

# SHAKESPEARE AND RACE

EDITED BY

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AND

STANLEY WELLS



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK www.cup.cam.ac.uk  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA www.cup.org  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

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First published 2000

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Set in 11/12.5pt Baskerville No. 2 [GC]

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Shakespeare and race / edited by Catherine M. S. Alexander and Stanley Wells.  
p. cm.

ISBN 0 521 77046 7 (hardback) – ISBN 0 521 77938 3 (pbk)  
1. Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616 – Views on race. 2. Literature and  
society – England – History – 16th century. 3. Literature and  
society – England – History – 17th century. 4. Shakespeare, William,  
1564–1616 – Characters – Blacks. 5. Blacks in literature. 6. Race in literature.  
I. Alexander, Catherine M. S. II. Wells, Stanley W., 1930–

PR3069.R33 85 2000

822.3'3–dc21

99-089004

ISBN 0 521 77046 7 hardback

ISBN 0 521 77938 3 paperback

## Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	page vii
<i>List of contributors</i>	viii
<i>Editorial note</i>	ix
1 Surveying 'race' in Shakespeare <i>Margo Hendricks</i>	1
2 A portrait of a Moor <i>Bernard Harris</i>	23
3 Elizabethans and foreigners <i>G. K. Hunter</i>	37
4 'Spanish' Othello: the making of Shakespeare's Moor <i>Barbara Everett</i>	64
5 Shakespeare and the living dramatist <i>Wole Soyinka</i>	82
6 Shakespeare in the trenches <i>Balz Engler</i>	101
7 Bowdler and Britannia: Shakespeare and the national libido <i>Michael Dobson</i>	112
8 'Shakespur and the Jewbill' <i>James Shapiro</i>	124
9 Wilhelm S and Shylock <i>Laurence Lerner</i>	139
10 Cruelty, <i>King Lear</i> and the South African Land Act 1913 <i>Martin Orkin</i>	151

11	Caliban and Ariel write back <i>Jonathan Bate</i>	165
12	Casting black actors: beyond Othellophilia <i>Celia R. Daileader</i>	177
13	'Delicious traffick': racial and religious difference on early modern stages <i>Ania Loomba</i>	203
	<i>Index</i>	225

## *Illustrations*

- |   |  |                |
|---|--|----------------|
| 1 | Portrait of the Moorish Ambassador to Queen Elizabeth, 1600–01<br>(University of Birmingham, UK)                               | <i>page</i> 25 |
| 2 | Hugh Quarshie as Aaron in <i>Titus Andronicus</i> ,<br>Royal Shakespeare Company, 1982<br>(Photo: Shakespeare Centre Library)  | 181            |
| 3 | Hugh Quarshie as Tybalt in <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> ,<br>Royal Shakespeare Company, 1986<br>(Photo: Shakespeare Centre Library) | 182            |
| 4 | Hugh Quarshie as Loveless in <i>The Relapse</i> ,<br>Royal Shakespeare Company, 1995<br>(Photo: Shakespeare Centre Library)    | 185            |
| 5 | Ray Fearon as Brachiano in <i>The White Devil</i> ,<br>Royal Shakespeare Company, 1996<br>(Photo: Shakespeare Centre Library)  | 186            |
| 6 | Ray Fearon as Paris in <i>Troilus and Cressida</i> ,<br>Royal Shakespeare Company, 1996<br>(Photo: Shakespeare Centre Library) | 191            |
| 7 | Ray Fearon as Paris in <i>Troilus and Cressida</i> ,<br>Royal Shakespeare Company, 1996<br>(Photo: Shakespeare Centre Library) | 197            |
| 8 | Evroy Dear as Ferdinand in <i>The Tempest</i> ,<br>Royal Shakespeare Company, 1998<br>(Photo: Shakespeare Centre Library)      | 197            |

CHAPTER I

*Surveying 'race' in Shakespeare*

*Margo Hendricks*

Like a number of Shakespearians intrigued by the question of race and the works of William Shakespeare, my first critical engagement with the matter of race in early modern English literature occurred when, as an undergraduate, I read *Othello*, in particular Gerald Eades Bentley's 1958 introduction to the play. Bentley's commentary is striking in its near total inattention to Othello's skin colour: Bentley's only comment about the matter is to state, 'Othello is a man of action whose achievement was immediately obvious to an Elizabethan audience, in spite of his exotic colour and background, because of his position as the commanding general for the greatest commercial power of the preceding century.'<sup>1</sup> When so much has been made of Othello's hue, Bentley's lack of commentary on the place of colour and race in the play seemed singularly odd. Yet it was not until much later that I considered Bentley's omission to be an astute stratagem to redirect the reader's attention and gaze away from Othello's colour and to his stature as a warrior, and to the complex moral dimension that status entails in Shakespeare's tragedy.

Since then, I have taught Shakespeare's canon, written about a number of his texts, and, over the course, I have developed something of a deep interest in the concept of race in Shakespeare, Renaissance English literature and culture. This interest, however, is not solely linked to what I consider the obvious markers of race – *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Titus Andronicus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Rather, my interest concerns the epistemology of race in the period. Thus when asked to write the introductory essay to this volume, I pondered what such an introduction might convey to its reader in keeping with the aim of the volume, namely to highlight the on-going relevance of the essays published in the volume for the study of Shakespeare and his canon. My introduction, thus, will follow a familiar format in that it offers an overview of the contents of the volume either newly published or reprinted in the order of their composition. My own reflections at the

end of this introduction are less an essay and more a personal commentary on the matter of Shakespeare and race.

With the advent of post-colonial theory, race studies and cultural studies, it is quite easy to believe that practitioners of these techniques are the first to interrogate ‘Shakespeare and race’ as an epistemological query; yet what this volume demonstrates is that, in fact, we are only the inheritors of an intellectual, critical and political tradition. The publication of *Shakespeare and Race* acknowledges the continuing importance of the intellectual labours of a generation of scholars increasingly ignored or dismissed in the rush to ‘racialize’ Shakespeare’s canon and/or Elizabethan England, and also reminds us of the work yet to be done. With reference to this last point, I must own that I consider myself culpable. I too have frequently overlooked the work of an ‘older’ generation of Shakespeare scholarship on race. Now I have begun to redress this oversight.

