


THE S. MARK TAPER FOUNDATION PRESENTS
A NOISE WITHIN'S REPERTORY THEATRE SEASON

AUDIENCE **GUIDE**

William Shakespeare's **OTHELLO**
FEBRUARY 10 - APRIL 28, 2019

 **aNoiseWithin**
Classic Theatre, Modern Magic

Pictured: Michael Manuel and Wayne T. Carr. Photo by Daniel Reichert.

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CHARACTER MAP

Duke of Venice

The figure of authority in Venice. She sends Othello to take command in Cyprus in the Venetian conflict with the Ottoman Turkish empire.

Brabantia

Desdemona's mother and a Venetian senator. She does not approve of Desdemona's marriage to Othello.

Othello

A respected general in the Venetian army who has worked his way through the ranks. He elopes with Desdemona and travels to Cyprus, where he commands the Venetian war effort.

Desdemona

The daughter of Brabantia. She elopes with Othello and joins him in Cyprus.

Iago

Othello's ensign, an officer who works closely with him. He believes he deserved the promotion instead of Cassio. Iago devises a plan to exact revenge on Othello.

Cassio

Othello's recently promoted second in command. He becomes the unwitting victim of Iago's schemes.

Emilia

An officer in the army, Iago's wife, and a friend to Desdemona.

Roderigo

A Venetian gentleman in love with Desdemona.

Bianca

A courtesan and Cassio's mistress in Cyprus.

Montano

The governor of Cyprus. He holds command in Cyprus until Othello arrives.

Gratiano

The brother of Brabantia and a Venetian statesman who travels to Cyprus with Lodovica.

Lodovica

A Venetian statesman who travels to Cyprus with Gratiano.

SYNOPSIS BY MIRANDA JOHNSON-HADDAD

Act I

Othello, a general in the Venetian army, has become vitally important to the powerful Venetian state. When the play opens, Othello has passed over his friend and comrade-in-arms, Iago, for promotion, instead choosing Cassio for his lieutenant. Iago feels betrayed and embittered. Knowing that Othello has secretly married Desdemona, a Venetian aristocrat, Iago enlists the foolish Roderigo, who is in love with Desdemona, to inform Desdemona's mother Brabantia of the marriage. Appalled, Brabantia confronts Othello before the Duke and the Senate, who have convened to discuss Venice's war against the Turks. Desdemona arrives and confirms her love for Othello, who is then dispatched by the Senate to Cyprus to defeat the Turks and protect the island. The Senate adjourns, and Iago urges Roderigo to go to Cyprus too. Alone, Iago ponders a scheme to cause Othello to doubt Desdemona's fidelity.

Act II

The action moves to Cyprus, where Othello overcomes the Turks and is welcomed by Desdemona, Cassio, Iago, and Iago's wife, Emilia. As the soldiers celebrate their victory that night, Iago encourages Cassio to drink too much. Cassio becomes quarrelsome and fights with Roderigo and Montano, another soldier. The clamor rouses Othello. Learning that Cassio began the brawl, Othello demotes him. Alone with Iago, Cassio laments his situation, and Iago urges him to ask Desdemona to plead his case to Othello.

Act III

Cassio importunes Desdemona to speak on his behalf to Othello. Iago begins to plant doubts in Othello's mind, suggesting that Desdemona is having an affair with Cassio, and Othello gradually becomes persuaded by Iago's insinuations. When Desdemona accidentally drops her favorite handkerchief, a gift from Othello, Emilia gives it to Iago, who tells Othello that he has seen Cassio with the handkerchief. When Othello asks Desdemona for it and she cannot produce it, he grows incensed. He tells Iago that he will murder Cassio and Desdemona. Cassio, having found the handkerchief in his room, gives it to Bianca, his lover.

Act IV

Othello, almost insane with doubt, falls into a trance. Afterwards, he watches while Iago questions Cassio about Bianca, believing that they are discussing Desdemona. Othello becomes determined to murder Cassio and Desdemona. Lodovica arrives from Venice to recall Othello, appointing Cassio in his place in Cyprus. Desdemona is happy to hear this news, and Othello strikes her, to everyone's shock. Later, Othello interrogates Emilia and then Desdemona. Iago continues to string Roderigo along. That evening, Emilia and Desdemona sit together, singing and discussing men.

Act V

Iago incites Roderigo to kill Cassio, who instead wounds Roderigo. Iago surreptitiously injures Cassio, who cries for help. Lodovica and others appear, and Iago, feigning ignorance, fatally stabs Roderigo. Meanwhile, Othello awakens the sleeping Desdemona and murders her, despite her protestations of innocence. Emilia arrives and learns of Iago's deception. Lodovica, Iago, Cassio, and others soon follow. When Emilia reveals Iago's lies, he kills her. Lodovica relieves Othello of duty, and he speaks his final words before killing himself with a concealed weapon. ♦

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

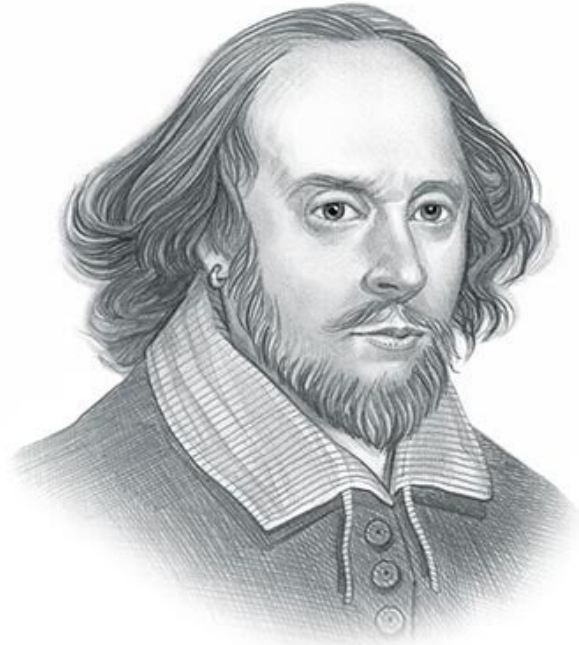
William Shakespeare, a poet, playwright, and actor, was born on April 23, 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon in England to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden. While Shakespeare's plays and poetry have endured the test of time and are of the most well-known works in Western literature, very little documentation of Shakespeare's life exists beyond public records of his birth, death, marriage, and financial transactions.

Shakespeare's education began at home. The fact that Shakespeare's mother was the executor of her father's will suggests that she was literate. Shakespeare would have grown up hearing fairytales and fables from her and his father. He also would have learned to read the Bible at home. In addition to his home education, Shakespeare most likely attended the King's New School, a grammar school in Stratford, where his studies would have been almost exclusively in Latin.

When Shakespeare was 18, he married Anne Hathaway, who was 26 years old. The two had a rushed marriage because Anne was already pregnant at the time of the wedding. The couple welcomed their first child, Susanna, six months after the ceremony. Anne later gave birth to twins Hamnet and Judith, however, Hamnet died when he was just eleven years old.

From 1585-1591, not much is known about Shakespeare's life and this period is often referred to as the "lost years." However, it is clear that he moved to London to pursue theatre at some point during this time (probably around 1587). In 1592, Shakespeare had established his reputation as an actor and playwright in London. During that year, it is believed that the Lord Strange's Men, a prominent acting company at the time, performed one of Shakespeare's plays—most likely *Henry VI, Part I*. Shakespeare later became an original member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, one of the two theatrical companies legally approved to perform within London city limits at the time. During his time as a member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, Shakespeare wrote many of his most prolific works.

