Laura Seymour

The Name of Grim: Tracing the Character of Grim the Collier in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century English Theatre

Grim the Collier is a curious comic character who receives little critical attention. Grim appears in three key plays, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century pamphlets, herbals, and ballad culture. This article examines, and rejects, Grim as a potentially useful figure for environmental awareness. I dispel legends about the basis of this character, and examine how the labile significance of the name 'Grim' implicates it in networks of superficial similarity between devils, colliers, and racialized black skin. These networks link to the proverb that underlies most early modern depictions of Grim: 'like will to like quoth the devil to the collier'.

In Anthony Brewer's probably-Jacobean play *The Love Sick King*, a curious comic character introduces himself as '*Grim* the Collyer that has been thus long Controler of the Cole-pits, chief Sergeant of the Selleridge, nay the very Demigorgan of the Dungeon' (D2r).[1] Grim's euphuistic assertion positions him within a long tradition ('long Controler of the Cole-pits'), establishes his concern with social status ('chief Sergeant of the Selleridge'), and draws on associations between colliers and devils (Demogorgon being a powerful ruler in hell). Grim should not be so proud of himself, however. A stock comic character in early modern English dramatic, pamphlet, and ballad culture, Grim shaped a tradition of using labile similes abusively to racialize the collier's black skin, marking it as devilish. This article examines how we might read Grim simultaneously in racial and ecological terms.[2] Analyzing William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611), Patricia Akhimie discusses the ways in which various early modern senses of 'cultivation' embrace noble education and productive land husbandry. Akhimie illuminates how, marking and arguably darkening Caliban's skin with painful 'pinches', Prospero denies Caliban both benefits of cultivation; thus, she explains of Caliban, 'his labor effaced, he is marked as uncultivatable, a born slave'.[3] Grim the Collier provides

Laura Seymour (laura.seymour@st-annes.ox.ac.uk) is a stipendiary lecturer in English at St Anne's College, University of Oxford.

a particularly sharp example of why we might be wary of latching on to early modern literature as a source of useful models of understanding our relationship to the environment. Though as an emblem of the dirtiness, foolishness, and distastefulness of coal, Grim might seem to speak to modern-day anti-fossil fuel concerns, he drags with him a racist apparatus that renders him an undesirable ambassador from the past.

The precise date of *The Love Sick King* is uncertain; it was first published in 1655, but textual references to Scotland and Denmark suggest the play was written and performed in James I's reign. Brewer's Grim, however, resonates with the earlier incarnations of Grim the Collier in a handful of Jacobean and Elizabethan plays, pamphlets, and ballads. Though some other published work on ecocriticism and lost plays mentions Grim the Collier incidentally, this article focuses on tracing the character of Grim in three key plays: *The Love Sick King*, *Grim the Collier of Croyden* (of uncertain authorship, ca 1600), and Richard Edwards's *Damon and Pithias* (1564). In each of these plays, Grim is a subplot character, alongside main plots of King Canutus's invasion of England and love for an English nun (*The Love Sick King*), the demon Belfagour's marriage to a shrew (*Grim the Collier of Croyden*), and Damon and Pythias's self-sacrificing friendship (*Damon and Pithias*). I examine these plays alongside the similar figure Tom Collier who dances with the devil in Ulpian Fulwell's interlude *Like Will to Like Quod the Deuel to the Colier* (1568), and Grim's appearance in ballads and seventeenth-century writing by Thomas Dekker and William Winstanley.[4]

This article examines how the common early modern English proverb 'like will to like quoth the devil to the collier' shaped the character of Grim. Fulwell uses this proverb for his title, cites it frequently in his interlude, and incorporates it into a song: 'Tom Colier of Croydon hath solde his coles, / And made his market to day: / And now he daunceth with the Devil, / For like will to like alway'.[5] Fulwell's devil and collier characters 'matche' as part of the interlude's wider schema whereby virtuous people seek virtuous companions and vicious people seek vicious companions; the virtuous shun the vicious's company, and vice versa.[6] Brewer, Edwards, and the author of *Grim the Collier of Croyden* 'match' the devil with Grim the Collier. Both dwelling in subterranean fiery environments, both foolish, both with black(ened) skin, and often friendly with each other, the devil and collier appear in these early modern plays as a pair. In so doing, they embody the dual significance of 'like', which suggests both simile and affection.[7]

As ecocritical writers like Todd Borlik and Ken Hiltner have shown, several early modern literary texts were alert to (char)coal's polluting qualities as part of a wider early modern awareness of human actions detrimental to the environment,

like deforestation.[8] Like Borlik, I consider whether early modern literary texts contain frameworks for understanding nature that we can apply in the context of our present-day climate crisis. Borlik advocates adopting early modern animist conceptions of nature, connecting them to James Lovelock's modern Gaia hypothesis, which describes nature as an interconnected self-regulating system. Borlik posits early modern literature as 'the vicar of nature', guiding us towards greater respect and ability to care for nature as a delicately-balanced living system.[9] I am sceptical about the extent to which plays involving the character of Grim can be recuperated in this manner. These plays' portrayal of coal as ugly, and the collier as diabolical, may well chime with present-day understandings of fossil fuel industries as morally corrupt, massive polluters. Brewer's Grim's desire for infinite expansion of his coal mining projects and his desire wantonly to burn huge towers of coal might well ring alarm bells in modern ears. However, problems lie in the way that Brewer, Edwards, Dekker, and the author of *Grim the Collier of Croyden* centre their representations of coal's devilish ugliness around the word 'Grim', which could mean fierce, ugly, grimy, and devilish. 'Grim' is part of a wider constellation of devil- and coal-related vocabulary that implicates racialized blackness in the likeness between devils and colliers.

