COSTUME DESIGN AND PRODUCTION FOR

OTHELLO, BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

THESIS

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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Graduate Program in Theatre

The Ohio State University

2011

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2011
Abstract

For my thesis I designed costumes for the theatre department’s production of *Othello*. For this production I will be looking at the text and studying the silhouettes of the Renaissance period as well as modern styles of today. I will also be looking at fabric and color and the psychological effect it has on creating an overall mood. This production will be directed by guest director Alison Bomber, a member of the Royal Shakespeare Company.

The original script has been edited by the director, is 90 minutes and runs without an intermission. The time length was also in compliance with the time line employed by the RSC when they produced their “Young People’s Shakespeare” series.

The majority of the roles were double cast with the exception of Othello, Bianca, and Roderigo. This developed a challenge for me due to the fact that each of the actors is very different from one another in physical shape and form. This ‘challenge’ obliged me to examine the actor and their body and think of silhouettes and fabrics which supported the way that each approached their role. *Othello* is primarily comprised of male characters and the cast exclusively includes the MFA actors, five male and five female; consequently many women will be playing male roles. My goal is to create a sense of style that carries many masculine characteristics but does not disguise the fact that there are women playing these parts.
In early September of 2011, in lieu of a traditional director’s concept I received a series of notes from Bomber. These notes were transcribed by Professor Leslie Ferris and dramaturge Chelsea Phillips who met with Bomber in Stratford, August 2011. (Appendix A) She requested the costumes to retain a distinction of the English Renaissance but not be completely historically correct. My preliminary research that I have collected contains many forms of modern clothing that possess elements from the Elizabethan era, such as ruffs, corsets, and slashed sleeves. From her original email to me, I understood that the production would contain a lot of movement and be somewhat surreal in style. The director also wanted to keep the show in a palette of gray colors with hints of red. Bomber did discuss the use of hard and soft fabrics and clothing structure. She was very interested in the use of the corset and the confines it holds on women. She mentioned that the corset was a visual element that she would like to see used, especially with the character of Desdemona.

Overall I felt that *Othello* was a perfect piece for my thesis production due to the particular challenges it presented and what I felt would be an interesting director’s approach. Though I have listed issues above I felt I would be able to resolve all the hurdles that might arise and design a show that is aesthetically pleasing to an audience as well as to myself. This production I believed will showcase the skills and practices that I have developed over my time spent here and be the perfect final design piece that I produced as a graduate student at The Ohio State University.
This document is dedicated to my husband.
Acknowledgments

Thank you to Mary Tarantino, Lesley Ferris, and especially Kristine Kearney for their time and efforts throughout the thesis process as well as my time at The Ohio State University.
Vita

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2011 ......................................................Othello, Costume Design

Fields of Study

Major Field: Theatre
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Chapter 1: The Producing Situation

*Othello* was presented in the Roy Bowen Theatre at The Ohio State University from February 10th through February 27th, 2011. The Bowen Theatre is located in the Drake Performance and Event Center. *Othello* was produced as the fourth play in a seven-production season. The production of *Othello* coincided with The Ohio State University’s partnership with the Royal Shakespeare Company and their “Stand Up for Shakespeare” education program. The Bowen Theatre is configured as a three quarter thrust stage with seating that holds 250 persons.

All costumes for *Othello* were constructed, altered, and/or fit in The Ohio State University Theatre Department’s Costume Studio. The Costume Studio is located in the Drake Performance and Event Center and accessible to the dressing rooms, Green Room area, the Bowen, as well as the Thurber Theatre. The Costume Studio is equipped with four cutting tables, seven domestic sewing machines, two industrial machines, two sergers, one industrial serger, and a computer for purchasing costume items. There are three gravity-feed industrial irons, a dye vat, two washing machines, and two dryers. There is a range of dress forms, both male and female, and they vary in size. The Costume Studio is equipped with all tools, notions, and materials that would be necessary for costume construction and alterations. The Costume Studio also occupies space in the Green Room, which contains multiple cabinets that are designated for shoe, craft,
millinery, make-up, wig, dye and corset construction supplies. The four dressing rooms are also located in the GTA corridor, which is located off the “Green Room”. Dressing rooms numbers one and two were used for *Othello*, assigning one to the male cast of five and the other to the female cast of four. Dressing room numbers one and two can accommodate eight persons and dressing rooms three and four accommodate fifteen or more. There are three stock locations that are easily accessible to the Costume Studio with another stock room located in an off-site building on Kenny Road. This building is located on campus, one mile from the Drake Performance Center.

Associate Professor Kristine Kearney, Resident Costume Designer, and Jan Woods, Costume Studio Supervisor, oversee all costume construction that is produced for The Ohio State University Department of Theatre. Professor Kearney acts as advisor for the Graduate Student costume designers as well as the undergraduate designers and oversees all stages of the design process. Woods supervises all costume construction and alterations within the Costume Studio. Woods also communicates fitting schedules with stage management, oversees and trains wardrobe crew, distributes work within the studio, constructs some costumes, attends fittings, and works with designers on budgeting shows. Additionally, Woods works with designers to decide what items will be built, altered or purchased for production as well as assigns individual projects to students.

The production period allowed for *Othello* was approximately five weeks during winter quarter. *Othello* had been in pre-production for over 5 months before it was brought into the studio for production to begin. During this time, costume construction was also taking place for a 60 minute version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* that
opened a week before *Othello*. *Spring Awakening* was also being produced in the studio and opened two weeks following *Othello*. There are three other costume graduate assistants besides myself assigned to the Costume Studio. Shiree Houf, Samantha Kuhn, Lauren Bush and myself are responsible for the overall build as well as overseeing the undergraduate students who are required to work in the studio for course credit. The undergraduate students vary widely in their ability to sew. There can be anywhere from six to ten undergraduate students in the Costume Studio each quarter. The Costume Studio employs one work study student that has experience and knowledge in sewing. Besides the work study student the Costume Studio also employs one over-hire professional seamstress, Nadine Spray, who is trained and skilled in advanced sewing techniques as well draping and tailoring. The wardrobe crew consisted of three undergraduate students. There was no assistant costume designer assigned to this production.

The budget for *Othello* was originally set at $2,500. The final budget was changed to $3,500 after the original specification was approved and other issues came about. The funds were applied to purchasing fabric for corsets, chemises and skirts, as well as military uniforms, period-inspired shirts, boots and their up-keep, specialty make-up, accessories and all other costume needs specific to *Othello*.

The production was directed by guest director, Alison Bomber, Senior Voice and Text Coach, from the Royal Shakespeare Company, Stratford-upon-Avon, UK. The design team included scenic designer and MFA candidate Divya Murthy, lighting designer and MFA candidate Brian Elston, sound designer and MFA candidate Jarod
Wilson. Department of Theatre professional staff member Chris Zinkon served as the technical director. *Othello* was cast in the summer of 2010 and consisted originally of all ten acting MFA candidates. The target audience for the play was comprised largely of undergraduate introductory theatre students, other students of the university, faculty and staff of the university, a variety of members of the Columbus community, and high school students in the Columbus area.
Chapter 2: The Production Concept and Design Scheme

*Othello* was written by William Shakespeare around the beginning of the 17th century (1600-1604) under the title *Othello, The Moor of Venice*. This piece was chosen for many reasons. First, during the second year of the MFA Actor’s training, the department program gives them the opportunity to perform a complex or a classic text. The second reason for the choice to perform a Shakespearian piece for the winter season was linked to with Ohio State University/Royal Shakespeare Company partnership. Since 2009, the university under the leadership of the OSU Arts Initiative, has worked with the RSC to train teachers a teaching program called Stand Up for Shakespeare. This partnership promotes a pedagogy that promotes using Shakespeare’s text in the classroom (from first grade to high school) as a teaching tool. In addition to the development of the teaching program, and the guest artist residency, OSU was also sponsoring the RSC’s residency in New York City at the Lincoln Center Festival, performing at the Park Avenue Armory, summer of 2011.

Coinciding with the Royal Shakespeare Company’s connections occurring in the academic school year, the department faculty decided it would be a great experience to bring in a guest director from the RSC. The script of *Othello* was chosen by Bomber, who wanted to direct a tragedy that had a tight cast with strong roles for women, and could accomplish many other goals set for the actors. She felt *Othello* would resonant with
modern audiences as well as young viewers (Bomber was aware when deciding upon the
script that the show was to be promoted to high schools in the area). She also knew that a
condensed version of *Othello* could still maintain a lot of the themes and mood of the
original script.

Alison Bomber edited the piece into a ninety minute one act script. Bomber’s
intention was to shorten the text to make it accessible to all audiences while at the same
time trying not to lose any of the substance and beauty originally found in Shakespeare’sive acts. Shakespeare’s, and subsequently Bomber’s goal was to tell a tragic story about
love, race, betrayal, and human nature. According to scholars Alvin Kernan
Shakespeare’s *Othello* was inspired by the tales of Giraldi Cinthio, *Hecatommithi*.
Cinthio, an Italian writer, was known for his psychological and horrific tragedies. The
first performance of *Othello* is recorded to have taken place in 1604 by the Kings
Majesties Players under the title *The Moor of Venis*. The play was not printed until
eighteen or nineteen years after the first performance. Registered in 1621, the quarto,
edited by Thomas Walkley was not published until 1622. (Kernan, 1094) The folio
edition was printed in the later part of 1623. The intent of Bomber and the rest of the
production team were to present a relatable and emotional piece to a modern audience
that was originally performed over 400 years ago.

