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Thirty Times ‘More Fair than Black’: *Othello* Re-Translation as Political Re-Statement

This essay analyses one couplet – the Duke’s parting shot, “If virtue no delighted beauty lack, / Your son-in-law is far more fair than black” (1.3.291–2) – in about thirty of the German re-translations and adaptations of *Othello* which have been published since the 1760s. The corpus is comprehensive for the post-war period. A glance at the historical distribution (Table 1) shows two marked upsurges, in the 1970s and especially in the 2000s. New German *Othellos* are appearing nowadays at an increasing rate, both in absolute terms and relative to re-translations and

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1 This essay represents an early phase in an evolving and expanding research project. It was substantially completed in winter 2009. I am very grateful to Michael Neill, Gerd Baumann, Marie Gillespie, and Andy Rothwell for comments on early drafts, and to Balz Engler for many helpful corrections and suggestions on the last draft. Versions of the Duke’s couplet in all languages are being crowd-sourced at www.delightedbeauty.org, and the site also records work by an interdisciplinary team at Swansea University, devising data visualization techniques to facilitate exploration of variation in re-translations. A far shorter essay, based on German and French versions of the Duke’s couplet (French supplied by Dr Matthias Zach), is forthcoming in the *Cambridge World Shakespeare Encyclopedia*.


3 Two main sources are cited below as *BB* (with catalogue number: C10 etc.) and *TT*.


*TT* = Verband Deutscher Bühnen- und Medienverlage e.V., ‘VDB-Katalog’, at www.theatertexte.de (last accessed 12 December 2010). *TT* is a catalogue of theatre scripts, where rights are owned by members of the association of German stage and media publishers (VDB). At *TT* I found 33 *Othellos*, including five pre-2000 not in *BB*, and seven post-2000. My thanks to Dr Arnd Zapletal at *TT* for help with queries, and to all the staff at the various publishers who sent me hard copies or digital files.

adaptations of other Shakespeare plays. Evidently, Othello is becoming more and more of a myth to think with. Studying re-translations illuminates the history of the translating culture: its literary language, its canons of style and taste, and its ideological politics. This essay argues that the German re-translations of the Duke’s couplet can be grouped into historical periods, demarcated by political changes; in each period the representation of the ‘fair/black’ hero in this couplet obeys distinct, ideologically grounded rules. The essay also seeks to demonstrate a more contentious proposition, namely that reading re-translations can deepen understanding of the source text. Even advocates of translation studies in literary analysis don’t necessarily agree with this. Marilyn Gaddis Rose writes that the “patient research” involved in studying re-translations “can be immensely useful to literary historians.” But she goes on: “It does not, however, lead a reader into a text for the most profound experience. Certainly it does not provide us with new internal mental spaces for thinking about a text.” On the contrary, I hope to show that when we consider the interpretative readings performed by generations of re-translators, we must reconsider our interpretation of the source text, as we re-read it with them.

My method combines close reading with a version of Franco Moretti’s “distant reading”. It entails sampling large numbers of cognate texts (regardless of renown or imputed worth) in order to detect historical patterns – genetic and ideological – and in this case also in order to discover what the aggregate of differences reveals about the translated source. Unlike Maik Hamburger, a leading contemporary director, dramaturge, and translator, I do not find that the differences in the re-translations can be read as a “long process of ‘cumulative self-correction’”, in which Shakespeare’s German translators, “each profiting from the work of [his] pred-

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4 For reasons mentioned below, all Shakespeare’s plays are being re-translated and re-adapted more frequently now than ever before. Probably, too, a higher proportion of scripts are lodged at TT. But compare figures for Othello and the always more popular Macbeth: BB lists 52 editions of Othello, 114 of Macbeth; TT has 10 post-2000 Othellos, and 13 post-2000 Macbeths. This shows that until 2000, Macbeth was twice as frequently re-translated or adapted. Since 2000, Othello has almost caught up. However, Hamlet, King Lear, and The Tempest remain clearly in front.

5 Marilyn Gaddis Rose, Translation and Literary Criticism: Translation as Analysis (Manchester: St Jerome, 1997), 53.

Table 1: German Othello translators, redactors, adaptors
To 1920: all distinct versions of the Duke’s last couplet found. From 1920: all translations and adaptations consulted.
By approx. dates of publication, or translation activity, if known to be significantly earlier.

Key
*Bold type* = adaptation without the couplet. *Bold italic* = adaptation with the couplet. * = not in BB (post-2000: all).

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ecessors”,” “come ever nearer to the demands of the original”.? My sample shows, instead, that ideologically controversial lines – and *a fortiori*, whole plays – keep being differently re-translated, in ways which embody contemporary ideologies. There is no guarantee that translators (or any

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other interpreters) approximate to an original truth, whether located in Shakespeare’s time or any other.

In order to cover thirty re-translations and 250 years, I focus here on just the one difficult couplet. Its lexis encapsulates many of the play’s themes: race/colour, morality, power, gender, beauty, affect, and kinship. Its syntax exemplifies two rhetorics and prosodies: in the first line, courtly obfuscation, abstraction, ambivalence, delay, and awkwardly colliding consonants; in the second, blunt directness, pleasing assonance, and potentially amusing punning. With this ornate quasi-syllogism, the Duke draws a line, in the name of the state, under Brabantio’s challenge to Desdemona’s marriage, and declares Othello a good man. But in doing so he highlights his colour difference. The couplet in the end returns with “more fair than black” to equivocating ambivalence, and with “black” to “lack”: the rhyme and rhetoric combine with the first line’s obscurity to equate “black” with “beauty lack”, lack of beauty. A 1970s schools edition glosses the couplet as follows: “your son-in-law’s virtues are so fine that they completely overwhelm any qualms you may have at his Negro race.” Such paraphrase endorses racism, as do the Duke’s words themselves. James Schiffer (quoting Ania Loomba) comments: “To praise Othello’s virtue, the Duke slanders his race. […] Othello is granted the status of ‘honorary white,’ with all the privileges and insults that term suggests.” The Duke’s recommendation of Othello may once have seemed – to whites – full-hearted, but no longer. Some US productions of the 1990s cut the couplet, as well as Othello’s self-lacerating “Haply, for I am black” (3.3.265), for the sake of ‘political correctness’: to spare the audience the embarrassment of hearing racist speech from a figure of iden-

8 My thanks to Alan Finlayson for pointing out that the couplet is an enthymeme, an example of “‘quasi-logical’ arguments that employ only some parts of a syllogism or rely on premises that are probable rather than certain”: Alan Finlayson, “From Beliefs to Arguments: Interpretive Methodology and Rhetorical Political Analysis,” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 9/ 4 (2007), 545–563 (557).


In one 1997 UK production, the Duke spoke the couplet “‘as a forced, embarrassed attempt to defuse the racial tension with, as it were, a slightly off-colour joke’”; in another, “the chuckle from the officers that accompanies this remark suggests that they know Othello isn’t one of them, but they need him badly and – right now – they don’t intend to dwell on it.” It seems plausible that the Duke intends the polysemy of “fair” and “black” to be taken humorously, but if so, with what intent and what effects with regard to the main players in the scene, and the bystanders, and the audience? Do those who laugh laugh as he meant them to laugh? Or might his wordplay be neither meant nor taken humorously? “The humour of a pun depends very much on ‘the expectations shared by the framer of the message and the addressee’”, the Duke’s puns implicitly test the ‘common sense’ of on- and off-stage worlds. Translators are in exactly the same position as directors and actors, as Dirk Delabastita argues:

> Any understanding and evaluation of Shakespeare rests on textual, cultural, and ideological codes which are largely independent from the linguistic barrier as such. The operation of these codes therefore tends to confront editors, critics, directors, adapters, and other English-speaking rewriters of Shakespeare with much the same difficulties and dilemmas as those facing the translators abroad.

But puns present particular challenges for translators. It helps that one can render a given term as a contrary of a contrary of it, a procedure

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16 See, compendiously, Dirk Delabastita, *There’s a Double Tongue: An Investigation into the Translation of Shakespeare’s Wordplay, with Special Reference to Hamlet* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1993).
which is often appropriate in Shakespeare translation, with his constant playing on inconstant oppositions. Here the procedure is doubly licensed by the Duke’s double negative (“no … lack”). Like Timon’s gold, a translator can “make black white, foul fair, / Wrong right, base noble, old young, coward valiant” (Timon 4.3.1664–5). The semantic, figurative and connotative fields of English “black” and German schwarz happen to be fairly similar – yet surprisingly many translators eschew that seemingly obvious choice. For “fair”, German offers no obvious choice: the several meanings can only be conveyed by several words. Since German Shakespeare translators (with rare exceptions until very recently) obey a convention that a pair of rhyming iambic pentameters must be formally mimicked as such, their options are even more limited, although they have a surfeit of choices. The lack of rhymes for “schwarz” encourages translators to search for alternatives, but this purely technical factor does not fully explain the variation in translations of the word.

The Duke’s uses of “fair” and “black” are glossed by only the most recent Anglophone editors: a sign of increased sensitivity to race-related terminology. “Fair” is triply glossed by Michael Neill as “fair-skinned”, “beautiful”, and “free from moral blemish”, and by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen as “beautiful/pale/virtuous”.17 They gloss “black” as a corresponding series: “ugly/dark-complexioned/wicked”. Neill’s triple gloss on “black” does not correspond so exactly to his gloss on “fair”: “dark-skinned”, “baneful, malignant, sinister”, and “foul, wicked”. “Baneful” suggests by its contrary a further possible gloss on “fair”: “auspicious”. The sovereign is blessing both a marriage and a military expedition, so he might be expected to pronounce judgment on Othello in terms of his, his wife’s, and his companions’ anticipated destiny. But surely more obviously, “if one opposite of ‘fair’ is ‘black’, another is ‘foul’”18 with the primary sense of ‘ugly’: hence Bate and Rasmussen’s gloss “ugly” for “black” (an important choice in German translation history, as we will see); and by the same token, the primary contrary of “black” makes “fair” here mean “white”.

In a recent short story, Zimbabwean writer John Eppel depicts a Bulawayo schoolteacher mulling over the adaptation of these lines for a school production in which the sole white actor will be playing Othello.

In his reflections he assumes that the Duke’s comment on Othello is equivocal:

 [...] what about:
If virtue’s qualities are always rare
Your son-in-law is far more black than fair.
Bit clumsy. What if I change “fair” to “white”? Um ... what about:
If virtue lack no beauties that delight
Your son-in-law is far more black than white.
Better: “white” has fewer positive connotations than “fair”. Needs more work, though. Certainly
needs more work.19

Translators are adaptors working into another language, and English is always another language, too, in different times and places. Translators’ choices might be analysed in terms of personal style, but I hope to demonstrate that – as Eppel’s story implies – they are over-determined by ideological factors at work in the translating culture. This is not only a matter of lexis (“virtue” and “delighted” are similarly problematic here). Syntax and rhetoric often must change in translation between languages, and they circumscribe the implicit dramaturgy of the translated lines. Different choices impute different intentions to the Duke, for example by varying the extent to which, in speaking to Brabantio, he seems to include Othello as an interlocutor, or refers to him only as an object of others’ regards, whether admiring, or fearful, or contemptuous. He must, surely, look to meet Brabantio’s gaze as he speaks, but does he also look to meet Othello’s? (“The stranger soon learns that where the mouth may deceive, the eyes tell nothing but the truth.”20) In raising such questions, the re-translations of the Duke’s fourteen words offer a micro-history of German Shakespeare translating and of German ideologies with regard to state power and the black hero. And in their diversity they reveal implications in the source lines which monoglot readers not only might miss, but do miss, and must miss, unless they take the detour through the work of translation.

