

# SUDOKOTHELLOPHOBIA: WRITING HYPERTEXTUALLY, PERFORMATIVELY

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If you are an adventurous (or hypertextual, perhaps performative) reader I invite you to skip this introduction and go straight to the puzzle (you can always come back); what follows here is an orientation, a way into and around the main body of this article. If, as Umberto Eco writes, 'A title must muddle the reader's ideas, not regiment them',<sup>1</sup> then the next few pages aim to (slightly) un-muddle, though certainly not regiment, access to the puzzle through explanation of my title and method. I feel, at once, that I should apologize for this title and perhaps I would have abandoned the initial monstrosity altogether had its tripartite awkwardness not so neatly encapsulated the method. Writing about (Shakespearian) performance often involves such apologies, especially when the writing is deliberately methodological rather than descriptive of performance itself – I mean not writing about performance, but writing about writing about performance – and this is perhaps a tacit acknowledgement that writing cannot hope to reproduce a given production, neither its materiality nor ephemerality. Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, to whom I will return, defend their discrete disciplines of theatre and archaeology with 'Apologia' before less apologetically and less obviously bringing them together into a fruitful interdisciplinary blend.<sup>2</sup> Michael Dobson begins his reflection on 'Writing about [Shakespearian] Performance' most deferentially (which is not always the way he writes about Shakespearian performances): 'I should apologize first of all for starting this chapter thus in the first person' and then he further excuses the arti-

cle, which is 'purely personal' and 'very cursory and simplistic'; he also defends a title about which he feels uncomfortable.<sup>3</sup> Broken down, my title reveals an attempt to create a form of writing which thickly describes Shakespearian production – in this case an adaptation of *Othello* I directed in 2003/4 called *Othellophobia* – and to weave together the most pressing textual and contextual concerns. Thus: the **form** of the writing is (post)structured by the number puzzle *sudoku*; the **content** is Shakespeare's *Othello* – the text itself, its more recent production history and the way that my production shaped the play; and the **analysis** of the content, which is facilitated by the form, is represented by *phobia*, which signals my concern here with (sub)textual and cultural anxieties generated and sustained by the play in performance.

My role not just as director of *Othellophobia*, but as facilitator of a wide-ranging collaborative process, focused my thoughts on wanting to document far more than what actually and finally happened on the stage (on any given night, or as recorded onto DVD). I developed a goal akin to that expressed by Ric Knowles, which 'is to articulate and apply a method for achieving a more precise and more fully contextualized and politicized understanding of how meaning is produced in the

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<sup>1</sup> *Reflections on The Name of the Rose* (London, 1985), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Theatre/Archaeology* (London, 2001), pp. 14, 29, 53–67.

<sup>3</sup> 'Writing about [Shakespearian] Performance', *Shakespeare Survey* 58 (Cambridge, 2005), 160–8, p. 160.

theatre'.<sup>4</sup> Knowles's excellent book, to my mind, certainly achieves this via his various analyses, but his skilful readings of the materials of these theatres, are, for the most part, 'readerly' and confirmed as opposed to the 'writerly' and open text/s that I was hoping to produce. In searching for this Barthesian<sup>5</sup> multivalence I imagined a kind of hard-copy hypertext, whereby, to some extent, the freedom to cross-link, as on the internet, would be available to the reader of the following pages. George Landow defines hypertext as 'text composed of blocks of words (or images) linked electronically by multiple paths, chains or trails in an open-ended, perpetually unfinished textuality'.<sup>6</sup> Though not linked electronically, the blocks of words, what Barthes calls 'lexia', enable such paths through the juxtaposition and interplay of, for example, aspects of the rehearsal process with the way the production was received in the press. The documentation of performance/art offers a further methodological precedent for this type of interaction: such work has attempted to incorporate documentation within the work itself and thus to deconstruct product-centred analyses by making process a visible priority.<sup>7</sup> The form of sudoku foregrounds precisely this type of deconstruction and incorporation through the post/structure of nine pages with nine blocks (of words/images) to each page: though the box in the top left corner of the first page and the box in the bottom right corner of the last page ostensibly appear as starting and finishing points, entry to, exit from and movement within the article is not bound by conventional linearity.<sup>8</sup>

Whether this sense of open-endedness actually produces a 'perpetually unfinished textuality' is another matter; you can obviously read all of the boxes, although perhaps you could continue to find new resonances between them and to other external texts. Marvin Carlson's seductive notion that 'Performance by its nature resists conclusions, just as it resists the sort of definitions, boundaries, and limits so useful to traditional academic writing and academic structures'<sup>9</sup> might appear strategically apposite for my project given its implicit encouragement to test performative boundaries through challenges to 'traditional

academic writing' but (Shakespearian) performance seems to me to embrace conclusions, if not a conclusion: the final line of a text, a curtain call, Othello is noble, Othello is a monster. Also helpful here is Pearson and Shanks's observation that 'Rather than pretending to be a final and complete account of things, a closure, the performance document, an equivalent of the dramatic text, might be in itself equally fragmentary, partial and encouraging of interpretation.'<sup>10</sup> This text is exemplary of my method: in fact, in attempting to demystify those processes, practical and theoretical, which co-create the meaning of *Othello* as it is staged as *Othellophobia*, less of the actual production is revealed than might be by a more traditional theatre 'review'; instead, this space is ceded to other priorities and the performance document becomes increasingly fragmentary and partial and, hopefully, more 'encouraging of interpretation'. It is this notion of the reader being what Barthes calls 'a producer of the text', of choosing how to read it and how to make meaning of it (or, Hawkes-like, mean through it<sup>11</sup>) which constitutes the writing/reading as performative. For just as J. L. Austin characterises performative speech acts as those utterances which also enact, which say *and* do something, this article offers writing which actively encourages, perhaps

<sup>4</sup> *Reading the Material Theatre* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> These oft-rehearsed ideas come from Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York, 1974), pp. 3–16.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Gabriella Giannachi, *Virtual Theatres: An Introduction* (London, 2004), p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> I am indebted to Synne K. Behrndt for steering me both through this discourse and towards Matthew Goulish, *39 Microlectures: in proximity of performance* (London, 2000) and Tim Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment* (London, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the puzzle represents an ironic reversal of the commonplace observation of documentation of Shakespearian theatre: that the writing palely and partially reflects the performance. In this case the documentation is perhaps more interesting and layered and provocative than the performance (or its DVD recording) itself.

<sup>9</sup> *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London, 1996), p. 189.

<sup>10</sup> *Theatre/Archaeology*, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Terence Hawkes, *Meaning by Shakespeare* (London, 1992).

demands, interpretation, a critical performance on behalf of the reader.<sup>12</sup>

Published within a year of each other, two seemingly independent – neither cites the other (though each is in the other’s acknowledgements) – and yet strikingly similar articulations of this idea help further to explicate the notion of performative writing as I am here practising it:

‘Meaning’ in a given performance situation – the social and cultural work done by the performance, its performativity, and its force – is the effect of all these systems and each pole of the interpretative triangle [of performance text, conditions of production and conditions of reception] working dynamically and relationally together.<sup>13</sup>

. . . the work of scripted drama and its performance, what we might call ‘dramatic performativity’ – the relationship between the verbal text and the conventions (or, to use Butler’s term, ‘regimes’) of behaviour that give it meaningful *force* as performed action.<sup>14</sup>

Both texts are concerned with performativity, with inter-relationships, meaning and force but there are subtle differences: the first, by Knowles, characterizes performativity as a result or effect; the performance, through the conjunction of a series of material factors – including, for example, script, design, the actors, working conditions, auditorium, audience amenities, ticket prices, cultural moment of reception – produces a performative force, its meaning. The second, by W. B. Worthen, expresses performativity more as a process, whereby a series of citations – to ‘regimes’ such as modes of performing identity or subjectivity, historical reconstruction and authenticity or globalization – produces the meaning/s of performance. Thus, I am concerned with the way both *Othello* and *Othellophobia* generate/d meanings as a result of their material construction and with how their citation of various discourses, historical and contemporary, enabled this meaning. Allow me to summarize this as simply as I can: this article documents an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Othello* which is hypertextual in the way it weaves together the different narratives and discourses which shaped its production and reception. The hypertextuality

facilitates the article as performative in that it: one, reveals a thick description of the production in action; two, explores the effect of that action, how the play means; and three, demonstrates how that meaning is contingent upon a series of citations, the recognition of which might otherwise be elided or occluded.

