

# OTHELLO



## Toolkit

EXPERIENCE  
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art.





# Welcome!

We are thrilled to have you at the theater to see Shakespeare's most intimate of tragedies. ***Othello*** explores society's polarizing struggles with difference. Consumed by their bigotry and xenophobia, those who praised the Moorish general Othello for his military successes now reject his marriage to Desdemona. The newlyweds are determined to overcome this resentment, but Othello's assignment in Cyprus draws them into the web of his lieutenant Iago, whose jealousy knows no bounds.

This Toolkit is intended for learners of all ages wishing to dive deeper into the history and themes of Shakespeare's play, as well as the contemporary context in which this production of ***Othello*** was staged. In the following pages, you will find materials on the development of this production, Shakespeare's influences and methods in writing *Othello*, and sources that illuminate the long, complex, and rich history of this play. You will also find detailed lesson plans crafted to help high school students engage more deeply with the themes, characters, and language of the play.

See you at the theater!

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## ***Othello* TOOLKIT**

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## **Thank you for participating in the A.R.T. Education Experience!**

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# *Othello*: The Production



Chris Butler (Othello)  
and Alejandra  
Escalante (Desdemona)

Photo: Jenny Graham

This section introduces the American Repertory Theater presentation of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's production of ***Othello***. Follow a synopsis of Shakespeare's classic play (pages 5-6). Then, familiarize yourself with the characters and performers in this production (pages 7-8) in the show. Finally, read a compelling interview between Director Bill Rauch and actor Chris Butler in "The Edges of Acceptance" (pages 9-13) that addresses the themes and challenges of staging this complex tragedy.





# The Story

By Dawn Monique Williams

Othello's ensign, Iago, shares the news with Roderigo that Othello, a mercenary for the Venetian Senate, has advanced Michael Cassio to Lieutenant. This promotion leaves Iago incensed as he had hopes of moving up the ranks himself. Iago enlists the help of Roderigo, a failed suitor to Desdemona, to wreak havoc on Othello. Iago taunts Brabantio, sharing the news of his daughter's marriage to Othello. Outraged, the wealthy senator makes for the Senate to have Othello arrested.

The Senate is already in session, making preparations for war with the Ottoman Empire. The Duke has plans to deploy Othello, not arrest him. So other than Brabantio's curse, there is no penalty for Othello and Desdemona's elopement. The honeymoon is cut short, however, as Othello must set sail immediately. He is to assume command of Venetian-occupied Cyprus and hold back the Ottoman forces, who are making their way toward the island. Desdemona makes a case for joining her husband.

Once in Cyprus, Iago's machinations take full swing. He gets Cassio drunk, and a moment of unruly behavior gets the young officer stripped of his title. Iago plants seeds of doubt in Othello's mind that perhaps his faithful wife is not so

faithful. Iago enlists the help of his own unsuspecting wife, Emilia, who, eager to please her husband, presents him with the handkerchief that Othello had given as a gift to Desdemona. Iago uses this prop (perhaps the most famous in all of Shakespeare) as the “ocular proof” to give momentum to his plot. With the gullible Roderigo in tow, Iago’s treacherous plan is solidified.

Having been craftily led, Othello believes Iago honest and Desdemona an adulterer. Iago is granted the promotion he is so desperate for, but even having it, he is not content. He sees his duplicity through to the end, working Othello into such a madness that the jealous man swears he’ll kill his wife, leading to more than one tragic conclusion.

*Dawn Monique Williams is the Production Dramaturg for **Othello**.*

*This article first appeared in the Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s Illusions 2018 magazine.*





The cast of **Othello**. From top left to right: Chris Butler, Danforth Comins, Alejandra Escalante, Derek Garza, Amy Kim Waschke, Stephen Michael Spencer  
From bottom left to right: Richard Howard, Neimah Djourabchi, Rainbow Dickerson, Daniel José Molina, Vilma Silva, Richard Elmore

## Who's Who

Notes by Dawn Monique Williams

*The following is a list of characters as they are interpreted in this production of **Othello**.*

**Othello** – A hired mercenary for the Venetians who serves as the Admiral of their fleet, Othello is a black North African trying to assimilate. He has converted to Christianity and is in love with Desdemona, the daughter of a Senator. Played by **Chris Butler**

**Iago** – Ensign to Othello, determined to ruin him. Iago's motivation is unknown and could be that he was passed over for a promotion in favor of Cassio, or because he believes Othello has had an affair with Emilia, Iago's wife. Played by **Danforth Comins**

**Desdemona** – A young Venetian woman secretly wed to Othello. She is made bold by her love for Othello and follows him on his Cyprus campaign. Played by **Alejandra Escalante**

**Michael Cassio** – A young sailor skilled in war-room tactics but lacking application in the field. Promoted to Lieutenant, he is quickly stripped of his

## The Characters and Performers (cont.)

title when his behavior is deemed unbecoming of a sailor. Othello is convinced that Cassio is having an affair with Desdemona. Played by **Derek Garza**

**Emilia** – Iago's wife who attends Desdemona. Savvy and loyal, she schools Desdemona on marriage while trying to keep her own husband satisfied. Played by **Amy Kim Waschke**

**Roderigo** – A wealthy former suitor of Desdemona's whom Iago easily manipulates. Played by **Stephen Michael Spencer**

**Brabantio** – Desdemona's father and high-ranking senator in Venice. A seeming friend to Othello until he learns of Othello's secret marriage to Desdemona. Played by **Richard Howard**

**Montano** – The Governor of Cyprus, relieved of his command by Othello. Played by **Neimah Djourabchi**

**Bianca** – A courtesan and Cassio's mistress. Played by **Rainbow Dickerson**

**Lodovico** – Venetian officer and relative of Desdemona. He arrives from Venice to recall Othello from Cyprus since their occupation was a success. Played by **Daniel José Molina**

**Gratiana** – Desdemona's aunt and Brabantio's sister. Arrives in Cyprus along with Lodovico bearing important news. Played by **Vilma Silva**

**Duke of Venice** – The highest-ranking Venetian official. Played by **Richard Elmore**

*Dawn Monique Williams is the Production Dramaturg for **Othello**.*

*This article first appeared in the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's Illusions 2018 magazine.*





# The Edges of Acceptance

Imagining **Othello** in a contemporary US context

*A.R.T. Editor and Assistant Dramaturg Robert Duffley spoke with **Othello** director (and Oregon Shakespeare Festival Artistic Director) Bill Rauch and actor Chris Butler, who plays the title role.*

**Bill, as a director, what drew you to *Othello* in this particular moment?**

**Bill Rauch:** All of Shakespeare's plays are "for all time," as the adage goes, but I do feel that this play is particularly resonant with the United States of America in the twenty-first century: **Othello** illustrates society navigating difference and otherness in a way that is painfully relevant right now. Racism, misogyny, homophobia, religious bigotry, Islamophobia—Shakespeare has created a portrait of these societal constructs, and the ways that they hurt the individual psyche and the individual heart.

**How has that resonance informed the setting of this production?**

**BR:** We think of our Venice as a contemporary Venice located in the United

## The Edges of Acceptance (cont.)

States. Then, when the characters go to Cyprus, they are actually on the island of Cyprus. There's not actually a US naval base on the island of Cyprus, but there are naval bases all over the world, so that change felt like a Shakespearean elision: Shakespeare collapses Elizabethan England—his own time and place—with wherever the play happens to be set. As a director, I felt inspired by that mixture.

**Othello represents many different types of other: he is seen as a racial outsider, but also as a national and religious foreigner. How does that intersectional otherness appear in this production's contemporary US setting?**

**Chris Butler:** Othello's position as a racial other is something that I'm always aware of, and something I was prepared to embrace when I got involved with the production. In addition to Othello's status as a racial other, Bill also thought that it was very important to highlight that he is a foreigner in an adopted country. I was resistant at first, because I wanted to play Othello as an American Black guy. But given conversations about refugees and the closing of borders in the US (and the world) today, Bill felt that we really needed to not ignore that part of the story. Othello's religion is also a factor in this production. He's a convert, trying his best to be a Christian in America, but the fact that he is a convert keeps him on the edges of acceptance in society.



Photo: American Repertory Theater

**BR:** When we started talking about Othello being an immigrant to the country that he serves, Chris made a connection to the Lost Boys of Sudan. And the more deeply I learned about them, the more I saw how their stories converge with Othello's biography as written by Shakespeare. So we imagine that before he was pulled into military

service in his home country, our Othello probably came from an animist tradition in a village. Then he was converted to Islam as a part of his enforced military service as a child, and then in his adopted homeland, he converted to Christianity. I think that Othello struggles powerfully with trying to stay true to who he is, because he's suffered lifelong cultural whiplash beginning with his traumatic upbringing.



## The Edges of Acceptance (cont.)

**What can you tell us about who the other characters are within this production's contemporary landscape?**

**CB:** I am an admiral in the Navy, and Cassio is still a lieutenant. The senators are senators. But one interesting shift is that Emilia isn't just a servingwoman in this production—she's a petty officer in the Navy. I think that choice informs why she might not immediately be very close to Desdemona: it's just a military assignment. Then she grows more loyal—it's an interesting journey, and a strong arc.

**BR:** From the get-go, it was also really important to me that we not have eleven white people and the actor playing Othello. In order to reflect the complexity of the country and the world that we live in, we wanted a more multi-racial cast. Very specifically, Iago, Roderigo, and Brabantio are all played by white actors, and there are many other actors of color—and therefore characters of color—in the play. For instance, Emilia is played by an Asian American woman, and Montano is played by a Middle Eastern actor as a Muslim Kurd.

In the rehearsal process, my directorial instinct was to keep pushing the otherness of the characters, while Chris was very thoughtful about the fact that if we highlighted that otherness too much, that approach might diminish the way that Othello himself is othered. I think the result of those conversations was a great collaboration, and I'm proud that we found a way to make the world of the play more complex in terms of both racial and cultural expressions while making sure that Othello's unique blend of otherness really remains the dominant issue in the story.

**Chris, given the possibly painful relevance of the play, what do you draw on to bring this role to life, and how do you take care of yourself while living this tragedy every night?**



Amy Kim Waschke (Emilia)  
and Danforth Cornins (Iago)

Photo: Jenny Graham

## The Edges of Acceptance (cont.)

**CB:** This has been a surprisingly personal story to tell. The themes of the play really resonate with my life today, and having lived with the role for nine months now, it's had a heavier personal effect on me than anything else I've done so far. The hardest part for me isn't necessarily the racial aspect of it; it's how I treat Desdemona—my wife, someone whom I love. I'm not a violent person, but I certainly know what it's like to make a mess of things—to look down and realize you're the one who made that mess. That's a dark place to go at the end of a story, and it has been trying. However, in terms of handling that in the long term, we have a wonderful cast—a very warm, professional group of people. We treat each other with kindness and compassion, and that positive working experience has been nourishing.

