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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 Irizarri, 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,’ [...]with 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 of 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.

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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