

Intercultural Othello

An Analysis of Race in William Shakespeare's *Othello*, Tim Nelson's *O* and Osada & Appignanesi's *Manga Shakespeare*



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Abstract

This thesis focusses on the cultural influence within Shakespeare adaptations across different cultures worldwide. It does so through a comparative analysis of race in Shakespeare's *Othello*, Nelson's *O* and Osada & Appignanesi's *Manga Shakespeare*. Relative to Shakespeare's original, Nelson's *O* significantly emphasizes the themes of race and violence in *Othello* in order to emphasize specific social problems alive in the United States today. Through various choices of omitting and adding textual and visual elements, the *Manga Shakespeare* offers a rendering of *Othello* in which race does not have to be the nucleus. The comparison of Shakespeare's original *Othello* to Nelson's *O* and Osada and Appignanesi's *Manga Shakespeare* displays the influence of culture in the appropriation process of modern Shakespeare appropriations. Vice versa, it displays what modern Shakespeare appropriations can tell us about the culture or society from which they originate.

Table of contents

Introduction (3)

Chapter 1: Shakespeare's Othello (6)

Chapter 2: Nelson's American Othello (13)

Chapter 3: Japanese Manga Shakespeare (23)

Conclusion (31)

Works Cited (33)

Introduction

Although William Shakespeare's last work dates back to the early years of the 1610's, his works remain relevant to this very day. His works have withstood the test of time, grown to be world famous and have been the topic of conversation and investigation for many years now. However, Shakespeare's original works are only a part of his relevance in today's global culture. Numerous adaptations of his work ranging from plays to films, television series, novels, games and music offer the core of his works to a new audience in a new timeframe. Although the concept of adapting Shakespeare is recognized and practiced around the world, the ways in which he is appropriated are heavily culturally influenced. As Shakespeare plays tend to be extremely multi-dimensional and dynamic, they offer adaptors a wide range of components to focus on in their appropriation. Examples are plenty for various cultures worldwide, take for example the global movie industry. Hollywood produced big-screen adaptation of *Hamlet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *King Lear*, respectively referring to *The Lion King* (1994), *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), *Get Over It* (2001) and *A Thousand Acres* (1997). Bollywood produced movie adaptations of *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, respectively referring to *Omkaara* (2006), *Maqbool* (2003) and *10ml Love* (2010). Lastly, the Japanese movie industry has appropriated *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, respectively referring to *Throne of Blood* (1957) and *Ran* (1985). All of these adaptations reveal and reflect on some of their cultural background in the appropriation choices they make regarding Shakespeare's original. The choices made during the process of adaptation give an insight into the cultural background of the adaptation and the different ways in which Shakespeare is used around the world. This culture-influenced notion of Shakespeare adaptations is not new, as a number of publications dedicate attention to the specific way in which Shakespeare's work has been appropriated in a specific culture. Lawrence Levin, for example, describes the way in which Shakespeare has been specifically

appropriated in the United States considering its cultural values in his book "*William Shakespeare and the American People: A Study in Cultural Transformation.*" (1984). Dennis Kennedy and Li Lan Yong build upon the same idea, but specifically describe the various ways in which Shakespeare is appropriated in the Asian culture in their book "Shakespeare in Asia: Contemporary Performance." (2010). Subsequently, publications regarding the comparison between different culturally influenced Shakespeare adaptations arise. Anthony Dawson, for example, describes the triangular relationship between Shakespeare's original works and the British culture of the time, French translation and acting traditions, Asian theatre traditions and inspirations in his book "International Shakespeare." (2002). Even more topical in this regard is Huang and Ross's book "Shakespeare in Hollywood, Asia, and Cyberspace" (2009), putting forth an analysis of the so-called intercultural traffic between Shakespeare movie adaptations across cultures.

The focus in this thesis will thus be on the cultural influence within Shakespeare adaptations across different cultures. An analysis of this cultural influence requires an insight into the culture from which a certain adaptation originates. Moreover, it shows the versatility and dynamic nature of the work of William Shakespeare and its seemingly everlasting relevance both in terms of entertainment and education. In order to compare the cultural influence of various Shakespeare adaptations one logically needs adaptations to compare. Therefore, this thesis will focus on a triangular comparison between Shakespeare original version of *Othello*, Tim Blake Nelson's Hollywood adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello* called *O* (2001) and Ryuta Osada and Richard Appignanesi's Japanese *Manga Shakespeare* version of *Othello*.

Introducing the adaptations that will feature in comparison to Shakespeare's *Othello*, one could say that Nelson's *O* is the most faithful adaptation that will be discussed. *O* can be described as a modern adaptation of *Othello* set in the context of a predominantly white high

school in the United States. *O* narrowly follows the basic plotline of Shakespeare's *Othello*, narrating the story through the eyes of the Hollywood version of Othello; Odin James. Odin is the star player of the high school's basketball team and the only black student attending the school. Although racial tension could debatably be considered a theme in Shakespeare's *Othello*, it definitely is the major theme in Nelson's *O*.

Ryuta Osada and Richard Appignanesi's Japanese *Manga Shakespeare* version of *Othello* goes about adapting Shakespeare in a different manner compared to Nelson. Most striking is perhaps the clear clash of cultures within the work. On the one hand, there is the only lightly edited Shakespearean English language, the reading flowing from left to right (as opposed to an original Japanese manga) and the exact core set of plot and characters as Shakespeare's original *Othello*. On the other hand, there is the characteristic over-the-top Japanese illustration style by Ryuta Osada, adding an element of fantasy and absurdism which the original never knew. Most captivating however is the relative absence of the racial component so vividly present in Nelson's *O*.

As Shakespeare's *Othello* features a racial component considering the treatment of its protagonist Othello, this seems like an interesting angle from which to analyze the cultural influence of its adaptations. Comparing the way in which the racial component of Shakespeare's 17th century *Othello* is represented at the time, in American Hollywood culture and in Japanese Manga culture offers a new cross-media and cross-cultural view upon the adaptation and the nature of Shakespeare's work. This thesis will thus not just tell something about Shakespeare in general, but also about *Othello* specifically; namely that it is not necessarily concerned with race at all. This statement will be corroborated through three chapters respectively concerning Shakespeare's 17th century *Othello*, Nelson's *O* and Osada and Appignanesi's Manga version of *Othello*.

