6-15-2019

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I

Midway through Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, Shakespeare's Dark Lady sonnets make a guest appearance. Irie Jones, one of the book's protagonists, is sitting in a secondary school English class, agonizing about her appearance while watching her longtime friend and love interest, Millat, flirt with another girl. She will soon unsuccessfully try to relax her natural hair in a failed attempt to win Millat's affections. But before Irie's disastrous trip to the salon, she is forced to contend with Shakespeare's Dark Lady. Cold-called by Mrs. Roody, her secondary school teacher, to offer "anything" on the reading, Irie asks if the dark lady is black.[1] What ensues further ostracizes Irie from many of her classmates. Mrs. Roody responds:

> No dear, she's *dark*. She's not black in the modern sense. There weren't any…well, Afro-Carri-bee-yans in England at that time, dear. That's more a modern phenomenon, as I'm sure you know. But this was the 1600s. I mean I can't be sure, but it does seem terribly unlikely, unless she was a slave of some kind, and he's unlikely to have written a series of sonnets to a lord and then a slave, is he?[2]

Irie responds with embarrassment, in part at what she begins to perceive as the unsuitability of her experience to the interpretative standards of the Shakespeare lesson. As the narrator offers, "Irie reddened. She had thought, just then, that she had seen something like a reflection, but it was receding; so she said, 'Don't know, miss.'"[3]

The interaction continues in this way, with Mrs. Roody privileging her own points of access to the material while restricting Irie's. Mrs. Roody persists: "Besides, he says very clearly, *In nothing art thou black*, *save in thy deeds*… No, dear, she just has a dark complexion, you see, as dark as mine, probably."[4] Despite her teacher's objections, Irie manages to pursue her thought-provoking reading, saying "I just thought…like when he says, here: *Then will I swear*, *beauty herself is*

black… And the curly hair thing, black wires—."[5] But Mrs. Roody only finds further occasion to undermine Irie's approach, responding, "No, dear, you're reading it with a modern ear. Never read what is old with a modern ear. In fact, that will serve as today's principle — can you all write that down, please."[6] According to the narrator, "the reflection that Irie had glimpsed slunk back into the familiar darkness."[7] Based on the exchange, Irie's classmates, who, despite not appearing particularly territorial about Shakespeare as a group, find occasion to reassert Irie's cultural distance from the material with a demeaning note that reads: "By William Shakespeare: ODE TO LETITIA AND ALL MY KINKY-HAIRED BIG-ASS BITCHEZ."[8]

These events take place in a chapter aptly called "The Miseducation of Irie Jones." In part, the chapter explores the ways in which traditional study can quickly redouble the exclusionary routines of the outside world, leveraging them in ways that significantly disadvantage students of color.[9] After encountering this passage, I immediately thought of the work of Kim Hall, who anticipates such a moment with striking accuracy. Citing the actor, activist, and writer Ossie Davis—who, in his "The English Language is My Enemy," considers "the enormous heritage of racial prejudgment that lies in wait for any child born into the English language," arguing that anyone "who uses the English Language as a medium of communication is forced, willy-nilly, to teach the Negro child 60 ways to despise himself, and the white child 60 ways to aid and abet him in the crime"[10] —Hall offers a hypothetical classroom scenario:

> Let's imagine that we are in the classroom evoked by Davis, and we ask the students to read sonnet 138, "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun." A student who is immersed in the negative language of blackness and has been reared with an oppositional consciousness asks, "Is he talking about a black woman?" Do we ignore that student's experience as a racialized subject and silence her or him by responding that the woman is just a brunette? Do we then add insult to injury by insisting that the positive references to blackness be read only as a joke? Instead of seeing this student's comments as an interruption of our creation of Shakespeare as a mark of high culture and our examination of so-called universal themes, we might use that moment to make whiteness and its power visible or to discuss the politics of beauty standards and their negotiation in the sonnets. In treating Shakespeare "as if 'Shakespeare' were some fixed object, some physically determinate piece of marble, as if I could discount all my own interpretative power and responsibility over what I render from it,"[11] we similarly discount the interpretative abilities of all students and deny black students in particular their experiences as subjects constituted by a highly racialized language.[12]

