Adaptations of *Othello*: (In)Adaptability and

Transmedial Representations of Race

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Abstract

This thesis examines adaptations of William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice* (*c.* 1601–4) across media, comparing cinematic, televisual, musical, visual art, and online adaptations, among others, in an endeavour to determine its adaptability in various periods and cultural and societal contexts, with a focus on the issue of race. Shakespeare's seeming endorsement of a racial stereotype has proved to be challenging in adaptations, which have not always been successful in either reproducing or interrogating the issue, despite the fact that the play has continuously been engaged with across media, periods, and cultures. Resultantly, the thesis considers the ways in which the race issues present in *Othello* have been exploited, adapted 'faithfully', ignored, and negotiated in different contexts. Sustained consideration of representations of the race issues of the play from a Western perspective has not been undertaken previously and this thesis analyses the use of *Othello* as a vehicle for commenting on and reflecting contemporary current events through the lenses of adaptation theory and the singular history that adaptations of Shakespeare's work have. Initially, the thesis explores national readings of screen adaptations (from the United States, Great Britain, and outside the Anglo-American gaze), before grouping adaptations by media (such as music and online videos, as well as allusions in other media), deducing why specific adaptive trends have endured in *Othello*s, examining the relationship between the adaptability of the play and the media in which it is placed. A pertinent question addressed is: what is *Othello*'s place in adaptations of Shakespeare's work – and how adaptable is it when both black and white performers and adapters perpetuate racial stereotypes? One conclusion drawn is that – despite its prevalence across media – *Othello* is inadaptable when its race issues are linked – through various methods – to the contexts in which it is placed, changing them in the process.

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1. Introduction

1.1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis critically examines adaptations of William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice* (*c.* 1601–4[1]) across media, including cinema, television, music, and online videos, determining the adaptability/inadaptability of the play in different periods and cultural and societal contexts – beginning with its pre-Shakespearean origins (in terms of its plot and characters) – through to its transposition to postmillennial appropriations, with a focus on the issue of race. To a certain extent, *Othello* has proved to be adaptable in that – as this thesis will illustrate – it has continuously been engaged with across media, periods, and cultures. However, Shakespeare's handling of race has proved challenging in adaptations, which have not always been successful in either reproducing or interrogating the issue. To clarify my chosen prefix for the word 'adaptability', 'in' has been selected over 'un' in order not to dismiss the possibility of adapting the play entirely, but to call attention to the difficulties involved in translating its race issues. Although the words can be used interchangeably, 'inadaptable' will be used exclusively throughout this thesis to lessen the association with *not* being adaptable, as 'unadaptable' connotes that *Othello* is impossible to adapt (in the same way that 'insensitive' and 'unsensitive' may evoke different interpretations, for example).

Sustained consideration of representations of race in *Othello*s from a Western perspective has not been undertaken previously and this thesis studies the use of the play as a vehicle for commenting on and reflecting contemporary issues through the lenses of

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[1] For a breakdown of evidence suggesting that *Othello* was written between 1601 (the date on the title page of Philemon Holland's translation of Pliny's *Natural History* (AD 77–9), from which Shakespeare borrowed) and 1604 (a performance of the play was recorded at court on 1 Nov. that year), see the Third Edition (2004) of The Arden Shakespeare: *Othello*, edited by EAJ Honigmann, the primary edition used for in-text referencing in this thesis.

adaptation theory and the singular history that adaptations of Shakespeare's work have. As a result, this is the first endeavour to complete a longitudinal survey of *Othello* adaptations in their various contexts, considering how the seeming endorsement of a racial stereotype in the play has been exploited, adapted 'faithfully', ignored, and negotiated in different contexts. Rather than endorsing a racial stereotype, one may argue that Shakespeare challenges notions of 'blackness' in *Othello*. However, this thesis contends that this does not have a substantial legacy in adaptations of the play and representations of its titular character.

Structurally, the thesis is not a chronological charting (although trends borne out of the periods in which adaptations are produced are engaged with when relevant and the thesis ends with a chapter on the most recent *Othello*s on *YouTube*): the first half primarily explores national readings of screen adaptations, whilst the second groups adaptations by media. However, nationality and media often coincide in screen adaptations of the play: British *Othello*s tend to be teleplays, whereas those from the United States tend to be cinematic treatments. Additionally, analysing adaptations by media facilitates both the observation of adaptive methods prevalent in specific contexts and the ability to compare treatments of race in representations of the play with adaptations in other media.

Regarding the selection of materials for this thesis, I have chosen to largely omit pre-twentieth-century *Othello*s from my discussion, focusing primarily on popular culture treatments.[2] I will also focus mainly on *Othello*s that have not been written about previously, such as new media adaptations, popular music engagements, and allusions to the play in film and television, specifically in the second half of the thesis. In addition, adaptations that are not commercially available to purchase on DVD or view online will not be considered, principally because one of the objectives of this thesis is to identify intertextual trends in *Othello*s across media regarding visual representations of the Moor and his race. However,

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[2] For example, I will only discuss Giuseppe Verdi's *Otello* (1887) in the context of its cinematic adaptation by Franco Zeffirelli (1986).

visual art depictions of *Othello*/Othello (which have been preserved and can be accessed through online resources, for example) and stage productions that have been recorded and distributed for public consumption will be examined when deemed relevant in terms of their racial discourse and influence on the representation of race in other adaptations.

Lorne M Buchman (2003) observes: "*Othello* has received the least critical attention and continues to be one of the most rarely seen of all cinematic adaptations of the plays" (184). This may not be entirely true (and the statement is not quantified in the chapter), but the fact that there have been so few major Hollywood adaptations of *Othello* (one of which does not use the title and text of the play) might be evidence that it translates uneasily to screen. One of the aims of this thesis is to discover why this is, especially when *Othello* adaptations utilise contrasting adaptive methods, particularly concerning depictions of the titular character. The central issue observed in terms of the adaptability of the play is the representations of Othello and his race. The crux of the problem is that – if we view Shakespeare as prophesising that black actors would eventually play the role – a black performer self-perpetuates a racial stereotype, whereas the use of a white actor in blackface is surely out-dated and threatens to propagate another stereotype pertaining to white conceptions of 'blackness', begging the question: what is *Othello'*s place in adaptations of Shakespeare's work – and how adaptable is it? Deborah Cartmell has raised a similar question previously: "What is worse: a white or a black representation of a racial stereotype" (2001: 144–5)? Contrasting portrayals of Othello on screen will be considered in conjunction with cinema's singularly troubled racial history, from its blackface beginnings to adaptations in which black actors are used and their race is foregrounded. As the Literature Review section will suggest, the topic of *Othello* and race is still largely uncharted territory in adaptation studies and a contentious issue in reviews of adaptations of the play, and in some cases, remains a 'taboo' subject. Attitudes towards the issue have changed considerably since

the time in which Shakespeare wrote, and may continue to do so, moving further away from the racial discourse of *Othello*, raising a question pertaining to how much of the play text will be engaged with in future adaptations.

One of the reasons why adapters treat *Othello* as a race play is that – by modern standards (or the contemporary standards of the vast majority of adaptations focused on in this thesis) – Iago's words and actions are racist. In light of this, Coleridge's note on the play is not true: "The last Speech, the motive-hunting of motiveless Malignity–how awful! In itself fiendish–while yet he was allowed to bear the divine image, too fiendish for his own steady View.–A being next to Devil–only *not* quite Devil" (1987: 315). Of course, it would be anachronistic to accuse the play of racism in its own context, but because Iago identifies the Moor as the "thick-lips" (I.i.66) and an "old black ram" (I.i.88), in addition to his use of animalistic imagery throughout and his claim that: "it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets / He's done my office" (I.iii.386–7), it is understandable that interpretations of the Ensign's motives in adaptations are often based on racial difference, especially in a play in which Othello's race and sexuality are linked.

In reference to Samuel Pepys observing a female audience member encouraging Othello to smother Desdemona during a performance of the play on 11 October 1660, Lena Cowen Orlin claims that there is no "comparable record" of audience members interacting with a Shakespeare play in the early modern period in a similar way, a result of the fact that *Othello* "provokes so intense a level of audience engagement" (1). We can compare this with adaptations of *Othello* in subsequent centuries, in which adapters and their respective cultures and societies inform and perpetually reform the play to coincide with contemporary tastes and the conventions of the medium in which it is placed. The reason for expanding the thesis to *Othello* in media other than cinema is that adapters still feel the need to engage with the

play without adapting it in the form of feature-length screen versions, which may reveal more about how the play is seen today than its comparatively few film adaptations.

As previously stated, the following three chapters of the thesis are grouped as national readings of *Othello*. However, the first two are also separated by medium. "Hollywood *Othello*s: From Blackface to Branagh and Beyond" examines three major cinematic adaptations of the play: Orson Welles's *Othello* (1952), Oliver Parker's *Othello* (1995), and Tim Blake Nelson's *O* (2001), in conjunction with Hollywood's own racial history, demonstrating that there is no 'real' Othello, a result of the contrasting depictions of the character since the conception of the medium. However, all three films have their own unique methods of preserving the race issues of Shakespeare's play, amalgamating them with those of their contemporary periods. It also seems to be the case that cinematic adaptations of *Othello* are produced in periods in which audiences can relate it to current events. One of the reasons why this chapter contributes to existing knowledge lies in its relation to the thesis as a whole. It asks whether or not these films – as arguably the most widely seen (and therefore influential) adaptations – inform perceptions of *Othello* as much as the play text itself does by comparing them with adaptations across media, treating Hollywood versions as the framework on which the rest of the thesis builds.

"British Adaptations of *Othello*s (and *Othello*s on British Television)" examines British and televisual adaptations as singular national representations of the play that correspond with the placement of *Othello* within a specific medium. Contrasts are made with Hollywood cinema through a comparison of treatments of *Othello*'s arguably inadaptable race issues. Adaptations of the play made specifically for television are almost exclusively products of Great Britain, and an analysis of the British style of adapting *Othello* is deliberated, alongside whether or not the medium within which they are placed is influential on their adaptive methods. Factors such as the use of the script in British televisual

adaptations in comparison with the use of filmmaking techniques in Hollywood cinema are also considered in terms of how they affect the adaptability of *Othello* and representations of race. For example, British adaptations are normatively 'true' to the words of the play text; resultantly, this chapter will analyse how images of the Moor in British *Othello*s correspond with Shakespeare's conception of 'blackness'.

"*Othello* Outside the Anglo-American Gaze" chronologically charts screen adaptations of the play produced outside the United Kingdom and the United States – from silent and early talkie adaptations onwards – in order to analyse the relationship between *Othello* and different cultures around the world in terms of its adaptability and race issues. The chapter also aims to discover if adaptations produced within the United Kingdom and the United States are relatively similar in comparison with those produced elsewhere, or if each adaptation is singular in its adaptive methods. In addition, the chapter attempts to determine whether or not the play is still tied to the playwright and the country and period within which it was first performed, and how adaptable it is within different societies, which invariably adapt from their own cultural palettes and comment on their own contemporary concerns, often negating Shakespeare's play text and the English language.

The second part of the thesis begins with "The New '*Othello* Music': From the Play Text to Classical and Popular Treatments and Allusions, and Diegetic and Non-Diegetic Soundtracks". It analyses *Othello*/Othello's relationship with music in order to determine if the play is more adaptable in media outside of screen adaptations in terms of representing its race issues. It uses opera adaptations, popular music allusions, and film soundtracks to demonstrate this, as well as the '*Othello* music'[3] of the play text itself. Unlike previously published work on the topic, this chapter specifically ties music with representations of race in adaptations. Texts such as *Shakespeare and Music: Afterlives and Borrowings* (2007) by

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[3] This term, coined by G Wilson Knight (1930), refers to the lyrical speeches (particularly by Othello) and symphonic interplay between characters' voices in the play.

Julie Sanders and *Shakespeare and Popular Music* (2010) by Adam Hansen are utilised

throughout; Hansen, in particular, makes references to allusions to Shakespeare in popular

music lyrics, but neither focuses on *Othello*, nor do those monographs consider the specific

examples cited in this chapter. Other questions asked will pertain to whether or not *Othello*

sits as awkwardly in musical adaptations as it does on screen, and if music racialises and de-

racialises *Othello* to suit various forms and contexts in the same way that films have.

"The 'Dark Matter' of the *Othello* Universe: Other Adaptations and Appropriations,

Fragments, and Allusions across Media" examines a selection of allusions and references to

the play across media and periods, including pre-cinematic engagement in the visual arts,

alongside citations in video games and comic books, for example, analysing why *Othello* is

still prevalent in popular culture despite the fact that there have been so few feature-length

screen adaptations, especially in the postmillennial period. These interactions with *Othello*

often adapt the play in a fragmented state without utilising the words of the play text.

Regarding *Othello*, Laurie Maguire states: "if one removes the sublimity of the ear's

experience, we are left with the brain's experience: the plot is ridiculous" (109). In the

examples discussed, the desire to exploit the 'ridiculousness' of the play without the 'ear's

experience' often manifests in adaptations in the focalisation of its potential comedic aspects.

This chapter will investigate the importance of appropriations and allusions in the spectrum

of *Othello* adaptations in contrast with comparatively 'faithful' versions, focusing on the

scenes, images, words, themes and characters retained and presented, asking if they have

endured in the relatively invisible role of 'dark matter' as much as the play in its entirety has,

affecting populist perceptions in the process. Additionally, the chapter analyses seemingly

minor interactions to create a broad perspective on how *Othello* is being engaged with, using

a comprehensive selection of adaptations that have not been examined collectively (and in

many cases, individually) before.

"'With as little a web as this' (II.i.168–9): Ensnaring *Othello* in *YouTube* Adaptations" concentrates on videos uploaded on *YouTube*, exploring who is making these adaptations and what they are focusing their attention on in a relatively brief amount of time, whether that be the seemingly inadaptable aspects of the play or its potential comedic scenes, uncovering how *Othello* is interacted with in its most modern adaptations. Additionally, whether or not the scenes and themes engaged with correspond with those observed in the previous chapter will be of interest in order to determine how *Othello* is viewed by adapters/audiences today. Of course, combining the specificity of *Othello* with a relatively new adaptive platform suggests that *YouTube* adaptations offer the potential for innovative findings in the field. However, one finding of this chapter is the detection of patterns in videos that correspond with adaptations of the play across media, and the influence of previous versions on those uploaded as recently as 2015 is focused on throughout.

The thesis ends with research findings concerning the (in)adaptability of *Othello*, exemplified through a case study of what I propose to be a fourth major Hollywood adaptation of the play, George Cukor's *A Double Life* (1947), in which abiding problems regarding representations of race in *Othello*s can be demonstrated. In addition, the Conclusion offers insights into the 'Othello/Me' theme that pervades the thesis, which, I argue throughout, manifests in different ways in adaptations of the play, from actors playing actors within the narratives of films, to the alignment of Othello with the actor playing the role. The Conclusion also hypothesises on the future of *Othello* adaptations based on the findings of the thesis. In addition, Appendix A is a compendium of *Othello* adaptations across media, with the exception of stage productions and others that have not been distributed for commercial or online release, which, resultantly, have not been considered for discussion. Finally, Appendix B features an email conversation with *Mickey B* (2007) (a modern retelling of *Macbeth*) director, Tom Magill, conducted for this thesis, in which he

discusses issues pertinent to the topic of adapting *Othello* and its race issues.

1.2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section outlines debates surrounding adaptations of *Othello* and how they are developed in the thesis, continuing – and, in many cases – expanding on the ideas of those currently working within the fields of adaptation studies and Shakespeare on screen. Since the turn of the decade (from 2010 to the present), the *Shakespeare* journal has featured only three articles on *Othello*: Volume 6, Issue 2 (March 2010); Volume 8, Issue 1 (April 2012); and Volume 9, Issue 3 (September 2013), all of which review stage productions, signifying that *Othello* is being staged by theatre practitioners, but is not being considered in scholarly articles, especially concerning adaptations. Similarly, in the two previous issues of *Borrowers and Lenders*: Volume 8, Numbers 1 and 2 (Spring/Summer 2013 and Fall/Winter 2014), nothing is featured on *Othello*. However, in a recent issue of *Adaptation*: Volume 8 Issue 1 (March 2015), Andrew Barnaby's "'It Is the Cause … Let Me Not Name It': (mis)Reading *Memento* Through *Othello*" compares the two works named in its title, deliberating on male sexual anxiety and the circumstances that lead husbands to murder, focusing on Christopher Nolan's film (2000) and Shakespeare's play, rather than adaptations of it. In addition, *Shakespeare Survey 21: Othello* (1968) is devoted almost entirely to the play, but features little on the topic of race and even less on adaptations, perhaps in part because the volume was published when adaptation studies was still in its infancy.

Shakespeare Quarterly has offered slightly more criticism since the turn of the decade. In addition to a review of Emily C Bartel's *Speaking of the Moor: From Alcazar to Othello* (2008) (Volume 64, Issue 2: Summer 2013), in which Mary Floyd-Wilson discusses Moors in English theatre from 1588–1603, there are two articles on *Othello*, although neither deals with adaptation. In "*Othello*'s black handkerchief" (Issue 64, Volume 1: Spring 2013),

Ian Smith investigates the handkerchief in the play and its potential meanings (a symbol for white bed linen, for example) and how it is portrayed in the "changing early modern traditions of staging racial impersonation" (9). Although the subject matter differs, the idea of a device in the play changing over time is not dissimilar to aspects of the cultural analysis applied in this thesis. "*Othello* in Tokyo: Performing Race and Empire in 1903" (Volume 62, Issue 4: Winter 2011) by Robert Tierney deals with the play in one specific societal context (and will be utilised when relevant in my "*Othello* Outside the Anglo-American Gaze" chapter), and does not consider adaptation beyond a discussion of transposing *Othello* to a different country, rather than a different medium. Tierney's central point – that Japanese practitioners had no problems adapting the play to their own cultural context, despite having "no concrete experience of discrimination or racial tensions" (514) – raises a question regarding how *Othello*'s race issue can be made to resemble Japanese imperialism, to use Tierney's example. He explains: "the settings were shifted from Venice and Cyprus to Japan and Taiwan" (515). This suggests that even though the subject of race has been negated and transposed to Japan, it actually remains the central (in)adaptable issue, even though it can be the catalyst for adapting it to other societies.

This thesis utilises and engages with texts ranging from adaptation theory, to those on the subjects of Shakespeare, cultural studies, the Internet, and popular culture, as well as those on *Othello* outside the adaptation sphere. Adaptation studies will form the basis for many of the ideas explored, using an approach that considers adaptation to be – as Robert Stam puts it – an "ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transmutation, with no clear point of origin" (2000: 66). Kamilla Elliott points out, "the appeal to intertextuality has been specifically developed as a methodological challenge to the fidelity model" (193). However, this is not to say that early adaptation texts, such as *Novels into Film* (1957/1971) by George Bluestone and *The Novel and the Cinema* (1975) by Geoffrey Wagner will not be used. As

Mireia Aragay observes: "in the 1970s the assumption that literature was the superior medium was an enduring one. Wagner's *The Novel and the Cinema* (1975), for instance, is still trapped by an unspoken reliance on the fidelity criterion" (16). Of course, this thesis does not revert to Wagner's view of the field, but it does – through case studies – suggest that *Othello*'s race issues are largely inadaptable outside of their original context.

Although this thesis will not dwell on the 'fidelity' argument, Bluestone discusses how the differences between literature (or, a play text, in the case of *Othello*) and cinema are greater than their similarities, and this thesis will expand on that, by contending that the differences between cultures and media also affect adaptations, offering a wide spectrum of diverse and contrasting *Othello*s to demonstrate this. In "On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and 'Success'—Biologically" (2007), Gary R Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon use biology and evolution as a template to discuss an alternative method of looking at 'fidelity' in adaptations. They state: "By revealing lineages of descent, not similarities of form alone, we can understand how a specific narrative changes over time" (445). This type of analysis is utilised throughout this thesis, and I plan to expand this line of enquiry by questioning: what has 'survived' and endured in adaptations of *Othello*, and why?

The primary criticism addressed in this thesis, however, is that on the topic of adaptations of *Othello*, most prevalent in chapters in edited collections and journals, usually examining individual case studies, particularly those on screen and produced in Hollywood. As a result, none features the breadth of adaptations discussed in this thesis. However, *Shakespeare on Screen: Othello* (2015), edited by Sarah Hatchuel and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin, focuses specifically on screen adaptations of the play, rather than *Othello*s across media with a focus on (in)adaptability and race. The edited collection considers race, albeit with brevity through a prefatory overview of screen adaptations of the play in its Introduction, listing many of the *Othello*s analysed in this thesis, but only in order to provide

a brief history of the topic. On the whole, the text focuses on race no more than it does on gender, translation, intertextuality, and genre, for example. Additionally, with its series of case studies on screen *Othello*s in individual chapters by different authors, no uniform statement is made and no sustained patterns are observed due to the breadth of the topics explored. However, when addressing the same adaptations, *Shakespeare on Screen: Othello* will be referenced and engaged with throughout the thesis.

There are several articles on the topic of Hollywood *Othello*s and race, such as "The Veiled (Hot) Bed of Race and Desire: Parker's *Othello* and the Stereotype as Screen Fetish" (1997) by Lisa S Starks; "Shakespeare and Race: *Othello* I.iii" (2001) by Deborah Cartmell (both of which discuss race and the fetishisation associated with the body of an African American Othello; the latter uses a specific scene to exemplify this, contrasting Laurence Fishburne's Othello with that of Welles); and "Race-ing Othello, Re-EnGendering White Out" (1998) by Barbara Hodgdon, which observes that the connections between OJ Simpson and Othello point towards the American public seeing Othello as an outsider. Hodgdon draws a parallel between Othello and Simpson, claiming that their defining feature in the eyes of the American public is their relationships with white women. These are engaged with in my discussion of Hollywood *Othello*s, although the thesis compares the adaptability of three cinematic adaptations in conjunction with the periods in which they were made and Hollywood's racial history, as well as in comparison with those of other media.

Similarly, in "Racism, Misogyny, and the 'Othello' Myth: Inter-racial Couples from Shakespeare to Spike Lee" (2007), Christy Desmet discusses Anglo-American culture's apparent obsession with interracial relationships, which "has less to do with race *per se* than with an imaginative appropriation of black men to control women, both black and white" (281). Desmet examines the productions of Trevor Nunn and Janet Suzman – both of which feature black actors and were filmed for television (but started on stage) – from a postcolonial

perspective. From an adaptation standpoint, she writes that screen versions "circulate metanarratives of race, gender, and class and cultural tropes of assimilation and domestic violence" in order to keep "*Othello,* and Othello in place" (43). An analysis of gender and class is not a preoccupation of this thesis, except in relation to the central adaptability issue: Othello and his race. However, whether or not *Othello* and Othello are kept 'in place' by metanarratives regarding portrayals of the play and the character is of relevance and will be considered in adaptations across media, particularly in cinema, in which the issue of race in Hollywood will be examined in conjunction with adaptations of the play.

Judith Buchanan is another of the main contributors in the area of *Othello* on screen. In "Virgin and Ape, Venetian and Infidel: Labellings of Otherness in Parker's *Othello*" (2000), she explores how the camera emphasises Othello's Otherness/alterity in the 1995 adaptation by encouraging the voyeurism of the titular character. Buchanan documents how Fishburne's Othello advertises his resistance to his environment through his power and eroticism more than the character does in other productions, which often present a man trying to minimise his distinction from it. Regarding Shakespeare's play, in *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance: Barbarian Errors* (2009), Ian Smith states: "Othello wants to participate in Europe's cultural whiteness" (149). He does not ultimately succeed in this, however; the character's use of language places him within Venetian society, but the stories told in his speeches emphasise his Otherness. Smith also argues that "the play's structural juxtaposition of Othello, the ostensible Moor, and Iago forces recognition of the indeterminate nature of blackness" (144). He continues: "if Othello aspires after 'cultural whiteness', then Iago is conceived according to stereotypes of 'blackness'" (141). This may be true, to a certain extent, but there is a focus on Desdemona's 'whiteness' as the "most emphasized physical feature" (Daileader 2005: 25) of the character, which contrasts with the Moor's physical and metaphorical 'blackness'. An ambiguity regarding 'whiteness' and 'blackness' can also be

found in adaptations of the play, which have portrayed Othello contrastingly across periods and media, often according to the conventions of both.

Buchanan also argues that though other *Othello*s "deliberately courted topical resonances" (188), Parker's adaptation does not, simply because it was filmed in 1994, simultaneous to when the OJ Simpson incident occurred. The subsequent chapter on Hollywood *Othello*s will test the veracity of this statement through the analysis of paratextual materials. Buchanan's observation that *Othello*s court 'topical resonances' is also explored in this thesis in relation to whether or not it is the adapters (including those involved in making postproduction materials) or the audiences and critics who create these parallels and what they reveal about the adaptability of the play. Buchanan contends that *Othello* is a variation of the Beauty and the Beast fairy tale (although the story did not appear in publication until 1740), which potentially helped form the template for depictions of Othello as a monstrous and unrealistic character in some adaptations, although the linking of 'blackness' with animalism is certainly prevalent in the play. In "'Othello was a white man': Properties of Race on Shakespeare's Stage" (1999), Dympna Callaghan writes that – in addition to the fact that Shakespeare presumably would have written Othello to be played by a white actor – whiteface make-up techniques provided Desdemona with "histrionic femininity" (88), creating a physical disunion between the two characters. Callaghan does not take adaptation into consideration, but like Buchanan, she does refer to Jacobean stage practices as perpetuating Beauty and the Beast roles. Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) suggests that there is still a market for that element of the story, especially considering the fact that fairy tales are such pervasive intertexts, but tying animalism with race is, of course, problematic.

Animalistic imagery is certainly prevalent in *Othello*. However, screen adaptations have the ability to concretise images, such as the use of birds in the Hollywood appropriation, *O*, which literalises the flying and bird imagery of the play. In *Re-Humanising Shakespeare:*

Literary Humanism, Wisdom and Modernity (2007), Andy Mousley rightly points out Iago's objectification of characters other than Othello, such as how the Ensign treats Roderigo like a pawn. Othello, however, is singularly objectified – or, rather, animalised – by both Iago and Shakespeare, "recreating" the Moor – to use Mousley's term – as a "cultural outsider" (53). Elliott observes: "a structural analogical model of adaptation has been favored throughout the twentieth century into the twenty-first. Bluestone (1957) and Wagner (1975) talk of cinematic equivalents and analogies that adaptations must try to recreate" (184). However, this technique is singularly complicated when applied to *Othello*, as the images of the play inform the personification of the titular character in adaptations. Furthermore, as Caroline Spurgeon points out: "The main image in *Othello* is that of animals in action, preying upon one another, mischievous, lascivious, cruel or suffering" (335). I would extend this to beasts, and by extension, monsters and devils, too.

Within the play text, there are: a plague of flies (I.i.70); a Barbary horse (I.i.110); "the beast with two backs" (I.i.115); a guinea-hen (I.iii.316); a baboon (I.iii.317); drowning "cats and blind puppies" (I.iii.336–7); a locust (I.iii.349); a snipe (I.iii.384); leading asses by the nose (I.iii.400–1); wild cats (II.i.110); a spider ensnaring a fly (II.i.168–9); an ass (II.i.307); a quarrelsome dog (II.ii.47–8); beating an offenceless dog (II.iii.270–1); "the green-eyed monster" (III.iii.168) and other monsters (III.iii.110; III.iv.161; III.iv.163; and IV.i.64); a toad in a dungeon (III.iii.274–5) and foul toads breeding in a cistern (IV.ii.62); goats and monkeys (III.iii.406; IV.i.263); "wolves in pride" (III.iii.407); aspics' tongues (III.iii.453); the ill-boding raven over the infected house (IV.i.21); a snake (IV.i.266); a viper (V.ii.282) and a serpent's curse (IV.ii.16); crocodiles' tears (IV.i.244–5); and summer flies in the shambles (IV.ii.67); and "the blacker devil" (V.ii.129), in reference to Othello, tying 'blackness'/race/colour with the demonic, evil, sin, and immorality.

Whether or not these images are recreated in adaptations (especially those that do not use the words of the play text) may be significant in determining the adaptability of the play. Additionally, images of animalism and monstrousness may be particularly problematic when black actors play the role, as mentioned. As printed in Ania Loomba's *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (2002), the actor Hugh Quarshie states: "'If a black actor plays Othello does he not risk making racial stereotypes seem legitimate and even true? When a black actor plays a role written for a white actor in black make-up and for a predominantly white audience, does he not encourage the white way, or rather, wrong way, of looking at black men'" (110)? Considering this question is essential in an examination of the adaptability issues of the play and permeates my discussion, especially in light of the fact that the presence of a black actor in the role does not necessarily represent a black 'presence' in adaptations. However, if the use of a white actor in the role is unlikely in the future (according to the normative method of adapting the play today), does this render *Othello* inadaptable (despite the fact that it is still being adapted)?

Pertinent to my exposition of Hollywood *Othello*s, work on the topic of representations of race in American media is utilised in this thesis. In "Doing it for Daddy: Black Masculinity in the Mainstream" (2006), bell hooks writes that the "colonizing culture's manipulation of representation is essential to the maintenance of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (105). This is achieved, according to hooks, by the oppression of black males in cinema as "always lacking, as always subordinated to more powerful white males whose approval they need to survive" (105). Although she is not referring to *Othello*, this is relevant to its adaptations, which have utilised, for example, devices such as a white hand entering from outside the frame to apply Othello's make-up (Anson Dyer, 1920), as well as white actors playing the role, in general. Analysing how representations of Othello change when black males play the role will be significant in proving that – even though the race of the

actor often changes the way in which the Moor is presented – it does not affect the play's adaptability.

Perhaps the main contributor in the area of *Othello* on screen is Douglas M Lanier (who has also published on Shakespeare in popular culture). He has discussed metanarratives in adaptations of the play, as well as race, to a certain extent, although his discussions are based in screen adaptations and the conclusions he draws are different to those of this thesis. Nonetheless, the conclusions drawn in this thesis are certainly indebted to ideas that Lanier has brought to light and he will be cited throughout. In "Murdering *Othello*" (2012), Lanier writes about how cinema has been "attracted to backstage narratives which involve Othello and real murder" (199). Lanier is referring to films like *Carnival* (1921) and *A Double Life*, but one may extend 'real' murder to the parallels drawn between Othello and OJ Simpson, for example, in Parker's film. Lanier uses several case studies to exemplify his point, which raises two questions relevant to this thesis. Firstly, is the play so incompatible with the modern world that the only way to engage with it is to have (predominantly white) actors questioning the role in a metatextual manner? And secondly, is this contradicted by the fact that these actors (within the narratives) are influenced by the character to commit murder themselves?

Writings about Shakespeare and film will also be utilised in this thesis, such as *Interpreting Shakespeare on Screen* (2000) by Deborah Cartmell and *Visual Shakespeare: Essays in Film and Television* (2002) by Graham Holderness. In "Radical potentiality and institutional closure: Shakespeare in film and television" (1994), Holderness details the marginal role of Shakespeare on screen as an "important but peripheral fringe", where he claims that "the values of high art can be held to justify or compensate for the lack of commercial success" (206). How this relates to the cultural allusions observed in screen *Othello*s will be significant in determining if this is indeed true, and whether or not such

allusions are actually an attempt to gain commercial success. Texts relating to Shakespeare and adaptation in different media will also be utilised, such as the aforementioned *Shakespeare and Music: Afterlives and Borrowings* by Sanders and *Shakespeare and Popular Music* by Hansen, specifically for the chapter on the relationship between *Othello* and music.

Publications on *Othello* (outside of adaptations studies) will also inform the thesis in terms of observing what is prevalent when critics discuss the play today. In fact, there have been two publications in 2014 from The Arden Shakespeare on *Othello*. In *Othello: Language and Writing*, Laurie Maguire writes briefly on adaptation. Maguire's discussion of screen adaptations is, in part, descriptive (perhaps because the adaptations are relatively obscure). She points out the similarities and differences between adaptation and 'source', such as how the words of the play text are changed, but the style and effect are the same, exemplified through Jago's "linguistic economy" (114) in ITV's televisual production (2001). This is challenged in this thesis in the chapter on British *Othello*s, arguing that updating the race issues of the play changes them in the process. As it is a text on the topic of language and writing, this type of analysis pervades Maguire's discussion; nonetheless, it will inform what is written in this thesis, as language forms the '*Othello* music', which this thesis ties to race.

The title of *Othello: The State of Play* (2014), edited by Lena Cowen Orlin, suggests that it offers insight into the status of the play in the twenty-first century, but discussion of *Othello*'s place in contemporary media is largely absent. One of its chapters, "'Speak[ing] Parrot' and Ovidian Echoes in *Othello*: Recontextualizing Black Speech in the Global Renaissance" by Robert Hornback, contextualises Othello as being akin to the "'white-souled'" (72) black characters of early seventeenth-century Spanish drama, as well as the black speakers of "'pidgin English'" (75) within English drama of the same period. He also discusses Othello's repeating of Iago's lines throughout the play, which parallels an idea that

pervades this thesis: the control that 'white' has over 'black' in adaptations of the play,
whether that be through Shakespeare's own conception of blackness (and that of the period in
which he wrote), or those of adapters. Repetition in the play manifests in other ways in
adaptations, such as the fugue-like repetition of Otello's words by Desdemona in Franco
Zeffirelli's *Otello* (1986), which is examined in conjunction with its racial implications.

Also in *Othello: The State of Play*, Ambereen Dadabhoy explains in "Two Faced: The
Problem of Othello's Visage" that the definition of Moor was "elastic" (124) in the early
modern period, although she also states that Shakespeare amplifies 'blackness' when he
wants to illustrate Othello's animalistic and sexual sides, which is of relevance to my
discussion of the adaptations of Oliver Parker and Tim Blake Nelson, which heighten these
elements considerably through filmmaking techniques. Even though the character of Iago is
not the primary focus of this thesis, my argument works on the assumption that racism (or an
early modern equivalent) is an element of the play, a result of the image Shakespeare creates
of Othello through language.[4] Regarding criticism of *Othello*, in general, in the
aforementioned "Othello's black handkerchief", Ian Smith expounds on the mechanics of
racial cross-dressing on the Shakespearean stage, from the application of blackface make-up
to the animal skin used to differentiate black characters from their white counterparts. This
highlights a continuous palimpsestuous adaptive process in *Othello*s across periods and
media, in that, just as animal skin was used as costuming on stage in previous centuries,
animal imagery now manifests in other ways in adaptations, to be discussed.

The thesis also engages with texts that concern issues surrounding the adaptability of
the play, regardless of whether or not they refer to *Othello* specifically, such as *Passing
Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America* (2011) by Ayanna Thompson; texts
on film and race, like *Literary Adaptations in Black American Cinema* (2010) by Barbara

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[4] In addition, Iago is a name that may derive from, among others, the Spanish patron saint who helped
King Ramirez deliver Castile from the Moors.

Tepa Lupack and *The Subject of Film and Race: Retheorizing Politics, Ideology, and Cinema* (2014) by Gerald Sim; as well as *Shakespeare and Race* (2000) edited by Catherine MS Alexander and Stanley Wells, which primarily deals with race issues in Shakespeare's plays (its text and stage productions). In addition to books on the subject of race, those on cultural studies are also used, such as *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture* (2002) by Douglas Lanier, which analyses the relationship between pop culture and Shakespeare, the realm in which many of the adaptations in this thesis exist. In fact, Lanier writes of how our perception of Shakespeare today is informed and shaped by adaptations of his work, which may prove to be a key point to consider when discussing the adaptability of *Othello*, which often depends on the contexts within which it is placed.

Regarding *Othello*, specifically, in *Shakespeare and Outsiders* (2013), Marianne Novy observes that recent criticism suggests the "dominant impact of the play is racist and pornographic" (87). Novy is referring to stage productions, but racism (and treatments of it) might be most prevalent in adaptations of the play. Even though Novy does not define 'pornographic', Parker's erotic thriller sexualises Othello through the focus of the camera, specifically during love scenes with Desdemona. Race, as this thesis argues, is certainly *Othello*'s central issue in terms of its (in)adaptability today. However, the volumes of *The Cambridge Shakespeare Library* do not offer much insight on the topic. For example, in "Orson Welles's *Othello*: A Study of Time in Shakespeare's Tragedy" (2003), Buchman does not deliberate the issue of Welles's blackface make-up (the shade of blackness varies considerably from scene to scene, and gets progressively darker as Othello spirals into jealousy), despite discussing the issue of continuity in the film, suggesting that race is still being ignored, particularly regarding adaptations of the play.

In *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*, Loomba documents Othello's racial origins, observing that in previous centuries, critics were "eager to rescue Shakespeare's hero from

the taint of blackness", and that this continues today: "underplayed by those who want to draw our attention to the Muslim aspects of the 'Moor'" (92). However, adaptations often ignore the latter and treat Othello as black, presumably because of the imagery Shakespeare uses to amplify the exoticness and sexuality of the character, as well as the fact that it parallels some of the race issues that have been most prevalent in the United States over the past century (the place of origin of a significant proportion of the adaptations discussed herein). However, to align Othello with Islam would also be problematic in terms of contemporising the play, which adaptations invariably do.

Regarding the issue of Othello's race, Loomba states: "it is impossible, but also unnecessary, to decide whether Othello is *more* or *less* 'African'/'black' than 'Turkish'/'Muslim'" (92). She explains that some dark-skinned Africans were Muslims and that Turks and Muslims were often regarded as morally and physically 'darker' than Christians in the early modern period. This issue is only discussed in this thesis in relation to how Othello is represented in adaptations when an uncertainty regarding his race is foregrounded, but the Moor's racial ambiguity offers a potential reason for the array of treatments of the character. In *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said writes that one of Europe's "deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (1) comes from the Orient. Said states that the Orient "was almost a place of European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (1). This can be found in both *Othello* and its adaptations, despite the fact that this view of the Orient is arguably out-dated in the case of the latter. This notion of Otherness is presented in even the most modern *Othello*s, and this particular understanding of Otherness will pervade the thesis from a methodological standpoint, although the 'exoticness' highlighted by Said suggests that Othello – like the Orient – is of 'European invention'.

In "Hybridity, Othello and the Postcolonial Critics" (2009), Daniel Roux concludes that if "we read the play as essentially a racist fantasy that claims even a noble, Christian Moor will eventually succumb to the Elizabethan stereotypes that define and dismiss blackness", then Othello returns "to his stereotype in order to foreclose the possibility of black agency in a European world" (31). Whether or not this is true of *Othello* adaptations will be engaged with throughout the thesis, particularly in cases in which the character is transposed to an alternative period or setting. Roux's statement implies that it is the plot – rather than the context – that determines representations of the Moor. Reading (and adapting) Othello as a character with a cultural history (as Roux claims postcolonial critics tend to) is hindered by his failure in a 'European world'. However, by continuously adapting the play across media, the question of why this 'failure' is propagated can be raised. Sim believes that – over the course of the twentieth century – people began to 'accept' that "race is constructed in social practice and cultural discourse" as opposed to "who someone genetically is" (23–4). Regardless of whether or not this is verifiably true, Othello, a black male, 'fails' in white society in the play; and if, how, and why this manifests in adaptations will be examined in the thesis.

Other postcolonial works, such as "'Local manufacture made-in-India Othello fellows': Issues of race, hybridity and location in post-colonial Shakespeares" (1998) by Ania Loomba, "Who Speaks for the Moor? Interrogating Shakespeare's *Othello*" (2007) by Sahana Bajpaie (which also looks at *Othello* through an Indian postcolonial lens), and *Post-Colonial Shakespeares* (1998), edited by Loomba and Martin Orkin, will inform how *Othello* is analysed in relation to the countries in which the play has been adapted. In their Introduction, Loomba and Orkin contend that Shakespeare represents "the quintessence of Englishness" (1), and that *Othello* (written during the germination of English colonialism), may have been written to reinforce racial hierarchies, which echoes Roux's deduction. These ideas are of

particular relevance to my "*Othello* Outside the Anglo-American Gaze" chapter, in which the likes of Indian and South African *Othello*s are examined, focusing on how this 'Englishness' is either reinforced or reacted to.

Postcolonial texts will be examined in conjunction with Roux's notion that some critics believe that:

> the character Othello's history and culture somehow reside intact in
> a kind of textual palimpsest: that a correct, attentive reading might
> somehow surface an Othello that lives beyond the text even as he
> inhabits it, an Othello momentarily apprehended in history by
> Shakespeare's play. (23)

If, according to Roux, Othello represents the inability for 'blackness' to be accepted in a European world, then attempts to adapt the play in a 'correct' way – which, in this case, refers to adapting Othello 'authentically' (from a cultural perspective), rather than in a normative method that corresponds with contemporary perceptions of 'blackness' – may be futile. Of course, 'correct' in this instance would involve alterations to the play involving the character's cultural history, and whether these are more or less 'correct' than an arguably racially-problematic adaptation like its two most recent Hollywood adaptations is challenged in this thesis. The idea that Roux brings to light also implies that some postcolonial critics believe that Othello is not a 'white' man, autonomously tied to the 'white' tragedian who would have played him on the Jacobean stage, nor extratextually linked to the white playwright whose sources were, to a certain extent, geographical histories and a short story. Being a 'textual palimpsest' in this instance suggests that the character is constantly being rewritten towards a 'correct' version.

Relatedly, in "'A most wily bird': Leo Africanus, Othello and the Trafficking in Difference" (1998), Jonathan Burton is primarily concerned with the play and one of its sources. He writes of how studying the trajectory of Leo Africanus and the 'Old World' can shed light on attitudes of the time in which Shakespeare wrote *Othello*, uncovering the "vexed collaboration with European histories of Africa" (45). Burton concludes, "like Othello in his vilification of the Turks, Africanus insinuates himself into the idiom of Eurocentrism" (60). Whether or not this survives in adaptations (and how it manifests) is explored in this thesis, pertaining to how white actors in blackface potentially make Othello less Other.

Confusion regarding Othello's race may be one of the central reasons why there is such an array of representations of the titular character in adaptations. In "*Othello*: A Retrospect, 1900–67" (1968), from the second volume of *The Cambridge Shakespeare Library*, Helen Gardner affirms that there have been contrasting views on the Moor since the beginning of the twentieth century. She observes: "A tendency to qualify the conception of Othello as a heroic figure, calling out a passionate sympathy which survives his appalling deed, reached its zenith in F. R. Leavis' famous onslaught" (398). In his writing on the play, Leavis states: "from Coleridge down, Iago – his motivation or his motivelessness – has commonly been, in commentaries on the play, the main focus of attention" (1965: 138). This thesis avoids this except when it pertains to race and Othello, although because it has been a prevailing focus of scholarly attention, this criticism is utilised throughout when relevant, albeit not as a 'main focus of attention'. In addition, the 'motiveless malignity' of Iago is largely untrue: he uses (by modern standards) racist language towards Othello and discloses: "I do suspect the lusty Moor / Hath leaped into my seat" (II.i.293–4), among other revelations to be discussed throughout the thesis.

1.3. SHAKESPEARE AS ADAPTER

To demonstrate the intertextual approach that this thesis employs, this section explores the source(s) of Shakespeare's *Othello*, contextualising the adaptive methods of *Othello*s across media, and refuting 'fidelity' arguments in the process. Moreover, it analyses what Shakespeare adapted and why, and if this material manifests in adaptations of *Othello* subsequently, specifically regarding the titular character and his race. Shakespeare adapted *Othello* from various sources, both fictional and non-fictional, including travel literature, Italian romance, and its hypotext, from which it adapts its basic plot, "Un Capitano Moro" (1595), which bears a strong resemblance to "The Tale of the Three Apples" from *One Thousand and One Nights*. "Un Capitano Moro" was published as part of Giovanni Battista Giraldi Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, which in turn is modelled on Boccacio's fourteenth-century allegory, *The Decameron* (1351–3). Due to its brevity and lack of character development, Cinthio's story "does not seem to afford a suitable plot for a tragedy" (Muir 1961: 126). Shakespeare might have adapted that which he deemed most relevant to his own artistic interests (as far as transposing literature to the stage) and those of his contemporary period, expanding upon it. Although not a direct parallel, one may also apply this to adaptations of *Othello*, in which adapters make changes to the play for the purposes of transposing it to a new medium and period.

Probably the most adapted scene from *Othello* – Desdemona's death – is particularly prevalent in media that attempts to encapsulate the play in one scene, such as visual art depictions and *YouTube* videos. This scene is almost entirely of Shakespeare's creation, from its language to its execution and its characters' actions and reactions. Shakespeare's denouement is climactic when compared to that of his central source as it ends with Desdemona's death, Othello's suicide, and Iago's capture in one closing scene. Cinthio's story features the Ensign bludgeoning Disdemona to death with a stocking filled with sand at the request of the Moor. The two men then conspire to make the murder seem like an

accident, fracturing the skull of the victim, claiming that the rafters from a cracked ceiling above the bed caved in on her. Their plot is successful but feelings of guilt manifest in the Moor, resulting in his hatred of the Ensign. The Moor then demotes the Ensign, who takes revenge by disclosing the Moor's involvement in Disdemona's death to the Squadron Leader. Ultimately, the Moor is arrested, tortured, exiled, and then killed by Disdemona's family. A similar fate (also resulting in death) befalls the Ensign, who continues to live a life of crime until he is arrested and tortured. Ultimately, because of the collusion between the Moor and the Ensign, the latter does not plot the former's downfall through a racial agenda. In addition, because it is the Ensign who kills Disdemona, the perpetuation of what is now a racial stereotype is tempered in the tale. Roderigo and Brabantio are not found in the story; the latter may have been created in part to replace the Ensign as the one who lusts after Desdemona. In fact, the Ensign's revenge plot is triggered by her rejection of him (and his plot is directed towards her, resultantly), although it must be noted that in Shakespeare's play, Iago wants to get 'even' with the Moor, "wife for wife" (II.ii.297).

In the Cinthio tale, pity is directed towards the victim, Disdemona, but no sympathy is shown for the Moor. In the play, we (arguably) sympathise with Othello, a result of Shakespeare developing the character more than Cinthio does; the latter simply relays the story, with an emphasis on its role as a morality tale, albeit one that, in part, concerns the dangers of miscegenation. Shakespeare's Desdemona is thought, by the likes of Coleridge, to be a fair, virginal, "beautiful Venetian girl" (1960: 42), as opposed to someone who is fascinated with Othello's exoticness, one aspect of which is his sexuality. In this regard, it will be significant to determine whether or not twentieth- and twenty-first-century adapters portray Desdemona as the dynamic character found in *Othello*, or if they, in fact, portray her as being the comparatively one-dimensional victim found in Cinthio.

Even though Shakespeare creates sympathy for Othello by detailing the character's military prowess, mysterious past, as well as through the vilification of Iago and Brabantio, it is arguable as to whether the playwright gave credence to the histrionic claims: "And of the Cannibals that each other eat, / The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders" (I.iii.144–6). When the play was first performed, this might not have been the issue that it has become in cinematic adaptations, particularly those which update the setting (although this usually coincides with updating the words of the play text, too), especially if WR Elton's statement is true, that Elizabethans believed in "myth, and by disposition to entertain the marvellous" (24). Of course, this is speculative, but if twentieth- and twenty-first-century adapters were to be 'true' to Shakespeare's representation of Othello and race, then the following piece of contextual information must be taken into account: "From the earliest contact with Africans in the sixteenth century, the English responded negatively" (Olsen 81). This suggests that sympathising with Othello would be an unusual choice considering the Jacobean audience's preconceived perception of him as a villainous, lascivious stereotype, as found in Aaron of *Titus Andronicus* who plays the role of antagonist. In light of this, subsequent treatments of the character should not be dismissed as evidence of Othello's incompatibility with the modern world: he has arguably always been an anomalous choice for a hero.

It is believed, according to Malvern van Wyk, that, "from *The Tempest*, written only a few years later, that Shakespeare thought the story of the Blemmyae or 'such men / Whose heads stood in their breasts' to be nonsense" (37). By extension, if the audience believe this, it could aid in the facilitation of Othello's 'failure', although one may argue that the speech actually satisfies white conceptions of black males, in addition to the fact that the Moor's stories woo Desdemona. Van Wyk Smith also claims that Aaron is "a character so endemically evil that only in the lineaments of the conventional stage Moor of the

Elizabethan theatre could he be made credible" (35), suggesting that this type of villain represents a vogue that is specifically Elizabethan/Jacobean and may lose its relevance in contemporary media and periods. To compound this, Ewan Fernie contends that the play was written in a "social context where blackness represents animalism, mortality and sinfulness" (171). The latter is evident in the "bastard shame" (127.4) of blackness in the 'Dark Lady' sonnets. Additionally, Othello tells Desdemona: "Think on thy sins" (V.ii.39), to which she replies: "They are loves I bear to you" (V.ii.40), a result of going against her father's wishes, illustrating the association of blackness with sin prevalent in the play. When considering adaptations, this can become particularly problematic when Shakespeare's societal context is merged with that of a subsequent period.

In *Othello: A Contextual History* (1994), Virginia Mason Vaughan explains that "Shakespeare exploits a discourse of racial difference that by 1604 had become engrained in the English psyche" (51), in which blackness represented "nakedness, savagery, and general depravity" (52). She describes how theatre audiences of the period were "presumably composed of white English men and women and some foreigners" (59), who would have equated Othello's blackness with "paganism and an exotic but forbidden sexuality. Blackness had shock value" (59). She details that this was a result of the fact that – in addition to the proliferation of "lurid travellers' tales" – the number of black people in England was so "substantial by 1601 for Elizabeth to licence sea captain Caspar van Senden to transport all Negroes and blackamoors out of England" (58). Despite this, Vaughan concludes: "I think this play is racist, and I think it is not" (70). Her reasoning for believing that Shakespeare is, in part, championing the Moor and his Otherness (in spite of the fact that stereotypes are perpetuated simultaneously), is the 'music' of Othello's words and his status as the hero of the play. Similarly, many adaptations across media can also be viewed according to this binary, often depending on the contexts in which they were made.

If audience members were expected to suspend their disbelief in the same way that they would have assumingly done during the scenes featuring the three witches in *Macbeth*, for example, the contemporary setting of *Othello* makes this difficult. Unlike the majority of Shakespeare's plays, *Othello* is set close to his own contemporary period, presumably alluding to the 1570s Turco–Venetian conflict. The catalyst for this might have been that King James I had an "interest in the conflict between Turkey and Christendom" (Neill 399), suggesting that Shakespeare was writing for the tastes of the new King, who granted the playwright's acting company royal patronage in 1603. In the role of adapter, Shakespeare's period and audience might have been an influence, then, foretelling the adaptive techniques of filmmakers and adapters in subsequent centuries. Another sign that the play is intrinsically tied to its own period lies in the fact that "*Othello* recalls the plays that Jonson wrote for the King's Men, some of which tend to have two protagonists rather than one" (Potter 7), which implies that the play is an intertextual piece that would have been composed differently had Shakespeare written it during a different period, even within his own lifetime. In addition, a character in Ben Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* (1598)[5] might have been an influence on Othello: Thorello, whose name and jealousy resemble Shakespeare's Moor.

Despite the fact that Cinthio's story provided the basic plot of *Othello*, the settings of the play are of Shakespeare's creation. *Othello* adapts travel literature, not only for geographical information, but for dialogue, too, creating a web of intertextuality unique to Shakespeare's play. The same case may be put forward for its adaptations, which often feature references to other works as well as contemporary culture. Kenneth Muir comments that "Shakespeare went to Lewkenor's translation of Cardinal Contarini's *Commonwealth and Government of Venice* for some of his information about the Venetian state", and that he also made "copious use of Philemon Holland's translation of Pliny's *Natural History* for

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[5] Although unverifiable, Shakespeare might have acted in this play, according to a playlist published in the 1616 folio of Jonson's work.

filling in the exotic background of Othello's career" (1996: 12). To be clear, even though Muir uses the word 'career', Pliny's work, which features monstrous beasts, hybrids, and cannibals, also provides material for Othello's sensational stories. Shakespeare's use of Lewkenor's translation suggests that he may have borrowed more than just geographical information about the Venetian state from the text: "Lewkenor confesses, 'My education hath been in the wars'" (Muir 1961: 129). This is not dissimilar to Othello's "And little of this great world can I speak / More than pertains to feats of broil and battle" (I.iii.87–90). This raises a question regarding whether Shakespeare is adapting Contarini or Lewkenor. If he is adapting Contarini and Lewkenor, it should be noted that he is utilising non-fiction from both, and a fictional narrative from Cinthio, emphasising the multi-faceted nature of his adaptive process.