In 1599, Shakespeare became the chief shareholder in the Globe Theatre, a newly-built performance space in London. His plays were regularly performed there until 1613 when a fire that began during a production of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* burned the theatre down. The Globe was rebuilt by 1614, but was destroyed again in 1644, two years after the Puritan English government closed all theatres.



Over the course of about twenty years, Shakespeare created a staggering body of work including 154 sonnets, 3 narrative poems, and 38 plays that continue to be performed around the world today. Sometime Between 1610 and 1612, Shakespeare retired to Stratford-upon-Avon, where he died in 1616 at the age of 52. It is believed that he died on the same day he was born, April 23rd. He is buried in the Church of the Holy Trinity in Stratford-upon-Avon. ♦

SHAKESPEAREAN TIMELINE

1564

William Shakespeare is born on April 23 in Stratford-upon-Avon to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden.

1582

William Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway. Their marriage license is issued on November 27th.



"Shakespeare's Birthplace," Stratford-upon-Avon.

1583

Shakespeare's first child, Susanna, is born in May, just six months after the wedding of Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway. Susanna is baptized on May 26th.

1585

Anne Hathaway gives birth to twins, Hamnet and Judith. They are baptized on February 2nd.

1585-1591

"The Lost Years." No records of Shakespeare's life during this period exist. At some point, he travels to London.

1590-1592

Shakespeare begins to write plays during this time. His earliest works are *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Henry VI Parts I, II, and III*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Richard III*. The exact dates these plays were written and first performed is unknown.

1592

While it is unclear when Shakespeare left Stratford-upon-Avon, by this time, Shakespeare has established a reputation in London as an actor and a playwright. This same year, a plague breaks out in London, and theatres are closed.

1593

Shakespeare writes *Venus and Adonis*, a long, narrative poem based on Book 10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

1594

Theatres re-open after the plague. Shakespeare becomes a founding member of The Lord Chamberlain's Men. *The Comedy of Errors* is performed for the first time.

1596

Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, dies at age 11.



"The Original Globe Theatre," artist unknown.

1599

The Globe Theatre opens in London. Shakespeare becomes a shareholder of the theatre.

1600-1610

Shakespeare writes a number of his most prolific tragedies during this time including *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*.

1603

Queen Elizabeth I dies, and King James I ascends the throne. He becomes the patron of Shakespeare's theatre company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men, who change the name of their company to The King's Men in honor of King James I.

1604

Shakespeare writes *Othello* which is performed for the first time in court on November 1st by the King's Men. Richard Burbage, the leading actor of the company, originates the role of Othello, presumably wearing blackface makeup to suggest Othello's race.

1609

Shakespeare's sonnets are published. Shakespeare is believed to have written the sonnets at some point during the 1590s.

1613

The Globe Theatre burns down during the first performance of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*.

1614

The Globe Theatre is rebuilt.

1616

Shakespeare dies at the age of 52 in Stratford-upon-Avon. It is believed he died on April 23rd. He is buried in the Church of the Holy Trinity.

1623

John Heminges and Henry Condell collect and publish Shakespeare's plays in *Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*. This publication is also known as The First Folio.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: **ELIZABETHAN SOCIETY**



Image Left: "Civitates Orbis Terrarum" Map of London by Georg Braun, Frans Hogenberg, and Joris Hoefnagel, c. 1600-1623.

Image Right: "Queen Elizabeth I" (The "Darnley Portrait") by an unknown artist, c.1575

Social Structure

Shakespeare was a prominent playwright during late Elizabethan Era. This historical era began in 1558, when Queen Elizabeth I became the ruling monarch of England. The structure of English society during this period was rigid and provided little opportunity for social mobility for members of lower classes. Opportunities for social advancement for women and people of color were even more limited.

In Elizabethan society, a person's birth often determined their social status. The tiers of Elizabethan social structure can be broken down as follows from highest to lowest status:

- The Queen
- The Court
 - ◆ Made up of the English Nobility
- Merchants
 - ◆ Well-off citizens without royal connections. Individuals in this social class often took positions in town councils and local government.
- Livery Companies
 - ◆ Institutions that controlled what was bought and sold. Companies specialized in certain products such as wine, cloth, and jewelry.
- Apprentices
 - ◆ Young men who paid workers in Livery Companies in exchange for experience learning trades.
- The Poor
 - ◆ The lowest status of citizen. By 1569, a welfare system was in place in the City of London to help the able poor find food and work.

Women in Elizabethan England

While Queen Elizabeth I famously decided not to marry, and instead ruled England as the sole monarch, women in Elizabethan England at large were not granted the same liberties as men of the time. For example, women were not able to own or inherit property. Any property belonging to a woman's family would be passed down the family's eldest son. A woman's financial status and stability depended, then entirely on the men in her life. In childhood and adolescence, girls depended on their fathers for financial backing, and in marriage, women depended on their husbands. While girls were able to attend grammar school, they were not allowed to attend university. Much of a young woman's education centered on how she might be a proper wife.

People of Color in Elizabethan England

People of color in Elizabethan England also suffered from limited social opportunities and liberties. An anxiety of the "other" fueled English misplaced disdain and distrust for the growing African population in England at the time. In fact, in 1596 Queen Elizabeth I wrote an open letter to the Lord Mayor in which she describes her discontent with the size of the African population in England and asks that deportation measures be taken to address what she believed to be an issue. While a sizable percentage of the African population in England at the time were free in so much that they were allowed to seek out work (although they still faced significant social discrimination), a considerable percentage of the population was enslaved as servants as well. ◆

Information on Social Structure edited from:
<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/the-social-structure-in-elizabethan-england>

BACKDROP TO *OTHELLO*: THE OTTOMAN-VENETIAN WAR



"The Grand Canal, Venice" by James Holland, c.1835-55

The History

At the start of *Othello*, the Duke of Venice calls an urgent late-night senate meeting to strategize the Venetian response to the seemingly imminent Turkish invasion of Cyprus, a Venetian territory. The Duke decides to send Othello to Cyprus to spearhead the Venetian effort to protect the island from invasion. While not all of details of the conflict between Venice and Turkey depicted in Shakespeare's *Othello* are historically accurate, the war depicted in the play is based in historical fact.

The relationship between Venice and the Ottoman Empire is one goes back to the early 15th century. During the late 14th century up through the early 16th century, the Ottoman Empire saw a period of massive territorial expansion. By 1453, the Ottoman Empire had conquered territories throughout the Adriatic Sea as well as parts of Egypt, and Constantinople, the former capital of the Byzantine Empire. Venice, as a port city, built up along canals, did not have plenty of space or opportunity to harvest crops or maintain livestock. In efforts to acquire needed natural resources, the city became a major player in trade across the Adriatic and Mediterranean seas. However, by the early 15th century, many of the territories where Venice had established trade relations had been annexed into the Ottoman Empire. While Venice was able to maintain relations with many of these territories and became a prominent trading partner with the Ottoman Empire, the continued expansion efforts of the Ottoman Empire eventually created tension between the Venetian and Ottoman governments.

