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The Appearance of Blacks on the Early Modern Stage: *Love's Labour's Lost's* African Connections to Court

While scholarship is certain that white actors did appear in blackface on the Elizabethan stages, this paper argues for the additional possibility of actual moors and blacks appearing on stage in early modern London. Examining the positive social, political, and economic implications of using in performance these bodies perceived as exotic, I argue for the appearance of blacks in Love's Labour's Lost as a display of courtly power in its 1597–8 showing for Elizabeth I. Building on this precedent, Queen Anna's staging of herself as black in the 1605 Masque of Blackness, I argue, worked to assert the new Jacobean court's power.

In the year 1501, Spanish princess Catherine of Aragon arrived in England to marry Arthur, eldest son of Henry VII. The English greeted Catherine with much fanfare and were impressed with the pageantry of her entrance, which, as Sir Thomas More wrote, 'thrilled the hearts of everyone'.¹ In spite of the fanfare, not everything about Catherine's entrance was entirely positive. The Spanish princess's arrival brought not only a wife for the prince of Wales, but also attention to a confusion prevalent in English culture, the simultaneous visibility and invisibility of blacks. Of the fifty-one members of Catherine of Aragon's household to make the trip to England with her, two were black.² Describing these individuals as 'slaves to attend on the maids of honour', More calls them not "Tolerable" to look at.³ Imtiaz Habib interprets More's disgust at the black Africans not just as an aesthetic revulsion but as a response complicated by English assumptions that the blacks included in Catherine of Aragon's household functioned as 'proud advertisements of an ambitious Spain's recent imperial achievements' and 'ridiculous pomp'.⁴ The appearance of blacks in Catherine of Aragon's retinue would not in any way have worked to integrate the races in England, then; rather, More's response

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to the inclusion of blacks in Catherine of Aragon's entrance draws attention to the confused and incompatible perspective that the English had toward blacks, one which would come under increasing pressure over the century, when blacks became viewed simultaneously as something to be feared and something at which to wonder.

While evidence shows that blacks had had a presence in England since Roman times, the overwhelming public opinion toward black races prior to More's comments was outwardly negative. For hundreds of years, at least since the crusades, the English held a widespread belief that fairness or whiteness was equivalent with beauty, modesty, and good and blackness was equivalent with ugliness, promiscuity, and evil. During the medieval period, this belief was made evident in stories, such as the myth of washing the Ethiopie white and the biblical tale of the curse of Ham, and in drawings and etchings depicting these stories. Another widely held belief among the English was that the darkening of the skin was a sign of sin, and they often depicted devils and demons, both in art and in medieval cycle plays, as having black skin or faces.

While the English held a predominantly negative view of blackness, to say it was entirely negative oversimplifies the complex and confused perspective that was predominant in early modern society. More's comments on Catherine of Aragon's entrance represent the paradoxical ideas that most scholars still adhere to today, that the early modern English placed blacks at one of two extremes: either as objects to be feared and loathed or as objects of exoticism and wonder, in either case remaining separate from the dominant English culture. A popular description of Africans came from the elder Pliny's work, *A Summary of the Antiquities and Wonders of the World*, first published in English in 1566, which chronicles the extraordinary types of people to inhabit the interior of Africa. According to Pliny:

Of the Ethiopians there are divers forms and kinds of men. Some there are toward the east that have neither nose nor nostrils, but the face all full. Others that have no upper lip, they are without tongues, and they speak by signs, and they have but a little hole to take their breath that, by which they drink with an oaten straw. There are some called Syrbote that are 8 foot high, they live with the chase of elephants. In a part of Affricke feed people called Ptoemphane, for the team they have a dog, at whose fancy they are governed. Toward the west there is a people called Arimaspi, that hath but one eye in their foreheads, they are in the desert and wild country.⁵

The descriptions continue to include cannibals, people who walk on their hands, people with no heads whose faces are on their chests, and naked people. These descriptions consistently paint Africans to be something less, more, or other than human. Similarly, as Kate Lowe explains, the early English viewed blacks as naturally inferior based on conflicts ranging from large ideological differences, such as the Africans' lack of knowledge of the Christian faith, to small cultural differences, such as the Africans' propensity towards nudity.⁶ While the Africans were not fully nude (their genitals were usually covered), clothing in early modern England was directly related to status, and according to early modern English paradigms, a lack of one equated to a lack of the other. The English population also considered Africans lazy, criminal, and irresponsible with an inherent inclination to drunkenness and sexual promiscuity. All traits that the early modern English associated with 'uncivilized' cultures.⁷

These negative stereotypes, however, did not constitute the entirety of the English attitude toward blacks, whom oftentimes they viewed as commodities that symbolized wealth and power. Evidence shows that blacks have a long and prominent history of performance in early modern Britain. Early in the sixteenth century, royals used blacks in performances and pageants as an exotic way to display their power. To the English, 'possession of a black slave was an emblem of riches, rank and fashion' and 'rich people would often display their wealth and good taste by dressing their black slaves in special costume'.⁸ Many early modern English people used blacks to display and perform power and wealth the same way people today use cars and jewelry. Evidence of blacks being festively dressed and used as status symbols occurs mostly in Restoration portraits, such as those of Louise de Keroualle, duchess of Portsmouth, Mary Somerset, duchess of Ormonde, and Frederick Armond de Schomberg, the duke of Schomberg. So even though the English did find positive connotations in blackness, the positive attitude recognizes blacks as objects rather than subjects in English society.