This research was prompted by a controversial, radical ‘tradaptation’ commissioned by the Munich Kammerspiele, first staged there in 2003,

and published by the writers in 2004.\textsuperscript{21} Feridun Zaimoglu and Günter Senkel’s \textit{Othello}, in a production directed by Luk Perceval, has the status of a contemporary classic. At the time of writing it has just opened at the Thalia Theater Hamburg, after being in repertory in Munich for five years. It has toured widely. At Stratford in 2005, the script’s obscene contemporary language, scrolling on surtitles in a literal back-translation, gave great offence. In Iago’s quayside jokes to Desdemona (2.1.129 ff.), for example, Zaimoglu and Senkel overturn the entire German translation tradition by not translating the words of the couplets, but instead giving Iago current misogynist, racist jokes, such as: “How do you stop five blacks from raping a white woman? Throw them a basketball.”\textsuperscript{22} The provocation offered here is arguably more faithful to the part of Shakespeare’s Iago than most translations, which go by the words, instead of seeking contemporary cultural equivalents. Zaimoglu and Senkel’s modernizing tradaptation strategy involves a far stronger, more consciously ideological interpretation of the text than most translations or adaptations – in part because Zaimoglu’s Turkish background entails a distinctive perspective on racism. Not that they always “tradapt” so loosely. About 90% of their text derives quite directly from Shakespeare. In the Duke’s couplet, eschewing verse metre and rhyme, they are more strictly faithful than many translators, except in their choice for “fair”:

\begin{quote}
Zaimoglu/Senkel: \textit{Solange männliche Tugend mehr zählt als Schönheitsfehler, kann man sagen, Ihr Schwiegersohn ist eher edel als schwarz.}\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

So long as male virtue counts more than minor blemishes [literally: beauty-failings], one can say your son-in-law is more noble than black.

We will come back to the ideological significance of their choices here. The writers claim to have consulted “more than a dozen” previous translations,\textsuperscript{24} and when I began to think about comparing theirs with others’, it occurred to me that rhyming couplets offered a useful litmus test, a trial of translators’ mettle. The re-translations of Iago’s quayside jokes offer

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{22} Zaimoglu and Senkel, \textit{William Shakespeare}, 34.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Zaimoglu and Senkel, \textit{William Shakespeare}, 26.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Zaimoglu and Senkel, \textit{William Shakespeare}, 122.
\end{itemize}
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very rich material; indeed, more German re-translators and redactors have tinkered with them over the generations than with the Duke’s couplet. But his play on “virtue” and “lack”, “fair” and “black” makes an ideal sample for initial analysis, because translators are forced to make choices which reveal their ideological positions on basic questions posed by Othello: what does “black hero” mean? What does the play’s representative of state authority think it means?

One meaning of “fair” is almost certainly not in play in the Duke’s couplet: the sense of “just” or “even-handed”. The line has meanwhile acquired that additional – anachronistic – meaning, as witnessed by some current student editions with translations into modern English. In the first, “valour” is a good explanatory translation for “virtue”, but the ambiguity of “fairer” permits a misleading pun on “more just”:

Durband: If valour is the measure of true beauty, your son-in-law is fairer than he’s black.25

The second example, catastrophically bad, documents a disturbing divorce between scholarship and educational publishing. The translator apparently works from intuition alone, using no reference works. He overlooks a negative and reads “fair” as plain “just”:

Scott: If virtue is missing delightful beauty,
Your son-in-law is far more just than black.26

The third, the most simplified, raises a different problem of anachronism by invoking a phrase which has only been current since the 1960s, the slogan “Black is Beautiful”.27

Crowther: If goodness is beautiful, your son-in-law is beautiful, not black.28

This is arguably appropriate for young readers today: it implicitly affirms an anti-racist tenet, by making the Duke contradict it. But “black” is not

27 Wikipedia (at December 2009) credits the phrase to John S. Rock (1825–66), but this cannot be confirmed. The sources given by Wikipedia do not contain the phrase in question. My thanks to Sara Martin, Associate Dean of Libraries, University of Detroit Mercy.
the absolute contrary of “fair” in Shakespeare’s far more ambiguous, comparative formulation.

Translations must often simplify. Translators can sometimes compensate for this by expanding on a source, introducing explanatory glosses into their text. In Shakespeare translations for the stage or for general readers, this option is limited by formal constraints. German Shakespeare translators operate within a tradition which imposes high standards as regards awareness of precursors, and of current textual and critical scholarship. Still, in translating lines like these they must pin their colours to an interpretative and ideological mast. It is one task to try to understand the Duke’s words in terms of a reconstruction of Shakespeare’s English, which predates the Atlantic slave trade and European imperialism, let alone decolonization, the Civil Rights Movement, and postcolonialism. It is another task to use a current language to convey an interpretation with playable or readable concision. Translations of literary texts are not transparent vehicles of some original meaning, stripped of linguistic specificity, reclothed in other words. Norms of “fidelity” or “accuracy” vary, as do the norms of “adequacy” or “appropriateness” which subsume them. Translators are writers of their own time. Their texts obey – or transgress – contemporary literary norms. Choices of words, syntax, and punctuation depend on an implicit understanding of what translators are supposed to do, and this varies between contexts. A theatrical producer demands an appropriately playable script; an academic publisher wants an appropriately faithful text; general publishers want appropriately readable versions, differing depending on the age, gender, class or cultural capital of anticipated readers. What these demands specifically imply is quite different in 1970 from what it was in 1790.

I. German Othellos: Overview and Periodisation

The first German Othello appeared in 1766 in the first complete plays edition, translated by Christoph Martin Wieland. Others were soon trying to improve on it. By the 1830s the sheer mass of German Shakespeares was already startling: in that decade alone, eight distinct editions of the

complete plays came onto the market. Re-translating Shakespeare had become a kind of highbrow parlour game, and it is still a popular pastime – sometimes remunerative – among people involved professionally or as amateurs in theatre, literature, and literary scholarship. As Maik Hamburger points out, Germany's well-funded state theatres commonly cobble scripts together from several translations, and so avoid paying anyone else royalties, but they also often commission new scripts. Trade publishers nowadays do so less often; most reprint out-of-copyright work, typically in a range of editions for different book market segments. Still, two new complete works editions are currently underway, both bilingual: the critical Studienausgabe under the patronage of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft, with annotated English texts facing annotated German prose versions; and Frank Günther's literary and playable translations, printed facing the texts of the New Penguin Edition, with (modest) end-notes and commentaries.

German critical editions once set a philological example to Anglophobes. Nicolas Delius's edition (1854–65) was the basis for Frederick James Furnivall's Leopold Shaksper (1880s) and Royal Shakspere (1890s). Arnold Schröer's parallel printing of First Quarto and Folio texts (1909) was long a standard tool for Othello research. Delius, unlike Anglophone editors for a long time to come, saw the need to gloss “fair” at the Duke's couplet: "einerseits = schön, andererseits = hellfarbig" (“on the one hand: beautiful, on the other hand: light-coloured”); he also gave

32 Günther's translations of the plays have appeared since 1995 with Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag (Munich); also since 2000 with the bibliophile publisher ars vivendi (Cadolzburg), currently offering 27 volumes of his projected 39-volume "William Shakespeare Gesamtausgabe" (complete works; to be completed in 2014).
the corresponding contraries for “black”: häßlich ("ugly") and schwarz ("black"). He glossed “fair” slightly differently in Iago’s quayside couplets (2.1.121): “fair steht hier doppelsinnig = schön und blond” (“here with double meaning: beautiful and blond”). As we will see, these glosses may have influenced subsequent translators, but what is more certain is that they reflect a cultural consensus already established by earlier translators, working from the texts established by earlier British editors, and those editors’ glosses.

The corpus of Othello re-translations used here is naturally incomplete. Working translations commissioned by theatres, prepared by directors, dramaturges, and playwrights, are not usually published. If they are, they are not usually published in the regular book trade, but by theatre publishers. The history of this type of publication is obscure, but up until the 1960s, scripts for use by theatres were printed in small-book formats, later issued as loose-bound typescripts, and nowadays they are produced as pdf files. These scripts remain outside book trade circulation, being intended for use by theatres, under license. Some are reprints of trade published translations, or latterly photocopies of them; but many such scripts are extant only in specialised (‘grey’) formats, and may not be deposited in national libraries or other public archives. Sometimes, independently of productions, translations are done by amateurs, outsiders seeking to attach their name to that of the Bard. These may find speculative trade or theatre publishers. Many translations in manuscript must be languishing in private drawers and attics, as well as in theatre archives. Many will have been lost. The potential scale is indicated by Ulrich Erkenbrecht’s researches over many years on German versions of Sonnet 66: the third edition of his anthology reproduces 204 translations and adaptations.

A minority of translations are reprinted; of these, few have a life of more than a few decades. The exception is the complete works associated with leading Romantic writers: the ‘Schlegel-Tieck’ edition (1825–33), hallowed by tradition in the course of the nineteenth century, and

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35 Several scripts accessed through TT are neither in BB nor in the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek; see notes below.
36 Ulrich Erkenbrecht, Shakespeare Sechsundsechzig (3rd edn, Kassel: Muriverlag, 2009). It has to be said that a good many are by Erkenbrecht himself, or otherwise owe their existence to his anthology.
much tinkered with by later editors. Its variants remain the most often reprinted, most widely read, performed and quoted texts: most Germans’ introduction to Shakespeare. All subsequent translations can be considered as ripostes to Schlegel-Tieck’s archaisms, smooth cadences, and limited range of registers—nearly everyone speaking high style nearly all the time. It has provoked modernising efforts in every generation. On the other hand, some re-translations and adaptations replicate Schlegel-Tieck over long stretches.

In the Schlegel-Tieck edition, Othello (like twelve other plays) was translated by Wolf Graf Baudissin. His version of the Duke’s couplet lacks any equivalent for “fair”, while “black” becomes häßlich: “ugly”. Bate and Rasmussen suggest “ugly” here, but the OED and other modern reference works do not legitimate that choice. Yet it was legitimated by nineteenth-century scholarship: Delius’s gloss cited above, or Alexander Schmidt’s Shakespeare Lexicon, where the meaning “ugly” is tellingly subsumed under the definition “of a dark complexion”. The point is, though, that Baudissin’s choices were not idiosyncratic but ideologically determined. What clinches this is the fact that most other translations of the period display similar features, and few later translations do so. Using features of this kind, a historical sequence of implicit ideological rules can be reconstructed. Each rule dominates for a period demarcated by political events. No ideological domination is perfect: there are exceptions to some rules, as some translators adhere to past rules, some anticipate a future rule, and some are just idiosyncratic. But the dominant rule in each period is clear.

The political demarcation points are: German national unification (in progress from the 1860s, achieved in 1871); the end of the First World War (1918); the foundation of the two post-Second World War states (1949); unification (1990); and finally, most specific to the “fair/black”

37 Needless to say, the semantic field of häßlich does not exactly equate with that of “ugly”. For instance, hanno is “to hate”, but “hateful” would be an unnatural translation of häßlich in this and most other contexts. My back-translations offer the closest or standard equivalents, with necessary variants, glosses and notes.

38 “Black, adj. […] 2) of a dark complexion; often opposed to fair […] Synonymous to ugly” (with six references, none to Othello, e.g. “all the pictures fairest lined are but b. to Rosalind”, As 3.2.98): Alexander Schmidt, Shakespeare Lexicon (Berlin: Reimer, 1902), consulted at Tufts University’s Perseus Digital Library: www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/resolveform?lang=cn&type=begin&formentry=1&doc=Perseus%3Atext% 3 A1999.03.0068, last accessed 1 June 2011.
theme, the redefinition of German citizenship on a non-ethnic basis (2000). In the most recent period – my starting-point – Zaimoglu and Senkel work from a new ideological rule, but other translators are still working to earlier rules. Othello translation today is characterised by unprecedented ideological diversity. The story can be summarized as follows:

1. Through most of the nineteenth century, in most translations (and in all the most frequently reprinted ones), Othello is represented as not black. A black hero is simply inconceivable. The Duke speaks as if Othello were not differentiated in terms of colour. To be praised as noble, his being a “Moor” must be unspoken. Rule: Avoid colour terms.

2. Late in the century – when the German nation-state was founded and acquired imperial colonies in Africa and elsewhere – Othello begins to be black. But colour terms are disassociated from physical appearance; instead they are associated with light or lack of light. This conceptual shift relates to the imperial ‘civilizing mission’. Rule: Translate “black” and “fair” metaphorically in terms of “(lack of) light”; avoid “black” as a physical descriptor.

3. From the end of the First World War, until about 1950, modern racist categories are used in a fascistic conceptual framework. Othello is a fearsome black man, strongly gendered, and contrasted with “white”. Rule: Translate “black” as “dark” or as “black man”; translate “fair” as “white”, or omit.

4. From the 1950s to the 1980s (with no distinction between capitalist and communist German-speaking countries), Othello is beautiful and black. This conceptual pairing pre-dates (but is later reinforced by) the Civil Rights slogan “Black is Beautiful”. Blackness is exoticised and eroticised in terms of an intentionally post-fascist, humanist state ideology, which is nonetheless uncritically Eurocentric. Rule: Translate “black” as “beautiful”.

