INTRODUCTION

Date and Early Performances of *Othello*

Othello was written during a time of transition in Shakespeare's England, as a long-reigning monarch, Queen Elizabeth I, sickened, died and gave way to her Scottish male successor King James I. Shakespeare may have written the play as early as 1601, when Philemon Holland's translation of Pliny's *Historie of the World* appeared, as it furnished some of the play's exotic details including the 'Anthropophagi' and men 'whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders' (1.3.143–4). The most likely date of composition, however, is generally thought to be 1603–4. The theatres were closed because of plague for more than a year, from March 1603 to April 1604, and Shakespeare may have taken the opportunity to write *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*, basing both on tales from Giovanni Battista Giraldi Cinthio's 1565 collection, *Hecatommithi*. We know from the account book of the Master of the Revels, Edmund Tilney, that, on 1 November 1604 (Hallowmas Day), Shakespeare's company, 'the King's Majesty's players', performed 'a play in the Banqueting House at Whitehall called the Moor of Venice [by] Shaxberd [Shakespeare]', though we don't know if this was the play's first performance or a reprise of its debut on the public stage of the Globe. But James became King in 1603, and the play appears to capitalise openly on some of his interests. James himself had written a poem celebrating the (short-lived) 1571 victory of the Venetians over the Turks at Lepanto, and his 1591 poem was reprinted in 1603 in England in honour of his ascent to the throne. Also published in 1603 – and explicitly dedicated to the King – was Richard Knolles's *General Historie of the Turkes,* a large volume that Shakespeare may have consulted in print or in manuscript for its detailed account of the Turkish wars (along with a name, that of a Venetian naval commander, 'Signior Angelo', at 1.3.16). In addition, in referring to one 'more savage than a barbarous Moor' (1.1.37) in their 1604 play *The Honest Whore (Part I)*, Dekker and Middleton may be tipping their hats to *Othello*'s recent success. And the 'noble Moor' may have been the inspiration for a group of noble ladies, at Queen Anne's suggestion, to appear in black paint as daughters of Niger in Ben Jonson's *Masque of Blackness* during the 1604/5 season of court entertainments. Thus, although some have made the case for a date of composition as early as 1601–2 based on possible echoes of *Othello* in the 'bad quarto' of *Hamlet* (1603) and stylistic similarities to earlier plays,[1] the general consensus is that *Othello* was written in 1603–4 and first performed, probably at the Globe, in the spring/summer of 1604 before its court performance in November. If so, as a 'stranger' (1.1.135) whose black skin sets him apart, Othello is the tragic successor

[1] Michael Neill summarises the case for an earlier date ('Introduction', *Othello*, ed. Neill (Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 401–3).

to Hamlet (1600–1), an alienated prince whose black garb immediately distinguishes him from those around him in the first scene in which he appears (1.2). Indeed, Richard Burbage, the principal actor of the King's Men who had recently played Hamlet, took the part of Othello, while the likeliest candidate for Iago was John Lowin, who was 28, the right age for the role (1.3.306) and a specialist in the roles of the plainspoken malcontent and bluff soldier.[1]

Though we have no idea how the courtly audience responded to the 1604 performance at Whitehall, six years later Henry Jackson recorded (originally in Latin) his deeply felt response to a staging of *Othello* in Oxford. Testifying to the actors' abilities to move audiences to tears with their speech and action, Jackson goes on to single out 'the celebrated Desdemona, [who], slain in our presence by her husband, although she pleaded her case very effectively throughout, yet moved (us) more after she was dead, when, lying on her bed, she entreated the pity of the spectators by her very countenance'.[2] Since, in Shakespeare's time, all female parts were taken by boy actors around the age of 16, Jackson pays tribute to that actor's skill by responding deeply to the female *character* Desdemona.[3] The 'pity' that Desdemona extends to Othello (1.3.167) and Othello feels for his wife (4.1.185) is here an essential aspect of audience engagement with the play. No audience response is extant for the performance of *Othello* chosen to celebrate the lavish wedding of Princess Elizabeth to Prince Frederick in 1613, but its selection for the occasion suggests that the play was perceived as, in essence, a moving love story.

