OTHELLO

REVISED EDITION

WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY
AYANNA THOMPSON

EDITED BY E.A.J. HONIGMANN

OTHELLO

REVISED EDITION

THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL	edited by G. K. Hunter*
ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA	edited by John Wilders
AS YOU LIKE IT	edited by Juliet Dusinberre
THE COMEDY OF ERRORS	edited by R. A. Foakes*
CORIOLANUS	edited by Peter Holland
CYMBELINE	edited by J. M. Nosworthy*
DOUBLE FALSEHOOD	edited by Brean Hammond
HAMLET, Revised	edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor
JULIUS CAESAR	edited by David Daniell
KING HENRY IV PART 1	edited by David Scott Kastan
KING HENRY IV PART 2	edited by James C. Bulman
KING HENRY V	edited by T. W. Craik
KING HENRY VI PART 1	edited by Edward Burns
KING HENRY VI PART 2	edited by Ronald Knowles
KING HENRY VI PART 3	edited by John D. Cox and Eric Rasmussen
KING HENRY VIII	edited by Gordon McMullan
KING JOHN	edited by E. A. J. Honigmann*
KING LEAR	edited by R. A. Foakes
KING RICHARD II	edited by Charles Forker
KING RICHARD III	edited by James R. Siemon
LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST	edited by H. R. Woudhuysen
MACBETH	edited by Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason
MEASURE FOR MEASURE	edited by J. W. Lever*
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE	edited by John Drakakis
THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR	edited by Giorgio Melchiori
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM	edited by Harold F. Brooks*
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING, Revised	edited by Claire McEachern
OTHELLO, Revised	edited by E. A. J. Honigmann, with a new introduction by Ayanna Thompson
PERICLES	edited by Suzanne Gossett
ROMEO AND JULIET	edited by René Weis
SHAKESPEARE'S POEMS	edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones and H. R. Woudhuysen
SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS, Revised	edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones
THE TAMING OF THE SHREW	edited by Barbara Hodgdon
THE TEMPEST, Revised	edited by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan
TIMON OF ATHENS	edited by Anthony B. Dawson and Gretchen E. Minton
TITUS ANDRONICUS	edited by Jonathan Bate
TROILUS AND CRESSIDA, Revised	edited by David Bevington
TWELFTH NIGHT	edited by Keir Elam
THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA	edited by William C. Carroll
THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN, Revised	edited by Lois Potter
THE WINTER'S TALE	edited by John Pitcher

* Second series

OTHELLO

Edited by
E. A. J. HONIGMANN

With a new introduction by
AYANNA THOMPSON

iv

For
Elsie McConnachie Honigmann
(née Packman)
10.7.1919–6.12.1994

Only a sweet and virtuous soul
Like seasoned timber, never gives:
But, though the whole world turn to coal,
                    Then chiefly lives.
                        (George Herbert)

CONTENTS

LIST OF
ILLUSTRATIONS

GENERAL EDITORS' PREFACE

The earliest volume in the first Arden series, Edward Dowden's *Hamlet*, was published in 1899. Since then the Arden Shakespeare has been widely acknowledged as the pre-eminent Shakespeare edition, valued by scholars, students, actors and 'the great variety of readers' alike for its clearly presented and reliable texts, its full annotation and its richly informative introductions.

In the third Arden series we seek to maintain these well-established qualities and general characteristics, preserving our predecessors' commitment to presenting the play as it has been shaped in history. Each volume necessarily has its own particular emphasis which reflects the unique possibilities and problems posed by the work in question, and the series as a whole seeks to maintain the highest standards of scholarship, combined with attractive and accessible presentation.

Newly edited from the original documents, texts are presented in fully modernized form, with a textual apparatus that records all substantial divergences from those early printings. The notes and introductions focus on the conditions and possibilities of meaning that editors, critics and performers (on stage and screen) have discovered in the play. While building upon the rich history of scholarly activity that has long shaped our understanding of Shakespeare's works, this third series of the Arden Shakespeare is enlivened by a new generation's encounter with Shakespeare.

THE TEXT

On each page of the play itself, readers will find a passage of text supported by commentary and textual notes. Act and scene divisions (seldom present in the early editions and often the

product of eighteenth-century or later scholarship) have been retained for ease of reference, but have been given less prominence than in previous series. Editorial indications of location of the action have been removed to the textual notes or commentary.

In the text itself, elided forms in the early texts are spelt out in full in verse lines wherever they indicate a usual late twentieth-century pronunciation that requires no special indication and wherever they occur in prose (except where they indicate nonstandard pronunciation). In verse speeches, marks of elision are retained where they are necessary guides to the scansion and pronunciation of the line. Final -ed in past tense and participial forms of verbs is always printed as -ed, without accent, never as -'d, but wherever the required pronunciation diverges from modern usage a note in the commentary draws attention to the fact. Where the final -ed should be given syllabic value contrary to modern usage, e.g.

Doth Silvia know that I am banished?

(*TGV* 3.1.214)

the note will take the form

214 **banished** banishèd

Conventional lineation of divided verse lines shared by two or more speakers has been reconsidered and sometimes rearranged. Except for the familiar *Exit* and *Exeunt*, Latin forms in stage directions and speech prefixes have been translated into English and the original Latin forms recorded in the textual notes.

COMMENTARY AND TEXTUAL NOTES

Notes in the commentary, for which a major source will be the *Oxford English Dictionary*, offer glossarial and other explication of verbal difficulties; they may also include discussion of points of interpretation and, in relevant cases, substantial extracts from Shakespeare's source material. Editors will not usually

offer glossarial notes for words adequately defined in the latest edition of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* or *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, but in cases of doubt they will include notes. Attention, however, will be drawn to places where more than one likely interpretation can be proposed and to significant verbal and syntactic complexity. Notes preceded by * discuss editorial emendations or variant readings.

Headnotes to acts or scenes discuss, where appropriate, questions of scene location, the play's treatment of source materials, and major difficulties of staging. The list of roles (so headed to emphasize the play's status as a text for performance) is also considered in the commentary notes. These may include comment on plausible patterns of casting with the resources of an Elizabethan or Jacobean acting company and also on any variation in the description of roles in their speech prefixes in the early editions.

