



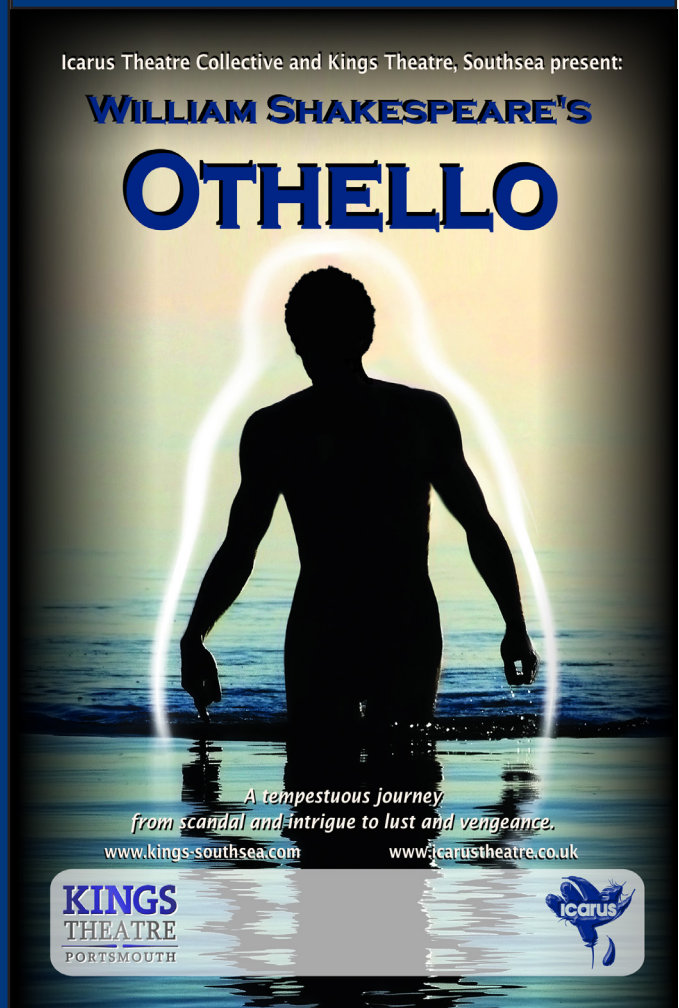
ICARUS THEATRE COLLECTIVE

EDUCATION PACK

2013 - 2014

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Othello is a legend in his own lifetime: noble, brave, victorious. 'Honest' Iago fuels his venom with malignance and hateful contempt. Othello's world will be brought vividly to life as a live string quartet and stunning ensemble cast combine with some of literature's most vibrant language and characters. A dangerous tale of ambition, jealousy and love will unfurl as Shakespeare's classic tale of deception hurtles to its dramatic and poignant conclusion.



ABOUT ICARUS

Supported by South Hill Park Arts Centre and Kings Theatre Southsea, Icarus Theatre Collective takes its fourth foray into a national tour of a Shakespeare play since its inception in 2004.

Icarus Theatre Collective explores the harsh, brutal side of modern and classical drama, creating a contemporary Theatre of the Absurd while maintaining a cohesive, evocative story. Icarus aims to produce two mid-scale

tours every year using diverse performance formats that are intellectual, visceral or engaging and always kinetic and dynamic: theatre that moves.

Led by Artistic Director Max Lewendel, Icarus teams artists from the international community with British artists, and experienced artists with promising young professionals, to enable both groups to build rapport and grow as artists.

PREVIOUS PRODUCTIONS

from Icarus Theatre Collective

- 2004: *The Lesson*, Eugene Ionesco
- 2004: *Coyote Ugly*, Lynn Siefert
- 2005: *Albert's Boy*, James Graham
- 2007/8: *The Lesson*, revival and international tour
- 2008: *The Time of your Life*, William Saroyan
- 2009: *Vincent in Brixton*, Nicholas Wright
- 2009: *Othello*, Shakespeare
- 2010: *Rip her to Shreds*, Grant Corr
- 2010: *Journey's End*, R.C Sheriff
- 2010: *The Madness of King George III*, Alan Bennett
- 2010/11: *Hamlet*, Shakespeare
- 2011/12: *Macbeth*, Shakespeare
- 2012/13: *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare
- 2013: *Spring Awakening*, Frank Wedekind

THE PRESS ON ICARUS

"It is impossible not to enjoy Icarus Theatre Collective's production of Ionesco's one-act play".

Francesca Whiting, The Stage on *The Lesson*

"Theatre at its best."

Ales Sierz, The Stage on *Albert's Boy*

"This sexy, steamy drama really hits home, especially after delivering the scorpion sting in its tail". Philip Fisher, British Theatre Guide on *Coyote Ugly*

"Icarus Theatre Collective's *Macbeth* is an impressive fluid production, with clarity and adroit direction from Max Lewendel.

This was a powerful and engrossing production."

Robin Strapp, British Theatre Guide on *Macbeth*

"Icarus Theatre Collective brings vividly to life some of literature's most vibrant language and characters". Glenn Meads, What's On Stage



Artistic Director:
Max Lewendel





PRODUCTION STYLE AND INFLUENCES

Icarus' style is a blend of Stanislavskian psychological probing and physical, kinetic performance inspired by Laban. We work with Shakespeare's text to uncover the motivations of the characters and translate that onto the stage with the help of physical theatre techniques which allow for a dynamic reinvention of the text.

INTERVIEW with

Artistic Director Max Lewendel

1. *Which elements of the play did you draw upon when deciding upon the play's design?*

The verse irregularities like extended meter, excessive elision, etc. The oceanic element of the setting being in Venice and Cyprus, and the mythological stature of war-hero Othello thrust into a real life battle set in 1570.

2. *The version of Othello possesses a strong musicality created by the use of live string instruments. What led you to making this decision?*

This largely came from the verse being more extended, flowing, and dynamic than most of Shakespeare's work. Much like the water-drenched setting of Venice and Cyprus and the tempestuous sound of a string quartet, the verse too screams out sounds of the ocean.

3. *How did you merge the actor and their instrument to create a stronger impression of their character?*

Music is one of the greatest tools to communicate emotions.

4. *Stanislavski encourages the actor to be as knowledgeable about their character as possible. Is there any research you ask your cast to complete prior to or during rehearsals?*

Yes, extensive. I want them to know everything from what they ate for breakfast each day of the play to their exact station in society, to details of their childhood.

5. *How has the Laban technique influenced your work?*

I see movement work such as Laban as the other half of Stanislavski work: two sides to the same coin. By channelling an objective through Laban effort actions we create a richer, more dynamic character.

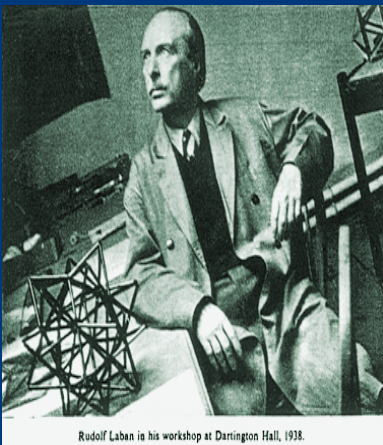




RUDOLPH LABAN (1879-1958)



LABAN



Rudolf Laban in his workshop at Darlington Hall, 1938.

The Laban Technique is a system visualizing and notating all methods of human movement which was created by Rudolf Laban, a dance-artist, theorist and one of the pioneers of modern dance in Europe. Used as a tool by dancers, actors, musicians, athletes, physical and occupational therapists, it is one of the most widely used systems of human movement analysis. Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) is an outgrowth of Laban's theories that comprises four main categories: body, effort, shape, and space.

1) Body

The body category describes structural and physical characteristics of the human body while moving including which parts are moving, which parts are connected, which parts are influenced by others and general statements about body.

2) Effort

Effort, or what Laban sometimes described as dynamics, is a system for understanding the more subtle characteristics about the way a movement is done with respect to inner intention. The difference between punching someone in anger and reaching for a glass is slight in terms of body organization - both rely on extension of the arm. Isolating the different qualities of these efforts, when combined with our Stanislavski work, is the main way Icarus uses Laban's regime.

3) Shape

While the Body category primarily develops connections within the body and the body/space intent,

the way the body changes shape during movement is further experienced and analysed through the Shape category. It is important to remember that all categories are related, and Shape is often an integrating factor for combining the categories into meaningful movement.

4) Space

The abstract and theoretical depth of this part of the system is often considered to be much greater than the rest of the system. Laban explored the concept of motion in connection with the environment, looking at spatial patterns, pathways, and lines of spatial tension. He felt that there were ways of organising and moving in space that were specifically harmonious, in the same sense as music can be harmonious; some combinations and organisations were more theoretically and aesthetically pleasing. As with music, Space Harmony sometimes takes the form of set 'scales' of movement within geometric forms which can be practised in order to refine the range of movement and reveal individual movement preference.