I draw on Ian Smith's arguments in *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance* (2009) and 'White Skin, Black Masks' (2003) that race was a linguistic configuration in the early modern era, and that white authors often involve blackness in two-dimensional schemata of similarity, connecting black skin to black things with similes that are 'superficial' in all senses of the word.[10] Today, racial and environmental injustices continue to reinforce each other, rendering people of colour disproportionately affected by the climate crisis. Hiltner demonstrates that early moderns understood, however reluctantly, that humans caused air pollution with coal smoke: 'as the seventeenth century opened, London had a serious problem with air pollution (resulting from the burning of coal with high sulfur content)'.[11] Hiltner illuminates that sea coal was the main culprit; early modern texts framed its smoke as toxic to plant, animal, and human health and an 'abuse' of the environment, but also sought to conceal these undesirable qualities.[12] Present day texts representing racial and environmental injustices are also inflected by efforts both to occlude and to lay bare human responsibility. Hsuan Hsu lays out how in modern cities 'atmospheric violence frequently overlaps with — and amplifies — patterns of racial violence', exacerbated by financial and political inequalities.[13] Ellen Tani highlights modern metaphors of racism as a totalizing 'climate' surrounding us; though we might breathe this climate in to the core of our beings, it can be invisible, or visible only partially, to us. Adducing ideas of race as an

'atmosphere' that mediates our relations to one another, Tani draws together ideas of ecological and ethical pollution.[14] Though we might be tempted to use the Grim plays to bring early modern ideas about diabolical coal into the present day, this would also bring into the present racist ideas that have helped cause our environmental crisis, inseparable from racial injustice. We should beware of what Grim tugs with him on the thread of simile.

The Name of Grim: Multivalent Adjective, Not Proper Noun

Several historical and literary-critical texts repeat an apocryphal legend, which is also to be found in online and physical displays from Wetherspoon's Moon Under Water pub at Norbury, that plays like *Grim the Collier of Croydon* are based on a real collier in Croydon, called Grim or Grimes.[15] The legend has it that during Edward VI's reign Grimes mined and burnt vast quantities of charcoal (the coal type Croydon was famed for), smoking out Archbishop Grindal from his nearby palace and instigating a legal battle. Though early modern Croydon was famed for its colliers, evidenced by the still-existing 'Colliers Water Lane', my research suggests this legend to be a later invention rather than a real piece of sixteenth-century gossip. Grindal acceded to the archbishopric of Canterbury (with its associated manor at Croydon) in May 1575, thereafter taking six months to reach London from his bishopric in York.[16] This post-dates Grim the Collier's first appearance on the English stage in Edwards's *Damon and Pithias* which was probably written and performed in 1564 (or sometime between 1564–8). The play was entered into the Stationers' Register in 1567 and the first publication in 1571 refers to an earlier performance 'before the Queenes Majesty'. Moreover, no Grim or Grimes shines forth to claim this historical role in the records from St John Baptist in Croyden, though several Grims and Grimeses were born, married, and died in various other Surrey and London locations in the sixteenth century. It seems that, rather than Grim being a historical character, sometime in the mid-sixteenth century 'Grim' became a stock name for a collier. This name stuck for at least another fifty years, so that by 1615 when in *A Cold Yeare* Thomas Dekker questions a generic collier in London, he could write 'I asked honest Grimme'.[17] Nor is the literary character of Grim closely tied to Croydon: in *The Love Sick King*, Grim complains about Croydon colliers, opposing their charcoal to what he sees as the superior Newcastle colliers and their sea-coal, 'Then stand thy ground, old Coal of *Newcastle*, and a fig for *Croyden*' (G2r).

In *Grim the Collier of Croyden*, Grim's name confuses Clack the Miller, who is Grim's rival for the affections of rustic Joan. Referring to 'old proverbs', Clack

truncates 'soft and fair goes far' and implicitly recalls 'like will to like quoth the devil to the collier' by associating Grim's name with foul devilishness:

> CLACK   Ay, but Joan, bear old proverbs in your memory; soft and fair — now
>   sir if you make too much haste to fall foul, ay, and that upon a foul one,
>   too, there fades the flower of all Croyden [*aside*] Tell me but this: is not
>   Clack the miller as good a name as Grim the Collier?
>
> JOAN   Alas! I know no difference in names to make a maid to choose or to
>   refuse.
>
> CLACK   You were best to say, no, nor in men neither.   (H1r)[18]