The puzzle of sudoku requires that every row, every column and every  $3 \times 3$  box contains the numbers 1–9.<sup>15</sup> As I have adapted the puzzle for this article, the nine boxes concern different aspects of the production, some of which inevitably overlap, and given that every row, column and box (in this case, a single page of the puzzle) must contain each of the numbers 1 through 9 only once, the form of the puzzle affirms the notion that each of these spheres, narratives, discourses and practices is equally (or near-equally) as important as any of the others in (in)determining the meaning of the play. The boxes have ghosted numbers and the numbers decode as follows:

1. **textual** – the text of the production was heavily filleted in order to play through 90 minutes without an interval and to leave space for the physical dimension of the production; these boxes provide an edited selection of those parts of the text which were most relevant to the overall conception of the production.
2. **theoretical** – much of the theoretical underpinning of the production was drawn from literary or theatre studies; the practice of the production – including martial arts, dance and clowning – was far more interdisciplinary.
3. **anecdotal / personal / cultural** – this is a testimony of how personally invested I (and others) was/were in the work and how the play shaped the participants’ personal lives throughout the production; John Russell Brown writes that ‘any full account of performance must go

<sup>12</sup> See Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 1997), chapter 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Reading the Material Theatre*, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> W. B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> [www.sudoku.com/](http://www.sudoku.com/), accessed 10 January 2006.

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beyond mere quotation or factual description and call upon impressionistic and very personal reconstruction.’<sup>16</sup>

4. **rehearsal processes** – this process was extremely collaborative so that I became almost a facilitator of the production, as much as a director: the other creative authors included; the designer/producer, choreographer, bouffon director, composer, voice/text coach, assistant director and, of course, the actors.
5. **production history** – this was predominantly the recent stage history of the play and there were many to choose from in 2003/4 in the UK as post-colonial Britain continued to wrestle with its own phobias.
6. **finished production** – there were two versions of the production, as outlined in the puzzle.
7. **critical reception** – the production was reviewed by *The Bath Chronicle*, *Times Educational Supplement*, *The Stage* and *Time Out*, and by colleagues, mostly from The University of Winchester.
8. **pedagogical** – this mainly concerned a second-year class at The University of Winchester called ‘Shakespeare and Ideology’, which ran concurrently with the production of the play.
9. **visual/photographic** – these are images taken from the DVD recording of the production and contemporary and historical paintings and photographs which inspired or influenced the work.

The nine pages are arranged, in no particular order of importance, according to themes:

1. sexuality
2. emotion
3. history
4. stereotypes/binaries
5. animals
6. nightmare/monsters
7. race/blackness
8. stupidity
9. Desdemona

Though it can be read perfectly acceptably one page after another, to see the puzzle as conceived, the pages should be laid out thus:

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

This pattern, on the wall or on the floor, will allow the reader to make connections along lines, vertical or horizontal, or from page to page. Here are some ways, according to degree of difficulty, the puzzle might be read:

1. Easy: thematically – a whole page at a time, perhaps according to the reader’s interest, for example, the Desdemona and then the Sexuality page.
2. Moderate: follow a number – again by interest, you might prioritize the production history (5) and develop an overall sense of those production moments that most impacted upon the production of *Othellophobia*.
3. Difficult: chronologically (roughly) – you might want to attempt to reconstruct an approximate chronology of the production’s conception, creation and reception; this would mean reading (perhaps) the text boxes (1), followed by the theoretical (2) or production history (5), then onto the anecdotal, rehearsal, pedagogical and visual (3, 4, 8, 9), followed by the finished production (6) and then critical reception (7).
4. Fiendish: resonances – there are deliberate connections between boxes, sometimes on the same page and sometimes across pages: you might attune your reading to discovering such connections; for example, boxes 2.6 (by which I mean the box with the ghosted number six on page 2), 8.9 and 9.5 are linked by the trope of smudged make-up and also, less obviously, connect to 1.3 and 3.2.

A final deferral – if you didn’t heed my initial advice – before moving to the puzzle, and continuing apologetically, I conclude with what I’m not doing through this article. I am not trying to persuade anyone to adopt my somewhat radical reading of *Othello*, which for some will seem unhelpfully ideological and for others obvious good sense; in

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Writing about Shakespeare’s Plays in Performance’, in *Shakespeare Performed: Essays in Honour of R. A. Foakes*, ed. Grace Ioppolo (Newark, 2000), p. 151.

part, the catharsis of putting on the production has (almost) cured me of such proselytising ambitions. I am not, either, advocating a new form of writing about Shakespeare in performance. I doubt that I shall ever repeat this experiment and a collection of articles in sudoku form would be obviously excessive, perhaps somewhat ridiculous. And I am not making any startling conclusions, open-ended or otherwise; the main conclusion of the article, and you really should not read this before the puzzle itself, is that the meanings of the play and the production were hopelessly beyond my authorial desire to control them (though this is perhaps especially the case given the collaborative nature of the project); I can proclaim with Sebastian of Messaline that 'My determinate voyage [was] mere extravagancy' (*Twelfth Night* 2.1.10). Though the death of the author may have been exaggerated, the suggestion that a production's meaning exceeds the designs of those authors is hardly groundbreaking. I am, however, offering a consistent, if biased,

and deliberately self-invested, view of the play for early twenty-first-century Britain; I am making a challenge to find new and creative structures for the documentation of (Shakespearian) performance, including, for those more able than me, the creation of actual hypertexts on e-journals such as *Borrowers & Lenders*, which encourages 'contributors to use the online format to its best advantage, in particular, by imagining how to enhance or illustrate their essays with multimedia (screen captures, sound clips, images, and so on)';<sup>17</sup> and I am emphasizing the hypertextual and performative as the organizing apparatus by which unfixed and multi-layered meaning might be, at least for a moment, grasped. Now, complete the puzzle.

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<sup>17</sup> See *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation*, at <http://atropos.english.uga.edu/cocoon/borrowers/>, accessed 4 May 2006. As far as I can tell, the 'and so on' has yet to be fully explored.

I was teaching a Shakespeare and race class in parallel with the production of *Othello-phobia*. After several weeks of theoretical discussions, we split the class into two groups who worked on edited productions of the play, one as a tragedy and the other as a comedy, and with the shared brief of foregrounding the ideological implications of staging the text. The comedy group was largely devoid of sexuality, excepting Iago's homoerotic/phobic desire for Othello; the tragedy group started with the murder - and with the young black actor topless - and then constructed a sexually assertive and promiscuous Desdemona.

I saw Ricky Fearon's Othello for Concentric Circles at the Haymarket in Basingstoke with a large group of women. Their chief topic of conversation was of waiting to see Othello naked. The production's publicity did not disappoint; at the beginning of 3.3 Fearon started stripping to his fetishised white boxer shorts and muscular body and then took a shower as Iago began to reel him in: more exemplary Othellophilia I have not seen. Making not quite the same point a local review decided, 'His vulnerability was highlighted in a highly original shower scene, when he stripped down to his underpants.'

