

# Film review of othello (1995)

[Literature](#), [Character](#)



I have chosen to do a review of the film adaptation of Othello. In this review, one will find a concise description of the movie along with theatrical review of the film which includes an evaluation of it as well. The film Othello directed by Oliver Parker was based on the play by the playwright William Shakespeare. The film was produced in the year 1995. The movie starts with Roderigo and Iago talking about the hidden marriage between Desdemona and Othello and devises a plan to tell Desdemona's father Brabantio of their marriage. Iago does this because he has hatred for Othello because he gave Cassio, an inexperienced soldier, rank of lieutenant over him. Though Brabantio respects Othello as a soldier, he doesn't see him fit as a husband for his daughter. Before Brabantio can reach Othello, Cassio goes to Othello to tell him that the duke is calling him to send him to Cyprus to fight off a Turkish fleet. After Othello has gotten this news, Brabantio enters and accuses Othello of stealing Desdemona and since Othello was on his way to the duke, Brabantio decides to go along and accuse Othello before the assembled Senate. When they arrive at the Senate, Brabantio accuses Othello of stealing Desdemona with witchcraft, but his plan backfires because the duke Othello convinces the duke that he did not woo Desdemona by witchcraft, but with his war stories. Desdemona then insists to go with Othello and is allowed to and they left for Cyprus that night. At Cyprus, they learn that the Turkish fleet has sunk. Othello's cargo arrives last, and while Cassio and Desdemona await Othello, they share pleasantries and Iago tells the audience that he will use "as little a web as this hand-holding to ensnare Cassio" (II. i. 169) which initially gives one an insight into this character. Then, Othello tells everyone that they saved Cyprus from an

invasion and they should celebrate. While celebrating, Iago encourages Cassio to take a drink, which leads to more drinking on Cassio's path. This causes Cassio to get drunk which ends in Cassio assaulting another soldier. Iago then interrupts Othello and Desdemona's first night together as a married couple to bring this incident to his attention. This causes Othello to fire Cassio due to his behaviour. Iago then encourages Cassio to ask Desdemona to speak to Othello about giving him his job back. This is also when Iago misleads Othello by telling him that Desdemona and Cassio are having an affair. At first, Othello doesn't believe Iago but Iago puts ideas into his head and Othello then believes him. Othello gets a seizure picturing Desdemona and Cassio together. Iago uses this to his benefit. This causes Othello to treat Desdemona harshly. He embarrasses her in front of all the soldiers and the Dukes of Cyprus. He then sends her off to her room to wait for him. There, her servant Emilia, also Iago's wife, gives her a bath. She brings to the attention of Emilia that she keeps singing a song of death that she knows. Emilia then leaves her sleeping and Othello then walks in. Othello sees her sleeping and decides to kill her for if he cannot have her, no man cannot. When he has killed her, Emilia then walks in and tells Othello that Desdemona never cheated on her and that her husband is vindictive and lies. He then also kills Emilia because she was going to report him. Feeling guilty he then kills himself because he could not live with these deaths on his conscience. In the end, Iago is put in jail for his wrong doings and Othello and Desdemona are dropped together in the sea as part of tradition for lovers. This movie based on the Shakespeare play Othello, the strengths and weaknesses of the performance will be further examined in this review.

These strengths were illustrated in terms of the audiences understanding of the movie, the actor's performances, the setting of the movie and costuming whereas the weaknesses were lighting and props. The acting in this movie was commendable, the most accurate portrayal of their characters were Iago played by Kenneth Branagh, Othello played by Laurence Fishburn and Desdemona played by Irène Jacob. The actors gave the emotion, the personas and brought Shakespeares characters to life. Kenneth Branagh who played Iago recieved positive reviews for his performance. His portrayal of hurt, vindictiveness and manipulativeness revealed how the character Iago felt. Janet Maslin a critic for New York Times wrote in the Times on the 20th May, 2003, " Mr. Branagh's superb performance, as the man whose Machiavellian scheming guides the story of Othello's downfall, guarantees this film an immediacy that any audience will understand." Therefore this emphasizes how superb Iago's performance whereby the audience was able to grasp and he even able to stir one's emotion. He enabled the audience to show sympathy for him. Laurence Fishburn who portrayed Othello also gave a worthy performance through the use of his emotions and his speeches. He made one feel what Othello was feeling. So great was his portrayal of the character that he stirred the audience's emotions and even the audience were moved to tears. Lastly, Desdemona played by Irène Jacob, gave a worthy performance when she was embarrassed by Othello and also, her reactions in the scene where Othello was killing her, showed how stupendous her portrayal was. Cassio played by Nathaniel Parker, gave a respectable performance also. Kevin Thomas from the Los Angeles Times wrote in the Los Angeles Times on the 13th of February, 2001, that, " Parker has shown

