

William Shakespeare:
***The Tragedy of
Othello, the Moor of
Venice (c. 1603)***

English Literature I

Prof. Pedro Groppo - UFPB



Introduction to Renaissance Drama

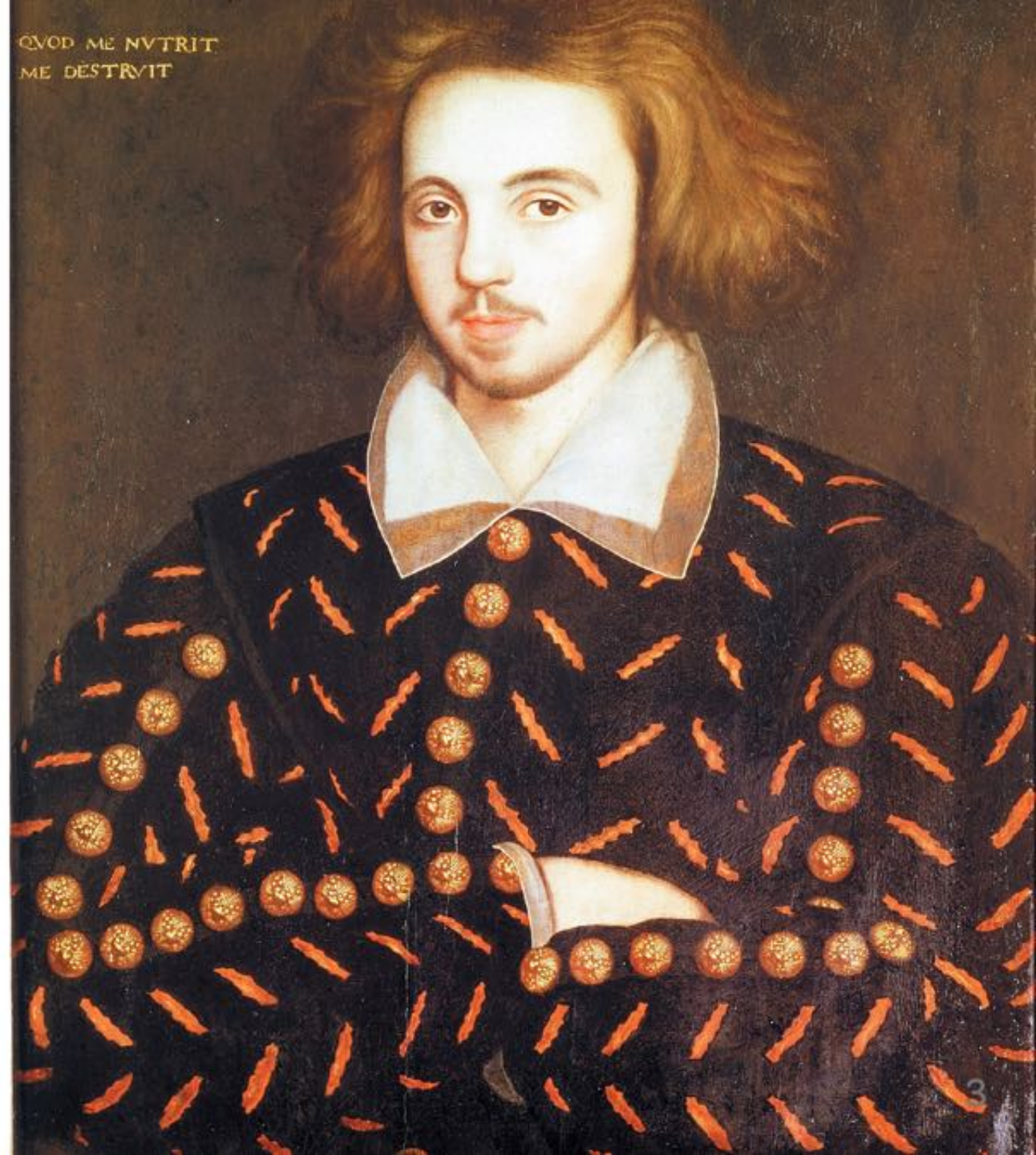
- Evolved from religious miracle plays (Bible stories) to secular plays about history and morality
- The Privy Council banned religious plays as "too Catholic," forcing this change
- Actors needed noble sponsorship to avoid arrest for vagrancy (hence names like "Lord Strange's Men")



