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SHAKESPEARE, BLACKFACE AND RACE

Different Perspectives

Coen Heijes
University of Groningen



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ABSTRACT: This Element addresses the topical debate on blackface, race and Othello. With Shakespeare performance studies being rather Anglo-centric, the author explores how this debate has taken a radically different course in the Netherlands, a country historically perceived as tolerant and culturally close to the UK. Through several case studies, including the Van Hove Othello of 2003/2012 and the latest, controversial 2018/2020 Othello, the first main house production with a black actor as Othello, the author analyses the interaction between blackface and (institutional) racism in Dutch society and theatre and how Othello has become an active player in this debate.

KEYWORDS: Othello, blackface, race, performance, Shakespeare

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