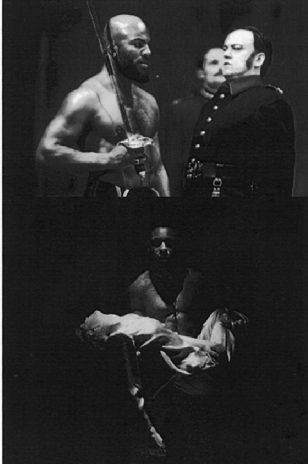
Adi Bloom, reviewing *Othello-phobia* for the *Times Educational Supplement*, focused on the production's use of the death / desire dynamic as outlined by Jonathan Dollimore. Bloom picked up that the murder was troublingly bestialised and eroticised and, as in the play, inextricably linked to her father: 'When Brabantio discovers the betrayal of his daughter, Desdemona, he glares like a wild-cat about to pounce... [her] murder is a culmination of animal baseness. Declaring "I would kill you and love you", Othello pulls her to him, her writhing death throes a reflection of his lust.'

This is a text saturated by sex, and nasty sex at that. Iago warns Brabantio that 'an old black ram/Is tugging your white ewe' (1.1.89-90), and that 'you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse' (111-12), images which prefigure the tugging / covering / smothering of the final bedroom act. Emilia complains that 'when they are full,/They belch us' (3.4.99-100) but advises reciprocal treatment: 'The ills we do, their ills instruct us so' (4.3.99). This threat, however, is idle; the women have no means by which to return the violence enacted on them, let alone to resist it.

My first idea for Desdemona's murder, according to the strategy of exploding and exposing the play's stereotypes through grotesque exaggeration, was to have Othello beat her to death with a six foot phallus; the cast didn't go for it... What evolved through rehearsals, in collaboration with the designer, was that the tie around Othello's waist, and which could be read as phallic, was used to strangle her. The Brabantio figure was on stage throughout this, and later made a noose from the tie with which to hang Othello - obviously a horrible historical image - and prevent him taking his own life.

Othello and Desdemona's sexual union in Cyprus was represented far more poetically; this was the one moment in the production where the sexuality was healthily unpolluted. The consummation took the form of an improvised dance which happened upstage throughout the drinking scene; thus the apparent health was physically juxtaposed with the ensuing sickness. Brabantio watched both scenes, impotently unable to interrupt the love-making, but enabled to oversee and endorse Iago's machinations with Cassio's drinking - and soon the dance was halted by a screaming, Artaudian siren.

I met up with one of the actresses in the show to discuss elements of the production. It was a fine hot day so we sat outside at a local pub. The outdoor furniture meant that she had to sit, perfectly demurely, with her legs either side of a slightly obtrusive pole. When I returned with drinks she reported the comments of near-by male drinker: 'Stay out here much longer and you'll turn dark, love. Still, you've got a mighty shaft between your legs there.' Is it merely fanciful to connect this kind of comment to *Othello* in a manner similar to that of Bloom's connection of *The Merchant of Venice* to the Holocaust?



Celia Daileader coins the term 'Othellophilia' to describe overt, if sometimes unconscious, sexualisation of the black classical actor; this cultural process approaches 'biracial porn [and] functions to exploit both white women and black men.' It is defined by dramaturgies which foreground 'violence, physicality, sexuality, the demonic; black leather, leopard skin, black nudity against white dishabille.' Though she lauds the casting of black actors in non-black Shakespearean roles she laments the all-too-common 'pageant of black fantasy flesh, the fruits of allegedly colour-blind casting.'

Rosenberg begins his exhaustive chronicling of *Othello's* various social, literary and theatrical histories with a biblical echo; 'From the beginning, men wept at *Othello*.' Emotional responses form the spiritual core of this history, which Bristol argues 'signals a chronic unwillingness amounting at times to outright refusal to participate in the performance of a play as the ritual or quasi-ritual affirmation of certain social practices.' I think this is perhaps an optimistic, carnivalesque reading: as often as not, such responses might express (latent) sympathy with Brabantio, if not Iago.

Perhaps *Othello* is the Shakespeare play which has elicited the most involved (and recorded) emotional responses from both readers and spectators. Iago says 'I will wear my heart upon my sleeve' (1.1.65) but it is Othello who, Tom Cruise-like, speaks of his 'soul's joy', such that he 'cannot speak enough of this content' (2.1.176, 188). His young bride continues to be the locus of the emotional 'rack' Iago ties him to, and, having murdered her, he describes himself as 'one whose subdued eyes, / Albeit unused to the melting mood / Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees / Their medicinable gum' (5.2.344-8).

When I went to the cinema to see *Far From Heaven*, a story of prohibited love between a white woman and a black man, there was a poster for the Australian film, *Rabbit-Proof Fence*. Its warning about the narrative of Aboriginal assimilation, in this case the removal of 'half-caste' children from their families for institutional instruction, read 'mild emotional content'. It made me so mad I went back with a permanent marker and scrawled next to it, 'white English perspective'. The poster for *R-PF* eerily re-images Parker's *Othello* poster, with an over-sized Branagh looming over the three girls / Fishburne + Jacob.

Like *Shakespeare in Love* (1999), *Stage Beauty* (2004) trebles the emotional impact of the play (*Othello*) it stages: the tragic ending of the play itself is played; so is the audience's intense involvement in, and euphoric/cathartic response to, the tragedy; and, the characters playing the parts are romantically involved and their parts reveal their characters. Crudup playing Kynaston playing Desdemona (& Othello) seeks the emotional truth of the death scene. This can be read as an attempt to kill his 'feminine side', which the film suggests is the result of abuse, and once achieved allows him to embrace heterosexual love.

My emotional reactions to this play have changed over time. Reading it for the first time at 20 I was shattered by the destruction of what appeared to be an ideal romance; on the page Othello's blackness did not register with my yet-to-be-politicised eyes and my response was of an essentialised despair at love destroyed. Maybe ten years later I noticed the first signs of othellophobia: unease reading the play; a focus on the sexualised/bestialised construction of Othello; further unease sitting in the naturalistic (white audience) theatres; a nauseous inability to watch any contemporary adaptation of the play. Is it just me?

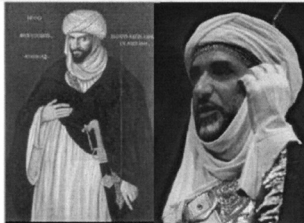


At a Sunday afternoon rehearsal, with opening night fast approaching and much still to be worked on, Oni turns up. Oni is Olu's very beautiful baby daughter. She is the physical reality of the Brabantio's nightmare of miscegenation, a brown baby. She is here an hour before the scheduled close of rehearsal, I suspect, because her mum quite rightly wants to make clear her prior claim to her over-worked husband. So Oni walks in and out of scenes, a haunting presence disrupting all around her by her beguiling smile and curls - chaos is come again - and I feel powerless as a controlling figure of the production's meaning.

At the end of the production Brabantio was very much involved in Desdemona's death. At different moments he held them, ambiguously either trying to prevent the murder or facilitate it. Othello struck Desdemona and then pulled her up onto him using his waist-tie. Her strangulation as she sat astride him was disturbingly sexual and at the end he invariably had her white makeup smudging his face. Then, farce; Brabantio breathed life back into Desdemona so that Othello had to keep cartoonishly killing her. All the reviews singled out the murder as harrowing; several were upset about the too-immediate comedy.

Of the two student productions, the tragedy group sought to provoke emotional responses to the play by turning Othello into a victim of domestic abuse (and cuckolding). This was tied to universalised notions of character which largely attempted to erase race as a central consideration of the production. The comedy group totally resisted any sort of emotional engagement with the narrative. The characters were represented as very broad stereotypes and even the serious actions of the play - Iago still tricked Othello into murdering Desdemona - were mocked as not worthy of serious attention.

Olu's agenda was recuperative; like many black actors he wanted fiercely, and entirely justifiably, to resist a white-constructed Othello and to affirm a black identity which was powerful and autonomous. His chief means for this were historical and cultural: for the former he did extensive research into Moorish history and used this to inform his characterisation; for the latter he developed a British/Nigerian accent as a way of focusing otherness. My agenda, contrarily, was 'explosive': I wanted to expose what I saw as pernicious (trans-historical) white constructions of the part; we were on a collision course...