#### STILL SIGNIFICANT AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

In 1958 *Shakespeare Survey* published an essay entitled ‘A Portrait of a Moor’ by Bernard Harris, which draws attention to the acquisition by the Shakespeare Institute of a portrait of Morocco’s Ambassador to Elizabeth’s court in 1600. As Harris notes, the ‘portrait . . . is of considerable interest to students of history, of art and of the theatre’ (p. 23). For the historian (literary and social), the painting serves to put to rest a long-standing debate as to whether there was a viable presence of Moors and Africans in Elizabethan England. For Harris, the painting provides visual, and thus irrefutable evidence, or ‘ocular proof’. Harris uses this portrait as a starting-point for a more detailed account of the complex ‘commercial and diplomatic’ ‘relations between England and Barbary’ (p. 23). This ambassadorial portrait reveals a geo-political complexity that can, as Harris argues, ‘assist a producer of *The Merchant of Venice* when he comes to the stage direction, “Enter Morochus, a tawny Moore all in white”’ (p. 23).

In his efforts to link the English social history behind and alongside the 1600 painting of the Ambassador from Morocco, Harris charts the relations between these two geographic spaces: the role of the Barbary Company (led by the Earls of Leicester and Warwick) in fostering an alliance; the merchant adventurers Richard, George, Arnold and Jasper Tomson; and the correspondence and financial details surrounding the visit of Morocco’s ambassador to England. As Harris shows, the Moorish

embassy created some havoc, politically and financially, for Elizabeth's subjects. For example, John Stow writes:

Notwithstanding all this kindness shown them together with their dyet and all other provisions for sixe moneths space wholly at the Queenes charges, yet such was their inveterate hate unto our Christian religion and estate as they could not endure to give any manner of alms, charitie, or relief, either in money or broken meat, unto any English poore. (p. 32)

In the writings of the day, the Moors were described as subtle, 'stubborn', 'bestial' and intolerant. This imagery and commentary, Harris argues, suggest that 'To Elizabethan Londoners the appearance and conduct of the Moors was a spectacle and an outrage, emphasizing the nature of the deep difference between themselves and their visitors, between their Queen and this "erring Barbarian"' (p. 35). Thus, Harris concludes, 'When Shakespeare chose, for this audience, to present a Moor as his hero, he was not perhaps confused in his racial knowledge, simply more aware than his contemporaries of the complex pattern made by white and black' (p. 35).

Despite this final comment, and his earlier allusion to *The Merchant of Venice*, Harris largely ignores Shakespeare's plays. It is left to the readers of 'A Portrait of a Moor' intuitively to make the interpretative links with Shakespeare's drama. Even so, Harris effectively sketches a historical landscape that makes sense of both *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* as textually formed and framed by the changing racial landscape of Early Modern England. As Harris himself notes, 'To recount the story of the embassy in some detail is to take us nearer to Shakespeare's England, perhaps even, in a sense, to Shakespeare's Moor' (p. 24). I would add that the portrait of the ambassador from Morocco and Harris' essay serve to remind us of the political forces that frame a society's 'racial imagination' just as effectively as the literary ones.

G. K. Hunter's 'Elizabethans and Foreigners' similarly maps the 'impact of foreigners on' Elizabethan society (p. 37). Yet Hunter's account is strikingly different from 'A Portrait of a Moor' in two ways. First, Hunter is much more intrigued by the impact of this contact in terms of Elizabethan literature, and second, he is much less interested in the actual presence of these foreigners in Elizabethan society than in the 'framework of assumptions concerning foreigners' (p. 37) who enter England during the sixteenth century. As a result, 'Elizabethans and Foreigners' becomes a model for a literary analysis that bridges the presumed divide between 'social' and 'literary' history; in essence, Hunter's essay cogently demonstrates the importance of links between



context and interpretation. Hunter begins by asking a crucial question: 'What was the framework of assumptions concerning foreigners' in Elizabethan England? Drawing upon a wide range of texts – travel accounts, romances, plays, and poetry – Hunter reminds us that the Elizabethan (and by extension Shakespeare's) vision of foreignness had a complex and evolving material and philosophical history.

Beginning in the middle ages, the English engagement with 'foreigners' often functioned on two levels: spiritual and material. In the early travel narratives, Mandeville's *Travels* for example, places such as Jerusalem, Africa and India were frequently idealized in terms of their spiritual significance as sites of biblical history and theological relevance. As new knowledge about the world, acquired through voyages to Africa, India and the Americas, supplanted old, the Elizabethan imagination had to be refitted. In essence, the 'framework of assumptions' about foreigners had to be expanded. What is significant, however, is that the impact of these voyages on the literary imagination in the sixteenth century may be less dramatic than we have come to believe. As Hunter argues, 'we should beware of supposing that a pattern of races emerged readily from the Europe that Christendom had become, a pattern capable of supplying moral discriminations rich and complex enough for literary use' (p. 45).

What apparently occurred, according to Hunter, was the emergence of 'material for caricature,' not 'for character' (p. 45). Within Elizabethan culture and literature, the foreigner serves to inaugurate a 'process of *vulgarization*' (p. 47) based upon the intimate knowledge of the foreigner. Thus, in Hunter's view, the more deeply racialized stereotypes and characterizations are those most familiar to the English – Dutch, German, Italian, Irish and Spanish nationals. And importantly, the Elizabethan's 'awareness of foreigners was closely conditioned by a traditional religious outlook on the world' (p. 51). This 'religious outlook', of course, situated Jews and followers of Islam as the antithesis to all Christians. Even so, the Elizabethan imagination could sustain the racialization of the Italian as a deeply held belief alongside the traditional racializing of the Jew and the emerging racialization of the American Indian.

Despite their dates, these two essays easily reflect the type of scholarship typical of New Historicism. Both 'A Portrait of a Moor' and 'Elizabethans and Foreigners' offer 'thick descriptions' of Elizabethan culture and society that have come to mark the type of inter-textual analyses generated by New Historicists. Even more significant is the way

these two essays cogently adumbrate a Renaissance English discourse of race without recourse to contemporary (i.e. twentieth-century) theoretical discussions. In other words, both Harris and Hunter manage to convey the relationship between cultural interaction and the emergence of racial ideologies as acts of history. For both Harris and Hunter, though in differing ways, the literary text encapsulates the assumptions, expectations and representations that define the Elizabethan notion of race and, as a consequence, provides the idea with its historical and thus empirical meaning. Only in their subtle avoidance of the more vexing issue dancing liminally on the periphery of their analyses – is Shakespeare 'racist'? – do these essays appear 'dated'. That is, neither author directly engages the implications of his findings for questions about authorial subjectivity and its texts.

