The Discourse Of Difference:
The Representation of Black African Characters
in English Renaissance Drama

A Thesis Submitted to the College of
Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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in the Department of English
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By
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Summary of the Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment
of the Requirements for the
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by

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FALL 1997

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THESIS

THE DISCOURSE OF DIFFERENCE: THE REPRESENTATION OF
BLACK AFRICAN CHARACTERS IN ENGLISH RENAISSANCE DRAMA

The view of black Africans that emerges from Renaissance drama is shaped entirely by the stereotype, and is overwhelmingly negative. There is a general lack of interest, within Renaissance scholarship, to question or challenge the stereotype as a major organizing principle in shaping negative images of African dramatic characters. My argument is that the stereotype is a powerful tool in the hands of self-interested parties, and must be recognized as capable of maiming and distorting the reality of those it sets out to construct, as the one-sided, eurocentric representations of African characters in Renaissance drama reveal.

With this idea in mind, Chapter One reviews the history of European attitudes to black skin colour, focusing on England's public displays of other nations, cultures, and people, on the visual art tradition, and mainly on English Renaissance travel literature which, I believe, was the largest single influence on dramatists' imaginations. The chapter establishes that English anti-black polemics or the stereotyping of black Africans was heightened and crueller during the Renaissance, largely because constructions of otherness were a big part of England's self-fashioning.

Chapter Two explores traditional meanings of blackness as well as the aesthetic and moral aspects of otherness, and attempts to show how the stereotypical assumptions and value judgements encoded in the rhetoric of blackness are
allegorically manipulated to suit the needs of Christian England while Africa suffers erasure.

Chapters Three and Four foreground the idea that the physical presence of black African characters on the stage becomes a sign of an entire set of actual and imagined differences by which England constructs her view of Africans as prime, visible signifiers of cultural difference. Chapter Four goes a step further and looks at those dramatic texts in which seemingly fixed categories are revealed as unstable, especially when overlaps in race, gender, and social rank come into play.

The representation of black African characters on the English Renaissance stage thus reveals a definite correlation between the dominant culture's fears and anxieties over the perceived threat posed by the black African other, its insistence on a self-representation as a distinctly superior culture, and its subsequent and systematic production of Africa and Africans as indelibly other. For the dominant culture to be able to define, produce, and maintain itself as superior, it must, of necessity, strive to keep the other in a position of chronic inferiority, hence the persistent appeal to the stereotype.
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ABSTRACT

The view of black Africans that emerges from Renaissance drama is shaped entirely by stereotypes, and is overwhelmingly negative. There is a general reluctance in the scholarly community to challenge the stereotype as a major organising principle in shaping negative images of African dramatic characters. My argument is that the stereotype is a powerful tool in the hands of self-interested parties, and must be recognised as capable of maiming and distorting the experiences of those it sets out to construct, as the one-sided, eurocentric representations of African characters in Renaissance drama reveal.

Chapter One reviews the history of European attitudes to black skin colour, focusing briefly on England’s public displays of other nations, cultures, and people, on the visual art tradition, and mainly on English Renaissance travel literature which, I believe, was the largest single influence on dramatists’ imaginations. The chapter establishes that English anti-black polemics and the stereotyping of black Africans was heightened during the Renaissance, mainly because constructions of otherness were a large part of England’s national self-fashioning.

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Introduction

My interest in the topic of black African\textsuperscript{1} characters in English Renaissance drama was sparked a few years ago by a moving passage I came across while researching a seminar paper I was to present on \textit{Othello}. The passage is about the unfortunate fate of a black African woman who had been forcefully brought to Europe in the early nineteenth century and exhibited as a black freak worthy of cultural and scientific exploitation. Although I have since come across more than one account of the same incident, Amina Mama's version captures best the degrading and dehumanising experiences Europe's others went through, perceived as they were as creatures different from the European norm.

Saartje Baartman, a South African woman, was brought to England in the 1800s and displayed in fairgrounds across Europe, billed as "the Hottentot Venus" until her premature death. Much of the attention she attracted, caged and shown in a semi-nude state, was centred on her physique—a fascination which led to her being made into a sexual fetish, featuring on many bawdy postcards. She also attracted the scrutiny of scientists such as Baron Cuvier, who probed and examined her while she was alive and later dissected her corpse and preserved her genitals. A plaster cast was made of her body and, until recently, displayed in the \textit{Musee de l'Homme} in

\textsuperscript{1}The term "black Africans" will be used throughout this study for two main reasons: to distinguish the dark-skinned Africans, who are the focus of this study, from white Europeans, and to underscore the fact that for me, something is lost when only the word "blacks" is used as a standard reference to people of African descent. Using the word "Africans" rather than "blacks" recognises that African identity should not be colour-based but placed in a definite, authentic place of origin too, like Scots, Italians, Turks, Irish, English, and so on.
Paris, where it continued to attract unsavoury attention. (91)

My offended sensibilities notwithstanding, Baartman’s fate and the ironic representation of her as a Venus figure exposed a whole baggage of negative stereotypes of the African then in circulation, and it’s surely these stereotypes that were on display for all to see.