Shakespeare's Sources for *Othello*

Shakespeare based the plot of his play on a single source: the Seventh Story in the Third Decade of Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, one in a series of tales illustrating the effects of 'amorous passion'. Published in Italian in 1565, Cinthio's novellas appeared in a French translation in 1584 (Gabriel Chappuys, *Premier Volume des Cents Excellentes Nouvelles*). It is now impossible to know whether Shakespeare used the original Italian or the French translation, or both (or a lost English translation), though verbal echoes favour the Italian.[4] As in Henry Jackson's report of the 1610 performance, in Cinthio's original tale 'the fate of the unhappy Lady was lamented' by everyone.[5] The tragic outcome is attributed both to 'the insidious plots (*tesele*) of a villainous mind and the frailty of one who believes more than he need'.

Cinthio's tale relates a straightforward course of events: love between a 'very gallant' Moor and the virtuous and beautiful lady Disdemona is succeeded by

[1] Lois Potter, *Shakespeare in Performance: Othello* (Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 3.
[2] Edward Pechter, *Othello and Interpretive Traditions* (University of Iowa Press, 1999), p. 11.
[3] David Kathman, 'How Old Were Shakespeare's Boy Actors?' *S.Sur. 58* (2005): 220. This boy actor clearly possessed exceptional vocal skills and physical qualities; Clare McManus argues that the willow scene in particular (4.3) was a 'break out' piece designed to showcase his virtuosity ('"Sing it Like Poor Barbary": *Othello* and Early Modern Women's Performance', *Shakespeare Bulletin* 33 (2015): 110).
[4] Neill, 'Introduction', p. 22.
[5] All references to Cinthio are taken from Bullough, VII, pp. 239–52.

a harmonious marriage that is briefly and ineffectually opposed by her family. Only the prospect of the Moor's posting to Cyprus interrupts their peace, as he feels distress at having either to separate from his wife or to subject her to the dangers of a sea voyage. Once Disdemona declares her desire to accompany him, however, the couple proceed happily to Cyprus, sailing together on a calm sea. After their arrival in Cyprus, a very handsome but utterly wicked Ensign, himself passionately in love with the unreceptive Disdemona, begins to believe that she must secretly be in love with a handsome Corporal. To prevent both men from enjoying her love, he therefore plots to kill the Corporal and to accuse her of adultery to the Moor. In the meantime, the Corporal, stripped of his office after wounding a soldier while on guard duty, is staunchly defended by Disdemona. The Ensign takes advantage of this incident to hint at her adultery. The Moor, tormented by the suggestion, confronts Disdemona. In her own defence, she blames the 'hot' temperament of Moors, who are moved to 'anger and revenge' by small matters. The Moor again talks to the Ensign, who feigns reluctance to speak before suggesting that Disdemona 'takes her pleasure' with the Corporal because she has grown tired of her husband's blackness. Outraged by the Ensign's slander of his wife, the Moor demands further proof. The Ensign then contrives to steal Disdemona's handkerchief and plant it in the Corporal's bed. Finding it, the Corporal attempts to return it to Disdemona, but is suspected by the Moor who returns home unexpectedly. Further enraged by the Ensign's false report of his conversation with the Corporal, the Moor demands the handkerchief of Disdemona, who confesses that she lost it. Confronted with her husband's changed demeanour, Disdemona worries that their 'abundance of lovemaking' has made him tire of her, and she fears becoming a cautionary tale for Italian girls who, against their families' wishes, marry men 'whom nature, Heaven, and manner of life separate from us'. The Moor finally believes his wife's adultery when he sees the Corporal's female servant copying the handkerchief's pattern, and he bribes the Ensign to carry out the murder of the Corporal. When the Corporal is wounded in the leg by the Ensign, Disdemona shows great distress, which further enrages the Moor. The Ensign then suggests that they murder Disdemona by beating her to death with a stocking filled with sand, but make it look like an accident by pulling the ceiling down on top of her. One night, when the Moor and Disdemona are in bed together, the Ensign leaps out of the closet at a signal from the Moor and strikes her with the sand-filled stocking. To her appeals for help, the Moor replies: 'This is how those women are treated who, pretending to love their husbands, put horns on their heads.' Asserting her innocence before divine justice, Disdemona dies. After the Moor, with the Ensign's help, breaks her skull, he cries out for help, feigning fear that the house is collapsing. God then punishes the Moor by driving him into a profound mourning for her death and turning him against the Ensign. Though the Moor stops short of killing the Ensign (for fear of Venetian justice), he strips him of his post. In retaliation, the Ensign tells the Corporal that the Moor is responsible for both the Corporal's wounding and Disdemona's murder, and the Corporal in turn denounces the Moor to the Signoria. The Venetian lords order the Moor to be arrested and tortured. Obstinately refusing to confess his crimes, the Moor is banished and (after some years) finally killed by Disdemona's relatives.

