

## **Pompa Banerjee**

University of Colorado Denver

Trafficking in Shakespeare—Early Modern Race Studies

This essay juxtaposes The Tempest with a travel narrative in order to put both texts into a conversation about race, bloodlines, and ancestry. A self-conscious pedagogy of Shakespeare and race recognizes that in contemporary America some immigrants outside academia seize on anti-black racism to deal with pressures of assimilation: Moving beyond these strident, influential voices will require rigorous “conversations,” a word, which via Kwame Anthony Appiah, invokes the older meaning of cosmopolitanism. In such conversations, Shakespeare’s texts are part of a connective web that makes race visible in the long histories of contact between Europe, Africa, Asia, and America. The narrative of race in America is distinct but not detached from these other narratives. Such a pedagogy compels students to attend to the issue of race within these connected and global histories. It also invites them to respond imaginatively to the shifting constructs of race and the radical asymmetries that shaped these texts as well as their own responses.

## **Urvashi Chakravarty**

George Mason University

As You Like It: Similitude, Strangeness, and Early Modern English Homonationalisms

My paper looks to the interstices between queer studies and race studies to explore the ways in which the problems and possibilities of proximity can give us purchase on new directions for early modern race studies. In particular, I argue that current critical conversations in queer studies around homohistory and homonationalism can illuminate paradoxical shifts in the meanings of the early modern English family. Drawing on the tension between sameness and alterity generated by discourses of the “homo,” I examine both the household’s “alien bodies” and their imbrication in blood-based ideas of race and family to ask how sameness can make us more attentive to the (so-called) “strange.”

## **Vanessa Corredera**

Andrews University

“Not a Moor, Exactly”: Shakespeare, *Serial*, and Modern Constructions of Race

In the quest for responsible historical contextualization, scholarship on early modern race has vigilantly attended to the differences between Renaissance culture and our own. We have put our scholarly selves on high alert over imposing contemporary views upon early moderns, especially regarding the privileging of phenotypes as markers of racial difference. Yet doing so has depended on the specious assertion that somehow those in Renaissance England conceived of race as more fluid than it is considered today. Though many may acknowledge that *race* is a construction, skeptical critics continue to insist that its privileged modern conception is predominantly scientific, phenotypical, and more stable than the past’s. Thus, here, I want to briefly turn to current race and ethnic studies and more extensively to a contemporary cultural example, the now famous NPR podcast *Serial*, to counter this assertion by demonstrating that more often than not, a multiplicity of issues like language, religion, skin color, and descent all play pivotal roles in modern constructions of race. *Serial* proves a

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particularly intriguing study due to its Shakespearean connections—namely, invoking *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* as touchstones in its opening minutes and garnering increasing attention for its role in replacing Shakespeare in the English classroom. At the same time, the ways the educated figures both within the podcast and who analyze it online demonstrate how the term *race* today often references much more than the biological. In other words, *Serial* exemplifies that we are wrong to insist that the privileged discourse of race today is more stable and thereby constructed in a fundamentally different way for us than for early moderns. By letting go of this false dichotomy, we also let go of the impetus to whitewash the potential presence of racialization in great works of the Western literary canon, Shakespeare's among them. Moreover, by admitting the fluidity of modern constructions of race, we can enable discussions of race in the classroom that make Shakespeare's works (among others) especially relevant and engaging to students increasingly multi-racial as well as increasingly skeptical about the value and pertinence of classic literary works.

### **Ms. Meghan Daly Costa**

Northwestern University

"Blackface is not history": Teaching Racial Impersonation in the Renaissance Classroom

Responding to Ayanna Thompson's recent call for contributions to early modern race studies "that more frankly...question the relationship between the desire for historicism and the desire for social relevance," this essay examines how considerations of blackface impersonation, both recent and early modern, crystallize the complex relations between white privilege, racial performance, and the cultural production of difference. Taking my home institution's recent history with blackface spectacle as a launching pad, I examine how undergraduates engage (historicized) conventions of Renaissance blackface, while also foregrounding connections or (dis)connections between those conventions and later racial discourses and discriminatory practices. I ultimately argue that attention to "Moorish disguise plays" like William Berkeley's *The Lost Lady* (1637), which leverage the conventions of blackface impersonation to consolidate constructions of whiteness on stage, springboards discussions that more canonical plays like *Titus* and *Othello* often preclude or cut short.