ACTIVITY: Act out an everyday activity (getting ready for bed, making a sandwich, going round the supermarket for example) in a few different ways, (angrily, dreamily, sadly etc) exploring your actions, their dynamics, your body shape and the way you use the space. How do they alter? What changes if something/someone intervenes and alters your inner intention?



EFFORT

There are three main efforts that Laban used: Time, Space and Weight.

Sudden/Sustained relative to time –

A swift, rapid move (such as a sneeze) is a 'sudden' move – whereas a continuous, un-interrupted movement (such as a yawn) is a 'sustained' movement. Careful – 'sudden' and 'sustained' doesn't necessarily relate to speed – not all sustained movements are slow.

Direct/Indirect relative to space–

A 'direct' movement is like an arrow, finding the shortest and most direct path to its destination (pointing at something is a very 'direct' move – it's straight, economic and spatially restricted). An 'indirect' movement is the opposite; it's curved and spacious.

ACTIVITY: Pretend to take a stroll through a garden, lingering and wandering without a purpose to experience an 'indirect' use of space.

Light/Weighty relative to weight-

Weight often looks different to how it feels, but relates to your use of muscular tension. If you drop to the floor like a stone, your use of weight is light, but actually you look heavy (a term we try to avoid) which may be perceived as weighty. Whereas if you lift yourself high up onto your tip-toes like a ballet dancer, you seem 'light' and lifted, but your use of weight may be 'weighty' and strong. Another example: if you try to push a car, your use of weight is 'weighty' – you use a lot of muscular action; whereas if you push a bicycle or trolley, your use of muscular tension can be 'light'.

There are eight ways to combine these three effort categories. Below is a table which shows the term we apply to each combination. These are called 'effort actions'.

	Sudden/ Sustained	Direct/ Indirect	Light/ Weighty
Tap	Sudden	Direct	Light
Punch	Sudden	Direct	Weighty
Flick	Sudden	Indirect	Light
Slash	Sudden	Indirect	Weighty
Glide	Sustained	Direct	Light
Press	Sustained	Direct	Weighty
Float	Sustained	Indirect	Light
Wring	Sustained	Indirect	Weighty

So a calm, reasonable character may 'Float', passing through a scene like a cloud in a very smooth and 'sustained' way, 'indirectly' moving around the stage with very 'light' muscular tension; whereas an aggressive or stubborn character may 'Punch', 'suddenly' shifting focus from one place to another, always choosing a 'direct', specific target and getting there in a very 'weighty' manner, very grounded and with a lot of muscular tension.



Konstantin Stanislavski (1863 - 1938)

Konstantin Stanislavski founded the first acting 'system', co-founded the Moscow Art Theatre in 1897, and was a committed advocate of the naturalist school of thought. Stanislavski questioned the traditional dramatic process, and his approach became one of the most enduring methods of theatre practice to ever develop. Stanislavski created his 'System' during a lifetime of exploration and experimentation. Some key principles of the 'System' include:

Emotion Memory

An actor should recall a time when they experienced a particular emotion, and transform that moment to become part of a performance. Emotion should not be made-up, it should always come from the actor.

Imagination

The actor's imagination should come into play to create a more detailed life for their character. Improvisation can be used to create a history, or a shared history, of key events that happen outside the parameters of the play, so that the actor has memories of actual occurrences to draw upon.



"All action on the stage must have an inner justification, be logical, coherent, and real."

Magic If Method

Stanislavski believed the truth that transpired onstage was different from real life occurrences, but that a 'scenic truth' could be achieved onstage. A performance should be believable for an audience so that it may appear to the audience as truth.

Actors were required to ask many questions of their characters and themselves. Through the 'magic if', actors were able to satisfy themselves and their characters' positions of the plot. One of the first questions they had to ask was, "What if I were in the same situation as my character?" and "What would I do if I found myself in this (the character's) circumstance?" The 'magic if' allowed actors to transcend the confinements of realism by asking them what would occur 'if' circumstances were different, or 'if' the circumstances were to happen to them. By answering these questions as the character, the theatrical actions of the actors would be believable and therefore 'truthful'.

Objectives, Super Objectives and Through-Line

A play can be broken up into a series of 'units', each with their own objective for the characters involved: a verb, an action, or something that needs to be done. These should always lead towards the characters' 'Super Objective' or 'Raison d'Etre'; their purpose in the play.



All About the Bard

Shakespeare's Plays



1590 Henry VI, Part 1

1590 Henry VI, Part 2

1590 Henry VI, Part III

1592 Richard III

1592 The Comedy of Errors

1593 Titus Andronicus

1593 Taming of the Shrew

1594 The Two Gentlemen of Verona

1594 Love's Labours Lost

1591-1596 Romeo and Juliet

1595 Richard II

1595 A Midsummer Night's Dream

1596 King John

1596 Merchant of Venice

1597 Henry IV, Part 1

1594-1597 Love's Labours Won

1598 Henry IV, Part II

1599 Henry V

1599 Julius Caesar

1599 Much Ado About Nothing

1599 As You Like It

1597-1600 The Merry Wives of Windsor

1599-1600 Hamlet

1602 Twelfth Night

1602 Troilus and Cressida

1603 All's Well That Ends Well

1603-06 King Lear

1603 Measure for Measure

1604 Othello

1606 Antony and Cleopatra

1607 Coriolanus

1607 Timon of Athens

1608 Pericles Prince of Tyre

1609 Cymbeline

1594-1610 The Winter's Tale

1611 – The Tempest



Shakespeare Facts

Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire in 1564.

Nothing official is known of Shakespeare's early life before his marriage, at the age of 18, in 1582. His bride, Anne Hathaway, was 26 (and three months pregnant).

He had three children, Judith, Hamnet and Susanna. In his lifetime Shakespeare wrote at least 37 known plays and 154 sonnets.

By 1592 he was in London working as a dramatist. As an actor, he was associated with the parts of kings and old men. His roles may have included Ghost in *Hamlet* and Adam in *As You Like It*.



Shakespeare

In 1613, Shakespeare retired from the theatre and returned to Stratford-upon-Avon.

He died in 1616, on his 52nd birthday.

There is a 'lost' Shakespeare play, *Cardenio*, which is referenced in contemporary documentation, but the text has never been found, and neither has *Loves Labour's Won*, which may just be an alternative name for one of his other works.



Stratford Upon-Avon Today



Map of Stratford-upon-Avon's location



Who was Shakespeare?



Shakespeare's Birthplace, Stratford-upon-Avon

Although Shakespeare's works are among the world's most well-known literary creations, very little is known about the man behind them. In his poem *To Shakespeare*, Thomas Hardy described how hard it can be to know Shakespeare, given the little information we have about him:

“Bright baffling Soul, least capturable of themes,
Thou, who display'dst a life of common-place,
Leaving no intimate word or personal trace
Of high design outside the artistry
Of thy penned dreams”

Shakespeare's father, John, was a prominent Stratford worthy, with a successful glove making and leather working business and a civic role in the community. His mother, Mary, was from the wealthy and aristocratic Arden family. Neither could read or write, which makes Shakespeare's achievements even more remarkable.

It is proposed by many that Shakespeare had a Catholic upbringing. In this period of English history, the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England had acrimoniously divided, and great pressure was put on all Catholics to renounce many tenets of their religious practice. If the Shakespeare family was indeed Catholic, they would have been no strangers to secrecy and oppression, and this may have been a factor that led to John's ultimate decline into bankruptcy.

What is more questionable is what faith, if any, Shakespeare maintained into adult life. His life and works have been probed and studied, and evidence to support Catholicism, Protestantism, and even Atheism, has been brought forward.

That he had to leave school at fourteen due to his father's financial troubles, and was therefore not able to continue his education at university, is thought to have been a matter of insecurity for Shakespeare in his later life. In contrast to playwrights such as Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Kyd, Shakespeare was not always highly regarded by his contemporaries. Kyd, Marlowe and many other playwrights of the sixteenth century were prominent figures of their day, who revolutionised Elizabethan theatre, and later became known as the 'University Wits' due to their affiliation with Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Greene, a prominent 'Wit' is known to have looked down upon Shakespeare due to his lack of education, and famously referred to him as an "upstart crow".

