on the soul 'life breaks in.' Desdemona's soul burns steadily; when life breaks in, in the form of a husband who strikes and kills her, this cannot extinguish her love. Othello's burns with a more flaring flame, at times so intensely that he gasps for breath; it switches easily to its opposite, an equally unbearable hatred.*

-E.A.G. Honigmann (1997)

*As a Moor, he is clearly presented as Other, but not necessarily an offensive Other; the qualifier noble Moor does not extricate him from the realm of the exotic, yet it undermines the perception of him as evil. The association of him with blackness and its numerous signifiers, however, clearly locates him in the world of the undesirable.*

-Elliott Butler-Evans (1997)

# WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

## 2000s

*Dramatic irony is the primary device here. We are required as an audience to understand the distance between reality and appearance in Othello's distress. We are asked to reflect on the disparity between a false human engagement with reality, and the actual truth. We are driven to see the terrible absurdity of Othello's misunderstandings, as well as their plausibility, and consequences. ... Othello believes Iago, and the dramatic irony of the play establishes this as a terrible and false belief. But we as an audience see how persuasive this subjective and false 'truth' is. We are therefore encouraged by the narrative to view our own truths as less certain than they might have been. For what is truth, but a subjective construct rendered persuasive in the moment of its construction? There are, perhaps, no absolute truths... The baroque experience addresses, in a more general way, the disenchantment and anguish arising from the emergence of new religious views of the world, putting into question the old religion of catholic Europe. The play is a study of human relations through a 'secularised' religious perspective.*

-Anthony Gilbert (2001)

*[Desdemona] is shown as so pure that she cannot conceive of the impurity Othello accuses her of, and so obedient that she goes to bed to be murdered. ... With her last breath she tries to save her loved Othello from punishment. It was not he who stifled her, she says—she did it herself. Shakespeare lavishes such plangent poetry, such spiritual delicacy, on this portrait, this it is very difficult to notice how such an unqualified display of virtue might be seen as provocative, from the analytical point of view—because it leaves the other partner in the relationship to carry everything else, the messy, unspiritual, gross, and violent elements of sexuality, as Othello in fact does.*

-Felicity Rosslyn (2001)

*Critics recently have focused attention on the interplay of race and gender in Shakespeare's Othello, examining how the play interrogates social norms and disagreeing over whether those norms ultimately are subverted or upheld. However, in analyzing the Caucasian, patriarchal world of the play, critics have largely overlooked the textual issue of age, failing to note that Othello and Desdemona may be separated by as much as a generation... Such a difference in age would alarm the typical early modern audience, as they would likely perceive this match as unnatural to the point of being doomed... In fact, the age difference in this union would foreshadow tragedy for the audience even without the compounding of other differences...*

-Valerie Barnes Lipscomb (2001)

*Othello's collapse into murderous violence would seem to be an illustration of the way, according to the racist view, the coating of civilization must slide readily off the "savage" personality. But Shakespeare's readiness to admit the instability of personality—as though he is ready to entertain Iago's denial of intrinsic and permanent character—is apparent in all his tragedies. The Macbeth who is held by his wife to be too full of the milk of human kindness before him murder of Duncan is not the same as that "dead butcher" whose head is triumphantly carried onto the stage on the uplifted lance of Macduff at the end.*

-Millicent Bell (2002)

*At the last, Othello surrenders himself to the prison of race he thought he had escaped. He is not able, in the end, to cast away the role and character which societal convention prescribed to him at the beginning of his career in the white colonial world.*

-Millicent Bell (2002)

*Emilia, rather than any of the male characters, has the final say on female sexual honesty, as she exonerates Desdemona with her last words: "Moor, she was chaste" (5.2.249). Finally, it is Emilia who in her last statements and actions redefines "honesty" for women in the play, making it signify not only a case of chastity, but one of being "truthful," "loyal," "loving toward friends which brings honor," and "one who takes up the cause of another as if it were her own."*

-Steve Cassal (2003)

*To ensure that we do not miss the intimate connection between the sexual act on the first day and the murderous act on the second, Shakespeare makes both happen in the same place: in bed.*

-Lukas Erne (2003)

# WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

*The benevolent properties of the handkerchief are conditional upon its retention within Othello's family. Desdemona's consequent loss of the article (and its repossession by Iago) initiates the malevolence of which the charmer warns Othello's mother: "If she lost it / Or made a gift of it, my father's eye / Should hold her loathed, and his spirits should hunt / After new fancies" (3.4.60-63). Thus Othello, in fulfillment of the curse, begins to loath his wife and pursue the fancy of murdering her.*

-Diana Adesola Mafe (2004)

*Othello is the story of a woman killed—smothered in her bed—for having sex. Which particular man she is killed for having sex with matters less to me than the sexual nature of the transgression she dies for... That relatively few objections to Shakespeare's politics in this play have focused on its treatment of domestic violence—as opposed to its treatment of race—seems to me worthy of comment. Indeed, even those critics who categorize the play as "domestic tragedy" overwhelmingly resist applying the language of domestic violence... Wife-murder is a crime—in Shakespeare's culture as in our own—even when the wife is "guilty" of adultery.*

-Celia R. Daileader (2005)

*Othello is a tragedy that continually surprises us. Not only did Shakespeare make the blackest man on stage a white man (Iago), I would suggest that he made the bravest warrior onstage a woman (Desdemona). ...Because none of the acknowledged literary sources for Othello describe the heroine as a warrior... Shakespeare catches us off guard when Desdemona is identified as a warrior twice in the play, once by Othello who greets her on the seemingly peaceful battle front of Cyprus as his "fair warrior" (2.1.180) and once by herself when she calls herself in the subsequent act and "Unhandsome warrior" (3.4.152) for uncharitably arraigning Othello.*

-Joan Ozark Holmer (2005)

*Shakespeare calls on his audiences to consider the person before them, complex as he may be, rather than judging him by inherited assumptions used to dismiss a maligned people in the abstract. Shakespeare makes the stage a venue for closer examination, a place where audiences may begin to relate to 'others,' not all at once, but one extraordinary example at a time. In adapting Cinthio, Shakespeare sets up familiar stereotypes to explode them and to teach his audiences compassion for those whom society uses but never fully embraces as countrymen.*

-Kristin Johnsen-Neshati (2005)

*As trade opened up with northern Africa in the late 16th century, growing prejudices against Moors and Muslims in England added to the acceptance of this stereotype. In 1601, Queen Elizabeth issued an edict expelling all Moors from the British Isles. Debate continues today about whether Othello subverts Elizabethan expectations of a Moorish character or simply delays the reinforcement of the stereotype until later in the play, as Othello descends into madness and jealousy.*

-Virginia Mason Vaughan (2005)

*...this multi-ethnic society and the blurring of social boundaries that accompanied it did not come without a sense of anxiety, whether in the Venice or the England of that time. Othello's relationships with himself and to those around him reflect renaissance imaginings of the exotic—of the cultural 'other'—that were at once glamorous and dangerous. In Shakespeare's England the abhorrence of 'otherness' was profound, and this anxiety ripples upon the surface of Othello.*

-Farah Karim-Cooper (2007)

*...Shakespeare leaves Othello's religious conversion deliberately ambiguous, poised between Moor, Christian and the other complex ethnic group described in the play, 'the general enemy Ottoman.' This ambiguity surrounding the origins and approaches towards the figure of the Moor can be partly explained by the extensive and amicable relations that were established between Elizabethan England and the kingdom of Morocco. It is important to remember that by the late 1580s, Protestant England regarded Spanish Catholicism, rather than Ottoman or North African Islam, as its biggest religious and political threat.*

-Jerry Brotton (2007)

# A PLAY COMES TO LIFE

## IN WHICH A PLAY STAYS ONSTAGE FOR 400 YEARS...

### A LOOK BACK AT OTHELLO IN PERFORMANCE

*Every so often, perhaps once in a generation, Othello has laid hold of people, primitively, in a way that no other Shakespearean tragedy could hope to do. Women have shrieked and fainted, old men have laid their heads down on their arms and sobbed, young men have lost their sleep and gone about for days in a trance.*

—Julie Hankey, 1987

Looking back on *Othello* from a modern perspective, it can certainly be considered among Shakespeare's most innovative plays. The plot is tight—like a mystery thriller. The emotions are heart-stopping in their intensity. And the motivation behind all the characters' actions, especially that of the title character, are rooted in a tangled



Uta Hagen as Desdemona and Paul Robeson as Othello, Theatre Guild Production, Broadway, 1943-44

web of causation. Throughout history, productions of *Othello* have changed to reflect not only actors' and directors' insights into the play, but also the pervading social thought of the time. Few other plays have caused as much furor over the actors playing key roles or as much emotional discomfort over the subject at hand. And few other plays—by Shakespeare or any other playwright—have commanded the stage and the imagination of its audiences so persistently over nearly 400 years.

*Othello*, when first performed at the Globe Theatre, followed the great introspective tragedy of *Hamlet*. Richard Burbage, one of Shakespeare's leading actors, played the title role. Continuing the trend he had begun with his interpretation of *Hamlet*, Burbage made his *Othello* more personal, his acting filled with deep emotion. The play obviously appealed to audiences and actors alike, since it continued to be performed after Burbage's death until the Puritans closed the playhouses in 1642.

In 1660, with monarchy restored in England, King Charles II reopened London's theaters. Attempting to maintain some control, however, he limited the number of new theater companies by creating only two that were "licensed": the King's Men (the vestiges of Shakespeare's own company) and the Duke's Men, owned by William Davenant, Shakespeare's godson. The two companies divided the rights to Shakespeare's plays. As perhaps some indication of the plays' varying degrees of popularity, the King's Men settled for the rights to *Othello*, *Julius Caesar* and the three Falstaff plays; the rest were the inheritance of the Duke's Men. Productions of *Othello* during the Restoration are thought to have resembled those of Shakespeare's time, since many of the actors had once performed as boys with Shakespeare's company prior to the closing of the theaters in 1642.

A special edict from King Charles II allowed women to appear on the English stage for the first time, causing a furor among many of the all-male acting companies, not to mention the more conservative sectors of the population. It was the role of Desdemona that was first played by a professional actress in England. Throughout the Restoration until the late 1700s, *Othello* was played majestically, usually dressed in a general's uniform, complete with the white-powdered wig that was the fashion of the time. The character of Iago changed during this period as well. Based upon our knowledge of the actors who played the role, it is thought

# A PLAY COMES TO LIFE

that Iago was originally portrayed with comedic elements to his character. Over time, the villainous aspects of Othello's ensign took prominence.

By the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, *Othello* became a battle flag for the Romantic movement—not “romantic” as we might think of it today, however, for the play fell victim to severe cuts that eliminated all its “indecentencies.” Rather, *Othello* allowed the actors to suffer the intensity of a full range of emotions before their audience. Edmund Kean, who played the role in the early 1800s, is considered to have given the greatest English interpretation of his century. Like Burbage before him, Kean showed an inwardness, a preoccupation in *Othello*. He broke with earlier tradition by using brown, not black, make-up to become the Moor. And he displayed incredible concentration and intensity on stage, making it all the more dramatic when he burst out in rage.

Many theaters on the European continent could not accept *Othello*, and in fact it was banished entirely from the French stage throughout the 1700s. Shakespeare had the reputation of writing plays that were “abominable, but real.” Comic elements in this obviously tragic tale did not adhere to current theories of drama. The so-called “unities” ruled, and tragedy and comedy were never to co-exist in the same text. Cassio's drunken brawl was omitted entirely because drunkenness, viewed as the sole property of comedy, had no place in high tragedy. However, these “abominable” plays that showed too many realities of life were sometimes performed and often had more dramatic results in the audience than on stage. At a performance in Paris in 1822 the murder scene caused such uproar among theatergoers that the curtain had to be brought down. The Frenchman named Ducis who “translated” *Othello* for the French stage in 1792 (the first year of the Republic) was forced to supply a “happy” ending; in his version, Brabantio rushed on stage and stopped Othello before he could kill Desdemona. Both endings were subsequently published in France.