Chapter 1: Shakespeare's *Othello*

When investigating modern Shakespeare adaptations, it is only logical to start at the base, with Shakespeare's original 17th century version of *Othello*. Before being able to compare the original to contemporary Shakespeare, an understanding of the text that sparked years and years of appropriation and debate is needed. More specifically, an understanding of the role of the theme of race and its representation in Shakespeare's 17th century *Othello* is needed to move forward.

From the very start of the play, various textual references to the theme of race in *Othello* come into view. A number of which we will discuss from this point onwards. Starting in the first scene of the first act, Iago and Roderigo talk about Othello, yet do not care to call him by his name. Othello is referred to as the Moor. This tendency by Iago and Roderigo sets off the tone of the characters distancing themselves from Othello. As the act progresses, the racially colored language intensifies. Before the act is over, Othello is referred to as "thick-lips" (1.1.67), an "old black ram" (1.1.90) and "the devil" (1.1.93). Apart from the somewhat plain racist remarks like having thick lips and being black, Othello is more viciously compared to an animal and the devil, implying the idea that the black race is considered inhuman. Iago's reference to the devil could well tie in with the idea of the unknown black man taking the shape and form of the devil, this also ties in with references relating to the supposed use of black magic, of which Brabantio accuses Othello in order to win his daughter's heart (James 224).

This notion actually ties in with the timeframe which is discussed here. According to Aubrey James and his article "Race and the Spectacle of the Monstrous in *Othello*", the English population during the 17th century still considered black people much the same as they thought about monsters. According to James they considered them somewhat "strange creatures from outside the boundaries of the known world." (James 222). More specifically

regarding *Othello* he states: “Blacks were outsiders in a more profound sense as well, at this time, for they were associated in the popular imagination with monsters, so that the play's numerous references to monstrosity would have resonated with Othello's racial characteristics to establish his extreme difference from typical Europeans.” (James 222) This extreme racial difference between Othello and his audience is exactly where Emily Bartels places the character's power. She ties in with James and considers the character of Othello to be a way for people to “demonize an Other as a means of securing the self.” (Bartels 454). When searching for the actual number of black people in Shakespeare's London, the answers prove vague. James Walvin states that the exact amount of black people around the end of the 17th century in England is unclear but, “there is no doubt that their numbers had been growing over the forty years since the first West Africans had been introduced to London in 1563.” (Walvin 12). Ruth Cowhig has also contributed to the discussion stating that “there were several hundreds of black people living in the households of the aristocracy and landed gentry or working in London taverns” (Cowhig 5). She immediately nuances her statement specifically with regard to the more common population of London when commenting that “even if most Londoners had seen blacks, however, the appearance on stage of a black person who spoke and felt must still have seemed remarkable.” (Cowhig 5).

Interestingly, Desdemona, like Othello earlier, is compared to an animal as well in the first act. She is presented as the “white ewe”, referring to a she-male sheep, who the “old black ram” Othello is making love to. Iago's animal imagery is not over as in the following scene, Othello and Desdemona are said to be “making the beast with two backs” (1.2.127). By this point however, Iago has increased his racial tone and transformed Othello from the “old black ram” (1.1.90) to a “barbary horse” (1.1.122). Once again implying that Othello's animal-like nature compromises Desdemona. This notion is put forth even stronger as Iago uses it to scare Brabantio when stating that unless he takes action “the devil will make a grandsire of you”,

implying that an interracial marriage and subsequent children are considered a terrible scenario (1.1.93).

Moving on to scene three of act one, in which Brabantio encapsulates the racist view of at least some of the Venetian community. He states that Desdemona's feelings for Othello are "against all rules of nature" (1.3.442), according to him she has "in spite of nature" (1.3.437) fallen in love "with what she feared to look on!" (1.3.439). According to her father, Desdemona should have acquired fear and a loathing towards the black race from her white upbringing. Further along the same scene, the Duke of Venice seems to defend Othello from Brabantio's accusations of the use of black magic on Desdemona. However, the Duke's words expose somewhat of a more deeply rooted racism. When addressing Brabantio, the Duke states: "If virtue no delighted beauty lack, your son-in-law is far more fair than black". (1.3.646). As the Duke is defending Othello, he seems to do so considering his military agenda. With Othello being an acclaimed military leader, the Duke cannot afford to lose him. Hence, we can read the Duke's statement in two ways. On the one hand, the Duke characterizes Othello as "virtuous" and "fair", thus complimenting him. However, these compliments seem to connect to the idea that the black race usually does not possess these positive qualities. Hence, the Duke's words suggest that Othello is not just "virtuous" and "fair", but possesses these qualities despite his blackness. Othello is shortly speaking rather the exception than the rule.

Advancing to act three, we once again hear Iago suggesting that an interracial marriage is most undesirable. He suggests that Desdemona, sooner or later, will have to find a match "of her own clime, complexion and degree" (3.3.1888). Furthermore, he deems the concept of interracial marriage to be "rank" and "unnatural" (3.3.1890). Iago poses the idea that there has to be something wrong with Desdemona if she were to choose a black man like Othello, instead of a man "of her own clime, complexion and degree". Iago believes that

Desdemona would be better off with someone white and from European descent, preferably from Venice. Additionally, in the last lines of Iago in this passage he is heard doubting Desdemona's loyalty to Othello in front of Othello. Iago states she will "recoil to her better judgment" and then "may fall to match you with her country forms and happily repent." (3.3.1894-1896). He states that Desdemona eventually must come to her senses and change her mind about being with Othello. Othello does not react angrily at these statements by Iago, instead he seems to accept them stating "if more thou dost perceive, let me know more." (3.3.1998). Could it be that all these racist stereotypes and remarks have gotten into Othello's head? Iago seems to be playing on Othello's fears of Desdemona leaving him because of his race or background, whereas this is not the case at all.

