

ABSTRACTS

Seminar 48: Shakespeare's "Other Race Plays," Part I

Seminar Leader: David Sterling Brown, Binghamton University, SUNY

Andrew Bozio, Skidmore College Whiteness as Property in *As You Like It*

Early in *As You Like It* (1599), when Celia proposes that she join Rosalind in exile and that, together, they "seek my uncle in the Forest of Arden," Rosalind's concern for their vulnerability prompts Celia to propose that they darken their faces in disguise. Although Rosalind rebuffs Celia, this moment—together with evidence that Celia adopts the disguise—invites us to consider the implications of such "umber" for *As You Like It*'s role in the construction of racial difference. In this essay, I argue that *As You Like It* manages a tension between two conceptions of whiteness within early modernity—the first, whiteness as an idealized aesthetic, and the second, what Cheryl I. Harris calls "whiteness as property." The play thereby challenges the idea that whiteness was "invented" in the aftermath of Bacon's Rebellion (1676-1677), as the historian Theodore W. Allen has claimed, to suggest, instead, the role of early modern drama in developing a racist apparatus with which the English would justify the dispossession and enslavement of Africans and Native Americans.

Mario DiGangi, Lehman College and the Graduate Center, CUNY Branded with Baseness: Bastardy and Race in *King Lear*

In this essay, I explore bastardy in *King Lear* as a racial formation. Edmund takes his life from the "dark and vicious place" that signifies both *illegitimate female sexuality* (see Joyce Green MacDonald on bastardy as a "blemish" worse "than a slavish wipe, or birth hour's blot") and *female sexuality as illegitimate* (what Lynda Boose calls "the dark place of the mother"). Despite being regarded as inherently "base," Edmund boasts that his generation through parental lust gives him more manly vigor than the "tribe of fops" who are coldly conceived in a "stale" marital bed. Relegated by his biological "nature" to a socially disadvantaged class of persons, Edmund, like Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, weaponizes his socially precarious identity through what Carol Mejia LaPerle describes as "racialized will." Just as Aaron will have his soul "black like [his] face," so Edmund will use the "fierce quality" of his base bastard nature to deceive and supplant his brother Edgar. Moreover, Edmund's relegation of Edgar to a "tribe of fops" both negatively racializes and genders Edgar's "legitimate" birth, as "tribe" signifies both Jewish and Indian otherness (cf. *Othello*'s "base Judean/Indian"). Although "fop" in the early seventeenth-century generally meant "fool"—as in the "excellent foppery" of astrology that Edmund also mocks—the "effeminate" (mannered, vain) behavior characteristic of the Restoration fop is already recognizable in the affected courtiers of Shakespeare and Jonson. What might Edmund's co-articulation of lineage (the naturalized hierarchy of legitimate vs. illegitimate sons), sexuality (the degree of lust expended in legitimate vs. illegitimate reproductive sex) and gender (the foppish vs. fierce disposition of legitimate vs. illegitimate sons) contribute to our understanding of racial ideologies in the early modern period?

**Margaret Jane Kidnie, University of Western Ontario
Stratford's Look and Looking at Stratford**

Diverse and inclusive casting practices have become increasingly visible over the past decade and a half at the Stratford Festival (Canada). Their 2018 productions of *Julius Caesar* and *The Comedy of Errors* cast women in fifty percent of the parts, including lead roles, and gender cross-casting has been visible in many other productions, such as the 2016 *As You Like It* and *Breath of Kings* (a two-part staging of the second tetralogy). Divergent and inclusive casting at Stratford has also created space for actors of colour, both in supporting and lead roles (on racialized casting models embraced by the terms “colourblind” and “nontraditional”, see Thompson 2011: 76-81). This is a departure from habits of casting that were commonplace at Stratford into the new millennium that saw actors of colour portrayed in limiting and stereotyped social roles or exoticized racialized identities (Taylor 1998; Kidnie 2004).