The first conflict between Venice and the Ottoman Empire broke out in 1423. An era marked by fluctuating periods of war and periods of peace between the two

states followed. One period of conflict began in 1570. This conflict was considered the fourth Ottoman-Venetian war, and it centered the fight for the control of Cyprus. Cyprus, an island south of present-day Turkey, had been under Venetian rule since 1489. However, in 1570, the Ottoman Empire launched a large-scale invasion of the island. The Ottoman Empire had a powerful navy and army, and by 1573, the empire had conquered Cyprus.

Shakespeare's Version

Shakespeare's *Othello* is believed to have been written in 1604, about thirty years after the Ottoman Empire successfully seized Cyprus. Shakespeare's original audience might have been familiar with the events of this conflict and might have been aware of the Ottoman Empire's victory in conquering the island. However, at the start of Act II, the Turkish fleet has been dispersed and badly damaged in a great storm. At this point, it appears that the Venetians have the upper hand in the conflict—Othello even calls for a large celebration for the Venetian victory.

It appears that Shakespeare has taken some liberties with the factual history of the Ottoman-Venetian War for Cyprus. However, in setting the bulk of the play's action in the aftermath of a Venetian victory, Shakespeare's characters are able to switch their focus from executing large-scale war tactics to developing and investigating their personal relationships with other characters in the play.

Even further, the use of Ottoman-Venetian conflict which resulted in a large-scale massacre of civilians in Cyprus, sets the stage for the ultimate violence in the play. ♦

THE ROLE OF **RACE IN OTHELLO**

By the start of the play, it is clear that Othello's path to the position of a Venetian general has been long and complicated. Presumably born in North Africa, and at one point sold into slavery, Othello's journey to Venice is marked by systemic and racially discriminatory hardships. Throughout Shakespeare's text, Othello is called a "Moor." In Elizabethan England, this word was often used as a blanket term for anyone with dark skin. However, the history of the word "Moor" merits some examination. "Moor" comes from the Latin word *Maurus*, a term ancient Romans used to describe individuals from Mauretania—a region made up of parts of present-day Algeria and Morocco. Moor has also been used in reference to a member of the Muslim population in Spain and Portugal during the Medieval period. There has been much debate over Othello's exact origin, but textual clues indicate one thing for certain: Othello is an outsider in Venice.

Othello's outsider status creates a buzz around the town. Brabantio, fascinated by Othello's otherness, often invites Othello over to tell the stories of his life. Othello's stories do not disappoint the Venetian senator. In fact, it is in overhearing Othello's tales that Desdemona falls in love with the general. While Brabantio appears interested in the events of Othello's life, that interest proves to be rooted more in the entertainment value of his stories than genuine curiosity and empathy for Othello. As soon as Brabantio learns that his daughter has eloped with Othello, he develops a deep hatred for the general. Brabantio's radical shift in attitude towards Othello as soon as Othello becomes his son-in-law represents the underlying anxieties of many Europeans in 16th century about close relationships with outsiders—specifically individuals of color.

In a 1958 essay entitled "A Portrait of a Moor," Bernard Harris touches on the anxieties Elizabethans felt toward people of color: "To Elizabethan Londoners the appearance and conduct of the Moors was a spectacle and an outrage, emphasizing the nature of deep difference between themselves and their visitors, between their Queen and this 'erring Barbarian.'" However, Harris goes on, concluding that "when Shakespeare chose, for his audience, to present a Moor as his hero, he was not perhaps confused in his racial knowledge, simply more aware than his contemporaries of the complex pattern made by white and black." While this certainly could have been the case, it is difficult to definitively conclude anything about Shakespeare's personal understanding of race and racism in his time.



"Ira Aldridge, Possibly in the Role of Othello" by William Mulready, c. 1826.

Race and the Performance History of *Othello*

While Othello's race is an important factor in Shakespeare's play, Richard Burbage, one of the leading actors in The King's Men theatre company originated the role of the general in 1604. It is believed that Burbage played the role while in some type of blackface makeup. This became the standard for performances of *Othello*. In fact, it was not until the 1830s, more than 200 years after the play was written, that Ira Aldridge—an African American actor from New York City—became the first black actor to play the title role. ♦

Etymology of "Moor" edited from: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Moor-people>

Race and Performance History of *Othello* edited from: <https://www.rsc.org.uk/othello/past-productions>

THE FEAR OF THE OTHER: **OTHELLO AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

It has been over 400 years since Shakespeare's *Othello* was first performed in court on November 1, 1604, yet the critiques of the social norms and prejudices of the Elizabethan Era Shakespeare offers through *Othello* remain powerful and relevant today.

Prejudice, specifically racial prejudice, plays a significant role in the way events unfold in Shakespeare's *Othello*. Brabantio, Iago, and even Othello himself, consistently refer to Othello and his appearance through derogatory language, often reducing Othello's identity to the color of his skin. Throughout the play, these prejudices drive characters to commit discriminatory actions such as when Brabantio asks the Duke of Venice to punish Othello for marrying Desdemona as well as when Iago decides to enact a vicious revenge against Othello that far outweighs justification. These discriminatory acts ultimately lead to Othello's downfall.

While societies all around the world have certainly evolved since the time Shakespeare wrote *Othello*, racial prejudice continues to be one of the most pressing social issues facing contemporary American society.

In order to understand how racial prejudice functions both in Shakespeare's *Othello* as well as in contemporary society, it is important to understand how prejudices are formed. At its core, a prejudice is a perceived negative and unjustified judgement about an individual or a group. Prejudices tend to be based on the belief that a negative stereotype—an overgeneralized and simplified belief about the members of a particular group—is valid. Emotions also feed prejudiced attitudes. In her research about prejudice, Susan Fiske, PhD, discovered that the emotions pity, envy, disgust, and pride all play significant roles in the formation of prejudices—in fact, her research indicates that these emotions predict discriminatory behaviors more than twice as well as the negative stereotypes a person holds do.

It is important to note that there is a distinct difference between prejudice and discrimination. Prejudice is an attitude, while discrimination refers to a behavior or action. Prejudiced attitudes are nearly always at the root of discriminatory behaviors, whether those prejudiced attitudes are conscious or not. Because emotions play a significant role in shaping prejudice, and because emotional responses are not always conscious, prejudices can also operate at the unconscious, or automatic level. These unconscious emotions can contribute to subtle implicit biases and prejudices that can be extremely powerful in perpetuating prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory behavior.



"Ira Aldridge as Othello" by Henry Perronet Briggs, c. 1830

There are a few social phenomena that have been defined as ways to explain why prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory behaviors persist in society. The first is the Just-World Phenomenon, which occurs when individuals on all parts of the power and wealth spectrum begin to believe that people get what they deserve. In turn, this leads to the belief that people deserve what they get in life. This phenomenon is fueled by pride and disgust—it gives the wealthy and powerful the pride to say that their success is deserved while also justifying any sense of disdain or disgust the group might have for those without wealth or power. A belief in the Just-World Phenomenon perpetuates social inequalities as it causes increased marginalization of already marginalized communities.

The Ingroup-Outgroup Phenomenon can also be used to explain how prejudiced attitudes are formed. In this phenomenon, individuals tend to group themselves with others who share common qualities or characteristics. While it is typical for individuals to seek out groups and communities that provide them with a sense of belonging, strict distinctions between groups that are

THE FEAR OF THE OTHER: **OTHELLO AND CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY** CONTINUED...

based on characteristics such as appearance, skin color, and socio-economic status can lead to problems. The Ingroup-Outgroup Phenomenon can lead to fear of and frustration with other groups.

