CHAPTER 4.8

Early modern race-work: History, methodology and politics

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While many scholars are now ready to accept the deeply embedded history of race in the early modern and pre-modern periods, scholarship on race in these periods has enjoyed a relatively short history. And yet much ground has been covered between the initial forays of Eldred Jones (1965) into the representation of Africans on the early modern stage and the current explosion of scholarship emerging in print as well as in conferences, special symposia, podcasts and many online forums. Any scholar wishing to delve into the now substantial body of critical and theoretical work on early modern race will find a wealth of entry points and pathways that diverge and intersect over the last decades of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first. In their introduction to *Shakespeare Quarterly*'s first special issue dedicated to discussions of race (2016), Peter Erickson and Kim F. Hall outline three phases of early modern scholarship following the work of Jones. These include the 'sustained collective movement of the 1990s' (4) consisting of foundational work by Ania Loomba (1989), Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (1994) and Kim Hall (1995); an expansive body of more diffused work produced between 2000 and 2015; and the then present and future period of work for which Erickson and Hall suggest a number of possible directions. Dennis Britton's useful 'Recent Studies' on early modern race (2015) provides a comprehensive overview of books and articles spanning from 1965 to 2015. And Urvashi Chakravarty's subsequent discussion of 'The Renaissance of Race and the Future of Early Modern Race Studies' (2020) offers a thoughtful reflection on the state of the field and possible new avenues for future expansion. These are great resources for establishing a critical sense of the field and its genealogical development.[1]

In our current twenty-first-century moment, there is more new work emerging on early modern drama and race than I can reasonably take account of here – a gratifying and long overdue development. Notably, non-print venues have proven to be the most hospitable mediums for the publication and dissemination of exciting new work on race, which reflects the protracted timescale of print and the

historically conservative biases of many academic publishers and journals. A few examples of non-print initiatives include the Folger Shakespeare Library's 2020–21 'Critical Race Conversations', symposiums organized by the RaceB4Race Collective, the 2018 'Shakespeare and Race' festival at Shakespeare's Globe and plenaries hosted by the Shakespeare Association of America and other scholarly associations. The start of the pandemic in 2020 also spurred numerous online forums aimed at facilitating emerging research on race. At the same time, work on early modern race is appearing with increasing frequency in scholarly journals as well as monographs and anthologies published by academic presses.[2] The wave of new attention focused on early modern race creates many opportunities to change the face and critical tenor of our field. Along with openings for innovative scholarship that breaks through the boundaries of what was previously possible – in terms of the questions we ask, the objectives and values we pursue, and the archive we explore – we also see new challenges around defining the political impact of our work, retaining inclusivity and furthering the collective pursuit of our mutual goals.

Rather than attempt to provide an exhaustive survey of scholarly resources, in what follows I offer several reflections on the implications of recent work on race in terms of its archival considerations, recent new directions and methodological innovations. In particular, I consider how the collective expansion of early modern race scholarship invites new methodological approaches to the relationship between past, present and future, as well as creating possibilities for new kinds of intersectional work. More generally, I consider how recent scholarship has opened up different ways of knowing and of determining what counts as 'evidence', enabled different voices and discursive registers, and compelled a reconsideration of the boundaries between personal, political and scholarly investments. This chapter is organized around three overlapping and interrelated loci: the archive and the search for different ways of knowing through different voices and discursive registers, the recognition of a related problematic of both blackness and whiteness in recent studies of race, and the importance of intersectional engagements in race and the early modern.

Finally, I will seek to bridge the theoretical and the practical by considering some of the disciplinary and institutional implications of early modern race studies, including what effects recent work might have on the ways we do criticism and how and why it matters. How has greater awareness of the importance of race to early modern literary studies corresponded with new attention to the demographics of the field, and how might efforts to shift these demographics impact our field's values and interpretive practices?[3] As Ian Smith asks in 'We Are Othello' (2016), what happens when one questions the presumed white male subjecthood of the 'we' that receives, identifies with and interprets Shakespeare's plays? 'Who are the subjects of this collective "we" and what is its institutional power' (107)? Encountering *Othello*, or any early modern play for that matter, is a significantly different experience for those identifying as black, indigenous and people of colour (hereafter BIPOC): how might an awareness of the effects of this difference change the way *all* scholarship is approached and valued? As Chakravarty observes, the 'position of neutral inquiry' is a privileged fiction, compelling each one of us to

understand our varying positionality in terms of 'interpellation, even implication' and to observe how 'Renaissance studies may operate as a disciplinary apparatus in its own right' (2020: 17). Early modern race scholarship has disrupted conventional scholarly practices and assumptions, and in doing so it has created openings for new kinds of scholars to enter the field and empowered new ways of doing scholarly work on race in all periods. As we continue to break down the doors and walls of our field, we simultaneously build a richer one that can grow well beyond its current configuration and more fully realize its potential not only to be relevant but to actively contribute to the world. If early modern literary studies thrives in the twenty-first century, it will be only because it is unafraid to take risks, question its purposes and do things differently.

