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PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS/INGLÊS E LITERATURA CORRESPONDENTE

# MANIFESTATIONS OF OTHERNESS IN PERFORMANCE:

# A BRAZILIAN *OTHELLO*

por

RICARDO MOURA BUCHWEITZ

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Área de concentração: Inglês e Literatura Correspondente

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Profa. Dra. Lêda Maria Braga Tomitch
Coordenadora

BANCA EXAMINADORA:

Prof. Dr. José Roberto O'Shea
Orientador e Presidente

Profa. Dra. Bernadete Pasold
Examinadora

Prof. Dr. Gladir da Silva Cabral
Examinador

Florianópolis, 16 de julho de 2002.

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# ABSTRACT

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A Brazilian production of William Shakespeare's *Othello*, directed by Janssen Hugo Lage, was analysed. Data including video, photographs, source text, prompt book, critical reviews and interviews with members of the company and audience, were investigated according to the methodology proposed by Jay Halio and backed up by Maria Helena Serôdio and Susan Bennett. Given the relevance of *Othello's* racial discourse to Brazilian contexts, the analysis sought to investigate how Shakespeare's text was realised in Lage's production with regard to the depiction of the main character as the Other, for which the concepts of Otherness and Race, as discussed by Edward Said and Robert Miles, were considered. The analysis has shown that, despite the company's expressed concerns with dramatic updating and racism as a theme, the production was still in agreement with racist stereotypes long-attached to the play.

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# RESUMO

MANIFESTATIONS OF OTHERNESS IN PERFORMANCE:

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Uma produção brasileira de *Otelo*, de William Shakespeare, dirigida por Janssen Hugo Lage, foi analisada. Dados incluindo vídeo, fotografias, texto de origem, manual de palco, críticas e entrevistas com membros da compania e da platéia, foram investigados conforme a metodologia proposta por Jay Halio e sustentada por Maria Helena Serôdio e Susan Bennett. Dada a relevância do discurso racial de *Otelo* para o contexto brasileiro, a análise procurou investigar como o texto Shakespeareano foi realizado na produção de Lage em relação à caracterização da personagem principal como o Outro, motivo pelo qual os conceitos de Alteridade e Raça, conforme discutidos por Edward Said e Robert Miles, foram considerados. A análise mostrou que, apesar das preocupações da compania quanto à atualização dramática e o tema do racismo, a produção continuou concordando com os estereótipos racistas há muito atrelados à peça.

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# INTRODUCTION

> Here is the man, this Moor...
> (*Othello* 1.3.73)

The study of a play in performance holds the basic premise that a dramatic text only becomes a play when delivered in front of an audience in a theatrical event, one that adds to the language printed on the paper elements that would, on the written page, be constructed only in what Jay Halio calls "the theatre of the mind" (40). Those elements, among which acting, dressing, lighting, and scenery are just some, fill the many gaps the page leaves behind and, when audience is taken into account, contribute to the construction of meaning.

If the text alone poses different possibilities of interpretation, the inclusion of so many and varied scenic elements complicates and expands such possibilities. William Shakespeare's *Othello* is a case in point, in which different themes are underlined, otherness being the one chosen as the thematic focus of this study. The relevance of the play to Brazilian society stems from the very history of the country, which received large crowds of black slaves from Africa and has incorporated important cultural aspects deriving from such contact, not always in positive terms. Racism, for instance, has been one negative derivative. No doubt, racism in Brazil has affected social as well as cultural relations. As far as *Othello* is concerned, racist interpretations have produced views on the play potentially different from those observable in other countries where the exploitation of slavery happened to a lesser extent, or simply never happened at all; one of the consequences is that Brazilian views on racial relations have reflections upon the whole understanding of the play as produced by Brazilians on

Brazilian stages, from the first moments of a production's conception up to its ensuing reception.

When investigating a Brazilian *Othello* in performance, two primary points arise, both deriving from the recognition that theatre, as a social act, constructs–and is constructed by–ideology. The first relates to examining the way Othello's otherness is constructed on the stage by Brazilians who live in a country where racism is still a common–though at times disguised–practice, whereas the second, only a consequence of the first, relates to establishing how this construction was received by a Brazilian audience.

Considering that the case of *Othello* is especially relevant due to its dealing with the issue of racism, an important social problem in this country, the analysis of data from a Brazilian production of *Othello* is bound to provide evidence regarding the thematic motif chosen by the company, as well as the theatrical devices employed in order to achieve the interpretation of the character Othello as the other on a Brazilian stage at the end of the twentieth century. The analysis of data relative to the production in view of the critical material available on performance analysis is expected to provide answers related to (1) the changes made to Shakespeare's text in order to make *Othello* adapt to a Brazilian audience, (2) the company's thematic intentions regarding the representations of Othello's otherness, (3) how such intentions were expressed dramaturgically, (4) the company's expectations regarding the impact of linguistic and visual adaptation upon the audience, (5) the audience's response to the adaptation, mostly to the aspects related to the main character's otherness, and finally (6) how such response affected the relevance of the play. Starting from such questions, stage representations of Othello as an archetype of the intruder in a predominantly white

European Christian society shall be investigated, specifically as regards the character's representation in Brazilian society.

If Shakespeare's intentions concerning *Othello* cannot be assessed, the same is true for the playwright's original text, for, as Chapter II shows, what we have now is often a conflation of different texts; neither can the social context into which *Othello* was inserted, however important, be precisely analysed. In fact, both the play's language and the context of its early performances have changed since Shakespeare's time, and such changes are expressed both by the verbal and the visual language of the play, whose interpretation often demands adaptation to modern audiences. The recognition of such aspects of performativity has made the visual aspects, neglected for a long time, gain recognition as important elements that contribute to diminish, reinforce or even substitute aspects supported by the verbal language, therefore, altering the "original meaning" of a play. Indeed, scenographic updating sometimes works even more effectively than verbal language to reflect changing social contexts on the stage. Commenting on the importance of scenography, Dennis Kennedy states that "the visual history of performance, which has been mostly excluded from Shakespeare studies, rewards extended investigation because of its intriguing relationship to the status and uses of Shakespeare, both in the theatre and in the culture at large" (*Looking* 4).

Given the power of scenography over stage production, the most recent trends in performance analysis rely mainly on the study of linguistic adaptations of the original (dramatic) text combined with the observation of visual and aural features of the play-text in production. Indeed, effective performance tends to move along a path opposite to that of pre-established notions, as the delivered text often needs to be changed to meet the requirements of the audience, the play's consumers. Thus, neither the literary ties of the text nor the visual conventions traditionally applied are constant, as they are

unable to provide rigid answers to the interpretation of a play, which varies greatly across countries and cultures. Besides, theatre is made by human beings eager to construct their own interpretations of art, even when they have to fight against (or in favour of) other possible interpretations.

The changes made to the original text and the inclusion of visual elements in order to enhance, reinforce or even undermine the verbal language naturally produce effects upon the meaning(s) of the play. From the perspective that *Othello* is a play that has otherness as one of its main themes, it is important to observe how such theme develops in the text; moreover, it is important to study the theme's construction also through the visual elements of a given production; i.e., it is relevant to see which visual elements have been supplemented to or underscored in the text with the purpose of showing otherness, and how these elements are dealt with and received in actual performance. According to Sérgio Bellei, the concept of otherness is usually "*marcado pelo negativo: o outro é escuro em relação ao claro, o inferno em relação ao céu, o doente em relação ao sadio*" (113).[1]

Edward Said who, as well as M. H. Serôdio, provides some of the theoretical paradigms for otherness used in this study, also poses the question of diverging forces when conceptualising otherness; furthermore, Said suggests that the other opposes a ruling force in a non-static intentional process:

> The construction of identity–for identity, whether of Orient or Occident, France or Britain, while obviously a repository of distinct collective experiences, *is* finally a construction–involves establishing opposites and "others" whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from "us". Each age and society re-creates its "Others". Far from a static thing the

> identity of self or of "other" is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual, and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies. (*Orientalism* 332)

The socio-political dimension of Shakespeare has been object of careful study, and in the case of *Othello* it could not be otherwise, as the play sheds light upon a delicate theme even in modern days. The "*estratégias de resistência*" (Serôdio 183) made possible by contestatory adaptations of *Othello* and the challenging position such strategies demand are also discussed by Said (although not specifically with regard to Shakespeare's play), who highlights the importance of literature as a political instrument that can give "voice" to colonised cultures. The construction of meaning in adaptations of Shakespeare offers, indeed, a space for contesting traditional views of some of the play's aspects and, as far as *Othello* is in mind, the many ways in which meaning is ascribed to a given production open a vast territory for questioning race relations, an element that cannot go neglected as long as a Brazilian staging is at stake.

The contesting space aforementioned gains special relevance when modern foreign (i.e. non-English) adaptations are addressed; in those, language and scenography come to issue again, mostly because the fear of depriving the text from Shakespeare's "original" language does not apply, at least with the same emphasis, as in English-speaking companies, thus offering a larger space for the construction of new meanings; freed from the commitment to Shakespearean English, designers and directors are somehow freer to resort to verbal (and scenic) elements that might not be present in productions intended to cater to Anglophonic audiences. As Kennedy points out,

> The differences that derive from performing [Shakespeare] in languages other than English have led to major differences in performance strategies. They are especially noticeable in the visual aspects of

> production; unable to place the same emphasis on Shakespeare's verbal resourcefulness, foreign performances have explored scenographic and physical modes more openly than their Anglophone counterparts, often redefining the meaning of the plays in the process. (*Foreign* 6)

The analysis of a Brazilian production of *Othello* sets out to investigate how the relative freedom (Kennedy) to change the "original" conception of the play was exercised and mostly to investigate how the racial aspects of the play-text were affected when adapting the play to be staged in Brazil. Companies whose language is other than English offer Shakespearean scholars a vast corpus for the investigation of performance events, and such comparison of intercultural art can be a useful tool for the scrutiny of mental representations and world views across different cultures, since, according to Kennedy, "reflecting on performances outside of English, we can see more clearly how Shakespeare is alien, as well as what we continue to find indigenous or domestic about him" (*Foreign* 17).

The production chosen for analysis was the *Otelo* directed by Janssen Hugo Lage, which ran from late 1999 until mid-2000, starting in Rio de Janeiro and then touring to several Brazilian cities, starring Norton Nascimento in the title role.[2] That production was selected because it was the last Brazilian staging of *The Moor of Venice* in the twentieth century and, therefore, is bound to provide grounds for a discussion concerning an adaptation of the said play that most touches the issue of race relations, and how that adaptation fits into the social context of turn-of-the-century Brazil; another aspect of the production that is of special interest to a discussion of otherness is that until recently not many productions have cast a black actor in the title role, or at least not enough to redeem the play from charges of racism, for, as Hugh Quarshie believes,

"the racist conventions have persisted for so long precisely because not enough of us [black actors] have played the role and challenged the conventions" (20).

The data related to Janssen Lage's *Otelo* were collected from several sources, such as newspaper articles and critical reviews from data banks (especially FUNARTE and Biblioteca Nacional), the production's promotional materials available at the Internet, and those provided by the company itself, among which are the play's prompt book, programme, interviews held with members of the audience, photographs from rehearsals, and a video recording of actual performance. The analysis of the photographs and the video were carried out in agreement with concerns expressed by Dennis Kennedy and Marco de Marinis with regard to the usefulness and limitations of both resources in performance analysis. The procedures for the data analysis follow the methodology proposed essentially by Jay Halio and backed up by Maria Helena Serôdio and Susan Bennett.

Despite their usefulness to the archaeology of theatre studies, photography and video indeed have their limitations; the visual elements of a production, as much as its verbal language, do not offer a single representation of meaning, but multiple choices through different social contexts; as Kennedy points out,

> Like drawings and designs, photographs are two-dimensional objects on paper that rely upon perspective to indicate depth of field and upon printed shadings to suggest objects and colours. Like any graphic representation, the meaning of photographs ultimately depends upon cultural signification. (*Looking* 20)

When discussing the limitations of video, Marco de Marinis states that "films of theatrical subjects ... are partial and incomplete texts, stamped with a linguistic, cultural, and ideological subjectivity, like all documents: traces and sensory effects, not

replacement performances" (388). Marinis' statement suggests that video and photography have their own limitations as instruments of analysis, which means that their employment requires good sense in order to avoid dogmatic and biased conclusions.

Nevertheless, such limitations do not deprive photography or video from their fundamental value in performance analysis. Even though these cannot be trusted as the only authoritative proofs when reconstructing a play for analysis, if added to other tools they can contribute to a better view and appraisal of a play in production. Marinis reminds us that "audiovisual footage is not considered as *the only* theatrical document but, more properly, as *one* document ... which the theatrical happening leaves behind" (388). Regarding photography, Kennedy states that "... even when all the shortcomings of pictorial verification are registered, the advantages of the method abide. No other path will provide the same immediate access to performance style" (*Looking* 24).

Halio proposes the analysis of different aspects of production in order to identify how such aspects fit together to make a play what it is, i.e., how they contribute to construct a play as a whole. Such aspects include (1) the text, (2) the set design, (3) the characters, (4) the subtext, (5) the language, (6) the stage business, music and other effects, and finally (7) coherence. As the construction of meaning and its reception are relevant in order to analyse a play in performance, the protocol of intentions and the reception of that play must also be taken into account, thus justifying the inclusion of Serôdio and Bennett in the methodology. Serôdio is particularly concerned with the political choices made by the company that affect a production from its very beginning, whereas Bennett focuses on the effects a play has upon its audience and vice-versa, thus reinforcing the notion that a play is never an isolated, but rather a socio-cultural

phenomenon affected by the environment and the individuals that take part in it, before, during and after performance.

With regard to the reception of Lage's *Otelo*, one thing I want to clarify at this point is that I have not seen the production, which does not invalidate the analysis, for, as the tradition of stage history in Shakespearean studies has shown, performance analysis relies on "excavatory" procedures which lead, at the most, to approximate conclusions. Otherwise, it would be virtually impossible to draw considerations on Shakespeare in performance ranging from his time to the present (as will be addressed in Chapter II).

The thesis is divided into four sections following this Introduction. Chapter I presents a critical discussion on otherness as a cultural construct, drawing mostly on Edward Said's considerations on the subject. Otherness and other concepts important to the study, such as race (Robert Miles), Orientalism (Said) and contrapuntal reading (Said) are discussed as related to *Othello* and cross-checked against other sources when necessary in order to test, corroborate or add specificity to the paradigms used in this work.

Chapter II offers an overall discussion on *Othello* in performance. Important productions of *Othello* in English-speaking countries, especially England and the United States, are discussed, ranging from the Restoration to the late twentieth century. The discussion then proceeds to Brazilian productions from the nineteenth century on, still focusing on the construction of Othello as the other. Additionally, filmic productions are briefly addressed, as they also derive from the cultural assumptions that underlie stage productions. Data related to visual representations, text and reception of those productions are considered, and the possible social constraints in which they were embedded and which resulted in different cultural appropriations are accounted for.

Chapter III presents the analysis of Lage's production. Drawing mostly on the aforementioned methodology, different aspects of Lage's production are discussed; the company's intentions and the reception of the play are also considered, as has been proposed. Special attention is given to the representations of Othello's otherness in the textual adaptation and its transposition to actual performance.

In the Conclusion, the discussion of the relation between the racial aspect of *Othello* and the ways in which such theme was explored in performance under Lage's direction is extended in the light of the theoretical paradigms presented in Chapter I. Other thematic discourses are reviewed as they contribute to affect the theme of otherness, and considerations are drawn with regard to implications for further research on the issue of otherness in theatrical productions of *Othello*. As this Introduction has suggested, conceptualising otherness and establishing how it applies to *Othello* is a fundamental issue to this work. The topic of otherness being momentous, it is the focus of the first chapter of this dissertation, which begins with a general discussion of otherness as related to culture, and proceeds with a discussion of the issue as specifically related to *Othello*.

# Notes

[1] Taking into account the bilingual nature of my readership, all quotations originally in Portuguese are left in that language.

[2] In order to provide further details regarding the production, a list with the names of actors, technicians and other people involved in the production is presented in Appendix 1. Photographs and additional material relevant to the analysis are also appended, as they are cited throughout Chapter III.

# CHAPTER I

## OTHELLO AS A SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED OTHER

> ... an extravagant and wheeling stranger
> Of here and everywhere.
> (*Othello*, 1.1.134-135)

Pirenópolis, Brazil, 2001. A multitude of locals joins tourists in the first week of June to watch a reconstitution of chivalry games in which Christians, dressed in blue costumes, fight Moors in red. As always, the Christians win and, most importantly (however obvious), the Moors lose the battle. Coincidentally, that same week a television channel shows one of the most important characters of a soap opera, a cultural institution in Brazil, declaring that "*as coisas mudaram muito, principalmente desde a invasão mourisca de nossa cidade*" (*Porto dos Milagres*).

The battle against the Moors in Central Brazil, a very distant place from Europe and 'Barbary', as well as the malicious utterance of the female character in the soap opera, are two out of many examples to be drawn from modern daily life that show the effects upon Western culture of what Edward Said has called Orientalism. This is particularly interesting if one considers that Brazilians are often regarded by Europe and The United States as inferior in some aspects, sometimes being attributed a degree of inferiority arguably comparable to that of Turks and Moors in sixteenth-century Europe. Brazil is for some a mixture of 'Barbary' and Europe, a land where the civilised and the cannibal live under the same sky, in a crudely simplified perspective, not very different from colonial views on India during the British ruling.

Contact with other cultures has yielded quite a harvest, one of which the phenomenon of Orientalism, described by Edward Said as the "knowledge of the Orient that places things Oriental in class, court, prison, or manual for scrutiny, study, judgement, discipline, or governing" (*Orientalism* 41). In fact, Orientalism has reached far beyond the boundaries of theoretical constructions or references to the other. What (North) Americans and Europeans have decided to call World Music, for instance, is a mere way of categorising whatever kind of non-Anglo-American modern music under the same label, regardless of the differences between Uruguayan and Vietnamese music, for example. Such broad labelling also applies to the way Latin Americans are portrayed in American films, stereotyped under a common appearance, language and behaviour, and has likewise proved to be a successful means to justify unfair economic and political practices.

For Said, the traditional role of academics in relation to Orientalism is that of perpetuating it as a proof of the many forces that contribute to the establishment of an other who is usually put at an inferior level of knowledge, faith, culture, and even appearance. An other is thus defined as an alien identity,[1] a definition created by Westerners, beholders of the dominant culture who put to use a discipline or line of philosophy they have decided to call Orientalism, and that served (and still serves) as a constructed "political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them')" (*Orientalism* 43).

The construction of the other founded on Orientalism, however, does not rely only on concrete or factual information. Indeed, it is based on assumptions about the physicality of alien territories and their dwellers to construct myths frequently grounded on misconceptions about such places and people. Said's following definition

exemplifies the link between the academic view of the Orient and the aggregate meanings it encompasses:

> *Orientalism* is the generic term that I have been employing to describe the Western approach to the Orient; Orientalism is the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice. But in addition I have been using the word to designate that collection of dreams, images, and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line. (*Orientalism* 73)

In an important afterword to the 1995 reprinting of *Orientalism*, Said points out that "most people resist the underlying notion: that human identity is not only not natural and stable, but constructed, and occasionally even invented outright" (*Orientalism* 332). He thus implies that both the discipline and the "collection of dreams, images and vocabularies" attributed to the Orient are used as a means to establish power relations. With this argument, Said relates Orientalism to a later book by himself, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), in which he makes the issue of differentiation even more connected to culture, especially to culture as constructed according to the paradigms of imperialistic control.

In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said extends the issues discussed in *Orientalism*, seeking to provide "a general world-wide pattern of imperial culture, and a historical experience of resistance against empire" (47). Doing so, Said confirms his previous assertion that the definitions or the identification of an other have a political purpose, as they serve as instruments or excuses for domination. In this sense, it is possible to conclude that the effects of imperialistic thought upon culture rely on a heterogeneous system grounded not only on the dichotomy self/other, as such a straightforward binary

system might be suggestive of difference at individual levels, but not at social or national levels, in which there is a stronger need and place for resistance. The following quote provides a clear view on how Orientalist discourse can be used as a means for cultural-imperialistic domination:

> What are striking in these discourses are the rhetorical figures one keeps encountering in their descriptions of 'the mysterious East', as well as the stereotypes about 'the African [or Indian or Jamaican or Chinese] mind', the notions about bringing civilization to primitive or barbaric peoples, the disturbingly familiar ideas about flogging or death or extended punishment being required when 'they' misbehaved or became rebellious, because 'they' mainly understood force or violence best; 'they' were not like 'us', and for that reason deserved to be ruled. (*Culture* xi-i)

From the effects of cultural interchange, the establishment of otherness as an instrument for prejudice and thus as an excuse for domination is one that has become a constant in most (if not all) modern societies. This does not mean differentiation was unknown before the world-wide advent of colonialism and imperialism,[2] but it seems to have become more powerful after their spreading. In fact, what governments have done is to use the notions of otherness as a tool at the service of their political interests, since this notion is older than colonialism and imperialism; however, such practices have contributed to make otherness into a greater thing than it used to be. On the issue, Said states:

> Throughout the exchange between Europeans and their 'others' that began systematically half a millennium ago, the one idea that has scarcely varied is that there is an 'us' and a 'them', each quite settled,

> clear, unassailably self-evident. As I discuss it in *Orientalism*, the division goes back to Greek thought about barbarians, but, whoever originated this kind of 'identity' thought, by the nineteenth century it had become the hallmark of imperialist cultures as well as those cultures trying to resist the encroachments of Europe. (*Culture* xxviii)

Indeed, the very concept of race achieved new standards of recognition after the imperial enterprises of the nineteenth century. There is no doubt that the practice already existed and served socio-political purposes, mainly in the case of attributing a sense of inferiority to other individuals or communities, but the commercial and political practices of the imperialist doctrine made use of racial differentiation (one can say it even created the modern idea of race) as a kind of propaganda that made racism into a much more common practice than it used to be.

