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SAA 2021

**Psychosomatic-Physiognomic, Religio-Racial Early Modern Race Formations:
The Phenotypological Synthesis of Greco-Roman, Old Testament, and Medieval Racial Thought**

Early modern Europe's dominant racial thinking constituted a recycled distillation of complementary tendencies, with the result being a prejudiced predisposition to interpret perceived physical differences of a constructed "race" as revelatory of inherent mental, moral, and, significantly, *religious* traits. Consequently, "races" were understood as being different from the inside out, due to a psychosomatic correlation between soul (Greek ψυχή or *psyche*) and body (Greek σῶμα or *sōma*), where race newly bodied forth soul *and* religion, as soul and religion conditioned newly-racialized body. Obscuring this early understanding of race there remains a prevailing critical failure to recognize: 1) that Greco-Roman/Aristotelian-Galenic humoral and Old Testament religious paradigms of racial origin were compatible at least insofar as both assumed some soul-body correspondence, thereby enabling their early modern synthesis; and 2) that Renaissance race-making also updated and distorted Aristotelian-Galenic humoral theory to coalesce with Christian religious prejudices influenced by the medieval composite of "race-as-religion" or "race-religion" as an inseparable category. Renaissance humoral theory adapted as it was subordinated to religious prejudices and prior racial paradigms realigned in a much more manifest correspondence between *psyche* and *sōma*. Early modern Europe's compounded conceptual unity of a soul-body relation, newly conditioned by religion, resulted in a potent, Christo-centric fusion of paradigms, one that formed a coherent, powerfully overdetermined ideology of race that enabled Europeans to exploit condemnatory religio-racial discourses against foreign races encountered via exploration, colonialism, and global trade.

Leighla Khansari
Ohio State University
SAA Seminar 2021: "Religion, Race and Bad Humour in Early Modern Drama"

"That Human Frailty": Pan-Christian Constancy, Racism, and Conversion in Philip Massinger's

The Renegado

Resorting to Galenic humoralism, Robert Burton highlights the extent to which one's religious identity could indeed affect the balance of the bodily humors and cause religious melancholy in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621). Burton regards Jews and Muslims as followers of a false religion and the devil. By following such false and superstitious beliefs, Burton reasons, the irreligious people have the devil stir their bodily humors resulting in religious melancholy which leads to inconstant behaviors, such as lusty actions, impatience, immutability, and ignorance, all of which contradict Christian notions of constancy. In this paper, I investigate the extent to which Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* (1624), articulates and reinforces such racialized and scientific views with regard to religious identity and behavioral characteristics of its Muslim female character, Donusa. The play's Muslim woman behaves in certain ways that associate her body with the dominant racialized perception of Muslim women, some of which were narrated in Burton's writings. The play also racializes Donusa by color-coding her religious and spiritual identity despite her supposed physical fairness. Nevertheless, despite this construction of Muslim women's racial inferiority, the play suggests that masculine Christian constancy, witnessed in the Christian Vitelli, has the potential to undo such racial deformity. Early modern cross-cultural encounters in the Mediterranean region shattered the Christian perception of their inherent masculine superiority, as various Christians converted to Islam in the lands under the Ottoman rule. *The Renegado*, I claim, reverses the frailty associated with Christians by having Vitelli practice a constancy that not only converts Donusa and purifies

her racial inferiority as a Muslim, but also guarantees the maintenance of masculine-Christian supremacy over their Islamic counterparts.

Lisa Jennings
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Bloodwork: The Humoral Transmutation of the Soul and Race in Othello

*Is it his use
Or did the letters work upon his blood,
And new-create this fault?*
Othello

Lodovico's query as cited in the above epigraph is one of the many instances in Othello where the improper motion of the blood is seen as the cause of perilous or immoral action. When Othello is convinced of Desdemona's infidelity, he utters, "O blood, blood, blood!" (3.3.453). This is not merely a moment of distress, but another instance of the movement of blood within the play and its correlation to multifarious constructions of selfhood. Medical theorists such as Robert Burton and Thomas Geminus presumed the blood to be the seat of the soul and the body. Geminus states that blood from the heart, "[quickens] all the membres of the bodye sythe the spirite that is receyued in them is the instrument and treasure and virtue of the soule." Burton also describes blood as "a most subtle vapour, . . . which is expressed from the blood, and the instrument of the soul, to perform all his actions; a common tie or medium betwixt body and soul." Thus, Othello's utterance is a multi-linguistic slippage equating his wife's soul with her blood, her supposed transgression with the humoral imbalance in her body, as well as his racial identity. This dynamic moves him to "right" the flow of Desdemona's blood, in the hopes of regaining his personhood. The play engages in this slippage between the humoral constituents of blood and the Christian elements of the soul, as in Brabantio's declaration, "O treason of the blood!" (1.1.168), in order to destabilize notions of race. Thus, racial difference is modulated via the rhetoric of humoral agency. Throughout the play, Othello labors to unite Christian doctrine with humoral sensibilities. However, he errs in his efforts to harmonize these two discourses. Othello's flaw is not that he comprehends too little, but that he has a surfeit of understanding.

