

Yunah Kae

SAA 2024 – New Objects in Critical Race Studies

Abstract

The Withering White Woman –  
Race, Family, and Trivial Tragedy in *A Woman Killed With Kindness*

This paper examines the interconnections between early modern constructions of domesticity and race formation within seventeenth century domestic tragedy. Feminist scholars such as Frances Dolan and Vivania Comensoli have shown how this sub-genre centering domestic crimes such as adultery and spousal murder reproduce and contest notions of the private household and domesticity that were becoming consolidated in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Taking a new approach, this paper attempts to demonstrate that a consideration of the comedy embedded within this ostensibly tragic genre allows us to see how the development of the “domestic sphere” intersects with race-making, especially, the construction of whiteness. To do this work, I focus on Thomas Heywood’s popular *A Woman Killed With Kindness* (1607). Rather than reading the play’s tragic ending of Anne Frankford’s self-induced starvation and death as a grim cautionary tale against women’s adultery and a deserved punishment of the “unruly woman,” this paper puts pressure on the play’s generic ambiguity. I suggest that the ephemerality of female whiteness becomes paradoxically underscored in Anne’s withering body; the very process of her physical erasure through starvation (paleness, emaciation) is precisely what allows her to re-embody female whiteness and chastity. In coming face-to-face with the generic and epistemological ambiguity of the play (are viewers supposed to laugh at the over-the-top tragic ending?) the audience is also forced to confront the paradox or impossibility of the construction of whiteness.

**Susanne Wofford**

**Title:** “Race and Recognition in Plautus’s *Rudens* (*The Rope*) (with brief reference to *Twelfth Night* and *Pericles*)”

**Abstract:**

This paper explores different forms of racialized slavery and foreignness in ancient Roman comedy and their implications for Shakespeare’s Mediterranean recognition scenes. Urvashi Chakravarty and others have noted the role of the Ethiopian slave in Terence’s *Eunuchus*, but much work on slavery in the Roman comedies does not see racialized difference as a common component of these slave plays. In this paper I look at Plautus’s

*Rudens* (*The Rope*), where two young female slaves who have been forced into prostitution and lost in a shipwreck become involved in a complex recognition plot. One of them, Palaestra, is recognized as an Athenian citizen who had been stolen by pirates as a young child and sold into slavery and is described as beautiful. The other, Ampelisca, is described as a charming, sexy, “bronzed, tanned” [subaquilum] figure of Venus [Lewis and Short “**sūb-āquīlus**, a, um, *adj.*, somewhat dusky, brownish, tawny (ante- and post-class.): Plaut. Rud. 2, 4, 9]. This example of what seems to be this racially differentiated slavery leads us to very different kinds of reconciliation or closure—in one, the white, Athenian citizen is recognized as the daughter of Daemones, and given citizen (free) status, enabling her to marry the wealthy citizen young man who had initially planned to buy her as a slave. Ampelisca, in contrast, is bought out of slavery, and married to another slave who is simultaneously gaining his freedom through wit, the plot, and capacity to claim a share of the treasure in the pimp’s trunk rescued from the shipwreck. In this paper I explore how citizen status in the Roman comedies plays against racialized slavery including racialized foreignness, and consider the question of cross-marriages. How much does this complicated set of Roman intertexts complicate our understandings of Shakespeare’s recognition scenes in *Twelfth Night* and *Pericles*? In a larger sense I am interested in pursuing further the influence of Roman comedy and Greek romance on early modern plays and their sometimes racialized constructions of otherness and foreignness.

