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Racial Prosthesis: Shakespearean Properties of Whiteness

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Andrew Clark Wagner

2021

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2021

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Racial Prosthesis: Shakespearean Properties of Whiteness

by

Andrew Clark Wagner

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles

Professor Arthur L. Little, Chair

"Racial Prosthesis: Shakespearean Properties of Whiteness" explores the early modern English theater's use of prosthetic devices to depict race onstage. I argue the theater's broadly conceived racializing technologies materialize a racial whiteness hidden beneath those masks. When characters who apply blackface remove these prosthetics, they substantiate their whiteness as natural and biological. Drawing on work in early modern race studies, disability studies, and critical whiteness studies, this dissertation uncovers narrative, historical, ideological, and racial properties of Shakespearean whiteness. Across a range of plays—the *Henriad*, *King Lear*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Othello*—I examine Shakespeare's engagements with English, British, and Roman myths and histories, revealing how the logic of racial prosthesis enables the imagination of futures predicated upon the genealogical reproduction of white supremacist racial orders.

The dissertation of Andrew Clark Wagner is approved.

Christine N. Chism

Helen E. Deutsch

Lowell Gallagher

Arthur L. Little, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2021

for my parents

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My parents have always believed in me and supported me, and they gave me the gifts I needed to produce this work: love of literature, attention to detail, sensitivity to the experiences of others, political consciousness, and the confidence to track down leads wherever they may go. I am grateful for their patience and love. This dissertation is for them.

The greatest joy of my life has been meeting my wife, Kathryn, and I am endlessly amazed by her brilliance, kindness, and care. Her insights are on every page of this project. Her abundant support has made the endeavor possible, and her love has made it imaginable. This closes one chapter, and so begins another. I love you.

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Introduction

> Prosthesis occurs on the border between the living and the lifeless; it represents the monstrosity of interfering with the integrity of the human body, the act of unveiling the unnatural within the natural.
>
> —David Wills, *Prosthesis*[1]

> The society in which surveillance dominates ages quickly, becoming old-fashioned and abusively archaic. The past lurks there like a monster, harking back to the age of myth.
>
> —Michel Serres, *The Five Senses*[2]

> Despite having no real basis in biochemistry, the hieroglyphics of the flesh requires grounding in the biological sphere so as to facilitate—even as it conceals and because it masks—the political, economic, social, and cultural disciplining (semiosis of procedure) of the Homo sapiens species into assemblages of the human, not-quite-human, and nonhuman; this is what I am referring to as racialization.
>
> —Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*[3]

The Prosthetic Matter of Race

Racial prosthesis describes the dissimulation of racial whiteness beneath the early modern English theater's blackface devices—the paints, oils, textiles, and mud used to modify skin color. The prosthetic relationship between an actor's white skin and darkening materials

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[1] David Wills, *Prosthesis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 247.

[2] Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, trans. Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley (London: Continuum, 2008), 39.

[3] Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 43.

substantiates racial whiteness, and these theatrical conditions of representation form a flexible but stable ideological position for whiteness: the mask that gives form to whiteness is both substantive and detachable. Because the theater's darkening masks are often, but not always, used to depict racial blackness, whiteness is defined by its capacity to exploit racial alterity. The materiality of the prosthetic prefigures white supremacist manipulations of bodies, space, and history: the properties of whiteness that emerge out of the early modern theater's prosthetic configurations of race, and which this dissertation explores.

Prosthesis replaces a part of the body with a substitute made artificial by virtue of its attachment. Racial prosthetics create boundaries between natural and artificial; white and nonwhite; English and foreign. As David Wills writes in the epigraph which opens this introduction, prosthesis emerges on and substantiates a border between human and nonhuman. The early modern theater's use of racial prosthetics forges a divide that otherwise does not exist, out of which whiteness appears natural, unmarked, and pure. Although this dissertation explores how racial prosthetics establish, as Ian Smith has argued, "black identity as wholly material and insubstantial," it investigates more fully than any previous study how a broadly conceived array of darkening devices creates "the authentic white body beneath."[4] "Racial Prosthesis" thus denaturalizes racial whiteness by attending to the attachment and removal of artificial racial prosthetics in Shakespearean drama.

Prosthetics are retrofitted replacements, and the addition of a racial prosthetic articulates a future aided by the application of *technē* to the body. This dissertation argues that the theater's use of prosthetic devices establishes racial whiteness as a pure, unvarnished condition toward which plays navigate. Rather than arguing that race and disability are merely analogous, this

[4] Ian Smith, "White Skin, Black Masks: Racial Cross-Dressing on the Early Modern Stage," *Renaissance Drama* 32 (2003): 34.

dissertation shows how racial prosthesis emerges in the early modern period as an interpretive and narrative strategy for imagining racial whiteness. Racial prosthesis modifies a concept described by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder in *Narrative Prosthesis*, that "a prosthesis seeks to accomplish an illusion," that a "body deemed lacking, unfunctional, or inappropriately functional needs compensation."[5] Racial prosthetics establish the racialized body's inappropriate functionality, which is restored by the removal of the prosthetic device. In this sense, racial prosthesis does not "accomplish an erasure of difference," but introduces difference so that a later return to a state of whiteness can be represented and conceived of as nonracial. The condition opens narrative possibilities: as Mitchell and Snyder frame the issue, "the question is not whether disability is cause or symptom of, or distraction from, a disturbing behavioral trait, but whether its mystery can be pierced by the storyteller."[6] As I explore across several of Shakespeare's plays, the answer to that question, in one form or another, is whiteness. Racial prosthesis constructs whiteness through the material conditions of racial othering, and the conceptual framework of disability studies highlights how the theater's "mythologies, images, and characterizations" of race constitute a "built environment" of white spaces that enable and privilege the freedom of white subjects.[7] I argue that the theater imposes structural limitations and obstacles, and deploys race—as a marker of difference, obfuscation, or prognosis—and thus produces, as narratives unfold and resolve, the ideology of whiteness I am concerned with here.

Racial prosthesis constitutes an attachment to the white body, and reifies the contradiction at the heart of racial epistemologies, that race is both an inner, determining essence

---

[5] David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 6.

[6] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 6.

[7] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, xiv.

and a superfluous, disposable excess. As Michel Serres suggests in this introduction's second epigraph, the early modern theater's obsession with seeing difference corresponds with a compulsion to maintain perspectival control over the past, a situation that becomes "abusively archaic" when history is used to perpetuate racial exploitation. Racialized others are atavistic in their alterity, and the theater's manipulations of racial prosthetics is an attempt to correct the dangerous persistence of the past that inheres in nonwhite bodies. Moreover, because the conjunction of skin and prosthetic conjured for early modern writers and audiences a fraught figure of unnatural monstrosity, English whiteness manifests itself through the tacit necessity of the racializing device's removal. The conjunction of racial prosthetic and white skin poses a threat Aaron articulates near the end of *Titus Andronicus*, for example, that the capacity of whiteness to be written upon points to its precarious changeability:

> Coal-black is better than another hue,
>
> In that it scorns to bear another hue. (4.2.99-100)[8]

Aaron's couplet expresses a danger understood better within the theater than anywhere else: that, as Jean Baudrillard puts it, "it is dangerous to unmask images, since they dissimulate the fact that there is nothing behind them."[9] Triumphant returns to unmarked purity underscore the extent to which whiteness insists upon its own vitality, an insistence belied the necessity of manifesting itself through material representations of racial difference.

This dissertation explores Shakespeare's prosthetic depictions of race by bringing the theoretical and political insights of critical race studies to bear on the discipline of Shakespeare

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[8] Unless otherwise noted, all references to Shakespeare are derived from William Shakespeare, *The Wadsworth Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin, 2nd ed. (Boston: Wadsworth, 1997).

[9] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 5.

studies. Shakespearean prosthetic racialization shifts back and forth between the materiality of racial depiction and its countervailing shrouding as biological, a process Alexander G. Weheliye theorizes in this introduction's final epigraph. When characters in Shakespearean drama wear and remove blackface, the prosthetic mask conjures as biological the whiteness beneath the disguise. As I argue throughout the first half of this dissertation, these moments occur in a wide range of narrative contexts, and reveal Shakespeare's persistent interest in dissimulating the historical, ideological, and narrative properties of racial whiteness. In the second half of this dissertation, racial whiteness exceeds the bounds of the body, as the fixed and overdetermined application of blackface establishes as biological the racial alterity of figures whose material race remains attached to the body. As it tracks these prosthetic movements between nonbiological, pseudo-biological, and biological, this dissertation develops racial prosthesis as a relation that "discipline[s] humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans."[10] I thus follow Weheliye in centering race as I develop analyses of Shakespearean drama, and uncover how race in early modern England functions "as a set of sociopolitical processes of differentiation and hierarchization, which are projected onto the putatively biological human body."[11] A reverberating upshot of this project is a striking continuity between Shakespearean and modern constructions of race, an interrelationship I argue is inaugurated by the centrality of the Shakespearean text within cultures of racial whiteness.

Racial prosthesis arrives on the early modern stage as a solution to the problem of representing a racial identity unaccustomed to the gaze of spectators. When Dympna Callaghan describes "the poles of the representational spectrum of early modern England," between

[10] Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 4.

[11] Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 5.

"exhibition" and "mimesis," she gestures toward this fraught relationship between racial prosthetics and the onstage depiction of whiteness.[12] Both extremes are unacceptable positions for racial whiteness. On one side of the spectrum,

> exhibition, people are set forth for display as objects, passive and inert before the active scrutiny of the spectator, without any control over, or even necessarily consent to, the representational apparatus in which they are placed. [. . .] Mimesis, on the other hand, entails an imitation of otherness, and its dynamism is a result of the absence of the actual bodies of those it depicts, whose access to the scene of representation, therefore, needs no further restriction or containment."[13]

Whiteness is in a literal sense always present on the early modern stage, but is rarely subjected to the whims of theatrical or narrative demands. Mimesis not only restricts and contains the bodies of racial others, but provides access to a "dynamism" that sheds light on the desires and capacities of England's racial identity. Because the gap between actor and prosthetic generates properties and possibilities for whiteness, this dissertation extends upon the work of Virginia Mason Vaughan, who argues that

> theatrical performance is by definition a masquerade, which by its very nature negates essentialist notions of reality. The white actor in blackface may speak and act in ways that reinforce stereotypes about black people, but because he is not the thing he pretends to be and the audience knows it, his gestures and attitudes suggest that his identity is

[12] Dympna Callaghan, "'Othello Was a White Man': Properties of Race on Shakespeare's Stage," in *Alternative Shakespeares*, vol. 2, ed. Terence Hawkes (London: Routledge, 1996), 194.

[13] Callaghan, "'Othello Was a White Man,'" 194.

adopted, not inherited.[14]

The theater's prosthetic mode of racial representation relies upon the audience's perception of an actor's identity, but constructions of whiteness are inherited only insofar as they rely upon and perpetuate the transmission of white, English identity. Theatrical manipulations of racial prosthetics enable audiences to imagine connections with the past, exert control over the future, and claim inheritable ownership over markers of identity that enable such racial configurations.

"Racial Prosthesis" exposes Shakespeare's sustained interest in organizing hierarchies of power in and around depictions of race. Whiteness possesses the power to represent race in the theater, and to reduce it, at will, into an object. But the theater, as Michel Serres reminds us, lacks objects: "There is no place for things on the boards of a theatre."[15] Like "politics" or "magic," the theater is a space where objects are changed, "by sleight of hand, into a relationship, language or representation."[16] In this sense, whiteness in the theater exerts control over the relationships between objects. Whiteness controls how an audience sees an actor's application and removal of blackface, and therefore governs the relationship between bodies and racializing objects. Whiteness circulates inside and outside of the theater's bounds and shapes a language of representation: whiteness is a property. Indeed, Cheryl Harris has argued that whiteness is a property in the legal sense, and that in "society structured on racial subordination [. . .] whiteness was an 'object' over which continued control was—and is—expected."[17] Insofar

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[14] Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500-1800* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4.

[15] Serres, *The Five Senses*, 40.

[16] Serres, *The Five Senses*, 41.

[17] Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1730.

as whiteness is a property, it is a defining feature of white personhood: "If an object you now control is bound up in your future plans or in your anticipation of your future self, and it is partly these plans for your own continuity that make you a person, then your personhood depends on the realization of these expectations."[18] This dissertation argues repeatedly that whiteness is made visible not only in the application of racial prosthetics, but also in the narrative possibilities engendered by a demand for the realization of white expectations. Arthur Little has argued that "part of the modernity of the early modern period was its investments (seen through various discursive pathways), again uneven, in exploring and sometimes claiming whiteness as a racial property."[19] Crucially for this project, the application of racial prosthetics is always oriented toward the future, toward the continuation of a personhood laid bare by the theater's use of racial prosthetics.

Shakespeare's White Women

The story I have been narrating about the early modern theater's use of racial prosthetics to dissimulate whiteness has thus far overlooked the use of whitening cosmetics to depict femininity onstage. Because white men played all the parts in Shakespearean drama, theatrically exaggerated whiteness was necessarily prevalent on the early modern stage, and Dympna Callaghan has described how depictions of both blackness and whiteness involved the use of stage cosmetics:

For race, crucially *both* black *and* white, is articulated as an opposition on stage

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[18] Margaret Jane Radin, "Property and Personhood," *Stanford Law Review* 34, no. 5 (1982): 968.

[19] Arthur L. Little Jr., "Re-Historicizing Race, White Melancholia, and the Shakespearean Property," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (2016): 89.

> principally by means of cosmetics: burnt cork negritude projects racial difference against white Pan-Cake. The elaboration of cosmetic practices will, I hope, bring into sharper focus the relation between race and gender in drama, showing how whiteness becomes visible in an exaggerated white and, crucially, feminine identity.[20]

Although feminine whiteness was represented with the use of cosmetic prosthetics, femininity makes the representation unstable and changeable. As Kimberly Poitevin writes, women played a crucial role in "making whiteness a visible English trait," but "because cosmetics could be so easily applied and removed, though, women who made up also revealed color to be an unreliable marker of race, class, or moral truth."[21] Kim F. Hall has explored the extensive continuities between whiteness and fairness in descriptions of women and femininity in the period, pointing out how white "is attached to values—purity, virginity, and innocence—represented by (or notably absent in) women." This dissertation takes up Hall's project of exploring how "concern over the whiteness of English women and the blackness of African men (and the mixture of both) projects onto the bodies of white women the anxieties of an evolving monarchical nation-state in which women are the repository of the symbolic boundaries of the nation," a status that distracts from "the equally vulnerable bodies of white men and the potentially threatening bodies of black women."[22] I argue that the English theater asserts a more stable and transmissible masculine whiteness through embodied and narrative relationships between racial others and white women. The most notable prosthetic deployed in depicting whiteness is femininity itself, through which

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[20] Callaghan, "'Othello Was a White Man,'" 195.

[21] Kimberly Poitevin, "Inventing Whiteness: Cosmetics, Race, and Women in Early Modern England," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 11, no. 1 (2011): 62.

[22] Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), 9.

ideas about masculinist whiteness can be transmitted and inherited. The theatrical work of depicting whiteness as an identity that underlies racial impersonation becomes disseminated in relation to depictions of femininity: through the vessel of the feminine body, representation becomes genealogy.

This dissertation's attention to the genealogical configurations of racial prosthesis modifies work undertaken by critics like Mary Floyd-Wilson, whose study of race and ethnicity argues that "geohumoralism not only estranged northern whiteness and southern blackness but it also tended to intertwine the two as inversions of the other."[23] Early modern audiences who may or may not be aware of geographical diversity can still register the use of racial prosthetics in the theater, as these racial devices activate ideas about whiteness, naturality, and the integrity of the body independent of larger global contexts. Although Floyd-Wilson's study of the ways early modern audiences may have acquired and synthesized knowledge about foreign bodies is instructive, her study describes how race emerges out of essential differences—place of birth, for example—whereas racial prosthesis constructs racial information it then construes as essential, an endlessly useful capability both within the theater and for a nation increasingly organized around white supremacy.

The theater's reliance upon racial prosthetics to articulate whiteness continues to shape the way critics read Shakespearean drama. Near the beginning of her study of blackface in the early modern period, Dympna Callaghan writes, "blackface performances were never static, [and] their changing nature reflected England's shift from an insignificant European power in the

[23] Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 6.

early sixteenth century to a global empire supported by a slave economy in the eighteenth."[24] Even as she charts the overarching global changes critical to understanding early modern England's racial constructions, Callaghan's language is shaped by the theater's prosthetic mode, attributing England's later status as a global empire to the unstable—"never static"—performances of racial prosthesis. This dissertation interrogates the evident but under-examined presence of racial prosthesis in Shakespearean drama, and tells the story of that "shift" of England's global status, which was predicated upon the "support" of a slave trade which was enabled and expanded with the assistance of the theater's prosthetic engagements with race.

Shakespeare Studies and White Futures

Because characters who attach and detach racial prosthetics exert control over their own futures, racial prosthesis is a narrative device. This dissertation argues that the ways in which whiteness exerts control over racial representations in the theater prefigures its interest in managing historical narratives that in turn characterize white control of the future. Racially prosthetic figures control history and the future in ways otherwise achievable only through what Jonathan Sawday describes as the creation of complex "hydraulic automata" which "promised to re-create a mythical world, ushering the images, characters, stories, and fables of Ovid and classical antiquity into the present," and which "linked human temporality to the supra-temporal plan of scriptural salvation."[25] In Sawday's telling, these automata mark "the specialization of

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[24] Dympna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage* (London: Routledge, 2000), 15.

[25] Jonathan Sawday, "'Forms Such as Never Were in Nature': The Renaissance Cyborg," in *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies, and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert, and Susan Wiseman (London: Macmillan, 1999), 186-187.

[human] labor into discrete tasks."[26] Within the context of the theater, racial prosthetics facilitate discrete tasks for the characters who don them. As they deploy prosthetics, these figures exert power over the forward momentum and desired endpoints of the plays in which they appear. The temporal and narrative dimensions of racial prosthesis thus function in concert with the English throne to create English subjects whose own whiteness creates a sense of possibility and fungibility not possible without the representational apparatus of racial prosthesis. These theatrical bodies take the place of what was once the domain of eschatology and will soon give way to technology, a force which opens up "a space of experience adequate to this acceleration" of "time that had previously belonged to eschatology."[27] When characters discard a racial mask and reassume a previously dispossessed inheritance, changing the future appears newly possible.

Using prosthetics to materialize otherwise insubstantial racial whiteness, racial prosthesis replicates the double movement of Protestant iconoclasm. As Wills describes it: "Idolatry inaugurates the structure of iconoclasm: if bodily forms can be constructed they can also be broken. Idolatry creates a temporal and thus perishable material form where there was previously assumed to be only immateriality; [. . .] it invites dismantling and reconstruction."[28] All of these shifts, breaks, and reconstructions take place within a flourishing English theater being threatened by the private, interior world of the essay, the novel, the play-text—the printed word. The sermon yields to the marginal gloss, and the stage is survived by the page. In this story, dramatists like Shakespeare engage in a theatrical resistance to the epistemological break taking

[26] Sawday, "'Forms Such as Never Were in Nature,'" 187.

[27] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 22.

[28] Wills, *Prosthesis*, 231.

place all around the theater: the printing press and Protestant reformation have inaugurated new modes of criticism and interpretation, and enabled breathtaking scales of reproduction and dissemination. With Edgar's "face [of] grime" or Hal's "base contagion clouds," Shakespeare reaches backward, bringing technological and medical discourses of race to bear on mythic foundations of English racial knowledge, and its reliance upon the operations of whiteness. This Shakespearean innovation, what Hans Blumenberg might call a "work on myth," has been obscured by the disembodiment of early modern print culture, a tool which creates imperfect translations of racial embodiments.

When Wills writes that the invention of the printing press "installed the whole problematics of reading and interpretation, the dialectic of commentary versus text," he marks in the early modern period both the inauguration of literary studies and a shift away from embodiment, a moment in which "the human hand is superseded by the machine in the service of truth."[29] As four centuries of Shakespeare studies have shown, our inability to access the early modern stage's embodied representations of race—and their replacement by prosthetic play-texts—has encouraged countless studies of Shakespearean texts that treat Shakespearean bodies as an afterthought. The translation from stage to page does not merely erase race, but opens the space for a critical racial illiteracy, an affordance Arthur Little describes as a kind of white melancholia: "[S]igning onto a raceless Renaissance repeats some of the foundational principles of whiteness—its claims of being a nonproperty, of being both the arbiter of history and outside of it, outside of any legitimately humanistic critical frame."[30] Insofar as a "raceless Renaissance" has been developed out of Shakespeare's prosthetic representations of race, this project seeks to

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[29] Wills, *Prosthesis*, 221.

[30] Little, "Re-Historicizing Race," 93.

dismantle claims to objectivity predicated on a whiteness that disclaims its racial status. The logic of prosthesis is notoriously unreliable, as Wills writes, liable to "go the other way when you least expect it, to change direction without warning."[31] The impulse to treat the human body as instrumental, to separate and reattach its constitutive parts, is a dangerously unpredictable task, and the white melancholic desire to "posit and valorize an imaginary historical moment when indeed 'humanity' was both white and unraced" can be upended through critical engagement with the dramatic, literary, and critical operations of racial prosthesis.[32]

An orientation toward the future at least partially explains this dissertation's exclusive interest in Shakespeare, a corpus that has become over several hundred years bound up in the genealogies and futures of racial whiteness. In each of the chapters which follow, I explore a dramatic moment in which a character claims, in one form or another, to be "both the arbiter of history and outside of it." These moments, articulated with a variety of racial prosthetics, capture what Blumenberg calls the "point of view of the lamenting but uninvolved spectator," a critical distance which, I contend, structures ideologies of whiteness.[33] Although by no means exhaustive, the paradigmatic collection here attests to the wide-ranging, plastic, and often unpredictable properties of whiteness.

Although the early modern theater's racial prosthetics imply that race is detachable, this dissertation explores how whiteness is woven into the narrative structures of Shakespearean drama. Ayanna Thompson identifies a common tendency to separate historicist methodology

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[31] Wills, *Prosthesis*, 128.

[32] Little, "Re-Historicizing Race," 93.

[33] Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*, trans. Steven Rendall (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 11.

from the modern political sympathies of individual critics, writing that "it is possible to detect a certain anxiety about the relationship between early modern constructions of race, our own contemporary constructions of race, and the critics' own identity politics through the employment of prologues, forewords, afterwords, afterthoughts, and epilogues."[34] The impulse to separate race emerges out of a desire to maintain objectivity with respect to the historicity of Shakespearean drama, an instinct to "articulate a subject position" which critics then "quarantine [. . .] from other aspects of the argument," and which Thompson feels is a "symptom of the prestige felt by historicism in literary studies."[35] Hall grapples with a similarly perceived gap between early modern and modern conceptions of race, leading her to justify a practice of "resistant reading" which balances the insights of American black feminists with the moments of racialized discourse visible in the early modern archive.[36] Hall's work describes the ways in which modern anxieties about race have been generated by both early modern drama and the four centuries of scholarship produced on the period. This entanglement demands that studies of race be labeled anachronistic, and scholarly conversations have as a result treated race as a separate field of study, which itself entrenches the notion that race is extraneous to discussions of Shakespeare. This dissertation shows how historicist approaches to early modern drama can articulate a vision of race in which the early modern theater's relationship with English power structures, its prosthetic modes of racial representation, and the emergent culture of print all conspired to construct race as an historical force whose effects continue to infiltrate and confuse

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[34] Ayanna Thompson, "The Future of Early Modern Race Studies: On Three Ambitious (Enough?) Books," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 49, no. 3 (2008): 259.

[35] Thompson, "The Future of Early Modern Race Studies," 260.

[36] Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 15.

critical projects.

My first chapter shows how Shakespeare's *Henriad* develops a genealogical relationship to history that makes monarchical whiteness personally available to the English. Whiteness informs the interplay of property, land, and royal succession across the *Henriad*. Shakespeare deploys racial prosthetics as a way to dissimulate whiteness and to signal dispossession of land or title, visible in Hal's performances of nonwhiteness: Hal's cavorting in *1 Henry IV* leads his father to question his advancement and wonder aloud at the "riot and dishonor" that "stain the brow / Of [his] young Harry" (1.1.84-85). Examining the dynamic interplay of Henry Percy and Prince Hal, I argue that the tetralogy distinguishes between the two Henrys by differentiating between different kinds of whiteness, ultimately rewarding Prince Hal's ability to cast off his "base contagious clouds" to reveal, in his "reformation," a sun-like whiteness (1.2.198, 213). Hal's reformation concludes in the bedchamber of Katherine of France, whom the play imagines as a suitable vessel for whiteness, albeit one who, because of her foreignness, the play almost immediately disclaims. In the continuation of Henry's genetic line, the plays teach Shakespeare's audiences how whiteness might be delineated through the expulsion of racial others, a work of boundary-making inaugurated by the Chorus of *Henry V*.

The second chapter's central figure is Edgar of *King Lear*, who decides his "face [he'll] grime with filth" as a way to evade detection until he can discover the nature and extent of Edmund's machinations (2.3.9). The apparent indistinguishability between Edgar and Edmund engages biblical myths of particular interest to antiquarians who, at the beginning of King James I's reign, were developing competing racial origin stories for England. Edgar's choice of disguise, the grimed face that obscures both inheritance and fair skin, creates a narrative possibility for reclaiming his own inheritance, just as those antiquarians might reclaim a superior

genealogy of whiteness for seventeenth-century England. As Lear and his dispossessed retinue make their way across the heath, the liminal space between city and country creates a boundary between the safe, white spaces of London and the degraded outskirts of town. When Edgar finally returns to the safety of whiteness his career through the heath has articulated, he defeats his brother in combat, and engages the play's generic allusions to a romance mode that tempers its tragedy with a triumphalism indistinguishable from a celebration of white supremacy.

The second half of the dissertation engages racial prosthesis as a narrative device and explores its utility in plays explicitly concerned with depictions of racial others. My third chapter examines how violent entanglements of embodiment and textuality in *Titus Andronicus* reflect England's interest in separating the literary legacy of Rome from the racially othered bodies of ancient Rome. The play's management of space in its first act treats Aaron, a prominent but silent figure in the beginning of the play, like a "conspicuous" but "unobtrusive" black servant often featured in early modern portraits of white patrons.[37] In his first speech, Aaron upends the play's racial organizations; as Arthur Little writes, "Aaron steals the show, the picture, making him the primary actor."[38] When Aaron describes Tamora as a "siren that will charm Rome's Saturnine, / And see his shipwreck and his commonweal's," Aaron places himself in the privileged position of a spectator uninvolved in the seafaring misfortunes of Rome's actors (2.1.23-24). The play uses Aaron to establish an optical framework for whiteness, a telescopic perspective that distances white audiences from the fraught historical relationship between England and ancient Rome. The ensuing manipulations of both Aaron and Lavinia enable

[37] Peter Erickson, "Invisibility Speaks: Servants and Portraits in Early Modern Visual Culture," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 9, no. 1 (2009): 24.

[38] Arthur L. Little Jr., *Shakespeare Jungle Fever: National-Imperial Re-Visions of Race, Rape, and Sacrifice* (Stanford University Press, 2000), 25.

England to imagine English origins of whiteness, albeit ones predicated on violent inscriptions of texts upon maimed bodies. *Titus Andronicus* ultimately reconfigures England's relationship to Rome by perpetuating racial hierarchies embedded in the textual prosthetics used to repair the play's bloody obsession with dismemberment and silence. Although racial prosthetics make possible the play's representation of Aaron, this chapter shows how the logic of racial prosthesis works its way into the textual afterlives of Shakespearean drama.

My fourth chapter examines the persistent myth of Venice both in *Othello* and in Shakespearean scholarship, and argues that the city's fabled tolerance and multiculturalism provide a framework for English white supremacist organizations of space and time. Reading the play's depictions of public and private spaces of the city, I show how Othello's blackness provides a structural support for imagining the construction and policing of white neighborhoods. Venice's unique political structure, especially its public courts, allows Shakespeare to create a nation where racial hierarchies are strictly enforced and publicly disclaimed. In the play's opening scene, Iago and Roderigo's racial incitements remind Brabantio about the threat multiculturalism poses to the city's racial purity by establishing a simultaneity of white space and time, a temporal and spatial relationship to whiteness Othello reiterates in the play's closing moment. In this way, the play constructs a city of whiteness around Othello, a white world where the pathology of Othello's blackness props up and maintains civic institutions designed to protect white wealth.

