In inglese s'intitola Othello. In italiano è senza'acca, Otello: di tutte le edizioni della pellicola, la versione targata Scalera è la più antica e la più estesa, forse la più bella. Eppure dopo l'uscita in sala, nell'autunno 1951, venne clamorosamente dimenticata. Il film italiano di Orson Welles riemerge ora dagli archivi della Cineteca Nazionale, e la sua riscoperta permette di recuperare immagini sconosciute e scene poi tagliate, illumina le traversie di una lavorazione lunga e imprevedibile, scioglie vecchi enigmi, propone nuove affascinanti incongruenze. Il volume è illustrato con le preziose fotografie provenienti dal Fondo Massimiliano e Oberdan Troiani, in gran parte inediti, scattate sul set del film dal suo operatore più fedele.

In English, it is titled Othello. In Italian, it is spelled without the h: Otello. Of all the film editions, the version labelled Scalera is the oldest, the longest, and arguably the most beautiful. And yet, after the theatrical release in autumn 1951, it was resoundingly forgotten. Orson Welles's Italian film has now resurfaced from the archives of the Cineteca Nazionale. Its rediscovery allows us to regain unknown images and scenes deleted later. It sheds light on the hardships of a lengthy, unpredictable production, solves old enigmas, and proposes new, fascinating inconsistencies. The volume is illustrated with precious photographs from the Massimiliano and Oberdan Troiani Collection, taken on set during filming by Welles's most loyal camera operator. Most of them have never been published.

con scritti di
with contributions by:
Alberto Anile, Oberdan Troiani, Orson Welles.
Alberto Anile
«Otello» Without the H

The Italian version of Orson Welles's masterpiece is the oldest, the least known, and arguably the most beautiful. It is discussed here for the first time.

It is easy to say Othello. To begin with, the film’s correct title is The Tragedy of Othello. The shortened, conventional form is preferred for its simplicity and will be used throughout. But it is not the formally exact title.

Then one must ask, ‘which tragedy’, ‘which Othello’? Three versions of Orson Welles’s film are usually considered: the winner at the 1952 Cannes Film Festival, the 1955 American cut, and the 1992 ‘restored’ version. The most popular is the first, with Welles reading the cast and crew credits in voice-over underneath frames of Venice. In the 1955 American Othello, the spoken-word titles are replaced by a short presentation narrated by the film director. The editing was rehashed and several dialogues re-dubbed. The 1992 version restored by Castle Hill with the blessing of Beatrice, Welles’s third and last daughter, is the only one that can be found on the market – its only prerogative. The so-called ‘restoration’ was actually a re-writing and was further spoiled by arbitrary manipulations.

These three versions present variants too. Apparently, the print presented at the Cannes Film Festival on May 10, 1952 was not identical to the dubbed version distributed in French movie theatres in September. There is a slightly different version of the American cut upon which the 1992 ‘restoration’ was based. On top of this, Castle Hill prints with differing details can also be found (with or without the monks praying at Othello’s funerals), including a 2014 ‘restoration’ released by Carlotta Films.

In substance, however, the traditionally analysed versions are the three mentioned above. Very few people know the oldest Othello, i.e. the Italian print. This was the first released theatrically, five months before the Cannes screening.

A long, windy path conducts to this version. Producer Michele Scalera first came up with the idea during the shooting of Black Magic. Filming began in Venice in autumn, 1948, with Lea Padovani playing Desdemona. The shooting schedule allegedly envisaged interior shots in Rome and new sets in Castel Sant’Angelo as well as Palermo for the Cyprus scenes.

The agreement with Scalera was not formalized. Roger Hill sent Welles the first rolls of film from America. Therefore, the film director welcomed any opportunity to collect funds. For example, he also worked as an actor in Prince of Persia.
and *The Third Man*, often leaving the camera to his assistant director, Michal Waszyński, aided by production coordinator, Giorgio Papi. Haste played a substantial role because a crowd of Moorish princes was about to see the light. According to reports of those days, another *Othello* was in the pipeline, produced by Sandro Ghenzi and directed by Renato Castellani. What’s more, for a few years a story outline by Luchino Visconti and Antonio Pietrangeli had been circulating among the studios “inspired by the novella of Gian Battista Giraldi Cinzio and the drama tragedy by William Shakespeare”

When Welles was wrapping up his film, he admitted that he intended to establish precedence over a similar project of British origin. In short, speed was of the essence. And this phase was just as quick. After a few weeks, Welles caught his Desdemona in the arms of Papi, fell into a crisis, and shut down the production altogether.