It should also be noted that the same contradictions regarding the race of Othello can be found in Africanus's *A Geographical Historie of Africa* (1550). He writes of black people being addicted to the study of arts and science, whilst also being so ignorant of philosophy that they imagine the effects of natural events to be divine. This may have influenced Shakespeare. For example, Othello claims that he is "little blessed with the soft phrase of peace" (I.iii.83), yet he is proficient in discourse with white society and succeeds within it, initially. Othello subverts the stereotype of being the uncivilised Moor, to a certain extent, yet he is also an outsider, and the eloquent speeches, which he claims to not possess (problematically implying false modesty), suggest duplicity that may hinder sympathy towards him in the same way that they can also justify his final actions. Whether or not adaptations of the play subvert the stereotype of the uncivilised Moor will be significant in determining why *Othello* is not particularly prevalent in adaptations of Shakespeare's works. However, when the idea of refuting as well as perpetuating stereotypes is updated to contemporary perceptions of 'blackness', as in Blake Nelson's *O*, it is evident that parallels

between Shakespeare's character and perceived modern equivalents are one of *Othello*'s central problems in terms of its adaptability.

1.4. CONCLUSION

Othello's adaptability/inadaptability across media is the central issue explored in the this thesis, determining whether or not the play and its representation of the Moor and his race are treated differently according to the medium, society, culture, period, and genre within which it is placed and why. It aims to offer an analysis of a broad spectrum of approaches to how *Othello* has been adapted and continues to be engaged with, examining why certain aspects of the play are either heightened or ignored, racialised or de-racialised, as well as what contributes to these decisions. Adaptations rarely "speak parrot" (II.iii.275), as Othello does of Iago in the play, even when they adapt the play 'faithfully' regarding language, setting, character, or plot. This thesis aims to explore adaptations of a play that has offered – and continues to offer – an array of interpretations. Consequently, there is no linear trajectory of representations of *Othello*, especially in terms of tracking 'progression', despite the fact that patterns are detected throughout the thesis concerning the adaptive methods of the play and its race issues across media, periods, and societies, suggesting that its place in adaptations of Shakespeare's work is perpetually unclear and changeable.

2. *Othello* in Hollywood: From Blackface to Branagh and Beyond

2.1. INTRODUCTION: HOLLYWOOD'S 'BLACK' HISTORY

This chapter considers the ways in which the changing cultural contexts of Hollywood cinema have treated *Othello* and its race issues, determining the adaptability of the play and its titular character in what is arguably its most influential environment. To this extent, Hollywood *Othello*s will serve as the framework on which this thesis builds, gauging the effect of cinema – and its adaptive methods – on representations of race in other media. In terms of charting the history of *Othello* and race, the fact that its major Hollywood adaptations represent a broad period of cinematic history facilitates chronicling the trajectory of the issue on screen. Although not writing on the subject of *Othello*, Brian A Rose states: "creators of adaptations record and exploit social concerns – reflected by motifs derived from the original story, remodeled to affect specific audiences" (1). This is achieved, he claims, through the chosen vehicle for adapters' commentary: "tracer texts" (2). Using this definition, the idea can be applied to *Othello* when analysing its film adaptations in relation to the race issues of twentieth- and twenty-first-century America. By extension, whether or not *Othello* is 'remodelled' according to the conventions and ideologies of the cinematic medium will also be examined. This chapter not only treats *Othello* as a 'tracer text', but it also considers Hollywood adaptations as potential 'tracers' for adaptations of the play across media.

As mentioned previously, in "Murdering *Othello*", Lanier observes: "cinema has been so attracted to backstage narratives which involve Othello and real murder" (199). Lanier is referring to a trend most frequently found in early cinematic adaptations of the play – such as *Carnival* (in both its 1921 and 1931 incarnations) and *A Double Life* – that involve a character within the narrative playing Othello and being influenced by the actions of the Moor, tying them to their own lives and relationships. Simultaneously, employing this device

refutes the 'relevance' of the play (by using Othello as the catalyst to make the character behave in a 'regressive' manner), as well as reinforcing it (because the character relates to the Moor enough to attempt to commit murder in 'real' life). This adaptive method is not as prevalent in the twenty-first century, but can be found in the British film, *In Othello* (2003), in which the 'spirit' of the play affects an actor whose behaviour begins to mirror that of Othello. However, this chapter extends this trajectory to subsequent 'faithful' adaptations of *Othello* (those which use its title and play text, for example), which can be linked with 'real murder' through (often accidental) parallels with contemporary societal issues, connecting the earliest Hollywood adaptations of the play to its most recent ones in one linear thematic thread.

The relationship between actor and character is maintained (although it manifests in different ways) in the case studies engaged with in this chapter, inextricably linking Othello with the actor playing the role, from the parallels between Orson Welles and his blackface Moor, to the 'exhibition' involved when black actors play the part. FR Leavis writes: "in responding to a Shakespeare play that engages us imaginatively we respond *as if* the situations were actual and the characters real" (1974: 40). Because of Othello's exotic tales and the play's history with blackface actors, it may be argued that it is difficult to respond to the character as being 'real'. Nonetheless, the Moor (and the play) has continuously been associated with 'reality' in Hollywood, to the extent that parallels were drawn between Laurence Fishburne's Othello and OJ Simpson, to cite an example to be discussed in this chapter.

If it may be argued that Hollywood mirrors society in its treatment of race, it would be fair to say that – like twentieth-century America – cinema has had a turbulent racial history, from *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), with its perpetuation of white supremacist values, to the stereotyping found in the stage roles of the Jewish actor, Al Jolson, to those of the

opera, *Porgy and Bess* (1935) (written and adapted by three white men for black actors to play), to the character of Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* (1939), and through to the blaxploitation genre and subsequent urban stereotyping found in 1990s and postmillennial cinema. In conjunction with the fact that *Othello* is the work of the Western world's most acclaimed playwright, Hollywood has found it difficult to appropriate it to the twentieth- and twenty-first century without retaining some aspects of the 'source' that do not correspond with contemporary adaptive frameworks. As mentioned, Edward Said states that one of Europe's "deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (1) comes from the Orient. However, for Americans, according to Said, the Orient is "much more likely to be associated very differently with the Far East (China and Japan, mainly)" (1). Despite this, the version of the Orient depicted in Hollywood *Othello*s is based on a combination of Shakespeare's Jacobean conception and contemporary American conceptions of 'blackness'.

If attitudes towards race in cinema have not changed since the birth of cinema, it would be difficult to watch adaptations of *Othello* without seeing the titular character as a racial stereotype, albeit a different, updated stereotype to the one presented in the play. The director of *The Birth of a Nation*, DW Griffith, is described by Hollywood historian, Brian Lee, as lacking intellect and restraint, being unwilling to change or grow, having a crude sense of comedy, as well as embracing violence and sentimentality in his films. Lee contends: "This is almost a perfect blueprint for the creation of the various film genres that were to dominate American film production in the future. It gives weight to the claim that it was Griffith who really invented Hollywood" (12). A problem with this – and the ramification of it on subsequent filmmakers – is that, if Griffith's work lacks the ability to change, then adapters might be influenced by early cinema more than (or in conjunction with) Shakespeare's play, especially those whose work falls into specific genres, such as Oliver

Parker's erotic thriller and Tim Blake Nelson's teenpic, potentially modifying

Othello/Othello for subsequent adapters across media.

      In "The Visibility of Race and Media History" (1993), Jane Rhodes writes that

images of benign slaves in early cinema "were replaced in popular culture by the more

sinister coon or the black brute whose sole aim was raping white women" (36). Rhodes is not

writing about *Othello* here, but the similarities are obvious. The raping of a white woman is

realised in the most recent Hollywood appropriation of the play, *O*. As printed in *White on*

Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture (1996) in 1973, Donald

Bogle observed five dominant racial stereotypes in Hollywood cinema:

          toms – they served their masters well;

          coons – funny men; all blacks are stupid;

          mulattos – tragic because they're not all white;

          mammies – sexless archmothers;

          bucks – bestial superstuds. (152)

This guide becomes complicated when applied to Welles's *Othello* and his antecedents

because they do not feature black actors. It would be anachronistic to apply Bogle's

categorisations to subsequent adaptations of the play, which were released twenty-two and

twenty-eight years subsequent to this statement, respectively, but there are elements of the

'bestial superstud' in Fishburne's Othello and Mekhi Phifer's Odin, proving the lasting effect

of racial stereotyping in Hollywood.

      In the prologue to *The Birth of a Nation,* the film is tenuously compared to the "art of

the written word – that art to which we owe the Bible and the works of Shakespeare". Even

anachronistically, one can draw a parallel between this and subsequent adaptations of

Shakespeare's work, which arguably use his name as a means of ascertaining 'highbrow'

credibility, such as *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and *Shakespeare in Love*

(1998). Griffith uses Shakespeare's name to justify the ideology put forward in his film, a

dubious tactic as it implies that the latter's views on race and other issues are objective truths,

as opposed to products of their own time. In the case of screen *Othello*s, using the play's plot,

characters, words, and title (and the connection to Shakespeare that this invokes) to comment

on contemporary race relations is certainly evident in the most recent Hollywood versions.

Richard Maltby notes that, in Griffith's silent films, the director "draws parallels between the

screen action and current events – in short, to open up a direct line of communication

between himself and his audience" (456). How adapters of *Othello* appropriate the play to

reflect the concerns of their own periods and cultures is a preoccupation of this chapter,

which may prove that Griffith's Hollywood legacy has infected adaptations of a play written

centuries earlier.

2.2. A 'BLACK AND WHITE' ISSUE: *OTHELLO* BEFORE 'COLOUR'

Related to Lanier's point about the connection between Othello and 'real murder', in

"'Othello/Me': Racial Drag and the Pleasures of Boundary-Crossing with *Othello*" (2001),

Elise Marks writes: "in *Othello*, the boundary between Self and Other is famously, and

perilously, permeable" (103). The 'Othello/Me' concept is evident in Welles's *Othello*,

although 'Self' and 'Other' do not manifest in the white actor transforming into the Moor

within the narrative of the film, but because Othello is presented – in part – as Welles

himself. From critical and commercial perspectives, the potential reasons for this could be the

perception of Welles as a celebrity, his potential 'high culture' credentials concerning his

personal 'journey' with the project over the course of three years, and his status as an *auteur*

whose career was "marked by confrontations with 'the system'" (Maltby 46–7). This section,

in particular, examines the treatment of race in Welles's adaptation in addition to analysing how its paratextual materials treat the issue and engage with the 'Othello/Me' concept, although a discussion of the film pervades the entire thesis.

It has been written that Welles's *Othello* adheres to the notion that the play "insists that we relate – at times obsessively – with actor and with character" (Davies 209), but one aim of this thesis is to illustrate that this existed before Welles's adaptation and continues to manifest in subsequent adaptations. Printed on the VHS cover is the fact that the film won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 1952. It ostensibly portrays Welles as himself – foregrounded and in profile – emphasising the 'merit' of the director/actor. *Citizen Kane* (1941) afforded him the "complete freedom to make any film he liked without being subjected to the normal restraints or interference" (Lee 22). As a result, *Othello* might not have been a play that the studio wanted to regurgitate; rather, it was a labour of love for Welles, evident in the filming schedule, which spanned three years. Theatrically released a year subsequent to the resignation of Louis B Mayer, who condemned Shakespeare adaptations as "box-office poison" (Wilson, Jr 1), it is difficult to argue that *Othello* was particularly adaptable in Hollywood in 1952. The film's engagement with race (when compared with adaptations that followed) is minimal, suggesting that it is the casting of a black actor in the role that serves – at least in part – as the catalyst for contemporary cultural allusions in Hollywood *Othello*s, specifically regarding contemporising the race issues of the play.

However, in addition to Queen Elizabeth II succeeding George VI, 1952 saw the publication of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (detailing the plight of African Americans in the early twentieth century), the University of Tennessee admitting its first black student, and the first professional African American baseball umpire (Emmett Ashford) being appointed, as well as the rise of McCarthyism, which saw the publication of *Red Channels: The Report of*

Communist Influence in Radio and Television (1950), which listed 151 entertainers and

public figures – of which Welles was one – who were suspected of having Communist beliefs

(Schrecker 244). Race issues – and ones concerning identity and outside influences on

American society – were relevant at the time, and can be specifically tied to Welles's *Othello*

when one considers the similar issues found in the play (regarding the influence of the

'outsider'), as well as extratextually, if Welles's status as a potentially troubling influence on

American culture is taken into account.

The pressbook for the film (labelled as the Exhibitor's Campaign Book) features a

page of paratextual materials, in which Welles and Shakespeare are the main selling points.

In fact, schools, colleges, and dramatic societies were encouraged to advertise the adaptation

as featuring "the famous ORSON WELLES", whereas bookshops and libraries were

informed: "There are many bookshops and libraries which make a feature of the works of

William Shakespeare". Welles and Shakespeare are the two main selling points in these

examples. Additionally, a biographical piece on Welles features the headline, "Living

Legend", potentially alluding to how *Citizen Kane* influences the way in which audiences

view his subsequent work. Marketing the film (outside of bookshops and libraries) on

Welles's Hollywood credentials may point towards the inadaptability of Shakespeare at the

time, as well as *Othello*. Taglines (or catchlines, to use the terminology of the book) include:

"The story of love … of one who loved not wisely but too well", and "The tragic story of

love and jealousy", which 'sell' the film as a love story (the posters enclosed in the pressbook

feature shots of Othello and Desdemona embracing). However, the materials, it seems, are

actually obsequious to Shakespeare, despite being erroneous: one write-up in the pressbook

on the making of the adaptation describes how the movie was "filmed in many of the actual

authentic settings". Additionally, a short piece entitled "Exploitation" details how distributors

and theatre managers should market the film: "Dress up your Staff in the costumes of the

period depicted in the film". This suggests that Shakespeare – or 'Shakespeare', to use the

inverted commas of Holderness – is used as a "brand" (2001: 129) in this instance to signify

'high culture'.

One may argue that Welles's racial ambiguity in his adaptation is borne out of the fact

that the film is shot in black and white. This is clearly not the case when analysing

paratextual materials: even in the colour painting on the home video cover (also a poster for

the film), the character's race is ambiguous (as it is in the black and white shot inside the

'O'), suggesting that star power is of paramount importance in promoting this Hollywood

adaptation of *Othello* (see fig. 2.1).

Fig. 2.1. "*Othello*". 1952. Poster. *IMDb*. IMDb.com, n.d. Web. 17 June 2015.

By comparison, a British *Othello* like Stuart Burge's 1965 adaptation, features Shakespeare on the cover of the DVD release (British Home Entertainment, 2003). With the prominence of Welles's image (his 'whiteness', status as *auteur*, and artistic merit) in conjunction with Shakespeare's name and play, one may argue that he resembles Shakespeare in paratextual materials more than the character he plays. This is justified, in part, because Welles (unlike Parker) is not just an actor in the film, but also the director, paralleling Shakespeare's role as 'creator'. In "Black and White as Technique in Orson Welles's *Othello*" (2002), James Stone argues: "Welles does much to strip Shakespeare's play of its racial thematics, or at least to reduce racial difference to the fundamentally cinematic grid of black and white photography" (189). This is true, to a certain extent: in some scenes it looks as though he is barely wearing make-up at all. However, the 'blackness' of his Othello is evident in other ways. As Victoria Bladen observes in "*Othello* on screen: Monsters, marvellous space and the power of the tale" (2015), "monstrous, even demonic" (26) statues are placed in the *mise-en-scène* of scenes featuring Welles's Moor, using visual signifiers to embellish or replace that which is achieved through language in the play.

By comparison, Parker does the opposite in his film: rather than tempering the play's racial 'thematics', the contrast between black and white is heightened in the 1995 adaptation in the love scenes between Othello and Desdemona, as well as in the image of them embracing in paratextual materials. One poster for Parker's film focuses on racial miscegenation and sexuality, and – recalling the placement of Shakespeare on the DVD release of Burge's film (which conceivably could have been influenced by Parker's paratextual imagery in that the DVD was released in 2003) – it is the white male (Iago) who is placed in the background in this instance, looking down the camera lens, as he does throughout the film – as a metatextual means of colluding with the audience (see fig. 2.2).
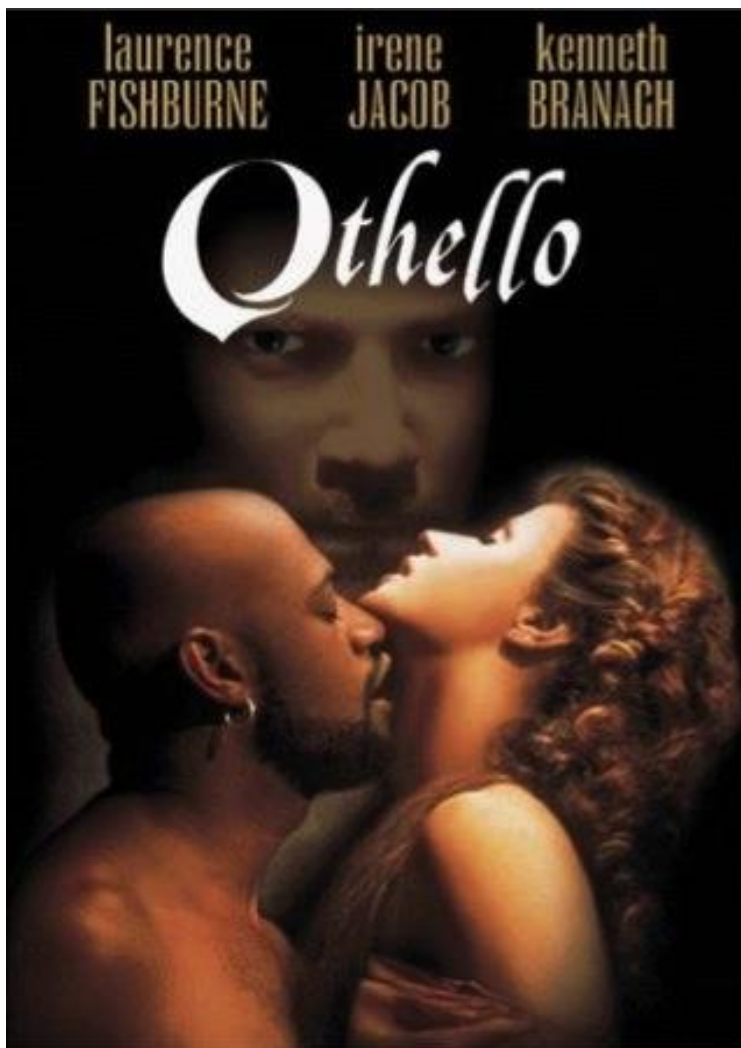
Fig. 2.2. "*Othello*". 1995. Poster. *IMDb*. IMDb.com, n.d. Web. 2 June 2015.

Iago's prominence in the adaptation mirrors that of Shakespeare on Burge's paratext, especially when one considers what the Ensign represents in Parker's adaptation: he is arguably the viewer/voyeur and the antihero, but also the architect/creator of the tragedy and was seen – by some at the time – as the "unacknowledged director" (Buchanan 187). As he does in the film, Iago observes and oversees events, commenting on them in the adaptation in a fashion similar to a news reporter, a tactic that viewers could conceivably tie to the publicity that the Simpson trial received in the news media. However, the placement of the title of the film on his forehead may have also led some to believe that he is, in fact, the

titular character. Moreover, the positioning of the Ensign as the antihero might have been used as a potential method of dealing with the arguable inadaptability of the play and its titular character.

Towards the denouement of Welles's film, the actor's blackface make-up gets progressively darker in tone. However, the shadowy cinematography obscures the Moor's body in a way that contrasts subsequent Hollywood Othellos, a significant factor in differentiating Welles's portrayal from those of Fishburne and Phifer, which both emphasise 'blackness'. Regarding the opening of Welles's film, it does not begin in the same way that the play does. Instead, it opens with thirty-eight shots (over the course of four minutes) with no dialogue for accompaniment, except choral singing and prayer, before an intertitle fills the screen. The intertitle – an adaptation cliché – features the full title of the play adorned on a book, which progresses from one page to the next, featuring both Shakespeare's name and the bolded word: 'adaptation'. The fact that the book is shown (rather than the stage, as in *A Double Life*, for example) seems to place the film as a literary adaptation, rather than a theatre adaptation, compounded by the fact that another page appears with misleading text: prose is read in voiceover by Welles (rather than by his character, Othello, whose voice is deeper and tonally different) and is not from the play text.

It details the premise of the story and is simultaneously written on the screen, indicating a further parallel between the director and Shakespeare. The opening of the film depicts the funeral of Othello and the imprisonment of Iago, who is hooded during these scenes. In contrast, Othello is hooded upon his first appearance in Parker's adaptation. Branagh's Iago dominates the opening of the 1995 film, manipulating Roderigo, Brabantio, and the viewer, colluding with the latter in his cozening of Othello, who is shown fleetingly and hooded. Because Branagh's Ensign does this, an unintentional parallel can be made between the character and a news reporter, which provides Branagh's Iago with an

'objective' quality, in that he seemingly represents the viewers' interests by providing information to them, significant if audiences watched the film upon its release through the lens of the OJ Simpson case, even if the parallels are accidental.

2.3. "OCULAR PROOF" (III.iii.363): 'COLOUR' *OTHELLO*S DURING THE SHAKESPEARE 'BOOM'

In *The Birth of a Nation*, the Ku Klux Klan 'saves' the white Elsie from the 'black' (or, rather, played in blackface) Silas Lynch. There are several black actors in the film, but because of the sexual aspect of the relationship, a white actor was chosen to play the role. As a result, Griffith's film established another pattern in Hollywood: that of linking sexuality with race, already an element of Shakespeare's play. This section focuses on this in comparison with the negation of it in Welles's film, progressing to an *Othello* made forty-three years after the 1952 adaptation in a different cultural climate, examining the adaptability of the play alongside the representation of Othello and his race in this context. In fact, one may argue that the time lapsed between the adaptations points towards the inadaptability of the play in Hollywood. It is claimed in *New Wave Shakespeare on Screen* (2007) that: "no Shakespeare play has been adapted to the screen as provocatively as *Othello* has in the last twenty years" (Cartelli and Rowe 120). In addition to covering the period in which Parker's film was made, this period spans Janet Suzman's South African production on British television during Apartheid, through to Blake Nelson's *O*, delayed because of its unintended parallels with the Columbine shootings. Resultantly, one aim of this chapter is to determine whether it is *Othello* that is the 'controversial' element, or if adapters/critics/audiences make the play controversial by positioning it to correspond with current events.

In the case of Parker's film, a potential reason for its 'provocativeness' is clear. Through a racial lens, America in the years building up to the 1995 adaptation witnessed the Rodney King incident and its subsequent riots (sparked by the acquittal of four police officers who were filmed beating a black motorist), the OJ Simpson case, the prevalence of race issues (and racial miscegenation) in art, such as in a Hollywood film like *Jungle Fever* (1991), as well as the rise of gangsta rap music and its controversial (and often race-related) content, evident in Ice T's "Race War" (1993), to cite an example. As an adaptation that markets Othello's 'blackness', however, Parker's film might have had its potential maximum audience during this period, in spite of (or due to) its ability to incite provocation. In *O. J. Simpson Facts and Fictions: News Rituals in the Construction of Reality* (1999), Darnell M Hunt extends his primary discussion to cinema, stating: "actors in the United States helplessly rely upon the bipolar framework" (10), a reference to one-dimensionality: 'black' or 'white'. In the case of adaptations of *Othello*, black and white actors usually portray the Moor contrastingly, but both perpetuate stereotypes, regardless of this. White actors in blackface and black actors both call attention to race: the former through the racist overtones involved in mimesis, and the latter because of unusualness and the self-perpetuation of a stereotype. Fishburne, in fact, was the first black actor to be cast as the Moor in a feature-length Hollywood *Othello*.

In "'Othello was a white man': Properties of Race on Shakespeare's stage", Callaghan documents that – in the years since black actors started playing the role on stage in the nineteenth century – "the performance becomes an exhibition as opposed to 'art'". In other words, a black actor has been seen to detract from Othello's "tragic humanity" (91). To a certain extent, this may be the genesis of the Othello/Me concept in that a black actor causes the audience to see the character differently, calling attention to how the way in which we view Othello depends on the race of the actor playing the role. In turn, this is also a potential

explanation of the trend in early cinema of actors playing the role within narratives of films, such as *Carnival* and *A Double Life*.

Parker's *Othello* was the first major studio adaptation of the play to feature a black actor in the titular role and the reasons for this are varied. Firstly, in post-civil rights America, the mimesis of a black character by a white actor would surely be deemed offensive. Secondly, potential societal parallels could be made with the race issues of contemporary United States culture, which may have aided in the film's commercial potential. And thirdly, before Parker's film, there were adaptations produced outside of Hollywood that feature black actors, such as the televisual productions of Janet Suzman (1988) and Trevor Nunn (1990), as well as a Hollywood movie likes *True Identity* (1991), in which *Othello* plays a part in the narrative, confirming that *Othello*s are influenced by their predecessors. The play has also been by adapted by black directors in the United States. African American actress Liz White adapted the play (1980); and Ted Lange, known for his role in *The Love Boat* (1977–87), directed an independent adaptation (not commercially released on DVD) of the play in 1989, both of which push contemporary race issues to the fore, suggesting that a black Othello as 'exhibition' is not resolved when re-appropriated by black actors/directors.

True Identity follows the mould set by films like *Carnival* and *A Double Life*, as Lenny Henry's character is involved in playing the role of Othello on stage within the film. Unlike those two, however, Henry's character, Miles Pope, wants to play Othello, which may indicate that one of the reasons why the actors within the narratives of the aforementioned films do not want to play the part is a result of their race. A potential 'reaction' to screen *Othello*s manifests in one scene in which Miles 'whites up' in order to escape capture from the Mafia. This may be an ironic reference to how the play had previously been adapted on screen; after all, *True Identity* was made before a black actor had played the part in a Hollywood film. Additionally, if one reads the film extratextually, the contrast of a black

Englishman playing a part previously only played in Hollywood by white Americans may imply a sense of 'authenticity' through Henry's nationality and race, even though a white actor would have played the role on stage in Jacobean England.

However, a problem that pervades adaptations featuring black Othellos is the adherence to a racial stereotype. In Henry's case (within the 'actor as Othello' backstage narrative framework), it manifests in the verisimilitude of a black American male through his actions, 'period' clothing, dialogue, and accent. Henry's performance coincides with Maltby's assertion that "Hollywood has usually required supporting players, ethnic minorities, and women to be more broadly expressive than white male stars" (586). However, because *True Identity* is a comedy, race is treated in accordance with the genre. When threatened by a mobster, Miles responds: "This is one spook that just won't stay whacked". The word 'spook' recalls an earlier time and is also used in the British adaptation, *All Night Long* (1962), suggesting that Henry's character is 'responding' to previous *Othello*s and periods, reacting to what it perceives to be the 'problems' with them in terms of representations of race.

Both Buchanan and Cartmell have published on *Othello* and race in Hollywood, informing what is written in this chapter, especially concerning Parker's adaptation – and in the case of Cartmell, pointing towards the inadaptability of the play in cinema. Resultantly, this section investigates that which is not detailed in their work, and that which can be applied to – and extended through – a discussion of *Othello*s before and after Parker's adaptation. As Buchanan observes in the aforementioned "Virgin and Ape, Venetian and Infidel: Labellings of Otherness in Parker's *Othello*", with "his colour, stature, bearing, earrings, unfamiliar gestures and half-mocking atmosphere" (182), Fishburne's Othello has no interest in fitting into Venetian society, suggesting that one of the reasons for using black

actors in these films is to 'react' to their blackface antecedents, who – in Welles's case, for example – are almost indistinguishable from the denizens of Venice.

Michael Neill writes: "*Othello* in the late 1980s and 1990s would become a play saturated with racial anxiety" (63). The Simpson parallel exemplifies the way in which audiences and critics can read adaptations through the lens of current events, even when, in the case of the Parker's film, the filmmaking process had already begun when the incident occurred. According to Samuel Crowl, some viewers read Parker's *Othello* "through an American, rather than British, cultural lens" (2003: 92). As the film is a product of Hollywood, this hardly seems revelatory. However, both the 1952 and 1995 adaptations adapt Othello's speech in Act One, Scene Three 'faithfully' in terms of their use of the words of the play text. However, those viewing Parker's film upon its release might have connected Othello's tale of wooing Desdemona with Simpson and his interracial marriage, delivered to the Senators and other 'witnesses', potentially resembling a courtroom to contemporary viewers. Furthermore, even though the handkerchief is not emphasised in Parker's film any more than it is in Welles's adaptation, it would be easy to connect it with the infamous glove of the Simpson trial because it serves as 'evidence' in the play. This suggests that even when society does not influence the filmmaking process, it can still be viewed through a specific cultural lens.

This is not to negate the obvious parallels between Othello and Simpson, however. In a 'suicide note' read aloud at a news conference on 17 June 1994, Simpson's words, "if we had a problem, it's because I loved her so much" ("O.J.'s Suicide Note") resembles Othello's declaration as being "one that loved not wisely, but too well" (V.ii.342). Later in the letter, Simpson reiterates the sentiment: "I loved her; make that clear to everyone" ("O.J.'s Suicide Note"), which recalls Othello's insistent: "set you down this" (V.ii.349). As this chapter explains, coincidental parallels and the media's reaction to the Simpson case aligned it with

Othello, continuing the discourse of early cinematic adaptations of the play regarding 'backstage' narratives in which the 'character' (Simpson, in this case) is influenced by the actions of the Moor. In actuality, however, it would be specious to assume that Othello influenced Simpson, just as it is to assume that Parker's film is influenced by the Simpson case, beyond the arguable case of the aforementioned paratextual materials.

In *O. J. Simpson: The Trial of the Century* (1997), Felicia Okele-Ibezim highlights a dichotomy in perceptions of the case. Speaking towards the end of the trial regarding media interpretations of it, defence attorney Robert Shapiro stated: "'I still believe it is not a racial issue'" (13). However, in terms of how the situation was perceived by the public, it is claimed that there was "a huge divide between whites and blacks" (8). This suggests that if the trial was not 'about' race, then the media and public had the power to make it so, in the same way that coincidental parallels were drawn between the case and Parker's film. It has been reported, as per Okele-Ibezim, that: "blacks overwhelmingly felt that, for once, justice had been served regarding a black man" (9). Conversely, the verdict also reportedly "sparked unprecedented white resentment" (Williams xv). In light of this, white cinematic audiences might have found themselves colluding with Iago because of what he represents in his complicity with the viewer. Othello, however, is not 'served' with 'justice' at the end of Parker's adaptation, rendering the film unsuccessful in its portrayal of a black male when compared with the Simpson case. Moreover, in light of 'unprecedented white resentment', Othello as a protagonist for a white audience may have been minimised at the time.

Crowl observes in *Shakespeare at the Cineplex: the Kenneth Branagh Era* (2003) that: "Parker's screenplay cuts all of Othello's lines about his race and colour, which indicates how thoroughly he has internalised Iago's racial and racist assumptions" (100). Crowl argues that Parker's alternative method of showing Iago's 'racist assumptions' is through the symbolism of chess pieces and the scene in which an unnamed black character,

whom the viewer is presumably supposed to mistake for Othello, dons a white Venetian mask (despite the fact that Othello shows no desire to alter his race). Crowl also notes that none of Parker's visual metaphors is explored further or developed beyond their gratuitousness in order to create meaning, allowing viewers to impose their own cultural extratexts onto adaptations. During Parker's adaptation of Othello's speech to the Senators, the Moor talks of "witchcraft" and being "sold to slavery", and images are shown of the character in shackles, as well as shots of him riding on horseback through flames (an image borrowed, perhaps, from an equivalent scene in Zeffirelli's film, suggesting intertextual engagement between adaptations). Subsequently, a flashback is shown of Othello, as a child, in a different landscape, looking on with a bone in hand towards a male with a spear in his, suggesting exoticness – and arguably evoking Africa, too. Rather than allowing viewers to create their own images from Othello's 'music', then, Parker literalises (and offers visual 'equivalents' for) the Moor's speeches, in some cases.

Elements of the Simpson trial that sparked media interest (such as tragedy, violence, racial miscegenation, drama, mystery, scandal, spectacle, and controversy) are also facets of *Othello*, to a certain extent. Resultantly, utilising them would retain 'fidelity' to *Othello* whilst also being culturally 'relevant', emphasising not only the coincidental similarities between it and the Simpson case, but also the play's susceptibility to be exploited, thus pointing towards the adaptability of the play. During the period, the media had no problem comparing Simpson with Othello. In a July 1995 issue of *Los Angeles* magazine, one reviewer wrote: "'They murder. And afterward, they don't feel very bad. Welcome to the Othello syndrome'" (Hunt 1999: 33).[6] This comparison is dubious because Othello commits

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[6] In an email conversation on 16 Jan. 2015, director Tom Magill offered his opinion on the 'Othello syndrome' remark, stating: "I think this generalised comment says more about the reviewer than it does about the subject". Regarding the 'ghettoisation' of Othello and the media parallels with Simpson, Magill continues: "That's sad and depressing to read". He concludes: "I have not seen any contemporary adaptations of *Othello* but I think it is cheap and lazy to simply 'ghettoise' the main character".

suicide in light of his wrongdoing (proving his feelings of guilt). Other parallels may also be purely coincidental. For example, because there were "many observers comparing daily developments to a tasty soap opera" (Hunt 1999: 41), a blur between reality and fiction may have appeared in the Simpson case, mirroring the Othello/Me concept, making Simpson comparable to a soap opera character, but also positioning Othello as a character who is not confined to his Shakespearean origins, but one who changes with each new adaptation, and one whose actions – in the case of the films involving backstage narratives – influence 'real' events.

In her chapter on Parker's *Othello*, Buchanan criticises one journalist for questioning, "'why … is there something so creepy and so very O. J. in the initial love scene between Othello and Desdemona?'" (194). It may be true that Parker's adaptation attempts to disconnect itself from topical allusions within the narrative of the film itself, to a certain extent, but its theatrical release came a year subsequent to the murders of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman (even though the trial concluded in 1997), and to suggest that it did not influence or affect the film in any way (including its post-production and marketing) may be overlooking some aspects of the film as a product, as evident in its paratexts. Additionally, as has been alluded to, the casting of a black actor in itself can be considered 'topical', especially in the context of *Othello*'s history in adaptations. Despite the autonomous nature of Branagh's role – both in terms of screen time and the focalisation of his Iago (which is comparable to Welles's Othello, even though they play hero and villain respectively) – the white star is centralised regardless of the role he plays. Similar to Welles's voiceover in the opening of his film, Branagh's Iago is comparable to Shakespeare in that he speaks directly to the audience, despite not playing Othello. The parallel suggests that Fishburne is excluded from doing this as a result of his race.

The aspects of Parker's *Othello* highlighted by newspaper and magazine articles tended to be those of a violent and sexual nature. The reviewer for *Time Out* (14 December 1995), for example, notes that Fishburne's Othello is "more than usually violent" (compared with previous incarnations of the character) before mentioning his 'violence' again before the end of the 197-word article. Like Willard White's Othello (in Trevor Nunn's 1990 televisual adaptation), whose race was not mentioned overtly in reviews (to be discussed in the subsequent chapter), the *Time Out* reviewer might be using the word 'violent' as a synonym for 'black', whilst also implying that Fishburne's Moor is more violent than previous white Othellos. However, it is true that Fishburne's Othello strikes Nathaniel Parker's Cassio, attempts to drown Iago, and then attacks the Ensign after his plot is revealed. Additionally, the review of Parker's film in *The Observer* (18 February 1996) points out the torridness of Othello's fantasies about Desdemona performing sexual acts with Cassio, rather than 'blaming' the director, for example, for showing the scene. This may have been influenced by a previous adaptation of the play, Zeffirelli's *Otello*, in which Cassio dreams of wooing Desdemona with words, although the difference between the races of the characters potentially corresponds with the nature of what is being 'imagined'. Additionally, literally seeing Desdemona committing adultery can serve as a method of creating sympathy for Othello on screen.

Dissimilar to Welles's Othello, the viewer is encouraged to study Fishburne's 'blackness', which contrasts the 'fair' Desdemona, highlighting the fact that Othello's race is one of his defining features in the adaptation, although it must be noted that Desdemona's lustfulness is centralised alongside that of the Moor in the above poster. As Cartmell observes, it is Fishburne's Othello's "body rather than his words which clearly attracts Desdemona" (2001: 146). Of course, as Cartmell points out, this is evident in the play, too, but only in conjunction with Othello's exotic tales (tied with the references to 'blackness'

that Parker cuts), which Desdemona devours "with a greedy ear" (I.iii.148). By comparison, however, Welles's film does not avoid allowing the viewer to gaze upon Othello. Indeed, his body is transported in long shots in the opening scene, but our introduction to the character 'alive' is when he is pronounced as having a "sooty bosom" (I.ii.70), after which he steps into the frame, and stands in silence as the camera lingers. Of course, it must be noted, that this might be a ploy to show us that the man in front of the camera (as well as 'behind' it) is Orson Welles. The objectification of Fishburne is exemplified when Branagh's Iago shouts "'Look!'", rather than "Look where he comes" (III.iii.333) of the play text, colluding with the audience by speaking to them, directing their attention.

'Blackness' is amplified in later adaptations, arguably as a ploy to gain sympathy for Othello in a society in which OJ Simpson can be a popular sport and film star, yet is also, allegedly, capable of murder. Along with the influence of Griffith, scopophilia (the pleasure of looking) is another aspect of Hollywood's history that is clearly prevalent in the 1990s. Rudolph Valentino, for example, "was presented in his movies as an object of desire, an erotic body to be exhibited and gazed at" (Maltby 404), which "invoked a set of racist stereotypes about the excessive, predatory sexuality of the ethnic or racial Other" (Maltby 405). This is an element of Fishburne's Othello that was not only unique to Hollywood adaptations at this point, but also ones that cast black actors in the role. Because both adaptations examined thus far treat the issue of race so differently to one another, it is difficult to observe patterns specific to Hollywood adaptations beyond the perpetuation of a racial stereotype, specifically one that is influenced by Griffith. However, the different cultural climates in which the adaptations were produced might also account for their differences. Tim Blake Nelson's *O*, however, was scheduled for release only four years after Parker's adaptation.

2.4. "DESIRES FOR SPORT" (IV.iii.100): *OTHELLO* IN POSTMILLENNIAL

HOLLYWOOD

Both Buchanan and Cartmell published on race issues in Parker's *Othello* at the turn-of-the-millennium. In the case of Cartmell, her chapter was published on 18 June 2001, predating the cinematic release of Blake Nelson's adaptation (31 August 2001). Buchanan argues that Parker's film perpetuates "'the virgin and ape' myth", and subsequently, "nudges the material in that direction" (196) for future versions. However, despite being an accurate premonition, Buchanan does not discuss the most recent *Othello*. In "Film as the New Shakespeare and Film on Shakespeare: Reversing the Shakespeare/Film Trajectory" (2006), Cartmell identifies that "Shakespeare adaptations at the beginning of the twenty-first century tend to reduce Shakespeare to an intertext" (1158). This is certainly true of *O*, in which the play can be seen as a hypotextual "pageant / To keep us in false gaze" (I.iii.17–18). In contrast with previous Hollywood adaptations, *O* is an 'appropriation' of *Othello* (to use Sanders's definition). Unlike adaptation, which "signals a relationship with an informing sourcetext or original", appropriation "frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain", that "may or may not involve a generic shift", and may or may not even explicitly acknowledge the relationship with its 'source' (2006: 26). The film adapts more from its own societal palette than it does from its 'source' material. Resultantly, its adaptation of *Othello*'s race issues is unique. Unlike Parker's film, which had cultural parallels thrust upon it afterward, *O* creates its own cultural parallels.

Appropriation is not a new device in Hollywood *Othello*s. *Jubal* (1956) transposes the basic plot of the play to the western genre framework, although the Otherness of the titular character only manifests in his status as an outsider in a new town. *O* explores race, violence, sex, and drug use within the context of an American society in the aftermath of the

Columbine High School massacre, although it must be noted that – similar to the parallels between Parker's film and the Simpson case – it was filmed before the incident actually occurred; nonetheless, the film was delayed until 2001, regardless (it was scheduled for cinematic release in 1999). Lanier's point on popular culture, that it "uses Shakespeare to create meaning and not merely as an inert decoration or simple-minded token of prestige" (2002: 16), can also be applied to appropriation. In the case of *O*, its director refers to the adaptive process of his film (on the DVD audio commentary) as "re-imagining *Othello*". By appropriating – or 're-imagining' the play – Blake Nelson does not use his 'source' as a 'token of prestige', he engages with it as if it is of relevance to contemporary America – and does not treat it with the 'high culture' aplomb that the comparatively 'faithful' adaptations of Welles and Parker do in terms of language, characters, and setting. However, whether or not it is possible to 're-imagine' *Othello*, what this actually involves, and to what extent its race issues are engaged with and changed, are the main preoccupations of this section, in order to determine if it is possible to 'create meaning' from a play that seems to be at odds with modern sensibilities concerning 'blackness'.

The Darwinian definition of the word 'adaptation' indicates that the adaptive process is "a means of evolution and survival" (Stam 2005: 2–3). Applying this to screen adaptation, removing elements of 'source texts' may pertain to the time restrictions of Hollywood cinema or removing that which is no longer relevant in the adapted context (for 'survival' purposes), for example. Blake Nelson's method of making *Othello* 'evolve' and 'survive' on screen, however, is questionable in his film's handling of the race issues of the play, which are arguably incompatible with Hollywood. In terms of its adaptive process, the most striking element of *O* may be that it utilises *Othello*'s plot without any of its characters' dialogue. In other words, it embraces the violence and sexuality associated with 'blackness' in the play and negates Othello's "soft phrase of peace" (I.iii.83), even though the Moor claims that he

lacks it. Resultantly, as a prelude to his final actions, Othello's speeches are an important aspect of his characterisation, especially in their original context, in which the character comes from a world – according to his "unvarnished tale" (I.iii.91) – of "hills whose heads touch heaven" (I.iii.142–3), of "cannibals that each other eat" (I.iii144) and "men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders" (i.iii.145–6), in which "sieges, fortunes" (I.iii.130), "broil and battle" (I.iii.88), and "accidents by flood and field" (130) occur.

By removing this, what we see on screen becomes paramount. In the case of *O*, there are no visual indicators that Odin is particularly different from his peers: he even dresses in a similar fashion to the other characters. The main difference, of course, is that he is black, but a question pertaining to whether or not this is a significant differentiator in turn-of-the-millennium Hollywood is raised. Regarding *Othello*, HR Coursen writes: "Without the words and the magnificent arc of their overreaching, no tragedy exists" (108). One may presume this to be an overestimation of words in *Othello* in light of the fact that the ending of *O* depicts the 'tragic' downfall of Odin (in that both he and Desdemona die), but Coursen's statement is proved true when one considers that Odin is never truly presented as the hero of the film (Hugo/Iago's antihero status compounds this), perhaps because he lacks the '*Othello* music' of the play. However, *Othello* features very few similarities to Cinthio's prose, especially in terms of its characters' words. In fact, Cinthio's story has little speech, as a third-person narrator pervades the story.

Convincing viewers of Odin's exoticness may be the reason for *O*'s South Carolina setting, the founding state of the Confederate States of America. Even in this somewhat believable location, Odin's Otherness is treated with a sense of irony: as much as the filmmakers appear to want to centralise the issue of race through what they deem to be a realistic setting, they presumably know that Odin's past (at another school) cannot be sensationalised in the same way that Othello's mythical homeland is in Shakespeare's play.

In his Introduction to *Alternative Shakespeares* (1985), cultural materialist John Drakakis writes of adaptations: "the world which they are said to imitate is reduced to a unified ahistorical cipher" (4). The ways in which the race issues of *Othello* and the adapted period are amalgamated in Hollywood adaptations attest to Drakakis's statement, although it should be noted that Odin's language and weapon of choice (a gun) have more in common with contemporary black stereotypes and gangsta rap than with Othello.[7]

However, in addition to adhering to the imagery of rap music, *O*'s use of guns may have been influenced by one of its predecessors in the 1990s Shakespeare 'boom', *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet*, in which one could "mistake the opening scenes for Quentin Tarantino's *Romeo + Juliet*" (Lehmann 190). In Blake Nelson's film, Odin's race is explored in a bedroom scene, in which he uses a racial pejorative in reference to himself, which is repeated by Desi (Desdemona), illustrating a curiosity borne out of her predominantly white upbringing. She continues by questioning the taboo: "'why can't I say it? My people invented the word!'". The word 'invented' is potentially crucial as it parallels the conception of Othello by a white male, white actors, and white society. Additionally, *O* is a film in which a black actor follows the directions of a white filmmaker. Desi's repetition of Odin's language asserts her control and power over him by illustrating that he – not her – is the one who is 're-appropriating' words.

The 'equivalent' of Othello's mysteriousness and danger manifests in Blake Nelson's film in the scar on Odin's back, which Desi notices as they lie together in her bed. Echoing Desdemona's admiration for the "dangers" Othello "passed" (I.iii.165), Desi states: "You do have the best stories". This is one of the few appropriations of Shakespeare's dialogue in the film. When Emily (Emilia) asks Desi if she would have the same problems sleeping with

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[7] Intertextually, Mekhi Phifer would later appear in *8 Mile* (2002), a film about an up-and-coming white rapper (played by Eminem) in the underground hip-hop scene. The fact that it was released just one year after *O* suggests a trend in presenting race issues aligned with rap music on screen at the time.

Odin if he was white, Desi replies: "That is *so* easy". Because of this, *O*'s racial discourse is paradoxical, highlighting Odin's exoticness before denying the fact that it affects his relationship with Desi. However, the filmmakers embrace other aspects of racial stereotyping, such as Odin's perception of himself. Lois Potter argues that Iago's plot depends on the acceptance of the stereotype that "Moors (like Othello) are lascivious braggarts" (8). This is exemplified in the film by a shot of Emily staring at Odin as he flirts with Desi in her bedroom. In the same scene, Odin jokes: "Don't be using that phrase, 'little cocky'", when Desi uses it in a different context. The fact that Potter uses the word, 'stereotype', suggests that being lascivious and braggadocios are generalisations (or even falsehoods), but the 'cocky' innuendo is given credence by a black actor in this case.

One may argue that a contemporary teenpic audience might not associate that being branded with black skin was "visited on Noah's son Ham after he flouted his father's prohibition against copulation in the Ark" (Neill 126), which links sin with sexuality, and Othello with both. *O*'s appropriative techniques involve removing the potentially racist terms from the play text, such as "old black ram" (I.i.88) and "thick-lips" (I.i.66), rejecting the language but not the images of *Othello*. Later in the film, Odin visualises Hugo having sex with Desi when he is actually in bed with her, angering O to the point that he ignores Desi's pleas for him to stop. The image of Odin's body, which the viewer is forced to examine because of the camera's focus, is seen to be overpowering Desi. Parker also uses this method of focusing attention on the black body, as does Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999) of the same period. Fishburne played Ike Turner two years previous to Parker's film in *What's Love Got to Do with It* (1993), as well as playing a rapist in *Death Wish II* (1982), which aligns Othello with contemporary black stereotypes, extratextually. By contrasting the opposing colours of black and white, and depicting 'blackness' tainting 'whiteness', *O*'s filmmakers use the same images that Shakespeare utilises. In the 'Dark Lady' sonnets, the poet writes: "In nothing art

thou black save in thy deeds" (131.13). By combining the image of the black body, which we are drawn to in *O* by the camera, in conjunction with a 'black' deed, Odin becomes an unsympathetic character.

Both of the most recent Hollywood *Othello*s depict their Desdemonas with Cassio and Iago, respectively, during imagined lovemaking scenes. In Parker's film, the gaze of both Desdemona and Cassio is aimed towards the camera and Othello, as it his fantasy and he who interrupts them (see fig. 2.3).

Fig 2.3. *Othello*. Dir. Oliver Parker. 1995. Columbia TriStar, 2007. DVD. Author's screenshot.

This serves a dual purpose. Firstly, in this scene, Desdemona and Cassio are aligned with the audience in the same way that Branagh's Iago is in the film, colluding with the viewer by staring directly into the camera lens. And secondly, the audience are aligned with Othello because they are looking at the scene through his 'eyes'. The second imagined love scene between Cassio and Desdemona appears to represent Othello's 'violence' as he strains in

contemplation of the scene. Whether or not Othello's emotional fervour makes the viewer sympathise with him is debatable, as it is his jealousy that incites the violence (in addition to the fact that the scene is not 'real' within the narrative). The fact that there are five lovemaking scenes in Parker's film points towards there being an attempt to transform *Othello* into a genre movie (the erotic thriller), albeit through emphasising an element that already exists in the play, pertaining to Desdemona's lust for the Moor. However, the abundant use of sex scenes can also be aligned with the fact that Parker's film is the first Hollywood adaptation to cast a black actor as Othello.

As in Parker's film, the Cassio of Blake Nelson looks to the camera during the imagined sex scene (see fig. 2.4).

Fig 2.4. *O*. Dir. Tim Blake Nelson. 2001. Miramax, 2001. DVD. Author's screenshot.

In both cases, the camera 'is' Othello's gaze, a possible attempt to create viewer sympathy for him through a mutually shared experience. To a certain extent, this is being 'faithful' to the play in that – what Celia R Daileader refers to as "offstage sex" (1998: 40) – is alluded to

in Act Two.[8] Cartmell refutes Coleridge's idea about Desdemona's innocence by arguing that Desdemona is attracted to Othello because of his race and that she does not coincide with the image of the 'fair' Venetian that Coleridge suggests she is. On the contrary, Cartmell argues that Desdemona's desires – her assertiveness and her use of language – do not render her an impassive party in the play; rather, they confirm her to be "wilfully perpetuating the stereotype of the oversexed, corrupt white female" (2001: 142). Because her language is not a factor in Blake Nelson's film, this manifests in the image of her betraying Odin.

In a scene in which Hugo's plot to make Odin jealous of Desdemona and Cassio's 'relationship' takes effect and manifests in a violent outburst involving Odin smashing the glass behind the basketball hoop in the school gym, Odin pushes the only other black character in the film, a child, to the floor. One could ascertain that the smashed glass symbolises Hugo's psychological 'breaking' of Odin. However, the fact that the character being shoved is a young boy may suggest that Odin's own racial insecurity is triggered by an innate characteristic that he sees in the child. As a result, Odin cannot truly escape his racial stereotype, even in an appropriation like *O*. The 'source' of this – outside of the narrative of the film – may be the representation of Othello in both the play and in previous adaptations, suggesting that *Othello*'s incompatibility with a modern setting is primarily a racial issue.

In the play, Othello refutes stereotypes as well as perpetuates them; for example, he speaks eloquently, but in doing so, he also satisfies white conceptions of his race through his exotic tales. Conversely, as a result of *O*'s context, Odin's eloquence is not surprising in the same way that Othello's is. Ironically, unlike Othello, Odin's language is actually less refined than that of his peers through his use of slang. When discussing early adaptation studies, Kamilla Elliott observes that both Bluestone and Wagner call for "equivalents and analogies

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[8] "Come, my dear love, / The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue: / That profit's yet to come 'tween me and you" (II.iii.8–10); and "Look if my gentle love be not raised up! I'll make thee an example" (II.iii.246–7).

that adaptations must try to recreate" (184). She also observes that this has also been favoured into the twenty-first century. Blake Nelson's film finds 'analogies' and 'equivalents' for Othello's initial pacifism, but only toward the end of the film, when he has already ruined this reputation. In the play, Othello's introductory statement features the line: "Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them" (I.ii.59). The Moor shuns violence in the face of accusation. When Odin states, "I wasn't no gangbanger. It wasn't some hood-rat drug dealer that tripped me up", he is inferring that he is not a contemporary black American stereotype, but this opposes Othello's tactic in the play of accentuating his difference in a line such as "rude am I in my speech" (I.iii.82). Thus, one could argue that Odin is stating that he is to become the victim of racist stereotyping (because of his actions) in a way that Othello does not, perhaps because of the fact that racism in Jacobean England does not correlate with racism today: "neither 'racism' nor any equivalent term was available to Shakespeare – while 'race' itself was a term whose connotations had more to do with lineage than with biology" (Neill 123). Odin emphasises that it is a white character (Hugo) who 'trips him up', in the same way that white conceptions of Othello – from Shakespeare's play onwards – serve as a problematic element in the Moor's characterisation. However, it is difficult to sympathise with Odin. Othello is not the only 'victim' in the play; another, Desdemona, dies as a result of his actions, an element of *Othello* that is not changed as much as its race issues are in adaptations.