ARCHIVAL CONSIDERATIONS: RACE IS NOWHERE/RACE IS EVERYWHERE

As Ayanna Thompson states in the opening to her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race* (2021), her initiation into the field of Shakespeare Studies was beset by the repeated insistence from teachers and scholarly authorities that 'race did not exist in Shakespeare's cultural and creative imagination' (1). Many BIOC scholars leading up to Thompson's generation, and even beyond it, can relate to this experience. Charges of anachronism, presentism and ahistoricism have been highly effective in obstructing work on early modern race by showing it to be at odds with the dominant methodologies authorized by the field. A bias that equates rigor with historicism – the more precise and modest the claim, the better – and that simultaneously insists that the history of race is a modern phenomenon suggests that early modern work on race can be neither historically substantiated nor adequately rigorous. Such gatekeeping relegated those working on race to the margins or drove them into other fields, while early modern studies preserved the fiction of its antecedence to the history of race. Kyle Grady (2016) has called attention to how the denial of early modern race is akin to claims of a 'liberal post-racialism', which 'overprivileges progressive phenomena as representative of a disappearing racialism' (72). The impulse to confine race to a discrete period of modern history led early modern studies to cling to a pre-racial identity, claiming a time of innocence not yet sullied by the stain of race.

Race is of course a product of racism, of which there is abundant evidence in early modern texts, and yet the denial of racism in the Renaissance has alienated BIPOC scholars and dissuaded them from feeling like they have a place in the field. Matthieu Chapman opens his book on *Anti-Black Racism in Early Modern Drama* (2017) by quoting the 'seven words' that served as the impetus behind the book: 'There were no black people in England' during that time – a response that he received from a respected scholar at a conference in 2007 and that was subsequently repeated to him many times as he pursued his project (1).[4] Without validation from authorities in the field or the direct evidence of a ready-made archive, BIPOC scholars and those unwilling to accept the denial of what they knew to be true ploughed forward, guided by inner knowing and an inextinguishable sense of purpose.

In fact, as Imtiaz Habib (2008) has shown, there is ample documentary evidence of the presence of black people in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. However, the undertaking of archival work on black lives in early modern England, or any non-white subjects for that matter, presents a special challenge and requires a unique set of tools, skills and capacities. This is because the same power structures that produce the abundant presence of racism in the archives of early modern England lead directly to profound absences, including partial and complete erasures as well as damaging fictions and distortions of the truth. As a result, the archive of early modern racialized subjects is much less a reliable historical record than it is a fictional re-construction of the past. As Saidiya Hartman (2007) has powerfully articulated, archival absences represent a set of histories that have been wilfully repressed or forgotten, as well as a history of the power structures that have imposed this silencing, rather than an absence of histories themselves. Individual scholars labouring alone in the archives cannot overcome these historical challenges without the shared support and recognition of their field and set of tools with which to work. The field of subaltern studies offers a useful model through its commitment to holding space for the voices and lives that have been lost to dominant historical narratives; it maps a kind of presence by apprehending the absences of those silenced due to race, gender, class, religion and other inequities.

To begin to grapple with the archival challenges of this work, early modern scholars must recognize how historical records, or what counts as such, are shaped by the same power structures that upheld colonialism, slavery and other increasingly globalized commercial forms of exploitation. Thus, early modern archival race-work requires a set of theoretical and interpretive tools that are borrowed from black feminist studies, subaltern studies and other transhistorical fields of enquiry. In addition, this kind of research requires a certain reading practice that is patiently attendant to minute detail, that is capable of reading around and drawing connections across gaps and inconsistencies, that can make meaning of absences, and that is willing to sit uncomfortably with all that will be forever unknown. In a 2019 talk given for the Shakespeare Association of America's plenary panel on race, Kim Hall spoke about the personal challenges of what 'it's like to follow traces of Othello in archives meant to celebrate white Achievement'.[5] For example, after coming across mention of an enslaved boy named Othello listed in an estate inventory, Hall combed through the other items in the list, including things like a sideboard, a gold belt buckle and eighteen felt hats, among which she also found a servant's bridle, 'a Negro Musician called Andrew' and 'A Negro Woman Nam'd Deliverance'. These innocuous juxtapositions, so neutral in their tone and yet so sparse and suggestive of life stories that have been forever lost, filled her with feelings of longing and rage. The personal demands of such work, especially for BIPOC scholars, demonstrate how archival work on the lives of raced and enslaved subjects requires not only special tools and skills but also a degree of patience, fortitude and emotional labour.

Clearly, this kind of archival work demonstrates how the powerful effects of race are undeniable both in the early modern period and today. However, even if scholars are now ready to accept that the history of race is not just a modern phenomenon, the question of what exactly race meant in early modern England

has been difficult to pin down. Critical studies published in the first fifteen years of the twenty-first century exemplify many different approaches to early modern race that locate its roots in other systems and discourses for understanding difference. These approaches demonstrate how the presence of race is diversely manifested through discourses of geo-humoralism, bloodline and rank, religion, skin colour, embodiment, sexuality and reproduction, geography and ethnicity, and manners and civility. Complementing these approaches are critical studies focused on different kinds of geographically or religiously informed racialized identities, including Turks, Moors, Jews, Muslims, Indians or Southeast Asians, Mongols, Native Americans, pagans and Gypsies. This range of work illustrates the broad history of race in early modern England and its multifarious domains of expression, as well as the unstable ways in which race was frequently intertwined with other categories. The feminist orientation of the first wave of early modern race scholarship, which emphasized intersections between the logics of race and gender, laid the groundwork for a rich body of intersectional approaches. 'Early' scholarship tended to emphasize the intersections of race with gender, class and religion, and there is certainly room for more work to be done in these areas.[6] In addition, recent scholarship has begun to explore new areas of intersection with sexuality, conduct, servitude and slavery, rhetoric, disability, natural ecologies, animal studies, the post-human and more. I consider some of these intersections below, with special attention to newly emerging directions and opportunities, as part of my discussion of new pathways in the field.