## The Stage Prop and Early Modern Racialization

Jean E. Howard

This brief paper explores the racial effects created by the deployment and re-deployment of stage props on English stages in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. I argue for the generative role of material stagecraft in racecraft, that is, in the creation of racialized system of meaning and therefore of racial subordination and racial supremacy at a particular historical moment. The paper does not offer sustained readings of individual plays, but instead looks at instances of prop usage and the ways in which the racial effects of particular props are mobilized by an assemblage of factors within and across plays. While a few props may connote racialized meaning fairly straightforwardly—turbans and scimitars might be two such props—more often racialized effects do not inhere in the object as much as they accrue to it by the way it is utilized in a particular theatrical moment, carries racial implication from a prior stage usage, or gathers its racial aura from its relation to an assemblage of other textual and performance features. For example, I examine how the glove which Beatrice-Joanna drops in the first act of *The Changeling* acquires a racialized meaning from DeFlores’ retrieval and manipulation of it, the cascade of animalizing rhetoric that follows in the wake of DeFlores’ gesture, and then Beatrice-Joanna’s reactions. In turn, the racializing effects of the initial glove exchange add

to the racial layering of later theatrical moments. I examine several other instances when “hide props” such as Beatrice-Joanna’s gloves become the vehicles for racializing effects. I draw throughout on the work of William West, Andrew Sofer, Patricia Cahill, Alexander Weheliye, Noemie Ndaiye, and Ian Smith.

Erika Boeckeler

Northeastern University

SAA 2024: Abstract

### Print’s Animals

This paper examines printers’ shop signs to study how early print engages in white world-making. Nearly all of the references to color in printers’ shop signs involve animals. When an animal’s color is specifically noted in the written record, it generally falls into one of two options: white or black. These two colors are not neutral in the printing industry, whose final product consists of “black” ink on “fair” paper. Many race scholars, drawing upon Kim Hall’s foundational *Things of Darkness* (1995), have noted the complex visual and verbal use of those terms, “black” and “fair,” in establishing early modern English racial discourses. Using an animal studies framework, I am to demonstrate that racecraft guides the choice of animals and the decision to chromatically highlight them.

For the most part, we don’t know what these shop signs looked like, and so this paper examines printers’ devices that may have duplicated what appeared on the printer’s shop sign. In particular, I focus on Henry Wykes’s [Blacke] Elephant/Oliphante, whose color in the printed record oscillates between being black and unspecified in his imprints, and appears visually as paper-colored in his extant device. With Wykes’s sign, I show how Africa, and African blackness, are used to bolster a (white) English Protestant reading public.

Walter Cohen

## Renaissance and Early Modern African Literature

My "objects" are Renaissance and early modern works of African letters and literature—Mediterranean/North African, Sub-Saharan, and diasporic. I begin with a distinction between Renaissance and early modern literature, collectively defined as the period ranging roughly from the Black Death to the French Revolution (1350-1800). My focus, however, will be on texts closer in time to Shakespeare's plays and poems. The aim is to assess the extent to which this writing is usefully understood as part of the Renaissance and especially of early modernity, in the way that recently has been argued—persuasively, in my view—for Chinese, Japanese, and South Asian letters of the era. My very tentative view is that it is reasonable to include at least some African texts under the rubric of the Renaissance (diasporic texts only) and more in the loose category of early modernity (both diasporic writings and materials from Africa itself). The main bases for the connections implicit in these claims are trade (in slaves and other "goods"), religious conversion, and conquest. But I have no stake in the outcome of the inquiry one way or the other. This is the kind of project where the goal is less to demonstrate influence, if any, than to get a fuller picture of what was going on at the time in other parts of the world, to understand—if you will—the world literary system of the time. The conclusion will then try to assess what relevance—again, if any—these findings have for our view of Shakespeare and, very loosely, his contemporaries.

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SAA 2024  
Revised 2/26/24

### Wilkins' *The Discovery of a World in the Moone* and its SF Whiteprints

Abstract:

During the sixteenth century, an uptick in publications about the moon and travel to the moon emerged in early modern England. The moon, often considered a "new world," reflected colonial fantasies and racemaking strategies. What early modern literature about the moon and plural worlds reveal are antecedent strategies, or what I shall call here, whiteprints of sf worldmaking. Specifically, the whiteprints undergirding sf worlds that

reflect whiteness as its impetus for worldbuilding. Whiteprints borrows from the architectural design and planning of blueprints; however, the *white* in whiteprints highlights the strategies of white worldmaking.