Ira Aldridge (1821-67), the American grandson of a Senegalese chieftain, was prevented from acting in the United States. That did not stop him from traveling to Europe and playing Othello, among many other roles, in the greatest theaters on the Continent. By the time he toured Europe, Continental audiences once again embraced the full range of

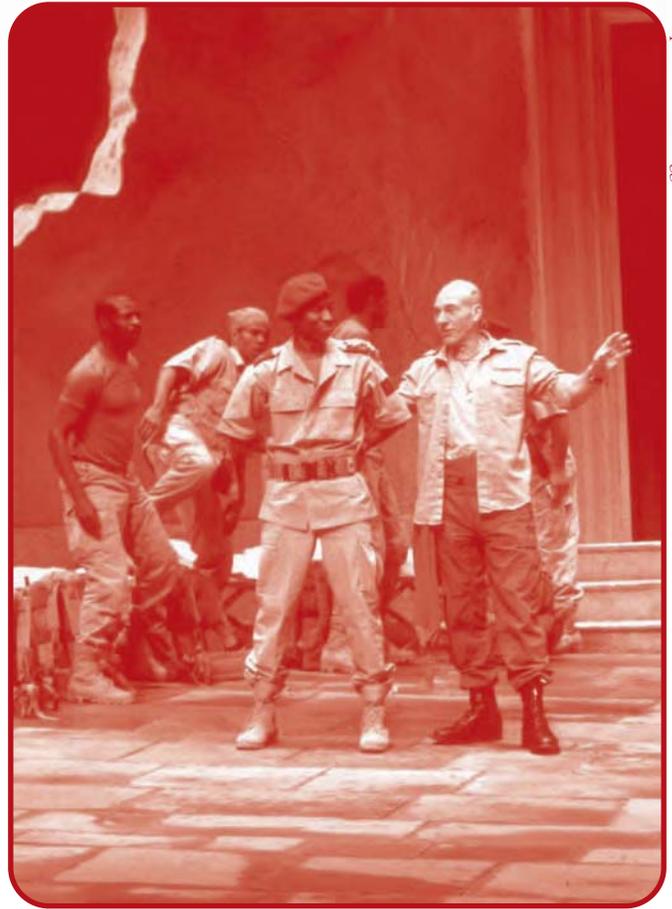


photo: Carol Rosegg

Shakespeare Theatre Company's 1997-1998 production, directed by Jude Kelly and starring Patrick Stewart as Othello

emotions in the play. Aldridge was a proponent of naturalistic acting, and was able to bring his audiences to the same emotional peaks as he experienced on stage. As one critic wrote, “After this Othello, it would be an anticlimax to have seen an ordinary Othello again. What abandonment, passion, beauty, greatness, sense... A Negro from Africa's western coast has come to show me the real Othello” (quoted in Hankey, 1987). For all his acclaim across Europe and Russia, Aldridge was never permitted to perform the role in the United States and died while on tour in Poland.

In England, this grand festival of emotions on stage became less popular. Othello's cruelty and savagery were not easily accepted. The Victorian middle class did not want to see a cruel and sensual Othello, so all allusions to sex were cut from the text. His foreignness was downplayed. The Victorian love for heroes made Othello into a man who had been tempered

# A PLAY COMES TO LIFE

by the Venetian society; a man with excellent parlor manners. His love for Desdemona was almost completely devoid of any sexual feeling—partly due to restrained Victorianism and partly due to the Victorians' aversion to seeing a black man with a white woman. The nineteenth century screened the murder from its audiences by closing the curtains around Desdemona's bed. Cutting the play to end with Othello's suicide speech, the Victorians wanted to restore tragic propriety to the play's disturbing conclusion.

Across the Atlantic a very different *Othello* was being performed. In America, a rougher, more violent portrayal was given by Edwin Booth (the famous actor-brother of John Wilkes Booth). Traditionally, Desdemona's death had been played in the center of the stage, with Othello's back to the audience, masking much of the brutality of the scene. In

Booth's production, the bed was moved downstage to the front and side. The audience could focus on Othello's face and see Desdemona's struggles. Through much of the nineteenth century, the play was set in contemporary middle-class interiors. It was only later in the 1800s that the tradition of historical costuming became prevalent.

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*Though a respected actor and singer, Robeson was forbidden as a black man to appear on stage as Othello in the United States. And so, like Aldridge a century before, Robeson went to England.*

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Another American, Paul Robeson, added dimension to the role of Othello in the early twentieth century. Though a respected actor and singer, Robeson was forbidden as a black man to appear on stage as Othello in the United States. And so, like Aldridge a century before, Robeson went to England. In 1930 London, he played Othello opposite Peggy Ashcroft to much critical acclaim. Not until 1942, after an extensive public relations campaign and an exhaustive search for a white actress who would agree to play Desdemona opposite his Othello, was Robeson able to perform the title role in the United States. Even then the production only toured to theaters above the Mason-Dixon Line, since Robeson refused to play to segregated theaters. Paul Robeson brought a quiet, subdued Othello to the stage, a man who "carried the chains of his race with him as weight" (Hankey, 1987).

The twentieth century has seen some of its greatest actors in the role of Othello. Sir Laurence Olivier portrayed him as a man who was the instrument of his own downfall. Orson Welles nearly bankrupted himself producing a film version of the play. The play last appeared on Broadway in 1982, with James Earl Jones commanding the stage with his characteristic dignity and nobility to Christopher Plummer's Iago and Diane Wiest's Desdemona.

In 1997, The Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, D.C. produced what its *Othello*, Patrick Stewart, called a "photo negative" production in which the Moor was white

photo: Bill Buntingham



Derrick Lee Weeden and Allison Batty in CST's 2008 production of *Othello*, directed by Marti Maraden

# A PLAY COMES TO LIFE

and his Venice black. The production's director, Jude Kelly, said about this non-traditional choice: "I don't think we're trying to make any more major a point than Shakespeare himself was trying to make, we're just making it differently. What's fascinating for me is that you have 22 African-American actors onstage who know what racism is about, and one white British actor who may know the effects of racism but has never experienced it the way they have. So the images of racial hostility flip back and forth."

In 1999, *Othello* returned to the stage of the Royal Shakespeare Company, featuring Ron Fearon as a relatively young title character. The lines that reference Othello's age were largely cut from this otherwise traditional production. 2007 saw the first *Othello* at the reconstructed Globe Theatre in London. The production, which featured Eamonn Walker and Zoe Tapper as Othello and Desdemona, garnered acclaim from audiences and critics alike.

*Othello* returns to Chicago Shakespeare Theater this season after a 13-year absence. In 1995, Paul Butler played the title character under Barbara Gaines' direction in a production that focused on "the pervasive and incessant clash of two cultures; the story of a man who aspires to belong to a world that is not his own, and who becomes victim to its racism, and to his own deep and monstrous terrors." (*Stagebill*, 1995) An original haunting, percussive score, composed by Lloyd King and performed by three musicians in traditional African dress, reminded the audience of Othello's state of isolation, a man alone in a foreign land. Now in 2008, acclaimed director—and Artistic Director of Canada's Stratford Festival—Marti Maraden tackles this great play on CST's stage, with the accomplished actor Derrick Lee Weeden taking on the title role.



## A LOOK BACK AT OTHELLO ON FILM

More than 20 film and television versions and adaptations of *Othello* have been made. From the silent German film version by Dmitri Buchowetzki in the 1920s, to Bollywood's of-the-moment take on the story in 2006, *Othello* has proven one of Shakespeare's most popular

works on the big screen. *Othello* was also produced frequently for television from the 1950s to the 1990s and was even made into an animated short version in the early 1990s.

Of the several notable film versions, one of the most critically well received was Orson Welles' *The Tragedy of Othello: The Moor of Venice*. It won the Grand prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 1952, but was not released in the US until 1955. Welles' movie was filmed over the course of three years in Venice and Portugal, and production was halted when Welles, who self-financed the project, ran out of money. The cast starred Welles as Othello, Suzanne Cloutier as Desdemona, and Michael MacLiammoir as Iago.

Also notable on film is Stuart Burge's cinematic version of the National Theatre's 1964 stage performance at the Old Vic, with Laurence Olivier as Othello, Maggie Smith as Desdemona, Frank Finlay as Iago, and Jane Redman as Emilia. When it opened in the US, all four leading actors were nominated for Oscars.



photo: Bill Burlingham

Derrick Lee Weeden in CST's 2008 production of *Othello*, directed by Marti Maraden

# A PLAY COMES TO LIFE

Oliver Parker's 1995 film version with Laurence Fishburne as Othello marked the first time an African-American played the title role in a feature film adaptation. Acclaimed Shakespearean actor and filmmaker Kenneth Branagh played opposite Fishburne as Iago. The film's release coincided with the O.J. Simpson trial, which may have contributed to how little critical attention it received from a nervous press at a time when issues of race were so negatively pervasive in the media. Branagh earned a nomination for a Screen Actors Guild Award and Fishburne was nominated for an Image Award for their respective roles in this version, driven by strong performances and a strikingly realistic interpretation of Shakespeare's text.

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*The original release date for the film coincided with the Columbine shootings. Because it portrayed violence and murder in a high school setting, its release was delayed nearly three years.*

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In addition to these film versions that closely follow Shakespeare's original text, several other screen adaptations of the *Othello* story have been made. The 1947 movie *A Double Life*, starring Ronald Colman, tells the story of an actor playing Othello who essentially "becomes" the part and is filled with the character's murderous jealousy. *All Night Long*, which premiered in 1961, also updates the *Othello* story. Set in the world of jazz musicians, this film showcases some of the best jazz artists of the time, including Charlie Mingus and Dave Brubeck. Richard Attenborough plays the lead as Rod Hamilton. Richie Havens, of Woodstock fame, appeared in *Catch My Soul* (also known as *Santa Fe Satan*) a 1974 rock musical adaptation.

Tim Blake Nelson's 2001 film *O*, originally called *The One*, is a modern-day take on Shakespeare's story. In Nelson's adaptation, Odin James, a black basketball player in an almost exclusively white boarding school, falls for Desi, the most popular girl at school. Hugo, the son of the basketball team's coach, plots to make Odin doubt Desi's love—with

extreme consequences. Julia Stiles stars as Desi, opposite Mekhi Phifer as Odin. The original release date for the film coincided with the Columbine shootings. Because it portrayed violence and murder in a high school setting, its release was delayed nearly three years.

*Omkara*, a 2006 adaptation by filmmaker Vishal Bharadwaj, uses Shakespeare's story as a starting point for an exploration of India's caste system. By taking what is traditionally a question of race and transforming it into an issue of caste, Bharadwaj creates a film that is alternately visually stunning and disturbingly gritty, while retaining Shakespeare's story of love and betrayal powerfully at its core.



## A CONVERSATION WITH DIRECTOR MARTI MARADEN

Director of Education Marilyn Halperin and Associate Director of Education Beatrice Bosco spoke with guest director Marti Maraden in late October 2007 when she visited Chicago for production meetings at CST. Returning to CST after directing *Much Ado About Nothing* here in 2006, Ms. Maraden serves as Artistic Director at the Stratford Festival of Canada.