Chapter One

Blood, Soil, and Whiteness in Shakespeare's *Henriad*

Levellers, Liberalism, and White Shakespeare

In late 1648, Leveller pamphleteer and New Model Army printer John Harris published a series of pro-Parliamentary newspapers under the title *Mercurius Militaris*. Harris had come to printing and publishing by accident. Previously a stage actor, he was forced into a new line of work following the closure of the theaters by the Long Parliament in 1642.[39] His attacks on the monarchy (and, at times, its opposition) are bitterly scathing, his prose imaginatively rendered, and his viewpoints virulently xenophobic. The Levellers sought to tear down social hierarchies—or, at least, the monarchy—and derived their name from a 1607 rural uprising in which a group of rioters razed the fences and hedges of a local landlord.[40] Like their namesakes, the Levellers had clear antagonists and dramatically conceived tactics, and it is not hard to imagine Harris's theatrical background serving him in his new line of work as a Leveller journalist. Indeed, in an earlier pamphlet, he rails against the French for only wanting to see an English play performed "but once":

> The French (so further speakes intelligence) desiring to see an English Play acted but once—: Geographers indeed do speake of a Nation that is naturally fickle. Besides, if that Play were one of 2 or 3 that I could name in Shakespeare, it were incredible newes to me

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[39] John Rees, *The Leveller Revolution: Radical Political Organisation in England*, *1640-1650* (London: Verso Books, 2016), Kindle edition, ch. 12.

[40] Steve Hindle, "Imagining Insurrection in Seventeenth-Century England: Representations of the Midland Rising of 1607," *History Workshop Journal* 66 (2008): 21.

they would see it (quite out) once.[41]

For Harris, the theater is a crucial marker of Englishness both because of England's ownership over a rich literary tradition—in this case, Shakespeare—and because the English possess a uniquely discerning literary taste. These mutually reinforcing features of English superiority were in jeopardy, however, and not only because of the recent closure of the theaters. The long-raging civil wars had, for Harris, exposed a tyrannical streak within the monarchy which constituted a corruption of the English line, and which undermined the version of English history depicted in Shakespeare's histories. Harris frequently turns to Shakespeare's tragedies to critique Charles I, thus casting tyranny as a Roman perversion, but resists direct reference to what looks, from our vantage, to be the more suitable comparison: the dynastic struggles for the English crown depicted across Shakespeare's two historical tetralogies.[42]

Those history plays were doubtless on Harris's mind, however, in an October 19, 1648 dispatch of *Mercurius Militaris*. In questioning King Charles I's divine right to the throne—"Did God drop down the oyl, or send a messenger with it?"—Harris associates the material symbols of divine monarchy (oil) with the messengers of divine authority (angels), and to which the title of his own publication alludes, in its positioning of Mercury as divine messenger. He then connects James I's claim to the monarchy with Richard III's usurpation of the throne, suggesting the genealogy of the monarchy has been corrupted for generations: "Who desided the question then, and divers times since, which was the bastard brood, and which was the Royal blood?" Harris

[41] John Harris, *Mercurius Candidus. Communicating the Weekely Newes to the Kingdome of England. From Wednesday, Novemb. 11 to Friday, Novemb 20th. 1646. Published according to Order* (London, 1646), 2.

[42] Nigel Smith, "Soapboilers Speak Shakespeare Rudely: Masquerade and Leveller Pamphleteering," *Critical Survey* 5, no. 3 (1993): 242.

proceeds to posit another source for the monarchical impurities plaguing England in the middle of the seventeenth century:

> Where are now the old English spirits? [. . .] [T]hey would even sink into their ashes, and desire to dwell in the Caverns of the earth, rather then to see such degenerated sprouts from their roots, who having, liberty put in their hands, will so basely betray it into the most bloody Tyrants; nay, would they not defie us from relating to their stock, and suppose, that the Boars of France and Negroes in Barbary were transformed into English habits.[43]

Harris first conjures the ancient past to introduce a disjunction between ethereality and base materiality: the "old English spirits" would, if they knew the depravation being visited upon their native land, "sink into their ashes, and desire to dwell in the Caverns of the earth." Harris's language calls to mind the terraforming force of the rural terrorists from whom the Levellers derived their name, and just as those rioting peasants resisted the enclosure of private land which occluded access to free, arable land, so too is Harris's language curiously generative: the collapse of those "English spirits" serves as the root and soil for "sprouts," howsoever "degenerated" those descendants may be. The monarchy's collapse into a corrupted, material (and in this case, bodily) substance is rendered yet more visible in his "bloody Tyrants," but what will ultimately sever the English from the stock of their forebears is the introduction of "Boars of France and Negroes in Barbary." Harris here extends his rage into explicitly racial territory.

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[43] John Harris, *The true Informer, or Monthly Mercury. Being The certain Intelligence of Mercurius Militaris or the Armies Scout, from Tuesday October 7th, to Tuesday November 8th 1648. Communicating from all parts of England, Scotland and Ireland, all marshall enterprises, designes and successes; and particularly the actions, humours and qualities of the Army under the command of his Excellency THOMAS Lord FAIRFAX. Corrected and revised by the Author, at the earnest request of many wel-affected persons* (London, 1648), 9.

For Harris's white, English readers, genealogical connections to the past are always personal, represented through a seemingly unending chain of fathers and mothers. In the paragraph preceding his evocation of "Boars of France and Negroes in Barbary," Harris explores this mode of relating to the past: "How came King Jamee to his power? From her Cozen, or my aw Uncle, or my Aunt, or my awe Grandam, or my Beldam?"[44] The blurring of monarchical and personal genealogies set against a depersonalized group of others constitutes a fundamental mode through which ideas about whiteness become racial: through the "conferral of otherness made visible only through collective characterization" which renders Harris's white readers, by contrast, a fully human set of individuals.[45] Harris thus differentiates English whiteness from French whiteness and African blackness. The suggestion, moreover, that these intrusions upon English racial purity threaten "English habits" solidifies, in its connection of habits-as-behavior with habits-as-clothing, the centrality of theater in this story of racial, English whiteness. The materiality of blood, ashes, and earth provides shape and form to an otherwise disparate constellation of ideas, transmuting notions of genealogy, monarchy, and Englishness into bodies capable of imagining a racial whiteness that is disembodied, pure, and instrumentally historical. Degraded blackness constitutes a materiality which simultaneously supports and dissimulates the presence of a whiteness obscured by a mask of bloody earth or ashen mud.

The story Harris tells here is exceptional insofar as it highlights a racial epistemology I wish to explore in much greater detail in the pages which follow. But Harris's story is unexceptional in that it could well have been told by any English reader of Shakespeare, then or now, and indeed points to ideas of Englishness and whiteness which thread themselves through

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[44] Harris, *The true Informer*, 9.

[45] Steve Garner, *Whiteness: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 22.

much of Shakespeare's dramatic work. This chapter explores genealogies of English whiteness in Shakespeare's second tetralogy: *Richard II*, *Henry IV Parts 1* and *2*, and *Henry V*. These dramatic and monarchical deployments of genealogy attest to the persuasive force of natural and innate pedigrees; the past, in its immutability, justifies the present. Genealogies are narrative constructions assembled with chosen ends in sight, however; monarchs are born inevitably into worlds that mandate their dominion. Two genealogies, for example, might be constructed out of the story of John Harris and the Levellers: in one, the Levellers stand "at the headwaters of liberalism's most democratic and egalitarian branch," as "harbingers of the democratic revolutions of later centuries."[46] In another genealogy, their tactics are adopted by a group in Ireland known variously as the Levellers and the Whiteboys, so called because they wore their shirts outside their jackets to aid recognition, and whose tactics were in turn adopted by the "Ku Klux Klan, whose origins have been traced directly to them."[47] These genealogies are not entirely distinct; Charles W. Mills has argued that liberalism "has historically been a racial liberalism," and the social contract "has really been a racial one."[48] In what follows, I investigate the origins of these genealogies within Shakespeare's histories, locating eddies of whiteness at the "headwaters of liberalism." In their muddled origins, at the river's source, the futures imagined within Shakespeare's dramatic renderings of history begin to appear fathomless. We begin, appropriately enough, with rivers.

[46] Michael B. Levy, "Freedom, Property and the Levellers: The Case of John Lilburne," *The Western Political Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (1983): 116.

[47] Joseph Valente, "From Whiteboys to White Nationalism: Joyce and Modern Irish Populism," in *A History of Irish Modernism*, eds. Gregory Castle and Patrick Bixby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 209-10.

[48] Charles W. Mills, "Racial Liberalism," *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (2008): 1381.

Bloody Rivers

In the opening scene of Shakespeare's *Henriad*, Henry Bolingbroke, the future King Henry IV, challenges Thomas Mowbray, the Duke of Norfolk, to a duel, comparing Norfolk's murder of Gloucester to the murder of Abel: Mowbray

> Sluic'd out his innocent soul through streams of blood,
>
> Which blood, like sacrificing Abel's, cries,
>
> Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth,
>
> To me for justice and rough chastisement. (1.1.103-6)

Bolingbroke's fusion of blood, soil, and genealogy both locates John Harris's "caverns of the earth" and supplies, in its sensitivity to the inherited impurity of Mowbray's misdeeds, an essentially racial interrelation of past and present. Abel's cries—and Gloucester's—are of a genealogy denied; Abel's obverse is the wandering Cain who founds cities. Cain, a farmer who bears a mark, soaks the soil with Abel's blood and renders it infertile. Bolingbroke's mythic wrangling places himself within a lineage alongside, but separate from, the city dwellers descendent of Cain.[49] We might then posit an intuitive link between the Levellers and the itinerant, farming poor who resisted the enclosures of English land which facilitated the grazing of livestock. But the *Henriad* does not imagine the English participating in one genealogy or another, nor is the murder of Abel, strictly speaking, "a foreclosure of otherness, which is

[49] "William Camden's Brittania (1590) traced the origins of the Britons back to Brute, the great-grandson of Aeneas, who thus linked Britain to Troy, then stretched back further to Old Testament history, linking all Europeans to Japhet: son of Noah. Readers of the Bible genealogies could then calculate the ultimate link to Adam: Noah—Lamech—Methusaleh—Henoch—Jared—Mahalaleel—Kenan—Enosh—Sheth—Adam (Gen. 5)." Hannibal Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 133-34.

represented by the original sacrifice of the brother."[50] Rather, the *Henriad* repeatedly engages with genealogy as an opportunity to make meaning out of the historical record, to craft history from the bare elements of chronicle. Available to certain characters but unavailable to others, Shakespearean racial genealogies produce figures who are simultaneously the arbiters of historical meaning and its creation, endlessly fecund in the face of infertility, marking and unmarking at will the boundaries of English identity and soil: defining and redefining "streams of blood" as violent symbols of conquest and seminal fountains of identity.

Rivers mark the natural boundaries between England, Wales, and Scotland. But as Henry "Hotspur" Percy demonstrates in *Henry IV, Part 1*, what is natural is not always permanent. Before they take the field against Henry IV and his son Hal, the rebels Glendower, Mortimer, and Hotspur meet with a map of the island of Great Britain to divide their future territories. The moment comes at the play's keystone, Act III, Scene 1; the appearance of the map is explicit—Hotspur forgets the map, but Glendower has remembered it—and as is the case when maps appear on the Shakespearean stage, the audience is prepared for geographical manipulation. The map serves as a tool to divide the landscape of their united (and severable) kingdoms, both reflecting and informing the natural features of the island of Britain. Before the business at hand, however, Glendower and Hotspur argue about the range and scope of their ability to manipulate nature, focusing on the conditions of Glendower's birth, which Glendower asserts were marked by "fiery shapes / Of burning cressets," and during which "the frame and huge foundation of the earth / Shak'd like a coward" (3.1.14-17). Glendower, whose martial prowess is unmatched, asserts a remarkable connection with the natural world which has "mark'd" him "extraordinary"

[50] Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Changes of Cain: Violence and the Lost Brother in Cain and Abel Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 39.

(3.1.40). Glendower, “irregular and wild,” stands apart from his peers and adversaries; he has been set out as different, exceptional, peculiar (1.1.40). Unlike Henry Percy and his foremost adversary, Henry Monmouth, who are apparently so indistinguishable by sight that Henry IV fantasizes that “some night-tripping fairy had exchang’d / In cradle-clothes our children where they lay,” Glendower is unmistakably himself (1.1.87-88). He is not, he declares, “in the roll of common men” (3.1.42). His potency is endowed by nature, but unnaturally singular. His unique faculties asserted, Glendower attempts to conclude his quarrel with Hotspur by reminding the young Percy about his remarkable successes against Henry IV, which the valiant Welshman effected from his natural seat of power:

> Three times hath Henry Bullingbrook made head
> Against my power; thrice from the banks of Wye
> And sandy-bottom’d Severn have I sent him
> Bootless home and weather-beaten back. (3.1.63-66)

Glendower here contends his rebuking of Henry IV constitutes an organic force against which Bolingbroke is impotent; the Welshman blends into “the banks of the Wye” and emerges out of the “sandy-bottom’d Severn” to send his English foe “bootless home.” Bolingbroke returns “weather-beaten back,” his action against Glendower like so much exposure to wind, rain, or sun, and we might imagine Henry’s bronzed and tarnished face blighted by the ferocity of Glendower’s rage. Hotspur’s response, however, empties Glendower’s metaphorical intimations of their grandeur:

> Home without boots, and in foul weather too!
> How scapes he agues, in the devil’s name? (3.1.67-68)

Hotspur’s retort renders Glendower’s “bootless” *ex post facto* metaphorical, Bolingbroke’s

unsuccessful attacks now merely a shoeless return to England, Glendower's natural fury translated into a punning topos of meteorology, a supernatural system brought to bear on the English king nothing more than "foul weather." What is at first Bolingbroke's unrewarded attempt to turn back the tide of the Wye and Severn, to fight with nature itself, becomes a punning riff on *bootless*: "unsuccessful," as in "devoid of boot or profit," as well as "without boots."[51] As Glendower imagines himself imbued with the power of Welsh rivers, Hotspur recasts the metaphorical force of Glendower's proclamation, from "head" to "bootless" toe, and renders the sandy soil beneath his feet unstable and changing, Hotspur himself sweeping away the soil with the force of a wild river. Hotspur's throwaway is an absolute etymological deracination: the OED lists the entire exchange not under the entry for "unsuccessful," but under that for "without boots," Hotspur having altered permanently the legacy of Glendower's locution. Words, Hotspur has demonstrated, are pliable.

Hotspur repeats this feat of mutability when it comes time to trisect the kingdom. Hotspur is dissatisfied with his lot, which is the "remnant northward lying off from Trent," the southwest being given to Mortimer and Wales to Glendower (3.1.78). Hotspur does not like the path of the river Trent, which "comes me cranking in," cutting him off "from the best of all [his] land" (3.1.97-98). The resulting loss is a "monstrous cantle out," a "huge half-moon" gutted from his territory, and so he warns of a solution he may pursue: to dam up the river, so that it runs "fair and evenly," "smug and silver" in a newly straightened course (3.1.99-102).[52] The river Trent is

[51] "bootless, adj.1" and "bootless, adj.2" OED Online. December 2019. Oxford University Press.

[52] *Contra* David Bevington, who argues Hotspur's use of "smug" is "meant to lay stress on the ideas of 'self-satisfied' and 'conceited,'" I would suggest the sense of "smooth, clean, neat, trim" is equally in play here, especially given Hotspur's interest in advancing a notion of corrected purity. David Bevington and Stephen Bevington, "Sweet Swan of Avon: Rivers in Shakespeare," *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 59, no. 2 (2019): 331.

notoriously fickle and changing, and Hotspur will have none of that incertitude. The Trent would do well to run "smug"—clean, pure, and neat—and "fair"—clean, pure, and white—in a newly fashioned course (3.1.101-2). Glendower's protestation—"Not wind? It shall, it must, you see it doth"—is characteristic of his reliance upon the fixity of nature, but his reputation for strength on the battlefield is nothing in the face of Hotspur's reality-bending manipulations (3.1.105). Your kingdom will be diminished, winnowed out one small charge by one small charge, as the Trent moves farther and farther west, cantling Wales silver half-moon by silver half-moon. Hotspur's gambit challenges the immutability of nature, rejecting the notion that what is natural is fixed and constant. He does not take exception with the authority of the archbishop to divide the land in this fashion, or with using the river as a boundary between his lands and those of Mortimer and Glendower. He simply moves the river, clarifies its path, straightens its course.

In its construction of and ownership over natural orders which are at once fixed and mutable, Hotspur's focalization of identity, nature, and property typifies the way whiteness becomes racialized within the *Henriad*. In shifting the course of the Trent, Hotspur not only refashions and fixes the internal boundaries of the kingdom—just as Henry V will proleptically recreate the external boundaries of his own unified kingdom, claiming dominion over an empire which includes the kingdom of France—but also clarifies the functions of a newly racial whiteness in relation to English history and identity. Henry V will unify the British Isles during his French campaign, and in this earlier moment, the rebels seek a tenuous alliance between otherwise disparate factions, regions, and nations. Indeed, the *Henriad*'s persistent interest in breaking down and reestablishing borders of identity signals its investment in a racial whiteness: "the function that whiteness as a social identity performs is to temporarily dissolve other social differences—sex, age, class, region and nation—into a delusion that the people labelled white

have more in common with each other than they do with anyone else, purely because of what they are not—black, Asian, asylum seeker, etc."[53] Hotspur's characteristically rash behavior—he later suggests to Mortimer his outburst had arisen from a visceral disgust with Glendower's stereotypically Welsh habits of behavior—reminds Glendower that his participation in this alliance is tenuous and revocable. Throughout the entire tetralogy, key figures remind audiences and readers about those whom "they are not": Richard II pursues "Irish wars" to his ruin (*R2*, 1.4.62); *Henry IV, Part 1* is scarcely underway before Henry IV is desiring to "chase these pagans in those holy fields" (*1H4*, 1.1.24); the Bishop of Carlisle celebrates the deceased Norfolk's battles against "black pagans, Turks, and Saracens" (*R2*, 4.1.95). Immediately following their verbal spat in *Henry IV, Part 1*, Mortimer attempts to mollify Hotspur by praising Glendower, saying he is "valiant as a lion, / And wondrous affable, and as bountiful / As mines of India" (3.1.165-67). Even in flattering Glendower, Mortimer gazes upon him, like India, as a natural resource suitable for exploitation, his "bountiful" nature at once a defining characteristic and a mineable, removable quality.

Rivers link a people to a place and inform notions of identity, and English rivers are no exception. Ian Smith has noted how in Richard Eden's 1553 travel narrative, "the land, the river, and the people [of Africa] seem one continuous contour of blackness in Eden's evocative geography of color," defined by Smith as a "chromatic materiality" in which the "flattened identities of African people [. . .] become discursively available for reassignment to material objects."[54] Rather than being subjected to the idiosyncratic whims of the natural world—like Glendower's source of power or the flattening of identity Smith describes—the English were in

[53] Garner, *Whiteness*, 11-12.

[54] Smith, "White Skin, Black Masks," 37-8.

the sixteenth century constructing images of themselves dominating their waterways. In his *Description of England*, William Harrison describes a straitened Thames confined for the sake of commerce: "it is and hath beene choked of late with sands and shelves, through the penning and wresting of the course of the water for commodities sake."[55] Harrison's tone belies his admiration of the English spirit: a shame, he suggests, that such a mighty river has been tamed by so powerful a people. Harrison moreover claims that English waters are plainer and less supernatural than rivers described by writers from other times and locales: "[Y]et can I not find by some experience that almost anie one of our rivers hath such od and rare qualities as divers of the maine are said to be indued withall."[56] Unlike rivers foreign and ancient, waters in England do not cause laughter, or cure gout, or cause the drinker to lose her teeth; nor do they make men effeminate, or dye wool scarlet.[57] The "like whereof are not to be found in England, [. . .] but that which is good, wholesome, and most commodious for our nation. We have therefore no hurtfull waters amongst us, but all wholesome and profitable for the benefit of the people."[58] In its depiction of placidity, Harrison's description of English rivers constitutes a project not unlike Hotspur's, which is to construct English identity as both natural and pure: English waters are nothing more, or less, than clean and wholesome.

The cleansing properties of English waters in Harrison's description are, of course,

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[55] William Harrison, *Harrison's Description of England in Shakespeare's Youth, Being The Second and Third Books of His Description of Britain and England*. Ed. from the *First Two Editions of Holinshed's* Chronicle, *A.D. 1577, 1587*, by Frederick J. Furnivall. Part I, Bk. 2 (London: New Shakspere Society, 1877), xxxv.

[56] Harrison, *Description of England,* 332.

[57] All supposed qualities of foreign waters detailed in Harrison, *Description of England*, 332-34.

[58] Harrison, *Description of England*, 334.

nothing short of exceptional, and the purifying essence of English waters appears to bear upon the whiteness of the English people insofar as that whiteness is contrasted with blackness, which is characterized by defiling or despoiling marks.[59] Patricia Parker has explored at length the proliferations of spotting—"blackness, soiling, sullying, and dulling"—in *Hamlet*, and as Gary Taylor suggests, "one of the favorite adjectives coupled with slave in early modern plays is muddy, literally 'covered or splattered with mud.'"[60] Muddiness appears throughout the *Henriad* as a mark of shame and degradation: Mistress Doll brands Falstaff a "muddy rascal" in *Henry IV, Part 2* (2.4.39); Falstaff warns Hal about the dangers of "pitch," which "doth defile," in *Henry IV, Part 1* (2.4.412-13); at the end of *Richard II*, King Henry IV laments the rebellious treachery of York's son, Aumerle, by invoking, once again, the metaphorical coupling of rivers and genealogy:

> Thou sheer, immaculate, and silver fountain,
> From whence this stream through muddy passages
> Hath held his current and defil'd himself! (5.3.61-63)

Despite Richard II's protesting that "Not all the water in the rough rude sea / Can wash the balm off from an anointed king," we could be forgiven for thinking of English rivers as a good place to undertake a penitential project (*R2*, 3.2.54-55). Although the history plays repeatedly contrast visible marks of shame with the purifying essences of clear water, mud and pitch prove often hard to cleanse. Confronting his accusers, Richard condemns their "deposing of a king," which

[59] "Whiteness, as it has come down to us, is conceived in part as a sort of physical hygiene—the lack of a mark or pollution." Dana Berthold, "Tidy Whiteness: A Genealogy of Race, Purity, and Hygiene," *Ethics and the Environment* 15, no. 1 (2010): 2.

[60] Patricia Parker, "Black *Hamlet*: Battening on the Moor," *Shakespeare Studies* 31 (2003): 127-64; Gary Taylor, *Buying Whiteness: Race, Culture, and Identity from Columbus to Hip-Hop* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 35.

will be written into history “[m]ark’d with a blot”:

> Though some of you, with Pilate, wash your hands,
>
> Showing an outward pity, yet you Pilates
>
> Have here deliver’d me to my sour cross,
>
> And water cannot wash away your sin. (4.1.234-42)

Richard connects the outward signs of blotting with an inner sin that cannot be cleansed, and in so doing claims a limit for cleansing waters, which can neither purify sin nor repair the historical record once marked with blots. But Richard’s protestations rest upon an assumption of equivalence between identities, a belief that in the “balm” of an “anointed king,” Richard’s status is fixed, just as ancient writers like Aesop write that “all the changes of water, and all the pains taken in rubbing and scrubbing him, could not make the Aethiopian change his hue.”[61] Richard’s assertion of kingly identity imagines a shared fixity of kingship and blackness, out of which emerges a crucial fiction of white identity, the notion that whiteness situates itself not only as an absence of markings, but as the ground upon which all identities are formed, king and Aethiopian alike.

In the theater, of course, whiteness does not exist as a terra firma upon which identities may be generated. The opening scene of *Richard II* lays out the troubling persistence of identity and places these later moments of sullying within a racial framework. In attempting to mollify Mowbray’s concerns, Richard promises to deal with the upstart Bolingbroke—“Give me his gage. Lions make leopards tame”—but Mowbray is not convinced: “Yea, but not change his spots” (1.1.174-75). Mowbray’s suggestion, that Bolingbroke cannot and will not change his

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[61] Aesop, *Mythologia ethica, or, Three centuries of Aesopian fables.* London: Printed for Thomas Hawkins, 1689, 251-2, in *Race in Early Modern England: A Documentary Companion*, eds. Ania Loomba and Jonathan Burton (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 39.

nature in the face of Richard's monarchical power, recalls "the spotted leopard and 'Moor' of Jeremiah 13:23, the biblical counterpart to the proverbial blanching of the Ethiope."[62] In Mowbray's estimation, Bolingbroke's accusations—that Gloucester's streams of blood have called out to Bolingbroke like Abel's—rob Mowbray of his once unsullied name:

> The purest treasure mortal times afford
> Is spotless reputation; that away,
> Men are but gilded loam or painted clay. (1.1.177-79)

Mowbray's complaint constructs two separate conceptions of purity, the latter of which undermines the efficacy of chromatic disclosure: although he first articulates the existence of a "spotless," unsullied reputation, such a state is indistinguishable from the gilding and painting which covers the base, material, and embodied condition of humanity. References to mud seem to suggest that blackness is a covering, but gilded loam and painted clay reverse that construction: so too is whiteness a fabrication. The *Henriad*'s darkening devices give shape to what is absent; but *contra* Ian Smith, who has argued that theatrical props of blackness "materialize the imagined black bodies of real Africans existing in the world outside the theater," I suggest that the discourse of sullying used here temporarily materializes a white body which is simultaneously being created as absent, beyond the grasp of representation.[63] The mud, the pitch, and spots repeatedly recalled in the *Henriad* belie the absence of white bodies, onstage or off. Whiteness materializes onstage in the gap between body and prop, established here as an immaterial, disembodied condition, one not subject to the kinds of material conditions that characterize racial alterity.

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[62] Parker, "Black *Hamlet*," 131.

[63] Ian Smith, "Othello's Black Handkerchief," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 64 (2013): 4.

The early modern English theater's mode of dissimulating whiteness participates in a broader project of humanistic education, and of political projects—like that of John Harris and the Levellers—aimed at escaping the vagaries of embodiment, including the frailty and moral failures of monarchs. Philip Sidney's "Defence of Poetry" recognizes the transcendence of embodiment as an aim of poetry:

> This purifying of wit, this enriching of memory, enabling of judgement, and enlarging of conceit, which commonly we call learning, under what name soever it come forth, or to what immediate end soever it be directed, the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of."[64]

Sidney's evocation of continuously perfecting ends is contrasted with the chronic condition of the "black Moor's skin," which is to make "apparent his hereditary sin and the punitive sentence to which he is subject."[65] If marked skin fixes one's fate, whiteness is an unmarked potential, an open-ended possibility. Whatsoever we call it and wheresoever it be directed, whiteness resists disclosure, fashioning and refashioning its telos out of the erasure of its bodily limitations.

The newly constituted path of Hotspur's Trent will be "silver" and "fair" not simply because it is pleasing to Hotspur; the river becomes fair in its refashioning. To be fair is not to be without blemishes, but to become unblemished. Mowbray's complaint about reputation hinges upon the difference between treasures innate and acquired, but as Henry's "bootless" assault upon Glendower reminds us, even qualities acquired can be asserted as innate. Hotspur rewrites

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[64] Philip Sidney, "A Defence of Poetry," in *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 347-48.

[65] Michael Neill, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 147.

the historical record, erasing blots at will: what is white was always white. The assertion requires historical erasure and refashioning made "fair and evenly," without cranks, cantles, angles, or nooks. But Hotspur's articulation of racial whiteness will be improved upon; though in his death Hotspur becomes "dust," Hal will transform not only his words, but his body into "food" not just "for worms" but also the grist of racial genealogy (*1H4*, 5.4.84-87). As *Henry V* looms, the *Henriad* heightens its resonances between past and present, and even the civil wars, a fascination for Shakespeare's audiences, come to represent a kind of inevitable and clarifying justification of royal power, despite Elizabeth I's concern that she herself is represented in the figure of Richard II.[66] The *Henriad* is simultaneously open and resistant to analogical readings: Elizabeth is Richard II as much as she is the bride of Henry V, Katherine of France, and so too, I will suggest, Katherine's descendent. If one function of myth is to mediate change, the *Henriad*'s experimentations with biblical myths and English history make sense of the end of Elizabeth's reign, and the Shakespearean innovation is to craft a solution to the problem of genealogy without an heir. If blood and genealogy can be transcended, how does racial whiteness replicate itself, and through which vessels? Into the gap between Elizabeth and her successor, between an English queen and a Scottish king, the women of the *Henriad* come "pouring like the tide into a breach" (*H5*, 1.2.149).