Shooting resumed in Morocco in June 1949. Welles was there to play the role of Bayan in *The Black Rose*. *Commodore Scelera* tried to organize a dual-language production in English and Italian. He made available his studio sets in Rome (Circonvallazione Appia) and Venice (Giudecca). However, on the eve of the African shooting he downsized his commitment, only guaranteeing Italian distribution. The burden of the production thus fell back on Welles, who from now on would pay with his own money under the aegis of Mercury Film first and Orson Welles Productions after.

Meanwhile, both the approach and the cast were completely changed. Between ups and downs, sudden hiatuses and equally sudden cast and crew calls, this touch-and-go shooting went on until March 1950 with Welles constantly swinging between Italy (Rome, Venice, Tuscania, Viterbo) and Morocco (Mogador, Safi, Mazagan). The film was financed with his earnings as an actor, the help of distributor Jean Davis, and chiefly the money of French-Algerian producer Edmond Tenoudji, along with Michel Olian, a sinister Latvian middleman who, according to rumors, was the new owner of Scelera. The film wrapped up in the Scelera studio sets of Rome and Venice in late 1950 after Welles spent a summer among travelling shows and thousands of other projects. Another few scenes were also filmed the following year.

If the shooting phase was chaotic and labyrinthine, post-production didn’t fare much better. The film was edited in three different countries by three different editors, Italian Renzo Lucidi, French Jean Sacha, and British John Shephard. Transfers of footage from Rome to Paris to London created continuous problems. In Rome, late December 1950, Welles set up the version dubbed in Italian which was to debut under the aegis of Scelera Film. The film director commissioned the dialogues to Gian Gaspare Napolitano, who was responsible for the translation of Laurence Olivier’s *Hamlet*. This film had so crushed the Welles *Macbeth* at the 1948 Venice Film Festival that he preferred to withdraw it from competition. Even Napolitano was not paid by Scelera: his contracting party was Orson Welles Productions* (picture 1).
shorter than the French. It lacks a few frames moving upward that Welles adds to mimic the Moor definitively passing out before collapsing with his wife onto the nuptial bed. The Scalera Otello is also slightly shorter on the final dissolve, before we get back to the funerals. In the French version, Welles holds the hatch image longer, so that the audience perceives more clearly the macabre closing of the hatch over the dead bodies of the two lovers. However, in the 1955 version he will get back to a more concise dissolve similar to the Scalera one.

The adaptation work done by Gian Gaspare Napolitano was precious. It is not easy to respect the lips' movements, remain faithful to the original, and keep Shakespeare's sophisticated phrasing. In addition, if the voices belong to professionals other than the original cast, mention should also be made that the dialogue curator was chosen and paid by the film director himself, who was now familiar with Dante Alighieri's tongue. As far as the dubbing artists are concerned, Mario Almirante coordinated them. All were excellent. Otello and Desdemona were marvelously re-interpreted by Gino Cervi and Rina Morelli. Sandro Ruffini dubbed Jago insinuatively. Emilio Cigoli lent his warm voice to Cassio. Giovanna Scotto magnified the character of Emilia. Mario Besesti gave his voice to an impetuous Brabantio. And Carletto Romano added to the comical quality of Rodrigo. By the way, when Welles in person came to dub Roderigo in the later versions, one wonders whether he inspired himself exactly from Romano's nasal, slightly clucking timbre.

In closing, the choice of music seems very similar in the later versions, but differences are still to be found. The most considerable is the inversion of two themes underneath Otello's monologue "Allora addio, addio per sempre animo mio tranquillo..." ("Oh, now, forever, farewell the tranquil mind") and the meeting with Lodovico that follows. In the Scalera version, these scenes are accompanied respectively by the Venetian theme (mandolins) and a variant of the funeral theme (choruses and timpani). In the French version the opposite solution was chosen. Otello speaks to himself over a background of deep percussion, whereas he prepares to slap Desdemona in front of Lodovico to the gentle rhythm of a baroque counterpoint. The Scalera solution does not seem the less effective. To the contrary, the Venetian theme filled Otello's farewell with nostalgia, and the grave notes of the funeral theme during the meeting with Lodovico built up grief and tension that would explode with the sudden slap to Desdemona.

There are more differences. Over the alarm to Brabantio, the Scalera version features only dialogue, whereas the French piece includes music. Unlike the 1952 version, the Italian prepares Otello's arrival in the Senate with trilling mandolins that stop as soon as he appears, as if they too were anxious about the truth. In the scene where Otello in Piazza San Marco calls, "Jago, onesto Jago!" the Italian version is accompanied by music, whereas the French one opts for dialogues and the ringing of bells. Also different is the background sound underneath the sighting of Otello's ship in Cyprus. The trumpet call of the heralds is re-recorded. In general, the Italian version music is mixed at a louder volume.