QVOD ME NVTRIT
ME DĒSTRVIT

Key Playwrights

- Christopher Marlowe (1564): Son of shoemaker, Cambridge-educated, wrote *Tamburlaine*, *Doctor Faustus*
- William Shakespeare (1564): Wrote 25+ plays including *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Henry V*
- Ben Jonson: Former bricklayer/soldier, wrote *Every Man in His Humour*



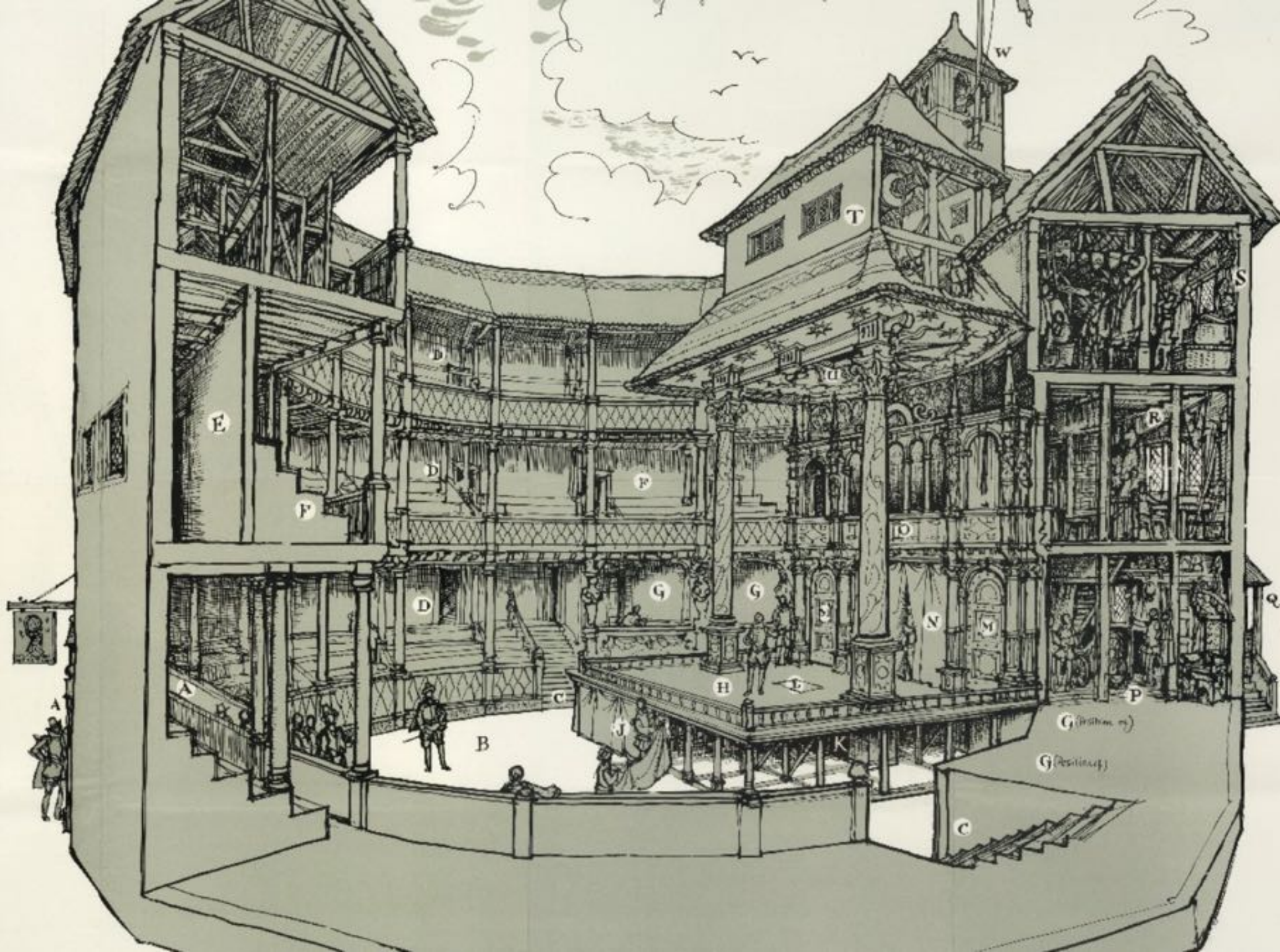
1599-1613

A Conjectural Reconstruction by
C. Walter Hodges



KEY

- AA Main entrance
- B The Yard, where the 'groundlings' stood
(for the penny admission)
- CC Entrances to lower gallery (on payment of
outside penny)
- D Entrances to staircase and upper galleries
- F Corridor serving the different sections of the
middle gallery
- F Middle gallery. (The 'Two-penny Boxes')
- G 'Cockswain's Room' or 'Lark's Room'
- H The stage
- J The longways being put up round the stage.
(p.s. In some theories this was located to)
- K The 'Hell' under the stage
- L The stage trap, leading down to the Hell
- MM Stage doors, leading into the tiring-house
- N Cartwheel 'place' behind the stage, sometimes
opened for special scenes
- O Gallery above the stage, used as required
sometimes by musicians, sometimes by
spectators, and often as part of the play (e.g.
Romeo and Juliet)
- P Backstage area (the tiring-house)
- Q Tiring-house door
- R Dressing rooms
- S Wardrobe and storage
- T The hot house for the sunbathing for lowering
costume galls, etc., to the stage
- U The 'Heaven'
- W Hoisting the playhouse flag



The Theater Experience

- Cost: 1 penny to stand in yard, extra pennies for gallery seats, 6 pence for private box
- Working people, merchants, nobles, housewives
- Polygonal buildings, open-air with covered galleries
- Minimal props, elaborate costumes, actors performed directly to audience



The Theater Experience

- Women forbidden on stage; boys played female roles
- Both Puritans and moralists opposed theater as immoral
- Queen Elizabeth supported drama, created her own company (Queen's Men)
- By 1590s, best actors stayed in London rather than touring



The Text

- Written to be acted on the stage, not read