William Shakespeare was a poet and playwright born April 23, 1564 in Stratford-
upon-Avon, England. Shakespeare had wrote 37 plays, 154 sonnets, as well as multiple
poems over a course of 20 plus years. Known for his ability to write in various genres,
Shakespeare is considered to be one of the most influential and greatest of playwrights.
His work has been performed all over the world for hundreds of years and has influenced many talented directors, actors, writers, and designers on both stage and screen.

One of Shakespeare’s most popular tragedies, *Othello*, tells the story of a Moor who, due to a period of hard work and dedication, has been promoted to general in command of the Venetian army. Through his success (and other reasons never known) his loyal friend Iago’s jealousy infuses and develops a method to destroy Othello by suggesting that the one person he truly loves, Desdemona, betray him. With the help of the foolish Roderigo, Iago uses the unwitting cast of characters stationed with him on the island of Cyprus to help him carry out his plan. By manipulating Othello’s insecurities that have built up over time due to racial injustices directed at him, Iago manages to convince Othello that Desdemona has been unfaithful with his lieutenant, Michael Cassio. Othello, outraged by Desdemona’s supposed infidelity, kills his wife by suffocating her, and quickly kills himself after learning of Iago’s plan. Alvin Kernan explains aspects of plays power when he remarked “the vision of human nature that the play offers is one of ancient terrors and primal drives – fear of the unknown, pride, greed, lust – underlying smooth, civilized surface” (1094)

Many well-known actors have donned the character of “Othello, the Moor”. Famous African American actors including Paul Robeson as well as famous Caucasian actors such as Orson Welles and Laurence Olivier have all tried to make this complex character their own. Othello has been a role that in recent times has been made available to black actors because historically they have been prohibited from playing the role. In the past, Othello has most often been played by a white male, usually with black face
makeup. The play *Othello* itself has only, in the past 150 years, been a play that is viewed as a treatment that describes racial unjustness to the black man. Some scholars believe that *Othello* was originally performed as a piece to show the demise of the Moor as a positive aspect that audience members of the Renaissance at the time could rejoice about. The historical background on Othello’s racial identity is the subject for discussion.

Othello is referred to multiple times in the script as ‘the Moor’ and that reference alone give question as to what Othello’s real race or skin color unclear- raise debates. In modern productions of Shakespeare’s play, Othello has been portrayed as an African man with dark colored skin, but some historians believe that Othello would most likely be a man of Middle Eastern descent, like the portrayal of Othello in the late 1980’s by Ben Kingsley. Whether or not Othello has dark skin, similar to that which Iago and Roderigo refer to as an “old black ram” (Bomber, 2), or has the complexion of a Middle Eastern native, the idea of race is still a strong subject that audiences can relate to. Throughout the play, Othello is degraded by Iago and Roderigo with racial slurs, calling him a beast and using many animal references to describe the general, words like “thick lips” (Bomber, 1) and “Barbary horse.” (Appelbaum, 4) As Stanley Appelbaum explains in his introduction, “Sprung from Iago’s hatred, these images of blackness and brutishness point up Othello’s tenuous position in Venetian society. And Othello’s reluctant but complete conviction of Desdemona infidelity speaks of an insecurity born of his marginalized position” (iii)

Besides the subject of race, the theme of religion is a strong topic throughout the play. Although Bomber’s script rarely touches upon the subject, Shakespeare uses the
differences between Othello (a converted Christian) and the Christian Venetian’s beliefs and compares those beliefs to the Muslim Turks. Using this motif of religion and race, Shakespeare uses the Turks not just as the enemy not because the attempt to conquer Venetian land, but also Venetian and Shakespeare’s English values. As Kernan remarks, Cyprus and Venice became the stronghold of the Christian beliefs surrounded by “barbarism, monstrosity, sterility.” (1091) Shakespeare then uses this strategy to allow audience members to think through the issues the play raises. The idea Shakespeare presents is that the world beyond Venice is barbaric, filled with cannibals, as talked about by Othello, but the characters are at least aware of the danger. The civilized, law abiding world (Venice) Othello believes he resides in is filled with trickery and it too is filled with cannibalism but this cannibalism is manifested by the consumption of another human spirit not the physical body. What is easier to take, the obvious frightening world beyond the cliffs or the problematic one that they reside in on Cyprus? Cyprus then becomes the middle ground between physical barbarism and a psychological savagery.

Bomber’s concept was to concentrate on Shakespeare’s words and present a production that was centered on text rather than technical elements. Bomber’s main priority for this production was to focus on the relationships found throughout the show, and their demise. Her goal was to have the “audience organically, through time, feel unpleasant and uncomfortable.” (Bomber Director Notes. All the following notes are quoted from Alison Bombers Director Notes) Bomber wanted Othello to be seen as an outsider to the Venetian society, and ask the audience ‘How do you survive your sense of self as an outsider?’ I felt that this was a perfect approach to this script for modern
audiences. Besides it being edited down to a ninety minute one act, I felt Bomber’s ideas on being an ‘outsider’ could resonate to a wider, as well as a younger audience. Bomber’s edited version of Shakespeare’s script left out much information involving Othello’s rise to power and the tribulations he endured, but she still wanted to show the Renaissance position on race. As a designer, I was intrigued as to how I might be able to present a design that was uncomplicated in presentation but still maintained a sense of beauty and richness without being fussy. Bomber’s vision for the overall design was one of “neutrality and simplicity.” Originally she felt that the color scheme should be a mix of black and white shades but later felt that a monochromatic color combination of blacks, whites, grays, tans, browns, and other neutral colors would be best. Aside from the simple color palette, Bomber’s original thought for the overall silhouette was to have the costumes look like “a sort of embellished rehearsal clothes aesthetic.” In her notes she discussed having the costumes display a Renaissance feel but not be designed as a period piece. “(As a) nod to the Renaissance body”, Bomber discussed the use of the corset as a woman’s body armor. She, as well as myself, liked the idea of comparing and contrasting texture and structure in the costumes and overall silhouette of both the men and women. The men, mostly made up of soldiers, were to have a military look. I decided to look at modern men’s fashion, which in recent years has been heavily influenced by military style and tailoring. With the use of the simple uniformed color scheme, we discussed the use of one dominant color that would play throughout the costumes. Originally I imagined using the color red but after discussing the director’s notes in further detail with Bomber and her reference to the fact that the look should “have a nasty rough notion;
something fresh that has gone nasty” I decided to go with an orange-rust color to be the overall shade to run throughout the design. Aside from Bomber’s comments, I felt that the color choice complimented what the scenic designer, Divya Murthy, had researched in her design. Murthy discussed that she wanted to use a variety of unfinished, raw surfaces such as metal mesh, wood, and steel. Murthy presented a piece of research of a rusted metal fence that she felt was a strong influence on her design goals because she wanted to present a raw environment that was rotting away.

Bomber left a lot of decisions to the designers and was very open to our ideas, especially the overall silhouette of the costumes and fabric choices. After receiving Bomber’s edited version of the script and her designer notes, I decided to use her idea of employing the Renaissance silhouette and mixing it with other period styles in addition to modern fashion. The production was a chance to emphasize texture and fabric to represent different characters complex personalities but still managing to make the clothing appear effortless. As I began research for this production, I relied heavily on two very important books: *Infra-Apparel* published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and *The Historical Mode: Fashion and Art in the 1980s* by Richard Martin and Harold Koda. I felt both books contained images that could relate to the overall mood and genre that at I was attempting to visually describe. One of the most influential pieces of research I discovered was a picture of a Valentino [Garavani] Evening Gown from the 1992/93 fall/winter collection (Figure 5). The dress was red and was closely fitted in the bodice and hip portion of the garment but became full and billowy from the knees down. The dress was then complimented with a corset in the same bold red color. Although the
fabric of the dress was not noted, the material had a dramatic drape to it, making it look very weighty. The Valentino dress was probably the most important piece of research I discovered. It had everything I was trying to accomplish in the overall look of the costumes. The dress is tailored, yet has some unstructured features to it; it looks heavy but has body and movement, and had a hard exterior paired with a soft body.

Figure 1. Research Image: Valentino Evening Gown 1992/93 fall/winter collection

In addition to the Valentino dress, I was also attracted to the photography of Anne Leibovitz, especially her “The Love of a Lifetime” Romeo and Juliet inspired fashion editorial for Vogue Magazine, December 2008 (Figure 1, 2 & 3). The editorial featured many haute couture designs that were heavily influenced by the Italian Renaissance. I also looked at the photography of Leibovitz for inspiration of color, especially her Vanity Fair photo shoot titled “Killers Kill and Dead Men Die”.