**Speaking of Othello's treatment of Desdemona, this production is coming in the midst of a widespread conversation about sexual violence and violence against women. As artists looking at classic texts with painful topics, how do you responsibly bring those texts to life in a way that adds to the wider conversation?**

**BR:** As a director, you try to cast the strongest possible actors in every role. There are four women in our cast. They're all powerhouses, and they have fought—in the best sense of the word—for the integrity of their characters. Alejandra Escalante, who plays Desdemona, is a strong artist who portrays a strong woman. There's nothing wispy or generic about her performance. I wrestle with this question a lot as the head of a Shakespeare festival. When Shakespeare has a passage that is misogynist, or racist, or homophobic, is he endorsing those things, or is he exposing them? I've learned that you can't make excuses for the man in terms of his being a product of a time and a place, and you can't diminish the ugliness of what he brings forward, but at the same time, his humanity as a writer is so exceptional, as is his ability to have empathy, understanding, and love for every character he creates.

**CB:** From the very beginning of rehearsals, Bill didn't want us to gloss over the ugliness in this play. People have asked, "Did you add some of those adjectives and epithets directed at Othello?" No. All of that is there. We wanted you to hear it, because we didn't want to apologize for it. We wanted to make sure you could hear it in order to have a deeper understanding of the play.

**BR:** I think the question I'm hearing beneath your question is, "Is it worth putting this ugliness onstage? Is it worth bringing more ugliness into the world?" And I think Shakespeare's humanity as an artist, and the humanity of the artists interpreting these roles, do make it worth our time. There's a cost—Chris talked about the cost of having to go there emotionally. There's a cost to the artist, and to the audience, too, who go on the emotional ride that is the play. But in some ways, the question is "Why do we do tragedies at all? Why show



## The Edges of Acceptance (cont.)

the ugliest things that human beings are capable of doing to one another? Do we learn from those immersions in the ugliest parts of our nature?” And I believe that we do, but it has to be done with unbelievable care, thoughtfulness, emotional risk-taking, and integrity.

**CB:** This production asks a lot of the audience: it goes to an emotionally intense and unrelenting place. And people come away from the production with different feelings. People have left thinking about how to find the lags in their own lives, and also with a greater love and respect for the women in their lives. I want this play to be an impetus for kindness, because of the ugliness. It’s clear in the images that Bill creates that everyone in society is responsible for its ugliness. We all have a hand in it, and at some point, we all have an opportunity to do something about it.

**BR:** There’s one moment in particular that relates to what Chris is describing. As we enter the scene before Othello approaches the bedroom in the final act, everybody in the ensemble rotates the bed—it’s a moment of ritual movement. It was very important to me to highlight that these tragedies are not simply stories of individual pathology. These are societal tragedies—and that is something I believe very strongly. That’s not to take away responsibility from each of us as individuals for how we deal with those social constructs, but nevertheless, the social constructs are real and are part of what we’re all grappling with as individuals. I think Shakespeare understands that dynamic and creates it in his work, and we wanted to be able to underscore that aspect of the play in our production.

**I think those reflections are very useful for audience members seeing the show. Is there anything else you’d like to add?**

**BR:** On a personal note, I will just add that I was an undergrad at Harvard and had the absolute privilege of directing a couple of plays on the Loeb mainstage as a student when I was just becoming a director. Now this is my third professional production at the A.R.T., so the space, the institution, the audience, and the Greater Boston community hold great meaning for me personally—it’s a great honor to come back and to be able to share this work. It’s also the first Shakespeare production that OSF has toured to another city in many decades. So it’s a big deal for OSF to be invited to bring one of our Shakespeare productions to an institution like the A.R.T.

**CB:** And I have never been to Boston, so I am tremendously looking forward to it.

*This article originally appeared in the A.R.T Winter 2018/19 Guide.*

# Text and Context



Danforth Comins as Iago (left) and Chris Butler as Othello (right)

Photo: Jenny Graham

This section examines the world that helped shape Shakespeare’s writing and the development of ***Othello***, as well as the themes that remain relevant today.

In “Something Borrowed, Something New” (pages 15-18), uncover a few of the sources that informed the Bard’s writing of *Othello*. Next, take a close look at the verse used in Shakespeare (pages 19-21). The Elizabethan and Jacobean world is the backdrop for “1604 and All That” (pages 22-26), which details the politics that informed the play. Then, “Speak of me as I am” (pages 27-31) details the complex performance history of the tragedy. Finally, “*Othello* in Adaptation” (pages 32-34) offers a selection of the books, movies, and theatrical works inspired by the play.

Next, explore the portrayal of war in this and in many of William Shakespeare’s plays in “Shakespeare and War” (pages 35-36). Finally, Dr. Farah Karim-Cooper of Shakespeare’s Globe in London details the lives of the “Women in *Othello*” (pages 37-40).

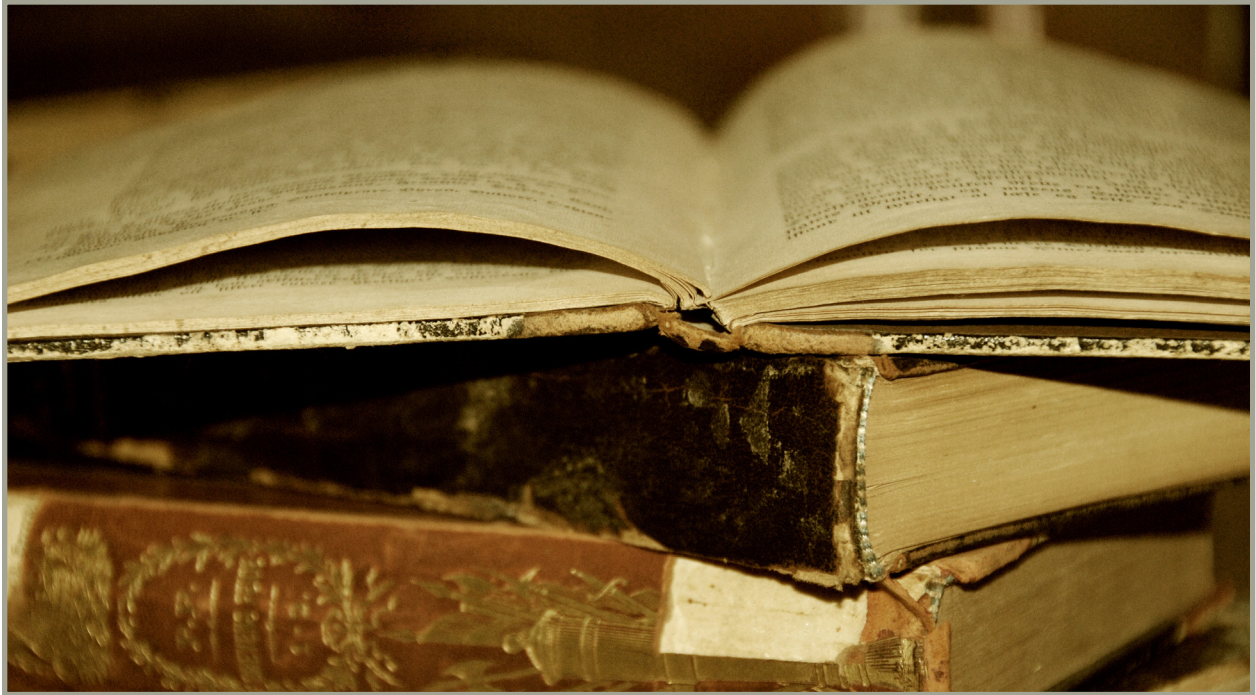


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## Something Borrowed, Something New: Shakespeare's Sources

Shakespeare often crafted his plays from a fabric of shared stories, contemporary Elizabethan interests and original additions. To create *Othello*, Shakespeare combines a tale from 1566 with the early seventeenth century's growing interest in foreign places and cultures.

The primary source for the story of *Othello* appears to be Italian author Giraldi Cinthio's 1566 collection of tales *The Hecatommithi*. (Shakespeare used a *Hecatommithi* tale for *Measure for Measure*, too.) Cinthio's story tells of an unnamed Moor who was a valued, distinguished soldier in Venice. The young Venetian and only named character "Disdemona" 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 in Cyprus, Disdemona asks to accompany him.

Meanwhile, the Moor's ensign (a soldier who carries the army's flag) desires Disdemona. When Disdemona fails to recognize his secretive advances, he assumes she must already be in love with someone outside of her marriage. He assumes she desires the Moor's handsome Corporal and decides to kill both the Corporal and Disdemona. Fortuitously, the Corporal wounds another



## Something Borrowed, Something New (cont.)

soldier while on guard, and is immediately dismissed from service by the Moor. Disdemona pleads for his reinstatement and the rebuffed ensign suggests to the Moor that his wife, disgusted by his looks, is attracted to the dashing Venetian Corporal. The Moor demands proof of his wife's infidelity, and so the ensign steals Disdemona's handkerchief, a wedding present from her husband, and drops it in the Corporal's bedroom.



Photo: Public Domain via Folger's Library

The ensign arranges to talk with the Corporal in sight of the Moor. He claims the Corporal admitted his adultery and the gift of the handkerchief. When the Moor questions Disdemona, she seems guilty. Disdemona confides her fears to her best friend, the ensign's wife, but she, fearing her husband, cannot divulge his plan. The ensign brings the Moor to the Corporal's window to see a woman copying the embroidery of the lost handkerchief. At the

Moor's request, the ensign attacks the Corporal but fails to kill him. The Moor resolves to kill Disdemona. The ensign and the Moor bludgeon Disdemona to death and stage the murder to appear an accident. Finally realizing the ensign's lies, the Moor demotes him. In retaliation, the ensign charges the Moor with the attack upon the Corporal. The Moor is banished from Venice and murdered by Disdemona's family in exile. Later imprisoned for another crime, the ensign dies from torture.

The similarities to Cinthio's story are striking, but so are the alterations Shakespeare made to tell his story of *Othello*. Cinthio's tale is a forbidding sermon against inappropriate marriage, complete with a moral from Disdemona:

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.

*Othello*, however, names and develops each of Cinthio's characters to create a compassionate, multifaceted story through many changes and additions:

- Shakespeare adds Brabantio, Roderigo and the Turkish attack on Cyprus entirely. In the Cinthio, the ensign at first loves Disdemona; in Shakespeare Roderigo takes over this role.

## Something Borrowed, Something New (cont.)

- Iago's passed-over promotion is unique to *Othello*. In Cinthio the ensign is demoted at the end of the story as punishment.
- Shakespeare adds Othello's Act 1 account of how he and Desdemona had fallen in love.
- Iago improvises his way to revenge, unlike the ensign, who carefully plans Desdemona and Cassio's murders from the beginning.
- Othello alone murders Desdemona—and by smothering rather than bludgeoning her to death.
- Instead of being killed in exile as Cinthio's Moor is, Shakespeare's Othello commits suicide.
- Othello's story moves much faster than its source material: a marriage that experienced years of happiness in Cinthio's tale lasts no more than weeks in Shakespeare's retelling.

