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'Use Desdemona Well': Orson Welles's and Oliver Parker's Filmic Interpretations of Shakespeare's *Othello*

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English Honors

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In the opening chapter of *The Madwoman in the Attic*, authors Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss the idea of the pen as a metaphorical penis: because the male generates life itself and the female merely bears that male-generated life, the male also assumes the right to generate art and writing, while the female is assumed to be incapable of generating anything worthwhile. Gilbert and Gubar take this idea a step further, asserting that in “fathering” the nineteenth-century texts, men subsequently govern and define the roles and standards for women. They are the ones defining womanhood—and part of that definition includes an inability to create (3-11).

Though *The Madwoman in the Attic* was written as commentary on the problematic restrictive gender roles of the nineteenth-century, we may still apply the fundamentals of that text to today’s film. After all, the majority of screenwriters and directors are men, and so, in a sense, they are again defining and creating the roles of women. At least in their films, they are, and in today’s culture, media shapes culture just as much as culture shapes media, according to Sharon Smith (Smith 14).

Perhaps what makes film even more dangerous in its influence, though, is its employment of *two* powerful mediums: language and picture. Whereas literature utilizes words to evoke images in its readers’ minds, film builds from words and then presents the images the director chooses in a very visual, in-your-face way. Filmmakers write the roles for their male and female characters, scripting their lines and behavior, and then they interpret those scripts by presenting visual portrayals of them.
The power of the image stems from the human tendency to find pleasure in watching, according to Laura Mulvey, who addresses this in her 1975 publication of "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Looking to Freud for the foundation of her argument, Mulvey first acknowledges the scopophilia, or pleasure in looking, that Freud introduced in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*. Freud correlates scopophilia with "taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (Mulvey 60). In its most extreme form, scopophilia produces voyeurs whose sexual satisfaction only comes from "watching, in an active and controlling sense, an objectified other" (Mulvey 61). But Peeping Toms and perverts are not the only ones stimulated by this watching—all of us are. Mulvey contends that film preys on its spectators' voyeurism, offering sexual images that will stimulate the audience. This does not necessarily mean the act of sex itself, but mere images that connote sexuality or rouse sexual desire. The illusion of secret observation augments the stimulation, as most mainstream films, according to Mulvey, "portray a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic fantasy" (61).

Of particular importance for Mulvey is the sexualization of the female presence on screen. She explains that in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (62-63)
Film achieves this objectification, or *to-be-looking-at-ness* quite easily: as Teresa de Lauretis explains, “the woman is framed by the look of the camera as icon, or object of the gaze: an image made to be looked at by the spectator, whose look is relayed by the look of the male characters” (de Lauretis 87). As Mulvey suggests, filmmakers structure films around a “controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify” (64). In almost all cases, that controlling figure is male. Most films feature the male as the hero, while the female is depicted as the prize itself, or as the impediment to the male’s obtaining the prize, either “mythical obstacle” or “monster” as de Lauretis explains (87). Viewers—both male and female—therefore watch films from that male perspective and identify with the male protagonist.

Even in those films that *do* feature a female as the protagonist, there exists a problem. As Smith suggests, “even when the woman is the central character, she is generally shown as confused, or helpless and in danger, or passive, or as a purely sexual being” (Smith 14). If she is introduced to the viewer as autonomous, beautiful and sexy, her path is still inevitably mapped out for her: she falls in love with the male protagonist, and her sexuality subsequently becomes subject to him. Rarely do we find a female character with depth and self-sufficiency; instead, as Smith notes, the woman’s role “almost always revolves around her physical attraction and the mating games she plays with the male characters” (Smith 14). Nor do we encounter a woman character who maintains her autonomy throughout the duration of a film. Generally, as Mulvey points out, a woman’s importance lies in what she provokes; she serves as an impetus for the male’s behavior, though independently she holds no worth (Mulvey 63).
The limitation of a woman’s role in the film ultimately leads to a limitation of options for the female spectator. According to Doane, the female spectator really has two options, one being the "masochism of over-identification" (143) with the male character. With this option, the female viewer, in identifying with the male character, is forced to take pleasure in watching herself humiliated and abused. The other option is the "narcissism entailed in becoming one’s own object of desire" (143) that Mulvey describes. To this option, de Lauretis raises an important question: “How can the female spectator be entertained as subject of the very movement that places her as its object...?” (88).