In quite different ways, Barbara Everett's "'Spanish" Othello: the Making of Shakespeare's Moor' and Wole Soyinka's 'Shakespeare and the Living Dramatist' entertain the problematic that Harris and Hunter astutely avoid: is there a link between the politics of Shakespeare and race studies and the politics of race inherent in his canon? The argument of Everett's "'Spanish" Othello' is that "'Moorishness" was a condition that had a meaning, for Shakespeare and his audiences, once casually familiar though long lost to us' (p. 66). Everett bases her argument not on Venice and/or Shakespeare's source, Cinthio, as one might expect but rather on the Spanish genealogy behind three of Shakespeare's characters in *Othello*. Everett traces the Spanish context for the names of Iago, Roderigo and by extension the Moor. According to her, Shakespeare's audience would most likely have recognized that the anglicized version of Iago was James, that St James was the patron saint of Spain, and hence have been aware of the general history of St James as 'Santiago Matamoros, St James the Moor-killer' (p. 67). Thus, Everett contends, 'Every time the name "Iago" drops with helpless unconsciousness from the Moor's lips, Shakespeare's audience remembered what we have long forgotten: that Santiago's great role in Spain was as enemy to the invading Moor, who was figurehead there of the Muslim kingdom' (p. 68).

Everett acknowledges that there are limits to this type of reading, but the 'imaginative resonance possessed by mere names' often reflects 'certain harsh facts in the world outside the plays' (p. 68). Like Harris and Hunter, Everett draws upon social and political events of the day to frame her interpretation; she cites Elizabeth's proclamation expelling 'negars and blackamoors' from England, papal commentary on Moors

and Jews, and Spanish history. What is significant in Everett's essay, however, is her observation on Othello's colour:

If Shakespeare himself had been asked what colour his Moor was, I think he would have answered that few actors in his experience would permit a shade dark enough to hide the play of expression. Othello is, in short, the colour the fiction dictates. And it is in order to make this point that I have hoped to suggest that the Moor may be quite as much 'Spanish' as 'African'. (pp. 72–3)

This suggestion is intended as a 'challenge [to] our perhaps too simple "African" sense of Othello' (pp. 78–9). Ultimately, Everett concludes that Othello's links to the Moorish figure Rogero in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* may provide a better sense of Othello's racial and social identity than any other source, especially a source that dwells on his colour (as Cinthio's text does). In the end, for Everett, Othello 'is almost any "colour" one pleases, so long as it permits his easier isolation and destruction by his enemies and by himself' (p. 72).

Wole Soyinka's 'Shakespeare and the Living Dramatist' also explores the 'ethnicity' of Shakespeare and his characters through the politics of culture. In what might be viewed as a precursor to post-colonialist readings of Shakespeare's drama, Soyinka balances his deep admiration for what he terms 'the paradox of timelessness and history' that infuses Shakespeare's poetics and the politics of race and culture that surround this most complex Elizabethan writer and dramatist. In 'Shakespeare and the Living Dramatist,' Soyinka elegantly and imaginatively demonstrates the fluidity of racial identity in a world shaped by colonialism and its politics. In the Arab world, William Shakespeare has nearly the same acclaim that he possesses in Europe. In fact, as Soyinka states, 'the Arab world was not content to adopt or "reclaim" Shakespeare's works' but to claim him as one of their own (p. 84). That is, Arab writers and dramatists have argued that Shakespeare 'was in fact an Arab. His real name, cleansed of its anglicized corruption, was Shayk al-Subair, which everyone knows of course is as dune-bred an Arabic name as any English poet can hope for' (p. 84). As a consequence, the translations and adaptations of Shakespeare's plays by Arab writers and dramatists serve only to 'return' Shakespeare's canon to its rightful language.

Soyinka's ironic piece about the Arabization of Shakespeare only partially conceals his astute yet ambivalent reading of the politics of the Shakespeare industry and its implications for post-colonial societies. Soyinka begins with a comment on his own experience at an RSC production:

Some years ago, I watched a production of *Antony and Cleopatra* at the Aldwych, by the Royal Shakespeare Company – and winced throughout the entire night. We all have our prejudices of course, but some of these prejudices are the result of experience. Perhaps the RSC knew that it had a problem in persuading even an English audience to accept any interpretation of Cleopatra by an English actress – so the actress sent up the whole thing. . . . (pp. 85–6)

His reaction, as Soyinka posits, is balanced by 'the near-unanimous opinion of the Arabic critics themselves on the translations and adaptations of their "compatriot" Shayk al-Subair's masterpieces in that they were, in the main, the work of "scald rhymers" who "ballad him out of tune"' (p. 86).

Soyinka notes that, among Arab writers,

it is claimed – as one of the reasons for endowing Shakespeare with Arab paternity – that only an Arab could have understood or depicted a Jew so 'convincingly' as in *The Merchant of Venice*. Similarly, the focus is sometimes placed on *Othello* – the Moor's dignity even in folly has been held up as convincing proof that no European could have fleshed out this specific psychology of a jealousy complicated by racial insecurity but a man from beneath the skin – an Arab at the very least. (p. 87)

To substantiate this argument, Soyinka writes, one need only look closely at Shakespeare's works where his use of non-English locales further distances him from any English roots. In the end, Soyinka observes, 'one acknowledges with gratitude the subjective relation of other poets and dramatists to the phenomenon of Shakespeare, for even the most esoteric of their claims lead one, invariably, to the productive source itself, and to the gratification of celebrating dramatic poetry anew' (p. 99).

In his ironic discussion of the uses to which post-colonial Africa and Arab nations put Shakespeare, Soyinka only hints at a traditional notion of race in relation to Shakespeare's works. As a novelist and dramatist, Soyinka clearly is less interested in the politics of race in Shakespeare's poetry than he is in the poetry of politics. His 'Shakespeare and the Living Dramatist' thus distances itself from the other essays in this volume. Yet Soyinka's discussion serves as an important segue to those concerned with 'race', nation and Shakespeare. As Soyinka highlights, importing Shakespeare requires a 'naturalization' and assimilation of his characters, themes and poetics. And, as Soyinka contends, Shakespeare's use of 'foreign' locales makes this naturalization process quite simple. As Shakespeare's 'racial identity' disappears, what is left is the power and the 'timelessness' of his poetic voice.

Balz Engler's 'Shakespeare in the Trenches' engages the competing 'racial' claims that two nations, England and Germany, make on the person and canon of William Shakespeare and his poetic voice. Engler's essay looks at a particular moment in Shakespearian history, the tercentenary of Shakespeare's death, April 1916, a time when England and Germany were at war. Both nations prepared celebrations in honour of Shakespeare but, as Engler illustrates, these celebrations were strikingly different yet had the same political and ideological purpose. In England, the celebration was an elaborate week-long patriotic affair. Productions, publications, even a 'Shakespeare prayer', were devised to recognize not only Shakespeare's 'genius' but more importantly his significance as a 'patriot.'

