Jealousy, Manipulation and Murder: Designing the Costumes for William Shakespeare's Othello

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Jealousy, Manipulation and Murder:
Designing the Costumes for William Shakespeare’s Othello
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Designing the Costumes for William Shakespeare’s Othello

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Drama

By

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Oklahoma Baptist University
Bachelor of Arts in Theatre, 2005

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Abstract

The following thesis explains the process utilized to create and implement the costume design for the production of Othello produced at the University of Arkansas University Theatre in the Spring of 2011. Throughout this thesis I will illustrate how the costumes went from initial research ideas to sketches and colored renderings and finally to finished three-dimensional costumes. The design process detailed here includes an analysis of the play, production history, research, renderings, and an evaluation of the overall process.
This thesis is approved for recommendation
to the Graduate Council

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Acknowledgements

A special thanks is due to the Drama Faculty and Staff at the University of Arkansas. Their guidance and mentorship during the past three years has been invaluable. I would like to especially thank Pat and Val for helping me become a better costumer and theatre artist. It is also necessary to thank my thesis committee, Pat, Michael, and Michael.

Thank you for your time and care not just in this thesis, but also in my career and my life.
Dedication

I must first thank my family for their love, care, and unceasing support. Without you, this dream could not have become a reality. Mom and Dad, this thesis is dedicated to you. I would also like to thank the friends that have walked beside me over the past three years. Thank you for laughs and tears and for continually pushing me to go forward, to grow and to become better at this art called theatre.
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Chapter One

Introduction

Othello is one of William Shakespeare’s most well known tragedies. It has been produced for over 400 years and its themes of jealousy, deception, and misguided passions are still relevant to modern day audiences. Othello was produced at the University of Arkansas’s University Theatre in the spring of 2011. Michael Landman directed the play with the set design by Shawn D. Irish, lighting design by Justin B. Ashley, sound design by Will Eubanks. I served as the costume designer with Patricia J. Martin serving as my mentor and Valerie Lane was the Costume Shop Manager for the production.

This thesis focuses on the design process I followed to create the costumes for the production. This process includes my initial ideas and analysis of the play, research, renderings, finished costumes and my final evaluation of the production. This production allowed me the opportunity to explore the nature of characters in a specific story and help bring them to life three dimensionally through the costumes they wore.

The costume design process for this production included several steps which all provided information necessary for the creation of the final product. My first step was to read and analyze the script, and begin exploring the play emotionally and visually. The script analysis can be found in Appendix 1, Pages 35-47. After my analysis I created an emotional collage, which expressed my ideas of the theme and mood of the play. This can be found in Appendix 2, Page 48. I also created a portrait gallery, which expressed the personality and character of each of the characters of the play. The portrait gallery can be found in Appendix 3, Page 49. My next step was to research past productions and looking at what worked and what didn’t as well as finding research specific to the concept decided upon after meeting with the director. After determining a
period in which to set the play with the director, I created research boards specific to each of the characters. My research can be found in Appendices 4 and 5, Pages 38-41. After completing my research I created initial or rough sketches of what I thought the characters might look like followed by completing fully rendered and swatched costume renderings of the designs. These can be found in Appendices 6 and 7, Pages 42-50. Once the costume designs had been determined visually, came the task of creating the actual three-dimensional costumes. This required finding or building each costume piece. Production photos of the finished production can be found in Appendix 10, Pages 66-76.

This thesis will look at each of the steps that led to the final costume design for Othello in more depth. Like any theatre good design must, I will begin by looking closely at the story. The first step, detailed in the next chapter will examine my production analysis for Othello.
Chapter Two

Analysis of William Shakespeare’s Othello

In order to be able to tell a story about a character or group of characters it is important to know and understand the story. For the costume designer it is important to know where, when and why the story takes place, but most importantly whom the story is about. What is it that makes these characters the people they are? Why do they do what they do? What will happen to them and how will they react to it? These questions and others can only be answered through searching the script intimately and completing an in-depth textual analysis. Before the costume designer can speak clearly with the director, actors or other designers they need to know who the characters are, what they do, and why. So, my first step in my design process was to complete a written script analysis. This chapter is a summation of what I discovered about the script and characters throughout the process.

Through an initial reading of the play I was able to discover the basic plot. Shortly after Othello, a military general, and Desdemona, the daughter of a wealthy Senator, are married they are sent to Cyprus because of a threat of coming war. When a storm renders war unnecessary, Othello, the general, is left virtually useless. Iago, Othello’s ensign, is upset because Cassio, Othello’s lieutenant, received a promotion Iago felt he deserved. Iago manipulates Othello into believing Desdemona is unfaithful, in order to enact revenge against him. Cassio, Othello’s lieutenant, is also caught up in Iago’s manipulations and loses his job. Iago uses many people including Roderigo, a suitor of Desdemona’s, Emilia, Iago’s wife, and Bianca, a prostitute in love with Cassio, to drive Othello into a fury of jealousy. Iago’s schemes ultimately lead to the death of Desdemona, Emilia, Roderigo, and Othello.
The action of Othello takes place in a somewhat limited location and time frame. The story begins in Venice and then moves across the sea to Cyprus. The play was written around 1602-1604, but there are no specific textual references to a date, month or year given within the play. Historically, Venice controlled Cyprus from 1489-1571, and the Turks attacked Cyprus in 1570.

Othello shows us a picture of the danger of passion untamed. He desires to live his life in peace and love his wife, but goes to a place of jealousy, destruction, and ultimately death because of the doubts and insecurities which Iago plants in his mind. Iago, hideous villain that he is, is a master manipulator and initiator of often seemingly pointless conflict. He is the extreme antagonist, setting up often-unnoticeable obstacles at every path. Desdemona provides a picture of goodness, a woman who continues to love Othello despite his wrong actions toward her. Cassio provides an opposite for Iago, trusting and genteel. Emilia is a faithful and loyal woman who helps to bring truth and resolution to the doubt and manipulation. Roderigo shows another man blinded by love used by Iago as a means to make things happen and incite trouble and chaos.

Othello is a successful and important military general and the newly wed husband to Desdemona. He is the man most trusted to lead the Venetian forces in the Cyprus wars. He says that he is of royal blood, though he is still seen as an outsider due to the color of his skin. Othello has been fighting since the age of seven; he tells the Duke that it was stories of his battles that did “woo” Desdemona (I.iii.167). In the text it seems that he is much older than she, possibly in his early to mid forties. As Iago and Roderigo are waking Brabantio they tell him “an old black ram/ Is tupping your white ewe” (I.i.90-91).
The Moor, as Othello is often referred to, referencing his North African descent, seems to take people at face value… Iago appears to be honest, therefore he must be; Desdemona appears to be having an affair with Cassio, therefore she must be. Othello is much quicker to believe Iago than his own wife. Othello also suffers from insecurities prompted by his lack of experience with women and because he feels like an outsider due to his race. After Iago has begun to plant seeds of doubt in his mind, Othello muses on what may be seen as inadequacies saying:

Haply, for I am black  
And have not those soft parts of conversation  
That chamberers have, or for I am declined  
Into the vale of years – yet that’s not much –  
She’s gone, I am abused, and my relief  
Must be to loathe her” (III.iii.267-272).

Iago uses these insecurities to plant seeds of doubt within Othello’s mind throughout the play. Having been driven to great extents of anger and jealousy, Othello thinks he is justified in killing Cassio and Desdemona. When Othello learns of Iago’s manipulation and betrayal he wounds Iago, and is stripped of his power. Before he kills himself, he says he is one who “loved not wisely, but too well” (V.ii.360).

