

## Reading Tim Blake Nelson's *O*: Adapting and Obfuscating Othello's Blackness

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### ABSTRACT

This study analyzes Tim Blake Nelson's "O" (2001) as a modern film adaptation of William Shakespeare's "Othello", with particular attention to the representation of Blackness and how it is reshaped or obscured in the cinematic form. Using a qualitative, interpretative textual analysis method, the research explores how racial identity, which is central in the original play, becomes muted or recontextualized in the film adaptation. The study applies adaptation theory, semiotic analysis, and critical race theory to examine both narrative and visual elements of the film—including dialogue, characterization, cinematography, and symbolism. Through a comparative framework, the analysis identifies key thematic shifts, such as the movement from overt racial tension in "Othello" to internal psychological conflict in "O". Visual aids and a comparative table support the findings, illustrating the adaptation's emphasis on personal trauma over racial discourse. The results reveal how the film strategically downplays racial markers, offering a layered yet potentially problematic reading of race in contemporary adaptation. This research contributes to broader discussions of race, identity, and representation in Shakespearean film adaptations.

**Keywords:** Othello, Tim Blake Nelson's O, Blackness

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis film "O" (2001) karya Tim Blake Nelson sebagai adaptasi modern dari drama "Othello" karya William Shakespeare, dengan fokus khusus pada representasi identitas kulit hitam (Blackness) dan bagaimana unsur tersebut dibentuk ulang atau disamarkan dalam bentuk sinematik. Dengan menggunakan metode analisis tekstual kualitatif dan interpretatif, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana identitas rasial yang menjadi pusat dalam drama asli menjadi redup atau direkontekstualisasi dalam versi film. Kajian ini menerapkan teori adaptasi, analisis semiotik, dan teori ras kritis untuk menelaah elemen naratif dan visual dalam film—termasuk dialog, karakterisasi, sinematografi, dan simbolisme. Melalui kerangka perbandingan, analisis ini mengidentifikasi pergeseran tema utama, seperti perubahan dari ketegangan rasial yang eksplisit dalam "Othello" menjadi konflik psikologis internal dalam "O". Visualisasi dan tabel perbandingan mendukung temuan, yang menunjukkan penekanan adaptasi ini pada trauma personal dibandingkan diskursus rasial. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa film secara strategis meredam penanda rasial, sehingga menghasilkan pembacaan yang kompleks namun berpotensi problematis terhadap isu ras dalam adaptasi kontemporer. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap diskusi yang lebih luas mengenai ras, identitas, dan representasi dalam adaptasi film karya Shakespeare.

**Kata kunci:** Othello, O karya Tim Blake Nelson, Identitas Kulit Hitam

## A. Introduction

“That's great, son. Congratulations. You know I don't ever have to worry about you, thank God. You've always done well and you always will. But Odin is different. He's all alone here. Hell, there's not even another black student in this whole damn place” (BBC1 London, 2001).

The quotation above is the part of the conversation between Hugo (Josh Hartnett) and his father, Duke Goulding (Martin Sheen) in “O” screen adaptation of Othello directed by Tim Blake Nelson and written by Brad Kaaya. Hugo tries to seek an attention from his father by shifting the conversation topic from Odin to himself and his recent good score in English, but his father seems to keep more paying attention to Odin as the only black student in the school and their basketball team's most skilled player. Here, Hugo's jealousy is drawn by a feeling of being unloved and underappreciated by his father. This feeling is portrayed in the scene that makes Duke not visible in the frame, blocked through the wall. Here, the camera tries to only focus on Hugo's expression and prevents the audience to see Duke. In this way, the audience can catch every expression of Hugo when he feels disappointed in his father's response. The scene tries to configure Hugo's aloneness although he sits together with his father and talks to each other. The camera highlights the irony of how his father, Duke, has been blind to read his own son's loneliness which drives the plot to an avoidable disaster and violence.