5. A quantitative upsurge in re-translation activity occurs in the 1970s, when it becomes clear that visible “others”, “guest-worker” immigrants, are beginning to settle in Germany, posing new questions about German hospitality. But this is not associated with any change in the translation rule.

6. In the 1990s, following unification and the ensuing racist violence, which brought the new Germany unwelcome international publicity, moral anti-racist re-translations intentionally challenge the racism inherent in hierarchical concepts of “black” and “white”, but they
maintain a normative concept of whiteness. The Duke speaks for a paternalistic, pedagogical state, which seeks to discourage racist attitudes. Rule: *Translate “black” and “fair” as “black” and “white”, and postulate a black-to-white metamorphosis.*

7. After 2000, there is unprecedented *diversity* not only in respect of dramatic form (more adaptations and works loosely based on Shakespeare) but also in respect of ideology. Most re-translators revert to the *exotic-eroticism* of the pre-unification period (1950s–80s), which thus re-asserts its dominance. Only Zaimoglu and Senkel’s *Othello*, the most successful at the box office, is also ideologically innovative, reflecting the entirely new status of ethnic ‘others’ as equal German citizens. Its translation rule corresponds to political rather than moral anti-racism, from a minoritarian position. Rule: *Emphasise class over race.*

It might be objected that this sequence merely confirms a conventional view of cultural history as a superstructure resting upon a base of political history. Three answers can be offered. Firstly, this survey of a minute sample of textual *Othello*-work is not the end-point of the research. The comparison helps to identify past and present texts of particular interest – not necessarily the ‘canonical’ ones – which will repay further investigation, using a wider range of sources and interpretative methods, encompassing performances, other media, and reception. Secondly, the project emerges from my particular interest in recent and contemporary *Othello*-work. I guessed that knowledge of the past would illuminate the present, and it does. The findings regarding contemporary work are perhaps the most surprising. And finally, by uncovering the diversity of past and present German readings of *Othello*, the research enriches understanding of Shakespeare’s lines, and of the play.

The quantitative upsurge in German *Othello*-work in the 21st century is coupled with a diversification of *kinds* of work. Adaptations (as distinct from would-be complete and – on their own terms – “faithful” translations) have not been seen since nineteenth-century burlesques, and are now suddenly common. They include new works for young people, and adaptations translated into German from third languages. The overall increase in and diversification of kinds of work accords with general, in-

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39 Krüngsteiner’s *Othello, der Mohr von Wien* (1806) (*BB* C23790) is the only one I have consulted. Further Viennese burlesques: *BB* C23810 (1829), C23820 (1841), C23830 (1865), and Louis Taufstein’s *Othello im Frack* (1901, according to Wikipedia.de; not in *BB*). Further parodic texts: *BB* C23870 (1885), C23890 (1887).
ternational trends in theatre work: increasing economic importance of the cultural industries, increasing cultural importance of innovation, lessening respect for tradition, increasing pedagogical work, and increasing international exchange. All these factors favour adaptations or tradapta-
tions of cross-culturally familiar classics. Except for Zaimoglu and Sen-
kel’s, the German adaptations omit the Duke’s couplet.40

II. Initial Prose Translations

Brabantio tells Othello he cannot believe that Desdemona “Would ever have, t’incurr a general mock / Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom / Of such a thing as thou – to fear, not to delight” (1.2.70–2). Addressing the Duke, Brabantio uses less offensive language, but still refers to Othello as a fearsome thing – “what she feared to look on” (1.3.100). The Duke’s phrase “delighted beauty”, therefore, not only sets up his pun on “fair” by coupling “light” with “beauty”, but offers a riposte to Brabantio: “delighted” can be read as the contrary of “fearsome”. “Delight-
ed” has invariably been glossed as “delightful” by editors since George Steevens in 1778.41 The problem posed by the word’s odd ending had first been noticed by Thomas Hanmer, who suggested “no delighting”, and William Warburton, who let “delighted” stand in the text, but noted: “This is a senseless epithet. We should read belighted beauty i.e. white and fair.”42 His was the edition used by Wieland in the 1760s:


41 ‘Delighted for delightful; Shakespeare often uses the active and passive participles indiscriminately. Of this practice I have given many examples.’ ‘There is no such word as belighted.’ The Plays of William Shakespeare, ed. George Steevens (1778). Consulted in the database, Editions and Adaptations of Shake-

Wieland: wenn Tugend die glänzendeste Schönheit ist, so ist euer Tochter- mann mehr weiß als schwarz.  

If virtue is the most radiant beauty, then your son-in-law is more white than black.

Wieland aimed to convey the sense for readers, not to write poetry for the stage. His prose translation, with scholarly annotations, sets a high standard for accuracy here, though he simplifies by cutting the double negative. For “delighted”, Wieland’s choice is influenced by Warburton, whose note highlights the root “light” in the word, as well as bringing “white” into play for “fair”.

In the 1770s, Johann Joachim Eschenburg’s prose versions of the plays revised Wieland’s texts in the direction of contemporary idiom:

Eschenburg: wenn es der Tugend nicht an Reiz und Schönheit fehlt, so ist Ihr Schwiegersohn vielmehr weiß, als schwarz.  

if virtue does not lack charm and beauty, then your son-in-law is far more white than black.

Eschenburg is slightly more precise than Wieland with “not lack”, and he avoids archaism for “son-in-law”. With “Reiz und Schönheit” (Reiz: charm, attractiveness), he may be influenced by Samuel Johnson’s edition of 1765, which conjectured “no delight or beauty”, glossing “delight” as “delectation or power of pleasing”. At the word “weiß”, Eckert (Eschenburg’s unasked-for editor) inserted a footnote: “fair heißt im Englischen: blond und schön” (“fair means in English: blond and beautiful”), thus inaugurating a minor tradition of confusion between “fair” of skin or complexion, and “fair-haired”.

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45 *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, ed. Samuel Johnson and George Steevens (1765). Consulted in EAS.
For “son-in-law”, Wieland uses *Tochtermann* and Eschenburg *Schwiegersohn*: both current terms, but *Tochtermann* would become archaic during the nineteenth century. Most subsequent translators choose *Eidam*, which was already becoming archaic in 1800. *Schwiegersohn* became standard by the mid nineteenth century, and it is typical of the tendency to archaism in German Shakespeare translations that we won’t see *Schwiegersohn* used in this couplet until the 1950s. Also archaic, from about the mid nineteenth century, is the second-person singular pronoun *ihr* (possessive *euer*; capitalization varies). The modern familiar form *du* (*dein*) is not used until the 1970s. As for “fair” and “black”, given the editions they are working from, Wieland’s and Eschenburg’s choice of *weiß* and *schwarz* (white and black) might seem fairly commonsensical. And one might have guessed that their versions would have influenced later retranslators. But here’s a surprise: not until the 1920s will a published re-translation choose *weiß* here; indeed this still continues to be a rare choice. Equally surprising is the rarity of any translation of “black”, and indeed the complete absence of all colour terms from the most important (that is, most often reprinted) re-translations, until the later nineteenth century.

III. Period 1: 1800s to 1860s: Pre-National ‘Colour Blindness’

By the turn of the nineteenth century several writers had produced verse versions for the stage, based on Wieland, without finding much contemporary favour.46 Two prominent men of letters collaborated on a more elevated, aesthetically and philosophically ‘idealised’ *Othello* in 1804–1805. Johann Heinrich Voss is renowned for his translations of Homer; his translations of most of Shakespeare’s plays were published in 1818–1829.47 Friedrich Schiller was revising Voss’s draft of *Othello* when he died. Voss drafted two versions of the couplet, but Schiller’s was the

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46 Eighteenth-century re-translations I have not yet inspected include Schmid (*BB C23700*), Steffens (*C23720*), Schröder (not in *BB*; cf. his *Hamlet*, *C9010*), and Schubart (*C23770*). Schröder’s *Othello*, no longer extant, reportedly so shocked Hamburg audiences that a happy ending was provided; see Sonja Fielitz, *Othello* (Shakespeare und kein Ende 03; Bochum: Kamp, 2004), 117 f., citing Aban Gazdar, *Deutsche Bearbeitungen der Shakespeare-Tragödien Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet und King Lear im 18. Jahrhundert* (PhD diss., Munich, 1979).

47 *BB C130* (completed with the help of his sons and published after the father’s death).
one which made the final cut. The sequence of redactions reveals precisely what ‘idealisation’ means in practice. The most important features are the complete suppression of colour terms and of the comparative construction “more … than”, with its intrinsic ambivalence, and the transformation of the syntax into an absolute injunction: a command which is addressed not only to Brabantio, but to all in hearing range – and the audience. Such general address is normally implicit in a Shakespearean character’s parting rhyming couplet. The Duke’s couplet is unusual in explicitly addressing “my noble signior”. Idealising translations therefore ‘normalise’ the dramaturgy in terms of the Shakespeare canon. They also rob the couplet of any trace of humour.

The idealising effect had to be worked towards. Voss chooses “son” for “son-in-law”, entailing a command to accord Othello full kinship, but his first version still includes a colour term, and also a suggestive variant:

Voss: Wenn’s nur der Tugend nicht an Schönheit (Weisheit) fehlt, / Werd’ Euer Sohn den Weißen beigezählt.  

If only virtue not lack beauty (wisdom), / let your son be reckoned among the white [men/people].

The racial, collective terms “whites” (“Europeans”) and (implied by contrast) “blacks” (“Africans”) are Voss’s first recourse. The variant “(wisdom)” shows that Voss is considering a metaphorical, idealising reading of “beauty” as “wisdom”, which offers a pun on weis (wise) and weiß (white) – just like the “wit/white” joke in Iago’s quayside couplet (2.1.134–5).  

But such punning is inappropriate for the dignified tone to which these translators aspire. In his second draft, Voss erases both the colour term and the suggestion of humour:

Voss: Wenn’s nur der Tugend nicht an Reinheit fehlt, / Werd’ Euer Sohn den Reinen beigezählt.  

If only virtue not lack purity, / let be your son be reckoned among the pure [men/people].  

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49 Schiller cut the entire quayside joking sequence, though Voss reported that Schiller had been ‘sorry to have to’ do so (Schiller, Werke, vol. 17, 370).
50 Ibid.
“Pure” is yet another plausible gloss for “fair”; and “black” can have the sense of “impure”. But Voss’s couplet now shows no trace of race difference; no trace in fact of corporeality. Idealisation is complete.

In his redaction, Schiller chose the most archaic available term for “son-in-law”, but otherwise took the same approach, introducing a favourite term of his: verklären. This religiously connoted verb with the root klar (clear) means, roughly, ‘to cause to appear spiritually purified’ or even ‘bathed in heavenly light’; it is usually rendered in English as ‘transfigure’:

Schiller: Wenn je die Tugend einen Mann verklärt, / Ist Euer Eidam schön und liebenswert.\(^51\)

If ever virtue transfigured a man / your son-in-law is beautiful and lovable.

Verklärt is a fine, daring translation of the root meaning of ‘delight’, as glossed by Warburton rather than Johnson. But nothing here remains of colour, or of ambivalence. Voss’s injunction has become a plain declarative statement. The Duke unreservedly recommends the beautiful, quasi-beatific (“black” deleted) hero.

Schiller’s couplet, as published in Voss’s posthumous text, was adopted in the 1830s in Ernst Ortlepp’s much reprinted translation.\(^52\) I have yet to inspect some other translations of the 1820s and 30s which were less reprinted.\(^53\) One, by Johann Wilhelm Otto Benda, is very idiosyncratic, and arguably anticipatory: he uses the Romantically connoted, poetic term licht (bright-lit) for “delighted” (we will see licht for “fair” from about 1900), and he follows Eschenburg and Eckert in using blond for “fair”, taking “fair” to refer to hair colour. This underscores the couplet’s connection with Iago’s quayside couplet sequence, where “black” versus “fair” has always been conventionally glossed as “brunette” versus “blonde” (although in context, skin colour must at least be implied).

\(^{51}\) Schiller, Werke, vol. 14, 167. This version was published in 1806 under Voss’ name (BB C23780).

\(^{52}\) Ortlepp’s Othello appeared in the 1830s both in his own complete plays edition, and in an edition by Adolph Bötger’s translation team; the latter was widely disseminated in a cheap Reclam edition from the 1860s: BB C330, 340, 350, 420, 530 etc.