### **Ruben Espinosa**

University of Texas at El Paso

Alienated Shakespeare

In this paper, I examine how Latino/a engagement with Shakespeare reveals how the weight of Shakespeare's cultural capital is often overbearing, and I also scrutinize how apprehension about accessing Shakespeare—how the burden of identity politics, laden with insecurities, anxieties, insularity, ethnocentrism and all—can be fostered to uncover a different, culturally relevant Shakespeare for American Latino/as. More specifically, I seek to consider how the dynamics of identity politics on the U.S.-Mexico border, where Mexican Americans often negotiate cross-cultural identity and pressures of assimilation, stands to shed light on both the promise and the limitations surrounding the future of Shakespeare studies amid the shifting demographic in America. I attend to marginal YouTube productions as a jumping off point as a means of offering a snapshot of sorts to consider how young Latino/a consumers of Shakespeare see and understand him, and how the particular standpoints from which they approach him influence that understanding. Mindful attention to the various epistemologies that Mexican-American readers offer allows for a fresh understanding of the rich strangeness of

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Shakespeare—that is, it allows for an alienated Shakespeare not yet filtered through a critical apparatus that often privileges and takes for granted his universality.

### **Kyle Grady**

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Othello, Colin Powell, and Post-Racial Anachronisms: Reframing Critical Approaches to Shakespeare's Moor

This paper analyzes the modern-day sociopolitical frameworks circulating in early modern ethnicity studies. Specifically, it focuses on the field's critical strategies for deemphasizing the salience of modern-day constructions of race, arguing that those strategies demonstrate affinities with the post-racial logics of our contemporary moment. Through a survey of the racially transcendent rhetoric attached to Colin Powell, it interrogates similar approaches to Shakespeare's *Othello*, emphasizing this rhetoric's relationship to post-racialism's black ascendancy narrative. By reframing criticism of the play along this axis, this paper demonstrates that the myriad approaches to *Othello* either enact or trouble this narrative. As post-racial logics engender blind spots to racial inequity in the modern-day, corollary frameworks in early modern studies risk similar elisions. Because awareness to the limitations of this rhetoric derives most effectively from a familiarity with the modern-day sociopolitical, this paper proposes a reassessment of the ways in which modern-day concerns and their impact on early modern scholarship are addressed. For the pursuit of more thorough historicizing of early modern ethnic ideology, the multivalent manifestations of modern-day concerns that circulate in the field must be foregrounded, grappled with, and redeployed in productive ways.

### **John Kunat**

Sonoma State University

"Mislike Me Not for My Complexion": Race and Alternative Sexuality in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*

This paper examines the different modes through which race and sexuality produce and reproduce one another in Shakespeare. It focuses on the Prince of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice* as a figure in whom the various contradictions between these discourses are contained. Since Morocco was England's ally in the struggle against Spain, audiences were inclined to look upon the enemy of their enemy as a friend. Overall, the Prince is a relatively sympathetic character, yet he never has a real chance of marrying Portia because race is represented as an insurmountable barrier. In contrast, Lorenzo does marry Jessica, who is able to alter her identity and reconstruct herself as a Christian. This religious conversion is framed by the cross-dressing episodes involving Jessica, Portia and Nerissa, in which an alternative sexual identity is assumed and then discarded. Racial, religious, and sexual identities are thus fashioned in relation to one another in terms of both fixity and fluidity.

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**Arthur L. Little, Jr.**

UCLA

White Properties: Racism, Race, and the Shakespearean Imaginary

Is the early modern period (the early modern imagination), especially Shakespeare, white property? What in the early modern imagination and in our own imaginative *reconstruction* of Shakespeare/the early modern is the relationship between “race” and “racism”? This paper examines notions of whiteness, property and freedom embedded in the ways Shakespeare/early modern scholarship imagines both the past and the scholar’s relationship to that past. It addresses some of these questions by turning to works that collectively may help us think about the *state* of early modern/Shakespeare race studies and help us move the conversation forward by advancing not only its empirical bases but its theoretical reach and depth. While the imaginative frame of dominant early modern and Shakespearean critical discourses is deeply informed by a kind of early modern hermeticism when it comes to race (Shakespeare and the early modern are quite porous in so many other respects—in fact, their porousness is so much a part of their presumed cultural authority and power), these same discourses are no less quick to put forward a kind of imaginary whiteness, a kind of untouchability, that speaks to the “exceptional” sovereignty (via Agamben) that undergirds *proper* understanding of Shakespeare and the early modern.

**Lynn M. Maxwell**

Spelman College

A Renaissance for Spelman

Drawing on my personal experience teaching at Spelman College, this paper explores what it means to teach early modern literature at a minority serving institution and considers the extent to which a historically black women’s college might require different kinds of courses in the Renaissance / Early Modern period. Ultimately, I propose a survey organized around global exchanges in the period and argue that such a survey would allow themes of race, exploration, empire, and colonialism to rise to the surface. Since this is a course that would be taken by a large percentage of undergraduate majors, it would provide students at Spelman with much needed entry points to the period and might encourage them to pursue studies in early modern literature and early modern race. Embedded in this conversation is a larger one about why teaching race in the early modern period matters at the undergraduate level.

