"I would my [European] pilgrimage dilate"

Othello in European culture

Francesca Rayner, Elena Bandín and Laura Campillo

University of Minho / University of Léon / University of Murcia

> If we learn anything from *Othello*
> it should be that there are benefits to accepting
> multiple stories, frames and narratives.
> (Thompson 2016a, 3)

Ayanna Thompson's focus on the multiplicity of stories told in and about *Othello* is a salutary reminder of the ways in which critical race studies, gender, film and performance studies have transformed approaches to the play. This is evident not only in the sections of her introduction dealing with contemporary critical interpretations and performances but also in the earlier sections on sources, places and peoples in *Othello* which are characterized by extensive geographical and cultural diversity. Thompson's own work across these fields of study illustrates also how twentieth- and twenty-first-century approaches to the play have favoured intersectional methodologies rather than methodologies located within one particular field of knowledge. It is hard to overestimate how far *Othello* has travelled as a result of these critical interrogations and the extent to which those who write about *Othello* have also changed in the process. Moreover, Thompson's introduction ends with a call to readers and audiences to "listen with a sceptical ear" (116). This suggests that expectations in relation to the play have themselves changed dramatically, particularly with regard to conceptions of racial, religious, gender and sexual identity.

This volume builds on and engages with this groundbreaking work whilst also suggesting that a European perspective shifts the parameters of contemporary debates around *Othello* in equally important ways. Translating and performing in languages other than English are perhaps the most obvious differences from anglophone approaches, but these differences also include alternative ways of distinguishing between texts, adaptations and versions, as well as differing perspectives on questions of gender and race. In line with the series in which the volume is published, this book starts from the premise that a focus on the European reception of *Othello* represents an important contribution to existing critical work on

the play. This is not because it puts forward a linear and homogenous European perspective, which would be neither possible nor desirable. Rather, such a perspective is valuable precisely because, as Thompson suggests, it multiplies further the narratives, stories and frames in and through which *Othello* can be viewed and discussed. Additionally, a European perspective raises key political questions about power and representation, in terms of who speaks for and about Othello, within a European context profoundly divided over questions of immigration, religious, ethnic, gender and sexual difference.

This volume began its journey at the international symposium *"My Travels' History": Othello in European Culture* held by the University of Murcia's research team "Shakespeare in European Culture" at the University of Murcia in May 2018. The aim of the event was to explore European translations, adaptations and performances of *Othello* from the seventeenth century to the present, the 'Europeanness' of Othello within a globalized world and its germaneness to the topic of migration. The book is the third in the series "Shakespeare in European Culture" inaugurated with *Romeo and Juliet in European Culture* (2017). It displays a clear continuity with that volume as

> the whole project was and remains about deterritorializing Shakespeare in an effort to see how the writer and his works have reconfigured the local, regional, national and indeed European and other international levels, being part of a history in which these levels never stop interacting with each other and in which Shakespeare has often been a barometer or even an agent of change.
>
> (Cerdá, Delabastita, and Gregor 2017, 2)

As well as selecting papers from the symposium, the editors have commissioned additional chapters to widen the European focus. In keeping with the aim of this volume to reflect upon *Othello* within European culture, the twelve contributions enlarge the focus in terms of geography and in terms of medium. Contributions to the volume come from Eastern, Western, Northern and Southern Europe, and include authors writing in Austria, Spain, Romania, the Netherlands, Greece, Hungary and Germany. The contributions from the United Kingdom and those from authors in other national contexts emphasise that whatever the twists and turns of the post-Brexit period, the European dimension of the production and reception of Shakespeare in the United Kingdom will continue to form part of European culture. Some of these contributions cover specific time periods, such as the nineteenth or twenty-first century, while others provide more panoramic approaches to *Othello* in their national contexts and illustrate how responses to the play have shifted over time and responded to national and international political developments. In terms of medium, while emphasizing the fact that questions of textuality are themselves

multiple, ranging from the use of different Shakespearean texts in translation to travesties, rewritings and adaptations, the chapters illustrate how the play has shifted its sites of production and reception along with its meanings.

In the period that has elapsed between the conference and the publication of this volume, the Black Lives Matter movement has raised political questions of social justice and historical memory that have resonated in many national contexts and refocused attention on cultural representations of black men and white privilege. The Coronavirus pandemic has changed drastically the way *Othello* is taught, researched, performed and translated in ways that may not be solely short-term, while vaccine nationalism has put pressure on pan-European solidarity. With many women confined to their homes in often abusive relationships, notions of domestic tragedy have accrued new meanings. The Brexit referendum has seen the United Kingdom withdraw from Europe as a political unit, leaving the 1.8 million British citizens living in EU countries effectively disenfranchised and rendering even more precarious the status of immigrants, refugees and foreign citizens in the UK. In this move from the 'New Europe' (Hattaway, Sokolova, and Roper 1994) of the 1990's to the 'Neo-Europe' (Cinpoeş 2018) of the early millennial years to the 'numbed Europe' riven by multiple crises of the 2020s, critical work has countered notions of the European as white, patriarchal and Christian in order to emphasise the transnational flows resulting from successive waves of migration, the hybrid, translocal identities that have come in their wake, and, in some cases, to emphasise that difference has been at the heart of the European reception of the play for many centuries. *Othello* in particular, along with *The Merchant of Venice*, has focused discussion on ethnic, racial and religious difference within Europe and the fact that both this volume and the contributions in Janice Valls-Russell and Boika Sokolova's forthcoming book *Shakespeare's Others in Twenty-First Century European Performance*: The Merchant of Venice *and* Othello (for the Arden Shakespeare series) seek to chart the European dimension of these wider global movements indicates the centrality of both plays in rethinking contemporary notions of the European and Shakespeare's others. In a recent chapter on European identity, Rosi Braidotti has envisaged Europe "becoming nomadic." She argues that European identity needs to be reshaped beyond national boundaries as a "multicultural democratic space" as a precondition for "adequate, positive representations of the new trans-European condition" (2015, 98, 108). Kasia Lech, in her work on the post-Brexit stage, builds on Braidotti's work to argue that it is

> not a matter of creating an idealistic and homogenous idea of European culture and community; it is about offering people who live in Europe various points of engagement with and opportunities to shape a multifaceted, multifocal, and pluralistic culture that reflects the diversity of individuals that live in today's Europe.
> (2020, 218)

