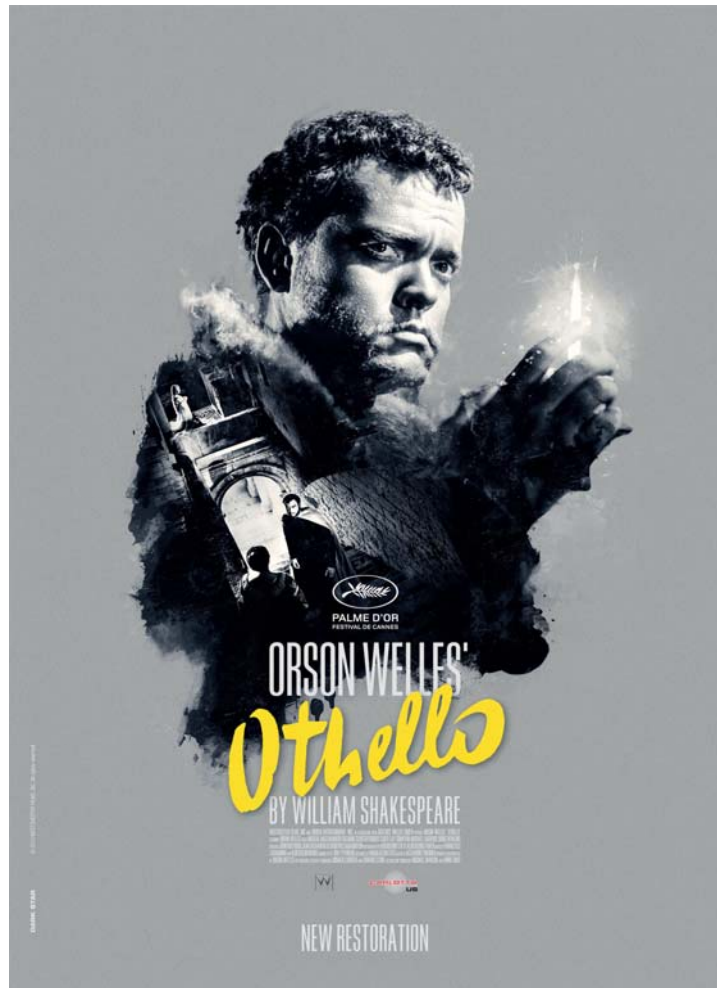




**A TRAGIC, POETIC, AND VISUALLY STUNNING WORK
FROM THE DIRECTOR OF *CITIZEN KANE***



**A FILM BY AND STARRING
ORSON WELLES
PALME D'OR 1952**

BASED ON THE PLAY BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

**NEW DCP RESTORATION
IN THEATERS
APRIL 25 2014**

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« *Othello* is indeed one of Welles' most personal works. (...) It is the deepest poetically and the richest visually. (...) What we see in his film is a bloody, dark, gloomy, passionate, tender, hostile, poetic, and truly tragic story about men who are bigger than life. »

Peter BOGDANOVICH

The moor Othello, a well-esteemed Venetian general, and the beautiful Desdemona, senator Brabantio's daughter, hold secret nuptials in Venice. At the far end of the church, two men stand in the background: there is Iago, Othello's officer who hides an immeasurable hatred for him, and Roderigo, madly in love with Desdemona. After their union, Othello leaves to fight the Turkish fleet, then meets up with his wife in Cyprus, where he is appointed governor. The deceitful Iago is determined to tear apart the newlyweds' bliss by manipulating their entourage....



Soon after the release of *Macbeth*, in 1948, American director Orson Welles (*Citizen Kane*, *Touch of Evil*) decided to adapt another Shakespeare play, *Othello*. The film's shoot was fraught with pitfalls, including the original producer going bankrupt and unforeseen cast changes, leading Welles to suspend filming several times. The result is an astounding and breathtakingly beautiful adaptation of Shakespeare's tragedy: the actor-director, assisted by renowned production designer Alexandre Trauner, glorifies each shot of his *Othello* with clever contrasts between shadow and light. Orson Welles exerts his genius with a masterpiece of unique aesthetics, earning a well-deserved Palme d'Or in Cannes in 1952. We're proud to announce the film is finally available in a brand new 2K digital restoration!