Many of the characters in Shakespeare’s script are divided into groups. Although these groups did not always occupy the stage at the same time I felt it was necessary to identify their place through color association. This association would also help with the change in setting from Venice to Cyprus. I knew I wanted the soldiers in darker uniforms, so I felt it was best to have the Venetian officials in a lighter color. I was drawn to a tan/beige color because it reminded me of the city of Venice. Having been to Venice myself I remember clearly how the warm colored buildings existed in contrast to the water around them. I also wanted the officials to have a pattern, as well as fur, incorporated into their costumes. This would highlight a polished presence that I felt was very important because it could show a contrast between the officials and the soldiers. These officials were a group of people who decided to send others into battle, but would never see a battle field let alone the true destruction of war.

Originally when I started the preliminary pencil sketches, I designed Desdemona to be completely covered, with a high neck line with a collared ruff. I wanted her to have
a mature and sophisticated style, in contrast to Bianca’s overt sexual appeal. I believed that these women display polar opposites in their clothing styles. Although Desdemona and Bianca were complete opposites on the surface, they still wanted the same thing: to be loved. Bomber expressed her desire to have some type of commonality displayed in the costume between Desdemona and Bianca. She felt that Desdemona was not entirely pure or innocent and that she shared a lot of Bianca’s characteristics. Although I understood (but never thought this idea was achieved in the production) her request, I felt that her condensed script managed to eliminate the similarities between the two women. Bianca’s role had been diminished to very few lines, and became more of a comedic element then a passionate woman.

I knew that one of my main goals for this production was to avoid any major costume changes and I had to keep the overall appearance simple. This concept had to be infused in all of the designs due to the double casting in the script and the lack of time for quick changes in the production. I felt it was necessary to have all the actors playing male roles have a basic costume. I felt this would be an easy way for the actors to switch from one role to the next without being held up in the changing of clothing. The male characters would wear the same black trouser, white shirt, and riding boots. From there I would use different garments to characterize them: grey jackets for the soldiers, tan cloaks for the Duke and Senator, a brown jacket for Roderigo, and a robe for Brabantio. The script describes Desdemona undressing onstage, with the help of Emilia. I knew that she would be in a corset, and that it had to be unlaced during a brief amount of dialogue. I also knew that she would need to reveal her undergarments in preparation for going to
bed. When designing her costume I felt that her blouse could then double as her chemise/nightgown. By doing this I would be eliminating a costume change backstage.

Bomber did not arrive in Columbus until the first week of the winter quarter. All prior communication with Bomber had been through emails, conference calls and private phone conversations. This method of communication for this production held no limitations. Bomber was very clear and concise in her direction and was also encouraging. She was easy to get contact and gave her notes on our submitted ideas in a timely fashion. When presenting her with research as well as the preliminary designs, I put all my work into Power Point© presentations and emailed them to her. (Figure 6) For me, this was a very easy to showcase my ideas for each character by including multiple research pieces along with the design on an individual page.

![Image of research slides]

Figure 3: Power Point© Presentation Slide of Research

The various ideas mentioned above were discussed in notes included with each design page. It was during this meeting that Bomber asked to have the similarities between
Desdemona and Bianca stated above become more visible in the renderings. In order to address this small change I decided to eliminate the covered up bodice for Desdemona and give her an off-the-shoulder one that would still double as her nightgown.

The preliminary costume designs for *Othello* were presented to the entire design team at a production meeting on October 5, 2010. At this meeting, the final set design was presented as well as ideas from the lighting designer. Little concern was expressed for the costumes except that the set would be using rough material that could fray the costumes as well as surfaces that might be slippery to the actors. Open communication between myself, the scenic designer, the sound designer, as well as the lighting designer was always part of our design process as well as our procedure. The issues addressed above never became a problem and all matters between the design team were discussed and solved in a timely matter.
Chapter 3: Character Analysis

Othello is the primary male character in this Shakespearean tragedy. Othello is a captain of a Venetian army. I imagine he is in his early thirties or at least somewhat older than Desdemona, due to his life experiences and high military rank. He is referred to as “Othello the Moor” which indicates that Othello is either of African or Middle Eastern descent and that his skin color is rather dark. Othello is smart, strong and a good leader. For the most part, he seems to be respected and liked by his peers. Although Othello has worked his way up in rank, he is still overly paranoid and suspicious most likely brought on by constantly having to prove his own self-worth. Othello is deeply in love with Desdemona, a young woman from Venice that betrays her father by marrying Othello. Although he truly loves Desdemona, Othello becomes so overcome by paranoia and jealousy that he eventually kills her while she sleeps. Aside from Othello’s relationship with Desdemona, he is also very close to Iago, who Othello constantly refers to as “honest Iago”. Othello considers Iago his closest and most important ally. Iago uses Othello’s trust and flaws to his own advantage and becomes the puppeteer in the destruction of Othello as well as the other characters in the play.

Although Othello is often considered a sympathetic character; historically, he might have not always have been viewed as such. During the time that Shakespeare was writing this tragedy, England had developed a great fear for the Moors. During the late
15th Century the population of Moors (who were predominately Muslim) in Europe was experiencing a great decline due to the Catholic Church and its crusades. Othello’s murder of Desdemona and his subsequent suicide might have been looked upon as redemption for Desdemona and her ‘sin’ of fraternizing with a Moor.

Othello is costumed in a uniform; although this uniform is similar to the rest of the army, it does contain detail embellishment that differentiates him from the rest of the troops. Othello’s costume is made up of a simple color palette represented in pieces consisting of: black riding boots, black fitted trousers, a full, white Renaissance-inspired shirt, and a gray herringbone military inspired jacket. The jacket insignia is designed in multiple tones of rust velvet and has a stripe running down the arm seam, which then blends into the three horizontal stripes around the cuff of the jacket. Aside from this costume, Othello dons an orange colored burlap-like robe at the end of the play. The director and I found that it was important to dress Othello in a robe to help indicate that it was night and also to vary his structured, uniformed look to one that is looser. Bomber also wanted the robe to have a more ‘native’ look. She felt that the contrast between his structured uniform and the loose robe would show a comparison to Othello’s state of mind. Othello wears the robe over his white shirt, black pants, and boots.

Iago, like Othello, is part of the Venetian army. Iago is younger; perhaps in his late twenties. He is outgoing, humorous, and trusted by everyone. Iago is considered one of the most villainous literary characters due to his unjustified and largely unexplained destruction of Othello. In the beginning, we believe that Iago is angry with Othello due to Iago being passed over for a promotion, but as the play continues we learn that Iago has
no real reason for his hatred. Iago lacks compassion and has no sympathy for anyone, including his wife, Emilia. Iago’s relationship with Emilia is decidedly odd, and is most likely a marriage of convenience, not love. Iago uses and deceives everyone in the story for his benefit.

Iago’s costume needed to stay within the boundaries of the Venetian army uniform but I felt he needed a few changes. Like Othello and the others, Iago’s costume consisted of black boots, black pants, a white Renaissance-inspired shirt, and a grey herringbone military jacket. Iago’s costumes also consisted of the rusted velvet insignia on the front of the jacket but had two horizontal bands around the cuffs rather than three. Unlike the rest of the military, Iago’s collar was cut higher and his sleeves were detached. Bomber requested that the sleeves be detachable because she would like to play with the removal of them during the show. I felt the detachable sleeves played with the idea that Iago was a chameleon and that he could remove and change his identity as his plan progressed. The high collar was a designer choice that I felt went along with Iago’s ability to hide and be mysterious.

Michael Cassio is a character that is strong and trustworthy but naïve. Cassio is a lieutenant under Othello. Cassio is easily manipulated by Iago and quickly becomes engrossed in Iago’s web of destruction. Although Cassio and Iago are supposed to be on watch, Iago convinces Cassio to join him and the others for a drink. Cassio, known to not handle his liquor well, refuses the drink but is quickly persuaded by Iago and begins drinking with the others. After being teased by Roderigo, Cassio becomes angered and tries to attack Roderigo, causing Othello to be awakened from his sleep. Othello punishes
Cassio by kicking him out of the army. Cassio, who is destroyed by the idea that Othello is disappointed with him, allows Iago to get involved in saving his reputation. Iago uses Cassio as a pawn to enrage Othello. He makes Othello believe that Cassio is in love with Desdemona and that Cassio and Desdemona are having an affair. Cassio does have a close relationship with Desdemona but it is one of friendship not lust. Desdemona, after being asked by Iago, believes she can use her sway with Othello to get Cassio back into Othello’s good graces. Cassio’s carnal relationship is with Bianca, a prostitute in Cyprus. Cassio is deeply smitten with Bianca but is embarrassed by her and hides his relationship from others. Cassio continues to promise Bianca that he will marry her and take her away. It is obvious that Cassio will never marry Bianca and would most likely marry a woman like Desdemona who is more respectable. As mentioned above, Cassio is very young and naïve and that is why he is easily tricked and controlled by Iago.

Cassio, like Othello, Iago, and the other soldiers, is dressed in the same uniform look. He has no recognizable differences in his costume. He is, the only character aside from Othello with facial hair. The design choice to have him with facial hair was to allow the actor to look older and tougher. Like the other characters, Cassio’s costume consisted of black boots, black pants, white Renaissance-inspired shirt, and grey herringbone jacket with rust color insignia.

