The Use of Modern Film to Examine Iago in Shakespeare’s Othello.

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For William and Noah.

"I thought [Shakespeare] wrote movies?" (Q 47:17).
Abstract

Using modern film to study Shakespeare’s text is more effective when combined with performance theory criticism. Within the classroom, students should be allowed to compare the various actors’ performance interpretation of a character to the text. The viewing of the key scenes of modern film versions can assist the students in creating their own understanding of Shakespeare’s *Othello* and the character Iago. The Introduction presents a brief overview of performance theory and the methods for performance criticism. The Introduction will also provide background from scholars who have found film in the classroom successful. Within Chapter One, I have concluded that two modern film versions are required for this theory. One version is a replication of the script in its textual setting and poetic dialogue. The second version is an adaptation of the text into students’ current language, setting, and attire. I argue that my chosen films of Oliver Parker’s *Othello* (1995) and Tim Blake Nelson’s *O* (2001) provide different interpretations of Iago and grasp students’ attention with recognizable characters. In Chapter Two, I conclude that the selection of the key scenes from films is not always the key scenes in the text. I have conducted this research through performance criticism of the soliloquies of Kenneth Branagh’s Iago as well as Josh Hartnett and his body language. The students’ performance criticism of these two actors can lead to contrasting interpretations of Iago, other characters, and the text. The process of using a combination of performance theory criticism and modern films can assist the students in determining their own understanding of Shakespeare’s text. This argument is significant because it presents a new interpretation method to students examining Iago and the *Othello* text.
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Introduction

Without the assistance of film, it would be impossible for college students to have the opportunity to view multiple performances of Shakespearean plays during a semester. The amount of class time available for road trips to the theatre is limited, as well as the selection of Shakespearean films being performed during the same timeline of the semester. Therefore, the viewing of modern Shakespearean films in the classroom may act as a substitute for the lack of available time to visit the theatre. However, there are potential harmful elements in viewing Shakespeare on film as most film adaptations contain only twenty-five to thirty percent of the original text (Jackson 17). But when these versions are viewed as interpretations, the lack of core text may not harm students’ understanding of the play.

By comparing the various actors’ performance interpretations of a character to the text, a professor should be able to choose the ideal modern film versions, consisting of modern settings and dialogue, and substitute a trip to the theater for this classroom film viewing. Thus, using modern film will assist in providing a visual stimulant to the students for the text when the theatre is not available. The use of multiple modern films, examining such items as the same character or scenes in the text, will provide the students with various interpretations that may assist in an understanding of the text. The Introduction of this thesis includes a brief definition of performance theory to be followed by an argument for the use of Shakespearean film in the classroom and past scholarship. The following chapters will examine the selection process of determining the valid films on Shakespeare’s Othello for classroom viewing, as well as how to choose keys scenes from these films when focusing on the performance interpretations of various actors of the same textual character, such as Iago. This argument is significant in that it presents a new interpretation method to students of the Othello text.
The first question that may arise is why use film at all? If confused, a student cannot go back and “reread [film] as [they] can a book” (Reynolds 201). Peter Reynolds, author of “Unlocking the Box: Shakespeare of Film and Video,” spearheads the question by explaining that if film is watched critically, movies can assist in stimulating classroom conversation (189-190). Therefore, when attempting to guide students to an understanding of Shakespeare, a professor should bring enthusiasm into the classroom through the viewing of modern movies. The students should view the film from a performance criticism stance, in that the students are evaluating their own interpretation of the text in relation to the actors’ portrayal on film. This increased analysis of the text in comparison to a film that includes modern actors, themes, settings, and dialogue will assist in a student’s ability to understand the text. In attempting to grasp an understanding of the text from multiple performances, it is a necessity to compare and view multiple modern films, scenes, and character interpretations. One film should be a retelling of the text, a viewing of the play that attempts to replicate the stage performance. Then the second film should be a remake or adaptation of the text into current settings and dialogue.

This assessment will narrow its focus to Shakespeare’s Othello, particularly with the character image that film creates of Iago. Othello is an ideal play for this research as several modern movies project conflicting interpretations of Iago. The films allow for students to critically compare their interpretation of Iago to the performance interpretation of the various acting techniques chosen to represent Iago. The movie selections are Oliver Parker’s Othello (1995) and Tim Blake Nelson’s O (2001). Both contemporary movies have been chosen based on their casting, dialogue, and comparison images to the text. As to be discussed in Chapter One, Parker’s Othello will serve as a stage replication film that is closer to the text through setting and dialogue. In comparison, O will present the text in a modern setting with
Shakespeare’s text translated into modern dialogue. Through performance theory as a methodology to compare critically the text to the actors’ interpretations, I will explain what strengths and weaknesses Kenneth Branagh and Josh Hartnett, as Iago, bring to the text that a student may not envision. To follow in Chapter Two will be such examples as Branagh’s ability in Othello to make eye contact with the audience during his soliloquies and various scenes in O, where Hartnett, someone close to the same age as the students, presents a more believable threat to Othello’s future. If viewed apart, these two movies can create one-dimensional images of Iago’s character. But when key scenes from each movie are observed together in the classroom, students are able to gain an all-encompassing view of Iago’s character traits. Therefore, when choosing a modern film version, it is possible that the more effective films are those in which the actor fully grasps the attention of the students.

The use of performance theory as a methodology for examining modern film is important because it helps readers see that Shakespearean texts, like Othello, are “no longer simply a literary artifact, [but a] performance text” (Bulman 1). However, performances show textual interpretations through the vision of stage directors and actors. These visions may ineffectively and inaccurately translate the text as theatre and film “today produce a range of ‘Shakespeares’” (Worthen 12).

It is possible that many students will have different opinions of the character traits of Iago from reading the text. Thus, the students themselves are producing a range of Iagos. The students should be allowed to criticize the performance interpretation of the portrayal of Iago. Are the interpretations harming the script as a range of Iagos is presented? These interpretations lead to the professor picking the modern film interpretations within Othello that will help the
student to understand the text and classroom teachings of the semester instead of confusing them more with an extreme comparison of a range of Iagos.

To grasp the argument for film in the classroom, readers should have an understanding of performance theory. This school of interpretation examines the methods and interpretations of the actors, directors, and the viewers of the performance. In The Roots of Theatre: Rethinking Ritual and Other Theories of Origin, Eli Rozik details how this methodology looks at “performance [as] an activity done by an individual or group in the presence of and for another individual or group” (166). Richard Schechner, a professor at NYU who is one of the leaders and founders of performance studies, explains that “to perform is to put on a show, a play, a dance, a concert” (22). Schechner’s work with performance criticism in art and theatre can be broken down into two senses. The first is the “execution of a work of art,” such as a script (Rozik 167). The second sense is the method of “doing something by means of verbal or nonverbal acts,” similar to the actor’s actions on stage through interpretation (167). These are the methods that students should use in criticizing the performance interpretation of the actors on film.

In Rozik’s interpretation of the first sense of performance criticism, the execution of a script represents the basic guidelines that a writer provides the actors in order to perform on stage. This sense of execution gives the actor a purpose to perform. In completing the script on stage, the actor has successfully performed for the viewers. Schechner sets up the script as the “interior map of a particular production” (Rozik 176). The script, or the text of Othello, is thus the map or blueprint of the theater’s stage that is leading actors to certain specific actions and dialogue. In Rozik’s discussion of the second sense, the means of interpretation represents the actor’s emotion towards the script. This is the way that an actor interprets the script. Is the
character emotional, if so, how? While the director of a play may give some guidance to the actor on stage performance, it is the actor who determines the emotional and energetic interpretive performance of the script. The actor uses the script as a map about stage. But then, the actor must determine the extreme measures to which the dialogue and gestures are to be performed (168). These acting traits will be examined in Chapter Two with the performance interpretations by Branagh and Hartnett.

Using performance theory as a methodology for teaching Shakespearean films can assist the professor in effectively teaching multiple interpretations of the text. However, “Shakespeare wrote playscripts whose potentials are best realized in performance” (Bulman 1). Therefore, without the ability to visit a playhouse every week to view the most recent play discussed in the classroom, bringing the stage to the students is a method to experience the performance. As W. B. Worthen, in “Staging Shakespeare: Acting, Authority, and the Rhetoric of Performance,” points out that “the function of ‘Shakespeare’ in performance criticism points to what we are doing when we read performance, and so in a sense to what we think Shakespearean performance is and does” (13). Thus, performance criticism of Shakespeare may consist of two versions of performance: “Academic writing about text and performance, and actors’ accounts of their work in transforming the text into meaningful behavior” (13). In choosing the modern film versions of Iago, the students are given a visual stimulant of the actor’s criticism of the actor’s interpretation of the character similar to what may be shown in the theatre. This visual stimulant assists in bringing the characters out of the text and into the theatre.

As the film performance takes place in the classroom, it could then be argued that the professors may be bringing the theatre to students. Rozik presents that “what makes a place a theatre is thus the ‘performance’ that takes place within it” (179). Worthen says that the
“modern stage becomes a site of interpretation, rather than a place of production, a place where ‘meanings’ are found rather than made” (16). Thus, viewing modern film in the classroom is a group engagement involving discussion of the actors’ interpretations of characters.

However, there are varying opinions on the effectiveness of using film in the classroom to assist in teaching a text. One critic who may be in opposition to using the film medium is Michele Willems. In “Video and its Paradoxes,” Willems voices an opinion against using film as a teaching aid in the classroom. Willems argues that Shakespearean film may “nurture a multitude of theoretical confusions affecting teaching as well as research” (36). To address this argument, in my first chapter is a list of guidelines that will assist in selecting modern films. This list will give more detail in how the professor should continue to guide the class through the text and modern film interpretations in order to prevent confusion with the teaching of the text. Some students may misinterpret some aspects of the text and film. But some students already misinterpret the text from just reading in general and without having a film to compare or assist. Some of Shakespeare’s texts are complicated and can be misinterpreted on their own.

