

OTHELLO

Course Prospectus

Prof. Abdulhamit Arvas
arvas@upenn.edu

Shakespeare's *Othello* has been one of the most controversial and popular Shakespearean plays, which addresses such critical issues as race, religion, gender, class, and sexuality. In this class, we will examine these issues in the past as well as the present by studying *Othello* from a variety of critical perspectives through close-analysis of the play-text and adaptations on film and stage, beginning with the play's earliest performance. We will first devote several weeks to read slowly and closely the text of the play by paying attention to Shakespeare's use of language, metaphor, genre, and dramatic form. Then we will investigate the complex meanings of race, religion, gender, social status and sexuality in premodern England through *Othello* as well as other medieval and early modern materials. Besides recent interpretative criticism and the performance history of the play, including the use of blackface on stage and in film, the course will also include global adaptations of the play in various forms from Verdi's opera *Otello* to Bhardwaj's film *Omkara*, Toni Morrison's play *Desdemona* and Tayeb Salih's novel *Season of Migration to the North*. Our goal throughout the course will be discussing the relevance of *Othello* (and of pre-1660 literature in general) to our understanding of race, religion, gender, sexuality, class, and immigration in today's world. Using *Othello* and its afterlives as a case study, therefore, this class aims a deliberate exploration of not only "Literature before 1660," but also its relevance in today's world.

Course requirements will include participation, short papers, and a final project.

Tentative readings are:

The Oxford Shakespeare: Othello. Edited by Michael Neill. Oxford University Press, 2006

Toni Morrison, *Desdemona*. Oberon Books

Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*. New York Review Books Classics

All other materials will be provided in e-text versions on Canvas and/or electronic reserve at Van Pelt Library.