The German celebration, while much more subdued, was no less firm in its claim to Shakespeare – though some Germans questioned the propriety of the continued performance of his plays. Despite this minority voice, and although he was born an Englishman, Shakespeare's 'opinions, as expressed in his plays, were in accordance with the German position in the war', according to Rudolf Brotanek (p. 103). In fact, Shakespeare became an ideological object fought over by both nations; in a prologue to a German production of *Twelfth Night*, Feste delivered a 'message from Shakespeare' whereby Shakespeare declares himself a fugitive who seeks and finds a 'second home' in Germany. As Engler notes, 'In Germany the claim that Shakespeare was *unser*, ours, presented a problem, of course' (p. 105). German response to this dilemma was to remind the German people that Germany 'had naturalized Shakespeare in a long effort of appropriation. . . . As such Shakespeare could come to be considered one of the three greatest German authors, along with Goethe and Schiller' (p. 106). Ultimately, Engler's essay reminds us that 'Shakespeare' is always a contextual matter: 'the context in which we perceive Shakespeare and his works, *how we use them*, [is what] determines their meaning' (p. 107).

This dictum might very well be the motto of 'the Shakespeare industry' and is the central concern in Michael Dobson's essay, 'Bowdler and Britannia: Shakespeare and the National Libido.' Since the late seventeenth century, editions of Shakespeare's plays and poetry have spawned what has become trivialized as 'the Bard Biz', especially in the publishing industry. For Dobson, the Bowdler edition reflects the complex intersection of the veneration of William Shakespeare and 'the construction of modern sexuality and the construction of English national identity' (p. 112). In a cogent reading, Dobson brings to light

the policing of Shakespeare's text as part of the deployment of Shakespeare as national poet and his works as moral exempla. For example, George Granville's production of *The Merchant of Venice* in 1701 included an appearance by Shakespeare, or at least his ghost, on stage. Informed by the ghost of John Dryden of the tendency to present homoeroticism on the stage, Shakespeare's ghost 'promises to do what he can to remedy the situation, offering his play (now properly "*Adorn'd and rescu'd by a faultless hand*") as a contribution to the internal discipline which is the proper and unique function of literature' (p. 114).

Productions and editions of Shakespeare's plays were purged of potential or real eroticism and, as Dobson argues, became part of a national trend to 'discipline and promote British manhood' (p. 116). Furthermore, as an icon of English masculinity Shakespeare himself had to be represented as 'disciplined'. That is, for Shakespeare to function as a national icon 'his body [must be] left out of the picture entirely' (p. 117). Or, if his body remains it is a decidedly heterosexual one (the insistence that the sonnets are addressed solely to a woman for example). What is at stake, Dobson contends, is the nation's own identity, and that identity perforce must be masculine, British, and a virile heterosexual. The mandate for 'the lopping away of his [Shakespeare's] particular textual and sexual lapses' permits eighteenth-century editors and producers of Shakespearian plays to link Shakespeare's 'transcendence' of both his 'own body' and his 'corpus' (p. 121) to his stature as patriot *par excellence*. Nowhere is this better exemplified than in the 1769 Stratford Jubilee.

As Dobson notes, this celebration 'did not seem to require the performance or even the quotation of any of Shakespeare's plays' (p. 121). One reviewer observed, in the *Middlesex Journal*: 'It has been generally believed, that the institution of the Stratford jubilee was only a matter of taste and amusement; but the more sagacious see a great political view carried on at the bottom of it' (p. 121). In citing this review, Dobson points out that Shakespeare is not only to be idealized as an example of British ingenuity and productivity but also as an aid to populating 'the Midlands in the cause of England's industrial future' (p. 121). With the 1769 Stratford Jubilee Shakespeare's role as national icon of masculinity and creativity is solidified. In essence, as Dobson playfully puns, what the Stratford Jubilee bore witness to was 'Shakespeare's triumphant installation as Britain's national Willy'.

One of the more complicated and fraught issues facing scholars interested in the matter of race in Shakespeare's works emerges in relation to Shakespeare's dramatic representations of Jews. Two essays

reprinted in this volume, James Shapiro's 'Shakespur and the Jewbill' and Laurence Lerner's 'Wilhelm S and Shylock', direct our attention to the contentious place Jews hold in the national discourse and the racial imagination of modern England. In 'Shakespur and the Jewbill', James Shapiro examines the role Shakespeare performs in the debates surrounding the Jewish Naturalization Act of 1753, also referred to as 'the Jew Bill'. Shapiro's historical overview of the genesis of the bill, the political controversies that emerged around the bill, and the use to which Shakespeare was put offers us a profound insight into one of the vexing questions facing Shakespearian studies – the place of anti-Semitism or racism in Shakespeare's canon.

In his insightful discussion, Shapiro reminds us that eighteenth-century English attitudes towards Jews should be viewed in terms of the modern notions of race and racism. Centred on the question, 'What is an Englishman?' debates over the Naturalization Act resound with familiar cultural stereotypes, analogies and pronouncements. Central to all of these tactics is a long-standing notion that Jews were fundamentally, immutably distinct from the English – no matter that the Jew was born in England, as were his ancestors. Rooted in the broader discourse of racism and anti-Semitism sweeping European societies, English discourse about Jews linked itself to this modern ideology even as it drew upon its own literary past, in this instance, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, to create a peculiarly English perspective *vis-à-vis* English Jews. The production of this play during the height of the debates over the Naturalization Act became a vivid reminder of a prevailing negative mythology about Jews: 'the threat of Jews circumcising Englishmen, taking Christian servants, and racially contaminating the English nation' (p. 128). This production became an integral part of the propaganda campaign to protect England and its Englishness, in essence a 'racialized nationalism' (p. 135).

Laurence Lerner's 'Wilhelm S and Shylock' offers a contrasting view in his analysis of the uses to which Shylock and Shakespeare have been put in the name of 'racialized nationalism'. Lerner's method in the essay is quite similar to Soyinka's: Lerner refers to Shakespeare as 'Wilhelm S', locates Shakespeare's talents/genius in a 'Nordic profundity', and establishes Shakespeare's connection with Nazi Germany. Lerner begins his discussion by noting that what 'led Nazi Germany to congratulate S for his understanding of racial psychology was *The Merchant of Venice*' (p. 140). This reading of Shakespeare's play, despite its obvious ironic (almost tongue-in-cheek) style, raises a number of

insightful questions about paradoxes engendered by the political dimensions of *The Merchant of Venice*. Lerner's critique is directed at the uses to which Shakespeare's play has been put, especially decidedly political interpretations and the interpretative community that generates those interpretations. As Lerner notes,

Wilhelm S offers us an anti-Semitic *Merchant of Venice*, and we, reacting like good liberals, are upset by it. My 'thought experiment' was a way of asking how important is the difference between writing an anti-Semitic play, and offering an anti-Semitic interpretation of a play written in 1597. (p. 144)

For Lerner there is a difference and it is history which provides that distinction.