Advancing to the final act of the play, we hear Othello contemplate the murder of his Desdemona because of her alleged infidelity:

Yet I'll not shed her blood,
 Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
 And smooth as monumental alabaster.
 Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
 Put out the light, and then put out the light,
 If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
 I can again thy former light restore. (5.2.3302-3310)

As Othello mulls over the way he plans to kill Desdemona, he is strikingly obsessed with her skin being "whiter skin of hers than snow". Othello explains he does not plan to "shed her blood", in other words he thus decides not to stab her to death. He implies he does this because he does not want to mutilate her (white) skin. It seems odd that Othello focusses so much on Desdemona's race and skin, all while pondering over murdering her. Perhaps this ties in with Othello's apparently confused feelings regarding race as the play progresses. As

Othello is drawn deeper and deeper into Iago's web of lies, his image of himself and his race seem to change as well. As he is maddened by Iago's lies he holds to be true, he starts to adopt the racist feelings that have surrounded him throughout the play. An example of this can be found in act three, in which Othello suspects that Desdemona is cheating on him with Cassio. Othello states that "her [Desdemona's] name, that was as fresh as Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black as mine own face." (3.3.2067). Othello implies here that his reputation and good name have been "begrimed" by Desdemona's alleged infidelity (3.3.2067). Moreover, he compares a good name and reputation with a fresh and, more importantly, white face (3.3.2066). On the contrary, his begrimed and black face now serve as the metaphor for the negative situation that has transpired. Othello now thus associates the black color of his skin with negativity, exactly like characters around him have been doing from the very start of the play. Othello has essentially and ironically become somewhat of a racist himself. Another example of this development is found just after Othello finds out through Iago that Cassio has been seen with Desdemona's handkerchief. Othello states that "all my fond love thus do I blow to heaven ... Arise, black vengeance, from the hollow hell!" (3.3.2132). Once again, Othello associates his race with negativity and the crime he is about to commit through the "vengeance".

Now returning to the final act of the play, Emilia encounters Othello only moments after he murdered Desdemona. Othello confesses to his crimes stating that "She's like a liar gone to burning hell! 'T was I that killed her." (5.2.3459). Emilia at this point once again confirms Othello's delusions by directly associating the murder with race when stating: "O, the more angel she, and you the blacker devil!" (5.2.3462). Moreover, the devil imagery which Iago started in the first scene of the first act has returned right at the closing act.

Closing in on the end of the play, Othello finds out that Desdemona was not actually

cheating on him with Cassio and that it was all a web of lies devised by Iago. This leaves Othello broken, stating the following:

Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,
 Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak
 Of one that loved not wisely but too well;
 Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,
 Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,
 Like the base Judean, threw a pearl away
 Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,
 Albeit unused to the melting mood,
 Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
 Their medicinal gum. (5.2.3709-3718)

At this point it seems evident to recognize that Othello has incorporated the racist ideas that some characters around him have bestowed upon him. As Othello fully realizes that he killed Desdemona without an actual reason he feels like he has “threw a pearl away”, once again associating the white girl with a clean, pure and beautiful object like a pearl. On the contrary, his image of himself has dropped as low as it could, completing the arc from the strong and loved military leader of Venice to the broken and self-loathing man he has become just moments before his suicide.

Having now seen what the racial component of *Othello* contains, the question remains if race really is what *Othello* is about? I argue it is not. Racism in *Othello* is but the mean in order to achieve the end. Although, as pointed out earlier, racism was quite a big part of society in 16th and 17th century Europe, it is not the main incentive upon which the characters act. It is only used in order to achieve much deeper desires, most importantly Iago’s desire to take Cassio’s place as Othello’s right-hand man. Much the same as Roderigo’s desire to be

with Desdemona and Emilia's desire to be truly loved by Iago. A large factor in the success of Iago's operation then is Othello himself. The tragedy of Othello then is that in the end, Othello himself fulfills the stereotype which has been stamped upon him from the very first scene. When Othello murders Desdemona he confirms the stereotypical image the majority has of him. In this one moment culminating his mental demise, he seems to make the play about race, all while in its essence it is not. Because in its essence, *Othello* is about the characters' deepest desires and the lengths they go to, to achieve these. Moreover, it serves as a form of social criticism, showing how a phenomenon like racism can give evil a platform to exist upon.

Chapter 2: Nelson's American Othello

The previous chapter of this thesis analyzed the role of the theme of race and its representation in Shakespeare's 17th century *Othello* and asked itself the question if race really is what *Othello* is all about. It concluded stating that, although the theme of race plays a significant part in *Othello*, it is not the central theme in the play, nor is it the characters' primary incentive upon which to base their actions. However, modern Shakespeare adaptations do tend to put extra emphasis on themes like race in order to construct a certain narrative. A striking example of that tendency is the American Hollywood *Othello* adaptation *O*, directed by Tim Nelson, which significantly emphasizes the themes of race and violence in *Othello* in order to emphasize the specific social problems that are alive in the United States today.

When comparing Nelson's *O* to Shakespeare's *Othello*, *O* can be considered a faithful adaptation of Shakespeare's original. It can be described as a modern adaptation of *Othello* set in the context of a high school in the United States. *O* narrowly follows the basic plotline of Shakespeare's *Othello*, narrating the story through the eyes of the Hollywood version of Othello: Odin James. Instead of being the General of the Venetian army though, Odin is the star player of the Palmetto Grove Academy basketball team and the only black student attending the school. His teammates Michael Cassio and Hugo Goulding respectively portray Cassio and Iago from Shakespeare's original, while school outcast Roger Calhoun, high school dean Bob Brable and his daughter Desi respectively portray Roderigo, Brabantio and Desdemona. To complete the modern Shakespeare cast, Hugo's girlfriend Emily portrays Shakespeare's Emilia and coach Duke Goulding of the Palmetto Grove Academy basketball team fills the role of Shakespeare's Duke of Venice.

The similarities between Shakespeare's original play and Nelson's 2001 film adaptation are numerous and striking. Surprising at first sight are the choices made regarding

the names of the characters in *O*, which closely resemble Shakespeare's. Converting from Othello to Odin might seem like somewhat of a stretch when looking for Shakespearean resemblance, but transforming Iago to Hugo, Roderigo to Roger, Emilia to Emily and Desdemona to Desi does make the Shakespearean connection known from the very beginning of the movie.