More importantly, Baartman’s treatment reveals a one-sided, eurocentric view of Africans as nonhuman and as objects of curiosity. It portrays Africans as animals in a zoo, upheld and maintained as other for public consumption. She, and by extension, all Africans, is equated with guinea-pigs in a "science" field that seeks to prove empirically the irrevocable differences within the human race and, in particular, between white Europeans and black Africans. The emphasis on Baartman’s physique, including the irreverent dissecting of her corpse, the shameless preserving of her genitals in the name of science, and the plastering of her degraded body on bawdy postcards, collapses her humanity and womanhood into a sexual fetish.

That a plaster cast was made of her body and subsequently displayed in a museum is emblematic of the function of the stereotype (a phenomenon that I will study more closely in Chapter One) to legitimise difference. Here was perceived inferiority produced, personified, and reified for posterity as a scientific "truth." These details show, as Kim Hall argues in a different context, that "the easy
association of race with modern science ignores the fact that . . . race [is] a social construct that is fundamentally more about power and culture than about biological difference" (Things of Darkness, 6). Scientists such as Baron Cuvier prove only too well what Hall says most theorists of race agree on, that "racist thought involves a degree of classification and exclusion used to exercise or to justify control over (or exploitation of) people of other cultures" (Things of Darkness, 6).

This account of the South African woman recalled for me a similar incident that appeared in the Kenyan media in early 1980s and raised a public outcry. Certain Europeans visiting Kenya and taking advantage of the simplicity and innocence of country folks, had taken back to Europe with them a local Masai couple whom they used to display African "barbarity" or "primitivity," at a price. The thought-process provoked by these two temporally distant yet culturally related experiences of black Africans reminded me of Trinculo's remark in The Tempest about the readiness of the English to pay to see a dead Indian in London streets sooner than they would relieve a lame beggar (II.ii.31-33). Here was proof that the negotiation between a dominant culture and its others was not a nineteenth- or twentieth-century phenomenon; it was a practice firmly established as early as the time of Shakespeare.

The two incidents and Trinculo's remark had something
in common: a fascination for the strange and an urge to exhibit difference between self and other through the production and maintenance of stereotypes. What’s on display in these incidents is definitely not a cultural exchange but a perverted curiosity and an anxious feeling of superiority in the European engaged in displaying or observing the foreigner as distinctly other. Europe’s odd fascination with her others, be it in the sixteenth, nineteenth, or twentieth century, brought to mind the old saying that the more things change the more they remain the same. It was this idea of unchanging attitudes that touched the chord of the nascent scholar in me. My interest was piqued. I was intrigued by this European fascination with displaying people of other worlds as anomalies across centuries, particularly black Africans whose dark skin, a prime signifier of cultural difference, elicited negative attitudes from the beholder almost automatically.

My African roots and colonial heritage were an added stimulus to my already growing interest in the negative attitudes towards those outside England’s borders during the English Renaissance period. The suspicion that black skin colour might be the primary material ingredient in the general animosity to black Africans in particular, and the need to control the scope of my project, led me to limit my research to black African characters at the expense of England’s other others. In some ways, as a black African
myself, research into the subject of blackness is also partly a search for a missing link in this so simple yet often convoluted network of skin colour politics. With the benefit of a collective rather than a personal experience, I was curious to know where all this "blackphobia" expressed in real-life situations and reflected in Renaissance dramatic texts began. Why hadn’t I seriously questioned it, and why has it endured?