DEFINING 'RACE'

How might the many ways that race has been understood to have had meaning in early modern England inform our definition of race? Many early modern scholars now embrace the utility of Geraldine Heng's (2018) working definition, which is intended to reflect how 'race has no singular or stable reference' (19): rather, 'race' is 'a name we retain for the strategic, epistemological and political commitments it recognizes – attached to a repeated tendency, of the gravest import, to demarcate human beings through differences among humans that are selectively essentialized as absolute and fundamental, in order to distribute positions and powers differentially to human groups' (27). Or, as Heng succinctly sums up, 'race is a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences, rather than a substantive content' (27). This definition resonates with an earlier discussion by Ania Loomba and Jonathan Burton (2007), which sought to emphasize the fluidity of race and the 'thick web of associations that is central to racial thought', as well as to problematize the distinction between culture and biology that is often mapped onto a pre-modern/modern historical divide (6). While underscoring the protean nature of race as one of its most pernicious qualities, these three scholars insist that racial fluidity is not unique to the early modern period. According to Loomba and Burton, there has never been a 'singular approach to or agreement about human difference, something that is often forgotten by those who emphasize the gap between "fluid" or unformed early modern ideologies and the more rigid modern ones' (7). More

recently, Burton (2020) has elaborated an understanding of the 'polychronicity' of race that 'highlight[s] the collaborative diversity of racial discourse at work in any given moment', thereby replacing a historical narrative of the 'invention of race' with an understanding of how race relentlessly *reinvents* itself (186). His understanding of race's continual reinvention may be seen to follow a principle of evolution in that race survives by constantly shifting, adapting and proliferating. As he points out, the protean quality of race constitutes its enabling condition in the sense that race 'thrives by keeping multiple forms in its active repertoire' and is 'relentlessly adaptive' (187–8).

By asking us to slice time horizontally, rather than approaching race in terms of past, present and future, Burton performs an intervention into the history of race that replaces our traditionally diachronic or progressive view of history with a synchronic view. But if this approach does important political work by undermining the periodization of race and perceiving the many subtle ways that race rears its ugly head, does it also run the risk of abstraction? Erickson and Hall have cautioned that the tendency to emphasize racial fluidity in the early modern period might shift our attention away from 'the implications of living as a raced subject then and now, as well as the political urgency many of us feel in doing this work' (2016: 11). Invoking the historical ways in which women's bodies have been relentlessly 'anatomized, dismembered, and repressed', Joyce Green MacDonald reminds us of the importance of honouring 'the passionate degree to which race was (and is) believed to inhere in the body and in the bodily' (2002: 14). For Burton and Loomba, the moving target of race is precisely what makes it so impossible to escape and thus politically crucial to identify. By the same token, while the logic of race may be difficult to pin down, once it attaches to something – or someone – its grip is unrelenting. Early modern scholars working on race must determine for themselves how to meet the imperatives of theorizing a concept whose complexity is rooted in its evasiveness and remembering at the same time that we are also talking about real lives – past and present – and that our theoretical work is done in service of real political causes. The political implications of our work cannot be divorced from the theoretical and must always be owned and managed with intentionality. For many scholars, even to use the term 'race' is partly a political commitment, for as Heng puts it, not to do so 'would be to retain the reproduction of a certain kind of past, while keeping the door shut to tools, analyses, and resources that can name the past differently' (4).[7]

And so I return to where I began this chapter: as the field of early modern studies has shifted from an assumption about race's absence in the period to an awareness of its utter pervasiveness, so also has the archive for conducting race-work expanded. Criticism on early modern drama and performance has been especially prominent, guided by studies such as Loomba's *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (2002), Thompson's *Performing Race and Torture on the Early Modern Stage* (2008) and Lara Bovilsky's *Barbarous Play: Race on the English Renaissance Stage* (2008), as well as other studies focused on Shakespeare and his contemporaries. However, multi-genre studies and criticism focusing on non-dramatic texts have also paved the way for early modern race studies, beginning with Hall's *Things of Darkness* (1995), extending to studies such as Sujata Iyengar's *Shades of Difference*

(2005) and Benedict Robinson's *Islam and Early Modern English Literature* (2007), and newly emerging with increased frequency at conferences and events organized by the International Spenser Society, the Sixteenth Century Society and the Modern Language Association. Awareness of the pervasive influence of race at all levels of culture and across all genres of writing suggests that the significance we place on generic divisions needs to be questioned. Scholars conducting research on drama will find their work profitably served by engagement with non-dramatic texts – an awareness set forth by Burton and Loomba's *Race in Early Modern England* (2007), which encouraged scholars to consider how different kinds of writing are always in conversation with one another.

Within drama studies, critical attention to what have been characterized as 'Shakespeare's race plays' has increasingly expanded to include many other plays in Shakespeare's canon as well as works by other playwrights that do not necessarily feature non-white characters or thematize race in an overt way.[8] While new approaches to *Othello* and *The Tempest* will always be of value, the recognition that racial constructions influence the full spectrum of early modern drama provides an opportunity for different kinds of critical race-work. As Burton observes, our previous tendency to locate race 'almost exclusively around moments of desire and violence' has led us to dismiss 'detached, offhand or seemingly archaic instances of racial language … as if there is a kind of threshold that racism must reach before it is worthy of our attention' (2020: 183). By expanding our focus to a broader range of plays, we confront the destructiveness of quotidian racism and also attend to the ways that the apparent 'absence' of race often serves as a bulwark of universality, masking perspectives and privileges that are unaware of their implicit exclusions.