The choices made when naming the movies' characters is not the only area in which Nelson chooses to stick closely to Shakespeare. The basic plot of *O* is almost identical to that of Shakespeare's original. To illustrate, Odin is the leader of the school's basketball team and passes by Hugo for a position that Hugo believes he deserves. Odin instead shares his most valuable player (MVP) trophy with Michael. Hugo then uses Roger and tells Desi's father Bob that Odin has raped his daughter. Further along the movie, Hugo uses Roger once more to purposely engineer a fight in order to discredit Michael, who is subsequently suspended from the basketball team. Hugo advises Michael to talk to Desi in order for her to talk to Odin on Michael's behalf. Closely thereafter Hugo informs Odin of Desi and Michael's spare time spent together, along with his suspicions of Desi cheating on Odin with Michael. Odin allows Hugo's lies to enter his mind and slowly becomes suspicious of Desi. Her comforting words are not able to prevent him from slowly descending into the madness created by his apparent troubles. Hugo thereafter manipulates Emily into stealing a scarf Desi got as a present from Odin. Hugo passes it to Michael in the hope of proving Desi's unfaithfulness to Odin, considering the worth and intentions of the gift. After Odin overhears a conversation between Hugo and Michael set up by Hugo, he is convinced of her unfaithfulness and plans to murder her in an act of ultimate vengeance. Hugo and Roger are obliged to attempt to murder Michael in order to protect their secret but fail and wound him. Subsequently Hugo murders Roger to cover his tracks. Meanwhile Odin strangles Desi to death in her bedroom as planned. Emily walks in on Odin and exposes Hugo's scheme to him, upon which Hugo murders her. Odin

ultimately sees the true line of events, and commits suicide driven by madness. Hugo is arrested and taken away from the scene.

If one now was to replace all character names from *O* with Shakespeare's original character names, the basic plot of Othello, stripped down to its essentials, would emerge. This shows to what large extent the makers of *O* decided to stick to Shakespeare's original. Just as important, however, are the ways in which Nelson's adaptation differs from Shakespeare's original. These differences are mostly found in the context and details of the film and show how Nelson used Shakespeare to address social problems specific for the American society.

Nelson confirms this idea in the director's commentary for *O*, emphasizing his use of the colors red, white and blue, which appear all through the film as part of the American flag or the Palmetto Grove Hawks' team colors (Corredera 1). Nelson states that the idea was to say that this was an American version of Shakespeare's tragic tale. (Corredera 1) Considering the United States' turbulent history concerning slavery and racism, it is no surprise that the focus on race in *O* is present from the start of the film.

At the beginning of the film we see a group of all-white birds together as Hugo's voice is heard as a voice-over, stating that: "All my life I always wanted to fly. I always wanted to live like a hawk. I know you are not supposed to be jealous of anything, but to take flight, to soar above everything and everyone, now that is living." (Nelson). At the moment Hugo has finished his sentence, the shot immediately switches from the group of all-white birds to one dark colored hawk, the Palmetto Grove basketball team's mascot. The very next shot is a close-up of Odin, drenched in sweat from playing basketball. These first few moments of the film already show Odin's position within the school. Through the combination of the group of white birds, Hugo's voice-over, the hawk mascot and the shot of Odin, analogies are made. Hugo wants to be like a hawk, but is only one of the many white birds. Odin, on the other hand, is the only hawk among the group of white birds. This analogy is true for Odin's

position on Palmetto Grove Academy as he is the only black student on campus and the best player on the basketball team. Coach Duke confirms this analogy during the first basketball scene, stating that Hugo is only a decoy, used to create the best possible chance for Odin to score the basketball. After Odin does score the game-winning basket, Nelson completes his analogy by immediately switching from Odin's game-winning shot to the hawk serving as team mascot. This way, Odin is positioned as the hawk on campus and on the basketball field, while Hugo is only one of the white birds.

This partly racial difference is emphasized further during the basketball game between the Palmetto Grove Hawks and the Bulldogs, a team comprised of only black players. During this game, the Hawks face the toughest opponent of the film. According to Corredera this shows the racialized nature of this athletic domination (5). Burnett connects Odin's position at Palmetto Grove Academy to the American history and culture stating that constructions of race can be deployed to underscore achievement, even as they are used to point up antipathetic and historically entrenched stereotypes (67). These stereotypes are confirmed in *O* as well as in *Othello*. Whereas the difference in situation between an experienced military leader and the star of the high school basketball team seems large, it is not. It is not because Othello's battlefield and Odin's basketball court are, in essence, not so different from each other. Odin's basketball team is the modernized version of Othello's army, with their games being their wars. This idea is affirmed by actor Mekhi Phifer, who plays the role of Odin in *O*, who states that: "These basketball scenes are almost like war." (OTheMovie Production). The comparison does not stop there, as the basketball games serve as much more than just exciting sports events at Palmetto Grove Academy. In the movie, the basketball scenes demonstrate the characters of and interrelationships between the players. This is most notably seen in the scene in which Odin shares his MVP-trophy with Michael instead of Hugo. This is Nelson's equivalent to Shakespeare having Othello choose Cassio in favor of Iago for a position as his

right-hand man. This then is a main incentive for both Iago and Hugo to devise a scheme to take down respectively Othello and Odin. Understanding the importance of the basketball scenes within his movie, Nelson planned three-hour training sessions every day for two weeks to make sure the actors were mentally prepared for this type of role (OTheMovie Production).

Corresponding with Nelson's scenes, American high schools' sports teams and student athletes are among their proudest possessions. Within the high school community of Palmetto Grove Academy, the basketball team is central to the success and image of the school. Because of this extremely American context the coach almost has more power than the dean, as Mekhi Phifer puts it (OTheMovie Production). This sports-centered culture trickles down to the student athletes as well, who are somewhat admired around campus. This is especially true for the basketball team's star player, Odin, who now is in a similar position to Othello's in Venice. Both are black males leading a group of white men, who are tolerated only because of their rare skills. Odin would probably never have attended Palmetto Grove Academy if it had not been for his athletic talents. This notion is confirmed by coach Duke and Odin himself. Coach Duke first asks his son Hugo to keep an eye on Odin, because if he [Odin] has got a problem, we have got a problem. (Nelson). The concern that would be created in the sports-centered high school culture in case Odin is going through troubles, is the decreased quality of the school's basketball team, not Odin's wellbeing. The notion that Odin is only important because of his athletic prowess is confirmed once Odin confronts coach Duke, asking him: "If you are so worried about me, how come this school bust its ass to get me here?". Coach Duke replies: "Because you were worth it" (Nelson). Odin's unique position within Palmetto Grove is then once more connected to race as coach Duke states that: "Odin is different, he is all alone here. There is not even another black student in this whole goddamn place." (Nelson). Put bluntly, Odin is only worthy of a place on Palmetto Grove Academy because of the success he can bring to the school's basketball team. He seems to be

present as a means of bringing entertainment and athletic success instead of intellectual prowess to Palmetto Grove. This stereotype of the masculine and athletic is not new, as Corredera states that the modern basketball court is not devoid of long held stereotypes associated with black masculinity. Rather, the court allows for the black male to appropriately channel his supposedly inherent physical dominance, while simultaneously providing a means of controlling and commodifying his body (Corredera 4). Hooks connects this stereotype to America's history of slavery, stating that professional sports have constituted an alternative work arena for many black men. In that world the black male body that was once abused in a world of labor based on brute force could be transformed (Hooks 21). This stereotype of the young black descendant of slaves trying to escape his background through sports does apply to Odin's situation at Palmetto Grove. Whereas the white students at Palmetto Grove Academy are able to earn success in life through a good education, Odin's only option is a professional basketball career. Thus, as Corredera states: "even as it provides a means of social mobility and authorized celebrity for young black men, the basketball court holds in tension constructions of black masculinity by emphasizing the black male body and its various forms of physical dominance." (5).