The essays of Shapiro and Lerner, despite their divergences, also respond to the vexing question associated with Shakespeare's plays: is Shakespeare racist and/or anti-Semitic?<sup>2</sup> Carefully dissociating themselves from the reductive and, not surprisingly, visceral reaction – 'authorial intention' – Shapiro and Lerner remind their readers that every commonplace has its complex historiography. The commonplace invocation and deployment of *The Merchant of Venice* to discriminate, persecute and redefine definitions of humanity through an ideologically driven campaign against people of Jewish heritage must be seen as precisely that, and not an essential attribute of the playwright. In other words, it is the play and not the man that bears the burden of nineteenth- and twentieth-century anti-Semitism.

#### POST-MODERN SHAKESPEARE

Important studies such as Harris's and Hunter's, not surprisingly, lay dormant as Shakespearian scholars and critics embraced the tenets of New Criticism, structuralism, and Russian Formalism in the 1960s and 1970s. Questions of politics, history and race quickly gave way to questions of language and form. In the late 1980s, two theoretical methodologies, cultural studies and New Historicism, inspired a 'next generation' engagement with race and Shakespeare. The effect was to revive interest in the scholarship of individuals such as Hunter, Harris, Winthrop Jordan and Samuel Chew. It would not be inappropriate to argue that Celia R. Daileader's 'Casting Black Actors: beyond Othellophilia' and Ania Loomba's "'Delicious Traffick": Racial and Religious Difference on Early Modern Stages' reflect this revival and the nature of the current critical and scholarly practice in what can be termed the study of race in Shakespeare criticism.



Ania Loomba's "Delicious Traffick" begins definitively: 'For at least the last two hundred years, "race" has functioned as one of the most powerful and yet most fragile markers of social difference' (p. 203). Exploring what she terms the 'mirror-dance on the stages of Shakespeare's time – a time which can be characterized as either the last period in history where ethnic identities could be understood as fluid, or as the first moment of the emergence of modern notions of "race"' – Loomba cogently brings together postcolonial theories, feminism and the problems of historiography to frame her analysis of the iconography of race on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stages. Loomba's essay is less an argument than an overview of the place race had on the stage in Shakespeare's culture. Where Loomba skilfully reminds her readers of the fluidity of racial iconography is in her discussion of the problematics of the 'Moor'. In contrast to Everett's essay, Loomba draws our attention to the literary conjunction of Moor and blackness, despite the diversity of 'skin colour' across Islamic cultures and the political agenda this conjunction is intended to serve. As Loomba argues:

Othello does not move from a glamorous black to a hated Turk; rather, we need to notice how both blacks and Turks can be glamorized as well as hated in contemporary representations, and how the two were interconnected, both in *Othello* and in the culture at large, via the Spanish discourse on Moorishness, via medieval stereotypes of black Turks, or Egyptians, and also by more recent developments in global relations. (p. 206)

Loomba's comment on the importance of 'recent developments in global relations' echoes the remarks of G. K. Hunter and Bernard Harris. Like these two earlier critics, Loomba enlarges her reading of Shakespeare's drama through careful attention to the global politics shaping late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century English culture. Where Loomba exceeds the reach of Hunter and Harris is in her inclusion of gender in the critical matrix for reading Shakespeare's drama. As Loomba cogently suggests, there are two sites around which early modern anxieties and obsessions with 'race' can be identified: conversion and sexuality. With regard to the former, Loomba writes that 'conversion was viewed as a perpetually unstable condition: converts to Christianity were suspected of covertly practising Judaism or Islam, or of interpreting Christianity in the light of their previous faiths' (p. 209). Furthermore, she contends, 'it is precisely when faith could be improvised that the question of authenticity became especially urgent' (p. 210). That is, when 'inner faith' could not be 'match[ed to] exterior show' conversions became increasingly suspect. Thus, Loomba observes,

'a Marrano or a Morisco cannot be a quintessential Renaissance man even though he may represent the essence of Renaissance self-fashioning' (p. 212).

It is, however, the problematics of race and its association with gender, in particular the depiction of the converted woman, where Loomba offers her most significant contribution to explorations of race and Shakespeare. Her analyses informed by the work of feminist Shakespearians such as Lynda Boose and Mary Jane Metzger, Loomba traces the ways in which the 'exchange of women', which 'has always signalled the vulnerability of cultural borders', 'took on new urgent meanings in an early modern England which was simultaneously looking outward and consolidating its national culture in linguistic, religious and ethnic terms' (p. 218). Women characters such as Tamora in *Titus Andronicus* and Cleopatra 'highlight a tension' between ethnicity and colour, between politics and gender, and between religions; yet, as Loomba concludes, the 'convertible body of women' becomes 'the "delicious traffick" between cultures, religions and races' on the Shakespearian stage (p. 219).

Where Loomba's reading addresses the dramatic parameters of Shakespeare's 'global' politics, Celia R. Daileader's essay, 'Casting Black Actors: beyond Othellophilia', localizes the politics of race and Shakespeare in the physical body of the black actor on the modern English stage. Daileader focuses on the two media through which the late twentieth-century spectator's and actor's racial gaze is/can be constructed through Shakespeare's drama, in particular *Othello*: stage and photography (the latter effecting a kind of permanency that the former lacks). This gaze so constrains almost any actor playing Othello that, according to Daileader, he seems 'to be playing the same character in [whatever Shakespeare play he acts] – and the more one looks at that character, the more he looks like Othello' (p. 178). Daileader labels 'this phenomenon' 'Othellophilia' and, in an insightful discussion, she illuminates the degree to which racial ideologies become inescapable for the 'black' actor once he performs the role of Othello.

Central to 'Othellophilia' are the problems engendered by the concept of 'colour-blind casting'. Directing her attention to the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), Daileader organizes the essay into four sections: the first section provides a historical account of RSC tradition in casting black males in Shakespearian roles; the second explores black/white imagery and the related theme of sexual purity as played out in *Othello* and echoed in *Troilus* and in *White Devil*; and sections

three and four focus on the ways in which the RSC productions ‘replicate’ the ‘racialized language’ of Shakespeare’s text. It is Daileader’s aim to ‘reconstruct the scene of the casting crime in *Troilus*,’ and to illustrate the ‘way Othellophilia, with its attendant opportunities for something approaching biracial porn, functions to exploit both white women and black men’ (p. 179).