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### **Carmen M. Meza**

The Ohio State University

Localizing Racial Difference: Geographic Imagination and Feminist Theory in *The Renegado* and *The Island Princess*

This paper explores the intersectional relationship between race, gender, and dramatic representations of geography in early modern drama. I focus on Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* and John Fletcher's *The Island Princess* as my primary case studies. Whereas previous commentators have focused on issues of climate theory to examine constructions of race in drama (Feerick; Floyd-Wilson) and on issues of bodily difference (Macdonald) my analysis centers on the function of space and place as a way to further complicate how we might interpret representations of race in drama. By taking a "comparative race studies" approach to these texts, I unpack how race functions differently in Massinger's Tunis location as opposed to Fletcher's Spice Islands. In focusing on texts where different cultures meet, I examine how setting contributes to our understanding of racialized characters. Rather than thinking about racial categories as inherently separate from one another, this essay explores what happens when racial categories and dramatic settings are studied against one another in a multi-racial framework. In this way, I offer the work of women of color feminists, such as Gloria Anzaldua, Cherrie Moraga, and Chandra Mohanty, to examine connections between early modern plays and contemporary feminist perspectives.

### **Noémie Ndiaye**

Columbia University

The Devil's Advocates: Revisiting the Politics of Early Modern Blackface

This paper argues that, in the 1590's, the power structure that most 21st century race scholars have in mind when they use the term race permeated English culture much more than has often been acknowledged. In *Titus Andronicus* and *The White Devil*, Shakespeare and Webster manifest their awareness of the existence of this racial matrix, and develop a critique of it by dismantling the devilish hermeneutics of blackface on stage. To make this claim, this paper relies on the work recently done by Imtiaz Habib to recover the lives of early modern Africans from secretive English archives, and on his thought-provoking claim that the majority of Elizabethan Africans lived in "unspoken chattel bondage" (Habib 76). By focusing on racial power structures on stage and off stage, rather than on what the word race meant to the Elizabethans, this paper breaks away from what Ian Smith has called "the terminological obsession" that informs attempts at relegating the invention of race to the post-Restoration era, and "obscures race's strategic, opportunistic, negotiating purpose" (Smith 12). Ultimately, this paper promotes the engagement of early modern race scholars with the recent and upcoming findings of historians regarding the social condition of Africans in England "before slavery".

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### **Ian Smith**

Lafayette College

We Are Othello: Speaking Race in Early Modern Studies

Both Hamlet and Othello make requests for their posthumous stories to be told to explain their actions and rehabilitate their reputations. Critics have become the *de facto* literary biographers, providing assessments that, in the Hamlet's case specifically, affirm the prince as the literary incarnation of the modern self. Such easy identification is not forthcoming for Othello whose racial difference, the play suggests, makes his auditors unreliable narrators. This question of racial disjunction and the division created among interlocutors, audiences, and critics is replayed in the split reactions along clear racial lines to the recent protests arising as a result of multiple black homicides involving white police officers epitomized in the "Black Lives Matter" slogan. Additional research among social psychologists confirms that white preference amounting to racial bias is pervasive in American society. In such a social context, are literary critics immune to this bias, and to what extent can such critics speak and write about race, as Othello demands, in our time?

### **Sandra Michele Young**

University of Cape Town

"Searching the 'secrets of nature': reading early modernity's racialized imaginary"

The texts that sought to establish new knowledge practices constitute an archive of resonant materials with which to examine early modern strategies for dealing with human difference. The suitability of a race-based critical lexicon to discuss the undeniable bigotry in the period is still contested within early modern studies, so I begin by weighing up some of the familiar arguments and making a case for what I see as the resonances between early modern studies and cultural studies, for both research and teaching. This paper then provides an opportunity for me to suggest how the inscription of an early modern "global south," as I see it, might contribute to the conversation. I argue that the language of cartography made itself available as a conceptual grid within which to place the peoples of the world, without having to resolve or explain degrees of difference. The visual, bibliographic and narrative structures of the early geographies produced a set of distinctions that seemed to warrant little qualification or explanation, so powerful was their rhetoric. I have found it productive to extend my critical reading into what book historian Roger Chartier calls the "*espaces lisibles*" (or readable spaces) that exist beyond the traditional domain of literary studies. My concern has been to read the books themselves, as cultural objects, and not just the sentences they contain, in order to understand the explanatory frameworks they constructed for making sense of perceived differences across the globe. These textual features contributed to the cultural production of the "southern climes" and the racialized imaginary within which they were understood. The recognition of the construction of an early modern global south thus offers one way to think about the operations of race and racism in early modernity.