In attempting to distinguish his name from Grim's, Clack entangles their names and identities. Clack poses a congruence between names and men ('is not Clack the Miller as good a name as Grim the Collier') which he and Joan swiftly destabilize: in the next lines there is 'no difference' between either men or names. This confusion pervades Clack's musings, as the identities of the people he refers to in his asides are not fixed. Whether Clack addresses himself with 'sir' or whether he is here imagining admonishing his rival Grim is unclear. The 'foul one' might be Joan, who is 'fallen upon' either literally in a sexual position or by being 'encountered' by her husband (H3r).[19] But, perhaps the 'foul one' is grimy Grim, who threatens the beauteous flower Joan: Clack's fricatives mimic this infection by bleeding from 'falling foul' into the 'fair flower'. As we shall see, Clack describes Grim's body begriming Joan's when he anxiously imagines Grim and Joan as a married pair.[20] Clack certainly later 'falls upon' Grim in this phrase's other early modern sense of 'attacks'. The name of Grim precipitates a mire of confusing similarities and contaminations, encapsulated in this image of a foul flower, like the orange hawkweed, a flower colloquially known both in the early modern era and today as 'Grim the Collier' because its buds seem peppered with soot.[21] In early modern botanical texts the name of 'Grim' was likewise unsteady and associated with foolishness. Herbals display confusion over which plant 'Grim the Collier' refers to, slipping between two different hawkweeds (*pilosella aurantiacum* or *hieracium aurantiacum* and *hieracium caespitosum*), while the mid-seventeenth-century herbalist John Parkinson ridicules readers who refer to hawkweed as 'Grim the Collier': 'the name of Grim the Collier, whereby it is called of many is both idle and foolish'.[22] Whichever type of early modern writing it appeared in — play, pamphlet, or *theatrum botanicum* (theatre of plants) — 'grim' stood for injudicious instability.

It matters whether 'Grim' is purely a proper noun in these plays or whether it also functions as an adjective. As a proper noun, 'Grim' has at least some

fixity, referring to a specific character. As an adjective it is more labile, bringing together a range of significations that include temperament, physical appearance, and devilishness, allowing these three often surreptitiously to inform each other. Grim was an old name for the devil, and the adjective 'grim' could mean stern or fierce. Associated with Woden, 'Grim' as a word for 'devil' lingers in place names like Grimshaw and Grimsby. The root words low German *gremen* (to make black or dirty) and old German, Norse, Danish, and Swedish variants of 'grimm' (harsh or ugly) are also in play here.[23] 'Grime' could signify black pigment, and 'grime' appears closely adjacent to the word 'black' with enough frequency in early modern texts to suggest a conceptual link between being fierce and being grimy or black. Death and the devil are often 'grim' in early modern literature, suggesting terrifying and ugly looks, fierceness, griminess in the sense of being smeared with mud or soot from hellfire, and blackness. John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), filled with names transparently indicating a character's key qualities, includes a fierce giant called Grim. Clack puns on the anger implied by Grim's name when he says, 'Well Grim, since thou art so collier-like choleric' (H2r).[24] In *The Love Sick King*, Grim lets his name rest between adjective and noun when describing the army of colliers obeying him as 'grim fellows'. The phrase 'grim fellows' both suggests that the colliers are Grim's to command or work with and points to a similarity in their appearance and disposition: they are like carbon (pun intended) copies of Grim: fierce, stern, ugly and sooty. Grim emphasizes that the colliers are his copies and companions ('fellows') by designating them 'fellowers' rather than 'followers' (F2v).

The shared name 'Grim' highlights supposed similarities between colliers and devils. Collier and devil share, and swap, significations of 'Grim' with each other: colliers and devils are both black and sooty; both can be fierce or angry. This is a two-way exchange, not only are colliers devilish, devils can be collier-like; the devil is 'the Collier of hell'.[25] The alternative names for the ca 1600 play, *Grim The Collier of Croyden* or *The Devil and His Dame* suggest an interchangeability between collier and devil. This raises further uncertainty about whom names refer to in this play. Though 'the devil and his dame' ostensibly are Belfagour and his planned wife Honorea alongside his actual wife Marian, they could plausibly be Grim and Joan. In *Grim the Collier of Croyden*, Grim alludes to this similetic framework, attesting, 'if you cannot endure the Devil, you'l never love the Collier, why, we two are sworn Brothers' (I12r). Devil and collier are confused several times in this play; for instance when, having been defeated in battle by Robin Goodfellow but believing him to be Grim, Clack complains, 'the Collier playeth the Devil with me!', Goodfellow retorts by swapping the places of the nouns in

