

Multicultural Shakespeare: *Translation, Appropriation and Performance*

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*Shakespeare, Blackface, and Performance:
A Global Exploration*

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Coen Heijes teaches Shakespeare, Presentism and Performance at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. He wrote/edited/participated (in) books on the abolishment of slavery, multicultural society, blackface and performance, diversity and leadership, cross-cultural communication, and performing early modern drama today and published in a variety of journals, including *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, *Human Relations*, *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance*, *Sederi*, *Shakespeare*, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, *Shakespeare Quarterly* and *Theatre Journal*. He is a member of the editorial board of *Multicultural Shakespeare: Translation, Appropriation and Performance* and of the board of directors of the British Shakespeare Association. His latest publication is *Shakespeare, Blackface and Race: Different Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

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Igiaba Scego, born in Rome in 1974 to a family of Somali origins, is a writer and independent scholar. She holds a PhD in education (on postcolonial subjects) and has done extensive academic work in Italy and abroad, including a two-year fellowship at the Center for Humanities and Social Change at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. Among her books in English are the novels *Rhoda* and *Oltre Babilonia* published by Two Lines. Her memoir *La mia casa è dove sono* (Rizzoli) won Italy's Mondello Prize in 2011. She is a contributor to the magazine *Internazionale* and the newspaper *Avvenire*. Her latest novel, *Adua* was published in English by New Vessel Press (US), Jacaranda (UK). Her new novel *La Linea del Colore* (Bompiani) is due for publication in 2021 by Other Press.

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Ayanna Thompson is Director of the Arizona Center for Medieval & Renaissance Studies (ACMRS) and Professor of English at Arizona State University. She is the author of *Blackface* (forthcoming Bloomsbury, 2021), *Shakespeare in the Theatre: Peter Sellars* (Arden Bloomsbury, 2018), *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose: A StudentCentred Approach*, co-authored with Laura Turchi (Arden Bloomsbury, 2016), *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America* (Oxford University Press, 2011), and *Performing Race and Torture on the Early Modern Stage* (Routledge, 2008). She wrote the new introduction for the revised Arden3 *Othello* (Arden, 2016), and is the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race* (forthcoming Cambridge University Press, 2021), *Weyward Macbeth: Intersections of Race and Performance* (Palgrave, 2010), and *Colorblind Shakespeare: New Perspectives on Race and Performance* (Routledge, 2006). She is currently collaborating with Curtis Perry on the Arden4 edition of *Titus Andronicus*. She was the 2018-2019 President of the Shakespeare Association of America, and served as a member of the Board of Directors for the Association of Marshall Scholars. She was one of Phi Beta Kappa's Visiting Scholars for 2017-2018.

Coen Heijes* and Ayanna Thompson**

Introduction: Shakespeare, Blackface and Performance A Global Perspective

When we were invited in 2019 by the editors of *Multicultural Shakespeare* to guest edit a special issue on a topic that would be of international significance, we did not have to think very hard or long, as the request aligned with one of our main research interests: racism, blackface and performance. Shakespearean performances have employed racial prosthetics since the Elizabethan period, but the intervening 400 years since Shakespeare's lifetime have seen the symbolic, social, and performance meanings of blackface and its relation to xenophobia, institutional racism and populism change. Over the past years these topics have gained even more significance and worldwide attention, and 2020 accelerated interests in systemic racism and the histories and performances that foster and enable its perpetuation. The brutal murder of George Floyd in May 2020 inspired even more urgent calls for analyses of systemic, anti-black racism.

As the mission of *Multicultural Shakespeare* (formerly *Shakespeare Worldwide*) aims to broaden scholarly perspectives beyond an Anglophone approach, we sent out a call for papers inviting scholars to analyse specific uses of blackface in both local and global contexts across the world. We were particularly interested in essays that would explore specific political, social, and cultural issues regarding institutional racism and their relations to blackface traditions both inside and outside the theatre. Interest in this topic has increased over the past decades and is currently accelerating and deepening, with recent and forthcoming publications on the subject not only moving beyond the Anglophone context but also aiming to contextualise the interactions between institutional racism, blackface, performance and the socio-political context (Heijes, 2020; Valls-Russell and Sokolova, 2021; Thompson, 2021a, Thompson, 2021b).

When we launched our call for papers for this special issue of *Multicultural Shakespeare*, we had no idea that so many authors would submit their papers. The international interest in blackface revealed just how pervasive

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the performance trope became in the 19th, 20th, and now 21st centuries. In the end, we decided on two essays that have a more historicist perspective, placing their analysis within the seventeenth-century context of early modern England. The remaining seven essays take a more presentist approach and analyse the interactions between blackface on the Shakespearean stage, the more general employment of blackface tropes and the historical, political, cultural and educational contexts in seven non-Anglophone countries, respectively Germany, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Albania, Chile and Poland. As a group, these essays not only present a deeper understanding of the variety of approaches to Shakespeare and blackface across the globe, but also offer greater nuance than the Anglo-American domination of these discussions in Shakespeare studies. At the same time, we are painfully aware that there are still many blanks to fill in, and we hope that this special issue may also serve as a call for further research. We encourage authors to continue working on this important and topical area of Shakespeare studies.

Of the two historicist essays, the first takes us back to the Banqueting Hall of Whitehall Palace on 6 January 1605, when *The Masque of Blackness* by Ben Jonson was performed at the Jacobean Court, slightly more than two months after the first recorded performance of *Othello* at Whitehall by the King's Men. Rather than, as is almost traditional, discussing the masque in conjunction with *Othello*, its Jacobean counterpart in performing blackness, Pascale Aebischer and Victoria Sparey focus solely on the masque, and in particular on Inigo Jones's stage design and Queen Anna's role, James I's Queen Consort, who commissioned the masque. Their essay effectively reinterprets Queen Anna's blackface appearance in the masque. Without diminishing Anna's complicity in her contribution to the racist narrative, the authors complicate the focus by analysing the use and meaning of her six-month pregnant body and the black, blue and white make-up which helped to unsettle the traditional black-and-white that supported King James's white, male, 'British' national idea of supremacy.

Sensory studies have over the past years gradually developed into a somewhat more mature field of research in Shakespeare studies. Although the subject of scent has attracted a fair amount of attention, the interaction between blackface make-up, olfactory technology used on stage and the broader racial discourses in early modern society is an area that deserves further exploration. In his essay, Benjamin Steingass argues that the Globe's pungent atmosphere, Othello's scented black body and the use of pungent dye in fabrics on stage combined to build up and invent a bodily revulsion towards Othello amongst the early modern audience. We hope this essay might encourage other researchers to explore this highly sensitive area of olfactory studies, moving beyond the confines of an historicist approach. Recent, more general studies, such as *The Smell of Slavery: Olfactory Racism and the Atlantic World* (Kettler, 2020),

might also help to bring in an interdisciplinary perspective that extends beyond the early modern period.

Moving to discuss racism and blackface on the Shakespeare stage in more recent history, Alessandra Bassey examines three productions of *Othello* in Nazi Germany between 1935 and 1944, and one production in pre-annexation Austria. The author has uncovered previously ignored archival material in the cities where the productions took place—Berlin (1939, 1944), Frankfurt (1935) and Vienna (1935). Focusing on the use of lighter make-up, Bassey frames her analysis in the political context of the rise of the Nazi regime, in the contradictory policies towards black people in Nazi Germany, and in the wider theatrical context, by including some pre-Nazi, Weimar productions of the play. Bassey argues that the popular success of *Othello* productions during the Nazi period, the admiration for his soldierly attributes and the avoidance of blackface in favour of a more light-skinned Berber portrayal reflects the regime's own perfidious and ambivalent attitude towards Sub-Saharan Africans, Berbers and mixed-race people in Germany.

In the next essay, Shaul Bassi and Igiaba Scego also examine *Othello* within the context of the rise of fascism in the 1930s, but place it within a wider narrative of Italian productions of *Othello* and blackface traditions. While the authors are critical of blackface and advocate its discontinuation, they also demonstrate the intricate relationship between the use of blackface and the colonial and postcolonial relationship between Italy and Africa. They stress the importance of considering both the analogies, the entanglements and the differences between the legacy of blackface in Italy and the (better known) American history of blackface. Presenting a well-documented historical and political overview of blackface and racism in Italian society and its colonial legacy, they focus on five productions of *Othello* as case studies to examine the continuities and discontinuities in Italian blackface: Tommaso Salvini, Pietro Sharoff, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Carmelo Bene and Elio De Capitani. The authors argue that De Capitani's *Othello* (2016) is exemplary of the Italian blackface palimpsest as an unambiguously antiracist production; it is in this apparent contradiction, which the authors examine in detail in their essay, that they build on the specific, complex Italian context, a context which is only further complicated by the growing popularity of African-American popular culture and African and African-American literature in contemporary Italy.

In the next essay, Kitamura Sae discusses a series of twenty-first-century productions of *Othello* on the Japanese stage and how they performed racial otherness through blackface. The author situates her analysis in the wider Japanese theatrical context, discussing non-Shakespearean theatrical productions that contained instances of blackface within the general context of Japanese society. Sae points out differences in blackface traditions and the use of black actors on stage between Anglophone countries and Japan, a society that

considers itself largely homogeneous in terms of race and ethnicity. In this context, it is not only the apparent lack of black actors but also the seeming unfamiliarity of audience members with the racial discourses and tensions in North America and Europe that has driven Japanese theatre to find new strategies to explore the racial tensions in *Othello* and to modify them for a twenty-first century Japanese audience. In analysing these strategies, Sae demonstrates how theatre companies have changed the focus from racism to lookism, how they focused on jealousy and alienation rather than on race, and how they used different acting styles or changed Othello's race to differentiate him. An intriguing example is the analysis of the 2018 production by Shimodate Kazumi, which depicts Othello as an Ainu general and Desdemona as a Japanese woman born to a family of samurai. It was the first time the controversial, racial discrimination against the Ainu people, living on the northernmost island, had been adapted in the play to address attitudes towards Japan's own minorities.

The sixth essay, by Katherine Hennessey, builds on a fascinating pedagogical case study, a class on Shakespeare that the author taught at the American University of Kuwait during the Fall semester of 2019. In discussing *Othello*, a play rarely researched or performed in Kuwait, Hennessey hoped to help students gain a sense of the history and the debates surrounding blackface, racism and *Othello*, not only in the US but also in relation to the region's recent blackface controversies and racial discrimination. Hennessey places this debate within the wider context of blackface traditions in Arab countries, drawing a distinction between Arab blackface that is explicitly intended as demeaning and the use of blackface in Arab performances, such as that in Farid Shawqi's *Antara*, which does not seem to be intentionally malicious. Hennessey points out how this distinction does not condone the use of blackface, but rather serves to mirror the Arab socio-political context, which she argues has become cruder and more insensitive over time. Hennessey reflects how, contrary to expectations, the (generally Anglophone) debate on the origins and consequences of blackface have not led to a regional awareness, which makes her classroom in Kuwait a productive space for a necessary and, at times, uncomfortable discussion on blackface and racism.

The next essay, by Marinela Golemi, examines the history of *Othello* in Albania. Translated into Albanian for the first time in 1916 by Fan Noli, *Othello* was not staged until 1953. Hoping to combat racial discrimination in Albania, Noli drew connections between Othello's experiences in Venice and the Albanophobic experiences of Albanian immigrants. *Othello* was also used to address ethno-racial tensions between Albanians and Turks, northern and southern Albanians, and Albanians of color and white Albanians. A.J. Ricko's 1953 National Theatre of Albania production was premised on the belief that there is an anti-racist power inherent within Shakespeare's play. In the end, however, the race-based rhetoric in the Albanian language, the use of blackface

make-up in performance, and the logic and rhetoric of Shakespeare's play itself challenged these lofty goals for race-healing.

In an essay that builds on an impressive array of historical sources, travellers' records, interviews and other documentation, Paula Baldwin Lind draws a fascinating portrait of the evolvement of Chilean blackface in *Othello*, focusing in particular on the first *Othello* in the country, in 1818, and the latest *Othello* that ran from 2012 to 2020. The author argues that the early nineteenth-century production leaned strongly on the Spanish stage traditions at the time, presenting Othello in the (Spanish) image of the Moor and mirroring Spanish racism during the sixteenth century and afterwards. The latest production, directed by Jaime Lorca, was set against the background of the explosive growth of migration from Latin America and the Caribbean, Haiti in particular, as black people became part of everyday life in Chile. In her essay, the author moves beyond a mere survey of *Othellos* to argue that the racial impersonations and employment of blackface in *Othello* have activated an awareness of racism and fears of miscegenation among audiences in Chile, both enabling and deconstructing racial thinking simultaneously.

In the final essay, Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik analyses the representation of Othello both on the page and the stage in Poland, an ethnically relatively homogenous country. While American minstrelsy is relatively unknown in Poland, the use of blackface and stereotyping blackness is not uncommon both in the theatre and other media. Situating her essay in the wider context of Polish society, Kowalcze-Pawlik builds her argument on three specific case studies: the nineteenth-century translation of *Othello* by Józef Paszkowski and two theatre adaptations, the 1981/1984 televised *Othello* by Andrzej Chrzanowski and the 2011 post-Communist *African Tales Based on Shakespeare*, a five-hour production based on *King Lear*, *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*. The author first examines the etymology and lexemes in the translation process and the far-ranging influence this exerted on the public discourse on racism. In her examination of the two adaptations, Kowalcze-Pawlik analyses and comments on the use of brownface and blackface in these two productions and how they seem to work in contrasting ways, offering evidence both for supporting and challenging the audience's racial thinking.

By way of some final words, we would like to express our deep-felt gratitude to the authors for their fascinating research, to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments which have helped the authors in further improving their essays, to the editorial assistants for helping us in the process, and to the editors-in-chief for inviting us and giving us so much freedom to compose this special issue. It has been an incredible joy and privilege to have been able to work with such a variety of enthusiastic scholars. In an era in which the Humanities and Shakespeare Studies are often faced with budget cuts and increasingly have to defend their relevance, we are confident that the authors in

this special issue have demonstrated the deep and intricate entanglements between theatre and the world around. Now more than ever, deep cultural analysis is important for today's societies around the globe.

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Pascale Aebischer and Victoria Sparey*

Black, White and Blue: Pregnancy and Unsettled Binaries in *The Masque of Blackness* (1605)

Abstract: This article examines the construction of national and racial identities within Ben Jonson's and Inigo Jones's *Masque of Blackness* against the backdrop of King James' investment in creating a 'British' union at the start of his reign. The article re-examines the blackface performance of the Queen and her ladies in the contexts of the Queen's and Inigo Jones' European connections, the Queen's reputation as 'wilful', and her pregnant body's ability to evoke widespread cultural beliefs about the maternal imagination's power to determine a child's racial make-up. We argue that the masque's striking use of blue-face along with black and white-face reveals a deep investment in Britain's ancient customs which stands in tension with *Blackness*' showcasing of foreign bodies, technologies, and cultural reference points. By demonstrating the significance of understanding Queen Anna's pregnancy and her 'wilful' personality within the context of early modern humoral theory, moreover, we develop existing discussions of the humoral theory that underpins the masque's representation of racial identities. We suggest that the Queen's pregnant performance in blackface, by reminding the viewer that her maternal mind could 'will' the racial identity of royal progeny into being, had the power to unsettle King James I's white male nationalist supremacy in the very act of celebrating it before their new English court and its foreign guests.

Keywords: masque, blackface, body paint, performance, set design, Queen Anna of Denmark, Ben Jonson, Inigo Jones, pregnancy.

The Masque of Blackness: Inventing, Personating and Designing British National Identity

Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones' *The Masque of Blackness*, the second masque commissioned by James I's Queen Consort, Anna of Denmark, was performed on Twelfth Night in the 1604-1605 Christmas revels season at the Jacobean court. The masque's performance in Whitehall's Banqueting Hall was immediately preceded by a performance of Shakespeare's *Othello*, and the two texts are often taught and studied side-by-side as two early Jacobean texts that

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deal with racial alterity in ways that strikingly intersect with gender. *Blackness*, as Kim F. Hall (128) has influentially argued, “inaugurated a new era in the English court, which demonstrated a renewed fascination with racial and cultural difference and their entanglements with the evolving ideology of the state”. Our purpose is to re-examine this masque, with its aristocratic female dancers’ prominent use of blackface, without reference to its Shakespearean counterpart and without letting Jonson’s dialogue crowd out the contributions of his collaborators. Instead, by focusing on the creative input of the masque’s designer Inigo Jones and the Queen as its lead performer, we seek to understand this blackface performance in relation to Anna of Denmark’s and Inigo Jones’ European connections, the Queen’s own reputation for wilfulness and resistance to her husband’s decrees (Aasand; Iyengar; Barroll; McManus), and her pregnant body’s ability to bring into play widespread cultural beliefs about the maternal imagination’s power to determine a baby’s racial make-up.

The court environment within which, less than two years after his arrival from Scotland, James was at pains to establish a new “British” national identity for himself and his subjects through the creation of mythologies of race was marked by a multiplicity of racial, cultural and national identities. Only a few months earlier, James had agreed a peace accord with Spain that heralded a period of increased mercantile activity throughout the Mediterranean (Jones 15); this was also a period of more general “growth of actual contact with Africans, Native Americans, and other ethnically different foreigners (which went much beyond anything seen previously in England)” (Hall 129). At the Jacobean court with its foreign ambassadors, visiting dignitaries (including, for that Christmas season, Anna’s brother, the Duke of Holstein) and their entourages, Queen Anna was therefore one foreigner amongst many others. Brought up at the German-speaking court in Denmark and a Catholic convert (McManus 66, 92-96; Barroll 163-164; Murray), she had come down from her Scottish court speaking Scots, with English her fifth language (after Danish, Latin and French) (McManus 66) and Italian (which she studied with John Florio) her sixth. Having “moved between courts, bringing with her the influences and material traces of her previous culture”, as Clare McManus (62) points out, the Queen was ambivalently poised between her new role as the female figurehead of the “British” body politic and her roots and continued interest in continental European court cultures.

In the genre of the court masque, in which aristocratic participants danced but did not speak, the Queen’s foreign accent and descent are reimagined in terms of visible racial alterity through her and her ladies’ application of blackface. *The Masque of Blackness* engages in a complex reconfiguration of the Scottish King and his Danish Queen in relation to their new composite realm, positing the King as quintessentially “British” (rather than either Scottish or

English) and his foreign Queen and her ladies as drawn to him by a deep-seated desire for racial assimilation. At first sight, the founding mythology at the heart of the masque simply consists in suggesting the natural superiority of James as the “SVNNE” ruling over “BRITANIA” (B3v), which is surrounded by the overdeterminedly white “*fnowy cliffe*” of “*Albion the fayre*” (B3r). It is to him that twelve nymphs, the daughters of the river Niger, who are played by the Queen and her ladies, have travelled from “*Æthiopia, ... the blackest nation of the world*” (A3v), through “*Blacke Mauritania*”, “*Swarth Lufitania*” and “*Rich Aquitania*” (B2v). The masque’s conceit is to suggest that the “*light scientiall*” shed by the sun-king is “*of force / To blanche an ÆTHIOPE and reuiue a Cor’s*” (B3v) and will confer on the nymphs the longed-for white beauty which is praised by poets. The masque famously ends without visualising this transformation from black to white, so that, as Sujata Iyengar (85) explains, “[t]he ladies end *Blackness* in the full glory of their make-up, resolutely unbleached by the rays of James’ sun.”

Jonson’s masque script, with its fleeting allusion to the “swarth” colouring of the inhabitants of Lusitania (now southwest Spain and southern Portugal), therefore seems to acknowledge early modern “geohumoural” thinking which, as we will see, primarily attributed differences in skin colour to climatic differences in heat and to environmental influences (Floyd-Wilson *English Ethnicity* 4; Andrea 272) only to resolve itself in a binary opposition of black and white skin tones. The masque ostensibly grafts this binary opposition of white and black onto gendered positions in which the “*light scientiall*” and whiteness of an immovable, insular Britain and its temperate sun is gendered male, whereas the fluidity, blackness and wilfulness of the river nymphs, who do not heed their father’s reasoning, are gendered female. And those gendered positions, in turn, match the respective authorial positions of cerebral, steady Jonson as the writer of the masque and physical, wilful Queen Anna as its lead performer: keen to distance himself from “her Maiesties will, to haue [the lady masquers] *Black-mores* at firft” (A3v), Jonson distinguishes between the Queen’s wish to “perfonate” her character in black-face and his own “invention” of the evening’s entertainment (title page and C2r; A3v).

Bridging the gap between Jonsonian invention and royal personation, however, are the masque’s ostentatiously European performance technologies, which are the brainchild of architect, stage engineer and designer Inigo Jones. Jones brought to the collaboration not just his experience of working for Anna’s brother, King Christian IV of Denmark, but also expertise in the cutting-edge stage technologies developed in what is now northern Italy. In particular, he was familiar with the designs and innovative stage machinery that had stunned guests in Florence at the pageants in honour of the wedding of the French Princess Christine of Lorraine and the Grand Duke Ferdinando de Medici in 1589, as well

as of the perspective arrangement of audience seating and stage designs in Andrea Palladio's Teatro Olimpico (Vicenza) and Vincenzo Scamozzi's Teatro all'antica (Sabbioneta) (Baugh 24-27). Jonson's acknowledgement of Jones' creative contribution to *Blackness* carefully positions his collaborator between the poles of invention/design and personation/action when, to wind up his convoluted introductory description of the scenic design, he writes: "So much for the bodily part. Which was of Maister YNIGO IONES his designe, and act" (A4v). The dismissiveness with which Jonson treats Jones' input here suggests that it might be worth paying closer attention to Jones' "design, and act", since it evidently was the means whereby Jonson's invention was reconciled with the Queen's silent but wilful performance of blackness.

Accordingly, the first part of this essay examines theatre historical evidence in order to explore "the bodily part" of the masque's physical staging of power relations and its deployment of white, blue and black-face cosmetics. Our analysis of the masque's "bodily part" reveals the extent to which through a spectacle that was coded as pan-European in some respects and insularly British in others, the hierarchical oppositions of Jonson's plot were challenged and the myth-making that informed geohumoural racial theories was made visible. In the second part of the essay, we turn our attention to how the Queen "perfonated" (C2r) the blackface role of the nymph Euphoris. For this, we investigate early modern constructions of pregnancy and layer onto our exploration of the masque's visual effects a focus on the body of the Queen who was six months pregnant with her daughter Mary at the time of the performance. Anna of Denmark's personation of Niger's daughter and her wilful fancy to do so in blackface, we suggest, puts further pressure both on the central conceit of white masculine dominance and on the binary opposition of black and white. While the Queen's blackface performance reveals her own investment in the masque's celebration of white beauty and Britain's national supremacy, it also blurs some of the racial and gendered distinctions on which this assertion of supremacy depended. Rather than simply enshrine the superiority of the white British King over the black African river nymphs, we argue that the masque, not least through Jonson's suggestion that what spurred the nymphs' desire for whiteness was the poets' praise of other empires' "*painted Beauties*" (B2r), also exposes the extent to which normative British whiteness itself was a myth. The Queen, who appropriates blackness for her own purposes, demonstrates her own promotion of hierarchies that depend on skin colour. However, the international spectacle that was created, and which drew attention to the Queen's 'wilful' influence at court, also decentres James' Britain and unsettles the myth-making that places black and white in opposition. In an environment in which people from different racial and cultural groups rub shoulders, binary oppositions break down along with the familiar colonialist narrative that sees the feminised "other" as subordinate to masculine whiteness (Hall 133-134; Habib 157).

The “Bodily Part”: European Technologies and the Celebration of British Identity

Piecing together “the bodily part” of the masque’s “action” involves marrying up Jonson’s description of the designs in the published text with Jones’ surviving costume designs, the records of the Pipe Office Works Accounts, and the letters written by courtiers present at the performance. The Works Accounts reveal the extent to which Jones’ expertise in Northern Italian theatre design had an impact on this masque. Not only do they record that the “roofe overhede” was painted “with cloudes and other devices” in the manner of Palladio’s Teatro Olimpico, but they specify that Whitehall’s Banqueting House was to be equipped, on this occasion, with a “greate stage ... xltty [40] foote square and iiii [4] foote in heighte with wheles to go on”. That stage was to be matched by “an other stage a greate halpace” high, which was to be surrounded by seating on “degrees ... for people to sitt on” (anon.). The masque, therefore, took place on and between two competing stages: one, the customary stationary stage for the King’s throne at one end of the room; the other the Italian-inspired innovation of a 3.71 m² raised stage with perspective design that could accommodate at least thirty-two performers, arranged “feated, one aboue another: so that they were all seene” (A4r), and that could roll forwards towards the King at the start of the performance.

This forward thrust of the movable stage corresponds to the point when Jonson’s script calls for the “*Landschape*” of small woods painted onto a curtain to fall. The novelty of the concept of a painted landscape is signalled in Jonson’s awkward Dutch spelling: European exoticism imbues even the language Jonson uses to describe Jones’ spectacle (Lindley 216, note 20). The falling curtain revealed an “artificial Sea” which “sho[t] forth, as if it flowed to the land, raifed with waues, which seemed to mooue” (A3v). At its centre was a large and brightly lit scallop shell on which the twelve lady masquers were thrust towards the King and the assembled court as if “ris[ing] with the billow” (A4r). Once the ladies had descended from their stage and performed their first showcase “fingle *Daunce*” on the hall floor at the foot of the King’s throne, a tenor, to a score written by Antonio Ferrabosco II (Schmalenberger), urged them to “*Come away*”, prompting the ladies to “make choice of their Men” (B4v).

One of these men, we know thanks to a letter by Sir Dudley Carleton (“Masque of Blackness 12”), was the Spanish Ambassador, who had been invited in a private capacity and was therefore there “disguised”. The Ambassador was first “taken owt to dance and footed it ... like a lusty old gallant with his cuntrywoeman”. He then initiated another dance and “tooke owt the Queen”, placing himself at the centre of the masque’s spectacle by selecting his royal dance partner. In the middle of the evening’s entertainment, therefore, there was what Carleton, in another letter (“Masque of Blackness 6”), describes as a spectacle riven with strangeness: he is “sory that strangers should see owr

court so strangely disguised". In Carleton's eyes, both the foreign dignitaries participating in the masque and the masquers in blackface provided a "strange" spectacle as they danced a succession of slower, traditional English measures (Ravelhofer 41) and faster-paced Continental "*coranto's*" or "*courantes*", for which there was "a fashionable craze" at the time of *Blackness*' performance (Pulver 100; Barroll 87). For the foreign guests, on the other hand, *Blackness*' *corantos* had, as Barbara Ravelhofer points out, "a high recognition potential" as they "suddenly heard or saw something they recognized from their home country" which encouraged "a common identity shared by performers, patrons, and audience" (73). In the masque's penultimate phase, another song, this time sung by "two trebles" (presumably the "paire of *Sea-Maides*, for song" (A3v) who were seated behind six Tritons), called the ladies back to the giant sea shell on which they had entered. The entire set then "went out" as the artificial sea ebbed away from the King's throne on his static stage, to the tune of a final song about the waning of the moon that controlled this artificial tide.

No wonder, given the multiplicity of musical, technological and visual borrowings from northern Italian, French, and Dutch practices, as well as the flattering involvement of the Spanish Ambassador, that James' foreign guests, rather than put out by the masque's heavy-handed celebration of Britain's insular superiority as "A World, diuided from the world" (B3v), were delighted by the entertainment that visually signalled cultural connection rather than political division. Ottaviano Lotti, secretary to the Florentine ambassador, reported that the "Queen's masque was performed" and was "more magnificent" and of rarer invention than the masque performed for Susan de Vere's wedding a few weeks earlier, and that it was "staged in a larger room, very richly decorated." He also noted that new engines ("*nuovi apparati*") had been built for these "[t]wo superb masques".¹ For his part, Nicolo Molin, the Venetian ambassador, reported that "the Masque...was very beautiful and sumptuous", and even M. de Beaumont, the French ambassador who had felt slighted by the attention given to his rivals and therefore stayed away claiming illness, described the event second-hand as "this superb ballet" ("*ce superbe ballet*") (qtd in. Barroll 103).

Jonson's description of Jones' design makes it clear that the most important thing governing this remarkably pan-European spectacle was the King's eye-line from the vantage-point of his elevated throne. That is the point of Jonson's specification:

¹ Orrell and the Cambridge Ben Jonson edition both translate Lotti's "*nuovi apparati*" as "new scenes", but the proximity with "*bellissimi teatri*" ("extremely beautiful theatres") makes it more likely that he is commenting on the novel stage engines inspired by the Florentine wedding which English observers described variously as "secrett ingines" (Vincent) or the masque's "great engine ... which had motion" (Carleton, "Masque of Blackness 12").

These thus presented, the *Scene* behind, seemed a vast Sea ... from the termination, or *horizon* of which (being the level of the *State*, which as placed in the upper end of the Hall) was drawn, by the lines of *Prospective*, the whole worked flooting downwards, from the eye; which *decorum* made it more conspicuous, and caught the eye a far off with a wandering beauty. (A4v)

The whole masque, it appears, observed “*decorum*” by being arranged to suit the King’s sightline in the manner of northern Italy’s Palladian perspectival theatres, putting him in total control of the perspective and at a level with its vanishing point. As the “greater *Light*, / Who formes all beauty, with his light” (B2v), in fact, the King was not only given command over the perspective, but over the beauty of the masque and masquers altogether. James I was literally put in the position he had warned his son Henry about in *Basilikon Doron*, where he described how “a King is as one set on a scaffold, whose smallest actions & gestures all the people gazingly do behold” (R1r). Jones’ perspectival set-up and Jonson’s poetic conceit make of King James I both the creator of the masque which “floot[s] downwards” (A4v) from his eye and its spectacular focal point in his own right as the stage is “scene to float forth” (A3v) towards him, with “light” (B2v) referring both to his *seeing* and his *being seen* in relation to the spectacle and as an integral part of it and its power to shape beauty.

The King’s positioning as both subject and object of the gaze becomes important at the point of the masque’s great discovery of an alternative vantage point that rivalled that of the King and that, quite literally, outshone it:

At this, the *Moone* was discovered in the upper part of the house, triumphant in a *Silver* throne, made in figure of a *Pyramis*. Her garments *White*, and *Silver*, the dressing of her head antique; & crown’d with a *Luminarie*, or *Sphere* of light: which striking on the clouds, and heightned with *Silver*, reflected as natural clouds do by the splendor of the *Moone*. The Heavens, about her, was vaulted with blew filke, and set with *Starres* of *Silver* which had in them their several lights burning. (B3r)

Positioned in the upper part of the house close to the ceiling vaulted with blue silk and silver stars, the moon’s silver throne was placed higher than the King’s state, so that the moon dominated, in her “splendor”, the entire hall as she returned the King’s “light”.² Played by a professional male performer trained to perform such a speaking part, the unambiguous femininity of this moon (in line with playhouse convention) was signified both through gendered costume and

² Even if the “upper part of the house” were to refer to the rear of the extremely crowded stage, it would still signal an elevation of the moon’s pyramid throne higher than the King’s state, given that his throne was at a level with the stage with his eyeline at the level of the vanishing point.

white face-paint (Karim-Cooper “This Alters Not”, 144). The emphatic silver-laced whiteness of the moon, whom both Jonson’s main text and his marginal annotations identify as “Æthiopia”, flies in the face of Jonson’s association of “Æthiopia”, in his general description of the masque, with being “the blackest nation of the world” (A3v).³ The set-up establishes this blue-clad “female” figure reuniting opposite racial signifiers as a rival creative force to that of Albion’s King, capable of governing the ebb and flow of the masque and to splendidly outshine him with her silver-and-white garments and the sphere of light crowning her antique head-dress. It is surely no coincidence that, as Æthiopia reveals in her final address to the masquers (C1v; see also Iyengar 85), that it is by the “*glorious light*” of the full moon rather than “*the beames of yond’ bright Sunne*”—an implicit deictic stage direction that is likely to have prompted a gesture pointing at the King—that the Daughters of Niger are to wash in rosemary dew in order to attain “*perfection*.”

While the moon was thus associated with glorious whiteness and silver against a blue backdrop, on the scene below her, blue was by far the most dominant colour, with a total of thirteen characters in blue-face, at least another six in blue wigs, and further blue and sea-green-accented costumes against the blue backdrop of the seascape with its presumably blue sea-monsters. The six Tritons’ half-human, half-fish nature is signalled in part through the blue colour of their hair “as pertaking of the Sea-colour” (A3v). Oceanus’ identity as the Atlantic Ocean is indicated through “the colour of his flesh, blew; and shadowed with a robe of Sea-greene”, and whereas his body is “presented in a humane forme”, his grey and horned head features a “beard of the like mixt colour” of blue and sea-green (A4r). Jonson notes the “*Sea-greene*” tint (A4v), with interwoven gold and silver, of the skirts worn by the twelve Oceaniae, the women masquers who acted as torchbearers to Niger’s daughters and who perched on top of “fixe huge *Sea-monsters*” (A4r), but he does not specify their skin colour. That they, too, were wearing blue-face, however, is evident from Inigo Jones’ watercolour of “an Oceania as a torchbearer” (Chatsworth, Devonshire Collection) in which he colours her unvizarded face and hair blue, with what appear to be long blue sleeves or gloves to cover her arms and hands (Daye 250). Blue skin (both painted and prosthetic), sea-green fabrics, fishtails and sea-grass garlands are evidently deployed here as signifiers of the elemental nature of these creatures of the ocean.

³ Strikingly, both Vecellio’s etching of an “Aethiopian Virgin” which Jones drew on for the costume of the Daughter of Niger (Orgel and Strong 96) and his own drawing of “Candace” (Chatsworth, Devonshire Collection), who is described as the ‘Pride of Aethiopia’ in *The Masque of Queens* (1609), depict light-skinned women. They thus participate in the paradoxical combination of black and white features which Ania Loomba (8-10) finds in early modern “black bride” narratives based on Jeremiah 13:23.

The blue ocean creatures, combined with the blue silk of the vaulted heavens above the moon, provide the backdrop to the protagonists of the masque: the Queen and her eleven courtly companions. As “*Nymphs, Negro’s; and the daughters of NIGER*” (A4r), they wore cosmetic blackface, with their arms also painted black up to their elbows. This detail can be seen in Jones’ watercolour design for the “*Daughter of Niger*”; it is further confirmed by two English eyewitnesses, whose accounts reveal the extent to which this display of painted skin was experienced as noteworthy. Vincent writes of how the ladies were “all paynted like Blackamores face and neck bare”, while Carleton is more frankly scandalised about how the lady masquers’ “faces and armes up to [the] elbowes were painted black, [which] was disguise sufficient for they were hard to be knowne, but it became [them] nothing so well as theyr read and white” (“*Masque of Blackness 12*”; see also “*Masque of Blackness 6*”). Carleton’s cosmetics-induced racial anxiety extends to his concern for the cleanliness of the Spanish ambassador, who, when he danced with the Queen, “forgot not to kiss her hand, though there was danger it would haue left a marke on his lips” (“*Masque of Blackness 12*”). Of course, if Farah Karim-Cooper (“*This Alters Not*” 146) is correct in her suggestion that blackface performers in the early modern period sealed cosmetic pigments with an egg glaze, which would have had the added benefit of making their skin shimmer in the torchlight, then Carleton need not have been concerned about any potential smudging, however much he was disturbed by the various forms of strangeness at play in this interaction.

While at first sight the contrast between the blue-face of the ocean creatures, the black-face of the principal masquers and the white-face of the moon above might seem absolute, there are also several indications that blue and black were not so much opposed as interconnected colours that also bore a historical relationship with the “*painted Beauties*” so envied by Niger’s nymphs. In fact, the costumes of Niger and his daughters integrated strong accents of blue that marked them, too, as river creatures: while “in forme and colour of an *Aethiope*”, with “curled” hair and “rare beard”, Niger is “*fhadowed with a blew, and bright mantle*” (A4r). Black and blue also combine in Jones’ design for the *Daughter of Niger* (Chatsworth, Devonshire Collection), which was furthermore gender-bending in its inclusion of masculine buskins. If Ravelhofer (177) is correct in her interpretation of Vincent’s reference to the “*Barbaresque mantells to ye halfe legge, having buskins all to be sett w[i]th iewells*”, the costume might also have struck this viewer for its indebtedness to “*French and Italian theatrical practice*”. Tellingly, Jonson describes that costume as being in “the colours, *Azure*, and *Siluer* ... interlaced with ropes of ... the moft choise and orient Pearle; best setting of from the black” (A4v). Hence, the overall stage image, in the flickering light of the *Oecaniae*’s torches, was of azure bodies in dark green juxtaposed with the shimmering of black arms and

faces in azure with accents of white created by the pearls, uniting them in an aesthetic whole.

Moreover, the actual face and body paints used by the blue torchbearers and the black masquers may have been based in the same natural blue dye, woad (Ravelhofer 173), and have therefore appeared, in the flickering light of the torches, as different shades of blue-black.⁴ That would certainly explain why Carleton (“Masque of Blackness 12”) misidentifies the Oceaniae, who are blue in Jones’ design, as “moores” who are distinct from “owr Lady-Moores” only by virtue of their inferior ranks as “a wayting gentlewoeman or some baggage”.⁵ Woad, as Jonson’s erstwhile schoolmaster William Camden points out in his discussion of “The Maners and Customes of the [ancient] Britans”, was the body paint used by “*the women of Britaine, as well married wives as their young daughters, [to] anoint and die their bodies all over; resembling by that tincture the colour of Aethiopians, in which maner they use at solemne feasts and sacrifices to goe all naked*”. This custom, Camden speculates in his chapter on “Britaine”, may have been to create “a beautifull shew”.

In his etymological discussion of “The Name of Britaine”, furthermore, Camden suggests that the very name of “Britannia” is a compound of “*brith*”, a word that denoted “painted, depainted, died, and coloured” and the suffix “-tania”, which he notes (in a manner that suggests that Jonson remembered that section in Camden’s text when he traced the travels of the nymphs⁶) also appears in the names of “Mauritania, Lusitania, and Aquitania.” The very identity of the ancient Britons was therefore connected to their women’s “depainted bodies”, which were put on display for festivities. It seems, as Philippa Berry and Jayne Elisabeth Archer have argued, that in using Camden’s *Britannia* as a source and

⁴ Virginia Mason Vaughan (67) suggests that the cosmetic used was “black grease”; Karim-Cooper follows Dympna Callaghan in suggesting the use of a soot-based solution (“This Alters Not” 146). Most recently, Morwenna Carr (79) has cited Nicholas Hilliard’s recipe for a paint based on burnt ivory and gum and also suggested that the pigments used by theatre professionals were “made of charcoal, lampblack, coal, and cork added to bases of animal fats, grease, tallow, water, and egg white.”

⁵ Even if the Oceaniae were painted in woad and the Daughters of Niger in a soot-based solution (see note 4 above), candlelit performances at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse show that the colour distinctions between black and dark blue can blur sufficiently in low light to explain Carleton’s inability to spot the difference.

⁶ Floyd-Wilson (“Temperature” 194) discusses the obviousness of “Jonson’s debt to Camden’s text” but rather than read the allusion to the painted beauties of other Empires as referring to English ladies as the descendants of the ancient Britons, which is the reading we propose, she understands the phrase as referring to the lady masquers who perform the dual roles of “Aethiopian nymphs *and* ancient British wives and virgins”. In *English Ethnicity* (122-123), furthermore, Floyd-Wilson links woad paint specifically to Picts in a reading of Camden and Pliny that sees the dye as referencing specifically Scottish and Egyptian, rather than “British” identities.

reference point, Jonson was deliberately “excavating and redefining ‘native forms’ and ‘native manners’” so as to refresh the self-representation of the English Court at the dawn of James I’s “new Britain” (119, 125). Ravelhofer additionally points out that by the time Milton wrote *Comus* (1634), in which he hails the “blue-haired deities” that inhabit “this isle”, blue was associated with British identity in masque iconography (174). This antiquarian concern with British roots accords with Æthiopia’s praise of the “*ancient dignitie, and stile*” of “BRITANIA, *this blest Isle*” in the masque (B3V): *Blackness* is as deeply invested in tapping into Britain’s ancient customs as it is in exploding the very insularity it extols through its showcasing of foreign bodies, technologies and cultural reference points. Hence, when Jonson’s Niger describes how his daughters were stirred to envy by hearing poets sing of “*The painted Beauties, other Empires sprung*” (B2r), this is a three-pronged reference. At one level, Iyengar is certainly right to see in it “a theatrical in-joke that seems to equate blackness with unpainted or natural beauty, whiteness with artifice” (84). Beyond that, it invokes the “read and white” cosmetics normally worn by Queen Anna and her ladies, whose absence Carleton regrets on this occasion (“Masque of Blackness 12”) and which are themselves a response to the extolling of red-and-white beauty in visual art and Petrarchan poetry (Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics* 10-13). And finally, it points towards the blue-black body paint historically associated with British women at festivities and worn on this occasion by at least one half of the masque’s female performers.

Via the prominent use of blue body paint in the masque and Camden’s antiquarian unearthing of ancient customs and etymologies in *Britannia*, *Blackness* thus established a connection between the “Æthiopians”, blue woad dye, and the ancient British “*painted Beauties*” so envied by Niger’s daughters. Through Jones’ fusion of Italianate stage technologies, Dutch landscapes, Franco-Italian dance styles and archetypally “British” dyes and its showcasing of the Danish-Scottish-English Queen, the “bodily part” of this “strange” masque about Britain’s supposed white male supremacy highlighted the indebtedness of this Jacobean spectacle to cutting-edge Continental stagecraft. Moreover, Jones’ blue-black colour palette blurred absolute distinctions between sea-creatures, the river Niger, and the nymphs that are his offspring, just as through his relative positioning of the King and the moon, Jones upended the power relations between the male and female poles of Jonson’s masque text. The masque’s costumes and cosmetics reminded its spectators that the women personated by the masquers were not so much human as mythological creatures who bodied forth the colours of their natural environments: the blue of the sea and river or the blackness of Africa’s fertile soil. If climate and environment had an impact on racial make-up, as geohumoural theories stipulated, the colour scheme of Jones’ “design, and act” pushed such mythologizing to absurdity in its presentation of blue sea-creatures and thereby destabilised all absolute skin

colour distinctions and climatological explanations of racial difference. In a masque in which “whiteness” itself was associated with being “painted”, and the only white presence other than the King on his separate throne was a single cross-dressed male performer in white-face, “blackness” was but one colour in a spectrum of cosmetic skin tones that are remarkable not for their binary opposition but, ultimately, for their lack of distinction and fixity.

The Queen’s Wilful Body: “Personating” Maternal Fantasies of Blackness and Whiteness

It is against the backdrop of the masque’s visual destabilisation of absolute opposition between black and white skin tones, female and male creative forces, “strange” and “British” people and stagecraft, and its engagement with geohumoural explanations for racial difference that we now return to Jonson’s pointed parenthetical remark that it was “her Maiefties will, to haue [the lady masquers] *Black-mores*” (A3v). The use of blackface within *Masque of Blackness* seems bound, in Jonson’s comment, to the Queen’s assertion of “will” over the entertainment, demonstrating her concern for, and influence over, her own performance within the masque to which she leant her “authoritie, and grace” (A3r). Given that the Queen was six months pregnant at the time of the performance, this notion of the Queen’s wilfulness takes on particular significance in relation to cultural ideas about maternal “wilfulness”. As we will argue, the Queen’s use of blackface while pregnant has multiple implications that suggest the degree to which the Queen’s influence over the masque—her “will”—was visible in its performance. We will show how in itself, the Queen’s involvement in the masque already indicates a wilful disregard of medical advice that cautioned against the physical exertion of dancing and warned against exciting the expectant mother’s imagination, or “phanfie” (Sharp 124). At the same time, Anna’s determination to appear in blackface also suggests her exploitation of medical advice regarding the way a pregnant woman’s will/“phanfie” needed to be heeded for the wellbeing of the baby. Moreover, the pregnant Queen’s blackface performance offered a visual cue for guests to recall stories about “Ethiopian” mothers, where the power of maternal thought was understood to determine the racial make-up of a baby. As such, the pregnant Queen’s blackface performance highlighted a form of maternal wilfulness that frustrates a strict oppositional position between masculine “whiteness” and feminine “blackness” within the masque even more intrinsically than do Jones’ design choices.

The significance of the Queen’s pregnancy has recently been recognised by Sara Thiel, who uses biographical detail to trace how “Anna wielded her reproductive body as a weapon in Stuart court politics” (211), deploying it “as

a bargaining chip” (216) through her performance in *The Masque of Blackness*. However, how Queen Anna’s contribution to the masque can be understood as a demonstration of her specifically maternal “will” requires fuller exploration of what it may have meant to view Anna’s painted pregnant body within the context of early modern ideas about generation. This is because modern generative theories did not yet consider heredity as “the transmission of characters and disposition in the process of organic reproduction” (Müller and Rheinberger 3). Instead, theories of generation were an amalgamation of Classical models, whereby humoral dispositions (dependent on properties of heat and moisture) from the father’s seed, the mother’s seed and uterine blood influenced a child’s physicality. Properties of the physical environment, including climate, sources of nourishment, the sights and passions encountered, all influenced parents, who passed on those humours in their generative materials—and with them degrees of resemblance—to a child. In this humoral understanding of the relationship between the body and its surroundings, “Nature and nurture, or heredity and environment, were not yet seen as oppositions” (Müller and Rheinberger 4).

Bernadette Andrea and Floyd-Wilson have established the indebtedness of *Blackness* to a related humoral system of beliefs which Floyd-Wilson has dubbed the “geohumoral” (*English Ethnicity* 4) climate theory. This theory primarily attributed differences in skin colour to climatic differences in heat, resulting in a “spectrum of shades” (186) in order to track the journey of Niger’s daughters across the world and through its different climes. Both critics note how geohumoral race theory stands in tension with the masque’s fashioning of Albion’s power, which relies on constructing absolute binary oppositions between the “whiteness” that the daughters seek and “blackness” that they reject (Floyd-Wilson “Temperature, Temperance” 186), so that, as Andrea (272) observes, the masque’s “climate theory” is ultimately “ambivalent” in its formulation of Albion’s “whitening” powers. Such ambivalence, Andrea contends, meant that the Queen’s painted body “substantially unsettled the emerging dichotomy opposing blackness to femininity, beauty and chastity” (274). Yet while Floyd-Wilson and Andrea open up discussions about whiteness and blackness in relation to concepts of beauty and racial difference within the masque, they do not pay attention to Queen Anna’s pregnancy, which would itself have been viewed within the context of the humoral doctrine they discuss. They therefore neglect the power of Anna’s own pregnant body to rework the masque’s narrative of transformation and its binaries of “black” and “white.”

The Queen’s pregnant body, we suggest, acted as a visual reminder of the persistent humoral model that connected mother, child and environment beyond the influence of fathers or kings. As the physician Nicholas Culpeper (156) observed, all of a mother’s activities directly informed the humoral material with which she nourished her child: “your Child is nourished by

your own blood, your blood is bred of your diet, rectified and marred by your exercise, idleness, sleep or watching, &c.” How a mother engaged with her surroundings carried implications for the child in her womb, and, as Sara Read (133) has noted, pregnant bodies in early modern culture, whether real or performed, were often viewed in light of “a common thread founded in a distrust of woman and the secrets their bodies can conceal”. Studies of early modern concerns surrounding the power of maternal imagination have especially focused upon the misogynistic framing of female generative powers, where female minds and bodies come under suspicion.

Understood as one way in which the pregnant body was open to influence from its environment, a woman’s imagination could be understood as a threatening means by which humoral disturbance could affect the development of offspring. Levinus Lemnius, an influential medical writer of the period, warned that pregnant women should “see nothing, that may move their mind to think “absurdly” (14). The workings of the maternal imagination, and the mother’s “absurd” response to a visual stimulus, could lead to a sudden disruption of generative humours, so that an alteration was immediately imposed upon the developing child. Common examples in early medical writings include children being born with harelips because the mother saw a hare, and birthmarks taking the shape of something the mother observed in a heightened state of emotion (Helkiah Crooke 300; Paré 978-979). As Marie-Hélène Huet’s *Monstrous Imagination* has shown, hostility was often directed towards the maternal imagination, which threatened “usurpation of the father’s role” in shaping progeny and—as suggested in the directions from Lemnius and Culpeper—cultivated a desire for management and containment of maternal bodies and minds (16).