- What we have is a script made after the fact, not one of the working scripts - published after Shakespeare's death
- No single, authoritative text of Shakespeare's plays - they varied even in early editions
- Unlike today's published plays, Shakespeare often integrates actions into the dialogue rather than relying on explicit stage directions
 - Desdemona: "Here I kneel"
- No elaborate scenery or lighting - imagery and descriptive language were crucial for creating the play's world
 - e.g. In Act 1, Iago's crude descriptions of Othello ("old black ram," "Barbary horse")

THE TRAGEDIE OF Othello, the Moore of Venice.

Actus Primus. Scena Prima.

Enter *Roderigo*, and *Iago*.

Roderigo.
Ever tell me, I take it much unkindly
That thou (*Iago*) who hast had my purse,
As if y^e strings were chine, shouldst know of this.
Iago. But you'll not heare me: If ever I did dream
Of such a matter, ah, howe me.

Roderigo. Thou toldst me,
Thou didst hold him in thy hate.

Iago. Despise me

If I do not. Three Great-ones of the Citty,

(Is personall suite to make me his Lieutenant)

Off-capt to him: and by the faith of man

I know my price, I am worth no worse a place.

But he (as loving his owne pride, and purposes)

Blades them with a bombast Circumstance,

Horribly stufft with epithetes of warre,

Non-suites my Mediators. For certes, since he,

I have already chose my Officer. And what was he?

Forsooth, a great Arithmetician,

One *Micahel Cassio*, a Florentine,

(A Fellow almost damnd in a faire Wife)

That neuer see a Squadron in the Field,

Nor the decision of a Battaille knowes

More then a Spinster. Vntill the Bookish Theoreticke

Wherein the Tongued Consuls can propose

As Masterly as he. Meere practice (without practice)

Is all his Soulesher ship. But he (*Sir*) had th^e elections

And I (of whom his eyes had seene the prooffe

At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on others grounds

Chastised, and Heathen) must be be-leeed, and calow'd

By Debitor, and Creditor. This Counter-caster,

He (in good time) must his Lieutenant be,

And I (blessed be the mark) his Mooreships Annient.

