

Secondary Sources – *Othello*

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With its central focus on an interracial marriage and a malcontent servant, *Othello* offers rich material for the study of authority, sex, and resistance in Shakespeare. *Othello* begins with a marriage that is at once happy for the spouses—Desdemona and Othello’s accounts of their mutual love are among the most moving in Shakespeare—and devastating for Brabantio, the patriarch who attempts to control his daughter’s freedom and assert racial boundaries. Brabantio, however, is soundly overruled, both by his daughter’s assertion of her sexual desires and by the republican values of Venice. The critical studies below can facilitate informed discussion of Renaissance ideas about marriage, race, ethnicity, and republican government, as well as provide historical contextualization about the multicultural Mediterranean world.

Bartels, Emily C. “The ‘Stranger of Here and Everywhere’: *Othello* and the Moor of Venice.” *Speaking of the Moor: From “Alcazar” to “Othello.”* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008. 155–90. Bartels explores the historical implications of Shakespeare’s placing Othello, a Moorish general, in the service of the Venetian republic.

Bovilsky, Lara. *Barbarous Play: Race on the English Renaissance Stage*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. Bovilsky argues that Desdemona begins the play as pristinely white, but becomes racially “darkened” through her disobedience to her father and her sexual desire for a Moor.

Hall, Kim F., ed. *Othello, the Moor of Venice: Texts and Contexts*. Boston: Bedford-St. Martin’s, 2007. Hall’s excellent edition of the play provides scholarly accounts of topics such as race, religion, the Mediterranean, marriage, masculinity, and the passions.

Kolb, Laura. “Jewel, Purse, Trash: Reckoning and Reputation in *Othello*.” *Shakespeare Studies* 44 (2016): 230-262. Addressing the play’s pervasive economic language, Kolb argues that Iago provokes Othello’s jealousy by teaching him new ways of calculating both his own worth and Desdemona’s.

Loomba, Ania. “Othello and the Racial Question.” *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. 91-111. Loomba examines how medieval and newer ideas about Blacks and Muslims come together in *Othello* via the racialization of skin color, religion, and nation.



- Julia Reinhard Lupton. "Othello Circumcised." *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. 103-123. Lupton explores the contradiction between the inclusiveness of Christian republican civic ideals and the actual exclusions of national and religious others.
- MacDonald, Joyce Green. "Black Ram, White Ewe: Shakespeare, Race, and Women." *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*. 2nd ed. Ed. Dymphna Callaghan. John Wiley: 2016. 206-224. MacDonald explores how thoroughly "race permeates gender and class positions" in *Othello*, particularly through the domestication of women and their sexuality.
- Neill, Michael. "Unproper Beds: Race, Adultery, and the Hideous in *Othello*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989): 383-412. Neill explores how Othello's murder of Desdemona in their marital bed has historically provoked "fear and revulsion" about the spectacle of interracial sex.
- Smith, Ian. "Othello's Black Handkerchief." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 64 (2013): 1-25. Noting that black cloth was used to simulate African skin on the Renaissance stage, Smith argues that regarding Othello's handkerchief as black instead of white can alert us to the racist representation of a "black man as a thing."
- . "We are Othello: Speaking of Race in Early Modern Studies." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 67 (2016): 104-124. Smith considers the implications of reading *Othello* in the contexts of academic racism and popular racism in the contemporary United States.
- Thompson, Ayanna, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*. Cambridge UP, 2021. This collection provides an excellent, up-to-date overview of major historical, critical, and theoretical perspectives for the study of race in *Othello* and Shakespeare generally.