Here Hall accounts for a variety of the often-unforeseen consequences of Mrs. Roody's approach, particularly as they stand to negatively impact a student who inhabits Irie's cultural and racial position. Irie is silenced by Mrs. Roody's failure to engage with issues related to racial blackness. The history of a white beauty standard—a key issue raised by the sonnets, and one of particular significance not just to Irie, but also to a classroom capable of producing a note ridiculing black women along aesthetic lines—is overlooked entirely in favor of recapitulating a particular "creation of Shakespeare."[13] Of course, part of the insightfulness of this moment in *White Teeth* is its ability to show Shakespeare as just such a "creation," one cultivated by a dominant culture that is often unaware of its participation in such a process and conditioned to see "oppositional" approaches as nonobjective. Mrs. Roody fails to see that by positing that the Dark Lady's complexion might have been "as dark as mine" she inserts herself into the sonnets and engages in the very mode of reading she presumes her student errantly pursues. Moreover, in doing so, Mrs. Roody reasserts the "so-called universal[ity]" of a white positionality, playing up Irie's reading as strictly personal: a search for "Afro-Carri-bee-yans" rather than an attention to discourses relevant to racial blackness. Irie's peers follow suit, transmuting Irie's emerging question about history and racial aesthetics into a cruel "joke" about her "modern" reading, parodying black vernacular and grossly caricaturing black women's bodies to assert an absurd dissonance between Shakespeare and black culture.

Mrs. Roody's blanket objection to Irie's reading undoubtedly appears excruciating to many scholars and teachers of early modern English literature, particularly during a critical moment in which our field is beginning to recognize the importance of studying race to more accurately understand the period. But this moment serves as more than a reminder of the hazards of upholding a racially exclusive view of history. It also demonstrates how students of color often find themselves at a disadvantage in traditional educational spaces, in large part because such spaces tend to operate in a white cultural register. Indeed, Irie's distressing treatment is engendered by more than her instructor's ignorance to broader historical issues. Irie also faces a cultural and educational system that is simply not oriented to properly—let alone positively—represent someone like her. Her fruitless search for a "reflection" in the lesson on the sonnets parallels her failure to find validation elsewhere. As the narrator explains before the classroom scene, "There was England, a gigantic mirror, and there was Irie, without reflection. A stranger in a stranger land."[14] Irie already feels invisible, and her Shakespeare classroom's inability to deftly or appropriately engage with a topic like natural hair only redoubles the notion that her experience is simply incongruous with a discussion of "high culture."

As I demonstrate in this essay, a sense of racial and cultural alienation can problematically inhibit learning outcomes for students of color. For Irie, the continual reinforcement of a white standard centers most immediately around issues of beauty, but her sense of not belonging aesthetically correlates directly to

her diminishing faith in her abilities in the classroom. As the narrator explains, Irie's "belief in her ugliness, in her *wrongness*, had subdued her."[15] Insomuch as Irie's sense of isolation leads her to feel intellectually enervated and inferior, her experience matches those of many black college students enrolled at PWIs (Predominantly White Institutions). As we continue to work toward a more diverse and inclusive early modern field, it is essential to keep in mind the challenges that many students of color face at PWIs, particularly since our field, in also being predominantly white, is at risk of perpetuating the very culture that can make such educational spaces unwittingly exclusionary. In what follows, I outline some of the research examining the black experience in higher education, focusing specifically on the ways in which our field may continue to deny many students of color pivotal opportunities to identify as students and scholars of early modern English literature.[16] I argue that in order to foster more inclusive and equitable early modern English classrooms, we must attend to curriculums that do not adequately address issues of race, adopt pedagogical practices designed to promote racial inclusivity, and devote sustained attention to the problematic lack of diversity among our professoriate. While I specifically focus on the experience of black students in this essay, I feel that these observations are relevant in myriad ways across a variety of underrepresented categories of identity.

II

As more recent archival investigations demonstrate — most notably Imtiaz Habib's meticulously researched *Black Lives in the English Archive* — we have significantly underestimated the scope of the black presence in 15th and 16th century England.[17] These findings not only lend further credence to Irie's lines of inquiry. They also demonstrate the importance of pursuing questions of race and culture that have traditionally fallen outside the dominant scholarly purview. Insomuch as these questions have historically been forwarded by students and scholars from marginalized groups, it is that much more crucial that we find ways to invite, rather than inhibit, contributions from students who represent demographic and cultural change in our field. We might begin to do so by acknowledging the field's gaps in knowledge in our teaching, so that such students recognize that their insight could prove essential to opening up new and under-explored territory. Indeed, as much as it remains important to help students from traditionally marginalized backgrounds succeed — including those students who are the first in their family to attend college, and who appear to be at a particular disadvantage—we should also remember that our field needs the perspective of such students in order to grow.