Daileader’s reading of *Othello* and *Troilus and Cressida* reminds us of the powerful effect directorial decisions in lighting, costume, music and setting have in setting the limits of meaning in these two plays. Black actors (whether British or American), as Daileader astutely shows, are quickly interpellated as erotic objects of and for the spectatorial gaze in the way the RSC casts and costumes, and importantly the way critics respond to the casting and costuming. As Daileader notes, despite the fact that Hugh Quarshie and Ray Fearon ‘achieved a measure of success in the RSC *without* playing Othello’, both actors remain shadowed by ‘Othellophilia’ until they have portrayed the Venetian General (as Fearon did in 1999, after this essay was written). What is strikingly notable in Daileader’s argument is that, contrary to the ‘liberal intentions’ behind colour-blind casting, ‘a director with truly liberal intentions in casting a black actor [in any Shakespearian role] will have to work hard to surmount audience preconceptions’ (p. 195). In other words, the deeply embedded racial assumptions and expectations about the place, status and behaviour of blacks effectively circumvent any well-intentioned efforts on the part of a ‘liberal’ director.

In matters of race and sex, Daileader suggests, the inclination towards ‘Othellophilia’ is a factor of both the long historical shadow Shakespeare’s play has cast on the performance of ‘race’ in Shakespearian theatre and the ideologies that figure blackness as erotic and dangerous. As a consequence, whether Ray Fearon plays Francisco in Kenneth Branagh’s filmed version of *Hamlet* or Paris in the RSC’s *Troilus and Cressida* or Romeo in the RSC’s 1997 *Romeo and Juliet*, critics and spectators will inevitably view his performance through the lens of Othello’s blackness and all that it entails. It is this inevitability which prompts Daileader to coin ‘the term Othellophilia’ and to remark that while she ‘was not initially conscious of the fact that it ended in a homophone for Shakespeare’s famous female suicide’, as the essay’s argument clarified itself, ‘the feminizing and self-destructive suffix seem[ed] appropriate’ (p. 199), given the recurring erotic display of the black actor’s body as part of the Royal Shakespeare Company’s response to his skin colour.

As Ania Loomba's essay demonstrates, there has been a return (so to speak) to contextual evidence, that is, the archive, in the scholarly study of 'Race and Shakespeare'. In my own work on Shakespeare and the question of race, I have not only begun to re-read (and read anew) critical studies such as those of Bernard Harris and G. K. Hunter, but also texts published during the years Shakespeare wrote. What I have discovered is that there is still much work to be done on the question. The one area which interests me and which I believe remains under-scrutinized is the epistemological and philosophical conceptualization of race in the early modern period. As an example, I want to trace briefly how a philological inquiry can shed light on the multivalent nature of the idea of race in Shakespeare's England.

In 1591 Richard Percyvale published *Bibliotheca Hispanica. Containing a Grammar, with a Dictionarie in Spanish, English and Latine, gathered out of divers good Authors: very profitable for the studious of the Spanish toong*.<sup>3</sup> Despite its obvious indebtedness to the idea behind traditional bilingual lexicons, Percyvale's work marks a new trajectory in English vernacular and cultural history. For, unlike earlier compilers of lexicons and dictionaries (which were primarily Greek and Latin), Percyvale produced a dictionary not for the grammar school or university student but for the lay-person who might require fluency in Spanish. In other words, Percyvale's intended audience was the merchant, lawyer, sailor or soldier whose livelihood took him to Spain or its territories or who had dealings with Spaniards in England. There are a number of striking elements to Percyvale's dictionary: its familiarly modern layout, its ease of use and its attempt to be inclusive. What stand out, however, are two aspects which are seemingly unrelated yet when juxtaposed become a vivid reminder of the significance of race to Elizabethan society. The first aspect is Percyvale's detailed account of the origins of the Spanish language,<sup>4</sup> and the second is the curious absence of the Spanish word *raza* – 'race' – as a main entry in the dictionary.

On first glance Percyvale's dictionary appears remarkably apolitical in its handling of semantics. Words are familiarly cross-referenced, entries when needed have sufficient diversity of English analogues to permit the reader's understanding of a word's complexity, and the pronouncing key is easily comprehended. Yet this organizational apoliticism, I would argue, begs critical attention. A reader who turns to the Spanish section to look up the Spanish equivalency for the English word 'race' discovers that it is not listed as a main entry. Upon further scrutiny, our reader finds that 'raza' does surface, however, on

a number of occasions in the dictionary, in both its Spanish and English sections, but only as a synonym for other main entries.

While we can only speculate as to why Percyvale decided to omit 'raza' as a main entry in the Spanish section of the dictionary, it would not be presumptuous to suppose that he assumed his readers would be familiar enough with the word's Italian spelling and signification that inclusion in his dictionary was not warranted. Whatever the reason, Percyvale's other entries which cite 'raza' – *casta*, *abolengo* and *abolorio* – provide an understanding of what 'raza' signifies, even if indirectly. In each entry, Percyvale notes as English linguistic equivalents the words 'a race, a lineage, a breed, genus'. The situation takes on a different shading if we recognize that the absence of an entry for 'raza' may be explained by looking to the word's problematic semantics in Spain. As a number of critics have shown, 'raza' in Renaissance Spain<sup>5</sup> was already signifying a complex (and often contradictory) classification system, which included ethnicity and phenotype. Perhaps, inhabiting a society still wedded to conceptualizing race in terms of lineage or genealogy, Percyvale was not yet convinced that this signification was important enough to his English readers.

John Minsheu, on the other hand, in his continuation of Percyvale's dictionary, was apparently under no such illusions. At first glance, Minsheu's *A Dictionarie in Spanish and English. First published into the English tongue by Ric. Percivale gent. Now enlarged and amplified with many thousand words* (1611) appears to make only minor or slight changes to Percyvale's *Biblioteca Hispanica*, yet a careful scrutiny reveals that Minsheu's entries are far more significant additions to Percyvale's lexicon than his title page suggests.<sup>6</sup> In his dictionary, Minsheu includes not only an entry for 'raza' but one other term which will have major ideological consequences in the long run, 'mestizo'. Minsheu's handling of the Spanish 'raza' and English 'race' does indeed 'enlarge' on what is missing in Percyvale. For example, in the Spanish-to-English section, the entry for 'raza' (or 'raca') is defined as 'a ray or beame shining through a hole. Also a race, stocke, kinde or breede'. Additionally, in the English-to-Spanish, Minsheu writes, 'line or race – vide *Casta, Raca*'; and under the entry titled 'race or stocke' he directs the reader to 'vide *Raca, caste, Abolorio, Abolengo*'. In doing so, Minsheu creates a dictionary which offers its users as much information as they will need to comprehend all the vagaries of the Spanish language and its racial lexicon, even going so far as to provide definitions for subsets within entries. Yet every entry seems to reiterate a prevailing semantics; whatever Spanish

word one uses – *casta*, 'raza', *abolorio*, *abolengo* – it will inevitably signify in English 'a race, a lineage, a breed, issue of one's bodie, a progenie, a stocke an offspring' or 'pedigree, stocke, or descent of kindred'.<sup>7</sup>