To take one example, a play such as *As You Like It* (1599–1600) takes place exclusively in France and presumably contains only white characters who are native to France. But in its dialogue the play nevertheless betrays a racially informed global consciousness as well as a commitment to sustaining social hierarchies organized around difference, even as it strives to reinvent a new, more inclusive community in the Forest of Arden. The play exemplifies how racism often fuses together with sexism and classism and shows how these categorical judgements are mutually constituted. When Rosalind receives a love letter from the poor shepherdess Phoebe, she protests that it could not have been written by Phoebe because it is clearly 'a man's invention' (4.3.29). Exclaiming, 'She defies me / Like Turk to Christian. Women's gentle brain / Could not drop forth such giant-rude invention, / Such Ethiop words, blacker in their effect / Than in their countenance', Rosalind describes the unwomanly style – and sexually laden content – of the letter in racialized and religious terms of abuse (4.3.32–6). Her reference to how the blackness of the 'effect' of Phoebe's words exceeds that of their 'countenance' suggests a dichotomy between inner and outer blackness that is constitutive of the 'Ethiop'. Further, Rosalind's lines reflect the ways that violations of gender conventions (through the letter's un-'gentle' desirous language), as well as its trickery or 'invention' (based on the assumption that Phoebe could not have written it herself) constitute perversities that find their ideal expression through a language of race. Rosalind's lines thus demonstrate her ready access to a larger world of difference far beyond the confines of Arden and

even France – a world whose differences are automatically transposed by her into racist stereotypes of deception and foulness. These judgements are in turn part of the fabric of the new communal world of Arden, which for all its inclusivity is ultimately quite homogenous and bounded by intolerance. The racialized 'hand' ascribed to the letter in fact bleeds into Rosalind's description of Phoebe's actual physical hand, which Rosalind describes as 'leathern' and 'a freestone-coloured hand', adding 'I verily did think / That her old gloves were on, but 'twas her hands' (4.3.24–26). A racialized sense of skin colour, informed by the geopolitics of a newly globalizing world, seeps into the play's domestic constructions of class and gender with remarkable ease.

WHITENESS

Just as it becomes possible to observe the presence of a racialized worldview even in the 'whitest' of plays, scholars in the field have also come to recognize the importance of approaching whiteness itself as a racial category and exposing the ubiquitous strategies and structures that enable its unspoken claim of universality. Beginning with Hall's (1995) attention to how discourses of 'fairness' implied a connection between skin tone and feminine virtue and extending to Arthur J. Little's forthcoming collection *White People in Shakespeare*, scholars have increasingly repudiated the tendency to render whiteness transparent in Renaissance England. Discussions of the performance of race, such as the Fall 2009 special issue of *Shakespeare Bulletin*, interrogate the complex racial implications of blackface and the historically contingent effects of casting white actors in black roles. Studies focused on the visual and material elements of performance demonstrate how race is constructed through the use of cosmetics, costuming, props and staging effects.[9] These kinds of approaches similarly invite an interrogation of whiteness and the ways that it is 'at once enfleshed and performative', in the words of Christine Varnado (2019: 248). Critically refusing the transparency and neutrality of whiteness and identifying how it is always implicated in representations of blackness – or any racial marking, for that matter – also means noticing the ways that white bodies enjoy a certain privilege of unmarked mobility on the early modern stage. Thomas Heywood's *Four Prentices of London* (*c*. 1594) indulges an extreme fantasy of unmarked mobility by dramatizing the inability of four brothers – all London apprentices – to recognize one another after they are separated by shipwreck on their way to Jerusalem. Travelling individually over land, the brothers repeatedly cross paths without realizing it, falling into pointless skirmishes with one another and competing for romantic possession of their own sister, whom they also fail to recognize. While not expressed explicitly in terms of skin colour, *Four Prentices* captures the sense of entitlement – in essence, the prerogative of being unaware – that is germane to white privilege. Only when they reach Jerusalem – and find themselves in direct confrontation with the Muslim enemy they have come to fight – do the protagonists finally perceive their underlying brotherhood and band together in solidarity. Ultimately, their misrecognitions and petty fights along their journey have provided a kind of racial training ground for their unification and perception of their essential difference from the Muslims.

While born with certain heritable traits, the protagonists must cultivate qualities such as proper discernment and temperance, which the play establishes as constitutive of European white male Christianity in order to earn their victory. In effect, the play teaches its protagonists, as well as members of its audience, how to embrace white privilege.

Just as this play may be seen to demonstrate how the racialization of whiteness goes deeper than white skin, there are many critical opportunities for scholars to interrogate the racial privilege of whiteness that permeates the language, ideological engagements and performative effects of early modern theatre. Varnado's innovative reading of *The Merchant of Venice* demonstrates how whiteness constitutes 'a dramatic posture, a set of attitudes, actions, opinions – qualities: something the characters *do*' (2019: 256). Moving beyond whiteness as a function of skin colour, we also begin to appreciate how whiteness might manifest in formal, symbolic and aesthetic registers, thereby returning to Hall's early observation of how 'aesthetic concerns easily become a semiotics of race' (1995: 5). Renewed interest in formalism, and particularly formalist work that is undertaken with a progressive methodology, invites new opportunities for scholars to examine the ways that race permeates the semiotics, speech patterns, prosody, genre and other conventions of dramatic form.[10] Such work need not be at odds with a trenchant political purpose. As scholars continue to redress the view of race's absence in early modern drama by perceiving its presence *everywhere*, they can retain a clear political focus by naming and exposing the pervasive structures of power that uphold hierarchies of race and always keeping sight of the real lives that are affected by its violence.