Given my interest in fostering more welcoming classroom dynamics, I was glad to find that many contributions to the "First-Generation Shakespeare" SAA seminar shared innovate methods for encouraging, strengthening, and leveraging student insights. For example, Whitney Taylor's editing assignment asks her students to "become editors of Shakespeare."[18] In part, this practice derives from her assessment that "encouraging students to think about editorial choices places them in an authoritative position as both editors and as critical readers, destabilizing the authority of both Shakespeare and of editorial apparatuses, and, in turn, cultivating their own interpretative authority."[19] In a similar vein, Cassie Miura advocates for including students in conversations about canon formation. She does so with the thoughtful perspective that "first-generation students are uniquely equipped to participate in the ongoing reappraisal of Shakespeare in the field of early modern studies and doing so can furnish them with the critical skills and conceptual vocabulary needed to articulate their own positionality within the university and to interrogate other forms of symbolic power."[20]

Given my essay's focus on diversification and representation in early modern studies, I was also glad to see stories like those offered by Perry Guevara. Along with advocating for a pedagogy that "empower[s] those without a voice, those who are struggling to find it, and those who are not allowed to speak,"[21] Guevara's essay opens with his account of seeing Shakespeare anew as a graduate student. According to Guevara, exploring issues of marginalization with a racially and culturally diverse group of mentors is part of what changed his perception of Shakespeare as a site of "unattainable prestige" to a topic that invited his intellectual energy.[22] Working with such mentors confirmed for him the "value of a diverse professoriate that better reflects the makeup of a pluralistic society."[23] And studying Shakespeare's "outcasts"—"immigrants, African Moors, interracial couples, disobedient women, clowns and fools"—through approaches like critical race studies and queer theory demonstrated for Guevara the benefit of working with a critical repertoire that was inclusive and affirming.[24] As Guevara writes, "what a difference it made to encounter characters whose lives resembled mine and through frameworks that not only restored but also insisted on their dignity."[25]

Guevara's essay encouraged me to think back to my experience as a graduate student studying early modern English literature. While the seminars that were available to me explored incredibly energetic, engaging, and often wonderfully experimental topics, I did not have the opportunity to take any courses that focused specifically on race in the Renaissance. Moreover, the culture of the early modern classroom, from the vernacular used to the scholars foregrounded, tended to reflect the demographic of

my teachers and peers, nearly all of whom were white. As an African American, first-generation student interested in exploring representations of blackness, I often experienced critical and cultural isolation. My participation in such seminars undoubtedly offered me valuable opportunities to grow, helping to increase the range of my critical vocabulary and—insomuch as Standard Academic English dominates the early modern classroom—my linguistic expression. That said, my early modern seminars were rarely positioned to adapt to my input and experiences, particularly those that coded as black. There was simply no discussion of white culture's prevalence in our classrooms, nor was space made to address the problematic tendency for contributions delivered in the cultural codes of upper-middle class whiteness to be seen as more legitimate and objective than those expressed in the idioms associated with blackness. Since the curriculum offered no overt means of representing my intellectual interests as part of a long-standing and vital critical tradition, employing black cultural codes—particularly to explore issues of race in early modern literature — risked further marginalizing my academic points of inquiry as niche at best, and as personal and misguided at worst. Like Irie, I was more than once told that I was reading with a "modern ear," regardless of the historical grounding of my observations. This is not to say that the seminar space was markedly hostile. My classmates and instructors were overwhelmingly kind people, and, crucially, I found friends and allies among them. But in lieu of informed classroom conversations about racial iniquity as it relates to our field, its demographics, and its history of scholarship on race, I was frequently required to personally navigate the various hazards of exclusion characteristic of under-representative academic spaces.

Engaging with the work of scholars of color who explored issues of race in early modern English literature provided me with points of access to the field that were otherwise unavailable in my immediate academic setting. In their scholarship, I found diverse and innovative methods for thinking through questions of difference. The range of their work helped me to imagine my research speaking to a different type of academic community, one in which I was not minoritized—intellectually, racially, or culturally—and thus one that was not as burdened with the cognitive tax of translation and assimilation. And where their writing spoke to the challenges of inclusivity in early modern studies, it helped prepare me to navigate the field. I distinctly remember rereading the epilogue to Hall's seminal *Things of Darkness*—from which the above quotations about teaching the sonnets are drawn—after a particularly discouraging experience at an academic conference. Hall's critique enabled me to better understand that the type of hostility my work could invite

was part of a broader dynamic that needed to be shifted. The crucial insights I found in the work of scholars like Hall encouraged me to continue working, providing me with a sense of belonging that helped counter the various signals suggesting that I was out of place.