Throughout this introduction, I will bring forth several critics, such as Samuel Crowl and James Hirsh, who have studied the use of film in the classroom as a breakthrough. When film is used as a method for experiencing various interpretations of the text, film may assist students in visualizing and understanding complex items in Shakespeare’s text.

Over time, Shakespeare’s plays have been “restaged, adapted, changed, and revived at every period of English and American history” (Riggio 3). Thus, the use of film as a teaching aid in the classroom may be looked down upon as a method for moving farther away from the text. But it is important to note that “Shakespeare designed those playscripts for players, playgoers, and playhouses that no longer exist” (Dessen 63). In order to assist today’s students
with their own understanding of the text, professors need to look to modern films. These screen adaptations of the text assist students in being able to imagine the attire, language, and life of Shakespeare’s characters as if they themselves were in the Elizabethan audience. Therefore, film continues to act as a visual aid to the students’ interpretations of the text.

Using film in the classroom is not a new concept. The use of film as a teaching method “has become the means by which most academics and students study a Shakespeare play” (Willems 35). Alan Dessen, in “Shakespeare’s Theatrical Vocabulary and Today’s Classroom,” argues that “Shakespeare was crafting not literary texts (to be read and interpreted by readers) but theatrical scripts (to be bodied forth by actor-colleagues, with whom he was in close contact, and then interpreted by playgoers)” (63). To actors, the text is a script to perform that will allow the audience to analyze the performance based on the interpretation of the actors.

In “Original Staging and the Shakespeare Classroom,” Ralph Alan Cohen speaks to how various techniques of performance interpretation, such as taking students to plays and watching videos, “have worked well to increase [his] students’ investment in the plays, to raise their awareness of the collaborative and material nature of theatre, to remind them of the infinity of possibilities for the text and of the importance of every directional choice, and generally to give them greater access to the works” (78). While Cohen supports and has successfully used theatre and film in the classroom, Cohen’s attempts to keep his students focused on the text. By using film in the classroom, Cohen’s students are able to gain access to confusing texts by viewing the actors’ interpretations. Cohen points out that “helping [his] students experience [the text through film and theatre] does not harm” the method of teaching the text (78). Cohen’s goal in using film to teach is a “clearer understanding not only of Shakespeare’s stagecraft but also of his word craft” (79). While the text may act as a script and stage directions for the actors, Cohen argues
that students should still read the text for its literary value in the canon. Students need to continue to focus on the “word craft,” the text, to be able to criticize the actors’ performance interpretation.

While Cohen speaks to the recognition of Shakespeare’s textual masterpiece that is transformed into film, James Hirsh, in “Picturing Shakespeare: Using Film in the Classroom to Turn Text into Theater,” chooses to analyze the differences in film and text. Hirsh’s theory is that film can assist students in understanding complex items within a text. This complements my argument that the film should in no way be a substitute for the text but merely an avenue to assist in understanding. Hirsh believes that when a professor views a film in the classroom, the process may assist in bringing forth an “array of differences among reading, playgoing, and filmgoing, and thereby help students better understand each of the media through which they might experience drama” (140). As I will discuss later with the various interpretations of Iago, the actor in each medium can present a different character interpretation, or range of Iagos.

Hirsh believes that his students have experienced excitement and knowledge in each of the three media forms (text, film, and theatre). First, Hirsh argues that a student reading the play “must exercise [his or her] imagination to turn those words into characters and actions” (140-41). The characters’ actions, appearance, fear, and heroism are only limited to the imagination and interpretation of what students’ can create in their minds. Second, Hirsh argues that reading the text presents freedom, similar to video, as students can “pause at any time to consider the implications of a passage [. . . . and] even go back and reread an earlier passage” (141). It would be highly discouraged to interrupt a live performance in the theatre to ask the actors to re-act a certain scene or go back and explain their actions (141). On the other hand, Hirsh points out that a “film lacks the spontaneity and the potential for interaction between actors and playgoers at a
live production” (141). But the professor must deal with the options at hand. The substitution of video for theatre is better than no medium outside of the text at all.

The idea that Hirsh returns to is that the text has many advantages as it is the source of the other two mediums. Each reading, theatrical, and film experience is different. But Hirsh has noticed that in his studies, “students who do not participate regularly in class discussions do participate actively in discussions after a film showing” (144). Film is yet another door to reach these students that may be struggling to understand the text.

One of the most notable names in Shakespeare on film, Samuel Crowl of Ohio University, focuses mainly on comparing film to theatre and text. Crowl has assisted academia in overcoming teaching assumptions such as film is at best entertaining and at worst potentially harmful (Reynolds 189-190). Crowl’s argument is based on the “art of observation” in viewing and responding to modern film and stage productions (Shakespeare Observed 18). Similar to Hirsh, Crowl argues that “students [respond] enthusiastically” and are more “eager to talk” after the viewing of a performance (3).

Crowl is forward in standing up for Shakespeare on film. Crowl argues for film as a medium that helps students understand and present a visual interpretation:

Many of the available films [are] far superior to their reputations, often established through dismissive reviews by academic Shakespeareans unknowledgeable about film and unwilling to concede that a performance could ever match or even approximate the vision of the play they carried fixed in their imaginations. (3)

Crowl is quick to dismiss the Shakespeare scholars who are not open-minded to enhancing and assisting students in the understanding of the text through film. Sometimes students need film to
aid in interpreting Shakespeare's text. By showing a film in the classroom, Croll is an example of a professor who is behind giving students the “opportunity to experience Shakespeare in one [of the three] mode[s] of performance” (3).

With the availability of so many Shakespearean films on DVD, video is “far and away the medium of choice at present for bringing Shakespeare performances into the classroom” (Walton 321). After all, W. G. Walton Jr., author of “Bringing Performances into Classrooms through Multiple Media,” points out that “for most students, renting a video is a more familiar activity than checking a book out of the library; for instructors and libraries, purchasing a video is as cheap as buying a hardback book” (321-22). In addition, students have the ability to “pause to check the text, or rewind and replay an important or confusing scene, without being subject to an instructor’s agenda” (339). Film is not taking the place of the text but merely acting as a performance medium in assisting as a visual interpretation of the text.
Chapter One

Defining the Shakespearean Modern Film Version of *Othello*

When looking for a better way to help students understand Shakespeare, it is possible that professors are not taking full advantage of the video medium. Film can assist in presenting the breakthrough image that a student may not be able to interpret from reading the text. Therefore, in order to truly represent the text and provide various interpretations of the text, a professor should show and compare two films.

These two films should be a modern version, as in a film to which students will relate with current actors from the last decade or two, as well as a dramatic visually stimulating setting and attire. W. G. Walton, Jr. realized this need for modern film in his classroom, not only to relate to current trends, but also to keep the students entertained: “Even when [students] cannot articulate their preferences, my students typically prefer productions that rely heavily on visual and musical images to augment or replace verbal ones [. . . .] In other words, they prefer the films of Zeffirelli and Branagh to those of Orson Welles and Grigori Kozintsev” (323). The argument is not that older films are ineffective, but that the goal should be to find a connection with the student’s current culture trends.

At times, a professor may be lucky to find a modern film that has current actors interpreting the text of Shakespeare. In the case that modern film versions are not available, the professor must rely on the black-and-white film versions. Thus as many professors choose to use the black-and-white 1952 version of Orson Welles’ *Othello*, I argue that the students’ attention can be grasped by the 1995 film version of Oliver Parker’s *Othello*. The colorful images of the
past and the familiarity with the actors and their ability to play up the roles in order to entertain may enhance the students’ interpretation and understanding of the text.

Obviously there is not enough time in a semester to show two modern films of each play discussed in their entirety. Therefore, the professor should pull out the key scenes of the text and view the modern film versions as a comparison. The performance criticism of an actor’s interpretation of the text will assist in the determining factors of a modern Shakespearean film version that enhances the students’ understanding of the text. But before a professor can start pulling out key scenes from the text, the professor should choose which two films to view in the classroom.

When looking for two modern films, does it matter which films they are, or can the films just be from the last decade or so? There is a guideline to using two modern films in the classroom. One film must be a retelling of the text, a viewing of the play that attempts to replicate the stage performance. This type of film is what I call a replication film version. These are the types of films that attempt to bring the theatre performance to video. The replication film has its setting and time period as a mirror image of the text. The actors attempt to dress in accordance to what the actors would have worn during a stage performance of the play in Shakespeare’s era. The characters also speak their lines from Shakespeare’s script. An example of this type of film is Parker’s Othello.

For the purpose of setting these guidelines in using Othello as the choice of example text, I argue that Parker’s Othello is ideal for a teaching of the text to students in today’s culture. Parker’s version fits the guideline of a replication film. Ideally, once a decade, another Othello replication film would be made. If not, then this enters the area where professors must look back
to which replication film would best assists students’ interpretation of the text, Parker’s or Welles’ Othello.

The biggest component to the success of a replication film is the actors that will be providing the textual interpretation. In Parker’s Othello, with Othello being played by Laurence Fishburne, there is a possible connection to be made by the students. Many of the students may have seen Fishburne in his role as Morpheus in the Matrix trilogy movies. This could be an instant recognition factor for students. Students may push aside all distractions and focus on the pop culture actor. While some professors may feel that this recognition of another film may harm students’ understanding, I completely disagree. Even though the students could laugh at Morpheus playing Othello, there is subconsciously a new connection. This connection may encourage the students to re-examine the text or even pay better attention to other texts. It could even spark interest for the students to see other Shakespearean films.