In the beginning, Welles allegedly wasn't happy with the quality of the recording. "There was great dissatisfaction about the way this music was recorded in Rome," said composer Hubert Clifford years later. He was entrusted with re-recording everything in London. But the commission came to nothing and Welles found himself with one more claim of compensation. The presence of a few adjustments (like the addition of a recurring high-pitched, rhythmic spinet chord) over a few scenes of the French version is evidence, therefore, that something must have been re-recorded. Proof should be that two different orchestra leaders are mentioned, Franco Ferrara in the end credits of the Scalera version (picture 21) and Willy Ferrero in the 1952 and 1955 versions (picture 21bis). But, with Welles, nothing is ever simple or certain. Both Ferrara and Ferrero were active in the film industry in that period. They could have taken turns at the cradle of the newborn film. Yet those two names are too similar not to suspect a common typo (for example, there is at least one mistake in the spoken credits of the French version, where Welles calls "Roberto" camera operator Alberto Fusi. The same wrong spelling is repeated in the written American credits). One should make an accurate comparative listening session, made more difficult by the age of the materials. By ear, it doesn't seem like Welles recorded the entire musical score anew. It is more likely that one of the two orchestra leaders has never had anything to do with the Otello.

One of the most picturesque gambles taken by Welles is tied exactly to the music composition. It involves the scene of the attack on Cassio and Rodrigo, re-invented in a sauna because men's costumes from Scalera had not arrived. We include this scene not because it is different in the various versions (it isn't) but because it is a very good example of how complicated the production was as well as to which extent Welles remained madly faithful to his work. Arab guitarists appear in the scene of the Turkish bath. They too are covered
with towels. Notice has already widely been taken that the presence of wooden string instruments seems absurd in an environment saturated with damaging steam. But the idea of playing the musical score directly in the scene, as if in a musical, is so original that it moves all inconsistency to the background. On top of this, the scene is about two attempted murders. One thing that has never been noticed, though, is that the schedule is even more inconsistent. Francesco Lavagnino remembered that, when discussing the music of the scene, Welles and he came up with the same idea: mandolins. But this discussion allegedly took place well into post-production (1951), so mandolins and mandolinists could not have been on the Mogador set (1949). Accordingly, mac Linnámóir did not mention them in his journal. This means that they were added later. Therefore, Welles must have gone back to Morocco for the third time in the spring of 1951, with editing almost completed, only to shoot three brief takes with some Arab musicians. Absurd? Possible. It is rather almost certain. The proof? According to a little piece of news in the periodical magazine "Hollywood", in March 1951 Welles was in Casablanca in order to write the future Mr. Arkadin. What's more, the Scalera press-book spells clearly that "in April 1951, Orson Welles resumed and completed the shooting of Othello on location in Mogador". In the complicated mosaic of the production, which began two years and a half earlier, the last pieces are those three shots (namely, two pan shots and a stationary camera shot) of arab guitarists, blended in the sequence by skillfully alternating cuts and cross dissolves.

Inconsistencies, doubts, logical or technical discrepancies are part and parcel of Othello to the point that they actually add to its beauty. But even without considering or perceiving them, and in spite of the misadventures that the production had to tackle, the film radiates a special beauty and unique splendour. "Of all Welles's films - wrote James Naremore - Othello is the one for which the adjective ‘beautiful’ is most justified". Indisputably beautiful is the Italian Othello as well. Perhaps, it is even more beautiful than the other versions. The Scalera version can neither be considered an unfinished film snatched untimely from its author nor a concession contract for a producer on the verge of bankruptcy. On the contrary, it is a complete product, well-finished and refined much later than the deadline foreseen (the Venice Film Festival). The accuracy with which it was prepared contains the whole genius of its maker. After that, Welles continued to smooth the film and trim here and there, managing to accelerate its pace and correct a few mistakes. However, the Italian Othello is not a mere draft with a view to the French edition, and the 1952 editing does not always seem better than the 1951 one, just as the 1955 cut does not always seem better than the 1952 one.

What happened to Othello more or less befell Mr. Arkadin as well. Every version is influenced by different factors, thwarted or facilitated by different circum-
stances. But all of them, or at least, those licenced by Welles himself, have to be considered ‘authorial works’ with full rights. It is impossible to choose the definitive edition, just as it’s questionable to designate the latest or the shortest as the closest to a hypothetical director’s cut. If the French Othello were a mere enhancement of the Italian version, then it would ensue that the former is equally made obsolete by the American cut, for which Welles also re-recorded almost half of Othello’s lines, replacing all of Desdemona’s cues as well. (The suave diction of Cloutier was substituted with the more fierce delivery of Gudrun Ure, Desdemona in the 1951 stage play). This would be easy at the very least.

