



Journal of Arts & Humanities

Volume 09, Issue 05, 2020: 47-59

Article Received: 08-04-2020

Accepted: 25-05-2020

Available Online: 04-06-2020

ISSN: 2167-9045 (Print), 2167-9053 (Online)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18533/journal.v9i5.1903>

‘Bondslaves and Pagans shall our Statesmen be’: Interracial Marriage and Transgression in Othello

Imed Sassi¹

ABSTRACT

The representation of race, ethnicity and cultural difference has become a focal point in recent Shakespearean and early modern scholarship. Nevertheless, the issue of interracial marriage has not yet been given its due even though it unravels the most intimate and significant encounter with otherness, not only for the couple involved, but also with reference to their society at large. This essay explores the dynamics and politics of interracial marriage in Othello (1604). My main argument is that the Moor’s interracial marriage potentially guarantees a better integration in Venice for an outsider whose almost sole attachment to, and toleration in, that society is predicated on his usefulness to it.

Keywords: Interracial marriage, Moor, Othello, Shakespeare, early modern, race.

This is an open access article under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License.

1. Introduction: Race in early modern studies

“Race as analytic category” in early modern studies is no longer, as Ania Loomba stated back in 1996, “conspicuous” by its very “absence” (Loomba, 1996: 164). It has, in fact, become one of the predominant foci in Shakespearean and early modern drama research. Scholars in the field are currently increasingly using the designation “early modern race studies” to refer to an established and almost distinct area of scholarly research. Moreover, studies investigating the representation of racial and cultural difference in that age, and more particularly in Shakespeare, have become overwhelming by their sheer quantity. They gained momentum especially in the form of feminist analysis, binding the category of race to that of gender. Ania Loomba’s *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (1989) is groundbreaking in this regard. Equally central to this concern is Kim Hall’s highly influential work, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (1995).² Studies of “race”

¹Imed Sassi is an independent scholar. Email: isassi2018@gmail.com. Tel: 966509602198.

² Numerous works discuss gender in conjunction with race in early modern drama. Examples include: Celia Daileader, *Racism, Misogyny, and the Othello Myth: Inter-racial Couples from Shakespeare to Spike Lee* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005); Dymphna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage* (London, Routledge, 2000); Joyce Green MacDonald, *Women and Race in Early Modern Texts* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002); Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (eds), *Women, ‘Race’ and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (London, Routledge, 1994); Ania Loomba, ‘Sexuality and Racial Difference’, in Anthony G

in early modern drama have proliferated, the risk of being anachronistic notwithstanding. For, as Michael Neill succinctly indicates, *Othello*, for example, “is a play that trades in constructions of human difference at once misleadingly like and confusingly unlike those twentieth century notions to which they are nevertheless recognizably ancestral” (Neil, 1998: 361). For this concept, as many scholars have shown, did not at that age inhere the stable semantics which it is now believed to denote, as it was variably used to refer to lineage, rank, religion or community rather than, exclusively to, phenotypical differences and skin colour, referents to which it is usually attached in modern usage.³ Consequently, early modernists have reiterated their cautious admonition that it would be “anachronistic” to apply the unqualified concept of “race” to the early modern period particularly when related to slavery.⁴ Nevertheless, this rather new historicist unwillingness to engage with race in early modern studies has been recently challenged by several scholars.

Peter Erickson and Kim Hall argue that this opposition is “encapsulated in the single word ‘anachronism’ and informally deployed as a scare tactic and conversation stopper”. (Erickson & Hall, 2016: 4). They equally contend that “these acts of refusal” to include race as an analytic category in early modern scholarship are “due to a pathological averseness to thinking about race under the guise of protecting historical difference” (Erickson & Hall, 2016: 2).⁵ Lara Bovilsky also questions this rigid historical difference, arguing that first “race is not now, and indeed has never been, a matter merely of biological categories, phenotypes, or fixed identities; second, that the past is neither as fluid as has been nearly universally assumed, nor the present as rigid” (Bovilsky, 2008: 9).⁶ Bassi, for his part, voices his critique of the predominance of “race” in early modern studies albeit all the attendant critical and conceptual problems; he suggests, instead, the use of the more “flexible” concept of “ethnicity”, which, he postulates, is a “critical category potentially useful for any Shakespearean text” since “race”, he argues, “ends up isolating a small number of characters according to contemporary logic” (Bassi, 2016: 37). However, as Peter Erickson has previously contended, “in the shift from race to a more inclusive ethnicity, the specificity of black-white power relations is in danger of disappearing”. (Erickson, 1998: 30). Therefore, “race” in early modern studies is a debatable issue given the admittedly compelling reason of historical difference for some, but no less due to the urgency of race and racism in contemporary life, for others. While being heedful of historical difference, I think that terminological “precisionism” should not inhibit serious scholarly investigation of this issue.

As Ania Loomba and Jonathan Burton persuasively argue, “it makes less sense to try and settle upon a precise definition or indeed to locate a precise moment of origin for racial ideologies than to delineate the ways in which they order and delimit human possibilities through a wide range of conjoined discourses and practice” (Loomba & Burton, 2007: 2). Given the current global conditions, informed by a relentless rise of racism as well as different political neo-conservatism and far-right discourses and practices, race is, in fact, an urgent issue that needs to be addressed in early modern

Barthelemy (ed.), *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Othello* (New York, G. K. Hall, 1994), 162–86. Jyotsna Singh, however, contends that the category of ‘race’ has been at times collapsed, by some early modern feminist critics, in that of gender, see ‘Othello’s Identity, Postcolonial Theory, and Contemporary African Rewritings of Othello’, in Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (eds), *Women, ‘Race’, and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (New York, Routledge, 1994), 287-99. For a critique of intersectionality, see also Jasbir Puar ‘I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess’: Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory’, *philoSOPHIA: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 2:1 (2012), 49–66.

