EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES

Afterword

Strangeness: Early Modern European Women and the Invention of Whiteness

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> I met a strange lady; she made me nervous.
> Colin Hay, 'Down Under'

As recent scholarship has reminded us, the most common term used to describe foreign visitors, immigrants, migrants, refugees, and enslaved people in London was 'strangers', a term that connotes both residence or origin in a different part of the world from the viewer but also bizarreness or other-worldliness.[1] Ema Vyroubalová and Edel Semple's introduction to this special issue foregrounds the importance of European immigrant women in early modern England and the liminal position such women held in labour markets and cultural and religious production. Marking these intersecting axes of oppression historicises the idea of Europe and its present-day association with whiteness, and makes visible the process by which 'race' has been ascribed to particular groups of people. Historian Theodore Allen has called this process 'the invention of the white race' in his magisterial survey of the same name. Allen contextualised the emergence of whiteness as a social category alongside empire and slavery in early America, while Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* attended sensitively to the ways in which our language itself makes 'race'. Morrison additionally observed that, once manufactured, 'race' became something that marked out only persons of colour. Valerie Babb identified the need to investigate whiteness in early American Literature, even as germinal work by Kim F. Hall, Richard

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[1] John Michael Archer, *Citizen Shakespeare: Freemen and Aliens* (Hounmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Eva Johanna Holmberg and Chloë Houston, 'Shaping Strangers in Early Modern English Travel Writing', Introduction to special issue of *Journeys: The International Journal of Travel and Travel Writing*, 14.2 (2013), 1-9.

Dyer, Patricia Parker and Margo Hendricks, Peter Erickson, Arthur Little, Gary Taylor, Sujata Iyengar, Joyce Green MacDonald and others presents early American and early British texts alongside each other in order to contrast and parallel the development of whiteness.[2] MacDonald observes that to flatten out whiteness into a single category 'naturalize[s] and normalize[s] the operations of existing hierarchies of race, nation, and sexuality'. Moreover, she suggests, whiteness works alongside emerging categories of difference to reinforce and recreate divisions of gender: 'Whiteness articulates cultural authority.'[3] The essays in this collection texture the flat surface of whiteness and estrange it from authority by pointing out the spaces, words, and gestures through which strange ladies make men nervous when they unsettle hierarchies of fairness, masculinity, and capital.

Individual essays in this collection use literary texts in their rich cultural and historical contexts to direct us to the fissures within early modern cultural practices that attempt to establish authority through a shared masculine, European, or emerging white identity. Such practices and counter-practices can include everything from sexual appetite or preference (for 'virtuous' women or for 'whores' or for the pre-contracted but unwed mother); fashion and hair-styles (the bare-headed or elaborately coiffed Dutch courtesan or the bonnet of a 'Dutch frow'); kinds of English spoken or 'broken', or the assertion of English as a lingua franca rather than Latin; the competing claims of national origin versus residence to determine political loyalties and liabilities (nativity vs. locality); the courtly Italianate lady or the theatrical Italianate diva; the beautiful Jewish queen for

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[2] Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (London: Verso, 1976; rev. ed. 1996); Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1992); Valerie Babb, *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997); Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker, eds., *Women, 'Race' and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994); Peter Erickson, 'Can We Talk About Race in *Hamlet*?', in *Hamlet: New Critical Essays*, ed. by Arthur Kinney (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 207-13; Arthur Little, *Shakespeare Jungle Fever: National-Imperial Re-Visions of Race, Rape, and Sacrifice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); Gary Taylor, *Buying Whiteness: Race, Culture, and Identity from Columbus to Hip Hop* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Sujata Iyengar, *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Color in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Joyce Green MacDonald, *Women and Race in Early Modern Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For an extensive and growing bibliography on whiteness studies, see 'Towards a Bibliography of Critical Whiteness Studies', ed. by Tim Engles et al. (online: The Center on Democracy in a Multiracial Society, n.d.), <https://archives.library.illinois.edu/erec/University%20Archives/2401001/Production_website/pages/Research/06-07/CriticalWhiteness/Introduction.htm> [accessed 29 May 2017].

[3] MacDonald, p. 37.

whom there is no place in the violent world of men despite her red-and-white Petrarchan beauty. Many of these identity markers are still popularly used to create, challenge, or reinforce hierarchies of race and ethnicity in North America and Europe, to such an extent that laws or rules about seemingly non-racialised or non-politicised objects and actions — hairstyles, syntax, the volume of your speech, having or not having children, supporting particular sports teams, using social media — turn out to be both racial and political.[4]

It is therefore instructive to estrange our own present-day stereotypes by juxtaposing them to early modern beliefs about ethnicity and national identity. Lisa Hopkins uncovers an association between Danish men and 'sexual susceptibility', complicating Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and adding to our understanding of what Francesca Royster has called early modern 'Gothic extremism' as a marker of barbarism or (as Stephanie Chamberlain implies) a humoral stereotype of drunkenness.[5] Marianne Montgomery comments that the literally 'outlandish' nature of Luce's disguise as a 'Dutch frow' in *The London Prodigal* enables the latter to rekindle her husband's desire for her without risking her sexual reputation. Moreover, her 'shifting' Dutch disguise permits her to identify as a businesswoman, a manager of commodity capital, rather than as a sexual

