

THE POLITICS OF INTERPRETATION: PRESENTIST AND HISTORICIST
PERSPECTIVES OF *OTHELLO* AND *AS YOU LIKE IT*

by

ARIELLA SINGLETON

Bachelor of Arts, 2017
University of Texas at Arlington
Arlington, TX

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
AddRan College of Liberal Arts
Texas Christian University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts

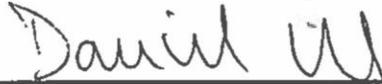
May 2019

THE POLITICS OF INTERPRETATION: PRESENTIST AND HISTORICIST
PERSPECTIVES OF *OTHELLO* AND *AS YOU LIKE IT*

By

Ariella Singleton

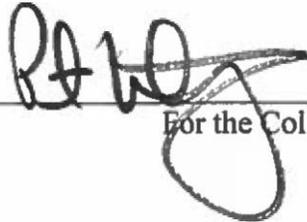
Thesis Approved:



Major Professor







For the College of Liberal Arts

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank Dr. Daniel Juan Gil, my thesis chair, for dedicating so much time and energy to supporting and guiding me throughout this process. I am greatly appreciative of his constant kindness, as well as all I was able to learn from him in my time at TCU. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Ariane Balizet and Dr. Anne Frey, for their helpful feedback and encouragement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ii
List of Figures.....	iv
I. Introduction.....	1
II. Chapter One: Guiding Interpretations of Difference in <i>Othello</i>	14
III. Chapter Two: Translating <i>As You Like It</i> 's Rosalind-Ganymede.....	34
References.....	53
Vita	
Abstract	

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Rosalind Whispering in Celia's Ear in Branagh's *As You Like It* (2006).....46
2. Rosalind (in the Ganymede Costume) with Orlando in *As You Like It* (2006).....48

INTRODUCTION

“I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream—past the wit of man to say what dream it was”

(William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 4.1.203-05).

Leading Concepts

As the title of my thesis suggests, historicism and presentism are key concepts for this project. Thus, I would like to begin by familiarizing my readers with these terms before describing the ins and outs of a project for which these terms are foundational. In what follows, when I employ the term “historicism,” I will be invoking it as defined by Stephen Greenblatt in the 1980s, though he referred to it then as “new historicism.” As evidenced by the works of Greenblatt and other historicist scholars, historicism involves seeking out historical facts when interpreting a text and attempting to set the present social, political, or cultural climate aside to avoid misreading it. In addition, historicist scholars hold not only that a given text reflects the historical context of the time and culture in which it was produced, but also that attention to historical context leads to a fuller understanding of the text itself.

Historicism is decidedly popular, and often preferred, among literature scholars. This is especially the case in early modern literature studies, in part, because there is much about literature as far removed from the present as Shakespeare's that does not make sense without a knowledge of historical context. It is also the preferred choice because it is considered scholarly and responsible; employing it requires a fair amount of investigation into the past and, thus, time spent thinking about the connections between a text and the historical events that likely influenced its development. It follows, therefore, that historicism's reputation is largely positive. Why, then, would anyone deviate from it?

Presentism is, in many ways, historicism's opposite, and its premise is that the present is inextricably connected to the past and, thereby, influences all interpretations of past work.

Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes, noteworthy presentist scholars, write in *Presentist Shakespeares* (2007),

The truth is that none of us can step beyond time. The present can't be drained out of our experience. As a result, the critic's own 'situatedness' does not – cannot – *contaminate* the past. In effect, it constitutes the only means by which it's possible to see and perhaps comprehend it. And since we can only see the past through the eyes of the present, few serious historians would deny that the one has a major influence on their account of the other. Of course we should read Shakespeare historically. But given that what we term history develops out of a never-ending dialogue between past and present, how can we decide whose historical circumstances will have priority in the process, Shakespeare's, or our own? (3)

Presentists, therefore, assert the present's power to sway understandings and interpretations of the past, including the literature it produced. This makes practicing what we could call "true" historicism seem nearly impossible. And although presentism is less established than historicism and does not appear, from my research, to be as popular today as it was in recent history, it is an especially useful approach for situating a text alongside discussions of current events. It seems, too, that it would be the preferred choice in undergraduate classrooms, where hot-button topics are likely to be at the forefront of discussions of texts such as *Othello* and *As You Like It*, whose thematic leanings toward topics like race and gender make the texts more accessible; that is, race and gender, for students, are logical starting places for

discussion in the absence, and sometimes even in the presence, of a full, working knowledge of relevant historical context.

Still, there are certainly those who dislike presentism, mostly because they see it as not only unscholarly, but also woefully anachronistic. Therefore, a scholar's employing of presentist approaches in their writing tends to require the integration of a solid defense of and justification for the "anachronistic" use of terms deemed relevant by the scholar to a given text. Thus, while presentism is valuable in certain situations, there are nearly always hoops to jump through and naysayers who need to be addressed before a work that incorporates it can fall on listening ears—making the adoption of presentism in an approach to Shakespeare's works especially daunting. I trust, however, that it is still a worthwhile endeavor. In this thesis, I will examine both presentist and historicist scholarship and demonstrate that there are political effects to employing not only presentism, which is more plainly political and acknowledges itself as such, but also historicism. Furthermore, I will argue that synthesizing these approaches, despite their distinct differences, and holding both in mind when approaching a text leads to a responsible kind of teaching and scholarship. This examination, I hope, will create a clearer representation of each approach, including the advantages and disadvantages of applying them. And for those who feel comfortable with the foundational elements of presentism and historicism addressed in this thesis, I hope what follows will serve both to enrich their understandings of these approaches and to demonstrate how they function in the context of scholarship on Shakespeare's works, especially *Othello* and *As You Like It*.

Why *Othello* and *As You Like It*?

Othello and *As You Like It* provide uniquely appropriate jumping-off points for navigating historicist revelations alongside presentist conversations of the ubiquitous topics of race and gender. Consider, for example, how unlikely it would be for most people today to read *Othello*'s references to its namesake as "black Othello" without considering issues of race (2.3.29). And after long-standing debates among scholars about whether the play *is* racist or *is about* racism, discovering—or else revisiting—multiple approaches to *Othello* can be incredibly illuminating, making insightful and often competing interpretations of this widely read, taught, and performed tragedy available. One historicist approach, for example, could uncover early modern conceptions of "race" that modern readers are unlikely to be familiar with. However, another historicist approach, by shedding light on social constructions of race over time, can make the text more accessible for readers today (in that it allows them to connect the dots between what is happening in modern society and what was happening at the time the text was written). And certainly, presentist approaches to *Othello* would encourage discussions of race in the text as they connect to current, seemingly relevant ideas based on anything from social movements, milestones of equality, and social progress to modern-day racism, bigotry, and oppression. Of course, *As You Like It* is more obviously suited to topics of gender. Relevant historicist works reveal avenues for interpreting the play that look drastically different from its contemporary performances and adaptations. With historical context in mind, the issue of men performing women's roles is at the forefront of interpreting the play's events. A presentist approach to *As You Like It*, however, leans toward feminist readings of Rosalind's cross-dressing. Together, and in conjunction with relevant scholarship, these two plays reveal a number of things about the

adoption of historicism and presentism, which I will explore more fully in the section of this introduction titled “Key Moments and Noteworthy Findings.”

Defining the Project

For this project, I set out to discover what presentist and historicist scholarship on *Othello*, *As You Like It*, and Shakespeare more broadly revealed about not only the fundamentals of each approach, but also the benefits and downfalls of each—including their scholarly reliability and political implications—in analyses of Shakespeare’s works. I did this by examining what presentist and historicist scholarship had to say about race in *Othello* and gender in *As You Like It*. Essentially, race and gender were the focal points of my analysis of each play, and most of the sources incorporated into my thesis were chosen because they demonstrate an attentiveness to these themes. The primary purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate, through a review of relevant scholarship and by modeling the interpretive possibilities each makes available for readings of *Othello* and *As You Like It*, the political implications of employing presentism and historicism and the necessity of going about this carefully.

Inspiration for the Project

The semester prior to beginning work on my thesis, I developed an interest in learning how to responsibly teach and write about Shakespearean works that appeared to speak to hot-button issues while availing themselves to disparate interpretations. This interest was sparked after returning, in a course with my thesis chair, Dr. Gil, to Shakespeare’s sonnets. Sonnet 20, in particular, was an especially intriguing case; and I discovered that, for many readers, it raised questions about Shakespeare’s sexual orientation, despite the fact that words like “homosexual” were, of course, not in play at the time it was written. Upon a first reading of

Sonnet 20, which I will include here, it makes sense that readers would be curious about the nature of the speaker's feelings for the sonnet's recipient:

A woman's face with nature's own hand painted
 Hast thou, the master-mistress of my passion;
 A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted
 With shifting change as is false women's fashion;
 An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,
 Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;
 A man in hue, all hues in his controlling,
 Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth.
 And for a woman wert thou first created,
 Till nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting,
 And by addition me of thee defeated
 By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.
 But since she pricked thee out for women's pleasure,
 Mine be thy love and thy love's use their treasure. (1-14)

I think it is fairly easy to see this “master-mistress” as the object of Shakespeare's, if we understand him to be the speaker, declarations of romantic devotion. However, when I was an undergraduate, I interpreted—because of some historical context provided to me by a professor—the sonnets to the Young Man as empty flattery conjured up in attempts to acquire funds from a patron who needed some convincing. Thus, while completing coursework, I found myself interested in discovering how to teach these texts to students

while keeping their best interests in mind and, simultaneously, being careful to present, to the best of my ability, a truthful representation of the past.