³ For a discussion of ‘race’ in the early modern period, see especially Lynda Boose, ‘“The Getting of a Lawful Race”: Racial Discourse in Early Modern England and the Unrepresentable Black Woman’, in Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (eds), *Women, ‘Race’, and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, 35-54; Joyce Green MacDonald (ed.) *Race, Ethnicity, and Power in the Renaissance*, (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997); Peter Erickson, ‘The Moment of Race in Renaissance Studies’, *Shakespeare Studies* 26 (1998), 27–36; Francesca T Royster, ‘“The ‘End of Race” and the Future of Early Modern Cultural Studies’, *Shakespeare Studies* 26 (1998), 59-69; Margo Hendricks, ‘Surveying “Race” in Shakespeare’, in Catharine M. S. Alexander and Stanley Wells (eds), *Shakespeare and Race* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1–22; Imtiaz Habib, *Shakespeare and Race: Postcolonial Praxis in the Early Modern Period* (Lanham, MD, University Press of America, 2000); Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003); Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴ See for example, Emily Bartels’ ‘Othello and Africa: Postcolonialism Reconsidered’, *William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (1997): 45–64. Emily Weissbourd, however, argues that ‘it is not in fact anachronistic to read Othello in the context of both the Mediterranean and the enslavement of sub-Saharan Africans’, ‘“I Have Done the State Some Service”: Reading Slavery in Othello through Juan Latino.’, *Comparative Drama* 47:4 (2013) 529-551.

⁵ For a critique of ‘anachronism’, see Vanessa Corredera, ‘“Not a Moor exactly”: Shakespeare, Serial, and Modern Constructions of Race’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 67:1 (2016), 30-50; see also Arthur L. Little, Jr., ‘Re-Historicizing Race, White Melancholia, and the Shakespearean Property’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 67:1 (2016), 84-10, which is a sustained critique of the refusal of some scholars to engage with race in early modern studies, dubbing this tendency ‘white melancholia’.

⁶ She equally refutes rigid periodization which she construes as an “orthodoxy” (Bovilsky, 2008: 24).

studies both in research and in the classroom as they ultimately shape and are shaped by our present moment; more so is the topic of inter-racial relationships in increasingly multicultural modern societies.

Apart from a few studies, such as Daileader's *Racism, Misogyny, and the Othello Myth: Interracial Couples from Shakespeare to Spike Lee* (2005) and more recently Kaufmann's ' "Making the Beast with Two Backs": Interracial Relationships in Early Modern England', as well as Bovilsky's *Barbarous Plays: Race on the English Renaissance Stage* (2008), interracial marriage in early modern drama remains largely understudied. Moreover, Bovilsky's and Daileader's work is shaped by feminist reading as they focus largely on the effects of the interracial relationship on female characters, while they do not pay equal attention to the character of Othello, for instance, since he is mainly read as part of the dominant patriarchal structure. Kaufmann's, on the other hand, is more of a historical investigation of actual interracial relationships in early modern England although it makes several references to the drama of the age.

Interracial relationships in Shakespeare have not been the main focus of much scholarly work even though the subject is occasionally mentioned, in a rather ancillary way, in some studies dealing with the representation of Moors in early modern drama (Bartels 2008 & Callaghan 1996). This essay investigates the shaping dynamics and underlying politics of interracial love and marriage relationships in Shakespearean drama, taking mainly *Othello* (1604), as a case in point, while references to other Shakespearean works, as well as to some of his contemporaries' will be incorporated in the discussion as a means of contextualisation. It explores mainly the interracial marriage of Othello, the black Moor, to Desdemona, the white Venetian, but while I attend to both characters, I will focus more on the effects of the interracial marriage on Othello, as most work undertaken in this area, has so far been more emphatically interested in Desdemona and in gender. My main argument is that the Moor's interracial marriage potentially guarantees a better integration in the Venetian society for an outsider whose almost sole attachment to, and toleration in, that society is predicated on his usefulness to it.

Although a substantial body of research has been devoted to the play, *Othello* still yields itself to a pertinent investigation of the dramatization of interracial love and marriage relationships as it is unique, among contemporaneous plays, in its close exploration of this issue. I will start with a discussion of the literature on interracial marriage in early modern drama. Then I will focus on a close reading of the dramatization of this issue in *Othello* while contextualising the play within both its historical milieu and with reference to other dramatic works which explore the same issue. I will conclude the discussion by showing how Othello's interracial marriage to Desdemona not only fails to guarantee better acceptance and / assimilation of the Moor in his foster Venetian society, but it also alienates, even if at times symbolically, Desdemona herself.

2. Interracial relationships

The context of marital or extra-marital interracial relationships within which Shakespearean Moors are dramatized uncovers the dynamics of racial (in) tolerance as well as the politics of assimilation and integration in early modern Europe. The issue of interracial relations has permeated the Bard's oeuvre; witness the enigmatic Dark Lady of the Sonnets;⁷ passing through the diabolic, stereotypical and rather crude character of Aaron in *Titus Andronicus* (1594) and the terse, but no less revealing, sketchy female Moor in *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-98) together with the more amply fleshed out character of Morocco in the same play; culminating—even climaxing—in the profound exploration of Othello, the Moor of Venice (1604); and having as an epilogue the invocation of the King of Tunis's marriage to a Neapolitan princess in one of Shakespeare's last plays, *The Tempest* (1611). Therefore, the issue of interracial love, marital and sexual relations held a significant interest to the Bard during almost his whole dramatic and poetic life. The fact that all Shakespearean Moors are involved in interracial relationships does not arise, to my mind, from mere coincidence. Another distinctive and notable feature colouring Shakespeare's dramatization of Moorish interracial relations is

⁷ Marvin Hunt shows how, *pace* traditional scholarship, the Dark Lady was rather black, Marvin Hunt, 'Be Dark but Not Too Dark: Shakespeare's Dark Lady as a Sign of Colour', in James Schiffer (ed.), *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays* (New York, Garland, 1999), 369-90. While it would be precipitous to suggest that Shakespeare's interest in interracial relationships sprang from what might have been a personal life experience with the Dark Lady, it would be enlightening to explore the sonnets in conjunction with the plays as they may shed a valuable light on our understanding of the playwright's dramatization of the issue for the stage.

that almost all his Moors are located within a European metropolis, be it Renaissance Italian Venice and Belmont or even ancient Rome.⁸ Divorced from their native, social environment, they are represented as outsiders in predominantly European cultures. They are, from this particular perspective, different for instance from George Peele's Moors in *The Battle of Alcazar* (1589) who are dramatized in "their" native countries. Therefore, their adaptation to, or integration in, their adoptive societies becomes rather crucial for their very social survival and, ultimately, their success.