Although the view that the English held blacks in one of two extremes remains predominant in scholarship, it is not universal, and it ignores evidence pointing to the inclusion rather than exclusion of blacks in some arenas, most particularly the theatre. The theatre often profited on spectacle, and the existing racial dichotomy allowed these simultaneously fearful and wonderful beings to be displayed onstage for power and profit. Beginning in 1587 with Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, and even earlier on court stages, the trend of including black bodies in both speaking and non-speaking roles

developed, shifting blackness on the stage from being taboo to being banal. Between 1587 and 1660, more than 100 black characters appear in English dramatic texts, many of whom exist only in stage directions, such as the blackamoor musicians in *Love's Labour's Lost*. Dympna Callaghan, in her 2000 book *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage*, echoes the prevailing scholarly opinion of the last 400 years when she argues that all of these characters would have been portrayed by white men in blackface, and that the stage direction 'Enter Blackamoors with music' (5.2.158) that appears in *Love's Labour's Lost* 'bespeaks fantasies of a presence about people who ... could not possibly have been onstage'.⁹ Ayanna Thompson in *Performing Race and Torture on the Early Modern Stage* similarly remarks that 'one must remember that the abject black male bodies on these stages were not black at all: they were white English actors in blackface'.¹⁰ These assumptions enable the continual erasure of actual blacks from English theatrical history in favour of white men in blackface. In fact, most scholars have completely ignored the possibility of actual blacks appearing on the stage, even though no law or social edict prohibited their appearance. Scholarship has continually ignored the potential financial, social, and theatrical benefits of staging actual blacks in any or all of these unnamed, silent black roles. Throughout early modern England, blacks have hidden in plain sight both in public and in court, and I contend that not only is Callaghan's statement inaccurate, but also the perspective that blacks existed only in one of two extremes is overstated. While extant historical data cannot concretely confirm the appearance of blacks on the early modern English stage, the same evidence demands scholarly speculation that challenges the assumed impossibility of non-white performers in commercial dramas. Nothing in history explicitly excludes or forbids black performers on the early modern English stage, and the evidence, together with the acknowledged role of blacks in court and the history of black court performers, allows for the presence of actual blacks on commercial and court stages, and even allows the possibility that Shakespeare wrote the blackamoor musicians into *Love's Labour's Lost* to make use of actual blackamoor musicians available at court as a display of power.

Performance opportunities for blacks increased on both professional and court stages in the sixteenth century. The first performances by blacks in early modern England were dances and musical concerts in English courts, beginning as early as the royal court of Henry VII. Records from 1507 show payments to a black trumpeter named John Blanke, who appears dressed

richly in yellow in the Westminster Tournament Roll of 1511.¹¹ During the second half of the century, it was common for the most prominent members of court to keep troupes of black dancers or musicians at their homes. The trend continued in royal courts through the reign of Queen Elizabeth, who is depicted with a group of seven black musicians and three black dancers in Marcus Gheeraerts's 1570s painted panel titled 'Queen Elizabeth and her court at Kenilworth Castle'. Queen Anna of Denmark and her husband James I of England also staged blackness prominently at their court, as witnessed through entertainments such as Jonson's *Masque of Blackness*. The early modern English recognized the tribal rhythm prevalent in African dances and music and acknowledged it as a positive quality of these Others¹² while simultaneously exploiting the performative talents of black Africans to enhance their own social status.

Performances by blacks would not be confined to private courts for long. Later in the sixteenth century, dramatists recognized the popularity of blacks in court performances and appropriated the rising trend in an attempt to awe the audience and heighten the perceived power of the company controlling these blacks. Steven Mullaney argues that the early modern theatre functioned as a cabinet of wonders, calling it 'a dynamic and dramatic exhibition of "strange things" ... a glass in which Elizabethan culture could find the objects of its fascination represented and reflected'.¹³ The idea of the theatre as a display of 'strange things' allowed an opportunity for early modern dramatists to exploit the existing racial dichotomy within England by staging the exoticism of othered races for commercial purposes. In 1587, Christopher Marlowe wrote the first part of *Tamburlaine*, introducing the early modern audience to black characters but using them only as spectacle for the performance of power. The beginning stage direction of act 4 scene 2 reads, 'Enter *Tamburlaine*, [others] and two Moors drawing *Bajazeth* in his cage, and his wife following him'.¹⁴ These two moors are the first known black characters on the early modern professional stage. By recognizing the new-found attitude towards the spectacular nature of blacks and exploiting the pre-existing racial dichotomy of England, Marlowe was able to gain an advantage in the competitive world of the early modern commercial theatre by using blacks to play into the idea of the theatre as a cabinet of wonders.