The textual notes are designed to let readers know when the edited text diverges from the early edition(s) or manuscript sources on which it is based. Wherever this happens the note will record the rejected reading of the early edition(s) or manuscript, in original spelling, and the source of the reading adopted in this edition. Other forms from the early edition(s) or manuscript recorded in these notes will include some spellings of particular interest or significance and original forms of translated stage directions. Where two or more early editions are involved, for instance with *Othello*, the notes also record all important differences between them. The textual notes take a form that has been in use since the nineteenth century. This comprises, first: line reference, reading adopted in the text and closing square bracket; then: abbreviated reference, in italic, to the earliest edition to adopt the accepted reading, italic semicolon and noteworthy alternative reading(s), each with abbreviated italic reference to its source.

Conventions used in these textual notes include the following. The solidus / is used, in notes quoting verse or discussing verse

lining, to indicate line endings. Distinctive spellings of the base text follow the square bracket without indication of source and are enclosed in italic brackets. Names enclosed in italic brackets indicate originators of conjectural emendations when these did not originate in an edition of the text, or when the named edition records a conjecture not accepted into its text. Stage directions (SDs) are referred to by the number of the line within or immediately after which they are placed. Line numbers with a decimal point relate to centred entry SDs not falling within a verse line and to SDs more than one line long, with the number after the point indicating the line within the SD: e.g. 78.4 refers to the fourth line of the SD following line 78. Lines of SDs at the start of a scene are numbered 0.1, 0.2, etc. Where only a line number precedes a square bracket, e.g. 128], the note relates to the whole line; where SD is added to the number, it relates to the whole of a SD within or immediately following the line. Speech prefixes (SPs) follow similar conventions, 203 SP] referring to the speaker's name for line 203. Where a SP reference takes the form e.g. 38+ SP, it relates to all subsequent speeches assigned to that speaker in the scene in question.

Where, as with *King Henry V*, one of the early editions is a so-called 'bad quarto' (that is, a text either heavily adapted, or reconstructed from memory, or both), the divergences from the present edition are too great to be recorded in full in the notes. In these cases, with the exception of *Hamlet*, which prints an edited text of the quarto of 1603, the editions will include a reduced photographic facsimile of the 'bad quarto' in an appendix.

INTRODUCTION

Both the introduction and the commentary are designed to present the plays as texts for performance, and make appropriate reference to stage, film and television versions, as well as introducing the reader to the range of critical approaches to the plays. They discuss the history of the reception of the texts

within the theatre and scholarship and beyond, investigating the interdependency of the literary text and the surrounding 'cultural text' both at the time of the original production of Shakespeare's works and during their long and rich afterlife.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

'What I would now like to propose to you', the General Editor of the Arden Shakespeare wrote to me on 17 August 1982, 'is that you consider taking on the editing of the next Arden *Othello*.' He suggested 1988 as the completion date. I was tempted, but did I really want to give five or six years to a single play? After some soul-searching I signed a contract with Methuen & Co. to deliver the edition in 1988 in a form 'acceptable to the General Editor', with 'sufficient appendices' (whatever that means: is five sufficient?). I knew, of course, that *Othello* had received much less detailed editorial attention than *Hamlet* or *King Lear*, though not that so much editorial work still remained to be done. Five or six years have stretched to somewhat more, the Arden Shakespeare is no longer published by Methuen, its General Editor has been joined by two other General Editors, the edition of *Othello* needed a companion volume on *The Texts of 'Othello'* (Routledge, 1996) – much has changed, yet my gratitude to Richard Proudfoot has remained constant (or rather, has grown with the years). He chose the editor, he read through my drafts and always commented encouragingly (and, to my great advantage, critically). On almost every page I am indebted to him, and I gladly acknowledge this. At a later stage, in the last year or so, a second General Editor (David Scott Kastan) checked through the edition: I am grateful to him as well for many helpful comments.

Over the years innumerable offprints of articles on *Othello* have reached me, some from old friends, others from complete strangers. It was not possible to refer to all of them, the list of publications on the play being now so huge, but I hope that the edition has benefited, directly or indirectly. Other friends and

colleagues have helped in different ways – sending books that were unobtainable in Britain, inviting me to give lectures or to write papers on *Othello*, or simply answering my questions: David Bevington, Helen Boden, Susan Brock, T. W. Craik, Katherine Duncan-Jones, R. A. Foakes, the late Charlton Hinman, Harold Jenkins, Holger Klein, Giorgio Melchiori, Sylvia Morris, Barbara Mowat, Elisabeth Orsten, Edward Pechter, Willem Schrickx, the late Terence Spencer, Marvin Spevack, Rosamond Kent Sprague and Stanley Wells. Mairi McDonald, Marian Pringle and Robert Smallwood of the Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon, were efficient and helpful in locating books, manuscripts and illustrations. In addition I am grateful to the librarians and officials of the Bodleian Library, the British Film Institute, the British Library, Cambridge University Library and Trinity College, Cambridge, Durham University Library, the Public Record Office, the Theatre Museum (London) and, last but not least, Newcastle University Library (the Robinson Library). To all, my sincere thanks: without their generous cooperation this edition would have had many more gaps and faults.

Jane Armstrong, a friend from the Methuen years and Arden 2, who took charge of the third Arden Shakespeare for the publisher, has been, as usual, understanding and supportive. Her colleagues, Penny Wheeler and Judith Ravenscroft, were equally tactful and efficient in dealing with the unforeseen quirks of an edition of Shakespeare – or should I say, of an editor of Shakespeare?

My greatest debt – for putting up with *Othello* uncomplainingly for so long, and for having so much else in common with the gentle Desdemona – is acknowledged in my dedication.

<div align="right">

E. A. J. Honigmann
Newcastle upon Tyne

</div>

INTRODUCTION

How and where to begin? An introduction like this one serves not only to frame William Shakespeare's *Othello* but also to prioritize its themes, topics and contexts. While there are differences of opinion about how best to frame *Romeo and Juliet* (should one foreground early modern concepts of love before contextualizing certain literary forms, like the sonnet), the debates are rarely heated or political, and unsurprisingly they rarely replicate themselves in the court of public opinion. For *Othello*, however, the debates get extremely heated and traverse the terrain between the academic and the public.

