BLACK SKIN MATTERS:
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COLOR IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

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by
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**BLACK SKIN MATTERS: THE SIGNIFICANCE
OF COLOR IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND**

presented by Timothy Love

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BLACK SKIN MATTERS:
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ABSTRACT

This book explores the impact of stereotypical concepts associated with black skin color in representations of black people during the English Renaissance, namely Shakespeare's *Othello* (*Othello*), Aaron (*Titus Andronicus*), Caliban (*The Tempest*), Rosaline (*Love's Labour's Lost*), and the "dark lady" (*Sonnets*).

Ultimately, this book demonstrates how Shakespeare, and texts of select English Renaissance authors, retaliate against traditional stereotypical, mythical, or colonial representations of black people—representations stemming from distinct resentments for black skin color, hegemonic notions of black inferiority, and opportunistic ambitions deriving from collective concepts of white superiority. These very early postcolonial-minded authors foreshadow modern postcolonial philosophers as they factually assess psychological patterns associated with early modern black people who endure racial discrimination, subjugation, and assimilation. Their literature contrasts previous and contemporary colonial works which fail to reference or utilize fact over racial myth when creating representations of black individuals.

Black Skin Matters:

The Significance of Color in Early Modern England

...where are the voices proclaiming, “It is we who are Othello”? Further, what might such a general absence reveal about our scholarly practices and profession as literary critics?

—Ian Smith¹

Introduction: Why Black Skin in the Early Modern Period Mattered, and Should Matter to Us

Shakespeare Influences Black Civil Rights Leaders

W.E.B. Du Bois, the great African American civil rights leader, once said, “I sit with Shakespeare, and he winces not.”² Here, Du Bois may see an inherent connection between his passionate views on race and Shakespeare’s demonstrations of anti-racism. Many other civil rights leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr., are often influenced by Shakespeare. *Richard III*’s opening monologue moves MLK to reference it in his great “I Have a Dream” speech. Inspiring King’s unique adaptation, Richard III describes the

¹ Smith, “We are Othello,” p. 107

² Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk*, Chapter VI: Of the Training of Black Men

long English civil war he's just endured as "the winter of our discontent,"³ then calls the end of that war a "glorious summer."⁴ King, knowing that black suffering and the civil rights movement are far from over, proclaims that the "sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality."⁵ Whereas Richard III clearly believes the English civil war is behind him when saying "dreadful marches" have turned into "delightful measures,"⁶ King calls his current marches "whirlwinds of revolt"⁷—indicating an ongoing war for freedom—and is sure that delight has not yet come for the Negro.

Civil rights activist Maya Angelou admits that, as a young woman, she "thought that the author of Sonnet 29 must have been a black girl because its solemn words expressed so fiercely what she—an outcast, the victim of racism, destitution, and childhood sexual abuse, crying out alone before a deaf heaven—felt inside."⁸ Here, Angelou not only seems to indirectly connect with an author who paints a powerful picture of a victimized, abused "dark lady" in Sonnets 127-154, but directly identifies with the speaker of the "fair young man" Sonnets who is also, in the eyes of many critics, a direct reflection of Shakespeare himself.

Bella Merlin and Tina Packer notice striking similarities between a revolutionary speech by Stokely Carmichael—a prominent leader of the 1960s black power movement—and dialogue in two of Shakespeare's history plays: "In later years, I realized that the energy and message Stokely Carmichael used was the same energy

3 1.1.1

4 1.1.2

5 King, p. 1

6 1.1.8

7 King, p. 1

8 Prior, pg. 1

Henry V uses in ‘Once more unto the breach’ and Mark Antony uses in ‘Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war.’” In both speeches, Shakespeare’s characters—in the face of injustice, oppression, and/or death—cry for victory or justice *by any means necessary*, a phrase made popular by Malcolm X, and adopted by Stokely Carmichael. Henry V and Mark Antony do not literally say “by any means necessary” but use parallel phrases that indicate a similar desire.⁹

Probably the most explicit or convincing example of associative bonds between black American civil rights leaders and Shakespeare can be found in James Baldwin’s essay “Why I Stopped Hating Shakespeare.” Baldwin, a renowned black poet, novelist, and one of the most influential speakers and essayists of the civil rights movement, not only finds distinct parallels between Shakespeare’s content and modern white experiences, but also realizes special connections between Shakespeare and the black experience—notably the black cultural experience. After comparing the “blind,” “deluded,” “single-mindedness” of Cassius’ words after Caesar’s murder with the single-mindedness of modern white men who’ve overthrown the “State,” Baldwin’s context shifts. He then appears to focus on Shakespeare’s knowledge of all people, including people like himself: “The greatest poet in the English language found his poetry where poetry is found: in the lives of the people. He could have done this only through love—by knowing, which is not the same thing as understanding, that whatever was happening to

⁹ After Caesar is killed, Mark Antony, yearning for justice, says: “Cry ‘Havoc,’ and let slip the dogs of war; / That this foul deed shall smell above the earth / With carrion men, groaning for burial (3.1.1501-1503).” Henry V, determined to be victorious in a pressing battle says: “Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more; / Or close the wall up with our English dead. / In peace there’s nothing so becomes a man / As modest stillness and humility: / But when the blast of war blows in our ears, / Then imitate the action of the tiger” (3.1.1-7).

anyone was happening to him.” Without explicitly saying it just yet, Baldwin wants us to know that black people are definitely included among these “lives of people.” The author doesn’t just realize Shakespeare’s transcending sense of black humanity in a past tense or general way, but implies that Shakespeare studies, explores, and recreates individual human experiences—which include those directly indicative of universal black experiences. It’s as if Baldwin feels that Shakespeare produces dialogue and characters African Americans can directly identify with. As Shakespeare empathizes with distinct human personas, plights, circumstances, emotions, and mentalities which may arise via oppressive human conditions, he taps into the black American soul.¹⁰

When Baldwin finds parallels between black culture and Shakespearean language, we see the makings of this explicit soulful connection:

Again, I was listening very hard to jazz and hoping, one day, to translate it into language,

and Shakespeare's bawdiness became very important to me, since bawdiness was one of

the elements of jazz and revealed a tremendous, loving, and realistic respect for the body, and that ineffable force which the body contains, which Americans have mostly lost, which I had experienced only among Negroes, and of which I had then been taught to be ashamed.¹¹

10 As Baldwin believes that Shakespeare “saw...that the people who produce the poet are not responsible to him: he is responsible to them” (Baldwin, “Why I Stopped Hating Shakespeare.” p. 3). We can also estimate that Baldwin sees a progressive notion in Shakespeare to somehow fight for those who suffer from human conditions.

11 Baldwin, p.3

Here, Baldwin sees a Shakespearean stylistic propensity that resonates specifically with black people. He feels that the Bard's "bawdiness," or the art of portraying daring, indecent things, is evident in "elements of jazz." The bold, racy, highly poetic jazz lyrics of many black vocalists like Cab Calloway and Billie Holiday contribute to this notion, and create a thematic, linguistic, cultural bridge between the black jazz era of Baldwin's time and many areas of Shakespearean dialogue. This bawdiness is also very evident in black blues music and comedy of the same period, all of which derive from a will to express pain and articulate oppression—to unleash voices that have been suppressed for too long. Conversely, Baldwin suggests that these expressions of pain aren't as evident in white cultural music and comedy when saying "Americans have mostly lost" bawdiness.

The list of black activists who relate to Shakespeare seems infinitesimal. Thus, the pervasiveness of such an influence among twentieth century America black leaders could mean that a portion of the American civil rights movement, in supplementary, indirect, and direct ways, begins with Shakespeare.

Believe it or not, Shakespeare champions anti-racism in some of his most popular plays, and in half of his renowned *Sonnets*. As the author empathizes with the early modern black experience in ways that attract modern black activists, I wonder why so many generations of white scholars ignore, fail to mention, or fail to detect such anti-racist consistency. When I utter the words "Shakespeare is an anti-racist champion in my eyes," several white advisors and colleagues of mine question my motives, thinking my black skin causes a biased perception of the Bard.

Historical Critical Perceptions of Early Modern Black Skin

As a lover of boxing, I, as many fans across the world, am pleased with the idea of an undisputed champion. I feel somewhat dissatisfied when several champions occupy one weight class, especially since the cacophony of opinions held by the WBA, WBC, IBF, and other boxing commissions are often influenced by factors that honestly have nothing to do with a boxer's winning record. Political influences and inevitable human biases often make boxing frustrating and, more importantly, less credible. Likeminded implicit biases also hinder college basketball and college football. Seed rankings are often determined by individuals who favor teams with historical reputations, large revenue streams, and enormous fan-bases.

Equating the manner in which modern literary critics have theorized racial conceptualization in early modern England to the aforementioned sports dilemma creates quite an interesting analogy. Like boxing commissions and college ranking committees, literary critics are sometimes swayed by partialities. Whether the critic favors certain trends, academic norms, arbitrariness, economic viability, socio-political beliefs, specific nationalities, or specific races, it is safe to say that literary academia is not immune to unfair biases. More specifically, to suggest that many scholars in early modern literary race studies throughout modern history have been motivated by irresponsible implicit biases or types of racism that are endemic to the very collegiate systems which employ them is not farfetched. It's not a coincidence, for instance, that various white scholars who are accustomed to historically biased administrative regimes—collegiate regimes who've commonly practiced broad levels of systemic racial discrimination against students and faculty of color—fail to realize or censure their own racial biases in literary

criticism. As black people across the nation have been underrepresented in collegiate faculties and student bodies, receive less pay, and are offered tenure at much lower rates,¹² they've also been underrepresented in scholarly discourse concerning early modern race concepts. Even as more and more critics of color in the twenty-first century participate in this highly controversial field, biased dogma which seeks to undermine the significance of black skin color and its association with racial conceptualization from 1500-1700 nevertheless crowds analytical conversations.

Before the late 1980s, the field of early modern race studies was dominated by white critics—namely white men¹³—and consequentially driven by detached, inexperienced philosophies of the black experience. White scholars controlled a literary field which not only sought to understand how early modern white people perceived black figures, but how blackness was defined. Scholarship regarding early modern societal perceptions and literary representations of black people relied on estimations of blackness from non-black, privileged critics who oftentimes created patterns of stigmatized rhetoric or indifferent approaches that went unchallenged. As these tactics commonly sought to de-legitimize or ignore the profound relevance of black skin color, racial bias was accepted as the norm. In “Surveying ‘race’ in Shakespeare” (2000), Margo Hendricks notices a “near total inattention to Othello’s skin colour” in Gerald

12 Patricia A Matthews, “Written/Unwritten: Diversity and the Hidden Truths of Tenure,” pp. 5, 7, 9-11, 14

13 Ian Smith makes an interesting comment on this historical white male elite in early modern race studies. In response to Hazlitt’s claim that “It is *we* who are Hamlet,” Smith says, “Hazlitt’s privileged category, ‘we,’ has, therefore, multiple referents, including of course a male academic elite but also, most centrally for the purposes of this essay, a white literary intelligentsia whose investments in the project of white invisibility—that is, its hegemonic ubiquity—require attention (“We are Othello: Speaking of Race in Early Modern Studies,” p. 107).

Eades Bentley's 1958 introduction to *Othello*.¹⁴ She goes on to credit Bentley and other "older" generation Shakespearean critics for omitting race in order to strategically focus on other things, exonerating them from bias. On the contrary, I equate their behavior to the pulse of historical English and white American indifference to racism. Channeling James Baldwin's belief that black rage derives from the "the most extraordinary and criminal indifference, the ignorance and indifference of most white people in this country,"¹⁵ part of my displeasure with past and present early modern race studies derives from its distinct methodological connection to past and present, English and American, racial ignorance and indifference.

Unlike Margo Hendricks, Ian Smith does not excuse older generational biases. When noticing how Stephen Orgel attributes references to black skin color in *The Merchant of Venice* and Queen Elizabeth's expulsion warrants to xenophobia rather than racism, Smith counters such biased arguments by claiming that "Blackness does figure as a racial signifier."¹⁶ Moreover, Smith emphasizes the significance of skin color throughout *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance: Barbarian Errors* (2009),¹⁷ representing a very rare breed of current scholarship.

Epitomizing a swath of older generation critics, Stephen Orgel additionally rejects the prospect of using ancient Greek indignation toward black people as a precedent when

14 Hendricks, p. 1

15 James Baldwin, et al, "The Negro in American culture," p. 205.

16 Smith, "Race in Perspective" in *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, 45–46. Ian Smith also points out that Orgel "dismisses race from the analysis" of Queen Anne and her ladies in *The Masque of Blackness* when substituting the word "blacks" for "marketable commodities and rich possessions" (p. 45).

17 Noteworthy examples can be found on pages 9-12, and 46-58; Smith also emphasizes language throughout the book, but his theories repeatedly show that linguistic implications surrounding early modern racial conceptualization were intrinsically related to bias against black skin.

theorizing pre-colonial racial conceptualization—something Ian Smith passionately advocates in the *Barbarian Errors*.¹⁸ Orgel also aligns with many older and newer generational scholarship when believing that race concepts in precolonial England should not be theorized through colonial/postcolonial lenses, sparking rebuttals from some uncommon voices of his own era, like Winthrop Jordan who, before the 1980s, saw the existence and function of colonial mentalities in early modern hegemonic structures. Jordan would pave the way for some future critics by rejecting the notion that English Renaissance racism is anachronistic, noticing that, by 1589, before widespread English colonialism, “a seemingly gratuitous identification of blackness with slavery affirms what had already become a cultural reflex.”¹⁹

In the late eighties, Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, Elliot H. Tokson, and Jack D’Amico challenged prior pervasive narrow perspectives by considering historical evidence that not only verifies links between early modern racial conceptualization and modern concepts of racism, but proves a long history of European indignation toward black skin—before, during, and after the slave trade. It wasn’t until the early nineties, however, that critical voices from black scholars, like Kim F. Hall (and voices from other scholars of color, such as Yumna Siddiqi), began to find more problems with traditional criticism of English Renaissance literature by offering experiential insight that confidently sees inherent associations between the “othering” of early modern black people and the discrimination of subsequent black people via similar race concepts which derive significantly from black skin color. Hall emphasizes skin color when making

18 See *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, Chapter One: “Classical Precedents,” and pp. 46-58.

19 Jordan, p. 60

theoretical claims, suggesting, for example, that the presence of Ethiopian women in Jonson's Jacobean court masque *The Masque of Blackness* reinforces conceptual links between blackness and subservience—as well as gender and subservience—affirming a powerful presence of negative English interpretations of color during the Renaissance. Hall also finds a foundational basis for negative applications of blackness in early modern proclivities to conceptually mesh color with “African difference.”²⁰ According to Hall, the term *black*, even when used in reference to Native American, Indian, Spanish, Irish, or Welsh groups in early modern England,

draws its [negative] power from England's ongoing negotiations of African difference and from the implied color comparisons therein. Thus the Irish may be called “black” and an English woman may be called “Ethiopian,” but these moments always depend on a visual schema that itself relies on an idea of African difference.²¹

In other words, even though *black* is sometimes applied to non-black African groups, the term nevertheless draws from innate rejections of blackness which quintessentially encompass black skin—a skin color labelled by its categorical difference from the perceptual normality of white skin. Thus, in this dissertation, when the term *black people* is used, it primarily refers to individuals of black African or black Moorish descent. These individuals possess a range of brown skin colors, from dark brown to light brown skin, despite being represented by white actors who wear pitch black makeup or blackface in early modern theater, and are called “black” by white characters. The term

²⁰ Hall, p. 7

²¹ Hall, p. 7. Also, Smith, *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, pp. 45-46

also applies to non-African individuals of color who may stereotypically associate with black Africans and black Moors in the eyes of white societies.

It is important to realize that white perceptions of black African people, especially those negative perceptions, are often applied to non-black people of color in a manner that targets them equilaterally. This equilateral denigration does not usually happen with white individuals who absorb the term (although The Black Legend often applies the term quite equilaterally to European Spanish Muslims—see Chapter One). To persecute non-black African individuals of color by lumping them with black Africans, or with the intention of smearing them with black African stereotypes, encapsulates historical indignations for blackness that are intrinsic to non-white skin color—an indignation that eventually intensifies with white negative perceptions of virtually all black and brown Americans, and positive or better perceptions of virtually all white Americans.

The emergence of “color criticism” in the late 80s and early 90s would not sustain in critical circles.²² In English Renaissance criticism since the early 90s, it’s been largely okay to feel that “Hamlet’s speeches are ‘as real as our own thoughts,’” or to say “It is we who are Hamlet,”²³ because many “critics identify with Hamlet personally and see in his doubt and skepticism a philosophy that resonates with their world view and points toward a modern social ethos.”²⁴ But scholars who attempt to see themselves in Othello, or relate

22 Smith notes that “A new orthodoxy has emerged as a corrective to the predominant but unsustainable ...sole emphasis on color. Researchers now typically posit that race in the early modern period is the product of several, often interrelated, categories of identification, a complex amalgam of codes that can be mobilized to ratify group exclusion and marginalization” (*Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, p. 3).

23 Smith, quoting Hazlitt in “We are Othello,” p. 106.

24 Smith, “We are Othello,” p. 106

modern black people to Othello, or see color as a very important function in Othello, are once again out of favor (reflecting the pulse of the field before the late 1980s). In 2016, Ian Smith noticed a disappearance of scholarly voices who identify with Othello, asking, “where are the voices proclaiming, ‘It is we who are Othello’? Further, what might such a general absence reveal about our scholarly practices and profession as literary critics?”²⁵ Smith partially blames a continuous predominantly white field of scholars for this absence, suggesting that “the unavoidably simple yet pertinent response to the lack of overt statements of identification with Othello is that Othello is black while the cadre of critics in Shakespeare studies has been predominantly white.”²⁶

I agree with Smith here. Though Ayanna Thompson shows a glimmer of hope in 2019 by noting a rise in scholars of color during the Shakespeare Association of America’s Annual Conference (SAA),²⁷ rhetoric which seeks to discredit the process of theorizing early modern racial conceptualization by identifying with blackness and emphasizing skin color—or, rhetoric that discredits the process of theorizing early modern race concepts through creating or emphasizing parallels to modern racism—still seems to reign supreme. By 2021, hope continues to rise. The list of black Shakespeareans across the country—of whom I am a grateful member—continues to expand. There are more efforts to address race in the 2020 and 2021 SAA conferences. However, far too few scholars remain uninterested or unwilling to focus on or prolifically discuss the significance of skin color and anti-racism. Daniel Vitkus, during a “Class and Identity” seminar at the 2021 SAA Conference, claims that academics of early modern

25 Smith, “We are Othello,” p. 107

26 Smith, “We are Othello,” p. 108

27 Qtd by Dr. William Kerwin, SAA Annual Meeting, 2019. Ayanna Thompson is currently President of the SAA.

literature are “behind the curve” or lag behind increasing post-George Floyd discussions about anti-racism.²⁸ Immediately after his bold words, I vocally agreed with him, and thanked him.

Several critics since the 90s, inadvertently or not, prevent modern minds, black minds, from identifying with early modern black characters like Othello by over-complicating the concept of race in early modern England, or by using complication to de-emphasize the significance of black skin color.²⁹ Many scholars in this ongoing critical

28 Vitkus during a “Class and Identity” seminar

29 As examples, Emily Bartels says, “By the 1990s...conceptions of race, racialized subjects, and England’s early ‘racism’ were complicated by intersections with gender, religion, ethnicity, whiteness, genre, performance” (*Speaking of the Moor*, p. 12). She definitely contributes to these complications and agrees with separating pre-colonial English mentalities which denigrated black people from colonial/postcolonial mentalities. Here’s an example: “The presence of Africa and its subjects, in all their infinite variety, breaks up the possibility for [pre-colonial] England of a clean imperial sweep, posing instead from the start a complicated nexus of relations that could not fall easily under or into a racist or imperialist regime. And that Africans became the most vigorously regulated and subjugated of all England’s Others should ultimately come as a surprise” (“Othello and Africa,” p. 64); Michael Neill “maintains that, in this period, signs of profound cultural difference, registered more significantly ‘in establishing the boundaries of otherness than the markers of mere biological [or racial] diversity’” (qtd by Ian Smith in *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, p. 3. Smith retrieves this quote from Neill’s “‘Mulattos,’ ‘Blacks,’ and ‘Indian Moors’ p. 366); Sujata Iyengar says, “I resist the imposition of a straightforward historical trajectory ‘toward’ racialism ‘toward’ color-prejudice. In particular, I suggest that literary affiliations...entangle with variable concepts of skin color and emergent racial distinctions” (p. 1); Mary Floyd-Wilson says (notice how she uses “xenophobia” instead of “racism”): “Anyone who reads *Othello* or *Titus Andronicus* will recognize that early modern English culture identified black skin with a set of negative qualities. Despite the obviousness of Elizabethan xenophobia, however, scholars face a number of challenges in determining the significance of these stereotypes. As Margo Hendricks has pointed out, ‘Race, as it surfaces in Shakespeare’s and other early modern texts, reveals itself to be a multiplicity of loci, of axes of determinism, as well as of metaphorical systems to aid and abet its deployment across a variety of boundaries in the making’... The complexity of tracing what’s familiar and what’s peculiar about premodern taxonomies and their cultural functions has intrigued critics for several generations” (“Moors, Race, and the Study of English Renaissance Literature: A Brief Retrospective,” p. 1044); Lara Bovilsky doesn’t mention color at all when theorizing early modern racial theories: “[r]acist theories encompass specific beliefs about nationality, language, psychology, intellect, religion, morality, vocation, class, gender, and sexuality, to name some significant and interrelated categories” (qtd in Ian Smith’s *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance* p. 4).

wave, blur clear parallels between English Renaissance rejections of black skinned people and modern racism, hence diminishing the power of pre-colonial aversions to black skin color. Even though pre-colonial English mindsets bear striking resemblances to colonial/post-colonial oppressive mentalities, the two eras, racially speaking, are often viewed as apples and oranges. Though some renowned and/or influential scholars³⁰ have contributed greatly to early modern race studies, insomuch that I find a good deal of their research valuable (especially for this project), their relentless desire to erase the aforementioned resemblances and minimize early modern emphases on black skin color over the past few decades has, in my opinion, incurred irreparable damage. This damage not only separates modern black people from identifying with characters like Othello, Aaron, and Caliban, but siphons the sting of stereotypes and slurs which demoralize physical blackness in the English Renaissance—an indirect siphoning that, as mentioned before, seems to ultimately point toward a long history of modern academic disinterest in black oppression in the field.

Too many critics do not seek to know how black people understood their own place in English Renaissance societies, or how rare criticism which considers the historical feelings of oppressed black people can engender a more accurate view of early modern black perception. *Black Lives in the English Archives* (2008) by Imtiaz Habib, and Gustav Ungerer's *The Mediterranean Apprenticeship of British Slavery* (2008) both affirm a significant presence of black people in Tudor England, but fall short of granting thorough, reliable hypotheses concerning the state of black consciousness. Onyeka also misses an opportunity in *Blackamoors in Tudor England: Their Presence, Status, and*

30 ...such as Michael Neill and Emily Bartels.

Origins (2013) when gathering hidden facts deriving largely from unexamined records—evidence that previous critics failed to thoroughly examine or even discover.³¹

Ian Smith on the other hand utilizes effective empathy, choosing to place himself in the shoes of colonial and post-colonial oppressed black people in order to gather more quasi-experiential viewpoints on patterns of bias that emerge from pre-colonial black experiences. In *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, Smith wonders what happened to two black men, Anthonie and Binnie, who returned to Africa after accompanying the alleged first group of Africans to enter England in 1556. Smith empathizes with the manner in which these men were forced to learn the English language and work as translators for the benefit of English trade, equating their plight to colonial black people by realizing that “their intended destiny in the trade system required their assimilation into the English language as forced subjects of a racializing linguistic economy.”³² In “We Are Othello: Speaking of Race in Early Modern Studies,” Smith equates the treatment of Othello to the treatment of modern American black men who are stereotyped, brutalized, and/or killed by the police, advocating processes which not only

31 Oneyka irresponsibly uses information associated with Tudor black people to place a large rift between pre-colonial and colonial white attitudes, choosing not to focus on how looming racist attitudes may have affected the feelings, opinions, and lifestyles of African diaspora before widespread English colonialism. Like many scholars, Oneyka seems to feel that pervasive racial bias suddenly turned on like a light switch after the Tudor period, being somehow nonexistent throughout the English Renaissance. Reflecting Stephen Orgel and foreshadowing Miranda Kaufmann, Oneyka unwisely purports that the status of some Tudor black people and the potential absence of large-scale slavery somehow disproves the concept of ubiquitous early modern racism. He repeatedly states that Tudor Africans, for the most part, were somehow not treated differently because they were black—whether they were servants or non-servile workers—and weren’t treated as harshly as black people who lived in Renaissance Spain.³¹ Even though English slave traders in the early sixteenth century contributed to the population of black people in Tudor England, and were considered the top slave traders in Spain³¹—and even though popular travel narratives and literary depictions of black people were largely stereotypical in this period—Oneyka still balks at the prospect of common Tudor racial bias.

32 Smith, *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, p. 125

find distinct parallels between modern underprivileged black people and Shakespeare's Moor, but also empathize with both parties, allowing confident experiential theories of black consciousness across centuries. I applaud Smith's texts, and wish there were more empathetic critical discourses which seek to urge author and reader to peer through the eyes of black people, as opposed to peering through privileged out-of-touch lenses.

Hundreds of years ago, obscure early modern messages from the influential theologian Peter Martyr allowed English audiences to know and empathize with early modern black thought by suggesting "The Aethiopean thinketh the black colour to be fairer than the white; and the white man thinketh otherwise,"³³ along with George Herbert who claims "So Black-Moores think us foule, and we / Are quit with them, and more."³⁴ But many current scholars are not interested in capitalizing on such literary patterns which might shed light on the significance of racial conceptualization via color perception, or how color plays an important role in the type of early modern discrimination that directly affects Tudor black people.

Before the expansion of English colonialism, there were hundreds, possibly thousands of black people who lived in Tudor England.³⁵ There is evidence that many were servants, and others were employees.³⁶ But the reason little is known about the racial views of these black people—despite the work of few scholars who investigate individual Tudor black people like Onyeka and Miranda Kaufmann (who overstate many artifactual clues, in my opinion)—partially lies in an academic over-fixation with early

33 Qtd in Tokson, p. 6

34 Herbert, "A Paradox, addressed to the healthy, who think they are Better than the sick"

35 Kaufmann, *Black Tudors: The Untold Story*, p. 5; also see Onyeka, *Blackamoors: Africans in Tudor England, their presence, status and origins*, p. xv; and Habib's *Black Lives*

36 See Kaufmann, *Black Tudors: The Untold Story*; Onyeka, *Blackamoors: Africans in Tudor England, their presence, status and origins*

modern *white* authors, artists, kings, queens, merchants, architects, etc. The feeling that black people represented such a small portion of the population and do not deserve heightened attention, or that people of color were not significant to the history of early modern England, thrives in the face scholarship that knows too little about non-whiteness. If we, as Renaissance scholars, begin to see the acclamation of information concerning people of color and estimations of early modern non-white thinking as important goals, we can inch closer to more comprehensive and precise views of inter-ethnic race concepts. We can do a better job in locating evidence outside of white purviews, surmising how Tudor black people (and other people of color) felt, how they were treated, and how skin color contributed to this treatment if our interest warrants it.

To prevent rushes in judgment and disappointing impediments, we can also start by keeping in mind that the vast majority of Renaissance English history was written by whites, and may lack detailed acts of discrimination against Tudor black people (and other non-whites).³⁷ Thus, none of us should rush to make conclusions which obstruct efforts to discover more information, such as completely disavowing the existence of widespread Tudor discrimination against black people. Let's remember that critical thinking oftentimes produces evidence in itself, and can lead to empirical racial assessments.

37 For example, Onyeka and Kaufmann (author of *Black Tudors*) discover court records, religious records, personal correspondence, and other evidence from Tudor Africans that were not made public or used as contributions to English history.

The Significance of Precolonial Black Oppression

Before I go any further, readers must know that I am not proposing that we shouldn't seek to know more about white people or Jewish individuals who were oppressed. Nor am I suggesting that black people were the only group who suffered from oppression in early modern England. It is a fact that Jews, the Irish, and women were heavily mistreated before, during, and after the English Renaissance. It may even be legitimate to say that Irish individuals and women were more likely to be slighted in early modern England than black people, simply because there were more of them throughout Britain. However, the purpose of this project is to shed light on a specific ethnic group who seems to endure an extreme type of prejudice.³⁸ The overall severity of black oppression in Europe and the Americas, the amount of lives lost, and the continued impact thereof must be addressed.

The Edict of Expulsion which banned Jews from England was enforced for 350 years between 1290 and 1657, subjecting them to horrible persecution.³⁹ Between 1537 and 1691, England led conquests against Ireland, colonizing its citizens through fear, torture, and murder.⁴⁰ And women of all ethnicities suffered from continuous patriarchal punishment throughout the early modern period (and beyond). However, from the mid-1400s to the mid-1800s, *tens of millions* of black people were slaughtered during the

38 In "Othello and Africa," Bartels notes that "the terms of the negative stereotypes were commonly applied to such a broad range of Others—from Africans to black magicians to sodomites to Jews—that their validity had to be suspect. And it seems no coincidence that the most popular targets of both positive and negative stereotyping were the Ethiopians, a people whom the English for decades knew only from texts, not experience. Such representations formed part of a discourse that, however much it might be 'anxiously repeated' could never fully mask its imaginative outline" (p. 53).