Another example of the use of black stereotypes is the film's music choices, which are not merely aesthetic, but also racialized (Corredera 6). Apart from the opening and closing scene, in which the aria "Ave Maria" from Verdi's *Othello* plays alongside Hugo's voice over, hip-hop and rap music dominate the musical landscape of the film. Interestingly, as Corredera puts it, "It is not until Odin appears that hip-hop becomes the dominant musical force" (Corredera 6). During the opening scene we hear "Ave Maria" played over a shot of the earlier mentioned white birds. As we have established earlier, these white birds symbolize Hugo and the white student body and culture of Palmetto Grove Academy, as opposed to the one dark hawk Odin. As soon as the shot cuts from the white birds to the hawk, hip-hop music

starts playing as the soundtrack of the basketball game that is about to resume. This stereotypical connection of black men to hip-hop music is embedded in the American culture through its history. As Tucker puts it: “In rap, representations of black men bearing far more than traces of their historical antecedents return in spectacular and audible forms. Although individual celebrities in other arenas, such as sport, have performed the role of the black brute, never has it been exploited for profit and pleasure to the extent that has been the case in rap. The figures of thugs or gangstas—America’s worst nightmares, as Tupac once called them—return in rap as speaking subjects.” (Tucker 131). Corredera builds upon this notion stating that the violence of the brute stereotype has transformed into the common image of the criminal black male, often epitomized by the ‘thug’ gangster figure associated with hip-hop culture. (Corredera 6). This stereotypical image is linked to Odin as the hip-hop music is played in scenes that heavily feature him in a strong role. As Odin’s face is prominent on screen, rap music by Outkast, Black Star, Spooks, Kurupt, 50 Cent and Tupac plays as the soundtrack of his character. This way the film “creates a vexed conclusion for Odin. Even as he tries to shift blame elsewhere, by aurally and visually characterizing him in a way that echoes the common cultural ‘thug’ figure, and by depending so thoroughly on stereotypes as a shortcut for depicting an individual in whose life race plays a defining role, the film makes it hard not to blame Odin’s Otherness for his actions.” (Corredera 7).

Less symbolic and more literal references to Odin’s unique position on Palmetto Grove Academy and the racism he endures, feature in the film as well. An example of this is the moment at which Emily expresses her concern over Odin to Desi. Desi questions Emily’s motivations in talking badly about Odin and asks her: “Would you be so concerned if he [Odin] was white?” (Nelson). This shows that the students of Palmetto Grove Academy are more than aware of the racial tension that plays a role in Odin’s situation at the school. Hugo even uses this knowledge to his advantage when he tries to sell the idea that Desi is cheating

with Michael to Odin. Hugo states that: “They do it in her room. And there is one more thing, don’t get mad at me for saying this but, they [Desi and Michael] call you the nigger man.” (Nelson). While Hugo abuses his knowledge of racism to lure Odin into a mental trap, Michael articulates the common racist tone when stating that: “He [Odin] is a freaking loser, the ghetto just popped out of him. Listen man, the nigger is out of control and I am glad he is of the team.” (Nelson). These remarks show that the characters in this film are not just innocent teenagers, but adolescents who are well aware of the racist agenda and are not afraid to use it themselves.

Another primary example of Nelson’s intentions with *O* is the choice of filming location. Whereas the original decision was to shoot the film in Toronto because of its affordability, the location was changed to Charleston, South Carolina at the last moment (OTheMovie Production). In 2019, Charleston is sadly best known for the racially-infused church-shooting in 2015, during which a 21-year-old white supremacist murdered nine African-Americans during a church service. Important for Nelson, in his 2001 film, however, was Charleston’s infamous heritage as part of the former Federation of southern states in the American civil war. This heritage is seen prominently during the regional dunk contest scene, in which a confederate flag hangs from the jury table. Nelson comments on the relationship between his protagonist and the filming location stating: “Place Odin on a distinctly ante-bellum campus, in a crisp school uniform, among the similarly dressed scions of former slave-owning families, and the rhetorical value is immeasurable.” (OTheMovie Production). From this statement we can deduce that Nelson is thus very aware of the effect of the filming location on the theme of the movie. Because of his deliberate choice in filming location, he steered the focus of the movie down one particular path. Once more, Nelson verifies this line of thought by stating that “Charleston gives the story a specific and pointed setting” (OTheMovie Production). This specific setting points the movie towards a focus on race and

racism, especially regarding Odin as the only black student at Palmetto Grove Academy.

Moreover, Nelson has (deliberately or not) eliminated the possibility of an alternative interpretation of Othello and *O*, namely the interpretation focusing on age. This reading of *Othello* states that not only race, but also age is a negative factor in the relationship between Othello and Desdemona. This reading is possible as Othello is much older than Desdemona in Shakespeare's original. In *O* however, Nelson has decided to drift away from Shakespeare, casting Mekhi Phifer and Julia Stiles in the roles of Odin and Desi. Phifer and Stiles are roughly the same age in the movie, eliminating the age-factor present in *Othello* from *O*. Through the elimination of this age-factor, even more emphasis is generated towards the racial theme in the movie.

To conclude this analysis and chapter we return to the final scene of the movie, in which Hugo's voice over is extended compared to the one in the opening scene. As Hugo is handcuffed on campus and taken away by the police, we hear him stating that: "A hawk is no good around normal birds, they can't fit in. Even though all the other birds probably want to be a hawk, they hate him for what they can't be: proud, powerful, determined, dark. Odin is a hawk. He soars above us, he can fly. One of these days everyone is going to pay attention to me, because I'm going to fly too." (Nelson). These are the last words of the film and of Hugo, who here returns to the opening scene in which the bird and hawk analogy was first made. These words showcase Hugo's awareness and use of racism. They crystalize his motivations and try to convey the message that racism is still very alive in American society today. Moreover, they show that Hugo's motivations are not solely based on racism, but on envy of the better sportsman too. In the American basketball sport however, which is dominated by African-American professionals, these go hand in hand.