**Q:** Working on this play, what have you found that has surprised you or that has caught your imagination?

**A:** How small the play is. I don't mean small in theme or importance or heart, but really this play is ultimately about six or seven people on whose lives we focus. That doesn't mean other roles such as Brabantio, the broken-hearted father of Desdemona, are of no consequence. They are complex humans and essential to the story-telling. However, this is a very domestic play. It really is about a husband and a wife and something that happens to them, which destroys their potential for the happiness they surely would have known. Throughout huge sweeps of the play, there are scenes containing only five characters, and many prolonged scenes between just two people.

# A PLAY COMES TO LIFE

**Q:** *How are we to understand Brabantio?*

**A:** With a father like Brabantio, so grief-stricken by his daughter's marriage to a man he can't accept as her husband because of his race, we are challenged to see both the ugliness of his bigotry and to accept his genuine heartbreak. And through him we see how that bigotry toward Othello lurks in the worlds of Venice and Cyprus, and beyond.

**Q:** *How have you come to understand the relationship between Desdemona and Othello?*

**A:** While I think they are a man and woman who are very sexually alive to each other, theirs is also a marriage of two people who are soulmates, who are meant to be together, who are well matched in sensibility and imagination—and who feel true love for each other. What gets destroyed is something that might have been very beautiful and successful.

Desdemona chooses a truly admirable man, just as Imogen does in *Cymbeline*. They are both women with so much to offer—they are very intelligent, and have enormous heart, and both seek in a partner someone who shares that greatness of heart. Desdemona is a very young woman who for the first time encounters someone who tells her stories of incredible experiences, courage and bravery. We see someone greatly admiring the exploits, the stratagems, and the intelligence that are all part of being a general, a great and generous leader of men. But it's more than that. She also falls in love with what he has experienced in the way of deprivation, of being enslaved, being hurt, going through hellish situations. Othello's experiences awaken in her a sympathy that's at once wifely and maternal. There's something that makes her pity what he has had to go through, as well as admire it. I think both feelings make her love him, and they are the very feelings that Othello responds to and that have made him fall in love with her.

He was a career soldier who might never have married, but this one young woman awakens love in him with her sympathy and her ability to listen. Needing Desdemona by his side, he asks for the senators' permission as he departs for Cyprus saying "Vouch with me, heaven, I therefore beg it not to please the palate of my appetite..."—that is, he needs Desdemona to accompany him not just to have her in his bed—"but to be free and bounteous to her mind." In other words, I want Desdemona to accompany me because I know her as a wonderful human being with whom I want to talk and live and philosophize. I think this is key to their relationship.

**Q:** *And where does Iago fit in to their relationship and to the world they live in?*

**A:** A grave danger with this play is for people to think that Iago is somebody who has a Machiavellian scheme from the beginning and he knows what he is going to do and what the consequences of it will be—that Othello will kill Desdemona and will take his own life. Rather, Iago is a discontented man with a deep-seated grudge who believes falsely that Othello may have slept with his wife Emilia and who resents Michael Cassio's promotion. He is an opportunist who takes advantage of events as they occur. His revenge seems petty at first but eventually horrific possibilities evolve which he pursues, going down a road that inevitably has to unravel; inevitably somebody is



photo: Bill Burtlingham

Director Marti Maraden, Derrick Lee Weeden and Allison Batty prepare for CST's upcoming production of *Othello*.

# A PLAY COMES TO LIFE

going to say something that's going to make somebody think. And eventually he knows this perfectly well and must improvise at a faster and faster pace.

Whatever pathology in Iago's brain engenders this scheme, he clearly has that gift of being charming and making people believe his lies. You only need to look at sociopaths, who are almost inevitably described as charming and convincing, right?

I think Iago fundamentally can never really get inside other people. He can read them, that's a different thing. But because Iago thinks people are corrupt, because he's cynical about life, in the end he likely expects people to behave a certain way because that's what he would do.

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*All the words associated with Iago show admiration for him. So if we are to say that Othello is deluded by Iago, then we must assume that everybody else is, too.*

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**Q:** *How do you view Othello, then, as he gives way to Iago?*

**A:** The big mistake is for people to think that Othello is somehow naïve. Why doesn't he suspect Iago and how could he doubt his wife so? The fact is we have to remember over and over again that Desdemona, Iago's own wife Emilia, Cassio and even Roderigo, the only one ultimately suspicious—all victims of Iago's machinations—and everybody who knows him, thinks that Iago is a great guy. How many of the characters, not just Othello, use the word "honest" in association with his name? All the words associated with Iago show admiration for him. So if we are to say that Othello is deluded by Iago, then we must assume that everybody else is, too. And it's my job to make it clear, and I hope I can, how everybody admires Iago, how much everyone is deceived by him.

Iago is profoundly clever and plausible in his deception of Othello. Nevertheless, Othello is unquestionably culpable in not trusting his own deepest instincts about his lovely wife. This is a journey of understanding that Derrick and I will explore throughout the rehearsal process. We've had

a number of conversations already on this subject. We both recognize that Othello, in Shakespeare's words, was a man that "loved not wisely, but too well." He failed to listen to the voice inside him telling him that Desdemona was for him the one true and perfect pearl. But we are all capable of being subject to influences outside of ourselves. I believe the play in many ways is about being tested in ways we can't anticipate. We have no idea how any of us would respond to dire circumstances until they are upon us. When Othello is put to the test, he unexpectedly and horribly begins treading the terrible path of jealousy.

**Q:** *And who is Emilia in this very complicated set of interpersonal dynamics?*

**A:** Emilia is a very ordinary woman. She's not a Lady; she's probably a middle-class woman who displays no remarkable qualities early on in the play. She says in response to Desdemona's question that, yes, she might have been unfaithful to her husband for the whole world. We don't see anything in Emilia that tells us that she is capable of greatness. But in the end, when the truth is more important than her own life is, she rises to the occasion and she becomes, in my view, someone of great stature. Truth is so deeply important to her, at any and all cost, that she will defend it and make known Iago's guilt and Desdemona's innocence and Othello's folly. And so, a woman who is ordinary becomes extraordinary.

**Q:** *What period do you plan on setting your production in, and what was behind your choice?*

**A:** My general preference with Shakespeare is to bring the plays forward in time, somewhat at least, but always to a time appropriate for the play in question. *Othello* feels so immediate and human, intimate and domestic. Elaborate period costumes can sometimes make us feel as if the events of the play happened a long time ago (this isn't always the case) and we lose the sense of immediacy. The characters in *Othello* aren't kings and queens. They are for the most part working soldiers, civilians, husbands and wives. What is wonderful about the early twentieth century (our period) is that the clothes look like ours but not *quite*. They are more elaborate and striking and a pleasure to the eye.

The period also affords a marvelous way to contrast Venice with Cyprus. We can achieve with Venice a sense of a centuries-old, rich and highly cultivated society. When we

# A PLAY COMES TO LIFE

arrive in Cyprus, we are first greeted with a bright Mediterranean sky in a colonial outpost. As the play progresses we hope to achieve a kind of film noir quality. The play starts out as fairly realistic, for want of a better word, but as it progresses, we will gradually lose the sense of our physical surroundings and with our lighting focus more and more on our characters psychological journeys, journeys which the audience will share in close-up.

Our scenic designer, Patrick Clark, has designed a very clever set with at times an entire wall of shutters onstage—you know how light through shutters creates that sense of light and shade, of that which is hidden and that which is revealed? It's a play where people lurk in shadows.

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*We are all capable of being subject to influences outside of ourselves. I believe the play in many ways is about being tested in ways we can't anticipate.*

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**Q:** *You've directed *The Merchant of Venice* in Stratford—another play in which the role of the “Other” is pivotal. Do you see an analogy between the characters of Shylock and Othello?*

**A:** There are some overlaps, certainly, but the quality of Otherness in *Othello* is very different than in *The Merchant of Venice* in which there is no admiration for Shylock. Shylock is a necessary evil to the Christians of Venice. The Jews were only allowed to follow two or three professions, usury being one of them. He had to be a money-lender. People needed his services, and they reviled the man because of what he was. And because he was very sharp and very good at it, that made them dislike him more. He was hated for being a Jew. There is definite racial awareness and bigotry in *Othello* regarding the title character but there's no dispute over what a great man he is. He's regarded as brilliantly gifted and he's greatly admired. The racial prejudice is there in Brabantio and Iago but you never feel it from characters like Michael Cassio or Montano, the governor of Cyprus. And, after all, Desdemona chose him as her husband. Nevertheless, Brabantio's words about his

daughter accusing Othello of using magic to win her, believing she would otherwise never have shunned “the wealthy, curled darlings of our nation” and run to “the sooty bosom of such a thing as thou,” are reinforced later in the play when Iago puts the same argument to Othello:

*Not to affect many proposed matches  
Of her own clime, complexion and degree,  
Whereto we see, in all things nature tends  
Fob! One may smell in such a will most rank,  
Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural.*

A great and good man comes to believe his wife's choice of him as a husband despite his Otherness is evidence that she must and has betrayed him. ■





## THEATER WARM-UPS

A brief physical and vocal warm-up can help your students move from a “classroom mode” to a “studio mode.” It sets the tone for a student learning Shakespeare in a theatrical sense as well as a literary sense.

Every actor develops his/her own set of physical and vocal warm-ups. Warm-ups help the actor prepare for rehearsal or performance not only physically, but also mentally. The actor has the chance to focus on the work at hand, forgetting all the day-to-day distractions of life, and beginning to assume the flexibility required to create a character. The body, the voice and the imagination are the actor’s tools.

### PHYSICAL WARM-UPS

#### GETTING STARTED

- creates focus on the immediate moment
- brings students to body awareness
- helps dispel tension

Begin by asking your students to take a comfortable stance with their feet shoulder-width apart, toes pointing straight ahead, knees relaxed. Ask them to inhale deeply through their noses, filling their lungs deep into their abdomen, and exhale through their mouths. Repeat this a few times and ask them to notice how their lungs fill like a six-sided box, creating movement in all six directions.

#### WARM-UP FROM THE TOP OF THE BODY DOWN (*approx. 7 to 10 minutes*)

- gentle movement helps increase circulation, flexibility, and body readiness,
- increases physical and spatial awareness

- Begin by doing head-rolls to the left and to the right, about four times each way, very slowly. Then do a series of shoulder rolls to the back and to the front, again very slowly, and emphasizing a full range of motion.
- Stretch each arm toward the ceiling alternately, and try to pull all the way through the rib cage, repeating this motion six to eight times.
- Next, with particular care to keep knees slightly bent, twist from the waist in each direction, trying to look behind. Again, repeat six to eight times.
- From a standing position, starting with the top of the head, roll down with relaxed neck and arms until the body is hanging from the waist. Ask the students to shake things around, making sure their bodies are relaxed. From this position, bend at the knees, putting both hands on the floor. Stretch back up to hanging. Repeat this action about four times. Then roll back up—starting from the base of the spine, stack each vertebra until the head is the last thing to come up.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- E. Repeat the deep breathing from the beginning of the warm-up. Ask the students to bring their feet together, bend their knees, and keeping their knees together ask the students to rotate their knees in a circle parallel to the ground six to eight times. Repeat in the other direction. Return to standing.
- F. Pick up the right foot, rotate it inward six to eight times, and then do the same with the left foot. Repeat with outward rotation of the foot. Take a few moments and shake out the entire body.



## VOCAL WARM-UPS *(To directly follow physical warm-up—approx. 7 min.)*

☞ helps connect physicality to vocality

☞ begins to open the imagination to performance possibilities

- A. Ask students to gently massage and pat the muscles of their faces. This will help wake up the facial muscles.
- B. Ask students to stick their tongues out as far as possible—repeat this with the tongue pointing up, down, and to each side. (This process will probably seem strange, but can be made silly and fun, while accomplishing the necessary vocal warm-up. When students see you going through these exercises with commitment, that’s often all they need to draw them in.) Repeat this exercise once or twice.
- C. Ask students to put their lips gently together and blow air through them, creating a “raspberry.”
- D. Next, hum, quietly, loudly, and across the entire vocal range. The vocal instrument loves to hum. Explore all the resonating spaces in the body, by moving the sound around. Humming helps to lubricate.
- E. Create the vowel sounds, overemphasizing each shape with the face —A, E, I, O, and U—with no break.
- F. Choose two or three tongue-twisters—there are some listed below. Again overemphasizing the shape of each sound with the lips, tongue, jaw, and facial muscles, begin slowly with each tongue-twister, and gradually speed up, repeating until the speed is such that the enunciation is lost.