39 Mundill, Robin R. *England's Jewish Solution: Experiment and Expulsion, 1262-1290*. pp. 1-2.

40 See Nicholas P. Canny's *Making Ireland British, 1580-1650*.

slave trade.⁴¹ For over 400 years, multitudes of black women, men, and children suffered from the largest holocaust in human history. From the mid-1600s to the early 1800s, the English greatly contributed to this holocaust (as well as some Irish and Jewish individuals). Thus, the English Renaissance, which occurs just before this specific oppressive period, suddenly becomes a focal point as it gives potential answers to the kind of pre-colonial psychological profiles that were capable of committing such atrocities.

Colonial philosophies that specifically subjected black people to arguably more harm than any other ethnic group, were apparent when the first group of Africans were transported to England.⁴² In the mid-1500s, five black Africans (as previously mentioned) from “Guinea” or west Africa were brought to England by traders who forced them to learn the English language—a process that would make future trade with Africa a lot easier. Here, pre-colonial directives to assimilate black people through language bear a striking similarity to colonial methods of control.⁴³ Ian Smith stresses that this forced implementation of language is not only indicative of aggressive economic methodologies, but also racial hierarchies: “Their inflicted training in English, however, was not simply a matter of learning to translate the context-specific language of trade, but also bore the attitudinal and racial bias embedded on the history of barbarism.”⁴⁴

41 See Saidiya V. Hartman’s “The Time of Slavery” (2002), pp. 757–77.

42 Peter Fryer says the first group of five Africans were brought to England in 1555 in the “Africans in England” section of Chapter One (entitled “Those kinde of people”) from the book *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (ebook); Noel Malcolm says the first black people were brought to England from west Africa in 1555; Tokson says they came from Guinea (p. 1).

43 See Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, “Chapter One: The Black Man and Language”

44 Smith, “Shakespeare’s Africans” in *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, p. 124

Some of these first Africans were eventually allowed to return home under specific English mercantile command, and were forced to translate in the interest of English trade.⁴⁵ Subsequently, as more black people entered England by force or voluntarily, evidence suggests they were forced or compelled to assimilate in the interest of white gain, whether that gain profited English trade, English religions (i.e. Leo Africanus), the English court, English conflicts (i.e. the representational black figure Othello), English farming, English art, etc. Thus, the acceptance of black people into early modern English culture seems dependent on strict assimilation or whitewashing. Though some black people—like those first Africans, and those mentioned in Onyeka and Miranda Kaufmann’s research—were given some freedoms, wages, religious accommodations, etc.,⁴⁶ it would be foolish to conclude that brewing colonial mindsets somehow paused, or did not exist at all simply because unequivocal slavery might’ve been uncommon in Tudor England.

Yes, we do not have much evidence to affirm that black people were commonly enslaved in pre-colonial England. Still, the preponderance of evidence cannot completely exonerate Renaissance Englanders from participating in slave trade culture. English merchants took advantage of “privateering” laws, and commonly captured slaves through processes of recouping property from ships associated with native nations of applicable pirates.⁴⁷ In addition: English slave traders were very prosperous in Spain; English masters of black servants appeared to have a say as to the freedom of their servants;⁴⁸

45 Tokson, says four returned home (p. 1). Smith says two were allowed to return, and were forced to translate (“Shakespeare’s Africans” in *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, p. 124-25)

46 See Onyeka’s *Blackamoors* and Kaufmann’s *Black Tudors*

47 See Kaufmann 144-146

48 Kaufmann, “Introduction” to *Black Tudors*

black slaves throughout imperial England from the 1640s until the nineteenth century served in the same servile positions as many Tudor black people;⁴⁹ and, as mentioned before, forced assimilation was consistently applied. But more importantly, the tenets of colonialism do not require the imposition of unequivocal slavery, or widespread slavery. The most detrimental element of colonialism is its mental element.⁵⁰ Transcending slavery, the mental goliath of colonialism causes long-term psychological horror that perpetuates a state of inferiority for the oppressed (before, during, and after physical enslavement) and infects them with traits of the oppressor (Chapter Two heavily details this subject).⁵¹ For England, a national colonial mindset was apparent long before expansive imperialism began, and lingers far after its end. Colonialism's mental tentacles during pre-colonial England are chronically endemic, and thus deserve heightened significance.

John Hawkins' mastermind behind attempts to gather black slaves during the 1560s⁵² is much more significant than his failed mission. Royal mentalities which authorized such a mission, and a national culture which largely endorses the idea of black enslavement, tells us more about the pulse of white thinking regarding black skin than assessments which draw conclusions from deficient evidence of actual black slavery.

49 See Dabydeen's *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art* for 17th and 18th century descriptions and images of black people in similar servile positions.

50 Various scholars, such as Mignolo Walter, Prasad Prushkala, and Mohammed Sabrin suggest that true decolonization involves the removal of intellectual or mental colonization—not just the geographical removal of the colonizer. This highlights the significance of psychological oppression. (Note: This statement appears again in this group of essays.)

51 Marcelo Dascal argues in "Colonizing and Decolonizing Minds" that colonialism imposes "epistemic violence" upon the mindsets of colonized people, causing them to reproduce the same violence, perspectives, and culture that once subjugated them. (Note: This statement appears again in later in this group of essays.)

52 Bartels, "Othello and Africa: Postcolonialism Reconsidered," p. 53; Kaufmann, "Introduction" to *Black Tudors*

Efforts to colonize black Africans in the 1560s conveys the extent of pre-colonial ideas concerning which racial ethnicity should be overpowered, tortured, kidnapped, subjugated, and raped, mimicking an already established Spanish slave trade culture. Given this, I just don't see how Tudor black people were exempt from discrimination. If black people were even slightly aware of such imminent supremacist perceptions, their own perceptions of Tudor whites could not have been good (as Peter Martyr and George Herbert, mentioned earlier, convey). Even if Tudor black people weren't slaves at the moment, the mental oppression exacerbated by English whites who wished to subjugate black people outside of England offers a kind of psychological enslavement indicative of colonial/postcolonial oppression.

Renaissance Englanders and colonial whites across the globe used very similar racial philosophies to perceive black people, and thus treated them in analogous ways. Both types of discrimination, which merge or bleed into each other during the mid-seventeenth century,⁵³ were motivated by distinct resentments for black skin color, hegemonic notions of black inferiority, and opportunistic ambitions deriving from collective notions of white superiority. The latter is not just an economic motivation, as many critics may assume, but also thrives from augmented racialization. Most importantly, I must emphasize that all three motivations are quite evident before expansive colonialization in England. Not only can we estimate Queen Elizabeth's resentment—or the resentment of royal powers around her—when the English throne exclusively orders that “divers blackamoors” be expelled from England in 1596 (because,

53 Expansive English colonialism begins in the mid-seventeenth century (Bartels, “Othello and Africa: Postcolonialism Reconsidered”; Kaufmann, “Introduction” to *Black Tudors*)

according to the warrants, the Queen feels there are too many of them,⁵⁴ and blames them for socio-economic problems), but we can also approximate how these black people who faced expulsion, and the whites who wanted them gone, conceptualized race.

Even though Queen Elizabeth's expulsion warrants have been hotly debated in early modern literary criticism, especially during the past ten years—with several critics doubting the existence of racist motivations and/or racist implications—we cannot get around the fact that the throne's efforts to kick out "*blackamoors*," or *black-skinned* Moors, mimic Spain's prior, contemporary, and subsequent expulsion of Moors, some of whom had black skin. As anti-Spanish propaganda from England and France thoroughly exploits the notion that Spain harbors or is filled with black people and Muslims, the expulsion of moriscos might work to lessen this stereotypical brand—a brand which emerges from the Black Legend—in the eyes of Philip II of Spain (this issue is further examined in Chapter One). In addition, it might move Elizabeth to expel black people as a way of ensuring distance away from such a demeaning racial legend.

The black skin of "those kindes of people"⁵⁵ who faced expulsion during Elizabeth's reign is confirmed by the ethnic terms used in all the Queen's expulsion warrants, specifically the 1596 arrest warrant, and another 1601 warrant which orders the expulsion of "Negars and Blackamoors," whom Elizabeth—or royal officials who exploit the Queen's authority in her elderly age—also brands "infidels."⁵⁶ It important to

54 *Acts of the Privy Council*, pp. 20-21

55 From Elizabeth's 1596 warrant, transcribed in "Early Times" from *Black Presence* (published by *The National Archives. Exhibitions & Learning Online*)

56 Quoted in Bartels *Speaking of the Moor*, p. 100. Bartels notes other references associated with Queen Elizabeth's 1601 order, such as Jones' *The Elizabethan Image of Africa*, p. 20; "Licensing Casper van Senden to Deport Negroes" (1601); and *Tudor Royal Proclamations, 1588-1603*, ed. J.L. Hughes and J.F. Larkin, p. 22. When the Queen calls English black people "infidels," she parallels Leo Africanus' *Historie* which was translated into English in 1600, just a year before.

highlight the fact that “Negars and Blackamoors” are two terms used to geographically identify black-skinned people, because sometimes the term “Moor” is used by Elizabethans to identify individuals of color who did not have black skin (such as Indians, Native Americans, Arabs, and Africans in general⁵⁷). This places English black people who faced Queen Elizabeth’s warrants in a position of much greater discrimination—at that specific time—than other non-whites living in England, and low status whites (with the exception of Jewish individuals, who were expelled centuries beforehand, as previously noted). Elizabeth’s orders just so happen to single out those very dark people whose skin symbolically associates them with highly popular religious and classical notions of sin, evil,⁵⁸ danger, and death.⁵⁹ As black people in England were urged to learn the English language and assimilate into English culture from the start,⁶⁰ they were capable of realizing that the aforementioned ideologies concerning blackness determined their fate. Moreover, English white people who knew about the warrants undoubtedly comprehend a powerful ideological license emitting from the Queen’s words. This license not only makes freedom and humanness contingent upon racial distinction, but sanctions associative racial discrimination. As a pre-colonial ideological

Africanus identically calls Negroes and other black people “infidels,” among other slurs. See also Kaufmann, pp. 114-115.

57 Bartels, “Making more of the Moor: Aaron, Othello, and Renaissance Refashionings of Race,” p. 434; Bathelemy, p. x; Tokson, p. 2

58 Cohen states, “In his *Moralia in Iob*, Gregory the Great (ca. 540–604) interpreted Ethiopia as a symbol of the fallen world, its blackness a figure for sin. Paulinus of Nola declared that Ethiopians were burnt by sin rather than sun, while a popular school text glossed ‘Ethiopians’ simply as ‘sinners,’ and stated that ‘Ethiopians are...black men presenting a terrifying appearance to those beholding them’ (p. 118). Also, see Bartels, “Othello and Africa: Postcolonialism Reconsidered,” p. 53; Barthelemy, p. 64; and for classical conflations of evil and blackness, see Smith, *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, Chapter One: “Classical Precedents,” and pp. 46-58,

59 Hall, p. 9; Tokson p. 7

60 Smith, *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, p. 123-24; Kaufmann, “Introduction,” *Black Tudors*; Tokson, p. 1

license, there are resounding parallels that link such a dangerous mentality to modern white privilege, affirming a connection with colonial and post-colonial philosophies of race via color classification.

And there's more. The Queen's expulsion orders may also be a reaction to popular early modern stereotypes that associate black people with hyper-sexuality (I expand upon the this English Renaissance racial stereotype in Chapter Two) and sodomy.⁶¹ Although homosexual sodomy was rarely prosecuted in Elizabethan England, "a Moor would be occasioned by a 'period of dislocation,' a social upheaval that triggered cultural scapegoating."⁶² As harvests recurrently failed, causing hunger, disease and sharp increases in poverty and vagrancy during the 1590s, the Queen's orders attempt to make black people culpable.⁶³ In 1601 the English throne claims that black people were "fostered and relieved here to the great annoyance of [the queen's] own liege people, that want the relief, which those people consume."⁶⁴ The throne goes on to say that "most of them are infidels, having no understanding of Christ or his Gospel."⁶⁵ Accordingly, Elizabeth's orders may also mirror the most renowned Old Testament kings

61 Smith, *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, pp. 148-49; Daniel Vitkus, "Turning Tricks," *Conversions: Gender and Religious Change in Early Modern Europe* pp. 250-51 affirms early modern hypersexual stereotypes associated with black skin

62 Smith, *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, p. 149. Smith references the phrase "period of dislocation" from Alan Bray

63 See Beier, A. L., *Masterless Men: The vagrancy problem in England 1560-1640*; Brundage, A., *The English Poor Laws 1700-1930*; File, N., and Power, C., *Black Settlers in Britain 1555-1958*; Slack, ...P., *Poverty & Policy in Tudor & Stuart England*; Walvin, J., *Black and White: The Negro and English Society, 1555-1945*.

64 From Elizabeth's 1601 warrant, transcribed in "Early Times" from *Black Presence* (published by *The National Archives. Exhibitions & Learning Online*)

65 From Elizabeth's 1601 warrant, transcribed in "Early Times" from *Black Presence* (published by *The National Archives. Exhibitions & Learning Online*)

of Israel and Judah (biblically speaking), who found divine favor by expelling sodomites from the land.⁶⁶

Even though the Queen's expulsion orders were not fully carried out,⁶⁷ the magnitude of the throne's racially biased ideology is evidence of a royal culture of white indignation against black skin. Instead of considering this, some current critics wave off voices which suggest skin color motivates Tudor white individuals to form discriminatory perceptions or actions. Not only do these scholars deny that Queen Elizabeth's orders may reflect widespread racism—simply because the orders were never fulfilled—but claims that skin color does not relegate Tudor black people to servile positions, nor leads to prejudices regarding interracial relationships in Renaissance England.⁶⁸ On the contrary, I believe the orders themselves give us information on a normal, stereotypical, hegemonic white mindset—a mindset which finds black people repulsive, and doesn't go unnoticed to ruling-class whites.⁶⁹ Unlike such scholars, Fryer notices that white Tudor minds accept many offensive black stereotypes that foreshadow modern racial stereotypes. According to Fryer, by the mid-sixteenth century, maps which depicted African countries contained illustrations of stereotypical black figures.⁷⁰

66 For instance, Asa, the fifth King of Israel who “did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord,” expelled sodomites from Israel (I Kings 15).

67 Kaufmann, “Introduction” to *Black Tudors*

68 Kaufmann, “Introduction” to *Black Tudors* and p. 125

69 Even though there is evidence that many masters of Tudor black people did not comply with the Queen's warrants, others blamed black people for social problems in England (See Beier, A. L., *Masterless Men: The vagrancy problem in England 1560-1640*; Brundage, A., *The English Poor Laws 1700-1930*; File, N., and Power, C., *Black Settlers in Britain 1555-1958*; Slack, ...P., *Poverty & Policy in Tudor & Stuart England*; Walvin, J., *Black and White: The Negro and English Society, 1555-1945*.)

70 Fryer, from the “Africans in England” section of Chapter One

Such manifestations show a blatant disregard for individuals with black skin. This disregard is also clearly evident when the Queen's successor, James I, orders a group of black African children to dance and play in snow (during his wedding ceremony with Anne of Denmark in 1589). The children later died, most likely of hypothermia.⁷¹ (One can only wonder how many other negligent hate crimes like this occurred under James's watch in Tudor England.)

And let's not discount significant evidence of English cultural resentment for black people in religious writings, travel narratives, propagandized writings during the Crusades (which comprise of a portion of all Crusades propaganda), artwork, masques (like *The Masque of Blackness*, and *The Triumphs of Truth*), dramas (like *Othello*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Tempest*, *Merchant of Venice*), and countless other early modern plays, poems, songs, broadsides, etc. Though Kaufmann discounts notions which see Shakespeare's *Othello* as proof of such widespread racist mentalities—calling the play “merely fiction”⁷²—I think it's rather naïve to suggest that early modern audiences were not somehow familiar or responsible for racist characters. Iago, who denigrates Othello's skin color, or Emilia, who calls him a “blacker devil,” or the Nurse in *Titus Andronicus*, who claims that Aaron's mixed-black child is ugly and a “devil,” or Lavinia and Bassianus, whom Shakespeare seems to punish for ridiculing Tamora's interracial relationship, or Lysander in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, who disposes of his “dark” lover Hermia by saying “Away you Ethiop!” and “Out, tawny Tartar,”⁷³ or Lorenzo's scorning of Lancelot's black mistress in *The Merchant of Venice*, or the prince of

71 *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 9th Ed, Vol B. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt, p. 546.

72 Kaufmann, “Introduction” to *Black Tudors* and pp. 123-125

73 3.2.257 and 263

Morocco's plea to Portia: "mislike me not for my complexion,"⁷⁴ are much more likely to be products or representations of reality than complete fiction.

So, whereas Chapter One affirms the significance of black skin color in racial conceptualizations by exploring perceptions of black people in Reginald Scot's influential nonfictional text *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, it also accomplishes this feat by exploring Marlowe's fictional *Tamburlaine*, and, briefly, George Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar*, as well as Thomas Dekker's *Lust's Dominion*. Chapter Two examines how black skin color contributes to racial discrimination and the psychological consequences thereof by focusing on representations of black people in Shakespeare's *Othello*, *The Tempest*, and *Titus Andronicus*. And finally, Chapter Three examines how black skin is demonized via racialized fictional Crusades propagandist literature, and by Iago in *Othello*—but beautified in *Love's Labour's Lost* and Shakespeare's *Sonnets*.

The Racial Damnation of Tudor Black People

One way that some scholars seek to distance slavery from its association with early modern black people lies in statements that claim "all slaves were not African" and "more than a million white Europeans were enslaved in North Africa between 1530 and 1780, having been captured from the shores of England, Ireland, France, Spain and Portugal by the Barbary pirates."⁷⁵ However, as mentioned before, *tens of millions* of black people were enslaved during the same time period, insomuch that the slave trade—driven almost entirely by white Spanish supremacy, white Portuguese supremacy, white French supremacy, white English supremacy, and white American supremacy—became a

74 2.1.1

75 Kaufmann, "Introduction" to *Black Tudors*

“black” thing. We should not downplay the extremely harsh reality of slavery upon black people just because some whites were enslaved too. And, even though some Tudor black people may not have endured the type of servitude or slavery indicative of post-Tudor servitude and slavery (or the type of slavery that present day audiences are most familiar with⁷⁶)—or may have suffered in ways which some white people of low status suffered⁷⁷—evidence affirms that the vast majority of black people under European rule from 1500-1800 were oppressed. As I contend that this oppression arises primarily because they did not possess white skin, black people were generally treated far worse than white individuals of low status.⁷⁸

By claiming that only “social class governed society” in Tudor England,⁷⁹ one implies that racism did not govern society, irresponsibly overlooking an important caveat: white people dominated the social class. In England, the Queen was white. The kings were white. Princes and princesses were white. Dukes were white. Rich merchants were white. The armies and navy were ruled by whites. Landowners were white. The ruling clergy were white. And no matter the circumstance, English black people were not allowed to assume such positions. As long as freedom, humanity, happiness, and life was synonymous with whiteness, blackness ultimately reflected the opposite in Tudor

76 Kaufmann seems to think that most people form images of slavery from movies like *12 Years a Slave* and *Roots* (“Introduction” to *Black Tudors*)

77 Throughout *Black Tudors*, Kaufmann claims that black people were often treated the same as low status whites

78 As an example, according to E. Abbott’s *Haiti A Sheltered Nation*, and Perry, James’ *Arrogant Armies Great Military Disasters and the Generals Behind Them*, the French enslavement of Africans in Haiti during the seventeenth century was viewed as the most horrific in world. The French worked the Africans so hard, and yellow fever was so rampant that half of the first wave of slaves died. Abbott claims it was cheaper for the French to import more slaves than improve conditions on the plantations (p. 61). This treatment was common for many black slaves worldwide.

79 Kaufmann “Introduction” to *Black Tudors*

England. This is one reason why Renaissance England transitioned so easily to an imperial, slave-owning power in the mid-seventeenth century.

In 1444, Portugal brought the first enslaved black people to Europe. The Spanish followed suit, eventually leading both countries in transporting, enslaving, torturing, raping, and/or killing hundreds of thousands of black people during the sixteenth century. These countries shared socio-religious ideologies with England, including popular Christian beliefs that associated blackness with (as mentioned before) the devil,⁸⁰ evil, sin, chaos, doom, death, etc. In this case, if Kaufmann is right when claiming that “Tudors were far more likely to judge a new acquaintance by his or her religion and social class than by where they were born or the colour of their skin,”⁸¹ she excuses two institutions that fuel indignation toward black skin: religion and social classes. Though some Tudor black people received regular wages,⁸² they also most likely received damaging prejudices from social classes and religious forces that inherited cultures of discriminatory ideologies that trace back to early European Christianity.

Even Jerome and Augustine, whose ideological beliefs were highly respected and influential in medieval and early modern England, accepted the myth that God cursed the offspring of Ham (one of Noah’s sons who, according to the Genesis, settled in Africa) by giving them black skin and relegating them to slavery.⁸³ Likewise, Leo Africanus, an early modern Christian convert of Moorish descent, accepted this racialized idea,

80 See Tokson, Chapter 4 “The Devil and the Moor: ‘Being Hell’s Perfect Character”

81 Kaufmann, “Introduction” to *Black Tudors*

82 See Kaufmann, *Black Tudors*; Onyeka, *Blackamoors: Africans in Tudor England, their presence, status and origins*

83 Tokson pp. 12-14; Barthelemy p. 3; Floyd-Wilson, “Moors, Race, and the Study of English Renaissance Literature: A Brief Retrospective,” pp. 1045-46; Tokson pp. 12-14; Barthelemy p. 3

influencing countless Christians throughout Europe and England.⁸⁴ Like Africanus, people of color were accepted into Catholicism⁸⁵ only if they assimilated to ideas adopted by their white counterparts—even if it meant denigrating those of their own race (which Africanus accomplishes in his *Historie* [translated by John Pory in 1600]; Othello accomplishes this in Shakespeare’s play, giving credence to some critics who feel Othello was inspired by Africanus⁸⁶).

The fact that Tudor black people assimilated into white culture is not necessarily a sign that Tudor white people weren’t racist. On the contrary, it perhaps affirms evidence of systemic racism. Like Othello and Aaron, the whitewashed traits of Tudor black people, or traits which served to appease white people, namely royal white people, contribute to their acceptance into society. The illumination of their own native traits—native traits that both Africanus and Othello periodically disown in favor of assimilation⁸⁷—do not produce the same outcome. John Blanke, probably the first Tudor black person to be illustrated on an English painting,⁸⁸ is, in my estimation, accepted by Henry the VIII because he plays the trumpet for him. It is the unwavering servitude of John Blanke—his loyalty in pleasing rich whites, his participation in bolstering English nationalism—that seem to underwrite his reputation, good wages, etc. His black skin is

84 See *The Historie and Description of Africa: And of the Notable Things Therein Contained*, translated by John Pory in 1600, Ed. by Robert Brown in 1896

85 Kaufmann, “Introduction” to *Black Tudors*

86 Bartels, “Making More of the Moor,” p. 436

87 Africanus says “When I heare the Africans euill spoken of, I will affirme my self to be one of Grenada...” (*The Historie and Description of Africa: And of the Notable Things Therein Contained*, translated by John Pory in 1600, Ed. by Robert Brown in 1896), and Othello, before suicide, calls himself a “dog” (5.2.357), reflecting Africanus’s usage of the term in reference to Negroes, and other black people in his *Historie*.

88 Fryer, Chapter One, “Africans in England section”; Kaufmann, p. 8

not forgotten, but simply covered by whitewashing.⁸⁹ He even is given an ironic name that both covers his blackness and pokes fun at his real skin color. Since Blanke means “white,” he is basically called John White.⁹⁰

Stereotypical information concerning native, non-whitewashed black people in the popular *A Summarie of the Antiquities and wonders of the Worlde* (1566), and Leo Africanus’ widely read *Historie* (translated into English in 1600) reflect an existing European inclination to denigrate unassimilated black people, serving as influential sources that propagated highly offensive racialized typecasts and myths.⁹¹ (Pory’s

89 In Chapter One, Kaufmann notes that the 1511 Westminster Roll painting which includes John Blanke on horseback, features the trumpeter in a native turban. Though Kaufmann readily admits that perhaps Henry VIII dressed him in the turban, she does not mention, however, that Blanke is dressed in complete royal English garb while playing a trumpet bearing a flag of Royal Arms (Fryer, however, does mention the royal garb). This reflects his assimilation. The turban and royal English clothing (and the flag of Royal Arms) together reflects a kind of hybridity that we can apply to Othello and Aaron, two black loyalists of royal European courts.

90 Fryer, Chapter One, “Africans in England” section. Kaufmann concurs with Fryer, affirming that Blanke’s name was an ironic joke. She also notes that a black slave from Grenada was humorously named Juan Blanco in the same ironic fashion. I see these not only as jokes, but racial ridicule.

91 Fryer states that “a popular English version of whose description of Africa and Africans was published in 1566, entitled *A Summarie of the Antiquities, and wonders of the Worlde*. What kind of light did this throw on the ‘dark’ continent? Readers were told that some Ethiopians had no noses, others no upper lips or tongues, others again no mouths. The Syrbotae were eight feet tall. The Ptoemphani were ruled by a dog. The Arimaspi had a single eye, in the forehead. The Agriophagi lived on the flesh of panthers and lions, the Anthropophagi on human flesh. There were people in Libya who had no names, nor did they ever dream. The Garamantes made no marriages; the men held the women in common. The Gamphasantes went all naked. The Cynamolgi (‘dog-milkers’) had heads like dogs’ heads. The Blemmyes had no heads at all, but eyes and mouths in their breasts. ‘The laste of all the Affriens Southewarde’, according to another book of the time, were the Ichthyophagi, or fish-eaters. ‘Like vnto beastes’, after a meal of fish washed up on the shore and baked by the sun, they would ‘falle vpon their women, euen as they come to hande withoute any choyse; vtterly voide of care, by reason they are alwaye sure of meate in good plentye’ (like animals . . . [they would] fall upon their women, just as they come to hand, without any choice; utterly free from care because they are always sure of plenty of food.) Such fantasies tended to cement in the minds of English people the notion that Africans were inherently carefree, lazy, and lustful” (p. 7, or Chapter One; the “Africans in England section” of Chapter One [ebook]).

revisions of Africanus' *Historie* even seem to expand stereotypical descriptions of black people.⁹²)

However, Africanus decides to partially depict Moors of the Barbary region in a positive light.⁹³ Richard Hakluyt's choice to paint a more civilized picture of some Moors—not including Negroes, Ethiopes, etc.—in his *The Principal Navigations* (1589-1600)⁹⁴ parallels Africanus'. These inclinations may initially serve as models for respectable Moors like Othello in some early modern plays, but do not succeed in influencing all early modern authors. Moors in general, whether fictitious or real, nevertheless appear to be seen as “others,” despite their rank, status, etc. Jay Z once wrote that he's “still nigger,” despite achieving riches as an African American.⁹⁵ This dynamic seems pertinent for the Moor. Even Bartels concurs that the Moor remained an “other,” despite periodic praises.⁹⁶

Africanus and Hakluyt's praising of some Moors sharply contrasts their total denigration of Negroes, Ethiopes, etc., leading me to question the authors' favorability of regions that contained more brown-skinned or lighter complexioned Africans—who Africanus (and Peele in *The Battle of Alcazar*) calls “tawny” or “white” respectively. Indignation seems directed at regions that contained more black-skinned Africans.⁹⁷ Like

⁹² *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, Ed by Richard Hakluyt (between 1589-1600) and Edmund Goldsmid (between 1885 1890); Bartels, “Making More of the Moor” p. 437; Fryer, pg. 7

⁹³ Bartels, *Making More of the Moor*, p. 437

⁹⁴ Bartels, *Making More of the Moor*, p. 438-49

⁹⁵ Jay Z, “The Story Of OJ” from the album 4:44

⁹⁶ Bartels, *Making More of the Moor*, p. 434-35

⁹⁷ According to Cohen, “Mandeville [in the late fourteenth century] divided Ethiopia into an eastern portion where the people were black, and a southern portion where they were blacker. As a result of the climate, he wrote, all Ethiopians ate little, were easily intoxicated, and often suffered diarrhea. Not surprisingly, Ethiopia in *Mandeville's Travels* is also a place of bodily deformity” (p. 118).

“Negra,” the terms “Negroes” and “Ethiopes” carry more specific geographic and racial connotations than Moor, because they categorize areas which contain people with black skin more explicitly. Though “Moor” was commonly used to describe black African people, and sometimes used in tandem with “Negroes” and “Ethiopes,”⁹⁸ it was also, as mentioned before, used periodically in reference to lighter-skinned ethnicities. The terms Negro and Ethiop do not necessarily carry the same racial versatility.