Ideas that related the colour of a child’s skin to the workings of the maternal imagination are recounted in numerous early modern writings (Sharp 118, 123). Ambroise Paré reproduces two particularly popular stories:

Queene of *Aethiopia*, by her husband *Hidustes*, being also an *Æthiophe*, had a daughter of a white complexion; because in the embraces of her husband, by which she proved with childe, she earnestly fixed her eye and mind upon the picture of the faire *Andromeda* [...]

Hippocrates [...] freed a certain noble wo-man from suspicion of adultery, who being white her selfe, and her husband also white, brought forth a childe as blacke as an *Æthiopian*, because in copulation she strongly and continually had in her minde the picture of the *Æthiophe*. (978)

These stories, in their emphasis on the intensity of the mother’s thoughts at the moment of conception, are distinct from the maternal “surprise” narratives regarding harelips and birthmarks. These accounts of conception stress that the origins of “blackness” and “whiteness” depend on more than the humoral

qualities of the seeds produced by parents because the nature of the mother's thought is key. The father's thoughts, perhaps more trusted than those of the mother, go unrepresented and—in its apparent absence of influence—appear less powerful. Moreover, while shocks and surprises regularly framed the female imagination as open to external influences beyond the woman's own control (reacting “absurdly” to what is seen), depictions of the “black” mother, usually an Ethiopian Queen, who produces a “white” child, and the “white” mother who produces a “black” child, repeatedly identify an intent of thought, as the woman wilfully directs her attention onto a racially coded image.

These stories about maternal fantasies of “whiteness” and “blackness” notably act to limit the timeframe for maternal imagination to have an influence over a child, perhaps suggesting anxieties over miscegenation by focusing upon the act of generation, wherein maternal imagination allows for interracial sex itself to be denied. Laura Gowing has suggested, moreover, that these ideas could enable racist attitudes that indulge a fantasy by which “blackness can be imagined in and out of existence” (134), and while Gowing offers an example of such thinking in a contemporary account, the model for maternal imagination can be seen to show how blackness *and* whiteness can be imagined into and out of existence. Hall has observed that this imagining of “blackness” and “whiteness” in pregnancy narratives contributed to constructing a model of opposition that “others” blackness in contrast to whiteness, and this same binary modelling can be perceived in *Blackness*' plot of racial transformation. By having a child's skin colour be determined in the moment of conception, however, the child's skin (which does not yet exist) is not transformed in the same way proposed in the masque's narrative about transforming “black” to “white” skin; *in utero*, skin colour is formed out of this imagistic origin and the mother's assertion of “will.” “Blackness” in these examples is identified with Ethiopia, but the accounts also suggest that geographical location—in contrast with the type of climate theory Floyd-Wilson and Andrea have explored in relation to *Blackness*—is not the humoral determinant of skin colour. Instead, as with the obstinately “*fet[t]led thought*” (B2v) of Niger's daughters, it is the mother's focused desires which, without requiring the aid of a Sun King, play the determining role in the child's pigmentation.

By being visibly pregnant *and* painted black in a masque whose tidal cycle is presided over by “Æthiopia,” Queen Anna's performance in *Blackness* invokes these familiar narratives from medical and popular literature. Her intense preoccupation with the thought of appearing with her ladies in the guise of “*Black-mores*” was likely first expressed (and certainly realised in performance) after the moment of her child's conception. As a result, attendees at the masque probably would not have believed that the Queen's blackface performance would itself affect the racial identity of her developing baby. At the same time, the cultural associations of the performance act to remind viewers that all mothers (in line with early modern medical thinking) have the power to

determine the colour of their child's skin when they conceive. The Queen's pregnant "blackface" appearance invokes less the ideas about maternal impressions that result from sudden, unexpected events, or material "staining" (Thiel 223) and more the focussed self-assertion of a Queen whose "personation" within the masque is associated with thoughts the mother-to-be "strongly and continually had in her minde" (Paré 978). Set within the context of the masque's overt recall of Æthiopia (as both the figure of the moon, and the location from where Niger's daughters have travelled), and of the masque's concern for the power of women's "*fet[t]led thought*" (B2v), the pregnant Queen's blackened body alludes to a maternal will in which the Queen's self-assertion clearly features. Drawing upon cultural associations that identified the power of maternal thought to determine the colour of a child's skin, the pregnant Queen's blackface performance in *Blackness* corresponds to what we already know about Anna's forthright character and realises a particularly powerful demonstration of the Queen's "will" in showcasing her wilful pregnant body.

It is therefore clear from early modern medical writings that all issues relating to the physicality of children, including skin colour, hinged upon an understanding of the mother's "will," or "phanfie" during pregnancy (Sharp 121; Read 141-144). Acknowledging the will/"phanfie" of a pregnant woman was, accordingly, taken seriously and understood as a part of safeguarding the wellbeing of a child. From recording a mother's food cravings to observing her ardent desires, medical writers recognised the connection between mother and child as an enabling as well as a destructive relationship. On the one hand, a mother who longed for "figs, or rofes, or such things" might promote physical changes, "moved by the phanfie", that would "imprint this likenefis from imagination" onto the child (Sharp 124). On the other hand, medical writers also "warned that unwholesome longings, if they were frustrated, could cause abortion or make 'foul impressions' on the child" (Gowing 128; Lemnius 16-18). Sara Read has shown, moreover, that mothers could take advantage of their position in perceiving the needs of their pregnant body: "women might have overstated their longings in the expectation that their husbands would not want to risk the pregnancy by not fulfilling their every whim" (136). Jane Sharp observed that pregnant women "defire to something not fit to eat nor drink, as some women with child have longed to bite off a piece of their Husbands Buttocks" (103). Presumably most husbands' buttocks remained intact, but medical writers suggested that the cravings and "phanfie" (Sharp 124) of pregnant women should be accommodated where possible.⁷

Early modern observers depended on mothers to articulate their own perception of their pregnancy, identifying key moments of development, as in

⁷ Similar observations can be found in other medical writings; see Jaques Guillemeau (26) and Lemnius (14, 285).

the perception and announcement of the child's "quickening" (perceived movement within the womb) and in articulating their own needs for a healthy pregnancy (Gowing 122; Read). As Jakob Rüff notes in *The Expert Midwife*, the pregnant mother's desires should be taken into account and understood in relation to the condition of the developing child, whereby a "happy" mother made a "happy" child: "Before all things, let them be of a merry heart, let them not be wasted and pined with mourning and cares, let them give their endeavour to moderat joyes and sports" (67). The child would enjoy and be "strengthen[ed]" by the mother's activities, so that entertainments designed according to a mother's desires would "cheare up the Infant" too (Rüff 67). Having her "will" might, then, be the best way for a mother to avoid dangerous passions that could endanger a child and even promote miscarriage.

Understood in light of early modern ideas about maternal thought, the prominence of Queen Anna's "will" in *Blackness* suggests Jonson's and King James' accommodation of the Queen's longings in pregnancy, or even a response to a more threatening ransoming of her influence over the child (Thiel). Leeds Barroll, who has observed more generally the Queen's "wilfulness" over the guardianship disputes for Prince Henry, records how the King and his advisors were used to accommodating the Queen's "will": "since the crux of the problem was the fixedness of Anna's will, apparently the solution, in the opinion of all involved parties, was to accede to this will—because nothing else would work." (31-32). Following an incident in which James had to appease the Earl of Mar "in case [the Queen] continue in that wilfulness as she will not hear your credit" (qtd in Barroll 30), Lord Fyvie, a member of the Scottish Privy Council, felt pushed to offer advice to the King regarding the Queen's wilful personality. His letter similarly suggests a strategy of compliance in order to moderate the Queen's expressions of her will: "Her Majesty's passions could not be so well moderated or mitigated as by seconding, following, and obeying all her directions" (qtd. in Barroll 32). The "will" of the forthright Queen was no doubt even more apparent to those at court at a time when she was visibly pregnant.

Indeed, ahead of the performance of *Blackness*, Ottaviano Lotti seems to have found the Queen's plan to participate in the masque unusual because of her pregnancy: "*even though* she is several months pregnant", Lotti remarks, the Queen "has commanded a masque at which she will dance" (emphasis added). Lotti's account suggests both that the Queen's command is out of the ordinary but permitted, and that the surprising aspect of the pregnant Queen's involvement in the masque was her dancing. Early modern medical advice warned that pregnant women should avoid "vehement labour in running, leaping, and dauncing" as possible "causes of abortion or untimely birth" (Paré 921), and Lotti's implicit reservations about the Queen's involvement in the masque may relate to these concerns and his possible anticipation of the vigorous corantos she would be performing. Molin, however, observed

the Christmas preparations in a different vein to that of Lotti, positioning the entertainments as part of the scheduled event in the Queen's progressing pregnancy: "Once these festivities are over, at Candlemas, the Queen will go to Greenwich and stay there till her child is born. Her pregnancy continues happily." For Molin, the Queen's involvement in the masque appears designed as her last public event before confinement, in line with a "happy" pregnancy that is going to plan. Part of that plan, for Molin, as for most commentators, involves understanding the masque as the Queen's event, which they attend, at least in part, according to her "will": "I knew that the Queen would like her masque to be seen". Therefore, it is clear that even the foreign attendees at the masque were alert to the Queen's pregnancy and saw the entertainment specifically as hers. Among the English observers, Vincent explicitly noted that the King would pay for the costly masque in order to "execute ye Queens fancy", using a word that echoes the medical descriptions of maternal longing.

The Queen's painted "black" body, then, seems to exhibit her imagistic power, by being evocative of a narrative about the intense power of the pregnant "Ethiopian" mother, and also through her demonstrable ability to have her "will" in the manner by which she can display her pregnancy in a blackface performance. Anna's black pregnant body, signposted further by symbols of fertility in her costuming (McManus 15), draws attention to the way that the proverbially impossible underscores the fashioning of *both* the King and Queen's representation in the masque: the ability to "blanch an Æthiope" is not only possessed by Albion's Sun-King, but it is also a power attributed to the maternal "will." From her elevated position in the masque, the moon, pointedly identified as "Æthiopia" and bound to early modern understanding of cycles at work within the female generative body, delivers the masque's infamous lines, but re-inscribes an uncertain gendering of transformative powers in her own visual and cultural signification. As we have seen, "Æthiopia," at once associated with "the blackeft nation of the world" (A3v) also appears in white, silver and blue, advocating but not requiring the "blanching" she promotes, and collapsing the binary between "whiteness" and "blackness" by signifying both.

Hence, the assured position of James' patriarchal power and the binary oppositions on which it relies become a point of repeated challenge in a masque where the female figures of both the Queen and the moon not only appear to possess the transformative powers ascribed to the King, but are associated with blackness and whiteness, masculinity and femininity *at the same time*. Models of binary opposition—whether in terms of race, nationhood, or gender—begin to appear as artificial as the black, white and blue make-up applied to the bodies of the performers in the masque, and are exploded through the Queen's body which signifies blackness and whiteness, fertile femininity and buskined masculinity, European and British identities all at once. Jonson, who on his title page stresses the importance of how the masque was "*perfonated* By the most magnificent of Queenes ANNE Queene of great Britaine, &c.", is also tellingly unable to

fully describe the Queen's performative contribution in relation to his own "invention" of the masque's words (just as his "&c." limply gestures at her multiple national identities). In his concession, at the end of the script, that the masque "had that successe in the nobility of performance; as nothing needes to the illustration, but the memory by whome it was perforated" (C2r), Jonson asks us to recall the "strange" and wilful Queen's pregnant performing body in recognising how *The Masque of Blackness* should be understood. In the context of a masque that is so deeply riven by contradictions, a conclusion which may look like the standard Jonsonian trope of ineffability whereby (as in his epigram 76 "On Lucy, Countess of Bedford") it is enough to name the object of his flattery to say all there is to say about them, reads ever more like his admission that his script, despite all its descriptive passages and marginalia, is unequal to the task of conveying the full meaning of the evening's entertainment. The paradoxes of the masque, this suggests, can be reconciled neither through the power or "*light scientiall*" (B3v) of the King nor through the poet's attempt at citing his sources, explaining the "decorum" of Jones' perspective design, or describing the colour schemes of costumes and wigs. Instead, reconciliation is only possible through the strikingly indecorous performance of the Queen. There is no question of seeing her blacking-up, and the masque's framing of that act and of the blackness of Niger's daughters as something to be remedied by blanching, as anything but a celebration of the Queen's underlying white beauty and an implicit assertion of white supremacy. Nevertheless, the performance's repeated blurring of racial and gendered categories, and the ability of the Queen's pregnant performance in blackface to cue the viewers' awareness that her maternal mind can "will" the blackness and whiteness of royal progeny into being, also work to unsettle her husband's white male nationalist supremacy in the very act of celebrating it before James I's new English court and its foreign guests.

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Benjamin Steingass*

Othello*-dor: Racialized Odor In and On *Othello

Iago: O, 'tis foul in her (IV. i. 203)

Abstract: For Shakespearean scholars, the subject of scent in his work has remained relatively lukewarm to discussion. Shakespeare's use of smell is not only equal to that of his other senses, but smell's uniquely historical record both on and off the stage illuminate his works in more ways than currently perceived. Shakespeare's usage of smell is found throughout his works, and their importance on the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean stage present a playwright-director that was exceptionally in-tune with his audiences on the page and in person. Positioned at this culturally significant point in Shakespeare's career, one work's utilization of scent textually and theatrically fully explicates the importance of odor in a societal, racial, and domestic capacity: *Othello*. This article explores and establishes the importance of smell in relation to textual *Othello*, his "dyed in mummy" handkerchief, and Desdemona in the written tragedy. Additionally, it studies the heightened focus of smell in *Othello* on a metatheatric level for Shakespeare on his early modern stage, calling attention to the myriad of odors contained in and around his Renaissance theatre and the result effect this awareness would have had on his contemporary audiences in their experience of *Othello* as a uniquely smell-oriented show.

Keywords: Shakespeare, *Othello*, scent, odor, blackness, blackface, performance, textiles, dyeing, costuming.

Something is rotten in the state of Shakespearean studies (*Hamlet* I. iv. 90): that is, the very lack of focus on odor itself. While Shakespearean scholars have plunged the depths and scoured relentlessly on a multitude of topics, the subject of scent has remained relatively lukewarm to discussion. This is a shame, for Shakespeare's use of smell is not only equal to that of his other senses, but smell's uniquely historical record both on and off the stage illuminate his works in more ways than currently perceived. Shakespeare's usage of smell is found throughout his works, and their importance on the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean stage present a playwright-director that was exceptionally in-tune with

* Toledo Museum of Art.

his audiences on the page and in person. Positioned at this culturally significant point in Shakespeare's career, one work's utilization of scent textually and theatrically fully explicates the importance of odor in a societal, racial, and domestic capacity: *Othello*.

My purpose, therefore, is twofold: first, to explore and establish the importance of smell in relation to textual *Othello*, his "dyed in mummy" handkerchief, and Desdemona in the written tragedy; second, to explore the heightened focus of smell in *Othello* on a metatheatric level for Shakespeare on his early modern stage, calling attention to the myriad of odors contained in and around his Renaissance theatre and the result effect this awareness would have had on his contemporary audiences in their experience of *Othello* as a uniquely smell-oriented show.

To start, it is important to understand the difficulties surrounding the science and history of smell. When compared to the other major senses of the human body (sight, sound, touch, taste), smell remains an outlier in a number of aspects. First, descriptions of scent are often filtered through various linguistic mediums, in that they are frequently not direct comparisons. As Jonathan Harris states, "the words we use to represent smell tend not to be nominal, but comparative—an object smells *like* something" (468). Just as our bodies are able to perceive, process, and identify sounds, tastes, etc., we do the same with smell; the issue is not based in biology, but in language. When it comes to conveying senses, it is here smell deviates: unlike the "complex...array of terms for color and phonemes," Harris writes, we "have no such terminology for the spectrum of odor" (468). As a result of this failure in language, we are forced to relay odors through the other senses in referential manner.

In spite of this communicative failure, scent's indescribability presents an interesting phenomenon. While odor linguistically can be seen as a problem, it can likewise be presented an unrestrained opportunity; unlike the other senses, odor is capable of claiming more so as to identify itself. Odor, in this case, works descriptively and not prescriptively. With this idea established, an innovative approach has been utilized in addressing smell: the idea of "smell as the palimpsest" (472). In the same manner that a literary and physical palimpsest invokes the past when viewing the present, so too does this view of odor identification. However, the palimpsest fails to work as chronologically as intricate as scent memory and identification. "The centrifugal nature of smell," according to Harris, allows smell to simultaneously "smell *like* something else and hence to evoke the past by metonymic association" (472), ultimately placing the object of olfactory scrutiny both in the past and *in media res*, outside and inside of the object itself. Yet, as suggested above, this unique property of smell has caused its written and narrative history to falter.

Therefore, it may come as no surprise that the history of communicating the experience of smell, in particular within the confines of the Renaissance

stage, has been often a forlorn enterprise. Perhaps Holly Dugan puts it best in summarizing that “as stage properties,” smell has often been overlooked or avoided when dealing criticism of Elizabethan and Jacobean physical records of the theatre and stage, a clear result of the false claim that smell and “olfaction lacks both a history and an archive” (229). Despite historical abdication of smell, scholars have recently attempted to shift their focus to olfaction and its importance in the early modern theatre, both specifically in meta-theatrical and -textual connections of dramas to their performances.

For William Shakespeare, contemporary stage conditions were juxtaposed between the physical limitations of the stage itself to the drama forced to perform on it. “The stage had *property* but no *scenery*,” writes Muriel Bradbrook (30). Written dramas were able to indicate setting through stage directions; English history plays were easy to assume their settings, England; performed dramas did not share in this convenience. This posed an issue for playwright and director Shakespeare. Without the ability to establish setting through a physical landscape, Shakespeare had either determine setting through the use of language or the use of dramatic conventions. Linguistically, Shakespeare often attempts to establish a scene of scenery early in the first scene of the show. *The Comedy of Errors* (I. i. 29), *Measure for Measure* (I. i. 23), and *A Midsummer’s Night Dream* (I. i. 12), as well as other early-Shakespeare comedies, reference their location almost immediately in the show to establish a footing. In most extreme examples, shows like *Romeo and Juliet*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, and *Troilus and Cressida* all announce location in their first spoken lines. This occurs even on the micro-level for Shakespearean shows: Hamlet’s first scene verbally places the characters standing guard on a cold midnight (I. i. 6-8), whereas Edgar has to orally announce to a blind Gloucester their arrival to Dover (IV. vi. 1-3).

On the other end of the spectrum, Shakespeare the director was pigeonholed into establishing his settings through dramatic staging conventions. Independent of the physical stage that remained relatively in stasis, scholars have begun to note Shakespeare the director’s distinct use of spectacle in his work. According to Stephen Orgel, the “device” for establishing a setting through spectacle forced poets-directors and playwright-directors to utilize “nearly every other art know to the age: painting, architecture, design, mechanics, lighting, music of both composer and performer, acting, choreography, and dancing both acrobatic and formal” (49). In this sense, the special effects of early modern drama played an equal, if not more important role in creating the settings for plays. The one feature noticeably absent from Orgel’s list: the deliberate and nuanced utilization of scent.

This negligence of odor was not historical, but rather, documental. Scent played a major role on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage; it merely has been deemed insignificant. In “Scent of a Woman,” Dugan argues, “Perfumes were powerful stage properties...on early modern professional stages” (246) for their

ability to capture not just natural phenomena associated with smells, but in their evocation of “early modern theatrical fantasies about gender and desire” (246). While Dugan limits her discussion to dramatic scent’s role in gender identity, her underlying work can be expanded to grapple with the importance of odor in setting racial identities—both a gendered and racial text and stage ‘smelled very differently, their aromatic properties suggest that olfaction was a crucial part of theatricality throughout the sixteenth century” (230). Scent in the Shakespearean drama and on the Shakespearean stage equally enacted the invisible and visible social differences, particularly in a distinctly “black” *Othello*. The incorporation of these two different features of drama, speech and spectacle, fluctuated throughout his career, placing *Othello* in a uniquely precarious position. “Whereas the first half of [Shakespeare’s] career witnessed a shift from spectacle to speech,” Douglas Bruster notes, “the second half saw a return to spectacle, as generic emphasis moved from history plays and comedies to tragedies and romances” (“The dramatic life...” 83). Essentially, “spectacle replaced scenery” on the stage in a way to appeal to “the demands of the more unsophisticated” audience members (30).

Coupled with this change in the theatre is the underlying change in societal conditions in late Elizabethan England. From this lens, the shift can be seen as the result of Shakespeare’s conscious awareness of his audience’s attention of “a signal transitional period in English history” (*Drama in the Market...*, 1) that was found both ex- and internally to the stage. Theatrical techniques paralleled a changing perception in society for “language, religion, geography, and color” (Smith 9), which in turn “had a direct impact on the audience’s perception of [blackness]” (9). In the temporal battleground for control of the narrative is *Othello*, dated 1603-1604, during the proverbial apex of Shakespeare’s professional period. As a result of this placement occurring almost synchronically with this theorized shift, *Othello* adopts both the former emphasis on the power of scripted speech, couple with Shakespeare’s later desire for utilizing drama spectacle. Rather than jostling between these two tools, *Othello* conjoins both its text and its stage elements on the early modern stage to address its audience.

On a textual level, Shakespeare’s emphasis on olfactory language in relation to race and gender throughout *Othello* is clearly more than coincidental. Perhaps most noticeable in *Othello*’s obsession with scent is in regards to the titular character himself. Othello is repeatedly referred through and reduced to olfactory means. In learning of Desdemona’s marriage to Othello, Brabantio deems him a “foul thief” who “hast enchanted [Desdemona] (I. iii. 61-63). Further, Iago states, “one may smell in such a will most rank,/ Foul disproportion, though unnatural” (III. iii. 231-233). This “rank” is not only in “foul disproportion” to Othello’s military classification, but points to larger Elizabethan ideas of racialized odor. Further, this “will most rank” potentially

carries a doubly malicious and biting pun on the “will” of both the author—William—and rape, as similarly depicted in the alternative title of *Twelfth Night*: “What You Will” (Fineman 39). Smell was closely related to the since debunked humors system of medicine: “passions exercised an effect on the humors; they also affected individual odor” (38), Alain Corbin cites. Under the humoral system, “The Negro...*must* to some extent smell more strongly,” Corbin references, “They represented the brutish, strongly animalized world” (38). For Iago and his fellow conspirators, Othello’s stench was not just metaphorical, but a literal result of his identity as a “Moor,” and much like other “animals”, “[Othello’s] hath blown his ranks into the air” (III. iv. 135).

Much like the text itself, *Othello*’s early modern staging played heavily on the importance of odor. This importance of odor to race on the stage can be found in relation to argument as presented by Ian Smith in his article, “Othello’s Black Handkerchief.” Shakespeare, in his specific emphasis on both the speech and the spectacle of his shows during *Othello*’s creation, would have dealt with the dramatic convention at the time of performing Othello as black. For Smith, this performance of blackness was not just limited to modern idea of a cosmetic “blackface”; rather, one popular way “to imitate the black skin of Moors or Africans on the stage was the covering of the actor’s body with black cloth” (4); the literal “rank garb” Iago refers to (II. i. 304). Not only that, but the very covering worn by actors to portray blackness was the same material used for the “ocular proof” (III. iii. 357): Othello’s handkerchief. Ultimately, these findings for Ian Smith suggested a “manufacturing” of blackness in *Othello*:

The black body in the early modern theatre is the product of artistic and artisanal creation—conceived, sewed, dyed, and fitted according to the body measurements of the actor and, more importantly, the ideological demands of race. (22)

I would like to further this idea by adding an additional qualifier that cohabitates both inter-textually and meta-theatrically: the black body in *Othello* is “conceived, sewed, dyed, fitted, and *scented*”. This scent not only reinforces the “foul” nature of Othello, but contributes to a more complicated understanding of the function of smell within the tragedy.

Renaissance and Baroque England was equipped with numerous ways to dye fabrics black both on and off the stage. In M. Channing Linthicum’s *Costume in the Drama of Shakespeare...*, English costume manufacturers had various classes of dyes: “plants and woods...minerals...insects...salt and lye...ashes and such obnoxious sources as brine of pickled fish” (2)¹. Of the

¹ Perhaps my favorite source for dye: “animal or human excretions.” While this is never cited as a source for dyeing material black, it would certainly have established a “foul” and “rank” Othello.

plants and woods category, two important dyes were employed for blackening: madder and woad. “Madder was a climbing herb,” Linthicum explains, “the dye of whose root, when combined...with woad, it produced black” (2-3). While madder’s smell was rather nondescript, woad’s was incredibly pungent. In *Poetaster*, Ben Jonson places the smell of woad in contrast with the incense of frankincense (II. ii. 57). Perhaps most indicative of woad’s unpleasant smell comes Queen Elizabeth herself, who “in 1580, forbade the planting of woad within eight miles of the royal residences” (Linthicum 3). Although she eventually revoked this decree², she still found the smell repulsive, reportedly noted that, “when she cometh on Progress to see you in your Countries; she be not driven out of your Towns by suffering it to infect the Air too near them” (qtd. 4). Moreover, woad’s olfactory effects have been noted to linger well past the dying process, as dyers “wore their labor on their hands” (Uhlman 182) through the lasting stain and smell, barring these manufacturers from joining local trade guilds (183).

Further, the conflation of Othello’s material black skin to the material of his handkerchief can also be accounted for through an olfactory interpretation. In describing the origins of his handkerchief, Othello states its Egyptian history:

The worms were hallowed that did breed the silk,
And it was dyed in mummy which the skillful
Conserved of maidens’ hearts. (III. iv. 74-76)

As Smith explores in his aforementioned article, being “dyed in mummy” offers a pointed description of the prop. “Samuel Johnson, citing the ‘mummy’ reference in *Othello* in his *Dictionary*,” Smith relays, “describes the ‘liquor’ emanating from mummified bodies as ‘a thick, opaque and viscous fluid, of a blackish and strong but not disagreeable smell’” (qtd. 19). However, Johnson’s “strong by not disagreeable smell” is not unanimous among those involved in thanatology and remains. Platearius writes that, “Mumma...is black, ill-smelling, shiny, and massive” (qtd. Dannefeldt 164); botanist Pierre Pomet noted bad-quality mumia “[stunk] of Pitch” (qtd. 179); Pliny the Elder identified the liquid dye of mumia as “pissasphalt...[a] natural mixture of pitch and asphalt” (qtd. 164).

On a textual level, in marrying Othello, Desdemona’s “heart’s subdued/ Even to the very quality of my lord” (I. iii. 245-246). The quality is not just a metaphorical resonance, but is additionally a very literal dawning of Othello’s nature, including his very smell. The “dyed in mummy,” sulfuric-pitch smelling handkerchief is thus a symbol of the relationship between Othello and his bride becoming one in nature. Thus, physically and olfactory, Othello’s handkerchief

² A whopping twenty years later in 1601 (quite a period to hold a grudge against a smell).

is a reminder to both characters of Desdemona's racial and spiritual mixing; as Emilia states:

Let husbands know
Their wives have sense like them: they see and smell
And have their palates both for sweet and sour,
As husbands have. What is it that they do
When they change us for others? Is it sport?
I think it is: and doth affection breed it?
I think it doth: is't frailty that thus errs?
It is so too. And have not we affections,
Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?
Then let them use us well: else let them know
The ills we do their ills instruct us so. (IV. iii. 96-106)

On one level, Emilia's view of marriage can be read as the need for husbands to recognize that wives and women possess the same physical abilities to see, smell, and taste; the use of the senses are not limited to men. This "like"-ness, then, can be further extended in her soliloquy, where the "desire for sport," or infidelity, can be found in men and women alike. Essentially, she claims that both men and women "smell" for sport equally; furthermore, in her final couplet, she even goes as far as to indicate that any infidelity committed by wives is the result of men themselves in that they "instruct us so."

However, Emilia's soliloquy can likewise be seen in another light. The "like"-ness is rather a result of marital mixing, where the tastes, sights, and smells of the two conform and identify solely with the husband. Therefore, a matrimonially chaste Desdemona would no longer retain her own smell; she would thus smell akin to Othello and all his "foulness." Returning to her final couplet, any "ills" of infidelity by wives are thus created and established by husbandry imagination; if the two share the same smelling essence, one that is fundamentally rooted in the husband's "like"-ness, adultery by the wives are merely extensions of the husbands, creating a smelling arborous of sort.

Furthermore, in receiving Othello's black scented handkerchief, Desdemona receives a physical and olfactory reminder of this smelly miscegenation. While Desdemona retains her physical whiteness, through marriage, she is naturally attached to the distinctly non-white "foulness" of Othello and his handkerchief. Further, this "foul" association is only physical; both "black Othello" (II. iii. 30) and "white" Desdemona (I. i. 86) are spiritually *unfoul*. In Othello's recognition that, "My name, that was as fresh/ As Dian's visage is now begrimed and black/ As mine own face" (III. iii. 385), there is clear distinction between the "foulness" associated to the body and the "foulness" of the soul, which Othello sees as separate from his own racial status.

The dichotomy between her “sweet” spirit and her “foul” odor, however, is not lost on other characters.

It is not surprising then to see this odious “pitchy bitumen” (20) metaphor appear in Iago’s attempt to frame Desdemona. In stereotyping Othello’s blackness as an indicator that he can “as tenderly be led by th’ nose/ As asses are” (I. iii. 393-394), Iago is aware of the importance of smell in his plotting against “the Moor.” In stealing the “napkin” (III. iii. 286), Iago physically removes the olfactory reminder of Desdemona’s relationship to Othello. As a result, Desdemona’s scent changes from “foul” to “sweet”, thus paradoxically changing her spirit from “sweet” to “foul.” In removing the “olfactory proof” of their relationship, Iago lays the groundwork for his “odious, damned lie” (V. ii. 177), leading Othello “by th’ nose” to smell out his own verdict. Upon learning the handkerchief is “not about [her]” (III. iv. 54), Othello’s scent and spiritual recognition of Desdemona completely changes. Othello casts her “foul” spirit to “Fire and brimstone!” (IV. i. 234) where it will “rot” (IV. i. 184). Paradoxically, Othello recognizes her scent is no longer the “foul” odor associated with him, but rather something more sensual:

Othello: O thou weed,
Who art so lovely fair, and smell’st so sweet,
That the sense aches at thee, would thou hadst never been born!...
The bawdy wind that kisses all it meets
Is hushed within the hollow mine of earth
And will not hear’t. What committed?

Desdemona: By heavens, you do me wrong!

Othello: Are not you a strumpet? (IV. ii. 65-80)

Rather than connecting Desdemona’s scent to his own “foul” odor, Othello implicates Desdemona’s new smell to “fair” and “sweet” Bianca (III. 4. 169 and 179), the sexual promiscuous “huswife” (IV. i. 96). To Othello, this sexually associated “sweet” odor is an affirmation of her spiritual “rot;” Iago’s assessment that “tis’ foul *in* her” (IV. i. 205), not *of* her; her spirit is foul, her smell no longer is pursued further by Othello, coming to a climax in the final scene of the tragedy.

Eventually, this identification of Desdemona smelling as “a fine woman, a fair woman, a sweet woman” (IV. i. 180-181) drives Othello to potential murder. It is here we revisit the final moments at Desdemona’s fragrant bedside:

Othello: When I have pluck’d thy rose,
I cannot give it vital growth again,
It must needs wither:—I’ll smell it on the tree.—
O, balmy breath, that dost almost persuade
Justice to break her sword!—One more, one more;—

Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee,
 And love thee after.—One more, and this the last;
 So sweet was ne'er so fatal. I must weep,
 But they are cruel tears: this sorrow's heavenly;
 It strikes where it doth love.—She wakes. (V. ii.12-22)

Othello smelling Desdemona as “rose...balmy breath” is the final proof he needs. As Alison Findlay notes, “Breath carries an erotic attraction” (59) that would be recalled by lovers in an intimate setting; however, “sense of smell was the sense of violent appetites...sweet sensations,” Corbin suggests of early modern Europe, “Consequently, blacks, who had remained nearer to the beast...were more sensitive to the sexual power of odors” (187). Othello, smelling Desdemona in such an intimate setting, fall victim to his own racialization being “more sensitive to the sexual power of odors” and recognizes her “sweet” scent as the “olfactory proof” of her infidelity. Summed up best by Danielle Nagler, “Desdemona does not smell true to Othello because both her natural and redefined smells suggest what is morally reprehensible lies within her” (55).

Yet, almost ironically, this change in smell is ultimately a construct of Othello's own doing. Returning to Emilia's soliloquy, any infidelity on Desdemona's part would be a result of Othello's own doing, as their “smells” have a shared “like”-ness to Othello as the husband. Thus, in smelling the sweetness of Desdemona, Othello projects a false smell upon her, one that he fundamentally has created for her; the “ill” Desdemona committed was “instructed” by Othello's misguided logic, an olfactory, self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts. Should Othello *believe* Desdemona “turn'd to folly” (V. ii. 162), the mental distrust is the very “ill” that “instructs” Desdemona to “ill” and smell Biancan “sweet,” and not a Moorish “foul.” Only once Emilia unweaves Iago's incriminating plot, does Othello realize his mistake, that “[Desdemona] was foul!” (V. ii. 197) in the same way that he himself is olfactory “foul” like the “dyed in mummy” handkerchief.

Following the events of the written tragedy are, as one may expect, tragic. Yet, placing the events on the late Elizabethan stage create an even more interactive and scent based experience for the audience, allowing the audience to almost participate in the sensual experience of *Othello*. If Smith's assessment that Othello would have been portrayed by “covering... the actor's body with black cloth” (4) and the “dyed in mummy” handkerchief is “a substitute self, a metonymic memento” (14) to Desdemona to serve as a constant “reminder of her black Africa love” (20), while simultaneously serving as a reminder of “black cloth and other materials used in... performances to fabricate and reproduce black skin” (21) is true, then the role of scent on stage exponentially compounds these ideas.

At a historically significant moment in the production of Shakespeare as playwright-director with an emphasis on both text and spectacle, not only would the visual of a white actor garbed in black cloth strike audiences, but so too would the lingering smell of the very dye used to material, just as it had been on the fabric dyers hands. Unlike the “foul” and “pitchy bitumen” (Smith 20) smells of Othello and his handkerchief within the text of the show, the staged *Othello* would smell of a lingering reminder of the woad scent or of the Globe’s foul atmosphere itself.

With a grain of salt, it is important to note the documented extent to of woad’s persisting scent in the Renaissance and Baroque theatre is difficult to place. While costumes from the Elizabethan period through the present have been documented as retaining a specifically “wet dog” stench, as reported by Folger’s historian Caryn Lazzuri, these may equally be the result of costumes being worn “night after night of performance, and never deeply cleaned afterwards.” Furthermore, one account shows that the Empress Josephine’s pungent use of “musk, ambergris, and civet” in her relationship with Napoleon was so prolific that “sixty years later her boudoir at Malmaison still retained the odor of the musk that had saturated it” (Corbin 196). Pungent smells have a way of lasting. However, the handkerchief’s woad-y smell may still have been simply overpowered by the theatre itself. Especially significant is the fact that groundlings at Shakespeare’s main theatre, the Globe, were additionally termed “stinkards” by the literate bourgeoisie, referring to potentially both their odious and odorous state as common citizens (Dugan 248). Compounding this issue is the historical problem that the theatres themselves most likely would have smelled quite rank. As Tiffany Stern states, for theatres like the Globe and the Hope Theatre that occupied the near or the same physical spaces as the sport of bear bating, the audience would most likely be surrounded by the “smell of blood and urine and death” (Witmore).

Yet, the early modern Globe’s characteristics still contributed to *Othello*’s obsession with scent and the theatrics of smell; for a show so focused on the experience of smelling, the very content of the show primes the audience to become aware of their olfactory surroundings. This olfactory priming is still employed today on the stage: the Broadway musical *Waitress*, a show about a waitress who attempts to escape her downtrodden life through baking pies at a greasy diner, installed a pie oven to pump the smell of apple pie through the foyer and air ducts of their original Broadway home³. As lead producer Barry Weissler stated, “I wanted that aroma, and I wanted it desperately...It’s a wonderful intense surround for the show” (Paulson 4). The resulting effect adds “an olfactory extension to the show’s set, which replicates a small-town diner specializing in fresh pies” (4). Rather than smelling the specific pies that

³ Having seen the original Broadway production, I can confirm this detail.

the main character “bakes” on stage, the audience is already primed and shaped to experience the show beyond merely sight and sound. Just as the pies onstage evoke a heightened awareness and connection to the narrative, so too the Globe’s stench of death, rot, and blood would evoke the foul odor in *Othello*.

Thus, the spectacle of the staged Othello’s scented black body is relayed further in the incorporation of both the handkerchief of the same black material and the pungent Globe atmosphere. Onstage, Desdemona possessing the woad black handkerchief would literally smell the same as Othello’s body. The actor playing Desdemona would ideally continue to emit the same woad black odor while Othello is offstage. Thus, in accidentally quitting herself of the handkerchief on stage, the actor playing Desdemona would no longer smell akin to Othello, just as textual Desdemona’s loss of the “dyed in mummy” handkerchief loses her “foul,” “very quality of [her] lord.” On stage, it is not the “ocular proof” alone Othello needs to convince himself of Desdemona’s sham infidelity; it is the “olfactory proof,” one shared by the actors portraying the various characters with the spectacle-dependent groundlings enveloped with the foul smell of the Globe. Only once both the actor playing Othello and the groundlings takes “One more, one more;—“ (V. ii. 17) sniff of the sleeping actor Desdemona does he fully vicariously smell and experience the indescribably scent based tragedy found in *Othello*, one that is continuously pressing on those the audience in the repeated reminder of their notably smelly surroundings. Perhaps putting it best, the audience shares a vicarious experience with Emilia throughout the course of the staged tragedy in her decree:

EMILIA: Villany, villany, villany!

I think upon’t,—I think,—I smell’t;—O villany!—(V. ii. 187-188)

On the whole, smell and its inculcated emotional associates work for Shakespeare the playwright-director in a hyper fixation within *Othello*. For the educated readers and distanced viewers of *Othello*, playwright Shakespeare utilizes the language and speech of odor to “evokes Othello’s own bestiality created out of the possibility of Desdemona’s adulterous lust” (Nagler 47), and his misapprehension, founded, as elsewhere in the play, upon partial knowledge. As a result, the very possibility of Desdemona smelling “ill” is begot through Othello’s own flawed smelling, being “led by the nose.”

Furthermore, it is imperative to understand how this blackface technology of costuming helped forge a lasting connection between black and blackened skin, contamination, and the idea of a primordial body repulsion. Both the physical scent of Othello’s literal blackened figure on the early modern stage through his dyed costume and the smell of *Othello* the racialized play being performed in a theatre of heightened scent-awareness further make bedfellows of the dichotomies of a constructed racist ideologies (Saunders 148-176). The

fixedly black or blackened character and black staged play support a white supremacist belief in a hierarchical, essentialized race wherein white characters and white staged plays are “sweet,” and black characters and black staged plays are “foul.” The perpetuation and continuation of these racist and racialize connections have yet to be fully addressed, dismissed, and destroyed.

Similarly the spectacle-dependent viewers of staged *Othello* “smell’t” the villainy around them in a meta-theatrical sense. Shakespeare’s contemporary audience would be engrossed with and in odor, evoked through the recognizably “foul” woad dyed cloth of *Othello*, the repeated occasions of physical sniffing staged before them, and the hyper emphasized dialogue pertaining to odor, all of which prime the audience’s consciousness to an awareness of their placement within the uniquely piquant setting of the Globe Theatre. Thus, through both textual and theatrical priming, both Shakespearean character and spectator alike are drawn in to smell the “foul” tragedy both in and around *Othello*.

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Brown, Never Black: *Othello* on the Nazi Stage¹

Abstract: This paper examines the ways in which *Othello* was represented on the Nazi stage. Included in the theatre analyses are *Othello* productions in Frankfurt in 1935, in Berlin in 1939 and 1944, and in pre-occupation Vienna in 1935. New archival material has been sourced from archives in the aforementioned locations, in order to give detailed insights into the representation of *Othello* on stage, with a special focus on the makeup that was used on the actors who were playing the titular role. The aim of these analyses is not only to establish what *Othello* looked like on the Nazi and pre-Nazi stage, but also to examine the Nazis' relationship with Shakespeare's *Othello* within the wider context of their relationship with the Black people who lived in Nazi Germany at the time. In addition, the following pages offer insights into pre-Nazi, Weimar productions of *Othello* in order to create a more complex and comparative understanding of Nazi *Othello* productions and the wider theatrical context within which they were produced. In the end, we find out, based on existing evidence, why *Othello* was brown, and never Black.

Keywords: *Othello*, Nazi Germany, Nazi Shakespeare, Blackface, Race, Representation, Shakespeare Production, Global Shakespeare, German Shakespeare, Theatre History.

While people of African descent are often assumed to have been absent from German society before and during the Nazi period, *Othello*, arguably Shakespeare's most famous Black character, thrived on the Nazi stage. In much the same way that Germany's Black population has been left out of recent historical accounts, Shakespeare's Black general has been largely overlooked by theatre critics. The German-Polish historian and Auschwitz survivor Joseph Wulf's assumption that *Othello* must have been banned on racist grounds is, for example, fairly representative of current scholarship on the topic of Shakespeare's *Othello* in Nazi Germany (280). In spite of this, the number of productions of the play under the Nazi regime suggest that far from disappearing from the theatre repertoires of the time, *Othello* remained

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¹ All German citations have been translated into English, all translations are mine.

prominent, ranking among the top ten most performed Shakespeare plays of the Nazi period. According to Thomas Eicher, *Othello* ranked as the tenth most performed Shakespeare play between 1933 and 1945, whereas it was the ninth most performed play between 1929 and 1933 (302). *The Merchant of Venice*, in comparison, sank from being the third most performed play between 1929 and 1933, to the ninth position between 1933 and 1945 (Eicher 302). So, even though its popularity experienced a slight decrease in 1933/34 (which already started during the years 1931/32 and 1932/33), and with the exception of 1934/35 (in which there were no *Othello* productions) (Eicher 310), *Othello* remained an often-produced play (Bonnell 167).

The question that this, for some, rather surprising fact about *Othello*'s popularity on Nazi stages raises is the question of the representation of the Black general himself. What did Othello look like on Nazi-controlled stages? Was he portrayed by a white actor in the kind of blackface that we would associate with minstrel shows, or did the actors wear a lighter shade of brown instead? Was he portrayed (as was the case during the Weimar period) as a great "Negro chief" or the "modern conductor of an all-Black Jazz band" (Stahl 625)? Or was he made into a caricature version of what Germans at the time perceived as 'African'?

The following pages will examine the ways in which *Othello* was presented under one of the most infamous racist regimes in recent history, with a special focus on the make-up used on actors in three different productions of *Othello* in Nazi Germany, starting in 1935 in Frankfurt, then looking at a 1939 Berlin version and a 1944 version of the play in the same city. In addition, Raul Aslan's 1935 rendition of Shakespeare's *Othello* at the "Burgtheater" in pre-annexation Vienna will also form part of the analysis. Previously ignored archival materials for the four respective productions have been sourced from archives in Vienna, Frankfurt and Berlin. The following analyses will show that the Nazis' relationship with Shakespeare's *Othello* (and by extension, the Black people who lived in Germany at the time) was far too complex to easily and unproblematically compartmentalise. The following pages will also offer insights into pre-Nazi productions of the play, representations of *Othello* on stage, and reactions to them in the press, in order to create a more comparative understanding, not just of Nazi *Othello* productions as such, but of the wider theatrical context within which they were produced.

In order to fully understand the Nazis' view of *Othello*, one must first gain an understanding of the context in which the play was produced, especially in relation to Germany's colonial past, the treatment of Black people in Germany just after the First World War and the social and political repercussions of having to concede German territory to foreign occupiers, who had among their ranks, a large contingent of Black African soldiers.

The First World War, the Aftermath, and the Repercussions for Black People in Germany

Before the end of the First World War, one of the greatest fears among German soldiers was to be captured by their Black opponents, particularly the Senegalese troops, who were known as “tirailleurs Sénégalais”, and who fought for the French with their infamous “coupe-coupe” (Olusoga 181). This weapon was essentially a machete originally used to cut down the thick vegetation in West Africa (Olusoga 181). Their skilful fighting techniques and their use of the “coupe-coupe” in hand-to-hand combat made the Senegalese soldiers fierce and feared enemies. The German war-propaganda machine used this traditional African weapon to create the ultimate emblem of the supposed uncontrollable savagery, barbarism, and inhumanity of African soldiers in the collective German consciousness (Olusoga 181-182).

The fear of the Black soldiers and the indignation of being subjected to the supposedly inferior race of Black people were mainly expressed in gendered and sexual terms. The inevitable relations between the African soldiers and the white German women led to a double-sided discourse, in which the German women were either seen as the victims of the “dark beasts”, or as whores, who willingly betrayed their fatherland, their race, and their people. Similarly, the fact that some white women would have voluntarily entered into sexual relationships with these African soldiers appeared to have been neither accepted nor understood by German society. The African man was, therefore, characterised as “infectious, instinctual, uncivilised, and—most notably—irresistible, insatiable, and uncontrollable” (Campt 54).

Before the ravaging stereotype of the brutal Black rapist spread across Germany, the African subjects in the German colonies were often associated with the myth of the “loyal Askari”—African soldiers, who willingly and happily submitted to their colonisers and who valiantly fought for the protection of the fatherland and the propagation of its political and economic interests (Lewerenz 3: 46).² This myth of the loyal African soldier represented the imperial world order, a time during which the white man was still at the top of the racial hierarchy, during which the “good coloniser” watched over his colonial subjects, and during which sexual relations between the races were limited to white males and Black females, with the white women at a safe distance. The stereotype of the Black rapist and occupier essentially subverted

² However, as David Olusoga and Casper W. Erichsen show in their book *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, the African people in the German colonies fiercely fought against German troops and for their freedom and independence, see: Olusoga, David, and Casper W. Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust. Germany's Forgotten Genocide*, London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2010.

these imperial and colonial tropes and instilled instead, a great degree of anxiety within German society. While the offspring of the white colonisers and the African women was largely kept away from the eyes of the German press and families, Negrophobia, German Nationalism and the ideal of social and racial apartheid was continuously challenged by the gradual appearance of the mixed race offspring of German women and Black occupying soldiers, who would later be called the “Rhineland bastards”(Olusoga and Erichsen 306). How to address and eventually solve the issue of these Black Germans was established in the immediate post-war period but would later on flourish under Hitler’s regime. Eugen Fischer and his research, in which he conducted experiments on 310 mixed-race children from Southwest Africa in order to determine their racial “quality”, for example, would become a prominent agent under Nazism for the establishment of the policies towards the so called “Rhineland bastards” (Lusane 50).

In hindsight, and given the aforementioned negative stereotypes with which Black people were associated at the time, it becomes clear that though the military prowess of Shakespeare’s general was never in question, and perhaps because of it, his Blackness, especially within the Nazi German context, would always be questioned.

Black People in Nazi Germany

While the general situation of Black people in Germany was marked by discrimination, insecurity and hate, some sources state that it was sometimes also a paradoxical situation, as the Black presence in Germany was seen by the regime as a potentially useful tool for international affairs. The leaders of the Third Reich were nursing the dream of re-establishing Germany’s colonies, consequently rebuilding Germany’s imperial power and ensuring the expansion of the Reich and of “Lebensraum” for the “Aryan” race.³ Because of the regime’s attempt to maintain “favourable” diplomatic relations with the outside world, it was internally agreed that Black people in Germany should not be too openly abused, without a veneer of legality to justify what were already brutal policies (Oguntoye and Opitz and Schultz 56). So, at least during the early years, the regime tried to maintain a façade of “tolerance” towards its Black

³ This idea of creating new ‘Lebensraum’ in Africa for the German people was not new, as already Heinrich Göring and other Germans ventured to Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to conquer land for the expanding German nation. Hermann Göring followed in his father’s footsteps by supporting the expansion of the Reich towards the East of Europe in the hopes of gaining suitable “Lebensraum”.

population; this way, a few Black people were, from time to time, given special opportunities, which would otherwise have been unavailable or illegal in accordance with the Nuremberg Race Laws. These exceptions meant that a select few mixed-race Germans were sometimes offered a high-profile position or role (Pommerin 66). In order to grasp the often contradictory policies towards Black people in Nazi Germany, it is important to differentiate between the treatment(s) meted out to the various kinds of Black people who lived or stayed in Germany after 1933. While a captured Black American soldier could be brutally killed, and the mixed-race children forcibly sterilised or deported, African students, workers, teachers, or diplomats were initially more or less ignored and left alone, but their presence would later on become untenable; and Africans from the diaspora (mostly from France, England or America), who were usually entertainers, musicians, journalists, or students were “embraced” (Lusane 96). The treatment and position of these Black entertainers, however, was a double edged sword. On the one hand, the regime used Black performers for their own gain, which was to create state-controlled “Black art”; and on the other hand, these positions paradoxically provided a kind of sanctuary for the performers, as their usefulness to the regime allowed a degree of security for them. In the aftermath of the Nazi regime, many survivors had to live with the difficult fact that they used their positions for safety, while perpetuating ideologies that were meant to exterminate their own people, and, by means of their Blackness, further the regime’s racist cause (Lusane 179, 181).