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This notion of the European as a "multifaceted, multifocal and pluralistic culture" enables this volume not only to deterritorialize Shakespeare's *Othello*, but also to re-territorialize the play within the new political and artistic structures created as a result of this deterritorialization. Douglas Lanier's ground-breaking article, "Shakespearean Rhizomatics: Adaptation, Value and Ethics" uses the concept of the rhizome as defined by Deleuze and Guattari as a theoretical model for rethinking the Shakespearean adaptational field – a model that may itself be adapted to conceptualize European Shakespeare(s) as a rhizomatic structure:

> A rhizomatic structure […] has no single or central root and no vertical structure. Instead, like the underground root system of rhizomatic plants, it is a horizontal, decentered multiplicity of subterranean roots which cross each other, bifurcating and recombining, breaking off and restarting. In some places rhizomatic roots collect into temporary tangles of connection or nodes that then themselves break apart and reassemble into other nodes, some playing out in dead ends, others taking what DG call "lines of flight," that is, altogether new directions of thought, all without compromising the ever-expanding, ever-changing aggregate.
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> (Lanier 2014, 28–29)

The questions raised by the distinctive European approaches to *Othello* in this volume represent attempts to explore the nodes or 'lines of flight' that can be identified in the circulation and reception of the tragedy in Europe. Ducis's translation (see Franssen, Pujante), for instance, is one of these nodes, combining a variety of translations, stage versions and rewritings where '*Othello* the text' continues to have a key role. Race can be considered another of these nodes (see Prescott, Heijes, Campillo and Bandín), shared in a dynamic global Shakespeare rhizome, but which in European contexts has taken a new direction of thought that (re)combines crucial issues about immigration. Another pivotal 'line of flight' is class, foregrounded in many European adaptations of *Othello*, which entwines or tangles itself up with the issue of race (see Franssen). A key node to consider in the European scenario is the intersection of opera and its extensive dissemination in various countries and cultural contexts, which in turn impacted on and expanded the *Othello* European rhizome in rich and productive directions (see Bottez).

Furthermore, if we take into account that, according to Lanier, "a rhizome has no central organizing intelligence or point of origin; it may be entered at any point, and there is no *a priori* path through its web of connections" (2014, 29), we may be able to enter 'Shakespeare', '*Othello*' or 'the European' at any point, studying the multiplicity of nodes and tracking their evolution in different directions throughout several centuries. This dynamic rhizome, a live structure in constant change that affects and is affected by Europe's geopolitical, historical and cultural configuration, can in turn be understood as constituting a 'line of flight' itself within the wider global Shakespeare rhizome.

The chapters in this book on the European reception of *Othello* can be grouped within three main areas of Shakespeare Studies: performance, adaptation and translation studies. Each of these areas is well-established within the area of European Shakespeares and brings a particular perspective to critical work on *Othello*. What unites work in these three areas is a sense that the reception of the play is inseparable from the social and political contexts in which texts, performances and adaptations are produced and circulated. As such, the book contributes towards a vision of a political Shakespeare in the European context through a politicized approach to *Othello.* Andrew James Hartley suggests that in assessments of political Shakespeare "context is all, reception is all, empowerment is all" (2013, 140) and the three critical approaches outlined in this introduction focus on these three elements of the political as an introduction to the chapters of the book. Consequently, we have subdivided the chapters into three parts: (1)Trans(national subjects); (2) *Othello* and European constructions of alterity, and (3) Adapting *Othello* – The audience is listening. Notions of the transnational analyse the various contexts of *Othello*, whether national, transnational or translocal. A focus on alterity works towards notions of empowerment of the different racial, ethnic, religious and gendered voices in the play and in contemporary audiences. Adaptation raises questions of reception and the transformative potential of artists, readers and audiences to shape new meanings for the play. Although these three features of the political are analysed separately here, their intersections and overlaps are equally important in creating a contemporary political perspective on *Othello.*

Part 1.   Trans(national) subjects

The contributors to this volume are engaged in recovering, reshaping and questioning histories of Shakespeare within particular national contexts. They bring their considerable expertise to the volume on questions such as the shifting constructions of national identity, the relationship between the artistic, the social and the political, as well as the ways in which Shakespeare has been conceived and reshaped historically within particular national contexts. Nevertheless, the twin processes of migration and globalization mean that bounded notions of the nation and national identity are rejected in favour of more fluid conceptions of the transnational flows within and between nations. In a 2018 article on European Shakespeares, Sabine Schülting asked how it might be possible "through Shakespeare, to reflect on the diverse encounters, juxtapositions and conflicts of ethnicities within Europe, within the individual nation states and on a transnational scale" and urged European Shakespeareans to understand borders not as threats to the European but "as the very condition of a European identity" (2018, 163). Such "encounters,

juxtapositions and conflicts" are very much part of *Othello*, which is centrally concerned with the movement of people, commodities and narratives over local, national and regional borders and they are also central in the contributions to this volume. The less canonical form of the Shakespeare travesty, for instance, reveals the presence of the real-life Black-British crossing sweeper in nineteenth-century London (see Draudt). Ira Aldridge tours nineteenth-century Hungary and changes the way Hungarian critics view the play (see Reuss). Turkish Kanak Sprak challenges the hegemony of German as a national language in the 2016 *Othello nach Shakespeare* during Shermin Langhoff's 'post-migrant' tenure at the Maxim Gorki theatre in Berlin (see Guntner). Ducis's translation of the play plays a key role in the Spanish acculturation of *Othello*, but his revolutionary concern with *égalité* does not travel so easily over national borders in the first Spanish translation by de la Calle (see Pujante). What critical methodologies might capture such transnational flows and the obstacles to them in the European reception of *Othello*?