\(^{53}\) E.g. Fick (1825–1827, BB C180), Meyer (1824–1828, C160), Kaufmann (1830–1836, C250); Köerner (1836, C270). See also the checklist at Marti’s ‘Shakespeare in Europe’ website.
Benda: Wenn es der Tugend nicht an lichter Schönheit fehlt, / ist vielmehr blond als schwarz, den euer Kind gewählt.\textsuperscript{54}

If virtue not lack bright-lit beauty, / [he] is far more blond than black, whom your child [has] chosen.

This shows that the ‘no colour’ rule epitomised by Voss, Schiller, and Baudissin is not universally applied in the earlier nineteenth century. Benda’s (partial) complete works failed to be reprinted: he was not translating in accord with dominant taste or ideology. The way his couplet shifts attention towards Desdemona – and her power to choose – has only one, partial parallel among other versions, and that is the only one by a woman (Hedwig Schwarz, 1941; see below). Benda’s reading of “fair” and “black” is bluntly corporeal, and his implicit dramaturgy has the Duke seeming to ignore Othello’s presence, speaking of him as an object of another’s will, not directly stating Brabantio’s kinship with him. All these features anticipate translations of the fascist period, and are absent in intervening translations.

The Schlegel-Tieck translation is better dramatic poetry than any we have seen so far. Although Baudissin suppresses colour references, he conveys something of the original couplet’s ambivalence.

Baudissin: Wenn man die Tugend muß als schön erkennen, / Dürft Ihr nicht häßlich Euren Eidam nennen.\textsuperscript{55}

If one must recognise virtue as beautiful, / you may not call your son-in-law ugly.

Like his idealising predecessors, Baudissin avoids a ‘black’ Othello: this ‘Moor’ might be vaguely Oriental, Arab, or North African; he might even be ‘white’; he is certainly not sub-Saharan African; but above all his ethnic or racial specificity is not raised; it is not an issue for this Duke, as it is not an issue for any real or imaginable German state. Othello is, however, said to be called häßlich. To call him so must be morally wrong, because Othello is virtuous; however, by implication he is physically ugly. Just as important as the wording is the dramaturgy of the couplet. The syllogistic structure is yet clearer than in the original. It is under-

\textsuperscript{54} Johann Wilhelm Otto Benda, \textit{Shakespear's dramatische Werke}, vol. 19 (Hannover: Göschens, 1826); \textit{BB} C190.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Shakespear's dramatische Werke} uebersetzt von August Wilhelm von Schlegel; ergänzt und erläutert von Ludwig Tieck (Berlin: Reimer, 1825–1833), vol. 8; \textit{BB} C200. Numerous later editions; none of those consulted alters the wording of the Duke’s couplet, although there are several revisions of Iago’s quayside couplets.
lined by modal verbs with imperative senses, turning the original’s com-
parative, ambiguous observation into an only slightly modulated com-
mmand: “you are not allowed to call him ugly”. This Duke unreservedly de-
defends Othello; however, he does so without catching his eye. The second
line has two second-person pronouns. State power speaks to Brabantio,
insisting on his duty to recognize kinship with Othello, but without seem-
ing to include Othello as a potential interlocutor.

No other German re-translation will ever be so widely disseminated as Baudissin’s. Many later re-translations of Othello are essentially redac-
tions of it.56 All others, in relative terms, are ‘minority’ translations, with
shorter lives in print and/or performance.57 Baudissin’s ‘unblack’ but
‘ugly’ Othello remains dominant. It currently circulates in a very cheap
Reclam edition, at less than half the price of any other, and in many
other editions besides. When Othello was issued in paperback in 2002
to tie in with the German release of the film O – an American high-school
basketball drama, which may lie behind Zaimoglu and Senkel’s choice of
joke for Iago in the quayside scene – it was Baudissin’s text that teenagers
were offered.58 It is still regularly staged. Some recent adaptations of Oth-

56 Editions consulted which use Baudissin’s Duke’s couplet, but render Iago’s
quayside couplets differently: Schmidt in Ulrici’s edition (1867–1871, BB
C630), Vischer (1901 [translated in the 1880s], C23920), Schücking (1912–
1935, C1190), Bab and Levy (1923–1924, C1380), Meinerts (1958, C1920). An
important edition not yet consulted is Hermann Conrad (1891, C950; 40th
edn 1914).

57 An Othello of 1947 found neither in BB nor TT deserves special mention. Karl
Brunner was a professor of English at Innsbruck University, Austria, before the
Nazi ‘Anschluss’. His protests cost him his job but he returned as Dean after the
war. He launched a parallel text series, translating and editing Hamlet, Romeo
and Juliet, and Washington Irving’s Sketch Book, as well as: Othello, der Mohr
von Venedig, ed. Karl Brunner (Britisch-Amerikanische Bibliothek, 1. Abtei-
lung, Englisch-amerikanische Studienausgaben, Band 2; Linz: Österreichischer
Verlag für Belletristik und Wissenschaft, 1947). Brunner describes his text as a
revision of Baudissin’s, drawing on Conrad’s revision (27). He varied Iago’s
jokes, but the Duke’s couplet only in orthography (Euern for the commoner
Euren).

(Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch, 2002), with cover and inside photos from O, dir.
Tim Blake Nelson (Miramax, 2001). The text and sparse endnotes are based
on Klotz’s edition of Schlegel-Tieck: Shakespeare, Sämtliche Werke (Berlin:
Aufbau, 2000).
ello, or plays which quote from it, counterpose Baudissin’s script and con-
temporary dialogue.59

There were many nineteenth-century rivals to Schlegel-Tieck, but at
least in this couplet, most followed Baudissin. However, in the 1860s Frie-
drich Bodenstedt crossed Schiller with Eschenburg:

Bodenstedt: Wenn Tugend Reiz und Schönheit nicht entbehrt, / Ist Euer
Eidam schön und liebenswerth.60

If virtue not lack charm and beauty, / your son-in-law is beautiful and lova-
ble.

As in Schiller, “fair” is elaborately translated, but in non-colour terms,
and “black” is not translated at all. But a radical break from ‘colour-
blind’ or ‘colour-suppressing’ idealism was made by Wilhelm Jordan, con-
tributing to another of the new complete works editions in the 1860s. Wil-
helm Jordan was a liberal nationalist politician, a member of the 1848 na-
tional assembly. He is credited with coining the phrase ‘the third German
classic’ (dritter deutscher Klassiker), assimilating Shakespeare to German
national culture alongside Goethe and Schiller.61 He has an odd habit as a
translator of altering the sequence of clauses, apparently in the interests
of rational clarity as he sees it. So here, he reverses the order of the
lines in the couplet, destroying its rhetorical effect. But in other respects
his translation is radically faithful. He is the first to translate “fair” and
“black” as schön and schwarz: “beautiful” and “black”. This pairing
will not be seen again until the 1950s. Jordan was also ahead of his
time in being the first translator (and for a very long time, the only
one) to render ‘virtue’ with philological accuracy as Mannheit, “masculin-
ity”, “manliness”, or “manhood” – capturing the presence of vir, and
some of the implications of the Italian virtù.

As with the colour terms, recent Anglophone editors highlight the
long overlooked ambiguity of “virtue” in this context, testifying to in-
creased sensitivity to the representation of gender difference. Neill
again glosses triply: “not merely ‘moral excellence’, but also ‘manly

59 E.g. the adaptations noted above by von Düffel (set in the afterlife, focusing on
the female characters), Zimmer (set in a youth football club), and also Horst
Vincon’s drawing-room comedy Mohrenköpfe (1994) (all: TT).
60 William Shakespeare’s Dramatische Werke. Trans. Friedrich Bodenstedt et al.,
ed. Bodenstedt, 9 vols (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1867–1872); BB C640; many re-
prints up to C1020 (1895–1899).
2009.
strength and courage'; the sense of ‘inherent quality’ (used e.g. of medicines, herbs, etc.) is probably also present.” Reinforcing the latter two senses, moments later in the scene, Roderigo is surely mocking the Duke’s usage when he confesses: “it is my shame to be so fond; but it is not in my virtue to amend it” (1.3.314). Here, Neill glosses: “power; strength of character”. The implication of manliness is also apparent. In German re-translations, Jordan’s emphasis on gender will not be heard again until the 1940s (couched within fascistic discourse) and then again in the 2000s:

Jordan: Mehr schön als schwarz ist euer Tochtermann, / Wenn Mannheit reizen und gefallen kann.\(^{62}\)

More beautiful than black is your daughter’s husband, / If manliness can charm and please.

In some respects, then, Jordan’s example was not followed. But in one key respect it was: after him, the question of colour difference, hence ethnic or race difference, will no longer be suppressed in re-translating these lines. It may not be coincidental that Jordan’s work appears when Germany is on the brink of coming into existence as a European nation-state, hence a political entity within which ethnic and race difference must be significant.

IV. Period 2: 1870s to 1920s: National-Imperial “Black to Light”

After German national unification and the foundation of the Wilhelmine Reich in 1871, versions of the couplet appear in which colour is essential to the meaning, but – unlike in Jordan’s couplet – its ethnic or racial connotations are metaphorically disguised. A certain effort of poetic elaboration is necessary to achieve this effect: “black” is read as “absence of light” rather than physical coloration. My surmise is that these re-transla-

\(^{62}\) Shakespeare’s Othello, der Mohr von Venedig. Deutsch von Wilhelm Jordan (Bibliothek ausländischer Klassiker in deutscher Übersetzung; Hildburghausen: Verlag des Bibliographischen Instituts, 1868). My copy is bound in one unnumbered volume with Jordan’s translations of King Lear, Romeo and Juliet, and Macbeth, each with its own title page, in the same edition, but all dated 1865. This pre-dates any of Jordan’s drama translations recorded in BB. Cf. BB C650: Dramatische Werke und Sonette, ed. Franz Dingelstedt et al., in 9 vols, in the same publisher, all plays dated 1867–1868; Jordan’s Othello in vol. 7, 1867.
tions transport imperialist ideology. In the earlier nineteenth century, at least in well-received translations, Othello’s blackness could not be reconciled with the sovereign gesture of recommending him, so it was suppressed. Towards the end of the century, for the first time, German culture confronts ‘black’ subjects directly: as imperial subjects. *Othello* becomes a text with which to think that encounter. The metaphors used in re-translating the couplet concern a ‘light’ (European or Christian or German civilization or culture) which is imagined as dispelling a ‘darkness’.

The first of these translations is by Otto Gildemeister. He contributed twelve other plays to Bodenstedt’s complete works edition, first published in the 1860s. His *Othello* was drafted in 1871–2 and appeared posthumously in 1902. This means that Gildemeister’s work predates imperial Germany’s officially acknowledged aspiration to the status of a world power. The European powers’ “scramble for Africa” began in the 1880s. At the time of the Berlin ‘Congo Conference’, in 1884, Bismarck briefly relented in his opposition to the state’s acquisition of colonies, but only after he resigned as Imperial Chancellor in 1890 did German foreign policy become fixated on the proverbial “place in the sun”. Nevertheless, Gildemeister’s couplet already implies a state sovereign who recognises racial difference, but interprets it metaphorically. ‘Black’ is ‘black night’, and ‘fair’ is ‘bright day’.

Gildemeister: *Eu'r Eidam, – wenn die Tugend lieblich macht, – / Gleicht mehr dem hellen Tag als schwarzer Nacht.*

Your son-in-law – if virtue makes [people] lovely – / resembles more the bright day than black night.

There is an immanent, partially buried metaphor of light and dark in Shakespeare’s words: it had been noticed by Warburton and was high-

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63 *Shakespearedramen (Romeo und Julia, Othello, Lear, Macbeth). Nachgelassene Übersetzungen von Otto Gildemeister*, ed. Heinrich Spies (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1904). Spies’s foreword (vii) states that Gildemeister’s first draft of *Othello* was dated 28 October 1871, and the second draft appears to have been completed not long after.


lighted by Wieland with glänzendeste (most radiant). The question is: why do most re-translators overlook it, but re-translators in the imperial period – and sometimes in the following fascist period – choose to elaborate this metaphor? In the imperial period, it is as if the ‘colour-blind’ taboo on representing the hero as black has been only partially overcome. Othello’s blackness becomes undeniable – a literary fact which is visible because of imperial-colonial facts. But those facts must be ideologically disguised. Blackness is present but made invisible as a physical attribute, by being represented as (rhetorically: the absence of) the absence of light.

