

2021 SAA Seminar:  
“Queer|Race|Global: Early Modern Crossings”

Organizers:

Bernadette Andrea, Professor of English, University of California, Santa Barbara

Abdulhamit Arvas, Assistant Professor of English, University of Pennsylvania

Abstracts:

**Valerie Billing, “Size, Race, and Queer Femininity in *The Faerie Queene*”**

Mutabilitie, Acrasia, and Radigund—all physically large, disruptive female figures in Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*—are described simultaneously as white and as racial others. In this paper, I argue that these figures are raced as “other” to Englishness through the physical trait of size rather than skin color and through the metaphorical outsized desires their large bodies represent. These racially othered large women are condemned in Spenser’s allegory for their excessive desires, but they also function subversively as figures of queer embodiment who use their largeness to disrupt normative performances of masculinity and redirect the acceptable forms of desire and chivalric power the poem ostensibly promotes. I thus argue that these large, foreign female figures offer alternatives to white English chivalric masculinity, though I am also interested in exploring the tension between a celebratory queer reading of these figures and a sobering race reading of them, which leads me to conclude with a set of methodological questions that continue to puzzle me.

**Erika Boeckeler, “Enter Balthazer for”**

The stage direction for the crossed-dressing Portia’s entrance in the *Merchant of Venice* is “Enter Portia for Balthazer” (Q1, Q2; F1 Balthazar). While a letter announcing Balthazar’s arrival directly prefaces this entrance, there are no further references identifying Portia as Balthazer. Why is this name important? In this paper, I flip the stage direction to understand what entering Balthazer into the play is for. I argue that Portia’s assumption of this name deliberately allies her with the Black magus from early modern European “Adoration of the Magi” images. The magus Balthazar commonly occupies a medial position in visual art. His physical position between the other two cross-continental travelling magi visualizes the triad-based symbolic programs in which he functions as a hinge: the three ages of “man”; Europe, Africa, and Asia and the accompanying early modern racial, religious, and travel associations; and the three types of gifts. Gold and frankincense are associated with Christ’s kingliness and divinity, while Balthazar’s offering of myrrh represents Christ’s transition between earthly and heavenly realms through His passion and death. This paper examines how entering “Portia for Balthazer” ties into the trans-capacities of the play. I am working with David Gettsy’s concept of “transgender capacity,” which describes “the trait of those many things that support or demand accounts of gender’s dynamism, plurality, and expansiveness.” The text presents Portia and Balthazer simultaneously, performing a range of gendered practices. I consider how Portia|Balthazer also tap into and propagate racial, sexual, religious, financial, and semantic pluralities across the play.

### **Jeremy Cornelius, “Wandering Wombs: Bestial Pathologies in Early Modern Obstetrics and Midwifery”**

This project considers regimes of power in early modern medical approaches to reproduction in English obstetrics and midwifery and their queer and biopolitical translations onto the early modern English stage. Midwifery was the primary care for pregnancy, where masculinized approaches in Western medical models deemed reproduction as bestial or as a mode in the “secrets of women,” which Katharine Park has excellently provided a historical overview of this term for describing reproduction in medical discourses. Classical and neo-classical medical theories render the womb as a traveling, lively beast, blurring a species divide between human and nonhuman animal under humoral medical models of the period. By inspecting these representations in early modern English drama, drawing from work on early modern anatomy theaters, midwifery manuals, and medical tracts, I consider the ways race, disability, and gender intersect in the figurative comparisons between humans and animals in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* and *Richard III*. These cross-currents of obstetrics in early modern culture reflect an instability of species differentiation for understanding bodily transformations in discourses of reproduction. Renaissance drama interrogates the wandering womb and its related diseases by highlighting the masculinization of medical frameworks and complicated relationships between human and nonhuman animality in reproductive discourses. I consider how early modern medical and obstetrical models of reproduction framed bodies through animality and deformity as a framework of reproduction that instrumentalized forms of differentiation and taxonomy through human/animal distinctions. These processes of theorizing reproduction by thinking about anatomy translated into early modern theatrical performances. I seek to unpack the medical gazing that exists in early modern European culture, particularly from work done on French, Italian and English anatomical illustrations and midwifery models for their shaping discourses about raced bodies and the many ways this framed early modern biopolitical structures throughout Renaissance European medicine and midwifery.