While Cinthio's story (which Shakespeare likely read in a 1584 French translation) is clearly *Othello's* main literary source, scholars also view contemporary public figures and travel narratives as influential to the playwright. At the time of *Othello's* writing, the English were fascinated by faraway lands that offered new resources and power. Elizabethan England had long standing relationships with Venice, the Ottoman Empire and African nations, all of which appear in *Othello*. By 1604, Britain had established peace with Venice after wars over perceived British piracy in the Mediterranean and was aware (and partially in awe) of the Ottoman Empire's expansion. (Shakespeare altered history by giving Venice control of Cyprus; the island had long been part of the Ottoman Empire.) England also had a long history of commerce with African nations from which it imported both goods and slaves.

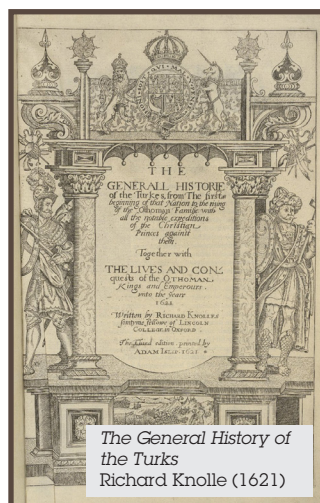


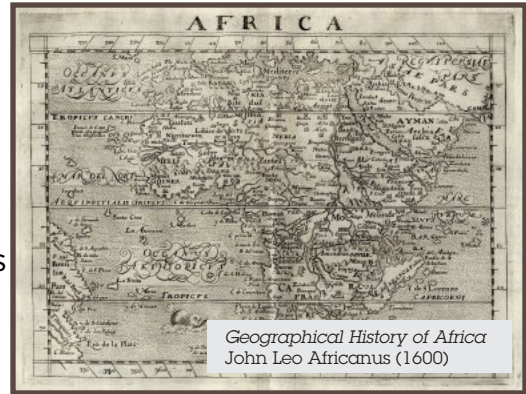
Photo: Public Domain via Folger's Library

Scholars frequently point to three sources that inspired Shakespeare's depictions of Venice, the Ottoman Empire and Africa: Sir Lewis Lewkenor's translation of Contarini's *The Commonwealth of Venice*; [Richard] Knolles's *The General History of the Turks*; and John Pory's translation of John Leo Afrfricanus's *The Geographical History of Africa*. All these works appeared in print shortly before the first known performance of *Othello* in 1604, fueling curiosity about the nations that Shakespeare presents in his tragedy.

*The Geographical History of Africa* is especially interesting because its writer bears a personal history

## Something Borrowed, Something New (cont.)

similar to that of Othello's before meeting Desdemona. John Leo Africanus was born Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan, the Muslim son of wealthy, upper-class parents in Granada in 1485. (Othello was born noble and Muslim.) Al-Wazzan grew up in Morocco and traveled extensively on diplomatic work. In his early twenties, he was captured by Christian pirates, given to Pope Leo X, imprisoned and, as a sign of the Pope's success at (forcibly) converting Muslims to Christianity, baptized and named John Leo, mirroring Othello's own story of capture and conversion. Like Othello, he thrived in Italy writing the widely read *Geographical History of Africa*.



While John Leo Africanus offers a historical parallel for Othello's early narrative, a story involving the Spanish King Phillip II mirrors Othello's subsequent rage. As Peter Ackroyd describes in *Shakespeare: The Biography*:

[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.

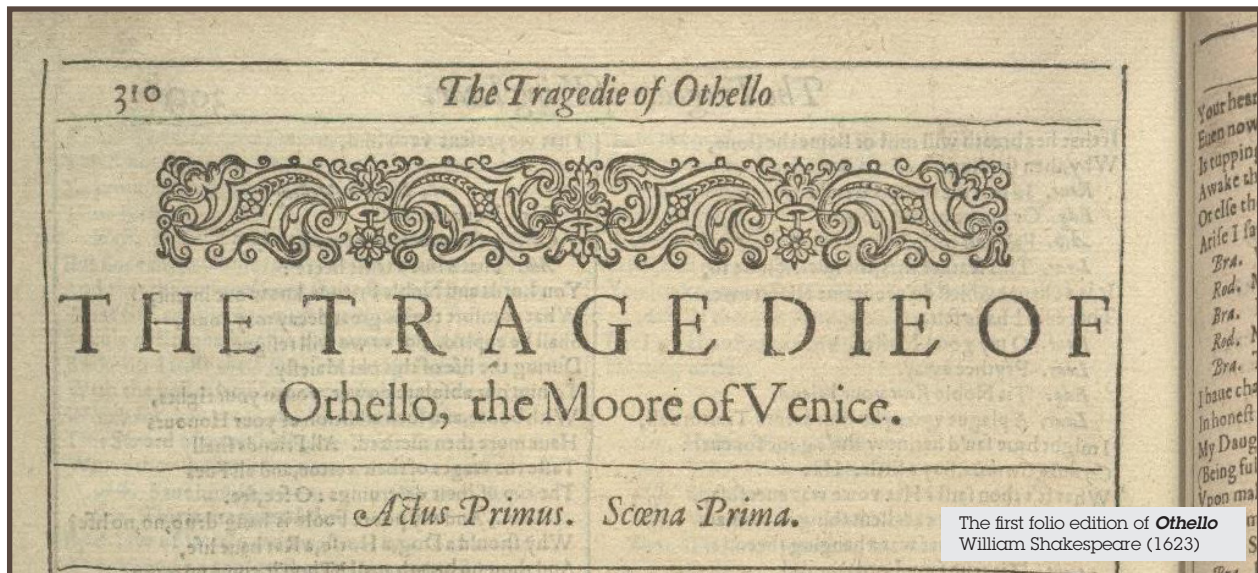
It's interesting to explore what elements of a story Shakespeare adopted and what he created. What does the character of Roderigo, for example, add? How does knowing the history of their love story change our perception of Othello and Desdemona? Does knowing that Shakespeare may have based part of Othello's character upon narratives surrounding contemporary figures change our perception of the General? Exploring these questions will lead to a deeper understanding of both Shakespeare's sources and of his *Othello*.

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## DISCUSSION

- How do the changes Shakespeare made to the original plot of Cinthio's work influence its overall thematic meaning?
- Does knowing that Shakespeare borrowed this and many of the plots of his famous works change how you perceive his originality and/or "genius"? Why or why not?





# Intro to Shakespearean Verse

By Brenna Nicely

If you are looking for rules and tips for understanding the rhythm of Shakespeare, you've come to the right place. Here are some of my favorites, compiled over many hours in rehearsals and in countless sessions at the local library. Rhythm is meaning in Shakespeare, and understanding the technical aspects of his poetry can unlock a deeper understanding of his texts. Bust out your favorite colored pens and get ready for a lot of words with Greek and/or Latin roots.

Most of the writing in Shakespeare's plays is written in a poetic form called **blank verse**: a consistent metric rhythm of poetic lines that do not rhyme. Shakespeare sometimes uses **rhymed verse**—he often uses rhyming couplets (pairs of rhyming lines) at the end of scenes and sometimes includes **sonnets**, especially during love scenes. Shakespeare also frequently uses **prose**: language without a formal metric structure. Prose is often used in the following scenes:

- Scenes of everyday life (often connected to lower-class characters)
- Lowly humor (also, often connected to lower-class characters)
- A casual or relaxed (rather than formal or impassioned) conversation
- A character is (or is pretending to be) mad
- Contrasting reason (verse) with emotion (prose)

## All about verse!

First, there are two important marks to know when notating verse:

- **macron** (—) or an **ictus** ( ' ): marks a stressed or long syllable.
- **breve** ( ~ ): marks an unstressed or short syllable. Sometimes called a "smile" when we're all in a good mood.

## Intro to Shakespearean Verse

In poetry, a **foot** is typically a group of two or three syllables. Groups of feet make up a line of poetry. While the following is not a complete list, these are the most common feet used by Shakespeare in his writing:

- **iamb** ( ~ ' ) – a foot made up of one unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. This is the most common rhythmic foot in English poetry, it is the primary foot used by Shakespeare, and it also mimics the rhythm of a heartbeat!
  - Sounds like: oh-KAY!, al-RIGHT!, my GOSH!
- **trochee** ( ' ~ ) – one stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable. Shakespeare often uses trochees at the start of a line, especially if a character is excited. This is known as an inverted line (since a trochee is the inverse of an iamb)
  - Sounds like: CAR-rot, CAB-bage, LET-tuce (and many other vegetables)
- **pyrrhic** ( ~ ~ ) – two unstressed syllables. When used in Shakespeare, a pyrrhic is almost always paired with a **spondee** in the same line.
- **spondee** ( ' ' ) – two stressed syllables. Almost always paired with a pyrrhic in the same line.
  - pyrrhic/spondee combo sounds like: “but we NEED IT!”
- **dactyl** ( ' ~ ~ ) – one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables.
  - Sounds like: DAN-ger-ous, PER-i-lous,
- **anapest** ( ~ ~ ' ) – two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable.
  - Sounds like: “I like JUICE!”

The number of feet in a single line of a poem defines the **meter**. A poem written in monometer has one foot per line, **trimeter** has three, etc.

Shakespeare wrote primarily using lines made up of five feet, usually iambs. This is why the meter Shakespeare and many of his contemporaries used is called **iambic pentameter** (i.e. lines made up of five iambic feet). Why iambic pentameter, you ask? This is the poetic verse that comes closest to mimicking natural English speech. Iambic pentameter sounds something like this in contemporary speech:

*you HAVE to GO to SLEEP and GET some REST*

In Shakespeare, the rhythm sounds like this (from *Romeo and Juliet*):

*But SOFT, what LIGHT through YONder WINdow BREAKS*

### Further Terms and Other Sundries:

- A **caesura**—usually marked in a line of verse by a **double pipe** ( || )—indicates a brief pause outside of the metrical rhythm of the text. A caesura often coincides with a grammatical shift (i.e. a comma introduces a new phrase) or a logical shift (i.e. the speaker is introducing a new idea or image). Caesuras are most common in the middle of a line in

- Shakespeare, though they may also be placed elsewhere.
- Sometimes Shakespeare includes an extra unstressed syllable at the end of a line or right before a caesura. This is called a **feminine ending** and is usually marked by a breve in parentheses: ( ˘ )
  - To make a word fit a line, sometimes Shakespeare uses an **elision**, meaning he cuts out a less-important vowel syllable to shorten the word. Example: “reverend” turns into “rev’rend” OR “degenerate” turns into “degen’rate.”
  - Sometimes Shakespeare does the opposite of an elision and expands the syllables in a word. This often can happen in words ending in “ed” or “tion.”