Desdemona is the wife of Othello and the daughter of Brabantio; she is also the cousin of Lodovico a senator of Venice. She is young and beautiful, and is highly regarded by many, especially Roderigo. Desdemona is a strong woman who loves Othello very much. She is a complex character because she betrays her father to secretly
marry Othello, which makes many question her ability to remain loyal. Desdemona is not a push over and defends herself and the causes she believes in to the bitter end.

Desdemona, although smart, is still influenced and manipulated by Iago. She feels that Cassio has been wrongly punished and tries to coax Othello into reconsidering his dismissal and talk to Cassio. Although this seems like a simple request, Iago uses this as a way to inflame Othello’s suspicion of Desdemona. Iago uses Desdemona’s disloyalty to her father as a tool to make Othello question the devotion Desdemona has towards him.

The traits of both hard and soft fabric textures and clothing structure needed to be seen in all the women’s costumes but especially in Desdemona’s. Her costume needed to reflect her personality traits of being a strong woman who also feels emotion deeply. Her costume consisted of a loose fitted chemise, a fitted yet flowing skirt, and corset. The color and fabric choices were very important for this character. Although I did not use a lot of pattern in the show, I felt that Desdemona’s corset should have some pattern to it. I chose a tan floral brocade that I dyed grey. I complemented the grey brocade with rust colored piping that was stitched between seams as well as around the top and bottom of the corset. With the contrast between the grey and rust coloring, the clothing made Desdemona look very long and strong as if she were wearing armor. Her skirt consisted of a light and flowing wool suiting. The grey skirt was fitted around her hips and began to flare around her knees. Again using research and silhouettes from multiple time periods, the design I employed made Desdemona look timeless as well as very feminine. When Desdemona is brought in front of the Duke, she enters wearing a short jacket. The jacket consisted of a mandarin collar and long gathered sleeves. Again using multiple period
resources, the rust colored jacket allowed Desdemona to look more pure, proper and covered up. It is not until after she arrives at Cyprus that she removes the jacket and is therefore more exposed. Desdemona’s chemise, (which also doubles as her blouse under her corset) was designed in great contrast to her corset. When Emilia removes Desdemona’s corset on stage, she reveals a sheer undergarment that reflect Desdemona’s guard being let down. Her sheer chemise emphasizes Desdemona’s body and her vulnerability.

Desdemona, as mentioned above, is a complex character that I had challenges trying to understand. The director mentioned multiple times that Desdemona was not pure and that she and Bianca had a lot in common. I understand that Desdemona and Bianca just want to be loved and trusted by the men they love, but I don’t know if they are that similar. While Desdemona does betray her father by secretly marrying Othello, how does that make her similar to a prostitute? I believe that devaluing Desdemona’s purity allows for the audience to partially understand Othello’s distrust.

Bianca, as mentioned above, is a prostitute that Cassio likes to visit frequently. Bianca in Bomber’s edited script is very minor character and is only used as a small part of the scheme to trick Othello. Bianca is viewed as being very foolish for believing that Cassio would marry her, allowing her character to be somewhat sympathetic. There should be a visual comparison between her and Desdemona. Aside from the fact that she is a woman who is taken advantage of, I do not see many similarities between the two women.
Bianca’s costume consisted of a corset, skirt, and shrug (a type of short jacket). Although I personally did not see the parallels that Bomber wanted to get across, I felt those parallels should be suggested in the costume. Like Desdemona, I covered Bianca’s shoulders with a shrug, which was constructed of a grey sheer stretch spandex. She also wore a corset but instead of a one made of floral brocade, hers was made of imitation leather. I felt that dressing her in leather would be suggestive of a more sexual woman. Her skirt was made of strips of chiffon that were a variety of colors. Constructing it in strips with no real structure allowed the skirt to flow and break apart while the actress moved, exposing her legs and making her look extremely sexy. My goal for Bianca was to dress her in such a way to display an obvious sex appeal, compared to the virginal innocent sex appeal that Desdemona retained.

Emilia, another of Shakespeare’s important female characters, is a woman for whom one feels sympathy. Emilia’s love for Iago is very strong, but Emilia knows that Iago does not desire her or even love her. Emilia’s disastrous betrayal of Desdemona is unintentional. It is obvious that she would have never stolen Desdemona’s handkerchief if she knew what type of trouble Iago was creating. When Emilia is killed by Iago, it is a sad death due to the fact that she feels guilty and is unloved. The only person that seems to have really cared about her, was Desdemona, and she is dead due to Emilia’s willingness to please her ungrateful and wretched husband. Emilia’s costume was designed to be simple and had the same characteristics as the other women in the play, except that I paired her corset with a man’s shirt. I felt that Emilia played a strong part in Iago’s game, and had a masculine personality similar to that of Othello and Cassio. The
cream shirt was trimmed in the same fabric as the solider jacket, and her corset was black duppioni silk with shoulder straps. Emilia wore a grey wool skirt and black tights and shoes. I tried to make Emilia’s costume less obvious in displaying her sex appeal and allowed the actress to express that distinguishing trait.

A very important character that is only seen in the beginning of the play, but continues to play a significant role, is Brabantio. Brabantio is the father of Desdemona and also a Venetian Senator. He feels he is betrayed by Desdemona when she secretly marries Othello. Although he is friends with Othello, he does not approve of Othello’s marriage to his daughter and presents the matter to the Duke of Venice and the other Senators. Brabantio tells the Duke that he believes Othello has tricked Desdemona into marrying him through witchcraft. Brabantio is denied his request to have Othello punished and is told by the Duke that he should be lucky to have a son-in-law like Othello. Upon his exit, Brabantio warns Othello that he should be cautious of Desdemona. If she can so easily deceive her father, what then is stopping her from betraying her husband, “Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see: She has deceived her father, and may thee”. (Bomber, 11) In Bomber’s script there is no mention of the death of Brabantio, which is revealed in Shakespeare’s original version. Brabantio’s costume was designed to be worn over the costume worn by the actor who would also be playing Montano, and that it should also be able to hide Montano’s costume due to a relatively quick change. Brabantio is awakened at night by Roderigo to be informed of his daughter’s marriage. I wanted Brabantio to be in a robe that was long, full and would lend a sense of physical presence and weight. Besides a robe, Brabantio also would wear
a hat to help with disguising the actor (who later plays Montano). Originally I had
designed Brabantio’s costume to be a light brown robe with dark brown accents. I wanted
all Venetians to have a common color of brown that would separate them from the
soldiers. I later used a dark blue/black robe with green and tan trim that I had found in
stock. The robe was very full and heavy, giving both Brabantio actors a tool to help with
their physical movement of the character.

Aside from Brabantio, three characters, the Duke and the Senators, play roles that
are important to the exposition of the story. One Senator is Lodovico, Desdemona’s
cousin. Lodovico’s role in the production is not that large except that he is the only one
that seems to believe Desdemona when Othello accuses her of being unfaithful. Lodovico
is summoned to Cyprus with letters to inform Othello that Cassio will replace him as the
governor of Cyprus, allowing Othello and Desdemona to return home to Venice.
Lodovico, along with the other Venetian politicians, are costumed in a tan brocade robe
with fur trim on the shoulders, except for the Duke, who wears a fur capelet. Lodovico,
the Duke and the other Senator also wear tan hats, along with their stock costume of
black boots, black fitted trousers, and a white Renaissance-inspired shirt.

Montano and the other Venetian soldiers play a smaller role in the story. We first
see Montano on the shore of Cyprus waiting for Othello and the others to arrive from
battle. There is mention of a tempest, a common element in Shakespeare’s plays, used to
move the action along. Montano is the first to welcome Desdemona, Emilia, Iago, and
Roderigo to Cyprus. Montano is the governor of Cyprus before being replaced by
Othello, and he recounts the battle to the audience. Montano is later stabbed by a drunken
Cassio, after coming to the rescue of the scoundrel Roderigo. Montano is dressed like the rest of the soldiers, wearing a grey jacket with rust color trim, black riding boots, black fitted trousers and a white shirt. The Gentlemen/Venetian Soldier characters are designed similarly to the rest of the main characters except for the cut of their jackets. I wanted to show a lower rank with the two Gentlemen characters. I designed their jackets with no sleeves and originally had them in combat boots. The combat boots would later be cut due to the quick changes the actors had to undergo.

Roderigo is an oddly complex character that is somewhat misunderstood. He is head over heels in love with Desdemona, and naturally becomes enraged when he is informed of her marriage to Othello. Roderigo will do anything to make Desdemona his, including teaming up with Iago to kill Othello. Roderigo is gullible and trustworthy. The death of Roderigo is as sad as the other deaths in the play, due to the fact that he has been duped by Iago. He is probably in his late twenties early thirties. He is financially wealthy, but uses most of his funds to pay off Iago for his help. The design for Roderigo, had more Renaissance inspired style than any other character in the production, due to the style of his sleeves. Like the other male characters Roderigo wears black trousers, a white Renaissance-inspired shirt, and black boots. His jacket, like the soldiers, has a modern cut and texture to it, but the sleeves are slashed. Besides the construction of the sleeves they are also oversized, giving Roderigo a exaggerated and silly look. I believe this compliments his character due to the fact that he is being played as a fool by Iago.
Chapter 4: The Process

This chapter will focus on the process of creating the costumes for Othello. I will discuss challenges, changes in the designs due to unforeseen circumstances, budgetary concerns, restrictions, labor and available costume stock.