Comparing the French and American Othellos, Thomas remarked that “between the two, both authentic, versions, it is difficult not to prefer the former owing to the spoken-word credits while still crediting the invisible polishing work done in the latter. Everyone then choose between the two Othellos and the two Desdemonas according to their taste”. Such embarrassing wealth of options should also include the wonderful, unacknowledged Scalera cut. This too is an authentic version (excluding the fact, of course, that the original voices were substituted) with objective qualities and equally objective faults with respect to the other versions: a more complete Venetian prologue, a few little imperfections, a richer wealth of shots, a couple models too evident, and a few more accomplished effects.

Therefore, everyone decide according to his or her taste. Prefer the American Othello because it includes the latest afterthoughts of the author? The French one with recited credits and the original voices? Or the Italian, dubbed Othello, with one less "H", and three minutes more running time.


3. The storyline by Visconti and Pietrangeli, entitled Othello, Il moro di Venezia, is to be
found in Antonio Pietrangeli, Lampe d’estate e altri soggetti, editor Antonio Maraldi, Il Ponte Vecchio, Cesena, 1997; the typescript is not dated, but according to Maraldi dates back to 1946.


6. Napolitano, Al terzo uomo piace il bloody marriage, cit.

7. Letters of Orson Welles to George Fanto, December 20, 1950 and January 8, 1951, both preserved at the Lilly Library, Bloomington, Indiana, “Fanto Ms” Collection, folder 2. For these documents I am indebted to the kindness of Jean-Pierre Berthomé and François Thomas.


10. This refers to the copy I have viewed, identical to the print preserved in the Cineteca Nazionale of Rome. The film was submitted to censorship. It was approved on November 6, 1951.


16. François Thomas, La tragédie d’Othello, cit. (our translation).
“I put all my money into this enterprise”, explained Welles to Napolitano. “As of today, I am the majority shareholder”. When Welles uttered these words, he was working on the Italian version of Othello as well as on another one. In a memo dated December 20, 1950, addressed to the camera operator, George Fanto, the film director mentioned the necessity of obtaining two negatives, one of which to be shipped “across the Atlantic, for reasons of security”. One Othello was to be in English, the other one was defined “European or non-English speaking version”. We don’t know which differences were foreseen, apart from the language. But there had to be some, if Welles was afraid that Tenoudji could feel diminished. “It is important to stress that the European version of the film is not to be regarded as a second best version”, he recommended to Fanto, who was in charge of meeting the French producer. “It is not. It is literally the European version. It is not something prepared afterward for the provincial theatres. The contrary”. From an economic/produce point of view, Welles’s intentions seem clear. Every co-producer should obtain a tailored Othello, thus one version in original language for himself (and the Anglo-American market) and one European, dubbed in Italian for Scalera/Oliani, and in French for Tenoudji.

After a short trip to France, the film director got back to working on the Italian language version, complaining about the slowness of his collaborators. “Our staff of cutters is as expensive as it is large, and their tempo of work is unhappily European rather than American. I find that unless literally hanging over everybody’s shoulder very little is accomplished”. It is January 8, 1951: Welles is writing in the ante-chamber of Catalucci where I practically live these days. Enrico Catalucci was the owner of SPES Sviluppo Pellicole e Stampa, the laboratory of film development and printing that served the entire Italian cinema. Financial restraints taught him how to simplify the work, “I have abandoned the notion of preparing two separate negatives at the same time, not because it is not a good idea, but because I find that I need even the Italian cutter to work on the English version. The Italian speaking version can be directly prepared and based on this same copy”. It seems that the work of picture editing was steering towards simplification by cutting a single negative. The soundtrack would still change from country to country of course.

Over the following months, music was recorded and last touches finished, including a few extra shots, presumably taken in Morocco in April. The film’s debut in English was foreseen for early September at the 1951 Venice Film Festival. For Welles, it was an opportunity of redemption after the resounding withdrawal of Macbeth, an incident that had enraged most of Italian film critics. But, at the last minute, word is that customs seized the original language version, or perhaps the latter was not ready. Scalera hastily printed a copy dubbed in Italian but the author found it poor, thus deciding at last to withdraw again. This stirred up another hornet nest.

That print would debut in our country anyway. The official press-book reports that one more month was needed for the film director to obtain a sharp, well-synched copy. The world premiere of Othello, or rather Otello without the “H” because it is the Italian version, was scheduled for Thursday November 29, 1951 at the Cinema Barberini in Rome.