The very concept of race must be questioned if one is willing to understand its relations to culture. One of the widely accepted conventions is that race relates mostly to skin colour; this, however, is insufficient to justify discrimination. Robert Miles proposes that racial discrimination has already been used against white people, and exemplifies by quoting the case of the prejudice against Jews in Germany during World War II, or against Germans in Britain in the same period (135-6), when race was used as an excuse for segregation. Thus, race does not depend on skin colour, but on intentions, mainly on questionable intentions justified by the fear of the other, as shown in Miles' definition of otherness:

> Otherness can be ... successfully constructed by signifying a long-resident population as either a long-hidden 'bacterium' which has intentionally assimilated itself into all corners of the nation in order to effect its evil intent unobserved, or as a long-evident 'naturally' distinct

> alien force whose negative effects have, for some reason or another, been intensified at this or that particular moment. (13)

From the concepts studied, it seems that Orientalism is a view of the Orient that uses otherness as an excuse for domination. The concept of otherness, in turn, involves the idea of race, supposedly the most important attributive feature of the other. And, according to common knowledge–but not necessarily based on historical facts, as Miles has shown–race depends on skin colour. If race is the starting point for the description of the other as well as of the Orient, it is not only those concepts that need to be questioned and revised for, as Miles points out,

> [t]here are no 'races' and therefore no 'race relations'. There is only a belief that there are such things, a belief which is used by some social groups to construct an Other (and therefore the Self) in thought as a prelude to exclusion and domination, and by other social groups to define Self (and so to construct an Other) as a means of resisting that exclusion. Hence, if it is used at all, the idea of 'race' should be used only to refer descriptively to such uses of the idea of 'race'. (42)

The establishment of the basic concepts of Orientalism and otherness–which include but do not necessarily overlap with race–is of fundamental importance, as they are to be present throughout this study, explicitly or implicitly; this is so for the reason that *Othello* is a play whose interpretations are often closely related to the (mis)understanding of such concepts. Initially, an important point is to assess the play's main themes (if such an assessment is at all possible). In *Othello: a Contextual History*, Virginia Vaughan analyses the four aspects or themes that she considers as fundamental to Shakespeare's text: nationalism, militarism, race, and gender. Such delimitation, however, cannot be taken as authoritative or exclusive, as Vaughan herself claims that

"the text supports contradictory readings" (8); besides, the emphasis given to any of such readings is also variable.

Isolating the question of race, for instance, there are different readings concerning the importance of Othello's Africanness for a broader understanding of the text (especially when performed). Leslie Fiedler, for one, sustains that, even though race is an important aspect of the play, it is not the most important reason for Othello's otherness; this, according to Fiedler, was more a consequence of his being a stranger than a dark man, and that blackness was in this case more a symptom than a cause of otherness. Fiedler argues that "the blackness of Othello is, in short, primarily symbolic, signifying not that he is of a lesser breed, but rather one at the furthest possible cultural remove from the girl he loves and who loves him" (173). Whatever the case, blackness has been used to justify Othello's behaviour and to place him as an outsider; Fiedler himself points out that

> for Shakespeare "black" does not primarily describe an ethnic distinction (though, of course, Othello is meant to be perceived as an African, thick-lipped as well as dusky-hued), but a difference in hue–and temperament–distinguishing from one another even what we would identify as members of the same white race. (171)

Vaughan agrees that colour itself is not a trigger to otherness, but rather a feature of it or, in her words, 'the visual signifier of his Otherness', one that in Elizabethan days was already associated to evil [3]:

> Elizabethans were fascinated by travelers' accounts of foreign peoples, especially by tall tales of monstrous creatures, heathen customs, sexual orgies, and cannibalism. All were associated with blackness in the Elizabethan mind, a color that, in turn, suggested negation, dirt, sin and

> death. From ancient and medieval lore, black meant the demonic. [...] And as the accounts of exploration spread, blackness joined additional signs of Otherness–nakedness, savagery, and general depravity. (*Contextual* 52)

Being blackness closely related to evil and sin, especially sexual deviation, the marriage of Othello to Desdemona was a guaranteed scandal for an Elizabethan audience. Vaughan reminds us that the reason why black characters were relatively common in English Renaissance drama is that 'blackness had shock value ... and if the black male character were linked with a white female, the prurient gaze would be even more excited' (*Contextual* 59).

The fact is that *Othello* presents its readers (and spectators) the possibility of multiple, controversial readings. With regard to the play's racial context, Vaughan poses an intriguing question as to whether or not *Othello* is a racist text (*Contextual* 70). She comes to this question by observing textual passages that lead to both conclusions, i.e., that it is racist and, at the same time, that it is not. When discussing the position of scholars with regard to the backgrounds to *Othello*, Vaughan points out that most of them

> agree that the dominant discourse of Shakespeare's culture was ethnocentric in its assumptions about color and foreign customs. They disagree, however, as to what degree Shakespeare shared those assumptions and to what extent they informed his tragedy. (*Contextual* 64)

No doubt, the complex discourse within the play frequently offers controversial readings, as the text keeps 'blackening' and 'whitening' Othello, for he is given qualities stereotypically attributed to a black man in some passages and to a white man

elsewhere. Such attributes are questionable at their very bases, as there is no singular definition for Moorishness in the English Renaissance. With regard to the representation and stereotyping of Moors in that period, Michael Neill points out that *Moor* (and by extension *Turk*)

> ... could refer quite specifically to the Berber-Arab people of the part of North Africa then rather vaguely denominated as "Morocco," "Mauritania," or "Barbary"; or it could be used to embrace the inhabitants of the whole North African littoral; or it might be extended to refer to Africans generally (whether "white," "black," or "tawny" Moors); or, by an even more promiscuous extension, it might be applied (like "Indian") to almost any darker-skinned peoples–even, on occasion, those of the New World. (364)

Such definitions do not encompass geography alone, but also religion, as Neill himself states that "it is simply impossible to be sure whether *Moor* is a description of color or religion or some vague amalgam of the two" (365). Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin also question the exactness of the term when they write:

> Although 'white Moors' and Moors who have converted to Christianity abound in writings of the period, and although not all Muslims are seen as black, the association of blackness and Moorishness becomes increasingly pervasive, as does the association of Moors and Islam. Maybe because of this, Islam and blackness are often regarded as markers of similar qualities, such as lasciviousness and depravity. At other times, distinctions are strenuously traced between Turks (who are Muslims but not regarded as black) and black Africans (who are only sometimes Muslims). (13)

Loomba and Orkin go on to justify Othello's origins by stating that 'Othello the Moor clearly has an African past and yet is also identified with the very Turks he goes to fight (13). No matter how inaccurate and vague the definitions of Moor or Turk were,[4] the point is that such words were generally employed negatively because, as Vaughan states, "by Shakespeare's day 'the Turk' represented all that was barbaric and demonic, in contrast to the Christian's civil and moral rightness" (*Contextual* 13).

When discussing the stereotypes in *Othello*, Vaughan quotes Eldred Jones' assertion that "in the end Othello emerges, not as another manifestation of a type, but as a distinct individual who typified by his fall, not the weaknesses of Moors, but the weaknesses of human nature" (*Contextual* 64); she also quotes Winthrop Jordan, who wrote that "Shakespeare did not necessarily accept his society's fears about miscegenation, but that he exploited the theme of black/white sexuality to explode his society's beliefs" (*ibid.* 64). This relates to the collective expectations about the play which may have somehow shaped Shakespeare's text and led him to question such expectations, as Fiedler suggests:

> In *Othello* ... it is Shakespeare's bad conscience which has the final word, the bad conscience not only of all in himself which the black stranger symbolised but of his whole culture: the Renaissance, in which he lived; the Middle Ages, which shaped it; and the Modern West, which is the heir of both. (155)

Shakespeare's position in the text is indeed open to different interpretations. Writing is not a completely independent act, and it reflects the author's context as a whole, thus rendering a piece of writing a place for political reflections, assertions and questioning pertaining to the author as well as to that society in which he or she lives. On the interaction between author and text, Patrick Fuery and Nick Mansfield write:

> Texts are not merely positioned in the world as a way of exhibiting their authors' perspective. They do, however, constitute different positions that define distinct ways of being inside–or relegated to the outside of–social identities and formations. It is not that these positions are a reflection of the author's priorities. Indeed, authors define themselves by occupying the position of selfhood that an already existing textual politics offers them. The text is not merely a fully imagined and fully controlled product of its author's mind. The nature and identity of the author is constructed within the text. (145)

Fuery and Mansfield carry on by stating that texts

> ... *invite* ... a certain type of author and audience. This already complex situation is complicated further by the presence in the text of other possible figures, who may be neither author nor audience but become the subject matter of the writing. (146)

In fact, the construction of meaning of a dramatic text does not rely solely on the text itself; in performance, the visual aspects of a play can substitute, diminish or add to the original language and, therefore, to original meanings of that play–whatever they may have been. As much as the language, the visual representations on the stage are reflections of social contexts, and such representations interact with the audience's perceptions of the world. Being so, they also vary according to time and place, a reason why the adaptation of a play requires the adaptation of its language and also of its visual aspects, as these are intertwined.

*Othello* reflects many of the assumptions of Shakespeare's time, which are in themselves subject to careful research. As previously mentioned, Othello is both 'blackened' and 'whitened' throughout the play, and this offers the apparently strange

possibility of seeing him as a white man, insofar as 'white' attitudes and adjectives are attributed to him, whereas 'black' attitudes and qualities are given to Iago at specific moments. It is Iago, the white man, who introduces Othello as a black man right from the beginning (1.1.87), and who keeps disparaging him as so throughout the play, not only physically, but most of all morally, thus associating Othello to the fears of nakedness, savagery, and general depravity often associated to blackness in the Elizabethan mind (Vaughan, *Contextual* 52). Arguably, Iago, along with Brabantio and Roderigo, all enemies to Othello, make the protagonist fit the representation of the Elizabethan much-feared stereotype of the Moor. Othello's deeds and friends, on the other hand, prove him 'white' enough to be an honoured Venetian aid. Therefore, it is right to say that Iago is the one responsible for Othello's blackness but, as the play comes to its end and Iago proves he is the one who deserves being called by Montano a "damned slave" (5.2.241), Iago is finally 'blackened', thus changing roles with Othello; Fiedler indeed demonstrates that, by the end of the play, Othello and Iago have changed roles:

> Moreover, Iago is also called repeatedly, as the play moves toward its end, a slave ... an insult attached in Shakespeare's mind specifically to blacks. [...] Iago has, in short, become, before *Othello* is over, anything signified for Shakespeare at the beginning of his career by the word "Moor". (192)

The inversion of roles can be seen as a challenge to the social conventions of Shakespeare's time. If the audience's expectations right after the beginning of the play were those of seeing a tragedy caused by the Moor, who was bound to act according to the evil natural characteristics generally attributed to his breed, when the play ends they learn that now evil had a white face, that of Iago. The mere characterising of Othello at

the core of the action gives the stranger a louder voice than usual and is a revolutionary position taken by Shakespeare;[5] as Serôdio writes:

> *Não será ... abusivo considerar que, ao construir Othello como herói trágico nessa precisa configuração dramatúrgica, Shakespeare se coloca numa relação de contestação ... das ideologias dominantes do seu tempo sobre raça e sexo. E isto porque, ao expor dramaticamente o espaço do diferendo e da contradição, acaba por se localizar aí, nessa fractura, a possibilidade de uma inquirição da ordem dominante, sujeitando-a a uma relativização, e desocultando eventuais "estratégias de resistência"*. (183)

Vaughan agrees that the inversion of roles between Othello and Iago is in some aspects a strategy of resistance, for "just as Iago turns out to be the white villain with the black heart, he also becomes the true slave while Othello asserts his freedom to choose his own death" (*Contextual* 69). In this sense, a plausible justification for Vaughan's assertion "I think this play is racist, and I think it is not" (*Contextual* 70) is that the language in *Othello* repeatedly associates blackness to evil, which imparts a racist discourse onto the play; on the other hand, it is also right to say that the play is not racist, as the plot denies stereotypes by making Othello (stereotypically) whiter than Iago, thus giving him the positive attributes of mankind, not only those negatively pertaining to black people.

A similar process of change happens to Desdemona who is, like Othello, stereotyped by Iago as a false woman, though the final scene reveals Iago himself as a false man. Indeed, if neither Othello nor Desdemona had been submitted to the process of stereotyping by Iago (who might be said to represent the hegemony of prejudice), they would not have fallen in the end; this however, would spoil the plot.[6]

On Othello and Desdemona as victims of preconceptions, Serôdio writes:

> *No final ficará tragicamente exposta a consequência da sujeição dos protagonistas à ideologia dominante no que diz respeito ao comportamento racial e sexual: porque na conformação às representações dominantes no espaço "da cidade de Veneza", tal como o texto as reconstrói, não há lugar para o outro, que é sucessivamente demonizado, fragilizado e suprimido, pelo que os únicos que permanecem ("vivos") em cena no final são homens, e todos eles brancos*. (192)

Given the range of possible interpretations of *Othello*, even when only one of the play's thematic aspects is considered, as is the case with race, new readings are inevitable. Still as regards race, Quarshie wonders, like Vaughan, whether *Othello* is a racist play or not. Quarshie understands that, even though the plot redeems Othello from supposedly black behaviour–because he proves to be honoured–the language in the text is racist, for it suggests that Othello's behaviour is predetermined by his being a Moor; Quarshie suggests that new readings and appropriations of the play in performance can oppose traditional renderings that have reinforced racial generalisation:

> This carelessness about racial distinctions reminds me of that casual racism which is unable or unwilling to distinguish one black man from another, that attitude which generalizes out of ignorance and supposition, that attitude which would offend so greatly when applied to Jews, as if the distinctions between Orthodox and Liberal, between Ashkenazim, Sephardim, and Falasha, were insignificant under the banner of Jewishness. (16)

Arguing further about the role of performance as a means of freeing *Othello* from the racial prejudice of the original text, Quarshie points out:

> It might still be impossible to avoid the conclusion that Othello behaves as he does because he's black; but it might be possible to suggest that he does so not because of a genetic disposition towards gullibility and violent jealousy, but for compelling psychological, social and political reasons; that he behaves as he does because he is as black man responding to racism, not giving a pretext for it. (21)

What Quarshie proposes is, indeed, new readings of *Othello* so as to make non-racist interpretations possible, i.e., readings that may 'deracialise' the play. In this sense, he, unknowingly, suggests that individuals involved in the production of *Othello* must try to offer their audiences what Said calls 'contrapuntal reading', the term used to describe a form of 'reading back', an appropriation of the discourse of the imperialist so as to hear in it the voice of the imperialised.[7] This goes against the coercive forces that work to keep the colonised unheard, especially the assumption by the rulers that the dominated do not wish to speak, as Said points out:

> Without significant exception the universalizing discourses of modern Europe and the United States assume the silence, willing or otherwise, of the non-European world. There is incorporation; there is inclusion; there is direct rule; there is coercion. But there is only infrequently an acknowledgement that the colonized people should be heard from, their ideas known. (*Culture* 58)

Said proposes contrapuntal reading as a form of resistance, at least an intellectual one that relies on the source of any other kind of rebellious attitude that goes against the acceptance and consequent silence typical of what he calls "rhetoric of

blame" (*Culture* 19). He remarks that acceptance of the ruling system is primarily based upon ideological foundations, and it is at such level that opposition must first work. The role of contrapuntal reading in this process is that of providing a broader perception of history through narrative:

> As we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally but *contrapuntally*, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts. (*Culture* 59)

The concept of contrapuntal reading relates to the assertion that culture is a powerful agent of resistance, especially when post-colonial writers perform what Said calls "the voyage in" (*Culture* 288), an appropriation or, in a better word, adaptation of the coloniser's language, explained by Ashcroft and Ahluwalia as one in which "writers take hold of the dominant modes of literary writing to expose their culture to a world audience" (8), thus making an attempt to have their voices heard.

Even though Said explores contrapuntal reading mostly with regard to novels, the concept is not limited to them. Indeed, the dramatic text offers a wide range of uses for contrapuntal reading as well as for "the voyage in", both forms of resistance against the cultural impositions of 'first-world' nations. And being Shakespeare one of the most acknowledged representatives of British culture, his texts have conveniently become a trademark of imperialist ideology and hegemony. In his 2000 lecture at UFSC entitled "Shakespeare in Ideology", Christopher McCullough pointed out that Shakespeare did not become a literary event until after his death, and that literary Shakespeare in fact began to be spread only in the eighteenth century; McCullough stated that Shakespeare was, finally, made into an icon of English culture in the

nineteenth century, through a process that changed him from a man of the theatre into a man of literature. It is certainly not a coincidence that this process occurred right at the peak of British Imperialism.

Fuery and Mansfield agree with Said regarding the use of culture by imperialist societies with the purpose of dominating others, being literature a useful instrument that is put at the service of rulers whose interest is 'proving' the inferiority of alien individuals and, by extension, societies. As texts are long-living documents, they gain credibility and consistency as supposed evidence of somebody else's position in relation to the coloniser, by means of constructing the identity of the colonised. When discussing the uses of otherness in texts, Fuery and Mansfield write:

> The text usually produces one set of identities that are considered normal and substantial, and another that is marked off as different or inferior. One set of attributes is validated and another treated sceptically. Usually the position of author is affiliated to the dominant and accepted identity; identities that are 'written-about' are treated disdainfully and reductively, and the audience is invited to dissociate itself from the latter and approve the former. In other words, two rival sets of identities are constructed, one of which presents a complex and dynamic position in the world, and the other a simpler, more debased one. The former (the self) is given a full and rich interior perspective. The latter (the other) is almost invariably seen from the outside. (146)

Fuery and Mansfield carry on by stating that "this process is commonly described as *the reduction of the other to the same (or self)*. The other loses its independence and becomes merely an inferior version of the dominant self" (148). Dominance and independence are strongly related to otherness, which is a key element

of ‘reduction’, as Said has also shown. Canonical texts become particularly relevant when they express the dominant ideology that places the colonised as inferior, thus reinforcing the alleged need of some cultures to be colonised. This is the case with Shakespearean texts such as *Othello* and *The Tempest*, among others, which have long been used to demonstrate the superiority of British ideology, thus implying the inferiority of others, and vice-versa. The canonisation of Shakespeare has indeed become an ideological artefact at the service of the Empire; when discussing Shakespeare and colonialism, Loomba and Orkin suggest that

> the nature of their global presence, and the historical interactions between ‘Shakespeare’ and colonialism, have been, in the last decade, subjected to new and exciting critiques. Such critiques have shown how Anglo-American literary scholarship of the last two centuries offered a Shakespeare who celebrated the superiority of the ‘civilized races’, and, further, that colonial educationists and administrators used this Shakespeare to reinforce cultural and racial hierarchies. Shakespeare was made to perform such ideological work both by interpreting his plays in highly conservative ways (so that they were seen as endorsing existing racial, gender and other hierarchies, never as questioning or destabilizing them) and by constructing him as one of the best, if not ‘the best’, writer in the whole world. He became, during the colonial period, the quintessence of Englishness and a measure of humanity itself. Thus the meanings of Shakespeare’s plays were both derived from and used to establish colonial authority. (1)

Unfortunately, it will not be possible to include in this study, for sheer lack of space, further considerations regarding the implications of post-colonialism affecting

(and being affected by) the Shakespearean text, especially *Othello*. This does not mean, however, that such implications do not deserve further study considering culture, race, nationality, and ideology as being deeply connected to one another, for, according to Loomba and Orkin, English culture and literature cannot be isolated from "considerations of racial and cultural difference, and from the dynamics of emergent colonialisms" (4).

In a sense, individuals involved in theatre production function as writers as well, for they need to reinterpret and rewrite the original text for the purpose of adaptation; thus, they can offer resistance not only by writing or reading, but also by rewriting and rereading the text. This is often the case with *Othello*, a text that is prone to racial and political interpretations that will inevitably affect the construction of its meanings; as Serôdio suggests:

> *Com efeito, a encenação envolve opções, saberes, vontade de uma (mesmo que não consciente) função social e resolução estética que atravessa o processo de feitura de um espectáculo. Assim, evocando modelos estéticos (ainda que os não cite, ainda que os não copie), o encenador coloca-se numa zona de significação que ultrapassa o gesto individual e o insere num jogo múltiplo de criação de sentidos: não só porque opera com outros criadores, e configura intercepções artísticas, mas porque o espectáculo de teatro se relança ainda num processo de recepção e recriação por parte do público.* (265)

Being drama a highly mediated kind of writing (and reading), it naturally offers plenty of possibilities for interpretation. The culture of resistance proposed by Said then finds a place whenever an already written dramatic text is adapted to be staged, as adaptation itself is enough to provide the text with new meanings, for it demands new

readings from those involved in such an adaptation; much more than that, the performed text also allows new readings on the part of the audience. From such new readings, one that is more empathetic with the position of the colonised and may thus offer resistance to elements of the hegemonic culture present in the original text can be enhanced. In the context of the British Empire, modern representations of the other were often constructed according to Imperialistic views that were produced in the nineteenth century, a notion that applies to Shakespeare's *Othello*. Even though the text was written and originally performed in the seventeenth century, it is important not to forget that the Modern West is, as pointed out by Fiedler, the heir of both the Middles Ages and the Renaissance (155). Modern readings of *Othello*, whether contrapuntal or not, have their roots in the backgrounds that led to the play's first productions, as well as in the stage history that ensued. Such history has inevitably planted new meanings into Shakespeare's text, especially when adapted; the point is that some of those meanings might still be elided and thus demand investigation and disclosure, and describing what is 'invisible' in a text demands a political vision of resistance (Said). But that vision, of course, depends on choice.

# Notes

[1] Homi Bhabha also poses the question of diverging forces when conceptualising otherness; in his words, "the Other must be seen as the necessary negation of a primordial identity–cultural or psychic–that introduces the system of differentiation which enables the cultural to be signified as a linguistic, symbolic, historic [sic] reality. If, as I have suggested, the subject of desire is never simply a Myself, then the other is never simply an *It-self*, a front of identity, truth or misrecognition" (52).