We have now seen that Nelson chose to emphasize the racial component of Shakespeare's original *Othello*. He does so through the extensive use of black stereotypes.

Additionally, he adds a layer of meaning considering the United States' infamous history with school-shootings (Semenza 101). Nelson connects the past with the present, stating that: "The sort of violence and level of passion that the characters in *Othello* experience leads finally to murder and self-destruction. But these problems are faced today by teenagers. There are high-school shootings. They don't just happen in urban areas. We wanted to make a film that's true and coherent with what's going on in our society." (OTheMovie Production). From this statement it is clear that Nelson uses his film at least partly as a form of social criticism (Semenza 118). He studied Shakespeare and transposed some of the key themes from *Othello*, like race and violence, to the 21st century. He updates the 17th century character of Iago to his 21st century version of Hugo and connects Shakespeare's *Othello* to Odin in the same way. In doing so Nelson connects Iago's and *Othello*'s vices to those of the numerous school shooters in the United States (Semenza 113). Ultimately, Nelson created a 21st century update of Shakespeare's 17th century original *Othello*. He did so from an American viewpoint, emphasizing the specific social problems that are still alive in the United States today. Nelson thus focusses on race and violence, in particular regarding discrimination against African-Americans and mass (school) shooting violence, both tragic and current themes (Semenza 118). He does so through the representation we see in *O*, which emphasizes the criminal stereotypes embedded in the American culture and collective memory. Or as Corredera puts it: "By representing Odin as the black brute and the criminal black male, the film thus memorializes Odin as the vicious black man of racialized white fantasy, making him the embodiment of virulent American stereotypes." (Corredera 7) This way Nelson eliminates the possible number of interpretations and steers the viewer towards the message he hopes to convey. According to himself this entails "that the film is startlingly real, and, in the end, devastating." (OTheMovie Production).

Chapter 3: Japanese Manga Shakespeare

The previous chapter of this thesis analyzed the role of race in Tim Nelson's 2001 film adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello* called *O*. It concluded that *O* can be considered an American version of Shakespeare's tragedy which uses racialized white stereotypes of the black male in order to convey a message of social commentary. Whereas *O* does strongly emphasize the racial component of Shakespeare's original, other modern adaptations choose a different approach. The *Manga Shakespeare* version of *Othello* goes about adapting Shakespeare in a different manner compared to Nelson and his team. In their version of *Othello*, the racial component of Shakespeare's original barely features at all compared to, for example, Nelson's adaptation. In this chapter Osada and Appignanesi's *Manga Othello* will be analyzed and compared to Shakespeare's 17th century original and Nelson's 2001 film adaptation *O*.

The genre of the manga is an interesting subject of analysis as it is currently growing rapidly around the world. Manga turns out to be the fastest-growing niche within the comics market when concentrating on the Western market (Grande 1). Jüngst even states that "Manga have become the largest segment of translated comics in the Western world" (50). This development can be considered quite ironic considering the subject of this thesis being intercultural Shakespeare, because while we discuss the cultural influence within Shakespeare adaptations across different cultures, manga as a genre is moving interculturally from a solely Japanese existence to popularity in Europe and the United States. This popularity then influences European and American adaptations of Japanese manga in the same way in which Shakespeare is adapted through either Nelson's *O* or the *Manga Othello*.

The appropriation of a 17th century play into a 21st century manga entails more than might be expected. Douglas Lanier states that any Shakespeare appropriation into so-called popular culture entails "an interplay between two cultural systems—high and pop culture—

that operate in parallel realms, two bodies of reference, sets of cultural institutions, canons of aesthetic standards, modes of constructing cultural authority” (16). This interplay could, in this case, be best rephrased as being a marriage considering the success *Manga Shakespeare* has had. This success is not limited to aficionados of Japanese manga wanting to try something new. *Manga Shakespeare* is actively endorsed by many educational institutions who consider it to be valuable teaching material (Grande 2). While manga is not bound by any age-restricted demographic in Japan, its popularity in the rest of the world seems to limit itself to a younger population. Grande has noticed this trend as well and states that manga Shakespeare has “a special appeal to young people as a means of resisting the established values of high culture” (Grande 2). This interplay also exists in *Manga Shakespeare* as manga is, justly or not, not considered high art. Despite the technicality of the artform, manga “are not considered products of high culture” (Ingelsrud and Allen 50). Harrington and Bielby suggest that manga is seen as popular culture because they are “more immediately accessible, more emotional and less distant, as well as less moored to an identifiable single author” (6). On the other side of the spectrum, Shakespeare is seen as an “icon of high or proper culture” and “seems to stand apart from popular culture” (Lanier 3). Merging both worlds, the *Manga Shakespeare* series, first issued in 2007 by SelfMadeHero in the United Kingdom, seized the opportunity which the manga’s increased popularity in the Western world offered. According to Michael Bristol, the manga combines the so-called “Bardbiz” (or the Shakespeare Industry) with the so-called “Mangabiz”, which entails the complete industry supporting the manga discourse (Bristol 13).

A disquisition of the general thought process behind the creation of the appropriation is helpful. Emma Hayley, founder of London-based publishing house SelfMadeHero in 2007, states that the aim regarding the *Manga Shakespeare* series was to introduce teenagers or first-time readers to the work of William Shakespeare via a medium they understood. (268-

269). This key demographic is supposed to specifically understand Shakespeare better through the manga because of its “pace and vigor” and the fact that William Shakespeare created his plays to be seen instead of read out of a book (269). The visual element of the manga thus was key. This way, the *Manga Shakespeare* series strove to provide a combination between visual and textual elements in order to reach a new demographic.

When comparing the *Manga Shakespeare* version of *Othello* to Shakespeare’s original *Othello*, a few interesting differences and similarities immediately stand out. First of these is the reading order, which is flipped in order to appeal to an audience used to reading from left to right (Hayley 270). This is noteworthy as the Japanese are used to reading from right to left and/or from top to bottom. Original Japanese manga would thus never flow from left to right. Interestingly, Osada, Appignanesi and Hayley did decide to largely stay true to the original manga color scheme, which is traditionally black and white. The exception to this concerns the first few pages, which serve as colored visual dramatis personae, introducing the characters of the manga to the reader. This black and white color scheme is interesting because it affects the way in which the racial component of Shakespeare’s original *Othello* is adapted. On the first page of the dramatis personae we see Desdemona in the arms of her lover Othello. Othello, however, has only a slightly darker complexion than Desdemona. When after the dramatis personae, the switch is made to the black and white color scheme, Othello’s complexion becomes somewhat of a light grey compared to the surrounding white characters. It thus seems like the emphasis is not on Othello’s darker skin from the very onset of the manga. Comparing this to Nelson and *O*, a distinct difference is detected as Odin’s divergent black complexion is extremely emphasized through its uniqueness among its all-white surroundings.