While there are stark contradictions in the treatment of Black people in Germany, racism was nevertheless prevalent in the Reich. What these contradictions show is that Nazism, its ideologies and policies, were not uniform or static; on the contrary, they evolved over time and proved adaptable to the needs of the regime and the corresponding political climate. “There was no one overall policy, but there was one overall objective” (Lusane 97)—the creation of a “pure German racial state”, in which Jews, Blacks, Gypsies, and any other “non-Aryans” did not have a place. It is within this historical and socio-political context that any assessment of *Othello* productions, the representation and performance of its protagonist, and its reception in Nazi Germany must be placed.

De-Blacking Othello

Discussions around Othello’s appearance were prevalent during the Nazi period, and to some extent, already shortly before. Those discussions were, almost unfailingly, accompanied by fervent efforts to distance Othello from his Black, African heritage. In 1938, for example, G.R. Bienel published an article in the *Wiener Neueste Nachrichten* newspaper titled “Othello war kein Mohr. Ein

kleiner Irrtum Shakespeares” (“Othello was not a Moor. Shakespeare’s small mistake”). In it, Bienel explained how Shakespeare used a novella first published in 1566 (as part of Cinthio’s *Hecatommithi*) as the basis for his *Othello*, and how he supposedly took the title too literally. The idea was that Shakespeare must have mistaken the original subtitle “Un Capitano Moro” to mean that the captain, Othello, must have been Black since he was a Moor. Bienel blames this on Shakespeare’s lack of contextual knowledge of the fact that this epithet “il moro” may have been used to refer to a person with tanned skin, as the original story was based in Cyprus (Bienel 12). Bienel continued to explain that “moro” was a phrase commonly used to describe someone’s skin complexion rather than someone’s race or ethnicity. As such, according to Bienel, Shakespeare may have *mistakenly* created a Black Othello, because he assumed, albeit wrongly, that the epithet “il moro” identified the race of the original character, rather than his complexion (Bienel 12). It is impossible not to read these comments as deeply influenced by racist ideology. Bienel implies that Shakespeare’s Othello was in fact a European, a Cypriot, with a dark complexion. While having a tanned character on stage was already much more acceptable than having a Black man be seen in front of the audiences, Bienel’s attempt to rid Othello of his Black African heritage altogether shows that he tried to make the play even more suitable for its production in Nazi Germany, as nothing would beat the appeal of a European general, who valiantly fights for his country, but falls for the treachery of his opponent because of his love for a woman. Othello could, in other words, be turned into a warning tale for German men and soldiers, not to let their passions or women lead them astray and away from their duties.

Chiming into the discourse surrounding Othello’s heritage and skin colour, Nazi-contemporary and Shakespeare-translator Hans Rothe argued that in Shakespeare’s time the term “Moor” was referring to a Berber, an Arab, not a “negro”, and, according to Rothe, when referring to a “negro”, one would have used the term “Black-a-Moor” (“Schwarzer Maure”) (Rothe 310). He claimed that only Iago actually talks about the Blackness of Othello, but that Shakespeare was talking about a Berber, an Arab, not a “negro”. Rothe illustrated his argument with a personal anecdote, stating that when he studied in Edinburgh, Scottish students would call Indian students “Blackies”, and that Othello was obviously no “Blackie” on the Elizabethan stage, but a Berber, and that Iago’s racist insults based on Othello’s skin colour would only gain more importance through this obvious paradox of Othello not even being Black (Rothe 310-311). He explained this theory by stating that historically, Othello could not have been Black, because a “negro” would and could never have dared to be in the company of senators and dukes, that he could never have climbed up to the rank of “condottiere”, let alone imagine to court or marry Desdemona (Rothe 311). Rothe added that:

[A]s a negro, the Prince of Morocco could also not have dared to court Portia, as an Arab, he was free to do so. Elizabethan society knew almost nothing about negroes, [as] they were on the same level as wild animals. (311)

Again, Rothe's argument is historically flawed, since Black people were indeed present and known to have held different positions across different levels of society in Tudor and Jacobean England. John Blanke, for example, was the Trumpeter of King Henry VIII; Cattelena of Almondsbury lived independently as a single woman in England; and Reasonable Blackman, was a silk weaver in England (Kaufmann 3). Rothe's arguments are thus based on the common misconceptions that there were no Black people that were recognised as citizens in Elizabethan England, and that Shakespeare could not have conceived Othello as a successful Black general. What he forgot, or perhaps, ignored was the fact that "[n]ot all slaves were African", and not all Africans were slaves (Kaufmann 3). In effect, Rothe was reinforcing a biased, anachronistic and fundamentally racist approach to the play.

The often-debated meaning and racial implication of the term "Moor" has helped many performers and critics alike to justify their choice to portray Othello as a light-skinned man, basing their choice on the argument that "Moor" did not always explicitly refer to Black African in the general colloquialisms of Elizabethan England and afterwards. While the meaning and implications of the term "Moor" may have changed, there is an agreement among scholars nowadays that in Shakespeare's time, performances of "Moors" meant performances of Black men, meaning that Shakespeare's Othello was a Black man, or rather, a Black man played by a white man (Thompson 32).⁴ This debate about Othello's heritage and skin colour was fully appropriated by the racial politics of the Nazi regime, since it allowed for a lighter-skinned Othello, permitting the continuous uninterrupted flow of *Othello* productions on stage, in spite of the assumptions one might have had to the contrary.⁵ If it was assumed

⁴ More contemporary approaches to Othello can be found here: Bassi, Shaul, 'Barefoot to Palestine: The Failed Meetings between Shylock and Othello', in *Visions of Venice in Shakespeare*, ed. by Laura Tosi and Shaul Bassi, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011, pp. 231-250; Cowhig, Ruth, 'Actors, Black and Tawny, in the Role of Othello – and Their Critics.', in *Theatre Research International*, 4, March 1979, pp. 133-146; Kaul, Mythili, 'Background: Black or Tawny? Stage Representations of Othello from 1604 to the Present.' in *Othello: New Essays by Black Writers*, ed. by Mythili Kaul, Howard University Press, 1997, pp. 1-19: <http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=1997024665&site=eds-live>; Okri, Ben, 'Leaping out of Shakespeare's Terror: Five Meditations on Othello', in *A Way of Being Free*, London: Phoenix, 1997; Quarshie, Hugh, 'Playing Othello', in *Discovering Literature: Shakespeare and Renaissance Writers*, 2015.

⁵ For more information about the relationship of prominent German figures, such as political theorist Carl Schmitt, with Othello and his blackness before and during the

that Othello was not a veritable Black man, but rather, a brown man of North-African origins, for example, there would have been no need to put an actor in the demeaning and stereotyping blackface make-up that was prevalent during the 19th and 20th century to “portray” Black people’s appearance. Whereas the mere portrayal of Othello as a light-skinned North-African may not be inherently racist, it is the reasoning behind that representation and the reactions of the press (and/or the audience), that uncover racist prejudice and stereotyping, making this representation and staging of Othello problematic and racist.

Othello on the Nazi Stage

The notorious Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg claimed that people of North African descent could potentially be classified as “Aryans” (Rosenberg 26). In his theory, he focuses on the Berber and Kabyle peoples. Rosenberg claimed that:

The light-skinned and often blue-eyed Berber were not influenced by the later Vandal conquests, but by the ancient Atlantic-Nordic human waves (conquests, settlements). The hunter-Kabyle, for example, are still largely of impeccable Nordic origin (blonde Berbers make out 10% in the region of Constantine, they are even more numerous in Djebel Scheschor). (26)

According to Rosenberg, then, some North Africans could thus still be classified as “Aryans” or at least as heirs to the “Aryan” or Nordic race. This “scientific” claim laid to the supposedly lighter-skinned inhabitants of North Africa emphasizes the exclusion of the continent’s sub-Saharan, Black African population. Nazi-contemporary reviewer Frank Vogl stated that

[...] it has been asserted often enough that it would be misunderstanding to depict Othello as too dark-skinned or with hair that is too curly, [that he was obviously] a Berber, with skin that was not much darker than that of a Southern Italian and a phenotype [that differed greatly to that of] a negro. (5)

In the context of determining Othello’s racial and ethnic origins, and thus the shade of his skin, the makeup used to adjust Othello’s appearance on stage became particularly significant. Photographs of the 1935 production of *Othello*,

Nazi period, see: Höfele, Andreas, *No Hamlets*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 25ff. For an in-depth look at Thomas Mann’s relationship with Shakespeare’s characters more generally, and with Othello in particular see: Döring, Tobias, Fernie, Ewans, eds., *Thomas Mann and Shakespeare: Something Rich and Strange*, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015, p. 113-133.

which was directed by Ernst Relchke, with Hermann Schomberg as Othello, show him wearing tanned make-up; not the ridiculing blackface that one would have seen on actors in minstrel shows, but a medium brown or bronze tan. His hair was wavy, borderline curly, and of a brown shade. Schomberg's Othello was wearing a light-coloured uniform that seemed to have some Arabic or Middle-Eastern influences, with a flowing, loose fitting overcoat on his shoulders. In an article in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Othello is described as

an imposing general, wearing a white uniform, he is not a Black negro [...], but a light-brown cultivated Moor, a magnificent face, which one does not associate with African wildness or wilderness.

Hermann Schomberg's Othello was generally described as a "brownish", noble Arab, (F. Th. *Neueste Zeitung*) "a Moor, indeed an African, but not a Negro" (*General Anzeiger*) with a superior, calm, and collected countenance—at least until Iago's poisonous scheme first influenced him.

When Ewald Balsler played Othello at the "Deutsches Theater" in Berlin in 1939, Karl Heinz Ruppel described him as a "noble Berber, with dark-brown hair and tanned skin", with the "proud demeanour of a great warrior and hero, who we can believe is a descendant of royalty" (Ruppel 47). So again, it becomes clear that the actor playing Othello was indeed not wearing out-and-out blackface, instead, the make-up worn by Ewald Balsler was meant to demonstrate Othello's "otherness" without the added insult of ridicule and racist stereotyping that accompanies the usages of blackface. Most newspaper reviews from the archive of the Academy of Arts in Berlin follow the general trend of describing Balsler's Othello as a "royal, princely" Moor, stating that he was in no way a "gnashing, eye-rolling, raging [...] negro" (Wanderscheck). Wilhelm Westecker described Balsler's Othello as

[...] a superior, disciplined, noble thinking Moor, who, nevertheless, possess[ed] the ability to degenerate into unbridled passions once his mistrust has been awakened, but even then, he [was] never a [...] negro.

Wilhelm Hortmann explained that this Othello was the Nazi-version of the embodiment of a proud, manly, noble Moor, who was sure of his rank and his worth as a general, making him an ideal and easy target for Iago's perfidious malignity (151).

A similarly grave-looking, proud and imposing general was played by Paul Hartmann at the "Staatstheater" in Berlin in 1944 under the direction of Karlheinz Stroux. The production premiered in February, only six months away from the final closure of the theatres due to the Nazi's impending military capitulation. Paul Hartmann was the president of the Reich Theatre Chamber

and well known for his success in young, male, lead heroic roles. Paul Fechter described Hartmann's Othello as the embodiment of the "son of the desert", a man only marginally darker than the Venetians themselves, and "not the Black African" (quoted in Bonnell 174).

While Schomberg, Balser, and Hartmann all sported bronzed complexions, photographs from the archive of the "Theatermuseum" in Vienna show Raoul Aslan, under the direction of Hermann Röbbeling, as a much darker Othello, sporting a significantly darker shade of make-up. Performing at the "Burgtheater", Aslan was wearing a long, flowing white kaftan, with prayer beads hanging from his waist band, and a turban on his head. Although Aslan's Othello wore much darker make-up, the fact that he was portrayed as a brown Arab meant that blackface was, yet again, not used.

The focus on Othello's racial and ethnic identity, as well as the lighter shade of make-up used on actors portraying the character during the Nazi period, differed from the approach to and portrayal of Othello's appearance during the Weimar Republic.

Pre-Nazi *Othello* Productions

While the reviews that were written and printed during the Nazi period spent, as we have seen, much time debating, excusing, and describing Othello's skin tone, heritage, race or ethnicity, pre-Nazi reviews of the play's production differ in style and focus. Weimar production reviews tend to focus on the description and analysis of the productions' general set-up, their interpretations of Shakespeare's play, the stage design, the choices of actors, the lighting, etc. rather than Othello's appearance and the make-up used on the actor.

In the case of the 1921 production at the "Staatliches Schauspielhaus" in Berlin, which was directed by Leopold Jessner, and in which Fritz Kortner starred as Othello, Kortner's achievements as an actor, his representation of Othello's character, his passions, and his behaviour seem to have been of far greater interest to the press than long elaborations on the hue of Kortner's makeup. It is possible to read an entire review of the 1921 production without coming any closer to picturing Othello's appearance at the time. Othello's skin tone and / or ethnicity are simply circumvented and not explicitly discussed in most reviews. In addition, since Kortner was not sporting the typical minstrel show blackface, it seemed to have been clear to the audience that they were not dealing with an actual Black character on stage. This circumvention of a discussion of Othello's origin was, however, not present in Paul Fechter's review of the 1921 rendition of the play. Quite early on, Fechter stated that Kortner's Othello was "not Black, but brown, not a Moor, but a North African"

(“Maure”) (Fechter 2).⁶ Apparently, Fechter perceived the differentiation between Othello being viewed as a North-African, brown man, rather than as a Black African of Sub-Saharan descent, to be of importance. Looking closer at his review, it becomes clear why he would stress Othello’s origins and why he would remain a successful journalist even under Hitler’s regime. The discourse and language employed in his review of the 1921 *Othello* production foreshadows the ones used to describe, represent, and justify Othello’s presence on the Nazi stage. Othello was seen as a gentle, childlike man who has found happiness and solace in his love for Desdemona but only until he loses his temper and gives into his feelings of jealousy—which is when the very heritage that had been denied or circumvented is morphed into the reason for his irrational behaviour. Another reviewer, namely Alfred Klaar, likened Kortner’s Othello to a younger man, who let an “erotic” smile over his “slightly darkened face”, which may have reminded one too much of the “naïve embarrassment of a negro-boy” (*Vossische Zeitung*). This comment points towards Klaar’s belief that Othello was indeed darker than the Europeans and that he should not be represented as a “negro”, but that Kortner may have played into the latter a bit too much.

The interest in Othello’s heritage intensified in the reviews of the 1932 production of *Othello*, which was also directed by Leopold Jessner at the “Staatliches Schauspielhaus”, and in which Werner Krauss played Iago, with Heinrich George as Othello. Monty Jacobs wrote a review and stated that

[...] in Kortner’s place stands Heinrich George, not a North African, but a Moor according to the phantasies of Shakespeare, and, to be candid, a Black man. (*Vossische Zeitung*)

This remark about Heinrich George playing Othello as a Black man comes, of course, as somewhat of a surprise, especially in the context of previous productions and the socio-political context of 1932. Jacobs continued to describe Othello as a

Black man, who can indeed be a general [...]. But, he is mostly a nature-boy from the jungle, an embarrassed and smiling man, a big child. (*Vossische Zeitung*)

While Jacobs described him as a real Black man, pictures of George as Othello do not seem to support this description. George’s hair is wavy, borderline curly,

⁶ I have translated ‘Maure’ to North African, because technically ‘Maure’ and ‘Mohr’ translate to ‘Moor’ in English, but Fechter meant a North African, a Berber by ‘Maure’, since ‘Mohr’ was specific to someone with black skin and of sub-Saharan origins.

much like Erich Engel's hairdo in 1939. George's skin is tanned and not even as deep and earthy as Kortner's make-up in 1921 (who was likened to a North African, rather than a sub-Saharan African). Alfred Kerr's review of the production sheds light on this apparent discrepancy in descriptions further down in the text, as he elaborated on Othello's behaviour on stage, and not just his appearance. Kerr likened George's Othello to the "King [...] of Bithynia", alluding to Othello's royal lineage, but also referring to Othello as someone "straight from Togo", clearly referencing stereotypes of supposedly wild, uncivilised Africans, who stand in opposition to someone of royal and noble descent (549-551). He continued stating that it seemed to have become customary for the latest Othellos of the time to almost "climb on palm trees", to "swing from branch to branch. With throaty howling", but that a real Othello should be represented as an "almost handsome, Europeanised person [...] without a nose ring" (549-551). Kerr's description thus illuminates why it seemed to have been so obvious and easy to admit for Jacobs that Othello was indeed a Black African, since only Black Africans could be seen as behaving in such an unruly, animal-like manner.

In Jacobs' review of the 1932 production another rather subtle remark about the production deserves our attention in the context of the extreme and racist Africanisation of Othello towards the end of the Weimar period and just before the Nazi era. Jacobs stated that over the course of the evening, with rising tension and heat on stage, George's darkening makeup, came dangerously close to staining or rubbing off on his white garment (*Vossische Zeitung*). This subtle remark about the dark make-up marking the white garment and potentially exposing George's white skin underneath could be seen as uncovering a subconscious prejudice or thought about the juxtaposition between George's behaviour as Othello, who has been turned into a wild "Negro chief" (Stahl 625), and George's behaviour as a white man. Only a Black African could be permitted to be seen to behave in such wild and raging ways on stage, which is why reviewers such as Jacobs and Kerr were so open about admitting that this Othello was portrayed as a Black man, and not a brown North African (who could still be associated with, at least, a degree of civilisation). Ironically, Alfred Kerr (who was of Jewish heritage and who went into exile in 1933) and Jacobs seemed to have the same expectation and vision of Othello's representation as the Nazis themselves.

Conclusion

We might ask why the Nazis went to such great lengths not to portray Othello as a dark-skinned Black man, and why they refrained from putting the Othello actors in blackface, especially considering the fact that a number of productions

across Europe had already come to terms with Othello's Blackness, centuries before. For one, admitting that Shakespeare, who was one of the most revered playwrights in Nazi Germany, made a Sub-Saharan African man (someone who would have qualified as "Untermensch", as "subhuman") into the protagonist of a play was unthinkable; within the scope of Nazi ideologies, Othello's valiance and noble characteristics could not be combined with the images of the supposedly barbaric and primitive Africans. Adolf Hitler himself stated that Black people needed to be pitied for ostensibly being such lowly creatures (quoted in Lusane 95), rather than be revered by Germans. As we have seen, the Nazis respected and admired the soldierly attributes of Othello, and, considering the prevalent, racist stereotypes of Black African people (largely established and reinforced in the immediate post-war period at the beginning of the 20th century), letting Othello be a Black African was impossible. What is more is that the Berbers (which they fought so hard to associate Othello with), were, according to Nazi eugenics, distant relatives of the "Aryan race", so if Othello's Africanness was indeed acknowledged, there was no need to associate him with sub-Saharan peoples. Lastly, and maybe ironically, having a brown Othello on stage would have been a much more tangible image to the 1930s and 1940s German audience. After all, during and after the post-war occupation period, especially in the Rhineland region, many mixed-race Germans suddenly appeared. They were, of course, the offspring of white German women and Black soldiers, and subsequently became the target of extermination and forced sterilisation campaigns shortly after Hitler's rise to power. These mixed-race people were Germans, who claimed a place in their country, and thus posed a threat to the "Reinigung" (cleaning) of the Aryan society. Thus, I would suggest that having a commonly known image of a light-skinned man of African descent "defiling" and killing the white woman on stage would have been much more effective propaganda than having a dark-skinned Black man play the same role, as they posed a much lesser threat to white German society in the 1930s.

In short, the Nazis were sure that Othello was brown, never Black. He may have been an Arab, or a Berber, but he was never a Black, sub-Saharan African. The fictional character Othello was as much used for the propagation of the regime's racist ideologies as were the Black people that were forced to perform in human circuses and shows at the time. While Othello may have had the advantage of being a fictional character, Black people did not benefit from such privilege in real life. On the contrary, they endured cruel and demeaning treatments at the hands of the Nazis. As such, while Othello was allowed and celebrated on stage, Black people in real life were persecuted and humiliated in ways that were reminiscent of the Kaiser's Holocaust of the early 1900s, which was the attempt by German colonial forces to obliterate the Herero and Nama peoples in modern day Namibia. In fact, the popular success of *Othello* should serve as a reminder of the perfidy with which the regime operated, because just

like it used *Othello* for its propaganda, it used some Black people for political, cultural and propagandistic purposes, while the majority of the Black population suffered unimaginable humiliations, persecution, and eventual attempts at extermination.

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Shaul Bassi and Igiaba Scego*

***Othello* and the Ambivalences of Italian Blackface**

Abstract: Blackface is a cultural practice that appears ubiquitously in Italian history cutting across the political spectrum; it also lends itself to surprising anti-racist actions. This essay examines the use of blackface from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century by looking at its appearance in popular culture and, contextually and dialectically, at its adoption in selected performances of *Othello*, a play that holds special meaning in Italy because of its famous operatic adaptations. Africa and blackness were often represented in Italian visual arts in the early modern period, but the early colonial ventures of the new independent Italy create a new exotic imaginary that is particularly manifest in popular culture. *Othello* is influenced by new African discourses but it also exists in a parallel dimension that somehow resists facile political interpretations. The colonial ventures of post-unification and Fascist Italy do not reverberate in any predictable manner in the growing popularity of the play. After World War II new forms of exoticism emerge that will be subverted only by a new postcolonial scenario that also coincides with a re-emergence of racism. Against the respective historical backdrops, we examine the idiosyncratic versions of blackface by Tommaso Salvini, Pietro Sharoff, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Carmelo Bene, and Elio De Capitani to suggest continuities and discontinuities in Italian interpretations of *Othello*.

Keywords: *Othello*, Shakespeare in Italy, blackface, colonialism, postcolonialism, fascism, film, adaptations, popular culture.

Paradoxes

In the second half of 2019, blackface made the national news three times in Italy. The national airline featured a television commercial with a blacked-up white actor impersonating Barack Obama as part of their US presidents series; an American soprano refused to wear black make-up in her performance of *Aida* at the Arena in Verona, the temple of opera; before a junior football match, players from both sides appeared with black marks painted on their faces to protest the racist abuse to which an African Italian child playing for one the teams had been subjected to in a previous occasion. These unrelated episodes,

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which elicited very mixed public reactions, highlight the ubiquitous and ambivalent use of blackface. Perhaps, the most striking factor is the repeated use or understating of blackface for anti-racist purposes (one can find numerous cases of solidarity towards black victims of racism through collective blackface since the last century).

In 2016, Elio De Capitani, a well-known stage and screen actor with a recognized politically progressive profile, staged a successful version of *Otello* at his home institution Teatro dell'Elfo in Milan, where he is artistic director. Without resorting to any facile explicit reference to the current political situation and opting instead for a highly stylized set, his production resonated powerfully with the resurgence of anti-black and anti-Muslim racism in Italy during the widespread migrant 'crisis' that Europe has been facing in the last years. Iago was fashioned as the epitome of the resentful underling who vents out against the ethnic outsider, reminiscent of the typical exponent of the Lega, the once fringe separatist movement whose stronghold was traditionally in the Milan region and that was on its way to becoming the largest political party in Italy with an explicit populist, anti-migrant agenda. This unambiguously antiracist production included De Capitani himself in the role of an austere Otello in blackface, an apparent contradiction that we will be examining in detail later in the essay.

We argue here that all of these phenomena need to be placed in the context of the specific Italian genealogies and legacy of blackface, where Shakespeare features prominently both through the criticism and performance of *Othello* and, even more, in its operatic adaptations by Gioacchino Rossini and (especially) Giuseppe Verdi. We are critical of blackface and believe it should be discontinued in Italy as elsewhere. We also share the conviction that blackface (a word that tellingly does not have a straightforward translation in the Italian language) needs to be properly understood and contextualized in each and every cultural milieu in which it appears, as it participates in specific cultural and political traditions as well as specific racilogies. As we try to show, blackface cannot be separated from an ancient relationship between Italy and Africa, and more directly in the colonial and postcolonial phase of that history. In this light we need to carefully consider the analogies, entanglements, and differences from the better known archive of blackface in the United States, where the black/white dichotomy has long been the defining racial determinant. Stressing the need to learn from the African American experience and to cultivate forms of solidarity across continents in reference to 'emergent formation of Black Europeans', Paul Gilroy remarks in his recent preface to the new edition of *Between Camps*:

US-derived specifications of what racial conflict entails are being projected worldwide as non-specific outcomes. Those the North American contingencies

become widely understood as intrinsic to the general workings of racial division. ... My essential point is that accepting this salience of the social and political processes that the US knows and accepts as a nature of phenomenon called “race”, does absolutely nothing to address the multiple mystifications wrought by racism either in US political culture or elsewhere. (Gilroy xiii)

To test this hypothesis on the Italian case, we attempt a broad overview of different historical moments in the last three centuries, looking at representations of blackness and uses of blackface in different cultural domains. We then provide an analysis of coeval Italian productions of *Othello*. The case of Shakespeare’s play is significant insofar as it constitutes a bridge between Italy and the anglosphere so allowing us a precious term of comparison with English and American discourses and practices of blackface that provide the standard context of *Othello* criticism and production. It also illuminates deep anxieties about racial and ethnic difference as they change over time and place. As Michael Neill’s remarks:

Othello is a work that trades in ethnic constructions that are at once misleadingly *like* and confusingly *unlike* the twentieth-century ideas of ‘race’ to which they are, nevertheless, recognizably ancestral. Just as the modern vocabulary of ‘race’ continues to be inflected by the pseudo-biological thinking of the nineteenth century, so the early modern language of colour was indelibly marked by primitive fears that associated darkness with evil and death. (Neill 125-126)

We understand that the amount and diversity of the cultural materials we reference may be daunting, the nexus with *Othello*’s performances may look occasionally tenuous, and the analysis of individual case studies somehow limited, but we hope that certain patterns will emerge that will suggest continuities and discontinuities in the history of Italian blackface.

Africa in the New Nation

At least since the early modern era the African presence in Italy, mostly linked to slavery and piracy, is well documented. It is particularly visible in paintings and monuments that depict the trope of chained slaves and servants, but also black gondoliers and even aristocratic figures such as Alessandro and Giulia de Medici, whose renaissance portraits show a complex Italian ethnic metissage that was sentenced to oblivion by unified Italy (Kaplan 2010). For centuries the major source of knowledge for Europeans (including Shakespeare) was Leo Africanus’s *History and Description of Africa*, a book written in Italian by a northern African diplomat sold to slavery to the Pope Leo X.

When Italy became an independent state in 1861, it soon entered the scramble for Africa. A colonial enterprise was part and parcel of the building of the new nation and imagined community: the imperial fantasies, aspirations, and violent practices of Fascism were thus preceded by the campaigns of the liberal governments of the new Kingdom of Italy in the 1880s. This political interest gave a particular Italian twist to a typical European post-Romantic exotic imaginary. In 1884 a delegation of six people from the first colonial settlement in today's Eritrea, the bay of Assab (hence their name 'assabesi') visited Turin, a former Italian capital and the most modern and intellectual city in the young nation. The event generated widespread curiosity and excitement, especially because the group was rumored to include a Sultan. In reality the three men, one woman, and two children were selected because one of them was a native agent who spoke rudimentary Italian. Even in the absence of "men of royal siege" they were followed all around town by a small crowd, they were depicted in various lurid illustrations and were described as "barbarians" and "savages" (Abbatista). An ersatz African village was even built along the Po river, which they refused to use asking for more suitable accommodations. The memory of that visit survives in another traditional lieu of African exoticism in Italian culture: pastry. Cocoa- and liquerice-coated cookies called Assabesi continued to be sold today.

In the same decade Giuseppe Verdi, whose orientalist fantasies in *Aida* have been examined by Edward Said (1993) in an essay that provides the best background to understand the recent polemic started by the American soprano, was working with his librettist Arrigo Boito on the "chocolate" project (as they nicknamed it in their correspondence), namely their operatic adaptation of *Othello* that had its triumphant première in 1887. It is important to remember that Shakespeare did not become a successful stage presence in Italy until the second half of the nineteenth century and that it first made its way through adaptations in genres such as opera, ballet, and painting. It was precisely the stylistic hybridization between tragedy and comedy that made it very difficult for traditionalist Italian audiences to accept a play like *Othello* and Shakespeare's final triumph was made possible by some iconic actors. An early and innovative Shakespearean use of blackface was that of one of them, Tommaso Salvini, a star of the Italian and international stages who toured successfully both North and South America. Remarkably, for the Italian patriot and actor, becoming Othello involved a sort of exploratory journey:

I read the history of the Venetian republic, the invasion of Spain by the Moors, their passions, their warfare science and their religious beliefs; nor did I neglect the novella od Cinthio Giraldi [sic] in order to better master that sublime character. It was no longer the superficial study of words or of some scenic effect, or or more or less stressed sentences to obtain a fleeting applause; it was

a vaster horizon that was opening to my sight, an infinite sea where my ship navigated safely, with no fear of finding rocks (Salvini 119).

This account, the reference to the Moorish invasion of Spain and his amply documented success with the character suggests that Salvini endorsed the notion of an “Arab” Othello instead of the “black” one that had been rejected in England by Romantic critics and actors. His work on the character lasted for a long time. In 1871, on his way to South America, Salvini stopped in Gibraltar:

I was struck by a most beautiful figure of majestic gait, with a Roman physiognomy, save a slight protrusion of the lower lip. The hue of the flesh was between copper and coffee, very strong, and he wore light moustache and his chin was covered with sparse and curly hair. Up until then I had always represented Othello with my moustache only, but since I saw that proud moor I adopted also the hair on the chin and tried to imitate his gestures, motion, deportment, and, had it been possible, I would have imitated his voice too, so much did that splendid moor represent to me the true type of the Shakespearean hero. And Othello must be a son of Mauritania, if we must deduce from what Iago says to Roderigo: “He returns to Mauritania”. And why should he return precisely there, if the author had not intended that *he returns to his homeland*? It appears quite logical to me. (Salvini 260)

The last deduction is misleading since the text (and the Italian translation used by Salvini) reads “he goes into Mauritania” (4.2.226) and crucially Shakespeare does not pinpoint Othello’s birthplace. It is precisely in this space of indeterminacy that Salvini combined his research work with a sort of ethnographic study of Othello that blended orientalist stereotypes, racist tropes, and genuine curiosity and admiration. If in England the Romantic Othello was toned down to widen, in the age of debate over slavery, an ideologically reassuring gap between the black sub-Saharan African and the noble northern African moor, in Salvini we see a more complicated engagement with and openness to cultural alterity. What is also relevant is that anglophone reviewers (including Henry James) made a specific connection between the racial identity of the character and that of the actor, who in his performances abroad always played the part in Italian even when the rest of the cast acted in English.

We may also remark that in those plays of Shakespeare’s which are founded, like *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, on Italian tales or romances, the development of the story often calls for the exhibition of darker and fiercer passions, more deadly hatred and jealousy, or blacker guile and perfidy, than would be allowed by the tame and placid manner in which we live in modern England. [...] The characters of Othello and Iago, for example, are remarkable as types of some peculiar veins of thought and sentiment that prevailed among

men of different classes and varieties of individual disposition, in the city-republics or principalities of Medieval Italy. [...] As the moral characteristics of a nation, therefore, do not become wholly extinct in three or four centuries, it is probable that an Italian actor of the present day may perceive and appropriate some shades or hues of character which would perhaps have escaped an English performer. (“Signor Salvini”, 368).

This passage resonates with some familiar assertions of Victorian science and culture, including the Lamarckian notion that inherited mental and physical characteristics prevail throughout the centuries. Interestingly, the anonymous English reviewer talks about Italian plays but singles out *Othello* and *Merchant*, and also names Iago as a racial type. When another anonymous critic published a ponderous tome to demonstrate that Shakespeare had faithfully represented the main superior (Germanic and Celtic) and inferior (Italian and Jewish) races in his oeuvre, Salvini’s biographer Jarro ridiculed this racial study by pointing out that if Iago was the true representative of the “Italian race”, Desdemona and Cassio were also Italian (10). After remarking that the issue of Othello’s “colour” had caused “rivers of ink” to be spilled, Jarro also challenged Salvini’s position: the Moor was black, because if he had been a noble Arab he would have certainly proclaimed his genealogy to the Senate. In general, a survey of nineteenth century Italian criticism shows very little interest in the fact of Othello’s blackness.

Perhaps the standard Italian position was summarized by Paulo Fambri in 1884, the heyday of the new colonial era: “the story would remain in any other part the very same, and a whitened-faced Othello to hold the stage would need but the crossing out of a few allusions and the toning down of a few sentences. The psychology would still remain real, profound, most powerful” (Fambri 6). Othello’s ethnicity (like the Jewish component of *The Merchant of Venice*, in a parallel that has been examined by Bassi 2011) was then in turn repressed, allegorized, wished away, considered accidental versus other essential themes. Othello the black was different from Othello the man. As Italy advanced in Africa, it sanitized the African element in *Othello*.

In the early twentieth century an interesting insight into the changing perceptions of Africa is provided by a very particular segment of popular culture where blackface features prominently (Scarpa). In 1908 the first Italian comic book was born, signed by Attilio Mussino on the first issue of the *Corriere dei Piccoli*. Bilbolbul is a guileless, wide-eyed African child who takes literally the metaphors and proverbs that cross his path. In the first episode, having stolen an egg, he turns literally red from blushing and then literally white out of fear. So runs his life: he gets taller, shorter, breaks into pieces and is glued back together, frequently changing his colour. Everytime he reverts to blackness, he is again the innocent child from the colonies. By now Italy had already experienced the

humiliating defeats of Dogali and Adua, the thwarted ventures into Ethiopia, and in 1911 it invaded Libia as part of a war against the Ottoman Empire. Bilbolbul is a typical colonial creature, inviting the same dose of paternalism, patience and whippings used by Italy towards the askari, the local soldiers recruited as colonial troops. His ridiculous clumsiness creates an analogy, if not a relationship, with the American tradition of the minstrel show. Bilbolbul's protruding, fleshy lips, his wide eyes, and an ink-black hue that was toned down with time, make of him a caricature whose connection with colonialism is evident from the very first rhyme with its reference to the East African hut: "nel domestico tukul, ruba un uovo Bilbolbul" ("in the domestic tukul, an egg is stolen by Bilbolbul"). Otherwise his backdrop is a generically exotic one, with desert and cactus. Bilbolbul's blackness is also a mark of rebellion, contestation, linguistic subversion but it also marks him as inferior, in need of a civilizing process. Nevertheless Bilbolbul also invites sympathy and identification on the part of children for his daily vicissitudes, and it is ambivalence that made him be gradually marginalized and finally silenced by Fascism during its Ethiopian campaigns. Other comic books explicitly used blackface, such as Bruno Angoletta's *Giacometto gira l'Europa* that shows the wandering protagonist blackening up to escape the French police and posing as colonial trooper. His ploy is discovered when the rain washes away his artificial colour. In the bestselling *Adventures of Signor Bonaventura* by Sergio Tofani, a milestone of Italian culture from 1917 until 1978, we have an exemplary episode. In *Bonaventura in Parrot Island* the hero faces terrible black, monstrous cannibals and is saved by a little black girl. But she turns out to be a white girl kidnapped by the savages, making explicit the paranoid nightmare of the black man as sexual predator and of blackness as a thin veneer that covers the white skin of the brave, innocent, sagacious white girl.

Little Blackface(s)

Fascism exasperates the early twentieth century orientations towards blackness. Mockery becomes a trend, and the exotic turns into ghastly colonial pornography. Blackness as mark of inferiority is inscribed in pervasive propaganda accompanying the occupation of Ethiopia in the 1930s. Ethiopians were cast as a mass of slaves to be delivered from Hailé Sellasie, the Italian regime's foremost public enemy, invariably described as a stinking, cowering black man hiding behind the skirts of other European countries. Popular songs became a special vehicle to mark black as the color of inferiority and subjugation. In *Topolino in Abissinia (Mickey Mouse in Abissinia)*, a children tune from 1935, the skin of the 'moor' is abject, raw matter used to make a purse

for mom, cover dad's car seats and make gloves for the uncle. Unquestionably, the most famous "blackface" of the Fascist era is the young 'abissinian maid' made popular by the song *Faccetta nera* (Little black face), representing the trope of the young black woman as the figure of colonial penetration, political and sexual. As late as 1969, one of the most famous Italian journalists, Indro Montanelli, candidly explained in a television interview that while he served in Africa as a soldier, he had a 12-year-old sexual concubine: "In Africa it's different", was his nonchalant gloss on the rape of a minor. The fact that the veracity of the story has been recently called into question only adds to the shameless appropriation and flaunting of the "young African concubine" trope as a mark of colonial virility.

In 1934, as we learn from the Fascist censor-in-chief Leopoldo Zurlo, Mussolini was incensed by the recent publication of the novel *Sambadù, amore negro* by Mura (the pseudonym of Maria Assunta Giulia Volpi Nannipieri). This interracial romance was highly subversive because it inverted the traditional gender roles in a modern-day version of Othello by matching an African engineer who had earned his degree in Florence (Sambadù Niôminkas), and a young Italian widow. The relationship was vividly illustrated on the cover where an elegant black man with a jacket and tie holds the smiling white woman, covered by a towel and with shoulders and knees well exposed, her arms voluptuously around his neck. A shorter version of the novel had been serialized in 1930, but in this new version this intense erotic relationship falls apart when Silvia gets pregnant: "The blood of my child will be polluted by that of another race, and will carry with him the savage germs of a negro tribe". The unequivocal racist moral of the story was evidently less compelling than the plot itself (and perhaps the cover) since Mussolini was described as furious because the novel "promotes racial cross-breeding" (Caponi 68).

Blackface remained a recognized practice in film, and its most famous performance on screen was by Doris Duranti, who embodied an exotic alterity in several roles. In Romolo Marcellini's *Sentinelle di bronzo* (*Bronze Sentries*) (1937), she plays Dahabo, a Somali woman who belongs to a clan (Cabila) allied with the Italians. Her name means 'gold' and her skin is painted with a golden brown hue that is very different from the caricatures of the cartoons and represents the accomplished civilizing mission. After all, the most obsessive trope under Fascism was not the blackening of the white face but its perverse mirror image, the whitening of the black skin, a biblical and early modern trope that became the ultimate symbol of the civilizing mission (Giuliani and Lombardi Diop). In 1937 racism was officially sanctioned by the laws against *madamato*—the concubinage between Italian men and African women in occupied territories. The following year the regime made racism a centerpiece of its politics by issuing the Racial Laws against its Jewish citizens, proudly proclaiming the purity of the Italian race. The journal *La difesa della razza* set

out to provide scientific support for Italian racism and anti-Semitism, typically casting racism as a defensive move against the contamination posed by blacks and Jews. As Valentina Pisanty (2006) has demonstrated, Italian racists had a hard time theorizing a distinctly Italian racism, since the peninsula had been historically a crossroads of peoples and the social and economic differences between South and North had been frequently racialized. The result were continuous oscillations and conflicts between a purely biological racism of the Nazi type, and a more politically malleable 'esoteric' racism that conveniently located 'race' in the 'spirit' rather than in the body, allowing the formulation of a distinct Italian race which had been 'refined' over time. In 1940 *La difesa della Razza* published a "Racist Interpretation of *Othello*" (L.D. 1940) where that while insisting that the play dispensed an unmistakable warning against miscegenation, the writer was also keen to demonstrate that such a racist message was not to be credited to Shakespeare the Englishman, a son of that Perfidious Albion which was Italy's arch enemy, but to the Italian Giraldi Cinzio who had provided Shakespeare with the main plot of the play.

Apart from this marginal intervention, in his study of "Othello in black shirt" Caponi observes that the transformation of Shakespeare into a classic sheltered the play from the pseudoscience and racist propaganda fueled by the renewed colonial enterprise. Italy became more and more sensitive to the matter of blackness but simultaneously *Othello* became a "fundamental milestone" for a more innovative and modern theatre (64-65). The play did not make frequent appearances but three major productions triggered a debate between a "foreign" style of directing and the Italian tradition, with very limited regard to the racial theme (87). The most famous one took place in 1933 in the courtyard of the Ducal Palace in Venice, thanks to Pietro Sharoff, a Russian pupil of Meyerhold and an assistant to Stanislavsky who became an Italian citizen in 1938. Sharoff's show was called an "extraordinary open-air experiment" (Caponi 88) and combined the fascination of its historic backdrop with the new methodology inspired by Stanislavski (influenced in turn by his experience of seeing Salvini as Othello), at odds with the histrionic style associated with the charismatic Italian performers. The reviews suggest that the Fascist regime's official spokespersons were less concerned with the racial identity of Othello than with the superiority of the Italian style of acting—"a noble and strong, Mediterranean and national tradition", in the words of Marco Ramperti, a leading theatre reviewer known for his racist and anti-Semitic views (Caponi 92). The play, if not the character, confirmed its vocation as vehicle of experimentation but its ethnic component was marginal, and blackface was used as a cosmetic component that was taken for granted with no obvious political referentiality. Even the most famous anti-Fascist critical views of Shakespeare dismissed the racial themes of the play. Benedetto Croce asserted that "poetry originates only from itself and not outside, from nation, race, or something else" and ridiculed the notion that *Othello's*

message was in “the fate that strikes unequal marriages, between people of different race, social condition or age” (154). From different political angles, in short, Othello’s blackness was once again neutralized.

Avant-Garde *Othello*

As Neelam Srivastava remarks, “since Italy lost its colonies to Britain in 1941, it never had to face the force of anti-colonial uprisings and independence movements, and did not have to operate any form of critical revision towards its own role as a colonizing power” (205). Such “failed decolonization” contributed to the myth of the good Italian, a self-exculpatory narrative endorsed by Republican Italy in times of Cold War that conveniently whitewashed the regime racist and anti-Semitic crimes and cultural practices.

This also allowed the return of blackface with a surprising twist. It reappeared in popular culture as imitation of the American models, with ridicule skits and songs that are reminiscent of the minstrel show. In 1949 “Bongo Bongo Bongo”, a cover of Bob Hilliard and Carl Sigman’s “Civilization”, became a hit sung by Nilla Pizzi and Luciano Benevene. The explorer who tries to invite an ‘old negro’ to follow him towards civilization and is answered that he is so happy in the Congo jungle, took the distinct form of a vocal blackface, with a play on the syntax and the accent of the ‘old negro’ (“*No bono scarpe strette*”—“no good, tight shoes”) that did not exist in the original.

It is tempting to compare this song to the slightly later hit “Tu vuo’ fà l’Americano” (1956) by Renato Carosone, still popular nowadays. The Neapolitan lyrics poke fun at young Italians who mimic the American lifestyle by wearing baseball caps and drinking whiskey and soda, turning their back to local traditions. But while satirizing Americanization and the vogue for Rock ‘n Roll, Carosone and co-author Nicola Salerno combine Neapolitan themes with swing and jazz, creating a successful match between two distinctively hybrid traditions. If “Bongo Bongo Bongo” is an unwitting import of Jim Crow, “Tu vuo’ fà l’Americano” is a felicitous embrace of African American music.

Against these subtle forms of cultural hybridity, the white/black racial hierarchy was reiterated and reified in both high and low culture, especially cinema, even by progressive intellectuals. Mainstream comic actors blackened up frequently in television and b-movies, but one can find more highbrow uses of it like in Michelangelo Antonioni’s existentialist film *The Eclipse* (1962). The young protagonist Vittoria (Monica Vitti) visits her friend Marta, the daughter of a Kenyan settler, who displays photographs of Masai men and women and calls Africans ‘Six million monkeys’. Mesmerized by the pictures, Vittoria, romanticises the natives and their connection to nature to the extent that she

paints her face and body black, wears an African costume and butt dances holding a spear until Marta urges her to stop ‘playing negro’ (O’Healy 182).

While remaining the unproblematized standard practice onstage, blackface features prominently in two important alternative *Othellos*. The short film *Che cosa sono le nuvole?* (*What Are the Clouds*) by Pier Paolo Pasolini was one of five episodes of *Capriccio all’italiana* (1968). A rare foray into comedy film by the poet and filmmaker whose literary adaptations ranged from *Canterbury Tales* to *Medea*, this metatheatrical adaptation is set in a run-down makeshift theatre where a company of full-sized human puppets performs *Othello* before an uproarious, working-class audience. Drawing on the tradition of Sicilian puppet theatres, Pasolini’s mix of high and low replicates both Shakespeare’s ability to blend registers and genres in *Othello* (among other plays) and the Italian tradition of adapting Shakespeare plots to distinctly Italian artistic forms. While in the same year Franco Zeffirelli was taking this method in a distinct realistic direction with his successful *Romeo and Juliet*, whose lavish scenography and costumes were inspired by Italian Renaissance paintings, Pasolini endorsed a more experimental approach. He translated a small selection of Shakespearean lines into Roman and Neapolitan dialects; he cast the 70-year-old Totò, a living monument of Italian comedy, as a green-faced Iago, and the 20-year-old Ninetto Davoli as Othello with brown make-up. A working class Italian young man from Rome, Davoli embodied the innocent nature of Italian proletarian youth sexually and politically fetishized by Pasolini. Before *Othello* becomes animated, we see the head of the puppet being screwed on his body. Othello than becomes simultaneously Adam and Pinocchio (himself a Christological figure), an innocent, prelapsarian, naive figure who, in Sonia Massai’s subtle analysis, will ‘fall’ through his discover of sexuality and will be “re-admitted to God’s presence at the end of the film” (103). By using his fetish actor Davoli as Othello, the opposite of Shakespeare’s older and eloquent aristocratic soldier, Pasolini reiterates an association between primitivism and proletarianism that had a distinct African component. As Giovanna Trento has demonstrated, Africa was a constant presence in Pasolini’s works since the 1950s, and featured in both completed and unfinished projects (Trento *Pasolini*). He filmed *The Thousands and One Nights* in Yemen and planned an African *Oresteia* but also a film set in contemporary postcolonial Africa (*Il padre selvaggio/ Savage Father*), where in a newly independent nation, an idealistic white high school teacher tries to redeem a young local pupil from the authoritarian methods of the colonial educators, while inviting to challenge his own native traditions (a standard theme that African authors such as Achebe and Ngugi were addressing in their novels). Pasolini writes in his notes on the projects: “It is the prehistorical world of Africa, just emerged to history. Tribal life, taboos, rituals, hatred. We are so fully immersed in black life (*vita negra*)

that characters can speak their own language without any need of translation, spoken or written; the world is so fully their own and expresses itself in their language. But the actions, though in their untranslatable mystery, are absolutely simple, and can atrociously speak by themselves. Davidson has been thrown back into his world, the heart of Africa” (Pasolini *Padre* 321, our translation). Influenced by Gramsci’s discourses on subalternity and the ideology of Pan-Africanism, and in a peculiar combination of anti-capitalist communism, Catholic pauperism, and third-worldism, Pasolini built “a deterritorialized and idealized never-ending South: the Pan-South (Panmeridione), ... a fluid, non geographical *topos* where ‘traditional’ values are used in non-traditional and subversive ways with the goal of resisting industrialization, mass media, and late-capitalist alienation” (Trento *Pan-Meridionalism* 59). This imaginary space connected the subproletarian and subaltern classes of a South broadly conceived as a vast Mediterranean space that included Africa, whose values and mentality provided an antidote to capitalist modernity. In this cultural operation Pasolini envisioned an archaic and primitive Africa linked to the ancient Mediterranean world of the classics but also with the Italian peasant society that the rapid industrialization of Italy had disrupted. But he also incorporated colonial fantasies about the relationship between Italy and the Horn of Africa that his generation had inherited from the Fascist imaginary and, one could add, the older racial discourses that detected an affinity between Italians and Africans and that we found in the Salvini reviews.

