

Shakespeare Association of America
"Race-ing and Queering Queens" Seminar
Abstracts Received

"Queer Pregnancy, Women's Spaces, and Disruption of Heteropatriarchal Empire in *The Masque of Blackness*" by Anita Raychawdhuri

In 1605 Queen Anne of Denmark performed in Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness* about six months pregnant. I read Anne's pregnancy in this performance as queer because it exhibits a desire and futurity outside of patriarchal and colonial fantasies of the pregnant body, a fantasy that is deeply connected to a crystalizing English identity predicated on coherent and legible whiteness. *The Masque of Blackness*, through the performances of the Daughters of Niger, focuses on the pleasures of women's intimacy while undermining King James's colonial ambition, in spite of the narrative of turning the nymphs white. Anne's pregnancy reimagines motherhood and relationality, subtly presenting how the unborn child will not represent a futurity that continues James's desired "Great Britain," through her appropriation of different mothers, including Isis, the Virgin Mary, and Venus. Yet, the reality of African people in the Stuart court, England's colonial ambitions, and narratives of unruliness at home all further contextualize what is at stake in how this masque maps race, colonial violence, and desire. Building off of Kim F. Hall's, Bernadette Andrea's, and Joyce Green MacDonald's interventions on empire, gender, and archival study in relation to Stuart masques, I consider how lesbian-like kinship and queer pregnancy in the masque (through symbolism in the costume, as well as the content of the drama) further effects these spectacles of race.

**"Matching with the accursèd Canaanites":
Reprobation and Race-Making in Lucy Hutchinson's Critiques of Royal Marriage**
Emily Griffiths Jones

In my book *Right Romance*, I argued that Lucy Hutchinson draws parallels in her Genesis epic *Order and Disorder* between Esau's ungodly Canaanite wives and foreign Catholic queens of England, namely Henrietta Maria and Catherine of Braganza.¹ Hutchinson's abhorrence of such "mixed marriages," I wrote, had "nothing to do with [...] intercourse between physically or nationally distinct peoples" but rather with "*spiritual* miscegenation," the pollution of godly families through marriage to reprobate spouses.² I proposed that Hutchinson used racializing discourse as a mere analogy, designed to comment on religion but not directly on race.

Thanks to recent scholarship on race, religion, and romance in the early modern world, I wish to revise my prior claim. In this paper, I consider how Hutchinson's writing is part of an early modern English Protestant movement which engaged in religious demarcation and race-making simultaneously, as described by Dennis Britton.³ Hutchinson depicts foreign wives/Catholic queens as dangerous to God's holy state through their intertwined ungodly religion and racial

¹ Emily Griffiths Jones, *Right Romance: Heroic Subjectivity and Elect Community in Seventeenth Century England* (Penn State University Press, 2019), 169-70.

² *Ibid.*, 167.

³ Dennis Austin Britton, *Becoming Christian: Race, Reformation, and Early Modern English Romance* (Fordham University Press, 2014).

otherness. In particular, she links the “accursèd Canaanite” brides of Genesis, and their royal analogues, to Noah’s curse of his son Canaan, which English Protestants broadly interpreted as a rationale for the subjugation of nonwhite peoples (*O&D* 17.468).⁴ While royalist texts typically celebrated the romance of unification between the British Stuart kings and their religiously and nationally distinct brides, Hutchinson represents true romance within these royal marriages as impossible due to the inextricable religious and racial identities of the foreign queens.

**“Had nature lent thee but thy mother’s look”:
Tamora and Racialized Reproduction in *Titus Andronicus***

Elizabeth Steinway

In her trajectory from Queen of the Goths to discarded carcass, Tamora of *Titus Andronicus* portrays the precarity of embodying a position at the intersection of early modern discourses of race and reproduction. She is a foreigner in the land that she rules; as Empress of Rome, anxieties about Tamora’s power are heightened by her potential to establish a royal lineage that is not Roman. These anxieties are fully exemplified in the birth of her mixed-race child. Although Tamora’s command to kill the infant and Aaron’s desire to save his son and replace him with a lighter-skinned child work towards entirely different outcomes, both plans suggest that reproductive and racial (il)legibility threaten to undermine Roman order and identity.

By examining early modern theories about race and reproduction, this essay argues that the child disrupts Tamora’s goals in securing her position within the Roman Empire. This is evident in the play’s departure from the prose narrative, *The History of Titus Andronicus*, in which Tamora uses maternal impression to explain her child’s skin color and summons physicians to testify to the theory’s legitimacy. The play, however, does not attempt to explain the child’s “hue” as anything other than parental influence, thus underscoring the child’s lineage. Ultimately, the child unsettles expectations about race and reproduction, suggesting that Tamora’s threat to Rome comes most distinctly in the form of her reproductive body.