III

I have since come to understand that part of the reason it was so important for me to encounter the work of early modernists of color was that it offered me something of a reflection, one that I rarely found in my immediate academic community. Despite some of our best efforts to foster inclusivity, our field's demographics and culture are still quite far away from representing the racial and cultural diversity of the world outside of most traditional spaces of higher education. As a result, many students of color, at both the undergraduate and graduate level, can feel distinctly out of place working in our field. This lack of representation can be understood as part of an urgent and problematic cycle that risks putting students of color at a disadvantage in comparison to their white peers, further inhibiting the very diversification our field needs to foster a more equitable and inclusive intellectual and pedagogical landscape.

One way of understanding the distinct challenges that students of color are likely to encounter in our classrooms is to consider research conducted on the black student experience at PWIs. Such research elucidates the often unforeseen consequences of underrepresentation in academic communities, under which "Black collegians still encounter campus environments with racial dynamics akin to those described in studies from decades prior."[26] Insomuch as our field's demographics mirror the more homogenous racial makeup of the typical PWI, we are at a particular risk of unwittingly sustaining similarly exclusionary environments, ones that foster problematically uneven experiences and outcomes for students based on their racial and cultural backgrounds. As Shaun R. Harper succinctly explains, "Extreme underrepresentation is usually accompanied by a set of experiences that undermine espoused institutional commitments to fostering inclusive campus climates; these are challenges from which White students at PWIs are almost always exempt."[27]

Indeed, working in a space in which one is unmistakably racially and culturally minoritized can prove especially challenging. Along with the standard social and intellectual pressures facing nearly every student, minoritized students are regularly forced to contend with a host of

additional obstacles, ranging from experiencing various forms of racial bias to being shouldered with the task of accommodating cultural mismatches between themselves and those around them. Thus, part of the common burden of being underrepresented is the necessity to hone strategies to deal with the complex and often discouraging terrain of the PWI.

For example, students of color are often required to assimilate to mitigate the effects of stereotyping—a process that can entail a level of self-effacement and erasure—while concomitantly maintaining the strong sense of self necessary to succeed in the post-secondary environment. As interviews conducted by Sharon Fries-Britt and Kimberly A. Griffin studying the experiences of high-achieving black students demonstrate, a lack of representational equity looms large as a factor that contributes to such adverse conditions. According to Fries-Britt and Griffin, "many of the students talked about the fact that they were still the only Black person in a classroom, and they noticed the low numbers of minority professors they encountered on the campus. It also became evident that these students encountered stereotypes about Blacks both in and outside the classroom."[28] In response to these demographic and social obstacles, "Students felt they had to dispel stereotypes and myths about Blacks from peers and faculty and described feeling pressure to behave in ways that are considered 'non-Black.'"[29] While not all students of color who appear acclimated to the culture of predominantly white spaces struggle with the tax of assimilation, those who do face the all too common challenge of learning to adopt white cultural codes in order to advance or simply engage in a given pursuit. Such a dynamic brings to mind the racial "asymmetr[y]" importantly discussed by Ian Smith in his essay "We Are Othello"—that "blacks have always needed to know whiteness, its rules, discipline, and various forms of corporal punishments, while whiteness has been free of the burden of knowing anything about the cultural intimacies of blackness."[30]

That said, this very asymmetry makes it far more likely that black students will be required to explicate racial matters when such issues emerge in their academic communities. And this position, whether it is one the student chooses to occupy or one they are made to occupy, risks further alienating them in spaces where there are few or no other people of color.[31] As Fries-Britt and Griffin write:

> To the extent that Black students have a primary role in explaining cultural differences and serving as cultural informants on college campuses, they are likely to encounter negative attitudes that can foster

conditions that impede their academic progress. Over time, they may be typecast as hostile for always raising "racial issues," labeled as intellectually narrow-minded because they continue to place race on the agenda, and more likely to become socially isolated as their peers perceive interactions with them as confrontational.[32]

This dynamic presents a troubling double bind. On the one hand, black students may feel additional pressure to discuss issues of race, especially when those issues are elided or are not dealt with thoughtfully. But taking on the role of racial representative can undermine the strategic acts of assimilation that many black students often engage in to navigate white spaces. And insomuch as topics like racial blackness are erroneously (and often unconsciously) considered a personal rather than academic pursuit, students of color that pursue such a focus in spaces where it is not the primary curricular concern risk being considered antagonistic or intellectually myopic. I am reminded of Arthur Little's frank observation noting "the impossibility that an African-American Shakespeare scholar interested in pursuing critical questions of race could do so without his or her racial identity being suspiciously or at least cautiously present as part of the reading experience."[33] Given that scholars of color continue to navigate this terrain in their research, students of color interested in pursuing early modern race studies face an especially daunting proposition.