### **Mario DiGangi, “The Depraved Familiarities of St. Pelagius”**

In this essay I will examine intersections of race, religion, and sexuality in a play seemingly unknown to early modern race and sexuality studies, Joseph Simon’s Latin tragedy *Sanctus Pelagius Martyr* [*The Martyrdom of St. Pelagius*]. Simon was a professor at the English Jesuit College of St. Omers, the students of which “manful[ly]” performed his play in July 1623. Based on medieval sources, the play concerns Pelagius, a fourteen-year-old Christian boy imprisoned by the Islamic king Abderramenus [as the play calls him]. Enamored of Pelagius’ mind, body, and face, the king offers him love, favor, and advancement if he will convert to Islam and join his court. Although Simon’s attribution of sodomitical desire to a Muslim caliph is not unusual, the play focuses with remarkable intensity on Pelagius’ susceptibility to male love: he fears that the “corruption of this sordid sect” might “attract [his] mind to depraved habits.” Moreover, while generally following his sources, Simon invents a new character, Abderramenus’ son Zunelmus, who blurs the already tenuous line between “Islamic” and “Christian” habits of male-male love. Zunelmus cites the Renaissance tropes of virtuous friendship even as he frankly admires Pelagius’ “handsome body.” As Pelagius’ friend, Zunelmus counsels and consoles him; as the king’s son, he instructs the recalcitrant boy to wear a “happy face” and to graciously accept his father’s love. Even as it deploys the tropes of Moorish/Islamic cruelty, luxury, and sexual vice,

*The Martyrdom* thus represents eroticized male intimacies as a norm of Mediterranean culture, whether Christian or Muslim. Particularly salient is the play's setting in pre-modern Iberia, where cultural exchange between Christian and Muslim communities had long bred "familiarity rather than alienation" (Hutcheson 106). Pelagius recognizes, even as he fears, his susceptibility to "depraved familiarity" with proximate religious and racial others.

**Mary Fuller, "'You're getting colder': Reading for Atlantic Africa in *The Principal Navigations*"**

In 1553, two major projects announced England's new determination to contact regions and markets beyond Europe. One sought a route to east Asia through the Arctic; the other inaugurated direct trade with the African tropics. Both are documented in Richard Hakluyt's geographical compilation, *Principal Navigations*, along with their sequels ("A persuasion of Robert Thorne" and "The discourse of ... Robert Thorne," in *Principal Navigations* [1600], 1: 212-20). Famously, 16th century English writers on geography often invoked the tropics as informative for thinking about the Arctic; both were considered to be extreme climates. This paper takes that conjunction as the impetus to explore what we can learn by thinking through these geographically distinct and temporally simultaneous projects together in the context of the compilation. That context allows us to think about not only connections through documents—like the Arctic proposals of the Anglo-Spanish merchant Robert Thorne, slave owner and West-Indian merchant, or the African sojourns of voyages for the West Indies and the Straits of Magellan—but also the editor's largely silent work of selection, commentary, organization, distribution, and emphasis, the shaping force of the social networks that provided many of his materials, and the background of ideas about climate and cultivation that inflected geographical thinking in systemic but not always predictable ways. Kim Hall memorably commented that "African voyages were truly the nursery to English seamen" like Frobisher and Drake (*Things of Darkness* 19). Yet Hakluyt's book seeks to direct our attention elsewhere, toward later feats of exploration and naval combat, the sublime fantasy of an open pole, or the acquiescence of indigenous Americans to imagined civilizing projects (and modern indexes reproduce the editor's structuring inattention to the African tropics). In the paper, I'll provide some key findings on Africa and the Arctic in *Principal Navigations* from a nearly completed book project that could benefit from feedback.

**Colby Gordon, "The Flower of Palestine: Trans Philistines and *Samson Agonistes*"**

This paper pairs Milton's *Samson Agonistes* with texts from Christian theologians and Crusading propaganda to linger over the racialized gender of the Philistines. The ambitions nurtured by European powers to conquer and Christianize Jerusalem led to a reinterpretation of the Book of Judges that cast Muslims as the "New Philistines," an equivalence brokered by their allegedly shared weakness for idolatry, luxury, despotism, and effeminacy. These accounts frequently invoked the events of 1 Sam. 6, when the Ark of the Covenant smashes the idol of the Philistine god Dagon and punishes his followers with a plague of the '*ofalim ba-tehorim*, a "swelling in their hindparts" that is translated by the Geneva Bible as "emerods." This paper revisits *Samson Agonistes*' account of the settlement and annexation of Canaan in light of the obscure gender of the Philistine, an embodied difference that is also racialized.