This point of recognizable actors has been studied by Harry Keyishian, author of “Shakespeare and Movie Genre: The Case of Hamlet,” who examined the impact on his students when they saw Mel Gibson playing Hamlet in Franco Zefferelli’s 1990 replication version of Hamlet. To many students, Mel Gibson may be viewed as Riggs from Lethal Weapon, the perfect suicidal character to play Hamlet. Keyishian notes that Zefferelli was searching the genres of similar movies and saw Mel Gibson as the ideal revengeful Hamlet that lived in movies like Lethal Weapon and Mad Max (77). Thus, Keyishian argues that this interpretation of Hamlet by Gibson assisted the students in viewing Hamlet as a “revenge tragedy” (77). The director’s proper casting of a actor, that will use imaginative ways to interpret the text to film, will help professors determine which films have literary merit for classroom viewing (Limbacher 87).
Once a professor finds a modern film that embodies these types of actors, the task is to go through the film and find various interpretations of the text. In Chapter Two, I will spend more time dissecting the characters in Parker’s Othello by focusing on the acting and casting of Kenneth Branagh as Iago. Similar to Gibson fitting the role of Hamlet, Branagh is one of the better actor representatives for Shakespeare on replication film in the case of Iago.

As mentioned in the Introduction, these replication film versions may limit the amount of text that is spoken in the film. Russell Jackson, editor of The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film, notes that due to time constraints in filming, “the most obvious difference between a screenplay and the text of an Elizabethan play is the number of spoken words. In writing for the mainstream cinema it is axiomatic that dialogue should be kept to a minimum” (16). One example of reduced dialogue is the changing of scenes in films. As the text may sometimes note at the beginning of each act that time has shifted, a director may find it necessary to fast forward time in a film in order to make the film more compressed. If a director needs to have time pass in a matter of days, months, or even years, the director may use a series of images to compress time into seconds through a montage (19). Therefore, the compression of some timeline items is what leads to the omission of some scenes and lines of the text.

As some students may look to film to assist interpreting the text, it is important to encourage the use of these replication films where the dialogue is attempting to verbalize most of the text. I argue this point in support of Dennis Kennedy, author of “Shakespeare without his Language,” who argues that today’s student culture dialogue is changing the language of the classroom so that being able to understand Shakespeare’s script could become a skilled trait:

In English the language will always be important to our appreciation, yet our ability to reach the plays directly in their original language lessens year by year. Our own
English continues to change, and eventually only specialists will be able to read the
texts, much less listen to them comfortably in the theatre. This may well happen
within the next fifty years. In fact, some of us teaching Shakespeare believe that it is
happening now, at an accelerated pace. (146)

It is possible that the use of modern actors using dialogue from the text in cooperation with their
actions throughout the film may assist students in an interpretation of the language. Thus, the
use of the next type of modern film version that I will discuss, adaptation, can only attempt to
strengthen students’ interpretation through the actions of the text staying similar to the theme of
the script. However, Shakespeare’s language is turned into modern dialogue. It is possible that
students could match up the modern dialogue in the adaptation films to understand better the
original text.

The second modern film version, which I am calling an adaptation, should be a remake of
the text into current settings and dialogue. The setting of this film is usually more present day in
terms of students’ trends. The setting of the film is usually no more than a decade or two before
the time that the students are viewing the film in the classroom. The actors’ attire is modern
culture, for example, jeans, t-shirts, 1990’s clothing, etc. The characters usually speak in current
non-poetic form with today’s language. However, at times the characters may quote a line
exactly from the text. There are some film adaptations that keep the dialogues in the poetic form
of Shakespeare’s script, but images, setting, and attire continue to be modern (to be discussed
later in Sarah Lorenz’s study on Romeo + Juliet).

Adaptation films may provide the students with an image of a character to whom they
may relate. With the use of the actors wearing items such as the current style of clothing, attire
that is in style today and out of style next month, clothing may assist the students in seeing that
the characters of the text are just like them, just in a different time period. These types of familiar images also assist in the interpretation with setting that is usually someplace more realistic to the students, a setting of a location known to the students, whether a real city in the United States or even a local high school setting. Language is also a key aid in using these adaptation films as a source of varying interpretations of the text. Many of these films use today’s pop culture dialogue and attempt to plug in pieces of the text as reference. For example, Gil Junger’s 1999 film 10 Things I Hate About You is an adaptation of Shakespeare’s The Taming of the Shrew. While this film uses today’s current language, at one point, an actor playing the role of Lucentio who is infatuated with Kate speaks the line, “I burn, I pine, I perish” (Shr. 1.1.149). The actor could have easily said something clever with a 1990s pop culture reference, but he didn’t. The actor uses the line from the text that corresponds to the situation. The use of this line from the text in its poetic form may assist the students in interpreting the text. The images and situation that the actor is involved in during the film corresponds to the text and the need to speak the character’s feelings. The best measurement of these feelings is interpreted by the language from the text. A professor should point out these interpretations of the film in correspondence to the script in order to assist in the students’ interpretation and understanding of the text.

Adaptation films may present a link from the text to the love and friendship issues with today’s students. In many of the films, the directors have taken the issues surrounding today’s students and connected them to events in the text. Thus, the selection of Tim Blake Nelson’s 2001 film O is the ideal adaptation movie when used to compare interpretations of Othello. With O, the setting is sometime in the early twenty-first century at a private high school in South Carolina. All students dress in today’s fashion, as in jeans, polo shirts, and private school
uniforms. The language is drawn from pop culture as the actors use profanity and slang to express their feelings instead of the poetic dialogue from the text. The key piece to this interpretation is the connection of the film’s dilemma in comparison to the text and the students’ world of today. As Othello deals with rank within the military and the possible love affair that creates jealousy in a marriage, O recreates these troubles in relation to today’s students and their troubles with love and sports. O compares the playing time associated in high school basketball to the military ranks of the text. O presents the troubles that students may face when the question of a cheating girlfriend is brought into their young high school life. O has found a formula for turning today’s issues into an interpretation that the students may connect to the text.

As with Parker’s film, the adaptation version O also uses the key element of recognizable characters. First, there is Mekhi Phifer who plays Othello. Students may recognize Phifer from various teenage drama films and the television show “E.R.” The second recognizable character is Julia Stiles. Stiles has also been seen in several teenage drama films and most notably in the film mentioned earlier, 10 Things I Hate About You, in which Stiles played Kate. The casting of actors close to the same age of the students may assist in providing a believable interpretation of the dilemma facing the characters in the text. For example, a director cannot make an adaptation film about the troubles of high school love without casting actors who appear to be in the high school age group. Another method of the director attempting to connect to the students is the process of shortening or reworking the textual character names into modern names. In O, Othello is shortened to O, and Desdemona is shortened to Desi. The star character of Iago, played by Josh Hartnett, is changed to Hugo. In the next chapter, I will spend more time exploring how the acting of Hartnett creates the high school version of an evil, backstabbing friend in Iago.
Since professors may not have sufficient time to show an entire film in class for each play, it is important to pick a film and find key scenes to view. A professor should attempt to choose two modern films: one is a replication version and the other is an adaptation film. Both films should use current recognizable actors in the key roles. These previously mentioned guidelines will assist in picking the more effective two films to view within the limited time available in the classroom. While most film versions will be problematic based on their interpretations of the text, I have chosen these two films, Parker’s *Othello* and Nelson’s *O*, based on the key scene selection to be discussed in Chapter Two. I have yet to find another critic who is using my formula for choosing films. Several critics have mentioned using variations of this formula. However, I have not yet found a variation that uses the play *Othello* as an example.

Sarah Lorenz, author of “Romeo and Juliet: The Movie,” is another critic who has studied the approach to using modern film in the classroom. Lorenz’s research into *Romeo + Juliet* is what provided the inspiration for me to use modern film adaptations reflecting current pop culture trends. Lorenz paired Shakespeare’s text, *The Most Excellent and Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet*, with the 1996 modern film adaptation version by Baz Luhrmann entitled *Romeo + Juliet*. Lorenz’s belief is that professors should “let [students] have their version, with their [movie] stars” (50). Lorenz argues that students are more able to understand through a connection to modern surroundings and actors (50). In her study, Lorenz speaks to the ability of students to connect to the image of love in the text and movie. At first, her students did not understand why a young boy and girl would kill themselves because they could not be together in love and marriage. Lorenz’s students also had a difficult time in understanding the battle between the two houses, the Montagues and the Capulets. But once Lorenz showed the entire modern film adaptation version in the classroom, students started to make connections
about the interpretation. Students seemed to be able to relate to modern actors Leonardo DiCaprio as Romeo and Clare Danes as Juliet. With the movie’s setting in Venice Beach, California, the same location of the classroom viewing the film, Lorenz was able to assist students in making the film and text connection. The gang lifestyle of Venice Beach led her students to an understanding of two houses at war in the play as well as why two lovers from “different gangs” would not be allowed to be together (50-51). Another interesting point for this adaptation film is that the dialogue was poetic verse and not modern dialogue. The director, Luhrmann, was able to keep the text’s dialogue but create a modern interpretation of the script. However, when the text calls for a “sword” to be pulled for battle, in the film the actual image is that of a gun with the phrase “a sword” written on the barrel of the gun. This is an example of how Luhrmann has changed the images of the text. These are the types of adaptation changes from the text that may assist students in creating their own interpretations by comparing a modern visual image to that which the text attempts to represent.