The Ensign is also arrested and tortured, for a similar though unrelated crime, and dies of his injuries. His Italian wife, aware of but not complicit in her husband's plots, narrates the events of the story.

The bare bones of Shakespeare's plot can be found in Cinthio's narrative, which Shakespeare has streamlined to maximise dramatic conflict. Shakespeare's play surrounds the lovers with menace from the beginning; the wicked Ensign, who in Cinthio appears only in Cyprus, leaps into malicious life from the first scene. And, while in Cinthio Disdemona's family offers only perfunctory objections to the match, in Shakespeare her father denounces the couple in the highest court. Unlike Cinthio's 1565 narrative which predates the Turkish threat to Cyprus, Shakespeare's play opens on the pressures of a full-scale political crisis in which Othello's military skill must be immediately deployed and his new marriage tested. If, in the play, Othello and Desdemona initially respond to the test with compelling public professions of their mutual love, Shakespeare's hero – unlike Cinthio's solicitous husband – accepts his military commission with alacrity, proclaiming it of greater value than the 'light-winged toys / Of feathered Cupid' (1.3.264–5). In this way Shakespeare hints at the arc of the play's tragic action: Othello dangerously minimises the love that he will later recognise as the fountain of his being (4.2.58). And, whereas in Cinthio Disdemona's loss of the handkerchief is engineered by the Ensign, in *Othello* the hero himself dismisses her 'napkin' as 'too little' and waves it away (3.3.289). Unlike Cinthio's, Shakespeare's Moor commits actions that precipitate – if they do not fully account for – the tragedy.

Driven by an unreciprocated passion for Disdemona and sexual jealousy of both the Moor and the Corporal, Cinthio's Ensign is a considerably simpler and more readable character than Shakespeare's Iago, the Moor's 'Ancient' (or 'Ensign'). In Shakespeare, Cinthio's single character becomes two, Iago and Roderigo: like Cinthio's Ensign, Roderigo is motivated by jilted love and sexual jealousy, but Iago is fuelled by a range of improvised resentments – what Coleridge notoriously called 'the motive-hunting of motiveless malignity'.[1] Because Iago manipulates Roderigo's love for Desdemona, the relationship between the two men provides a structural counterpoint to the relationship between Iago and Othello. While Iago manipulates Roderigo largely for profit (5.1.16), his purpose in destroying Othello becomes far more obscure, as the elimination of his general is likely to endanger his own position. Yet if Iago is far more prominent throughout Shakespeare's play – he delivers a third of the total lines, 43 per cent of them in the first two acts – he all but disappears in the final acts, quite unlike Cinthio's Ensign. In Cinthio, the Ensign beats Disdemona to death while the Moor denounces her, but in Shakespeare's play the murder is carried out solely by Othello. Indeed, in place of the near-farcical joint attack with a sand-filled stocking in Cinthio, the murder scene in *Othello* is powerfully intimate. As in Cinthio, the Moor is plunged into mourning after the murder, and turns against his Ensign (Iago), but unlike the cowardly Moor in Cinthio who is exposed by the Ensign, Othello not only