For instance, when *The Guardian* announced that the Royal Shakespeare Company was casting its first black actor to play Iago in its 2015 production, the readers reacted with impassioned comments about how *Othello* should be framed – that is, what histories, social contexts and themes should be foregrounded. Some readers decried the article's claim that Iago 'is usually interpreted as being a deeply malignant racist' because they argued this misinterprets the play's historical context: 'it was never really a play "about" racism anyway (not exactly a hot button social issue of Shakespeare's day)'; and 'Whatever else happens it won't be Shakespeare's vision'. Other commentators responded by providing a different contextualization altogether, one that did not rely on Shakespeare's time period: 'Casting a black actor as Iago is not a new thing – it's been done by at least one director who wanted to make the point that racism is not just a black/white issue and can manifest itself in all kinds of subtle and insidious ways'; and 'Maybe this explains why some critics were hostile when Ira Aldridge played Othello because having an actual black actor play the role wasn't Shakespeare's vision'. And others wanted to frame the discussion outside of the context of the play by addressing contemporary casting practices: 'Dear RSC – Just cast more black actors across more

roles across your season and then we would cease to have news "stories" like this.'[1]

So is *Othello* a play about race? Or maybe it is a play about religion and ethnicity? Or maybe it is a play about jealousy in general? Perhaps it is really a domestic tragedy framed within a military narrative? Or is it the exact opposite: a military tragedy framed in a domestic drama? Or possibly it is simply an experiment in transforming a comedy into a tragedy? Or maybe *Othello* is about the nature of evil? Or the nature of man? Or the nature of woman? Or the nature of the family? Or the changing nature of the family in an increasingly global world?

The way we frame the story of *Othello* will impact the way the play will be understood and performed, and students, scholars, performers and audience members have long debated the best way to crystallize the story of the play. Of course, the idea that stories are crafted – that they are not innate or natural – is another way to frame *Othello*: it is a play about storytellers, their tall-tales and their effects on gullible listeners. After all, Othello won Desdemona's heart by telling her 'the story of my life / From year to year – the battles, sieges, fortunes / That I have passed' (1.3.130–2). The story was so compellingly crafted that the Duke admits, 'I think this tale would win my daughter too' (1.3.172). Moreover, Othello's dying words are a request for the way his story should be framed in the future: 'When you shall these unlucky deeds relate, / Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate, / Nor set down aught in malice' (5.2.339–41). Othello dies worrying about the way his life will be framed so he narrates exactly how he thinks, believes and hopes it should be told ('Set you down this' 5.2.349).

Storytelling matters in very explicit and tangible ways in *Othello*, and Othello is not the only character who is attentive to this fact. While Iago suggests that Othello duped Desdemona with lies ('she first loved the Moor, but for bragging and telling

---

1 All quotations come from online comments to Brown.

her fantastical lies' 2.1.220–1), he himself is a master story crafter. After all, from the beginning of the play Iago recognizes that the best way to exact revenge is to 'abuse Othello's ear' (1.3.394). Iago realizes that once a person is characterized or pigeonholed within a certain narrative structure (Desdemona as a 'super-subtle Venetian', Othello as an 'erring Barbarian' and Cassio as 'a finder out of occasions') it can prove difficult-to-near impossible to escape that plot, or to recast oneself (or others) into alternative narrative structures. He who controls the storytelling controls the world in *Othello*.

It is clear, then, that while any introduction to *Othello* will be interpreted as an argument about the play's meaning, the play teaches us to be sceptical of adhering to one frame, or one story: the act of framing something narrowly often makes it impossible to accept other narratives and other perspectives. Keeping this in mind, it is instructive to note that *Othello* does not exist in one historical moment, or one historical context, alone. It does not merely come out of and reflect the early-seventeenth century; rather, it is a play whose stagings, readings and meanings have mutated and evolved over time. The *Othello* that we read or see in the twenty-first century is not the same that Shakespeare's audience read or saw in early modern England, or that slave owners saw in nineteenth-century America, or that Afrikaners saw in Apartheid South Africa. Many eras reframe the story of the Moor of Venice. Nonetheless, while these various *Othello*s are obviously discrete historical events reflecting and commenting upon the time in which they were produced, they are never entirely isolated or separate; they comment upon each other; they revise each other; and they invite readers and audience members to see both the connections and fissures between them. If we learn anything from *Othello* it should be that there are benefits to accepting multiple stories, frames and narratives.

Some might argue that we experience multiple frames when reading or seeing any, and all, of Shakespeare's plays – that

Shakespeare's plays are both timely and untimely all at once. While this is true to a certain extent, there is something different about the ways history and context get framed for Shakespeare's Venetian plays, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*. The violent histories that occurred towards Jews and Africans since the early modern period render history and context more fraught and complex when approaching the constructions and presentations of religion and race in Shakespeare's plays. For instance, in various historic moments *Merchant* and *Othello* have been employed to promote anti-Semitic and racist beliefs: the Nazis considered staging *Merchant* to vilify the Jews, and blackface minstrel shows were first staged alongside performances of *Othello* to mock blacks. Of course, the obverse is also true with both *Merchant* and *Othello* employed in efforts to combat anti-Semitism and racism: Jewish actors/directors have proudly claimed Shylock as their own, and black actors have identified performing in *Othello* as a 'rite of passage'. When staging either play now, directors must decide which historical construction of the 'Jew' or the 'Moor' they will employ. And, of course, they must also be cognizant of the various historical constructions their audience members will bring with them to the theatre – and whether those constructions are in harmony with or at odds against the production's intended constructions.

This is all to suggest that reading, seeing and/or discussing *Othello* in our post-slavery and post-Civil Rights Era moment is both a rewarding and a challenging experience. It is useful to learn and discuss the historical moment in which *Othello* was composed, but it is just as important to review the historical moments *Othello* has passed through, affected and been affected by. The play is not an inanimate object that never changes. Instead *Othello* is a dynamic organism that is affected by every hand that touches it – from the actors who perform the role, the visual artists who re-imagine and re-animate the character, the creative writers who rewrite the plot, to the scholars who contextualize its various, disparate and interconnected histories.

Othello, then, exists in history (multiple time periods) and through history (the stories and frames we use to recreate it). We constantly create new stories in which to frame *Othello* because it is a play that interrogates stories, frames and contexts; it is a play that invites revision.