### Helpful Hints:

- Assume it’s regular until it’s not. Most of Shakespeare’s lines will have a regular iambic rhythm.
- As Shakespeare’s writing gets more sophisticated and complicated, so do his rhythms. This is why later plays like *King Lear* have much more rhythmic variance than early plays like *Romeo and Juliet*.
- Count the feet, not the syllables. While most lines will have ten syllables, many feet have extra, so syllable-count alone is not reliable.
- Two characters can share a single line of poetry, especially when they are in love or arguing (or both). This is called a **shared line**.
- Feet can also be missing (yikes)! And they turn into **ghost feet** (double yikes). If a line is short and not continued by another character, the feet are still there and are silent, much like a rest in musical notation. This will usually indicate a big interruption (i.e. a character is cut off by a sudden entrance, by a new thought, or sometimes by their own death [triple yikes]).
- There are always five feet! Some of the feet might be silent or a line might be shared, but this is a reliable rule. The only exception: less than 1% of the time, Shakespeare will use a 6-foot line (also known as an **alexandrine**), but this is very rare.
- For most standard English words, Shakespeare uses the same stresses that we would. However, invented words or words with double meanings might be emphasized differently. Character names have a particular tendency for multiple pronunciations (Romeo can be two syllables or three). If you are unsure, check a Shakespearean glossary!

Still want to know more? Check out [this clip about iambic pentameter from the Royal Shakespeare Company](#) for further explanation of Shakespeare’s verse.

*Brenna Nicely is the A.R.T. Education and Engagement Director.*





Image: Public Domain via Folger Shakespeare Library

## 1604 and All That

1604—the year of the first recorded performance of *Othello*—was one that was pivotal in English history. In 1601, the Queen’s one-time favorite, the Earl of Essex, staged an unsuccessful rebellion against the crown and 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. A “brutal examination of man’s deepest commitments— personal, marital, sexual” (Rosenberg, 1961) became the subject of dramatic and social discourse. 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, and Shakespeare renamed his acting company “The King’s Men” to honor his new patron. The most successful playwright was at the height of his creative genius. *Hamlet* was written; *King Lear* and *Macbeth* were soon to follow.

[...]A culture that honored and idealized its military, England was full of out-of-work, disillusioned professional soldiers. England was becoming less isolated and therefore more multicultural, but was still preoccupied with distinctions of nation, race and religion. Romantic love was idealized in works of fiction but, in real life, was viewed as an unessential ingredient for a successful marriage. These current strands of conflicts can be found in *Othello*, which Shakespeare uncharacteristically chose to set in his own time period.



Image: Public Domain. Artist and date unknown

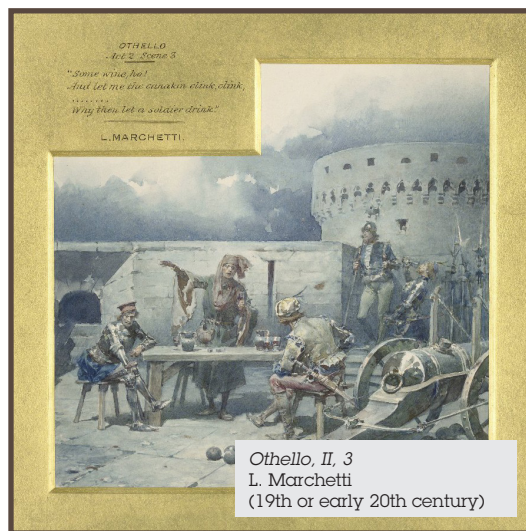
*Othello*’s story takes place inside the army, which in Shakespeare’s England had drastically changed. Even as recently as the late 1500s, England had an unpaid standing army that awarded its members based on “wealth, kindred and favor” and not for winning wars. The heroes of this army were noble knights who led anonymous, unwilling villagers into battle, writes scholar Kim F. Hall. But by 1604 its military was largely made up of

## 1604 and All That (cont.)

professional soldiers. Hall describes this change:

[Before the early modern period] battle stories mostly told of individual courage and of the opportunity war offered to win personal glory and reputation. However, by Shakespeare's time, men on foot—infantry from the lower classes—had come to dominate, and the professional soldier acting in concert with others became the new image of war.

Hall recognizes in *Othello* an image of the “old horseman-knight...for whom war was a noble calling and a religious duty rather than a profession.” Although Othello is a paid mercenary, his love of exploration and his chivalrous language align him with this history of the noble fighter. Iago, Hall argues, represents the newer face of England's military. He is a professional, hoping to eventually rise in the ranks and disgruntled because his lack of promotion means a lack of money. Othello speaks the language of chivalry; Iago speaks the language of commerce that is about to conquer the developing world.



In 1604 England was comparatively at peace—bad news for its new army, who found themselves out of work and unpaid. The plight of the poor soldier was so widespread that it appeared as an item in the Poor Man's Petition of 1603. In addition to other concerns, this petition asked King James to “let poor soldiers be paid their wages while they be employed and well provided for when they are maimed.” The fact that soldiers felt the need to petition their king for wages and disability care suggests that they were not receiving what they were owed. [...] Iago's dissatisfaction with the army would have resonated

strongly with Shakespeare's original audience.

[...] *Othello* reveals early modern anxieties about race and otherness. Still at the beginning of centuries of imperialist relations with Africa, it is likely that Jacobian England did not know racism as we in America know it today. But because there was less association between nations than now, those who fell outside the borders of the known, white world were viewed as “barbarians.” Scholar Michael Neill writes:

*Othello* is a play full of racial feeling, 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 racist ideology was beginning to evolve under the

## 1604 and All That (cont.)

pressures of nascent imperialism.

Although he never uses the word himself, *Othello* is referred to throughout the play as a “Moor,” a vague term then used to signify a Middle Eastern or black Muslim (or, occasionally, Christian or pagan) likely from Africa, Arabia, or, perhaps, Spain. The white, early modern conception of a Moor was an exotification of a population viewed as foreign, though present in England at the time of *Othello*’s writing. In 1596 Queen Elizabeth licensed Captain Casper van Senden to deport both free and enslaved “blackamoors” from England, arguing that they drained relief meant for white Elizabethans in times of economic hardness. This edict was aimed at both enslaved and free Africans. In 1601 Queen Elizabeth published another, more strongly worded edict—likely because the first had not been successful. But while marriage between races was emphatically taboo, England continued to depend upon African workers for cheap and free labor.

Jerry Brotton explains that the ambivalent attitude of early modern England towards Africans “can be partly explained by the extensive and amicable relations that were established between Elizabethan England and the kingdom of Morocco.” *Othello* was written soon after the visit of the Moroccan 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.

At the same time that England was becoming more internally diverse, it was also becoming a more global nation, engaging with foreign countries through commerce and war. *Othello*’s original audiences had their own ideas of what Venice, Cyprus and African nations looked like and represented.

Venice then embodied the height of Western civilization. It was the Italian city



Image: Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons



## 1604 and All That (cont.)

viewed as London's counterpart, the seat of art and commerce in a Western world growing ever more commercial. It was also celebrated as a place of cultural exchange. In *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice* Gaspar Contarini wrote that:

“[Some] exceedingly admired the wonderful concourse of strange and foreign people, yea, from the farthest and remotest nations, as though the City of Venice were a common and general market to the whole world.”

And, as A.J. Honnigmann notes in his introduction to the Arden Shakespeare *Othello*, “Venice was the pleasure capital of Europe, especially in its sexual tolerance.” So in Venice, a city celebrated for its sexual permissiveness and multicultural flair, a story of a “civilized” society excluding an Other from outside its borders could be depicted and explored at a safe distance from the England of Shakespeare’s audience.

[...]By 1555, books appearing in English described the Moors of Africa. 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.

Early modern England had a long history of commerce with Africa, which might have led to an understanding of the continent’s varied countries and nations. [...]And yet, despite this potential wealth of information, the continent remained a mystical, foreign and unknowable place within Jacobians’ collective imagination. [...] Scholar Emily C. Bartles argues, “it seems to have been a deliberate choice to make Africa mysterious and dark because it was not actually THAT mysterious to Europeans.” *Othello*’s unspecific African background would have been in keeping with the Jacobian’s carefully selected understanding of Africans. Clearly, *Othello* was a modern story: a modern story, specifically, centered on the marriage between a black man and a white woman.

In sixteenth-century England, women were legally the property of their father or husband. Marriage marked a transfer of property as the bride moved from

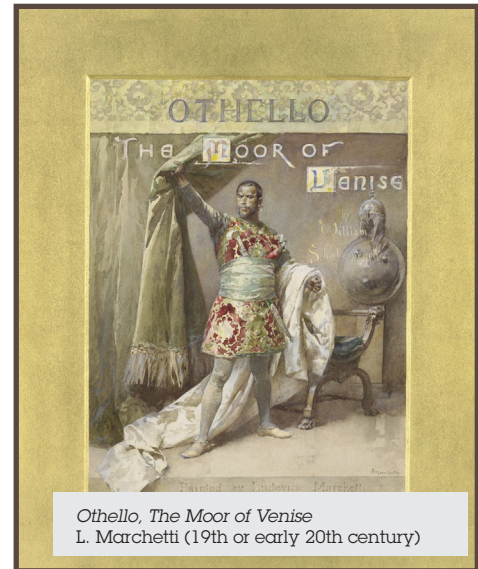


Image: Public Domain via Folger Shakespeare Library

## 1604 and All That (cont.)

her father's to her husband's care. Wives were understood to require the kind control of men and were in turn expected to be chaste, silent and obedient to their husbands. Adultery threatened not only an individual marriage, but also the patriarchal state. In 1650 (forty-six years after *Othello's* writing) female adultery was made a corporal crime.



Image: Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons

Although spouses were not treated equally within a marriage, they were expected to be well matched by external measures. Balance was thought to be the required foundation for a solid union. Spouses were supposed to be equal in age, class, social status, religion and, of course, race. Love, on the other hand, was considered undesirable and viewed as a passion, an explosive and illogical force more likely to destroy couples than to make them happy. Desdemona and Othello's elopement between

two people in love of different ages, races, social standings and religious backgrounds went against all conventional Jacobian beliefs of what made a stable marriage.

Shakespeare wrote *Othello* as a modern story in a time of sudden cultural change and concern. Jacobian fears about the military, race, a globalizing world and marriage informed what has been called Shakespeare's most intimate tragedy. Written over 400 years ago, Shakespeare's *Othello* survives both as a masterful play in its own right and as a testimony to the changing beliefs of the early modern world.

*This article has been edited for length and is used by permission of [Chicago Shakespeare Theater](#).*

### DISCUSSION

- In describing the social context that informed the writing of the play, are there similar tensions or events in our time that keep the play fresh or relevant?
- The article states that around 1604 there was a strong "dissatisfaction with the army." Do you see examples of that dissatisfaction in society currently? How does that manifest in art or storytelling nowadays?