The final costume renderings were not presented to the whole production team but scanned, emailed, and then a hard copy mailed to Bomber on November 2, 2010. Through individual talks with the other designers I was able to present them the final designs.

Budget specifications for the designs were made by Jan Woods, Professor Kearney and myself on November 30, 2010. During this initial specification the costumes were budgeted well over the set cost of $2,500, and came closer to $4,500. I had been informed earlier in the process by Professor Dan Gray (Producer and Departmental Chair) that I could request more funds if needed. Although I made attempts to discuss this matter of requesting more money right away with Woods, she seemed to ignore my efforts and remarked that I would have to make cuts elsewhere and ‘make do’ with what I had. Othello moved into the Costume Studio on January 3, 2011 to begin construction and assembly before the end of fall quarter. The cast originally consisted of all ten MFA graduate acting students. At that time, six of the ten actors were double cast in the show.
Towards the end of autumn quarter, I was informed that one of our actors, would not be returning to the department. At the time I was informed by the departments acting chair Professor Gray of this confidential material, the reasons for this actor’s absence was unclear. This actor’s release from the show required a rearrangement of the casting. (See Table) This actor and fellow actor Alison Vasquez were originally going to double the same role. After Bomber and the head of Acting/Directing, Associate Professor Maureen Ryan, discussed how to proceed, they decided to have Vasquez be the only actor playing Emilia and the Senator, and allow Kevin McClatchey and Aaron Zook, who were already double casted as Iago, Brabantio, and a Gentleman, take over the character of Montano. Now that these two actors would be playing Montano, Bomber decided to have Ibsen Santos play the Gentlemen character. The actor/character switch made very little change for me due to the fact that I still had to produce eight uniforms.

Because of the distinct design and the fact that the majority of the cast had to be in uniforms, only a third or less of the costumes were pulled from the university’s existing costume stock and what was pulled had to be altered or repaired. The tight color palette, the non-period specific silhouette of Desdemona’s and Bianca’s clothing, and the uniform style envisioned for all the male characters required the clothing to purchased or constructed in the costume studio. Desdemona’s entire costume was built in the studio, as well as the skirt for Emilia and the robes for the Duke and Senators. Fabric for Desdemona’s chemise, skirt, and corset was purchased from multiple sources. Her shrug fabric was found in stock as well as the silk dupioni used in the casing/binding in her corset. Fabric for Bianca’s corset was found in the studio, left over from a costume made
for the fall production of *Aida*, but her multi layered chiffon skirt was purchased at Jo-Ann’s and then spray painted by fellow graduate student Lauren Bush. Bianca’s shrug fabric was originally purchased over the internet from Spandex House. Once the mesh spandex was sent and received in the wrong color (the company was less than willing to solve the situation), new fabric was purchased from Theatre House. The beautiful mottled velvet used on the soldier’s costumes was located in the studio stock as well as the fabric and fur used for the cloaked Senators and Dukes. These discoveries helped cut down the projected cost of the show but much more needed to be done to get the show to a reasonable cost of the original cost of $2,500, instead of the specification cost of over $5,000. Nearly all of the remaining garments were purchased, including the matching white Renaissance-inspired shirts, the black skinny pants for the entire cast, and the uniform coats. I was able to pull Roderigo’s coat as well as Brabantio’s robe and Emilia’s corset. This corset was originally built for Vasquez in a past production of *Summer and Smoke*, which I had designed.

The uniform jackets were purchased a week before winter break as well as the skinny pants for the women. The jackets were found and purchased at overstock.com and were a little darker then I originally rendered. After approval from the director, I was able to purchase the garment in multiple sizes for the cast. The jackets were made from a herringbone fabric that I believed was perfect for the overall texture/pattern look I was trying to accomplish throughout the show. I was hesitant to purchase the men’s pants due to the return policy and the fact that we were breaking for the holiday and would not return for almost a month. This reasonable explanation for the late purchase would
eventually disconcert me due to the fact that it took up to three weeks to receive the pants. Although this wasn’t a major problem, it did cause for multiple or incomplete fittings to occur for some of the actors, which I try very hard to avoid.

Costume designs were presented to the cast members at the first official read-through of the script on Monday, January 3, 2011. Reactions seem to be very positive, and there were very few questions. Due to the nature of the show, I promised the actors that I would have their boots available by the time they moved into the Bowen Theatre. I felt this would allow them to be comfortable and become used to the restraints riding boots could have, but this would also allow me to solve early any problems that might arise with the boots. Besides the boots, I informed the female actors that I would provide them corsets throughout the rehearsal process so they would become accustomed to the movement, as well as help the Desdemona actresses and Emilia work on unlacing the corset for the undressing scene.

With the start of winter quarter on January 3rd, the costume studio and I had about four weeks to complete the costumes for Othello’s first dress. The mockups for Desdemona’s costumes as well as Bianca’s corset and skirt were started as soon as possible and we were able to have fittings on the men’s coats and boots by the end of the first week. The costumes we planned on constructing were given out to multiple people in the studio. I was assigned to drape and construct Desdemona’s chemises, skirts, and jackets, as well as build Bianca’s skirt, shrug, and Emilia’s skirt. I was assisted by Lauren Bush, who took over all aspects of Bianca’s costume after I had patterned it. First year graduate student Samantha Kuhn was assigned the patternning and construction of the
Duke and Senators robes and third year student Shiree Houf was originally assigned the construction of all three corsets in the show. Houf’s assignment would eventually be passed over and completed by Professor Kearney due to time constraints on Houf. Costume Studio Manager Woods would be in charge of the construction of hats (and headband) as well as the large alteration to Roderigo’s coat. Over hire stitcher Spray would be in charge of all the solider alteration and trim. All other alterations would be finished by the 205 practicum undergraduates or by a one of the graduate students.

Boots became the biggest issue in this show, besides budget. The university costume stock has a variety of riding boots that could fit the actors. Unfortunately the boots began to wear out and become difficult for some actors to work with over the rehearsal period. Riding boots are very expensive and although we had figured them into our original specification, we were already over budget so the cost was unimportant. I had a hard time getting a chance to fit the boots on the actors due to time restraint of the actors themselves, missed communication with stage management, and a emergence of a personal issue. Within the second week of the rehearsal my maternal grandmother died. Though I had become distant from her over time, it was hard for me to see my mother go through this monumental loss. Due to her death I had to miss two crucial days of school and fittings that I had scheduled and needed to keep due to time restraints. Luckily Spray was able to fit both Aaron Zook and Alex Boyles’ uniform coats and we were efficient with time.

Once rehearsals moved into the theatre, the boots again became an issue. Although the actors had very little problems working with the boots, they felt that the
boots needed to have dance rubber applied to them to provide safety while working the
fight scenes. I completely understood this concern however this would take a chunk out
of my budget, which had already been tapped almost dry. Professor Kearney advised that
the repair should come out of the costume studio’s seasonal budget due to the fact that
this would benefit the studio stock in the future. Woods felt it was best to take it out of
the Othello budget but would consider shifting the cost if I was to have any future
budgetary concerns. Besides the rubbering issue with the boots, one of the actors had torn
his boots badly and others needed their boots stretched. Though the stretching issue was
easy to take care of and relatively cheap, the repair of the torn boot became a dilemma
that would not be solved until preview. Kevin McClatchey had been assigned a pair of
boots that he had previously worn in a production of The Three Sisters. Assuming they
worked, I had them repaired after he had accidentally torn them. The boots took about a
week to repair and once given back to McClatchey, he felt the one boot was too tight to
wear. I then quickly bought another pair of boots which again took about a week to
arrive, and those also were too small. By then we had pulled a pair of boots from stock
that were a bit big and loose in the calf but McClatchey felt he was able to work with
them by wearing two pairs of socks. By this time we had already moved into tech week
and after the fast purchasing of a third pair of boots we had the boot issue fixed the day
before opening night. Though this was a setback, McClatchey was nothing but
professional and very understanding.

By the time the original boot issue had occurred I had already asked for additional
funds from the department. I, along with the help of Professor Kearney, composed a
letter addressed to the Acting Chair, Professor Gray requesting more money for the purchase of boots as well as capes and shirts. Our request tallied close to eight hundred dollars, but we thought it would be best to ask for $1,500 because we felt that other financial issues might appear and we wanted a contingency. Professor Gray approved the call for extra funds but only allotted for $1,000 due to the unsupported appeal for $1,500. Professor Kearney informed me that although Professor Gray was not personally angry with me, he felt that he should have been informed of the over budgeting sooner and that I could have done more to stay within the production budget range. After hearing this I believed he was right and I should have taken the responsibility of going to Professor Gray as soon as I felt the budgeting issue was a problem. I also should have talked to Woods about ways we could fix the cost. I have always been able to stay within my budget, so this was personal set-back. I tried extremely hard to search out other options for the show but the costume pieces that were needed were very specific, and since the shop was incapable of building these pieces due to time, labor, and lack of cobbling skills, there was no other option rather than purchase them.

