

**2017 SAA Seminar: Race and the Materiality of Early Modern Performance**  
**Leader: Miles P. Grier, Queens College, CUNY**

**Urvashi Chakravarty**

**Manumission and the *Macula Servitutis* in Early Modern Drama**

This paper argues that the Roman *macula servitutis* or ‘stain of slavery’ that attends the freed slave or *libertus* comprises an intellectual and conceptual antecedent for material iterations of early modern race formation. In the insidious tenacity of the *macula servitutis*, which persists despite and beyond manumission, we may also foresee the ineradicability of early modern racial markers. This paper explores early modern editions and translations of Terence’s *Andria* alongside *The Tempest* to argue that the *macula servitutis* gives the lie to fictions of freedom, constantly reminding the *libertus* of his past slavery and threatening him with future servitude. Yet, in the figure of Caliban, that *macula* also allows for the operation of *mancipatio*, a Roman enslavement ceremony. Thus, I suggest that the *macula servitutis* denotes an alternate literary and conceptual genealogy for the incipient early modern imbrication of slavery and race.

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**“Our freight is Grecians, Turks, and Afric Moors”: Racial Trauma, War, and Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta***

This paper submits that the socio-psychological and the clinical psychiatric effects of racial trauma on Moors and Turks not only emerge on the early modern stage, but also manifest themselves in both legal and cultural consequences for the these figures, and reap identifiable behaviors characterized by the larger society. By focusing on the psychological perspective, including the role of memory and hidden wounds like moral injury, I investigate how racial injury affects the perception of the Blackamoor and the Turk as the stereotypically aggressive and cruelly violent—and even monstrous—warrior. For instance, the “warrior gene” has been defined as a gene, which possesses “a heightened incidence of psychopathology and aggression” (Sutton and Douglas 570). While racial trauma has been acknowledged, this narrative has not been read with the Moor, as military figure across several dramas and playwrights.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, in *The Jew of Malta*, Ithamore, a captured Turk and slave, serves as a figure through which I examine the legal repercussions of the violence that surrounds him. The bloody trail of bodies left by Ithamore and Barabas, a wealthy Jewish man from Malta, finds interesting parallels with Shakespeare’s Aaron the Moor in *Titus Andronicus*—where Aaron facilitates rape, murder and maiming, Ithamore’s culpability possesses much more proximity to the victims. I assess Ithamore’s potential sociopathy, and analyze how the narrative of the play “prosecutes” or makes judgments against the behavior of Ithamore. Finally, I determine whether his mental state and master-servant relationship with Barabas mediate his legal culpability. Beyond the physical transition from captive to

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<sup>1</sup> Some scholars have discussed racial trauma in different contexts, including African literature by Norridge (87) and psychology by Lane (7).

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combatant, I craft psychological profiles that encompass the emotional, social, cultural, and legal transitions that these transformations demand. Ultimately, I develop a theory of racialized trauma that evolves among these warriors as they navigate within these early modern dramas, and provides a method for this society to read and receive these warring Moors in this comparative analysis of the Turkish figure of Ithamore.

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**Shifting the Paradigm of Race in Britain:  
The Possibility and Politics of a Racialized *Macbeth*.**

While scholars of Shakespeare have widely regarded both *Othello* and *Titus Andronicus* as important plays concerning the cultural production of race in Renaissance England, the possibility of *Macbeth* functioning as a race play in the period has gone largely unexplored.

Scot L. Newstok's and Ayanna Thompson's brilliant collection *Weyward Macbeth: Intersections of Race and Performance* analyzes the ways in which *Macbeth* has been appropriated and performed to make a statement about race in America. The collection draws attention to the fact that *Macbeth* is called "black" more times than either *Othello* or *Aaron*. Although the play includes numerous characters called black, the scope of their project focuses on America and, like most scholars, does not argue for the ways in which the play worked to address and reconstruct unsteady notions of race in the Early Modern period.

With the ascension of King James, a Scot, to the throne of England, conceptions of race in the British Isles underwent a significant re-evaluation. Mary Floyd-Wilson argues in *English Ethnicity and Race in the Renaissance*, the English constructed the Scots as lesser beings through racializing their "swarthinness." Upon James's ascension, however, the Scots used this narrative to align themselves as descendants of Egyptians, who were the oldest known civilization at the time, thus throwing into upheaval emerging, color-based stratifications of racial identities.

This paper argues for the ways in which staging both the titular character of *Macbeth* as a black character in Early Modern England worked in two ways: first, to reconstruct and confirm a color-based stratification of racial identities; and second, to reposition the Scottish King James and his Scottish subjects as ethnic and racial equals to the English. This paper will engage with both the original staging practices of blackness and the politics of race on the stage to argue for the ways in which staging a racialized *Macbeth* works to reconstruct narratives of English, Scottish, and black ethnicity and race.