Once Marlowe introduced blacks to the stage, it would not be long before other dramatists began to imitate his initiative. In the next year, a stage direction in Thomas Lodge's *Wounds of Civil War* (1588, second edition 1599) takes the first step toward conventionalizing Marlowe's innovation of black

characters. The beginning stage direction of act 3 scene 3 reads, ‘*Enter Scilla in triumph in his chare triumphant of gold, drawn by foure Moores, before the chariot*’.¹⁵ Marlowe’s and Lodge’s moors are of particular interest for many reasons. First, they predate George Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar* (1588–9), which Elliot Tokson claims has the first black character on the Renaissance stage.¹⁶ Second, these moors do not speak. The lack of lines means that someone without an education or the ability to speak English could play these roles, making it more likely that actual black Africans could have played the roles instead of white men in blackface. *Tamburlaine* and *The Wounds of Civil War* both present the moors in a completely subservient role as beasts of burden. Finally, in both cases, the playwright uses the moors to reflect the pre-existing racial dichotomy. Placing the blacks onstage presents them as objects of awe, while their role in the play keeps them subservient, exploiting the dichotomy to increase the performance of power for the other characters who have authority over them. The dramatists further complicate the existing dichotomy by displaying othered peoples not just for power but for profit, using their spectacular nature to draw audiences.

Even the introduction of speaking black characters in Peele’s *Battle of Alcazar* did not stop the trend of using non-speaking moors only for spectacular purposes and, in fact, the trend continued to grow during the following decades. After introducing speaking moors on the stage, Peele used the convention of unnamed moors in *The Famous Chronicle of Evvarde the First, Sirnamed Edvuarde Longshankes, with His Returne from the Holy Land*, in 1593. In this play, Queen Elinor enters ‘*in her litter borne by foure Negro Mores*’.¹⁷ Ania Loomba writes in *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* that ‘Apart from Morocco, one of Portia’s suitors in *The Merchant of Venice*, there are only two black men in Shakespeare’s plays: Aaron, the evil Moor of *Titus Andronicus*, and the valiant, Moorish hero of *Othello*’,¹⁸ but she is mistaken, and like most scholars misses the fact that Shakespeare recognized and capitalized on the trend of placing unnamed blacks onstage. In addition to the three characters she names, three of Shakespeare’s plays, *The Merchant of Venice* (1596), *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606–7), and *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (1595–6), contain multiple unnamed, silent black characters.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, the well-known moorish character Morocco first appears in act 2 scene 1. Often ignored, however, is Morocco’s train. The Folio stage direction accompanying his entrance at act 2 scene 1, ‘*Enter Morocco, a tawny Moor all in white, and three or four followers accordingly*’,¹⁹ dictates that a minimum of four moors appear on the stage simultaneously.

Outside of Morocco himself, none of these moors speaks and they do not appear in the *dramatis personae*. Perhaps invisible to the eyes of scholarship, *Antony and Cleopatra* presents an entire society of named and unnamed blacks, as all the servants, attendants, and messengers in Egypt would be Egyptian, or tawny moors. The text as written clearly states:

Nay, but this dotage of our general's
 O'erflows the measure: those his goodly eyes,
 That o'er the files and musters of the war
 Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn,
 The office and devotion of their view
 Upon a tawny front: (1.1.1–6)²⁰

Egyptian Cleopatra is tawny, and while she may not be full black, she is certainly darker than the Romans who speak of her or the western Europeans with which Shakespeare was familiar. To assume that Cleopatra would be the only non-white character in Egypt requires the reader to disavow common knowledge about history, geography, and race. Darkening the rest of the Egyptians would visualize the cultural dichotomy between the Romans and the Egyptians. While named moorish characters appear in *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Merchant of Venice*, the unnamed moors in these plays, such as those in Cleopatra and Morocco's trains, recall the moors in Catherine of Aragon's party since they serve no purpose except to heighten Morocco's and Cleopatra's royalty and power. In both of these plays, the unnamed black characters serve no function in the plot or story other than to provide an exotic element to the spectacle.