In Nelson's O, the Duke character pays more attention to the Othello character as Othello's text version, but Hugo's intentions are more explicit in Nelson's film adaptation. Moreover, Hugo has a father-son relationship with the Duke, while Iago only has a court-subject relationship with the Duke (Criniti, 2004). This father-son relationship between Hugo and Duke has bold the intensity of Hugo's jealousy and provides a much clearer motivation for the ensuing crimes (Criniti, 2004). Here, Hugo feels like losing his father's affection which leads him to be a villain and manipulates Odin. Therefore, this essay would like to

explore how Nelson's and Kaaya's screen adaptation makes Hugo's jealousy motivation become more visible than in Shakespeare's play. I would argue that Nelson and Kaaya try to obfuscate the blackness issue by highlighting Hugo's jealous motivation since the adaptation is adjusted to the adaptation of contemporary American English in 2002 and adjusted to teen audiences.

Kaaya and Nelson intend to make the basic plot structure of “O” adhere closely to Shakespeare's original text (Crinity, 2004). However, as a close adaptation of “Othello”, the film faces a challenge. Othello as text displays racial representation in its depiction of blackness. For example, In scene 3, the second act of Othello, Iago speaks to Cassio to evaluate Othello's blackness: “Well: happiness to their sheets! Come, lieutenant, I have a stoup of wine; and here without are a brace of Cyprus gallants that would fain have a measure to the health of black Othello” (2.3.26-29) (Shakespeare, 2016). Here, Iago invites Cassio to have drunk and having a conversation leads to racism. Iago intends to bring up the racism issue regarding the negative stereotypes of blackness and the black Othello. The line “have a measure to the health of black Othello” implies that there is a negative suspicion towards the black person. It also suggests that blackness is interpreted as subhuman or inferior (Glotzer, 2018). In Nelson's “O”, the adaptation depicts Odin, the black student, as a superior character. Here, Hugo as the Iago character is bitterly envious of Odin's superiority in the basketball team and in his father's affection (Semenza, 2005). Therefore, Hugo becomes a jealous teenager who emotionally seeks for his father's attention. By comparison, in Othello, there is an uncertainty about Iago's villain motive whether he is jealous of Othello's social and sexual status or the racial issue of blackness. Iago hates the Moor, but his motivation may not be fully revealed as Iago in Scene 3 of Act 1: “I hate the Moor: my cause is hearted; thine hath no less reason. Let us be conjunctive in our revenge against him” (1.3.366-368) (Shakespeare, 2016). Thus, Iago's character in Nelson's O, Hugo, has a more visible

reason to be jealous of Othello's character, Odin, which is able to be caught by the audience.

## B. Research Method

This study applies a qualitative and interpretative textual analysis approach to examine the ways in which Tim Blake Nelson's film *O* (2001), written by Brad Kaaya, adapts and reconfigures William Shakespeare's *Othello*, particularly in terms of how Blackness is represented and, at times, obscured. The research centers on close reading and visual analysis of key scenes in the film, placing emphasis on cinematic techniques such as framing, lighting, color contrast, and camera angles, especially in moments of character interaction that reveal psychological tension, racial discourse, and narrative divergence from the source text (Dyer, 2021; Alvarado, 2022).

A comparative analysis is employed to explore how *O* as a screen adaptation parallels and diverges from *Othello* in representing the Black male protagonist, shifting the focus from racial identity to individual psychological motives—specifically jealousy. In this context, the study draws on theories of adaptation (Hutcheon, 2013), semiotics (Barthes, 1977), and critical race theory (Hall, 2017) to understand how racial markers are encoded and potentially obfuscated in visual and verbal cues throughout the film. Intertextual references to *Othello* are examined alongside contemporary markers of youth culture and American racial dynamics, to assess how the film negotiates racial representation for a teen audience in a modern American high school setting (Smith, 2023).