Therefore, this introduction is not limited to early modern English history. While I will spend time laying out the historical context in which *Othello* was created, paying particular attention to Shakespeare's source materials and the evidence about early modern constructions of racial and religious difference, I will also spend time discussing the life of the play in different historical moments, demonstrating how meanings develop, accrue and metamorphose over time. In essence I will be writing about multiple *Othello*s, inviting you to imagine if, when and how different readers and audience members were affected by these histories, contexts and performances. Moreover, the dynamic nature of the play will be presented in a global context with attention paid to non-Western approaches to and performances of *Othello*.

This is an unusual Arden edition because I am writing a new introduction to the play while maintaining E. A. J. Honigmann's editorial work. In other words, this is not the Arden4 *Othello*, but rather a type of Arden3b. While Honigmann's editorial decisions remain both useful and admirable, the birth of early modern race studies changed critical approaches to *Othello* since Honigmann's introduction was published in 1997 (for more on this topic see p. 62ff). This introduction, then, is written for a new generation of readers, readers who expect a contemporary view of *Othello* that was not widely available critically when Honigmann prepared his introduction. This introduction is heavily informed by early modern race studies, performance studies and global Shakespeare studies, fields that have grown exponentially since the turn of the millennium and have, in turn, changed the ways we read, produce and see *Othello*. Like the critical revolution that occurred with the birth of new historicism in the 1980s, the

1 *A Moor Offering a Parrot to a Lady* (c. 1660–70) by Nicolaes Berchem (courtesy of The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1961.29, Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT)

impacts of early modern race studies and global Shakespeare studies on the ways we experience *Othello* cannot be underestimated. A seismic change has occurred.

In practical terms, the revised Arden3 *Othello* contains the new introduction, Honigmann's excellent edition of the play, commentary notes, longer notes and appendices. All references to the introduction have been updated to reflect the

new introduction, but the bulk of the notes and appendices are those created by Honigmann for the 1997 edition because they remain instructive and constructive.

What is *Othello*?: Genre

While both the folio and quarto label the play as a tragedy, *Othello* is related to several other generic forms that might not at first seem readily apparent to the modern reader. First is the morality play, a medieval allegorical theatrical form in which moral lessons were taught through characters who personify moral qualities, like charity or vice. The genre thrived in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe and helped establish vernacular drama, which in turn helped set the stage for the secular drama that thrived in early modern England. The anonymous play *Mankind* (c. 1465) provides a good example. Characters who represent the enticements of earthly pleasures (Newguise, Nowadays and Nought), try to tempt Mankind, a farmer, away from Mercy. Essential to the morality play tradition is the moral conundrum the central character – the mankind figure – must face when tempted by figures who actively endeavour to lure him to commit vices such as avarice, lust and gluttony.

Although originating from popular folk performances, the Vice is a character in the morality play. A temptation figure who performs the blithe spirit of worldly pleasures (as opposed to spiritual ones), 'The Vice was a favorite with the audience' and the Vice's role was 'almost invariably the longest single part' in the performance (Mares, 13). The Vice 'is on intimate terms with the audience and cracks jokes with individual members of it' and does not appear to be 'subject to the limitations of the other characters' (Mares, 14). In one scene in *Mankind*, for instance, Titivillus, the Vice figure, is visible to the audience but is invisible to Mankind, and he addresses the audience directly as he plays tricks on Mankind. Furthermore, the Vice is frequently depicted as a worldly figure who frequently 'give[s]

an account of extraordinary travels' (Mares, 19). And the Vice even performs his worldliness by dressing as an Egyptian or a Turk with the aid of blackface and red-face makeup (Mares, 19–20).

Shakespeare was clearly aware of and interested in the structure of morality plays and the figure of the Vice. In a famous metadramatic moment, Richard III willingly adopts the tempter's role: 'Thus, like the formal Vice, Iniquity, / I moralize two meanings in one word' (*R3* 3.1.82–3). And Aaron, the Moor, in *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare's first tragedy, is clearly related to the worldly corrupting figure of the Vice. Like Richard III, Aaron is afforded more direct addresses to the audience than other character, and he also seems preternaturally aware of the plot structure into which he has been scripted. 'If there be devils, would I were a devil, / To live and burn in everlasting fire, / So I might have your company in hell / But to torment you with my bitter tongue' (*Tit* 5.1.147–50). Likewise, in the *Henry IV* plays, Shakespeare adopts the morality play structure in which a type of psychomachia, that is the battle for the soul of man, is set up for the young Prince Hal. Despite the fact that Hal announces early in the first play that he is only pretending to enjoy the debauchery of the tavern, his father, the king, and his quasi-step-father, Falstaff, are set up to represent the decision he must make between virtue and vice.

Shakespeare's employment of elements from the morality play within *Othello*, then, is not that surprising. By the end of the play, Othello seems to interpret the events through the lens of the morality play, even identifying Iago as a Vice figure or devil. Looking for Iago's cloven foot, Othello says, 'I look down towards his feet, but that's a fable' (5.2.283). Yet Shakespeare's alterations to the genre demonstrate the experimental nature of his work. First, the Vice figure is not the racialized character in *Othello*; rather the mankind figure is explicitly racialized (Othello) and the Vice figure is the native,

2 William Haviland as Iago (late nineteenth century or early twentieth century), photograph by J. and L. Caswall Smith (used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International Licence). Haviland's portrait picks up on the Vice tradition.

a Venetian (Iago). Furthermore, while Iago makes it clear that he has served abroad in battle with Othello ('And I, of whom his eyes had seen the proof / At Rhodes, at Cyprus and on other grounds, / Christian and heathen' 1.1.27–9), Othello, the mankind figure, is nonetheless the character associated with extraordinary travels ('an extravagant and wheeling stranger / Of here and everywhere' 1.1.134–5). Thus, Shakespeare seems to employ familiar aspects of the morality play, tempting audience members to believe they understand how the play will progress based on its generic form and structure only to have those expectations thwarted, disrupted and subverted.