[1] S. T. Coleridge, 'Marginalia on *Othello*', *Othello, A Casebook*, ed. John Wain (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 53.

refuses to evade punishment, but, immediately after confessing his crime, executes justice on himself and dies 'upon a kiss' (5.2.355). In the final act of Shakespeare's play, Othello leaves Iago and his own degraded passion behind, 'all-in-all sufficient' (4.1.256) in acting against the woman he loves before committing suicide.

Othello and Iago are not the only characters Shakespeare develops and complicates. Whereas Cinthio's Disdemona falls in love with the Moor's 'good qualities', Shakespeare's Desdemona is moved not only by Othello's 'honours and his valiant parts' but also by the history of his suffering (1.3.249, 156–7). While in both works her spirited defence of the Corporal/Cassio allows the Ensign to impugn her virtue, in the play her father's opposition and the staging of the Senate scene give Desdemona the opportunity to speak boldly in public in defence of her love (1.3.244–55). In Cinthio, Disdemona suggests that her husband may have tired of her because of their 'abundance of lovemaking' in the past, but Shakespeare shrouds the couple's sexual relationship in mystery, never making clear when or if their marriage is consummated. Unlike Shakespeare's Desdemona, Cinthio's Disdemona is a conventional woman – faithful to her husband in body, but less faithful to him in other ways. For the most significant difference between the two texts lies in Desdemona's response to her husband's growing rage: in Cinthio's tale, Disdemona blames his Moorish temperament and suggests she should not have married him, whereas in Shakespeare's play, Desdemona believes his Moorishness makes him less prone to jealousy and stubbornly defends the rightness of her choice (3.4.26–7, 4.3.18–19). In both texts, the Ensign tells the Moor that his wife may be repelled by his racial difference, but whereas in Cinthio Disdemona herself comes close to reiterating this view, in Shakespeare Desdemona utterly rejects it, calling Othello her 'kind lord' with her dying breath (5.2.126). In the play, unlike the source, Desdemona displays a bold unconventionality along with an insistent devotion to her own choices.

Although Cinthio's novella was the primary source for the play's basic plot, Shakespeare also drew widely on a range of contemporary works. It is virtually certain, for example, that Shakespeare knew not only William Thomas's *Historie of Italie* (1549), but also Lewis Lewkenor's translation of Gasparo Contarini's *Commonwealth and Government of Venice* (1599). Both represented the city state of Venice as an idealised republic much admired by some English aristocrats for 'the majesty of their Senate, the unviolablenes of their laws, their zeale in religion and lastly their moderation and equitie'.[1] The Senate scene (1.3), in which Duke and Senators work together to arrive at a just evaluation of the real intentions of both the Turks and the lovers, seems indebted to Contarini's description of a political system in which 'many wise men meet together, who by long use growen skillful in many things, by comparing the inventions and examples of others with their owne experience, do at length after long consultation determine that which shall seeme best unto them'. And Othello's confidence in the 'services' he has rendered to Venice (1.2.18) may echo Contarini's observation that 'some forrain men and strangers have been adopted into this number of citizens, eyther in regard

[1] Lewis Lewkenor, 'To the Reader', *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice* (London, 1599), sig.A2r.

