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Writing Project #2

Iago and Hugo are completely different characters in the adaptations *Othello* and *O*. Oliver Parker's movie *Othello* stays more true to the character of Shakespeare's Iago than Tim Blake Nelson's Hugo in his movie *O*. *O* guides us blindly through Shakespeare's *Othello*, while Parker's *Othello* provides us with Shakespeare's internal character development. Nelson also alters Shakespeare's Iago considerably by changing his motivations for his treacherous activities, while once again Parker remains faithful to the text of *Othello*. The motivation for Tim Blake Nelson's adapted Hugo is simply a modernization of Iago for movie production, while Oliver Parker relies on the faithful Shakespearean purists for his movie audience. Nelson has created a pitiable character for a modern audience, while Parker reveals to us the true Shakespearean Iago.

Just as in *Othello*, Oliver Parker's Iago remains faithful to the mental basis of Iago's character, while Tim Blake Nelson's Hugo is a complete departure from the original text. Parker's Iago is clearly a psychologically driven character. Iago reveals his plots to us by way of Shakespeare's soliloquies and we are more involved in the inner thoughts of his mind. However, Nelson's Hugo refrains from any Shakespearian soliloquy, but does occasionally use a voiceover, which provides the audience with Hugo's generic rationale. The only indication of Hugo's plotting comes only through his actions and the only reasoning behind his actions is found in the actions of other characters. The audience is unaware of his intentions until he manipulates others to carry out his plans, thus the audience becomes disconnected from Iago's inner thoughts unlike in Parkers *Othello*.

Additionally, Hugo's character is weakened by Nelson to attract sympathy from the audience. In *O*, Hugo is influenced by drug use. The use of drugs is intended to lead the audience to believe an impairment of both Hugo's judgment and his desire to mastermind a scheme to destroy all of his friends. Hugo tries to gain the unfair advantage on the basketball team by using drugs instead of his mental acumen as it was written by Shakespeare. This is the antithesis of Parker's Iago. Parker shows us in intimate detail the rational mental status of Iago through his reasoning and planning. Iago shares this same mental stability with Shakespeare's Iago, who is eerily collected about the foul deeds he performs. However, the most distinguished flaw in Nelson's *O* is Hugo's primary reason for committing the acts he does. Nelson once again creates sympathy for Hugo by making Hugo destroy Odin to win the love of his father. While this one motive is a driving force for the entire movie, it is the film's greatest weakness and stray from Shakespeare's *Othello*. Iago was intended to be a character that was only pitied because of his lack of compassion and human qualities. Nelson created a pitiable situation in which any person would feel compassion for the lack of love Hugo received from his father and how Odin trumped him in his own father's heart. From the initial speech of Hugo's father at the awarding of most valuable player to Odin in which he announces that "I [Hugo's father] love him like my own son," (*O*) the situation portrays itself as an unfortunate set of circumstances in which Hugo has found himself placed. On the other hand, Parker's Iago is held accountable for his actions as his only motivation is found in greed and lust. Iago shows throughout Parker's *Othello* that he is willing to do away with anyone and anything that stands in his path to personal greatness. While Hugo desires recognition for his success on the basketball team, it is apparent that he is driven by the want of love from his father. During Act II Scene i of Shakespeare's *Othello* and one of Parker's Iago's soliloquies, Iago reveals in soliloquy that he lusts over Desdemona, "Now I do

love her too, Not out of absolute lust” (659). This adds to the savage nature of Iago when he encourages Othello to kill Desdemona for the shame she has caused her husband. However, Nelson chose to omit this yearning for Desi from Hugo. Hugo never mentions wanting to have relations with Desi or lusting over her. Thus, when he aids Odin in the plot to murder Desi, it is not nearly as shocking because he has no apparent feelings for her. It is clear that Nelson believed it was unimportant to remain true to the rationalization of Shakespeare’s Iago by the amount of alteration performed on Hugo’s motivation if this change created compassion in the movie audience.

Iago’s most difficult interpretive problem for modern audiences is his believability. Iago is portrayed as a brutal, yet incredibly cunning character who is almost god-like in action. Parker and Nelson have obviously taken two completely different paths to achieve what they wanted. Parker took the more sensible path by staying true to the Shakespearean Iago because his character was already well developed through soliloquies and his motivations. However, Nelson took the opposite path in making a huge departure from the original Iago. This decision was made to better suit the mind of a teenager in a modern setting. Audiences don’t want to hate a character that is so young and has gone astray. Thus, Nelson has softened the character of Iago, making him more authentic as a modern day teenager at the expense of textual accuracy. Purists would obviously view *O*’s divergence from Shakespeare’s works as blasphemy. Iago is a character that was developed to be despised because his actions are loathsome. However, the modern movie viewing audience would most likely not have conflict with the changes made to Hugo. The changes would be accepted because the adaptation makes *Othello* in a modern setting more plausible. The changes also appease the audience by not playing on the extremes of their emotions because they are not forced as in Shakespeare’s *Othello* to despise Iago. Shakespeare’s

text is wide open for interpretation of adaptations and Parker and Nelson have catered their films to two different audiences. Parker has made a more believable Iago in a Shakespearean *Othello* sense, while Nelson has created a more realistic modern Hugo.

Clearly, Tim Blake Nelson has formed a softer modern Iago, while Oliver Parker has maintained Iago's textual integrity. It is almost as if Nelson was compelled by Act IV Scene i of *Othello* to create Hugo, "But yet the pity of it, Iago! O Iago, the pity of it, Iago!" (Shakespeare 677). The only difference is that "it" has become Iago. Parker's *Othello* portrays to us the innermost thoughts of Iago, while *O* maintains the suspense of the plot development. However, Hugo's judgment and motivations are heavily altered in comparison to the Shakespearean *Othello* by drug use and lack of love from his father, thus creating pity not felt for Parker's Iago. The changes have only been made in the adaptation *O* for the modernization and popularization of the film because a main character can no longer be as loathsome as Iago truly is. In this principle, Tim Blake Nelson has created an Iago in Hugo, which modern day audiences can sympathize with, while Oliver Parker's character reveals Shakespeare's true Iago.

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