Clack's sentence, 'No, it's the Devil playeth the Collier with thee' (I4r).[26] When Grim ultimately invites Goodfellow to dine with him in his house, Goodfellow, touched, replies, 'This is more kindness, *Grim*, than I expected' (I12r). 'Kindness' indicates both the similarity between Goodfellow and Grim (they are kindred, of a kind), and Grim's unexpected benevolence in a play where devils tend to be milder and nicer than humans. Grim's friendliness and trustingness here make him more like the play's main devils (Goodfellow and Belphagor) than its lying, murderous humans. Brewer's Grim explicitly links his fellow colliers to hell, designating them 'honest Tatarians' and bringing all meanings of 'grim' into play: 'as for my seven hundred fellowers they are honest *Tatarians* and whoever deals with 'em shall find them grim fellows'. Brewer's Grim adds that his followers are more diabolical than hell's devils, 'If you wo'd rake hell and Phlegeton Acolon and Barruthium, all these low countries could not yeeld you such company' (F2v).[27]

Staging Grim: Cosmetics, Race, and Set-Piece Scenes

On stage, Grim's 'grimness' would have been visually obvious in his blackened face, a physical feature that Brewer and Edwards particularly emphasize. *The Love Sick King* carefully builds up to Grim's first entrance, whetting the audience's appetite for the appearance of this, by now well-known, comic figure. In an example of what Mariko Ichikawa identifies as the commonly 'highly theatrical' speeches around characters' entrances, Goodgift asks his wife 'How now, who's this comes here?'; she replies ''Tis *Grim* the Collyer, Ist't not, brother?' (C1r).[28] These words incite the audience to look for Grim, arousing their anticipation, and priming them to find his appearance impressive. In a later entrance, similarly advertised by other characters, Brewer's Grim announces himself as initiating a separate drama within the play; Thornton asks 'Who, honest Grim?'; Grim enters and replies 'Yes Sir and am the Prologue to the Play'. Though we are now in act 4 of *The Love Sick King*, Grim launches into rhyming couplets as befits a prologue, announcing that his army of colliers is poised to save England. Thornton reflects on this prologue's theatricality, 'This speech I thinks was pen'd on purpose', and Grim acknowledges that it was a performance, explaining that he meant 'no disparagement to the Author' in his delivery (F1r).

   'Grime' could specifically mean black particles of soot and coal dust, thus the name Grim the Collier translates to 'the sooty collier'. When the collier in *Grim the Collier of Croydon* introduces himself as Gilbert Grim, this simultaneously tells us he is a sooty Gilbert. In this play, Grim's blackened face and Robin Goodfellow's reddened face (which suggests mirth and fertility) evoke the blackened

and reddened faces of early modern mummers' plays.[29] Goodfellow links his and Grim's faces, implying that they are bad faces (because they curse good faces), marking them as ill-favoured by sarcastically calling them 'well-favoured', and using a term associated with racialized blackness, 'slaves': 'Here is two well-favoured Slaves, *Grim* and I may curse all good faces' (I4r). Clack the Miller possibly appeared with a whitened face and hair, as if covered in flour (indeed, real flour could plausibly have been used for this effect); Goodfellow refers to Clack as having a powdery (dusty) head (poll): 'Miller, Miller dustipoule' (I3v). Thus, when Grim and Clack fight, this may visually evoke a black-white binary that, as work by Farah Karim-Cooper and Patricia Akhimie shows, rests on racist humour.[30]

Grim's sootiness is metatheatrical, pointing at the use of soot and charcoal to blacken early modern actors' faces when they played Moors, colliers, and devils, as well as foolish characters in drama and folk-ritual.[31] When a white early modern actor playing a Moor applied soot and (char)coal dust to their face, they attempted to represent racialized blackness using a substance proper to the collier. An actor blackening their face to play a sooty collier and an actor blackening their face to play a Moor are by no means the same thing. While the former may simply be a realistic touch, the latter is always intrinsically an act of violence. However, early modern playwrights blurred this distinction by verbally connecting devilish, collier-like, foolish, and racialized blackness. 'Black', 'begrimed', 'sooty', 'collied' (ie begrimed or blackened, specifically with coal dust or soot), and 'devil' ring through Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604) for example. In *Titus Andronicus* (first performed 1594), Aaron's 'coal black is better than another hue' perhaps points to the fact that the actor playing Aaron's skin was blackened *with* coal, what Smith calls 'an embedded metatheatrical reference to the devices used by white actors to impersonate blackness'.[32] When Othello states, 'Dian's visage, is now be*grim*ed and black / As mine own face', and refers to 'rose-lipped' Patience becoming 'grim as hell' the word 'grim' with all its connotations of devilry, ugliness, blackness, and coal-dust used as a theatrical cosmetic, is doing heavy work (3.3.397–8; 4.2.72). As Smith writes, this description is of a devil not of the soul, but of the skin.[33]

In *Damon and Pithias*, a set-piece scene in a barbershop centres around Grim's black face. The collier in Dekker's *A Cold Yeare* ('my black-facde Gentleman') weeps at a loss of profit, thus cleaning the soot from his skin. Dekker's description perhaps recalls Edwards's play half a century earlier: 'he wept more warme water, then euer he had at any countrie Barbers to wash his smutty Face on a Satterday night'.[34] As the barbers 'wash' and shave Grim's face in *Damon and Pithias*, Edwards stages this visual contrast — or rather, lack of contrast — between black