This tactic is more fully developed by Friedrich Gundolf in his 1909 re-translation. Later to become one of the most prominent academics in Germany, Gundolf was for many years the ‘first disciple’ of the cult poet Stefan George, who even ‘named’ him Gundolf (his given surname was Gundelfinger). George sought to renew German civilization on the basis of elitist, classicist aestheticism. The Master’s message was first conveyed to a wider public by Gundolf’s magnum opus, Shakespeare und der deutsche Geist (“Shakespeare and the German Spirit”, 1911, reprinted into the 1950s). This landmark in German literary historiography still represents the highpoint of German cultural assimilation of the Bard as a nationally symbolic ‘Germanic’ writer; and no less a highpoint of German Jewish scholarship conceived and received as German national scholarship. In his translations of Shakespeare’s plays, Gundolf combines condensed simplicity with delicate poetic suggestiveness. His couplet draws on Bodenstedt (hence Schiller and Eschenburg) for the first line. In the second line, Gundolf’s Duke sounds rather precious. Turning “more than” into “less than”, he chooses the most delicate available term for “less”, minder, while for “fair”, he uses licht, the adjective Benda used for “delighted”. My back-translation is “bright-lit”: licht is an intrinsically poetic adjective, favoured in Romantic and later poetry and song, but scarcely used in spoken German (where hell is standard for “bright” light, or for ‘light’ colour). Its associations include the noun Lichtung: a clearing in woodland, a lit space surrounded by darkness – later, a key term in Heidegger’s vocabulary. The ethereal symbolic effect here recalls Schiller’s use of verklärt (“transfigured”).

Gundolf: Entbehrt die Tugend Reiz und Schönheit nicht, / Ist euer Eidam minder schwarz als licht.66

If virtue not lack charm and beauty / your son-in-law is less black than bright-lit.

Only capitalisation distinguishes the noun Licht (light) from the adjective licht: in performance, the Duke might be heard to say that Othello “is (a source or an incarnation of) light”. Contrasted with “black” in this way, (L/l)icht carries all the connotations of European enlightenment, civilisation, modernity, and supremacy. The rhetoric of the lines is entirely affirmative. This Duke, like Baudissin’s, whole-heartedly recommends Othello, although the implicit dramaturgy is again as ambiguous as Shakespeare’s. Only the curious fact that ‘black/light’ metaphors in this couplet are specific to the period of the Wilhelmine Empire leads one to suspect that what is described in the passage from schwarz to licht is a will to assimilate “black” subjects to the “light” of German imperial civilization – and that, in Gundolf’s case, some years after the horrors of the Herero genocide.67

V. Period 3: 1920s to 1950s, National-Fascist: ‘Black to Dark’

After the First World War, the end of German empire, the loss of German colonies: national humiliation, which the victors reinforce by stationing French colonial troops in the Rhineland. They and their children constitute the first politically and demographically significant black presence within German territory. A little later, African-American musicians and sportspersons are stars in jazz-age Berlin.68 Gundolf’s rhymes on –icht recur in this radically changed context, but new re-translators rhyme on nicht (“not”): the mid-line negative of “no […] beauty” becomes newly prominent. The persistence of –icht rhymes might index Gundolf’s influence. But nothing remains in this period of his ethereal tone and echoes of Romanticism and Schillerian Idealism. The force of negation is directed towards a really present, fully visible, physically ‘black’ ‘other’. Max J. Wolff in 1920 is the first to offer the new, violently concrete diction, the sound of Weimar Republican dirty realism. Wolff explicitly mentions “colour” and “face”, and bluntly contrasts “white” and “black”, turning

67 See Anderson, “Redressing Colonial Genocide”.
the adjective “black” into the noun “black man”. For the first time in this story, the categories of modern racism appear explicitly:


If virtue lends its colour to the face / your son-in-law is white, not a black man.

“Delighted beauty”, as Wolff reads it, is the colour of virtue: white. Wolff was a distinguished Shakespeare scholar whose translations were published in huge editions by Insel Verlag and others. They were marketed as re-dactions of Schlegel-Tieck, but were far more radical than this suggests. Wolff breaks entirely with all the poetizing, taboo-struck versions we have seen since Wieland and Eschenburg. The archaic *Eidam* for “son-in-law” creates a frisson, as otherwise modern, vernacular diction collides with this lexical token of the canonized Bard-of-yore. Jordan had broken with the taboo on “black” in the 1860s; now Wolff breaks with the taboo on expressing racist thought. From now on, all translators will recognize colour as a feature of Othello’s physical appearance, and of his identity, and will present it in terms which reference contemporary, state-sanctioned racist discourses – reproducing those discourses, or resisting them, or something in between.

For the moment, all translators reproduce racist discourse: the Duke’s voice of the state is a voice of white supremacy. Unsurprisingly, this is the case in all translations of the Nazi period. In 1939, on the eve of war, Erich Engel directed *Othello* in his own translation at the Deutsches Theater, Berlin. Engel had directed the original production of Brecht’s *Dreigroschenoper* in 1928, among other productions by Brecht and other leftist writers. He later worked as a film director under the Nazis at UFA, and from 1949 in the GDR at DEFA. Engel’s couplet is a little more subtle than Wolff’s. He retains the rhyme on -icht, but uses *Licht* (light), depoeticizing Gundolf’s fey adjective *licht*. In the story of this couplet, Engel has a double distinction. First, he initiated a strategy which is the opposite of the pre-national, idealising re-translations: those omitted “black” and elaborated “fair”, but Engel omits “fair” and elaborates “black”. This strategy is followed by two other

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mid-century translators (Zeynek and Rothe). Second, Engel introduced the term *dunkel* (“dark”) into the couplet – a term for people with “dark” skin which was preferable in this context: within Nazi discourse, *schwarz* was an emblematic colour of the regime, particularly connoting the SS. This couplet is (aside from *Eidam*) vernacular, colloquial in its rhetoric, distinctly jokey in intent, and unmitigatedly racist:

Engel: *Spricht man von Tugend, als von einem Licht, / Scheint Euer Eidam mir so dunkel nicht.*

If one speaks of virtue as of a light, / your son-in-law seems not so dark to me.

The implicit dramaturgy again completely excludes Othello as an interlocutory subject, while the first-person pronoun highlights the Duke’s charismatic authority.

Such modernizing re-translations, using vernacular language, provoked fierce debate for rejecting the canonized poetry of Schlegel-Tieck. In particular Hans Rothe’s Shakespeare scripts (which began to appear in print in 1922, although his *Othello* appeared only after the war) were the focus of controversy. In 1936 the Nazi Cultural Association published a special edition of its theatre magazine titled *The Battle Against Rothe*; Josef Goebbels announced in the SS magazine *Das Schwarze Korps* that Rothe’s “liberalist efforts to corrupt the German stage” had been defeated; and Rothe hastily emigrated.\(^1\) Under Nazi rule, new Shakespeare re-translations did appear – as witness Engel’s version in production – despite the official promulgation of Schlegel-Tieck as


standard. But in the case of *Othello*, at least, no such new translations were published.

Two re-translations of *Othello* were made during the Second World War, neither of which appears to have been produced; both are extant in typescript formats only; one was “published” in the 1960s, posthumously; the other was not published at all. The first was the work of a retired Austrian army general, Theodor von Zeynek, who reputedly translated 37 plays between retirement from the army and his death in 1948;\(^2\)_\(^7\)\(_2\)\(_7\) several were published in the general book trade in the 1950s and 1960s.\(^3\)\(_7\)\(_3\) These do not include his *Othello*, which is extant only as a hand-bound typescript prepared in the early 1960s by a theatrical publisher.\(^4\)\(_7\)\(_4\) Von Zeynek, like Engel, omits to translate “fair”, and uses a bluntly prosaic, plainly racist formulation to introduce “black”. Von Zeynek stands out for reading “virtue” as “courage”, with philological acumen; with *Mannesmut* (male courage), he makes masculinity explicit as no translator had since Jordan. Von Zeynek’s style is certainly officer-class. His suppression of Othello’s kin-status, use of a third-person pronoun, and “even if” in place of a comparative, make the couplet dramaturgically no less offensive:

\[
\text{von Zeynek: wenn Mannesmut nicht Reiz und Glanz entbehrt, / so ist er, wenn auch schwarz, höchst schätzenswert.}
\]

If manly courage is not without charm and radiance/glory / then he is, even if black, highly estimable.

More clearly than any version before, this couplet suggests a staging in which the Duke speaks to Brabantio as if Othello were not present. In militaristic fashion, it also amplifies a homo-erotic subtext in Shakespeare’s couplet. There, male- and female-connoted terms alternate: “virtue” and “son-in-law”, versus “delighted”, “beauty” and “fair”. Here, the

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\(^3\) Von Zeynek is not in mentioned in *BB*, but 26 Shakespeare plays translated by him are registered in *TT*, published by Ahn und Simrock. The catalogue of the Austrian National Library records eleven plays in his translations: Austrian editions published under the aegis of the New York Stifter Library in the 1950s and 1960s; some of these editions also appear in ZVAB and Amazon.de listings.

\(^4\) *Shakespeare: Othello Der Mohr von Venedig.* In deutsche Sprache übertragen von Theodor v. Zeynek. Unverkäufliches Manuskript (München: Ahn und Simrock Bühnen und Musikverlag, n.d. [1962; date supplied by the publisher]: *TT*).
stress on masculinity given by *Mannesmut*, the pronoun *er*, and the term *Glanz* (radiance, splendour, sparkle, or – in a heroic, military context – glory) is countered by *Reiz* (charm, attractiveness) – a word which is rather out of place in the discourse of heroic, fascistic manliness. Zeynek’s script might even be said to resist ideological racism: unlike the officially mandated Baudissin text, in which Othello is “ugly”, Zeynek’s Duke does at least admit the hero’s blackness.

The very fact that writers re-translated *Othello* under the Nazi regime, when the Schlegel-Tieck Shakespeare was more than just culturally canonical, can be considered a sign of non-conformity. Certainly, the Shakespeare translations of the period will repay further scrutiny. If, as I suspect, Flatter and Rothe (discussed below) translated their *Othellos* during the war, in exile, then (with Engel and Zeynek) at least five German re-translations were completed between 1939 and 1945, making this (after the 2000s) the second most intense period of *Othello*-work in German history.

The fifth is the only woman translator in this story. Hedwig Schwarz’s version of the couplet stands out for replacing Othello with Desdemona:

Schwarz: Wenn nie der Tugend lichte Schönheit fehlt, / ist Eure Tochter hell, nicht schwarz, vermählt.\(^{75}\)

If virtue never lacks bright-lit beauty, / your daughter is brightly, not blackly, married.

Schwarz’s translations of many of Shakespeare’s plays, dating from the 1930s and 1940s, are available through theatre publishers, but not her *Othello*. In terms of publishing history, the case is oddly like Zeynek’s *Othello*: can it be that the play was peculiarly unwanted during and immediately after the war? Schwarz’s translation, it seems, was never even taken on by a theatre publisher. Her version of the couplet recalls

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Benda’s, in the rhyme on “fehlt” and in the shift of attention to Desdemona. Schwarz captures the sense of “fair” and “black” as “(in)auspicious” well, and makes unique use of “schwarz” as an adverb. Her version shares with others of the period a sense that Othello is excluded from the exchange, although the reason is quite different: like Benda’s Duke, Schwarz’s Duke addresses Brabantio as a father. Her ‘feminised’ couplet perhaps makes an exception to my overall argument: it is the least politically motivated version.

VI. Period 4: 1950s-1980s: Universal Humanist ‘Beautiful Black’

Poet and essayist Rudolf Alexander Schröder was a member of the Bekennende Kirche (Confessing Church) which resisted the Nazification of the Lutheran church. His Shakespeare translations appeared in 1963, posthumously; his Othello was completed in 1962, in the last year of his life. In the Duke’s couplet he translated “fair” as blond, repeating the error of Eckert and Benda, but now the choice is over-determined by ‘Aryan’ racist ideology: Schröder’s Duke voices Nazi discourse:

Schröder: Wo so viel Mut bei so viel Eifer wohnt, / Dünkt Euer Eidam minder schwarz denn blond.⁷⁷

Where so much courage resides with so much zeal, / your son-in-law appears less black than blond.

The translation of “virtue” as “courage”, the suppression of “beauty”, and the use of Eifer (zeal) in a positive sense, are all features of Nazi discourses of masculinity. In Schröder’s translation, the intention is presumably critical: the Duke should be seen as representing a repugnant throwback to authoritarian militarism and crude racism.