Even though cultural difference in early modern England has become the focus of an expansive body of research, work on the issue of interracial marriage and interracial relationships per se is still rather scant. Two studies, however, can be singled out, Daileader's *Racism, Misogyny, and the Othello Myth: Inter-Racial Couples from Shakespeare to Spike Lee* (2005) and more recently Kaufmann's ' "Making the Beast with Two Backs": Interracial Relationships in Early Modern England' (2015). Daileader's work is a sustained critique of what she dubs "othellophilia" which she accounts for as "the critical and cultural fixation on Shakespeare's tragedy of interracial marriage". (Daileader, 6) She raises the suggestive question: 'where is Othello's sister?' (Daileader, 13), whereby indicating that female black partners, within interracial relationships, have been disowned in Western culture. However, her readings, interesting as they are, focus largely on gender representation. As she herself states, "I am less interested in the question of which came first, the racist or the xenophobe, than I am in teasing out the way both forms of chauvinism participate in and perpetrate misogyny". (Daileader, 43). As for Kaufmann's article, it yields a valuable survey of actual interracial marriages and sexual relationships which took place in early modern England and concludes that, contrary to the previously largely held assumptions, there was a significant black presence, and there were several white-black couples, in early modern England. She also argues that "it is vital that the new historical understanding of the African presence in early modern England be incorporated into the discussion of interracial relationships in Renaissance literature" (Kaufmann, 2015: 26).⁹

Apart from these two studies, interracial relationships in Shakespeare have not been the main focus of much scholarly work even though the subject is occasionally mentioned, in a rather ancillary way, in some studies dealing with the representation of Moors in early modern drama. For example, Emily Bartels maintains that in *Othello* "the Moor's integration into Europe is evidenced and fostered ... by his sanctioned marriage to a Venetian senator's daughter" (Bartels, 2008: 142). She equally refers to the marriage in other instances as well as to that of Eleazar, the Moor, to the white Maria in *Lust's Dominion* without dwelling sufficiently on the issue.¹⁰ Bovilsky, however, examines mainly *Desdemona*—but also to a less extent *Othello*—in light of their marriage. She indicates that their "racialization" is pointedly stressed within the marriage matrix, stating that "[w]hen not being directly contrasted with or idealized by *Othello*, *Desdemona*'s racial identity is less static and less classified (just as *Othello* can appear less starkly or simply racialized outside the context of marriage)" (Bovilsky, 2008: 50); hence, she cogently argues that it is their marriage which exacerbates their racialization both. However, she tends to read *Desdemona*'s "racial darkening" process as a result of the assertion of female "agency" and as due to marriage tout court, not interracial marriage. Equally, marriage is read mainly vis-à-vis the character of *Desdemona*, while little attention is given to the effects of this enterprise on *Othello*, the Moor.¹¹

8 The only exception being the king of Tunis, who remains off-stage is not even considered a secondary character (2.1 72-73).

9 For a more detailed account of the presence of black people in early modern England, see Kaufmann's more recent work, *Black Tudors: The Untold Story* (London, Oneworld Publications, 2017) where she maintains that "[t]udors were far more likely to judge a new acquaintance by his or her religion and social class than by where they were born or the colour of their skin, though these categories did on occasion intersect", 4. See also Imtiaz Habib, *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500–1677: Imprints of the Invisible* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2008); Paul Edwards, 'The Early African Presence in the British Isles', in Jagdish S. Gundara and Ian Duffield (eds), *Essays on the History of Blacks in Britain from Roman Times to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Aldershot, Avebury, 1992), 18-20; Gustav Ungerer, 'The Presence of Africans in Elizabethan England and the Performance of *Titus Andronicus* at Burley-on-the-Hill, 1595/96' *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England* 21 (2008), 19-55; for black presence in Renaissance Venice, see, for example, Kate Lowe, 'Visible Lives: Black Gondoliers and Other Black Africans in Renaissance Venice' *Renaissance Quarterly* 66 (2013), 412–52.

10 Dymrna Callaghan also mentions the issue in passing, see Dymrna Callaghan, ' "Othello Was a White Man": Properties of Race on Shakespeare's Stage', in Terence Hawkes (ed.), *Alternative Shakespeares 2*, (London, Routledge, 1996), 192-215.

11 For a critique of her approach, see Matthieu Chapman, *Anti-Black Racism in Early Modern English Drama: The Other "Other"* (New York, Routledge, 2017).

3. Interracial marriage in Othello

Although it has been recently the subject of numerous critical investigations, and pace Dailaeder, Othello is still the ideal early modern play for an investigation of interracial love and marriage relationships. It is the only early modern play enacting a sustained dramatization of an interracial marriage involving a Moor. Certainly, interracial—especially sexual—relationships are portrayed in several other contemporaneous plays, but, unlike Othello the issue has not been the major focus of any of them.¹²

Firstly, Othello's marriage to Desdemona is synonymous with transgression of not only the patriarchal order but also social norms, hence its in-compliant form, elopement. Unlike Roderigo who relentlessly pesters Brabantio with his incessant request to marry Desdemona even though he has been categorically rejected (1.1.99-101), Othello, being a Moor, has not even tried an engagement request for most likely he knows that it would be in vain. He is aware that his only chance to get married to Desdemona is through elopement. As for Brabantio, his daughter's elopement with the Moor is a nightmarish scenario that has metamorphosed into a hideous reality. Nonetheless, his uncompromising and harsh opposition to Othello's marriage to his daughter is partly due to pragmatic reasons. For in historical Venice, a daughter from the nobility was regarded as a useful asset that should be manipulated through marriage to improve the social, economic, and political positions of her family, and more particularly that of her father. William Thomas reports, in this regard, a Venetian upper-class father declaring: "If I spend largely with my daughter, it is because I will bestow her on a gentleman Venetian to increase the nobility of mine own blood and by means of such alliance, to attain more nobility to rule and reign in my commonwealth" (Qtd in Levith, 1989: 32). A noble daughter was hence seen as "symbolic capital" that should be invested to "increase" the father's wealth and power; for the nobility, marriage was consequently largely a mere transaction that is intended to enhance Venetian upper classes positions. Taken from this particular perspective, Othello's marriage reverts the terms of the process; Brabantio comes up as a loser in this match mostly because his daughter is married to a Moor, but also because her marriage runs counter to his interests, particularly that Desdemona has, as he declares, "shunned / The wealthy curled darlings of our nation" (1.2.66-27; emphasis added), those who could have, by marrying her, enhanced his own wealth and patriarchal power.