As my epiphanic passage above demonstrates, embedded in the attitudes of European exhibitors of other nations, of other cultures, and of other people is also a covert, simultaneous exhibition of the inferiority of the other and the self-postulated superiority of the self. Europe’s implicit claim to power over her others, for example in the above incidents, is grandly manifested in the very act of displaying them as anomalies. What is being represented in the exhibition of the South African woman and the Kenyan couple, are beings perceived as devoid of human emotion, intelligence, or voice—inert objects fit only to be acted upon rather than acting. Mama sees the dehumanisation and degradation of Baartman as illustrative of "the role that Africans played in the nineteenth-century European imagination" but goes on to say that it "tells us little of how they might have seen themselves" (91). One could say the same of the similarly ugly fate of the Kenyan couple in the twentieth-century European imagination.
These two incidents were not isolated cases. The representation of difference, as Shakespeare testifies through Trinculo, was an important cultural issue as far back as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This idea provided a point of departure, and Steven Mullaney’s essay, "Strange Things, Gross Terms, Curious Customs: The Rehearsal of Culture in the Late Renaissance," offered me a good place to start. According to Mullaney, there were many "wonder-cabinets"—collections and public displays of people and of cultural objects gathered in London from foreign countries during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Mullaney describes a wonder-cabinet as "a form of collection peculiar to the late Renaissance, characterized primarily by its encyclopedic appetite for the marvellous or the strange" (65). Commenting on this collecting activity of the period, he notes that

The late sixteenth and early seventeenth century collected and exhibited not only the trappings but also the customs, languages, and even members of other cultures on a scale that was unprecedented. In forms ranging from wonder-cabinets to court masques and popular romances, from royal entries and traveller’s narratives to the popular playhouses of Elizabethan London, the pleasures of the strange are invoked to solicit our attention as spectators, auditors, or readers, but the motives of what the period knew merely as its ‘curiosity’ are far from clear. (68)

Contra Mullaney, however, the motives for the period’s curiosity appear to have been clear, at least in the drama, and the artists seem to have been aware of this fact.

I saw some connection between the period’s fascination
with the curious and the strange wonder-cabinet collections and the drama's representation of England's others on the Renaissance stage. The cultural climate was such that England needed to compare herself with other cultures, and the need was for a comparison that favoured the "us" at the expense of the "them." The period's "wonder-cabinets" were thus part of England's exercise of constructing her cultural distinctness from the rest of the world. England's displays involved covert productions of such binary oppositions as civilisation and primitivity, Christianity and paganism, white and black, but it was also a distinctness beleaguered with anxieties and insecurities over the perceived threat posed by the other.

As Sander Gilman argues convincingly, production of difference and otherness is not unusual in times of crisis. "A rich web of signs and references for the idea of difference arises out of a society's communal sense of control over its world. No matter how this sense of control is articulated, whether as political power, social status, religious mission, or geographic or economic domination, it provides an appropriate vocabulary for the sense of difference" (20). The increasing presence in England of alien elements at that time was cause for concern, and the threat black Africans represented reveals England's layered and interconnected anxieties over difference (see Hall, Things of Darkness, 141).
A case in point is the repeated injunctions in 1596 and 1601 from Queen Elizabeth,¹ that ideal model of Englishness, that "those kind of people," the "blackmoores," should be "expelled" from the land "God hath blessed . . . with great increase of people of our own nation" (D'Amico, 32). This injunction was in response to increasing numbers of Africans settling in London and "revealing an independence which must have alarmed contemporary Englishmen" (Walvin, 8). It was also a time of economic hardship and attendant social problems, and while immigrants in general "added to the problem," according to Walvin, "no group was so immediately noticeable as the Blacks" (8). The Queen's concern for her people is understandable, but her attempt to justify her deportation of black Africans on grounds that God Himself privileged "people of our nation" over "those kind of people," most of whom were "infidels having no understanding of Christ or His gospel" (Walvin, 8) reflects the general attitudes current at the time, to black Africans. Not only does it reveal a royally-sanctioned racial discrimination coated in divine will, but it also shows that England's claim to distinctness is closely linked with economic and social insecurities and with the insistence on portraying foreigners as England's debased others.

¹For other references and critical attention to this royal decree, see also Jones, viii; Vaughan 42; and especially Kim Hall's insightful analysis of the Queen's document in her essay, "Reading What Isn't There," 26-28.
English Renaissance texts reflect this ambivalent mood of an age whose search for self-aggrandisement is closely tied to the fear of foreigners who must, of necessity, be made to look less than human. The fictional worlds, for example, depict African characters as though they were part of the "large and often lively cast of what the period perceived as alien, anomalous, dissimilar, barbarous, gross, or rude . . . sought out for purposes of exhibition and display—maintained and produced as something Other" (Mullaney, 68). Nothing, of course, is said of how foreigners must have perceived themselves, because this would destabilise the simulated idea of a difference naturally determined. The ideas provoked by Mullaney's essay led me to look for what other Renaissance literary critics who have addressed the subject of black African characters in Renaissance drama had done so far.