# “Speak of me as I am”

Finding Othello in the Harvard Theatre Collection at Houghton Library

By Elizabeth Amos

Shakespeare’s Othello is a character of contradictions. Othello is, in his own words, the paradoxical “honorable murderer”: he is the perpetrator of a terrible crime, but also the victim of Iago’s ruthless deceptions. He is confident in the art of war but feels insecure in his own marriage. Despite his high-ranking position in its military, he is an outsider in the Republic of Venice, referred to throughout the text as “The Moor” while other characters, individualized, are called by their given names. In the seventeenth century when *Othello* was written, the term “Moor” was generally understood to mean “Muslim” and was applied to peoples of Berber and Arab descent—usually from North Africa, but also from the Middle East or Spain. Additionally, the term was more widely used to refer to peoples from across the African continent, regardless of their religious or cultural affiliations, and there are ongoing scholarly debates as to what Shakespeare specifically intended in his use of the word as applied to Othello. Throughout the play’s production history, these complexities have resulted in a wide variety of interpretations of the role.



Image: Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library/Harvard University



## “Speak of me as I am” (cont.)

Records from generations of performance reflect a changing image of Othello, shifting in tandem with conceptions of masculinity, nobility, and race within the public imagination.

The first recorded performance of *Othello* took place on November 1, 1604 starring Richard Burbage, one of the most famous actors of Shakespeare’s company, The King’s Men. Othello was one of the best-known roles of Burbage’s varied career, which included characters ranging from Romeo to Richard III. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the lineage of white actors performing Othello in blackface was effectively a who’s who of notable players, including David Garrick (England, 1745), Edmund Kean (England, 1814), and Edwin Booth (America, 1881). During this time, exoticized stereotypes of blackness—with roots in Elizabethan processions and plays depicting Moors as giants—meant that Othello was expected to be tall and imposing. A small man, Garrick was considered ill-suited for the role, while the handsome and more physically commanding Irish actor Spranger Barry became the eighteenth century’s most esteemed Othello. As the popularity of Napoleon began to rise, however, the image of heroic warrior-types started to shift. Slender builds and highly polished manners became acceptable expressions of the character, and slight-framed performers, including Kean and Booth, played Othello to great acclaim. This trend would be interrupted by Italian actor Tommaso Salvini, who took the English-speaking world by storm in the 1870s with a fervent performance that rejected the preference many actors of the time were showing for beautiful speech over action. Seeing an Italian actor perform the role thrilled American and British audiences. Echoing the sentiments of many audience members who saw Salvini’s performance, one critic observed, “the Moors are akin to the Latins...being of Latin temperament, Othello is played better by Latins than Englishmen.”



Image: Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library/Harvard University

This enthusiasm for a non-Anglo-Saxon Othello had not been widely shared by Ira Aldridge’s audiences 40 years earlier who, in 1833, saw a prominent Black performer play the character for the first time. A month after Edmund Kean’s final performance as Othello at Drury Lane, Aldridge, an American actor with a long and lauded career, received mostly lukewarm reviews after his debut in the role at Covent Garden. 1833 was the year that slavery was abolished in the British colonies, and some, perhaps in response to this political shift, bemoaned the notion of a Black man stepping onto a major British stage in one of Shakespeare’s great tragic roles. A few nights after Aldridge’s *Othello* opened, an outbreak of influenza in London forced the theater to close for five days. When the theater reopened, *Othello*—and the

## “Speak of me as I am” (cont.)

other two shows in which Aldridge had been featured—were removed from the repertory. As the *National Omnibus* reported: “Mr. Aldridge has been the victim of an unmanly, vindictive, and unprincipled persecution, got up by a gang of callous, mischievous ruffians, who took the advantage of an unworthy prejudice, which still lingers in the minds of weak persons.”

American actor Paul Robeson’s three turns as Othello marked a junction in the performance history of the play. Robeson, who became an actor in part because of the racial prejudice he experienced as an African American lawyer, achieved early success in his career on stage. He was approached about playing Othello at the Savoy Theatre in London and agreed on the condition that he be allowed to spend several years in England perfecting his pronunciation of the material. For this 1930 production, directed by Ellen van Volkenburg, Robeson chose Peggy Ashcroft to play opposite him as Desdemona. The production met with mixed reviews. Most agreed that Robeson spoke the text well but felt the direction of the piece was poorly conceived. Audiences also protested the number of times Robeson and Ashcroft, who were having an affair at the time, kissed on stage—ironically replicating the same anxiety surrounding interracial relationships that informs the plot of the tragedy.

By 1943, Robeson, who had become increasingly politically minded while travelling extensively throughout Europe, including parts of Soviet Russia, Nazi Germany, and wartime Spain, had come to firmly identify the cause of Black Americans with the situations of oppressed peoples around the world. Believing it was time for the United States to see an interracial *Othello*, Robeson approached Margaret Webster to direct him on Broadway. Contractually, Robeson had exclusive final say on all casting and costume decisions, and he shared artistic control over all aspects of the production. “In our conflict,” stated the show’s program note, “all races are allied to fight for common ideals.” Despite an air of idealism in an America professing strong anti-fascist beliefs, the production was launched cautiously with a trial engagement at the Brattle Theatre in Harvard Square. After a warm reception in Cambridge, it moved to Broadway for a record-breaking 296-performance run.

The multicultural production featured Uta Hagen as Desdemona and José Ferrer as Iago, neither of whom had the star power of Robeson at the time. Both would have been dropped from the Broadway production had Robeson not argued on their behalf, going so far as to negotiate top billing for them both. In line with Robeson’s broader and uncompromising advocacy for equality, when the company toured, they refused to perform at segregated theaters. After the war, Robeson was one of many artists, including Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes, questioned by the House Committee

## “Speak of me as I am” (cont.)

on Un-American Activities. Robeson was seen as having controversial political attitudes, and his passport was withdrawn in 1950. Nine years later, in a successful attempt to force the return of his passport, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre invited Robeson to play Othello in Stratford, England.

After Robeson first played Othello in 1930, one reviewer announced that “no white man should ever dare presume to play [Othello] again.” This was not to be the case. On film, Orson Welles played the role in 1952, followed by Laurence Olivier’s Oscar-nominated 1965 performance. In fact, in England, white actors would continue playing the role well into the 1980s. And, while many established actors of color—including Earle Hyman (1953), Ben Kingsley (1986), and Laurence Fishburne (1995)—have now lent their talents to the role, opinions on who should play Othello continue to vary. In 1998, Ghanaian-born British actor Hugh Quarshie asked: “When a black actor plays a role written for a white actor in black make-up and for a predominantly white

audience, does he not encourage the white way, or rather the wrong way, of looking at black men...?” In a similar vein, Sidney Poitier once told James Earl Jones (*The Night of the Iguana*) that he refused to play the role because, as he put it, “I cannot go on stage and give audiences a black man who is a dupe.” Jones himself played the role in seven different productions between 1956 and 1982. Jones rejected producers’ encouragement to perform “black rage,” instead finding inspiration in imagining an Othello born into a rich historical Muslim culture, such as that of Spain before the Moorish expulsion. “Was Othello a savage?” asked Jones. “All I had to do was go to the Alhambra in Spain to know that it could not be so.”

Hugh Quarshie later decided that the role should continue to be played by Black actors, as long as Othello was played as a man responding to racism, “not giving a pretext for it.” As Quarshie has identified, there are complex politics at play in Othello’s identity. Each production that engages with these complexities must find its own answer to the question of who Othello is, or should be. By doing so, each production joins in dialogue with the play’s rich



Image: Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library/Harvard University



## “Speak of me as I am” (cont.)

and varied history. In the Oregon Shakespeare Festival production coming to the A.R.T. this winter, director Bill Rauch’s contribution to that history is a production that avoids casting one Black actor to play Othello in an otherwise white ensemble. “Given the glorious complexity of our society, that felt like the wrong direction for this production,” says Rauch. The production’s cast of twelve features eight actors who identify as people of color, creating new possibilities in answer to the question: “Who is Othello?”

*Elizabeth Amos is the A.R.T. Dramaturgy Apprentice.*

*This article originally appeared in the A.R.T Winter 2018/19 Guide.*

Sources: Milly S. Barranger, Margaret Webster: A Life in the Theater (University of Michigan Press, 2004); Sheila Tully Boyle, Paul Robeson: The Years of Promise and Achievement (University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Sarah Hovde, “A contract for *Othello*” (Folger Shakespeare Library, 2016); Bernth Lindfors, Ira Aldridge: The early years, 1807-1833 (University of Rochester Press, 2011); Lois Potter, Shakespeare in Performance: *Othello* (Manchester UP, 2002); Marvin Rosenberg, The Masks of *Othello*: the search for the identity of Othello, Iago, and Desdemona by three centuries of actors and critics (University of California Press, 1961); Dale Stinchcomb, “Full freedom, not an inferior brand” (Houghton Library Blog, 2016)



For more on the use of blackface in Shakespeare, listen to this compelling radio episode from PRI.

### DISCUSSION

- Do you agree with Othello’s self-categorization as an “honorable murderer”? Why or why not?
- Why might the actor Sidney Poitier see the character of Othello as a “dupe”?
- What does the play gain or lose based on the race and cultural background of the actor playing Othello?



Image: Public Domain via the Victoria Book of Opera

# Othello in Adaptation

By James Montañó

William Shakespeare found inspiration for his plays in many places. Famous fables, books of history, and epic poems were among the many sources of Shakespeare's oeuvre (see article *Something Borrowed, Something New: Shakespeare's Sources*, pages 15-18). Likewise, almost all of his works have been adapted, changed, and reimagined since his death in 1616. Shakespeare's tragedy of *Othello* is ripe for adaptation. For centuries, artists have mined the material for inspiration and new meaning. Below are only a few examples of adaptations of this work.

## **Otello** (1887)

Opera by Giuseppe Verdi and librettist Arrigo Boito.

Written late in Verdi's life—he was seventy-six when the opera was completed—this adaptation stays true to the main plot points of *Othello*, while adjusting the timeline slightly. For example, the opera opens in the midst of a massive storm. A storm occurs in Shakespeare's play, but not until Act 2. The storm is a way for Verdi to begin the opera in an exciting fashion and foreshadow the tumult to come. [Click here for a video of New York's Metropolitan Opera's 2012 production of Otello, starring Johan Botha and Renée Fleming.](#)

## Othello in Adaptation (cont.)

### **Dom Casmurro** (1899)

A novel by Brazilian author Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis.

This sprawling, widely-praised novel centers the themes of distrust and infidelity. The title character narrates the story throughout three stages of his life: Bento (young), Doctor Bento (middle age), Dom Casmurro (old age). Like Othello, Dom Casmurro is distrustful of his wife, believing her to be having affairs. As the plot unravels, Dom Casmurro's jealous paranoia begins to turn him into an unreliable teller of his own tale. The author was also a translator who had previously translated *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *Romeo and Juliet* into Portuguese.