My new object for exploration here is John Wilkins' *The Discovery of a World in the Moone* (1638). Wilkins' *Discovery* provides a rich site to explore whiteprinting because of the text's endeavor to prove thirteen propositions about the moon, including its inhabitants. Wilkins draws on ancient and contemporary knowledge about the moon to make his own educated guesses, but he proposes to his readers that the less certain knowledge about the moon, and the less provable will be left to reader "fancie." Wilkins may believe he escapes "fancie," but considering the power of language to shape reality, Wilkins in effect contributes to fictions of white worldmaking that we often see in modern sf.

Aaron Kitch

SAA 2024: "New Objects in Critical Race Studies"

**"My Hounds are Bred Out of the Spartan Kind":  
Race and Animal Breeding in Early Modern England"**

Wandering the forest with Hippolyta to observe the rites of May in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Theseus sings the praises of his Spartan hunting dogs. He celebrates their physical appearance, their mellifluous "cry," and their hunting prowess. Although the play does not describe the dogs in explicitly racial terms, its detailed focus on the breed characteristics of the animals participates in broader questions about the racial lives of animals bred for aristocratic pleasure and utility in early modern England, a connection that Shakespeare makes more explicit in *Macbeth* where the Scottish nobleman Ross refers to Duncan's royal horses as "minions of their race" (2.4.15-16). Lacking an etymological origin in Greek or

Latin, “race” first appears with reference to animal breeding in medieval Italy before migrating northward at some point in the fourteenth century.

Where aristocratic estates had lavished attention on falcons in earlier centuries, sixteenth-century noblemen pursued new efforts to create pure “races” of dogs in early modern Europe. Early modern treatises on animal breeding by George Gascoigne and others helped to establish dog and other animal “breeds” as ideals of size, appearance, and animal behavior that could be monitored, regulated, and reproduced over time. Such racialized animal breeding differed in important ways from these later instances of racialized breeding, it nonetheless participates in what Nicole Shukin calls the “zoo-ontological production of species difference” and modern systems of biopower. Enhanced attention to the purity of dog “races” in the sixteenth century helped to introduce a cult of pedigree to animal owners in England and elsewhere while also applying new taxonomies of difference to such animals in ways that helped to support racial hierarchies in human beings. Englishmen saw their own nobility mirrored in the animals they produced, just as the hunt both reflected and performed a version of masculine nobility.

Anna-Claire Simpson

SAA: New Objects in Critical Race Studies

Children and Whiteness in Jacobean Masques

This paper will consider child performers in the crafting and mediation of whiteness in Jacobean masques. The Jacobean masque is a particularly racially-charged object of inquiry, often notable for its racialized performance of nonwhite others in displaying the splendors of England's colonial/global endeavors and for its exoticization of non-English places in their transposition to a localized English courtly setting. As a celebration of nobility and expression of England's colonial ventures and imperial fantasies, the aspirational quality of the masque is itself an articulation of the performativity of whiteness; of whiteness as an "event," to quote Arthur L. Little. The performance as an aspiration of that which it aspires to embody and replace is a vital framework for understanding whiteness in a premodern context. Masques typically featured mixed-status performers (professionals and noble amateurs) and mixed audiences (by virtue of the procession), so the masque's celebration of the nobility and all it wished to represent—whiteness specifically—was accomplished by borrowing from the symbolic potential of childhood and non-aristocratic child performers. By symbolic potential, I mean childhood's presumed innocence, its ephemerality, and its capacity to stand in for a desired past. That symbolism works in tandem with childhood's performance: the ways in which children can play both human and animal and the puppet-like qualities ascribed to children which make them ideal vehicles for God's message. Children's bodies and the performance of childhood in the construction of the privileged status of whiteness reveal the ways in which whiteness operated in exchange with the non-elite—an exchange which precedes the more concrete ways in which "white people" would come to be understood as such. In other words, children's roles in masques can reveal how whiteness was not only about status, but was something already in the process of being thought of or imagined as more ubiquitous.