Beaumont and Fletcher, too, used the convention of staging black characters twice in their careers, first in *Four Plays, or Moral Representations, in One* (1608) and again in *The Island Princess* (1619). In *Four Plays*, the last play *The Triumph of Time* contains the stage direction, 'Enter Plutus, with a troop of Indians, singing and dancing wildly about him'.²¹ These Indians never speak, following the trend established in earlier plays. *The Island Princess* also stages multiple blacks. In this instance some are listed in the *dramatis personae*; however, they remain nondescript in the text. The *dramatis personae* lists 'Moors' as characters, and act 2 scene 1 begins with the stage direction 'Enter Keeper, and two or three Moores'.²² Two of these three Moores do speak in the following scene under the speech prefixes of '1.Moore' and '2.Moore'. The third, if staged, does not speak. The two (or three) moors appear onstage only for the 142 lines of act 2 scene 1, but are important enough to be listed

specifically in the *dramatis personae*, unlike some of the other characters such as citizens and soldiers.

Thomas Heywood includes both named and unnamed blacks in *The Fair Maid of the West, Part II* (1630). In addition to the characters of Tota, Mullisheg, and Bashaw Alcade, the play also contains the black characters Bashaw Joffer, A Negro, A Guard of Moors, and the Lieutenant. The Guard of Moors is of particular interest since, unlike other non-speaking servants and messengers in the play, the *dramatis personae* lists them specifically even though they do not speak and appear in only thirty-four lines (in act 2 scene 6). Heywood enforces the significance of the black characters by making the black non-speaking characters distinct from the white non-speaking characters in the *dramatis personae*. In addition to these eight named blacks, the play also uses unnamed blacks. Since the play begins in Fez, Morocco with the king and queen of Fez, the servants and attendants to Mullisheg and Tota could logically also be black.

Using blackface to portray any of these unnamed black characters or named black characters with minor roles does not make economic sense for the playing companies.²³ The only records for the cost of blacking a white actor for performance come from the *Records of Early English Drama for Coventry*.²⁴ In the Drapers' Guild accounts, records show payment for the 'collering ye blacke solls faces' in every year from 1561–73 except for 1564. The records specifically state that the faces are to be coloured, not masked, terminology which points to blackening that alters the face through cosmetics rather than concealing the face. The pageant requires the blacking of 'iij white soules',²⁵ for which the cost begins at six pence in 1561 and inflates to sixteen pence by 1573, or over five pence per man. The costs in the accounts follow a consistent pattern of inflation, meaning, most likely, that in the fourteen years between the last Drapers' pageant account and the first use of blacks on the commercial stage in 1587 with Marlowe's *Tamburlaine Part I* the cost would have increased and been more detrimental to company finances. In early modern England, records show companies paid their hired men between five and ten shillings per week, or about one shilling (twelve pence) per man, per day on average.²⁶ Assuming that black hired men were paid the same as their white counterparts and no inflation for the cost of blacking occurred, it would cost a playing company fifty percent more per man to use blackface than it would to use black actors. While an extra six pence per man per day does not sound like much, admission to an outdoor playhouse was one pence, meaning a show like *Wounds of Civil War*, requiring four unnamed moors,

would need two dozen more audience members per showing to recoup the cost of using white actors instead of black ones.

The actual cost of the blacking is only one factor that makes using blackface for groups of black characters an unreasonable economic option for playing companies. A much larger potential cost for the playing companies comes from the makeup's propensity toward smearing and staining, especially onto the companies' most valuable assets, their costumes. In the summer of 1598, Philip Henslowe spent forty-five pounds on special costumes for the Admiral's Men; this amount is eight pounds more than the company spent on play-scripts and only five pounds less than a share in the company at the time.²⁷ By spending less money on personnel, the company could eliminate the risk of damaging costumes. Examining the options for portraying multiple blacks from a purely fiscal perspective makes placing multiple whites in blackface for one scene an absurd choice for two reasons: it costs fifty percent more per man and it risks damaging costumes, the companies' most valuable asset.

In addition to such economic factors, the blacking techniques of early modern England supported the use of black actors as unnamed black characters. Prior to 1621, players could not remove blacking cosmetics quickly or effectively. This difficulty eliminated the possibility of an actor portraying a white character and a black character for the same performance. While sharers could have filled any of these minor black roles, to limit a well-paid sharer, presumably one of the company's best actors, to a non-speaking role would be illogical. Not only would using a sharer in these roles be more expensive, as limiting a sharer to one black role would have forced the company to employ more hired men, but also the spectacle of the performance would have lacked the exoticism provided by using one of the many available black performers of the time.