'grime' and underlying skin. Edwards's stage direction innocently calls for 'water', though hints emerge that Grim is being shaved with urine (something Hazlitt notes in his edition as soon as the bowl appears). If so, in being visually 'cleaned' of its grime to reveal the actor's skin, Grim's skin is made dirtier. Once they have washed and shaved his face, the barbers tell Grim, 'Your face like an Incorne [ie inkhorn] now shineth so gay': this washing has made Grim's face grimier, or revealed black skin beneath (G1r).[35] With his mouth 'lyke an Ouen' and his face persistently like an inkhorn, Grim is physiognomically tied to his profession (F4r). To add insult to injury, the barbers rob Grim. Grim repeats that he feels 'lighter', but in no sense of the word is this simply the case (G1v).[36] Rather than being washed 'lighter' from its dark grime, Grim's skin is besmirched by urine. Grim's light-heartedness vanishes when he realizes that he is lighter precisely by the weight of his purse. This scene suggests that Grim the Collier can never be 'light': his polyvalent name keeps him 'grim': dark in appearance, fierce and foolish in temperament.

   Smith writes that early modern race is a 'discursive fiction' that is 'properly situated within rhetoric, for it is a purposive, persuasive invention', often based disingenuously around superficial similarities between words, or between people's skin colours and objects of that colour.[37] Grim is part of one such 'invention': the common early modern triangulation of devils, colliers, and people racialized as black. Writing in 1622, the Scottish poet Patrick Hannay makes this triangulation in his description of 'Croydon, clothed in blacke' as a blight on the floral spring landscape, stating, 'those who there inhabit, suting well / With such a place doe either Nigro's seeme, / Or harbingers for *Pluto*, prince of hell' because 'besmeared with sut and breathing pitchy smoke'.[38] Brewer's Grim connects racialized dark skin with colliers' sooty skin, describing 'seven hundred black Indians or Newcastle colliers your Worship keeps daily to dive for Treasure five hundred fathom deep for you, and as they bring it up, Ile send it out to your profit, Sir' (D1r–v). Brewer turns an image of black pearl divers into an image of Newcastle colliers diving 'five hundred fathom deep' for coal. The framework of Grim, a collier, exploiting other colliers' labour for his own gain in Newcastle blurs into a framework of an English (proto)capitalist profiting financially from colonization and enslavement overseas, highlighting the links between these exploitations. Sometimes, the triangulation collapses. When Brewer's Grim refers to his colliers as 'honest Tatarians' the language makes it difficult to tell whether this is another assignment of ethnicity to them (people from the Tartar region of Asia), or a statement that they are devils from Tartarus (hell) (D1r).[39] In an ascription of temperament to a particular ethnicity, and chiming with the fact

that 'grim' meant 'fierce', seventeenth-century writers also used 'Tartar' to sig-
nify a rough or unruly person, or a vagabond.[40] As Smith and other critical race
theorists like Sydnee Wagner discuss, this link between skin colour, subterranean
heat, and fierceness is not coincidental; Wagner writes, 'in geo-humoral theory,
a body too heated was more likely to be dark in complexion' and associated with
an angry temperament.[41]

Brewer includes gender and social class in these slippery superficial exchanges
when Grim suggests that the mere use of a black face-covering can turn a person
into a 'lady' no matter that person's initial gender and status. Referring to early
modern women preserving light skin with black fabric masks, and perhaps evok-
ing the black fabric sometimes used to represent black skin on stage, Grim attests,
'I hope one day to purchase a Lordship, and all my Collyers under me shall be
Ladies, for Ile maintain 'em with black Masks on their faces already' (D1v).[42] In
The Love Sick King, a black face on stage is a two-dimensional, malleable symbol
that taps in to cultural associations that are 'purposive, pervasive invention[s]'. In
segueing from racialized black skin to black fabric, Grim displays the superficial
understanding of blackness that Smith identifies. According to Grim, just don-
ning a collier's black face enables that collier or actor to 'be' any other being with
a black face: a lady or a staged person of another race.

Grim's grimness is uncontrollable. To be 'grim' in these plays is to set off a
chain of significations that extend beyond, yet centre around, the figure of the
collier. Whether explicitly cited or not, the proverb 'like will to like quoth the
devil to the collier' is at work in all these plays, connecting and confusing differ-
ent types of 'grimness': fierceness, theatrical blackface, racialized blackness, the
sootiness that comes from labour in a coal pit, and devilishness. Grim's grimness
is also infectious. In *Grim the Collier*, Clack warns Joan that marrying Grim will
smudge her with two associations of grimness, leaving her with a sooty face and
a devilish life: 'I perceive you mean to lead your life in a Colepit, like one of the
Devil's drudges, and have your face look like the outside of an old iron pot, or
a blacking pot' (H1v).[43] The coal pit is a place of blackness, but this blackness
can mean many things; Thornton says in *The Love Sick King* 'every Coal-pit has
a rellish on't, for who goes down but he comes out black as ink' (A4r).[44] Relish
here can mean any characteristic quality, though often refers specifically to taste,
suggesting that Thornton is ludicrously so much a connoisseur of coal that he
smacks his lips to taste each different pit. Grim is enmeshed in questions of hell,
gender, race, social class, foolishness, and the material conditions of theatre. Does
the character have something to teach us? Or is this a part of literary history that,
like coal, would be better left in the ground?