The downfalls for Lorenz are time spent on one film and comparison to other films. It appears that Lorenz spent a lot of time showing the entire film, which would take away class time from teaching another play. Lorenz should have picked out key scenes to relate to the text. For example, “the sword” as a gun scene would be a key scene to view as an interpretation for the class. The other problem is that of a comparison to a replication film. Lorenz claims that the students now have a better understanding of the play and are able to listen to this adaptation film in the script’s voice. But the setting of the text has not been taken into consideration as the film takes place in California. I argue that it is necessary to view a replication film version to show how the text may be acted out on stage and possibly within the timeline the script calls for in the text.
Michael J. Collins, of Georgetown University, has become one of the leaders in the field of using Shakespeare on film in the classroom through his multiple articles and research including “Using Films to Teach Shakespeare.” Collins focuses mainly on textual analysis and the mechanics of speech, the focus on who the director was able to cast in the role of the defining characters (229). Collins is a firm believer that the “play comes to life on stage” (228). Thus, Collins takes the next step that has assisted in creating a new set of guidelines for using film in the classroom. Collins’ method centers on the selection of three to four films and an examination of various lines in the text and their interpretation in the film. Collins points out to his students that the director’s choices in interpreting these lines will have an effect on the audience’s understanding of the play (228).

While Collins’ research has assisted me in the creation of my guidelines, note that Collins is using three to four films. Going outside of the two modern films may be too much for students to handle at one time. There is a lot of information to compare, and a professor could lose some students in the film journey. Also, Collins is just pulling out key points in the text and comparing the director’s choice of action in film. By the use of performance criticism, the professor should allow the students to interpret the actor’s performance of the character. While the director may set the scene and provide guidance, the actors are the ones providing an interpretation of the text to be examined by the audience. It is also not necessary to compare each key scene from the text to film. I will discuss the selection of key scenes in more detail within Chapter Two.

The other piece that I find concerning about Collins’ methods is the use of modern films that are not related to the text. For example, Collins does speak at times about Othello. Collins compares Jack Nicholson’s portrayal as the Joker in the movie Batman to Iago (231). Students
may be able to make a visual image comparison because *Batman* is a popular film. It is possible that Collins is using the same method of finding recognizable actors as with the casting of Gibson to play Hamlet. But there is no need to show the *Batman* film in the classroom. Modern film adaptations should be limited to an interpretation of the text in a modern setting. Showing other films that have no basis of background on the text may confuse the students. Of the three to four films Collins uses, one is not a pop culture film adaptation in a modern setting. Using this type of film, as Lorenz studied with *Romeo + Juliet*, may make a better modern interpretation of characters than that of the Joker.

Mentioned in the Introduction as a supporter of film in the classroom, James Hirsh has a method to teaching with film as well:

I do not show a film until after we have discussed the play in some detail, and I ask students to pay particular attention to those ways in which the film differs from the play as they imagined it during the reading process and as we discussed it. (143)

The first part of Hirsh’s method is a little different. My argument focuses on viewing the key scenes on film as they are discussed in class. Professors should show the film while the scene and text are fresh in the students’ minds. Let them compare the interpretation of the text to the film immediately. Second, Hirsh is showing the entire film and not just the key scenes. Hirsh is asking the students to recall the entire play for an interpretation comparison to the movie all at one time. If the class spans over a week of reading, it may be hard for students to recall each detail of the play, and they may miss the key scene the professor wishes to compare.

Hirsh also says that “because of the time required to show a film and to compare it with a play in detail, I do not show more than one film per term” (144). My argument is the need to compare interpretations of each play to the two modern film versions of replication and
adaptation where available. If Hirsh did not spend time showing an entire film, perhaps he would have more time to show multiple films. In addition, there is no mention of Hirsh’s method of picking a film.

While I speak highly of the efforts of Crawl and his journey to support film in the classroom, I have been unable to discover and research the method that he uses in his classrooms. Crawl assists Shakespearean professors by providing ammunition for the justification of film in the classroom not only as a method to understanding Shakespeare’s text, but also as a method to introducing performance interpretation of the text and film/theatre. Crawl is looking to “build bridges between traditional criticism and the performance event whether on film or on stage” (Shakespeare Observed 9).

While I argue for the use of modern films in the classroom, it is good to remember that these modern films are easier to access than the black-and-white versions of the text. If a student wishes to see the entire film outside of the classroom, not just the key scenes, the modern films are available to buy or rent. Crawl even notes this argument by the use of an Othello example in which the black-and-white version by Welles is difficult to obtain compared to modern film: “Welles’s Othello [. . . . ] is his [Welles] most maddening work for scholars because it remains unavailable for public screening and has only recently been released on video” (54).

The use of modern film in the classroom is one method of assisting the students in finding their own interpretation of the text. It is important to remember that the play text is the script by which the actors in the films interpret their actions and character traits on stage. Alfred Hitchcock mentions that film “has seen stage directions in Shakespeare’s poetry” (Jackson 31). Therefore, a text continues to be the basis of modern films in providing a script and setting for the play.
In continuing to critique the performance interpretation of these actors, professors should provide two modern film versions to their students. The viewing of a replication film may assist students in the interpretation of setting, attire, and dialogue of the text as a theater presentation. The viewing of an adaptation film may assist students in the interpretation of the text in comparison to modern issues, settings, attire, and dialogue that may be current in the students’ culture. But what are the key scenes to view in the classroom? Are they the same key scenes that are mentioned in the text? In Chapter Two, I will discuss how to focus on one character in the selection of this character’s key scenes that present an aid to understanding the method of various interpretations of the Othello text.
Chapter Two

Focusing on Key Film Scenes Involving the Interpretation of Iago

Key scenes in the movies may not always be the same key scenes in the Shakespearean text. The key scenes in Oliver Parker’s Othello and Tim Blake Nelson’s O lead to another vision of interpretation of Iago. These interpretations may be used to find a different approach to examining the text. In this study on Othello, I have chosen to focus directly on the actors’ performance interpretations of Iago. By viewing multiple modern films, students will be able to see how the actors’ interpretations can create similar and different Iagos, or a range of Iagos. While this method can be done with any of the characters of Othello, I have singled out Iago for his complexity and the variations of performance interpretations from the two selected modern films.

The guidelines to finding the right key scenes to view in the classroom are based on viewer interpretation. The method that I have used for finding key scenes in the films involves a viewing of each modern film back to back. After reading the text, I recommend watching the replication modern film version first. After this viewing, attempt to then watch the adaptation version. What is it about the films that really stood out? What is it about the films that made a new interpretation of a character? Answers to these questions assist in finding the more effective modern film interpretations.

This is the process I used to focus on Othello. The emotion of feeling sorrow for Iago at times, as well as the vision of evil in Iago’s eyes, pushed me to focus just on this character’s performance. However, in the classroom, it may be necessary to focus on multiple characters or even just particular scenes. The focus can also be limited by the amount of time allotted to each
text in the semester. As I have taken an in depth look into Iago, another professor may do the same with Othello, or maybe Iago and Cassio’s relationship. It all depends on the focus for the class.

After deciding on the key scenes to view in the classroom, I argue that an effective approach is reviewing a particular scene or act from the text in the classroom, take a break, and show the two variations of modern film. First, show the replication film scene for a better grasp of the poetic dialogue recreated from the text. Then show the adaptation film scene as another interpretation. However, it may be necessary to find longer scenes in the film that will create a longer performance interpretation rather than jumping around the film for short five-second clips. Throughout this chapter, I will provide the approximate key scene film minute markers as well as the corresponding location of the interpretation in the text.

While focusing on a particular scene is an option for viewing the modern films, I prefer the use of performance interpretation in studying the relationship between the text and the actors who portray these characters on film. Many times, the actor will imbed himself with the character in that “the personality of the artist himself” becomes part of the text (Brode 12). In my study of Othello, I have noticed this with Iago. In Parker’s Othello, Kenneth Branagh is well versed, a “British-trained Shakespearean who makes films, [who has an] infatuation with popular film culture” (Crowl, “Flamboyant Realist” 224). Branagh’s interpretation of Iago can pull the audience into being on the same side as Iago because Branagh creates a likeable Iago for a period of time. A film that presents a friendly or sorrowful Iago may be problematic. These interpretations should be viewed as a whole throughout the key scenes in order to determine the appropriate direction for classroom discussion and viewing. Branagh shows the audience the evil inside Iago, the cunning ability to betray and be deceitful but still be the character that all in
the play trust and see as “most honest” (Oth. 2.3.7). Samuel Crowl has been so astonished at
Branagh’s Shakespearean film performance that Crowl wrote At the Shakespeare Cineplex: The
Kenneth Branagh Era on several of Branagh’s appearances. In Crowl’s chapter on Othello,
Crowl states that “many elements of the Branagh style and aesthetic can be seen at work in
Oliver Parker’s film of Othello (1995)” (At the Shakespeare Cineplex 91). With his energetic
and audience engaging roles in Shakespearean film, “Branagh [is] striving to reach the large
popular American film audience dominated by teenagers” (Crowl, “Flamboyant Realist” 223).
Branagh’s interpretation of Iago is a performance that may grasp the attention of students.
Branagh may not be a recognizable name to many of students, like Fishburne as Othello, but
Branagh’s performance and connection with the audience can grasp the attention of the viewers.

One small example of how connected Branagh is to his character and the audience can be
seen in the wink of an eye. Even though the wink may be something little, this gesture can pull
the audience into the performance. While not part of the text, in Parker’s Othello, Branagh as
Iago sneaks up behind Cassio in Act 1, Scene 2. This part of the text entails Iago and Cassio
meeting up with the recently married Othello. As Branagh walks up behind Cassio, the camera
pans right to show Iago standing behind Cassio with an evil stare. Then in a split second, Iago
grins and winks at Cassio causing Cassio to smile (Othello 7:10). This may seem meaningless,
but when watching the movie, it is something that stuck out. Crowl explains that such little
actions as this are an interpretation of “Branagh’s steely performance [that] is cold and
calculating, but [allows] us, with one searing gesture, to shudder at the repressed heat that burns
in Iago’s festering emotional interior” (At the Shakespeare Cineplex 103). This is an example
of performance interpretation. While the script/text did not call for a wink, Branagh’s character
interpretation may give a different vision into the textual character of Iago.
A different Iago, more evil, may be seen in the facial emotion presented by Josh Hartnett as Iago in O. The emotion that Hartnett displays provides a visual interpretation of Iago. Hartnett shows his character’s emotions on his face, whether they are sorrow, anger, fear, or joy. These images are not provided as stage directions in the text. Hartnett has taken it upon himself to develop the character into someone that wears his emotions.