While non-cosmetic methods for blacking such as black vizards did exist, a fact well documented in sources such as Henslowe's diary, Eldred Jones makes the case that such techniques would have been problematic on the public professional stage, 'where [a] higher degree of realism would have been required'.²⁸ In this case, theatrical realism does not refer to the sort of psychological realism associated with Anton Chekhov, Johann Strindberg, and Henrik Ibsen, but instead to the attempt to provide more authentic exoticism. While texts from the professional stage make references to and require blackening the skin, there are no records of the techniques and methods used to achieve this effect. If the professional playing companies used the same

techniques as the court masques, however, this activity would have worked against the popular trends toward exoticism and realism identified by Jones. The use of black vizards to blacken white characters would also have had glaring practical shortcomings. While an actor could quickly put on and remove the masks, allowing him to play both black and white characters in the same play, the drawbacks of the vizards almost certainly would have excluded their use on the professional stage. According to Randle Holme's *Academy of Armory* (1688), the masks were often made of hardened leather and were 'held in the teeth by means of a round bead fastened on the inside over against the mouth'²⁹ a feature which prohibited the actor from speaking. In addition, the mask forced the actor to keep the expression the mask presented. When not made of leather, masks were made of black velvet and 'could have been neither too realistic nor particularly convenient for masquers who had to dance in them'.³⁰ So in spite of these black vizards appearing in Henslowe's inventory, no convincing evidence shows that they were used in professional productions, and their lack of realism and practical problems in performance make the use of cosmetics or actual blacks a suitable and probable alternative.

From Marlowe's introduction of a black character in 1587 to the end of the Caroline period in 1642, dramatists wrote roles for black characters in no fewer than seventy plays. In addition to the more than 100 named speaking blacks in these plays, we can find at least thirty-five black characters who have no name, do not speak, and serve no purpose other than to increase the performance of power for other characters or to heighten the play's spectacular qualities. Marlowe's innovation worked in both the theatrical and real worlds. The spectacular nature of blacks on the stage affected the audience, heightening the perceived power of other characters, while actual African performers heightened the perceived power of the company that employed them. In the same way that black servants became an emblem of rank for families, the use of actual Africans became an emblem of rank for the playing companies.

While many Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists imitated Marlowe's innovation, Shakespeare was unique among his contemporaries. With Morocco's train in *The Merchant of Venice* (1596) and the presentation of black Egyptians in *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606/7), as I have argued, Shakespeare capitalized on the trend of placing unnamed moors onstage as objects. In *Love's Labour's Lost* (1595/6), he wrote an appearance of moors that stands apart from any other when, at act 5 scene 2, Shakespeare's stage direction

reads 'Enter ... blackamoors with music'.³¹ While these characters certainly can accomplish the aforementioned functions of blacks as established by Marlowe eight years earlier, the stage direction also specifically mentions that they are musicians. This detail complicates the typical rationale for usage of black characters in other plays, giving them a purpose other than that of set dressings.

For years, scholars have presented theories explaining the presence of these black musicians. The most common theory behind these musicians being blackamoors, as Richard David and many others have noted, is that Shakespeare took them from his sources.³² In 1906, M.C. Hart first noted the similarities between the masque of the Muscovites in *Love's Labour's Lost* and a particular revels at Gray's Inn at Christmas 1595. In both *Love's Labour's Lost* and the Gray's Inn revels, a group of Muscovites enters accompanied by a group of blacks. E.K. Chambers also brought attention to the relationship between the two works, contending that the black musicians in Shakespeare's play directly reflect the Negro Tartars in the Gray's Inn revel.³³ The other potential source, first noted by Fred Sorensen in 1935, comes from Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1587). The passage makes reference to a 1510 masque for Henry VIII in which, 'came the lord Henrie earle of Wiltshire, and the lord Fitzwater ... after the fashion of Russia or Rusland', and 'the torchbearers were apparelled ... like Moreskoes, their faces blacke'.³⁴ Either of these descriptions could be the source of Shakespeare's inspiration, but we can neither prove nor disprove that they are the basis for Shakespeare's masque and his use of blackamoors.

While both of these descriptions bear striking resemblances to Shakespeare's scene, I argue against these sources being the sole inspiration for the blackamoors in *Love's Labour's Lost*. From a strictly visual perspective, the three scenes are nearly identical. The Grey's Inn revels, the Holinshed description, and Shakespeare's masque in act 5 scene 2 of *Love's Labour's Lost* all present a group of nobles disguised as Muscovites accompanied by a group of blackamoors. While I think that either Hall's or Sorensen's theory for the potential source material could be correct, neither theory takes into account the potential cultural implications of casting actual black Africans as the blackamoor musicians, a possibility enhanced by the court connections of *Love's Labour's Lost*.

Another possibility for the inclusion of blackamoor musicians, which I am arguing here, is that Shakespeare wrote the blackamoor musicians into *Love's Labour's Lost* to garner favour by allowing the Elizabethan court an

opportunity to place actual black Africans on the stage as a display of status and power, and that these blackamoor musicians later became central to Queen Anna's early preoccupation with staging blackness in Jacobean court performances. In other words, Shakespeare potentially wrote the blackamoors into the play to more fully integrate *Love's Labour's Lost* into the royal court's cultural dynamics. After all, evidence indicates that Shakespeare wrote *Love's Labour's Lost* for private court performances. M.C. Hart, Richard David, and many others point to the artificiality of the form and tone of the play as a Lyly-esque technique that would have appealed to Lyly's courtly audience. They also make note of the large number of women's roles in *Love's Labour's Lost* as an indication that it was written for court performances. According to Elizabethan staging conventions, these female roles would have been played by boys. Since the Elizabethan boys' companies had lost their license in 1590 and did not have it restored until 1600, after the first performances of *Love's Labour's Lost*, the large number of parts for boys points to the play's being produced in great households, which often employed a troupe of choristers who would have filled the roles.