Besides several essays which focus only on individual black characters and only in individual texts, existing book-length literary studies of the cultural work done by the representation of black African characters in Renaissance drama in general have been distressingly few and far between. Prominent books on the subject that feature in this study include the pioneering work on the subject, Eldred Jones's *Othello's Countrymen* (1965), then Elliot Tokson's *The Popular Image of the Black Man in English Drama, 1550-1688* (1982), Anthony Gerard Barthelemy's *Black
Face, Maligned Race (1987), and Jack D'Amico's The Moor in English Renaissance Drama (1991). In Things of Darkness (1995), Kim F. Hall examines tropes of blackness in a wide range of the literature and visual culture of early modern England but says little about the dramatic representation of black characters in texts that are covered by this study.

I am indebted to these critics for their illuminating surveys of, and some opinions on, the various images of the African other delineated in various Renaissance literary texts. It is neither my intention nor my desire to critique the useful and thorough surveys meant to highlight either the theatrical or thematic issues with which they are dealing. I feel, however, that they do not, in general, adequately interrogate or challenge the ideological constructions of stereotypes in Renaissance drama in a way that could make available a deeper understanding of those marginalised and dehumanised by it. There is a need, therefore, to supplement their analyses by directing more attention to the underlying tensions and complex impulses governing such negative portrayals of black African otherness. It is not enough simply to expose the recurring images of black Africans or of binary oppositions suggested by black and white, without questioning the motivation for, and the origins and manner of, their construction.

Several of the writers who have addressed the subject of black Africans in Renaissance drama concur about black
skin colour being the most obvious and dominant trait among the many perceived deficiencies of the African, both in the larger society and in the drama. Perhaps because of this "obvious" factor, however, the writers' works generally do not adequately and critically investigate the far-reaching impact of the word "black," capable as it is of disseminating mostly negative meaning on a people whose skin colour is deemed to carry its "cursed" shade. The twentieth-century valorisation of blackness by, for example, the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, its over-idealisation in the West Indian and African francophone concept of Negritude, or its glorification in such slogans as "I am black and proud" or "Black is beautiful," are among the impassioned responses to the unpleasant meanings blackness has come to acquire over the centuries. Understandably, many black African intellectuals were opposed to this self-regarding, self-promoting philosophy as an ideal response to eurocentric degradation of black Africanness. As the well-known African scholar and Nobel-prize winner for literature, Wole Soyinka, once remarked in regard to the Negritude philosophy, a tiger does not need to proclaim his tigritude. However, if or when he feels compelled to proclaim it, no matter how blinded by passion, the least one can do is attempt to understand the source of his passion.

I therefore argue that as a reservoir of most negative
stereotypes about the African and as a site for ideological conflicts, skin colour is not only obvious, but it is also the key material ingredient in English anti-African attitudes, the chief source from which all the perceived shortcomings of the African springs. Whether it is primitivity, barbarity, demonism, ugliness, lasciviousness, godlessness or cruelty, for the African character, these stereotypes are all constructed from a common material base: black skin colour. Woven as it is into the very fabric of European beliefs, skin colour is the single, visible signifier that English society could (and still does) liberally transform into moral and/or cultural difference. It was a material sign in early modern culture for an entire network of conflicts, anxieties, evaluations, and burgeoning power relations that placed England in relation to Africa in particular, and to the "new" world in general. In various Renaissance artistic expressions, whether in masques, pageants, visual arts, other cultural rituals, or on the public stage, the otherness of African people is rooted more in skin colour than in speech or mannerisms that distinguished Europe's other others during the Renaissance. As such, a detailed analysis of the dynamics of blackness and a sustainable critique of its implications is necessary as one maps out its ideological function in relation to the dominant culture's actual practices.

Recent literary criticism has also insufficiently
examined the presence and role of black women on the Renaissance stage. In spite of the presence of black women servants in a number of Jacobean plays, little critical attention has been paid to the multiple and contradictory positions they are forced to occupy. To ignore gender and class issues in the discourse of colour difference is also to refuse to recognise the particular circumstances of the black woman of low rank in the larger scheme of things.

Part of the purpose of this study is to retrieve from the far margins, black women characters in Jacobean drama so as to try to bring further understanding of the nature of their predicament.

This study thus sets out to show that the representation of the black African character on the English stage is more than just an idle, disinterested assembly of negative stereotypes of blackness, reproduced only for theatrical purposes or for the mere pleasure of entertaining audiences with the spectacle of difference. It is important that even as we visualise black African characters walking across the stage in unchanging images of otherness, we should not suspend but sharpen our critical faculties to enable us to question what propels the one-sided representations. We need to avoid seeing on the stage, stereotypes of the other as simply unvarying clones. One of the salient issues that this work addresses is whether or not the representation of difference on the Renaissance
stage was an important cultural issue in England at that time.