The years between the end of his school career and his marriage are a 'lost period' in Shakespeare's life. It is likely that, as this coincided with his father's financial problems, the young William was simply busy helping him with his business and supporting his family. However, it has been proposed that during this time he had taken on an alternative profession – soldiering, teaching or working as a law clerk - or that, as a devout Catholic, he served a prominent Catholic family in Lancashire, or even that he took a pilgrimage to Rome to escape persecution. Although there is very little supporting evidence for any of these theories, it is evident from his plays that he had an extensive knowledge of the world, particularly Italy; how a leatherworker from Stratford, with illiterate parents and a limited education, had this knowledge is certainly rather mysterious.



Anne Hathaway

Shakespeare's relationship with his wife is also rather unusual and open to speculation. Anne Hathaway was eight years his senior; it has been suggested that the marriage was hurried through due to the fact that she was pregnant with their first child.

At the time of his marriage, Shakespeare's family was bankrupt and Anne, although rather older than many Elizabethan brides, came from a financially secure family and would have been considered a good match, so possibly the arrangement was based on pecuniary interests rather than romantic ones. Some would argue that this would not be surprising as they believe that Shakespeare was in fact, homosexual. Some of his sonnets are thought to reflect a same-sex relationship between Shakespeare and the elusive W.H. to whom they are dedicated with 'all happinesse and that eternitie promised'. Possibly, this referred to the boy actor, Willie Hughes. Consider the following, addressed to a young attractive male youth in Sonnet 20:

“Till Nature, as she wrought thee, fell adoting,
And by addition me of thee defeated,
By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.
But since she prick'd thee out for women's
pleasure, Mine be thy love and thy love's use
their treasure.”

Whatever the truth about Shakespeare's sexuality, it is known that he and Anne had three children. Following this, in 1585, another period of 'lost years' begins, at the end of which we find him, seven years later, transformed from a humble Stratford citizen to an actor and playwright living in London. One proposed reason for leaving Stratford is that he was involved in a legal wrangle over poaching and had to escape to avoid prosecution.

An alternative theory is that sometime between 1585 and 1592 he was recruited by the Leicester or Queen's men - touring players who were known to have visited Stratford on several occasions.

Whatever led to Shakespeare's relocation and change of career, by 1593 things were going well for him. The theatres had been reopened after being closed due to health concerns – there had been an outbreak of plague in 1592 - and he had caught the attention of a young but wealthy patron, the Earl of Southampton.



Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton



The Earl of Southampton was a controversial figure- his involvement in Shakespeare's career has added more fuel to the fires of gossip about the more controversial aspects of Shakespeare's life. Southampton was a Catholic. He was involved in a plot to start a rebellion to overthrow Elizabeth I, but narrowly escaped being executed, and spent many years imprisoned in the Tower of London. He was also, allegedly, bisexual, and believed by some to be the object of Shakespeare's romantic affections in certain sonnets.

Shakespeare could have been no stranger to tavern life, and it is known that he was among those who drank at the Mermaid Tavern in Bread Street, along with the playwright Ben Jonson and his friends.



Inside an Elizabethan tavern

Thomas Fuller, a contemporary historian, referred to Jonson and Shakespeare and their meetings in the Mermaid in his book 'Worthies of England' (1662).

“Many were the wit-combats betwixt [Shakespeare] and Ben Jonson, which two I behold like a Spanish great galleon and an English man of war; Master Jonson (like the former) was built far higher in learning, solid but slow in his performances. Shakespeare, with the Englishman of war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds by the quickness of his wit and invention.”

But even Shakespeare's wit and invention could not continue for ever, and after writing his final play, 'The Tempest' in 1611, Shakespeare returned to his wife in Stratford, where five years later he died. Even his death has an air of mystery to it. Dying exactly fifty-two years after his birth, (which is quite strange in itself!) of an unknown illness, his will famously bequeaths his 'second-best bed' to his wife. Historians and Shakespeare scholars over the years have wrangled over what this implies. Did he detest his wife, and leave his best bed to someone else to spite her? Or, rather, was the best bed the one used only by visitors, and his second best in fact the marital bed, and therefore a sign of his lasting affection for her?

QUESTION:

Do you think that understanding Shakespeare the man is important in understanding his plays? How does it affect our interpretation of them?



Why is Shakespeare so Popular Today?

“He was not of an age, but for all time!”
Ben Jonson, preface to the First Folio.

Amanda Mabillard, in her article ‘Why Study Shakespeare?’ highlights four aspects of Shakespeare’s work that she believes have led to his continued popularity around the world.

1) Illumination of the Human Experience

Whatever emotion you want to express, she argues, “Shakespeare can speak for you.” He captures every facet of human experience, deftly describing it in such a way that even today his work resonates with audiences

2) Great Stories

They may not have been original ideas, but Othello is an excellent example of Shakespeare’s talent for recognising and bringing to life a story that will stand the test of time and appeal to people of all ages and cultures.

“William Shakespeare was the most remarkable storyteller that the world has ever known. Homer told of adventure and men at war, Sophocles and Tolstoy told of tragedies and of people in trouble. Mark Twain told cosmic stories, Dickens told melodramatic ones, Plutarch told histories and Hans Christian Andersen told fairy tales. But Shakespeare told every kind of story –comedy, tragedy, history, melodrama, adventure, love stories and fairy tales – and each of them so well that they have become immortal. In all the world of storytelling he has become the greatest name.”

(Marchette Chute, *Stories from Shakespeare*, 11)

3) Compelling Characters

Elizabethan acting style may have been far from realistic, the sets and costume non-existent, the female characters played by boys, and the stories sometimes far-fetched and magical, but there is truth at the heart of Shakespeare’s central characters that speaks to audiences and actors alike. They are complex, fallible beings, reacting in a truly human way to their situations.

3) Ability to Turn a Phrase

Shakespeare had such a talent for summing up a situation in a neat, concise way that four hundred years later our language is peppered with expressions of his invention. Some examples of these include:



‘As dead as a doornail’ – Henry VI

‘Mum’s the word’ – Henry VI, Part 2

‘Fair play’ – The Tempest

‘Wear my heart upon my sleeve’ - Othello

QUESTION:

Why does Shakespeare appeal to you?



Actor Joseph Fiennes as Shakespeare in the film, *Shakespeare in Love*



Shakespearian Insult Kit

One thing that Shakespeare was famous for was his invention of insults. To experiment with your own, combine one word from each of the three columns, placing "Thou" before it:

Column 1

Artless
Bawdy
Beslubbering
Bootless
Churlish
Cockered
Clouted
Craven
Currish
Dankish
Dissembling
Droning
Errant
Fawning
Fobbing
Froward
Frothy
Gleeking
Goatish
Gorbellied
Impertinent
Infectious
Jarring
Loggerhead
Lumpish
Mammering
Mangled
Mewling
Paunchy
Pribbling
Puking
Puny
Qualling
Rank
Reeky
Roughish
Ruttish
Saucy
Spleeny
Spongy
Surly
Tottering
Unmuzzled
Vain
Venomed
Villainous
Warped
Wayward
Weedy
Yeasty

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
Elf-skinned
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
Plume-plucked
Pottle-deep
Pox-marked
Reeling-ripe
Rough-hewn
Rude-growing
Rump-fed
Shard-borne
Sheep-biting
Spur-galled
Swag-bellied
Tardy-gaited
Tickle-brained
Toad-spotted
Unchin-snouted
Weather-bitten

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-wrench
Flirt-gill
Foot-locker
Fustilarian
Giglet
Gudgeon
Haggard
Harpy
Hedge-pig
Horn-beast
Hugger-mugger
Joithead
Lewdster
Lout
Maggot-pie
Malt-worm
Mammet
Measle
Minnow
Miscreant
Moldwarp
Mumble-news
Nut-hook
Pigeon-egg
Pignut
Puttock
Pumpion
Ratsbane
Scut
Skainsmate
Strumpet
Varlot
Vassal
Whey-face
Wagtail



Critical Approaches to Shakespeare

So we might say that when it comes to Shakespeare, anything goes. In fact, this might even be an illuminating way of thinking about Shakespeare in the context of twentieth-century criticism.

The critic Roland Barthes argued in an important essay *The Death of the Author* that to give a text an author was to limit its meaning and that as a result of this we should try and separate texts from their authors if we want to understand them. In some ways this idea echoes the views of an earlier literary movement called New Criticism.

New Criticism was an important academic movement that began in the 1920s. Literary critics such as F.R. Leavis established a close-reading approach which focused on the multiple meanings in any text, and allowed readers to look into the formal and structural characteristics of texts (a practice called practical criticism, which informs the GCSE and A Level exams of today).