Shakespeare was not content to borrow from merely one generic tradition though; rather, he blended several unlikely generic bedfellows together almost as if placing the audience in Othello's position – that is, as one who feels as if he is always misreading events, customs and characters. For instance, several comedic motifs get folded into *Othello*'s web. First, there is the plotline of the father who cannot control his wily daughter. Because a daughter's obedience was prized in early modern English society, plots capitalized on the humour that can ensue when daughters intentionally deceive their fathers. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* after all begins with a father's complaint about his daughter's unwillingness to marry the man he intends for her. Not unlike Brabantio's claims about Othello's courtship of his daughter Desdemona, Egeus complains to the Duke that Lysander has tricked his daughter into loving him: 'With cunning hast thou filched my daughter's heart, / Turned her obedience (which is due to me) / To stubborn harshness' (*MND* 1.1.37–9). In fact, the rhetorical similarities between Egeus's complaint and Brabantio's are stark with both men concerned with the effects of 'cunning', a word which implies both run-of-the-mill trickery and devilish witchcraft on a daughter's 'obedience'. Brabantio declares that they must 'find out the practices of cunning hell' (1.3.103) to discover why Desdemona would marry Othello, and then pointedly asks her, 'Do you

perceive, in all this noble company, / Where most you owe obedience?' (1.3.179–80). Brabantio's language provides a clear rhetorical echo to Shakespeare's earlier use of this plotline for comic effect. Of course, a daughter's disobedience can also be the stuff of tragedy as Shakespeare thoroughly explored when he created two generically disparate plays based on the same source material, the story of Pyramus and Thisbe: *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Yet Shakespeare adds to the generic comic expectations by also weaving in the familiar plotline of the older husband who is cuckolded by his younger wife. Chaucer helped to popularize the comedic structure of the so-called January–May romance genre in 'The Merchant's Tale' in *The Canterbury Tales*, in which January, a man of sixty years, marries the youthful May so that he can beget an heir. Because she is so young and wild, May has sex with a young squire in a pear tree. Likewise, in 'The Miller's Tale,' the young wife Alisoun cuckolds her old and uxorious husband John. Thus, when Othello declares to the Duke and the Venetian senators that he is too old to be motivated primarily by a physical desire for Desdemona ('I therefore beg it not / To please the palate of my appetite, / Nor to comply with heat, the young effects / In me defunct' 1.3.262–5), the audience could hear echoes of other familiar January–May plots. By pointing out the comic plotlines that Shakespeare embeds in *Othello*, I am not suggesting that the play is any less tragic than it is. Rather, I want to emphasize the way Shakespeare cannibalized and transformed familiar structures, plots and character types, thereby subverting audience expectations.

Othello also taps into the popularity of the romance narrative. The early modern prose romance was indebted to the medieval chivalric romance, in which knights went on marvel-filled adventures to fulfill fairy-tale like quests. Othello's personal narrative, the one that Desdemona would 'Devour up' with her 'greedy ear' (1.3.151, 150), borrows liberally from popular romances of the time, including John Mandeville's travels (for

more, see p. 17). Those tales were filled with extreme adventure and demonstrations of pure love, and the inclusion of their generic elements in *Othello* serves to highlight the fantastical aspects of those narratives. Even though we hear him described as such, the audience never gets to see Othello as a military leader or heroic adventurer. So the romance genre is invoked to highlight its absence in *Othello*.

Of course, *Othello* is tragic in structure, tone and content. Yet even within tragedy, we see Shakespeare experimenting with multiple sub-genres. The play is set up in a bifurcated fashion with a political tragedy bleeding into a domestic one, and vice versa. The movement of the play from Venice to Cyprus, after all, is governed by the political anxiety that the Turks will seize the important military base and trading island of Cyprus. The Duke and senators of Venice are willing to ignore the complaints of their fellow senator Brabantio precisely because they need the Moor to agree to battle the Turks. This is a political tragedy. But Shakespeare kills the Turks off in a storm so that the military narrative dies a natural death. The comic plot of the rebellious daughter marrying her true love against her father's wishes then transforms into a domestic tragedy (Callaghan, *Women*, 35ff). The genre was popularized by plays like the anonymous *Arden of Faversham* in which a cuckolding wife plots her husband's death with her lover only to be delayed by a series of accidents and chance events. Othello seems to fear that he is the duped victim in a domestic tragedy only to become the villain of one.

Once again, by blending these various tragic generic elements with those from morality plays, domestic comedies and January– May plot structures, Shakespeare seems to be prompting his audience to interrogate the expectations we bring to characters, narratives and encounters with the unfamiliar. *Othello*, in the end, is a play about how well or how difficult it is to integrate disparate people, personal narratives, culture and cultural narratives.

Where is *Othello*?: Early Modern Contexts

1. Sources   One can get a better sense of how Shakespeare blended generic elements into *Othello* by understanding the early modern sources and contexts that Shakespeare used to create *Othello*. Scholars tend to agree that Shakespeare must have read and been influenced by the Italian writer Giovanni Battista Giraldi, known by his classical pseudonym Cinthio (1504–1573). *Gli Hecatommithi* (see Appendix 3 for Cinthio's text), Cinthio's suite of 100 interwoven novellas, which are organized in groups of ten according to different topics and themes about love, was first published in Italian in 1565 and then in French in 1583. Although we cannot be certain if Shakespeare read the text in the original Italian, the translated French version, or some lost early modern English translation (the first extant English translation did not appear until 1753), it is clear that he borrowed plots, themes and characters from *Gli Hecatommithi*. While *Measure for Measure* (written around the same time as *Othello*) is influenced by the fifth story in the eighth decade, the group that addresses ingratitude, *Othello* is indebted to the seventh story in the third decade, the group that addresses the infidelity of husbands and wives.

In Cinthio's tale, an unnamed Moor who lives in Venice proves himself 'valiant' and 'skillful' to the Signoria, Venice's governing authority. Disdemona, 'a virtuous Lady of wondrous beauty', whose name in Italian means unlucky or ill-omened, falls in love with the Moor 'impelled not by female appetite but by the Moor's good qualities'. Nonetheless, 'the Lady's relatives did all they could to make her take another husband'. While there is no Turkish threat to Cyprus in *Gli Hecatommithi*, the Signoria send the Moor 'to maintain Cyprus'. The unnamed Ensign who accompanies the Moor to Cyprus, 'fell ardently in love with Disdemona, and bent all his thoughts to see if he could manage to enjoy her'. Because Disdemona remains

oblivious to the Ensign's advances, 'the love which he had felt for the Lady now changed to the bitterest hate'. As in Shakespeare's *Othello*, the Ensign chips away at the Moor's confidence by telling him that Disdemona is unfaithful, and yet in Cinthio's version his digs are more pointed racially: 'The woman has come to dislike your blackness'.