Early Modern Pushbacks Against Black Degradation

But all English white people were not in a rush to degrade black people. When reading early modern texts (written by white authors) which contain black characters and/or mention black individuals, I look for clues which signify a progressive outlook, because those are signs which may affirm a fair authorial racial approach. In essence, the lack of racial stereotypes in a handful of early modern English literature, coupled with the presence of anti-racism—coming by way of textual trickery or not—may exist via authorial education concerning actual early modern black people. The idea that some early modern writers possess mentalities that parallel post-colonial views is not implausible, but proof that some white authors were beginning to draw from direct research concerning real black cultures, and were noticing the real psychological effects of white discrimination.

Racism is older than colonialism, but can be accurately identified with lenses which consider oppressed voices. If we, as literary critics, can grasp the idea that

⁹⁸ Bartels, “Making more of the Moor: Aaron, Othello, and Renaissance Refashionings of Race,” p. 438

colonialism is a product of racism,⁹⁹ and that racism is thus similar from generation to generation,¹⁰⁰ we can value post-colonial views which articulate racial constructs in pre-colonial Renaissance England. Although Othello, Aaron, and Caliban, for instance, are fictitious characters, the empathetic way that Shakespeare conveys the consequences of white domination through their stories may reveal an ever-forming post-colonial mentality¹⁰¹—a mentality that appears to emerge before its time, via familiarization with actual black people and/or racism that can be thoroughly understood through such a peering through the eyes of actual black people—through empathy.

Though modern definitions of the word *race* (in context with human ethnicity) may not parallel early modern meanings for the same word—as early modern meanings may be ambiguous¹⁰²—resentment toward black skin is nevertheless universal, stable, and/or consistent in both time periods. Imtiaz Habib and Sujata Iyengar highlight the many contextual meanings associated with the word *race* in Shakespeare’s time, consequentially diminishing the significance of black skin bias in association with racial conceptualization and failing to get around the elephant in the room. Even though there are “historical, geographical and literary” examples throughout the period that interrogate

99 Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965), p. 131

100 In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon says “Colonial racism is no different than any other racism” (p. 65).

101 In “Surveying “race” in Shakespeare,” Margo Hendricks discovers clues within Shakespeare’s *The Rape of Lucrece* that verifies a complex understanding of colonialism—a type of understanding that makes a post-colonial view of race and racism possible for Shakespeare. Moreover, in “Between Prospero and Caliban: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Inter-identity,” Boaventura de Sousa Santos uses dynamics between Prospero and Caliban to better articulate Portuguese colonialism and post-colonialism, further affirming a prophetic Shakespearean understanding of post-colonial-like lenses.

102 Habib, *Shakespeare and Race*, pp. 2-3

black skin color's association with how whites negotiated ethnic differences,¹⁰³ physical blackness remains a primary contributor to the way early modern Europeans perceived the concept of race, perpetuated historical racial stereotypes, and/or disseminated popular literary representations of black people.¹⁰⁴ Geraldine Heng verifies the presence of "racial thinking, racial law, racial formation, and racialized behaviors and phenomena in medieval Europe before the emergence of a recognizable vocabulary of race," long before the early modern period.¹⁰⁵

More importantly, when European Christian nations decided to propagandize Ottoman Turks during the Crusades, they sometimes chose to demonize them with black skin. Though most Ottomans were not black-skinned, some Crusade propaganda associated them with blackness, illustrating Turks as devilish, bestial, and monstrous¹⁰⁶ (this is evident in historical records, letters, poems, plays, and artwork throughout the early modern period—see Chapter Three for more details). The mental act of conflating

103 See Iyengar's *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Color in Early Modern England*; also see Bartels' "Othello and Africa: Postcolonialism Reconsidered," and "Making More of the Moor." Though Bartels offers valuable historical information concerning early modern race studies in her essays (which span decades), she consistently de-stabilizes pertinent obvious data, interpretive data, and/or perspectives, that contribute to making blackness and racism significant within Renaissance English society and literature. Bartels writes several essays encompassing race and Othello, race and the Moor, the Moor and Africa, etc., but often diminishes the importance of the kind of familiar racism that targets black skin by emphasizing notions of multi-faceted race concepts or ambiguous interpretations of race in the aforementioned period. When displaying these traits, Bartels, and many of her contemporaries, despite utilizing more complex approaches, act as extensions of critics who reigned before the rise of open-minded, postcolonial trends. Bartels famously asked the question, "What does Othello's identity as a Moor...have to do with anything?" ("Othello and Africa," p. 64)

104 In *Shades of difference: Why Skin Color Matters*, Glenn suggests that black skin bias is linked to racism. Though Glenn primarily applies this binary to modern times, I apply it to early modern times, because black skin bias seems to significantly contribute to representations of black people, discrimination against black people, etc.

105 See Heng, "The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages I: Race Studies, Modernity, and the Middle Ages" (abstract).

106 Barthelemy, p. 10-11; and see Cohen's "On Saracen Enjoyment"

Muslims with blackness not only applies color-based stereotypes to Turks, Saracens, and Moors,¹⁰⁷ but places Christianity in opposition with black skin.¹⁰⁸ This periodical but powerful opposition is highly effective in formulating race concepts, seeming more influential than certain early modern climate theories may apply some positivity to black skin and some negativity to whiteness—even though negative personality traits are predominantly associated with black skin in early modern climate and humor theory.¹⁰⁹

Hence, the significance and/or consistency of black skin bias is not nullified by theories that appear to complicate the significance of black skin or separate black skin bias from racial conceptualization. When juxtaposed with humor theory, climate theory, and various other early modern institutions that may contribute to early modern race concepts (even institutions that, for instance, metaphorically call white people black, dark, or tawny¹¹⁰), physical racism reigns as the most aggressive institution,¹¹¹ especially when recognizing how racialized Crusade propaganda reflects an exclusive relationship with European Christianity,¹¹² and influences a plethora of well-known literature.¹¹³

107 Barthelemy, p. 10-11

108 Cohen, p. 118

109 Mary Floyd-Wilson, "Temperature, Temperance, and Racial Difference in Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness*," p. 183

110 See Iyengar's *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Color in Early Modern England*

111 "Habib argues that a small population of captured black Africans (and Indians, people of color) brought to England during the 16th century provided the impetus for Elizabethan constructions of race rather than existing European traditions in which blackness was represented metaphorically" (Abstract to *Shakespeare and Race, Postcolonial Praxis in the Early Modern Period*).

112 Cohen states, "Christian allegoresis aligned black skin with the devil, with Ethiopians consequently appearing as diabolical figures in the writings of Jerome and in some of the earliest saints' lives" (p. 118).

113 Hankins, "Renaissance Crusaders: Humanist Crusade Literature in the Age of Mehmed II," p. 112, 120-121

The fact that black “Moors were the only ‘African’ subjects featured on the early modern stage,”¹¹⁴ and the prime subjects who were associated with black skin, tells us something about the popularity of black skin color. Shakespeare is aware that making Moors black is most fitting to audiences who were more likely to both associate Moors with black-skinned people and apply discriminatory stereotypes that denigrate black skin color. Several characters negatively use “black” when referencing Othello, often juxtaposing the metaphorical and the physical. In fact, metaphorical references to blackness are habitually backdropped by physical blackness, insomuch that quantitative uses of each juxtaposition indicate a foundational fixation on skin color. Basically, black skin color moves characters (and/or authors) to use metaphorical references to blackness which allude to racial stereotypes. This dynamic moves us to realize the dominant influence of black skin color—not the absence of it—when metaphorical black allusions are mentioned (see Chapter Three for more information).

Consistent binary-based references to blackness link an array of early modern Turkic characters like Tamburlaine (who Marlowe calls a Scythian, despite the fact that Timur, the real Tamburlaine, was Turkic-Mongolian [see Chapter One for further details]) to blackness also. Evidence of increasing English contact with Turkic people, Eurasian Muslims and/or Ottoman Muslims—coupled with common knowledge of propagandized Crusade directives that “blackwash” Turks—is evident within the creation of heroic, exotic, eloquent, sympathetic characters of color (whether those characters remained Muslim, were converted, or were neutral, like Tamburlaine). As stereotypical blackness often supersedes religious identifications in early modern Europe, or is often

¹¹⁴ Bartels, *Speaking of the Moor*, p. 12

used to ultimately define Muslims, writers like Marlowe, Shakespeare, Peele, and Middleton whitewash Islamic characters to convey human elements that most English Renaissance audiences can only interpret through European cultures—only to expose whitewashing and blackwashing as ultimately negative things. Some Muslim characters, like Muly Mahamet in *The Battle of Alcazar*—described as a “negro” who was “black in his look and deeds...Accompanied...with devils coated in the shape of men”¹¹⁵—are simply whitewashed through eloquent dialogic language. Others, like Othello, are religiously, politically, and socially assimilated. They all nevertheless endure racial stereotypes, and are either overcome by evil white people—evoking sympathy and creating disdain for racial bias—or take revenge on white people, an action which seeks to create similar audience reactions.

In general, we see in these strategies a kind of authorial understanding of race psychology that thematically pushes back against traditional prejudice. Contrary to the belief of historical early modern scholarship, these early modern authors *can* distinguish between the exploitation of blackness and symbolic applications of blackness. They can differentiate between the demonization of skin color (blackwashing) and metaphorical contexts of blackness. They know how to place distinct focus on false applications of blackness by subversively utilizing “black” metaphors, not just by solidifying them exclusively.

115 1.7-20

Tokson, Hall, Bartels, and Fryer¹¹⁶ all agree that English interest and contact with black people begin to increase during the sixteenth century. However, Tokson and Hall suggest that information concerning black people readies England for expansive racial discrimination and colonization.¹¹⁷ Frye appears to agree as he's concerned that "sober facts" were mixed in with "accepted myths":

If we can detect a note of surprise here at Africans' behaving with such human warmth, that is because sixteenth-century English people were poorly informed about Africa and those who lived there. Of course, as more and more Englishmen went to Africa, were surprised and impressed by the riches and living standards of the rulers and merchants they met, and started publishing their findings in travel books, sober facts began to get mixed with the accepted myths.¹¹⁸

Though Fryer's concern is valid, I also believe that increased factual knowledge of and contact with black people and other people of color caused some key authors to disbelieve and push back against historical black myths and black stereotypes. As tangible evidence concerning black appearance, behavior, demeanor, etc. increased, some saw how each equivocal racial fact worked to de-bunk traditional racist fables and typecasts. Hendricks, in "Surveying 'race' in Shakespeare" appears to concur: "As new knowledge about the world acquired through voyages to Africa, India, and the Americas,

116 Tokson p. 4, Hall pp. 2-4, and Bartels, "Othello and Africa: Postcolonialism Reconsidered," pp. 48-52; Fryer, Chapter One, "Africans in England" section

117 Tokson's focuses on consequential discrimination stemming from increased racial knowledge on p. 4, while Hall emphasizes consequential colonization stemming from increased racial knowledge on p. 4.

118 Fryer, Chapter One, "Africans in England" section

supplanted the old, the Elizabethan imagination had to be refitted. In essence, the ‘framework of assumptions’ about foreigners had to be expanded.”¹¹⁹

Although G.K. Hunter foreshadows Tokson and Hall’s fears by suggesting that increasing racial information from abroad was used as “material for caricature” not “for character”¹²⁰—which is understandable, given the fact that much information described black people as cannibals, beasts,¹²¹ and dogs¹²²—there are too many early modern authors (namely Peele, Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Southerne) who seem to use more accurate information to reverse negative stereotypes against people of color.

These authors must have been able to distinguish between the facts and myths. While referencing Bernard Harris’ 1958 book *Surveying Shakespeare*, Hendricks conveys Shakespeare’s ability to form non-stereotypical assessments about black people through evidentiary “racial knowledge.” Hendricks writes,

In the writings of the day, Moors were described as subtle, stubborn, bestial, intolerant. This imagery and commentary, Harris argues, suggest that ‘To Elizabethan Londoners the appearance and conduct of the Moor was a spectacle and an outrage, emphasizing the nature of the deep difference between themselves and the visitors, between their Queen and the ‘erring Barbarian’... Thus Harris concludes, ‘When Shakespeare chose, for his audience, to present a Moor as his

119 Hendricks, p. 4

120 Hunter, p. 45

121 Dabydeen, *Hogarth’s Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art*, p.30

122 In the English translation of Leo Africanus’ *History*, he calls Negroes “beasts” and “dogs.” David Brion Davis’ *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (1966) states “...explorers threw the spotlight of publicity upon back-ward, darker-skinned, non-Europeans, when they brought home and told their stories of naked cannibals...” (p. 9)

hero, he was not perhaps confused in his racial knowledge, simply more aware than his contemporaries of the complex pattern made by white and black.”¹²³

Even Barthelemy points out the difference between the mimesis of some early modern plays and the “religious, moral, cultural or political” agendas of masques and pageants.¹²⁴ I believe this mimesis not only occurs when playwrights copy each other, but also when they create black characters through studying the behavior of real life black people—when characters mimic actual black people.

As I read 400-plus-year-old texts like *Othello*, for me, there is no anachronism in recognizing a problem that affects black folks now. The problem of white figures degrading black figures seems extraordinarily familiar to me, across time, because I’ve been a victim of racial oppression for so long.

I see myself in Shakespeare’s Moors, more than some may know. Even though the term “Moor,” as mentioned before, was often used for other non-white groups throughout the early modern period, we know that *Othello*, a Moor, endures black slurs, just as I and other modern black people have. So, when scholarly voices suppress the sting of precolonial discrimination by criticizing current individuals for noticing resemblances, they solidify an offensive disconnection from my own valid experience with oppression. How can the majority of early modern academics since the 1990s, who are white, and don’t possess oppression experience, tear down conceptual parallels that black people—who commonly have tons of oppression experience—notice between post-Enlightenment racial oppression and early modern racial oppression?

¹²³ Hendricks, p. 4. She quotes Bernard Harris, p. 35

¹²⁴ Barthelemy, p. 18

To ignore or erase such resemblances, or wish to de-classify them, and make them irrelevant to Shakespeare's time, is to make racism irrelevant to me. Those of us who experientially understand these parallels utilize empiricism that considers phenomenology along with other types of evidence.¹²⁵ This is not an issue foreign to Shakespeare, as much as it might be foreign to us—after all, as racism is ever-prevalent in our society, racially biased individuals seldom admit to it, or define it accordingly (let alone understand its complexities).

Nevertheless—methods of denial and ignorance which change over time—the core issue itself changes little with time. Whether from classical times to the present, or biblical times to the present. The issue encompassing the color of black skin, and how those of white complexion reject it (before, during, and after the early modern period) is not so different after all. In fact, noting the fundamental, unchanging history of indignation toward black skin is quite easy. It is our own prejudicial minds, as critics especially, that complicate things. To devalue, set-aside, or snub this issue is more of a reflection of implicit bias than empirical inquiry. Making black skin insignificant to discrimination in the early modern period, or failing to recognize historical parallels before mass colonial implications, before post-Enlightenment implications, and in spite

125 With me, the chance of suppressing the significance of skin color, or post-colonial views is low. I cannot say the same about the dominating group of privileged critics which drive the discourse of my field. Academic patterns of criticism which undermine skin color may emerge from privileged individuals who lack the experience of feeling alienated or targeted because of their own skin color. There is thus value in the voices of underprivileged minorities in literary criticism—minorities who, existing as firsthand victims of historical and contemporary privileged majorities, might offer less biased approaches or voices which comprehensively and more accurately consider the other side of the racial coin. I do not promote inclusion at the expense of effective criticism or literary accuracy. No. On the contrary, I wish to tap into early modern mindsets that may very well have leaned toward post-colonialism before its time, realizing comprehensive, progressive perspectives on race decades before the global spread of colonialism, and hundreds of years before Césaire and Fanon.

of humor theory, climate theory, and ambiguous linguistic definitions, is irresponsible, and (as mentioned earlier) reflects a literary academic culture of continued racial problems.

So, to answer Ian Smith's question, "Is it we who are Othello?"¹²⁶—an appropriate anti-thesis to Hazlitt's statement: "It is we who are Hamlet"—I say yes. I am Othello.

And if I'm Othello, I cannot ignore epithets which criticize the color of my skin, whether hurled from overt Iago-type racists, or systemic racists who, like the Duke, only call me "valiant" when appreciating my whitewashed attributes. Though he is an early modern Moor and I am a modern African American, textual evidence suggests that we've both been treated like a nigger.

And if I cannot ignore being deemed a nigger, I must write about my experiences within my black skin, as if I'm Othello, to somehow protect myself—even though my colleagues and fellow scholars feel I probably shouldn't.

126 Smith, "We are Othello" p. 108

We think it a lie, to saie that white is blacke, and blacke white, but it is a more shamelesse assertion to affirme, that white is not, or black is not at all...

—Reginald Scot (1584)

Chapter One: Early Modern Activists Who Advanced Figures of Color

Identifying Reginald Scot's Groundbreaking Anti-Racism

Though hard to believe, there were activists—albeit oftentimes subtle and tricky—who opposed biases toward people of color in late sixteenth century/early seventeenth century England. Though few in number, their significance and acute knowledge of our modern concepts of racism is apparent.

Reginald Scot, author of *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), a popular English non-fictional text throughout the early modern period—read by Gabriel Harvey, Thomas Nashe, Thomas Middleton, William Shakespeare, and more¹²⁷—gives the following quote after censuring white people for believing that the devil has “skin like a Niger” in a previous chapter:¹²⁸

We think it a lie, to saie that white is blacke, and blacke white, but it is a more shamelesse assertion to affirme, that white is not, or black is not at all, and yet more impudencie to hold that a man is a horsse; but most apparent impudencie to saie, that a man is no man...¹²⁹

127 Wootton, p. 1

128 Scot, p. 122

129 Scot, p. 364

This passage also comes chapters after Scot criticizes white women for ludicrously claiming that the devil, in the form of a black male Moor, had sex with them and impregnated them—giving them black children.¹³⁰ Thus, the frequency and emphatic nature in which Scot uses the term “blacke” to reveal white societal descriptions of the devil gives context to the juxtaposition of “blacke” and “white” in the above passage. Hence, Scot implies that “it is a more shameless assertion to affirm” that white people are not who they presume to be—white *people*—but just as shameless to affirm that black people are not “at all” *people* like white people. The latter pushes back against the notion that devils with “skin like a Niger”—who are not human—wickedly impregnate white women, or perform other devilish deeds which Scot details. And, when Scot follows these phrases by claiming it is “yet more impudencie to hold that a man is a horse,” he offers context that validates the prior assertion that it is a “shamelesse assertion to affirme, that...black is not at all,” or that black people are not human.

Nineteen years after *Discoverie* is published,¹³¹ Iago ridiculously compares Othello to a Barbary horse, warranting Scot’s claim that it is “more impudencie to hold that a man is a horsse.” Moreover, Christopher Marlowe, George Peele, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Middleton, and others, offer heroic, humanistic characters of color who counter the words of many biased white characters. The very existence of these sympathetic protagonists and supporting characters of color attacks real world racial myths which convey (in explicit and implicit ways) that non-whites are inferior—not human, but dogs, monsters, and devils, reflecting Scot’s claim of a “most apparent impudencie to saie, that a man is no man.”

130 Scot, p. 255

131 *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* was published without authorization from Scot in 1584.

There's more evidence that gives this passage a highly racialized context indicative of future, modern pushbacks against color stereotypes and myths. And, given the popularity of *Discoverie*, Scot's words are significant as they precede a burgeoning early modern movement that would eventually pave the way for progressive Shakespearean content, as well as modern post-colonial thought.

Discoverie is placed in a very pivotal position if its accessibility to so many important early modern authors indicates significant influence. It is possible that Scot's text exists as a major point of reference for a number of key early modern authors who believe that racist accusations surrounding people of color victimize and dehumanize them, and hence should not compromise they're humanity, or make them naturally evil products of mythical or stereotypical imagination. Most notably, Scot's desire to reject black dehumanization comes before Shakespeare's ability to appropriately humanize black people in opposition to predominant, traditional, religious, mythical, societal, and political de-humanization—foreshadowing the desires of many American civil rights leaders.

Although S.F. Davies' "The Reception of Reginald Scot's Discovery of Witchcraft: Witchcraft, Magic, and Radical Religion" (2013) notes that William Percy, Ben Jonson, and Thomas Middleton "all used Scot's work as a source for dramatic material related to witchcraft and magic,"¹³² he says that "it is [only] possible that Shakespeare did likewise."¹³³ I am inclined to go further than Davies and Wootton's affirmation of Shakespeare's knowledge of Scot's text by revealing parallels between Shakespeare's textual anti-racism and *Discoverie*'s anti-racism (in Chapter Two and

132 Davies, p. 388

133 Davies, p. 388

Three of this dissertation)—a kind of anti-racism that just doesn't exist prior to Scot's work.

Identifying these parallels despite the fact that Shakespeare never references Scot by name is not farfetched. Even Davies essay and George Gifford's *A Discourse of the subtile Practises of Deuilles* (1587) admit that others "who did not mention Scot by name though they may have known of him"¹³⁴ were fundamentally aligned with Scot.¹³⁵

Scot's significance emerges as many of these authors heavily cite him and align themselves with his essential perspectives on witchcraft immediately after *Discoverie* is written. Davies states that "no other English witchcraft treatise was as widely cited,"¹³⁶ and "much of the early reaction to the work in print was positive."¹³⁷ And although "almost every English [other] author who subsequently wrote on the subject of witchcraft mentioned Scot disparagingly"¹³⁸—like the King James, who "held a firm belief in the reality of witches and witchcraft and published *Daemonologie* in 1597 as a tool to educate his subjects about the perils of maleficent magic and to admonish doubters"¹³⁹—many of these same authors were happy to "condemn Scot with one hand, while the other borrow[ed] from his voluminous compendium of source material on witchcraft and magic."¹⁴⁰

For example, witchcraft theorists commonly shared Scot's fundamental belief in the realities surrounding *affliction* or misfortune. Scot believed that affliction was not a

134 Davies, p. 384

135 Davies, p. 384

136 Davies p. 389

137 Davies, p. 386

138 Davies, p. 383

139 Bercovice, p. 129

140 Davies, p. 384

consequence of witchcraft or an act of the devil, but a common thing that occurs in the lives of good and bad people. Although Scot only mentions how English society blames old women for “any aduersitie, griefe, sicknesse, losse of children, corne, cattell, or libertie,” punishing them with “mens calamities,”¹⁴¹ there are other obvious victims of the same type of false blame—black people. Because *Discoverie* periodically mentions the unfair fashion that English society blames black people by fusing ethnic attributes to devilishness, and making black traits intrinsic to the devil, demons, and other figures associated with “black” magic, we can infer that the above passage does not leave out black people from the small group of marginalized individuals who are wrongly blamed.

Yes, Scot’s *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* ultimately wishes to oppose traditional concepts of witchcraft, and specifically targets an earlier popular work entitled *Démonomanie* (1580) by Jean Bodin which claims that witchcraft is factual, and thus should not be practiced. But since the tenets of European witchcraft often associate with blackness—or make people of color intrinsic to black magic, evil, devilishness, the devil himself, etc.—then Scot’s text finds itself consistently severing well known racist ties between black skin and wickedness, becoming a work that directly and indirectly pushes back against racism (a dynamic which significantly contributes to Scot’s criticism of overall witchcraft). Consequently, Scot comes off as a person who abhors ignorance—

141 Scot says, “if any aduersitie, griefe, sicknesse, losse of children, corne, cattell, or libertie happen vnto them; by & by they exclaime witches. As though there were no God in Israel that ordereth all things according to his will; punishing both iust and vniust with greefs, plagues, and afflictions in maner and forme as he thinketh good: but that certeine old women heere on earth, called witches, must needs be the contriurers of all mens calamities, and as though they themselues were innocents, and had deserued no such punishments. Insomuch as they sticke not to ride and go to such, as either are iniuriouslie tearmed witches, or else are willing so to be accounted, seeking at their hands comfort and remedie in time of their tribulation, contrarie to Gods will and commandement in that behalfe, who bids vs resort to him in all our necessities” (*Discoverie*, “The first Booke,” “The first Chapter,” p. 1).

especially the kind of ignorance that ends up oppressing marginalized people: old women, poor people,¹⁴² and black people.

Let's take a minute to absorb the magnitude of Scot's efforts to sever mythical ties between blackness and witchcraft. He, a white author of the English Renaissance, writes and publishes a text that contains rhetoric which *attacks black myths and stereotypes*. Coming on the heels of centuries-old European biblical interpretations of witchcraft (which Scot especially rejects, believing that many religious claims concerning witchcraft misinterpret the bible¹⁴³), as well as tales, paintings, etchings, etc. that pair black people with evilness, "black" magic, and demonizing stereotypes, Scot's text does something that virtually no other English text even attempts to do in his time—it stands up for black people. Since no other well-known English text seems to accomplish such a feat in the 1580s—just before the emergence of Marlowe, Dekker, Peele, Middleton, and Shakespeare—we must realize its importance their subsequent racial activism:

142Wootton concurs, stating that "Scot went beyond a systematic attack on the intellectual foundations of the belief in witchcraft because he described witch accusations in England as resulting out of a particular type of social encounter: old women begging for food or other assistance would curse their neighbours when they were turned away empty handed; if something bad then happened—the death of a child, perhaps—the old woman would be taken to be a witch. Witchcraft accusations in England thus arose in the context of disagreements over expectations and obligations relating to charitable giving. This sociological account was persuasive to contemporaries and has been adopted by modern historians" (p. 1).

143 Scot references many Old Testament and New Testament scriptures to refute religious arguments that seek to prove the existence of witchcraft. For example, Scot commonly accuses individuals, like J. Bodin, of twisting the scripture. In the first chapter of the fifth book, Scot states "First, as touching the divell (Bodin saith) that he dooth most properlie and commonlie transforme himselfe into a gote, confirming that opinion by the 33. and 34. of Esaie: where there is no one title* sounding to anie such purpose" (p. 71). Beside this quote, in the margins, Scot writes a note saying "J. Bodin abuseth scripture to prove a lie." This affirms that Scot believes in scripture, but debates with popular interpretation and other religious beliefs concerning the existence, properties, and impact of witchcraft. Wootton notes that Scot "asserted that none of the terms used in the *Bible* which had been translated as 'witch' had that meaning in the original languages, thereby undermining the claim that there was a biblical sanction for the execution of witches, and he is thus a significant figure in the history of biblical criticism" (p.1).

For some are so carnallie minded, that a Spirit is no sooner spoken of, but immediatlie they thinke of a blacke man with cloven feet, a paire of hornes, a taile, clawes, and eies as broad as a bason, &c. But surelie the divell were not so wise in his generation, as I take him to be, if he would terrifie men with such uglie shapes, though he could doo it at his pleasure.¹⁴⁴

Here, in chapter eighteen of “A Discourse on divels and Spirits” in *Discoverie*, Scot specifically condemns the notion that the devil comes to men or terrifies men in the form of a black man with horns and other animalistic attributes. Notice how Scot mentions the color of the alleged devil first, emphasizing the prominence of such an offensive mythical attribute. Scot conveys that the black color of the devil is not just a prevailing imaginative attribute among many, but a signifying trait which informs us of racial knowledge. Since Scot uses the phrase “a skin like a Niger”¹⁴⁵ in a previous chapter (Chapter Fifteen, Book Seven) to convey societal descriptions of the devil, then we can affirm that Scot, when using “blacke” in this instance, doesn’t believe blackness is simply metaphorical, or subordinate to other attributes, or unconnected to actual ethnicities, but powerfully physical, and unequivocally discriminatory. Scot is aware that the devil’s black skin is a prime or even sole humanistic contributor to predominant white notions of evil. In fact, throughout *Discoverie*, Scot does not state any other alleged humanistic attributes as much as black skin when relaying how Jean Bodin and English society describe the devil.

Scot offers his own opinion indirectly when stating, quite sarcastically, that the devil, being “wise in his generation,” would surely not have a chance to lure or deceive “men” if he came to them in “uglie shapes.” It’s obvious here that Scot doesn’t intend to

144 Scot, p. 426

145 Scot, p. 122

actually place black skin in the category of these “uglie shapes,”¹⁴⁶ but to show that society has made these shapes ugly. And, since the devil would know this, English society would be ignorant to think that the devil—an extremely wise, cunning, experienced spirit—would attempt to lead them astray with shapes or attributes that are obviously repulsive to them.

Later, in chapter twenty-eight,¹⁴⁷ Scot calls accounts of racialized sightings of the devil lies, again rejecting the idea of seeing black skin as a primary attribute of stereotypical images of the devil:

...also they may be seene of some, and of some other in that presence not seene/
at all; as Ursine sawe Peter and Paule, and yet manie at that instant being present
could not see anie such sight, but thought it a lie: as I doo. Michael Andræs
confesseth, that papists see more visions than protestants: he saith also, that a
good soule can take none other shape than of a man; manie a damned soule may
and dooth take the shape of a blacke moore, or of a beast, or of a serpent, or
speciallie of an heretike.¹⁴⁸

Scot’s criticism of Michael Andræs is a continuation of his criticism of Ursine and others who claim to see ghosts, even though those around them “could not see anie such sight.” Michael Andræs not only takes a jab at protestants when suggesting that “papists see more visions,” but dehumanizes “the shape of black moores” by placing them in opposition to the “shape...of a man.” Andræs clearly implies that black moores are not

146 In Book Seven, Chapter Fifteen, Scot similarly says that English mothers commonly give “ouglie” descriptions of the devil (p. 122). In *Titus Andronicus*, the Nurse similarly calls Aaron’s child an ugly devil (see Chapter 2 of this dissertation).