The rationale underlying marriage in aristocratic Venetian circles was also at the basis of marriage among early modern English upper-classes. Martin Ingram indicates that in that society, "[s]ave at the poorest social levels, the marriage of a child was usually associated with the transfer of property across the generations, while wealthier and more influential families could hope to derive a variety of benefits from favourable alliances" (Ingram, 1987: 128). J. A. Sharpe also points out that in matters of marriage, social interests "especially among the elite had priority over affective considerations" (Sharpe, 1987: 62). Accordingly, marriage was meant to preserve the order and hierarchy in rigidly and highly stratified societies, both the Venetian and English ones. Even when some concessions were given to love as an important factor in match-making, the essential benchmark remained "equality or at least comparability between the couple, especially in respect of religious commitment, virtue, age, birth and breeding, and wealth and estate". (Ingram, 1987: 136). Othello, mainly because of his racial difference, is deemed to be by no means equal to Desdemona. In the play, Brabantio reminds the Senate that the "condition of possibility" for a "normal" marriage between the Moor and his daughter, i.e. equality, is inexistent: "and she [Desdemona], in spite of nature, / Of years, of country, credit, everything, / To fall in love with what she fears to look on?" (1.3.94-98).¹³

The inequality of the couple, resulting mainly from Othello's cultural difference, is represented to partake of the natural, and is hence irreducible. The Christianity of the Moor and his virtue cannot, according to this viewpoint, redeem his "natural" inferiority and make him a match to this noble Venetian lady.¹⁴ It is, paradoxically, solely through that very marriage that the Moor could achieve full

12 Examples include Shakespeare's own *Titus Andronicus*, as well as Lust's *Dominion*, *All's Lost by Lust*, *All's Lost by Lust*, *The Knight of Malta*, *The Fair Maid of the West Part I* and *Part II*.

13 All references to Othello are to the *New Cambridge Shakespeare*, edited by Norman Sanders (Cambridge, CUP, 1984).

14 Dennis Britton maintains that "the transformative power of baptism and marriage to a Christian woman ought to assure Othello's Christian identity. Yet Iago seeks to undo romance telos and manipulate the infidel-conversion motif in order to restore what is presumably Othello's prior Muslim identity", Dennis Austin Britton, *Becoming Christian: Race, Reformation, and Early Modern English Romance* (New York, Fordham University Press, 2014), 3. The assumption that Othello is a converted Christian who reverts to a presumed, prior Muslim religion and culture is

integration in his adoptive Venetian society. It could be argued that Othello's marriage is not stimulated by an obsessive desire to erase, as it were, his blackness and "blanch" himself.¹⁵ Even though Othello's end—unlike that of Jessica, in *The Merchant of Venice*, who openly declares, "I shall be saved by my husband; he hath made me Christian" (3.5.15-20)¹⁶—is not explicitly articulated in the play, there are, I would argue, some subtle hints which underscore this suggestion.

In fact, the Duke tries to console the "afflicted" Brabantio: "And noble signior, / If virtue no delighted beauty lack, / Your son-in-law is far more fair than black" (1.3. 284-286). Despite the fact that Othello's fairness is related to virtue and is not an attribute of his skin colour, he is granted that measure of fairness only in the context of his marriage to the 'fair' Desdemona; his being Brabantio's "son-in-law". Othello's relative fairness is contingent on his marriage. We should, on the other hand, keep in mind the fact that this is the only time in the whole play where Othello is, as it were, bestowed this prestigious fairness; and it is equally the only time that he is referred to as Brabantio's "son-in-law". It is quite revealing that this fairness is conferred to him only after the official authorisation of his marriage by the Senators. The only other instance where the Moor's in-law relationship to Brabantio's family is implicitly acknowledged figures at the end of the play when Lodovico instructs Gratiano—Brabantio's bother—to "keep the house, / And seize upon the fortunes of the Moor, / For they succeed on you" (5.2.376-78). Therefore, the first instance when Othello is acknowledged as Brabantio's son-in-law, it is articulated in conjunction with his fairness, i.e. symbolic blanching¹⁷—subsequent to his marriage—while at the end of the play, he is granted this intimate relation to Venetian society belatedly, after his demise. Consequently, the ratification of his marital status by the Venetian state is somehow contingent on the absence, be it real or imagined, of the real Moor, i.e. predicated on the symbolic or actual annihilation of his racial difference; hence, at first he is acknowledged as Brabantio's son-in-law not as the real "black" Moor, but as somehow an imagined "fair" one, and at the end when he is no mo(o)re. Therefore, even though it is fraught with contradictions, Othello's interracial marriage to Desdemona secures to the Moor, vexed as this may be, full integration in Venetian society.

Hitherto the "valiant" Othello's is primarily, and almost exclusively, a war life. As a Moor warrior he has very little social interactions. He states himself that he is "little blessed with the soft phrase of peace" (1.3.84) and that "little of this great world can I speak / More than pertains to feasts of broils and battles" (1.3.88-89). Even if we do not take Othello's statements at face value, their veracity can be corroborated by other instances in the play. Iago complains, in effect, that Othello's rhetoric is "horribly stuffed with epithets of war" (1.1.14). Equally, even in his intimate interaction with Desdemona, the Moor refers to war; upon their reunion in Cyprus he greets her: "My fair warrior!" (2.1.182).¹⁸ Othello's whole life and knowledge are devoted to belligerence, hence the high importance and radical change his marriage to Desdemona represents to the Moor. It is, indeed, a way for a better integration in the Venetian social formation which has conceived of him, and most likely tolerated him, mainly because he is a capable warrior.¹⁹ Therefore, Othello's seemingly high position as the general of the Venetian army

also maintained in Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005) and in Daneil J. Vitkus, 'Turning Turk in Othello: The Conversion and Damnation of the Moor' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48 (1997), 145-76.

15 Frantz Fanon articulates this desire from admittedly an entirely different historical and cultural context:

Out of the blackest part of my soul, across the zebra striping of my mind, surges this desire to suddenly be white. I wish to be acknowledged not as black but as white (...) Who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man. Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization.... I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Markham. (London, Pluto Press, 1986), 63 (originally published in Editions du Seuil, 1952).

16 All references to Shakespeare are, unless otherwise stated, to David Bevington (ed.), *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (New York, Pearson, 2009), 6th ed.

17 Ania Loomba terms Othello 'honorary white', stating that 'Othello stresses his usefulness to white society, his adoption of its rules of conduct, his achievements which make him acceptable in order to efface the negative connotations of blackness', Ania Loomba, *Gender, Race, and Renaissance Drama* (Manchester, Manchester UP, 1989), 63-64. For Othello's 'process of blanching', see also Ian Smith, 'Barbarian Errors: Performing Race in Early Modern England' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 49 (1998), 168-86.

18 From a different perspective, Timothy A. Turner states that '[t]he play's language emphasises [the] militarisation of domesticity when Othello calls Desdemona his "fair warrior" (2.1.182)', Timothy A. Turner 'Othello on the Rack', *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 15:3 (2015), 102-136, 114.