With these points in mind, we can fairly question what the effect of such a representation has on its viewers, both male and female. As Warhole and Hendl ask, “what is at stake for women in this process of being looked at: can a woman be represented without being objectified?” (Warhole & Hendl 427).

This paper explores two filmic interpretations of Shakespeare’s *Othello*: Orson Welles’ 1952 film noir adaptation and Oliver Parker’s 1995 version. Because the films were released over forty years apart, it makes sense to question how that amount of time has effected filmic interpretations of Shakespeare's women, specifically Desdemona and Emilia. It is important to point out that Desdemona and Emilia were chosen as case studies in this project because, though they are well-known, they are not necessarily well-defined characters. There is room for interpretation in their portrayals, whereas a blatantly feminist character does not offer that leeway. To study one of Shakespeare's feminist characters would be too easy: the film either does or does not capture her independence. However, examining characters who might easily be overlooked and
whose analysis is more flexible allows us to focus more on the filmic interpretations—
directorial choices such as textual editing, lighting, etc.—rather than on their accuracy in
representation.

Orson Welles's *Othello*: Stalking an Angelic Desdemona

Orson Welles's 1952 adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello* opens with the funeral
procession of Desdemona and Othello: our initial image of Desdemona is that of her dead
face, veiled in gauze as she is carried to her burial place. Welles speeds up Shakespeare's
plot by imposing a narrating voice at the beginning of the film who informs us that
Desdemona, "drawn by his virtue, became... enamored with [Othello]." Interestingly,
though, the film portrays the relationship between Othello and Desdemona in a near
opposite way, for it is Othello who seems more enamored with Desdemona than vice
versa. Welles's Othello sees his Desdemona as an unreachable angel, rather than as his
equal. Kathy M. Howlett comments that Othello's love in this film is portrayed as more
of "an anguished type of worship" (Howlett 87) than mutual, marital affection. This
elevation of Desdemona is relayed through a number of important directorial choices.

When Othello returns from Cyprus, Desdemona is shown waiting for him from
her safe point atop the fortress, high above where the ship comes in. From this point, she
is not only physically above Othello, but she also has the better view. *She* watches *him.*
Othello climbs the stairs, and she makes her way down to him. When he reaches her, he
praises her: "O my fair warrior! It gives me wonder great as my content/ to see you here
before me. O my soul's joy!"(II.i.184-7). But he does not embrace her or kiss her; he
merely looks at her in awe, keeping a distance before finally putting his arm around her
and leading her away.
At a later point in the film, Desdemona walks to the edge of the fortress and stands looking down on a crowd of men. A high angle lens shows the crowd from her elevated perspective. In that crowd stands Othello, who looks up at her from far below. The camera then shifts to his vantage point, showing Desdemona high above Othello: in her flowing white gown, she looks down at the crowd—an image with clear angelic connotations. A low angle lens is used to emphasize this heavenly portrayal, and Desdemona's figurative pedestal position (in Othello's eyes) becomes literalized to the viewer.

Desdemona’s angelic associations are further developed by the cutting of many of her lines. Welles’s Desdemona fits the quiet, submissive "angel in the house" archetype, as he cuts those lines in which she resists authority and asserts her wit and intelligence. Of specific importance is the scene towards the end of the script in which Lodovico arrives in Cyprus. In Shakespeare’s text, after Othello strikes Desdemona, she insists that he had no right to do so: "I have not deserved this" (IV.i.252), she tells him. However, Welles cuts this, and instead his Desdemona backs away sheepishly, whispering "I will not stay to offend you" (258). Cutting this line strengthens the Wellesian presentation of a docile, obedient wife, though it detracts from Desdemona’s own strength of character.

Welles enhances the image of Desdemona as angelic spectacle through his use of the gaze. He takes the idea of spectatorship to actual stalking, offering his audience a sort of voyeur’s window through which to secretly observe Desdemona. Throughout his film, the camera, and therefore the spectator, stalks Desdemona. Howlett suggests that “Shakespeare’s Othello is a tragedy that ‘turns on looking on’, on voyeurism, on proof” provided by a mere handkerchief” (52). Orson Welles’s 1952 adaptation emphasizes this
voyeurism (52), framing his characters, and particularly Desdemona, within the gaze of another character. Much of this is achieved by the use of eyeline match cut: one character is shown looking at something, and the camera cuts to show what the character is gazing upon. Showing Desdemona through the eyes of Othello and Iago forces the spectators, in identifying with the male characters, to gaze upon her as a specimen.