**Kim Hall, “Dragging Shakespeare, Dragging White Queerness? Lasana Shabazz in *Six Acts*”**

This paper examines Black British artist Sonia Boyce’s 2018 Manchester Gallery of Art installation, *Six Acts*, done in collaboration with the Manchester-based drag collective, Family Gorgeous, and performance artist Lasana Shabazz. *Six Acts* emerged from Boyce’s fascination with the “dandy-ish” nature of James Northcote’s portrait of Ira Aldridge and Shabazz’s performance with the portraits of Aldridge and Shakespeare is at the heart of my discussion. I am particularly interested in Shabazz’s ritualistic application of whiteface in front of Ford Madox Ford’s Shakespeare portrait and its relationship to both Aldridge’s whiteface career and drag performance in global black minstrelsy. Overall, I read the event as a performance of the type of liberatory movement called for by Cathy Cohen, one based on “the destabilization and radical politicization of identity categories.” The whiteface might signal an implicit critique of the whiteness of the Manchester gay village’s much-vaunted cosmopolitanism even as *Six Acts*’ takeover explicitly critiques museums themselves as economic institutions, as sites of national memory, and as sites of heteronormative sexual pleasure.

**Andrew Keener, “Devotions of Bondage: English Jesuits and American Slavery”**

*The Devotion of Bondage* is a prayer manual printed in 1634 at the English College at Saint Omer, a school for Catholic boys operated by the Society of Jesus. On the surface, this book is concerned with the mortification of the flesh and the adoration of Mary in a way that would seem to confirm Protestants’ worst stereotypes about Catholic perversion. At another level, though, its rhetorical flourishes—urging readers “to be the enchained Slaues of the mother of God” and figuring Mary as “Empresse of the world”—raise critical questions for me about the participation of Jesuits in the development of racialized bondage and empire. Despite the book’s obscurity—only a single copy survives today, and it is not in EEBO—I believe it sheds some light on the contemporaneous establishment of England’s Catholic colony in Maryland. The same year *The Devotion of Bondage* appeared at Saint-Omer, two sea vessels arrived on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay. The objective here was a colonial settlement amenable to English Catholics and sanctioned by King Charles I. What I wish to focus on in this paper, though, is the presence of Jesuits among these colonists—particularly the company’s record keeper, Andrew White S.J., who was accompanied by two servants designated as “molato” in early records: Francisco and Matthias Sousa. Before the end of the decade, Sousa’s bond was transferred to another Jesuit priest, while legislation for religious freedom in the colony adopted the clause “Slaves excepted.” Putting these developments in Maryland alongside *The Devotion of Bondage*’s distinctively Catholic (and favorable) approach to the language of enslavement, I hope to tie together some thoughts about the (non-reproductive) position of Jesuit priests and their servants/bondsmen of color in the decades before the white settlers embraced widespread traffic in enslaved Africans.

**Shannon Kelley, “Daphne and the “un/ravished bays” of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*”**

My seminar essay responds to Peter Erikson and Kim F. Hall’s 2016 invitation to “expand and theorize the archive of race, [and] seek out new texts, questions, and vocabularies” in the early modern period. As an experimental piece, it positions the Renaissance herbal as an archival space where race, sexuality, and geographies cross. In two herbals written by John Gerard and John Parkinson, one such crossing appears in a tree known as the “Indian mourner.” The