Cinthio's Disdemona gives voice to the story's moral when she states, 'I fear greatly that I shall be a warning to young girls not to marry against their parents' wishes; and Italian ladies will learn by my example not to tie themselves to a man whom Nature, Heaven, and manner of life separate from us'. In the end, the Ensign and the Moor kill Disdemona together by bludgeoning her to death with sand-filled socks which leave no marks on her body; and then they fake her death by making it look as if she was killed by a collapsed ceiling. Through complicated plot twists, the faked death is eventually revealed, the Moor is sentenced to exile, and Disdemona's relatives eventually hunt him down and kill him. The Ensign continues enacting his wicked deeds until he dies under torture: 'he was tortured so fiercely that his inner organs were ruptured'. Everything is eventually revealed by the unnamed Ensign's wife, who knew all the facts but was too scared of her husband to reveal them while he was still living.

One of Shakespeare's exceptional talents was his ability to ingest older plots, narratives and stories and then to transform them into new creations. While Cinthio's tale has a didactic purpose – to warn young girls not to marry 'a man whom Nature, Heaven, and manner of life separate' from them – Shakespeare's *Othello* resists this simplistic moral thrust. Desdemona, unlike Disdemona, dies protecting Othello and continuing to pledge her love for him. Desdemona's death, in other words, hardly lends itself to a clear moral narrative. Likewise, the fact that Shakespeare's Othello kills himself instead of being killed by Disdemona's relatives 'as he richly deserved', according to Cinthio's tale, thwarts the moralism inherent in vendetta narratives.

Shakespeare was able to make his Moor more richly textured than Cinthio's by weaving other sources into the play to fill out Othello's backstory. In particular, it seems that Shakespeare used *A Geographical History of Africa*, an influential geographical and ethnographic book about Africa (the first of its kind in early modern Europe). Its author, an Andalusian Muslim who lived in Fez, Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan (c. 1485–1554), was captured by pirates in the Mediterranean, taken to Rome, and then gifted to Pope Leo X, who christened him Johannes Leo Africanus. First published in Italian in 1550, *A Geographical History of Africa* was held up as the authoritative text on north and west Africa for centuries, and the first English translation was published in 1600 by John Pory. It was subsequently included in many travel narratives published in England.

While scholars debate how much of Africanus's geographical history Shakespeare actually read, it seems clear that Shakespeare found the author's personal narrative a rich one to mine for *Othello*. The idea of a well-born, educated and experienced African who works his way into the upper echelons of white, European power is clearly echoed in *Othello*. Shakespeare's tragic hero, after all, explains that he comes from 'men of royal siege' (1.2.22), and explains that he was 'taken by the insolent foe / And sold to slavery' from which he received 'redemption' (1.3.138–9). Shakespeare's Othello, then, tells a tale that echoes the fascinating reality of Johannes Leo Africanus's life.

Shakespeare also appears to have used bits and pieces from a new early modern English translation of a famous Roman encyclopedia by Pliny the Elder, *The Historie of the Natural World*, translated by Philemon Holland in 1601. While Pliny's text, like Africanus's, provides a wide range of information about botany, zoology and astronomy, the more fabulous parts of the narrative about the 'Nature of Man' seem to be echoed in *Othello*. For example, Pliny includes an interesting section on 'the diversitie of other nations' and focuses on the Scythians, some of whom he calls 'Anthropophagi' (Pliny, 153 and 154).

3 *Portrait of an African Man (Christophle le More?)* (c. 1525–30) by Jan
Jansz Mostaert (courtesy of Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

Furthermore, Shakespeare may have gotten specific geographical locations like the 'Hellespont' (see commentary note on 3.3.456–9) from Pliny's encyclopedic text (Pliny, 154 and 190).

Yet Othello's narrative of self blends the personal ('my travailous history' 1.3.140) with the fantastical ('cannibals that each other eat, / The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders' 1.3.144–6), and this narrative structure echoes a different wildly popular text, John Mandeville's *The Book of Marvels and Travels* (c. 1371). Supposedly written by an English Christian pilgrim who travels in and around Jerusalem, *The Book of Marvels and Travels* is a fabricated tale that blends travelogues, fantasy narratives and fiction often in the same moment. Take for example, Mandeville's description of cannibals in India: 'One travels from this country via many lands and islands . . . and after fifty-two days' travel one reaches the land called Lamuri. . . . The land is held in shared ownership, in that one man has it one year, another man another year. . . . They do, however, have one wicked habit: they eat human flesh more enthusiastically than anything else. Merchants bring them their children to sell, and if they are fat they are eaten straightaway' (Mandeville, 78–9). Mixing the guidebook structure ('after fifty-two days' travel') with fantasy (a town of communist cannibals), Mandeville's *Book* seems to provide Shakespeare with an elastic narrative structure that can encompass veracity and fantasy.

Shakespeare also appears to have browsed books about the social and political structure of Venice, texts he used for both *Othello* and his earlier Venetian play, *The Merchant of Venice* (c. 1596). In particular, he seems to have used Sir Lewes Lewkenor's English translation of Gaspar Contarini's *De Magistratibus et Republica Venetorum* (c. 1543), *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice* (1599) when writing *Othello*. Written by Contarini when he was an ambassador to Charles V, *De Magistratibus* romanticizes the Venetian state, explicitly painting a portrait of balance, fortune and evenhandedness. Lewekenor's

English translation was significant because the early modern English were often looking to Venice for models of social, political and economic prosperity. Thus, Lewekenor's text analyses the structures of the political (the Duke and Grand Council), military (generals and commanders of empyreal outposts) and social systems (a two-class system with nobility/gentlemen and commoners). While there is more to say about early modern perceptions of Venice (for more, see p. 22ff), suffice it to say that Shakespeare not only borrowed fictional sources for plots and characters, but also non-fictional sources for information about foreign social and political systems. Iago's attentiveness to issues of class and rank ('Preferment goes by letter and affection / And not by old gradation, where each second / Stood heir to th' first' 1.1.35–7) clearly reflects Shakespeare's intertextual interests.