« Orson's bravery – along with his imagination, his selfishness, his generosity, his cruelty, his tolerance, his impatience, his sensitivity, his coarseness, and his vision – is magnificently excessive. »

Micheál MACLIAMMÓIR

ADAPTING SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare's work is unanimously considered a timeless triumph of anglo-saxon culture. Numerous film adaptations exist, such as Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet* (1948) and *West Side Story* by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins, adapted from *Romeo and Juliet*. Orson Welles himself adapted three of the illustrious British dramatist's plays: *Macbeth* in 1948, *Othello* in 1952, and *Falstaff* in 1966 (mixing together various Shakespeare plays including *Henry IV* and *Richard II*). For this second adaptation, Welles appropriates the original text to offer a personal interpretation, opting for an inventive mise-en-scène with baroque aesthetics. He takes the liberty of starting at the end of the play, then proceeds to a flashback that constitutes the rest of the film. The precarious shooting conditions help create an oppressive atmosphere, close to madness: Welles's *Othello* is a whimsical stranger slowly pushed into an infernal downward spiral by the vile Iago. Allowing himself to make some cuts from the original play, his *Othello* reveals itself as pure entertainment cinema, with an excessiveness that is truly Wellesian.



A CHAOTIC PROJECT



Welles's extraordinary *Othello* shoot is infamous. The project started in September 1948, in Venice, where Welles was to present *Macbeth*, when he convinced the Italian producer and distributor Michele Scalera to finance a new Shakespearian project. The director already had the casting of his three lead roles in mind: The Moor, played by himself; Italian actress Lea Padovani—his then fiancée—as Desdemona; and American Everett Sloane—who starred in *Citizen Kane* and *The Lady of Shanghai*—would play Iago. The actor/director then went to Paris to meet up with production designer Alexandre Trauner, and the two associates started to work on the project. In early 1949, Welles considered shooting exclusively in Italy but realized that Scalera's contribution was not sufficient enough to finance the film. He then thought about

shooting in France, at studios in Nice, in an attempt to find a French co-producer who would also invest in the film. In the meantime, some cast changes occurred: British actor Micheál MacLiammóir—Welles's old friend and the co-founder of the prestigious Dublin Gate Theatre—was hired to play Iago, while the role of Desdemona's was given to Frenchwoman Cécile Aubry—who quit after three days—and subsequently to American Betsy Blair. In March, Welles discovered that his producer had dropped out as well; he now had to find the money himself to bring his project to life. He decided to donate the entirety his actor's fees—earned from playing in *The Black Rose* and *The Third Man*—to finance the production of *Othello*, constraining him to suspend the shoot three times. In late August 1949, the role of Desdemona was finally taken on by Canadian Suzanne Cloutier. *Othello*'s epic shooting was completed in March 1950—more than a year and a half after the launch of the project.

OTHELLO: BIGGER THAN LIFE

Othello is an atypical example of a long and grueling shoot, which against all odds, managed to turn its weaknesses—mostly financial ones—into strengths. It must be said that the constant lack of funding took a heavy toll on the production. In addition to the increasing diminution of the crew size, and the difficulty of retaining its members, Orson Welles had to almost entirely renounce shooting in the studio. Since Shakespeare's play takes place in Venice and Cyprus, the actor-director had initially thought he would shoot the Italian sequences in Venice, in exterior, and the Cypriot part in studio. Unfortunately, the precarious financial conditions prevented him from doing so. While working on the *Black Rose* shoot, Welles discovered the Moroccan coast, notably the splendid Portuguese fortifications from the 16th century located at Mogador—now Essaouira—and decided, with Trauner, to shoot in that region. More than half of *Othello* is thus shot in exterior in Morocco, the rest in various cloisters and crypts around Rome, and in Scalera's studios. The diversity of locations forced Welles to opt for narrow pan shots, high-angle shots, low-angle shots, and close shots to avoid re-filming shots now rendered obsolete because of the troubled shoot. Filming outside with a bright light forced him to use a contrasted image, allowing for a lot of shadow. Getting the right sound was also tricky because it is tremendously complicated to record direct sound in good conditions; Welles had to do a lot of postsynchronization. As for the editing, done between Paris, Rome, and London, it took almost two years. The challenge, which Welles was certainly up to, was to edit numerous shots, which took place thousands of kilometers apart. Quite unexpectedly, *Othello*'s fragmentation eventually became the visual driving force of the film, conferring it its idiosyncratic aesthetics.



VERSIONS OF OTHELLO



There are different versions of *Othello*: the one presented at Cannes in 1952 then shown throughout Europe, and a second version, released in the US, in 1955. In the meantime, Welles modified the original editing of his film, in particular during the postsynchronization phase—he inverted some dialogue and rerecorded one exchange between Othello and Desdemona. A final version was made in 1992, with the approval of Beatrice Welles-Smith, the filmmaker's third daughter. A thorough restoration was undertaken from the original negatives correcting the sound mix and sound editing from the 1955 version, updating it with new technologies from the 1990's. Although controversial at times, this initiative returned the original splendor to the cinematography and compensated for the numerous sound issues of the British version—the soundtrack was often inaudible. This is the version that was digitally restored in 2K, in early 2014.