EMERGING CRITICAL PATHWAYS: INTERSECTIONALITY AND BEYOND

Whereas the early foundations of an intersectional critical practice established by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1991) and other black feminists sought to capture the reality of intragroup differences and the multiply interactive forms of oppression that affect individuals, emerging intersectional work in early modern studies explores the ways that racial logic itself intersected with other discourses. Some of the most promising new intersectional work on race includes considerations of regional and diasporic contexts, sexuality and queerness, embodied affect, environmental and animal studies, and the history of the 'human' and the post-human – a list that is admittedly selective and incomplete. As the editors of the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Intersectionality in Early Modern Literature* (Chakravarty, Coles and DiGangi) suggest, early modern studies can offer distinct contributions to intersectionality as a critical method because of its particular historical perspective. The literature of the period provides unique access to histories of global economic expansion, including commerce, chattel slavery, the forced migration of peoples and the early development of the British Empire through colonial exploration and conquest. Increasingly, critical approaches to these histories attempt to decentre England and to counter Eurocentric narratives, not simply by exposing the dominance of non-Western nations and empires in the period, but rather by shifting

how we centre our perspectives and expanding our use of regional, transnational, inter-imperial and diasporic approaches.

Comparative, transnational and transhistorical approaches have always been central to early modern race-work. Early studies tended to focus on transnational encounters between England and Spain, Africa, the Mediterranean, Ireland, the Netherlands, the New World, India, the Spice Islands and the Far East, as well as on the sedimented histories of these relationships implied through England's acute awareness of the 'Old World' or the 'ancient' world. These studies emphasized points of identification as well as difference, which were often revealed though representations of mimesis, conflict, conversion and sexual seduction. Carmen Nocentelli's *Empires of Love: Europe, Asia, and the Making of Early Modern Identity* (2013), for example, draws upon Dutch, English, French, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish sources to take account of how European-Asian encounters produced new sexual ideologies that emerged in relation to formations of race. More recently, Alexa Alice Joubin, who is a co-founder of the Global Shakespeares Digital Performance Archive, offers a comparative approach to Asian theatrical and film productions in *Shakespeare and East Asia* (2021). Other studies set their focus more directly on the influence of imperial and colonial dynamics and the crucial ways they intersected with racial formations. Critics have begun to extend this work by adopting an 'inter-imperial' theoretical framework, which moves away from the binary relationship between centre and margin to consider a more holistic and yet multiply centred 'political-economic field of several empires operating simultaneously … and in relation to capitalist formations' (Doyle 2014: 159).[11] Inter-imperial analyses offer an opportunity to take stock of the multiply interacting imperial, economic and political forces that impact representations of race in many early modern plays. In a play such as Thomas Heywood's *Fair Maid of the West, Part I* (1600), for example, racial dynamics are forged within the crucible of inter-imperial relationships that involve England, Spain, Morocco, the Ottoman Empire and even the New World. Similarly, John Day, George Wilkins and William Rowley's *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* (1607) produces its racialized representations of Sunni and Shiite Muslims, as well as Protestants, Catholics and Jews, in relation to complex inter-imperial dynamics involving the Ottoman Empire, Persia, England, Rome and Spain.

While scholarship produced in the wake of the 'Global Renaissance' has tended to foreground the global imaginary of early modern drama, critics have also begun to consider alternative racial geographies that do not necessarily align with the imperial and territorial demarcations of power implied by a global understanding of the world. Recent work moves beyond the privileging of globe, nation and empire to highlight regional and diasporic contexts. Sandra Young's (2015, 2016) work, for example, has drawn attention to the early modern significance of the 'global south' and the ways it was distinguished from the 'north' according to a racial hierarchy. Regional studies provide an opportunity to consider cultural, territorial and economic networks that transcend political borders and yet retain an internal coherence. Sometimes 'subnational' and at other times 'supranational', in the words of Marissa Greenberg (2019: 343), regions are not marginal to a centre, nor are they central to a margin: they are worlds unto themselves, dependent upon internal relationships

and yet always connected to other places. Because regions are not only distinct from the categories of nation and empire but also inform an entirely different set of phenomenological experiences, memories and imagination, they provide particularly rich contexts for pursuing new examinations of race. Inverting the internal coherence of regional formations, diasporic contexts attend to the scattered but nonetheless interconnected lives of racialized persons throughout the world. Diasporic readings of Renaissance plays offer opportunities to map new racial geographies and dramatic canons, as well as foregrounding new collective perspectives that are not anchored by spatial or temporal boundaries. Cassander Smith, Nicholas Jones and Miles Grier's *Early Modern Black Diaspora Studies: A Critical Anthology* (2018) provides a rich array of readings that 'place black lives at the center of inquiry' and raise the pressing question: 'what would it mean to have an entire subject/discipline devoted to discussing the many ways in which black lives mattered … not just as part of the story about what Europeans were doing but as *the* story itself?' (2).

