

dergoes in living” (p. 132). For our and his good fortune, we will continue to be unable to embrace Hamlet, aware that the action to be taken is precisely this seemingly impossible task: “sketching the boundaries of the soul” (p. 137) – Hamlet’s and our own, if they can be told apart.

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**Sokolova, Boika and Valls-Russell, Janice, eds, *Shakespeare’s Others in 21st-century European Performance: The Merchant of Venice and Othello*, The Arden Shakespeare, London, Bloomsbury, 2022, xii+395pp.**

*Shakespeare’s Others in 21st-century European Performance*, a collection of essays edited by Boika Sokolova and Janice Valls-Russell, delves deeply into the adaptations of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*, showcasing how the staging of these plays is intricately entwined with Europe’s colonial, anti-Semitic, and racist history. This anthology confronts the tumultuous societal landscape in the 21<sup>st</sup> century marked by nationalisms, migrations, racial violence, and various forms of oppression through nuanced exploration of stagings of *Othello* and *Shylock*. However, as the volume demonstrates, there are many ‘others’ in these plays, and they have different ethical, racial, gendered and cultural features across Bulgaria, Romania, Italy, Hungary, France, the Netherlands, Serbia, Germany, France, Portugal and Poland.

Originating from papers presented at The European Shakespeare Research Association (ESRA) in 2017, this collection’s purpose and form are born from a need to respond to historical crises, offering insightful considerations about how Shakespeare can be a tool for identifying and/or dismantling persistent racism across various societal fronts. Aligned with the Global Inverted Series of The Arden Shakespeare, this publication endeavors to revise conventional notions of centre and periphery, challenging biased geographical perspectives in relation to Shakespeare’s works. It particularly focuses on the manifestations of ‘others’ within the context of *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*, delving into the essential question: ‘other to what’?

From the vantage point of Europe’s long colonial history, the collection sheds light on the challenge of defining the centre to which

'others' are relegated. It brings attention to the ambiguity surrounding the restructured dichotomy between the 'other' and what is perceived as the centre, with a pointed question about whether European culture still constitutes this centre. Within the context of Global Shakespeare studies, pondering the shifts in power dynamics and violence within this discourse, these essays carefully navigate the ethical considerations in adapting Shakespeare's works, emphasising the need for a decolonising approach. At its core, the anthology serves as a testament to the prevalent themes of violence, fear, and aversion towards the Other in European discourse. It scrutinises the essence of identity, actions, and values when confronted with the unfamiliar, the stranger, and the outsider, contemplating the pervasive European practice of *othering*, and prompting reflection on the role and responsibilities of theatres in confronting these issues. It probes the contours of 21st-century European performance trends and the very definition of 'European', while rejecting a simplistic 'black' versus 'white' racial oppression narrative by highlighting the multifaceted forms of violence in a continent that should not be confined to a binary racial paradigm. Moreover, the volume seeks to reposition Shakespeare within European theatre, using his works as cultural capital to reflect the struggle of European societies with their civilised self-image. It prompts critical engagement with the challenges of living alongside 'Strangers' and navigating the often invisible line between civilised and uncivilised behaviour.

The volume takes a dual perspective: while considering audience response, performance analysis and critical reception of productions in their cultural contexts, it focuses on political issues. The collection's balanced selection of essays offers diverse portrayals of Shakespeare's *others*, with the first part focussing on 'relocating' otherness, and the second part exploring instances when productions failed to address the vulnerability of the Other or where the cultural capital of Shakespeare seems to be exploited. The book's structure, encircled by Lawrence Guntner's introductions to the three parts, contains essays, interviews, and a reflective coda. The use of ethical frameworks by thinkers such as Levinas, Todorov, and Maffesoli offers a rich philosophical basis for examining 'otherness', the ways society treats the 'other', and restoring a sense of 'civilisation' by accepting the humanity of others. While the volume does not explicitly question if

some productions perpetuate symbolic violence, it emphasises the importance of acknowledging and respecting 'otherness' in its own right, rather than merely defining it in contrast to something else.