Back to his *Othello*, as Massai puts it, “Pasolini used meta-theatrical and meta-cinematic devices to show his audience how to resist the influence of familiar patriarchal and racist narratives embedded both in Iago’s improvisational strategies *and* in the play as a whole” (95) Quite idiosyncratically she locates Pasolini’s critique of “the brutal logic of racism” in his turning Cassio into a victim of the abuse of a group of Cypriots led by a conveniently disguised Roderigo while he is flirting with Bianca. She could have pointed out that the brutality of racism is also inscribed in the vicious epithets used by Iago, Brabantio and Roderigo against Othello in the Shakespearean text that Pasolini translates into the Italian dialects used by his puppets. “That negro/nigger son of a bitch” (the Italian language does not have separate words for ‘negro’ and ‘nigger’), ‘Moroccan’ (a definition that was widely used for any northern African); ‘cannibal’, “you are so black, it looks like you want to eat me!” (Pasolini *Nuvole* 932-966)—Pasolini shows the persistence of racist tropes in popular parlance. But while he takes such an explicit view of racism, he makes hardly anything of blackface. In the playtext Pasolini calls Othello ‘il Moretto’ (the little moor), a word traditionally associated with neutral and harmless figures of black servants ubiquitous in Italian art. But the final scene may reveal a deeper connection with Africa. As Massai observes, once removed from “the

enclosed space of representation, the decrepit theatre” and dumped by a rubbish collector in an open-air tip, the two puppets seem to experience freedom and are “endowed with agency, stoical strength and self-awareness when they linger in the wings” and experience a sort of happy ending in their blue sky and cloud gazing, variously interpreted as Christain heaven, Platonic world of ideas, or—in Massai’s view—immanent natural, mundane beauty (Massai 102). Compare this to the final scene Pasolini scripted for the unaccomplished *Savage Father* film project: “The young African protagonist sees his girlfriend walking merrily careless and some lines of poetry come to his mind: they make something surface, a more explicit hope, a ‘dream of something’, of a confused but happy future, that make a light smile flashing white on the dark (fosco) face of the negro boy” (Pasolini *Padre* 325). The young Othello and the young African boy evoke scenarios of existential and political liberation, but they remain confined in the imaginary realm of Pasolini’s “Pan-Meridionalism” rather than affording any insight into the singularities of African culture. Pasolini unmistakably denounces the racism of Iago and other characters, but unlike Salvini, does not use Othello to look into a different culture. The same ambiguity can be seen in the interpretation of the scene where the audience storms the stage and forcefully remove the puppets, which end up in the rubbish dump. Calling the audience “radically innovative”, Massai challenges views that consider spectators too naive or manipulable, arguing that “the audience is in fact the closest fictional counterpart to the adapter who eats his master to absorb his creative power while exorcizing it” (101). However, this audience that loudly boos at the ploys of the characters and finally remove them violently from the stage lends itself to various interpretations. Are they a revolutionary crowd that rises against unjustified violence? Is it a patriarchal group protecting the honor of Desdemona? Is it an uncontrollable mob? Whatever the case, they do not differentiate between Iago and Othello, finding no reason to distinguish—for better or for worse—between the black and the green/white man.

Pasolini’s sophisticated poetics of innocence could not be farther from Carmelo Bene’s postmodern approach to Shakespeare. This anarchist, *enfant terrible* of Italian post-dramatic theatre who aimed at unsettling all the tenets of tradition and entertained intellectual conversations with the likes of Gilles Deleuze, produced various Shakespearean adaptations on stage and screen, characterized by an anti-naturalistic, anti-mimetic, anti-narrative style exemplified by works such as *Hommelette for Hamlet* and his radical adaptation of Othello (1979), that was also edited for the screen twenty years later (Bene *Otello*). If Pasolini uses the human puppet device to complicate the perception of the role, Bene set out to curtail if not effectively block any psychological and emotional dimension of the play by deliberately deconstructing the very concept of character. His charismatic performance was simultaneously both the ultimate incarnation of and ultimate challenge to the tradition of the great histrionic

Italian actor *à la* Salvini (Bene notoriously played once without an audience making the idea of a one-man show painfully literal). Like Pasolini, Bene's "anti-representational operation on performance serves as a critique of power" (Vittori and Chillemi 82), but his method was the opposite of Pasolini's experiments with popular forms. He pursued highly intellectual techniques of enstrangement such as the dissociation of actor and voice enabled by modern technologies (Bartalotta 63-86). In an interview he explained:

Your theatricality regurgitates and vomits: it is very physiological.

I have never been able to prescind from the body. There is a lot of "body" in my stage work. Voice, oral cavity, diaphragm, breath. The characters have gradually faded away. Turned into limbs, fingers, nails, prosthesis, bodies, pieces of colonized bodies, given volutariness by the derided I (Bene & Dotto, 1998: 30).

Bene's metatheatrical playtext exploded all sentimental clichés and emphasised the artificiality and literariness of the plot as a constantly rewritten palimpsest. Shakespeare's original text in translation survives in snippets of dialogue and in Bene's interpolations, blackface is literalized as make-up and becomes an active 'prosthesis'.

"Now that he is WHITE and Black—half naked—he can only accept a whore who plays, loving him, the role of the "unfaithful wife"...

It goes without saying that in this intercourse the INNATE HONOUR of OTHELLO'S MAKEUP is tempered (dissolves) on DESDEMONA's pale complexion. Face to face, losing in her kisses, Othello loses his nature and SHE is soiled with DIRT-BLACK: the (grotesque) JAGO-EMILIA scene from part one is tragically repeated.

Even the WHITE of the bed is BLACK and WHITE... (Bene 126)

The make-up turns smudge and is transferred via the handkerchief from skin to skin. When he approaches Desdemona to kill her, his face is totally white ("there is no trace of Othello on his face. He has lost his 'ROLE'.... a bunch of white roses in his arms", 153). Bene has completely separated the act of murder, which in many modern versions is actually represented as a return of the African repressed, from blackness, which makes one last appearance as pure materiality in the end: "then, fascinated, he contemplates his own hand, almost BLACK from the stage dust, and he is, for a moment, absent-mindedly caressed by his own MEMORY, and trying to put his hand on his face..." (154).

In Shakespeare's text blackness oscillates between the literal and the metaphorical, the ethnic and the symbolic, the carnal and the spiritual, the concrete and the abstract, the mimetic and the metatheatrical. Bene takes all these oscillations to the extreme, treating blackface as an exhausted stage

property at the end of its cultural entropy. For Bene Othello's blackness is the pure artificiality and self-referentiality of art and theatre, in which blackface is only a dulled prop. For Pasolini is part of a chain of semantic and political associations: Africa-South-Innocence-Youth-Proletarianism. In both cases there seems to be a self-conscious acknowledgment that Othello is a 'white' character created by a European writer and there is no pretence of realism there. Both Pasolini and Bene focus on women's desire and sexuality, but there is only space to mention this element here. Nevertheless, in both cases they foreclose that openness and curiosity toward alterity that was experimented (with all the limitations of his time) by Tommaso Salvini.

Black Salvini

This survey finally returns to our opening scene in the new millennium, and to a different Salvini. Italy is becoming a multiethnic country, with pioneering postcolonial voices emerging since the 1990s. In 2006 a ground-breaking anthology of short stories introducing emerging literature by women of colour was named *Black Sheep* (Scego et al. 2006), a tongue-in-cheek title that yet betrayed the uneasiness of mainstream publishing in regard to black Italian writers. The enduring ambivalences we have explored in previous periods are condensed in the public figure of Mario Balotelli, the football player who made the cover of Time Magazine in 2012.

The first black player to represent Italy at major tournaments, Balotelli's early appearances provoked monkey hoots and a chant that speaks volumes about his country of birth: "There's no such thing as a black Italian!" Balotelli, of Ghanaian descent, was born in Italy and has never visited Africa. The racism continues, even as Balotelli's popularity has grown in tandem with his goal tally for Italy. As Italy prepared to meet England in the Euro 2012 championship, the national sports daily *Gazzetta dello Sport* published a cartoon depicting Balotelli as King Kong, the giant ape's prehensile legs clasped around the top of Big Ben. Amid protests, the *Gazzetta* issued an aggrieved statement: "This newspaper has fought any form of racism in every stadium." Italy may not be color-blind, but a wide strain of Italian culture seems blind to the sensitivities around color. When Balotelli delivered two goals against Germany in the semifinal of the same competition, another leading sports publication, *Tuttosport*, celebrated his achievement with the headline *LI ABBIAMO FATTI NERI*, literally "We made them black," a pun on bruising—and race. (Mayer and Faris)

As mainstream media outlets struggled to reconcile their democratic agendas with persisting racist tropes, Italy has experienced a recrudescence of ideological

racism, embodied by another Salvini. If the attitude of defining political leader of the late twenty-first century, Silvio Berlusconi (born 1936) was summarized in his calling Obama “young, handsome and tanned” in a perfect example of an old-fashioned imaginary, Matteo Salvini (born 1973) represents an openly instrumental racism deployed as political propaganda. As a young leader of the separatist Lega Nord, Salvini built his political career by endorsing the supposed ethnic difference and superiority of the hard-working north of Italy against the parasitic, lazy Southerners. The post 9/11 shock and even more the migrant crisis of 2015 saw him made an about-face and had him join the ranks of many other European nationalist and populist forces. The Italian nation he had long overly denied or derided became his banner: the new enemies were blacks and Muslims, alien invaders prone to destroy the religious and national identity of Italians. The erstwhile champion of a Celtic Padania tinged with green paraphernalia and pagan rituals, turned into a right-wing Catholic nationalist that led his party to a sweeping electoral victory and the strategic position of the Ministry of Interior, where he enforced a racist platform that exacerbated a securitist discourse admittedly inaugurated by the previous center-left governments.

One could definitely read the spirit of Salvini (in his city, Milan) in the Iago staged by De Capitani. This wise-cracking, seductive figure was embodying the populist figure who was gaining ground in Italian politics. Both the typical working class and petty bourgeois voter who feels that his economic and social decline is caused by the new migrant population and the ‘privileges’ granted to them by politicians and the politician who represent their redemption. As Shaul Bassi wrote to De Capitani in a correspondence that also touched on blackface, “Maybe Iago is laughing too much and making the audience laugh too much, giving them an excuse to vent, to release their inhibitions. In the long term, you end up sympathizing more with him than with the overly self-restrained Othello”. The director and actor acknowledged that he was disturbed by the fact that in his and other contemporary productions (such as Thomas Ostermeier’s *Richard II*) the audience was implicitly invited to flirt with manipulating villains and enjoyed that. Challenged about the make-up, De Capitani responded by expressing a typical impatience with political correctness, and played down the relevance of blackface;

make-up is a matter of inefficacy, not of racism. To use blackface, more than anything, is a crutch that has become too short while it was a very effective convention in the past. So we need a gimmick (‘trovata’) to give my Othello back his power [...] if the make-up speaks the right stage language and not that of hindrance, there is no problem, even with the blackface mask. I also believe that Iago’s racism is well connotated—his animosity is not aimed at a Jew like Shylock or any foreigner, he feels aversion towards a ‘negro’.

De Capitani had no doubt or reservations about recognizing anti-black racism as a central element in the play. He even took issue with other prominent European directors who had replaced Othello's blackness with some alternative form of otherness more connected with their specific cultural tradition. Simultaneously he saw no indispensable meaning attached to blackface (that in his case was a very light brown shade that was not accompanied by any 'ethnic' marker in his costume). When he revived the production a few months later he decided to shed that and replaced it with a stylized black stripe painted across his shaved skull.

What possible conclusions can we draw from this partial and arbitrary excursus? Italian blackface is a palimpsest, a culturally ubiquitous practice connected to a vast archive of raciological tropes that by and large posit an explicit or implicit dichotomies where blackness is located in an inferior or subordinate position and the correspondent superior identity is in turn occupied by different subject positions—white, European, Mediterranean, Latin, Italian, Northern Italian—varying from time to time, according to changing political and cultural conditions. This raciological repertory constitutes not only a familiar arsenal for reactionary exponents but also an insidious temptation for liberal ones. When Igiaba Scego and others criticized the use of blackface in the case of the airline commercial or in the football match solidarity, many progressive voices fulminated against the excesses of political correctness. African culture continues to exist in Italy predominantly in the form of consumable stereotypes that are exploited, fetishized or allegorized for political purposes, across a broad spectrum that goes from (neo)Fascist representations of black masculinity as a contaminating factor of Italian identity to the primitivist myth of the African as the last bastion of innocence against the tentacles of global capitalism. The broad visibility of African American popular culture enriches and complicates this picture, as is the growing success of African and African American literatures. Representations of *Othello* are no longer of any interest for racists, which means that in most performances of the play blackface is inscribed in a symbolic order that is broadly defined as democratic but that often replicates the positions we have examined in this essay. From liberal Italy, through Fascism and after the war, the overall tendency has been to play down the relevance of Othello's racial identity. Tommaso Salvini may have inherited the Victorian interpretation of Othello as a north African character, but for him blackface was part of a broader artistic and cultural strategy of studying and understanding the "other" and exploring ethnic and cultural difference. He was a mainstream protagonist of the Italian stage, but his approach has remained marginal.

In recent years Italy has finally begun to address its colonial legacy and postcolonial condition, capitalizing on the pioneering work of historians, on the fruitful dialogue with anglophone critical race theory and postcolonial studies, and on the groundbreaking work of novelists and playwrights (the afrodescendants Igiaba Scego, Gabriella Ghermandi, Cristina Ali Farah or

the white Italian Francesca Melandri, Daniele Timpano and Elvira Frosini, just to mention a few).

As we write these conclusion in the midst of the Coronavirus outbreak, some European public figures have advocated experimenting vaccines on African individuals, confirming the notion that black lives offer disposable bodies, either as guinea pigs or, in its strange mirror figures, invincible “magical negroes”. Even a supposedly neutral scientific discourse is haunted by a racist imaginary. The scientists quickly retracted but their initial statements shows how in times of crisis anti-black racism becomes an even stronger temptation.

In early 2020 the afrodescendant artist Luigi Christopher Veggetti Kanku, a native of Congo who moved to Italy when he was five years old, painted and auctioned off his work *Salvini Nero (Black Salvini)*. By painting the smiling Matteo Salvini as a black African priest, he denounced the xenophobic practices of the former minister by appropriating and subverting blackface. “I dressed him of his own instruments of fear, persuasion, and manipulation, trying to create something that would transform his appetite for confrontation into respect and social inclusion” (Veggetti Kanku 2020). By portraying a blackface Iago, the artist is not only sending an important cultural and political message but also paving the way for new Italian interpretations of *Othello* that face the legacies of Italian colonialism and racism and take the play in new unexpected directions.

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How Should You Perform and Watch *Othello* and *Hairspray* in a Country Where You Could Never Hire Black Actors? Shakespeare and Casting in Japan¹

Abstract: This paper discusses how Japanese theatres have handled race in a country where hiring black actors to perform Shakespeare's plays is not an option. In English-speaking regions, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, it is common to hire a black actor for *Othello*'s title role. Blackface is increasingly unacceptable because it reminds viewers of derogatory stereotypes in minstrel shows, and it deprives black actors of employment opportunities. However, the situation is different in regions where viewers are unfamiliar with this Anglo-US trend. In Japan, a country regarded as so homogeneous that its census does not have any questions about ethnicity, it is almost impossible to hire a skilled black actor to play a title role in a Shakespearean play, and few theatre companies would consider such an idea. In this cultural context, there is an underlying question of how Japanese-speaking theatre should present plays dealing with racial or cultural differences. This paper seeks to understand the recent approaches that Japanese theatre has adopted to address race in Shakespearean plays by analysing several productions of *Othello* and comparing them with other major non-Shakespearean productions.

Keywords: Japan, Blackface, *Othello*, *Hairspray*, *Memphis*, Ainu, Fandom, Social media.

In English-speaking regions like North America and the British Isles, racially diverse casting has become increasingly prevalent. It is now common to hire a black actor for *Othello*'s title role, while blackface has become rare because it

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reminds viewers of derogatory stereotypes from minstrel shows and deprives black actors of employment opportunities. Although the performance history of *Othello* is filled with white actors with blackface, by the late 1990s most high-profile English productions of the play came to hire black actors for the title role (Holland 206: Suematsu; Vaughan 2). Even in opera, where blackface is still used, New York's Metropolitan Opera abandoned this practice in its 2015 *Otello* (André 9-11).

However, the situation is different in less racially diverse regions like Japan, where audiences are unfamiliar with this trend. In the United States, as of 1 July 2019, 76.3% of the population was classified as “white,” 18.5% as “Hispanic or Latino,” and 13.4% as “Black or African American” (United States Census Bureau). According to the 2011 census in England and Wales, 86% of the population was “white”, 7.5% “Asian”, and 3.3% “Black” (Office for National Statistics). By contrast, Japan's homogeneity is so deeply entrenched that its census asks no questions about race or ethnicity. According to Japan's Immigration Services Agency, 2.24% of the Japanese population in June 2019 were non-Japanese nationals, although this figure deals with nationalities rather than ethnic backgrounds. Among these non-Japanese residents, 27.8% were Chinese and 16% Korean (Immigration Services Agency). Those coming from African countries are referred to as “the minority of the minority”². Demographically, Japan is less diverse than the USA and the UK, with ethnically Japanese people forming an overwhelming majority of the population. This means that Japanese theatres can rarely hire black actors; some may even be unaware that such an option exists.³

Japanese companies have a higher bar when tackling race in Shakespeare's plays because few audience members have given thought to the reality of racism in a more diverse society. Theatre companies have difficulty finding black actors, and most audience members are unfamiliar with the current concept of race discussed and questioned in North America and Europe. Ayanna Thompson, analysing Asian American YouTube performances of Shakespeare's plays, points out that they “update *Othello*'s narrative by framing it in a fantasy of contemporary, black-American culture” (18). However, in Japan this option is unavailable because, unlike American audiences, Japanese audiences do not have a unified “fantasy of contemporary, black-American culture” typified by gangsta rap. Japanese theatres must come up with new solutions to interpret racial differences for their audience.

² Matsumoto 1. All Japanese quotations are translated by the author.

³ Because of the rarity of black actors in Japan, in 2018 Theodore Adams III directed ‘*Othello-san*’, a short film about a fictional African American actor starring in a Japanese production of *Othello*.

One could come up with an idea of casting minority actors for black roles such as *Othello*, but it is rarely a viable option for Japanese companies. As Baye McNeil, an African-American writer living in Japan, suggests, no Japanese Shakespeare company has yet hired a black actor for *Othello* because it is difficult to find one, although he hopes that such a production will be possible in the near future (McNeil). Furthermore, casting minority actors could make a production even more problematic. Japan is not so homogeneous as it appears, and most visible ethnic minorities are Korean, Chinese, Ainu, Ryukyuan, and the outcast class called *burakumin*. Although these groups are clearly racialized, and racializing discourses historically draw on purported physical differences (Kurokawa 62), there is little difference between these minority groups and ethnically “Japanese” people in appearance. Almost all these people have dark hair and eyes, with skin colour ranging between brownish yellow and smoky white. Minority actors from these groups can easily pass as “Japanese.” A Japanese audience may thus have watched a minority actor playing *Othello* without even realising it. If a company hires a minority actor as *Othello* and advertises that as a point of the production, that act may be considered a kind of racial “outing.”

Given this problematic situation, Japanese theatre companies have tried to address the issue by culturally translating *Othello* into the Japanese context. They have adopted several interpretive strategies, such as shifting the focus from racism to lookism, using different acting styles to represent racial otherness, and highlighting racism in Japan by changing *Othello*’s race. This paper discusses how Japanese theatres have handled race in a country where hiring black actors to perform Shakespeare’s plays is not an option. The first section of the paper focuses on the Japanese blackface tradition in general and its use in theatre, because without understanding the cultural context, it is impossible to analyse the performance history of Shakespeare’s so-called “race plays” in Japan. Several non-Shakespearean performances are also discussed, which helps to reveal the general casting trends. The second section analyses current Shakespearean productions by Japanese theatres and their attempts to address race, focusing largely on three productions of *Othello* by the Setagaya Public Theatre, Kakushinhan, and the Shakespeare Company in Sendai, with references to other related productions.

The Recent History of Blackface and Theatre in Japan

Thanks to American influence, Japan has a long tradition of blackface. American minstrel shows reached Japan when it first opened up to the West after over 220 years of isolation. When Commodore Matthew C. Perry arrived in Japan in

1854, “An Ethiopian entertainment⁴”, or minstrel show, was performed for Japanese guests on board the *Powhatan*. This show served as “a powerful facilitator of US-Japan solidarity” (Bridges 2).

Since that first contact, blackface has appeared in Japanese theatre, films, and TV shows. Comedians and musicians of the 1930s adopted blackface in singing (Sato 65). “Spider and Tulip”, a 1943 short animated film by Masaoka Kenzo, depicts a blackface spider as a villain, perhaps influenced by Disney films (Hagihara 6). The most striking use of blackface in Japanese culture is found in African American music communities. Rats & Star, a Japanese doo-wop group popular in the 1980s, wore blackface, and Andy Warhol designed the sleeve of their 1983 album *Soul Vacation*, with the members’ blackface portraits prominently featured.

In the Japanese context, performers traditionally wore blackface as a symbol of enthusiastic respect for African American culture and artistic rebelliousness. Few Japanese viewers noticed its racist connotations because it had been completely separated from its original history. People from the United States introduced blackface to Japan, but its cultural and historical baggage was left back there. However, racial discrimination toward black people does exist in Japan. A recent psychological research suggests a “relative implicit preference of “white people” over “black people”” in Japanese society (Mori 7), but this bias remains largely unnoticed, which makes it difficult for the viewers to understand the problematic nature of blackface. With little knowledge of its historical background, Japanese audiences received it as something typically American in the process of globalisation.

This changed in the mid-2010s, when Japan faced another phase of globalisation in the age of social media. In 2015, Rats & Star members collaborated with the female idol group Momoiro Clover Z for a television show; before the broadcast, they published a photo online in which the two groups wore blackface, as Rats & Star had done in the 1980s. Social media was soon filled with criticism, and this plan was withdrawn, partly due to a protest led by McNeil (Osaki). In 2018, Hamada Masatoshi, a member of the popular Japanese comedy duo Downtown, appeared on television dressed as Eddie Murphy. His blackface makeup was controversial and made headlines in English media, including the “Japanese TV Show Featuring Blackface Actor Sparks Anger”. However, not many Japanese viewers understood the nature of the problem, and much of the criticism came from American residents in Japan (“Japanese TV Show Featuring Blackface Actor Sparks Anger”; Suzuki and Allen).

⁴ See the reproduction of the show’s program, partly available online at the International Fellowship of Regional Music and Culture’s website (<http://rmac.jp/motion/motion02.html>); see also Yellin 266-267.

Part of the reason why the Japanese blackface tradition has remained unquestioned until recently is the small black population in Japan. It has been impossible for most theatres to hire skilled black actors to play Shakespearean title roles in Japanese. Indeed, virtually no company would consider the idea.

Until around 2010, blackface was common in Japanese Shakespeare productions. Hira Mikijiro, a well-known actor in Japan, played *Othello* many times; according to *Mainichi Shimbun*'s article in 1973, he took his blackface makeup seriously, even appearing at early rehearsals wearing it ("Ambitious for the 'Black Transformation'"). On the 1995 and 2006 posters for the *Othello* productions, he wore blackface. When Sato Chikau played *Othello* for the Shakespeare for Children project in 1999, he said, "since I am naturally dark-skinned, I won't paint my face black" (Kodama). Even though blackface gradually came to be avoided in *Othello*, blackness itself was still considered necessary. In twenty-first-century Japanese theatre, the idea that black characters should be dark-skinned remains, but a more modest "blacking up" is preferred to stereotypical blackface. When Yoshida Kotaro played *Othello* in Ninagawa Yokio's 2007 production, he appeared as a naturally dark-skinned, suntanned general.

There are several striking non-Shakespearean examples of blacking up in Japan. *Memphis*, a musical about interracial romance between Huey, a white DJ, and Felicia, an African American singer in the 1950s, was performed at Tokyo's New National Theatre in 2015 and 2017. The productions were choreographed and directed by the African American artist Jeffrey Page, with Yamamoto Koji, a Japanese actor who played Huey, joining as co-director in 2017. A popular Japanese African American singer, Jero, played Felicia's brother Delray, while Felicia was played by a Japanese actress, Hamada Megumi. As noted above, it is difficult for Japanese companies to hire black actors, but *Memphis* was able to do so, because it was a big-budget musical; notably, even in such a high-profile effort, the creative team could not find enough black actors to play all the African American characters. In this production, many of the actors who played African American characters blacked up. In an interview, Page said that he tried to avoid blackface because it was unacceptable in the United States (Gekipia Editorial Desk). However, according to another interview with the actors and a post-show talk on 3 December 2017, they finally decided to black up modestly, because the Japanese audience would have otherwise had difficulty understanding the show.⁵ Even though the cast and crew included multiple African American artists, the Japanese theatrical

⁵ See Enterstage Editorial Desk's article. The content of the post-show talk was not officially published, but a detailed report with analysis was uploaded in a theatre review blog by a fan with the username "aru" at <http://ayayay.cocolog-nifty.com/blog/2017/12/2-5284.html>

production still had to adopt dark makeup. Behind this decision is the notion that Japanese society is so homogeneous that a Japanese audience would not understand racial differences unless they were clearly visible.

If an actor chose to adopt more traditional blackface than modest blacking up, the production would likely be criticised, although the problem would be unnoticed by mainstream media. From June to July 2019, *Driving Miss Daisy* was staged in Kinokuniya Hall. This production was directed by Mori Shintaro, a director experienced in various classic playwrights, including Shakespeare. Ichimura Masachika, who has starred in a wide variety of productions ranging from musicals to Shakespeare, wore traditional blackface to play Hoke, Daisy's African American chauffeur. As soon as the publicity photos were published, this decision was heavily criticised on the web as outdated.⁶ For example, Maruya Kyubee, an expert on African American music, stated that it was an "anachronistic" and "destructive" theatrical choice. However, mainstream theatre reviews rarely discussed the issue. When the production made the 27th Yomiuri Theatre Award shortlist, one reviewer commented on *Driving Miss Daisy* without mentioning blackface: "I have rarely seen a recent production with a better aftertaste than this" ("The 27th Yomiuri Theatre Award Screening Meeting"). The use of blackface did not affect the reviewer's "aftertaste" of the production.

The Takarazuka Revue, an all-female musical company in Hyogo, has a long history of using both stereotypical blackface and the less extreme blacking up. *Otokoyaku*, or female performers specialising in male roles, use red or brownish greasepaint to look more "masculine" even when they play white male roles, while *musumeyaku*, actresses specialising in female roles, sometimes whiten up to look more "feminine". There is a distinct colour line between men and women in this all-female theatrical tradition. One of their features is "Latin shows", in which performers adopt modest dark makeup and dance to Latin music; this form of blacking up is often cited as a symbol of exotic attractiveness in theatrical reviews (Fuchigami 13; "[Takarazuka] The Summer of Passion, to the World of Cats"). Performers who play black characters wear more typical blackface. In 2014, the company staged *The Lost Glory: The Beautiful Illusion*, a musical adaptation of *Othello*, written and directed by Ueda Keiko and set in 1920s New York. Otto Goldstein, the Othello character played by Todoroki Yu, was a highly successful Greek immigrant, and Ivano, the Iago character played by Yuzuki Reon, was an illegitimate child of an Italian-American businessman. Todoroki and Yuzuki modestly blacked up for the male roles, while Mishiro Ren, who played the African American servant Sam, wore much darker makeup. *For the People: Lincoln, the Man Sought Freedom* was produced in 2016, with performers playing African American characters in

⁶ The publicity photos are available at <https://natalie.mu/stage/news/336253>

blackface in this highly acclaimed musical biopic. The production was also nominated for the 24th Yomiuri Theatre Award, and reviewers did not mention blackface when the shortlist was published (“The 24th Yomiuri Theatre Award Screening Meeting”). The use of blackface and blacking up in Takarazuka productions, however, has been increasingly criticised in fan blogs, especially after Hamada Masatoshi’s blackface incident (“In the First Place, Why Do You Want to Black Up So Much?”; *nagi-narico*). While the Takarazuka Revue is a prestigious theatre company with over a century’s history, some fans think that those traditions need to be updated.

As for the reception of blackface, there is a gap between online criticism and major theatre reviews and awards in Japan. Those who know Anglo-American theatrical trends are critical of blackface. Other theatregoers, including critics and creators, take blackface for granted because black actors are generally unavailable in Japan.

While one could fault Japanese audiences for their naïveté, it is also important to note that Anglo-American copyright holders, by adopting non-US-centric approaches about race, maintain better creative control over their productions to avoid blackface. The creators of *Hairspray*, a musical focusing on racism and lookism, know that there are less racially diverse societies in the world than the United States and that people in those regions are also interested in their work. According to the composer, Marc Shaiman, when the copyright holders of the show discussed licensing issues, they first thought that “actors who are the race of the characters” should play the roles but realised that their show might be produced in countries like Japan and Sweden (Kavner). They decided to release a letter insisting that the show never use blackface (“Billing”). This letter was “used as a program note in any production that lacks African American actors” (Wolf 53) until June 2020. Shaiman and his colleagues’ decision was an appropriate artistic choice in staging a show problematising racism worldwide.

The Japanese production of *Hairspray* was to be staged in June 2020, but was eventually cancelled because of the COVID-19 outbreak. Japanese theatregoers were deeply concerned about the blackface problem when the performance schedule was released. Some fans even started a petition against the use of blackface at the beginning of November 2019 (*s kanna*). Soon after the petition was launched, a Japanese translation of the letter to the audience was uploaded to the official website (“Authors’ Letter”). This process illustrated the clear, non-US-centric vision of *Hairspray*’s creative team.

This casting strategy, however, may be changed after the COVID-19 pandemic ends. To respond to the criticism against all-white productions of *Hairspray* in the midst of the Black Lives Matter movement, Shaiman posted a statement on Instagram saying that he would require “groups to cast the show so as to accurately reflect the characters as we wrote them” (Shaiman). This

means that only black actors play black roles and white actors play white roles in future productions, perhaps even outside North America. This statement caused anxiety among Japanese fans because they would never be able to see Japanese productions of *Hairspray* due to the difficulty of finding such actors in East Asian countries.

While the use of blackface had long been unquestioned in Japanese entertainment, theatregoers' frustration has recently grown to the extent that they started a petition against it. This can be ascribed to the increase of black residents in Japan and the popularisation of the Internet, through which fans can obtain information about Anglo-American theatre far more quickly and easily than before. In this cultural climate, Shakespearean productions, long considered high-profile in Japanese theatre, have come to change their attitude towards blackface.

Post-2010 Shakespeare Productions and Race in Japan

Recently, Japanese productions of Shakespeare have tried to tackle race more frequently than before, using different interpretive strategies. The Setagaya Public Theatre's *Othello* focused on lookism and male jealousy, Kakushinhan's *Othello* used acting style to distinguish Othello, and the Shakespeare Company's *Ainu Othello* changed Othello's race. Comparing these productions with other related productions will enable us to understand the general tendency of Japanese companies' attempt to address race in Shakespeare.

Shirai Akira, an experienced director of translated plays, directed *Othello* at the Setagaya Public Theatre in June 2013. This production changed the focus from racism to lookism. Nakamura Toru played Othello with no blacking up, Yamada Yu played Desdemona, and Akahori Masaaki played Iago. It downplayed the racial connotations and emphasised Iago's jealousy towards the gorgeous leading couple played by the two popular actors. Othello was deliberately cast as a tall, confident, and genuinely good-looking man, while Iago was portrayed as plain-looking. Although Othello mentioned the racial difference, what mattered more to Iago was the fact that Othello was charming, popular, and successful. Othello's otherness came from his attractive appearance, and Iago's masculine pride was threatened by the handsome outsider. Japanese audience members could easily understand this interpretation. In Japan, there is a popular slang expression, "May all the shiny happy people explode!" It is said that this type of antipathy towards shiny happy people is shared by frustrated heterosexual single men, or Japanese counterparts of American incels (Elliot; Klee; Ueno 61-83). In this production, Iago is something of an incel, although his wife Emilia apparently loves him. Iago is not satisfied with his life and ascribes that to his plain appearance. Instead of

tackling race, a topic with which Japanese audience members were unfamiliar, this production focused on lookism, alienation, and jealousy, which were more emotionally accessible to a Japanese audience.

This interpretation could be connected to earlier Japanese adaptations of *Othello*. As Kondo Hiroyuki demonstrates, the first two Japanese novelisations of *Othello* in the 1890s emphasised Othello's ugliness. Inspired by *Othello*, Jono Saigiku wrote *Abata Denshichiro* in 1891, while Udagawa Bunkai wrote *Bando Musha* in 1892.⁷ Both depicted their Othello characters as ugly. *Bando Musha* focused on the appearance of Othello, and Kondo calls this novel a "drama of beauty and ugliness" (163). Racism was transformed into lookism, which the late-nineteenth-century Japanese readers could easily understand because they were familiar with the topic through kabuki. As was true in the West, blackness was connected to ugliness in Japan. However, in the Setagaya Public Theatre production, Othello was handsome, and Iago was ugly and envious. Tradition was reversed here, perhaps because the production's creative team strove to highlight Iago's masculine pride.

Kakushinhan, led by director Kimura Ryunosuke, is a theatre company in Tokyo, known for political and modernising interpretations of texts, a physical and violent acting style, and cross-gender casting (Eglinton; Kitamura; Tanaka). In 2015, Kakushinhan staged *Othello*. Maruyama Atsundo, who played the title role, wore no blackface makeup. What makes Maruyama's Othello different from other characters is the acting style. In an interview I conducted with Kimura on 3 July 2018, he said that it was difficult for Japanese companies to hire black actors. Kimura believed that theatre was for minorities because it challenged the social norms, but that Japanese companies had to take different approaches from English-speaking theatre in order to encourage the audience to understand Shakespeare. Kimura cast actors with "differences" in order to represent the racial "Other" in Shakespeare plays. In *Othello*, he invited Maruyama from Kara-gumi, a company whose acting style greatly differs from Kakushinhan's. When he directed *Titus Andronicus* in 2017, Kakushinhan member Iwasaki Mark Yudai played Aaron; he was raised in North America and speaks English, which made a "difference". Physical or linguistic differences signified the "Otherness" in Kakushinhan's productions.

Kakushinhan's decision to distinguish Othello from others by acting style is useful, and when Japanese companies try to signify racial otherness, it is often theatrically effective. In directing an all-male version of *The Merchant of Venice* in 2013, Ninagawa Yukio hired Ichikawa Ennosuke for Shylock, the only kabuki actor in this production. When AUN Age, the youth branch of Yoshida

⁷ *Abata Denshichiro* is included in *Shakespeare Translation Literature Collection*, vol. 15. *Bando Musha* was serialised in *Mainichi Shimbun* from 19 September to 19 October 1982.

Kotaro's company AUN, staged *Othello* in 2019, Tanihata Satoshi did not black up in playing the title role; instead, he adopted a kabuki-influenced overacting style.

Ainu Othello was first performed in 2018 by the Shakespeare Company in Sendai, a city in northern Honshu, and toured to Tokyo and London (Yamamoto). This company is famous for performing Shakespeare adaptations in the Tohoku dialect, a north-eastern Japanese accent. *Ainu Othello* is the first major adaptation featuring Othello as an Ainu man. The Ainu are indigenous people of Japan who live on Hokkaido, the country's northernmost main island. They have suffered from serious discrimination, but their history has been largely ignored by mainstream Japanese (Siddle 6-7). The discrimination against Ainu people is one of worst historical examples of blatant racism in Japan, but no one had ever tried to adapt *Othello* into a play about them, because the subject was considered too controversial.

Set in 1860, this version depicts Othello as an Ainu general married to Dezuma, a Japanese woman born to a family of samurai in Sendai. According to a post-show talk on 14 June 2018, the director, Shimodate Kazumi, worried about the delicate nature of the story, had invited Akibe Debo, an Ainu artist, to help with the production. The portrayals of Ainu culture in this play, including the Ainu speeches and dancing, were all supervised by Akibe. The handkerchief in the original play was transformed into a *matanpushi*, an elaborately embroidered headband, which is an important part of traditional Ainu attire. It was an ingenious translation, because audience members who had never heard of *matanpushi* could easily understand its value just by looking at it, thanks to its refined design. Akibe also advised that Iago should be a half-Ainu, half-Japanese man, because the racial closeness between Othello and Iago would clearly explain Iago's powerful jealousy. Compared to Othello, a valiant general admired by Japanese people, Iago suffers from a different discrimination, because he is despised as a "half-breed" man. Akibe's suggestion gave depth to the production. This production was well received: McNeil said it was "dope" (McNeil).

Like the Setagaya Public Theatre's *Othello*, *Ainu Othello* has an important precedent. In Japan, *Othello* was first performed by Kawakami Otojiro in 1903 as a theatrical adaptation set in Taiwan, translated by Emi Suiin.⁸ In this production, Othello is Muro Washiro, a governor of colonial Taiwan. He is from Satsuma, in the southern part of Japan, and portrayed as a relatively dark-skinned character by Kawakami in dark makeup (Tierney 524). Since Muro Washiro is rumoured to come from a "new commoner" (Emi 7), a person from the *burakumin* class, this adaptation is often regarded as a play dealing with

⁸ For this play, see Suzuki 216-219.

race.⁹ It is an early attempt at changing the racial background of *Othello* for the Japanese audience. However, this seemingly simple solution did not flourish in Japanese theatre, partly because changing *Othello* to a minority character in Japan is considered controversial, as the creators of *Ainu Othello* suggested at the post-show talk. *Ainu Othello* is a long-awaited successor to the first *Othello* adaptation in Japan.

Although *Ainu Othello* addressed racism in a straightforward and careful manner, its treatment of gender was less successful. In contrast to the complex male characters, the female characters were one-dimensional. The dialogues between Dezuma and Emilia were heavily edited, and Emilia's famous speech defending women was cut. *Ainu Othello* was a bold attempt at highlighting racism in Japan, but it failed to address gender issues.

Several notable attempts have also been made to address race in Japan using Shakespeare. *A Strange Tale of Typhoon*, a 2015 adaptation of *The Tempest* set in the 1920s, was written by a Korean playwright, Sung Kiwoong, and directed by a Japanese director, Tada Junnosuke, starkly portraying Japan's colonial past. Chong Wishing, prolific Korean-Japanese playwright and director, produced *Macbeth on the Equator* in 2018, a backstage drama about *Macbeth* set in a war criminal prison in post-WWII Singapore, and *Crying Romeo and Angry Juliet* in 2020, an all-male adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* set in post-war Japan and focusing on two mob groups, one led by veterans and the other led by colonial immigrants. These productions have attempted to encourage audience members to discuss racism as something closer to home.

It should be noted, however, that by only focusing on race, creators and viewers may fail to notice another bias in Japanese theatre: gender. *Ainu Othello* focused too much on male characters. The gendered colour line in the Takarazuka Revue reflects the persisting ideal of beauty in Japan, which predates the contact with the West: white-skinned women are beautiful, while wild and attractive men are darker than women. *Crying Romeo and Angry Juliet*, an all-male production, unwittingly follows this Takarazuka-style colour line: Juliet is played by a male actor Emoto Tokio without whitening up, and the play contains jokes about Juliet's plainness—based on the assumption that male actors dressed as women without specific makeup are not beautiful, rather, they are problematic.

Japanese theatre companies have gradually learned to address race in Shakespeare, although their approaches still differ notably from those found in English-speaking regions. While blackface is still found on the Japanese stage, the Shakespeare productions discussed in this paper tried to break away from this problematic tradition and present racism more relevant to Japanese

⁹ See Tierney 523 and Yoshihara 151. For the history of the *burakumin*'s racialization, see Kurokawa.

viewers by adapting various interpretive strategies. If Japanese companies continue to tackle race and skin colour, however, the concept of beauty and gender must also be questioned in more comprehensive and balanced ways, for these are closely intertwined problems.

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Katherine Hennessey*

Interpreting *Othello* in the Arabian Gulf: Shakespeare in a Time of Blackface Controversies

Abstract: This article opens with some brief observations on the phenomenon of Arab blackface—that is, of Arab actors “blacking up” to impersonate black Arab or African characters—from classic cinematic portrayals of the warrior-poet Antara Ibn Shaddad to more recent deployments of blackface in the Arab entertainment industry. It then explores the complex nexus of race, gender, citizenship and social status in the Arabian Gulf as context for a critical reflection on the author’s experience of reading and discussing *Othello* with students at the American University of Kuwait—discussions which took place in the fall of 2019, in the midst of a wave of controversies sparked by instances of Arab blackface on television and in social media.

Keywords: Shakespeare, *Othello*, Antara Ibn Shaddad, blackface, Arab blackface, Kuwait, Egypt, Arab/ic film and theatre, Arabian Gulf.

Introduction: Blackface on the Arab World’s Screens and Stages

Blackface has a long history in the Arab entertainment industry. In Egypt, the epicenter of film production in the Middle East,¹ it was a recurrent phenomenon in the 20th century for non-black Arab actors to “black up” in order to play

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¹ In 2015 Eman Rashid estimated that over the course of its history, the Egyptian film industry had produced more than four thousand films, accounting for 75% of film production across the Arab world. It is also important to note that Egyptian cinema often looks to Hollywood and the UK and European film industries for inspiration, and some instances of blackface in the Egyptian cinema clearly borrow from Hollywood models.

African or black Arab characters. In fact, celebrated Egyptian actors like Ali Al-Kassar and Farid Shawqi² attained some of the most striking successes of their careers in blackface roles, from Al-Kassar's comedic character Othman the Nubian, to Shawqi's portrayal of the half-Arab, half-African epic hero Antara Ibn Shaddad, in Niazi Mostafa's 1961 cinematic adaptation *Antara Bin Chaddad* (translated into English as *Antar, The Black Prince*).³

While Shawqi's performance as Antara is dignified, and does not seem intended to provoke laughter at his character's expense,⁴ other instances of blackface in Egyptian cinema seem deliberately to demean Africans and black Arabs, including Egypt's sizeable and marginalized Nubian population, who hail predominantly from Upper Egypt, the country's south. Such acts serve to support a construct of Egyptian identity that is Pharaonic, Northern/Mediterranean, and Arab, by contrasting it with a Southern/African Other, rhetorically constructed as inferior in beauty, intelligence, and ability (El Hamel). And this rhetoric has persisted well into the 21st century: the 2018 compilation of "Seven Egyptian Movie Scenes that are Racist AF" by Sarah Ahmed Shawky does not include instances of blackface *per se*, but her examples—all from the 1990s through the early 2000s—illustrate the continuing occurrence of slurs against black Arabs and Africans on the Egyptian screen.

Over the course of the 20th century, the use of blackface (and also other racial prosthetics, like wigs, body padding, and so forth) gradually spread from Egypt to burgeoning entertainment industries across the region—including to

² Where Arabic titles and names have commonly used transcriptions, this article reproduces those; otherwise, Arabic words and phrases are transliterated using the ALA-LC system.

³ For more on the iconic status of Othman the Nubian within the Egyptian entertainment industry, and the character's centrality within Al-Kassar's career, see Tam. The 1961 film was Mostafa's second attempt at adapting the epic tale (Dumont 196); his 1945 film *Antar and Abba* featured the blacked-up actor Seraj Mounir as Antar, though interestingly the publicity poster for the film does not show Mounir in blackface (c.f. the film, available on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxlQ4zmBvP8>, and the poster, here: <https://elcinema.com/en/work/1005987/gallery/123771124>).

⁴ I find arguments that try to justify or excuse some uses of blackface based on a presumed lack of intention to offend, such as the one put forward in McWhorter's "The Case for 'Blackface'", deeply problematic. The distinction suggested here—between Arab blackface that is obviously intended as an aggressive and demeaning act of mockery, and Arab blackface that does not seem motivated by active malice—should not be misconstrued as condoning any instance of the practice. Rather, the distinction is salient only insofar as it underscores a central assertion in this article: that the use of Arab blackface has actually become more insensitive and more demeaning over time, rather than less so, and that this tracks with recent upsurges in regional nativism and racism.

Kuwait, which established the Arabian Gulf's first cinema company in 1954, and which in the 1960s and 70s made rapid advances in the development of theatre and television programming. The 1979 Kuwaiti musical revue *Bisāt al-Faqīr*⁵ ["The Poor Man's Magic Carpet"], starring celebrated Kuwaiti actor Abdulhussein Abdulredha [1939-2017], contains a number of the tropes which continue to characterize Kuwaiti comedy today, such as men impersonating women, and it includes three segments in which Abdulredha darkens his skin. In the first, set in a café in Upper Egypt (complete with a bellydancer in drag), a browned-up Abdulredha leads the cafégoers in song. In the second segment, in darker makeup, Abdulredha plays Antara, in an extended spoof of scenes from the classic film—including one in which Antara's father's wife Sumaya, here played by a male actor in women's garb, tries to flirt with him. When Antara rejects her advances, she insults him using the epithet *yā aswad al-wajh* ["you black face!"], a slur repeatedly leveled at Antara in the classic film. And in the revue's final segment, Abdulredha, in brownface, performs a musical number set in India.

Such scenes defy easy characterization. The revue has very little plot, and its unifying image is that of a magic carpet that transports the main characters to communities which, the revue implies, lack material wealth but are rich in musical traditions and in social cohesion. Thus the café scene could be interpreted as a celebration, even a valorization, of Upper Egyptian culture and music, not intended to denigrate or demean; the Indian-inspired number likewise does not seem to engage in mockery of the people or the musical traditions of the subcontinent. In both of these scenes, the primary entertainment value of the segment seems to stem from the enjoyment of the musical numbers, and from the pleasure of watching Abdulredha in various forms of "racial drag,"⁶ rather than from black- or brownface being used as travesty or caricature. If anything, it is classical Arab culture and the 1961 film that the revue sends up, in the Antara sequence, which occurs midway through the revue. Abdulredha plays

⁵ A full video is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6lMko-FqA4&feature=youtu.be>. The Arabic title literally means "The Carpet of Poverty," from its central image of the flying carpet, comically complete with steering wheel. In Kuwait, the musical revue—known locally as *awbarīṭ*, from the Italian *operetta*—was a popular genre in the 1970s and 80s. My sincere thanks to Hasan Hajjiah for bringing this performance to my attention.

⁶ This is Elise Marks' term for the "tricky combination of 'strangeness' and 'kinship'" that provides "an emotional thrill ride" for audience members watching a white actor playing Othello in blackface (Marks 116). Though the Kuwaiti revue is not exactly a thrill ride (it is much more "It's a Small World" than it is Space Mountain) Abdulredha's performance of black Arab, Indian, or half-black/half-Arab characters seems intended to evoke a similar combination of feelings for Kuwaiti and Gulf audience members.

the character with gravitas, like Shawqi before him. But here the dignity of the epic hero is undermined by comedic elements like his obvious discomfort in the face of Sumaya's flirtatious advances, and by a penultimate scene in which, as he attempts to save his beloved Abla from the aggression of another male character, he falls and clumsily drops his sword, leaving Abla to pick it up and kill the rival herself.⁷

Such productions raise a series of intriguing questions. Does Arab blackface signify differently with the passage of time, for example from the film in 1961 to the revue in 1979, or across geographical and national borders, e.g. in Egypt vs. Kuwait? How does the Kuwaiti revue's purported crossing of racial and cultural boundaries, via makeup, costuming, accents and set, intersect with the production's transgression of the region's gender boundaries, where male actors dress as women and female characters enact traditionally masculine gestures, as when Abla brandishes the sword? To what degree can contemporary academic discourses about blackface and the performance of race in the American/Western entertainment industry be applied to a context like Kuwait's, and to what degree do they need to take into account Kuwait's own historic, socio-economic and demographic specificities?