Here is Ben Kingsley historicising his appearance via the Moorish Ambassador to Elizabeth I, and yet offering a rather ugly universalism: 'Thus from the beginning of rehearsal a being emerged who, if provoked at a primal level, would react with the violence of a psychopath.'

The senate's questions to Othello about his elopement was played as a bear-baiting, which, as described by Hawkes, involved 'the chaining to a stake and the whipping of a blinded bear... The use of specially trained dogs to tear the bear's flesh... guaranteed violent mutilation and plenty of blood, guts and noise'. More often connected to Macbeth's end, Othello defines himself when referring to Desdemona's powers of musical placation; 'O, she would sing the savageness out of a bear!' (4.1.186). His statement is a kind of performative fortification against such an appeasement, a renewed commitment to savagery.

Newman outlines some of the early modern explanations for blackness, in particular George Best's late sixteenth-century theory, extrapolated from the birth of a black baby to a black father and white mother, that 'it seemeth this blacknes proceedeth rather [as opposed to the previous notion of exposure to the sun] of some natural infection of that man'. This infection is given a scriptural aetiology which confirms, according to Newman, 'the link between blackness and the devil, the myth of black sexuality, [and] the problem of black subjection to authority'.

We aim, in the Shakespeare class, to develop a cultural materialist theatre practice. Part of this process is attempting to historicise any text which we study - in this case with particular reference to Newman and Vaughan - and analysing its relationship to a present context. The students are often quite reluctant to let slip the security blanket of universalism, preferring to connect themselves to the play's themes of love, jealousy and honour. We steer them towards a specific contextualisation of the universal theme: what are the material factors which produce Othello's, as opposed to OJ's, jealousy?

Two historical and anecdotal accounts of the play's emotional impact:

... Desdemona killed before us by her husband, although she always acted her whole part extremely well, yet when she was killed she was even more moving, for when she fell back upon the bed she implored the pity of the spectators by her very face.

During a performance in Baltimore in 1822, a soldier on guard duty, seeing Othello about to strangle Desdemona, drew his gun and fired at the stage, breaking the arm of the actor playing the Moor.

One of the actors who was later cast in Max Stafford-Clark's enormously successful 'African' *Macbeth* came to see the first version of the production. He was extremely generous about the show and he was especially complimentary about Olu's citation of Africa - specifically Yoruban Nigeria - through accent and gesture, and saw this as a means of taking ownership of the role and moving it away from white authority. A colleague of mine - white, European, female - took an opposite view, supposing that it 'felt too much like "cultural tourism" rather than subverting or asking questions of the content.'

Sello Maake ka-Ncube, the black South African actor who played Othello for the RSC in 2004, revealed to the *Times*'s Gore-Langton that 'Basing the whole thing on race is a bit ridiculous... It's the emotional/psychological landscape that interests me.' His descent into madness, however, was a journey from civilised poise to African barbarism. As Carnegie's review lamented, 'his fall is all too swift. As he works himself up into a paroxysm, [pre-epilepsy] he grotesquely reverts to the stamping war dance of some tribal beast within'. Sher's Iago did a monkey-dance, but that, at least, was on the surface.

Just as Olu's characterisation of Othello was informed by Moorish history, Othello's character is similarly defined by his/story. His (perhaps unintended) courting of Desdemona involves recounting his 'disastrous chances', of being 'sold to slavery' and 'all my travels history' (1.3.133, 137-38). That relationship is symbolically sealed (and later undermined) by the handkerchief, which has 'magic in the web of it' (3.4.65). Dying, Othello recalls an incident in Aleppo where he, in an act of Christian and Venetian alliance, and in appropriating an alternative history, smote a traducing and turbaned Turk (5.2.349).



In rehearsal we started with the following stereotypes as a way of developing distinct and non-naturalistic ways of moving and of breaking down traditional modes of characterisation:

Othello - monster  
 Iago - devil  
 Desdemona - doll / whore  
 Emilia - nagging wife  
 Bianca - hysteric  
 Cassio - ladies man  
 Brabantio - dotard  
 Rodrigo - fool  
 Montano - soldier  
 Lodovico - messenger

There were two incarnations of *Othellophobia*. In the first the real and the nightmare worlds were mixed, the natural and animal physicalities interwoven. I came away from the first night of this show thinking I had perpetuated/confirmed a racist nightmare. In version two the scenes up until the end of the senate were a real, modern world, with much of Iago's animal images filleted out. The remainder of the play was Brabantio's nightmare, when these images were re-inserted, and during which he roamed as spectator: he occasionally influenced the action and he unleashed the uncontrollably destructive Iago.

I gave a lecture to our Theatre & Society class entitled 'Monsters and black cool', in which I traced, the 'coalescence' of early modern and postmodern stereotypes of blackness. I argued that modern Othellos, who begin according to black cool - eg. gangsta rap or Samuel L. Jackson - and then, as their script demands, turn into monsters, further consolidate (and even exacerbate) the nasty binary which sustains the role. Leo Wringer (Nottingham Playhouse) and Ron Cephas Jones (Greenwich Playhouse) were especial agents/victims of this with their initially unflappable demeanours and subsequent monstrosities.

Honigmann's optimistic reading - 'Shakespeare's determination to question "the normal" emerges from the large number of stereotypes that he sets up only to knock them down... each one fails to conform to our expectations' - is countered almost directly by Loomba's - 'But the play goes on to show us that, despite his seeming different from other Moors, Othello ultimately embodies the stereotype of Moorish lust and violence - a jealous, murderous husband of a Christian lady'. My position is that Shakespearean stereotypes carry such weight (and threat) because they seem (and are so-off portrayed) as real people.

One day during a break in rehearsals (for some reason) the conversation turned to Viagra (for some reason). One of the actresses turns to Olu and says 'well, you wouldn't need that.' At a staff meeting the topic of sexual discrimination is raised; 'I vote Olu to be the rep' smirks an older Marxist colleague. Both remarks were intended as compliments, endorsements of Olu's physical beauty, but tied, I would suggest, to the stereotypical problems of:

othellophobia  
 othellophilia  
 negrobilia  
 brabantioddities.

It is, though, a fine performance by Wringer - a fluent and accomplished Shakespearean actor whose soft and honeyed tones lapse into a raw, almost primitive utterance as he descends into madness. The manner in which Jones allows his cool two-star general to become a caged animal pacing in ever smaller orbits to something crouched, reptilian [and] cowering... The first, eclectic + contemporary, jarred because Othello went from Zen contentment to monster in a flash; the second, a US general in WWII, made Othello's investment in magic seem ridiculous.

If I were to stage the play again (God forbid), I would take on board Ray Proctor's vehement defence of the poetic Othello. I would have two actors playing the part, one playing the 'noble Moor', those incredibly progressive characteristics Shakespeare creates, and one playing the stereotype, the fool, the buffoon. My fantasy casting for this production would be Hugh Quarshie - a very serious Shakespearean - and Lenny Henry - a genius with comic racial stereotypes. The production would be a struggle between the two for priority with perhaps one (alternately) killing the other.

Iago is in charge of the stereotypes which drive the play - 'these Moors are changeable in their wills' (1.3.336) and 'I know our country disposition well:/In Venice they do let God see the pranks/They dare not show their husbands' (3.3.202-4) - and Othello internalises them (in the seduction / temptation / capitulation scene, 3.3) - 'And yet how nature erring from itself-' (229) and 'O curse of marriage,/That we can call these delicate creatures ours/And not their appetites!' (270-72). Question: to what extent are these stereotypes 'internalised' by the text itself, as opposed to the characters it represents?