The two volumes produced by the Theater without Borders research group are explicitly transnational in their methodology, seeking to identify 'theatergrams' of common thematic clusters within early modern European drama and their different national configurations. Blackface is one such theatergram identified by the group and is dealt with in the chapters of this book (see Heijes, Georgopoulou). In their first volume, *Transnational Mobilities in Early Modern Theater*, Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson (2016) note the increase in transnational exchange between 1500 and 1650 in "new and better ships, entrepreneurial funding of voyages, increasingly mobile capital, developing trade networks (including the employment of translators and other cultural intermediaries) as well as many other factors, [which] all worked to transmit commodities, people (both voluntarily and involuntarily, as slaves), viruses, plants, cultural artifacts, and ideas across boundaries ([…] not without resistance)" (2016, 8). In the group's second volume, *Transnational Connections in Early Modern Theatre* (2020), M.A. Katritzky and Pavel Drábek develop a more relational and embodied approach, defining transnationality "not merely as a mechanical transfer, traffic or bilateral exchange across national borders. Transnationality is a fundamental quality of the performances, works of art and events; in itself it is a *lived culture* that is supranational, exceeding any notions of borders or limitations" (2020, 16). Such a conception productively shifts understandings of the transnational from an exclusive focus on circulation to one where transnationalism shapes the very production of goods, subjectivities and works of art. Moreover, the development of this approach to the transnational enables fertile analysis of *Othello*, from the various transnational crossings of the "extravagant and wheeling stranger / Of here and everywhere" (1.1.134–135) at its heart to the transnational materialities of Desdemona's wedding sheets and the much-travelled handkerchief.

Both these volumes establish transnational frameworks and methodologies for the study of the European and for the exploration of the material and imaginative

crossings that structure its history. However, the transnational remains wedded, however ambivalently, to the national as a point of reference. For this reason, contemporary critical work on the translocal has advocated a complementary focus on locality in sites such as cities, neighbourhoods, communities or regions with their multiple beliefs, inhabitants and cultures and socio-spatial patterns of migration. Much of the original interest in the term came from geographers (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013) but the term has gained currency in a variety of different critical areas. For Volker Gottowik, the translocal highlights "the mobility of actors, ideas, commodities and artefacts between different regions" and "the consequences of exchange, circulation and transfer beyond real or imagined boundaries," while the emphasis is "not on crossing borders but on overcoming spatial differences' through attention to "a multiplicity of borders which are not necessarily political but economic, social, religious, etc." (2010, 180–181). Gottowik's analysis is an important reminder that processes of transnational negotiation, conflict and exchange are often played out in local contexts. Attention to the translocal in relation to *Othello* not only brings out the ways in which the unfamiliar geography of Cyprus dis-locates Othello, Desdemona, Roderigo and Bianca, but also how the 1828 Spanish parody *El Caliche, o la parodia de Otelo* (see Pujante) relies on the particular location of Granada for its resonance and popular appeal, or the ways in which Anglo-Irish relations in nineteenth-century London are reflected in English travesties of *Othello* (see Draudt).

Critical work has also explored the notion of migration to analyse the aesthetics and politics of the transnational. In an article outlining her vision of a "migratory aesthetics," Mieke Bal (2008) identifies four areas in which the artistic traces of the movement of peoples across and through cultures might be theorised.[1] These areas are movement, time, memory and contact. While the first of these might seem self-explanatory, Bal links physical movement with a sense that people are also moved emotionally by these experiences and a recognition that migration, unlike tourism, involves the movement of people to often undetermined destinations for a similarly undetermined period of time. Othello learns this to his cost when he is removed from his position in Cyprus in favour of Cassio. Bal also notes that movement is always movement through time, and analyses the dense multitemporality of migration, with its cruel contrasts between long periods of waiting and short bursts of activity and between movement and stagnation. Little attention has been paid to the question of temporality in *Othello*, beyond a felt sense that the exchanges between Othello and Iago in scene 3.3 advance the action at almost breakneck speed, but performances of the play in particular, as a time-based art form, bring out more clearly its contrasts between stasis and haste. Bal argues that acts of memory are always performed in the present rather than the past and notes that "in times of

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1. We thank Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik for introducing us to this essay.

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political and social hardship in the present, acts of memory become indispensable for psychic survival and a comforting allure of a privacy one can fall back on" (157). Othello's rehearsal of the transnational maternal history of the handkerchief (3.4.57–69) or his military travels (1.3.129–170) are examples of what Bal labels "brief flashes of memory, barely perceptible acts of remembrance" (157) that seem exclusive to Othello and the performative construction of his transnational subjectivity. Bal's final emphasis on contact reinforces the idea of migration as an embodied experience, whether for those who migrate, for those left behind and for those living in the locations to which migrants travel. What past experiences lie behind Othello's violent epileptic episode, for instance, or Cassio's tragic drunkenness? How might the violence of Iago and Emilia's relationship be written on their bodies in dance (see Bührle)? To take up a question dealt with in one of the chapters in this volume (see Reuss), why was Desdemona stabbed in nineteenth-century England but dragged across the boards in contemporary Hungarian productions of the play?

Migration is also at the centre of Janet Clare and Dominique Goy-Blanquet's recent collection of essays *Migrating Shakespeare* (2021). Their detailed introduction illuminates the ways in which the European histories of the figure of Shakespeare and the plays migrate across national borders. As they point out, the "Shakespeare" who travels across Europe over the centuries is "not a stable, trans-historical figure" but "a variable construct" whose ideological flexibility and narrative adaptability promotes diverse engagements with the plays (21). The transnational subjects that inform the present volume illustrate the different ways in which this ideological flexibility and narrative adaptability have shaped the European reception of the play, but also the ways in which these migrations have often been enforced, disallowed or reversed. After the murder of Desdemona and Othello's suicide, for instance, it is notable that the transnational flows that follow are constructed exclusively on white, male, Christian terms.

Part 2. *Othello* and European constructions of alterity

Is *Othello* a play about race? Contemporary theoretical perspectives on the historical constructions of blackness and race involve not only a critical attention to race as a constitutive element in *Othello* but also a new mode of scholarship that actively contributes to promote diversity and create change. As Ayanna Thompson urges (2011), we should attend to race and racism regardless of the contradictions of Shakespeare's treatment of race. Thompson's call has been echoed by many scholars in the field of race studies, who consider that an ethical commitment to a diversified Shakespeare seems especially mandatory in the age of the 2020 Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement (O'Neill 2016, 247). The BLM movement, which made a

comeback after the unlawful killing of George Floyd, has made evident the fiction of a post-racial America in which race no longer matters. This is just another episode in the history of the killing of unarmed black boys and men by law enforcement that has led to anti-racism protests around the world to demand the end of white supremacy and put an end to systemic racism. Nowadays, it seems more evident that "all of us invested in Shakespeare continue to have a material role to play in realizing greater diversity" (246–247).