Roderigo. By heauen, I rather would haue bin his hangman.

Iago. Why, there's no remedie.

'Tis the custome of Seruice;

Preferment goes by Letter, and affection,

And not by old gradation, where each second

Stood Heire to th^e first. Now *Sir*, be iudge your selfe,

Whether I in my last terme am Affin'd

To loue the *Moore*?

Roderigo. I would not follow him then.

Iago. O *Sir* content you.

I follow him, to serue my turne vpon him,

We cannot all be Masters, nor all Masters

Cannot be truly follow'd. You shall marke

Many a ducious and kneecrooking knaue;

That (doting on his owne obsequious bondage)

Wrests out his time, much like his Masters Ass,

For naught but Provender, & when he's old & Collected.

Whip me such honest knaues. Others there are

Who try'n'd in Forimes, and viages of Dutie,

Keepe yet their hearts attending on themselves,

And throwing but shewes of Seruice on their Lords

Doe well thence by them.

And when they haue laid their Costes

Doe themselves Homage.

These Fellowes haue some soule,

And such a one do I professe my selfe. For (*Sir*)

It is as sure as you are *Roderigo*,

Were I the *Moore*, I would not be *Iago*;

In following him, I follow but my leile.

Heauen is my Iudge, not I for loue and dutie,

But seeming so, for my peculiar end;

For when my outward Actiō doth demonstrate

The native act, and figure of my heart

In Complement exterie, 'tis not long after

But I will weare my heart vpon my sleeue

For Dawes to pecke at; I am not what I am.

Roderigo. What a fall Fortune do's the Thicke-lip't

If he can carry't thus?

Iago. Call vp her Father;

Rowe him, make after him, poyson his delight,

Proclaime him in the Streets. Incense her kinred,

And though he in a fertile Climate dwell,

Plague him with Flies; though that his Ioy be Ioy,

Yet throw such chances of vexation on't,

As it may loose some colour.

Roderigo. Heere is her Fathers house, He call aloud.

Iago. Doe, with like timorous accent, and dire yell,

As when (by Night and Negligence) the Fire

Is kind in populus Cities.

Roderigo. What hoa? *Brabantio*, Signior *Brabantio*, ho.

Iago. Awake, what hoa, *Brabantio*: Three ones, Thre ones,

Looke to your house, your daughter, and your Bags;

Theues, Theues.

Roderigo. What is the reason of this terrible

Summons? What is the matter there?

Roderigo. Signior is all your Familie within?

Iago. Are your Doores lock'd?

Roderigo. Why? Wherefore ask you this?

Iago. *Sir*, y^e are rob'd, for thome put on your Gowne,

Your

Awake the shorning Citizens with the Bell,
Or else the deuil will make a Grand-fire of you.
Awile I say.

Roderigo. What, haue you lost your wits?

Roderigo. Most sweetest Signior, do you know my voice?

Roderigo. Not I: what are you?

Roderigo. My name is *Roderigo*.

Roderigo. The worse welcome.

I haue charg'd thee not to haunt about my doores:

In honest plainnesse thou hast denied me lay,

My Daughter is not for thee, And now in madness

(Being full of Sopper, and displeasing daunges)

Vpon malicious knaueserie, dost thou come

To start my quiet.

Roderigo. *Sir*, *Sir*, *Sir*.

Roderigo. But thou must needs be sure,

My spirits and my place haue in their power

To make this bitter to thee.

Roderigo. Patience good *Sir*.

Roderigo. What tell'st thou me of Robbing?

This is Venice: my house is not a Grange.

Roderigo. Most graue *Brabantio*,

In simple and pure soule, I come to you.

Iago. *Sir* you are one of those that will not serue God,

If the deuil bid you. Because we come to do you seruice,

and you thinke we are Ruffians, you'll haue your Daugh-

ter cover'd with a Barbary horse, you'll haue your Ne-

phewes neigh to you, you'll haue Courtesers for Coaches:

and Gennets for Germanes.