## TONGUE TWISTERS

☞ red leather, yellow leather ...*(focus on the vertical motion of the mouth)*

☞ unique New York...*(focus on the front to back movement of the face)*

☞ rubber, baby, buggy, bumpers...*(focus on the clear repetition of the soft plosives)*

☞ Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers...*(focus on the clear repetition of hard plosives)*

One of the actors at Chicago Shakespeare Theater likes to describe the experience of acting Shakespeare as the “Olympics of Acting.” Shakespeare’s verse demands a very flexible vocal instrument, and an ability to express not only the flow of the text, but the emotional shifts which are suggested by the variations in rhythm and sound. In light of the sheer volume of words, some of which are rarely—if ever—used in modern vocabulary, the actor must also be prepared to help the audience with his body, as well. An actor acting Shakespeare must go through each word of his text, determine its meaning, and then express it clearly to his audience. This requires a very physically demanding style. The physical and vocal warm-up is the actor’s basis for each performance.



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



## STAGE PICTURES

- shows how varied interpretation is: there is no wrong answer
- encourages the students to interpret concepts with their whole bodies
- begins to show how the body interprets emotion

You will need a list of very strong descriptive, colorful, emotional words from the script for this activity. Ask your actor-students to begin walking around the room. Ask them to fill up the entire space, exploring pacing, what it would feel like to be a different weight, a different height, and ask them to move the center of their body into different places. Encourage them to see if they feel any emotional differences within these changes. Giving them about three minutes to explore these changes, see if you notice any particularly interesting discoveries. Encourage these discoveries without necessarily drawing focus to individual students, as this is a self-reflective activity, but perhaps suggest to the group they might “Try what it feels like if you slow your pace, hunch your shoulders, droop your head, and move your center into your knees.”

After a few minutes of this exploration, ask your actor-students to find a “neutral” walk. Explain that they are going to create a stage picture as an entire group. You will give them a word, and then count down from seven. After those seven beats, you will say freeze, and they must create a photograph of the word you have given them, with their entire body, collectively. Comment on the emotions you feel from their stage picture. After a couple of words, split the group in half—half will be in the space and half will be audience. Repeat the process, encouraging the audience’s reactions after each tableau. This might be a good time to discuss balance, stage direction, and the use of levels as effective variation for the audience’s visual interpretation. *(This activity should take about 10 minutes.)*

Shakespeare’s characters are often very physically broad. There were crippled characters, old people, clowns, star-crossed lovers, and more. These characters call for the actors to figure out how they move. If the character is greedy, should his center be in a big fat belly? The actor must be prepared to experiment with the character’s body.

## MIRRORING

- helps build trust within the ensemble
- encourages the students to “listen” with all their senses
- helps the students reach a state of “relaxed readiness,” which will encourage their impulses and discourage their internal censors

Either ask your actor-students to partner up, or count them off in pairs. Ask them to sit, comfortably facing their partner, in fairly close proximity. Explain to them that they are mirrors of each other. One partner will begin as the leader, and the other partner will move as their reflection. Explain to the actor-students that they must begin by using smaller, slower movements, and work up to the maximum range of movement that their partner can follow. Encourage the partners to make eye-contact and see each other as a whole picture, rather than following each other’s small motions with their eyes. Switch leaders and repeat. After the second leader has had a turn, ask the actor-students to stand and increase their range of movement. Switch leaders and repeat. After the second leader has had a turn, tell them that they should keep going, but there is no leader. See what happens, and then discuss. *(This activity should last about 10 minutes.)*

Many actors will tell you that learning the lines is the easy part; making it come out of their mouths as if for the first time is the hard part, especially with Shakespeare. Shakespeare can sound like a song, but how do you make it sound like real people talking to each other? Actors listen to each other, and try to respond to what they hear in the moment of the play. Listening is a very important part of acting; it keeps the moment real.



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

## COMMUNITY BUILDERS

Each of these exercises is meant to open and expand your students' imaginations, increase their sense of "ensemble" or teamwork, and bring them "into the moment." These are some of the most fundamental and crucial elements of an actor's training. Their imaginations will allow them to believe the situation of the play, their sense of ensemble will bring them together with their scene partners to create the relationships necessary to the movement of the play, and their willingness to be in the moment will allow them to live in the play in such a way as to make it believable to their audience. In each of these exercises the use of students as audience, and constructive reflection from that audience, will be helpful to the ensemble of your classroom. Remember, there is no wrong answer, only different interpretations—encourage them!



### ZING! BALL *(requires a soft ball about 8 to 12 inches in diameter)*

- helps the ensemble grow together
- helps the students let go of their internal "censor" and begin tapping into their impulses
- brings the physical and the vocal actor tools together

Ask the students to stand in a circle, facing in. Explain that the ball carries with it energy. This energy is like a feedback loop that increases the energy, speed, and focus of the entire group by the amount that each actor-student puts into the ball. The idea is to keep the ball moving in the circle without letting the energy drop. There should be no space between throw and catch. There should be no thought as to whom the actor-student will throw the ball to next. As the ball is thrown, to keep the intensity of the energy, the actor-student must make eye contact with the person he is throwing the ball to, and at the moment of release, the throwing actor-student should say "Zing!" Note: Encourage the actor-students to experiment with the way they say "Zing!" It could be loud or soft, in a character voice, or in whatever way they wish, as long as it is impulsive and with energy. *(This activity lasts about five minutes.)*

Shakespeare has love scenes, sword fights, betrayals, and all sorts of relationships in his plays. An ensemble must have the trust in each other to make a performance believable, without any of the actors getting hurt. They must be able to experiment, follow their impulses, and create character without the fear of failure. Shakespeare wrote many clues about his characters in his text, but the actor must be given license to find his character, and his relationship with the rest of the characters in the script.

### ZING! BALL (WITH NO BALL) *(approx. 5 to 7 min.)*

- asks the students to make their imagination clear to the ensemble
- focuses the students on physical detail

This exercise builds on Zing! Ball. Take the ball out of the circle and set it aside. Take an imaginary Zing! Ball out of your pocket. Grow this ball from a tiny rubber ball into a huge balloon. Using "Zing!," toss the ball to an actor-student across the circle, and as it floats down, ask the actor-student to catch it with the same weight and speed as you threw it. Then ask that actor-student to recreate the ball into a different weight and size, making it clear to the rest of the circle how they've changed it. In the same way as Zing! Ball, work around the circle.

The wide range of vocabulary in Shakespeare's plays can often be intimidating as one reads the scripts. The actor's job is to make the language clear, and this is often accomplished by very specific physical gesturing.



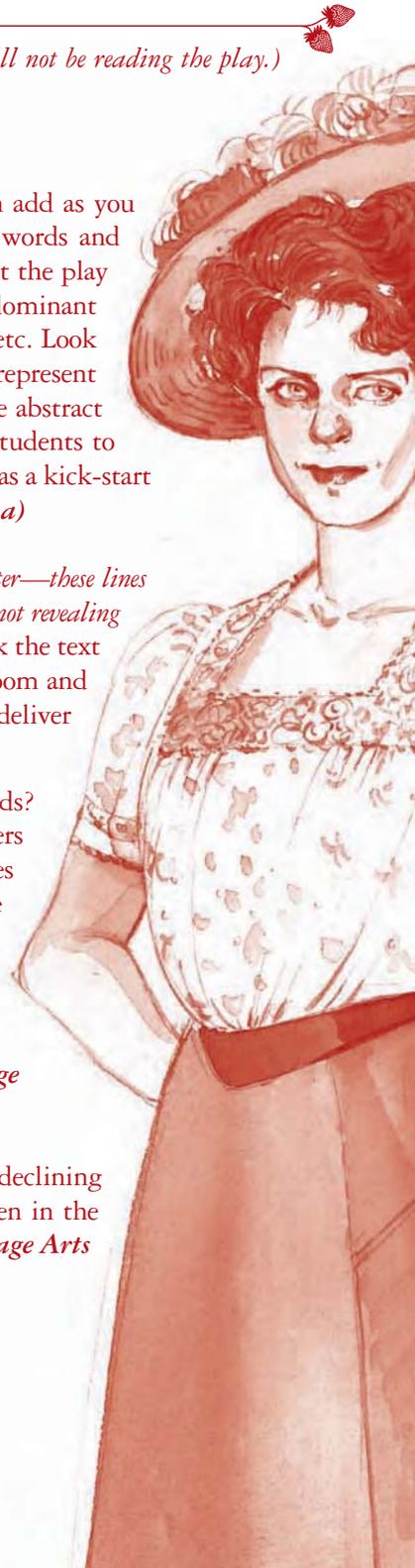


## BEFORE YOU READ THE PLAY

(This “Before You Read” section is also helpful in preparing students who will not be reading the play.)

### AS A CLASS

1. Create an *Othello* bulletin board to which you and your students can add as you read through and think about the play. Begin by posting images, words and phrases that represent anything you know (or think you know!) about the play before you start to read. Then include pictures of some of the play’s dominant images—night, a handkerchief, Desdemona’s bed, a purse of money, etc. Look for pictures that conjure up the play’s main characters—what images can you use to represent Othello, Iago, or Desdemona? Don’t confine yourself to pictures that are realistic—use abstract representations of these characters as well. As you work through the play, encourage students to add their own pictures, quotes, related phrases, articles to the board—and always use it as a kick-start for discussion. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goal 1B4a, 1B5a, 1C4a, 1C5a, 2B3a*)
2. Choose 30 lines from *Othello* that are rich in Shakespeare’s language or are descriptive of character—these lines need not occur continuously in the text. Distribute a line or lines to each student on a slip of paper, not revealing which character says it in the play. Read the line(s) and, as you walk around the room, speak the text aloud again and again without addressing anyone. Now, have them walk around the room and deliver the line(s) directly to your classmates. Quickly form a circle, and have everyone deliver his or her line in turn.  
  