The research also analyzes symbolic elements—such as the recurring imagery of the black hawk versus white doves, and the *mise-en-scène* in moments of emotional crisis—to argue that the film constructs a racialized visual language that simultaneously acknowledges and displaces the issue of Blackness. In doing so, it evaluates how Hugo's jealousy is foregrounded as a primary narrative driver,

potentially overshadowing the racial discourse central to Shakespeare's play. In addition, selected dialogue and character monologues are analyzed to trace the evolution of racial awareness and internal conflict in the characters, especially Odin.

This methodology enables a nuanced interrogation of how adaptation can serve both as a vehicle for continuity and distortion—preserving the original's thematic tensions while recontextualizing or diminishing others, particularly those pertaining to race. The paper ultimately seeks to understand how the film adaptation navigates the dual pressure of fidelity to the Shakespearean text and the demands of a culturally specific, racially sensitive contemporary audience.

To illustrate the comparative process, the study includes both visual and tabular representations. The comparison of thematic emphasis between “*Othello*” and “*O*”: Jealousy, Race, Power, Identity, Cultural Context. Meanwhile, the following table presents the comparison of thematic and stylistic treatment in the two works.

Table 1. Comparison of “*Othello*” (1603) and “*O*” (2001) in Representing Blackness

Element	<i>Othello</i> (Shakespeare)	<i>O</i> (Tim Blake Nelson)
Central Conflict	Racial tension + jealousy	Jealousy, peer pressure, and identity
Representation of Blackness	Explicitly racialized, socially alienated	Ambiguous racial coding, less overt conflict
Setting	Venice & Cyprus (military context)	American high school (modern teen drama)
Character of Iago/Hugo	Manipulative, driven by racial and social envy	Driven by jealousy and the need for recognition
Role of Language	Elevated, poetic, charged	Casual, modern, with suppressed

	with racial metaphor	racial cues
Visual Symbolism	Handkerchief (infidelity, trust)	Hawk and dove imagery (power and innocence)

### C. Result and Discussion

In this analysis, the researcher discusses how racial stereotypes—especially those related to Black masculinity—are subtly represented and problematized in Tim Blake Nelson’s film “O” (2001). By adapting Shakespeare’s “Othello” into a contemporary high school setting, the film foregrounds issues of race, power, and jealousy through both visual and verbal cues. The study particularly focuses on how the imagery of animals (such as the hawk and doves), narrative framing, and character behavior serve to simultaneously reinforce and obscure the stereotype of Black male violence. Through this lens, the film constructs a tension between Hugo’s explicitly stated jealousy and Odin’s racially coded characterization. While Hugo’s motivations are overtly developed to rationalize his manipulation, the film nonetheless embeds the racial anxieties around Blackness in ways that cannot be fully dismissed.

#### Obfuscating Blackness Stereotype

As Hugo’s motivations are more explicit than Iago’s, some images associated with the villain’s plan and the racial issue also materialize in Nelson and Kaaya’s contemporary adaptation (Ludot-Vlasak, 2015). In the early scene of O film, there is a close-up shot of white doves which are contrasted with a black hawk above the gymnasium floor. The black hawk is linked to Odin as the camera cuts directly to Odin after closing up the hawk. While Hugo refers to the white dove as he said that he wants to be like a hawk: “All my life I always wanted to fly; I always wanted to live like a hawk. I know you’re not supposed to be jealous of anything or anyone, but to take flight, to soar above everything and

every one: now that’s livin” (BBC1 London, 2001). In this way, Hugo’s desire to live like a hawk symbolizes his jealousy. Hugo’s true desire is to take Odin’s place, not only on the basketball team but also in his father’s heart. Here, Hugo considers Odin’s superiority regarding to Odin’s difference and Hugo’s aloneness. Hugo’s perspective of a hawk is the superior bird living among the white doves. Although the hawk is as the image of superiority, the it cannot thrive in an environment largely populated by doves. Thus, Hugo struggles to dream of being a hawk-like Odin, while Odin himself strives to fit in like a dove.