Desdemona, Othello’s wife and the daughter of Brabantio, a wealthy Senator, is most likely in her late teens or early twenties, though a specific age is never mentioned. The daughter of a Senator, Desdemona is of the upper class. She has recently wed Othello without her father’s knowledge or permission. Othello has captivated her through his stories of war. Although often seeming very naïve there is also a beautiful sense of feminine power about her. She is bold enough to speak up for her marriage in front of the Duke and her father, and to request to go with Othello on his military mission to Cyprus. She is repeatedly praised throughout the play as a woman who is beautiful, heavenly, moral, precious and modest. She is skillful at sewing and singing, is witty and creative, and has a good personality.
When Othello treats her badly and unfairly she excuses his unkindness as her own fault. Aside from her naiveté and that she may be too good, there is little to not love about Desdemona. She desires eagerly to make right her relationship with Othello, but does not understand what she has done wrong, since she is innocent of the adultery Othello is accusing her of. She does not understand how any woman could do such a wrong, and is convinced that there is nothing in the world that could cause her to wrong her husband in such a way. She asks Emilia, her maidservant, to put the wedding sheets on the bed. Perhaps she sees this as a symbol of her purity and an attempt on her part to remind her husband of their love and vows to one another. Even as she is dying, however, she refuses to blame Othello, but rather herself, and speaks still of her love for Othello. To her dying breath she remains loyal to her cruel husband.

Iago is the charming yet manipulating villain of the play. He is 28 years old and is Othello’s ensign. He has faithfully served in battle. Iago says he’s serving Othello in order to turn on him because he hates him. While he is clearly a notorious villain his motivations for the evil he causes in this play are never entirely clear. He mentions that he is upset about Cassio receiving a position he believed he deserved and was next in line for. He also suspects that both Cassio and Othello have slept with Emilia, his wife. While these things he is upset about are perhaps justifiable, they are not necessarily worth destroying someone’s life over.

Iago is a master at manipulation. He sees his actions simply as a means of working his way up in life, and making right the injustice he has suffered.

Others there are
Who, trimmed in forms and visages of duty,
Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves
And, throwing but shows of service on their lords,
Do well thrive by them. And when they have lined their coats,
Do themselves homage. These fellows have some soul. (I.i.51-56)
Referred to throughout the play as Honest Iago, he crafts lies that appear as truth in such a way that no one suspects that he is deceitful. However in the final scene of the play, Emilia realizes how he has manipulated Othello and ultimately caused the death of Desdemona. While the audience sees Iago’s inner thoughts through his soliloquies, the characters see a charming, friendly young man, who seems to be willing to give sound advice and appears to have their best interests at heart. Iago cannot purely seem the villain, or else, all of the other characters are fools for not seeing through his disguise. Even though the audience sees the darker intentions of Iago they are also seduced by him, increasing the horror as the plot unfolds. In my early meetings with the director, he revealed his idea that Iago is in love with Othello. He believed Iago was driven by romantic jealousy. Rather than desiring Othello’s destruction he sought to remove any obstacles that could stand in the way of Othello returning his love. This was not a concept I had previously entertained, but could see how it could be supported by the script, and it seemed to provide justifiable motivation for the character.

Emilia is Iago’s wife. He does not seem to think to highly of her, and shows her affection only when he wants something she may be able to give him, such as Desdemona’s handkerchief. She is also the maidservant to Desdemona in Cyprus. Though not specifically mentioned, I suspect that she is around Iago’s age of 28, giving her a bit more age and maturity than Desdemona. While Emilia seems more headstrong than Desdemona, she is faithful to her mistress Desdemona and her husband Iago. When Othello begins to accuse Desdemona of infidelity, Emilia comments that there must be some villain who is meddling and deceiving Othello into believing lies about Desdemona. She says, “The Moor’s abused by some most villainous knave/ Some base notorious knave, some scurvy fellow” (IV.ii.146-147). She is not aware yet that this deceiver is in fact her own husband. When Othello tells Emilia that Iago knew
of the affair between Cassio and Desdemona, Emilia realizes that Iago is the villain and liar. She reveals his deceit to Othello and the other characters present, which leads Iago to draw his sword on her and kill her.

While Cassio is Othello’s lieutenant, he seems to be more of a pawn of Iago’s, whom Iago moves around in order to accomplish his evil motives. Iago says Cassio knows more about numbers than fighting. He has only military theory, not practice. He has “Never set a squadron in the field” (I.i.23). Despite his lack of battle experience, Othello has promoted him to the position of lieutenant rather than Iago. Though an age is not mentioned Cassio is most likely younger than Iago, perhaps around 25, further adding insult to injury. Cassio is a handsome man, but one of his flaws appears to be that he cannot hold his liquor. Iago sets him up to lose his position after he gets into a drunken brawl with Roderigo and injures Montano. Cassio is distraught at his loss of reputation and being out of Othello’s favor. After Othello has removed him from his position he laments “Reputation, Reputation, Reputation! Oh, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial” (II.iii.250-252). Upon Iago’s suggestion he entreats Desdemona to speak with her husband to see if he can get his position back. Iago uses Cassio’s entreaties to Desdemona to plant seeds of jealousy in Othello’s mind. Cassio is involved romantically with Bianca, a prostitute; however, he has no true intentions towards her, despite her desires to marry him.

Roderigo has been courting Desdemona, but has been rejected. He is young, around 25, and is a wealthy citizen of Venice. He follows Iago around looking for advice on how to win Desdemona back. Iago sees Roderigo as a fool, but realizes that he can use him both to help bring Othello’s destruction and also to take Roderigo’s money (I.iii.374-377). Roderigo seems like a little lost puppy that just won’t go away and keeps nipping at Iago’s heels. Iago tells
Roderigo Desdemona will soon tire of Othello and look for a younger man, someone close to him in age, indicating that Roderigo is near in age to Desdemona. Roderigo begins to tire of the games Iago is playing and feels as if Iago is making a fool of him. Despite his better judgment he continues to follow Iago’s advice, which ultimately leads to his death by Iago’s hand.

Bianca is a prostitute who is in love with Cassio and has followed him to Cyprus. She is probably in her early twenties. When Cassio asks her to copy the pattern of the handkerchief she suspects Cassio is cheating on her with another woman and becomes jealous. She says,

O Cassio, whence came this?
This is some token from a newer friend!
To the felt absence now I feel a cause.
Is’t come to this?” (III.iv.174-177).

Cassio continually teases her or pushes her away. When Iago says she “gives it out that you shall marry her” Cassio indicates that he has no intentions of wanting to marry Bianca (IV.i.113). Bianca provides a view of the lower class woman. She is a high contrast to the purity of the upper class Desdemona, but like Desdemona she loyally loves her man and is ill treated by him.

Brabantio is a Venetian Senator, of around fifty-five years old. His daughter has recently wed Othello without his knowledge or permission. He believes his position on the Senate will convince the Duke to annul the marriage between Othello and Desdemona. He is wrong and at the end of the play we find out Brabantio has died due to heartbreak over Othello and Desdemona’s marriage. Brabantio is rather clueless, as he knows little of what is going on in his daughter’s life or heart or for that matter what is going on in the affairs of the state.

The Duke governs in Venice. Won over by Othello’s tales of how he wooed Desdemona and Desdemona’s testimony of her willing consent he sanctions the marriage between the couple. After civilly resolving the marriage issue, he quickly moves on to his own issue at hand, the impending war with the Turks. He seems capable of making rational decisions quickly and
effectively. The Duke appears to be a good leader, clear-headed and judicious to all. He seems wise, and is probably in his mid to late forties. During the audition process the decision was made to have the Duke be played by a woman. The impact of this will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

Montano is the governor of Cyprus and may be in his thirties. He mentions that he had served under Othello. Generally calm and collected, Montano gets into a brawl with the drunk Cassio while he is trying to stop him from injuring Roderigo. Othello is surprised at Montano’s fighting saying:

Worthy Montano, you were wont be civil.  
The gravity and stillness of your youth  
The world hath noted, and your name is great  
In mouths of wisest censure. What’s the matter  
That you unlace your reputation thus  
And spend your rich opinion for the name  
Of a night-brawler? (II.iii.177-183)

Montano declares that he responded only in self-defense. Othello takes his word and assures him that he will care for his injuries personally. Montano’s injuries are in great part the reason Cassio is fired from his position. He seems eager for peace and is someone of patience and reason.