Sit down in the circle and discuss the lines. What questions do you have about the words? Imagine what this play is about based solely on the words you’ve heard its characters speak. What do you imagine about the character who speaks your line? Did you hear lines that seem to come from the same character? All ideas are encouraged, and none can be wrong! This is your time to listen to the language and begin to use your imagination to think about the world of the play you’ve just entered. As you go through the play, keep an eye or ear out for the line(s) you were assigned. When you come across the line, think about it in the context of the play. Is anything surprising about its placement? Its meaning in context? The character from which it comes? (*Illinois English Language Arts Goal 1B4a, 1B5a, 1C4a, 1C5a, 4B4b*)
3. Scholar David Bevington writes that “Shakespeare is fascinated by this phenomenon of declining reputations.” As a class, think about recent examples of this type of decline you’ve seen in the news. Why do you think that such stories interest us so much? (*Illinois English Language Arts Goal 1C4c, 4A4a, 4B4b, 4B5b*)



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

## IN SMALL GROUPS

4. James Andreas wrote, “Racism cannot long survive without the verbal and symbolic apparatus that generates and sustains it: the names, the jokes... In short, racism is a cultural virus that is verbally transmitted and its antidote must therefore be verbally transmitted as well.” At the turn of the seventeenth century when Shakespeare lived and wrote, the meaning of “black” included “deeply stained with dirt, soiled, dirty, foul...” Look up the word “black” in several dictionaries (including the O.E.D. [Oxford English Dictionary] if your school has a hard copy or on-line access). Note all the word’s different uses. Now do the same for “white” and “fair,” words used to describe Desdemona. Divide the definitions into two categories, those with positive connotations and those with negative ones. Discuss your findings as a class. As you read or watch *Othello*, listen for when, how, by and about whom these three terms are used. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goal 1A3b, 1A5b*)

5. So often in Shakespeare (as in other texts), the context will help lead you to a word’s meaning—even if the word is totally unfamiliar. Leaf through the script to find three words you’re pretty sure will be unknown to everyone. Using the footnotes in your text (or a lexicon of Shakespeare’s words if you have one in the classroom), look up and write out the definition that seems to make the most sense in the context of the story. Next, make up two other convincing definitions for each word that the class will likely believe—even if they’re nowhere near what the word actually means, it’s your job to make the false definitions sound real. In small groups, read aloud the line in the play in which the word appears. Then, read the three possible definitions for the word, including the right one—be sure not to give yourself away; each definition should be read as if it could be the right one! Have the rest of the group vote for which definition is correct. If you like, you can keep score—you earn one point for every definition that you guess correctly, and one point for each vote your false definition receives from the group. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1A4a, 1A5a, 1A4b, 1B4a, 1C4a, 1C5a, 4B4b*)

6. In writing his plays, Shakespeare readily moves back and forth between prose and verse. It’s easy to see on the page: the prose has margins justified on both the left and the right; the verse has shorter lines, justified on the left alone, and with capitalization at the beginning of each new line. There is no hard and fast rule that dictates Shakespeare’s choices, but typically, verse is reserved for upper class characters, and prose for ordinary people. But he also uses the two different forms to set a different mood, or to indicate a change in the character’s state of mind. It’s important to explore the rhythm and pace of the verse and to feel how differently this text moves from the prose sections. As you read through the play, consider the following questions:

- ☞ Are there characters who speak in both prose and verse?
- ☞ In which situations do the characters in *Othello* use prose? When do they use verse?
- ☞ What might Shakespeare be trying to communicate by having characters switch from one to the other, or by having some characters speak exclusively in prose or exclusively in verse?

(*Illinois English Language Arts Goal 1B4b, 1B5b, 1C4c, 4A4a*)



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



7. In pairs, read aloud the verse passage below that has been stripped of all punctuation and internal capitalization. Read it again several times aloud, listening for the rhythm and to find the sense of the verse. When you feel you've grasped the meaning, punctuate and compare with your text. Hint: In Shakespeare's later plays, he frequently experiments with "midstops"—that is, sentences ending in the middle of a verse line. There are six such lines in this passage. What do you think that tells us about Iago's emotional stage in this famous soliloquy found in 1.3, lines 381—403? (*Illinois English Language Arts Goal 1B4b, 1B5b, 1C4c, 4A4a*)

*Thus do I ever make my fool my purse  
For I mine own gain'd knowledge should profane  
If I would time expend with such a snipe  
But for my sport and profit I hate the Moor  
And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets  
He has done my office I know not if't be true  
But I for mere suspicion in that kind  
Will do as if for surety he holds me well  
The better shall my purpose work on him  
Cassio's a proper man let me see now  
To get his place and to plume up my will  
In double knavery how how let's see  
After some time to abuse Othello's ear  
That he is too familiar with his wife  
He hath a person and a smooth dispose  
To be suspected framed to make women false  
The Moor is of a free and open nature  
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so  
And will as tenderly be led by the nose  
As asses are  
I have't it is engender'd hell and night  
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light*

8. Working in pairs, select one character from the *Dramatis Personae* to explore through the play. Skim through the play and mark any of your character's speeches or lines that seem like they might tell you something important about that character. Select 3–4 small segments that seem to best portray your character and prepare to present to the class and defend your ideas! This is the way that Elizabethan actors learned their roles. They were given just their own lines with the cue lines that preceded theirs, and were never handed an entire script. (At the end of your study, go back and repeat this exercise with the same character. Present again, and as a class, discuss the differences.) (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1C4b, 1C4d, 1C5d, 2A4b, 2B4c, 4B4a*)
9. Choose four or five (or more!) production photos from various Othello film/television/theater interpretations (try the Internet Movie Database ([www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)), or Google "Othello production stills"). In groups of three or four, write headlines and captions for the photos as they might appear in a newspaper or magazine. Imagine what the people are saying and what they're thinking; figure out the relationship among the people in the photo, whom they might be, etc. Present your picture and headline or caption to the class. (You can use this activity to introduce the play's themes, or after the students have gotten into the text and have started thinking about the themes themselves.) (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1B4a, 1C4a, 1Cb, 1C4d, 2B4a, 3C4a, 4B4b*)

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

## IN YOUR OWN WORDS

You may wish to have students begin their own *Othello* journals in which they can respond to the Personal Narrative and many of the On Your Own prompts found throughout this section of your teacher handbook, and also record their own thoughts, questions, reflections, etc. as they work through the play. Encourage students to include images, phrases, and any everyday references (cultural, literary, entertainment, etc.) that remind them of the play in their “outside” lives.



10. Before beginning your exploration of *Othello*, it's useful to think about your personal connections to the themes, situations and emotions surrounding Shakespeare's characters. In your *Othello* journal or other notes, explore one of the following that has particular resonance for you. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 3A4, 3B4a*)

-  Think about a time when you were hurt by somebody and, in trying to protect yourself from that hurt, ended up causing more pain to yourself or others. What kind of hurt were you trying to avoid? Is it a natural human response to try to protect ourselves from hurt? Are there times when our protective behavior actually gets in our way? How? In looking back at the situation, can you think of another way in which you might have responded that might have changed the outcome?
-  All of us at one time or another piece together bits of information we have about a situation and come up with our own story, our own picture of possible outcomes. Think about a time recently, no matter how insignificant the incident was, that you incorrectly predicted what would happen in a situation. Given certain facts, perhaps you came to a conclusion that didn't, in fact, pan out. What were the facts? Which pieces did you add to the story? Why do you think we tend to jump to conclusions, to determine the outcome of situations that haven't yet run their natural course? Did your false conclusion in any way affect your own behavior, or even the real outcome of the situation?
-  Think about a time when somebody falsely accused you of something. What were the circumstances? How did they present their accusation? How did you respond? What feelings did the situation stir up about yourself and your accuser? Looking back, do you wish you had responded in another way to the accusation? If so, why?

## ON YOUR OWN

11. Choose a character to follow through the play. What is your initial impression of the character based on the Dramatis Personae and/or the “Who's Who” section of this handbook? How do other characters feel about your character? What do they think and say about him or her? You can use your *Othello* journal or other diary to record these text references, citing act, scene, and line numbers. (This exercise can be followed up after reading the play with a class activity. See the “After Reading the Play” section.) (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1C4d, 1C5d*)
12. Shakespeare was a descriptive writer—which any of us can be when we observe our subject matter very closely. Choose a place to sit and free-write for 10 minutes on your own. Pick a location that is active, like a school hallway, the cafeteria, or the gym. Keep writing throughout, and don't stop writing until the time is up. Just write what you see, hear, smell, and how the place feels. Make your words as descriptive as possible. Poets like Shakespeare rely on metaphors—comparisons of seemingly dissimilar things (like comparing love to food) to describe abstract emotions and sensory experience. Test out your metaphorical skills! (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 2A4a*)



## AS YOU READ THE PLAY

### ACT I

#### AS A CLASS

1. Take another look at the first few lines of *Othello*; you'll notice two different characters speak about ownership, about money, about the value of a person as if she were a commodity to be bought and sold. The late sixteenth century when Shakespeare was writing his plays was a time of dramatic social change in England. "The feudal world of honor, fidelity, and service is becoming the bourgeois world of property and contractual relations," writes scholar Mark Rose. In the second half of the 1500s, the monastic lands were put on the market place, and about one-sixth of English land changed hands. Suddenly, your identity was not determined solely on the basis of heredity, but also upon what you came to own. Ownership and power became more and more synonymous.

What can you infer about the rest of the play from these opening lines? What are some of the consequences of thinking of other people as commodities, or possessions that can be "owned," "discarded," "acquired"? As you read through *Othello*, think about Rose's comment, and look for other places where human relations are referenced in terms of price, cost, and possession. Add the references as you find them—and any you might encounter in your everyday life—to a list compiled by the class. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 2A4a, 2A5d*)

#### IN SMALL GROUPS

2. Shakespeare takes his time before introducing us to Desdemona in 1.3. We've heard much said about her already—by Iago, Roderigo, her father Brabantio, and her new husband. In your groups, review the various—and varying—comments that we hear about Desdemona before her entrance at 1.3.170. Gather what you feel to be some of the key lines that describe Desdemona from these four men's points of view, and say them aloud to one another in your group. How do Desdemona's lines through the end of this scene match (or contrast) these male perceptions of her? With one person taking selected lines from Desdemona in which she talks of her feelings for and marriage to Othello, compare and contrast her words with the other characters' words about her. What do you discover? Compare your work with other groups' and discuss as a class. How do the differences or similarities among Desdemona's and the gentlemen's words compare to contemporary society—do women tend to view themselves differently than the men with whom they interact? Support your argument with examples from the media, books, movies, music, etc. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 2B4c, 2B5b*)
3. Towards the beginning of 1.2, Iago swears "by Janus," the two-faced Roman god who simultaneously faces in opposite directions. Why is it significant that Iago chooses this god to swear by? Standing back to back with a partner, return to Iago's lines, 1.2.1-53. Have one partner read Iago's words aloud, pausing at the end of each sentence for the other to give voice to what Iago's "inner monologue"—or what he's really thinking in the scene. How different do you think it is from what he's really saying? Why doesn't Iago simply say what he's thinking? Think about a time you were in a situation in which you found yourself saying something other than—perhaps even the opposite of—what you felt. Why did you behave that way? What was the result? (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 2B4a, 2B3c, 4B5a*)

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

4. Improvise a scene between a parent and child in which the child is asserting his or her own decision in the face of parental opposition. Look at this scene from the perspective of three different “children”:

☞ a five-year-old child

☞ a student your age

☞ a 40-year-old adult

Now, perform scene 1.3 in which Desdemona acknowledges she has married Othello out of love and was not bewitched as her father assumes. As a class, discuss the similarities and differences between your scenes and Shakespeare’s scene of filial disobedience. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals, 2B5a, 4a4b, 4B4b*)

5. Before you move on, make a list in your notes or reading journal of all the significant characters you have met so far in *Othello*. Add a second column in which you describe as specifically as you can what each of these characters wants (which, incidentally, may change as the story progresses). In a third column, note the act, scene and line numbers that created this impression for you. Which characters so far have gotten what they wanted? Does it seem likely that they will retain it? Why or why not? As you go through the play act by act, return to your list, filling it in with new characters you meet, and making notes in a fourth column to indicate when they change their goals, or when you change your mind about them. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1B4a, 1B5a, 1C4d, 1C5d, 1C5f, 2A4b, 2A5b, 2B4c*)



## IN YOUR OWN WORDS

6. Take a moment to consider Desdemona’s actions in Act I—she openly defies her father and asks to accompany her new husband on a dangerous crusade against the Turkish fleet. Have you ever defied your parents/guardians and done something they thought was dangerous? What was the result? Imagine you are Desdemona’s best friend and, in your *Othello* journal or elsewhere, write a letter to her either supporting her decision to marry and follow Othello, or trying to dissuade her from going with him. Use examples from your own life, other pieces of literature, etc. to make your argument more persuasive. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 2B5a, 3C3a, 3C5a*)

## ACT II

### IN SMALL GROUPS

7. Today, Shakespeare’s plays are rarely performed in their entirety. If they were, most would last between three and four hours—even without an intermission! You can learn more about Shakespeare’s use of language by reducing a longer speech or scene while trying to retain its original meaning, its poetic language, and its place in moving the plot forward.