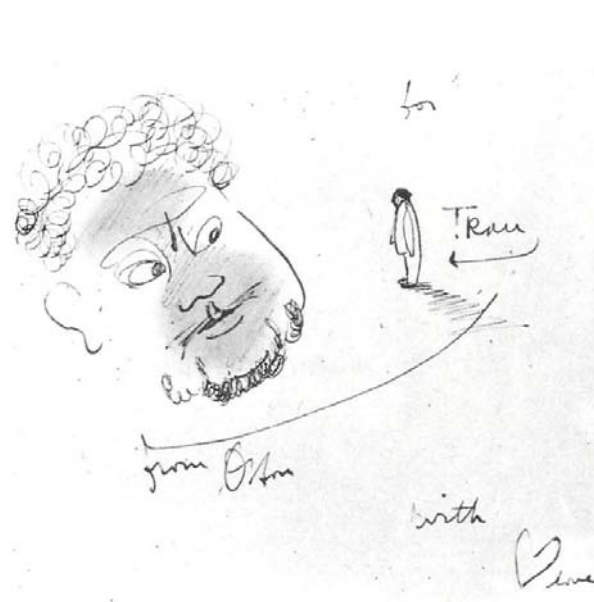
SHOOTING ANECDOTE:

TURKISH BATH SEQUENCE BY ALEXANDRE TRAUNER

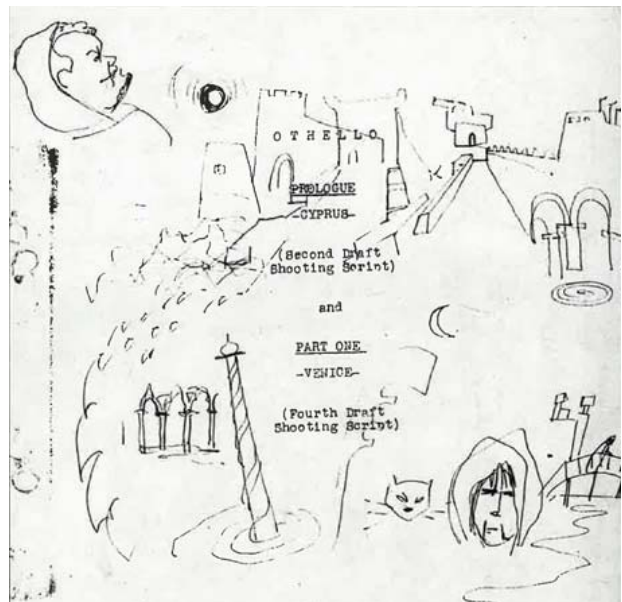
« As we were experiencing many of difficulties getting what we needed for this film, we asked local artisans and they eventually produced the most beautiful items. In the beginning, the costumes had been ordered at Peruzzi, a great couturier in Florence, known for brocaded fabrics, embroidery, velvets, and satins. We ended up in Mogador, ready to shoot, without these famous costumes that they didn't want to ship to us before getting paid for them. As we had the whole crew on set and couldn't waste any time, we decided to use some tricks and I returned to my old desire of situating a battle in a steam bath, to play with the unexpected imagery of sweat, dripping water, and naked bodies draped in cloth. We found a location above the Scala, a fish shop that we transformed into a Turkish bath by creating different levels, installing gratings in order to create the effect of steam coming through them. We obviously didn't have a steam machine and all we could do was to burn incense, whose smell mixed with the fish, which the place reeked of. Orson loved that idea and I think that visually, it is the most successful sequence of the film. Constraints help a lot, they prepare the cast, the crew, and they force us to be creative. »



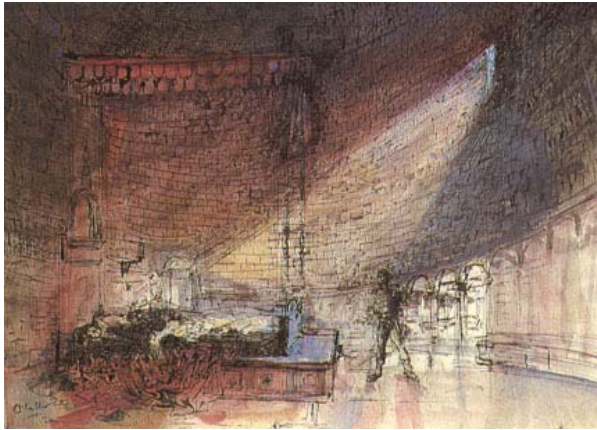
Excerpt from *Alexandre Trauner. Décors de cinéma*. Éditions Jade – Flammarion (1988)
Interview with Jean-Pierre Berthomé