With Hartnett as Iago, named Hugo in the film, the audience may feel sorry for Hugo at times. As the son of the coach of a high school basketball team that Hugo plays for, Hugo is picked on and dismissed by his father. Hugo has little connection with his father. Hugo is seeking the love of his father, which is given to someone else, Othello. A teenager searching for the love and recognition of his father may be seen as an emotional roller coaster. I argue that similar to Lorenz’s study on the inability to love outside of the gang in Romeo + Juliet, this lack of affection from a father figure may also touch the students’ understanding of this performance.

However, the evil that Hartnett possesses as Hugo makes the vision of Branagh’s evil Iago look tame. Hugo’s ability to find ways to manipulate, lie, and be deceitful in ways that today’s students can relate to may be more hurtful than that of Branagh’s Iago. For example, in trying to get ahead, Hugo is hooked on drugs and steroids (O 13:25). To some athletes, the use of steroids to excel in sports makes the character look like a cheater. This is Hartnett’s first move into deceit and may lead the viewers to dislike Hugo even after understanding the suffering Hugo encounters from the lack of a relationship with his father. Hugo is cheating himself and the game by using performance enhancers.

But just as Hugo presents an evil picture of himself to the audience, Hugo is the character that everyone in the film trusts. Even as the play presents “honest Iago,” someone who lacks an enemy, Hartnett’s representation may be evil but still convincible as honest to almost all other
characters in the film. Desdemona, renamed Desi in Othello, points this out in the film, noting that she doesn’t trust or like someone who has no enemies (Othello 14:50). This is a picture of film foreshadowing for what Hugo will do to ruin Desi’s life. Hartnett has done a good job creating the “honest Iago” appearance as the modern Hugo that has no enemies.

Thus, in preparing to pick out the key scenes that best represent the variations on performance interpretation by these two actors, I argue that each actor is going for a different vision of Iago. It is important to show both film versions in comparison with the text in order to allow the students to create their own interpretation of Iago. Branagh brings a likable, cunning, and sometimes evil Iago who strives for audience connection and approval. Hartnett presents a Hugo who is the face of evil in the teenage world. Hugo is an Iago that the other characters trust and at times the audience feels sorrow for.

The first key scene for Iago is his introduction to the audience. The recommended viewing in Parker’s version is from about the four-minute mark to the seven-minute mark. This recreation of Act 1, Scene 1 is the audience’s first experience with Branagh looking into the camera, making that first connection with the audience. There is no talking by Branagh to the audience. This acknowledgement is more of a welcome look, a look that the audience is aware that Branagh is aware we are all in the play together following Branagh along. The next connection by Branagh will be more personal and involve talking to the audience.

During the introduction to Iago, Branagh’s performance has a dramatic pause where the lines “I am not what I am” are stressed (Othello 1.1.65; Othello 4:40). This is a key scene focusing on an important element of the text. Branagh is letting the audience know that even though most will eventually see him as “honest Iago,” his character is not what it seems. Branagh stresses these lines by pausing in-between each word and pronouncing each syllable. It is important to
point items of this nature out to the students. These are the little key elements in the text that a student could miss.

Branagh’s first eye contact comes as Iago quotes the line, “Call up her father” (Oth. 1.1.68; Othello 5:00). As mentioned earlier, this piece introduces Branagh to the audience. It is just a glance to let everyone know that Branagh is aware of the audience. However, in reciting this part of the text, Branagh leaves out the six lines of text that follow. Does this omission of the text harm the interpretation? I argue that some lines being omitted may not harm the interpretation if carefully sculpted. But this would be a good conversation topic for the students. With several lines being left out of the text, did the students still follow Branagh’s interpretation? I conclude that Branagh’s performance and stress on the need to call Desdemona’s father are enough that the omitted lines may be understood.

It is important for the students to see Iago hiding in the background speaking for Roderigo during this three-minute piece of film (Oth. 1.1.86; Othello 5:53). This key scene is an interpretation of how Iago is the brains behind the entire operation. Branagh banters with Brabanzio, while Roderigo appears confused as to what is going on. The scene ends with Iago’s evil laugh and Iago giving Roderigo a high five (Othello 6:50). After Iago has completed the image of deceit in Brabanzio’s mind, Branagh quickly states, “Farewell, for I must leave you” (Oth. 1.1.145). Branagh then runs away, leaving the helpless and confused Roderigo to figure everything out. These first minutes of Parker’s Othello are key scenes as they show Branagh’s interpretation of the introduction of Iago. The scenes introduce the use of soliloquies and the process that Iago will continue to leave Roderigo helpless.

When it comes to presenting the same introduction to Iago in the adaptation version, the interpretation of Josh Hartnett as Hugo is more pitiful. As Q begins, the audience is shown a
vision of white doves and a voice-over by Hartnett. Hartnett paints the image of the motivation of his interpretation of Iago by saying, “All my life, I always wanted to fly – I know you are not supposed to be jealous of anything but . . .” (Q 1:20). This first introduction could be confusing for the students. Why does Hugo want to fly? What does this interpretation mean? This is another topic for classroom discussion. Is Hartnett’s desire to fly being compared to being able to dunk a basketball?

Hartnett is clear in the introduction and with his interpretation of Iago that Hugo is jealous of Othello and his abilities. As with the text, Hartnett lets the audience know right away of his jealousy for Othello. As the film moves out of the introduction in the first minute to the first scenes of a basketball game, the audience is shown how Hugo’s father continues to set up Hartnett as a decoy and second fiddle to Othello and Cassio. These scenes start to be found in the introduction of the text at Act 1, Scene 1. While the wording of the text has been changed in Q to current language, as in non-poetic dialogue, the purpose is still evident that Iago is jealous of Othello’s triumphs and the picking of Cassio as the lieutenant, the number two in command. The professor may decide to continue to present this lengthy introduction that shows Hugo’s misery and the choosing of Cassio as Othello’s number two most valuable player. Hugo is at first visually shocked, but then shows fake emotion as he pushes Cassio up out of his seat to accept the award. At this point in the film, the students may feel sad for Hugo. Just as some students may have felt in their lives at some point, Hugo is shunned and not appreciated. These feelings may make it a little easier to understand why Hugo attempts to destroy the joy in Othello and Cassio’s life. However, later in the film, a more evil Hugo will appear that disgusts the students.
As the film moves to the next key scene, images of Hugo whispering to Roderigo, who is in the film named Roger, start the beginning of Hugo’s plan to “break them [Othello and Desi] up” (7:20). Starting with the text at line 1.1.19, Hugo explains his hatred for Cassio. Hugo then moves things along to about line 1.1.75 where he is pushy, similar to Branagh speaking for Roderigo, in forcing Roger to make a phone call to Desi’s father. While the film does not show the entire phone call, it is understood what Hugo’s plans will be. However, with Branagh’s Iago, the students see Branagh speaking for Roderigo. But in O, the audience simply sees the pushing of Hugo to make Roger call Desi’s father on the phone. These are two different interpretations of the same scene. In order to show this more controlling side of Iago, the two films’ scenes should be shown together. The students may then see that Iago is interpreted by both actors as controlling in that Branagh speaks for Roderigo while Hartnett forces Roger to make the phone call. Both provide a vision that Iago is calculating and displays cunning intellect in his ability to direct Roderigo. The introductions present a Shakespearean Iago and modern Hugo that assist the students in creating their own interpretation of Iago from the text.

The next key scene that I argue presents an interpretation of Iago’s character traits from the text occurs at the end of Act 1, Scene 3. The text represents Iago putting a plan together for Roderigo to win Desdemona that leads to Iago’s first soliloquy. Both of my chosen modern film versions have different interpretations of this scene.

In the replication version, starting with lines 1.3.300 of the text, Branagh shows his ability to turn Iago into a likable character. Branagh creates an Iago who is friendly and relaxed in body stature. In this scene, when Roderigo arrives, Iago acts as a good friend and cheers him up by talk of “no drowning.” But the key to this scene is the image of Branagh over Roderigo’s right shoulder (Othello 20:17). The image is that of a voice speaking into the ear of Roderigo,
feeding Roderigo deceit and instructions of ways to carry out evil. Branagh’s interpretation presents Iago as a friend, yet also as an evil-minded character. Branagh adds a line at the end of his conversation that is not in the text. Branagh instructs Roderigo to have “no more of drowning” (22:12). The manner in which Branagh adds these words pulls the audience into the idea that Iago is being a friend to Roderigo while there is a hidden meaning. The rationale for Iago to keep Roderigo in check during this plan is the need for Roderigo’s money and treachery in order to have the plan work. This image of Iago is a good interpretation for students to understand the ending of the first act. The images show Iago as the downfall of things to come.

These events lead up to Iago’s first soliloquy at the end of the first act. Branagh starts the soliloquy by looking straight into the camera and saying, “Thus do I ever make my fool my purse” (Oth. 1.3.365; Othello 22:25). This quick change to connect with the audience is dramatic. Branagh pulls the audience into the film by interacting in a one-on-one conversation. I argue that this method, Branagh talking to the camera, is more effective than reading the text or having a voice-over during the movie. The look in Branagh’s eyes is of revenge and hatred. Branagh adds drama as he slowly speaks and pauses in-between each word in saying, “I hate the Moor” (Oth. 1.3.368; Othello 22:45). Crowl points out that “Branagh’s line-readings manage to be both apt and intelligent [. . . . and] hang in the air with the same vividness as his grasp of that smoldering log” (At the Shakespeare Cineplex 103). It is a different Iago than we have seen just talking with Roderigo.

