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Reading Journal Assignment #6

Iago and Hugo are completely different characters in the adaptations *Othello* and *O*. Oliver Parker stays more true to the character of Shakespeare's Iago than Tim Blake Nelson's Hugo.

Just as in *Othello*, Oliver Parker's Iago remains true to the mental basis of Iago's character, while Tim Blake Nelson's Hugo is a complete departure from the original text. Parker's Iago is clearly a psychologically driven character. Iago reveals his plots to us by way of Shakespeare's soliloquies and we are more involved in the inner thoughts of his mind. However, Nelson's Hugo refrains from any Shakespearian soliloquy, but does occasionally use a voiceover, which provides the audience with Hugo's generic thoughts. The only indication of Hugo's plotting comes only through his actions. The audience is unaware of his intentions until he manipulates others to carry out his plans. Additionally, Hugo's character is weakened by Nelson to attract sympathy from the audience. In *O*, Hugo is influenced by drug use. The use of drugs is intended to lead the audience to believe an impairment of both Hugo's judgment and his desire to mastermind a scheme to destroy all of his friends. Hugo tries to gain the unfair advantage on the basketball team by using drugs instead of his mental acumen as it was written by Shakespeare. This is the antithesis of Parker's Iago. Parker shows us in intimate detail the rational mental status of Iago through his reasoning and planning. Iago shares this same mental stability with Shakespeare's Iago, who is eerily collected about the foul deeds he will perform.

The most distinguished flaw in Nelson's *O* is Hugo's reason for committing the acts he does. Nelson once again creates pity for Hugo by making Hugo destroy Odin for the love of his father. While this one facet is a driving force for the entire movie, it is the film's greatest weakness and stray from Shakespeare's *Othello*. Iago was intended to be a character that was only pitied because of his lack of compassion and human qualities. Nelson created a pitiable situation in which any person would feel compassion for the lack of love Hugo received and how he was trumped by Odin in his own father's heart. From the initial speech of Hugo's father at the awarding of most valuable player to Odin, the situation portrays itself as an unfortunate set of circumstances in which Hugo has found himself placed. On the other hand, Parker's Iago is held accountable for his actions as his only motivation is found in greed and lust. Iago shows throughout Parker's *Othello* that he is willing to do away with anyone and anything that stands in his path to personal greatness. While Hugo desires recognition for his success on the basketball team, it is apparent that he is driven by the want of love from his father. During Act II???? of *Othello* and one of Parker's Iago's soliloquies, Iago reveals in soliloquy that he lusts over Desdemona. This adds to the savage nature and lack of pity for Iago when he encourages Othello to kill Desdemona for the shame she has caused her husband. However, Nelson chose to omit this character from Hugo. Hugo never mentions wanting to have relations with Desdemona or lusting over her. Thus, when he aids Odin in the plot to murder Desi, it is not nearly as shocking because he has no apparent feelings for her. It is clear that Nelson believed it was unimportant to remain true to the rationalization of Shakespeare's Iago by the amount of alteration performed on Hugo's motivation.

The most difficult interpretive problem for Iago for modern audiences is his believability. Iago is portrayed as a brutal, yet incredibly cunning character who is almost god-like in action.

Parker and Nelson have obviously taken two completely different paths to achieve what they wanted. Parker took the more sensible path by staying true to the Shakespearean Iago because his character was already well developed through soliloquies and his motivations. However, Nelson took the opposite path in making a huge departure from the original Iago. This decision was made to better suit the mind of a teenager in a modern setting. Audiences don't want to hate a character that is so young who has gone astray. Thus, Nelson has softened the character of Iago, thus making him more authentic as a modern day teenager at the expense of textual accuracy. Purists would obviously view *O*'s divergence from the Master's works as blasphemy. Iago is a character that was developed to be despised because his actions are despicable. However, Shakespearean conservatives would most likely not have conflict with the changes made to Hugo. The changes would be accepted because the adaptation makes *Othello* in a modern setting more plausible and appeasing the audiences by not playing on the extremes of their emotions. Shakespeare's text is wide open for interpretation of adaptations and Parker and Nelson have catered their films to two different audiences. Parker has made a more believable Iago in a textual *Othello* sense, while Nelson has created a more realistic modern Hugo.