etiology of its nocturnal blooms involves a princess in the West Indies whose rape by the sun god parallels Apollo's sexual assault of Daphne and her transformation into the bay tree. Both herbalists mock the "poetical Indians" who must have read Ovid, but whose similar story of sexual trauma, vegetal resiliency, and ongoing desirability unsettles distinctions between east and west, plant and person. I am interested in how these archival references potentially impact iconic scholarly readings of race, sexuality, and the "spiced Indian air" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where signifiers for romantic desire draw from a lexicon of racial difference within the context of global encounters with India. While the duke's oak tends to command our attention, Shakespeare actually bookends the comedy with two queer Ovidian trees: Daphne, the violated laurel with whom Helena identifies, and the stained mulberry in act 5's performance of Pyramus and Thisbe. If Hermia narrowly avoids Thisbe's fate associated with the blood-stained mulberry, Oberon forces Helena to become Apollo's *tree* again, for following the allusion to Daphne tells us she marries her rapist. While *Midsummer* uses racial signifiers (Tartar, Ethiopie, Egypt, Helen) to chart, regulate, and define the flow of desire, the Indian mourner's nocturnal bloom narrates resistance since it blossoms unseen, free from Apollo at night.

**Sarah Le, "A Race of Calibans': Miscegenation and Its Uses in Dryden's and D'Avenant's *The Tempest*"**

This paper argues that John Dryden's and William D'Avenant's *The Tempest, Or the Enchanted Island* represents interracial sex as both queer and normative, and that condemnation of miscegenation as non-normative changes in the context of global domination. In this adaptation, Caliban is joined by his sister, Sycorax—an addition that reveals not simply the dangers of interracial sex, like its predecessor, but also its uses for multiplying European subjects and influence. In focusing on the role of the newly invented Sycorax, I want to investigate how the black feminine body operates as a vestibule (in the words of Hortense Spillers) for both the creation of colonial subjects and blackness as a category of being itself. I argue that Dryden's and D'Avenant's rewriting of Caliban and creation of Sycorax are not accidental but rather a purposeful reconstruction of narratives of race and miscegenation, so that "a race of Calibans" thus serve both as a warning of the products of miscegenation in Shakespeare (creation of monsters) and as a source of possibility and a way to control Caliban and Sycorax in Dryden and D'Avenant (creation of monstrous subjects). This adaptation serves as, I argue, a Foucauldian production of racial knowledge through the medium of the public theatre and public discourse—revealing the power of theatre in not simply representing its society but creating it.

**Vin Nardizzi, "Tulips and/in Turbans"**

There is an enduring connection between tulips and turbans in Western European natural history. The link that fastens them together is philology: mid-sixteenth-century European ambassadors who returned with tulip bulbs from the Ottoman court also brought home and circulated a nomenclatural error. Ambassadors and other travellers did not call these "new" flowers by the Turkish word for *tulip* (*lale*); instead they seem to have adopted as the word for the flower the Turkish pronunciation of the Persian word for *turban*—that is, *dulband*. John Gerard's *Herball* (1597) records the persistence of this error. According to Gerard, "After [the tulip] hath beene some fewe daies flowred, the points and brims of the flower turne backward,

like a Dalmatian or Turkes cap, called *Tulipan*, *Tolepan*, *Turban*, and *Tursan*, whereof it tooke his name.” Another paper would discuss the relationship between philology and morphology that Gerard’s natural history here articulates. This paper begins instead with popular natural historians, from the mid-1990s forward, who fantasize the moment of sixteenth-century contact: they wish to find a reasonable explanation for the error. What I’ve discovered is that these natural historians are uncritically re-circulating seventeenth-century (English) fictions about tulips, turbans, and a fashion for tulips tucked into the folds of turbans – in a phrase, false representations of Turkish, sartorial custom, masculinity, and sexuality. I will offer a few examples from popular natural history to support this claim before turning to the culture of tulips that obtained at the Ottoman court during the sixteenth century. I propose that when importing tulips, Europeans also rewrote and *straightened out* the predominant sexual discourses and practices of Turkish men.

### **Carmen Nocentelli, “Fiery Love”**

This paper approaches the figure of the self-immolating Indian widow (*satī*) as a crucial node in an emerging discourse of domestic heterosexuality. I argue that *satīs* were not only part of the tropology of early modern imperialism but also part of an emerging emotionology of marriage that deeply inflected how Europeans understood, experienced, and regulated desire both at home and abroad. My point of departure is a simple observation: far from being the exclusive preserve of travelogues, missionary writing, and colonial legislation, the self-immolating Indian widow infiltrated a wide range of normative and prescriptive works concerned with spousal affect. In my contribution to “Queer|Race|Global: Early Modern Crossings,” I examine some of these works, asking how representations of widow self-immolation inflected Europeans imaginings of domestic heterosexuality. In so doing, I also seek to understand how the dynamics of early modern globalization helped shape the “emotional repertoire”—to use Amélie O. Rorty’s phrase—of early modern Europe.