Conclusion: Ecocritical Grim

Where colliers appear in early modern literature, devils are close by, whether physically embracing and dancing with their collier friend, or haunting the text's vocabulary. Hiltner describes how, because of coal smoke's well-known toxicity, many early modern writers (including Milton and Spenser) used imagery of sulfur and brimstone in depictions of hell.[45] To read for Renaissance writers was also to gather flowers (the Latin *legere* signifying both); perpetuating racist tropes, Grim the Collier is a foul flower indeed. In 1633, the herbalist and surgeon John Gerard wrote of hawkweed, 'The stalkes and cups of the floures are all set thicke with a blackish downe or hairinesse as it were the dust of coles; whence the women, who keep in it gardens for noueltie sake, haue named it Grim the Colliar'.[46] Gerard relies on similes to explain the plant's name, '*as it were* the dust of coles'. The dramatic character Grim teaches us to distrust simile and to view with suspicion the maxim 'like will to like'. Because the Grim plays have taught us not just this but also illuminated interlinking early modern ideas about race and racism, the environment, devils, fools, and the perniciousness and value of coal, we may see reasons to keep Grim in our gardens of classrooms, critical texts, and new editions for novelty's sake.

 I argue that we should not turn to Grim to help us with our environmental problems in the present day, however. In so doing, we may reach for this collier but find ourselves dancing with the devil. None of the three plays I have focused on display explicit environmental awareness, though they may have ecocritical value as examples of the ways in which writers occluded coal's polluting qualities, and the imperfect forms such occlusions took. Grim's rural world in *Grim the Collier of Croyden* is a simple and idyllic one; Robin Goodfellow escapes there to find safety away from the noble families that have been tormenting him and Belfagour in their stifling and violent households. Containing Grim within a comic set piece, Edwards confines coal's besmirching power to Grim's own body, and Grim's coals in *Damon and Pithias* bring warmth and royal connection. Filled with triumphant imagery of burning enemy cities, *The Love Sick King* is concerned more with invasion of territory than pollution of air. Represented as martial 'conquerers', Brewer's colliers are central to the reestablishment of English national sovereignty; the play's concern with devastating burning is most waste-fully expressed by the burning coal mountains which Grim plans (precisely how, is unclear) to use to save England from King Canutus. The colliers 'Shall make a Dale of Mauburn hils, / Then raise a Mount as high as *Poles* / And turn it strait to burning coals' (F1r).[47] These coal mountains showcase the colliers' strength and

ability to dig and delve; the mountains are impressive for their height (reaching the axis of the heavens in the celestial poles) and the depths they spring from. But, like Edwards and the author of *Grim the Collier of Croyden*, Brewer declines to depict the coal's horrid smoke.

Given the existence of what Hiltner shows was a pervasive and increasing early modern worry about polluting coal smoke dating to the thirteenth century, the Grim plays' removal of this crucial detail — coal smoke's atmospheric toxicity — should give us pause. Hiltner suggests that when early modern authors shied away from explicitly acknowledging their and their fellow citizens' causative roles in air pollution, this gave rise to more oblique forms of acknowledgement, 'when confronted with the challenge of representing what neither writer nor reader may wish to acknowledge about their own actions, the causes of environmental problems may be represented unintentionally'.[48] Focusing similetically on the collier's skin rather than coal's noxious smoke, the playwrights I have examined render visible another aspect of the early modern coal trade: the early intertwining of racism and damage to health and environment. I find Grim to be a good example of two things: first, of the ways in which those who, at the expense of others, benefit materially from what Tani has identified as the perniciously invisible atmosphere of racism can be invested in perpetuating the invisibility of this atmosphere. Second, of the fact that such attempts at invisibility can never be completely successful.

Notes

1   Anthony Brewer, *The Love Sick King* (London, 1655; Wing: B4426). David Kathman argues that, though the play was first printed in 1655, it was probably written during James I and VI's reign. See David Kathman, 'Brewer, Anthony (fl. 1607–1617), playwright', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (*ODNB*) (2004), https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/3359.

2   This article contributes to an emerging subfield of ecocritical writing on early modern literature attentive to race, ethnicity, and colonialism: including bodies of work on water and wetlands by Hillary Eklund, Debapriya Sarkar, and Steve Mentz; writing on colonialism by Todd Borlik; and studies of later texts like Kimberly Ruffin's work on African American ecoliterary traditions. For the first three mentioned authors, I refer to their wider body of work; specific references in mind for the last two are Todd Borlik, 'Caliban and the Fen Demons of Lincolnshire: The Englishness of Shakespeare's *Tempest*', *Shakespeare* 9.1 (2013), 21–51, https://doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2012.705882; and Kimberly Ruffin, *Black on Earth: African American Ecoliterary Traditions* (Athens GA, 2010).