how involving and moving Shakespeare can still be on the screen". This just goes to show the type of performance these actors gave. An example of this superb acting was when Iago convinced Othello that Desdemona was having an affair, the way he portrayed the hurt and disappointment he felt, showed how great of a job the actors did. In my analysis, it was effective because it made it easier for one to understand the characters and the play/movie. It showed one the emotions and feelings that each character displayed in the film. Setting is another aspect evident in this movie. The setting contributed to the mood of the movie and is an attraction for the audience as it sets the way of the play. The play was set in Italy around the 1700's and is crucial to the movie. The setting of the movie aided the performance of the actors. It took us back to the era when it was all happening and made one feel like one was present at that time. To re-create a performance within the 21st century based on a 17th century play is very difficult. An example of this was when Othello and Iago were in the dungeon, this symbolised Iago's plan to destroy Othello and Desdemona's marriage for his own personal gain. The 17th century setting and the dark atmosphere of the dungeon added to the suspense of this scene. In my analysis, therefore setting was effective because it showed clearly what was occurring despite the time gap. The costuming was another crucial aspect that contributed to the success of the movie. The clothing gave the characters their identity and adequately portrayed who their characters were and the era in which the play took place. The costume also helped the audience to understand what year the movie was set in. It also helped the director to express who the characters truly were. An example of this is Desdemona, the way she dressed was

covered and mostly in white was a symbol of her purity. Makeup was also a strength of the movie. The make-up added to the personalities of the characters. An example of this was the makeup used for Othello's scars. It helped the character played by the actor, but also showed the personality of the character. Othello's scars revealed the pain he endured and the past that he takes with him. It could have also been used as a remembrance as to where he came from to where he is now. It also represented how many battles he fought in and his time in the army and his hard work and dedication to the people of Cyprus. Hence, the costuming contributed to the effectiveness of the movie because assisted in the characters performances because it gave them the impression that they were in that era. The makeup also brought the characters to life, which one could also deduce by their realistic performances. Apart from this, there were also weaknesses that took away from the movie such as the lighting and some props. The lighting was very poor and too dark even though it was set in the 1700's. One could assume that what was happening in night time could hardly be seen. The lighting made it difficult to see what was taking place. An example of this is when Roderigo and Iago were discussing the plan to tell Brabantio about Othello and Desdemona's marriage, one could have hardly seen their faces because of the poor lighting. Therefore, in my analysis, poor lighting served as a disadvantage to the movie and hence it was ineffective. Props was also another fault of the play. The props were not effective as they should have been. An example of this was when Iago and Roderigo were in Cyprus hiding underneath a carriage devising a plan to break up Othello and Desdemona, the location of this was not very effective because they could have been

seen by someone which would have not contributed to the movie. Another prop the producer could have used could have used instead of the carriage was behind a wall or some object that would completely remove them from where people could find them. This would make this scene more effective because it would add to the mystery of their plans. Another example of poor prop choice is Hence, these props served to be a disadvantage to the movie therefore making it ineffective. In conclusion, the superb performances by the actors, the costuming, the audiences understanding of the play and the setting of the movie are parts of Othello that stood out and made the movie a success. Though there were downfalls such as lighting and props, it did not take away from the essence of the movie.

Bibliography \* Shakespeare, William, and Norman Sanders. Othello. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire: Cambridge UP, 1984. Print. \* Othello. Dir. Oliver Parker. Perf. Lawrence Fishburne, Kenneth Branagh & Irène Jacob. Warner Bros, 2001. DVD. \* Maslin, Janet. " Othello Movie 1995." Review. n. d.: n. pag. Rottentomatoes. com. 20 May 2003. Web. \* Thomas, Kevin. " Othello Movie 1995." Review. n. d.: n. pag. Rottentomatoes. com. 13 February 2001. Web. Appendix Actor-Character Laurence Fishburne- Othello Irène Jacob- Desdemona Kenneth Branagh- Iago Nathaniel Parker- Michael Cassio Michael Maloney- Roderigo Anna Patrick- Emilia Nicholas Farrell- Montano Indra Ové- Bianca Michael Sheen - Lodovico André Oumansky- Gratiano Philip Locke- 1st Senator John Savident- 2nd Senator Gabriele Ferzetti- Duke of Venice Pierre Vaneck- Brabantio Luca Guardabascio- Servant in the dancing scene (uncredited)