In *Shakespeare's Tragedies: Violation and Identity* (2005), Alexander Leggatt observes that, "While Othello in his last moments commands eloquence, Odin's equivalent speech is broken, distraught, slurred" (256). Odin attempts to distance himself from racial stereotyping, but by addressing these issues, he evidently feels that his peers perceive him in a negative light. Regarding black males in popular culture, in "Doing it for Daddy: Black Masculinity in the Mainstream" (1996), bell hooks writes that they tend to be:

individuals tortured by what I call 'unrequited longing for white male

love.' For the most part, black males do not represent themselves in this

manner. They are represented in this manner by white cultural

productions, particularly in television, film and advertising. (105)

Of course, it would be anachronistic to apply this to *Othello*, but it can be applied to *Othello*

on screen. In the climactic scene of *O*, Odin feels it important to refute stereotypes about his

race, 'tortured' by how white people, specifically, see him. Unlike Othello, Odin is of the

same nationality as his peers. More problematically, because Odin portrays himself as 'no

different' to them, his actions can only be judged accordingly. Therefore, at the end of the

film, it may be argued that the viewer feels no more sympathy for Odin than they do for

Hugo. Odin's acts are committed under the influence of drugs, which implies that they do not

represent his natural character, but one may argue the same case for Hugo, who continually

injects himself with steroids. As a result, drugs may make Odin's naivety and Hugo's anger

more conceivable, but they also serve as a conduit to justify the actions of characters that are

not compatible with Hollywood.

In *Black Minstrelsy in Britain* (2008), Michael Pickering states that minstrelsy was,

"from the start, not so much an imitation, involving any strict fidelity of reproduction of

black cultural expression and practice, as a caricature based on white conceptions of Africans

and African-Americans" (185). One may argue that this is not dissimilar to the conception of

Othello in Shakespeare's play. *O*, however, does not take this into consideration, and as a

result, it shows 'fidelity' to the play's racial discourse in what Cartmell refers to as "a 'belief'

in Shakespeare as timeless educator" (2001: 143). *O*'s attempt to reconcile the past (the play)

with the present (contemporary America) creates a dichotomy of being visually and audibly

different to *Othello*, whilst its plot and characters' actions are similar, rendering the film

inconsistent (an 'ahistorical cipher') in its portrayal of race, partially removing the adaptation

from the contemporary society it appropriates to.

The two-disc DVD edition of *O* includes Dmitri Buchowetzki's silent *Othello* (1922),

which – unlike Blake Nelson's film – portrays Othello in blackface. The inclusion of

Buchowetzki's film (to be discussed in a subsequent chapter on *Othello*s outside the Anglo-

American gaze) emphasises *O*'s 'reaction' to previous versions, but Emil Jannings plays the

Moor as animalistic and savage, forcing his Othello to come to the same conclusion as

Phifer's 'black' Odin. *O* embraces Shakespeare and previous screen *Othello*s through in-

jokes and refutes his 'authority' through what Emma French refers to as "anti-intellectualism

and revelling in its own self-conscious irreverence" (101). Like *William Shakespeare's*

Romeo + Juliet, with its various references to Shakespeare and his plays, and *10 Things I*

Hate About You (1999), with its literary references to the likes of Elizabeth Barrett Browning

and Ernest Hemingway, *O* embraces Shakespeare's 'high brow' credentials and ridicules

them simultaneously. In one scene, a teacher asks Hugo and Odin, "Would one of you care to

name one of Shakespeare's poems for me?". Hugo replies: "'I thought he wrote movies'".

This seems to be a reference to the prevalence of Shakespeare on screen in the 1990s.

However, it is evident from the way in which *O* tackles the race issues of *Othello* that

Shakespeare did not write the play for cinema, nor did he write it for twentieth- and twenty-

first-century audiences (nor could he, of course). Even though there are seventy-nine years

between the adaptations of Buchowetzki and Blake Nelson, they both perpetuate racial

stereotypes, despite the fact that their adaptive methods regarding the character differ greatly.

Although he does not condone this view, Lanier categorises the general perspective

on popular culture as "immediately accessible and therefore shallow" in comparison with the

works of Shakespeare, which are considered to be "aesthetically refined, timeless, complex

and intellectually challenging" (2002: 3). Because of its arguably inadaptable racial elements, it may be contended that *Othello* is not entirely 'timeless' (confirming Lanier's notion that these are generalisations), at least in terms of adapting it to Hollywood cinema. Moreover, *O* is not 'immediately accessible' because it does not feature a central hero; rather, it has two. Hugo serves as the antihero, who epitomises the school outsider. The outsider role is usually reserved for Othello alone, but in *O*, Odin is a popular sport star. Like Branagh's Iago, Hugo is featured on posters and the DVD cover (Miramax, 2001) alongside Julia Stiles, although this may be a result of Josh Hartnett's fame being more substantial than that of Mekhi Phifer.

In Parker's adaptation, Branagh's Iago arguably encourages the audience to collude with him through asides, soliloquies, and metatextually breaking the fourth wall by staring directly into the camera lens. Part of the reason why *O* does not achieve complicity between antagonist and audience lies in the fact that Hugo is simply another character that we view through the relatively omniscient camera lens, although there are lingering shots of the character when his plan is in effect. As mentioned, to prevent viewers from aligning the plot of Hugo and his accomplice, Roger (Roderigo), with the Columbine perpetrators, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the film's cinematic release was delayed by two years. Unlike other Hollywood versions, *O* provides Hugo with a clearly established motive: he is jealous of Odin's popularity and talent. Even Hugo's father, the team coach, pays more attention to Odin than he does to his own son. Unlike his antecedents, who are older and relatively covert about their motives, Hugo is a jealous teen who allows his jealousy to act as his downfall. Resultantly, in a film that emphasises its Othello's 'blackness', race does not appear to be an overt motivation of its Iago, but in Odin's aforementioned reaction to Hugo's plot, racism is implied. Because of the history of race in both cinema and twentieth- and twenty-first-century America, one may argue that the issue – like Iago's supposed 'motiveless malignity' – needs not be made clear in the film: it is present even when it goes unspoken.

If we may presume that the value of Cinthio's story to Shakespeare "may have lain essentially in its relative unlikelihood – its thinness, simplicity, its functionalism" (Alexander and Wells 66), the difference between *Othello* and *O* becomes obvious. *Othello* is not 'thin' and 'simple', unless one dilutes it to its basic plot, as Blake Nelson does. However, by 'simplifying' – or modernising the racial discourse of *Othello* for a modern audience – *O* aligns Shakespeare's cultural value and supposed 'timelessness' with turn-of-the-millennium race issues of the United States. *O* is a film of paradoxes, a direct result of its appropriative methods. It values Shakespeare as a 'timeless educator' as much as it recognises that *Othello* is perhaps his most inadaptable play today, changing it as a result. Cartmell and Whelehan claim that, "far from being parasitical, some adaptations provide sites of contestation and interrogation, returning rather than borrowing, augmenting rather than culling" (40). *O* 'interrogates' without contesting the fundamental assertions of Shakespeare, simultaneously 'returning' and 'borrowing' in a manner that stops it from engaging with the race issues of the play, culling from contemporary society as much as it does from *Othello*, highlighting the distance between the two. However, it does 'react' to *Othello*/Othello in its transposition of the setting to the American South, making the Moor a gangsta-rap inspired African American in the process, although it does not make the race issues of the play more adaptable. Although *Othello* has proven its ability to 'survive' outside of its original context in adaptations, it is, like *O*, a product of its time in its tying of its story to a particular cultural climate. *O* does not engage with the race issues of its 'source' – rather, it changes them. However, the adaptation does represent how the play has 'evolved'/'devolved' on screen. It makes *Othello* 'adaptable' to Hollywood cinema, but in doing so, it also gives the ideas of Griffith a new setting in which to thrive.

2.5. CONCLUSION

Holderness states that, because films frame the action and subsequently limit viewers' imaginations, cinema is actually an "inherently *conservative* medium" (1994: 208). Regarding adaptations of *Othello*, even those that do not exercise 'fidelity' to the play, such as *O*, can be considered 'conservative', to a certain extent, in that they preserve aspects of Shakespeare's racial discourse, even when they do not seem to correspond with contemporary views of race. However, Holderness also contends that cinema renders Shakespeare's plays "open to question" and "vulnerable to change" (1994: 207). Through the perpetuation of the racial stereotypes found throughout cinema's history, Hollywood *Othello*s can also be considered 'conservative' in terms of their alignment of the play with cinematic trends. Additionally, *Othello* is undeniably 'open to question' and 'vulnerable to change' on screen, although questioning and changing the play does not necessarily equate to making it more adaptable.

Moreover, whether or not viewers' imaginations are limited is a question that this thesis progresses towards in its assessment of the influence of cinematic *Othello*s in other media. For example, do Hollywood versions concretise how subsequent adapters see the race issues of the play? Holderness also writes that, "in reading an old text we cannot disown our modern knowledge: consciously or unconsciously, we can interpret the language of the past only by translating it into a language we ourselves can understand" (2001: 168). If this is true, then changing *Othello* is inevitable in adaptations, although how and why it is changed (and the implications of this) is a subsequent preoccupation of this thesis. All three major Hollywood adaptations of the play show the influence of Griffith (and, more broadly, the influence of a national history marked by racial prejudice and tension) in their troubling representations of the Moor, but none shows an inability to change in terms of adapting to their own cultural, societal, medial, and generic climates. It is not just Shakespeare's racial

discourse that causes problems regarding adapting the play today, but also the problems that exist as a result of Hollywood's own problematic racial history.

In *The Subject of Film and Race: Retheorizing Politics, Ideology, and Cinema*, Gerald Sim writes of how, in recent films, such as *The Help* (2011) and *Django Unchained* (2012), audience "empathy" is with the black victims, despite the fact that their overcoming is "facilitated by their white saviour" (1). He contrasts this with Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, suggesting 'progression' in representations of race. However, adaptations of *Othello* are singularly problematic in their representations of race. Of course, there has not been a Hollywood *Othello* made during the period in which Sim's examples were released (although his hypothesis can be tested against adaptations in new media), but the trend of portraying Iago as the antihero and continually aligning Othello's 'blackness' with his wrongdoings suggests that adaptations do not truly correspond with contemporary America.

Coincidentally, the two most recent Hollywood adaptations of the play were cinematically released during periods in which racially charged societal issues corresponded with what is happening on screen. Evidently, adaptations of the play thrive in periods in which audiences can relate it to current events, which may make the future of *Othello* in Hollywood troubling when one considers that previous societal parallels have all been negative. If there is, as Maltby states, a "dominance of the liberal perspective in Hollywood's postwar output" (308), then the 'conservative' output of pre-war Hollywood is still evident in the racial discourses of cinematic *Othello*s. It also implies that despite this 'liberal perspective' of Hollywood's post-war output, representations of race remain largely the same due to 'fidelity' to Hollywood's race issues and those of past adaptations within the cinematic medium, in addition to the partial adherence to Shakespeare's conception of 'blackness'. The veneer of *Othello* on screen has changed and may continue to do so, but the adaptability of the play and its titular character arguably remain its most challenging obstacle. The race

issues of the play have been changed to coincide within contemporary culture climates – in part – because of their inadaptability. Regarding whether or not it is *Othello* that is the 'controversial' element in its screen incarnations, or if it becomes 'controversial' in adaptations, the play and its race issues are arguably inadaptable on film, but the specific tonic of its racial discourse mixed with those of twentieth- and early twenty-first century America, makes it particularly problematic, with no evidence that suggests change in the future. Regardless of the period in which the films were produced and the genre within which *Othello* has been placed – from a blackface actor shot in black and white to a 'ghettoised' African American in a postmillennial teenpic – adaptations of the play in Hollywood have always been disquieting.

3. British Adaptations of *Othello* (and *Othello*s on British Television)

3.1. INTRODUCTION: "I LEARNED IT IN ENGLAND" (II.iii.72)

This chapter contends that British *Othello*s (and non-British *Othello*s aired on British television) are singular representations of the play in light of their national and medial contexts. However, whether or not the arguable inadaptability of the play's race issues pervades *Othello*s, regardless of their country of origin, will be examined herein. This chapter will also ask if the individualities of British adaptations make *Othello* more or less adaptable than it is in American cinematic counterparts, or conversely, if patterns can be observed in Anglo-American treatments, irrespective of their differences. An observable dissimilarity between British and American adaptations is that of medium. Three of the four main case studies analysed in this chapter are televised adaptations; the other is a filmed stage production, bearing the hallmarks of a televisual adaptation in its intimately theatrical *mise-en-scène* and sense of 'fidelity' to the words of the play text.

Despite their obvious similarities of 'showing', television and cinema are fundamentally different forms. As Crowl notes, "film grew out of still photography where the frame and the image are central; television developed from radio where the word predominates" (2008: 61). This offers a potential reason for the differences in the adaptive methods of cinematic and televisual *Othello*s, and will be taken into consideration when examining national similarities and differences between adaptations, as will the periods in which they were produced. Crowl's point also raises several questions: do Hollywood *Othello*s focus on the image of the Moor more than their British counterparts? Secondly, do British adaptations rely on the '*Othello* music' more than their American equivalents? And thirdly, how does this affect representations of the play's race issues? It is of importance to this thesis to establish how *Othello*s from the United States and Great Britain treat the play in

comparison with each other before moving onto adaptations outside the Anglo-American gaze.

To return to Crowl, it may be true that television "does not possess the technical resources of film" (2008: xv), and this is particularly evident in adaptations of *Othello* on British television, although this does not immediately seem to coincide with representations of race. However, without the 'resources' of film, 'fidelity' to the play text is exercised, preserving the '*Othello* music' in the process. Crowl continues: "televised Shakespeare relies more on the script and the actor to tell the story than on camera and editing" (2008: xv). This is certainly true of pre-twenty-first-century British *Othello*s. Resultantly, a relevant question arises. Regardless of whether or not cinema privileges action over words, is Othello's race more inadaptable in Hollywood adaptations, in which the actions and image of the Moor are not counteracted by his words? However, Stam's observation, that a "source of hostility to adaptation is the charge of parasitism" (2005: 7) can be applied to British adaptations more than any other type of *Othello*. Lanier points out that 'high culture' is generally "said to have importance independent of the size of its audience or its entertainment value" (2002: 6). This can be applied to 'high culture' on screen, achieved through the relatively 'faithful', theatrical – and arguably derivative – adaptive methods of British *Othello*s.

However, in the postmillennial period, a reliance on Shakespeare's play text is lessened, particularly in the negation of the '*Othello* music' in the ITV adaptation (2001). In "The Shakespearean Glass Ceiling: the state of colorblind casting in contemporary British theatre" (2013), Jami Rogers writes of a 'glass ceiling' that black (and other non-white actors) cannot 'break', stating that, since the turn-of-the-millennium, "the *percentage* of white to black/Asian/mixed race actors has shifted very little" (422) in comparison with British stage productions prior to the period. However, in the case of *Othello*s, using a black actor is now the norm, although a 'glass ceiling' regarding 'ownership' of the play may be

particularly evident in British adaptations when one considers their reliance on Shakespeare, the play text, and the theatre (including the use of specific actors and directors). Indeed, unlike its postmillennial United States counterpart (Blake Nelson's *O*), the ITV adaptation uses the title of the play and features an Othello (Eamonn Walker) who would later play the role on stage.

In the aforementioned "Two Faced: The Problem of Othello's Visage", Ambereen Dadabhoy writes: "*Othello*'s scopic economy mandates discovery, that things be seen and shown" (121), citing Desdemona's seeing Othello's "visage" (I.iii.253) and the Moor's call for "ocular proof" (III.iii.363), among other examples. Not only does this suggest that *Othello* is translatable to screen, but this observation directly implies that words and images are closely linked in the play, and that the two should correspond. Notionally, cinema and television have the potentiality to enhance the 'scopic' capabilities of the play. How this is engaged with in adaptations that maintain the words of the play will be examined in this chapter in comparison with an adaptation that contemporises the language within the same medium. Even though this thesis has detailed problems regarding black actors playing the role, this chapter will expand this to include (and question) white actors in the role, which prevailed late into the twentieth century in televisual *Othello*s, uncovering what the media and periods in which the play has been adapted reveal about representing the titular character in British adaptations.

3.2. TWENTIETH-CENTURY BRITISH *OTHELLO*S

The first British televised *Othello* was aired on 14 December 1937, and was directed by George More O'Ferrall. Subsequently, the play did not appear on British television until 1950, in which two versions were aired: a filming of the final scene of a French-language production being performed at the Old Vic at the time, followed by O'Ferrall's second

attempt at directing the play on screen. None of these *Othello*s has been preserved today, making it difficult to trace the treatment of race in British televisual adaptations pre-1950s. However, even though a black actor did not play the Moor in Hollywood until 1995, a BBC *Othello* from 1955 (directed by Tony Richardson) features the black actor, Gordon Heath, who ironically, is American. Unlike Fishburne's Othello, however, Heath's portrayal is effete in mannerisms and voice. This also contrasts with Laurence Olivier's Moor of the following decade, who – unlike Heath – wears blackface and speaks in a stereotypically 'African' accent, confirming the inability to linearly track 'progression' in representations of *Othello*/Othello from a racial perspective.

The first British film to use *Othello* within its narrative – an adaptive method that will be discussed in detail throughout the thesis – is the aforementioned 1921 silent adaptation, *Carnival*, which tells the story of an actor, Silvio Steno, whose behaviour increasingly begins to mirror that of Othello as he plays the character on stage. The film uses the Moor as a vehicle to transform a 'good' white male into a murderous black male. The film was remade in 1931 and released in the United States as *Venetian Nights*, suggesting that British and American tastes are comparable: even though the title of the film is altered, the plot is not. In fact, a subsequent Academy Award-winning equivalent of the following decade, *A Double Life*, borrows dialogue from *Carnival*. In the 1931 film, Silvio states (regarding playing Othello), "I don't like the part, it disturbs me, almost frightens me". In *A Double Life*, Anthony John confesses: "Some parts give me the willies – on stage and off", suggesting that perceptions of Othello are translatable from Great Britain to the United States. In the original silent *Carnival*, the 'problem' with Othello is made clear via intertitle (see fig. 3.1).
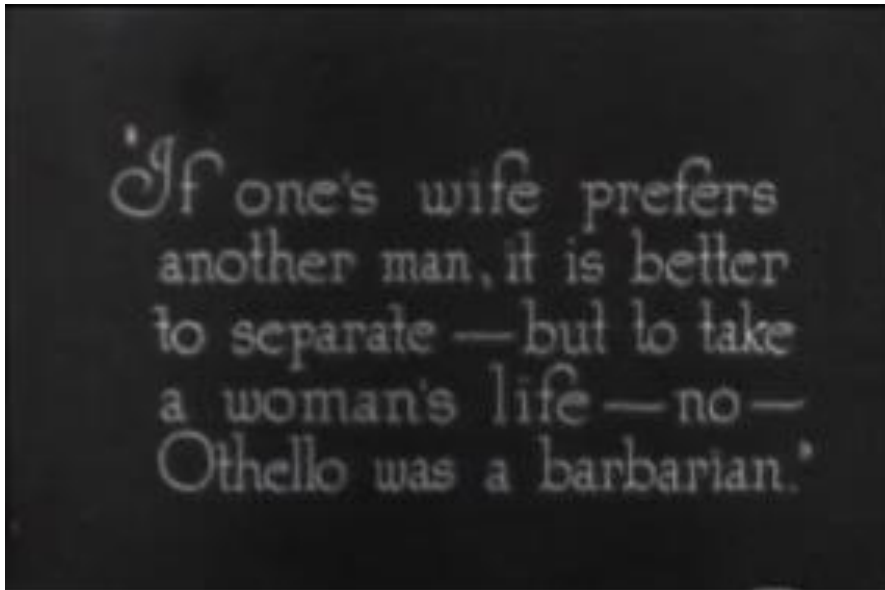
Fig 3.1. *Carnival*. Dir. Herbert Wilcox. 1921. "*Carnival* (1921)". *BFI Screenonline*. BFI Screenonline, n.d. Author's screenshot. 4 June 2015.

Othello's actions are specifically tied to his race in the intertitle. Because Silvio begins to recite the Moor's lines from the play with regards to his own life, the actor becomes the 'barbarian', eventually confusing Simonetta's name with that of Desdemona. Othello, rather than Silvio, is blamed for killing his wife for her supposed infidelity in the intertitle. The word 'barbarian' is synonymous with savagery, a primitive state, and uncivilised behaviour, which Silvio develops under the influence of the Moor, whose "unvarnished tale" (I.iii.91) does not shy away from this aspect of his character, but Silvio, on the contrary, has to be 'tainted' by the character he plays in order to behave in this manner. The characters within these films involving backstage narratives cannot behave like Othello without this framing device, suggesting that the actions of the Moor are not believable outside of 'faithful' productions – or conversely, that they are so believable that they incite those playing the part to be influenced by it.

The backstage narrative formula is also repeated in *Men are Not Gods* (1936) and *East of Piccadilly* (1940). Both films involve actors who play Othello on stage and receive

poor reviews for their performances, developing vendettas against reviewers, as a result. This addition forms the basis of *Theatre of Blood* (1973), although the horror film uses several Shakespeare plays rather than *Othello* alone. The theme of rewriting negative reviews may serve as a metaphor for 'rewriting' Shakespeare in these films, but *Othello* is not particularly changed in this context. The fact that *East of Piccadilly* was renamed *The Strangler* (a title that evokes the horror genre) for its theatrical release in the United States implies that the descent into the Othello character can be aligned with monstrousness. The only line in *Men are Not Gods* that tackles race is: "I think it's pretty disgusting and silly for a girl like you to get all romantic for a guy in a black painted face every night – like Al Jolson!". It is indeterminable as to whether or not this is a comment on race or on the acting profession, but the linking of Othello with minstrelsy in this period (also evident in Anson Dyer's 1920 adaptation) confirms that – since its earliest screen incarnations – *Othello* has been aligned with contemporary perceptions of race.

None of the aforementioned play-within-the-film *Othello*s are televisual adaptations, which have tended to be 'faithful', by comparison. Visually, Stuart Burge's *Othello* (1965), starring Laurence Olivier, exemplifies an arguably 'parasitical' approach to adaptation in comparison with those of Hollywood: it is not shot on location (evoking an intimate, theatrical environment) and is relatively 'true' to the words of Shakespeare's play text, running at 246 minutes, compared to Welles's 133-minute adaptation of the previous decade. Crowl writes that the "pace of televised Shakespeare is more leisurely and static than that of film" (2003: 61), but Burge's adaptation was not made for television, despite bearing what have become the hallmarks of televised *Othello*s, pointing towards 'vampirism' being a British adaptive method, rather than one relating to the medium. In "Rethinking Blackness: The case of Olivier's *Othello*" (2015), Peter Holland believes that "the gulf is painfully immense" (45) between the adaptations of Burge and Welles from a filmmaking perspective,

emphasising that, despite being made over a decade subsequent to Welles's film, the British *Othello* can be viewed as retrograde. Additionally, Kenneth S Rothwell points out that it is difficult to appreciate the adaptive methods of an adaptation in which "the *mise en scène* is so patently theatrical that … the actors might as well have been talking to an empty auditorium" (67). Regardless of whether or not this sense of theatricality is intended, it does tie the film to Shakespeare and the theatre in a way that also affects its handling of race, removing it from a mimesis of reality and current events to one of a stage production.

The opening titles of Burge's adaptation clarify that the film is both a Shakespeare adaptation and a production of The National Theatre of Great Britain, tying it to a specific stage version and preserving it in the process. In fact, in an interview with Anthony Hopkins on the DVD extra features, the actor primarily discusses the stage production from which the film was adapted, tying British adaptations to their stage predecessors, regardless of the medium within which they are presented. Jo McMurtry confirms the connection to the stage equivalent of Burge's adaptation: "Critics who saw both the stage play and this film found the latter a pale reflection of the former" (163). It is possible that a 'highbrow'/'lowbrow' divide may have coloured critics' opinions of the adaptation, as the statement suggests that – in order to have seen the stage production – the reviewers would most likely have been theatre critics, compounded by the fact that the stage production is presented in the play's intended medium. In light of this, one may argue that British *Othello*s are not concerned with the adaptability/inadaptability of *Othello*/Othello as much as adapters from the United States, nor are they concerned with the technical resources of film, beyond its capability to record renowned stage productions.

Even paratextual materials are markedly different in British and American *Othello*s. As mentioned, Shakespeare's image looms behind the separate figures of Othello and Desdemona on the front cover of the DVD release of Burge's film (British Home

Entertainment, 2003), symbolic of the sense of 'fidelity' to his play text in the adaptation, whereas Branagh's Iago assumes the same position in the poster for Parker's film behind the embracing couple. Because Burge's adaptation does not feature the black and white cinematography in which Welles had been shadowed previously, the unnaturalness of Olivier's make-up is in focus for the length of the feature. The mimesis is exaggerated by Olivier's interpretation of 'blackness' in his first scene in the film. Here, Othello is not dead (as in Welles's film), nor is he hooded and obscured (as in Parker's adaptation); he enters the scene lazily in plain sight with languid eyes and crooked posture, emphasising his protruding stomach, giggling lasciviously at Iago's mention of Desdemona and singing impatiently when others speak, whilst flouncing a red rose in his expressive hands. Reportedly, Olivier even "lowered his voice an octave to qualify for the role" (Rothwell 68). Despite the use of the red rose as a prop, he is not a sexualised and romanticised Moor like those of Zeffirelli and Parker's films; rather, he is the ageing Moor of the play, although, like Fishburne, Olivier is playing a specifically black Othello, despite the different races of the actors.

Barbara Hodgdon's statement, "Olivier's Othello confirms an absolute fidelity to white stereotypes of blackness" (1998: 44), is seemingly irrefutable, but her conclusion on the fallout from this is questionable. She believes that, "a made-up Othello ensures that both blackness and whiteness remain separate, unsullied" (44). It is obvious that its 'faithfulness' allows the film to perpetuate the play's racial discourse unabashedly. However, if a blacked-up Othello implies racial stereotyping during a period in which the Race Relations Act (passed on 8 November 1965) was a current event, causing Lanier, in his paper, "Post-Racial *Othello*" (2010), to declare that Olivier's performance "could not have been more ill-timed", then this claim is dubious. In addition, considering that the Civil Rights movement was happening at the time of the film's roadshow release in the United States, the 'separation' between 'black' and 'white' in Burge's adaptation does not leave either race 'unsullied'.

Because of Olivier's interpretation of 'blackness' during a period of racial unrest, an obvious disconnect can be observed in the performance, which is specifically of its time in its interpretation of it in 1960s Britain.

Two years subsequent to Burge's adaptation, an episode of the BBC radio comedy show, *I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue* (1967) adapted *Othello* in an abridged, comedy sketch, complete with contemporary British jokes and innuendo. Its Othello speaks in a stereotypically 'black' voice (albeit dissimilar to Olivier's accent), recalling Al Jolson and minstrelsy from the United States of previous decades. Fourteen years subsequent to Burge's *Othello*, the BBC produced their own version for a television audience as part of their series of Shakespeare adaptations (1978–85). Unlike the Hollywood adaptations subsequent to it, Jonathan Miller's *Othello* (1981) was not made in light of perceived contemporary societal parallels by filmmakers, but rather, out of necessity: the BBC undertook the task of filming every Shakespeare play for the small screen. The BBC is "financed by a combination of State patronage and a fee-paying clientele, observed by the watchful eye of a government acutely concerned about the politics of its culture" (Holderness 2002: 31). In this regard, the 'timelessness' of Shakespeare can be considered to be a type of contemporary resonance in this series of adaptations. For its Shakespeare adaptations, the BBC received funding from the American company, Time-Life TV (and three of its financial backers). Holderness claims that the monetary investment of these companies (as well as their public image) is a significant factor in creating "the constraints and determinants built into the series" (1994: 218), emphasising individualities in *Othello*s that result from the specific demands placed upon them, rather than ones relating solely to the medium within which it is placed.

Miller's *Othello* is not a 'radical' adaptation in terms of its adaptive methods and casting, both of which are similar to the previous British version by Burge in terms of theatricality and use of blackface. Its representation of race is ambiguous, borne out of its

attempt to negate the issue entirely, although it must be noted that James Earl Jones was cast to play the Moor, but was unable to due to the British Actors' Equity Association's refusal to grant the actor a permit because of his nationality (due to their disapproval of an American playing the character in a British Shakespeare adaptation). As a result, Anthony Hopkins was offered the part of the titular character. Ironically, the next British televisual Othello would be Willard White, a black Jamaican opera singer. Lisa S. Starks writes: "Miller claimed at the time that he cast the white Hopkins in order to diminish the contrast between Othello and Desdemona" (64). This is incongruous if we are to believe that Jones was offered the part as it suggests that the directorial decision to diminish the contrast between 'black' and 'white' was borne out of an unforeseen casting change. Miller believed, as noted by Rothwell, that "the play really had little to do with race" (111). This is not the case, especially in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century, in which race has been a central element of *Othello*'s (in)adaptability, rendering the BBC adaptation anomalous in this regard.

In *Cultural Shakespeare: Essays in the Shakespeare Myth* (2001), Holderness describes how BBC adaptations "emulate the social and cultural rituals of theatre-going" by publicising programming of this sort as "old-fashioned" (2001: 15) through advertising each instalment as if it were a one-off theatrical event. In fact, Miller's adaptation is the only *Othello* adaptation to be released on home video in two parts. When applied to *Othello*, 'old fashioned' is synonymous with blackface Moors, arguably justifying the use of a white actor. By contrast, a 'new' *Othello*, like *O* (made two decades later in a different cultural context), uses a young black actor, in order to appeal to its teenpic audience. Of course, the fact that the BBC Shakespeare adaptations were "more akin to a theatrical visit than to a televisual experience" (2001: 15) compounds the fact that they are derivative of the plays in their original theatrical form, regardless of how regressive this viewpoint is in contemporary adaptation studies. Holderness describes the branding of 'Shakespeare' as being akin to the

past itself being fought for "within a cultural industry" (2001: 129), signifying that 'Shakespeare' is exploited for financial gain, an idea also explored in John Drakakis's *Alternative Shakespeares* (2002). In terms of British *Othello*s, the fact that the adaptations of both Burge and Miller utilise white actors in blackface correlates with this 'authenticity' to Shakespeare and 'the past'. In the case of Miller's *Othello*, the adaptation takes advantage of television's capabilities of marketing the product to its intended audience, but is derivative in other aspects of the production. Regarding its viewership, Holderness deduces that Shakespeare did not write for everybody, but that "Everybody is Shakespeare" (2001: 163), in that his name can be appropriated in a manner that coincides with subsequent societies' contemporary tastes, suggesting that – unlike Mayer's claim concerning Hollywood – *Othello* is not 'poison' on British television.

Hopkins continues Olivier's tradition of wearing blackface make-up for the part and is the last on-screen actor to do so in a feature-length screen adaptation of the play.[9] Even though Olivier's interpretation might have influenced the decision to cast a white actor, Hopkins's Othello is not a racial stereotype in the same way that Olivier's is. In fact, in contrast with Olivier, Hopkins's Mediterranean Moor recalls the Othellos of opera – or, an Othello that is Venetian rather than an outsider, as he does not look particularly different from the rest of the cast, directly contrasting with Fishburne's Moor. However, dialogue concerning Othello's 'blackness' makes little sense in Miller's adaptation, even though it reinforces Hopkins's 'blackness' because of the director's fidelity to the words of the play text. This corresponds with an issue that pervades adaptations of the play: amalgamating Shakespeare's *Othello* with other periods and cultures – and, in this case, a director's vision regarding its (lack of) race issues. The director's vision extends to the *mise-en-scène*. Like

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[9] *Stage Beauty* (2004), although not a feature-length adaptation of *Othello*, engages with the play and blackface through comedy in order to highlight incongruity, and will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.

Burge's film, Miller's adaptation is intimately presented, drawing attention to the use of black and white checkerboard floors, corresponding with the imagery of the play, albeit in a relatively tame fashion when compared with *Othello*s that utilise black actors, for example.

Jo McMurtry highlights one difference between Hopkins and his British predecessor: "Hopkins's nervous, wired-up rendition of Othello strikes many viewers as antithetical to the role" (164). Olivier's Othello might have been the reason for this reaction. Indeed, his relaxed voice and posture are the actor's way of affecting 'blackness', making Hopkins's Moor 'white', by comparison. Although it manifests most noticeably in films in which *Othello* is a device within the narrative (and can be applied to feature-length adaptations, such as Welles's film), the idea that "*Othello*, more perhaps than any other of his plays, insists that we relate – at times obsessively – with actor and with character" (Davies 209) is unobservable in Hopkins's performance as it is difficult to separate him (racially or otherwise) from his characterisation of Othello – even his make-up is 'natural' when compared with Olivier's, although the separation between actor and character is 'permeable' in Hopkins's case, to a certain extent. Additionally, unlike Olivier – and unlike Welles, with his 'legendary' reputation – Hopkins was not synonymous with his defining role as Hannibal Lector in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) at this point, for which he won the Academy Award for Best Actor. As a result, viewers conceivably would not have been watching the character through an extratextual lens. However, he did star in the BBC adaptation of *War and Peace* (1972), arguably rendering him a recognisable television actor at this point.

In the closing scene of Miller's *Othello*, the camera is positioned in a way that prevents the audience from witnessing the most memorable scene in the play – as is evident in visual art depictions of previous centuries and in allusions to the play across media – Desdemona's death: "the only view of the bed it allows is one that we keep seeking by squinting into our television sets" (Boose 192). Indeed, the viewer must look into the

conveniently placed mirror in the scene to see the bed in its reflection. This contradicts Miller's statement about the play not being 'about' race; rather, he is intentionally disallowing the audience from connecting the actions of Othello with his race (through its alignment in the play with sexuality and violence), in addition to contrasting Parker's *Othello*, which makes the viewer pay specific attention to the marital bed throughout the film, especially to emphasise Othello's sexuality and violent behaviour. Miller's depiction of Desdemona's death may be a reaction to that of Burge, in which Olivier's make-up rubs off on Desdemona's cheek as he holds her lifeless frame, as such detail (however accidental) is spared in Miller's version, which treats the details of Desdemona's death with the same ambiguity that it treats Othello's race with.

Linda E Boose states that Miller's adaptation is "consciously domesticated to the medium of television's 21-inch expectations" (186). The word 'domesticated' may be a reference to the intimacy of the setting in the adaptation, or its tameness regarding violence, sexuality, and race. However, directorial decisions, investors' concerns, and the country in which the adaptation was produced also affect its presentation of *Othello*. Michèle Willems argues that, "on the screen words are secondary; the dialogue follows the image" (70). This is not true in televisual adaptations – or in British *Othello*s, based on evidence observed thus far. The image – specifically of Othello – is purposely nullified in this adaptation, and even though Miller's teleplay is over three hours long (205 minutes), viewers cannot share Desdemona's visual fascination with the Moor, except through her evocation in her speech to her father. Even though Miller succeeds in presenting an unabridged version of *Othello* to a televisual audience, he neglects to adapt the images presented in the play text. In a recent BBC *Arena* profile of Miller (2012), his *Othello* is not profiled at all, suggesting that its authorship is with Shakespeare (or that it is not one of the director's greatest achievements), which may also be the case for other British *Othello*s, too.

Unlike the two aforementioned adaptations, Trevor Nunn's *Othello* (1990) updates the setting of the play to the American Civil War (1861–5), albeit in a confusing manner. Nunn modernises aspects of *Othello* whilst remaining 'true' to it simultaneously, creating a juxtaposition borne out of the 'fidelity' to Shakespeare's words also evident in the films of Burge and Miller. As stated, the costumes suggest a Civil War setting, yet the plot is concerned with the Venetian army defending Cyprus against the Turks, and Ian McKellen's Iago speaks with a Yorkshire accent. In Miller's adaptation, Bob Hoskins's Iago speaks in a cockney accent. Arguably, this is a device used to differentiate the Ensigns from the rest of the cast because of his class, making him – rather than Othello – the outsider, tempering the race issue as a result. In the case of Miller's *Othello*, it is difficult to differentiate Hopkins and Hoskins from a racial perspective, and the class divide serves as an alternative. To compound this, in a lecture on *Othello* on screen, Lanier stated that the "emergent trend in adapting *Othello* to the screen has been to shift away from race toward some other form of identity politics" (2010). As a result, a potential difference between British and American *Othello*s becomes clear: adaptive methods suggest that an issue like class may be more prevalent in Britain, in the same way that race is clearly topical in *Othello*s from the United States, such as those of Parker and Blake Nelson.

However, even though the reasons for the Civil War re-imagining of *Othello* in Nunn's adaptation seems tenuous, it does evoke slavery (potentially establishing racism as a motive for Iago), bringing the issue of race into focus, although because of its 'fidelity' to the play text, the reason for its setting is never directly addressed. One could speculate as to why Nunn updates the setting: for example, to justify the treatment of Othello by moving the action to a period before black people were treated as equal citizens, not dissimilar to the potential motive for *O*'s South Carolina setting. Of course, the Antebellum South is unquestionably linked in the cultural lexicon with slavery, but the 'Othello as slave' parallel

is not explored further, and his position in the Venetian army raises questions as to what the parallel is exactly, beyond the Moor's reference to being "sold to slavery" (I.iii.139) in the play. However, the abolition of slavery was not the central cause for the Civil War and the Union were not entirely against it. Abraham Lincoln stated that the "paramount objective in this struggle is to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or destroy Slavery" (Brogan 326–7), potentially placing Iago as a Confederate sympathiser fighting for the Union. Other aspects of the Civil War are more difficult to compare with *Othello*: there were "approximately 189,000 Blacks in the uniform of the Union army and navy" (Robinson 76), which arguably negates Othello's Otherness in the context.

Leavis's belief that Iago is an "ancillary character" (1974: 41) is not true in screen *Othello*s. In some cases, such as in the adaptations of Nunn and Parker, the star power and Shakespearean credentials of McKellen and Branagh might have influenced the decision to centralise the Ensign. Regarding McKellen's Iago, Hodgdon argues that he is in "cahoots with both the cameraman and the editing process" (51), which may influence the audience in that he speaks directly to them, creating a relationship in the process. McKellen's Iago is able to 'frame' Othello (in both senses of the word), leading Hodgdon to conclude that it is about "who controls the narrative of racism" (55). If Iago and the play are aligned with the American Civil War and slavery (metaphorically, of Othello's mind, it could be argued) in Nunn's adaptation, directing sympathy towards the Ensign heightens the sense of confusion regarding viewer sympathy and the representation of race.

Willard White also stars in Nunn's filmed production of George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (1986), creating an extratextual link between his Othello and the racially stereotyped characters of the opera.[10] In comparison with Miller's adaptation, Nunn's *Othello* depicts the violence of the final scene as White's Othello straddles Desdemona before slaying

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[10] In addition, three white males wrote its music, lyrics, and book.

her. In contrast with Hopkins, White's Othello smothers Desdemona in a "frightening parody of sexual consummation" (Crowl 2003: 78). In Nunn's adaptation, the satellite for violence and sexuality manifests in a specifically black Othello, whereas Miller avoids these connections. Hodgdon observes: "most reviewers avoid mentioning White's colour" (1997: 37). She argues that 'opera singer' became code among critics for 'black person', which highlights an uncertainty regarding how race should be addressed in contemporary culture. Arguably influenced by the rudimentary language of White's character in Nunn's *Porgy and Bess*, Hodgdon claims that reviewers critiqued White's handling of Shakespeare's language and blamed it on the fact that his operatic past meant that he could not comprehend the nuance and subtlety of Shakespeare: he bellows the words, contrasting with the comparatively measured Hopkins of Miller's adaptation. Despite the fact that the British stage has a history of black (American) actors playing the role – from Ira Aldridge to Paul Robeson – Miller's *Othello* completely avoids race. However, Nunn presents the Moor as a specifically black male through his choice of actor. Hodgdon's assertion that White could not "match the constructed blackness of the white imaginary" (1998: 59) is a direct result of the presentation of 'blackness' in Nunn's adaptation, in its casting and its representation of violence, sexuality, and race. However, one may argue that Nunn represents the 'white imaginary', and by casting a black actor, a white conception of 'blackness' is realised.

Author and screenwriter, Larry McMurtry, questions the relationship between literature and film, asking: "Are the two arts sister arts, or merely cousins by marriage? Or it could be that something darker is suggested? Perhaps the relationship of film to novel is that of whore to customer, of mortician to cadaver, of cannibal to meal" (111)? In the case of the adaptations of Burge, Miller and Nunn, they are the most 'vampiric' of *Othello*s, treating Shakespeare as the "powerful cultural institution" (2001: ix) that Holderness writes of, specifically regarding their 'fidelity' to their 'source' material. However, they differ in terms

of their representations of race. Burge's adaptation confronts Othello's race, with Olivier perpetuating a stereotype with arguable contemporary echoes; Miller attempts to avoid the issue in his presentation of the Moor; and Nunn's stance – regardless of what it may be – is overshadowed by his use of an actual black actor.

In *Writing for the Medium: Television in Transition*, it is stated that: "authorship in television is an oddly floating category" (95). In literature, authorship is normally applied to the writer; in film, the director is often assigned as the *auteur*, but in television, there is comparative ambiguity: is it author of the 'source', is it the screenwriter, or is it the audience, because they may expect certain adaptive methods? This may explain why adaptations of *Othello* on British television have largely been concerned with 'fidelity' to the play. In these cases, 'fidelity' is the use of Shakespeare's play text, an historical setting (regardless of whether or not it is true to sixteenth-century Venice/Cyprus), and a theatrical *mise-en-scène* that heightens intimacy and focuses attention on the words being spoken. In terms of authorship, Shakespeare (and, to a lesser extent, the filmmakers and audience) takes precedence in three of the four British *Othello*s analysed in the chapter. As a result, adaptive methods vary, but are perpetually problematic: 'fidelity' to Shakespeare's language creates problems in the singular representation of race in each.

3.3. *OTHELLO* ON BRITISH TELEVISION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

This section examines the latest British televisual adaptation of the play, Andrew Davies's rewriting of *Othello* (2001) under the direction of Geoffrey Sax for ITV, released in the same year as the Hollywood appropriation, *O*. This section interrogates the adaptation's relationship with previous British *Othello*s in terms of its representation of the race issues of the play in an attempt to determine what is revealed about its adaptability in postmillennial Britain. The ITV adaptation is the most 'cinematic' of the British televised adaptations due to

its appropriative methods of contemporising the play's setting (it is shot on location rather than in a studio) and modernising the language, but this is also the case in *O*, suggesting that period takes precedence over medium and country of origin in determining treatments of *Othello*. It also suggests that the filmed-theatre style of adaptation is not as prevalent in the postmillennial period, although Gregory Doran's *Hamlet* (2009), starring David Tennant, could be considered a contemporary equivalent of 'preserving' a stage production, especially in terms of its use of the single-camera, potentially implying that it is *Othello*, specifically, that needs to be changed today.

When compared with previous televisual *Othello*s, the treatment of race is contemporised in the ITV adaptation, borne out of the fact that it modernises the words of the play, reinterpreting them in the process, moving the characters from the Venetian army to the police force of twenty-first century Britain. Mirroring Miller's directorial perspective of the play, Ben Jago (Iago) declares in the opening sequence: "Don't talk to me about race, don't talk to me about politics. It was love, simple as that". This is deceptive in terms of the adaptation as a whole. Following the initial renouncement of 'racism', there is a conversation in a bathroom between Jago and his colleagues, in which one member of the group vocalises his disapproval of racial equality in the police force. Jago remains silent, but does not object to the remarks. In addition, terms such as 'monkey' and 'wild animal' are used throughout the adaptation – not in reference to Othello – but they mirror the language of the play. The black and white imagery in *Othello* also manifests in the recalling of the chess pieces featured in Parker's film. More specifically, Sax employs the same technique as Miller in his use of checkerboard flooring during a scene in which Iago is manipulating (John) Othello (see fig. 3.2).

Fig. 3.2. *Othello*. Dir. Geoffrey Sax. 2001. "William Shakespeare - Othello - U.K modern

day adaptation". *YouTube*, 3 July 2014. Author's screenshot. 21 June 2015.

Unlike Miller, however, Sax casts a black actor as the Moor, tying two *Othello*s that claim to

not be 'about' race through their use of imagery.

    Jago accuses John (in voiceover) of being a: "stupid, patronising ape". Immediately

following this, the former rants frenetically, arguing back and forth as he plays the roles of

both himself and Othello, walking down a corridor that presumably represents the recesses of

his mind (as well as his true feelings, rather than those of the opening scene). In this

dreamlike sequence, Jago's simulates Othello and states, "I'm just a token, handsome

nigger". Because these remarks are spoken non-diegetically, the viewer is made aware that

they are private thoughts, reserved for them alone, rather than the characters in the

adaptation, compounding a sense of collusion with the viewer that also manifests in Jago

speaking directly to the camera, replicating the asides of stage productions, as well as

potentially intertextually borrowing from previous screen adaptations from both Great Britain

and the United States.

In the ITV adaptation, London Metropolitan Police commissioner, Sinclair Carver (who is eventually fired for making a racist joke about the lasciviousness of black males), wants to promote black and Asian officers in light of recent rioting. Jago objects to this because it signifies that Othello's race is the reason why the latter was promoted over the former. The motive for the inclusion of promoting black and Asian officers in the adaptation might have been a result of a perceived parallel regarding *Othello* and its race issues with the adapted police force framework and the Bradford race riots of 2001, highlighting the tendency to use *Othello* as a vehicle to commentate on (or exploit) current events. Relatedly, in "'Institutionally racist': Sax's *Othello* and tethered presentism" (2015), Peter J Smith considers Sax's adaptation in the context of racism in football, citing an on-field incident between Chelsea captain (and former England defender) John Terry and former Queens Park Rangers player, Anton Ferdinand, as an example, suggesting that, like Hollywood adaptations, British versions can be easily tied to contemporary race issues, regardless of filmmakers' intentions. Not only does this vouch for *Othello*'s perceived relevance (however flawed) in various contexts, it also confirms the association of the play in some adaptations with contemporary news stories involving seemingly retrograde behaviour.

Additionally, there is a subplot in the ITV adaptation involving a police officer committing suicide after killing a black male during a riot that takes place in the narrative. One particular scene features Jago manipulating the officer: "They were saying stuff, yeah? 'Kill the nigger' and stuff like that?". Again, Jago uses racial epithets here without incriminating himself as being prejudiced. The issue of race also appears when two skinheads confront Dessie (Desdemona) as she jogs through a park, claiming that she "goes with blacks". Resultantly, race and racism are integral to the ITV *Othello* – not only in terms of their role in the narrative and developing characterisation – but also in how the adaptation engages with the issues, by trying to distance itself from them.

Before the actor, Eamonn Walker, moved from playing John Othello to playing the Moor on stage in a comparatively 'faithful' production, directed by Wilson Milam (2007), he knew that he would "eventually meet the real Othello on stage" (Foss). From Walker's perspective, then, it seems that 'loose' adaptations can be differentiated from those concerned with 'fidelity' as the latter are genuine (or 'real') versions of Shakespeare's plays. However, this contradicts his story of "three young black kids of about fifteen or sixteen" who approached the actor after a performance. Walker stresses the importance of this experience to him, with one of the teenagers proclaiming: "That is my life up there on the stage, right there" ("Othello (2007)"). Walker appears to be subscribing to the idea that the most effective way of making *Othello* 'relevant' to modern audiences is making it contemporary – whether overtly, through appropriation – or covertly, through the ways in which it is marketed through paratextual materials (in interviews with the actors, for example). Additionally, the fact that he explains that the teens are of a particular ethnicity connects the relevance of the play today with the topic of race. Walker's comments also raise a question regarding what a 'real' Othello is. Presumably the actor is not making reference to the race of the character; rather, it may be that he considers a 'real' Othello to be one who speaks the '*Othello* music' of the play. However, in screen adaptations and appropriations, which often reduce – or even eliminate – the words of the play text, the idea of a 'real' Othello may either be inadaptable or increasingly irrelevant, specifically on screen.

Holding the belief that there are 'faithful' adaptations of the play may be naïve in that those which have reached the widest audience (Hollywood movie adaptations, in particular) have changed what *Othello* (and indeed, Othello) is, proof of which can be found in subsequent adaptations across media. *Othello* itself has changed – not the play text – but the ways in which it (and its racial discourse) is treated in adaptations. In "Iago's Alter Ego: Race as Projection in *Othello*" (1997), Janet Adelman writes: "Othello's 'discovering' that his

blackness is a stain – a stain specifically associated with his sexuality – and 'discovering' that stain on Desdemona are virtually simultaneous for him … her 'blackening' is a kind of shorthand for his sense that his blackness has in fact contaminated her" (126). Othello as the "contaminating agent" (126) manifests literally in Burge's adaptation when Olivier's Moor taints Maggie Smith's Desdemona with 'blackness', in the literal sense. Andrew Davies, who (unlike Burge) rewrites the play text, finds an equivalent for Othello's contamination of Desdemona. In the ITV appropriation, Dessie states: "I was a blank sheet waiting for you to write your name on me". The black and white imagery is clear here: in general terms, paper is white and ink is black.

3.4. CONCLUSION

Michèle Willems contends that, "producing Shakespeare with the resources normally expected on the small screen has too often resulted in attracting attention to the fact that Shakespeare did not write for television" (83). Willems inadvertently raises the point that Shakespeare did not write for the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, of which television is a product. As is evident in the adaptations analysed in this chapter, since the conception of the medium, the central difference between British and American *Othello*s lies in the fact that British *Othello*s are less concerned with the adaptability/inadaptability of *Othello*/Othello, although Sax's postmillennial adaptation suggests that this is changing. Indeed, the most recent RSC production (directed by Iqbal Khan), starring Hugh Quarshie (opposite another black actor, Lucian Msamati, as Iago), was shown in selected cinemas worldwide for one day (26 August 2015), suggesting that the screening of theatrical productions is still prevalent in British adaptations of the play, albeit manifesting in a new context. Due to their attempted 'fidelity' and arguably derivative theatrical parallels, one may assume that British *Othello*s have been the least problematic adaptations of the play. However, even in the twentieth-

century British adaptations that remain largely true to the words of the play text, problems arise regarding the visualisation of Othello. In the twenty-first century, however, British and American adaptations are more similar than different. Both 'react' to the play, creating new – albeit equally problematic – issues regarding representations of race, specifically because Othello's 'music' is quietened in favour of contemporary language. This potentially points towards the prevailing of the Hollywood adaptive method, that of making the Moor primarily identifiable by his image (and race, as a result). However, it is evident that there is no identifiable adaptive method of representing *Othello*/Othello from within the Anglo-American gaze, in which both black and white actors perpetuate racial stereotypes, normatively through attempted 'faithfulness', or conversely, by contemporising the character.

Although working outside of the medium of television, British director Tom Magill offered insight on the adaptability of the play in the future. In email correspondence, the *Mickey B* director revealed that *Othello* was the first Shakespeare play he read whilst spending time in a young person's centre. He recognised Iago in his own life – how he had met Iagos and had been an Iago (a synonym for being jealous). Magill learned from reading the play, raising the question: is the character of Othello someone who can be sympathised and empathised with today, and would a contemporary director consider adapting it? Magill deliberates: "I think there are contemporary parallels with the character Othello – jealous men who are possessive of the women in their lives". He continues: "Yes I would consider adapting it – it's a great story about the manipulation of weakness for evil gain". He concludes: "I'd need to find a parallel setting that illustrates the above theme and gives a good twist on the original story". This may be the same thought process of other contemporary adapters: finding parallels. In the past, this method has given rise to adaptability issues, although Magill's 'twist' implies one that has not been utilised yet.

Like *O*, the most modern British televisual adaptation finds a 'twist' – or, an equivalent of the story of *Othello* – suggesting that a modern trend in adapting the play involves trying to make it 'relevant', a reaction to 'faithful' versions involving blackface, a technique universally banished from adaptations (barring *Stage Beauty*, which tackles the issue with a sense of irony). This points towards the inadaptability of the play today, as both 'faithful' and modern retellings are problematic. As mentioned previously, Stam observes that Darwinian overtones of the word 'adaptation' evoke the word "as a means of evolution and survival" (2005: 2–3). In terms of British adaptations, this definition of 'adaptation' can be applied to ITV's most recent British *Othello*, which changes its language and setting, similar to how *O* appropriates the play to contemporary America, updating the race issue: both utilise the word 'nigger', for example. The play may continue to be adapted sporadically on British television, following the Hollywood template of modernising and geographically specifying *Othello* to reflect particular cultures, but adaptations since the conception of the medium point towards a problematic future for the play on screen, regardless of national and medial contexts.