3   Patricia Akhimie, *Shakespeare and the Cultivation of Difference: Race and Conduct in the Early Modern World* (London, 2018), 159. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351125048.

4   For discussion of the authorship of *Grim the Collier of Croydon*, see 'Devil and His Dame', in *Lost Plays Database*, ed. Roslyn L. Knutson, David McInnis, Matthew Steggle, and Misha Teramura, last modified 8 June 2011, https://lostplays.folger.edu/Devil_and_his_Dame; E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols (Oxford, 1921), 3.317; William Baillie, 'The Date and Authorship of *Grim the Collier of Croydon*', *Modern Philology* 76.2 (1978), 179–84, https://doi.org/10.1086/390844; H. Dugdale Sykes, 'The Authorship of *Grim, the Collier of Croydon*', *The Modern Language Review* 14.3 (1919), 245–53. Frederick Burwick discusses colliers in nineteenth-century drama, adducing Henry Milner's 1825 rewriting of *Grim the Collier of Croyden*: *Grim Will, The Collier of Croyden or the Death of the Red King*, a copy of which I have been unable to trace. See Burwick, *British Drama of the Industrial Revolution* (Cambridge, 2015), 134–57, https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781316276082.

5   Ulpian Fulwell, *An Enterlude Intituled Like Will to Like Quod the Deuel to the Colier* (London, 1568; STC: 11473), A4v.

6   Ibid.

7   On the foolishness/irrationality of the devil and its links to blackness on stage, see Robert Hornback, 'The Folly of Racism: Enslaving Blackface and the "Natural" Fool Tradition', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 20 (2007), 46–84. Grim the Collier is synonymous with foolishness in early modern theatre, ballads, and pamphlets. An amorous collier jumps into a bed filled with stinging nettles in Anon, 'The Collier of Croydon', in John Holloway and Joan Black, ed., *Later English Broadside Ballads* (London, 1975), 63–4. This echoes jestbooks where the person tricked into the nettle-filled bed is simply a 'fool' (rather than a collier specifically), see Robert Armin, *Foole Vpon Foole* (London, 1600; STC: 772.5), C3r–v. William Winstanley describes Grim as 'without either *Brains,* or *Honesty'*, *Poor Robin's Prophecies and Divertisments* (London? HB, 1677; Wing: P2889A), bs, v.

8   Todd Borlik, *Ecocriticism and Early Modern English Literature* (New York, 2011), 159–64, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203819241; Ken Hiltner, *What Else is Pastoral? Renaissance Literature and the Environment* (New York, 2011), 95–124, https://doi.org/10.7591/cornell/9780801449406.001.0001. Cf. for example John Evelyn, *Fumifugium* (London, 1661; Wing: E3489).

9   Borlik, *Ecocriticism*, 74.

10   Ian Smith, *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance: Barbarian Errors* (New York, 2009), 2, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230102064. Smith argues that 'barbarism' was 'not just a linguistic difference' but also a racialized one: 'In the ancient world, barbarians did not belong to the civilised master race; to be barbarous was to be a linguistic outlaw, to be exiled to the very margins of culture'.

11   Hiltner, *What Else is Pastoral?*, 95.

12   Ibid, 97–101.

13   Hsuan Hsu, *The Smell of Risk: Environmental Disparities and Olfactory Aesthetics* (New York, 2020), 11–13, https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479807215.001.0001. Hsu gives the example of pollution, and authorities' failure to clear up this pollution, in the 'poor, predominantly Black' community of Eight Mile, Alabama.

14   'The vagueness of atmosphere — its invisible operations — has also been invoked in the name of post-racialism: because one does not directly see racial violence in one's immediate community, then it must not exist. The interdependence of visibility and existence make it extremely difficult to recognize what occludes or enables recognition'. Ellen Tani, 'Darkening Atmospheres', *Venti* 1.1 (2020), https://www.venti-journal.com/ellen-tani.

15   Works repeating this legend without providing primary sources include Borlik, *Ecocriticism*, 162; Peter Brimblecombe, *The Big Smoke* (New York, 1987), 27–8; Eric Parker, *Highways and Byways of Surrey* (London, 1908), 362. The Moon Under Water at Norbury's history page gives the impossible date of 1568 (before Grindal gained the archbishopric) for this encounter: https://www.jdwetherspoon.com/pub-histories/england/london/the-moon-under-water-norbury.

16   See Patrick Collinson, 'Grindal, Edmund (1516x20–1583)', *ODNB* (2004), https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/11644.

17   Thomas Dekker, *A Cold Yeare. 1614* (London, 1615; STC: 26091), C1v.

18   Anon, 'Grim the Collier of Croyden', in *Gratiae Theatrales* (London, 1662; Wing: G1580), H1r.

19   The play contains similar jokes about Marion being 'foul' for allowing Castellano to fall on her.

20   The experience of love is elsewhere an experience of becoming begrimed for Grim; 'poor *Grim* that before was over shooes in Love, is now over head and eares in Dust and Mire' (G10r).