A similar strategy seems to underlie two other post-war re-translations, by Hans Rothe (1955) and Erich Fried (1970), which both repeat

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77 I am grateful to Balz Engler for this information. See his Rudolf Alexander Schröders Übersetzungen von Shakespeares Dramen, The Cooper Monographs, 18 (Bern: Francke, 1974).
79 As Victor Klemperer noted, ‘fanatical’ (fanatisch, a near-synonym of eifrig) was a positive term in the discourse of the Third Reich: chapter 9 in The Language of the Third Reich: LTI, Lingua Tertii Imperii: A Philologist’s Notebook, trans. Martin Brady (London: Continuum, 2006), 52–56.
Engel’s use of dunkel (dark) for “black”. This may be considered an essentially racist choice – an option within Nazi discourse. We will come to Fried shortly: he uses dunkel with fairly evident critical intent. Rothe’s case is more ambiguous. He was a prolific and – as we have seen – controversial Shakespeare re-translator, and precisely as a Shakespeare re-translator he was a victim of Nazi persecution. He not only claimed scholarly authority, but the authority of his own intuition of Shakespeare’s authentic intentions, buried behind the chaotic collaborative ‘melting-pot’ which in his view produced the Quarto and Folio texts. His scripts cut and simplify to such an extent that they are almost as much adaptations as re-translations, and they notoriously misconstrue the main sense in places. But they are eminently playable, and were very widely used on German stages both before 1936 and after the Nazi period, into the late 1950s. Typifying his bold approach, Rothe’s Othello is subtitled Der Maure von Venedig. German has two terms for English “Moor”: Mohr (black African, ‘blackamoor’, Negro) and Maure. The latter is specifically associated with Iberian Al-Andalus: a “tawny Moor”, an “Orientalized, ‘dignified’ white Moor”.\footnote{Eldred Jones, Othello’s Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 49; Emily C. Bartels, “Making More of the Moor: Aaron, Othello, and Renaissance Refashionings of Race,” in Shakespeare Quarterly 41 (1990): 433–454, here: 434.} Rothe’s is the only published Othello to make this fundamental choice in the title.\footnote{Hedwig Schwarz’s typescript (“Othello, der Maure von Venedig,” 1941) is the one other translation using Maure in the subtitle.} Most translators, until very recently, retain the German subtitle established by Wieland, with Mohr. As we will see shortly, recent translators see this term as problematic because it combines racist connotations with archaism. Frank Günther, in his 1995 re-translation, gives the play no subtitle at all, declaring that all the available terms for “Moor” have inappropriate racist connotations. \footnote{Frank Günther, “Aus der Übersetzerwerkstatt: ‘The Moor – der Mohr – der Neger,’” in William Shakespeare, Othello, ed. and trans. Frank Günther (Munich: dtv, 1995): 271–274.} But Günther does not even consider Maure as a possible choice. Rothe caters to long-standing white public demand in establishing programmatically an Oriental or Maghrebi rather than black African hero.

In the Duke’s couplet, Rothe uses dunkel in a comparative formulation, turning the syllogistic structure into a conditional, hypothetical statement, with a first-person plural pronoun. This innovative rhetoric in-

\footnote{See Hamburger, “Translating and Copyright”, 163–164.}
volves all the auditors, on- and off-stage – except, that is, for Othello, who is named, without specifying his relationship to Desdemona and Brabantio:

Rothe: Zähle bei Menschen nur der innre Schein, / würden wir dunkler als Othello sein.84

If people’s inward appearance were all that counted, / we would be darker than Othello.

The rhyme-pair alludes to a favourite topic in German literature and criticism: Schein, outward appearance, versus Sein, inward reality, being, or essence. This is arguably a clever, philological translation of “virtue” in the sense of “essential nature”. However, Rothe’s phrase der innre Schein (“inward appearance”) is strictly speaking nonsense. Setting that aside, his Duke is not actually making the same point here as Shakespeare’s Duke. He is not so much commending Othello as condemning “us” – everybody else – as being essentially morally “dark” compared to him. Rothe’s dunkel, and the omission of “fair” and “son-in-law”, recall Engel and von Zeynek in the fascist period; but the effect is very different. The emphatic use of Menschen (people, humans) highlights humanist state ideology. The rhetoric overlays physical and moral meanings of “dark”, and postulates a hypothetical metamorphosis (“we would be darker”): these features anticipate a moral anti-racist discourse of the 1990s. Rothe’s Duke speaks for a state intent on uniting its subjects as commonly human, under a universalist view of what it means to be human. He does not address Brabantio in particular, but seeks to construct an all-human community of spectators and auditors. He wants us to minimise the significance attached to visible, racial difference. He speaks, then, for a liberal, post-fascist, humanistic state, which is implicitly struggling with the recognition – post-Holocaust – that “we” are “dark” indeed. At the same time, however, by opposing the pronoun “we” and the name “Othello”, Rothe’s couplet proclaims normative whiteness. Dramaturgically, the lines recall von Zeynek’s (with the same suppression of “son-in-law”, and the pronoun “he” where Rothe has “Othello”): Othello might as well not be present. So Rothe’s couplet is as ambivalent as

Shakespeare’s, but differently. In its own context, it activates fascistic racist discourse, aiming to oppose it, only to remain caught in a post-fascist, universalist-humanist, normatively white, implicitly suprematist discourse. We will see similar mechanisms at work in recent, intentionally anti-racist re-translations.

Rothe’s couplet is intriguingly original. Few other re-translators have been so willing to take creative translational liberties. A series of others, from the 1950s to the 1980s, established and varied a rather strict rule in the translation of the couplet, which more plainly articulates a post-fascist, humanist ideology of race. Richard Flatter and Rudolf Schaller, both returnees from exile, worked in the 1950s on complete plays editions in Austria and the GDR respectively. Schaller’s was the state-sanctioned, communist German Shakespeare. Their re-translations of the couplet move towards the new norm in which “black” is equated or contrasted with “beautiful”. They are remarkably similar, both doubling schönen for “beauty” and “fair”, and using the same rhyme-pair: kann, Mann (can, man). Possibly they were collaborating across the ideological divide of the Cold War, but certainly this reflects the prominence of gender – as under the Nazis – and above all, the importance of the humanist ideology which Shakespeare was now being enlisted to help disseminate, just as previously he had helped to disseminate ‘Germanic’ ideology.\textsuperscript{85} Not only the content but the style of these couplets – simplifying and clarifying the syllogism – exemplifies the new, humanistic Shakespeare. Flatter becomes the first re-translator to use the standard modern term Schwiegersohn for “son-in-law”. He reverts to the early nineteenth-century rule of suppressing all colour terms, and simplifies the syllogism to the point of banality. As in Baudissin’s couplet, race is suppressed in favour of a term of aesthetic judgment, but there is none of the equivocation associated with häßlich here:

\begin{quote}
Flatter: Wenn edler Sinn für Schönheit gelten kann, / Ist Euer Schwiegersohn ein schöner Mann.\textsuperscript{86}
\end{quote}

If noble-mindedness can be considered as beauty, / your son-in-law is a beautiful man.

\textsuperscript{85} Brunner’s edition (Austria, 1947) is just such a project (\textit{Othello, der Mohr von Venedig}, ed. Brunner).

\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Othello der Mohr von Venedig}. Sonderabdruck für Bühnenzwecke (Vienna, Bad Bocklet, Zürich: Krieg, 1952; \textit{TT}). This is an offprint from Flatter’s six-volume \textit{Shakespeare}, 1952–1955 (\textit{BB C1750}).
Schaller uses an archaic term for “son-in-law”, but (as Jordan first did in the 1860s) he uses the pair “beautiful/black”, and this choice inaugurates a new era for the couplet:

Schaller: Wenn Tugend sich mit Schönheit messen kann, / Mehr schön als schwarz ist Euer Tochtermann.87

If virtue can be measured with beauty, / more beautiful than black is your daughter’s husband.

Both these re-translations dramaturgically include Othello: emphasising his kinship with Brabantio, and concluding on Mann (or Tochtermann), they rhetorically stress his humanity, and the Duke who speaks them surely turns to face him.

There was a hiatus in re-translating activity in the 1960s: Shakespeare was too old hat for the radical decade, perhaps; and the three main German-speaking states each now had at least one post-war Othello.88 In the 1970s, there was a general upsurge in Shakespeare re-translation in West Germany in particular, and several new Othellos were published and performed, responding to the new salience of race in view of the immigration of millions of ‘guest-workers’ from southern Europe, Turkey, and the Maghreb, as well as influxes of African and Middle Eastern asylum seekers. In the Duke’s couplet, these re-translations are all remarkably similar, and similar to Flatter’s and Schaller’s; especially Schaller’s, in that all use the pair schön/schwarz (beautiful/black). Again, this might be because the translators were conferring, but it is more likely that the general effort to balance fidelity with colloquial appropriateness, under the determining ideological conditions of this period, led all translators to approximately the same solution. As before, there are no significant distinctions between capitalist and communist German-speaking countries. The second line always ends on Schwiegersohn (deploying a syntactical inversion which is not archaic in German, as it is in English), in order to stress both

87 Othello, der Mohr von Venedig. Deutsch von Rudolf Schaller (Berlin [GDR]: Henschelverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft, Abteilung Bühnenvertrieb, n.d. [1959]); TT and BB C24090. This is the same text as Schaller’s Shakespeares Werke for the Berlin Academy of Arts (BB C1940, 3rd edn 1964; many reprints). My own copy of the theatrical edition, an offprint, has numerous cuts and changes marked in pencil, marginal numbers 1–360, and a pencilled note on p.7 stating that these correspond to photographs of a Cottbus production.

88 Flatter, Rothe, Schaller. Reading my first draft, Michael Neill raised the question of Swiss versions, which should reflect a different political history. I have yet to locate any.
gender and the post-fascist, humanistic state’s command to curb racist affect and to recognize the marriage and Othello’s kinship. Translators vary in the rhyme words they find for the first line, often involving forced metaphors, and they concur in the implicit evocation of the Civil Rights slogan “Black is Beautiful”, which became familiar in Germany in the late 1960s. But that was some ten years after Schaller’s couplet was published: it is at least possible that German re-translators might have arrived at the same schönschwarz consensus without the added motivation provided by the slogan.

Erich Selbmann, a prominent East German radio journalist, writer, and politician, wrote and translated for the theatre in the 1960s and 1970s under the pseudonym E. S. Lauterbach (the name of his hometown).  

Lauterbach: *Gilt Tugend als der Schönheit höchste Kron, / Mehr schön als schwarz ist Euer Schwiegersohn.*  
If virtue is considered beauty’s highest crown, / more beautiful than black is your son-in-law.

Wolfgang Swaczynna was a celebrated West German actor-translator in the 1970s, and is still productive:

Swaczynna: *ist Tugend selber höchste Schönheit schon, / so ist mehr schön als schwarz dein Schwiegersohn.*  
If virtue itself is highest beauty already, / then more beautiful than black is your son-in-law.

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Horst Laube’s postmodernist, Marxist-psychoanalytical Othello premiered in Frankfurt in 1979. He gives a new sardonic twist to the couplet by using a mercantile metaphor and introducing aber (“but”) between “black” and “beautiful”:

Laube: Wenn Tugend schön ist, hast du jetzt zum Lohn / Nen schwarzen, aber schönen Schwiegersohn.44

If virtue is beautiful, you now have as your reward/wage / a black but beautiful son-in-law.

These “black/beautiful” translations all share the implication that the Duke – the voice of the state – is chiding, even mocking Brabantio for his racism, and so affirming a universalist humanism. In this post-fascist period, racism is to be frowned upon, according to liberal consensus. But a marked exoticisation and eroticisation of “black” can also be detected here. “Beautiful/black” is arguably the most faithful translation of the original’s primary meanings, as currently understood, in concise contemporary German. But this only becomes the most appropriate translation in the period when African-Americans have successfully asserted civil rights in the USA, black Africans have emerged as political leaders in decolonized countries, and “black music” has become the soundtrack of youth culture. On the liberal and radical left, “black” has become desirable. These translations accordingly foreground Othello’s body as a pleasingly exotic spectacle. Although their rhetoric commends Othello and stresses his kinship with Brabantio, these Dukes objectify him more subtly but no less than those of the fascist period.

In a sense ‘obvious’ re-translations, these “black/beautiful” couplets lack the subtler (if not perhaps fully intended) equivocation of Rothe’s. Also diverging from the ‘black/beautiful’ norm in this period is the work of Erich Fried. A committed left-wing poet and naturalized Briton, Fried re-translated most of Shakespeare plays during the 1960s and 1970s. His version of the couplet encapsulates his anti-fascism and anti-racism and displays his liberty with verse form. Writing in alexandrines, he adopts dunkel (dark) for “black”, but renders “fair” as Gold – “gold”, not the adjective, but the noun.