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[4] See, for example, on sexual behaviour stereotyping, L. Rosenthal and M. Lobel, 'Stereotypes of Black American Women Related to Sexuality and Motherhood', *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 40.3 (2016): 414-27, DOI: 10.1177/0361684315627459, accessed May 29, 2017; on fashion and hair, Ayana Byrd and Lori L. Tharps, 'When Black Hair Is Against the Rules', April 30, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/01/opinion/when-black-hair-is-against-the-rules.html> [accessed May 29, 2017]; Maureen Downey, 'Schools celebrate diversity, but force students to leave their cultural knapsacks at the door', Get Schooled blog, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, August 2, 2016 <http://getschooled.blog.myajc.com/2016/08/02/schools-celebrate-diversity-but-force-students-to-leave-their-cultural-knapsacks-at-the-door/> [accessed May 29, 2017]; on language-use, the so-called 'English only' movement in the United States and the 1990s debates surrounding Ebonics, African American Vernacular Language, or African American Language; on nativity versus locality, Norman Tebbit's notorious 'cricket test' for the descendants of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Caribbean immigrants to the UK; on theatricality and the 'Latina diva', see Isabel Molina-Guzman, *Dangerous Curves: Latina Bodies in the Media* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); on the embattled position of Jewish women with regard to white supremacy, see Lois Beckett, 'Jewish woman in Montana sues over 'troll storm' of neo-Nazi harassment', *The Guardian*, April 18, 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/apr/18/montana-jewish-woman-sues-troll-storm-neo-nazi-harassment> [accessed May 29, 2017]; and Emma Green, 'Are Jews White?', *The Atlantic*, December 5, 2016 <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/12/are-jews-white/509453/> [accessed May 29, 2017].

[5] Francesca T. Royster, 'White-Limed Walls: Whiteness and Gothic Extremism in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51 (2000), 432-55; Stephanie Chamberlain, 'Fatal Indulgences: Gertrude and the Perils of Excess in Early Modern England', *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium* 13 (2013), 25-33.

commodity herself, because Dutch artisans comprised a 'familiar other' in early seventeenth-century London. Montgomery alerts us to the ways in which identity markers such as language and dress (including hair-dressing and the ability to reproduce distinctive hair-styles for other women) can indicate ethnic or national origin on stage and on the streets of London before the invention of the flat category 'white'.

Steven Veerapen's essay likewise foregrounds female figures for whom language becomes self-consciously a marker of national identity but whose claims to Englishness through language and acculturation fall prey to an emerging discourse of English nationhood and blood purity. In *Henry VIII* Katherine of Aragon's pleas for toleration of the 'stranger' and her high-spirited demand that her trial be conducted in English yield to Anne Bullen's claims of English blood and ultimately to the infant Elizabeth's sobriquet as 'English as she can be'. At the same time, however, Anne's Englishness (Veerapen observes) is tied to the emergence of an autocratic masculinity; Anne avows 'submissi[on]' where Katherine demanded political agency. *Perkin Warbeck* likewise associates foreign women with aggressive power-brokering, but, Veerapen concludes, both plays nonetheless offer a clear-eyed analysis of the internecine and even international risks that can proceed from a new, exclusive English nationalism, even as they seem to accept those risks. In contrast, the plays discussed by Elizabeth Pentland, *Henry V* and *King John*, seem, she suggests, to crack open the façade of Englishness that they ostensibly build. Where French men often seem irrecuperable to the project of English nationalism, she writes, French *women* can deploy a 'fluid' identity that they can use to 'perform' Englishness through their actions rather than an origin curtailed by their place of nativity (the etymological origin, Pentland reminds us, of the word 'nation'). Her powerful conclusion recuperates the words of the French queen, Isabel, as not mere platitudes for a superficial and temporary reconciliation but as an act of compassionate imagination in which 'English may as French, French Englishmen' treat each other. Isabel hints that such a fantasised brotherhood, continues Pentland, is perhaps utterable only by a 'woman's voice', precisely because Isabel can undertake only diplomatic negotiations, wars of words, not swords.

Two plays by Fletcher, discussed by Celia Caputi, offer in her reading a model for cross-feminist coalition. Italianate women and an Italianate setting offer Fletcher the opportunity to present as heroines women of ambivalent sexual status, such as the pre-contracted but unmarried mother Constantia in *The Chances*. In that play Fletcher deploys the same name — ironically, 'Constantia', or the constant one — for the Madonna-like deserted mother and the self-confident courtesan. He does so, suggests Caputi, in order to clarify that the 'whore' and the romantic heroine can make common cause against the misogyny that forces women into sexual commodification and then

shames them for becoming that commodity. Caputi explicitly connects Fletcher's insistence on breaking binary or monolithic categories such as 'woman' or 'whore' or 'wife' to his insistence (in *The Tamer Tam'd* and in *Women Pleased*) upon 'equality' over 'hierarchy'. She offers as an example of how binaries reinforce inequality the 'coloured' and 'white' labels on water fountains and public bathrooms in the US in the era of Jim Crow. Thus Caputi reads at least some of Fletcher's plays — particularly those that treat marriage as a dance between the equally matched rather than as a contest between the powerful and the disempowered and that nuance 'woman' as a category — as creating a de facto, proto-feminist 'cosmopolitanism'.