of their great nobility, or that they had been dutifull towards the state, or else had done unto them some notable service'.[1] We can also be sure that Shakespeare drew on Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* (1601) for a number of the exotic nouns that distinguish Othello's speech and mark his strange origins. The Anthropophagi, gum-dropping Arabian trees, chrysolite, mandragora, the Pontic, the Propontic and the Hellespont all come from Pliny, though more recent travellers' accounts by Sir John Mandeville and Walter Raleigh also describe Plinian creatures such as cannibals or acephali. In addition, Othello's self-defence, 'This only is the witchcraft I have used' (1.3.168), may echo that of a bondslave in Pliny, who defends his acquisition of worldly goods by pointing to his farming tools and claiming 'these are the sorceries, charms and all the inchantments that I use'.[2] Yet Shakespeare also knew the work of another bondslave: Leo Africanus's compendious *Geographical Historie of Africa* (1600). In the Introduction to his translation, John Pory provides a biography of the author that suggests another extraordinary Moor: born a Muslim in Spain, Africanus travelled widely throughout Africa before converting to Christianity, being taken by pirates, and receiving a papal baptism in Rome. Like Othello, who claims to be 'rude' in his speech yet narrates wonders that fascinate his listeners (1.3.81), Pory says of Africanus that 'without any orations or ornaments of speech . . . with a perpetuall delight of new and strange things, he doth (as it were) perforce detaine his Reader'.[3]

For material on the Ottoman Turks (who do not figure in Cinthio), Shakespeare went to Knolles's *General Historie of the Turkes* (see above), which describes the Venetian Senate dealing with conflicting reports regarding the Turkish attack (cf. *Othello* 1.2). King James's own poem *His Maiesties Lepanto* (1591), which describes the famous battle over Cyprus as between 'the baptiz'd race / And circumcised Turbaned Turks', may be echoed in Othello's final speech (5.2.349–51).[4] Knolles's massive volume also contains an analogue for Othello and Desdemona in its depiction of the powerful Bassa Inouses, who slaughters his 'chast and constant' wife Manta under the influence of the 'mad humour' of jealousy.[5] But a more certain source for Shakespeare's murder scene (so different from Cinthio's) is a story from Geoffrey Fenton's *Certaine Tragicall Discourses of Bandello* (1567), a popular translation of a French translation of Italian *novelle*. In Discourse 4, Don Spado, an Albanese captain, falls deeply in love with a Greek lady, but soon is poisoned by a 'fervant jelowsie' that drives him into such 'extreme frenezy and madnes' that he collapses (much like Othello at 4.1.41) in a seizure-like attack, 'foaminge at the mouth, like one possessed with an evill spirit'. Kissing his wife before he stabs her to death, he then commits suicide and joins her on the bed, convinced that he is damned for the deed.[6] A vivid antecedent for *Othello*'s final scene, Fenton's

[1] Gaspar Contarini, *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice*, trans. Lewis Lewkenor (London, 1599), pp. 11, 18.
[2] Pliny the Elder, *The Historie of the World*, trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1634), p. 556.
[3] John Pory, trans., *A Geographical Historie of Africa, Written in Arabicke and Italian by John Leo a More* (London, 1600), 'To the Reader', p. 59.
[4] See Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Othello: A Contextual History* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 26.
[5] Ibid., pp. 78–81.
[6] Geoffrey Fenton, *Certain Tragical Discourses of Bandello*, in Bullough, VII, pp. 256, 259.

Discourse disseminates a representation of the passionately jealous Italian that also shows up in native English drama. Having acted in Ben Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* (1601), Shakespeare may have exploited both the name and the condition of Jonson's character Thorello, who anatomises his own fall into jealousy (1.4.211–25).[1] Similarly, Robert Greene's play *Orlando Furioso* (1592) contains a romantic love story that is derailed by the hero's sudden jealousy and madness. Like Othello, Greene's hero Orlando vies for the heroine's love in public by telling of his heroic adventures amidst 'savage More and Anthropagi', then urges her to speak and wins her love only to fall into a jealous rage.[2] Though Greene's play, like Jonson's, ends happily, it may be a pre-text for Othello's rise and fall. These works suggest that the passion of jealousy was not exclusively identified with Moors; on the contrary, in most drama of the period, it was so characteristic of Italians that Isabella in *The White Devil* (1612) assumes that 'jealousy' and 'Italian' are synonyms (2.1.160–1).