At the beginning of the film, the contrasting color of animal images, a black hawk and white doves, has indicated that there is racism of blackness brought into the film narrative. By asserting these different images, O looks like to show Othello’s emphasis on the complexities of human jealousy while still acknowledging the underlying racial tensions. Hugo’s confession of his jealousy and ambition is presented through the final voice-over, which further expands on the bird-related metaphor:

“But a hawk is no good around normal birds. It can’t fit in. Even though all the other birds probably want to be hawks, 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 gonna fly too” (BBC1 London, 2001).

Here, Hugo explicitly tells of his reasons of jealousy, such as power and pride. Moreover, Hugo clearly implies the darkness of the hawk is like Odin as he said “Odin is a hawk”. While he mentions himself as the normal bird that signs himself as a normal white person. Thus, Hugo is a normal white person that gets jealous because of Odin’s black superiority and power. This jealousy is drawn as the assumption of a white male that the black male should not be more powerful than the white. The film also emphasizes that there is a social, racial and cultural gap between Odin and his schoolmates except the scene when the team thanks to Odin for winning a

game. Although Hugo is jealous of Odin's superiority, he truly realizes that no one, the white students, likes a black person like Odin. In the early of film narrative, Hugo's jealousy has been attached to the racial issue, yet Kaaya and Nelson blur the racial issue of blackness in a subtle way of animal images.

The contrasting imagery of hawk and doves also symbolizes the racial issue in the relationship between Desi and Odin, the camera frames the contrasting skin between Desi's white skin and Odin's dark skin when they lie topless in bed together. The basic sequence of the film is an R-rating which includes violence, partial nudity and sexual situations, under 17 requires accompanying parent or guardian (Hodgon, 2003). In the scene of his conversation with Desi, Odin makes a joke which leads to the negative racial stereotype when Desi touches Odin's scar:

Odin : Are you asking me how I got that scar on my back?

Odin: I was a c-section baby, and they cut too far. My mom couldn't afford a good doctor.

Desi: Are you serious?

Odin: [He laughs] I fell off my skateboard. (BBC1 London, 2001)

Here, Nelson seems to make a paradox of the audience's stereotype of blackness. The audience may think the cause of Odin's scar is related to the racial issue that black people were poverty to not able to have a good doctor. By contrast, this scene reveals Odin's ability to confront the racial dynamics related to his identity. As Corredera states that this scene shows Odin's ability to confront, negotiate, and upend the expectations raised by his blackness (Corredera, 2017). Odin tries to obfuscate the negative stereotype of blackness suffering by the youth culture of skateboarding as the youth culture in American teenagers

In Nelson's "O", another negative stereotype of the relationship between Desi and Odin is their sexual relationship. The intimate scene between Desi and Odin. The camera shoots Odin on top of Desi, but suddenly it transforms into the image of Mike in the mirror as the transference of

Odin's jealousy. Therefore, Odin becomes rough with Desi. Desi asks Odin to stop but he does not. The way how Odin hurts Desi and being rough in their sexual relationship signs as the violent black male rape a white woman. This scene evokes the historical racial stereotype that portrays Black men as sexual threats to white women, a myth that has long been used to justify lynching.. The rape scene transforms the stereotype that the black male dominates the white female. The scene casts Odin as the threat to a young, innocent white woman, effectively portraying him as a representation of the "black buck" stereotype (Corredera, 2017). The depiction of Odin's sexual aggression reflects the historical caricatures of the brute and black buck, which were created to vilify and dehumanize black masculinity.