19 For a discussion of Othello's life in Venice as a 'mercenary' and how it is governed solely by belligerence, with very little 'cultural ties', see Andrew Sisson, 'Othello and the Unweaponed City,' *Shakespeare quarterly* 66 (2015), 137-166.

does not lead to a seamless integration in that society.²⁰ In historic Venice, as Turner demonstrates, “hiring foreign mercenaries had more to do with safeguarding domestic tranquility than with a tolerant or inclusive cosmopolitanism” (Turner, 2015: 113). Othello’s strangeness and “unfixedness” is emphatically articulated in the play by Roderigo’s telling statement: “an extravagant and wheeling stranger / Of here and everywhere” (1.2.139-140).

Additionally, although Othello’s warfare skills are highly esteemed by the Senators—and acknowledged by Iago himself—the Moor’s initial social interactions and subsequent success are not predicated on his present status as a “noble” Christian and general of the Venetian army, but rather on the exotic travel narratives of his past life. It is highly significant that those very stories have allowed him access to Brabantio’s house; without which he would not have met, and subsequently, married Desdemona. Brabantio has been interested in Othello as the purveyor, the representative even, of exoticism. Even Desdemona herself, despite her professed love for the Moor, is, at least initially, fascinated by Othello largely because of his exotic stories.²¹ Desdemona’s statement: “I saw Othello’s visage in his mind” (1.3.255) is significant. His “mind” has, in fact, unfolded to her mostly through his stories. The way her own mind is fascinated by these exotic stories has a great impact on how she sees “Othello’s mind”. So Othello’s mind is, in a way, an idealized construction of her own mind. Her idealized image of Othello can be glimpsed through her disillusionment upon the appearance of the first signs of the Moor’s “passion” and jealousy; she says to Emilia: “We must think. / Men are not gods” (3.4.138-139).

It is equally his rehearsal of a world of wonders and primitiveness in the senate scene which largely seals the official acceptance of his marriage. The Duke himself admits that such a “tale” would have won his own daughter (1.3.173). While this statement suggests the inherent seductiveness of the Moor’s exotic background, Othello’s exotic self-fashioning should be constructed carefully. By recounting the stories, Othello wants partly to show that they are the object of his discourse; that he has full control over them; he has gone through all those instances of “savagery” and sur-passed them. This, on the other hand, does not entirely obliterate the exoticism with which the Moor associates himself. It becomes an indelible part of his identity construction. Even though he has gone beyond that “dark” episode in his (hi)story, we are left to understand that its residue remains there and may erupt as seemingly “atavistic” behavior. In fact, Othello’s travel narrative both makes and breaks him. For now, the Moor proves to be highly articulate; he is, from this particular perspective, reminiscent of another Shakespearean outsider; namely, Caliban, in that both are able to eloquently speak the “master’s tongue”, but while Caliban’s “profit on it” is that he knows “how to curse” (1.2.366-67). Othello’s is “to woo” not only Desdemona, but also the senators and dignitaries to his cause. In wooing and “obtaining” Desdemona, the Moor has been able to attain what Caliban could not achieve through cursing. It is quite significant that both aliens, their widely divergent strategies notwithstanding, are driven by a desire to possess the ‘master’s’ daughter. This interracial desire has been thwarted in the case of Caliban and has remained unfulfilled, while Othello—mainly for his more compromising and assimilative attitudes—has been granted some measure of success, that is, however, only temporary and contingent.

The above comparison to the character of Caliban may be revealing in some respects, but Othello is, in fact, more readily comparable to another Moor on the early modern English stage. Eleazar in Thomas Dekker’s *Lust’s Dominion* (1600 pub. 1657) not only recalls Othello’s “unfixedness” with his scornful rejoinder to threats of banishment from Spain, “I can live there, and there, and there, / Troth ‘tis, a villain can live anywhere” (1.4.60-61),²² but also this character bears some striking similarities to Othello. Most importantly, Eleazar’s interracial marriage offers an interesting parallel to that of Othello. The integration of Eleazar, the Moor, in the Spanish court and society is largely predicated on his marriage to the white, noble Maria. From this particular perspective, Eleazar has succeeded in securing

²⁰ Kyle Grady argues that ‘ostensibly mitigating factors, such as Othello’s prominent occupation, and ancillary social mechanisms, like the text’s interest in religious identity, contravene rather than converge with the play’s racialism’. Kyle Grady, ‘Othello, Colin Powell, and Post-Racial Anachronisms’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 67:1 (2016), 68-83, 69.

²¹ Cowhig asks pertinently ‘Is she not more attracted to the exotic myth of ‘otherness’ than to the real man?’, Ruth Cowhig, ‘Blacks in English Renaissance Drama and the Role of Shakespeare’s Othello’, in David Dabydeen (ed.), *The Black Presence in English Literature* (Manchester, Manchester UP, 1985), 1-25, 13.

²² All references to *Lust’s Dominion* are to Fredson Bowers (ed.), *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker* (Cambridge University Press 1961).

a better integration through interracial marriage. In getting married to Desdemona, Othello is likely following in Eleazar's footsteps. This, certainly, should not obscure the essential differences between the two characters: Othello, the "valiant" and "noble" Moor and Eleazar the "villain" the "black Prince of Divels" (1.1.126). Yet the two Moors have some important and striking affinities in that both are married to a white aristocratic European lady, who—in Eleazar's case—has secured and—in that of Othello—would secure their full integration in their respective adoptive societies. Additionally, both are Moors adopted by European societies and they seem to have wholly embraced those societies' culture; both are "warlike" and both resort in moments of crisis to their military defence of their adoptive societies; Othello to the "service" he has "done the state" (5.2.349) and Eleazar, as he states, to the "losse of blood, / Which I have sacrificed in Spains defence" (3.4.177-98).