This critical approach owed much to T.S. Eliot's argument that writers must surrender themselves and develop an impersonal approach to writing if they are to produce great poetry. Writing about *Hamlet* in a 1919 essay, Eliot spoke of an 'objective correlative', and argued that a formulaic approach to writing was necessary to induce the right response from a reader or spectator. According to Eliot, Shakespeare fails to achieve this in *Hamlet* because the emotional response does not match up to action of the play, and so in Eliot's opinion *Hamlet* is an 'artistic failure'. Barthes' argument was different because he believed that the reason we should disassociate texts from their authors was because nobody can claim to be the sole author of a work; their work is woven out of the fabric of myth and language in any given society that helps to make a text what it is.

This the basis upon which the critic Susan Sontag was able to argue that we shouldn't be looking for meaning in artworks, but for an 'erotics of art'. By this she meant, a way of dressing up art works; of making them have meaning for us (and even sex appeal). If we conclude that Shakespeare's works do not belong to Shakespeare, either because he wrote them impersonally or because they were actually the result of the society and the language that produced them, then we can begin to dress them up and turn them into whatever we want them to be. We all write Shakespeare, rewriting his works every time we read them. We don't have to walk down the lonely road of feeling that there is something we are missing; that we should be reading Shakespeare in a particular way. We rewrite him as we choose.

However, recent shifts in academia have tended towards a new academic movement called New Historicism, which involves a greater emphasis on placing works of literature back into their historical contexts. Stephen Greenblatt wrote on *Hamlet* that 'nothing comes from nothing' and that the important thing is to know what Shakespeare's inspirations were, given the context in which he wrote.

Ultimately, we can all find our own resonances within Shakespeare's work, but we must not lose sight of its original meaning.

QUESTION:

Do you agree with Greenblatt? Or Sontag? Or do you have your own ideas about how Shakespeare's work should be explored?



Shakespeare Theatre

The British theatre building as we know it evolved in a very specific way. European Theatre, which has its origins in the amphitheatres of Greece, is a theatre of spectacle, large happenings and specific movements to indicate stories to audiences that were often very far away. British Theatre has its roots in the troupes of travelling players, who would tour the country performing on village greens.



An artist's imagining on an Elizabethan touring company performing

As a result, props and set would be very minimal, meaning performers often gave speeches that were very descriptive to allow the audience to imagine their setting. British Theatre thus developed in the oral tradition, which is reflected in many works of the Elizabethan and Jacobean period, such as Shakespeare's description of Cyprus in *Othello*, or Marlowe's description of Troy in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*.

In towns and cities, companies performed in inn-yards. Audiences would purchase sitting or standing places, or hire rooms from which to view the stage; the further away from the ground, the more expensive, like the Dress Circle in most theatres today. And when the first theatres were constructed – the Red Lion in 1567, and The Theatre in 1576 – they evolved from this arrangement, with the stalls area being similar to the inn yard and the tiers of seating stemming from the rooms and walkways of the inn itself.



The Cross Keys Inn-Theatre

Shakespeare's plays were often staged in an open-air theatre, during daylight hours. Costume and set, with the travelling players, was minimal, and, as it was considered highly amoral for women to appear on the stage, all female parts were played by young men. The audience was divided with wealthier spectators purchasing seats, and the "groundlings", who paid less to stand in a crowd around the stage, were notorious for their rowdy behaviour.



The theatre atmosphere was closer to that of a modern-day carnival or sporting event. People sold concessions and even openly solicited clients (the theatre was in the same area as the brothels). A show was an afternoon's entertainment, and there were often several intermissions. The audience in a Shakespeare play would have been very closely packed with seats being taken on a first come, first served basis. If the spectators disapproved of an actor they would pelt him with oranges or just about anything, booing, hissing and shouting.

However, they were always ready with their applause and would clap and cheer when they approved. A visit to the theatre in Shakespeare's day was a rousing, noisy and very lively experience.

The most famous Elizabethan playhouse or theatre was the Globe Theatre (1599). It was built by the company with which Shakespeare was associated, which is why its modern-day counterpart is called Shakespeare's Globe. The original theatre was destroyed by fire on 29th June 1613.

A second Globe Theatre was built on the same site by June 1614 and closed, along with all the English theatres, in 1642 during the brief Puritan administration of Oliver Cromwell.



The Modern Globe today

The interior of the original Globe Theatre



After many years of struggle, American actor Sam Wannamaker's ambition was realised, and in 1997 a modern reconstruction of the Globe was built. It sits approximately 230 metres from the site of the original theatre.

The current Globe Theatre is a universal resource, dedicated to the discovery of Shakespeare's work and the playhouse that he worked for, through the connected means of performance and education.

QUESTION:

Thinking back to any Shakespeare productions you may have seen, did they reflect the irreverent way in which the plays would have originally been seen? Or was it performed in a more formal manner? Do you think that anything is lost if a production follows this latter approach?



Shakespeare Language

Verse

Blank verse - unrhymed iambic pentameter in poetry. Although blank verse has no rhyme, it does have a definite rhythm.

Rhyming verse - when the last word of each line of verse rhymes, such as,

“ If Virtue no delighted beauty lack,
Your son-in-law is far more fair than black. ”
- Duke, Act I Scene III -

Prose - the most common form of natural speech and writing. Although sometimes rhythmic in sound, it is unlike verse in that it does not have a regular metrical structure or pattern of rhyming line. Different to blank verse, it often induces the speaker to speak more slowly and is often used for lower class characters or when a character breaks down emotionally.

Rhyme Scheme - the sequence in which the rhyme occurs. The first end sound is represented as the letter 'A', the second is 'B', etc.

“ King Stephen was and a worthy peer, (A) His
breeches cost him but a crown, (B) He held
them sixpence all too dear, (A) With that he
call'd the tailor Iown ” (B)
- Iago, Act II Scene III -

Rhyming couplets - two rhyming lines of verses with similar or identical meter.

“ If Virtue no delighted beauty lack,
Your son-in-law is far more fair than black. ”
- Duke, Act I Scene III -

Meter - from the Greek word for “measure” - the regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a poem.

Scansion - the process of marking the stressed and unstressed syllables in verse. On a very fundamental level the purpose of writing speech in verse in the first place is not to be “poetic” but to give the language a pulse that makes it easier to speak and hear.

The actual sound of lines written in verse can be comprehended more easily by a listener than prose, because in addition to the tones and pitches, rhythmic clues help convey the message. Scansion, despite the imposing sound of the word itself, is just the simple practice of checking the verse to be sure you understand its rhythm.

Foot - a metrical unit composed of stressed and unstressed syllables. The most common form in Shakespeare is the iambic foot (or just iamb), which is an unaccented syllable followed by an accented one. For example;

“ I slept the next night well, was free and merry;
I found not Cassio's kisses on her lips: ”
- Othello, Act III Scene IV -

Below are the different forms of stress possible in a foot.

Iamb (iambic): da/dum

Trochee (trochaic) : dum/da

Dactyl (dactylic): dum/da/da

Anapaest (anapaestic): da/da/dum

Pyrrhic: da/da

Iambic pentameter - Shakespeare wrote most of his poetry in iambic pentameter, with five units of iambic beat to a line:

“ Farewell the *tranquil mind*, farewell content ”
1 2 3 4 5
- Othello, Act III, Scene III -



This releases the physical pace and momentum of the verse and illuminates the meaning through the stress. Shakespeare used iambic pentameter as a framework and sometimes added emphasis by putting an important word in an offbeat position.

Iambic tetrameter - A number of the songs in Shakespeare's plays are written in iambic tetrameter, with four units of iambic beat to a line:

Her *hand* on her *bosom*, her *head* on her *knee*. ”

1

2

3

4

- Desdemona, Act III Scene III -

Feminine ending - in meter, a line of verse that ends with an unstressed syllable.

Elision - the joining together of two syllables in a word by omitting a vowel sound.



Rhetorical Devices

Alliteration - the repetition of the same sound or letters at the beginning of words or in stressed syllables.

“And let me speak of her before her Father,
If you do find me foul in her report.”
- Othello, Act I Scene II -

Ambiguity - when a word or phrase could have more than one meaning, and a sense of uncertainty as to the meaning emerges. Ambiguity is an effective method of creating tension, uncertainty and unease; or humour.

“Our general cast us thus early for the love
of his Desdemona; who let us not therefore
blame: he hath not yet made wanton the
night with her; and she is sport for Jove”
- Othello, Act II, Scene III -

Antithesis - a contrast or opposition of ideas; the exact opposite of something.

“’Twas pitiful, ’twas wondrous pitiful!”
- Othello, Act I Scene III -

Assonance - deliberate repetition of identical or similar vowel sounds.

“Why, anything; An honorable murderer if you
will.” - Othello, Act V, Scene II -

Hyperbole - exaggeration for dramatic effect. Can appear in prose, verse, or dialogue.