This interpretation of Iago’s soliloquy is captivating as Branagh aspires to gain the audience’s full attention and support. However, if not for the first eye contact near the beginning of the movie, this soliloquy could confuse the students, as in the students may wonder why is
Iago talking to them. But with the first eye contact to let the students know that Iago sees them watching and interpreting his own interpretation of Iago, then the soliloquy is more inviting.

It is important to know when to speak with the audience and when not to. Russell Jackson argues that the use of speaking to the camera directly should be used “sparingly and strategically” (25). I argue that this is Branagh’s approach to the use of directly speaking to the camera. Branagh only speaks when needed to the audience. At other events in the film, Branagh will only make eye contact with the camera. Branagh is very strategic in his placement of speaking to the audience. While it may be interpreted that his connection is not sparing enough, I argue that the placement throughout the film is an interpretation of placement based on the location of the soliloquies within the text. The importance of the soliloquy is that it allows for Branagh to stop the flow of the film and speak to the camera. Similar to soliloquies being used in the text, Branagh stops the action in the film to make sure that the audience is aware of what is going on. These are scenes that pull the audience into the film. Thus, when a major event occurs or something happens to disrupt or even enhance Iago’s plan, the look that Iago gives the camera suggests “did you all get that?” Similar to the facial emotion of Hartnett’s Hugo, Branagh chooses to use eye contact. This is like that understood nod that friends give each other when a secret is being kept. The students are part of Iago’s secret, and Branagh helps to keep them involved through eye contact.

I argue that the lack of soliloquies in Othello’s modern film versions can at times hurt the text. In Orson Welles’ version of Othello, the audience sees a representation of an old, weak Iago. Jackson argues that Welles’ Iago is timid and afraid and is deprived of his soliloquies (25). However, Hartnett’s Hugo also does not have a soliloquy. Hartnett does have a voice-over at the beginning and end of the film. This interpretation is good to use mainly because Hartnett’s
ability to create an evil Iago is also done with his acting interpretation of the character and the use of visual emotion. Hartnett does not need the soliloquy to connect to the audience or to keep the audience on track. It is possible that the lack of the soliloquy is caused by this adaptation not being spoken in poetic dialogue from the text. Or Hartnett is able to provide enough of an interpretation in action, emotion, and spoken word so that soliloquies are not needed. This could be a topic for discussion in the class. Why does Branagh use soliloquies and Hartnett does not? Does it affect the interpretation of the text? Jackson says that a film version soliloquy is a “theatrical convention allowing access to a character’s ‘private’ thoughts” (25). The students are able to see most of Hartnett’s thoughts via body language, facial expression, and motion. Hartnett is able to “address the audience directly,” as with Branagh’s eye contact, without the need to speak directly to the viewers (25).

In falling back to the adaptation comparison of the Iago and Roderigo scene at the end of Act 1, Scene 3, I had to find this scene on the deleted scenes section of O. This is a key scene to the text that Hugo has interpreted as a way to dismiss Roger. I found it interesting that this key scene was in the deleted scenes of the DVD. In attempting to understand Hartnett’s interpretation of Hugo, I found it important that this part of the text be viewed. This exemplifies how leaving out part of the text in the film may harm the students’ interpretation. While there is no director’s statement on why this scene was deleted, I argue that in attempting to study the film and text, it is a key scene for criticizing Hartnett’s interpretation of Iago. This would be a topic of discussion for the students. Would the fact that this is a deleted scene affect their interpretation of Hugo’s character? Would a student even watch this scene since it was deleted? I conclude that the omission of this piece of the text can harm the interpretation of the text or of Iago.
Hartnett’s interpretation presents Roger as a nuisance while Branagh’s Iago speaks to Roderigo as a friend, filling his head with evil thoughts. Instead of telling Roger that it is silly to kill himself, as Branagh speaks to no more talks of drowning, Hartnett says that if Roger kills himself, “Then I’d never see you again” (O 0:30). Hartnett says this as he is leaving the room and ignoring Roger and his ignorance. Hugo is not as compassionate as Iago and is more sarcastic. However, Hugo does touch on the “fill thy purse with money” lines from the text (Oth. 1.3.340). As Branagh makes it out to be a great idea for Roderigo to use his wealth to win Desdemona, Hartnett is able to explain the situation in more modern terminology. Hartnett reminds Roger that wealth to teenagers is seen in cars, CDs, and other material possessions and that these are what girls want. Roger has money and will be there for Desi when Othello dumps her. Hugo tells Roger to use wealth as an advantage: be there to provide material items for Desi that no other teenager in the high school can.

These scenes that deal with Iago’s first soliloquy and the second piece of the plan with Roderigo assist in creating varying interpretations of Iago. Branagh “repeatedly makes it clear that his Iago is a creature of twisted and tangled emotions – emotions he thinks he controls by the cool veneer of his rationality” (Crowl, At the Shakespeare Cineplex 94). Branagh is calm and interacts with the audience, sharing in the plan. Hartnett then represents a modern calm and collected Iago. Hartnett ignores Roger and acts as if nothing were ever wrong. Hartnett does show more anger and emotions that may make up for the lack of a soliloquy. But Hartnett does possess the calm demeanor when necessary. The replication version may assist in an interpretation of Iago’s ability to be an insincere friend, as he will be later with Othello. The adaptation version may aid in putting the character traits and ability to use other people into a modern interpretation.
It is then necessary to use the key scenes that deal with the fall of Cassio and his 
reputation in Act 2, Scene 3 in order to follow the treachery that Iago builds throughout the text. 
Starting with Branagh in Parker’s Othello, Iago puts his plan into action by acting as if he were 
Cassio’s best friend. After Iago is able to tempt Cassio to drink, Branagh looks quickly at the 
camera and mentions that if he could just get Cassio to drink one more. Then Branagh leaves the 
scene. After the drunken party and Iago’s singing in lines 2.3.77, Iago is in Cassio’s mind as his 
right-hand man. While Cassio exits, Branagh gives a head nod to Roderigo who enters to fight 
Cassio. Iago’s evil plan is unfolding before the audience (Oth. 2.3.104; Othello 35:55).

Iago is forced to tell Othello about the fight. Branagh’s body language and facial 
expression imply that he does not wish to betray his friend Cassio, but Iago is under orders (Oth. 
2.3.203). After saying what happens, Branagh looks over to Cassio with an “I’m sorry” look on 
his face and shrugs his shoulders (Othello 39:50). After the event, Iago finds Cassio and 
_attempts to poison his mind. Before Branagh attempts to comfort Cassio, he looks both ways to 
see if anyone is watching. Branagh’s Iago then turns to acting as the fake best friend to Cassio. 
When Cassio starts to go into his “reputation” speech, Iago informs Cassio to go after 
Desdemona to get back into Othello’s good graces (Oth. 2.3.245; Othello 41:00). With this 
information, Cassio puts his back to the audience and hugs Iago. Iago hugs back and looks 
straight at the camera with an evil stare, appearing to say that the plan is working.

When Iago starts the next soliloquy, Branagh smiles and talks to the audience as if friends 
for many years (Oth. 2.3.310; Othello 43:00). Branagh acts like he has done nothing wrong as 
he speaks the text, “And what’s he then that says I play the villain, / When this advice is free I 
give, and honest” (Oth. 2.3.310-11). Branagh uses this time to explain in his soliloquy what is 
going on in the text. Roderigo shows up, and Branagh gives a look of disgust to the audience
Oth. 2.3.337; Othello 44:35). Branagh looks at the camera as if to say, “Not this fool again.” Branagh becomes insincere again and starts to feed Roderigo the great news that the plan is working. As Roderigo runs off, Branagh looks back at the camera as if to speak more. But he is slapped on the back when Roderigo returns to hug him again (Othello 46:20). Branagh looks back at the camera with disgust toward Roderigo. Branagh looks to be thinking, “I am surrounded by idiots.” Branagh has continued to make eye contact with the audience, showing his emotions without speaking. As Jackson explained, direct camera speaking needs to be strategic; Branagh is able to withhold dialogue and simply let his eyes and body language speak the unspoken words. While similar to Hartnett’s body language, Branagh’s makes more of a joke of the situation, as these scenes are humorous at times.

In Nelson’s O, Hartnett’s version of the events may be more adaptable for high school students. The text moves to a party off campus where under-age students are drinking alcohol. As the scene starts, Hugo is seen jumping up and cheering Cassio in his binge drinking (O 23:40). Then Hugo sends out Cassio to look for a girl. Hugo has built up Cassio’s confidence, which is perfect for Roger to start a fight. Hartnett moves very cautiously over to Roger to whisper that now is the time. As the fight starts, Hugo waits till Othello gets involved. Then, Hugo acts as the middle man and attempts to break up the fight. The twist with the adaptation version is that the students must answer to their coach on the fight issue instead of to Othello. As Hugo’s father questions the team on the fight, Hugo is forced to answer that Cassio started the fight but it was not his fault (Oth. 2.3.203; O 25:15).