### **Rebecca M. Quoss-Moore, “Sites of Irrationality in *The Winter’s Tale*”**

Many of Shakespeare’s most tragic moments revolve around “mad” men. (When I reference Elizabethan or Jacobean “madness,” I refer to irrationality and instability, and I intend neither an ableist oversimplification nor a reading of the characters as subject to any psychiatric diagnoses.) Othello, Macbeth, and Leontes all lash out irrationally, murdering those they love and destroying self and standing in the process. In the work from which this paper sprung, I am engaged in examining what I see as sustained, gendered efforts, in modern adaptation and performance, to inscribe rational motivations onto these three characters. I argue that these inscriptions mirror a broader, curious, and sustained interest in *explaining* Shakespeare’s men, where women characters in his plays are allowed a greater scope of irrationality. In examining that impulse towards explanation, though, I necessarily returned to the question of “madness” and justification in the source texts. As I explore that terrain, I am developing a distinction between modern justification and early modern context. That is, I still see in each of these characters an irrational man—but one placed in a site that contextualizes that irrationality in ways that may, for the early modern audience, (1) reflect a gendered distinction (different from our own, but still activated in these sites); (2) encourage questions about their relationships to heteronormative structures, particularly marriage; and (3) position irrationality outside of

England/Englishness. For this piece, I focus on sites of madness in *The Winter's Tale*—considering their relationships to foreignness and to the heteronormative, gendered roles of husbands and fathers. I am especially interested in Perdita's contribution to or reflection of these sites—in the competing claims to her fatherhood, in the failures of those fathers, and in her disguise as the Libyan princess.

### **Ian Smith, "Everything but the Burden: Querying Early Modern Intersections"**

As we strive to expand our canonical understanding of early modern sexuality, the need to "intersect the sexual" exposes the predominantly white investments that have characterized early modern sexuality studies and place new demands on scholars. The central question raised in this paper is, therefore: as we think about intersecting the sexual with race, are scholars interested in racial tourism—everything but the burden—or are we prepared to engage the responsibilities of race fully and seriously?

### **Edward "Mac" Test, "Rehearsing Lieutenant Nun"**

This paper explores gender and the translation of the Golden Age Spanish *comedia* play, "The Lieutenant Nun" (*La monja alférez*, 1626), which is based on the real-life person, Catalina de Erauso. Hispanic Golden Age *comedias* were a vibrant and popular dramatic spectacle, similar to theater in early modern England, but with some notable differences. Women, for example, performed on the Spanish stage. *The Lieutenant Nun* stands out because the cross-dressed Catalina de Erauso only appears on stage dressed as a man named Guzmán. In Spanish *comedias*, Guzmán was the common character name for a roguish soldier who roamed the streets of the "Spanish empire" looking for drink, gambling, and a war to fight. Throughout the play, Erauso refuses to be recognized as a woman, making statements such as, "I'll die before making public that I am a woman," and "I am not a woman." The cross-cultural questions of translating and staging *Lieutenant Nun* present a myriad of possibilities and contextual difficulties, especially given the importance of gender to the play, the grammatically gendered Spanish language, and the way English is heavily marked by pronouns. Erauso has been interpreted by critics as a cross-dresser, an empowered female, a *mujer varonil*, a lesbian, and, more recently, as a transgender and a trans man. While it is impossible to ascertain what the real-life character would have thought, especially nowadays, this translation strives to honor the character by according to him the male identity he prefers.

### **Valerie Traub, "The Times and Affects of Early Modern Queer/Sexuality & Critical Race"**

This paper offers a comparative analysis of certain features of early modern queer/sexuality studies and critical race studies. It aims to offer a contrapuntal perspective derived from, and responsive to, characteristics and method rather than geography or linguistic tradition. My premise is that thinking with and across these field formations might provide traction for confronting challenges internal to each, as well as fostering more capacious and flexible points of intersection. I analyze their in-some-ways parallel and in-some-ways divergent trajectories in terms of temporality and affect, and then turn to significant debates within critical race studies that might benefit from comparative reflection with other fields. I end with ruminations on protocols of debate and an invitation to metacritical conversation.