In earlier writing I did, I explored some of the interpretive possibilities that can arise by situating the sonnets in various and competing contexts in order to prompt consideration of the responsibilities of instructors in teaching moments where sharing historical context has the greatest effect on students' interpretations of Shakespeare. I saw danger, for example, both in historicizing the sonnets to the point of erasing the same-sex desire that seems evident within them and thereby discouraging discussions of such readings, which I now know a presentist approach mitigates, and in teaching students a sort of modern reading of the sonnets despite what historical context may suggest. Thus, I started with the assumption that students are capable of thinking through multiple, disparate meanings of Shakespeare's sonnets at once. Then I asserted, first, that because the content of the sonnets crosses into current charged emotional and political issues, it is worthwhile to consider whether there are pedagogical obligations to give students access to the multiple perspectives that a knowledge of historical context makes available to them and, second, that providing students with this access could prevent narrowminded readings and misunderstandings of both the author and the histories surrounding the texts being studied in a given course. With these considerations in mind, I entered into my thesis year and learned about historicism and presentism, both of which gave me the ideas and language I needed to more fully consider the political implications of interpreting, discussing, and teaching Shakespeare's works.

Guide Map to the Chapters

“Chapter One: Guiding Interpretations of Difference in *Othello*” begins with an examination of the concern that scholars have expressed over using the word “race” in

discussions of early modern history and literature and explores how and whether we should employ the term “race” when talking about difference in *Othello*. After establishing a means of understanding “race” that is foundational to how the term is used for the duration of the chapter, it moves on to a review of historicist and presentist scholarship on Shakespeare’s works, specifically *Othello*, on the basis that looking at both presentist and historicist scholarship can give us a better idea of the interpretations each makes available and help teachers and scholars make more responsible moves when disseminating knowledge on Shakespeare’s plays. The presentist section that follows the chapter’s opening discussion of “race” explores scholarship including Linda Charnes’s “Shakespeare, and Belief, in the Future,” Kyle Grady’s “Othello, Colin Powell, and Post-Racial Anachronisms,” and Ewan Fernie’s “Shakespeare and the Prospect of Presentism.” Collectively, these works demonstrate what exactly makes *Othello* ideal for presentist exploration, with one bringing attention to the play’s connections to real regimes of racial intolerance and others drawing attention to the fact that Shakespeare’s works are culturally relevant and more widely read now than they were in his day. Following the presentist scholarship is a section outlining and surveying historicist scholarship, including Ben Saunders’s “Iago’s Clyster: Purgation, Anality, and the Civilizing Process” and Sandra Young’s “Imagining Alterity and Belonging on the English Stage in an Age of Expansion: A Reading of *Othello*.” These works serve to identify the beginnings of racism and its corresponding vocabulary as reflected by the play, help foster a better understanding of Othello’s social positioning, and reflect on the significance of the emergence of a national consciousness in Shakespeare’s day, which help explain the anxieties surrounding identity that led to global comparisons. And lastly, the historicist scholarship paints the Othello character as a culmination of English anxieties about

foreignness/otherness rather than an attempt at faithfully representing a “Moor.” An assessment of the advantages, disadvantages, and political implications of employing each approach follows. At the end of this chapter, I offer my own analysis of *Othello*, with each approach serving, one at a time, as the basis for said analysis.

“Chapter Two: Translating *As You Like It*’s Rosalind-Ganymede,” opens with an introduction to the relevance of gender in the play and proceeds with a review of works that, though not straightforwardly historicist or presentist, have what I describe as either “historicist or presentist tendencies” that prove useful for approaching the topic of gender in *As You Like It*. This review begins with a focus on the historicization of gender in the play, calling on Stephen Greenblatt’s in *Shakespearean Negotiations* (1988), Thomas Laqueur’s *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (1992), and Judith Butler’s *Undoing Gender* (2004) to accomplish this work. The presentist section, however, focuses solely on Kenneth Branagh’s 2006 film adaptation of the play, which I propose is a fair representation of a presentist approach to the text. Just preceding my review of relevant scholarship in this chapter is a section titled “Portraying Rosalind,” in which I consider, while building upon some of Lorraine Helms’s ideas, the great influence that casting Rosalind has, and must have had, over audiences’ understandings of the play’s dominant themes. In the last section of the chapter, I again bring attention to the politics of interpreting the play with each approach.

Key Moments and Noteworthy Findings

In this section, I aim to bring attention to the principal things I learned from this project and alert my readers to what to keep an eye out for as they navigate the ensuing chapters. The first chapter reveals, for one, that illuminating the many similarities between

Shakespeare's world and our own in scholarship, especially where race is concerned, is one way of preserving his canonicity and helping readers get as much as they can out of his works. The first chapter establishes, therefore, Shakespeare's relevance to current events and conversations using *Othello* as an example of this relevance. Perhaps most importantly, this chapter also addresses pitfalls of applying presentism and historicism to *Othello*. It argues, first, that dedicating too much attention to the play's modern applications could lead to misunderstandings of how racist ideologies and hierarchies—which are non-essentialist, invented and constructed—developed over time; the reason this is so dangerous is because it risks misrepresenting the past we and others could learn from. Second, it suggests, in opposition to the previous issue, that there is a danger in historicism in that it could stifle productive conversations and learning moments about modern racial intolerance in ways that presentism does not.

The second chapter, I think, is the more daring of the two. It proposes that a historicist analysis of *As You Like It* reveals that Shakespeare had a sort of Butlerian perspective on gender performance, and it calls on the work of Stephen Greenblatt and Thomas Laqueur to support this idea. Other noteworthy moments in this chapter include my analyses of the play's epilogue and the scene in which Rosalind comes up with the plan to disguise herself as a man. These are moments that not only get at the soul of what the play is about, but also are crucial for this thesis in that dealings with them are very telling of both presentism and historicism; they help demonstrate how a presentist approach to *As You Like It* calls for a re-essentializing of gender in the play to make it fit into a contemporary feminist agenda, while a historicist approach allows us to align Shakespeare's ideas with Judith Butler's by lending itself to a reading of gender in the play as non-essential.

Overall, *Othello* and *As You Like It* work alongside relevant historicist and presentist scholarship in this thesis to elucidate a number of things about each approach, which I believe are important to note here (though they will be revisited in the chapters that follow). First, these two approaches have their own advantages and disadvantages. This is relevant because an awareness of the benefits and consequences of approaching scholarly discussions with any sort of lens can enable you to make a more educated decision about choosing to employ one and not another. Second, this exclusion of one approach in favor of the other says, whether intentionally or unintentionally, certain things about the person making this decision. This is important, for one, because recognizing the messages you send about yourself to other people can assist you in demonstrating to the those who would engage in scholarly conversations with you that you are willing to respectfully listen their perspectives, even if they do not necessarily align with your own. And third, recognizing the competing interpretive possibilities made available by distinctly different approaches like presentism and historicism places responsibility on the person influencing others; it forces those with power to think through their teaching or writing and how they are—in some sense—shaping their audience’s perspective of the text under discussion by telling a version of it that is likely to stick with them for the rest of their lives.

Imagined Usefulness

I drafted this thesis and gathered the research needed to do so, at first, out of a personal desire to learn more about these plays and how to approach them through the adoption of historicism and presentism; I wanted to feel prepared to discuss these texts, and others of Shakespeare’s works, with a class of my own in the near future. But along the way, I began going about the work required for this project in hopes that others would find it

useful for some purpose or other. The people I feel would most value or appreciate the ideas presented in this thesis include graduate students, teachers, and scholars—some of whom, I realize, are likely to fall under more than one of these categories. Such an audience, I believe, could find many ways to extend or improve upon the arguments laid out in the chapters that follow. However, my desire is that this project serves at least one person, and I imagine that this could happen in a few ways. First, this project could influence a teacher to carefully weigh the pros and cons of historicism against those of presentism so that, in their own classroom, they can choose between the two approaches responsibly, or perhaps, decide that both deserve to be incorporated into lessons. My hope, too, is that they will be encouraged to put the students first, providing them with the knowledge they need to come to educated conclusions about the texts being studied. Second, I think this project could, either immediately or later in their writing, help those working on and researching a project that is either pertinent to the plays examined here or centered on historicism or presentism to more fully consider the political implications of their decision-making, as well as to remember that a writer can be just as influential as a teacher (and to be careful with that power). And for those married to one of the two approaches, I hope the issues outlined in this thesis, at the very least, challenge their thinking and prompt them to consider potential gaps in their knowledge; I would be happy if this resulted either in their being able to articulate an argument for their chosen approach with more confidence or in them branching out of their comfort zone from time to time. Finally, I think this thesis has the potential to encourage responsibility and fairness among all three groups in the presentation of ideas to their intended audiences—though that is, admittedly, an ambitious goal. Most practically, though, I think this project could be useful because presentism and historicism have not been put

together in this way with these texts before, and viewing them side by side in conjunction with *Othello* and *As You Like It* is, if nothing else, the culmination of a fresh perspective.

CHAPTER ONE: GUIDING INTERPRETATIONS OF DIFFERENCE IN *OTHELLO*

As our understanding of terms like “race” change over time, it becomes increasingly difficult to responsibly apply them to the historical contexts of distant pasts. How can scholars, teachers, and readers of a text that appears to be so racially charged simply put aside the events that have shaped a modern understanding of “race” over the last four centuries and talk about difference as it would have been understood in Shakespeare’s day? Can we apply the term with caution, or do we have to find another way to engage with difference in the text? Before approaching the topic of race in *Othello*, it is important to explore the dissonance surrounding applications of the word “race” in discussions of early modern history and literature. In this chapter, I hope, first, to establish how and whether we can reconcile applying the term “race” to discussions of *Othello*. Next, I will examine presentist and historicist scholarship on the play; this will be followed by a reflection on the political implications of employing each approach, which I think is illuminated, even if unintentionally, by the scholarship. And lastly, I will analyze the play itself, interpreting key moments under the parameters of each approach in turn and allowing the scholarship to guide my interpretations.