Because of the double casting of characters, I had paid close attention to the logistics of the production’s quick changes. I knew that Vasquez was playing the Senator before Emilia and only had a limited amount of time to change from her Senator costume consisting of boots, pants, shirt, cloak, and hat into her Emilia costume of flats, tights, petticoat, skirt, blouse, corset, and a different hairstyle. By Vasquez’s second fitting we discovered that the best solution to this problem would be to under dress her. She would wear her tights under her pants, and her blouse and corset under her Senator shirt. She
could also tuck her hair into her hat allowing her enough time to have the dressers help her get into her two skirts and shoes. Besides Vasquez, there were other dressing questions to be solved. McClatchey and Zook had a quick change into Montano from Brabantio, which was easily solved due to the Brabantio cloak being so massive and full. This cloak, which turned out to be a huge success, was pulled from the department’s stock.

Originally I had designed the cloak to be brown to go along with the color coordination I rendered for all Venetians. Brabantio’s cloak was an item that became crucial that I pull from stock. The cloak that I found was dark and looked like it was navy blue. It had green specks throughout it and made with gigantic sleeves. Once I brought it into the fitting I knew it was the perfect robe and the actors felt the same way too. The robe was quite heavy and the actors used the weight of the robe to benefit their portrayal of this character. Both Zook and McClatchy felt that the weight made them move differently and bend their body in an entirely altered manner than Montano and Iago.

Roderigo, played by Ibsen Santos, also had a few quick changes but they were relatively small and simply needed to be tracked during designer run. Santos changed from Roderigo to First Gentlemen a few times at the beginning of the show. Once the dressers were aware of his movement, the matter was solved.

Santos as well as Tory Matsos’ quick changes did have me alter my design by removing the change of footwear. Initially I had the Gentlemen wearing combat boots to illustrate the idea that they are foot soldiers and below the ranks of the other officers, but
in to the interest of time, because they would be difficult to change quickly, they remained in their riding boots.

My biggest change came from Matsos, who played the Duke, Second Gentlemen, and Bianca. Although the changes were small from Duke to Gentleman due to the original design of a stock costume, Matsos’ big change happened between her appearances on stage from Gentleman to Bianca. Though the script allowed time for the transformation, I needed to make sure that Matsos, the wardrobe crew, and I clearly understood how the changes to proceed. Matsos needed to retreat to the dressing room for this costume change and needed assistance from the wardrobe crew due to the fact that she would be putting on a corset. Formerly the design for Bianca was to have her corset open up the front but that was changed during the mockup stage because there was a feeling it would not be needed because extra time was allowed to get in and out of the corset. With that change in the construction of the garment, Matsos would then need to be assisted, which would not be a problem. Aside from the corset, Matsos needed to change out of her Gentleman’s costume of boots, pants, shirt, and jerkin into Bianca’s flats, pantyhose, skirt, strapless bra, corset, shrug, jewelry and an up do hairstyle. In the beginning of the design process I felt it would be best to have Matsos wear a wig so that the actress could save time during her change.

Working with Shiree Houf on wig styling, I chose a strawberry red wig that helped the character of Bianca differ from the others Matsos was portraying. The goal was never to disguise Matsos from the other characters she played but to give some edge to the Bianca role. Once we got into dress rehearsal Matsos felt she had enough time to
fix her own hair by prepping it before the show and asked if it would be okay to try this out instead of the wig. Though I liked the hair color and the styling of the wig, I wanted Matsos to be comfortable and believed that if she was able to get the look I was trying to achieve I had no problem with cutting the wig from the show.

The build of the show for the most part went very smoothly. As mentioned before, there were other shows in the shop besides Othello. Spring Awakening was to go into dress rehearsal a week after Othello was to open, which allowed everyone in the shop to concentrate on Othello first and then move on to Spring without much concern. The uniform jackets for the men took considerable time to tailor but that was due to one person only working on them and the fact that some jackets needed more attention than others. Due to the show being so stripped down, there were few accessories, such as jewelry, needed.

The designer run for Othello occurred on January 22, 2011. During this run of the show, the designers were only shown one cast performance of the piece. The run through went well and there was very little concern on my part. This did give me a chance to start tracking the exits of the actors as well as some of their entrance/exit timing for quick change purposes.

Through the course of working on Othello, I was given another opportunity to work with Alyssa Ellis as stage manager. Ellis and I had previously worked together on a production of The Long Christmas Ride Home. While working on that show I had very few problems with Ellis except for the fact that she seemed a bit scattered and did not always understand her role as stage manager. I again had the same issues with Ellis on
this production. Ellis and I had a lot of communication issues. Although there was nothing too drastic, I, as well as the other designers, were confused by stage management’s notes as well as her inability to get information passed on to others. Following is a specific example:

Designer run was scheduled about week prior to beginning of technical rehearsal. At this point I felt I was in a good position. I had fit everyone and was finishing the final fittings for the soldiers. All alterations generated from the fittings up until that point were complete. In the soldier fittings I had marked were the swords should be placed on their belts. The swords and their accompanying belts were an issue that was discussed and solved by myself and prop master Eric Barker. The costume studio had a beautiful stock of these particular belts, and little needed to be done to them except for replacing all the metal tubes that served as sheathing with plastic tubes to avoid extra noise. The main issue that derived from the belts was the fact that no one knew how to put them on at the time except for stage management. Ellis forgot the directions after I had explained them to her earlier that day, and the actors were confused for a few of rehearsals. The assistant director had the actors step into the belts instead of actually belting them around themselves. The issue was quickly resolved after I had individually repeated the instructions to the actor as to how the belts were worn. I marked the belts in place on each actor and later stitched the sheaths of the belt so they would not slide.

The actresses playing Desdemona, Ashley Kobza and Charlesanne Rabensburg, had a total of three fittings each. During the first fitting we fit mockup corsets, chemises, and jackets. Each one of their fittings went well and we were able to get the information
needed to proceed. During the second fittings, we were able to try on their finished Desdemona mock-up chemise and mock-up skirt, as well as their Lodovico costume. In this fitting, Charlesanne and I discussed how we were going to address the concealment of her tattoo. Charlesanne possesses a large tattoo that spreads across the majority of her upper back and shoulders. Her chemise was to be placed off the shoulders which allowed for the tattoo to be extremely visible. Besides the placement of the chemise, I had also chosen a light, semi-transparent cotton to construct the garment. This design choice also made the entire tattoo visible. When designing this garment, I had to keep in mind that this garment was going to be worn by two different women. I remembered that Rabensburg had this issue and originally designed the chemise to be higher as mentioned in the previous chapter. Also mentioned was the fact the director wanted an off the shoulder look for Desdemona to play up her sexual side. Knowing that makeup could cover her tattoo, I didn’t think this would be much of an issue, but it was.

Rabensburg informed me that she would conduct research into what she thought would be best for the tattoo as well as her skin. She felt that the Dermablend tattoo cover-up product would work best and after contacting several local stores, I realized I would have to purchase it through the main supplier on line. Although I had no issue buying it, it was costly. With shipping and tax I needed to spend seventy-five dollars out of my budget for her makeup. Normally this might not be a problem but as mentioned above, I was already in a budget crunch. It took a while for the product to ship and we did not get a chance to use it until preview night. Wardrobe crew felt comfortable applying the makeup and I relayed to them that I needed to be informed well in advance if the product
was close to running out due to it taking time to ship. Again communication would become an issue.

The makeup was depleted and almost gone a day before I was aware of this issue. Fortunately I was in the building at the time wardrobe informed me that there was only enough to get through that evening’s performance. Knowing there was nothing I could do to immediately attain more Dermablend, I went out the next day to try to purchase theatrical makeup that I thought might be comparable to the other. After purchasing this makeup and informing stage management of the issue I received a phone call that night saying that the makeup did not work and that the wardrobe crew was able to scrape out enough to make it through another performance. Luckily for me, Rabensburg would not be on stage for another three days. I ordered the makeup the next day and paid for the quickest shipping possible but due to the Martin Luther King Holiday, it still did not reach us until later that Wednesday after Rabensburg’s morning performance. I was called by Ellis that morning to report that the makeup did not show up and that Rabensburg was upset. I told Ellis that Bomber and I had discussed earlier in tech process that if the makeup did not work we would allow Rabensburg to go without it and that it wasn’t a large problem. Although the tattoo was visible it was not distracting. I was not at the theatre to partake in the makeup fiasco. I was informed by the Costume Studio Supervisor Woods that Bomber made a decision to allow Rabensburg to perform without the makeup. Ellis attempted to cover up the tattoo herself with makeup she found in the costume studio. This upset Rabensburg because of Ellis’ forcefulness to make a last ditch effort to cover the tattoo instead of listening to me and the instructions I gave earlier.
Although the tattoo being visible caused no issues to the production’s artistic integrity of that particular performance, I did feel guilty that Rabensburg was upset. Later that day, I was able to talk to the actress and get her side of the story; I was also able to apologize. I told her that I was sorry that she was upset and that I felt bad that I might have caused her to have issues getting into character but that I was not apologizing for the makeup not getting here on time. I felt I had made myself clear to the wardrobe crew that I needed to be informed well in advance. I know this problem could have been resolved if I had bought multiples of this product. The three piece product cover-up was expensive and I felt I was not compromising wardrobe by asking them to keep me informed as to how much makeup remaining.