My contribution to our seminar reconsiders racial and ethnic diversity at Stratford in the context of Canadian theatre politics with particular attention to Shakespeare’s “other race plays” (and the occasional twentieth-century musical). I am especially interested in semiotic processing and spectator response. Spectators register and interpret a wealth of production choices at any performance, and such information, one assumes, typically includes actors’ race and ethnicity. How then do spectators make sense of the relationship between racialized body and enacted character? What narratives energize a spectator’s interpretation of stage action, and how does a spectator know when to “see” – and when to ignore – race? This short essay takes as one of its starting-points an awareness of the continued impact of racialized politics in so-called colourblind productions. Scholars have persuasively argued that claims “not to see race” – within and beyond theatres – promote assimilationist narratives that implicitly understand the supposedly neutral body as white, while colourblind casting strategies also often reinforce glass ceilings that continue to forestall access to desirable roles by actors of colour (see, for example, Anderson 2006: 90-92, Thompson 2006: 6-8, Thompson 2008: 7). My conclusion will build on recent calls for more open public discussion with theatre audiences concerning casting choices. I will suggest that direct audience engagement, a methodology that has gained fairly strong footing in performance studies but is still emergent in Shakespeare studies, might offer an important way forward for future research.

Joyce Green MacDonald, University of Kentucky

“The first beginnings of nations”: Race, Nation, and Inheritance in *Cymbeline*

Although much study of race in Renaissance drama starts with questions of how nonwhite characters are represented, in this paper I want to examine how we can understand how *Cymbeline*’s (presumably white) Romans and Britons are racialized through their connection to their national histories and their lines of descent, particularly in the maternal line. A history play that is simultaneously Roman and British, and aware of how Roman and British fictions of origin were supposed to overlap (with the first Britons being the descendants of the last Trojans, who had continued voyaging westward in the generations after Aeneas first founded Rome), *Cymbeline* struggles to imagine how this honored tradition can survive in a present where the British king’s family is in the grips of a crisis of inheritance. Even if *Cymbeline*’s line dies out, we can’t be sure that Rome will reabsorb Britain, either, as I believe that the play’s skewed invocations of Roman myths of the importance of patriarchal order to preserving civic order

indicate. The sexual and familial crises enveloping the play—Posthumus’ belief that Innogen has been unfaithful to him, the mysterious disappearance of Cymbeline’s sons and heirs—embody a crisis of the very principle of historical descent and resemblance. To the degree that familial and civic order will be restored, this late romance, with its characteristic interest in how daughters’ chaste loves can reunite families and reform masculine authority within them, is convinced of women’s role as instruments of racial identity and continuance.

Alicia Meyer, University of Pennsylvania
Masquing for Trouble: Race and Transgressive Female Desire in
The Merchant of Venice and Romeo and Juliet

In this essay, I consider the court masque to be a racialized form of performance and ask, what effect does this racialized form have on the plays in which a masque is staged? How does the masque embed within the play the material reality of masquing techniques? And, to what extent do the racial imaginaries that the masquing form evolved out of influence, animate, or challenge critical understanding of the text? I examine how the form of the masque staged in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Romeo and Juliet* embeds a racial imaginary into the text of each play. I argue that in both texts (one a familiar “race play” the other less so), the masque operates as a mechanism for female transgressive desire insofar as both Jessica and Juliet use the masque to resist patrilineal expectation by initiating sexual encounters with Lorenzo and Romeo, respectively. Yet, while each of these transgressive heroines use the masque as a means of rebellion, their rebellions exhibit what Melissa Sanchez has termed “impure resistance” or an “ambivalent, even perverse, participation” in their own demise through heterosexual romance. The masque thus allows for a particular form of heterosexual desire that imagines masculinized penetration of the feminine body as a means of domination. Consequently, I argue that in the case of Jessica and Juliet, the masque leaks its representation of race upon sexual discourse dedicated to the physical domination of the female body – a domination that, while possibly violent, is sought after by the heroine.