In fact, Othello derives his security not from a feeling of belonging to Venice, but rather from his usefulness to that society. Othello's life, worth, and merit depend entirely on the Venetian state and the senators, whom he calls: "my very noble and approved masters" (1.3.77). His only defensive strategy against Brabantio's harsh onslaught and vitriolic vilification, following the Moor's marriage to his daughter, is contingent on his services to the state. He confidently declares to Iago: "Let him do his spite. / My services which I have done the signiory / Shall out-tongue his complaints" (1.2. 17-19). It is quite significant that Othello does not try to defend himself by referring to Desdemona's love for him or by asserting his freedom and honour. Thus he dismisses Brabantio's threat to imprison him by referring to how he has been called "upon for some business for the state" (1.2.90; emphasis added), by reiterating hence his usefulness to the state. His life is represented somehow as the property of the state. His is the public sphere; even his private life is publicized. Not only is Desdemona compelled to make public the very "rites" of their love, a matter as intimate and private as where she is to live during his absence is discussed in public. Othello, the outsider, does not have any friends or relatives with whom his wife can stay; he appeals to the Duke to provide her during his absence with suitable accommodation, (1.3.232-236); hence, his seemingly consequential position as the Venetian army general notwithstanding, the Moor is not fully integrated in Venice as a member of a social community. In addition, Brabantio's reaction to the marriage is also revealing. Upon the realization that Othello has married his daughter, Brabantio professes: 'If such actions may have passage free / Bondslaves and pagans shall our statesmen be' (1.2. 100-101), which suggests that this interracial marriage is not only a threat to Brabantio, but to the state itself. Thus it becomes tantamount to the very usurpation of the oligarchic prerogatives at the foundation of the Venetian political power system. In this moment of crisis the Moor is conceived to represent a menace that is by far more formidable than the Turks', who are threatening the, relatively, remote island of Cyprus.

Brabantio's statement perceives Othello's interracial marriage as a threatening attempt at upward social mobility that may usurp Brabantio and his fellow senators' power. While it is fraught with insults and is highly denigrating, it, nonetheless, gestures towards, its exaggeration notwithstanding, the potential outcome of the Moor's marriage to the white Venetian lady and suggests how this interracial marriage could be a means of appropriation of the Venetian political power. This is precisely what happens in Lust's Dominion, where Eleazar, the Moor—as I have mentioned above—has been able to secure a high position in the Spanish court, largely thanks to his marriage to Maria, a white noble lady and the daughter of one of the influential courtiers. Eleazar manipulates interracial relations with white women²³ to further his ambition in the Spanish court; first his marriage to Maria, his illicit sexual relationship with the Queen Mother and then the prospective, but unfulfilled, attempt to marry Princess Isabella all work to cement his ambitious designs. While there are some notable divergences separating the two characters, like Eleazar's, Othello's interracial marriage is potentially transgressive of the Venetian state power, whereas on the individual level, it is construed in terms of 'contamination' of the white partner and her community.

Othello's marriage to Desdemona is largely authorized by the Venetian state due to political reasons; hence, once the Turkish threat is dispensed with, this interracial marriage starts to receive the first blows. While, admittedly, the Moor's marriage seems too delicate to survive the diabolic machinations of Iago, its failure stems largely from its progressive and transgressive thrust. Even the

²³ Curiously in this play black women are conspicuous by their very absence although we have a large 'train' of male Moors.

Duke, his authorization of the Moor's interracial marriage notwithstanding, seems to sympathize with Brabantio; hence, he refers to Othello's marriage as a "misfortune" visited on the "Good Brabantio" who should endure it with courage and fortitude. His association of Othello's marriage to Desdemona to "griefs" which have no "remedies" (1.3.197-207) construes it in terms of, to use Othello's own expression "destiny unshannable" (3.3. 291); it is somehow suggestive of an incurable disease and is also reminiscent of the Bard's own fascination with the Dark Lady, whose love is represented particularly in Sonnet 147 as a "disease":

My love is as a fever longing still,
For that which longer nurseth the disease
Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
The uncertain sickly appetite to please

The pathological discourse of disease emphatically conveyed in this sonnet, to which the poet becomes a defenseless victim due to his interracial desire is echoed in another instance of an interracial marriage, that of George Best's oft-mentioned account of a marriage which took place in early modern England between an English woman and a Moor. In both cases the "infection" is associated with an interracial affair; and while in the sonnet mentioned above, the interracial love seems to lead to the infection, in Best's case the infection is literally ascribed to the black partner. To refute the heliotropism theory, according to which blackness is inherited from the dwelling of black people in hot countries as well as from their exposure to the sun, George Best declares:

I my self have seene an Ethiopian as blacke as a cole brought into England, who taking a faire English woman to wife, begat a sonne in all respects as blacke as the father was, although England was his native country, and an English woman his mother: whereby it seemeth this blacknes proceedeth rather of some natural infection of that man, which was so strong, that neither the nature of the Clime neither the good complexion of the mother concurring, coulde anything alter, and therefore, wee cannot impute it to the nature of the Clime. And the most probable cause to my judgment is, that this blacknesse proceedeth of some naturall infection of the first inhabitants of that Countrey, and so all the whole progenie of them descended, are still polluted with the same blot of infection. (emphasis added)

Therefore, the encounter between black and white not only failed to regenerate the "evil" blackness, but it corrupted and blackened the "good" English whiteness and turned it into pitch.²⁴ The physical pollution which was construed by Best as resulting from a real-life interracial marriage is operative also in Othello, though in a subtler way, by virtue of which the physical is reinscribed rather as cultural pollution and fear of miscegenation. The Moor's cultural difference seems to spill over, as it were, to Desdemona. This is emphatically articulated by Othello: "Her name that was as fresh / As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black / As mine own face" (3.3. 402-404).²⁵ Equally, Desdemona's identification with her mother's maid, Barbary (4.3-28) and her ill-omened "willow song" indicate how Othello's cultural difference has affected her. She is now—as with George Best's interracial marriage—"infected" with Moorish inscription due to her interracial marriage. Therefore, far from securing the full integration of the Moor, their interracial marriage results in the alienation of Desdemona herself. She is represented to partake now of "Barbary" precisely because of her marriage to a "Barbary horse".

As for the Moor, his very identity disintegrates upon his murder of Desdemona: his marriage has given him a feeling of security and self-fulfillment, without which Othello is lost. This can be glimpsed in his anticipatory declaration to Desdemona: "when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again" (3.3.99-100). Now he helplessly and sorrowfully laments: "Where should Othello go?" (5.2.280) Othello has nowhere to go. He is uprooted and unbelonging now that his marriage is, unwittingly, dissolved by him. He has reached a cul-de-sac because precisely it was his marital status—his being the husband of the white Venetian Desdemona—which has largely identified him as the Venetian Othello; hence, after her death, he declares "That's he who was Othello. Here I am" (5.2.292). Henceforth the "Moor" will take over. Admittedly, he has been identified as the "Moor" throughout the play, yet his "Moorishness" becomes

²⁴ For a discussion of different theories and discourses of blackness in early modern culture, see Sujata Iyengar, *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Colour in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

²⁵ The expression 'her name' figures in Q2, published in 1630. The Folio edition uses 'my name'. For a discussion of this issue, see Stuart Hampton-Reeves, *Othello: A Guide to the Text and the Play in Performance*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3-4.

more conspicuous after Desdemona's death—which means also the disintegration of his marriage—hence, Emilia's inculpatory interjection "Moor, she was chaste, she loved thee, cruel Moor" (5.2.247, emphasis added). He has committed uxoricide as a "Moor". It is therefore his "Moorishness" which is responsible for the murder, not the individual and self-possessed Othello, but the "Moor", an alien, a stranger. Consequently, to re-claim belonging to Venice, Othello has to eliminate the Moor in himself. As paradoxical as this may seem, Othello achieves complete assimilation only through self-elimination; once his racial difference is neutralized as it is inseparable from his corporeal presence.

