

Worksheet 3 – Race

Review: Lecture Religion

Can you answer these questions, which are based on the previous lecture from Professor Lisa Hopkins about religion?

- A. What did Saint Veronica give Jesus’ to alleviate his suffering on the cross, which later became a religious relic and proof of Jesus?
- B. Because he abuses the ear and says words which are designed to help but actually hurt, how does Mallette describe Iago?
- C. Which biblical figure does Ribner compare Othello to?
- D. Daniel J. Vitkus explores the fear of conversion from Christianity to Muslim in which phrase?

Recall: Lecture Race

Answer these questions after watching the video lecture to check how much you remember.

1. Complete the word from Charles Gildon’s quotation (1694), in which he criticises Thomas Rymer by saying: “’tis such a vulgar error to allow nothing of humanity to any but of our own acquaintance the _____”? (Time 2:19)
 - a) Sooty bosom
 - b) Thick lips
 - c) Fairer hue
 - d) Monumental alabaster
2. Who wrote this: “Until the nineteenth century, the Moor was a tragic hero whose color was irrelevant and whose greatness and savagery could be considered together without contradiction.”? (Time 3:10)
 - a) Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1812
 - b) Charles Lamb, 1811
 - c) Charles Gildon, 1694
 - d) Meredith Anne Skura, 2008
3. Who said they found it “extremely revolting” to see on stage “the courtship and the wedded caress of Othello and Desdemona” but didn’t mind reading the play?
 - a) Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1812
 - b) Charles Lamb, 1811
 - c) Charles Gildon, 1694
 - d) Meredith Anne Skura, 2008
4. Who said Othello could only be acted by a white man, because “it would be something monstrous to conceive this beautiful Venetian girl falling in love with a veritable negro” (Time: 3:50)
 - a) Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1812
 - b) Charles Lamb, 1811
 - c) Charles Gildon, 1694
 - d) Meredith Anne Skura, 2008

Analysis

In the lecture Professor Hopkins presents a quote from Martin Orkin: “...there is racist sentiment within the play but it is confined to Iago, Roderigo, Brabantio.” (1987). (Time: 5:10)

5. Complete the table below, filling in the gaps with either the missing quotation or character.

Characters	Racist quotation	Reference (Act.Scene.Line)
Iago		(1.1.88-9) (1.1.123-127)
	“Thick-lips”	(1.1.66)

	“More fair than black”	(1.3.289–90)
Brabantio		(1.2.70–1) (1.3.114-119)
Desdemona		(1.3.252)
	“Her name ... is now begrim'd and black / As mine own face” Arise, black vengeance, from the hollow hell!	(3.3.386–8) (3.3.4505-507)
Emilia		(5.2.159-161)

6. Do you agree with Orkin that it is only the bad characters who are racist?

Evaluation

In the lecture, Professor Hopkins describes a multicultural London. (Time 6:30)

Read through this extract from Andrew Dickson article on Multiculturalism in Shakespeare's plays (2016), in which Dickson describes the position of racial and religious minorities in Renaissance England, and considers how this might have influenced Shakespeare's depiction of immigrants, outsiders and exiles.

An immigrant city

When Shakespeare arrived in London at some point in the late 1580s or early 1590s, the capital was expanding faster than anyone could remember: from 50,000 inhabitants in 1500, it had swelled to some 200,000 people, four times that number, a century later. Hungrily absorbing people from across the British Isles and overseas – one of whom, of course, was an aspiring actor/playwright from Warwickshire – London was pre-eminently a city of immigrants, both first- and second-generation...

The status of black people in Jacobethan England was hazier. Though England had no official slave trade, black Africans had been shipped to England during the 16th century, mainly from West and North Africa, and by the century's end perhaps a thousand people were resident across the country. Most were employed in domestic work; Elizabeth I even had a black maidservant. Yet when racial tensions rose, they were among the first groups to be targeted; Queen Elizabeth may have been content to be served by people of colour, but she issued numerous edicts ordering the expulsion of a group of black men captured from a Spanish colony in the West Indies, proclaiming in 1596 that ‘there are of late divers blackmoores brought into this realm, of which kind of people there are already here to manie’.[9] The call was repeated in 1601. For anyone of immigrant heritage in Jacobethan England, the situation appears to have been similar: you are tolerated here, but only just. It is a situation with which many migrants in present-day Europe will be only too familiar...

Shakespeare's outsiders

How this changing city – and world – inflected Shakespeare's writing is a tantalising question. Most obviously, it is there in his fascination with setting plays in worlds other than his own, whether in those early French comedies or his passion for locations in Italy (Venice, Verona, Padua, Sicily). Travel is a propulsive driver of Shakespearean action, as are its numerous hazards, as witnessed by the catastrophic shipwrecks that dominate *The Comedy of Errors*, *Pericles*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Tempest*. So too is exile, a theme that crops up in texts as different as Sonnet 109 (‘O never say that I was false of heart / Though absence seemed my flame to qualify’) and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, where Julia is the first of many Shakespearean heroines to don disguise and set out on a journey of self-discover.

It is surely not accidental that Shakespeare is at his most geographically exploratory in the final

phase of his career, from around 1608 to 1613, whether in the Levantine wanderings that fill his late romance *Pericles* or the colonial shadows that fall across *The Tempest* (the jester Trinculo’s casual reference to ‘dead Indian[s]’ (2.2.33) on the streets of London must have reminded audiences of sights they had seen themselves). The Jacobean world was expanding faster than ever before; it is perhaps inevitable that Shakespeare’s plays expanded too.

Yet he kept an eye on tensions between different urban communities, and despite his manifest sympathy for outsiders, the worlds he conjures expose the fractured complexities of multiculturalism. *Othello*, a play set at first in a cosmopolitan metropolis even more impressive than London, Venice, portrays a man of dark skin – written, of course, to be played by a white actor blacking up – murdering his white wife in a jealous rage, something that at face value only seems to live out the worst paranoid racist prejudices of Shakespeare’s era. Only as we watch do we become aware how subtle the grain of the drama is: Othello, a widely respected general, is the play’s victim as much as its villain; the real vortex of evil is Iago, a white (and racist) Italian.

(British Library www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/multiculturalism-in-shakespeares-plays)

7. Consider this contextual information and write a paragraph outlining whether you believe the play to be racist.

Glossary

- **Race** - Generally refers to a group of people who have in common some visible physical traits, language and/or religion.
E.g. I am from the Jewish race.
- **Venetian** - A person from Venice, Italy.
E.g. The girl was Venetian.
- **Blackface** - White people wearing make-up to mimic the appearance of a Black person.
E.g. Laurence Olivier played Othello in blackface.
- **Exculpate** - To remove blame from someone.
E.g. The pilot of the aircraft will surely be exculpated when all the facts are known.
- **Reprehensible** - Extremely bad or unacceptable behaviour.
E.g. His conduct, though morally reprehensible, is not a crime.
- **Racial marker** - Visible physical differences which are symbols of race identity.
E.g. Othello’s skin colour is a racial marker.
- **White privilege** - The societal advantage that benefits white people.
E.g. She was unaware of her white privilege.
- **Deported** - Expelled from a country.
E.g. The immigrants were deported from England.