Muddy Waters

At the outset of both *Henry IV, Part 1* and *Henry V*, invasions nearer to home foreclose the possibility of military excursions abroad, and in both cases, incursions across the internal

[66] Urszula Kizelbach, "'I Am Richard II, Know Ye Not That?': Queen Elizabeth and Her Political Role Playing," in *The Pragmatics of Early Modern Politics: Power and Kingship in Shakespeare's History Plays* (Boston: Brill, 2014), 113-43.

borders of the island of Britain are encoded as feminine perversions. In the earlier play, Westmoreland brings news to Henry IV that Mortimer has been captured by Glendower, and refers obliquely to rumored treatment of the English dead:

> A thousand of his people butchered,
>
> Upon whose dead corpse' there was such misuse,
>
> Such beastly shameless transformation,
>
> By those Welshwomen done as may not be
>
> Without much shame retold or spoken of. (*1H4*, 1.1.42-46)

The "tidings of this broil / Brake off our business for the Holy Land," laments Henry (*1H4*, 1.1.47-48). The supposed defiling of English bodies at the hands of Welsh women haunts Henry's imperial ambitions (or, rather, muddles them, the use of "broil" as a noun being a sixteenth-century derivation from the verb meaning "to mix or mingle confusedly," giving Henry's remark familiar valences).[67] Although English rivers may not, as those ancient writers report, turn men effeminate, crossing the River Wye into Wales threatens to destabilize the masculinity of English warriors, not to mention their Englishness; Lisa Hopkins notes that in "English writing of the time, the primary markers of [Wales's] geographical and cultural difference from England are rivers."[68] The offense alluded to by Westmoreland is indelibly rendered in the historical record, the accusation being that "orifices [have been] systematically stuffed with members from opposite regions," a "beastly shameless transformation" which threatens the very constitution of the male, English body.[69] In the Shakespearean text, the deed

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[67] "broil, n.1" OED Online. December 2019. Oxford University Press.

[68] Lisa Hopkins, *Shakespeare on the Edge: Border-Crossing in the Tragedies and the* Henriad (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 17.

[69] Terence Hawkes, "Bryn Glas," in *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, eds. Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin

remains unspoken, however, despite Holinshed having declared the act "testified in historie," and "imparted in our mother toong to the knowledge of our owne countrimen, as well as unto strangers in a language unknowne."[70] Perhaps Shakespeare's audience need not be reminded, in excruciating detail, of an incident already burned into their imaginations. And perhaps the "beastly shameless transformation" remains unnamed in the play because of the way it marks the bodies of the English over and against those of the Welsh, who might otherwise be expected to carry the mark of differentiation. But despite the memorialization of Welsh difference, the play nonetheless suffers the incorporation of that difference into a novel imperial identity, one defined through and by a shared but revocable whiteness.

The episode's depiction of the dangers posed to patriarchal racial whiteness by unchecked femininity provides a crucial framework for understanding the role of women in the *Henriad*; in evoking but eliding what happens when foreign women interact with English men, the text temporarily dissolves boundaries between English and Welsh, creating a shared racial identity defined by the preservation of masculinist genealogies, in which whitened mothers both establish and reproduce, albeit precariously, the whiteness of fathers. Terence Hawkes at least partially captures this genealogically formalizing function, arguing that in the Welsh language, Shakespeare locates a "capacity to create a 'bower of bliss' whose modes dissolve and transcend the male, order-giving boundaries of an English-speaking world," a feminine and feminizing quality Hotspur rejects in that critical scene near the middle of *Henry IV, Part 1*.[71] But Hotspur's dismissal of his wife is itself rejected by the play—his fate is to remain harrowed in the soil, as

(New York: Routledge, 1998), 122.

[70] Hawkes, "Bryn Glas," 122.

[71] Hawkes, "Bryn Glas," 124.

food merely for worms—in favor of the vision hinted at by Mortimer following the cartographic machinations of Act III, Scene 1, when the men are joined by their wives, including Mortimer's Welsh wife, Catrin Glendower, who speaks and sings entirely in Welsh. "[T]hy tongue," Mortimer exclaims,

> Makes Welsh as sweet as ditties highly penn'd,
>
> Sung by a fair queen in a summer's bow'r,
>
> With ravishing division, to her lute. (3.1.205-8)

The Welsh language does not, as Hawkes suggests, merely transcend "male, order-giving boundaries," but reestablishes its own formal logic. At once ordering and destabilizing, Catrin's voice manages to evoke both the "highly penn'd" structure of poetry and the disintegrative "summer's bow'r," its "ravishing division" a gendered uncoupling which upends Mortimer's rapine fantasies with the assistance of Catrin's "lute." Mortimer is ravished through division, separated and separated again by Catrin's voice, taken apart, piece by piece, down to his constituent elements. The image Mortimer constructs is penned in by both metonymy and simile, however; Catrin's empowerment is restricted metonymically to her tongue, then removed by simile to an imagined "fair queen." Catrin is blurred at the margins of the play, portrayed and embodied by a Welsh-speaking actor but rendered virtually invisible within the text of the play itself.[72]

The presence of Mortimer's Welsh wife anticipates the end of *Henry V* not only in its depiction of domesticity, but also in its focus upon the linguistic alterity of a woman whose marriage serves to enforce diplomatic ties between erstwhile warring kingdoms, and whose

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[72] As Hawkes puts it, "[h]er powers are clearly located in a language that Shakespeare never attempts to transliterate, but presumably hands over to the invention of Welsh-speaking actors working within the company," Hawkes, "Bryn Glas," 124.

foreignness will soon be incorporated into a newly articulated racial whiteness. *Henry V* reincorporates the divisions wrought by the Welsh Catrin, however, linguistically turning back the ravishing divisions of a foreign woman in the form of Katherine's self-blazoning attempts to learn the English tongue. For Mortimer, the sound of his wife's voice is akin to that of a "fair queen," and Mortimer finds himself powerlessly captivated by her voice. In *Henry V*, Hal not only whitens his future bride, the French princess so frequently interpellated "fair Katherine," but dominates her, the final wooing scene culminating Hal's military exploits in France. If Mortimer's wife Catrin exists at the edges of *Henry IV, Part 1*, Katherine is simultaneously centered and scattered, appearing in brief interludes as a comic figure learning English, and finally appearing within the play's main plot only once her fate has been secured violently by Henry V. Her presence is crucial, however, and Laura Aydellote has noted the "tension between the mastery that the men in the plays hold over these women and the extent to which, both historically and within Shakespeare's fiction, they depend upon the women's lines as the means to consolidate their power."[73] The racial dependence on these women's lines is significantly nonbiological, however; John Watkins has argued Elizabeth I's rejection of a French husband "decisively removed England from the cycle of wars and treaties that, from a sixteenth-century perspective, compromised England's independence," and which "enabled the eventual emergence of a national foreign policy detached from dynastic interests and shielded against the vagaries of biology."[74] Exploring the role of women in the history plays, J. L. Simmons

[73] Laura Aydellote, "Mapping Women: Place Names and a Woman's Place," in *Travel and Travail: Early Modern Women, English Drama, and the Wider World*, eds. Patricia Akhimie and Bernadette Andrea (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 190-91.

[74] John Watkins, *After Lavinia: A Literary History of Premodern Marriage Diplomacy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 146.

inadvertently acknowledges the fraught racial nature of feminine involvement in masculinist racial genealogies, writing that the "disruptive women" of the historical tetralogies are most visible "in the genealogy of the Mortimers, the earls of March, who disturb and muddle the patriarchal narrative whenever they appear in Hall and Holinshed, a muddle notoriously reproduced in the Shakespeare sequence."[75] In the muddling of a patriarchal narrative, the mud, pitch, and spots of the *Henriad* return again, generating in the evocation of racial prosthetics the imagined white bodies in which the entire historical sequence is invested. The *Henriad* seeks to resolve the tension which arises out of the desire to maintain monarchical, absolutist power without entangling the English throne with foreign monarchs; in short, to propagate a patriarchal, white supremacy without the disruptive participation of muddling women and the vagaries of biological reproduction.

The forms of English whiteness depicted by Shakespeare thus coerce the participation of women who function as dispensable progenitors of whiteness. The development of an English racial identity insulates England from both the unreliable dispositions of kings and queens and, moreover, the instability wrought by an absence of heirs. A punning acknowledgement of lost heirs in *Henry IV, Part 1*—"thy precious rich crown for a pitiful bald crown"—becomes an earnest appeal for Katherine's love in *Henry V*, an appeal paired with a "fair face": "a curl'd pate will grow bald, a fair face will wither" (*1H4*, 2.4.381-82; *H5*, 5.2.160-61). Aging monarchs are no less precariously positioned than infant kings, and *Henry V* follows its unexpectedly comic fifth act with a somber reminder of Henry VI's imminent failures. Indeed, the *Henriad* complicates over and again the supposed greatness of England's medieval dynastic rulers, and

[75] J. L. Simmons, "Masculine Negotiations in Shakespeare's History Plays: Hal, Hotspur, and 'the Foolish Mortimer,'" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 442.

takes pains to commit to memory the unnamed English who might claim membership in the racial group it forms. Just as the scene with Mortimer's Welsh wife anticipates Henry's wooing of the French Katherine, so too the maimed English dead mentioned near the beginning of *Henry IV, Part 1* anticipate Henry V's pseudo-memorialization of the fallen English following the battle of Agincourt: in contrast to the numerous dead "gentlemen of blood and quality" on the French side, the English have lost but a few noblemen, and "none else of name; and of all other men / But five and twenty" (*H5*, 4.8.90, 105-6). Henry's celebration of the few noble dead may be read as satisfaction with England's overwhelming victory, but as he prepares a return to England, he orders unusually generous rites for those unnamed English heroes, to be "with charity enclos'd in clay" (4.8.124).[76] Enclosures of clay here attest to preoccupations with vessels—wombs, borders, clayey caverns—which, combined with the battle's charnel conclusion, lead Shakespeare's audience inexorably toward the consolatory womb of Katherine of France, and toward a racial genealogy which both deploys and disclaims the necessities of biological generation.

Near the beginning of the *Henriad*'s final play, as Henry V is persuaded to make plans against the French, he recalls an imminent danger for a defenseless England, "the Scot, who will make road upon us / With all advantages" (*H5*, 1.2.138-39). "They of those marches," Canterbury promises,

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[76] Philippe Ariès suggests how unusual this arrangement may have been, at least as a permanent resting space, noting the prevalence of common graves and charnel houses during the late medieval and early modern periods in Europe: "When one ditch was full it was covered with earth, an old one was reopened, and the bones were taken to the charnel houses. The remains of the more wealthy dead, buried within the church itself, were not placed in vaults but in the dirt, under the flagstones. They too eventually followed the path to the charnel houses. As yet unborn was the modern idea that the dead person should be installed in a sort of house unto himself, a house of which he was the perpetual owner or at least the long-term tenant, a house in which he would be at home and from which he could not be evicted" in *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 22.

Shall be a wall sufficient to defend

Our inland from the pilfering borderers. (*H5*, 1.2.140-42)

But Henry, who has read his history, disagrees:

For you shall read that my great-grandfather

Never went with his forces into France

But that the Scot on his unfurnish'd kingdom

Came pouring like the tide into a breach,

With ample and brim fullness of his force,

Galling the gleaned land with hot assays,

Girding with grievous siege castles and towns;

That England being empty of defense,

Hath shook and trembled at th' ill neighborhood. (*H5*, 1.2.146-54)

Henry's sense of history is familiarly lineal, the connection with the past both personally genealogical and broadly available to the English: "For you shall read," he begins, about "my great-grandfather." The image Henry paints is of a country "unfurnish'd" without its army, "empty of defense," shaken, trembling, and breached. So long as the Scottish remain a dangerous foe, no expeditions into France will be allowed. The portrayal of England as a fragile vessel—one empty without men—persists throughout the *Henriad* as a way of feminizing the landscape, beginning as early as Gaunt's personification of England as

This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,

This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings. (*R2*; 2.1.50-51)

The land teems only with its "royal kings," without which England is but an "unfurnish'd kingdom." England becomes the site and source of an English racial bloodline, one both effected

and threatened by its feminized landscape, which in its porous nature is inherently and perpetually muddled. Richard Helgerson has noted how sixteenth-century mapping made the land available to patriarchal domination: "Feminized, the land becomes a fitting object for male desire and appropriation. Furthermore, the title given that female personification, 'Great Britain,' explicitly supports a particular and highly controversial element in James's political program, his attempt to unite the kingdoms of England and Scotland as the Empire of Great Britain."[77] Appropriating France through the feminization of that foreign land constitutes a central project of *Henry V*, as those imperial ambitions become translated dramatically into the coercive marriage plot with which the *Henriad* ends. The Welsh Catrin provides a template of division, a tilling of soil, and by *Henry V* the operation has been turned upon Katherine, her own body divided into parts as she learns English, translating her into an appropriate enclosure for advancing an English line. Katherine of France provides a formal structure for mapping the future, a scaffold upon which the newly racialized content of English identity might be hoisted. If at the beginning of *Henry V*, the Chorus requests that audiences "Into a thousand parts divide one man," by the end of the play, the imaginative work of ideology and nation—the racialized conquest of France—is reversed, reducing itself into the embodied conditions of the theatrical representation, into the material constructions of racial—and gendered—alterity (*H5*, Pro.24).

In the English theater, representations of women necessitated the use of theatrical props, and modified skin color offered one visible mechanism by which audiences could be informed about the presence of women onstage. Dympna Callaghan has suggested the visibility of whiteness emerges out of the use of whitening prosthetics to depict femininity onstage:

[77] Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 124.

"whiteness becomes visible in an exaggerated white and, crucially, feminine identity."[78] Whiteness is thus a dangerously feminized theatrical condition, but England's imperial ambitions nonetheless necessitate those depictions of whiteness; indeed, the history of emergent racial awareness in England intertwines itself with histories of both colonial expansion and theatrical portrayals of alterity. Kimberly Poitiven argues constructions of whiteness in England originated with developments in women's cosmetic practices in the face of an expanding global world:

> [A]s the English learned to see black and brown skin colors as significant markers of race with respect to peoples in other parts of the world, there arose a pressing need to define themselves as racial subjects. As the primary users of cosmetics at home, English women helped fulfill this need, using make-up to accentuate differences between themselves and their foreign, darker-skinned counterparts, and making whiteness a visible English trait.[79]

The emergence of a specific racial epistemology becomes evident, then, in the coupling of visual theatrical materials and linguistic markers which mutually reinforce whiteness as both feminized and conquerable. This history moreover establishes whiteness visibly as a process of whitening, a condition to be attained, perhaps even narratively. *Henry V*'s repeated evocations of "fair Katherine" insinuate the extent to which her whiteness is both readily available and apparent to Shakespeare's audience, even as Katherine's obvious difference becomes a condition to be overcome by Hal's steady and interminable march toward the chamber scene of Act V. Katherine represents the play's French "others," especially insofar as her appearances are dominated by the difficulties of English language acquisition. But despite that reinforced difference, Katherine's cosmetic whiteness links her inevitably with Queen Elizabeth and her

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[78] Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women*, 78.

[79] Poitevin, "Inventing Whiteness," 62.

cult of whiteness, a connection reinforced by Katherine's reiterated epithet.[80] Shakespeare's Katherine is resiliently white.

As the *Henriad* nears its conclusion, near what must have felt like the always approaching end of Elizabeth's reign, Shakespeare's audiences are presented with a reapplication of whiteness, as Hal's muddy, battle-tested visage finds ablution in a whitened queen. At the beginning of *Henry IV, Part I*, Hal suggests his "foul and ugly" youth will be redeemed, son into sun, lightened from behind a mask of "base contagious clouds"; Hal imagines his maturation as both rebirth and reformation, a return to a prior glory all the more "wond'red at" for its having been absent (1.2.198-202). Hal's narrative arc conveniently mirrors the crisis of succession facing England at the end of the sixteenth century. Although James VI of Scotland was already a rumored successor, his ascension was neither consoling nor even assured, and "as a foreigner he faced a common law prohibition against alien land inheritance in England."[81] If England's future monarch was to arrive from a foreign land, the *Henriad* grapples with a racial answer to the question of an English identity in desperate need of plasticity. If Hal's "foul and ugly" youth can be redeemed, perhaps a past in which Scottish incursions threatened a fragile England can be rewritten, and a separate northern kingdom can be reproduced as just another province in an always present, misremembered empire.

The play's answers, however, arrive fraught with precarity. When he suggests their future son will live to defeat a nameless, faceless, generalized racial other, Henry imagines his union with Katherine as an innovative racial "compound": Shall not thou and I, between Saint Denis

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[80] Poitevin, "Inventing Whiteness," 61: "Certainly Queen Elizabeth's use of cosmetics was legendary in her time—it is believed she began using them most heavily after a bout with smallpox in 1562—and as she aged, they helped her create the iconic mask-like image she is known for today."

[81] Stuart M. Kurland, "Hamlet and the Scottish Succession?" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 34, no. 2 (1994): 281.

and Saint George, compound a boy, half French, half English, that shall go to Constantinople and take the Turk by the beard?" (5.2.206-9). By asserting Katherine's fairness and placing their future son in opposition to "the Turk," Henry reminds his audience of the manifold threats to English whiteness, and the importance of racial purity. But his use of "compound" evokes as well an incomplete union, a combination that leaves visible and separable the discrete elements that make up the heir to England and France, laying bare the extent to which biological reproduction alone is inadequate for the task of ensuring the future stability of racial whiteness. In the closing lines of *Henry V*, the Chorus reinvokes the language of blood and genealogy which began the *Henriad*, reminding audiences of Henry VI's failure, the king

> Whose state so many had the managing
>
> That they lost France and made his England bleed. (Epi.11-12)

Despite all, the son will fail, and the country still will bleed. This genealogical bookending calls to mind an unexpected bloodline at work between the play's historical subject and its representation, between the staged history and the audience's imagination upon which those stage forces work. Elizabeth I of England was not a descendent of Henry V, but her ancestor is represented onstage. The historical figure represented by Katherine of France, Catherine of Valois, would marry Henry V and give birth to Henry VI, whose advisors would so badly manage his kingdom to effect its fracture. Catherine would remarry, however, and her marriage to a Welsh commoner, Owen Tudor, would produce the Tudor line of which Elizabeth was the final monarch. But despite a direct genealogical line between Shakespeare's Katherine and his Queen Elizabeth, the play rejects strictly genealogical connections to the past, opting instead for a muddling of national and personal identity. Although *Henry V* draws upon a similar set of resources to make sense of Elizabeth's successor—blood and soil—the play reimagines the

conditions of racial genealogy, crafting a racial identity whereby inclusions and exclusions reshape past and future alike, and in which uncertainties of biology are asserted as evidence, rather than relied upon for results.

Resistance to genealogy is evident in an elision set in motion in *Henry IV, Part 1*, when Lady Percy—Elizabeth Mortimer—is inexplicably named "Kate," a blurring of "Kate" and "Elizabeth" which initiates the commingling of whitened women which persists throughout the *Henriad*, and out of which emerges a sense of whiteness which simultaneously links individuals with nation and clouds the boundaries between individuals and nation. Elizabeth becomes Kate; Kate, Elizabeth; Catrin speaks no English, then Kate does; the Welsh become white, so too the French. No stabilizing or generative marriage is available for Elizabeth I at the end of the sixteenth century, so the Shakespearean text resists genealogical solutions, and another mode of engaging with history appears, a mode in which the linearity of genealogy is replaced with a theatrical staging of England's origin, which is then made available to future generations of English readers.

William Camden began near the end of Elizabeth I's reign to reexamine the racial status of the island's earliest inhabitants and to refashion English histories of whiteness. History had at times been more consistent in describing English bodies as white: Harrison writes in his *Description of Britain* that the Britons were "tall of stature, strong in body, white of colour."[82] In *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, Batholomew Anglicus tells the story of Saint Gregory, who upon seeing English slaves in Rome, declares, "Truly they be English, for they shine in face right as

[82] William Harrison, "The Description of Britain," in Raphael Holinshed, *The firste volume of the chronicles of Englande, Scotlande, and Ireland. . .* (London: John Hunne, 1577) in Loomba and Burton, *Race in Early Modern England*, 103.

angels."[83] But in Camden's *Britain, or A chorographical description of the most flourishing kingdomes, England, Scotland, and Ireland* (a title which anticipates the unification of England, Scotland, and Ireland staged in *Henry V*), the antiquarian imagines a different history of race in England: "[T]he most sufficient authors that be, as Caesar, Mela, Pliny, and the rest do show that the Britons coloured themselves with woad, called in Latin glastum (and glass at this day signifieth blue)."[84] In Camden's history, it is not an English presence in Rome that establishes English whiteness, but a Roman presence in England:

> This yoke of the Romans, although it were grevious, yet comfortable it proved a saving health unto them. For that healthsome light of Jesus Christ shone withal upon the Britons . . . and the brightness of that most glorious empire chased away all savage barbarism from the Britons' minds.[85]

Like Hal's ascendant sun, or like the English waters described by Harrison, the brightness of Roman Christianity washes away "savage barbarism" and corrects historical faults. Shakespeare's engagement with English history brings about a similarly realigned conception of history, genealogy, and race, one which relies upon foreign intrusions—in this case, of the French Katherine—to make clear the underlying white purity of the English race.

Upon finally arriving at the *Henriad*'s destined end, in Katherine's bedchamber, with marriage imminent, Henry tells Katherine: "An angel is like you, Kate, and you are like an

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[83] Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De Proprietatibus Rerum* (ca. 1230-40), in Loomba and Burton, *Race in Early Modern England*, 63.

[84] William Camden, *Britain, or A chorographical description of the most flourishing kingdomes, England, Scotland, and Ireland* (London: George Bishop and Joannis Norton, 1610), in Loomba and Burton, *Race in Early Modern England*, 183.

[85] Camden, *Britain*, in Loomba and Burton, *Race in Early Modern England*, 183.

angel" (5.2.109-10). In naming Katherine, Henry makes her white, just as the Anglicus does in his story of England's origin, of the island "hight sometimes Albion" and its "white rocks, which were seen on the sea cliffs."[86] In Anglicus's account, naming constitutes the civilizing operation of his mythic tale, which offers converging etymologies for England: the angels of Saint Gregory, and "Angulus, a corner, as it were set in the end, or corner of the world."[87] Perhaps England's position—culturally and geographically—as a backwater is what motivates the Duke of Bourbon's disgust with England's "dirty farm[s]" covering the "nook-shotten isle of Albion" (3.5.13-14). But so too does the image of England as a "corner of the world" "shotten" with "nooks" suggest a rejoinder to the linear model of history the play has been rejecting, and an investment instead in a refashioning of English myth, an account of origins which makes sense of the bloody, muddled lines of civil strife.

The Choric Space of Whiteness

Just as Hotspur moves a river, and Katherine is made white before her marriage, the Chorus of *Henry V* creates an originary whiteness through which it gazes upon past, present, and future. Repeatedly invested in establishing traceable lines of descent, the Chorus instills in King Henry V an inevitable and reiterating historical legitimacy. In the choric interlude which precedes the fifth act, the audience of *Henry V* hears what sounds like a linear account of history:

> The mayor and all his brethren in best sort,
> Like to the senators of th' antique Rome
> With plebeians swarming at their heels,

[86] Anglicus, *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, in Loomba and Burton, *Race in Early Modern England*, 64.

[87] Anglicus, *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, in Loomba and Burton, *Race in Early Modern England*, 73.

> Go forth and fetch their conqu'ring Caesar in;
>
> As by a lower but by loving likelihood,
>
> Were now the general of our gracious Empress,
>
> As in good time he may, from Ireland coming,
>
> Bringing rebellion broached on his sword,
>
> How many would the peaceful city quit,
>
> To welcome him! (*H5*, 5.Cho.25-34)

Shakespeare casts Henry in his triumphant return as a conquering Caesar, and connects the exploits of both Henry and Caesar with Essex's not yet unsuccessful campaign into Ireland. But what appears sequential is rather a mode of repetition, a repeated return to the origin of a society "founded on an act of violence by exclusion, while history is the chain of repetitive imitations of this act."[88] Caesar conquers the Goths; Henry conquers the French; Essex conquers the Irish, and in distant anticipation of an act not yet performed, English whiteness conquers lands as yet unknown. History folds back on itself, having already anticipated what is not yet to come, an operation evoking Sara Ahmed's claim that "what appears in front of us, racism as what we have to confront, is already behind us."[89] Racial histories proceed in this fashion, retreading the same ground time and again, forever.

Naming and singling out London's mayor, the Chorus recalls a configuration of race, land, and royal power imprinted into English politics contemporaneously with Shakespeare's writing of *Henry V*. In 1596, Elizabeth I delivered "[a]n open letter to the Lord Mayor of

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[88] Maria Assad, *Reading with Michel Serres: An Encounter with Time* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 11.

[89] Sara Ahmed, "Race as Sedimented History," *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 6 (2015): 96.

London" concerning

> late diverse blackamoors brought into this realm, of which kind of people there are already too many, considering how God hath blessed this land with great increase of people of our own nation as any country in the world, whereof many for want of service and means to set them on work fall on idleness and to great extremity.[90]

Elizabeth's letter imagines racial expulsion as a means to eliminating idleness, an invigorating exclusion of otherness which connects English identity with agricultural labor: "this land," blessed with increased population, places the English in "great extremity" for want of food and shelter. Elizabeth's calculation anticipates Henry's calls to action in *Henry V*: before the second act, the Chorus tells the story of Henry's wartime volunteers, who "sell the pasture now to buy the horse" (2.Cho.5), and later, lamenting the overwhelming energy of those English forces, the Duke of Bourbon declares,

> I will sell my dukedom,
> To buy a slobb'ry and a dirty farm
> In that nook-shotten isle of Albion. (3.5.12-14)

Although Elizabeth's proclamation points to the presence of blackamoors troubling an overcrowded island, the Duke of Bourbon implies the opposite: English land is agriculturally available to the defeated French duke.

The availability of English land coincides with the articulation of white, English culture, as the open-ended possibilities of racial whiteness become convoluted with the fecundity of soil. This staging of England's white racial origin—the connection between Elizabeth's expulsion of

[90] Queen Elizabeth I of England, "An Open Letter to the Lord Maiour of London and th'Aldermen his brethren," in Loomba and Burton, *Race in Early Modern England*, 136.

blackamoors and Bourbon's at-hand "isle of Albion"—constitutes a kind of clearing away, an exclusion which evokes what Michel Serres describes as the origin of agricultural society:

> The invention of an empty space, its discovery under floodwaters or its continuation by the sweat of our brow, open a gap in the world's tissue, produce a catastrophe, a distance, a fault through which rush, not the excluded multiplicity, but rather the mad multiplication of the most random or the best adapted single unit. The previous equilibrium was sewn with differences. But in the local whiteness that we produce, homogeneity appears.[91]

Nonwhite figures are not merely excluded from the city of whiteness, but the city is created in their exclusion. The *Henriad* creates empty, racial space, an invention fully realized in the Chorus of *Henry V*. Unlike the work of the company's Welsh actor, whose linguistic ability and alterity creates the character Catrin Glendower, the Chorus demands the audience donate the "sweat of our brow" to make the English foreign and the foreign English. The "vasty fields of France" are crammed "[w]ithin this wooden O," and we "[a]ttest in little place a million," multiplying the English actors onstage into the French, Welsh, Irish, and Scottish portrayed therein (Pro.12-16). The Chorus is tediously concerned with imagining division amidst persistent sameness. Dissolution and agglomeration: the prosthetic work of whiteness. The play's opening "O" is not only an expanding physical border around England, but also a graphical representation of the scrubbing the play performs, of the white spot of homogeneity, a ring that persists and expands despite Henry VI's loss of the "infant bands" in which he was crowned king (Epi.9). The play's depictions of white Englishness within an agriculturally violent milieu conjure the

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[91] Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence R. Schehr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 178.

furrowing divisions of the plough, destruction and reconstruction, decay and growth, the commingling of blood and soil which weaves itself throughout the entire sequence, from Gloucester's sluiced blood to the "famine, sword, and fire" and "narrow ocean" cut "asunder" in *Henry V*'s prologue (Pro.7, 22).

The *Henriad* cuts sacrificially; the creation of racial whiteness calls for a victim, and the *Henriad* offers them severally, from Gloucester and Richard II to the clay-lodged English dead in *Henry V*. "The ploughshare is a sacrificial knife," writes Serres,

> frenetically manipulated at the height of murdering fury. The knife kills a man or an animal. Abel or the lamb, Isaac or the scapegoat. [. . .] It marks a closed line: inside, the sacred; outside, the profane; inside, the temple; outside, the vague area filled with evil. Inside, the city, surrounded by walls, and the country outside. The ploughshare founded the city, and in the hollow of a furrow, a brother killed his twin.[92]

The Chorus creates enclosures and divisions, a wall between audience and performer, city and country, the voice of the people which compels the participation it receives, marking the partitions of the play, beginning and end, and every stage of Henry's journey along the way. The Chorus, or *chōra*—"place occupied by someone, country, inhabited space, marked place, rank, post, assigned position, territory, or region"—calls our attention to the *Henriad*'s sustained interest in the space of borders.[93] Curiously, however, the Chorus makes portable its demarcations of space, the climactic effect of its racializing operations. One particular effect of the Chorus is to make sense of the *Henry V*'s movement between France and England, and it

[92] Serres, *The Parasite*, 177.