His contingent, though state-sanctioned, "blanching" is short lived and is unable to survive the disintegration of his marriage. It would be worth noting first that this marriage is negated by Desdemona herself even before it has received its fatal blow (4.2.96-101). What, however, is still more poignant is that we are given to understand that the failure of this interracial marriage is partly due to what is regarded as the impermissible, and hence punishable, love Desdemona bears to the Moor. Before killing her, Othello exhorts Desdemona to make penitence for her sins:

OTHELLO. Think on thy sins.

DESDEMONA. *They are loves I bear to you!*

OTHELLO. Ay, and for that thou diest.

(5.2.40-42; emphasis added)

Desdemona's love for Othello is represented as a sin precisely because it is considered a transgression against the laws of nature and the norms of society. Desdemona's doom serves from this particular perspective as a normativizing and intimidating example. In fact, the "moral" gleaned from this subversive interracial marriage is explicitly stated in—Shakespeare's source—Cinthio's narrative, where Desdemona thinks that her doom "shall be a warning to young girls not to marry against their parents' wishes; and Italian ladies will learn by my example not to tie themselves to a man whom Nature, Heaven, and manner of life separate from us", (Bullough, 1975: 248). Thomas Rymer takes up Cinthio's didactic point and ascribes it to Shakespeare's tragedy, asserting that its "Morall embodies a caution to all Maidens of Quality how, without their Parents consent, they run away with Blackamoors" (Rymer, 1974: 29). While these points of view may be dismissed as outdated, the ideological structures underlying them are, in fact, still deeply entrenched in modern societies and may partly account for the continuing popularity of Shakespeare's narrative. Thus Joyce Green MacDonald argues that Othello is attractive to modern audiences because it enacts their deeply seated prejudices "about race and sex: about black men's fundamental irreconcilability to the values of civilizes society and about what happens to nice (white) girls who defy their fathers' wishes" (Qtd in Daileader 2008: 46). Desdemona is, in effect, rather an exception, in early modern drama, in her love for a Moor. White women who indulge in sexual—and most often extra-marital—relations with Moors in that drama are represented as degenerates as if to match the ostensible moral depravity of their partners. In fact, Daileader argues that in early modern drama "a white woman marrying a Moor is a whore" (Daileader: 46). While her statement may be true for some early modern plays, she fails to adequately account for Desdemona's case in this rather sweeping generalization and a fortiori for that of Maria in *Lust's Dominion* who chooses rather to commit suicide than compromise her honour in the face of the king's relentless sexual advances.

Nevertheless, both Desdemona and Maria—the Moors' wives—face a tragic end: the former through uxoricide and the latter through suicide which leads one to wonder: is it a mere coincidence that, probably, the only two white wives to Moors on Renaissance stage are meted out with a horrible death?²⁶ In addition, although Eleazar, in *Lust's Dominion*, is represented as a normal husband to a noble white lady, their marriage is somehow effaced, as mentioned above, through the suicide of the wife and is also qualified through the absence of offspring, which would represent the married couple leading a "normal" family life. This might be a strategy to allay the fear of miscegenation in the audience. Aaron's liaison with the empress in *Titus Andronicus*, for instance, shows the repercussions of miscegenation as she gives birth to a child, who is described by the Nurse as "A joyless, dismal, black and sorrowful issue! / Here is the babe, as loathsome as a toad, / Amongst the fair-breeders of our clime" (4.266-68). Therefore, even if it can be tolerated—as is the case with Eleazar and Maria's—an

²⁶ While both Desdemona and Maria pay the ultimate price for their marriage to Moors, Portia, in *The Merchant of Venice*, seems, as it were, to be more cautious and categorically rejects Morocco, the Moor, as a suitor.

interracial marriage in early modern drama is not represented as a viable marital relationship that would lead to a “normal” family life. This claim may be questioned in light of Kaufmann’s archival evidence of the existence of normal interracial marriages between Moors and English women in Elizabethan England.²⁷ However, these marriages involved solely lower social classes, so no power, high social status, wealth or any other forms of privilege were at stake; hence the regrettable truthfulness of Rymer’s otherwise prejudicial statement: “With us, a Moor might marry some little drab, or Small-coal Wench: Shake-spear would provide him the Daughter and Heir of some Great Lord”. (Rymer: 29).

4. Conclusion

Like the character of Othello himself, the interracial marriage in the play marks a notable development in Shakespeare’s dramatization of Moors. Although the playwright has touched upon the subject of interracial love and sexual relationships in his earlier plays *Titus Andronicus* and *The Merchant of Venice*, these relationships remain unfulfilled, illicit and/or extra-marital. Accordingly, Morocco is rejected as a suitor to Portia, while the white servant Lancelot indulges in an unlawful sexual affair with an unnamed Moor. As to Aaron’s liaison with Tamora, in *Titus Andronicus*, it partakes more of the illicit and is driven by lust. However, in his later play *The Tempest*, the Bard returned to this issue once again with, this time, the marriage of an Italian Princess, Claribel to the King of Tunis even though the marriage is contested.²⁸ Therefore, it seems that as the playwright’s dramatization of Moors became more sophisticated, interracial marriages—as opposed to mere extramarital interracial sexual relationships—involving these Moors figured more in his works.