If inter-imperial, regional and diasporic approaches enable us to access new racial geographies, studies focused on the intersection of race with the history of embodiment direct our focus to the bodies that are the targets of these racial mappings. Whereas early work in the field emphasized gendered embodiment as well as geohumoral understandings of the relationship between bodily temperament and environment, recent work suggests opportunities to explore a new range of discursive intersections. The intersections of race and sexuality, for example, have been taken in new directions by scholars such as Melissa Sanchez (2019), Arthur Little (2000), Ian Smith (2009), Abdulhamit Arvas (2021) and Mario DiGangi (2020). These scholars demonstrate how racial constructions intersect with bodily discourses of sodomy, homoeroticism, rape, monogamy and promiscuity, infidelity, and sexual abduction and enslavement. While discourse analysis can tend to shift our attention away from actual bodies, it also compels us to remember that the relationship between discourse and the body is never a simple binary. As Valerie Traub (2016) asserts, embodiment is a critical concept that 'bridges the material and the discursive, the experiential and the analytical, the sensory, the affective, and the cognitive' (32). Patricia Akhimie's (2018) work on the racial implications of conduct and courtesy zeros in on how these discourses impinge on the body in terms of pain, pinches, bruises, stigmatized marks and corporal methods of policing. In addition, emerging work on racialized affect considers the embodied forms of feeling that help to constitute the visceral dimensions of early modern race. Carol Mejia LaPerle's *Race and Affect in Early Modern English Literature* (2022) is the first collection to use affect theory to explain 'the nexus of relations, dispositions and sensations that constitute the racialized subject's lived experience' as well as the affective responses through which racism takes expression (ix). Its considerations of disgust, shame and ill-will model possibilities for new work that examines the early modern production of racial affects, while discussions of the affective responses generated in and by early modern texts suggest new possibilities for thinking about the formation of affective communities.

Closely aligned with investigations of racial embodiment are critical approaches that explore the limits and ontological status of the human – an area of enquiry

that offers ripe opportunities for new work on race. Sylvia Wynter has influentially drawn attention to how developments associated with Renaissance humanism contributed to the elevation of the human subject, who assumed the idealized form of a 'White Man' – an occurrence connected to 'the rise of Europe … on the one hand, and, on the other, to African enslavement, Latin American conquest, and Asian subjugation' (2003: 263). Given the significance of the early modern period to a new understanding of the human and 'his' place in the cosmos, it is imperative for critics to interrogate the ways that constructions of the human intersected with the history of race and often relied upon racial (il)logic to demarcate the limits of human ontology. For example, at the climactic moment in *The Tempest*, the non-human spirit Ariel convinces Prospero to forgive Sebastian and his confederates by invoking the 'tears' that 'run down [Gonzalo's] beard' (5.1.16) and suggesting that witnessing such suffering would move even Ariel to compassion, 'were [he] human' (5.1.20). This moment, in which Prospero is coaxed to demonstrate his inherent humanity through his capacity to be moved to 'fellow' feeling by another's suffering, is set in contrast to earlier exchanges in the play where Caliban's 'vile race' (1.2.359) is deemed to be impervious to 'humane care' and 'kindness', justifying his confined enslavement and the use of 'stripes' to move him (1.2.346–7). In this way, the play reveals a direct intersection between the construction of the limits of the human and the ontologies of race and enslavement. Put simply, the Renaissance history of the human was always also a history of race.

The legacy of the Renaissance's racialized exclusions in shoring up the category of the human remains sharply relevant today. A film such as Guillermo del Toro's Oscar-winning *The Shape of Water* (2017) makes clear just how deeply attached we remain to aspirational (and moralistic) human ideals in our supposedly post-human cultural imagination. While not conceived in direct reference to *The Tempest*, del Toro's film offers a useful intertext for analysing the transhistorical ways in which the boundaries of the human are policed by a capacity for 'kindness' – understood in terms of both 'kind' (or species) and compassion. At the climactic moment, the mute protagonist Elisa attempts to convince her neighbour Giles, a closeted gay man, to help her rescue an 'Amphibian Man' who is being held captive by US scientists after being found in the Amazon by an American drilling company. Giles protests, pleading in exasperation, 'Look, it's not even human', to which Elisa replies in sign language: 'If we do nothing, then neither are we.' Like *The Tempest*, the film seeks to redefine what it means to be human in terms of a capacity for empathy for another's suffering and endangerment, whether that other be human or not. Aided by Elisa's black co-worker Zelda, Elisa and Giles free the Amphibian Man, positing an alliance between disabled, queer, black and non-human subject positions. While the film celebrates a kind of post-human ideal that embraces those deemed less-than-human, it flattens out differences of bodily ability, sexual orientation, race and species without acknowledging the divergent ways these categories have been constructed in relation to the human category that stubbornly remains at its centre. Furthermore, the film's terms of inclusion ultimately fall back on the same distinction of kindness, or capacity for empathy, that Shakespeare's earlier play uses to justify Caliban's racialized exclusion from the human. What if the Amphibian Man – or Elisa, Zelda

or Giles, for that matter – were *unkind*? Would they no longer be entitled to the same freedoms and right to life? Scholarship on early modern race might turn more frequently to the resources offered by twenty-first-century film, writing and art as productive intertexts for analyzing the legacy of early modern race-making. Reading *The Shape of Water* against *The Tempest* illuminates the deeply embedded ways in which claims to humanity are based on an exceptionalism that systematically excludes those deemed less than, other than, or beyond reach.