147 Chapter 28 of “A Discourse on diuels and Spirits” in *Discoverie*.

148 Scot, p. 449

good and not men—or naturally bad and inhuman—since a “good soule can take none other shape than of a man” and a “damned soule may and dooth take the shape of a blacke moore.” Like previous descriptions from Bodin and early modern white society which Scot analyzes, the black skin of a damned figure is a telltale sign. It isn’t just the Moorish ethnicity that’s applied to the “damned soule” but the black skin which quantifies its hellishness—its natural perdition.

As Scot seeks to ultimately prove that these quantifications, imaginations, sightings, etc., are bogus, and that witchcraft basically does not exist,¹⁴⁹ he creates progressive standards that stick out like a sore thumb (especially in a time when writers like Bodin and predominant English/European populations claim otherwise). For instance, by constantly claiming that acts of alleged witchcraft are actually acts of God, not the devil,¹⁵⁰ he, whether mentioning black people or not, uniquely separates them from conceptual devilishness and hence formulates a set of moral criteria that lies outside of societal norms. With each indirect and periodic direct stance against accusations which target old women and black men—stances which explain, among other things, how accusations of witchcraft are often motivated by desires to undermine acts of providing marginalized people with necessities¹⁵¹—we see a moral standard, a kind of subversive double-down against bigotry, that authors like Marlowe, Shakespeare, and others subsequently replicate.

149 Although most of Scot’s criticisms of witchcraft do not directly target racism (as mentioned before), the periodic direct instances provide context which allows us to see consistent indirect pushbacks against racism or the demonization of black skin throughout *Discoverie*.

150 In Chapter One of Book Five, after stating that Jean Bodin “sometimes alloweth the divell the shape of a blacke Moore,” Scot says “But I mervell, whether the divell createth himselfe, when he appeareth in the likenesse of a man; or whether God createth him, when the divell wisheth it” (p. 71).

151 Wootton, p. 1

Unfortunately, I am alone in my racial assessment or reading of Scot's text. I've yet to find one scholarly analysis of *Discoverie* that even mentions its remarks about black skin, black people, or racialized illustrations of the devil and black magic. Davies mentions nothing about Scot's intermittent comments on black myths. The word *black* or *blacke* does not even exist in Leland L. Estes' "Reginald Scot and his *Discoverie of Witchcraft*: Religion and Science in the Opposition to the European Witch Craze." In "Reginald Scot and King James VI: The Influence of Skepticism," Kimberly Bercovice does not take advantage of the opportunity to contrast Scot's intermittent anti-racism with King James' periodical racism. And although Philip C. Almond's *England's First Demonologist: Reginald Scot and 'The Discoverie of Witchcraft'* mentions the usage of "black witches,"¹⁵² "a black toad,"¹⁵³ a "black dog,"¹⁵⁴ and "black bile,"¹⁵⁵ he does not relate these color markings to historical racial desires to mingle images and perceptions of physical blackness with pure evil, ugliness, disgrace, and abnormality—even though each phrase, commonly used in medieval and early modern literature, including Shakespeare's plays—accomplishes such relations.

Marlowe Builds an Ideological Bridge Between Scot and Shakespeare's Anti-Racism

Eight years after Scot's *Discoverie* is published, Christopher Marlowe champions the idea that European concepts of the devil are illogical figments of white imagination.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Almond, p. 31

¹⁵³ Almond, p. 43

¹⁵⁴ Almond, p. 45

¹⁵⁵ Almond, p. 45

¹⁵⁶ Scot's attempts to prove that European concepts of the devil are illogical figments of white imagination are especially evident when Scot catalogues, condemns, and makes mockeries out of the many imaginative physical traits (as mentioned before) that are applied to the devil. For example, Scot states: "But in our childhood our mothers maids have so terrified us with an ouglie

Marlowe condemns parallel imaginative concepts of the devil, demons, and magic by both correlating them with Doctor Faustus' imagination and by making mockeries of each concept. When Faustus uses witchcraft to carry out comical pranks and other humorous insubstantial deeds, he not only foolishly wastes his power, but treats black magic as an unserious, unreal joke to audiences who've historically taken witchcraft seriously. In the face of witchcraft-believing Euro-Christians who commonly accuse and punish individuals for practicing witchcraft, Marlowe illustrates the black magic as a petty methodology. So petty, it should not be equated with reality—appearing to take cue from Scot's *Discoverie*. If a highly knowledgeable and skillful character like Faustus relegates himself to performing gags via witchcraft—but accomplishes great constructive things with “physic” beforehand¹⁵⁷—the practice must be inferior to physic, or just plain bogus. It is Faustus' *belief* in witchcraft, not the alleged power of witchcraft, that proves dangerous. Faustus is inevitably tortured and killed because he believes in such an illogical practice over and above science and divinity.

Instead of urging audiences to punish those who practice witchcraft, Marlowe suggests that audiences shouldn't believe in witchcraft in the first place—again mirroring Scot's *Discoverie*. The type of divinity or Christian authority that punishes witches in

divell having homes on his head, fier in his mouth, and a taile in/ his breech, eies like a bason, fanges like a dog, clawes like a beare, a skin like a Niger, and a voice roring like a lion, whereby we start and are afraid when we heare one crie Bough...” (Scot, p. 122)

157 In 1.1.42-50 Faustus says:

“Be a physician, Faustus; heap up gold
And be eternized for some wondrous cure...
Summum bonum, medicinae sanitas:
The end of physic is our body's health:
Why, Faustus, hast thou not attained that end?
Are not thy bills hung up as monuments,
Whereby whole cities have escaped the plague
And thousand desperate maladies been cured?
Yet art thou still but Faustus and a man.”

early modern European societies is nonexistent in *Dr. Faustus* (which further aligns Marlowe's play with Scot's *Discoverie*, a text that is very much against such punishment¹⁵⁸).

Faustus says goodbye to "divinity," which is, along with saying goodbye to logic and science, or "physic farewell,"¹⁵⁹ a crucial mistake in the eyes of Scot's *Discoverie*. When Scot, as mentioned before, constantly refutes claims of witchcraft or alleged powers of the devil by being logical, quoting scripture, and by asserting that perhaps God is actually behind such things, he attempts to create rational tools that are able to conquer beliefs in irrational black magic. If Marlowe is influenced by Scot, it would make sense that Faustus sets himself up for failure by denying theology, divinity, science, and logic—the very things that can prevent him from pursuing black magic.

Before writing *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe's protagonist in *Tamburlaine the Great* (1587) seems to be a tangible, quintessential devilish figure, as he's constantly draped in black and described with terrorizing, Satanic language:

Black are his colours, black pavilion;
 His spear, his shield, his horse, his armour, plumes,
 And jetty feathers, menace death and hell;
 Without respect of sex, degree, or age,
 He razeth all his foes with fire and sword.¹⁶⁰

158 Marlowe and Scot both seem concerned with punishing or targeting early modern beliefs in magic which supersede logic and the kind of theology that doesn't entertain concepts of witchcraft. In Renaissance England, beliefs in magic would oftentimes lead to deadly acts via unsubstantiated prejudice—so targeting these beliefs would be very important to each author.

159 1.1.54

160 Act 4 Scene 1

Despite these devilish qualities, Tamburlaine, unlike Faustus, is essentially heroic throughout the play. Marlowe exquisitely tricks English mindsets by illustrating Tamburlaine in a way which reflects stereotypical views of Turkic Muslims (people of color). Since a significant portion of English audiences view Turkic people and/or Muslims as devils, or in ways indicative of devilish description (which are oftentimes biblical in nature), Marlowe, on the surface, gives them what their biased hearts already believe concerning Turkic Muslim people. However, the author attacks these biases by enabling Tamburlaine to be undefeated in battle (like the original Tamerlane¹⁶¹), even against European-Christian nations—as if to prove that warriors or people of color must not be devils if they’re always victorious, because God is more powerful.

This sneaky, subversive assault against European-Christianity not only attacks a Euro-wide sense of white religious supremacy, but also white racial supremacy. As Joel Slotkin affirms in “‘Seeke out another Godhead’: Religious Epistemology and Representations of Islam in Tamburlaine,” Tamburlaine “is literally or figuratively associated at various times with pagans and Muslims, Persians and Turks,”¹⁶² setting up Marlowe’s assault on white Christian privilege via indirect associations with Islam. This assault doesn’t supplant Christianity with Islam, but reassesses it through the protagonist’s non-Christian voice:

The play thereby reconfigures the discourse of religious difference in order to unseat Christianity from its privileged position while deliberately refraining from replacing it with Islam or even with atheism. It enables an imaginative reconsideration of religious belief and practice and of the role of divine

161 Meri, p. 812.

162 Slotkin, p. 413

providence in human affairs by forcing its audience to see the world from the perspective of non-Christian characters.¹⁶³

So, as Tamburlaine is demonized for the sake of essential trickery, the notion of white superiority (which usually adorns English literary protagonists) is thwarted through the unrelenting victories of a non-European, non-Christian character.

There are times when the textual description of Tamburlaine's demonization seems very similar to Crusade propaganda that blackwashes Turkish Muslim warriors via devilish, savage, black bestial depictions. This stereotype is thoroughly manifested in the descriptions of Ysore, Vernagu, and Alagolfare, three medieval, mythical, black, devilish warriors who emerge from anti-Turkish/pro-Euro-Christian propaganda during the Crusades (see Chapter Three of this dissertation for further details). Like Tamburlaine, they are portrayed in animalistic, Satanic ways which evoke unique racial anger and fear. As evoking racial anger toward Muslims of color is integral to Crusade directives, the enlarging of racial-religious stereotypes via mythical representation ensures a kind of bigotry that thrives well into the English Renaissance. Slotkin claims that "Focusing on Tamburlaine's Muslim origins, as well as his savage behavior, highlights his connections to the Renaissance stereotype of the raging Turk."¹⁶⁴ In *Tamburlaine*, the Soldan of Egypt (as with other non-Christian characters who oppose Tamburlaine), becomes angered as if he's a Christian Crusader who must defeat the raging devil himself:

Let him take all th' advantages he can:

Were all the world conspir'd to fight for him,

Nay, were he devil, as he is no man,

¹⁶³ Slotkin, p. 413

¹⁶⁴ Slotkin, p. 413

Yet in revenge of fair Zenocrate,
 Whom he detaineth in despite of us,
 This arm should send him down to Erebus,
 To shroud his shame in darkness of the night.

Here, the Soldan of Egypt distances Tamburlaine from humanity as he calls him “devil” and “no man,” using such demoralizing rhetoric to strengthen his own sense of supremacy—even though the selfsame rhetoric is commonly used against his own ethnicity throughout medieval and early modern European literature. The Soldan is so sure that this devil, Tamburlaine, will not outdo his might or “arm”—an arm which he hopes will cast Tamburlaine down to “Erebus,” the Greek personification of darkness—he believes the great warrior will come to shame in Erebus’ “darkness of night.” His use of Greek allusions also mirrors Christian-European literary devices, not Muslim-Middle Eastern devices during medieval and Renaissance times.

In response to the Soldan, his messenger warns that Tamburlaine’s devilishness should be feared:

Pleaseth your mightiness to understand,
 His resolution far exceedeth all...
 As red as scarlet is his furniture;
 Then must his kindled wrath be quench'd with blood,
 Not sparing any that can manage arms:
 But, if these threats move not submission,
 Black are his colours, black pavilion;

The Messenger's response indirectly affirms Marlowe's tricky methods behind Tamburlaine's character. The "red" and "black" Satanic "colours"—which George Peele would use just four years later to describe the violent bloodiness and black skin of the sympathetic warrior Muly Hamet in *The Battle of Alcazar* (1591)—mythically associate the protagonist with the aforementioned blackwashed Turkish devils (also see Chapter Three) and consequently images of stereotypical Turkic people as a whole in a way that should be greatly feared or respected.

The color black is especially ominous, yet powerful, superior, and thus worthy of respect. Accordingly, the blackness of "His spear, his shield, his horse, his armour, plumes, / And jetty feathers" contributes to an identity that pushes back against white efforts to make blackness inferior. His black attire emits the essence of Tamburlaine's progressive display of power on the English stage, though highly stereotyped and mythicized. The Governor of Damascus affirms this in the play when he implies that Tamburlaine's blackness is stereotypically cruel, yet superior enough to conquer Damascus: "With terrors to the last and cruel'st hue; / His coal-black colours, every where advanc'd, / Threaten our city with a general spoil."¹⁶⁵

As a feared and respected character, Tamburlaine, despite his devilish descriptions, is not presented as unwise or foolish for allegedly being evil. Unlike Faustus, the non-European hero does not practice black magic, nor does he treat logic with the same debasing fervor as Faustus. Though he is irreverent to divinity, especially

165 5.1.241

Christianity,¹⁶⁶ Marlowe doesn't actually condemn him for it¹⁶⁷—because his religious references ultimately work to criticize religion, not completely disregard it (as touched upon before).¹⁶⁸ As a character based on Tamerlane or Timur—a fourteenth century conqueror of Turkic-Mongolian decent¹⁶⁹ who, based on popular early modern European stereotypes, should stereotypically embody all the evils that Faustus values¹⁷⁰—

Marlowe's Tamburlaine is accurately depicted as a logical, valiant, successful leader who is powerful and smart enough to conquer white nations and eradicate European leaders as if they deserve it.

But, being a very early progressive text, Marlowe must further trick audiences—balancing blackwashing with whitewashing¹⁷¹—in efforts to minimize, and/or perhaps avoid racist backlashes from English audiences, ensuring that his anti-racist messages sneak through one way or another. For one, making Tamburlaine a Scythian despite the Turkic-Mongolian ethnicity of the original Tamerlane somewhat waters down

166 Though Slotkin asserts that “Tamburlaine suggests that Christianity and Islam are equally contemptible” (p. 413).

167 Although he burns the Quran at the end of the play and subsequently grows sick and dies, many scholars read the play as a conflation of Christian-Islamic sentiment (Slotkin p. 408) or a critical undermining of “the notion of a unified, all-powerful god (Slotkin, p. 414). In a nutshell, Tamburlaine is not punished for treating divinity like Faustus treats it, neither is it clear if he's punished at all for criticizing it.

168 Slotkin says: “As Vitkus suggests, the variety of religious references serves more to call into question the idea of a unified godhead than it does to support the existence of God” (p. 414).

169 Tamburlaine is based on Tamerlane or Timur the Great, an actual 14th/early 15th century Turkic-Mongol (or Turco-Mongol) ruler and founder of the Timurid dynasty who is related to his predecessor of the same general region, Genghis Khan.

170 Given pervasive Christian-European stereotypes and/or Crusades propaganda which pair Turkic people with the devil, as mentioned before

171 Joel Slotkin detects the makings of Marlowe's strategic process of balancing whitewashing with blackwashing: “He is a Scythian, but he is literally or figuratively associated at various times with pagans and Muslims, Persians and Turks, to the point where Mark Hutchings calls him a ‘floating signifier’” (p. 413). Moreover, when Tamburlaine marries Zenocrate, a black African Muslim, then turns around and burns the Quran at the end of Part Two, we see a strategic balancing of racial-religious associations that all work to create digestible activism.

ethnographic connections to the biggest enemy of Christianity at the time—the Turkic people of the Ottoman Empire. This connection would perhaps carry explicit layers of inferred anti-Christian sentiment and/or anti-white sentiment, as well as abundant layers of demonizing, blackwashed stereotypes that might jeopardize the process of making such a hero palatable to early modern whites.

If English audiences were not ready for an actual Turkic-Mongolian hero in 1587, a Scythian, on the other hand, deriving from a Eurasian region just west of ancient Greece and north of the Black Sea (stretching into what is now Russia and/or Siberia), would be a more tolerable choice, especially since Scythians were (and largely still are) historically associated with white ethnicities. Russian and Polish histories often absorb or include Scythian history or ancestry. Moreover, many ancient Scythian illustrations and sixteenth century illustrations of Scythians depict white individuals. Below, the first illustration (#1)¹⁷² is from an ancient Scythian carpet. This Scythian Iron Age archaeological cultural piece from approximately 300 B.C. depicts a white Scythian man on horseback. The second illustration (#2), from the fifteenth century, is a painting of a white “Warrior Queen of The Scythian Massagetae” by Italian artist Castagno.

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But Scythians shared similar cultural traits with Turkic-Mongols (as Scythia shared borders with Turkic-Mongolia). For example, the Scythian warrior dress from the fourth to fifth century B.C. in the illustration below (#3)¹⁷³ resembles the Turkic-Mongol warrior clothing of Tamerlane's time in the neighboring illustration below (#4). Therefore, a Scythian Tamburlaine might successfully pass as an acceptable hero in Renaissance England while nevertheless still preserving many racial stereotypes associated with Turkic people. This instance of subtle whitewashing, as with other instances, adds a kind of racial concealment that doesn't compromise Tamburlaine's indirect and symbolic ties to color.

A Scythian Tamerlane-based character also wins the favor of English audiences via contemporary English dialogue. Marlowe, like Peele and Shakespeare after him, seems to realize early on that applying beautiful language to ethnic figures causes a kind of whitewashing that makes characters of color agreeable to white audiences. Tamburlaine speaks with a type of mastery of the English language and knowledge of traditional early modern European academia that places yet another white veil over stereotypical perceptions.

Moreover, emphasizing the fact that characters of color, not just whites, demonize Tamburlaine and are also conquered by the Scythian (as in the real Tamerlane story) gives biased white audiences the ability to further minimize their fears of anti-white

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rhetoric and/or anti-Christian rhetoric, playing into Marlowe's tricky hand. The Soldan of Egypt is a prime character who accomplishes this:

Methinks we march as Meleager did,
 Environed with brave Argolian knights,
 To chase the savage Calydonian boar,
 Or Cephalus, with lusty Theban youths,
 Against the wolf that angry Themis sent
 To waste and spoil the sweet Aonian fields.
 A monster of five hundred thousand heads,
 Compact of rapine, piracy, and spoil,
 The scum of men, the hate and scourge of God,
 Raves in Aegyptia, and annoyeth us:
 My lord, it is the bloody Tamburlaine,
 A sturdy felon, and a base-bred thief,
 By murder raised to the Persian crown,
 That dare control us in our territories.¹⁷⁴

Evidence that nations of color, such as Egypt, called Tamerlane a “base bread thief,” a “monster of five-hundred thousand heads,” or a “savage Calydonian boar” is not as exact.¹⁷⁵ After all, a fourteenth century African-Arabian sultan, as mentioned before, most likely would not reference a Greek mythological boar. But we do know for sure that early

¹⁷⁴ Part 1, 4.3.214-217

¹⁷⁵ Correspondence between Timur or Tamerlane and various rulers, even European rulers like Charles VI (a document confirming this is held at Le Musée de l'Histoire de France, code AE III 204—it's mentioned Dossier II, 7, J936) does exist, and Marlowe may very well have known about them.

modern whites and converted Christians of color, like Leo Africanus, a native of north Africa (like the Soldan of Egypt), commonly used this kind of language against black people and/or non-Christians of color. Africanus called Africans of the Barbary region and Negros “needie,” “covetous,” a “base people,” “savage,” and “beastly.”¹⁷⁶ We see a pattern in *Tamburlaine* where many characters of color call the protagonist a “thief,” “savage,” “base,” and a “beast,”¹⁷⁷ further contributing to the blackwashing of Tamburlaine, and perhaps facilitating responsive anti-racist measures, such as instances when Tamburlaine conquers and kills those characters who stereotype him.

A Brief Overview of other Key English Renaissance Activists Who Advanced Characters of Color

Tamburlaine was extremely popular and very influential. We see a small movement of authors after 1587 who systematically create characters of color for heroic roles and/or sympathetic roles which had been exclusive to white characters for centuries in Europe. Adorning these dark-skinned characters with elevated blank verse, as well as other applications which contribute to successful trickery in the face of racially biased English audiences, these writers exert innovative progressiveness in early modern theater.

176 In his *Historie*, Leo Africanus writes: “Those which we named the inhabitants of the cities of Barbarie are somewhat needie and couetous, being also very proud and high- minded, and woonderfully addicted vnto wrath...So rusticall they are & void of good manners, that scarcely can any stranger obtaine their familiaritie and friendship...They obserue no certaine order of liuing nor of lawes. Abounding exceedingly with choler, they speake alwaies with an angrie and lowd voice...By nature they are a vile and base people, being no better accounted of by their gouernours then if they were dogs... They haue no churches at all, nor any kinde of prayers, but being vtterly estranged from all godly deuotion, they leade a sauage and beastly life ...The Negros likewise leade a beastly kinde of life, being vtterly destitute of the vse of reason, of dexteritie of wit, and of all artes. Yea they so behaue themselues, as if they had continually liued in a forrest among wilde beasts” (Africanus section 1 85 - 1 87).

¹⁷⁷ For instance, Ortygius calls Tamburlaine “such a devilish thief” (Part 1, 2.6.119)

As each progressive character tantalizes the English Renaissance stage, opportunities for fewer tricky tactics or less whitewashing increases. After *Tamburlaine* and Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, we begin to see physically black-skinned protagonists and black-skinned supporting characters who are victorious against white characters, often via violence, and evoke audience sympathy, sending clearer anti-white supremacist, pro-color messages.

The Spanish Tragedy's correlations with the Black Legend—or anti-Spanish (as well as anti-Catholic) propaganda from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—allows it to pack a significant progressive punch, despite the European ethnicity of Hieronimo, the main character (as well as other heroic and/or sympathetic European characters). Because these figures in the play are Spanish, we can nevertheless lay a foundation for viewing Kyd's play as another early contributor to an early modern English movement that embraces racial activism. Backdropped by a barrage of English and French propaganda which blackwashes Spain (a key element of the Black Legend), and anti-Islamic policies executed by the Spanish government against moriscoes¹⁷⁸—policies which were possibly also anti-black, despite an apparent predominant population of white moriscoes (Muslims) in Spain during the early modern period¹⁷⁹—*The Spanish Tragedy* is positioned and primed to strategically utilize racial connections and attack bigotry.

178 In the early modern period, the term “morisco” was used to denote converted Muslims who were targeted for continuing Islamic practices. This term would go on to have a more racial context in modern times, especially in South America; also see Thomas Bourke's *A Concise History of the Moors in Spain: From Their Invasion of That Kingdom to Their Final Expulsion from It*.

179 Muslims, including black African Muslims, played a significant role in Spain's history, culture, and/or population since 711 AD, when Moors from northern Africa crossed into the Iberian Peninsula and conquered Visigothic Christian Hispania (Fletcher, p. 1). Muslim territories once covered most of the peninsula and part of present-day southern France (Corral, p. 67). The Kingdom of Grenada occupied the southern portion of the Iberian peninsula until 1492.

Consequently, some Muslims who later converted to Christianity and fell victim to Philip II's discrimination and expulsion were descendants of the aforementioned Moors. In fact, prolonged Muslim sustainability and conversion in Iberia indicates a "high mean proportion of ancestry from North Africa" (although North African does not mean black African, it does indicate the non-rare existence of black African ancestry; see Adams et al.'s "The Genetic Legacy of Religious Diversity and Intolerance: Paternal Lineages of Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula"). This, according to Elena Bosch "attests to a high level of religious conversion (whether voluntary or enforced), driven by historical episodes of social and religious intolerance, that ultimately led to the integration of descendants" (see Elena Bosch's "The religious conversions of Jews and Muslims have had a profound impact on the population of the Iberian Peninsula"). Historian Richard Fletcher suggests that "the bulk of the invaders and settlers [in Iberia] were Moors, i.e., Berbers from Algeria and Morocco" (Fletcher, p. 10). However, the existence of Spanish *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) laws, and the fact that moriscoes were often traded for black slaves, indicates that moriscoes were predominantly white Muslims. Nonetheless, as Elizabethan England associates Spain with blackness via stereotypical knowledge of Moorish and Muslim inhabitants, white Spanish Christians often similarly applied black washing stereotypes to all Muslims.

Since we know that some Spanish Moors had black skin—like other European Moors—Philip's prejudicial actions against all white moriscoes and moriscoes of color (despite the fact that, as mentioned before, most moriscoes appear to have been white) was probably motivated by associative racism also—not just religious discrimination.

Many illustrations from the medieval to early modern period depict Spanish Moors and other European Moors with black skin. The following thirteenth century Spanish illustrations depict black-skinned Moors. The first (#5, below left) is from Alfonso X's *Libro de los Juegos* or *Book of Games*, 1283 AD. The second (#6, below right) is A Spanish Moor in a *Cantiga*, 13th century:

#5

#6

This sixteenth century Spanish illustration (#7 below) depicts black Moors playing the trombone—reflection a common occupation of English Renaissance Moors ("The Engagement of St. Ursula and Prince Etherius," sometimes called "St. Ursula and Prince Etherius Making a Solemn Vow." *Spain, circa 1520* ["Earliest Depiction of Black Trombonist?"]):

#7

The bigoted propaganda from Renaissance Englanders which combatively and foolishly applies black stereotypes to Spanish individuals¹⁸⁰ indicates that England's own black people must have also been fair game. We can thus predict that a rather hostile

In the first illustration (#8, below left) French artist Christopher Wren (1632-1723) named this painting "Le Maure," meaning "The Moor." Here, the artist doesn't call the young man a black Moor, but simply "The Moor," as if the subject's blackness is synonymous or known to be associated with such an ethnicity. In the second (#9, below right) we see a German sculpture from 1281 AD of St. Maurice or Mauritius (a Latin word which uses the root word *maurus*, which takes on the terms "Moor" or "black").¹⁷⁹ It is housed in the cathedral of Magdeburg, Germany:

#8

#9

Spain not only imposed death, enslavement, or expulsion upon white moriscoes and black and brown Muslim Moors in Grenada (Rawlings, *The Spanish Inquisition*, pp. 72-89), but expelled over 300,000 Spanish moriscos from Spain between the 1570's and 1609 (two texts, one from the 19th century and one from the 18th century affirm these numbers: Robert Scot, *A Dissertation on the Expulsion of Moors from Spain* [1778], pp. 17, 27; Thomas Bourke, *A Concise History of the Moors in Spain* [1811], p. 252), and subsequently expelled remaining converted moriscos in 1612. The first expulsion wave comes during Queen Elizabeth's expulsion warrants which threatened to oust black Moors from England (see Elizabeth's 1596 warrant, transcribed in "Early Times" from *Black Presence*).

But black Moors had been fleeing from Spain's harsh racism long before Elizabeth thought there were too many of them in England (especially after the fall of Moorish Grenada in 1492). And though some black people may have viewed Renaissance England as a place of refuge, others nevertheless remained in Spain via Christian conversion.

However, as Elizabethan and French propaganda paints Spain as a nation associated "with Islam, with Africa, with dark peoples,"—contributing greatly to the Black Legend—Phillip II is possibly influenced by such racialized accusations to expel all moriscoes (Fuchs, pp. 94-96), whether white or black. Perhaps he wishes to "whiten" Spain with nationalized, anti-Islamic, anti-color actions.

¹⁸⁰ Eric Griffin suggests that, as Catholics and Protestants "attempted to broach with rational, inter-ecclesiastical discussion, [they] could devolve all too frequently into the end-game of ethnic demonization. Further, in these texts we can view the special role of the Black Legend in the forging of Spain's "fictive ethnicity" during this early moment of English national consciousness-raising" (p. 369);

Also, see Fuchs, *The Spanish Race*, pp. 94-96, from *Rereading the Black Legend, The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires*.

climate was created for both Tudor and Spanish black people, because both nations seem to embrace efforts to reclaim whiteness—through discrimination, the threat of expulsion, and expulsion—via specific resentments for myths surrounding black skin. Therefore, Kyd's *Tragedy* is poised to combat both fronts by offering a successful Spanish hero who is tied to black stereotypes. If Robert Ashley's translation of *A Comparison of the English and Spanish Nation* in 1588 or 1589 (which arises within *Tragedy*'s approximate creation time frame) spreads the Black Legend by calling Spanish people "demie Moor[s]," "a legion of divels," "savage beasts," "thievish," and other terms associated with medieval and early modern black demonization,¹⁸¹ then the Spaniard Hieronimo may exist as a reflection of blackness. Eric Griffin's "Nationalism, the Black Legend, and the Revised Spanish Tragedy" provides strength for this theory, claiming that "in the ethno-poetic interventions of early modern English drama 'the Spaniard' became something alien: a barbarian, crueller even than 'the Turk,' a rapist, a sodomite, an Atheist, a Saracen, a Moor, a Negro, a Jew."¹⁸²

But Hieronimo's brave, justice-driven, successful spirit—as well as his victimization—works to lift such stains from his Spanish ethnicity, raising the status of

181 In *A Comparison of the English and Spanish Nation* (1589), Robert Ashley's translation of a French pamphlet seems to draw from Leo Africanus' black stereotypes, as well as demonizing black stereotypes in Crusades propaganda, when targeting Spaniards: "consider the nature and disposition of the Spaniarde...an uncleane and filthie swine, a theevish howlet, a proud peacocke...a legion of divels...[Columbus] would never have undertaken this voyage, if he had thought that the men whome hee brought thither ... should straightwaies be transformed into Lions, Panthers, Tigres, and other savage beastes...This wicked race of those half Wisigots...This demie Moore, demie Jew, yea demie Saracine....What? Shall those Marranos, yes, those impious Atheistes reigne over us kings and Princes?...theyr insatiate avarice, theyre more than Tigrish cruelty, theyr filthy, monstrous and abominable luxurie...theyr lustfull and inhumaine deflouring of their matrons, wives, daughters, theyr matchless and sodomiticall ravishings of young boys, which these demi-barbarian Spaniardes committed." (Ashley, p. 21, 23...)