Lodovico, a man of noble status, arrives to Cyprus as a messenger from the Duke. He is a cousin of Desdemona’s. Emilia and Desdemona speak of him as a handsome man and a man who speaks well (IV.iii.35-36). He tries to stand up for Desdemona when Othello strikes her in Act Four Scene One. He asks Othello to “make her amends” (IV.i.236). Lodovico may be in his 30’s. In the final scene, he is part of the group who captures Iago, and helps to create order in the chaos. He seems to be a rational man who is worthy to be trusted.

Gratiano is the uncle of Desdemona, brother of Brabantio. An age is not given for Gratiano, but given that he’s the brother to Brabantio he may be between fifty and sixty years
old. He appears to be a devoted, loyal person and as the brother of Brabantio has a level of distinction as well, although he seems much more levelheaded than his brother.

A major theme in *Othello* is the idea that appearances can be deceiving. “Men should be what they seem, or those that be not, would they might seem none.” (III.iii.132) Iago’s numerous schemes illustrate the duplicitous nature of humanity. While one may seem to know or think they know the truth, it may simply be deception. The destructiveness of jealousy and misguided passion is another prominent theme. “It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock/ the meat it feeds on.” (III.iii.170-171) This jealousy taken to extreme passions incites a world of unfaithfulness, deception and death.

This script analysis provided me with a deeper understanding of the characters, plot, and themes of *Othello*. With a better understanding of the story I was able to make more informed decisions in my design choices. The original written script analysis may be found in Appendix 1, pages 35-47. With this information I then moved on to looking at production history and various periods of history in which this play can be set.
Chapter Three

Production History & Initial Research

With a script filled with very rich characters and minimal specific directions as to what they wore, I realized that it was possible to set *Othello* in a wide range of time periods. Before my first meeting with the director I was encouraged to come up with a few ideas for periods in which I might be interested in setting the production. To do this I looked at several different productions as well as a range of time periods in which this play could be set. Looking back at past productions allowed me to see what choices other designers and directors made in setting the period and evaluate for myself the success of these choices and determine how I could incorporate these ideas into my own designs.

Initially I researched the original history of the production. The first performance of *Othello* was for the court of James I in November of 1604 (Ashton 152). It is interesting to note that the first appearance of a female actress on the English stage was believed to be in the role of Desdemona in 1660 (Parsons 162). As with many of Shakespeare’s plays, *Othello* has been performed countless times over the past four hundred years. Notable figures to have played the role of Othello include Thomas Betterton, Edmund Kean, William Charles Macready, Tommaso Salvini, Ira Aldridge, Paul Robeson and Laurence Olivier. I looked briefly at these productions as well as productions from the past decade.

Ultimately, I decided to focus my attention on more modern productions. The productions I researched were the Donmar Warehouse West End production of 2007 directed by Michael Grandage featuring Chiwetel Ejiofor as Othello and Ewan McGregor as Iago, the 2008 Shakespeare and Company production directed by Tony Simotes, starring John Douglas Thompson as Othello and Michael Hammond as Iago, and the 2005 Shakespeare Theatre
Company production directed by Michael Kahn featuring Avery Brooks as Othello and Patrick Page as Iago.

The Donmar Warehouse production was set in the Elizabethan period, the period in which the play was written. Designer Christopher Oram used period costumes which did not require specific military uniforms. With this choice rank becomes less important and character more important. Reviewer Michael Billington said, “Period costumes themselves obliterate distinctions of rank: McGregor, in his dark balloon-breeches, doesn't look any different from his military superior, Cassio” (Billington). This idea of staying clear of defined modern military uniforms appealed to me regardless of when we set the period. I was particularly drawn to the contrast of the black doublets and white shirts and what seemed to be a fairly minimal color palette. While the distinction of rank was not readily present in these costumes in a traditional sense through medals or trim, it was still possible to distinguish rank between characters through the use of fabric and the construction of the garments.

The Shakespeare and Company production of 2008 was set in the Regency period of the nineteenth century. This period created characters that seemed very noble and elegant. Through looking at production photos I gleaned a sense of the military, without the stark specificity of modern day military uniforms. There seemed to be a strong sense of character and sophistication that created a unique interpretation of the play. While Othello seems to be a very messy play full of manipulation, deceit and death, this production seems to capture an unusual beauty. I wasn’t convinced that the aesthetic of such a clean, neat and elegant production was the direction I wanted to take, but I saw it as an option, and it was different from most of the other productions I had researched.
The Shakespeare Theatre Company production of *Othello* produced in 2005 put a modern spin on a traditional approach. The costumes were stylized with a more modern approach to period costumes. In her review for the Washington Diplomat Lisa Troshinsky says “In keeping with period pieces, Goldstein manages to intertwine form-fitting leather trench coats, pants and boots for the men and beautiful flowing gowns for Desdemona. Even Bianca’s garb is a stylized, flowing, hip-hugging skirt and midriff” (Troshinsky). I found the hard-edged structure of the men appealing, and I enjoyed the modern interpretation that didn’t require a full military look. I was also inspired by the contrast between the flowing gowns of Desdemona and the hard edge of the military men.

Having taken this time to look at photographs of past productions, I felt like I had a better idea of the elements I wanted to incorporate into our production at the University of Arkansas. Chief among these elements included a military look that focused more on character than on specifics of military dress as well as a period that allowed femininity in women’s dress.

Having determined what I liked about each of these periods, I took some time to look at different periods in fashion history. I hoped to get a better grasp of silhouettes and find some images that I found inspiring. This included looking at the Elizabethan period in which the play was written, the Regency period mentioned in the production above, the 1920’s, and modern day high fashion. While the Elizabethan period, the period in which the play was written, was not my preference, it was how Shakespeare’s *Othello* would have been performed. To me, this period seems to have a stuffiness and sense of unreality to the modern audience. It seemed possible however that this period could take the audience back in time and possibly help them to see Shakespeare’s world. In the Regency period I wanted to explore what it might be like to put *Othello* in a world where elegance and high class were important. I particularly loved the delicate
femininity of the women in this period. In looking at the 1920’s I wanted to give the director an option of a more unified military look and still allow for a very feminine woman. However, in the end, I was most inspired by the modern images I found. Style.com, an online source for fashion news and trends, including images of top runway collections from contemporary designers, was my key source for this research. Looking at couture fashion, I was able to find very theatrical stylized clothing, much of which had a militaristic flair. The high style seemed to allow a great amount of freedom in which to create the designs for the show; it was very theatrical and not tied to a specific period or silhouette. After finding images, which inspired me, I compiled research boards for each of these periods. This enabled me to talk about the different periods I was interested in pursuing while allowing the director to visually see the different ideas. These research boards can be found in Appendix 4, Pages 50-51.

Researching and evaluating past productions of Othello and researching historical fashion from the past and present helped to shape my ideas for our production. I was able to present the research boards to the director at our first meeting. This research helped to facilitate our discussion of when to set our production.
Chapter Four

Design Process and Approach for Othello

Costume design more than any of the other design areas focuses on the character. Real, genuine characters create much more interesting stories. My goal for this production was to support the creation of rich characters that each had very distinct characteristics and personalities despite the uniformity of their various places in society.

For the first meeting with the director I created the period research boards discussed in the previous chapter, as well as an emotional response collage and portrait gallery. These visual tools enabled a more in-depth look at the visual world of this production and helped to further my conversations with the director and other members of the design team.

As part of my process I created an emotional response collage, which can be found in Appendix 2, Page 48. I collected images that expressed the ideas, themes, and emotions that stuck out to me after my initial reading of the play and subsequent analysis. For Othello I found images that expressed the ideas of jealousy and envy, deception and truth, decay and beauty, and the twisted paths of life. This collage visually expressed my emotional and visceral response to the show. It also helped me determine a very dark color palette, which also included cool colors of blues and greens and even some tans.