Productions such as Chapman's *The Memorable Masque* (1613), which featured an antimasque of at least "a dozen little boys, dressed like baboons," Jonson's *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* (1618), representing "Pygmies" played by "twelve masqued boys in the guise of frogs. ... [who] danced together, assuming sundry grotesque attitudes," and Jonson's sequel to *The Masque of Blackness*, *The Masque of Beauty* (1608) all provide us with quite stark examples of the display or spectacle of whiteness and its painstaking construction, performance, and its intangibility even for those elite figures for whom it was proprietary. Further, that non-noble child performers were so fundamental to its expression, this paper considers how the Jacobean masque imagined whiteness beyond its embodiment by the monarch and those in proximity to him.

Miranda Alksnis

#### The 1598 Mantuan performance of *il Pastor Fido*

In November 1598, Giambattista Guarini's famous pastoral *il Pastor Fido* was performed before Margaret of Austria, newly married consort to Philip II of Spain. I examine this singular performance with specific attention to its little-studied "intermezzi." Nestled between scenes from Guarini's playtext, new and lavishly-produced interludes display fishermen in canoes "dressed in the Indian style"; "savage" gods; a stylized flyover of Spain's colonial holdings; and, in a final sensory assault upon the indoor audience, a dance complete with burning torches. Studies on sixteenth-century Italian performance that



name these intermezzi make nothing of their confused allusions to North American, South Asian, and/or Southeast Asian indigeneity. The intermezzi were actually more commented-upon the play itself, troubling the playtext as self-evident object of study. The details of this particular performance invite us to do a double take, to look more closely the second time when studying Renaissance pastoral.

Practitioners and patrons intended the entire performance as an extended appeal for Spanish political protection, and staging choices in the intermezzi reference printed ethnographic accounts of European colonization. These interludes both clarify the Italian stake in European colonization as bonafide para-social imperialism and have local implications. Theater in Mantua was produced by the city's Jewish community, and practitioners such as Leone de Sommi, in exchange for nominal protection by Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga. These pseudo-ethnographic intermezzi may therefore have been performed by Mantuan Jews for the monarch of a violently anti-semitic regime—or not: the interpretive possibilities for “reading” this production multiply with each archival lacuna. The 1598 *Pastor Fido* performance frustrates simple identity-based accounts of agency in theatrical production, telling a more complex racial and ethnic story about stage production and performance.

Adele Lee

Provisional Title: “Betwixt and Between:” The Role of Mixed-Race Shakespearean Actors

Pursuing new directions in the subject of Shakespeare and race and addressing some of the gaps in current conversations about representation, casting, performance, diversity and inclusion, my paper will broadly explore the ways in which Critical Mixed Race Studies (CMRS) might help us move beyond a monoracial “black and white” mentality. More specifically, arguing that mixed-race identities and experiences have been marginalized

and considered “incompatible with ... the canonical boundaries of the field [and] deleterious to the struggles of traditional communities of color and their monoracial imperative,” my paper attends to those – especially actors – who’ve been excluded from critical discussions and who’ve either been integrated into the racial order as White - based on phenotypes and/or power structures - or have chosen or been pressured to identify with either one heritage or another.

Shakespeare was certainly interested in “betwixt and between” characters – The changeling in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Aaron and Tamora’s baby in *Titus Andronicus*, the child of the “clown” in *The Merchant of Venice* – and Early Modern Race Studies has paid considerable attention to the playwright’s treatment of miscegenation and interracialism. Building on this scholarship, my paper will examine why certain characters, for instance Caliban and Cleopatra, have historically been presented as mixed race on stage and screen, and why mixed-race actors are typically cast in/ confined to certain roles (like the bastard in *King Lear*). By reflecting on the experiences and contributions of multiracial-identified actors in the Shakespeare industry, my paper hopes to broaden the scope of inquiry to include discussion of performance history, theatre practice, and critical debates all through the lens of Critical Mixed Race Studies.