As Ania Loomba observes in “Early Modern or Early Colonial?” “in the last decade we have heard repeatedly that because England was not yet an empire in Shakespeare’s day, it is anachronistic to analyze the play of race in the early modern stage’s representation of Africans, Muslims, and other Eastern people” (147). Importantly, Loomba, herself, disagrees with this accusation of anachronism. However, whether we see the application of “race” to discussions of *Othello* as anachronistic or not, examining constructions of race over time can help us bridge the gap between modern conceptions of the word and the kinds of social

categorizations that existed or were being formed in Shakespeare's day. Vanessa Corredera, in "'Not a Moor exactly': Shakespeare, *Serial*, and Modern Constructions of Race," argues that the way race is conceptualized today has a comparable fluidity to early modern racial discourse (33). According to Corredera and early modern race scholars, those who describe modern constructions of race as more stable than those of the early modern period—and thus oppose using the word "race" to talk about ideologies of otherness in early modern history and literature—fail to see the full impact of the social (as opposed to the biological) on contemporary notions of race (35). Accepting that the racial conceptions of the early modern period and today function in much the same way, she says, permits scholars to "employ the contested term 'race' with much less trepidation and defensiveness" (43). In other words, illuminating the connections between race as it would have been perceived in Shakespeare's day and race as we understand it today allows us to more freely use "race" without fear of applying it anachronistically.

This concern over the kind of language we should adopt or avoid when discussing *Othello* is especially evident in historicism. Historicism, as a reminder, involves seeking out historical facts when interpreting a text and attempting to set the present social, political, or cultural climate aside. And where historicism is concerned, Corredera's article means that even though, through contextualization, we can talk about race in the early modern period in different terms than we may use to talk about it today, recognizing the ways in which race is unique to each period actually clarifies how little, operationally, constructions of race have changed over time. Corredera notes, "Some scholars view the use of the term 'race' in relation to the Renaissance as anachronistic because 'race' did not signify for early moderns as it does for us today. 'Race,' they explain, was a term connected to family and lineage

instead of to foreign otherness exclusively” (30-31). Certainly, contemporarily, we do not normally think of race in this way. Nonetheless, it does not appear to be any less socially constructed. She continues this line of thinking with “in Renaissance England, people saw religion, familial ties, and bloodlines as more important signifiers of othered identity than bodily markers such as skin color” (31). This appears to be true, although especially where religion is concerned, there are some similarities to modern thinking. We may be left to wonder, then, why Shakespeare repeatedly makes his characters bring attention to Othello’s blackness. In other words, the descriptions of Othello that use the color black should stand out to us precisely because this kind of concern over skin color, one that signal possible racism, was not supposed to have been as prevalent then as it is now. It is important to note that colors, especially black, used to describe various Shakespeare characters did not always refer to their physical appearance. Othello’s skin color, however, seems to be primarily what the other characters are referring to when they describe him as “black.”

This concern over anachronistic employment of “race” is irrelevant in presentism, which of course, says that we always look back at texts through the lens of the present and in light of contemporary social views/movements. So, where presentism is concerned, Corredera’s article means that early modern ideas surrounding race and otherness can be understood by and applicable to modern audiences regarding contemporary social issues. She asserts that, “by admitting the fluidity of modern constructions of race, we enable pedagogical discussions that make Shakespeare’s works . . . especially relevant and engaging to students who are increasingly multiracial, as well as increasingly skeptical about the value and pertinence of classic literature” (34-5). According to Pew Research Center in 2015, “The share of multiracial babies has risen from 1% in 1970 to 10% in 2013. And with interracial

marriages also on the rise, demographers expect this rapid growth to continue, if not quicken, in the decades to come” (Parker et. al.). Corredera’s case for the relevance of discussing race in Shakespeare’s texts in multiracial classrooms makes sense, but I think we can extend her ideas to discussions of the relevance of Shakespeare in the present more broadly. She spends some time exploring adaptations of Shakespeare’s works, and it seems that audiences turn to these adaptations because they make clear the pertinence of Shakespeare’s ideas to modern events. That is, while audience members may still be able to identify with specific characters, the actual goings-on of the play seem to have the most pull. Perhaps, then, illuminating the many similarities between Shakespeare’s world and our own in scholarship, especially where race is concerned, is one way of preserving his canonicity (especially for scholars with a stake in proving the value of his plays and sonnets) and helping readers get as much as they can out of his works. What I primarily hope to establish, however, is that looking at both presentist and historicist scholarship can give us a better idea of the interpretations each makes available and help us make more responsible moves when teaching or writing about Shakespeare’s plays. Thus, with an understanding of “race” foundational to discussions of *Othello*, I will now begin my review of some of the most recent and relevant presentist and historicist scholarship, all of which focus on Shakespeare’s works, and specifically, race in *Othello*.

Presentist Approaches

Those who have adopted presentist approaches to *Othello* do not always acknowledge that they are doing so, while many historicist sources state outright that they are contributing to a larger body of historicist work. I am not certain why this distinction exists, though it may have something to do with the idea that not explicitly stating the kind of approach you are

adopting makes it seem as though it is the norm—the approach we should default to. Or, perhaps some presentist scholars think it should be obvious to readers that they are doing presentist work. While this issue can make locating these kinds of sources difficult, it is also a characteristic that makes them more intriguing. This has, however, led to my collecting an interesting array of presentist works, which, though disparate, approach the play in insightful ways. I would like to begin by looking at Linda Charnes, who, in “Shakespeare, and Belief, in the Future,” proposes a response to Shakespeare in which we imagine ourselves into his future instead of his past. Charnes asserts that the past, present, and future are complicatedly connected and, thereby, problematizes acts of strict historicization. Furthermore, Charnes accomplishes the interesting work of imagining what Othello’s life may have been like had he himself been more of a presentist and less of a historicist. That is, instead of showing us how to approach *Othello* as presentists, she demonstrates how the play itself pushes a presentist agenda.

Kyle Grady’s “Othello, Colin Powell, and Post-Racial Anachronisms” looks much different, serving as an example of presentism rather than arguing that *Othello* is inherently presentist. Grady addresses the ambiguity surrounding race in *Othello* and argues that, instead of causing scholars to dismiss the function of race in the play, this ambiguity makes taking a closer look at the race and identity more worthwhile, especially when considering the characteristics that make it so much like real regimes of racial intolerance. The article draws a parallel between Colin Powell and Othello to demonstrate the similarities between the ways they are invoked in discussions of racism. Furthermore, it calls on Powell’s rise to leadership, which has often been used in support of the argument that racism is declining, to

instead make a connection between scholars' excusal of racialism in the play and modern-day "post-racialism" (83).

Ewan Fernie contributed to relevant presentist scholarship with his "Shakespeare and the Prospect of Presentism," which, though it does not speak directly to race in *Othello*, I will respond to and explore here in greater depth than those previously mentioned both because it is more distinctly presentist and because it acknowledges itself as such. In this piece, he said something simple and obvious, yet important, that I thought was worth noting here. He explains, "Shakespeare, in particular, is primarily a contemporary dramatist and writer, because he is currently taught, read and performed on a global scale unmatched by any other author. With respect to new historicism, this means that he is more embedded in our modern world than he ever was in the Renaissance" (175). It may be easy to imagine that applications of presentism involve a certain amount of tugging at a play and dragging it away from its historical home. But if, in some cases, we cannot uncover or fully understand what a play was once meant to be in its entirety, we can certainly find a use for it today—even if that means brushing off what only historical context makes accessible and allowing for interpretations of historical texts that are inspired by recent events.

However, Fernie's ideas are a reminder that part of the reason Shakespeare has been and continues to be so influential is that his works are relatable. They speak to everyday occurrences (comical mishaps, relationships, etc.) about as well as they do to contemporary social issues, and there are elements of his works that are easy to grab on to even though they were written centuries ago. This makes sense under presentism, which holds that our current moment, a future history, must shape our interpretations of the past. But all this makes drawing connections between current events and Shakespeare's plays seem rather simple,

and Shakespeare's works are also often *molded* to fit into popular agendas. In other words, meanings are sometimes clearly manipulated to send messages that would not have been on Shakespeare's radar. Nonetheless, making Shakespeare's plays appealing to modern audiences is not that difficult a task. Thus, I think it may not be that we should always try in earnest to escape the lens of the present in our readings of these plays, because there can also be, as I think the aforementioned scholars would agree, responsible, scholarly work in allowing the plays to act as they appear to naturally under the gaze of modern eyes, or else highlighting the elements that seem applicable to current events. In other words, part of what makes Shakespeare's plays worth studying is their continued and widespread influence, as well as the impression they give to modern audiences, both at the theatre and in the classroom, that they are relatable in some way. Thus, presentists may find ignoring these qualities to be just as irresponsible as historicists find a failure to account for historical context while interpreting Shakespeare's plays.

Fernie, not surprisingly, spoke specifically to Shakespeare's effect on modern audiences, noting that "a play does not only present an alternative world"; he continues, "In moving around and restructuring a group of antagonistic individuals, it jolts its audience into imagining that its own condition can be similarly reshaped. It is, therefore, a particularly effective vehicle for realizing social change" (184). Fernie's presentism, therefore, is one that compels modern audiences to see connections between their own lives and the events of the plays they are watching. It is not, in other words, a total repurposing of the play for a modern agenda without recognition of what is actually taking place within it. And the propensity of his plays to elicit both epiphanies and action still today, I think, is one of the most compelling arguments for the utility of presentism in Shakespeare studies.