Though it cannot provide definitive answers to those questions, this article makes three observations that may prove useful as scholarship on Shakespeare, race, and blackface performance in the region continues to develop. First, as the above examples suggest, when surveying the use of blackface in the region, it is productive to look at performances of *Antara Ibn Shaddad* in tandem with those of *Othello*. Antara is, in many ways, Arabic literature's iconic analogue to Shakespeare's Moor: each hero is a racialized outsider who must contend with pervasive prejudice; each falls in love with a young woman of social standing who returns his affection despite her father's aversion to the match; and each strives to demonstrate his nobility and strength of character through a combination of rhetorical art⁸ and martial prowess—a literary correspondence that at least one theatremaker from the Arabian Peninsula, Omani playwright Ahmad al-Izki, has productively explored in performance (Hennessey, "*Othello* in Oman"). Moreover, portrayals of Antara raise thorny questions about racial signifiers and colorism in the Arab world. The role has been repeatedly performed in dark blackface, despite the fact that Antara's half-Arab, half-Abyssinian parentage does not require it. And even

⁷ In the 1961 film, Antara teaches Abla to fight with a sword; she uses those skills twice to fight with her cowardly suitor 'Amara al-Ziyadi, but does not kill him or anyone else.

⁸ Complicating this picture is the fact that Antara was a historical figure and an esteemed poet, at least some of whose works have survived. See Khannous for an excellent introduction to Antara's reflections on race in his poetry.

when an actor of African heritage is cast in the role, as Kuwaiti actor Faisal Al-Ameeri was in the 2008 Ramadan television series *Antarah Bin Shaddad*,⁹ he may find himself playing next to blackfaced Arab actors (like Jordanian actress Nadia Odeh, in the role of Antara's mother Zabiba). Portrayals of Antara can thus be usefully juxtaposed with regional performances of *Othello*, for which data points are currently scarce.

Second, where one might expect that international debates about the origins and the consequences of blackface would lead to an increased regional awareness of the problematic nature of the practice, the use of Arab blackface seems over time to have become even more crude, more insensitive, and more pointedly intended to make one subset of audience members laugh by portraying another subset in demeaning ways, several recent instances of which are detailed in the next section. And sadly, this observation seems to be borne out whether we look at Kuwait in particular, or the Arabian Peninsula more broadly, or across the Arab world.

Third, the contemporary university classroom on the Arabian Peninsula provides a productive space for long-overdue discussions of the use of blackface and the region's problems of racism and racial discrimination. Moroccan historian Chowki El Hamel describes "the refusal to engage in discussions on slavery and racial attitudes" as tantamount to a pervasive "culture of silence,"¹⁰ and although some critics and writers from within the Arab world have responded to regional instances of blackface with scrutiny and condemnation (e.g. Al-Khamri; "Blackface: The Ugliness of Racism"; Nashed), many actors and audience members continue to justify the practice as a harmless comedic trope. Raising these issues within the context of classroom discussion—through, for example, consideration of works like *Othello*—is one way to encourage the region's young people to break the "culture of silence" on racial discrimination.

Racism-as-Comedy in Arab Entertainment: Just How Bad Is It?

Abdullahi Hassan's Twitter compilation of instances of Arab blackface and racist jokes and language—primarily from Egyptian, Kuwaiti, and Lebanese television and cinema—provides an eye-opening survey of the pervasive nature of these phenomena (@Abz Captures). A few of his examples date back to the 1990s, but most are more recent. And even if we confine our attention only to

⁹ Directed by Rami Hanna and produced by Al-Maha Production; episodes are available via WatanFlix at <https://watanflix.com/en/series/%D8%B9%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D9%86-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF>.

¹⁰ El Hamel's scholarship focuses on Mediterranean North Africa, but the "culture of silence" is an apt description for the Arabian Peninsula as well.

2018 and 2019, we still find a startling range of incidences of Arab entertainers using black- or brownface.

In Kuwait in 2018, for example, the Ramadan comedy series *Block Ghashmara* sparked controversy for an episode where comedians donned blackface for a skit impersonating Sudanese men, playing on stereotypes of Africans as lazy and indolent, and travestyng Sudanese Arabic. The skit caused such an outcry that Kuwaiti actor Hassan al-Ballam delivered an apology over Twitter, promising never to play a role of this type again,¹¹ while his co-star on the series, Kuwaiti actor Dawood Hussain, apologized via YouTube. (Hussain, it should be noted, previously wore blackface and a wig to parody a well-known Sudanese song, backed up by a similarly made-up, trumpet-carrying minstrel-esque chorus, in a video that has racked up 2.4 million views on YouTube over the past decade.¹²)

In May 2019 Egyptian comedian Shaima Saif wore blackface in an episode of the television series *Shaqlabāz*: in a hidden-camera skit, she boarded a bus where she harassed other passengers in a Sudanese accent, flirted with a male passenger and pretended to drink alcohol and to steal other passenger's cell phones.¹³ A backlash ensued, including a Twitter campaign calling for a boycott of MBC Masr, the television channel that had aired the show. Saif apologized over Twitter, but claimed to just be playing a comedic role with no intention of offending anyone, implying that the criticism was overblown.

In an even more crudely racist skit on the Libyan TV show *Hidden Camera with Munira*, a clip of which was posted to YouTube in May 2019, a blackfaced actress leaves a baby stroller behind as she exits an elevator, the doors of which then jam. The targets of the prank, the people "trapped" in the elevator, check on the "babies," only to discover that the stroller contains a pair

¹¹ For coverage of the *Block Ghashmara* controversy, see for example Abuelgasim and Batrawy; Saeed and Peristianis; and Walsh.

¹² Dawood's apology can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJKmoguPGKY>, while the parody video is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QagZEz3WjXI&feature=youtu.be>. For purposes of comparison, a Sudanese YouTube video of the same song, *Saraqū mūbaylī* ["They Stole My Mobile Phone"], which I believe is the original artists' recording, is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ItujyRs6zWs&feature=youtu.be>. It has only two hundred thousand views, where the Kuwaiti parody has more than ten times that number. Once again, my gratitude to Hasan Hajiyah for bringing the latter two videos to my attention.

¹³ For coverage of this controversy, see for example Khalaf; Magdy; Marquis; and "Egypt Blackface Sketch." A partial compilation of clips from Saif's sketch can be seen on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bq8o9SjWaTU&feature=youtu.be>. The compilation concludes with the big reveal that the unsuspecting passengers have been filmed for the television show, upon which everyone laughs, thereby implying that Saif's actions were all just harmless fun.

of monkeys (Walsh). Arabic-language comments on the YouTube video repeatedly ask why the actress has chosen to demean Sudanese women by portraying one in this way.¹⁴

Why, one might ask, are the Sudanese the butt of all of these jokes? On one hand, Sudan's¹⁵ proximity to Egypt, the legacy of the enslavement of Sudanese and other Africans in Egypt through the 19th century (Powell), and the fact that the Sudanese community in Egypt numbers over four million have all made it a recurring target of Egyptian humor, which as noted above often serves as a model for entertainers elsewhere in the region. Etymology also comes into play: the name "Sudan" derives from the Arabic *bilād al-Sūdān*, literally "the country of black people," and thus the geographical designation serves reductively in some Arabic discourse as a metonym for black African peoples and cultures. And Kuwait's relationship to Sudan adds a further layer of complication, stemming from the significant role that Sudanese teachers, engineers, and medical professionals played during the rapid development of the Gulf states in the 1960s and 70s, and the summary deportation of Sudanese residents from Kuwait after the First Gulf War, in reprisal for Omar al-Bashir's failure to condemn the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Moreover, in March of 2018, a rumor surfaced that Kuwait had asked North Sudan to grant citizenship to the *bidoun jinsiyya*, ["those without a nationality"], a segment of Kuwait's population that claims, but has not been granted, Kuwaiti citizenship—a seemingly intractable issue that dates back to the establishment of Kuwait as an independent nation in 1961, and a problem which, the rumor implied, North Sudan could step in to resolve (AlJazeera, "Are Sudanese Passports"; Kennedy; Koningsor).

A local analogue to what Eric Lott describes as "the dialectical flickering of racial insult and racial envy" (18) may thus be at play in the *Block Ghashmara* sketch, given the long-standing significance of Sudan and the Sudanese in Kuwait. And this dialectical flickering seems even more obvious in the Egyptian and Libyan examples. In neither of those two countries did the Arab Spring of 2011 achieve the democratic transformation that protesters had hoped for, while in 2011 South Sudan achieved independence, and in 2019 a democratic revolution toppled North Sudan's dictatorial regime. It is no coincidence, in my view, that these two particularly crude instances of Arab blackface both occurred in May 2019, a month after the deposition of al-Bashir

¹⁴ Video of this skit, which aired on the Libya al-Ahrar channel, is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-aYoFT_Gzw&t=240s.

¹⁵ In this article, "Sudan" refers to the country as it existed before 2011. In other texts, the terms "Sudan" or "the Sudan" continue to designate the northern part of the country, from which South Sudan seceded in 2011, but for clarity's sake, I use "North Sudan" and "South Sudan" to refer to these two countries post-2011.

on 11 April. Given that one of the most iconic images from North Sudan's revolution was a photo that went viral in early April 2019, depicting a female protester named Alaa Saleh in a position of leadership and authority (Jenkins; Malik), the comedians' decision to don the dismissive patina of blackface to mock Sudanese women, in particular, smacks of both insult and envy.

But Arab blackface extends beyond caricatures of a single nation or people. On the Kuwaiti stage, blackface was employed in the reductive portrayal of black African characters in the hit 2017 comedy *Junūb Afrīqiya* ("South Africa")¹⁶—in which a group of Kuwaitis book a safari vacation at a resort, only to discover, to their dismay, that the resort is haunted, having been built on the ancestral lands of a spear-wielding, animal-hide-sporting African tribe who still lay claim to it. Kuwaiti performers have also invoked the facile association of blackness with petty criminality and Rastafarian culture, in plays like 2019's *Al-Da'ira Al-Sādīsa* ["District Six"], in which the incarcerated protagonist wore a braided wig and a Jamaican hat as well as skin-darkening makeup,¹⁷ and repeatedly pretended to take hits from a joint (recreational drug use is illegal, and potentially subject to severe penalties, in Kuwait). In short, Kuwait is a context in which serious discussion of the history and the implications of blackface is long overdue.

The Complexities of Race in Kuwait and the Gulf

Kuwaiti citizens, and citizens of the Arabian Gulf countries in general, are quite diverse in terms of physical appearance: while many have stereotypically Arab features, many others look African, Asian, or white. Various forms of racism, colorism, and racialized discrimination run rampant in the Gulf; African features, in particular, are a reminder of the region's long-standing trading links with East Africa, but also, more specifically, of the legacy of the African slave trade, which was not just legal in the Gulf but a significant component of the economy through the first half of the 20th century.¹⁸

¹⁶ Full video available at <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x70u6kg>.

¹⁷ An image from the play is available at <https://atitheatre.ae/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A6%D9%84-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84/>.

¹⁸ Transnational slavery remained legal in the Arabian Gulf countries until the 1960s and 70s—and, as attested by numerous reports and exposés, forms of modern-day slavery continue to exist throughout the Gulf (Badger and Cafiero; Begum, etc.). For more on the slave trade in the Gulf in the first half of the 20th century, see for example Zdanowski.

Residents of the Gulf are, by and large, wary of discussing the topics of race and racism, as socio-political criticism of any kind can be easily (and/or deliberately) misconstrued as an attack on national identity or social mores, or more dangerously, as an insult to the government or the ruling family. Yet scratch the surface and anecdotes abound, of Gulf citizens who look African being referred to as *'abd* [pl. *'abīd*], the Arabic for “slave” (a regional analogue to the n-word¹⁹); or of citizens who do not have stereotypically Arab features being treated as foreigners (see, for example, Nabbout 2018 and 2019).²⁰

Furthermore, while the above instances provide examples of citizen-on-citizen discrimination, the primary division within Kuwaiti society, as Anh Nga Longva argued in her classic study *Walls Built on Sand: Migration, Exclusion, and Society in Kuwait*, is that between nationals and non-nationals. Like Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait is a nation of unusual demographics, in that non-citizen residents outnumber citizens. According to recent estimates, only 30.4% of the population is Kuwaiti, while nearly 70% of the population is composed of non-citizens. Asian residents alone make up an estimated 40.3% of the population—more than Kuwaitis themselves—while non-Kuwaiti Arabs live in Kuwait in almost equal numbers to Kuwaitis (27.4% of the overall population). Africans and “Other” expats (including Europeans, North and South Americans, and Australians) each make up only about 1% of the total (Index Mundi).

As an “extreme rentier” state (Herb 2), Kuwait provides its citizens with lifelong welfare benefits, including free health care and education through the university level, heavily subsidized housing and utilities, and white collar public sector employment.²¹ Non-citizens, conversely, do not have access to any of these; many are euphemistically termed “guest workers,” performing low-skilled labor at the behest of employers who exercise an enormous amount of power over their living and working conditions and the duration of their stay, while other expats carry out higher-skilled labor in the private sector. Long-term foreign residents must send their children to private schools, as public schools

¹⁹ The Arabic word *zanjī*, sometimes transliterated *zinjī* (pl. *zanj* or *zinj*)—historically a designation Muslim geographers used as a catch-all term for the peoples and territories of much of southeast Africa—is similarly employed in contemporary Arabic as a pejorative for blacks and Africans.

²⁰ One recent, thoughtful literary exploration of this phenomenon—though about a citizen who looks Asian rather than African—is Kuwaiti novelist Saud Al-Sanousi’s prizewinning novel *The Bamboo Stalk*, the narrator of which is a young man with a Kuwaiti father and a Filipina mother. Though he has Kuwaiti citizenship, the narrator looks, as he puts it, “like a Filipino... a face that brought shame” (241, 244).

²¹ For more on rentierism in the Gulf, see for example “Politics of Rentier States” and “Kuwait Study Group.”

are restricted to those with Kuwaiti citizenship.²² As a 2013 Chatham House report notes,

The segmented labor market system and the mass importation of low-paid migrant workers benefits nationals economically, and helps to create a sense that they are privileged... (“Kuwait Study Group” 2).

Within the non-citizen population, race is often a marker of status: whites and non-Kuwaiti Arabs predominate in white-collar private sector positions, while low-skilled manual and domestic labor and work in the service industry are carried out primarily by the Asian population. And these demographic and economic disparities have given rise to a climate where racism and xenophobic rhetoric are on the increase.²³ One member of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, Safa’ al-Hashem, has deployed particularly virulent rhetoric against the non-citizen community, castigating migrants for overcrowding Kuwaiti hospitals (Associated Press), calling for them to be taxed “even on the air they breathe,” and describing the presence of non-Kuwaiti Arabs in the workforce as tantamount to “an invasion” (“Kuwait MP”)—a disconcerting metaphor, given that Kuwait suffered an actual military invasion in 1990, within living memory.

Moreover, in addition to the fraught issue of the *bidoun jinsiyya* mentioned above, a further race- (and gender-) based issue has recently come to the fore, raised by the activists of Kuwait’s “Gray Area Team”: by law, Kuwaiti fathers pass their citizenship to their children, but Kuwaiti mothers do not. Thus the children of Kuwaiti women and non-Kuwaiti men may be ineligible for Kuwait’s social welfare benefits, and vulnerable to other forms of discrimination (“Half-Kuwait”).²⁴

In sum, there is a spectrum of ways in which racialized discrimination can manifest itself within Kuwaiti society, and these forms of discrimination

²² Kuwaiti scholar Rania Al-Nakib has documented the ways that school district divisions in Kuwait mirror and reinforce divisions between various ethnic and sectarian groups within Kuwaiti society. For a contrarian argument that the standard academic analysis of Gulf societies which posits them as exceptionally exclusionary towards non-citizens has been reified and overblown, see Vora and Koch.

²³ For the pervasiveness and causes of xenophobia in the GCC, see Al-Kubaisi and Soliman. Ray Jureidini has also explored the links between the presence of migrant workers and xenophobia in the region (Jureidini), while Kristian Coates Ulrichsen and Andrew Gardner have each developed a body of nuanced scholarship on migrant labour in the Gulf.

²⁴ In a recent presentation at AUK, for example, one such half-Kuwaiti member of the Gray Area Team recounted that her recognition of her marginal status in Kuwait first occurred in her childhood, when a schoolmate threatened, “I’ll have you deported” (“Half-Kuwait”).

intersect with, and can reinforce or be reinforced by, other types of bias, like gender-based constructs or discrimination based on sectarian affiliation or social status. Add to this mix the fact that Kuwaitis, and Arabs who have grown up in Kuwait, are often acutely aware of the phenomena of anti-Arab and Islamophobic discrimination around the globe, and therefore may see themselves primarily as victims of racist stereotyping, rather than as perpetrators of it, and it becomes clear that *Othello* can be a particularly rich and thought-provoking text to read and perform in Kuwait.

‘Where is the Moor’ in Kuwait?

Egyptian scholar Ferial Ghazoul has argued that *Othello* is a play with particular resonance for the Arab world:

No work of Shakespeare’s touches chords of Arab sensibility and identity so much as the tragedy of *Othello*. For one thing, the hero is a Moor and therefore an “Arab.” Furthermore, he is not simply an Arab character in an Arab context; he is an Arab in Europe, necessarily evoking all the complex confrontations of Self/Other in a context of power struggle (1).

North African theatremakers have repeatedly invoked *Othello*, from Egyptian playwright Tawfiq al-Hakim’s short 1948 play *Al-Mukhrij* (“The Director”)—in which an actor playing the role comes to believe he is *Othello*, and kills the actor who plays Iago (Badawi 52)—to the high-profile 1964 performance of an Arabic translation of the play in Tunisia, by a “pan-Arab” cast, including Egyptian actor Gamil Ratib in the lead role.²⁵ Elsewhere on the Arabian Peninsula, despite scarce records of theatrical production, we find the play repeatedly staged and adapted by the pioneers of Yemeni theatre in the 1940s and 50s. In the late 1970s and 1980, Arabic-language theatre troupes in Qatar and Bahrain also staged high-profile productions of *Othello* (Hennessey, *Shakespeare* 48, 50-52, and 63-66).

But Kuwait provides scant records of *Othello* in performance. Arabic-language productions include a performance by an Algerian troupe in Kuwait in 2016, as part of the Eighth Festival of Arab Theatre (Jiradat), and a 2013 performance of a play called *Al-Mandīl* [“The Handkerchief”], based on the

²⁵ See “Arabic ‘Othello’”. It is unclear whether the actor played the role in blackface, though a description of Ratib in a 1956 French *Othello* as having “handsome and powerful features, though more Egyptian than Moorish” (Jacquot 120) may imply that he did not, at least not in that production. Also, for a comparative analysis of two Egyptian translations of *Othello*, see Hanna.

events of Shakespeare's play, by students at Kuwait's Higher Institute for Dramatic Arts (Abdullah).

Intriguingly, however, the play has proved of interest to expatriate communities in Kuwait. Indian expats, for example, recently performed two different versions of *Othello*, both in early 2018 and both in Malayalam (and neither in blackface). The first was playwright Hemant Kumar's Indian-set adaptation *Mazha* ["The Rain"], produced in February by the Kerala Arts and Nataka Academy and directed by Babu Chakola (Peter). The second was a translation performed in April, directed by Babuji Bathery and produced by the Kerala Arts and Literature Promoting Association of Kuwait at the Indian Central School, to an estimated audience of five thousand. One review noted both the spectacular nature of the latter production (including a grand entry by Othello and Cassio on horseback), and the fact that it had been executed by artists living "away from their homeland," amidst "the limitations of being in a foreign country," suggesting an analogy between the figure of Othello and the marginalized status of the Keralan community in Kuwait ("KALPAK").

Beyond that, my research to date has turned up only one other performance of *Othello* in Kuwait, and that only anecdotally: Bahraini actor, playwright, and television scriptwriter Qahtan al-Qahtani, who studied at the Higher Institute for Dramatic Arts in Kuwait, recently recounted that in the 1970s he and his cohort performed several of Shakespeare's plays, *Othello* included. Asked whether the title role had been performed in blackface, Al-Qahtani said no, but added that it was a very simple production, with little attention given to make-up, costumes, or the set (Al-Qahtani)—a response that suggested that blackface might have been employed, had the performance been more elaborate.

Othello does occasionally appear on university syllabi in Kuwait; professor Shahd alShammari, for instance, has written compellingly of her experiences teaching the play to students at the Arab Open University. And at least one student in Kuwait has made a deep dive into the text and a comparison of its various Arabic translations (Al-Fahal). But for a play purported to "touch chords of Arab sensibility and identity," *Othello*'s appearances in Kuwait are few and far between. Before the Fall of 2019, I had not even taught the play in Kuwait myself; my previous Shakespeare syllabus at the American University of Kuwait, from Fall 2017, had included *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Richard III*, and *The Tempest*, together with selections from the sonnets and other plays, but not *Othello*.

Othello and Shakespeare at AUK

One of the first questions that I wanted to answer was whether Ghazoul's assertion of a particular affinity between Arabs and the Moor would ring true among my students. AUK's student body is around 60% Kuwaiti and 35% non-Kuwaiti Arab, with a handful of students of American, Indian, and other backgrounds rounding out the numbers (the faculty, conversely, is primarily non-Kuwaiti Arab, Western, and Southeast Asian). So on the first day of the Fall 2019 semester, I presented my students with a list of Shakespeare's plays and asked which they would like to read in our class. *Hamlet* would be on our syllabus—that, I told them, was non-negotiable—and our reading would include plays from a range of genres, from comedy to tragedy to history. Beyond that, I was prepared to entertain their suggestions. The initial response was nonplussed (a number of students told me later that, up to that point in their university careers, no professor had allowed them input into the syllabus). An initially tentative but increasingly animated discussion followed, in which several students suggested that we read *Othello*, though not in overwhelming numbers; it just edged out *Macbeth* in terms of students' expressed interest. The discussion generated a reading list that included—in the order in which we read them—*Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.²⁶

The question of how Shakespeare and his characters rhetorically construct race arose quite early, in our discussion of the “Dark Lady” and the “Fair Youth” of the sonnets, where students, particularly those who had taken colonial and post-colonial literature courses, were attuned to the Elizabethan elision of whiteness, fairness, beauty and virtue, and to the rhetorical association of darkness of complexion with deception, ugliness, and malignity. Some were troubled by the ways in which this dichotomy also manifests itself in Arabic: in phrases like *qalbhu/qalbha abyad*, for example, literally meaning “his/her heart is white,” commonly used to praise someone for their kindness, generosity, or virtue. And before we even began reading *Othello*, one of my female students had expressed vibrant indignation at the racist implications of Claudio's line, “I'll hold my mind, were she an Ethiopie,” from *Much Ado About Nothing* (5.4.39).

Comparative reading of *Much Ado* and *Othello*, given the similarities (and divergences) of plot, theme, and character, will obviously bear fruit in

²⁶ My thanks to all of my students from ENGL 307: Shakespeare during the Fall 2019 semester at AUK, for their thoughtful and enthusiastic participation and for all that I learned from them throughout the semester. To maintain student privacy, the responses quoted here have been anonymised.

a classroom setting, hence their sequencing on the syllabus. But for our discussion of *Othello* I also had these goals in mind:

- to make the students aware of the fact that, for the majority of its history, the title role has been played by white actors in blackface;
- to help them gain a sense of how that history intersects with the phenomena of slavery, blackface minstrelsy, and systemic anti-black racism in the US;
- to familiarize them with the difficulties faced by pioneering black Shakespearean actors like Ira Aldridge in the 19th century and Paul Robeson in the 20th;
- to make them aware of just how recently the expectation persisted that *Othello* would be played by a celebrated white Shakespearean actor, blacked up or bronzed for the occasion.

I speculated that doing these things might encourage them to turn a more critical eye on blackface as a comedic trope in local and regional performance.

Before any of that, however, I wanted the students to read and respond to the play itself—so during our first week of discussion, I made no mention of blackface. But the issue of whether *Othello* is a racist play, or Shakespeare a racist writer, quickly arose. Some students were repelled by the graphic slurs Iago uses in the first scene; others countered that by associating such objectionable ideas and language with a malign and repugnant character like Iago, Shakespeare might be encouraging audience members to critique them. Some seemed quite keen to defend Shakespeare from the potential taint of proto-racist ideologies—in part, perhaps, because within their own context they receive contradictory messaging about the importance of constructive socio-political critique on one hand, and, on the other hand, about the threat that such criticism poses to national identity and patriotism. In short, our first two class discussions were somewhat ahistorical, involving close readings of the text and discussion of broad issues like racial and gendered power dynamics, truth and deception, and the nature of evil.

But by the second week, I wanted students to grapple with the play in more complex and historically grounded ways. We read texts like Edward Pechter's "*Othello* in Its Own Time" and Virginia Mason Vaughan's "'The Ethiopian Moor': Paul Robeson's *Othello*," and examined the long history of how the title role of the play has been cast. Collective discomfort grew, as the students discussed Vaughan's argument regarding the racialized language that underpins even the positive critiques of Robeson's performances, and as we looked at images of Orson Welles, Laurence Olivier, and Anthony Hopkins performing the role.

In the third week, I asked them to engage with a selection of texts about the history of blackface in the US, and about some of the region's recent blackface controversies. I also asked them to watch the YouTube video of

Ayanna Thompson's lecture "Shakespeare and Blackface, or Shakespeare and Unfreedom," delivered at the *Shakespeare and Social Justice* conference in Cape Town in May 2019. Students were intrigued by Thompson's discussion of, among other things, how she became "The Othello Whisperer"—the scholarly expert who would be called in to consult on productions of *Othello*, particularly when an actor of color was struggling to overcome negative feelings about the experience of performing the role—and by her insights into the "structural imbalance" within the play. As Thompson notes, Iago has a larger speaking role than Othello,²⁷ and Shakespeare allows Iago, in contrast to Othello, to deliver lines directly to the audience, creating a sense of shared understanding and complicity. Most problematically, insofar as Iago constantly explains his villainous plotting to the audience, the structure of the play places audience members in a position of intellectual superiority to Othello: since Iago reveals his plots to us, we understand that Othello is being duped, while he himself does not. In its very structure, then, the play creates a dynamic which activates racist stereotypes.

Thompson's lecture was one of several texts that I asked students to grapple with in preparation for a writing assignment which provided a choice of three questions; all three invoked the problem of what and how race signifies in *Othello*, and one specifically asked them to comment on the use of blackface in the Kuwaiti and/or regional entertainment industry. It was somewhat surprising, for me, to see the depth of emotion that these questions elicited, particularly in the typically self-censoring context of Kuwait. The following are two representative excerpts:

Orson Welles appeared in blackface while portraying Othello in the 1952 production and its irony screams at the audience. A white man playing a black character who is criticized for his skin color and in it, he begs the audience to understand or sympathize with what he's going through. It is extremely problematic in its way of trying to move the audience with its false compassion.

I have never seen any Arab show or movie portraying blackface. I thought it didn't exist in our region until I read the article by Declan Walsh called "Blackface, Staple of Arab Comedy, Faces Surge of Criticism." I was shocked and appalled when I read the article as it described certain scenes from shows and how some actors didn't see how it was wrong and offensive. One actress [Shaima Saif] even stated that "It's just comedy." She wouldn't have said that

²⁷ Iago speaks almost 9000 words to Othello's 6800. In fact, according to PlayShakespeare.com, Iago has one of the largest roles of any Shakespearean character, in terms of the overall percentage of the lines of the play that he speaks: 31% to Othello's less than 22%.

if instead of blackface, someone portrayed her race in a stereotypical way, but since it isn't about her, she thinks it is okay.

One student tried to justify certain uses of blackface within Arab theatre:

...Minstrel shows are racist because their characters are made to mock black people whereas in some cases [in Kuwaiti and Arab theatre] blackface is just used to match the features of the characters being played.

Others critiqued the local tradition much more harshly, as in the following three examples:

Just like the Minstrel shows, Kuwait has had a history of portraying dark-skinned people as caricatures, and treating them as unintelligent poor people.

The way Sudanese people felt about a Kuwaiti man [Hassan Al-Ballam] playing a caricature of them helped me realize how black people might feel when they saw white people portray characters like Othello on stage. The same way Alballam exaggerated his mannerisms, speech, and looks to depict Sudanese people, white actors playing Othello exaggerated their mannerisms to depict a black man.

[Referencing Saudi actor Nasser Al-Qassabi's portrayal of a Sudanese man in an episode of the popular television series *Tash Ma Tash*]: *The act seems very offensive because of his way of copying Sudanese by making himself seem ridiculous and stupid at the same time. It was supposed to be a funny scene, but it wasn't even fun to watch.*

The last student quoted above concluded her paper with a lament: *The blackface issue is really a frustrating and horrible thing to talk and write about.* That comment, I think, sums up the feelings of many in the class at being tasked with commenting on the fraught issue of racism, particularly in Kuwait and particularly by beloved actors in the regional entertainment industry.

It was as necessary as it was uncomfortable, however, since blackface continues to provoke controversy in Kuwait. In early January 2020, for example, Kuwaiti Instagrammer Ghadeer Sultan posted pictures and video of herself in blackface, claiming that her aim was to celebrate diverse forms of beauty and to demonstrate her virtuosity as a make-up artist (AlJazeera, "Kuwaiti Makeup Artist"). By that point, at the very least, my students had a more nuanced conceptual framework for understanding why Sultan's actions were problematic, whatever her intentions may have been. And I believe a further insight came out of our discussions: if *Othello* as a play can be structurally racist—even if Shakespeare himself didn't intend it to be so—then arguably, a society can also

be structurally racist, without that outcome being deliberately intended by any member of the government or any of the nation's citizens. That is, societies can be structured so that certain groups of people only interact, or most often interact, under circumstances that activate or reinforce negative stereotypes. And this idea, in the Kuwaiti context, generates a much more interesting nexus of questions and ideas than the reductive, defensive ones that come to the fore if a professor, particularly a non-Kuwaiti professor, asks a bald question like "Are Kuwaitis racist?"

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***Othello* in the Balkans: Performing Race Rhetoric on the Albanian Stage**

Abstract: This essay examines the racialized rhetoric in Fan Noli's 1916 *Othello* translation and the racialized performance techniques employed in A.J. Ricko's 1953 National Theatre of Albania production. Hoping to combat racial discrimination in Albania, Noli's translation of *Othello* renders the Moor an exceptional Turk whose alienation in Venice was designed to mirror the Albanophobic experiences of Albanian immigrants. Moreover, the Albanian *Othello* can serve as a platform for addressing ethno-racial tensions between Albanians and Turks, northern and southern Albanians, and Albanians of color and white Albanians. Both Noli and Ricko believed there was an anti-racist power inherent within Shakespeare's play. In the end, however, the race-based rhetoric in the Albanian language, the use of blackface make-up in performance, and the logic and rhetoric of Shakespeare's play itself challenged these lofty goals for race-healing.

Keywords: *Othello*, Albania, race, ethnicity, rhetoric, blackface, performance.

Othello was the first play performed and translated in Albania.¹ The play was initially staged in 1890 in Korça as an amateur school performance in a church hall. An Albanian translation did not exist at the time, so the performers relied on Italian translations and their own oral performance traditions. *Othello* officially reappeared on the Albanian stage in 1953, as a politically-motivated performance based on Bishop Fan S. Noli's 1916 translation.² Noli translated *Othello* while he was living in the United States, studying at Harvard University.³ His choice was primarily "induced by his status as an 'other', an

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¹ Albania is thought to be the remainder of Illyria. Fan Noli's preface to *Othello* notes that he is translating the play for the Albanian people in their own language—"the ancient language of the Illyrians."

² Theofan Stilian Noli is one of Albania's most revered political and literary figures.

³ The finished translation was published by Vatra, the pan-Albanian Federation of America which Noli and Faik Konica co-founded. The translation's success inspired Noli to also translate *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Julius Caesar* in 1926.

‘alien’ in culture, origin, complexion, like other emigrants” from Europe (Kadija 37). During his stay in Boston, Noli was inspired to translate *Othello* after observing the struggles of the African American community. He found the realities of immigration, alienation, and racism reflected not only in Shakespeare’s play, but also in the connection between black Americans and Albanian immigrants. As a result, *Othello* was translated and performed with the political agenda “to attack ‘racial’ discrimination” (Kadija 37) in Albania. Noli’s translation emphasizes that Othello is a type of “exceptional Turk,” whose status in Venice was intended to be relatable to the Albanophobic experiences of Albanian immigrants in Europe.

The sentiments and prejudices Albanians shared against Turks, following centuries of Ottoman colonization, seemed to Noli to resonate in Shakespeare’s *Othello*.⁴ Although he did not address this directly in his introduction to *Othello*, Noli’s translation seems to link Othello’s struggles with the experiences of marginalized Albanians of color (Afro-Albanians, Romani, Egyptians, and northern Albanians). In Albanian theater, Othello’s racial overtones are performed as being ethnically, geographically, and religiously based. Therefore, the Albanianized *Othello* simultaneously exhibits the identity of a Turkish other, a black foreigner, and a Muslim man.

Despite the fact that A.J. Ricko’s 1953 text-based production belongs to the communist era in Albania’s history, Noli’s translation is still reproduced faithfully today, thereby carrying old business in with the new. Noli’s original translation and Ricko’s 1953 production of *Othello* continue to inform Albania’s engagement with race in modern entertainment outlets, including the problematic employment of blackface. To date, critics have neglected to comment on the racial politics of Shakespearean translations and performances in Albania, but there is a rich and complicated history that deserves to be unearthed and analyzed. This essay will trace the history of race in Albania, Noli’s employment of race-based Albanian rhetoric in his translation, and Ricko’s use of blackface in his wildly popular 1953 production. While both Noli and Ricko believed that Shakespeare’s *Othello* was the right vehicle both to explore and heal Albania’s racial tensions, I argue that some of the challenges faced by Noli and Ricko actually stem from the race-based logic of Shakespeare’s *Othello*. This argument, I hope, will help demonstrate the need for an expansion of the critical engagement with Albanian translations and performances of Shakespeare.

⁴ After centuries of Ottoman control, Albania’s nationalist movement emerged, and it further fueled their ethnic pride. Albania futilely battled against their massive forces, and as a result, many had to flee to surrounding countries while approximately two thirds of the population had to convert to Islam.

Race in Albania

Race takes on a specific meaning in Albania. As one of the oldest ethnic groups of southern Europe, race for Albanians is a delicate subject matter that is intimately woven with ethnicity. Consequently, one cannot review racial discrimination in Albania without recognizing that race and ethnicity are conflated concepts, although they are not necessarily interchangeable. The various definitions of the Albanian term *rracë/rraca* (race) include “origin, descent, blood, nation, phenotype, colour, body build and shape, geography, and kin” (Ohueri 39). However, ethnicity is determined by many of the same internal and external categorizations, thereby creating a gray area that has immobilized the discursive progress of race studies in Albania. Because “boundaries between race and nation are slippery” (Lemon 60), certain ethnicities are racialized phenotypically. This means that the idea of ethnic pride or ethnic nationalism could conceivably be a racialized epistemology. Due to their war-bound history, Albanians embrace their ethnicity with a sense of national pride which has inadvertently led to a rise of ethno-racial division within and without the country’s borders.

The ideological value that Europeans have placed on colorblindness has rendered race invisible in Albania. Race is not given the necessary political and cultural gravitas it warrants, and racism is often not regarded as a real issue. During her field work in Tirana, anthropologist Chelsi West Ohueri recounts testimonials from Albanian natives who reveal their naive attitudes about racism in their country.⁵ Beyond direct denials of racism or reiterations of the claim that “there is racism everywhere” (qtd. in Ohueri 19), Albanians offered justifications for the lack of racial diversity by explaining that their xenophobia is a result of their isolation (Ohueri 6). As one of the “last European socialist countries to break with communism” (Waal 5), Albania’s self-imposed isolation, following centuries of colonial rule from the Ottoman Empire, has divided Albania from the rest of the world for at least fifty years, geographically, culturally, and politically.⁶

In her research on race in Albania, Ohueri also records responses from residents who view themselves as victims of racism from the English, Italians, Germans, and especially, the Greeks. Despite Albania being a predominantly white country, many Albanians have experienced racism in their own migratory

⁵ I follow Gilroy’s definition of naivety which suggests that “any aspiration to live outside of racialized bonds, codes and structures is naïve, misplaced, foolish, or devious” (xvi).

⁶ Robert Austin explains that under communist rule, Albanians were forbidden to watch foreign television and there was an absence of foreign literature (174). Even at the collapse of communism “Albania had adopted a form of self-reliance” which made them “the most isolated people in the world” (Austin 175).

relations with Greece, thus placing their whiteness in question. For this reason, Albanians claim that race is understood primarily through ethnic differences rather than skin color. But to complicate matters, an interlocutor categorizes Albanians as “the n*****s of Europe” (84).⁷ Misguided as it may be, this respondent’s analogy between the racial discrimination perpetuated against blacks in the US and the discrimination faced by Albanians in Europe is symptomatic of a lack of a coherent Albanian discourse for racism and the unequal distribution of power, rights, and goods based on constructions of race.

Moreover, many Americans and Europeans retain an outdated and stereotypical image of Albanians as violent and blood-thirsty from 19th and 20th century travel writing. Albania has been noted as the “ideal Balkan type—violent, independent, and at times untrustworthy,” for it “both touched Lord Byron’s creative fantasies and haunts Robert Kaplan’s recent travels” (Blumi 528). In letters he wrote to his mother, Lord Byron famously romanticized his time in Albania by describing “Albanians in their white, gold and crimson dresses (the most magnificent in the world)” (Bhattacharji 40). In 1813, he even commissioned a self-portrait in rich Albanian garbs. Byron’s exoticization of Albania as a strange and savage land was repeated by the British travel writer Edith Durham, who expressed a sympathetic attitude toward these “unfortunate and childlike nations,” while she romanticized their “ancient customs of archaic Balkan violence” (Schwandner 122). Likewise, the German writer, Karl May projected an image of Albanians as the world’s real “noble savages”—not only courageous and brave, but also “corrupt, violent, dirty, [and] poor” (Schwandner 121). This stereotypical image of the Balkans, Maria Todorova avers, was set and consistently reproduced during World War I (184).⁸ In its wake, the imagery and rhetoric of the noble but backwards Balkan personality has been perpetuated for decades in the media around the world. Albanians have internalized these ethnic stereotypes as is evidenced by their recorded responses to racism.

Albania’s ethno-racial politics are transcribed spatially and are fostered through imaginary racial-spatial boundaries. Primarily, there is a racial division between northern and southern Albania, or as an Albanian interviewee suggests, “the real racism comes from political parties [...] they perpetuate racial divisions between city and mountain folk” (Ohueri 97). The glorified violent practices of the *Kanun*⁹ are assigned to the northern Albanians from the mountains, who are

⁷ Alaina Lemon describes the slipperiness between race and nation through the Romani people whose blackness became a signifier of being a “true Gypsy” (60). Lemon interviews a Romani man who complains: “we are negry; we are treated like second class here, like your blacks in America” (60).

⁸ This image is reflective of “Balkanization,” a negative connotation that means to break up a geographic area into small and often hostile units (Todorova 33). In other words, Albania is repeatedly viewed as a place of destitution, turmoil, and political chaos.

⁹ The *Kanun* is a set of customary Albanian laws, much like a strict conduct book.

derogatively called “malok,” meaning highlander (Schwandner 119), because they border with surrounding Balkan nations.¹⁰ While northern Albanians are not people of color, they do face racial exclusion if one acknowledges that racism is a system built on sustaining inequalities of power. Race, Ayanna Thompson argues, does not have a stable of fixed meaning, and it can be “signified by something that is unseen, hidden, and/or invisible” (*Performing Race* 19). Some Albanians insist that racial divisions are not determined by blackness or whiteness, but rather by geography and ethnicity.

However, the urban/rural divide fails to account for phenotype-based racial discrimination which directly affects those classified as *dorë e zezë* (black) from the *dorë e bardhë* (white).¹¹ Blackness and whiteness in Albania are characteristics for differentiating white Albanians from black Romani and Egyptians. Gypsiness is discussed in ethnic rather than racial terms (Mudure 277), despite the fact that some of these “Gypsy” communities identify as Albanians. Roma and Gypsy-Travelers “play the part of ‘the Stranger’, the internal outsider” (Mudure 149). Although Alma Hoti insists that it is difficult to measure racial discrimination because race is a changing concept (72), the marginalization of Roma people in Europe is widely documented in data that shows the violence perpetrated against these groups, as well as the income disparities—due to lack of labor integration and shelter—that are allowed to flourish. In Albania specifically, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination reported that “Roma and Egyptians were among the poorest, most marginalized and socially excluded groups.”¹² Racial discrimination of Gypsy or Tsigani people follows a long history of targeted abuse as indicated by the history of medieval Gypsy slavery in Europe (Heng 440). Romani history, Geraldine Heng states, proves that race is not a modern concept at all, but one that can be traced in medieval Europe (Heng 449). The influence of western European culture becomes visible when unpacking the racial conflicts between Gypsies and Albanians.

Race Rhetoric in Translation

Shakespeare is a global phenomenon valorized for his cultural fluidity, but if that fluidity is oblivious to the inherently racialized ideologies of Shakespearean plays, then cultures risk reproducing imperialist credos through their faithful

¹⁰ The divide between north and south Albania is also distinguished by language and dialects.

¹¹ *Dorë e zezë* literally translates as “black hand,” referring to the blackness of Roma and Egyptians in contrast to the whiteness of *dorë e bardhë* (white hand) Albanians.

¹² Hoti reveals that “Egyptian and Rom communities are recognized as *linguistic minorities*, not as *national minorities*” (70) in Albania.

translations. Fan Noli's attempt to bring Shakespeare to Albania as a means of bringing Albania to the world serves as a prime example of this colonial cycle. Noli considered Shakespeare the "greatest dramatist in the world after Christ" (Noli 5), and he wished to grant his people access to great literature, so he "Albanianized" *Othello*.¹³

Shakespeare entered Albania at a time of war. In her reception study of Shakespeare in Albania, Enkelena Qafleshi explains that Shakespeare flourished in Albania because Noli's commentary framed his work as being in concert with the historical moment of the country (44). Albanians "were fighting for freedom, independence, integrity of the country, dissemination of Albanian language, [and] preservation of Albanian culture," and Shakespeare grew popular amongst them because his works were used as propaganda to address such concerns (Qafleshi 45). As a liberal politician, Noli had his own political agenda for translating Shakespeare's tragedies.¹⁴ Noli favored Shakespearean tragedies for their relatability to the stories of his war-torn country, but he deliberately translated *Othello* first because he imagined the play would relate and reflect the racialized experiences of Albanian immigrants.

Yet, *Othello* is a race play and its racialized language and themes easily transfer in translations. For this reason, the play forbids audiences from forgetting Othello's blackness by invoking imagery of "an old black ram" topping a "white ewe!" (1:1:97-88), or by describing Othello as "a Barbary horse" (1:1:110), and by repeatedly referring to him as black and/or Moor rather than Othello.¹⁵ Such racialized rhetoric is reflected in the Albanian translations, despite Noli's reassurance that "Othello had a black face, but was great, kindhearted and beautiful in spirit and in heart" (Noli 7). Noli admires Othello for being a self-made warrior, who is "brave, loyal, just, and naïve," and yet who must remain in Venice "a stranger and black" (Noli 6). Alfred Uçi, one of the premier Albanian Shakespeare critics influenced by Noli, refers to Othello as a "white-hearted" person whereas "Iago is white-skinned but his soul is black" (123). This is presented as a moral lesson, not a racial one. Blackness is confined to a symbolic role of sin that is manifested outwardly and assigned indiscriminately to the Moor. Although it is Iago, not Othello whom Noli labels as a "black demon" (166), the stigma of blackness is not overturned by Noli's interjection since it remains woven in language.

Othello's intrinsic racial themes are furthermore reinforced through the fundamentally racialized rhetoric of the Albanian language. For example, the

¹³ All English translations from Albanian are mine.

¹⁴ Kadija claims that "there was a political motivation behind every Shakespearean play either staged or translated" (38).

¹⁵ References to *Othello* are to the Arden Shakespeare, edited by E.A.J. Honigmann, with a new introduction by Ayanna Thompson (2016).

line “The Moor is of a free and open nature” (1:3:398) becomes “The Moor is by nature white-hearted” (Noli 44). The kindness and naivety of Othello’s nature in Albanian is understood through racial descriptors of whiteness. The slipperiness of the term Moor is equally difficult in its Albanian translation. Arap (moor) in Albanian is used as a “chromodermal signifier” (Smith 35) to derogatorily refer to Turks, Africans, and Gypsies—basically anyone who is non-white. There is of course the unmistakable proximity between Arap and Arab which invites the common, but misguided, conflation of Arab and Muslim. For instance, when Noli describes Othello as the black Arap (7), he is simultaneously emphasizing his blackness while also assimilating an ethnic and a religious identity into one. Thus, the Albanian Othello rhetorically embodies the racialized identity of a Turkish other, a black foreigner, and a Muslim man. All these associations are burdened unto one word which is then burdened unto a body.

In Albanian culture, blackness is a sign of malady, of being accursed. For instance, when Brabantio exclaims, “With the Moor, say’st thou?—Who would be a father?” (1:1:163), Noli translates it as: “With whom, the Moor, you said? Oh, I am black!” (Noli 22).¹⁶ Brabantio’s blackness here is not literal, it is symbolic. Because Brabantio considers fatherhood a burden, Noli uses the common expression “I am black” to indicate his fatherly misfortune. Similarly, Desdemona’s line “It is my wretched fortune” (4:2:129) is translated as “thus has been my black fortune” (Noli 139). This also serves as a pun that ties her “black” wretched fortune to her “black” wretched husband. Desdemona becomes “rhetorically black” (Hall 22) since her social and marital value has been blackened by her proximity to the Moor. It is precisely this “insistent association of black as a negative signifier of different cultural and religious practices with physiognomy and skin color,” Hall argues, that “pushes this language into the realm of racial discourse” (6). Both Brabantio and Desdemona’s translated exasperations describe a racialized understanding of their misfortunes. This racial emphasis is possible because the medieval associations of blackness with sin still thrive in the Albanian language and culture.

Noli does not provide footnotes for these references to race, ethnicity, or religion, nor does he justify his explicitly racializing translation choices. For example, the rhetoric in Desdemona’s “Willow” song is racialized by blackening the willow. Noli translates the line “Sing all a green willow (4:3:40) as “Weep, willow, o black willow” (146). These lyrics rely on the same cultural signification of blackness as ill-fated to indicate Desdemona’s misery as the one’s cited above. Thus, the willow is transformed into a symbol of racialized grief. While a “green willow” symbolizes the natural green color of a tree as well as jealousy “the green-eyed monster” (3:3:168), a “black willow”

¹⁶ Noli’s *Othello* translation uses page instead of line numbers.

symbolizes an unnatural grief that stems from Othello's blackness. Race is of course not limited to a binary of black and white, but in this Albanian context Othello's otherness is nonetheless colored by the country's race politics.

Race Rhetoric in Performance

In 1953, Noli's translation of *Othello* reached the Albanian stage under the direction of A. J. Ricko. It was "staged 40 times for a number of 23,747 spectators until 1964" at the National Albanian Theater (Qafleshi 110).¹⁷ It was incredibly popular and helped to establish the centrality of the theatre in the Stalinist-leaning Albanian government. While the production was poorly documented, Q.M.K.SH has released an image from the production featuring the actor Loro Kovaçi who appears to be performing as Othello in blackface makeup.¹⁸ In this Albanian performance of *Othello*, "race is colored," to borrow a phrase from Thompson (*Performing Race* 51), and in doing so, the performance represents blackness as performative. Because "the trope of blackness is applied to groups that need to be marked as other" (Hall 7), Othello's cosmetic blackness corporeally signifies physical, geographical, and religious difference. "The black African on the stage," Smith claims, "is visibly fixed in an intractable series of 'devil' stereotypes that require no further knowledge beyond the skin" (35). Ricko's 1953 production of *Othello* attempted to address race in Albania, but it did so by using the wrong tools. Rather than promoting racial unity, the use of racial prosthetics in his Albanian performance failed to distort the racial politics of *Othello* because blackface practices sustain stereotypes about the performativity of blackness. Thus, Othello's racial difference was highlighted, not erased.

Othello, Kadija notes, "was the first Shakespearean play to be staged and performed by the Albanian National Theatre" to combat racial discrimination by emphasizing "the theme of the 'other', alienation, loneliness, the life of a soldier, the discrimination of a coloured man"—all of which would

¹⁷ The text was later transformed by directors L. R. Kiçko, B. Levonja, and A. Pano whose "scissor approach" omitted several characters and cut off the second scene of act two (Qafleshi 51).