[2] On the differences between imperialism and colonialism, Said sees the first as "the practice, theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory", whereas the latter is "the implanting of settlements on a distant territory". He adds that "in our time, direct colonialism has largely ended; imperialism ... lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices" (*Culture* 8).

[3] According to traditional readings, Genesis 9:21 tells that blackness is the consequence of one of Noah's sons' disobedience to his father and to God, who imposed on all his descendants blackness and servitude as a form of punishment. Vaughan (*Contextual* 53-55) and Serôdio (184-185) quote early Elizabethan narratives that also justify the origins of blackness (and slavery) as a Divine punishment for sexual sin, thus relating it to moral perversion.

[4] The pen-and-ink sketch attributed to Henry Peacham is acknowledged as the earliest known illustration of a scene from one of Shakespeare's plays (*Titus Andronicus*). There are doubts to whether the sketch is a real record of performance or only an illustration to accompany the text; for these reasons, Dennis Kennedy refers to it as a document that has 'authenticity without reliability' (*Looking* 19-20). Despite such doubts and the misrepresentation of the scene, it offers interesting information, such as the inclusion of Aaron the Moor, who is portrayed not as a 'tawny', but as 'thick-lipped' black (see Appendix 2).

[5] As it seems, calling Othello a hero would be quite imprecise, as he does not quite fit the traditional definition of either hero or villain. As Fiedler points out, he is a "figure who escapes both poles of the classic definition–appearing sometimes as hero, sometimes as villain, sometimes as clown" (15).

[6] Fiedler suggests that there is some farce and paradox in *Othello*, thus seeing its plot as flawed. He points out that (1) "the fable of *Othello* is incredible and yet we believe it [because] the events of *Othello* constitute a 'bloody farce,' and yet we respond to them with the tragic shudder" and that (2) Othello's unjustified jealousy is "a fitter occasion for laughter than for tears" (150).

[7] Ashcroft & Ahluwalia quote Said to define contrapuntal reading as "a form of 'reading back' from the perspective of the colonised, to show how the submerged but crucial presence of the empire emerges in canonical texts. As we begin to read, not univocally but *contrapuntally*, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history and of those other subjected and concealed histories against which the dominant discourse acts (59), we obtain a very different sense of what is going on in the text" (92).

# CHAPTER II

## PERFORMING *OTHELLO* ON STAGE (AND SCREEN)

> These Moors are changeable ...
> (*Othello* 1.3.347)

### 2.1. EARLY HISTORY

In his introduction to the Third Series of the Arden Shakespeare, E. A. J. Honigmann discusses the controversy as to whether *Othello* should be considered Shakespeare's best tragedy or not, placed at a higher position than *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, usually recognised, along with *Othello* itself, as Shakespeare's four "mature" plays (Honigmann 1). There is argument leading to different directions; if plot, for instance, is taken as a justification for *Othello's* grandiosity, one can say it is magnificently constructed and exciting (Honigmann 1; 102-1), in spite of being artificially constructed, thus flawed (Fiedler 150; Quarshie 18).

*Othello* is, indeed, a play that has long been subject to much discussion. Although meaning and relevance can be endlessly discussed in theoretical terms, data related to what could be regarded as "concrete" information are bound to be contested, as is the case when both the play's date of composition and text are brought into question.

With regard to the first issue, *Othello's* date is traditionally accepted as sometime between 1603 and 1604. However, Honigmann presents evidence supporting the original date as being between 1601-1602 (344-50); such evidence includes (1)

intertextual reference between *Othello* and other plays, especially *Hamlet*, (2) the availability of actors with specific talents, especially those who worked in *Twelfth Night*, and (3) the date of publication of authorised and unauthorised texts. Whatever the case, such data, added to historical facts that served as backgrounds to *Othello*, suggest that the play was written no earlier than 1601 and no later than 1604, the year its performance at court was officially registered (Kermode 98).

If date can be questioned, the same is true for *Othello's* text; like other plays of the canon, *Othello* does not have a single, authoritative text. There are two traditionally accepted versions, both published after Shakespeare's death, namely the Quarto, from 1622 and usually addressed as Q, and the Folio, published in 1623 and known as F. Both F and Q have differences in wording, spelling and content, thus posing difficulties in assessing which version is closer to Shakespeare's original text; Honigmann proposes that Shakespeare himself produced a manuscript in which his second thoughts were added to the first text (351-354).

The terms Quarto and Folio are basically printing designations referring to the format of printed material. Folio refers to a two-fold leaf that would thus produce four pages, whereas a Quarto was a Folio folded twice, thus producing eight pages of a smaller size. The Quartos are often considered "unofficial" editions of Shakespeare's plays, sometimes published as "pirate" copies, although some were later recognised as good Quartos due to their very credibility; Folio, in turn, relates to the "official" edition of Shakespeare's plays published in 1623. Both Quarto and Folio have been traditionally accepted as the most complete versions deriving from Shakespeare's originals, and modern texts of *Othello* are generally compilations of both texts, with corrections and additions varying from one edition to the next, which is the reason why editorial notes are always needed.

Shakespeare took a story by Giraldi Cinthio as the main source for his *Othello*. Cinthio's story is about a Moor who lives in Venice with his wife Disdemona (the only character with a name). After living happily in Venice for some time, they move to Cyprus, where the story gains its tragic tonalities. The Moor's Ensign, being rejected in his love for Disdemona, makes the Moor believe in her infidelity and helps him to murder her. Apart from all similarities, Shakespeare added important elements to enrich Cinthio's story (Kermode 98). Perhaps the most fundamental change is that Shakespeare's Moor is more noble in some aspects, the "noble Moor whom our full senate / Call all-in-all sufficient" (4.1.264-65), a man who commits suicide after killing his wife with his own hands. Furthermore, his love for Desdemona has a spiritual quality that defies the notion of lust attributed to Moors in Elizabethan days, as discussed in Chapter 1 (19). Shakespeare's story is made more tragic through one more device: the reasons for the Ensign's hatred are not entirely clear; Cinthio's Ensign had in his rejected desire for the Moor's wife a plain motive for revenge, whereas Shakespeare's Iago offers ground for interesting speculations about his reasons for hating the Moor. As we have seen, by making the white villain more evil, the moral distance between Othello, the Moor, and white Iago increases, thus challenging the stereotypical notion of white as related to good and black as related to evil.

From the many other possible inspirational sources of *Othello* besides Cinthio,[1] the presence of the Moorish embassy in London in August 1600 deserves consideration. When referring to the portrait of the Moorish Ambassador (see Appendix 3), Honigmann suggests that the visit of the embassy and the Ambassador's "intense and aristocratic face" (3) might have inspired Shakespeare – supposing that he saw the Ambassador – to write, or at least to characterise, Othello as a dignified Moor. Vaughan, on the contrary, states that "by the time Shakespeare began writing *Othello*,

the embassy was a distant memory. Any familiarity most Londoners had with 'blackamoors' probably came from slaves and servants, not from 'men of royal siege'" (*Contextual* 59); however, given the aforementioned considerations about *Othello*'s date, it seems quite reasonable that the embassy had really influenced the play.

The portrait of the Moorish Ambassador, indeed, only increases the discussion as to whether Othello should be originally seen as a 'tawny' or 'black' Moor; even though the word Moor had different meanings in Shakespeare's time, as outlined in Chapter I (20), the text uses the word 'thicklips' (1.1.65) when referring to Othello. As previously mentioned, Henry Peacham's famous drawing of a supposed scene of *Titus Andronicus* shows Aaron the Moor as definitely black (see Appendix 2), but there is evidence suggesting that both Shakespeare and the Elizabethan audience were aware of the existence of distinct types of Moor, as illustrations from the period have shown. However, as expected, such awareness and the consequent renderings of *Othello* went through many changes in the years to come.

## 2.2. *OTHELLO* IN PERFORMANCE IN ENGLAND AND THE UNITED STATES

The conflicts of the English Civil War led the Parliament to enforce the closing of the theatres in 1642; when the theatres reopened in 1660, many actors of Shakespeare's company and who were now part of the new King's Company were still alive. This may suggest that early Restoration performances of *Othello* did not vary much from the original performances, as the members of the King's Company seemed to have an interest in keeping Shakespeare untouched (Vaughan *Contextual* 93). New actors learned tradition from older actors, which suggests that, at least for some time,

*Othello* was kept quite close to the original stagings. Early reports and illustrations support the argument that, "given the continuous chain of *Othello* tradition, it is reasonable to assume that Shakespeare's Moor was meant to be black and that he was played black throughout the Restoration" (Vaughan *Contextual* 96).

The productions of *Othello* during the Restoration showed a romantic hero to audiences not yet afraid of his otherness; as Vaughan points out, the fear of racial difference or miscegenation had not become as strong as in the end of the nineteenth century (*Contextual* 234), which caused Othello to be seen merely as an exotic hero coming from a distant land. Despite showing Othello as a black man, Restoration productions stated him as a dignified follower of the Cavalier code, much more a noble than a savage (Vaughan *Contextual* 95). Being a member of the aristocracy as well as a guardian of civility, Othello was traditionally shown during the eighteenth century as a black man whose British uniform was more important to the eyes of the audience than his colour; an illustration in the 1728 Alexander Pope's edition of Shakespeare shows Othello in British clothes, his colour the only feature to distinguish him (visually) from other characters (see Appendix 4).

Restoration values of militarism and nobility were still common during the eighteenth century, though Othello was made into a more romantic lover. Not yet regarded as a total stranger, Othello's exoticism increased in that period, shown through the change from British military uniforms to Moorish clothing. This may be due to the greater amount of information actors and audiences had about distant lands, as provided by the emerging travel literature.

A production dated from 1814 showed actor Edmund Kean playing an aggressive and exotic Moor, whose otherness was characterised by abundant jewellery and exotic clothing, suggestive of richness, but also by bracelets, chain and dagger,

which all suggest violence and imprisonment (see Appendix 5). Kean's performance gave him a long-lasting reputation as one of the best actors in the role, with an interpretation full of "emotional range which instilled pity and fear" (Mason 162), one in which "moments of primitive violence were juxtaposed with elegiac lyricism" (ibid.).

The nineteenth century showed *Othello* as a domestic tragedy. Family values replaced the military ones, as the family was at the core of Victorian society. The tragedy of the Moor thus became what might have been called the tragedy of a husband, with a considerable shift even in the hero's image.

The shift to a more domestic Othello can be exemplified by a production of 1848 in which G. Y. Brooke does not at all portray a violent figure; shown in a penitent posture, the hero has gained a moustache, in resemblance with a typical Victorian father and a much used trait in later productions, although otherness was still typified mostly through clothing, now less extravagant, better suited for Victorian standards (see Appendix 6). Perhaps the best example of a nineteenth-century *Othello* is the one offered in the late 1830s by an actor who had already played Iago opposite Edmund Kean, and who "contrived to domesticate Kean's wildness" (Bate 111). William Macready (see Appendix 7), known as a typical Victorian father, transposed his personal views on family bonds unto the play, for he saw Othello as a "loving husband whose domestic tranquillity becomes brutally shattered" (Vaughan *Contextual* 136). Despite the fact that Macready did not achieve recognition as a great actor, his vast experience with *Othello* influenced most productions of the century, even after his death. One of his contributions is the use of what was then called the Macready pause, a pause in speech that he believed could make the text sound more natural, possibly motivated by Macready's concern with scenery and costumes (Vaughan *Contextual*

136-7). Another reason for his success was the impact *Othello* had on English, as well as on American, audiences of the period, as explained by Vaughan:

> The Macready *Othello* portrayed a loving husband, beset by a scheming but appealing villain who destroys the hero's domestic and psychological harmony and causes an innocent wife to suffer and die. Iago's personal venom thus constituted a threat to what could have been a stable and happy family unit, the ideal building block of Victorian culture. (*Contextual* 157)

If *Othellos* of the Restoration and the eighteenth century, as well as those of the early Victorian period, could be interpreted by seeking points of similarity with the audience, the same cannot be said about productions from the late Victorian period on. The establishment of British Imperialism was concomitant to new and intentional notions about strangers, which reflected the portraying of a "foreign" Othello on stage, no longer a quasi-European; political, racial and geographical otherness brought the culture of difference to the theatres, changing the performance of *Othello* ever since. On the issue, Vaughan states:

> These complex cultural forces–the establishment of tight anti-miscegenation laws in the United States, the expansion of Britain's overseas empire, and widely disseminated theories of racial Darwinism–mark a major shift from the eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries. Lines of difference between Othello and his white audiences had always existed, but now they were more rigidly defined and codified. Audiences continued to respond to the humanity of Shakespeare's tragic hero, only now their sense of his Otherness was stronger than it had been before. (*Contextual* 162)

A good example of a production affected by emerging Orientalism is Tommaso Salvini's *Othello* of 1875 (see Appendix 8). Salvini delivered his speeches in Italian while the other actors spoke English, thus emphasising "not simply the actor's differentness from his audience but also Othello's differentness from the other characters in Shakespeare's play" (Vaughan *Contextual* 163). Besides the linguistic shock, Salvini's Othello showed more violent reactions (both physical and vocal) than his previous counterparts. A turban also added strangeness to the character, which is in fact a contradiction if Othello's conversion to Christianity is considered, for, as Honigmann points out, obviously, "the turban counts as a symbol of the Muslim faith" (17). Salvini's clothing was also typically oriental, which is, according to Honigmann, another "error", as Othello hopes to be assimilated as a Venetian (17). The impact of that production upon racial views of *Othello* is well put by Vaughan:

> Salvini's Othello marked a major change in racial discourse; no longer "one of us," the Moor became identified with passions antithetical to what was perceived as "Anglo-Saxon" rationality. Represented by an Italian actor speaking Italian, Salvini's tigerish Moor conjoined with English and American racial stereotypes to shape the early twentieth century's conception of Othello as a "primitive" who lacked civility and thus could not control his passion. (*Contextual* 235)

Performances of the late nineteenth century, such as Ernesto Rossi's and Tommaso Salvini's, showed an Othello whose passion was remarkably contrasted to Iago's self-control, thus initiating what Vaughan calls the "dissociation of intellect" (*Contextual* 158-80) that marked the play from that period on, according to which Othello came to be seen as a passionate (primitive) man in opposition to intelligent (civilised) Iago.

Othello's difference, highlighted in the late nineteenth century, continued to ghost his image for a long time, as turbans and oriental robes were present in many later productions. One such is the 1897 production in which Wilson Barrett appeared on stage wearing a turban, dagger, chain, earrings, moustache and beard, evoking extreme exoticism and thus otherness (see Appendix 9), a tendency that went on until the first decades of the twentieth century, when Othello was shown as a warrior, sometimes even in medieval armour.

It was only by the third decade of the twentieth century that new readings of Othello's racial difference emerged, especially as a result of Paul Robeson's playing the title role (see Appendix 10). Even though Ira Aldridge (see Appendix 11) achieved great reputation as a black actor in the nineteenth century, especially after a successful debut as Othello at the Theatre Royal, London, in 1833, Robeson's Othello, played by a black actor with a white cast in front of a white audience in major theatres, first in London in 1930 and later in the United States, Robeson's home country, caused greater social impact. Also a political activist and a fighter for civil rights, especially those of black people, which sets him at a special position in American history along with Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, Robeson contributed to raise the discussion of skin colour in *Othello*. The day before his first public performance in the role of Othello in London, the actor declared that the play "is a tragedy of racial conflict, a tragedy of honor, rather than of jealousy" (*Othello Rutgers* 1); and on Othello himself, Robeson believed that "the fact that he is an alien among white people makes his mind work more quickly. He feels dishonor more deeply. His color heightens the tragedy" (*ibid.*). Although Robeson's performance caused new views upon black actors playing Othello, as well as upon the social space for black people in general, it did not contribute to dissociate Othello from the traditional image of strangeness; Robeson saw Othello as a

"noble figure", but also as "a man of singleness of purpose and simplicity with a mind as direct as a straight line", which confirms the naïveté of someone who will, in Iago's words, let himself "be led by th' nose" (1.3.400). Robeson's *Othello* took quite a long time to reach his own land, as the American theatres only saw this genuinely black Othello in 1943, due to the resistance of American audiences to see a white woman kissed by a black man in public, which gives strong evidence of the growth of racism in the United States as compared to Britain.

Robeson's sympathy with the part led other actors to believe it was meant to be played by a black actor. Hugh Quarshie, however, shows deep concerns about black actors like himself playing Othello, as he believes the role portrays offensive stereotypes and thus "diminishes or distorts humanity" (20).[2] However, instead of affirming that black actors should not play Othello, Quarshie points out that "the racist conventions have persisted for so long precisely because not enough of us have played the role and challenged the conventions" (ibid.). Quarshie goes further to suggest that it is possible to redeem the play from its prejudicial feeling by offering new readings to it, as mentioned in Chapter I (15). Robeson's successful Othello has made the role a difficult one for white actors since then. Robeson started a new era, one in which the part became more and more intended for black actors and, although it gained memorable performances by actors such as Laurence Olivier in 1964 and Anthony Hopkins in 1981, a white actor in black make-up was no longer accepted without controversy (Vaughan *Contextual* 197).

The 1964 production at the Old Vic showed an Othello played by Laurence Olivier, who was, according to Pamela Mason, "the first to challenge the legendary supremacy of Kean's performance" (162). Olivier's Othello was played black, in "a performance of remarkable physical detail" (Mason 164) which, still according to

Mason, contributed to reveal Othello's sophistication, sensuality, and racial confidence (164), as well as irrationality and return to primitiveness, especially when he "tore the crucifix from his neck as he severed his links with a civilisation he now derided and condemned" (166). Besides, the murder of Desdemona depicted new shades of dignity possibly influenced by Paul Robeson's Othello, as in the final scene Olivier "was calm, convinced of the moral imperative to carry out what he was sure is an honourable murder" (Mason 168).

In 1985, Terry Hands directed Ben Kingsley as Othello at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, in Stratford-upon-Avon. Kingsley's Othello was an Eastern Moor who conveyed "the sense of a meditative man untouchable by humdrum reality, almost godlike in his grace and bearing" (Mason 164), thus challenging Iago's initial descriptions of Othello as lustful and lascivious (see Appendix 12). In this sense, that interpretation also paid a tribute to Paul Robeson's, who rendered the Moor greater physical power and dignity than his predecessors.

South Africa saw Othello played by a black actor–with a white Desdemona–in front of a multi-racial audience for the first time in 1987. Janet Suzman directed the Johannesburg's Market Theatre production featuring John Kani in the title role, in what Vaughan calls "a strong political statement" (*Contextual* 198), given the context of apartheid; in her production, Suzman defies the barriers imposed by the system and, as Hodgdon states, "appropriates *Othello* as a mirror in which South Africans might confront the racism of their prevailing social order" (42). Suzman's *Othello* was intended to an audience "familiar with the banning of mixed marriages" (Cartmell 74) and to which "the fear of white disempowerment" (ibid.) would be specially meaningful, which makes her production notable.

Trevor Nunn's 1989 Royal Shakespeare Company production of *Othello* concentrated on gender problems. The key element of that *Othello* was the marriage of Othello–played by Jamaican black actor Willard White–and Desdemona contrasted to that of Iago and Emilia, complicated by a military environment. Although racial issues were not neglected, greater emphasis was given to human relations in a difficult setting that would however facilitate comradeship among men or, as Vaughan reports, to "the search for meaning in human relationships, the struggle to find trust and intimacy in a world of appearances, the fragility of human bonds" (*Contextual* 219). Such "intimacy" might have been fostered by the place itself, as Nunn's production "took advantage of the spectator proximity of studio theatre by using many small properties to create its world" (Smallwood 190).

Given the importance of the Royal Shakespeare Company, this production was likely to become a reference to later productions of *Othello*, among which the famous 1997 staging for the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, starring Patrick Stewart, an experienced Royal Shakespeare Company's actor, in the title role. That production had, as well as Nunn's, a military setting, and it gave great emphasis to racial issues. It can be seen as an attempt to question the racial stereotypes in the play, as its "colours" are "inverted", with Patrick Stewart playing a white Othello acting with a mostly black cast (see Appendix 13). The production offered challenging attitudes to Shakespeare's text, placing the action in a scenery resembling a metropolitan city with a mixture of nationalities. In that setting, black was essentially the colour of the upper class, Othello being the only exception, and white was the colour of the lower class, Bianca, the Cypriots and Brabantio's servants being examples of such. The production definitely set Othello in the place of an other, if not inferior, at least unequal and, although it redeemed Othello from the "burden" of blackness, it still insisted on difference.

Stewart remarks that his white Othello was performed at a time when it "no longer became acceptable for a white actor to put on a blackface and to pretend to be African" (Greene 2). When commenting on his thoughts about what he called a "photo negative" production of *Othello*, Stewart expressed his awareness of the social role of the play with regard to racism, as well as his knowledge that colour is not the only attribute of otherness in Shakespeare's text:

> To replace the black outsider with a white man in a black society, will, I hope, encourage a much broader view of the fundamentals of racism, and perhaps even question those triggers–you know, color of skin, physiognomy, language, culture–that can produce instant feelings of fear, suspicion and so forth. (Greene 3)

Jude Kelly, director of *Othello*, agrees with Stewart with regard to the relevance of reversing racial conventions in their production:

> When an all white or mostly white audience watches a black Othello, the reaction can be liberal but patronizing. This production is a deliberate attempt to reverse that situation, to make white audiences experience some of the feelings of isolation and discomfort that black people experience all of the time in their lives. (Gardner 2)

Kelly insists, however, that racial tension is not the only aspect that deserves attention in the play. The military set design of their production contributes to make the issues of masculinity and violence add to those of jealousy and race, thus creating an extremely tense environment. Kelly explains that the murder of Desdemona "is not a blind moment of madness as with many crimes of passion. It is a soldier exterminating an enemy" (Gardner 3).