As Hayley confirmed earlier, the *Manga Shakespeare* series strives to convey meaning through the combination of textual and visual elements. The visual elements of the manga do

not seem to emphasize Othello's blackness, at least not nearly as prominently as Nelson does in *O*. Interestingly, the textual elements of the adaptation do not emphasize Othello's blackness either compared to *O* and Shakespeare's original.

When analyzing the textual references to race and blackness in the *Manga Shakespeare* adaptation of *Othello*, only few are found when it is directly compared to its source material, Shakespeare's 17th century original *Othello*. This because interesting adaptation choices diminish the role of race in the *Manga Shakespeare Othello*. Fitting examples of this discrepancy can be found throughout the manga. For example, in the first act of Shakespeare's *Othello*, Othello is referred to as "the thick-lips" by Roderigo just before he ventures to Brabantio's house with Iago (1.1.67). This specific racist slur is not transferred to the manga version at all. Drawing conclusions exclusively from the manga up to this point, we can only assume that Iago's hatred of Othello has to do with his jealousy regarding Cassio's appointment as Othello's lieutenant. As Iago and Roderigo venture to Brabantio to inform him of his daughter's relationship with Othello, racist slur is employed once again. As we have seen in the first chapter of this thesis, Othello is referred to as an "old black ram" (1.1.90) and a "barbary horse" (1.1.122) before the scene is over. None of these racist insults are maintained in the *Manga Shakespeare Othello*. What has been maintained are the non-race specific insult regarding Othello. He is compared to "the devil" (1.1.93) by Iago and is called a "lascivious Moor" (1.1.137) by Roderigo. Comparing Othello to the devil obviously is ill-mannered and mean, however it is not a literal reference to his race. As far as the "lascivious Moor" goes, this is not a literal reference to race either. Any person belonging to any race can behave in a lascivious manner, this is not necessarily tied to a darker skin complexion. Referring to Othello as "the Moor" may seem at least disrespectful if not racist, however, this seems common practice, even among Othello's peers. For example, even Desdemona refers to Othello as "the Moor" in both Shakespeare's original *Othello* and the

Manga Shakespeare Othello (Appignanesi 40; *Othello* 1.3.537). Despite not literally referring to race, these last two remarks do possess a racial undertone when considering the timeframe of the play, which has been discussed in chapter one. Combining these insights, one could state that most direct and literal references and insults regarding Othello's race are omitted in the *Manga Shakespeare Othello*. However, the racist slur apparent in *O*, and to a lesser degree in Shakespeare's original *Othello*, is still present in the manga adaptation of *Othello*.

Concretely referring to the devil reference, this would entail the sentence "the devil will make a grandsire of you" (1.1.93). Although this notion is not strictly speaking racist, in the timeframe it does imply that an interracial marriage and subsequent children between Othello and Desdemona are considered undesirable.

Other racist slurs and references to race, too, have been omitted. In scene two of act one of Shakespeare's original, Brabantio describes Othello as something Desdemona feared to look upon. This obvious reference to Othello's complexion, considering him being the only black man surrounded by white people, is not featured at all in the manga adaptation. Moving on to 2.1, we hear Desdemona and Iago discussing the nature of women. During this overly sexist conversation from Iago's part, he states that "If she be black, and thereto have a wit, she'll find a white that shall her blackness fit." (2.1.921). By linking blackness to ugliness, Iago demonstrates his racism and positions the white race as superior to the black race. This passage is once more omitted in the manga adaptation of *Othello*. In 3.2, Iago then states that Desdemona, sooner or later, will have to find a match "of her own clime, complexion and degree". Thereafter, he deems the concept of interracial marriage to be "rank" and "unnatural" (3.3.1888). This obvious racist language is omitted in the manga adaptation, which reduces the passage to the following: "When she [Desdemona] is sated with his [Othello's] body, she will find the error of her choice. She must have change, she must." (48). This passage once more omits the racist slur present in Shakespeare's original.

However, not all references to race have been omitted in the *Manga Shakespeare Othello*. Perhaps in order not to omit too much of Shakespeare's eloquent language and not to completely omit a dimension of the play present in the original, Osada, Appignanesi and Hayley did decide to preserve certain passages. The first of these is the Duke of Venice's famous passage in the first act, stating that: "If virtue no delighted beauty lack, your son-in-law is far more fair than black." (1.3.646). As we have seen in chapter one, in this passage the Duke compliments as well as insults Othello in a way. On the one hand, the Duke characterizes Othello as virtuous and fair, thus complimenting him. However, these compliments seem to connect to the idea that the black race usually does not possess these positive qualities. Hence, the Duke's words suggest that Othello is not just virtuous and fair, but possesses these qualities despite his blackness. Othello is, in brief, rather the exception than the rule.

Other references to race that have been preserved by the adapters include Othello's personal reflections regarding race and Emilia's statements regarding Othello in act five. An example of the former is Othello's contemplation on how to murder Desdemona. In both Shakespeare's original and the manga adaptation, Othello states: "Yet I'll not shed her blood, nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow." (Appignanesi 184; *Othello* 5.2.3305). This statement does put emphasis on race, yet it does not do this in a negative way per se. It highlights the difference in race and the importance of that notion within the timeframe of the original play. The statements made by Emilia in act five are perhaps too important to omit, although this could be argued for a number of omitted passages as well. Nevertheless, Osada, Appignanesi and Hayley decided not to omit too much of the play's finale when adapting it into their manga. Just as in Shakespeare's original, Emilia reacts to Othello's murder of Desdemona by stating: "O, the more angel she, and you the blacker devil!" and "He lies to the heart. She was too fond of her most filthy bargain." (Appignanesi 193-195; *Othello* 5.2.3462).

These statements preserve the racial tone present in Shakespeare's original *Othello* and to a stronger degree Nelson's *O*, although in significantly less prominent fashion.