The latter (1997) National Theatre *Othello* defined himself by reference to the former (1964). Of Olivier, Harewood says, 'You can see the technique: the relaxed hands, hung low, the open mouth with the tongue stuck out',<sup>34</sup> and yet as he gives into Iago he falls to his knees, rolls his bass Rs and beats his chest - Harewood, not Olivier. Then, the murderer, he grunts (16 times) like an animal.

John Ray Proctor - black American actor, scholar and martial artist - and I explored the possibility of staging Othello-phobia in the US. His response to version 1: 'Your production makes Othello an animal, on so many levels, but it is not clear that Othello's animism is caused by... the white society in which he exists... your production repeats a cycle of ideology which posits that black men are thick tongued, aggressive and bestial... Making Othello an animal; I think I understand the impetus but I am absolutely positive that I cannot participate in this tradition.' He was right, about version 1 at least.

Neill writes that 'Iago locates their marriage in that zoo of adulterate couplings whose bastard issue... are the recurrent "monsters" of the play's imagery'. MacDonald locates the transference of the monstrous to (include) the women in the play: they are 'racialized as black, assigned a set of negative sexual characteristics associated with Africa'. Bianca is described as a fitchew, which, along with monkeys 'were thought to have particularly strong sex drives. Indeed, many early modern travellers gave credence to the notion that black Africans were the product of cross-species breeding between humans and apes'.

Kenneth Muir's New Penguin introduction to the play lists, like a perverse rendition of Old MacDonald's Farm, some of the text's animal references -

'ass, daws, flies, ram, jennet, guinea-hen, baboon, wild-cat, snipe, goats, monkeys, monster and wolves'

- spoken especially by Iago in the first three acts and then, almost as if accepting the baton, by Othello in Acts 3 and 4. To this list can be added, of course, the particularly sexualised and racialised references to the 'old black ram' and the 'Barbary horse' (1.1.89, 111).

Perhaps surprisingly, the RSC's Education website is intent on demonstrating the historically constructed nature of discourses which underpin their universal author's works. The resources for teachers of *Othello* include this assistant director journal entry: '*Othello* is teeming with images of animals and beasts. Day Two: Text work, language, imagery. We discussed [Iago's] use of beasts and animal imagery to describe people and his consistent desire to reduce men and their actions to that of beasts'. Following this is an extensive list of the play's animal imagery and connections made to sexuality and jealousy.

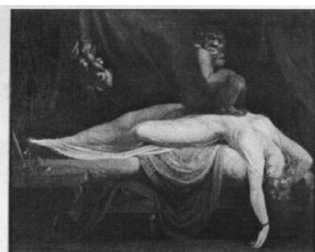


In version 2 of the show we introduced more animals and more animal-like movements in order to better distinguish the 'real' world from the nightmare world. So not only did Othello move, at various times, like a bear, a tiger, and even the ape-like creature, but there was also a snake, meercat, peacock, barracuda (actors!), cat and owl. On the soundtrack for the show were dogs barking and various other roars and screeches (directors!). However, whilst these additions added to the Goya-like disturbance of the staging, they muddled the notion that the text's obsession with animals is most expressly tied to Othello.

Olu comes out of the rehearsal room at the Janacek Academy of Music and Performing Arts, Brno, Czech Republic. Suddenly he is surrounded by a group of skin-heads. They menacingly start mimicking monkeys, the gestures and the all-too-familiar 'ooh-oo' sounds an obscene parody of the choreographic work he has just been doing on an intercultural production of *The Wizard of Oz*. Some people watching from the outside laugh at the spectacle. He wants to tear them apart, all of them, and he is physically capable of it, but he just waits until the 'performance' ends.

The teen adaptation *O* (2001) follows Shakespeare's structure with one very disturbing interpolated scene; in the grip of Hugo's lies, Odin, who is linked to a predatory hawk, begins his first sexual encounter with Desi tenderly but then, having imagined Michael in his place, brutishly thrusts into her until orgasm though she repeatedly shouts 'no'. Like the 2001 TV adaptation, Iago's temptations begin a third of the way into the film, but this 'spreading' of 3.3, though an acknowledgment that the capitulation is unjustifiably quick, at least in a contemporary version, fails, in both cases, to rationalise Othello's monstrosity.

Olu and I had a big argument in rehearsal. I was pushing, in accordance with what we had talked about, or so I thought, about doing a literal monkey for the scene where Lodovico arrives (4.1.230ff). 'I can't do it. I won't do it', he said. 'We've got to find a compromise.' I pushed further. He stormed out. After a while I went out and apologised. Then we did some work on the tiger and he was brilliant. The monkey eventually evolved into a movement he had learned from Australian Aborigines, an unnerving and performative glare at the audience, a very brave and confronting compromise.



This painting by Henry Fuseli perfectly encapsulated my idea for the production (a nightmare): the devil (Iago) sits atop the damsel (Desdemona), drawing her life from her; complicit and menacing, the Barbary horse (Othello) awaits his turn.

My best friend at high school was an Aboriginal kid - black mum (a legend), white dad (not quite so impressive) - called Jeff. One day, coming home on the bus, I casually called him a 'black cunt'. He spat in my face and I wept for the entire trip (and never spoke of it). It was 'forgotten' but I had a recurring nightmare that I had gotten into heaven and that he had not (because he scored 7/10 on a test). During the rehearsals, whilst I was having dreams about Olu and I reconciling our friendship after the extreme tensions of the production, I received news that, back in Australia, Jeff had committed suicide.

#### IAGO

**Awake! What, ho, Brabantio!**  
*Brabantio sits bolt upright, as if waking from a nightmare, eyes staring.*

**INT. CASTLE - FLASHBACK FANTASY - NIGHT**  
*Desdemona's arm is stretched over the bed, fingers splayed as in their earlier love-scene.*

*Groans of pleasure. A hand reaches out to grasp her (as Othello did). This hand is white.*

**INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT**  
*Othello's eyes flash open and he drops her hand in shock. He gets up.*

Brabantio has the nightmare - 'This accident is not unlike my dream' (1.1.141) - and Iago is the (subconscious, if you like) instrument through which the nightmarish devils and monsters are conjured. He says, 'Hell and night/Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light' (1.3.385-86). Othello is right in supposing of Iago that there is 'some monster in his thought/Too hideous to be shown' (3.3.107-8), a thought which turns him, Hulk-like, into 'the green-eyed monster which doth mock/The meat it feeds on' (3.3.168-69), 'Begot upon itself, born on itself' (3.5.156).

Proctor's response to version 1 of the production was astute, and what I was hoping for, but in general white audiences did not respond this way. One of the problems was that Othello's animalism was, ironically enough, presented in a too naturalistic, and not sufficiently performative, manner. Thus, it was nightmarishly racist, to a certain viewer, but not enough for less (or differently) politicised viewers to be disturbed by an animal-like black man. One of my colleagues wrote, 'I thought [it] was going to be more exploratory than it was... I'm not sure what it was about the story that you found exciting or controversial.'

Artaud's manifesto on cruelty was a key text for our shaping of the nightmare. In version 2 we had a blind man figure, mostly made up from Lodovico, who trampled all over both Cassio's wounding and Emilia's discovery of the murder. This expressed Quarshie's notion that 'Shakespeare's attempts to tie up the loose plot threads at the end of the play invite derision'. The blind man (and everyone else) kept accidentally bumping into Cassio's wound and then he looked in completely the opposite direction when Emilia pointed to the lamentable evidence. Perhaps needless to say, the actors with hitherto big moments were miffed.

One of the key themes of the nightmare was of being out of control: Iago goes out of control and wreaks havoc; the production itself was a monster that got away from me; the meanings I sought to generate mocked me and took on grotesque shapes. I explained this to a class, that I had attempted to do something with the play and that it had turned into a monster, a nightmare. A few years ago a group of boys had played the ending as a riotous comedy; a 17 stone hairy man played Desdemona, who when attacked by Othello, retaliated with a series of devastating world wrestling moves - the play gave me the pile-driver.