Anna-Claire Steffen, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
“Surrogate Boys and the Performance of Whiteness in *Henry V*”

My paper seeks to balance textual analysis with consideration of theatrical/performative elements and motifs to explore the racial work of *Henry V*, as I see theatrical approaches often complicating (or sustaining) arguments across text. Scholars of Shakespeare’s “race plays” quite frequently focus on the performance of race for those characters we have burdened with carrying race, and such an approach should be important in the project of analyzing Shakespeare’s “other race plays” to make visible the performance of whiteness. I consider the motif of the white boy as theatrical surrogation (borrowing from Robin Bernstein’s *Racial Innocence*), linking Henry’s youth, the Boy character, and the fantasy “compound” boy who “takes the Turk by the beard” in Henry’s imagination. The boy invites attention to how children perpetuate racial identity and naturalize it: childhood as a process of surrogation naturalizes the melancholia of whiteness (“endlessly searching some half-forgotten original”) and makes racism (or racialization) itself appear natural, as children can make observations of difference, and the extrapolation of meaning from that, appear innocent.

Deb Streusand, University of Texas, Austin
Earning a Diverse Shakespeare

What I have written is more of a narrative or meditation than a scholarly argument, and it is primarily the tale of my learning something, something I should have figured out already, at someone else's expense. I share it because it is also a tale of wrangling with how to answer the call of the Shakespeare's "other race plays" concept—how to engage with race in the Shakespeare plays in which white scholars and directors have often ignored it—and how to do so in a racially ethical manner as a white person. I hope to provoke conversation about how to get beyond questions like: How do I get people of color to audition for my show? Or how do we get our department to be more diverse? And move on to asking, how do we actually make this place, this project, this group a welcoming home for people of color?"

Jennie Votava, Allegheny College
The Ethiop's Jewel Meets Euphoria's Jules:
***Romeo and Juliet's* Dark Ladies**

This essay examines intersectional constructions of race and gender in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and two of its contemporary adaptations, Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* and a brief allusion to both the play and Luhrmann's film in HBO's new 2019 drama, *Euphoria*. In an episode of *Euphoria*, the transgender teen Jules (played by transgender actress Hunter Schafer) attends a Luhrmann-esque Halloween party as Claire Danes's Juliet. There Jules engages her unwitting girlfriend (played by biracial actress Zendaya) in a re-enactment of Danes's and her co-star DiCaprio's iconic underwater kiss.

With reference to scholarship by Kim F. Hall, Jonathan Goldberg, Sujata Iyengar, and others, I situate *Romeo and Juliet's* female characters, especially Juliet herself, in the lineage of the English sonnet's "dark lady" tradition. From Mercutio's taunt about being "stabbed with a white wench's black eye" to Romeo's longing for "the white wonder of dear Juliet's hand," images of white and black femininity signify the poetics of the traditional world in which the young lovers paradoxically immerse themselves as they strive for freedom from its constraints. As Hall has shown, moreover, such seemingly "purely aesthetic" tropes actually reveal early modern anxieties about racial difference. Juliet's defiance of gender constraints as she claims discursive authority over her sexuality simultaneously reinscribes such racializing conceits—a tension that becomes highly visible in Luhrmann's adaptation. *Euphoria's* appropriation of Claire Dane's Juliet in its depiction of a young transgender woman's own self-fashioning provocatively demonstrates both the continued subversive power, and the seductive danger, of Shakespeare in the twenty-first century.

Andrew Clark Wagner, University of California, Los Angeles
"If more, the more th'ast wronged me":
White Futures and Racial Histories in *King Lear*

This essay investigates connections between race and history articulated in *King Lear*, paying particular attention to Edgar's Poor Tom disguise, an assumed, racialized identity which allows the play to create a vision of the future despite its otherwise tragic outlook on genealogical succession. In creating Poor Tom, Edgar's face he "grime[s] with filth"; in doing so, Edgar

reinforces, I suggest, a “futurity promoted by white, heteronormative culture [that] requires the threat of a past that atavistically persists in the person of abject subjects.”¹ Lear both articulates a genealogical sense of time and collapses such a system, imagining a distant British past that is both radically different and assimilable to the England of the present. Poor Tom’s atavistic abjection allows the play to conceive of a racial genealogy which is not strictly familial, and in which whiteness both creates and destroys historical time. The play’s experimentation with racial whiteness allows 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’ast wrong’d me,” reminding the audience of the importance of genetic purity while suspending problems of familial inheritance which set the tragedy in motion.