The next step in my process was to create a portrait gallery. The portrait gallery consisted of images of people that conveyed the quality and personality of each of the characters in the play. This visual aid enabled me to more clearly discuss each of the characters’ personalities, as well as issues of age, health, social status and other qualities intrinsic to the characters. The portrait gallery allowed the director and I to determine the roles and characters for our
production and establish who was who. For instance, for our production the musicians and clown would be cut, and the gentlemen of Cyprus were to be Cyprian soldiers.

At my first meeting with the director we began discussing the play, the environment, and the characters. The director expressed a desire for a visceral and stylized theatrical production. With Venice he wanted to create a world full of excitement and mystery, a place filled with a wide mixture of different kinds of people. Cyprus, on the other hand, was hotter and brighter, more rough, sexy and exotic. Venice should look very civilized compared to the primitive world of Cyprus. However, both Venice and Cyprus were full of illusion and magic being controlled by the master puppeteer Iago. The director told me that he planned on Iago using magic throughout the show as a metaphor of Iago’s manipulation of people. He also indicated that preparations were in process for a fight choreographer to come in at the beginning of the semester to stage the fights for the play. The actors would be fighting with quarterstaves, rather than swords. Through looking at the research boards I had created, the director and I were able to discuss possibilities for the time period in which we could set our own production. After looking at each of the options I had presented we both expressed an interest in the modern time period. We were also able to discuss each of the characters, what they were like, and character qualities we wanted to visually emphasize. I was able to leave this meeting with a much better idea of the world, the characters, and the needs of the production.

My next step was to research styles of clothing specific to each of the characters in this modern stylized period in which we had determined to set our production. I created new research boards for each of the characters based on the conversation the director and I had. A selection of these research boards can be found in Appendix 5, Pages 52-53. I presented the research boards to the other design collaborators at the first official design meeting along with a presentation of
my design collage. During this meeting Shawn Irish, the scenic designer, also presented research that had inspired him. Some of these ideas included using camouflage or cargo netting in the Cyprian world. Shawn and Justin Ashley, the lighting designer, as well as Michael, were also very interested in playing with shadow and light. I left the meeting eager to explore ways to incorporate their ideas into my own design, particularly through the use of the cargo netting in the Cyprian world.

After this meeting I began to sketch. Because there are so many different unified groups, it was important to be able to quickly identify visually which group they belonged to. These groups included the Venetian military, the women, Brabantio and his attendants, the Duke and Senators, and the Cyprian soldiers. As I began to draw I set the following goals for myself: I wanted the military group to have a hard-edged masculine characteristic that could provide a high contrast to the femininity that I wanted to give Desdemona, Emilia and the other women of the play; and I wanted the Cyprian world to contrast sharply with the civilized world of Venice.

With the military group I wanted to be able to differentiate rank and character without having everyone wear the exact same uniform. To achieve the military uniformity I chose to use a very tight gray and black color palette, and used zippers to trim the military jackets. This metallic element against the black and dark gray jackets helped to provide a high contrast and give different jackets a uniform look. Othello, Iago, and Cassio would each have a different cut jacket, with similarities between the various styles giving them each a sense of uniformity. The other military soldiers had matching vests that resembled the jackets of Othello, Iago, and Cassio. The jackets were then trimmed according to ranking. Through the use of this color palette, along with similar trim and adornment I was able to create a uniform group that could still reflect the personality of each of the characters.
As the general I wanted to give Othello a more structured and imposing military jacket. When he arrives in Cyprus, the Turks have been defeated by the storm, and he is left with little to do. As a result I tried to contrast Othello the soldier to Othello at ease. He was seen with his military jacket only in the scene with the Duke, where he was being commissioned for battle. The majority of his time in Cyprus he wore only his black pants and a white dress shirt, unbuttoned, with sleeves rolled up. I also wanted to mark Othello as foreign to his core. To do this I made the decision to create full chest tattoos for him, which would be seen the first time we see him as he’s preparing to meet with Brabantio, as well as when as he’s interrupted from making love to his wife in the Cassio Montano fight, and finally as he kills himself at the end of the play.

Iago, as the man manipulating the action, is much more calm, controlled, and collected. He is also lower in rank, but values his career. His military jacket was a shorter version of Othello’s, but whereas Othello’s jacket is buttoned high up to his neck, Iago’s is left open at chest level. It is as if Othello is trying to protect himself from vulnerability as a military general, yet Iago is more open, unworried of what will happen as he feels in control. Cassio, a man from Florence, is much more flashy. His jacket was made of leather and I wanted him to have jewelry, an earring as well as a choker style necklace. Cassio also had a well-kept beard. The additional Venetian soldiers had military vests, which resembled those of Othello, Iago and Cassio in trimming. Through the use of a tight color palette of blacks and grays and a sharply contrasting trim I was able to tie together this group of military officers and soldiers.

There are few women in this play and I wanted to emphasize their femininity. These women included: Desdemona, who is seen as a woman who is beautiful, heavenly, moral, precious and modest, and possesses a feminine but bold presence; Emilia, who is eagerly
desirous of her husband’s affections and is the female confidant to Desdemona; and Bianca, who is a prostitute desirous of the true affections of a man. To enhance their femininity I tried to accentuate curves as well as give them a sense of air and lightness through the flowing aspect of their clothing.

In my initial research of Desdemona, I was drawn to the light and flowing gowns I found. These gowns gave her an otherworldly and almost heavenly quality. In her color story I wanted to move her from blue to green as Othello’s jealousy grew. I sought to recreate this with Desdemona’s first gown. I chose to give her a light blue silk chiffon gown, seeking to emphasize her loyalty, stability and truth, in a feminine and soft way. When Desdemona arrives in Cyprus she is wearing a vest resembling those of the Venetian soldiers but more elaborate. Her glamorous ideas of war are somewhat humorous as she arrives “ready for battle” still wearing her silk gown. As Desdemona seeks to repair the relationship of Cassio and Othello beginning in Act 2 Scene 3 she seems to have more work than her husband, who is left with no war to fight and nothing to do. Iago says “Our general’s wife is now the general” (II.iii.298). I wanted to give Desdemona a more structured look here, but still maintain her femininity and sex appeal. I chose to put her in an off the shoulder knit knee length dress. I believed this would accentuate her curves and give her a structured and polished look. When the dress rehearsals began, I realized the dress selected was not working for the character or the actor. I began to look for other options and by a stroke of luck I found another dress in our costume stock. The new dress was a one-shouldered floor length teal green gown, which fit her perfectly. The gown seemed stylish and elegant, but also sexy and carefree. For Desdemona’s last look I designed a backless halter style gown inspired by an image of a backless gown from my research, which the director, Michael Landman, had been particularly drawn to. The research image for this gown can be found in
Appendix 5, Page 53. This gown emphasized her vulnerability at the crucial moment when she is pleading with her husband for her life. The scene was staged in such a way that you would see her entire back exposed as her life is being suffocated out of her. My original intention was to make the nightgown out of a very light green silk in continuing her color shift from blue to green, however, the color options I could find were not flattering to the face. I chose instead to do an ombre dye starting with a green at the bottom of the skirt and blending into a pure white silk.

Emilia, Desdemona’s maidservant, needed to dress in a way that would show she is of a lower social status than Desdemona. The director requested that she be pregnant, and planned to stage her death by having Iago rip the baby out of her womb. He wanted to stage this in a highly theatricalized and stylized way by having Iago pull out a long string of handkerchiefs from her belly. In looking at maternity wear I was drawn to the wrap style shirt. It gave the impression of comfort like a cocoon that Emilia was encasing the baby in for protection. I felt that this style of shirt could also help us as we worked on creating the rigging for her death. Iago was able to reach under the wrap and grab the handkerchiefs out of a secret pocket in the shirt.