Very early in the film, Desdemona is shown sleeping, her long blonde hair spread across the bed. Othello watches her sleep, then rips open the bed curtains. He leans over her, kissing her face before leaving for Cyprus. When Desdemona and Othello consummate their marriage shortly after this scene, they are shown in that same bedroom. Othello closes the door in the face of the camera, as though closing off any spectators. However, the camera then shows their shadows uniting, offering the viewer a shot of the very image Othello has attempted to conceal. In a later bedroom scene, Othello storms into the room, ripping open the curtains to gaze upon an empty bed. Here, it seems as though he may have been hoping to find an adulterous Desdemona with Cassio, but both he and the viewers see nothing instead.

Othello is not the only character whose secret gaze violates Desdemona’s privacy. We often see her through the eyes of Iago, who is hiding in a corner. It is Iago who watches her meet with Cassio, then points them out to Othello. Later, from the top of the fortress, Iago and Othello watch Desdemona and Emilia walking below. Here, Welles’s use of non-diegetic sound is important. Othello’s voice is dubbed over the image of the two women, saying, “A fine woman, a fair woman, a sweet woman... let her rot, perish and be damaged...” In addition to his voice, eerie, ghostlike voices sing, and thunder claps diegetically, foreshadowing his acting upon those thoughts.
After Othello has confronted Desdemona, demanding her to “let [him] see her eyes,” he walks away from her. Desdemona is left alone, and the viewer is now watching her through the eyes of Emilia. The camera shows Desdemona walking away from Emilia’s perspective, and then it shows the same image of Desdemona, only from a higher point: Othello, too, watches her from behind a column. The scene fades out, and again non-diegetic sound is employed to foreshadow the next inevitable event. The following line is “Get me some poison, Iago…” It is as though, in watching her from that hidden and very limited perspective, Othello has finalized her fate in his mind: he has made the decision to murder her.

Later, in the willow song scene, Desdemona and Emilia discuss marital fidelity and the role of women. According to Barbara Hodgdon, this scene “represents an instance where a woman spectator can, if she so chooses, separate her gaze from the sexualized male surveillance of the play’s inscribed spectators… and so escape being constructed as ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ by owning a (potentially) desexualized look at a woman’s body” (Vaughn & Cartwright 215). However, Welles does not allow his female spectators such an opportunity, as the camera then pulls back to where Othello lurks in the shadows. The assumption, then, is that Othello has been watching them converse all along, waiting for Emilia to exit so that he can proceed with the murder. We have been watching them because he has been watching them, and again we realize that we have observed the women through the eyes of the spectating male character. Othello continues to watch Desdemona through a cage-like window as she prepares for bed. From Othello’s perspective, Desdemona is shown behind the bars of her window; this is of
course appropriate, as Othello will essentially imprison her in that room by murdering her there.

When he enters the room, the noise of the door awakens Desdemona, whom we see lying on the bed in an angelic image similar to the one early in the film. Othello extinguishes the candles and then proceeds to tear open the bed curtains, just as he has done earlier. Interestingly, though, we see Desdemona close her eyes at this point, pretending to be asleep. Doing so allows Othello to see her while she cannot see him. He is thereby given the advantage in the bedroom, as his position as spectator becomes integral to survival itself. Perhaps the most memorable image in Welles’s film follows: key lighting emphasizes an extremely white profile of Desdemona with an extremely black face of Othello. This chiaroscuro effect draws attention to both the literal and metaphoric blackness of Othello, who, juxtaposed with his literally and metaphorically white Desdemona, becomes an evil predator of goodness. It is here that Desdemona finally opens her eyes, asking him “Othello, will you come to bed, my Lord?”