I want to highlight one more instance of augmentation on the part of Minsheu. As I noted earlier, in his *Bibliotheca Hispanica*, Percyvale does not provide entries for the Spanish terms familiar to postmodern readers – such as *mulatto* and *mestizo*. Minsheu, interestingly enough, includes *mestizo* but not *mulatto*. Moreover, in his definition of *mestizo* Minsheu does not cross-reference other Spanish terms or offer English equivalents. Instead, he writes, 'mestizo m. that which is come or sprung of a mixture of two kinds, as a blacke-Moore and a Christian, a mungrell dog or beast'. What Minsheu does in defining *mestizo* this way is to dissociate the word (and thus the concept) from the term (and concept) 'raza'; in effect, 'raza' (and its English equivalent, race) is used to connote class-based genealogy, while *mestizo* (and 'kind') registers an identity rooted in species or, intriguingly, religion.

What Minsheu's definition misses, or to be more accurate, misrepresents, is that, in the period under scrutiny, the word *mestizo* was rarely applied to anyone born of sexual relations between African (or Moor) and Christian; in fact, the term generally referred to offspring of Spanish and American Indian unions. Second, it was rare for *mestizo* to signal non-human sexual relations. What Minsheu seems to do is to draw upon a number of different terms in the Spanish and Portuguese racial lexicons (*mestizo*, *mestico*, *mulatto* and *morisco*), blend their meanings, and offer his English readers a hybrid explanation. As Minsheu constitutes it, *mestizo* functions as a less than desirable term of reference. To categorize a person as a *mestizo*, then, is not only to point to a problematic genealogy but to deny that individual a 'racial' history.

The emergence of dictionaries such as Percyvale's and Minsheu's, and their attempts to carefully delineate (and limit) the meaning of race, is not a coincidence. On the contrary, these dictionaries represent a major attempt to localize the semantic possibilities of the word 'race' in the face of increasing perturbations within existing social relations. In fact, I would further contend that these lexical efforts are linked initially not just to the colonial practices under way in the Americas but also to changing class and social dynamics in England itself. Between 1560 and 1660, England's political economy and social institutions underwent a radical realignment. The English nation-state was no longer firmly rooted in a feudal mode of production; capitalist economic relations and institutions were beginning to shape all aspects of

its social relations. Merchants, lawyers and other professionals (especially as civil servants) were an important defining presence in Tudor/Stuart culture. Though an increasing number of merchants and financiers came from the nobility or the gentry (younger sons), the majority of this class were 'commoners'. The increased wealth of this emergent class produced fundamental changes in a social fabric once thought immutable. Money enabled these 'commoners' to live in a manner once thought solely the privilege of the nobility, to acquire the trappings of 'civility' (land, education, luxury goods), and, more importantly, to procure titles (either through service, purchase or marriage).<sup>8</sup>

The patriarchal feudalism which had given rise to the word 'race', and its social legitimacy, was inexorably being transformed by the dynamics of mercantile capitalism and the class that it was to engender, the bourgeoisie. It is no coincidence, then, that the word 'race' and its conceptual semantics require lexical elucidation at the same time that the English capitalist/mercantile class is just beginning to solidify its presence as a political, cultural, and social power as a consequence of its economic hegemony. And it is this ambiguous, or more accurately, rather flexible semantic possibility which may have prompted sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English lexicographers, such as Percyvale, Minsheu and John Florio, to undertake the onerous task of constructing a taxonomic system for the word 'race' that was prescriptive yet, when necessary, inclusive. 'Race', these dictionary compilers seem to suggest, is capable of accommodating whatever shifts may arise in the emerging political economy. Thus early modern writers can deploy the word in a variety of ways without once having to evince concern for the political contradictions which may surface.<sup>9</sup> In effect, because of these types of lexical and semiotic interventions, the word 'race' required just enough semantic augmentation to permit the possibility of delineation specific enough to mark a person's class but general enough to allow it to be used for other purposes.

Of the various semantic registers, typology provided the most efficacious means of defining social differences as the seventeenth century progressed. More and more, phrases such as 'the English race', 'the Irish race', 'race of women', appear with greater frequency. Furthermore, as a result of the colonial and imperialist endeavours of the English, phrases such as 'black race' or 'white race' begin to displace 'Moor', 'Ethiopes', or the 'English nation' as taxonomic classifications. These 'shifts' are rarely reflected upon in later dictionaries and lexicons for, I would argue, one telling reason: from the outset, the dictionary

was explicitly designed, politically and ideologically, to be a discursive investigation into a word's semantic and etymological origins. Having set out the terms of race, compilers of dictionaries left to their literary, philosophical and historical counterparts the task of implementing a word's cultural and philosophical value, to embellish or restrain meaning.

I end this introductory essay with this brief account of the word 'race' and its lexical history in Elizabethan society because, in many ways, it adumbrates the complex theoretical problematic that goes into a critical reading of 'race' and Shakespeare. Like Percyvale's and Minsheu's dictionaries, this volume reveals that our understanding of race in Shakespeare's canon (and his England) is built upon the continuing contributions a generation of Shakespeare scholars can make to our epistemological understanding of the history of a social ideology. In one of the most engaging and thoughtful analyses of racist discourses, David Theo Goldberg asserts that 'race is a fluid, transforming, historically specific concept parasitic on theoretic and social discourses for the meaning it assumes at any given moment'.<sup>10</sup> In other words, in order for race to be understood it must pretend to universality. Race ensures the idea of commonality by negating or effacing the differing interests of a group of individuals. However, there is an inherent paradox in this push for commonality. In order to invest race with meaning, modern societies must frame visible (and, quite frankly, minor) differences among people in terms of antithesis. Consequently, race becomes at once transcendentally immutable and historically mutable. Furthermore, this, at times, contradictory 'truth' becomes preternaturally astute in sustaining itself through the illusion of essentialism.

Comprehension of this theoretical avatar produces sets of questions different from those one might normally ask with regard to early modern English literature: for example, we might well inquire why literary works such as Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Titus Andronicus* or John Webster's *The White Devil* are treated as texts which deal almost exclusively with race and racism, while Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* or Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* are treated as primarily concerned with matters of nationalism and Englishness. On this and related issues, we might also ask whether modern cultural and social critics of early modern literature, by extending the racial taxonomies and ideologies which have shaped post-Enlightenment social subjectivity to pre-Enlightenment subjectivity, have fashioned earlier social formations in our own image.