Bianca was the visual antithesis of Desdemona. While Desdemona is an elegant noblewoman praised for her virtue and chastity, Bianca, the prostitute, is a woman who is looked down upon because of her harlotry. She wore a very form-fitting, curve shaping mini-dress and thigh high boots. As a reference to her primitive and raw aspect I also gave her a black fur coat. To help accentuate her curves I chose to give her a green colored panel in the center, and black on the sides, and emphasize her waist through a wide black belt.

Casting decisions had been made before I began to make design decisions, and contrary to traditional practice, the decision had been made to have the Duke played by a woman. For a
play that traditionally only has three women, to have the person with the most authority portrayed by a woman puts a different emphasis on the role of women in this world. I chose to use this unique decision to make a very stylized choice. I did not want to hide or deny that the Duke was a woman, but rather use this choice to celebrate women in a man’s world. Our Duke would be a woman in a man’s role, and as such would fully have command of the power she held. I chose to work with her femininity giving her a gown that fit closely along her torso and flared at her knees. I wanted this piece to be more architectural and to stand out from her shoulders. I chose to use silver satin fabric to draw the focus to her as well as indicate a level of glamour. I added purple piping along the princess seams of the Duke’s dress to accentuate her curves and indicate her royalty.

In the world of the Venetian court, Senators surround the Duke. I wanted the Duke’s court to have a very polished look; they were to be sleek and well put together. The Senators needed to be glamorous to fit within the world of the Duke. I chose to put them in slim silver blazers with a reflective quality to them. The Duke’s attendant, a woman, also wore a fitted tunic of silver with purple piping.

While the Senators seemed well put together, Brabantio, Desdemona’s father looks like a mess. Though he is a member of the Senate he has been left out of the decisions of war that are being made at court. At home, he is losing grip on his power, and he quickly runs to the Duke for her to solve his problems. So, I chose to have him arrive at the Duke’s in his pajamas with his less spectacular jacket over his pajamas. Before we reached dress rehearsals, however, the director and I felt like it would be better if he simply arrived in his pajamas, which would help him to seem weaker while surrounded by the other fully dressed members of the court.
Roderigo is a wealthy man. However, he has not been successful in wooing Desdemona. I wanted him to have a classic but formal almost preppy feel about him like you might see at an Ivy League school. I also decided to give Roderigo several layers that could be shed as he sold his possessions in pursuit of Desdemona. These layers included a navy blue blazer such as one might find at any prep school along with a blue and green striped tie, a tan vest, green sweater vest and pink shirt. The excess items of clothing made the look seem comical, yet not over the top.

Lodovico and Gratiano arrive in Cyprus from the Venetian court with a message from the Duke. I wanted to associate them with Venice but also give them a feeling of lightness through their color that helped to set them apart from the Duke and her court. While the Venetian court was in grays and blacks, Lodovico and Gratiano wore tones of tan and gold. I chose to give them both light colored suit jackets in reflective or glossy fabrics.

The director made a choice to turn the Cyprian gentlemen into soldiers who fought under the leadership of Montano. He also wanted the Cyprian world to be a sharp contrast to the high fashion and glamorous world of the Venetians. He wanted a world that was very primitive, raw, and dirty. I went through several revisions of these characters before coming up with a group of people who were connected to nature through colors and textures of fabrics. They wore loosely fitted brown and earth tone pants as well as a camouflage of netting over bare chests or earth tone distressed shirts. The scenic designer, Shawn Irish, had been exploring ways to incorporate some kind of cargo netting or camouflage netting into the scenic design. Using the netting in the costumes seemed to help connect and ground them to the world they lived in. Since the actors played the various Venetian roles as well as the Cyprians I chose to mask them. The masks
helped to give these characters a mysterious and menacing quality. They were made of a soft fabric that could be pulled back from their faces in times of peace.

In our production a woman played the Herald. We again chose to feature her femininity, rather than denying it. She was connected to the Cyprian military, but in a more decorative way. As she says, “all offices are open” and welcomes the crowd to revelry in the defeat of the Turks and the marriage of Desdemona and Othello, I wanted to make her the Cyprian prostitute (II:ii:8). In this world that was hotter and dirtier and very raw, the Herald provides a very sexualized view of women, another contrast to Desdemona. I chose to keep the Herald’s costume similar to those of the Cyprian soldiers, but more feminine and showing more flesh. I knew that the actor might have to do back flips in the costume so I gave her pants resembling those of the Cyprian soldiers. She wore a midriff one shouldered shirt and the same netting as the soldiers.

The director staged the opening of the play with the conversation between Iago and Roderigo taking place in a gondola. The actor who played Othello was also the Gondolier. I chose the traditional gondolier costume, giving him a striped gondolier shirt and beret. I also gave him a Venetian mask in order to disguise the actor who would be playing the title role, as it should not look like Othello was the gondolier.

Portions of the costumes for this production were built, others were pulled from our costume stock, and others were purchased locally and online with a $4,000 budget. My costume renderings were my primary guide in the process of taking the costumes from idea to realized three-dimensional garments.

The garments built by the costume shop included Desdemona’s first dress and her nightgown, Emilia’s blouse, the Duke’s dress, the tunic for the Duke’s Attendant, Bianca’s dress, and the Cyprian pants. Through a series of mock-up fittings and fabric fittings I was able to help
the costume shop create the costumes I had designed. One of my big responsibilities in this process was selecting and in some cases preparing the fabrics to be used for these costumes. For several of the fabrics selected this included dyeing the fabric. For Desdemona’s first dress, I chose a beautiful blue silk as the under layer, but I wanted to have a silk chiffon over layer, which needed to match. I was able to use our costume shop dye vat to dye a piece of silk chiffon fabric which complemented the under layer beautifully. For the Cyprian pants, I found a fabric online that had a great texture when washed, but it only came in a cream color, and I needed to make it brown. Again, I was able to use dye to create the colors we needed for our show.

The physicality of the show and technical needs required by the fight choreography provided several challenges that we had to address in the building of some of the costumes. One challenge in the build process was the creation of the Emilia blouse. The requirements for this garment were that she needed to appear to be pregnant and have a hidden string of handkerchiefs that could be pulled out of the costume during her death. Because of the nature of the fight choreography I needed to work closely with both the draper and the actors to make sure the garment gave the look I wanted, but could also perform the action it needed to. Desdemona’s nightgown was also a costume with similar challenges to work through. For Desdemona’s death Othello pulled her face tightly into his lower chest suffocating her and then breaking her neck. Because of the choreography of the death, by staging Desdemona in a low bent position while she struggled for her life and the long length of the nightgown, the garment was put at some level of risk. It was important to help ensure that Desdemona would not tear or stain the garment in her struggle against Othello. We worked with both Othello and Desdemona in Desdemona’s costume fittings having the actors rehearse the choreography of the fight beginning in the early mockup phases to ensure the garment and actors’ safety could be achieved. The Cyprian soldiers
had several very active and intense fights. Due to the somewhat loose nature of their clothing as well as the fact that they were to be masked, we had to work both in fittings and rehearsals to ensure safety both for the actors and the costumes.

Another challenge for the production was determining how to tattoo Othello. I wanted Othello’s tattoos to be unique to him. They needed to have a tribal appearance, cover the majority of his chest, arms, and back, be bold and visible to the audience, and they had to be reproduced each night for two weeks of performances. In order to achieve the look I wanted and maintain uniformity for the run of the production I created a stencil from large sheets of transparent plastic. The crewmember responsible for the tattooing would lay the stencil over the actor’s body and airbrush the tattoos on to the skin. The paint had somewhat of a shiny finish, which we toned down by adding powder over the tattoos.

Many of the actors needed to quickly change into different characters throughout the course of the play. In order to facilitate quick changes and give a more modern element to the show, I chose to dress everyone in a pair of black jeans. These jeans were all purchased at Old Navy. I chose a variety of men’s coats online and looked at them in fittings in order to decide on the jackets for each of the military men. The vests for the Venetian military attendants were also jackets that we purchased and then removed the sleeves from to help them correspond to the design idea and rendering.