In small groups, work together to edit 2.1—your goal should be to cut approximately half of the 290-plus lines of the scene as it is written in your text. Many productions of *Othello* actually cut the entire first two scenes of Act 2. Compare the cut versions of all the groups, and discuss your reasoning for cutting certain lines, while leaving others intact. What effect might it have on a production to cut the scenes entirely? What is lost by this decision? Is there anything to be gained by cutting Shakespeare’s text? If so, what do you think that is? (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 3B4c*)

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



8. Look back at Act II. In your group, come up with just one word that describes the mood or atmosphere of each scene. Then title each scene, choosing a title that reflects both the mood and the action. How is each scene informed by the scene that comes before it? How does it inform the scene that comes directly after it? (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1B4a, 1C4b, 1C5b, 1C4d, 1C5d, 4A4a, 4B4b*)

9. “But” is a very short but very loud word...

*You are lord of all my duty;  
I am hitherto your daughter. BUT here's my husband...*  
(1.3.182-3)

*Cassio, I love thee,  
BUT never more be officer of mine.*  
(2.3.229-230)

In groups of three, take Desdemona’s and Othello’s lines above, and think how you might physicalize them, how you were take them from the page to stage. As one person speaks the line, the other two should consider how they might personify or characterize the two poles that the speaker is working between. Play with the possibilities!

As you read through the rest of *Othello*, listen for the “but’s” in people’s speech. Does one character have a corner on the market? When are “but’s” spoken? What effect do they have on the speaker? On the listener? Be on the lookout for other “wee words” in Shakespeare’s language. Can you find others that seem to matter as much as “but” seems to? (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1A5b, 1C4d, 2A4b*)

## ON YOUR OWN

10. Othello has his herald announce a great celebration that will take place in Cyprus in honor of his marriage and the defeat of the Turkish fleet. What do you think that celebration was like? Create a picture of the festivities—either a literal piece of visual art in any medium, a scene or tableau in class, or a piece of creative writing. Try to include as many details as you can to create as clear a picture of the party as possible. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 3C3a, 3C3b*)

## ACT III

### IN SMALL GROUPS

11. Someplace in Act III always marks the midpoint of Shakespeare’s five-act plays. In your small groups, imagine that you are directors who must decide where to place your intermission. Take a look back at Act III, follow its course of action and decide where you would choose to take a break. (For some ideas, think about how television positions its commercial breaks.) Reconvene as a class and discuss your ideas—then compare your intermission placement to that of the Chicago Shakespeare Theater’s production. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1B5a, 1C4a, 1C5a, 1C4c, 4A4a, 4A4b, 4B4b, 4B5b*)



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

12. A tableau is a wordless, still picture made by bodies assuming certain poses and conveying a particular mood or image. A play often ends with a tableau that the director creates with his/her actors to leave a dramatic impression in the mind of the audience as it leaves the theater. Choose a scene in Act III that you think could be represented by using a single tableau. Create your stage pictures and share them with the class. You can also do this exercise with each act, or use a series of three or even five tableaux to show the progression of the entire play. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1A4a, 1A4b, 1B4a, 1C4a, 1C4b, 2B3a, 2B4a, 4A4b, 4B4b*)



## IN YOUR OWN WORDS

13. List five of the major characters in *Othello*. Write a single sentence for each that begins, “What I most want is...” Remember, there’s not just one right answer! Then write a sentence for each character beginning “What I’m most afraid of is...” Is there ever a situation when what one most wants is also what one most fears? Now complete these two questions for yourself. What do you find? Which character in *Othello* is most similar to you based on this exercise? Which one is least like you? What, if anything, is surprising about that? (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1C5b, 2B3a*)

## ACT IV

### AS A CLASS

14. Read Othello’s lines 4.1.35-41 aloud while walking around the room. Change directions by at least 90° at every punctuation mark. Next, compare his manner of speech in this scene to that found at the beginning of the play. What do you discover? Has his language changed? Has his speech pattern changed? What can we learn about his journey as a character from examining the way he speaks and the way it changes over the course of the play? Do you notice a change in any other character? If so, what do you observe? Be sure to use specific examples from the text. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1C4e, 2A3a*)

### IN SMALL GROUPS

15. In 4.1 59-90, Iago makes four quick and deep jabs about Othello’s manhood. With a partner, first find the four references in Shakespeare’s script. Practice saying them aloud—with feeling and on your feet!—until you are comfortable with the words and they are “yours.” Now, working as a pair or small group, imagine a situation that might incite one person to say these words to another. The circumstances of your scene don’t have to have anything at all to do with *Othello*, but it must incorporate these four lines of Iago’s.

Afterwards, share your original scene with the rest of the class. Discuss why Iago might choose this particular means of speaking to Othello at this moment in the play. What is there about Othello and about the society in which the story takes place that makes Iago’s terms particularly appropriate or inappropriate? (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1A5b*)



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



## ACT V

### IN SMALL GROUPS

16. Take a look at the final scene of the play and all its brutality. Working together in a small group, decide how you would stage this scene so that it would have the most impact on your audience. Where would you place the bed in relation to the audience? How brutal would the stage violence be—is there a “non-traditional” or more poetic way for you to show the brutality of these final moments, or would you want to both shock and awe your audience? Be sure you can justify your choices with support from the text. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1B3b, 1C5b*)
17. Look back through Act V and create a signature gesture for each of the characters you’ve met. Present your group’s ideas to the rest of your class. Discuss these gestures and how you chose them. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1C4d, 1C5d, 2A4d, 4A4a, 4B4b, 4B5b*)

### IN YOUR OWN WORDS

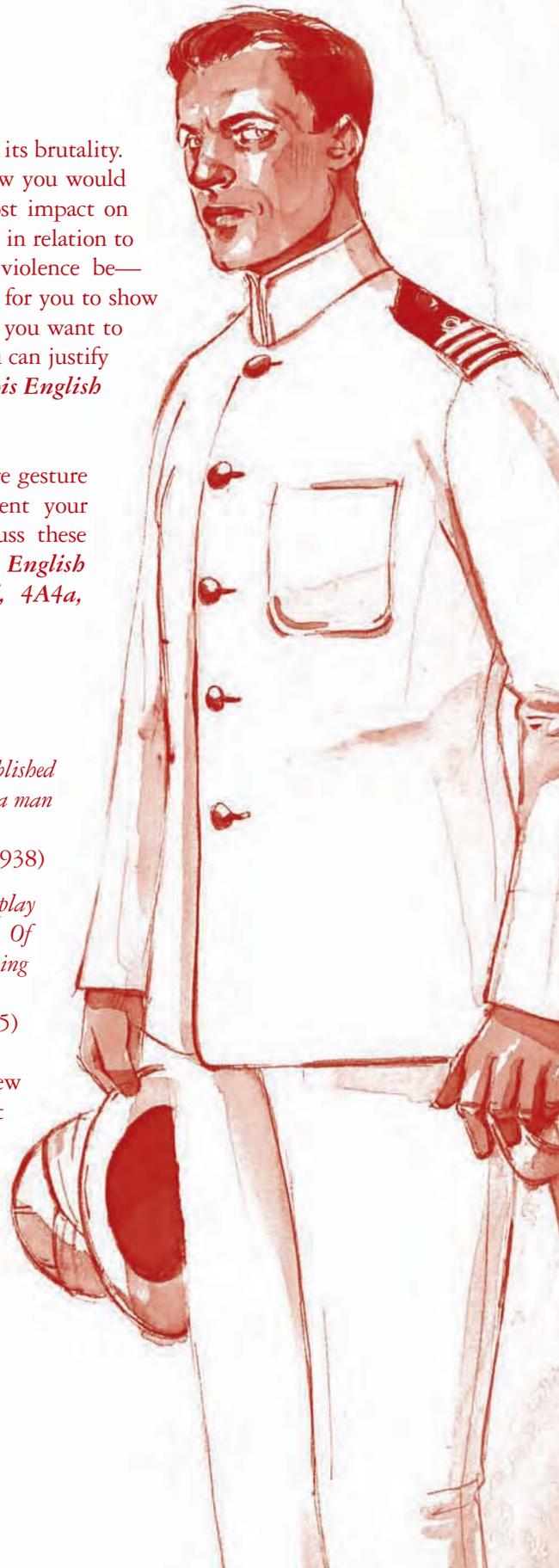
18. [Othello] pictures through the hero not only the destruction of an established way of life, but the birth of a new order. Othello in his final soliloquy is a man of more capacious mind than the Othello who first meets us.

-E.M.W. Tillyard (1938)

*Othello's... is a story of blindness and folly, of a man run mad. As the play is planned, evil works all but unquestioned in him until it is too late. Of battle between good and evil, his soul the battleground, even of a clarifying consciousness of the evil atwork in him, there is nothing.*

-Harley Granville-Barker (1945)

Tillyard and Granville-Barker claim very different points of view about the Othello we see at the end of the play. Thinking about Othello’s final speech, what is your point of view? Is Othello a hero who has come to a deeper self-understanding, or is he one who, at his story’s end, still understands very little? Use examples from the text to support your view. Record your thoughts in your *Othello* journal. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1B4b, 1C4c*)



## AFTER READING THE PLAY



### IN SMALL GROUPS

1. *Othello is thus a true, and sublime, love tragedy—not a true-love romance with a tragic ending brought about chiefly by a heavy villain. It is Romeo and Juliet matured and recomposed. In writing the earlier play Shakespeare was aware, though not deeply aware, that the tragedy of love, when supreme is also the tragedy of hate. In Othello those two passions comparatively superficial in all of his previous stories are intensified to the uttermost and deeply interwoven... Othello is Shakespeare's, and surely the world's, supreme secular tragic poem of human love divine.*  
-G.R. Elliott (1953)

Now that you've read (or seen) both *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*, think about Elliott's quote. In your small group, return to each play, and discuss where love and hate were rooted in each. Now, divide your group in half again. Return to the scripts of both plays, one group exploring *Othello*, the other *Romeo and Juliet*. Your task is to find key lines in your play that express these two strong passions—be searching for 20-30 lines. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1B4b, 1C3c, 2A4b, 2B5a, 4B5b*)

2. *....if Iago 'represents' something that is in Othello, so equally does Desdemona.*  
-Jane Adamson (1980)

What do you think about Adamson's comment? In these three apparently different natures, what are the commonalities? In small groups, discuss Adamson's comment. Do you perceive aspects of Othello that reflect a commonality with Iago? With Desdemona? Return to the script, and see if you can pinpoint a phrase, a word or a line that seem to bridge each pair of characters. Read these lines aloud to one another. Then decide how you might present one of your paired sets of lines to the rest of the class. What feeling do you want to evoke? You may have members of the group who are not speaking the lines either echo, speak chorally, or dramatize the words as they are spoken. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goal 1B4b, 1C5c, 1C5e*)

3. Return to the play and explore several of the key lines in which the words "black," "white" and "fair" are spoken. Discuss their definitions as you discovered them before you began reading the script, and in the context of who uses each word, and when. Has your personal conception of any of these words changed after reading the play? Why or why not? (*Illinois English Language Arts Goal 1A3b, 1A5b*)
4. In groups of four or five, choose a character from the play and pull a series of lines that tell you something about him or her, either through the character's own words, or what's said about him or her by other characters. As a group, decide how you will present your character to the class given what you've discovered and using specific pieces of text. You can recite the lines in a row, take parts, repeat and echo certain lines while others are being spoken, move around, etc. Then, be prepared to answer questions, and defend your choices of characteristic lines! (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1C4b, 1C5b, 3B4c, 3C5b, 4B4b*)

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



5. In small groups, look through your *Othello* journal and use what you've learned about the character you chose to track through the play to re-tell the story of *Othello* from your character's perspective. Discuss these different retellings of the story either as yourselves or—for a challenge—in character! (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1C4b, 1C5b, 1C4d, 1C5d, 4A4a, 4B4b*)

## ON YOUR OWN

6. While Americans and Englishmen in the mid-nineteenth century rejected Shakespeare's Othello as it stood, cutting it heavily to suit the tastes of "proper society," Europeans on the Continent embraced the play as an expression of the critical changes in the political climate at the time. Ira Aldridge, an African-American actor, couldn't find work in America, and only minor parts in England. But touring as Othello throughout Europe brought him honors and medals.

