Seminar 05: Classicizing Race in Early Modern England
Abstracts

Seminar Leader:
Joseph M. Ortiz
University of Texas at El Paso

Seminar Respondent:
Bernadette Andrea
University of California, Santa Barbara

Classicizing Turks in the Early Modern Period
Abdulhamit Arvas
University of Pennsylvania

In parallel to the Ottoman advancement into European territories, European writers increasingly questioned the lineage of Turks. While some authors connected Turks to Saracens and Scythians by stressing their religious difference, others linked Turks to the Trojans and later Romans with references to classical authorities including Virgil. On the other hand, the Ottomans, upon the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, claimed an imperial linkage with the Romans. Sultan Mehmed II was said to claim having taken revenge of Hector upon taking Constantinople, other sultans used the title of Caesar declaring themselves "New Romans." Ottoman intellectuals also produced theories that harmonized the Ottoman population with a Greco-Roman lineage. Reading English and Ottoman discourses about what constitutes a Turkish identity in the early modern period, this paper will trace the shifts in the producing the Turk as a racialized category in order to uncover racialized imperial politics and discourses in both cultural contexts.

The Kleopatra Problem: Early Modern Dramatic Uses (and Abuses) of Classical and Medieval Sources on the Female Ptolemaic Ruler
Christian M. Billing
University of Hull

Recent Classical scholarship by Schäfer, Hallet and Hersch has demonstrated on the one hand the complexities of representation that exist in classical Greek and Roman sources relating to Kleopatra VII as a female Ptolemaic ruler, and on the other (particularly through Tanaquil and Tullia in Livy) her position as the source of an emergent genealogy of Roman caricatures and satirical palimpsests of Greek mythic and historic Hellenistic queens. This innovative scholarship moves disciplinary thinking beyond the 'Dio = good', 'Augustan poetry (i.e., Vergil, Propertius and Horace) = bad' binary. At the same time, recent analysis considering Arabic sources that have been largely ignored by Western scholars (e.g., El Daly - who reads sources relating to

Kleopatra from the Muslim annexation of Egypt in the 7th Century CE until the Ottoman conquest in the 16th century) uncovers and reclaims a 'Virtuous Scholar' Kleopatra - a woman respected across North Africa for making significant contributions to the study of medicine, alchemy and mathematics. This paper will consider the complexity of the available sources relating to Kleopatra VII, and will set these differing trans-cultural traditions of historical and literary representation against her portrayal in Shakespeare, Jodelle and Cinthio - asking at what points race-making and misogyny lead the interpretative and political agendas of these white European men.

Or at least - it will begin to . . .

What is Hecuba to Titus?: Race, Pity, and Imperial Violence in *Titus Andronicus*
Dennis Britton
University of British Columbia

This paper will examine how Shakespeare employs the emotional resources of Euripidean tragedy to shape how audiences feel about Tamora and Titus in *Titus Andronicus.* After the murder of Tamora's son, Alarbus, at the end of act 1, Demetrius suggests that "The self-same gods that arm'd the Queen of Troy / With opportunity of sharp revenge / Upon the Thracian tyrant in his tent, / May favor Tamora, the Queen of Goths." Demetrius' response follows Tamora's passionate pleading for her son, a scene that has striking resemblances to Hecuba's pleading for the life of Polyxena in *Hecuba,* just as Tamora's revenge upon Titus patterns itself after Hecuba's revenge upon Polymester. Yet, for as much as Shakespeare sets Tamora up to be like Hecuba, who too is a conquered foreign queen who suffers great loss, the play shifts pity away from the conquered Goths and toward the Romans. As Emrys Jones has noted, Titus becomes a male Hecuba, but this Roman appropriation of Trojan suffering, I argue, is made possible through blackening and animalizing Tamora and her desires; the play works hard to keep the audience from feeling pity for victims of imperial violence. This paper will also consider the extent to which the emotions of Greek tragedy threaten the racial and imperial politics of Virgilian epic.