For this production it was important to create real people who in spite of wearing uniforms were still able to maintain a sense of individuality. Through my process of researching, drawing and rendering, and costume fittings I believe I was able to create a successful design. Production photos can be seen in Appendix 10, Pages 66-76. In the next chapter I will discuss my evaluation of the production.
Chapter Five

Evaluation of the Othello design process

In looking back at my costume design process for Othello, I feel like the show on the whole was a success. I was pleased with the way the design transformed from an idea to sketches and then renderings and finally to finished three-dimensional costumes.

The process of designing the costumes for Othello went very smoothly. I believe my collaboration with the director went very well in particular. From the first meetings, to full design meetings, and finally through the dress rehearsals and production I felt like we were able to openly discuss the play and characters. We were able to work collaboratively to create a world that is close to our modern world, yet in many ways is also very different. Our first meetings in particular were very helpful in shaping the course of our process for this production. The research I had done prior to this meeting and the storyboards I created for each period were significant in allowing us options we could consider. The research and storyboards may be found in Appendices Two through Five.

One of my biggest challenges for this production came in instructing drapers in the build process. I had an excellent team of drapers, led by Valerie Lane, who worked hard to create my vision. As someone who likes to be very hands on in the process it was a challenge for me to take a step back and allow them to create. Valerie was a consistent source of encouragement to me throughout our collaboration. We had an excellent and open working relationship as I did with the other drapers, and through a consistent open dialogue it became easier to step back and trust them with these costumes. Ultimately, I was very pleased with their work. In terms of the costumes constructed for the production my only disappointment was the execution of the Duke’s dress. Due to a poor fabric choice on my part and the realization that the dress needed to
be flat-lined too late, the dress did not quite have the sleek quality and grandeur that I envisioned. I do not think this hindered the show, and I learned lessons from the experience, which I believe will benefit me as a designer.

Another challenge for me was problem solving technical elements including the creation of Emilia’s baby, Desdemona’s death, magic tricks, tattoos and fight choreography. Through working through these elements in rehearsals and costume fittings I believe I was able, with the help of the costume shop, to successfully achieve all of the elements the director had requested and I had designed. In the process I learned to allow time for experimentation and be open to new ideas that might work better than the original plan. Often, the way I had intended something to be done was not working and required flexibility in order to achieve the desired goal.

Overall, I was very pleased with the final outcome of the design, as was the director, Michael Landman. I was particularly happy with the way the women turned out. I believe they provided a lovely contrast to the men and were able to add a beautiful level of femininity to a play that is extremely male-dominated. With the exception of construction issues of the Duke’s costume, I think the designs of each of the women worked very well to establish their character and importance to this play. I also believe the sharp contrast between the Venetian world and the Cyprian world worked very well. The opposition of the black and gray metallic world, with the brown and green earthy world helped to heighten the sense of alienation that is central to this play. I believe the contrast of the two worlds was enhanced by the costume choices and helped to emphasize the ideas of civilized vs. primitive. Another successful element of the design was the distinction made between the various groups. Because of the doubling of actors in various roles it could have been possible to confuse which character was which, but I believe the design
appropriately separated them into distinct groupings, enabling a clear understanding of character and of the play as a whole.

The design process for Othello was a great experience for me. It allowed me to experiment with new ideas, work with other collaborators, and grow in my ability to work with a costume shop to create costumes for a theatrical production. I believe the process of creating visual research through the portrait gallery, collage, and historical and production information, then sketching and rendering and finally working with the costume shop to create the costumes is a good model that I will continue to put into practice. My goal for this production was to create very rich characters that each had distinct characteristics and personalities despite the uniformity of their various places in society and I believe I was able to achieve that goal with the help of all those on the team.


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Appendix 1: Script Analysis

I. Where are they?

1. Exact geographical location.

The play opens in Venice. The Duke then sends Othello to Cyprus (Iago, Desdemona, Emilia, Cassio go as well); the remainder of the play takes place in Cyprus (Acts 2-5)

I:1 | A street in Venice – outside Brabantio’s house
I:2 | Another street
I:3 | In the palace
II:1 | A port in Cyprus
II:2 | A transition – Herald announces the celebration
II:3 | In the castle in Cyprus
III:1 | In the castle
III:2 | A transition. Othello goes to see fortifications.
III:3 | In the garden of the castle
III:4 | Near the castle
IV:1 | Near the castle
IV:2 | In the castle
IV:3 | In the castle
V:1 | In a dark street near the castle
V:2 | In their bedroom in the castle

II. When are they?
1. Day, month, year.

The play was written around 1602-1604, but no specific reference is given to a date, month, or year within the play. Historically, Venice controlled Cyprus from 1489 – 1571. The Turks attacked Cyprus in 1570. However, as with many Shakespearean plays, it is possible to modernize or set the production in a different period.

I:1 | Night
I:2 | The same night
I:3 | The same night
II:1 | Some time later (a week or so), after the storm
II:2 | The day of Othello’s arrival
II:3 | That evening
III:1 | The next morning
III:2 | Later that day
III:3 | Later that day
III:4 | A few days later
IV:1 | More than a week later
IV:2 | A few days later
IV:3 | That evening
V:1 | That night
V:2 | That night
III. Who are they?

Government
They are in a Democratic society, with the Duke governing alongside a group of Senators.

Religious
They are living in a Christian society; however, there is not a strong presence of religion in this play. Desdemona says “No, as I am a Christian. If to preserve this vessel for my lord from any other foul unlawful touch be not to be a strumpet, I am none.” (IV:ii:88-91). Also, Othello gives Desdemona a moment to confess any unconfessed sin and ask forgiveness for sins before killing her.

Characters

Othello

Othello is a successful and important military general and the newly wed husband to Desdemona. He seems to be the man most trusted to lead the Venetian forces in the Cyprus wars. He says that he is of royal blood, though he is still seen as an outsider due to the color of his skin (black). Othello has been fighting since the age of 7, and the many stories of war and heroism have been the seduction needed for Desdemona to fall in love with him. He is much older than she, possibly in his early to mid 40’s. In the scene with the Duke he speaks of being too old to have Desdemona in Cyprus just for sex. The Moor, as he is often referred to (referencing his North African descent), seems to take people at face value…Iago appears to be honest, therefore he must be; Desdemona appears to be having an affair with Cassio, therefore she must be. He is much quicker to believe Iago than his own wife, playing into the sense of mistrust of women that
is seen at times throughout the play. Iago continues to plant seeds of doubt within Othello’s mind throughout the play and having been driven to great extents of jealousy, he thinks it well to kill Cassio and Desdemona. Iago puts forth to be Cassio’s “undertaker” (a plan which does not succeed), and Othello plans and succeeds in killing Desdemona. When the murders come to light, he realizes what has happened, stabs Iago, and is stripped of his power before he kills himself. Before he kills himself, he says he is one who “loved not wisely, but too well” (V:ii:360).

Desdemona

Desdemona is most likely in her late teens or early twenties, though a specific age is never mentioned. She has recently wed Othello without her father’s knowledge or permission. Othello has captivated her through his stories of war. Although often seeming very naïve there is also a beautiful sense of feminine power about her. She is bold enough to speak up for her marriage in front of the Duke and her father, and to request to go with Othello on his military mission to Cyprus. She is repeatedly praised throughout the play as a woman who is beautiful, heavenly, moral, precious and modest. She is skillful at sewing and singing, is witty and creative, and has a good personality. When Othello treats her badly and unfairly she excuses his unkindness as her own fault. Aside from her naïveté and that she may be too good, there is little to not love about Desdemona. She desires eagerly to make right her relationship with Othello, but does not understand what she has done wrong, since she is innocent of the crime Othello is accusing her of. She does not understand how any woman could do such a wrong, and is convinced she would not do such a wrong for the whole world. She does however seem to realize somewhat the gravity of the situation, as she asks Emilia, her maidservant, to put the wedding sheets on the
bed. Even as she is dying, however, she refuses to blame Othello, but rather herself, and speaks still of her love for Othello.