*It is impossible Mr. Aldridge should fully comprehend the meaning and force or even the words he utters...*  
-Reviewer for London's Athenaeum (1833)

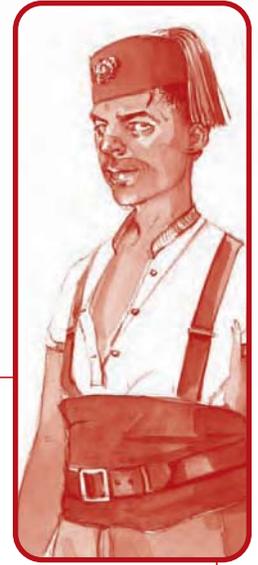
*After this Othello it would be an anticlimax to have seen an ordinary Othello again. What abandonment, passion, beauty, greatness, sense... A Negro from Africa's western coast has come to show me the real Othello.*  
-A critic writing in Germany following Aldridge's tour there

Take a look at Aldridge's life and place in theatrical history by writing a short research paper on him and his experiences touring the world as Othello. Consider focusing your research around the question of racial discrimination in the United States and England in the mid-1800's, contrasted with the attitudes in Europe of that same period. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goal 1B4b, 1C4d, 5A5a, 5A5b, 5B4a*)

7. Write an epilogue (a short passage/essay) to *Othello*. What's happening five years following the conclusion of Shakespeare's play? How was Iago punished for his treachery? How were Othello and Desdemona memorialized? Did Cassio regain his status in the military? Does Iago ever come to regret his actions? Be creative in your telling of what happened next. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goal 1C4a, 1C4d, 3C4a*)
8. You've been hired to write epitaphs (a phrase or phrases memorializing a person's life on his or her tombstone) for Othello and Desdemona. What would you write? Why? How do you think these individuals should be remembered? (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1C4a, 2B4c, 3C4a*)
9. Using music that you already know, create a soundtrack for *Othello*. The songs don't necessarily have to reflect the same ideas as the scenes in the play—they can be as literal or abstract as you'd like. Be sure to note to which moment each song corresponds. And for extra credit... create your own CD cover art to go along with your soundtrack. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1C4d, 1C5d, 3C4b*)
10. Create an enticing, descriptive, alluring travel brochure for either Venice or Cyprus as they are featured in *Othello* that would encourage tourists to take their next vacations in that location. (*Illinois English Language Arts 3B4a, 3C4a, 3C4b, 5B4a*)
11. Scrapbooking your journey through the play, create a quote book. Match quotes from the text with photos or drawings. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 3B4a, 3C4b, 5B4a*)



## PREPARING FOR THE PERFORMANCE YOU'LL SEE



### IN SMALL GROUPS

1. Divide the class into groups of four. These groups will work together as production teams, and will include a designer for each of the following elements: set, lights, costumes, and sound. Write the act and scene numbers for each scene in the play on slips of paper and put them in a hat. Have each group draw one scene—they will act as the design team for that scene. Each group will create a design concept and presentation for the scene they draw. Some questions to get you started:

- ☞ Where does the scene take place?
- ☞ What props are helpful in setting the mood?
- ☞ What is the weather like? What time of day is it?
- ☞ What's the overall tone of the scene?
- ☞ Who's in the scene? Where are they from? What is their status in relation to the other characters?

One way to present your design is to make a production collage for your scene—a large piece of poster or foam core board with swatches of fabric, paintings, photographs or other images that have an element of what you envision, and anything else that illustrates the scene for you. You can also create a CD or play list with songs or other sounds that you would include in your design. Magazines and art books are often a good source of ideas. When you've finished your collage, pick the line or lines from the scene that are most inspirational to your design concept. As a class, do a "show and tell" in order of scenes (designers often do this for the cast on the first day of rehearsal). When you see the play, pay special attention to the design elements. Are there similar elements to some of the designs you saw in class? (*Illinois English Language Arts Goal 5C3b, 4B3b*)

2. In traditional Shakespearean theater, the audience (unlike that in a proscenium auditorium) is always in view of each other. The experience of theater is one of community. We all are present and watching together an event that will never happen exactly this way ever again, no matter how many time the play is performed by those—or different—actors. Each visit to the theater is, in that way, a once-in-a-lifetime experience! The thrust stage at Chicago Shakespeare Theater is much like the stage of Elizabethan theaters—and situates the action of the play within the audience facing each other around the stage. As you watch the performance, note when during the play you become aware of other audience members. How does this affect your own experience of the production? (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 4A4a, 4B4b, 4B5b*)

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



3. A director's interpretation often begins in choosing which lines will *not* come to life on stage. Almost every director of Shakespeare begins by cutting the original text. Throughout Shakespeare's history on stage (and even more critically, on film), this kind of exercise is common practice. Shakespeare scholar Jane Adamson talks about the tendency of both scholars and directors to look for one voice in the play that represents our own. She says that our need for definiteness is as strong as the characters' need: "For us as for them, complexities stimulate the need for simplicity, singleness." In your small group, choose one character with whom you strongly identify. Return to the play and find as many lines as you can that point to the complexity—and contradictions—in this person. Now decide on a "take"—a single, simplified vision based on that character's point of view that you would choose to bring to life on stage. What lines might you have to cut out of your script to support that choice? Which lines would be the "focal points" of your production? (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1A4b, 1A5b, 1B4a, 1C4b, 1C5b, 1C4d, 1C5d, 3A4, 3B4c, 4A4a, 4B4b*)

4. Soliloquies are important tools in Shakespeare's dramatic technique. The soliloquy is ideally suited to a thrust stage where the actors can approach the audience and speak intimately with them, as if one-on-one. On the proscenium stage where there is much greater distance between the actor and the audience, the soliloquy tends to become a moment when the character talks aloud to himself. The soliloquy allows the audience to learn about the character and his motivations privately—that is, without the knowledge of other characters.

In your small groups, choose either Othello's "It is the cause..." soliloquy (5.2) or Iago's "That Cassio loves her..." (2.1). Divide the soliloquy into "sense groups" of related ideas. Each sense group is allocated to a member of the group who then practices speaking those line(s), listening carefully to their sound and rhythm, noting any key images or patterns of sound. All members of the group then stand in a semi-circle in the order of their lines and speak the soliloquy in a continuous sequence as though all of you are one person. Spend some time discussing each group's performance. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1C4a, 1C4d, 2A4d, 2B4a*)

5. Shakespeare is known for his brevity—at least when it comes to writing stage directions! He rarely indicates more than an *Enter* or *Exeunt*, which means that actors and directors get to be extra creative when they bring any of his plays to life. In groups of three, write your own stage directions for your favorite scene in *Othello*. To get started, think of specific details: How old are the characters, and how will age affect their movements? What are some of the sounds we hear? The smells? Will the characters' clothes affect their movements? What are their states of mind during the scene? After writing out stage directions, present your scene, and explain your reasons for staging it the way you did. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1C4a, 1C4b, 1C4d, 3B4a*)



## BACK IN THE CLASSROOM



### AS A CLASS

1. Did your views about the play or any of the characters change after seeing this live production? If so, how? Try to be very specific about moments in the action of *Othello* that affected you and your feelings about the play. Discuss these moments and your experience at the theater as a class. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goal 1C4d, 1C5d, 4A4a, 4B4b*)
2. *The play makes us consider and reconsider not merely what aspects of one's nature and behaviour one can make and change and control, but also the relationships between various ways that things seem 'fated to us...'—parentage, birth, physical attributes, natural talents and dispositions—and those which our own experiences, choices, actions, commitments, and so on, in all the given circumstances of our lives, gradually accumulate and form into our destiny. Throughout the play, the characters themselves keep confusing all these—as when Othello for example alleges that he is congenitally doomed to be betrayed. Yet their very confusions painfully underline and intensify our own difficulty in maintaining any clear-cut distinction between the 'fated' and the 'free' aspects of the self... Are the feelings we cannot help having really 'fated' to us? And in what sense are we free or able to do anything about them? All these perennial questions lie at the heart of the play... -Jane Adamson (1980)*

Think about the CST production you saw, comparing it to the play you read and discussed in class, or any other version you may have seen live or on film. Was Othello portrayed as a victim of his own fate on the CST stage? How much was he shown as a person with free will? Did your view of Othello change as you watched the play? If you are able to watch other versions, compare different actors' portrayals of this character. In each, think about the question of Othello as free agent vs. Othello as victim. How did the director and the actors suggest a point of view? At what specific moments did you feel this way? Did the portrayal of Iago in the CST production make a difference in the way you viewed Othello? What about any other versions you've seen? Again, think of specific moments in the CST production and others you've seen that brought you to your conclusion. Discuss these moments and your observations as a group. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goal 1C5e, 2A5b, 2B4c*)

3. *[Iago's]...last speech, the motive-hunting of motiveless malignity—how awful! In itself fiendish; while yet he was allowed to bear the divine image, too fiendish for his own steady view. A being next to devil, only not quite devil... -Samuel Taylor Coleridge (c. 1810)*

*Shakespeare's presentation of Iago challenges us to dare not to shield ourselves from what the drama shows: that Iago's inhumanity is itself the clearest sign of his humanity. It cannot be safely fenced off into a category labeled 'devilish,' 'inhuman' -Jane Adamson (1980)*

Think back upon your class discussions about Iago, and then upon your responses to him as portrayed in the Chicago Shakespeare Theater production. (Also think about any other portrayals of Iago that you've seen.) Discuss Coleridge's and Adamson's very different points of view. Is Iago something inhuman, or someone all too human? Did your opinion change as you saw one particular interpretation? Why or why not? At which moments in your

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES



reading or watching the play did Iago's behavior make you take the stance you have about him? Were there other moments in the play which, even briefly, seemed to challenge your point of view? Discuss your viewpoints and these questions as a class. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goal 1C5e, 2A5b, 2B4c*)