Mass media's portrayal of individuals who occupy the "outgroup" of contemporary society—such as individuals of low socio-economic status, the African American community, the Latinx community, the LGBTQA+ community, the Muslim community, and the Asian American community—reinforces prejudices against these communities. For example, in a study of Chicago television stations, African Americans arrested for violent crime were twice as likely as white people arrested for violent crime to be shown being handcuffed or held by police. Even though Caucasians and African Americans live in Chicago in roughly equal numbers, the television news shows them depicted whites 14 times more often in stories of "good Samaritans."

The prejudices that emerge from these phenomena can lead to serious social injustices. When individuals with authority such as lawmakers, judges, employers, and police officers hold implicit prejudices based in pity, pride, disgust, and envy as well as in frustration and fear, individuals from traditionally disenfranchised communities suffer. Prejudice has the power to drive political policies that threaten the rights of various religious, socio-economic, gender, and racial groups, the power to prevent members of marginalized groups from upward socio-economic mobility, and the power to prompt unwarranted physical and psychological violence against members of disenfranchised communities. ♦

Edited from: <http://open.lib.umn.edu/sociology/chapter/10-3-prejudice/>, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/beyond-heroes-and-villains/201304/spectacular-tragedy-in-just-world-the-power-why>, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201012/in-groups-out-groups-and-the-psychology-crowds>, and, <http://www.apa.org/monitor/oct04/prejudice.aspx>

Questions to Consider:

1. Do you think Iago believes in a just world?
2. Do you think Iago believes Othello's fate is deserved?
3. Do you think Iago's actions could be explained by the Ingroup-Outgroup Phenomenon? Why or why not?

TRAGIC HEROES AND VILLAINS: OTHELLO AND IAGO

“And what’s he, then, that says I play the villain

When this advice is free I give and honest” —Iago Act II, scene iii

A **tragic hero** is a character who makes a grievous error in judgement and must endure the consequences of his mistake. The concept of tragic heroes is one that dates back to Ancient Greek literature. In his work, *Poetics*, the Greek philosopher Aristotle outlines the basic characteristics of a tragic dramatic hero:

1. The character should be essentially good.
2. The character must have a “fatal flaw” or make a serious error in their judgement. This fatal flaw, called *hamartia*, leads the character to their ultimate downfall.
3. The character must have excessive pride, or *hubris*.
4. The character must experience a total reversal of their fortune. This reversal is known as a *peripeteia*, and usually occurs near the end of play.
5. The character must discover or recognize that the reversal of their fortune was brought on by their own actions. This discovery is called *anagnorisis*.
6. The character’s fate as a result of their error in judgement must be greater than is deserved.

By all accounts, Othello is a tragic hero. The victim of Iago’s intricate plan of revenge, Othello loses the most important person in his life, and does so by his own hand. At the start of the play, Othello has a reputation in Venice for being a great and respected general. However, his jealousy—his fatal flaw or *hamartia*—leads him to confidently convict and kill Desdemona for her rumored affair with Cassio. Othello’s *hubris* drives his jealousy, and in killing Desdemona, Othello experiences a great loss or *peripeteia*. However, it is only after Desdemona’s death that Othello has an *anagnorisis* when he discovers that she was innocent all along. When Othello realizes what he has done, he commits suicide, and in doing so, suffers greatly.

On the other hand, Iago appears to be a definitively villainous counterpart to Othello. A jealous soldier, Iago weaves an intricate plan of revenge against his commander, Othello, in response to a rumor that Emilia has been unfaithful to him with Othello as well as in response to Othello’s decision to promote Michael Cassio to a lieutenant instead of Iago. However, Iago’s actions against Othello, Cassio, and ultimately, Desdemona, at first glance, seem out of proportion to the harm, rumored and real, done to him. Theatre artists have long debated

Iago’s precise motivations to exact such an extensive, ruthless revenge against his commander. Iago’s schemes land him a place among the most villainous characters in the Shakespearean canon.

However, Iago does in fact exhibit many of the qualities Aristotle lists as characteristic of tragic heroes. Like Othello, Iago’s *hamartia* seems to be his jealousy—he is upset and angry when Othello decides to promote Cassio, and he seems to think that his wife has been having an affair with Othello. This jealousy drives Iago’s decision to create a plan of revenge against Othello. Iago is also a proud man. His *hubris* contributes to his jealousy. As soon as Iago kills Emilia for revealing that she was the one who took Desdemona’s handkerchief and thereby reveals that Iago has fabricated the tale of Desdemona’s unfaithfulness, Iago experiences a *peripeteia*, a complete reversal of his fortune. His *anagnorisis* follows almost immediately. Iago then is placed in custody, set to withstand a presumably torturous punishment for his crimes.

What separates Iago from Othello, and what perhaps makes Iago the villain of the play, is Iago’s ambiguous sense of morality. Iago’s decidedly devious actions are the primary force that propels the action of the play. However, it is unclear what precisely motivates Iago to plan such an extensive and extreme revenge against Othello, Cassio, and Desdemona. If Iago’s primary motivation is retribution for Othello’s rumored affair with Emilia, Iago appears to be in a similar moral position as Othello who also commits a great crime as retribution for his wife’s rumored unfaithfulness. What’s more, Iago frequently delivers soliloquies to inform the audience of the next steps in his plan of revenge, a dramatic device sometimes reserved for Shakespearean heroes.. However, the deceptive tactics Iago uses to set and keep his plan in motion are extreme and cunning. Iago’s cunning is perhaps a clue into his faulty moral compass and his villainy. In the midst of the ambiguity surrounding Iago, one thing is clear: the division between heroism and villainy as well as the division between good and evil in *Othello* is blurred. ♦



“Othello Act V, scene ii,
Desdemona in Bed Asleep” by Josiah

OTHELLO THEMES

JEALOUSY

“O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on.”
—Iago Act III, scene iii

Jealousy drives the action of *Othello*. As he formulates his scheme of retribution against Othello, Iago uses Othello’s innate jealousy against him. Othello admits to Iago, rather openly, that he is aware of his susceptibility to jealous thought:

“As, I confess, it is my nature’s plague
To spy into abuses, and oft my jealousy
Shapes faults that are not.”
—Othello Act III, scene iii

Iago uses this confession as fuel for his plan to convince Othello that Desdemona and Cassio are having an affair. As Othello becomes increasingly suspicious of the relationship between Desdemona and Cassio, his jealousy begins to take a physical toll on him, even sending him into epileptic fits. As Iago continues to plant increasingly convincing evidence of Desdemona’s unfaithfulness, Othello begins to take Desdemona’s realistically innocent comments about Cassio in conversation and extrapolate them as evidence of her affair. Between Iago’s planted evidence and Othello’s interactions with Desdemona and Cassio, it does not take long for Othello’s jealousy to motivate him to devise drastic ways in which to punish his wife and his friend. Ultimately, Othello’s jealousy drives him to murder his wife and to order Iago to kill Cassio. As Iago says:

“Trifles light as air
Are to the jealous confirmations strong
As proofs of holy writ.” —Act III, scene iii

Although Iago uses Othello’s jealousy to drive his own plan of revenge forward, Iago is a jealous man himself. In fact, Iago’s apparent jealousy toward Cassio and Othello sparks his desire to seek out drastic means of retribution against the lieutenant and commander. At the start of the play, Iago confesses his jealousy of and disdain for Michael Cassio to Roderigo. Othello has recently granted Cassio a promotion to a lieutenant position instead of Iago. While Iago’s apparent jealousy toward Cassio is professional, his jealousy in regard to Othello is personal. Iago has heard a rumor that Othello and Emilia have had an affair. While there is no evidence for this affair, Iago cites the rumor as a source of his disdain for his commander.