Self-Consuming Enemies: Endocannibalism and Otherness in Ovid and *Titus Andronicus*
Stephen Cohen
Central Connecticut State University

The study of early modern colonialism has familiarized us with the role of classical depictions of cannibalism in the demonization and racialization of American natives: depictions drawn primarily from Herodotus of the cannibal as savage Other, who could then be "discovered" and justifiably subjugated in the New World. Less discussed in this context is another classical treatment of the cannibal, not as radically Other but as fundamentally the same or the self: drawn from the myth of Saturn, Seneca's *Thyestes*, and Ovid's tale of Philomela, this cannibal eats within the community or family, practicing not the New World "savage's" exocannibalism

but an endocannibalism all the more horrifying for its solipsistic, self-destructive intimacy. This essay will argue that it was the latter rather than the former that played the more significant role in early modern English thought on the nature and significance of cultural and racial difference. At the end of the sixteenth century when England's colonial ambitions were balanced if not overshadowed by concerns about the threat to national identity posed by expanding immigration and mercantile importation, the English imagination was less concerned about being eaten by the Other than about eating or incorporating otherness. It was a concern expressed through the culinary xenophobia characteristic of the period's gastro-medical literature—but not, strikingly, through the rhetoric of cannibalism. Instead, cannibalism was used to express anxiety about eating the same or the self, a figurative intracultural endocannibalism often depicted as the logical extreme of an abstemiousness or refusal of external nutrition rooted in a fear of incorporating otherness. The essay will offer a reading of the use of Ovid's Philomela in *Titus Andronicus*' conflict between the Andronici and their Gothic adversaries to locate at the heart of the play an intractable tension between the fear of incorporating the Other and the horror of consuming the self.

The Racial and Sexual Politics of Bondage in *Antony and Cleopatra*
Katherine Gillen
Texas A&M University, San Antonio

In this essay, I explore the discourse of bondage that runs throughout *Antony and Cleopatra*, used both to express Antony's infatuation with Cleopatra and, I contend, to interrogate the boundaries of white subjectivity within imperial contexts. While this discourse—used for example when Antony says that he must break his "strong Egyptian fetters"—is often treated as merely metaphorical, the torture of enslaved people within the play elucidates its material and ethical stakes and points to the significance of slavery to the racial work enacted in Shakespeare's Classical appropriations. Slavery was fundamental to Classical political thought, as the purportedly inherent enslavability of some people, particularly the colonized, inversely defines the liberty and mastery of others, a condition coded as whiteness in Shakespeare plays. Elsewhere in this project, I suggest that *Julius Caesar* charts the ascendency of Antony's imperial vision, which incorporates common Romans into a shared sense of whiteness as property. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare puts pressure on this imperial whiteness, exposing its fragility through Antony's sexual and political submission to Cleopatra, who is depicted as racially other. Antony seeks to recuperate his white mastery both by inflicting corporeal violence on the enslaved and by denigrating Cleopatra as a tyrant, a figure who inappropriately keeps Roman citizens in bondage. Tyrants were often depicted as both effeminate and foreign, a sign of their illegitimacy, but here this discourse is applied to an actual Egyptian woman, thus exposing the intersections of misogyny and racism undergirding colonial white supremacy.

Singularity and The Second Death of Shakespeare's Cleopatra
Benjamin Hilb

Francis Marion University

This essay argues that Shakespeare, picking up on a classical trope for Egyptians as incomparable, "resembl[ing] only themselves" according to Hippocrates, figures Cleopatra as radically singular. This singularity perhaps suggests that Cleopatra's suicide can be read as a figure for what Deleuze calls "the second death," an event that casts a shadow over the Roman Empire, making possible new modes of life in resistance to it.

Demonizing and Beautifying Black Skin in *Love's Labour's Lost*
Timothy Love
University of North Texas

This essay seeks to affirm that Rosaline in *Love's Labour's Lost* is in fact a black woman character, and explores Shakespeare's desire to refute historical tendencies to pair blackness with ugliness via speaking through Biron (Berowne) during the fourth Act. After falling in love with a slave or servant named Rosaline, the celibate Biron argues that black is in fact beautiful. Departing from exoticism, Biron poetically, logically, and humorously outdoes the King, Dumaine, and Longueville's stereotypical, highly racist remarks, channeling or perhaps foreshadowing Shakespeare's "dark lady" Sonnets which both beautify black skin and push back against forces which demonize it. Biron's beautification of blackness seeks to combat racist insults on a personal level, exhibiting an alignment with non-exoticism. He doesn't dwell on the black beauty of Rosaline without implicative depth, indicating substance through a type of anti-racism. This essay challenges the rhetoric of historical critics who reject or ignore the strong evidence in *Love's Labour's Lost* which allude to Rosaline's skin color, and the significant metaphorical stereotypes associated with her black skin. Whereas scholarly systematic interpretations define every mentioning of blackness (as it relates to Rosaline) strictly in metaphorical terms devoid of racial contextualization—even statements which appear to directly describe skin color—I emphasize Shakespeare's proclivity to systematically couple or juxtapose the physical with the metaphorical in plays which feature black people. This juxtapositional binary is present in *Titus Andronicus, Othello, The Merchant of Venice,* and *The Tempest.*