[93] Jacques Derrida, "Khōra," trans. Ian Mcleod, in *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 109.

does so in ways that place the English "both at the center and in the periphery" of their land.[94] Near the end of the entire dramatic sequence, in the prologue to the fifth act of *Henry V*, the Chorus will call attention to the English as a natural feature fencing in the unruly sea: "Behold, the English beach / Pales in the flood with men, wives and boys" (5.Cho.9-10). English whiteness is in this final arrangement indistinguishable from the water for which it provides form; the pale skin of the English, the pale waves of the sea, and the boundary—the "pale"—formed in the juxtaposition blend into each other, a culminating image of English whiteness as both naturalizing and organic.

The *Henriad*'s engagements with historiography provide form to inchoate epistemologies of race through the manipulation of inheritable cultural legacies, creating racial myths which operate as such insofar as they are "distinguished by a high degree of constancy in their narrative core and by an equally pronounced capacity for marginal variation."[95] The *Henriad* reshapes the story of Cain and Abel, recasting a narrative of primal fratricide as a myth of purity, soil, and genealogy. The history plays borrow freely from the libraries of myth, and Shakespeare's recourse to the figure of Mercury attests to the tetralogy's investment in modes of cultural transmission. Mercury first appears in the *Henriad* during Act 4, Scene 1 of *Henry IV, Part 1*, when Vernon arrives to report to an expectant Hotspur on Hal's performance in battle:

> I saw young Harry with his beaver on,
>
> His cushes on his thighs, gallantly arm'd,
>
> Rise from the ground like feathered Mercury,

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[94] Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World*, trans. Andrew Szegedy-Maszak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 7.

[95] Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1985), 34.

And vaulted with such ease into his seat

As if an angel dropp'd down from the clouds

To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus. (*1H4*, 4.1.104-9)

The soil generates, in its abundant fecundity, a Hal who has not yet cast away his base, contagious clouds, and who assumes the likeness of an angel he will later confer upon Katherine. *Henry V* will conjure the earlier moment when the Chorus describes the "youth of England":

They sell the pasture now to buy the horse,

Following the mirror of all Christian kings,

With winged heels, as English Mercuries. (2.Cho.1, 5-7)

Like Henry's St. Crispin's Day speech in miniature, Mercury's transference from Hal to the youth of England creates Shakespeare's audience as fully realized individuals whose descendants might number themselves among Shakespeare's readers, and whose own personal histories become intertwined with the history of a white nation unfolded in the scenes and pages of the *Henriad*. One such reader was John Harris, the Leveller printer whose concern with the debasement of the English monarchy was felt personally across the pages of *Mercurius Militaris*. Although those pamphlets articulate a dissatisfaction with the monarchy, Harris repeats the acts of exclusion upon which the *Henriad*'s racial whiteness rests, suggesting that corrupted monarchs operating under the guise of "English habits" conceal beneath their gilded loam and painting clay "Boars of France and Negroes in Barbary." Harris creates his own racial and literary genealogies, printing his *Mercurius Militaris* and seeing it distributed, as most pamphlets were, by "semi-destitute female hawkers known as Mercury Women."[96] Even in distant

[96] Bob Clark, *From Grub Street to Fleet Street: An Illustrated History of English Newspapers to 1899* (London: Routledge, 2017), 23.

historical echoes, the formal function of femininity within the plays becomes replicated in its external transmissions, and the formal constancy of Shakespearean myths of whiteness enable their myriad disseminations along innumerable lines of descent.

The story told here attests both to the need for a stabilizing framework at the turn of the seventeenth century, but also the persistent portability of racial whiteness as a mode of reading and conceiving of history. John Harris cites Shakespeare's histories to provide a grammar and language of exclusion, and his return to those dramatic texts points to the origins of his thinking within those selfsame dramas. The peculiarly unfinished nature of the *Henriad*—its inconclusive final gesture toward the failures of Henry VI—leads its audiences to generate and regenerate its mythologizing operations with their own histories, to repeat and rearticulate the act of expulsion upon which the cultural legacy of Shakespeare's histories rests.

Chapter Two

King Lear's White Heirs

A Blushing Genealogy

King Lear is a play about the origins of race in ancient Britain, and it begins by exploring the relationship between bloodlines, inheritance, and skin color. Just as King James's reign began in the midst of national myth-making about England's racial whiteness, the play's opening line appears mid-conversation, as Gloucester and Kent discuss Lear's impending "division of the kingdom" (1.1.4). The play imagines an ancient division repaired by James, and in his own speeches and writings, James frequently thought about his role in unifying a divided kingdom. As James Shapiro notes, the opening line of the play—"I thought the king had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall" (1.1.1-2)—is an "uncharacteristically topical" way to open a play about ancient Britain, referencing as it does James's sons, the Dukes of Albany and Cornwall.[97] James's *Basilikon Doron*, written to his son Henry, warns against the division of kingdoms:

> And in case it please God to prouide you to all these three Kingdomes, make your eldest sonne *Isaac*, leauing him all your kingdomes; and prouide the rest with priuate possessions: Otherwayes by deuiding your kingdomes, yee shall leaue the seed of diuision and discord among your posteritie; as befell to this Ile, by the diuision and assignment thereof, to the three sonnes of *Brutus*, *Locrine*, *Albanact*, and *Camber*.[98]

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[97] James Shapiro, *The Year of Lear: Shakespeare in 1606* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015), 40.

[98] James I, *Basilikon Doron. Or His Maiesties Instrvctions to His Dearest Sonne, Henry the Prince*, in *The Political Works of James I, Reprinted from the Edition of 1616*, ed. Charles Howard McIlwain (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918), 3-52, 37.

James's caution about the future finds precedent in the ancient matter of Britain, a topic that, because of James's interest in unifying Britain under his rule, found itself under sustained focus in the opening years of the seventeenth century, "as it made it possible to argue that the whole island had once been united under a single ruler. James's union of the crowns could thus be seen not just as a unification but as a reunification."[99] If James was reunifying the ancient kingdoms of Britain, he was in the seventeenth century doing so through an organization of racial whiteness first introduced into England during the reign of his predecessor, and as a foreign king in England, his presence on the throne depended upon the success of the project.

When King James at last arrived in London after a long trek south from Scotland further delayed by the plague that was in 1603 tearing its way through the city, he was greeted by pageantry made all the more glorious by the delay of several months and a span of forty-four years between royal accessions.[100] Ben Jonson and Thomas Dekker collaborated on the entertainment, and the latter printed his contributions alongside portions ultimately abandoned due to James's plague-altered career into the city. Near the end of his *Magnificent Entertainment*, Dekker describes the appearance of Vertumnus, whose seduction of Pomona in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* analogizes the "ability of man to control nature and to subjugate it to his wishes."[101] This manipulation of feminized nature already recalling my reading of Hotspur in the first chapter, Dekker's Vertumnus is further limned as a figure of racial whiteness appropriately situated in a pageant celebrating the accession of a Scottish—but white—king to the throne of

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[99] Arnold Hunt, Dora Thornton, and George Dalgleish, "A Jacobean Antiquary Reassessed: Thomas Lyte, the Lyte Genealogy and the Lyte Jewel," *The Antiquaries Journal* 96 (2016): 181.

[100] Anne Lancashire, "Dekker's Accession Pageant for James I," *Early Theatre* 12, no. 1 (2009): 39.

[101] Roxanne Gentilcore, "The Landscape of Desire: The Tale of Pomona and Vertumnus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *Phoenix* 49, no. 2 (1995): 110.

the (re)united kingdoms of Great Britain:

> In steade of a Hat, his browes were bound about with flowers, out of whose thicke heapes, heere and there peeped a Queene-apple, a Cherie, or a Peare, this boon-grace hee made of purpose to keepe his face from heate, (because hee desired to looke louelie) yet the Sunne found him out, and by casting a continuall eye at him, whilst the olde man was dressing his arbours, his cheekes grew tawnie, which colour for the better grace, he himselfe interpreted, blushing.[102]

Dekker's description of this mythic gardener suggests a climatological theory of race, his tawny cheeks the result of too much closeness to the sun.[103] Vertumnus not only shapes and controls nature, but interprets bodies, a crucial hierarchical tool of racialization. Gardening offers fertile metaphorical territory for thinking through the stakes of racial genealogy. Holding in either hand a "weeding hooke" and "grafting knife," Dekker's Vertumnus lauds James's support of the arts "that were threatned to be trod under foot by Barbarism," and then Pomona, "who carefully pruine this garden, (weeding-out al hurtful & idle branches that hinder the growth of the good)," offers the "faithfull Laborers," "them selves, this Arbor, the bowers & walkes, yea her children" to be "disposde after his royal pleasure."[104] That Vertumnus precedes this garden scene by interpreting his own tawny cheeks as blushing, and that his blushing is linked—by Dekker, Vertumnus, or both—to beauty and grace, casts the moment as racial, and blurs the categorical differences between the generative capacities of a garden and the interpretive capabilities of a

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[102] Thomas Dekker, *The Whole Magnifycent Entertainment: Given to King James, Queene Anne his wife, and Henry Frederick the Prince; upon the day of his Majesties Tryumphant Passage (from the Tower) through his Honorable Citie (and Chamber) of London, the 15 of March. 1603* (London, 1604).

[103] Cf. Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race.*

[104] Dekker, *The Whole Magnifycent Entertainment.*

reader or audience. As I will argue in a moment, blushing is a quality of racial whiteness, and all the more so when defined by the one who blushes. The garden in Dekker's pageant presents itself as a symbol of James's divinity and an extension of his pleasure, and Vertumnus mirrors both James's whiteness and the power to render bodies as such.

The beginning of *King Lear* reads bodies, too. Although Kent believes Lear favors Albany over Cornwall, Gloucester thinks "it appears not which of the dukes he values most, for equalities are so weigh'd, that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moi'ty" (1.1.4-7). The dukes are indistinguishable. But before Lear produces a map and divides his kingdom, Shakespeare interposes blushing between indistinguishability and division, the conversation between Gloucester and Kent interrupted by the appearance of the duke's illegitimate son, Edmund. We are faced with a readable body, and Kent's question—"Is not this your son, my lord?"—intimates some undeniable legibility between father and son (1.1.8). "I have so often blush'd to acknowledge him," Gloucester admits, "that now I am braz'd to't" (1.1.10-11). As Sujata Iyengar argues, blushes "maintain a social hierarchy" because "an offender blushes neither from guilt, nor from remorse, nor from being caught in the act: paradoxically, he blushes from fear of being seen to blush."[105] Although Gloucester does not blush now, his admission is transformative, revealing an ultimately virtuous sense of shame. His blush "transforms bad intentions into goodly acts, individual emotion into social order."[106] Perhaps Gloucester does not, in fact, feel shame. We do not see the blush. But an audience would have little reason to doubt him, chiefly because of his light skin. As Iyengar writes, blushes "are also signs of national

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[105] Sujata Iyengar, *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Color in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2005), 105-7.

[106] Iyengar, *Shades of Difference*, 105.

origin. Black Ethiopians and tawny Indians were thought to be unable to blush and therefore to experience shame."[107] Gloucester admits to a blush, and his audience confirms the claim by reading his body as white, fair, and honest. Blushing is frequently associated with white innocence, with feminine beauty, and with the dangerously legible white body. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Friar Francis describes a blush of Hero's as

> A thousand blushing apparitions
> To start into her face, a thousand innocent shames
> In angel whiteness beat away those blushes. (4.1.159-61)[108]

In *Titus Andronicus*, by contrast, Aaron views white skin as a

> treacherous hue, that will betray with blushing
> The close enacts and counsels of thy heart! (4.2.117-18)[109]

By admitting to the blush, Gloucester virtuously discloses the "close enacts and counsels" of his heart, and when he tells Kent that although Edmund's birth was unexpected, "yet was his mother fair, there was good sport at his making, and the whoreson must be acknowledged," he corroborates the virtuous reading of Edmund's body, and of his own (1.1.22-24). In the space of a few lines acknowledging Edmund, Gloucester references not only his own blushing skin, but the fairness of Edmund's mother, and in so doing, acknowledges Edmund's own whiteness. This opening scene's reading of Edmund, however, offers crucial precursory evidence of Gloucester's

[107] Iyengar, *Shades of Difference*, 107.

[108] Cf. William W. E. Slights, "'Shame's pure blush': Shakespeare and the Ethics of Spectatorship," in *Early Modern Spectatorship*, ed. Ronald Huebert and David McNeil (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019), 62-63.

[109] Cf. Neill, *Issues of Death*. See also Francesca T. Royster, "White-Limed Walls: Whiteness and Gothic Extremism in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2000): 443.

eventually literal blindness. James urges in the *Basilikon Doron* to make one's eldest son Isaac, and in this moment, Gloucester becomes Isaac, blindly unable to distinguish elder from younger, bastard from legitimate, Jacob from Esau. Although Gloucester can identify whiteness, he cannot differentiate within whiteness, and just as Albany and Cornwall blend into one another, so too do Edmund and Edgar, white all and one. Edmund is worth acknowledging because of his white skin, but thus indistinguishable from his legitimate half-brother, Edgar, who will struggle to claim an inheritance based on racial purity to which Edmund could not also lay claim. The crisis was a topical one, as distinguishing between bodies, past and present, constituted a major project for the early years of James's court.

Blushing Vertumnus's gardens and Pomona's "bowers," "walkes," and "children" suggest as well an early Jacobean interest in cultivating connections between places and bodies, map-making and genealogy, gardening and lineage. In dividing the kingdom, Lear employs a map to divide the king's two bodies, preserving the integrity of the body natural and delegating the responsibilities of the body politic:

> Give me the map there. Know that we have divided
> In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent
> To shake all cares and business from our age,
> Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
> Unburthen'd crawl toward death. (1.1.37-41)

Lear's deictic gesture divides the kingdom from its subjects, rupturing the body politic into pieces detached from the king's own body. But the map creates a history, and in parceling out the kingdom's land to his biological issue, Shakespeare's Lear binds map-making with lineage—

chorography with chronicle—the two together "forming a necessary union."[110] The history of ancient Britain is for early modern antiquarians inextricably connected to place, a reality reflected in the project of justifying James's unification of the kingdoms: tracing the lineage of James constitutes remapping the empire. This reparative work was defining for James, who in his 1603 address to both houses of Parliament linked the reunification of the kingdoms with that of the king's bodies, natural and politic:

> I am the Husband, and the whole Island is my lawful Wife; I am the Head, and it is my Body; I am the Shepherd, and it is my Flock; I hope therefor no man will be so unreasonable, as to think that I, that am a Christian King under the Gospel, should be a Polygamist, and Husband to two Wifes; that I being the Head, should have a divided, and monstrous Body.[111]

Seventeenth-century poets, artists, and antiquarians took the cue and in the early years of James's reign produced several works celebrating and depicting his "all-embracing genealogy" and "multilineal descent."[112] Created to justify the newly unified Great Britain, these "complex genealogical rolls and tables," were impressive artifacts that, "just like majestic maps, [. . .] were found in state rooms where it was very difficult to get close enough to them for a long enough time to understand much more than the general layout."[113] Like the map called for by Lear, the maps James hung in his palaces were intended to signal the control royal power exerted over

[110] Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*, 132.

[111] James VI and I, *The Speech of King James the I. To Both Houses of Parliament Upon his Accession to, And The Happy Union Of Both the Crowns of England and Scotland, Regally Pronounced, and Expressed by him to them, Die JOVIS 22th Martii 1603*. (London, 1689), 3.

[112] Sara Trevisan, *Royal Genealogy in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2020), 193.

[113] Trevisan, *Royal Genealogy*, 196.

both the natural landscape and majestic figures of British history. And just as Lear's map is illegible to theatrical audiences, the complicated, digressive, and obsessive attention to detail made James's royal genealogies curiously unsuited for their ostensible purpose, and nonetheless magnificently resplendent.

One such work, the Lyte Genealogy, was presented to James in 1610, in return for which James gave its maker, Thomas Lyte, a "diamond-studded locket containing a miniature of James I" that is now regarded as "one of the finest pieces of jewellery to survive from the early Stuart period."[114] Although the years immediately following the accession saw a proliferation of histories interested in the matter of Britain, their apparent value was not diminished because of quantity. The Lyte Genealogy performed a particularly complex feat of concatenation, responding to several competing explanations for James's right of succession by bringing together the Danish, Saxon, North Wales and South Wales lines in a genealogy that spanned "nine sheets of parchment [. . .] approximately 2 metres along each side."[115] The Lyte Genealogy's attempts to wrangle these various lines into a coherent pedigree succeeded, if at all, by overwhelming its audience with information. Intricate genealogies like Lyte's encouraged local antiquarians to fill out gaps by conducting research into the histories of their own regions, and to leverage particular knowledge about individual regions and towns toward the creation of a comprehensive historical record.[116] This work further solidified the deep connection between the bodies of the English and the land, at least in part because of the legacy of the gentry: "lineage

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[114] Hunt, Thornton, and Dalgleish, "A Jacobean Antiquary," 169-70.

[115] Hunt, Thornton, and Dalgleish, "A Jacobean Antiquary," 174-75.

[116] Jan Broadway, *'No historie so meet': Gentry Culture and the Development of Local History in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 32.

linked the inheritance of blood from one's ancestors inextricably with the maintenance of their ancient estate."[117] A broader and more widely discernible English racial whiteness that linked land and bodies was comprehensible at least in part because local English lands had long been tied to the bodies and bloodlines of those who ruled those ancient estates.

Much of the antiquarian work around the turn of the seventeenth century sought to rework the mythic origin which traced the British back to the arrival of Brutus of Troy, a longstanding explanation for England's connection with the ancient world. The Mediterranean was an increasingly fraught ancestral region for the English, especially in relation to the fashioning of English racial whiteness, and William Camden had as early as 1586 suggested that the name "Britain derived not from legendary Brute but from the Welsh word Brith, meaning painting or coloured, in reference to the ancient Britons' custom of painting their bodies."[118] Camden's account suggests a conception of whiteness as a foundational hue, a story which evokes both the theatrical representations of race in the early modern theater—the English white skin as a base for both blackface prosthetics and feminizing whiteface cosmetics—and also Aaron's analysis, in *Titus Andronicus*, that

> Coal-black is better than another hue,
>
> In that it scorns to bear another hue. (4.2.99-100)

In his *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence* (1605), Richard Verstegan notes several competing claims about the etymology of the word Britain, including that of "Humfrey Lhuyd, [who] wil rather have it to bee Pridcain, because that woord in british signifieth beautie, or whyteness."[119]

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[117] Broadway, *Gentry Culture*, 154.

[118] Hunt, Thornton, and Dalgleish, "A Jacobean Antiquary," 180.

[119] Richard Verstegan, *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence: In antiquities. Concerning the most noble and renowned English nation* (Antwerp: Robert Bruney, 1605), 90.

But Verstegan is less interested in superficial accounts of racial whiteness, and his *Restitution*, which makes sense of England's whiteness in relation to continental Europe, was "the first authoritative Anglo-Saxon history that directly connected English ancestry to the Saxons."[120] For Verstegan, their relative insulation in Germany makes the Saxons appealing ancestral stock, and although he refutes ancient writers who saw their isolation as incompatible with English origin stories, he rehearses their claims at length: "Germans are home-bred & the natural people of their countrey, & not mixed with others," because those who

> in former tymes did seek new habitations, did come by sea and not by land, and their huge & spatious Ocean beeing as [. . .] different from ours, is sildome nauigated by our men, for besydes the peril of such a rough and unknown sea, who unless Germanie were his natiue soil, would leave Asia Africa or Italie to go plant himself there.[121]

Despite a lack of contact's explanatory incongruity, Verstegan believes it gives the English great honor that "they have ever kept themselves unmixed with forrain people."[122]

Verstegan's work evinces a preoccupation with internal, rather than external, properties of whiteness, and his reworking of a familiar story reveals the subtle but significant stakes at play in the difference. In *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, Bartholomaeus Anglicus tells the story of Saint Gregory, who upon seeing English slaves in Rome declares, "Truly they be English, for they shine in face right as angels; it is need to send them message, with word of salvation."[123]

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[120] Jenna M. Schultz, "Inventing England: English Identity and the Scottish 'Other,' 1586-1625," in *Local Antiquities, Local Identities: Art, Literature, and Antiquarianism in Europe, c. 1400-1700*, ed. Kathleen Christian and Bianca de Divitiis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 308.

[121] Verstegan, *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*, 40.

[122] Verstegan, *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*, 43.

[123] Anglicus, *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, in Loomba and Burton, *Race in Early Modern England*, 64.

For Anglicus, Gregory finds little friction between external and internal states, and upon seeing their white faces, he sends word of salvation. Verstegan expands and complicates the story, and his Gregory

> coming together & beholding them to bee of a very faire complexion, ruddy & whyte with yellowish haire, demaunded of the marchant that had them to tell of whence they were were, which beeing told him, hee asked yf they were christened, it was answered that they were not, whereat fetching a deep sigh, he said; alas that the author of darknesse should yet detaine people of such bright countenāces in his possession, & that men of so faire faces should inwardly carrie such fowl soules.

Although fundamentally similar—both versions end with Gregory sending Augustine of Canterbury to convert the English—Verstegan emphasizes the initial discrepancy between the "faire complexion" of the "whyte" English and their "fowl soules," and his narrative further elaborates Gregory's struggles to send word of the salvation that is for Anglicus already a fait accompli. Verstegan's interest in internal properties of whiteness reflects a recent development in thinking about racial whiteness. An emerging concern in the early years of Jacobean reign was distinguishing between different kinds of whiteness—between Saxonist or British origins of the English, for example—in an effort to unite the severable kingdoms of James's burgeoning English empire. The tensions inherent in this project always threaten to overwhelm whatever stability might be temporarily achieved, and *King Lear* dramatizes, in both the Lear and Gloucester plots, the difficulty in maintaining power across generations, and of preserving rule brought together under the force of a single sovereign's will and passed onto another generation. Whereas in the previous chapter I examined whiteness as a response to succession crises, in *King Lear* we see yet another limit of biology as a salve for monarchical quandaries, a crisis of

indistinguishability set up in the play's opening scene.

The play's opening scene of recognition, Kent's witness to a resemblance between Gloucester and Edmund, suggests that one's outward appearance reliably indicates what lies within. In this case, however, Edmund's legible whiteness obscures his illegitimacy and, more crucially for the plot of *Lear*, his ambitions to "top th' legitimate" (1.2.21). Although Edmund's soliloquy in the play's second scene argues for more sympathetic treatment toward bastards and second sons, the play ultimately asserts the danger of Edmund's intentions. Edmund destabilizes the political order, and the specific threat directed toward his half-brother—"Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land"—jeopardizes the gentry's ability to maintain control over the land upon which future genealogies can be constructed (1.2.16). Edmund generates his complaint out of the superficial similarities between legitimate and illegitimate:

> Wherefore base?
> When my dimensions are as well compact,
> My mind as generous, and my shape as true
> As honest madam's issue?" (1.2.6-9)

So when his father bemoans the meaning of astrological origins of distress—"These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us"—Edmund suggests these explanations constitute an avoidance of responsibility (1.2.103-4). "This is the excellent foppery of the world," he contends,

> that when we are sick in fortune—often the surfeits of our own behavior—we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and stars, as if we were villains on necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves and treachers by spherical dominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforc'd obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on. (1.2.118-26)

Edmund here rejects external determinants of behavior, and in so doing, upends an alternative theory of racialization, that internal states are dictated by external conditions—"that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on"—whether those causes be geohumoral, astrological, climatological, or otherwise environmental.[124] Edmund thus lambastes twinned systems of somatic legibility: white skin does not reliably expose one's internal states, nor do environmental factors dictate future behavior or morality.

Gloucester's inability to differentiate between sons evokes the biblical story of Jacob and Esau, and of their blind father, Isaac, deceived through the use of animal skin prosthetics. In that story, Jacob, the second-born son, dons animal skins to simulate his elder brother's hairy body, fools his father, receives the blessing intended for his brother, and goes on to found Israel. Edmund appears to place himself in Jacob's position, as a second son who deploys a forged letter—a parchment, perhaps, an animal skin—to fool his father and steal his elder brother's birthright. The issues raised here were of contemporary Jacobean interest, and the story cropped up in genealogies and writings. Contemporary debates turned on questions of primogeniture and genealogy, because "as an ancestor to the Israelites, Jacob belonged to the elect nation," but "genealogically speaking, Jacob had usurped his elder brother's right."[125] In the Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul suggests that God favored the younger Jacob before birth, an argument perilously close to a case against primogeniture.[126] James himself "saw Jacob's lie to his father

[124] External conditions explained black skin; see, for example, "the Moor" in George Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar*, Muly Muhamet, who declares, "My stars, my dam, my planets and my nurse, / The fire, the air, the water, and the earth, / All causes that have thus conspired in one / To nourish and preserve me to this shame" (5.1.78-82). George Peele, *The Battle of Alcazar*, in *The Stukeley Plays*, ed. Charles Edelman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 59-128.

[125] Trevisan, *Royal Genealogy*, 244.

[126] Trevisan, *Royal Genealogy*, 244.

as one of the evils that would turn into 'lawful and allowable virtues' if the rebellion of a people towards their monarch-father be encouraged."[127] One genealogist, the creator of the College of Arms Genealogy, saw in his mapping of bloodlines a solution to the problem, and inscribed above an image of King James a passage from Genesis 27:29, "Curseth be he that curseth Jacob and blessed be he that blesseth him."[128] The quotation aligns James with Jacob, and in doing so, asserts the self-legitimating qualities of power, the genealogist having "bypassed all debates on his genealogical birth right to the throne of England and highlighted instead how the divine grace and blessing which come with the king's office were themselves the justification of the right of succession of James/Jacob."[129] By appearing on a genealogy ostensibly invested in asserting James's "genealogical birth right," the simultaneous attempt to sidestep the debates stands as a hallmark example of the way power—and, I suggest, whiteness—views myth, history, and identity as malleable, multifarious sources of legitimacy.

Edgar's recourse in the face of such a crisis—to muddy up his face and assume the socially invisible identity of Poor Tom—responds immediately and forcefully to Edmund's appropriation of the story of Jacob and Esau. Edgar's application of a racial prosthetic picks up on the biblical story's "sheer theatricality," the resonance between Jacob's covering "his body, his bands and neck, just like sixteenth-century performers used goatskins to wrap their legs or dyed lambskins to envelope their arms in their imitation of a Moor's skin."[130] Edgar need not

[127] Trevisan, *Royal Genealogy*, 243.

[128] Trevisan, *Royal Genealogy*, 243.

[129] Trevisan, *Royal Genealogy*, 245.

[130] Ian Smith, "The Textile Black Body: Race and 'shadowed livery' in *The Merchant of Venice*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race*, ed. Valerie Traub (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 182.

respond directly to Edmund's attempted dismantling of bodily legibility, because his whiteness affords him the ability to refashion myth into a justification of his rights. In the moment when Edgar appears at his most vulnerable, in an apparent failure of his own white skin to passively insulate him from the dangers of an illegitimate interloper, Edgar sidesteps Edmund's critiques of racialization. Edgar's success will not so much reconcile competing visions of racialization as it will render them feckless. What Edmund attempts to embody, Edgar will instrumentalize. By the end of the play, Edgar's office will justify his right of succession. Although the sacrifice of Cordelia will come about because of an inability to choose between children—to differentiate between shades of white—Edgar solves the problem with a racial prosthetic, a blackface disguise that demonstrates a capacity for changeability, and an ability to more completely cleanse himself, both literally and symbolically, of the impurity of blackness, thus establishing a more stable and reliable ground—and future—for whiteness.