Other English-language productions of the century focused on different aspects of the play, such as militarism and global conflict, as well as gender issues, thanks to the growing concern with the role of women in society. Despite the shift from one topic of *Othello* to another in modern productions, the racial aspects of the play could never be fully neglected, since, as Vaughan points out, "in the 1990s, race is not the only issue in theatrical and filmic productions, but it is not likely to be ignored" (*Contextual* 235).

## 2.3. *OTHELLO* IN PERFORMANCE IN BRAZIL

The early performances of *Otelo* in Brazil were held under two basic influences.[3] The first one is textual. Due to the opposition of Voltaire, who believed Shakespeare's works to be diversions from the classics and also too extreme for the French taste (Faria 21-23), the English Bard was not well received in France, until Jean-François Ducis adapted Shakespeare's texts to the French audiences. As much as in continental Europe, this of course had an impact on Brazilian perceptions of Shakespeare in the early nineteenth century, whose texts arrived in the country as translations from Ducis' adaptations.

This is certainly true for *Otelo*. However, Ducis' "undignified" version of Shakespeare's text was eventually regarded as a farce that gave rise to imitations not only in France, but also in other countries influenced by French theatre, as is the case with Brazil (Gomes 89). What is especially relevant about Ducis' Moor was that he was intentionally white, as Ducis believed that a dark-skinned character would be too shocking to the audience (Gomes 89-90).

The most prominent Brazilian actor of the century was João Caetano dos Santos (see Appendix 14), an actor-manager who played Otelo repeatedly, starting from 1837, and who arguably tried to present "*um Shakespeare mais legítimo*" (Gomes 89); whether this is true or not, the fact is that João Caetano surrendered to Ducis' text, translated by Gonçalves de Magalhães (Prado 25), possibly due to public pressure. If Caetano can be accused of accepting the "corruption" of Ducis' text, the same cannot be said with regard to Otelo's physicality, as Caetano's Othello was modelled according to Ira Aldrige's, i.e., African both in colour and clothes, a challenging choice for the time (Gomes 16). However, Caetano's performance showed an Otelo whose savagery stood above nobility and who sounded, as much as Salvini's, like an African beast (ibid.). In *Lições Dramáticas*, Caetano remembers how he constructed his Otelo:

> *... depois de ter dado a esta personagem o caráter rude de um filho do deserto, habituado às tempestades e aos combates, entendi que este grande vulto trágico quando falasse devia trazer à idéia do espectador o rugido de um leão africano, e que não devia falar no tom médio da minha voz; recorri por isso ao tom grave dela e conheci que a poderia sustentar em todo o meu papel*. (29)

The second aspect to affect dramatic activity in Brazil then is that theatre in the nineteenth century (in fact, not only in Brazil) was under the influence of the romantic acting style, especially after João Caetano, who often performed in an operatic style in the same fashion of famous Italian actors who were part of the European star system (O'Shea 2). As we have seen, most of them played their roles in Italian, even when performing abroad (Tommaso Salvini and Ernesto Rossi being two such examples), which contributed to rendering the plays nearly as "spoken operas". Although neither Salvini nor Rossi had performed in Brazil until 1871, the year they both arrived in the

country, their exaggerated romantic performances, then supposed to be "natural", in opposition to earlier sung declamation, allied to the poor lines of Ducis' text used in Brazil, proved to be a handful for parodies in the early Realist period (Gomes 88-93).

The Romantic era had come to its conclusion by the end of the nineteenth century; many other famous Italian actors and their companies brought Shakespeare to Brazil (O'Shea 5-6; Gomes 21), no longer through the imitations of Ducis nor with the melodramatic acting of the previous years. Coincidentally–but not accidentally–with the rise of Realism, Shakespeare had also become a cultural Ambassador of British culture and empire. Strange as it may seem, Shakespeare's plays proved to be unable to gather large crowds in Brazil at a time which corresponded to the peak of British Imperialism in the second half of the nineteenth century, which is mostly due to (1) the rising interest in comedies and dancing (Faria 160, Gomes 17, Macedo 571-573, O'Shea 5), and (2) the search for a national theatre and new themes claimed by Realism (Varela 511).

As much as in the nineteenth century–with the exception of João Caetano–twentieth-century professional performances of Shakespeare's plays in Brazil were delivered exclusively by foreign companies until 1938, when the Teatro do Estudante do Brasil was founded and presented *Romeu e Julieta* as its first production (Gomes 24). What is especially relevant about the Teatro do Estudante is that, as a cultural movement, it gave new life to the national theatre. Moreover, the search for new cultural and political standards in the period that motivated the Teatro do Estudante also motivated the creation of TEN (Teatro Experimental do Negro) in 1944.[4]

The name Abdias do Nascimento deserves special consideration; if the United States can be proud of Paul Robeson, Brazil can also value the career of Nascimento, the most important figure involved in the "black experimental theatre" that aimed at

new views of the place of black actors on Brazilian stages, not to mention in society. Besides being a respected actor, Nascimento was a black activist–which further caused him to be an expatriate in the United States and South Africa from 1968 to 1981–who gained recognition rarely achieved by black people at the time, leading him to take to politics and hold the position of deputy (from 1983 to 1986) and senator (for six months in 1991 and again from 1997 to 1999).[5]

Nascimento was the first black actor to play Otelo professionally in Brazil. In one of his performances in the role he played act V, scene II, during the celebration of TEN's second anniversary in December 1946 (see Appendix 15). Desdêmona was played by Cacilda Becker, one of the greatest Brazilian white actresses ever, which helped to give TEN the recognition it deserved, and also to set Abdias Nascimento as a reputable actor.

Nascimento did not perform the role as often as Ira Aldrige or Paul Robeson; however, also a playwright, he wrote and acted in *Sortilégio: Mistério Negro*, which gave him some notoriety. The play was censored in 1951 and again in 1953, coming to actual performance only in 1957. It is all about race and shows clear connections with three other plays with racial content: Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones*, Nélson Rodrigues' *Anjo Negro*, and William Shakespeare's *Othello* (Mostaço 60). Léa Garcia, Nascimentos' wife and one of TEN's actresses, tells of *Sortilégio*:

> *No texto, o personagem passa por uma transformação: ele era deformado–Abdias preferia dizer "embranquecido"–, não tinha consciência de sua problemática e começa a adquirir essa consciência por causa das agressões que sofre. Passa a negar tudo o que considerava importante, porque descobre que havia assimilado os valores da classe dominante. Acontece então uma catarse–uma*

> *revelação–e ele de repente desperta e nega tudo o que antes valorizara.* (Garcia 135)

Can one say this is not–thematically speaking–*Othello*? Besides thematic similarities, Abdias' text also makes explicit reference to Shakespeare's for, at a given moment of the play, Emanuel, the black hero married to a white woman, talks to himself:

> *Vamos, negro. O que espera? Põe fim nisto. Um pouquinho de coragem ... um pequeno golpe, e pronto. (verificando a lâmina) Ponta bem afiada ... Faça como o negro Otelo. Lembra-se? Mas ... Desdêmona era inocente. E Otelo?* (Nascimento *Sortilégio* 1011)

To which the chorus answers: "*Culpado. Culpado. Culpado como todos os negros*" (ibid.). This caused the play to be, at the time, accused of racism, which, added to the fear of conflict, due to TEN's political attachment with the Teatro do Estudante, were probable reasons for the play being censored. Referring to events of the mid 1960's, Nascimento expresses his awareness of the role of theatre as a political act, when commenting on the ideology behind the beginnings of TEN and its later relation with the Brazilian military dictatorship:

> As all protest and demonstrations were forbidden, I then had the idea of expressing our views through the means of theatre. And that was of course allowed, because outwardly theatre is pure entertainment, there is song, and dance, etc. However, our kind of theatre was a battle front. Its explicit objective was to combat racism and racial discrimination. Not the kind of theatre that used Black characters as secondary personages, always pejorative: *Mãe Preta* (Black Mother) weeping, or the little Black boy being kicked, for example. Our theatre was focused on all types of

> racial discrimination. We never had sufficient funds to have our own premises, but performed all over in conventional theatres. It worked as a Black experimental theatre, and it was more like a psychological call, in order to draw the attention of Blacks and Whites. (Roelofse-Campbell)[6]

Ruth de Souza, one of the female actresses who came to stardom thanks to the opportunity to work at TEN, played a black Desdêmona at the 1949 Shakespeare Festival in Rio de Janeiro, being Otelo played by no less than Abdias himself, in one of his few performances in the role (see Appendix 16). Although most actors working at TEN were black, they were able to gather a considerable audience to their plays, due mostly to the artistic quality of their work, but also to their linking with the students' movement. This very unconventional Otelo and his black wife show how advanced and courageous TEN was, as their production defied conventional views of the play, especially if the "role" of Shakespeare as a symbol of tradition is considered; their production also revealed the possibility of challenge that fits Quarshie's ideas about deracialising *Othello* through performance. The efforts of both Teatro do Estudante and TEN were crucial to the reestablishment of Shakespeare in Brazil. As Gomes points out, the Teatro do Estudante "*marcou uma nova era, quanto a representações de Shakespeare em nossa língua, reabilitando o teatro nacional da mácula de haver preferido durante quase meio século os arremedos de Ducis*" (Gomes 27).

On March 6th 1956, a notable production of *Otelo* had its première at Teatro Dulcina, in Rio de Janeiro. Paulo Autran, Tonia Carrero and Adolfo Celi chose *Otelo* as the first play to be produced by their recently founded company, which shows how relevant Shakespeare's play was to Brazilian stages. Besides their right choice, both Autran, who played Otelo (see Appendix 17), and Carrero, who played Desdêmona, were already famous stars, helping to make the production into a success in its more

than two hundred presentations that gathered approximately sixty-three thousand spectators (Pennafort xxxvii).

Celi, the company's director, offered revealing information about their reasons for choosing *Otelo* and, most important, about their conceptions of the play:

> *Escolhemos "Otelo" porque sempre acreditamos que essa tragédia seja a mais latina entre as produções shakespereanas (sic). Privada de elementos fantásticos, sobrenaturais ou supersticiosos, "Otelo" vem a ser, mesmo na concepção mais popular, o símbolo de um sentimento popular. [...] É, por isso mesmo, uma tragédia doméstica, cujo tema alcança o universal pelo feliz conluio entre sua excepcional força poética e a capacidade de aprofundar os meandros mais recônditos da alma dos homens: suas fraquezas primitivas que a cultura, civilização e formação moral conseguem ocultar.* (Celi 17)

Despite their willingness to "modernise" Desdêmona by showing her, in Celi's words, not as "*ingênua, fraca e passiva*" but rather as "*com a consciência de sua posição e dos seus direitos*" (Teatro Dulcina 12)–indeed, the production seemed to concentrate more on Desdêmona than on Otelo–a more modern view of the text with regard to racial stereotypes was not offered. The conflict between civilisation and primitivism, signified by Otelo's otherness, was at the core of the action, and is in agreement with traditional assumptions about the Moor's racial difference as being determinant of his fate, as shown once again in Celi's statement:

> *Nessa ilha que se transforma em jaula, a personagem Otelo despe a roupa de sua civilisação (sic) adquirida e vai pouco a pouco voltando a seus instintos raciais. A luta, a resistência contra o instinto do mal,*

*implacável, o devolve ao abismo da sua dúvida e do seu destino.* (Teatro Dulcina 12)

Besides the reputation of both Paulo Autran and Tonia Carrero, which gave the play the status of high theatre from the very beginning, the text used in their production was also remarkable. Onestaldo de Pennafort, who had already achieved reputation for his translation of *Romeo and Juliet*, was asked to translate *Othello* specifically for their production.[7] This was September 1955, which gave Pennafort three months to prepare the text for the first rehearsals in December of the same year, as the play was intended to be performed in March 1956 (Pennafort xii). Pennafort's translation was not restricted to being used as a stage text; it was published as a book, its release being coincident with the play's première in Rio de Janeiro.

Celi's notes on interpretations of *Otelo* demonstrate the company's concern with the reception of the play. Celi quotes Thomas Rymer, Ducis, Victor Hugo, André Gide, Henri Fluchère, Harley Granville-Barker, and Stanislawsky, whose reflections on *Otelo* vary from negative to highly enthusiastic ones, thus showing Celi's awareness of the changing reception of Shakespeare's play through history (13-16). Set design also deserved careful study that led the company to decide for "*planos abstratos horizontais, de níveis diferentes, fazendo com que o "pathos" de cada personagem, ao chegar aos mesmos, sugerisse o lugar e a atmosfera requeridos*" (Celi 19). Such a choice definitely demanded stronger efforts in terms of acting, which in this sense resembles the 1964 English production starring Laurence Olivier, one that concentrated on acting (Mason 162).

The high artistic level of Celi's production and its long-lasting fame might have been responsible for the long gap between it and the next major (professional) staging of *Otelo*, perhaps due to the fear by professionals of risking negative comparisons. Indeed,

that *Otelo* was so highly regarded, that a page of the programme of the next production (1982), with Juca de Oliveira in the tittle role (see Appendix 18), offers Paulo Autran's comment that the 1956 spectacle "*antes de começar já era um 'acontecimento' social e político. Teria que ser um 'acontecimento' artístico*" (Laport 1).

In fact, twenty-six years passed until *Othello* came back–at least professionally–to Brazilian stages.[8] In 1982, Juca de Oliveira directed, translated and played the title role in a production that was, as newspapers called it, a "*tragédia feminina*" (F., A. G.), "*mais feminista que político*" (Magaldi). The production was centred on Othello's jealousy, showing Desdêmona as a victim of her husband's possessive feelings, ignorance, and barbarism. In sharp contrast with Desdêmona's tenderness, Othello's savagery was reinforced, and he was rendered simple-minded. Othello was characterised as a "*mouro primitivo*" with "*total falta de inteligência*" (Viana); in an interview in which he spoke about the Moor, Oliveira himself declared that "*o que leva Otelo ao assassínio de sua mulher é seu caráter bárbaro, em contraposição com o requinte e sofisticação da sociedade veneziana*" (F., A. G.). In an earlier interview, given one month before the opening night, Oliveira stated that "*Otelo é de origem baixa, é primitivo, e ele conseguiu apenas uma capa de verniz de civilidade em Veneza, que quando se rasga deixa vazar sua primitividade*" (Moreira 19).

Oliveira's *Othello* was definitely marked as a production of contrasts: Othello was a 50 year-old jealous, primitive, violent, gullible "macho"; Desdêmona, a 17 year-old delicate woman, a Venetian daughter whose juvenile eroticism was "*sua vocação e sua alegria*", in the words of young actress Christiane Rando, who played the role (Laport 7); Iago, as usual, was articulate and intelligent, following the tradition of "dissociation of intellect" that has been attached to the play since late nineteenth-century performances, such as those of Rossi and Salvini (Vaughan *Contextual* 158-

180). The programme of Oliveira's production shows a deterministic view upon Othello's nature, in the words of A. C. Bradley, here quoted from the original source:

> The sources of danger in this character are revealed but too clearly by the story. In the first place, Othello's mind, for all its poetry, is very simple. He is not observant. His nature tends outward. He is quite free from introspection, and he is not given to reflection. Emotion excites his imagination, but it confuses and dulls his intellect. In the second place, for all his dignity and massive calm ... he is by nature full of the most vehement passion. (158)

Othello's passion, as opposed to intellect, an image attached to the character with great emphasis since the late nineteenth century, is also discussed by Barbara Hodgdon, now (explicitly) in terms of Imperialism:

> Indeed, their relationship [Othello and Iago] reproduces the stereotypical opposition between instinctive, emotional "natural" power attributable to the "native" other and the intelligent, rational judgement of the (civilized) colonizer–and is most clearly worked out in terms of the selective representation of performative bodies. (51)

Although the play's racial aspects were not disregarded, the focus of Oliveira's production was on marital relations. Race was one more reason only–along with age, citizenship, and other features of otherness–to explain Othello's jealousy and savagery. However, in Oliveira's production, it is worth mentioning the cast's concern with the social impact of their work; in a document sent to the Ministry of Education when the tour finished, Oliveira wrote that, despite ending before planned–due to financial problems–the production was extremely successful, and that they took part in "*palestras e conferências em todas as cidades visitadas onde foram discutidos importantes*

*problemas culturais com a comunidade*" (Oliveira 1). It does not require much imagination to think of what the "cultural problems" were. The domestic theme highlighted in this production was motivated by the increasing awareness of women rights at the time, when marital violence was a common issue in the press and feminism was on the rise, as shown in the following passage:

> *Poucos se atreveram a montar "Otelo" nesses últimos anos. O mouro, apesar de todo o seu sofrimento, não é lá muito simpático ao grande público, que parece mais próximo de Desdêmona, sua mulher, particularmente após o advento do feminismo. As feministas, em geral, não costumam vibrar com o paroxismo da cólera de Otelo, e tampouco com seu exclusivismo (emocional e sexual) que o leva ao assassínio de Desdêmona*. (F., A. G.)

As the study of performance–as well as other forms of rewriting–shows, different periods of history produce or reinforce meanings according to their own cultural assumptions or expectations. It seems reasonable to say that not only each time, but also each place, has shown and will continue to show *Othello* inscribed in social and political contexts, which is true no matter how "English" or "Brazilian" a given *Othello* may be. Despite the strong influence European views on *Othello* had upon Brazilian early performances–not to mention those that were in fact European–the nation has invariably given the play its own interpretation, if not always through acting, at least through reception. The study of performance is a useful tool to understand the values society has inscribed into a given text and, whenever possible, to question the social and political forces that underlie that text; as suggested by Vaughan,

> Every time the play is produced, debated in critical periodicals and conferences, taught in school, or read privately for pleasure, the text is

> reinscribed with a new and unique set of attitudes and values. Awareness of such multivalence will open up the text; perhaps as a result we can realize, less painfully than Othello did, that foregone conclusions and unexamined assumptions are socially and psychologically dangerous. (*Contextual* 237)

Once again, it took some time until another professional *Othello* could be seen on a Brazilian stage, now with a black actor in the title role. In December 1999, Norton Nascimento played the last "Brazilian" Othello of the century, so that, in a sense, twentieth-century performances of Shakespeare's *Othello* in Brazil went from Nascimento (Abdias) to Nascimento (Norton). This turn-of-the-century *Otelo*, indeed, is the topic of the next chapter.

## 2.4. *OTHELLO* ON FILM (AND TELEVISION)

Although this chapter has the theatrical representations of Othello as its main object of study, a brief overview of important filmic versions shall be presented.[9] One of the reasons for such is that films, as much as theatre, are reflections of cultural assumptions; another is that films reach a greater number of people than theatre and, as pointed out by Vaughan, "from the mid-1940s ... Shakespeare's texts have reached their largest audiences through film" (*Contextual* 200). Finally, as the chapter addresses *Othello* in performance, screen representations cannot be ignored.

In 1952, Orson Welles, famously, directed and played the title role in his filmic version of *Othello* (see Appendix 19).[10] Welles's film concentrated on gender issues

rather than on race, giving women a treatment typical of films from the 1940s and 1950s (Vaughan *Contextual* 235). On Welles's Desdemona, Vaughan states:

> Welles shot his film from the masculine perspective, shaping his Desdemona into the object of male desire and exchange. Desdemona's visual image is seen to cause perturbations of Othello's mind, superimposing the desire to destroy onto the desire to possess. (ibid.)

The camera seems to be the most important "character" in Welles's *Othello*; it is the camera that is responsible for capturing the viewer's attention to subliminal aspects of the story. According to Jack Jorgens, Welles's production falls into the "filmic mode" category, one that sets "emphasis on the *artifice* of film, on the expressive possibilities of distorting the surfaces of reality" (10). Anthony Davies claims that such exploitation of the visual, although making Welles's into an "unforgettable filmic experience" (209), also deprives it from "an intensity of theatricality which ... the play demands" (ibid.), for "Shakespeare's *Othello* ... insists that we relate ... with actor and with character" (ibid.).

John Dexter's 1964 theatrical production starring Laurence Olivier was filmed in 1965, under the direction of Stuart Burge (see Appendix 20). Davies claims that the film belongs to a set of productions typical of the 1960s, whose "intention was to base cinematic presentation upon an earlier successful theatre production and to capture on film as far as possible the essence of theatrical performance" (196), thus falling into the category of "theatrical mode" (Jorgens 7). Differently from the successful stage production from which it derives, the film version is, according to Holland, "intensely disappointing" and "exaggerated" (*Two-Dimensional* 52). By capturing characters in isolation, the film does not capture some relevant reactions from other characters on the stage; Davies points out that, in this case, "the dramatic complexity is diminished with

the reciprocity of tension between individual character and an audience within the play being lost" (197). However, apart from such deficiencies, the film is "both a record of Olivier's unique performance and a historical document revealing an interaction of theatre with society" (Davies 196).

Jonathan Miller directed Anthony Hopkins as Othello in the 1981 BBC Television production (see Appendix 21). That production was cause of much controversy because it cast a white actor in the title role, a role that was at the time already expected to be played by a black actor. Hopkins' Othello is a modern example of the "dissociation of intellect" discussed by Vaughan (*Contextual* 158-180); it is also a good example of how such "dissociation" can be achieved through performance, as Cartmell points out that "blacked-up, with an uncertain and incredulous intonation in his voice, Othello cannot cope with the sophisticated intelligent society of which he is 'privileged' to be a part" (74). Despite failure as concerns race, Miller's film had the issue of marital relations as its most fundamental aspect, being "committed to a small scale, domestic setting throughout" (Mason 168).

Janet Suzman's 1987 theatrical production featuring John Kani was filmed in 1988, thus making it available to non-African audiences (see Appendix 22). Davies states that Suzman's film was effective in terms of "compensating for the losses suffered in filming a staged version of *Othello*" (200), perhaps more than the Burge/Dexter film. The deficiencies caused by framing characters in isolation, visible in Burge/Dexter's *Othello* in those moments when there is an audience on-stage, as pointed out by Davies, were skilfully managed in Suzman's production, especially during Othello's speech to the Senate, or when he strikes Desdemona (200).