4. *Othello* Outside the Anglo-American Gaze

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Although this thesis is a study of the adaptability of *Othello* across media with a focus

on the issue of race, it is yet to address adaptations produced outside the United States and

the United Kingdom. Despite the fact that there is no uniform adaptive method of

representing the race issues of *Othello* in adaptations from within the Anglo-American gaze,

both black and white actors have tended to perpetuate the stereotype of white conceptions of

'blackness'. In the vein of *Alternative Shakespeares* (1985) and *Alternative Shakespeares:*

Volume 2 (1996), in which Shakespeare's status as "an all-wise, all knowing genius" is

challenged, as is the idea that "his work is universally valid" (Hawkes 1996: 9), this chapter

will extend this to adaptations, focusing on the 'universality' of Shakespeare, specifically

concerning its adaptability outside the Anglo-American gaze, raising new questions regarding

representations of the Moor, such as: when Othello is adapted by non-white (and often), non-

Western filmmakers, how are the race issues of the play treated; is it more adaptable in these

contexts? In many cases, screen *Othello*s have been shown almost exclusively in their

countries of origin – on television, for example, in the case of British adaptations – invariably

adapting from their own cultural palettes in the process. The adaptations examined in this

chapter exist outside of those countries and their gaze, to a large extent. Another question

posed is: are representations of the race issues of the play country- and culture-specific, and

how does this affect the adaptability of *Othello* and its titular character?

This chapter begins as an analytical chronological charting of *Othello*s on screen from

around the world, initially exploring silent European adaptations in order to determine if the

adaptability of the play and its titular character's race are affected by the negation of the

'*Othello* music' (in spoken form). The second section examines the trajectory of Janet

Suzman's adaptation of the play, from South African theatre to British television, studying its

adaptability in both, and the treatment of race in a context that finds a perceived social

equivalent for the action. The final section is an exploration of postmillennial *Othello*s from

six different continents around the world in order to gauge the adaptability of the play in the

twenty-first century by looking at screen equivalents of those from the United Kingdom and

the United States: cinematic adaptations and filmed stage productions. Although this thesis

excludes the comparatively transient medium of theatre, productions that have been recorded

for public consumption are considered as potential influences on other recorded adaptations.

On the subject of adapting Shakespeare, in their Introduction to *Shakespeare in*

Hollywood, Asia and Cyberspace (2009), Alexander Huang and Charles S Ross write that the

"moment of origin never disappears" (6). Huang and Ross do not consider *Othello* for

discussion in their text, but to engage with this idea in the context of this chapter, the racial

discourse of Shakespeare's play (the 'origin' for adapters, despite Shakespeare's own

adaptation of the story) is not normally circumvented in British and American adaptations.

The question of whether or not the movement of the race issues to other countries changes

the adaptability of *Othello* – or, if *Othello*'s 'origins' serve as a perpetual palimpsest – will

permeate this chapter. Even though there are no monographs on *Othello* outside the Anglo-

American gaze, specifically, there are books dedicated to the subject of Shakespeare

productions from around the globe, as well as Shakespeare in world cinema, such as the

aforementioned text by Huang and Ross, and *Shakespeare and World Cinema* (2013) by

Mark Thornton Burnett, which addresses several screen *Othello*s and will be cited in this

chapter. In "Radical potentiality and institutional closure: Shakespeare in film and

television", Holderness writes that the relationship between 'Shakespeare' and 'film' is an

"exchange of cultural authority between institutions in a reciprocal process" (206). With

regards to this chapter, it may be the case that the contexts of the adaptations analysed lend

themselves to *Othello* as much as the play is adapted to them. When 'cultural authority' shifts

from Holderness's conception regarding media to one concerning cultures and countries,

whether or not a 'reciprocal process' changes the adaptability of *Othello* and its race issues –

or simply transposes them to a perceived equivalent – will be addressed in this chapter.

4.2. SILENT AND EARLY TALKIE EUROPEAN *OTHELLO*S

Examining if (and how) 'equivalents' of the race issues of *Othello* are found in silent

adaptations is the focus of this section, particularly regarding the words and 'music' of

Othello, which these adaptations are void of in spoken form. When compared with the British

adaptations examined in the previous chapter (which are comparatively long in duration and

show 'fidelity' to Shakespeare's play text, relatively), silent *Othello*s may actually be the

most 'cinematic' versions in that they do not rely on Shakespeare's words in spoken form

(although they often feature lines from the play text – or appropriations of it – in intertitles).

There were several *Othello*s produced outside the United Kingdom and Hollywood during

cinema's silent era, and one may assume that the impact of these versions on current

adaptations may be insignificant due to the fact that none are available on DVD in the United

Kingdom at present, including versions from Austria (1908) and Italy (1914). However, the

Danish adaptation, *For Åbent Taeppe* (1911), released in the United States as *Desdemona*,

foreshadows later 'backstage narrative' *Othello* appropriations in its plot concerning an actor

strangling his wife on stage during a performance of the play. Subsequently, in the Spanish

romantic comedy, *Miguel y William* (2007), William (Shakespeare) dresses as Othello in

blackface at a party and begins throwing knives. To a certain extent, this mirrors the character

becoming Othello within the narrative of the adaptation, representing regression through the

mimesis of another race – although it also mirrors Cassio's descent into "bestial" (II.iii.260)

behaviour when Iago gets him drunk, even though, in the case of *Miguel y William*,

transgression from acceptable behaviour ends in a food fight, presumably because of its comedic framework.

A seventeen-minute silent Italian *Otello* (1909), directed by Ugo Falena, survives with French intertitles. However, it is an adaptation of Verdi's opera, increasing its inability to showcase the '*Othello* music' of the words of the play text. In its abridgement, much of the running time is constructed around the introductory scenes as well as the denouement of the play. The tone is set in the opening scene in which the setting of Venice is focalised through shots of a gondola on a canal (aided by non-diegetic orchestral music), before moving to the waking of Brabantio and the Senators scene. Resultantly, the 'exoticness' of Venice is the focus, rather than the 'exoticness' of Othello, who does not stand out in the context. His sweeping hand gestures and theatricality suggest integration into Venetian society that adaptations from within the Anglo-American gaze often attempt to dislocate, as in Parker's opening (see fig. 4.1).

Fig. 4.1. Hans Egede. "Pathé-Baby 9.5mm - 1909 – Otello [Ugo Felena] aka Othello ou Le

More de Venise". *YouTube*, 8 Feb. 2013. Author's screenshot. 16 Oct. 2013.

Subsequently, visual splendour is highlighted as a ship arrives and the action moves to Cyprus. In the climactic scene of the film, Otello cuts his throat as the other characters look on despairingly, opposing the Western tradition of stabbing the stomach, although it must be noted that Olivier's Othello uses the same method, in part because he is still holding the slain Desdemona to his body.

In *Othello* (1922), a silent German adaptation, the acting is similarly theatrical in its expressivity, despite featuring a different 'type' of Othello. Buchanan contends that Emil Jannings's 'Africanness' is diluted in the 1922 adaptation. She focuses on Othello's line in the film that he is the "son of an Egyptian Prince and a Spanish Princess", as well as: "My blood is fair, like hers, my wife's". Buchanan writes that these lines are "illuminating about the anxieties that surrounded even the fictional representation of a black and white sexual union in 1922" (201). However, these 'anxieties' manifest in the representation of the Moor as being visually and behaviourally radically different to the white characters. Resultantly, Othello's words and his image contradict each other in this version. To explain, in *Othello: Shakespeare in Performance* (2002), Lois Potter divides Othello's performance history into two sections: before and after Paul Robeson. Potter purports that Jannings "plays Othello almost like an animal" (97) (see fig. 4.2).

Fig. 4.2. MovieScores. "Scene From Othello". *YouTube*, 22 Mar. 2008. Author's screenshot. 20 Oct. 2013.

As illustrated, Othello's barbarity coincides with an image of innocence – or unintelligence – in his facial expression, which suggests that his act of violence stems from confusion and fear. Like its Italian counterpart, the sets in the 1922 *Othello* are elaborate and play a significant role in the *mise-en-scène*, illustrating a stylistic trend in adaptations of the play from this period. Regarding Jannings's performance, Rothwell states: "Jannings seems more concerned with self-indulgently playing the role of the great actor than with locating the soul of Othello" (25). This might have been a direct intertextual link between the film and *Carnival* of the previous year. Even if this is not the case, patterns between adaptations of the play from different countries can be identified.

Similar to the British televisual *Othello*s that came later, the acting is evidently overly theatrical in these adaptations, but the settings are comparatively cinematic in their extravagance, giving the actors playing the Moor an environment that is as elaborate as their actions. The central difference between the two silent adaptations is their representations of Othello: the Italian Moor is grandiose, whereas his German counterpart is to be pitied or even reviled. The fact that Shakespeare's words in spoken form are unavailable to these Othellos focuses attention on the image of the Moor, prohibiting the actors from speaking the 'music' of the play in a way that twenty-first-century screen adaptations from Anglo-American countries also do, albeit via different methods. Moreover, because Othello's physical appearance is of more concern than his words in silent adaptations, one may argue that these films set the template for postmillennial versions. These adaptations focus on the image of Othello (rather than his words) – and by extension, his race – and begin the varied but problematic history of the Moor in cinema, regardless of their countries of origin.

The first feature-length talkie *Othello* from outside the Anglo-American gaze, Sergei Yutkevich's *Othello* (1955), was produced post-World War II in the Soviet Union. Critically lauded upon its theatrical release, it won the Best Director prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 1956. In comparison with its American counterpart by Orson Welles (which won the Palme d'Or at the same festival four years previously), Yutkevich's film emphasises its vibrant use of colour. Unlike the relative subtlety of Welles's use of blackface (a result, in part, of the film being shot in black and white), the make-up of Sergei Bondarchuk's Othello is inky black with a bottle-green tint, not dissimilar to Olivier's shade a decade after Yutkevich's film. In the climactic scene, Othello's eyes are foregrounded in a close-up shot to illustrate his heightened emotions, whilst the rest of his face is darkened (see fig. 4.3).

Fig. 4.3. *Othello*. Dir. Sergei Yutkevich. "Отелло". *YouTube*, 24 Dec. 2013. Author's

screenshot. 23 June 2015.

The effect of this is the emphasis of what lies beneath the make-up: the white actor. Othello

has a moment of clarity that coincides with the moment when the audience are reminded that

they are watching a white actor. The close-up may be an attempt to force an 'epiphany' from

the viewer, too, removing them from the action and reminding them that they are watching a

white person. Conversely, Welles's Othello gets progressively darker throughout his

adaptation, mirroring his descent and foreshadowing his actions, whereas Bondarchuk's

Moor is to be sympathised with in light of his perceived epiphany: just as Welles becomes

increasingly darker, Bondarchuk becomes progressively 'whiter'.

Even though he does not provide evidence to justify the following statement, in *A*

History of Shakespeare on Screen (2004), Rothwell writes of the appeal of *Othello* (and other

Shakespeare plays) to Soviet adapters: "Shakespeare had always appealed to Russians on

stage because of some innate need in the Russian soul for romanticism and depth of feeling"

(170). Differentiating Yutkevich's adaptation from Anglo-American *Othello*s, this can be

extended to other European versions, such as the 'romantic' Otello of Verdi's opera, which

treats the character as being relatively 'integrated' into Venetian society. However, this is not

wholly true of adaptations outside the Anglo-American gaze. In an Italian poster for

Yutkevich's film, Othello is depicted as being chained and caged, recalling the Iago of

Welles's adaptation (see fig. 4.4).

Fig. 4.4. "*Otello*". 1955. Poster. *Benito Medela: International Movie Poster*.

BenitoMovieposter.com, 2015. Web. 1 June 2015.

This precedes Nunn's adaptation in its linking of Othello with slavery, although it should be

noted that the Moor speaks of being "sold to slavery" (I.iii.139) in his speech to the Senators. Additionally, Othello's face behind the central image is coloured red and framed in black, which – in conjunction with his expression – connotes the demonic rather than romance/passion in this instance. Additionally, patterns concerning types of engagement with *Othello* are equally difficult to discern. In the 1950s, it may seem that feature-length *Othello*s predominate in adaptations of the play; however, in 1952, an Italian film named *Il peccato di Anna* (concerning an American playing the role on stage in Italy and falling in love with the native Desdemona) places the play within its story, illustrating the continued influence of *Othello* as a 'backstage narrative' in films.

The objective of the 1955 adaptation, according to Rothwell, was "to entertain the masses without resorting to the sex and violence of western film and television" (170). By detracting from Othello's sexuality, his race is also tempered in the film (contrasting the paratextual representation), as both are linked in signifying the Moor's exoticness through a line like: "an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe" (I.i.87–8). This adaptive method is also applied in Miller's BBC adaptation, suggesting similarities between *Othello*s, regardless of nationality. Rothwell's use of the word 'soul' is revealing in that it correlates with Othellos in blackface, and those that portray the Moor as a sympathetic character, such as Zeffirelli's adaptation. Yutkevich's film strives for 'soul', which cannot be 'located' by barbarous Othellos, such as that of Jannings.

4.3. "YOU'D THINK OTHELLO IS A POP GROUP": SOUTH AFRICAN PROTEST THEATRE ON BRITISH TELEVISION

Director Janet Suzman's teleplay, *Othello* (1988), is an example of an adaptation that spans media, beginning on stage in South Africa (1987) before being transposed to British television, two years before the adaptation of her ex-husband, Trevor Nunn, also in the

televisual medium. Of course, British television is within the Anglo-American gaze of the chapter title, but this section treats the teleplay as a South African adaptation, outside of its original framework. This section also examines the differences between the two versions, highlighting the irony that perhaps the most socially relevant *Othello* is also one of the most problematic when its original medium and audience are altered. Regarding screen appropriations, Lanier writes, "by simply changing the context in which Shakespeare's words appear – without changing the words themselves – we radically alter their meaning" (2002: 5). This section will illustrate how Suzman's teleplay manipulates *Othello* without altering its play text, offering the illusion that it corresponds seamlessly with Apartheid-era Johannesburg, explaining how Suzman adapts South Africa to *Othello* as much as she adapts *Othello* to South Africa. In "'Local manufacture made-in-India Othello fellows': Issues of race, hybridity and location in post-colonial Shakespeares", Loomba states that *Othello* is "not just about race in general but about a black man isolated from other black people" (148). In Apartheid-era South Africa, *Othello* is 'reintroduced' to a black audience, developing new 'meaning' in the context. As will be explored in the next chapter through an examination of rap music references to *Othello* and its titular character, this section will determine how the Moor is 'reclaimed' by (or for) a black audience, and how this is translated for British televisual viewers.

In her article, "Shakespeare in the Twentieth Century – South Africa in *Othello*" (1995), Suzman writes of her stage production: "I suspect that it will not happen again; it was a play that had found its time and place" (29). This section will question whether or not *Othello*'s 'time and place' was on the South African stage, and will propose that its time and place was not on British television. However, regarding Suzman's adaptation, Rothwell notes, "the reception was enthusiastic, both in South Africa and after a 1989 telecast from London's Channel Four" (114). The 'enthusiastic' reaction for the latter production is bound

with the reception of the stage production, rather than as a stand-alone televisual experience. Potter echoes Rothwell's positive sentiments about the production, quoting Michael Billington in *The Guardian*: "'Othello is currently the least revived of all Shakespeare's tragedies and the reasons are not far to seek: casting problems and racial guilt'" (185). Billington's review was published in March 1989 (after the airing of the teleplay on Channel 4) and he implies that these 'problems' have been overcome in the South African production, ignoring the casting issues that arise from using a black actor in the role.

Suzman's *Othello* in the form of a teleplay can be viewed – in part – as a method of preserving the stage production, but a change of medium and audience raises several issues that will be addressed in this section. The stage production was initially given a six-week run at The Market Theatre in Johannesburg because, according to the director, "such were the initial doubts about Mr. Shakespeare's box-office clout" ("Twentieth Century" 30), reminiscent of Louis B Mayer's aforementioned assessment that Shakespeare (albeit in Hollywood) is 'box-office poison'. This may suggest that Shakespeare is not seen as a viable commodity in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, regardless of whether or not *Othello* is the most inadaptable of his plays, and the key to making his work adaptable is to make it culturally 'relevant'.

In conversation at De Montfort University (2012), Suzman revealed a relative disdain (partly through her tone of voice and dismissive hand gesture) for the teleplay after talking about its stage counterpart, blaming the 'theatrical' adaptive method that can be compared with British televisual *Othello*s. The teleplay featured a spoken introduction by the director before it aired on Channel 4 on 28 December 1988, explaining the societal context of The Market Theatre production, suggesting that a preface is necessary for an audience outside of South Africa. Whereas cinematic, musical, and online *Othello*s have worldwide audiences – at least comparatively – Suzman's adaptation originally had a maximum audience of 520

people per performance at The Market Theatre before being transposed to a potentially larger

viewership on British television. In a written piece included in the DVD paratextual

materials, Suzman writes of an interracial kiss between Othello and Desdemona: "Who knew

what a public display would provoke? We would have to wait and see" ("Twentieth Century"

16). This serves the same purpose as the preface to the Channel 4 showing of the production.

Suzman relays the excitement that the live production invoked, which can only be imagined

when watching the teleplay, suggesting that the director wants the viewer to watch the

teleplay as if it is a theatrical experience, again, recalling how Miller's adaptation was

promoted. Suzman writes subsequently that "a few people walked out in dudgeon when

Othello and Desdemona first kiss" ("Twentieth Century" 29), creating a metatextual lens

through which the televisual audience can view the adaptation, making the teleplay a filmed

mimesis of the stage production in its South African societal framework.

Proof of this is the vivid description of Johannesburg by the director in her

introduction. She talks in non-diegetic voiceover of markets, jazz clubs, a "nicely eclectic

bookshop", as well as industrial buildings, and "looming nearby is John Forster Square, one

of the more chilling police stations in the world" ("*Othello* in Johannesburg"). Concurrently,

the viewer is shown shots of street dancers and a group of punk rockers, representing the

cultural diversity of the city. She states that Johannesburg is "flanked by both desolation and

creativity", not unlike the teleplay itself: the 'creativity' of the appropriation of the play to the

South African stage, contrasted by the 'desolation' of the sparse, theatrical adaptive methods

of the screen version. The irony of shots of excited theatregoers before Suzman's Channel 4

introduction – incited by South African theatregoers being able to watch a play that

seemingly reflects societal issues of their own time and place, with the addition of a black

actor playing Othello for the first time in the country – is the teleplay's similarities to

previous British televisual *Othello*s, in light of its filmed-theatre style. Despite the fact that

both versions appear to be very similar to one another, the framing of *Othello* adaptations – and knowledge of its various contexts – is of importance to adapters and audiences.

Moreover, the director tells us in her introduction that we are about to witness "protest theatre", depriving the British audience of watching the teleplay through their own cultural lens, regardless of the fact that the play text is retained and the production is difficult to differentiate from British *Othello*s. In addition to Suzman's spoken preface, reviews and paratextual materials confuse the stage production and its televisual equivalent. Favourable comments are featured on the *Focus Films* website (the production company that sells the currently available UK DVD edition), such as "remarkable. A powerful production" (*Daily Mail*), and "a production that made you rethink *Othello*" (*The Listener*). However, through the use of the word 'production', these comments seem to refer to the stage version and not its televisual counterpart. Criticism of the theatre production does exist, however. Loomba writes that, "Shakespeare's *Othello* is about the African in Europe and not the African in Africa" (148). However, because no overt changes are made in terms of setting and Othello's race, Suzman's adaptation only becomes about an African in Africa when the production is viewed in the context of its extratextual environment.

In her essay, Suzman states that she chose to view *Othello* as a "protest play" (28), and her reading of it is borne out of the parallel she observed between *Othello* and South Africa during Apartheid. In light of this, it may be deduced that the central parallel is a racial one, exemplified by the focalisation of the topic in her Channel 4 foreword. Unlike Parker's *Othello*, which had comparisons with cultural events thrust upon it, Suzman actively encourages television viewers to make comparisons with Apartheid in South Africa. In her foreword to the Channel 4 airing, she states: "For South Africans, there was no need to update this play, the metaphor was clear". A problem with this is that the director claims that she is not updating *Othello*, possibly because she retains its play text and stages it in a way

that does not evoke South Africa, but this would not have been necessary in Johannesburg at the time: race-related issues were prevalent in society. The director is, in fact, updating the play through her introduction and directorial choices, such as the way in which actors dwell on certain words. When Iago claims, "I know our country disposition well" (III.iii.204), it is difficult to avoid comparisons in Suzman's adaptation with Eugène Terre'Blanche, founder of the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging, a far-right separatist organisation who threatened civil war to maintain white rule in South Africa.

Because Suzman makes a direct comparison between Terre'Blance and Iago during her Channel 4 preface, the malignity of the latter becomes racially motivated. Suzman describes the Ensign as a character who "acts like your local bigot" ("*Othello* in Johannesburg"); simultaneously, the image on screen transitions from one of Shakespeare's character to one of Terre'Blanche. In light of this, it is no surprise that the audience might be reminded of the white rule (and even the Ku Klux Klan) when Iago arrives on screen with a torch in hand. During the opening scene, Iago's gestures and voice are particularly histrionic, illustrated by the way in which he stares directly towards the camera lens (similar to the British and American Iagos of McKellen and Branagh, for example) before looking from side to side deviously, making him appear stereotypically villainous. Despite her claim to the contrary, 'updating' manifests in Suzman's use of music and the way it can affect viewers' feelings towards characters. Emilia sings a reprise of the "Willow Song" as she mourns the death of Desdemona, with a synthesiser for accompaniment, contrasting the diegetic bells and lute-style guitar (also featured in the opening of Welles's film) of the first scene, drawing attention to the modern instrumentation in the process. By using a contemporary musical arrangement, the audience may be able to empathise with characters in a way that might not have been possible with the unaccompanied text of the play alone, especially in the South African stage production, "in a language that is not your mother tongue" ("Twentieth

Century" 13).

In addition, John Kani's refusal to wear black boots because "'white chaps wear boots for their army service'" ("Twentieth Century" 24) might have resonated with a black audience, as would the fact that he "attended the funeral of a murdered activist" (22) shortly before a performance, making his Othello specifically South African, rather than one that has been 're-appropriated', as none of the aforementioned actions coincide with those of the Moor of the play. In *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (1984), Jonathan Dollimore writes: "In each age we discover new ways of perceiving the eternal verities" (xlviii). When Suzman tells the viewer, "It might have been written by an orthodox Africana" ("*Othello* in Johannesburg"), she is affecting the way in which the audience perceives the teleplay and hears the play text, anachronistically detailing current events in South Africa, seemingly affirming that Shakespeare is for all times and all people.

Additionally, when viewers hear Iago's racist language (by contemporary standards), they can potentially draw a parallel with the relationship between sections of black and white South Africans during Apartheid. Another example of this, as Potter points out, is when "Emilia reaches out her hand toward Othello as she dies" (178). Potter believes that this is "important for Suzman" (178), which may be true, but it is an addition to her production, rather than a direction in Shakespeare's play (see fig. 4.5).

Fig. 4.5. *Othello*. Dir. Janet Suzman. Arthaus Theater, 2006. DVD. Author's screenshot. 12 Nov. 2013.

In conversation at De Montfort University, the director talks of coming from the school of "text is character". However, not only is this scene another addition that modernises *Othello* without altering the play text, it also adapts it as a play that extols racial harmony – not dissimilar to Basil Dearden's *All Night Long* (to be discussed in the subsequent chapter). Emilia not only reaches out to Othello, the gesture is used as a symbol for the end of Apartheid.

In her written piece for the DVD release, Suzman writes: "Iago offers up a handful of reasons for his vengeance, none of which hold enough water to be entirely plausible" (28). This suggests that Suzman emphasises racism in her adaptation as Iago's motive. In the context of South Africa at the time of the production, Iago's hatred is borne out of racial prejudice. However, because the Ensign's actions have been interpreted differently in adaptations, Suzman's belief in Iago's 'motiveless malignity' seemingly justifies the director's message regarding the senselessness of racial prejudice. Conversely, one may

question if the two implications that Othello has slept with Emilia are not 'plausible' motives. In addition to Iago's admission in Act One, Scene Three, that: "it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets / He's done my office" (I.iii.386–7), the Ensign reveals: "I do suspect the lusty Moor / Hath leaped into my seat" (II.i.293–4), and that he wants to get 'even' with him, "wife for wife" (II.ii.297).

In her spoken foreword, the director states in voiceover that there are characters "who don't see colour at all" as the camera shows Cassio, Desdemona, and Emilia. Not only is this erroneous (most notably in the case of Desdemona, whose attraction to Othello is partly based on his exoticness), but it also endorses the actions of characters who will have conflict with Iago, whose feelings are, according to Suzman, "no longer appropriate" ("*Othello* in Johannesburg") in South Africa (neither are blackface Othellos, according to the director). This confirms that the Ensign's reasons for disliking Othello (which are not 'appropriate') have been concretised as racial hatred in Suzman's adaptation. Regarding staging *Othello*, Barney Simon, artistic director of The Market Theatre in 1987, states: "In this country it becomes a political decision" ("*Othello* in Johannesburg"). In her prologue, Suzman references her 'source' rather than contemporary society regarding casting decisions: "It is a foreigner that Shakespeare requires, a black African foreigner at that". However, specifically South African characters permeate Suzman's adaptation in light of the director's tying of Iago to Terre'Blance, reducing Othello's difference to a racial one, exclusively.

Also in conversation at De Montfort University, the director stated that Kani did not understand the classical allusions in the play, which actually suggests a cultural distance from the character, opposing the idea of Othello being re-appropriated by a black actor in Africa. To cite Suzman, "iambic pentameter is as natural to the English as a rumination on the weather", whereas Kani was "not only fighting the misscansions that the spoken rhythms of his own language predicated, but also the highly wrought poetic imagery and complex

conceits of Elizabethan poetry" ("Twentieth Century" 24). The director had to explain "the

cultural implications that classical mythology holds in the European collective psyche" (25–

6) to the actor, who told her in return, "'I was taught to hate those white bastards when I was

a kid'" (23). The fact that Kani was not familiar with the 'collective psyche' of previous

Othellos, in addition to the racist feelings from his childhood, casts doubt on Suzman's claim

that he is "the real thing" (14). According to the director, the Moor is "the single most poetic

role in all of Shakespeare" (13). Resultantly, it is revealing that this this is of less importance

to Suzman than casting a 'real' Othello. In other words, the image of the Moor as a black

male is more important, in this instance, than being true to the '*Othello* music' of the play.

Suzman's casting of a black actor is also an attempt to erase the history of Othellos on

screen – or 'correct' them. Specifically, the director champions an actor who can explore the

sensuality of the play, "without leaving smudges on his Desdemona" ("*Othello* in

Johannesburg"). This, of course, is a reference to Olivier, whose paint rubs off on Maggie

Smith's cheek in the 1965 British adaptation. The adaptive method, in part, then, is borne out

of the history of the play on stage and screen. A potential problem with this is that Suzman

posits that Olivier's Othello is not as 'authentic' as Kani's, but one may argue that the

former's portrayal is an imitation of a black male borne out of a 1960s British context in the

same way that Kani's Moor is borne out of a 1980s South African context, in addition to the

fact that Olivier arguably has more command over the '*Othello* music'.

Suzman summarises her feelings on the teleplay from an adaptation perspective as

being "pretty crude technically, but it has a rawness and a passion that I'm rather proud of"

("Twentieth Century" 30). This is only true when it is viewed through the lens of the

director's prologue regarding the Market Theatre Production and Apartheid in South Africa.

Without this, Suzman's *Othello* is no more adaptable – or inadaptable – than other screen

versions. The irony of Suzman adapting her socially relevant *Othello* for the screen is that its

'crude' filmmaking techniques and need for contextual framing may render it peripheral in the pantheon of *Othello*s on screen in terms of its 'relevance' to – and influence on – subsequent adaptations. The headline, "You'd think Othello is a pop group" ("*Othello* in Johannesburg") may prove the relevance of the production in Apartheid-era South Africa, but on screen, Kani's Moor does not exhibit the lasting appeal of a Hollywood incarnation like Odin in *O*, for example, who is appropriated to the culture of the period through language, image, and non-diegetic music, and has subsequently shown his influence on *YouTube* adaptations that utilise young, urban-inspired Othellos. Suzman's adaptation, by comparison, maintains the language and setting of *Othello*, but is extratextually tied to parasitical comparisons with its stage equivalent by the director in order to align it with current events.

4.4. WORLD CINEMA *OTHELLO*S AND POSTMILLENNIAL FILMED STAGE PRODUCTIONS

Unlike the previous section, this part of the chapter surveys *Othello*s from six different continents, including a selection of adaptations from outside of Anglo-American countries, as well as postmillennial filmed stage versions (not dissimilar to Suzman's adaptation in their style of filmmaking), specifically those which have been made available online or preserved on DVD and found through online sources such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's *Global Shakespeares* website. Thus far, findings in this chapter have suggested that national readings change *Othello* to reflect the cultures within which the adaptations are placed. This final section – before moving to adaptations from other media in the subsequent chapter – will conclude whether or not this is the case across continents, determining what is revealed about the adaptability of the play and its race issues around the world.

An adaptive method that can be found across continents – that of contemporising the

characters and language of the play – can be found in *Othello, el comando negro* (1982), known as *Othello (The Black Commando)* in English, a Spanish/French co-production directed by and starring Max Boulois (and featuring Tony Curtis as Iago). Because Othello is a United States mercenary in Africa – and because of its English dialogue and American star – the film is not truly outside the Anglo-American gaze, compounded by the fact that its familiar adaptive methods do not render it different to those made within it, although Shakespeare's name is misspelt (unintentionally or not) as 'Sheakspeare' in the opening titles. The film's non-diegetic soundtrack is composed entirely of music by Beethoven; however, when the main characters arrive in Africa, tribal sounds and ritualistic dancing contrast this, foreshadowing the use of similar music in Parker's adaptation. The film also explicitly concerns race – a trend in appropriations of the play – reducing *Othello* to a story of racism and interracial love. When Othello and Desdemona are introduced, they have a 'conversation' in non-diegetic voiceover. Desdemona evokes imagery found in the play through her use of the word 'devil'. She is the Senator's daughter, and Othello accuses her of racism: "What do you care about a thousand – or five million Africans?". Racism is contemporised and made an explicit motive for Iago's plot in the film, exemplified when he describes Othello: "Those chimpanzee hands, those thick lips, and he smells", before concluding: "All niggers smell". As crass as this seems, one may argue that it contemporises Iago's discourse in the play, such as "thick lips" (I.i.66).

The adaptive methods of *The Black Commando* can also be found in *Huapango* (2003), a Mexican *Othello* filled with specific cultural references that supersede its 'fidelity' to the play. The imagery and music in the adaptation are unmistakably of its own national culture; in fact, the film is titled after a style of music native to the country. The elaborate opening sequence depicts a wedding, which is, of course, not an element of the play, suggesting that the scene is a device used to showcase Mexican culture and traditions. This

type of interaction, which fuses contemporary cultural influences with the basic plot of *Othello*, is not unusual outside the Anglo-American gaze. *Eloise* (2002) is a low-budget digital feature film written and directed by Australian director Brenden Dannaher, inspired by the song of the same name by Barry Ryan (1968), as well as Shakespeare's play. To return to *Huapango*, in terms of its representation of the race issues of Shakespeare's play (and the matter of adapting them in the twenty-first century), Otilio (Othello) – like Santiago (Iago) and Julia (Desdemona) – is relatively fair-skinned when compared to the other characters in the film. It is Otilio's drunken, violent behaviour in private that separates him from the other characters, although it does not parallel the characteristics of the initially noble general of the play. This *Othello* 'equivalent' is problematic in its tying of alcohol-driven violence with race. In addition, Otilio wears black during the wedding ceremony, contrasting Desdemona in white, reducing racial difference to a symbolic allusion to the play. Another *Othello* outside the Anglo-American gaze that utilises this adaptive method is *Jarum Halus* (2008), a Malaysian appropriation of the play, which takes place in the corporate world. The story revolves around Daniel Oh (Othello) eloping with the daughter of one of the board members, the son of whom plots revenge against the former. Its trailer features the intertitle, "This is a story about love", echoing the opening words of Jago in the 2001 ITV *Othello*: "Don't talk to me about race; don't talk to me about politics. It was love, simple as that". This points towards the universality of contemporising the play, as well as demonstrating the way in which *Othello*s draws influence from previous adaptations.

In addition to being adapted to various national contexts, *Othello* is engaged with in a variety of other ways in films from around the world. *Souli* (2004), a Malagasy film directed by Alexander Abela, appropriates the characters of *Othello* and frames them in a different story. Carlos (Cassio) travels by boat to find Souli (Othello), who lies dying when the central line of the film (focalised in the trailer) is spoken: "The tale must be saved". Carlos is a

Spanish student in search of the Senegalese writer, Souli, a travelling poet (griot) in possession of a rare tale. A plot similar to *Othello* ensues and its racial angle manifests in the fact that Mona (Desdemona) is French. However, the trailer also features Carlos speaking the line, "I'm hoping to find this ancient tale", and "I've been studying Souli's work for years". Of course, this could be an allusion to adapting Shakespeare: the rare physical copy of the tale that Souli possesses could parallel a First Folio, or even a lost Shakespeare play. However, the idea of finding an 'ancient tale' before the narrative ensues places *Othello* as not only a tale that 'must be saved', but also one that is 'dying' along with Souli.

Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Che cosa sono le nuvole?* (1967) features the staging of a production of *Othello*. According to Sonia Massai in "Subjection and Redemption in Pasolini's *Othello*" (2005),[11] it was "initially conceived as one of the episodes of a feature film" (95) entitled *Capriccio all' Italiana* (1968). The language of Shakespeare's *Othello* is transposed to Roman and Neapolitan dialects in the episode and images in the scene are influenced by metaphors from the play. For example, puppeteers operate the tragedians onstage in order to illustrate Iago's manipulation of Othello, evident in the strings attached to the Moor (see fig. 4.6).

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[11] For additional critical analysis of Pasolini's treatment of *Othello* on the subject of how filmmakers from different countries adapt Shakespeare, see "Six Authors in Search of a Text: The Shakespeares of Van Sant, Branagh, Godard, Pasolini, Greenaway and Luhrmann" by Anthony R Guneratne in *Shakespeare, Film Studies, and the Visual Cultures of Modernity* (Palgrave, 2008).

Fig. 4.6. fabriziomaccallini. "Cosa sono le nuvole? (What are the clouds? - part1)". *YouTube*, 6 May 2008. Author's screenshot. 29 Oct. 2013.

In addition, Iago's skin is painted green, making the blackface of the Moor less unordinary in the context. The fact that there is an audience within the *mise-en-scène* watching a staging of the play creates an element of interactivity through the use of "meta-theatrical and meta-cinematic devices" (Massai 95). During the climactic moments of the play-within-the-play, the audience members swarm the stage, attacking Othello and Iago, potentially signifying that the plot of *Othello* is incompatible with contemporary Italy, compounded by the fact that both characters are taken away as rubbish and disposed of on a waste heap. Sanders writes: "appropriation carries out the same sustained engagement as adaptation but frequently adopts a posture of critique, even assault" (2006: 4). In this case, the dumping of the bodies on the heap may be construed as a posture of 'assault', representing the difficulty of adapting *Othello* on screen. When *Othello* is not treated with irreverence, as in *Hrid Majharey* (2014) (inspired by several Shakespeare plays), the central male character, Abhijit, murders the central female character, Debjani (who is revealed to be pregnant), at the denouement of the film. In light of this, it may be telling that the audience members in *Che cosa sono le nuvole?*

interrupt the production, suggesting that the scene being adapted (that of Desdemona's death) is perhaps the most inadaptable in the play.

Massai claims that some critics, such as Stephen Greenblatt in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980), have tended to "glamorize" (105) the character of Iago. Greenblatt, according to Massai, contends that the way in which the Ensign's plot and ability to enter into the consciousness of characters makes him comparable with Shakespeare, providing Iago with an authorial presence. As mentioned previously, this has a legacy in adaptations of *Othello*, such as the presentation of Branagh's Iago in Parker's film. However, by "lowering the register" of the play and turning it into a puppet show before a "working-class audience" (Massai 95), Pasolini facilitates his own 'critical' engagement with *Othello*, permitting spectators to comment on the action and engage with it in a way that previous audiences had not.[12] The audience members in *Che cosa sono le nuvole?* offer onscreen "warnings" as they become "increasingly frustrated" (96) by Iago's plan. By not allowing the Ensign to be glorified, a potentially "racist narrative" (95) is avoided, according to Massai, because the audience members become the "adapter who eats his master to absorb his creative power while exorcizing it" (101). In this instance, one may argue that the race issues of the play are overcome, although this is only achieved because they are significantly altered.

Omkara (2006) (to be discussed further in the subsequent chapter) differs from *Hrid Majharey* in that – even though it is an Indian adaptation – it is a specifically Bollywood interpretation of *Othello*, mixing drama with musical and dancing interludes, which are vaguely linked to the plot. *Omkara* features an entirely Indian cast, and as a result – like *Huapango* – it provides its Iago with a clear motive other than racism. However, the

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[12] Massai refers to audiences "traditionally" finding the play "disquieting and upsetting" (101), citing the aforementioned female observed by Pepys who cried out as Othello smothered Desdemona during a performance.

difference between Omkara and the rest of the characters lies in his caste, an Indian concept

specific to Hindu society regarding degrees of 'purity' and class, as a result. In *Huapango*,

Santiago's malignity is aimed towards Julia, who elopes with the wealthy Otilio, whereas in

Omkara, the titular character (a working-class member of a criminal organisation in the

troubled region of Uttar Pradesh) is the victim of the frustration of its Iago (Langda)

regarding the fact that Omi (Omkara) chooses Kesu (Cassio) as his right-hand man, despite

Langda's fifteen years of loyalty. *Omkara* offers retribution for the death of Dolly

(Desdemona) by having Langda killed by his wife Indu (Emilia), engaging with gender issues

more than racial ones in the process. However, its transposition of the race issues of *Othello*

to one of caste confirms that it does not truly escape the influence of its Anglo-American

origins, creating a prejudicial issue to serve as an 'equivalent' for the singular racial dynamic

of a play first performed in Jacobean England.

Other adaptations that utilise Asian Othellos (as opposed to the normative

contemporary method of portraying the Moor as a black male) also manipulate racial

difference, such as Zaibh Shaikh's *Othello: The Tragedy of the Moor* (2008) and Hammudi

Al-Rahmoun Font's *Otel•lo* (2012), both of which depict the character as a 'Turbaned Turk'.

However, unlike *Omkara*, these adaptations are products of Canada and Spain, respectively.

Promotional images for *Othello: The Tragedy of the Moor* show the titular character pictured

beneath the *Ay-yıldız* crescent moon and star symbol found on the Turkish flag. In the

comments section of a *YouTube* trailer for the film, one user deems the utilisation of the

symbol and its connection to Islam as "weird...offensive...stupid" (anticryptojoo). When this

is mixed in *Otel•lo* with the transposition of Shakespeare's play text into Spanish, the

relationship of the film with race becomes confused as a result of its need to appropriate the

issue to its own national context. In the trailer for *Otel•lo*, the actors are shown leaving their

dressing room before transforming into the characters of the play, a metatextual device

similar to those of the 'backstage narrative' *Othello*s, although, in this case, it appears to relate to the fact that the 'source' material began on the stage, rather than relating to the racial discourse of the film.

The influence of Anglo-American *Othello*s is significant in adaptations produced outside Britain and America – not just in terms of their 'reaction' to them – but because the antihero aspect of *O* can be found in *Iago* (2009), an Italian equivalent of the teenpic (albeit aimed at a strictly Italian audience: the DVD release does not feature English subtitles, for example), in which Iago is the wronged party, suggesting that some twenty-first century *Othello*s may be aimed towards audiences who may empathise with the Ensign. Othello damages Iago's academic stature and usurps him as the designer of an architectural project, whilst also stealing his love interest: the Chancellor's daughter. Iago responds by elaborately plotting Othello's downfall in order to pay him back for his manipulative acts. Even though Iago is the central character in this appropriation, portentous orchestral music accompanies the opening intertitle, which reveals his name and the title of the film, suggesting that even though he is to be sympathised with, Iago is an antihero. The ominous string arrangement is also evident later in the film when Iago photographs Cassio stealing a kiss from Desdemona, serving as a *leitmotif*.

As is the case with the antiheroic Ensign of Branagh, who plays with chess pieces in order to illustrate his control over the action, race-related symbolism is used in the opening scene of *Iago*, in which the titular character (along with the complicit Emilia) plays with an architectural model as if it were the world in which the narrative takes place. The central difference between this Iago and that of Branagh is that the character is the protagonist in the Italian film. The chess parallel seemingly confirms the fact that Branagh's representation of the character as an antihero has influenced subsequent adaptations, and these similarities highlight the impact of versions within the Anglo-American gaze on those outside it. Like *O*

and *Omkara*, *Iago* amalgamates cultures and periods through its diegetic and non-diegetic music: Italian-language dance tracks and English-language pop ("That's Not My Name" (2008) by The Ting-Tings) are blended during a party scene. The film ends with the closing of a curtain – parasitical of its 'source' medium – while the lyric, "Love is these blues that I'm singing again" can be heard, arguably reminding the audience that they are watching an adaptation of another story.

  Kaliyattam (1997) is a Malayalam film that places *Othello* against the backdrop of a Hindu Theyyam ritual performance that visually parallels the witchcraft imagery conjured by Shakespeare in the play. The witchcraft references – by Brabantio, for example, regarding "spells and medicines" (I.iii.62) and "mixtures powerful" (I.iii.105) – that make Othello exotic in Venice are normative in this context. Additionally, the climactic scene of *Kaliyattam* recalls Parker's *Othello* in its use of tribal drumming to accompany the Moor on screen, although this is less incongruous in *Kaliyattam* because of its setting. Subsequently, the ceremonial mask that *Kaliyattam*'s Othello wears in the opening scenes is reduced to just red face-paint surrounding a pair of black eyes embellished with "mythic intertexts" (Thornton Burnett 77), visually symbolising the 'mythic' "men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders" (I.iii.144–6) in the play (see fig. 4.7).

Fig. 4.7. malayalambiscoot. "Kaliyattam: Full Length Malaysian Movie". *YouTube*, 12 May 2013. Author's screenshot. 2 Nov. 2013.

This continues the theme of the physical transformation of Othello in screen adaptations, from the actor-turned-murderer of the 'backstage narrative' films, to the visibly darker Moor towards the end of Welles's movie. The visual analogies for the images of the play continue as a fire rages in the *mise-en-scène* as Othello confronts Iago, ostensibly representing the hellish imagery associated with Shakespeare's Moor. In *Kaliyattam*, black eyes – in the closing scenes – subscribe to an image used by Shakespeare in the 'Dark Lady' sonnets: "In nothing art thou black save in thy deeds" (131.13). Through the close-up shot, Othello's wrongdoings are emphasised (through his literal 'blackness') before he runs into the fire to commit suicide.

This section concludes with an examination of filmed stage productions produced outside the Anglo-American gaze in the postmillennial period. Unlike stage *Othello*s from the United Kingdom (such as those of Burge and Nunn), these productions are not concerned with 'fidelity' to the play; instead, they transpose its narrative and language to their own national contexts, which has been apparent since the turn-of-the-millennium. In the case of *Desdemona* (2000), Ong Keng Sen assembled a troupe of actors, musicians, designers, video artists from India, Korea, Myanmar, Indonesia, and Singapore to work together, blending those cultures on stage simultaneously, using *Othello* to unite them, rather than divide them. Its visual esotericism comprises an Othello of indeterminate racial origins, visually recalling Ancient Egypt and African shamanism at the same time. The production also features a symbolic use of puppetry by actors wearing silver face-paint. The amalgamation of traditions and styles in this multinational production suggests that *Othello* is treated differently throughout the world (rather than there being an East–West divide), but it also reveals little about the adaptability of the play and its race issues (and will not be examined further, as a result) because cultural reinterpretations supersede both.

Japanese director Satoshi Miyagi creates a relative tonal and cultural tranquillity in his *Othello* (2005), blending the tragedy with the conventions of Noh theatre. The production has an ethereal tone, borne out by its loose, terse translation of the words of the play text and its use of Japanese folk instruments, heightened by characters wearing masks and white face-paint, negating the blackface tradition of *Othello*s (albeit corresponding with the use of masks in adaptations, both literally and figuratively). Similar to silent *Othello* adaptations, actions supersede words in this production. The Moor manifests as a spirit, represented by a warrior's glove on Desdemona's hand, positioning Desdemona as a literal puppet-master, a role reserved for Iago in Western adaptations (see fig. 4.8).

Fig. 4.8. *Othello*. Dir. Satoshi Miyagi. Ku Na Uka Theatre Company. Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo, Japan. 2005. *Global Shakespeares*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, n.d. Author's screenshot. 24 May 2013.

However, Othello actually manifests as an 'evil' spirit. Imagery concerning 'blackness' in the play is engaged with as a chorus of singers chant of "black hands" and "black jealousy burned red". Subsequently, the singers liken Othello to a devil, stating that he is "truly like a demon", before repeating the sentiment as they observe Desdemona "summoning his demon spirit". Moreover, both diegetic drums and Othello (or, his spirit) are featured in the shot. As in Parker's film, the percussion is of a frenetic pace as the Moor is invoked, conjuring and culling ideas of 'blackness' from the Hollywood adaptation, potentially pointing towards the influence of cinema on stage *Othello*s.

Regarding early twentieth-century Japanese productions of *Othello*, Tierney writes: "Othello is simply not intelligible to Japanese audiences, because they lack any concrete experience of 'discrimination' or 'racial tensions'" (514). This might be the reason why Miyagi's *Othello* arguably borrows one aspect of its racial discourse from an Anglo-American adaptation. However, one could apply this to the aforementioned Indian *Othello*s too, although Tierney's point implies that the play is adaptable in Anglo-American countries, by extension, not taking into consideration the fact that the 'racial tensions' of contemporary America and Britain are different from those of Jacobean England. Moreover, the Japanese *Othello* engages with race in spite of its 'intelligibility', emphasising the importance of the issue in adaptations of the play, whilst also tying 'evil' with 'blackness' in the production, regardless of the lack of 'racial tensions' in the country.

Doditello (2001), staged in Cairo, Egypt, is an *Othello*-based play concerning the relationship between Princess Diana and the Egyptian businessman, Dodi al-Fayed, focusing on the aspects of their lives that correspond with Shakespeare's play – the main one being the fatal ending that both couples meet. However, the ending of *Othello* is acted out in a play-within-the-play scenario devised by Shakey (a royal advisor/cloning error based on both Shakespeare and Dolly the Sheep), using a device found in *Hamlet* to foil the relationship.

Another allusion to *Hamlet* comes in the epilogue when Dodi's ghost appears to his father inside Harrods department store, stating that his death was not an accident. In fact, *Hamlet* is adapted as much as *Othello*, which is presumably only utilised for the convenience of the parallel 'endings'. In *Doditello*, *Othello* is used as a façade to comment on a current event (implying that al-Fayed and Diana were murdered). This contrasts with the two most recent Hollywood *Othello*s, which have had societal parallels thrust upon them, although in light of the allusions to contemporary society in the ITV adaptation, for example, it is difficult to make a distinction between the adaptive methods of versions made within the Anglo-American gaze and those outside it.

In *Doditello*, Iago is a drag queen parody of Queen Elizabeth II, who orders the cloning of Shakespeare to break up the Dodi–Diana coupling. It is Shakespeare, not Dodi/Othello, who is the cloning error in this production, although the latter is portrayed as opportunistic and lazy. Additionally, a trio of Islamists who – as well as conspiring to deduce whether or not Dodi is betraying them through his miscegenation with a white woman or avenging them through his reverse-colonisation of her – are convinced that Shakespeare was a North African Arab. To add to the mixture of nationalities and races, *Othello* is rewritten in colloquial Egyptian in *Doditello*. A line of the Queen's dialogue (according to Nehad Selaiha in her review) regarding *Othello* is: "that delicious piece of virulent racism". In turn, this incites 'virulent racism' from the characters in *Doditello*, which in turn creates an East–West divide in the production. However, it is Shakespeare who is challenged and rewritten rather than Othello. *Doditello* regards Shakespeare as the 'contaminating agent', who makes Othello inadaptable in this context.

Otelo da Mangueira (2006) transposes the play to Brazilian Samba Schools of the 1940s, and to the medium of musical theatre. The production opens with a samba piece that sets its upbeat tone, but it is not evocative of *Othello* in that it is difficult to pinpoint

'equivalents' for the action of the play. Similarly, its Othello is native to the production's country of origin, visually indistinguishable from the other characters as a result. That which is appropriated from Shakespeare and *Othello* – its basic plot and the recreation of an Elizabethan theatre as the backdrop for the action – is set against favelas and landscapes of drug dealings and violence, making it apparent that the play is adaptable to any cultural context from across the world, ironically because it is not being engaged with to a significant extent. In this case, the musical and samba routines do not adapt *Othello* in any discernable way. Ângelo Brandini's *Othelito* (2007) is another Brazilian production in the form of a comedy aimed at children. Like *Otelo da Mangueira*, it features a minimalistic relationship with its 'source'. In fact, its Commedia dell'Arte framework is the central influence on the action. It also features samba dancing and an *Othello*-inspired Venetian background, linking its adaptive methods with those of *Otelo da Mangueira*, and ultimately pointing towards the inadaptability of the play outside the Anglo-American gaze.

In *Othelito*, the titular character wears a frilled shirt, purple waistcoat and stockings, and red socks, and his physical countenance is characterised by a fake moustache and nose, as well as a balding head, a parody of an Italian stereotype (see fig. 4.9).

Fig. 4.9. *Othelito*. Dir. Ângelo Brandini. Cia Vagalum Tum Tum. São Paulo, Brazil. 2007.

Global Shakespeares. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, n.d. Author's screenshot. 24

Feb. 2014.

Because this Othello's appearance is comedic, his physical violence against Desdemona

mirrors this and is limited to him biting her ponytail before attempting to start a boxing

contest with his wife as she fends him off with a hand against his head in a scene that

resembles one from a cartoon. Subsequently, she kicks him from the stage, suggesting the

inadaptability of one of *Othello*'s most adapted scene (when considering the numerous

adaptations of Desdemona's death across media, from visual art depictions to screen

allusions). Another Latin American production, *Otelo* (2009), directed by Claudia Ríos,

transposes the play to twenty-first-century Mexico, although it does not appropriate the Moor

in a comparable way to the aforementioned adaptations. Hernán Mendoza's blackface Otelo

is tall and imposing with a tattooed face, and wears a full-length coat with military insignia,

contrasting not just the characters with whom he shares the stage, but other postmillennial

Othellos from Latin America, although the fact that this production is not a comedy is clearly significant. However, Mendoza's visualisation of Othello confirms that the Moor is an ever-changing character, open to interpretation, and visually indefinable as a result of his various incarnations over the centuries in different countries, cultures and media.

4.5. CONCLUSION: "O MONSTROUS WORLD! TAKE NOTE, TAKE NOTE, O WORLD / TO BE DIRECT AND HONEST IS NOT SAFE" (III.iii.380–1)

In "Olympic Shakespeare and the Idea of Legacy: Culture, Capital and the Global Future" (2015), Erin Sullivan details how adapting Shakespeare during the World Shakespeare Festival and Cultural Olympiad of 2012 speculated "on new and less familiar ways of approaching" Shakespeare in "non-English languages and performance traditions" (283). Sullivan continues by stating that with "Shakespeare as a figure of British triumphalism no longer feasible on a global scale, Shakespeare as the representative of cultural equality and exchange predominated, although the extent to which this paradigm will continue to be valued outside of high profile, nationally appointed festive times remains an open question" (283). In the case of *Othello*, there are adaptations inside and outside the Anglo-American gaze (such as *All Night Long* and Suzman's teleplay) that have used the play to promote cultural (and racial) equality, albeit inconsistently, in that the aforementioned *Othello*s do not represent a sustained adaptive trend. Whether or not *Othello*s from around the world will adapt the play in what Sullivan refers to (albeit not on the topic of *Othello*, specifically) as a "new guise" (283) of cultural equality remains to be seen, although previous high profile adaptations have tended to coincide with periods of racial tension rather than with festive times. The case studies analysed in this thesis prove that Shakespeare can exist as a vehicle for cultural exchange on screen, but the same can only be said of Shakespeare's

Othello as a vehicle for cultural equality when the race issues of the play are appropriated to different contexts, changing them in the process.

Othello is as prevalent on stage and screen in the twenty-first century outside of Anglo-American countries as it is in it, albeit for potentially different reasons. One reason why such diverse treatments of the play exist around the world may be a reaction to Anglo-American *Othello*s and their perceived problems regarding representations of race, as well as potential links between the character of Othello and those countries. It may be argued that the Shakespeare play that has a 'black' central character has been shown to engage adapters in 'reclaiming' (however dubiously) their own 'real' Othello. These adaptations offer opportunities for interactions with the play outside the Anglo-American gaze, but they are also haunted by it. If some of the adaptations analysed in this chapter are 'reactions' to *Othello* and its Western adaptations, the lack of discernable 'equivalents' for the race issues of the play raise questions as to its adaptability in these contexts. The catalyst for adapting *Othello*, however, might lie in the fact that the Moor is not a Western character to many adapters, and many re-appropriate him, as a result. They fail to realise, however, that Othello's origins are in Jacobean England, and that the character is a white conception of 'blackness'. Despite this, Anglo-American adaptations are arguably as far removed from the Jacobean stage as the likes of modern-day Japan or India. In their Introduction to *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, Loomba and Orkin ask: "in what voices do the colonized speak – their own, or in ancients borrowed from their masters" (7)? One can not only extend this question to *Othello*s outside the Anglo-American gaze, but to adaptations of the play in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The answer, in the case of *Othello*, is often a mixture of both.