If the Italianate setting enabled Fletcher to question binaries of gender and profession, so, argues Eric Nicholson, it allowed Shakespeare to create the Italian *dive* [divas] Beatrice, Katharina, and Desdemona. These *dive* adeptly adapted the Italianate fencing style to words, uttering poniards rather than stabbing with them and, in the first two cases, ultimately subduing their husbands through their own theatrical and verbal skill. Castiglione's ideal court lady, Nicholson reminds us, is already a kind of hybrid, expected to be witty and silent; beautiful and modest; welcoming yet reserved. In the comic register, Katharina's encomium from Petruchio in the wooing scene is then both true and ironic, and in the tragic, Othello's praise of Desdemona's appetite and beauty marks the life-threatening difficulties of cultural translation in courtly behaviour. But Shakespeare's Beatrice — and to a certain extent, Katharina — extend their license to go beyond court-sanctioned duelling, and evoke the sexually explicit jokes and wit of the Italian *dive*, Nicholson suggests.

Evelyn Gajowski's essay perhaps most explicitly connects the project of whiteness studies to the investigation of European Women in Early Modern Drama in her discussion of race and gender in *The Tragedy of Mariam.* As Kim F. Hall, Dympna Callaghan, and Sujata Iyengar have independently observed, Elizabeth Cary's closet drama activates stereotypes that connect dark skin with animality, excessive appetite, ugliness, and wickedness and associates them with the character Salome in order to contrast her to the 'fair Queen of Jewry', Mariam. In this way the play blanches Mariam and allows her, argues Gajowski, to participate in the Petrarchan rhetoric associated with the blazon of female beauty. Despite, however, Mariam's conformity to Petrarchan (and English) modes of beauty and virtue, continues Gajowski, Mariam's Jewishness compels her tragic death, and the 'black' Salome 'lives on'. The play thus fissures whiteness or fairness by dissociating Mariam's 'Europeanised' whiteness from victory even as the 'de-Europeanised' Salome in some fashion thrives.

Taken as a whole, these essays encourage us to continue productively to investigate our own persistent cultural beliefs about European identity, whiteness, gender, and sexuality alongside early modern ones. In so doing, we find that imputations of moral value to female behaviour, and associations between women's national origins and their habits, appearances, or comportment, are not historically bound or fixed, or even based in empirical observations or measures of such behaviours, but are instead what Jonathan Burton and Ania Loomba have helpfully dubbed 'travelling tropes' – accusations of frigidity or lewdness, nudity or covering, correct or incorrect speech, savagery or sophistication, beauty or ugliness, loosely or tightly braided hair, tasteful or disgusting culinary habits, and so on – that are applied to one ethnic, cultural, or racial group by another that seeks to dominate them.[6] Thus a sixteenth-century stereotype associating the Danish and Northern Europeans with excessive drinking 'travels' in twentieth- and twenty-first century America to persons with Native American ancestry, to such an extent that even the issuing of death certificates can be found to exhibit racial prejudice.[7] Or concerns about women's covering or veiling can be found applied to German women in both the sixteenth and the twenty-first centuries, although in the first instance such women are Christian and in the second they are Muslim.[8] Observers both hundreds of years ago and today variously connect women with braiding (of hair or of textiles) in order either to praise their neatness and diligence or to castigate them for vanity and time-wasting.[9] As we keep exploring such observations and their assumed meanings, we will continue to make strange, fresh, new, and unique the lived experiences of individual women through literature and history, even if doing so sometimes makes us nervous.

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[6] Jonathan Burton and Ania Loomba (eds.), *Race: A Documentary Companion* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 20-2.

[7] A. Noymer, A.M. Penner, A. Saperstein A, 'Cause of Death Affects Racial Classification on Death Certificates', *PLoS ONE* 6.1 (2011): e15812, published online Jan. 26, 2011, <https://phys.org/news/2011-01-racial-stereotyping-death-certificates.html#jCp> [accessed June 5, 2017], doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0015812.

[8] Susanna Burghartz, 'Covered Women? Veiling in Early Modern Europe', translated by Jane Caplan, *History Workshop J* 80.1 (2015), 1-32, published online 23 Sep. 2015, <https://academic.oup.com/hwj/article-lookup/doi/10.1093/hwj/dbv028> [accessed June 5, 2017], doi: https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbv028; Alison Smale, 'Germany Calls for Ban on Full-Face Veils in Germany', *New York Times*, Dec. 6, 2016 <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/06/world/europe/merkel-calls-for-ban-on-full-face-veils-in-germany.html> [accessed June 5, 2017].

[9] Claire Canavan, 'Textual and Textile Literacies in Early Modern Braids', *Renaissance Studies* 30.5 (2016): 684-707, published online 29 June 2015, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/rest.12169/full> [accessed June 5, 2017].