Jordan Windholz, Shippensburg University

“Antiphrasis and the Poetics of Whiteness in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*”

In *Things of Darkness*, Kim Hall demonstrates how an early modern epistemology of race was shaped through tropes of blackness that, while trafficked across a range of texts, found vibrant life in the period’s poetic discourse. Her first case text is *A Midsummer Night Dream*, and in her reading of one of Shakespeare’s most popular plays, Hall connects George Puttenham’s definition of antiphrasis to Lysander’s rejection of Hermia as an “Ethiop” and “Tawny tartar.” The derogation of Hermia in terms of color and stature epitomize Puttenham’s definition, where the “dwarfe” and “blackemoore” stands as exemplary targets the “Broad floute” of antiphrasis. Asking “how, then, do we read ‘the unnamed, nontext of race’ of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*,” Hall answers that we read Lysander’s rejection of Hermia in the contexts of “trade and gender politics.” Taking Hall’s reading as lodestar, and drawing on the recent work of Cord Whitaker on pre- and early modern “black metaphors,” I consider how we might read race in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* through its poetics, in particular its structuring tropes of antiphrasis and catachresis. These devices, I want to suggest, construct a poetics of whiteness through which white people imagine their status as vulnerable to the antiphrastic and catachrestic forms of imagination they wield to validate their power. In making my argument, I ask to what extent *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’s dream is a dream of whiteness that crucially depends upon poetic structures that become central to discourses of white supremacy.

ABSTRACTS

Seminar 48. Shakespeare’s Other Race Plays, Part II

Seminar Leader: David Sterling Brown, Binghamton University

Lilly Berberyan, Northwestern State University of Louisiana

Immigrant Passing: A Consideration of Race, Class, and Status in Early Modern Drama

In this essay, I suggest a response to David Sterling Brown’s timely question about Shakespeare’s other race plays by looking at the broader category of the “other” in Shakespeare’s plays. I begin this discussion by considering the figure of Doctor Caius in *Merry Wives of Windsor*; because of his immigrant status, Caius is mocked throughout the play because of his accent and his frequent misunderstandings of insider jokes. I then expand this category of outsider to other figures who may not be outsiders in the literal sense, but are

nevertheless culturally incompetent. This cultural incompetence becomes the basis of mockery they endure in their plays; a mockery that we, as audience members, are asked to become complicit in. I conclude with a suggestion of reading practices that force us to pay attention to these moments of complicity and think about ways that in celebrating protagonists of specific plays, we are also celebrating their function as paragons of white European supremacy.

Dennis Austin Britton, University of New Hampshire
Race and King's Two Bodies: *Henry V*

Richard II and *Henry V* are two of Shakespeare's bloodiest plays, not so much in the physical shedding of blood within the staged action but in their references to blood. In *Richard II*, the betrayal of blood shared by the descendants of Edward III is at the heart of the play's political and affective conflict: Richard's supposed part in the murder of the Duke of Gloucester, Richard's banishment of Bolingbroke, and Bolingbroke's overthrow and supposed sanctioning of the murder of Richard. Yet, it is the dethroning of Richard and the shedding of his blood that carries the play's greatest affective charge and haunts the entire Second Tetralogy. Vile as Richard may be to some, the Second Tetralogy nevertheless represents the dethroned monarch as someone who might be pitied, even by King Henry V, who has "bestowed more contrite tears / Than from it issued forced drops of blood" (4.2.273-274). Ernst Kantorowicz argued many years ago that *Richard II* is a tragedy of the King's two Bodies, produced by a tension emerging from the vexed relationship between the body natural and the body politic model after the dual nature of Christ as fully human and fully divine. Yet, Kantorowicz goes on to describe another iteration of the body politic, that model after the corpus mysticum, the body of Christ in the Eucharist and the Church itself. While *Richard II* may be a tragedy of the King's two Bodies, I argue that *Henry V* is a comedy of the corpus mysticum. This comedy, moreover, operates through a fantasy of race that links Englishmen and the English monarch through the sharing blood.