182 Griffin, p. 370

associative demonized entities and figures—especially the black Moor figure—in the process.

The notion that Kyd's oppositional views against racism and religious discrimination move the English author to create a Spanish protagonist for the English stage is a rationality unaffirmed by personal evidence of Kyd's thoughts. It is the unique direction in which subsequent early modern English tragedy plays (that are immediately influenced by *The Spanish Tragedy*) seem to collectively take that offers substantial evidence for such a theory.¹⁸³

George Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar* (1594) takes cue from Kyd's play but creates a black skinned character, Muly Hamet, a villainous yet sympathetic figure whose physical appearance is inherently linked to racist presuppositions. His predicament is far worse than Hierónimo's, because his black face exists as an explicit visible signifier of stereotypes that only indirectly sullies Kyd's Spanish hero. Muly Hamet is called "barbarous," a "traitor," and a "negro" as if the term is intrinsically violent: "The negro puts to death by proud command¹⁸⁴...Now war begins his rage and ruthless reign, / And Nemesis, with bloody whip in hand, / Thunders for vengeance on the Negro-Moor.¹⁸⁵"

183 *The Spanish Tragedy* may have been written between 1582 and 1592. And, if it was written and performed before 1587, it may have influenced Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*. However, if *Tamburlaine* precedes Kyd's play, being written in 1587 or 1588, then *Tragedy* would be directly influenced by Marlowe's play. Moreover, if George Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar* is written and performed before *Tragedy* in 1592, then Peele's drama may act as a blueprint for Kyd's. Either way, the plays' significant similarities gives credence to the notion that they share a similar thematic anti-racist agenda.

184 1.55

185 2.3

The term “negro” is primarily used to emphatically denote the Moor Muly Hamet’s black skin.¹⁸⁶ Peele’s dedication to differentiating between the skin color of the two primary Moors in the play—Muly Hamet’s dark skin, and Abdelmelec fairer skin¹⁸⁷—indicates a heightened awareness for social discernments of skin color, and knowledge of how these discernments both effect and feed into existing audience perceptions. This is a prime example of significant early modern racial conceptualizations via skin color, but also a contextual marker that allows us to gage the importance of skin color in determining levels of racial prejudice. We mustn’t forget that, although *The Battle of Alcazar* is fiction, Peele (as with other playwrights) creates a drama that is both relatable and a reflection of the culture and mindset of immediate audiences (or English Renaissance society). Drama is often relegated to the confines of an author’s cultural mentality and socio-political mentality, despite imaginary offerings. When patterns of racism against black-skinned individuals are seen on the Tudor stage, it is not farfetched to believe that they were actually common in Tudor society. Particularly if prepondering patterns in fiction often act as corroborating evidence for real accusations. After all, *Tamburlaine*, *Alcazar*,¹⁸⁸ as well as other similar Tudor literary works, are based on actual events anyway.

With that said, Abdelmelec (based on an actual Moor), the lighter-skinned Moor, is infused with far fewer racist stereotypes than the blacker-skinned Moor (also based on

186 The annotated notes of this version of *The Battle of Alcazar* states: “Bovill tells us that by tradition, Muly Mahamet was said ‘to have inherited the dark skin from his slave mother, and was therefore known as El-Mutuakel, the Black Sultan.’ The OED notes that in the 16th century, negro was used to describe dark-skinned people in general, which included Moors” (p. 7, annotated notes by Peter Lukacs and ElizabethanDrama.org).

187 According to editor Peter Lukacs and ElizabethanDrama.org’s annotation, fairer skin “typically was found amongst Moors” (p. 46).

188 *The Battle of Alcazar* is based on the Battle of Alcácer Quibir in 1578.

an actual Moor), reflecting inner societal norms. Though he is called “barbarous,” Abdelmelec, who also goes by Muly Molocco, is illustrated as brave, and the rightful heir to the throne of Morocco: “The negro Muly Hamet, that withholds / The kingdom from his uncle Abdelmelec...That now usurps upon this prince, / This brave Barbarian lord, Muly Molocco.”¹⁸⁹

Likewise, Muly Molocco is never presented as a devilish figure—but the blacker Moor is systematically and/or excessively demonized. In fact, Peele incorporates the same Satanic colors, black and blood red, as Marlowe uses for Tamburlaine (as mentioned before) in the process of demonizing Muly Hamet: “Black in his look, and bloody in his deeds; / And in his shirt, stained with a cloud of gore, / Presents himself, with naked sword in hand, / Accompanied, as now you may behold, / With devils coated in the shapes of men.”¹⁹⁰

Here, like Tamburlaine, the Moor is a force to be reckoned with. We should fear him, but also understand that his superiority does not diminish via his black “look,” but manifests through a kind of warlike competence that doesn’t falter through bigoted perceptions. Peele makes sure his audience knows that the Moor is black-skinned, and a Muslim, in efforts to allow Muly Hamet’s Machiavellian intelligence and daring—as a black Islamic character—to push back against racial-religious inferiority stereotypes.¹⁹¹ In fact, the two main white protagonists in the play blame Hamet’s smart trickery for their

189 1.8, 11-12

190 1.16-20

191 For example, the Presenter in the play uses the word “unbelieving” to draw attention to Hamet’s Islamic beliefs when saying: “The negro...this unbelieving Moor / Murthering his uncle and his brethren / Triumphs in his ambitious tyranny” (1.56, 58-60)

demise in the end. They are shocked and sorrowfully humiliated when they realize that a black man has brought an end to their white superiority.¹⁹²

The fairer-skinned Moor, though demonized much less, is still a person of color, and still a non-Christian—thus he also challenges and subdues Euro-Christian superiority in the play. When his Moorish soldiers defeat the two white stars of the play—Sebastian, the king of Portugal, and Thomas Stukeley, the white Captain of the Papal Fleet—we see a clear victory of color over whiteness (the Spanish, who join forces with the Moor, are on the side of “color,” absorbing implications surrounding blackness, as with the Black Legend). Notably, a denouncing of white-Christian racism simultaneously occurs. After Stukeley—a primary symbol of foolish, oppressive, early modern white Christianity—is wounded by the Moors in battle, he damns them, calls them dogs (drawing from Africanus’ stereotypical outbursts against Moors and foreshadowing the racist characters who demean Othello and Aaron), then seems appalled over the idea of perishing in their Africa.¹⁹³ Subsequently, the crying white “Englishman”¹⁹⁴ doesn’t die an honorable death, but is stabbed in the middle of his racist rant. After stabbing him, Jonas, Stukeley’s servant, wishes that his master will pay for wreaking oppression in death.¹⁹⁵

192 While he retreats from the armies of the fairer-skinned Moor, knowing his doom is near, Sebastian says: “Stukeley, alas, I see my oversight! / False-hearted Mahamet, now, to my cost, / I see thy treachery, warned to beware / A face so full of fraud and villany.”

193 “That I must perish by these barbarous Moors,
Whose weapons have made passage for my soul
Ye proud malicious dogs of Italy,
Whose mounting mind stoops to no feeble stroke...
Thus Stukeley is slain, with many a deadly stab,
Dies in these desert fields of Africa (5.1.170-175, 186-187).”

194 Before stabbing Stukeley, Jonas says: “Why suffer this Englishman to live” (5.1.177).

195 5.1.177-182; Jonas, Stukeley’s servant, stabs Stukeley then says “Villain bleed on; thy blood channels run, / And meet with those whom thou death hast done” (5.1.181-182).

But we see Peele's ultimate anti-racist message when the Moor charismatically rails against the white king of Portugal. Foreshadowing Aaron's moving speech in Act Five of *Titus Andronicus*, Muly Hamet damns the white Sebastian, and justifies black rage in the face of white oppression as he wants the king of Portugal to be tortured "as usurpers feel below" (below meaning hell).¹⁹⁶ Hamet asks for revenge, because he despises the colonial intentions of Sebastian. The king of Portugal only sides with the black Moor to take Morocco for himself (after agreeing to help Muly Hamet take Morocco back from Abdelmec). So, as the black Moor curses the white king of Portugal, we are able to further sympathize (even in 1588), knowing the oppressive nature of white nations, and the manner in which individuals of color often fall victim to white superiority. Muly Hamet's violent indignation against Portugal (and Spain) is thus justified with these facts in mind. Even the violence he wreaks upon fairer-skinned Moors in the play can be understood through his susceptibility to oppression because, as a black-skinned individual, he is seen as devilish to both whites and some fairer skinned Moors.

Subsequently, when Sebastian and Thomas Stukeley both run away from the pressing fair-skinned Moorish army in distress, extreme panic, and cowardly fear, the black Moor doesn't retreat right away. He gives a powerful, beautiful soliloquy that

¹⁹⁶ Ride Nemesis, ride thy fiery cart,
 And sprinkle gore amongst these men of war...
 Descend and take to thy tormenting hell
 The mangled body of that traitor-king
 That scorns the power and force of Portugal:
 Then let the earth discover to his ghost
 Such tortures as usurpers feel below...
 And lastly for revenge, for deep revenge,
 Whereof thou goddess and deviser art,
 Damned let him be, damned, and condemned to bear
 All torments, tortures, and pains of hell (5.1.94-96, 99-103, 108-111).

yearns for peace and curses his “mass of flesh.”¹⁹⁷ Unlike the two white protagonists, he seems to ask for repentance—not to save his flesh from death, but in sheer remorse. We are made to increase our feelings for him, not the retreating white stars of the play, and concern ourselves with the black Moor’s plight. Even as he subsequently craves for revenge and asks for a horse¹⁹⁸ (a scene which Shakespeare recycles in *Richard III*), we walk away with the impression of an unstable yet sympathetic figure—not a character that should be loathed or forgotten.

Muly Hamet’s black skin and violent devilish traits do not prevent his sympathetic characterization, mental superiority, and gallant qualities (he actually kills a lion to prove his gallantry). Despite a much greater quantity of English literature which portrays black skinned characters in very demeaning ways before, during, and decades after the play’s inception,¹⁹⁹ Peele dissents, taking cue from Marlowe. Both men mirror Reginald Scot’s rejection of black devilish stereotypes, making socially demonized characters of color quite indispensable.

Thomas Dekker’s *Lust’s Dominion* (1600) capitalizes on the idea of Peele’s sympathetic black Muslim hero by creating a black protagonist who expresses anti-racist messages through violent revenge. The black Moor Eleazar, prince of Fez and Barbary, is held as a prisoner or slave in the Spanish court—but is honored for the military successes he wields for them against Turks (foreshadowing Othello, who is a Venetian slave who fights for Venetia against Ottoman Turks). Thus, from the onset of the play, the Spanish

197 5.1.104-126

198 5.1.134-135

199 Such as countless medieval cycle plays, Middle English romances like *Richard Coer de Lyon*, English Renaissance masques and dramas like Richard Jonson’s *The Famous Historie of the Seven Champions of Christendom* (1596), Ben Jonson’s *The Masque of Blackness* (1605), and Richard Brome’s *The English Moor* (1640).

in *Lust's Dominion* are clearly not associated with blackness (like Hieronimo and the Spanish in *Alcazar*). On the contrary, the Spanish here seem to reflect a predominant portion of Renaissance Spaniards who hold prejudices and discriminate against black people.

Consequently, Eleazar holds grudges against all Spaniards, including the Queen Mother of Spain, who is in love with him. Not only has King Philip played a role in murdering his father—just as the real Philip II of Spain murders and expels many Spanish Moors during this time period—but societal Spaniards prejudicially ridicule him:

I cannot ride through the Castilian streets
 But thousand eyes through windows, and through doors
 Throw killing looks at me, and every slave
 At Eleazar darts a finger out,
 And every hissing tongue cries, there's the Moor...
 That's the black prince of devils, there goes he²⁰⁰

Eleazar conveys clear instances of racial prejudice here. The white Spanish stare at him, a man of color, and despise him, as well as “every slave.” He’s targeted not only for his class and foreign status, but (chiefly) because he’s “black,” and construed stereotypically as a “prince of devils.” This black slur essentializes his alienation, rising above other qualities that would not be as visible or vulnerable to mockery—he cannot hide the black skin on his face.

Eleazar immediately appears (on the surface) to blame the Queen Mother for this societal racism when asking “Who arms this many headed beast but you?”²⁰¹ But, as the

200 Act 1, Scene 1

201 Act 1, Scene 1

play goes on, we understand that Eleazar seems to mistrust white superiority in general. Subsequently, like Muly Hamet, he uses his intelligence to defeat or rise above white supremacy. As a black Machiavellian villain, Eleazar is smart enough and powerful enough to take the Spanish throne. Dekker allows him to wage a victorious war against white supremacy—killing King Ferdinand and conducting a promising war against Philip, the Queen mother's son—because the author appears interested in challenging white oppression. Although Eleazar, at the end, is killed by Philip and Hortenzo who, in blackface, pretend to be Moors at the end of the play, Eleazar's reign and good fight sends a strong message—a message that withstands a final racist assault from two blackfaced white figures.

Dekker's play is bold. Its audacity to punish whites for being oppressive, to challenge their normal sense of white brawn (both directly and indirectly) may be a sign that audiences are becoming more receptive to black heroes and the notion of anti-racism (see Chapter Three). In some ways, Shakespeare's race plays are fortunate to trail the aforementioned innovating plays as he's free to address racial issues in more liberal ways.

Following Shakespeare's contributions to the movement, Thomas Middleton's pageant, *The Triumphs of Truth* (1613), also persuades us to empathize with a humanistic black figure, creating a scene which dares to affirm that the black King of the Moors *matters*. In one scene, Middleton, through fictionalizing the arrival of Moorish ambassadors to England, affirms his importance to discussions concerning racial conceptualization:

I see amazement set upon the faces

Of these white people, wond' rings and strange gazes;
 Is it at me? does my complexion draw
 So many Christian eyes that never saw
 A king so black before?...

Opinions, common murmurs, and fixed eyes,
 At my so strange arrival in a land
 Where true religion and her temples stand.
 I being a Moor, then, in opinion's lightness,
 As far from sanctity as my face from whiteness.²⁰²

Here, the idea of race is clearly demarcated through words of color. In fact, “Middleton’s play is the earliest printed example of a European author referring to fellow Europeans as ‘white people.’”²⁰³ This places Middleton at the forefront of realizations of racism via skin color during the English Renaissance, clearly defining the existence of modern racial cognizance or racial understanding in such an early point in English history. Accordingly, if the alienation, the sense of otherness, and religious impurity that the King of Moors feels²⁰⁴ derives from an awareness of his contrasting “complexion” or black skin—as well as the multiple, overwhelming, “white” perceptions surrounding him—then the process of inducing our sympathy comes from a progressive desire to combat such racial

202 Middleton, p. 973

203 Simon, p. 1

204 Note: As mentioned before, these progressive scenes and plays emerge amidst many popular racist scenes and plays and religious literature of the same period. So, the anti-racist movement which absorbs Middleton during the English Renaissance wasn’t immediately pervasive, but sowed incremental seeds which would blossom into modern liberalness in theatrical plays and other literary works.

consequences. Middleton thus joins the ranks of early modern English activists by distinctly showing the severe dejection that color prejudice causes.

Shakespeare and Black Lives Matter

Hundreds of years before the “Black Lives Matter” movement, Shakespeare, like Middleton’s *King of the Moors*, conveys to the “fixed” white “eyes” of his audiences that black lives *should* matter, and *do* matter to him.

Shakespeare appears to understand the need to propose a philosophy which seeks to reveal the value, the humanity, and sorrow of dark-skinned people. Centuries before the term *racism* is coined in the English language, the author realizes inherent color biases within European mindsets that constitute normal acts of discrimination. Knowing how English individuals commonly view black people as inferior, sexually promiscuous, ill-mannered, unintelligent, animalistic beings, Shakespeare is privy to the manner in which black Moors matter very little to white mentalities. Though Othello is the star of the play which bears his name, he is projected as an inferior figure by virtually every character—even those who claim to be loyal to him. He is called an animal, a monster, a devil, *before* he commits murder. He is branded with violent stereotypes which early modern audiences commonly believe and is relegated to the status of a criminal long before his hands even touch the neck of a white woman.

One of the most intriguing racial things that Shakespeare understands before his time is the peculiar manner in which black people, whether they commit crimes or not, are unfairly indicted by racial stereotypes. And that these stereotypes—which seem reinforced when Othello actually commits murder, or when Aaron the Moor wields

murderous plots, or when Caliban attempts rape—are actually more evident among the very whites who project them. White oppressors in Shakespeare’s race plays both propagate oppression by committing acts of violence and move black characters to assimilate through heinous acts of violence. European characters set the precedence for criminal behavior not only by setting violent examples, but also by tyrannizing black characters to the point of responsive criminality.

It is Iago, the white oppressor, who murders before Othello.²⁰⁵ And it is Iago who uses manipulation to oppress the black Moor, causing him to lose all rationality and commit murder.

It is Tamora, Aaron’s white master, who leads him by example—who sanctions the use of violence before Aaron commits it. Aaron masterminds evil deeds for the sake of pleasing his white master—nothing more. And since he is an obedient servant or slave, we must infer that his oppression compels him to be a reflection of his master—a reflection which unfortunately causes him to succumb to black stereotypes.

If Shakespeare were alive today, I am confident that he’d understand that individuals who’ve endured years of oppression might very well commit consequential violent acts, or carry out the very acts which their oppressors used to subjugate them.

Thus, I don’t believe Shakespeare would associate modern “black on black” crime with stereotypes which illustrate black men as naturally violent. On the contrary, he, seeming to know more about the history of oppression which black people have endured

205 After Roderigo is stabbed by Iago, he calls him a “dog” (5.1.74), using the same racial epithet Iago uses to denigrate Othello in prior scenes. Here, Roderigo realizes that Iago, the white oppressor, is actually the very criminal or dog that the black Moor is projected to be.

at the hands of Europeans than many of us, would understand that prior or simultaneous racial oppression contributes to proliferations of black criminality. Writing before the massive onslaught of the slave trade, Shakespeare would still be aware of a very long history of white supremacy—a kind of highly influential, powerful supremacy that demoralizes black skin and forces black bodies to become something they’re not.

Through subjugation or oppression, a perfectly civil race of people, like Caliban’s indigenous race, might very well turn violent. Had Othello never been captured by Europeans and made a slave, had Aaron never been attached to a white master, and had Prospero never colonized Caliban, consequential characterized evil deeds might be non-existent. And thus, if African Americans had never endured centuries of “white on black” segregation, brutality, rape, lynching, and murder, proliferations of American “black on black” crime might not exist.

After reading *Othello*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *The Tempest*, we, as readers, should come away knowing that Shakespeare ultimately wants us to sympathize and empathize with the oppressed, and hold the oppressor accountable—just like Maya Angelou, Stokeley Carmichael, Martin Luther King, and James Baldwin wanted. We should be privy to Shakespeare’s attempts to show that black lives should matter, and do matter—despite bias against skin color, which is culpable for the very pervasive notions of black inferiority that warrant the phrase “black lives matter.”

*For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own king; and here you sty me
In this hard rock whiles you keep from me
The rest o'th' island.*

—Caliban²⁰⁶

Chapter Two: Shakespeare Understands the Psychological Consequences of Living in Black Skin

Shakespeare Exemplifies the Violent Psychological Pitfalls of Colonization

Franz Fanon, Aime Césaire, and W.E.B. Du Bois all delineate the psychological pitfalls of divided identities associated with many black people who suffer from colonization. Though each post-colonial scholar coins this mental dilemma in different ways, they all agree that hybrid identities—via colonization—can cause symptomatic mental breakdowns, including breakdowns that may result in consequential violence, namely rape.

In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon suggests that Caribbean black people often endure self-division and self-annihilation when accepting colonial languages and seeking interracial relationships at the expense of rejecting their own heritage.²⁰⁷ And, when some

206 *The Tempest* 1.2.341-344

207 Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, pp. 8, 28, 43. The chapters entitled “The Negro and Language,” pp. 8-27, and “The Woman of Color and the White Man” pp. 28-45 provide comprehensive referential information.

Caribbean black people fail to achieve acceptance from the colonists who subjugate them, they make themselves “obsessive neurotics”²⁰⁸ or fall into “complete situational neurosis.”²⁰⁹ Dennis Gill gives a more comprehensive synopsis, suggesting “Fanon submits that since [Caribbean black people] do not ever feel accepted in the colonizer’s world, and also lose communion with the world of their fellows, they ultimately acquire a state of ‘non-being.’”²¹⁰

Césaire is in agreement with Fanon, claiming that colonization reduces native black people to “things” through “forced labor, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape...contempt, mistrust, arrogance...No human contact, but relations of domination and submission which turn the indigenous man into an instrument of production.”²¹¹

Césaire believes that the process of “thingification”²¹² transforms prior independent black individuals into dependent figures who now see white properties as superior. Through thingification black people are “drained of their essence, culture trampled underfoot.”²¹³ Blackness suddenly becomes undesirable through “an inferiority complex,”²¹⁴ and whiteness an element to be sought after or indoctrinated into the psyche for optimal survival or happiness.

In W.E.B. Du Bois’ theory of “double-consciousness,” African American identities are often divided into a natural sense of oneself and a sense of oneself through

208 Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, p. 43

209 Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, p. 43

210 Gill, p. 185

211 Césaire, p. 6

212 Césaire, p. 6

213 Césaire, p. 6

214 Césaire, pp. 6-7

the eyes of predominant white society. A stereotypical image of oneself dominates an innate sense of blackness, damaging self-images by repressing native, independent attributes in favor of those imagined by white prejudices.²¹⁵ Here, as with Césaire and Fanon's models, blackness ultimately becomes inferior in the mind, compelling individuals to view white acceptance as a remedy. Such schisms ultimately heighten the possibility of psychological instability—as long as one lives in black skin.

William Shakespeare seems to foreshadow these models by incorporating the diagnoses of “double-consciousness,” “thingification,” and “self-division” within the psyches of Caliban, Othello, and Aaron. Like few other early modern playwrights, Shakespeare exists as a progressive, evolutionary link between ultra-biased representations of black characters in medieval plays and equality-driven modern plays. Some popular early modern plays, such as George Peele's *Battle of Alcazar*, Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, Thomas Dekker's *Lust's Dominion*, Shakespeare's *Othello*, and Thomas Southerne's *Oroonoko*, pale in comparison to prior cycle plays, pageants, and masques that heavily stereotype people of color by exemplifying the devil, evil, sin, and animalism (to name a few negative stereotypes) through blackface performances.²¹⁶ A key motivational element within this literary evolution lies in the manner in which these playwrights and Shakespeare are able to recognize how racial discrimination and/or colonization can psychologically affect marginalized people of color.

I argue that Shakespeare sees patterns of psychosomatic trauma among early modern black people who suffer from white domination that are similar to those which Fanon, Césaire, and Du Bois identify in many modern colonized black people. Though

²¹⁵ Du Bois, p. 3-4

²¹⁶ Vaughn's *Performing Blackness on the English Stage*, p. 2; Barthelemy, pp. 17 and 18-20.

operating hundreds of years before modern psychological theory, Shakespeare is privy to the potential systematic mental effects of racial insults, subjugation, involuntary assimilation, and voluntary assimilation as he methodically applies these attributes to applicable characters of color. In *The Tempest*, *Othello*, and *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare foreruns the theories of Fanon, Césaire, and Du Bois by allowing his ethnic characters to exhibit mental breakdowns via white oppression. The mental breakdowns appear to occur as each diasporic character displays direct or indirect difficulty with enduring a divided identity.

In Caliban's case, Shakespeare's *The Tempest* gives us a representation of an oppressed figure (an apparent amalgamation of oppressed African natives, and indigenous people from the New World²¹⁷) who is relegated to subjugation and mental instability after being colonized by Prospero, a powerful European. Caliban exists as an outcast in his native island not only because he's the sole native inhabitant, but because his ethnicity also relegates him to the status of a slave.

In the face of early modern English audiences, Caliban would have been a ready-made outcast. Though his representational skin color is often debated, he is ultimately characterized as a non-white figure, and carries an innate ability to invite the racial biases of early modern English audiences. Being part-"devil"²¹⁸ in the eyes of Prospero and

217 Tokson suggests that black people and native Americans were often mistaken for each other (linguistically, and physically when it came to darker natives), especially by those who did not have direct contact with them. He notes that Thomas Dekker's *Lust's Dominion* "appears to confuse the Moor with the Indian" (p. 3). He goes on to note that Caliban possesses traits indicative of New World natives and native Africans (p. 3). I suggest that Shakespeare is aware of the aforementioned, ignorant confusions, and purposely confuses the two ethnicities within Caliban as an ironic trick, as well as to affirm similarities in both psyches, which are altered by colonialism).

218 Prospero claims that Caliban was "got by the devil himself" (1.2.319), and also calls him a "demi-devil" (5.1.275).

other white characters, Caliban's servitude and alienation is solidified through the racial implications of this non-human side. As the historical European correlation between blackness and the devil would have been privy to Shakespeare—especially given Shakespeare's knowledge of Greek-Roman influences which commonly conflated blackness and evil,²¹⁹ and Euro-Christian ideologies that often fused the two²²⁰ (which include elements of Crusades propaganda²²¹)—Caliban can never become Prospero's equal. As long as Caliban is not white, he is not fully human or biologically civilized. As his monstrous attributes illuminate his association with racial savagery, Caliban's main issue lies in the dangerous stereotypes that associate people of color with barbarism.²²²

As whiteness exists as a popular model for the opposite of barbarism, or a blueprint for normality in early modern English society,²²³ Caliban's hybrid identity must represent an implied abnormal racial identity. This identity appears to parallel Césaire and Fanon's idea of "otherness."

Despite the fact that Prospero, on the surface, further relegates Caliban to otherness as punishment for attempting to rape Miranda, Caliban's actual crime seems to encompass the manner in which his tainted identity or theoretical ethnicity stereotypically links him to hypersexuality and rape. As a half-devil or "demi-devil" according to

219 Smith suggests that the English were highly motivated by Greek-Roman influences that conflated blackness with evil in *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, Chapter One: "Classical Precedents," and pp. 46-58.

220 See Cohen's "On Saracen Enjoyment"; Hankins' "Renaissance Crusaders"

221 Barthelemy, p. 10-11; and see Cohen's "On Saracen Enjoyment"

222 See Smith's *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance: Barbarian Errors*, "Introduction: Barbarous African, Barbarous English, and Transactions of Race"; also Harris's "A Portrait of a Moor"; and Bovilsy's *Barbarous Play*

223 Césaire, p. 2, and Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*, p. 2)

Prospero²²⁴—which, according to some Crusade propaganda and the Black Legend, is synonymous with the term demi-Moor (as mentioned in Chapter One)²²⁵ or half-black—Caliban is expected to possess stereotypical attributes indicative of hypersexuality. As these attributes are commonly applied to black people throughout early modern English history, Caliban’s punishment is thus inevitable. Several current scholars affirm these stereotypical attributes during Shakespeare’s time, namely Daniel Vitkus’ “Turning Tricks,” *Conversions: Gender and Religious Change in Early Modern Europe*, which affirms “the racist association of black identity with base passion and hypersexuality” during the early modern period.²²⁶

Shakespeare is also, of course, thoroughly aware as he appears to attach these stereotypes to Caliban as a consequence of colonial control—not a result of some innate racial biology. Shakespeare blames colonization for Caliban’s hypersexuality and barbarism, as if these stereotypical traits are both the imagination of the colonizer and a symptom of colonization.²²⁷ As Caliban’s enslavement thoroughly contributes to the concept of his otherness and mental instability, we understand that he is not the same person or monster that he was before Prospero. We are shown a sick character, an ill monster, infected only by the subjugation of a white man. More specifically, when Caliban endures a series of tormenting mental breakdowns—in the form verbal rants,

224 *The Tempest* 5.1.275

225 Ashley, Robert, *A Comparison of the English and Spanish Nation* (1589), p. 21, 23...

226 Vitkus, p. 251. Also see 248-251.

227 Though living in pre-colonial England, or before England delves into expansive colonization, Shakespeare is nevertheless aware of the complexities of colonization. In “Surveying “race” in Shakespeare,” Margo Hendricks discovers clues within Shakespeare’s *The Rape of Lucrece* that verifies a complex understanding of colonialism. Moreover, in “Between Prospero and Caliban: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Inter-identity,” Boaventura de Sousa Santos uses dynamics between Prospero and Caliban to better articulate Portuguese colonialism and post-colonialism, further affirming an acute Shakespearean understanding of both institutions.

chronic expressions of agonizing pain, an elevated fear of white torment, and desires to violate Miranda—his dialogue and actions point to colonization as the culprit, not an implied biological schism.