It is important to keep in mind that these circumstances not only engender a challenging academic landscape. They also foster a hazardous one, for both black student success and social wellbeing. Consider again how the various pressures Irie deals with as a person of color meet in the classroom to further affirm her sense of "wrongness." Irie, already struggling with a declining sense of self due to her inability to conform to white standards of beauty, is restricted interpretive access to the sonnets along exclusionary lines that only emphasize her difference. And when she attempts to approach the lesson through relevant issues of racial blackness, she is essentialized as an "Afro-Carri-bee-yan." As a result, she disengages from class discussion. For students of color, such acts of withdrawal are often more than a reaction to discouraging circumstances. They also typify a common response to Stereotype Threat, an experience known to affect black students in their academic pursuits. As defined by Claude M. Steele and Joshua Aronson, Stereotype Threat is "a social-psychological predicament that can arise from widely-known negative stereotypes about one's group."[34] According to the pair, "the existence of

such a stereotype means that anything one does or any of one's features that conform to it make the stereotype more plausible as a self-characterization in the eyes of others, and perhaps even in one's own eyes."[35] The threat of stereotype can have a notably detrimental impact on the intellectual performance of black students, who confront a panoply of negative beliefs concerning their abilities in academic settings. In response, some students actively disengage from intellectual pursuits as a way of protecting their sense of self. Steele and Aronson continue:

> As this threat persists over time, it may have the further effect of pressuring these students to protectively disidentify with achievement in school and related intellectual domains. That is, it may pressure the person to define or redefine the self-concept such that school achievement is neither a basis of self-evaluation nor a personal identity. This protects the person against the self-evaluative threat posed by the stereotypes but may have the byproduct of diminishing interest, motivation, and, ultimately, achievement in the domain.[36]

The obstacle of assimilation and the risks of being academically essentialized—to say nothing of the various forms of racism and racial bias that persist on college campuses—are an ongoing challenge even for those students of color who manage to progress into more specialized levels of study in predominantly white fields. In the case of Stereotype Threat, students of color poised to otherwise excel in domains in which they are underrepresented may actually face additional obstacles related to the phenomenon. As Edward Taylor and James Soto Antony note in their research into the experience of African American doctoral students in education:

> Stereotype threat is a situational pressure that affects a specific subportion of the stereotyped group — the bright, capable, and confident students who are recognized as having good prospects in the domain. Their high degree of self-identification with this domain creates added internal pressure to be perceived in a positive light and to be successful. Thus, stereotype threat has the greatest effect on students who represent the academic vanguard of their group.[37]

Various scholars have noted the outsized level of pressure high achieving black students place on themselves in response to persistent stereotypes.[38] Indeed, many such students carry the additional weight of feeling—and not mistakenly—that their success or failure can influence the prospects for other black people.[39] The findings of a study focused on black male Resident Assistants at PWIs aptly encapsulate this experience. Therein, the researchers noted that participants in their study, given their own "lived experiences with the inequitable enforcement of standards," felt it was incumbent upon them to perform well in their jobs such that other black students would be able to hold similar positions in the future, "even if it meant working twice as hard."[40]

IV

Among all of the significant ways the concept of "first-generation" should register in our field, we might consider that some of our most notable doctoral programs have yet to produce their first generation of scholars who had the opportunity to study the literature of the English Renaissance with an early modernist of color.[41] Indeed, the institutions that train much of our professoriate—and from which our field's scholarly and cultural norms emanate—do not yet offer the diversity representative of a multiracial society.[42] The study of black male RAs conducted by Harper, et al. introduced the term "onlyness," defined as "the psychoemotional burden of having to strategically navigate a racially politicized space occupied by few peers, role models, and guardians from one's same racial or ethnic group."[43] This experience is one that students of color working in our field are almost bound to encounter in some form. One of the most crucial ways to begin to mitigate this detrimental experience — and, indeed, to foster a more diverse and equitable early modern community in our classrooms and in our field—is to continue to advocate for more diversity among the ranks of our colleagues.

While a faculty member's identity should not stand as a reliable indicator of the type of mentorship they can or should be expected to provide, research repeatedly shows that faculty members of color overwhelmingly serve as essential sources of support for students of color. As Harper writes, "students of color seek out White professors (those who are sometimes the perpetuators of low expectations and racial stereotypes in the classroom) less often than they do minoritized faculty role models who can offer restorative care, validation, culturally

interesting research opportunities, and helpful advice on how best to navigate a racially alienating or hostile campus environment."[44] And as Fries-Britt and Griffin note regarding the importance of black faculty to black students, "In order to be successful in their own academic careers, [black faculty] too have encountered many challenges to their academic sense of self. Hence, they are more likely to understand the challenges that Black students often face at PWIs and can instinctively know how to support Black students."[45] While it is our collective responsibility to find ways to mentor students of color regardless of our own race, particularly given the fact that such mentorship remains under-recognized work that disproportionately falls on women of color, we cannot hope to fully confront the experience of onlyness without a more representative faculty.[46]

In addition to providing a stronger base of mentorship, an increasingly diverse professoriate in early modern studies would help foster a more pluralistic culture in our classrooms and in our field. While, again, a teacher's identity should not be considered a consistent indicator of the type of culture they might foster in a classroom, the traditional pedagogical space of the PWI remains white – and often unconsciously so – to the detriment of many students from underrepresented backgrounds.