By dramatising African otherness through repeated reproductions of negative stereotypes of the African without any serious challenge to these stereotypes, are the dramatists necessarily being racists, blinded by colour-prejudice? Are their works intended merely to expose existing societal biases and value-systems? Are they meant to reflect the dominant culture's fears of the threat posed by the culturally, socially, and politically other? Is their writing a voluntary act of patriotism, or is it subject to such controlling higher authority as parts of the state machinery? Are certain modes of representation subversive of orthodox beliefs and practices?

The literary texts under discussion insist on productions of difference negotiated through stereotype constructions. The endings of these works in particular often opt to exclude black African characters from mainstream culture through death or expulsion, or else to incorporate them through conversion into the Western cultural ideal. The question is, should we automatically assume that all the playwrights, consciously or unconsciously, conform to contemporary belief systems about the black African other, or is it possible that some or all attempt to recreate an alternative, more credible and sustainable picture of black African identity that
challenges these belief-systems as cultural fantasies?

The primary texts selected for this study are representative dramatic works with African characters in their cast (whether these characters play prominent or minor roles) covering the period between 1588 and 1625. These are George Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar* (1588/89), Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* (1594), *The Merchant of Venice* (1596), and *Othello* (1604), Thomas Dekker’s *Lust’s Dominion* (1599), John Marston’s *The Wonder of Women, or the Tragedy of Sophonisba* (1606; hereafter referred to simply as *Sophonisba*), John Webster’s *The White Devil* (1611), and John Fletcher’s *The Knight of Malta* (1616). Included in the list for their particular relevance to constructions of aesthetic and moral difference are Ben Jonson’s *The Masque of Blackness* (1606) and *The Masque of Beauty* (1608), and one of Thomas Middleton’s pageants, *The Triumphs of Truth* (1613).

Of all the genres, drama seemed the most obvious choice for my project. Dramatic works must necessarily generate conflict, and there is no easier way to achieve this conflict than through such binary confrontations as black and white. The Elizabethan stage is an appropriate place from which to start exploring critical issues of conflict generated by black-white encounters in the period, especially since the collecting impulse can be seen at work in the Elizabethan playhouse as well. Itself a cultural phenomenon, contemporaneous with wonder-cabinets and the
like, the theatre served "as a glass in which Elizabethan culture could find the objects of its fascination represented and reflected" (Mullaney, 78). These objects, however, are not simply reflected but also conflicted, for they are disturbed by undercurrents of anxiety that are produced by imagined threats posed by the other.

The looking-glass is a shattered one and can reflect only distorted, fragmentary images of reality. The African characters who are paraded across the stage during this period are perceived as no different from the collected objects that came to reside in the wonder-cabinets: "strange things: tokens of alien cultures, reduced to the status of sheer objects, stripped of cultural and human contexts" (Mullaney, 68). They form part of what Ben Jonson refers to in his Masque of Queens as the "spectacle of strangeness" (line 17) that was so popular in the period. Drama is thus the most appropriate medium in which to observe the conflicts, fears, and anxieties resulting from such cross-cultural encounters.

There are a number of reasons for the choice of the period, 1588-1625. One, the first significant contact between English and black Africans through travel, trade, and evangelism occurred in the mid-sixteenth century (Tokson, ix). Two, the flood of travel writing, a major influence in moulding English perceptions of Africans, imaginatively and otherwise, crested during this time.
Three, the period invested heavily "in the sheerly Other" (Mullaney, 69), perhaps as part of a rigorous promotional exercise for the uniqueness and cultural purity of the English, but also to defuse perceived fears of the other. The production of African dramatic characters as demons and decidedly different from the Europeans is thus most marked in the writing produced during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and James I. Four, full dramatic treatment of African characters began and intensified during the Elizabethan period, and the black African female servant character, mostly absent in Elizabethan depictions, was popularised during the Jacobean era.

As active portrayers of the intense cultural negotiations of the era, English Renaissance dramatists must have been aware that England's craze over cultural displays of foreign curios even in human form, was not always geared towards quenching a thirst for knowledge about another culture or another people, but towards producing them as a different set of beings from "us." Stress on difference was often not based on an accurate appraisal of what was authentic; rather, it was the governing body's working out of a hidden agenda. The need to mask its fears of a perceived threat from the other, for example, involved the strategy of distancing its own shortcomings by transferring them onto the alien whose "evil" they must expose and purge. The process often reproduced negative stereotypes as though
they were true representations.