Trevor Nunn transposed his *Othello* onto the screen for a television production in 1989 (see Appendix 23). His "theatrical" film (following Jorgens' categorisation)[11]

is, according to Holland, however, "much more than a record of a stage production; it is a perfect example of filming Shakespeare theatrically" (*Two-Dimensional* 52). A plausible reason for its success is that the stage production from which it derived already counted on the proximity between stage and audience, due to the physical limitations of The Other Place in Stratford (ibid.); when transposed to television, the production kept its original intimacy.

Oliver Parker was the director of the 1995 *Othello*, featuring Laurence Fishburne in the title role (see Appendix 24). Until its release, Janet Suzman's and Trevor Nunn's were the only filmic productions of the play with black actors as Othello (Hodgdon 42) and, as those two derived from theatre productions not originally intended as films, Fishburne has come to be the first Othello "played by a black actor in [an original] major screen production" (Cartmell 75). Cartmell also claims that, despite the use of a black actor playing Othello, Parker's film is still racist, due to its focusing on body and sexuality, which "reinforces a racial stereotype and ... is ultimately exploitative in its representation of race" (Cartmell 77).

In 1984, Paulo Grisolli directed *Otelo de Oliveira*, a production of Brazilian Globo/TV, featuring Roberto Bonfim as Otelo in a "stylish 'Latinization' set in a shanty town section of Rio de Janeiro" (Rothwell). The casting of that production reversed the traditional opposition of colours, as Otelo was a "tawny" Moor whereas Iago (then called Tiago) and Emilia were both black. Given the vast audience of Globo TV in Brazil, such a production not only helped to make the story of Othello more popular, but also contributed to reinforce the issue of colour in *Othello* as a relevant one to Brazilian audiences.

The considerations about performances of *Othello* presented in this chapter are a small piece of the play's history; however, they illustrate the many changes which

stagings of the play have suffered through time, and suggest that there is much more to be discussed. What remains is the notion, as discussed by Vaughan (*Contextual* 237), that each society produces its own interpretations of the play–whether on stage, film or TV–according to its needs and interests. The establishment of new interpretations of *Othello* or the reinforcement of old ones shall be tested in the next chapter, in which an analysis of the last Othello of the twentieth century in Brazil shall be carried out.

# Notes

[1] Honigmann lists other sources of *Othello*, such as "John Leo, Pliny, Lewis Lewkenor (the translator of Contarini), Lyly, Marlowe, *Arden of Faversham*, *A Warning for Fair Women*, *Every Man in His Humour*, *Every Man out of His Humour*, Terence, Plautus, Ovid, Rabelais, the Bible, popular ballads, songs and proverbs, and the scenic form and characters in Shakespeare's own earlier plays, notably *Titus Andronicus*, *Much Ado* and *Twelfth Night*", as well as Shakespeare's "perusal of very recent books on the Mediterranean world, on north Africa and on Venice" (387).

[2] Fiedler goes a bit further by insisting that the role is definitely suited for a white actor; he points out that "Othello *must* be played so [by a white actor in blackface], since to give the part to an actual black man is to blur the point" (150). Ian McKellen, on the contrary, thinks no white actor should play the role (Vaughan *Contextual* 197).

[3] The Portuguese spelling shall be used when addressing Brazilian productions or characters henceforth, except when referring either to the play or the character in general.

[4] There is controversy about the foundation of TEN. Gomes establishes 1945 as the date of foundation (24), whereas Müller presents 1944 as the official date (7, 13, 233). With regard to its founder, Gomes identifies Paschoal Carlos Magno as the person who started the ideological movement that led to the creation of TEN (25), whereas Müller presents Abdias do Nascimento as its genuine founder (7, 13). Given the amount of data provided by Müller, which includes vast documentation from the period, he seems a more reliable source than Gomes on the subject.

[5] For further information–in English–about the life and work of Abdias do Nascimento, see http://www.muse.jhu.edu/demo/cal/18.4do_nascimento.html.

[6] Abdias do Nascimento's interview to Zélia Roelofse-Campbell, from the University of South Africa, was originally published in English, with no reference to the translator's name; considering the life-experience of Abdias do Nascimento in the United States, the interview might have been originally held in English.

[7] Pennafort's translation has *The* [First] *Arden Shakespeare: Othello* edited by H. C. Hart and published by Methuen & Co. in 1941 as its source text (Pennafort vi). For reference to earlier translations of Shakespeare in Brazil, see Celuta M. Gomes in *Mello e Monat* 157-169.

[8] The English spelling was kept in Juca de Oliveira's production.

[9] See Holderness and McCullough (18-49) for a list of Shakespeare's plays in film.

[10] Welles's film was restored and re-released in 1992 (Davies 196).

[11] Although Jorgens, for chronological impossibilities, does not address Nunn's production, that film fits into Jorgens categorisation of "theatrical mode" (7), according to which a film becomes the mere medium with the purpose of capturing theatrical performances for posterity.

# CHAPTER III

## JANSSEN LAGE'S *OTELO*: VISIBLY A STRANGER

*Um mouro entre senhores*
(*Otelo* Lage Act I, scene iii)

Transposing a dramatic text onto stage involves an array of practical difficulties, not to mention the cultural implications raised in the process. Indeed, adapting a text to be performed involves variables that will affect the play in different ways, as dramatic literature becomes a performance text (Marinis). According to Jay Halio, the variables affecting performance are specially represented by elements such as text, set design, characters, subtext, language, stage business, music and other effects. Halio proposes their study as a means to understand what happens to a play in performance. Other crucial elements are (1) the protocol of intentions (Serôdio) and (2) reception (Bennett), briefly addressed in the Introduction to this thesis. Thus, the study of performance requires examining not only what happens at the moment of performance, but also what happens prior to and after it.

As far as *Othello* is concerned, the analysis of a given production's constituents, as mentioned above, is not in itself sufficient for a broader understanding of the play as performed and received in late twentieth-century Brazil. For this reason, some of the concepts outlined in Chapter I, especially Orientalism, otherness and contrapuntal reading, all explored by Said, and race, explored by Miles, shall be considered, as they provide grounds for discussing the cultural and the socio-political implications of the specific production of *Othello* that is the object of this study. The considerations

outlined above will serve as technical and thematic (theoretical) instruments for the analysis of the *Otelo* staged in 1999-2000, in Brazil, with Norton Nascimento playing the title role under the direction of Janssen Hugo Lage.

## 3.1. THE PROTOCOL OF INTENTIONS

Any form of art is embedded in a social context, and this is very true as regards theatre. The text, which is almost always the starting point of every production, is itself created from a context and, after its birth, is driven into a world that may be that of the writer or not, in a process by no means isolated from reality. Thinking that a text can be neutral is, thus, a naive attitude towards literature. In the case of a text put into practice or, in better words, rendered in performance, such innocence would be quite an oversight, for performances, as Halio states, "make the plays live" (2) and, in order to meet that goal, elements are usually added to or removed from the verbal text, and a certain intention is usually behind each alteration. Fully discussing, in details, the intentions regarding alterations made to the dramatic text in performance, however, requires a vast amount of time and, even so, the results might be limited and questionable; what seems more efficient in terms of analysis is to assess the production's overall intentions, which can be then contrasted with the play's enactment and reception.

Although the value of self-assertion by those directly involved in theatre production with regard to their own work can be questioned as faithful sources, such statements are authentic records of the intentions the company had concerning the production in question. Such, as it were, autobiographical documents are here

understood as declarations from members of the company–whether to the press, in personal communications, or in the show's programme–which might serve as instruments of investigation.

In the case of Lage's *Otelo*, two of the concerns that marked the company's intentions are those that most affected the production. The first is a conveniently advertised desire to modernise Shakespeare's play and make it more accessible to a modern spectator. The intended modernisation was attempted by means of two basic resources: language and set design. According to statements in newspaper articles, Nascimento and Lage planned to give *Otelo* "*uma linguagem contemporânea para atrair o público jovem*" (Tognoni) and "*tornar o texto simples e compreensível para qualquer espectador*" (Néspoli *Otelo*). For that purpose, the play-text was cut and grafted with "*expressões do cotidiano e até alguns palavrões*" (Tognoni). That intention was supported by the assertion that the adapters aimed at a "*linguagem dinâmica e a um turbilhão de imagens que funcionam como aceleradores e esclarecedores da macro-narrativa*" (Companhia 3), which shows that the company had the clear purpose of substituting action for words, indeed often one of the basic provisos of adaptation.

The set design, no doubt, contributed to characterise the production as a "*versão contemporânea*" (Tognoni) of Shakespeare's play, new with thematic implications. An impressive oilrig with eight-metre columns represented, as Nascimento declared, the modern struggle for wealth, in a play that was about "*ódio, intriga e dinheiro ... e como tudo isso é efêmero*" (ibid.).

Besides modernisation, the awareness of the racial discourse of the play was the second concern noticeable in the company's intentions. Race and race relations were of particular interest to Norton Nascimento, who declared that it was very important to

have Otelo played by a black actor, as the role had already been played by so many white actors (Néspoli *Otelo*; Néspoli *Norton*). The play's programme includes a page about the extinction of the Movimento Negro (Black Movement), written by one of its members, with comments on the importance of the Movement to Brazilian society, along with an advert of the Associação Cultural Poder Negro, a cultural association that promotes art and information to and about black people.

An important statement regarding the adaptation, offering a valuable hint as to the kind of reception the company expected, reads as follows:

> *Não há a pretensão de se apresentar um Shakespeare novo, nem uma leitura que supere as anteriores, nada disso: mas pretende-se "dar a ver" um possível Shakespeare. Com uma estética contemporânea e acessível, com um olhar criativo para a obra, com o desejo de que hajam (sic) lacunas suficientes para que o espectador crie o seu possível Shakespeare*. (Companhia 3)

## 3.2. LANGUAGE AND TEXT

The difficulties Shakespearean language imposes on reading *Othello* stem from the playwright's special use of words. This often relates to Shakespeare's use of complex metaphors, besides the high frequency of syntax and vocabulary that might make understanding the printed text a difficult task to modern readers. When performance comes into question, however, the challenge can often be diminished, as the adapted text tends to solve some of the difficulties reading offers, as performance (albeit through a given director's interpretation) can show much of what the written text expresses.

Yet, simplifying Shakespeare on stage has the danger of leaving out much of the beauty of his language. Linguistic games, poetry, metaphors, the music carried in Shakespeare's words, over-simplified or simply omitted, can render the language cold and lifeless. It is a requirement that actors playing Shakespeare make strong effort to memorise the lines of the text – unless technical achievements such as hidden microphones are available – including the frequent shifts from verse to prose and vice-versa, and, more than that, to practice ways to deliver the lines without sounding meaningless or artificial (Halio 50-61); these difficulties increase when one thinks of Shakespeare's long and complex speeches which must be delivered while acting, a reason that might lead directors to cut lines in order to facilitate the actors' work, perhaps even more than to facilitate the audience's understanding.

In the case of Lage's *Otelo*, many of the features that characterise Shakespearean language–again, linguistic games, poetry, metaphors, and musicality–are missing from the production, starting from the verse, which was omitted from the text, as the translation is rendered fully in prose. The drastic textual changes seem to reflect the company's concern with the story instead of the text, as expressed by Norton Nascimento's assertion that "*é a mesma história escrita por Shakespeare, apenas mudamos a forma de contá-la*" (Tognoni). The linguistic changes observable in Lage's text make it so different from Shakespeare's that it would be equivocal to consider language and text under separate topics, which is the reason why the discussion on language shifts here towards a discussion on text.

One of the difficulties in working with stagings of *Othello* sometimes stems from identifying the text used in a given production. To complicate matters, as discussed in Chapter II, *Othello* has been a multiple-text play from the very beginning, a problem aggravated by continuous editing along the nearly four centuries of the play's

existence. In any event, the source text is only the starting point, as the performed text may vary greatly from that. Halio enumerates deletion, substitution, transposition and addition as the changes to be considered when investigating "the relationship between the script that has been used in the production and the text of the play as it is generally read" (4). Lage, who directed *Otelo* and shared the textual research with Alexandre Montaury, made a compilation of miscellaneous Portuguese versions of *Othello* before coming to the final result.[1]

In what seems an attempt to simplify the text by making it less ponderous and more appealing to modern audiences, Lage's text is marked by a vast amount of deletion as compared to Pennafort's translation. Deletion, in this case, applies not only to isolated words, but also to sentences, speeches and scenes, all of which contribute to affect Othello's otherness in two of its aspects. One of the signifiers of otherness at stake in *Othello* is geographical. Lage omitted all references to Othello's origins, the word *mouro* being the only indication of his foreignness. Thus, potentially xenophobic passages, frequent in Shakespeare's text, do not appear in Lage's production, and one can say that Othello's otherness, in this aspect at least, was diminished.

Although, in Lage, Othello defends Venice from the Turks, he is in essence as much a stranger as the enemy, and, like them, a non-Christian. Thus, if in Shakespeare's text, the Turk is not a mere competitor for territory, but also a cultural opponent, Lage's text does not show the enemy as the demonised Turk who threatens European values, as discussed by Vaughan (*Contextual* 13). Lage's *Otelo* does not set the Turk at such an overall negative position as Shakespeare's, for all references to Turks are, in the former, simply military, i.e., the Turk is a materialistic enemy fighting for territory–and for the oil in it–instead of being both a military and cultural opponent against whom the Venetians are pleased to fight, as the original play-text suggests. Even the geographical

position, i.e., the setting of the play in Venice, remains unclear, as there is no reference to the city in Lage's text apart from that in Act I, scene iv, which reads "*Mais uma nau de Veneza viu os graves danos em quase toda sua frota*"; at this point, the action has already moved to Cyprus, and the reference is in itself insufficient to establish the city of Venice as a point of departure. There are references to Florence, Rhodes and Cyprus, all of which set the scene somewhere in the Mediterranean, but the precise location is never mentioned, apart from the journey to Cyprus and the settling there.

Part of the depiction of the Turk as the other comes from religious difference; in *Othello*, fighting the Turk means fighting the barbaric, non-Christian infidel, which sets religion as another signifier of otherness. As Fiedler points out, Elizabethans were probably more terrified by Othello being a non-Christian than by his colour (173), a fear that was eliminated from Lage's text, in which only three references to religion were kept, the first two when Brabâncio speaks to the Duchess accusing Otelo of witchcraft in Act I, scene ii, which read "*Que tipo de magia usou para pervertê-la*?" and "*Até que a lei lhe tenha cobrado suficientemente pela falta e pela prática de magia, arte proibida, ilegal*"; the third reference appears in Act II, scene ix, when Otelo asks Desdêmona about her prayers before killing her, and reads "*Fez suas orações?*". Such references to religion–despite being incriminating–are not sufficiently strong to characterise religion as a marker of Otelo's otherness, for they do not associate witchcraft to Otelo's backgrounds as a Moor.

Colour, on the other hand, was not affected by textual deletion, but rather by substitution and, especially, by addition, both of which contribute to highlight this third signifier of Othello's otherness. The word *negro* is used simultaneously with *mouro*, sometimes with very aggressive overtones, which can be observed in Act I, scene ii, when Brabâncio goes up to Otelo after learning of Desdêmona's secret elopement and

says "*É um negro e está preso ... Se tentar resistir, negro, será dominado*"; in Act I, scene iii, when Brabâncio accuses Otelo of stealing Desdêmona and the Chorus says "*Diga! Vamos! Otelo! fale! Mouro! Negro! Ladrão! Covarde! ...*"; and, still in the same scene, when Brabâncio uses the word *negro* once again in a very offensive tone: "*... Um palhaço entre feras. Um mouro entre senhores. Um fraco que é capaz de matar homens. Negro. Palhaço.*"

Consequently, the concept of Orientalism receives new shades in Lage's text. Geography and religion, especially the latter, have been important keys to seeing Othello as alien, which, by the way, supposedly had an impact upon Elizabethan audiences comparable to that of colour, sometimes even a greater one, being, in fact, a strong expression of Othello's "difference in hue" (Fiedler 171), as discussed in Chapter I. In performance, such depictions of otherness have been left practically untouched after the late nineteenth-century renderings–especially after Salvini and Rossi–and have contributed to increase Othello's otherness. Lage's production, however, has moved into a rather different direction, as the descriptions of the Orient, as well as references to religion, were omitted from the text; colour, thus, becomes the basic–and possibly the one–"cause" of Otelo being seen as a stranger, as well as the basic marker of his race.

## 3.3. SET DESIGN AND COSTUMES

Investigating the visual elements of a production seems to be one of the most useful procedures that leads to a better apprehension of the construction of meaning. When studying past performances, brief pieces of writing, sketches and worn-out drawings become precious; in modern days, however, the advent of photography and

video has brought theatre researchers a marvellous instrument of "excavation". Due to their value as instruments of study, photographs from rehearsals and a video-recording from actual performance have been used in the analysis of both setting and costumes in Lage's *Otelo*, bearing the limitations of the latter in mind, as discussed in the Introduction.

Set design relates to observing "the transposition of the time frame from one period to another (if that happens), and the effect the transposition has on the production" (Halio 3). This is of special interest in Lage's *Otelo*, as the production, with set designed by the experienced designer José de Anchieta, presented a radical shift from traditional stagings.

The classic, the Elizabethan, the domestic or even the military set design adopted by directors in previous productions of the play gave way here to a materialistic scenery centred on a futuristic oilrig that demanded physical strength and balance from the actors on stage, as it was unstable, suspended by iron cables that made it rattle and tremble (see Appendix 25). This platform was a fine allusion to the Island of Cyprus, suggesting isolation and vulnerability, thus a natural setting for the internal conflict(s) the story enacts. Moreover, by establishing an inexact time in the future, the setting proved to be suited for a story intentionally independent of time or place, thus stressing the (however arguable) "universality" of the plot.[2]

The military environment often explored in earlier productions was replaced by a more "financial" setting, in the sense that the war between Venetians and Turks was, in Lage's *Otelo*, regarded as a war over commodities, in this case represented by oil; this differs from the story told by Shakespeare, in which the battle between Venetians and Turks is for land–due to Cyprus' strategic position in the Mediterranean–based on the alleged "Christian right" to control it. Although in Lage the reasons for the

occupation of Cyprus are rather different from those found in Shakespeare, one aspect of Otelo's journey remains in agreement with the original text: Otelo goes to Cyprus to fight the Turks, who, paradoxically, align with him as others, being all non-Christians from a distant land. If one reads the oil in the oilrig as a metaphor for Otelo's blackness, Lage's production expresses the notion that, while fighting to free the place from the enemy, Otelo is fighting to eliminate the Barbarian in himself, a battle that he begins to lose soon after his arrival. Thus, as much as in the original text, Lage's Otelo goes on a journey into himself, on which he meets the savage that society was able to domesticate only for a short while. Besides suggesting such implications, the scenographic solution of using an oilrig as the setting for the Moor's tragedy contributed to enhance ambition as one of the play's thematic aspects, thus increasing the struggle for power and making Iago's envy justifiable at least in terms of material desire. Although other alleged causes for Iago's hatred for Otelo, such as the competition for military status and revenge for a supposed adultery, remain in keeping with the source text, Iago's ambition is, in Lage's production, more directly connected to wealth, which differs from Shakespeare's text and makes the play more connected with modern contexts.

*Othello* is one of Shakespeare's plays most affected by costumes. The reason for that is the need of portraying Othello as the other, which, as we have seen, is a crucial aspect of the play. Chapter II presented an overview of the stage history of the play, and showed how the Moor has been represented throughout different periods of time. As the chapter has demonstrated, visual representations of Othello vary according to the social and historical context in which each production is inserted. Chapter II has also shown that late nineteenth-century productions were a watershed in the play's stage history, because the rise of imperialism brought about new conceptions of the exoticism of the Orient, which is of special relevance given the context of the play. Such

exoticism, over-stressed in order to meet imperialist needs, became a key element in dressing Othello from the late nineteenth century on.

Othello is by no means an unnoticeable figure. His strong character, associated to narratives about his adventures in distant lands (narratives, in fact, that helped him win Desdemona), seems to be a handful for exotic representation, a perfect match for audiences eager for exoticism–incoming from the colonies–in the late nineteenth century. As we have seen, renderings like those of Salvini, for instance, doted Othello with exotic wildness, until more recent performances, such as that of Paul Robeson, gave him greater nobility and honour.

Thus, an important issue in the analysis of Lage's show relates to the general appearance of Norton Nascimento's Otelo in order to investigate whether some of those visual features long attached to the Moor were kept or not. Although Nascimento's Otelo was always a noticeable figure on stage, he was not shown as being more exotic than his counterparts; the costumes adopted by the company were rather uniform, with slight differences marked by social rank only, i.e., Otelo's garments were similar to those of other men of his position on the social scale. The flamboyant Muslim-like robes of earlier productions gave way to a futuristic overcoat, thus making Otelo less Oriental and diminishing his otherness, the typically Oriental goatee being the only similarity with post-Salvini Othellos (see Appendix 26).

The futuristic setting of the play contrasted with the mixture of science fiction and medieval Venice suggested by exotic costumes that resembled a ball of masks. This "masquerade" effect was also suggested by heavy make-up, especially that worn by the white actors in Lage's production. Contrary to those Othellos performed before Paul Robeson's, when white actors played the Moor in black make-up, Lage's

production presented white actors in bright white faces, stressing the black-and-white contrast between Otelo and his counterparts.[3]

## 3.4. SUBTEXT AND CHARACTERS

Drawing on Stanislavski, Halio defines subtext as "the unwritten, or unspoken, indications ... that help make characters what they are, or make them behave in certain ways" (40); this "undercurrent of thought and feeling with which the text is charged" (ibid.) thus establishes ways in which the text can be delivered, with a direct and strong impact upon acting. Related as they are, subtext and characters are here discussed under the same topic, also with the aid of the photographs and video, and still considering the limitations of both, as previously discussed.

The relevance of studying the subtext stems from the recognition that the text itself does not provide absolute answers to a play. The text does establish the main aspects of the story, such as plot, theme and characters, but it cannot establish how the story can be told. When the subtext is taken into account, the hidden aspects that emerge bring new shades to the play and are likely to stress or obscure some of its thematic aspects, thus allowing new interpretations that will inevitably affect the way actors deliver (verbally and visually) their lines.