While scholars believe that Shakespeare wrote the large number of boys' roles to make use of the choristers available at large households, what scholars thus far have ignored is that in addition to the style of the play and the number of boys' roles, the appearance of blackamoor musicians offers another potential link to court circles. The title-page of the 1598 quarto of *Love's Labour's Lost* reveals the potential for black performance by a professional acting troupe on a court stage. This title-page contains two important pieces of information that support this notion. First, it states when and where the Lord Chamberlain's Men staged the play. *Love's Labour's Lost* was 'presented before her Highness this last Christmas'. This location and staging is important because the Gheeraerts panel shows that Queen Elizabeth employed black musicians as far back as the 1570s, meaning that blackamoor musicians were readily available at the court for the Chamberlain's Men to use. Second, the title-page states that the printed version is 'newly corrected and augmented' to reflect the play as it was staged for Queen Elizabeth at Christmas. H.R. Woudhuysen addresses these two title-page phrases in the third Arden edition of the text and, after offering numerous suggestions on the potential meanings of the phrases and their histories, concludes that 'it would be dangerous to put too much faith in their claims to be providing better and fuller texts than their predecessors or to trust in the accuracy of the apparent statements about performances',³⁵ all the while acknowledging that the evidence of what

was corrected is, at best, uncertain. I argue that the evidence points to the possibility of one of these corrections being the inclusion of blacks. The existence of the panel acknowledging blacks in Queen Elizabeth's employ opens up a new possibility for the appearance of blacks onstage previously unaddressed by scholarship: that the inclusion of the blackamoor musicians in the augmented text simply states what actually appeared onstage. While this is an argument of possibility rather than probability, it allows for the possibility of black people onstage that Callaghan dismisses. Examining clues found on the title-page of the 1598 quarto furthers the likelihood of *Love's Labour's Lost* being not just the '*Pleasant Conceited Comedie*' that the title-page indicates but also an interesting and important event in the history of black performance in England.

Early in the Jacobean period, the royal court had a brief preoccupation with staging blackness, and *Love's Labour's Lost* became a key element in this preoccupation. The staging of exotic bodies was a way for the court to demonstrate its mastery over the Other. The staging of blackness is most evident in Jonson's *Masque of Blackness* in 1605, but occurs in other entertainments performed in court around the time of this production. According to the Master of the Revels accounts, this masque formed the centrepiece of what was possibly a three-part suite on African themes. The day before Jonson presented *The Masque of Blackness* in the great room at Whitehall on 6 January 1605, the King's Men performed *Love's Labour's Lost* in the same space. When the King's Men next visited court in early February, they performed *The Merchant of Venice* twice, first on 10 February and again on 12 February at the request of King James. When placed together, the stagings of black characters in these three plays create a theatrical triptych displaying each of the Elizabethan theatrical conventions associated with the performance of blackness, whether it be by white people in blackface or by actual black Africans. By breaking the established Elizabethan conventions and creating new ones, the Jacobean court's preoccupation with staging blackness becomes a way to symbolize and reinforce the new dynasty's royal power.

Love's Labour's Lost is the first in the suite, and allows Queen Anna to continue the Elizabethan trend of staging blackness while safely containing any potential public criticism. In the Elizabethan period, the blackamoor musicians in this play exist to place actual Africans onstage as a display of the power and status of the court, a trend that Anna wanted to continue in her court. The blacks' appearance in the masque within the play mirrors their real life appearance in court masques, helping to insulate the producers

of the play from public criticism while allowing the spectacular nature of blacks to be seen. Anna could make use of the tradition by using the black minstrels whom James employed in the court as the blackamoor musicians in act 5 scene 2, in a manner to which they and the court may have been accustomed. Placing black Africans on her court stage would have added to the spectacle that dominated Jacobean court performances by visualizing the period's cultural anxieties about race and by recreating the exotic nature of Africa. Having actual blacks onstage as status symbols would have enforced Anna's awareness of the social trend, her desire to continue it, and her willingness to exploit it.