For us to better understand how presentism functions in early modern scholarship, as well as the political import of this approach, it may be helpful to frame our understanding of presentism using the work accomplished by the aforementioned presentist approaches to *Othello*. In addition to these, beginning with what is generally known of presentism, we can see that it is sometimes painted as selfishly concerned with what is happening *right now*, but presentist texts fit well with the turn toward a non-anthropocentric concern for a global future. Presentist texts with an ecological focus, for example, though they have not been examined for the purposes of this thesis, demonstrate how connecting current environmental issues to Shakespeare's plays can be beneficial. The texts examined in earlier sections, however, also demonstrate that presentism can be used to learn from the past with present/forthcoming problems in mind. Understanding the function of hierarchies in relation to race in *Othello* can, for example, prompt consideration of the dangers inherent in current or developing hierarchies. Presentists, both generally and those specifically discussed in this chapter, hold, furthermore, that one cannot escape the lens of the present when looking at the past—that it is our present situation that influences all of our interpretations. These works demonstrate that it is suspect to push what we understand about the social implications of race out of our minds when reading about how *Othello* is treated by the play's other characters. Presentism, then, involves looking at texts for connections to current problems. This is demonstrated in part by the ecological focus I previously mentioned of some recent articles; scholars are, for example, revisiting Shakespearean texts to analyze instances where plants are mentioned out of an interest in current conversations about the environment. But this search for connections can also be seen in works like Grady's, which clearly outline the similarities between the events of Shakespeare's day and our own world. Allowing the events

of the present to influence our interpretations of Shakespeare's works, however, can lead to our misrepresenting the past. It is valuable, therefore, to look also to historicist scholarship before beginning the work of interpreting—and especially influencing others through those interpretations.

Historicist Approaches

There are many noteworthy contributions to the more traditional route to interpreting and analyzing Shakespeare's works, and these can, of course, be categorized as historicist. Historicism is traditional, in part, because it is seen as responsible. That is, historicists tend to closely examine historical context and trends before coming to conclusions about a text; they seek to present works in a historically accurate way without allowing modern understandings to skew interpretation. Ben Saunders made one of these noteworthy contributions with "Iago's Clyster: Purgation, Anality, and the Civilizing Process," in which he demonstrates how a historicist approach to *Othello* allows us to see the emergence of racist vocabulary. That is, while it is difficult to pin down racist ideologies (as we understand them today) in the renaissance, we can, arguably, see these ideas beginning to take shape. According to Saunders, recognizing dichotomies such as civilized and barbaric; early modern and medieval (while Shakespeare did not have these terms, they are useful in Saunders's article where ideas of cleanliness are concerned); rich and poor; and others as they existed in Shakespeare's day is important for making sense of Iago's motives/actions. I tend to subscribe to this line of thinking, and reading the play with its historical context in mind certainly leads to interpretations that would not otherwise be available. For example, while these dichotomies illuminate certain aspects of the text, they also complicate modern readers' interpretations. Certainly, modern readers are inclined to read Iago as motivated purely by

racist ideologies, and a presentist perspective of *Othello* may prompt readers to consider current conversations and events concerning race while reading the text. But while it can certainly be useful to revisit Shakespeare's plays and attempt to understand how they connect to present situations, a historicist approach to this particular play illuminates many other problems that existed in the early modern way of thinking that better explain Othello's social positioning. Perhaps most importantly, and in accordance with Saunders, historicism allows us to see race as historically and culturally constructed—rather than having some essential basis.

Sandra Young's "Imagining Alterity and Belonging on the English Stage in an Age of Expansion: A Reading of *Othello*," is another historicist work worth exploring here. It focuses on the functions of colonization (and, thus, globalization) and the emergence of English nationalism in understanding *Othello* within its historical context. And whereas Saunders's piece can be characterized as predominantly historicist, Young's is more straightforwardly so. According to Young, colonization and emergent nationalism are especially important where alterity and identity within the play are concerned. Young recognizes that the development of a nationalist consciousness was taking place before Shakespeare's *Othello* came to be. She uses this as a jumping-off point in her examination of the text and asserts that this created some anxiety about identity among the English when they considered their relation to the global (21). Scholars have asserted time and time again that, despite the play's being set in both Venice and Cyprus, it features remarkable parallels to the English world, especially in its reminiscently English concern with the binary of "Christian" and "other" ("other" meaning, more specifically in this context, Turk or

Ottomite). Young, following this line of thinking, adds that an English audience likely would have pictured the play's events within their own cultural context.

Young holds that situating the play within its historical context (one of global exchange) illuminates “the dark side of the Renaissance,” fostered, for example by the play’s “overt engagement with the preoccupations and knowledge systems of the expanded globe” (22). I think it is worth noting here that Young invokes Gilroy’s ideas on the unstable nature of the development of “Englishness,” specifically that the purity and uniqueness once seen in English identity is challenged by the fact that cultural identity is a culmination of the movement of many people groups across the Atlantic. Young provides an insightful bit of historical context and support for her ideas with the following:

The fact that England had become exposed to difference during the sixteenth century has been well acknowledged in a growing body of critical work within Shakespeare studies. Virginia Mason Vaughan argues that “after centuries of relative ethnic isolation English men and women were jolted by sudden exposure, in print and in person, to peoples remarkably different from themselves” (29). Though racial difference had not hardened into the unforgiving pseudo-scientific categories of nineteenth-century race discourse, representation of racial difference, already by 1600, was undoubtedly influenced by the development of a slave economy in Europe. It was within that unstable and charged context that notions of ‘Englishness’ were being forged. (21-22)

The inclusion and acknowledgement of print culture, specifically, is something I have not consistently seen in other historicist approaches to *Othello*, and I think it is one of the many things that makes this article stand out. Details like this allow it to paint a picture of early

modern men and women totally immersed in things new and unusual. However, this article also complicates our understanding of the kinds of ideas Shakespeare would have had about “race” as we now think of it, because it is difficult to say just how much revolutionary thinking he was exposed to and how much of it concerned skin color. Social developments of the time, nonetheless, are likely the key to understanding how race was understood during the writing of *Othello*.

While Young spends a significant portion of the article relaying the historical context that shaped English ideologies around that time, she also dedicates a good deal of her article to an exploration of Othello’s identity. Young notes that its ambiguous nature lies with his being “a racially-marked foreigner, a ‘Moor’,” who “masters the codes and values of his adopted society . . . deftly enough to be rewarded with military leadership, but not to be fully convinced, himself, of his right to belong, as subject” (23). Attempting to understand Othello’s identity is only made more complex when we remind ourselves, as Young reminds us, that Othello was played by a white man in black face. Young, therefore, paints Othello as a sort of culmination of English anxieties about foreignness/otherness, arguing “that we not over-read Othello as an attempt to offer an ‘authentic’ representation of a ‘Moor’” (23). Worth noting, especially if we continue to ponder the problem of how to talk about “race” without using the term anachronistically, is that Young does not seem too worried about this issue. That is, while she notes that racist ideologies have changed over time, she also asserts their early beginnings (which seem to support discussions of early modern “race”).

Historicism, broadly speaking and as evidenced by the historicist works examined in this section, involves the contextualization of a text within the time and place of its setting/creation with the historical knowledge necessary for such contextualization and with

the goal of better understanding an event, ideology, phenomena, etc. or its development over time. Historicists tend to believe this process of revelation works in two ways: the text revealing something about history and history revealing something about the text. What appears to be most important for historicists, like Saunders and Young, working in early modern literature, however, is that historical facts have greater sway over interpretation than the present social, political, or cultural climate. But what are we saying about a text, or even ourselves, when we opt for one approach to it over another?

Political Implications

This examination of recent literature on *Othello* was essential in helping me to better understand the pedagogical and practical considerations of engaging in discussions of the play. This is important, in part, because the political implications of the various avenues to interpreting and teaching Shakespeare's works are what first got me interested in learning about historicism and presentism. I will address these concerns in light of both the scholarship explored earlier in this chapter and my understanding of presentism and historicism more broadly.

There are, of course, downfalls to approaching dramatic texts, especially those as complex as Shakespeare's, with any kind of limited scope. Presentism, for one, has the potential to cause audiences to overlook the historical value of a text or else misinterpret significant historical events by placing too much emphasis on present affairs. Where *Othello* is concerned, this means that dedicating too much attention to its modern applications may result in an ignorance or misunderstanding of the development of racist ideologies and hierarchies, which are non-essentialist, invented and constructed. Historicism, however, may not leave enough room for readers to apply what they learn from past events to present and

future issues. For example, steering clear of topics of race in *Othello* to avoid falling into anachronistic practices can greatly limit understandings of its relevance to modern audiences. Consider the following questions: If we are in the classroom, are we doing a disservice to our students by teaching them how to relate to the text through presentism without clarifying the aspects of early modern society that influenced some of the play's fundamental events? Are we, in other words, misrepresenting the past? Or could we, on the other hand, be contextualizing plays like *Othello* to the point that students miss valuable opportunities to connect with the text and apply what they've learned? It is because of concerns like these that I am in favor of approaching the text with consideration for the interpretive outcomes of both historicism and presentism, and I believe the work I have done here demonstrates the value in this. Though the two are mostly incompatible, some of the most responsible teaching and analysis can be done with both of these approaches, at the least, in mind. I am not saying that we should force competing approaches to work together or even that we should give them equal weight in the classroom or elsewhere. Instead, I hold that if, in our teaching and reading of Shakespeare, we *must* exclude some things and privilege others, let us do so with careful thought and consideration of the implications of our decision-making. Taking a closer look at the interpretive possibilities available to each approach can help us make these difficult decisions.