“Othello Relating His Adventures to Desdemona” by Robert Alexander Hillingford, 1869

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

“That death’s unnatural that kills for loving”
—Desdemona Act V, scene ii

Love plays a complicated and prominent role in the events of *Othello*. The play begins shortly after Othello and Desdemona’s secret wedding. Despite Brabantio’s belief that his daughter’s love for Othello is false and that Othello has tricked Desdemona into the marriage, both Desdemona and Othello testify in front of the Venetian Senate that the love they have for each other is quite real. The fact that Desdemona married Othello without her father’s permission is uncharacteristic of a noblewoman of the time. However, Desdemona’s marriage to Othello proves to be anything but characteristic.

It is interesting to compare the relationship between Othello and Desdemona with that of Emilia and Iago. The marriage between Othello and Desdemona is borne out of true love. However, as Othello begins to question Desdemona’s fidelity and begins to treat her poorly, he uses his love for her as justification for his actions. He even uses his love for her as the basis for his decision to kill her. On the other hand, Emilia and Iago never display any love for each other. Iago’s mistreatment of Emilia appears to come from a place of annoyance—as it appears in Act III, scene iii when Emilia reveals that she has taken Desdemona’s handkerchief for Iago. Emilia’s relationship with Iago has made her cynical about marriage. In Act IV, scene iii, Emilia delivers a speech in which she condemns the hypocritical way in which men tend to treat women in marriage.

OTHELLO THEMES CONTINUED...

THE POWER OF WORDS

“But words are words. I never yet did hear
That the bruised heart was piercèd through the
ear.”

—Brabantio Act I, scene iii

In a play set against a violent war between Turkey and Venice, the most powerful weapon used to spark character-to-character conflict is words. As the play begins, both Othello and Desdemona testify that Desdemona initially fell in love with Othello by hearing him tell the tales of his life. In this sense, it is Othello’s command of storytelling and mastery of his use of words that incites Desdemona to develop feelings for him and renders Brabantio’s belief that words are not powerful enough to sway someone’s heart incorrect.

Iago also uses words and storytelling to set Othello down a path of jealousy. Throughout his interactions with Othello, Iago carefully decides when and how to reveal false information to Othello. Iago initially feigns reluctance to tell Othello about Desdemona’s supposed affair with Cassio. In feigning this reluctance, Iago drops hints about Desdemona’s unfaithfulness to draw Othello into his tale and his trap. As Iago weaves his intricate web of lies, he compares storytelling to medicine, suggesting that words, when used well, have the power to influence a person as potently as any medicine or poison might:

“Work on,
My medicine, work! Thus credulous fools are
caught,
And many worthy and chaste dames even thus,
All guiltless, meet reproach.”

—Iago Act IV, scene i



“Desdemona” by Rodolfo Amoedo, 1892. Museu Nacional de Belas Artes

HONESTY AND FAÇADES

“I should be wise; for honesty’s a fool
And loses that it works for.”

—Iago Act III, scene iii

Iago’s entire plan of revenge hinges on his ability to present a false front of honesty and interest in Othello, Cassio, and Desdemona’s well-being. From Iago’s soliloquies, we can quickly deduce that any kindness Iago appears to show toward Othello, Cassio, or Desdemona is not genuine. However, Iago is so adept at putting on and maintaining an honest façade in front of others that he is often referred to as “honest Iago.” Iago uses his falsely positive reputation to mask his villainous intentions to cause other characters great psychological and physical pain. ♦

“GIVE ME THE OCULAR PROOF”: DOUBT AND RACISM IN SHAKESPEARE’S *OTHELLO* BY DR. MIRANDA JOHNSON-HADDAD

William Shakespeare’s *Othello* has long been considered to be one of the playwright’s four greatest tragedies. First performed in 1604, *Othello* was likely written after *Hamlet* but before *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. Unlike the other three tragedies, however, *Othello* is what literary critics call a “domestic tragedy,” meaning that the principal characters, though in many cases aristocratic, are nevertheless not royal. As is the case with virtually all of Shakespeare’s plays, the plot of *Othello* was not invented by Shakespeare; its source is a story written by an Italian author named Giraldi Cinthio that was published in Venice in 1565. (Shakespeare would have read the tale in a French translation or possibly in the original Italian.) But Shakespeare, characteristically, changes the focus of the story, rendering it much more complex and nuanced through the power of his own beautiful dramatic language. Of the four major Shakespearean tragedies, *Othello* is, in many respects, the most richly poetic; and no character employs more beautiful language than Othello himself, the so-called “Moor of Venice.”

We cannot fully appreciate *Othello* without having some understanding of the significance of both Venice and Cyprus as the two locations in which the play is set. Renaissance Venice was a European city like no other. The city’s nickname of “Serenissima,” which can mean both “most serene” but also “sovereign” or “powerful,” reflects the city’s influence in multiple spheres: political, economic, cultural, and commercial. Strategically situated in northeast Italy on the edge of the Adriatic Sea, but protected by a lagoon, Venice was for many centuries the focal point of trade throughout a vast area that spanned much of Europe to the West and Africa to the South, and that extended East to include the Byzantine and Ottoman empires (which were at various times both friend and enemy of Venice) and much of Asia. From before the Middle Ages and continuing into the late 18th century, the Venetian state—led by a powerful “Doge,” or Duke, and a council of influential men—was a military force to be reckoned with. In contrast, the small island of Cyprus (located below Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea), where the action of the play shifts, was associated with an even older power than the military might wielded by Venice: it was the island where Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, was said by some classical authors to have been born.

The military strength of Venice, and the city’s need to maintain that strength in order to preserve its commercial interests, constitute the principal reason for *Othello*’s success. Venice was a famously diverse and cosmopolitan city-state, and Shakespeare’s *Othello* has achieved significant power and influence because of his

outstanding abilities as a general. When the play opens, the Venetian state is deeply indebted to Othello for his successful battles against the Turks and their efforts to control Cyprus. Yet in marrying Desdemona, Othello is seen by many influential Venetians as having gone too far. The Doge and his council, mindful of Othello’s military prowess and the fact that Venice needs him, override the opposition of Desdemona’s father to the marriage, but more out of self-interest than out of any sense of fairness. In the end, Othello can never hope to be anything other than an outsider in Venetian society; and once transferred to Cyprus, he easily falls prey to the machinations of the villainous Iago, a character who represents, in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s famous phrase, a “motiveless malignity.”

For sheer malevolence, Iago has few parallels in all of literature. (Joffrey Baratheon in *Game of Thrones* is perhaps his only rival.) Some critics have observed that Iago recalls the Vice figures of medieval morality plays, for he seems to be the pure incarnation of evil. Occasionally Iago offers clues as to why he hates Othello so much: he resents him for promoting Cassio over himself; he claims to believe that Othello has seduced his wife, Emilia (suggesting that Iago himself is a victim of the baseless jealousy that he cultivates with such success in *Othello*). But in the end, Iago defies our understanding, and in his final lines he bluntly refuses to explain his motives.