Scalera Film tried to turn the screening into a big event. The income of the gala at the cinema was destined for the charity of Fr. Carlo Gnoccich, an institution that operated for war-mutilated infants and children and counted the ineffable Oliani among its friends and benefactors. The charity in turn decided to target the donations to the child-victims of the horrible latest flood in Polesine. Nonetheless, the event attracted neither reporters nor the jet set. The newspapers seemed to challenge each other to ignore it. The only mention to be found is a little note reporting that the gala was attended by “VIPs from the world of journalism, culture, and the arts”, executives of Scalera Film, and a few names from show-business including ex regime starlet Doris Duranti, film director Léonide Moguy, actress Eleonora Rossi Drago, and actor Massimo Serato. Not Welles, however. He had already flown elsewhere to set up new wonders.

Another gala and fundraising premiere was organized the next day in Milan at the Cinema Missori. From then on, the film had a regular theatrical distribution. Michele Scalera fired his last shots and launched an aerial publicity campaign in the sky of the capital. Italian film critics didn’t help. Ill-disposed towards the public figure, his sensational comments, old and new festival controversies, virtually all first-line critics, including Guido Aristarco, Gian Luigi Rondi, Ugo Casiraghi, Luigi Chiarini, Umberto Barbaro, and Alberto Moravia condemned Welles for “baroccoismo”, excessive extravaganza. The film remained in first-run theatres for one week. Then Scalera began to close shop. The Italian version would be soon forgotten altogether.

As a consequence, the Italian Otello has remained unknown. Not because it is invisible. A very good print is preserved at the Cineteca Nazionale (Italian National Film Archive), and is easily accessible. The fact of it being a dubbed version was likely to induce to underestimating. The feeling of watching an already ‘seen’ film, like a somewhat spurious version, must have allowed it to escape academic studies, and the periodic hunt for a hidden Wellesian masterpiece, for more than sixty years. And yet, it hides notable surprises, least of all its length. Without the end credits reel and the two title boards announcing the end of the first half and the beginning of the second, the Italian Otello is almost 96 minutes. It is absolutely the longest version. The 1952 French version is about 93: The 1955 American one stops at 90: It is as if Otello had been crumbling away, losing more frames and fragments every year.

Therefore, Welles did not keep his resolution to realize the same visual part for all the editions of Otello. Between the Italian theatrical release and the Cannes
presentation, the film director had the time and was willing to make alterations. This is why the Scalera cut is not identical with the French version, even though it is very close to it.

The Italian Otello is unique exactly because of these differences. Images within some sequences were slightly reshuffled. A few shots were placed at different points. Others were substituted with different takes of the same subject. The most striking difference remains the unbalance of about 3 minutes. This is due to Welles keeping longer sequences in the Italian version, even only for a few frames, as well as scenes that were deleted later. Thus, never-seen-before images pop up like those of Micheál mac Liammóir and above all Hilton Edwards and Fay Compton, whose characters (Brabanzio and Emilia) have more weight in the Scalera cut. The analysis of the main differences between the Italian version and the following allows, among other aspects, to pry into the afterthoughts, indecisions, setbacks, and little mistakes made and then repaired inside the great creative workshop that was Orson Welles's Otello for a few years.

Let's delve into the details.

After the opening scene with the funerals of Otello, almost identical in all versions, the cast credits are read in voice over in the Scalera cut as well, not by Welles, but by a professional narrator against the beautiful Venetian background, the same to be found in the French version. The title too is announced not as Otello but La tragedia di Otello. At this point in the film the only difference between the Italian and French version is in the cut to the church scene, with the dark silhouette of Jago dissolving to the water of Venice. In the 1952 cut, Welles would also superimpose the water reflections on Jago, but he would not blot him out altogether, thus alluding more clearly to the liquid, ambiguous nature of the character.

The following Venetian scenes instead, from the ire of Brabanzio to the speech of Otello at the Doge's Palace, contain several differences compared to the known versions. If you compare the 1952 cut with that of 1955, you perceive that Welles devoted a particular effort into going back to rework and redefine those sequences, reducing them more and more until they are almost cryptic. The Italian version, whose Venetian prologue has more extended duration and pace, heightens the suspicion that the author had not been satisfied with it from the very beginning.