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Leslie R. Malland
“Othello’s Duality: Religion in the Soul and on the Body”

Shakespeare presents multiple layers of duality in *Othello*: body/soul, private/public, internal/external, Muslim/Christian, civilized/barbarian. For this project, I explore Othello’s body/soul duality as it relates to his Muslim/Christian duality and his racial identity. I then consider the biopolitical implications associated with Othello’s racialized body within the context of the play’s early modern culture.

In Othello’s body, we see differences of race and religion come together on the stage. The duality of a converted Christian soul within a Muslim body portrays Othello locked in a battle with himself as he attempts to maintain his powerful disciplinary position within a white Christian society. His race, like his epilepsy, makes visible his internal struggle. Because race and racism function as elements of Foucauldian biopower meant to fragment the species into subgroups, there is a biopolitical reading to Othello’s struggles.

Further, his dual Christian/Muslim soul causes his humors to become off balanced, a symptom that causes his blood to become too hot and his passions to overcome his logic, according to Galenic Humoral Theory. By placing Othello’s religion visibly upon the body and drawing our attention to Othello’s penis by referencing the religious ceremony of circumcision, Shakespeare inscribes Othello’s body as one inherently foreign and lusty. Coupled with the humoral concept of heat/heated blood, Othello’s body becomes one at the mercy of distorted humors. Thus, my project studies Othello’s body itself where we see the intersections of race, religion, and humoral theory portrayed on the stage.

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2021 SAA Seminar
Religion, Race and Bad Humour in Early Modern Drama

"...be'st a good mooncalf": Challenging Essentialism in *The Tempest*

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Abstract

My project examines Caliban's minority in terms of his humoral vulnerabilities. I argue that his constitution is phlegmatic, from his physical appearance and the appellations *tortoise* and *mooncalf* to his mistaking of the physical euphoria of intoxication for religious epiphany. I show in particular how this delusion extends to a false pastoral experience producing no meaningful transformation in apprehension or circumstance.

My study is in the early stages, in that I'm returning to an older thought. The literary context of illusory pastoral is well-developed, and I'm looking now to ground it more deeply in early modern religious theory. In particular, I intend to examine the connection between religious authority and Caliban's rejection from human/humane/humanist experience.

Through Caliban, Shakespeare introduces a philosophical quandary, since Caliban clearly has the capacity of a perceiving soul. Sensory descriptions of the island take flight in his imagination and are elevated in verse descriptions of his experience. He is surrounded by archetypes of greed, love, authority, and service, seeming at times the only character in the play with the true capacity for poetic imagination. Yet, the diminishment of his bodily status, and by extension his humanist faculties, undermines his humanity and any human authority he might be able to access. I hope to show that Caliban represents the play's critique of religious essentialism—or at least how the play manifests contemporary expressions of it. More to come ...

Holly Pickett

Blackness as Religious Trope: Spiritual Abjection and Anti-Blackness in Early Modern English Drama

Building on the seminar's larger question about the relationship among religion, race, and the humours, I will ask whether conversion, apostasy, and despair are within subjects' control both within early modern theology and on the early modern stage? If religious states are inextricably bound up with bodily states, how did theologians and playwrights deal with the question of *choice*? Can humans choose the good if their spiritual state is a product of chemical balance or imbalance? Of course, the question is further complicated by theological debates in the period about whether conversion is a choice or predestined in the first place. Furthermore, how did the trope of "blackness as sinfulness" play into these complicated dynamics? Is there more than a racialized undertone to such rhetoric that redounds upon Black characters?

I will pose this series of questions to some key texts, mainly Jonson's *Masque of Blackness* and Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (along with its source), with a brief detour through *Hamlet*. I hypothesize that despair and spiritual abjection, which are so deeply associated with blackness in the early modern imagination, render despairing characters with a near-physicalized inability to change their states. When Faustus repeatedly fails to repent in the play, who or what is to blame? And how can that question help us further conceptualize the relationship among the trope of blackness, anti-Blackness, and despair?

Robert Burton and the Exculpation of the Suicidal

In his *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton cites the Dutch physician Pieter von Foreest (Petrus Forestus) to provide a story of two melancholy brothers.¹ In the story, the two brothers suffer from despair, eventually making “away with themselves” to alleviate their suffering. Two brothers were “censured to be infamously buried” so that the burial would “terrify others,” deterring would-be self-murderers from following suit.² Burton’s readers would be familiar with this response to suicide, even if they were unaware of Foreest’s Dutch context. Suicide was condemned legally and religiously, but the posthumous punishment was explicitly social: these brothers were to be displayed somewhere public, perhaps along a road or alleyway, “out of C[h]ristian buriall,” with “a stake” driven through their chests.³

By discussing the suicides’ symbolism, Burton engages with a cultural moment in which both religious and legal institutions corporeally punished the body; however, Burton is sensitive to how complicated suicide and despair were to the premodern mind, reframing religious discordance as impinging upon one’s rational capacities. The brothers’ narrative hints toward Burton’s final project: mediating the judgment of the desperate. While he primarily argues in the *Anatomy* that religious despair was a product of incorrect worship, Burton’s most significant contribution to despair’s reframing draws on the legal treatment of suicides and the *non compos mentis* tradition. I explore how, in writing the *Anatomy*’s many versions, Burton illustrates a view of suicide’s value consistent with a small but important trend in London that encouraged a tempered judgement of the desperate.

