

## Assignment Prompt

### ***OTHELLO* STAGING**

Paper Length: at least 1,000 words, and no more than 1,500  
MLA format

As we've discussed in class, the written words of a play only comprise part of the art form. The rest is in the acting, costumes, stage design, and, especially, the *direction* of a particular production. For this assignment, instead of showing your interpretation of *Othello* through a scholarly analysis, you will show it through your directorial choices.

Pretend you are the director of a film or play version of *Othello* (you decide which). Write a production proposal that provides the following information (and any others you'd like to add):

- **Introduction:** Begin your proposal with a few sentences explaining what will be unique about your production. What will you focus on in your production? What is the central idea behind your interpretation of the play—the interpretation you will communicate to the audience in your directorial choices?
- **Medium:** Explain why you chose to direct a film adaptation or a stage version of the play. As we've discussed in class, film and theatre offer unique challenges and affordances, as they are very different media. How will you make use of the affordances of your medium?
- **Setting (time and place):** Is your rendition set in today's world, or Shakespeare's, or 3,000 years into the future? Is it set in Venice, Brooklyn, or Mars?
- **Setting (set design):** If film, where would you shoot? If a play, how would you set the stage? Are we indoors? Outdoors? What do the shoot locations and sets look like for each scene?
- **Mood:** Grim and dark? Light-hearted and comical? Romantic and sweeping? Mysterious and dangerous? Etc.
- **Actors:** Which actors would you cast for each role?
- **Costumes:** How would you costume each of the characters?
- **Music:** When would you use music in your production, and what kinds of songs?
- **Language:** Would you retain Shakespeare's original language, or update it for a modern audience?
- **Scenes:** Are there any scenes you would cut? Would you rearrange the order of any scenes?
- **Scene focus:** Choose any one scene and walk us through the choices you would make and direction you would give the actor. If film, when would you use close-ups? If theater, where on the stage would you have the actor walk? Is the actor speaking to the audience, to him/herself, or to someone else? How are the actors speaking to each other? Are they touching?
- **Other:** Are there any other changes you'd make from Shakespeare's original? Anything else you'd particularly highlight that I haven't asked about on this sheet?

Please explain WHY you've made each of your choices—how they tie together into your overall thematic focus. For these explanations, you should use textual evidence from the script. Finally,

make sure to give your proposal a title that shows what your overall interpretation of the play is.

In addition to your proposal, I ask that you design a movie or play poster that sets the tone for your particular interpretation of the play. (27" x 40" poster as a PDF or JPG file).

## Appendix A

### Grading Rubric

There is no right or wrong way to interpret this play, and I am not going to grade you on whether your interpretation is one that I personally agree with! Instead, I will grade you on how each of your direction choices supports your overall interpretation of the play, and how your choices and interpretation show that you've thought carefully about the script and its context. I want to know that you read the play carefully and spent time considering its themes and questions.

#### An A-range paper:

- \*has a strong, clear, complex, and original interpretation grounded in lots of good evidence from the text. All directorial choices are thoroughly explained and work well together to communicate the director's interpretation.
- \*the writer shows an excellent understanding of the play's plot, characters, and conflicts
- \*the production proposal is logically structured and flows smoothly from topic to topic
- \*the writing is engaging and demonstrates the writer's interest in the topic
- \*there are few if any grammatical or technical errors

#### A B-range paper:

- \*has a clear but predictable or surface-level interpretation
- \*the writer has attempted to support their directorial choices with connection to an interpretation, but the evidence may not be carefully analyzed or some choices may contradict
- \*the writer's understanding of the play's plot, characters, and conflicts is mostly correct
- \*there is some sense of logical order to the topics; the writer has thought about how to structure the paper, but the transitions may not be as smooth
- \*the writing is mostly clear so the reader can follow along
- \*there are few grammatical or technical errors

#### A C-range paper:

- \*has a weak, unfocused interpretation and/or one that lacks support from the text
- \*directorial choices are unexplained, weakly developed, unoriginal, unclear, or contradictory
- \*the paragraphs and topics are disorganized; the writer has shown little thought as to how the paper should be structured
- \*there are frequent minor and major errors that make the paper difficult to read

#### A D-range paper:

- \*shows a major misunderstanding of the prompt and/or the text
- \*there are major errors in the writing that make it difficult to understand

#### An F-range paper:

- \*shows a major misunderstanding of the prompt and/or the text
- \*has no identifiable main point
- \*does not attempt to analyze the text
- \*there are major errors in the writing that make it difficult to understand

## Appendix B

### *Othello* Staging Project: Getting Started

#### **Help! I'm not a theater nerd!**

I'm guessing that none of us (myself included) are movie or play directors, and very few of us may have even performed in a play before. Perhaps you haven't even seen a play performed on-stage. Don't worry—that's okay! This assignment is meant to give you a unique way to demonstrate your own original interpretation of the play—what you see as its central concerns, conflicts, and questions, and the motivations behind the characters' actions. Everyone has a different interpretation of these things, and that's why people see the same Shakespeare plays over and over again—because each time, through the eyes of each new director, the play becomes something totally different.