¹⁸ Qendra Mbarëkombëtare e Koleksionistëve Shqiptarë (International Center of Albanian Collectors): <https://www.qmksh.al/21-mars-1953-premiere-e-otellos-ne-teatrin-popullor/>. The collection includes a black and white image and one in color. It is unclear whether they are from the same production. The use of blackface is especially apparent in the color image. More photographic documentation of the blackface performance can be found on the National Theater's social media account.

hold special resonance for Albanian audiences (37).¹⁹ Regardless of the play's negative images of Turks, Othello's perceived foreignness in Venice and Cyprus was relatable to many Albanians who faced similar discrimination when migrating from the Balkans. Respectively, the northern Albanians, Romani, and Egyptians expressed their felt exclusion from Albania's mainstream socio-political culture just like Othello.

In Ricko's production, Othello is treated as the exceptional Turk, "a central black figure who appears to supersede the prevailing black stereotype" (qtd. in Smith 35), in order to show Albanians that regardless of his hue, the character is essentially Albanian and white. This notion is complicated given that in performance "Othello was a white man" (Callaghan 76). Any anxieties the audience might have had about the "black Turk" could be nullified simply by the removal of the black makeup. For this reason, Ian Smith argues that "the prosthetic black body" on stage only validates the "native whiteness" underneath (36). Relying on Othello's static whiteness beneath the surface as a means of promoting racial unity between Albanians of color and white Albanians is a colorblind approach that enforces whiteness as the norm. Thus, the privileged union of a predominantly white audience enables the production of the "white/right gaze" (Thompson, *Performing Race* 20) under which racialized bodies become constructed spectacles on the stage.

While the racialized rhetoric encoded in Noli's translation alludes primarily to racial attitudes against Turks, Ricko's 1953 *Othello* production also relied on the ethno-racial conflicts between Gypsy communities and Albanians. This relation is not strenuous given that the discrimination against Gypsies is in part due to their association with Turks. Moreover, the racial themes in *Othello* allow for the reflection of the ethno-racial tensions between white Albanians and Afro-Albanians,²⁰ a term I borrow from Mustafa Canka to refer to African Albanians of color, who are also affected by the racial representation of *Othello* in theater.

¹⁹ Othello's jealous nature also contributed to play's popularity among stereotypically jealous Albanian men. Albanian culture is heteronormative and still upholds patriarchal values; thereby, cuckoldry and betrayal are relatable causes for masculine anxiety. As Kadija asserts, "the betrayal of fathers holds particular weight in patriarchal Albanian families" since they maintain a strong patriarchal system (38). Desdemona's betrayal of her father would have struck a chord for Albanian fathers.

²⁰ Canka discloses that during the Mediterranean wars of the 19th century, many countries resorted to slavery to fill their fleets. Ulcincj, Montenegro, now located above Albania, kept slaves as prisoners for labor or for ransom. The "Afro-Albanian" slaves became free working citizens as they integrated into their communities (Canka).

Despite Ricko's production with an exceptional Othello who is black yet "white-hearted in nature" (Noli 44), there is no way to control or predict an audience's reaction to his racialized body because "power resides almost entirely with the [white Albanian] spectator" (Callaghan 77). To that end, the use of racial prosthetics is not in concert with a colorblind ideology; rather, their use exposes the lack of racial diversity among the cast and the audience. Unfortunately, this contributes to the continuous use of outmoded blackface practices in Albanian theater and television.²¹ Noli and Ricko have left their blackface mark on Albanian performance history.

Conclusion

In adopting western literature, specifically Shakespeare's canon, countries of non-European status like Albania, risk the appropriation of the racial ontologies that are engulfed within that imperial culture. Racism cannot be easily erased from western history because it "is built into Britishness, and Britishness is built on racism" (qtd. in Bancroft 39). Once that western ideology of racial difference has infiltrated the non-European or Balkan nations, then "Western European nations use evidence of racism in Central and Eastern Europe to 'orientalize' racism" (Bancroft 3). Racialized borders, Agnes Czajka notes, also separate Western from Eastern Europe by linking slavery with East Europeans (Slavs) (210). Thus, the West *others* racism and takes on a centralized identity of racelessness "by which racial thinking and its effects are made invisible" as if race exists anywhere but Europe (El-Tayeb xvii). Nonetheless, Albanians have aspired to the status of "European" and for inclusion in the European Union because of the enduring myth of the West. The West, Fatos Lubonja explains, was idealized in communist Albania, first as the "Promised Land," a utopia of sorts, and second, as the "Saviour," a singular source of benevolence and justice (131). This myth has been diluted but not destroyed. Consequently, Albanians' attitude toward racelessness seems derivative of the ideological value Europeans place on colorblindness—unable "to pinpoint a stable signification for race," Albanians "replicate the anxieties [their] society has about defining race" through colorblind practices (Thompson, *Colorblind Shakespeare* 8). Europe's colorblind approach to race oppresses legitimate racialized discourses and therefore stunts potential resolutions. Goldberg astutely comments: "Nonracialism squeez[es] out any possibility of anti-racism" (349). Albania's ethno-racial politics are situated within a larger European notion of racelessness that

²¹ Ohueri points to an example in the television comedy show *Portokali*, wherein a white Albanian actor impersonates an African football player using blackface and accented speech (5).

rationalizes racist practices like blackface, and Shakespeare can be found at center of it all.²²

When it comes to theatrical spectacles, Dymrna Callaghan distinguishes between two modes of racial representation: exhibition which is the “display of black people,” and mimesis which refers to “the simulation of negritude” (77). In the Albanian production of *Othello*, the racial prosthetics functioned as an exhibition of a Turkish identity that was nonetheless mimetic because it reproduced blackness as performative. Even by portraying Iago as internally black, Noli’s translation and Ricko’s production comply with and reinforce stereotypes of blackness. Although Noli’s sympathy for Othello intended to elicit a similar affinity from the audience as a means of mending a bridge between white and non-white Albanians, that sympathy did not translate onto the stage. Despite the spectacle of “the amiable Othello” (qtd. in *Othello* 56), Ricko’s blackface production rendered him a spectacle. Noli’s political agenda to combat racial discrimination through the theater was distorted by Ricko’s decision to employ blackface. Moreover, the choice to use a *race play* that disparages people of color to combat racial discrimination and promote racial unity seems contradictory at best. *Othello*’s inherent toxicity is particularly traceable and unavoidable in a homogeneous nation like Albania.²³

The existence of negative significations of blackness in Albanian language further complicates a blackened-up performance. It is uncertain whether Albanian performers are aware of the history of blackface in medieval and early modern Europe. But blackface performances of *Othello* do not and cannot so easily subvert the medieval correlation of black and evil like Noli intended. As Paul Gilroy’s states, “Any fool knows that real, grown-up governments cannot legislate the emotions of their populations” (xvi). A more desirable outcome is to invite a discourse that deliberates on the significance of race in performance for both actors and audiences rather than hoping to train audiences to not see race (Thompson, *Colorblind Shakespeare* 12). Reception theory can further demonstrate this point. For instance, Anat Gesser Edelburg evaluated “the effects of political performances on the opinions of their audiences” with a race-based questionnaire that they answered prior and after the show (Sauter 255). Willmar Sauter performs the same experiment as a means of testing the anti-Semitic effects of *The Merchant of Venice* on audiences. The results revealed that the play did in fact enhance and confirm stereotypes about Jews (257). I imagine that an extension of this essay would benefit from

²² Ayanna Thompson proposes that the name Shakespeare employs many “meanings, references, and ambiguities” and it is important to “capitalize on these multiplicities” (4). My use of the name Shakespeare in this essay references this multiplicity.

²³ While I don’t believe it is yet possible to do *Othello* “right” in Albania, its complexities create a necessary space for a discourse on race.

a similar form of reception research that investigates the reception of *Othello* in Albania. Beyond *Othello*, I propose instead that a bilingual and intracultural production of *Romeo and Juliet* performed by northern and southern Albanians, or white and Roma Albanians would render the stage a neutral space for reconciliation, and therefore combat racism by Albanizing Shakespeare in a way that *Othello* cannot.²⁴

Ricko's 1953 production was vastly successful, and the actors were highly praised for their performances. However, based on the lingering stereotypes about Turks and the existing racial division between Albanians of color and white Albanians, it is evident that *Othello* did not achieve its initial purpose on the Albanian stage. The print translations accompanied by Noli's introduction were also unsuccessful since they emphasized racial differences rhetorically, despite Noli's insistence of Othello's exceptional blackness. Ultimately, the translation failed to carry this message since Noli's commentary which glorified Othello was erased from the later 1977 reprints (Belluscio & Koleci 237). The only form of control the translator maintained over his readers was to pave how Albanians got to know Shakespeare, but even that can change.

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²⁴ Miki Manojlović's 2015 bilingual and intracultural production of *Romeo and Juliet* successfully confronted the ethnic conflict between Kosovo and Serbia as Kosovan Montagues and Serbian Capulets performed together on an x-shaped stage, making the performance itself an act of reconciliation.

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“Far more fair than black”: Othellos on the Chilean Stage¹

Abstract: This article reviews part of the stage history of Shakespeare’s *Othello* in Chile and, in particular, it focuses on two performances of the play: the first, in 1818, and the last one in 2012-2020. By comparing both productions, I aim to establish the exact date and theatrical context of the first Chilean staging of the Shakespearean tragedy using historical sources and English travellers’ records, as well as to explore how the representation of a Moor and of blackness onstage evolved both in its visual dimension — the choice of costumes and the use of blackface—, and in its racial connotations alongside deep social changes. During the nineteenth century *Othello* became one of the most popular plays in Chile, being performed eleven times in the period of 31 years, a success that also occurred in Spain between 1802 and 1833. The early development of Chilean theatre was very much influenced not only by the ideas of the Spaniards who arrived in the country, but also by the available Spanish translations of Shakespeare; therefore, I argue that the first performances of *Othello* as Other — different in origin and in skin colour — were characterised by an imitative style, since actors repeated onstage the biased image of Moors that Spaniards had brought to Chile. While the assessment of *Othello* and race is not new, this article contrasts in its scope, as I do not discuss the protagonist’s actual origin, but how the changes in Chilean social and cultural contexts can reshape and reconfigure the performance of blackness and turn it into a meaningful translation of the Shakespearean Moor that activates audiences’ awareness of racism and fears of miscegenation.

Keywords: Shakespeare, *Othello*, Chilean theatre, blackface, Moor, Other.

When Samuel Haigh (1795-1843), an English merchant, travelled to Chile for the first time between 1817 and 1819, besides visiting different places where he could appreciate a variety of landscapes and learn about the customs of the people, he had the opportunity to see the first Shakespearean staging that was produced in the country. The year was 1818 and the play was *Otelo, ó El Moro*

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de Venecia, an 1802 Spanish version by Teodoro de la Calle² based on the 1792 French edition of the tragedy by Jean-François Ducis (1733-1816³). Haigh was probably impressed with the performance; thus, he took notes about the event and expressed his critical opinion about it in his *Sketches of Buenos Ayres, Chile and Peru* (1831⁴): “At the same theatre [a temporary building in Las ramadas street (today Esmeralda) in Santiago] I likewise saw represented Shakespeare’s *Othello*, ‘done in Spanish,’ with nothing resembling the original except Othello’s black face, and the smothering of Desdemona” (269).

We do not know much about this British accounting clerk, nor do we have information about his knowledge of Shakespeare, or of Chilean theatre, yet, as William Edmundson recounts, “Haigh is an example of the several travelers-cum-businessmen who were attracted, and he added soldiering to his curriculum once he arrived in Chile. [He] was drawn to Chile in 1817 by the chance to make his fortune [...]” (84). In fact, Haigh left England and sailed from the port of Dover in June 1817 at the age of 22 in order to transport a shipment with merchandise, including weapons and tools, destined for the ports of Buenos Aires, Valparaíso, and El Callao⁵. He probably never imagined that his account would become crucial evidence not only to determine the date of the first Chilean representation of Shakespeare, but also to establish hitherto the first record we have in the country of an actor representing Othello with a black painted face.

Behind his opinion about Shakespeare’s play, Haigh reveals what he believes to be the essence of this tragedy: the dark skin of the protagonist and the final scene in which he murders his wife. But, why does the English traveller define the play by this external performance of blackness, which he considers as the only characteristic that is similar to the original play? Even though the fundamental aspects of *Othello* have been debated by a myriad of scholars,

² Teodoro de la Calle (Madrid, 1771-1833) wrote the first Spanish translation of this Shakespearean tragedy. He also translated *Macbeth* in 1803.

³ Ducis adapted Shakespeare’s works to French Neoclassical taste. He translated them into verse without knowing English, so he used the previous French translations by Pierre-Antoine de La Place (1707-1793) published in eight volumes in *Le Théâtre Anglois* between 1746 and 1749, and those by Pierre Le Tourneur (1737-1788). Despite the shortcomings of Ducis’s translations, Shakespeare’s plays in his versions were widely applauded: *Hamlet* (1760), *Roméo et Juliette* (1772), *Le roi Lear* (1783), *Macbeth* (1784), *Jean sans Terre* (a version of *King John*, 1791) and *Othello* (1792).

⁴ The chapters in which Haigh recounted his time in Chile were translated into Spanish by Alfredo Ovalle and Félix Nieto and published by the University Press in 1917 under the title: *Viaje a Chile durante la época de la Independencia*, p. 136.

⁵ Haigh made three trips to Chile: in 1817-18, then in 1820-21, and the last one in 1825. For more information on Samuel Haigh, see *Memoria chilena* website: <http://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-7672.html#presentacion>

Haigh’s appreciation is not far from the ideas of some modern critics, such as Karen Newman, who states that “In *Othello*, the black Moor and the fair Desdemona are united in a marriage which all the other characters view as unthinkable. Shakespeare uses their assumption to generate the plot itself [...]” (144); or Michael Neill who resorts to some engravings and illustrations of the play from the 1780s to the 1920s to examine the impact of seeing a wife murdered by her husband onstage, “but even more disturbing than the killing itself seems to have been the sight of the dead woman ‘lying in her bed’ — a phrase that echoes Emilia’s outrage: ‘My mistress here lies murdered in her bed’ (5.2.184)” (“Unproper Beds” 384); furthermore, Neill sees in “this display of death-in-marriage a gestic account of the play’s key meanings” (“Unproper Beds” 384). Some years later, Arthur L. Little, taking Newman’s and Neill’s perspectives, among others, summarises the essence of the play in the following terms: “The three crucial structural elements of Shakespeare’s play are Othello’s blackness, his marriage to the white Desdemona, and his killing of her” (306).

In this article, I aim to show that the racial ideas of blackness that circulated in early modern stagings of *Othello* in England, as well as the Spanish racism regarding Moors during the sixteenth century and after, were inherited and imitated in some of the colonies that the Spanish conquered, specifically in Chile, where Pedro de Valdivia arrived in 1540. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the theatre companies established in the country received translations of Shakespeare’s plays written by Spanish authors who mainly worked with French versions by Jean-François Ducis. The characteristics of the Chilean society at that time — particularly, its deep class differences — became fertile land where this amalgam of European cultures germinated and resulted in a racist approach towards all immigrants who did not come from Europe. Despite the country’s long-standing social mobility, the effects of globalisation, and the implementation of some positive social integration policies, this tendency is still present within the Chilean society. While most research on the techniques of racial impersonation such as blackface focus on the strategies used by playwrights and directors to perform blackness onstage, I will verify that most of the actors who have played Othello in Chile have followed the tradition of painting their faces black in order to activate audiences’ awareness of racism and fears of miscegenation in Chilean society.

Setting Dates: The First Chilean *Othello*

For a long time, Chilean historians have believed that the first performance of Shakespeare in Chile took place either in 1816, in 1822, or in 1824. In his *Histórica relación del teatro chileno*, Benjamín Morgado gives an account of a theatre company formed by amateurs and some professionals from Buenos

Aires who staged an *Antony and Cleopatra* that he attributes to Shakespeare (41). Both Nicolás Anrique and Alfonso Escudero explain that Casimiro Marco del Pont (1765-1819⁶) had ordered the construction of a theatre in a private house “located on Merced street, corner of Mosqueto, the house that now has number 509” (9 and 20 respectively) where this play was performed in 1816. However, Cristián Rossi Medina has pointed out that this piece was a version of *Marco Antonio and Cleopatra*, sometimes ascribed to Pedro Calderón de la Barca or, more likely, according to Eugenio Pereira Salas, a version by Francisco Leyva Ramírez de Arellano (363; Rossi Medina 12). This is clearly a mistake since, as Rossi adds, Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* had first been translated into Spanish between 1870-1871, so there was no available copy of the text in Spanish at that time. With respect to Calderón’s authorship, there is not enough evidence to prove that this work was written by the Spanish playwright⁷. I think that the aforementioned play corresponded to Leyva’s authorship, since besides Pereira Salas, at least two other historians — Mario Cánepa and Alfonso Escudero — attribute the play to him. They also date this staging back to the year 1816 (9 and 20, respectively). In his *Historia del teatro en Chile* (1974), Pereira Salas established the repertoire of Shakespearean plays staged in Chile from 1822 to 1849 and determined that *Othello* was the first performance that Chileans could see, but he was referring to the production of 1822, with Francisco Cáceres — native of Andalusia, Seville — playing the Moor’s role (116). He includes Haigh’s record as part of his evidence, but he confuses the date since the English entrepreneur was not in Chile during 1822. In his book on the social dimension of Chilean Theatre, Orlando Rodríguez suggests a different year for the first Shakespearean performance when he affirms that Luis Ambrosio Morante⁸ was the actor who “first presented a play

⁶ Casimiro Marcó del Pont (1765-1819) was the last Spanish governor of the country before the Independence.

⁷ The authorship of *La gran comedia de Marco Antonio y Cleopatra* is still not clear. It appears in a *suelta*, which according to McKnight, “designates a play issued as a separate unit rather than in volumes of *partes*”. For Bergman and Szmuk, *comedias sueltas* correspond to “a group of eighteenth-century editions in pamphlet form” (See William A. McKnight and Mabel B. Jones, *A Catalogue of Comedias Seltas in the Library of the University of North Carolina*, 1965, p. 6, and Hannah E. Bergman and Szilvia Szmuk, E., *A Catalogue of Comedias sueltas in the New York Public Library*, London: Grant and Cutler, 1980-1981, 2 vols., p. 7).

⁸ Luis Ambrosio Morante (1780 in Perú? – 1836), actor, dramatist, and theatre director. He plays an important role in the development of Chilean theatre between 1822 and 1936. He was hired by Domingo Arteaga to help complete the training that actors had received from Colonel Latorre. He introduced the use of adequate costumes and props for each play and each role, which greatly enriched the performances. See Julio Durán Cerda, “El teatro en las tareas revolucionarias de la independencia de Chile”, *Anales de la Universidad de Chile* 119. 4, year 118 (July, September 1960): 233-234.

by Shakespeare in Chile. It was *Hamlet*, in 1824” (14; Rossi Medina 13⁹). However, this is another error because we know that Cáceres had already played *Othello* in 1822, and probably in 1818 too.

Despite the contradictions that I have found among these Chilean scholars, there are two historical events that confirm the validity of the date recorded by Haigh, thus contribute to clarify the matter. After the Battle of Maipú¹⁰ on April 5, 1818, and the establishment of a separatist government, King Fernando VII, ordered the organization of a maritime expedition that would carry reinforcements to the royalist army that remained in the southern zone of Chile. On 28 October of that same year, “The [Chilean] squadron sailed for Talcahuano, and had the fortune to meet with the Spanish frigate María Isabel, which had brought the convoy from Spain” (Haigh 263). After some manoeuvres, the Spanish were defeated, and the vessel was added to the Chilean squadron and renamed “O’Higgins” in honour of the Chilean revolutionary leader and first head of state (Supreme Director) of the country at that time.

The second event is related precisely with Bernardo O’Higgins (1778-1842). Haigh reports that “[o]n November [28, 1818], Lord and Lady Cochrane arrived in the *Rose*, Captain Illingsworth; his lordship had been invited by Irrizarri, when in England, to take the command of the Chilean navy” (265). The English officer arrived in Valparaíso (Edmundson 68), but some days later travelled to Santiago where he was invited by O’Higgins to a welcome reception. Despite the attacks of some members of the Chilean clergy, who considered theatrical spectacles immoral, the national leader had a theatre company formed in order to receive Cochrane officially (Eyzaguirre 252; Campbell 14; Rossi Medina 14-16).

According to Margaret Campbell,

O’Higgins appointed one of his aides-de-camp, Lieutenant Colonel Domingo Arteaga, to organize a company of players. Arteaga was at the time in charge of a contingent of Spanish prisoners. He was authorized to select from his prisoners those he could use in the enterprise as actors or assistants. The men were selected and put under a Spanish colonel named Latorre, one of the prisoners from the battle of Maipú. All the actors were Spanish except two, Pérez and Hevia, who were Chilean. The main actor was Francisco Cáceres, originally from Sevilla¹¹. The actresses were Chilean. (14)

The information regarding the Arteaga company directed by Latorre is extremely valuable because, “in connection with the troupe, the first permanent

⁹ All translations of the original quotes in Spanish are mine, unless otherwise specified.

¹⁰ The Battle of Maipú, also known as the Battle of Maipo, was a decisive armed confrontation within the context of the Chilean War of Independence.

¹¹ Written in Spanish in the original.

theatre in Chile was constructed and national drama made its appearance” (Campbell 14; the event is also mentioned in Anrique 12; Amunátegui, *Las primeras representaciones* 73-74; Durán 233; Cánepa 46-47; Pereira Salas 106; Bravo Elizondo 7; Pradenas 141; Rossi Medina 13). When the company was formed in 1818, they staged Shakespeare’s *Othello* in an old Jesuit house in Santiago where a provisional national theatre was created. It was located in Esmeralda street, formerly called Las ramadas, but in 1919 the group had to move and began to occupy some rooms of the Instituto Nacional in Catedral street. Later, in August of the same year, Arteaga built a wooden playhouse in the house of the Gumucio family, which was located on Compañía street, corner of Plazuela O’Higgins. This theatre ran until 1826 (Anrique 16-17). If Haigh reported having seen the tragedy of the Moor, it must have been in the temporary playhouse improvised in Esmeralda/Las ramadas street in 1818 because, as I have stated, none of the dates of his three trips to Chile (see note 6) coincide with the 1822 performance of the play that Pereira Salas proposes (116). Enrique Bunster (1912-1976), Chilean playwright, novelist, and journalist, confirms the location of the place and the occasion of the performance in one of his chronicles years after the English witness had left Chile and died¹². The inaccuracy that I have found in some of the historical works researched regarding dates, names of performance spaces, and identification of the actors interpreting one character or another, arise, in part, because Arteaga set up many theatres before opening the definitive national playhouse. As a consequence, many historians refer equally to all of these places as “Teatro Arteaga”.

Haigh describes some details of the theatre he visited and makes general comments about the audience’s conduct and the costumes the actors wore that day:

The whole arrangement was very good, and although the house was constructed of wood with beams strengthened and fastened together by ropes of hides, yet the place was strong and commodious. [...] The behavior of the audience was always very quiet and orderly, but smoking cigars was allowed between the

¹² Enrique Bunster Tagle (1912-1976): In 1977, he published a very peculiar chronicle about Diego Portales (1793-1837), minister of state and prominent political figure in the country during the government of José Joaquín Prieto (1786-1854). He refers to the politician’s relationships with women for whom he felt deeply attracted, thus he usually invited them for his own solace and that of his friends: “Memorable in the Santiago tradition is the Philharmonic, a kind of private cabaret set up by Don Diego and his intimates, and maintained at his expense, to have fun behind closed doors. It operated on Las ramadas street (today Esmeralda), near the famous open-air theatre where Spanish prisoners performed *Othello* in honour of Lord Cochrane” (84). See <http://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-3358.html>

acts; for the only roof to the house was the spangled vault of heaven, than which nothing could be better in so benign a climate, where the skies are cloudless and the moon clear and bright. (266-67)

Despite the fact that Haigh was not a historian, it can be said that he wrote with a deep historical sense, since his notes provide relevant information from the early development of theatre in Chile. In 1822, Mary Graham (1785-1842¹³), another English traveller-writer, arrived in the country during the closing stages of the War of Independence (Edmundson 85). She got acquainted with some local aristocratic families, as well as with the relatives of Bernardo O’Higgins; in particular, his sister Rosa (Graham 216). During her stay, she observed the public and private life of the emerging nineteenth-century Chilean society, which she described in her *Journal of a Residence in Chile during the Year 1822*, published in 1824. In those pages, Graham shares her experience at the theatre on the occasion of the feast of Saint Rose on August 30, 1822:

On the one side of the square, between the palace of the Consulate and the Jesuits’ church, a gate in a low wall admitted us to a square, in which there is a building that reminded me of a provisional temporary theatre; but the earthquakes of Chile apologise for any external meanness of building but too satisfactorily: the interior is far from contemptible; I have seen much worse in Paris. The stage is deep, the scenery very good, but the proscenium mean. (217)

She is probably referring to the “third” Teatro Arteaga that was opened for the first time in 1820. This playhouse was located in the square contiguous to the church run by the Company of Jesus, which explains the name of the street: Compañía. Graham did not see a Shakespearean play there¹⁴, but she could realise that “[t]he theatre is a very favourite amusement here, and most of the boxes are taken by the year, so that it was by favour only that I obtained one to-night” (218).

¹³ English traveller and writer who was born on July 19, 1785 in Papcastle, Cockermouth, north east England. She married English Royal Navy Captain Thomas Graham. In 1822, they both undertook a journey to South America, but he died before they arrived. Her *Journal of a Residence in Chile, During the Year 1822. And a Voyage from Chile to Brazil in 1823* shows her view of Chile and other Latin American countries. See <http://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-3603.html#presentacion>

¹⁴ The plays were *King Ninus the Second* followed by a farce, *The Madmen of Seville*.

A Spanish-Chilean Moor

In the case of Haigh's record of *Othello's* performance, besides including his first impressions of the tragedy, as I mentioned at the beginning of this article, and providing the brief description of the playing space, the English traveller does not reveal the name of the member of the company who starred in the 1818 production. He just adds that the main performers at that temporary theatre were "European Spaniards who were taken prisoners at Maypo" (266), a fact that Campbell records when she refers to the beginning of Latorre's troupe (14). According to Amunátegui, the main actor of that company was Francisco Cáceres "who had enlisted in the Spanish army, and after having fought in the Peninsula, was sent to the garrison of Valdivia [Chile], where he reached the rank of sergeant, at the times when Lord Cochrane attacked the plaza in February 1820" ("Las primeras representaciones" 75). In a previous text, from 1872, the same historian states that Cáceres "made its first appearance on the scene on August 20, 1820, when the theatre of the Plazuela de la Compañía [today O'Higgins] was opened" (Amunátegui, "El establecimiento" 496). We face another historical inconsistency here, since Nathanael Yañez Silva claims that the Spanish actor "premiered at the Arteaga theatre (built in Santiago by Bernardo O'Higgins on Las ramadas street in front of the Puente de Palo, at the end of 1818) Shakespeare's *Othello*" (16-20); hence, it seems plausible that Cáceres could have also embodied the first Chilean Othello. The only visual record we have of him playing this role is a watercolour¹⁵ art print with the figure of "an actor characterized as the 'Moor of Venice', in a scene from act IV of *Othello*" (Castagnino 89). Even though the Chilean historian Pereira Salas reproduces this illustration in his book, he acknowledges its Argentinian source (see Fig. 1 caption).

We do not know the exact date of the performance of *Othello* that is shown in this watercolour sketch, yet the artist, Charles C. Wood Taylor (1792-1856¹⁶), must have painted it after 1919 when he arrived in Valparaíso, Chile, because he did not stay long in the country that year, but continued on board the

¹⁵ The reproduction of Wood's watercolour in Castagnino's book is in black and white. We do not know whether the original is a colour drawing.

¹⁶ Charles Chatworthy Wood Taylor was a painter, engineer, mariner, and military officer. Ricardo Bindis Fuller, in his study of *Chilean painting* (1984), describes him as "the first artist of importance among the Europeans in Chile". He was born in Liverpool in 1792, and due to certain difficulties with his taxes he emigrated to the United States in 1817. He went to work in Boston as a landscape painter, and later he was contracted by the American government to join a scientific expedition as an artist (Edmundson 95). He designed the Coat of arms of Chile, which was adopted by the government in 1834.



Fig. 1 (H2-25): “Francisco Cáceres in *Otelo*. Watercolour by Charles C. Wood in Raúl Castagnino, *El teatro en Buenos Aires en la época de Rosas*. Buenos Aires, 1944” (Pereira 95). This is a collaboration of the Research and Archives Programme of the Theatrical Scene, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. The original is preserved in the Manuscripts section at the National Library of Buenos Aires (Castagnino 89). <http://www.chileescena.cl/index.php?seccion=busqueda&accion=buscar&busqueda=Otelo>

frigate *Macedonia* (or *Caledonia*) on his way to Callao (Perú), and was back in Chile in mid-1820 (Edmundson 95-96). Therefore, we can assert with some certainty that the image of Francisco Cáceres corresponds to his 1822 staging of *Otelo, ó El Moro de Venecia*, which took place in Santiago, Chile, possibly in the wooden playhouse that Arteaga put up in the Plazuela de la Compañía (today O'Higgins) that was opened in 1820 (Amunátegui, "El establecimiento" 484; Escudero 21). Because he was one of the first members of Latorre's company (Amunátegui, *Las primeras representaciones* 74), it is likely that he also performed *Othello* in the first Chilean staging of 1818, as I suggested before. According to Amunátegui, in 1824 he worked in some performances in the city of La Serena, and after staying in Santiago for a while, "in 1825 went to practise his art in Buenos Aires" (*Las primeras representaciones* 76; also in Durán 234). In 1828, Cáceres returned to Chile and, after some other trips, he died in Valparaíso in 1836.

When Samuel Haigh saw the first staging of the Chilean *Othello*, he did not make any comments about the actor's acting style, although the position of his body inclined to one side, as seen in the watercolour, and the movement of the arms suggest a quite melodramatic style. Campbell claims that Cáceres was the public's favourite (16), yet despite being handsome and having "an excellent voice, [...] he was completely lacking in education" (Campbell 16), a fact that Amunátegui sharply criticises, as he considers that the Spanish actor, indeed, had "a vigorous and silvery voice, but somewhat monotonous" ("El establecimiento" 496). However, what powerfully caught Haigh's attention above all other things was *Othello's* black painted face. Certainly, the English traveller did observe the actor's blackness, and he also reported seeing others dressed in costly garments: "The costume of the actors was preserved much better than could have been expected, and some of them were even costly" (266). Even though Haigh is referring to the actors in general, his comment on the quality of the costumes may well be applied to Cáceres's outfit, as seen in Wood's sketch.

Just like when early modern Londoners saw an actor representing a Moor onstage, the Spanish actor's clothing was foreign for the Chilean audience. At the time *Othello* was staged in London, between 1601-1602 according to recent investigations (Honigmann, Introduction 1-2, and Appendix 1, 344-367; Neill, Appendix A, 399-404), or traditionally in 1603 or 1604, at least two printed sources were available to explore Moorish fashion and customs, besides the observation of Moors who were living in London and visitors who came from abroad, being the most well-known, Ab ed-Quahed ben Messaoud, the Moroccan Ambassador who visited the English capital between 1600 and 1601 with a delegation of sixteen other people (Harris 91; Mirabella 106-107). Although most Elizabethans were fascinated by these foreigners, others, including Queen Elizabeth I, showed their anxiety with

respect to the “excessive” African population, most of whom were servants or slaves. In an open letter by Elizabeth I to the Mayor of London, dated on 11 July 1596, she declares: “Her Ma[jes]tie understanding that there are of late divers Blackmoores brought into the Realme, of which kinde of people there are all ready here to manie [...]. Her Ma[jesty]’s pleasure therefore ys, that those kinde of people should be sent forthe of the lande” (TNA, PC 2/21 f.304). By the year 1600, John Pory’s translation of Johannes Leo Africanus’ *A Geographical History of Africa* (1526¹⁷) was available in England, in addition to the rich collection of woodcuts representing a great variety of visitors to Venice produced by Cesare Vecellio (c. 1521-1601)¹⁸, a work in which he pairs customs with geography, thus with race. The woodcuts Vecellio shows include a number of Moors from North Africa and the sub-Saharan region, as for example, a noble Moor of Cairo (423v), a wealthy Moor (429v), a Moor of Barbaria (431v), and a black Moor (438v)¹⁹. By displaying this variety, the artist suggests that the nature of a Moor is quite ambiguous, since regardless of some similarities in the figures’ elaborated attire, the woodcuts reveal that each of them has a different skin colour: white, olive, brown, and black. In Kim F. Hall’s words, the notion of a Moor was “multifaceted” (359), and at times, “of complex indeterminacy that generally marks geographic and religious difference in ways that make the Moor a profound Other to Christian Europe. While sharing the common connotations of ‘alien’ or ‘foreigner,’ [...w]ith these overlapping registers of race, region, and religion, the term’s links to the darker-skinned peoples of Africa can therefore be quite confusing” (359). In the same line, Emily Bartels argues that the chromatic variety of Moors, as well as the different regions where they came from, had an impact on their Renaissance portrayal, which was “vague, varied, inconsistent, and contradictory” (434). Indeed, Vecellio’s images constitute a visual evidence of what Bartels describes in words: “the term ‘Moor’ was used interchangeably with such similarly ambiguous terms as ‘African,’ ‘Ethiopian,’ ‘Negro,’ and even ‘Indian’ to designate a figure from different parts or the whole of Africa (or beyond) who was either black or Moslem, neither, or both” (434).

¹⁷ “The work was originally published in Rome in 1526 at the wish of Pope Leo X, who baptized Africanus, and changed his name” (Mirabella 109). Eldred Jones argues that it is “certain that Robert Greene and Ben Jonson among the playwrights knew the book. It is hardly likely that they would have been the only two who did. There is some evidence to support the belief that Shakespeare and Webster also knew it” (21).

¹⁸ Cesare Vecellio, *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutto il mondo; di nuovo accresciuti di molte figure. Vestitus antiquorum recentiorumque totius orbis, per S. Gratilianum Latine declarati*. Venetia: Gio. Bernardo Sessa, 1598. The work has been translated and edited quite recently by Margaret F. Rosenthal and Ann Rosalind Jones, *The Clothing of the Renaissance World* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008).

¹⁹ See <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/16th-century-costume-guide>

If we compare Wood's depiction of a Moor to Vecellio's images, we find many elements in common, which corresponded to universal and conventional stereotypes of Moorish people that were transmitted on stage and page, as well as in art during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. To an extent, the Italian engraver visually shows the myriad ways in which Europeans conceived Moors who usually wore a *djellaba*, which included a baggy hood called a *qob* that comes to a point at the back. Wealthy Moors from Morocco wore long robes, and nearly all men and most women wore *balghas* — soft leather slippers with no heel. Considering these visual references helps positing that the drawing of the English artist settled in Chile shows Francisco Cáceres dressed as a real Moor, with turban, sash, long breeches, and slippers. By observing his clothes, we can realise that the character he represents has a high social status, yet what is more relevant in terms of racial issues is that Cáceres was a Spanish white actor who had emigrated to Chile and he was playing the role of a Moor — who had been displaced and dislocated from Venice — in a country where African blacks and Moors represented a small percentage of the population at that time²⁰. These different levels of impersonation of a theatrical character, as I suggest, go beyond the idea of “double consciousness on the audience's part, a recognition that the actor underneath the blackened skin is actually white” (98) proposed by Virginia Mason Vaughan, based on ideas from Eric Lott²¹ and Ian Smith²², who conclude that the verisimilitude of blackface onstage stems both from the mimetic conviction that the performance is real, and, at the same time, from pure illusion enabled by means of prosthetics (Thompson 100, n.13), or what Dymyna Callaghan calls “cosmetic artifice” (83). According to the latter, the “simulation of negritude” (77) or mimesis “entails an imitation of otherness” (77). Even though, “Othello's black face is crucial to an understanding of how he was read and understood on the stage”

²⁰ Once independence was achieved, the Chilean state made its first attempts to find out the number of inhabitants of the country. Juan Egaña carried out the first official census in 1813, taking into account preliminary data obtained during Jáuregui's government in 1778, which determined that the population of the territory reached 259.646 people (190.000 whites, 20.000 *mestizos*, 22.000 indians and 25.000 blacks). Despite the inaccuracy of the 1813 census, it provides a glimpse of the Chilean demography. By that year, the country had 1.103.036 inhabitants, of whom 97.786 lived in Santiago. The majority were Spanish and European foreigners, closely followed by Spanish Americans: 546 were classified as indians, 554 as *mestizos*, and 172 as mulattos. Blacks were divided into 21 men and 34 women, while only one man was registered as Asian or Canary Spanish and African.

²¹ See Eric Lott, *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*. Foreword by Greil Marcus. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

²² See Ian Smith, “White Skin, Black Masks: Racial Cross-Dressing on the Early Modern Stage.” *Renaissance Drama*, vol. 32 (2003): 33-67.

(120), as Bella Mirabella argues, his attire is also relevant to onstage semiotics and the mimesis of race. As she contends, Shakespeare signals the importance of clothing from the beginning of the tragedy, and in so doing, he confirms what Polonius had already advised to Laertes in *Hamlet*, that “apparel oft proclaims the man” (1.3.72²³); that is, a person’s dress reveals his true self. Othello’s attire — the actor’s costume — might show that “he is foreign-born, but it is the clothing and his skin colour working in concert with one another that reveal a fuller and more complete understanding of the character” (Mirabella 120-121).

Just as it is almost impossible to recapture how the impersonation of the first English *Othello* by Richard Burbage was exactly like (Vaughan 93, 97²⁴), we will never be able to find out what Cáceres’s black face looked like, nor whether his blackness was achieved by scrubbing a cork with soot over his face or by smearing a coat of dark stain and greasy black make-up, yet the “Moor [is seen as] an impersonation, sporadically reminding the audience that the actor’s blackness is a façade” (Vaughan 94-95). However, when he impersonated Othello, he prompted the Chilean audience to conjure up in their imagination many races at the same time — Spanish, Chilean, Black, Moorish — which, I think, were intertwined in two shared notions: difference and otherness. According to Vaughan,

[w]hen it was originally written, *Othello* was not racist in our contemporary sense because ‘race’ was not a fully developed mode of thought for early modern Englishmen. It did, however, embody stereotypes about black people that were circulating in the culture at that time. And as *Othello* has been reenacted again and again over the years, its text has accumulated racial resonances like barnacles attach to a ship. (105)

By representing the Other onstage, Cáceres imitated the Spanish stereotype of a Moor that was introduced in Chile by the Spanish conquerors and whose racist connotations were reflected both in his skin colour, as well as in his clothes and behaviour. While Wood’s watercolour of the Chilean Othello clearly

²³ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*. Arden Second Series. Ed. Harold Jenkins. London: Thomson Learning, 2005.

²⁴ Richard Burbage (1568-1619) was probably the first man to play *Othello*. It is likely that he played the part wearing black make-up and a wig made of black lamb’s wool (See Gabriel Egan, “Burbage, Richard”. *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Michael Dobson and Stanley Wells. 2nd ed. Oxford University Press, 48). Vaughan argues that “there is no reason to doubt that [...] Burbage wore blackface for the role. He was a painter as well as an actor, and [...] was sensitive to visual effects” (93). Ayanna Thompson contends that Othello “was originally created for, and performed by, the white Renaissance actor Richard Burbage. [...] the part and the play were not written for black or even dark-skinned actors. Instead, Othello was a white man in blackface makeup (97).

reflects that type, Vecellio's woodcuts display the variety of Moors that he met in the streets of Venice, but also the ones that Elizabethans could see in London. As N. I. Matar argues, the presence of Moors in England during the seventeenth century was not limited to "dramatic types who existed only on the London stage, or as characters (and engravings) in popular travelogues about the distant domains of Islam" (63). Eldred Jones sheds light on this point in his seminal study on Africans in English Renaissance drama when he explains that, "[a]part from these stage types, popular notions of Africans were circulating widely in the form of books both scholarly and popular, and in the gossip of sailors, traders, and slavers who were now sailing to Africa in ever increasing numbers" (87). Compared to other immigrants, Turkish and Moorish Muslims arrived in England in higher numbers, so much so that they were a continuous presence; nevertheless, the fact that Londoners met Moors in the streets or saw them represented onstage, does not mean that they considered these people as their equals. The English approach to them was contradictory; thus "[they] were traded and feasted with, admired and feared, understood and misunderstood, gaoled and tried and hanged [...]" (Matar 81).

If this occurred in early modern England, the religious and racial prejudice against the Moors reached very high degrees in Spain. After the Moors were expelled by the edict of King Philip III of September 22, 1609, Miguel Herrero García argues that "literature took charge of perpetuating a type of Moorish to [the Spaniards'] liking and convenience" (563). This type was fed by racial prejudice with respect to their religion and rituals, to their allegedly social and political crimes, and to their servile and despicable offices (Herrero García 575). Spaniards used the word *Moro* generically, yet they classified Muslim people into two families: one of Turks and the other of Moors; "the first represented the aristocracy with respect to the second" (Herrero García 535). Undoubtedly, the Moors' rejection of Catholic religion became one of the key factors for their expulsion from the Iberian lands. They were considered a threat to Catholic faith in the eyes of the Spaniards who viewed them as superstitious, dishonest, and "branded [them] as rude in food and clothing; as lustful and given to sorcery" (Herrero García 547). Regardless of whether this conception of Moors was adjusted to reality or not, this was the vision that Spaniards brought to Chile.

In her study about the Moors who came to the Pacific Ocean coasts, Lucila Iglesias points out that "[t]he image of the Moor in America would seem to respond more to the transfer of a typology that worked in Spain, and that in the Indies would be effective in pointing out a 'prototypical' enemy of Catholic dogma" (6). Along these lines, the "blood purity" statutes that had been officially created to guarantee the integrity of the Catholic faith by restricting access to political and ecclesiastical positions for converts, either Muslims or Jews, ended up becoming a mechanism of social segregation and creating

a socio-political order based on blood (Iglesias 6). Moreover, Iglesias claims that “in America, this framework of senses associated with the Muslim migrated with the Spaniards and can be found in written documents of different origins, both ecclesiastical and legal [...]” (8).

Purity of blood and skin colour became core ideas in the definition of the Chilean race since early times. Luis Pradenas claims that during the colonial period — between 1598 and 1810 — eight years before the first Chilean *Othello* was staged, there existed a rigid categorisation of individuals, “according to the preponderance of their ethnic features, within a spectrum of racial colors, displayed in a pyramid of social regulation common in colonial Latin America” (73²⁵). In his study, *El africano en el reino de Chile*, Gonzalo Vial claims that during the eighteenth century, “the pure African was inexorably absorbed by the castes or mixed races. [...] In other words, mulattos tripled Africans themselves” (47), and on “the eve of Independence, in 1810, of the 800.000 inhabitants that Chile had, 12.000 were of recognized African origin” (Mellafe²⁶ qtd. in Vidal 4). Neither the studies already mentioned, nor the first official census conducted in the country in 1813 distinguished different races within the black group²⁷. Chileans at that time, and at present, used the word Moor synonymously to refer to different peoples, such as Iberian Moors, North Africans or Turks. However, as I have suggested before, when Francisco Cáceres played the leading role in *Othello* in 1818, he was imitating an inherited Spanish prototype of the Moor of Venice. He was repeating a literary and visual formula that, more than emphasising his racial origin or skin colour, was reinforcing his alterity. In other words, the 1818 Chilean Othello was built on the basis of otherness, but not just due to his different race, costume, and made-up black face, but because the character pointed to the fear and dangers of miscegenation, since the results of it could be monstrous; it could mean becoming the Other, changing one’s skin colour; thus, one’s identity and social status.

Michael Neill refers to the construction of human difference in *Othello* when he cogently argues that in early modern England “the hybrid was always liable to be construed as prodigious or monstrous” (“Mulattos” 362); furthermore, the critic points out that Iago “successfully essentializes or ‘racializes’ Othello’s difference” (“Mulattos” 362), and explains that the villain

²⁵ Pradenas describes the different Chilean peoples in a hierarchical way according to “blood cleansing”: Europeans and “Criollos”, children of Europeans born in America. Then, “Indians” and “Morenos”, African slaves, followed by “Mestizos”. Other denominations complement the range of this “pigmentocracy”: The Mulattos (73-74).

²⁶ Rolando Mellafe. *La introducción de la esclavitud negra en Chile. Tráfico y rutas*. Valparaíso: Ediciones Universitarias de Valparaíso, 1979, p. 155. The original edition was printed in Santiago by Universidad de Chile in 1959.

²⁷ The Spanish conqueror, Diego de Almagro, arrived in Chile in March 1536 with 240 Spaniards, 1,500 indigenous people and 150 black slaves (Vidal 3).

considers that to be a Moor is equivalent to becoming “an erring Barbarian” (1.3.356²⁸); that is, “a fundamentally dislocated creature” (“Mulattos” 363). As I have argued before, dislocation is present in different levels in the performance of the first Chilean *Othello*: Cáceres is an immigrant impersonating another immigrant; he is a foreigner who embodies another foreigner.

I think that Neill and Vaughan are right when they argue that when *Othello* was originally written, it was not racist in our strict contemporary sense (Vaughan 105), but I find this statement quite problematic, since despite the fact that Othello’s part was not written for a black man, from the very first performances of the tragedy the actors impersonating the protagonist resorted to blackface and became Other onstage (see footnote 25). Elizabethans did not know Othello’s character as a result of reading the play, but after seeing the actor playing the Moor; thus, the performance of blackness on stage enabled racial thinking, as it did in Chilean stagings in the 1800s and at present.

Margo Hendricks brilliantly analyses the variety of approaches regarding racial issues in Shakespeare’s *Othello* in her introductory chapter to the volume on *Shakespeare and Race*, in which she studies the “epistemology of race in the period” (1) when the play was performed. Like Hendricks and Vaughan, Loomba explains that the usage that Shakespeare made of the concept of race — barely eighteen times within all his works — “often suggests meanings not usually associated with the term ‘race’ today” (22); he used other words “to convey differences of religion, ethnicity, nationality, and colour” (22). This fact reinforces the idea that the playwright did not communicate racial topics only through words, but mainly when the scripts were performed, when words were put into action and otherness became much more palpable by means of props and makeup. In fact, Karim-Cooper argues that cosmetics in *Othello* are racialised: “Othello’s darkness is the key issue and the actor’s painted black face is the material signifier that brings this issue literally to the forefront” (168). Undoubtedly, one thing is to read the word “black”, and another is to see the blackfaced actor materialise that colour onstage. Thompson also analyses the semiotic significance of race in performance to conclude that “[i]t is an understanding about if and how an actor’s race is endowed with any meaning within a performance — whether realistic, symbolic, or otherwise. It explains how an audience interprets the meaning of an actor’s race within the larger scope of the theatrical visit” (99). In line with the ideas of Karim-Cooper and Loomba, I think that when *Othello* is performed in blackface today, the character the actor represents is almost inseparable from his racist past because his blackness is tinged with historical, social, moral, ideological, and often political overtones.

²⁸ Unless otherwise stated, all references to *Othello* are from *The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series* (2006), edited by A. J. Honigmann.

Blackness on Page and Stage

A basic Boolean search in the *Concordance of Shakespeare's Complete Works* website²⁹ shows that while the term “Moor” appears forty-three (43) times in *Othello*, “black” as a noun, and its comparative and superlative forms, is recorded eight (8) times in the first usage, and only once in each of the last two cases. Several lines in Shakespeare’s tragedy attest to the Moor’s blackness: Iago calls Othello “an old black ram” (1.1.87) and offers “a stoup of wine” (2.3.27) “to the health of black Othello” (2.3.29). The protagonist also acknowledges his blackness: “Haply, for I am black / And have not those soft parts of conversation / That chamberers have [...]” (3.3.267-269); and when he suspects of Desdemona’s chastity: “Her name, that was as fresh/ As Dian’s visage, is now begrimed and black / As mine own face” (3.3.389-391), or when he metaphorically announces that he will seek revenge: “All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven. / ’Tis gone. / Arise, black vengeance, from thy hollow cell!” (3.3.448-450). These are just some examples of Othello’s literal or linguistic blackness; evidently, there are other expressions within the script that signal Othello’s black countenance, but my point is that blackness (in contrast to pure whiteness) is embedded in Shakespeare’s text, regardless of whether different directors and actors decide to face racist dilemmas or not in their productions of the play. In other words, and following Hendricks’s reading of *Othello*, “[t]o pose this and other questions about the racial implications of any early modern text is also to inquire into how audiences (then and now) might have construed and recognized the concept of race and its linguistic inflections” (20). In other words, the performance of blackness then and now — its visual dimension — could either enhance or deconstruct racial connotations embedded in the text, since playgoers may incorporate their own ideas of blackness when interpreting the play.