After the team leaves the coach’s office, we see Hugo watching in secret as the events unfold (O 27:00). The camera angle is similar to the angel in Branagh’s soliloquies. The audience is involved, as the camera angle appears to allow the students to be looking over the
shoulder of Hartnett. The audience views the coach getting angry and throwing things off his desk because the team could lose a game due to the suspension of Cassio for fighting. I argue that this interpretation may present a more compassionate feeling for Hugo. Hugo’s father, the coach, is more concerned about basketball and Othello than his own son. Is it possible that Hugo’s father may be the villain in this interpretation of the text instead of Hugo? Does Hugo’s lack of love and a relationship with his father cause Hugo to turn to steroids, jealousy of Othello, and murder? This interpretation may lead to classroom discussion: how does the addition of Hugo’s father as a character affect the interpretation of the text and the characters’ motives?

This is a different approach than by Branagh that makes Iago look more human. Hartnett makes Hugo human by his emotion of not seeing the love of his father. This lack of love from Hugo’s father is seen at dinner in the next scene where Hugo asks his father if he would have suspended Othello if Othello would have been in the fight. Hugo’s father will not answer the question.

However, in the scene in which the coach throws items off his desk in anger, the students may begin to see the mess that Hugo has created (27:00). Looking over Hartnett’s shoulder, the audience can also see Othello dismissing Cassio as letting Othello and the team down. We see the evil side of Hugo again because Hugo has destroyed a relationship of friends in order to have his plan work. At this point in the scene, Hugo encounters Cassio to talk about Cassio’s “reputation” (Oth. 2.3.246; Q 28:35). Hugo whispers a plan for Cassio to spend more time with Desi in order to get in the good graces of Othello. At the end of this scene, Roger is upset about being beat up again with nothing to show for it (Oth. 2.3.337). Instead of Hugo cheering him up, as Branagh with Roderigo, Hugo mocks Roger and tells him to calm down. It is a short scene of hatred and leaves the audience feeling that Hugo is taking out his anger on Roger by ignoring him. The students may see that this is similar to the way Hugo’s father is treating Hugo.
These two longer film sequences show similar interpretations of a key piece of the text involving Cassio’s downfall and the plan to have Cassio spend more time with Desdemona. A viewing of a replication film, such as Parker’s Othello, provides a more textual interpretation of the script. Branagh helps to build up the audience’s understanding of the plot. Then in viewing the adaptation version, as with Nelson’s O, the students can see the evil that comes from the construction of the plan in a setting that may be more familiar, a high school party. While I have chosen to focus more on Iago, please note that several of these keys scenes can also be used for a comparison of the ways in which Othello and Cassio act different from to the text in the replication and adaptation films. One could use this scene as a method to examine the play or various characters.

In Parker’s Othello, Iago has now destroyed Cassio and moves on to Othello. The events in Act 3, Scene 3 start a “transformation of Othello into an image of Iago” (Crowl, At the Shakespeare Cineplex 100). Branagh starts by talking to Othello about Desdemona and Cassio (Othello 47:28). Iago acts like a concerned friend, someone who has seen or heard something and is afraid to say it because of the harm it will cause. Iago says, “Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady, / Know of your love?” (Oth. 3.3.96-97; Othello 47:50). Iago starts the sense of jealousy and betrayal as he later says, “O, beware, my lord, of jealousy” (Oth. 3.3.169; Othello 50:30). Branagh speaks calmly and acts ashamed of what he must tell Othello. But why would Iago lie? He must have proof because he is considered honest Iago. As Othello starts to fall into Iago’s hands, there is the image of Branagh’s lips whispering into Othello’s ear (Oth. 3.3.233). Branagh now speaks the words and poisoned thoughts directly into all characters. First, Iago whispered into Roderigo’s ear, then Cassio’s, and now Othello’s. As Othello starts to drift away into disbelief of Desdemona cheating, Branagh stands back and watches in silence;
then he makes a quick glimpse at the audience (Othello 55:08). It is just enough eye contact to say that the plan is working.

In the following scenes in which Iago watches Othello’s downward spiral, Branagh sits hidden behind a rock on a beach. Branagh is narrating to the audience what is happening to Othello. Branagh makes plenty of eye contact with the audience during this soliloquy while still keeping an eye on Othello’s struggles on the beach in the distance. Iago appears to be proud of his accomplishments as Branagh ends this soliloquy by saying, “Look,” instructing the audience to see what Othello is doing (Oth. 3.3.325; Othello 59:30). The camera pans to the left to watch Othello, as if the audience were hiding behind the rock with Iago. With this interpretation of the soliloquy, the audience is no longer the viewer of Iago’s actions. The audience is now also a participant. With the audience hiding behind the rock with Iago, the audience has become part of Iago. No longer is Branagh simply making eye contact and talking to the audience. Branagh now brings the audience with him. By Branagh telling the audience to “Look,” he wants the audience to no longer be a spectator but also a participant because the plan is working.

Then, as Iago comes out from behind the rock and starts to walk towards Othello, Branagh starts back into a soliloquy, but it is a voice-over with no connection to the audience. Has the audience been betrayed? Branagh is no longer talking to the audience? Or has the audience reached a new level of connection with Branagh? As the audience may now be participants in the plan, the audience is inside of Iago’s mind so that eye contact is not needed as the audience shares in Branagh’s secret thoughts. A discussion for the class could be the effectiveness of this type of soliloquy. Would this vision of what the soliloquies would be like if Branagh did not talk to the camera be effective? Would this interpretation bore or be more
helpful to the students’ interpretation? I argue that this style of discussion throughout the entire movie would not be effective and may bore students.

When these same scenes are played by Hartnett, the audience is also perplexed as to whether the audience should feel sorry for the discarded son regardless of his evil ways. Hugo starts in the same manner by planting seeds of Desi’s affair with Cassio in a reworking of line 3.3.96: “Did Mike know that you and Desi were getting together?” (Q 34:10). As Othello and Hugo go back and forth in the same dialogue in the text, but with current language and swearing, Hugo begins to act as the friend that hates to tell the truth to someone he cares about. When pressured for more details, Hugo says to Othello, “You’re not a jealous person [. . . . ] I am, it’s a weakness” (Q 35:00). Hartnett tells Othello the faults of Hugo and the method for the madness. Jealousy is what Hartnett has for Othello and Cassio. But in these scenes, Hartnett’s facial expressions and body language suggest he is a true friend and looking out for Othello’s best interest.

At this point in the film, Hartnett brings a more humane approach to Iago, as the next couple scenes will involve Hugo being cast aside. Hugo’s father asks Hugo to join him for dinner in his office (Q 53:00). Hugo is excited because he has not spent time with his father or enjoyed dinner in his office for some time. However, the conversation between the two is about what’s wrong with Othello. When Hugo is not sure, Hugo’s father leaves the office so that Hugo may finish his dinner alone. As the camera pans out, there is an image of Hugo sitting in a chair with his food on a tray in his lap. Hugo does not eat as he looks to be pondering the events. This is a touching scene and image of Hartnett’s acting ability. The audience can do nothing but feel grief for Hugo. Hartnett’s interpretation of Iago has led to an image of someone who has been pushed aside, left alone, and unloved by his own father. At this point, the involvement of
Hugo’s father, as a possible source for Hugo’s sorrow, may continue to point toward the reason behind Hugo’s evil plan. It is important to ask students if this involvement of Hugo’s father affects their interpretation of why Iago is vengeful.

Later, Hartnett is seen watching Othello before a basketball dunk contest (O 59:25). This scene seems to mirror the scene from Parker’s Othello in which Branagh, from behind a rock, is watching Othello walk down a beach. As Hartnett begins to monitor Othello from a distance, Hartnett’s facial descriptions mimic a demon’s. Hartnett is cold and stands hidden in the doorway, watching the crowd and Othello. When Hugo sees that the plan is working as Othello dismisses Desi, Hugo briefly smiles and fades backwards into the shadows and out of the doorway. Then, as Othello begins to fall out of touch with Hugo’s father, Hugo watches from the darkness and begins to act like he is taking everything back for himself. Hartnett spends many of these scenes standing in darkness, with little to say. Hugo is admiring his work from a distance, as does Branagh from behind a rock.

Both of these key scenes suggest an interpretation of Iago as filling Othello’s mind with betrayal over the course of a day. Branagh and Hartnett both stand back and admire their work, one from behind a rock on the beach and the other from the sidelines of a basketball court. These scenes show something the text cannot, the facial expressions of a happy Iago who sees the downfall of Othello and Cassio at his fingertips.

Iago’s plan to destroy Cassio takes a turn towards bodily harm in Act 5, Scene 1. In Parker’s Othello, Branagh hides with Roderigo and confirms the plan to attack Cassio (Othello 133:45). Branagh then looks to the audience with excitement, but then changes his expression to fear in that this plot to kill Cassio must work or Iago will be found out (Oth. 5.1.22). As Iago walks up behind Cassio and stabs him in the back of the leg, Branagh is acting on one of the very
few stage directions given in that text (Oth. 5.1.26-27; Othello 134:15). Branagh has a stage
direction from the play to stab Cassio. The evil of Branagh’s interpretation of Iago comes
through a stare after Iago kills Roderigo (Oth. 5.1.63). After the kill, Branagh looks to the
audience, not for approval but more to show what he has done. This eye contact is more
terrifying as it appears that the audience is looking into the eyes of a killer. Iago has moved from
an evil plot to a murder. Branagh attempts to provide this interpretation with his posture and
immoral look into the camera.

In Nelson’s O, Hartnett portrays a similar Iago in the killing of Roger but with more
survival in mind in order to atone for Roger’s stupidity. The audience sees Hugo’s excitement as
the plan comes together. Hartnett smiles and is happy with the phone call he received with the
timetable going according to his plan (O 112:35). As Hugo attempts to be the Good Samaritan
helping out in a car wreck, the plan to have Roger jump Cassio is underway. As Roger pulls a
gun on Cassio, the only sound is the demanding murderous voice of Hartnett screaming at Roger:
“Do it” (116:55). When the plan backfires, quick-thinking Hugo must take down Cassio by
hitting him in the back of the head (Oth. 5.1.26-27). With Hugo upset that Roger destroyed the
plan, Hartnett kills Roger with a gunshot to the stomach at point blank range (Oth. 5.1.63). At
this point, Hartnett’s actions have also created a murderous Iago, as he kills Roger, the teenager
that everyone picked on throughout the entire film. Hartnett picks up the weapons as he races
back to check on Othello. Hartnett leaves the scene with an image of two bodies lying helpless
on the road (O 119:00).