## IN SMALL GROUPS

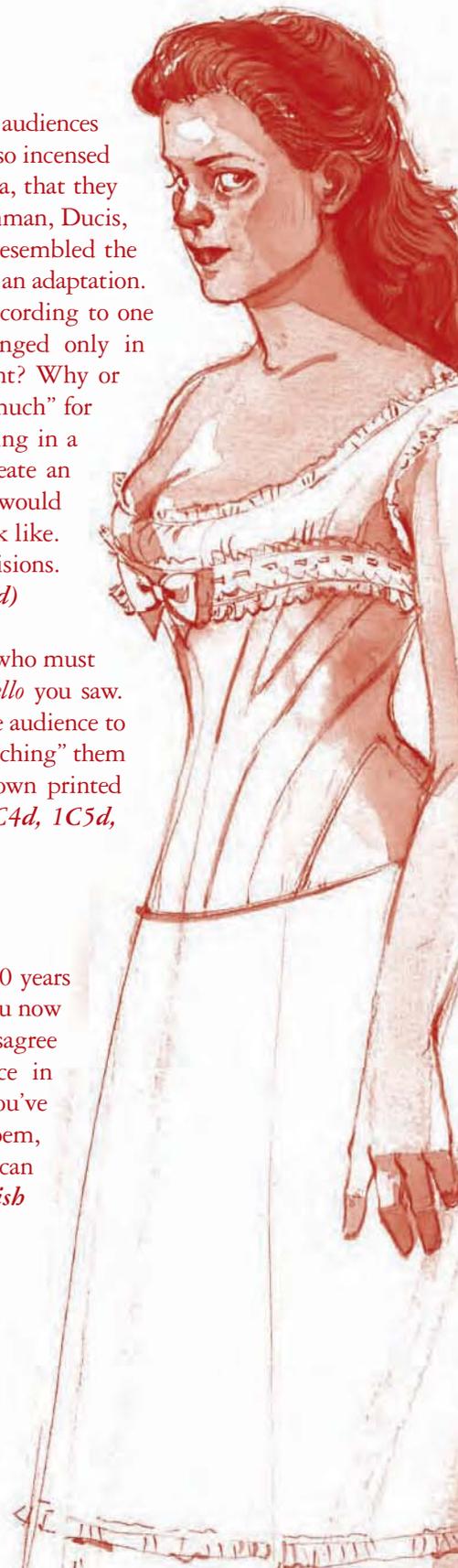
4. Throughout the nearly 400 years of *Othello's* history on stage, audiences have responded differently to its tragic story. The French were so incensed by Shakespeare's refusal to adhere to the classic forms of drama, that they banned him from their stages in the 18th century. One Frenchman, Ducis, "translated" *Othello* for the French stage, but the translation resembled the original so little that it might more accurately have been called an adaptation. Ducis' version cut Cassio's drunken scene entirely, because according to one interpretation of classical tradition drunken behavior belonged only in comedies, never in tragedy. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Is there anything in *Othello* that you think is "too much" for a contemporary audience or out of place in a tragedy? Working in a

group, think about how you would adapt this play for today's audiences. Create an outline for your adaptation, and if there's any scene in particular that you think would need to be drastically changed, write a draft of what your new version would look like. Share your adaptation with the class, and be prepared to defend your decisions. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goal 1B5a, 1C4b, 2A5d, 3B4a, 3B4b, 4B4d*)

5. Working in groups of three, you are a team of designers for an advertising firm who must create an ad for the *Sun-Times* or *Chicago Tribune* about the production of *Othello* you saw. Remember that you must communicate the essence of the play and attract a large audience to it using minimal text and images. Share your ads with the class as if you were "pitching" them to CST. Then, grab one of those newspapers and compare your ads to CST's own printed advertisements for this production. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1C4d, 1C5d, 3C4a, 4B4b, 4B5b*)

## IN YOUR OWN WORDS

6. Review the quotes of scholars, critics and theater professionals over the past 350 years that are included in this handbook. Choose one that is of particular interest to you now that you've seen the play performed—either because you strongly agree or disagree with it, or because it simply makes you think. Return to your experience in watching Chicago Shakespeare Theater's production (and to your reading if you've read the script), and respond to the quote by writing a response essay, a story, poem, by creating a piece of visual art, music, performance, etc. Be as creative as you can in formulating your response to the scholarly perspective. (*Illinois English Language Arts Goal 4B3b, 1C3d, 1C3b*)



# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

7. Think about contemporary movies or TV shows you've seen. Where have you seen elements of comedy and tragedy in the same story? In your group, discuss your examples. Why would a writer or director choose to add comedy to an essentially sad story, or conversely, add more serious elements to a story that's primarily light or funny? Throughout *Othello's* stage history, Iago has been played a range of ways from comedic subordinate to the embodiment of evil. Looking back at the production of *Othello* at Chicago Shakespeare Theater, how would you characterize Iago? Was any comedy reserved for him, and if so, when? Was he portrayed as a human being with qualities other characters and we share, or something inhuman and fiendish? Support your position with as many examples as you can from the performance! (*Illinois English Language Arts Goal 1C3c, 1C5d, 2A4a, 2A5a*)

## ON YOUR OWN

8. You are a drama critic for your school newspaper. Write a review of the performance at Chicago Shakespeare Theater for your paper. Briefly recount the plot. Discuss the parts of the production—including the casting, acting, setting, music, costumes, cuts—you particularly liked or did not like, and explain why. How easy/difficult was it to understand Shakespeare's language? How much did you "believe" what was happening? (These are good clues to a production's strengths or weakness.) (*Illinois English Language Arts Goals 1B4a, 1C4d, 3B4a, 5C4b*)



# TECHNO SHAKESPEARE



## CHICAGO SHAKESPEARE THEATER

Chicago Shakespeare Theater's website  
[www.chicagoshakes.com](http://www.chicagoshakes.com)

## ON OTHELLO

Royal Shakespeare Company—Shakespeare & Race in *Othello*  
[http://www.rsc.org.uk/explore/themes/race\\_othello.htm](http://www.rsc.org.uk/explore/themes/race_othello.htm)

Royal Shakespeare Company's On-line Play Guide  
<http://www.rsc.org.uk/othello/home/home.html>

"No Fear Shakespeare" *Othello* from SparkNotes  
<http://nfs.sparknotes.com/othello/>

The Reduced Shakespeare Company's Othello Rap  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UC-f0drvdmM>

## OTHELLO ON FILM—AVAILABLE ON-LINE

*Use the links below to compare and contrast a few different interpretations of these vibrant and complex characters as Iago deceives Othello with a handkerchief*

Anthony Hopkins (Othello) & Bob Hoskins (Iago):  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pT\\_NAJZ9so](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pT_NAJZ9so)

Willard White (Othello), Zoe Wanamaker (Desdemona), and Ian McKellan (Iago):  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gE4K2sbSF4>

Laurence Olivier:  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDXG04pIH\\_0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDXG04pIH_0)

## COMPREHENSIVE LINK SITES

William Shakespeare and the Internet  
<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/>

Shakespeare in Europe (*Basel University*)  
<http://www.unibas.ch/shine/home>

Touchstone Database (*University of Birmingham, UK*)  
<http://www.touchstone.bham.ac.uk/welcome.html>

Absolute Shakespeare  
<http://absoluteshakespeare.com>



# TECHNO SHAKESPEARE



## TEACHING SHAKESPEARE

The Folger Shakespeare Library  
<http://www.folger.edu/index.cfm>

ShakespeareHigh.com (*Amy Ulen's "Surfing with the Bard"*)  
<http://www.shakespearehigh.com>

Web English Teacher's Section on Shakespeare  
<http://www.webenglishteacher.com/shakespeare.html>

Shake Sphere  
<http://sites.micro-link.net/zekscrab>

Proper Elizabethan Accents  
<http://www.renfaire.com/Language/index.html>

The English Renaissance in Context: Multimedia Tutorials (*University of Pennsylvania*)  
<http://dewey.library.upenn.edu/sceti/furness/eric/teach/index.htm>

The History of Costume by Braun and Schneider  
<http://www.siue.edu/COSTUMES/history.html>

The Costumer's Manifesto (*University of Alaska*)  
<http://www.costumes.org>

Rare Map Collection (*The University of Georgia*)  
<http://www.libs.uga.edu/darchive/hargrett/maps/maps.html>

Spark Notes  
<http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/>

## SHAKESPEARE AND ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust  
<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/>

The Elizabethan Theatre  
<http://www.uni-koeln.de/phil-fak/englisch/shakespeare/index.html>

Queen Elizabeth I  
<http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/eliza.htm>

Shakespeare and the Globe: Then and Now (*Encyclopedia Britannica*)  
<http://search.eb.com/shakespeare/index2.html>

Elizabeth I: Ruler and Legend (*The Newberry Library's Queen Elizabeth exhibit*)  
<http://www3.newberry.org/elizabeth/>



# TECHNO SHAKESPEARE



## TEXTS AND EARLY EDITIONS

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (*Massachusetts Institute of Technology*)  
<http://the-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/works.html>

Treasures in Full: Shakespeare in Quarto (*British Library*)  
<http://www.bl.uk/treasures/shakespeare/homepage.html>

The First Folio and Early Quartos of William Shakespeare (*University of Virginia*)  
<http://etext.virginia.edu/frames/shakeframe.html>

Furness Shakespeare Library (*University of Pennsylvania*)  
<http://dewey.lib.upenn.edu/sceti/furness/>

The Internet Shakespeare Editions (*University of Victoria, British Columbia*)  
<http://ise.uvic.ca/Foyer/index.html>

Shakespeare: Subject to Change (*Cable in the Classroom*)  
<http://www.ciconline.org>

What Is a Folio? (*MIT's "Hamlet on the Ramparts"*)  
<http://shea.mit.edu/ramparts/newstuff3.htm>

Shakespeare's Grammar  
<http://www.bardweb.net/grammar/grammar.html>

Word Frequency Lists (*Mt. Ararat High School*)  
<http://www.mta75.org/curriculum/english/Shakes/index.html>

## SHAKESPEARE IN PERFORMANCE

The Internet Movie Database: William Shakespeare  
<http://www.us.imdb.com/find?q=Shakespeare>

The Internet Broadway Database  
<http://www.ibdb.com>

## SHAKESPEARE IN ART

Shakespeare Illustrated (*Emory University*)  
[http://www.english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare\\_Illustrated/Shakespeare.html](http://www.english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare_Illustrated/Shakespeare.html)

The Faces of Elizabeth I  
<http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/elizface.htm>

Tudor England: Images  
<http://www.marileecody.com/images.html>



# SUGGESTED READING



Adamson, Jane. *Othello as Tragedy: Some Problems of Judgment and Feeling*. Cambridge, 1980.

Barthelemy, Anthony Gerard. *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Othello*. New York, 1994.

Bevington, David. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. New York, 1992.

Bloom, Allan. *Shakespeare's Politics*. New York, 1964.

Boyce, Charles. *Shakespeare A to Z*. New York, 1990.

Calderwood, James. *The Properties of Othello*. Amherst, 1989.

French, Marilyn. *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*. New York, 1981.

Gibson, Rex, series ed. *Cambridge School Shakespeare: Othello*. Cambridge, 1992.

Goddard, Harold C. *The Meaning of Shakespeare*. Chicago, 1951.

Hankey, Julie. *Plays in Performance: Othello*. Bristol, 1987.

Heilman, Robert. *Magic in the Web: Action and Language in Othello*. Lexington, Kentucky: 1956

Kettle, Arnold, ed. *Shakespeare in a Changing World*. Pennsylvania, 1974.

Kolin, Philip, ed. *Othello: New Critical Essays*. New York, 2001.

Kott, Jan. *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*. London, 1965.

McDonald, Russ. "The Flaw in the Flaw," in *Shakespeare Set Free*. Peggy O'Brien, ed. New York, 1993.

Mullaney, Steven. *The Place of the Stage*. Chicago, 1988.

O'Brien, Peggy. *Shakespeare Set Free*. New York, 1993.

Poole, Adrian. *Tragedy: Shakespeare and the Greek Example*. Oxford, 1987.

Rosenberg, Marvin. *The Masks of Othello*. Berkeley 1961.

Shaughnessy, Robert, ed. *Shakespeare in Performance*. New York, 2000.

Snyder, Susan. *Othello: Critical Essays*. New York, 1988.

Van Doren, Mark. *Shakespeare*. New York, 1939.

Vaughan, Virginia Mason, and Kent Cartwright, eds. *Othello: New Perspectives*. New Jersey, 1990.

Woods, Leigh. *On Playing Shakespeare: Advice and Commentary from Actors and Actresses of the Past*. New York, 1991.



# NOTES





Chicago Shakespeare Theater  
on Navy Pier  
800 East Grand Avenue  
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