Recent work in early modern animal studies, disability studies, ecocriticism and post-humanism has yet to take full account of how the history of race informs constructions of non-human life, despite the fact that it explicitly seeks to contest the boundaries of the human and often makes a case for human 'indistinction'. In her study of how transnational discourses of 'monstrosity' were used to police bodily normativity and disability, for instance, Elizabeth Beardon gestures to how these discourses also implicated 'monstrous races of men' (2019: 12) but stops short of a direct consideration of race. Many opportunities remain to explore the possible intersections between constructions of disability and of race, and recent work by Justin Shaw on networks of care (2019) and Amrita Dhar on sight and blindness (2015, forthcoming) suggests promising new directions. Similarly, influential discussions of human-animal cosmopolities and interspecies relationships by Laurie Shannon (2013), Karen Raber (2013), Erica Fudge (2018) and Holly Dugan (2020) might be productively extended to foreground the relationship between animality and race. Noémie Ndiaye's (2021) analysis of an 'animalizing choreographic discourse' on the early modern stage offers a useful model that registers relational associations between Gypsies, animality, dance and the racialization of Blackamoors. Working in a later field, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson has drawn attention to how 'anti-blackness', and particularly racialized formations of gender and sexuality, was in fact 'central to the very construction of "the animal"' (2020: 17). Jackson argues not for an extension of the human 'as a solution to the bestialization of blackness' but rather demonstrates 'an urgent demand for the dissolution of "human"' as it is defined 'within liberal humanism's terms' (2020: 18, 21). In addition, Jackson usefully articulates the importance of recognizing how 'appeals to move "beyond the human" may actually reintroduce the Eurocentric transcendentalism this movement purports to disrupt, particularly with regard to the historical and ongoing distributive ordering of race' (2015: 215).

In other words, whose conception of humanity does the move 'beyond the human' presume to move beyond? We must be wary of the costs and pitfalls of embracing a post-human future that too easily effaces the lingering effects of humanism's complex history and its deep entanglement with the history of race. While studies such as Joseph Campana and Scott Maisano's *Renaissance Posthumanism* (2016) seek to contest human exceptionalism by identifying the roots of a non-anthropocentric post-humanism in Renaissance humanism, their realization 'that we have always been posthuman' makes no attempt to account for the history and realities of race (which precluded the recognition of the humanity of raced subjects in the first place) or for how a post-humanist praxis might be equipped to combat racism. The emerging ecocritical work of William Steffen (2020, 2018) provides one example

of what a non-anthropocentric method might offer to a critical history of race. Steffen approaches the distributive agency of early modern theatrical production in ways that direct our attention back to race by considering how the agency of environmentally sourced materials such as imported corkwood and galls contributed to early modern constructions of blackness. Approaching the intersection of natural environment, colonialism and race-making in a different way, John Yargo's (2022) examination of early modern narratives of environmental catastrophe demonstrates how awareness of a shared human precarity gives way to racialized hierarchies that reveal varying human capacities for attunement and adaptability. As recent seminars and panels at the Shakespeare Associaiton of America demonstrate, the field is ripe for more ecocritical work that foregrounds the significance of race and its crucial implications for our understanding of early modern environments.

CONCLUSION: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As scholars reflect upon current directions in the field and speculate on its future, they might productively return to the question of why they are doing this work. What are our objectives and how might these objectives prompt us to question and expand our current methodologies? Do our current methods line up with our objectives? When we make a case for the value of excavating early modern histories of race, we might take the opportunity to re-examine our understanding of how early modern race-work orients itself to the present – and how it views the relationships between past, present and future more generally. It seems clear that knowing about the histories of early modern race better equips us to approach its legacies today. Scholars might also consider the ways that their heightened awareness of the present-day realities of race equips them to attain a fuller understanding of the early modern past. As Melissa Sanchez has observed, 'When we begin to notice and care about injustices in the present – when we become, in current parlance, "woke" – we also begin to notice and care about aspects of the past that we may not have seen before, even if they were right under our noses all along' (2020: 138). In this sense, our work on early modern race is warranted not just by how it might serve the present but also by how it serves to revise and expand our understanding of the past. It behoves us to recognize that the goal of early modern race-work is not simply to better understand the history and operations of race but rather to reconfigure the field of early modern studies around the importance of race and its pervasive influences, and in doing so to transform our own present institutional and historical moment. By the same token, we must avoid falling into the trap of assuming a 'more progressive' awareness of race that entitles us to reconstitute the past however we see fit or to presume that the past is less complex and varied than our own time. As Sanchez astutely observes, 'Recognizing that the present is neither exceptional nor inevitable allows us to live otherwise in the future' (140). Only by perceiving how race inhabits (all) time with a violent dynamism that casts its lessons both forwards and backwards can we come to a fuller appreciation of the value of early modern race-work.