#### **How do I begin?**

Begin with your gut. What disturbs you the most about this play? Which characters, scenes, and conflicts most caught your attention? For me, it's the treatment of women in the play. For that reason, I might want to stage a feminist version of *Othello* where Desdemona, Bianca, and Emilia are the heroes.

Follow your curiosity. What left you puzzled in this play? For me, it's how obsessed Iago is with Othello and his marriage. You may be more interested in the issues of race raised in *Othello*. Or warfare, or family, or marriage—the list goes on and on!

Do some freewriting and brainstorming about what you think about the play. Look back at your reading journal and class notes. Think back on class debates and discussions we had. Whose interpretations did you agree with? Whose did you disagree with?

Use your resources. Read more interpretations of *Othello* online and using the library databases. Flip through your book and look at all the questions on the left-hand side of each page spread, and at the end of each Act. These questions may inspire you.

Use your imagination to consider many different options, and then choose. Open your book at random and read the dialogue you find there in an angry voice. Now a nervous voice. Now a depressed voice. Now bitter. Read the scene imagining music playing underneath it, and then silent. Imagine the character delivering these lines while holding a knife in his hand vs. holding a cat. When you try to imagine all the different possibilities, you'll eventually find some that you like more than others. That's based in your interpretation!

#### **Now what?**

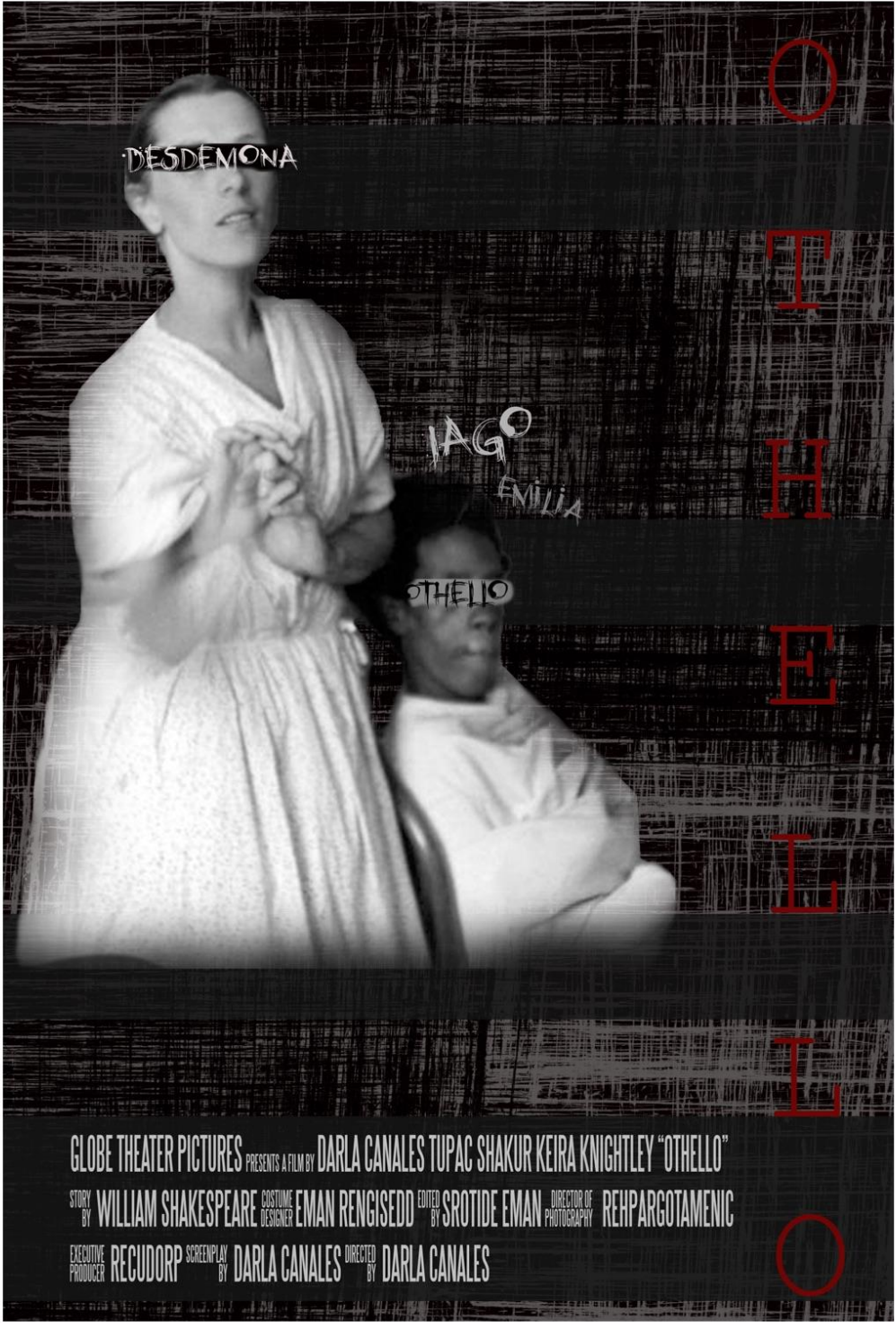
Run through my list of bullet points on the prompt in the order in which I list them. Write some ideas for each of them. Once you've completed them all, return to the beginning and read your answers, ensuring that your directorial choices all work together to form a unified interpretation. Make any changes you find necessary. Next, add a few sentences explaining each choice, and provide a quote from the play that supports your decision for each choice. When you're done, go back through them all again to ensure everything ties together and seek feedback.