**Iago**

Iago is 28 years old. He is Othello’s ensign (flag bearer), and has served faithfully in battle. Iago says he’s serving Othello in order that he can turn on him. He is the clear villain in this play, however, his motivations for the evil he causes in this play are never entirely clear. While the things he is upset about are justifiable, they are not necessarily worth destroying someone’s life over. He mentions that he is upset about Cassio receiving a position he believed he deserved, a position which several men recommended him for, and he believes he was next in line for. He also suspects that both Cassio and Othello had slept with Emilia, his wife. He seems to mistrust women, and their sexuality. Iago is a master manipulator. He sees his actions simply as a means of working his way up in life, and making right the injustice caused to him. “Others there are who, trimmed in forms and visages of duty, keep yet their hearts attending on themselves and, throwing but shows of service on their lords, do well thrive by them. And when they have lined their coats, do themselves homage. These fellows have some soul.” (I:i:51-56) Frequently referred to as Honest Iago, he crafts lies that appear as truth in such a way that no one suspects (except maybe Emilia) that he is deceitful. However in the final scene of the play, Emilia realizes what he has done and reveals the truth of his deceitfulness. He then stabs her and flees. He is captured, stabbed by Othello, but not killed. While we see Iago’s inner thoughts as the audience through his soliloquies, the other characters see a charming, friendly young man, who seems to be willing to give sound advice and has their best interests at heart. Iago cannot purely seem the villain, or else, all of the other characters are fools for not seeing through his disguise.
Emilia

Emilia is Iago’s wife, the poor thing. He does not seem to think to highly of her, and primarily only shows her affection when he wants something she may be able to give him (the handkerchief). She is also the maidservant to Desdemona in Cyprus. As Othello begins to accuse Desdemona, Emilia begins to comment that there must be some villain who is meddling and deceiving Othello into believing lies about Desdemona. It does not seem that she is aware yet that this deceiver is in fact her own husband. She, as opposed to Desdemona, seems willing to entertain the idea of unfaithfulness, particularly if a little reward is in it somewhere, giving a little more credence to the possibility that perhaps she really did cheat on her own husband. It is only when Othello tells Emilia that Iago knew of the whole affair, that Emilia realizes that Iago is really the villain and liar. She reveals his deceit to the whole company, which leads him to draw his sword on her and kill her. Though not specifically mentioned, I suspect that she is around Iago’s age of 28, giving her a bit more age and maturity than Desdemona.

Cassio

Cassio is Othello’s lieutenant. Iago says Cassio knows more about numbers than fighting, he has “Never set a squadron in the field (I:i:23). He has only military theory, not practice. However, Othello, still believed him to be the one fit to receive the position. He is a handsome man, but his flaw (or at least one of them) appears to be that he cannot hold his liquor. He loses his position after he gets into a drunken brawl with Roderigo and injures Montano, an important man in Cyprus. He is distraught at his loss of reputation and being out of Othello’s favor. Cassio meets with Desdemona in order to entreat her to speak with her husband to see if he can get his position
back; however, Iago uses this moment to further the lie about the affair between Cassio and Desdemona. Before Othello murders Desdemona, Lodovico arrives to give the news that Cassio is to take over as governor in Cyprus and Othello is to return to Venice. Roderigo, at the urging of Iago, attempts to kill Cassio, but fails, and Iago stabs Cassio in the leg. Cassio is brought in after Othello has killed Desdemona, where the truth of Cassio’s innocence is brought forward.

Othello is stripped of his power and it is given to Cassio. Though an age is not mentioned Cassio is most likely younger than Iago, further adding insult to injury, perhaps around 25. Cassio is involved with Bianca, the prostitute; however, he has no true intentions towards her, despite her desires to marry him. Cassio’s discussion with Iago about Bianca is misconstrued and used to further fuel Othello’s jealousies. Cassio also entreats Bianca to copy the pattern on Desdemona’s handkerchief, which he has found in his house (Iago planted it there). Cassio in many ways seems to be one of Iago’s pawns, which he moves around in order to accomplish his evil motives.

Bianca

Bianca is a prostitute who is in love with Cassio. Cassio asks her to copy the pattern from Desdemona’s handkerchief, which he has found in his house (planted there by Iago). She believes it is from another lover of his and protests copying it. He continually teases her or pushes her away, Iago later questions Cassio about whether he plans to marry her, a revelation that is misconstrued by Othello, as he believes Cassio is talking about Desdemona, not Bianca. Cassio has dinner at Bianca’s house the night he is injured, which Iago uses to frame her as a guilty party. She is probably around 22-23. There is not much mention of Bianca’s life, other than her love for Cassio. However, presenting her as a woman who may be highly sought after
for her body presents another dynamic element: she wants what she can’t have (marriage), while continually giving away what she thinks will get her there (sex). Marrying Cassio would take her out of the life she is living right now, and provide stability and commitment, rather than a continuous cycle of men who are simply using her. Cassio is not only a handsome young man, but one who has quickly in his life moved up in the ranks. Bianca may love Cassio more for his position and ranking in life than for the man. She may be like so many others trying to move up and gain something that is out of her reach.

Roderigo

Roderigo has been courting Desdemona, but has been told by Brabantio that she will never marry him. He is young (25ish) and has money. He follows Iago around looking for advice, which really only serves to move forward Iago’s plans and does more harm than good for Roderigo. Iago sees Roderigo as a fool, but realizes that he can use him both to help bring Othello’s destruction and also to take his money (I:iii:374-377). He seems like a little lost puppy that just won’t go away and keeps nipping at your heels. He is younger than Othello, given that Iago tells him Desdemona will soon tire of Othello and look for a younger man, someone close to him in age, indicating that he is near in age to Desdemona. He begins to tire of the games Iago is playing and feels as if he is being made a fool of; Iago, however, convinces him once again to carry on, and he eventually gets himself killed after a fight with Cassio, and Iago stabs him, in order to remove him from the picture and keep him quiet.

Brabantio

Brabantio is the father of Desdemona. His daughter has recently wed Othello without his
knowledge or permission. He is a Senator, and an important man in the city and believes his position will convince the Duke to annul the marriage of Othello & Desdemona. However, he is wrong. He takes the news of the marriage very dramatically. At the end of the play we find out Brabantio has died due to heartbreak over Othello & Desdemona’s marriage. He is probably around 55.

Duke

The Duke governs in Venice. He is meeting with some of the Senators about what to do about the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. He has sent for and is planning to send Othello to Cyprus when Brabantio and Othello and the group enter. The Duke sanctions the marriage of Othello and Desdemona based on Desdemona’s testimony of her willing consent. After civilly resolving the marriage, he moves on to his issue at hand, and informs Othello that he will have to send him to Cyprus. He agrees to allow Desdemona to accompany him. He appears to be a good leader, clear-headed and judicious to all. He seems wise, and is probably around 45-50 years old.

Montano

Montano is on the shore waiting as Cassio, Iago, Desdemona, Emilia, and Othello arrive. He mentions that he had served under Othello. Generally calm and collected, a man wise people respect, Montano gets into a brawl with Cassio after he tells him he’s drunk and tries to stop him from chasing and injuring Roderigo. Montano’s injuries are in great part the reason Cassio is fired from his position. He is also part of the group after Othello has killed Desdemona, and helps to capture Iago. Montano may be in his 30’s.
**Lodovico**

Lodovico arrives to Cyprus from Venice with word from the Duke and Senators that Cassio is to take over as governor in Cyprus and Othello is to return home. Othello strikes Desdemona in front of Lodovico, who then questions the sanity of Othello. Emilia and Desdemona speak of him as a proper and handsome man who speaks well. Lodovico may be in his 30’s. He is part of the group in the final scene, capturing Iago, and helping to create order in the chaos.

**Gratiano**

After the fight between Roderigo and Cassio in which Cassio is injured and Roderigo killed, Gratiano enters with Lodovico, looking for Cassio. Gratiano is the uncle of Desdemona, brother of Brabantio. An age is not given for Gratiano, but given that he’s the brother to Brabantio he may be between 50 and 60 years old.