One way in which our field fosters such an imbalance is through our linguistic norms, which tend strongly toward forms of Standard and Academic English that generally code as white. Insomuch as these norms pervade our classrooms, they present a substantial obstacle for students that naturally speak a so-called "non-Standard" iteration of English. As Carol D. Lee writes,

> disjunctures between ways of using language in everyday settings and prototypical ways of using language in classrooms. . . are most common in classrooms serving students from minority and low-income communities where the language of the home is either a so-called non-mainstream dialect of English (e.g. African-American English, Appalachian English) or a national language other than English (e.g. Spanish, Hmong). Close examinations of language in practice in such classrooms documents the ways that students' are misunderstood by teachers or where students simply do not actively participate in classroom talk. The consequences of limited opportunities to participate are limited opportunities to learn.[47]

Cultivating a more diverse early modern professoriate would increase the availability of courses conversant in different cultural codes, thereby increasing access for many underrepresented students. As I have argued elsewhere, being inclusive of alternative linguistic modes would inevitably expand our field's interpretive potential.[48] As Lee's research makes clear, African American Vernacular English is "a rich medium for reasoning about literary questions."[49] And indeed, this notion is applicable to a variety of so-called "non-Standard" iterations of English.[50]

V

While continuing to cultivate better representation in our professoriate across race and culture remains one of the most deeply important and effective means of fostering a more equitable field, we still have some recourse in our academic communities, regardless of their current demographics, to help shift the racial and cultural imbalances that typify the traditional PWI. Perhaps chiefly, we must continue to take seriously the racial inequality that persists in higher education, especially that which is still prevalent in our field despite current efforts toward inclusivity. As Harper notes, minoritized students benefit greatly from faculty and advisors who are able to validate their "racialized experience."[51] Indeed, my own graduate work was significantly supported by a dedicated mentor who not only advised me on the subject of early modern literature, but who also took the time to learn about the exclusionary routines I navigated as an early modernist of color.

In addition to remaining attentive to the challenges many students of color confront in higher education, we should also make a point to include immediate racial issues in our class discussions, including seeking responsible ways to address iniquity as it relates to our classrooms and our subjects of inquiry. As Fries-Britt and Griffin recommend when explicating ways to make the standard college classroom more hospitable for students of color, "faculty must also feel comfortable talking about race in the classroom."[52] Engaging various issues of identity remains a shift our field must continue to work toward. As Ayanna Thompson and Laura Turchi observe, even while students from all manner of backgrounds are "eager to have open and respectful discussions" about issues of race, "current approaches to Shakespeare often segregate his works from intentional discussions of difference (race, gender, ability and/or sexuality) and bias."[53] Their book, which offers innovative approaches for leveraging issues of difference and students' diversity of

experience, is one of the few investigations that explicitly considers identity in the Shakespeare classroom, including taking the phenomenon of Stereotype Threat into account.[54]

Another way to alter the current climate of the early modern literature classroom is to employ critical race studies along with diverse cultural contexts. As Thompson importantly notes, "If the field were to support the inclusion of race studies more systematically and consistently, then our ranks may diversify more rapidly and thoroughly."[55] And as David Sterling Brown argues in his thoughtful reflection on teaching an undergraduate course combining the study of early modern English and African American texts, "simply reimagining how we teach sixteenth- and seventeenth- century literature . . . is essential for increasing the appeal of early modern studies for students who might not otherwise see themselves as fully interested in, comfortable with, or capable of succeeding in the field."[56] I benefitted greatly as a graduate student from working with a supportive dissertation committee—made up of both early modernists and scholars of the African Diaspora—who were invested in the project of collaborating across their respective areas of specialization. Committing to the expansion of the cultural and intellectual purview of early modern studies enables the field to make scholarly breakthroughs and simultaneously support inclusivity. Dana A. Williams's overview of approaches to canonical literature employed at many Historically Black Colleges and Universities explains the rationale and benefits of such an approach: "there persists among many HBCUs a distinctive commitment to a culturally responsive pedagogy that aggressively expands the Western world's values, literatures, and cultures to include those from classical and modern African and African diaspora civilizations."[57] According to Williams, "A broad base of knowledge about the world and its cultures and the awareness of being heirs to this intellectual and cultural genealogy create in students a self-definition informed by their traditions and heritages and a confidence that abides with them under circumstances good and bad."[58] When considering the impact of such an approach, it is essential to note that HBCUs succeed in training a disproportionately high number of black undergraduates who go on to earn doctoral degrees in the humanities.[59]