Applying the Presentist Approach

For those reading *Othello* today, it is instinctive to interpret *Othello* with contemporary notions of racism in mind. A presentist approach makes this permissible. I would like to dedicate the bulk of this section—which I see as a proposal for how we can adopt a presentist approach to interpreting the play—to examining the language Iago

employs when referencing Othello. For modern readers, Iago's words are likely to be seen as nothing less than the result of racist ideologies. An undergraduate class, for example, especially if lacking knowledge of relevant early modern historical context or the development of racist ideologies over time, would likely be taken aback by what appears to be blatantly prejudiced behavior. Indeed, with the modern sociopolitical climate and recent (as well as not-so-recent) history lingering in the minds of readers and audiences, it is difficult to understand descriptions of Othello and Iago's targeting of him without considering race. A presentist approach to the play makes allowances for these kinds of inclinations. And when we examine, for example, the unusual ways Iago refers to Othello, which are set apart precisely because of the fact that Iago does not refer to the other characters in at all the same way, we see just how easy it is to read Iago as not only clearly manipulative but also racist.

Some may consider the possibility that Iago only employs what can be interpreted as racist language in order to convince others to do his bidding in his jealous, or possibly bored, targeting of Othello. This idea is problematized when we note where Iago says to himself (when no one is around), "I hate the Moor" (1.3.385). However, with a presentist approach to the text, Iago is either truly racist, simply playing a racist to appeal to the other characters, or inciting racism to sway others to turn against Othello; regardless of the route taken, race is inextricably part of the picture. Modern readers, therefore, are often left to wonder whether the play itself is racist or if it is, instead, *about* the racism experienced by its hero. There is certainly no simple answer to this question. I would, however, like to explore some of the specific interpretive possibilities that a presentist approach reveals.

As the play clearly indicates, Othello is othered by some of the other characters; this is evident, for one, in their repeated referral to him as “the Moor.” Iago, especially, who is central to discussions of race in the play for many reasons, has a habit of referring to Othello as “the Moor” instead of calling him by his name, and these occurrences usually take place alongside negative remarks. There are, in fact, very few instances in which Iago mentions Othello by saying “Othello,” and one of the most notable cases in which he employs the hero’s name is when he calls him “black Othello” (2.3.29). The accompanying descriptor is, of course, both troubling and unnecessary, and it adds to the long list of reasons why Iago appears to target Othello because of his appearance.

Iago’s descriptions of Othello also appear to be strategic and manipulative, if not only reflective of his true feelings towards the hero. In his comparison of the hero to various animals, for example, we see clear attempts to demean Othello in the minds of the other characters. The following excerpt from the play is one in which Iago paints Othello as impressionable and appears to belittle his intelligence: “The Moor is of a free and open nature / That thinks men honest that but seem to be so, / And will as tenderly be led by th’ nose / As asses are” (1.3.398-401). While this passage alone may not be sufficient evidence of Iago’s racism, in conjunction with other similar passages, it seems to suggest a connection between Iago’s debasing animalistic analogies and his views of Othello’s blackness. One such passage, which is consistently analyzed in scholarly discussions of race in this play, reads, “an old black ram / Is tuppung your white ewe!” (1.1.87-88). Here Iago is contrasting Desdemona and Othello with a vulgar statement meant to rouse Brabantio to respond to their marriage with angry retaliation. The emphasis on color, however, only adds to the seemingly thematic racism tied to Iago’s character. In another of his animal analogies, Iago states,

“Because we come to / do you service, and you think we are ruffians, you’ll / have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse” (1.1.108-10). This reference to Othello as a Barbary horse, following the same line of thinking employed throughout this section, alludes also to Othello’s foreignness/otherness. Presentism allows readers to think less about the various shapes that otherness takes and directly interpret Iago’s remarks as undeniably racist, especially in conjunction with his many references to Othello as “black.” Iago, in another of his many demeaning comments regarding Othello, as if the formerly mentioned were not enough for audiences to peg him as racist, calls out to Brabantio, “Arise, arise, / Awake the snorting citizens with the bell, / Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you” (1.1.88-90). We are given no real explanation for what makes Othello “the devil,” and in the absence of logic is precisely where one might expect to discover prejudice.

Applying the Historicist Approach

Whereas a presentist approach to *Othello* prompts readers to interpret the play in relation to current affairs and, thus, leads to discussions of the role of race in the text, a historicist approach requires, of course, consideration of historical context. This historical context, however, is precisely what can dissuade readers from thinking race is of significant relevance to the play’s events. This is because it alerts audiences to the idea that, if we can in fact see racism at work in the play, it is not racism as we think of it today because the period was just starting to see the beginnings of racial classifications, which were largely dependent on things like religion and lineage rather than skin color. In other words, a historicist approach allows us to ponder the cultural shifts that Shakespeare may have noticed at the time of writing the play, whether or not he acted on his observations, and if there’s a chance these shifts were not on his radar.

Some of the passages mentioned in the previous section are also worth exploring with a historicist lens, and the interpretations these passages lend themselves to can look either rather different or strangely similar from one approach to the next. Where Iago refers to Othello as an “ass,” “an old black ram,” or a “Barbary horse,” historical context reveals that these animal descriptors were likely as demeaning in the Renaissance as they are today. However, uses of the word “black,” as with Iago’s repeated “black Othello,” have changed considerably over time. And when we keep in mind that the color black was often associated with sin or cruelty, “black Othello” begins to look like a commentary on his actions or, possibly, religious affiliations (especially if pagan or non-Christian, as Saunders’s article supports).

In fact, the value of a historicist approach is that it allows us to see that Iago demonstrates the beginnings of racist ideology. Thus, permitting ourselves to look for racism in the play allows us to consider *how* Iago is demonstrating the beginnings of racism. For one, he could be evidencing these beginnings by being racist himself. Perhaps his hatred, in other words, is representative of a larger, historical racist ideology. He could, under this lens, genuinely hate Othello because of his own prejudices, which we could see as representative of racist early modern cultural ideologies. The other option is that he reflects the beginnings of racism by so easily persuading those around him, especially those who may have recently been introduced to racist ideologies, to turn against Othello. Were they, for instance, already on the verge of that sort of thinking so that all Iago had to do was tip them over the edge? Is he playing on ideas that, though not his own, are, nonetheless, tools in the minds of those around him, which he can then use to carry out his villainous plot? Deciding on either option requires

further examination of the text, but both paint a picture of racism that looks quite different from what can be seen today.

There are certain lines, particularly those spoken by Brabantio, that seem to make the most sense when adopting a historicist approach to the play—and this approach elicits understandings that a presentist approach does not allow for. Consider once more how Iago taunts Brabantio with “the devil will make a grandsire of you” (1.1.88-90). What, exactly, are we meant to believe makes Othello “the devil”? Brabantio says of his daughter’s decision to marry Othello, “She is abused, stolen from me and corrupted / By spells and medicines bought of mountebanks” (1.3.61-62). This tie Brabantio perceives Othello as having to some form of witchcraft, sorcery, or paganism suggests that Brabantio sees Othello as foreign or, at the least, not a Christian. Whether this perception is because of the color of Othello’s skin, his familial line, the place of his birth, or his religion is difficult to tell. However, early modern perceptions of difference suggest that it probably would not have been a result of his appearance alone. Brabantio, in a similar vein, says, “O thou foul thief, where hast thou stowed my daughter? / Damned as thou art, thou hast enchanted her” (1.2.62-63). These lines in conjunction with “thou hast practised on her with foul charms” only serve to solidify our understanding that Brabantio believes Othello does not practice Christianity and is, instead, practicing a religion or paganism that involves enchantments and charms (though he is most likely thought to be Muslim) (1.2.73).

Seeing how Iago pairs things like skin color and foreign religion demonstrates what can be described as the beginnings of racist ideologies, and he plays off other characters’ misconceptions in order to further his plots against Othello. He had to paint Othello as more than someone who is simply different in appearance; racist ideologies can be seen developing

here as Othello is demeaned in a variety of ways. Iago links negative ideas surrounding Othello to his skin color, presumably in an attempt to make others see Othello as inherently different.

Historicism, in this light, not only offers up more avenues for interpretation than presentism does but also complicates what may otherwise seem obvious in the play. Rather than seeing acts as outrightly racist, we are instead left with a diversity of ways to define early modern difference, some of which may lead us to conclude that the play is racist while others negate this possibility. Therefore, if we employ historicism as a means of discovering how racist ideologies developed over time, we might be able to make more of a connection between the two approaches and bridge some gaps in a given audience's (possibly students in a classroom) understanding. Both presentism and historicism, then, are useful for discussing difference in *Othello*, but they provide unique means of navigating this topic, and can lead to profoundly different interpretations of the text. Nonetheless, locating the similarities between the construction of early modern social ideologies and how ideas surrounding race function today is one way of squaring the two approaches. More important than finding how they can be compatible, though, is keeping both in mind despite their incompatibilities when considering how to appropriately talk or write about texts like *Othello*.