Roderigo. What prophane wretch art thou?

Iago. I am one *Sir*, that comes to tell you, your Daugh-

ter and the *Moore*, are making the Beast with two backs.

Roderigo. Thou art a Villaine.

Iago. You are a Scoundrell.

Roderigo. This thou shalt answer. I know thee *Roderigo*.

Roderigo. *Sir*, I will answer any thing. But I beseech you

If be your pleasure, and most wise content,

(As partly I find it is) that your faire Daughter,

At this odde Hourn and dull watch o' th' night

Transported with no worse nor better guard,

But with a knaue of common hire, a Gandelier,

To the grosse clasps of a Lasciuious *Moore*:

If this be knowne to you, and your Allowance,

We then haue done you bold, and sinfull wrongs.

But if you know not this, my Manners tell me,

We haue your wrong rebuke. Do not beleenee

That from the fence of all Chastitie,

I thus would play and trifle with your Reuerence.

Your Daughter (if you haue not giuen her leave)

I say againe, hath made a grosse foule,

Tying her Dutie, Beautie, Wit, and Fortunes

In an extravagant, and wheeling Stranger,

Of here, and euer where: straight in this your selfe.

If she be in her Chamber, or your house,

Let loose on me the Iustice of the State

For thus deluding you.

Roderigo. Strike on the Tinder, ho:

Give me a Taper: call vp all my people,

This Accident is not unlike my dream,

Beleefe of it oppresses me already.

Light, I say, light.

Iago. Farewell: for I must leaue you.

It seems not meete, nor wholesome to my place

(How euenly may gall him with some trecke)
Cannor with safetie cast him. For he's embark'd
With such loud reason to the Cyprus Warres,
(Which euen now stands in Ad'ition for their soules
Another of his Fadome, they haue none,
To lead their Businesse. In which regard,
Though I do hate him as I do hell apines,
Yet, for necessity of present life,
I must show out a Flag, and signe of Loue,
(Which is indeed but signe) that you shall surely find him
Lead to the Sagitary she raised Search:
And there will I be with him. So farewell, Exit.

Enter *Brabantio* with *Servants* and *Turkes*.

Roderigo. It is too true an euill. Gone she is,
And what's to come of my despised time,
Is naught but bitterness. Now *Roderigo*,
Where didst thou see her? (Oh wretched Girl)
With the *Moore* fast thou? (Who would be a Father?)
How didst thou know 'twas she? (Oh she deceives me
Past thought): what said she to you? Get more Tapers:
Raise all my Kindred. Are they married thinke you?

Roderigo. Truly I thinke they are.

Roderigo. Oh Heauen show got the out?

Oh treason of the blood!

Fathers, from hence trust not your Daughters minds

By what you see them act. Is there not Charmes,

By which the propertie of Youth, and Maidenhood

May be abus'd? Haue you not read *Roderigo*,
Of some such thing?

Roderigo. Yes *Sir*: I haue indeed.

Roderigo. Call vp my Brother: oh would you had had her,
Some one way, some another. Doe you know

Where we may apprehend her, and the *Moore*?

Roderigo. I thinke I can discouer him, if you please

To get good Guard, and go along with me.

Roderigo. Pray you lead on. At euery house Ile call,

(I may command at most) get Weapons (ho)

And raise some speciall Officers of night:

On good *Roderigo*, I will deferre your paines. Exit.

Scena Secunda.

Enter *Othello*, *Iago*, *Attendants*, with *Turkes*.

Iago. Though in the trade of Warre I haue slaine men,
Yet do I hold it very sinfull o' th' conscience
To do no conuict Murther: I lacke Inquiritie
Somehow to do me seruice. Nine, or ten times
I had thought to haue yerk'd him here vnder the Ribbes.

Othello. 'Tis better as it is.