Theatrically, *Othello* is indebted to dramas that featured 'negro Moor[s]' (*Alcazar* 2.1.3), especially George Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar* (c. 1591), the first early modern English play to do so. A play that relates the true history of the Moroccan defeat of the Portuguese in 1578, including the death of the King of Portugal, *Alcazar* features 'barbarous', 'ambitious', 'lusty' and 'manly' Moors of various different skin colours (*Alcazar* 1.1.6; 3.2.25; 3.3.12; 3.3.20). Muly Mahamet, the play's 'negro Moor', who is the offspring of the former king and his black bond slave, tricks the Portuguese into supporting his bid for power. A chorus figure, who introduces each act, declares of Muly Mahamet:

> And ill betide this foul ambitious Moor
> Whose wily trains with smoothest course of speech
> Hath tied and tangled in a dangerous war,
> The fierce and manly King of Portugal.
>
> (*Alcazar* 5.1.1–5)

With his characterization of the smooth talking negro Moor who manipulates his European friends rhetorically, Peele helped set the stage for Shakespeare's depictions of race, rhetoric and

4 *Mulay Ahmad* (c. 1609) by Peter Paul Rubens (photograph © 2016 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, USA)

intercultural collisions.[1] While not a stereotypical stage villain, Muly Mahamet is frequently discussed by other characters in terms of his colour, as if his racial difference might provide a reason for his ambitiousness and cunning.

Peele's Muly Mahamet is most closely related to Shakespeare's Aaron, the Moor. It should come as no surprise, then, that critics have argued that Peele may have been a co-author on *Titus Andronicus*.[2] Like Muly Mahamet, Aaron is described as a 'barbarous Moor' who is 'raven-coloured' (*Tit* 2.2.78; 83). And like Muly Mahamet, Aaron is a truly gifted rhetorician who frequently cites classical allusions, translates Latin and puns incessantly. When the Roman army defeats the Goths, Aaron is taken prisoner along with the Goths. Unbeknownst to the Romans, he and the Empress of the Goths, Tamora, have been having an affair. Thus, when Tamora unexpectedly rises in power in Rome, Aaron rises with her and helps to plot her revenge. In *Titus Andronicus*, Aaron represents the creative force of chaos and destruction. He can improvise; he dreams up creative ways to torture the Romans; and he understands the narrative plots into which the Romans script him.

The fascinating theatrical and characterological moves that Shakespeare makes from *Titus Andronicus* to *Othello* effectively divide the devil figure from the 'raven-coloured love'. So Iago embodies the devilish improvisational and rhetorical effectiveness of Muly Mahamet and Aaron, the Moor, while Othello embodies the blackness of them. In Othello, Shakespeare seems to return to a small figure he included in *The Merchant of Venice*, the Prince of Morocco. While a humorous character

---

1 For more on other early modern racialized characters see Jones, E. For more on race and rhetoric see Smith, *Race*.

2 While Dover Wilson was the first to speculate that *Titus Andronicus* was co-authored with George Peele (Wilson *Titus*), and while Brian Vickers followed up (Vickers, 148–243), Gary Taylor and John Nance have employed sophisticated computer modelling to prove the point (Taylor and Nance).

who attempts to marry the wealthy, white Portia, the Prince of Morocco begins his wooing by telling the 'gentle queen' (*MV* 2.1.12) stories about his adventures:

> By this scimitar,
> That slew the Sophy and a Persian prince,
> That won three fields of Sultan Solyman,
> I would o'erstare the sternest eyes that look,
> Outbrave the heart most daring on the earth,
> Pluck the young sucking cubs from the she-bear,
> Yea, mock the lion when 'a roars for prey,
> To win the lady.

<div align="right">(*MV* 2.1.24–31)</div>

The Prince of Morocco clearly thinks that telling adventure stories from exotic lands will win Portia's hand. While this tactic does not work on Portia, Shakespeare returns to this narrative in *Othello* with a female protagonist, Desdemona, on whom it does work. Othello is also related to the Prince of Morocco in their belief that their births, although foreign, are nonetheless worthy of the women they desire. During the famous casket test for Portia's hand, the Prince of Morocco does not hesitate to declare that he matches Portia in birth: 'I do in birth deserve her, and in fortunes, / In graces and in qualities of breeding' (*MV* 2.7.32–3). Thus, we see Shakespeare borrowing from and imitating the characterizations of villainous 'negro Moors' in his earlier work only to abandon those characterizations to create figures who are still rhetorically gifted but also high born and self-assured.

2. Places The geographic landscape of *Othello* also helps to reveal the early modern context into which Shakespeare was imagining this world. Like many of Shakespeare's plays, *Othello* has a split geography with the first act of the play taking place in Venice and the remaining acts taking place in Cyprus. In a comedic structure, this type of geographic split usually emphasizes the licensing freedom that is enabled outside of the

city walls. Think, for example, of the geographic split in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in which Athens represents the world of the law and patriarchal order (Egeus appeals to Theseus, the Duke of Athens, to force his daughter to marry Demetrius instead of Lysander), and the woods represent the world of holiday and licentiousness (in which the lovers end up paired according to the women's initial wishes: Hermia with Lysander and Helena with Demetrius). Of course, tragic tales can contain a geographic split as well in order to mark a break from order into chaos. Most famously, *King Lear*'s movement from the court to the heath marks the political, familial and emotional breaks that the titular hero experiences. In *Othello*, the geographic split seems to signify the movement from Christian civilization to an unstable outpost.

Venice, however, was not viewed as the same kind of city as London in early modern England. In fact, Venice was both lauded and reviled in the early modern English imagination. It was lauded for being a cosmopolitan and diverse city; for establishing a formidable maritime power; and for enabling most of Europe's trade with Africa and the East. Venice was a cosmopolitan city in which people from different races, ethnicities and religions lived and worked together, and had a 'reputation as a multicultural republic' (Drakakis, 3). Clearly, this was one of the factors that drew Shakespeare to making Venice the setting for *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*, two plays that investigate what it means to live in a cosmopolitan city during times of increasing international trade (one play explores this through a comedic lens and one through a tragic one). As already noted, Venice was also admired for its complex political and social structures. To the early modern English, then, Venice seemed wealthier, more sophisticated and more outward-facing than London. Although it could not have been fully clear at the time, Venice's international power was waning by 1600, prompted in part by the loss of Cyprus to the Turks in the Fourth Ottoman–Venetian War (1570–1573). Thus, the Duke's fears that Cyprus must be protected

at all costs against the Turkish invasion reflect the growing awareness of the fragility of this 'multicultural republic'.