And indeed, if we hope to foster a more diverse and inclusive field, we should aim to cultivate academic environments that offer students of color equal access to affirming representation and to means of identifying as students and scholars of early modern English studies. To do so, we might start by interrogating the culture of our academic communities, remaining conscious of their whiteness. And with respect to the issues above, we might advocate for an early modern field that also

centers blackness, brownness, the immigrant experience, and diasporic tradition.

Notes

1. Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (New York: Vintage, 2001), 226.

2. Ibid., 226-27.

3. Ibid., 227.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. See Lydia Efthymia Roupakia, "On Care, Ethics, and Reading Practice: Re-Reading Zadie Smith's White Teeth," *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 26, no. 2 (March 25, 2015): 150–71, who notes that "established codes of English femininity…are forced upon [Irie] through the formal education system" (161).

10. Ossie Davis, "The English Language is My Enemy," *Negro History Bulletin; Washington* 30, no. 4 (April 1, 1967): 18.

11. Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (Harvard University Press, 1991), 84.

12. Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 267.

13. Hall has also written on how to thoughtfully engage issues of beauty, gender, and race in the early modern classroom. See Kim F. Hall, "Beauty and the Beast of Whiteness: Teaching Race and Gender," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (1996): 461–75.

14. Smith, *White Teeth*, 222.

15. Ibid., 224.

16. As I discuss later in this essay, research on Stereotype Threat demonstrates that success in a given domain is correlated with one's ability to identify with achievement in that domain. See Claude M. Steele and Joshua Aronson, "Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African Americans," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69, no. 5 (1995): 797–811.

17. Imtiaz Habib, *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500-1677: Imprints of the Invisible* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008).

18. Whitney B. Taylor, "The Pedagogical Possibilities of Editing a Digital Text in the Shakespeare Classroom," in this volume.

19. Ibid.

20. Cassie M. Miura, "Empowering First-Generation Students: Bardolatry and the Shakespeare Survey," in this volume.

21. Perry Guevara, "Toward Speech Therapy: Affect, Pedagogy, and Shakespeare in Prison," in this volume.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Shaun R. Harper, "Am I My Brother's Teacher? Black Undergraduates, Racial Socialization, and Peer Pedagogies in Predominantly White Postsecondary Contexts," *Review of Research in Education* 37, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 183-211, esp. 183.

27. Harper, "Am I My Brother's Teacher?," 189.

28. Sharon Fries-Britt and Kimberly Griffin, "The Black Box: How High-Achieving Blacks Resist Stereotypes About Black Americans," *Journal of College Student Development* 48, no. 5 (September 27, 2007): 509-24, esp. 514.

29. Fries-Britt and Griffin, "The Black Box," 514.

30. Ian Smith, "We Are Othello: Speaking of Race in Early Modern Studies," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (2016): 104-24, esp. 108. Smith cites Frances E. Kendall, *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race* (Routledge, 2013), who observes that "those of us who are white are able to live our lives knowing very little of the experiences of people of color" (65).

31. For a brief overview of the persistent expectation placed on black students to be the "spokesperson" on issues of race in the classroom, see Harper, "Am I My Brother's Teacher?," esp. 190.

32. Fries-Britt and Griffin, "The Black Box," 517.

33. Arthur L. Little, *Shakespeare Jungle Fever: National-Imperial Re-Visions of Race, Rape, and Sacrifice* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2000), 11.

34. Steele and Aronson, "Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African Americans," 797.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Edward Taylor and James Soto Antony, "Stereotype Threat Reduction and Wise Schooling: Towards the Successful Socialization of African American Doctoral Students in Education," *The Journal of Negro Education* 69, no. 3 (2000): 184-98, esp. 187.

38. See Fries-Britt and Griffin, "The Black Box," esp. 511–512. See also Harper, "Am I My Brother's Teacher?," esp. 194–196. See also James L. Moore, Octavia Madison-Colmore, and Dionne M. Smith, "The Prove-Them-Wrong Syndrome: Voices from Unheard African-American Males in Engineering Disciplines," *The Journal of Men's Studies* 12, no. 1 (October 1, 2003): 61–73.

39. As Fries-Britt and Griffin note, "A key difference for White students is that they perceived that assessments made about their academic ability were aimed at them individually and were not applied to the larger community of Whites" ("The Black Box," 520).