CHAPTER TWO: TRANSLATING *AS YOU LIKE IT*'S ROSALIND-GANYMEDE

“The actors are at hand. And by their show you shall know all, that you are like to know” (William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1.188-19)

In this chapter, I will explore approaches, both historicist and presentist, to interpreting gender in *As You Like It*. The corresponding sections, however, will appear much different here than they did in the previous chapter. Instead of incorporating scholarly articles that present more obviously as historicist or presentist, I have, instead, included sources with historicist or presentist tendencies that I believe are most useful for interpreting and thinking about gender in the play. This chapter also includes a section on the interpretive possibilities that arise from competing portrayals of Rosalind, as well as the relevant considerations necessary for manipulating interpretive outcomes; my hope is that this bridges the gap between the historicist and presentist sections in a way that is useful for understanding the kinds of reactions different versions of Rosalind can and did elicit from audiences. Lastly, this chapter includes a section on the political implications of adopting historicism and presentism in hopes of making the gravity of that decision evident for people, such as teachers and scholars, in positions of influence.

Historicizing Gender in *As You Like It*

That Shakespeare is playing with gender in *As You Like It* becomes even more apparent when we look at how it would have originally been performed. Since all parts were played by men, a male actor would have played the part of Rosalind, and typically, audience members would have been expected to look past the sex of the person underneath the costume by interpreting characters like Rosalind as women and not as male actors playing women. But this particular play would have made this typical task of the audience much more difficult.

For much of the play, Rosalind disguises herself as a man named Ganymede. And under the guise of Ganymede, she pretends to be Rosalind in order to cure Orlando of his infatuation with her. Thus, performing this play in Shakespeare's day meant a man had to dress as a woman who disguises herself as a man and also, at times, pretends to be a woman—making gender out to be rather flexible and malleable. Add this to the fact that all other female characters were played by men, and it seems as though Shakespeare tasked his audiences with noting the gender transformations that took place through costuming and performance, which was necessary if they were going to keep track of everything that was happening on stage, and recognizing these as translatable, part of what everyone does all the time in their adherence (or not) to cultural expectations.

Stephen Greenblatt, in *Shakespearean Negotiations* (1988), reflects on the cross-gendered performances that took place on the Shakespearean stage as they relate to both early modern ideas surrounding gender and how we can make sense of all the gender-blurring in the midst of distinctly different representations of masculinity and femininity:

Within the imaginary women's bodies, there are other bodies—the bodies of the actors playing the parts of Shakespearean women. From the perspective of the medical discourse . . . this final transvestism serves to secure theatrically the dual account of gender: on the one hand, we have plays that insist upon the chafing between the two sexes and the double nature of individuals; on the other hand, we have a theater that reveals, in the presence of the man's (or boy's) body beneath the woman's clothes, a different sexual reality. The open secret of identity—that within differentiated individuals is a single structure, identifiably male—is presented literally in the all-male cast . . .

Presented but not represented, for the play . . . cannot continue without the fictive existence of two distinct genders and the friction between them. (93)

Here, Greenblatt reminds us that an early modern audience was meant to imagine that the women characters on stage were actually women, despite the fact that they knew all the parts were played by men and boys. And while these performances usually drew clear distinctions between the gendered parts, they simultaneously highlighted that it was all an act; this, in turn, would have reminded audiences of the single gender represented on stage beneath the costuming—that which, in the presence of early modern ideas of anatomy and biology, was also the foundation for the bodies of women.

With Greenblatt's ideas in mind, I would like to take a look at *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (1992), by the influential Thomas Laqueur, which is a helpful starting place for gaining clarity on how bodies were perceived, and thus portrayed, in the Renaissance. In this work, he notes that “the more Renaissance anatomists dissected, looked into, and visually represented the female body, the more powerfully and convincingly they saw it to be a version of the male's” (70). This idea was explored in various early modern artforms and certainly would not have been neglected on the stage. Interesting, however, are the opposing perspectives with which we can approach this information. On the one hand, this paints a picture of Renaissance culture as incredibly sexist, especially in conjunction with the discourse surrounding women as “inversions” of men. Greenblatt nods to this, saying, “characters like Rosalind and Viola pass through the state of being men in order to become women. Shakespearean women are in this sense the representation of Shakespearean men, the projected mirror images of masculine self-differentiation” (92). In other words, highlighting the distinctions between men and women was a way to mark what

makes the former superior to the latter. On the other hand, it opens the door to the possibility that figures such as Shakespeare were interested in the malleability, flexibility, and performativity of gender. That is, while Greenblatt and Lacquer point us to early modern ideas concerning biology that can give us some insight into the minds of Shakespeare's audiences, Shakespeare is still unique in his concern with what we can identify today as gender performativity. His ideas, in other words, are not necessarily a direct reflection of how the culture thought about gender. It is the early modern anatomical understanding of the difference between men and women, therefore, that opens the door to Shakespeare's ideas, which he developed through many years of working in theatre—where men dressed as women and everything was about performance.

Not only, then, was Shakespeare mindful that *As You Like It's* gender-blurring would pose an intellectual challenge for his audiences, but he likely had reason for challenging them. If we were to imagine Shakespeare as ahead of his time, which he certainly was in many ways, we could align his ideas concerning gender with those of Judith Butler. Butler, of course, rejects the notion that we are essentially one gender or another and, instead, views gender as performative. It follows, then, that where Laqueur is interested in biology, Butler is, instead, interested in the norms we reflect through performance. Therefore, in order to transition from Laqueur to Butler, we have to imagine how the early modern anatomy Laqueur focuses on—which led people to believe that male biology was foundational to female biology—is actually reminiscent of a kind of genderlessness. That is, if everyone is inherently one gender, there can be no gender at all. Butler's ideas on performativity can, therefore, lead us to a better understanding of what Shakespeare had in mind with the gender-blurring that takes place in *As You Like It*. But how can we talk about historicist scholarship,

Shakespeare's aims, and Butler's ideas all in the same breath? Starting with the following excerpt from Butler's *Undoing Gender* (2004), I would like to explore the connection between Butler's ideas and Shakespeare's more fully:

If gender is performative, then it follows that the reality of gender is itself produced as an effect of the performance. Although there are norms that govern what will and will not be real, and what will and will not be intelligible, they are called into question and reiterated at the moment in which performativity begins its citational practice. One surely cites norms that already exist, but these norms can . . . be exposed as nonnatural and nonnecessary when they take place in a context and through a form of embodying that defies normative expectation. What this means is that through the practice of gender performativity, we not only see how the norms that govern reality are cited but grasp one of the mechanisms by which reality is reproduced and altered in the course of that reproduction. (218)

Individuals, from her perspective, perpetuate dominant social ideas of how a person should think or act, but they are not inherently feminine or masculine. With the nature of casting early modern plays and the ease with which Rosalind fools those around her in mind, it is not a leap to imagine that Shakespeare, too, thought of gender as performative and desired to express this to his audiences. That is not to say that anyone from the Renaissance would have subscribed to Butler's ideas, but her work is useful in that it gives us some of the vocabulary necessary for interpreting and then articulating Shakespeare's moves concerning gender and performance, which we can certainly understand to be the result of his longtime involvement in the theatre, and their effects. In what is perhaps the most famous quote from the play, Jacques declares that "All the world's a stage" (2.7.140). And it is one of a plethora of clues

that alert us to Shakespeare's preoccupation with a kind of performance that is not restricted to theatre alone. The ambiguous gender of the Rosalind/Ganymede character, heightened by the fact that a biologically male actor lies just beneath the costume, demonstrates an idea of gender performativity similar to that which we see explored throughout Butler's work.

Rosalind is, of course, Shakespeare's primary means of evidencing the idea that gender is performative, non-essential. She even states, as though winking to the audience, "I'll prove a busy actor" (3.4.55). That she does, even until the very end of the play. In fact, that there is no real resolution in Rosalind's gender (that is, she cannot be easily identified as either male or female) in the epilogue might be the biggest clue to the notion of gender Shakespeare is trying to tune his audience into. She starts out by acknowledging, "It is not the fashion to see the lady the / Epilogue" (1). So of course, while reading or watching the play, you would assume Rosalind is appearing to the audience, even if unconventionally, as Rosalind and not as Ganymede. However, she throws a wrench in that assumption near the end of her speech with the phrase, "If I were a / woman" (16-17). It is deliberately unclear, then, whether we are listening to Rosalind, Ganymede, or simply a boy actor, even though one can usually find Rosalind's name next to the epilogue while reading it. Shakespeare only adds to this ambiguity in the epilogue by addressing the men and the women of the audience separately, alerting us to the fact that we are supposed to be thinking about gender. Thus, just when audience members think the play has resolved neatly through the marriage of Rosalind to Orlando and situated each character into their "correct" identity categories, they are prompted to revisit the idea of gender performance. That audiences are left without real closure, unable to assign the actor of the epilogue to a strict gender category, says that Shakespeare must have wanted audience members to leave with something perplexing and

new to think about. Perhaps he was demonstrating to his audiences that everyone is, at all times, acting—reflecting, through dress and performance, ideas about gender that are socially constructed.