If Lage's *Otelo* was rich in terms of scenography, the same cannot be said with regard to characterisation. For one thing, the production was overly economic, reducing the number of characters, keeping the cast at the minimum possible number. From fourteen of all the original roles–plus a variable number of senators, gentlemen of Venice and Cyprus, officers, musicians and other secondary characters– , only Othello,

Iago, Desdemona, Roderigo, Cassio, Brabantio, Emilia, Bianca and the Duke (changed into Duchess) were kept. A Chorus was idealised as a substitute to some of the characters eliminated, also working as a moralising voice at some points, or even as the personified thoughts of Otelo or Iago.

Admitedly, both the text and the subtext of Lage's *Otelo* suggest that Desdêmona, played by Heloísa Maria, is not a totally passive woman. The original text reads that, when Brabantio accuses Othello of abusing his daughter, Desdemona speaks before the Senate in defence of her husband (Act I, scene iii), defying her father in front of other men; at the port of Cyprus, she responds to Iago's comments on women (Act II, scene i) and, later on, insists on pleading for Cassio before Othello (Act III, scene iii). In Lage's production, Desdêmona also speaks to defend Otelo (Act I, scene iii). However, her discussion with Iago and Emília while waiting for Otelo is omitted; she only speaks after Otelo arrives, and her lines at that point sound rather naive, even dull. At first she confesses her fear of being alone, then she is unable to understand Cassio's comments on how the ships lost sight of each other, and finally she cannot understand Iago's irony when speaking about women who "*perdem-se em encantos e devaneios*" (Act I, scene iv). Thus, Desdêmona, although visually interpreted as a sexually active woman, ultimately, is rendered too innocent and fragile in speech (actually, speaking at a very low tone of voice), being this another distortion from Shakespeare's text, which lends inconsistency to the play as produced.

Originally, there is no textual evidence at all of any sexual intercourse between Othello and Desdemona. What could have been their honeymoon was interrupted by Iago and Roderigo's call to Brabantio (Act I, scene i), and later by their journey to Cyprus aboard separate ships, as announced in Act I, scene iii. Their first night on the island was cut short by the fight between Cassio and Roderigo plotted by Iago (Act II,

scene iii), and the tragedy ends with Othello killing Desdemona the following night (Act V, scene ii).

In my reading, Othello's love for Desdemona was more spiritual than physical. Lage's Otelo, on the other hand, shows the pair making love right at the first scene, while Iago speaks about his hatred for the general (the sensual tableau will be duly discussed as stage business in item 5 below), this being only the strongest among other gratuitous visual explorations of sexuality in the play. The reversion from an emotional to a more physical relationship might have resulted from an intention to make the play more convincing to modern audiences which would presumably conceive as too naïve love originating from heroism and pity. However, by emphasising physical love, Lage's production reduces the tragedy. If, unlike Lage's opening tableau suggests, Desdêmona is chaste, Otelo's reasons for doubting her as a faithful wife would come to an end, once the "material proof" of virginity was checked. In fact, the tragedy supported by the text increases as Otelo never has real proof of infidelity, to be sure, never has enough time to have a proof of chastity.

The means through which Otelo's marriage in Lage's production is made more sexual than in the original text are contradictory. To reiterate my reading, I recall that Shakespeare's text suggests that Othello's love for Desdemona is rather spiritual than physical. Let us grant that Lage's text is in agreement with Shakespeare's with regard to the origins of Otelo's love for Desdemona ("*Eu a amei porque sentiu piedade*" [Act I, scene iii]) and Desdêmona's love for Othelo ("*Senhores, vi no rosto de meu marido a sua honra e sua valentia*" [ibid.]), thus justifying their spiritual love; however, differently from Shakespeare's, Lage's text does not show Otelo declaring himself too old for physical love, by mentioning "the young affects in me defunct" (1.3.264-265), a textual omission perhaps justifiable due to Norton Nascimento's young age. Lage's text

is in agreement with the assertions about the origins of Otelo and Desdêmona's love, but there is great contradiction in performance, which shows exactly the opposite, i.e., a love that is more sexual than spiritual, thus reinforcing Iago's assertions about the Moor's lustfulness. In this sense, Lage's production reduces Shakespeare's text, as it eliminates spiritual love while enhancing sexuality, and it also shows internal inconsistency by expressing spiritual love (verbally) while showing sexuality (in actual performance).

A similar dissonance can be observed in the Otelo played by Norton Nascimento. Originally, Othello is the dignified general who, as a hired officer by the state of Venice, is recognised by his brave deeds and unquestionable character so that, when he strikes Desdemona, Lodovico shows astonishment at the changed man he sees; the "nature whom passion could not shake" (4.1.265-266) indeed shifts drastically, but only after Iago manages to convince him of Desdemona's betrayal, thus leading him to the tragic ending. However, that is not what Lage's Otelo shows.

Norton Nascimento, from the very beginning of the show, rendered his Otelo rather dull, inconstant in his movements, making funny faces without any apparent reason. Indeed, the strong traits attributed to the general that the original text supports are reduced, as much as the textual references to Otelo's bravery. When Otelo is called before the Duchess, she hails him "*bravo mouro*" (Act I, scene iii); however, the last scene, which should re-establish Otelo as an honoured man, is drastically and clumsily reduced. Being too abbreviated, Otelo's famous dying speech shows only a shattered man, possibly a repented husband, but never a brave soldier.

If dignity and equality were achieved through dressing, as item 3 above shows, body language showed a different perspective. The brave general who originally showed his weaknesses only after the so-called temptation scene (Act III, scene iii), is

rendered flighty from the beginning in Lage's play, as his body posture shifts from intense and aristocratic to insecure and even comic at times, reinforcing Iago's assertion, in Act I, scene iii, that "*mouros são inconstantes nos seus desejos*", without ever reassuring the general as the "valiant Moor".

Iago, played by Bartholomeu de Haro, was, differently from Otelo, rendered more faithful to traditional stagings, at least with regard to his manipulative skills. Iago's use of the body duly shows that he is the one in charge from the beginning of the play, as when he carries Rodrigo upon his shoulders while directing him to denounce Otelo in front of Brabâncio's house (Act I, scene i). Moreover, the intellectual combat between Iago and Otelo becomes physical in Lage's production, as in the moments when Iago literally climbs onto Otelo's back while telling him what to do, thus showing his control over the Moor at the level of body as well as mind. Whereas Otelo seems more easily gullible than in previous productions, Iago remains the intelligent puppeteer, which stresses their intellectual difference and reinforces the alleged superiority of white over black.

Sadly, Lage's production limits Emília, played by Patrícia Franco, to a very brief participation, placing her merely as the pliant servant of her mistress Desdêmona.[4] Emília's role as Desdêmona's counter-voice and as the scourge of males is suppressed, since the former is no longer heard as the character who discusses the role of women in society and opposes the latter's conceptions with regard to marriage. Moreover, Emília is not present in the port scene (Act I, scene iv), so that the argument Iago has with both Emília and Desdêmona about women is omitted in Lage's production, not to mention the unforgivable omission of the traditional "Willow Song", which further contributes to reduce the amount of conversation between Emília and Desdêmona (the song will be discussed in item 5 below). Apart from the obvious passage in which she tries to tell

Desdêmona about the stolen handkerchief but is stopped by Iago (Act II, scene vi), Emília's only significant entrance, and the only one to show resistance to male power, is in the last scene, when she denounces Iago (Act II, scene ix).

Rodrigo, played by Flávio Amado, is as exaggerated as many other characters in Lage's production. Rodrigo's exaggeration, however, does not seem to have affected the production as negatively as some others, as he is traditionally a puppet in Iago's hands, almost like Otelo; entirely deprived of the severe tones of the Moor, however, Rodrigo seems well suited to be rendered as a substitute for a clown, which can be observed from the opening scene, performed with exaggerated circus-like movements.

Tuca Ribeiro, who played Bianca, also played the Duchess. The Duke has originally the highest social status among all the characters in the play, being usually played as a noble figure. In Lage's Otelo, however, the Duchess was played as a simple-minded, dull figure, resembling a clown, in what seems to have been a caricature of the upper class, especially of those who hold political power.

Perhaps the most disturbing character adaptation relates to the double role of Brabâncio, played by João Petry. Although the programme does not mention a clown, the promptbook refers to all the entrances of Brabâncio in Cyprus as "Brabâncio/Palhaço". If one thinks of classic definitions of tragedy, it is possible to say that the tragedy of Othello is also the tragedy of Desdemona, as well as the tragedy of the loving father who saw his daughter "stolen". Placing Brabâncio as the clown–insane at the point of running stark naked around the stage–has, perhaps, the implication of increasing his individual tragedy, although, as item 7 below shows, this intention was never achieved.

## 3.5. STAGE BUSINESS, MUSIC, AND OTHER EFFECTS

Halio defines stage business as the directions, particularly the visual imagery intended "to complement or extend the significance of dialogue" (63).[5] It so happens that, in the case of Shakespeare's plays, "the stage directions are frequently incomplete or lacking altogether" (ibid.); it becomes the task of directors, then, to fill in the gaps Shakespeare has left, and to find out what to do when "the text does not make clear whether characters are present or not, or what gestures or actions they should perform when they have no lines" (ibid.).

The most significant example of how stage business affected meaning in Lage's Otelo was evident in the opening scene. Originally, Otelo should enter only in Act I, scene ii, and Desdêmona in Act I, scene iii; in Lage's production, however, as we have seen, they are present in the very first scene, silent, naked and, even more surprisingly, making love upstage centre, while Iago and Rodrigo deliver their speeches. This interpolation affected meaning for, as discussed in item 4 above, neither the text nor the subtext support such sexual intercourse; much to the contrary, they oppose that idea. The vulgar eroticism shown in the opening scene is once again expressed in the port scene, when Otelo arrives at Cyprus and Desdêmona jumps astride his hips to greet him (see Appendices 27 and 28).

The show's opening scene also portrays Iago and Rodrigo drinking and possibly suffering the effects of drunkenness. They move relentlessly across the stage with exaggerated movements, and Iago, at a given moment, carries Rodrigo upon his shoulders, "directing" him, which reinforces the power Iago has over Rodrigo; again, as discussed in item 4 above, Iago's control over Rodrigo is in agreement with Shakespeare's text, but there is no indication in the original text to support either their

drinking or such a pantomime at that point. The same kind of stage business can be seen in the "temptation" scene, when, as we have seen, Iago climbs over Otelo's back (see Appendix 29); with a less comical effect, however, as has been pointed out, this action agrees with Iago's efforts to exert power over Otelo, both physically and psychologically.

The last scene, in which, textually, Otelo becomes a murderer but, at the same time, has the last chance to redeem himself from Iago's destructive deeds by proving nobility, was, as has been said, equivocally shortened. Lage's text and directions omitted the passage in which the Moor sets out to "put out the light" (Act V, scene ii), a metaphor for the murder he is about to commit. The murder scene, carefully exploited in previous productions, was reduced to a fast action sequence and, in what followed, the chance to recover Otelo's dignity was missed.[6]

All original "intradiegetic" music was omitted from the production.[7] Besides their aesthetic value, the "intradiegetic" songs are meaningful to the story itself, especially two that make up important parts of the play. The first is, in fact, a sequence of drinking songs delivered by the soldiers in Cyprus the night Othello arrives (Act II, scene iii); such songs are specially relevant because they establish the military comradeship that describes the environment on the island, and because they describe some stereotypes about strangers, an important thematic feature of the play. The other crucial piece of music is the famous "Willow Song" Desdemona sings while in her bedroom with Emilia (Act IV, scene iii), a song that works as a premonition, as well as a sign of grief and resignation, announcing the foreboding events of the play. The omission of such songs, besides depriving the text of poetic beauty, diminishes the thematic implications of the scenes in which they should be heard.

Music ("extradiegetic" only) was electronic from the opening scene on, sound effects included the noise of motorcycles, and lighting oscillated between darkness and sudden flashes of light, giving the show a modernist aspect, thus reinforcing the contrast between old and new suggested by scenography, costumes and make-up, rendering *Otelo* a production of elaborate–though at times questionable–technological apparatus. One element, however, was added both to scenography and text that does not seem to fit anywhere. After the so-called temptation scene, when Otelo decides to murder Desdêmona, Iago advises that she be killed with her own pillow made of goose feathers (Act II, scene iv). The reference to goose feathers appears again in Act II, scene vii, when Otelo wonders about Desdêmona's infidelity, and finally in Act II, scene ix, when he kills Desdêmona, in what seems to be a mere aesthetic gimmick without any clear purpose.

## 3.6. OVERALL INTERPRETATION

One of the most striking features in Lage's adaptation is the vast amount of textual changes. The text was noticeably reduced in length, supposedly to fulfil the intention of "modernising" the play. This practice, however, resulted in the concomitant reduction of meaning, which gave the production a fragmented conception. A possible (if unlikely) explanation for this lack of coherence might be that the production reflected some of the trends of other forms of art in the late twentieth century. Halio states that human beings long for unity (72), which is a rather generalising assumption; in fact, the mass media, especially in the last twenty years or so, have moved into the path of fragmentation. In a sense, this fragmented conception

produced, as it were, an effect of immediatism, causing the production to be an assembly of images that might provide small dosages of excitement. Juca de Oliveira's 1982 *Othello* was seen as influenced by television soap operas, very popular in Brazil (Lara). Lage's *Otelo* also seems affected by the influence of the popular media, in this case, perhaps, action films, in which the camera shifts after every three or four seconds, giving the impression of fast, brief events.

Besides being, arguably, influenced by the filmic media, the fragmented effect was also caused by textual changes in Lage's production, as the deliberate intention to modernise the play by simplifying its text was extreme. The extensive cuts not only reduced the play's acting time; they reduced meaning as well. One such reduction regards what Vaughan calls the "global discourse" present in *Othello* (*Contextual* 13-34), for she considers the conflict between Venetians and Turks as characterising early constructions of East/West oppositions in which the East is stereotypically constructed by the West. Xenophobic constructions were softened in Lage's text, for the references to the war between Venetians and Turks were minimised, and so was the depiction of the Turk as the inferior other. Although Otelo's otherness was reduced with regard to his origins and religion, the same was not observable when race is considered, even if only from the perspective of skin colour.

Of the many misreadings of the play in Lage's production, the role of Otelo deserves special attention. Otelo was given an equivocal interpretation, inconsistent with Shakespeare's text, as the noble warrior was instead rendered weak and insecure, reinforcing Iago's intellectual superiority. If one bears in mind Said's concept of contrapuntal reading, the opposition between Otelo and Iago offers a fundamental space for questioning the power relations between black and white, as well as the power relations between the European and the non-European, the exploiter and the exploited,

especially when the history of slave trade in Brazil is taken into account. Unfortunately, such relations remained obscure in Lage's production, despite the company's acknowledged intention to deal with them.

The final impression is that important thematic aspects of the play-text were neglected in favour–as it seems–of technical effects and linguistic simplification made in order to meet a supposed urgency for modernisation. This urgency distorted some of the play-text's foundations, producing an effect opposed to that intended by the company, as expressed in the programme: that the play's macro-narrative was "*obedecida tal e qual a obra clássica merece*" (Companhia 3).

## 3.7. RECEPTION AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

Critic Macksen Luiz criticises Lage's *Otelo* for its emphasis on the visual, which, as he states, ended up by "*convertendo em frações a integridade do texto*". He states that the action condensed the play into "*cenas curtas que eliminam bastante os detalhes da peça*", thus diminishing one of the play's most attractive elements: Iago's eloquence and its growing power over Otelo as the play progresses. According to Macksen Luiz, this reduction happened because the action was overly accelerated, overriding language and giving the production a "*ritmo de desenho animado ou de video-clipe*".

On her critical review of the play, Barbara Heliodora goes much further, stating that the production was mistakenly attributed to Shakespeare, and that Janssen Lage was the author of "*algo confuso e falsamente inovador*" (Nome); furthermore, she claims that, apart from some aspects of the action and the names of the characters, nothing else

resembled Shakespeare (ibid.).[8] Even though Professor Heliodora claims that Lage's *Otelo* was not Shakespeare's–in fact, nobody really knows which is–it was at least intended as such. The company expressed the intention to achieve an expected type of reaction: that the audience would receive the play as Shakespeare's, with the consequent expectations the name of Shakespeare carries. She enumerates the several elements that are, as she believes, unconnected–setting, wardrobe, lighting, music, acting–and shows her disapproval of the play's language as a whole, by stating that the verbal language was "*pobre e grossa, as de signos insatisfatórias, e as corporais e gestuais desastradas*" (ibid.). Her claims seem to reflect the limited understanding of the company as regards Shakespeare's text, frankly made evident in an interview to the press before the premiere; Norton Nascimento himself declared he had deliberately not read Shakespeare's *Othello* again before rehearsals began, in order to avoid any comparisons between the texts (Néspoli *Norton*). The same article suggests as the main causes of the play's failure the lack of a more comprehensive theatrical view on the part of the director and the emphasis given to the superficial story, as well as to the fashionable tendency to modernise.

Another issue to be raised at this point is that this study does not only address the appreciation of Lage's *Otelo* as a work of art from the aesthetic viewpoint, but also as a reflection of the socio-cultural context in which it is embedded and which can be conceived as having led the production to make specific scenic choices. Thus, no matter how negatively the production was received, it serves at least as a prism through which Brazilian theatre, or at least some of its aspects, can be observed and questioned.

One such question relates to the fact that neither of the two reviewers mentioned above commented on the racial emphasis–at least intended–to be perceived in Lage's *Otelo*. The textual changes which, however reductive, reinforce the play's racial

discourse, were not seen as relevant, which seems rather intriguing. Given the visible disapproval of Lage's production by those reviewers, the most plausible explanation for their not mentioning such an important aspect of this *Otelo* is that the emphasis given to other aspects, both visual and textual, instead of reinforcing, had the opposite effect of obfuscating what could have been the production's most relevant and well exploited theme.

Besides the critical reviews discussed above, interviews with spectators (see Appendices 31-35) were used in this study as a source of data about the reception of Lage's *Otelo*. Given the small number of such interviews, and due to the physical contingencies of the research, they are not intended as quantitative instruments to assess the play's reception, nor are they expected to provide absolute answers regarding the production; they can, however, offer interesting clues as to how the show affected those specific spectators and elicit further questioning about the production.[9]

An important element to be considered when assessing reception is the level of information the spectators have about the play. When discussing the textual knowledge of theatregoers, Halio points out that more informed audiences are less likely to accept any changes without questioning, although they are more prepared to "appreciate alterations that have sharpened some important point in the play without destroying other important points" (4). Halio's assertion implies that the opposite might be true for less informed spectators, i.e., that those with lesser knowledge of the original text may accept changes more easily, although they will not be able to achieve the pleasure deriving from such understanding.

From the five spectators interviewed, the two of them with greater experience with Shakespeare's text–a professional actor who has played Iago and a literature teacher–showed uneasiness with regard to the linguistic adaptation in Lage's *Otelo*.

Both declared that the adaptation showed disregard for the original poetry of the text and, as C. Jr. declared, "*sem ... oferecer algo que valesse a pena*". From the three other subjects–all undergraduate students of language and literature at the time the production was staged–A. G. and M. K. also expressed their disapproval of the play's language, although both agreed that adaptation made the play easier to understand for modern Brazilian audiences.

With regard to the strong eroticism shown in Lage's production, only L. C. saw it negatively, whereas two other subjects declared that in fact it contributed to rendering the play more modern and realistic; from those, C. Jr. pointed out that "*o público de hoje não se convenceria de um amor tão súbito baseado apenas no heroísmo de Otelo e na piedade de Desdêmona*", whereas M. K. saw it as part of the modern tendency observable in the media. When questioned about Brabâncio's nudity, R. C. saw it positively, as a characterisation of Desdêmona's betrayal of her father; the other subjects, however, could not see a reason for such nudity or simply did not recognise the character as Brabâncio.

Racial conflict, one of the most important thematic aspects of Lage's production according to the company's intentions, was not perceived by the interviewed subjects as an important element, probably, as C. Jr. declared, due to excessive scenography and "*tantas outras questões misturadas*", which agrees with A. G.'s statement that other aspects called more the audience's attention than race; from the five spectators interviewed, only M. K. related race as a noticeable aspect of the play, expressed mainly through the colour contrast between Otelo and Desdêmona, as well as through language.

The results of the interviews summed up above are, as I have said, limited by the small number of subjects as well as by shortcomings inherent in audience memory, but even if taken in large amounts right at the theatre's exit, the results might still be

questionable. One of the reasons for the lack of exactness in reception analysis is that, as Holland states, "we have no mechanism to understand the degrees of immanence of the text in the consciousness of the consumers of the performance (*English* 19)"; another difficulty stems from the fact that it is virtually impossible to assess all the necessary elements to scrutinise reception because, as Bennett points out, such a task would require investigating several aspects before (the theatre building, the playing space, the pre-production set, light, informal proxemics, the programme), during (infectious laughter, derision and applause), and after performance (number of curtain calls, after-performance buzz) (133-176).

Although the interviews alone are unable to provide all the necessary answers about Lage's production, when allied to the other elements previously discussed, they contribute to a better understanding of the production. In general, the subjects' answers agree–though not at the same level of criticism and appreciation–with the professional critics of Lage's *Otelo*, and are consistent in many points with what the analysis of other data, such as photographs, video, promtbook, etc., has shown. Especially with regard to racial representations, the data analysed have shown that, although race was intended as one of the production's most important issues, "facilitated" both textually and visually, the reception of the play's racial discourse was not achieved as intended by the company.

As a whole, the data analysis has suggested that the textual adaptation and stage business were the special elements of the production that caused strong impact upon the play's reception, the first for its simplification and the second for its apparent excessiveness; and that the result of such adaptation might have been responsible for the way racial discourse was obscured throughout the production. The most important

findings of the analysis regarding the racial representations depicted in the production and how they were affected by performance are further discussed in the Conclusion.