In the other depiction scene, Odin confronts the stereotype of a young Black man commonly seen in American portrayals of Black masculinity by referring to himself as a "nigga", Mentioning nigga asserts his complex racial difference with Desi. Odin tells Desi, "I pulled you cuz I'm that kind of nigga." The scene conveys to the audience that Odin and Desi confront a racial difference in their relationship. Later, Hugo also uses the words "nigga" to manipulate Odin's mind about Desi's affair with Mike. He tells Odin, "they call you the nigger, man." Although Odin believes that the racial difference would not matter to Desi as he said, "Desi wouldn't say nothing like that", racism still becomes Odin's anxiety and fear that haunts him. This mirrors Shakespeare's Othello, who is deeply concerned about how others perceive him, particularly the fear of embodying the barbarian stereotype that white Europeans associate with him (Semenza, 2005). Like when Iago manipulates and tells Othello about Cassio's affair with Desdemona, Othello answered: "Haply for I am black and have not those soft parts of conversation that chamberers have" (3.3.267-269) (Shakespeare, 2016). Here, Othello is fully aware of his barbarian stereotype as he said that he cannot be as soft as Cassio to Desdemona. Thus, Othello's fears are similar to O's worries about the barbarian blackness stereotype

although both characters have made a relationship with the White girl.

Since Nelson and Kaaya make Shakespeare's text to be the modern screen adaptation, there are some verbal acknowledgments of racism toward Odin. The verbal acknowledgments are portrayed in some scenes. First, when Duke mentions that Odin is the only black student in this whole damn place. As he said "the damn place", Duke realizes that the racial issue still matters in the school. Second, when Odin and Desi talk about the word "nigger" that reminds the audience about the blackness calling. Third, when Desi tells Emily that Emily would not be worried and concerned if Odin is not black, but a white male. Then, when Odin tells about the race in his final speech: "But while all you all are out here living yours, sitting around talking about the nigga that lost it back in high school, ..... I ain't no different to none of you all. My mom, she ain't no crack'head. I wasn't no gangbanger" (BBC1 London, 2001). In Odin's final speech, he wants to state that although he is a "nigga", he is just like all other white students. He tries to erase the negative stereotype of nigga such as not having a mad mom and not being a criminal. By addressing these verbal recognitions of black stereotypes, Nelson and Kaaya has provided for a racial tension in the subtle imagistic valorization (Criniti, 2004).

### **Obfuscating Black Male Violence**

It is difficult to determine the extent to which Odin's violent instincts are inherent, Odin's repeated and gradual employment of physical violence constantly confirms his brute stereotype. At the beginning of the film before Odin's jealousy, Odin beats up Roger for vilifying him to the Dean, Desi's father, that he has raped Desi. Odin also threatens Roger while hitting him: "If you lie on me again, I'll fuck your punk ass up worse than this. You understand me, huh, Rog? Huh?". Therefore, the camera dwells on Roger who is in pain and cowering. This scene leads to depict the innate black male brute tendency due to the fact that it occurs before Hugo's manipulation to Odin's thoughts and actions,

implying that Odin naturally has a tendency toward violence. Odin's innate brutality appears not only when he is against the threat and his jealousy but also when he grabs the collar of an innocent ball boy during the dunk contest. The young black boy asks for Odin's ball after his dunk, but Odin ignores him, grabs his collar and pushes him rudely. The camera captures this scene with a long shot, nearly from a bird's-eye perspective, directing the attention of everyone in the stadium to focus and gaze at Odin. By portraying the violent scene toward an innocent boy without any motives, Nelson has positioned Odin as the brute figure. Moreover, Odin's portrayal as the black brute grows stronger throughout the film, particularly as his jealousy increases due to his suspicion of Desi's betrayal. In his suspicion of Desi's and Mike's affair, Odin suddenly attacks Mike and fights him during basketball practice. Odin also pushes Hugo and nearly strangles him when Hugo talks to him about Desi's betrayal. This visual framing not only isolates Odin but also amplifies the social gaze that constructs him as an inherently violent and threatening figure, consistent with longstanding racial stereotypes about black masculinity (Alvarado, 2022).