In email correspondence conducted for this thesis, director/adapter Tom Magill offered insight on the adaptability of the play in light of Shakespeare's place in the twenty-

first century. Regarding Shakespeare's status as what Holderness calls a "cultural phenomenon" (1994: 211), as well as Deborah Cartmell's assertion that there is "a 'belief' in Shakespeare as timeless educator" (2001: 143), Magill suggests: "I agree Shakespeare is a 'cultural phenomenon' and I might even add 'global' – Shakespeare is a global cultural phenomenon". He continues: "I think we have a lot to learn from Shakespeare and I also agree that he is perceived as a 'timeless educator'". This belief may be true for other plays, but *Othello* is unique. For example, how 'timeless' and 'educational' are the race issues of *Othello*, especially for adapters and audiences who find perceived cultural equivalents for them? Magill concludes with his own question: "The important question for me is: who is educating who about what and who is benefitting most from the knowledge exchange?". If we apply this to adaptations of the play, the adapters can be placed as the 'educators' of their audiences, although the lessons taught are changed with each subsequent adaptation across media, periods, and nations. In many cases, *Othello* is used as a vessel to perpetuate a racial stereotype, as well as acting as a veneer for commentary on current events.

Roland Barthes states: "writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin" (125). However, considering the miscegenation between *Othello* and different cultures in 'rewritings' of the play, 'ownership' is still tied not only to the playwright, but also to the time and place in which it was written and first performed, evidence of which lies in the varied but problematic treatments from across the globe. These adaptations are influenced by the play, Anglo-American adaptations (even if this manifests in the form of 'reactions'), and their own cultures, but their retention of remnants of *Othello*'s race issues renders them to be responses to – and reinforcements of – a racial stereotype. As a result, the play is no more (or less) adaptable outside the Anglo-American gaze than it is in it. *Othello*s from Great Britain and the United States transpose its race issues to contemporary periods or attempt to ignore them through a past setting, whereas adaptations from across the globe

normatively nationalise the play, altering *Othello* and its race issues in the process.

5. The New '*Othello* Music': From the Play Text to Opera, Diegetic/Non-Diegetic

Soundtracks, and Popular Music Allusions

5.1. INTRODUCTION: PRELUDE TO *OTHELLO* AND MUSIC

In his essay, "The *Othello* Music" (1930), G Wilson Knight details how *Othello* is rich with lyrical speeches, particularly by the eponymous character, coining the term, 'the *Othello* music', in reference to the symphonic quality of characters' voices as instruments. Knight focuses on the musical quality of Othello's words in contrast with the candour of Iago's language. *Othello*, Knight claims, is unlike any other Shakespeare play, and the key to interpreting it is to find meaning in characters' actions and dialogue; in this case, the dialogue is identified to be symphonic. Knight's notion about the musicality of the play raises the question: is *Othello* more suited to musical (rather than screen) adaptations? Knight contends that *Othello* stands alone in the Shakespeare universe as "silhouetted, defined, concrete" (104). In addition to the fact that it has one linear storyline, the linking of the '*Othello* music' with the apparent completeness of the play brings to mind Walter Pater's assertion that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music" (125). Whether or not Shakespeare's form aids the lyrical quality of Othello's speeches is debatable, and Pater does not explain why music's unification of form and subject matter is important in art, but by extension, the idea of music unifying subject matter and form may be a potential reason for *Othello*'s supposed completeness correlating with its musicality.

To take this further, in *Filming Othello* (1978), Orson Welles states:

Carlyle said that almost everything examined deeply enough will turn

out to be musical, and of course this is profoundly true of motion

pictures. Pictures have movement – movies move. And then there's

the movement from one picture to another – there's a rhythmic

structuring to that – there's counterpoint, harmony, and dissonance. A

film is never right until it's right musically.

Knight's essay was published during a period in which sound cinema and popular recorded

music were in their early stages and he does not consider them for discussion. This chapter

examines the relationship between *Othello* and music, expanding the lines of analysis from

Knight's conception of the '*Othello* music' into musical adaptations of the play, combining a

discussion of the Moor's 'musicality' with the relationship between music and

representations of race. Of course, Knight aligns Othello with music through the lyricism of

the character's words, but in adaptations – as this chapter will suggest – the '*Othello* music'

is often aligned with the issue of race. Drawing on the work of Lanier and Hansen, who will

be cited throughout, this chapter is the first sustained analysis of musical adaptations of

Othello, exploring the attraction of the story and its titular character to musical forms. In

addition, it will examine whether or not it sits as awkwardly in music as it does in screen

adaptations, which have arguably continuously perpetuated racial stereotypes – both in the

early period of screened blackface Othellos – and in recent film adaptations, in which the

character has been anachronistically compared to OJ Simpson, for example, in Parker's film,

in addition to being appropriated in *O* as a gun-wielding high school student, accompanied by

a gangsta rap soundtrack.

Pre-existing work on Shakespeare and music is varied. Frederick William Sternfeld's

Music in Shakespearean Tragedy (1963) and "Music and Ballads" (1964) focus on the

relationship between music and Shakespeare's plays through contextual analysis; others, like

Sanders's *Shakespeare and Music: Afterlives and Borrowings* and Phyllis Hartnoll's

Shakespeare in Music (1964), explore how music in opera and the concert hall treat

Shakespeare's plays; and others, like Hansen's *Shakespeare and Popular Music*, focus on Shakespeare's relationship with popular music with a broader scope than this chapter will aim for. Following them, I will examine the role of music in the play (its songs and the language of 'the *Othello* music'), as well as *Othello* in opera on screen and as a 'musical' (grouped by the use of diegetic musical soundtracks), in addition to detailing how filmmakers embellish 'the *Othello* music' through non-diegetic soundtracks. These will serve as the crossover point between *Othello* on screen and *Othello* in other media, as the chapter ends with an exploration of *Othello* in popular music lyrics.

In "Music and the Crisis of Meaning in *Othello*" (2009), Erin Minear discusses how work on the subject has tended to compartmentalise. For example, Knight focuses on the symphonic quality of language, rather than actual music within the play. Minear states that *Othello* "blurs the distinctions that separate different kinds of music" (355), albeit through deliberating on the play alone, rather than adaptations of it. In *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), Hutcheon writes: "If you think adaptation can be understood by using novels and films alone, you're wrong" (xi). Of course, this is not a revelatory statement in the field, and Hutcheon is not referring to music, specifically. However, it does prompt the question: what does analysing musical adaptations reveal about the adaptability of *Othello* – does it offer a better 'understanding'? In "That's how good it was" (1995), from *The Faber Book of Pop*, Hanif Kureishi writes of how popular music can offer an alternative history of time: "since pop, intersecting with issues of class, race and particularly gender, has been at the centre of post-war culture" (xix). By extension, another aim of this chapter is to explore how *Othello*'s relationship with music can shed light on the adaptability of the play and its race issues in specifically musical forms and contexts.

5.2. MUSIC IN *OTHELLO*

In addition to the songs in the play and directions for musicians to play an unnamed tune in Act Three, Scene One, *Othello* is abundant with lyrical speeches, particularly by the titular character, and the influence of the '*Othello* music' is evident in the use of its words in music. For example, "Land of Hope and Glory" by Elgar is known – particularly in the United States – as "Pomp and Circumstance" – a phrase coined in *Othello*: "Pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war" (III.iii.357). Words like 'music' and 'song' feature no more noticeably in *Othello* than they do in other Shakespeare plays (five times apiece), but the word 'instrument' appears seven times,[13] corresponding with the way in which Iago 'plays' Othello rather than relating to actual music (although the use of the word corresponds with characters' words being aligned with music).

Music permeates *Othello* in other ways, too. Three songs are sung in the play text (or, more specifically, in the Folio version, which modern editions, including the one cited in this thesis, print). Iago sings the first, "And let me the canakin clink", in order to create a convivial atmosphere in which he can "ensnare" (II.i.165–6) Cassio. The Ensign sings a short verse about the life of a soldier being "but a span" (II.iii.67), and that this alone is reason enough to get drunk. According to Muir,[14] there is no evidence to suggest that the tune for the song is known, but the melody appears to fit that of "A Soldier's Life", which was not printed until 1651 (237). The ambiguity regarding the authorship of the song does not rule out the possibility that Shakespeare himself wrote it, potentially in order to concretise and amplify the role of music in the play. Iago claims that he "learned it in England" (II.iii.90), which might allude to the fact that it potentially allows him to communicate with the audience in a way that Othello's exoticness stops him from doing. No major screen adaptation includes this song; instead, they rely, in the case of Parker's *Othello*, for example, on non-diegetic music

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[13] In I.iii.267; III.i.3; III.i.6; III.i.10; IV.i.217; IV.ii.44; and IV.ii.168.
[14] As printed in the Penguin *Othello* (1996) referenced in the Works Cited of this thesis.

and Branagh's Iago talking directly to the camera to create a similar effect, condensing the need to create new scenes by taking advantage of cinematic techniques.

The second song, "King Stephen was and-a worthy peer", is sung in the same scene and its tune, according to Muir, was not printed until the eighteenth century (238), and does not feature in any screen adaptations of the play. The fact that early ballads used ordinary, day-to-day vernacular suggests a parallel with appropriations of – and allusions to – *Othello* in popular music, in which songs often utilise simple rhyme schemes similar to the iambic tetrameter/trimeter of "King Stephen was and-a worthy peer". When Iago's plan is in effect and the scene ends, a group of musicians appear and play at Cassio's insistence (although the song they play is never mentioned), beginning Act Three in the same manner in which Act Two ends: with scenes involving music. Whatever the song is, it presumably represents Cassio's emotional state due to his declaration: "I will content your pains" (III.i.1). Again, no screen adaptation includes the song.

Unlike the two previous pieces, "The Willow Song", or, "The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree", was certainly known during performances of the play, as unlike the aforementioned songs, it appears in contemporary ballad collections and sixteenth-century manuscripts, as indicated by Muir (239). However, it does not feature in the Quarto text of 1622, only in the Folio of 1623, but the inclusion of it in a Hollywood adaptation like Parker's *Othello* attests to its resonance as a means of expressing Desdemona's sadness through song, revealing more about her character in the process. As an alternative to speech, the emotional quality of "The Willow Song" may be particularly adaptable to screen; if cinema can reach an alternative (or wider) audience than theatre, those unfamiliar with the language of Shakespeare's plays could potentially respond to the unification of subject matter and form in music, in which sentiment can be conveyed without words, or alongside them.

It would be anachronistic to refer to it as a 'pop' song, but it is important to differentiate "The Willow Song" from a stereotypically classical piece in light of its instrumentation of just voice and lute, which may resonate with twentieth- and twenty-first-century audiences due to its parallels with the often sparsely-instrumented singer-songwriter style. According to Sternfeld, like the cinematic adaptations that came subsequently, Shakespearean tragedies use "music as a means to expose their characters" (24). In the case of *Othello*, according to Sternfeld, characters are 'exposed' through their words and actions, but one can also find meaning in the songs of the play, despite the fact that Shakespeare did not compose them. Moreover, in relation to this chapter, it may prove that music can be used as an alternative method to speech in creating a particular tone, or, in the case of cinema, affecting viewers' feelings towards characters in a way that Knight did not anticipate. By extension, how music reveals the adaptability of the play (and the titular character, specifically) in various contexts (of form and media, in particular) is a predominant objective of this chapter.

By removing songs from the play text in screen adaptations, non-diegetic soundtracks can serve as a companion to speech in the relatively time-restricted multi-sensory medium of cinema. Desdemona's song parallels her situation because it details a dejected lover, which "had great popular appeal and could be relied upon to arouse a sympathetic response" (Sternfeld 25). Cinematic adapters often use contemporary music to affect viewers' emotions: in *O*, Odin is positioned as a contemporary black male through a gangsta rap soundtrack, for example. As mentioned previously, in Suzman's teleplay of her Market Theatre production, lute music is underpinned by the sound of a synthesiser (which also accompanies Emilia when she sings a reprise of "The Willow Song" as she mourns the passing of Desdemona), mixing Renaissance music with that of the contemporary period, seemingly in order to heighten the response from the viewer.

5.3. *OTHELLO* IN OPERA ON SCREEN

Opera, like stage productions, will not be the primary focus of this thesis, due to the fact that adaptations within the medium are not recorded for distribution, for the most part. The opera adaptations of the play committed to screen are more concerned with adapting Verdi – the music and libretto of his opera (1877) – than Shakespeare's play. In Franco Zeffirelli's *Otello* in which the Spanish tenor, Plácido Domingo, plays the Moor in blackface, the director cuts "The Willow Song", perhaps because it is not a Verdi composition, compounding this sense of 'fidelity' to the composer. Considering Verdi's work an adaptation of Rossini's earlier operatic treatment of the play, *Otello* (1816), is difficult; it features the same plot, but exhibits a new libretto and music. Before Zeffirelli's adaptation, John Iraci's short film, *Otello* (1930) survives as a forty-minute fragment. Like Verdi's opera (and Zeffirelli's film, subsequently), it is of Italian origin, and features the Costa Rican tenor, Manuel Salazar, as the titular character. After some explanatory intertitles revealing its plot, the film begins with a one-minute and ten-second shot of the sea, so unchanging that it directs attention to the non-diegetic soundtrack of the opera's overture. Another minute and six-seconds pass without the presence of characters; an extended exterior shot of a balcony is shown before Otello and Desdemona arrive on it and the former begins to sing. Because the fixed-camera shoots the action without editing and cutting techniques, music remains the focal point. The scene comprises ten-minutes and six-seconds of the film's running time (and nine-minutes and fifty-four seconds elapse before the camera angle changes to a long shot). The subsequent scene continues in the same vein with the same actors in a similar setting with similar architecture serving as the backdrop to Othello and Desdemona.

The lack of realism that pervades the film (and opera adaptations of the play, in general) is exemplified in the scene as the characters stare into the distance beyond the

camera with raised hands; rather, the interpretation of Verdi's music by the two leads is the

cynosure in this adaptation (see fig. 5.1).

Fig. 5.1. Historicaltenors. "Manuel Salazar as Verdi's Otello - 1930 - Complete movie".

YouTube, 29 Sept. 2011. Author's screenshot. 22 Mar. 2015.

A singing Iago is not featured in the adaptation (nullifying any engagement with the '*Othello*

music' by Knight's definition) as the Ensign only appears in the fourth and final scene (that

which depicts Desdemona's death), in which Othello cuts his own throat in a close-up shot.

Unlike Hollywood *Othello*s from Parker and Blake Nelson, race is not the catalyst for

choosing to adapt the play in this instance, perhaps a result of its focus on Verdi's opera and

its European cultural context, as well as its black and white cinematography, which tempers

the issue.

In terms of revealing the racial discourses of screen *Othello*s, an observable pattern is

that they introduce the titular character in conflicting ways (although they typically end

similarly). Verdi's Moor in Zeffirelli's *Otello* is depicted as a commanding leader and

defender of Cyprus from his first scene. Initially, one may assume that the film is not

introducing the narrative: it too begins with shots of the raging sea (possibly intertextually

influenced by its predecessor, although it should be noted that this is an element of Verdi's

opera). Verdi's music and the war-torn city are then centralised, rather than any particular

characters. Religious imagery is introduced in Otello's first scene as the libretto evokes an

invocation to bring the Venetian army back safely. Towards the end of the opening sequence,

we see that the Venetian ship has weathered the storm and returned to Cyprus. On it (and

centred in a long shot) is Otello, who gives a triumphant speech before chants of "Victory"

and "Long live Othello" are sung in chorus by Cyprus's temporary denizens (see fig. 5.2).

Fig. 5.2. *Otello*. Dir. Franco Zeffirelli. 1986. Twentieth Century Fox, 2005. DVD. Author's

screenshot.

By comparison, the Othello of Parker is hooded from the outset, rendering him opaque rather than transparent in terms of 'revealing' himself to the audience, which Zeffirelli's Moor does partly through music.

The third scene (which follows a furtive exchange between Iago and Roderigo, an interiorly-shot equivalent of the first scene of the play) also focuses on musical performance, as one might expect in the context. A banquet featuring dancing, drumming, and musicians performing an Arabian-tinged woodwind melody negates any potentiality for Knight's conception of dialogical musicality. Non-verbal action becomes the preoccupation of the scene as Cassio smiles at Desdemona, and Jago (Iago) watches the action from a distance, positioning him as the 'orchestrator' in the process. To return to the film's relationship with religious imagery, Jago is positioned as being in league with the Devil. In order to fulfil his plot, he pleads, "Help me, Satan, to achieve my end". Conversely, Otello is portrayed as a deeply religious man, which may be an attempt to align this specifically Western Othello with the dominant religion of the country. Otello sings "Amen" during the love duet with Desdemona and swears by "Eternal God" in unison with the baritone Jago during a scene in which they stand before a statue of Jesus fixed upon the cross (the latter's worship is performed in duplicity in order to create a bond with Otello) (see fig. 5.3).

God of Vengeance!

Fig. 5.3. *Otello*. Dir. Franco Zeffirelli. 1986. Twentieth Century Fox, 2005. DVD. Author's screenshot.

This contrasts an aspect of Othello's character in the play as "the blacker devil" (V.ii.129), in addition to removing the Iago as anti-hero agenda arguably put forth by the two most recent Hollywood *Othello*s.

In adaptations that depict love scenes between Othello and Desdemona, Zeffirelli's is unique. Otello approaches Desdemona's bed in a long shot, as opposed to Parker's adaptation, in which the camera follows Fishburne's Moor on his approach as frenetic percussive music plays. In contrast, Otello performs a love song, which becomes a duet later in the scene. However, the piece becomes musically 'violent' when a flashback to Otello's past is shown (to complement the physical violence depicted in the flashback scene), as he joins Desdemona on the bed. In *Shakespeare in Opera, Ballet, Orchestral Music, and Song* (1997), Arthur Graham notes that – similar to Jacobean theatre (in which boys played female characters) – love scenes in nineteenth century opera were "not physically demonstrative, but the music and text of this duet are romantic and passionate" (119). The operatic tradition of

avoiding 'physically demonstrative' love scenes plays a significant role in differentiating this representation of Othello from Parker's Hollywood adaptation that followed. The discord between romance (in the bedroom) and violence (in the flashback) emphasises Otello's status as an outsider in Venice. That which he cannot change – his past in a war-torn location and his race – are the focus of the scene, in which a black child actor plays Otello, opposing the Spanish tenor in blackface (see fig. 5.4).

Fig. 5.4. *Otello*. Dir. Franco Zeffirelli. 1986. Twentieth Century Fox, 2005. DVD. Author's screenshot.

Unlike Hollywood adaptations, Zeffirelli's film evokes a North African setting through Plácido Domingo's Moor singing of "flaming deserts" and "burning sands", with accompanying shots of characters in headscarves (see fig. 5.5).

Fig. 5.5. *Otello*. Dir. Franco Zeffirelli. 1986. Twentieth Century Fox, 2005. DVD. Author's screenshot.

In the 1995 Hollywood adaptation, the speech and an alternative flashback are featured, but not during the love scene. In Zeffirelli's film, all three are combined in a heightened operatic maelstrom. However, Zeffirelli's use of an Italian actor in blackface, who sings in order to seduce Desdemona, may detract from any predatory connotations associated with the titular character (due to the animalistic imagery of Iago's descriptions in the play) that manifest subsequently in Parker's adaptation, in which Othello stalks Desdemona's bed in the corresponding scene, continuing the Hollywood trend that "black men's desire of white women is animal, ignoble and predatory" (Buchanan 196), cemented in *The Birth of a Nation*, which "established or confirmed many filmic conventions, both technical and thematic, that were to influence later filmmakers" (Buchanan 195).

Otello's race is explored through the libretto during the love scene in Zeffirelli's adaptation. Desdemona sings: "I saw the beauty of your noble spirit / beyond the darkness of your brow". It is implied that Desdemona has overlooked Otello's race, despite the fact that it

is momentarily haunting their relationship. As the scene – and the first 'act' (the plot on screen mirrors that of the four-act opera) – reaches its denouement, Verdi's adaptation interacts with the play text in an operatic equivalent of the 'Othello music'. Otello sings: "You loved me for my misfortunes. / And I loved you that you did pity me". Desdemona responds: "I loved you for the dangers you endured. / You loved me that I did pity you", an appropriation of: "She loved me for the dangers I had passed / And I loved her that she did pity them" (I.iii.168–9). Hutcheon discusses how music can be symbolic of the words spoken in the play, as Verdi's Otello "gradually takes on Iago's imagery" (70) through the triplets and dotted rhythms of the latter's *leitmotif*, a musical equivalent of how Othello speaks "parrot" (II.iii.275), repeating Iago's lines.

In this regard, opera's use of music anachronistically parallels that of cinema in its ability to alter viewers' perceptions of characters without the use of dialogue, manifesting in Otello's mimetic singing style and his use of an unequally subdivided rhythm. The refrain sung with Desdemona is similar to Othello's 'parroting' of Iago, but in this instance, Otello is the character whose words are being recalled. Desdemona's 'parroting' of Otello's words stresses the film's representation of the Moor as influential and powerful: she is repeating lines from Othello's speech to the Senators. Not only is a romanticised Otello depicted in the film, but in this setting, the play is adaptable primarily because the operatic framework removes it from a societal context. The adaptation presents a Spanish actor in blackface in 1986, when the use of white actors playing the role was in decline.

In *Shakespeare and Music: Afterlives and Borrowings*, Sanders primarily discusses Verdi's opera rather than adaptations of it, equating its arias with the Shakespearean soliloquy (171). As mentioned, the aria-turned-duet in this scene is an equivalent of Othello's Act One, Scene Three speech, and the 'Othello music' of the play becomes 'actual' music here. Even in an appropriation of the play in the theatre, such as the Urdu production, *Sherdil*

(1918), there is a reliance not only on music, but on singing as well, specifically when Othello is courting Desdemona, suggesting that music has become increasingly prevalent in adaptations of the play, both diegetically and non-diegetically. In Verdi's opera, the themes and melodies associated with Otello are not representative of his race in the way that they are in the films of Parker and Blake Nelson, for example. Instead of music evoking blackness (through tribal percussion and hip-hop music, respectively), Otello's singing is grand and heroic.

A televised opera adaptation of the play from this decade (2011), directed by Graham Vick for the BBC, was billed as Verdi's *Otello*, without reference to Shakespeare in television listings. In a scene that features posters being brought onto the stage, the word 'nigger' is prominently featured on one. To contemporary viewers, this may seem like an attempt to draw a parallel with the 'racism' of the play text (or a modern equivalent of it). However, the authorship is clearly with Verdi in this version, whose adaptation largely negates race issues. An additional adaptive method that Vick employs to contemporise the opera is to set his production in an industrial plant with a multiracial cast (who interact with the audience by acting amongst them, as well as performing synchronised dance routines). Responses to Vick's production, such as its review in *The Guardian*, were positive and emphasised the quality of the orchestration of "Verdi's raging storm" (Evans). As a result, Evans's review concludes that the opera is "totally compelling", suggesting that music and Shakespeare coexist best when authorship is not with Shakespeare, which is, in fact, often the case with popular music interactions as well, which often adapt *Othello* through allusion.

5.4. NON-DIEGETIC SOUNDTRACKS: HOLLYWOOD *OTHELLO*S

As previously stated, in the case of *Othello*, according to Sternfeld, characters are 'exposed' through their words and actions. By removing the songs of the play text in screen

adaptations, non-diegetic soundtracks can serve as an alternative method (or companion) to words and actions in 'revealing' characters. As previously mentioned, when discussing early adaptation studies, Elliott observes that both Bluestone and Wagner call for "equivalents and analogies that adaptations must try to recreate" (184). She observes that this has also been favoured in the twenty-first century. Filmmakers' perceived 'equivalents' and 'analogies' for adapting the character of Othello in non-diegetic soundtracks will be discussed in this section, focusing on their hermeneutic responses to the play. Blake Nelson's *O* finds analogies and equivalents for Othello's initial pacifism, but only towards the end of the film, when Odin has already ruined his reputation. Non-diegetic soundtracks are distinct from the play text in that they do not adapt its songs for the most part, but they can affect and influence audiences in terms of how viewers 'understand' characters and scenes, in that they can convey exoticness or danger, for example, without adapting components (such as the words) of the 'source' material. Whether adaptations have newly composed or compilation scores, non-diegetic soundtracks are a vital part of representations of *Othello*/Othello through the multi-sensory way in which Hollywood cinema uses music to develop plot and characterisation.

Returning to "Filming Othello", Welles states: "A movie must have a great opening. It must command attention". He talks of this being the opposite of theatre – that a play should not open "at the top of its vent" because the audience members are still settling into their seats at this point. This is often the case in screen *Othello*s: Shakespeare's play opens with a private conversation between Iago and Roderigo, whereas its film adaptations usually begin relatively melodramatically. The first scene in Welles's adaptation depicts the titular character's funeral accompanied by choral music and the elegiac imagery of a religious ceremony, which immediately frames Othello as the fallen hero. This is accentuated by the gathering of a procession of mourners in the foreground of wide shots of an open sky,

emphasising the grandeur of the scene and the importance of Othello, not dissimilar to its operatic counterpart, albeit using different methods. There are thirty-eight shots without dialogue, and resultantly, music and images are the main communicators in the scene. Because of his use of fast-cutting montage sequences rather than long takes, it has been argued by the likes of Rothwell that, "Welles invented the MTV-style decades before it was invented" (78). This technique may have been deployed to persuade the audience to accept Othello as an extension of Welles, rather than as the black character, by making it difficult for viewers to observe him for a sustained period of time, heightening the idea of Welles playing the role as not only a white character, but as himself, the acclaimed actor/director, who, as noted earlier, was known for his confrontations with 'the system'.

Concurrent to this scene, Iago is imprisoned in a cage, which positions him in the ambiguous role of either a sympathetic figure, or conversely, as the villain and main suspect for the death of the hero (the former proves correct at the end of the film, even in light of Othello's crime). As the opening sequence concludes, the discordantly modernist non-diegetic music track segues to a Renaissance-inspired lute piece, accompanied by voiceover and the clichéd adaptation technique of a book being opened and its content narrated to the viewer. In the process, this emphasises that the story is set in the past, severing ties with current events or racial animosity, as the film was released in a pre-Civil Rights period. Although the word 'adaptation' is prominent in the shot, the words being read by the narrator are not from *Othello*; the opening of the play (the exchange between Iago and Roderigo) is replaced by an introduction to the titular character, spoken by Welles.

Parker's *Othello* also features a composed score, introducing Othello with an orchestral string arrangement. However, as mentioned previously, like Iago in Welles's film, Fishburne's Othello is hooded during the audience's first glimpse of him. In the 1952 adaptation, this costume may have been chosen to symbolise the duplicitousness of the

character, implicating Iago in the death of Othello. In Parker's adaptation, however, it appears to represent the unknown, or the exoticness of the Moor. By hiding his face, Othello is not revealed to the audience as the hero. He is 'revealed' later in the film in other ways, however. In "Virgin and Ape, Venetian and Infidel: Labellings of Otherness in Parker's *Othello*", Buchanan observes that the mysteriousness of Fishburne's Othello is exemplified in his first love scene with Desdemona, in which it is Fishburne's "undressing, not hers, upon which the camera lingers" (183). In terms of music in the scene, the non-diegetic soundtrack features feverish drumming sounds (hardly what one would normally associate with a Hollywood love scene), representing danger through frenzied pace and the predatory manner in which Othello (and the viewer/camera) approaches the bed and the waiting Desdemona, creating a synergy between sound and visuals. By using this music, the scene also conjures the tribal sounds of African percussive music, detaching Othello from Venice further, and perhaps from Western film audiences, despite the parallel with contemporary cultural issues concerning OJ Simpson that came later. The soundtrack then transitions into a slower, sensual piece during a scene that, according to a contemporary reviewer, was "photographed in the melting deliquescent style of a kitschy soft-porn *Emmanuelle* movie" (Walker), invoking a sense of fantasy. Conversely, the love scene between Iago and Emilia borders on the comedic (heightened by Iago's commentary to the camera) and is comparatively less sensual, accentuated by the lack of non-diegetic soundtrack.

Blake Nelson's *O* features a compilation score that blends classical and popular music, mirroring 'the *Othello* music' of Knight's essay in its blending of two opposing sounds in order to create a symphonic quality – an 'equivalent' – in that it does not utilise the 'music' of Shakespeare's language. According to Sanders, Shakespeare adaptations that feature compilation scores choose music based on its "relevance or apposite relationship to both film and Shakespearean subtext" (2007: 176). To apply this to *O*, the songs in the film

not only represent the appropriated Othello (Odin), but Shakespeare's play (and perceptions of it) in a twenty-first century context. During the scene in which Odin forces himself on Desi sexually, one can easily associate the often violent, racist, and misogynistic lyrical content of the gangsta rap music soundtrack with Othello, heightening what Sanders refers to as a "troubling enactment of racial stereotypes of black male libido" (2007: 173). To further Sanders's observation that the hip-hop songs overlie the film's use of opera due to the immediacy and forthright nature of rap music's lyrical content, the soundtrack informs contemporary perceptions of Othello in a similar fashion. Odin's actions in the film echo the messages of the songs on the soundtrack, and in turn, the soundtrack represents how Othello is 'seen'. In other words, soundtrack is an extension of the character in this instance and portrays Odin/Othello in a more negative light than the play does through its supposed contemporary parallels and quietening of the '*Othello* music'.

In terms of its representation of Odin/Othello in the opening scene of the film, which is set in a high school gym during a basketball game, fast-cutting shots of Odin scoring baskets emphasise his physical prowess, accompanied by a non-diegetic rap song. Each line in the verses of the song feature the rapper stating that he is 'blacker than' various comparatives, using an alternative method to Parker to position Othello as an outsider. Odin is new to South Carolina, enrolling in a school of predominantly white students. In this environment, his sporting ability and the music that accompanies him make Odin a threat to his peers, which manifests in the theme of jealousy. In other words, Blake Nelson ties Odin's exoticness to gangsta rap. Even though the songs epitomise the feelings of the rap artists (due to the fact that the film uses a compilation score rather than a composed one), they are also being used in this instance to affect perceptions of Odin/Othello. The association with rap music may contribute to the decision for the devolving age of Othellos in Hollywood adaptations of the play. Odin is unquestionably associated with hip-hop culture through his

language and the non-diegetic music that plays during scenes in which he plays basketball, collating the stereotypes of rap lyrics with *Othello*. One contemporary reviewer of Parker's film wrote: "It will be interesting to see if Sony manages, or even tries, to reach black audiences" (*Variety*). It would seem that the young black Othello accompanied by a rap soundtrack, as well as the changing of Shakespeare's play text, is an attempt to achieve this, negating the title of the play – and Shakespeare, by extension – in an effort to remove white 'ownership' of the play.

Intertextually, "Ave Maria" from Verdi's *Otello* plays non-diegetically during the final sequence of the film, but because lyrically aggressive modern hip-hop songs precede it, one may wonder why this musical dichotomy is being presented. As mentioned, Sanders writes that "appropriation carries out the same sustained engagement as adaptation but frequently adopts a posture of critique, even assault" (2006: 4). In the case of *O*, it would seem that its transportation of the play to a different time and place breeds its 'critique' of *Othello* and its 'assault' on Othello, who is stripped of his '*Othello* music', only to be replaced by gangsta rap. The irony of using the piece at this stage is that the gun violence, sirens, and general dismay of the scene contradicts it, tonally, as Odin laments:

Somebody needs to tell the goddamn truth. My life is over. That's it.
But while all y'all are out here living yours, sitting around talking
about the nigger that lost it back in high school, you make sure you
tell 'em the truth. You tell 'em I loved that girl. I did. But I got played.
He twisted my head up, he fucked it up. I ain't no different than none
of y'all. My moms ain't no crackhead. I wasn't no gangbanger. It
wasn't some hood-rat drug dealer that tripped me up.

In addition to its contemporary reworking of the line, "one that loved not wisely, but too well" (V.ii.342), the 'high'/'low' culture juxtaposition in the scene parallels 'the *Othello* music' of Knight's essay on a societal level in its blending of two opposing cultures: those of Shakespeare and turn-of-the-millennium America. In *Why Music Moves Us* (2013), Jeanette Bicknell claims: "There is such a thing as 'music itself' that can be experienced without reference to a context or shared social understandings" (xiii–ix). This may be true in certain cases, but the perpetuation of a racial stereotype (aligned with sexuality) in the adaptations of Parker and Blake Nelson suggest that 'music itself' is more difficult to justify in Hollywood *Othello*s – specifically, in this case, in non-diegetic soundtracks.

5.5. DIEGETIC SOUNDTRACKS: 'MUSICAL' *OTHELLO*S

Stephen Foster, 'the father of American Music', wrote "Old Folks at Home" (1851) for blackface minstrels to perform, and with a lyric like: "Oh, darkeys, how my heart grows weary", the parallel between it and *Othello* becomes evident, especially when 'reclaimed' by black performers. "Ol' Man River" (written by Oscar Hammerstein II and Jerome Kern, two white men) from the musical *Show Boat* (1927) is a similar case, with lines such as "Niggers all work while de white folks play". Evidently, these songs have been changed and adapted (the word 'nigger' is substituted for 'darkeys' in the 1936 film adaptation of *Show Boat*, starring Paul Robeson), enduring – perhaps in part – because of their levity: the former is associated with minstrelsy and the latter with musical theatre, as opposed to Shakespearean tragedy.

Othello has been adapted in the form of 'musicals' (or, adaptations in which songs are sung and played diegetically). In the vein of Jack Good's rock 'n' roll stage musical adaptation: *Catch My Soul* (1968), *Othello* has been appropriated (according to the DVD packaging) to "London's smoky jazz scene" in Basil Dearden's *All Night Long*.

Subsequently, *Othello: The Remix* by the Q Brothers, commissioned by The Globe Theatre, a hip-hop musical in which the play is transposed to the music business, can be considered a contemporary equivalent of *All Night Long*, although the placement of a love duet at a specific point in the narrative also recalls Verdi's *Otello*, as Erin Sullivan observes (2012). In a segment from American television, Q Brothers member, JQ, claims that, like Shakespeare's Moor, their Othello "came up from nowhere – like – like The Game or Jay-Z, that kind of a rapper, and – like – he's made it" (YouandMeThisMorning), not dissimilar to the parallels made between rap artists and Jay Gatsby on *The Great Gatsby* (2013) soundtrack (partly written/performed/executive produced by Jay-Z, who draws parallels between Gatsby and his own rags-to-riches story). JQ goes on to state: "If Shakespeare were alive today he'd be a rapper, no question". Proof of the durability of the 'if Shakespeare were alive today' scenario can be found on the homepage of The Hip-Hop Shakespeare Company's website, a theatre production company founded by the rapper, Akala. It reads: "If Shakespeare was alive…. would he be a rapper?" ("THSC: The Hip-Hop Shakespeare Company"), pointing towards the adaptability of the playwright, rather than *Othello*, specifically.

With its happy ending, contemporary setting, and disregard for Shakespeare's play text, *All Night Long* uses *Othello* as a vehicle to deliver its main theme of racial harmony through music. This raises the question: when *Othello* is not adapted 'faithfully' (in terms of utilising its title, play text, character names, and story), is it more adaptable? The short answer is: yes, in that an issue like race can be avoided, although adaptations often find their own equivalent for it. Dearden's film does exploit racial tensions, even though it changes the tragic ending of the play to a comparatively harmonious one. Of the culture and genre of music played throughout the film, Hansen writes of jazz as an "art form generated by members of one community and appropriated, exploited and demonised by those of another" (62). This manifests in the narrative of Dearden's adaptation through the manipulation of

Aurelius (Othello) by Johnny (Iago), but is also evident when the record executive character attempts to financially profit from white and black youths making music together for their own enjoyment. There is a potential similarity between the play and popular music in their blending of 'black' and 'white'. Rock 'n' roll mixed rhythm and blues and country to create its own genre, and jazz is a product of black America. In addition to 'black' music being exploited for commercial gain, black actors in screen *Othello*s have arguably been treated similarly in their perpetuation of Shakespeare's conception of 'blackness'.

In order to segregate Aurelius and Johnny, the latter is portrayed as a frustrated drummer with a desire to start his own band. To form his group, Johnny wants Aurelius's girlfriend, Delia (Desdemona), to take the role of the singer. Tellingly, when Johnny and Delia are alone, he reveals that he is romantically interested in her, supplying the antagonist with a motive. Near the end of the film, Aurelius strangles Delia, but is stopped by Cass (Cassio), who is then physically attacked by Aurelius. Not only does Cass tell Aurelius of his wrongdoing, he is also the main objector to the record company executive scouting at the club, amplifying his status as the dual protagonist along with Aurelius. Additionally, the moral corruption of Johnny is manifested, in part, by the fact that Cass has stopped smoking marijuana to please Aurelius, which negates the role of the black character as the corruptor (or 'contaminating agent', to repeat Adelman's phrase, cited in a previous chapter) and vilifies Johnny through his luring of Cass back into drug-taking. Both Aurelius and Cass are positioned as the heroes of the film, emphasising its message of racial harmony, giving the viewer an alternative to sympathising with the black male, three years before Laurence Olivier would continue the tradition of blacking-up for the role in another British film of the period, in which he literally 'stains' (or 'contaminates') Desdemona's skin with his make-up.

Because it has a jazz music framework (with its cultural connections to America's Jazz Age, bebop, and Beat poetry), *All Night Long* is not representative of racial issues in

Britain at the time: Olivier in blackface does not seem as racially progressive as what is portrayed on screen in Dearden's film, for example. However, the reason for this might relate to the contrasting adaptive methods of the two films: *All Night Long* blends black and white and English and American actors in a tale of racial miscegenation, whereas Olivier's performance is borne out of a relatively 'faithful' stage production. In "Workers' Rights and Performing Rights: Cinema Music and Musicians Prior to Synchronized Sound" (2013), Annette Davison details how musicians were focal to the attraction of cinema in Britain in the early twentieth century, partly because (unlike the theatre and the music halls) no actors and crews (beyond a projectionist) were employed, and also because the orchestra "was a major expense that the best cinemas could not do without" (243). In fact, Davison writes that half the musicians employed in Britain at the time worked for cinemas, creating a link between music and cinema that is specifically British. However, more than just an appropriation of *Othello*, *All Night Long* is a vehicle to showcase musicians from outside the United Kingdom, including Charles Mingus (a jazz musician and American civil rights activist of the time); the film features musical segues in which the band plays to frenetic crescendos in order to build tension towards subsequent scenes. *All Night Long*'s setting is ambiguous in its mix of American and English cultures and vernaculars; along with drug references, for example, the film features discussions of philosophy and an incessant use of phrases such as 'dig' and 'cat'.

Additionally, there seems to be an immediate attempt to remove the story from its British social context; as Paul Skrebels puts it in "*All Night Long*: Jazzing Around with *Othello*" (2008), the film's "transhistorical quality is reinforced by the setting itself" (149). When the jazz club setting is introduced, one character remarks on entering "spook city" upon ascending the stairs. The word 'spook' implies the past or somewhere haunted by ghosts, but it is also a racial epithet, and is an appropriate metaphor for the problematic

palimpsestuous relationship that adaptations of the play have with their 'source' in their insistence on rewriting Othello as a contemporary black male. The line, "Rex wouldn't refuse Delia tonight even if she asked him to move to Jo'burg" makes reference to the fact that Johannesburg was the heart of South Africa's apartheid regime at that time, suggesting that the film may be using its status as an adaptation as a vehicle to comment on contemporary issues without committing to specificity. Moreover, the confusion between *Othello* and the jazz scene (and between Britain and America, as well its 'transhistorical' nature) epitomises a trend in adaptations of the play: the attempt to reconcile it with the contemporary period.

The Bollywood appropriation, *Omkara*, mixes drama with musical interludes in a style that resembles Broadway numbers in their song and dance ensemble pieces. These interludes are tenuously linked to the plot, and as such, reveal little about the adaptability of the play, other than stating that this Shakespeare adaptation, as is mentioned on the DVD extras, has "the Indian masala too". In light of it being an Indian film with an Indian cast, produced in an Indian cultural context, a relevant question to this study is: how is the racial dynamic of the play (and previous adaptations of it from a Western perspective) appropriated? In a lecture regarding modern world cinema adaptations, Lanier states: "Post-racialization is a resistance to Anglo-American ownership of Shakespeare" (2011). However, by refusing to allow British and American filmmakers to 'own' Shakespeare, race issues that exist within societies outside of Anglo-American countries are highlighted. According to Sanders, *Omkara*'s main signifier of Otherness is "not race but caste" (2007: 120). This raises the question: how 'post-racial' is a film that simply transposes the race issues of the play to a perceived equivalent in another country?

In *Omkara,* the imagery used by Shakespeare's Iago is perpetuated through words such as 'monster', but the titular character is actually "a damned half-caste". In other words, Omkara does not exhibit the exoticness of Othello (especially outside of an Indian cultural

context) – whose vastly different background and dark skin contrasts the "fair Desdemona" (IV.ii.227) – and is instrumental in his behaviour and final actions. However, Omi is racially indistinguishable from the other characters in the film, prompting Sanders to argue that the film actually concerns caste. In the aforementioned *Shakespeare and World Cinema*, Mark Thornton Burnett calls attention to the indication of smallpox on Omi's face as a "visual marker hinting at Othello's racial difference" (69). As a result, one may argue that the director/screenwriter, Vishal Bhardwaj, uses both caste and disease as 'equivalents' for racial difference. Consequently, even if *Omkara* primarily concerns caste, the film is specifically Indian in its racial discourse through its reaction to Anglo-American versions, but certainly not 'post-racial' in terms of overcoming the race issues of the play.

In *Othello's Countrymen: The African in Renaissance Drama* (1965), Eldred D Jones writes of a "a striking reversal of the traditional portrayal" (49) of Moors in *Othello* when compared with previous Elizabethan representations by Shakespeare (such as Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*) and others, like Eleazar in *Lust's Dominion, or The Lascivious Queen* (1599) by Thomas Dekker. However, despite having a Moor as his central character, Shakespeare maintains some remnants of Elizabeth/Jacobean notions of blackness in *Othello*, such as ideas concerning sexuality, savagery, and Africa. As a result, it is no surprise that adapters from previously colonised countries 'react' to *Othello*, especially when "Shakespeare's plays were both derived from and used to establish colonial authority" (Loomba and Orkin 2). In India, James Barry's 1848 production was the first to feature a native actor (Vaishnav Charan Addy) in the titular role, causing one spectator, according to Partha Chatterjee in *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power* (2012), to predict: "'Barry and the Nigger will make a fortune!'" (229). Although caste may be particularly relevant in the country, the treatment of *Othello* in *Omkara* may be a 'reaction' to the exploitation of the issue of race in Colonial India.

Bhardwaj, however, claims to have forgotten about *Othello* during the writing process: "I just took the milestones from the play and actually I made it mine". When Langda use the Anglicism: "I don't know, man" (one of the very few lines in the film spoken in English), Dolly's father responds with: "You Anglo shit!". This reply is not spoken in English, but it does illustrate that another racial dynamic in the film is between an Indian *Othello* and those of the United Kingdom and the United States. In terms of music within the film, in addition to stereotypically Bollywood songs, a blend of Western pop and electronic music are featured, creating an '*Othello* music' quality, unwittingly or not. Additionally, there are guns, mobile phones, and a reference to the titular character being a "gangster", which recalls Blake Nelson's *O*. Again, this may suggest that 'post-racial' entails transposing cultural issues to a different national context. For example, Omi is ambiguously alluded to as the General of the Party in the film, a potential reference to governmental corruption in India. In fact, Thornton Burnett, in his study of the films of Bhardwaj (rather than *Omkara*, specifically), states that the film "consistently prioritizes Uttar Pradesh settings and images" (56). Thornton Burnett contends that the use of modern technology hints "at the characters' divorce from their surroundings and themselves. What is old, in both films, is imagined as being in tension with what is new" (64). This points towards the film being a 'reaction' to Shakespeare, in line with many non-Anglo American adaptations of the play.

The DVD bonus features include a music video that brings to mind those shown on MTV, and Kesu sings Stevie Wonder's "I Just Called to Say I Love You" (1984) to Dolly as he strums a guitar (Dolly subsequently sings it to Omi). The music in the film does not allow *Omkara* to become distinctively Indian due to the fact that it aids in making it – as Lisa Hopkins puts it – a "universal text of love" (112), with its ambiguous racial issues and reliance on Western elements. Like the transposition of the play to Bollywood, the music in *Omkara* does not make *Othello* any more adaptable than it does in Anglo-American films. As

Sanders summarises: "the most notable effect of this attempt to move *Othello* to India is to show how very uneasily it sits there" (2007: 121). By changing the race issues of *Othello* to a contemporary Indian 'equivalent', the context of the play is shifted, but remains frozen in terms of its adaptability. Despite this, the influence of *Omkara* is evident in the feature-length stage adaptation filmed and uploaded on *YouTube* as "Shadow of Othello (Hindi Play)" (2014). The plot concerns villagers wanting to produce an adaptation of *Omkara*, illustrating the resonance of the adaptation in India. After abandoning their desire to adapt the film, they realise that it is an adaptation of *Othello* and decide to adapt Shakespeare's play instead. The crux of the problem within the narrative of the film is that the villagers want to adapt *Omkara* and not *Othello* (because the former 'speaks' to them in their cultural context), whereas the theatre director Gyanendra Raj Ankur wants to stage a 'faithful' version of Shakespeare's play. The rest of the plot mirrors 'backstage narrative' *Othello*s, as jealousy spills from the stage to the real lives of the villagers. Rather than disavowing *Othello* as being incompatible with contemporary India, the presence of the theatre director character represents a divide that manifests in many adaptations of the play – not least in music – between the 'source' and the period, culture, racial dynamics, and even music, of the adapted framework.

5.6. *OTHELLO* IN POPULAR MUSIC

In their Introduction to *Litpop: Writing and Popular Music* (2014), Rachel Carroll and Adam Hansen describe music as a product of society: "When popular music invokes or is influenced by what people read and write, we are reading, writing, making and listening to accounts of who we are" (6). By extension, we can also observe the trajectory of *Othello*/Othello's place in adaptations through popular music engagements with the play/character. Discussing musical interactions with Shakespeare, in *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture*, Lanier writes that pop music has been "resistant to incorporating

Shakespearian language beyond the occasional opportunistic commonplaces" (72), before listing some quotations from Shakespeare in song lyrics. This section will not necessarily challenge this statement, but it will examine the 'opportunistic commonplace' references to *Othello* in an attempt to determine what they reveal about the adaptability of the play and its race issues.

In *Shakespeare and Popular Music*, Hansen charts allusions to Shakespeare's plays in songs from a various artists, from Elvis Presley in "Are You Lonesome Tonight?" (1960) to Dire Straits in "Romeo and Juliet" (1980). This section will replicate this using references to *Othello*, specifically those not mentioned by Hansen, in an attempt to uncover how the play is treated in popular music, observing patterns or potential explanations for allusions to the play, and whether or not they render the play easily adaptable due to the relative brevity of engagement. Additionally, this section will not observe parallels between the play and unacknowledged popular music adaptations, as found in Charles Conaway's "The … monster, which doth mock / The meat it feeds on': R.E.M.'s Monst(e)rous Othello" (2012). Conaway describes how the R.E.M. album, *Monster* (1994), de-racialises the violence found in *Othello*, which is speculative as it is not an acknowledged adaptation of the play; instead, this section will assess actual references to *Othello*'s characters and words.

There are several references to *Othello* in popular music from varying genres that are not covered in Hansen's book, raising two questions. Firstly, why have a diverse mix of artists adapted elements of the play and referenced characters from it? And secondly, what is the populist viewpoint of *Othello* in this context – are its issues still relevant to adapters? Hansen validates his own analysis by stating, "Early published studies of Shakespeare and music paid only limited attention to the presence of music in a filmed context" (153). *Othello* is an anomaly here, in light of the '*Othello* music'. Before looking at some examples, it is worth debunking a myth observed by Hansen, that "popular music is inferior to classical

music because it is ephemeral and insubstantial" (2). Of course, Hansen does not subscribe to this view, and 'ephemeral' and 'insubstantial' in this context presumably denote artistic merit, rather than commerciality or popularity. To illustrate his point, Hansen refers to the amount of books written on the subject of Bob Dylan (not only biographies, but texts exploring his lyrics), which attest to "Dylan's position in a literary tradition, affirming his status as a poet" (40), alongside the likes of Shakespeare and Keats. This may be an overestimation of Dylan's place as a literary figure, but it does attest to how some evaluate his body of work.

Cole Porter's "Brush up Your Shakespeare" from the musical, *Kiss Me, Kate* (1948), could be the first reference to *Othello* in popular music, in which a chorus of mobsters sing: "Just declaim a few lines from *Othella* / And they think you're a heckuva fella". By mispronouncing the title of the play (and rhyming it with 'fella'), this arguably illustrates (albeit ironically) its unfamiliarity in the context (among gangsters), whilst also calling attention to their exaggerated accents. In a televisual equivalent of musical theatre, in an episode of *Fame* (1982), the play is performed within the narrative and parallels are drawn between the situation of a young black male and Othello throughout. A song entitled "Desdemona" is sung diegetically and was also released by The Kids from Fame on their eponymous album of the same year, spanning the media of television and recorded music, just as Porter's song has, appearing on compilations albums for the composer, such as *The Essential Collection* (2009).

Returning to Dylan, in "Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again" on *Blonde on Blonde* (1966), he references Shakespeare as being "in the alley / With his pointed shoes and his bells". By contemporising Shakespeare, Dylan makes him seem out of place in this imaginary world, pointing out the absurdity of what the playwright is wearing in the setting. This sense of displacement is also evident in "Desdemona sweeping up on Desolation

Row" (from "Desolation Row") on Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965). On *Blonde on Blonde*, Dylan then sings of Shakespeare "Speaking to some French girl / Who says she knows me well". In this lyrical landscape, Dylan envisions Shakespeare as a contemporary, seemingly alluding to the latter's ability to transcend his own time and place.

Dylan overtly undermines Shakespeare, but in doing so, his level of engagement does not render it 'insubstantial'. When referencing *Othello*, specifically, Dylan completely rewrites a part of the play. In "Po' Boy" (2001), he sings:

> Othello told Desdemona:
>
> 'I'm cold – cover me with a blanket;
>
> 'By the way, what happened to that poisoned wine?'
>
> She said: 'I gave it to you – you drank it.'

Dylan is not simply irreverently confusing *Othello* with *Hamlet*, he repeats a similar idea in "Floater (Too Much to Ask)" from the same album, continuing this reversal of gender roles with another Shakespeare play: "Romeo, he said to Juliet / 'You've got a poor complexion, it doesn't give your appearance a very youthful touch' / Juliet said back to Romeo / 'Why don't you just shove off if it bothers you so much?'". With these references, Dylan alters the way in which Desdemona and Juliet communicate, whilst also showing cynicism towards the treatment of these women and how they presumably do not correspond with his own sensibilities; rather, they coincide with his laconic declaration about being a feminist when asked about his political views in *Masked and Anonymous* (2003), which also features a scene in which a character in blackface mourns the loss of minstrelsy as popular entertainment. However, because Dylan denies Othello and Romeo control in their relationships, it would seem that race does not play a part in his apparent problem with

Othello, as it mirrors his 'problem' with *Romeo and Juliet*. Desdemona is more conniving and murderous than fair and virginal; and Othello appears to be one of the poor boys of the song's title. Whether or not this can be tied with his race is indeterminable; the brevity of engagements denies the listener such details.

The title of the album from which these songs come (*"Love and Theft"*) is in quotation marks, as if to clarify its status as an intertextual collection. It borrows lines from *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and *The Great Gatsby* (1925) (both of which exhibit their own race issues, which have been tackled differently in their respective screen adaptations), as well as non-fictional texts. However, when citing the aforementioned novels, Dylan does not engage and appropriate in the way that he does with Shakespeare; in fact, he simply repeats lines. The title of the album comes from Eric Lott's book, *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1993). One could argue that Dylan's form of adaptation on the album is a musical equivalent of blackface as he performs his own rewriting of Charley Patton's "High Water Everywhere" (1929), as well as borrowing lines and clichés from twentieth-century blues songs by black artists.