Thus, Shakespeare employs a reactionary mental illness within Caliban when he, like Othello, endures anguish. This illness is also culpable when these characters of color appear to mimic the violence of traditional European colonizers. According to Fanon, when black people are colonized, they often desire to imitate and assimilate with the colonizer, in an effort to become the colonizer's equal.²²⁸ This is not only symptomatic of an acute inferiority complex—which both Fanon and Césaire detail—but indicative of variables consistent with mental dilemmas that foster a need for mental decolonization. Various scholars, such as Mignolo Walter, Prasad Prushkala, and Mohammed Sabrin all suggest that true decolonization involves the removal of intellectual or mental colonization—not just the geographical removal of the colonizer. Marcelo Dascal argues in “Colonizing and Decolonizing Minds” that colonialism imposes “epistemic violence” upon the mindsets of colonized people, causing them to reproduce the same violence, perspectives, and culture that once subjugated them.²²⁹

In parallel fashion, Caliban's desire to rape Miranda mirrors significant desires and actions of European colonizers. Here, Shakespeare is privy to the fact that European colonizers have historically raped natives of the New World and African natives as a way of instituting control—a type of control that, according to Césaire, is a form of “civilization” in the eyes of colonizers.²³⁰ By Shakespeare's time, it was no secret that

228 Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, Chapter 4, “The So-Called Dependency Complex of Colonized Peoples”

229 See Dascal “Colonizing and Decolonizing Minds”

230 In *Discourse on Colonialism*, Césaire asks...

many European conquerors used rape as just another tool that contributed to effective colonization.²³¹ Thus, it is plausible that Shakespeare wants us to ultimately see Caliban's desire to violate Miranda as a reflection of an imposed colonial mindset—consistent with Fanon's "obsessive neurotics" and "complete situational neurosis"²³²—instead of a biological trait indicative of men of color.

The same could be said in reference to Othello. Though Othello's "rape" and murder of Desdemona seems, on the surface, to be a consequence of jealous, animalistic rage, we must not leave out the fact that Othello wishes to emulate those same characters who are modeled after Crusade-era Europeans—Europeans who utilize hatred, enslavement, murder, and rape as weapons of control. Since the Crusades is a significant setting for the play, there are added racial implications associated with Othello's persona. Othello's quest to become white or assimilate requires that he join Europeans in fighting, colonizing, subjugating, and murdering people of color. As the Duke consequently calls

"Colonization and civilization?

In dealing with this subject, the commonest curse is to be the dupe in good faith of a collective hypocrisy that cleverly misrepresents problems, the better to legitimize the hateful solutions provided for them. In other words, the essential thing here is to see clearly, to think clearly - that is, dangerously - and to answer clearly the innocent first question: what, fundamentally, is colonization? To agree on what it is not: neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law. To admit once for all, without flinching at the consequences, that the decisive actors here are the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, and behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point in its history, finds itself obliged, for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale the competition of its antagonistic economies" (pp. 1-2).

231 Césaire states, "Between colonizer and colonized there is room only for forced labor, intimidation, pressure, the police, taxation, theft, rape, compulsory crops, contempt, mistrust, arrogance, self-complacency, swinishness, brainless elites, degraded masses.

No human contact, but relations of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into a class-room monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production" (p. 6).

My turn to state an equation: colonization = "thing-ification" (p. 6).

232 As detailed throughout *Black Skin White Masks*

the Moor “valiant,” then specifically asks a black, atypical Christian-convert soldier to help defeat the Ottoman Turks²³³—people of color whom Othello shares prior-cultural, prior-religious, and some ethnic traits—we understand that Othello’s conditional purpose functions to further his assimilation. Since his acceptance depends on what he can do for white people, Othello has thus become a valuable object, a beneficial weapon or “thing,” ala Césaire’s thing-ification. Inevitably, Shakespeare’s exploited character eventually develops a neurotic mind via Iago’s supremacist deception, provoking the Moor into committing violent, horrific acts—foreshadowing Fanon’s belief that colonization “brings violence to the homes and minds of the subject,”²³⁴ reducing the subject “to the state of an animal.”²³⁵

Dissecting Othello, Caliban, and Aaron’s Assimilation

As various scholars of early modern literature have offered opinions regarding the racial implications surrounding the assimilation or divided identities of Othello, Caliban, and Aaron, I wish to contribute by examining the violent ramifications surrounding their initial psychological desires to pursue whiteness, and how these desires are associated with psychosomatic hybrid identities.

In chronological order, Fanon identifies two processes of racial assimilation that black men are compelled to use by internal or external racialized influences (or both):

First, the process of assimilation by learning a colonizer’s language.²³⁶ And second, the process of assimilation through becoming intimate with or marrying a white

233 *Othello* 1.3.48

234 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 4

235 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 7

236 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Chapter 1, “The Negro and Language”

woman.²³⁷ With both processes, Fanon sees an innate psychological trauma, an inferiority complex, which moves the colonized to replace their original culture—a culture suppressed by colonization and, of course, the very process of assimilation—with a white culture that seems better than the native.

When the colonized learns the language of the colonizer, in Fanon's view, something much more than mere linguistic versatility ensues. The colonized is made to believe that he or she is becoming better, whiter, human, normal:

Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle²³⁸... The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter—that is, he will come closer to being a real human being—in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language.²³⁹

The act of renouncing one's ethnicity, one's language, one's culture, though seemingly voluntary, comes about through involuntary psychological impulses, an "inferiority complex," implanted by colonization, which brainwash the colonized into thinking whiteness is loftier, "civilizing," "real"—and that blackness, in turn is the direct opposite. Native languages hence become "jungle" languages, and native attire, "jungle" attire,

237 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Chapter 2, "The Woman of Color and the White Man"

238 Fanon, p. 9

239 Fanon, p. 8

when juxtaposed to the language and culture of the colonizing white country or “mother country.”

In the case of assimilation through intimacy and/or marriage, Fanon sees a similar devaluing of blackness or devaluing of native cultures. The problem does not come simply because a black man wishes to marry a white woman. On the contrary, Fanon suggests that a psychological problem is imminent or evident if a black man desires to become white by marrying a white woman:

Out of the blackest part of my soul, across the zebra striping of my mind, surges this desire to be suddenly *white*.

I wish to be acknowledged not as *black* but as *white*.

Now—and this is a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged—who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man.

I am a white man.

Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization...

I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness.

When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine.²⁴⁰

Ian Smith concurs with Fanon’s decades-old rhetoric, making his words relevant to Othello. According to Smith, Othello’s linguistic mastery and marriage function as contributors to English political assimilation: “Othello’s rhetorical mastery of the opening sections of the play is, therefore, significant and can be read, along with his assimilative,

240 Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, p. 45

accommodating marriage, as enacting the racial performative commensurate with the political ambitions of Englishmen.”²⁴¹

Moreover, we must not forget how this two-step assimilation process was carried out representatively when the so-called first Africans arrived in England. Less than fifty years before *Othello* was written, a small group of Africans, called “Guineas,” were brought to London. They were a rare spectacle, among the first blacks to be brought to Britain.²⁴² Paralleling Fanon’s two step assimilation process, they were first forced to learn the English language.²⁴³ Subsequently, one of the Africans—who remained in London after the remaining group went home—married a white woman.²⁴⁴ It is not farfetched to estimate that, after so much forced assimilation, this lone African might have felt that marrying a white woman raised his chances of becoming more English, closer to whiteness, or less black. In fact, the marriage was not forbidden,²⁴⁵ despite many racist societal disapprovals in early modern illustrations, literature, etc. The same English influences that moved the African to accept the English language, to dress like the English, to assist English trade, to assume the English religion,²⁴⁶ also may have compelled him to further assimilate through interracial marriage.²⁴⁷ As overwhelming

241 Smith, *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, p. 134. Also see pp. 150-51. Note: On page 134, Smith goes on to explain how *Othello* is “a tragedy that dramatizes the disintegration of linguistic competence.” This coincides with Smith’s 1998 essay “Barbarian Errors: Performing Race in Early Modern England” where he explains that Iago’s “erring barbarian” comment criticizes of Othello’s language (pp.168-69, also found in *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, p. 134)—a criticism which mimics modern white denigration of black-English dialects.

242 Tokson suggests that blacks were first introduced to England in the mid 1550’s. However, Hall notes that many scholars believe that blacks periodically visited England long before this date (p. 3).

243 Smith *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, p. 124

244 Tokson, p. 1

245 Tokson, p. 3; Kaufmann p. 125

246 Smith, *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, pp. 123-25

247 Smith, *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, p. 150

assimilative influences create precedence and dictate to the course of this African's life, the elephants in the room force us to rethink his matrimonial motives, and give the process of unifying with an English woman unique significance toward the idea of assimilatory hybridity. It would thus be irresponsible to think, for example, that the African married a white woman simply because there were no black women around.

We know that Fanon sees this type of marriage, an interracial union of this caliber, as a contribution to white assimilation. I argue that perhaps Shakespeare, who most likely was aware of this popular marriage (occurring just a half century before the first performances of *Othello*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *The Tempest*), was also aware of how Othello and Caliban's assimilation might benefit from uniting with white women, despite predominant societal prejudices against miscegenation.

After all, Caliban appears to explicitly enact the same aforementioned two-step assimilation process as he's colonized by Prospero. Early in the play, he significantly speaks of learning Prospero's language.²⁴⁸ Subsequently, he talks about how he would have "peopled" the island with "Calibans" by having sex with the white Miranda.²⁴⁹

In addition, since Othello's linguistic eloquence (despite his claim that he's "rude"²⁵⁰ in speech, and Iago's claim that Othello's an "erring barbarian"²⁵¹) and gallant fighting already grants him favor with Europeans in the play, his pursuit of Desdemona, a white woman, appears to continue a pattern of acts which move him closer to whiteness.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ *The Tempest* 1.2.437

²⁴⁹ *The Tempest* 1.2.421

²⁵⁰ 1.3.81

²⁵¹ 1.3.342-342

²⁵² In 1693, Rymer claims that Othello won over Desdemona by language: "Desdemona was won by hearing Othello talk" (qtd in K. Newman p. 143). I believe that language is the foremost

Accordingly, Desdemona and Miranda act as potential remedies for Othello and Caliban's displaced identities or alienation. On the surface, Othello appears to love Desdemona, becoming jealous simply because he thinks his wife is cheating with Cassio. However, if Shakespeare is privy to the type of mental anguish that many black individuals with divided identities endure through assessing early modern servile, dominated, subjugated, and/or colonized European black people (whether from late 16th/early 17th century pre-colonial England or colonial European nations) in ways which foreshadow Fanon and Césaire's assessments of modern colonized black people, we must look deeper into Othello's mental breakdown. We must ask ourselves if Othello is mainly worried about Desdemona's alleged infidelity, or largely concerned with an infringement upon his own acceptance into Euro-Christian society. If marrying Desdemona contributes to or solidifies his indoctrination into white culture—serving as a combatant against racial prejudices which seek to alienate him²⁵³—then Desdemona's alleged infidelity impedes Othello's racial integration. Her alleged affair with Cassio distances the Moor from white assimilation. Accordingly, Othello's bouts of rage or mental breakdowns appear to be directed at a woman who jeopardizes his whitewashing in a threatening way—by allegedly sleeping with a white man.

element that makes Shakespeare's characters acceptable, appealing, and worthy of sympathy in the early modern period (and beyond). Early modern white audiences may not have accepted actual black actors (as white actors performed in blackface), or blacks talking in their native tongue, but appear able to accept whitewashed characterizations of blacks. Caliban, Othello, and Aaron of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, share a linguistic eloquence that affirms their whitewashing, making them palatable to audiences. They are worthy of attention because of their level of linguistic assimilation.

253 These racial prejudices verbally target him and are indirectly conveyed through conversations behind his back.

Yes, it surely becomes logical to ask ourselves whether Othello is compelled to rape and murder Desdemona by sheer jealous rage, or an inferiority complex that will stop at nothing to preserve a sense of superiority, or whiteness. The same colonial forces which formulate this image of superiority, of supremacy, educate him on the methodology of garnering superiority through rape and murder. As Othello finds a reputable place in Venetian society through violating and murdering his heritage (a heritage or implied native identity that his mother's handkerchief, for instance, embodies) and/or violating and murdering Turks, the violation and murder of other similar blockades can bring about similar assimilatory successes. By violating and murdering Desdemona, Othello can reclaim any superiority lost via her alleged affair.

But these thoughts, though aligning with white patriarchal supremacy and freedom, are actually deriving from pure psychosis. Having endured racial, cultural, and religious brainwashing, misappropriation, forced conversion, and, nevertheless, racism since being abducted as a slave at a young age²⁵⁴—a culture which conquers non-whites, kills non-whites, and murders the sophistication, identity, and religions of non-whites—then it shouldn't be surprising to witness him utilizing psychotic, violent traits toward Desdemona.²⁵⁵

Since efforts to assimilate or shed his blackness come before his marriage to Desdemona, assimilation can be construed as a significant priority, and his union with a white woman an extension of an assimilative pattern. As marrying Desdemona may grant

254 *Othello* 1.3.132-138; Othello says he was “taken by the insolent foe/And sold to slavery” during his “boyish days.”

255 The same could be said about Shakespeare's Aaron of *Titus Andronicus*. See subsequent pages in this chapter.

him additional acceptance into white society—despite the racialized quarrels raised by Iago and Brabantio—we can assume that his marriage continues habits of assimilation.

So, if maintaining a marriage with Desdemona can distance him from blackness (a racial status that consistently causes characters in the play to conflate him with beasts, evil, and the devil), then the opposite, a fractured marriage, would spiral him toward blackness. Desdemona's alleged infidelity with a white man, or the notion of a black man's wife choosing a white man over him, contributes to Othello's sense of otherness, shattering his chances of being integrated into whiteness.

Like Caliban, Othello sees himself becoming a “thing,” reflecting Césaire's “thing-ification.” As an abnormal inhuman “thing,” Othello's blackness must be unattractive and atypical if it is not good enough for the object of his racial affection. But most importantly, everything he's done to shed his blackness prior to learning about her alleged infidelity—such as becoming a Christian, fighting on the side of Europeans, ridiculing a nation of color, and winning the affection of Europeans (as mentioned before)—has not prevented his wife from having sex with a white man (in his mind). As mentioned before, when a black man who has intentions to assimilate marries a white woman, according to Fanon, he feels as if he's “loved like a white man.”²⁵⁶ This feeling is hence splintered in Othello's mind when the thought of Cassio's sexuality enters the picture. All the superiority and attractiveness that Cassio possesses as a European supersedes Othello's efforts to whitewash himself and gain acceptance into the “human,” “normal,” “real” or “white” world. Hence, he succumbs to reactionary insane rage.

256 Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, Chapter 2

Likewise, before Aaron encourages Tamora's sons to rape Lavinia, and before Aaron's act of rage against the Nurse (who, in racist fashion, says his biracial child is "as loathsome as a toad / amongst the fair-faced breeders of our clime,"²⁵⁷ meaning that Aaron's child is repulsive amidst beautiful white bearers of children), and before his raging diatribe against white oppression in Act Five of *Titus Andronicus*—a diatribe that white characters attribute to insanity—we see that Aaron's struggles with assimilation, racial hybridity, and/or influential white oppression are similar to Othello and Caliban's. Despite the cloud of historical criticism which paints Aaron as a pure evil villain, the most evil villain in all of Shakespeare's plays, we must realize that he, like Othello and Caliban, is colonized and suffers from the same psychological patterns deriving from assimilation.

First and foremost, Aaron is the only character in *Titus Andronicus* who would be viewed as barbarous without any evil deeds. Before Bassianus is aware of any evil acts committed by Aaron, he calls him a "barbarous Moor."²⁵⁸ Here, Bassianus is clearly upset with Aaron for sharing a moment of interracial intimacy with Tamora. When Bassianus is killed shortly after, we realize that his racist attack against Aaron is the only thing he does wrong in the play—the only sin that warrants Shakespeare's punishment.

Like Bassianus, Lavinia shows equal pre-judging disdain toward Aaron, calling his interracial relationship a "raven-colored love,"²⁵⁹ and referring to him as a "hound."²⁶⁰ Here, she targets Aaron's black skin and joins several white characters in the play and other Shakespearean plays who refer to black characters as "dogs," aligning with Leo

257 4.2.67-68

258 2.3.78

259 2.3.83

260 2.3.70

Africanus' habit of calling black Africans "dogs" in *Historie* (as mentioned before).

Lavinia also seems to beckon her subsequent torture after making such racist slurs, because, like Bassanius, she is guilty of just one wrong doing—racism.

Lucius also pre-judges Aaron when calling him a "barbarous beastly villain"²⁶¹ (Lucius is not aware of Aaron's actual deeds yet—only Demetrius and Chiron's). This comes of no surprise, because, in Act Three, Lucius doesn't protest when Titus and Marcus compare Aaron to a "black fly" in a very racist way—a black fly that should be killed as if it's nothing. Titus says "Yet, I think, we are not brought so low, / But that between us we can kill a fly / That comes in likeness of a coal-black Moor,"²⁶² concurring with Marcus' idea to view the Moor as a black fly. In their eyes, Aaron "coal-black" skin makes him grossly inferior, and stereotypically attaches him to barbarity, including hypersexuality or a natural predisposition to commit rape (immediately before Titus debases Aaron's "coal-black" skin, he blames Aaron Moor for "Com[ing] hither to purposely poison"²⁶³).

Although Aaron does influence Tamora's sons, Demetrius and Chiron, to commit rape, we should realize that they, along with Tamora, are Aaron's direct rulers. He is their slave. Thus, as Goths are also guilty of the same types of heinous acts, they, as masters and teachers of Aaron, become responsible for his evil deeds. If the Goths and Romans are applying a type of colonial pressure that compels black people to assimilate—the same hegemonic pressure that moves Othello and Caliban to emulate whiteness—then Tamora, Demetrius, Chiron, and other Goths are also inviting Aaron to imitate them.

261 5.1.97

262 3.2.1523-1525

263 3.2.1520

Being white slave masters, they, reflecting many early modern European slave masters, have the power to restrict Aaron's freedom, to involuntarily or voluntarily urge assimilation, relegating his success or failure in a white society. Though Aaron appears to mastermind rape and violence, they are the ultimate masterminds, because Aaron is a product of Goth culture, Goth colonialism, Goth barbarism, Goth hypersexuality, etc. When Aaron says to Tamora "no more,"²⁶⁴ he puns on the term "Moor," implying that he is no longer a Moor, but assimilated. When the Nurse asks Aaron "did you see Aaron the Moor?,"²⁶⁵ Aaron responds "more or less, or ne'er a whit at all,"²⁶⁶ once more alluding to the shedding of his ethnicity via assimilation.

The same psychosomatic influences that move black people to mimic their white rulers (ala Fanon, Mignola, etc.), or gain their favor, exists within Aaron. He is not an independent individual, despite the manner in which he coerces so many white characters to carry out evil acts. His survival is based on what he can do for them. This is why Aaron, unlike Iago, does not directly benefit from his evil schemes. Aaron's plans promise prosperous outcomes for Tamora, her sons, and Tamora's child (who Aaron fathers)—but not himself. Aaron's profits are indirect. The more he appeases Tamora, the more he acquires whiteness.

In Act Two, Scene One, Aaron proclaims his selflessness, undying loyalty, and/or "Uncle Tomness" in a short soliloquy:

Now climbeth Tamora Olympus top

Safe out of fortune's shot, and sits aloft,

²⁶⁴ 2.3.52,

²⁶⁵ 4.2.52

²⁶⁶ 4.2.53

Secure of thunder's crack or lightning flash,

Advanced above pale envy's threat'ning reach²⁶⁷

Here, Aaron praises Tamora's ascent to empresshood, taking joy in her success. His delight is fueled by her superiority, especially her advancement above "pale envy" or Roman envy. In subsequent lines, Aaron wishes to rise in success with Tamora, who is also his lover:

Then, Aaron, arm thy heart and fit thy thoughts

To mount aloft with thy imperial mistress

And mount her pitch whom thou in triumph long

Hast prisoner held, fettered in amorous chains

And faster bound to Aaron's charming eyes²⁶⁸

"Mount[ing] aloft" and "mount[ing] her pitch" describes the act of rising to her level, but is also sexually suggestive. Aaron shows a glimmer of hypersexuality when alluding to "mount[ing]" her in a dominant sexual way, and in binding Tamora to his eyes with "amorous chains." However, Aaron immediately reveals that his ultimate desire lies in serving Tamora:

Away with slavish weeds and servile thoughts

I will be bright, and shine in pearl and gold

To wait upon this new-made empress.²⁶⁹

Here, after imagining an upgrade in clothing—from slavish weeds (attire) to "bright" shining "pearl and gold"—and after wishing "away [his] servile thoughts," Aaron's looks

267 2.1.1-4

268 2.1.12-16

269 2.1.18-20

forward to using his newfound physical and mental wealth only “to wait upon this new-made empress.” More peculiar is the fact that Aaron’s eager anticipation for continued servitude or slavery contradicts the idea of wishing away “servile thoughts,” and undermines desires to rise to Tamora’s level. His divided identity creates an inconsistent reality as it brews imaginations of near racial equality before reverting back to a contrasting servile mentality. Just as he imagines rising with Tamora via assimilation, the notion of blackness relegates him to subservience. Yes, he can receive nice attire—most likely from Tamora—but he can’t receive the freedom to escape slavery. Perhaps colonization prevents him from ever actually wanting anything other than servitude. Or perhaps he’s more delusional in believing that he, as a slave, can nevertheless rise in status with her. Slaves of royalty in early modern England often received immaculate attire and higher privileges, as Shakespeare indicates with Othello. However, black slaves could not escape biased laws, biased edicts, white cultural restrictions, false accusations, stereotypes, social degradation, segregation—all those things white royalty commonly avoided.

Double Consciousness, Code-Switching, and Consequential Pain in Shakespeare’s

Characters of Color

As W.E.B. Du Bois recognizes inherent horrors associated with racialization, significant experiential references to elevated pain appear in *Souls of Black Folk*. Double consciousness, according to Du Bois, describes the conflicting identities within many black individuals—two repelling individualities conflated by means of oppression or, in Du Bois’ words, “two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone

keeps it from being torn asunder.”²⁷⁰ According to Du Bois, the black self, the essential black person, searches for a natural sense of worth, embraces the hope of independence, and desires to live as a human. This black self, this raw, human consciousness, remains at odds with the colonized or oppressed or assimilated or “white” self—a product of socio-political and economic racialization that causes voluntary or involuntary code-switching. Code-switching describes situations where black individuals speak or act unnaturally with the intention of appeasing white people. In other words, code-switching occurs when black individuals artificially talk “white” or act “white” in order to blend into white society, or be more acceptable and not cause white societal rejection or individual white rejection. As far back as 1895, African Americans like Paul Laurence Dunbar articulated the theory of code-switching in their own way. Dunbar describes code-switching as wearing a mask that “grins and lies” in the face of white people.²⁷¹

Many black Americans possess inherent mechanisms of pain caused by embracing their natural black identity. And, since this identity is prone to the tenets of elevated terror in America—racial slurs, racial profiling, implicit bias, socio-economic discrimination, socio-political discrimination, systemic racism, lynching, police violence, hate crimes, ghettoization—forming a white identity may lessen or relieve or take away each of the aforementioned historical painful terrors. Whether the elevated pain of African Americans comes from the psychological torture of such collective historical racism, or terrorizing individual sensory experiences, being an African American, possessing double consciousness, and being relegated to code-switching, in the past and present, is a unique problem. W.E.B. Du Bois concurs, admitting the fact that, as a black

270 Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chapter 1: Of our Spiritual Strivings

271 Dunbar, “We Wear the Mask”

American “being a problem is a strange experience,—peculiar even for one who has never been anything else.”²⁷²

Foreshadowing Du Bois’ double consciousness theory with accuracy, Othello’s natural identity is in conflict with the identity he aspires to be—the identity that is formed “through the eyes of others”²⁷³ or the eyes of white characters. Likewise, Caliban shows signs of possessing double consciousness: a colonial oppressive mentality alongside his natural native self. On one hand he longs for his former heritage again, and periodically censures the colonization of Prospero. On the other hand, he is glad to become Stephano’s slave—happy to serve another white slave master. In between these identities he suffers, he groans in anguish, appearing emotionally, mentally, and physical fractured. Just as Du Bois wants us to see the psychological anguish of wrestling with two identities via colonization, Shakespeare also reveals a design of psychological damage associated with Othello and Caliban’s contradictory racial identities.

The design is applied to the Aaron. Through an ever-present servile mentality that is driven by desires to assimilate and/or please Tamora, a white woman, Aaron’s black self or black individuality is suppressed, and selflessness enlarged. By placing Tamora on a pedestal and relegating himself “To wait[ing] upon this new-made empress,” Aaron secures a fundamental notion of selflessness and contentment with being a slave—with being ultimately inferior to white superiority. Yet he plays the Machiavellian villain throughout the play, and periodically rails against white superiority, affirming a contradictory mindset.

272 Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chapter 1: Of our Spiritual Strivings

273 Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Chapter 1: Of our Spiritual Strivings

Othello exhibits double consciousness and a will to code-switch when he downgrades people of color, Turks—who possess Othello’s prior-culture, prior-religion, and, in some instances, Othello’s ethnicity—then turns around in contradictory fashion and reveals misgivings about distancing from his native culture. This coincides with Fanon’s theory of the two-dimensional black man,²⁷⁴ in addition to Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness. When Othello reminisces about the history of his mother’s handkerchief, we see that he still holds on to an essential part of his ethnic heritage—one that white Venetian culture connects with barbarism.²⁷⁵ Despite being a servant and contributor of Venetian white supremacy, he has not completely disowned the idea of African magic. Witnessing Othello cherish his native culture/ancestry on one hand, then rail against Muslim Ottoman Turks in a racist manner on the other,²⁷⁶ allows us to identify two abrasive dimensions, consciousnesses within him: one identity that wishes to align with white biases for the sake of white appeasement lives alongside another identity that wishes to embrace a natural native heritage in opposition to white appeasement. The cognizant nature of this nonsensical dichotomy not only points toward a psychological schism that writes Othello’s disability, but gives us a good idea of how individually overbearing, how individually hegemonic white oppression has been and still is. Though

274 In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon says: “The black man has two dimensions. One with his fellows, the other with the white man. A Negro behaves differently with a white man and with another Negro. That this self-division is a direct result of colonialist subjugation is beyond question” (p. 8).

275 *Othello* 3.5

276 Othello denigrates or condescends to Muslim Ottomans who were both geographically and stereotypically associated with Moors: “Are we turned Turks, and to ourselves do that / Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites? / For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl!” (2.3.170-3). Though English and European whites attribute the same barbarous traits to Moors, Othello seems to exclude himself from these stereotypes, preferring to classify himself as a Christian rather than a Moor

Othello is a powerful, smart hero, and though I am a strong and intelligent scholar, we cannot get around the ever-powerful, ever-cunning, ever-present power of white oppression as individual black men.

With Aaron, Caliban, and Othello, a union with a white woman also serves to quell their black identities and offer relief from racial pain. Forming interracial relationships grants them the opportunity to procreate, and perpetually shed blackness, or whitewash their legacy through children who are less black. (Franz Fanon seems to believe that this is a primary way for black men to assimilate in Chapter 2 of *Black Skin White Masks*.²⁷⁷) Unfortunately, as interracial reproduction is a notable topic of concern during the early modern period, miscegenation appears to exist as an essence of white fears against interracial marriage. This is most notable in Cinthio's "Un Capitano Moro," a primary source text for *Othello*, where the moral of the story is geared to prevent white women from marrying and having sex with black men. As mentioned in Chapter One, Reginald Scot's very influential *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* describes the manner in which English society equates impregnation by a black Moor to impregnation by the devil. This is also notable in the many long-existing laws against miscegenation in early modern England and throughout American history. In America laws against miscegenation in the South lasted last from the mid 1600s until 1967.²⁷⁸

277 Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, Chapter 2

278 See Vitkus, "Turning Tricks," *Conversions: Gender and Religious Change in Early Modern Europe*. Also, the conversation of miscegenation in reference to *Othello* would be aimless without knowledge of an evoked text. "Un Capitano Moro," a story in Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*—written just fifty years or so before Shakespeare's adaptation—paints the Moor as a gullible, temperamental figure. After marrying Disdemona (later Desdemona in Shakespeare's version), the Ensign (later Iago), in an effort to punish the bride, tricks the Moor into killing her. Unlike Shakespeare's adaptation, there is little sympathy for the Moor, and he's shown no mercy for murdering a white woman. In a vengeful, hateful way, the Moor is tortured and massacred by Disdemona's family, producing a motif which seems to deter white women from choosing dark-

Iago also materializes this fear of miscegenation by telling Brabantio that the offspring of Othello will be “beasts” and “neigh” like horses.²⁷⁹ Throughout the beginning of the play Iago expresses particular concern over interracial reproduction: “you’ll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse. You’ll have your nephews neigh to you. You’ll have coursers for cousins and gennets for Germans...I am one, sir, that comes to tell you your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs”²⁸⁰. Here, Iago uses racist insults consistent with some racist Crusade propaganda. By equating Othello to an African horse and Othello’s potential offspring to strong and Spanish horses (a “courser” is a strong horse and a “gennet” is a small Spanish horse)—and by calling Othello a Sagittary later in the scene (or Sagittarius, who is half-man, half horse)—Iago applies notions of barbarism to a black-skinned man, just as European propaganda illustrates Ottoman warriors, often called Saracens, as black beasts or

skinned men. Just before her death, even Disdemona attests to such a cautionary deterrence: “much I fear that I shall prove a warning to young girls not to marry against the wishes of their parents, and that the Italian ladies may learn from me not to wed a man who nature and habitude of life estrange from us” (p. 4). In fact, the story opens with a didactic statement which anticipates an ultimate moral: “although the parents of the lady strove all they could to induce her to take another husband, she consented to marry the Moor” (p. 1). This racist, supposedly-edifying preclusion prepares us for an overarching lesson that culminates with Disdemona’s death. In short, the audience is taught to shy away from interracial marriage. If Disdemona’s decision to marry a dark, non-European ultimately ends in death, perhaps marrying outside of one’s race might induce the same fate in reality.