These facts together with a visible rise of xenophobia influence our approach to the concept of race and to the way scholars, theatre practitioners, reviewers and audiences encounter the production, performance and reception of Shakespeare's *Othello* around the world. Corredera asserts that "the way we consider race in to-day's society not only affects how we conceive of identity – whether our own or others' – but it also shapes how we tackle Shakespeare and race" (2016, 36). Corredera also affirms that "today's conceptions of race are not more stable and biologically based than those constructed in the early modern period" (43). Contemporary constructions of race are unstable and based on other factors than biology. The dynamics of race are products of social thought and relation, so race is a social construct based on power and culture: language, religion, descent and appearance play a key role in the modern construction of alterity.

Accordingly, Ian Smith invites us to question our own white positioning within the discipline and challenges us to speak reliably of Othello: "Speaking race enlightened by a profound intersectional identity and awareness can do justice to Othello's request, 'Speak of me as I am', and inform our disciplinary endeavours as responsible, reliable scholars working in a real twenty-first century world of change for Shakespeare in our time" (Smith 2016, 122). Consequently, it is the aim of this volume to contribute to the demand for racial self-inquiry and "allow the contradictions of race in Shakespeare to speak back to us in the present – not just to reveal the genealogy of our habits of thought, but also to suggest alternatives to them" (Harris 2010, 213–214). By aligning the study of Othello with modern constructions of race and social justice we are convinced that our research matters too.

What recent scholars in the field of race studies demand is that we look at the way race is constructed in performance and explore the political dimension of the representation of race and ethnicity on stage. As Andrew James Hartley (2013, 45) reminds us,

> we must reimagine the political valences of theatrical Shakespeare without recourse to literary models. First, we must explore the extent to which such valences might be completely subsumed within the cultural myth of Shakespeare in ways which determine the political dimension of the plays in performance as part of a larger manifestation of the way elite culture replicates and evangelizes the values of the ruling social order.

This is what Ayanna Thompson does in her approach to the study of Shakespearean colour-blind casting as a way to force a discussion about constructions and perceptions of race onstage in terms of both production and reception (2016b, 17). Nevertheless, as she demonstrates, theatrical practices of nontraditional casting do not always resolve but problematize issues of race (see Prescott). Although colour-blind casting emerged as a way to combat systematic racism in American and British culture, it has not become a regular practice in a European theatrical context.

The volume also illustrates some common ground in the way race has been seen and interpreted in European performances. The early modern practice of blackface or the 'tawny moor' represented by Edmund Kean (1789–1833) reveals that Othello has generally been conceived as a character to be performed by a white actor. While Paul Robeson's impact (1898–1976) was huge in the US, European audiences encountered a black actor for the first time when Ira Aldridge toured Europe, mainly Eastern and Central Europe (Kujawinska Courtney 2006). Aldridge disrupted the tradition of performing Shakespeare's Othello with European features and stressed his racial heritage with unparalleled success: "In contrast to his reception in Britain, where the color of his skin made Aldridge 'unworthy' to perform Shakespeare's roles in the legitimate London theatres, in Continental Europe his presentations were received with enthusiasm and admiration" (Kujawinska Courtney 2006, 104) (see Reuss). Not only did his performances coincide with Europe's 'discovery' of Shakespeare's works but also his physical presence triggered debates about race and otherness (105). As Kujawinska remarks, "the Continental reception of Aldridge's performances was inseparable from the political and cultural milieu of each country he visited" (104) and "though many people still associated him with the situation of blacks in overseas colonies, the American abolitionist movement, the Civil War and black emancipation, all these issues were perceived through the prism of European nationalism, which frequently involved a radical drive for liberation from political and social oppression" (107) (see Heijes).

Although Aldridge was considered a "full-fledged Shakespearean tragedian," his black anatomy was both feared and admired. Romantic thinkers had constructed Europeans as the superior race and "the concept of race became inseparable from classifying and categorizing individuals in relation to their physical appearance" (ibid.). Consequently, Aldridge's otherness reinforced the racial stereotypes and validated European identity. He was presented as an African savage, a barbarian, closer to nature, "but a Negro who has received in Europe an aesthetic education" (109). These grotesque representations dehumanised Aldridge and emphasised the primitive and brutal nature of the Moor, features that are still prominent in European performances of the play (see Georgopoulou).

The stage history of *Othello* shows how race is shaped by many factors such as gender, language, gesture, nationality and ethnicity. Ania Loomba (2006, xvii)

points out that nowadays, we must also consider the new forms taken by neo-racism and think about how religious difference and contemporary geopolitics may inflect ideas of race and colour-blind casting.

The chapters included in this book explore the construction of race in *Othello* in different European contexts and time frames. It has been commonly argued that continental Europe has had a fundamentally different approach to *Othello* from that of Anglophone contexts where race has been considered a major theme of the tragedy. For centuries, continental Europe has often foregrounded Othello's class instead of his race, putting emphasis on the domestic conflicts of the tragedy and the depiction of universal feelings of jealousy and passion. The European trend of downplaying Othello's race is first attributed to Jean-François Ducis, to whom we owe the spread of *Othello* across the European mainland through his rewriting of the play first staged in 1792 and published in 1794, as a number of the chapters in this volume make clear (see Franssen, Pujante).

Some of the contributions to this volume also show how European culture, Britain included, continues to be blind to issues of race in *Othello* (see Prescott, Heijes). We live in a supposedly post-racial world that is unable to confront alterity and otherness and to offer a critical reflection upon it, unable to relate current problematic racial, cultural or ethnic issues to its own perception of history. If *Othello* has not historically been a play about race, today it cannot avoid being about race.

Part 3.   Adapting *Othello*: The audience is listening

When considering the multifaceted and diverse European adaptations of *Othello*, we must reckon with the fact that they have transformed the Shakespearean play as much as they have transformed its audience. Indeed, these adaptations, appropriations and remediations not only ask the question who speaks for and about *Othello*, but also ask the equally important question of who *listens* and *responds to Othello*. Working intersectionally with the fields of Adaptation Studies and Audience Studies is essential when adaptations are defined, crucially, by key scholars such as Linda Hutcheon as a receptive process. In her ground-breaking *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon states that an adaptation must be interpreted "*as an adaptation*" (Hutcheon and O'Flynn 2013, 6; italics in the original), foregoing evaluations that focus on its secondary, derivative nature. According to her, adaptation is both a product – "an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works" (8) – and a process – "a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging" and "an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work" (ibid.). For Hutcheon, the audience also plays a key role as receptors whose knowledge and active participation is required in the process of recognizing adaptations: "To

experience [an adaptation] *as an adaptation* […] we need to recognize it as such and to know its adapted text, thus allowing the latter to oscillate in our memories with what we are experiencing" (120). As Thomas Leitch summarizes, adaptation is "a receptive process whereby adaptations are recognized and enjoyed as adaptations by audiences who are constantly invited to shift back and forth between their experience of a new story and their memory of its progenitors" (2008, 74).