There are also direct quotations from *Othello* in popular music. The opening line from English goth band The Sisters of Mercy's song, "Nine While Nine" (1985), is: "It's passing strange", borrowed from a line (I.iii.161) in Othello's speech to the Senators in Act One, Scene Three. On the Dio track, "Overlove" (1987), the heavy metal star sings of "Jealousy behind the greenest eyes", using imagery found in *Othello* – "the green-eyed monster" (III.iii.168) – albeit without directly citing it, suggesting that the words of the play have passed into general parlance, perhaps a result of their 'catchiness'. This method of allusion should be differentiated, however, from popular renditions of, for example, Sonnet 18, which has been set to music by the likes of Bryan Ferry (Roxy Music) and David Gilmour (Pink Floyd). The Sisters of Mercy cite Shakespeare without openly adapting his work or

referencing *Othello* in any way, illustrating that, as Hansen puts it (although not in relation to the band/song cited): "popular music doesn't reference Shakespeare simply because of some sense of inferiority or a lack of confidence in its own artistic authority" (157). This may be true, but this method of citation cannot be compared to cinematic adaptations of the play: it is allusion and does not negotiate its racial and societal issues in a significant way. Popular music has its own 'fidelity' issue in the form of cover songs, which can be considered parasitical (the 'not as good as the original' argument), creating a parallel with criticisms of literature on screen regarding 'fidelity'. A further connection between popular music and *Othello* is that Jerry Lee Lewis played Iago on stage in Jack Good's rock 'n' roll musical presentation of *Othello*, *Catch My Soul*. Its title – taken from Othello's "perdition catch my soul" (III.iii.90) – is also cited in the lyrics of the Iron Maiden song, "Hallowed Be Thy Name" (1982): "Catch my soul / It's willing to fly away".

Hansen claims that certain musical genres are "more resistant to or accepting of Shakespeare than others" (9). Of relevance to this section, he notes: "African-Americans are shown to relate to Shakespeare only in terms of how they corrupt his genius" (60). Using hip-hop as an example, it is easy to see why this is when considering that the genre's lyrical content of expletives, violence, and misogyny ostensibly contradicts the relative refinement of 'high culture'. In *Perspectives*: "Lenny Henry – Finding Shakespeare" (2012), the actor and comedian (who has played Othello on stage) interviews a young rapper who claims that "misogyny, violence, materialism" are important to both Shakespeare's plays and rap music, and that language is what separates the two (although he fails to mention that the line between fiction and reality is comparatively muddy in hip-hop). In contrast to Hansen's claim of hip-hop being more resistant to – and accepting of – Shakespeare than other genres, this suggests that some black artists can relate to *Othello*/Othello when the play/character (albeit anachronistically) reflects their own lives. Proof of this can be found in "Success" (2007) by

Jay-Z and Nas, in which the latter proclaims to be the "Ghetto Othello" in the same verse in which he uses derogatory terms towards women, as well as a racial epithet, and boasts of his wealth ("*Google Earth* 'Nas' / I got flats in other continents"). In addition to demonstrating that rap music perpetuates racial stereotypes in the same way that film adaptations of *Othello* do, this may also suggest that views of Othello in the twenty-first century are influenced by what the *Evening Standard* calls the 'ghetto blackness' of Fishburne's Othello, which can also be applied to *O*, which takes the concept further. The reviewer also claims that this is a different shade of blackness, in the literal sense, to how Othello should be played. Regarding the so-called 'ghetto' Othellos, Tom Magill writes: "I think it is cheap and lazy to simply 'ghettoise' the main character". However, with film adaptations featuring black actors and hip-hop artists doing this, it reflects how contemporary adapters view the play and choose to interact with it.

Both in terms of its audience and performers, rap is a mixed-race genre. An example of this is the Eminem/Rihanna duet: "Love the Way You Lie" (2010), which documents the domestic troubles of the couple in the song's narrative. Of course, Eminem is a white male and Rihanna is a black female (a reversal of the Othello/Desdemona dynamic), but whereas a rapper like Nas associates himself with Othello, Eminem has "led commentators to ascribe Shakespearean associations to him" (Hansen 69). Indeed, Eminem has even cultivated the claim himself as a guest on another Jay-Z song, "Renegade" (2001): "I'm a poet to some / A regular modern-day Shakespeare". Similarly, Hank Williams is known as the "hillbilly Shakespeare" (Heatley). This mirrors the previously mentioned 'Othello/Me' concept in screen adaptations in terms of how black and white artists engage with the play, suggesting that patterns in *Othello*s span media.

Lyrical references usually reveal more about the artists than the adaptability of the play, but they also demonstrate how these musicians view *Othello*/Othello. The play has been

'faithfully' quoted, yet it has also been alluded to, reshaped, and given new meaning in some cases. Othello can be a melodramatic romantic figure in opera and a character that rappers can 'relate' to; he can also be someone to challenge (in the case of Dylan) and someone to aspire to (in the case of Nas); as well as someone to cite (in the cases of The Sisters of Mercy and Iron Maiden). The titular character is as prevalent in lyrical allusions as the play itself is, and references do not seem to reflect a change in attitudes towards *Othello* that is specific to music; rather, they have a similar discourse to film adaptations of the play, albeit without the same diversity (of period and country of origin, for example), as most of the lyrical interactions cited are of late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century Anglo-American origin. When the play is adapted in musical forms, *Othello* and its titular character have been cited as a signifier of 'high culture', and its story, in shorthand, is usually one of interracial love or race/racism.

5.7. CONCLUSION

To return to the question, then: what do musical adaptations reveal about the adaptability of the play? Due to the scope of music's relationship with *Othello*, it is difficult to draw one definitive conclusion on the correlation between the two, other than the apparent inadaptability of the play in these contexts because of the perpetuation of racial stereotypes evident in all musical forms. Soundtracks can create 'analogies' and 'equivalents' for images, metaphors, themes, and characters – even when the issue of race is avoided in other aspects of production, but is the use of tribal drumming music, for example, different to 'ghettoising' Othello in terms of perpetuating a racial stereotype? In adaptations that utilise diegetic songs – 'musical' *Othello*s – finding perceived contemporary 'equivalents' and 'analogies' makes the play less adaptable in the context because they (ironically) remove the most 'musical' element of the character (using Knight's definition of the '*Othello* music'). In Zeffirelli's

adaptation, the 'high culture' of opera and the Spanish actor in blackface (in 1986, when it was in decline) removes the adaptation from its societal context; and when *Othello* is engaged with by black musicians, they run the risk of perpetuating the same stereotype that Fishburne's Othello is supposedly guilty of, suggesting that it is a play that sits uneasily in adaptations across media, but perhaps more so on screen than in music – the level of engagement in feature-length film adaptations is more substantial. Music can be used to racialise or de-racialise Othello, but the same can be said of the brief interactions with the play to be discussed in the following chapter.

Lanier states: "It is an axiom of postmodernist criticism that distinctions between high and low culture had utterly collapsed by the late twentieth century" (2006: 232). In the case of popular music and *Othello*, the axiom has proven to be accurate, although the play's problematic race issues have not 'collapsed' with the same sense of harmony. As previously mentioned, Holderness calls the relationship between Shakespeare and film an 'exchange of cultural authority between institutions in a reciprocal process.' (206) When applied to music, this may be true in the case of Dylan's interaction with *Othello* (in which he rewrites the dynamic between Othello and Desdemona), but less so in the case of Nas (who compares himself to the Moor), suggesting that brevity of engagement does not equate to an avoidance of its race issues. Even if what Lanier refers to as "nobrow" (2006: 232) Shakespeare has disavowed distinctions between 'high' and 'low' culture in a world in which black and white people can embrace through music, some dissonant notes still linger.

6. The 'Dark Matter' of the *Othello* Universe: Other Adaptations and Appropriations, Fragments, and Allusions across Media

6.1. INTRODUCTION: "'TIS NEITHER HERE NOR THERE" (IV.iii.58)

In the spectrum of *Othello* adaptations, many are not labelled as such. This chapter examines adaptations, appropriations, fragments and allusions to the play across media, observing relatively brief interactions when compared with feature-length versions in order to uncover what they reveal about the adaptability of *Othello* and its race issues. Additionally, this chapter will span media and periods in a way that previous chapters have not, examining the ways in which works that are not strictly adaptations interact with the play. Many of the case studies analysed herein do not rely on Shakespeare's name, nor the acclaim and reputation of *Othello*, prompting the questions: what is the significance of this type of engagement in revealing perceptions of *Othello*/Othello; why is this form of adaptation still prevalent, especially when the play in its entirety is rarely seen today outside of the theatre; and do they show *Othello* to be a play 'about' race when pared down to its most adapted signifiers? Ultimately, the aim of this chapter is to study seemingly 'minor' interactions with *Othello* to create a greater understanding of the adaptability of the play and its race issues, using a comprehensive selection of adaptations that have not been analysed collectively (and in some cases, individually) before in order to achieve this, beginning with pre-cinematic allusions in literature and visual art depictions, before moving onto fragments and references across media in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries.

Regardless of how infinitesimal the engagement with the play is, studying allusions to *Othello* reveals its most essential signifiers – those that adapters engage with without always referencing the play – and those that are the most 'adaptable' as a result. One potential meaning of Jacques Derrida's statement (in translated form), that "there is nothing outside the

text" (158–9), is that reading without contextual information is insufficient because all that surrounds the text is part of it. More than any other type of *Othello*, the majority of the allusions examined in this chapter depend on contexts outside of adapting *Othello* just as much – if not more – than the play itself. Allusions to *Othello* are not a modern phenomenon, used by pop culture products to benefit from the esteem that Shakespeare and his play have. In fact, other literary figures and dramatists have referenced the play before the advent of cinema. John Ford rewrote the *Othello* story in *Love's Sacrifice* (*c.* 1621–33) and Maurice Dowling's *Othello Travestie* (1813) also appropriates the play pre-twentieth century. In the Epilogue to Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* (1777), the drama closes with "Farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content!" (V.Epilogue.32) and "Pride, pomp and circumstance" (V.Epilogue.40). Both reference lines spoken by Othello (in III.iii.351 and III.iii.357, respectively), specifically, recalling the '*Othello* music', furthering Knight's notion by making the Moor's words repeatable refrains.

Similarly, "the head and front" (Dickens and Bradbury 306) of Mr Chadband's pretensions in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852–3) cites a line from Othello (I.iii.81), revealing a pattern concerning allusions to the lyricism of the titular character. Additionally, one of the three known audio recordings of F. Scott Fitzgerald features a reading of Othello's speech to the Senators from Act One, Scene Three. In Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera* (1909–10), Christine recalls:

> We at once began the duet in *Othello* and already the catastrophe was
> upon us. I sang Desdemona with a despair, a terror which I had never
> displayed before. As for him, his voice thundered forth his revengeful
> soul at every note. Love, jealousy, hatred, burst out around us in
> harrowing cries. Erik's black mask made me think of the natural mask

> of the Moor of Venice. He was Othello himself. Suddenly, I felt a
>
> need to see beneath the mask. I wanted to know the face of the voice,
>
> and with a movement which I was utterly unable to control, swiftly
>
> my fingers tore away the mask. Oh, horror, horror, horror! (134)

In this case, *Othello* (and Othello) represents power – of both Verdi's music and the Moor's passion and heightened emotions. However, the passage also raises questions: how 'natural' is Othello's 'mask' – and what do the words 'mask' and 'black' mean in this context? The Opera Ghost is a psychopathic murderer and denier of happiness. Additionally, 'horror' and 'terror' recall the monstrous imagery associated with Othello in the play. Moreover, one may argue that the novel is not dissimilar to the Beauty and Beast fairy tale (with regards to the Phantom's defacement and relationship with Christine). Othello is not literally a beast, nor a disfigured ghost: what connects the Moor to those characters is his Otherness. Additionally, in "Speaking of Poetry" (1925) by John Peale Bishop, which describes the wedding day of Othello and Desdemona, the Moor's race is explored in conjunction with its sexual implications, paring *Othello* down to a tale of racial miscegenation and a white conception of 'blackness'.

There are dozens of works named after lines from the play, including novels such as Noel Coward's *Pomp and Circumstance* (1960), *The Green-Eyed Monster* (1960) by Patrick Quentin, *Error of the Moon* (1963) by Sara Woods, and *Die upon a Kiss* (2001) by Barbara Hambly, spanning the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In *Othello, a Novel* (1995) by Julius Lester, race is focused on, placing Othello and Iago as African immigrants in Elizabethan England. In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971) by Hunter S. Thompson, Raoul Duke narrates that he empathises with the Moor, tying his own drug use with references to drugs in the play, irreverently claiming: "Othello used Dramamine" (122).

There is also a trend in appropriating *Othello* among contemporary female playwrights, such as Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* (1990), Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief* (1993), Djanet Sears's *Harlem Duet* (1997), and Toni Morrison's *Desdemona* (2012), reinforcing the idea that *Othello* still appeals to contemporary adapters, even though they focus on Desdemona, presumably as a 'reaction' to how she is treated in Shakespeare's play. They also focus on race, from Sears's 'ghettoisation' of the play, to Morrison's reworking of Desdemona, giving the character a contemporary 'voice' in this treatment, which sees her in conversation with a black nurse who raised her.

6.2. *OTHELLO*: PAINTED, DRAWN, AND ENGRAVED

As with Verdi's *Otello*, adaptations of the play are prevalent in 'high culture', especially in media that predates cinema and television. A ballet adaptation, *The Moor's Pavane* (1949), choreographed by José Limón, interprets Othello's descent into jealousy and murder through symbolic dancing. In visual art, however, the character is usually depicted physically. Most visual art *Othello*s illustrate scenes from the play and were created before the advent of film. As a result, this section will attempt to discover whether trends in adapting the character existed before screen adaptations, and whether or not representations of race in previous centuries influenced subsequent depictions in order to observe an historical trajectory, or to align treatments with trends in their respective media. One pattern that becomes immediately noticeable in visual art adaptations of *Othello* is the tendency to depict its climactic scene; another is that the majority date from the nineteenth century.

Paintings that fulfil both criteria include *Othello. Act 4, Scene 2: An Apartment in the Castle, Desdemona & Othello* (1801) by RK Porter and *The Death of Desdemona* (1858) by Eugène Delacroix. *A bedchamber, Desdemona in bed asleep* (1799), by Scottish artist John

Graham features a specifically black Othello stalking the bed of the sleeping Desdemona with

dagger in hand, potentially being the first use of a visual motif that may have influenced the

likes of Parker's screen adaptation (see fig. 6.1).
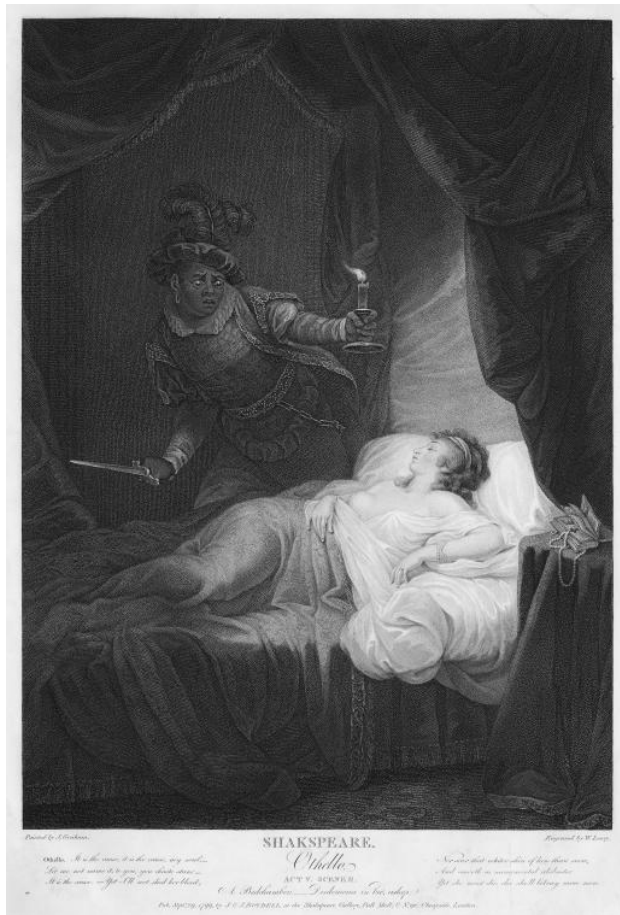
Fig. 6.1. John Graham. *A bedchamber, Desdemona in bed asleep*. 1799. Engraving.

Commons. Wikimedia Foundation, 26 Jan. 2008. Web. 26 Nov. 2013.

As mentioned, the depiction of Act Five, Scene Two is common in visual art *Othello*s, but the

representation of the Moor differs considerably. Regarding the potentiality of an adaptation

like Parker's being influenced by Graham's engraving, because Othello is fully clothed in the

artwork, and the bare-breasted Desdemona is the object of our gaze, relatively, this seems

unlikely. When compared with subsequent British *Othello*s, Graham's depiction of the Moor

is ornately dressed, suggesting a sense of refinement and integration into Venetian society that is not a feature of Olivier's screen Othello, by comparison.

   Mr Forbes Robertson as Othello (1902–3) by Max Cowper depicts the relatively pensive white actor in blackface – not looking at Desdemona in suspicion – but gazing upwards and left as if in deep thought (see fig. 6.2).

Fig. 6.2. Max Cowper. *Mr Forbes Robertson as Othello*. 1902–3. Oil. "Stigma in Shakespeare". *Harvard.edu*. Harvard College, n.d. Web. 17 Feb. 2014.

Graham's Othello, however – like the aforementioned death scene depicted by RK Porter (with its exaggerated coal-black Moor) – is comparable to Emil Jannings's 'animalistic' Othello in the way he looks at Desdemona. Because the actor, Forbes Robertson, is foregrounded, and Desdemona is placed clothed in the background, the sense of danger and impending violence is tempered in the painting. In *Painting Shakespeare: The Artist as*

Critic, 1720–1820 (2006), Stuart Sillars states that eighteenth century paintings of Shakespearean scenes frequently offer a "critical reading" (4) of their subjects. This is evident when examining treatments of Othello, specifically in light of his final actions. Like Graham's engraving, Christian Köhler's *Othello mit seiner schlafenden Frau* (1859) features an identifiably 'black' Othello (see fig. 6.3).

Fig. 6.3. Christian Köhler. *Othello mit seiner schlafenden Frau*. 1859. Painting. *Commons*. Wikimedia Foundation, 18 Mar. 2012. Web. 11 June 2014.

The vilification of both Othellos is compounded by the depictions of Desdemona. In both, her neck is exposed, heightening the aforementioned animalistic portrayals of the Moor, compounded by the quizzical way that Othello looks at Desdemona in Köhler's painting.

Othello and Desdemona (1829) by French artist Alexandre-Marie Colin is closer in appearance to the 'Turbaned Turk', and the predominate red colouring is relatively sensuous in tone when compared with the works of Graham, Cowper, and Köhler (see fig. 6.4).

Fig. 6.4. Alexandre-Marie Colin. *Othello and Desdemona*. 1829. Oil. *Commons*. Wikimedia Foundation, 5 Nov. 2006. Web. 22 Oct. 2013.

As with Graham's engraving, Desdemona's breasts are exposed. The positioning of the Moor's finger suggests that he is questioning his actions. By contrast, Graham's Othello is threatening, stalking the bedchamber in a predatory fashion. The identifiably 'black' Othello of Graham's engraving contrasts the actor in blackface (Robertson) and the 'Turbaned Turk' of Colin's painting. In fact, these works may have created a lasting visualisation of Othello, foreshadowing the dichotomous representations evident in subsequent adaptations, ranging from the romanticised to the animalistic.

In the wood engraving, *Othello and Desdemona* (late nineteenth-century) by Charles Gregory, Othello pulls away from the advancing Desdemona, although she is placed beneath him, seemingly pleading for her life. It is difficult to determine the 'type' of Othello depicted in this instance, but the placement of a stringed instrument at Othello's feet aligns the Moor with art and refinement, as does his robe and the ornate adornments of the room, visually

representing the '*Othello* music' and perhaps the most influential aspect of the character in adaptations, beyond those relating to his race (most notably, violence and sexuality) (see fig. 6.5).

Fig. 6.5. Charles Gregory. *Othello and Desdemona*. Late nineteenth century. Wood engraving. *Folger*. Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d. Web. 17 Feb. 2014.

Because the '*Othello* music' cannot be 'heard' in visual art, the placement of the lute in the engraving serves as a potential 'equivalent' of it.

Othello (1985) is a series of paintings by Nabil Kanso. Arguably because screen adaptations of the 1980s – such as the BBC televisual adaptation starring Anthony Hopkins in blackface – are relatively conservative in terms of representations of Othello and race, Kanso's paintings were exhibited in Atlanta in 1985 before being taken down a day later due to their perceived provocativeness. Unlike Suzman's adaptation (which centralises Othello as

a victim of discrimination and the play as a catalyst for racial harmony), Kanso's paintings

highlight violence and sexuality in a way that does not depict the Moor in a similar light. The

compositions in the series are divided into two sections. The first comprises paintings

showing nude figures embracing in sexual situations, using contrasting shades of light and

dark (a typical metaphor in adaptations of *Othello*, used to accentuate the difference between

Othello and Desdemona/Iago), whereas the second section visualises the themes of the play

through symbolic – as well as literal – images.

The painting, *Amorous Rhymes*, depicts a female playing a double bass guitar and a

male playing a violin alongside two figures making love: Desdemona and a demon,

potentially representing Othello (see fig. 6.6).

Fig. 6.6. Nabil Kanso. *Amorous Rhymes*. 1985. Oil. "*Othello*". *Kanso*. kanso.org, n.d. Web.

14 Dec. 2014.

Even though the instruments recall the '*Othello* music', the painting corresponds with the

paring of *Othello*/Othello down to its sexual (and racial, by extension) elements. Black is one

of two predominate colours (manifesting in wide, 'violent' brushstrokes), representing the

association of Othello with literal and metaphorical 'blackness'. The other principal colour is red, connoting passion, love, and violence. In the painting entitled *Ecstazy*, the demon is depicted behind Othello and Desdemona (see fig. 6.7).

Fig. 6.7. Nabil Kanso. *Ecstazy*. 1985. Oil. "*Othello*". *Kanso*. kanso.org, n.d. Web. 14 Dec. 2013.

The demon/devil – composed of black and red – unifies the colours, and ties Othello's passion with his blackness – not through language (or literal 'staining' in the case of Olivier), but through symbolic imagery, a technique found in paratextual materials for Sergei Yutkevich's adaptation, which also combines the colours of black and red.

My Warrior also literally depicts imagery found in the play (regarding animalism and the connotations of 'blackness') alongside Othello and Desdemona (see fig. 6.8).

Fig. 6.8. Nabil Kanso. *My Warrior*. 1985. Oil. "*Othello*". *Kanso*. kanso.org, n.d. Web. 14
Dec. 2013.

However, the figures could also represent the audience who watches the centralised
characters, allowing the viewer to be a voyeur in the same way that we are in the initial love
scene between Othello and Desdemona in Parker's film, suggesting that one of the main
attractions to the story is a fascination with their intimate relationship. *The Womb of Flame*
foreshadows the opening of Parker's film, in fact, in its use of the hood – in this case, worn
by a demon (see fig. 6.9).

Fig 6.9. Nabil Kanso. *The Womb of Flame*. 1985. Oil. "*Othello*". *Kanso*. kanso.org, n.d. Web. 22 Dec. 2013.

The fact that the demon is caressing a female figure suggests that he may represent the absent Othello, which coincides – coincidentally or not – with the representation of the hooded Moor in the Hollywood adaptation, aligning Othello not only with sexuality, but with sexuality that is 'black', sinful, and demonic. Like many of the allusions to *Othello* in the subsequent section, these works of art focus on either the climactic scene of the play or signifiers of the Moor's character, which happen to be those that perpetuate a racial stereotype. Unlike previous paintings, Kanso's are not always representations of specific scenes, which may attest to the influence of images and ideas from the play on adapters. Moreover, some of these artworks prove that contrasting visualisations of Othello existed before screen adaptations, suggesting that it is the play that offers opportunities for varied reinterpretations of the character.

6.3. FRAGMENTS OF AND ALLUSIONS TO *OTHELLO* IN FILM, TELEVISION, ANIMATION, AND VIDEO GAMES

An early adaptation like Anson Dyer's silent animated burlesque, *Othello* (1920), does not adapt a fragment of the play, but remains as one today. According to *Walking Shadows: Shakespeare in the National Film and Television Archive* (1994), "the main parts of the tragedy are ingeniously if not irreverently introduced" (McKernan and Terris 119), coinciding with a type of adaptation to be discussed in a subsequent chapter on *YouTube Othello*s. The remains of the adaptation focalise a 1920s flapper, 'Mona (Desdemona), the daughter of a bathing machine operator, whose name is shortened to match her bobbed hairstyle. Contemporary allusions are made through intertitles: "Desdemona……. Called 'Mona for short……she having been 'Bobbed'!". Desdemona is modernised through her chosen hairdo, associated at the time with the young women found in short stories like "Bernice Bobs her Hair" (1920) by F Scott Fitzgerald. In "Murdering *Othello*", Lanier documents the "troublingly misogynistic" (213) gender relations in adaptations and appropriations of the play, but because Desdemona is portrayed as a newly liberated 'flapper', one may argue that this, in its cultural context, is the reason why she is not murdered, highlighting the impact that contemporary culture can have on adaptations. Othello, however, is portrayed as an Al Jolson-inspired comedic character, which highlights the fact that adaptations of the play cannot be charted in terms of 'progression': the treatment of women is more troubling in Blake Nelson's *O*, for example, than it is here, whereas the treatment of race is perpetually troubling, despite contrasting depictions. As is the case with Bob Dylan's engagement with the play, the gender roles are subverted in Dyer's adaptation, undeniably, in this case, because of its cultural climate.

Unlike Dyer's other Shakespeare films (he directed a series in 1919–20), *Othello* survives as a three-minute fragment depicting the opening and closing scenes of the adaptation. The film begins with the intertitle, "Othello the Moore was black….". Because much is missing, it is unknown as to why the letter 'e' is present, even though a hand enters

the shot immediately after the word appears and scratches it out. This draws attention to the issue of race through a visual metaphor of a white hand representing the control that the director (and Shakespeare) has over the titular character. Proof of this is that it reappears in the first shot of Othello, which shows a white actor being 'blacked up' by a human hand (again, appearing from outside of the frame), shading the character to a darker tone (see fig. 6.10).

Fig 6.10. *Othello*. Dir. Anson Dyer. 1920. "*Othello* (1920)". *BFI Screenonline*. BFI Screenonline, 2013–14. Author's screenshot. 18 Apr. 2012.

The next intertitle reveals, "But he was not as black as he was painted!". In this case, black is associated with the morality of the character – and presumably, by extension – with the Devil/Hell, amalgamating the early modern period and the play with the 1920s. Both *Othello* (through the placement of the candle in the *mise-en-scène*) and the contemporary period (through minstrelsy and the banjo) of the adaptation are represented in the shot.

Dyer's adaptation was made during a period in which performing in blackface was still prevalent. Unlike other films that feature a character transforming into the Moor over the course of the narrative, such as *A Double Life*, the 1920 burlesque features a happy ending and a relatively light tone, potentially influenced by the comedic connotations of blackface at the time. As the opening scene progresses, the blacked-up actor paints a white diamond around one of his eyes and smears an exaggerated pair of lips around his mouth, creating the appearance of a clown. This coincides with the comedic aspect of Jolson's style of blackface, and the effect of minstrelsy is that Othello is treated in a humorous manner. In fact, in "Charivari and the Comedy of Abjection in *Othello*" (1995), Michael Bristol refers to Othello as "a kind of blackface clown" (147) because of the supposed unrealistic plot of the play. As Othello confronts 'Mona, the viewer is informed that he is about to smother her, not in order to kill her, but "…..With Burnt Cork and Kisses!", referring to the word 'smother' in a different context, meaning 'overindulge'. The phrase 'burnt cork' is a reference to the make-up applied during the blacking-up process, implying that 'Mona will literally be tarnished by Othello's blackness, forty-five years before Olivier's Othello's make-up rubbed off on Maggie Smith's Desdemona. To a modern viewer, it is unclear as to what precedes this scene in Dyer's film, but in order to surprise the viewer, it might be that this Othello plays the "bestial superstud" (Pieterse 152) that Bogle observes in his categorisation of racial stereotypes, hinting at Othello slaying 'Mona before executing the final comic twist.

One of the first talkie allusions to *Othello*, "Shake, Mr. Shakespeare" (1936), is a short cinematic promotional film that satirises Hollywood treatments of Shakespeare plays. As with all screen versions of the period, a white actor plays the part of the Moor, performing a dance several feet away from the rest of the cast (which includes several characters from Shakespeare plays, including Hamlet and Romeo) on a set that features adaptation signifiers, such as the placement of an enlarged tome in the *mise-en-scène*. The incongruity of

Shakespeare on screen is highlighted through Shakespeare's defence of the accusation that: "Today, the screenplay's the thing". The playwright responds: "The characters that I wrote were solid". This exemplifies a significant point regarding adaptations of *Othello*: the characters of the play may be 'solid', but they are inevitably changed in each adaptation. The dancing Othello also highlights the fact that cultural and generic contexts affect portrayals of Othello in that the dancing Moor in blackface is reminiscent of minstrelsy, as well as confirming that 'irreverent' treatments of the character are not a modern device used exclusively by *YouTube* adapters, for example. If there is, as Maltby states, a "dominance of the liberal perspective in Hollywood's postwar output" (308), then by comparison, pre-war *Othello*s can be considered conservative, in that – even though *Othello*/Othello is often treated irreverently – the issue of race is not tackled outside of the comedy genre in the two aforementioned engagements with the play, and those that do adapt the play in a 'faithful' manner, such as the silent films of 1909 and 1922, either temper the issue of race or perpetuate a white conception of 'blackness'.

Despite being British filmmakers, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger differ from Dyer in their treatment of *Othello*. In their mini-feature propaganda film for the Ministry of Information, "The Volunteer" (1944), the metatextual device of an actor (Ralph Richardson as himself) playing Othello within the film before leaving the acting profession to become a pilot (for the Fleet Air Arm branch of the British Royal Navy) was not a new ploy, even by this time: *Carnival* and its 1931 remake, for example, focus on the struggle between actors and the character they play. Unlike those, however, the heroism and nobility of Othello are accentuated here, opposing not only the comedic nature of blacking-up for the part centralised in the surviving fragments of Dyer's adaptation, but also the violence and racial difference emphasised after the transformations in the *Carnival* films and *A Double Life*. Moreover, it is ironic that – in spite of Othello's exoticness in the play – the character is used

as a symbol of British pride in the short film. In spite of the fact that Richardson is a white actor, he is shot coming from the stage as Othello, implying that the character is not to be racially discriminated against, but that it actually might inspire potential British soldiers to empathise with the Moor. The aforementioned observation by Elise Marks, that "in *Othello* the boundary between Self and Other is famously, and perilously, permeable" (103) can be applied to "The Volunteer", in which it manifests in a unique manner. Rather than using Othello (and all the connotations associated with the character) as a symbol of behavioural regression, the short film ties his 'perilousness' with the decision of the actor playing the role to become a wartime pilot, mirroring the Moor's military prowess in the play.

The 'Othello/Me' idea is also prevalent in adaptations that feature passing allusions to the play. The actor as Othello device is transposed to the horror genre in *Theatre of Blood* (1973), a comedy horror pastiche of Shakespearean death scenes. A year earlier, an independent British horror, *The Flesh and Blood Show* (1972), presented an actor 'changing' after having played Othello during the Second World War. In many of these types of engagements with the play, Othello serves as a vehicle to represent the 'dark' side of otherwise 'good' men. In addition, they suggest that the character of Othello is at odds with the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries, and grounding the character in a contemporary framework is potentially more 'believable' for audiences. In his portrayal of a homicidal actor in *Theatre of Blood*, Vincent Price pinpoints one writer for being the only person who has "the temerity to rewrite Shakespeare", illustrating the sense of irony that pervades the film. However, it is the deaths themselves that are focused on more than representations of characters.

Price's character, Lionheart, dresses as an Italian doctor (without expositional details as to why) and performs a massage on the wife of one of his enemies, knowing that the critic is covertly observing the scene. When the critic confronts them, he (rather than Lionheart)

murders his wife, positioning the critic as Othello, and Lionheart (who has orchestrated the event) as Iago. In other words, despite the alignment of Othello with 'monstrousness' in the play, Lionheart plays the Ensign. However, because *Theatre of Blood* is a horror film, it is one death among many, and the genre framework determines the treatment of the play. The aforementioned *Jubal* is also a genre film (a western), and as such, its plot, which adds a love triangle element to its appropriation of *Othello* – whilst also focalising the theme of jealousy – ends with the Othello equivalent, Jubal, riding horseback into the sunset with the woman he loves, with the implication that the Iago character, Pinky, will be hanged for his sins, corresponding with western imagery and tropes of the American frontier and the servitude of justice. In these cases, then, when *Othello* is linked with the 'main' cinematic genres (horror/western), the generic frameworks dictate the portrayal of the Moor.

In Nikolai Serebryakov's animated *Othello* (1992) for BBC television, Shakespeare's language is simplified and modernised, yet phrases such as 'black ram' and 'witchcraft' are retained, exemplifying one of the recurring problems with the adaptive methods of many *Othello*s, which attempt to amalgamate the words of Shakespeare with those of the adapted period, balancing obsequiousness with an attempt to contemporise the play. This is uniquely problematic in Serebryakov's adaptation, which is aimed at a young audience who may not be able to differentiate the amalgamated languages. Animation also affects the portrayal of race in the adaptation in a way that is dictated by its medium. At times, with hellish backdrops and Othello's often-changing skin tone (which flashes to blue, red, grey, and green from scene to scene, depending on the lighting), the character appears monstrous, heightened by his stentorian voice which recalls the Beast in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, cinematically released a year prior to the BBC animation, drawing further parallels between Othello and the bestial. In addition, the way in which the animated Iago speaks directly to the camera evokes the manner in which children's television presenters talk to their young

viewers. As a result, if *The Animated Shakespeare* series was aimed at introducing a new audience to the plays, further complications arise in terms of adapting *Othello*.

Relatedly, the *Manga Shakespeare* treatment of *Othello* (2009) exemplifies the vast array of *Othello*s produced this century. Whereas *O* portrays the character as a hip-hop culture-inspired, contemporary black Othello, the eponymous character in the manga version is identifiably white: he is of a white complexion – from his skin and hair colour to his attire – despite the retention of the word 'Moor' (see fig. 6.11).

Fig. 6.11. Richard Appignanesi and Ryuta Osada, illus. *Manga Shakespeare: Othello*. London: SelfMadeHero, 2009. Print.

Othello is shown to be angelic in the manga depiction through not only his physical attributes, but also through his wings. Again, this exemplifies that there is no definitive image

of who Othello is: there is no 'real' Othello, visually. Unlike *William Shakespeare's Othello* (1985) by Oscar Zarate, an animated comic book adaptation from the *Cartoon Shakespeare* series that reprints the full text of the play along with cartoon images, *Othello* is transported to the realm of fantasy in the manga. Its Othello holds Desdemona as she swoons: "O my fair warrior!". Unlike Parker's adaptation, which uses Shakespeare's play text in abridged form for the most part, and Blake Nelson's film, which rewrites the play for a contemporary audience, the manga evokes the language of Shakespeare's play without actually using it. The manga *Othello* ends with the Moor's final speech remembering the "great military feats he has achieved: now realising that the only infidel enemy left to kill…is himself". The word 'infidel' implies that Othello is an outsider, despite his androgynous image (stereotypically associated with manga), highlighting the contrast found in many adaptations of the play: the juxtaposition of revering it whilst also trying to modernise it and apply it to the conventions of the adapted medium.

The manga depicts Othello in body armour and features imagery found in other anime series' like *Fullmetal Alchemist* (2001–10) and the video game *Fable II* (2008). In that game, when a spell is cast, non-specific alchemical symbology is shown, illustrating a web of intertextuality – as well as a reversal of the trajectory – in that *Othello*s borrow just as much from pop culture as much as, for example, *Red Dead Redemption* (2010) cites *Othello*. In the game, Nigel West Dickens, a sixty-five-year-old snake oil salesman in a fictional Old West states, "Act I can, John. A finer Othello there has never been", during the same conversation in which he is accused of being a conman, mirroring the fact that mimesis of a black character is also arguably a confidence trick. In turn, West Dickens is potentially influenced by the duke and the king in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), two grifters who claim to be Shakespearean actors, who, in fact, have little knowledge of the plays and misquote them frequently.

Stage Beauty (2004) is another film that does not advertise itself as an adaptation of *Othello*, despite the fact that – unlike *Theatre of Blood* – the play is integral to its plot, which concerns a female theatre dresser, Maria (played by Claire Danes), becoming the first female to play Desdemona in *Othello*. Richard Eyre, who had previously offered an introduction to a BBC radio adaptation of the play (2001), creates a work of fiction based around the staging of *Othello* in the context of seventeenth-century England. Eyre reveals in his director's commentary on the DVD release that his film's mimesis of the way in which tragedians might have performed "is a form of acting that we had to invent". The style he is referring to, by his own admission, is "very histrionic and very demonstrative". In terms of its representation of Othello, who – unusually for a postmillennial adaptation – is depicted in blackface, is that the character becomes an exaggerated version of what is already a racial stereotype. The Moor is treated farcically in the narrative due to the fact that the actor playing him is clearly wearing make-up, which has a bottle-green tint when the camera pans to his face, creating a sense of comedic surprise for the viewer.

However, his appearance is not significantly different to that of Olivier, for example, in terms of the use of blackface, suggesting that it is British society's reaction to the technique that has changed. To expose what he evidently sees as the incongruity of both blackface and the idea of men playing women in a postmillennial *Othello*, Eyre depicts the actors out of character as white males immediately after performances to emphasise transformation. Highlighting the absurdity of blackface may be an effective comedic device for modern audiences who are used to black males and females playing themselves, but it also represents Othello as a character who is incompatible in this twenty-first-century context. In "Backstage Pass(ing): *Stage Beauty*, *Othello* and the Make-up of Race" (2006), Richard Burt asks: "Why doesn't *Stage Beauty* address the first black actor to perform Othello as it addresses the first woman to act on the stage" (54)? He argues that the film's

relationship with race is both intertextually and metatextually conscious of previous

blackface representations of the character on screen, claiming that it 'cites' Olivier's

performance through its use of 'smudged' and unrealistic make-up. As a result, Burt believes

that the film lacks an "interrogation of race" (54). Unlike gender, then, race is treated in a

comedic fashion in *Stage Beauty*, perhaps in part due to the history of white actors playing

the role.

Desdemona's death scene is acted out several times in *Stage Beauty*, on stage and in

rehearsals. This connects the film to representations of the play in the visual arts, and to the

'backstage narrative' *Othello*s, which tend to interact with that specific scene. In the

aftermath of Edward Kynaston (as Desdemona) being killed by Othello, the audience

applauds rapturously as he dies in a fashion that appeases the theatregoers. However, because

of Claire Danes's role in the film as the eventual 'real' Desdemona, gender issues take

precedence. When Maria (Danes) asks Kynaston (as Othello) why he did not kill her in a

manner befitting previous performances in which he was playing Desdemona, he replies: "I

did kill you; you just didn't die". In reply, when Maria asks: "Why didn't you finish me

off?", Kynaston concludes: "You finally got the death scene right". Of course, this implies

that women should play themselves for purposes of realism and gender equality, but it is

visibly obvious that when Kynaston plays Othello, his make-up is applied in a more realistic

(or economic) fashion than his predecessor. Contrastingly, when asked by a punter if he was

involved in the play that evening, the actor who initially plays Othello states that he did

indeed play the Moor, to which the punter replies: "You look different!". The actor then

quips: "Yes, I'm not really black", reinforcing the message regarding the incongruity of

blackface in this context.

This feeling is also expressed in the aforementioned televised *Perspectives*

documentary, "Lenny Henry – Finding Shakespeare", during a scene in which the actor and

comedian admits that he could not relate to Olivier in "black shoe polish". Othello's blackness (or underlying whiteness) may be one of the most enduring images from adaptations of the play. However, regardless of how the contrast of 'blackness' and 'whiteness' manifests in adaptations, it has had a lasting impression: even the board game, *Othello* (1883), takes its name from the contrast of black and white pieces used by opposing players; this, in turn, inspired the Japanese manga series, *Othello* (2001–4), which takes its name from the game rather than the play, based on its use of colours. This may suggest that the majority of adaptations analysed in this chapter are as important to the *Othello* universe as the relatively 'faithful' adaptations that use Shakespeare's language and plot, because it is the words, images, themes and characters that have proved to endure along with the play text. Even in Hollywood, in early adaptations like the *Carnival* films, Othello is portrayed as a savage yet sympathetic character who contrasts with the 'real' person playing him within the frameworks of the films, which might have been an influence on a horror movie like *The Wolf Man* (1941) and its 2010 remake, in which the eponymous character transforms and then kills.

Regarding televisual comedy, Lenny Henry is mentioned in the pilot episode of *Toast of London* (2012), in which the protagonist states: "I think people only got Shakespeare when Lenny Henry started doing it". In *Garth Marenghi's Darkplace* (2004), one of the central characters quips: "'I tried to put on *Othello* with Mr T but he wouldn't get on a plane'". Like the previously mentioned citation, a joke is implied about the idea of black comedy actors (or actors who have a comedic reputation in popular culture) playing Othello. In another British comedy, *Black Books* (2000–4), Manny refers to a nemesis as being "half Iago" ("Manny Come Home"). The utilisation of a name in order to quickly add depth to a character illustrates the place that the play has in the popular cultural lexicon and is also used in *The Lives of the Saints* (2006), a British comedy film in which a character named Othello, the

stepson of a man who runs an illegal operation, wants to overthrow his stepfather in a manner that makes him comparable to Iago, demonstrating the subversive way in which the play is often treated in the postmillennial period, which may be a result of portrayals of Iago as an anti-hero in the films of Parker and Blake Nelson, for example.

An episode of *Cheers* (1983) utilises the play-within-the-play technique, which, like its cinematic predecessors such as the *Carnival* films and *A Double Life*, uses *Othello* to invoke a primeval, murderous tendency in a character, but within the context of a situation comedy. An ex-convict who has recently been released from prison visits the bar and tries to take Diane out for dinner, a regular occurrence before serving his sentence. She convinces him to embark on an acting career in order to begin his life afresh. When the ex-convict learns of the relationship between Diane and Sam, the question of whether or not he will slip back into his murderous ways when he invokes Othello is exploited. It might be the troubled interpretations of the Moor in past screen adaptations – specifically from a racial perspective – that permits this kind of manipulation. In this instance, Othello represents reprehensible behaviour outside of societal norms.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the play-within-the-play device is modified in an episode of *Fame*, in which the School of Arts stages a musical rendering of *Othello*. When the piece is performed at the denouement of the episode, the musical element and the negation of the words of the play text beg the question: why adapt *Othello*? In this case, it is a race issue. Winner of the Academy Award for Best Picture, *The King's Speech* (2010) features a line from *Othello* (among other Shakespeare plays): "Poor and content is rich, and rich enough" (III.iii.174), in which the quotation may have been used primarily for its connection to Shakespeare and his literary reputation as a means of teaching someone to speak English 'properly', whereas *Fame* appropriates elements of *Othello* for race-related reasons. Its central character, Leroy Johnson, a black student from a deprived background, is

an outsider in the world of dance, connecting him to the ex-convict in *Cheers* and comedy actors like Lenny Henry in Shakespearean tragedy. Using *Othello* to aid a character in overcoming a speech impediment is also utilised in *Fame*: Miss Sherwood teaches Leroy that someone from the Bronx can speak the words of Shakespeare, just as Suzman had to 'teach' John Kani for her South African production, implying that the '*Othello* music' is one of the most inadaptable aspects of the play for black actors, although this might be the case for modern actors in general, as it is written in early modern English. The *Fame Othello* amalgamates the play with the contexts of the show: the song performed starts with the same style of 1980s musical instrumentation associated with its theme song, before progressing to a middle-section featuring Renaissance-inspired instrumentation, complete with pipes, lute and violins. Othello dons a cape and swordfights with Iago whilst the former sings histrionically in tenor: "You know I wanna own ya" – the word 'own' presumably referencing the theme of jealousy in the play, whilst the backing singers and dancers shadow Othello's movements in colourful clothing typical of 1980s fashion.

In an episode of *Sanford and Son* (1972–7), "Lamont as Othello" (1973), the play-within-the-play technique is not replicated exactly. *Othello* is not staged at the end of the episode as it is *Cheers* and *Fame*; instead, the concept of Lamont as Othello is exploited for comedic effect throughout. At the beginning of the episode, Lamont is reading from Act Five, Scene Two (one of – if not the most – adapted scenes from the play). The contrast of *Othello* with black working-class America becomes evident from this opening scene when Lamont does not attempt to disguise his demonstrative mannerisms or accent – not dissimilar to relatively 'faithful' and tonally 'serious' screen versions adapted from the stage. In one sense, the episode is 'successful' in its interaction with *Othello* because of the uproarious audience response. The contrast of the play with twentieth-century America is illustrated through language: Lamont's friend's response to the Shakespearean speech is: "Outta sight, dude".

Additionally, when the former questions Lamont about how he is going to get the local community to visit the theatre, Lamont replies: "Hey, maybe I'll tell 'em they're having a nudie film festival down at the neighbourhood theatre". In this instance, making light of the perceived cultural distance between the characters of the show and Shakespeare illustrates the potential humour to be found in treating Othello as a contemporary black male, whilst also highlighting a problem with a film like *O*, for example, in which the closing scenes of the play are acted out and a racial stereotype remains intact.

A subsequent scene explores the relationship between *Othello* and 1970s urban America when Lamont and his acting coach Marlene practise a scene in which Othello strangles Desdemona, which differs from the smothering of the source. When Fred, Lamont's father, observes this, not knowing its context, he assumes that his son is trying to murder a white woman. The race issue is centralised here, much to the delight of the studio audience. Unfamiliar with the play, Fred likens Othello to Jack the Ripper and questions: "Othello? A black man with an Italian name?". One may argue that it is the ambiguity of Othello's race (which has been perpetuated by its varied adaptations) that is part of the comedy here: Othello is a Moor with an Italian name, married to a white Venetian, and defending Cyprus against the Turks, in addition to the fact that Iago's descriptions in the play liken him to modern conceptions of 'blackness'. As the episode continues, Marlene invites Fred and Lamont to the home of her affluent parents in Beverly Hills for a rehearsal (in which the strangulation scene is repeated), which sets up another race-related comedic scene in which Fred walks in on Marlene's sleeping parents who assume that he is a burglar.

Of course, one may argue that this has racist overtones, but because viewer sympathy is clearly supposed to be with the central titular characters and the objective of the scene is to create laughter, its goals are achieved. Fred contemplates sitting in the car during the rehearsal whilst trying to explain to a passing policeman: "I'm sitting in the truck waiting on

my son who's inside choking a white woman to death". Race-related jokes are the source of the humour here, but when Fred states that the problem with the Beverly Hills house is that it "ain't got no smell" (referring to the fact that there are no aromas coming from the kitchen), and with quips such as "bigot" and "you people" (which are references to Marlene's parents but with overtones of white people in general), its relationship with *Othello* does not seem discriminatory towards either race – or if it is, it is towards both in equal measure, perpetuating racial disharmony for comedic effect. The use of this device in televisual comedy, then, emphasises Othello's Otherness in order to highlight the incongruity of the play in the modern world, which opposes the aims of non-comedic *Othello*s, which often try to quell its incompatibility.

There have been two references to the play in *The Simpsons* (1989–present) one in which Ned Flanders prays: "Dear Lord, please make tonight's production better than *Othello* with Peter Marshall" ("Mayored to the Mob"), and another in which Barney laments: "There's a line in *Othello* about a drinker: 'Now a sensible man, by and by a fool, and presently a beast'" ("A Star is Burns"). Cassio is the character who gets drunk and acts foolishly in the play, but the word 'beast' recalls the imagery associated with representations of Othello. However, in light of his condition in Act Two, Scene Three, Cassio describes "the devil wrath" (II.iii.292) of alcohol as being the "devil" (II.iii.279, II.iii.291 and II.iii.303) and "unblest" (II.iii.302), whilst using "bestial" (II.iii.260), "beasts" (II.iii.288), "beast" (II.iii.301) to describe the state he descends into when drunk, illustrating how the use of this type of imagery pervades the play, but often manifests in adaptations in relation to the titular character. More recently, a mash-up video, originally published on an Iranian web television channel, "Othello/Simpsons Trailer" (2012), amalgamates scenes from various *Simpsons* episodes to create a plot which resembles *Othello*, highlighting the comedic connotations that Othello (played by Homer) has in popular culture, even though they may have only come to

light because of past representations. The video is a parody in the style of a movie trailer, using the voiceover from Parker's *Othello*, coinciding with a trend that will be discussed in the subsequent chapter on *YouTube* adaptations.

Negating 'fidelity' concerns permits relatively experimental readings of *Othello*. This has its obvious benefits, as there need be minimal effort to amalgamate the play with the present. This is evident in a recent televisual allusion to the play. In an episode of *Hart of Dixie* (2011–15), Zoe Hart, a doctor, jokingly asks her friend, a former NFL line-backer played by Cress Williams (who played Othello on stage in a 1990 production at Fullerton College, suggesting extratextual connections): "Smother me with this pillow?". Of course, this allusion is not a verified reference to *Othello*, but the relationship between the play and the image of a black man smothering a white woman is irrefutably linked in the cultural lexicon. The quip is playful and any danger associated with it is negated by Hart's status as a career woman (as well as the centrality of her character in the show) and the fact that there is no hint of a sexual relationship between the two. Additionally, like many of the previously mentioned televisual allusions, the reference is laced with irony and is featured in a show that is – in part, at least – a comedy.

6.4. CONCLUSION

The adaptations of – and allusions to – *Othello* analysed in this chapter might reveal more about populist perceptions of the play than feature-length adaptations in that they typically focus on specific scenes and representations of characters with brevity, condensing them to their perceived fundamental elements, proving that the Moor's main signifier is his race, followed by his 'music'. However, they treat the play in contrasting ways: some of which can be explained by the contexts, media, and genres of the adaptations, as well as the equally contrasting ways in which *Othello* has been presented over the centuries. As stated,

the appropriations and allusions examined in this chapter may be as important to the *Othello* universe as comparatively 'faithful' versions because it is the scenes, images, themes, and characters of the play that are engaged with, enduring in the relatively invisible role of 'dark matter' as much as the play in its entirety has, even though what they reveal about populist perceptions of *Othello* does not affect its apparent inadaptability.

However, one may argue that – even though they reveal populist views of the play (regarding race, specifically) – the influence of the aforementioned interactions with *Othello* on future feature-length adaptations might not be as significant as the previous statement suggests. The *Othello*s examined in this chapter can easily avoid the issues they consider difficult, including race – although in many cases they do not – in fact, it is often the central adaptable element (unwittingly or not) of adaptations in which actors play actors within the narratives, as racial transformation is the catalyst for the differences between two sides of the same character. Brief interactions with *Othello* can treat its race issues with brevity – or even emphasise them in order to stress incongruity for comedic effect. When prospective filmmakers are looking to adapt *Othello* in the future, interaction with the play that does not feature its title or any marketed associations with it could have the same influence as those branded as adaptations because they are informing populist perceptions in an era in which *Othello* is not being adapted to screen in feature-length form. Because of the prevalence of these appropriations and allusions, it is obvious that people still feel compelled to interact with *Othello*, despite the fact that they often highlight the inadaptability of its race issues in contemporary contexts.

7. "With as little a web as this" (II.i.168–9): Ensnaring *Othello* in *YouTube* Adaptations

7.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines adaptations of *Othello* in the form of uploads on the video-sharing platform, *YouTube*. Unlike the allusions to the play of the previous chapter, the vast majority of adaptations analysed herein use the title of the play (often altered or embellished to suit the adaptive methods of the user) and an abridged version (usually because of uploading restrictions) of its plot. Because these video uploads are – for the most part – the most recent versions of the play (and new ones are uploaded weekly), online adaptations may indicate how potential forthcoming *Othello*s across media treat the play in that they represent how adapters and audiences view *Othello* and engage with it. As has been noted in previous chapters, current events play a role in influencing the adaptive methods of *Othello*s across media. Because the majority of *YouTube Othello*s are uploads by students from the United States (referenced as such in their titles and description boxes) – usually manifesting in the form of class projects – this chapter might indicate how Hollywood cinema, in particular, adapts the play in the future. By extension, because the influence of cinematic *Othello*s can be observed in adaptations across periods, nationalities, and media, the importance of *YouTube* adaptations might prove to be significant. Conversely, whether or not online *Othello*s are simply 'parasitic' of Hollywood adaptations will also be considered.