When all was said and done, I managed to spend close to $140 on makeup for one actress. Woods later asked me if I felt the department or the actor should be paying for this product. When I had originally discussed makeup with Rabensburg, she quickly responded that she could not personally afford to pay for it. The budget for the show was not my personal money, however I do feel that there should be some type of middle ground for such an expense. I suppose I am curious as to what Rabensburg or a theatre company would do if they had this issue again. I was asked this question early in the tech rehearsal period: how do you get around that tattoo? Do you design around that actress or does the actress work with you? I feel that the artistic quality and aesthetic goal should not be altered to work around one individual, but I do believe if you know ahead of time, you should be made aware of the issue while design process. The problem is comparable to knowing that the actress has a certain hair color that might clash with a certain dress.
color. As a designer in this situation I would most likely design the dress the way I see fit to the script and wig the actor. Although some actors do not like wearing wigs, my hope would be that they would be open and very willing to help solve the problem.

Although Rabensburg’s attitude towards me wasn’t a big problem, she did complain to her fellow classmates that there was a chance that she could be paying for the makeup and that this was not fair to her. I imagine that in the professional world if it came down to Rabensburg and another actor with the same quality and talent the director would go with the other actor because it would be easier and cheaper to deal with (this excludes famous named actors, like Angelina Jolie). I can’t imagine that this was the first time Rabensburg has been faced with this issue and I imagine this won’t be the last.

Crew watch was scheduled for January 28th and Woods oriented the wardrobe crew to the Costume Studio and made aware their duties, including make-up application. Othello’s costume crew consisted of three undergraduate students. During the crew watch rehearsal I was able to finalize my run notes for the wardrobe crew as well as a preset list. By this point, we were a week out from first dress and I felt I was in a good position. I believed there was very little to worry about except for the small quick changes mentioned above. The wardrobe crew seemed well aware of the quick changes and felt that there would not be any issues.

The Thursday of tech week, February 3rd, I decided to include some costumes for the actors. I felt it was necessary to supply Desdemona’s clothing due to her unpinning scene as well as Vasquez’s costume to help with the timing of her quick change. I thought all the costumes except the pants and shirts could be supplied and
would be helpful for the actors to get accustomed to the movement. Some of the male actors were confused and dressed in their full costumes but I felt it was unnecessary to ask them to change. Thursday was the “Scarlet” cast day to perform. Scarlet cast consisted of Rabensburg as Desdemona and McClatchey as Iago. The cast would change over the run of the production every two days. The wardrobe crew was called for this day and Shiree Houf was in attendance to assist me if there were any problems. Woods was at Mount Hall Theatre for the first dress of A Midsummer Night’s Dream and Professor Kearney was in Chicago attending URTA auditions. The show ran smoothly and there were only small problems. Bomber’s costume notes were sparse and her one request was to have Roderigo’s sleeve puffs larger and tighter around his arm. I was not surprised about the request but a little taken back due to the fact that Woods, who was responsible for the alteration, had originally made the sleeves big and I felt Bomber would find the jacket too silly. The alteration was a relatively small one to fix and we were able to have it back into the next rehearsal, and Bomber loved it.

The first full dress rehearsal was held on Friday, February 4, 2011. Costume graduate students Kuhn and Bush were in attendance. Woods as well as Houf were at Mount Hall for the start of tech for A Midsummer…, Professor Kearney was still attending URTA. No issues arose at the top of show and the actors seemed very comfortable in their costumes. The second group to start dress rehearsal was the “Grey” cast, which consisted of Kobza as Desdemona, and Zook as Iago. Bomber had very few notes for the performance and the wardrobe crew completed the show successfully. The only concern to develop from this rehearsal was Vasquez’s inability to remove Kobza’s
corset in a timely manner. I could tell that Vasquez was having a problem unlacing the corset but felt it was necessary to allow her to finish and not stop the show. When Vasquez was off stage, she was very angry with the wardrobe crew, believing that the issue was their fault because they are the ones who laced Kobza in her corset. I quickly diffused the situation by telling her that it was my fault and that the problem would be solved by the next rehearsal. Vasquez was quick to apologize and calmed down. She was frustrated because she lost her lines due to becoming more concerned about the removal of the corset. Bomber was not at all upset and asked Vasquez to carry the emotion she was feeling towards the corset issues into all her performances. The corset concern was derived from knotting the corset lacing at the top of the grommets even though I had given strict directions not too. The problem was quickly resolved and Vasquez never experienced the issue again.

Bomber had mentioned earlier in the week that she would be using Saturday as a day to rehearse with the actors their lines and choreography and that she would not be using any of the technical elements of the show. She also discussed perhaps not using Monday as a dress but rather a line/movement day as well but would decide after Saturday’s rehearsal. I was working that Saturday with Nadine on building new sleeves for Kobza’s chemise, which had been torn out during the previous run due to being too tight, when Ellis came to me to talk about cancelling the tech portion of rehearsal on Monday. For me, I thought it was a perfect idea due to the fact that I had scheduled a last minute root canal procedure that I had to have that Monday. I felt we, the costume department, were in a good place and if everyone else felt the same I had no problem
with the cancellation. We made up for the missed tech on Monday by running both cast on Tuesday.

Aside from the makeup issue with Rabensburg mentioned above, preview was successful and well received. While the process for Othello had some challenges, it was one of the most smoothly completed productions I have worked on in the costume studio. Shoe challenges and time restraints on others in the studio caused some stressful issues but they were resolved reasonably well.
Chapter 5: An Evaluation of the Process

The process for choosing the director is unknown to me but the selection to go with Alison Bomber was wise and ultimately resulted in a great experience for me as well as everyone who worked on this production. *Othello* was a unique challenge for me because it required a tight and concise design that allowed the script to be the main focus. It was not the most complex design I have executed at The Ohio State University, but I believe it was my best work and showed a new growth in my design abilities, as well as a new approach to creative thinking. The production allowed me to explore a wide range of costume history while at the same time developing one cohesive idea. I was given the chance to experiment with the alteration of both men’s and women’s costumes and silhouettes. Another aspect of this production that was a welcome challenge for me was the use of color and texture, giving me the opportunity to use a wide range of shades limited to one monochromatic color scheme. This was the most rewarding aspect of the process due to the fact that it allowed me to be the most creative. This was the first Shakespearian piece that I have designed, so it was the perfect opportunity to design for a director that is directly linked to the renowned Royal Shakespeare Company. My previous designs included a new work *Destinopolis*, a classic *Summer and Smoke*, as well as a contemporary American piece *The Long Christmas Ride Home*. I felt that I was able
to push myself in a new range and accomplish all the goals I had set for myself when entering the MFA program two and one half years ago.

Overall I am completely satisfied with the costume design. I believe this is the first time that if given the chance, I would not go back and change a thing. The design was intended to be cohesive with each of the characters as well as the other design elements. The look was to project a non-period specific time period while at the same time flash a hint of the English Renaissance. I wanted the look to be fresh and not dated, so that the production would look ageless. I felt that the goal of this production was to present a piece to which all audience members could relate. The costumes played a big part in that because it had to be relatable. I used research from the 16th century, the late 19th century, the mid 1980’s, as well as today. I felt this production really allowed me to showcase my ability to think creatively and with the guidance and freedom from my director as well as my advisor and design team, I feel I accomplished this.

Besides my growth in my design abilities, I have also seen growth in my technical costume production abilities as well. Being able to drape and construct Desdemona’s, Bianca’s, and Emilia’s costumes was a big stride for me. After completing work on Aida, where I was assigned major draping and construction, I felt I had quite a bit more confidence to construct these costumes in a timely fashion. I believe Professor Kearney did an excellent job of allowing me to discover things on my own and to leave a lot of the decision making up to me. She has been excellent at guiding me and giving me advice, but I really appreciated how she completely stepped back and allowed me to fit my own garments and make specific tailoring choices. I have never been as satisfied with my
draping abilities as I was when I fit Desdemona’s mockup on Kobza and Rabensburg and nothing needed to be altered. The clothing fit perfectly. I was so proud of myself and that would not be possible without Professor Kearney giving me the chance to try.

I was very satisfied with the relationship and collaboration amongst the design team. I felt that scenic designer Divya Murthy, lighting designer Brain Elston, sound designer Jarod Wilson and I worked well together and were very supportive of each other’s ideas. I know that our director Alison Bomber was extremely satisfied with our group approach to production meetings and our unified ideas that we presented to her. This was my first experience working as the costume designer with both Murthy and Elston, and my first working with Wilson as a sound designer. The four of us managed to ‘click’ right away. There were very few challenges set up for me by the other designers and what small issues arose was addressed in the first two production meetings. I imagine if the experience I had working with the design team did not happen, the overall outcome of the costumes would had suffered.

There is very little I would change with the costume design. As mentioned above I feel this is the most successful and fulfilling design I have ever completed. I did learn a lot from this show however the most important thing I learned is to speak up and communicate better. I felt that my budget issues could have been resolved quicker and be less problematic if I would have addressed them with Woods right away and then gone through the proper channels to get the issue resolved within the week, not the month. By doing this, all the other challenges I had with makeup and boots would have been resolved without any stress. I feel I have grown in my communication efforts towards the
actors, and felt I gained their trust and respect. Having all the MFA actors (half of them of which I had never had a chance to work with prior to this experience) in one show can be a struggle because there are a lot of opinions expressed, but I felt that all of them were very professional and I would love to work with any of them again.