### **The Tragedy of Othello: The Moor of Venice** (1952)

A film by Orson Welles. This award-winning film stars director Welles as Othello and is shot as a black-and-white film noir. The film is a condensed version of the play and is told in an extended flashback—the movie begins with Othello's dying face, then jumps back to his wooing of Desdemona (played by Suzanne Cloutier). [Click here for a trailer of the film.](#)

### **Othello** (1965)

A film directed by Stuart Burge, starring Laurence Olivier as Othello, Frank Finlay as Iago, Maggie Smith as Desdemona, and Joyce Redman as Emilia. Restaging his acclaimed 1964 National Theatre Production, Laurence Olivier's production remains true to the text. This film still holds the record for the most Oscar nominated acting performances for a Shakespearean film, with all four leads nominated. Olivier's performance is notable for its very clear use of blackface, which reportedly took Olivier hours to apply and buff. [Click here to watch a clip from PBS's Shakespeare Uncovered, discussing this production.](#)

### **Othello** (1995)

A film directed by Oliver Parker, starring Laurence Fishburne as Othello and Kenneth Branagh as Iago. The first feature film to cast a Black actor as the title character, the film was made while the O.J. Simpson trial was still capturing the attention of the American public. [Click here for a trailer of the film.](#)

### **O** (2001)

A film directed by Tim Blake Nelson, starring Mekhi Phifer, Josh Hartnett, and Julia Stiles. Setting the tale of Othello in an American high school, this adaptation replaces the military context with the basketball court, where Odin (played by Mekhi Phifer) is being manipulated by Hugo (Josh Hartnett) into killing Desi (Julia Stiles), after Odin is appointed MVP of the varsity basketball team—an honor Hugo desired. The themes of jealousy, race, and manipulation remain, but updated in modern language and an energetic hip-hop soundtrack. [Click here for a trailer of the film.](#)



## Othello in Adaptation (cont.)

### **Othello** (2002)

A ballet choreographed by Lar Lubovitch with a score by Elliot Goldenthal. This modern dance/classical ballet hybrid tells the tale of Othello in three acts. Choreographer Lubovitch longed to construct a full-length narrative told exclusively through dance. The ballet was originally staged by the San Francisco Ballet. [Click here for a clip of Iago's deception of Othello, performed by the Joffrey Ballet in 2009.](#)

### **Omkara** (2006)

A Hindi film adaptation directed by Vishal Bhardwaj. Moving the story into the modern day, this adaptation's background is political intrigue rather than military hierarchies. The filmmakers adapt Othello's race to make him a half-caste Indian and give Iago, renamed "Langda," clear political motivations for his machinations against Omkara (Othello). The film follows much of the structure of *Othello* but overlays modern technology and breakout musical moments found in many Bollywood films. [Click here for a trailer of the film.](#)



Danforth Comins (Iago) and  
Derek Garza (Cassio) in *Othello*

Photo: Jenny Graham

# Shakespeare and War

by James Montaña

War plays a pivotal role in many of Shakespeare's plays. In the English history plays, for instance, war is used by many of the title characters to create or maintain control: *Macbeth* is a circular war play, beginning and ending in civil wars that give power to the title character and end with Macbeth's death and beheading; King Lear's actions at the beginning of his play quickly lead to a bloody civil war among his own children; *Richard III* begins with one war's end and ends with the demise of Richard in battle at the hands of his enemy Richmond. The war in *Henry V* contains one of Shakespeare's most memorable speeches, called the St. Crispin's Day Speech, which coined the term "band of brothers" to describe the comradery found amongst those who serve in battle together.

While war in Shakespeare's works is often necessary to the development of the plot, in *Othello*, war happens in the background. Othello and Iago are soldiers and, in this production, so is Emilia. Director Bill Rauch has used the comradery, the intimacy, and the tensions that come from serving in active

## Shakespeare and War (cont.)

warfare to define the motivations and relationships of the characters in the A.R.T. production.

Actor and army veteran Stephan Wolfert has been travelling the country with a show called “Cry Havoc!”, which details his life in the armed forces and its relationship to Shakespeare’s work. In his show, he travels through his childhood in Wisconsin, to his time in the armed forces, the PTSD that forced him to leave army, and how his personal discovery of the Bard’s plays changed his life. As a veteran, he comes to the subject of war in Shakespeare’s plays with a specific perspective that sheds a fascinating light on many of the plays’ characters. For example, he tells a story of teaching *Othello* to other veterans. One common question asked by audiences regarding Othello’s motivations is why he would trust Iago in the first place. Why is Othello seemingly easily swayed by Iago’s distrust of Desdemona? When presenting this question to veterans, Wolfert says that the veterans had no problem understanding why Othello would trust and value Iago. Their service together in war provides a bond that is many times untranslatable for audiences that have not served in the armed forces. For Othello, the comradery of war trumps any obvious flaws in Iago’s character.

Stephan Wolfert is interviewed about his show and about Shakespeare’s theater of war by journalist Barber Bogaev for the Folgers Shakespeare Library’s podcast, *Shakespeare Unlimited*. [Listen to the interview here.](#)



Click to listen to the Folger Shakespeare’s podcast episode called, “Shakespeare and War”.

*Be advised that the podcast contains adult language and conversations about violence and trauma related to war.*

### DISCUSSION

- In this production Emilia is a petty officer in the army along with the men. What impact does this have on her character’s arc? If she was only known in the play as Iago’s wife, would that change the story?
- What role does the ongoing war play in the tragic conclusion of the play?





Amy Kim Waschke (Emilia)  
and Alejandra Escalante  
(Desdemona) in *Othello*

Photo: Jenny Graham

## Women in *Othello*

Written by Dr. Farah Karim-Cooper

In Shakespeare's time, women did not enjoy the same freedoms that they do today. This was a time of strict social hierarchies and stringent rules about how women should behave in the home and in public. Because women were responsible for maintaining the 'honour' of their families (particularly amongst the upper classes), there was a great deal of anxiety about how they behaved in public and in private. Society was patriarchal; in other words, men ran all of the institutions and were considered the heads of households. The rules that applied to women concerned their conduct in a variety of situations: they should not go anywhere unescorted (this is particularly true for elite women like Desdemona in Renaissance Venice); they should not wear sexually provocative clothing or makeup; they should not speak very often, and certainly not about matters of state or important issues that only men would be able to discuss; they should remain chaste, keeping their virginity intact until marriage; they should obey their husbands and fathers in all things. This last rule is why it is such a shock that Desdemona has had a clandestine marriage.

Once a woman is married she has more rules to follow—she especially needs to be submissive to her husband and faithful to him or she could be branded a

## Women in *Othello* (cont.)

whore. Women were warned in conduct books and in sermons preached each Sunday that if they misbehaved, they would be committing a sin. In *A Sermon of whoredome and Uncleaness against adultery* in 1547, the preacher tells women if they commit ‘fornication’, ‘adultery’ or any ‘unclean’ act, they would be going against ‘God’s commandment’ and would ‘abuse the gentleness and humanity’ of her husband. If a woman, married or not, is accused of being unchaste and labeled a ‘whore’, it could mean the downfall of her family and society, and the ruin of her future. It was a serious and dangerous accusation and, in this period, women were guilty until proven innocent.

*Othello* is a play that asks us to examine the position of women in society, since it explores issues such as: clandestine marriage, accusations of adultery, and includes three different social classes of women. Desdemona is from a noble or a ‘patrician’ family in Venice and therefore would have the least amount of freedom; her behavior would have been watched carefully and she would not have been allowed to go out in public without her gentlewoman. When Brabantio here’s Desdemona is with Othello he cries ‘*How got she out?*’—a reflection of the close supervision women of her class into word. Emilia is a gentlewoman, who may be of either the upper or middle class, but she is not as elite as a Patrician. Emilia is bold; she actually voices the unfair rules that apply to women but not to men and she voices the need for equality between the sexes:

*‘Why, we have galls, and though we have some grace,  
Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know  
Their wives have sense like them: they see and smell  
And have their palates both for sweet and sour,  
As husbands have.’ (4.3.89-93)*

Is Emilia right? Yes, it is true, men and women are not that different and perhaps women should behave as badly as they do, because that’s what they have been taught: ‘*The ills we do, their ills instruct us so*’ (4.3.100).

Bianca is the third woman in the play. She is a courtesan in Cypress. Courtesans were prostitutes and in Venice as well as Cypress during the Renaissance period, they were known to be quite educated, skilled at various

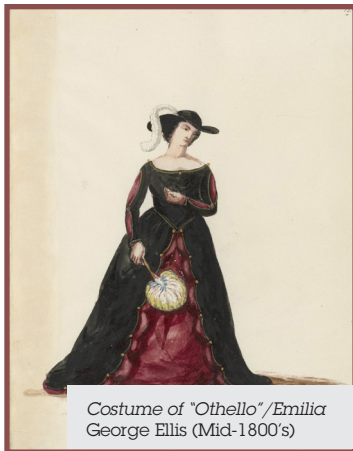


Image: Public Domain via Folger Shakespeare Library

## Women in *Othello* (cont.)

trades (including embroidery, as we learn when Cassio asks Bianca to ‘*take out the work*,’ or copy the embroidery in the famous handkerchief) and, oddly enough, courtesans had some independence and freedom even though they were at the lower end of the social scale.

The language in the play paints women as either virtuous and pure or as adulterous and sexually corrupt. There seems to be little compromise between the two statuses and this is frustrating for young women who read and see this play performed in the 21st century. Our perception of Desdemona is partly created by the poetic language that some characters use to describe her. In Act 2, scene 2, Cassio, for example, refers to Othello’s new wife as ‘*a maid/That paragon’s description and wild fame*’; that she ‘*excels the quirks of blazoning pens*’—which means she is more beautiful and virtuous than poets are able to describe. He later concludes his tribute to her by referring to her as ‘*The divine Desdemona*’, giving her the same status as a goddess. By equating her with a goddess, Cassio creates an ideal that seems impossible for a woman to actually live up to: it’s a bit like seventeenth-century airbrushing.



Costume of "Othello"/Desdemona  
George Ellis (Mid-1800's)

Image: Public Domain via Folger Shakespeare Library

Once the ideal has been established in the mind of the audience, Iago then begins to slowly chip away at it and changes Othello’s perception of Desdemona.

We see how her reputation gets soiled through the language Iago uses to talk about women and more generally: ‘*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*’ (3.3.205-206). Here Iago tells Othello that the women in Venice are deceptive and they hide loose behavior from their husbands. In the next moment, he takes his first dig at Desdemona: ‘*She did*

*deceive her father marrying you*’ (3.3.209), reminding Othello that Desdemona married him secretly, without her father’s permission. Iago uses language to manipulate Othello into a state of doubt about his wife’s faithfulness. He basically calls her a whore and Othello later does so as well. In fact, the word whore is used more in this play than any other Shakespeare play—over 13 times.

Disturbingly, Othello goes back to using poetic language when he sees Desdemona sleeping just before he is about to murder her: ‘*I’ll not shed her blood,/Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,/And smooth as monumental alabaster*’ (5.2.3-5). Here he admires and idealizes her white skin, highlighting the beauty ideal of the Renaissance: pale and glistening (like alabaster). This is a very common way of describing women’s beauty in Renaissance love poetry. But why does Othello do this here? Why in the



## Women in *Othello* (cont.)

moments before he's about to kill her? If he admires her beauty and loves her so much, why does he kill her?