Iago was the instrument of the nightmare, Brabantio's subconscious unleashed. When the old man's nightmare began he simultaneously spoke some of Iago's words to Roderigo: 'An erring barbarian... she will find the error of her choice... I hate the Moor; let us be conjunctive in our revenge against him' (1.3.339ff). From this point, Brabantio watched Iago carry out his demonic charivari. The problem, for Brabantio, was that Iago's menace could not be contained and thus not only was the marriage destroyed but everyone else with it. In version 2, Brabantio awoke, shocked, lights down.

In the documents Newman uses to contextualise *Othello*, she finds 'always... the link between blackness and the monstrous, and particularly a monstrous sexuality'. In a *Cheers* episode from 1983 Rippy critiques the perpetuated Othello myth in the representation of an occasional character: 'a widening of the eyes, opening of the mouth, and general depiction of the stereotype of mental instability that recalls racial stereotypes from minstrel performance'. This reading puts the US on the psychoanalytic couch and unpacks a nightmare of 'the black sexualized beast threatening a white female victim'.

### Othellophobia

i. A dread of watching Othello's stupidity and savagery.

ii. A series of fears related to stereotypical racist representation.

The production exploits the text's obsession with beastliness and the demonic by exposing these images through grotesque physical caricature.

I first noticed this fear / discomfort watching contemporary adaptations of the play, the teen film *O* and a TV film set in the London police department. When it got to the temptation scene (3.3), and Othello's impending credulity, I just couldn't watch any more.

Quarshie argues that *Othello* endorses 'a racist convention'; he invents the word 'negrobilia' to 'describe the representations of black people commonly made by white people' which depict 'grinning "darkies" with woolly hair, thick lips and cavernous nostrils' and he suggests that *Othello* might be just such a representation. Thus he asks, 'if a black actor plays Othello does he not risk making racial stereotypes seem legitimate and even true?' and concludes that such an actor further risks 'personifying a caricature of a black man, giving it credence.' I agree with him but I cast a black man as Othello.

Michael Ray Charles's artwork, controversial and negrobiliaic, also influenced the production. He writes: 'a lot of blacks have accused me of perpetuating stereotypes, and I think there's a fine line between perpetuating something and questioning something. I like to get as close to it as possible in order... to create that tension... to have people question how they deal with these images.' He discusses an anxiety about responses to his art which label the subjects of his paintings as real people, not as images or representations. This problem is doubly resonant for the stage where the image is embodied by a real person.

'I hope it's not so unbearable on screen that people want to switch it off!... I actually went to the filming on the day they were doing that scene [the murder], and it was really distressing to watch... When they'd finished, Eamonn was in floods of tears, and poor Keeley was a physical wreck.' Davies's reflection on adapting a contemporary *Othello* (2001) reveals elements of Othellophobia, but the uneasiness I am describing is more explicitly tied to the speed of 3.3, in particular, to Othello's too-immediate capitulation - which is spread out in the film from the 40th minute - rather than the (consequent) violence of 5.2.

Sometimes provincial reviewers comment most acutely. A local critic sardonically observed of the Concentric production that 'the decision to have Othello strip down and take a shower offered more beef to his cake than anyone expected.' For *Othellophobia* the city reviewers offered universalised praise, but found little offence in what was intended to be an offensive production; it was a scathing local critic who indirectly found me out: 'Olu Taiwo cuts a dash as the noble Moor, until he lapses into barely credible Black - and - White Minstrel parody.' Here, as a colleague observed to me, is a black man blacked up.

Iago speaks (of) the 'blackest sins' (2.3.318), Emilia calls Othello a 'blacker devil' (5.2.132) and Othello himself internalises these ideas, supposing Desdemona's name as 'begrimed and black/As mine own face' and summoning 'black vengeance' to destroy her (3.3.388-89, 448). But worse than references such as 'thicklips' is Desdemona's description of Othello in the last scene. The text invites/invokes centuries of grotesque minstrelsy:

...I fear you, for you're fatal then  
When your eyes roll so...  
why gnaw you so your nether lip?  
Some bloody passion shakes your  
very frame (5.2.37-44).

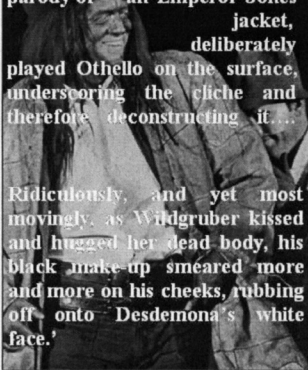


The students who had opted to turn *Othello* into a comedy explained to me that they didn't want their piece to be about race; it was to be about comic misunderstandings in relationships. On the spur of the moment I clutched at an analogy, not knowing where it would lead. *Titanic* (which I've not seen) is a film, I said desperately, about love, jealousy and betrayal but it's all about the iceberg. *Othello* is also about all of those things but race is its iceberg: not just because of the racism in the world of the play, but because race shapes who the people are and how they act; it's the fucking iceberg!

Start neologising and it's difficult to stop. How about this? Brabantioddities: old white men misjudging the cultural climate (with reference to *Othello*). Eg.1. After Quarshie had delivered his 'second thoughts' for the Shakespeare Centre (1998) an elderly gent apologised for the way *Othello* had been ruined by racism. Eg.2. Ernst Honigmann's lecture at the Bath Shakespeare Festival (2003), in which he spelt out Desdemona's injudicious and corrective-inviting behaviour: Juliet Dusinberre followed this lecture with the remark, 'if your husband smothers you, don't forget it's your fault.'

'Ulrich Wildgruber, his face obviously blackened in Negro Minstrel fashion, wearing a parody of an Emperor Jones jacket, deliberately played Othello on the surface, underscoring the cliché and therefore deconstructing it...

Ridiculously, and yet most movingly, as Wildgruber kissed and hugged her dead body, his black make-up smeared more and more on his cheeks, rubbing off onto Desdemona's white face.'



Two commonplace observations about *Othello's* double-time scheme: 1. It's brilliantly conceived. 2. You don't notice the inconsistencies watching it on stage. But 'To my mind, it happens too quickly', writes Quarshie of Othello's speedy capitulation to Iago's lies, which is the reason Parker's film splits 3.3 to different locations to imply the passing of time. This scene deserves the same ironic *Guardian* scorn offered to the hit TV show 24: '10.0 24 Kim continues her most-kidnapped girl world record bid.' This show's real-time scheme requires a day's action packed into every hour: farcical, but mostly overlooked.

This review (of version 1) from a colleague casts me as the Roderigo-like fool - this was *Othello* for idiots:

'It was very simplistic-it reminded me of a 4-hander version of *Macbeth* that I did many years ago, for 5 to 11 year olds ... There seemed to be nothing new about this production - no new angles, explorations, takes, etc. - but almost the opposite. The black / white issue was so blatant and stereotypical, that the complexities were not even touched upon. I find this rather worrying in this complex multi-racial world that we live in.'

Olu's Othello was the fool at the end of the play described by Emilia. The aftermath of the murder was a clown trio with Desdemona playing 'straight', Othello the inept, and Emilia the reprimanding boss. First he had wearily (and in exasperation) to keep re-finishing the murder. Then, as Emilia entered he stood in front of the body, went this way and that to prevent its discovery, and when discovered, feigned shock that there she was (shoulder shrug, 'gosh'). When Emilia could not register that Iago was the villain, Othello almost throttled her - 'He, woman... Dost understand the word?' (5.2.151). It's all there.

The comedy Othello was a master-stroke. Originally, a black student had been cast to play the part but he had to decline for reasons outside the class. The group's first response to having to have a white actor play Othello was to erase race but then they conceived of a wigger Othello, something like an Ali G character. He had convinced himself that he was black, his simple bride had believed him, and the regiment went along with the fiction because of his prowess as a soldier. Othello constantly said 'innit', did some of the world's worst rap dancing to prove himself to the senate and generally behaved like a total dolt.