Kimberly Anne Coles, University of Maryland
Queer Race: Redirecting Family Lines in *All's Well that Ends Well*

*Strange is it that our bloods
 Of colour, weight, and heat, pour'd all together,
 Would quite confound distinction, yet stands off
 In differences so mighty.*

The king speaks these lines in *All's Well That Ends Well* (II.iii.118-21), but a woman drives him to it. It is the women of this comedy who disrupt the bloodlines that so preoccupy it. Women are widely considered to be the receptacles through which bloodlines pass in the early modern period, and yet, in this play, they exert control over them. They interrupt family lineage to productive effect. Helen's skill serves to eradicate the humoral imbalance of the King, even though humoral equilibrium and the superior properties of the blood were considered bequests of

nobility. Noble blood in this play is instead susceptible to the manipulation of a woman. This paper will look at how the ideologies of race that naturalize power relations among social groups are revised in this play in favor of a women without social power.

Jeremy Cornelius, Louisiana State University

Racial Contagion: Animal Metaphors and Geohumoral Literalism

Racialized and racist epithets, such as Iago's descriptions of Othello (the black ram) and Desdemona (the white ewe), call attention to the entanglements between constructions of race and animality in early modern poetics. I consider the ways these animal analogies supply the logics of racialized exclusion and violence along with approaches to inspecting the formal elements of metaphor in these usages without succumbing to an apolitical approach to Shakespeare. The literal-metaphor divide, particularly around discourses of the body and the humors, shows the racialized notions of contamination and infection in the period, figured through animal analogies. While much has been commented on Iago's descriptions of race and animality, I turn to plays having had more conversations about animals and less about the ways these animal analogies demonstrate early modern constructions of race, hierarchy, and bio-power. By examining contagion and animality in *A Midsummer Nights Dream* and *Comedy of Errors*, I look at how the black/white binary frequents these texts but is also complicated by their accompanying animal signification. This species-crossing in relation to selfhood crops up across Shakespeare's work as well as ample other early modern plays and poetics. The comparison between human and animal in these plays evokes exclusion and humiliation through animal metaphor, which I argue mirror social constructions of racial differences and dynamics in early modern English culture.

Ariane N. Helou, University of California, Los Angeles

Conscious Casting in *The Winter's Tale*

My aim is to bridge a reading of *The Winter's Tale* as an "other race play" with a case study of a recent production that utilized color-conscious (as opposed to color-blind) casting. I write from my perspective as an embedded scholar in a 2019 production of *The Winter's Tale*, for which I served as dramaturg. In the first part of my paper, I examine how production choices and color-conscious casting made race an explicit concern of the play, layering intersectional tensions onto the play's existing anxieties about masculinity (in the Sicilian half) and class difference (in the Bohemian half). In the second part, I contextualize the director's intentions with the production concept and address the reception of the play by audiences and critics. I conclude with questions about how to bridge scholarly investigations into ORP with applications in theatrical practice.

Benjamin Hilb, Francis Marion University

"Come, night": Juliet's revaluation of blackness

One of the primary tenets of Afro-pessimism is that the traumatic inflictions of the transatlantic slave trade relegated the black lives lived in its extreme and ongoing breach to a condition of social death. Racialized blackness has been made to function in western discourse, in the most extreme measure, as a negative category signaling non-existence or nothingness in order to instantiate positive existence, namely human being, which thus implicitly and often explicitly

designates whiteness. Matthieu Chapman's recent book reveals that the negative positioning of blackness against humanity was operative not just through or in the aftermath of the transatlantic slave trade, as much Afro-pessimist work has demonstrated, but in English drama of the early modern era, too, when the British slave trade was still incipient. Continuing in this line of thought, this essay will examine the function of blackness in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which illustrates the exploitative ontological denigration of blackness as death to raise up whiteness that has been compellingly marked by Afro-pessimist thought. But as I will demonstrate, the play also presents, through the view and desire of Juliet, a powerful counter-valuation of blackness in/and/as death.