He must kill her because it has been determined that she is a 'whore' and has dishonored him and his family; in 16th century Renaissance culture, women may not have always been condemned to die under such circumstances, but they would be sent away to a convent, or spend their lives as spinsters because their honour was in question. The families of such women would be ridiculed and sometimes socially as well as financially ruined. Bianca (whose name very ironically means 'white'—a color associated with purity and virginity) is a prostitute or 'whore', but the only fate she suffers is heartbreak, since she appears to love Cassio quite genuinely.

What might Shakespeare be trying to say in this play about women in his time? Perhaps he wants us to pity Desdemona, who is brutally murdered for something she did not do. But Shakespeare's original audience may not have been as sympathetic to someone who married someone without her father's consent. And why is Bianca, a prostitute, presented to us as a sympathetic character—she loves Cassio and is distraught when he is wounded? What are we to make of Emilia? Is she the strong voice of womanhood, the loyal servant who dies telling the truth, defending her mistress's honour but disobeying her husband? The answer to these questions might be that Shakespeare is suggesting women do not fit easily into the categories created by Renaissance patriarchy, that they are human, and changeable and sometimes more noble and honorable, regardless of their sexual behavior, than the men who try to control them.

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### DISCUSSION

- What do you think Shakespeare is trying to say about women in his time period?
- The rights and freedoms of women have considerably expanded since Shakespeare wrote *Othello* in 1604. If *Othello* were set in 2019, how might the actions and treatment of the women of the play be different and what might be the same?
- Emilia supports and betrays both her Iago and Desdemona during the events of the play. How are these decisions shaped by her status within the society?

# Educational Activities

## Lesson Plan Index

### TELLING IT IN PROSE, FEELING IT IN VERSE

Pages 42-45

*Students will examine the use of prose and verse in Shakespeare's text. They will also learn the basics of iambic pentameter and the tools to identify its usage. With this knowledge, students will begin to creatively explore writing in both prose and verse.*

*This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **Othello**, though students should be familiar with the text of the play.*

### PERFORMING PERSUASION

Pages 46-51

*Students will deconstruct the various means of persuasion used throughout the text and in performance of **Othello**. Using the vocabulary of performance, specifically objective and action, students will explore the verbs of persuasion and enact such actions for one another. Those explorations will enable students to analyze various objectives and actions present in theatrical texts and reflect on how actors interpret and enact such objectives and actions.*

*This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **Othello**, though students should be familiar with the text of the play.*

### I AM NOT WHAT I AM...ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Page 52-54

*Students will analyze the primary characters in Othello. They will look at the characters' motivations, actions, and personalities. Using that information, students will interpret the characters interactions or inner life through the development of a social media profile. Students will use Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to construct the relationships between characters and portray the way that these characters might interact with the outside world on social media.*

*This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **Othello**, though students should be familiar with the text of the play.*

# Lesson Plan: Telling it in Prose, Feeling it in Verse

## OBJECTIVES

Students will examine the use of prose and verse in Shakespeare's text. They will also learn the basics of iambic pentameter and the tools to identify its usage. With this knowledge, students will begin to creatively explore writing in both prose and verse.

This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **Othello**, though students should be familiar with the text of the play.

## SUGGESTED STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

**MA RL.9-10.4 -- Reading Literature: Craft and Structure** Determine the figurative or connotative meaning(s) of words and phrases as they are used in a text; analyze the impact of words with multiple meanings, as well as symbols or metaphors that extend throughout the text and shape its meaning. (See grades 9-10 Language Standards 4-6 on applying knowledge of vocabulary to reading.)

**MA R.PK.12.4 -- Reading: Craft and Structure** Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

**MA L.PK.12.3 -- Reading: Craft and Structure** Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

## TIME

45 Minutes

## MATERIALS

- Handout of article "Intro to Shakespearean Verse" (Pages 19-21)
- Handout "Verse and Prose Examples from *Othello*" (Pages 44-45)
- Paper
- Pencils or pens
- Optional: Means for watching a Youtube video

## PROCEDURE

1. Students review the article "Intro to Shakespearean Verse" in advance of this lesson.
2. Either as homework or in-class, students write a fictional, short monologue to someone who betrayed them. Encourage the students to create a monologue that begins in a lower energy and builds with verbal vigor. This is a working draft, and does not have to be polished.
3. Pair students and have them share/perform their monologue for one another. If there is time, students should highlight one thing they found most interesting about their partner's monologue.
4. Discuss the differences between prose and verse. Ask students to explain iambic pentameter in their own words.

[Optional: Show [this clip about iambic pentameter from the Royal Shakespeare Company](#) for further explanation]



# Telling it in Prose, Feeling it in Verse

5. The instructor reads (or asks volunteers to read) examples of prose and verse from *Othello*. Ask students if they could tell from listening if the lines were written in prose or verse.
6. Students should then rewrite the monologue in verse. The language could have rhyming, rhythm, and, for an extra challenge, be constructed in iambic pentameter.
7. Ask for students to share this new version with their partner.
8. Bring students back to report out on the experience. Ask for volunteers to share one of their monologues in class.

Variation: In pairs, ask one student to perform the other's monologue. The writer should "direct" their partner in the performance. Have the students perform their monologue for the class.

## REFLECTION

- What was challenging about this?
- What was fun?
- Did the work have more or less of an impact when performed in Verse versus in Prose?
- In what other contexts do we hear things written or spoken in Verse in literature, art, or music?

# Verse and Prose Examples from Othello

## 1. Othello (verse):

It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul,—  
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars!—  
It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood;  
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,  
And smooth as monumental alabaster.  
Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.  
Put out the light, and then put out the light:  
If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,  
I can again thy former light restore,  
Should I repent me: but once put out thy light,  
Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,  
I know not where is that Promethean heat  
That can thy light relume. When I have pluck'd the rose,  
I cannot give it vital growth again.  
It must needs wither: I'll smell it on the tree.  
Ah balmy breath, that dost almost persuade  
Justice to break her sword! One more, one more.  
Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee,  
And love thee after. One more, and this the last:  
So sweet was ne'er so fatal. I must weep,  
But they are cruel tears: this sorrow's heavenly;  
It strikes where it doth love. She wakes.

## 2. (5.2.1) Iago (prose):

Virtue! a fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners: so that if we will plant nettles, or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs, or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness, or manured with industry, why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions: but we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts, whereof I take this that you call love to be a sect or scion. (1.3.331)

## Verse and Prose Examples from *Othello*

### 3. Brabantio (verse):

O thou foul thief, where hast thou stow'd my daughter?  
Damn'd as thou art, thou hast enchanted her;  
For I'll refer me to all things of sense,  
If she in chains of magic were not bound,  
Whether a maid so tender, fair and happy,  
So opposite to marriage that she shunned  
The wealthy curled darlings of our nation,  
Would ever have, to incur a general mock,  
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom  
Of such a thing as thou, to fear, not to delight.  
Judge me the world, if 'tis not gross in sense  
That thou hast practised on her with foul charms,  
Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals  
That weaken motion: I'll have't disputed on;  
'Tis probable and palpable to thinking.  
I therefore apprehend and do attach thee  
For an abuser of the world, a practiser  
Of arts inhibited and out of warrant.  
Lay hold upon him: if he do resist,  
Subdue him at his peril.  
(1.2.79)

### 4. Iago (prose):

Do thou meet me presently at the harbour. Come hither. If thou be'st valiant,—  
as, they say, base men being in love have then a nobility in their natures  
more than is native to them—list me. The lieutenant tonight watches on the  
court of guard:—first, I must tell thee this—Desdemona is directly in love with  
him. (2.1.217)

### 5. Desdemona (verse):

My noble father,  
I do perceive here a divided duty:  
To you I am bound for life and education;  
My life and education both do learn me  
How to respect you; you are the lord of duty;  
I am hitherto your daughter: but here's my husband,  
And so much duty as my mother show'd  
To you, preferring you before her father,  
So much I challenge that I may profess  
Due to the Moor my lord.  
(1.3.201)



# Lesson Plan: Performing Persuasion

## OBJECTIVES

Students will deconstruct the various means of persuasion used throughout the text and in performance of **Othello**. Using the vocabulary of performance, specifically objective and action, students will explore the verbs of persuasion and enact such actions for one another. Those explorations will enable students to analyze various objectives and actions present in theatrical texts and reflect on how actors interpret and enact such objectives and actions.

This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **Othello**, though students should be familiar with the text of the play.

## SUGGESTED STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

*MA ARTS.T.01.17 -- **Theatre: Acting [HS]** - Demonstrate an increased ability to work effectively alone and collaboratively with a partner or in an ensemble.*

*MA ARTS.T.01.18 -- **Theatre: Acting [HS]** - Apply appropriate acting techniques and styles in performances of plays from a variety of dramatic genres and historical periods.*

*MA ARTS.T.01.14 -- **Theatre: Acting [HS]** - Create complex and believable characters through the integration of physical, vocal, and emotional choices.*

## TIME

45-50 Minutes

## MATERIALS

- Whiteboard, chalkboard, or smart board
- Text of *Othello*
- Handout of Script Excerpt 1 (Page 48) and 2 (Page 49)
- Handout of "Action Verbs for Acting" (Pages 50-51)
- Space for performance

## PROCEDURE

1. Review Script Excerpt 1 handout on page 48. Introduce that the notes included are examples of notes an actor might write to build a performance.
2. Explain the brief history of this style of the Stanislavsky acting method: It originates with Russian actor/director Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938) in Moscow. Stanislavsky created a framework for modern realistic acting, which is sometimes called "Method acting." This method has been adopted and adapted by many acting teachers around the world, and is still used today. This style of acting relies on "objectives" and "actions".
3. Ask students what "objectives" and "actions" might mean in the context of the worksheet:
  - A character/actor's *objective* is what they or their character want in that moment. There can be a big objective, such as Iago wanting the downfall of Othello, or a smaller scene objective, such as Iago wishing to *compel* Roderigo to tell Brabantio that Othello has secretly married Brabantio's daughter, Desdemona. To "compel" is Iago's action.
  - An *action* is usually a verb in this context. It is something one character must do to another character. What makes an actor's performance rich is when they can come up with compelling actions that build upon one another to flesh out a character.

# Performing Persuasion

Also, the best actions for an actor is one that requires a change in the person they are acting against. To *compel*, to *incite*, to *belittle* are all actions that would hopefully cause their scene partner to be compelled, to be incited, or to be smaller.