Mediating Queenship: Queerness, Authority, and Constraint in the works of Margaret Cavendish by Katharine Landers

Margaret Cavendish’s fascination with figures of authority we might collectively label “queens” (empresses, princesses, and Amazon warrior women, to name a few) has been an enduring focus of scholarship on her work. This paper will consider how another crucial figure—the “mediator”—often intersects with queenship, specifically queer queenship, in her writings. I will examine Cavendish’s mediator-figures, including the character of Madam Mediator in Cavendish’s *Convent of Pleasure* and in her marital comedy, *The Bridals*, and Cavendish’s own autobiographical cipher, “the Duchess,” in her fantasy of authoritarian queenship, *The Blazing World*. I argue that mediator figures by turns facilitate and undercut iterations of queer agency

⁴ “Cursed be Canaan, vassalage his doom, / His brothers’ servants’ servant to become. / Blessed be the God of Shem: by special grace / He shall be lord of Canaan’s servile race” (*O&D* 9.205-208).

and absolute monarchy in these works, traversing queer spaces and temporalities such as Lady Happy's eponymous convent (where she falls in love with a "Great Foreign Princess" "of a Masculine presence") and the wedding day of Lady Coy. I will examine how mediators foster queer spatial and temporal states to underscore the authority of these text's "queens," including *The Blazing World's* Empress and *The Convent of Pleasures'* Prince/ess, while elsewhere enforcing heteronormativity and allosexuality. Building upon Julie Crawford's work on the "mediatrix," Sujata Iyengar and Cristina Malcolmson's examinations of race and empire in Cavendish's texts, Simone Chess's work on early modern asexuality, and Kim F. Hall's pivotal writings on beauty and whiteness in early modernity, I suggest that Cavendish's mediators at times bolster expansive queer potential for Cavendish's queens, but also work alongside the texts' problematic embrace of hegemonies of power, heteropatriarchy, and colonialism.

Vocal Drag: Queening Time and Fleshing Voice in *Antony and Cleopatra*

by Katie Adkison

As Cleopatra begins to stage and perform her own death in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, she infamously anticipates the very situation of the play's gendered dramatization, collapsing her future into the audience's knowledge of past history: "I shall see / Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness / I' th' posture of a whore" (5.2.220-222). But what of her now? This essay traces the play's treatment of Cleopatra's present—her nowness, her presence, her ever-imminent immortality—by looking to Alexander Weheliye's concept of *habeas viscus*, a theorization of flesh that builds on the work of Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynter, one attuned to racialized fleshly existence as a kind of perpetual "NOW." Drawing on Weheliye's appeal to the flesh as a vital critique of the way that "bare life and biopolitics discourse" negates race's role in definitions of the human, and placing this notion in conversation with Elizabeth Freeman's notion of *temporal drag*, I read Cleopatra as a Queen who counterposes presence and the now to the drive of European imperial time through the fleshliness of her voice. Cleopatra's attention to a fleshly voice, a voice that feels and senses as well as speaks, refuses the exceptionalism of Roman (and English) sovereignty. Even further, I contend, her fleshly voice maps the ruptures—rather than the metaphysics—of presence/the present, imagining a different vision of both her future and our own.

"What devils dare not move / Men to accomplish, women work them to"

Women, Wealth, and Queer Marriage in Early Modern English Theater by Melissa Vipperman-Cohen

This paper explores theatrical representations of an integral financial bond in early modern England: marriage. As London experienced an unprecedented influx of immigrants at the end of the sixteenth century and international trade flourished, England saw a rise in international marriages. Early modern plays depicting relationships and marriage between English subjects and those from other countries explored England's anxieties towards its financial position on the international stage. This paper highlights instances in which values are queered through characters' rejection of normative economic and erotic practices. Robert Wilson's *The Three*

Ladies of London utilizes three powerful women protagonists to challenge English ideas of power, usury, and eroticism, with the most powerful of the three an Italian immigrant usurer. In this play, women's bodies and agency represent English anxiety regarding identity and value, particularly when it is predicated on money, as well as the consequences of seduction into the lust for commodification. The play queers the representations and understandings of England's international status and identity, as well as the very nature of profitable marriage by challenging the expected gendered hierarchies within early modern marriage.

Black Rites and Queenly Assemblages by Patricia Cahill

In this essay I consider how queenship is racialized through witchcraft in John Marston's *The Wonder of Women, or The Tragedy of Sophonisba* (1606). Set in ancient Libya and depicting Roman conflicts with Carthage, *Sophonisba* retells a popular Renaissance narrative about a Carthaginian queen who pursues her lover, successfully avoids rape, and chooses death rather than yield to Rome. While critics routinely admire Marston's protagonist as a plucky proto-feminist, Joyce Green MacDonald powerfully exposed the racial violence at the core of the drama some twenty years ago. Most notably, she pointed out that Marston not only followed Petrarch in depicting the North African heroine as a white woman; Marston also underscored this vision of female virtue with a racist narrative about Black servants and the expendability of Black life. In this essay, I build on MacDonald's work by considering the significance for the play's racial fantasies of Erictho, a witch figure who functions as a kind of mirror image of the Carthaginian queen and whom Marston borrows from Lucan's *Pharsalia*. By focusing on this practitioner of "black rites," I suggest that the play somewhat counterintuitively offers audiences an affirmative vision of Blackness--perhaps even what Alexander Weheliye describes as a kind of racial assemblage. Imagined in terms of both corpse matter and reproductive fertility, Erictho embodies a kind of fleshly excess and arguably emerges as the play's more potent queen, thereby making space for a conception of Black life as not fully subjugated to whiteness.