Odin's romantic relationship with Desi is considered socially acceptable solely because of his crucial role as the basketball team captain. Nelson portrays the basketball team become a game to display the physical dominance of Odin. Moreover, most of the basketball players today are dominated by the black male players. In Nelson's film, one of the scenes frames the basketball match between Odin's team and the opposing team that captures both black males playing aggressively. Both Odin and another black male player are vying to make a shot, therefore, they are gazing at each other which is interpreted as the typical gaze of intimidation found on the basketball court. This basketball match has conveyed the dominance of the black males in the basketball game which drives an assumption that the black males have a powerful body. Unfortunately, their powerful body keeps linked to the negative stereotype of black males using in doing violence and

criminality. As mentioned, Odin's instinct of doing violence is portrayed when he attacks Roger, Mike, Hugo, and an innocent boy. Therefore, according to the hegemonic of white logic, the black males would otherwise turn against society through criminality (Corredera, 2017). In Odin's case, the criminality is signed by the violence caused by Odin's jealousy. The camera frames back and forth into Odin's jealous expression and Mike and Desi sitting together in the tribune. He glares at Desi who is failed to get an understanding of Odin's gazing of jealousy. Here, the camera drives the audience to the expression of Odin's jealousy and Odin's uncontrollable anger. He plays the basketball roughly and breaks the glass and the ring of the balls. In this scene, Nelson tries to use Odin's anger as the image of the violent and dangerous black male. In this way, Nelson brings an audience confusion about whether Odin satisfies his anger or he fulfills the negative stereotype of the violent black male.

In Nelson's film, teenage characters like Odin, Hugo, and Roger engage in violent actions driven by various motives and influenced by multiple factors, including race, social class, and envy related to affection and romantic relationships. These factors drive the audience to the complex psycho-social factors that influence such horrific acts of violence (Semenza, 2005). However, in Odin's case of violence, It may be different from Hugo and Roger. There are no stereotypes for Hugo and Roger as the white students. Moreover, Nelson makes Roger's jealousy of love and Hugo's jealousy of his father's affection as clear as their reasonable violence. Whereas Odin's violence, instead of being caused by Odin's jealousy, Odin continues to reinforce the negative stereotype of black men, suggesting that they carry out wicked actions due to an inherent evil or natural moral corruption. For example, when Odin starts using the drugs without any compulsion. Hugo offers Odin cocaine: "I'm gonna take care of you, man. This shit right here will help you make it through". After consuming the cocaine from Hugo, Odin begins to be increasingly brute, violent, and fulfilling the black brute character. He transforms into the very

person that most people around him anticipate and want him to become. This aligns with Hall's (2018) discussion on how Black identities are often constrained and shaped by societal expectations rooted in historical racial stereotypes, leading to a form of identity imposition. Moreover, Hutcheon's (2006) theory of adaptation emphasizes how adaptations not only reinterpret source texts but also reflect and respond to prevailing social discourses, here showing how Odin's representation is socially marginalized and enforced by the dominant cultural majority. Moreover, Nelson's *O* highlights how this portrayal impacts one of society's most vulnerable ones: children. Contrastingly, the ending reveals which one has the real evil character and which one is only the stereotype, whether Odin or Hugo. Odin tells in his final speech before shooting the gun into the chest: "Somebody needs to tell the goddamned truth..... It was this white prep-school motherfucker standing right there. You tell them where I'm from. Tell them you made me do this" (Nelson 2002). This speech reminds that he does not do the violence because he wants to, but it is as the cause of Hugo's manipulation. Ironically, he tells it by addressing the racial issue such as mentioning "this white prep-school" and "where I'm from" didn't make me do this violence. By mentioning the white and his origin, Odin fully wants to erase the negative stereotype towards him by telling the truth about Hugo's manipulation. Whereas Hugo's final speech signs his bad character as he refused to reveal his evil deeds: "Demand me nothing; what you know, you know. From this time forth I never will speak word" (BBC1 London, 2001). However, although Hugo's final speech presents his evil characterization, there is no stereotype toward him except the jealousy of his father's affection. On the other hand, the negative stereotype of the black brutality and racism has been attached to Odin before Hugo's manipulation. As Odin really does the violent crimes because of the force of society's oppression, there is the intensity to strengthen the negative lens toward him. By asserting the continuous black stereotypes toward Odin, The screen