He reaches out, covering her mouth—silencing her. Othello holds a sheet over her face, strangling her not only in the sheets that he believes she has defiled, but also with those sheets. As he leans toward her veiled face to kiss her, we see a demonic black face coming toward us, and for the only moment in the film, the camera forces us to experience the feeling of having someone closing in on us: we experience Othello through Desdemona’s eyes. Welles’s decision to cut some of Desdemona’s final words here is interesting: Othello silences her to an extent, but when Emilia asks who has murdered her, she answers, “Nobody; I myself…” (V.ii.124). She does not use Shakespeare’s words to indicate that she has been “falsely, falsely murdered” (115), nor
does she insist that it is “a guiltless death [she] die[s]” (122). Cutting these lines leaves the viewer with the impression that she is taking the blame for her own murder. Desdemona’s accepting the blame for her death proves fairly consistent with his overall representation of her. The submissive, quiet, angelic Desdemona who ashamedly backs away from her husband when he strikes her in public would not speak up for herself and assert her innocence if it might pose a threat to her husband’s reputation.

Although Desdemona does not speak, Emilia does. According to Hodgdon, “Emilia... voices the invisible assumptions that drive the play” and serves as “the agent of truth, who open[s] the closed mouth, the locked house” (Vaughn & Cartwright 216). She proves strong and unwavering in the end when, amidst a crowd of men, she “is bound to speak” (V.ii.184). However, Welles masculinizes his representation of Emilia, casting a woman with a deep voice, whose hair is bound tightly to her head, and who is noticeably older than Desdemona. This depiction implies either that her masculinity itself gives her power or that for a woman to have power, she must relinquish her femininity. Her physical appearance, in contrast to a beautiful, soft-spoken Desdemona, reinforces her masculinity and the subsequent threat she poses because of her age and maleness.

Welles, then, does not represent his female characters overtly unfavorably, but his depictions certainly perpetuate gender stereotypes. On one hand, we find Desdemona as “mythical obstacle,” while at the other extreme we have Emilia, the threatening “monster.” Desdemona serves as the impetus to Othello’s behavior, but independently, she holds no worth; she is only something to be looked at and conquered. Welles flattens any roundness given to Desdemona by Shakespeare, forming her to fit the passive,
angelic ideal. He desexualizes both her and Emilia, placing Desdemona on an unreachable pedestal that Othello can only worship, not intimately relate to, and creating an unfeminine Emilia whose power is only secured by her masculinity.

**Oliver Parker’s *Othello*: The Voyeuristic Imagination on Screen**

Over forty years later, Oliver Parker released another film version of *Othello*, casting an African-American Laurence Fishburne and a Swiss Irene Jacob as his Othello and Desdemona. Welles’s interpretation seems to have made an impact on Parker’s later version. Parker, however, sought to “foreground the love affair of Othello and Desdemona” (236) as Rothwell notes, and, as Starks outlines, to expose the driving forces of passion and sexual desire in the play\(^1\) (75). He marketed his film as an “erotic thriller,” hoping to “revitalize” Shakespeare’s play (Starks 64). Starks suggests that in doing so, the film primarily objectifies Othello as its sexual spectacle. She points out the cultural intertexts that would have most likely affected audiences when Othello was first released in 1995. A black Othello, Stark suggests, most definitely would have reminded audiences of the O.J. Simpson trial, and the casting of Laurence Fishburne who made a name for himself as the wife-beating Ike Turner in *What’s Love Got To Do With It* just two years earlier would have affirmed that association. In fact, Sparks believes that Parker’s film emphasizes Othello’s blackness and the taboo of the black male with a

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\(^1\) Of course, Parker’s attempt to “foreground the love affair of Othello and Desdemona” by displaying their sexual relationship prompts a question that cannot be ignored: did Shakespeare ever intend to portray a sexual relationship between Othello and Desdemona? After all, Othello informs us very early that their relationship is not based on sexual attraction, as the “young affects/in [him are] defunct” (I.iii.264-5). Ultimately, though, I think Parker achieves his goal of portraying their love.
white female (Starks 65). Welles, after all, played Othello in blackface, and audiences would have realized he was actually a white man only pretending to be black.