Bristol, like Zadec, is more interested in the play's surface than its apparent depth: 'To think of Othello as a kind of black-faced clown is perhaps distasteful, although the role must have been written not for a black actor... To present Othello with a black face, as opposed to presenting him as a black man, would confront the audience with a comic spectacle of abjection rather than with the grand opera of misdirected passion.' Part of my problem in turning this theory into practice was in casting a black man; I thought it could be negotiated but the various depths kept breaking the surfaces.

Honigmann notices that perhaps Othello is short-sighted, but it might be more accurate to say that he is an idiot, described by Iago whilst in the trance as a 'credulous fool' (4.1.43), his credulity, trance-like throughout, is capacious. After first calling him a devil and then realising he has been duped, Emilia chastises Othello for his stupidity:

'O gull! O dolt! As ignorant as dirt... O thou dull Moor... O murderous coxcomb, what should such a fool/Do with so good a wife?' Othello agrees: 'O fool, fool, fool!' (5.2.162-63, 223, 231-32, 319).

One of the rehearsal techniques we used was of the *bouffon* as practised by Cuming (who played Brabantio in version 1) via Gaulier via Lecoq. Lecoq writes that the *bouffon* made fun 'not only of what the person did, but also of his deepest convictions... when *bouffons* appear on stage, it is always to depict society.' We applied this to the epileptic fit, where all of the other players came on stage as various grotesque and lewd beasts and mocked the enthralled general. Othello is just such a *bouffon* in the last scene as described by Desdemona; uncontrollably rolling, quivering and gnawing.

Zadec's *Othello* (1976) was a key influence on *Othellophobia*:

'The method, intended to affront and shock, also proved a supple means of connecting the audience to the 'hidden' play, going beyond traditional psychology into the realm of cultural myth and cultural fear... The director was most outrageous at the end, treating the last scenes in an overtly sexual manner... The murder became a parody of a sex crime. When the audience laughed and shouted at him, Wildgruber shouted back, then recovered enough to continue the scene - five minutes or so of pandemonium, a pandemonium of comic terror.'

Desdemona has been dubbed and daubed: Potter describes the 'fate of Suzanne Cloutier, [in Welles's film] who was cast as Desdemona entirely on the basis of her looks and sometimes literally deprived of voice and identity by being dubbed and doubled by other women actors.' Maggie Smith was famously daubed by Olivier's meticulous makeup, perhaps prompting Honigmann's editorial note on the lover's encounter in Cyprus; 'two gestural kisses, perhaps without physical contact, as Othello's make-up might blacken Desdemona's face.' Historical, if not hysterical.

Brabantio fashions his daughter as perfectly virginal and dutiful: 'A maiden never bold;/Of spirit so still and quiet' (1.3.94-95). From such an elevated position is her virtue inevitably turned to 'pitch' (2.3.327), inscribed as she is as 'whore', 'subtle' and 'cunning' (4.2.20,70-71,88). The latent readiness of this transition is signalled by the juxtaposition of the two ideas within Othello's wailing, 'be sure thou prove my love a whore' (3.3.360). She may have trouble saying the word but Desdemona must hear it repeatedly, first from her husband and then from Emilia, who comically and incredulously repeats it.

The comedy group's Desdemona was played as broadly as possible and in total defiance of unified characterisation. Her entrance to the senate meeting was bottom-first through the curtain and with her skirt tucked into her pants. She had uneven pigtailed, boots, pink and purple tights and she spoke in a slow, uncomprehending drawl. She was so parodied, so thick, that she believed her deranged husband when he said that he was black. The tragedy Desdemona offered an opposite representation; here was a consistent character, but instead of the naivety being overly amplified, her supposed sexual duplicity was taken seriously.

On *White Girls Are Easy* Adebayo finds a black man who 'has capitalised on the notions that eternally surround black masculinity.' On *Forbidden Fruit*, David Dabydeen connects 'plantation and slavery' ideas about the size of a black penis with a prevailing attitude that 'with a black male you [can] have vigorous, passionate, brutish sex.' Both documentaries interview women intent on pursuing the black cock fantasy, and Reginald D. Hunter's comedy show 'White Women' tells the story of 'two stereotypes fucking each other': he, giving in to being constructed as a predator; she, capturing/subduing a black man.

We explored patriarchal constructions of femaleness: 'Underneath the dichotomization of women into virgins or whores, *Othello* implies, lies the belief that women may be simultaneously appear as virginal and yet *be* promiscuous.' I can accept an argument that Desdemona makes sense, that her change from active to passive is justifiable, but I cannot reconcile her response to being struck - 'I have not deserved this' - with her response to being called a whore - 'Tis meet I should be used so' (4.1.231, 4.2.106). This discontinuity emerges from the virgin / whore binary which is unable to sustain consistency.

Desdemona pops out of her box

'child-like in her innocence'

'He called her whore'

'O monstrous act'

Desdemona first appeared from out of an on-stage box like a doll, complete with white face and rosy red cheeks. Her movements were similarly marionette-like, sometimes dependent on others for motion. In 3.4, when Othello, duped by Iago, demanded to see the handkerchief, Desdemona changed from being the doll into a vixen. She moved sensuously, produced the wrong handkerchief from a garter belt, and turned his inquisition into a sex game. Enraged he picked her up and placed her on a spot; she turned back into the doll and flopped forward, inanimate until Emilia came and straightened her.

Building on Belsey and Sinfield's exploration of female character discontinuity as represented by early modern play-texts, Werner shows how rehearsal methods perpetuate and occlude such discontinuities: 'By reading a play's language as revelatory of a character's feelings..., voice work ignores the representational and dramaturgical strategies of the text and withholds from actors the tools to deconstruct patriarchal character readings. It focuses on character at the expense of the play.' Our tools to disrupt character were a juxtaposition of contrary subject positions; how the actor clings to consistency...

One colleague wrote, 'I realised what a dismal part Desdemona is, but by Jo playing it as this luminous archetypal character it worked as a perfect foil to Iago.' The reviews focused on her being 'child-like in her innocence and naivety', 'movingly innocent' and having 'simple trust'. This was another characterisation which 'got away' from me; we had not intended to create an idealised and passive victim, but the way we attempted to sexualise Desdemona, at least in the nightmare, was ignored. Another colleague did notice, however: 'her change to temptress in the handkerchief scene made so much sense.'

PAGE 1 SEXUALITY

**Box 1.2**, Celia R. Daileader, 'Casting Black Actors: Beyond Othellophilia', in *Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Catherine M. S. Alexander and Stanley Wells (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 179, 185, 196.

**1.3**, Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare and the Invention of the Human* (London, 1999), p. 190.

**1.5**, Jane Meredith, 'Deadly Game of Consequences', <[www.newburytheatre.co.uk/archive/200302d.htm](http://www.newburytheatre.co.uk/archive/200302d.htm)> accessed 9 June.

**1.7**, See Jonathan Dollimore, 'Desire is Death', in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Margreta De Grazia, Maureen Quilligan and Peter Stallybrass (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 369–86.

**1.7**, 'Othello takes a Fearless Turn', *Times Educational Supplement*, 12 March 2004.

**1.9**, Ray Fearon (Othello) and Richard McCabe (Iago), Royal Shakespeare Company, 1999, photograph by Donald Cooper, courtesy of the Royal Shakespeare Company Collection; David Harewood (Othello) and Claire Skinner (Desdemona), Royal National Theatre, 1997, photograph by Mark Douet, courtesy of ArenPAL (illustration 22).

PAGE 2 EMOTION

**2.2**, Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Othello: The Search for the Identity of Othello, Iago, and Desdemona by Three Centuries of Actors and Critics* (Newark, 1961), p. 5.

**2.2**, Michael Bristol, 'Race and the Comedy of Abjection in Othello', in *Shakespeare in Performance*, ed. Robert Shaughnessy (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 165.