“If thou dost slander her and torture me
Never pray more; abandon all remorse;
On horror’s head accumulate;
Do deeds to make heaven weep, all earth
amazed;
For nothing canst thou to damnation add
Greater than that.” - Othello, Act III Scene III

Metaphor - a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable, and the word symbolises the object.

“If consequence do but approve my dream,
My boat sails freely, both with wind and
stream.”
- Othello, Act II Scene III -

Simile - figure of speech in which two things are compared, often in a phrase using ‘like’ or ‘as’.

“Hath leap’d into my seat: the thought where-
fore Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw
my inwards.”
- Othello, Act II Scene I -

Pathetic Fallacy - When a character’s state of mind is projected onto their surroundings, or their surroundings encapsulate the atmosphere or mood of the play, informing the action of the text. For example, a storm may be indicative of bad fortune or a tempestuous mood.

“The chidden billow seems to pelt the clouds;
The wind shaken-surge, with high and
monstrous name,
Seems to cast water on the burning Bear.”
- Second Gentleman, Act II Scene I -

Onomatopoeia - when a word’s verbal sound resembles the word it is describing, such as ‘sizzle’ and ‘bang’.

“For that I heard the clink and fall of swords.”
Iago, Act II Scene III

Personification - the attribution of human characteristics to animals, plants, objects, natural forces, symbols or abstract ideas.



History of the Play

It was extremely fashionable for playwrights of the sixteenth century to write plays which copied plots of Italian stories. The principle influence for *Othello* was taken from *Gli Hecatommithi*, a collection of short stories published in 1565, which focused around the unfaithfulness of husband and wives. The original story was written by Gerald Cinthio and tells the story of “The Moor” who is falsely tricked by his ensign into believing that his beautiful wife Desdemona is having an affair.

There are many similarities between the short story and the play. The setting remains the same, as they initially marry in Venice and then travel to Cyprus, where the tragedy takes place. Iago is described as concealing, “The villainy of his soul with such art that he was too all outward show another Hector or Achilles” which no doubt assisted Shakespeare’s creation of the character. The supporting characters of Emilia and Cassio still exist, however remain unnamed, as does Iago’s stealing and planting of the handkerchief. Even Bianca exists, although she is described as Cassio’s wife and is seen copying the handkerchief through their house window.

Throughout the story, the title character also remains unnamed, simply referred to as “The Moor”. Shakespeare repeats this reference, using it to provoke racial discussions which still continue today. The choice to name the hero Othello is a unique decision, signifying his presence as an exotic stranger, whilst bringing musicality and richness which is further reflected through his speech. Iago’s original motive for fabricating the affair is due to his love for Desdemona and violent jealousy when his feelings are unreturned, a concept which seemingly does not exist in the play. Shakespeare instead creates Rodreigo, the young Venetian fool, who assists Iago’s schemes in the hope of winning Desdemona for himself. This produces many comical moments, allowing some of Iago’s plotting to be revealed through conversation as opposed to simply soliloquy. Brabantio also appears to be purely Shakespeare’s invention. The inclusion of Desdemona’s outraged father not only emphasizes the horror of a Moor marrying a beautiful Venetian woman but also gives Othello more reason to believe that Desdemona may betray her. As Brabantio famously declares, “She has deceived her father and may do thee”. This is one example of Shakespeare’s cleverly contrived foreshadowing techniques, which remain present throughout the play.

To increase the dramatic impact of his play, Shakespeare sets it amongst the war between the Venetians and the Turks for the island of Cyprus. His information on these wars is suspected to have generated from *The History of the Turks* by Richard Knolles, published in England around the time *Othello* was being written in 1603. However, he completely altered many historical facts, the greatest difference being that the Turks did not lose to the Venetians and remained occupying Cyprus for many years.

There are many other sources that are said to have influenced Shakespeare’s creation of *Othello*. These include *The Three Apples* narrated by Scheherazade in the *Thousand and One Nights*, the same classic collection of stories that contained Aladdin. The tale involves the murder of an innocent wife by her husband for suspected infidelity. John Leo Africanus’s *Geographical History of Africa* and Philemon Holland’s 1601 translation of Pliny’s *History of the World*, also may have assisted in the invention of Othello’s past adventures. To help create the Venetian setting, Shakespeare may have referenced Gasparo Contarini’s *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice*. Much of *Othello*’s influence may have also originated from Shakespeare’s real life experiences. His lifestyle would have brought him into contact with a great variety of characters, including musicians, entertainers, servants and prostitutes. He would have interacted with members of London’s African community as they remained present in places such as St. Helen’s Bishopgate, Silver Street and Turnmill Street and viewed the racism they suffered firsthand. As you can see, there are many theories about how Shakespeare’s great play was created. There is no doubt however that the plot was not entirely original, as many of the stories contain too many similarities to remain a coincidence.

QUESTION:

If you were to write your own version of *Othello*, what changes would you make? Are there any characters you would like to explore further?

Any scenes you would like to develop?



Was Othello Real?

There is no real evidence to suggest that Othello was based upon a real person. The most likely candidate is el-Ouahed ben Messaoud ben Mohammed, who was ambassador to the King of Barbary. He was known as a man of great honour who was treated with the uppermost respect, despite his olive skin. He was said to have met Shakespeare when he sat for a portrait for Queen Elizabeth I. Another possible inspiration for Othello was King Philip II of Spain, who is rumoured to have suspected his wife of conducting an affair after she misplaced her handkerchief and strangled her in their bed.

It is unlikely however that Othello is entirely based on a single person. Throughout the play he is referenced too as the “Moor”, which remains an unclear description of his true ethnicity. There is much confusion as to whether Othello was olive skinned, Arab, Indian or as he is most commonly seen today – black skinned. Traditionally the moors are known as a Muslim race, originating from a place along the northern coast of Africa, known as Barbary and are described as having darker skin than Europeans, but not being wholly black. However, if analyzing the text itself, this appears not to be the case. Brabantio accuses him of having a “sooty bosom”, whilst Othello says himself that,

“her name, that was as fresh
As Dian’s visage, is now begrimed and black
As mine own face.”
– Act 3, Scene 3 –

This confusion over the principle character’s race has led to a variety of actors portraying the part. Patrick Stewart, Thomas Thieme and Philip Seymour Hoffman each recently tackled the part, despite their white skin. Stewart’s production departed further by choosing black actors for all the other characters, thus maintaining the racial arguments by switching which race remains the minority.

There are many “blackish moors” Shakespeare would have come into contact with as Queen Elizabeth granted them “full diplomatic recognition” after their assistance in winning the war with Spain. Despite this however they were still met with much racism. What was known of the foreign races was more dictated though the government rather than exotic stories. They were frequently terrorised for their difference in dress and behaviour, labelled as “villains” or “devils”. They were classed as wicked creatures, being overtly sexual in nature and prone to jealousy. Africans were a known enemy of Christianity, indulging in heathen practices such as witchcraft and voodoo. Shakespeare questions these stereotypes throughout the play, choosing to make Othello a Christian Moor who possesses many honourable qualities, yet still allowing him touches of society’s presumptions. The subject of race became quickly topical when Queen Elizabeth ordered deportation of all these Moorish foreigners from England, claiming that they would lead to overpopulation and a growth in “irregular behaviour”. It seems that Othello was written not in remembrance of one man, but to question whether such foreigners actually possessed good natures instead of evil ones.



QUESTION:

Who is the modern day equivalent of Othello?



Historical Setting

There are two key locations in *Othello*: Venice and Cyprus. Venice was already known to an Elizabethan audience through Shakespeare's previous play *The Merchant of Venice*. This had already displayed the city's ethnically mixed population, thus making it possible for *Othello* to be given the position of general. This was due to the extensive trade market which dominated Venice's famous ports, trading to places such as Crete and Cyprus across the Mediterranean. This brought thousands of foreigners to the city. The *Miracle of the True Cross* at the Rialto a painting by Carpaccio, provides further proof, as it shows a black man rowing in a gondola down the Grand Canal.



The *Miracle of the True Cross* at the Rialto – painting by Carpaccio.

This illustrates the bustling variety of Venice's streets, complete with a black man rowing a gondola

Venice was transforming through the renaissance into a heavily artistic society, spurning *Othello*'s poetic speech and love for Desdemona. However it was also a country at war. This resulted in the English classing it as a city of crime. It soon became widely recognized as the sex capital of Europe. This helped make Iago's accusations of Desdemona's infidelity more conceivable as she was a Venetian woman subject to looser morals. These morals are discussed throughout the play, primarily in Emilia's speech delivered in Act IV Scene 3. Interestingly Venice is also a deeply religious city, following Italy's catholic roots. It was ruled over by a duke and a council of nobleman, who upheld clearly defined laws, which varied according to the individual's behaviour and service. Iago is a typical Venetian man, allowing him to easily escape suspicion. His great understanding of the inner-workings of Venetian society assisted in his manipulations against *Othello*, as he knew which strings to pull in order to achieve his revenge.