After the alert given to Brabanzio, the Scalera cut holds the high-angle medium long shot a little longer – as if it were spied on upon by Desdemona – watching the men going, along with him and Otello, before the Doge. At the end of the scene, four entirely new shots are to be found. It is a dozen-second double shot/reverse shot passage where Emilia, whom Jago has ordered to come along with Desdemona, finds out that the lady is already out of the building, a draped little figure walking all alone down the Venetian campielli. (pictures 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4).
These shots were to be included in the cut from the beginning, considering that Welles filmed them from a several-kilometre distance. The two shots with Desdemona, who could have been Suzanne Cloutier, but also a mere body double, are indisputably Venetian, whereas the shots with Fay Compton were realized in the Scalera Roman studios. In fact, the same partial view with the fake door and fake window can also be found in the beginning of Return to Glenmacnass, the short film by Hilton Edwards opening with Welles on the set of Othello (picture 2.5).

Why were those four shots deleted? Probably their presence interrupted the impetuous march of Brabantio and his men who escorted Othello to the Doge. However, cutting them out made the identity of Desdemona less discernible when, just a little later, you see her running in long shot towards the camera. In general, the entire Venetian part is more accomplished and more comprehensible in the Italian cut. It describes better the old father's anxiety, his rage when capturing Othello and bringing him before the senators, and, stricken with grief, his successive collapse in front of them. Among the 'additions', notice should be taken of this intense waist shot of Hilton Edwards (picture 3):

So far, of Othello we have seen over-the-shoulder shots, long shots, or brief glances. Now we finally see him in close-up, burdened by Brabantio's accusations. The Doge calls on the general to justify himself. Lodovico asks the official question, "Did you, by indirect and forced courses, subdue and poison this young maid's affection?" (In the Italian edition: "Hai tu, con arti dirette o indirette, sogggiogato o avvelenato l'animo di questa fanciulla?"). Just before Othello begins his monologue, here the Scalera version presents another half minute of never-seen-again pictures. It is a densely tense preamble composed of five shots, either longer or entirely new with respect to the known ones:
- Othello's initial close-up is extended. He now watches around himself, doubtful and slightly bewildered. He even looks directly to the camera (picture 4.1);
- two shots of Brabantio. At first sitting on his chair and then standing, while the senators barely hold him back, he shouts his accusations in the face of the man who has bewitched his daughter. These lines can only be heard in the Italian version: "Una creatura così dolce, di indole così calma e quieta che a ogni istante di se stessa orrossiva... E costei, ad onta della sua nascita e dell'età, patria, reputazione e ogni cosa, si innamora di chi le faceva paura di guardarle!" (pictures 4.2 and 4.3);
instance, the scenes filmed in Venice with Brabanzio and his fellow senators should have been completed with more takes shot in Perugia. These were planned and cancelled over and over, possibly never realized. No traces of them are to be found in the film, anyway. A version of the script was found where the Venetian part was even broader and more complicated. This confirms the idea that the film director was constrained by circumstances to downsize his project. By accelerating the film pace and cuts, Welles possibly tried to conceal a result that had failed his ambitions. The shortening of the Venetian prologue might have induced him to give up other, already realized, portions as well. Even the Scalera cut, in fact, lacks shots of Joseph Cotten and Joan Fontaine, disguised respectively as senator and pageboy – two good-luck cameos that Welles was very keen on filming.

On the contrary, Othello’s captivating speech of self-defence would be slightly improved in the editions that followed this Italian one. The Scalera cut presents a simpler monologue, almost a single long take of Otello intercut with shots of Desdemona who listens, hiding, with the sound of the Moor’s voice always in the foreground. In the French version, Welles opted for a more fractured monologue, giving more importance to Desdemona by moving forward her entrance among the senators and often leaving the sound of Otello’s voice in the background. Welles pruned down all that he could. This scene too in the Italian version presents a couple shots that cannot be found in successive versions. They are a reverse shot of Brabanzio and his peers (picture 5), and an image of Desdemona on the threshold of the Council (picture 6) that offers a half-view large profile of loved-hated Padovani. This may be the reason why it was deleted.

The reshuffle and internal cuts of this scene also allow to omit Othello’s final line, “Ma ecco, viene Madonna: che ella sia testimone” (to be found only in the Scalera version). It is made pleonastic by the actual arrival of Desdemona.
Therefore, the scene of Desdemona's speech before the Doge contains two short shots that will be replaced in the future cuts by analogous images belonging to other takes. These are two tiny, but objective improvements. In the first case, Desdemona, who has been asked by her father to express herself, turns her eyes toward her husband as if asking for a silent authorization. Otello pushes her gently with his hand, giving her his consent and strength simultaneously. In the Italian version, Desdemona is in close-up and Otello's arm can barely be seen (picture 7). In the successive versions, Welles opts for a wider shot that includes a waist figure of Othello, allowing for better comprehension of his gesture (picture 7bis).