Yunah Kae

Racial Poetics: The Comedy of Paradox in *Love's Labour's Lost*

According to Ian Smith in *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance: Barbarian Errors*, "language as a constitutive of race" (4) needs to be more fully addressed. Taking my cue from Smith, this paper attempts to draw out a "racial poetics" in *Love's Labour's Lost* which focuses specifically on light and dark language. I argue that Shakespeare deploys the culture's light-dark binary to explore the contested place of "poesy" in the program of Renaissance humanism, and in the process, shifts a binary thinking into paradox. Ultimately, the paradox of light and dark as demonstrated in the embedded lyric of Berowne's "defense" of love is, through the structuring of the play, made comic. This feat of dramatic engineering, the imbrication of light-dark language and comedy, provides the scaffolding for the former's racialization.

Timothy Love, University of Missouri

Beautifying Black Skin in *Love's Labor's Lost*

This essay probes Shakespeare's proclivity to challenge traditional European desires to vilify black skin in *Love's Labor's Lost*, adding to periodical scholarly claims of post-colonial propensities within the author. I ultimately seek to identify a representation of Shakespeare's contribution to a movement comprised of select early modern authors who reveal their progressiveness or post-colonial attributes in drama and poetry. Shakespeare perfects the movement's inclination to subvert audiences by systematically associating black characters with racial stereotypes, only to make erroneous racial typecasts seem ridiculous, ultimately refuting societal biases which originally form the stereotypes in the first place. In several Shakespearean plays, such as *Titus Andronicus* and *Othello*, numerous characters first reflect these societal biases by exhibiting ludicrous racial animus toward black characters. These attacks warrant methodical indirect authorial challenges through usually one or two open-minded characters. A blatant but rather unnoticed example occurs in *Love's Labor's Lost*. Pushing back against pervasive pre-early modern and early modern tendencies to pair blackness with ugliness, I assert that Shakespeare speaks through Biron (Berowne), an open-minded character, in the fourth act. After falling in love with a slave or servant named Rosaline—who, according to my findings, has black skin—the celibate Biron successfully argues that black is in fact beautiful. Single handedly, Biron poetically, logically, and humorously outdoes the King, Dumaine, and Longueville's stereotypical, highly racist remarks, channeling or perhaps foreshadowing sonnets which effectively beautify black skin and/or the "dark lady."

Milla Cozart Riggio, Trinity College (CT)

Much Ado about Race: Kenny Leon's 2019 *Much Ado about Nothing*

Kenny Leon's 2019 Shakespeare in the Park *Much Ado about Nothing* (Delacorte Theater, New York City) set this comedy not in Messina, Sicily, but in fictional Aragon, Georgia, a black suburb of Atlanta, during the 2020 U.S Presidential Election. With an all Afro-American cast that is anything but colorblind, in this production "the actors play specifically black characters, drawing on their own resources of emotion and style" (Jesse Green, "Review: In Central Park, A 'Much Ado' about Something Big," *New York Times*, June 11, 2019). Starring Danielle Brooks (*Orange is the New Black*, 2015 Revival of *The Color Purple*) as a robust Beatrice sparring with Grantham Coleman (Public Theater production of *Buzzer*) as Benedick, this production does not pretend that race does not matter; it is front and center staged. With music by Jason Michael Webb, buttressed by infusions of hip hop, and choreography by Camille A. Brown, Leon sets the action in a large, (presumably Governor's) mansion with a banner proclaiming "Stacy Abrams in 2020." Clearly, then, contemporary politics are not ignored. However, the political arena provides the background, not the foreground, for a production that literally "plays" with, interrogates, and establishes the comic fluidity of African-American styles within this contemporary setting, while remaining true to Shakespeare's language. Shakespeare, too, presents a variety of culturally specific characters, ranging from the Prince of Aragon, to Claudio, the young Florentine gentleman and would-be wooer of Hero, to the quick-witted Benedick of Padua, and the provincial Messinians, the Governor and his family, including the independent, orphaned Beatrice. Against the backdrop of Shakespeare's depiction of cultural difference and of assumptions about female sexuality, this paper will examine the transfer of *Much Ado* to a contemporary, politically charged Georgia setting with its all-Black cast and varied Afro-American vibes. What are the implications of such productions for the concept of Race in Shakespeare?