However, the cover design raises a question. The image of a human being embracing multiple paper dolls serves as a metaphor, possibly indicating the complexities of embracing the multifaceted 'otherness' of another human.

*Facing the other in 21<sup>st</sup>-century European productions of Othello and The Merchant of Venice*

The first part of the book opens with Anna Maria Cimitile's essay, *Venice' is elsewhere: The Stranger's locality, or Italian 'blackness' in twenty-first-century stagings of 'Othello'*. Cimitile explores how the residual subaltern vision of Southern Italy becomes a principle of 'othering', using dialect in representing Othello, whether Neapolitan or Sicilian, as a perpetual stranger. She examines two Italian productions that resist cultural homogenisation through linguistic diversity, while addressing issues of femicide and the local *versus* global dynamics within Italian culture.

In *Refracting the racial Other into the Other-within in two Bulgarian adaptations of 'Othello'*, Sokolova and Stavreva analyse two intriguing productions. Liliya Abadjieva's 2005 all-male cast performance delves into strong physical theatre, emphasising toxic masculinity contrasted with an erased and victimised femininity. Ivan Mladenov's 2008 documentary, set in a prison, loosely adopts *Othello's* characters, embodied by individuals serving sentences for lesser crimes compared to the political elite of Bulgaria's post-communist transition. These narratives offer powerful insights into human stories, highlighted by cinematic storytelling. The essay introduces two critical ideological frameworks within the collection: the recognition of humanity in individuals deemed *barbarians* by seemingly civilised society, and the complexities of recognising the humanity of the 'Other' amid economic, political, and cultural identity crises of post-communism. However, it seems to overlook the *barbarity* perpetuated by capitalism, structurally sustaining adverse conditions for individuals.

Another significant exploration of Shakespeare's work is found in Polish theatre, renowned for its bold reinterpretations of classic texts.

Aleksandra Sakowska's essay, *Estranged strangers: Krzysztof Warlikowski's Shylock and Othello in 'African Tales after Shakespeare' (2011)*, encapsulates Warlikowski's aesthetically and politically daring approach. The analysis highlights his incorporation of theatrical collage and intermediality, creating a fragmented spectator experience. Warlikowski's focus appears to revolve around the impossibility of completely embodying the identity of the Other. He aims to connect with his spectators, whom he perceives as *desensitised individuals*:

My aim is to wake them [the audience] up from a nap, and sensitize them anew. I do not know if this is a provocation, maybe just [a way of] loosening up, arousing, activating and raising awareness. *The Merchant of Venice* is familiar [...] Shakespeare is familiar. [...] I want to say [to the audience] that they are much mistaken. (p. 28)

In Zorica Bečanović Nikolić's analysis, *Drags, dyes and death in Venice: 'The Merchant of Venice' (2004) and 'Othello' (2012) in Belgrade, Serbia*, Serbian productions are explored as opportunities for audiences to empathise with and understand the pain of the Other. The discussion offers hermeneutical considerations, shedding light on the subjective experience of being the Other and the various possibilities of engaging with them. It delves into the disillusionment with political systems within Balkan and post-Yugoslav societies, where individuals from various backgrounds find themselves labelled as the 'Other', both among themselves and from a more western European perspective. The essay suggests that both productions demonstrate a need for an integration of European values, revealing the complexities of racism towards non-European 'Others' and the pursuit to adopt European identity, both potentially being profoundly violent and (self) destructive processes.

In *'The Merchant of Venice' in France (2001 and 2017): Deconstructing a malaise* by Janice Valls-Russell, the focus is on the perpetuation of archaic anti-Semitism and the exploration of themes relating to neotribalism and the relationship with 'otherness' seen through the lens of Maffesoli and Levinas. The essay delves deeper into the post-Holocaust ethical debate on staging *The Merchant of Venice* and explores broader forms of 'othering' and the complexities of French society's crisis, examining Andrei Șerban's production *Étrangers en France* (2001) and Jacques Vincey's production *Business in Venice*

(2017). Şerban's production accentuates the erasure of individuality through stereotypical representation, hinting that anyone in the audience members, could embody these stereotypes. Vincey's work, in particular, focuses on the creation of the 'Other', portraying how anti-Semitism results in perpetuation of hatred. The essay concludes with a symptomatic metatheatrical moment in the 2017 production, where the audience is subtly accused of acting in ways stereotypically associated with Jews. Overall, Valls-Russell concludes that the productions confront the unanswered questions that often remain unanswerable in their complex and multi-layered nature.