Classical and European epic and romance also lurk in the background of *Othello*. Greene's play is based on Ariosto's romance *Orlando Furioso*, a source that is also recalled in Cassandra's weaving of a magical tent for Hector in Othello's description of the 'magic' of the handkerchief (3.4.65–8 n.). Ariosto in the same work may also provide a model for Othello himself in the Moor Ruggiero's conversion to Christianity and marriage to his Italian beloved Bradamante.[3] Othello's moving speech wooing Desdemona and the Senators (1.3.127–69) is probably a recollection of Aeneas' speech to Dido in Virgil's *Aeneid*, one of the most important classical texts in the Tudor schoolroom.[4]

Scholars have proposed a range of additional sources for *Othello* that, despite leaving fewer detectable traces in the play, are highly suggestive, especially for the conception of Iago. Shakespeare frequently mined, echoed and parodied contemporary playwrights such as Christopher Marlowe, whose Dr Faustus is as ensnared by his 'servant' Mephistophilis as Othello is by Iago,[5] and whose Machiavellian Jewish villain Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* (1589–90) declares, much like Iago, 'I am always for myself' (1.1.189). Shakespeare's own black villain Aaron in *Titus Andronicus* informs his portrait of a white villain who puts on 'the blackest sins' (3.1.318). And, since Shakespeare used Plutarch's *Parallel Lives of Greeks and Romans* as a source for other plays, he may well have known the 'Life of Cato Utican', which relates the story of Munatius, who is filled with bitter envy when his general Cato demotes him in favour of a military rival.[6] Though Shakespeare clearly drew on multiple sources, he adapts, transforms and recombines them into a rich and complex new work.

[1] Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 132–4.
[2] Meredith Anne Skura, 'Reading Othello's Skin: Contexts and Pretexts', *Philological Quarterly* 87 (2008): 311–13.
[3] See Dennis Austin Britton, 'Re-"turning" Othello: Transformative and Restorative Romance', *ELH* 78 (2011): 35–7.
[4] Lynn Enterline, 'Eloquent Barbarians: *Othello* and the Critical Potential of Passionate Character', *Othello: The State of Play*, ed. Lena Cowen Orlin (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 159–62.
[5] See Neill, 'Introduction', p. 17.
[6] Skura, pp. 324, 320.

Strangers as Allies: Early Modern Contexts for *Othello*

In *Othello*'s explosive opening scene, Roderigo (in the Folio text) describes the man whom we know only as 'the Moor' as 'an extravagant and wheeling stranger / Of here and everywhere' (1.1.135–6). Yet the charge is ironic in the mouth of a character who bears a Spanish name and lives in the cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic city-state of Venice, which would itself have been exotic and strange to English audiences. Contarini's *Commonwealth and Government of Venice* (1599) notes that many people 'exceedingly admired the wonderful concourse of strange and forraine people, yea of the farthest and remotest nations', who converged on the prosperous centre of East–West trade that was Venice.[1] Indeed, the openness of Venice to strangers was believed critical to its prosperity, much envied by the English. When, for example, a member of Elizabeth's Privy Council argued in favour of foreign immigration, he turned to Venice as a positive example, remarking that 'Venice could never have been so rich and famous but by entertaining of strangers, and by that means have gained all the intercourse of the world.'[2] In his *History of Italie*, William Thomas remarked approvingly of Venice that 'all men, specially strangers, have so much liberty there'.[3] Among the strangers populating Venice were foreign-born mercenaries like Othello, Cassio (a 'Florentine') and Iago, for Venice – unlike England – relied entirely on a professional army to fight its wars and defend its garrisons.[4] Othello is therefore far from the only 'stranger' in Venice. Rather, the play initially presents all its main characters as strangers to an English audience, thereby complicating the simple distinction Roderigo makes between insiders and outsiders. Each of these strangers, however, proceeds to make significant claims on an audience's sympathies and allegiances – from foreign each becomes familiar, from a stranger each becomes an ally.