4. Hand out the list of “Action Verbs for Acting” on page 50-51 and allow students to read the scene.
5. Ask, what Roderigo’s objective and actions are in the first scene excerpt. There are many right answers to this. Encourage students to pursue bold actions that will help clarify their performance.
6. Students could then improvise a moment where one character must convince another. Give the possible scenarios/objectives inspired by the story:
  - Person A tries to convince Person B to give Person A a piece of candy.
  - Person A wants Person B to steal something for Person A.
  - Person A wants Person B to reveal a secret that Person B was told to keep.
  - Person A is trying to convince their partner, Person B, to trust them but Person B is usually very jealous.
  - Person A is trying to convince Person B to believe Person A, but Person A is a known liar.
7. Have volunteers perform their scene for the class.
8. Ask, “What were the actions you used in these scenes?”
9. Hand out Script Excerpt 2 on page 49 and allow the class to take a few minutes to write down the character’s objectives in the scene and what their actions might be.
  - Have students discuss their listed objectives/actions in pairs.
10. If time and skill level suffice, students may prepare their own versions of scene 2 in pairs, and perform for the class.

NOTE: The requirements for creating a social media account are constantly in flux. If the social media platform used by your students will not allow for creating a live exchanged, you may consider carrying out this activity in a worksheet format instead.

## REFLECTION

- Do you think noting the actions of the character helps in creating a performance for you?
- Does a character always have an objective and an action?
- What are a character’s actions if there is no one else in a scene with them? Who are they trying to change?
- Can you think of other strong action words that are not on the list?

# Script Excerpt 1

## Othello

IAGO OBJECTIVE:

GET RODERIGO to rouse  
Brabantio

ACT 1, Scene 1

IAGO

For, sir,

It is as sure as you are Roderigo,  
Were I the Moor I would not be Iago.  
In following him, I follow but myself.

> to  
Confide

Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,  
But seeming so for my peculiar end.  
For when my outward action doth demonstrate  
The native act and figure of my heart  
In complement extern, 'tis not long after  
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve  
For daws to peck at. I am not what I am.

> to  
intrigue

RODERIGO

What a {full} fortune does the {thick-lips} owe  
If he can carry 't thus!

> to  
Support

IAGO

Call up her father.

> to  
Provoke

Rouse him. Make after him, poison his delight,  
Proclaim him in the streets; incense her kinsmen,  
And, though he in a fertile climate dwell,  
Plague him with flies. Though that his joy be joy,  
Yet throw such chances of vexation on 't  
As it may lose some color.

> to  
ensnare

> to  
Stir

RODERIGO

Here is her father's house. I'll call aloud.

> to accept



# Script Excerpt 2

## *Othello*

### ACT 4, Scene 1

IAGO  
Will you think so?

OTHELLO Think so, Iago?

IAGO What,  
To kiss in private?

OTHELLO An unauthorized kiss!

IAGO  
Or to be naked with her friend in bed  
An hour or more, not meaning any harm?

OTHELLO  
Naked in bed, Iago, and not mean harm?  
It is hypocrisy against the devil!  
They that mean virtuously, and yet do so,  
The devil their virtue tempts, and they tempt  
heaven.

IAGO  
If they do nothing, 'tis a venial slip.  
But if I give my wife a handkerchief—

OTHELLO What then?

IAGO  
Why then, 'tis hers, my lord, and being hers,  
She may, I think, bestow 't on any man.

OTHELLO  
She is protectress of her honor, too.  
May she give that?

# Action Verbs for Acting

abase	abet	abolish	absolve	abuse	accept	acquaint	afflict
acquit	affront	addle	aid	address	ail	admonish	alarm
affirm	alert	allow	allure	amaze	amend	amuse	anger
antagonize		anticipate	ape	appeal	approach	arouse	arrange
assess	assist	astound	attack	authenticate			
baby bear	badger	beckon	baffle	befuddle	bait	beg	beguile
belittle	berate	beseech	bewitch	bid	blame	bless	bluff
boost	buck	brainwash		bushwhack		bribe	
cajole	calculate	call	catch	caution	censure	challenge	charge
charm	chastise	cheat	check	cheer	chide	clarify	cloak
coax	coddle	coerce	collude	command	commend	con	conceal
concern	conciliate	condemn	condescend		confide	confirm	confound
confuse	consider	consign	contest	convince	correct	corroborate	court
cover	criticize	crucify	crush	curse			
damn	dare	deceive	declaim	deduce	defame	defraud	defy
delight	delude	demean	denigrate	deny	detect	deter	devastate
dictate	direct	disconcert	discourage	discredit	disencumber		disgrace
disgust	dishearten	dispirit	displease	dissuade	distress	divert	divine
dodge	dominate	dramatize	draw	duck			
ease	educate	elevate	elicit	elucidate	embroil	enchant	endear
endure	enflame	engross	enkindle	enlighten	enmesh	ensnare	entangle
entertain	entice	entrap	entreat	entrust	eradicate	eschew	estimate
evade	evaluate	excuse	execute	exploit			
facilitate	force	free	frustrate	feed	frame	frighten	fuddle
gag	gauge	gladden	goad	graft	gull		
hallow	harangue	hassle	help	henpeck	hoodwink	humble	hurt
humiliate	hush	humour	hypnotize				
imitate	impair	implicate	indict	indoctrinate	induce	indulge	insinuate
inspire	invite	insult	interview	intrigue			
judge							
lambast	lead	libel	lampoon	lecture	liberate	lure	
magnetize	malign	maneuver	manipulate	marshall	mask	mend	mimic
mislead	misuse	mobilize	mortify	motivate	muffle	muster	mystify
nag	nauseate	negotiate	notify	nullify			
obliterate	oppose	orient	offend	organize	orientate		
overlook							

# Acting Actions

panic	parrot	patronize	perform	perplex	persecute	peruse	placate
plan	please	pledge	pontificate	pose	pray	preoccupy	press
prevail	prick	prod	promise	promote	prompt	propagandize	
propel	propose	propound	prosecute	provoke	purge	purify	pursue
quash	quench	query					
rack	rally	ratify	ravage	rave	read	rebuke	recreate
rectify	reiterate	reject	rejoin	release	relegate	remedy	renege
repel	reprehend	repress	reprimand	repulse	resist	retract	revolt
ridicule							
sanctify	satisfy	scheme	scold	scrutinize	sedate	seduce	settle
shake	shame	shroud	shun	sicken	simplify	slander	slur
smother	snare	sober	somber	soothe	spellbind	spoil	spur
spurn	squash	squelch	startle	still	stir	stretch	strike
strip	study	stymie	substantiate		suffer	suggest	summon
supplicate		support	suppress	surprise	swindle		
tantalize	tarnish	tease	tempt	terrify	thwart	ickle	titillate
tolerate	torment	torture	trammel	trick	trouble	tyrannize	
unburden	understand		uproot	urge			
validate	verify	victimize	vilify	vindicate			
warn	wheedle	woo	worry	worship	wrangle		



# Lesson Plan: I Am Not What I Am...On Social Media

## OBJECTIVES

Students will analyze the primary characters in **Othello**. They will look at the characters' motivations, actions, and personalities. Using that information, students will interpret the characters interactions or inner life through the development of a social media profile. Students will use Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to construct the relationships between characters and portray the way that these characters might interact with the outside world on social media.

This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **Othello**, though students should be familiar with the text of the play.

## SUGGESTED STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

*MA RL.9-10.3 -- **Reading Literature: Key Ideas and Details** - Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.*

*MA W.9-10.3.a -- **Writing: Text Types and Purposes** - Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create an appropriate progression of experiences or events.*

*MA ARTS.T.01.15 -- **Theatre: Acting [HS]** - Demonstrate an understanding of a dramatic work by developing a character analysis.*

## TIME

Two 20-minute Sessions, plus homework

## MATERIALS

- Example Social Media Profile Handout (Page 54)
- Internet Access
- Whiteboard, chalkboard, or smart board

## PROCEDURE

### First Session

1. Review the primary characters in **Othello**.
2. Write the characters on the board and write a few facts about each character, such as:
  - Place of Origin
  - Relationship ("Married to...", "Father of...", etc.)
  - Rank/Job
  - Character's objective throughout the play
  - Elements of character's personality
3. Split students into groups of four or five.
  - Each member of the group identifies a different character from the play that they

# I Am Not What I Am...On Social Media

- wish to explore/embody.
- Each student in the same group must be a *different* character. For example, there can only be one Othello in a group, though multiple groups can have an Othello.
- 4. Ask each group to briefly discuss their different characters' relationships to one another.
- 5. Explain that each person is going to make a social media profile based on their character.
  - Pass out the Example Social Media Profile of *Romeo and Juliet* on page 54.
  - Discuss how students could use conversations, hashtags, and modern speech to relay the important plot points of the story, as well as the characters' personality and relationships.
  - Let each group decide which social media platform they wish to use (Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter).
- 6. Detail the process of making the profile:
  - Make a new character-specific Gmail account.
  - Use the Gmail account to create a character-specific Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter profile (or other publicly accessible social media account of the group's choosing).
  - Students interact with each other in-character on the platform. Each student should post at least one original post and three responses to posts from other members of their group. (These parameters may be expanded if you wish for this to be a more involved project).
  - Students do not need to re-tell the entire plot of *Othello*, though every post should show an understanding of the plot, character dynamics, and relationships in the play.
- 7. Ideally students will have two days or a weekend to construct characters and begin interactions.

## Second Session


1. Review the Social Media interactions as a class.
2. Discuss which conversations/interactions stayed true to the play, and which strayed.
3. Allow students to discuss what they liked about each other's interactions.

## REFLECTION

- Did the characters interact well in the narrative?
- How did a character's inner life (non-interactive) moments show up on social media?
- Does a character have to take different approaches when discussing a sensitive/secretive matter on social media versus on the stage or on the page.
- Did this help in better understanding a character?

# Social Media Profile

facebook
Wall
Photos
Flair
Boxes
Juliet Capulet
Logout



Juliet Capulet is preparing to tell her mom that she got married

Wall
Info
Photos
Boxes

Write something...
Share

View photos of Juliet(5)
Send Juliet a message
Poke Juliet


Information

Networks:
Italian
Birthday:
July 31
Political:
Democrat
Religion:
Catholic
Hometown:
Italian


Friends

Mrs.
Mr.
Romeo


servant
nurse
family




Juliet Capulet is preparing to tell her mom she got married.  
October 7, 1963




Mrs. Capulet to Juliet Capulet I know you love Romeo but you just can't be together  
October 1, 1963




Juliet Capulet is missing Romeo  
June 11, 1963



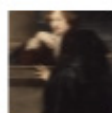
Juliet Capulet I don't care what my parents say I want to be with Romeo and that's what I will do!  
October 28, 1962



Juliet Capulet I cant believe this how could this be? This wont stop me from loving him.  
September 9, 1962



Juliet Capulet So I meet this boy and I really like him o Romeo ☺.  
April 17, 1961



**Mercutio**  
@mercutio\_theman



@Prince\_of\_Cats let's settle this in the town square. Capulets go DOWN  
#swordfight #HouseofMontague  
@LoverboyRomeo @NiceGuyBen

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