The central question of the play that both performers and readers must try to answer is whether Iago plants ideas in Othello’s head or merely nurtures ideas that are already there. Certainly Othello is not alone in being deceived by Iago, who is described by many characters as “honest Iago.” But Othello’s extreme susceptibility to Iago’s villainous suggestions reveals at best a profound insecurity about himself, and at worst an internalized racism that Iago gleefully seizes upon. Under Iago’s influence, Othello plummets rapidly from utter belief in Desdemona’s love and fidelity to total distrust, based on the scantiest of circumstantial evidence. His downfall is all the more dramatic because it apparently takes place over a matter of mere hours, and scholars sometimes refer to the play as having a “double time frame,” because the action seems to occur almost in parallel universes. Strictly speaking, Desdemona simply hasn’t had enough time to have spent “stolen hours of lust” with Cassio.

Questions of racism in *Othello* are furthermore inextricably linked to the performance history of the play. For centuries, beginning in Shakespeare’s own time, the role of Othello was played by white actors in blackface (the British term is “blacking up”). England under Queen

“GIVE ME THE OCULAR PROOF”: DOUBT AND RACISM IN SHAKESPEARE’S *OTHELLO* CONTINUED...

Elizabeth I was notoriously xenophobic (that is, fearful of strangers or of anyone who was perceived as being different). Although there were people of color in England in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, including people of African descent, they were not influential and were typically employed as service workers (including as “exotic” workers in aristocratic and royal households). Moreover, their position in England was highly precarious, given that Elizabeth regularly issued proclamations designed to rid the country of “too many blackamoors,” as one such decree put it.

The first actors of color to play Othello on the stage were the African-American actors James Hewlett and Ira Aldridge. Both did so in the early 19th century, Hewlett in America and Aldridge in England. Both were subjected to viciously racist criticism. Hewlett wrote spirited responses to his critics’ ugly words, and Aldridge ultimately went on to play several Shakespearean roles in addition to Othello throughout England and internationally, to great acclaim. Although these and other actors paved the way for such great Othellos as those of Paul Robeson and James Earl Jones, other Shakespearean roles remained frustratingly out of reach for most black actors until the later 20th century. In recent decades, many productions have sought to examine the question of race in the play through non-traditional casting choices (for example, casting black actors in other roles, notably Iago). Shakespeare scholars continue to debate the value of such choices as well as the mixed messages they sometimes send.

Interpretations of the play by various literary and theatrical critics over the centuries have usually revealed much more about the critic, and the prejudices of his era, than about the play itself. Many critics have argued incessantly about Othello’s “blackness,” often focusing on what Shakespeare might have meant by the term “Moor” and speculating about the nature of Desdemona’s attraction to Othello, obviously feeling a need to somehow justify it. The play has been read as a cautionary tale against allowing people of color into positions of authority, and against “race-mixing.” In the United States especially, with its shameful history of slavery and Jim Crow, the play has even been used to enforce white supremacist beliefs, including those about who owns Shakespeare or even who is allowed to perform his works.

But if the critical and performance traditions surrounding *Othello* have often reflected ugly prejudice, the play itself resists easy categorization. Unquestionably it is a play about perceived difference, and about the struggles

of an outsider to fit into a society that will never truly accept him. It is also a play about racism, in much the same way that Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* (which also explores marginalization in the supposedly tolerant city of Venice) is a play about anti-Semitism. And yet, troublingly, both of these plays also participate in certain racist and anti-Semitic beliefs; and we must resist the temptation to deny this fact simply because we don’t like to think of Shakespeare as contributing to the perpetuation of such prejudices, or because we can’t admit the possibility that he may have shared some of these repugnant ideas himself. Readers who argue for an enlightened Shakespeare are often quick to point out that the most reprehensibly racist lines in *Othello* are spoken by the least admirable characters in the play; but these readers tend to ignore Desdemona’s highly problematic line, “I saw Othello’s visage in his mind.” The Doge’s remark that “I think this tale would win my daughter too” is often delivered for humorous effect; but such a delivery allows us to avoid acknowledging that the Doge is acting not out of a sense of justice, but out of a desire to wrap up this family quarrel expeditiously in order to dispatch Othello back to battle and to the all-important task of defending the interests of the Venetian state.

If we can approach *Othello* with a truly open mind, and without feeling obliged to prove that Shakespeare was somehow “woke” enough for the 21st century (an impossibility for a 17th century playwright, no matter how evolved), we will find that the play still speaks to us on a very deep level, largely because the evils of racism continue to plague us today. Othello himself remains one of Shakespeare’s most memorable characters, and his language is soul-stirring. Yet he is also, in many respects, undeniably a stereotype. If his tragic end, which breaks our hearts, comes about in part because of his own flaws, it is also the result, as we can now understand, of the trauma created by his perpetual outsider status. In the 21st century as in the 17th, Shakespeare’s plays invite us to contemplate our own complicity in imposing such outsider status on others, from individuals to entire groups that we choose to label as different. *Othello* asks uncomfortable questions to which it does not provide easy answers; nor does the play leave us with clear guidelines for how to effect social change. Nevertheless, Shakespeare seems to suggest that seeing each individual as someone with whom we share a common humanity is a promising, and necessary, place to start. ♦

“GIVE ME THE OCULAR PROOF”: DOUBT AND RACISM IN SHAKESPEARE’S *OTHELLO* CONTINUED...

Additional Resources

On Shakespeare:

- Marjorie Garber’s *Shakespeare After All* (Anchor Press, 2005) offers insightful discussions of Shakespeare’s plays by a well-known Harvard professor.
- For historical background on Shakespeare and his plays, see *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare*, edited by Russ McDonald (Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, Boston and New York: 2001).

On racism in Shakespeare:

- Kim Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995).
- For an overview of outsiders in Shakespeare, see Andrew Dickson’s essay “Multiculturalism in Shakespeare’s Plays” (March 15, 2016) in the section “Discovering Literature: Shakespeare and Renaissance Writers” on the website of the British Library (bl.uk).

On *Othello* in performance:

- For a history of *Othello* performance in the United States, see Andrew Carlson’s “Not Just Black and White: ‘Othello’ in America,” January 2017 newsletter on the American Theatre website (americantheatre.org).
- Miranda Johnson-Haddad, “Teaching *Othello* through Performance Choices,” in *Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare’s Othello*, edited by Peter Erickson and Maurice Hunt (New York: MLA, 2005). (This volume provides many excellent resources on *Othello* for both teachers and students.)
- For a history of black Shakespearean actors, see Errol Hill, *Shakespeare in Sable: A History of Black Shakespearean Actors* (Univ. of MA Press, 1986).

Film versions of *Othello*:

- Film versions of *Othello* spanning many decades are readily available. Some, like the Olivier version (1965) or the Orson Welles (1951), at times betray a racism that is highly controversial today, but they are nevertheless worth watching for some strong performances and also for what they reveal about how racism can influence performance interpretations. Other productions, notably the 1989 film of the stage production directed by Janet Suzman in apartheid South Africa, deliver a powerful political message. Other films present truly superior acting, such as the Trevor Nunn version (1990), starring Ian McKellen as Iago and the opera singer Willard White as Othello. The 1995 film, starring Laurence Fishburne as Othello and Kenneth Branagh as Iago, features strong performances in a visually beautiful film.
- Two modernizing takes on *Othello* are *O* (2001), starring Mekhi Phifer, Julia Stiles, Josh Hartnett, and Martin Sheen; and *Othello* (2001, UK release), adapted by Andrew Davies for British television and starring Eamonn Walker, Christopher Eccleston, and Keeley Hawes. More unusual is the seventies-era rock musical *Catch My Soul* (1974), starring Richie Havens and Lance LeGault. The classic 1947 film *A Double Life*, starring Ronald Coleman, tells the story of an actor who is so affected by the roles he plays, particularly that of Othello, that he unwittingly re-enacts the events of Shakespeare’s play, with predictably tragic results.
- Finally, for a modern novelistic re-telling of *Othello*, see Tracy Chevalier’s *New Boy* (The Hogarth Shakespeare Series, 2017).