This brings us to two significant terms used in my title, "representation" and "difference." Mullaney defines representation as "always a form of repetition" (73) that "looks outward toward the exotic and the alien," and often involves "elaborate displays of Otherness" (ix). This definition is relevant to the discourse of difference in this study. "Representation" as it is used in this project calls attention to the use of the stereotype to simulate "truth" about the object represented so as to produce difference. The display and repetition involved in representations of the other are strategies meant to affirm and reaffirm what the play presents as in some sense true. Hence the stereotype, with its inherent elements of fixity and precise reproduction, becomes an important instrument in the discourse of difference that Europe was engaged in and the drama of the day exploited. Representation in this body of work draws attention not to truths but to untruths about the objects of representation. "Difference," produced as it is under false pretences, simulates hierarchical relations of domination and subordination meant to pass as natural and therefore fixed.

Part of what the dramatists reveal through their theatrical representation of otherness is the ability of the stereotype to plant in the landscape of the mind the unalterable "fact" that the difference between self and
other is naturally given and divinely sanctioned. One of the areas my study explores is the function of the stereotype and the various means the literary texts adopt to present difference on the English stage. It is necessary, therefore, to highlight the specific material conditions governing productions of otherness by exploring the drama’s ideological use of the stereotype.

Chapter One offers some necessary historical background to the cultural climate in Renaissance England, drawing on such influential nonfictional works as Hakluyt’s *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589), Leo Africanus’ *The History and Description of Africa and the Notable Things Therein* (1600), Margaret T. Hodgen’s *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1964), Winthrop Jordan’s *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (1968), James Walvin’s *Black and White: The Negro and English Society, 1555–1945* (1973), and Frank M. Snowden Jr.’s *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient Views of Blacks* (1983). This body of works helps to establish the origins and dissemination of widely held concepts about and attitudes to blackness and black African people that partly influenced the imaginations of the dramatists in question. Locating the genesis of these attitudes helps to place specific theatrical representation in a larger cultural scheme.
Chapter Two looks at the aesthetic and moral aspects of blackness in representative Renaissance texts and attempts to expose their role in producing and reinforcing negative stereotypes about dark-skinned people. It demonstrates how the language of colour, more particularly the rhetoric of blackness in texts like Ben Jonson’s *The Masque of Blackness* and *The Masque of Beauty*, Thomas Middleton’s *The Triumphs of Truth*, George Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar*, and John Fletcher’s *The Knight of Malta*, posits superficial lines of demarcation between black and white as relatively secure.

Chapter Three looks at how negative assumptions associated with blackness are extended to include productions of stock types. The chapter examines African stock types in *Titus Andronicus* and *Lust’s Dominion* which represent Aaron and Eleazar as consummate villains because of their skin colour. It also shows that while the texts explore fully the "typical" image of the black man in spirit, looks, word, and deed, they also expose moments of internal resistance and defiance from these black characters who recognise their disadvantaged positions and attempt to challenge Western attitudes to blackness. The chapter underscores the idea that although these attempts to resist are momentary and even show possibilities of exposing the dominant culture’s illusions of white superiority, the other is nonetheless often forced to bend to the will of dominant power brokers.
Chapter Four explores *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, *The White Devil*, and *The Knight of Malta* to show partly that some Renaissance literary texts also explore positive aspects of black African characters, and partly to trace the complexities of relations in which a variety of social determinants such as race, class, and gender are operating simultaneously. The chapter argues that those positive traits of the African character that are delineated are never sustained since they compete for space with the copious negative stereotypes that insist on conformity with orthodox views. It also demonstrates that contradictions arising from the interplay of race, class, and gender complicate claims to fixed categories of difference.
Chapter One

Stereotypes and the Cultural Transmission of Difference: Insights from Renaissance Travel Literature

Early modern drama represents the black African character generally in negative formulas which reveal that this figure is consistently steeped in broken conceptions as well as misconceptions by mainstream culture. The drama in general insists on reproducing and maintaining the black African character as "other" through the stereotype process. The term, stereotype, was initially used to describe a method of printing introduced at the very end of the eighteenth century in which a solid plate or type-metal cast from a papier-mâché impress, or a plaster mould taken from the surface of a form of type, is used (instead of the form itself) for printing or duplicating pages of type so that exact copies of the page might be reproduced at a later time (Oxford English Dictionary). In other words, the products of the stereotype process are identical, and they repeatedly conform to a fixed, unaltered type or pattern without any individual distinguishing marks (see Miller, 4).