Placing reception at the core of Adaptation Studies inevitably raises questions about notions of audience, audience configuration and audience expectations. As Stephen Purcell remarks in *Shakespeare and Audience in Practice* (2013, 23),

> audiences are not merely a number of different groups of people, but also a number of different discursive identities, encompassing imagined audiences (including those projected by the fictional character, by the writer, and by the live performer), social identities (determined by space, context, and event, among other factors), performed behaviours (in groups, individually, and individually in relation to the group), and retrospective characterisations (in post-show discussions, in questionnaires, online, in print, and in memory).

Although audience response will almost always be subjective, which makes it a difficult and elusive object of study, postmodern Shakespearean spectatorship(s) is an identity deeply dependent on and intertwined with postmodern Shakespearean adaptation(s).

This multilayered way of understanding adaptations in terms of process, product and audience reception compound previous notions of fidelity to the original textual source, whose centrality and stability need reassessing. It is noteworthy that Hutcheon considers that adaptations defy this notion of centrality by stating that "multiple versions of a story in fact exist laterally, not vertically: adaptations are derived from, ripped off from, but are not derivative or second-rate" (Hutcheon and O'Flynn 2013, 169). This move towards "laterality" in the conceptualization of adaptations is also central in Julie Sanders' *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2006), who refers to this phenomenon as "juxtaposition":

> it is the very endurance and survival of the source text that enables the ongoing process of juxtaposed readings that are crucial to the cultural operations of adaptation, and the ongoing experiences of pleasure for the reader or spectator in tracing the intertextual relationships.   (25)

Interestingly, when it comes to the audience's response to Shakespearean adaptations, a similar issue of "laterality" or "juxtaposition" applies, for what exactly is the source text for a particular audience? Maybe some spectators remember the first *Othello* they experienced, but this *Othello* might not necessarily be the Shakespearean text. Considering the postmodern audience pool of Shakespeare adaptations, a seasoned opera-goer might well have encountered *Othello* for the first time in Verdi's operatic

version; a millennial young adult maybe learnt about the Moor of Venice in Tim Blake Nelson 's film *O* (2001); teenagers surfing social media might well have seen the "Shakespeare in the Ghetto: Othello" Youtube videos by African-American actor Marcus Skyes (2007) without having read the tragedy; and film enthusiasts could have first engaged with it through Orson Welles's 1951 screen adaptation. If, according to Lanier, "to think rhizomatically about the Shakespearean text is to foreground its fundamentally adaptational nature" (2014, 26), a necessary node of this rhizomatic structure must be the 'receptional nature' of the Shakespearean text. Lanier considers the latter "as a version of prior narratives, as a script necessarily imbricated in performance processes, as a text ever in transit between manuscript, theatrical and print cultures, as a work dependent upon its latter-day producers for its continued life" (26). We could go one step further and consider that the Shakespearean work is dependent upon latter-day audiences for its continued life, a fascinating 'line of flight' within the rhizomatic model that establishes, as previously mentioned in this Introduction, new directions for thought and research. As Thompson argues, "reception creates production just as often as production creates reception" (quoted in Hartley 2013, 137), so different audience responses to the same Shakespearean adaptation play a key role in establishing its commercial, critical and didactic success (or lack thereof). Furthermore, the intertwined nature of production/reception leads us to ponder whether Shakespearean adaptations, appropriations and remediations are creating audience expectations or catering to existing ones, a dynamic that expands and alters already existing nodes in the Shakespeare rhizome.

The shift from "Shakespeare the text" to "Shakespeare the adaptation" must therefore essentially include "Shakespeare the audience," notions that constitute an "aggregated web of cultural forces" (Lanier 2014, 27) in continuous change and evolution.

Understanding Shakespearean adaptations in this way not only challenges formulations of textual centrality and hierarchy in the field but opens up research into approaches to the plays and spectatorship that have remained unexplored, or whose analysis in the academic field may have been catalogued as delving into secondary deformations or derivative desecrations. Understanding Shakespearean audiences as a key node of the Shakespearean rhizome similarly challenges the centrality and hierarchy of audiences, whose diverse makeup defies uniformity, and whose self-conscious role as audience is further compounded by the fact that individual spectators might not identify their particular responses as belonging to the general audience of a Shakespearean adaptation.

In the "proliferating network of relations that constitute 'Shakespeare' at a given historical moment" (Lanier 2014, 36), new media forms of the Bard, such as the creative forms that remediations of Shakespeare take in popular, digital and convergence culture today, co-exist with the more traditional stage versions, performances and translations that have informed the reception of Shakespeare across Europe

for several centuries. Nowadays, the Bard's plays circulate in film and TV adaptations, ballets and operas, comic books and graphic novels, Youtube videos, Internet memes and fan fictions, and their "demerits / May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune" (*Othello*, 1.2. 22–23) as that accrued by previous forms of mediations.

Regarding these new media forms of the Bard, we could explore and analyse the meaning of "Shakespeare" for young adults attending Early Modern Literature classes, a notion that could well encompass an academic and critical study of *Hamlet*; a performance as Puck in a high-school rendition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; their response to *The Hollow Crown: Henry V*, which may lead them to write a fanfiction about Hal and post it on the Internet; their active contribution in spreading and commenting on a Shakespeare / Game of Thrones meme crossover on social media (Figure 1); a movie marathon night on Leonardo DiCaprio's films, including *Romeo + Juliet*; and writing a few tweets as a response to the Shakespearean tweet in Figure 2.

In this way, adaptations, and several other transmedia interventions, together with their rich and complex audience configurations and responses, are (ever)growing into a valued and valuable part of Europe's – and the world's – shared notion of the Shakespearean.

