

Hamlet in the Margins: Shakespeare and the Performance of Whiteness in Cyprus

Stella Achilleos

This paper examines a 2019 production staged at the Centre of Visual Arts and Research in Cyprus in which students from the University of Cyprus performed the gravediggers scene from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (under the direction of Henry Bell and myself). The project involved a student workshop in which part of the text was translated in the Greek-Cypriot dialect and the script was then used for a bilingual production of the scene in which Hamlet spoke in Shakespeare's English, while the gravediggers responded in the Cypriot-Greek dialect. This bilingual production stages whiteness not through a black/white racial binary but as a linguistic and cultural hierarchy negotiated within peripheral Europe, exposing how Shakespeare functions as a vehicle of elite cultural whiteness beyond the Anglophone world; more specifically in postcolonial Cyprus, a former British colony where English continues to retain cultural, institutional, and educational prestige and Shakespeare continues to function as a marker of elite culture and European legitimacy. As I argue, counterposing Hamlet's English (that situates him within the linguistic register of elite authority, prestige, refinement, and power) to the gravediggers' responses in Greek-Cypriot (a dialect often socially marked as informal and excluded from official registers), the production points to hierarchy internal to European whiteness itself and creates a stratified soundscape that stages whiteness as cultural capital: a form of elite belonging mediated through language. Yet, the gravediggers' dialect responses in many ways destabilize this hierarchy: by forcing Shakespeare's English into dialogue with the local vernacular, the production fractures the very cultural authority it appears to affirm, exposing the colonial residues that involve the elevation of English as the language of high culture and showing how Shakespeare functions as a technology of European whiteness beyond the Anglophone centre.

Title: Swahili and Chinese Shylock: Towards a Discourse of Decolonization

Dr. Jinjian Li

Shakespeare's plays travelled around the world, and as they were translated and adapted into different languages, the image of the characters in these works changed, sometimes dramatically. The negative became positive and vice versa. Shylock, the villainous Jew in *The Merchant of Venice*, became known to Chinese and Swahili audiences through translations and adaptations of the two languages in the late 19th and mid-20th centuries. His image changed from that of a bloodthirsty and merciless usurer to that of a discriminated minority in Swahili literature and of a representation of the oppressed people facing Japanese imperialist invasion in Chinese literature. The transformation of Shylock's image not only shows the inclusiveness and richness of connotations of Shakespeare's characters, but also informs the local people's appropriation of the symbolic cultural products of the colonial power to represent their own situation.

In colonial times, translation from a dominant to a dominated literary field was carried out as a colonial enterprise, through which the language and literary patterns of the former were incubated in the latter. Whereas in the era of decolonization, as I will argue, translation is a way of appropriating the literary resources of the colonial power in order to articulate the decolonial impulse of the colonized.

Kirsten N. Mendoza

Title: Othello's Legacies: Black Germans and Internalized Racism in OG Keemo's Rap

This paper focuses on the intersections between two songs by Sudanese-German rapper OG Keemo and Shakespeare's *Othello*. In May 2019, OG Keemo released *Otello*, a five-song extended play, that displays his sense of entrapment living in a country that both associates blackness with violence and fetishizes black hypermasculinity. Like Shakespeare's *Othello*, OG Keemo's extended play portrays how these conditions could lead to self-harm and the 'white' romanticization of black, male self-destruction. Later that same year, OG Keemo's single *216* provocatively underscores how feelings of self-loathing and self-hatred are internalized by Black Germans living in a Federal Republic in which the self-perception of most Germans appears to be built around the presumption of whiteness despite the fact that the country has been shaped by people of colour and although more than one million people of African descent currently live in Germany.

The essay argues that OG Keemo draws upon one of the most damaging and enduring representations of black masculinity—Othello, who was created by a white author for the consumption of a white audience— to critique structural and quotidian forms of racism targeting Afrodiasporic populations in Germany and to provide insight to internalized racism. His rap personas reveal the difficulty of escaping feelings of self-hatred. Whether one is the state's ideal minority who rises in the ranks to become a military leader, like Othello, or is the fetishized "gangster" who is at odds with the state and whose primary pursuits are imagined by a white society to be for money, drugs, and sex, racist ideologies negatively impact how they view themselves to detrimental outcomes.

Shakespeare as Western Representative: Adaptation, Canon Formation, and Elite Reception from Britain to China

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This paper examines the transnational circulation of Shakespeare as an elite cultural figure through the mediating role of Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*. Engaging with Arthur Little's formulation of Shakespeare's participation in "white-people making," it explores how Shakespeare's identity was reshaped from a commercially minded playwright into a wise, white, national poet whose authority could anchor narratives of cultural refinement. In eighteenth and nineteenth-century Britain, his image was gradually elevated from that of a provincial dramatist to a literary master suitable for patronage, moral instruction, and the consolidation of elite taste. This transformation aligned with Enlightenment assumptions that Renaissance literature required improvement and moral clarification for modern readers, particularly the young.

The Lambs' prose adaptations domesticated Shakespeare for children's education, modifying plots, smoothing violence, and disciplining unruly passions. Such revisions did not serve merely pedagogical purposes. They also participated in the aestheticisation of white cultural identity, presenting Shakespeare as the embodiment of moral wisdom and civilizational maturity. When the *Tales* were translated and adapted in early twentieth-century China, this reconfigured Shakespeare travelled as a poet rather than a playwright, a shift shaped by the higher cultural prestige accorded to poetry in the Chinese literary hierarchy. Alongside figures such as John Milton, Shakespeare became a representative of Western high culture for an elite readership. Through these layered adaptations, Shakespeare functioned as a vehicle for performing whiteness beyond the Anglophone world, mediating how Western modernity and cultural authority were imagined and internalised.

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Circum-venting Whiteness: *Othello* in 19th Century Polish Translation Commentaries, Paratexts and Theatrical Reviews

This paper examines the history of the Polish reception of *Othello* in the Polish language in the long 19th century through the analysis of translation paratexts and commentaries surrounding the production of the first Polish translations of the play as well as theatrical reviews and other texts produced regionally around the same time, including drama, novels and medical treatises discussing blackness.

The question it asks is whether and to what extent racial prejudice was expressed in those writings owing to general cultural factors (e.g. religion); whether and to what extent it was installed by the post-Enlightenment models of knowledge production, and finally, whether and to what extent it was influenced by the spread of the geographies of race discourse

This inquiry is fuelled by the realisation that in the 19th and 20th century Eastern Europeans were not considered prototypically white in the Anglophone world. This begs the question of whether the patterns of Shakespearean appropriation in East Central Europe were implicated in asserting a sense of racial belonging with Western Europe and if so, how it came to bear on the production and reception of *Othello* in Polish translation and performance.