adaptation has drawn a reversal of character between Hugo and Odin. The society may see Hugo as the innocent dove whereas Odin is the violent hawk, yet, their characters will be reversed if the society chooses to see beyond the typical stereotypes. According to Barthes' semiotic theory, these animal images function as signs that carry both denotative and connotative meanings, shaping social perceptions and reinforcing cultural myths (Barthes, 1977). By decoding these signs, it becomes possible to challenge and reinterpret the imposed stereotypes, revealing the fluidity and constructed nature of identity. Moreover, by presenting this reversal, Nelson and Kaaya create a subtle and powerful example of the emerge when society confines its judgment to superficial appearances and unquestioningly adopts seemingly reassuring stereotypes.

Nelson considers "O" as Shakespeare's "Othello" adaptation to configure teen violence in America: "This film is meant to be a true reflection of high school life now. . . . Othello and high school are words that, when you put them together, sound silly. We're in a place in America right now in which it's not silly; it's serious and it's believable" (Nelson, 2005). As the reflection of the teen violence in America, Nelson gives the clear motives of Hugo's jealousy to reinforce the reasonable crimes as a teenager, but it cannot obfuscate the racism. The screen portrays a social phenomenon of jealousy as the fear that white men are losing their places because black men are taking over, usurping what rightfully belongs to whites (Hodgon, 2003). The explicit of Hugo's jealousy does not only assign racism but also makes the narrative of the screen flow understandably. It functions as a deliberate strategy to optimize audience comprehension and to convincingly establish the narrative's internal consistency. If such clarity of understanding is not established at the outset, the film's overall impact and message risk being diminished, potentially leading to unfavorable critical reception. Thus, these reasons make Nelson's O not able to obfuscate the racial issue in the screen adaptation. The attached racism displays not only by the imagery of doves

and hawks but also by the social oppression around Odin as the lone black student in the school. Although Hugo's jealousy is created to be clearer than the text, it cannot blur the clear signs of racism in the film, such as Odin's natural violence. Moreover, Nelson has mentioned that he tries to make a close adaptation of Othello's text that racism is one of the issues in Othello. In addition, Hugo's explicit jealousy is created to be the clear excuse for the violence by the teenager, as the violent scenes become the real reflection of the teenagers in America in that period. In my early argument, I assume that the clear motivation for Hugo's jealousy is an attempt to blur the racial issue in Nelson's screen adaptation, yet it remains to deliver the racial problem in a subtle way.

#### **D. Conclusion and Suggestion**

This study concludes that O (2001), Tim Blake Nelson's adaptation of Shakespeare's Othello, presents a significant shift in the representation of Blackness and racial identity. While Othello foregrounds race as a central thematic conflict, O redirects this focus toward internal psychological struggles and high school dynamics, thereby muting the original play's explicit racial discourse. Through the lens of adaptation theory, semiotics, and critical race theory, the film is shown to selectively reframe race to fit contemporary sensibilities, which results in a layered but ambivalent portrayal of Black identity. Visual analysis and comparative textual study further support that the adaptation minimizes overt racial markers, potentially making the racial implications less confrontational yet more subtle. This strategic reframing may widen the film's accessibility but also risks diluting the critical racial commentary of Shakespeare's original. The study contributes to the discourse on how race and identity are negotiated in modern cinematic adaptations of classical literature.

Suggestion for further research is encouraged to explore the reception of O (2001) among diverse audience groups, particularly in relation to their interpretation of racial themes and identity representation.



A cross-cultural or audience-based study could provide insights into how contemporary viewers perceive the muted racial discourse compared to Shakespeare's original *Othello*. Additionally, future studies might examine a wider range of Shakespearean adaptations to analyze whether similar patterns of racial reframing occur, especially in films targeting younger or mainstream audiences. Investigating the socio-political context during which these adaptations are produced and received may also help fill the research gap on how racial narratives are reshaped or obscured across different media and time periods.

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