As one of the four 'great' tragedies, *Othello* has enjoyed a long and rich reception history in Europe, and the various adaptations analysed in this book have contributed to enlarging a particularly rich and productive node in the *Othello* European rhizome. From the first silent screen *Othello* released in 1922 (dir. Dimitri Buchowetzki) to the DIY Youtube video "Russian Gangster Othello" (2013); from one of the "Sassy Gay Friend" episodes "Othello" (2010, with over 4 million views at the time of writing) to one of the many *Othello*-based memes (e.g., Figure 3), or to the surprising Othello Jack, a 16-inch limited-edition figure featured as a character in the PS2 game titled *Oogie's Revenge* by CAPCOM (2008) (Figure 4); *Othello* adaptations, remediations and appropriations invite us to reflect upon the way that the play circulates and has been received in various European countries.

Mirroring Othello's own "travels' history" (1.3.138) or his "travailous history" (in the reading of the Arden edition by Honigmann 1997), *Othello* has journeyed through Europe for several centuries, and adaptations of the play at different moments in European history have faced the challenge of navigating and negotiating the pitfalls of a tragedy with racist and sexist stereotypes. When the contexts and cultures of reception are both European *and* local, adapting a play that itself challenges national and transnational responses to race, gender and otherness originates a vibrant process in which different artistic media, aesthetics and ideologies affect the final outcome. Leaving a lasting trace in our contemporary cultures and audiences, the *Othello* musical and ballet adaptations, puppet show and TV series analysed in this volume (see Bottez, Guerrero, Bührle, Campillo and Bandín) challenge the audience members of the receiving culture to (re)assess and (re)consider their relationship with the Shakespearean tragedy and its controversial themes.
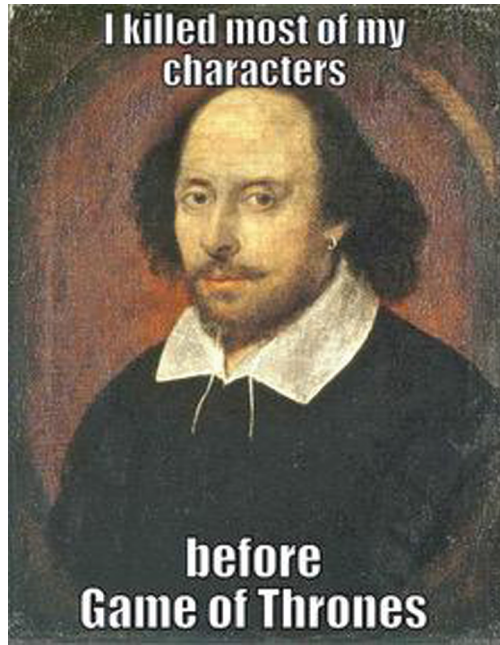
Figure 1. Shakespeare / Game of Thrones meme

Figure 2. Tweet by @marlixng addressing the implications of the different emoji faces in Android smartphones and iPhones in the context of *Romeo and Juliet*

Figure 3. An *Othello* meme based on the "One Does Not Simply Walk into Mordor" meme

Figure 4. Othello Jack figure

The chapters in this volume

The contributions to this book connect the three approaches described above to particular geographies and media. Manfred Draudt's "Charles Mathews's *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* (1833) and Maurice Dowling's *Othello Travestie* (1834): Nineteenth-century Shakespeare burlesques and the question of political correctness" adds to existing discussions within the United Kingdom on Shakespearean travesties (Wells 1977–1978; Schoch 2002) and widens discussion of these burlesques and their intertextual relationship with Shakespeare's *Othello* to Austria, Spain, Portugal and France, where similar strategies and techniques can be identified. Noting that there is much that is comic in the early scenes of *Othello*, Draudt

examines two nineteenth-century English travesties of the play and their different stage fortunes. He suggests that the domestic nature of this particular tragedy encourages travesty and quotes extensively from the plays and criticism of the performances to examine questions of localisation, topicality and characterisation in the two burlesques. He concludes that although Mathews's travesty was heavily criticized in the period while Dowling's was celebrated, this situation would be reversed in the present context because of the latter's racist language and presentation of Othello.

In "Traditions of playing and spectating: The nineteenth-century reception of *Othello* in London and Pest-Buda," Gabriella Reuss examines the tendency of English Othellos like Macready and Kean to stab rather than strangle their Desdemonas. She links this tendency to the peculiarly British phenomenon of prompt books and acting editions, which standardized such performance practices over time between generations of actors in what can be viewed as a Shakespeare franchise. She then contrasts these performance materials and their use by different actors with the situation in nineteenth-century Pest-Buda where actors and directors used translations of library editions in the absence of coded behaviour in acting editions. In a context where the emerging national theatre in the 1830s sought to prove its Shakespearean credentials through a suitably discreet death scene, Hungarian literary critics decried attempts by performers to drag their Desdemonas across the boards and strangle her in full view of the audience. Reuss's call to speculate about things worth speculating about, in this case how Desdemona's death scene was performed in both countries, illustrates one way of dealing with the inevitable gaps in histories of performance by producing intellectually credible hypotheses of what might have been seen from existing visual and written records.

Several contributions to this volume acknowledge the importance of Ducis's French translation and its migrations to different national cultures for the acculturation of Shakespeare in the European context. Ángel-Luis Pujante's "*Othello* in Spain (1802–1844): From theatrical performance to political utilisation" begins by highlighting the differences between Shakespeare's *Othello* and Ducis's translation. The latter orders the play in neoclassical fashion so that the action takes place exclusively in Venice during a twenty-four-hour period and the two protagonists are not married. Ducis's alterations were more to the taste of the Spanish translator Teodoro de la Calle, who produced the first Spanish translation of the play for performance in 1802. Nevertheless, Pujante also makes clear that the production and its translation were just one form in which the play circulated in nineteenth-century Spain. Indeed, in the year of 1828, the production of the play, the parody *Caliche*, a Spanish version of Duval's *Shakespeare Amoureux*, and Rossini's opera *Otello* could all be seen on Spanish stages in a phenomenon Clara Calvo has referred to as "Othellomania" (2008, 113). In the period of the Carlist civil wars in Spain it even

became part of political debates between liberals and authoritarians over who loved Spain the most and who might be more likely to betray her.