The second image substituted in the other Othello is a reverse shot of the Moor at the moment when Desdemona answers her father. The Scalera cut presents a waist shot of a somewhat frowning Otello (picture 8), whereas in the successive editions Welles inserts a close up taken from an earlier shot featuring a more consistent expression of Othello, now pleased with his bride's words (8bis).

When we analyse the Cyprian section, we find differences in editing of lesser importance, except in a couple cases. The Scalera cut still contains more brief shots, slightly longer scenes, individual images in different positions within substantially identical sequences, and a couple of 'mistakes' that Welles will correct. One of these was a lightning-quick image showing Otello's ship in extreme long shot in the scene of its first sighting from the coast. The use of a model was too obvious here (picture 9). It was one of the many little boats made in studio by ingenious Oberdan Troiani. In the subsequent versions, this will be substituted with a bow shot of the ship, still a model but less apparent (picture 9bis), cut from a few metres ahead and not replaced. Actually, in the Scalera version, it was to be found right after the night of the newlyweds and was supposed to represent the ship still dispersed in the storm.

In this sequence, the next decisions made by Welles go toward simplification. The French version, for example, lacks two very short takes of the gun salutes, the rough water of Mogador (picture 10), and another (possibly again, too evident) model ship (picture 11).
Another ‘afterthought’ concerned the image of the soldiers running to subdue the fight in the cistern seen in long shot from behind the bars of the Palace of Cyprus (picture 12).

A little further on, just before the dialogue under the straw roofs, Jago re-emerges in a very quick shot/reverse shot with Otello. Of these two shots there remains in the following versions a barely noticeable image, the beginning of the take with Welles (pictures 15.1 and 15.2).

In the following versions, Welles moves this image substantially forward, i.e. before Otello, once murdered his wife, begins his monologue. In the new position, this serves as alarm for the brawls at the Turkish bath, but the first impression for the viewer is that they are running to arrest the killer of his wife.

The Italian version also contains three brief shots of mac Liammóir never to be seen again. One is an over-the-shoulder shot of Jago, during the fight in the cistern, sneaking away in-between the columns (picture 13). Then another over-the-shoulder long shot, just before he addresses Cassio vehemently (“What, do you hurt, lieutenant?”, in Italian “Dimmi, sei forse ferito, luogotenente?”) (picture 14).

A one-to-one comparison of these two images brings out clearly the visual game whereby Welles describes his characters. The figure of Otello’s cynical ensign is standing and firm. He is perfectly aware of his weight and influence, well aligned to the perspectival flight of the background. On the contrary, the world surrounding the Moor appears oblique, centre-less, out of joint just as his psyche, now poisoned by the words of Jago, is. Along with Joseph McBride, he is oppressed by “an overwhelming sense of vertigo, of a world without a governing principle”12. We can’t find a reason for cutting out these two images besides the typically unorthodox Wellesian use of space. So the Moor and his counsellor, here still situated on the high bastions of the Palace, are seen marching on the bare ground immediately afterwards.
One of the longest passages to be found only in the Italian version consists of a dialogue between Otello and Emilia, just before the Moor reaches Desdemona who is absorbed in prayer. This cross talk will be entirely deleted.

Otello: “Non avete visto nulla, dunque?”
Emilia: “Visto né udito e neppure sospettato”.
“Avete visto Cassio e lei insieme?”
“Ma senza vedervi male”.
“Che parlavano basso...?”
“No, mai signor mio!.
“E mai si allontanarono?”
“Mai!”
“Per prendere il ventaglio i guanti la maschera, un qualcosa...?”
“Mai mio signore!
“Che strano!”
“Io m’azzarderei a scommettere che è onesta! Mi giocherei l’animas per posta. Se pensaste altrimenti allontanaste quel pensiero: vi farà male al cuore. Se qualche miserabile ve l’ha messo in testa...!”
“Madonna, chiudi la porta”.

A few shots in the scene (e.g. a spying Iago enters unseen, Desdemona’s frightened look when she perceives her husband’s arrival) remain in the subsequent versions. But Welles cuts out, along with the quoted passage, most of the two shots that portrayed Otello in the company of Emilia, especially the first one, a down shot of them on top of the stairs (pictures 16.1 and 16.2).

Compton (who played the role of Emilia) already had finished her job. Mac Liammóir described her goodbyes to the crew at the Scalera Studios in Rome in September 1949, more than a month before the Viterbo shoot. How is it possible that she pops up in this scene? Who is wrong? Mac Liammóir or Berthomè and Thomas? None of the three are. The presence of Compton in that scene is one of the many magic tricks in the film. Emilia is portrayed by a body double in an over-the-shoulder long shot. The voice conversing with the Moor in the Italian Otello belongs to a dub artist, of course. This suggests why the scene was reduced in the post-Scalera versions. It most likely had been a dabling problem. Maybe Compton was unavailable to add new lines in the sound track. Any other issue related to this need is possible as well.