Queen Anna, after safely duplicating Elizabethan conventions of staging blackness, quickly created her own conventions with Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness*, which debuted in 1605 at the command of Her Majesty. *The Masque of Blackness* changed traditional court pageantry and complicated the racial dichotomy of Jacobean England by presenting Queen Anna herself as a black African. While previous court masques had presented blackness as a theme, Anna's desire was to have the masquers, including herself, blackened for performance. The act of presenting herself as a 'daughter of Niger' in *The Masque of Blackness* changed both the societal and staging convention of Others as subordinate, presenting blackness in a manner that would perform and confirm her power to both her Scottish and English subjects. Mary Floyd-Wilson argues for a link between Jonson's Ethiopian nymphs and the Scots, arguing that the English equated the two nationalities based on alleged Scottish incivility and barbarism, thus removing England further from the roots of civility with the impending union between England and Scotland.³⁶ The Scots, however, refuted the English perception of their incivility, with Floyd-Wilson claiming that, in 'striving to outdo the elitism of the British race, the Scots claimed to be descendants of the Egyptians'.³⁷ By presenting herself as black in the masque, Queen Anna was able to satisfy both Englishmen and Scots; for the former her masque showed that the union of the two nations would in fact civilize the Scots while for the latter it showed that they did not need civilizing. By staging *Love's Labour's Lost* first, Anna publicly recognized that the control of an exotic race was a status symbol. She then altered the trend by not just placing black Africans onstage but also removing the actual black Africans and replacing them with herself as a blackamoor. Her successful combining of the beautiful with the ugly, the oppressors with the oppressed, the powerful with the powerless, and the good with the evil mirrored the impending union of two nations who

held each other in mutual low esteem. She challenged the centuries-old racial dichotomy by blurring the lines of the two mutually exclusive sides in a manner that worked to alleviate concerns over the impending political union.

Presenting the queen, who under the reign of Elizabeth had become a symbol for purity, as a black, a person associated with impurity, caused some members of the court to respond negatively to such disguising. Foremost among the nay-sayers was Dudley Carleton, who commented in his letter to John Chamberlain, 'you cannot imagine a more ugly Sight, then a Troop of lean-cheek'd Moors' and stated that 'Theyr black faces, and hands which were painted and bare vp to the elbowes, was a very loth-some sight, and I am sorry that strangers should see owr court so strangely disguised'.³⁸ Carleton's letter clearly showed that he thought it was a disgrace for Queen Anna to disguise herself as a black African in front of foreign ambassadors, most likely because of the still present belief of the inferiority of black Africans. In this instance, the presence of blacks on the stage was not a performance of power but, for Carleton, one of shame. Combining the two sides of the dichotomy upset the court because it presented the queen, their monarch's consort, as belonging to an inferior race.

After Queen Anna combined the once separate races on her own figure, thus blurring the lines of English society's racial dichotomy, the court had to restore the racial order. To restore the racial status quo, the next time the King's Men played at court on 10 February, 1605, the company presented blackness on the stage again, this time in *The Merchant of Venice*. In act 2 scene 1, the foreign prince Morocco, a tawny moor, enters with 'three of four followers accordingly'. Outside of Morocco himself, who is royalty, these moors do not speak. They are completely subjugated. This re-subjugation of racial others marked a return to Elizabethan conventions as, once again, royal characters staged such subjugation of racial others to display their own power and status. In the span of staging a three-performance African suite, the Jacobean court exploited the trend of subjugating other races to display status both in society and onstage; then, it challenged this trend by presenting the queen as a member of another race; and finally, the court attempted to restore perceptions of other races as inferior. The shift in the tone and attitude portrayed in the performance of blacks in this suite mirrors the unease and incoherence about race that was prevalent in Elizabethan and Jacobean England.

Beginning in the late sixteenth century, black Africans in England began to gain a status above that of creatures made for servitude and subjugation. While

the English still kept other races separate and beneath themselves, they began to recognize them as alluring and exotic as well as ugly and evil. The stage, both professional and courtly, was one of the places where this shift in attitude was most prevalent, as witnessed through the increasing number of black characters that appear in drama from 1587 to 1605. The new approach to the staging of blacks in *Love's Labour's Lost* created an important connection to court circles in the Elizabethan period by allowing the Chamberlain's Men to use Queen Elizabeth's blacks as musicians and not just set dressing. This public-private connection continued into the early Jacobean court as part of a much larger performance culture. Standing alone, *Love's Labour's Lost* was important to both Elizabethan and Jacobean black performance. When placed in context as part of an African suite with *The Masque of Blackness* and *The Merchant of Venice*, *Love's Labour's Lost* stages the contradiction of a society both infatuated with and frightened by the appearance and spectacle of blackness.