**2.9**, Screen captures from DVD recording of version 1 of *Othellophobia* (5.1, Desdemona's murder) (illustration 23).

PAGE 3 HISTORY

**3.2**, Karen Newman, "'And Wash the Ethiop White": Femininity and the Monstrous in *Othello*', in *Shakespeare Reproduced: The text in history and ideology*, ed. Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor (New York, 1987), pp. 146, 147.

**3.3**, See Gāmini Salgādo, *Eyewitnesses of Shakespeare: First Hand Accounts of Performances 1590–1890* (London, 1975), p. 30.

**3.3**, Kyle Brenton, 'Three faces of Othello', [www.amrep.org/othello/threefaces.html](http://www.amrep.org/othello/threefaces.html), accessed 23 May 2003.

**3.5**, Robert Gore-Langton, 'Black and White Moor Show', *Times*, 19 February 2004.

**3.5**, Patrick Carnegie, *Theatre Record* 12–25 February 2004, p. 243.

**3.6**, *Shakespeare in the Present* (London, 2002), p. 85.

**3.8**, See Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Othello: A Contextual History* (Cambridge, 1994).

**3.9**, Ben Kingsley, 'Othello', in *Players of Shakespeare 2*, ed. Russell Jackson and Robert Smallwood (Cambridge, 1988), p. 173.

**3.9**, Abd el-Ouahed ben Messaoud ben Mohammed Anoun, Moorish Ambassador to Queen Elizabeth I, 1600, image courtesy of The University of Birmingham Collections; Ben Kingsley (Othello), Royal Shakespeare Company, 1985, photograph by Reg Wilson courtesy of the Royal Shakespeare Company Collection (illustration 24).

PAGE 4 STEREOTYPES/BINARIES

**4.1**, Shannon Jackson writes in *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology to Performativity* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 183, that 'Performativity names the iterative processes that do the "institutionalizing" in institutional racism and that do the "internalizing" in internalized oppression. Racism is thus the ultimate performative.' Though I've not the space to argue it here, perhaps the category of 'Shakespeare' could be substituted for racism in this sentence; thus Shakespeare becomes an 'ultimate performative', for example, in the way various iterations of *Romeo and Juliet* – pedagogical, theatrical, cultural, quoted and misquoted – construct romantic subjectivities.

**4.2**, William Shakespeare, *Othello*, Arden 3, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann (London, 2001), p. 61.

**4.2**, Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism* (Oxford, 2002), p. 95.

**4.5**, *The Stage*, 13 November 2003.

**4.5**, Posting on BBC e-feedback; [www.bbc.co.uk/northamptonshire/stage/2003/othello/othello\\_review.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/northamptonshire/stage/2003/othello/othello_review.shtml), accessed 10 July 2004.

**4.8**, Bruce R. Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 131–61.

**4.9**, See Kyle Lawson, 'That's Moor like it; Royal National Theatre does right by Othello', *The Arizona Republic*, 25 September 1997. Screen capture from *Othello* (1965), directed by Stuart Burge (original stage production directed by John Dexter) – Laurence Olivier (Othello) and Frank Finlay (Iago). David Harewood (Othello) and Simon Russell Beale (Iago), Royal National Theatre, 1997, photograph by Mark Douet, courtesy of ArenPAL (illustration 25).

## SUDOKOTHELLOPHOBIA

### PAGE 5 ANIMALS

- 5.1**, William Shakespeare, *Othello*, New Penguin, ed. Kenneth Muir (London, 1968), p. 22.
- 5.2**, Michael Neill, 'Unproper Beds: Race, Adultery, and the Hideous in *Othello*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989), 383–412, p. 410.
- 5.2**, Joyce Green MacDonald, 'Black Ram, White Ewe: Shakespeare, Race, and Women', in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Dymphna Callaghan (Oxford, 2000), p. 196.
- 5.8**, See [www.rsc.org.uk/othello/current/home.html](http://www.rsc.org.uk/othello/current/home.html), accessed 26 August 2005.
- 5.9**, This composite image was created by the production's designer, Alexandra Hoare: the base image is Francisco Goya's 'The sleep of reason produces monsters' (1797–98); Photo: akg-images, London (illustration 26).

### PAGE 6 NIGHTMARE/MONSTERS

- 6.2**, "'And wash the Ethiop white'", p. 148.
- 6.2**, Marguerite Hailey Rippy, 'All our Othellos: Black Monsters and White Masks on the American Screen', in *Spectacular Shakespeare: Critical Theory and Popular Cinema*, ed. Courtney Lehmann and Lisa S. Starks (Teaneck, 2002), pp. 39, 27.
- 6.4**, Hugh Quarshie, 'Second Thoughts About *Othello*', International Shakespeare Association Occasional Paper No. 7 (Chipping Campden, 1999), p. 19.
- 6.5**, Screenplay for *Othello*, dir. Oliver Parker (Columbia Pictures, 1995) obtained from [www.geocities.com/thelunalounge/site/sections/screenplays/screenplays.html](http://www.geocities.com/thelunalounge/site/sections/screenplays/screenplays.html).
- 6.9**, Henry Fuseli, 'The Nightmare' (1781); Photo: akg-images, London (illustration 27).

### PAGE 7 RACE/BLACKNESS

- 7.2**, 'Second thoughts', pp. 3, 5, 18.
- 7.4**, See 'Art:21', [www.pbs.org/art21/artists/charles/clip1.html](http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/charles/clip1.html), accessed 27 November 2005.
- 7.5**, 'An Interview with Andrew Davies', [www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/othello/ei\\_davies.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/othello/ei_davies.html), accessed 27 January 2003.
- 7.7**, See [mandanajones.net](http://mandanajones.net), accessed 9 June 2003.
- 7.7**, Peter Patston, 'Tragedy Lies in the Treatment of Shakespeare', *Bath Chronicle*, 9 March 2004.

- 7.9**, Michael Ray Charles, courtesy and copyright Cotthem Gallery, Brussels-Barcelona; Screen capture from *Othello* (1965); Laurence Olivier as Othello (illustration 28).

### PAGE 8 STUPIDITY

- 8.1**, *Othello*, Arden 3, pp. 17–19.
- 8.2**, 'Race and the Comedy of Abjection in *Othello*', pp. 151–52.
- 8.3**, 'Second Thoughts', p. 8.
- 8.4**, Jacques Lecoq, *The Moving Body: Teaching Creative Theatre* (London, 2002), pp. 117–25.
- 8.5**, Dennis Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of Twentieth-Century Performance* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 269.
- 8.9**, *Looking at Shakespeare*, p. 269.
- 8.9**, Ulrich Wildgruber (*Othello*), Hamburg, 1976, photograph by Roswitha Hecke, courtesy of the Deutsches Theatre Museum (illustration 29).

### PAGE 9 DESDEMONA

- 9.2**, Catherine Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London, 1985), pp. 149–221.
- 9.2**, Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 52–79.
- 9.2**, Sarah Werner, *Shakespeare and Feminist Performance: Ideology on Stage* (London, 2001), p. 34.
- 9.3**, Screened on Channel 4 (in the UK) on 30 May 2003.
- 9.3**, Screened on Channel 4 (in the UK) on 4 December 2003; see [www.bfi.org.uk/filmtvinfo/ftvdb/](http://www.bfi.org.uk/filmtvinfo/ftvdb/) for details on both documentaries.
- 9.3**, See Fiachra Gibbons, 'Sexist and Racist but Certainly not Surreal', *Guardian*, 14 August 2003.
- 9.4**, Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (London, 1992), p. 34.
- 9.5**, Lois Potter, *Othello*, Shakespeare in Performance (Manchester, 2002), p. 142.
- 9.5**, *Othello*, Arden 3, p. 175.
- 9.9**, Screen captures from DVD recording of version 1 of *Othellophobia* (1.3, Desdemona's entrance; 3.3, the napkin; 4.2, false comfort; 5.1, murdered).