The Rialto Bridge is one of the most famous landmarks in Venice. It was built just before *Othello* was written in 1591 and reflects the architecture of the time.



The Venetians' strongest enemies were the Turks, who were known as the "terror of Europe". The Turks owned a huge empire which spanned from the Persian Gulf in the East to Hungary in the West, including the territories of Greece and Egypt. They were continuously fighting with the Venetians over land and power. The hatred against the Turks first originated from the crusades in which the Christians fought against the Turks for being Muslim.

The Turks were known to possess many barbaric tendencies. As many as 20,000 Russian and African slaves were imported per year to fight for their army. In addition, they decreed that every fifth Christian boy join the "janissaries", which was a corps of Christian children who were enslaved and forced to become warriors. The heathen nature of the Turks is continuously emphasised throughout Othello. The play questions the religious stereotype, by painting the Muslim born Othello as the hero and the noble Venetian Iago as the villain. However as the story progresses Othello begins to lose his heroic qualities. In his final speech Othello makes direct reference to the Venetian-Turk dispute, stating that his Turkish nature has destroyed his previous self:



A map of the warzone

“And say besides that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
I took by th' throat the circumcised dog
And smote him – thus. ”
- Othello, Act V -
Scene II

It is also thought by some that the Venetians would have to fight as barbarically as the Turks in order to win the war. This could be why Othello was selected as general, as he would be able to enforce this brutality.





Cyprus is an island under constant threat. Situated in the Mediterranean Sea it has been conquered throughout the years by the Greeks, Romans and the Turks. When the story takes place it was situated between a civilized and barbaric society, making it an extremely unstable location, where everything could change at any given moment. This instantly increases the tension of the plot, whilst reflecting the instability of Othello's emotions and morality as his marriage begins to unravel.



This is the entrance to the Citadel, where Othello was supposedly based

Once Othello lands in Cyprus it is transformed into a military outpost. It is a highly charged masculine environment in which reputation is everything. The female characters find themselves utterly dependent upon the men, which raises questions of sexism and freedom. The main action takes place in Cyprus' citadel, which consists of servant's quarters, halls and orchards. It is here that the civilised and barbaric worlds fully come to head. Othello and Desdemona's bedchamber provides a particularly formidable location, as it is a place of love and death. This single room incorporates Othello's sexual possessiveness, Desdemona's innocence and Iago's destruction.

QUESTION:

Where else could you set a production of Othello?
What locations have been used for other productions?



Church of Agios Lazaros. One of Cyprus' most famous landmarks, built in the 10th Century

The war plays a huge part in the story as Othello is sent to defend Cyprus from the invading Turks. This battle is said to have been based upon the battle of Lepanto which took place in 1571. In the play Cyprus is successfully occupied by Othello and his troops as the Turks are held off by the storm. In the actual battle however, the Venetians lost Cyprus to the Turkish army. The existence of this sea battle provides both a backdrop and a metaphor for Othello and Iago's emerging conflict.



The vaulted Hall of the Citadel. Which scenes from Othello can you imagine taking place here?



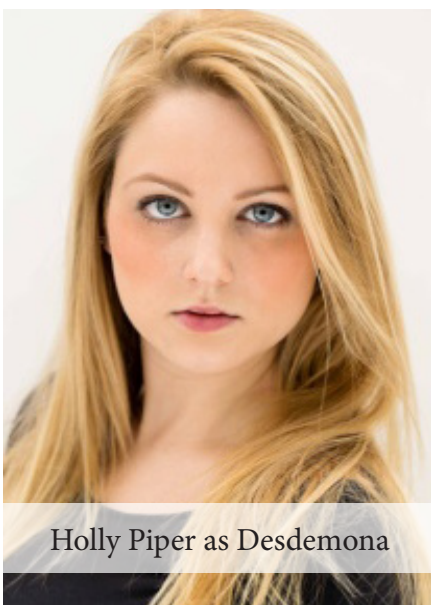
Character Breakdown



Gary Stoner as Othello



David Martin as Iago



Holly Piper as Desdemona

Othello is the hero of the play, who holds a powerful position as General of the armies of Venice. Initially he possesses a strong physical presence, tackling all matters with eloquence and grace. However, despite his authority he is still subjected to racial segregation and is often referred to as “The Moor”. His ethnical differences become a more pressing problem when he falls deeply in love with Desdemona, the daughter of Brabantio, an important Venetian senator, who does not wish his daughter to mix with other races. Despite her father’s objections, the pair marries in secret and he takes Desdemona with him to Cyprus.

Iago is the play’s villain, whose incredible talent for manipulation causes mass destruction as the play unfolds. Being Othello’s close friend, Iago is infuriated when the General selects Cassio for the role of lieutenant over him. He begins to formulate a plan to punish Othello and his new lieutenant. Enlisting the help of his wife Emilia and the young fool Roderigo, he sets many schemes in motion to help convince Othello that his beautiful new wife Desdemona is having an affair. There is no doubt that Iago is an extremely clever and dangerous man, although his exact motivations remain unclear.

Desdemona is a beautiful young girl who has fallen deeply in love with Othello and agrees to marry him despite the shame it brings her father Brabantio. Although she can be initially perceived as a rather submissive character, she remains very determined, able to defend herself and her marriage against much opposition. Whilst sometimes playful, she is ultimately graceful and truly loving, making it even more shocking when she is unrightfully accused of infidelity.

Cassio is Othello’s lieutenant who, despite his loyalty to Othello, remains rather young and inexperienced for the role. This infuriates Iago, as he wants the position for himself. Cassio is an honourable man who cares deeply about his reputation and is mortified when he loses his position due to a drunken brawl. He is brought to further shame by Iago twisting his youth, good looks and friendship with Desdemona into the suggestion of an illicit affair.

Emilia is attendant to Desdemona and Iago’s wife. She is distrustful of her husband and uses her cynical, worldly views to help her mistress, who she is deeply attached too. However, she is still caught within the bonds of marriage which result in her assisting in Iago’s plan to accuse Desdemona of infidelity.



Deborah Klayman as Emilia

Roderigo is a young wealthy fool who is in love with Desdemona. Iago tricks him into thinking he will help him win Desdemona's hand by giving him money. After Desdemona marries Othello and moves to Cyprus he is desperate. Iago uses this to his advantage and when he informs Roderigo of Desdemona's and Cassio's supposed affair, he agrees to help the trickster kill Cassio.

Bianca is a prostitute from Cyprus who has taken a particular interest in Cassio, who keeps teasing her with promises of marriage.



Eirik Bar as Sailor and Ensemble



David Sayers as Roderigo

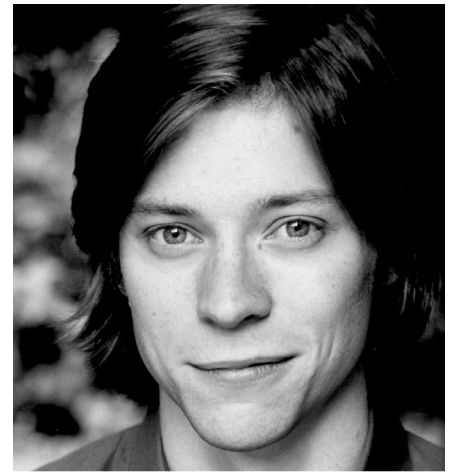
Brabantio is Desdemona's father, a Venetian senator filled with self-importance. He befriends Othello and is betrayed when he secretly takes his only daughter for his bride.

Duke of Venice is the official authority of Venice. He attempts to reconcile Othello and Brabantio. Holding great respect for Othello and his service in the military he sends him to Cyprus.

Montano is Cyprus's governor before Othello. He reveals the news of the war and awaits the Venetian ships.

Lodovico is a messenger, passing between Venice and Cyprus.

Graziano accompanies Lodovico to Cyprus, who tells them of Brabantio's death.



Julian Pindar as Cassio and Brabantio



Alice Bonifacio as Bianca & Montano



Activity

Choose a character from Othello and write a character study for them. This can take the form of either a list of facts and questions about the character that runs chronologically throughout the play, or can be made out of three separate lists – what the character itself says, what others say about the character and what others say to the character. Using the information you have built up from your knowledge of the character throughout the play, write two diary entries for them. One before the play starts and one for when it finishes (it doesn't matter if they are dead in the end!)