Appendix C

Sample Student Posters



**Othello**  
March 8, 2017



DESDEMONA

IAGO  
EMILIA

OTHELLO

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GLOBE THEATER PICTURES PRESENTS A FILM BY DARLA CANALES TUPAC SHAKUR KEIRA KNIGHTLEY "OTHELLO"

STORY BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE COSTUME DESIGNER EMAN RENGISEDD EDITED BY SROTIDE EMAN DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY REHPARGOTAMENIC

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER RECUDORP SCREENPLAY BY DARLA CANALES DIRECTED BY DARLA CANALES

## Appendix D Teaching Resources

### **FILM VERSIONS OF *OTHELLO***

*Othello* has been adapted into 11 different film versions, and a number of additional films based more loosely on the play. For the quality of the adaptation, variety of interpretations, and availability of clips on Youtube, I typically use the following six versions in my classes:

*Othello* (1990, dir. Trevor Nunn)  
[Othello](#) (1995, dir. Oliver Parker)  
[O](#) (2001, dir. Tim Blake Nelson)  
[Othello](#) (2001, dir. Geoffrey Sax)  
*Omkara* (2006, dir. Vishal Bhardwaj)

### **STAGE VERSIONS OF *OTHELLO***

The clips linked below were taken from the following stage productions of *Othello*:

The Globe (2007)  
[The Folger Theatre](#) (2011)  
[The National Theatre](#) (2013)  
 Royal Shakespeare Company (2015)

### **COMPARING DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SAME SCENE**

**Act 1 Scene 2:** [Three versions of Othello's defense](#) (the Globe, Parker, and Bhardwaj)

**Act 1 Scene 3:** Desdemona defends Othello in front of the Duke

[Version 1 \(Nelson\)](#)

[Version 2 \(Parker\)](#)

**Act 1 Scene 3:** Iago encourages Rodrigo to “put money in thy purse,” followed by Iago’s soliloquy

[Version 1 \(Parker\)](#)

[Version 2 \(Nunn\)](#)

**Act 2 Scene 3:** The brawl

[Version 1 \(National Theatre\)](#)

[Version 2 \(Parker\)](#)

**Act 3 Scene 3:** Iago begins to sow seeds of doubt in Othello

[Version 1 \(Royal Shakespeare Company\)](#)

[Version 2 \(Nelson\)](#)

[Version 3 \(Parker\)](#)

**Act 3 Scene 3:** Emilia gives Iago the handkerchief

[Version 1 \(Nelson\)](#)

[Version 2 \(Parker\)](#)

**Act 3 Scene 4:** Othello confronts Desdemona about the handkerchief

[Version 1 \(Parker\)](#)

[Version 2 \(Nelson\)](#)

**Act 4 Scene 1:** Othello listens in on a conversation between Iago and Cassio

[Version 1 \(Parker\)](#)

[Version 2 \(Nelson\)](#)

**Act 5, Scene 2: The Murder of Desdemona**

[Version 1 \(Parker\), Part 1](#)

[Version 1 \(Parker\), Part 2](#)

[Version 2 \(The Globe\)](#)

## COMPARING DIRECTORIAL CHOICES

### Critical Choices

[Four critical approaches to interpreting \*Othello\* \(feminist, Marxist, post-colonial, and new Historicist\)](#)

### Acting Choices

[National Theatre actors discuss their characters \(Iago and Othello\)](#)

[National Theatre actors discuss their characters \(Emilia and Desdemona\)](#)



[Folger Theatre actors discuss the theme of deception](#)

### **Setting**

[National Theatre director, actors, and others discuss the decision to set Othello in a modern-day military setting](#)

### **Casting**

[History of black and white actors playing Othello](#)

[Performance history of Othello](#)

[Othello and blackface podcast](#)

[Casting Iago in the Royal Shakespeare Company version](#)