While the play has a couple of stage directions for Iago in Act 5, Scene 1, such as “Iago
wounds Cassio in the leg from behind” and “stabbing Roderigo,” the film versions provide visual
interpretations of the murders (Oth. 5.1.26, 5.1.63). However, the image of seeing both Iago and
Hugo act out these scenes disrupts any previous interpretation of Iago’s character. Whether the students felt an attachment for Branagh or pity for Hartnett, seeing the planned murders occur shows the evil outcome of Iago’s plan.

The ending sequence in Act 5, Scene 2 allows Othello to finally view Iago eye-to-eye. First in Parker’s Othello, Othello is able to discover that honest Iago is also the beholder of the evil plan to destroy his life. As the scene unfolds, Branagh looks into the camera signaling that he is aware that Iago has been caught (Othello 147:40). Desdemona is dead, and Iago’s wife Emilia is preparing to speak the truth (Oth. 5.2.179). At this point, the audience may continue to see a different side to Branagh’s character interpretation, the same evil side that was just viewed in the murder scenes. Branagh uses a very stern and cold voice, similar to that of the first act in which Iago claimed to hate the Moor. Branagh stares down Emilia and slowly, pausing in between each word, and calmly tells her to “Be wise and get you home” (Oth. 5.2.200; Othello 149:07). The effect of Branagh’s delivery is rather frightening: he is someone who will do anything at the current time in order to save himself. To save his life and quiet Emilia, Iago even takes his wife as a hostage before killing her for speaking (Oth. 5.2.243).

This image of an evil Iago continues when Iago and Othello kneel across from each other. Branagh is able to keep his face emotionless but full of evil while speaking firmly and calmly once again: “From this time forth I never will speak word” (Oth. 5.2.310; Othello 153:00). Othello has called Iago a devil, as is truly shown in Iago’s stern reaction to all the death in this last act (Oth. 5.2.307).

Hartnett’s interpretation of the final scene, in Nelson’s O, is very dramatic. After killing Roger, Hugo has no problem in telling Emilia to “Be quiet” (Oth. 5.2.190; O 123:00). When Emilia will not stop from telling Othello the truth, Hugo pulls out a gun and shoots her in the
stomach, also at point blank range (Oth. 5.2.243). In shock because of all the killing he has committed, Hugo stumbles down a hallway and is met face to face with Othello. Othello is looking to Hugo for answers. Othello appears to still need Hugo’s help. Hugo is able to realize this and switches back to his evil stare and remains calm. Hartnett regains composure and looks at the crying Othello and says, “From here on out I say nothing” (Oth. 5.2.310; Q 124:17). Hugo then calmly gets up and begins to walk out of the house as if it is Othello’s problem now. This imagery is eerie and may anger the audience’s opinion of Hugo.

Then, when Hugo sees Othello kill himself, Hartnett’s mouth drops, and he begins to shake. At this point, Hugo finally realizes the consequences of his actions. Yet in his realization of the events and deaths, the ending voice-over has Hartnett saying that “One of these days, everyone is going to pay attention to me -- because I’m going to fly too” (Q 128:35). Somehow, Hartnett is able to turn everything around and get the audience potentially to feel remorseful for his position that led him to these evil acts. Hartnett’s interpretation of Iago may lead students to see that Hugo was provoked by forces and emotions beyond his control to commit these acts. It is not until Othello kills himself that Hugo finally realizes what has been done. But at least now his father and everyone will pay attention to him, as Hugo was the mastermind behind the murders.

These final scenes of the play are two varying interpretation of closure. It is interesting to see the facial expressions of the characters when they see that honest Iago was behind this tragedy. The disregard for the death of many people is seen in the facial expressions and voice patterns of both Branagh and Hartnett.

The purpose of finding the key scenes in the modern film versions is to help students with their understanding of the text by providing various visual interpretations. Film is not attempting
to replace the text, but merely enhance and present a visual stimulant. The variations in the film
scenes as well as missing lines from the text may lead to constructive classroom discussion.

The key scenes listed in this chapter focus on Iago's character and the varying
interpretations provided from the two modern films selected. Note that some of the key scenes
are acted similarly, such as the final act of Iago telling Othello eye-to-eye that he will say
nothing. However, there are other scenes in which a different interpretation may be presented,
such as Branagh's use of soliloquies compared to the lack of them in O. These key scenes are
noted because they offer different interpretations of Iago.

While I have selected Parker's Othello and Nelson's O as the modern film replication and
adaptation models for this research, others may choose to use different films from either model.
I have chosen these two particular films for their interpretations of Iago. If I were to study
Othello or Cassio in the same manner, I may choose two different modern films. Or I may stick
with my selected films and choose different scenes. The choice depends on what the professor
may be choosing to focus on during this study of the play.
Conclusion

Film is not intended to take the place of the text. Performance theory and modern film work as tools to enhance the reading and to help the students figure out their own meaning of Shakespeare's text. The rational for using modern films is that this medium offers a variety of performance interpretations. The first type of film interpretation is provided in the replication film, an interpretation that attempts to act out the text as it may have been performed on stage and usually in poetic voice. The second interpretation of film is an adaptation film, an interpretation that takes place more closely to the students' modern setting, attire, and dialogue that is usually not poetic.

In order to understand the use of this modern film medium, students should criticize the film actors' performance interpretation of the character that the actor represents from the text. This use of performance theory will assist the students in opening up to various interpretations of the text in an attempt to find their own meaning of the work.

The other argument for using modern film in the classroom is the lack of available class time in a semester for students to visit the theatre to view the performance of the text being studied. However, films are long in duration as well and may take up considerable amounts of class time. Therefore, a professor should choose one modern film version of a replication and adaptation interpretation to view in the classroom. After reading or discussing an act in the text, the class should view the key scenes of this act from modern film interpretations.
Without time to view the entire films, the key scenes that relate to an eye opening interpretation should be viewed. These key scenes may vary from class to class based on the approach the professor is making towards the text. At times, the professor may need to view a scene that focuses on one key turning point in the play. Or, maybe the professor will focus on the relationship between a couple characters. The focus may also be on the interpretation of a single character and how that interpretation assists the students in finding their own meaning of the text.

My example for this argument has been the study of Kenneth Branagh and Josh Hartnett’s interpretation of Iago in Shakespeare’s Othello. In Parker’s Othello, Branagh engages the audience by making eye contact with the camera throughout his soliloquies. While in O, Hartnett presents the evil side of teenage jealousy as he portrays his emotions with posture and facial movement. Othello was my choice of Shakespearean text for this argument as the key actors in both of the chosen modern films may be recognizable to the students and assist in capturing their attention to examine the detail of the text.

While some critics may speak to using film in the classroom, multiple films, scenes, and modern films, I have not yet found an article to measure up to my argument that the viewing of key scenes from only the two different modern film types will assist students in their interpretation of Shakespeare’s text. Crowl mentions that “performance criticism and performance approaches to teaching Shakespeare in the classroom had become one of the dominant strains in Shakespeare studies” (Shakespeare Observed 8). While academia continues to debate the use of performance criticism and the film media, I argue that professors should take whatever steps necessary to assist the students interpreting the text. As my argument is from one point of view, it may not work for
every student. But by comparing the various actors’ performance interpretations of a character to the text, a professor should be able to choose the ideal modern film versions, consisting of modern settings and dialogue, and to substitute a trip to the theater for this classroom film viewing.

This argument is significant in that it presents a new interpretation method for students to study the *Othello* text and Iago. I argue that we give the students the tools to make their own decisions about the text. Using modern films to assist students with visual stimulants of the text will help in the understanding and possibly the desire to read Shakespeare. The use of not only modern films, but also recognizable actors will aid in the importance of choosing the right films. It is noteworthy that professors provide their students with several mediums to learn about Shakespeare. The use of modern films will not only entertain, but may jumpstart the students’ imagination when attempting to interpret the text.

Performance theory is a key element in interpreting Shakespeare’s work. Remember that these Shakespearean texts are actually scripts for the actors. In order to assist the students in viewing the text as a play, it is necessary to view and criticize modern film versions. Thus, the selection of *Othello* is significant in that this text has several modern film versions. The selection criteria proposed for the *Othello* modern film is a blueprint to selecting other Shakespearean works. Students should use performance criticism to study actors’ interpretations of the text and its characters. By criticizing these performance interpretations from film, students may acquire a different observation of textual characters. Deeper issues with that character may become visual or understood. As seen with Sarah Lorenz’s method for teaching Shakespeare with
Romeo + Juliet, these performance criticism methods and deeper insights into the characters are successful and help the students understand complex issues and theories within the text.

Using this style of performance criticism and the modern film approach is especially effective when teaching Shakespeare. While a professor may attempt this teaching method with other pieces of literature, I am focused on the process as it relates to Shakespeare’s text being a play script. With this form of study on Shakespeare’s work, the text can be revived in the classroom through the excitement and visual stimulant of modern film. Students will learn to view Shakespeare’s text as a script. Poetic dialogue will be easier for the students to read and understand by watching the actors in the films incorporate words into actions. Students will begin to interpret the words in Shakespeare’s text as a form of dialogue with hidden stage directions. Through this process, students are finding new ways to read and study Shakespeare.
Works Cited


