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ENGL 4340

Performance Paper

*Othello* Act 5, Scene 2, Lines 126-171

My group and I chose the French scene we did because it was a big turning point in the play *Othello*. This is the scene where Desdemona has just been strangled by her husband, Othello, and Emilia comes in to catch her last dying words and then goes on to argue with Othello over Desdemona's innocence. Directly after our scene, Othello realizes that Desdemona was innocent, which becomes the climax and leads to almost everyone's death. We chose for me to play Desdemona because I am the "girliest" of the group, and I can be shy at times so we decided for me to have the least amount of lines. However, because Desdemona's death is a huge part of the scene, it was important that my "bed" be center stage with Othello and Emilia around me.

As a group, we chose to have me lying on a table in the middle of the "stage" because it would draw attention to the dead Desdemona lying on it, and keep her in the scene without her staying alive for it. Because her death is the most important aspect of the scene, it was important for her to be center stage. Emilia and Othello stood on opposite corners of the table, because they both had speech revolving around her, but they needed to be separated enough to show Othello's uncomfortableness of the conversation and to allow him to slowly walk further from Emilia as he talked.

Shakespeare had one big clue in the text to help the staging of it, the words spoken by Desdemona, "A guiltless death I die," and then "O, farewell!" (5.2.129), which signify that she is

to die right then. One big requirement of the scene was obviously a bed, which we used a table for. Other than that it didn't require much except the actors and their costumes and very best facial expressions.

A big theme of *Othello* was about loyalty to your spouse. In this scene, Shakespeare shows a prime example of disloyalty, when Othello doesn't listen to Desdemona and strangles her for something she didn't do. It also shows Iago's disloyalty to Emilia, because he plots against Othello and tricks Emilia into helping without knowing it and she then finds out from someone else what her husband has been doing.

The idea of us picking this scene was to give the audience the gist of the play without having to show the whole thing or multiple scenes. The words in this scene not only show Desdemona dying and Othello beginning to regret it, but they tell what actually happened to lead up to these events. I think that may have partially been Shakespeare's point with this scene. To have the climax, but to show it in such a way that it reminds the audience of what has happened here, and he does it in a funny way by having Othello make fun of Emilia when she keeps asking "My husband?"

I think we got most of the staging down pretty good the first time, with the exception of table-placement and some of Othello's movement. We learned that the table should be slanted slightly so that Emilia could cheat on making it look like she was leaning over my bedside, and that Othello should be slowly moving further away from Emilia as tensions rose, out of fear or both being wrong and getting caught.