One could wonder what the reason is for the toning down of the racial dimension in the *Manga Shakespeare* version of *Othello*. As there exists no record of the adapters Osada, Appignanesi and Hayley regarding the role of race in their adaptation, no conclusive proof is present. However, it could be argued that this relative disregard for the race component of the play stems from the relatively low racial diversity within the population of Japan. This culture has given rise to the manga and its surroundings could play a role in their content. Atsushi Kondo investigated Japan's population diversity in his article "The Development of Immigration Policy in Japan". He states that Japan historically has always had a low influx of foreigners, first as an economically closed empire, later for other reasons. Kondo states that "Japan's economy soared following World War II, but unlike the experience of other countries, Japan's economic growth transpired without importing foreign workers" (416). The causes of this trend were large domestic migration, economic automation and long working hours (416). Of the immigrants that did arrive in Japan, Koreans and Chinese are historically by far the largest group (415), deviating only slightly from Japanese in race and appearance. This absence of racial diversity on the Japanese streets might have been a factor in the fact that this racial diversity is also absent in their popular culture and thus their manga.

As has been made clear in this thesis, Hayley and her team of adapters have been very conscious about the trans-medial aspect of their appropriation and studied the characteristics of the manga in Japan before starting their *Manga Shakespeare* series. It is then not unlikely that Osada, Appignanesi and Hayley toned down the racial component of Shakespeare's *Othello* in their manga adaptation in order to stay close to the characteristics of Japanese manga, despite the manga being released in the United Kingdom first.

Now that the relative absence of the racial component in the *Manga Shakespeare* has

been established, what takes its place in the motivation of the plot? The answer to this could lie in the characteristics of the manga genre. As the manga tends to stress extreme emotions like vengefulness and jealousy anyway as a generic characteristic, it does not necessarily need any additional deeper motivations in order to make the plot work. It could even be argued that adding such a deeper motivation, like for example the racial component in *Othello*, works counterproductive. As the manga already does convey a relatively large amount of information to its reader through the combination of textual and visual elements, it does not need more depth in its plotline. The grotesque and fantastical visual elements tie in with this idea and provide meaning which builds upon the textual elements of the manga. In the *Manga Shakespeare Othello*, the visual appearance of the characters reflects their one-dimensional motivation which corresponds with the textual element. For example, Othello and the Duke of Venice are portrayed with angel-like large wings. Iago is portrayed as an evil magician of sorts, with the ability to shoot sharp arrows from his hands. Additionally, Roderigo is portrayed as an actual dog. This ties in with Roderigo's relationship with Iago, in which Iago clearly leads Roderigo on, despite his higher social rank. All the stereotypes used in the visual element of the manga are thus not tied to race and demonstrate the consistency between the textual - and visual elements of the manga.

Through the choices of omitting and adding various textual and visual elements, which have been discussed above, Osada, Appignanesi and Hayley appropriated *Othello* in a way that causes their *Manga Shakespeare* version of *Othello* to be specific and general at the same time. It is specific because of its faithfulness to the original characteristics of the manga, both visually and textually. Because of this consciousness of medium, the *Manga Shakespeare* version of *Othello* offers a rendering of *Othello* that is less about race than Shakespeare's original. This opens up the storyline for an understanding of Shakespeare's 17th century classic, in which race does not have to be the nucleus.

Conclusion

Although William Shakespeare's work dates back to the 17th century, the relevancy of his work still remains today. This is seen most prominently through countless appropriations. The specific focus of a given appropriation is heavily culturally influenced. This cultural influence within Shakespeare adaptation features prominently in two modern appropriations of Shakespeare's *Othello*: Nelson's film adaptation *O* (2001) and Osada and Appignanesi's *Manga Shakespeare Othello* (2009).

As Shakespeare's work and writing style are considered multi-dimensional and dynamic, appropriators have various components available to emphasize. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, race is considered one of these components. Although racism was quite a big part of society in 16th and 17th century Europe, it is not the main incentive upon which the characters act. The tragedy of race in *Othello*, lies in the notion that Othello himself fulfills the black stereotype which has been stamped upon him from the very first scene. General racism and racist slur thus are a part of *Othello* as a whole and motivates characters like Iago. However, infidelity, vengeance and jealousy play just as big a role as race in *Othello* overall.

In contrast to Shakespeare's original, Nelson's *O* significantly emphasizes the themes of race and violence in *Othello* in order to emphasize specific social problems that are still alive in the United States today. Nelson focusses on race and violence from an American viewpoint, particularly regarding discrimination against African-Americans and mass (school) shooting violence, both tragic and current themes. He does so through the extensive use of black stereotypes, literal racism, racialized music choices and the Charlotte shooting location. Nelson transforms Shakespeare's themes of race and violence to the 21st century and in doing so connects Iago's and Othello's vices to those of school shooters in the United States today. This way Nelson eliminates the possible number of interpretations and steers the viewer towards a focus on race and social issues.

Whereas *O* does strongly emphasize the racial component of Shakespeare's original, Osada and Appignanesi's *Manga Shakespeare Othello* barely features race at all, compared to Nelson's appropriation and Shakespeare's original. Textually, the vast majority of racial remarks present in Shakespeare's *Othello* have been omitted in the manga. Visually, Othello's divergent race and corresponding complexion have been extremely toned down. The reason for these choices lies in the heritage of the genre. As the manga genre originates in Japan, its characteristics are heavily influenced by Japanese culture. The relative disregard for the racial component of the play could then stem from the relatively low racial diversity within the population of Japan. This culture has given rise to the manga and its surroundings could play a role in their content. The replacement for the relative absence of the racial component of *Othello* in the manga also lies in its characteristics. As the manga tends to stress extreme emotions like vengefulness and jealousy anyway as a generic characteristic, it does not necessarily need any additional deeper motivations in order to make the plot work. The grotesque and fantastical visual elements tie in with this idea and provide meaning which builds upon the textual elements of the manga. All the stereotypes used in the visual element of the manga are not tied to race and demonstrate the consistency between the textual - and visual elements of the manga. Through the choices of omitting and adding various textual and visual elements, the *Manga Shakespeare* offers a rendering of *Othello* in which race does not have to be the nucleus.

In sum, the comparison of Shakespeare's original *Othello* to Nelson's *O* and Osada and Appignanesi's *Manga Shakespeare* displays the influence of culture in the appropriation process of modern Shakespeare appropriations. Vice versa, it displays what modern Shakespeare appropriations can tell us about the culture or society from which they originate.

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