¹ Burton is citing Forestus’ *Observationum et Curationum Medicinalium* (1597).

² Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001), 1.4.1: 439.

³ *Ibid.*, fn. z.

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Reading and Writing Blood on the Early Modern Stage

After insincerely weeping at the news that Columbo plans to go to war, the Duchess in Shirley's *The Cardinal* asks "virtue" for forgiveness because she has "dissembled" (1.2.169). Only a few moments later, however, she worries whether she will be able to maintain this lie, saying, "how shall I / Behave my looks? The guilt of my neglect, / Which had no seal from hence, will call up blood / To write upon my cheeks the shame and story / in some red Letter" (1.2.175-79). In the first of these statements, the Duchess suggests that she can control the bodily manifestations of her passions. In the second, she doubts this ability, and suggests that her blood will create indelible signs of her passions in her face. But in both situations, the Duchess frames herself, and particularly her face, as a text for the men around her to read. When she succeeds in "[b]ehav[ing] her looks," she is able to "dissemble"; when she does not, her blood writes in "red Letter" the "story" of her true behaviors on her face.

From Shirley's *The Cardinal* and Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, to Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing* and Heywood's *A Maidenhead Well Lost*, many early modern plays associate dissembling with acts of reading and writing, particularly with respect to the behavior of women. For example, just as the Duchess "writes" her face, Columbo will later "read" his memory of her face to determine whether she truly loves him. This paper considers blood in the context of women's secrets and acts of reading in the context of Christian discernment to explore what can be learned by imagining bodies as texts.

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Melancholy and Monotheism in Burton and Shakespeare
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Robert Burton's division of "love melancholy" into two species—one with women as its object and one with God as its object—implicitly constructs Christian (and more specifically, Protestant Christian) monotheism as a condition of "good temper" that avoids the melancholic excess of idolatry and the defect of atheism. Burton's comparison of sexual love and religious belief bears a structural resemblance to the Hebrew Bible's analogy between idolatry and adultery, established in the parallel between the second and seventh commandments of the Decalogue and expanded in prophetic allegories figuring Israel's lapses from its covenant with God as adulterous affairs. A crucial distinction between the two is that Burton assumes a heterosexual male subject for his diagnosis of both love melancholy and religious melancholy while the biblical author constructs the Israelite subject as heterosexual female. Shakespeare's *Othello* offers a dramatic expression of the intersection between early modern theories of melancholy and theologies of monotheism. Othello's romance with and marriage to Desdemona arguably figure his religious conversion to Christianity. Desdemona's character would seem to represent a well-tempered balance between monogamy (to Othello) and neighborliness (to Cassio), between a jealous, melancholic monotheism and the sanguine sociability of Pauline *agape*. However, Othello's vacillations between melancholic love and jealous wrath, fed by the satanic Iago and issuing in murder and suicide, reveal Christianity to be a volatile and unstable synthesis of the "pagan idolatry" and "Jewish idolatry of the law" it claimed to have superseded.

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Yunah Kae
 SAA 2021, Religion, Race and Bad Humour in Early Modern Drama
 Abstract
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Stinking Comedies: Reading Humour and Race in *Every Man Out of His Humour*

Ben Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour* demonstrates the complexions and contradictions inherent of early modern humoralism. Asper's lengthy definition of "humour" at the beginning of the play especially points to the culture's understanding of the term as *both* an innate bodily trait and socially acquired affectation. Jonson's "humour play," which ostensibly hinges on the genre's comic premise of "outing" characters of their particular humours, in fact reveals the ambivalence of Renaissance humoralism in theorizing the relationship between physical exterior and moral interiority. Expanding upon Michael C. Schoenfeldt argument that Galenic medical theory supplies the culture's writers with a "vocabulary of inwardness" (8), this paper argues that a poetic discourse of ethical interiority developing through humoralism is necessarily inflected by parallel ideologies of race, precisely due to the materialism grounding the theory.

Through a close reading of Jonson's "playing" of classical comic theory within *Every Man Out*, I attempt to demonstrate that Jonson (re)deploys humoral notions and their embedded contradictions in order to distinguish a *comic* economy of hierarchized bodies: white, essentially *unreadable* bodies mercilessly lay open, read, and laugh at, those who are oppositely racialized as openly readable. In my readings, I put pressure on the play's curious focus on bad smells and tobacco-smoking. Jonson's innovative take on "outing" the humoral figures of Sogliardo and Fastidious (who copiously indulge in the latter habit) renders a new type of *racialized* comic action, and further, a morality (or ethics?) which hinges on an *innate* ability to correctly read exteriors.

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