# Notes

[1] Although other people were involved in the adaptation, direction and linguistic choices, the reference is made to Lage, as he signed the direction. Due to technical difficulties in finding all the Portuguese sources used by the adapters, the translation of *Othello* by Onestaldo Pennafort, because of its recognition as a reliable source, was adopted as a reference for the necessary textual comparisons, as well as The Third Arden *Othello*, for references to the English text.

[2] Kenan Malik presents the concept of universal literature as a controversial one, due to its disregard for minorities and for non-European values, and proposes the concept be questioned in the light of other concepts such as race and pluralism.

[3] Unfortunately, the photographs used in the analysis are not from actual performance, but from rehearsals, in which the make-up worn in performance was not worn; this reinforces de Marinis' views on photography and video as fragments of, not substitutes for, performance.

[4] In fact, Emília's first appearance is in Act II, scene i, which is in Lage's production the port scene, although at a later moment, when Iago tells her to incite Cassio to ask for Desdêmona's help.

[5] As long as visual imagery is at stake here, photography and video were again taken as useful resources.

[6] Although explored through different directors' approaches, the murder scene is an important key to the play, as is the case of Trevor Nunn's 1989 RSC production, which showed violence, with Desdemona desperately fighting to survive, or Jonathan Miller's 1981 BBC production, which showed resignation in a more "civilised" environment.

[7] The terms intradiegetic and extradiegetic have been borrowed from Gérard Genette's classification of narrators, according to which intradiegetic relates to the innermost level of the narrative, whereas extradiegetic relates to the outermost level (228-234), i.e., intradiegetic refers to narration confined to the story-world, whereas extradiegetic narration is set outside the world of the play's characters.

[8] Professor Heliodora restated her opinions with regard to Janssen Lage's production in a later personal e-mail (see Appendix 30).

[9] Indeed, it would be rather naïve to consider such interviews as authoritative not only because of their reduced number, but also because the spectators were interviewed over one year after seeing the play, a span of time that may have affected their answers.

# CONCLUSION

> That's he that was Othello? here I am.
> (*Othello* 5.2.281)

As much as stage business, music and other effects, according to Halio, can contribute to or detract from plays in production (3), the analysis in Chapter III has suggested that other elements of performance–among which textual changes–have, in the case of Janssen Hugo Lage's *Otelo*, detracted from the production's overall effect. Unfortunately, one of the main detractions relates to the construction of Otelo's otherness, which was evidently limited to skin colour; being this the case, and given the company's concerns with the play's racial discourse, the consequent expectation would be that the production offered a less racist reading than previous stagings, an expectation that was not fulfilled.

*Othello, the Moor of Venice*, has had its hero traditionally delivered according to the play's subtitle, i.e., as a stranger who, despite being "of Venice", is still marked as a stranger. As discussed in Chapter II, Othello has been, since the eighteenth century, rendered as a stranger whose exoticism served the political purpose of showing the world how different–and arguably inferior–the East was. Eurocentric views of the Orient, foregrounded by the same ideology in which British imperialism was founded, and which constituted a fundamental part of the play's performances, especially after Salvini's, in the late nineteenth century, were not stressed in Lage's production. Originally, Othello differentiates from his peers in three basic aspects, all connected to one another; he is regarded as other for being a stranger, a man from Barbary; as a Barbarian, he is a non-Christian, which is the second marker of his otherness; and, to

complicate matters even further, he is dark-skinned. The analysis carried out in Chapter III has shown that in Lage's production Otelo's geographical origins and religion, which characterise him as Oriental and mark him as other, were diminished, whereas colour was highlighted as the strongest–indeed, almost the only–marker of Otelo's otherness.

Conquering territory was a major issue in Elizabethan England, so it is natural that some of the growing interests in the land expansion of the colonial system feature in Shakespeare's work, as is the case with *The Tempest*, and also that the curiosity about foreign cultures appears in other texts, as is the case with *Othello*. Victorian England also expanded considerably as compared to earlier periods of English history, and Shakespeare, already made into a cultural ambassador of Britain, was put at the service of the Imperial system, this time to assert the superiority of Britain over the exotic peoples already and yet to be conquered.[1] Although the use of an oilrig-like platform in the setting served as an effective visual allusion to the importance of the territory to be guarded from the enemy, the omission of the many textual references that establish the Turk as the enemy, and, particularly, references to Othello's Oriental background, deprived Lage's production from an important issue the play addresses; as discussed by Vaughan, in Othello "we find repeated expressions of concern about the Turkish threat to Europe" (*Contextual* 4), which contribute to establish the text's global discourse (ibid 13-34), omitted from Lage's show.

Religion as a marker of Otelo's otherness was also omitted from Lage's production. A plausible explanation for such a choice might be rooted in the Brazilian religious syncretism, for Otelo's religious backgrounds would not sound as an exotic sign of otherness to Brazilian audiences as it would to Anglo-Saxon, not to mention Elizabethan, audiences. Even his conversion to Christianity would sound natural, because religious practice in Brazil is often characterised by simultaneous devotion to

different religions; a good example is the coexistence of Catholicism and African religions, thanks mostly to the early conversion of black slaves to Catholicism as imposed by their masters.

Differently from the many geographic allusions that mark Othello as a stranger and have traditionally associated *Othello* with Orientalism, race was not erased in Lage's production. Much to the contrary, the racial discourse was enhanced both verbally and visually, as discussed in Chapter III. However, race was perceived and shown almost exclusively as related to skin colour, other traditionally alleged markers of Otelo's otherness–foreignness and religion–being diminished or omitted.

In Lage's production, skin colour was the most significant marker of Otelo's otherness possibly because colour has been the strongest marker of otherness in Brazil, mainly due to the country's history of slavery, and also because Brazilian people have not had much contact with non-black Africa. Showing Otelo's otherness, and by extension race, as depending almost exclusively on colour, reflected the common-place notion that race relates primarily to colour, and diminished other important discourses the play deals with.[2] However, as discussed in Chapter I, otherness does not rely on one single attribute such as colour, nor is it assigned to one single group; as Miles points out,

> Otherness is not a singular quality assigned to one group: it is a dialectically plural attribute. There has always been a multiplicity of Others, with the quality being attributed to different subjects in different contexts, often with the result that the same population has functioned as Other and Us at different historical moments. (89)

By limiting Otelo's otherness to colour, Lage's production certainly aimed at relevance as regards the history of slavery and the need of challenging racism in Brazil.

By disregarding other markers of otherness that Shakespeare's text deploys, the company's choice seems to suggest that skin colour is the only excuse for racial discrimination in this country, neglecting other stereotypes usually associated with blackness, such as poverty, criminality and incipient education. Nevertheless, the choice of emphasising Otelo's blackness as *the* marker of his otherness may have resulted from the modern popular conception of otherness–and race–as depending on colour, which agrees with Said's statement that

> Each age and society re-creates its "Others". Far from a static thing the identity of self or of "other" is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual, and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies. (*Orientalism* 332)

Given the social relevance of theatre as a vehicle through which cultural assumptions are exposed, choices must be made simply in order to reproduce those assumptions and thus validate them, or to offer new readings so as to contest them; in either case, the underlying notion is that the theatrical company is in charge of either keeping or re-creating the interpretation(s) of a play. As far as *Othello* is concerned, such choices involve establishing how the other is to be depicted, so as to affect reception according to the company's expectations. In her discussion of reception, Susan Bennett points out that, more than simply being the passive consumers of a production, the audience has a strong role of reflecting back upon the play and the social acts involved in it. Bennett concludes that

> Cultural systems, individual horizons of expectations, and accepted theatrical conventions all activate the decoding process for a specific production, but, in turn, the direct experience of that production feeds

> back to revise a spectator's expectations, to establish or challenge conventions, and, occasionally, to reform the boundaries of culture. (180)

Spectators can rarely benefit from the contesting reading of a play unless the production offers them such kind of reading. Unfortunately, Lage's *Otelo*–despite the company's intended efforts–missed the chance to exploit the play-text's racial discourse in ways such as to oppose racial stereotypes; worse still, the production even reinforced such stereotypes by making Otelo fit the characteristics Iago attributed him, especially lustfulness and naïveté–or lack of intelligence–without ever proving Iago was wrong.

Lage's *Otelo*, despite its many efforts towards "modernisation", still focuses on the "dissociation of intellect" (Vaughan *Contextual*) that has been attached to the play since late nineteenth-century representations; indeed, the Otelo played by Norton Nascimento even reinforces those assumptions, as the character was rendered emotionally unstable, lacking self-control. This over-emotional Otelo contrasted with a self-assured Iago at higher levels than in previous productions, thus enhancing Iago's intellectual superiority while reinforcing Otelo's intellectual inferiority, which increased their dramatic contrast. Although the company was aware of *Otelo* as especially relevant for its racial discourse, the play reinforced the intellectual difference between Otelo and Iago through text and acting, as the first was read and acted as a fool; the stage directions that also conferred comic traits to Iago did not diminish such difference, for Iago's humour suggested irony and wit, whereas Otelo's "funny" acting suggested naïveté and weakness.

By highlighting Iago's superiority, the alternative path to diminish the Moor's inferiority would be that of highlighting his moral qualities as the play moved towards the final act; however, as discussed above, this was not achieved. Besides reducing Otelo's chances of moral redemption, the excessive (if up to a point fine) scenography

and the stage movement obscured such an important theme as race, posing a gross contradiction between the company's intentions of showing race as a fundamental issue, as discussed in Chapter III, and the final outcome. The frustrating conclusion is that Otelo was stereotypically "blackened" throughout the production, but was not stereotypically "whitened" in the end, so as to oppose Iago's racist assertions that construct Otelo as the inferior black. It is Iago–along with Brabâncio, another enemy of Otelo's–who renders the Moor "black" from the beginning of the play, and mainly after they leave Venice, when Iago can manipulate Otelo and make him become a "savage" again; as Fiedler points out

> Mythologically speaking, Othello is really black only before we see him; after his first appearance, he is archetypally white, though a stranger still, as long as he remains in Venice: a white stranger in blackface. ... With the move to Cyprus, however, everything changes once more; for Cyprus is a strange, almost magical island, an anti-Venice .... (185)

Besides reassuring Otelo's inferiority by showing him as easily gullible, the production repeated racist stereotypical conventions through one more device. As discussed in Chapter III, Shakespeare's text, besides not providing enough evidence of sexual intercourse between Othello and Desdemona, can be seen as to suggest their love as being more spiritual than physical, the only clear references to sex being those uttered by Iago and Brabantio, the latter under Iago's influence. By visually emphasising Otelo's marriage as a highly sexual relationship, Lage's production validates Iago's assertions about Otelo's lustfulness, without ever questioning the first. In her discussion on Oliver Parker's 1995 film, Cartmell states that the production is racist because in the film Othello and Desdemona's is "a physical rather than cerebral relationship; and it sends out well-meaning but ultimately racist signal in its emphasis

on the body" (74). Lage's production also showed the same kind of physical relationship between Otelo and Desdêmona, which might be a consequence of believing that a more spiritual marriage would be too naïve and thus not convincing to modern audiences. In Lage's production, the exploitation of sexuality goes nearly as far as in Parker's film, which (if Cartmell is right) makes the production racist, despite its being one of the few major Brazilian renderings to cast a black actor as Otelo, another similarity with Parker's film.

Despite the company's efforts to denounce racism as an important issue both of the play and of modern Brazilian society, Lage's *Otelo* conserved traditional racist views through different aspects. Firstly, as has been argued, the production showed agreement with the "dissociation of intellect", as discussed by Vaughan (*Contextual* 158-80), we recall, by rendering Otelo a fool, thus agreeing with Iago's racist assertions. Another mistake was to show agreement with racist assertions about the Moor's lustfulness, emphasising a physical relationship between Otelo and Desdêmona, again agreeing with Iago's racist assertions about the Moor's bestial lust without, in either case, restating Otelo as an honourable man in the end–nor at any point before that.

The analysis of data regarding Lage's production has revealed that it lacked thematic coherence. Although the company intended to show racism as an important aspect, they were visually unable to "deracialise" Otelo; indeed, the overall effect was quite the opposite for, whereas there was a clear intention to "modernise", the production kept in agreement with the same old assertions about black inferiority shown in earlier performances. In short, Lage's production was to a certain extent technically coherent–for its modern visual effects in agreement with music and intentions–but not thematically, because the linguistic and visual modernisation employed did not agree with the conservative views about Otelo's otherness the production showed. The

chance to express resistance to the play's racist discourse was missed, as "contrapuntal reading" was not carried out, with the consequence that the audience was deprived from views that could oppose the racial stereotypes both of Shakespeare's text and Brazilian society.

The methodology adopted in this thesis has proved useful to the performance analysis that was carried out. The methodology proposed by Halio–backed up by Serôdio and Bennett–was an effective instrument for the analysis/synthesis process, although at some points the elements analysed demonstrated to be too intertwined–as, indeed, they were expected to be–, which made their study strenuous. The theoretical paradigms underlying the research, among which concepts of Orientalism, otherness, race and contrapuntal reading, also proved their relevance and applicability to the analysis of Lage's *Otelo*.

This thesis has fostered some questioning leading to suggestions for further research. Further productions of *Othello*–and perhaps any other Shakespearean play–might be interesting objects of study when compared to Lage's, in order to investigate if they also employed devices such as a fast action, drastic textual reduction, and sexual exploitation as means to "modernise" Shakespeare.[3] Another possible investigation relates to assessing how professionals directly involved with theatre productions understand the racial discourse attained to *Othello*, and how they work with their assumptions throughout the process of ascribing meaning to their productions. A third but not less important suggestion relates to comparing different methodologies in order to investigate how measurable theatre performances can be.

# Notes

[1] The terms *colonial system* and *imperial system* were taken in relation to the definitions of colonialism and imperialism drawing on Said (*Culture* 8), according to whom, as quoted in note in Chapter I (33), the first refers to occupation, whereas the second refers to cultural, political and ideological domination.

[2] As pointed out by Vaughan, *Othello* is characterised by four types of discursive formations: global, military, racial and marital (*Contextual* 4-6).

[3] Some late twentieth-century productions that seem to have been intended as attractive to young audiences are the 1996 filmic version of *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by Baz Luhrmann, and a Brazilian *A Tempestade*, directed by Caco Coelho and staged in January 2000 in Rio de Janeiro.

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# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX 1

## FICHA TÉCNICA DA PEÇA *OTELO*

Otelo – Norton Nascimento

Desdêmona – Heloísa Maria

Iago – Bartholomeu de Haro

Cássio – Nicolas Trevijano

Brabâncio – João Petry

Rodrigo – Carlos Sato

Duquesa/Bianca – Tuca Ribeiro

Emília – Patrícia Ribeiro

Música – Skowa

Adaptação e dramaturgia – Alexandre Montaury

Cenário e figurino – José de Anchieta

Direção geral – Janssen Hugo Lage

Diretor assistente – Ricardo Rizzo

Direção de produção – Robertson Freyre & Márcia Lilienthal

Fonte: Programa da Companhia Contemporânea de Encenação (13).