In the second part of the volume, titled *New nationalisms, migrants: Imperfect resolutions*, the papers share a common sentiment of missed opportunities to grapple with the question of the 'Other', both on and off the stage. Nicoleta Cinpoş's essay, 'Barbarous temper', 'hideous violence' and 'mountainish inhumanity': Stage encounters with *The Merchant of Venice* in Romania, navigates the issues of Romanian identity within the European context. It touches upon xenophobia, homophobia, and gender-based racism, amidst the backdrop of rising nationalisms and conflicts between Romanians and Hungarians. The discussion reflects the coexistence of democratic enthusiasm with extremism and intolerance, as depicted in Laszlo Bocsárdi's 2010 production of *The Merchant of Venice*.

Natália Pikli's study on *Staging The Merchant of Venice in Hungary* notes the avoidance of complicated themes and responsibilities in Hungarian productions, particularly concerning the country's involvement in the Holocaust. The rise of intolerant attitudes influenced directorial choices, making even the 'Others' within the narratives intolerant. Bagó's rendition of *The Merchant of Venice* in Hungary is highlighted as a theatrical performance that, while commendable, somewhat diluted potentially contentious issues about Jews and anti-Semitism. The essay touches upon the need for a more significant and visible presence of the Stranger on stage, criticising the superficial approach and colonial undertones in these productions, and asserting the need for deeper engagement with the Other.

*Dutch negotiations with otherness in times of crisis: Othello (2006) and The Arab of Amsterdam (2008)*, by Coen Heijes, scrutinises these performances' reluctance to confront Dutch colonial past, institutionalised racism, and societal hostilities between Muslims and Jews. The

analysis criticises the tendency to make generalised and banal statements, hiding behind a facade of universal pain and vulnerability, equating the *other* with everybody. While reflecting on the limitations of these contemporary Shakespeare performances in addressing societal and political issues, the essay observes that *Othello* (2006) largely adheres to the status quo, failing to enact significant change. Additionally, it contrasts this approach with *The Arab of Amsterdam*'s more direct and confrontational one in portraying the position of Muslim immigrants, asking to what extent Shakespeare can effectively convey the complexities of tumultuous societal moments and engage in contemporary discourse.

Francesca Rayner's exploration, *'Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago': Radical empathy in two Portuguese performances of 'Othello'*, inspects the deployment of empathy in the performances, emphasising the complexity and nuances that power dynamics introduce into the concept of empathy. It also criticises the productions' failure to challenge gender and racial stereotypes, pointing out how they refrained from unsettling societal expectations in their rendition of Shakespeare at national theatres. Lulling strategies of individual identifications could be overturned by a radical empathy based on collective struggles for equality and justice. In the performance of these Shakespeare plays, Rayner suggests that radical empathy could be a strategy of disidentification with stereotypes (both racial and gender) in order for an "artistic political transformation" (p. 193) to occur.

In *A tragedy? Othello and The Merchant of Venice in Germany during the 2015–16 refugee crisis* Bettina Boecker dissects the theatrical capacity to engage with societal and political relevance. It examines the cultural and societal responses during the refugee crisis of 2015–2016 in Germany, especially the 'culture of welcome'. The essay questions whether Christian Weise's *Othello*, directed for the Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin, and Nicolas Stemann's *Merchant of Venice* at the Munich Kammerspiele indeed address or exploit the themes of otherness they ostensibly tackle. Her conclusion is that both productions other everyone, just in different ways. While Weise's *Othello* moves to the centre from the periphery, while all others are othered, Stemann completely disavows the idea of a centre identical with 'us', doing away with all reference points to even construct the other.