Iago. Nay but be prated,

And spoke such kinred, and prouoking termes

Against your Honor, that with the little poe-nesse I haue

I did full hard forbeare him. But I pray you *Sir*,

Are you full married? Be assur'd of this,

That the Magnifico is much belou'd,

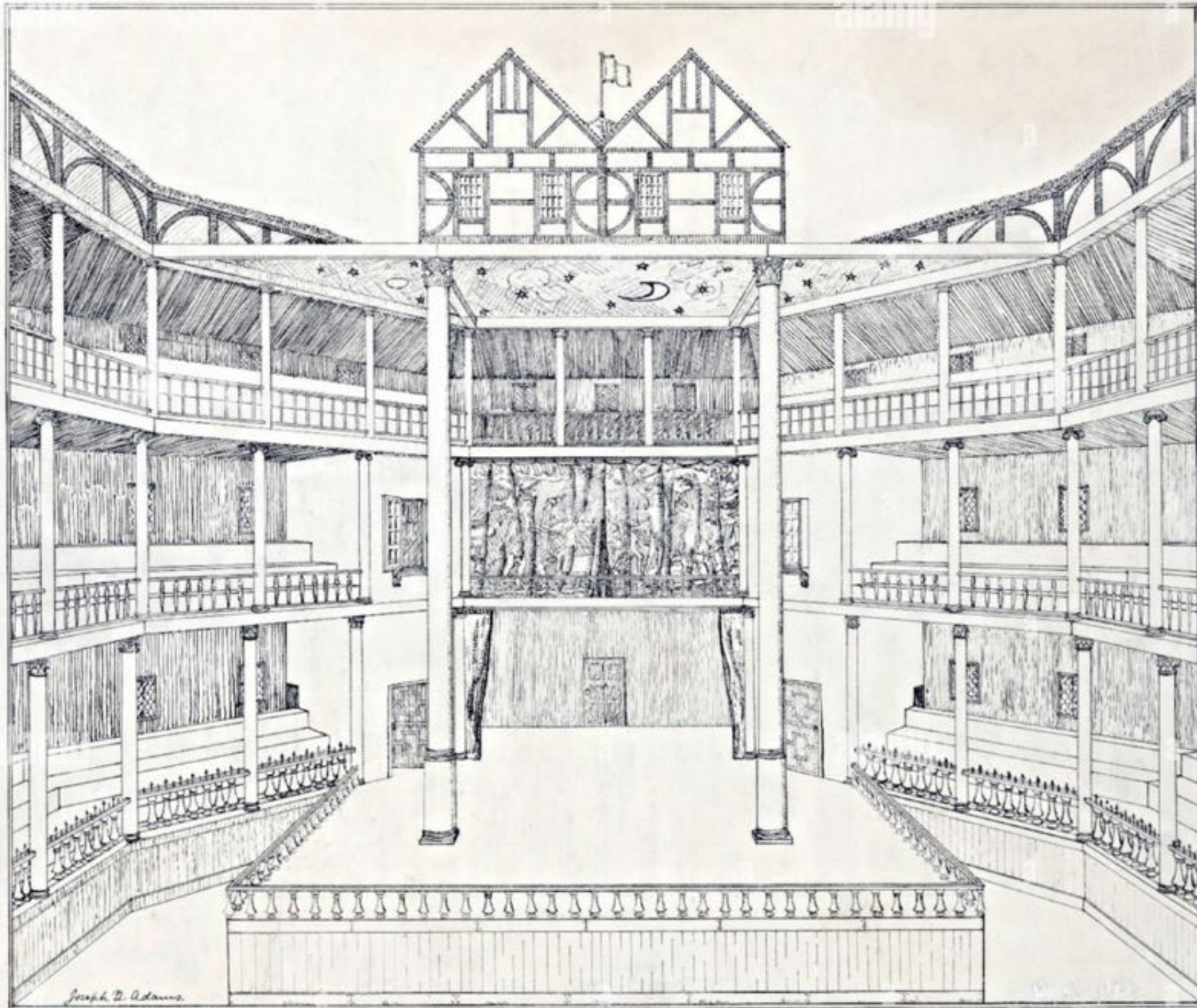
And hath in his effect a voice potentiall

As double as the Dukes: He will diuorce you,

Or put vpon you, what restraint or greiuance,

The





Medieval Morality Plays

- Morality play - medieval allegorical theatrical form in which moral lessons were taught through characters who personify moral qualities, like charity or vice.
- Example: *Mankind* (c. 1465) - Newguise, Nowadays and Nought), try to tempt Mankind, a farmer, away from Mercy and who actively endeavour to lure him to commit vices such as avarice, lust and gluttony.