I feel this production allowed me to develop the ability and talent to go back into the professional, ‘real’ world with more confidence. The show allowed me to explore some interesting outlets and design ideas. *Othello* displayed a clean design that supported a complex idea in a simple format. I feel professional growth has been accomplished as well as some of my own personal goals. I was completely satisfied with the overall production and feel it was one of the theatre department’s more successful productions.
Bibliography


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<td>Mary Hill (Mrs. Mackwilliam), c. 1585-90. Oil on panel. Private Collection. The Historical Mode: Fashion and Art in the 1980’s. 52</td>
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<td>(From top left clockwise) Karl Lagerfield for Chanel. Evening Dress Fall-Winter Collection, 1988-89. Photograph courtesy Collezione, Zanfi Editor, S.r.1.52</td>
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<td>Jacob Backer. Regentesses of the Burgher Orphanages, Amsterdam, 1633-34. Oil on canvas. Historisch Museum, Amsterdam. 58</td>
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<td>Issey Miyake. Sweater Dress, Fall-Winter Collection, 1988-89. Photograph Mitsuma Fujitsuka. Courtesy the designer. 44</td>
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Isaac Oliver. Portrait of an Unknown Man, late 16th Century. Watercolor on vellum. Courtesy of Her Majesty the Queen.54

Mary Hill (Mrs. Mackwilliam), c. 1585-90. Oil on panel. Private Collection. 52

All Images Found in The Historical Mode: Fashion and Art in the 1980’s.
Production Photography Credits

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<td>Damian Bowerman</td>
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Appendix A: Directors Notes
Alison Bomber’s Notes on *Othello*  
(Transcribed Lesley Ferris and Dramaturge Chelsea Phillips)

Meeting with Alison Bomber: 20 August 2010, RSC, Stratford-upon-Avon

Present: Chelsea Phillips, Divya Murthy, Charlesanne Rabensburg, Aaron Zook, Jarod Wilson, Lesley Ferris

Focus on The Relationship

Beginning/opening: shocking

Sex noises from around the auditorium
Intertwined bodies—one black, one white—on the bed
Iago’s face appears in the mirror—looking

Scenic note: An image of Iago’s face appears/ structured face? Eavesdropping/hiding
place of Iago: (Doric) columns that appear to be solid—but are not solid

Neutrality and simplicity of the set

Audience: Feeling of discomfort, unpleasant, uncomfortable—the feeling grows organically

But is black and white too much of a binary?

Color palette: Set up a false binary of black and white, hard and soft in opposition to a gray, in-between place; this gray/ black and white is counterpoised with the burst of colorful language of the text; an ‘epilepsy’ of flashing lights—a strong motif

There are things we should know about the position of race, blackness in the Renaissance, particularly Venice

Perhaps instead of ‘race’ Othello is an ‘outsider’—How do you survive your sense of self as an outsider?

The ‘old saw’ binary---Othello’s text works on vowels/ Iago’s on consonants
Costume/Texture: a nod to the Renaissance body = women corseted in hard, containing armor vs. the soft flowing shift beneath

The Eloquence of the Renaissance body
Women wear underwear as outerwear
Male silhouette—‘nod’ to soldiers, Renaissance
Soldiers = the State (its power)
When Desdemona gets undressed so does Othello
Bianca: a painted lady

Billowing fabrics/sheets/ softness
Can the bed sheets become the sails of the ships? Can the hangings on the bed turn into sails? Billowy softness---

Handkerchief, pillows surrounding the bed---this softness in contrast to the hard, upright presence of the soldiers, swords

Sense of a storm, there is an actual storm to Cyprus; literal thundering that has a resonance with the text

Useful guidelines: Storm, voices, sounds, noise---

Music: “Willow, willow”---[only place governed by it?] ensemble to sing this, ensemble to make many of the sound effects live.

Recommend Carol Rutter’s Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare’s Stage (Routledge: 2001). Dr. Rutter is the Director of the CAPITAL Centre at Warwick University. [From CAPITAL Centre website: “The CAPITAL Centre was a partnership between the University of Warwick and the Royal Shakespeare Company established to use theatre performance skills and experience to enhance student learning and to draw on University research and resources to shape the development of the RSC acting companies.”]

At CAPITAL Centre website: view video entitled “Unpinning Desdemona” [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/capital/] The website also gives the titles of two essays connected to the video by Dr. Rutter and Denise Walens (recommended reading).

Issue of doubling with a 10 person ensemble:

The doubling is very useful---Bianca may double with Duke
Women can play male roles such as the Duke
Remember that Elizabeth I is on the throne: a woman
Other doubling will include three roles each assigned two actors:

Iago, Emilia and Desdemona—the actors will play these roles at alternate performances and when not playing these roles will be assigned additional roles in the ensemble.

Alison is doing her own cutting of the script to make it 90 minutes. It will play without an interval. She expects to get us this version of the script by the end of September. Costume notes arising…

Really have in mind a sort of embellished rehearsal clothes aesthetic… The monochrome remains useful I think, blacks, greys, creams, whites, neutrals

The “basic” man
Big shirt, britches, boots

The “basic” woman
Shift (with or without sleeves), corset, skirt(s)

All women will need a “basic” man, as well as a “basic” woman, for doubling. So the clear delineation of female shape, vs. broad-shouldered male shape is important.

Brabantio, Duke and Senators need full length cape/gown (with or without sleeves)

Soldiers (Othello, Iago, Cassio, Montano and Cyprus soldiers) need doublets/jerkins (with/without sleeves – detachable?), optional to open front and sword + knife belts

Cloaks/shawls for pretty much everybody for storm scene

Roderigo: Something to mark him as half-flash, half-foolish

Cassio: Ladies’ man, but definitely a soldier

Iago: Chameleon, my favorite for detachable sleeves if possible

Othello: Maybe also detachable sleeves; and will also need some sort of dressing-gown, again sleeveless over shirt-sleeves would be fine

Desdemona: needs simple shift, could be sleeveless, vulnerability once corset and skirts removed in bedchamber

Emilia: slightly higher neckline above corset, and sleeves on shift/shirt preferable

Bianca: sexy version of neckline above corset, skirts maybe looped up
Duke: will need some sort of ornate clasp to differentiate from other senators

Duke and Senators: headgear? - as they’ll all be doubling from another role

Brabantio: Gown hastily cast on over shirt-sleeves, maybe some ageing?
Appendix B: Tables
Othello

Costume Plot

TABLE ONE

Othello
William Shakespeare
Setting: Venice/Cyprus
The Ohio State University
Date: September 9, 2010
Director: Alison Bomber
Cat Schmeal-Swope

A. PRINCIPAL MEN:


B. SECONDARY MEN:

8. Montano (Zook): Military Jacket, Cape (share w/McClatchey)
9. Lodovico (Kobza): Black Pants, White Shirt, Black Boots, Tan Robe with fur (share w/Rabensburg), hat, socks, undershirt

C. SUPERNUMERARY MEN:

12. Gentlemen I: Jacket
14. Senator: Black Pants, White Shirt, Black Boots, Tan Robe w/fur, hat, socks, undershirt

(CONTINUED)
TABEL ONE (CONTINUED)

D. PRINCIPAL WOMEN:

17. Emilia: Corset, Shirt, Skirt, Shoes, Shawl, Tights
Budget Specification for *Othello*:

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Approximated Expenditures: $3425

Actual Expenditures: 3096.67

Budget: $3500
### Cast List (Draft 1)

**TABLE 3**

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Appendix C: Figures
FIGURE 1: DESDEMONA RESEARCH IMAGES
FIGURE 2: COLOR RESEARCH AS WELL AS INSPIRATION FOR BIANCA’S SKIRT
The research above is modern (late 1980's) fashion that is inspired by period paintings. I would like to look at modern clothing and modify them to reflect some qualities of English Renaissance.
FIGURE 5: RESEARCH IMAGE FOR FEMALE STYLE

FIGURE 6: RESEARCH IMAGES FOR FEMALE STYLE
FIGURE 7: RESEARCH FOR MILITARY

FIGURE 8: RESEARCH FOR MILITARY
FIGURE 11: PRELIMINARY SKETCH FOR OTHELLO
FIGURE 12: PRELIMINARY SKETCH FOR IAGO
FIGURE 13: PRELIMINARY SKETCH FOR DESDEMONA

73
FIGURE 14: PRELIMINARY SKETCH FOR BIANCA

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FIGURE 15: PRELIMINARY SKETCH FOR GENTLEMEN
Appendix D: Plates
PLATE 1: RENDERING FOR OTHELLO

77
PLATE 2: RENDERING FOR IAGO
PLATE 3: RENDERING FOR CASSIO

The Ohio State University
Winter 2011

Cassio
Othello
PLATE 4: RENDERING FOR DESDEMONA
80
PLATE 5: RENDERING FOR BIANCA
81
PLATE 6: RENDERING FOR EMILIA
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