Although the above definition is literal, it can also be suggestive metaphorically of the drama’s representation of black African characters in fixed cultural impressions or in stock types, akin to the plaster cast made out of the South African woman’s corpse cited at the beginning of the
Introduction. These dramatic characters are uniformly cast in roles deemed appropriate to what is perceived as their nature, or what is symbolic of their difference from the mainstream (read white) characters. Much like the use of the literal stereotype to produce impressions of the original, early modern drama reveals mainstream culture's reliance on fixed notions or impressions inherited from the past to falsify the reality of black Africans so as to maintain difference. The drama of the period demonstrates that the reproduction and repetition of inherited clichés strategically imposed upon the black African character work to enable the given impression to be permanently lodged in the public consciousness as universal truth or reality.

Although some critics such as Eldred Jones see the dramatists' use of negative stereotypes of the African as merely for theatrical purposes or dramatic effect, or for the dramatists' need to satisfy their audience's attraction to the exotic and the strange, such a reading is confining and limited, for it ignores the ideological function of the stereotype in the representation of the black African as other. As Ania Loomba correctly points out, "a central feature of hegemonic ideologies is their projection of the dominant viewpoint as universally true, transcendentally valid and nonpolitical. In this way, they claim to represent all humanity and fix their 'others' as inferior and finally non-human" (19). The representation of black African
otherness on the English stage is dependent upon productions of stereotypes to legitimise the feature that Loomba identifies. The truth being "fixed" or "printed" in the English mind by the stereotype is that the black African is intrinsically different from, and inferior to, the white European.

Sixteenth and seventeenth century English travel writers' insistence on the production of self/other, superior/inferior binaries, for example, reveals that the cross-cultural encounter between the English and black Africans is a monological domination of a singular, eurocentric perspective designed to ensure that through the use of the stereotype, the African remains a physically and ideologically marked other. This initial cultural differentiation inevitably paved the way for later justifications for English imperial domination over other parts of the globe, particularly over the "dark" continent. Homi Bhabha defines the stereotype as "a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated . . . as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual licence of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse, be proved" (Bhabha, 66).

Bhabha's definition also hints at an ideological function of the stereotype concept. Not only does the
stereotype give the impression of "knowledge," but it "must" also "be anxiously repeated" and renewed. This anxious repetition is a key to a general understanding of the discourse of difference, and in particular, of the representation of black African characters in English Renaissance dramatic texts. The general impression one gets from the drama of the period is that the black African is posited as inferior to the dominant white culture politically, culturally, and socially. This idea is repeatedly (and anxiously) reproduced through the drama's manipulation and exploitation of various existing stereotypes parading as commonsense "knowledge" of the other. The claim of black African inferiority is not based on any African reality. That it is constructed largely out of myths, legends, and falsified reality is indicated by the way the black African character is rendered in fragments of identity that cannot cohere into a single, three-dimensional, human form.

In a way, the texts invite us to see the anxious reproduction of negative clichés about the other in the world of the plays as an ideologically necessary strategy on the part of the status quo to privilege the self over the other. Repetition helps fix, bolster, and legitimise impressions of self and other, and makes otherwise superficial differences appear natural. The more often a thing is repeated, the more likely it is to pass as an
indisputable, universal truth. What one must keep in mind, however, is that stereotyping is a process that only renews earlier positions; it works to advance the stereotype itself, not knowledge of the other. The frequency with which these stereotypes are repeated in the drama and in the larger society should be good enough indications of their being no more than mere rubber-stamps in the hands of the privileged, especially those who wield power.

The largely negative representation of black African characters on the English Renaissance stage corresponds to the disparaging eurocentric concept of black Africans depicted in masques and pageants, in the visual arts of the time, and more importantly, in the pages of travel accounts. No discussion of the representation of the African other in English Renaissance drama would do justice to the dramatists’ work without a prior understanding of the complex cultural process by which "knowledge" of Africa grew among the English people. It is necessary to contextualise this encounter historically in order to understand the reasons behind the rampant negativity attached to the image of black Africans as reflected in English written records and as reproduced in the drama of the period.