Notes

- 1 More, qtd in Richard Marius, *Thomas More: A Biography* (Boston, 1999), 45–6.
- 2 Imtiaz Habib, *Black Lives in the English Archives: Imprints of the Invisible* (Burlington, VT, 2007), 23–4.
- 3 More, qtd in *ibid.*, 38. Early modern English religious associations of white with purity and godliness and black with impurity and paganism create problems with studying the black presence in early modern England because any non-Christians could be considered black. This association of black with non-Christian created the lack of a distinct, concrete defining term for each of the myriad darker-skinned races. Records refer to these races in a list of varying, sometimes overlapping, terms: 'Blackamoor', 'Tawny-moor', 'Turkish-moor', 'Negro', 'Ethiope', 'Barberery', 'Guinea', 'Mulatto', 'Moriscoe', etc. While these terms sometimes give an indication of the origin of the person, more often than not the terms were interchangeable, and any of them can refer to 'Africans and Asians and their descendents'. See Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (New South Wales Australia, 1984), ix. The lack of distinction among groups enables a stripping away of individual identity, leaving only a larger group identity, that of 'black'. When citing texts, I use whichever term appears in the text with the understanding that 'black' is a blanket term for darker-skinned racial others that would have been portrayed onstage through the use of blackface.
- 4 Habib, *Black Lives*, 23–4.

- 5 Pliny the Elder, *A Summarie of the Antiquities, and Wonders of the Worlde* (London, 1566), no page numbers, ESTC S110480.
- 6 Kate Lowe, 'The Stereotyping of Black Africans in Renaissance Europe', T.F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe (eds), *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge, 2005), 21.
- 7 Ibid, 28–9.
- 8 Fryer, *Staying Power*, 31, 25.
- 9 Dympna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage* (New York, 2000), 2.
- 10 Ayanna Thompson, *Performing Race and Torture on the Early Modern Stage* (New York, 2008), 53.
- 11 Habib, *Black Lives*, 39–40.
- 12 Lowe, 'Stereotyping of Black Africans', 30–42.
- 13 Steven Mullaney, *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (Ann Arbor, 1995), 64–85.
- 14 Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great, Part I*, David Bevington (ed.), *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology* (New York, 2002), 223.
- 15 Thomas Lodge, *The Wounds of Civil War*, ed. J. Dover Wilson (Oxford, 1910).
- 16 Elliot Tokson, *The Popular Image of the Black Man in English Drama, 1550–1688* (Boston, 1982), 64.
- 17 George Peele, *The Famous Chronicle of King Edvuarde the First, Sirnamed Edvuarde Longshankes, with His Returne from the Holy Land* (London, 1599), ESTC S110374.
- 18 Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (Oxford, 2002), 45.
- 19 William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Stephen Greenblatt et al. (eds), *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York, 1997), 1100.
- 20 William Shakespeare, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, Greenblatt, *Norton Shakespeare*, 2629.
- 21 Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, Fredson Bowers (ed.), 10 vols (Cambridge, 1982), 8, 360.
- 22 Beaumont and Fletcher, *Dramatic Works*, 5.569.
- 23 Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Performing Blackness on English Stages 1500–1800* (Cambridge, 2005), includes a lengthy discussion of the types of bodily apparel used in court performances to achieve the effect of blackness, including black gloves, stockings, and other garments. I am not arguing against the existence of these forms of blackening apparel, but regular theatrical costumes could easily conceal a character's arms and legs. My argument focuses specifically on how to blacken the face of actors for performance. While Vaughan shows evidence of black velvet being used to establish a character as black in court performances, she also acknowledges the use of black makeup in rural pageants and other performance arenas. What she does not address, however, due to shaky evidence, is the method for blackening actors in

commercial drama, which is the primary arena for which I am arguing the inclusion of blacks. For a full discussion of non-cosmetic blackening techniques, see Vaughan, *Performing Blackness*, 18–33.

- 24 R.W. Ingram (ed.), *Records of Early English Drama: Coventry* (Toronto, 1981).
- 25 Ibid, 217.
- 26 Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare's Time 1590–1642* (Princeton, 1984), 106.
- 27 Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearian Playing Companies* (New York, 1996), 94, 103.
- 28 Eldred Jones, *The Elizabethan Image of Africa* (Washington, DC, 1971), 121.
- 29 As qtd in Vaughan, *Performing Blackness*, 9.
- 30 Jones, *Elizabethan Image*, 120.
- 31 William Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*, in Greenblatt, *Norton Shakespeare*, 783.
- 32 Richard David (ed.), *Love's Labour's Lost*, The Arden Shakespeare, 1st Series (London, 1906), xxvi–xxviii.
- 33 E.K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems* 2 vols (Oxford, 1930), 1. 335.
- 34 Fred Sorensen, “The Masque of the Muscovites” in *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Modern Language Notes* 50.8 (Dec. 1935), 499–501.
- 35 H.R. Woudhuysen, *The Arden Shakespeare Love's Labour's Lost*, 3rd edition (Surrey, 1998), 304.
- 36 Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Race and Ethnicity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge 2003), 114–18.
- 37 Ibid, 123.
- 38 Maurice Lee (ed.), *Dudley Carleton to John Chamberlain 1603–1624. Jacobean Letters* (New Brunswick, 1972), 67–8.