²⁷⁹ Throughout the beginning of the play Iago expresses particular concern over interracial reproduction: “you’ll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse. You’ll have your nephews neigh to you. You’ll have coursers for cousins and gennets for Germans...I am one, sir, that comes to tell you your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs” (1.1.110-115). Here Iago uses insults consistent with some Crusade propaganda. By equating Othello to an African horse, his potential offspring to strong and Spanish horses (a “courser” is a strong horse and a “gennet” is a small Spanish horse)—and by calling him a Sagittary later in the scene (or Sagittarius, who is half-man, half horse)—Iago applies notions of barbarism to a black-skinned man, just as European propaganda illustrates Ottoman warriors, often called Saracens, as black beasts or monsters. Iago’s words also reflect racist English societal fears depicted in a seventeenth century broadside illustration called “The Gelding of the Devil” (where a white man castrates a black devil).

²⁸⁰ 1.1.110-115

monsters. Iago's words also reflect racist English societal fears depicted in a seventeenth century broadside illustration called "The Gelding of the Devil," where a white man castrates a black devil.

Yet, the very thing that Iago is afraid of, interracial reproduction, could essentially save Othello from racial alienation. Therefore, my purpose for delineating Iago's fear is to convey the high significance of miscegenation here. Shakespeare seems aware of the societal consequences of miscegenation, whether negative or positive. To Shakespeare, it appears obvious that Othello, a man bent on being accepted into white society, would see the potential benefits of code-switching in the form of interracial reproduction, contrasting Iago's bigoted view.

Aaron's interracial relationship brings forth a child that satisfies his desire to assimilate. Aaron loves his mixed or biracial child more than himself, knowing that the child is a reflection of Tamora, of whiteness, his world. Despite the fact that the child is described as a "*blackamoor child*,"²⁸¹ one who could never be heir to the throne, Aaron calls the child an "heir,"²⁸² and tells Demetrius and Chiron—whom he calls "white limed walls"²⁸³—that the child is nevertheless their "brother."²⁸⁴ When the Nurse ridicules Aaron's child in a very racist way by calling it a "devil,"²⁸⁵ describing the racially mixed child as "a joyless, dismal, black, and sorrowful issue,"²⁸⁶ Aaron conversely defends blackness by responding "Is black so base a hue?"²⁸⁷ and "Coal-black is better than

281 4.2.51

282 4.4.91

283 4.2.97

284 4.2.87

285 4.2.64

286 4.2.66

287 4.2.71

another hue / In that it scorns to bear another hue.”²⁸⁸ However, in an effort to secure his child’s life, Aaron, in Act Five, divulges his role in “murders, rapes, and massacres,”²⁸⁹ calling them acts of “black night, abominable deeds.”²⁹⁰ He also claims to openly admit to many evil deeds “like a black dog.”²⁹¹ He doesn’t connect his child’s blackness to these atrocities, just as he doesn’t implicate Tamora. The whiteness that graces the child and Tamora appears to prevent the horrors of stereotypical blackness in his fractured contradictory mind.

A constant mental tug-of-war between pain and pleasure, and allusions of pain and pleasure, lies at the core Du Bois’ theory of double consciousness, and thus at the core of Othello, Aaron, and Caliban’s personas. Though Othello, Aaron, Caliban, and many past and present African Americans (mentioned by Du Bois) who experience the dichotomous qualities of double consciousness accept—on the surface—some sense of socio-political contentment and/or economic satisfaction via racial assimilation, the ever-present cancer of blatant and systemic racism perpetually sustains allusions and realities of pain.

It is pain that ultimately shines in the most popular scenes of Shakespeare’s tragedies, histories, and comedies. Shakespeare’s unique way of conveying humanity relies on strategic exemplifications of pain which often include death. The love pains of Romeo and Juliet, and the pain encompassing and emitting from their deaths, spark our continuous memory of the play. Hamlet’s “to be or not to be” speech, which ponders

288 4.2.98-99

289 5.1.63

290 5.1.64

291 5.1.122

death in an emotionally painful, philosophical way, is probably the most popular piece of Shakespearean dialogue. And we mustn't forget how painfully memorable, how powerful, the death of Desdemona has been in the face of generations.

We are forced to deduce that Othello's act of "rape" and murder, as well as Caliban's attempted rape, and Aaron's violent manipulateness—the pain they cause, and the pain which causes it—are parts of Shakespeare's idea of humanity, specifically the oppressed or colonized or racialized portions of humanity. Just as we do not condemn but overlook the human recklessness of Hamlet in favor of embracing him as a hero, Shakespeare wishes to evoke similar empathetic feelings for his black characters through pain and death. If horrific recollections of white oppression (which include colossal physical and mental suffering) spark the most powerful feelings available to the hybrid psyches of diasporic figures of color, then we know that Caliban, Othello, and even Aaron are not responsible for their recklessness. Aaron specifically alludes to this in Act Five of *Titus Andronicus*, claiming that he committed "a thousand dreadful things / as willingly as one would kill a fly."²⁹² Here, Aaron sees Titus' act of killing a black fly as a point of reference. Aaron is merely mimicking the violent deeds of white colonizers or white masters or white oppressors.

Just before Othello kills himself, he talks about killing a "turbaned Turk"²⁹³ who "beat a Venetian"²⁹⁴ and defamed the "state."²⁹⁵ Othello, now privy to Iago's racist manipulation, says he "took by th' throat the circumcised dog"²⁹⁶ and "smote him thus,"²⁹⁷

292 5.1.142

293 5.2.346

294 5.2.347

295 5.2.347

296 5.2.348

297 5.2.349

stabbing himself in demonstration. It was the state, the white powers of Venetian society, that drove Othello defend a white man and kill a man of color. We feel Othello's regret as his suicide shows deep remorse for such blind servitude fueled by a controlling white state.

And we mustn't forget how Caliban tells Prospero that learning his language, which is emblematic of Prospero's colonialism and culture, teaches or directs Caliban to curse (also emblematic of Prospero's white oppression): "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is I know how to curse."²⁹⁸

Despite scholarly double standards which have been applied to the aforementioned characters of color for centuries, we should not be quick to extol the white Hamlet and squash the black Aaron. Both men are responsible for killing innocent characters—and both have tragic, human excuses. Though Hamlet's white privilege prevents him from tortuously paying for his crimes via such sentences as Aaron's near lynching and live burial (from the chest down), make no mistake, Hamlet is still a murderer. His white skin should not make him more worthy of praise—just as Aaron's black face shouldn't make him less worthy. Human fallacy and strong immorality move Hamlet to recklessly murder Polonius and spiral Ophelia to insanity and death, just as human fallacy and strong immorality—both of which expand under white oppression—move Aaron to influence violence and spiral Lavinia to insanity and death.

As double consciousness also causes inner perceptive relationships between racial superiority and racial inferiority to result in the suppression or overshadowing of black

298 1.2.362

beauty—especially when that which is deemed small is oppressed by perceptual greatness—one’s black face in the mirror is a constant reminder of pain. Even in cases where one’s black face or skin color is accepted but deemed less enjoyable or less beautiful than white skin, a constant image of mediocrity in the mirror serves as an equal perpetual nuisance. Because the superiority of white beauty renders natural or artificial enjoyable emotions inferior within many black people, the aesthetic properties of natural blackness (when emotionally juxtaposed or expressively combined with whiteness) are rendered subordinate to properties of white consciousness, depleting the impression of black beauty in the mirror—a mirror which often transcends from two dimensional reflections to the human mirror of black society. Thus, when a person living with an intrinsic confliction or double consciousness²⁹⁹ suffers inexorable pain via black attributes, the person may seek recourse by outwardly embracing white attributes or code-switching.

The most intriguing Shakespearean display of this psychological phenomenon lies in Caliban’s desire to embrace Stephano’s white power in an effort to escape pain brought on by Prospero’s whiteness. Caliban dispenses with any further acts of re-discovering his native identity in favor of an alternate ruler connected to the core cause of his own psychological pain. In other words, he subjects himself to another white slave master. Caliban’s reminiscent thoughts of life before Prospero, of his mother Sycorax, of freedom, of pleasure, is not preferred when a potential replacement for Prospero, Stephano, comes into the picture.

299 One of which is conceived by extraneous oppression and the other by natural motivations.

But, unlike Prospero, Stephano uses alcohol to induce Caliban's servitude, just as black slaves were often controlled by alcohol.³⁰⁰ Caliban's inebriation becomes a catalyst for further psychosomatic behavior as it causes him to irrationally embrace a different white slave master who—through dissimilar methods which coincide with similar, Prospero-like, oppressive motivations—heaps powerful pain upon him.

If we view this use of alcohol and Prospero's magical power as an emblem of European technological prowess—a type of prowess that plundered endless indigenous and African nations—then it is understandable that Caliban pairs terrorizing magical power to whiteness. Before becoming Stephano's slave, he sees a white man (Trinculo) coming toward him, immediately believing it is the spirit of Prospero coming to further torture him: “Lo, now, lo! Here comes a spirit of his, and to torment me.”³⁰¹

If Caliban's pleasure from alcohol causes him to subject himself to another individual who harnesses pain's supremacy, then the potential of genuine happiness becomes exceptionally low, especially since oppressed, psychologically poisoned individuals like Caliban possess identities which are shaped by artificial means, keeping him under the thumb of whiteness. Living with characteristics that are formed by extraneous economic, social, political, and religious supremacy produces a two-fold type of servitude. In essence, the oppressed individual is both physically subordinate and mentally subservient to “the powers that be.” This paradigm, in my view, is essential to understanding the double-faceted prospects of African American suffering. Like other

300 In their popular slave narratives, Olaudah Equiano, an 18th century black man who was enslaved in England and America, and Fredrick Douglass, a 19th century former American slave, both speak about how white slave masters commonly used of alcohol to control and/or subdue black slaves.

301 2.2.14-15

minority groups, the affixation of dominant painful characteristics makes many African Americans (past or present) susceptible to undesirable destinies—crime, violence, death.

Or worse, solitude—like Caliban’s solitude on the island. Yes, Prospero, Miranda, and Ariel inhabit the island too, but Caliban’s enslavement and constant degradation ostracizes him from their society.³⁰² He hasn’t an equal or companion. Although Ariel—a character who, unlike Caliban, is not associated with physical or symbolic skin color—is a slave, she is not treated with the same indignant disgrace as Caliban.

Othello’s feeling of solitude just before he commits suicide also comes to mind. Since his reputation within white society is virtually gone, along with Desdemona, he is utterly alone.

The Moorish Eleazar from Dekker’s *Lust’s Dominion*, and the Moor from Middleton’s *Triumphs*, are alienated or emotionally ostracized by the eyes of white people who stare at them, and demean their blackness.

But Aaron is probably the most alone of all the aforementioned characters of color, as he is threatened with lynching—the only character in Shakespeare’s plays who is nearly lynched³⁰³ (reflecting centuries of black men, from early modern England to 1960s America, who were lynched by white oppressors). He is left in the hands of several

302 Societal exclusion is also very prevalent with real-life diasporic black people, especially contemporary and past African Americans—as well as other marginalized American citizens—especially when incorporating the lens of double consciousness. In *Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois feels that racialization creates a symbolic “veil” that shuts him off from society, causing him and other black Americans to endure the elevated pain of solitude: “Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows” (2). Because this solitude persists via one’s identity, the effects are perpetual. As racial categorization and discrimination comes by way of skin color and collective social supremacy, the black American *naturally* (or inherently) endures pain, and cannot simply thwart the commonalities of identity politics through reasonable paths.

303 5.1.53

white characters who aim to torture him with racial insults and cruel execution.³⁰⁴

Knowing that his white master—and personal efforts to maintain his white master's favor—cannot help him now, he verbally defends himself. As his words which censure racial discrimination are rejected by his white accusers, he and racial justice are utterly alone.

304 5.1.20-151

*In the old age, black was not counted fair,
Or, if it were, it bore not beauty's name;
But now is black beauty's successive heir,
And beauty slandered with a bastard shame.*

--Shakespeare³⁰⁵

Chapter Three: Demonizing and Beautifying Black Skin

Demonizing Blackness through the Blackwashing of Turks

The twelfth century French epic *Chanson de Roland*, a Crusades narrative, portrays anti-Christian Saracen warriors as “black-skinned people...each one of them...blacker far than ink” who “have large noses” and great outstretched ears.”³⁰⁶ The large noses, outstretched ears, and black skin resemble common European depictions of the devil. These physical attributes not only symbolize anti-Christian values, but equate Christian enemies to animals, preserving a substantially racial tone. Vernagu, another Saracen warrior who appears in the fourteenth century English poem “Rouland and Vernagu” is also described (and illustrated in paintings) as a devilish black man, black as pitch lines³⁰⁷ with horns.³⁰⁸ Other popular Crusade villains include Alagolfare, the Ethiopian giant whose “skin was black and hard” and Ysore, another black Saracen

305 Sonnet 127, lines 1-4

306 Lines 1917-1918, and 1933 from *The Song of Roland*, translated by Howard S. Robertson in 1972.

307 Lines 1913-21

308 “Roland and Vernagu” in *The English Charlemagne Romances*, edited by Sidney Hertridge in 1882, pp. 482-84

giant.³⁰⁹ Even Richard Coer de Lyon, after he's offered a black head of a Saracen to eat, says "What devyl is this!"³¹⁰

Throughout the medieval and early modern period, literature which fuses devilishness and blackness periodically appears in Europe.³¹¹ They align with centuries of letters, sermons, illustrations, masques, and dramas that serve to villainize the enemies of European-Christianity. Muslim Turks were mythicized and typecast in efforts to bolster European participation in the Crusades.

Maiers' *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology: Model Sermons for the Preaching of the Cross*, Hankins' "Renaissance Crusaders," and Riley-Smith's *Crusades: A History* all agree that Crusade propaganda was an aggressive effort (especially during the early modern period). But few scholars emphasize the portion of Crusade propaganda which uses racialization as a weapon. Some seemingly thorough scholars, like Maiers and Jonathan Riley-Smith, do not mention the "blackwashing" of Ottoman Turks or any Crusade-era black stereotypes at all. Even if black stereotypical propaganda may have been a relatively small part of all Crusade propaganda, its existence reverberates throughout medieval and early modern history. It is a fact that every English masque that contains black characters, and virtually all early modern English plays that have black characters (and/or Muslims), include stereotypes indicative of the aforementioned Crusade propaganda. Shakespeare's only play that features a Moor as a starring character,

309 See Barthelemy's *Black Face, Maligned Race*

310 *Richard Coer de Lyon*, Ed by Peter Larkin, p. 93

311 Even during the Salem Witch Trials in America, accused individuals would consistently claim to have seen the devil in the form of a black man ("The Salem Witch Trials, 1692.").

and all his plays which incorporate Moorish characters, just so happen to be inundated with these racialized stereotypes.

Over thirty years ago, Barthelemy's *Black Face Maligned Race* affirms the significance of racial demonization in some Crusade propaganda, citing countless examples of literature that stained Turks with mythical and stereotypical blackness. Since then, a few Crusade scholars, like Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, author of "On Saracen Enjoyment," have corroborated his claims, but virtually no other Crusades scholar denies the periodical, international, Euro-Christian effort to villainize Muslims by painting their skin black.

Apart from the imaginative mythical elements of many Muslim depictions, the racial connotations, which are often displayed as truth, actually excessively ostracize fact. Most Ottoman Turks were not black. In fact, Ottomans possessed black slaves, just as their European enemies. According to Ronald C. Jennings' "Black Slaves and Free Blacks in Ottoman Cyprus, 1550-1640," black slaves and free blacks were common in the Ottoman Empire,³¹² but there is no evidence that they outnumbered non-black Ottoman Turks. Although Jennings additionally states that "black slaves from Africa south of the Sahara were much in demand in the Ottoman empire in the 16th and 17th centuries,"³¹³ it is evident, at least according to A. Raymond, that black slaves were probably not commonly used as soldiers (even though there's a much higher probability that more blacks fought for Turks than European Christians during the Crusades).

312 Jennings pp. 287, 294

313 Jennings, p. 286

Mamluk slaves, who were primarily non-black, were “purchased for and capable of performing as soldiers.”³¹⁴

Despite these facts—facts which would have been available to many European-Christian travelers—medieval/early modern white propaganda would beg to differ. Thus, when estimating why certain early modern Muslim/ethnic characters were surrounded by racial stereotypes—as well as ethnic characters who converted to Christianity, like Othello and Aaron—it is only logical to examine widespread stereotypes which drive audience demand and adhere to existing audience perception (synonymous with societal perception).³¹⁵ When reading racial stereotypes contained in *Othello*’s dialogue and some early Crusade propaganda, we see that unreliable information about dark-skinned people pre-date the proliferation of factual racial information in Europe. Even Barthelemy posits that “Englishmen had witnessed black characters on the stage long before they saw real black men,”³¹⁶ heightening the possibility that false stereotypical influences from theatrical images held a much stronger, historical position in English society. We can thus determine with confidence that most black characters of medieval England and the English Renaissance largely stem from bigoted presuppositions—whether authors ultimately wished to push back against them or not. Elliot H. Tokson’s *The Popular*

314 qtd in Jennings p. 296

315 By stating that “the three greatest influences on the representation of blacks [are] English politics, social, and theatrical history” (x), Barthelemy suggests that at least a portion of English views of blacks are fictitious, or based on plays which do not always coincide with factual racial information. By claiming that “it is impossible to imagine that political and social events did not influence the way Englishmen saw Africans” (x), Barthelemy, alluding to socio-political anti-Muslim or Crusade propaganda—which spread much derogatory, fabricated information about Ottoman “blacks”³¹⁵ throughout Europe—actually implies that bigoted stereotypes influence English views of Africans, providing historical context for false portrayals of blacks in theatre. Thus, theatrical images of blacks both derive from socio-political propaganda and contribute to predominant socio-political misinformation.

316 Barthelemy, p. x

Image of the Black Man in English Drama, 1550-1688 (another old but very reliable text)

concur, suggesting that some early modern writers—though privy to some factual information—were prone to create negative portrayals of blacks:

[In] the drama of the period from 1550 to 1688...the image of the black man that the writers molded [came] from whatever information was available to them.

Whether these sources of information were the writer's works or earlier commentators or the oral and written reports of contemporary travelers, or whether the writers were affected by their own psychological disposition of black skin or by the total cultural climate in which slavery was becoming a dominant force, the resulting image tended to be markedly consistent and strongly negative.³¹⁷

Barthelemy concedes Tokson's claim, but adds that—as more Englishmen traveled internationally and came in contact with real blacks—theatrical representations of blacks contain a mixture of stereotypes and realism:

The theatrical history of blackness was not lost when Englishmen became familiar with Africans. Indeed, earlier representations of blackness seemed to receive reconfirmation and validation from the tales with which explorers returned home.

The theatrical past combined with knowledge of the world beyond Christendom to give us Aaron and Othello and other black Moors. But these Moors helped to create a new theatrical convention with its own history.³¹⁸

This new convention which begins to incorporate more factual images of black people in early modern theatre seems evident in 1603, when Shakespeare may have written

317 Tokson, p. ix

318 Barthelemy, p. x

Othello. Although stereotypical language from the play's white characters may reflect existing prejudicial views of audiences, ultimate authorial condemnations of such characters in the play (namely Iago, the play's premier racist character) may reflect sparse, increasing changes in audience/societal perception.

Shakespeare Condemns the Demonization of Blackness in *Othello*

Throughout the play—sometimes between the lines of racist dialogue—we see symbolic and allegorical pushbacks against the demonization of blackness. These authorial attempts to tackle racism would seem somewhat appropriate or less controversial if portions of audiences were also learning truths about ethnic individuals, sparking collective mentalities that would suppress traditional stereotypes.³¹⁹

In *Othello*, it would thus be logical for Shakespeare to address the stupidity of racial prejudice in a time of growing progressivism by criticizing dialogic reflections of traditional audience/societal racism. In fact, Shakespeare seems to satirically create absurd racist language, hoping that prejudicial mindsets might absorb the ridiculousness of bigotry which historically demoralizes blacks. At the beginning of the play, Iago, knowing about the union of Othello and Desdemona, ridiculously cries to Brabantio, Desdemona's father:

Awake! what, ho Brabantio! thieves! thieves!

Look to your house, your daughter and your bags!

319 Other theatrical efforts across England during the late sixteenth/early seventeenth century also reflect increasing non-prejudicial views, namely plays which depict blacks as heroes, such as Thomas Southerne's *Oroonoko*. The original *Oroonoko* (1688), a work of prose fiction by novelist and playwright Aphra Behn, was used to create Southerne's play of the same title in 1695. It "was the first play to have an African slave as its hero" (Barthelemy ix).

Thieves! thieves!...

Sir, you're robb'd; for shame, put on your gown;

Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul;

Even now, now, very now, an old black ram

Is topping your white ewe...

Sir...

you'll have your daughter covered with a

Barbary horse...

I am one, sir, that comes to tell you your daughter and

the Moor are now making the beast with two backs³²⁰

Here, though channeling traditional societal fears of black Moors—specifically the manner in which traditional English mindsets compare blacks to animals—Iago's exaggerated tone and ludicrous comparisons project an air of silliness. Surely, if Iago was sincerely worried about the safety of Brabantio's daughter, or genuinely thought she'd been raped, using racist metaphors to describe gratuitous sexual acts—such as telling Brabantio that he'll "have his daughter covered by a Barbary horse"³²¹ and that his "daughter and the Moor are making the beast with two backs"³²²—conveys a ridiculous rather than considerate tone

Iago's racist language also channels popular Classical myths concerning blacks and racial blackness, and could very well be used to spotlight ridiculous historical European prejudicial opinions. When Iago claims that Brabantio has "lost half [his] soul"

320 *Othello*, 1.1.79, 1.1.86-9, 1.1.89-90, 1.1.115

321 1.1.109-108

322 1.1.113

and predicts that “the devil will make a grandshire of [him],”³²³ the villainous character not only buys into portions of Crusade propaganda, but also the ominous tone of earlier Classical literature. Various Classical texts culturally pair blackness with evil, like Horace’s famous line “Hic niger est, hunc tu, romane cavetto” or “This is a black Roman; beware this.”³²⁴ This ancient correlation historically spills over into early modern English racial perspectives. Given the preponderance of classical influences in early modern English drama,³²⁵ English knowledge of Roman traditions become ever more relevant in racial Shakespearean projects.³²⁶ Shakespeare seems to allow influential classical sayings which paint overly threatening pictures of blackness³²⁷ to both influence the insane capabilities of Iago’s racist language and establish Iago as a reflection of real-life, historical, ridiculous, racial bias.

Iago’s usage of the words “black” and “devil”—in the same linguistic (and contextual) frame—also emphasizes some well-known Christian influences,³²⁸ reflecting over-arching, common-knowledge notions readily available to English-Christian audiences. In several instances, like Act Two, Scene Three, Iago theologically fuses blackness with wickedness or sin: “When devils will the blackest sins put on, / They do suggest at first with heavenly shows.”³²⁹ Coupled with Emilia’s similar discriminatory

323 *Othello*, 1.1.87-91

324 Qtd in Barthelemy, p. 2)

325 See *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance*, Chapter One: “Classical Precedents,” and pp. 46-58

326 Especially in plays set in Roman times and/or Italy, like *Othello*

327 The final line of a sixth century Codex Salmasianus poem which claims “Already then it is shown how Troy awaits her fall, / When Priam accepts black help” (qtd from Barthelemy 2) is another example of threatening Classical illustrations of blackness.

328 The utilization of these words—or other connotative terms in the same linguistic and contextual frame—oftentimes reflects Classical and/or Christian prejudices interchangeably in *Othello*.

329 *Othello* 2.3.353-54

reference in Scene Five, when she calls Othello “the blacker devil!” after Desdemona’s murder,³³⁰ we collectively find a verbal willingness—from an evil character and a relatively “good” character—to draw from some Christian traditions. The unified theological connotations of their dialogue places both characters on one side against blackness, adding significant weight to their versatile but unified racial mechanisms—an element which is repeated throughout the play, and specifically evokes realism. In essence, associating Othello with the devil agrees with some historical, influential Christian voices, but disagrees with Shakespeare’s black hero. Shakespeare thus facilitates an opportunity for audiences to choose Othello over the characters who spew racial epithets.

This is why Iago ultimately loses in the end, and endures a theological type of vengeful

fate. Although he does not die—like the man he calls a devil—his demise comes as a consequence of devilishness, and seems to ultimately punish his sins in Christian fashion. Through chastisement, Shakespeare appears to reveal the error of Iago’s ways, and makes no distinction as to which particular sin he’s actually punished for. We may hence infer that Iago falls because he is inherently evil, and the totality of his wrongs—including his racism—is brought to divine justice.

This assertion comes with many variables, however. Due to the very existence of so many non-evil or ultimately semi-virtuous characters who insult Othello’s race, propagate stereotypes, and condemn the idea of blackness, audiences cannot walk away from this play thinking that only evil people are racist. The Duke of Venice, for example,

330 *Othello* 5.2.130

while seeking to allay Brabantio's animosity toward Desdemona's marriage, tells him that "Your son-in-law is far more fair than black."³³¹ Desdemona, despite all of her virtues, also appears to slightly degrade dark ethnicity. After Iago mentions that his muse may possess "fairness" and "wit," Desdemona asks, "How if she be black and witty?"³³² as if to convey that blackness is the opposite of fairness. Although Desdemona could be speaking sarcastically, Iago's answer (which she does respond to by saying "Worse and worse"³³³), conveys an overt racist context: "If she be black, and thereto have wit, / She'll find a white that her blackness fit."³³⁴

More confusing is the way that Othello's Christianity or converted state allows characters to sometimes praise him, treat him with high regard, and sympathize with him. These periodic efforts may draw more audience attention than each instance of racial bias, given their uniqueness in comparison to predominant societal indignation toward blacks. While Othello's high rank as a soldier testifies to his unique reputation, the loyalty he commands from European characters (like Desdemona and Cassio) purports a sense of rare racial harmony onstage—harmony that might rub off on audiences. Most importantly, the manner in which Othello feels sorry for murdering Desdemona—and the fact that he manages to avoid white retaliation—attests to an important authorial deviation from the source text, "Un Capiano Moro." Here, the Moor never shows remorse for his actions, and is immediately brutalized and executed by white retribution. Contrarily, Othello is very apologetic at play's end, and, in a dignified, honorable way, commits suicide. With this, Shakespeare appears to send a non-discriminatory message to

331 *Othello* 1.3.291

332 *Othello* 2.1.125-31

333 *Othello* 2.1.134

334 *Othello* 2.1.132-33

audiences, thwarting the bigoted lesson of “Un Capitano Moro” by showering the Moor with sympathy, humanism, and integrity.³³⁵

Shakespeare Condemns Racial Demonization by Beautifying Black Skin

Shakespeare perfects Christopher Marlowe and George Peele’s inclination to trick audiences by systematically associating characters of color with racial stereotypes, only to make erroneous racial typecasts seem ridiculous, ultimately refuting societal biases which originally form the stereotypes in the first place. These methodical refutations are sometimes significantly supplemented by open-minded white characters who consistently seem to possess the sole anti-racist voice in the play.

In *Titus Andronicus*, Tamora is the only white character who defends racial attacks against the black Moor, Aaron, as well as her interracial relationship with Aaron. When Tamora lashes out at Bassanius and Lavinia, prompting Demetrius and Chiron to kill Bassanius and torture Lavinia, she does so in response to their racial slurs against her and Aaron.³³⁶ In fact, the only beef Tamora has with Bassanius and Lavinia is their racism (Tamora makes it known in Act One that her primary goal is to

335 Other Shakespearean plays, like the *Tempest*, portray marginalized individuals in very sympathetic ways, and send substantial, satirical messages to racially oppressive forces. Caliban, a native “monster” on an island conquered by Prospero, not only represents New World indigenous people, but encapsulates the plight of African slaves. Though he is called “barbarous” and “savage”—just as Othello is racially disparaged—he retains a sense of unmoving pride. Moreover, Shakespeare seems to side with the concept of ethnic freedom when Caliban reclaims his Island and Prospero apologizes for oppressing the monster at the end of the play.