The Vice Character

- A temptation figure who embodies worldly pleasures; often has the most important role
- The Vice interacts directly with the audience, often breaking the fourth wall
- Performs his worldliness by dressing as an Egyptian or a Turk with the aid of blackface and red-face makeup

Shakespeare

- Incorporates elements of morality plays, such as the Vice figure and the struggle between good and evil, into his plays like *Richard III*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Henry IV*
- Vice = Iago, not Othello: manipulates events and leads Othello down a path of destruction.

Comedy vs Tragedy

- Shakespeare uses familiar aspects of the morality play to mislead the audience's expectations as well as comedy
- Comedic elements: the disobedient daughter (cf. *Midsummer Night's Dream*) and the cuckolded husband
- Chaucer influence: older husbands cuckolded by younger wives (The Merchant's Tale, The Miller's Tale)



Sources

- Giovanni Battista Giraldi (aka Cinthio), in *Gli Hecatommithi* (1565)

I fear greatly that I shall be a warning to young girls not to marry against their parents' wishes; and Italian ladies will learn by my example not to tie themselves to a man whom Nature, Heaven, and manner of life separate from us.

(Disdemona)



What was a Moor?

- Elastic term in the early modern period, could encompass
 - Muslims (religious),
 - Africans (geographical),
 - blacks (racial),
 - atheists (non-religious) and other groups



native or inhabitant of ancient Mauretania [Morocco and Algeria]. Later ... a member of a Muslim people of mixed Berber and Arab descent inhabiting north-western Africa, who in the 8th C. conquered Spain. In the Middle Ages up to 17th C., Moors were mostly black or very dark-skinned, although the existence of 'white Moors' was recognized. Thus the term was often used, even into the 20th C., with the sense 'black person.' (OED)



Is Othello Black?

- Text suggests he was portrayed as black on the early modern stage
- Racialized rhetoric comes from Roderigo, Iago and Brabantio before the audience ever sees Othello
- Is this metadramatic = how Othello should be performed?
- Only in the 19th century Othello's blackness was questioned by scholars and actors



Moor vs Turk

- Early modern English texts portrayed Turks as barbarous, cruel, despotic, tyrannical, and sexually voracious.
- The Turks were perceived as a threat to Western civilization militarily, economically, and sexually.
- The term "Turk" was used to refer to the Turkish people, Muslims in general, and the Ottoman Empire.



Othello and the audience

- Unlike other Shakespearean tragedies where the audience is on equal footing with the hero, Othello's audience knows more, prompting a different emotional response.
- The audience's knowledge often leads to discomfort and a desire to intervene, as seen in historical anecdotes.
- The play's uneven structure forces the audience to choose a side.



Criticism

- A.C. Bradley: *Othello* is Shakespeare's best tragedy, surpassing *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, due to its intense drama, modern themes, and relatable characters.
- Othello's focus on **private matters**, particularly sexual jealousy, makes it more emotionally impactful than plays centered around state affairs.
- Challenged Coleridge's interpretation of Othello's race: Shakespeare **intended Othello to be black**.
- Shakespeare's plays, particularly *Othello*, are better experienced through **reading** than performance: discomfort of seeing Othello's race onstage.
- Shakespeare's plays were primarily experienced as performances during his time, by the early 19th century, they were increasingly studied and read as literary works.

Iago: a perfect combination of the two facts concerning evil (A.C. Bradley)

- "perfectly sane people exist in whom fellow-feeling of any kind is so weak that an almost absolute egoism becomes possible to them" + "exceptional powers of will and intellect"
- absurd "to compare Iago with the Satan of *Paradise Lost*" ... "so immensely does [he] exceed Milton's Fiend in evil".