Lawrence Guntner's "*Othello* on the German Stage: from 'The Moor of Venice' to 'Chocco', from Schlegel-Tieck to 'Kanak Sprak'" examines German translations, tradaptations and performances of *Othello* from the performance by itinerant English actors in Dresden in 1661 to the aptly named tradaptation *Othello, nach Shakespeare* (Othello, after/according to Shakespeare) at the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin in 2016. Gunter notes that the play has been one of the least performed and translated among the plays of Shakespeare in Germany and illustrates the ways in which key political events such as the influx of first Turkish and then Middle Eastern and African immigrants and refugees have shaped interest in and politicised changes to the play. Guntner recognizes the centrality of the Schlegel-Tieck / Baudisson translation of *Othello* throughout this history, remaining a central reference point up until the 1970s when it is increasingly challenged by a different kind of German reflecting the languages of immigrant communities. He also explores the ways in which translations and performances reveal the racial, ethnic and religious preferences and prejudices of critics and audiences, from the "tawny Moor" of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century to Zadek's "jungle Othello" in 1976 which confronted Germans with their own stereotypes of Jews and Turks right up to the representations of cultural hybridity, gender, race and sexuality of the present moment.

In "Othello's race and slavery: Shakespeare, Ducis and Barbaz" Paul Franssen examines the reception of the play in continental Europe after the French revolution to the aftermath of Napoleonic rule and he argues that "whether Othello's race is seen as the main issue depends on the political and economic context." According to Franssen, Ducis's reading of *Othello* in terms of class rather than race was the result of the idea of racial equality promulgated by the French revolution. He points out that Ducis removed Othello's dark colour, both on stage and on the page, not only due to neoclassical aesthetics but also under the premises of the abolitionist movement that arose at this time in France. Nonetheless, Franssen also exposes how economic factors affected the production and reception of the play after Napoleon's ascent to power in France and in the Netherlands. He examines the parody of *Othello* by Louis Barbaz *Othello or the Jealous Black*, derived from a Dutch translation by Uylenbroek of Ducis's *Othello*, in which race is placed centre stage. Franssen notes that the fear of economic prosperity menaced by the abolition of slavery in the Netherlands affected the perception of the play. In this parody, Othello is constantly ridiculed for his ugliness and irrationality while aggression and jealousy are attributed to his African origins. Barbaz's parody reflects the contradictory struggle between the revolutionary ideal of equality and the economic benefits derived from slavery and colonialism.

Most of the chapters included in this volume have been written under lockdown, limiting access to libraries and archives in search of primary sources. The result has been a shift in methodology since any kind of paratext that surrounds the Shakespearean text has turned out to be a proper object of analysis: open access sources, online materials, reviews, pictures, memes, videoclips, etc. This shift helps frame the play in a modern context and analyse how audiences, theatre practitioners and scholars perceive the implicit racism of the play.

Adopting this approach, Xenia Georgopoulou's "From black to white, from man to beast, from tragical to comical: Representations of Othello on the modern Greek stage" examines the different ways in which Othello has been represented in English and Greek criticism and stage practice as well as traditions of blackface in Greek popular culture. Despite Ania Loomba's assertion that "it is impossible, but also unnecessary, to decide whether Othello is *more* or *less* 'African'/'black' than 'Turkish'/Muslim" (2002, 91), Georgopoulou notes the tenacity of attempts to fix Othello's race, religion and history. In the Greek context, the continuing popularity of blackface and its connection with the comic and the carnivalesque inflects representations of Othello on the Greek stage from the1930s through to the 1990s. Critical identification of Othello's primitivism, bestiality and exoticism as well as notions of appropriate and inappropriate body language in these productions illustrate the ways in which popular and theatrical traditions intersect, as well as the often unacknowledged ways in which critics project their own prejudices, politics and desires onto stage Othellos. Georgopolou concludes that even when the Moor is played by a white actor, they remain the Moor and the Other, and the recent trend of having white actors play Othello without blackface raises important questions about whether this erases or foregrounds questions of race and ethnicity.

The resurgence of the BLM movement has also prompted comparisons of racial relations in the US and the UK. As is the case in America, Britons seem to live in a kind of post-racial Britain convinced that they are a multicultural and multiracial society that has no truck with the xenophobic attitude of their American counterparts. However, as Paul Prescott notes in "Let it be hid? UK Othellos, multiracial casting, hostile environments," downplaying British racism has been a habit since the British Empire abolished the slave trade in 1807 and slavery three decades later. British racism is considered something from the past despite the continuous unlawful killing of BAME people. In 2011, Mark Duggan, a 29-year-old British man, was shot and killed by police in London. In 2013 the BLM movement emerged in the US after the shooting of African American boy Trayvon Martin the year before. The movement became nationally recognized for street demonstrations following the 2014 deaths of two African Americans. In 2016, BLM protesters blocked London City Airport and there were BLM protests in many English cities to mark the fifth anniversary of the killing of Mark Duggan.

With these events as a backdrop, Paul Prescott examines three contemporary productions of *Othello* in the UK in the 2010s – at the National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company Theatre, and Shakespeare's Globe – and focuses on the construction and representation of blackness by multiracial casting in mainstream productions. He wonders what are the pertinent cultural frames through which to view the status of *Othello* in British culture in the 2010s and notes how these productions have avoided tackling Britain's race problems by appealing to the fantasy of a post-racial society. On the other hand, Prescott explores "the ways in which mainstream UK audiences might have been primed (or framed) to read *Othello* as a play that is either post racial or in some way not about race and racism." In the productions he analyses, models of non-traditional casting are used to erase or evade the issue of race. As a consequence, audiences face different categories of non-traditional casting unaware of the politics of race that these models confer on the performance. Nicholas Hytner's *Othello* premiered at the National Theatre in 2013, downplayed the issue of race and focused on toxic masculinities in a military atmosphere. The director's choice of a multiracial cast made the audience 'un-see' race, resulting in a performance framed in the context of a post-racial fantasy in which race is irrelevant to the militaristic nature of the hero. Reviews of the production corroborate the way of reading the racial dynamics of this colour-blind production thinking that a multiracial casting renders race meaningless. Iqbal Khan's colour-blind production for the RSC also used multiracial casting to evade the issue of race with both Iago and Othello played by black actors. In this case, reviewers were divided about the meaning of Khan's directorial innovations; for some, a black Iago makes race a more prominent issue while others saw the blurring of race and racism in the production as a reading of a post-racial world. Claire van Kampen also cast black actors in her 2018 *Othello* at Shakespeare's Globe which included Cassio and Emilia. Prescott says that this production, unlike the colour-blind productions formerly discussed, "vacillated between colour-blind and colour-conscious," but with the emphasis on issues of masculinity and class. Prescott concludes that these productions run the risk of mistaking colour-blind casting for political progress.