Fried: Wenn Ihr der Tugend nicht Schönheit absprechen wollt, / Ist Euer Schwiegersohn nicht dunkel, sondern Gold!

If you do not wish to deny beauty to virtue, / your son-in-law is not dark but gold!

Fried was a prominent internationalist and anti-imperialist, a vocal supporter of Third World resistance struggles. His version places invisible quotation marks around dunkel: the Duke is distancing himself from the racial prejudice implicit in that word. More emphatically anti-racist than others of the period, Fried’s translation posits a pedagogically inclined Duke, chiding Brabantio for his backward prejudice. But this couplet is not without ambivalence. Othello as Gold is an exotic-erotic, objectified figure. The idiom ist Gold wert (“worth [his] weight in gold”) is suggested, but denaturalised. In this context ist Gold suggests – as does Laube’s Lohn (reward or wage) and others’ variations on Preis (prize or price) – that Othello relates to the senators as a commodity to its owners: as a slave. Fried’s Duke can equally be played as a racist throwback, as a Venetian capitalist, or as a moralising anti-racist.

A further three re-translations appeared in student textbooks in the 1970s. These prose versions designed neither for performance, nor for reading for pleasure, show that translators with the authority of critical editors are no less constrained by ideology than script-writers. The first two have remained permanently in print in Reclam’s huge, cheap editions, the first recourse of school and university students. In 1971 Dietrich Klose annotated Baudissin’s text with occasional clarifications. Here his footnote includes a variant gloss in parentheses, to highlight the ambiguity of “fair”; but hell is itself ambiguous (“bright” of light, or “pale/light” of colour). Klose’s first line in fact gives an idiosyncratic reading, which seems to shift beauty and virtue onto the beholder:

Klose: Wenn zur Tugend die Freude an der Schönheit gehört, dann ist Euer Schwiegersohn eher schön (hell) als schwarz.

If joy in beauty belongs to virtue, then your son-in-law is more beautiful (light/bright) than black.

The second and third prose translations offer no variants, underplaying the lines’ intrinsic polysemy. Dieter Bolte and Hanno Hamblock edited a bilingual Reclam edition in 1976 with their prose translation facing

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95 Particular thanks to Balz Engler for this point.

an English text. They translate ‘delighted’ semi-literally with froh (happy), and their opposition of ‘white’ and ‘black’ recalls the bluntness of the fascist period – as does their choice of Tapferkeit (courage), a synonym of Mut, for ‘virtue’:

Bolte/Hamblock: Wenn es der Tapferkeit nicht an froher Schönheit mangelt, ist Euer Schwiegersohn eher weiß als schwarz.97

If courage does not lack happy beauty, your son-in-law is more white than black.

Finally, the less widely disseminated but more authoritative Studienausgabe, edited by Balz Engler in 1977, here uses licht (like Benda and Gundolf) and hell (like Gildemeister and Klose) to distinctly poetic effect:

Engler: wenn der Tugend nicht die lichte Schönheit fehlt, dann ist Euer Schwiegersohn viel eher hell als schwarz.98

If virtue not lack bright-lit beauty, then your son-in-law is much more light/bright than black.

Academic authority as represented by these three prose versions is predictably in disagreement. “Black” is certainly “black”, but the only suggestion two of them share for “fair” is hell. Gildemeister used hell within a day/night metaphor. But Klose and Engler use hell as an adjective of bodily appearance, i.e. a substitute for the racial “white” of Bolte and Hamblock’s version. Now, hell and dunkel are standard antonyms; applied to skin (Haut), standard compound adjectives are hellhautig and dunkelhautig (light-skinned, dark-skinned). We have seen dunkel appear in the couplet in the fascist period (Engel) and again in Rothe’s and Fried’s ambiguously anti-racist versions. The hell of the scholars who are more cautious than Bolte and Hamblock, then, seems to be dunkel’s contrastive proxy. This choice is motivated by the adjective’s useful polysemy (skin-colour is primary, but brightness of light is also suggested), but also by its apparent lack of racial connotations. Read beside the ‘dissenting’ version of Bolte and Hamblock, the effort to avoid invoking the discourse of racism becomes clear.

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98 Engler, Studienausgabe, BB C2370. Engler points out that “this edition explicitly defines the text and the notes together as serving the understanding of the English text. The text is not meant to stand alone [and so] the purpose of the German wording is different from most translations discussed here.” (Personal communication.)
Some subsequent translations intended for the stage derive from the scholars’ prose versions, most clearly Reinhold Rüdiger’s couplet of 1983. In lines of seven feet, expanding metrically even on Fried, he combines elements from the two Reclam versions, fusing translation and gloss. From Klose he takes the pair of adjectives offered for “fair”, and repeats them for “beauty”; for “virtue”, he takes nouns from both the Reclam editions:

Rüdiger: wenn Tapferkeit und Tugend, schön und hell, zusammengehn; / ist Euer Schwiegersohn mehr schön und hell als schwarz zu sehn.99

If courage and virtue, beautiful and bright, go together / your son-in-law is to be seen more beautiful and bright than black.

The diction is clumsily, artificially archaic; the construction ist zu sehn is more unnatural than the back-translation (“is to be seen”) can suggest; the repetition of schön und hell recalls Flatter and Schaller in the 1950s, who similarly flattened the word-play on “beauty” and “fair”. Rüdiger’s translation is obscure, but it epitomises the rule of its period: schön and schwarz are stressed by every playwright-translator between the end of the war and the 1980s, except for Rothe and Fried, who are both consciously grappling with fascist racist discourse by using dunkel for “black”, and by avoiding schön. Among the academic prose translators, only Klose agrees with the choice of schön – but his is also the most widely read of the three. This consensus on schön and schwarz, beautiful and black, collapses in the 1990s, when it becomes evident that universalist, liberal humanist ideology is inadequate to counter endemic racism in German society.

VII. Period 5: 1990s: Moral Anti-Racism

Frank Günther’s Othello (1995) belongs to his ongoing complete-plays project mentioned earlier, published in a parallel text edition with some scholarly apparatus (but not footnotes), designed for general readers, and also widely used in stage productions. His is the first explicitly,
programmatically anti-racist translation. In an accompanying essay, Günther justifies refusing to translate “Moor” with Mohr, and refusing to translate Shakespeare’s subtitle at all. As he says, Mohr is used in contemporary German only in compounds with comical, trivial, and archaic associations, which:

for all their seeming eye-rolling innocence have more than a trace of racism about them. The word Mohr itself no longer stands for a reality and hence can no longer convey any reality. A formulation such as “Come on, let’s go and beat up a Mohr” is surely little used in the relevant circles [of people] who are doing that sort of thing currently.

Günther refers here to racist violence on the streets of Germany, which was particularly prevalent in the early and mid 1990s, claiming scores of lives in thousands of incidents, some of them globally televised, and provoking millions to attend anti-racist demonstrations, with the energetic support of the German state. In view of the established traditional subtitle, Günther states:

it is not possible to translate with “Der Schwarze von Venedig” (the black man of Venice), “Der Afrikaner von Venedig” (the African of Venice), “Der Neger von Venedig” (the Negro of Venice), “Venedigs schwarzer General” (Venice’s black General), etc. (that would be programmatic in another way), so the apparently so simple subtitle must be abandoned as untranslatable.

Throughout his re-translation, Günther uses the relatively neutral term Schwarzer (black man), which, as he says, can convey a variety of attitudes in context, “from the Duke’s commandingly unprejudiced attitude, to Iago’s racist rabble-rousing.” Occasionally, Desdemona addresses mein Afrikaner (my African), Günther particularly avoids all terms which are used in contemporary hate-speech (e.g. Neger) – although Shakespeare’s play does, of course, contain much hate-speech.

Günther’s couplet, like Fried’s, but far more directly, prompts the audience to infer that the sovereign is a liberal who sees through and wishes to overcome his society’s endemic racism. He speaks directly of Haut (skin), using standard colour terms: hell, schwarz, and the sarcastically intensified reinweiß (pure white). The commodity trope noted in Fried


Tom Cheesman
(Gold) and Laube (Lohn: reward, wage) recurs as Preis (price or prize). But the rhetoric is crucially re-invented: just like Rothe, Günther uses a conditional, hypothetical structure in place of a syllogism. More explicitly than Rothe, he postulates an imaginary metamorphosis of black into white. His couplet’s satirical and morally pedagogical tone directs a lesson at Brabantio, but it is for all to hear:

Günther: Gäs helle Haut fü Edelmet als Preis, / Dann wär Ihr Schwiegersohn statt schwarz reinweiß.

If bright skin were a prize for noble-mindedness, / then your son-in-law would be pure white instead of black.

The thrust is similar to Rothe’s couplet, but Günther more successfully avoids allowing racist assumptions built into the language to undermine his point, which is his Duke’s point, and his ideal state sovereign’s point.

The newly urgent anti-racism of the 1990s, supported in a host of civil initiatives by agencies of the state in the newly expanded Federal Republic, also motivates Hermann Motschach’s less well-known version, which predates Günther’s Othello by a couple of years. Writing in 1992, when the racist violence ensuing upon re-unification was at its height, Motschach seems to take Schein and innrer from Rothe, and just like Günther he rhymes Preis and weiß and devises his couplet as a conditional, hypothetical structure, involving skin-colour metamorphosis – but in both directions:

Motschach: Wär äußerer Schein stets innrer Werte Preis, / schien mancher Weiße schwarz, manch Schwarzer weiß.¹⁰³

If outward appearance were always the prize for [or: price of] inner values / many a white man would appear black, many a black man white.

Here too, the Duke is the spokesman for an enlightened, state-sanctioned, but essentially moralising anti-racism. The liberal, universalist, humanist ideology encapsulated in the notion of “beautiful black” (in re-translations of the 1950s to 1980s) had left the difference of power and status between “white” and “black” unexamined. Re-translators of the 1990s voice a desire for transformation, metamorphosis, calling the hierarchical relation into question. However, this impetus is restricted to the domain of the moral. Racism and anti-racism are construed as matters of

¹⁰³ Othello, trans. Hermann Motschach (Munich: Drei Masken, 2004; TT). Word-processed typescript; copyright notice 1992; Eva Dutz at Drei Masken informed me that the script was written in that year and premiered in Cottbus in 1993.
personal choice. And these re-translations lack the ambivalence of Shakespeare’s Duke’s words, which less unequivocally articulate “sovereign lack of prejudice” than Günther apparently wishes (or wishes his readers and audiences) to believe.¹⁰⁴

VIII. Period 6: 2000s: Political Anti-Racism, or Back to ‘Beautiful Black’

Most twenty-first-century German Othello scripts are adaptations which condense, recontextualise, and/or deconstruct the play, and the couplet in question is often deleted in these processes. Four scripts do include it. Three of them vary approaches we have already seen; only the tradaptation by Zaimoglu and Senkel is ideologically innovative. The most retrograde versions of the couplet are by Michael Wachsmann (a theatre translator from former West Germany) and Werner Buhss (a dramatist and translator from former East Germany). Wachsmann’s is a conglomerate derived from earlier versions. He strains to be poetically archaic, and in doing so applies the exotic-erotic schön/schwarz rule of the 1970s, also echoing Laube’s Lohn rhyming with Schwiegersohn, and adding a hell from academic sources:

Wachsmann: Kühnheit wirkt anziehend, hell erstrahlt zum Lohn / Mehr schön als schwarz drum Euer Schwiegersohn.¹⁰⁵

Boldness affects [us as] attractive, brightly shines as a reward / more beautiful than black therefore your son-in-law.