IAGO

In Cinthio's original tale, there is no Roderigo, and the Ensign goes unnamed throughout, though his status as a stranger is suggested by his eventual return to 'his own country'. In giving the Ensign a name, Iago, and a companion, Roderigo, Shakespeare hints at their country of origin: Spain. Shakespeare's audience would probably have grasped Iago's ethnicity as soon as his name is mentioned in the second line; in a near-contemporary ballad, Iago is identified as a 'false Spaniard'.[5] But Shakespeare gives his villain not just any Spanish name: Iago is the name of the patron saint of Spain, Santiago (St James), also known as Matamoros (the Moor-Killer) for his role in helping the Spanish to wrest their kingdom back from Moorish invaders. In Shakespeare's time, Spanish Moors had become a persecuted minority, soon (in 1609) to be expelled from

[1] Contarini, p. 1; cited in Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare and Venice* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 26–7.
[2] Cited in James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 183.
[3] William Thomas, *Historie of Italie* (London, 1549), cited in Holderness, *Shakespeare and Venice*, p. 26.
[4] For a discussion of the implications of this difference between England and Venice, see Andrew Sisson, '*Othello* and the Unweaponed City', *SQ* 66 (2015): 137–66.
[5] Cited in Eric Griffin, 'Un-Sainting James: Or, *Othello* and the "Spanish Spirits" of Shakespeare's Globe', *Representations* 62 (1998): 67. Bullough assumes that the ballad is a forgery by Collier (VII, p. 194).

their country as 'the race of the displaced and the dispossessed'.[1] Spain was England's most powerful, hated enemy, and a direct threat to its sovereignty; in 1588, the Spanish had attempted an invasion of England, and the English were more likely to see themselves, like the Moors, as victims of Spanish persecution.[2] By giving Iago a Spanish name, Shakespeare associates him with a hostile European power whose obsession with purity of blood and the exclusion of strangers made it the antithesis of Venice. 'I know *our* country disposition well,' Iago remarks to Othello, implicitly contrasting their shared country of origin with Desdemona's Venice – '*her* country' (3.3.203, 239, emphases added). In early modern drama, Spaniards and Italians were often associated with a poisonous inwardness and a Machiavellian ability to manipulate appearances, and Iago is true to type. 'I am not what I am', he declares (1.1.66), and his personal God is Janus, the two-faced deity (1.2.33). If Iago and Roderigo in the first few scenes are taken to be evil Spaniards harassing a Moor, such strangers should immediately rouse the hostility of an English audience.

But Iago the Spaniard is a character destined for another play. For, despite the distinctively Spanish oath he utters in the second act – 'Diabolo, ho!' (2.3.142) – his Spanish name is a 'flag and sign' (1.1.155) of his identity that is raised largely to be forgotten. Iago's identification as a dangerous 'stranger' – like his self-moralizing alignment of himself with the devil (2.3.318–20) – is made only to be complicated. One might even argue that the first stranger to whom Shakespeare requires us to extend our imaginative empathy is Iago. 'Abhor me', 'Despise me', Iago challenges Roderigo – and, by implication, the audience (1.1.6, 8) – but the play's dynamic is carefully calibrated to thwart Iago's invitation.

In Cinthio, the Ensign is motivated by Disdemona's rejection of him; he acts against the other men to keep them from having the woman he wants. In Shakespeare's play, Iago is motivated not by Desdemona's but by Othello's rejection of him; he acts against other men to make them know what betrayal feels like. In Cinthio, the Ensign's revenge is personal. In Shakespeare, though Iago later mentions – almost as an afterthought – his own sexual jealousy (2.1.272–83), in the first scene he taps into a much wider cultural resentment. Iago contends that in promoting Cassio based on 'letter and affection', Othello has betrayed traditional ideas of feudal order, that 'old gradation, where each second / Stood heir to the first' (1.1.36–8). A military general, who should champion 'soldiership', the ocular 'proof' of Iago's manly service in the battlefield, has capitulated to a view of war in which an accountant, an 'arithmetician', is valued above a fighter (1.1.19–32). Rooted in nostalgia, Iago's complaint looks longingly backward to a world rapidly disappearing. With one foot still firmly planted in the feudal, chivalric past, England was stepping forward with the other foot into modern capitalism, with its loose and mobile relationships based on cash and utility rather than on loyalty and service.[3] If some benefited from this shift, many felt left