Bedlam Tom and the Boundaries of Whiteness

Upon hearing himself "proclaim'd," Edgar escapes the "hunt" brought about by his brother Edmund's machinations, leaving the safety and security of the family for the precarious environs of the heath (2.3.1-3). His body known, he finds himself surveilled:

> No port is free, no place
> That guard and most unusual vigilance
> Does not attend my taking. (2.3.3-5)

Edgar must escape the ports and places of the state, and to thwart his capture, he decides his "face [he'll] grime with filth," hiding his white skin behind a prosthetic mask—a bodily supplement—that reduces Edgar to

the basest and most poorest shape

That ever penury, in contempt of man,

Brought near to beast. (2.3.7-9)

The filth on his face befouls and diminishes his body. The prosthetic subtracts by addition, reducing the once proud Edgar to a figure repeatedly interpellated as an animal, including by Lear himself: "Thou art the thing itself: unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, fork'd animal as thou art" (3.4.106-8). Prostheticized, Edgar becomes "the thing itself." Whether executed with mud, oils, paint, or a burnt cork solution, Edgar's onstage application of "filth" covers his whiteness in an innovative cosmetic manner, although his characterization as animal or beast calls to mind the animal skins more commonly used for the purpose of racial impersonation. Ian Smith has argued that Ben Jonson's *Masque of Blackness*, written shortly before *King Lear*, "with its landmark spectacle of twelve aristocratic women painted black" was "a transitional text representing a historical first in cosmetic blackface."[131] Edgar's application of blackface dissimulates his whiteness, giving shape and form to a racial identity he will reassume in the play's closing moments.

Edgar employs these markers of racial impersonation even while the play avoids explicit articulation of racial blackness. The play alludes to stereotypical markers, however: shortly after Poor Tom describes past employment as a "servingman" who "curl'd [his] hair," "serv'd the lust of [his] mistress' heart," "did the act of darkness with her," and "out-paramour'd the Turk," Lear refers to him as a "learned Theban" (3.4.85-92, 157). Poor Tom's refrain throughout Act III, Scene 4—"Poor Tom's a-cold"—conjures connections between climate and skin color which culminate in its final utterance, in Act IV, Scene 1, followed immediately with an aside, "I

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[131] Smith, "The Textile Black Body," 170-71.

cannot daub it further," which further solidifies the connection between Tom's coldness and Edgar's daubed disguise (4.1.52). Perhaps Edgar's Tom is accustomed to a warmer, southerly climate that "burns out the body's heat and moisture, leaving only a black earthy element that darkens the outer flesh."[132] But the play's reliance on material markers of race emphasizes overlap and blurs distinctions between race and class; Ayanna Thompson and Benjamin Minor have suggested that "the play makes it difficult to disentangle the rhetoric employed for criminal activity, class status, and racial category."[133] Fashioning Poor Tom, Edgar enumerates a collection of objects—"pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary" (2.3.16)—reminiscent of the way "the actual representation of Africans or Moors on the stage required prosthetic devices that articulated black identity as wholly material and insubstantial."[134] The specific objects used by Edgar to assemble Poor Tom matter less than the fact of his materiality, reduced as he is into the very prosthetics protecting and hiding his body until ready to be made whole—or cleansed of the novel racial cosmetics, and once again made white.

The insubstantial materiality of Edgar's blackface constitutes, in this sense, the defining and crucial feature of the disguise. James Kearney has argued that in *King Lear* "Shakespeare does not give us a Levinasian ethical relation or the failure of one," but "stages the problem itself: can I experience the other person in his or her alterity without subsuming that other into the self the same?"[135] Edgar's material racialization complicates the ethical relation Kearney

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[132] Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race*, 30.

[133] Benjamin Minor and Ayanna Thompson, "'Edgar I Nothing Am': Blackface in *King Lear*," in *Staged Transgressions in Shakespeare's England,* ed. Rory Loughnane and Edel Semple (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 161.

[134] Smith, "White Skin, Black Masks," 34.

[135] James Kearney, "'This is Above All Strangeness': *King Lear*, Ethics, and the Phenomenology of Recognition," *Criticism* 54, no. 3 (2012): 459.

describes, however, the notion that “Lear’s failure to recognize Edgar within Poor Tom dramatizes for the audience the excess or alterity of the other that eludes Lear.”[136] Poor Tom does not merely hide Edgar behind a cloak or mask. Edgar’s mask materializes a newly racialized figure in Poor Tom, a character whose future becomes immediately inconsequential, and whose disappearance will mark the triumphal return of Edgar and his whiteness. An audience knows precious little of Edgar’s motivations, but he will stand at play’s end as the inheritor of the political order, a conclusion simultaneously unexpected and inevitable. We can perceive Edgar’s humanity, I suggest, not because he is “a bodily creature in extremity, a vision of the fundamentally creaturely existence of the human animal stripped of all prosthetic and pretension,” but precisely because the racial prosthetic renders legible his otherwise imperceptible whiteness.[137] At the moment racial prosthesis appears within the play, Poor Tom is reduced into an object capable of generating Edgar’s whiteness. The play offers Edgar a moment of redemption and recognition—one that arrives at the center of the play’s fifth act—but only through the annihilation of Poor Tom, an identity forged in the materiality of racial prosthesis. Lear’s presence in relation to Poor Tom is irrelevant to the audience’s perception of Tom’s identity, which is apprehended in the moment of blackface application, and just as the play withholds a moment of recognition between the king and Edgar, so too does it remain silent on the nature, extent, or existence of their relationship prior to Edgar’s racial muddying. The ethical condition described by Kearney is a racial condition, one that becomes visible the moment Edgar darkens up. What the play suggests, and what I am arguing, is that whiteness always views

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[136] Kearney, “‘This is Above All Strangeness,’” 457.

[137] Kearney, “‘This is Above All Strangeness,’” 458.

blackness as a prosthetic condition—Othello was always a white man—and in representing blackness on the early modern stage, whiteness comes to see itself as nonprosthetic: unadorned, unsullied, unbroken, and unimpaired.

The proximity between Lear and Edgar does reflect, however, the play's interest in thinking about the nature and construction of boundaries between power and dispossession. *King Lear* imagines new ways of conceiving order and separation, and Edgar's central and precarious role within the play registers the way spatially conceived membership in the polity becomes reconstituted somatically. Just as Lear's initial gesture toward the map of his kingdom confuses his twinned roles as head of the family and ruler of the kingdom, Edmund's deceit—"If our father would sleep till I wak'd him, you should enjoy half his revenue for ever, and live the belov'd of your brother"—leverages political and familial tension between a first-born and second-born son, legitimate and bastard (1.2.52-54). Removed from the family, Edgar hides from the state, separating himself from *oikos* and *polis*, his submission to "lunatic bans" placing Edgar in a circumstance not unlike the state of abandonment described by Agamben, "not, in fact, simply set outside the law and made indifferent to it but rather abandoned by it, that is, exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable."[138] The persistent attachment to the king throughout his career as Poor Tom sharpens the extent to which the two figures embody Agamben's state of exception, he and the sovereign Lear both excluded from the political order and included within it, a relationship that presages Edgar's own eventual office within the seat of political authority. In his representation of an unrepresented body, Edgar introduces the state of exception into the world of the play:

[138] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 23.

“The exception is what cannot be included in the whole of which it is a member and cannot be a member of the whole in which it is always already included.”[139] Edgar’s prosthetic establishes a racialized border within the world of the play between white and not, between city and country, sane and mad.

Agamben’s suggestion that political power is characterized by inclusive exclusion—of the presence of bare life within the confines of the state—explains both Poor Tom’s presence at the heart of the play and his transformation of Bethlem, which marks the boundaries of old London, into a marker of difference inscribed in a body dissimulating its whiteness, careening through Lear’s heath in search of political rights only conferred upon a redeemed, white subject. Like the antiquarian Richard Verstegan, Shakespeare’s Edgar turns to history when confronted with his political and personal crisis, finding solace in his English audience’s ancestral past, in this case, Bethlem Hospital. “The country gives me proof and precedent,” Edgar declares,

> Of Bedlam beggars, who, with roaring voices,
> Strike in their numb’d and mortified arms
> Pins, wooden pricks, nails, sprigs of rosemary;
> And with this horrible object, from low farms,
> Poor pelting villages, sheep-cotes, and mills,
> Sometimes with lunatic bans, sometime with prayers,
> Enforce their charity. (2.3.14-20)

Edgar’s account of “Bedlam beggars” elides the role Bethlem Hospital played in the civic life of London in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Bethlem was founded in the thirteenth century “not as a mad-house but as a link between England and the Holy Land, part of a wider

[139] Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 21.

movement in which the cathedral church of the Nativity at Bethlehem and its bishops sought land, alms and hospitality in western Europe."[140] Like the ruins of an English monastery, Bethlem stood as a symbol of England's past, and in his creation of Tom, Bedlam beggar and racialized other, Edgar materializes the play's propulsion toward a "futurity promoted by white, heteronormative culture [that] requires the threat of a past that atavistically persists in the person of abject subjects."[141] Edgar's Tom is a backward figure of the past away from which the play, and Edgar himself, must escape.

In his dispossession, Edgar takes up Verstegan's outside threat of pollution—the foreign travelers from Asia, Africa, or Italy—and looks as well among the "low farms" and "poor pelting villages" of the English countryside, ultimately locating in Bethlem Hospital an institution on the border between civilization and wilderness, one that "lay outside the City walls" but "inside the 'bars' or barriers which marked the City boundaries."[142] The site was indeed a liminal space that served as a gateway to the city. Standing "beside the highway which linked the City with the Great North Road," it was "well-placed for its original purpose of offering a base and accommodation for members of the Order of of Bethlem when they set out on or returned from their fund-raising journeys."[143] The hospital stood on the edge of the city's development in the early modern period: "Moorfields, the large open expanse to the west, remained marshy until it was drained in the sixteenth century," and the area surrounding the hospital, Bishopsgate

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[140] Nicholas Vincent, "Goffredo de Prefetti and the Church of Bethlehem in England," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 49, no. 2 (1998): 213.

[141] Valerie Rohy, *Anachronism and its Others: Sexuality, Race, and Temporality* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2009), x.

[142] Jonathan Andrews et al., *The History of Bedlam* (London: Routledge, 1997), 36.

[143] Andrews et al., *The History of Bedlam*, 36.

Without, “tended to be occupied by tradesmen whose occupations were unacceptable within the City walls.”[144] Although Bethlem itself had existed for centuries, its occupancy was relatively low at the turn of the seventeenth century, and turnover rates were similarly low.[145] So although his wandering suggests a countryside filled with itinerant beggars circulating in and out of the hospital, Tom o’ Bedlam is curiously out of place on the heath with Lear.

Located on the border of the city, the area around Bethlem demarcated the city’s purity and cleanliness, and the neighborhood became a flashpoint of the city’s efforts to deal with waste and pollution. The hospital was part of London’s increasingly visible public projects that arose out of a desire to “maintain the health of the whole commonwealth” through the maintenance of an infrastructure that “demonstrated the elite’s concerns for social suffering.”[146] Members of the city’s elite appear to have demonstrated their concern for social suffering by segregating the less desirable aspects of city life from the heart of the city, and the area north of Bishopsgate became synonymous with the very filth Edgar uses to daub his face. In the late sixteenth century antiquarian John Stow complained about excessive homebuilding along Bishopsgate Street, warning that “household refuse blocked the Ditch ‘to the danger of empoisoning the whole city.’”[147] The location’s association with refuse predated the density that irritated Stow. In the middle of the sixteenth century, if not earlier, “inhabitants of the precinct [. . .] who did not possess their own lavatories were required to traipse through ‘the west end of the long house of

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[144] Andrews et al., *The History of Bedlam*, 37.

[145] Carol Thomas Neely, “‘Documents in Madnes’: Reading Madness and Gender in Shakespeare’s Tragedies and Early Modern Culture,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (1991): 316.

[146] Ken Jackson, “Bethlem and Bridewell in ‘The Honest Whore’ Plays,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 43, no. 2 (2003): 399-400.

[147] Andrews et al., *The History of Bedlam*, 38.

Bethlem' to reach the 'comon Jaques' which were located behind the hospital."[148] When Shakespeare has Edgar disguise himself as Poor Tom o' Bedlam, the hospital's associations invite the simultaneous consideration not only of bare life and royal power, but also cleanliness and pollution.

Just as Elizabethan and Jacobean antiquarians translated the genealogy of royal descent into the spatial logic of maps, and as Lear shifts between these modes of sovereign representation in the play's opening scene, Edgar's transformation into Poor Tom inscribes the physical barriers surrounding and demarcating white spaces into the body of a racialized interloper. In a pamphlet published in 1607, an imagined citizen of London takes a gentleman to the "pleasant walkes of Moore-fields," pointing out the recent improvements of the once savage land: "But now, sir," the gentleman asks, "let us return by the walke neer this ditch side, where I am willing to understand howe those fields came so beautified, being, in times past, as I have heard, a fen, or moorish kinde of ground?"[149] Edgar no longer belongs within the world of the play, but his presence within the play, alongside Lear, and even on the quarto's title page all attest to his crucial function as a token of filth to be constantly and repeatedly repressed, again and again, into a hovel beneath the staid walks of the city.

Bethlem's location thus points to the cultural legibility of the hospital, and of Edgar's performance of Tom. Its situation as a hub for alms collection persisted into the early modern period, and Londoners "enforce[d] their charity" not upon chance passersby, but because "visiting Bethlem became a popular pastime, in part at least because the Hospital was close to

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[148] Andrews et al., *The History of Bedlam*, 51.

[149] Richard Johnson, *The Pleasant Walkes of Moore-fields. Being the guift of two Sisters, now beautified, to the continuing fame of this worthy Citty* (London, 1607).

the first Elizabethan theatres and other sources of entertainment."[150] Bethlem was not a theater, but by the seventeenth century, Londoners had begun visiting the premises under the guise of spectacle. Seeing the patients "living in squalor moved people to give," an impulse to charity which "coexisted with a vocal, visible disgust for the recipients."[151] The location may well have evoked a sense of entertainment both grandiose and depraved, as Bishopsgate "had been part of the route for Elizabeth's accession entry" decades earlier.[152] Thomas Dekker's abandoned plans for James's 1603 arrival into London include descriptions of a more "royall and serious ensuing Entertainment" that "should have been performed about the Barres beyond Bishops-gate."[153]

The performative nature of the Bedlam figure provides a key to understanding Edgar's own plotting. Depictions of madness were increasingly common on the English stage at the turn of the seventeenth century. Edgar is not typically included in discussions of dramatic stagings of madness, however, because his assumption of madness is strategic, because he "pretends madness as a way of surviving conditions that have suddenly grown life-threatening."[154] As Minor and Thompson note, Edgar's response to his sudden and absolute illegitimacy—Edmund's plan set in motion and at once successful—is to "implicitly defin[e] illegitimacy as freedom and salvation," contra his father, who views an illegitimate child as lacking in "duties, ties, or filiation."[155] Understanding his dispossession as a form of freedom, Edgar articulates two crucial

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[150] Andrews et al., *The History of Bedlam*, 36.

[151] Ken Jackson, "'I know not / Where I did lodge last night?': King Lear and the Search for Bethlem (Bedlam) Hospital," *English Literary Renaissance* 30, no. 2 (2000): 214.

[152] Lancashire, "Dekker's Accession Pageant", 43.

[153] Dekker, *The Whole Magnifycent Entertainment.*

[154] Jerome Mazzaro, "Madness and Memory: Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' and 'King Lear,'" *Comparative Drama* 19, no. 2 (1985): 111.

[155] Minor and Thompson, "'Edgar I Nothing Am,'" 154.

functions of whiteness, one of which is to "dissolve other social differences," like "sex, age, class, region," over and against racial others who are therewith excluded.[156] Edgar, of course, effects the dissolution of his familial ties, opting to embrace his dispossession through the radical clarification of a racialized disguise. Edgar performs another function of whiteness by conferring "an otherness made visible only through collective characterisation," and in which whiteness "consists of a set of individuals."[157] In *King Lear*, this phenomenon is visible both in Edgar's initial declaration of penury and in critical responses to the character of Poor Tom. In donning his disguise, Edgar does not declare himself a Bedlam beggar, but rather gestures toward the precedent of "Bedlam beggars," a pluralized abstraction which stops short of granting individual humanity either to his own character or to the patients of Bethlem hospital upon which his identity is modeled. Edgar's performance of Poor Tom, however, has garnered critical praise of his unique individuality, with one reader declaring that his "speech itself becomes host to an ingenious force, as if a crazed but fluent shadow-self gushed from his mouth."[158] For another, "Tom's idiom is radically indifferent to customary dialogical rules," evoking "some hobgoblin remainder [. . .] in Tom's vocative superflux."[159] Poor Tom is an amalgam of otherness which focalizes Edgar's own identity, and the impulse to laud Edgar's poetic faculties arises out of the tension between his own racial whiteness and the generalized alterity of the identity he has assumed.

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[156] Garner, *Whiteness*, 11-12.

[157] Garner, *Whiteness*, 22.

[158] Peter Campion, "Mad Tom," *Poetry* 201, no. 5 (2013): 574-76.

[159] Simon Palfrey, "Attending to Tom," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (2014): 4.

Readings of the "ingenious force" giving rise to Edgar's "vocative superflux" become possible because Edgar himself remains visible—is made legible—both as a character and a figure of racial whiteness. Minor and Thompson argue that Edgar's rhetoric "reflects the necessity of self-annihilation through the pursuit of achieving/being 'nothing,'' and that Edgar "not only casts off his identity completely, but also creates an identity that exists as nothing within the parameters of his society."[160] I find it difficult to imagine Edgar seriously contemplating annihilation, even more so because the sudden disappearance of Lear's Fool provides a template for what obliteration looks like within the context of the playhouse. Unlike many of the play's characters, Edgar has a future. Unlike Poor Tom, Edgar has a future. Readers not entirely despondent over the play's bleak ending may find an opening in the fifth act's gesture toward the possibility of a future. Locating such a promise requires the identification of a nearly religious belief that "the 'sanity' of the play comes not from Lear, who dies thinking that Cordelia may yet be breathing, but from Albany and Edgar, who, having triumphed over the evil of the play, express faith in a future."[161] For Kearney, the play's ending is shaped by a similarly extratheatrical move toward an ethical imperative: "In *Lear*, the ethical arrives—if it arrives—not as an original or fundamental relation but as *possibility*, as a *form* that is open to the future, a future that need not but can always turn to tragedy."[162] As I have been arguing, any redemption in the ending of *Lear*—any semblance of a future—is predicated upon Edgar's successful use of a blackface disguise, the efficacy of its removal, and the return of whiteness. It is the instrumentality of Edgar's disguise, and its implications for futurity, to which we now turn.

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[160] Minor and Thompson, "'Edgar I Nothing Am,'" 155.

[161] Mazzaro, "Madness and Memory," 113.

[162] Kearney, "'This is Above All Strangeness,'" 465-66.

Unveiling White Futures: Romance and Reconciliation

Poor Tom's abjection allows him to disavow his family, and to place himself outside of the dynastic struggles which preoccupy both the Lear and Gloucester plots. The play's experimentations with racial whiteness then allow Edgar to throw off the yoke of racial alterity and declare in the fifth act,

> I am no less in blood than thou art, Edmund;
>
> If more, the more th'hast wrong'd me. (5.3.168-69)

Edgar's revelation recalls the stakes of the play's inciting incident while apparently suspending any solution to the problems of familial dynasties. Punning on more/Moor, Edgar recalls the purity of his own blood, undoes the debasing insubstantiality of the material prosthetic, and reminds us in the process that bloodlines no longer function as they did in the world from which we once embarked. Just as antiquarians and genealogists placed detailed genealogical justifications of James's rule within overwhelming visual displays of power, Edgar dispenses with the need to explain or catalogue his rights. We have seen already how futures reliant on biology can be rendered dangerously precarious, and *King Lear* explores similar terrain in Lear's division of the kingdom and Gloucester's hasty acceptance of Edmund's deceitful claims about Edgar. Although the play's tidy double-plot creates an impulse to discuss a reflection or mirroring of storylines, one between the other, the Gloucester plot reacts to Lear's cataclysmic rejection of the dynastic system which existed before his elective retirement. Out of the chaos wrought by Lear's actions, Edgar forges a future born of racial whiteness.

Edgar's dismantling of biological constraints constitutes a deconstruction of the play's tragic force. If the play's "principal theme is authority and the consequences to the world when

authority is abandoned," the tragedy is set in motion when "Lear divides his kingdom and gives up his throne before God has relieved him of his duties by death."[163] Following this, Edgar's problems arise at the moment when Lear abandons the expected system of succession. In this brave new world, Edgar may well lack the legal and political standing to challenge Edmund, but his manipulation of racial prosthetics, and of the myths of whiteness undergirding the play, reflect the capacity of whiteness for plasticity in the face of shifting political landscapes. This pliability destabilizes the entire play. Just as Edgar upends Edmund's attempts to assume the mantle of a usurping Jacob, the play's ending challenges its generic confines. We might imagine the ending of *King Lear* as the culminating scene of a romance, in which a black-faced Edgar reveals his true whiteness and defeats his own brother in battle. Edgar's romance is a story in which a brother reconciles with goodness, a king and his daughter find each other after a period of despair, and in which questions of kingship are deferred beyond the ending of the play.

King Lear is often regarded as a generic failure, its performance history for nearly 200 years having been hijacked by Nahum Tate's reworked interpretation. If the precipitating crisis of the play is an abdication of political responsibility, the tragic implications of that abjuration redound not on the state, but upon the family. Tate's version asserts dynamics present in the original play, most importantly the central role of Edgar in the play's happy ending, in which Edgar and Cordelia marry, thus replacing the tragedy of one family through the creation of another. In a reading that highlights my own discussion of Edgar's peregrinations, Arlen Collier notes that Tate's revision "follow[s] the traditional pattern of romance," the "archetypal descent-pattern" in which "the hero flees or is forced out of the corrupt court or city into the pure and

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[163] Irving Ribner, "Shakespeare and Legendary History: Lear and Cymbeline," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (1956): 49.

simplistic countryside where he works out his own problems, undergoes purgation, and as a redeemed soul returns to the court or city either to purge it or to find it already purged."[164] Tate's version of the play asserts this path for Edgar, as though Shakespeare rejected romance in his writing of *Lear*. But the trajectory of Shakespeare's Edgar emerges strikingly intact out of this description of archetypical romance, and the language of purgation evokes just as vividly the "external and internal blackening that racializes the discourse of griming and begriming."[165] As Edgar removes the blackface oils and paints which have grimed his face, he is purged and redeemed, and so too is the city cleansed against the filth he has come to represent, the boundaries of Bedlam reconstituted in Edgar's redemption. Edgar is indeed a romance-like figure in Shakespeare's play, I suggest, a figure who promises a consolatory continuation of whiteness beyond the barriers of the play's ending, and who does not require the biological promise engendered by a marriage with Cordelia.

Edgar's racial innovation asserts a kind of meta-theatrical connection with the critical position of the audience which circumvents the play's otherwise tragic bleakness. The play gestures from its outset toward the shapes of romance. The Lear and Gloucester plots interrupt each other, seemingly aware one of the other, as though Lear registers and responds to Gloucester's blindness by enacting his own. Poor Tom and Lear carry on a conversation interrupted by the formal interventions of scene changes, and about which audiences can grasp very little, propelling each other endlessly into a literal storm, like the narrative strategies of romance in which "perpetual small-scale interruptions [. . .] are integral to its larger

[164] Arlen Collier, "'King Lear' and the Patterns of Romance," *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 30, no. 1 (1976): 52-53.

[165] Minor and Thompson, "'Edgar I Nothing Am,'" 156.

uninterruptability, its tendency to spin out endlessly," and in which "its narratives may interrupt one another but as a form it brooks no interruption, or, if it does end, it often does so with violent suddenness, as if its intrinsic dilatoriness can only be brought to a close by traumatic accident of divine fiat."[166] If we imagine racial miscegenation to be a bulwark against incest, then beginning with Gloucester's admitted infidelities in its opening moments, *King Lear* depicts the threats inherent in a romance mode of living as too far imbricated in the social fabric of London to be avoided. We are too far gone to prevent the possibility that a foreigner might seize the throne or that we may never return home. In such a world, emptied of promise, Shakespeare offers the most damning consolation to the problems of history and governance possible, a solution that overcomes the problems of biology and indistinguishable heirs through the forging of racial whiteness.

To find solace in Edgar's triumphal return suggests taking a pleasure in the misfortune of others, a perversity which calls to mind Londoners traveling to Bethlem hospital for entertainment, disgust, and charitable resentment. In these echoes between Bethlem and Lear, no satisfying conclusions emerge. In the play, the response to Kent's query, "Is this the promis'd end?" belongs to Edgar, of course, and it too arrives as a question: "Or image of that horror?" (5.3.264-65). Edgar's disquieting answer belies the promise of his own future, beyond the scope of the play, and his provision of political stability in an otherwise ruined state. But who takes pleasure in such an end? The questions are left for the audience: Shakespeare's white audiences, who have their own futures, and who open their purses for performances of racial alterity which simultaneously delight and disgust.

[166] Joe Moshenska, "Sir Kenelm Digby's Interruptions: Piracy and Lived Romance in the 1620s," *Studies in Philology* 113, no. 2 (2016): 463.

It is in this sense that Edgar's return to the political order—return, that is, to the safety of white spaces created through his very reappearance—establishes the play's control over the apocalyptic figurations which threaten to overwhelm it in its closing moments. When in the play's first act Edmund rejects astrological explanations of events, he evokes both a characteristic of theatrical blackness and a mode of predicting the future opposed by the "genesis of the absolutist state," one that, as Reinhart Koselleck argues, "enforced a monopoly on the control of the future by suppressing apocalyptic and astrological readings of the future."[167] Edmund's attempted betrayal rests upon an increasingly outdated orientation to the past, and to the exemplary function of biblical stories. Despite his best efforts, Edmund cannot blind his father into becoming Isaac, or make himself into Jacob. His machinations collapse into the realm of prophecy, in which "events are merely symbols of that which is already known."[168] Edgar, on the other hand, narrativizes his application of racial prosthetics, and audiences await the surprise of his revelatory unveiling, over which he alone exerts control. This is the realm of "rational prognosis," a mode of anticipating the future which "implies a diagnosis which introduces the past into the future."[169] Edgar reaches into the past for Poor Tom, into the atavism and alterity of racial blackface, so that a future beyond the ending of the play might be imagined, if not articulated. The theater suggests in the technologies of blackface a materiality of apocalyptic thinking, and Edgar's use of blackface provides a formal structure for thinking about the end of the world. When the paint goes on, Edgar's fate is fixed, at least, in the world of prophecy lamented by Edmund. When Edgar removes the paint, he redeems himself, and the end of the

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[167] Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 16.

[168] Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 19.

[169] Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 22.

world collapses.

Just as genealogical maps balanced sheer visual force with intricate, rational justifications of royal power, *King Lear* concludes poised between the apocalypse and Edgar's reminder that "we that are young / Shall never see so much, nor live so long" (5.3.326-27). The play does not depict the "promised end," nor is the ending "an image of that horror." Rather, the play imagines, however briefly, a space beyond the apocalypse, a kind of hopeful redemptive vision inextricably bound up in Edgar's racial experimentations. Racial prosthesis deploys the theater's racial technologies in order to imagine a future for an otherwise inarticulable racial whiteness. The doom and fate associated with blackness materialize in the prosthetics that prop up, provide a form for, and predict the reappearance of whiteness. Edgar's suspended participation within the political order has been predicated all along on his exemption from the punishments exacted on nearly every other character in the play, and he arrives, unmasked, after the dangers have passed. Edgar's redemption is bound up with an exaltation of white supremacy, and an acknowledgement that the boundaries of whiteness are constructed within and around—are indeed constituted upon—the English theater's technologies of racial representation.

Chapter Three

Witnessing English Whiteness in *Titus Andronicus*

Seeing a Portrait of Aaron

This project has thus far witnessed whiteness constructing itself out of metaphor and disclaiming its materiality, fashioning itself out of silver English streams and muddy soil on the outskirts of London, making and remaking its genealogies at will. A central aim has been to make whiteness visible, to expose a Shakespearean epistemology of race that renders invisible the hierarchical capacities of whiteness. *Titus Andronicus* reveals its interest in racial hierarchies through a persistent preoccupation with the interrelation of the English theater, textuality, and whiteness. In particular, *Titus* explores the theatrical possibilities of using the literary legacies of Rome to forge explanatory myths for a white England. The play's experiments result in a violence that points to the intransigence of English whiteness and a corresponding reluctance to adopt wholesale the textual and somatic characteristics of Rome. But as the play looks ahead, out of the disorder and chaos of maimed bodies and texts, it begins to imagine a future Rome contemporaneous with England, the future of an imagined history in which England is no longer a lesser nation to a greater Mediterranean empire of the past. *Titus Andronicus* constructs a fictional history of Rome that extends itself into an imagined English future. As the play moves historically into the sixteenth century, it brings along an English audience that by play's end has been prepared to see its own whiteness in juxtaposition with the racial identities—Aaron's blackness, the whiteness of Rome, and the even whiter Goths—portrayed onstage. In witnessing the violent collapse and unsteady rebirth of a newly imagined Roman state, England learns how to see beyond its own fragile embodiment, to hoist upon the racialized bodies of others an

apparatus for seeing the future: a racial subjectivity that pretends its viewpoint expands beyond the temporal and spatial confines of the body.