Haigh was probably right in his critical appraisal of the 1818 performance of *Otelo, ó El Moro de Venecia* when he highlighted the actor’s dark skin colour. In fact, De la Calle’s Spanish translation offers very few literal similarities to Shakespeare’s script regarding textual blackness, as the term “black” appears once as a feminine singular adjective, and twice as a plural adjective, both in feminine and masculine gender. In the three occurrences, the word is not applied to Othello, but to Iago (called Pésaro) who confesses his “negra furia” (black rage, 2.6, 12³⁰), and also his “negras tramas” (black plots,

²⁹ <https://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/concordance/findform.php> [accessed 29 March 2020].

³⁰ Unless otherwise stated, all references are from: *Otelo, ó El Moro de Venecia. Tragedia en cinco actos*. Trans. Teodoro de la Calle. Madrid: Imprenta de Sancha, 1802. The Spanish translation does not indicate line/verse numbers, so I include act and scene numbers, and page number after the comma. I have left punctuation marks as they are in the original, despite grammatical mistakes.

5.6, 28). Later it is used to refer to a place: “negros y oscuros calabozos” (black and dark dungeons, 5.2, 25). The word “Moor” appears four (4) times in the Spanish translation. Othello calls himself Moor, sometimes as a negative appellative, like “Moro despreciado” (Despised Moor, 1.7, 6); however, he usually associates his Moorishness with good qualities. The following examples illustrate this:

Llámanme el Moro; y para mi nombre lejos de vituperio es un aplauso [...]. (1.5, 3)	They call me the Moor; and for my name far from insult, it is applause [...]. ³¹
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In the same first act, but two scenes later, when Othello is speaking to the Duke, he expresses how he wishes to be remembered:

Quiero que digan los futuros siglos al oír mis victorias admirados: ‘Cuando Venecia intrépida aspiraba de los mares al cetro soberano con sus muchas escuadras poderosas, Edelmira vivía... y a su lado el Moro Otelo, célebre guerrero, más célebre se hizo...este Africano y la adoraba...su frente victoriosa supo hermohear con sus triumfantes lauros.	I want future centuries to tell upon hearing my admired victories: ‘When Venice intrepid aspired from the seas to the sovereign sceptre with its many powerful fleets, Edelmira lived ... and by her side Othello, the Moor, famous warrior, became more famous ... this African, and adored her ... his victorious forehead he knew how to embellish with his/ triumphant victories.
(1.7, 6)	

Nevertheless, I think that the most interesting speech in terms of racial issues occurs when Brabantio (called Odalberto) questions the way in which Othello has won Desdemona’s (called Edelmira) heart, and the Moor defends himself by arguing that neither his origin, nor his face colour take away the merit of his proven conduct:

Si a mi elección, señor, hubiera estado, en Venecia naciera... no en la Libia; y no penséis que el hado tan contrario puso mi cuna entre sangrientas fieras: es un baldón el nombre de Africano?... El color de mi rostro me ha impedido el probar el esfuerzo de mi brazo?... (1.5, 3)	If at my choice, sir, it had been, that in Venice I was born ... not in Libya; and do not think that such opposite fate put my cradle between bloody beasts: Is the name of African an affront?... Has the colour of my face prevented me to prove the effort of my arm?...
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³¹ All translations of the play from Spanish into English are mine.

When Pereira Salas referred to Haigh’s experience during the performance of *Othello*, without realising, he agreed with the English traveller’s opinion of the production because for him too, the play was different from Shakespeare’s tragedy; he comments: “Desdemona had become Edelmira; the protagonist was not black, but a little dark. Iago was Pésaro, very intriguing, but neither cruel nor vindictive. The other characters were suppressed” (106-107); thus, the Chilean historian criticises the faint blackness of Othello and the changes in number and names of characters. To an extent, the language of the text and the names of the characters, together with the Moor’s prototype performed by Cáceres made the first Chilean *Othello* seem more Spanish than English.

Barbara Everett discusses the meaning of Moorishness, both for Shakespeare and his audience, by tracing the Spanish genealogy of three of the characters: Iago, Roderigo, and the Moor. She links these names with the political conflicts between England and Spain at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Even though the critic argues that Shakespeare’s audience would have been aware of these Spanish issues, as well as of the connotations of names such as “Iago” when translated to James, the patron saint of Spain (103), I think that only part of the theatregoers — those paying for a seat in the galleries or in the Lord’s Rooms — could have grasped the possible implications of names, but probably not the groundlings, or at least not completely. Following the French source text by Ducis, De la Calle’s version includes seven characters and with the exception of “Oteló”, all their names are changed; thus, Desdemona becomes “Edelmira”; Brabantio becomes “Odalberto”; the Dux is called “Mocenigo”, Cassio is “Loredano”; Emilia is “Hermancia”, and Iago is “Pésaro”, “false friend of Othello” (1). However, most of these names are Germanic and Italian in origin; therefore, the Iberian resonances during the performance would have been probably given more by the Spanish accent of the protagonist and the other actors rather than by their names.

Everett goes on to suggest that the Moor could be quite as much “Spanish” as “African”, based on Shakespeare’s own allusions and also on the fact that the Moors who came to London from Spain “did not so stand out from their countrymen. There can have been very little difference between a dark-skinned Spaniard and an olive-skinned Moor [...]” (105). Finally, she concludes that “Othello is, in short, the colour the fiction dictates. [...] The Moor is, of course, neither an African nor a Spaniard, but an actor on stage portraying the experiences of any coloured Everyman: but our interpretation of those experiences will depend on how we read the words, and what presuppositions we bring as we begin” (107). Because of his skin colour, yet especially due to his garments, the Othello Cáceres impersonates looks like a conventional Spanish Moor. The Chilean actor portrayed a different race onstage, someone standing out from the Spaniards living in the country, whose possible

interbreeding was seen as a menace, given that Othello's murder of his wife was not honourable at all, and that, like Iago, he could become "a civil monster" (4.1.64), a monstrous Other.

Chilean Othellomania

After Cáceres's performance of *Othello*, the play was staged eleven times in Santiago and Valparaíso between 1818 and 1849 using De la Calle's version and other Spanish translations (Pereira Salas 363-399; Rossi Medina 10-11). There is no documentary evidence to explain this Othellomania, but the fact is that Chile was swept by the tragedy of the Moor during the nineteenth century. It is very interesting to compare this theatrical phenomenon with the situation of the Spanish stages at that time, considering that Chile was culturally influenced by its first conquerors. Clara Calvo refers to the popularity that the tragedy enjoyed in the period between 1802 — when it was first performed in Spain — and 1833. According to the scholar, while "*Hamlet* and *Macbeth* failed to engage the attention of Spanish audiences" (113), *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* became a success. She points out that one of the reasons for the positive reception of these plays was that they became "sentimental and domestic tragedies, as they contain a tragic story with middle-class characters rather than aristocrats, crowned heads, and mythical heroes, and both deal with thwarted love, parental opposition, and social obstacles — features often present in the kind of sentimental drama then fashionable on Spanish stages" (113); in fact, De la Calle's text focuses on the melodramatic dimensions of the tragedy noted by Calvo. The Spanish success was repeated in Chile and it marked the beginning of an important tradition of Chilean translators, theatre directors, actors, and scholars who have granted Shakespeare a special place in the national literary canon and theatrical repertory (Baldwin Lind, "Chilean Translations" 65-66³²).

The first local translation of the play was written more than a century after 1818 by Juan Cariola Larraín³³, a prolific translator, who published it in a volume including three Shakespearean tragedies in 1982. Then, in 2000, Jaime Collyer translated the play into Spanish for the collection "Shakespeare por escritores" (Shakespeare by writers), led by Marcelo Cohen. In relation to performances of *Othello*, the practice of casting white actors who "blacked up"

³² For updated information on the history of Shakespeare in Chile, see Paula Baldwin Lind, "Shakespeare in Chile". *Stanford Global Shakespeare Encyclopedia*. Ed. Patricia Parker (Forthcoming).

³³ See Paula Baldwin Lind. "Juan Agustín Cariola Larraín: traductor chileno de Shakespeare". *Traducir a los clásicos: entornos y transformaciones*. Eds. Salvador Peña and Juan Jesús Zaro, Granada: Editorial Comares, 2018. 247-272.

to play the Moor has dominated the Chilean scene from the nineteenth century to the present. Of the many *Othellos* staged in the country since 1818, three deserve to be mentioned. In 1981 the National Theater (ex *ITUCH*) chose Shakespeare’s *Othello* as one of the plays for its premiere at the Antonio Varas Theatre on the occasion of its fortieth anniversary’s celebration. Hernán Letelier directed the company, and Alejandro Cohen and José Soza performed the roles of Othello and Iago respectively (Baldwin Lind, forthc.). As seen in Figure 2, the main actor resorted to blackface.



Fig. 2 (U1-167-1): *Otelo, el moro de Venecia* by William Shakespeare. Director: Hernán Letelier. Company: “Teatro Nacional Chileno” (Universidad de Chile, 1975). Document year: 1981. Moment in the play. On stage: Alejandro Cohen (Othello). Author of the original image: Juan Carlos Navarro. Source: Archive of the Chilean National Theatre. This is a collaboration of the Research and Archives Programme of the Theatrical Scene, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

<http://www.chileescena.cl/index.php?seccion=busqueda&accion=buscar&busqueda=Alejandro%20Cohen>

Later, in 2004, the Theatre of the Catholic University adapted Collyer's translation of *Othello*. The staging was directed by Claudia Echenique and was very successful, as 11,671 spectators saw the performance. Andrés Céspedes played the role of the Moor and Paulina Urrutia that of Desdemona (Baldwin Lind, forthc.). Céspedes did not put on black makeup; however, his matte complexion produced a similar effect onstage, so much so that the audience thought that the actor was, indeed, black. In an email conversation, the director revealed that "Céspedes did not 'paint' his face; he was quite dark, and he put on just the usual performance makeup. People asked me where I had got the black actor from and I started joking that he was Cuban" (Echenique). Céspedes, of course, was Chilean, but he looked very much like the black actor Laurence Fishburne who starred *Othello* in the 1995 film directed by Oliver Parker.



Fig. 3 (U2-164-5): *Othello, the Moor of Venice*, by William Shakespeare. Direction: Claudia Echenique. Company: Theatre of the Catholic University (TEUC). Theatrical space: Theatre of the Catholic University, Eugenio Dittborn Hall. Document year: 2004. Image description: A moment of the play. Onstage: Paulina Urrutia (Desdemona) and Andrés Céspedes (Othello). Source: Theatre of the Catholic University of Chile. This is a collaboration of the Research and Archives Programme of the Theatrical Scene, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

<http://www.chileescena.cl/index.php?seccion=busqueda&accion=buscar&busqueda=Otelo>

The Chilean Most Recent Staging of *Othello*

Othello was also adapted and directed by Jaime Lorca, former member of *La Troppa Company* who created the theatre collective *Compañía Viajeinmóvil*, with Teresita Iacobelli and Christian Ortega in 2005 (Baldwin Lind, *forthc.*)³⁴. The actor and director’s praised version of the Shakespearean tragedy was first performed at the *Anfiteatro Bellas Artes* (Fine Arts Amphitheatre) in Santiago and since its premiere in 2012, it has been staged at that same playhouse in Chile and in sixteen other countries until January 2020. Only one actor, Lorca himself, and one actress, who was Iacobelli at the beginning, but is now Nicole Espinoza, share the stage and the roles of Othello/Iago/Cassio and Desdemona/Emilia/Bianca respectively, with objects and life-size plastic and wooden mannequins with detachable heads and limbs. According to Daniel Goldman, “Jaime and Nicole are so unbelievably skilled that from the hard wood and plastic comes breath, and voice and life” (Goldman).

The production, which is a 75-minute abbreviated reworking of Shakespeare’s *Othello*, was positively received by Chilean and international audiences, as well as by critics, regardless that some of them said that it was a dramatic experiment whose brevity did not allow the “meat” of the tragedy to be well-translated (James). Iacobelli argues that the company wanted to speak about the essence of the tragedy; thus, “our staging starts with Iago’s regret for not being promoted to Lieutenant while watching the scene of Desdemona with Brabantio and Othello in a TV soap opera. He then attends with his wife Emilia to the wedding celebration of Desdemona and Othello. After this, our performance begins in act four” (Iacobelli). Soap operas (*telenovelas*) about domestic violence have gained popularity in Latin American countries recently; therefore, this dramatic resource is very suitable to develop the proposed central themes, which Lorca defines in an interview that he granted to “El mostrador”, a Chilean digital newspaper. The director stated: “Othello’s real theme is femicide, not jealousy. To believe otherwise is to sweeten the play, reducing it to a tragicomedy of bad guys versus good guys. Desdemona’s murder cannot be smoothed by elevating her murder to a romantic dimension” (“Jaime Lorca y su *Otelo...*”). I think that the company’s choice of a soap opera style is quite consistent with the notion of domestic tragedy that Calvo associates to the play’s success in Spain; Lorca’s production is like a modern version of that theatrical genre.

The director explained that the company decided to work with industrial mannequins because these bodies “speak of the reification of women and to a certain extent of the human being. They are not people, but pieces, parts, disintegrated, dismembered, which is how a male chauvinist sees a wife, as a thing to possess, to control” (“Jaime Lorca y su *Otelo...*”). At some moments during

³⁴ See <https://www.viajeinmovil.cl/2016/09/27/otelo/>

the performance, Lorca and Espinoza only use the heads of the mannequins, which become part of the real body of the actors. “The disembodied head of Othello has exaggerated features”, comments David James, “which are accentuated by strong lighting — you could swear its dispassionate features change depending on the emotion of the scene — in the beginning, he is loving, but by the end, he is monstrous and broken — and the plastic visage remains exactly the same” (James). Other reviewers think that because of Othello’s violent behaviour, as well as for the racial issues addressed, the staging is too intense (Salmon).

If we observe figure 4, we can realise that the head representing Othello probably corresponds to that of an African black or descendant of that race, due to his characteristic features, such as the shape of his lips and nose, in addition to his curly hair. Although we cannot say that the skin of the mannequin is blackpainted for each performance, its colour is artificial anyway, for the plastic has been dyed. By 2012 when the Chilean *Otelo* began to be performed, the immigration wave in Chile was unmatched in comparison to the previous century. In a recent study, Isabel Aninat and Rodrigo Vergara showed that “while in 2006 there were slightly more than 150,000 immigrants in the country, in 2017 they were close to 800,000 and preliminary estimates for 2018 placed them at more than 1 million” (11). Among these people, Haitians “experienced



Fig. 4. *Otelo*. Dramaturgy: William Shakespeare. Adaptation and direction: Jaime Lorca, Teresita Iacobelli, and Christian Ortega. *Viajeinmóvil* Company. Anfiteatro Bellas Artes (Santiago), 2012. Jaime Lorca (Othello) and Teresita Iacobelli (Desdemona).

the highest growth rate between 2002 and 2017” (Aninat and Vergara 11), becoming part of the ninety per cent of immigrants who come to Chile from Latin America and the Caribbean (12), which includes a high number of Colombians. These figures are relevant to our analysis because they demonstrate that there was a profound change in the skin colour of foreigners arriving in Chile, as compared to the European wave recorded during the 1800s and 1900s. Even though black people in Chile were more numerous than historical records acknowledge for the nineteenth century, from 2000 onwards they became part of everyday life. Unfortunately, not all of them have access to a good system of education, work, health and housing at present; in addition, there are still discriminatory attitudes against them among Chileans.

This may explain, in part, why Lorca and his troupe decided to change the word “black” in their adaptation for “Moor”, as he points out in a recent interview: “The last years, due to racism and the number of immigrants in Chile, the word ‘black’ has been changed almost every time for ‘Moor’” (Lorca “Phone interview”). If we think of the first Chilean *Othello*, this linguistic or textual decision marks a clear shift of emphasis, since, despite the fact that Lorca’s Othello (the actor onstage; that is, the mannequin) is completely black, his costume, as seen in figure 5, is that of a member of the army who is not at all



Fig. 5. *Otelo*. Dramaturgy: William Shakespeare. Adaptation and direction: Jaime Lorca, Teresita Iacobelli, and Christian Ortega. *Viajeinmóvil* Company. GAM Centro de las artes, la cultura y las personas (Santiago), Nov. 2016. Jaime Lorca (Othello) and Nicole Espinoza (Desdemona).

like the garment of the Moor that Francisco Cáceres wore in 1818. Visually speaking, not only the performance of blackness is different, but also the content of it, as the Chilean sociocultural context has changed; thus, regardless that the audience almost always associates blackness to the notions of difference and otherness, racial thinking does not refer so directly to an African or a Moor — or to the European stereotype of these races —, but rather to the immigrants of colour who live in Chile today.

There are plenty of examples in Iacobelli, Ortega and Lorca's *Otelo* that illustrate the point just noted, but I include only some here. The text is written in prose and instead of act divisions, it uses sections, each with a different title³⁵. In the first one: "La pareja" (The couple), when Desdemona explains her father the love she feels for the Moor, he replies: "Ah, filthy nigger" (3)³⁶. In the same section both the father and Iago declare that they "hate the nigger" (3). However, when Othello ponders over his blackness in "La boda" (The wedding) section, he reveals that he is proud of it: "My father was a slave, my mother too. I am the first free black in my family. Long live love, long live freedom!" (6). When I asked Iacobelli the reasons they had to represent Othello as a black person, she argued that the protagonist is "a man that is very proud of his race, his history, and he is very different from us. That is an important point; that he is diametrically opposite to us. This leads Iago to observe every detail and to use his shrewdness, by appealing to Othello's self-love in the most intimate way, not in relation to military defeats or the history of his caste, or his mother's origin, but in relation to his bed, which symbolises the couple's possible offsprings" (Iacobelli, "Email interview"). According to Lorca, "Othello could not be black, but he must be inferior or different. Perhaps in Chile, it could be a 'Mestizo'. Desdemona and Othello are an odd couple. She chooses him regardless of his different race" (Lorca "Phone interview"). This mismatch is highlighted not only by the contrast of colours used during the performance: white sheets, red bedspread, and Desdemona's black and white dress, which is the conventional uniform that nannies used to wear in Chile when working for accommodated families (See Fig. 5). The staging aesthetics is coherent with the text's language, just as it is in Shakespeare's script, since, as Vaughan points out, "[t]hroughout its acting history, performances of *Othello* have reified the verbal imagery in visual contrasts of light and dark" (93), which is expressed in the opposition between black Othello and white Desdemona.

³⁵ Iacobelli states that when she adapted the text with Ortega and Lorca, each worked with a different version of *Othello*, but she only remembers hers: the edition of Instituto Shakespeare directed by Manuel Ángel Conejero. When they couldn't get the meaning of an expression, they resorted to two other texts (Iacobelli, "Email interview").

³⁶ The reference is to the page number because the text has no acts or lines division. All translations of the script into English are mine.

As I have argued when analysing the 1818 *Othello*, the fear of miscegenation is brought to the fore onstage once more — almost two hundred years later — by means of colour metaphors; nevertheless, the meaning of being black in the 2012-2020 performance has evolved. Blackness is emphasized by means of Othello’s violence against his wife and the loss of identity — change of skin colour — of the couple’s possible descendants. Loomba puts this quite clearly when she writes:

[p]recisely those visible features which are most commonly taken as evidence of racial difference (such as skin colour), are the most fragile from an evolutionary standpoint, which is to say that they are the quickest to mutate as a result of any sexual intermingling. Perhaps that is why skin colour produced so much anxiety in Shakespeare’s time: the assertion that it signified a deeper human essence was always challenged by its uncanny ability either to vanish or to show up in unwelcome ways. (3)

The association between skin colour and “a deeper human essence” to which Loomba refers, complicates the understanding of Othello’s blackface further and shows the audiences’ anxieties regarding miscegenation because, as Vaughan asserts, “the association between damnation and blackness became commonplace in Elizabethan discourse” (24). The Duke of Venice confirms this connection when he tries to convince Brabantio that Othello is a good man: “Your son-in-law is far more fair than black” (1.3.291). To an extent, he suggests that good conduct can transform a black person into a white man, “free from moral stain” (Honigmann 294, n. 291³⁷); in other words, the Duke wants to make him believe that blackness is somewhat a disguise of his true fair soul. In another level, a blackpainted actor shows, indeed, that his blackness is a mere cover-up, a coating that “makes the wearer black in appearance but not essentially black” (Vaughan 94); it conceals his true nature, which lays underneath (24); therefore, when Othello really becomes black is when he gives vent to his jealousy because in doing so, he lets his soul turn black.

Conclusion

In the process of performing the Other, all shades of black have been rehearsed by the Chilean Othellos. Clearly, the symbolism of blackness onstage has varied according to the social and cultural contexts in which the tragedy has been performed. It is quite surprising that in the constant cultural exchange towards the Chilean coasts, Haigh, Graham, and Wood — three English travellers —

³⁷ *OED* 9.

contributed to the history of the early development of Chilean theatre with their reports of the first local playhouses and performances of Shakespeare in the country.

While the 1818 *Othello* puts the emphasis on the protagonist's Moorish origin, the 2012-2020 production focuses on Othello's violence against Desdemona who represents all women. Even though racial prejudice is attached to both impersonations of the Moor, the first one responds to an imitative style that repeats a Spanish prototype, whereas the last shows a character that looks like a black Afro-descendant who is equated with the Haitian or Colombian immigrants who arrived in Chile during the last decade, thus generates much more direct and possible fears of miscegenation. To an extent, Lorca's staging is in line with Loomba's consideration that "beyond critical battles, plays like *Othello* [...] have spoken about race to an audience whose lives have been, and continue to be, enormously affected by the racial question" (5) and its implicit threat to whiteness as a result of miscegenation. Both performances of the tragedy of the Moor made blackness, with all its associated meanings, visible to the Chilean audiences; thus, supporting Callaghan's argument that "[r]acial difference on its most visible theatrical surface requires makeup" (78).

Even though cosmetic appearance has enhanced the Chilean Othellos' otherness and brought to the forefront a trope that Shakespeare frequently used onstage, we must not forget that the playwright usually did not configure his characters as prototypes. According to Jones, Shakespeare resorted to stage tradition and popular experience, yet he "used this background very sensitively, exploiting its potentialities for suggestion, but at the same time moving away from the stereotypes, so that in the end Othello emerges, not as another manifestation of a type, but as a distinct individual who is typified by his fall, not the weakness of Moors, but the weakness of human nature" (87).

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The Moor's Political Colour: Race and *Othello* in Poland

Abstract: This paper provides a brief outline of the reception history of *Othello* in Poland, focusing on the way the character of the Moor of Venice is constructed on the page, in the first-published nineteenth-century translation by Józef Paszkowski, and on the stage, in two twentieth-century theatrical adaptations that provide contrasting images of Othello: 1981/1984 televised *Othello*, dir. Andrzej Chrzanowski and the 2011 production of *African Tales Based on Shakespeare*, in which Othello's part is played by Adam Ferency (dir. Krzysztof Warlikowski). The paper details the political and social contexts of each of these stage adaptations, as both of them employ brownface and blackface to visualise Othello's "political colour." The function of blackface and brownface is radically different in these two productions: in the 1981/1984 *Othello* brownface works to underline Othello's overall sense of alienation, while strengthening the existing stereotypes surrounding black as a skin colour, while the 2011 staging makes the use of blackface as an artificial trick of the actor's trade, potentially unmasking the constructedness of racial prejudices, while confronting the audience with their own pernicious racial stereotypes.

Keywords: *Othello* in Poland; blackface in theatre; brownface in theatre; race in translation.

"Affer" Tales: *Othello* in Poland

Othello is a play, whose staging history in Poland is not particularly rich, with around 40 premieres listed since the beginning of the 20th century on www.encykopediateatru.pl, the Polish theatrical database focusing on the history of professional theatrical troupes. The play entered the landscape of the Polish Shakespeare history first through theatrical performance and only then in translation (Cetera-Włodarczyk, Kosim 118). Owing to numerous theatrical stagings based on the texts sourced from Schiller and Ducis, *Othello* was a play already known to theatre-goers when the first unpublished Polish translation was produced by Ignacy Hołowiński in 1834 (Cetera 20-22), and when the first

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complete Polish translation by Józef Paszkowski came out in 1859,¹ only to be followed by another endeavour by Szczesny Kluczycki in 1880 (Warsaw) and 1889 (Lviv).²

The question of Othello's ethnic origin comes to the fore already in the discussion on the margins of the unpublished manuscript of the Ignacy Hołowiński 1834 translation. The marginalia containing the reviewer's remarks include the following commentary on the Polish title of the play, *Otello albo Murzyn z Wenecji* [Othello, or the Venetian Negro]: "Venetian Negro makes one think of the Venetian Devil, enslaved. I would call him Moor, the Venetian General."³ This off-hand marginal remark attests to the strength of the stereotyped negative representation of Africans in the Polish culture, long mediated through the Bible, medieval hagiographic accounts and readings in ancient history.⁴ The image of the "black-faced devil" was gradually accompanied by another, equally strong negative representation, perpetuated by early modern travelogues detailing fantastic encounters with bestial, cruel and—necessarily—cannibal tribes as well as generic portrayals of "lazy Affers"; these would regularly point to the Biblical story of Noe's son, Cham, as their literary forefather, thus justifying the modern conglomerate of essentialising racist preconceptions and ethnic metaphors (Tazbir 89-110).⁵ The growing fascination with the exotic and the encounters with black pages and servants on the voyages of Polish nobles throughout Europe resulted not only in transplanting the pan-European *moro* heads fashion onto the Polish soil,⁶ but also in the use of

¹ The first partial translation was published by Leon Ulrich in 1840-1842. (Cetera-Włodarczyk, Kosim).

² The list includes: William Shakespeare, *Otello albo Murzyn z Wenecyi* Shakespeara, trans. Ignacy Hołowiński, BJ Mns. 4211. William Shakespeare, *Otello*, trans. Józef Paszkowski in: Henryk Biegeleisen (ed.), *Dzieła Williama Szekspira*, T. 1, *Tragedye*, Księgarnia Polska, Lwów 1895, p. 230-346. William Shakespeare, *Otello*, trans. Józef Paszkowski, in: William Shakespeare, *Dzieła dramatyczne w dwunastu tomach, życiorys Shakespeare'a i przedm. do poszczególnych utworów*, ed. Roman Dyboski, T. 10, Gebethner i Wolff, Warszawa 1912. William Shakespeare, *Otello. Tragedya w 5 aktach*, trans. Szczesny Kluczycki, Wydawnictwo Dziel Tanich A. Wiślickiego, Warszawa 1880; William Shakespeare, *Otello. Tragedja w 5 aktach Szekspira*, trans. Szczesny Kluczycki, Księgarnia Polska, Lwów 1889. More on these translations, see Cetera-Włodarczyk and Kosim.

³ „Murzyn wenecki przypomina poniewolenie Djabła Weneckiego. Jabym go nazwał prędzej Maur, wódz wenecki” qtd. in Cetera-Włodarczyk, Kosim 2019. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations mine.

⁴ Admittedly, some of the hagiographic accounts perpetuated in Poland from the medieval times presented black saints in a decidedly positive light; St Maurice is one of the more popular saints.

⁵ For "ethnic metaphors" in Polish contemporary discourse, see Zarzycka.

⁶ Cf. Dolczewski.

blackface in theatre, during diverse ceremonies, at costume balls, even as first people of colour found their way to Poland through slavery, gift exchange and warfare with the Ottoman Empire (Tazbir 89).⁷ Ignacy Hołowiński's translation conforms to strong social expectations of the time and place, playing down the erotic language and imagery present in *Othello*, while tapping into the hierarchising discourse of racial difference.

Translating Race: Józef Paszkowski's 1859 *Otello*

The first officially published translation by Józef Paszkowski also does away with much of the vulgarity and eroticism present in the original, while establishing a firm racialised frame of reference for Othello's origin. Paszkowski's text, used already in 1869 in the Polish premiere of the play in Krakow, became one of the most popular versions of the play both in print and for the stage well until the 1970s. As this was the translation, whose influence has turned out to be decisive for the reception of *Othello* for over a hundred years, it is worth investigating how it tackles the question of race and in what way it constructs Othello's alterity, especially as far as the references to his ethnicity are concerned. Unlike the US or the British Empire at the time, the multi-ethnic nineteenth-century society inhabiting what used to be the Polish territories, shared an experience of alterity that was based predominantly on such markers of group identity as religion, nationality and language, which were then translated into the sources of racial difference (Kujawińska Courtney, "Othello in Poland" 343-345). The colonial context and discourse was introduced into Polish mainly owing to such published sources as Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz's journal description of his American travels and an empathetic narrative of slavery,⁸ such sentimentalising bestsellers as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, translated into Polish already in 1853, and in ethnographic studies detailing the lives of "savages"; all these had a major impact on the way people of colour were thought of, possibly preparing the ground for the way Ira Aldridge was first apprehended during his tournees, especially when seen in the

⁷ Robert Hornback points to the significance of trans-Atlantic slave trade for the use of blackface: [...] blackface became a sign of one marked as both transgressor and [...] as a scapegoat, whipping boy, an *insipiens*, a fool—and also a slave. Here again the license authorized by blackface, which modern scholars have occasionally invoked as liberating, was symbolically and stereotypically limiting (70).

⁸ Niemcewicz J.U., *Pamiętniki Juliana Ursyna Niemcewicza, 1804–1807. Dziennik drugiej podróży do Ameryki*, Lwów 1873.

role of Othello.⁹ This lack of immediate context and the gradual emergence of institutional racism had some bearing also on Paszkowski's text.

Where Othello is described as "Othello, the Moor [a general in service of Venice]", in Paszkowski's rendering he becomes a more generalised: "Otello, wódz: murzyn" ["Othello, general: negro"¹⁰], with the word *murzyn* rendered in lowercase instead of capitalisation, which is used, however sparingly, also in the main text. Paszkowski seems to underline here the paradox apparently inherent in the coupling of the two nouns, adding a comment in 1.3.65:

The Venetian Commonwealth used to, because of political reasons, allot the leadership of its armies to foreigners, and not the native inhabitants [of Venice] who could use that power to implement plans contrary to the country's liberties. (1859 89)

The Polish etymology of the word *Murzyn* is rather blurry and that the lack of capitalisation does not necessarily involve disrespect, as it might have been treated both ethnonymically, and descriptively (Łazinski). The term *Murzyn* is defined together with its diminutive form, *Murzynek*, in the 1807-1812 *Dictionary of the Polish Language* by Samuel Boguslaw Linde as an ethnonym "commonly" used to denote the black inhabitants of Nigeria, Abyssinia. In a move characteristic for essentialist discourse, always on the lookout to establish a link between emotive scripts for humanity and Western logocentrism, the quality distinctive for that group is anger, while the quotes accompanying the definition connect the etymology with the impossibility of washing the black off: its cognate is the verb *murzyć*, i.e. "to stain", or "to darken" (Linde 164-165). This same dictionary does not mention at all the two other pejorative terms denoting blackness in Polish, *Negr* or *czarnuch*, which could be translated as "Negro" and "Nigger" respectively. Their occurrence in Polish is rather late: *Negr* is noted in the 1850s and *czarnuch* in 1900. This allows for a conjecture that in the absence of other more pejorative vocabulary, the residual meaning of the term *murzyn* would be brought to the fore in the translation, and serve as a context-dependent lexeme.

When speaking to Roderigo in Act I Jago ironically discusses "his moorship" (1.1.32); in Paszkowski's version it becomes *jego murzyńskiej mości*,

⁹ Krystyna Kujawińska Courtney discusses the significance of the 19th-century scientific discourse essentialising racial difference and leading to a conflation of the role and the actor as "a natural African" (*Kurier Lubelski* newspaper, qtd. in Kujawinska Courtney "Ira Aldridge" 112).

¹⁰ I consistently translate the term *murzyn* as *Negro*, because the constellation of idioms, proverbs and texts in which it figures nowadays, fashion it into an offensive word; its abusive potential is fully explored nowadays by the rightist discourse and hate speech in schools, streets and the media in Poland.

["his Negro highness"]; when Iago speaks of his love for "the Moor" (1.1.38), in Polish it is rendered as *Tego Murzyna* (1.1.51) ["that Negro"], with the pronoun "that" adding to the contemptuous, distancing overtone of the passage. This is indicative of the strategy used throughout Paszkowski's version, where the original allusions to Othello's skin colour are rendered throughout the text with the use of the word *murzyn/Murzyn*, whereas other, later translators may choose the functional equivalents of "black" or "tawny"; they may also vary the descriptions; postpone the recognition of Othello's racial identity until later in the play, or, possibly in the service of the euphemism treadmill or for the sake of nobilitating orientalisation, replace the term with the word *Maur*, i.e. "Moor/Arab".¹¹ In the absence of more derogatory terminology, the word *murzyn* seems to serve as both a point of offence as well as a regular ethnonym in Paszkowski's translation.

The irony and distancing signalled through syntax rather than the lexis are meant to build a contemptuous image of Othello in other characters' descriptions, and are further strengthened by other translation choices that pertain to Othello. In the exchange with Brabantio, "an old black ram/ [that] Is tupping your white ewe! (1.1.88-87) becomes „czarny baran tryksa/ Białą owieczkę waszą” [the black ram is tupping your *little* white ewe”] (1.1.112-113); the age difference becomes expressed solely through the lexical choice of the words used to speak of the animals involved in the act, as the diminutive *owieczka* stands in radical contrast with *baran*; but Othello is also further offended, as the Polish word *baran* can be used as a pejorative term denoting a "fool." "The thicklips" (1.1.65) of Othello transport him even further into the animal lore in the translation, as in Paszkowski he becomes a *grubodziób* (1.1.85) lit. "fat beak", which Lidia Mielczarek interprets as a further move down the hierarchical kingdom of nature, with the beak interpreted more like a mug (100). *Grubodziób*, however, is also a Polish name for *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*, a hawfinch, or a European grosbeak, described by Linnaeus already in 1758. It is a bird mentioned in Linde's *Dictionary* (784); the plausible reason for an avian metaphor here is rooted in the fact that the species was not always endemic to Poland. In the nineteenth century *grubodziób* was considered pest destroying cherry crops; its physical characteristics, i.e. its massive bill and large size, make it clearly distinguishable from the house sparrow, the most domestic of Polish birds with whom it mingles and against whom it fights. This set of attributes renders the bird an interesting context-dependent source domain for a surprisingly subtle metaphor underlining Othello's alterity.

¹¹ Interestingly, almost contemporaneous translation by Leon Ulrich uses the word *Maur* in the "Introduction," while *Murzyn* (consistently capitalised) is used in the translation; in the introduction it is stated verbatim that Othello had to be a Moor, not a *black* character, like Aaron, because Negroes are savages, while Moors are paragons of virtue [sic(k)].

Even though Paszkowski's text has been gradually replaced in theatre with other more stage-friendly translations, it still exerts a substantial influence over the Polish language and turns out to be still relevant for the academic and public discourse on racism inherent in the word *murzyn*. In his article on the Polish concept of race and the history of the term *murzyn* Marek Łaziński, an eminent Polish linguist, addresses the question heads-on, and starts his discussion on the etymology and history of *murzyn* with the telling subtitle "From Negro [*Murzyn*] to Moor [*Maur*]: *Othello*," arguing:

English *Moor*, German *Mohr* and Polish *Murzyn* did not have unequivocally negative connotations in the pre-colonial era. A Moor was always somebody alien to a European, but not always a slave; he was often perceived, however, as a respect-worthy opponent in fight or as a captive. Such associations are brought about by *Othello*, an officer in Venice's service. (47-56)

In the article Paszkowski's translation is used as a reference text seemingly offering the non-racist context for the use of the Polish race-related terminology. Even though it is hard to disparage the linguistic line of reasoning concerning the Latin etymology and the historical usage of the term, the use of the *argumentum ad Shakespeaream* lends itself to critique, as in his discussion Łaziński does not address either Paszkowski's translation's concrete socio-historical background, from which other lexemes indicative of race were absent; nor gives thought to a thorough analysis of the speech acts and the performance scripts surrounding the use of lexemes pertaining to *Othello*'s ethnic origin either in the original or in the translation.

Masquerading Otherness: Daniel Olbrychski's Brownface

Almost at the same time when racial stereotyping was ridiculed in Peter Zadek's 1976 Hamburg production of *Othello* (Kolin 36), the Polish television theatre was about to screen a filmed performance of *Othello* directed by Andrzej Chrzanowski, which was the third Shakespeare in the history of the Polish Televised Theatre, and its second *Othello*.¹² This particular performance merits

¹² The first one was *Macbeth*, dir. A. Wajda, 1969, teleplay. where Daniel Olbrychski was cast as Banquo. 1964 *Othello*, dir. Jan Maciejowski, trans. Krystyna Berwińska, teleplay, also portrayed *Othello* as a Moor, "Othello by A. Kopiczyński was very young, nimble, agile [...] This take on the role renders Desdemona's love for the handsome Moor more believable; we didn't doubt it that she was not only drawn to him because of his fame, but also owing to his physical appeal." A.O. "Otello" *Radio i Telewizja* no 34, 20 sierpnia 1967, *Othello* [*Otello*]. Dir. Andrzej Chrzanowski. Perf. Daniel Olbrychski, Piotr Fronczewski, Joanna Pacuła. TVP, 1981. teleplay.

special attention, as after its initial ban in 1981 it was replayed on a number of occasions; and when 100 out of the over 3000 teleplays were put together into a DVD "Golden" collection, Chrzanowski's *Othello* became one of the very few Shakespeare plays in the mix.

Chrzanowski's adaptation used a new, especially commissioned translation of the play by Jerzy S. Sito, and the cast was the *crème de la crème* of Polish theatrical and TV actors. In this production the scenes in which Othello is defined racially, are played down; racial slurring is omitted by replacing Paszkowski's word of choice, *murzyn*, with the more Arabic term *Maur*, "Moor", and Daniel Olbrychski in the lead role is given a rather light shade of makeup. Although the brownface looks very artificial, even more so for the lack of eye- and lip-makeup, it seemed to follow the exoticising success of Olbrychski's tour-de-force 1968 and 1969 performances in the role of the fictitious son of the Tatar leader Mirza Tughai Bey, in the film adaptations of Henryk Sienkiewicz's nineteenth-century bestselling novels.¹³

The beginning of the staging brings to the fore the centrality of the conflict between Othello (Daniel Olbrychski) and Iago (Piotr Fronczewski) who stand side-by-side already in the opening credits. The first scene consists of the exchange between Roderigo and Brabantio; the distraught father, however, mentions Othello only once as *Maur*, "the Moor"; when they leave, the camera rolls to a dark corner to reveal the overhearing Iago who then speaks to Othello of the scheming Roderigo and consistently masks as the loyal servant and confidant, also to the unsuspecting audience. The third scene jumps then to the discussion of the political context and the Cyprus conflict. When Brabantio exclaims to Othello "tyś ją zacczarował, ty, rodem z piekła" ["you have bewitched her, you, hell-born"], his outburst is mitigated both by Othello's calm demeanor and his quiet remark on his own political station and the social leverage he has against the Venetian aristocrat. When the scene moves again, it is to the Doge's palace and to the further strategizing of the Cyprus conflict. Even in the "evidence" scene, where Othello is seemingly distraught, Olbrychski retains composure and quietly threatens Iago, then rages on, displaying well-controlled anger of a stoic soldier [sic], while Iago remains matter-of-fact, defiant and ice-cold—a professional hitman. All in all, Olbrychski, already known as Hanuszkiewicz's Hamlet and Zanussi's Banquo, brings a larger-than-life quality to his character, but the universalising and politicising overtone of the performance annihilates both the racial and the domestic overtones of the play; what is underlined instead is the political cat-and-mouse between Othello and Iago.

¹³ Set in the orientalist setting of the early modern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, in these adaptations the young Tughai Bey is also portrayed in brownface.

Andrzej Żurowski writes in his *Myślenie Szekspirem* [*Thinking Shakespeare*] that after the 1956 the landscape of Shakespeare drama in Poland, hitherto filled only by relatively “safe” comedies, was broadened to include the plays “concerning the issues of History and Power,” with *Othello* included among them as one of the more surprising choices (76). The “domestic” tragedy was staged at the time at least once more as a political drama: the already mentioned 1969 Sttetin televised production by Maciejewski also displayed the Moor trapped in the prison of his own passion, but always ready to put up a political fight: “Thus executed, Maciejewski’s *Othello* got rid of the racial conflict and perverse eroticism” (Żurowski 132). If his exoticized ethnicity does not become annulled, then it is bracketed; what emerges instead is his political colour. *Othello* becomes “one of us” through the subjection to the mechanisms of constant surveillance, control and manipulation deployed by Iago. The source of the tragedy is not *Othello*’s social standing, but his political situation as a subject under surveillance: it is his inability to distinguish spies in his immediate circle and his lack of understanding for doublespeak that become the reasons for his downfall. In the context of *Othello*’s clash with the totalitarian system orchestrating his demise Desdemona’s death feels almost like collateral damage. *Othello*’s alterity becomes then somewhat of a masquerade, using and abusing brownface as a political pretext. Jacek Fabiszak underlines that political undertone of the performance which, once produced and ready to air in 1981, was indeed banned by the censors until 1984.¹⁴ It was that uncomfortable, political side of the production which censorship aimed to silence:

The presentation of the character of Iago by Piotr Fronczewski, I would argue, resembled the conduct of the communist political police officers and provocateurs, who not only desired to destroy and defile that which is pure and innocent, but also enjoyed the scheming. Iago was always there in the background, watching and silently conspiring, yet overtly arousing trust and confidence. With Fronczewski’s sober apparel, his plain looks and his “economic” acting, the play could easily have been read as a comment on the work of the secret police, their methods and influence on even the most noble and pure-hearted people. (Fabiszak 64)

¹⁴ Fabiszak notes: “The stress on the political import [of televisual Shakespeare] results from the fact that so far hardly any critical attention has been paid to Shakespeare productions aired on Polish television under the communist regime in terms of their commentary on the contemporaneous politics; a commentary, which out of necessity had to be subtle and implied rather than spelled out, not only because of official state censorship, but also because of the fact that television was under strict control by the state, even more than other media” (59-65).

Communist Poland was a country with a no clear-cut postcolonial past, as it is understood in the mainstream postcolonial studies; its colonial heritage was troubled, but located in regions less obvious than in the West. This, however, does not mean that Chrzanowski's performance in particular and the reception of *Othello* in general successfully steered clear of the issues of race and racism. Daniel Olbrychski himself writes in hindsight that originally he was to be cast as Iago and recalls anecdotally in his memoir a discussion with his friend, Francois Huster, where they both agreed that Othello was not "playable":

It is a Negro [*murzyn*] through and through. Lawrence Oliver showed us how to play a Negro [*murzyn*], but he wasn't one even for a split second. Is it really that interesting to judge how a great actor *imitates* a Negro [*murzyn*]? [...] Over vodka we deliberated with Piotr Fronczewski and finally decided that a Negro, and a bald one for that matter, seemed like a little too much, so we switched roles. I had some 'Persian lamb' done all over my head (oh, the things I heard from the ladies at the hairdresser's!) (98)

The light tone adapted in this passage and its anecdotal feel do not hide that fact that the decision to cast Olbrychski and not Fronczewski as Othello seems from today's perspective to have a generalized, racist tinge to it that had much to do with the audience's expectations. Speaking from the position of the white privilege this passage first comments on the impossibility of mimesis in the case of *Othello*, and then discusses the casting decision based on a disparaging comparison between non-whiteness and baldness: two things rendering a man less than a man in the essentialist paradigm of masculinity dominant in Poland at that time and more than ever haunting the land as a nationalist spectre. Ultimately, Chrzanowski's *Othello* masked racism, masquerading its presence, but it did not make the slightest effort to address or alleviate it.

Demasking Blackface: Adam Ferency's Othello

Between Andrzej Chrzanowski's production and Krzysztof Warlikowski's work on *Othello* there were about ten other premieres of *Othello* in Poland, all strategising Othello's blackness in one way or another.¹⁵ The production that seems to stand out in the attempt to subversively use blackface as an intervention, comes from the director, whose theatre is characterised by the obsession with the scene as audience's mirror, and who problematises conflict as a major interpretive category (Niziołek 8). Since his *Taming of the Shrew* (Dramatyczny Theatre in Warsaw, 1998), Krzysztof Warlikowski's engagement

¹⁵ One needs to note Omar Sangare's performances in the role (Kujawińska Courtney, "*Othello* in Poland" 351-354).

with Shakespeare has been a scandalous tale of love and hate; the plays are fragmented and the plots disrupted in a manner typical for the postdramatic theatre, while the theatrical conventions are laid bare to reveal the ugly underbelly of even the most comic of plots: violence that pervades all life, all form, all drama (Niziołek). Still, this playwright-director relationship has been a steadfast one, as Warlikowski seems to have been preoccupied with Shakespeare the longest in the post-transformation Poland, with the record number of staged performances. Grzegorz Niziołek discusses Warlikowski's adaptations as a "reincarnation of tragedy in the spirit of photography," explaining this obsession as follows: "Warlikowski always draws out a family motif, even if it is not an obvious one at the first reading. *Hamlet*, *The Tempest* [...] are for him family dramas" (qtd in Drobnik-Rogers 47). What about *Othello*, the family drama in Shakespeare's oeuvre?

Warlikowski's presentist interpretation of *Othello* remains a part of a larger whole: a five-hour-long performance consisting of scenes from *King Lear*, *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*, all based on the 1990s translations by Stanisław Barańczak; John Maxwell Coetzee's novels and monologues written by Wajdie Mouawadie. It was put together in 2011 and premiered in Liège and Warsaw.¹⁶ The outcome of the joint effort by Les Théâtres de la Ville de Luxembourg and Parisian Théâtre National de Chaillot, as well as the Prospero network, the production, which toured Europe between 2011-2012, was presented in Hong Kong in 2014, and won the best 2012 Polish theatre production award at the 5th Divine Comedy Festival in Krakow, and in 2018 the International Shakespeare Prize for original approach to Shakespeare at the International Shakespeare Festival in Craiova, Romania.¹⁷ This "trilogy of the excluded" (Śmiechowicz 116) is interspersed with quotes including passages from Johnathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*; *Soul on Ice*, a manifesto of the ex-Black Panther, serial rapist, reformed Marxist, Eldridge Cleaver. The production remains structurally dependent on John Maxwell Coetzee's narratives and three monologues commissioned by Warlikowski from the Lebanese-Canadian author Wajdie Mouwade ("Portia's Gender,"

¹⁶ *Opowieści afrykańskie według Szekspira*. Premiere: Oct 5, 2011, Liege, 2 Dec 2011 Dramatyczny Theatre, Warsaw. Direction: Krzysztof Warlikowski, Set design: Małgorzata Szcześniak, music: Paweł Mykietyn. "African Tales by Shakespeare," MIT Global Shakespeares Video & Performance Archive, <https://globalshakespeares.mit.edu/african-tales-by-shakespeare-warlikowski-krzysztof-2011/#video=african-tales-by-shakespeare-trailer>

¹⁷ Network of six European theatres working to promote European heritage: Théâtre de la Place, Liège (Belgium), Théâtre National de Bretagne, Rennes (France), Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz, Berlin (Germany), Emilia Romagna Teatro Fondazione, Modena (Italy), Fundação Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisbon (Portugal), Tukivan Teatterityn Keskus, Tampere (Finland).

“Desdemona’s Arm,” and “Cordelia”), while visually it heavily relies on allusions to Art Siegelmann’s *Maus* and Kurosawa Akira’s *Ikiru*.