Because of their platform, *YouTube Othello*s can reach viewers from across the globe, but the country of origin of the majority of videos will render them essential comparisons with Hollywood adaptations. In "*Shakespeare in Love* and the End of the Shakespearean: Academic and Mass Culture Constructions of Literary Authorship" (2000), Richard Burt writes of the "Shakespeare apocalypse", caused by the dissipation of the boundary between "canon" and "apocrypha" (227). This chapter will treat *YouTube* adaptations as evidence of

this, especially in the *Othello* universe, in which there is no evidence to suggest that stage productions and feature-length screen versions have more of an influence on populist perceptions of the play than 'apocryphal' treatments. For the most part, online adaptations are unconcerned with 'fidelity', and will not be analysed according to such criteria. Rather, pertinent questions will be: what methods do *YouTube* users employ to adapt *Othello*/Othello; are the adaptations similar or different to one another in terms of their adaptive methods, particularly concerning race; and do these adaptations reveal how the play and its titular character are viewed today? Online adaptations are usually so far removed from the 'source' material that comparisons with the play would be futile: whether or not the adaptations are 'true' or 'as good as' *Othello* will not be a feature of this chapter; instead, how they tackle its race issues will be the focus.

In *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America*, Thompson asks: "How do performances involving actors of color affect contemporary notions of Shakespeare's racial politics, and does the medium employed (film, television, stage, Internet, etc.) alter these receptions" (6)? How *YouTube Othello*s, specifically, address Shakespeare's racial politics (and those of the twenty-first century) will be addressed in this chapter in order to shed light on how the unchanged race issues of the play are treated in subsequent periods and different media. The videos discussed in this chapter have been uploaded over a decade subsequent to the most recent Hollywood *Othello*, *O*, and will serve as a method of charting whether or not adaptations illustrate a shift in perceptions of the play and the titular character since then. As Lanier states in "Shakespeare and Cultural Studies: An Overview" (2006), if conceptions of Shakespeare are not reproduced by the "Shakespearean officialdom" alone, but "perhaps even more influentially, by popular culture" (232), then the worth of *YouTube Othello*s might be as significant as those of other media, in that they have the potential to shape perceptions of the play and show their results to a global audience.

As yet, no monographs have been published on the subject of *Othello* and *YouTube*, and little has been published on the topic in general, especially concerning adaptability and race. In "Shakespeare on the Internet" (2004), Hardy M Cook extensively details online Shakespeare resources, but *YouTube* adaptations are absent (and an updated version from 2010 on the SHAKSPER website still lacks any references to *YouTube*). This might point towards a 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' distinction for online Shakespeares, whereby *YouTube* versions are neglected because of their impermanence or irreverence in their handling of the material. Thompson's article, "Unmooring the Moor: Researching and Teaching on *YouTube*" (2010) is restricted to *YouTube* adaptations by Chinese students. This chapter, however, discusses the adaptability of the play on a broader level by removing the limitation of the Chinese and pedagogical elements, exploring how adapters today (without the influence of the film industry, in some respects) treat the play, determining how they view it, as a result. As Thompson points out in relation to a specific adaptation by Chinese students: "the video does not announce itself as filming only part of a scene; instead, it announces itself simply as *Othello*" (342). This is the case for many of the adaptations analysed in this chapter, differentiating them from the allusions of the previous one, which, more often than not, do not reference the play by name, specifically in the cases of those in film and television. The idea that Chinese students "do not buy that Shakespeare is teaching them what they need or want to know" (351) is equally true of those outside that spectrum, and this chapter will expand on this, raising questions as to why *YouTube* adapters interact (or do not interact) with Shakespeare's 'teachings'.

In *Shakespeare and YouTube: New Media Forms of the Bard* (2014), Stephen O'Neill devotes almost an entire chapter to race in *YouTube* Shakespeares. O'Neill discusses *Othello* but focuses on comparatively few adaptations in this chapter, and on occasion, ones that do not engage with the play beyond a reading to camera. His study, using a different set of

videos to the ones examined here, considers online adaptations in conjunction with an analysis of *YouTube* as a platform for Shakespeare. This chapter directs attention towards a different set of uploads to those discussed by O'Neill, focusing on the adaptability of the race in online videos in the context of *Othello*s across media. In fact, some of the adaptations he discusses were difficult to locate due to the transient nature of *YouTube* videos.[15] Regarding online representations of the titular character, O'Neill observes that a racial stereotype is "reactivated rather than critiqued". He concludes: "the openness of online culture does not necessarily equate with an openness of attitude" (159). He cites race-related user comments to exemplify this. For example, he discusses a video entitled "Shakespeare in the ghetto, Othello" (2007), a short monologue to the camera by the uploader. O'Neill's analysis pertains to the reaction from users in the comments section rather than the content of the video. He does not discuss the adaptability of the play in light of its race issues, the titular character, or contemporary settings, for example, presumably in part because the video is a 'faithful' monologue and reveals little about the performer's relationship with *Othello*. However, even though the video is not an attempt at parodying or updating the play (in spite of the video's title), reactions to it relate to racism, potentially suggesting that the issue is still contentious and relevant to adapters.

Even though *YouTube* is global in the sense that the Internet is, O'Neill notes its "privileging of Anglophone content" (67). He explains that results are "localized and weighted in favour of Anglophone content" (67) if the IP address of the *YouTube* user is of an English-speaking country. Despite this, some of the adaptations considered in this chapter from non-Anglophone countries were retrieved from searches using English terms: "Othello - Official Trailer (2012) [HD]" (2012) is of German origin; "Othello [HD] Nicolas Xuan Vinter Drama Film" (2012) is Swedish; and "Italian adaptation of Othello" (2014) is, as its

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[15] This chapter uses screenshots as a method of preservation for key scenes and images.

title suggests, from Italy. However, their adaptive methods are not particularly different to their United States counterparts in terms of finding contemporary 'equivalents' for the action. Even in Anglophone countries outside of the United States (such as the United Kingdom), there are few adaptations: "Othello: a modern adaptation" (2012) transposes the narrative to a racially integrated England.

From a methodological standpoint, on 21 March 2015, the search term, 'Othello', returned 206,000 results on *YouTube*. On the same date, a more specific term, 'Othello school project' (entered because, as mentioned previously, many of the videos reference class projects in their titles or description boxes) returned 7,090 videos. Resultantly, I have been selective in my choice of videos included for discussion in this chapter, although the chosen adaptations span the history of *YouTube* (2005–present), offering a broad perspective of adaptive methods and trends. This chapter does not include a discussion of amateur-shot videos of stage productions, but rather, *YouTube* uploads with varied adaptive methods and contemporised 'equivalents' and 'analogies' for the action and characters, as well as the most popular *Othello* adaptations (in terms of view counts), excluding videos that show 'actors' reading lines from a script in view of the camera, evident in "Othello High school play" (2014), to cite an example. Finally, all titles are referred to verbatim, in spite of various spelling and grammatical mistakes.

7.2. *YOUTUBE OTHELLO*S

The representation of race in *YouTube Othello*s is different to the treatment of the issue in adaptations in other media in that there are comparatively few restraints in terms of studio demands and audience expectations, as well as a lack of regulations regarding content (unless a video is flagged by another user). As a result, the adaptability of the play is unique online: *YouTube Othello*s have their own adaptive methods based on the parameters of the

platform (which, of course, can also be written of cinema and television, for example). However, like previous adaptations of the play, patterns can be observed in online *Othello*s that correspond with their predecessors across media. In "Othello Representation – 'In the eye of the enemy'" (2015), the Moor is played in blackface, albeit with a sense of comedic irony, sharply contrasting the Othello of Olivier, to cite an example. Other videos, such as "Othello Blacking Up" (2011), are seemingly unconcerned with commentary on the subject of racial mimesis: it simply features an actor being blacked-up in front of a mirror, whilst music from Verdi's opera plays non-diegetically.

Trends in other media, such as the adaptation of (and focus on) Desdemona's death, are a feature of *YouTube Othello*s, as is evident in "Othello and Desdemona (Baku, School n.70)" (2015), but markedly less so than in visual art depictions, for example. Regarding Desdemona's death not being a feature of Chinese adaptations, Thompson writes that the nationality of the adapters allows "the representatives of the silenced, the invisible, and the colonised to talk back, giving them a highly visible and autonomous existence" (346). However, this chapter will argue that the ideas explored in the scene, such as race and gender (although the latter will not be focused on, specifically), are being engaged with in an arguably problematic way in *YouTube* adaptations, even when the denouement of the play is not being adapted directly.

An observable trend in *YouTube* adaptations – as is the case in *Othello*s across media – is to contemporise the play, evident in the use of the word 'modern' in the titles of several videos, examples of which include "Modern Othello" (2010) (Emmy1216); "Modern Othello" (2014) (kenzie zimmer); and "Othello… A Modern Take" (2010). Modernising the play is synonymous in these adaptations with positioning Othello as a contemporary black (or African American) male, who also happens to be younger than Shakespeare's Moor. Regarding other representations of a specifically young Othello in these videos, "Othello: 'O'

modern adaptation" (2009) is as much an adaptation of *O* as it is of Shakespeare's play, opening with a shot of black youth pointing a gun in the direction of the camera. In fact, guns are also prevalent in "Othello VR: Subsistance" (2010), in which the play is transposed to a live action modern warfare video game platform, and in "Short Cake (Othello Adaptation)" (2014), in which Desdemona is shot and killed, as Desi is in *O*. In addition to modernising *Othello* by adapting *O*, specifically, perceptions of Blake Nelson's film are potentially affected in the process, reducing Odin to his final actions (and the stereotype he fights). This trend is also observable in "Jamal- A modern adaptation of Othello" (2012), in which the central character's name is changed – as its adaptive method and title signify – to a contemporary 'equivalent'.

"Othello's Troubling Stereotypes" (2008) is a student questionnaire, in which the interviewer asks one peer: "What stereotypes of African Americans can you think of?". This specious connection between the race issues of *Othello* and those of African Americans is symptomatic of many adaptations of the play across media in the United States. The subjects answer the question with words like 'gangs' and 'rappers'. Resultantly, it is no surprise that *Othello* has been adapted according to these stereotypes because the play has often been conflated with contemporary perceptions of 'blackness' in adaptations. Regarding Shakespeare, one interviewee responds: "Anything he has to say about race is still relevant to today", suggesting a sense of reverence to the playwright that juxtaposes the way in which his work is treated in online adaptations.

Methods of modernising *Othello* vary. "Modern Adaptation Othello Pt.1" and "Modern Adaptation Othello Pt.2" (2008) (both uploaded by the same user, Dani Emerson) transpose the play to a reality television format, as do "Othello Project Reality Show" (2014)"; "A Matter of Survival: A Thrilling Adaptation of Othello" (2014), a *Survivor* (2000–present) parody that features the previously mentioned song, "Love the Way You Lie"

by Eminem and Rihanna; and "Othello Reality TV James M" (2015). This coincides with Lanier's 'real' murder notion, albeit extended to 'reality', in general. "OTHELLO A MODERN ADAPTATION 2014" (2014) transposes the play to a British council estate setting; and the aforementioned "Modern Othello" (kenzie zimmer), a Canadian school project, emphasises contemporary language, such as the use of a phrase like 'OMG', whereas "Othello (Modern)" (2013) uses text messaging as a method of communication between Desdemona and Cassio, the captain of the football team. In fact, private messaging and social media are prevalent in many *YouTube Othello*s.[16] In videos such as "Othello, A Facebook Drama" (2010) (comprised of screenshots of private messages) and "Unfriend: an Othello Adaptation" (2013), social media serves as an equivalent for the miscommunication between the characters of the play. It also provides the comedic novelty of viewing personal *Facebook* profiles for Shakespearean characters. Ironically, evidence suggests that the most 'adaptable' aspect of *Othello* for adapters is its ability to be transposed to contemporary periods and media, despite the apparent inadaptability of its race issues.

The social media adaptive method is put into focus in "The Othello Network" (2013), a heavily intertextual video that features the type of detail often absent from the majority of online adaptations. For example, as Desdemona clicks through her *Facebook* photographs, they are, in fact, a selection of paintings of scenes from the play, such as *Othello and Desdemona in Venice* (1850) by Théodore Chassériau, and *Othello erzählt Desdemona und ihrem Vater seine Abenteuer* (1880) by Karl Becker (see fig. 7.1).

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[16] Other adaptations not discussed in this chapter that utilise modern technology include: "Iago Official Trailer #1 (2015) - Othello Adaptation" (2015), which involves promotion within *Google* rather than the Venetian army; "Othello - Modern Version | Comedy | School Project" (2014); and "Othello Trailer" (2015), which utilises the Internet and *Facebook* within its narrative.

Fig. 7.1. Jessie Trespeses. "The Othello Network". *YouTube*, 3 Mar. 2013. Author's screenshot. 25 Mar. 2015.

Additionally, later in the adaptation, Othello posts an image after murdering Desdemona; it is *Othello and Desdemona* by Alexandre-Marie Colin, a painting that illustrates the final moments of the play. "The Othello Network" is similar to adaptations across media in that it updates *Othello* in a way that befits its own cultural and medial landscapes. Equivalents are found for the action of the play, but in terms of visualising the Moor, the images presented in this adaptation are contrasting ones from paintings throughout the centuries, indicating that one of the most recent *Othello*s embraces the changeable history of depictions of the character.

The opening scene of the play is transposed to a private messaging conversation on *Facebook* in "The Othello Network", a perceived equivalent of the secrecy and privacy of the conversation between Iago and Roderigo (see fig. 7.2).

Fig. 7.2. Jessie Trespeses. "The Othello Network". *YouTube*, 3 Mar. 2013. Author's

screenshot. 25 Mar. 2015.

Other details from the play, such as locations and characters' personal and professional lives

are retained. Cassio's *Facebook* profile states: "Michael Cassio added Venetian Army to his

work (Lieutenant)". Similarly, Othello Demoor is listed as "General at Venetian Army".

However, rather than singing, "And let me the canakin clink" (II.iii.65), Cassio posts a

drunken text message on his page: "CANAKIN, CLINK, CLINK", highlighting that the

video is largely a text-based appropriation (based on its medial context) that focuses on

updating the language of the play. Illustrating the intertextuality of the video (and the

tendency to adapt the play in an irreverent, comedic manner online), Cassio's post is 'liked'

by Charlie Sheen. When Cassio regrets his actions and posts again in the morning, his words

are 'liked' by the Clown. Further intertextual allusions are made, such as Iago 'liking'

Kenneth Branagh and Lodovico confirming his attendance at Hamlet's funeral, in addition to

Cassio interacting with Romeo from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, implying that the

former is romantically interested in Juliet, making Othello suspicious in the process and

adding depth to this rendering of the story. In addition, on Iago's *Facebook* profile, Roderigo – albeit beneath the message that the camera is focused on – has posted a message pertaining to Iago the Parrot from Disney's *Aladdin* (1992), exemplifying attention to detail that is seemingly missing from the majority of *YouTube Othello*s.

Confirming the influence of Blake Nelson's film on *YouTube* adaptations, Iago refers to Othello as 'O' at one point in "The Othello Network". Analogous of *O*'s use of popular music on its soundtrack, Desdemona posts: "It's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine", the chorus lyric of the R.E.M. single of that title (1987). In this instance, a popular music lyric conveys the emotions of the character in a way that diegetic and non-diegetic soundtracks in screen *Othello*s also do. In terms of the representation of race in "The Othello Network", Brabantio asks Othello: "Are you a witch or something?". Othello responds: "Is it because I'm black?". The race issue is treated comically in a non-sequitur exchange, amalgamating imagery associated with the Moor – 'witch' is presumably a reference to the "witchcraft" used four times throughout the play[17] – with the most prevalent adaptive method employed in *YouTube* adaptations: turning tragedy into comedy.

The use of a high school setting is also evidence of *O*'s influence on *YouTube* adaptations, such as in "Othello's High School Break Up" (2012), and the aforementioned "Othello High school play". However, because the majority of these adaptations are school projects, it is difficult to prove this in the context. Additionally, in "Othello: High School Version" (2013), the influence of Parker's adaptation appears to be alluded to as characters play the *Othello* board game during a scene, mirroring the black and white chess pieces parallel that Branagh's Iago makes during a scene in the 1995 film. These parallels might suggest that Hollywood *Othello*s are not disconnected from how adapters of the United States see the play, fourteen years subsequent to its last major screen adaptation.

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[17] In I.iii.65; I.ii.170; II.iii.367; and III.iii.214.

Of the Hollywood screen adaptations, it is *O*'s influence that leaves the greatest impression on *YouTube Othello*s: "Senior Plays (Othello) Modern Remake - O'Ghetto" (2012) and "Ghetto Othello - Centaurus High School" (2013) combine a modern setting with a 'ghettoised' representation of the Moor, as hinted at in their respective titles. An emphasis on technology is evident in "Otto, a modern version of Othello" (2007), which portrays Othello being duped via social media, and in "The Secret Life of High School Othello" (2012), which features instant messaging and *Facebook* terminology to explain the plot of the play, such as: "Othello went from being 'single' to 'in a relationship'", which receives two 'likes' and renders the relationship "*Facebook* official". The reference to Othello taking Cassie (Desdemona) to Disneyland and the 'sarcasm' slogan on the t-shirt of one of the performers once again exemplifies the ways in which tragedy is inverted to comedy in *YouTube* adaptations.

"CSI: Othello" (2012) continues the trend of intertextual allusion through music, using the theme from *Mission: Impossible* (1996) to build tension throughout the adaptation. In another video, "Othello Project" (2012) (MrAwsumxD), the theme from *Pink Panther* (1963) is played as the handkerchief is stolen. The climactic scene features Iago, who has framed Cassio for murder, looking on as Othello, Brabantio (a police chief), Cassio, and Desdemona face off in a scene reminiscent of the spaghetti western genre, illustrating the influence of cinema on another medium. Additionally, in "CSI: Othello", the Moor is played by a female (who is neither black, nor male), suggesting that modern adapters realise the historically problematic representations of Othello: the obvious unreality of the casting choice illustrates a potential disconnect with past incarnations. "Othello, kinda" (2014) also features a gender reversal; the only black character is the female lead. In "Othello over Flowers" (2012), a secret agent appropriation with an entirely Asian American cast (with the exception of its Othello), the Brabantio character proclaims: "How dare you steal my

daughter away from me, you North Korean?". The irreverent tone of the video treats race in accordance with the comedic genre of the adaptation, appropriating the race issues of the play to an alterative national framework, not dissimilar to the "You Anglo shit" comment in *Omkara*. Ironically, the sense of irreverence regarding race draws attention to the issue, suggesting that it is still a taboo subject in *Othello*s, and that parodying it is the normative method on *YouTube* – and in some cases, in modern adaptations across media.

One method of modernising *Othello* is to align it with rap music, a noticeable trend that often coincides with 'ghetto' treatments of the play. This spans media, of course, and can be found in *O* (and *True Identity*, to a certain extent) and in lyrical allusions in hip-hop songs. "Asian Othello: Music Video" (2009) uses the play as a platform for its message of racial equality, in which the Black Eyed Peas' "Where is the Love" (2003) is rewritten using the plot of *Othello*. Similarly, another music video entitled "ENG-L220 Othello Adaptation Project ('Oops!... I Did It Again')" (2013) adapts the play to the music of the Britney Spears song featured in its title. This is also the case in "Othello Song Project-'Don't Stop Perceiving'" (2011), in which jealousy is the lyrical focal point of a parody of Journey's "Don't Stop Believing" (1981). Even less serious in tone is "The Story of Othello" (2010), an original rap song in which Othello is rhymed with Caramello (a chocolate bar). Its Othello is a black male with an 'Afro' hairstyle; the fact that he is romantically interested in white women is mentioned twice before the first chorus, suggesting that race is a source of humour in comedic treatments. Another contemporary R 'n' B-themed adaptation, "Othello's Syndrome Music Video" (2007), is relatively less comedic in tone, and uses the play as the influence of an original song, which is also the case in "Othello Project" (2012) (Ross Neuman) and "Eye of the Tempest (Othello Adaptation)" (2013), a song that features lines from the play, not dissimilar to allusions in popular music lyrics.

The Reduced Shakespeare Company perform the most viewed (and adapted) *Othello* rap, and there are, to date, forty uploads of either the original performance or cover versions of it on *YouTube*. The decision to adapt *Othello* in the form of a rap is further evidence of the apparent desire to tie the play with the music genre in the postmillennial period. The most viewed version and top search result is "RSC : The Othello Rap" (2006), which has 576,204 views as of 6 November 2014. Intertextual allusions to *Romeo and Juliet* can be found in the lyrics: "For never was there a story of more woe than that of Othello and his Desdemon-o", suggesting that *Othello* needs to be 'explained' by lines from another play. The song also suggests that Desdemona loves Othello for his "big sword", which may be an interpretation of part of her attraction to him, but it is certainly not the only aspect of it, which calls the 'Reduced' aspect of the company's name into question, in that the play is being changed, as well as shortened. "Iago loved Desi like Adonis loved Venus" continues the intertextuality of the piece, and the reference to Desdemona as Desi recalls Blake Nelson's movie. However, one of the performers states, before beginning the rap, that: "As you know, the part is written for a black actor". As all three are white, he apologises, but this is presumably untrue and cannot be substantiated.

One framing device specific to *YouTube Othello*s involves Lego,[18] although other adaptations using toys exist, such as "Othello: Barbie Edition" (2011). "Lego Othello Rap" (2012) is a rendition of the Othello rap featuring exaggerated non-diegetic voiceovers (Desdemona speaks entirely in falsetto, for example). Othello is not differentiated by race in this context: he is of the same yellow tone as the other Lego figurines. In actuality, the video

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[18] In addition to those discussed in this chapter, eleven Lego *Othello*s are presently on *YouTube* (as of 21 March 2015): "Lego Man Othello (Intro)" (2008); "Lego Othello - English Class" (2009), in which Othello is depicted as a Batman Lego figurine; "Lego Othello silent film" (2010), which features intertitles similar to those found in Anson Dyer's adaptation; "Othello 5.1 Lego Stop Motion" (2010), in which Othello is played by a figurine with the face of a monster, tying it to the animalistic imagery of the play; "Lego Otello" (2010); which features a non-diegetic Verdi soundtrack with no dialogue; "Othello: AUF DEUTSCH (new and remastered version)" (2012); "Othello Lego Stop Motion/ Act 2 Scene 1" (2012); "PROJECT| Lego stop motion; Othello trailer" (2014); "Lego Othello" (2014); "Othello Act V: Lego" (2014); and "Lego Stop-Motion Movie: Othello" (2015) by David Thien.

is an adaptation of "The Othello Rap" more than it is of Shakespeare's play: it changes

several of the rap's lines to include expletives and features irreverently-placed references to

popular culture through an image of Bill Cosby, for example, advertising green jelly (to

presumably represent Iago's jealousy). However, in "lego Othello" (2006), Othello is

visualised as a relatively dark-skinned figurine in a red baseball cap, which is perched atop

his head at an angle (see fig. 7.3).

Fig. 7.3. cantbeyou. "lego Othello". *YouTube*, 14 Nov. 2006. Author's screenshot. 9. Mar.

2015.

Of course, the specifically black Othello with his contemporary signifier (the baseball cap)

either proves the lasting impact of Blake Nelson's film or the desire to 'understand' *Othello*

by contemporising it.

"Othello (School Project)" (2012) and "Othello: The Betrayal (Lego Man)" (2012)

also adapt the play using Lego, and the latter uses specific modern signifiers from outside the

Lego sphere to update it, such as the placement of a Beyoncé poster in the *mise-en-scène*.

One scene features a large-scale battle sequences reminiscent of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy

(2001–3), despite the fact that neither the play text nor its film adaptations feature battle

scenes of this magnitude. The fantasy theme is continued in "Lego Othello act 5.2" (2012),

which depicts Othello in the form of a Darth Vader figurine (who threatens Desdemona with

a line about dying "by the force"), contrasted by Iago's statuette, who is stylised in a vaguely

early modern costume. In actuality, fantasy *Othello*s oppose the likes of *O*, with its

contemporising and 'ghettoising' of the play. Rather than tying the play to current events,

fantasy adaptations remove *Othello* from perceived societal 'equivalents' and 'analogies', to

a certain extent.

However, contemporising the play text is exercised in fantasy-based adaptations like

"Lego Othello act 5.2), as Othello laments: "Describe me as someone who wasn't smart

about love", a modernising of "one that loved not wisely, but too well" (V.ii.340). A

consequence of removing the words of the play is that, as Coursen points out: "Without the

words and the magnificent arc of their overreaching, no tragedy exists" (108). As a result, it

is no surprise that many *YouTube* adaptations are comedic parodies of the play. In the plot of

"Othello Pilot Episode" (2012), the play is pared down to a scenario involving a student

(Othello) getting a B-grade on a class assignment, yet he is also attempting to woo the

academically superior Desdemona, whose father does not approve of the relationship. This is

also evident in "Cyprus High School Musical Season 1 Episode 1 Pilot Cordero" (2012),[19]

another video that uses the word 'pilot' in its title, recalling the televisual format. The former

features an Asian American cast, but the adaptive methods are similar in both, suggesting that

Thompson's article on Chinese students unnecessarily narrows the field.

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[19] Two other appropriations inspired by *High School Musical* (2006) can be found on *YouTube*:
"Othello Act 4 Scene 2 highschool musical style" (2013) and "High School Musical - Othello"
(2015).

The main objective of the majority of online adapters is to find a modern setting to accommodate the action, seemingly based on images from the play. There are two videos in which *Othello* becomes a hospital drama, for example, presumably because of the allusions to "medicines" (I.iii.62) and "drugs" (I.iii.92). The influence of *O* is combined with comedy in "Othello M.D. Pilot - P4 Cordero" (2012), in which Brabantio confronts Iago outside of a hospital with an automatic weapon, illustrating the irreverence of the video through the incongruity of the workers carrying guns, and coinciding with the comedic tone of the clip. At one stage, Othello quips: "You just hate me 'cause I'm black, huh?". In actuality, the actor here is not black at all. This is compounded when Doctor Iago repeats a line from the play: "I hate the Moor" (I.iii.366 –7). Another appropriation of the play to a hospital setting is "Othello Video" (2012), in which there is debate over whether or not Doctor Othello has used drugs to affect Desdemona's emotions, corresponding with the notion of cherry-picking an idea from *Othello* and exploiting it in a way that coincides with the chosen adapted framework.

Hospital dramas tend to be associated with television – in *ER* (1994–2009) and *Scrubs* (2001–10), for example – but different media is engaged with indiscriminately when adapting *Othello* online. Although not a *YouTube Othello*, *Being Othello* (2009) is an independent short film adaptation of the play set in a psychiatric hospital, exploring the issue of mental health. One patient believes that he is Iago and reads the passage from the play regarding the "black ram" (I.i.87). As in Parker's *Othello*, chess is used as a metaphor for racial miscegenation: "What sort of game would chess be if the blacks mingled with the whites from the beginning?". Similar to the aforementioned *YouTube* adaptations, Othello is a doctor (in a mental health unit, in this case), married to the nurse, Diana (Desdemona). Another inmate is manipulated into believing that he has a chance with the nurse, romantically, and a recognisable appropriation of the play ensues. By making Iago a mentally ill patient of

Othello, the dynamic of their relationship changes radically, and an interaction with race is tempered by the fact that it becomes a secondary issue, as the Ensign in the adaptation is not of sound mind. Moreover, because this adaptive method alters *Othello* significantly, it points towards the inadaptability (and malleability, to a certain extent) of the play.

Online interactions with television shows can also be found in "That 70s Othello" (2012), in which disco music and dance-offs are used in order to resolve the conflicts of the play, creating similarities with *All Night Long* in its use of creating harmony through music, whilst also continuing the trend of comically inverting *Othello*'s narrative on *YouTube*. Several other videos transform the play into a fast-cutting secret agent drama featuring teens dressed in dark suits and sunglasses, with a reliance on technological devices to propel the action. This is evident in "C.S.I. - Othello" (2010), which uses the crime drama framework to chronologically alter the plot of the play: Desdemona's body is discovered in the opening scene, emphasising that this is a continuation of the narrative, beginning with the final scene of *Othello*. In *Storytelling across Worlds: Transmedia for Creatives and Producers* (2013), Dowd, Fry, Niedermann and Steiff state that one definition of transmedia is that a work should do more than "just adapting the same story to different media" (4). *YouTube* adaptations are undoubtedly the *Othello*s that fit this classification most consistently, exemplified by "C.S.I. - Othello", which not only modernises the play, but uses it to create a new, separate narrative.

"Agents of Venice" (2012) engages creatively with Shakespeare's language: "You can't even swat a fly" is transformed from a metaphor concerning Iago's plan to "ensnare as great a fly as Cassio" (II.i.165–6) into a belittling insult. Roderigo slays Othello in this adaptation, positioning the former as a central character in the process, perhaps because the humorous tone of the video befits focusing on his haplessness for comedic value. "Othello Class Project" (2012) mixes the play with fairy-tale elements, beginning with the voiceover:

"Once upon a time in the far-off land of Venice". The voiceover performer stops mid-sentence, audibly incredulous at beginning a modern retelling in such a fashion. Subsequently, another adaptation cliché is refuted when a book is opened before pages are skipped in accordance with the brevity of the appropriation. Other fairy-tale allusions and intertextual references (that predate the play) feature the handkerchief being replaced by a poisoned apple, as well as Othello questioning: "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, is Desdemona's heart the truest of them all?". The female Iago wears a witch's hat in this adaptation, and females play males throughout. Additionally, Cassio and Desdemona declare their love for each other, which is also the case in "Mean Girls CV: Othella Pilot" (2012), in which the story revolves around the stealing of a boyfriend, based on *Mean Girls* (2004) more than *Othello*. In this adaptation, a *Skype* conversation serves as a modernisation of the 'proof' of Desdemona's infidelity, although this trend of technological framing is also evident in *All Night Long*, in which a recording device is employed for the same purpose. Exclusively female casts are also evident in "Othella!" (2012) and "Othello Remake- 'Death by Strawberries'" (2012), which utilise voiceover and orchestral music to update *Othello* with cinematic trends, found in screen adaptations of the play.

The prevalence of linking the play to contemporary culture in *YouTube Othello*s suggests that online adaptations are representative of those of the postmillennial period across media: even though the framework changes, the methodology pervades. However, although this highlights one trend, modernising the play produces varied results that do not necessarily represent the contexts within which the adaptations are made. As of 2 July 2015, there are fifteen *Othello*/*Jersey Shore* (2009–12) mash-ups.[20] One of these reality television parodies is

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[20] "Ronnie & Sammi: A Jersey Shore Love" (2010); "cyprus shore broski" (2010); "jersey shore (Othello, jasnow)" (2011); "Othello's Shore (English Project)" (2011); "Jersey Shore Meets Othello" (2011); "Jackie's Othello Spoof - Jersey Shore" (2011); "Venice Shore: Othello Jersey Shore Parody" (2012); "Othello jersey shore" (2012); "othello jersey shore.mov" (2012); "Cordero's 1st Period English Othello Project" (2012); "Othello Act 4 Scene 2 Jersey Shore Edition" (2012); "Othello

"othello jersey shore" (2012) (Meaghan Otoole), which is symptomatic of the adaptive methods of these videos. For example, it sets the action in a gym to mirror one recurrent setting from the show. Additionally, as part of the *Jersey Shore* framing device, Desdemona is branded a "skeeze" and her death is celebrated by the rest of the characters in this adaptation, adhering to irreverent treatments of the play, whilst also parodying the perceived vapidity of the characters. Additionally, because *Jersey Shore* is not a work of fiction, amalgamating it with a play from a different culture and period confuses the Italian-Americans of the show with the Venetians of *Othello* in a tenuous manner not dissimilar to the aforementioned hospital adaptations, as well as the portrayal of Odin as a gangsta rap-inspired Moor in *O*. For example, an Italian flag is foregrounded alongside the title of the video in "Othello's Shore (English Project)" (2011). Labelling Desdemona a 'skeeze' also highlights the broad variety of readings of the play in different cultural contexts; the difference between this and the newly liberated flapper of Dyer's animated *Othello*, who survives at the climax of the film, is considerable.

Other television-inspired *Othello*s include a sports news bulletin, entitled "Shakespeare Center: Othello" (2012), which features Cassio being attacked with a knife on a basketball court, another possible allusion to *O* and its effect on *Othello* in popular culture; and "All Around The World - Episode 1 (Othello Pilot Cordero Period 2)" (2012), which transposes the play to a game show scenario and has a tenuous relationship with its 'source' through a game consisting of collecting handkerchiefs. The prevalence of gun-wielding characters is also evident in "othello:jerry springer period 1" (2012), in which Othello is played by a female in drag, sporting a baseball cap and painted moustache in order to appear as the 'trailer trash' associated with *The Jerry Springer Show* (1991–present). In this adaptation, Othello murders Desdemona and Iago slays Emilia before the former looks to the

Jersey Shore" (2012) (Roya66); "Jersey Shore-Othello" (2013); "Jersey Shore- Othello" (2014); and "Othello jersey shore" (2014) (Molly Spalding).

camera and announces: "Please, people, when you record these sad events, describe me truthfully", before shooting himself. Desdemona and Emilia both die in this video, suggesting that even though Chinese students are 'talking back', according to Thompson, gender issues (which are linked with racial ones in *Othello*) are not made unproblematic in the same way. In the aftermath of the killings, the Springer equivalent informs the audience that the guests next week will be Romeo and Juliet, demonstrating that troubled relationships are focalised in this context. In the case of the aforementioned "The Secret Life of High School Othello", the influence of television is represented by a 'next week' intertitle appearing after Othello assaults Desdemona; and in "Silent Shakespeare: Othello (English Project)" (2012), the video ends with a shot of fingers picking up a handkerchief with an intertitle stating: "Find out next time", ending on a cliff-hanger.

As well as television-inspired adaptations, many *YouTube Othello*s are filmed in the style of movie trailers.[21] "Shakespeare's Othello: A Trailer of Tragedy" (2012) announces itself as a trailer through a non-diegetic voice talking over a montage, beginning with the phrase, "This summer", notable because feature-length versions of these uploads have presumably never been made. This video is typical of the irreverent treatment of race in the majority of online adaptations, illustrated by the fact that males play females. Unlike films that feature brief interactions with *Othello*, such as *Theatre of Blood* and *Stage Beauty*, this upload does not visualise Desdemona's death scene, although it must be noted that its trailer framework might be the main reason for this. "'The Hankie' A Short film adaptation of William Shakespeare's Othello" (2012) uses a horror movie framework, not dissimilar to

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[21] This trend persists in 2015. Examining a month's worth of *Othello*-related uploads (from 19 Feb. to 19 Mar.) reveals twelve more videos with the words 'Othello' and 'trailer' in their titles (although others exist without the 'trailer' label): "Iago Official Trailer #1 (2015) - Othello Adaptation" (19 Feb.); "Othello Trailer" (22 Feb.) (Leah Moss); "Othello (2015) Trailer" (22 Feb.); "Othello Trailer EC" (22 Feb.); "Othello - Desdemona's Death - Trailer H" (2 Mar.); "Othello Teaser Trailer" (4 Mar.); "Mandy's Othello Trailer" (7 Mar.); "Othello Trailer (2015)" (8 Mar.); "The Story of Othello (Movie Trailer)" (12 Mar.); "Dherice Flowers Othello trailer with caps" (15 Mar.); "Othello Alternative Plotline Movie Trailer" (16 Mar.); and "Othello Trailer" (17 Mar.).

Theatre of Blood; "Othello Short Film Adaptation: Picture Start" (2007) is a silent adaptation that hearkens back to the earliest screen adaptations of the play in its attempt to adapt the story (or a scene from it) without the '*Othello* music'; and "Othello Act 1 Opening" (2013) is an animation, a technique that had been used previously in Serebryakov's BBC *Othello*. However, neither television nor cinema is of greater influence on *YouTube Othellos*, but they are more influential than musical or visual art depictions.

Desdemona is played by a male in the aforementioned "Othello Project" (MrAwsumxD), which features a race reversal: Othello is white and Iago is black, which is also the case in "Othello: The Betrayal (Lego Man)" and "Othelloooooooooooooooo" (2012). This might have been influenced by Jude Kelly's stage *Othello* (1997), which features an entirely African American cast, except for Patrick Stewart. Unlike Parker's *Othello*, in which the titular character is hooded upon introduction, Iago is wearing a hooded sweatshirt in "Othello Project", aligning the danger of Othello in the 1995 film with the facelessness associated with wearing a hood in the *YouTube* video. In the video, Iago shouts, "'A moor is coming! He's a savage!'". It should be stressed that a black actor is available to play the part of Othello, but the students make the decision that the black cast member should play Iago. Iago attempts to form a relationship with the viewer by looking and speaking directly towards the camera, demonstrating his guile through scenes in which he uses black and white sock puppets to foreshadow the action, adhering to the type of imagery that it negates in its casting choices.

The handling of race in "Othello Project" is unique. It is a parody of *Othello* (like many other *YouTube* versions), but its 'comedy' manifests when its initial linear narrative cuts to a scene involving a male in an ape costume abducting a blow-up doll and simulating sex with it before eventually 'killing' it (see fig. 7.4).

Fig. 7.4. MrAwsumxD. "Othello Project". *YouTube*, 8 Feb. 2012. Author's screenshot. 3 May 2012.

Tonally, the non-diegetic metal music differentiates the scene from the main plot and the viewer may be left wondering if it bears any relation to the story. However, the fact that the 'animal' smothers the doll suggests that it is adapting *Othello*. When Othello commits suicide at the end of the video, Iago desecrates his corpse with various unconventional weapons including a stool and an umbrella, heightening the irreverent tone. Thompson's suggestion (albeit in reference to a specific group of online *Othello*s) that "their performances of blackness are often regressive, limiting, and unoriginal" (352) points towards racism in *YouTube Othello*s, albeit veiled by attempted humour. Conversely, the irreverence of the ape scene could suggest that the adapters do not mean to insinuate that Othello is uncivilised or bestial; rather, their methods may be reflective of the way in which they relate (or not, as the case may be) to the race issues of the play. Even though depicting Othello as a primate may be as racist – by modern standards – as blacking up is in previous adaptations, the

representation of 'blackness' might not be entirely 'regressive' if it captures the feelings of the adapters towards the play.

7.3. CONCLUSION

Lanier's observations about the division between perceptions of 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' can be applied to *YouTube Othello*s. He writes of 'lowbrow' (although he does not condone this view) as: "aesthetically unsophisticated, disposable, immediately accessible and therefore shallow, concerned with immediate pleasures and effects, unprogressive in its politics, aimed at the lowest common denominator" (2002: 3). The prevalence of the Internet and *YouTube*'s popularity make these videos 'immediately accessible', and the 'disposable' aspect resonates because of the transient nature of *YouTube* uploads in terms of their ability to be removed due to user complaints, or for the uploader to deactivate his or her account. Arguments could also be made about their 'immediacy'; the politically 'unprogressive' adaptation of race; and questions could also be posed regarding who their target audience is (if there is one at all). However, *YouTube Othello*s have the potential to reach viewers from across the globe and their concern with 'immediate effects' offers insight into the adaptability of the play today.

In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon writes (regarding the adaptation process), that: "return need not be regression" (175). Theoretically, this may be true, but the issue is singularly complex in the case of adaptations of *YouTube Othello*s, in which 'return' normatively equates to 'regression', regardless of adapters' motives. They 'return' to the play and change it, but do not 'progress' in terms of representing race, even if many online adapters see the issue as being so alien to them that they treat it with irreverence. Concerning online adaptations by Chinese students, Thompson writes: "Shakespeare's plot of forbidden interracial love seems so foreign and dated as to be implausible" (349). Even without the lens

of analysing adaptations by Chinese students alone, this manifests in online *Othello*s in the comedic treatment of the issue. However, this does not mean that race is not a pervading issue in *YouTube Othello*s. Whether or not online adapters see race issues as 'implausible' is insignificant: avoiding it has little bearing on the adaptability of *Othello* because the play is not being fully engaged with as a result. As mentioned, in reference to user comments on *YouTube*, O'Neill point out that "the openness of online culture does not necessarily equate with an openness of attitude" (159). Without studio demands and audience concerns (relatively speaking), the 'ghetto' adaptive method and portraying Othello as an ape, to cite examples, is evidence of this.

O'Neill writes of the thin line between irony and 'disconnect' (a result of 'implausibility') in *YouTube* adaptations of *Othello* because they offer "problematic associations between blackness and violence against women" (151). These 'problematic associations' between 'blackness' and women are evident in adaptations of the play across media. However, 'disconnection' from *Othello* manifests most frequently in *YouTube* adaptations, even though it is also evident in the 'backstage narrative' films, among others. The adaptability of the play in *YouTube Othello*s is borne out of the parallels that adapters observe with their own cultures, as is often the case across media. However, because the issue of race is always changed in the process, this points towards the adaptability (or malleability) and inadaptability of the play at the same time. In addition, race is not the only issue that is either being negated or radically transformed to coincide with contemporary popular culture: language, setting, and gender, are also altered in *YouTube Othello*s.

Of course, combining the specificity of *Othello* with a relatively new adaptive platform suggests that *YouTube* adaptations offer the potential for innovative findings in the field, but this chapter has detected patterns in videos that correspond with adaptations of the play across media, and the influence of previous versions on those uploaded as recently as

2015 is a main observation of the chapter. The influence of the Internet on cinema is clear: it is now a means of viewing the latest movie trailers, for example. Online *Othello*s can comment on the relevance of the play in an immediate way that cannot be replicated by cinema. Cultural allusions in Hollywood *Othello*s have arguably been accidental in the past (in the films of Parker and Blake Nelson), but because of the possibility of instantaneous interaction with popular culture, online *Othello*s have a synergy with the modern world that gives them a unique quality among adaptations of the play. However, the apparent influence of a film like *O* – released four years prior to the birth of *YouTube* – suggests that cinema might be the most influential medium of bringing *Othello* to audiences and colouring perceptions of it, as well as the fact that the variances between adaptations from different media is not radically different when they are products of the same period and cultural context, although online versions are relatively anomalous in this regard. Whether or not *YouTube Othello*s represent a specifically online perspective (similar to how the history of Hollywood affects screen adaptations), or if they will influence adaptations across media, remains to be seen, but if they represent how potential cinemagoers 'see' *Othello*, these video uploads might have more influence than their view counts suggest, even if their content is not entirely 'new'.

8. Conclusion: *A Double Life* (1947)

The main preoccupation of this thesis has been to determine the adaptability of *Othello* by studying representations of its race issues across media, periods, and societies. *Othello* has been persistently adapted over the centuries and continues to be prevalent among adaptations of Shakespeare's work, but it is not entirely 'adaptable'. Because the issue of race is invariably changed in the adaptation process, this points towards both the adaptability and inadaptability of *Othello* at the same time. Ironically, its most inadaptable element is also its most appealing aspect for adapters: race, as is evident in the types of engagement analysed in this thesis. In addition, race is not the only issue that is being altered to coincide with contemporary cultures: language, setting and gender are also transformed. This might also be the case for adaptations of other Shakespeare plays, but there are adaptive problems that are singular to *Othello*. When the play is transposed to contemporary contexts (often featuring contemporary allusions), it frequently becomes a story of miscegenation and racism, altering *Othello* in the process. When 'fidelity' (to language, setting, characters, or even theatrical practices of Jacobean England) is exercised, other questions pertaining to commerciality and relevance may be raised, although problems regarding representations of race pervade.

The normative method of adapting *Othello* correlates with the pattern of emphasising it as a race play in adaptations (even if this manifests in tales of racial harmony), or in some cases, attempting to avoid the issue entirely, making it conspicuous by its absence. Feature-length screen adaptations tend to adhere to the binaries of attempted 'faithfulness' or modernisation, and both methods present difficulties for adapters, whereas allusions to *Othello* usually pare the Moor down to his racial identity and his 'music'. Moreover, 'faithful' adaptations involving 'white' conceptions of 'blackness', and modern adaptations – often involving the self-perpetuation of a racial stereotype – are problematic. Resultantly, the

race of the actor playing the Moor is unimportant in making *Othello* more or less adaptable. By centralising race, the conclusion of the play – its tragic denouement – does not provide a 'positive' message on the topic: racial miscegenation ends in the murder of the white female and the suicide of the black male, and relations between 'black' and 'white' remain fraught.

The fact that there have been few Hollywood adaptations of *Othello* (one of which, *O*, does not use the title and text of the play) is not necessarily evidence alone that it translates uneasily to screen. In fact, it seems to have been adapted because filmmakers believe that there are parallels between the play and contemporary societies. A potential limitation of this thesis is that there is a lack of adaptations of *Othello* within the Anglo-American gaze in 2015 in any medium other than online videos (outside of stage productions, which this thesis has largely avoided), although evidence suggests that adaptive methods will not differ greatly in the future in terms of changing the normative methods of modernising elements of the play. The central reason why the adaptations are problematic, despite their differing adaptive methods, is the treatment of race. When *Othello* is adapted, race appears to be one of the reasons why filmmakers choose to transpose the play to screen, despite the fact that it is also the central reason why it sits so uneasily in this context. In terms of acting the role, Othello is now both a 'black' and 'white' man, to update the argument of Callaghan, in that a white Jacobean conception of a black male is still evident, but the influence of black culture – however 'negative' – is pervasive, even if it is still being framed by white conceptions. Both black and white actors perpetuate stereotypes, although a white actor playing the role is perhaps overtly racist, from a visual standpoint. However, updating the play by utilising a black actor creates other problems concerning the endorsement of Othello's actions by the tragedian.

When *Othello* is adapted within one of the 'main' screen genres, such as horror (*The Flesh and Blood Show*) and the western (*Jubal*), the adaptability of the play does not seem to

be a major concern for the adapters, and the Moor is changed to fit the generic framework, whereas comedic treatments do not tend to raise race-related questions beyond one relating to inadaptability that can be exploited for comedic effect. Focusing on genre, in "Mirroring *Othello* in genre films: *A Double Life* and *Stage Beauty*" (2015), Kinga Földváry writes of the two films mentioned in her title: "I am convinced that they testify to the continuing presence of the Bard in modern (mainly popular) culture in the same way as the textually more conservative pieces, which are recognized and canonized representatives of high culture" (177). If this is indeed true (Földváry provides no evidence), this is problematic in that the *Othello*s of Welles and Parker are arguably no more 'true' to the play than the case studies focused on in her article, raising a question as to why the two adaptations are 'canonized' in light of the fact that they adapt according to their medium, period, genre, and filmmakers' intentions. All the adaptations analysed in this thesis are 'untrue' to *Othello* in some respect, although their 'infidelity' manifests in different ways, and those that use the title of the play can be misleading in their 'fidelity' to the supposed 'source' material.

In addition to the three analysed, *A Double Life*, directed by George Cukor,[22] can be considered a fourth major Hollywood *Othello*. It tells the story of an actor who plays the Moor on stage and is influenced by the character's final actions. The film utilises a white actor (Ronald Colman, who won the Academy Award for Best Actor for the role) in order to comment on the action (and the inadaptability of the play, by extension), as well as using the closing scene of *Othello* as the catalytic rising action to make the respectable thespian turn murderer. This metatextual trend of actors playing Othello within the narratives of adaptations initially manifested in the 1921 British film, *Carnival*, remade and released in the USA as *Venetian Nights* in 1931. The latter film is, according to *Walking Shadows: Shakespeare in the National Film and Television Archive* (1994), "very ponderous and plain"

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[22] Cukor had directed other literary adaptations previously, such as *Little Women* (1933), *David Copperfield* (1935), and *Romeo and Juliet* (1936).

(McKernan and Terris 121). The adaptation is not shot on location in Venice like its predecessor and repeats its racial discourse, despite being the product of a different decade. However, the 1931 remake does not interact with *Othello* as much as its antecedent. Whilst the 1921 version appropriates several scenes from the opening of the play (presumably chosen because the lines resonate within the context of the 'backstage narrative'), the remake replaces these with Desdemona's "Willow Song", potentially illustrating one of the differences between silent and sound interaction with Shakespeare, rather than anything specific concerning the adaptability of *Othello*. Silvio, the actor who plays Othello, is in character (and blackface) for a short amount of his screen time. However, he does not enjoy playing the role of the Moor because it disturbs him. Similarly, as mentioned previously, in *A Double Life*, Anthony John (known as Tony) admits, "Some parts give me the willies – on stage and off". Like Silvio, Tony is disturbed by the role, a comment, perhaps, on how *Othello* is incongruent in the twentieth and twenty-first century, ironically contradicted by the fact that it is being interacted with to the extent that it influences the actions of the central characters in these films.

Lanier devotes a paragraph to *A Double Life* in *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture*, highlighting the "class status of the upwardly mobile American male", evident in the division in Tony's character, exemplified by the fact that his devotion to his wife Brita is undermined by his sexual desire for a waitress named Pat, "who is one step away from prostitution and squalor" (67). Although Lanier contends that this coincides with Tony's transformation into Othello, he does not discuss it as a racial issue, even though it may be implicit in his argument. It is after Tony, as Othello, utters: "Haply for I am black" (III.iii.267) that he visits Pat one evening in a New York neighbourhood. Lanier continues by deliberating the division in Tony as "insecurities about his urbane public image" and the "uncivilzed lower-class impulses he cannot fully suppress" (67). Lanier focuses on the fact

that it is Tony's class, rather than his racial transformation, that underlies the change.

However, on the subject of race and class in the United States, John L. Jackson Jr writes: "race and class are mutually constitutive social facts". He continues: "race, like class, is said to be expressed through behavioral differences that are loaded down with racial significances" (227). The fact that Tony makes the statement: "Haply for I am black" immediately before murdering Pat suggests a significant change in character brought on by his transformation into Othello, indicating that the behavioural difference is motivated by racial difference.[23]

Resultantly, a visible change comes over the actor when he is applying his make-up, underlining the fact that blackface is one of the most significant differences between Tony and Othello. Shots of the actor 'blacking up' seem to have been chosen to represent his descent into jealousy and 'blackness' (of character, as well as literal blackness). However, to read Othello from a Freudian perspective, the character can be seen as self-loathing. For example, one could argue that the Moor displaces his hatred of himself onto Desdemona. In the case of Tony, his self-loathing manifests when playing the Moor, blaming the character for the actor's personal issues. If Othello 'projects' his own desire to die onto Desdemona – arguably borne out of his Otherness – Tony wants his previous role as Othello to 'die' – but it does not: he 'regresses' to playing the Moor and murders Pat, tying the actor to the character in a way that is validated by the recurrent use of mirrors in the film, especially when Tony is observing himself as Othello. However, whether or not Tony simply wants Othello to die, or if the Moor is a veneer for the reawakening of actor's own latent murderous tendencies is

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[23] However, the association of Othello's blackness with animalistic and violent tendencies would, perhaps, not be so disturbing to an audience accustomed to racial segregation. In 1947 (the year in which *A Double Life* was released), the first African American news correspond (Percival Prattis) was allowed into the press galleries of the United States House of Representatives and Senate, and Jackie Robinson became the first African American since the 1880s to play Major League Baseball. Resultantly, the racial discourse of Cukor's film may have been influenced by segregation specific to 1940s America.

debatable, although Othello still serves as a metaphor for 'regressing' to animalism, regardless.

When he applies the make-up and becomes Othello, Tony develops murderous thoughts, not dissimilar to the type of deterioration evident in a horror film like the aforementioned *The Wolf Man*, in which the eponymous character 'regresses' to animal form before killing. In fact, in the play, Othello talks of how the "very error of the moon" (V.ii.108) can change a man's way of thinking, making a connection between the Moon and madness, which is, of course, prevalent in werewolf movies, wherein the full Moon invokes transformation. Although the context is different, this type of imagery is continued in *A Double Life*, as Tony's wife Brita (who plays Desdemona in the production within the narrative) states that she has grown used to "running after" Tony while he chases the Moon.[24] Outside of potential cinematic influences, 1947 was also the beginning of McCarthyism and the division between the United States Government (and the House of Representatives, who voted to approve citations against filmmakers who refused to cooperate with the government regarding the influence of communism in Hollywood) and cinema (and adapters of *Othello*, by extension, such as Welles). Additionally, the tying of 'real murder' and the film industry also manifested in 1947 in the Black Dahlia murder case, in which aspiring actress Elizabeth Short was mysteriously killed. In adaptations, one may argue that *Othello* has served as a vehicle for social commentary in that the veneer of the play makes contemporary parallels secondary to the 'source' material. In reference to Rouben Mamoulian's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), Cartmell writes of how the "literariness" of the film "was seen as a way of justifying what would otherwise be censored" (2015: 91). By extension, the 'literariness' – or, in this case, the 'high cultural' esteem – of *Othello* may be seen as justification for Tony's

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[24] The word 'moon' etymologically derives from the Old English word, 'mona'.

actions under the influence of the Moor, due to the reverence with which Shakespeare is held in the film.