Yet Venice also became a symbol of hedonistic excess in the early modern English imagination. John Drakakis has claimed that 'By the 1590s Venice had clearly become a byword for the exoticism of travel' (Drakakis, 4). Associated with the goddess of love, Venus, Venice fascinated the early modern English because of the city's more liberal treatment of sexual relations where prostitution was actually regulated by the state and involved thousands of women. Writing a few years after the creation of *Othello*, Thomas Coryate included his impressions of the courtesans in Venice in a travel book he published in 1611:

> As for the number of these Venetian Courtesans it is very great. For it is thought there are of them in the whole city and other adjacent places, as Muraon, Malomocco, &c. at the least twenty thousand, whereof many are esteemed so loose, that they are said to pen their quivers to every arrow. A most ungodly thing without doubt that there should be a toleration of such licentious wantons in so glorious, so potent, so renowned a City.
>
> (Coryate, 264)

Thus, Iago gives voice to many early modern English stereotypes about Venice when he describes Othello and Desdemona as 'an erring Barbarian and a super-subtle Venetian' (1.3.356–7), tagging the former as the foreigner and the latter as the whore who are both granted too much liberty in Venice. Likewise, Iago activates the stereotype of the 'loose' Venetian woman when he tells Othello, 'I know our country disposition well – / In Venice they do let God see the pranks / They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience / Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown' (3.3.204–7). In this statement, Iago manages both to vilify Desdemona and denigrate Othello as an unschooled outsider in Venice.

In *Othello*, Cyprus looks as if it will represent the opposite of Venice: the margin instead of the centre. Cyprus is after all an island at the far east of the Mediterranean, marking it as closer to the religions and cultures of the East than to those of the West. Cyprus is the territory over which empires clash; it is the colony and not the empire itself. But as is true of so many of Shakespeare's plays with split geographies, the centre and margins end up bleeding together in significant ways. In *Othello* there is the uncanny sense that Venice and Cyprus are related in their mythological associations with Venus: Cyprus is thought to be Venus's birthplace (and another of Venus's names is Cypris). Cyprus is the contested ground over which empires battle, but it also serves to highlight the problems inherent in those empires. After all, the Turkish threat is destroyed by the natural forces of a storm, but the island releases the violence lurking beneath the surface of the Venetian defenders of the Christian faith. The play seems to be asking if the violence was inherent to them in the first place, or if there was something about Cyrpus that made them change.

Two other locations play roles in *Othello* even though they are not depicted and are only referenced: Aleppo and Barbary. Aleppo (currently in part of modern day Syria) was captured by the Turks in 1517, and the Turks 'integrated it into the commercial system of their empire as a major center for their silk trade' (Molà, 57). Othello commits suicide mentioning that he has 'done the state some service' (5.2.337) in Aleppo in the past, and that brief mention serves to conjure a past in which the Venetian empire might have won more of the East. It is a fantasy, of course, but one to which Othello clings especially at the moment of his death (Kastan, 108). Barbary, on the other hand, appears at first glance to represent a geographical region and a people who are wholly other and distant from the Venetians. In early modern English, Barbary was slang for the region of North Africa associated with Berbers or Moors, the so-called Barbary Coast of Africa. For instance, Iago, riling Brabantio with images

of his daughter's sexual relations with Othello, states, 'you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse' (1.1.109–10). In Iago's logic, Desdemona has not only disobeyed her father but also flung herself into a relationship with someone so different as to be bestial. And yet even the certainty of the cultural, religious and racial divides between the Venetians and those from Barbary begins to collapse when Desdemona sings the 'Willow Song' and explains that she learned it from her mother's maid, Barbary (4.3.24). Although Barbary is never mentioned again, the audience is left wondering who this maid was, how she came to be associated with Desdemona's family, and what exactly she meant to Desdemona in terms of Desdemona's understandings of race and class.

3. Peoples   So what exactly was a Moor in Shakespeare's world? It is clear from the theatrical references already noted that Moor was an elastic term in the early modern period that could encompass Muslims (i.e., a religious group), Africans (i.e., a geographical group), blacks (i.e., a racial group), atheists (i.e., a non-religious group) and others. The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides the following definition for Moor:

> a native or inhabitant of ancient Mauretania [see 4.2.226], a region of North Africa corresponding to parts of present-day Morocco and Algeria. Later usually: a member of a Muslim people of mixed Berber and Arab descent inhabiting north-western Africa (now mainly present-day Mauritania), who in the 8th cent. conquered Spain. In the Middle Ages, and as late as the 17th cent., the Moors were widely supposed to be mostly black or very dark-skinned, although the existence of 'white Moors' was recognized. Thus the term was often used, even into the 20th cent., with the sense 'black person.'
>
> (*OED* n.2)

I include this long and wide-ranging definition to demonstrate that the term Moor was unstable when Shakespeare was writing *Othello*. As Anthony Barthelemy has cleverly written about the *OED*'s definition, 'Moor can mean, then, non-black Muslim, black Christian, or black Muslim. The only certainty a reader has when he sees the word is that the person referred to is not a [white] Christian' (Barthelemy, 7). Thus, the title of Shakespeare's play, *Othello: The Moor of Venice*, juxtaposes an unstable personal descriptor with a stable geographical location.

Hearing the title of his play, Shakespeare's audience members probably had various and potentially contradictory definitions and corresponding images in their minds. While not exactly analogous, I think something similar could be said for many in the US and the UK today for the word *Arab*: for some it will signify an ethnicity, for others it will signify a religious affiliation, for others it will signify a linguist grouping, and for still others it will signify a race. One can argue vociferously that the term *Arab* actually refers to an extremely heterogeneous panethnic grouping of peoples from western Asia, North Africa, the Horn of Africa and parts of the Arabian peninsula, but the terms *Arab* and *Muslim* often get conflated.[1] So it should not surprise us that there was confusion about Moors in the early modern period. It is not that the early modern English were quaint and unworldly, but rather that designations of identity often become fungible when race, nationality and/or religion are evoked.

How did the early modern confusion over the term Moor affect staging practices for *Othello*? What did Othello look like on Shakespeare's stage? While I will describe the performance history of *Othello* in more detail (see p. 67ff), it is important to address the history of performing Othello's Moorishness with

---

1 In 2004, *Slate Magazine* ran a scathing critique of *The New York Times* for publishing an article that purportedly examined 'Arab' donations to George W. Bush's campaign when in fact the article conflated Arabs, Muslims and others (Shafer).