The next dialogue with Otello and Desdemona was also reduced, cutting out the lines that follow:

Otello: “Voglio guardarti negli occhi... Guardami in faccia!...Dimmi, chi sei tu?” (in the original: “Let me see your eyes... Look in my face! ...Why, what art thou?”).
Desdemona: “Tua moglie, signor mio, la tua fedele e leale moglie” (“Your wife, my lord; your true and loyal wife”).
“Coraggio giurato. E dannati! Giura che sei onesta”.
“Il cielo sa che è vero”.
“Il cielo sa che è vero che sei falsa come l’inferno!”.
“Con chi, mio signore?!”.
“Forse è piaciuto ai cieli provarmi con le afflizioni”... (“Had it pleas’d Heaven to try me with affliction”...).

The cut-out dialogue (in italics) corresponds to portions of a shot (Otello) and reverse shot (Desdemona) (pictures 17.1 and 17.2) that was shortened, letting thus go the passage where Otello glances at the candle, a subtle allusion to ‘that other light’ that he is going to extinguish.
Why did Welles delete those four lines? It's a mystery. No doubts are there, instead, about the following alteration, owing to a little mistake of continuity in the Italian version. The dialogue between the spouses has just ended on the Moor's sarcastic words: "T'avevo preso per quella furba cortigiana di Venezia che si sposò con Otello" ("I took you for that cunning whore of Venice that married with Othello"). Incapable of reaction, a flabbergasted Desdemona lets go her left arm along her side (picture 18.1). The gesture of Cloutier is then repeated in a long shot (picture 18.2), a mistake that will be resolved in the 1952 version by reducing the previous shot.

The scene of the Turkish bath presents two bizarre 'indecisions' as regards the effects, with apparently better solutions to be found in the Scalleria version.

The first one is the shot where, after failing his attack on Cassio, Rodrigo tries awkwardly to sneak off. This scene appears in fast motion in the Italian cut, but you only notice this by comparing it with the French one. Here the speed of the shot is normal, but the scene appears quite slow and incongruous.

The second indecision is to be found in the coda of this sequence, where the images showing Jago wedging his sword in-between the floorboards don't present superimpositions. In the French and American versions, two shots that were originally alternated are actually superimposed in such a way as to show the weapon penetrating in-between the floorboards, but the movement of the blade in a straight line jars with moving camera shots of the boards. Some viewers may always be willing to admire the convulsed and incoherent effect of this superimposition, perhaps maintaining that Welles wanted to expose his own illusionistic game, but, judging from the point of view of mere effectiveness, this 'special effect' makes the much neater passage from the Scalleria version preferable.

Moreover, Otello's monologue after the murder of Desdemona begins in all versions with his off-screen voice on a portion of the nuptial poster bed. Before Welles (in an over-the-shoulder shot) enters the frame, eighteen seconds go by. This is an eternity in cinematic terms. In the Italian version, this bold solution lasts for an abundant half-minute. Is the small cut then made, beginning with the 1952 version, to be considered an outright improvement? Or is it an adjustment to cinematic conventions? This is up for debate. Meanwhile, what follows is the extra portion of monologue to be found exclusively in the Italian version (in italics): "Qual è il tuo aspetto ora? [in the original: "Now, how dost thou look now?"]). Oh sfortunata ragazza, pallida come la tua veste. Quando ti rivedrà nel Giudizio, quest'uo square pronto precipiterà l'animo mio dal cielo fra le unghie dei diavoli. Fredda, fredda, fanciulla mia come la tua castità... ("Cold, cold, my girl. Even like thy chastity...").

The final confrontation of Otello and Jago presents a slightly different editing. Welles streamlines it in the later versions, moving up or down some shots and reducing, even if only little, the overall length. The images too (but not the words) of the last Otello monologue, his eyes turned to the oculus in the ceiling, last a little longer in the Scalleria cut. Immediately afterward, and this possibly is the only instance, the Italian cut is simply nibbling at an excessively long coda. For example, the shot of Doris Dowling walking away among the crowd is somewhat drawn out, so it can lose a few metres without any problem (picture 19).

Other cuts operated in the successive versions seem to be based on more complex grounds than mere streamlining. Why, for example, shorten the scene with the shadows of the two spouses who meet in Cyprus, a shot that in the Italian version would extend up to the two silhouettes joining in a kiss (picture 20)? Does it make more apparent that Otello and Desdemona cannot be united in this life?