Portraying Rosalind

Because the dominant means of performing plays like this on the early modern stage involved the playing of all parts—even women’s—by an all-male cast, there have long been concerns surrounding the casting of women’s roles in the reproduction of these plays. Certainly, today, it is uncommon to see Shakespeare performed by an all-male cast due to the historically exclusionary nature of such performances. Those involved in the development of contemporary performances of these plays tend to subscribe to the notion that, if the character in question is a woman, it should be played by one. Nonetheless, there are scholars for whom the nature of the creation of those roles for their originally intended audiences is at the forefront of their concern over casting. Lorraine Helms, in “Playing the Woman’s Part: Feminist Criticism and Shakespearean Performance,” reminds readers that women’s roles were designed in a way that would support an audience’s task of distinguishing between the male actors on the stage; that is, the women’s parts, in a way, were more like caricatures than true and fair representations of women in early modern society. She argues, for contemporary adaptations in which a woman now fills the role of a woman’s character, “textual strategies, originally designed to feminize the boy actor, may infantilize or eroticize the woman who now plays the woman’s part” (192). Helms includes, also, the opinions of those who agree that these roles, if unchanged, should be played by men, but who have come to this conclusion by different means, saying they

have argued that female roles originally written by men for male performers—the Medeas and Antigones of the Greek theatre as well as the Rosalinds and Cleopatras of Shakespeare’s—are caricatures, and that they should again be played by men to emphasize the fact that the classic roles are, in Sue-Ellen Case’s phrase, “classic drag.” (191-92)

This view of Shakespeare’s cross-dressing roles as early drag is, based on my research, not the dominant approach to understanding and casting these roles. However, Helms and others seem to agree that many modern performances, by casting women, are not accomplishing the sort of feminist advancement they think they are. That is why she argues that, through certain “explorations and affirmations, feminist Shakespeareans may begin to create a theatre where patriarchal representations of femininity can be transformed into roles for living women” (200). Helms’s solution, then, lies not in the continuation of casting of men for women’s parts, but in the rethinking of those roles so that women can perform them without demeaning themselves.

Helms, referring to Declan Donnellan’s all-male production of the play, seems to suggest that what can be accomplished through this sort of production allows the gender play inherent in *As You Like It* to remain intact:

If Adrian Lester can play a woman pretending to be the strong man that his physical presence proclaims him to be, while convincing the audience that that physical presence is a charade enacted by a woman, a woman actress can and must also create the illusion that her womanhood is, in the final instance, a charade. Would an audience allow it? Probably not. We are too literal. The only way to do it effectively in the modern theater would be to cross-dress everyone. (279)

This proposal to cross-dress all characters, even if in jest, is not far off from what many presentist or otherwise modern adaptations have begun to do with Shakespeare's works. However, the approaches to portrayals of Rosalind that seem most popular today involve casting a female lead and emphasizing her femininity, rather than the gender performativity that portrayals of her character originally emphasized. The concerns over casting outlined in this section become especially interesting with the epilogue to *As You Like It* at the forefront. It reads as follows:

It is not the fashion to see the lady the
 Epilogue, but it is no more unhandsome than to see
 the lord the Prologue. If it be true that good wine needs
 no bush, 'tis true that a good play needs no epilogue.
 Yet to good wine they do use good bushes, and good
 plays prove the better by the help of good epilogues.
 What a case am I in then, that am neither a good
 Epilogue, nor cannot insinuate with you in the behalf
 of a good play. I am not furnished like a beggar,
 therefore to beg will not become me. My way is to
 conjure you, and I'll begin with the women. I charge
 you, O women, for the love you bear to men, to like as
 much of this play as please you. And I charge you, O
 men, for the love you bear to women (as I perceive by
 your simpering none of you hates them), that between
 you and the women the play may please. If I were a

woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards that
 pleased me, complexions that liked me and breaths
 that I defied not. And I am sure as many as have good
 beards, or good faces, or sweet breaths will for my
 kind offer, when I make curtsy, bid me farewell. (epilogue, 1-21)

If this epilogue is delivered by a man, audiences are likely to see the person in front of them as an actor cast in a play drawing attention to the fact that he was only pretending to be a woman for its duration. However, if these lines are delivered by a woman, they become slightly more confusing. The use of the word “I” in “If I were a woman” suggests either that a woman was not meant for this part at the time it was written or that she is speaking to the audience from the voice of Ganymede. Regardless of the gender of the actor delivering these lines, the epilogue is jarring because it takes place after the marriage of Rosalind, appearing as herself, to Orlando. On the Renaissance stage, a male actor delivering the lines would remind audiences that he has been performing gender the entire time. In most contemporary performances, however, the woman who delivers these lines, whether she appears as Rosalind or as Ganymede, is not likely to have the same effect as her male counterpart. Both are entertaining with merit of their own, but only one seems to get at what Shakespeare was saying about gender performativity.

Greenblatt notes that there are recognizable patterns in Shakespeare’s comedies, and these patterns are especially relevant to discussions of what *As You Like It* does with gender and sexuality. According to Greenblatt, “Shakespearean comedy constantly appeals to the body and in particular to sexuality as the heart of its theatrical magic; ‘great creating nature’—the principal by which the world is and must be peopled—is the comic playwright’s

tutelary spirit” (86). A Renaissance audience, then, may have been groomed to tune in to the very things Shakespeare wanted them to pay attention to. And by seeing a male actor, already cast in a female role, repeatedly undergo gender transformations on stage, this audience would have been better situated than a modern one, especially one that is reading the play instead of watching it, to identify the themes at work. Greenblatt also asks some important questions concerning the invention of Shakespearean comedies, as well as proposes a means by which we can go about answering them:

How does a play come to possess sexual energy? What happens when a body is translated from “reality” to the stage or when a male actor is translated into the character of a woman? What does it mean for a Renaissance comedy, the most artificial of forms, to invoke nature or for nature, in the reified form of medical discourse, to assume the artificial form of a Renaissance comedy? By focusing on the precise shape of certain cultural figures for the body—here the body as natural transvestite . . . —we can venture an answer to these questions . . . we can comprehend why Shakespeare repeatedly calls attention to the playing of all women’s parts . . . by boys. (87)

The implications of the act of translation that Greenblatt describes would be difficult to see today, especially with a woman playing Rosalind. Contemporary interpretations and casting decisions, therefore, may have to decide between preserving what the role accomplished on the early modern stage and allowing the play to take on new life for another purpose. In the section that follows, I will examine a recent portrayal of Rosalind in film and more fully explore how such a portrayal invites different possibilities for interpreting the play than a more traditional, historicist account would.

Presentist Perspectives

Many contemporary performances and film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays are, in that they simultaneously transform and translate his works for the enjoyment of modern audiences, presentist approaches to interpreting them. Thus, for the purposes of this section, I'll be looking at one such approach that, without necessarily claiming to be presentist, takes on the garment of presentism, as well as modern feminism, in its interpretation and portrayal of *As You Like It*. This decision to uphold a film adaptation as representative of or compatible with the larger body of presentist scholarship on Shakespeare is, admittedly, a bold one. A presentist scholar might be concerned, for example, that a film like this one is crafted with the intention of reaching a broad audience of mostly non-scholars and, because of the medium, fails to include explanations for key interpretive decisions. But this decision was made, in part, because of what I understand—as a result of my research—to be a lack of presentist scholarship on gender in *As You Like It*. Nonetheless, the issue of audience, I would argue, can be cleared up by returning to the heart of presentism, which has to do with making works accessible in the present, as well as applicable to contemporary social issues and modern conversations; of course, audiences watching Shakespeare's film adaptations are some of the people who carry on those conversations. In addition, because we have access to Shakespeare's *As You Like It* in print, it is not difficult to come to conclusions about key interpretive moments in a film adaptation; we can see very clearly what has been added, as well as what has been cut, and make some educated guesses as to why.

In the 2006 film adaptation of *As You Like It*, directed by Kenneth Branagh, Rosalind is depicted as almost inordinately feminine, with makeup, flowers in her hair, and a soft voice (see figure 1).



Figure 1. Rosalind Whispering in Celia's Ear in Branagh's *As You Like It* (2006)

Furthermore, she is frequently, visually emotional and the film highlights moments in which she expresses difficulty suppressing these emotions. In the well-known scene in which she plans the details of her disguise and escape with Celia, the idea of dressing like a man is almost too shocking for her to say aloud. In the text, however, Rosalind appears to have great fun imagining how she will carry out this deception; the conversation reads as follows:

Were it not better,
 Because that I am more than common tall,
 That I did suit me all points like a man?
 A gallant curtal-axe upon my thigh,
 A boar-spear in my hand, and in my heart,
 Lie there what hidden woman's fear there will,
 We'll have a swashing and a martial outside,
 As many other mannish cowards have
 That do outface it with their semblances. (1.3.111-19)

These lines emphasize how convinced Rosalind is that she can successfully play the part of a man. Importantly, the movie changes this scene, leaving lines 111-13 (through “That I did suit me all points like a man?”) and excluding the costuming details. The decision to cut these lines speaks volumes to the version of *As You Like It* Branagh was setting up for his audiences—one that downplays gender performativity in exchange for an adaptation that aligns much more easily with the kind of feminism associated with gender essentialism (that is, not Butler’s). The adaptation’s emphasis on the femininity of Rosalind makes it difficult for audiences to ever see her as anything other than a woman in man’s clothing, which is strikingly different from what an early modern audience would have experienced. In fact, the only reason we can buy the idea that Orlando does not recognize Rosalind when she is pretending to be Ganymede is because she kept a fan before her face for the majority of their time together at their first meeting.

When Rosalind speaks to Orlando as Ganymede for the first time, she does so loudly and aggressively in an attempt to trick him into thinking she is a man; she adopts a persona she thinks she needs based on her understanding of how men behave, but in doing so comes across to viewers as silly and artificial. It is difficult, furthermore, to believe anyone would buy her disguise, much less Orlando, since she looks so much like a woman in man’s clothing (see figure 2).