References

- Bartels E. (2008). *Speaking of the Moor: From Alcazar to Othello*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Bartels E. (1997). Othello and Africa: Postcolonialism reconsidered, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 54, 45–64.
- Bassi, S. (2016). *Shakespeare’s Italy and Italy’s Shakespeare: Place, “Race”, Politics*. New York: MacMillan.
- Best, G. (1578). A True Discourse of the Three Voyages of Discoverie, for the Finding of a Passage to Cathaya, by the Northwest, under the Conduct of Martin Frobisher Generall. In R. Hakluyt (Ed.), *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation*. Retrieved 10 January, 2019 from <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.03.0070%3Anarrative%3D578&force=y>
- Boose, L. (1994). “The getting of a lawful race”: Racial discourse in early modern England and the unrepresentable black woman. In M. M. Hendricks & P. Parker (Eds.), *Women, “Race”, and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (pp.35-54). New York: Routledge.
- Bovilsky, L. (2008). *Barbarous Plays: Race on the English Renaissance Stage*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bowers, Fredson (Ed.). (1961). *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Britton, D. A. (2014). *Becoming Christian: Race, Reformation, and Early Modern English Romance*. New York: Fordham UP.
- Bullough, G. (Ed.). (1975). *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*. Vol. 8. London, Routledge and Paul Kegan.
- Callaghan, D. (2000). *Shakespeare without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage*. London: Routledge.
- Callaghan, D. (1996). “Othello was a white man”: Properties of race on Shakespeare’s stage. In T. Hawkes (Ed.), *Alternative Shakespeares 2* (pp. 192-215). London: Routledge.

²⁷ See “Making the Beast with Two Backs”.

²⁸ Sebastian’s rebuke of Alonso is telling in this regard because, according to Sebastian, he ‘would not bless our Europe with [his] daughter, / but rather lose her to an African.’ (2.1.126-27)

- Chapman, M. (2017). *Anti-Black racism in early modern English drama: The other "other"*. New York: Routledge.
- Corredera, V. (2016). "Not a Moor exactly": Shakespeare, serial, and modern constructions of race, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 67(1), 30-50.
- Cowhig, R. (1985). Blacks in English Renaissance drama and the role of Shakespeare's Othello. In D. Dabydeen (Ed.), *The Black Presence in English Literature* (pp.1-25). Manchester: Manchester UP.
- Daileader, C. (2005). *Racism, Misogyny, and the Othello Myth: Inter-racial Couples from Shakespeare to Spike Lee*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Edwards, P. (1992). The early African presence in the British Isles. In J. S. Gundara & I. Duffield (Eds.), *Essays on the History of Blacks in Britain from Roman Times to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (pp. 18-20). Aldershot: Avebury.
- Erickson, P. (1998). The moment of race in Renaissance studies. *Shakespeare Studies*, 26, 27–36.
- Erickson P. & Hall, K. F. (Eds.). (2016). "A new scholarly song": Rereading early modern race, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 67(1), 1-13.
- Fanon, F. (1986). *Black Skin, White Masks*. (C. Markham, Trans.) London: Pluto Press. (Original work published 1952).
- Floyd-Wilson M. (2003). *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama*. Cambridge, Cambridge UP.
- Grady, K. (2016). Othello, Colin Powell, and post-racial anachronisms, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 67(1), 68-83.
- Green MacDonald, J. (Ed.). (1997). *Race, Ethnicity, and Power in the Renaissance*. Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
- Green MacDonald, J. (1994). *Women and Race in Early Modern Texts*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Habib, I. (2008). *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500–1677: Imprints of the Invisible*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Habib, I. (2000). *Shakespeare and Race: Postcolonial Praxis in the Early Modern Period*. Lanham, MD, University Press of America.
- Hall, K. (1995). *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Hampton-Reeves, S. (2011). *Othello: A Guide to the Text and the Play in Performance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hendricks, M. (2000) Surveying "race" in Shakespeare. In C. M. S. Alexander & S. Wells (Eds.), *Shakespeare and Race* (pp.1–22). Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Hendricks M. & Parker P. (Eds.). (1994). *Women, "Race" and Writing in the Early Modern Period*. London: Routledge.
- Hunt, M. (1999). Be dark but not too dark: Shakespeare's Dark Lady as a sign of color. In J. Schiffer (Ed.), *Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays* (pp.369-390). New York: Garland.
- Ingram, M. (1987). *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England 1570-1640*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Iyengar, S. (2005). *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Color in Early Modern England*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Kaufmann, M. (2017). *Black Tudors: The Untold Story*. London: Oneworld Publications.
- Kaufmann, M. (2015). "Making the Beast with Two Backs": Interracial relationships in early modern England, *Literature Compass*, 12(1), 22-37.
- Levith, M. (1989). *Shakespeare's Italian Settings and Plays*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Little, JR., A. L. (2016). Re-Historicizing race, white melancholia, and the Shakespearean property. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 67(1), 84-103.
- Lowe, K. (2013). Visible lives: black gondoliers and other black Africans in Renaissance Venice, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 66, 412–452.
- Loomba, A. (2002). *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*. Oxford, Oxford UP.
- Loomba, A. (1996). Shakespeare and cultural difference. In T Hawkes (Ed.), *Alternative Shakespeares 2* (pp. 164-191). London: Routledge.
- Loomba, A. (1994). Sexuality and racial difference. In A. G. Barthelemy (Ed.), *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Othello* (pp. 162–186). New York: G. K. Hall.
- Loomba, A. (1989). *Gender, Race, and Renaissance Drama*. Manchester: Manchester UP.

- Loomba, A. & Burton, J. (Eds.). (2007). *Race in Early Modern England: A Documentary Companion*. New York: Palgrave.
- Neill, M. (1998). "Mulattos," "blacks," and "Indian Moors": Othello and early modern constructions of human difference. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 49, 361–374.
- Puar J. (2012) "I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess": Becoming-intersectional in assemblage theory. *philoSOPHIA: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 2(1), 49–66.
- Royster, F. T. (1998). The 'end of race' and the future of early modern cultural studies. *Shakespeare Studies*, 26, 59-69.
- Rymer, T. (1974). A short view of tragedy. In B. Vickers (Ed.), *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage*. London, Routledge and Paul Kegan.
- Shakespeare, William. (2009.) *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. (6th ed). David Bevington. New York: Pearson Longman.
- Singh, J. (1994). Othello's identity, postcolonial theory, and contemporary African rewritings of Othello. In M. Hendricks & P. Parker (Eds.), *Women, "Race", and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (pp. 287-299). New York: Routledge.
- Sisson, A. (2015). Othello and the unweaponed city, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 66, 137-166.
- Smith, I. (1998). Barbarian errors: performing race in early modern England, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 49, 168–186.
- Turner T. A. (2015). Othello on the rack, *The journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 15(3), 102-136.
- Ungerer, G. (2013). The presence of Africans in Elizabethan England and the performance of Titus Andronicus at Burley-on-the-Hill, 1595/96, *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 21, 19-55.
- Weissbourd, E. (2013). "I have done the state some service": Reading slavery in Othello through Juan Latino, *Comparative Drama*, 47(4), 529-551.