But, while Parker may assign his Othello excessive sexuality, he also emphasizes Desdemona's sexuality. The sexual element of their relationship is first put on display when Othello returns from Cyprus. In a large crowd of people, Desdemona and Othello stand in the middle embracing and kissing. Everyone is forced to observe this intimate moment, and they do so awkwardly. As Starks notes, the camera emphasizes this discomfort, focusing on the reactions of some members of the crowd who appear uncomfortable (Starks 71). In the next scene, Desdemona dances for Othello—they lock eyes and her focus is on him. However, everyone there, both male and female, watches the mating ritual of the two. Their focus, though, is on the dancing Desdemona; she is the one parading herself as entertainment. Desdemona here becomes the spectacle of the entire dinner party. The camera focuses on her as its object, then on Othello (Starks 71), the eyeliner match cut implying that she is specifically his object.

The following scene shows the two consummating their marriage, the juxtaposition of the two scenes enforcing Desdemona's objectification. Othello spins around with Desdemona in his arms, and together they extinguish all the candles in the bedroom. In this scene, Othello is the object of the camera, but he is shown moving towards Desdemona with a predatory gaze focused on her: she becomes something to be conquered, devoured. Othello even licks his lips, reinforcing his predator role. At this point, the non-diegetic music heightens in a trialesque crescendo, enhancing the notion of animalistic sexual conquest. Desdemona crawls into bed, and the camera, placed right behind Othello, remains focused on her: the spectator is invited to experience the
approach and predation from Othello's perspective. However, Desdemona reaches out to
him, pulling him to the bed. She asserts her sexuality and incites the sexual ritual. When
the two are in bed together, the music softens, implying a more gentle love relationship,
rather than an animalistic sexual one. The scene then closes with an image of a black
hand clenched together with a white one.

Parker's bed motif begins with this sex scene, and he builds upon it by employing
similar images and actions later in his film. For example, in the murder scene, Othello
walks to the bed where Desdemona sleeps, ritually extinguishing the same candles. Also,
the same image that closes the initial sex scene—the black hand clenched with the white
hand—later appears as a figment of Othello's imagination: he pictures two white hands
clenched together rather than a black one with a white one. In fact, the initial sex scene is
the only instance where the sexual act is actually occurring in the bed. The other images
are those imagined by Othello.

In one sense, Parker gives his Desdemona more power and character than Welles.
He does not cut as many of her lines, and in the scene with Lodovico, she protests
Othello's abuse. Unlike Welles's version, her line "I have not deserved this" is not cut,
and in fact Parker's Desdemona stands up, looks into Othello's face and states it
indignantly and without any sign of fear. She also seems to enjoy her sexuality, which
grants her more control. Soliciting the sexual advance of Othello in the consummation
scene by reaching out her hand to pull him towards her serves as an example of this
control. However, while she enjoys the sexuality assigned to her in this version, it is of
course her sexuality that ultimately causes her death. The innocence Irene Jacob brings
to the screen, combined with the sexuality she also offers, creates an inevitable problem:
an enjoyment of her sexuality does not inform her of the danger potentially associated with it, and so she is completely unaware that Othello might imagine her as an adulterer. The drastic difference in their mindsets is evidenced with the cross-cutting of Desdemona in the bathtub Willow Song scene, with Othello preparing himself to murder her. The camera shows a naïve Desdemona naked and exposed with her handmaid, while a black profile of Othello is shown walking alone, pausing along the sea, face in hands as he contemplates the murder.

Parker introduces a new element to Othello, choosing to display Othello's vivid sexual hallucinations and nightmares of his wife with Cassio. Parker infuses the film with sexual images that parallel the original sexual images of the consummation scene. The delusions begin with Othello's distorted memory of Cassio and Desdemona dancing in slow motion. Earlier in the film, Cassio does dance with Desdemona, but Othello's recollection of this scene is inaccurate; their faces were not as close as he pictures them to be, and Desdemona was not laughing.

In a later scene, we find Othello walking towards the bed in a way that is identical to the original bed scene. It appears as though only Desdemona awaits him behind the bed curtains, but when Othello opens them with his knife, he finds Desdemona in bed with Cassio. At this point, Othello sits up in bed: the nightmare is over. "My life upon her faith," he whispers, repeating his response to Brabantio from very early in the play. Othello's nightmare continues after he has awakened, though, and an image of two white hands clenching together against the sheets is shown.