Figure 2. Rosalind (in the Ganymede Costume) with Orlando in Branagh's *As You Like It* (2006)

This film adaptation approaches the play with a sort of presentist feminism, making the notion of gender that comes across on-screen look much different from what we would expect to see in a historicist film version of the play (and there are many examples). That is, whereas Branagh's *As You Like It* reflects a "gender as essential" feminism in which the male and female characters really only ever fit into their original, strict gender categories, a historicist approach to the play, with a Butlerian feminism in mind, would reveal a playfulness concerning gender that regards it as both performative and non-essential. For the purposes of this discussion, it is important to note that Branagh's adaptation deliberately cuts the lines where Rosalind describes the masculine costume she could take on as her disguise. In the text, she says, "A gallant curtal-axe upon my thigh, / A boar-spear in my hand" (1.3.114-15). We might interpret this scene as one in which Rosalind considers the "acting" involved in playing a male role, as even the accessories she describes can be seen as over-

the-top masculine, a form of costume even for a man. The most notable effect of the portrayal of Rosalind that we get from this film is that, by omission of key lines and an emphasis on her undeniable, unalterable femininity, gender performativity is muted. A presentist reading of the play, then, tells a story of the power one woman took up through cunning despite being stuck in a misogynist culture. Truthfully, this message is one modern audiences are likely to gravitate toward upon seeing nearly any adaptation of the play, and certainly upon reading the text for themselves. This is because, without seeing men play the parts of the women in the play, the play's concern with gender performance—which seems so obvious under a historicist light—is less heightened.

The Politics of Interpreting *As You Like It*

Dympna Callaghan, through a historicist lens in *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage* (2000), explores the notion that women's parts in Shakespeare's plays—because they were designed to be played by men—were thus not intended to be true representations of women or their experiences. But where her historicist approach starts to deviate from the Butlerian historicism I laid out in the beginning of this chapter is in her understanding of what this representation says about gender essentialism. According to Callaghan, “In the context of early modern theatre, gender identities remained sufficiently inflexible to prohibit women from the stage, and the danger of the anti-essentialist argument is that it fetishistically disavows difference altogether” (167). The danger she refers to is something that appears to align her with the kind of feminism that is more popular today than it was in the prime of Butler's feminism—the kind that we are more likely to see reflected in a presentist approach to *As You Like It* and one that

is concerned with how you can fight for a group if you cannot clearly and effectively articulate what is different about it.

Terence Hawkes made the case for a presentist approach to Shakespeare's work in the introduction of his book *Shakespeare in the Present* (2002) with the following:

History is far too important to be left to scholars who believe themselves able to make contact with a past unshaped by their own concerns. All history, said Benedetto Croce, is contemporary history. The present ranks, not as an obstacle to be avoided, nor as a prison to be escaped from. Quite the reverse: it's a factor actively to be sought out, grasped and perhaps, as a result, understood. If an intrusive, shaping awareness of ourselves, alive and active in our own world, defines us, then it deserves our closest attention. Paying the present that degree of respect might more profitably be judged, not as a 'mistake', egregious and insouciant, blandly imposing a tritely modern perspective on whatever texts confront it, but rather as the basis of a critical stance whose engagement with the text is of a particular character. A Shakespeare criticism that takes that on board will not yearn to speak with the dead. It will aim, in the end, to talk to the living. (3-4)

Deciding between adopting a historicist or a presentist approach to *As You Like It* is not one to be taken lightly, as I think this excerpt and this chapter have made clear, though Hawkes's argument for presentism is certainly a compelling one. The presentist approach is important, in part, because it involves listening to current conversations and concerns and allowing a Shakespearean text to speak to those concerns. Applying a presentist approach to *As You Like It* allows us to interpret Rosalind as a kind of feminist heroine who overcomes the obstacles before her, using the tools she has available to her to save her own life despite being caught

up in a system that oppresses women. Presentism here requires, furthermore, a sort of authenticity in that it admits to the fact that the lens of the present must skew or else color everything we read of the past. Historicism, on the other hand, allows us to understand not only how a role like Rosalind's functioned at a historical point in time, but also how translating that role into the present can be helpful or hurtful to a modern cause or social movement. In addition, it compels us to come to terms with the early modern tradition of cross-dressing characters and how that information can greatly affect our understandings of what Shakespeare was actually accomplishing through this play. A historicist approach to this play acknowledges, furthermore, that the past, too, is an inescapable part of the present and, thus, that understanding Shakespeare's world is still useful for helping us understand our own.

With consideration for the benefits of each approach, however, comes the concern for what happens when one of them is chosen over the other. As the discussions of *Othello* in the previous chapter and *As You Like It* in this chapter demonstrate, the most responsible scholarship and teaching takes place when we are able to consider multiple and competing perspectives. Part of this task, then, is recognizing what is lost when we exclude one approach in favor of the other. Both of the plays examined in this thesis demonstrate, for example, that historicism may have the unintended effect of making the contemporary issues of our audiences seem irrelevant or unimportant. On the other hand, a presentist approach can clearly lead to misrepresentations of both Shakespeare and history. Therefore, it is important to recognize what there is to gain through presentism and historicism so that we can know what is lost when we privilege one over the other. Attention to the political implications of

adopting these approaches is, therefore, how we can come to employ these approaches responsibly.

REFERENCES

- As You Like It*. Directed by Kenneth Branagh, performances by Romola Garai, Bryce Dallas Howard, Kevin Kline, Adrian Lester, Janet McTeer, Alfred Molina, and David Oyelowo, HBO Films, 2006.
- Butler, Judith. *Undoing Gender*. Routledge, New York, 2004.
- Callaghan, Dymphna. *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*. Vol. 97. John Wiley & Sons Inc, Chichester, West Sussex, 2016.
- . *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage*. Routledge, New York, 2000.
- Charnes, Linda. "Shakespeare, and Belief, in the Future." *Shakespearean Criticism*, vol. 122, 2009, pp. 64-78.
- Cohen, Stephen. "I Am what I Am Not: Identifying with the Other in *Othello*." *Shakespeare Survey*, vol. 64, 2011, pp. 163-79.
- Corredera, Vanessa. "'Not a Moor Exactly': Shakespeare, Serial, and Modern Constructions of Race." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 67, no. 1, 2016, pp. 30-51.
- Dimock, Wai C. "Editor's Column: Historicism, Presentism, Futurism." *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, vol. 133, no. 2, 2018, pp. 257-63.
- Fernie, Ewan. "Shakespeare and the Prospect of Presentism." *Shakespeare Survey*, vol. 58, 2005, pp. 169-84.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1993.
- Grady, Hugh, and Terence Hawkes. *Presentist Shakespeares*. Routledge, New York, 2007.

- Grady, Kyle. "Othello, Colin Powell, and Post-Racial Anachronisms." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 67, no. 1, 2016, pp. 68-83.
- Greenblatt, Stephen Jay. *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. University of California Press, 1988.
- Hawkes, Terence. *Shakespeare in the Present*. Routledge, London, 2002.
- Helms, Lorraine. "Playing the Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism and Shakespearean Performance." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 41, no. 2, 1989, pp. 190-200.
- Holbo, John. "Shakespeare Now: The Function of Presentism at the Critical Time." *Literature Compass*, vol. 5, no. 6, 2008, pp. 1097-110.
- Laqueur, Thomas. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Lewis, Sarah. "Shakespeare, Time, Theory." *Literature Compass*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2014, pp. 246-57.
- Loomba, Ania. "Early Modern or Early Colonial?" *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, vol. 14 no. 1, 2014, pp. 143-48.
- Miller, G. "Cross-Gender Casting as Feminist Interventions in the Staging of Early Modern Plays." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2014, pp. 4-17.
- Nicholson, C. "Othello and the Geography of Persuasion." *English Literary Renaissance*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2010, pp. 56-87.
- Parker, Kim, et al. "Multiracial in America: Proud, Diverse and Growing in Numbers." *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project*, 23 Oct. 2018, www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/06/11/multiracial-in-america/.

Saunders, Ben. "Iago's Clyster: Purgation, Anality, and the Civilizing Process." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 55, no. 2, 2004, pp. 148-76.

Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Edited by Burton Raffel. Yale University Press, New Haven, 2005.

---. *As You like It*. Edited by Juliet Dusinberre, 3rd ed., Bloomsbury, 2006.

---. *Othello*. Edited by E. A. J. Honigmann, 3rd ed., Bloomsbury, 2014.

---. "Sonnet 20: A woman's face with nature's own hand painted." *Poetry Foundation*, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/50425/sonnet-20-a-womans-face-with-natures-own-hand-painted.

Smith, Ian. "We are Othello: Speaking of Race in Early Modern Studies." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 67, no. 1, 2016, pp. 104-24.

Young, Sandra. "Imagining Alterity and Belonging on the English Stage in an Age of Expansion: A Reading of *Othello*." *Shakespeare in Southern Africa*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2011, pp. 21-29.

VITA

Personal Background

Ariella Singleton

Born April 18, 1995, Arlington, TX

Education

Diploma, St. Paul's Preparatory Academy, Arlington, 2013

Bachelor of Arts, English, University of Texas at

Arlington, Arlington, 2017

Experience

Writing Center Tutor, University of Texas at Arlington,

2017

Grader, Texas Christian University, 2017

Teaching Assistant, Texas Christian University, 2017-2018

Graduate Instructor, Texas Christian University, 2018-2019

ABSTRACT

THE POLITICS OF INTERPRETATION: PRESENTIST AND HISTORICIST
PERSPECTIVES OF *OTHELLO* AND *AS YOU LIKE IT*

by Ariella Singleton, 2019
Department of English
Texas Christian University

Thesis Advisor: Daniel Juan Gil, Professor of English

This thesis explores what presentist and historicist scholarship on *Othello*, *As You Like It*, and Shakespeare more broadly reveals about not only the fundamentals of both presentism and historicism, but also the benefits and downfalls of each in analyses of Shakespeare's works. This exploration is premised on two things. First, *Othello* and *As You Like It* provide uniquely appropriate jumping-off points for talking about race and gender through historicism and presentism. Second, there are political implications to employing these approaches that make them worth exploring in a thesis-length project.