Kayla Shearer

SAA 2024: New Objects in Critical Race Studies

12/8/2023

### Color Iconography in the Afterlife in Early Modern England

This paper will examine how depictions of ghosts and souls in early English literature suggests already-acknowledged tensions between Christian color iconography and racial categorization based on skin color. The idea of the soul in the early modern English imagination was always already encoded in black and white through the Christian color iconography of sin and purity. This color scheme of morality mapped onto living bodies in straightforward, if uneasy, ways: literature of the period abounds with white characters

bemoaning the “blackness” of their sinful souls or actions, while at the same time tales of Christian missionaries’ successful conversion of Moors or Africans often touted the idea that they had created a white soul in a black body. However, depictions of the soul *after death* in both English literature and in visions of the afterlife universally diverted from this simplistic paradigm to convey the soul’s condition. While purity was still represented through extremes of whiteness (to the point of souls glowing), sinfulness was not depicted through blackness, but rather through tattered or improper clothing. For example, although we are explicitly told that King Hamlet’s soul was sent to the afterlife in the full realization of his sins, when his ghost enters the stage the guards determine the state of his soul by its armor, *not* by its color. Other tales of souls escaped from purgatory to demand tithes and prayers from loved ones mark progress by mode of dress; each time the ghost appears, it is in cleaner, better garb, representing its journey through the process of salvation by clothing and not color. This disparity, I will argue, is the outcome of the problematic overlap between Christian moral symbolism, which implies an afterlife where spectral bodies are colored not by race but by deed, with contemporary racial categorization based on skin color in early modern England.

Corinne Zeman

SAA: New Objects in Critical Race Studies

April 2024

**Sootface: The Racing of Cuckoldry in European Theater**

**Abstract:** Across the stages of early modern Europe, comic dramas used face-blackening episodes to discipline the desires of overweening fops, *senes amatores*, and citizen cuckolds. Soot functioned as a comic mechanism of sexual correction—a visual trope routinely deployed by playwrights to racialize the economic and sociomartial politics of cuckoldry. In this article, I collate Italian, French, Spanish, and English dramas, including neo-Terentian closet dramas, the commedia *scenari* of Giambattista Andreini and Carlo Goldoni, the Siglo de Oro comedies of Tirso de Molina and Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, and an assortment of ribald Stuart farces by George Chapman, Aphra Behn, and Edward Ravenscraft. All feature a little-studied subtype of the *exclusus amator* plot. In each of these materials, a spurned suitor is simultaneously expelled from the domestic interior and made to suffer unwitting “sootface,” his blackened visage neatly illustrating for audiences his exclusion from and potential antagonism to the sanctity of white marital relations. Across linguistic divides, this racialized theatergram would incorporate energetic sexual punning that lexically conflated female genitalia with sooty furnaces, a metaphor which links womanhood to the hearth as a site of reproductive futurity and domestic care while simultaneously freighting women’s bodies with the threat of impurity or an allegorical staining of white domesticity. These comic dramas ultimately evince how the laughter generated by spectacles of physical comedy could function in performance to firm the borders of the white household.

### **‘A Horned Man’s a Monster’: Reading Race in the Cuckold Catalogue**

Alex Lewis

Ubiquitous in art and literature from 1400 to 1700, cuckolds in early modernity are the topic of both endless (and endlessly repetitive) joking and profound cultural anxiety. My paper proposes the cuckold as a quasi- or para-racialized figure. Ensnared in cuckold plots or obsessed with cuckolding others, racial others in Shakespeare like Othello or Aaron the Moor suggest a convergence between the thematics of cuckoldry in early modern literature and nascent racial discourses in this period. “A horned man’s a monster,” laments Othello,

fusing the deceived husband's allegorical descent into sub-humanity with his racialized social status.

Analogies of this type are by no means unique to Shakespeare. My investigation here centers on a prolific but largely unstudied genre known as the "cuckold catalogue"—parodic taxonomies that describe and categorize various kinds of cuckolds. Appearing in English, Italian, French, and Spanish, these texts imagine cuckolds as an abject imaginary community, a subaltern population that they compare to Jews, Muslims, and pre-Christian or heretical Europeans. Locating the cuckold catalogue as a point of intersection between early modern comedy and racial taxonomies, I suggest this genre's relevance to the construction of non-Western sexuality in seventeenth-century travel writing.