The work of constructing an optical framework for whiteness begins in the play's opening scene, as Titus returns to Rome "bound with laurel boughs" like a

> bark that hath discharged his freight,
> Returns with precious lading to the bay
> From whence at first she weighed her anchorage. (1.1.74-77)[170]

The text here gives us pause: the quarto tells of a "bark that hath discharged her fraught." The Arden Shakespeare emends to "freight," even though the OED lists "fraught" as an acceptable word for a ship's cargo.[171] The editorial intervention excises a pun that invokes the danger faced in leaving and returning, the peril Titus faces upon his return to Rome. The connection between venturing out to sea and setting out to war is not novel, and Hans Blumenberg locates in Lucretius a resonance between the two, an impulse to transgress natural boundaries: "The same attraction that gradually leads life to venture out to sea also leads to the outbreak of wars."[172] The metaphor of seafaring is appropriate for Titus because he has put his life in danger and gained something in the process. Having survived his wartime peril, Titus enters a fraught political climate with newfound political capital, bringing with him changed goods, his "fraught" having been exchanged on his journey for "precious lading." The danger passed, the peril has been sold, and precious lading gained. Although he has lost many sons, Titus returns to port not only

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[170] Quotations from *Titus Andronicus* in this chapter derive from William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Jonathan Bate, The Arden Shakespeare, Third Series (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2000).

[171] "fraught, n." *OED Online*. December 2020. Oxford English Dictionary. https://oed.com/view/Entry/74313?rskey=E2bxEG&result=1#eid. Accessed 18 April 2021.

[172] Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 29.

"bound with laurel boughs," but also with bound Tamora, her sons, and Aaron: fraught treasures brought to Rome. That Titus's seafaring metaphor figures his prisoners of war as property is entirely apt, both in its anticipation of racialized chattel slavery and Tamora's status as a marriageable token of war. The evocation of property, moreover, prepares the audience for Aaron's silent presence throughout the remainder of the scene.

The Peacham Drawing depicts a moment that does not appear in *Titus Andronicus*. The only existing "contemporaneous illustration" of a Shakespearean play, a folio sheet that contains both a handmade picture and some forty transcribed or memorialized lines from the play, the drawing and transcription together capturing the play's persistent interest in bodies and texts.[173] The text is faithfully reproduced, but the drawing renders an arrangement that may be a collation of two different moments from the play. In it, Aaron stands beside Chiron and Demetrius, both bound, gesturing toward them and holding a sword. Tamora stands above, and Titus, or some other Roman figure, stands to the side. Although all of the characters appear in the play's opening scene, Aaron is never explicitly armed, nor Tamora's sons bound. But the drawing captures an essential truth about the play's interest in visualizations of race. Aaron's blackness provides some insight into Shakespearean prosthetics of race, his bare arms and legs as darkened as his face. Aaron's presence—armed, apparently directing the scene's action, and in contrast to the pale figures around him—is simultaneously threatening and anchoring, drawing the eye toward the edge of the picture, as he then points back to the white figures arrayed before him. Although Aaron's racialized blackness is most commonly remarked upon, the arrangement of bodies in Peacham's drawing is most clearly explained by the play's sustained interest in racial

[173] Jonathan Bate, introduction to *Titus Andronicus*, by William Shakespeare. Third Series. Ed. Jonathan Bate. (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2000), 38.

whiteness.

Titus Andronicus stages a confrontation between forms of whiteness. Tamora's arrival in Rome alongside Aaron complicates Rome's racial homogeneity: Tamora's extreme whiteness is contrasted not only with Aaron's blackness, but with the particular whiteness of Rome. The whiteness of Rome and the whiteness of the Goths are contestable. When Saturninus proposes his marriage to Tamora, he places her beauty above that of Roman women:

> lovely Tamora, queen of Goths,
> That like the stately Phoebe 'mongst her nymphs
> Dost overshine the gallant'st dames of Rome. (1.1.320-22)

A few lines later, Saturninus defines Tamora's beauty in terms of skin color: "Ascend, fair queen" (1.1.338). As Kim F. Hall has argued, descriptions of women as "fair" typically accentuate a polarity of black and white that constructs white women as beautiful by contrasting their beauty with blackness:

> Frequently, "black" in Renaissance discourses is opposed not to "white" but to "beauty" or "fairness," and these terms most often refer to the appearance or moral states of women [. . .] This is not to say that men are not "fair" or "black" in this discourse, but that the terms acquire a special force when they are turned to women and that they are most frequently used in relation to women.[174]

Tamora's fairness situates her in relation to Roman women, but also the play's men, most explicitly Saturninus and Aaron. Although Aaron's blackness is conspicuously present onstage, Saturninus's name undermines his own claim to whiteness, suggesting as it does a sullen, melancholic temperament. Aaron will later make explicit a connection between melancholic

[174] Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 9.

dispositions and black skin, when he tells Tamora

> Madam, though Venus govern your desires,
>
> Saturn is dominator over mine. (2.2.30-31)

As Francesca T. Royster has suggested, however, “Tamora’s whiteness *is* racially marked, is made visible, and thus it is misleading to simplify the play’s racial landscape into black and white, with black as the ‘other.’ One of the play’s striking features is its othering of a woman who is conspicuously white.”[175] I argue that both of these positions are essential for the play’s assertions of racial hierarchy, claims that necessarily involve the whiteness of Shakespeare’s English audiences. The comparative relation between Aaron and Tamora invites the English to compare their own racial identities with those being depicted onstage. The whiteness Saturninus identifies in Tamora both accentuates Aaron’s blackness and calls into question the whiteness of Rome, a fraught and pressing concern for sixteenth-century England.

Titus Andronicus tests multiple configurations of racialized bodies in its opening scene. Indeed, the theatrical complexity of the play’s opening scene has been cited as evidence of the play’s sole Shakespearean authorship: it “evinces a mastery of multiple entrances and exits, including use of the ‘above’ stage, that surpasses anything in any previous Elizabethan play.”[176] I will return to the question and stakes of co-authorship in the final section of this chapter. The chaos of the opening act creates two important images for Shakespeare’s audiences. First, the play imagines and depicts a sequence of somatic relationships, between differently racialized bodies, experimenting with the theatrical effect of variously juxtaposed figures. The play compares and contrasts white Romans, whiter Goths, and a black Moor. Prior to Titus’s arrival,

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[175] Royster, “White-Limed Walls,” 433.

[176] Bate, introduction to *Titus Andronicus*, 80.

Saturninus and Bassianus delineate but imply homogeneity between political factions within Rome: “Noble patricians, patrons of my right” (1.1.1); “countrymen, my loving followers” (1.1.3); Romans, friends, followers, favourers of my right” (1.1.9). Marcus explicitly combines these groups while distinguishing the ruling class from the populace, reminding all assembled

> that the people of Rome, for whom we stand
>
> A special party, have by common voice
>
> In election for the Roman empery
>
> Chosen Andronicus. (1.1.20-23)

The play introduces a polarity of black and white when Titus refers to the “mourning weeds” of Rome, which on stage may be indistinguishable from the racial prosthetics—black textiles—used to create Aaron’s black skin (1.1.73). Marcus then further entrenches this dichotomy when he attempts to crown Titus by presenting him with a “palliament of white and spotless hue” (1.1.185). The appearance of the Goths and Aaron complicates the divisions being created and maintained in Rome, and threatens to upset an already tenuous political climate. If “barbarous Goths” can later be “fair queens,” the hierarchies of Rome are tenuous, revocable, and uncertain (1.1.28). Before the end of the first act, Lavinia, introduced as “Rome’s rich ornament,” will be cast aside in favor of the interloping Tamora the Goth (1.1.55). The racial confusions engendered carry dire consequences for the legitimacy of Rome’s rulers, the efficacy of their dynastic intermarriages, and the racial purity of their descendants.

In addition to introducing racial juxtapositions that complicate the politics of Rome, the opening scene pushes the comprehensible limits of “multiple entrances and exits,” creating a theatrically chaotic storm that resolves, finally, in Aaron’s soliloquy. In doing so, the play reestablishes a border for whiteness, albeit one that will require extension beyond the boards of

the stage. Before he closes the scene, Aaron has occupied what Peter Erickson describes as the "anomalous position" of black servants in early modern portraiture:

> The portrait is of the white patron; the servant is secondary but nevertheless 'portrayed.' This portrayal is shaped by paradoxical interrelations between visibility and invisibility. The purpose of the role is display: hence the servant is a prominently visible object. Yet the display is simultaneously meant to signal a seen-but-not-heard subservience: hence the servant is invisible as subject.[177]

Aaron is not the central object of focus when the play begins. Rome is in search of a new emperor, and the arrival of Titus from the wars promises resolution to a domestic political crisis. The arrival of the Goths in Rome is marked by funeral, sacrifice, and murder, a series of highly visual arrangements that accentuate Aaron's position at the border of the theatrical frame. The sequence begins with funeral rites for yet another son of Titus, the coffin encoded visually as the "precious lading" Titus mentions, his victory equal parts an expansion of Rome's power and a loss of life that bestows honor and establishes connection with "their ancestors" (1.1.87). Addressing the burial chamber, Titus anticipates the play's interest in pits, aligning his family's tomb with the womb:

> How many sons hast thou of mine in store
> That thou wilt never render to me more! (1.1.97-98)

The association of birth and death reveals an interest in racial purity: bloodlines ended are bloodlines kept pure. The womb/tomb will not only refuse Titus "more" sons, but also protect him from "moor" sons, although the captives Titus brings to Rome carry with them the threat of miscegenation he fears.

[177] Erickson, "Invisibility Speaks," 24.

The play strives to maintain the borders of Rome, however, and sacrifice follows the funeral, as "Alarbus' limbs are lopped," so that the "shadows be not unappeased" (1.1.146, 103). Tamora protests the sacrifice, suggesting that, like black servants in an early modern portrait, the Goths are in Rome to better frame the Romans: "Sufficeth not that we are brought to Rome / To beautify thy triumphs" (1.1.112-13). Unlike servants at the borders of an English painting, the Goths with their indistinguishable whiteness challenge the centrality of Romans, and sacrifice enforces their difference: "To this your son is marked, and die he must" (1.1.128). Alarbus is marked for death, and in dying, he is marked out, separated, made different. So foreign combatants and sons of Rome together perish to ensure the stability of Rome's future. Rather than creating and maintaining a boundary between Roman and not, however, the funeral and sacrifice blur the difference, a confusion the play literalizes with the murder of Mutius. Titus kills his son, and whatever atrocities are committed in the name of the empire abroad come back to the city itself. "What, villain boy, barr'st me my way in Rome?" asks Titus, as though borders without Rome now endorse his violent acts at home (1.1.295). Distinctions have broken down, a father kills his son, and a barbarian weds the emperor: "monstrous" developments in Rome (1.1.313). But even as Tamora is made "incorporate in Rome," Aaron's presence is undeniable in the theater, his stark, visible difference a reminder of the radical racial alterity that exists outside the city, and which has now come home (1.1.467).

Aaron's soliloquy at the end of the first scene is unexpected, because the play has not treated him as a subject worthy or capable of such a speech act. His visible invisibility has heretofore functioned to burnish the reputations of Titus and Rome, to "beautify" their "triumphs" as an object of adornment (1.1.113). The play opens insistently preoccupied with historical questions of leadership, honor, and succession. As the scene slowly winds down,

leaving Aaron at the center of the stage, the racial configurations of the play become clear. The play focalizes its interest in whiteness in the presence of Aaron's prosthetic blackness, which provides shape and form for a whiteness that otherwise imagines itself as immaterial: Aaron's presence creates a frame for whiteness. As I have already argued, the questions of succession and the inclusion of Tamora within Rome's political order raise questions about competing claims of whiteness. Between Tamora and Rome, shades of whiteness are contested and challenged. The inclusion of Aaron centers these contestations of whiteness. Beside the black servant stand the play's figures of whiteness, the white "patrons" of the play's opening line. "Patron" suggests a Roman context, a "defender or advocate before a court of justice," as well as a "man in relation to a manumitted slave over whom he retains a certain degree of jurisdiction"; by the middle of the seventeenth century, Kenelm Digby would use the word "patron" to mean a "master or owner of a slave in the eastern Mediterranean or North Africa."[178] Aaron thus situates the patrons of Rome as white. In a broader sense, the relationship between Aaron and the remaining characters of the play is racially prosthetic: through Aaron, the identities of Romans and Goths are made racial. Crucially, the visual construction of the relation between an immaterial absence of whiteness (the space bounded by an "imperial diadem") and the materiality of blackness creates, through the framing of white patrons and a black servant, an audience that sees the portrait (1.1.10). The play creates its white viewers, who reflect on the play's racial cast and come to see their own position as removed from the tragedies taking place before them—*Titus* establishes a spectatorship of whiteness.

The subject position of whiteness relies upon Aaron's attempts, beginning with his first

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[178] "patron, n." *OED Online*. March 2021. Oxford University Press. https://oed.com/view/Entry/138929?rskey=PbtG2i&result=1. Accessed April 19, 2021.

soliloquy, to create his own perspective on the play's machinations. *Titus Andronicus* is a play about the origins of English whiteness in an imagined future of ancient Rome. In articulating that English whiteness, the play attempts to make sense of its imperial inheritance, the murky whiteness of Rome, and its own racially superior relation. To bring about the precarious double-move of accepting an imperial inheritance while maintaining safe distance from Rome's Mediterranean darkness, the play will violently divide, separate, and reattach bodies and texts. English whiteness is at least partially bound up in an inheritance of classical textuality, in the books England saw as their own blueprint for establishing England's greatness. But detaching Roman texts from Roman bodies is, as *Titus* suggests, a messy and violent business. The persistent and unending rearrangement of embodiment and textuality originates with Aaron's soliloquy in the opening scene, and will culminate in Aaron's final curse, with haunting memories of textuality re-inscribed in the corpses of one's beloved forebears. Around the figure of Aaron, the play imagines its own white subjectivity, a personhood that depends on the visible invisibility of Aaron, a "prominently visible object" of racial whiteness.

When Aaron closes the play's chaotic opening scene, he pictures Tamora ascending "Olympus' top," like the "golden sun" that "overlooks the highest-peering hills":

> Now climbeth Tamora Olympus' top,
>
> Safe out of fortune's shot, and sits aloft,
>
> Secure of thunder's crack or lightning flash,
>
> Advanced above pale envy's threatening reach.
>
> As when the golden sun salutes the morn
>
> And, having gilt the ocean with his beams,
>
> Gallops the zodiac in his glistering coach

And overlooks the highest-peering hills,

So Tamora. (1.1.500-08)

Aaron imagines Tamora within the seat of whiteness in *Titus Andronicus*, safe beyond the pale, envious reach of Rome's other white political actors, and naturalizes Tamora's superior position, like the sun. Tamora's perspectival position protects her from "fortune's shot," and the image Aaron constructs recalls Titus's earlier invocation of a return from sea. In this metaphorical articulation of the "ship of state," Tamora "overlooks" the arrival and departure of ships in the harbor, safe from contingencies of fate with which Titus has been engaged. Tamora from this position "sees the ship dashed under by storms from the point of view of the lamenting but uninvolved spectator."[179] Aaron then aspires to place himself alongside Tamora, furthering the visual association with black servants in early modern portraiture:

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 eyes

Than is Prometheus tied to Caucasus.

Away with slavish weeds and servile thoughts!

I will be bright, and shine in pearl and gold,

To wait upon this new-made empress.

To wait, said I? — to wanton with this queen,

This goddess, this Semiramis, this nymph,

[179] Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 11.

This siren that will charm Rome's Saturnine,

And see his shipwreck and his commonweal's. (1.1.511-23)

Aaron figures himself as "bright" and shining "in pearl and gold," situated and waiting upon Tamora, "this new-made empress." The image Aaron constructs explicitly recalls black servants included in early modern portraits of wealthy white English people. As Kim F. Hall has argued, both "black servant" portraits and "court jewels" functioned as "racially coded signifiers of aristocratic identity in the late sixteenth century"; Aaron's proximity to Tamora and adornment in "pearl and gold" solidify his presence onstage as an object that signals aristocratic prestige.[180] Aaron thus enacts linguistically an association with servitude the play has already constructed visually, not only because of his proximity with the play's white patrons, but also because his "role as a *servus callidus*" [clever slave] was "signaled in the first scene" by his "short dress" visible in the Peacham drawing.[181] Aaron quickly rejects an image of powerlessness, however, and characterizes himself as what Emily C. Bartels has described as the "prototypical cruel black Moor," not unlike Muly Mahamet from George Peele's *The Battle of Alacazar*.[182] Wantoning with Tamora—picking up additionally on the "prototypical sexualizing of Africans" prevalent in English literature and ethnography—Aaron delights in the ruin of Rome, as Tamora "charms Rome's Saturnine" and "sees his shipwreck and his commonweal's."[183] Aaron's shipwreck metaphor crystallizes the play's conflations of body and text. In this moment, Aaron, the play's

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[180] Hall, *Things of Darkness*, 213.

[181] Misha Teramura, "Black Comedy: Shakespeare, Terence, and *Titus Andronicus*," *English Literary History* 85, no. 4 (2018): 892.

[182] Emily C. Bartels, "Making more of the Moor: Aaron, Othello, and Renaissance Refashionings of Race," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (1990): 434.

[183] Smith, "White Skin, Black Masks," 43.

conspicuous avatar of blackness, moves from the edges of the stage and commands the audience through the simultaneous use of theatrical and literary traditions of blackness in England. Aaron brings to the stage Semiramis, the queen who succeeded her husband to found Babylon, and with her a series of characters out of the pages of England's classical readings: nymphs, sirens, queens, goddesses. Aaron begins to conflate stage and text, brought together into what Miles P. Grier has called "inkface": the "shared field of blackface performance, tattooing, writing, and printing" that "helped Britons struggling with memories of their own past as tattooed slaves in ancient Rome by transferring the ink mark of servility to other ethnicities as a property of their character."[184] Indeed, as Carolyn Sale argues, the very condition of Aaron's theatrical performance, the racial prosthetics applied to an actor's white skin, constitutes "a memorial practice which figures the ancient Britons in very particular ways—and at the very least remembers for Elizabethan audiences [. . .] that the English included people who may have become 'white-limed.'"[185] Aaron simultaneously distances and attracts English audiences to the action of *Titus*, creating a temporal, historical distance between audience and stage, even as he recalls a racialized past of Britain within which inheres a precursor to English whiteness.

Aaron's opening speech displays a dizzying manipulation of the way blackness and whiteness interact on the early modern stage. In this sense, the moment constructs a literary imagination, and realizes a way of cutting apart and analyzing the play that is predicated upon its textuality. Aaron brings the tools of the text onto the boards of the playhouse, inaugurating the

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[184] Miles P. Grier, "Inkface: The Slave Stigma in England's Early Imperial Imagination," in *Scripturalizing the Human: The Written as Political*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Routledge, 2015), 195.

[185] Carolyn Sale, "Black Aeneas: Race, English Literary History, and the 'Barbarous' Poetics of *Titus Andronicus*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (2011): 35.

play's many willful indiscretions of stage and page. As Aaron charms Tamora, and she charms Saturninus, a storm brews: the dangers of the sea, the "sphere of the unreckonable and lawless, in which it is difficult to find one's bearings."[186] Beyond the harbor await the dangers of racial miscegenation, the danger of the past, confusions of body and book, and a shipwrecked state.

Both Aaron and Tamora deploy the spectator-shipwreck metaphor throughout the play. When Aaron later expresses gratitude that a "happy star" led Aaron, Chiron, and Demetrius to Rome "to be advanced to this great height," he invokes again the image of "those rescued from shipwreck [who] are astonished by their new experience of dry land" (4.2.32-34).[187] But when Aaron later compares his own anger to the swelling ocean, the metaphor changes, and the danger Aaron poses to the white world of the play begins to overwhelm Aaron's reframing capacities. So when Tamora declares, "if Aaron be now wise, / Then all is safe, the anchor's in the port" (4.4.37-38), the metaphor has shifted beneath her feet, and audiences are reminded that the "sea voyage can still come to grief in the harbor."[188] Although apparently reflecting the facility with which his literary metaphorics shape his interactions and the careers of the play's characters, Aaron's greeting to Chiron and Demetrius—"Holloa! what storm is this?"—registers the extent to which the his own position outside of the frame is not guaranteed (1.1.524). Aaron is at sea.

Seafaring recurs as a metaphorical language for thinking about the play's ensuing troubles. Titus and Marcus repeatedly refer to the sea's uncertain and dangerous characteristics. Whiteness is not, however, placing itself in the position of the spectator on dry land who observes the shipwreck. Rather, whiteness wants the gains of the seafarer and the safety of the

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[186] Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 8.

[187] Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 21.

[188] Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 15.

harbor. This image of whiteness differs from other Shakespearean fabrications of whiteness insofar as Aaron is the one creating the image. White characters in *Titus Andronicus* do not construct whiteness as actively as Aaron. Tamora will remain in a safe, privileged position, out of danger: she sees the shipwreck, safely ashore, isolated from its danger. But if Tamora is removed from the peril of the sea, Aaron is set at yet another remove. As he imagines this future, he looks upon the spectator, insulated from the entire scene, but free to comment upon its action. If Aaron occupies the position of the spectator who in turn places Tamora in the safe position of spectator, then the telescopic image invites the audience to think of itself as yet a third spectator, another safe observer of the peril taking place on the stage.

Roman Letters and English Soil

Titus begins with a return from war and the promised reunion of a fractured nation. Having conquered the Goths, Titus might protect Rome from further rupture, both internally and externally. The marriage of a conquered subject, Tamora, offers the possibility of forestalling further external threats. Because her whiteness undermines the whiteness of Rome, her external racial difference—accentuated and excessive whiteness—upsets Rome's white racial identity. Tamora's danger to racial hierarchies is highlighted by her association with and the appearance of Aaron, who looms over the play's highly orchestrated opening scene as a visible reminder of the precarious alliances being formed between and within the play's white characters. If the play's union between Tamora and Saturninus attempts to test the limits of racial intermixing, between degrees of whiteness, the "adulterous liaison between Aaron and Tamora [. . .] produces an illegitimate baby [that] appears as a kind of enhanced miscegenation, ultrablack crossed with

ultrawhite."[189] The play's experimentations within whiteness fail and ultimately enforce a strict boundary, ratifying an impulse toward maintaining separations both external and internal to a white racial hierarchy. The problem posed by Tamora's whiteness is sameness and differentiation: the inability to distinguish between whitenesses with outward, visible markers, and the unyielding certainty that not all whitenesses are the same. Titus kills a son to maintain order, to preserve his power to determine what does and does not belong. Inside and outside are demarcated by cutting the body: limbs hewn apart, hands detached, separated, and reattached to the body. The spatial and temporal boundaries of Rome are muddled.

The spectator-shipwreck metaphor clarifies disjointed accounts of Rome's origin, itself a duplicitous—repeatedly doubled and misleading—tale. In his reading of Livy, Michel Serres describes the incessant doublings of Rome:

> The origin refers to another origin, the beginning demands a beginning, the instauration wants auguries, the foundation requires preliminaries; it seems a ray of light that, caught between two almost parallel mirrors, goes on reproducing image before image; everything flees in the infinite sequence. [. . .] The book of the foundation of the city begins with the destruction of the city.[190]

Titus Andronicus restages origins of Rome: imagining the destruction of the commonweal, Aaron refigures the arrival of Aeneas fleeing a ruined Troy, as Tamora looks out upon a sea and witnesses the destruction of a city that inaugurates the founding of Albion, a white England that mirrors Rome's precursor, Alba. And in another scene from Rome's origin, Hercules is deceived

[189] Royster, "White-Limed Walls," 432.

[190] Michel Serres, *Rome: The First Book of Foundations*. Trans. Randolph Burks. (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 33.

by Cacus, who imprints hoofmarks backward in the dirt, only to be undone by the cries of stolen cattle: Hercules "reads a text that makes him uncertain and confused; he hears sounds that bring him back to the place the tracks had chased him away from."[191] The play generates dramatic tension through the interplay of text and body, writing and voice: like Hercules following tracks placed in reverse by Cacus, the play moves backward toward a violent origin, with Lucius condemning Aaron to the soil:

> Set him breast-deep in earth and famish him;
>
> There let him stand and rave and cry for food. (5.3.178-79)

In Aaron, who digs corpses out of the ground—"Oft have I digged up dead men from their graves"—the danger and lawlessness of the sea returns to the soil (5.1.135). Aaron's monstrous agriculture threatens the stability of law in the Roman state, and the play restores order by inscribing the soil with Aaron's body, the materiality of the racial prosthetic returning to the soil out of which it has been constructed.

The elaborate perspectival scaffolding Aaron creates at the outset of *Titus* reflects the play's interest in maintaining historical distance between the play's action and its spectators, but it also emerges out of its engagement with myths of Rome's origins. The foundational myths of England's racial whiteness look backward toward a disavowed Rome. English writers in the late sixteenth century sought "to distinguish their writing from Greek and Latin literature, even as they imitated it with conspicuous intensity."[192] If Aaron embodies England's own history of enslavement in the Roman empire, his intermediary position between a rearticulated white England and the racial struggles depicted onstage registers the English stage's capacity for

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[191] Serres, *Rome*, 11.

[192] Sean Keilen, *Vulgar Eloquence: On the Renaissance Invention of English Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 1-2.

deploying history in the service of racial myth-making. Out of a complicated history of subjugation and a desire for literary inheritance, *Titus Andronicus* forges a singular, clarifying origin.

When Aaron fails to ascend "Olympus' top" alongside Tamora, white audience members can imagine their own safety in a number of ways, not least by asserting the historical distance between the play's action and their own positions within an Elizabethan playhouse. But as the end of the play suggests, that distance is not so great. *Titus* is a story of origins: like Cacus leading oxen backward into the cavern, the play invites a belief the tale is one of Rome and the ancient past. But Shakespeare has written in reverse; it is a story about a kind of future, one predicated upon a past that never occurred. The play deceives, and looking backward we cannot find what has not yet taken place. When Aaron is discovered by a Goth who "strayed / To gaze upon a ruinous monastery," the landscape brings together ancient Rome and contemporary England, littered in the aftermath of the English Reformation with the infrastructural remnants of a Catholic past (5.1.20-21). What does protect and insulate English audiences, however, from the turmoil wrought by and upon Aaron and Tamora, is their own white skin, distinguishable from both Aaron's blackness and Tamora's whiteness. The spectator-shipwreck relation set in motion at the beginning of the play is

> here only the superficial representation of the situation; at a deeper level, the shipwreck is a didactic drama staged by Providence. The spectator's security is threatened by the figure of the evil genius, who is capable of hurling him into the sea—the whole drama is set forth within the framework of this dualism of Providence and evil Genius. The metaphor is only a translation of a translation.[193]

[193] Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, 46.

In this sense, Aaron's position was always doomed, his fate fixed at the point the prosthetics of race were applied to the actor's white skin. The white supremacist logic at work in the play dictates and requires Aaron's downfall, and the triumphant perpetuation of a stable Rome that coexists with England. Despite her personal failure, Tamora's whiteness persists. When Titus brings the play-world crashing down, he does so in a way that maintains the racial hierarchies the play has set up. Titus thus inaugurates an important characteristic of white supremacist narratives: although individual characters may fall, the systems they create persist, even beyond the edges of genre. When Lucius claims authority in the closing moments of the play, political order is reestablished, stability ensured. Indeed, when Marcus laments the treatment of Lavinia, he turns toward the English spectators whose desires have shaped the play's actions:

> O, why should nature build so foul a den,
>
> Unless the gods delight in tragedies? (4.1.59-60)

English audiences delight in tragedies that leave them safely distant from the peril of shipwrecks.

Lavinia's Prosthetic Text

Just as *Titus Andronicus* allows Aaron's imagined perspective upon the shipwreck of Rome to serve as a template for the audience's successfully distanced spectatorship, Lavinia's rape, dismemberment, and death literalize England's use of books to simultaneously adopt and reject a Roman literary inheritance. The play opens up the possibilities of textual and authorial hybridity, making visible the imperfections of its singularizing historicity. Ultimately, however, Titus creates a racial history that emerges out of its violent excisions of nonwhite subjects, like Aaron, and white women, like Lavinia, both of whom are necessary for imagining and perpetuating masculinist whiteness. Arguing that Lavinia "functions as a coauthor, rejecting the

dominant story of suicide and deploying collaborative strategies to insist on her own hybridity and that of Rome," Bethany Packard highlights the play's interest in using Lavinia to complicate England's adoption of Roman narratives in fashioning its own stories.[194] The play imagines a single-authored, masculinist textuality, and situates Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as a conceptual reservoir for whiteness. When Lavinia points to that text as a way to explain the violence wrought by Chiron and Demetrius, she uses the Ovidian text not only to replace her voice, but also to explain the violence that has been done to her body. The book contains the very patriarchal violence she has suffered, and if it provides a language for her, it is because that violence has removed all other forms of language from her. She does not have a choice but to seek out the book, and although she might imagine a world beyond the text, she cannot describe it.