40. Shaun R. Harper et al., "Race and Racism in the Experiences of Black Male Resident Assistants at Predominantly White Universities," *Journal of College Student Development* 52, no. 2 (May 6, 2011): 180-200, esp. 193.

41. For example, black faculty are drastically underrepresented. And it is worth noting that early modern studies is not alone in this regard. As Rafael Walker writes in an op-ed for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* regarding a cursory assessment of black faculty in prominent English departments: "I examined the

faculties of the nation's top 20 English and history departments (as ranked by *U.S. News & World Report*), focusing on three subfields — medieval, early-modern Europe (also known as Renaissance in English), and 19th-century British (or Victorian). For English, I inspected a total of 21 departments and found that only one department had a black faculty member working in any of those three well-established subfields." Rafael Walker, "The Next Step in Diversifying the Faculty," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 23, 2016, https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Next-Step-in-Diversifying/238138.

42. See Ayanna Thompson, *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America* (Oxford UP, 2011), who frankly discusses the extent of the field's lack of diversity, writing "I find it incredibly depressing that I can name most of the Shakespeareans of color despite the fact that our professional organizations are relatively large" (180).

43. Harper et al., "Race and Racism in the Experiences of Black Male Resident Assistants at Predominantly White Universities," 190.

44. Harper, "Am I My Brother's Teacher?," 196.

45. Fries-Britt and Griffin, "The Black Box," 522.

46. For an overview of this imbalance, see Kimberly A. Griffin and Richard J. Reddick, "Surveillance and Sacrifice: Gender Differences in the Mentoring Patterns of Black Professors at Predominantly White Research Universities," *American Educational Research Journal* 48, no. 5 (October 1, 2011): 1032–57.

47. Carol D. Lee, "'Every Good-bye Ain't Gone': Analyzing the Cultural Underpinnings of Classroom Talk," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 19, no. 3 (May 1, 2006): 305-327, esp. 306.

48. See Kyle Grady, "Why Front? Thoughts on the Importance of 'Nonstandard' English in the Shakespeare Classroom," *Pedagogy* 17, no. 3 (October 1, 2017): 533–40.

49. Lee, "Every Good-bye," 317.

50. See Miura, "Empowering First-Gen Students: Bardolatry and the Shakespeare Survey," who notes that her "aim as a teacher, regardless of whether I am teaching first-year writing or an upper division literature course, is to leverage the lived experiences of my students in a way that positions their multilingual backgrounds as an asset rather than deficit" (in this volume).

51. Harper, "Am I My Brother's Teacher?," 196.

52. Fries-Britt and Griffin, "The Black Box," 523.

53. Ayanna Thompson and Laura Turchi, *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose: A Student-Centred Approach* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 72.

54. See Thompson and Turchi, *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose*, esp. 72-77.

55. Thompson, *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America*, 180.

56. David Sterling Brown, "(Early) Modern Literature: Crossing the Color-Line," *Radical Teacher* 105 (July 7, 2016): 69–77, esp. 76. Brown also advocates for "diversifying our [professorial] ranks" as essential for cultivating more inviting and inclusive early modern classrooms (76).

57. Dana A. Williams, "'The Field and Function' of the Historically Black College and University Today: Preparing African American Undergraduate Students

for Doctoral Study in the Humanities," November 2013,
https://profession.mla.org/the-field-and-function-of-the-historically-black-college-and-university-today-preparing-african-american-undergraduate-students-for-doctoral-study-in-the-humanities/.

58. Williams, "'The Field and Function' of the Historically Black College and University Today." See also Fries-Britt and Griffin, who echo William's point, writing that a "coping strategy for Black students is to simultaneously value learning about Anglo-centric stimuli and Afro-centric stimuli. Investment in learning from both of these perspectives allows Black students to relate to the dominant context while protecting their own psychological development and learning about ideas and information germane to the Black culture" ("The Black Box," 515). They also point out that "These interactions [with Afro-centric stimuli] are more likely to happen if there are greater numbers of diverse students and faculty and if the experiences of White students and professors reflect an appreciation and knowledge of both Anglo- and Afro-centric perspectives" (515).

59. See Williams, "'The Field and Function' of the Historically Black College and University Today," who points out that "*Data on the Humanities Doctorate Recipients and Faculty Members by Race and Ethnicity* reveals that African American students who earn doctoral degrees in humanities fields (identified as English, literature, modern languages, religion, history, philosophy) are being trained at the undergraduate level overwhelmingly at HBCUs—Spelman College, Howard University, and Morehouse College being the top three."

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