**Sydnee Wagner**

***Othello's Gypsy Handkerchief***

Ian Smith's groundbreaking article "Othello's Black Handkerchief" argues that though early modern cultural materialists have established that objects constitute subjects in the period, the "black" handkerchief in *Othello* "covers and masks the body beneath; its primary function is

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to materialize the imagined and absent real black subject and to give it meaning” (4). While this line of scholarship accounts for how characters who are present on the stage, like Othello, are racialized through materials like clothing, I will attend to how the handkerchief acts as a stand in for the absent women of color evoked throughout the play, especially the Egyptian charmer. My purpose is not to assert that the handkerchief’s association with Gypsies is its determined true meaning, but to offer the often-neglected Gypsy associations as an inherent trait of the handkerchief that mobilizes how characters interact with the prop in the play.

While some scholars argue that the “Egyptian charmer” in the origin story of the handkerchief follows Shakespeare’s numerous negative allusions to Gypsies in being nothing more than a signifier for bad omens, I argue that the presence of the Gypsy woman in Othello’s origin story allows the handkerchief to act as what Robin Bernstein would call a “scriptive thing” or “an item of material culture that prompts meaningful bodily behaviors,” in that Gypsies in early modern England were already thought to have both a sexualized relationship to clothing, a ‘devious’ and untrustworthy nature, and a seemingly unnatural relationship to magic. In this context, the handkerchief and the Gypsy charmer behind its construction prove that even things, or people, who are seemingly not there have the power to prompt bodies into action and to be meaningful catalysts in the events that transpire in *Othello*.

**Carmen M. Meza, Ohio State University**

**Borderlanders and Racial Outing in *The Island Princess***

Since Kim Hall’s publication of *Things of Darkness* there has been a strong push towards critical readings of texts that are not solely historicist but also where women of color feminists take on a central role in how we think about race relations in the early modern period. Gloria Anzaldúa’s well known *Borderlands: La Frontera/The New Mestiza* continues to be a historically significant text for Chicana/Latina studies, contemporary Mexican-American women writers, and cultural and race studies. In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa argues that her homeland and culture travel with her wherever she goes: “I was the first in six generations to leave the Valley, the only one in my family to ever leave home. But I didn’t leave all the parts of me. On it I walked away, taking with me the land, the Valley, Texas” (38). Similarly, in Fletcher’s *Island Princess*, the Portuguese characters take more to the Spice Islands than just themselves. My essay examines how the central Portuguese characters in the play (Ruy Dias and Armusia) are called out about their racial difference by the islanders in Tidore and Ternate. In this play, among others in the canon, there are certain reactions to seeing people of different nationalities and races, and my analysis focuses on how racial outing is verbalized. Along with examining Ruy Dias and Armusia, I interrogate the ways in which Quisara’s race and religion is confirmed in the play as similar and yet different than the Portuguese.

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**“To bear another [hew]”: Performing Race and Deforestation in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus***

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Scholars of early modern drama and the environmental humanities have overlooked how the stage's physical materials for representing race—and cosmetic ingredients, most notably—position racial difference as a physical construction of degraded European and colonial environments. In *Titus Andronicus* (1591), Aaron's black "hue" is closely tied to and understood through the play's several bodily "hews," which are figuratively associated with the cutting of timber. In this paper, I will explore this central pun in the context of England's (and Europe's) timber crisis at the turn of the seventeenth century. Because many of the cosmetic ingredients thought to have been used to represent Moors on the English stage were of foreign provenance—cork likely came from Portugal and galls from Northern Africa and Turkey—the play's collapse of Aaron's hue into his orchestrated violent hewings implicates theatrical blackness in a more global system of signification. The play promotes English economic expansion at the same time that it underscores environmental devastation as a consequence of racial mimesis and performance. I argue that Aaron develops from a marauding rapist of feminine environments into a proto-environmentalist father, who expresses concern for his son's ability to live off of the land. Aaron's environmental shift, furthermore, hinges on his understanding of theatrical blackness as something permanent, that will not bear "another hue"; if his son is to outlive him in the play, or to find life in another performance, he will require more imported wooden ingredients. The wooden ingredients required to "hue" Aaron black emphasize a link between unsustainable wood harvesting in Europe and its role in the production of unstable racial categories. I suggest that part of the anxiety Aaron arouses in his audience is environmental, since his hue, which might sustain a single performance, depends upon a different kind of non-renewable hew.