"That knight should knighthood euer so haue shent?": Classicizing Race and Rape in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*
Kirsten N. Mendoza
University of Dayton

Race in Antiquity attempted to explain, categorize, and determine differences between people as well as their differential treatment. For the ancient Greeks and Romans, then, race was both ideological and political, just as it was for the early moderns. But, a study of race would be incomplete without an inquiry into its connections with rape, which not only occupied similar registers of the ideological and political, but was also intimately yoked to discourses of lineage,

to the stories of the foundations of empires, and to the violences that either led to the heroic upheaval against tyranny or had been the mark of the undoing of a people. Racialized discourses of rape designated whose bodies deserve protection and whose persons were open to invasive touch. In Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene,* book 2, Duessa and Archimago accuse Redcrosse Knight and Arthur of raping Duessa (the violent encounter—the "stripping of Duessa"—that occurred in book 1). This paper analyzes how the influence of classical texts reveals the dismissal of Duessa's rape accusation as part of shifting forms of English race-thinking tied to imperial and colonial processes in the sixteenth century.

"Who knowes not England once was like a Wildernesse": The Environment of Settler Antiquarianism
Daniel Normandin
George Mason University

Spurred by New World reports, sixteenth-century humanists renewed classical developmental narratives that framed human history as a gradual emergence from forest- and cave-dwelling primitivism; all peoples, English, European, and native alike, must walk, or be prodded, along this path. Because ethnic difference was thus read temporally, colonizers viewed the taming of the ancient British under Roman occupiers as itself a precondition of English superiority over colonized peoples, a proof of the cultural supremacy granted by historical advantage. For promoters and planters eyeing Ireland and America, the Roman colonizers' most instructive legacy was their perceived "improvement" of this barbarism, a forcible, violent education to which the early modern English owed their civilization. As an "improved" nation, the English could replicate their past experience and improve others in turn. Colonial promoter William Strachey, for whom civilizing the Virginia Algonquian was akin to a father's "violence to his child, when he beats him, to bringe him to goodnes," insisted that "had not this violence, and this Iniury, bene offred vnto vs by the Romanis...even by *Iulius Caesar* himself...we might yet haue lyved overgrowne Satyrs, rude, and vntutred, wandring in the woodes, dwelling in Caues, and hunting for our dynners (as the wyld beasts in the forrests for their prey)." In my paper, I follow the traces of this settler rhetoric in early modern antiquarians' depictions of ancient Britain. I read Roman representations of British barbarism as quoted and discussed in the works of Camden, Speed, and Clapham. I argue that these writings, like Strachey's, emphasize a specifically ecological history of "progression" from pastoral nomadism to settled agriculture. By connecting *ethnos* and environment, they provided a framework for the portrayals of local primitivism by Spenser, Shakespeare, and other literary authors.

Trojan origins and 'our little world' in *The Lamentable Tragedy of Locrine*
Curtis Perry
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Locrine (printed 1595), takes as its subject matter Britain's legendary Trojan origins, beginning with the last days of Aeneas's descendant Brutus (founder and namesake) and ending with civil

strife and the death of his eldest son Locrine. It is a messy play, both in the sense of having internal inconsistencies that have seemed to indicate compositional patchwork and in the sense of being difficult to boil down to any clear ideological agenda or point of view: the text as we have it is chock full of ideas, motifs, theatregrams, etc. that bear upon the racial implications of Britain's Trojan origins, but these often seem to pull in different directions. Trojan origins carry a predictably patriotic charge at times in the play, for instance, but Priam is also described as having been 'grand emperor of barbarous Asia' (3.2.44). The play also has an interesting array of conflicting ideas about Roman-style imperial ambition, and about England's relation to globalization. The first part of the play features a Scythian invasion that occasions a range of racialized imaginings; the second half, which features Locrine's besotted hubris, treats as British some of the faults associated with Roman and Eastern despots in other English texts. I hope to explore these contradictory clusters of theatrical ideas as interconnected, and to read the play as a snapshot or time-capsule representing some messy Elizabethan thinking about Rome, race, empire, and globalization.