In recognizing the ways that race refuses to conform to periodized divisions, scholars might continue to expand their methodologies to encourage more transhistorical race-work. This might take the form of intertextual analysis, as I have suggested in my discussion of *The Tempest* and *The Shape of Water*, above, which pairs together disparate texts to illuminate points of resonance and yield new discoveries in each.[12] How much might we gain by setting early modern texts in conversation with texts outside the field and being open to what might happen? In addition, we should continue to draw from and invite conversations with scholars of critical race studies working in later periods. How might we continue to learn from black feminist studies, diasporic studies, postcolonial and subaltern studies, and Afro-pessimism? Opening to these approaches unlocks us not only from the temporal restrictions of our field but also from its methodological and geographical constraints. The editors of *Early Modern Black Diaspora Studies: A Critical Anthology* (Smith, Jones and Grier 2018) suggest that by 'reconceptualizing the time and geography of racial blackness – as well as the methods for assessing the impact of black Africans on early modernity', an integrated approach to early modern studies and Black studies has the potential to 'transform both fields' (1). Perhaps most compellingly for early modern studies, adopting an Afrocentric perspective disrupts Eurocentric epistemologies and allows us to re-examine what we think 'we know about the early modern period' and to open to 'a different epistemological sensibility, one that allows us to acknowledge and accept, as one example, the realms of the spiritual and the paranormal as archives of knowledge' (3).

Early modern scholars of race must take seriously the challenge to re-examine the biases of their own perspectives and to question their own epistemological assumptions about what constitutes knowledge and evidence. As we continue to debunk the narrow and intolerant approach to historicism that denied the presence of early modern race, how might we expand our reading practices and methodologies to become more open, more curious, more creative and more radical? How can we bring more awareness to what we are looking for when we 'read for race'? By shifting our orientation to early modern texts and expanding our methods, we might discover new ways in which our work can serve the purposes of social justice. For example, Kim Hall's (2019) examination of John Edward Bruce (1856–1924) and the links between the black performance of Shakespeare and black freedom movements reveals a hidden history of how the study of Shakespeare was used to provide intellectual tools for black advancement and resistance. This approach presents a stark contrast to standard readings of Shakespeare from not so long ago that concerned themselves with the question of whether or not Shakespeare was racist or anti-Semitic. Moving away from the question of what we can learn or know about Shakespeare, we might ask: What can Shakespeare do for the world? How can we use Shakespeare in service of performing anti-racist work in the world? The recent *Arden Research Handbook of Shakespeare and Social Justice* (Ruiter 2021) as well as *Shakespeare and the 99%* (O'Dair and Francisco 2019) and *Teaching Social Justice Through Shakespeare* (Eklund and Hyman 2019) begin to address such questions. We need more public-facing work to shift the inward-turning

orientation of our scholarly conversations. Early modern scholars of race must seize the opportunity to define as clearly as possible their own goals and intentions. This involves doing an inventory that addresses a set of pointed questions: What do you really care about? What do you want to change? How can your scholarship work towards this change?

Having done this, scholars might also reconsider their own writing practices and target audiences. Effective early modern race-work lends itself to many different possible discursive registers and forums, including testimonial writing, creative scholarship and broad public engagement. Anna Wainwright and Matthieu Chapman's forthcoming *Race in the European Renaissance: A Classroom Guide* foregrounds pedagogical applications. Other scholars have contributed to race-work through the less formal mediums of blogs or social media. Increasingly, scholars are thinking and writing in collaboration, sometimes across disciplines and time periods. The RaceB4Race Collective has committed to bringing forward the work of early career scholars. Ultimately, as we align our scholarly theories with our practices, we productively challenge, dismantle and revise our disciplinary standards for evaluating the quality and impact of scholarship. Some of the most important implications of early modern race-work lie in its potential to make institutional change. These institutional changes in turn help position the academy to address the problems of the world that extend beyond its intellectual community. The imperative of diversifying our field and our scholarly approaches is matched only by the need to create institutions and scholarly cultures where BIPOC can thrive. For many who choose to embrace the challenges and opportunities of early modern race-work, the work of scholarship is also a personal journey. While these priorities may seem quite removed from the question of how to conduct research on early modern race, they are crucial to bear in mind as one seeks to understand the political significance of this work and its inseparability from the lived realities of race in our world.

NOTES

1 See also Orkin and Joubin (2019) for a broad historical introduction to race that considers multiple global contexts spanning from the classical period to the present.

2 The Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (ACMRS) Press has recently undertaken initiatives to publish research that fills this gap.

3 On the urgent need to diversify the field, see Coles, Hall and Thompson (2019).

4 This experience resonates with a fictional moment represented in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) when a teacher explains that the Dark Lady of the Sonnets could not have been black because '[t]here weren't any … well, Afro-Carri-bee-yans in England at that time, dear. That's more a modern phenomenon, as I'm sure you know' (226).

5 Hall's speech was subsequently published as an article in 2020, as 'I Can't Love This the Way You Want Me To: Archival Blackness'.

6 Akhimie (2018) and Coles (2022) represent a few recent studies that continue to probe these intersections.

7 We might note that some scholars place quotation marks around 'race' in order to signal the methodological debate around the term, as well as to reflect the underlying fact the race itself is a fiction, even though its effects in the world are, of course, real.

8 Scholars such as Chapman (2017: 106–7) and Brown (2019) have argued for broadening our sense of which Shakespearean plays are 'race plays'.

9 See Karim-Cooper (2019) and Stevens (2013).

10 Dowd (2020) makes a compelling case for this work. For an insightful study of the relationship between comic form and the production of racial logic, see Kae (2022).

11 For a theoretical description of inter-imperiality, see Doyle (2014 and 2020).

12 Varnado's (2019) discussion of *The Merchant of Venice* and the 1924 silent film *The Thief of Bagdad* offers another innovative model of intertextual criticism.

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