Act IV, Scene 1 of *Titus Andronicus* begins with a series of misunderstandings predicated upon the play's confusions of body and text. Lucius' young son is fleeing his Aunt Lavinia, who, having seen the boy carrying a load of books, has begun to chase him: "My aunt Lavinia / Follows me everywhere, I know not why" (4.1.1-2). Lavinia is not chasing the boy himself, but his books. As Lavinia begins sorting through his dropped pile of texts, Titus thinks he understands, offering the use of his personal collection, which consists of more extensive and difficult reading than the young boy's:

> But thou art deeper and better skilled:
>
> Come and take choice of all my library,
>
> And so beguile thy sorrow till the heavens

[194] Bethany Packard, "Lavinia as Coauthor of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 50, no. 2 (2010): 283.

Reveal the damned contriver of this deed. (4.1.33-36)

Titus here imagines readings as a pleasing distraction, one that might charm away Lavinia's sadness until some later time, when a greater power uncovers her attackers. Lavinia's rape at the hands of Demetrius and Chiron remains unsolved, Lavinia being unable, her hands cut off and tongue ripped out, to speak, write, or otherwise fashion their names. Origins are heard or read: the discovery of "the damned contriver" has been forestalled by her inability to speak or write. If revenge must by delayed, Titus suggests, books provide an opportunity to "beguile" her "sorrow." Titus's solution is similar the one he devises at the end of the previous act, when he tells Lavinia

> I'll to thy closet and go read with thee
>
> Sad stories chanced in the times of old. (3.2.83-84)

In this earlier iteration, Titus imagines not the topic of reading, but its historical distance, to be the source of its distractive powers. More directly cathartic, reading "sad stories chanced in the times of old" offers an emotional outlet for Lavinia's traumatic rape, and for Titus, history promises a possible template for revenge. Between the end of Act III and the beginning of Act IV, however, something changes. The content of Titus's books proves inadequate (preferring now to "beguile" sorrow, perhaps because sad stories hurt too much) and so Lavinia seeks another text. If reading once provided a temporary relief from the inevitable conclusion of this revenge tragedy, in this opening moment of Act IV, the "damned contriver of this deed" once again occupies a central place in the minds of Titus, Marcus, and Lavinia.

Titus Andronicus makes no attempt to conceal its sources, referring openly to the classical texts upon which its plot is patterned. Revealing its source materials, the play invites audiences to think about the materiality of books and their use by authors to fashion their own

tales. That materiality is disavowed by masculinist authorship: "early modern writers and publishers often gendered texts feminine, [. . .] figuring books as loose women shamed as they were distributed in print."[195] Books are thus deployed by men to advance the interests of a patriarchy that requires women's bodies but denies their independence. Indeed, Lavinia's own position within the play constitutes an escape from the confines of the text, one that creates an illusion of freedom but which ultimately enforces gendered boundaries of honor and purity. Lavinia's rape and subsequent loss of honor differs from the story of Virginius Titus refers to later in the play. Although discovering the identities of Lavinia's attackers is a logistical concern for Titus, his desire to read sad stories with her advances his own interests, and stems from a desire to delay the moment of revenge, to dilate the time between Lavinia's rape and her death at his own hands:

> Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee,
>
> And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die. (5.3.45-46)

Lavinia's shame has made her unfit for life in a patriarchal Rome, an eventuality which, although a shocking onstage moment, has been anticipated by Titus, if not Lavinia. If reading merely delays the inevitable, beguiling or cathartic possibilities of the book offer little respite. Reading does not enable a secular, cloistered life, nor does it afford Lavinia an interior life safe from the horrors of Rome. In fact, books provide a template for her doom, and her pressing need to locate herself in books brings about both the end of the play and her own life. But by making explicit the textual precursor to Lavinia's fate, the play again telescopes the action of its plot, allowing audiences to reflect upon the inevitability of precedent and the possibilities for changing the past. If Titus cannot alter Lavinia's fate, he can at least delay it, and in doing so, he provides

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[195] Packard, "Lavinia as Coauthor," 282.

Shakespeare's audience with the means to think about what kind of history they would like to construct.

Lavinia names her assailants by writing in the sand, an action that returns the play again to the founding of Rome. As it turns out, "sad stories" prove not too sad, nor is the matter of history sufficiently distant as to provide a soothing diversion for Lavinia. In fact, she is looking for the very matter upon which her own story has been patterned. As Titus implores her to seek better reading in his private library, Lavinia finds what she has been seeking, and "busily [. . .] turns the leaves" of "Ovid's *Metamorphosis*," this particular copy having been a gift to the boy from his mother (4.1.45, 42). Upon locating the text in question—the tale of Philomel—Lavinia proceeds to take a "staff in her mouth," and writes the names of the attackers, and their crime, in a "sandy plot" (4.1.76sd, 69). As this scene makes clear, the "tragic tale of Philomel" has provided the template for Lavinia's woeful tale (4.1.47). But the Philomel story has been altered for *Titus*, as Marcus notes upon discovering Lavinia in Act II, Scene 3:

> A craftier Tereus, cousin, hast thou met,
> And he hath cut those pretty fingers off,
> That could have better sewed than Philomel. (2.3.41-43)

Lavinia is unable to sew the scene of violence into something legible for her sister—Progne, in the Philomel story—and so one potential reader is denied a text in *Titus*. In his introduction to the Arden edition of the play, Jonathan Bate lays out the play's use of its source material:

> Not only does a reading of Ovid replace Progne's act of reading in Ovid, but also, in a dazzling rhetorical *contaminatio* of sources, Shakespeare has then added a new method of disclosure, writing on the ground, from a different story in Ovid, that of Io, who is raped by Jupiter, turned into a heifer and only able to reveal her identity by scratching her hoof

on the sand.[196]

Overlaying his various source materials, Shakespeare highlights his own use of Ovid, and foregrounds the act of writing within the Philomel story. Writing on the ground is both an originary act of Rome's founding and an oft-frequented topos of Renaissance poetry, and this climactic moment fuses England's literary ambitions, in appropriately violent fashion, to the trope of Rome. Racial whiteness here offers a perspective on racial tragedy—a separation that Lavinia enables by creating temporal and historical distance between Rome and itself, between the world of Ovid and the world of *Titus*. England witnesses a Rome torn apart from itself, in which the present the play creates has been separated into a textual past, the Ovidian text, and an embodied present, the body of Lavinia. The ability to separate the past from the present constitutes a racial innovation of England, an ability to manipulate—to expand or collapse at will—a continuity between the present and the past. This operation reflects what Cheryl Harris has described, in another context, as one property of whiteness: "the rejection of the ongoing presence of the past."[197] A Roman past that can be divided into separate parts offers to England endless plasticity. In this moment, Lavinia becomes a conduit for birthing racial whiteness, her maimed body compelled into the service of writing in the sand the conditions amenable to establishing an English city of whiteness.

Although the presence of the book is a necessary bit of stage business, its textuality allows England to replicate Rome without its bodies, to create a white England that descends from Rome but not from Romans. Without her tongue, Lavinia cannot tell Titus and Marcus about the specifics of her rape. The theatrical requirement of a book does not, of course, stand up

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[196] Bate, introduction to *Titus Andronicus*, 92.

[197] Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 1761.

to much scrutiny; as I have already noted, Marcus apprehends the Philomel parallel immediately, and Lavinia's writing requires no context: "*Stuprum — Chiron — Demetrius*" (4.1.78). Crucially, the deliberate and insistent presence of the material text onstage offers Lavinia a prop to supplement her missing tongue. A bodily prosthetic, the book promises a kind of repair, a textual replacement for the damage done to Lavinia's maimed body. Where Lavinia cannot speak, the Ovidian text supplies the lack. Lavinia's *Metamorphosis* is not a ready-made prosthetic, nor does it impose upon her body normative ideas about whole, healthy bodies. The book both enacts and reacts to Lavinia's trauma, creating the conditions for its occurrence and absolution for the act. Although Lavinia attempts to take control of her own narrative by seeking out the book, her discovery is neither empowering nor fully restorative.

The prosthetic book mediates public knowledge of Lavinia's rape, and in doing so upends perceptions about the (dis)embodiment of printed play-texts and their performances. Performances publicly embody play-texts, which necessarily leave open the possibilities left ambiguous with the printed word; play-texts enable private consumption of otherwise public performances. When Lavinia gestures toward the Ovidian text, she compels Marcus and Titus to address what has heretofore remained unspoken—her rape. Although the crime is no mystery, the play seems to suggest it could remain hidden from view, as Titus and Lavinia lead private lives reading away their days. Lavinia's recourse to Ovid forces their hands, and makes public their private grief:

> Write thou, good niece, and here display at last
> What God will have discovered for revenge. (4.1.73-74)

When Marcus suggests the words might "stir a mutiny in the mildest thoughts / And arm the minds of infants to exclaims," he acknowledges that a private language has been pierced, that

Lavinia can share her story, and that revenge can no longer be delayed (4.1.85-56). The scene transforms Lavinia's private body into a public text, marking an end to her utility for racial whiteness, which the play conceives of as overt but hidden. Indeed, as Aaron tells Chiron and Demetrius near the beginning of the play,

> The emperor's court is like the house of Fame,
>
> The palace full of tongues, of eyes and ears. (1.1.626-27)

The separation between a highly visible "emperor's court" and the "unfrequented plots" of the forest is established by Aaron, who has already imagined himself shining in pearl and gold alongside Tamora (1.1.615). His conspicuous presence in the opening scene of the play raises the stakes of private and public spheres in the play. Aaron does not inaugurate the play's divisions between public and private spaces merely through his plotting. His racial legibility introduces into the world of the play a possibility for reading bodies as racial, transforming the private spaces of the play into laboratories of racial world-making, whether a private library or a "loathsome pit" of the forest (2.2.176, 193). Out of Lavinia's private reading comes the possibility of re-reading history and changing the past at will, and out of a forest's "loathsome pit" comes the violent dismemberments which allow the English to separate Roman texts and bodies. In both cases, the private work creates public, racial knowledge. In the end, of course, the operations of racial whiteness are disclaimed, as the racial work of the past remains hidden in the past, no longer at work in the world outside the playhouse.

The play's racial configurations finally combine the body and text by imagining the failure of this racial project of historical revisionism. Deploying the book onstage and using it to enable Lavinia's communication allows the material text to open up the body in novel ways, just as the play itself cuts apart and repurposes Shakespeare's reading. At the end of the play, as

Aaron enumerates his “heinous deeds,” he returns to the linkages of text and body set in motion by Lavinia:

> Oft have I digged up dead men from their graves
> And set them upright at their dear friends’ door
> Even when their sorrows almost was forgot,
> And on their skins, as on the bark of trees,
> Have with my knife carvèd Roman letters
> “Let not your sorrow die, though I am dead.” (5.1.135-40)

Where Lavinia seeks out the book to let her shame die along with her father’s sorrow, Aaron, whose own body is created by the application of mud, ink, or paint to a “blank” white body of an actor, here suggests a traumatic and horrifying return of the text, inscribed in the skin of the dead. If racial whiteness depends upon its ability to create racial hierarchies in the past it later refuses to acknowledge, textuality threatens to upend the project, as do the bodies of those subjected to those systems of oppression. The play ends by meditating on the open-ended and unpredictable afterlives of material texts, on their ability to conjure in individual readers private sorrows and uncontrollable reactions. Just as Ovid offers a template for Lavinia, Aaron reminds Shakespeare’s audience about the portability of books, the irrepressibility of bodies, and the impossibility of erasing the stories used to construct white supremacy. Just as the pastness of Rome can be manipulated to construct a story of English whiteness, the Shakespearean text makes itself available to readings that simultaneously disavow the existence of race and perpetuate white supremacist logics. Although Lucius ends the play by enclosing the Roman dead in his “household’s monument,” and condemns both Tamora and Aaron to the natural forces of soil and flesh-eating birds, the possibilities for reading remain open to the future

(5.3.193). An intervening audience may yet deny the play's impostures, refuse participation in its schemes, and bear witness to the whiteness it constructs.

Chapter Four

White World-Making in *Othello*'s Venice

Knowing White Spaces, Speaking White Worlds

In *Othello*, Shakespeare builds a world of whiteness upon the racially prostheticized body of the play's central character. In doing so, the play creates a future in which whiteness simultaneously constructs and disavows racialized boundaries of exclusion. When the play imagines Othello's downfall coming as the result of a tragically innate character flaw, and then pathologizes as "epilepsy" the narrative opportunities afforded by the operations of white supremacy, Othello's racial alterity becomes inextricably attached to the biological body (4.1.50). In this way, the play's inauguration of race through the attachment of the racial prosthetic becomes obscured by the purported facticity of biological race, both within and outside the world of the play. As though the prosthetic is perpetually recalled and removed from the body—and precisely because it is never detached—the logic of racial prosthesis enables the play to continuously shunt attention away from the constructed nature of the prosthetic: the centrality of Othello's race enables its erasure. In this way, *Othello* itself exists as a prosthetic text upon which whiteness hoists itself, and the play allows readers and critics to construct endlessly multiplying worlds of whiteness upon the play's foundations of whiteness, structures built within and around the spaces of Shakespeare's imagined Venice, a fabricated world upon which a whitened future for London is conceived.

Othello's Venice operates under the pretense of a tolerant multiculturalism that belies its construction and maintenance of strictly racialized hierarchies. The racial codes enforced in Shakespeare's Venetian world reflect English ideas about race that were central to Britain's

reorganization under King James at the beginning of the seventeenth century, whose ascension to the throne depended upon the flexibility and stability of racial whiteness that rendered the Scottish James acceptably white while excluding claims of foreign sovereigns from continental Europe. As though the arrival of James presaged England's rising global importance and the establishment of a cosmopolitan London, Shakespeare's depiction of Venice reflects "the idea of Venice as an aristocratic republic and cosmopolitan centre of capitalism, with her exceptional freedom for strangers and her exceptional attraction for travelers in search of sophistication"; in this sense, the play constructs an "image of Venetian society" as "a refracted projection of London," although the image projects onto the Continent London's twinned desires for racial purity and global dominance.[198] Margo Hendricks has called attention to the way that early modern myth "extols an image of Venice as the idealized feminine body, beautiful, desirable, and virginal, [while] it also vicariously projects an image of Venice as the imperfect body—corruptive, desiring, and easily violated."[199] I suggest these impulses are constitutive of the play's construction of a white world, akin to what Peter Erickson has described as a "comprehensive network of white motivational patterns, each a part of which actively contributes to the overall outcome" of the play.[200] The white world of Venice—which, as Hendricks suggests, was always construed as feminine—is created through the use of the

[198] Leo Salinger, "The Idea of Venice in Shakespeare and Ben Jonson," in *Shakespeare's Italy: Functions of Italian Locations in Renaissance Drama*, ed. Michele Marrapodi, A. J. Hoenselaars, Marcello Cappuzzo, and L. Falzon Santucci (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 173.

[199] Margo Hendricks, "'The Moor of Venice,' Or the Italian on the Renaissance English Stage," in *Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender*, ed. Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 194-95.

[200] Peter Erickson, "Images of White Identity in *Othello*," in *Othello: New Critical Essays*, ed. Philip C. Kolin (New York: Routledge, 2002), 138.

theater's racial prosthetics, through which ideas about English whiteness become articulable. As Dympna Callaghan explains, "race, crucially *both* black *and* white, is articulated as an opposition on stage principally by means of cosmetics: burnt cork negritude projects racial difference against white Pan-Cake, [. . .] cosmetic practices" which "bring into sharper focus the relation between race and gender in drama," and which reveal how "whiteness becomes visible in an exaggerated white and, crucially, feminine identity."[201] In *Othello*, masculinist English identity is made visible both through the articulation and destruction of Othello's materialized racial body, and in the rejection of dangerous Venetian femininity. This chapter explores the play's prosthetic use of Venice as a foundation for white world-making, that world's commitment to protecting and proliferating white capital, and the pathologizing of Othello's blackness—the projection of his difference onto a prosthetic body now imagined as biological—within a fabricated, white Venice.

One problem with absolute rulers is their bloodlines and heritage do not always align with those of the people they rule. If a seventeenth-century articulation of English whiteness helped justify the ascension of James I in 1603, the arrival of a foreign ruler on the English throne kept alive the possibility that a less amenable king or queen might later claim the throne, with no recourse available to the nobility whose families had become intertwined with myths about English land and soil. Shakespeare's Venice imagines an alternative political structure to dynastic kingship, one which simultaneously maintains class hierarchies and lessens the authority of sometimes foreign kings. The alterity of Venice obviates the danger of depicting political systems unlike England's own, and although *Othello* names as the titular head of state a Duke of Venice, the play avoids likening him to an English duke, let alone a king. Insofar as he

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[201] Callaghan, "'Othello was a White Man,'" 195.

remained independent of overlords like "the Pope and the Holy Roman Empire," the Doge "was not at all like an English duke. On the other hand, he was far from being an absolute ruler of Venice, the true governors of which were a hereditary oligarchy, who held the offices and elected one of their number Doge."[202] The comparison is alluring for members of the English gentry, however, as Shakespeare's Venice imagines a world in which authority derives from the longstanding members of the nation's racial stock. Projecting London onto a Venice consumed by questions of race and authority, the play imagines a racially constituted country, a white nation.

When *Othello* opens on the streets of Venice, Iago and Roderigo are enforcing the boundaries of racial whiteness within the Venetian republic. Their vigilante policing begins with Roderigo yoking together a network of racialized hearsay and an image of material wealth:

> Tush, never tell me! I take it much unkindly
> That thou, Iago, who hast had my purse
> As if the strings were thine, shouldst know of this. (1.1.1-3)

Roderigo reacts to the belated news of Othello and Desdemona's elopement by suggesting a broken intimacy between Iago and himself, and in these opening lines establishes a union between the two men, one predicated on gossip about Othello and a familiar bond that suggests—either literally or metaphorically—a shared financial circumstance. As I will argue, sustaining a whitened Venice requires the interdependency of its white citizens, the forebears of the "wealthy curlèd darlings" whose fates Brabantio bemoans in the following scene (1.2.68). The play opens by establishing a common racial identity between the two men, and sets out to

[202] John W. Draper, "Shakespeare and the Doge of Venice," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 46, no. 1 (1947): 75.

delineate the terms of that racial pact. Their whiteness is constructed in opposition to Othello's blackness, which is deployed as a prosthetic prop that stabilizes an entire world of white characters. As both Roderigo and Iago's persistently racial slurs make clear, of course, the nature of Othello's transgression is primarily racial: "the thick-lips," "an old black ram / Is tupping [Brabantio's] white ewe" (1.1.66, 88-89). The play opens with a "tumult of racial contempt keyed to visible physical features," "vicious rhetoric" that establishes the racial hierarchies at work in the world of Venice.[203] Iago and Roderigo quickly turn their racial invectives into the grist of white world-making, the generative material that creates an idea of Venice in which Iago, Roderigo, and Brabantio live all at once in a city beset by an "extravagant and wheeling stranger / Of here and everywhere" (1.1.136-37). Othello's alienation is not merely asserted, and the play admits to his belonging "here," in addition to "everywhere." Othello lives in Venice, a city known for its multiculturalism, but he is not of Venice. The unity of white Venice is created, in this opening moment, in contradistinction with an Othello whose identity is thus shaped by a lack of place, not only because of his cosmopolitanism, but also his lack of belonging in a Venice being built around him, in the financial bonds of Iago and Roderigo, and the racial differences they will assert, in public, to Brabantio. The opening of the play leverages a double movement of racial prosthesis wherein the construction of Othello's difference serves to solidify the multicultural identity of Venice, which in turn is disavowed by the audiences of Shakespeare's London.

Upon arriving at Brabantio's home in the city, Iago and Roderigo appeal to his fear of robbery, and suggest his daughter's elopement constitutes a theft of property. The patriarchal system that undergirds such an association obscures the extent to which Othello's racial identity

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[203] Erickson, "Images of White Identity," 137.

is constructed in the bargain: Othello's presence threatens white property in Venice. When he describes Othello as an "old black ram," Iago does so by calling attention to the conditions under which citizens of a city share a space and time: "Even now, now, very now" (1.1.88). Iago's insistent reminder about the simultaneous but private actions of the residents of Venice describes a city whose multicultural tolerance has heretofore rested on an unthinking ignorance about the lives of others: a crucial colorblindness that facilitates the multicultural myth of Venice. Iago changes the fundamental relationship between Brabantio and his neighbors, and as Brabantio is called out from the street, his private life is made public, just as the private lives of Othello and Desdemona are thrust out onto the streets of the city. But in doing so, Iago includes Brabantio within the financial association that already includes Roderigo and himself: just as Iago has Roderigo's purse "as if the strings were thine," Desdemona's elopement concerns Iago personally. The loss of Brabantio's property is a loss of Iago's property: their material fates are intertwined. The suggestion that Venice hides racial miscegenation around unknown street corners mobilizes a racial anxiety that solidifies white spaces as those places where homogeneity means race can be forgotten, ignored, or disclaimed. Iago's incitements mobilize white anxiety, and reveal the extent to which tolerance within Venice has failed to register as acceptance, which is impossible within the racist milieu Iago and Roderigo have begun to construct. Iago pierces the veil of colorblind anonymity. All of a sudden, a community of Venetian life has been interrupted by the intrusive presence not of Iago, but of Othello.

Iago's racial incitements rely upon an invocation of both time and space. As his "now, now, very now" demands that Brabantio acknowledge the private lives of fellow Venetian residents, both Iago and Roderigo call to mind the danger and threats that exist in different neighborhoods of the city. The public exchange between Brabantio, Iago, and Roderigo reflects a

tacit awareness of the racialized quarters of the city, and the undesirable location in which Othello resides:

> At this odd-even and dull watch o' th' night,
> Transported with no worse nor better guard
> But with a knave of common hire, a gundolier,
> To the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor. (1.1.123-26)

Iago activates latent racial knowledge about Venice, both in the suggestion that Othello and Desdemona's elopement is in some way a violation of racial norms, and also that certain sections of the city are less desirable than others. Without explicitly acknowledging the fact, all three men understand that traveling from the house of Brabantio to that of Othello requires transport by "a knave of common hire," done at the "dull watch o' th' night." Othello does not live as Brabantio lives, and when Iago instigates an explicit awareness of race, he inaugurates a conversation about the city's racialized ghettos. Indeed, the careful manipulation of space in the Venice of Shakespeare's *Othello* is characterized by what has been called, in another context, a "kind of "Schrödinger's whiteness," an awareness of racial segregation that refuses acknowledgement, that

> is simultaneously mindful of and oblivious to white involvement in black ghetto conditions and segregation. On the one hand, whites are simultaneously unaware of condoning ghetto conditions (and thus need better communication about them and their role in their creation, maintenance, and condonance), but on the other are all too aware of these conditions and explicitly leave them. . ."[204]

[204] Matthew W. Hughey, "Whither Whiteness? The Racial Logics of the Kerner Report and Modern White Space," *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 4, no. 6 (2018): 82.

The world in which Brabantio has been living is segregated, and although that segregation is not acknowledged, when Iago emerges at his window to call out the racial transgressions Othello has committed, Brabantio understands immediately the terms of the violation and its stakes. Othello has taken Desdemona to another place, one that exists simultaneously within the city, but is made separate by its racial alterity. Othello has taken Desdemona to the wrong side of town.

The racial incitements of the play's opening scene, and the Venetian court scene that follows, initiate the creation of a white world. As Lowell Gallagher has described it, a world is made up of a diversity of perspectives assembled into so many narratives and stories:

> Considered as a literary phenomenon, *world* reflects something other than a collection of data or facts about a given environment or community. It reflects a fabricated ensemble of inherited and shifting perceptions, memories, and expectations that has congealed into clusters of stories, story fragments, wisdom utterances, and gnomic aphorisms—these are a given world's building blocks of meaning.[205]

Venice is not a world that includes Othello simply because he resides within it, marries Desdemona, and commands the Venetian navy: these are facts about the Shakespeare's Venice that do not necessarily result in its status as a literary world. But *Othello* is tediously concerned with telling stories, listening to stories, and the racial implications of those acts. As Ian Smith has argued, the play is invested in the proliferation of competing stories, as *Othello* "presents a classic Shakespearean tragic conceit: the master storyteller undone by a rival storyteller, Iago, whose baseless fictions are the intended 'pestilence' (2.3.341) poured into Othello's ear."[206]

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[205] Lowell Gallagher, "Bridge Essay: Origins and Transformations: Tactics of Storying and World-Making," in *A Companion to World Literature*, ed. Ken Seigneurie (John Wiley & Sons, 2019), 1.

[206] Ian Smith, "We are Othello: Speaking of Race in Early Modern Studies," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (2016): 111.

Indeed, Smith describes the play as a “fabricated ensemble” of storytelling: the “verbal assaults” on Othello, “a salacious mix of claims about monstrous blackness,” the recurring “metaphor of war,” and Othello’s recourse to “narrative explanation” all make up this world’s “building blocks of meaning.”[207] The Venetian world created out of this narrative matter is not assembled haphazardly, however, nor does its assemblage lack an ordering conceit. The order imposed on the Venetian world privileges the play’s white voices: out of the silence of the play’s opening night, Iago’s voice cries out:

> Call up her father.
>
> Rouse him, make after him, poison his delight,
>
> Proclaim him in the streets. (1.1.67-69)

White Venice admits no unregulated speech, but the cries of its racially privileged citizens are allowed to interrupt the peace, and to call into question the hidden workings of the city. White voices make public the private worlds of others, render visible what is known but not recognized. When Othello describes to the court how Desdemona “with a greedy ear / Devour[ed] up [his] discourse,” he challenges the world-making undertaken by Iago and Roderigo, which began with the opening scene’s racial hearsay, the shared secret about the elopement that further solidifies bonds of whiteness (1.3.149-50). The interracial world-making implied by Othello and Desdemona’s courtship is dangerous because it promises to secure the multiculturalism Venice was known for, to make real the promise of a world not beholden to the racial ordering of patriarchal whiteness. The appeals of Iago and Roderigo, first to the father, then to the Duke, reassert the rules of order within the white world of Venice. Although the play pretends to appreciate Othello and his presence within Venice, Iago’s appeal to patriarchal institutions

[207] Smith, “We are Othello,” 109-10.

clarifies the threat Othello poses to that world. Audiences who witness Iago's invective are led to believe his racist anger effects the play's outcomes, but the institutions of Venice bring those about more certainly and solidly than Iago could alone.

Structures of Venice, Strictures of Whiteness

The creation and perpetuation of Shakespeare's whitened Venice requires the participation of audiences whose belief in the multicultural myth of Venice persists even beyond the boundaries of the play. Like the suggestion that the movements of the Turkish fleet are intended to mislead the Venetian navy— "'tis a pageant / To keep us in false gaze"—the myth of Venice's multiculturalism obscures the workings of its white supremacist political structures (1.3.18-19). The invisibility of the racial prosthetic enables colorblind readings of the play: if Othello's fabricated race is not the centerpiece of the play's narrative energies—if instead racial alterity is an unfortunate fact of Othello's existence—its reality becomes unremarkable. In assessments of Shakespeare's depictions of the city, Venice resists general condemnation, and beliefs about the tolerant nature of the city are sustained despite all evidence to the contrary. Consider, for example, Roberta Mullini's assessment that the

> image of Venice which Shakespeare evokes in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* stresses the multi-cultural dimension of the town, its worldwide commercial interests, its political role against the Turks in the Mediterranean and its equitable administration of justice. Venice is the place where different ethnic groups live together (though with reciprocal prejudices and racial hatred), where legal commerce ennobles citizens' life and usury is censored, where law courts meet to judge private cases which have deep public and political implications. Jews are tolerated, Moors can reach the top of a military

> career, mixed marriages are celebrated, and European Christianity is upheld and defended. It would seem a utopian ideal, were it not cracked by obscure, individual flaws which spoil this idealistic vision."[208]

Although such characterizations begin to acknowledge the contradiction between the antisemitic, patriarchal racism being depicted in the play and the persistent image of Venice as a "multi-cultural" town where "different ethnic groups live together," that vision is nonetheless maintained. It does still "seem," in this critical evaluation, to be a perfect world, and the analysis remains unable to crystallize its account of Venetian racial prejudice and unwilling to abandon the "utopian ideal" white critics, audiences, and readers desire. In this telling, the "idealistic vision" of Venice has by the end of *Othello* been spoiled only because it has been "cracked by obscure, individual flaws": the racism at work in *Othello* is characterized as individual, not systemic, and although Venice does not achieve the utopian ideal it evokes, the myth endures. Rather than being an "obscure" and unexpected sequence of events, I suggest the play's collapse emerges out of the play's unwillingness to see Othello as fully human, its deference to the white supremacy voiced by Iago, and the tacit participation of the political structures of Venice.