Feminization and the Making of White Supremacy in *Dido, Queen of Carthage* and *The Renegado*
Lauren Robertson
Columbia University

Through the Middle Ages and into early modernity, the most popular book of Virgil's *Aeneid* did not detail any of Aeneas's heroic exploits in Troy or Italy, but an episode that put his status as the future founder of Rome at risk: his romantic interlude in Carthage with Dido. When Christopher Marlowe adapted Book 4 for the stage in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, he included a moment from Virgil's epic narration especially well-suited to performance: wearing clothing given to him by Dido, Aeneas works busily to raise her Carthaginian empire. In Marlowe's imagining, Aeneas's feminization by his lover is a danger both to him and Rome—remaining in Carthage, the Trojan Achates worries, will "Effeminate our minds inured to war"—but as I will suggest in this paper, it is also the crucible through which Aeneas is simultaneously racialized and readied for his future as the founder of an eventual empire. Aeneas's preeminence, at once singular and representative of Roman supremacy, requires Dido's fairness to come into being; his as-yet-unrealized greatness is manifested as the whiteness that, for much of the play, he shares with her. Thirty years later, Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* would echo this moment of Marlowe's tragedy, though with a crucial difference: when the Venetian Vitelli dons the clothing given to him by the Algerian Donusa, he risks losing an identity he already possesses— his Christianity—rather than one he has yet to realize. In attending to the deployment of this trope through several decades of experimentation in the commercial theater, this paper will identify feminization as a key transformative process by which the idea of supremacy was embodied as whiteness on the early modern stage.

Nonhumanity, Race, and *Romanitas* in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*
Emily L. Sharrett

Loyola University Chicago

This essay interrogates the ways categories of nonhumanity—from mineral to weather patterns and more—represented in classical texts informed racialized ethics and politics voiced in early modern England. More specifically, my paper explores how nonhumanity functions in narratives of racial difference mobilized in early modern constructions of *Romanitas*, especially as evidenced in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. My larger project contends sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers understood *Romanitas* as a theory of life that established power differentials across binaries including the material and conceptual, the eternal and finite, humanity and nonhumanity, and the godly and barbaric. In this essay, I support that conclusion by reading moments in *Titus* when characters make ethical and political claims by appealing to Roman ideals that meld together discourses of nonhumanity and race. I expect to close read speeches in 2.3 in which characters formulate racialized ethical stakes after considering the natural world and classical philosophy, such as when Aaron dramatizes using tangible dirt for personal means, thus nodding to the ongoing commercialization and exploitation of natural resources and people in and beyond the borders of early modern England.

Re-Sourcing and Re-Racing *The Comedy of Errors*
Donovan Sherman
Seton Hall University

This essay conducts a reading of *The Comedy of Errors* that seizes on its repeated invocations of slavery and bondage as not only references to Roman servitude but also engagements with the nascent categories of race in Shakespeare's day—and to slavery's legacies in legal and social structures of the present. While Roman slavery may have depended less on racial markers of difference, the recurring racialization of casting decisions in centuries of the play's performances points to uncanny resonances with race in its production and reception histories. Might, then, the imbrications of slavery's historical and sociological forms in *Comedy of Errors* suggest a contact point between the classical sense of bondage as contingent and the more modern understanding of slavery's ontological formation of Blackness? The essay also takes on a broader consideration of how de-colonizing and globalizing Shakespeare also entails de-colonizing and globalizing his sources, and offers some experimental notes towards a performative dramaturgy of the play that honors its peculiar cultural texture while also recognizing how performance reveals its fugitive histories—histories entangled with a racial politics all but invisible in the text. Throughout, I draw on the work of performance studies as well as classical scholars who have labored to "race" the ancient archives from which Shakespeare drew inspiration.