The images evolve into more graphic ones as the play unfolds. In the prison scene we see Othello's most graphic fabrication. The camera shows Cassio lying on the
bed, an object of Desdemona's sexual gaze. Here, the camera employs both montage and cross-cutting. Within Othello's imagined sex scene, the camera shows brief images of mouths, tongues, hands, legs, feet—each of these body parts flash across the scene quickly and are underscored with a climactic drumming. The animalistic nature of this intercourse is emphasized by the dismemberment that occurs in the montage. Displaying fragmented body parts integrates a different type of eroticism, according to Mulvey: "it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon, rather than verisimilitude, to screen" (Mulvey 20). In showing pieces of Desdemona's body in a montage of the sexual act, Parker (and Othello) fetishize her, focusing on the sexuality of her body parts, rather than seeing her holistically.

Certainly, displaying the images of Othello's imagination introduces an interesting element to our perspective of Othello in that it explores the psychological aspect of Othello's degradation and forces us to experience those internal battles with him. As spectators, we are forced to share in Othello's fantasies—so we see Desdemona as gratuitously sexual, even though those images are merely a part of the imagination. We experience the graphicness of these images and the frustration evoked by them. Her sexuality poses a threat to Othello's power, and to maintain the patriarchal system and the sanctity of the marriage bed, he must stifle her sexuality—else she betray more men. So, while the glimpse into Othello's imagination may evoke sympathy for him, the gratuitous sexual images ultimately incriminate her. In giving her power and sexuality, then, Parker discredits her fidelity because any filmic attempts to empower her are nullified by the death Shakespeare assigns her.
The murder scene in the bed, though, might offer some redemptive qualities for Parker’s depiction. Surprisingly, Desdemona verbally defends herself and, as Rothwell says, “does not go quietly into the night, but fiercely resists the bullying Othello, and fights desperately for her life” (237). Undoubtedly, this scene gives Desdemona strength of character as she physically resists a muscular, powerful Othello. Desdemona tries to hug him, clinging to him, beg him, even hit him—she attempts numerous tactics to preserve her life, exhibiting a survivalist mentality. After a long struggle, her hand is shown pushing against his face as he stifles her with a pillow. In a painful transformation, Desdemona surrenders, her hand caressing Othello’s face instead of pushing against it. The film’s hand motif ends with a shot of her twitching, lifeless hand on the sheet where it once clenched Othello’s in ecstasy. Desdemona, who battles Othello for her life, ultimately loves him, and her tenderness in her suffering proves this.

A final redeeming element in Parker’s depiction of Desdemona lies in his decision to include her seventeen-line speech in Act IV, scene two. This speech, particularly in the context of Parker’s sexualized representation, asserts both her innocence and her desire to win back Othello’s favor. She asks Iago what she has done to anger Othello and what she should do to win her lord again, claiming that she does not know how she lost him. More importantly, the speech evidences her unconditional love for him: his unkindness—even divorce resulting in poverty—will “never taint [her] love” (l. 161) for him.

And certainly Parker’s favorable depiction of Emilia cannot be disregarded. Unlike Welles, he selects an attractive peer to play the role of Emilia, rather than a masculine older woman. His Emilia is nonetheless threatening, standing up to both
Othello and Iago. Even when Othello holds a sword to her throat, she screams for help, announcing that the Moor has killed her mistress. Parker, then, allows his Emilia power, youth and femininity, rather than forcing an exchange of youth and femininity for power.

Parker undoubtedly breaks ground in his film. Casting a black actor and then parading the sexual relationship of the interracial pair certainly stretches the majority of spectators out of their film-viewing comfort zone. The film acknowledges and emphasizes the taboo of Othello’s otherness in contrast to his white Venetian wife, whereas Welles shirks that responsibility. Parker’s glimpse into Othello’s psyche allows the spectator to experience that turmoil and thereby sympathize with his decision to murder his wife—something that many readers of the play have difficulty doing. But we must not allow Parker’s progress for Othello to overshadow his regress for Desdemona, for the progress certainly comes at Desdemona’s expense.

Parker’s Desdemona, though introduced as beautiful and independent, falls victim to the standard filmic path for female characters: her sexuality prompts her objectification. Parker’s oversexualized Desdemona stands in stark contrast to Welles’s desexualized Desdemona, but in their own very different interpretations of her, both Welles and Parker confirm that a woman cannot have both sexuality and autonomous subjectivity.
Works Cited