However, maybe the most important and crucial problem when it comes to European productions is the following:

[...] On the one hand, these colleagues curry favour with the *Zeitgeist*; on the other, they ignore the actual tasks of the theatre. Behind all of this is a big lie. Nobody is being helped – everyone is only pretending. And then the theatres fall in love with these social projects, which are nothing but vain posturing. [...] This is the way for theatre to abolish itself. [...] Theatre must remember its archetypical task. It must remember text, ensemble, the art of acting. ('Michael Thalheimer über Anbiederung, Posen und Gegenwartsdramatik' [Michael Thalheimer on currying favour with the public, posing and today's theatre], interview by Martin Eich, Wiesbadener Kurier, 28 November 2015; np; quoted in p. 222)

It seems that Thalheimer's provocative and direct comment is a much needed reflective point and a question one should have in mind before choosing to stage Shakespeare today. *Performative propositions*, a collection of conversations with directors Karin Coonrod, Arnaud Churin and Plamen Markov discusses their different theatrical practices and styles, comments on their inspiring readings and stagings of *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*. All these directors urge the need for hospitality, while also warning not to reduce Shakespeare's text to topics of racism and issues of othering. Nevertheless, this volume encapsulates the urgency and relevance of reevaluating Shakespeare's others within the context of contemporary crises, in Europe and beyond. Today's catastrophes are on a larger scale than they were in the time of conceiving the papers for the ESRA conference, and I would stress the need for a more daring, intellectually robust, and ethically provocative engagement with Shakespeare's others on European stages. Without a bold engagement, there is a risk of Shakespeare's legacy becoming complicit in problematic power dynamics or detached from the pressing issues of our time.

Additionally, the dangerous 'business as usual' attitude prevails in some theatres, as noted by Heijes. It is a feature of many institutions, academic environments and cultural venues that is desensitising us from ourselves and others, subsequently. More than ever, Edward Said's credo that the responsibility of an intellectual to *speak truth to power* resonates with issues raised in this volume, highlighting the necessity for introspection and a departure from conventional

practices, urging a move away from solely relying on Shakespeare as a cultural capital or a universal language. As expressed in Péter Dávidházi's *Coda: Staging Shakespeare's Others and their biblical archetype*, the hostile othering is not only a *tertium comparationis* for main characteristic of the analysed stagings, but also a biblical archetype of Western civilisation. In civilisational crisis, the other is needed and violated as a scapegoat to resolve it. In light of these archaic mechanisms, Dávidházi warns about how we collectively "cannot afford to alienate the Other much longer" (p. 277).

*Shakespeare's Others in 21st-century European Performance* urges us towards a more involved, relevant, and ethical dialogue with Shakespeare that remains attuned to the socio-political realities of our world. Otherwise, why stage Shakespeare at all? One would only be *othering* it from one of the main essences of theatre – to be relevant in present time.

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**Squeo, Alessandra, *Print and Digital Remediations of the Shakespearean Text: A Hermeneutics of Reading from the First Folio to the Web*, Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2022, 350 pp.**

The publication of this useful and thorough study is well timed, coinciding closely with the quatercentenary celebration of the publication of Shakespeare's First Folio in 1623. Once a treasure seen by only a few privileged scholars, the fact that copies of this iconic publication can now be viewed in high quality facsimiles on many websites points to the value of a study that outlines and examines the changing forms, fashions, and multimedia representations of Shakespeare's work. Alessandra Squeo opens with a witty exploration of Shakespeare as a multimedia experience. In the first of many examples of insightful close readings, she examines the way that Peter Greenaway's film *Prospero's Books* inventively juxtaposes the media of film, of books, especially the First Folio, and of the visual representation of text. Turning to a very different medium, she deconstructs an irreverent poster, created for a recent conference, that features an image of Shakespeare triumphantly breaking free of the bondage of the book. The title Squeo has chosen immediately makes clear that this is a book for