**Clown**

The clown is a servant of Othello’s. He jests with the musicians in Act Three Scene One and plays on the word “lie” with Desdemona in Act Three Scene Four, which Othello will later confuse in Act Four. He is a lower-class servant.

**Herald**

The Herald proclaims the news of Othello’s call for celebration until 11:00 that evening.

**Senators**

The Senators are seen when we see the scene with the Duke. They are important men in Venice.
They have received differing accounts of the Turkish invasion. They believe the message that the Turks are no longer invading is a trick (which it is). While they are not as important as the Duke, they seem to almost be the ones who may be second in command.

Sailor
The sailor is sent with the message that the Turkish fleet is headed to Rhodes, not Cyprus.

Officer
The Officer helps to move things along by short dialogue, indicating that the Duke is meeting and requesting Othello, and news that is coming in.

Gentlemen
The Gentlemen are watching with Montano after the storm for any ships that may be headed to Cyprus. One of them also brings news that the Turks have crashed and the war is over. Gentlemen also accompany Othello to see the fortifications.

Musician
The musicians are hired by Cassio as an attempt to reconcile with Othello. Act Three Scene One includes banter between the clown and musicians regarding wind instruments.

IV. What happened before the play begins?
Othello has secretly married Desdemona, without her father’s permission, and given a position of rank to Cassio, which Iago desired.
V. What is the function of each character?

* Who is the protagonist?

Othello – He desires to live his life in peace and love his wife, but goes to a place of jealousy and destruction and ultimately death because of the doubts and insecurities that Iago plants in his mind.

* Who is the antagonist?

Iago – His desire is to see Othello destroyed.

* Supporting Characters

Desdemona (picture of goodness, continues to love Othello despite his wrong actions toward her), Cassio (Used by Iago as a prime suspect to play off Othello’s jealousy), Emilia (faithful care for Desdemona, doubting voice toward Iago), Roderigo (used by Iago as a means to make things happen and incite trouble and chaos)

* Identify the stereotypical characters.

Bianca as the prostitute.

The clown as Shakespeare’s comic relief = servant (not Bozo).

* Identify the crowds.

There are messengers, sailors, senators, gentlemen, musicians, and officers.

VI. What is the Dialogue Mode?

Shakespeare’s verse is written in Iambic Pentameter. The higher classes speak almost entirely in the verse, while his lower class characters (sailors, clown) speak in prose, which seems much more crude and naturalistic. Iago, Othello, and Roderigo, however, also switch from verse to
prose at times. This shift seems to often highlight particular sections of evil scheming or manipulation.

VII. What is the play’s action?
Iago is eager to cause grief to Othello, and sets about to cause strife in his marriage. He plants seeds of doubt and mistrust towards Desdemona, gets Cassio removed from his position as lieutenant due to drinking too much, and creates the image that Cassio and Desdemona are having an affair. Othello’s jealousy grows to the point where he kills her, and then it is revealed that it was all a deception by Iago. Othello stabs Iago, and then kills himself, leaving Cassio to clean up the mess.

VIII. What is the play’s theme?
Appearances can be deceiving. “Men should be what they seem, Or those that be not, would they might seem none.” (III:iii:132) And jealousy can be destructive “It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on.” (III:iii:170-171)
Appendix 2: Emotional Response Collage

(Reynolds), (blue-a), (Bauman), (VanRoekel), (Friedrich), (Deceiver), (Vervitsiotis), (“Neural Networks”), (Imperioli), (Flaming Skull), (Chapman), (Annadriel), (Millburn)
Appendix 3: Portrait Gallery

(Amos), (Daniels), (Pettyjohn), (Collander), (“Ryan Daharsh”), (“Curly Hair”), (“Classic Men’s Look”), (“Tarkan”), (“Michael Telaydo”), (Teneson), (“Businessman”), (“Germany”), (Klawitter), (Teneson), (Roberts), (Jones), (“Doctoral”), (Teneson), (“Extreme”), (“Scott Ward”), (Constantini)
Appendix 4: Initial Research Boards

The Period in Which the Play Was Written

(Robert Dudley), (Lehman), (Benedict), (Robinson), (Hatzigeorgiou)

Regency

(Vic), (Read)
Appendix 5: Selected Character Research Boards

Othello

(Braukämper), (Braukämper)

Iago

(Braukämper), (“Alexander McQueen”), (Braukämper)
Desdemona Visit to the Duke

(“Elie Saab”), (“Elie Saab”)

Desdemona Nightwear

(“Long Green Satin Nightdress”), (“Silk Nightdress”)
Appendix 6: Selected Costume Rough Sketches

Othello
Emilia                                      Bianca
The Duke                       The Duke’s Attendant

The Duke                                      The Duke’s Attendant
Appendix 7: Final Color Renderings

Othello and Military

Othello Non-Military
Desdemona

Visit to the Duke  Dressed for War  Settling In  Dressed for Death

Emilia, Bianca, Roderigo
The Duke’s Court

Venetian Soldiers  Lodovico  Gratiano

Lodovico and Gratiano
Brabantio and Attendants

Gondolier and Herald
Montano and Cyprian Soldiers
Appendix 8: Costume Fitting Photos Selected Examples

Desdemona
Roderigo
Appendix 9: Costume Dressing Lists Example

Justin Cunningham

2:00 → SR

Black Jeans
Black Socks
Black Boots
Gumshoe Boot
Mask
Black Beret

Black Jeans
Black Socks
Black Boots

Black Jeans
Black Socks
Black Boots
White Shirt
Black Vest Jacket

Green Beret (for Duke Scene)
Can Remove Jacket During Wedding Scene

Mason Adlal

Water
Bibliotea’s Attendant
Venetian Soldier
Officer/Messenger
Cyprian Soldier
Venetian Soldier
Cyprian Soldier

As Before

As Before

Black Jeans
Black Socks
Black Boots
Black T-shirt

Black Jeans
Black Socks
Black Boots
White Shirt

Black Jeans
Black Socks
Black Boots

Pants
Pants

Camo Netting (Black loops)
Mano cuff
Fabric Belt
Lindenshirt
Black Vest

Moss
Moss

White Hat
Arms cuff
Fabric Belt
Lindenshirt
Black Vest

Black Socks
Black Boots
Black Socks
Black Boots

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White Socks

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Appendix 10: Production Photos

“Thus do I ever make my fool my purse.”
Iago

“Lie with her? Lie on her.”
Othello and Iago
“Signior, is all your family within?”
Roderigo, Iago and Brabantio

“That I did love the Moor to live with him.”
Othello and Desdemona
“The Turk with a most mighty preparation makes for Cyprus.”
Cassio, The Duke’s Attendant, Desdemona, Othello, 1st Senator, The Duke, 2nd Senator, Brabantio

“What tidings can you tell me of my lord?”
Cyprian Soldiers, Montano, Emilia, Desdemona, Cassio, Iago
“How is’t with you, my lord?”
Othello, Desdemona, Emilia

“Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters’ minds.”
Brabantio and his attendants
“You are welcome, sir, to Cyprus.”
Iago and Venetian Soldiers

“Heaven bless the isle of Cyprus and our noble general Othello!”
Herald and Cyprian Soldiers
“And let me the canakin clink, clink.”
Cassio and Cyprian Soldiers
“Give me to know how this foul rout began.”
Cassio, Cyprian Soldier, Othello, Iago, Montano

“How is’t with you, my most fair Bianca?”
Bianca and Cassio
“Forth, my sword: he dies.”
Roderigo

“You have seen nothing then?”
Emilia and Othello
“Sing willow, willow, willow.”
Desdemona

“O, who hath done this deed?”
Othello, Desdemona, and Emilia
“Precious villain!”
Iago and Emilia

“I took by the throat the circumcised dog, and smote him, thus.”
Othello
“What are you here that cry so grievously?”
Lodovico and Gratiano