Werner Buhss’s controversial re-translation is generally more ambitious, but not in this couplet. Titling the play Othello, Venedig’s Neger (Othello, Venice’s Nigger/ Negro), Buhss alludes to the vernacular phrase “den Neger machen” (“do the donkey work”, “be exploited”),¹⁰⁶ and in doing

¹⁰⁶ Particular thanks here again to Balz Engler.
so he adopts a strategy directly opposed to Günther’s. Many German speakers still use Neger (Negro) as a standard way of referring to people of African heritage, with no offensive intent; but increasingly many regard the word as unacceptably freighted with racist ideology. As Günther points out, racist aggressors do not say: “Let’s go and beat up a Mohr”. What they do say is: “Let’s go and beat up a Neger”, or of course “Nigger”, which has long been naturalized in German abusive slang. Neger retains some scientific-ethnographic relevance, but in colloquial parlance, among younger people in particular, there is now little to choose between Neger and Nigger. In the Shakespearian context, Neger is flagrantly provocative. Buhss’s script features a great deal of such language, but not in the Duke’s part. His couplet, like Wachsmann’s, reverts to 1970s exotic-eroticism and the schön/schwarz rule. He takes freuen for the verb “delight” from Klose’s academic version, but makes an idiosyncratic choice of rhyme:

Buhss: Wenn wir uns an der Tugend freu'n, der Schönheit Harz, / Dann ist Ihr Schwiegersohn mehr schön als schwarz.107

If we delight in virtue, beauty’s resin / Then your son-in-law is more beautiful than black.

Very few words rhyme with schwarz. Buhss’s Harz (resin) looks like a desperately forced choice, although he uses Harz once again, translating “med’cinable gum” (5.2.350), and so creates an intratextual echo of uncertain import.

Where Buhss uses Neger, the Austrian dramatist, director, and translator Oliver Karbus translates “Moor” in Iago’s part (but not the subtitle) as the still more directly offensive Nigger. His Duke’s couplet is another conglomerate, fusing Flatter’s and Schaller’s rhyme of kann and Mann with Bolte and Hamblock’s Tapferkeit (courage) for “virtue” and weiß (white) for “fair”. This formulation carries hints of satirical sarcasm, with a suggestion of 1990s moral anti-racism, although the crucial element of hypothetical metamorphosis is lacking:

Karbus: wenn Tapferkeit allein / so schön sein kann, / dann ist Ihr schwarzer Schwiegersohn / ein weißer Mann.  

If courage alone / can be so beautiful / then your black son-in-law is / a white man.

Karbus’s version also recalls Voss’s first attempt, a century earlier: “… be reckoned among the white men”. Prominent earlier and mid-twentieth-century translators such as Flatter, Schaller, and Rothe promoted their work as “anti-Schlegel-Tieck”. Both Buhss and Karbus are evidently writing “anti-Günther” translations: instead of suppressing racist language, they put it on display, whether to be provocative, or because they believe this approach to be more true to Shakespeare’s play, or to the Duke’s attitudes, or because they hold racist views. Inasmuch as their Duke’s couplets respond to Günther’s, they imply a disenchanted view of the idea that liberal state authority might genuinely promote anti-racist ideology. Their Dukes voice the un-self-critically white-suprematist ‘humanism’ of the 1970s.

Zaimoglu and Senkel’s tradaptation of Othello takes the general strategy of Buhss and Karbus further, using an artificially intensified version of contemporary offensive slang, particularly in Iago’s and Rodrigo’s parts. But in the Duke’s couplet, they do not merely imply disenchantment with state-sponsored, moralising anti-racism, by reverting from Günther’s and Motschach’s position to the post-fascist ‘beautiful/black’ consensus, like their contemporaries. Instead, Zaimoglu and Senkel find a way of making apparent the intrinsic limitation of moralising anti-racism. Their tradaptation is for long stretches a fairly faithful translation, in poetised prose, but they also make many cuts (above all, the entire play after 5.2.91), and add some original speeches: a long monologue, replacing 2.2, in which Othello hymns Desdemona; and neo-fascist political speeches by Brabantio, who comes to Cyprus in place of Lodovico. Their script deploys much inventive invective, but the Duke stands above the abusive fray. Zaimoglu and Senkel’s re-translation of his couplet combines philological precision with gender awareness in männliche Tugend (male virtue); has possible reminiscences of Voss and Rothe in using zählen (to count, to reckon); and makes telling use of contemporary


[110] Zaimoglu and Senkel, William Shakespeare: Othello, 40 f., 90–94, etc.
The compound noun Schönheitsfehler (blemish, flaw; literally: beauty-error) carries a commodifying connotation: the word is commonly used in retail, of damaged or defective goods. The choice is especially apt in this context since the noun element Fehler (mistake, error) has the same root as fehlen, which is the standard translation of “to lack”, so Schönheitsfehler is a clever calque on “beauty lack”: almost an in-joke for translators. But what is most original about their translation is the choice of edel (noble) for “fair”. The term edel has been used before in translating “virtue” (by Flatter and Günther), but never for “fair”.

Zaimoglu/Senkel: Solange männliche Tugend mehr zählt als Schönheitsfehler, kann man sagen, Ihr Schwiegersohn ist eher edel als schwarz.¹¹¹

So long as male virtue counts more than minor blemishes, one can say your son-in-law is more noble than black.

The choice of edel highlights class hierarchy as a corollary of race difference, assigning “black” to a socially subjugated class. In line with Zaimoglu’s prolific, polemical writing on the significance of race and ethnicity in contemporary German society and culture,¹¹² this choice implies a politicised, Marxist anti-racism, which challenges the moralising anti-racism of liberal consensus. In Günther’s and Motschach’s couplets, paternalistic state anti-racism appeals to spectators to recognise “blacks” as no different, “under the skin”, from “whites”, by imagining inter-racial metamorphosis. For Zaimoglu and Senkel, race cannot be elided or dematerialized in this way, not least because the state is itself racist: it exists to defend a class system, and it instrumentalizes race to that end. Their Duke reveals that political dynamic. He equivocally assimilates Othello to the political elite, urging Brabantio to overlook the racial “defect” in their “commodity”. To critical spectators, his words suggest the need for a political analysis of racism, understood not as a moral defect in individual, insufficiently humanist racists, but as a structural aspect of social domination.

Class connotations may be incipient in Shakespeare’s “fair” and “black” in this context. He often – notably in the Sonnets – uses “black” (of skin and complexion, and of eye and hair colouring) to

mean “dark”, with physical connotations which are not generally held to be racial, with moral connotations (“evil”, “impure”, “foul”, etc), and sometimes also connoting low social status. “Black” in the Sonnets is “used loosely to mean ‘dark-coloured’ or brownish”, “a dark or swarthy complexion”, as well as “brunette”. Such complexions were associated with persons of lower rank, especially those who worked outdoors. “White” or “fair” facial skin was an upper-class privilege. Sonnet 127 claims: “In the old age black was not counted fair”, but “black” has nowadays seized the inheritance of “beauty”; therefore “my mistress”, with her “raven black” eyes (and her “dun” breasts and “black wires” for hair, Sonnet 130), disdains to wear the face-whitening cosmetics formerly restricted to the nobility, but now democratised: “each hand hath put on nature’s power / Fairing the foul with art’s false borrowed face”. The theme of usurpation here involves not only the rights of the old (“fair”, light-hued) ideal of beauty being appropriated by a new (“black”, dark) one. The cosmetic arts used to be an elite preserve, but have latterly been popularised – hence the need for a new beauty ideal, to preserve social distinction. The old aristocratic ideal is now pitiablelly vulgar. The mistress’s eyes “mourners seem / At such who not born fair no beauty lack, / Sland’ring creation with a false esteem”. These are lines which the Duke’s couplet plays upon (unless it is vice versa). The sonnet refers to people who are not naturally “fair” (blond[e]), but are beautiful, who seek to become artificially “fair”, and so gain “esteem”, at the price of demeaning nature. The Shakespearean Duke’s statement of his esteem for Othello, similarly, is predicated on Othello’s visible blackness being symbolically whitened. Zaimoglu and Senkel re-translate this process as an artificial ennobling, strategically performed by the state, and always liable to be rescinded.

Later, their Brabantio becomes the voice of an emergent neo-fascist state. After taking Lodovico’s place to announce Othello’s demotion, he tells Iago that a “clean-up” is underway in Venice. The newly appointed “nigger’s lieutenant (Negerleutnant)” had better decide which side he’s on, because the recent “democratic niggerification (demokratische Vernigerung)” is being reversed. Brabantio tells Iago an anecdote about being in his “gentlemen’s club” recently and seeing the “grandson of a captured barbarian” there, a black club member – but not for long:

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115 In Shakespeare’s time not a racially coded usage; see Evans, The Sonnets, 248.
He actually has the affront to suggest a parley with me on the current turbulences in our state. ‘In our state’, he says, certain reforms are overdue. Do you know what response I made to him? […] Empty the spittoon and wash it out thoroughly. You should have heard how they all laughed.116

The spittoon may be a token of U.S. culture (a reminiscence from Westerns), but Brabantio’s discourse is that of resurgent European white racism, currently most prominently represented at European Union level by the Alliance of European National Movements, formed in 2009 by populist xenophobic parties from Belgium, Britain, France, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, and Sweden.

IX. Conclusion

The story told here has been necessarily compressed, and could be told differently. The periodisation is an artificial structuring device which possibly hinders analysis more than it helps. To gain a fuller understanding of re-translators’ choices, in order to catch their implications, one needs to examine the whole of each Othello script,117 and also look in many other places: in literature translated and not translated, in non-literary texts, in performances, images, and other kinds of evidence. Remaining only with Othello, the Duke’s last couplet must be understood in terms of his entire part in the play, not least his earlier set of homiletic couplets urging “patience” on Brabantio (1.3.205–212). After those po-faced, sententious rhymes, his final punning couplet comes as a surprise. Responding to it, Brabantio warns Othello of Desdemona’s propensity to deceive her menfolk, in a couplet which is cited much later by Iago (3.3.221). The Duke’s last couplet does not resound like this later, but it does echo Brabantio’s earlier phrase “to fear, not to delight” (1.2.71), and is echoed by Roderigo in his use of “virtue” (1.3.314), and by Iago in the quayside couplets playing on “black” and “fair” and “foul” and “white” and “wit”. These jokes have often been found troublesome: two of the four are omitted in Bowdler’s The Family Shakespeare; and as noted earlier, Schiller cut them all. They present translators with even more severe problems, forcing them to show their hand on entwined issues of gender, race, sexual attraction, and ascribed intelligence.

116 Zaimoglu and Senkel, William Shakespeare: Othello, 93.
117 Baudissin, for instance, uses häßlich for both “black” and “foul” in Iago’s couplets, but schwarz for “black” elsewhere.
In 1984, Werner Habicht, reviewing a recent upsurge in Shakespeare re-translations and innovative productions, in which *Othello* was conspicuously absent, commented that “a flexible approach to the plays via their retranslation can be an efficient way of interpreting them.” Indeed, there is no doubting the ‘efficiency’ of re-translation – from page to stage or screen, or from old to new pages – as an act of re-interpretation. Collecting, collating, and critically comparing re-translations is a far more inefficient procedure. It may not arrive at a new interpretation of the source, but it certainly alerts us to potentials we might otherwise overlook. “Over the four centuries,” V. S. Naipaul writes of another “great chain” of texts about (among other things) race, “the vision constantly changes; it is a fair record of one side of a civilization.”

*Othello* in German is not *Hamlet*: not a play with which German-speaking intellectuals have identified for generations as a national allegory. In fact, in German, *Othello* has so far been the least re-worked – re-translated, re-staged, re-adapted, re-edited, re-analysed, re-told, remembered – of Shakespeare’s tragedies. Intertextual references to the play in German literature are few and far between. But as migration and globalization keep increas-


121 There are just two significant examples; in neither is race significant. Wilhelm Hauff’s story “*Othello*” (1825) refers to Rossini’s opera, not Shakespeare, and the story’s plot bears no relation to either. In Christina Brückner’s feminist monologue for Desdemona, the title piece in a collection of monologues by women from Clytemnestra to Gudrun Ensslin, race difference serves only to underline Desdemona’s own ‘violence’: *Wenn du geredet hättest, Desdemona* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1983); trans. Eleanor Bron, *Desdemona, If You Had Only Spoken! Eleven Uncensored Speeches of Eleven Incensed Women* (London: Virago, 1992).
ing the social salience of ethnic and cultural diversity, in German-speak-
ing countries, as elsewhere, we can expect Othello to keep producing texts
and performances in which the Duke speaks differently again, about dif-
ference, and crucially: for and/or against the contemporary state’s way of
conceiving race difference. That this is what is at stake in his words, and
how variously they can be interpreted, only becomes clear when we ex-
amine how they have been translated. The translations discussed here,
as interpretations, and as acts of cultural expression, in their sheer variety,
as well as some particular versions, perhaps deserve to be called ‘shock-
ing’; but only if we are surprised to find that re-writings of Shakespeare
in German reflect German political history.

122 My thanks, finally, to the anonymous reader, who found the material, to my sur-
prise,”shocking”. 