Questions such as these, of course, become the catalyst for additional epistemological problems and queries: what if our assumption, our



'understanding', of Shakespeare's (and thus early modern England's) concept of race is incomplete? What if, in attempting to sort out the significance of early modern English literature to a post-Second World War, global political economy, we have misread, or not read at all, some of the transgressive signs of racial subjectivity in Shakespeare's canon? Is it possible that too narrowly a defined notion misrepresents and engenders a misreading of the complexity and ambiguity of the word 'race' as well as its social and cultural articulation in seventeenth-century England?

To pose these and other questions about the racial implications of any early modern text is also to inquire into how audiences (then and now) might have construed and recognized the concept of race and its linguistic inflections. As I have argued elsewhere, early modern English usage of the word 'race' reveals a multiplicity of loci, of axes of determinism, as well as metaphorical systems to aid and abet its deployment across a variety of boundaries in the making.<sup>11</sup> As an expression of fundamental distinctions, the meaning of 'race' varied depending upon whether a writer wanted to specify difference born of a class-based concept of genealogy, a psychological (and essentialized) nature, or group typology. Nonetheless, in all these variations, race is envisioned as something fundamental, something immutable, knowable and recognizable, yet we only 'see' it when its boundaries are violated, and thus race is also, paradoxically, mysterious, illusory and mutable. All of this, perhaps, was well known to Shakespeare.

## NOTES

- 1 William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. Gerald Eades Bentley (New York: Penguin, 1958), p. 17.
- 2 One of the continuing points of debate in 'race studies' is whether Jews constitute a 'race' and thus anti-Semitism should be considered racism. See James Shapiro's brilliant *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York, 1996).
- 3 Richard Percyvale, *Bibliotheca Hispanica. Containing a Grammar, with a Dictionarie in Spanish, English and Latine, gathered out of divers good Authors: very profitable for the studious of the Spanish toong. By Richard Percyvall Gent. The Dictionarie being enlarged with the latine, by the advise and conference of Master Thomas Doyley Doctor in Physicke*. Imprinted at London, by Iohn Iackson, for Richard Watkins. 1591. Folger Library copy.
- 4 Percyvale begins his rationale for the dictionary by stating that, 'it would be a tedious peece of worke, to search out what shoulde be the proper language of the Spanish nation; the countrie having bin mastered by so many dyuers kinds of people, as either of ambition to enlarge their dominions, or

of necessitie to seeke habitation for such surplus, as their owne lymits could not conteyne: haue been invited to make inuasions'. Not surprisingly, he then goes on to do exactly what he claims 'would be a tedious peece of worke' – pursue the origins of the Spanish language. The 'Spanyard', Percyvale writes, 'as in things he standeth highly upon his reputation; so he glorieth not a little of his antiquitie'. Percyvale's shift from linguistics to ethnicity is not surprising to anyone familiar with the political dynamics shaping late sixteenth-century England; yet that he engages in this discursive strategy in the preface to the reader stigmatizes Percyvale's text in ways no other dictionary of the period is marked. Percyvale's political gesture ideologically defines the terms of his project, as he moves from a linguistic to what would now be defined as a racial exegesis for the origins of the Spanish language.

- 5 See Verena Stolcke, 'Invade Women: Gender, Race, and Class in the Formation of Colonial Society', in *Women, 'Race' and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (London and New York, 1994), pp. 272–86, and Paul Julian Smith, *Representing the Other: 'Race', Text, and Gender in Spanish and Spanish American Narrative* (Oxford, 1992).
- 6 The full title is rather daunting: *A Dictionarie in Spanish and English: first published into the English tongue by Ric. Percivale gent. Now enlarged and amplified with many thousand words . . . together with the accenting of every word thorowout the whole dictionarie, for the true pronunciation of the language, as also for the diuers signification of one and the selfesame word: and for the learners ease and furtherance, the declining of all hard and irregular verbs; and for the same cause the former order of the alphabet is altered, diuers hard and vncouth phrases and speeches out of sundry of the best authors explained, with diuers necessary notes and especiall directions for all such as shall be desirous to attaine the perfection of the Spanish tongue. All done by John Minsheu . . . Hereunto for the further profit and pleasure of the learner or delighted in this tongue, is annexed an ample English dictionarie, alphabetically set downe with the Spanish words thereunto adioyned, as also an alphabeticall table of the Arabicke and Moorish words now commonly receiued and used in the Spanish tongue. I have used the Folger copy, STC 19619, copy 1.*
- 7 Other Renaissance dictionaries also engage in similar techniques. See John Florio's *A World of Wordes, Or Most copious, and exact Dictionarie in Italian and English* (1598), and Thomas Wilson's *A Christian Dictionarie* (1616), for example. Florio's work, in particular, illustrates how concerned later compilers were to include all possible meanings of words such as 'race'. Florio's definition of the Italian word *razza* goes as follows: 'Razza, Raza, as Raggia, a kind, a race, a broode, a blood, a stocke, a name, a pedigree.' The anomaly in this series is the word Raggia, which Florio defines as 'a fish with whose skin fletchers smooth their arrowes called a ray or skate. Some have taken it for the thornbacke. Also resin [which he defines as] a tree in Arabia, whereof there is but one found, and vpon it the Phenix sits.'
- 8 See Richard Grassby, *The English Gentleman in Trade: The Life and Works of Sir Dudley North, 1641–1691* (Oxford, 1994). As Grassby writes, of North, this

‘gentleman trader . . . accepted the prevailing norms of his society and he reconciled the demands of business with his personal desires, his family obligations, and the public interest. To [this man] money was never the measure of his life, but it served as an outward sign of success in a society which honoured wealth but not the skills by which it was created’, p. 285. See also, Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500–1700* (Stanford, 1994) and Marvin B. Becker, *Civility and Society in Western Europe: 1300–1600* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1988).

- 9 This did not foreclose, however, the possibility of exploiting the other meaning of ‘race’, kind. One has only to explore the corpus of Edmund Spenser to find instances where the plurality of meaning of ‘race’ abounds. Even William Shakespeare’s employment of the term, though primarily figuring lineage, is occasionally marked by ambiguity. Nonetheless, when we encounter the word ‘race’ it is usually understood to signify a group of characteristics associated with a particular socio-economic group, namely the aristocracy.
- 10 David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass., 1993), p. 74.
- 11 Margo Hendricks, ‘Obscured by Dreams: Race, Empire, and Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 2:1 (Summer 1996), 37–60.