21   Envisioning a plant as a flaming, sooty coal seems odd in the present day, when burning coal and the flourishing natural world are understood to be opposed. Conflation of plants and fossil fuels might suggest to us greenwashing or offsetting. The alternative common names for orange and yellow hawkweeds suggest that this plant is readily set in the popular imagination against a backdrop where colliers and devils swapped places: devil's paintbrush, yellow devil, king devil, red devil, yellow king devil. Whether these names were used in the early modern era remains unclear, but they rest on the early modern formation of similetic slides from devil to collier to (threatened) environment.

22   John Parkinson, *Paradisi in Sole Paradisus Terrestris* (London, 1656; Wing: P495), 301; compare John Parkinson, *Theatrum Botanicum* (London, 1640; STC: 19302).

23   *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, s.v. 'grim, *adj*.'

24   Grim's reply confirms this as a pun conflating name, profession, and temperament: 'Miller, I will not be mealy-mouthed' (H2r).

25   For example, Robert Crowley writes of a Croydon collier 'men thyncke he is cosen to the Colyar of Hell', 'Of the Colier of Croydon', in *One and Thyrtye Epigrammes* (London, 1550; STC: 6088), B6v.

26   Goodfellow adds, 'the Collier is excellent| To be Companion to the Devil himself' (I4v).

27   All quotations from Brewer in this paragraph from *The Love Sick King*, F2v. Phlegethon is hell's fiery lake; 'Acolon' is probably a corruption of Acheron, the river in Hades; and 'Barruthium' is probably Barathrum or the pit of hell.

28 'Speeches around entrances and exits are more often than not highly theatrical', Mariko Ichikawa, *Shakespearean Entrances* (New York, 2002), 53, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230287907; Brewer, *The Love Sick King*, C1r.

29 Linda Woodbridge, 'Black and White and Red All Over: The Sonnet Mistress Among the Ndembu', *Renaissance Quarterly* 40.2 (1987), 267–73, https://doi.org/10.2307/2861708.

30 Farah Karim-Cooper, 'The Materials of Race: Staging the Black and White Binary in Early Modern Theatre' and Patricia Akhimie, 'Racist Humor and Shakespearean Comedy', in Ayanna Thompson, ed, *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race* (Cambridge, 2020), 17–29, 47–61, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108684750.

31 On cosmetics and fabrics used to blacken skin, see Ian Smith, 'White Skin, Black Masks: Racial Cross-Dressing on the Early Modern Stage', *Renaissance Drama* 32 (2003), 51–2, https://doi.org/10.1086/rd.32.41917375.

32 All references to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, gen. ed. G. Blakemore Evans, 2nd edn (New York, 1997). The quotation from *Titus Andronicus* is at 4.2.115. Smith argues that the reference to Othello's 'sooty bosom' refers to the actor's use of soot as cosmetic, 'White Skin, Black Masks', 51.

33 Matthieu Chapman explains that once black people appeared as characters on the early modern English stage, these characters were always-already dehumanized and associated with death because of the prior tradition of black stage devils, *Anti-Black Racism in Early Modern English Drama: The Other "Other"* (London, 2016), 26, 47, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315559544.

34 Dekker, *A Colde Yeare*, C2r. On early modern racial discourses of 'washing' black skin through baptism, which may have been in early modern authors' and readers' minds as they engaged with these descriptions of Grim, see Dennis Austin Britton, *Becoming Christian: Race, Reformation, and Early Modern English Romance* (New York, 2014), 1–5, https://doi.org/10.5422/fordham/9780823257140.001.0001.

35 Richard Edwards, *The Excellent Comedie of Two the Most Faithfullest Freendes, Damon and Pithias* (London, 1571; STC: 7514), G1r.

36 Ibid.

37 Smith, *Race and Rhetoric*, 96, 21. Smith gives a key example of a superficial linguistic similarity, disingenuously deployed: the false etymological link Renaissance authors posited between 'Berber' and 'barbarian'.

38 Patrick Hannay, *The Nightingale Sheretine and Mariana. A Happy Husband. Eligies on the Death of Queen Anne. Songs and Sonnets* (London, 1622; STC: 12748), R3r.

39 Brewer, *The Love Sick King*, D1r.

40 *OED*, s.v. 'Tartar', 2b, 2c, 3. The *OED* gives the first usage of Tartar to mean 'vaga-bond' as 1602, and the first usage of Tartar to mean rough, savage, and unruly as 1669; Brewer may be an earlier example of the latter.

41 Smith, 'White Skin, Black Masks', 52; Sydnee Wagner, 'New Directions: Toward a Racialized Tamburlaine', in *Tamburlaine: A Critical Reader*, ed. David McInnis (London, 2020), 138–9, https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350082748.ch-006.

42 Brewer, *The Love Sick King*, D1v.

43 I.T., 'Grim the Collier of Croyden', H1v.

44 Brewer, *The Love Sick King*, A4r.

45 Hiltner, *What Else is Pastoral?*, 103–4.

46 John Gerard, *The Herbal* (London, 1633; STC: 11751), CC1r.

47 Brewer, *The Love Sick King*, F1r.

48 Hiltner, *What Else is Pastoral?*, 124.