Many years ago now, I was reading an article by Bernadette Andrea on Leo Africanus, the North African traveler who was enslaved by Europeans, presented as a gift to the Pope, learned Italian and Latin on top of his native Arabic, and wrote the premier Renaissance geography of Africa because of his voluntary and involuntary travels--and so became a primary source for Shakespeare's *Othello*. Suddenly, I saw, in a quotation from the original Italian version of his geography, that he termed North Africans "Bianchi." Lightning struck. The woman that Cassio in Shakespeare's *Othello* takes up with on Cyprus is named "Bianca," the feminine singular in Italian of this very word. Since the 1960s, I had seen and read about many productions of this play that employed Anglo-African or African-American actresses for this role. What if this were not a modern notion--what if the original audience, from that single word, understood Bianca, like Othello, to come from Africa?

Rather than reprise my essay and conclusions to this question in Judy's festschrift, today I'd like to talk about the philological method of my essay, and the origins of my field in the marriage of philology and the study of Classical literature. When I had finished my essay, "Bianca: The Other African in *Othello*," what were to me the most surprising and hard-earned insights, the philological ones, had been relegated to the notes. So I'm glad today to have an opportunity to talk about them. I'll start by explaining the derivation of this method, then how I used it in this essay, and end with my long friendship with Judy that enabled me to capitalize on the insight I had.
English Studies, Philology, and Classics

Philology has a long history intertwined with the history of the study of the Classics. Plato's *Cratylus*, Varro's *De Lingua Latina*, and Isidore of Seville's *De Etymologia* are all concerned with the interpretation of words by understanding their origins. The Renaissance recovery of the classics and the Reformation reinterpretation of the Bible both depend heavily on philological methods. By the mid-nineteenth century, "philology" could refer either to "the study of Classics, embodying a focus on language" and especially "comparative philology" and the evolution of families of language (Alan Bacon 11-12)--what came to be called the "embryology of the subject" (D. W. Palmer 76), or "Altertumwissenschaft," the German school emphasizing the historical "study of the ancient world in all its aspects, rather than the subjects of language and literature" (Bacon 4).

Both of these definitions actually descend to English Studies from the study of Classics. In addition, English "took its informing spirit from Classics, as an instrument of cultural education" (Palmer, 64)--as D. W. Palmer puts it, and which we would probably today call "cultural currency." English Studies became established at Oxford University, for example, not through literature, but at first through philology--the study of Anglo Saxon and the development of the English language (Bacon, 12-14).

One great irony, then, of the relationship of Classics to English, is that, once English modeled itself on classical scholarship, especially the offshoot of the new school of German philology, then English was in a position to replace Classics as the centerpiece of Anglo-American education. And what English most importantly learned through this route was the importance of the minutiae of language study and language evolution to the understanding of
literature as an embodiment of a nation's history and culture. In its simplest form, then, philology was viewed as a restoring of a reading or meaning that had been lost over the ages and this restoration depended--as Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, for example, pointed out for the Bible--on as much learning about the original language and the historical context as could be accumulated.

**Shakespeare's Bianca in Othello**

In my article for Judy's festschrift, I argue that the name for Cassio's lover on Cyprus in Shakespeare's *Othello*, "Bianca," indicates her place of origin. Bianca's name, derived from the Italian word for North Africans, "Bianchi," is drawn perhaps from a source for *Othello*, *Descrittione dell'Africa* (1554) by Leo Africanus. In my essay I follow this original word in Leo's Italian version to the wording in his Latin version--a copy of which is available in our very own Hornbake Library--"subfusci" (brownish or dark peoples), which is rendered in Pory's 1600 English translation as "white or tawny Moors"--thus balancing between the words in the two languages that Leo had used. I also found another source--Vossius's 1681 Latin *Commentariorum*--that explains "Veniti hodie similiter eos blanco nuncupunt"--Venetians today similarly call them [North Africans] white"--and I don't know why this Renaissance writer would have substituted that Spanish word. With the help of Art Historian Paul Kaplan, I have also found several instances where African slaves were named "Blanco" by Spanish or "Bianco" by Italian owners.

I then continue in the article by building a context for interpreting "bianchi" as North African. I explore the representation of the multicultural Mediterranean in other plays set on the islands so important for Renaissance trade, the use of other place names in *Othello*--especially
"Barbary," Desdemona's mother's maid, and "Iago," perhaps a reference not to St. James, but to another island, Santiago. This context then helps us discount Iago's misogynist interpretation of Bianca as a whore, and helps explain why Bianca is the one holding the handkerchief at the end of the play, the handkerchief that has traveled from Egypt to Venice to Cyprus with Othello. Lisa Jardine has argued that the Renaissance should be understood in terms of the economics of trade not just the circulation of manuscripts--and that the circulation of manuscripts is an important aspect of this trade. The etymology of Bianca's name, then begins to help us unravel the tangle of people and goods in commerce with each other, and helps us see the anxiety for the English of entering a multicultural world of commerce, an anxiety that, in Othello results in tragedy. The etymology of Bianca also emblematizes the circulation of words in the Renaissance, as well.

Judy

In this paper I wanted to try to show why I chose this essay to contribute to Judy's festschrift--because of the philological method, because of the little bit of Latin I got to read and explicate, and because of the surprising political reading that emerged from the philological close reading of a word. I first became acquainted with Judy through her early article on Sappho, and then worked with her to stage a comparative NEH institute for college teachers on Sappho (and other Greek and Roman women poets) and Lady Mary wroth (and other English and European women poets). What I have admired in Judy's scholarship and teaching is the marriage of deep philological learning with historical and political savvy. In the introduction to Philology and Its Histories, Alan Bacon quotes Edward Said, who describes philology as "a detailed, patient scrutiny of and lifelong attentiveness to the words and rhetorics by which language is used by human beings who exist in history" (11)--surely an apt description of Judy's career. And Bacon
himself concludes that philology "can influence not only how modern conversations about the past are conducted, but also the very nature of that past and the specific dynamics of its reconstruction and appropriation" (7). I think it is very much in keeping, then, with Judy's magnificent career as a scholar that I used this ancient method to buttress a feminist, political reading of this play where misogyny, circulated by Iago, wrecks such havoc.