336 2.3.55-119

“massacre” Titus and his sons for killing one of her sons³³⁷—she doesn’t mention any prior beef with Bassanius or Lavinia).

In *Othello*, Desdemona offers the sole anti-racist voice. Although, as mentioned before, she gives a slight impression of separating fairness from black in one instance, she does an amazing job of censuring Iago’s bigotry, calling his bigoted words a “most lame and impotent conclusion.” Also, when she realizes that something has infected or influenced Othello’s mind—never claiming that Othello becomes enraged and subsequently violent because of some racial schism which aligns with black stereotypes—Shakespeare, through her words, alludes to Iago’s racist infection, securing an anti-racist message. Also, when Desdemona says that something “Hath puddled his clear spirit,”³³⁸ and “Heaven keep the monster from Othello’s mind,”³³⁹ she alludes to jealousy on the surface, but Shakespeare indirectly alludes to Iago’s racially motivated infection that makes Othello jealous.

The lone white male speaker in Shakespeare’s “dark lady” Sonnets (Sonnets 127-152)—who writes on the heels of an “age”³⁴⁰ where “black was not counted fair”³⁴¹—profoundly beautifies blackness, proclaiming “now is black beauty’s successive heir,”³⁴² reversing the Petrarchan convention which adores the snow-white or lily white skin, bright eyes, and blonde hair of white women.³⁴³ Even in the “fair

337 1.1.452-457

338 3.4.135

339 3.4.154

340 Sonnet 127, line 1

341 Sonnet 127, line 1

342 Sonnet 127, line 3

343 From Petrarch’s “Giovane donna sotto un verde lauro” (Sestina form): “I saw a girl under green laurel / colder and whiter than the snow / untouched by the sun for many years: / and her speech, her lovely face, her hair / so please me that she’s before my eyes, / and will be always, wherever, on sea or shore” (lines 1-6).

man” Sonnets, the male speaker does not “wonder at the lily’s white / nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose,”³⁴⁴ undermining medieval and English Renaissance depictions of rosy cheeks on idealistically beautiful “lily white” female faces.³⁴⁵ The speaker, or Shakespeare, instead goes on to condemn images of traditional white beauty in favor of the fair man’s hand, further inverting the Petrarchan tradition: “The lily I condemnèd for thy hand, / The roses fearfully on thorns did stand, / One blushing shame, another white despair.”³⁴⁶ Undercutting literary racial biases which places “lily white” women on pedestals throughout Renaissance literary history, Shakespeare—in a quite anti-racist and anti-homophobic manner—boldly turns the Petrarchan model on its head, bringing “shame” and “despair” to white women with rosy cheeks after rejecting them.

From Petrarch’s Sonnet 227: “Breeze, blowing that blonde curling hair, / stirring it, and being softly stirred in turn, / scattering that sweet gold about, then / gathering it, in a lovely knot of curls again, / you linger around bright eyes whose loving sting / pierces me so, till I feel it and weep, / and I wander searching for my treasure, / like a creature that often shies and kicks” (lines 1-8).

344 Sonnet 98, lines 9-10

345 In “Black and White and Red All Over: The Sonnet Mistress Amongst the Ndembu,” Linda Woodbridge writes: “Even in medieval and Renaissance love poetry, roses in the cheeks, lips like cherries or rubies, skin like ivory, lilies, or snow were stiffly conventional: freshness of complexion prompted no freshness of metaphor. The mistress’s red-and-white face was relentlessly emblazoned, “red and white” becoming a short-hand notation for feminine beauty: “With lilies white / And roses bright / Doth strive thy colour fair” (Wyatt 65);¹ “Fair is my love . . . / A lily pale, with damask dye to grace her” (Passionate Pilgrim no. 7); “Thou art not fair for all thy red and white” (Campion 264). The mistress in Spenser’s Amoretti has “ruddy cheekes” and “snowy browes” (no. 64); the bride in his Epithalamion is a vision in red and white—cheeks like sun-reddened apples, lips like cherries, forehead like ivory, “breast like to a bowle of creame uncrudded, / Her paps lyke lyllies budded, / Her snowie necke”; when she blushes, “the red roses flush up in her cheekes, / and the pure snow with goodly vermill [vermillion] stayne, / Like crimson dyde” (11. I 72-7, 226-8). In Ben Jonson’s Masque of Beauty, the first personified “element of beauty” wears a flame-colored robe and carries two roses, one red, one white. The male lover, too, could be red and white, waxing “pale with anguish, red with fear” (Daniel, Delia, no. 20)” (p. 247).

346 Sonnet 99

In the “dark lady” Sonnets, the lone male speaker—who I believe is the same lone speaker of the “fair man” portion, Shakespeare himself—displays a kind of literary racial activism that foreshadows the “black is beautiful” movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Coming before the speaker says “Thy black is fairest in my judgment’s place”³⁴⁷ and “Then I will swear beauty herself is black / And all they foul that thy complexion lack,”³⁴⁸ Sonnet 130 states:

My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun;
 Coral is far more red than her lips’ red;
 If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
 If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
 I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
 But no such roses see I in her cheeks;³⁴⁹

Here, Shakespeare identifies the “dun” or dark brown complexion, black hair, non-rosy cheeks, and non-bright eyes of the “dark lady” not only in protest of the Petrarchan model, but also in route to spark a Western literary innovation that bolsters or prioritizes images of black beauty. Whereas the adoration of a blonde haired white woman, Laura, in Petrarch’s poems of the Italian Renaissance, and the adoration of blonde haired white women in English Renaissance poems which utilize the Petrarchan model³⁵⁰ both indirectly point toward the inferiority or ugliness of black women, Shakespeare’s “dark lady” Sonnets beautify one black woman (who appears

347 Sonnet 131, line 12

348 Sonnet 132, lines 14-15

349 Sonnet 130, lines 1-6

350 Woodbridge p. 247. Also, M.B. Ogle’s “The ‘White Hand’ as a Literary Conceit” states: “The blonde lady is not, moreover, a type peculiar to the Italian and French sonneteers. She is the one perfect type of beauty in all kinds of poetry and in prose” (465).

to be both a real woman and a symbol of black women during Shakespeare's time) while indirectly mocking the notion that only white women—or women with “snow” white skin—can be beautiful.

Another blatant but rather unnoticed example of a lone white anti-racist voice in a Shakespearean text occurs in *Love's Labor's Lost*. Pushing back against pervasive early modern (and pre-early modern) tendencies to pair blackness with ugliness—such as Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness* (1605) which tells the story of a group of black women who embark on a journey to make their ugly black skin white—Shakespeare speaks through Biron (Berowne), the only anti-racist white lord in the play, during the fourth Act. After falling in love with a slave or servant named Rosaline—who I argue has black skin—the celibate Biron successfully argues that black is in fact beautiful. Single handedly, Biron poetically, logically, and humorously outdoes the King, Dumaine, and Longueville's stereotypical, highly racist remarks, channeling or perhaps foreshadowing sonnets which effectively beautify black skin.

As Biron's unique love for Rosaline mimics the interracial adoration that Shakespeare has for the “dark lady,” it also parallels the manner in which Tamora adores Aaron (*Titus Andronicus*), and the unconditional way that Desdemona's adores Othello. We see the Prince of Morocco's desire for this kind of interracial adoration when he asks Portia to refrain from targeting his blackness³⁵¹—as if he wants her to break from tradition racist molds and see the beauty in his black complexion. Aaron also wants the same from the Nurse when he asks her “Is black so base a hue?”³⁵²

351 *The Merchant of Venice* 2.1.1-12

352 4.2.71

Whereas Aaron and the Prince's advocacy for the beauty of black skin is understandable, it's not always easy to understand why some white Shakespearean characters also want others to see beauty in blackness, or why they risk their status in predominantly biased environments by beautifying blackness, especially since those who interpret Shakespeare's words to us—past and current early modern teachers, professors, scholars, etc.—are skeptical of the meaning of blackness itself, and debate the black ethnicity or skin color of various key characters.³⁵³

There is no question (at least there shouldn't be a question among literary scholars) that Othello and the Aaron are physically black. Though critics question whether Moors were intrinsically associated with physical blackness in early modern England, we know that white or European characters in both *Othello* and *Titus Andronicus* consistently describe the black color of Othello and Aaron's skin, differentiating this distinction from metaphorical descriptions which, nevertheless, exist in binary juxtapositions with the physical.³⁵⁴ We also know that early modern English actors utilized black makeup and black masks to portray Othello, Aaron, and other Moors.³⁵⁵ (Virtually all Moors who appear in early modern plays were described as "black" characters. These characters were depicted by white actors who wore black makeup onstage.)

354 As mentioned in chapter two, Marcus and Titus pair the physical blackness of a fly to the physical blackness of Aaron (3.2.52-79). However, in Marcus' dialogue, there also seems to be an emphasis on the separation of the fly's color ("black") and its disposition ("ill favored"). Yet the two terms—the physical and the metaphorical (as I also mention in the "Introduction")—are consistently found working in tandem with each other in *Titus Andronicus*, *Othello*, and *Love's Labor's Lost*.

355 For example, in a 1595 Henry Peacham "illustration of a scene from Titus Andronicus," a white actor, playing Aaron, is wearing black makeup on his hand, face, and legs ("General Textual Introduction" p. 116).

The process of blackfacing characterizations reveals an exaggerated interpretation of Moorish and/or African skin color. The actual skin color of “black” Moors and/or “black” Africans would rarely be, of course, pitch black, or as black as the makeup early modern white actors wore. Those who were called *Moor*, *black*, *blackmoore*, *blackamoore*, *Ethiop*, *Negro*, and *Negra* in the early modern period almost definitely had variations of dark brown skin, brown skin, dark brown-reddish skin, brown-reddish skin, etc.—tones that do not match the actual color black.

However, there seems to be an ever-persistent question as to whether the dark lady and Rosaline possess any variation of skin color that is commonly associated with black skin and/or Moorish/African ancestry. Though Shakespeare delineates the blackness of the dark lady’s hair, eyes, and dun-colored skin³⁵⁶ (which, again, would not be an uncommon skin tone for a black person in early modern England), several scholars throughout English literary history only wish to see her darkness metaphorically, erasing any notion of physical darkness, as if it would be implausible or downright offensive to imply that the male speaker of Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* or the author himself—who was not afraid to create interracial relationships in his plays—was in love with a black woman.

The same rings true for Rosaline in *Love’s Labor’s Lost*. Even though the King—when mentioning Rosaline, Biron’s love interest—tells Biron that “By heaven thy love is black as ebony,”³⁵⁷ and “Black is the badge of hell / The hue of dungeons, and the school of night,”³⁵⁸ critics like Walter Cohen reject or ignore the strong evidence that suggests

356 “Sonnet 130”

357 4.3.241

358 4.3.248-249

Shakespeare is alluding to Rosaline's skin color (and the significant metaphorical stereotypes associated with her black skin). Cohen systematically interprets every mentioning of blackness (as it relates to Rosaline) in metaphorical terms, even statements which appear to directly describe skin color. For example, when the King initially rejects Rosaline's blackness, and Biron responds "No face is fair that is not full so black,"³⁵⁹ Cohen doesn't connect the term "face" to physicality, even though metaphorical lenses alone cannot discount the plausibility of black skin. As mentioned before, Shakespeare often systematically couples or juxtaposes the physical and the metaphorical in plays which feature black people (and in Sonnets 127-152). Several characters negatively use the term "black" when referencing Othello, often juxtaposing the metaphorical and physical. For example, Emilia calls Othello "the blacker devil" (5.2.127), pairing Othello's black skin with stereotypes encompassing black skin. The juxtapositional binary is present in *Titus Andronicus*, when Aaron claims he "will have his soul black like his face,"³⁶⁰ as well as Middleton's *The Triumphs of Truth* (1613) when the King of the Moors says "So many Christian Eyes, that never saw / A King so black before,"³⁶¹ and "However Darkness dwells upon my Face / Truth in my soule sets up the Light of Grace."³⁶²

At face value (no pun intended), Biron simply conveys that Rosaline's black skinned face is beautiful, countering traditional notions of exclusive white beauty or

359 4.3.247

360 3.1.4

361 Middleton, p. 973, Lines 414-415

362 Middleton, p. 973, lines 429-30. Analyzing these lines by Middleton, Ian Smith writes, "The King of Moors thereupon explains that his color should not be confused with the state of his soul, producing an incongruous early modern type, like Othello, the converted black man: black skin, white soul" (*Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance: Barbarian Errors*, p. 137).

implausible black beauty (notions which the King and lords embrace). If Rosaline does not have a physically black face, Biron would be expressing his adoration for the negativity of Rosaline's soul (face)—a very problematic possibility, in my opinion, since the King and other lords all adore the physical attributes of their own white love interests in the play, and use this kind of adoration to primarily express their love during celibacy. This predication on physical beauty doesn't evade Biron, despite the black skin of his love interest. He constantly esteems her physical blackness, and even points out the aesthetic benefits of Rosaline's natural face of color when comparing it with the make-up laden faces of the lords' white love interests: "Your mistresses dare never come in rain, / For fear their colors should be washed away."³⁶³

Moreover, if Biron is only figuratively beatifying Rosaline's blackness, he still seems to disfavor the concept of inferior blackness, putting him in opposition to using biased racialized terms to describe her personality.

When theorizing Rosaline's race, Cohen accepts a rather inconsiderate metaphorical interpretation which primarily works to distance physical blackness from the conversation:

Foreignness and sexuality converge in the debate about the aristocrats' own color.

A 1984 production of the play cast a black actress as Rosaline. Although only

Rosaline's hair and eyes are black, the play goes farther metaphorically.³⁶⁴

Here, Cohen feels that casting a black woman for the part of Rosaline in a 1984 production of *Love's Labor's Lost* is not congruent with Shakespeare's description of Rosaline's race. To say that "only Rosaline's hair and eyes are black" and "the play goes

363 4.3.263-264

364 Cohen p. 805

farther metaphorically” implies that Rosaline, in the original version of the play is, unquestionably, only figuratively black. I contend that this non-juxtapositional binary approach to understanding Rosaline’s association with blackness not only goes against juxtapositional binary patterns which consistently link Othello and Aaron with both physical and metaphorical blackness, but twists literal, textual norms that may move productions to make casting decisions that are actually closer to Shakespeare’s original intentions. Whether in 1597 or 1984 (or current times), sometimes the term *black*—whether used in the phrase black “face,” black “complexion,” and black “hue” (all terms used in reference to Rosaline)—just means the color *black*, plain and simple.

Earlier critics than Cohen, such as Neal Goldstein, author “Love’s Labor’s Lost and the Renaissance Vision of Love” (1974), also ignore literal textual clues that may simply point to the racial distinction of Rosaline:

Again, the mockery of love conventions can be investigated as an isolated phenomenon in Berowne's debate with Ferdinand over the respective merits of their ladies. He says that Rosaline is born “to make black fair. / Her favour turns the fashion of the days” (IV. iii. 26i-62). Berowne's mockery is aimed, of course, at the Petrarchan notion of the ideal beloved, her golden hair loosed to the breeze. Even a skimming of the love poetry of the period will prove the point-Petrarch's Laura and Astrophil's Stella are golden-haired. And an examination of the many quattrocento renderings of the Virgin can only reinforce the notion.³⁶⁵

Aligning with Cohen, Goldstein’s implies that Biron (or Berowne) only describes Rosaline hair color when saying that she was born “to make black fair,” asserting that

365 Goldstein p. 340

such a quote only mocks or pushes back against Petrarchan reverences for Laura's blond hair—as if Rosaline's only black physical attribute is her hair. Although Goldstein is absolutely correct that Biron uses color to attack the Petrarchan model, he doesn't relate this usage of color to Rosaline's skin or Laura's white skin. But determining that Rosaline's hair *and* skin are black would expand the pattern of attack against Petrarch's Laura who, of course, has white skin. Even though Rosaline and the dark lady have black hair, it is their skin color—Rosaline's "velvet brow"³⁶⁶ and the dark lady's "dun"-colored skin—that serve as the most provoking signifiers of their opposition to Laura. Ultimately, the dark lady and Rosaline's hair alone contribute to much less discrimination than their "black" skin, seeming not to warrant the amount of hostile biased ridicule that surrounds them in Shakespeare's texts (as the anti-racist voices in each text are lone and novel).

Nonetheless, Goldstein claims that female characters in *Love's Labor's Lost*, like Rosaline,

...are bold and haughty. As Talbert has observed, such characterization is an integral part of "the comic development of the wooing motif." Its aim in *Love's Labour's Lost* is a mockery of the Petrarchan-Neoplatonic ideal of the beloved. Berowne's dispraise of Rosaline—he refers to her as a "whitely wanton with a velvet brow" (III. i. i98)—suggests that even her chastity is suspect.³⁶⁷

In my view, when Biron claims that Rosaline has both a "whitely wanton" and "velvet brow," he seems to inform us about Rosaline's persona ("whitely wanton") in comparison or connection to her race ("velvet brow"). As touched upon before, Rosaline's velvet brow appears to describe not only the smoothness of her forehead or

366 3.1.198

367 Goldstein, p. 345

face,³⁶⁸ but her facial skin color also. This connects to the dual use of “brow” in “Sonnet 127,” line ten. Here, Shakespeare describes the dark lady’s eyebrows and countenance as “brows so suited.” In other early modern texts, like Spenser’s *Amoretti*, the brow or brows also represent facial skin color: “her ruddy cheekes, lyke vnto Roses red: her snowy browes lyke budded Bellamoures.”³⁶⁹

Furthermore, there is evidence that velvet was intrinsically associated with the color *black* in early modern England. John Narbrough’s³⁷⁰ *An Account of several late voyages & discoveries to the south and north* (1694) says “He is not as black as Velvet, as the Whale is, but like a Tench.”

In addition, ebony, a type of black wood, is distinctly and practically used in reference to Rosaline, as well as the dark lady. When the King says to Biron “By heaven thy love is black as ebony,”³⁷¹ Biron responds by saying “Is ebony like her? Oh, word divine! / A wife of such wood were felicity.”³⁷² In “Sonnet 128,” Shakespeare depicts the dark lady as a wooden string instrument,³⁷³ appearing privy to the lutes made of ebony (fully or partially) which were used by black Africans in early modern Europe who

368 Biron distinguishes between her brows or eyebrows (4.3.252) and “brow” (4.3.259), a term which commonly refers to the forehead, face, countenance, or look. Biron even claims that natives “Paint themselves black to imitate her brow” (4.3.259). Here, a fair comparison would not juxtapose a native face to Rosaline’s eyebrow, but a native’s painted black face to Rosaline’s black face.

369 Spenser, no. 64

370 John Narbrough was born in 1640 and died in 1688.

371 4.2.241

372 4.2.244-243

373 How oft, when thou, my music, music play’st
 Upon that blessèd wood whose motion sounds
 With thy sweet fingers when thou gently sway’st
 The wiry concord that mine ear confounds,
 Do I envy those jacks that nimble leap
 To kiss the tender inward of thy hand,
 Whilst my poor lips, which should that harvest reap,
 At the wood’s boldness by thee blushing stand (from Sonnet 128).

played before the white elite, as well as white musicians. *Diospyros crassiflora*, commonly known as Gabon ebony, a wood indigenous to West Africa, has been the ebony of choice for European lute parts and parts of other wooden instruments for centuries. The 1596 Renaissance lute below (#10),³⁷⁴ contains a backside that is made of black ebony (#11). This dark complected side possesses African roots, existing as an analogous symbol of Rosaline and the dark lady if they, as I argue, are both black women of African ancestry. It makes perfect sense that both Biron and the speaker of the dark lady Sonnets would use such an equivalent emblem to describe their black loves.

Rosaline's "whitely wanton"³⁷⁵—which Goldstein connects to her chastity—does not contradict or disprove the aforementioned clues to her black skin, but points toward a disposition, personality, and/or status that is *like* white women. Saying that Rosaline possesses a "whitely wanton with a velvet brow" testifies to her mimicry of whiteness (via assimilation, as with Othello and Aaron), especially since the phrase "velvet brow" denotes black skin respectively. Additionally, a white woman, most likely, would not be described as behaving *like* an unruly white woman. But a black woman, especially a high-status servant such as Rosaline—who speaks and acts like other witty, unrestrained white female characters—would logically be accused of having a type of wantonness or unruliness (in the patriarchal sense of the word) indicative of non-subservient, free white women.

When Holofernes reads a letter written by Biron “to the snow-white hand of the most beauteous Lady Rosaline,”³⁷⁶ Biron again alludes to Rosaline’s inner whiteness. M.B. Ogle’s “The ‘White Hand’ as a Literary Conceit”—an older but very valid and relatable text—claims that early modern usage of the term “white hand” reflects “the tribute which Elizabethan poets pay to the blonde type of beauty and her white hands”³⁷⁷—her *actual* white hands. After connecting “the [physical] white hand” to “the [physical] blonde type of beauty”—a beauty intrinsic to the Petrarchan model—Ogle’s text separates this physical combination completely from Rosaline, claiming that “Rosaline in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, with her black eyes and ‘velvet brow,’ is not the literary type at all.”³⁷⁸ This leaves Rosaline with only the nonphysical likeness of a “white hand.”

Also, Rosaline’s “snow-white hand” that Biron speaks of could refer to the white gloves which high status black servants often wore in early modern Europe. This would nicely juxtapose the metaphorical with the physical as white gloves reflect a slave’s close proximity to “whiteness.” In “Servants and Portraits in Early Modern Visual Culture,” Peter Erickson notes Kate Lowe’s suggestion that “early modern black servant-hood in Europe is a form of slavery”³⁷⁹ and that the “decontextualized use of the words ‘page’ and ‘attendant’”³⁸⁰ or high status “to describe black servants in European creates euphemisms that ignore and avoid the underlying structure servitude and subjection on which the aesthetic motif was built.”³⁸¹ Nevertheless, Erickson, when analyzing Jan Mostaert’s

376 4.2.123-24

377 Ogle, p. 466

378 Ogle, p. 466

379 Erickson, p. 25

380 Erickson, p. 25

381 Erickson, p. 25

Portrait of a Moor, a painting which depicts a black male servant with white gloves, states that

Lowe points to the high status [of a black Moor servant] implied by the expensive [white] gloves but without also considering their uncanny effect of turning his hands white—the contrast with his black wrists is striking. More than one thing can be happening at the same time, and the fabricated whiteness of his hands evokes the problematic identity of the ‘honorary’ European, who just happens to have black skin.³⁸²

I equate Rosaline’s persona to the same dynamic, seeing her “snow white hands” as a fabrication of whiteness, an artifice which seeks to reflect prejudicial perceptions that equate whiteness with affluence, wealth, dignity, etc.

Goldstein and Cohen’s refusal to consider the prospect of a black-skinned Rosaline also overlooks a plethora of insults directed at blackness in the play which relate to ideologies indicative of common historical racist stereotypes. If Rosaline was a white woman with mere black hair and black eyes, why does the King pair her blackness to hell or devilishness, a common conflation used to denigrate black people in travel narratives, histories of Africa, and some Crusade propaganda throughout the early modern period? When the King says to Biron “By heaven, thy love is black as ebony... / Oh, paradox! Black is the badge of hell, / The hue of dungeons, and the school of night; And / beauty’s crest becomes the heavens well,”³⁸³ he also aligns with other white Shakespearean characters who wish to equate blackness to evil. In

382 Erickson, 52

383 4.3.248-252

Shakespeare's plays, Othello, Aaron, and Caliban are equated to devilishness at a much higher rate than white characters.

If we further analyze the manner in which the King and lords target Rosaline's blackness, we find that something much more than a metaphorically "black" personality is bothering the men, and cause them to come together and demoralize Rosaline with extreme prejudice:

DUMAINE: To look like her are chimney sweepers
black.

LONGUEVILLE: And since her time are colliers
counted bright.

KING: And Ethiops of their sweet complexion crack.

DUMAINE: Dark needs no candles now, for dark is
light...

KING: No devil will fright thee, then, so much as she.

DUMAINE: I never knew man hold vile stuff so dear.³⁸⁴

First, we see vividly that the King and lords associate her with non-beauty via color discrimination. This extreme prejudice represents a glowing stereotypical attribute in which early modern English individuals (and other Europeans) pervasively applied to black people—not metaphorical blackness alone. And, based on the weight of their ridicule, the blackness of Rosaline's hair and or eyes do not appear to hold enough significance themselves to garner such cruel insults. The insults, though sarcastic and facetious, contain a kind of indignation toward blackness that reaches far beyond the

384 4.3.241-262

metaphorical. The King and lords discriminate against a woman who possesses a kind of physical trait that historically beckons supremacist patterns of poignant oppressive reaction.

In other words, the group passionately teams up against Biron's black love interest in ways that exude a sense of predominant cultural superiority. Rosaline's blackness is not just a red flag or disdainful attribute to them, but an offensive, inferior thing. They uniformly attack her blackness in the same fashion that Iago, and other white characters uniformly align to ridicule and/or stereotype Othello's physical blackness. They seem to draw from set of traditional mentalities that naturally accept the idea of stereotypes which surround black skin—in the same fashion that Marcus, Titus, Lucius, Bassianus, and Lavinia naturally and collectively reverberate and attack cultural notions that historically apply negativity to black skin when debasing Aaron.

Despite their discriminatory attacks, Rosaline is beautiful to Biron (physically and emotionally). In response to the King, Longueville, and Dumaine, he upholds a standard of progressive open-mindedness that appears logical compared to his companions' ridiculous sarcasm and biased humor. He stands up for more than just metaphorical blackness. He stands up for equality, for diversity—values that suddenly become necessary in the face of racism.

BIRON: Devils soonest tempt, resembling spirits of light.

Oh, if in black my lady's brows be decked,

It mourns that painting and usurping hair

Should ravish doters with a false aspect,

And therefore is she born to make black fair.

Her favor turns the fashion of the days,
 For native blood is counted painting now;
 And therefore red, that would avoid dispraise,
 Paints itself black to imitate her brow.³⁸⁵

Biron's wise, charismatic words make the king and lords' absurd-sounding dialogue seem ridiculous. This fuels Rosaline with integrity. Though absent from his conversation, Rosaline absorbs Biron/Shakespeare's defense of blackness, indirectly maintaining an unwavering sense of confidence, freedom. Her unrestraint is now a testament to the unique power or control that she (and the other women in the play) are given over bigotry. If Rosaline possesses this "white" control as a woman of color, she has both risen above her servile occupation and the nasty racial stereotypes which connect her to subordination, inferiority, and the type of unintelligence that is not supposed to surpass white intelligence—resembling Othello and Aaron.³⁸⁶

Conclusion

As early modern English society begins to learn more and more about ethnic individuals from Africa, Asia, and the New World, I believe early modern authors, like Shakespeare, reflect an increasing collective fascination with people of color in their works. We know that Sir Philip Sidney was very curious about the New World,

385 4.3.251-259

386 The dark lady is also in control of the speaker's love, but carries the weight of sexual promiscuity or hypersexuality that connects stereotypically to her race—making her, nevertheless, somewhat inferior in the face of white oppression. She, like Rosaline, is expected to be accessible to many men, as many black women in Renaissance England were. In the play, Boyet hints toward Rosaline's sexual accessibility when he claims that—after Rosaline says he cannot "hit it"—another can "hit it" if he can't (4.1.127-130).

insomuch that he begged Queen Elizabeth to participate in expeditions, and once tried to join an expedition against her wishes. If this piece of proof represents a budding societal fascination with New World things, then witnessing the integration of people of color into English Renaissance literature would be of no surprise.

But scholars have historically denounced the possibility that black skin color contributes to the description of Shakespeare's dark lady, Shakespeare's Rosaline, as well as Shylock and Jessica³⁸⁷ of *The Merchant of Venice*—even though the demographics of Jews prior to the eighteenth century contained a much higher concentration of black-skinned and brown-skinned people. In my opinion, as touched upon before, it is of no coincidence that a field of predominantly white literary scholars—who've historically worked in institutions where racial bias has been prevalent in curriculum, employment, social structures, etc.—would be inclined to rule out any possibility of racial diversity within highly revered sonnets written by highly revered white men. To legitimize the notion that Shakespeare and other pillars of early modern English poetry might have practiced color diversity and anti-racism in their sonnets would not only undermine a swath of revered scholars throughout history who say otherwise, but also compel unfamiliar diverse discourse in early modern English academia.

Perhaps recognizing the presence of a black person in more than half of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* and significant portion of other early modern English literature creates a fear of delving into uncommon conversations about non-white individuals that requires a kind of diversity education that scholars may reject, shy away from, or feel is not necessarily warranted. Thus, the consequences of ruling out the dark lady's

387 Jessica may very well may be the unnamed Moor who Lancelet impregnates in the play.

association with black skin or dark skin or black African ancestry not only perpetuates a narrow-minded approach and contributes to the lack of black representational discourse in early modern studies, but also propagates the need for more work toward an advanced familiarity with black people—two things academia has not been quick to embrace.

It's not as if we're forcing diversity into the English Renaissance. But we'd be thoroughly considering feasible, logical, evidentiary, open-minded hypotheses.

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