

RIV 1645.

Latymer House,
40 Upper Mall,
Hammersmith, W.6.
27 Sept. 49.

Dear Al fred (and Gunther!),

I know you must be horribly busy and beset with all kinds of difficulties, but you asked your cast (rashly, I thought) to let you know if, in the course of our intensive study we came across cutting problems. I have and therefore do. Further, I should be glad if the committee could be apprised of my objections (not in detail, of course)

First, I can't for the life of me see why 'Othello' has to be cut to ~~xxx~~ 2½ playing hours. I personally regard it as the finest play ever written for the stage. That is beside the point, but when I contemplate the lengths to which some of our efforts ('The Thracian Horses' 'The Tuscan Artist' and 'By Request') have been allowed to run, I am at a loss to see why Shakespeare is dealt with so cavalierly. Agreed, it is an intense play, but brevity is not necessarily ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ synonymous with intensity, and I can but express my sorrow, anger and complete surprise at some of the excisions and butcherings you have perpetrated. I do think that, at the Questors, we are a bit free and easy with our dramatists, who, it is conceivable, knew their job as well as we who produce their plays. 'The Beaux Stratagem' was pretty well murdered by Abraham and, for once, I am quite serious when I register this (and probably my only) formal protest!

I imagine one of the rules governing your 'Othello' cuts has been to follow the Quarto version in preference to the Folio readings. I don't think this is always advisable. One might easily argue that, since the Q. appeared after Shakespeare's death, some of the emendations were made, admittedly by his company, but, unfortunately, in his enforced absence.

I append the list of cuts which I personally dis-agree with, together with my reasons. I do hope that you will be able to restore some ~~xxxxxxxx~~ of the losses, which in at least two cases are irreparable. I may add that my wrath will not make the slightest difference to the zeal of my playing, and I'm extremely grateful to you both for giving me the chance to play Iago. Please don't attempt to reply to this missive, and forgive the erratic typing. My machine has caught some of my own fury and taking to skipping ahead.

Yours ever,

Valfrid.

P.S. On reading through my comments, I fear they sound a little impertinent. After all, you're the Producer! But I do feel strongly about it - only because I'm such an enormous admirer of the play, as I'm sure you both are.

My chief complaints about your cuts fall into 3 groups :-

- (a) You've removed some of the finest poetry
- (b) You've occasionally twisted the sense.
- (c) You've been a bit too hard on your cast.

I take the cuts in order as they come (New Temple edition).

1. p 4 l. 74 Unless Roderigo's speech is kept in, Iago's 'Do' doesn't make grammar or sense. *may have to think OK. Sense - colloquially.*
2. p. 6 l 120-128 I think the schoolboyish heavy sarcasm of Roderigo is delightfully conveyed here, and is very much true to his shallow character. *Withholds up action. I agree with this statement.*
3. p. 12 l. 53 I can't see why Cassio's 'To who?' is cut. To save time? To avoid outraging our schoolteachers with its slack grammar? I think it's wanted to give a slight pause for Othello's entrance. *Inconsistency*
4. p 21. ll. 141-145 Magnificent-sounding poetry, and also beautifully in character. Othello seems almost to be making gentle fun of Desdemona, as a romantic girl who liked bed-time stories. *only 1 1/2 lines of it. Audience-taste.*
5. p 23 l 178-9 You have changed the sense by your cut, surely. Brab originally says 'Stop me if I will criticise Othello if Desdemona confesses she was 50% to blame' With your cut, Brab's lines mean something quite different. *not quite different surely.*
6. p 24. l 198-200 Again you've ruthlessly changed the sense, and made Brab, it seems to me, a much more tragic figure than S. intended him to be. *This actually is a matter of opinion. Purpose was clarity.*
7. p 30. l 338-339 I was sorry to see this delightful sarcasm of Iago's go by the board, and also the sardonic alliteration of ll 349-350. *again for clarity.*
8. p 50. l 48 I feel this contemptuous remark about (a) Roderigo and (b) the state of love is worth retaining. *Don't object.*
9. p 51. l 70-81 I was sorry to see these topical jests go. Surely we may have a laugh occasionally in the show, and here are certain laughs. I don't want the 2nd song but I do feel you've been very hard on the drunk scene altogether. It has such wonderful opportunities for contrast in pathos, drama and humour. *Look at this again.*
10. p 53. ll. 114-117 Surely as you've left the speech, Iago's criticism of Cassio becomes far too abrupt and blunt. His approach to the gentry is always delicate. *114/115 to be restored.*
11. p 59 ll 251-2 I think you have quite destroyed the melancholic rhythm of this speech by cutting 'I have lost my reputation.', and the different epigrammatic rhythm of Iago's description of reputation, later on. *A good point, but not with cancelled.*

12. ~~xxx~~ p. 60. 11. 269-273 You're not leaving Cassio much to
may be right get the pathos, even the tragedy of his
plight, with, are you?

133 p. 85. ~~XXXXXX~~ 11. 375-7 To excise lines like this, is to me
*Don't accept the analogy.
But try both ways* just like casually removing 3 or 4
bars from a Beethoven quartet.

14. p 86. 11. 391-3 Surely these are vital lines for Othello? He
*Don't agree here. Possible
reference only.* doesn't often comment on the 'colour bar', but
he was obviously conscious of it.

15. p 86. 11. 402-406 I think it is a pity to lessen Iago's rough
Surely he has enough sadistic frankness here, at all. He is so
deliberately rubbing salt in the wound.

16. p 88. 11. 450-454 Printed in red, because I cannot honestly believe
*But the again is a
humorous dramatic
sleep* you meant to take out these lines, which seem
to me to be some of the most magnificent in the
play. There is a splendid ritualistic ring about
them which admirably suits Othello. Perhaps you
& Gunther were at the end of a long session.

17. p 93 70-77 So much is said about the slightness of the handkerchief
Labored as a cause for jealousy, that I think it's a pity to
remove these lines which at least convey some of Othello's
peculiar reverence for the gift. (You should read
Middleton Murry on this, in his 'Shakespeare')

18 p 103. 11. 61-65 A great pity to delete the tragedy and pity of
no. removed by audience this dialogue.

19 p 106 11. 120 See comment on Cut No. 9. *but wait a tick!*

20. p 116. 11. 63-68 I think it most important to keep the sensuality
of these lines in. *(a) etc. cur
(b) don't think it necessary. Some
implication there.*

21. p 128. I think it very sad and rather obtuse to delete Emilia's
*quite only place
dramatically.* speech. It explains so much of her relationship with Iago
and the rest, and has a lovely sad human note about it.

22. pp 133-136 I protest against the removal of Bianca. (O.K. you
protest!) *Stage compression*

23. p 149. 11. 260-278 See comment on Cut no. 13, as well as the
'tragic hero at his last gasp' aspect. *I believe we
have enough.*

24. p 148. 11. 253-255 Again I think Emilia's been harshly treated.
Or do you think the song business is just too,
too theatrical? *Actually I do!*