OTHELLO: DISCRIMINATION IN THE MILITARY

Othello is a general, the highest role one can typically hold in the army. He immigrated to Venice from North Africa and has earned such an esteemed title by rising through the ranks of the Venetian army, thus proving himself to be a versatile soldier. Any consumer of literature, theatre, and film has been privy to numerous military tales, yet seeing such a high ranking being held by anyone other than a white man is a rare find. If Othello were a soldier in present-day America, what would his experience be like? Could he still swiftly rise through the ranks of the military, or would he have to jump over even more hurdles to be made a general?

In 1948, President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 9981, which outlawed racial discrimination in the military. Truman established a committee to monitor the effects of his executive order as well as create and alter military policies pertaining to civil rights. However, a study conducted in 2015 by military advocacy group Protect Our Defenders revealed that in 4 of the 5 military branches, black soldiers were more than twice as likely than white soldiers “to face court-martial or nonjudicial punishment in an average year.” According to Col. Don Christensen, President of Protect Our Defenders and former Chief Prosecutor of the United States Airforce, “Military leadership has been aware of significant racial disparity in its justice process for years, and has made no apparent effort to find the cause of the disparity or remedy it.” The data for each individual military branch (except for the Coast Guard, which did not respond to Protect Our Defenders’ request for demographic information) is astounding:

- In the Air Force, black airmen are approximately 71% more likely than white airmen to face court-martial or nonjudicial punishment.
- In the Army, black soldiers are approximately 61% more likely than white soldiers to face court-martial punishment.
- In the Marine Corps, black Marines are approximately 32% more likely than white Marines to receive a guilty sentence at a court-martial or nonjudicial punishment proceeding.
- In the Navy, black sailors are approximately 40% more likely than white sailors to be referred to general or special court-martial.

Christensen suspects that white soldiers are given the benefit of the doubt more easily than their black counterparts. Since most military leaders are white men, Christensen theorizes that commanding officers are more likely to form bonds with white subordinates.

Black soldiers are not only abused, they’re

underrepresented. As of 2015, black people made up 17% of active-duty military; only 9% of commissioned officers were black.

Interestingly, the representation of black women in the military is almost as high as that of white women. According to a study done by the Pew Research Center in 2011, black women make up nearly one-third of the active-duty female force. The reasoning behind a high volume of black women enlisting in the U.S. military has not been studied, but Beth J. Asch, a senior economist and defense manpower specialist at the Rand Corporation, suspects that it is because they are perhaps the targeted group for military recruiters. The military tries to recruit high school graduates who are seeking job training, benefits, and help with college tuition – a bill that a high volume of black women fit.

Othello’s high rank for a man of color is a rare find; even in present day, the military is severely lacking in black leaders. The first African American general in the United States Army wasn’t elected until 1940. However, the tides are slowly turning: as of 2018, over 60 African-American individuals have been appointed General or Admiral, with 18 of them rising to Four-Star General – the highest rank one can hold in any military branch. In 2015, the Army launched an initiative to attempt to increase the number of minority officers in key command positions. Perhaps in the years to come, the level of military success Othello has reached won’t seem so far away. ♦

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LIGHTING DESIGN: **ROSE MALONE**

1. What attracted you to *Othello*? What is most intriguing to you about this story?

The main thing that attracted me to *Othello* was that we were focusing on a different element of the human story. So often *Othello* focuses purely on the malicious actions of Iago and leaves it at that. For this production we are focusing more on the deeply human relationship between Othello and Iago. I find this approach refreshing and intriguing.



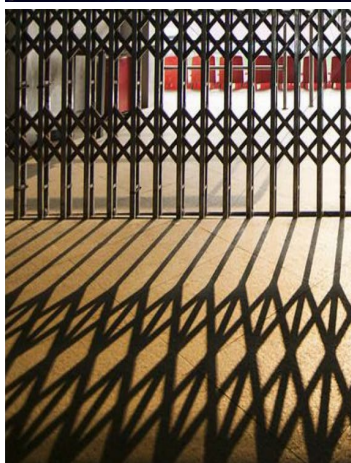
2. How did you begin your process for designing this show?

As with most shows, the design team sat down with the director and started to really discuss the world these characters live in. Changing the time period to modern day gave us all an excellent jumping off point for the overall design.



3. Did you collaborate with any other designers throughout the process? What did that look like?

As a lighting designer, I find it essential to collaborate with all of the other designers on the team, but especially with the scenic designer. One of the challenges to this play is that there are so many different locations. Working with the scenic designer, we have settled on a design that incorporates several practicals that will help to anchor the performers in specific places.



4. How did you first become interested in lighting design?

Initially, when I started college, I was interested in graphic and web design. I began to work in those industries, and had my own company for several years. After a while, I was craving a change of pace, and a friend of mine encouraged me to join her at a local college theatre. I was hooked.



5. What piece of the show are you most excited to see come to life?

Later in the play there are a few scenes that take place in a garden. The scenic designer has created this beautiful cut-out fence that I get the joy of lighting. The shadows and shapes that will be created are exciting to me, and I'm looking forward to these moments most.

WORDS COINED BY SHAKESPEARE

Accused—*Richard II*, Act I, Scene I

How Shakespeare used it: To describe the person being charged with a crime or offense. This is the word's first known use as a noun. In this case Henry Bolingbroke and Thomas Mowbray are the accuser and the accused—Bolingbroke (the accuser) argues that Thomas Mowbray (the accused) is "a traitor and a miscreant".

"Then call them to our presence; face to face,
And frowning brow to brow, ourselves will hear
The accuser and the accused freely speak:
High-stomach'd are they both, and full of ire,
In rage deaf as the sea, hasty as fire."—King Richard II

Modern Definition: someone charged with a crime or offense (particularly relating to a criminal case).

Addiction—*Othello*, Act II, Scene II

How Shakespeare used it: meaning a strong preference for or inclination towards something. The herald encourages everyone to take pleasure in whatever most delights them or in whatever they are most inclined towards (their addictions).

"It is Othello's pleasure, our noble and valiant general, that, upon certain tidings now arrived, importing the mere perdition of the Turkish fleet, every man put himself into triumph; some to dance, some to make bonfires, each man to what sport and revels his addiction leads him." —Herald

Modern definition: noun—an intense and destructive need to have or do something excessively.

Assassination—*Macbeth*, Act I, Scene VII

How Shakespeare used it: The word assassin was already known, but Shakespeare used assassination to describe a murder, or deed done by an assassin. In this soliloquy, Macbeth contemplates the murder or assassination of Duncan.

"If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly. If the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come." —Macbeth

Modern Definition: The act of assassinating someone, where assassinate means to kill someone who is usually famous or important, often for political reasons.

