

or other figures of alterity are portrayed. Researchers also looked at how those issues intersect with things like class, gender and beauty..”

Three main streams of thought have developed regarding discussions of race and the early modern period. The first group, Corredera says, believes scholars can legitimately talk about race during that period. “Obviously there is interest in skin color, what we would call ethnicity, regional difference and religious difference (such as in Shakespeare’s ‘The Merchant of Venice’). The language used and attitudes taken are about something equivalent to race, differences that are categorical and cannot be changed.”

“But,” she continues, “other scholars say we cannot discuss race because it is something we now describe as being biological; there was no concept of biology at that time. They also say that ‘race’ during the early modern period referred to familial relations.” A third category of scholars warns against imposing “modern conceptions of racial difference, such as the emphasis on skin color, which is not only modern, but, to a certain degree, very American.”

Still, discussions of race and the early modern period continue. Among those scholars who have decided to move on from the debate, some focus on how “Renaissance literature illustrates or addresses the racial or ethnic issues of the time.” Others, such as Corredera, “look at the way that Shakespeare speaks to current racial issues.” Corredera, and scholars like her, examine “modern appropriations of Shakespeare, such as YouTube videos, film adaptations, modern theater performances, novel adaptations, art installations, etc.”

Inspired by the work of scholars Ayanna Thompson, Kim Hall and Peter Erickson and the conversations at the seminar on Shakespeare and race, Corredera has begun working on a book on modern representations of “Othello” from 1994–2014. “I chose 1994 as the inner parameter for my study because of the O.J. Simpson trial; it was not just about race relations, it was also about black masculinity. He was a charming, African-American football player in an interracial relationship; I would not be the first to make the connection between his case and ‘Othello,’” she says. In fact, the similarities were referenced in newspapers and newscasts during the trial.

LEFT: Vanessa Corredera in front of *The Globe* at the 2016 World Shakespeare Congress in Stratford-Upon-Avon and London

Corredera is using 2014, the date “Serial” was broadcast, as the outer parameter for her study. She plans to work chronologically through several versions of “Othello” as represented across different media, such as a young adult novel, a podcast, a film and a modern play adaptation.

“I want to analyze why ‘Othello’ appears in the various mediums, what ideas or issues about race and racial theory the texts are engaging,” Corredera says, “and why the authors/creators choose to work with Shakespeare.” She notes that “Shakespeare” is a loaded term that refers not only to all Shakespearean texts, but also to William Shakespeare the person, as well as “all our cultural ideas about Shakespeare as the great humanist, the universal Shakespeare and the genius Shakespeare.”

In light of this, Corredera asks, “What do these re-imaginings of ‘Othello’ tell us about how we imagine Shakespeare and how we imagine Shakespeare in relation to race? Does Shakespeare allow us to see different things about race that we otherwise wouldn’t? Is Shakespeare antagonistic to productive discussions about race and racial relations?” Corredera aims to answer these questions in

*“Does Shakespeare allow us to see different things about race that we otherwise wouldn’t?”*

her book, which she sees as being “particularly timely for the current American context.”

Corredera’s current research project is a slight departure from her doctoral work on “The Early Modern Face: Physiognomy On and Off the English Stage,” which she completed at Northwestern University (2012). However, the two projects are connected by the concept of otherness, whether it is described in facial features or race. “For my dissertation I looked at archives, primary material and physiognomic texts to examine what they said about the com-



plexion and the face and what that tells the reader about how they can interpret someone else’s nature and character,” she explains.

The physiognomy research, Corredera clarifies, “is not a race project, it’s much broader. Race is part of the transactional social relationship context for physiognomy.” The concept of complexion and its representation, however, was a topic she explored in her dissertation, particularly with regard to Thomas Dekker’s drama “Lust’s Dominion.” The overlap between the two projects lies in questions about conceptions of the other. Both projects, Corredera says, analyze “social relationships and how they appear in literature” as well as the “intersection between race and gender in literature.”

Corredera has recently published revised chapters of her dissertation as a chapter in James A. Knapp’s 2015 “Shakespeare and the Power of the Face” titled, “Complex Complexions: The Facial Signification of the Black Other in ‘Lust’s Dominion’” (Ashgate), and as an article, “Faces and Figures of Fortune: Astrological Physiognomy in ‘Tamburlaine Part 1,’” in the Winter 2015 issue of “Early Modern Literary Studies.”

“The broad research interests” of how race, gender and social relationships are represented in literature “span across all my projects,” Corredera muses, “but they are manifested differently depending on the method, texts and theoretical frame. I think I’m still asking similar questions, just through different methods, with different texts and different foci.”

1 Sarah Koenig, “The Alibi,” Serial, podcast audio, October 3, 2014, <https://serialpodcast.org/season-one/1/the-alibi>