The Queer Spaciality of Mary Queen of Scots by Susan Frye

My study of Mary Queen of Scots uses queer theory to upend traditional modes of analyzing this much-discussed queen. I begin by acknowledging the non-heteronormativity of ruling Renaissance queens generally, and their subsequent tendency to haunt us, through the process that Carla Freccero calls "queer spectrality." The decidedly queer aspects of Mary's life require that we crisscross definitions of gender and race, space and time, as well as other, related boundaries, whether national boundaries or the very thresholds of buildings and rooms created to represent the monarchy.

In my paper, I will focus on Mary Queen of Scots's multi-national identities in the queer spaces that she inhabited and so inflected, from birth to death. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sarah Ahmed discusses "how bodies are gendered, sexualized, and raced by how they extend into space." Raised in the French palaces that appropriated the Spanish and Italian Renaissances,

even as the French rapidly developed a national empire based on hegemonic, imperial conceptions of space, scientific discovery, and trade, Mary's body moved in spaces that she helped define and create. When she returned from France to rule Scotland, she brought French modes of living a royal existence to a Scotland whose architecture and conceptions of the monarchy were simultaneously Protestant, medieval, and French, to the extent that Scotland had already embraced the French Renaissance. Once imprisoned in England, Mary inhabited a succession of mouldering English castles and newly-built great houses, where she produced the needlework pictures summarizing her life interest in science, space, and empire: her phenomenological representation of her queer selves, continue to haunt theater, opera, television series, film, printed texts, and Westminster Abbey.

“You would never have taken her for an Englishwoman”: Anne Boleyn and the Politics of Race in 16th Century Europe

by Yasmine Hachimi

Anne Boleyn, the woman for whom King Henry VIII broke with the Roman Catholic Church and who he eventually executed, has become the most famous of Henry's six wives. As the daughter of an English diplomat, Anne was educated in the Netherlands, but in 1514, she left the Habsburg court and became a lady-in-waiting to the Queen Consort of France. In 1521, she returned to England, where she eventually caught Henry's eye. When Henry began courting Anne, gossip about her spread around the Tudor court and beyond, painting a picture of an exotic woman whose dark features and personality were often viewed as non-English. While early modern scholars often read rhetoric around Anne as dealing with foreignness, they have ignored the role that race played in the establishment of suspicion around her and in hostile and sexualized depictions of her by her contemporaries.

This essay explores the role race played in constructions of Anne Boleyn as not-quite-English, not-quite-royal, and even not-quite-human, within chronicles, letters, and dispatches written in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Kim F. Hall, in looking at the “dark ladies” of the sonnets, argues that England's rising global presence in the 16th and 17th centuries meant invocations of whiteness and darkness were also racializations and not just phenotypical descriptions--and failing to attend to this undercurrent leads to racial erasures by literary scholars. Building off of her work, I argue that descriptions of Anne Boleyn as “swarthy,” “sallow,” and “the night crow,” are racialized markers that cause us to question early modern constructions of whiteness. Jealous of her increasing wealth and position and fearful of shifting political alliances caused by her growing intimacy with Henry, Anne's contemporaries constantly question her whiteness in attempts to undermine her position.

Approaching these texts as examples of race-making expands our knowledge about the methods that Anne Boleyn's contemporaries used in order to cast her as non-English and even monstrous. My greater hope is that we question why this issue of Anne's race has not haunted the popular imagination or figured into the overwhelming scholarship on Anne.

Kavita Mudan Finn

My submission for this seminar will be a bit unusual, as my current project is an academic biography rather than a more traditional literary study. But it nonetheless concerns itself with how queenly desire and desirability are represented. In 1464, King Edward IV of England encountered a lady and her two sons beside a road near Grafton Regis—a chance meeting that not only made this lady, Elizabeth Grey, the next queen of England, but also fed into a chain of events that rekindled the civil wars of York and Lancaster in 1470. Elizabeth is linked with both a king's love (or lust, depending on the teller) and the eventual death of that king as well as the deaths of their two sons.

How do we talk about a queen's desires—personal or political? Why do they matter? Are premodern queens solely legible as desirable rather than desiring, since we so often see them through the male gaze? What does it mean that this moment in Elizabeth Woodville's life is held up as the one that defines her personality and agency?

I will focus on untangling the earliest sources for this encounter, beginning with a narrative poem by Antonio Cornazzano, written c. 1468 in the Sforza court of Milan. Similar versions, possibly even derived from Cornazzano's poem, appear in the 1483 diplomatic memo of Dominic Mancini and in Thomas More's *History of King Richard III* (c. 1513), but not in any of the contemporary chronicle sources from England—a curious lacuna and one of many in accounts of Elizabeth's life. This scene also features as William Shakespeare's introduction to Elizabeth in *Henry VI, Part 3*, one of the few comic moments in an otherwise dark and bloody play, where it serves as an early indication of her quick wits and rhetorical ability, both of which prove significant in the denouement of *Richard III*.