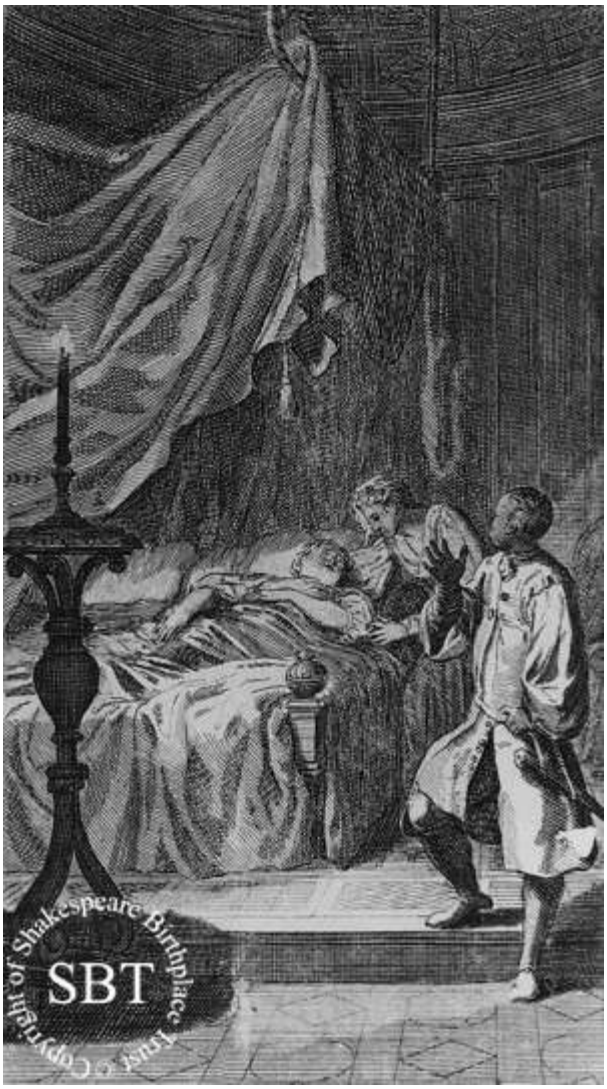
# APPENDIX 2

Henry Peacham's sketch of a scene of *Titus Andronicus*

# APPENDIX 3


Abdul Guahid, Moorish Ambassador to Queen Elisabeth I

# APPENDIX 4




Engraving by Du Guernier from Alexander Pope's edition of Shakespeare dated 1728

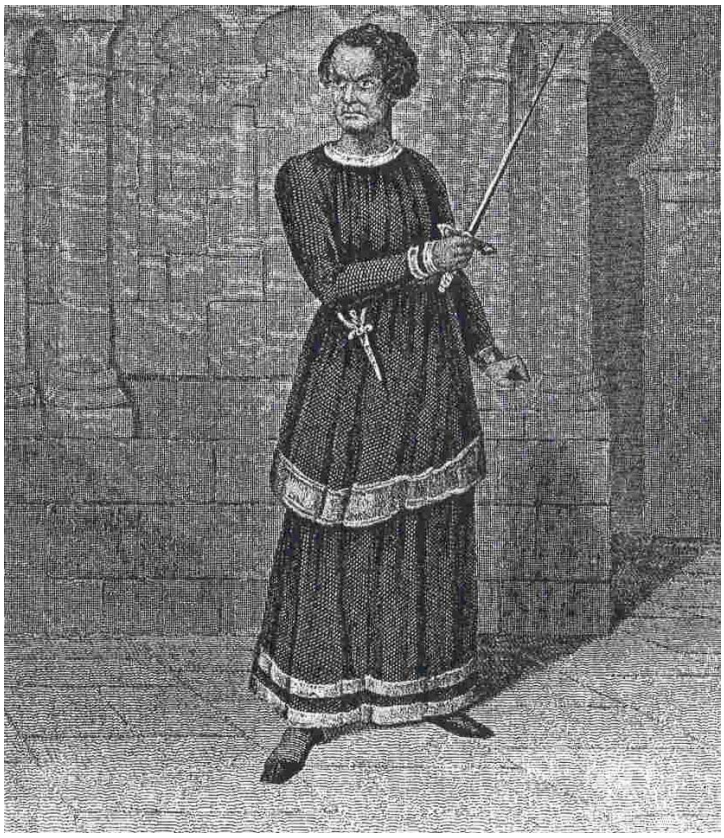
# APPENDIX 5


Edmund Kean as Othello

# APPENDIX 6


G. Y. Brooke as Othello

# APPENDIX 7



William Charles Macready

# APPENDIX 8


Tommaso Salvini as Othello

APPENDIX 9


Wilson Barret as Othello

# APPENDIX 10

Paul Robeson as Othello and Peggy Ashcroft as Desdemona

# APPENDIX 11

Ira Aldridge as Othello

# APPENDIX 12

Ben Kingsley as Othello and David Suchet as Iago

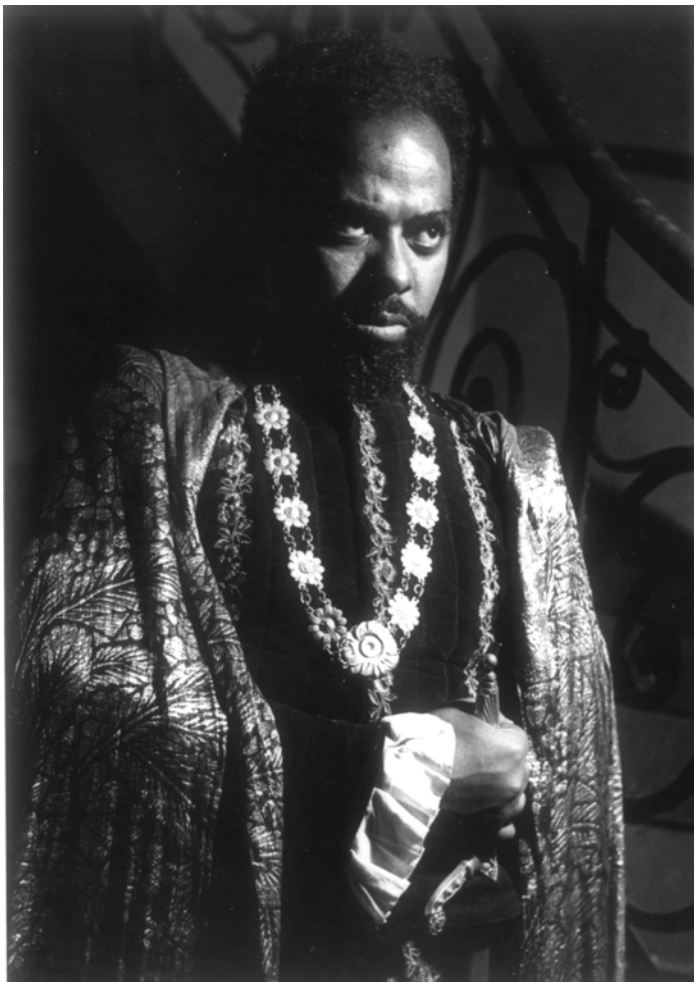
# APPENDIX 13

Patrick Steward (at the centre) as Othello

# APPENDIX 14

João Caetano

# APPENDIX 15



Abdias do Nascimento as Otelo

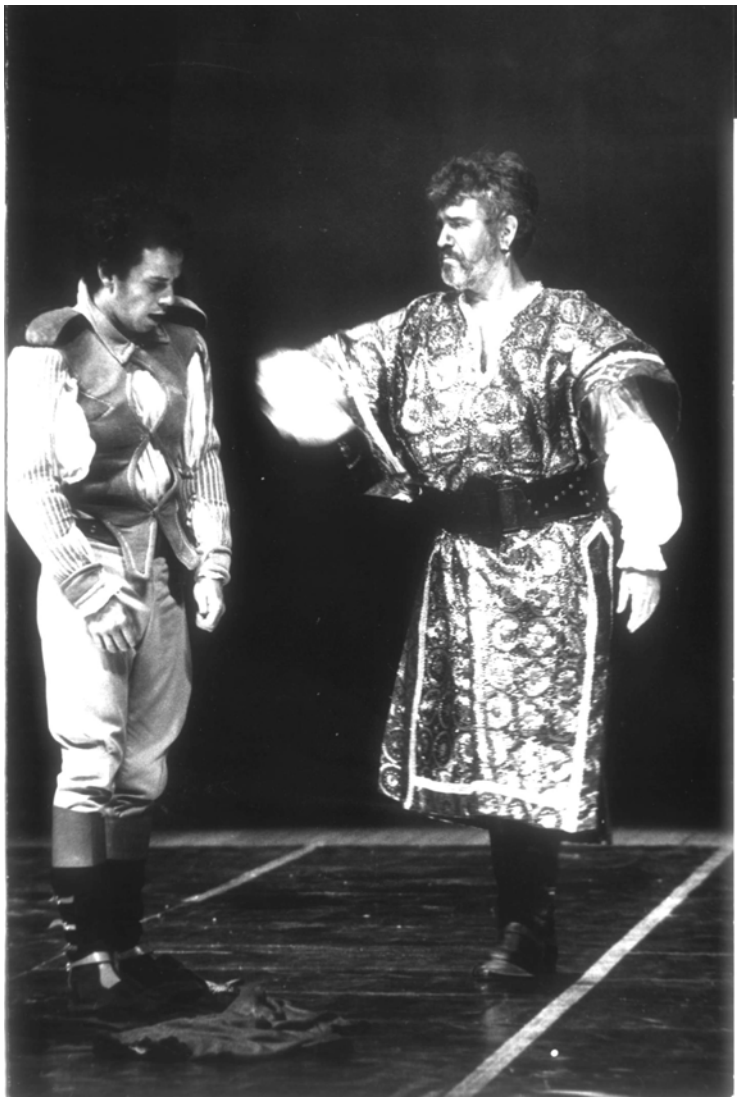
# APPENDIX 16

Abdias do Nascimento as Otelo and Ruth de Souza as Desdêmona

# APPENDIX 17

Paulo Autran as Otelo

# APPENDIX 18



Juca de Oliveira as Othello and Oswaldo Raimo as Cássio

# APPENDIX 19

Orson Welles as Othello and Suzanne Cloutier as Desdemona

# APPENDIX 20

Laurence Olivier as Othello and Maggie Smith as Desdemona

# APPENDIX 21

Anthony Hopkins as Othello

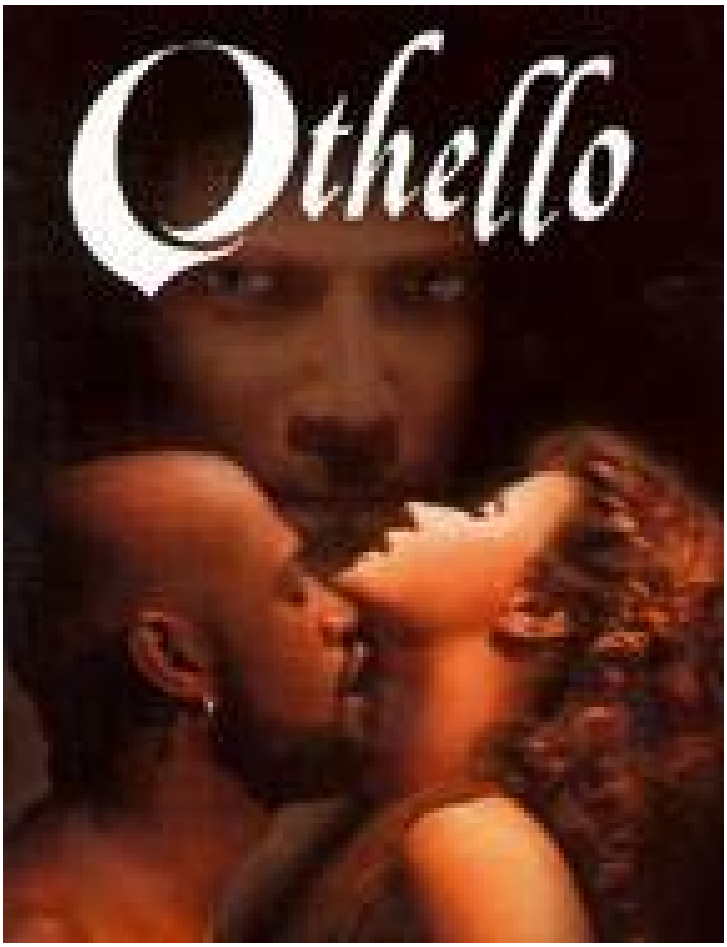
# APPENDIX 22

John Kani as Othello and Joanna Weinberg as Desdemona

# APPENDIX 23

Willard White as Othello and Ian McKellen as Iago

APPENDIX 24

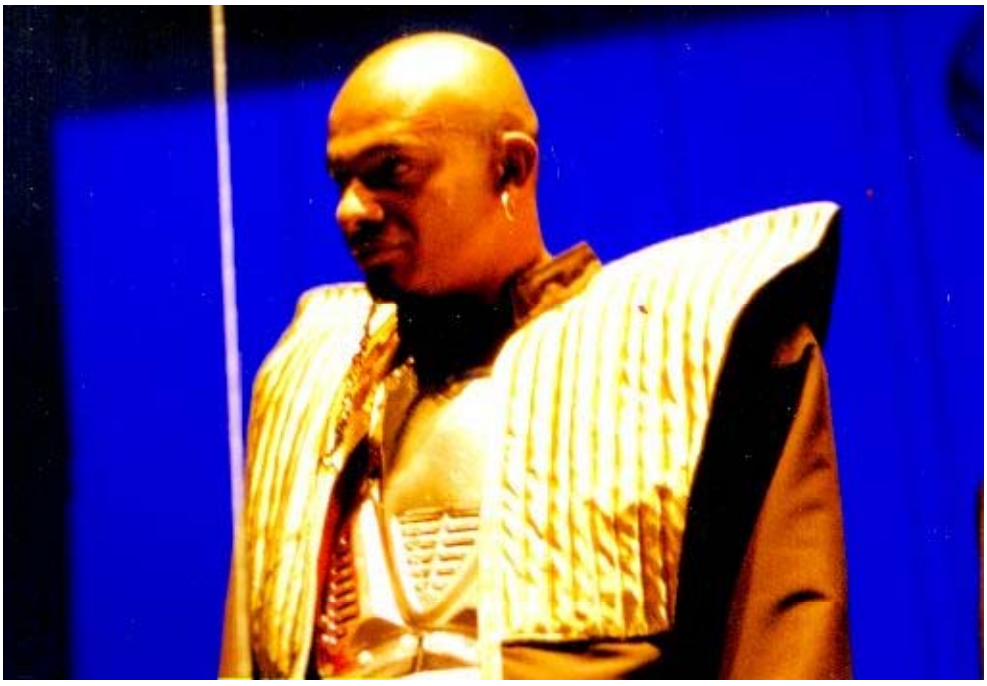



Lawrence Fishburne as Othello, Irene Jacob as Desdemona and Kenneth Branagh as Iago

# APPENDIX 25

João Petry as Brabâncio, Norton Nascimento as Otelo, Heloísa Maria as Desdêmona and Bartholomeu de Haro as Iago

# APPENDIX 26



Norton Nascimento as Otelo

# APPENDIX 27

Norton Nascimento as Otelo and Heloísa Maria as Desdêmona

# APPENDIX 28


Norton Nascimento as Otelo and Heloísa Maria as Desdêmona

# APPENDIX 29

Norton Nascimento as Otelo and Bartholomeu de Haro as Iago

# APPENDIX 30

## E-MAIL FROM BARBARA HELIODORA (TRANSCRIBED)

Prezado Ricardo:
É um exagero injustificado dizer que o Norton interpretou Otelo: o que foi levado foi um caos, tipo samba do crioulo doido, que pouco ou nada (realmente nada) tinha a ver com Shakespeare. Havia mais personagens inventados do que cortados: o cenário era uma torre de poço de petróleo (Deus sabe por quê), o Brabantio aparecia pelado no final, sem razão (não fazia nada, a não ser passear pelo palco). A linguagem era grossa e burra, mas a história não era melhor. Não consegui ver nada de erótico ou de conflito racial em um espetáculo que não era nada. A única e imensa verdadeira desonestidade era a exploração do nome de Shakespeare, falsamente apontado como autor de uma coisa que não tinha nada a ver com a obra dele.
Barbara

# APPENDIX 31

## E-MAIL FROM CELSO JR. (TRANSCRIBED)

Perguntas relativas à montagem de *Otelo* (1999-2000), dirigido por Janssen Hugo Lage, com Norton Nascimento no papel principal.
1. Onde e quando você assistiu à peça? Rio de Janeiro, no Vila Lobos, janeiro de 2000.
2. Como você classificaria seu conhecimento do texto de Otelo? Tenho profundo conhecimento do texto. Sou ator e já interpretei "Iago" na montagem em Salvador, Bahia, em 95/96. Durante o processo da montagem, estudamos profundamente algumas das peças de Shakespeare. Obviamente, o estudo de Otelo foi o mais aprofundado.
3. O Otelo de Janssen Lage teve sua linguagem adaptada, tendo inclusive o acréscimo de um número de palavrões. Como você acha que isso afetou a peça? É muito comum que encenadores contemporâneos "adaptem" as peças de Shakespeare. No caso de Janssen, achei que ele tinha um certo desprezo pela poesia do texto original. A adaptação que ele fez acabou perdendo muito da carga dramática e do lirismo de Shakespeare sem, contudo, oferecer algo que valesse à pena. Lastimável.
4. O espetáculo começou com forte apelo erótico. Como você acha que isso afetou a peça? A história da moça branca, virgem delicada que se apaixona pelo general negro, corpulento já traz em si um apelo erótico, pelo menos para a platéia contemporânea. O público de hoje não se convenceria de um amor tão súbito baseado apenas no heroísmo de Otelo e na piedade de Desdêmona. O fundo erótico da relação é muito utilizado pelas outras personagens (Iago, Brabâncio, Rodrigo) para desconfiarem do envolvimento de Otelo e Desdêmona.
5. Você acha que o cenário, a música e os figurinos foram coerentes entre si? Foram coerentes com o texto? A cenografia metafórica da peça (no original, uma ilha estratégica no Mediterrâneo; na montagem, uma plataforma de petróleo) já seria suficiente para dar ao público de hoje a noção de quão importante aquela ilha era para aqueles personagens. Porém, quando a adaptação se refere a petróleo, etc... a metáfora acaba ficando pobre. Além do mais, o cenário era muito feio. A luz era feia. A música, realmente não lembro.
6. Na montagem de Lage, o Coro substituiu um número de personagens do texto original. Você acha que o Coro conseguiu preencher esses espaços? Não. Coro? Não lembro de coro....
7. O ator que representou Brabâncio no início da peça retornou a partir de um dado momento. Como você percebeu seu retorno à cena? Percebi. Uma espécie de fantasma. Porque ele estava nu???
8. Como você percebeu o conflito racial neste Otelo? Isso ficou meio perdido em tanta cenografia, tantas outras questões misturadas.
9. O que você citaria como os pontos fortes da peça? E os pontos fracos? Pontos fortes: um ator negro interpretando Otelo. A idéia da plataforma de petróleo como ilha.
Pontos fracos: a visão pretensiosa da encenação que parece querer "melhorar" Shakespeare e a peça. Falta de cuidado no trabalho com os atores (alguns muito fracos).
10. Você gostaria de tecer algum comentário a mais sobre a peça? Eu fiz um comentário no Forum sobre as peças que eu assisti na temporada 1999/2000, no Rio. Deve estar em algum e-mail perdido no arquivo do Forum. Se quiser, pode entrar no site e verificar.

# APPENDIX 32

## E-MAIL FROM ANDRÉ GÂMIO (TRANSCRIBED)

Perguntas relativas à montagem de *Otelo* (1999-2000), dirigido por Janssen Hugo Lage, com Norton Nascimento no papel principal.

1. Onde e quando você assistiu à peça? Teatro 07 de abril, em Pelotas.
2. Como você classificaria seu conhecimento do texto de Otelo? Já tinha lido Otelo antes de assistir à peça como aluno do Curso de Letras da UFPEL.
3. O Otelo de Janssen Lage teve sua linguagem adaptada, tendo inclusive o acréscimo de um número de palavrões. Como você acha que isso afetou a peça? A adaptação abrasileirou a peça, mas acho que outro tipo de estratégia poderia ter sido usada para isso. Como um todo, achei interessante, mas isso poderia ter sido feito através da atuação, por exemplo.
4. O espetáculo começou com forte apelo erótico. Como você acha que isso afetou a peça? Foi algo inesperado, porque o texto original não passa isso, assim como o cenário. Apesar do choque inicial, achei que isso não afetou a peça negativamente. Chamou a atenção.
5. Você acha que o cenário, a música e os figurinos foram coerentes entre si? Foram coerentes com o texto? A idéia do texto, principalmente a intriga de Iago, foram conservadas, mas não achei o cenário condizente com o texto. Só compreendi a intenção real do cenário após ler um artigo de jornal que esclareceu a posição do diretor e atores sobre isso.
6. Na montagem de Lage, o Coro substituiu um número de personagens do texto original. Você acha que o Coro conseguiu preencher esses espaços? Foi algo confuso, mas percebi que essas vozes completavam pensamentos do Otelo, ou tumultuavam a intriga confundindo-o. Acho que isso ajudou a entender a situação psicológica de Otelo.
7. O ator que representou Brabâncio no início da peça retornou a partir de um dado momento. Como você percebeu seu retorno à cena? Não o reconheci como Brabâncio. Tive o mesmo tipo de choque que tive em relação à nudez e ao cenário, mas achei válido porque chamou a atenção e despertou curiosidade, apesar de não ter percebido um propósito claro nisso.
8. Como você percebeu o conflito racial neste Otelo? Fiquei mais curioso em relação a outro aspectos por ser a primeira vez que assisti a uma encenação de Shakespeare. Não me apeguei tanto a isso, mas sim à trama e movimentação. Mas lembro dos comentários de Norton Nascimento ao final da peça, quando falou sobre racismo.
9. O que você citaria como os pontos fortes da peça? E os pontos fracos? Como ponto forte, a maneira como a inveja de Iago foi mostrada.
Um ponto fraco foi o cenário, que poderia ter sido mais condizente com o texto original. Foi moderno e inovador, mas gostaria que fosse menos agressivo.
10. Você gostaria de tecer algum comentário a mais sobre a peça? Gostaria de ter entendido mais sobre a questão da nudez na peça, que não me pareceu ter propósito claro.

# APPENDIX 33

## E-MAIL FROM MARCELO KORBERG (TRANSCRIBED)

Perguntas relativas à montagem de *Otelo* (1999-2000), dirigido por Janssen Hugo Lage, com Norton Nascimento no papel principal.

1. Onde e quando você assistiu à peça? No Teatro 07 de Abril (Pelotas). Não lembro exatamente a data.
2. Como você classificaria seu conhecimento do texto de Otelo? Razoável. Sou graduado em Letras mas, apesar de ter lido algumas peças Shakespeare durante e após o curso, nunca li Otelo por inteiro.
3. O Otelo de Janssen Lage teve sua linguagem adaptada, tendo inclusive o acréscimo de um número de palavrões. Como você acha que isso afetou a peça? A adaptação da linguagem facilitou a leitura para público leigo, mas entendo que o uso de palavrões não é necessário para que esse público entenda melhor a peça. Mesmo assim, achei a idéia inovadora. Por outro, o uso de palavrões afetou a peça pois alterou muito a beleza poética do texto de Shakespeare.
4. O espetáculo começou com forte apelo erótico. Como você acha que isso afetou a peça? Acho que acabou fazendo parte da linguagem com palavrões. Também contribuiu para deixar a peça mais atual. Coincide com o forte apelo sexual que se vê atualmente na mídia.
5. Você acha que o cenário, a música e os figurinos foram coerentes entre si? Foram coerentes com o texto? Sim.
6. Na montagem de Lage, o Coro substituiu um número de personagens do texto original. Você acha que o Coro conseguiu preencher esses espaços? Sim. Não deixou a desejar, pelo fato de ser uma adaptação modernizada.
7. O ator que representou Brabâncio no início da peça retornou a partir de um dado momento. Como você percebeu seu retorno à cena? A coisa ficou desconexa. Para quem não tem conhecimento do texto original, isso pode ter causado confusão. A sua volta nu chama a atenção apenas porque voltou nu, mas ficou confuso.
8. Como você percebeu o conflito racial neste Otelo? Percebi bem. O contraste entre cor de pele de Otelo e Desdêmona realçou isso. A linguagem também reforçou o conflito.
9. O que você citaria como os pontos fortes da peça? E os pontos fracos? Fortes: adaptação lingüística, que deixou a peça mais moderna e permitiu que os leigos que não conheciam a peça tivessem acesso a ela.; o questionamento racial, bastante claro; a polêmica causada pela nudez, que salienta alguns aspectos importantes da peça. Fracos: para quem conhece o texto original, o texto novo foi muito distante. Aspectos importantes do texto original não foram evidenciados na nova versão.
10. Você gostaria de tecer algum comentário a mais sobre a peça? Não tenho mais comentários.

# APPENDIX 34

## E-MAIL FROM LÍGIA MILITZ DA COSTA (TRANSCRIBED)

Perguntas relativas à montagem de *Otelo* (1999-2000), dirigido por Janssen Hugo Lage, com Norton Nascimento no papel principal.
1.Onde e quando você assistiu à peça? Theatro Treze de Maio - Santa Maria - RS/ março/2000.
2. Como você classificaria seu conhecimento do texto de Otelo? Muito Bom.
3. O Otelo de Janssen Lage teve sua linguagem adaptada, tendo inclusive o acréscimo de um número de palavrões. Como você acha que isso afetou a peça? Dessacralizou em muito a nobreza da retórica original.
4. O espetáculo começou com forte apelo erótico. Como você acha que isso afetou a peça? Alterou excessivamente a proposta original shakespeariana.
5. Você acha que o cenário, a música e os figurinos foram coerentes entre si? Foram coerentes com o texto? Com a adaptação do texto, sim.
6. Na montagem de Lage, o Coro substituiu um número de personagens do texto original. Você acha que o Coro conseguiu preencher esses espaços? (*Não lembro)*.
7. O ator que representou Brabâncio no início da peça retornou a partir de um dado momento. Como você percebeu seu retorno à cena? *(Não lembro)*.
8. Como você percebeu o conflito racial neste Otelo? Nos parâmetros esperados, segundo a própria peça.
9. O que você citaria como os pontos fortes da peça? E os pontos fracos? A força da atuação e do texto do personagem Iago que, também na tragédia de Shakespeare, é de um maquiavelismo admirável, e a atuação e tipo vigoroso de Norton Nascimento, ator perfeito para o papel de Otelo.
10. Você gostaria de tecer algum comentário a mais sobre a peça? ----

# APPENDIX 35

## E-MAIL FROM ROBERTO CORRÊA (TRANSCRIBED)

Perguntas relativas à montagem de *Otelo* (1999-2000), dirigido por Janssen Hugo Lage, com Norton Nascimento no papel principal.

1. Onde e quando você assistiu à peça? Porto Alegre, em 09 de abril de 2000, no Teatro São Pedro.
2. Como você classificaria seu conhecimento do texto de Otelo? Talvez um conhecimento acadêmico ou mais, pois, após ter feito minha monografia sobre a peça, passei a conhecer um pouco mais sobre o universo shakespeareano.
3. O Otelo de Janssen Lage teve sua linguagem adaptada, tendo inclusive o acréscimo de um número de palavrões. Como você acha que isso afetou a peça? Creio não ter percebido nenhum problema com os palavrões, dos quais não me recordo muito. Além do mais, trata-se de um jeitinho brasileiro de adaptação. Sabe como é?
4. O espetáculo começou com forte apelo erótico. Como você acha que isso afetou a peça? Demonstra fragilidade e força ao mesmo tempo, o que são características da personagem de Otelo.
5. Você acha que o cenário, a música e os figurinos foram coerentes entre si? Foram coerentes com o texto? Uma adaptação "futurista", digamos assim, que obteve coesão. Quanto ao texto, fugiu um pouco da simplicidade.
6. Na montagem de Lage, o Coro substituiu um número de personagens do texto original. Você acha que o Coro conseguiu preencher esses espaços? Não.
7. O ator que representou Brabâncio no início da peça retornou a partir de um dado momento. Como você percebeu seu retorno à cena? O retorno nu caracterizou bem a "traição" de Desdêmona a seu pai, casando-se com Otelo às escondidas.
8. Como você percebeu o conflito racial neste Otelo? Infelizmente, não tenho recordações deste conflito.
9. O que você citaria como os pontos fortes da peça? E os pontos fracos? Ponto forte: a desenvoltura da personagem de Iago. Pontos fracos: Desdêmona não parecia ser aquela mulher casta e frágil da peça; faltou mais determinação para Otelo.
10. Você gostaria de tecer algum comentário a mais sobre a peça? Apesar de tudo, a peça é maravilhosa, pois foi a primeira vez que assisti, o que resultou num grande fascínio pelas obras de Shakespeare.