

# Italy vs. Africa

## *Topographies of desire in Othello, Antony and Cleopatra and The Tempest*

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This paper calls attention to the ambivalent divide which Shakespeare constructs in his dramas of desire and empire, where territory, maps and place names become intermingled in a nest of stories where the exotic other, racial difference and antipodean cultures are made to clash or merge, in order to represent the paradox of desire, its power as well as its shame in the tensions it arouses with the duties or landmarks of a character's original cultural background. The encounter between "an erring barbarian and a super-subtle Venetian" (Othello, I.3.348-49), the overcoming of 'Mars' by a 'gypsy' s lust' (Antony and Cleopatra, I.1.4-10) and the marriage of an Italian princess to an African (The Tempest, II.1.122-23), all predicate desire on tropes of otherness by associating it with various geographical sites where Italy –be it Venice, Rome, Milan or Naples– is opposed to as well as paired with Africa. Beyond intertextual resonances, such 'geography of difference' (John Gillies) works towards an exploration of the contrarities of desire and serves to promote an anthropological approach to gender and sexuality.

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