For his part, Coen Heijes analyses the performance history of *Othello* in the Netherlands in the second half of the twentieth century taking into account how the increase of immigration from Africa and Asia and the changing demographic composition of the country influenced the production and reception of the play. The analysis is divided into two time-frames: the 1950s-1970s, during which multicultural society began to emerge, and the 1980s onwards, during which negative stereotypes, marginalisation and tensions became more prominent. Generally speaking, the productions from the former period, "never seemed to focus on contemporary topics but, rather, used race and culture as background elements for the plot or as the explanatory forces driving the characters actions." Topics of race,

culture, religion and ethnicity were superficially and stereotypically dealt with and ignored by an audience more interested in the universal themes of the tragedy and the depiction of character's emotional shifts. Blackface was used with no critical debate and no connection was made with current Dutch society and its emerging multiculturalism. The 1980s and 1990s witnessed five productions that could have intentionally attempted to reflect the tensions in multicultural Dutch society when migration increased and social problems began to emerge. However, these productions failed to address current social topics in Dutch society and were uncritical of the use of blackface. Reviewers were also blind to issues of ethnicity and alterity, and oblivious to the possible parallels that could be established between the play and the marginalising and negative stereotyping of migrants in Dutch society at the time.

In "Adapting *Othello* for television in late Francoist Spain: It's all about the 'Moor,'" Laura Campillo and Elena Bandín explore a televised production of *Othello* (1972) for *Estudio 1*, a TV programme where Shakespeare's plays were adapted to serve the propaganda interests of the Franco regime in Spain. The authors discuss the controversial and contradictory meanings that the figure of the 'Moor' has had in the Spanish collective imaginary, and how Spanish identity has been historically forged in opposition to the idea of the threat of the invading, Islamic 'Moor'. Campillo and Bandín further investigate how this figure was constructed by the National and Republican sides of the Spanish Civil War to assert the 'true' Spanish identity that both sides claimed for themselves. They conclude reflecting on how *Estudio 1* appropriates Shakespeare's *Othello, the Moor of Venice* to confirm and authorise Spanish fears and prejudices about a Moor whose death is a political and cultural necessity at the end of the tragedy.

Isabel Guerrero's "Controlling the strings: *Othello*, puppet and object theatre" examines adaptations of *Othello* in puppet and object theatre by focusing on three productions: Pasolini's *Che cosa sono le nuvole* (1968), *O-telo* by the theatre company Viajeinmóvil (2011) and *Othello* as part of the *Complete Works: Table Top Shakespeare* (2015) by Forced Entertainment. Guerrero analyses how puppets and objects are "subject to feelings and exhibit consciousness," coexisting in some cases with actors, and staging meanings unthinkable for the latter. In this way, by engaging with several European puppet traditions, the three productions approach *Othello* with their unique aesthetics, developing a political approach to the Shakespearean tragedy with particular emphasis on racism and feminism.

In "The circumcised dog and the subtle whore: Race and gender in Shakespeare's *Othello* and its musical adaptations," Alina Bottez examines the interrelations between race and gender in *Otello*, the two Italian operas based on the tragedy by Rossini and Verdi; in the symphonic poem *Othello* by the Czech composer Zdeněk Fibich; in the soundtrack composed by the Armenian composer Aram Kachaturian for Yutkevich's 1955 film *Othello*; and in the musical *Iago* by the Czech composer

Janek Ledecký (2016). An exploration of these operas, symphonic poem and musical reveal key changes that rearticulate the themes of the Shakespearean tragedy and which allow for new readings of the (prejudiced) attitude of the main characters to Othello and Desdemona's race and her sexual behaviour. Bottez analyses how the specific use of different arias, choruses and sonorities emphasise and punctuate these themes in a dynamic process that pays tribute to the original tragedy and also enriches it.

Iris Julia Bührle investigates in "'It is not words that shake me thus': Ballet adaptations of *Othello*" how ballet adaptations have opened up new perspectives on *Othello* due to choreographic transpositions that have focused on four main topics: madness, metatheatricality, gender and otherness. Bührle examines the challenges of dance adaptations of the tragedy while also addressing the advantages of ballet in expressing strong emotions. The author explores the use of imaginary doppelgangers constructed around the stereotypes associated with the two characters in the Shakespearean play; the way Iago appears as a manipulative choreographer in some productions; male-female pas de deux and ballet casting. She concludes by highlighting the various innovations that choreographers have introduced into their adaptations and the challenges that *Othello* still poses for the contemporary ballet stage.

The material dealt with in these chapters has largely been absent from traditional anglophone approaches to the play. Its richness and diversity illustrate how a focus on the European context can expand notions of the sources, texts, performances and versions of *Othello*. Yet the objective of European Shakespeares goes beyond a merely complementary approach. Several of the accepted narratives about *Othello* are challenged in these chapters. Most prominently, the primacy of the Shakespeare text as the main source of knowledge of the narrative gives way to a more complex notion of the wide variety of entry points into the story, from opera and puppet productions to travesties and tradaptations. This is something that is shared with many non-European contexts but that is rarely foregrounded in critical discussions of the play. Moreover, these chapters also reinforce the ways in which *Othello* has been not only a stimulus but also a challenge for European Shakespeares. They make clear that the history of the play is inseparable from histories of race, religion and gender and that many engagements with the play have reinforced the social and political prejudices of the time. Significantly, they reject a linear narrative of progress where the prejudices of the past give way to a more enlightened present. As the paradoxes of the post-racial suggest, *Othello* remains a privileged site for conflicting discourses around race in the twenty-first century. Within such a context, this volume stakes a claim for determinedly anti-racist, anti-sexist politically progressive European approaches to *Othello*.

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A note on the timeline

As in the *Romeo and Juliet in European Culture* volume of this series, Jennifer Ruiz-Morgan has prepared a selective timeline of *Othello* in European culture from 1543 to 2020 that includes performances, editions, translations, parodies, filmed plays, operas, and screen, musical and TV adaptations. Some of the *Othello* case studies included in this volume appear in the timeline, which, although not exhaustive, offers a clear perspective on the European reception of the play. The timeline also enables readers to track aspects of *Othello* that have not been covered in the book but which we hope will be a stimulus to future research.

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