[1] Barbara Everett, '"Spanish" Othello: The Making of Shakespeare's Moor', *Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Catherine M. S. Alexander and Stanley Wells (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 71.
[2] *A Fig for the Spaniard* (1591) lumps together 'the millions of Moores . . . and the English that have been tortured and tormented by him [the Spaniard]' (cited Griffin, p. 84).
[3] See Mark Rose, 'Othello's Occupation: Shakespeare and the Romance of Chivalry', *ELR* 15 (1985): 296.

behind; early modern drama is filled with 'malcontents', over-educated, under-employed men who rail bitterly on the world of social privilege from which they feel excluded. Added to these were the English citizen-soldiers who went off to fight the Spanish in the Low Countries only to find little reward for their efforts once they returned home.[1] Iago speaks for this disillusioned, aggrieved group – and for all who longed for the simpler old world (even if that world was something of a fiction). In doing so, he sounds not Spanish but very English, and very familiar.

Out of the ashes of this mourning for a lost world, Iago fashions a self. Sneering at the 'love and duty' of the 'duteous and knee-crooking knave' who stands to gain little or nothing in this new world run by the commercial interests of 'debitor and creditor', Iago takes up a bitter opportunism that serves himself alone (1.1.60, 45, 31). Ironically, he thus becomes the incarnation of the new materialism he appears to loathe, treating others as revenue streams and/or commodities to be traded and used for his 'sport and profit' (1.3.368). How could such a figure appeal to an early modern audience, steeped in deeply traditional ideas of obedience to masters and to God? Redefining 'soul' (1.1.54) not as the spiritual part of man but as a 'high development of the mental faculties' (*OED* 3b, which records this as the first such use), Iago uses his 'wit' to manipulate and expose the passions and weaknesses of others (2.3.337–8). In doing so, Iago, like Sir Philip Sidney's comic playwright, offers 'an imitation of the comic errors of our life, which he representeth in the most ridiculous & scornfull sort that may be'.[2] Though Iago incites the passions he should (as comic moralist) seek to remediate, most of his victims deserve to be ridiculed: the tyrant/father Brabantio, the courtly snob Cassio, the puny coward Roderigo. Mocking the latter for his love-sickness, for example, Iago castigates him for lacking the 'reason' which should correct 'the blood and baseness of our natures' (1.3.320–1). Who could disagree? Displaying his knowledge of 'all qualities, with a learnèd spirit / Of human dealings' (3.3.261–2), he chastises Cassio's 'vice' – drunkenness – to Montano (2.3.106), and chides Othello for displaying a 'passion most unsuiting such a man' (4.1.75). Descended from the Vice, a stock figure that in the Tudor morality play exulted in exposing the appetites of his gullible victims, Iago acts as both tempter and moralist.[3]

Iago's autonomy offers him a superior vantage point from which to observe the follies and weaknesses of others, and he gains the trust and allegiance of the audience by sharing that vantage point with them. For if he determines early on to play the hypocrite with the other characters, 'seeming so for [his] peculiar end' (1.1.61), he appears transparent to the audience, with whom he shares every detail of his improvisatory plotting. For them, he *is* the 'honest Iago' he pretends to be. At the end of the first act, for example, he begins to engage them in the formulation of his plan, musing in soliloquy, 'Cassio's a proper man: let me see now; / To get his place . . . How? How? Let's see' (1.3.374–6). In the following scene, he broaches the plan with Roderigo and moves it into action by directing him to 'find some occasion to anger Cassio' (2.1.251).

[1] See James Siemon, 'Making Ambition Virtue? *Othello*, Small Wars, and Martial Profession', *Othello: The State of Play*, ed. Orlin, p. 182.
[2] Philip Sidney, *Defense of Poesy* (London, 1595), sig. E4r–v.
[3] See Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958).