All these intertexts work to destabilize the centrality of Shakespeare’s plays; what is presented to the audience in lieu of a dramatic theatre is an intermedial sequence of scenes which pit passages from *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello* and *King Lear* against a choir of contemporary voices. As a review by Constant Meijers notes, even though the title seems to suggest an obvious “African connection” (Meijers online), that link is largely symbolic and remains enmeshed in the palimpsestic region of stereotyped presuppositions and intertextual allusions. Magdalena Figzał-Janikowska argues about the production poster and the title, which in itself alludes to Doris Lessing’s and Coetzee’s writings, that both of them point in the direction of colonized “Africa” (616), which in the European cultural imaginary has for a long time occupied the function of a phantasmatic realm, onto which repressed desires of “wild Europeans” have been projected (Poster description, Raster Gallery online). The poster commissioned for the Nowy Theatre from a Polish artist, Zbigniew Libera, includes three figures, all of them exoticised (“Zbigniew Libera” online): an Asian female tourist and two European “savages” all gazing ahead, as if turning the colonizing anthropological gaze of the onlooker against itself. The author of *Lego. Concentration Camp* (1994) and the precursor of Critical art, Libera positions the dressed body of the tourist in the foreground, against the backdrop of the two completely naked white male bodies covered in what seems to resemble tribal patterns.¹⁸ What is significant is that juxtaposition which reveals an unexpected vulnerability of the painted youngsters, who strike an ethnographically-loaded pose of “native savages,” while their partially retained whiteness seems but one of the patterns covering their skin. Such an anti-heroic presentation of the white male body from a quasi-ethnographic perspective is a cultural taboo, as evidenced by the uproar the poster instigated in Warsaw.¹⁹ This confrontational image offers a representation that on the global cultural scene may well be tied with a wide array of outraged reactions, as it was in Poland; however, Polish far-right criticism focused first and foremost on the

¹⁸ The film from the phot shoot is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VPo0rkBKA0>; the close-ups show how artificial the white and all the other colours really are.

¹⁹ In his discussion of Libera’s art both Piotr Piotrowski and Jakub Momro point to significance of transgressing the boundaries of representational taboos and cultural prohibitions as formative for Libera’s art. The poster does seem to operate on the force of anarchy understood as a lack of responsibility *against* institutions that demand obeisance to diverse social norms; its provocation evokes confusion and possibly also shame as a reaction typical for “cringe art” (Momro online).

attempt to colonise the white bodies, rendered vulnerable by the exposition of the male genitalia to the general public [sic].²⁰

The poster does indeed seem to invite “interpretations leading to the (so-far) unsettled colonialism and inability to have an honest, intercultural dialogue (especially in the relationship between an oppressor and a conquered victim)” (Śmiechowicz 115); the issue of such difficult (power) relations seems to function as a leitmotif for both Libera’s work and the play it came to represent. What emerges as one of the principles organising both, is the focus on the hegemonic gaze, whose force is magnified via the use of the power/knowledge visually-oriented scenarios: a quasi-ethnographic representation of the hegemonic bodies in the case of the poster; the lab-like setting, as well as the dependence on the intermedial in the case of the production which, admittedly, uses Shakespeare’s plays as “dramaturgical schemata, like a myth transported out of the classical anthropological structures of Claude Lévi-Strauss to show patterns of behaviour in extreme situations” (Soszyński online).

A review at home recognizes both the “African connection” and the unifying principle behind the vertiginous collage of intertexts:

Warlikowski has his own vision of a human being. It is a creature with a burden inscribed into its being, be it age, race or religion. However, it does not require cleansing. It accepts the burden and wants to be respected together with it. But that call for respect is too desperate. [...] Black Othello [...] expects recognition from the society as well as reverence from his white wife, Desdemona. Demanding respect blocks insight of these heroes: they fail to notice the feelings of their loved ones, their daughters or wives. They are thus guilty of inflicting suffering and emotional torture. Pain can be caused to others, also by inflicting it on oneself. You get the impression that the characters do not have a soul that is somehow responsible for emotions and ethics. There is only a body that has been abused and worn out, that hurts. Corporeality is related exclusively to suffering. The title is puzzling, however. Where to classify these “African tales”? [...] Desdemona turns into a wild animal during her dance; she gives his monologue to the animal (the dog). [...] Maybe it is the ritual creation of a new identity [...]? Where are all the tales? Where is Africa? (Pyrkosz online)

All three main characters are played by one and the same actor, Adam Ferency, and all undergo a reductive metamorphosis as a result of the operations of the hegemonic culture represented in the case of Othello by the hostile whites; just

²⁰ Libera himself openly admits that he wanted to create a reverse of the images of the Nuba tribe taken by Leni Riefenstahl upon her visits to Sudan and published in German as an illustrations book *Die Nuba* in the 1970’s: where these images showed perfection typical for fascist aesthetics, he was striving to show imperfection, offering instead of a gigantic “black phallus” a “little white cock”, “shrivelled from cold” (Libera. Interview with Urbaniak online).

like Shylock and Lear, Othello gradually sheds all the semblance of culturedness to reveal the truth of bare life, a state of existential exclusion and loneliness which renders them at once larger-than-life and singular in their suffering (Lease). Still, the larger context activated by the use of Coetzee's writing as a major frame of reference, does not invoke only the consequences of social exclusion, racial segregation and violence (Figzał-Janikowska), but points also to the issue of collective guilt. Figzał-Janikowska justly notes that in this adaptation even Cassio and Emilia are not allies; Iago, who carasses Othello's body as his masseur, tells racist jokes known to the Polish audience;²¹ Othello's stage appearance is accompanied by passages from *Soul on Ice* by Eldridge Cleaver, and it is Iago who delivers Cleaver's shocking parable of the white Omnipotent Administrator and the black Supermasculine Menial:

I'm still going to be the Brain and you're still the Body. But from now on, you do all the flexing but I'll do all the fucking. The Brain must control the Body. I will have access to the white woman and I will have access to the black woman. The black woman will have access to you but she will also have access to me. I forbid you access to the white woman. [...] By subjecting your manhood to the control of my will, I shall control you" (Cleaver 193-194; qtd also in Figzał-Janikowska)

The process of subjection to othering from the white hegemonic gaze and white anxiety over the perceived conflict connected with the possession of white female bodies becomes apparent also in the video installation opening Warlikowski's *Othello*. The installation consists of an animated sequence, in which a black man and a white woman are having sex in a public restroom and are caught by a white male, and is offered as an introduction to the *Othello*-theme as a provocation for the audience: Who is to be offended by the long animated sex-tape with Desdemona and Othello loudly making out in front of the camera, with Desdemona making allusions to Othello's size and asking: Is that what you expect? Is this enough for you? The ideas of miscegenation and interracial coupling are unmistakably there in the installation to test the reaction of the viewers, as attested by the negative reviews in the right-wing press that, again significantly, keep mum on the issues of race and ethnicity as such, but raise hell for Warlikowski's attempt to "castrate the *male* civilisation" (Cieślak online, italics mine). The threat of castration does not come from women, however, as they are positioned in this production as the ultimate abject. It is the outcome of the obsessive focus on the bodies that remain in an antagonistic

²¹ Unfortunately, I did not come across any international reviews that would discuss *Othello* sequence in detail, so it is impossible for me to relate whether these were repeated verbatim or changed to their functional equivalents.

relationship with the normative phallo-logocentric vision of white hegemony; this cultural anxiety remains fixated on the desire for control leading to annihilation, as evidenced by Iago who does away with his repressed desire by cutting masked Cassio's throat in Othello's stead.²² The installation remains in stark contrast with the onstage presentation of the subtle relationship between Desdemona and Othello. Significantly, Desdemona's death is not presented as the direct outcome of Othello's actions, but as a result of the social exclusion she is subjected to once she starts wearing her bandana (the handkerchief?) and when she enters the society as Othello's wife (Figzał-Janikowska). The sense of physical separation and fragmentation that both Othello and Desdemona come to experience stems from the social and linguistic interventions undertaken by the hostile white bodies. Othello is being viewed and surveilled: "the white gaze, the only valid one, is already dissecting me. I am fixed" (Fanon 95).

Characteristically for the male subject undergoing racialisation in the crucible of linguistic interpellation and hegemonic gazing ("Look! A Negro!" Fanon 89), Othello is interpellated in his exchange with Iago as the Black Menial; the force of that interpellation pushes him into accepting categories used to describe him, even though he struggles to reject this totalising view. The jokes, where the word "murzyn" is repeated *ad nauseam*, the social expectations concerning the lack of "civilised body" expressed in the video installation, and the group scenes with Emilia, Iago and Cassio; all these come to bear on Othello and his relationship with Desdemona. As Achille Mbembe writes: "For everything, or nearly everything, encouraged the colonized peoples to inhabit as their skin and their truth the fiction that the Other had produced in their regard" (12). In Warlikowski's vision of "the world of people without bonds" (Mbembe 14) the actor's body becomes a surface for such a fiction, created with the use of blatantly theatrical blackface convention. The very conscious abuse of that tradition reveals the politically charged illusion of naturalness in the complex history of *Othello* performance, and possibly even goes as far as to suggest that race is only skin-deep, a flash of melatonin—or makeup. Throughout the *Othello* sequence Ferency's blackened face and hands do remain in stark contrast with the unpainted rest of his body, as noted by Małgorzata Grzegorzewska:

An unobvious [...] image of Othello: Elizabethan audience was not able to see a black actor, but a soot-painted white man. Warlikowski reminds us about that, making us face an Othello, whose white torso and arms are grotesquely contrasted with his black-painted hands and cleavage [sic] (online).

²² In Warlikowski's adaptation Iago represses his desire for the gay Cassio, who in the final scene becomes additionally othered by the black mask.

If there is grotesqueness in the way that the character is constructed, it comes attached to the fact that Ferency's blackface situates the performance beyond the realist and comic tradition present in various forms on European stages. This anti-realist use of blackface seems to point to the fragmentariness of the body, whose identity remains in a state of flux throughout the performance. Othello's racialisation is shown to be a gradual process that emerges through the use of the blackface; the "everyday racism" of Polish Negro jokes; the very structure of Shakespeare's play, the reliance on such hypotexts as Coetzee's and Eldridge's writings, and the interpellation of the viewer as the possible addressee of Desdemona's questions about the ends of the viewer's sensual pleasure. Repeatedly displaying his blackened hands and face against the rest of the un-blackened body, Ferency explodes the mimetic potential of blackface and its intention to dehumanise; what it seems to call for instead is to castigate the dehumanising practices and discourses that come to create "Othello" in the first place. This process of construction of Othello as a racialised subject evokes confusion and a sense of shame at least in some of the audience, as the viewers become entangled in the questions that on occasion accompany visions of violence on the stage, such as their own situatedness as violence perpetrators, bystanders and/or witnesses (Duggan). Warlikowski's production seems to be quite effective in provoking the audience to question their assumptions about racial stereotypes:

African Tales According to Shakespeare is a disgracing, disgraced, and perhaps even dishonorable performance. It is a performance in which the entire narrative remains in the power of the discourse of disgrace: it is disgrace that is bound to express the ineffable: the worst, the unbearable, the blasphemous, the incestuous. *Tales* are saturated with shame; they are as if an attempt to secure the traces it leaves and the indescribable confusion it causes. (Radecki online)

Such a sense of shame can potentially lead to a recognition of racial stigmatisation as wounding, and can have a potentially corrective effect (Ahmed 195), especially on those less obvious forms of racism present in such societies as Poland, where despite the lack of colonial history involving black communities, whiteness is treated as an unthinking, privileged position (Eddo-Lodge).

It seems significant that the majority of critical responses in Poland resonate more with the first and the third part of the production, while the overseas commentaries tend to point to the universalising character of the whole. Obviously, one could suggest that the archetypal forms of racism in Poland are tied to anti-semitism, while old age and illness remain among strong cultural taboos; this, however, is not the entire picture, as the omission seems to be a result of a blank spot in the perception of racism in Poland. Blackface, present not only in the North American minstrel shows, but in other forms of

entertainment, also in Europe, plays on stereotypes and feeds on cultural anxieties surrounding blackness by taming it through ridicule. This difficult heritage is present in Poland as well, albeit in an ostensibly less hostile form: in the brownface and blackface used in the Polish theatre and cinema, also in the context of Shakespeare. One needs to be aware of the fact that in the globalised world, the historical legacies of blackface will come to intrude upon such ostensibly “innocent” mimetic traditions.²³

[F]ew global cultures have been isolated from encounters with blackface and that do not have its depictions that are intrinsic of racialized humor, colonized shaming, and the overall humiliation of a certain portion of humanity. [...] The USA exemplifies a well-defined history that has appropriated, problematized, and continues to challenge the peculiarity of blackface. New and imported representations of blackface emigrating from other global cultures [...] inadvertently evoke legacies of American slavery, legal segregation, and racialized perceptions of blackness associated with inferiority. (Reyes 525).

Blackface as a subversive act seems to be inserted into Warlikowski’s production not only as a cultural allusion to the early modern history of staging the play, but also as a painful social experiment. The use of black paint creates a sense of double inscription on Ferency’s body, as a construct that points to a theatrical illusion of “race” and disappoints it at the same time. Thus, it serves as a parody of race relations, installing them and subverting them in a political representation which demystifies the dominant ideology of whiteness, “signal[ling] how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference” (Hutcheon 93). Warlikowski’s take on *Othello* parodies the performance history of the play, at once addressing the traditional presuppositions about the body of the actor playing Othello, the play as such, and the image of the society that looks at itself through the very critical mirror this production offers. One could therefore risk the conclusion that Warlikowski’s production seems to respond to “an innovative call to action for alternative performances with the ‘demasking’ of blackface,” as “demasking or erasing the demeaning social identity of blackface” can lead to a change in social relations (Reyes 525).

Conclusion: On Uneasiness

Even though Poland is a country in which the American minstrel shows remain relatively unknown, blackface and brownface performances occur both in theatre and in other media with some regularity. Their very existence in the Polish

²³ Innocent as in Gloria Wekker’s “white innocence”.

contemporary cultural imaginary has to provoke questions about racial wounding that is connected with stereotyping blackness and rendering stereotypical images part and parcel of the entertainment industry. Cultural anxiety surrounding *Othello* in Poland is on a microscale present already in the dilemma surrounding the very choice of the lexemes used by translators to address the main character's ethnic origin. Józef Paszkowski's first complete Polish translation of the play seems to be very much context-dependent in this respect, and utilises the existing terminology, while mobilising its gently, ambiguously generalized racist connotations. The two performances chosen to discuss the usage of blackface in the stage history of *Othello* in Poland offer two competing strategies of its deployment. Chrzanowski's 1918/1984 universalising *Othello* is a performance, in which the racial issues are toned down, the brownface almost eliminating them from the adaptation. Racial struggle is replaced with the political conflict between the individual and the oppressive regime, but that very choice to annul "race" is a whitewashing political gesture in itself. Warlikowski's "trilogy of the excluded" attacks the issue of race head-on, critiquing it as one of the many ways, in which we imprison ourselves and others in the cultural confines of whatever we think human nature is. Through its direct critique of the tradition of blackface and the artificially constructed image of Othello, Warlikowski's *African Tales According to Shakespeare* provides a painful recognition of the race trouble in the contemporary world. This theatrical intervention, coming from a director who does not occupy a position of cultural hegemony either in Europe or elsewhere,²⁴ risks the subversive use of blackface to urge a change in the emotive scripts surrounding figures of the excluded. These two theatrical adaptations reveal that Othello's "colour" in Poland has been first and foremost, political, even though they offer starkly different understandings of what the political might mean.

Warlikowski's production can be read hand-in-hand with Mbembe's reflection on politics of hostility; only by experiencing oppression can we understand that we need uneasiness as a fundamental intellectual position which makes us interrogate structures of power and see them for what they are: brutal hypocrisy of those who want to retain their power at all cost. For Mbembe the way out of the *bellum omnium contra omnes* is care. Only when we feel for others, only when we become witness to their plight, willing to share the responsibility for our transient presence in the violent world, do we create the conditions for seeing faces of enemies as faces of humans: "This experience of presence and distance, of solidarity and detachment, but never of indifference—let us call it the ethics of the passerby" (190).

²⁴ I understand, though, that his international success can be read as the outcome of white privilege.

There is no extensive discussion on the use of brownface and blackface in the Polish theatre that I have encountered so far, neither is race regularly employed as an object of academic inquiry at Polish universities. Franz Fanon's writings have just begun to be translated *in extenso*, and any major discussion on the presence of black minorities in public discourse is still in the future. Yet, recent newspaper articles and reports created as an echo of the Black Lives Matter movement in the US demonstrate that even though Poland has been an ethnically homogenous country, institutional racism and everyday racism do stigmatise individuals, hurting children and adults in a plethora of disturbing ways (Balogun and Joseph-Salisbury). The numbers of black Poles have been on the rise in recent years, just as the numbers of international students and researchers who come to Poland to study and work, and who are increasingly becoming the objects of racially motivated attacks, for which the populist political discourse has to be held accountable (Krzyżanowski). In writing this article I kept asking myself, whether I have the right to speak on the subject of racism in Poland at all, considering the fact that I have not been subjected to it. Yet, having been a witness of racial violence, I refuse to be forced into silence by such dilemmas, even though both the subject and my positioning remain uneasy.

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Book Reviews

Hu Kaibao, *A Corpus-Based Study of the Chinese Translations of Shakespeare's Plays* (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaotong University Press, 2015).

Reviewed by *Limin Li**

The rapid development of corpus-based translation studies has pushed translation studies towards empiricism, opening a fruitful dialogue within the discipline and beyond the boundary. It is a dialogue between theoretical and applied translation studies, and between translation studies and corpora studies, thus fostering interdisciplinary studies like corpus-based translation studies, translational stylistics and so on. Hu Kaibao's monograph *A Corpus-Based Study of the Chinese Translations of Shakespeare's Plays* tackles challenging issues in the field of corpus-based translation studies, like the much debated topic of universal features of translated texts, the corpus-based methodology employed in translation studies, and the list of universal hypotheses, etc. The book has not only approached those hot topics, but also provided solutions.

First, the corpus-based study of the Chinese translations of Shakespeare's plays provides a strong qualitative basis for describing the most distinctive English and Chinese expressions, which is quite systematic and objective.

1) Hu's DIY English-Chinese Parallel Corpus of Shakespeare's Plays is a big and balanced one. After a critical review of the studies on Chinese translations of Shakespeare's plays, Hu selects three most influential Chinese translated versions of Shakespeare's plays: Zhu Shenghao's (1912-1944) translation published in 1957, Liang Shiqiu's (1902-1987) translation in 1967 and Fang Ping's (1921-2007) translation in 2000. The book includes the three translators' works in his self-built English-Chinese Parallel Corpus of Shakespeare's Plays. The corpus also incorporates Shakespeare's original works and original Chinese plays. It achieves sentence level alignment between one original work and the three versions with more than three million words of text. The reason for having parallel corpora is to describe linguistic features, such as vocabulary, lexical combinations, or grammatical features of both Chinese and

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English, to exhibit the processes of representing and constructing an equivalent interpersonal meaning in the Chinese translated works of Shakespeare's plays, as well as to probe into translators' styles through their different ways of handling the salient vocabulary, lexical combinations, and grammatical structures in both English and Chinese.

2) With the aid of large corpora of both original and translated texts of Shakespeare's plays, the book selects the most representative English and Chinese lexico-grammatical expressions. The highly selective, instead of exhaustive way of handling translated materials equips researchers and readers with a better understanding of sensing the differences and unique features of Chinese and English languages. Moreover, those expressions provide abundant translation examples for cultural and literary researchers as well as translators. Through intralingual and interlingual translation comparisons, the research can render guidance to the translation of strong culture-loaded expressions.

3) The book applies the series of alleged translation universal hypotheses into the DIY corpus to test their validity, which is very inclusive and labour-intensive. And, for all those universal pairs, sets of related indicators, like explicitation and implicitation, normalisation, simplification, etc. are brought under scrutiny. After theoretical elaboration and empirical evidence, those hypotheses prove to be effective. They show the same commonality in Chinese as in Indo-European languages. Moreover, with statistical analysis of data, it is found that the Chinese translation of English degree adverbs has either been strengthened or weakened. A new pair of translation universal hypothesis is put forward based on the Chinese case study, namely strengthening and weakening. Thus, the employment of the large corpora method promotes the development of translation studies. Another example is the translation of English attributive clauses guided by "which". In Zhu's and Liang's translations, both of them try to avoid using long sentences so as to achieve the equivalent in form, and they convey the same meaning by using split translation. Actually, through translation, both Zhu's and Liang's translations absorb some authentic English ways of expression, and inject new vitality into the Chinese vernacular language.

4) Based on the DIY corpora, many researches can be conducted. Marco points out that the flaw of traditional translation studies is that "translation is a language-pair specific practical activity, but detailed comparative analysis of the languages involved often fails to be carried out" (57). Modified in methodology, Hu's book overcomes this defect, and the DIY corpus will play a more important role in future corpus-based translation studies.

Second, the book explicitly describes, explains, and analyzes how interpersonal meanings are represented and constructed both in Shakespeare's original plays and in Chinese translated versions. It stresses that translation is more than a linguistic operation, and restates that the very nature of translation is communicative. The communication must include the affection, attitude,

evaluation and so on. Taking them all into account, the holistic and in-depth study of the interpersonal meanings of translated texts furthers corpus-based translation studies, because previous studies are mainly focused on ideational and textual meanings of translation.

1) Through the comprehensive qualitative and quantitative descriptions, comparisons and explanations of Zhu's, Liang's and Fang's translation are made. Through investigating their translating motivations, the book reveals the methods to represent and construct the interpersonal meanings in Chinese translated texts. To generalize the methods of realizing interpersonal function in translated texts, it searches the most typical words that express interpersonal meanings, like the modal auxiliary "can", the evaluative words "good" and "love", and the appellation noun "Lord".

2) Using "Lord" to fully illustrate the representation of the interpersonal meaning is a poly-systemic work, which makes the studies of translation more socio-communicative. It first searches from Shakespeare's plays the word "Lord" which counts 1306 in number, then classifies them into four types: those referring to the nobility, those whose social position are higher than speakers but who are not nobles, those whose social positions are the same as speakers, and those referring to speakers' relatives. In Zhu's and Liang's translations, many "Lords" are not translated, for there are no Chinese equivalents. During the analysis of the motivations of reproducing the same effect of interpersonal meaning, the author states that the English word "Lord" is so rich in meaning that there is no corresponding word in Chinese. The reason is that "China's hierarchical system is stricter than that of the West" (205). The Chinese word "Your Majesty" corresponding to "Lord" refers exclusively to the emperor. It is not used to address high-ranking officials, let alone father and brother. Therefore, both Zhu's and Liang's translations strive to reproduce the interpersonal meaning of the source language text by adopting a more varied Chinese vocabulary. After the analysis, the book points out that the representation and construction of those interpersonal meanings in the translated works take into account not only the lexical equivalence, the mood and the affective meanings, but also the interpersonal intention of the author, the aim of the translator and the reading stance of readers.

Third, the book goes further to explore the cognitive aspects of translation studies by probing into the reason why the translation product exhibits the form as it does. It is a worthwhile and meaningful attempt to look into the mind of human beings through language in translation studies.

1) It helps people to gain a deeper understanding of one's own language. Based on different Chinese translations of Shakespeare's plays, the most representative Chinese words, phrases, and sentence structures are presented. For instance, the reduplicated word "AABB" is beautiful in tone and vivid in image and shows one of the unique features of Chinese language. The analysis

of the reduplicated words “AABB” in Chinese translation indicates its strong descriptive power, and explains the visualization/imagery mode of thinking of the Chinese people.

2) The book analyzes translators’ motivations of translation from the perspective of language and cognition. According to Cognitive Grammar’s premise, any syntactical structure is not randomly arranged; rather, “the choice of different grammatical structures determines inference of different conceptual content” (Harrison 2). This book takes some typical Chinese translated sentences like SHI/BA/BEI constructions from *Hamlet* to reveal the cognitive processes of translators. Take the BA construction as an example, translation is first affected by the translator’s cognition. The target language structure chosen by the translator is the mapping of the event schema carried by the source text. Conflicts and contradictions in drama are realized by characters’ dialogues, and actions and behaviors determine the event’s condition. In *Hamlet*, a wide range of sentence structures contains displacement schemata in characters’ language. The BA construction is the main sentence pattern that expresses the displacement schema in the Chinese language. The using frequency of BA constructions varies with the plot. The gradual increase of BA constructions is not only a manifestation of the increasingly fierce conflict in the drama, but also a schematic mapping of Liang Shiqiu’s and Zhu Shenghao’s understanding of the play. All those highly salient sentence structures will activate readers’ and translators’ schematic network, which constructs a typical meaning of the translated texts.

3) Chinese readers’ cognition will be reconstructed to some extent by reading those translated works, and they will also understand their own culture and language better. “Metaphor is the embodiment of human understanding of concepts” (240), which is related to cognitive activities such as mind and thought. In the area of Chinese translation of the metaphorical expressions of color words in Shakespeare’s plays, the three translators mostly use literal translation or retain the metaphor, supplemented by explanation. The translation of metaphors requires the conversion of the two cultures’ thinking modes, in order “to convey the meaning of metaphors and ensure the accurate expression of metaphors in the cultural context of the target language” (251). Literal translation can not only reproduce or even construct metaphorical images in the source language, but also promote cultural exchanges between two cultures. The translator’s intentional literal translation allows readers to perform cognitive transformation in the reorganization of meaning. This is a brand-new reconstruction of personal knowledge schema, and it also promotes readers’ cognition and understanding of the world. As cognition is highly influenced by culture, the investigation of readers’ cognition realizes the translation function of cultural exchange in a very effective way.

Fourth, the translational style of translators, translation ideas of translators and translation norms are summarized and abstracted in the book, which overcomes the previous linear approach in translation studies.

1) The way of digging into the motivations behind those translation products opens a new window for corpus-based translational stylistics. The traditional translational stylistics always centers on describing and explaining language foregrounding or deviation, leaving translators' motivation untouched. However, those language phenomena, such as under- and over-representation in the target language must embody the translator's choice of language and his/her translation motivation. Based on the big DIY corpus, the book's studies of the translator's styles are comprehensive and reliable in mathematical statistics and in logical argumentation.

2) "The translator's translation style is the translator's outer 'self' outside the original work's style" (155). It reflects the translator's synthesized demonstration of his/her idiosyncratic cognition, his/her inter-subjectivity and his/her translation views. Having a unique translation style of one's own is the basic quality of a mature translator. The book analyzes and generalizes the translation styles of the three translators from the perspectives of the translator's translation thoughts, translation norms, and target readers. Zhu's purpose of translating Shakespeare's plays into Chinese is to make the ordinary readers know the great writer. Thus, his Chinese translations highly pursue the acceptability and interestingness of the translated texts on the premise that they convey the meaning of the original texts faithfully. During the process, Zhu's degree of adhering to the linguistic and socio-cultural norms of the target language culture is the highest. And his main translation strategy is domestication. Contrary to Zhu, Liang's translation of Shakespeare's plays "aims to arouse readers' interest in the original text" (qtd. in Hu 106), focusing on "preserving the original authenticity" (qtd. in Hu 42) because Liang's target readers are those who are experts in English and scholars who study Shakespeare. In Liang's translation, the degree of using Europeanized language is the highest and foreignization is the main translation strategy for him. Fang Ping also has his unique translation style. In order to realize the real unity in form and in content, Fang strives for the "phonological effects" and "original flavor" of Shakespeare's play (qtd. in Hu 144). Obviously, Fang is committed to "being accepted and appreciated by more readers" (*Ibid.*). Fang's final aim is to achieve the effect of "poetic drama on stage" from a modern aesthetic point of view (qtd. in Hu 144).

3) The book uses a dialectic stance to look at whether a translator conforms to translation norms in his day or not. According to Toury, "norms are socio-cultural in nature, they are assimilated by individuals in the process of their socialisation" (55). Inevitably, translators will be influenced more or less by their socio-cultural pressures, and their ways of resistance vary. For instance,

in the translation of English sexual taboos, Zhu's translation shows the highest level of purification. He uses various translation methods, and, by adopting different Chinese expressions, his translation complies with the Chinese society and culture at the time. When Liang translates sexual taboos, he does not deliberately cater to the ethical norms of Chinese society at that time. Instead, he believes that these vulgar and colloquial expressions show the crudeness of the characters. Liang pays special attention to retaining the meaning of the original work, and consequently his translation appears rigid and lacks literary varieties, while Zhu's translation is clear and vivid. Fang's translation is easy to read and remember, and suitable for performance.

Last, translation is a multi-faceted phenomenon, and Hu's book is very competent in giving us evidence, summarizing language features and explaining motivations of the translated texts within the field of corpus-based translation studies. The multi-dimensional analyses in the book empower readers to gain a deep and critical understanding of the translation process, product and function. I would like to suggest doing further studies focusing on the translation processes of different Chinese translators based on their manuscripts. All in all, the book certainly clears the ground and points out the future ways for the study of translation theories, corpus-based translation study, and the study of Chinese translations of Shakespearean plays.

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Yang, Lingui, and others, eds. *Series of Shakespeare Studies* (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2020).

Reviewed by *Qian Jiang**

As a tribute to Shakespeare, the publication of the series showcases Chinese participation in the global celebration of his legacy and encourages scholarly exchanges about the works in his name in China and elsewhere. For its Chinese perspectives and typical mode of critical discourse as well as its wide array of coverage, the five-volume *Shakespeare Studies Series* makes a new landmark in the history of Chinese Shakespeare studies. As Lingui Yang, the general editor of the series, suggests in the “General Introduction,” the growth of Chinese efforts in Shakespeare scholarship necessitates continuous involvement and conversation with international colleagues (15).

The series anthologizes important achievements of Shakespeare research in China of the last hundred years and introduces to its Chinese readers contemporary schools of Western Shakespeare criticism. Among other things, such coverage seems to encourage a comparative approach to Shakespeare in the juxtaposition of Chinese and Western studies, but the books in the series extend their thematic as well as theoretical concerns beyond any methodology, with each focusing on one Shakespearean topic yet from diverse perspectives. Actually, the selections of Shakespeare scholarship demonstrate a unique Chinese mode of discourse about the English Bard, with abundant evidence that Chinese scholars engage themselves in establishing certain communication with Shakespeareans elsewhere by referencing world Shakespeare studies. For another thing, there might be a political approach to Shakespeare that is eminent in both Chinese and Western studies in a certain era. As noted by Peter Holbrook in the “Foreword” to the series, the Western selections of the last three or four decades are “deeply historicist—or, to put it otherwise, political” (3). We might detect a historical or political turn in the 1960s in Chinese and Western academia. However, political Shakespeare in the Chinese context tells another story as the other anthologies in the series demonstrate a different cultural politics. To be sure, political criticism of Shakespeare in the two worlds can be defined differently and has gone through different trajectories in the swing of political agendas towards left or right.

To begin with, the Western Shakespeare volume, edited by Lingui Yang and Xueying Qiao, features Chinese translations of mainstream studies in recent decades, when such trends as new historicism, cultural materialism, feminism, gender study, post-colonialism and other prominent studies have prevailed

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literary criticism. Curiously, the anthology limits its inclusion to studies published in Anglophone academia since the 1970s for a reason that the editors attempt to explain in the front matter. The book carries on the convention of an influential Chinese anthology published earlier, *Selected Works of Shakespeare Criticism* (1979), edited by Zhouhan Yang, that collects translation of representative criticism ever since Shakespeare's contemporaries till the 1960s. It's known that after the 1960s, Western literary criticism has been highly prosperous with various schools of critique, and Shakespearean texts are among those most written on. The new anthology as in this series focuses on studies in the decades after the 1960s. The book's interest in Shakespeare studies after the political turn is joined with a few Chinese monographs that review contemporary Western schools of Shakespeare criticism, such as Qinchao Xu's *Textual Politics: A Review of Cultural Materialist Shakespeare* (2014) and Wei Zhang's *Marxist Shakespeare in Contemporary Britain and U.S.* (2018). The anthology is not a book of review and is not dedicated to one single critical trend, but covers the mainstream Western schools of criticism on Shakespeare since the 1970s. The selection "is a reliable guide to dominant trends in literary criticism and scholarship over the last few decades, and shows how profoundly ideological criticism in the Anglo-American academy has been since at least the 1970s and 1980s" (Holbrook, "Foreword," 3). While the "most influential and prestigious critics of the last three or four decades have been overwhelmingly preoccupied with issues of race, power, sexual identity or sexual difference, colonialism and imperialism [...], they have not been concerned so much with the issue of class" (3). Interestingly, the issue of class is a special concern in Chinese Marxist criticism of the 1950s and its revival in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. The next few decades have also seen Chinese Shakespeare studies of the non-political criticism, for example, humanism in its Chinese elaborations—Marxist, Western or even Confucian as we may find in the Chinese selections in the series.

Two volumes are dedicated to Shakespeare's dramatic genres. The tragedy volume, edited by Weimin Li and Lingui Yang, selects Chinese studies of the tragedies and reflect the editors' efforts in tracing classic literary theories and combining them with the latest research in Shakespeare. In its two major parts, the book covers both general studies of Shakespeare's celebrated genre and focused explorations of individual tragedies, both striving to reflect the new insights in the field. Readers can see that in this book, there are not only analyses of the artistic features of the Shakespearean tragedy but also general discussions on subjects like death, the essentials of tragedy, plot structure and peculiar tragic aesthetics. Studies apply theoretical concepts to analyses of specific tragedies, such as interpreting *King Lear* with ethics and psychoanalysis, reading *Macbeth* in modernist terms, *Othello* from a post-colonialist vision, and *Romeo and Juliet*

from a new historicist perspective. They are mainly about Shakespeare's four major tragedies *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*.

In a similar vein, the comedy volume, edited by Weimin Li, covers general studies on Shakespeare's comedy, such as his comic spirit and techniques. The major articles in the book analyze individual Shakespeare comedies, including *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Measure for Measure*, and *The Twelfth Night*. Selected studies share some interest in the mixing of the tragic and the comic as in scholarly monographs published in recent years. These studies have not only broken the common division between tragedy and comedy, but have also shown an attempt to interpret Shakespeare plays in an interdisciplinary way. For example, Feng's "Shylock's Confusion: Shakespeare and Early Modern English Legal Thoughts" analyzes *King Lear*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Measure for Measure* from the perspective of legal practice. Obviously, these two anthologies provide us with a rich reference, which not only reviews Shakespeare studies since the 1980s but also displays the latest research perspectives.

Readings of Shakespeare's texts have influenced their theatrical presentations in the Chinese theater, which albeit contains its particular features in the form of *huaju* (spoken drama) or *xiqu* (traditional opera) within a certain reading or adaptation of the Shakespearean text. The performance/adaptation volume, edited by Chong Zhang, covers studies of Shakespeare on the Chinese stage in the last four decades when theatrical presentations of Shakespeare are most active. With the studies on stage performance, this book is thus far beyond textual analysis. Its authors also include professional actors and directors, far more than mere academic scholars. This book is divided into four parts: theoretical studies on Shakespeare performance and adaptation, Shakespeare on Chinese drama stage, adapting Shakespeare to traditional Chinese opera, and Shakespeare film adaptation. As scholars have pointed out, there are two distinct approaches to the adaptation of Shakespeare plays—localization and Westernization, or domestication and foreignization. Localization to some simply means adapting Shakespeare plays to traditional Chinese opera, such as Peking Opera, Kunqu Opera, Sichuan Opera, Yueju Opera and other local opera forms. Westernization also seems to refer to the stage performance following Western realistic approach. In fact, both local and Westernized methods can be used in adapting practices. All elements, traditional or modern, outdated or fashionable, elegant or vulgar, can be used in Shakespeare adaptations. This volume provides not only theories and thoughts in cross-cultural adaptation research, but also examples of adaptation to traditional Chinese opera and film. These are perspectives and achievements from Chinese scholars and artists for Shakespeare adaptation and performance research in the time of globalization.

We see in the anthologies that the Western Bard's texts are explored in multiple literary and artistic traditions, either Chinese or Western, in the Chinese classroom or theater. For most Chinese readers, Shakespeare is a prominent figure in the category of "foreign literature," and scholars approach his works as part of world literature. In the *World Literature* volume, edited by Zhenzhao Nie and Juan Du, we find out what important position Shakespeare has in Chinese foreign literary research. The position lies in the fact that *Foreign Literary Studies*, one of China's most prominent academic journals in foreign literary criticism, has dedicated a special column to Shakespeare ever since its start in 1978. The journal has thus played a highly important role in promoting Shakespeare studies in China. The selected articles from *Foreign Literary Studies*, as the series' special volume, include articles in various categories: general studies of Shakespeare; focused studies of Shakespearean tragedy; and studies of the histories, comedies and romances. They are arranged in chronological order of publication in the journal. Two English articles are also included and translated into Chinese in the volume. Of the writers in this volume, there are outstanding literary scholars, such as Zhouhan Yang, Weizhi Zhu, Shen Ruan, Ping Fang, and Shouchang Gu. The selected essays in the volume may represent the highest accomplishments Chinese scholars have ever made in each historical period in Shakespeare studies. The journal also publishes translations of essays by international Shakespearians so that it has become a valuable platform for international exchange in Shakespeare studies. Likewise, the world literature volume has presented not only substantial references for Chinese scholars but also a history of Shakespeare research in China since 1978.

Amid the wealth of the series of anthologies, which the general editor and collaborating editors have painstakingly put together, it is to be regretted to end by noting a few of issues. As the editors have admitted, this series of books would unavoidably have its own pities and flaws. For one thing, the selection is limited for some reason. Most Shakespeare studies in China have conventionally been concentrated on the several so-called major plays of Shakespeare. Therefore, most articles in the tragedy and comedy anthologies are on those most studied tragedies and comedies with which Chinese readers are the most familiar. If more articles in the two anthologies are on Shakespeare plays other than those key ones, the two anthologies could better display the latest research achievements. For another thing, the series has not included some important topics of study. According to different genres, studies could be on Shakespeare poetry, translation, history plays and romance plays and on different themes, such as death, love, law, and education. Finally, though there are one or two articles in the series by Taiwan scholars, not much has been learned in Shakespeare studies in Hong Kong, Macao and other Chinese-speaking communities. After all, Shakespeare studies outside mainland China are also part of Chinese Shakespeare studies. In the future, studies in these areas should be

added to the series either in each volume or as an independent volume. Perhaps all these are what editors and readers commonly wish for the improvement of the series.

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Theatre Reviews

***This is not Romeo & Juliet.* Dir. Argyris Pandazaras. Poreia Theatre, Athens, Greece.**

Reviewed by *Xenia Georgopoulou**

Love in the Time of Coronavirus

This is not Romeo & Juliet, a production by Argyris Pandazaras based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, premiered at the Poreia Theatre in Athens on 13 October 2020. Three weeks later, on 3 November, the theatres were closed by the Greek Government in the context of the general lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic. A few days later, on 8 November, the production was live-streamed for the first time (another two live-streamed performances followed on 14 November and 5 December¹), and this online experience is what I am going to talk about in this review.

Before I get to the performance itself, I thought I should first provide some information regarding the Athenian theatres during the coronavirus pandemic, and before the lockdown, using the Poreia Theatre as an example.² Following the protocols, theatres were allowed to fill up to 30% of their auditorium, which for the Poreia Theatre meant up to 70 spectators. The use of masks was compulsory; there were sanitizing spots in the theatre; the seats were organized in a way that social distancing was kept; the theatre was sanitized daily. The production was on for 5 nights before the lockdown, and every single show was a soldout.

I have to confess that the idea of watching a production online didn't seem particularly attractive to me; what is so special about theatre is the close interaction between the actor and the spectator in a space they share. However,

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¹ By the time this review was submitted.

² All information, including the programme and photographs of the show, was kindly provided by Vassilia Taskou.

during the lockdown there is no alternative. And yet I have to admit that the experience of watching the live-streamed *This is not Romeo & Juliet* made me forget about my original reservations. As for the production itself, its live-streamed version gave the opportunity to more spectators to watch it from all over Greece as well as abroad. The online tickets for the first three live-streamed performances amounted to 8,000, and the spectators were most likely many more, considering that more people could watch the show from the same screen with just one ticket. The actors' appearance in a popular television series (*Agries Melisses* [*Wild Bees*]) most probably contributed to the soldout live performances as well as to the large turnout online; as Grigoris Ioannidis observes, both actors have a "strong artistic as well as commercial value", also due to the fact that they are widely recognizable thanks to the serial (Ioannidis).

But let's move to the production itself. This was not the first time that Argyris Pandazaras dealt with Shakespeare. In January 2017 he presented with Stefania Goulioti a production named *AmorS*, consisting of Shakespearean sonnets and excerpts from several of Shakespeare's plays, at the Cycladon Street Theatre—Lefteris Vogiatzis. Once more, in *This is not Romeo & Juliet*, a production of the group Momentum Accelerated Evolution and the Poreia Theatre, Pandazaras approached the issue of love in Shakespeare—or indeed the matter of love in general.

The synopsis of *This is not Romeo & Juliet* on the website of the Poreia Theatre gives a rough idea of what the show is about:

Two eternal teenagers fall in love in a costume party.
 They dream, they escape from life, and they converse with death!
 In ecstasy, under the influence of love.
 They invade the theatre.
 They keep the play "Romeo and Juliet" as a lucky charm
 and they are "heavily armed" with all of Shakespeare's doomed couples.
 Couples who face love, oath, rejection, and death.
 Two children who wanted to build their own world and escape from it!
 Two protagonists without their own words.
 Two protagonists without their own play!
 A "dress rehearsal" for lovers! ("An Ordinary Night")

Together with Theodora Kapralou, Pandazaras created a new text. They kept the two protagonists of Shakespeare's tragedy, as well as a few famous scenes from the original in K. Karthaios's translation, and added their own story. The story of a modern young couple, who explore their own relationship through Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and their own view of the play. For the boy it is a play about love; for the girl it is a play about death. As Olga Sella synthesizes, this new play presents "two youngsters [who] want to play the game of love

through the myth of Romeo and Juliet. They try to get in their place, but they are entangled in their own relationship, in their own era" (Sella). For Anastassis Pinakoulakis this confusion seems to work the other way round: "two lovers try to live and create together, but they seem trapped in their archetypes" (Pinakoulakis). As Ioannidis remarks, the love element "on the one hand is based on a romantic archetype, and on the other it is engrafted with abundant modern vocabulary and gestures" (Ioannidis). Vivian Mitsakou observes that "we are transferred to the past and the present, sometimes through verse and sometimes through the vernacular" (Mitsakou).

Ioannidis detects throughout the production "the joy of the game and the magic of the convention/transformation, the theatre boxed within the theatre" (Ioannidis). Pinakoulakis adds that "The way [the actors] add garments on stage, a distancing technique, is in tune with the creation of a play-within-the-play production. The way the actors shift from the relationship between them to the convention of the performance is very attractive" (Pinakoulakis). In Pandazaras's production the use of the costumes, designed by Lina Stavropoulou and Gina Iliopoulou, follows the text. In the beginning of the show the two youngsters wear mostly modern casual or sports clothes; when they start playing parts of Shakespeare's play, they change into garments adorned with lace or embroidery (Juliet even wears a Renaissance ruff), which transform them into Romeo and Juliet. As Pinakoulakis synopsis, "the two actors appear in an almost athletic attire, which reminds of rehearsal clothing, while they gradually add accessories that 'transform' them into their archetypes" (Pinakoulakis).

In the beginning of the play there is an argument between the young couple about playing *Romeo and Juliet* or not; the boy (Argyris Pandazaras) wants to play, the girl (Elli Triggou) does not. Her reason is that the two lovers end up dead. The idea of the game is also present here: the two youngsters let a children's game ("rock- paper-scissors") decide whether they are going to play or not. The girl is eventually convinced, and they start playing the most famous scenes of the play: first the scene of the first kiss, then the so-called "balcony scene". At some point the girl feigns death, and seems to convince the boy that she is dead indeed. When she decides to "revive", the boy does not want to play any more, whereas the girl is now the one who insists that they should play on. Ioannidis argues that these "abrupt changes of mood [. . .] allude to the nature of youth" (Ioannidis), and Pinakoulakis adds that the play "focuses on the love relations with their ups and downs" (Pinakoulakis; on the same matter also see Mitsakou).

In his director's note (which he calls "notes from the rehearsal") Pandazaras talks about "couples doomed to endure their fate" and refers to Othello and Desdemona, Hamlet and Ophelia, Antony and Cleopatra—apart from Romeo and Juliet, of course. These references to more Shakespearean plays are also present in the text of the production, as in the excerpt from the

“nunnery scene” from *Hamlet* or the scene where the Moor kills Desdemona from *Othello*. As for Romeo and Juliet’s fate, which makes of them two golden statues at the end of the play, it seems to be referred to even before the show starts, when Triggou adorns both her partner’s face and her own with golden flakes.

The two characters move in a world of their own, underlined by the set, designed by Dimitra Zigaris. It consists of eight hexagonal prisms of different heights that look like a hive. Discussing the space in his note in the programme, Pandazaras talks, among other things, about the geometry of the hive, “a place of transformation, production, reproduction” (Pandazaras 8). In her own note in the programme, the set designer, apart from stating the obvious, that “the total shape of the set is that of a hive”, also remarks that “the hexagonal prisms recall the benzene rings of carbon, the ‘element of life’, the basis of all organic compounds” (Zigaris 18). At the top of the highest prism there is a semi-transparent rotating sphere, on which lies a large ruby. It symbolizes “eternal love, the power and vitality of blood” (Pandazaras 8). “Some called it mineral kiss, some the diamond of death”, the director adds (Pandazaras 8). The ruby is seen rotating on the sphere until the end of the show, when it is shared between the lovers, as it passes from one mouth to the other and back again through their kisses.

Acting on Zigaris’s small construct certainly requires choreographed movements, which were designed by Constantinos Papanikolaou, who also trained the actors, who execute his choreography with precision (Sella). In *This is not Romeo & Juliet* the set becomes “the third protagonist” of the production (Mitsakou). Pinakoulakis argues that the different levels of the set signify, in Pandazaras’s staging, the different levels of a relationship, and that the various forms that this “polymorphic” set takes could represent the various stages of a human relationship (Pinakoulakis).

Apart from its symbolic value, the set also proves very ergonomic. It works as a closet, with the characters opening parts of it to take their costumes from; and also covers needs deriving from the text, as in the scene in Capulet’s orchard (the “balcony scene”), when different parts of the set open to reveal branches with leaves. However, even this last part has its own meaning: “the set that blossoms” represents “life that comes through the burnt earth” (Pandazaras 8).

The lights, designed by Sakis Birbilis, work in harmony with the set. Vivian Mitsakou argues that they create a fairy-tale atmosphere, while stressing the different phases of the protagonists’ relationship (Mitsakou), and Sella adds that they underline “the tensions and the moments” (Sella). So does the music by Giorgos Poullos, but also the pieces selected for the beginning and the ending of the show. Before the show starts, we hear songs like “Bad Kingdom” by Moderat, whereas a last Shakespearean reference (“To be, or not to be”) is heard at the end of the show in “Fuck All the Perfect People” by Chip Taylor.

Of course, a live-streamed performance involves more participants: the cameramen (three of them for this production) and, most importantly, the director of the live-streamed version (Pavlos Kerassidis). This staging included views from above, close-ups etc., which offered to the online spectator a multi-faceted experience: a viewing of the performance from different angles, and occasionally a closer view of the actors, but also of the set and costumes, which would be absent from a live experience at the theatre, where the spectator is nailed to his/her seat. Sella underlines the benefits of this new experience: the views from above, or the close-ups, she says, gave a wholly new impression, which no theatre, not even the first row, could have offered. She also admits in her review that the views of the theatre that preceded the performance itself gave her a taste of the real thing; she somehow felt she was at the theatre (Sella).

The online show also involved references to the live-streaming process itself. At some point the girl asked the boy why they had to play *Romeo and Juliet*, since there was no-one watching; and the boy answered that he knew that there were people watching. There were also views of one of the cameramen, as well as of a person (probably the director of the online show) in front of a screen showing the different angles of the cameras that covered the live streaming of the production.

Despite the fact that the live-streamed performance was a full theatrical experience, the end of the show was still awkward, with no audience to applaud the actors. The two of them bowed, hugged each other, continued playing with each other, with the ruby, with the golden flakes, and left after a while.

This is not Romeo & Juliet was regarded as “a personal investigation on the big issues touched on in [Shakespeare’s] play: love, hate, the fear of death” (Pinakoulakis). Furthermore, Ioannidis observes that the “This is NOT” part of the production’s title “reveals the relation that the new generation of our artists has developed with classical literature. It is a relation without stereotypes and away from coercions, a relation of freedom and real, unpretentious respect” (Ioannidis). As for the live-streaming experience, as Veatricky Psychari remarks, “a life in live-streaming [. . .] is still life” (Psychari), after all.

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Photograph by Nikos Pandazaras



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