The independent status secured by its military strength at least partially explains the resilience of this utopian image of Venice, as both were of interest to England at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The durability and portability of the Venetian myth turns on its particular mode of balancing internal and external force, which apparently distinguished the republic from "the rest of Italy," which "was laboring under internal repression or foreign control," while Venice

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[208] Roberta Mullini, "Streets, squares and courts: Venice as a stage in Shakespeare and Ben Jonson," in Marrapodi et al., *Shakespeare's Italy*, 163.

> maintained her comparative toleration and her independence as a city-state thanks to her strict, efficient and secretive administration and thanks, it was said, to her strange but enduring form of government, described by an Englishman as 'a compounded form of state, containing in it an Idea of the three principal governments of the ancient Athenians and Romans, namely the Monarchical, the Oligarchical, and the Democratical.'[209]

This description of Venetian state administration as "secretive" is at odds with the form of justice practiced by Iago in the play's opening act, as he takes his complaints from the streets of the city to a somewhat public hearing shortly thereafter. That justice in *Othello* is efficient accords with theatrical demands for quick action. Iago manages to secure an immediate hearing for Brabantio's complaint, and if the moment is compressed by the exigencies of the military crisis, that only highlights the state's ability to deal quickly with matters of state when the stakes require haste. When Brabantio arrives before the Duke, their exchange reflects the notion that Venice operates secretively and efficiently. Although apparently roused from bed, Brabantio has been missed by the Duke:

> I did not see you; welcome, gentle signor.
>
> We lack'd your counsel and your help to-night. (1.3.5-51)

It is apparently remarkable that Brabantio would have been absent from their overnight meeting to discuss military preparations. Brabantio's response, however, suggests that the racial crisis set in motion by Iago might also demand the midnight participation of the state:

> So did I yours. Good Your Grace, pardon me:
>
> Neither my place, nor aught I heard of business,
>
> Hath rais'd me from my bed, nor doth the general care

[209] Leo Salinger, "The Idea of Venice," in Marrapodi et al, *Shakespeare's Italy*, 173.

Take hold on me; for my particular grief

Is of so flood-gate and o'erbearing nature

That it engluts and swallows other sorrows,

And it is still itself. (1.3.52-58)

Brabantio emphasizes a tension between "particular grief" and "general care," and in doing so, obscures the extent to which the elopement of Othello and Desdemona has demanded a hearing before the Duke. Brabantio might claim to conceive of the crisis as a "particular grief," but Iago's incitement, Brabantio's complaint, and the hearing granted all suggest that the racial calamity is of interest to the "general care." The image Brabantio deploys, of sorrow like a "flood-gate" that "engluts and swallows other sorrows" mirrors the way questions of race ultimately overwhelm the military interests of Venice. Although Cassio might be a mere "arithmetician," his whiteness will in the end make him a more acceptable military leader for Venice (1.1.19).

The court scene also offers a glimpse into the workings of the Venetian government, where a discussion of military affairs overseen by the Duke transitions almost seamlessly into the adjudication of a domestic crisis heard by the Duke himself. Although a "compounded form" of the "Monarchical, the Oligarchical, and the Democratical" represents, from the perspective of seventeenth-century England, an extraordinarily radical form of government, such a combination offers insight into how racial whiteness might become embedded in the operations of any state formation. The hybridity of the Venetian polity both strengthens and obscures the workings of race within the management of the city. When Harry Levin discusses the role of Venice in *Othello*, he calls particular attention to the relationship between Othello's status as an outsider and the order generated through the Venetian form of government:

> From this commanding city-state-empire, so well organised under its duke and senators, Othello the Moor—like Shylock the Jew—is an outsider. Yet, far more acculturated than Shylock, through religious conversions and now through marriage, he has been entrusted by the Venetians with their naval leadership and has led them to victory against the infidel Turks.[210]

This reading of the play's political structure implies the extensive and well-managed organization of Venice maintains Othello's standing as an outsider, but that through marriage and religious conversion, he has managed to become both "acculturated" within the city and "entrusted" with the management of its navy. Indeed, Othello's political status within Venice reflects the play's interest in sustaining and overlooking the prosthetic nature of his racialization. Although acculturated, the play keeps Othello racially distinct, and works to make his difference essential. Levin's analysis highlights the crucial relationship between the "duke and senators" and Othello's liminal status, but confuses the role Othello's military leadership plays in the configuration of the Venetian state. Othello is useful to Venice because of his military prowess, and for that reason his marriage to a white daughter of Venice is tolerated. But more importantly, both for Venice and Shakespeare's London, Othello's presence enables the dissemination of a story about Venetian tolerance and multiculturalism. When the Duke tells Othello he must "slubber the gloss" of his "new fortunes" and make haste for Cyprus, he forestalls the consummation of their wedding (1.3.227). The Duke's invocation of theatrical prosthetics of race—slubbered gloss evoking the blackface devices used to darken an actor's white skin—gestures to the way Othello's presence within the Venetian state soils its shine but executes a crucial function by providing a prop upon which whiteness can define itself. The Venetian polity

[210] Harry Levin, "Shakespeare's Italians," in Marrapodi et al., *Shakespeare's Italy*, 27.

accepts Othello, but not because of his marriage to Desdemona. As Levin suggests, "Venice functions as a point of departure, in the receding perspective of Act I. [. . .] After civic order reasserts itself, with the reinforced presence of the Venetians, it is Othello who avenges his own crime by suicide, even while recalling his services to the state."[211] The point here is obvious, but not explicitly articulated in Levin's formulation: Othello's prosthetic inclusion within the political structure of Venice defines the very racial hierarchies he must later uphold with his death. In his final moment, when Othello separates his duty to Venice from his duty to himself, he exacts the punishment Venice requires of him. The notion that marriage was strictly regulated in Venice is not novel; John Draper has noted how "the law forbade noble Venetians to marry outside their oligarchic caste; for otherwise the commercial wealth and the political control of the state would soon be dissipated."[212] Shakespeare's Venice is no different, where the perpetuation of the Venetian state and its considerable financial interests depended upon the maintenance of its genealogical purity through the prohibition of racial miscegenation and marital intermixing.

Although Othello at first appears to evade legal punishment for his marriage to Desdemona, the court scene sets in motion the punishment Othello himself will eventually carry out. The scene is crucially visual, and the idea that Shakespeare's Venice might allow English audiences to view its proceedings is not coincidental:

> It is not difficult to believe that the procedure of the Venetian law administration that mainly appealed to foreigners was the Avogadori's (especially after the Reformation, since the Council's procedures too closely resembled those of the Inquisition). Foreigners admired the guarantees offered by a fair trial and the lively debates which took place in

[211] Harry Levin, "Shakespeare's Italians," in Marrapodi et al., *Shakespeare's Italy,* 27.

[212] Draper, "Shakespeare and the Doge," 79.

> courts where 'spectators' were admitted and where the skillful oratory of both sides was to be witnessed.[213]

The Venetian court focalizes the play's interest in white world-making and establishes a juridical and visual language for adjudicating the acceptability of racial difference within the state. The court promises a "fair trial," and even when it does not deliver, the appearance satisfies audiences and spectators. Even Othello has internalized the court's role in making visible the private lives of Venetian citizens, and the role whiteness plays in bearing witness to the judicial proceedings of the court, ending his own defense by calling on Desdemona to attest to what she has seen: "let her witness it" (1.3.170). Insofar as the court absolves its members and spectators of guilt, it plays an important role in imagining white worlds in *Othello*. When Roberta Mullini describes Venice as fundamentally righteous, the critical analysis perpetuates this aspect of whiteness:

> The government of the town, as it were, is represented as positive, righteous and far-sighted, whereas the behaviour of individuals shows hatred, jealousy, greed and vindictiveness. What Shakespeare compares is a public and private image, the contrast between State politics and individual misbehaviour.[214]

As we have already seen, however, Iago blurs the lines between public and private, opening up the hidden spaces of Venice and calling to mind the otherwise private lives of Othello and Desdemona. Othello's apparent legal victory in the play's third scene is, of course, no victory at all, as Iago and Roderigo depart the proceedings more determined than ever to exact revenge upon Othello, and confident that there "are many events in the womb of time which will be

[213] Mullini, "Streets, squares and courts," in Marrapodi et al., *Shakespeare's Italy*, 162.

[214] Mullini, "Streets, squares and courts," in Marrapodi et al., *Shakespeare's Italy*, 163.

deliver'd" (1.3.369-70). Anticipating the ways in which the play's "womb of time" will render biological the prosthetic attachments of race that create Othello's character, Iago's suggestion that Othello's downfall will occur independent his own actions—that those "events" already exist, waiting to "be deliver'd"—also absolves him of culpability, as if the enforcement of racial laws will occur without his own intervention. Although Iago has of course intervened, his promise to Roderigo proves correct, as Othello carries out the sentence handed down by Iago at the end of this early scene.

Among the visitors "impressed by the exceptional variety of nationalities to be seen in Venice" was Montaigne, who traveled to Italy in 1580 and 1581.[215] Contrasting Venice with Rome, Montaigne writes that the "freedom given under the government of Venice, and the conveniences of traffic, attract thither vast numbers of foreigners, but they are nevertheless like men in a stranger city," unlike Rome, where foreigners carry "emolument and responsibility, for Rome is the home of all those connected with the Church."[216] The provocative suggestion that Venice tolerated foreigners without admitting "emolument and responsibility" to "those connected with the Church" offers a "utopian vision" of cosmopolitanism specifically unlike that of Rome. A whitened image of Venice functions as a successful model for a racialized London insofar as one can delineate both external and internal racial characteristics, whereas the figure of Rome represents the danger of hidden, internal sympathies. The concept was not novel to "early modern political theorists," who cited Venice "as a state to be commended for its successful handling of its imperial aims through the hiring of foreign nationals to provide its military force

[215] Salinger, "The Idea of Venice," in Marrapodi et al., *Shakespeare's Italy*, 173.

[216] Michel de Montaigne, *The journal of Montaigne's travels in Italy by way of Switzerland and Germany in 1580 and 1581*, vol. 3, trans. W. G. Waters (London: J. Murray, 1903), 164.

and to police the city."[217] The image of Venice supplied here by Montaigne—of "men in a stranger city"—highlights the way Shakespeare creates an estranging city around Othello, who enjoys the freedom and conveniences of Venice, and who, as a commanding officer, assists in the maintenance of its independent status. Not so much an innate difference of Othello's as the creation of a white city around him, one seemingly tolerant and structurally discriminatory, creates his alterity. Indeed, the "strict, efficient and secretive administration" of the city, its blend of governments at once familiar and not, contrives to ensure Othello has no choice but to be a man isolated in a stranger city.

Contrary to suggestions that *Othello* imagines Turkish incursions into Cyprus as a contemporary geopolitical crisis, I argue that the scenes set in Cyprus extend the play's investment in the creation and maintenance of white spaces. Colm MacCrossan's assessment that "Othello's downfall is not his alone; with it comes the near-certainty of the loss of Cyprus to the Turks due to his absence as governor" fails to grapple with the play's depiction of racial politics—and specifically white supremacy—within both its imagined Venice and the London in which it was performed.[218] Indeed, that the "newly Jacobean London theatregoers" might be "induced into futile empathy with the people of a Cyprus that had by that time already become subject to major political change" speaks to the stabilizing potential of racial whiteness, and the play's use of sensory experience, both metaphorical and literal, highlights its attempts to create a cityscape that audiences might imagine as coextensive with their own.[219] The "dreadful bell" of

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[217] Hendricks, "'The Moor of Venice,'" 199-200.

[218] Colm MacCrossan, "'What, in a Town of War . . . to Manage Private and Domestic Quarrel?': Othello and the Tragedy of Cyprus," *Shakespeare* 16, no. 3 (2020): 241.

[219] MacCrossan, "'What, in a Town of War,'" 240.

Cyprus and its incursion within the "urban soundscape" signals not only the arrival of a Turkish invasion, but also the persistent threat of Othello's nonwhite presence, which in a city that condones and tolerates white supremacy will always provoke and condone the racial incitements of someone like Iago.[220] As Ian Smith has argued, "Shakespeare's suspension of the Turkish aggression forces us to recognize that conflict continues as a major issue but in the form of an internal 'race war' initiated by the play's resident racist, Iago."[221] Cyprus is historically and geographically significant for the play because it dramatizes an external conflict it almost immediately quells; in this sense, the play invokes the threat of a Turkish invasion merely as a pretext to further develop the race war brewing since its opening scene. If the island of Cyprus is at greater risk following Othello's death, the play does not linger long on the possibility. Lodovico does not hesitate to announce that "Cassio rules in Cyprus," and if his rule is less militaristically sound, so too is it less racially diverse (5.2.332). The more pressing concern—that "the fortunes of the Moor" succeed on Gratiano—is explicitly resolved, come what will to the island of Cyprus (5.2.366).

When Othello marshals the legal apparatus of Venice to kill himself in the final scene of the play, the racially pathologizing policework of the play finally comes to a head. Othello's inclusion within Venice has always been almost fully realized, a contingent citizenship that violently fractures his unsustainably hybrid identity. That critics might read Othello's death as a reflection of the city's benevolence underscores the extent to which the play has managed to create whiteness as fundamentally good, in opposition with Othello's blackness:

Other details of Venetian life do not appear in the tragedy, but here, too, the town has a

[220] MacCrossan, "'What, in a Town of War,'" 241-42.

[221] Ian Smith, "We are Othello," 109.

> well-defined role as a benevolent character in charge of its citizens' well-being. Therefore, it is no wonder that Othello, in order to divert his controllers' attention in the last scene and kill himself, 'performs' a short play where he acts as a defender of Venetian honour by killing a Turkish slanderer.[222]

Although Margo Hendricks argues that Othello draws "upon the myth of Venice to re-create not just a racial image but also a political one where Venetian law is exact, swift and inviolate—whether one is a Turk or, in the case of Othello, a Venetian," my own suggestion is that Othello's final speech, however brief, dilates itself into an engagement with white temporality.[223] Othello finally brings to a conclusion the "events in the womb of time" Iago invokes earlier not only by replicating the theatrical space of the play's court scene, but also expanding the temporal space of the play, creating a moment that looks forward and backward in equal measure:

> No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,
> When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
> Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
> Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak
> Of one that lov'd not wisely but too well;
> Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,
> Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,
> (Like the base Indian) threw a pearl away
> Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdu'd eyes,
> Albeit unused to the melting mood,

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[222] Mullini, "Streets, squares and courts," in Marrapodi et al., *Shakespeare's Italy*, 165.

[223] Hendricks, "'The Moor of Venice,'" 204.

Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees

Their medicinable gum. Set you down this;

And say besides that in Aleppo once,

Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk

Beat a Venetian and traduc'd the state,

I took by th' throat the circumcisèd dog,

And smote him—thus. (5.2.340-56)

Othello first establishes a future moment, in which the story that has unfolded is written down in letters for posterity. Othello's attempt to fix the prosthetic text belies his tragic inability, in this final moment, to remove the racial prosthetics which have become fused to a body now conceived of as biological. The "when you shall" returns to the immediacy of the present, to Othello's request to "Speak of me as I am." As the simile creates a division within Othello, a division that culminates in the fatal separation of a "turbaned Turk" and a "Venetian," he shifts into the past tense, and his own storytelling becomes distanced from the future narratives supplied to his survivors: "one whose hand, / Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away." As Othello recounts this story in the past tense, he final arrives back in the present, and he commits the deed feared by Cassio, though he "thought he had no weapon," an attempt at absolution the play silently grants (5.2.360). These temporal movements—Othello's final speech a crystallization of a Venetian future, past, and present—respond to the "now, now, very now" with which Iago inaugurated the white spaces of Venice. But Othello does not in this moment unravel the immediacy of Iago's "now"; rather, he solidifies his permanent inclusion within the Venetian state, even if those assembled reject his request to speak of him as he is. Othello insists upon his transcription in a Venetian future as a figure perpetually lodged in the atavistic past.

The play writes a story about racial difference within Venice that manages to simultaneously fix its status as a tolerant, multicultural state and to provoke its government into policing the bounds of whiteness, with Othello serving as a constant reminder of the dangers of racial alterity, a threat that represents the past but can come crashing into the world of the present—"thus."

The play locates the stakes of maintaining its racial boundaries within the materiality of Venetian wealth. Shakespeare's Venice is not so much an "imperfect Utopia" as a world of carefully enforced racial hierarchies, where whiteness exerts its will and protects the capital of its wealthiest citizens without upsetting the social order upon which that commercial traffic rests.[224] Indeed, the perception of Venice, in addition to containing its unusual multiculturalism and tolerance, is an idea of a state that through those operations has generated considerable wealth. Venice generates its racial hierarchies in the interest of protecting white capital: "The myth offers us, that is, a vision of the city transfigured, an ideal counter-pastoral, with Venice as a miracle of civilisation rising from the waters, serene, stable and rich."[225] When Iago tells Roderigo their plans will come about eventually, he does give Roderigo one explicit task, which he repeats several times before parting: "Make all the money thou canst" (1.3.354). The racism of Venice does not merely serve to advance Iago's career or deliver Desdemona to Roderigo; on both counts, their machinations fail. Where they succeed, however, is in furthering the image of Venice as a wealthy nation, "serene, stable and rich," its stability brought about in the service of generating wealth for white citizens like Roderigo. In this world, Othello's handkerchief poses a threat, although not only because of, as Ian Smith has so persuasively argued, its "mimicry of a

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[224] Mullini, "Streets, squares and courts," in Marrapodi et al., *Shakespeare's Italy*, 167.

[225] J. R. Mulryne, "History and Myth in *The Merchant of Venice*," in Marrapodi et al., *Shakespeare's Italy*, 89.

black body and the fashioning of an idea of race contingent on the *thingness* of black textile," a thingness that enables its position as a "corporal supplement signifying black skin," in which "black cloth functioned as an epidermal prosthesis in the theater of racial cross-dressing."[226] I do not depart from Smith's incisive reading of this crucial theatrical prop, but want to emphasize the handkerchief's essential function within the white world as "an expensive luxury item," a symbol of white wealth under threat from the global forces Othello represents.[227]

In this sense, whiteness in *Othello* relies upon Othello to generate its materiality, and that whiteness can be made visible in the process. Although audiences watch the proceedings of the court and bear witness to the ways in which Iago and Roderigo indict Othello's blackness, evade culpability, and set in motion the play's racial incitements, the racial mechanisms of whiteness largely evade notice. The trick Iago recognizes and deploys is that the materiality of whiteness can be manifested to depict racial alterity and then shunted toward the accumulation of white wealth. The property of whiteness, in this sense, protects the accrual of property to whiteness. And to ensure its continued invisibility, the whiteness imagined by Iago and Roderigo insists upon Othello's materiality, repeatedly and pervasively. A central mode through which Othello is reduced into an object is through the pathology of race, the creation of a disease of blackness incurable and unsustainable in the clean, white city of Venice. This is the final operation of racial prosthesis: the complete and absolute attachment of the prosthetic to the naturalized and biological body of Othello.

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[226] Smith, "Othello's Black Handkerchief," 3-4.

[227] Smith, "Othello's Black Handkerchief," 4.

Pathologies and Ideologies of Race

Over several centuries of performance and critical assessment, *Othello* has proven to be remarkably successful at declaiming Othello's lack of racial belonging within the world of Venice while enabling erasure of the play's white supremacist imaginings. *Othello*'s textual afterlives have seen Othello's racial prosthetics dissolve into the body, becoming in the end a tragic and unremarkable biological fact. Invoking a presentation Margo Hendricks delivered at the 2011 annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America, Ian Smith calls attention to the "erosion of the materiality of race," a refusal to recognize the embodiments of race that marks "white privilege in the practice of literary criticism, where whiteness is a position from which one speaks and writes, an ideological location grounded in membership within majority culture."[228] Hendricks draws on Desdemona's "famous admission, 'I saw Othello's visage in his mind' (1.3.250)," calling "attention to Desdemona's looking away from the fact of Othello's blackness to focus on her own mental construct or imagining of Othello's reality."[229] That Desdemona creates her own "mental construct" for Othello is neither a peculiarity of her nature nor a coincidental collision of her own whiteness and Othello's blackness. Desdemona's inability or refusal to see "the fact of Othello's blackness" reflects her inculcation within the white world Shakespeare constructs in Othello's Venice, where stories about race and origins circulate in a way that privileges certain voices over others, a world in which Iago's racial incitements characterize the play's engagements with race, and where the political authorities of Venice are unwilling to commit to creating the multiracial republic the historical Venice was believed to possess. In this sense, the play delivers on the promise of racial prosthesis this dissertation has

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[228] Smith, "We are Othello," 121.

[229] Smith, "We are Othello," 121.

been pursuing, at length, over the course of Shakespeare's theatrical career: the creation of inviolable racial difference predicated upon the disappearance of the racial prosthetic into the body.

If *Othello* does establish a materiality for Othello's race, it does so with the use of cosmetic blackface deliberately lost on the printed page. But the technologies of racial representation and print culture do not point in opposite directions, and the play conspires to erase the facts of Othello's race by erasing the constructed nature of his theatrical body. The possibility of imagining the world of the play without the complications of race are embedded within Shakespeare's creation of Venice, a city built upon hierarchies of race that ensure Othello's ruin. The "ideological location" of whiteness sustained over several hundred years of Shakespearean scholarship is established there, in the court that absolves itself of culpability in Othello's death while enabling its occurrence, and that blesses his marriage to Desdemona while countenancing its forced dissolution. The play's dramatic elegance conspires to establish its racist isolation of Othello, the full scope of which Ian Smith has located in Othello's final appeal to "Speak of me as I am" (5.2.342). The impossibility of honoring the request emerges out of the play's construction of a white world that refuses Othello the "racially sensitive and responsible representation he deserves."[230] The prosthetic relationship I have been describing in the play, Venice's construction of a flattened character whose presence merely serves as a pretext for propping up a system constructed in the service of white supremacy, ensures that Othello never receives "responsible representation." The troubling irony of the play's successful creation of a white world is that such a world has a capacity to move through history, to bring into focus the way the Shakespearean white property has been mutually reinforced by what Smith calls the

[230] Smith, "We are Othello," 112.

"literary critics' white racial investments—white racial investments that might impede the ability to become the kind of reliable cultural narrators and race thinkers Othello envisions."[231] As I have already suggested, Othello's final request is delivered to a political body that refuses to reliably narrate what has occurred, from Cassio's immediate avoidance of responsibility to the dispersal of Othello's assets to Gratiano. The Venetian white world's racial investments constitute dividing the materiality of Othello's racial prosthetics into the material wealth of Venice—the reductive act that crystallizes the racially motivated operations of the play's political world.

The play excludes Othello from the white world of Venice without resorting to explicitly racist enforcement of his exclusion, preferring instead to locate the racism of the city in a handful of characters, like Iago and Roderigo, whose actions absolve the city of its role in punishing Othello. The perverse operation of ensuring the purity of Venice while denying responsibility simultaneously pathologizes Othello's difference as a disease and refuses Othello the kind of care such a diagnosis might demand. As Justin Shaw argues: "Though his Africanness should not be anomalous in early modern Europe, such tension demonstrates how his social environment, and the structure of the play itself, is designed to alienate Othello from any sense of community."[232] A failure to identify Othello's isolation as a result of the play's racial world-making is a defining characteristic of that very world. Robert Hornback argues, for example, that Othello fits within "the tradition of the so-called 'natural' fool (in Renaissance parlance), an 'innocent' comic butt, who is laughed *at* because he is physically and/or mentally different and

[231] Smith, "We are Othello," 113.

[232] Justin Shaw, "'Rub Him About the Temples': *Othello*, Disability, and the Failures of Care," *Early Theatre* 22, no. 2 (2019): 179.

socially deviant, a comic transgressor of norms to be scapegoated and abused."[233] That Othello is "scapegoated and abused" is clear, but Hornback's analysis, which obscures the centrality of the play's racial exclusions of Othello, highlights the play's ability to exclude Othello from the white world of Venice without explicitly calling attention to the racism that undergirds the project. Othello's blackness is made all the more different by the way Venice is built around him. The play's construction of Venice, in this sense, constitutes the construction of a "built environment" engineered with Othello's demise in mind.[234]

The fact of Othello and Desdemona's marriage begins the story of the play, and undoing that act of racial miscegenation becomes its central pursuit. The play pursues the goal along two interrelated tracks, both by destroying their relationship and undoing Othello's blackness. In this sense, the play functions as a narrative built around Othello's disability, in the sense described by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder:

> Since what we now call disability has been historically narrated as that which characterizes a body as deviant from shared norms of bodily appearance and ability, disability has functioned throughout history as one of the most marked and remarked upon differences that originates the act of storytelling. Narratives turn signs of cultural deviance into textually marked bodies.[235]

That Othello's blackness is conceived of narratively as a disability to be overcome is highlighted by the way the play overlooks other instances of bodily deviance, namely the maiming of Cassio,

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[233] Robert Hornback, "Emblems of Folly in the First *Othello*: Renaissance Blackface, Moor's Coat, and 'Muckender,'" *Comparative Drama* 35, no. 1 (2001): 70.

[234] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, xiv.

[235] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 54.

whose "leg is cut in two" by Iago, but who nonetheless stands to inherit Othello's rank and position at play's end (5.1.72). Shaw argues "that attempts to procure, police, and anatomize Othello—who is described as both a 'wheeling stranger' and an 'erring barbarian'—must be understood in concert with social realities of surveillance as a technology of power active in the coalescence in the early modern world of both race and disability as categories of difference."[236] That Cassio survives his deviancy reveals how the play's dominant logic, its pursuit and punishment of racial difference, "engluts and swallows" other instantiations of difference, including Cassio's maimed body.

Cassio's injury highlights the drunkenness Iago has sought to exploit; although both Cassio and Othello display characteristics of deviancy, Cassio's whiteness ultimately redeems him. Despite David Houston Wood's suggestion that "Iago's manipulation of Cassio's precipitancy to drunkenness and Othello's to jealous rage hinges upon humorological emotional reactions that he effects within them as what we might consider an environmental contaminant," the play does not treat equitably the environmental contamination of Cassio and Othello.[237] Iago's manipulation of Othello results in his death, and of Cassio in his promotion. Although Othello comes to view his deviancy as an internal fault, the radical ostracization effected by the play's world does not mean "the palpable drama of difference staged in *Othello* perhaps paradoxically comes to center on an aberration best conceived as *inward* rather than *outward*."[238] Rather, racial whiteness in *Othello* is revealed to possess the capacity to be both inward and outward. That the difference between Cassio and Othello might be characterized as only inward

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[236] Shaw, "'Rub Him About the Temples,'" 173.

[237] David Houston Wood, "'Fluster'd with flowing cups': Alcoholism, Humoralism, and the Prosthetic Narrative in *Othello*," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2009).

[238] Wood, "'Fluster'd with flowing cups.'"

underscores the extent to which the play succeeds in erasing its racially exclusionary operations: although both are viewed as deviant in a bodily sense, Cassio is white, and Othello is not. Cassio's whiteness is both internal and external, the visible outward sign of an inner, determining essence, a quality Othello can never possess.

The white world of Venice thus conspires to obscure the operations of its white supremacy, calling attention to the embodied difference of its political and military successors while rewarding their whiteness, and denying Othello the sympathetic auditors he requests. Rehabilitating Othello's request, granting an audience to the storytelling of his own origins, cannot be achieved so long as those stories are told within the confines of Shakespeare's theatrical Venice, a world where mutable whiteness mutes the voices of the nonwhite subjects who provide a racial framework for its financial and military might. Upon the racial materiality of Othello, the white city of Venice, as well as London, has been constructed. So too has the play sanctioned Shakespeare's centrality within a white culture construed—because of and despite the now purportedly biological fact of Othello's blackness—as multicultural. The prosthetics of race, in this final iteration, build whiteness upon blackness, generating out of the fecundity of blackface the endless plasticity of racial whiteness. Hearing Othello's voice requires dismantling the play's edifices of whiteness, of bearing witness to the way cities and worlds of whiteness have been built and rebuilt over many centuries of Shakespearean scholarship, the myths of a whitened Venice rearticulated within successive white worlds, past and present, nearer and farther away.

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