Act Breakdown



Act I

Shakespeare's famous play opens in Venice with Iago and Roderigo plotting revenge against Othello, who has recently married Desdemona in secret. Wanting Desdemona for himself Roderigo is deeply jealous and the pair tell Brabantio, her father, of the ceremony. Brabantio is infuriated and sets out to capture Othello. Iago is pleased by this as he hates Othello for appointing Cassio as lieutenant and not himself. However, Brabantio's accusations are overthrown in court as Othello is ordered to Cyprus to fight the Turks. Iago now reveals his plan to fabricate an affair between Desdemona and Cassio.



Act II

After the Turkish fleet has been successfully destroyed in a storm, Othello and company finally arrive in Cyprus safely. Iago sees Cassio praising Desdemona and urges a jealous Roderigo to kill him. The victory celebrations begin and Iago manipulates Cassio into drinking too much and engaging in a brawl with Roderigo. Othello is outraged and a distraught Cassio is demoted. Iago comforts Cassio instructing him to appeal to Desdemona for help in reclaiming his position.



Act III

Desdemona speaks to Othello on Cassio's behalf, but is unsuccessful. Iago uses this to imply that her affection for Cassio runs deeper and almost completely convinces Othello they are having an affair. Fate steps in when Desdemona loses her precious handkerchief, Othello's first gift to her. Emilia delivers it to Iago who plants it inside Cassio's lodgings, which he uses to convince Othello of his wife's infidelity. Othello instructs Iago to kill Cassio. Meanwhile Cassio has discovered Othello's handkerchief and he asks his mistress Bianca to copy the pattern for him.



Act IV

Othello is fully convinced of the affair when he overhears a lewd conversation between Iago and Cassio, in which he openly witnesses Bianca returning the handkerchief. As a result of this, Othello decides to kill Desdemona also. Lodovico arrives, announcing that Othello is to return home and Cassio is to be the next Governor of Cyprus. Desdemona's joy for Cassio enrages Othello and he publically insults and strikes her, accusing her openly of adultery. Meanwhile Iago enlists Roderigo to kill Cassio.



Act V

Roderigo attacks Cassio outside Bianca's lodgings and is wounded. From behind Iago stabs Cassio, also wounding him. Lodovico, Gratiano and Iago reappear, Iago claiming total innocence to Cassio's injuries, removing suspicion by killing Rodrigo and blaming Bianca.

Meanwhile Othello goes to Desdemona and, ignoring her pleas of innocence, murders her. He is interrupted by Emilia, bringing news of the attack on Cassio. Finding her mistress dead she cries accusations of murder. The others arrive and slowly Emilia begins to unravel Iago's treachery, starting when she realizes how he framed Cassio using the handkerchief which she stole. Iago, feeling betrayed, kills Emilia and escapes. Lodovico, Montano and Cassio are able to capture Iago, Othello wounding him. Othello, in despair for all that he is done, kills himself.



Themes



Duality

Othello inhabits a prejudiced world in which constantly clashing characters co-exist. From the very beginning Othello is at a disadvantage, merely due to his black skin. The play carefully questions the stereotype of black representing evil, as Othello is the hero whilst the white Iago is the villain. This encourages the audience to focus on greyer areas of the text, not merely classing individual characters as good or evil. For instance, there are certain acts throughout the text which would be considered honourable yet will destroy the innocent parties involved. It is made clear through all this ambiguity that nothing is to be trusted, often provoking discussion as to what could possibly be the truth and what could possibly be a lie.



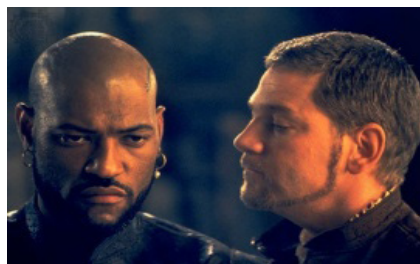
Time

The ambiguity within Othello is also present when considering the concept of time. For such a dramatic turn of events the story appears to transpire incredibly quickly. In Cyprus, it seems the action all takes place within 24 hours: the ships arrive late in the day; Cassio is demoted late that night; Iago arouses Othello's jealousy the next morning; Lodovico arrives that afternoon; and by late that night the play is ended. Yet a closer examination reveals discrepancies in this schedule. There are several comments suggesting that time has passed far more rapidly than first perceived. Bianca scolds Cassio for avoiding her an entire week. Emilia states that Iago has requested that she steal Iago's handkerchief "a hundred times". And considering the distance, it would take at least several days for the news of the Turks' defeat to reach Venice and for Lodovico to then travel to Cyprus to announce Cassio as Othello's replacement as governor. This "double time" scheme has raised curiosity in scholars and audiences alike for centuries. This suppressed time scheme may have been intended to heighten the drama. It could have been intentionally defying logic, thus displaying the gradual disintegration of Othello's mind into madness. Whatever Shakespeare's reasoning, this illogical presentation of time taps once again into the theme of trust which the play continually rises, this time questioning the audience's trust in the playwright.



Trust

Throughout the play Iago remains the audience's main point of contact, as he delivers a series of soliloquies and asides to reveal his secret schemes. However, considering the intelligent deceitful nature Iago possess it would be unwise for us to trust him. For instance, the Othello described by him in the first scene completely contrasts the character when we actually meet him. We also see him telling Cassio when Othello has fallen into a trance that he is prone to epileptic seizures, however it appears to be triggered by his evil manipulation. Iago describes Bianca as a whore, although there is no actual evidence of this, he merely uses it to remove suspicion from himself when Cassio is wounded. The character achieves his tricks by gradually weaving together a web of innuendo and suggestion. Shakespeare mirrors this through his writing of the play, as he gradually divulges small pieces of information to mislead the audience and provoke questions as to what is the actual truth.



Laurence Fishburne as Othello and Kenneth Branagh as Iago



Racism

Othello is a Moor in Venice, classing him as an instant outsider as he is a black man amongst a world of white men. At the time Shakespeare wrote the play, Queen Elizabeth was negotiating with the Moors to fight against the Spanish. Moorish ambassadors commanded a certain amount of respect in London. However when the black population grew larger, white Englishmen had no qualms about gathering them together and shipping them off, just as they did Jews and other minorities. Even though Othello is a highly respected and honored public figure, he is not immune to the common racial prejudices of Shakespeare's day. A person who is thwarted in his desires often lashes out at those who are perceived to be different or "the other." Angered at being passed over for promotion, Iago not only disparages Othello's colour, he notes that Cassio is a Florentine, an out-of-towner. Other characters make assumptions about Othello based on racial stereotypes, assumptions which turn out to be false. Once again, Shakespeare warns us not to accept things at face value.



Relationships



Eamonn Walker as Othello and Zoe Tapper as Desdemona in the 2007 Globe Production

QUESTION:

Can you think of any other themes or motifs that occur in the play?

Unlike other Shakespearean tragedies, whose central issue is often concerned with the royal line of succession, Othello focuses on a complex web of interpersonal relationships. The first major event of the play is the news of an elopement and the reaction of the bride's furious father. Despite the existence of a national emergency, the invasion of a Turkish fleet, the Venetian Senate pauses to address the family matter before returning to their discussion of the war. In real life it is highly unlikely that Desdemona would have accompanied her husband to the front lines of the battlefield. Cyprus is a frontier outpost, also an army garrison, which is a place where it would be highly unusual for a woman to be situated. It is interesting to place both Desdemona and Emilia in this peculiar environment and how their presence unsurprisingly causes tension amongst the men to rise. The plot of Othello becomes a succession of secret conversations, misunderstandings, innuendos and trifles as seemingly insignificant as who gives a handkerchief to whom. Yet these trifles represent aspects of real life, explored through relatable characters and their relationships, which Shakespeare uses to create a powerful and effective tragedy.



Production Design

The Director, who has the overall vision of how the show should look and feel will combine with the designers – set, costume, sound and lights - to create the world in which the play is set. What an actor wears on stage can also affect how they move – when you're used to wearing jeans and a t-shirt every day, suddenly finding yourself in tights and a sword can be a bit of a shock to the system!

Icarus often needs to teach male actors how to bow and bend in a doublet and hose, so they don't tear them on stage. Items like shoes, corsets and swords have to be introduced into the rehearsal process as early as possible so the actors can get used to them and make sure they're comfortable and won't hurt themselves, or other people.

Costume Design

It is very important that the set and costume designers work together to create the overall look of the show. During production, there will be regular production meetings so that the creative team can meet with the director and everyone can ensure they are working to one strong vision.

Our costume designer also has a number of other considerations to take into account:

The costumes need to differentiate when multi-rolling actors are playing different parts.

They need to fit in with the time period that the production is set in.

The costumes need to be durable as they will need to last the whole of a lengthy tour.