Regarding cinematic additions to literary 'sources', a division similar to Tony's is evident in Mamoulian's film, in which the duality of the central character also manifests in the addition of two female character (Muriel, Jekyll's fiancée, and Ivy, the lower-class seductress and implied prostitute, who, like Pat, is murdered by the 'transformed' character), who mirror the respectable, 'civilised' man and his primal 'animalistic' side. As with Shakespeare's *Othello*, this dynamic involving literal transformation is not evident in Robert Louis Stevenson's novella (1886), but rather, in adaptations of it. In fact, the additions complicate the potentiality of racial miscegenation in these adaptations: both Othello and Hyde are positioned as racial Others, evident in the use of blackface and apelike make-up techniques, respectively. In contrast with Mamoulian's film, in which Jekyll's face is aglow with white light after transforming back from Hyde upon his death, a dark shadow is cast over Tony's visage in the closing scene: he is not 'forgiven' and dies in blackface as the curtain closes.

One of Tony's problems with the role is that he has to make someone else's words his own, but this is one of the central abilities that an actor must possess; therefore, it is *Othello*, specifically, that he has difficulty with. In contrast with his scenes as the Moor, Tony is "outwardly gentlemanly" (McKernan and Terris 123), which serves to intensify the negative aspects of Othello after the transformation. Additionally, Desdemona's death is the only scene from the play that is acted out in the movie, further emphasising the projection of the negative aspects of *Othello*/Othello. The film begins with the adaptation cliché of a rising curtain before the camera moves to the Broadway streets, which also highlights the theme of duality: the refinement of the 'high cultural' medium against the modern New York cityscape, whilst also creating a parallel between Jacobean London and twentieth-century

New York through the association with the theatre. The adaptation clichés endure as the camera directs the viewer to a painting of a formally dressed Tony as classical music plays in allegro, which slows to adagio as we see a figure dressed in fedora and mackintosh observing the painting. Again, duality is focalised here: the man is revealed to be Tony, looking dishevelled, underscoring the separation between his professional and private lives at this point.

Tony turns to observe a bust in his own image as a group of female fans admire him, positioning him as a celebrity. As he walks out onto the busy streets, an off-camera male voice proclaims: "What a great guy!". Repeating a similar sentiment in an interior office setting, Tony's agent reminds the audience that his client is "a great actor". The agent continues: "You've got a responsibility. You can't stop, you can't limit yourself". The agent's suggestion to avoid limitation is that Tony play Othello on stage. Tony's reaction is framed in a medium shot to emphasise his eyes, which dart from side-to-side before he laughs at the proposal. The agent then reminds Tony about the latter's idea for changing the ending of the play, "where you strangle Desdemona with a kiss". From this, we may deduce that Othello is not only a 'challenging' role, but also one that can be 'changed', perhaps as a result of this. The emphasis on *Othello* in the narrative is magnified when a producer, Victor, enters the office, bringing with him a hardbound book detailing a new project for Shakespeare's play, which is centralised in a close-up shot. Tony's response to the project is: "I got a feeling it isn't the sort of thing I *ought* to do – great or no". When Tony leaves the room, Victor explains that acting is not a 'talent' for some: "When you do it like Tony does, it's much more – the way he has of becoming someone else every night – for just a few hours – so completely. No, don't me tell that his whole system isn't affected by it". Victor is speaking generally here, but the gravitas of his statement clearly coincides with a tonal change in the film (and a change in Tony) when *Othello* is introduced.

In a subsequent scene, a copy of the play text, some sketches of the final scene, and the bound script are focalised in close-up, complying with the adaptation cliché of emphasising the written word (with the word 'murder' capitalised), before cutting to another close-up shot concerning Othello's make-up, specifically (see figs 8.1 and 8.2).

Figs 8.1 and 8.2. *A Double Life*. Dir. George Cukor. 1947. Sky Cinema, 2003. Author's screenshots. 5 Jan. 2015.

In conjunction with this, Tony speaks the line from the play regarding the "green-eyed monster" (III.iii.168) before turning off the light in the room, representing the motif of duality, but also serving as a visual equivalent of Othello's "Put out the light, and then put out the light!" (V.ii.7). It is at this point, before murdering Pat, that Tony states: "Haply for I am black". To return to a point raised in the Introduction, this is significant in that it adapts the Shakespearean conception of 'blackness', according to Fernie, which is associated with "animalism, mortality and sinfulness" (171). To address another question posed in the Introduction of the thesis, the play may be incompatible with cinema, to a certain extent, but it is not true that the only way to engage with *Othello* is to have an actor questioning it in a metatextual manner. In fact, in *A Double Life*, Tony is not critical of the play: it is held with such reverence that it is the catalyst for the actor to commit murder.

In "Murdering *Othello*", Lanier believes that *A Double Life* "offers the most thorough consideration of the vexed authority of Shakespearean theater in the cinematic age" (207). However, the film's adherence to the outcome of the play – the death of the main character and his mistress (rather than his wife) – contradicts this. Additionally, its use of adaptation clichés and the parasitical way in which it cites the theatre (as well as lines and images from the play) solidifies its reverential treatment of *Othello*. One of the central reasons why *A Double Life* can be considered an adaptation of *Othello* is that, even when the play is not being adapted within the narrative, Tony makes references to it. He speaks of being 'away' in Venice, and meets his extramarital love interest in an Italian restaurant, wherein she lights his cigarette with a candle. Subsequently, Pat asks Tony: "Wanna put out the light?". This not only foreshadows her death, but it also illustrates how the film interacts with *Othello*, even when it seems to be creating its own story. When Pat leaves his table, Tony repeats a line from the play about being a "toad in a dungeon" (III.iii.274–5). Again, Tony's 'outwardly gentlemanly' appearance is contrasted with the 'animalistic' imagery associated with *Othello*/Othello. Later, on the subject of Pat's death, a doctor "likened the crime to the death of Desdemona in a current Broadway production of Othello. That's not dignity?". At the hands of Tony, Pat's death is compared to 'high art'.

In another instance of adhering to adaptation clichés, the written word is emphasised in the film through close-up shots of newspaper headlines. Additionally, there are two shots of billboards, both of which inform the viewer of the popularity of this production of *Othello*, which we are told is now running for its second year. Newspaper clippings are also featured, a result of the fact that a reporter is trying to uncover what happened to Pat, the murdered waitress. One investigative journalist tells another that Othello is worth more "off the theatre page. Front page is even better". This confirms Lanier's conception of the engagement between the play and 'real murder', suggesting that, in adaptations, *Othello* is often aligned

with 'reality', even though it might be becoming increasingly distanced from it. Another headline within the film, "Apprehend Killer in 'Othello Murder'", resembles one from the July 1995 issue of *Los Angeles* magazine: "'They murder. And afterward, they don't feel very bad. Welcome to the Othello syndrome'" (Hunt 1999: 33). The 'real murder' concept can be extended to subsequent 'faithful' adaptations (those which use its title and play text, for example), which often link *Othello* with 'real murder' through parallels with contemporary societal issues, regardless of whether they are intentional or not, tying the earliest adaptations of the play in Hollywood with its most recent ones in a linear thematic thread, as mentioned previously. As has been expounded, others have illustrated the parallels between *Othello* and 'real murder' in early and relatively modern adaptations separately, but none have observed this continued trajectory.

When Tony transforms into Othello for the first time (after the audience has been informed of the effect it could have on the actor), we watch Desdemona's death scene. Concurrently, Tony remarks on the action non-diegetically, illustrating that, even in 1947, commenting on *Othello* in light of its arguable inadaptability is apparent. Tony draws attention to the fact that the scene is an act: "You look out at the audience, a terrifying monster with a thousand heads". Iago is not acknowledged in the film, confirming that it is the actions of Othello (rather than the Ensign's plot) that influences not only Tony, but it is also the main attraction of the play to the filmmakers. It may be argued that both Tony and the filmmakers consider Shakespeare to be a "powerful cultural institution" (Holderness 2001: ix). However, *Othello* is also the catalyst for the actor's descent into adultery, murder, and suicide. Like Othello, Tony stabs himself and dies offstage – the significance being that it again ties the play with 'real murder'.

Tony struggles with his identity throughout the film. For example, Pat asks: "What's your name?", Tony replies: "Which one?". He continues: "If I could find out who I am I'd be

a happy man". He then talks of ambiguity concerning his nationality (presumably a reference to playing characters from different countries): "I'm French and Russian and English and Norwegian". Again, he may be referring to his profession as an actor here, but it does coincide with playing Othello. As a result, this parallels the fact that Othello can be interpreted in different ways, such as the North African 'Turbaned Turk' or the white conception of 'blackness' that has manifested in representations of the character from eighteenth-century paintings to cinematic and online visualisations (regardless of the race of the actor). Tony's statement reflects – intentionally or not – the fact that Othello has not only been both 'black' and 'white', historically, but also that the character has been adapted across the world.

In another scene, Tony is seen acting on stage in a crowd-pleasing comedy. The camera is placed in the audience, as it is in Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* (1944), arguably to draw cultural prestige from the anterior medium, but also to either make the viewer 'see' the character in the same way that the stage audience does, or conversely, to place the viewer as a complicit partner to Tony, aware of his 'offstage' feelings, unlike the on-screen spectators. Additionally, like Olivier, Cukor shows the viewer the backstage preparations for the production. When Tony tells his wife that he wants to reprise his role as Othello in what she refers to as one of Shakespeare's "deep numbers", Brita questions: "Oh dear, is that on again?". This sense of fear is expounded by her proclamation: "I know if we ever got mixed up in an *Othello* kind of thing, it would be the end". Through this statement, the play is distanced from the narrative, but it eventually engulfs it. The popularity of the device in screen adaptations suggests that *Othello* is at odds with the twentieth-century: by grounding it in a contemporary framework, the play is made 'believable' for audiences today. In this type of engagement with the play, Othello serves as a vehicle to represent the 'dark' side of otherwise 'good' men, rather than their 'natural' character. Masking *Othello* in this way

points towards its inadaptability, but the influence of it on the characters and the narratives of these adaptations (especially towards the end of the films) suggests otherwise.

In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon states:

> An adaptation is not vampiric: it does not draw the lifeblood from its source and leave it dying or dead, nor is it paler than the adapted work. It may, on the contrary, keep that prior work alive and giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise. (176)

In the case of adaptations of *Othello*, this is both true and false. In addition to *A Double Life*, Nunn's *Othello* derives from – and is 'parasitical' of – the stage and Shakespeare in its obviously theatrical *mise-en-scène*, whereas Blake Nelson's *O* is 'vampiric' to a lesser extent, but it is difficult to distinguish whether one film keeps the prior work alive more than the other. It is relatively true that *O* does not 'draw the lifeblood' from *Othello*, leaving it 'dying or dead' (regardless of how difficult such terms are to qualify), but in 'keeping it alive', it creates its own problems through its appropriation of the play to contemporary American society, influencing popular culture adaptations in other media. However, it does perpetuate the same racial stereotypes of the play, albeit with a black actor. Moreover, adaptations of *Othello* across media, periods, and countries have also provided 'lifeblood' to a play that is 'dead' with regards to contemporary understandings of race.

*Othello*s outside the Anglo-American sphere verify that complications exist in all adaptations of the play, regardless of the country in which it is produced and performed. Anglo-American versions tend to 'update' the play, but this is no different than Japanese and Indian adaptations transposing it to the cultures of their respective countries. Additionally, early silent adaptations from Italy and Germany negate the play text as a result of the

limitations of cinema during the period, but the focalisation of the image of the Moor adheres to the white conception of 'blackness' that manifests later in sound *Othello*s from within the Anglo-American sphere. The image of Othello can also be divided into binary opposites: the 'soulful' Moor, often in blackface and to be sympathised with; and the animalistic Moor, played by both black and white actors.

*Othello*s outside of screen adaptation differ in their treatments of the play, a result of the fact that the relationships are more varied, although many of the outcomes are similar regarding representations of race, such as soundtracks for screen adaptations perpetuating a racial stereotype through tribal drumming in Parker's adaptation, for example. However, lyrical references usually say more about the musical artists than they do about *Othello*/Othello, but they also reveal how both are 'seen' and 'heard', potentially influenced by soundtracks in cinematic adaptations. The titular character is as prevalent in lyrical allusions as the play is, and references do not seem to reflect a change in attitudes towards *Othello* that is specific to the form; rather, they have a similar discourse to its film adaptations, albeit without national and chronological diversity, as most of the lyrical interactions examined are of late twentieth- and early twenty-first century Anglo-American origin, as mentioned. Reasons for allusions to the play in popular music lyrics may either be to compare oneself with Othello as a 'successful' black man (as is evident in hip-hop music references), or to align the lyricist/singer with Shakespeare (and perhaps 'high culture') through the quotation of lines from the play text, suggesting a difference in engagements between white and black artists' interactions with the play, albeit based on few case studies.

When the play is adapted in music and in the form of online videos, the adaptive method does not change: the story of *Othello* in shorthand is either one of interracial love or racism, heightened by cinema's influential yet problematic past, as well as the fallout from the 'ghetto blackness' of Fishburne, and subsequently, Phifer. One may assume that race

issues can be negated in limited interactions with the play, but shorthand signifiers regarding Othello's race (and his 'music', to a lesser extent) seem to point towards the opposite. Without question, *YouTube* is the environment in which *Othello* is most prevalent at present. Online adaptations illustrate contemporary attitudes towards the play, without the filter of Hollywood 'rules' regarding audience and genre concerns, as well as politically correct representations of race and gender. *YouTube* adaptations tend to either parody *Othello*/Othello (because of their seeming incongruity with the modern world) or treat them with a seemingly regressive racial attitude, perhaps borne out of a lack of culpability for one's actions online when compared with cinema, for example. Whether or not these adaptive methods represent a specifically online perspective (similar to how the history of Hollywood affects screen adaptations) is difficult to determine in light of the fact that there has not been a cinematic adaptation of the play in over a decade.

This thesis has operated under imposed limitations in order to make a concise statement on the adaptability of *Othello* and its race issues, such as not including stage productions for discussion, for the most part. It has focused on representations of the titular character more than it has on Iago and Desdemona, for example, with the exception of circumstances in which they reveal aspects of the racial discourses of adaptations. The previous three chapters have focused on proportionately more *Othello*s than the three that precede them in order to comprehensively chart adaptations that have not been discussed previously, observing patterns as well as contemporary attitudes towards the play. Additionally, adapting *Othello* is more prevalent since the conception of cinema, and as such, this thesis has primarily focused on twentieth- and twenty-first-century adaptations, with particular emphasis on how the most recent adaptations are informed by earlier ones, concluding that the influence of previous adaptations is substantial.

However, the time period in which online adaptations were studied was not limited in terms of uploading dates: all of the adaptations looked at span the history of *YouTube*, offering a broad perspective on online *Othello*s. On 2 December 2014, the popular *Thug Notes* series on *YouTube* uploaded its crib notes *Othello* video: "Othello (Shakespeare) – Thug Notes Summary & Analysis". On the viewing date (4 January 2015), the video had already amassed 53,801 views. The stereotypically 'ghetto' presenter/teacher (sporting a skullcap and gold chain) narrates the story in 'urban' vernacular for comedic effect. After describing the gender-related violence of the play, he asks: "Damn, what is this, the NFL?". This is presumably a reference to the American football player, Ray Rice, who was filmed physically assaulting his wife in an elevator on 15 February 2014, adhering to the pattern of tying the play to contemporary – albeit largely unrelated – issues. In his analysis of the play, the narrator refers to Desdemona as 'Desi' (perhaps showing the influence of Blake Nelson's *O*) and a cut-out photograph of Othello depicts the character as a contemporarily-styled black male who refers to his wife using the epithet: 'bitch'. In fact, this treatment is not dissimilar to the racial discourse of Blake Nelson's film, which might suggest that perceptions of *Othello* and its relationship with race have not changed since the last major Hollywood adaptation fourteen years previously.

As mentioned, Stam refers to adaptation as an "ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transmutation, with no clear point of origin" (2000: 66). Even though *Othello* has its origins in earlier works, it would seem that Shakespeare's status as what Holderness calls a "cultural phenomenon" (1994: 211) means that he is the 'source' (or hypotext) for all adaptations of the play. However, in adaptations, it is becoming increasingly the case that there is no 'real' Othello, despite what Eamonn Walker insinuated. To consider 'faithful' productions on stage or screen to be 'real' ones may be naïve in that those which have reached the widest audience (Hollywood adaptations, in particular) have changed what

Othello (and indeed, Othello) is, proof of which can be found in adaptations across media, which often eliminate the '*Othello* music' and pare the Moor down to his visual image and final actions. *Othello* has changed – not the play text – but the ways in which it is treated in adaptations. Outside of adaptation studies, Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author" (1967) puts forward the idea that to give a work one author and one meaning is to set unnecessary and erroneous boundaries on it. In the case of *Othello*, this has arguably proven to be damaging. Of course, it is difficult to assign 'ownership' of *Othello* to any author other than Shakespeare, proof of which lies in the acknowledgement of the playwright in the majority of adaptations. However, the likes of Parker and Blake Nelson (and their respective collaborators) can now be considered co-authors of the play in adaptations, influencing subsequent versions in a manner comparable to *Omkara*'s influence on the aforementioned "Shadow of Othello (Hindi Play)". In this regard, Shakespeare's 'ownership' of the play has been removed: Othello is now both 'black' and 'white' today, Western and Eastern, as well as being both Jacobean and a product of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, to a certain extent.

By collating and critically examining adaptations of *Othello* across media, periods, societies and cultures (the scope of which has not been undertaken previously), one contribution to existing knowledge in this thesis is that the adaptability of the play and its race issues are problematic regardless of these contexts, even when adaptive methods differ. There is no medium, period, society or culture in which *Othello* is most adaptable: it is – in part, at least – a product of the world in which it was first performed. The panoramic scope of *Othello* adaptations can be explained, to a certain extent, by Hutcheon's explanation of the appeal of adaptations for audiences, which she claims lies in "their mixture of repetition and difference, of familiarity and novelty" (114). The problem with this statement with regards to *Othello*, however, is that regardless of 'repetition' and 'difference', the inadaptability of the

play permeates both 'faithful' and 'unfaithful' adaptations. Moreover, the 'familiarity' of *Othello* is formed by previous adaptations, which are products of the societies in which they were produced. In other words, Mekhi Phifer's Odin might be channelling Laurence Fishburne's Othello and the racial dynamics of Parker's film as well as those of its own period, creating a palimpsestuous relationship with *Othello* in which adaptations are not only influenced by the societies and media in which the play has been adapted, but also by other adaptations.

In "On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and 'Success'—Biologically" (2007), Gary R Bortolotti and Hutcheon state the following:

> When an environment changes in one particular identifiable direction, then we expect the former, as adaptations move toward a new cultural norm: for example, what was a minor terrorist subplot might shift to center stage after 9/11. In cultural terms, we could think of mutation, that is, any change in a narrative, in exactly these terms: if a musical theater adaptation of a film were to change the protagonist's nationality from Italian to French, the change might be viewed as beneficial in one culture (perhaps, French) but deleterious in another (Italian); yet it might not matter at all in yet another (Chinese). For instance, the musical might also change the color of the protagonist's shoes. When that color is without symbolic or narrative value, the change is *not* adaptive; in biological terminology, it is neutral with respect to selection. But if we are adapting the movie called *The Red Shoes*, any such change is significant in that it has the potential to be selected *for* or *against*. What we then end up with is the product of

cultural selection; what have survived are mutations that allow the

story to better fit (adapt to) its culture or environment. A potential

problem in the study of adaptation (and adaptations) is not realizing

that what we end up seeing are the survivors. Failed attempts are

eliminated in both biology and culture. (449)

This raises several questions that this thesis has endeavoured to answer. Firstly, has race

become the cynosure of adaptations of *Othello* over time? In the first section of his

Introduction to the Oxford edition of the play, Michael Neill addresses early receptions of

Othello, focusing on how early critics and theatregoers did not see race as a notable issue in

the play, instead focusing on jealousy. Neill confirms: "the most striking thing about the very

earliest responses to the tragedy is that they pay no attention to what, from a modern

perspective, seems its most conspicuous feature—the interracial love affair at the centre of

the action" (1). He then concludes that race "would have caused little demur before the last

third of the twentieth century" (2). However, race is an issue in the play, and a black Othello

can be seen in paintings of the character from previous centuries, and has certainly been a

device used to portray the Moor in a particular manner that coincides with society since the

conception of cinema, evident in the minstrel of Dyer's adaptation. A second question that

Bortolotti and Hutcheon's article raises is: what do audiences expect from an adaptation of

the play? Beyond signifiers that the adaptation is 'authored' – in part, at least – by

Shakespeare, many *Othello*s tie the play to contemporary times, 'representing' the specific

cultural issues of the contexts in which it is adapted.

Thirdly, what has 'failed' in adaptations of *Othello*? The obvious answer to this is

Othello in blackface, which is now evidently retrograde, as well as being overtly racist by

modern standards. As a result, the 'mutant' adaptations – those which have survived 'cultural

selection' – are both new and old, hybridisations that make *Othello* sit uncomfortably in adaptations across media, in spite of the fact that the play has consistently 'evolved', a result of the demands and normative adaptive methods of the media in which it is presented; reactions to treatments from various periods and national contexts; and lastly, the ways in which adapters 'see' *Othello*/Othello. Regarding whether or not these 'failures' can be reversed, evidence suggests that this is unlikely: the history of *Othello* adaptations does not indicate substantial change, nor does the media in which the play is placed alter its adaptability significantly. Finally, then, *Othello*'s race issues have proven to be inadaptable in adaptations, to a certain extent, specifically when they are tied (through various methods) to the periods in which they are placed, changing them in the process.

Appendix A: Adaptations of *Othello*

Listed is a compendium of adaptations of *Othello* (grouped by their respective media, and then chronologically), with the exception of stage productions and others that have not been distributed for commercial or online release (which, resultantly, have not been considered for discussion in the thesis). In addition, only adaptations of the play – rather than allusions to it – have been included due to the impossibility of listing (and indeed, comprehensively charting) references in lines of literary texts and song lyrics, for example. As mentioned in the chapter, "'With as little a web as this' (II.i.168–9): Ensnaring *Othello* in *YouTube* Adaptations", the continuous uploading of new videos based on *Othello* (as well as the 206,000 search results for "Othello" as of 21 March 2015, and the 7,090 results for a more specific search like "Othello school project") has contributed to the listing of the adaptations referenced in this thesis only, including the most popular versions (in terms of view counts) and those which represent relevant patterns in treatments of the play with regards to my topic.

CINEMATIC ADAPTATIONS

Title	Year	Director	Country
Othello	1908	William V. Ranous	Austria
Othello/Le More de Venise	1909	Ugo Felena	Italy
For Åbent Taeppe/Desdemona	1911	August Blom	Denmark
The Mad Lover/A Modern Othello	1917	Léonce Perret	United States of America
Othello	1920	Anson Dyer	United Kingdom
Carnival	1921	Harley Knoles	United Kingdom
Othello	1922	Dimitri Buchowetzki	Germany
Otello	1930	John Iraci	Italy
Carnival/Venetian Nights	1931	Herbert Wilcox	United Kingdom
Men are Not Gods	1936	Walter Reisch	United Kingdom
East of Piccadilly/The Strangler	1941	Harold Huth	United Kingdom
"The Volunteer"	1944	Michael Powell and Emeric	United Kingdom

		Pressburger	
Othello	1946	David McKane	United Kingdom
A Double Life	1947	George Cukor	United States of America
Il peccato di Anna	1952	Camillo Mastrocinque	Italy
Othello	1952	Orson Welles	United States of America
The World's a Stage	1953	Charles Deane	United Kingdom
Othello	1955	Sergei Yutkevich	Soviet Union
Jubal	1956	Delmer Daves	United States of America
Othello	1965	Stuart Burge	United Kingdom
Capriccio all'italiana	1968	Pier Paolo Pasolini	Italy
The Flesh and Blood Show	1972	Pete Walker	United Kingdom
Theatre of Blood	1973	Douglas Hickox	United Kingdom
Othello	1980	Liz White	United States of America
Otelo de Oliveira	1983	Afonso Grisolli	Brazil
Othello	1989	Ted Lange	United States of America
Un histoire inventée	1990	Andre Forciér	Canada
True Identity	1991	Charles Lane	United States of America
Othello	1995	Oliver Parker	United States of America
Kaliyattam	1997	Jayaraaj	Malaysia
O	2001	Tim Blake Nelson	United States of America
In Othello	2003	Roysten Abel	United Kingdom
Souli	2004	Alexander Abela	Madagascar
Stage Beauty	2004	Richard Eyre	United Kingdom
Omkara	2006	Vishal Bhardwaj	India
Jarum Halus	2008	Mark Tan	Malaysia
Othello: The Tragedy of the Moor	2008	Zaibh Shaikh	Canada
Hrid Majharey	2014	Ranjan Ghosh	India

TELEVISUAL AND RADIO ADAPTATIONS

Title	Year	Director	Channel/Station	Country
Othello	1937	George More O'Ferrall	BBC	United Kingdom
Othello	1950	Georges Neveux	BBC	United Kingdom
Othello	1950	George More O'Ferrall	BBC	United Kingdom
Othello	1955	Tony Richardson	BBC	United Kingdom
"Othello". *I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue*	1967	Unknown	BBC Radio	United Kingdom

"Lamont as Othello". *Sanford and Sons*	1973	Peter Baldwin	NBC	United States of America
Othello	1981	Jonathan Miller	BBC	United Kingdom
"The Strike". *Fame*	1982	Thomas Carter	NBC	United States of America
"Homicidal Ham". *Cheers*	1983	James Burrows	NBC	United States of America
Othello	1988	Janet Suzman	Channel 4	United Kingdom
The Animated Shakespeare: Othello	1992	Nikolai Serebryakov	BBC	United Kingdom
Othello	2001	Geoffrey Sax	ITV	United Kingdom

THEATRE PRODUCTIONS RECORDED FOR DVD OR ONLINE DISTRIBUTION

Title	Year	Director	Distributor/Website	Country
Othello	1996	Ruszt József	*YouTube*	Hungary
Desdemona	2000	Ong Keng Sen	*Global Shakespeares*	Singapore
Doditello	2001	Sameh Mahran	*Global Shakespeares*	Egypt
Othello	2005	Satoshi Miyagi	*Global Shakespeares*	Japan
Othello	2006	Daniel Herz	*Global Shakespeares*	Brazil
Othello	2007	Ângelo Brandini	*Global Shakespeares*	Brazil
Othello	2007	Wilson Milam	Heritage Theatre Ltd	United Kingdom
Otelo	2009	Claudia Rios	*Global Shakespeares*	Mexico
Othellos	2010	Nikos Charalambous	*Global Shakespeares*	Greece
Otel•lo	2013	Hammudi Al-Rahmoun Font	Escamdalo Films	Spain

VISUAL ART *OTHELLO*S

Title	Artist	Format	Year
Mr Pope as Othello	Unknown	Engraving	Late eighteenth century
Othello and Desdemona	William Blake	Watercolour	*c*. 1780
Othello and Desdemona, act V, sc. 2	Angelica Kauffmann	Engraving	1783
Desdemona	Henry Singleton	Engraving	1792
Cassio	Henry Singleton	Sepia engraving	1793
Iago	Henry Singleton	Sepia engraving	1793
Act IV, Scene 1	Henry Singleton	Engraving	1793
Act V, Scene 2	Henry Singleton	Sepia engraving	1793
Roderigo	Henry Singleton	Sepia engraving	1793
Yet I'll not shed her blood; nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow.	Henry Singleton	Sepia engraving	1793
Othello: Act 1, Scene 4	John Thurston	Engraving	1798
A bedchamber, Desdemona in bed asleep	John Graham	Engraving	1799
Act V, Scene II	John Graham	Engraving	1799

The Returning of Othello	Thomas Stothard	Oil	*c*. 1799
Othello, Act 3, Sc. 4	Joseph Kenny Meadows	Engraving	Nineteenth century
Othello et Desdemona	François Nicolas Chifflart	Engraving	Nineteenth century
Edwin Booth as Othello	Unknown	Engraving	Nineteenth century
Mr C Kemble as Othello	Unknown	Lithograph	Nineteenth century
Mr Charles Dillon as Othello	Unknown	Engraving	Nineteenth century
Othello and Desdemona	Adolphe Weisz	Oil	Nineteenth century
Othello: Othello, Desdemona asleep, act V, scene II	Josiah Boydell	Engraving	Early to mid nineteenth century
Othello & Desdemona (Othello, act II, sc. 1)	Henry Liverseege	Engraving	Early to mid nineteenth century
Othello. Act 4, Scene 2: An Apartment in the Castle, Desdemona & Othello	RK Porter	Painting	1801
The Murder of Desdemona	Ferdinand Piloty	Photomechanical Print	*c*. 1803
Othello: Alas, the heavy day! ... (Act 4, Scene 2)	John Thurston	Engraving	1815
Mr M'Kean as Othello	Charles Tompkins	Etching	1818
Mr M'Kean as Othello	JW Gear	Lithograph	Early to mid-nineteenth century
Othello: Act 5, Scene 2	James Neagle	Engraving	1823
Othello	William Say	Mezzotint	1825–34
Othello, the Moor of Venice	James Northcote	Oil	1826
Otello and Desdemona	Alexandre-Marie Colin	Oil	1829
Ira Aldridge as Othello	Henry Perronet Briggs	Oil	*c*. 1830
Othello	William Mulready	Oil	*c*. 1840
Emilia, Othello and Desdemona (Act 5, Scene 2)	HC Selous	Pencil	1830
Othello and Desdemona (Act 5, Scene 2)	HC Selous	Pencil	1830
Portrait de la Malibran en Desdémone	François Bouchot	Oil	1831
Othello relating his adventures [Othello, act I, sc. 3]	Douglas Cowper	Engraving	1838
Charles Kemble as Othello	Richard James Lane	Lithograph	1840
Othello and Desdemona	William Powell	Oil	*c*. 1840–56

	Firth		
Othello and Desdemona	John Everett Millais	Oil	*c.* 1841–3
Othello, V, 2: Othello killing Desdemona	Hubert François Gravelot	Ink	1842
Desdemona and Othello	Théodore Chassériau	Watercolour	1847
Ira Aldrige as Othello	Unknown	Oil	1848
Desdemona is Cursed by her Father	Eugène Delacroix	Oil	1849
Othello and Desdemona	Eugène Delacroix	Oil	1849
Thomas Mead as Othello	Unknown	Oil	1849
Mr G. V. Brooke as Othello	Thomas Hollis	Engraving	*c.* 1850–76
Desdemona Retiring to Bed	Théodore Chassériau	Oil	1850
Othello and Desdemona in Venice	Théodore Chassériau	Oil	1850
Othello: Yet she must die...	Théodore Chassériau	Pencil	1850
Othello relating his life story to Desdemona	Henri Jean-Baptiste	Oil	Mid nineteenth century
Mr E. L. Davenport as Othello	Thomas Phillibrown	Engraving	Mid nineteenth century
Othello (Act 1, Scene 3): Othello, Desdemona, Brabantio, and Iago	Alexandre Bida	Watercolour	Mid nineteenth century
Mr M'Kean Buchanan as Othello	Charles Henry Jeens	Engraving	Mid nineteenth century
Mr Macready as Othello	H. Tracey	Engraving	Mid nineteenth century
Othello's Despair	Alexander Christie	Oil	*c.* 1851
Drinking Song. Othello Act 2. Scene 3	John Prescott Knight	Etching	*c.* 1853
The Song of Poor Barbara. Othello Act 4. Scene 3	Richard Redgrave	Etching	*c.* 1853
Othello relating his adventures	Charles West Cope	Etching	1853
Ira Aldridge as Othello	S. Buhler	Lithograph	1854
The Death of Desdemona	Eugène Delacroix	Oil	1858
Tommaso Salvini as Othello	Unknown	Photogravure	1858
Mr Edwin Forrest as Othello	George R. Hall	Engraving	1859
Othello, Emilia, Iago, and others	Lorenz Frølich	Ink	1859
Othello mit seiner schlafenden Frau	Christian Köhler	Painting	1859
Drinking Song, Othello	Vincent Brooks	Lithograph	1864
The Life's Story	Charles West Cope	Painting	1868
Othello relating his adventures to Desdemona	Robert Alexander Hillingford	Painting	1869
Othello impresses Desdemona	Heinrich Hoffman	Etching	1870

and her father with his eventful life-story			
Othello prepares to murder Desdemona	Heinrich Hoffman	Photomechanical Print	1870
Ape/Tommaso Salvini. "Othello"	Carlo Pellegrini	Lithograph	1875
Sig. Salvini as Othello	F. Armytage	Engraving	Mid to late nineteenth century
Othello and Iago	Solomon Alexander Hart	Wood engraving	Mid to late nineteenth century
Mr. G.V. Brooke as Othello and Mr. James Bennett as Iago	Benjamin Holl	Engraving	Mid to late nineteenth century
Mr George Bennett as Othello	Thomas Sherratt	Engraving	Mid to late nineteenth century
Othello et Desdémona	Emile Vernier	Lithograph	Mid to late nineteenth century
Desdemona's Death Song	Dante Gabriel Rossetti	Pencil	1878–81
Desdemona	Frederic Leighton	Oil	1888
Otelo e Desdémona	Antonio Muñoz Degraín	Oil	1880
Othello erzählt Desdemona und ihrem Vater seine Abenteuer	Karl Becker	Watercolour	1880
Thomas Keene in Othello	Unknown	Lithograph	1884
Desdemona	Frederic Leighton	Lithograph	*c*. 1888
Desdemona and Othello	Jack L. Wardleworth	Oil	1891
Othello and Desdemona	E. Bure (Printmaker) and Charles Gregory (Artist)	Wood engraving	Late nineteenth century
Othello	John Granger	Engraving	Late nineteenth century
Mr Grist as Othello	Victor Moblard	Painting	Late nineteenth century
Othello, act 2, scene 2, "It is Othello's pleasure our noble valiant general every man put himself into triumph"	Ludovico Marchetti	Watercolour	Late nineteenth to early twentieth century
Othello: Five miscellaneous page decorations	Ludovico Marchetti	Pencil	Late nineteenth to early twentieth century
Othello: The Moor of Venice	Ludovico Marchetti	Watercolour	Late nineteenth

			to early twentieth century
Othello, title plate, portrait of Othello and tailpiece	Ludovico Marchetti	Pencil	Late nineteenth to early twentieth century
Othello: Act V, Scene 2	HM Paget	Ink	Late nineteenth to early twentieth century
Walter Hampden as Othello	Unknown	Engraving	Early twentieth century
Oh! Willo! Willo! Willo!	Maxwell Armfield	Oil	1902
Othello: Act II, Scene 3	Charles A. Buchel	Ink	1902
Mr Forbes Robertson as Othello	Max Cowper	Ink	1902–3
Othello: Act V, Scene 2	Charles A. Buchel	Ink	1905
Mr Hubert Carter as Othello	Max Cowper	Ink	*c*. 1905
Herbert Beerböhm Tree as Othello	Charles A. Buchel	Oil	1914
Othello, Emilia: She loved thee, cruel Moor	Louis Rhead	Pencil	*c*. 1918
Variation on Othello	Walter Richard Sickert	Oil	*c*. 1933
José Ferrer as Iago and Paul Robeson as Othello	SJ Woolf	Pencil	1943
The Flowered Dress	Patrick Edward Phillips	Oil	1953
Othello	Nabil Kanso	Oil	1985
#88: Othello	Hannah Tompkins	Oil	1990
#122: Othello	Hannah Tompkins	Oil	1990
Othello	Hannah Tompkins	Woodcut	1990
Scene from Othello	C. Lawson	Oil	Unknown
Othello and Desdemona	Unknown	Engraving	Unknown
Othello and Desdemona	Unknown	Oil	Unknown
Othello scenery: Act 2 Scene 1: Port & citadel of Famagusta, Isle of Cyprus	Unknown	Watercolour	Unknown
Richard III and Othello	Unknown	Painting	Unknown

MUSICAL ADAPTATIONS

Title	Main Contributor(s)	Medium	Year
Otello	Gioachini Rossini	Opera	1816
Otello	Giuseppe Verdi	Opera	1887

CHILDREN'S/COMIC BOOK ADAPTATIONS

Title	Main Contributor(s)	Form	Year
Cartoon Shakespeare: William Shakespeare's Othello	Oscar Zarate	Comic Book	1985
Manga Shakespeare: *Othello*	Richard Appignanesi and Ryuta Osada	Manga	2009
Othello: A Shakespeare Children's Story	Macaw Books	Illustrated Children's Book	2014

ONLINE ADAPTATIONS

Title	Uploader	Website	Upload Date
"RSC : The Othello Rap"	Allicat8318	*YouTube*	24 July 2006
"lego othello"	cantbeyou	*YouTube*	14 Nov. 2006
"Othello Short Film Adaptation: Picture Start"	David Sawchak	*YouTube*	18 June 2007
"Shakespeare in the ghetto, Othello"	Marcus Sykes	*YouTube*	23. Nov. 2007
"Lego Man Othello (Intro)"	insainne	*YouTube*	26 Jan. 2008
"Modern Adaptation Othello Pt.1"	Dani Emerson	*YouTube*	17 Oct. 2008
"Modern Adaptation Othello Pt.2"	Dani Emerson	*YouTube*	17 Oct. 2008
"Lego Othello - English Class"	drjrey	*YouTube*	5 Apr. 2009
"Othello school film"	The Bloodyhead	*YouTube*	2 Nov. 2009
"Othello school project"	mcmuffin315	*YouTube*	10 Jan. 2010
"Othello's Troubling Stereotypes"	Jmin0822	*YouTube*	19 Feb. 2008
"High School Othello"	MissYukari128	*YouTube*	26 Mar. 2008
"Asian Othello: Music Video"	Deerawkg	*YouTube*	15 Apr. 2009
"Othello/Simpsons Trailer"	Alirez Alborzi	*BardBox: Shakespeare and Online Video*	10 May 2009
"Othello: 'O' modern adaptation"	Molly Buckley	*YouTube*	11 May 2009
"Lego Othello silent film"	Joel Kuester	*YouTube*	2 Jan. 2010
"Othello 5.1 Lego Stop Motion"	crazytazer	*YouTube*	10 Jan.

			2010
"Lego Otello"	mrgoof45	*YouTube*	28 Feb. 2010
"Ronnie & Sammi: A Jersey Shore Love"	Mario Madera	*YouTube*	19 Apr. 2010
"Modern Othello"	Emmy1216	*YouTube*	29 Apr. 2010
"The Story of Othello"	goosetoffoh	*YouTube*	1 May 2010
"C.S.I. - Othello"	kellydoesntrunfast	*YouTube*	11 May 2010
"Othello VR: Subsistance"	Spidey406	*YouTube*	29 May 2010
"Othello Representation – 'In the eye of the enemy'"	Hmmaguire	*YouTube*	9 Sept. 2010
"Othello… A Modern Take"	Schectersmiles919	*YouTube*	30 Oct. 2010
"Othello, A Facebook Drama"	Yroubros	*YouTube*	10 Nov. 2010
"cyprus shore broski"	speakers43	*YouTube*	11 Nov. 2010
"jersey shore (othello, jasnow)"	Jackie Monroe	*YouTube*	9 Jan. 2011
"Othello Blacking Up"	Sita Thomas	*YouTube*	19 Jan. 2011
"Jersey Shore Meets Othello"	kaityhaley	*YouTube*	23 Jan. 2011
"Othello's Shore (English Project)"	facethefunny	*YouTube*	17 Apr. 2011
"Othello Song Project-"Don't Stop Perceiving"	Hawkstorm927	*YouTube*	26 May 2011
"Othello: Barbie Edition"	Sock Monkey Productions	*YouTube*	30 Sept. 2011
"Jackie's Othello Spoof - Jersey Shore"	JenisGalaXy	*YouTube*	8 No. 2011
"Othello: The Betrayal (Lego Man)"	insainne	*YouTube*	28 Jan. 2012
"Venice Shore: Othello Jersey Shore Parody"	spike20x9	*YouTube*	17 Jan. 2012
"Othello [HD] Nicolas Xuan Vinter Drama Film"	Cinema Heaven	*YouTube*	31 Jan. 2012
"othello jersey shore"	Meaghan Otoole	*YouTube*	8 Feb. 2012
"Othello Project"	MrAwsumxD	*YouTube*	8 Feb. 2012
"Othello - Official Trailer (2012) [HD]"	Riddle Pictures	*YouTube*	8. Feb. 2012
"othello jersey shore.mov"	stephanie daisy	*YouTube*	10 Feb. 2012

"Othello Project"	Ross Neuman	*YouTube*	12 Feb. 2012
"Othello Class Project"	InYourSkin2010	*YouTube*	22 Mar. 2012
"Senior Plays (Othello) Modern Remake - O'Ghetto"	AlexandraNicole1218	*YouTube*	20 Mar. 2012
"othello:jerry springer period 1"	lindsey kulchin	*YouTube*	20 Mar. 2012
"That 70s Othello"	jimmymac422	*YouTube*	21 Mar. 2012
"Othella!"	ayocuhhh	*YouTube*	22 Mar. 2012
"CSI: Othello"	mitzi32996	*YouTube*	22 Mar. 2012
"Othello Video"	AlanAndKathy	*YouTube*	23 Mar. 2012
"Lego Othello act 5.2"	X3mitchelX	*YouTube*	23 Mar. 2012
"The Secret Life of High School Othello"	flyawayquickly	*YouTube*	24 Mar. 2012
"Othellooooooooooooooo"	jimmymac422	*YouTube*	24 Mar. 2012
"Cordero's 1st Period English Othello Project"	corderosclass2012	*YouTube*	25 Mar. 2012
"Mean Girls CV: Othella Pilot"	estherhuangg	*YouTube*	25 Mar. 2012
"Othello over Flowers"	hemolymphyeehaw	*YouTube*	25 Mar. 2012
"Othello Pilot Episode"	ichii96	*YouTube*	25 Mar. 2012
"Othello M.D. Pilot - P4 Cordero"	jelliidoonuts96	*YouTube*	25 Mar. 2012
"Cyprus High School Musical Season 1 Episode 1 Pilot Cordero"	kooki33monster	*YouTube*	25 Mar. 2012
"All Around The World - Episode 1 (Othello Pilot Cordero Period 2)"	Rawrrawrsour	*YouTube*	25 Mar. 2012
"Othello Remake- 'Death by Strawberries'"	V2xL1	*YouTube*	25 Mar. 2012
"Shakespeare Center: Othello"	ThePancakes17	*YouTube*	26 Mar. 2012
"Silent Shakespeare: Othello (English Project)"	derekieboyrox	*YouTube*	27 Mar. 2012
"Shakespeare's Othello: A Trailer of Tragedy"	thehumancomputer1	*YouTube*	27 Mar. 2012
"Othello (School Project)"	Neville Gamage	*YouTube*	28 Mar. 2012
"Agents of Venice"	TofuuuProductions	*YouTube*	28 Mar. 2012
"Jamal- A modern adaptation of	Sarah Lavalette	*YouTube*	3 Apr.

Othello"			2012
"Lego Othello Rap"	Sonovaclaus	*YouTube*	17 Apr. 2012
"Othello Act 4 Scene 2 Jersey Shore Edition"	ellesebrynnxo0	*YouTube*	29 Apr. 2012
"Crouching Moor, Hidden Hanky (An Othello Adaptation)"	Felix Herbst	*YouTube*	4 May 2012
"Othello: AUF DEUTSCH (new and remastered version)"	hideflen	*YouTube*	17 June 2012
"'The Hankie' A Short film adaptation of William Shakespeare's Othello"	Bombie dela Cruz	*YouTube*	2 Sept. 2012
"Othello: a modern adaptation"	intermissionedu	*YouTube*	19 Oct. 2012
"Othello Lego Stop Motion/ Act 2 Scene 1"	dgatzki	*YouTube*	24 Oct. 2012
"Othello's High School Break Up"	trenton edwards	*YouTube*	16 Nov. 2012
"Otto, a modern version of Othello"	Vendela Frejd Östman	*YouTube*	13 Dec. 2012
"Othello Jersey Shore"	Roya66	*YouTube*	25 Feb. 2013
"The Othello Network"	Jessie Trespeses	*YouTube*	3 Mar. 2013
"Eye of the Tempest (Othello Adaptation)"	cowtipping86	*YouTube*	13 Apr. 2013
"ENG-L220 Othello Adaptation Project ('Oops!... I Did It Again')"	jillianschmidt	*YouTube*	14 Apr. 2013
"Ghetto Othello - Centaurus High School"	stormagan	*YouTube*	23 Apr. 2013
"Othello Act 4 Scene 2 highschool musical style"	shelby tourond	*YouTube*	21 May 2013
"Othello (Modern)"	Phill's Films	*YouTube*	3 June 2013
"Unfriend: An Othello Adaptation"	ETConflim	*YouTube*	26 Aug. 2013
"Othello: High School Version"	Elizabeth Gonzalez	*YouTube*	27 Oct. 2013
"Jersey Shore-Othello"	tarawick2317	*YouTube*	4 Nov. 2013
"Othello Act 1 Opening"	colourfuse.co.uk	*YouTube*	6 Nov. 2013
"Italian adaptation of Othello"	Charles Goodger	*YouTube*	12 Jan. 2014
"Shadow of Othello (Hindi Play)"	bumperclapent	*YouTube*	2 Feb. 2014
"Othello, kinda"	Daria Porter	*YouTube*	5 Feb. 2014
"PROJECT| Lego stop motion;	Agi xo	*YouTube*	26 Feb.

Othello trailer"			2014
"Lego Othello"	Lego Shakespeare Films	*YouTube*	2 Mar. 2014
"Othello Project Reality Show"	Caper Woodson	*YouTube*	26 Mar. 2014
"Modern Othello"	kenzie zimmer	*YouTube*	21 Apr. 2014
"Othello and Desdemona (Baku, School n.70)	Rufet Agabalayev	*YouTube*	22 Apr. 2014
"Othello High school play"	Coopiz 54	*YouTube*	7 May 2014
"Othello Act V: Lego"	Ian Macintyre	*YouTube*	12 May 2014
"Short Cake (Othello Adaptation)"	Tobe N	*YouTube*	20 May 2014
"Jersey Shore- Othello"	Dominique Ennis	*YouTube*	22 May 2014
"A Matter of Survival: A Thrilling Adaptation of Othello"	SunValleyHSNC	*YouTube*	5 June 2014
"Othello - Modern Version	Comedy	School Project"	FMLucme	*YouTube*	12 June 2014
"OTHELLO A MODERN ADAPTATION 2014"	Jack Hall	*YouTube*	9 Jul. 2014
"Othello jersey shore"	Molly Spalding	*YouTube*	6 Nov. 2014
"Othello (Shakespeare) – Thug Notes Summary & Analysis"	Wisecrack	*YouTube*	2 Dec. 2014
"Othello adaptation"	greatnesity	*YouTube*	23 Jan. 2015
"Lego Stop-Motion Movie: Othello"	David Thien	*YouTube*	2 Feb. 2015
"Othello Reality TV James M"	James Minock	*YouTube*	17 Feb. 2015.
"Othello: The Ghetto Version"	Vanessa Herrera	*YouTube*	18 Feb. 2015
"Iago Official Trailer #1 (2015) - Othello Adaptation"	Michael Havighorst	*YouTube*	19 Feb. 2015
"Othello Trailer"	Leah Moss	*YouTube*	19 Feb. 2015
"Othello (2015) Trailer"	Nick Thompson	*YouTube*	22 Feb. 2015
"Othello Trailer EC"	Julia Schwieterman	*YouTube*	22 Feb. 2015
"Othello - Desdemona's Death - Trailer H"	Linda Fritch	*YouTube*	2 Mar. 2015
"Othello Teaser Trailer"	wallaman	*YouTube*	4 Mar. 2015
"Mandy's Othello Trailer"	Mandy Sigale	*YouTube*	7 Mar. 2015

"High School Musical - Othello"	Jenna Atlas	*YouTube*	8 Mar. 2015
"Othello Trailer (2015)"	George Arustamyan	*YouTube*	8 Mar. 2015
"The Story of Othello (Movie Trailer)"	Jonathan Laksana	*YouTube*	8 Mar. 2015
"Dherice Flowers Othello trailer with caps"	iAbzel	*YouTube*	15 Mar. 2015
"Othello Alternative Plotline Movie Trailer"	Mikayla Sowers	*YouTube*	16 Mar. 2015
"Othello Trailer"	xXEverything	*YouTube*	17 Mar. 2015

Appendix B: Email Conversation with Tom Magill

Below is a transcript of email correspondence (14–16 January 2015) between *Mickey B* (2007) director Tom Magill and myself. Due to certain formatting issues involved in copying the conversation from the Internet, some stylistic alterations have been made: I have added my original questions and comments (labelled: BR) to clarify what Magill (labelled: TM) is addressing. In addition, other alterations have been made for presentation purposes (concerning spelling, spacing errors and missing italics). Otherwise, the words have been printed verbatim.

TM: Thanks for your interest in my work. I hope I can be of some help. I'm going to start at the end of your questions and deal with them in reverse order.

BR: Have you chosen to direct plays (specifically *Macbeth* in *Mickey B*) based on particular parallels with your chosen setting?

TM: I think you might find the chapter below useful regarding my approach to adapting Shakespeare for film generally and in adapting *Mickey B* particularly.
Transgression and Transformation: Mickey B and the Dramaturgy of Adaptation, An Interview with Tom Magill, Daniel Fischlin, Tom Magill, Jessica Riley in:
Outer speares: Shakespeare, intermedia, and the limits of adaptation, 'Macbeth becomes Mickey B in maximum security.'Edited by Daniel Fischlin, University of Guelph, published by Toronto University Press (2014)
I've included a short extract below from the chapter about *Othello* – which was the first Shakespeare play I read.

BR: Shakespeare has been called a 'cultural phenomenon' and a perceived 'timeless educator'.[25] Do you agree with these terms?

TM: I agree Shakespeare is a 'cultural phenomenon' and I might even add 'global' - Shakespeare is a global cultural phenomenon.

I think we have a lot to learn from Shakespeare and I also agree that he is perceived as a "timeless educator".

However, the important question for me is: who is educating who about what and who is benefitting most from the knowledge exchange?

BR: One pattern that I've observed in adaptations of *Othello* is the tendency to emphasise its supposed contemporary parallels.

TM: I think there are contemporary parallels with the character Othello – jealous men who are possessive of the women in their lives.

BR: For example, adaptations often contemporise the titular character as 'ghettoised', or if a race issue is minimised, it is the viewers/critics who observe these parallels.

TM: I have not seen any contemporary adaptations of *Othello* but I think it is cheap and lazy to simply 'ghettoise' the main character.

BR: For clarity, in a July 1995 issue of *Los Angeles* magazine, one reviewer writes: "They

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[25] Citations for these and others alluded to in this appendix have been used in the main body of the thesis, and have been fully referenced in the Works Cited.

murder. And afterward, they don't feel very bad. Welcome to the Othello syndrome".

TM: I think this generalised comment says more about the reviewer than it does about the subject.

BR: The reviewer is comparing Othello (in the Hollywood version of the same year) with OJ Simpson here, representing a specific trend in adaptations of the play.

TM: That's sad and depressing to read……I hope your research can begin to show the mistake of this trend and the error of following such a lead.

BR: Would you consider adapting *Othello* specifically – why/why not?

TM: Yes I would consider adapting it – it's a great story about the manipulation of weakness for evil gain.

I'd need to find a parallel setting that illustrates the above theme and gives a good twist on the original story. I'm doing The Tempest next and maybe Lear after that. So, tell Deborah it might be a while!

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3. Incarcerating *Macbeth*: Liberating Shakespeare in Prison7

DF: Can you discuss how you came to your relationship with Shakespeare?

TM: I was in a YP Centre (a young prisoners' centre) and I had a choice about whether to scrub floors or do education. And I said, "Okay, I'll do the education." I did my first exams in prison. I did English language, English literature, and Greek literature in translation in prison. And then I was looking – they had a little cupboard,

and that was the library – and I looked in it on a Friday. I wanted something to read over the weekend, and I'd read most of the stuff in there – Conrad, Dickens, Balzac, Tolstoy, Zola, Dostoyevsky, Joyce – I just went through it and read as much as I could. But then I picked up this little Penguin thing and it was marked differently and I said, "What's this?" and the teacher said, "That's Shakespeare. You won't be able to read Shakespeare" and I said, "Who fucking won't." So I took it away. And it was *Othello* and I read it over the weekend. It gave me a headache – I'm totally serious

about that, because I was like, "What does this mean?" – but within that text I recognized this character, Iago. And I thought, "I know you, I've met you, I know this character." I recognized so much in terms of the jealousy and what's motivating Iago and that's what I understood, because I'd been that jealous and it had landed me in a lot of problems. And I thought, "Whoa, you can actually learn about yourself through reading these books." So that's where it started. And I thought, "I'm going to master this."

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