Bedazzled—*The Taming of the Shrew*, Act IV, Scene V

"Pardon, old father, my mistaking eyes, that have been so bedazzled with the sun that everything I look on seemeth green."—Kate

Dwindle—*Macbeth*, Act I, Scene III

How Shakespeare used it: In this scene from *Macbeth*, the First witch tells the other two witches that she has been torturing a sailor whose wife was rude to her and explains to them how she will "drain him dry as hay" until he "dwindle, peak and pine". Dwindle in this sense is used to mean waste away.

"I myself have all the other,
And the very ports they blow,
All the quarters that they know
I' th' shipman's card.
I'll drain him dry as hay.
Sleep shall neither night nor day

Hang upon his penthouse lid.
He shall live a man forbid.
Weary sev'nights nine times nine
Shall he dwindle, peak and pine." —First Witch

Modern Definition: to gradually become smaller

Fashionable—*Troilus and Cressida*, Act III, Scene III

How Shakespeare used it: Ulysses describes time through a series of metaphors and similes. One of the comparisons he makes is with a fashionable host. In this context, fashionable means a host who abides by the most current etiquette—who follows customs that are of the current fashion.

"For time is like a fashionable host that slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand, and with his arms outstretch'd, as he would fly, grasps in the comer: welcome ever smiles, and farewell goes out sighing."—Ulysses

Modern definition: Representing a popular or trend or influence, particularly regarding personal styles.

Inaudible—*All's Well That Ends Well*, Act V, Scene III

"Let's take the instant by the forward top; for we are old, and on our quick'st decrees the inaudible and noiseless foot of Time steals ere we can effect them."—King of France

THE ART OF THE **SHAKESPEAREAN** INSULT

When we think of Shakespeare, we usually think of his plays and poetry. However, Shakespeare has also penned some of the most amazing insults. Far more interesting and colorful than the curse words we usually hear in modern conversation, the witty and acerbic Shakespearean insult is truly an art form. Next time you feel additional color is required in your conversation, try something Shakespearean! Go ahead!

Below are a few of Shakespeare's well-known insults:

"Thou art a boil, a plague sore, an embossed carbuncle in my corrupted blood."

"Heaven truly knows that thou art false as hell"

"I do desire we may be better strangers"

"I am sick when I do look on thee"

"Poisonous bunch-backed toad!"

"Thou lump of foul deformity"

ACTIVITY

Make Your Own Insult! Combine one word from each of the three columns below, then preface your combination with "Thou" to create your own Shakespearean Insult!

COLUMN 1

Artless
Bawdy
Bootless
Churlish
Clouted
Craven
Currish
Dankish
Dissembling
Droning
Errant
Fawning
Fobbing
Forward
Frothy
Gleeking
Goatish
Gorbellied
Infectious
Jarring
Loggerheaded
Lumpish
Mammering
Mangled
Mewling
Paunchy
Pribbling
Puking
Puny
Qualling
Rank
Reeky
Roguish
Ruttiesh
Saucy
Spleeny
Spongy
Surlly
Tottering
Unmuzzled
Vain
Venomed
Villainous
Warped
Wayward

COLUMN 2

Base-court
Bat-fowling
Beef-witted
Beetle-headed
Boil-brained
Clapper-clawed
Clay-brained
Common-kissing
Crook-pated
Dismal-dreaming
Dizzy-eyed
Doghearted
Dread-bolted
Earth-vexing
Fat-kidneyed
Fen-sucked
Flap-mouthed
Fly-bitten
Folly-fallen
Fool-born
Full-gorged
Guts-gripping
Half-faced
Hasty-witted
Hedge-born
Hell-hated
Idle-headed
Ill-breeding
Ill-nurtured
Knotty-pated
Milk-livered
Motley-minded
Onion-eyed
Pottle-deep
Pox-marked
Reeling-ripe
Rough-hewn
Rude-growing
Shard-borne
Sheep-biting
Spur-galled
Swag-bellied
Tardy-gaited
Tickle-brained
Toad-spotted
Urchin-snouted

COLUMN 3

Apple-john
Baggage Barnacle
Bladder Boar-pig
Bugbear Bum-bailey
Canker-blossom
Clack-dish
Clotpole
Coxcomb
Codpiece
Death-token
Dewberry
Flap-dragon
Flax-wench
Flirt-gill
Foot-licker
Fustilarian
Giglet
Gudgeon
Haggard
Harpy
Hedge-pic
Horn-beast
Hugger-mugger
Lewdster
Lout
Malt-worm
Mammet
Measle
Minnow
Miscreant
Moldwarp
Mumble-news
Nut-hook
Pigeon-egg
Pignut
Puttock
Pumpion
Ratsbane
Scut
Skainsmate
Vassal Whey-face

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ONLINE RESOURCES:

Folger Digital Texts' free online publication of *Othello*:
<http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/download/pdf/Oth.pdf>

Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Educational Resources:
<https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/>

ARTICLES:

"*Othello*" and Race Relations in Elizabethan England by Rudolph Shaw and Rudolph A. Shaw. Published *Journal of African American Men* in 1995.

Psychology in "Othello" by Brents Stirling. Published by the Shakespeare Association Bulletin in 1944.

BOOKS:

Othello by William Shakespeare. Published by Simon and Schuster as a part of the Folger Shakespeare Series in 2004.

Shakespeare and Race edited by Catherine M. S. Alexander and Stanley Wells. Published by Cambridge University Press in 2000. Available online: <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/samples/cam032/99089004.pdf>

Shakespeare: The World as Stage by Bill Bryson. Published by HarperPress in 2007.

Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth by A. C. Bradley. Published by Penguin Classics in 1991.

Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare by Stephen Greenblatt. Published by W.W. Norton in 2005.

FILMS:

Othello (1965) directed by Stuart Burge

Othello (1995) directed by Oliver Parker

TELEVISION:

PBS's *Shakespeare Uncovered: Othello with David Harewood*. Full episode available at: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/shakespeare-uncovered/uncategorized/othello-david-harewood-full-episode/>

VIDEO CLIPS

"Iago: The Ultimate Villain":

<https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/shak15.ela.lit.iago/iago-the-ultimate-villain/#.Wxno1FMvzOQ>

"Venice and the Ottoman Empire: Crash Course World History #19": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UN-ll_jBzzo

ABOUT **A NOISE WITHIN**

A NOISE WITHIN A Noise Within produces classic theatre as an essential means to enrich our community by embracing universal human experiences, expanding personal awareness, and challenging individual perspectives. Our company of resident and guest artists performing in rotating repertory immerses student and general audiences in timeless, epic stories in an intimate setting.

Our most successful art asks our community to question beliefs, focus on relationships, and develop self-awareness. Southern California audiences of all ages and backgrounds build community together while engaging with this most visceral and primal of storytelling techniques. ANW's production of classic theatre includes all plays we believe will be part of our cultural legacy. We interpret these stories through the work of a professional resident company—a group of artists whose work is critical to their community—based on the belief that trust among artists and between artists and audience can only be built through an honest and continuing dialogue. Our plays will be performed in rotating repertory, sometimes simultaneously in multiple spaces, and buttressed by meaningful supporting programs to create a symphonic theatrical experience for artists and audience.

In its 27 year history, A Noise Within has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle's revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the coveted Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

More than 40,000 individuals attend productions at a Noise Within annually. In addition, the theatre draws over 16,000 student participants to its arts education program, *Classics Live!* Students benefit from in-classroom workshops, conservatory training, subsidized tickets to matinee and evening performances, post-performance discussions with artists, and free standards-based study guides. ♦

Guide Credits

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