The costumes need to be easy to clean as a large amount of stage blood is used in the play!

It needed to be able to reflect the oceanic theme the director wanted to explore.



Othello – The blue shimmering fabric used suggests tones of the sea, adding to the production's oceanic theme.



Iago – His costume represents that of a jellyfish which hides at the bottom of the sea. Hidden beneath Iago's cape are the creature's tentacles which suddenly strike out at his victims.





Set Design

Throughout Othello there are many references to the ocean. The characters themselves undergo a sea voyage in which they are attacked by a storm. This creates a dramatic backdrop for the story, as Iago's manipulations unsettle each of the character's lives. Throughout there are many direct references to water, used both literally and metaphorically, such as:

“Seems to cast water on the burning bear,
And quench the guards of th'ever fired pole”
-Act 2, Scene I -

Shakespeare's use of iambic pentameter throughout the play also creates the feeling of waves lapping against the shore, as the varying rhythms reflect the ever-varying changes of the tides. We aimed to illustrate this oceanic theme through our design concept.



Model Box of Othello Set



Backdrop of sails - for the sea battle which takes place between Acts 1 and 2. These can be flown in and out and be lit up. This set design is similar to that of the original 2009 Icarus production of Othello. However some improvements have been made including: enhanced detail, an extended pier and a change in the levels. Below is a picture of the original set under construction:



Patterned floor - This has been designed for use throughout the entire play. Being slightly risen from the floor creates the impression of an island, which is perfect for Cyprus.

Brabantio's house - for use in the opening scene. Brabantio can appear from above and interact with the characters below. This prevents the need of a scene change for the rest of the act, which would be both time consuming and costly.



Decking - This can be shifted forward for the transformation into Cyprus. The pier can also be brought up and down to give the appearance of various locations. It will also stage the climatic bedroom scene.



Production History

Stage...

The first performance of *Othello* was at the Whitehall Palace in London, on November 1 1604. Richard Burbage, an accomplished actor who had previously portrayed the roles of Hamlet and Richard II and III, was the first Othello for which he received great acclaim. Not much is known about the first productions of *Othello*, however it is recorded that in 1660 the actress Margret Hughes took on the role of Desdemona. This marks a particular significance as up to this point women had not been allowed to perform in the theatre, making her one of the first actresses cast.

Desdemona's murder scene also created controversy, causing so much uproar that the curtain once had to be bought down early. To counter-act this, a Frenchman called Ducis who "translated" the play adapted the finale. In his version Brabantio lived and rushed in to save Desdemona before she is murdered, thus satisfying many French audiences. *Othello's* cruelty and sexuality was also deemed inappropriate and any hints of either were omitted from the text. In America however the opposite was encouraged.



Margaret Hughes, one of the first actresses

Othello was frequently presented as incredibly savage, often staging the suffocation scene to enforce maximum brutality.

Othello is famous for being one of the first plays to have a black skinned protagonist. Traditionally the role was played by white actors in black or brown make-up. The first black actor to play the role was Ira Aldridge in the late 1800's. His portrayal met great critical acclaim yet still he suffered for his ethnicity. A reviewer in *The Times* commented that, 'such an exhibition is well enough at Sadler's Wells, or at Bartholomew Fair, but it certainly is not very creditable to a great national establishment'. The first truly successful portrayal of *Othello* was made by actor and civil rights activist Paul Robeson in 1943. He won multiple awards including the Donaldson Award and American Academy of arts and letter.

In the 1960's there became a demand that only black actors play the role, as critics complained of the 'by-now outrageous impression of a theatrical Negro stereotype'. In the 1997 production, Patrick Stewart was featured as *Othello*, as the company had chosen to create a photo-negative production in which the moor was white and all the other characters were black. This emphasised the unimportance of colour and that racism is inflicted upon both black and white people alike.

There were many aspects of *Othello* that were not initially accepted. Throughout the 1700's plays were clearly separated into categories of comedy and tragedy; a tragic play was not expected to have humour. This was particularly enforced in France when Cassio's entire drunken brawl was cut from the play.



Ron Canada as Iago and Patrick Stewart as Othello in Judy Kelly's 1997 photo-negative production

Throughout the years the production of Othello has featured many famous actors, maintaining interest in a masterpiece which remains centuries old. These include Orson Welles, Laurence Oliver and James Earl Jones in the title role. In 2007, Othello proved its ever-growing popularity by selling tickets of up to £2000 for the Donmar Warehouse Production, which featured Chiwetel Ejiofor as Othello and Ewan McGregor as Iago.

Another highly successful production in 2007 was performed traditionally at the Globe Theatre in London and was recorded for future viewing.



The 2013 Othello cast in the National Theatre Production

... and screen

Othello is one of many of Shakespeare's great plays to be adapted for the screen. One of the first attempts was made by Orson Welles in 1952 - being credited as director, producer and screenwriter in addition to tackling the title role. He achieved this by adopting black make-up similar to many actors in the stage productions. The film was shot under a very loose schedule; taking four years to complete which meant it was not deemed theatrical release. Much of the text was changed, omitting all comical moments and noticeably reducing Desdemona's lines. The themes remained the same, however the ordering was shuffled and many intimate bedchamber scenes were introduced. To emphasise the dramatic impact of the story's finale the film opens with an imprisoned Iago watching Othello's body being carried away. The narrative continues to be revealed through flashbacks, meaning that any suspense about the play's outcome is eliminated.





Earlier adaptations were merely inspired by the play, such as the drama *Carnival* which was produced both silently (1921) and with dialogue (1936). Another example of this was the romantic comedy *Men are not Gods* which centres around jealousy and the ramifications upon the principle characters' relationships. The first completely faithful adaptation was a recording of the 1965 production at the National Theatre, which starred Laurence Olivier as Othello and Maggie Smith as Desdemona. The black stage make-up used on Olivier caused great controversy yet was compensated by his great screen presence.



Laurence Olivier as Othello and Maggie Smith as Desdemona



Poster for the 1995 feature film of Othello

The most successful film adaptation was directed by Oliver Parker in 1995. It starred black actor Lawrence Fishburne as Othello and the legendary Kenneth Branagh as Iago. The film was commended for its naturalism, heightened slightly by occasional fantasy sequences, such as when Othello vividly imagines Desdemona and Cassio's affair. There was however some criticism of Fishburne's lack of training which led to poor delivery of the text. In total there have been very few successful adaptations of the play, suggesting that it can only achieve its full effect before a live audience.

QUESTION:

What would you be looking for if you were casting for the roles of Othello, Iago and Desdemona?

Which actors do you think would suit the role?



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Education Workshops 2014 - 2014

We provide workshops alongside our production of Othello, touring September 2013 - April 2014.

For information on group ticket discounts for students and other tour information visit www.icarustheatre.co.uk/shows/othello.html or contact the theatre near you for more information.

Building a Shakespearean Character: This workshop gives students the opportunity to develop one of the scenes of Othello exactly as Icarus did. Students will work practically, combining the Stanislavskian approach to creating characters with Laban work, allowing them to bring the characters to life themselves. This workshop uses both Shakespearean verse and movement work, two of the mainstays of the Icarus style.

Physicality, Etiquette and Gender: In this workshop we will introduce students to elements of Shakespearean etiquette, physicality and gender. We will directly relate this to the text, enabling them to better understand the context in which Shakespeare wrote. This workshop provides an opportunity to explore Othello from a practical point of view, giving the students a better understanding of the cultural and social barriers faced by the characters - and audiences!

Shakespearean Verse in Performance: This workshop gives students an opportunity to understand verse in the best possible way - by speaking it. Taking a scene from Othello, we provide an introduction into how actors access the meaning of Shakespearean verse. The students will explore how Shakespeare's language instructs and directs actors in performance.

The Reduced Othello: Students workshop and perform the play within 90 minutes. This workshop can serve as an introduction to the play or to expand a group's knowledge of the characters and plot of Othello. Working closely with our facilitators in this way also provides students with an insight into methods used by actors to bring the script to life.

Black Rams and Motiveless Malignities: This workshop focuses on the key themes within Othello including prejudice and racism in Shakespeare's time and today. Students will get an opportunity to explore these themes through improvisation, character exploration and scene studies, giving them a greater understanding of the characters' motives and plot.

This education pack was researched and compiled by Serena Norman and Marissa Rauwerda.

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1 Workshop: £325
2 Workshops: £500
Free show programme to all participants with ticket purchase.
Group Ticket Discounts Available.

Each workshop lasts approximately 90 minutes.

Our education team are able to adapt material to fit your requirements.

Each in-school workshop will be led by a professional facilitator and cast member of the Othello company.

By arrangement, workshops can sometimes be held in the theatre, on our stage.