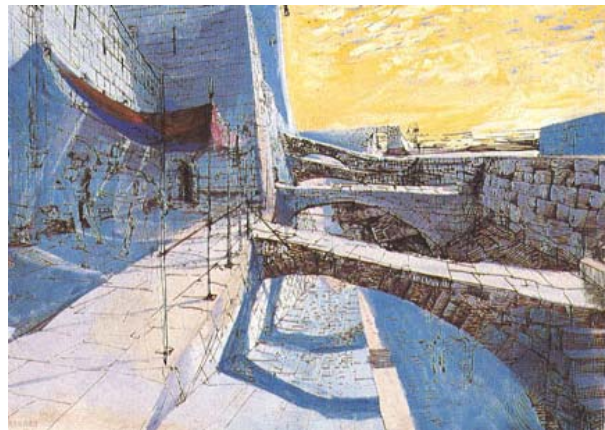
Orson Welles' self-portrait



Title page of a partial script illustrated by Orson Welles



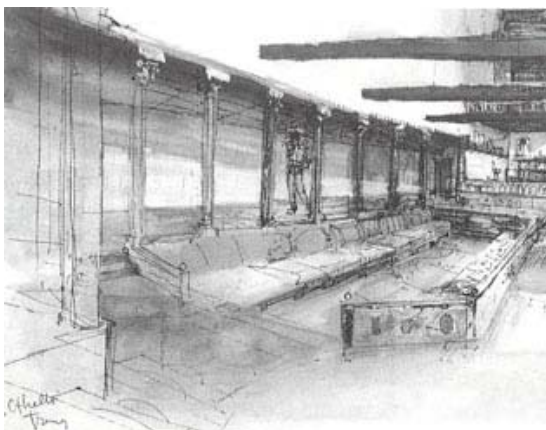
Desdemona's room



The ramparts of the Fortress of Cyprus

« Speed is a very important part of the job because it makes surprise possible and surprise is essential. For an actor, for instance, it creates an emotion that fades away once he gets accustomed. This is why a director like Welles always tries to surprise his actors and succeeds in getting a truly remarkable performance from them.

The set designer should help with that surprise so that an actor coming on set has to react, to be astonished even. Welles worked very, very fast and very slowly at the same time because he would do one thing and immediately try another, then go back to do a reverse shot in a different way, and then change his mind. He was thinking of his editing and



The divan

everything was constantly evolving. But what I consider working fast is that from the moment that you arrive on the set, everything must be immediate, everything must take place very quickly before the actors get tired. There is always something more or something less and you have to know what is the most important. For me, surprise and first intention are generally the best and then, as you multiply takes to correct little imperfections, you lose some spontaneity. There is a choice to make and Welles always opted for the first one.

« There is in *Othello* an exceptional intelligence of mise-en-scène. No camera was placed fortuitously, the film is made up of small pieces like a puzzle, but each of them is like a piece of bravery, together creating a visual richness and dramatic strength rarely seen in cinema. Of all the Shakespearian films, I believe it is one of the most important and it's Welles' greatest acting. »



OTHELLO

The Tragedy of Othello: the Moor of Venice

(1952, USA/Italy/Morocco/France, 93 mn, Black & White, 1.37:1)

WESTCHESTER FILMS, INC and WORLD ENTERTAINMENT, INC.

in association with Beatrice WELLES-SMITH present

a film by Orson WELLES

starring Orson WELLES with Micheál MACLIAMMOIR

Suzanne CLOUTIER, Robert COOTE, Fay COMPTON

Michael LAURENCE, Doris DOWLING

edited by John SHEPRIDGE, Jean SACHA, Renzo LUCIDI and William MORTON

photography by Anchisi BRIZZI, G.R. ALDO and George FANTO

music by Francesco LAVAGNINO and Alberto BARBERIS

conducted by Willy FERRERO

costumes by Maria de MATTEIS

decor by Alexandre TRAUNER

produced and directed by Orson WELLES

restoration executive producers Donald LEIBSKER and Edward STONE

restoration producers Michael DAWSON and Arnie SAKS



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