There is enough evidence from written records widely published in early sixteenth-century England to indicate that Englishmen’s popular notions of Africa and of its inhabitants were born largely out of contemporary accounts
from travel literature, from moralized socio-political tracts, and even from the Holy Bible. These written accounts, the totality of which were a "blend of fact and fiction" (Jones vii; see also Walvin 5, Hodgen 184), contributed to the largely negative images of black African people which found space, and were consequently nurtured, in the landscape of the English mind. When Elizabethan England was engaged in imperial overseas expansion through trade and travel, she was also fascinated by what she had come to consider, through what had filtered down from antiquity, a culturally inferior world: Africa. It is important to note at this juncture that racist views which in later centuries came to ascribe the inferiority of black Africans to their biological make-up were not yet formulated in the England of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Prejudice, however, that essential, traditional English consensus on black African inferiority, was a constant. The criteria by which black Africans were considered inferior shifted throughout the centuries, reflecting changing values in Europe in general, and in England in particular.

Although the skin colour of the African had never gone unnoticed by the European, it was not used as a basis for differentiation or as a sign of inferiority until the early modern period. In his exploration of ancient views on black Africans, for instance, Frank Snowden Jr. points out that the encounter between Africans and Mediterranean whites as
early as about the middle of the third millennium B.C. constitutes the oldest chapter in the annals of black-white relations (Snowden, vii). Yet in the ancient world, he says, there was no bitter antagonism towards blacks, and no great importance was attached to skin colour: "color prejudice has been a major issue [only] in the modern world" (63). Snowden observes that whereas "in England color became the basis for discrimination" (68), the ancient world, according to the view of most scholars, did not make color the focus of irrational sentiments or the basis for uncritical evaluation. The ancients did not fall into the error of biological racism; black skin color was not a sign of inferiority; Greeks and Romans did not establish colour as an obstacle of integration in society; and ancient society was one that "for all its faults and failures never made color the basis for judging a man [sic]" (Snowden, 63).

The Mediterranean whites outside Africa were struck by the novelty of the Africans' skin colour upon the whites' first encounter with black Africans. Greeks and Romans of the ancient world, according to Snowden, were the first of many peoples to apply to the majority of Africans (or to Africa itself) names emphasizing colour. "Aithiops," a generic term in the Greek and Roman world, applied to Africans from the south of Egypt and from the southern fringes of northwest Africa. The word literally meant a "burnt-faced person." However, although the Greeks and
Romans came to regard the African skin colour as the most remarkable and unusual feature of the African, according to Snowden, they did not use it as a manifestation of the innate inferiority of the African, nor did they barbarise black Africans because of it. Virginia Mason Vaughan notes as well the "comparatively nonjudgmental" representations of black African people by ancient authors (43). As Snowden comments, "such observations underscore a most noteworthy aspect of the attitude toward color in antiquity: the ability of the ancients to see and comment on the obviously different physical characteristics of peoples without equating inferiority or superiority with skin color" (Snowden, 151; 247n).

Snowden also observes that, unlike most white communities of the modern world, the Greeks and Romans of the ancient world accurately recognise the widely varying shades of complexion among black Africans in different regions, which usually vary from light brown, to dark brown, to dark (fusci), to very black (niggerrimi) (Snowden, 5-8). It is true that classical authors engaged in fanciful creations of Ethiopia as home to "fabulous creatures or wild and ferocious tribes" (Snowden, 50). According to Snowden, Pliny described Africans as "one-eyed creatures who ate human flesh" (51-2). To the historian Diodorus, Africans were primitive people "who wore no clothes at all, some covered only their loins, and others their bodies up to the
waist. Some were filthy and kept their nails long like beasts, and a few did not believe in any gods at all" (cited by Snowden, 50). Part of this information was to be echoed later in mid-sixteenth century by an English traveller to West Africa, William Towerson, who noted that in Guinea, "diverse inhabitants are mighty bigge men and go al naked except some thing before their privie parts" (Hakluyt, 6: 184). Towerson's reproduction of Pliny's "observations" shows clearly how cultural stereotypes were easily transmitted from the ancients to the moderns.

These ancient world's wild creations, however, were not limited to Africa. Snowden observes that in general, the classical view was that "certain peoples, both black and white, inhabiting the fringes of the earth were physically bizarre" (128; 87n). In addition, despite these exaggerated reports, the ancients did at least adopt a balanced method of reporting. As Snowden reports, Diodorus' writing "also included an account of those Ethiopians whom his sources regarded as the first of all men [sic] and as the originators of divine rituals most pleasing to the gods. Even after the Greeks and Romans had encountered Ethiopians as enemies, classical writers continued to treat without rancor ancient Ethiopian themes--military power, love of freedom and justice, piety, and wisdom" (Snowden, 56). Herodotus, Diodorus, and Seneca are all said to have made "sympathetic references to Ethiopian justice and resistance
to foreign aggression" (58). As Snowden concludes, in spite of exaggerated accounts of Africa as a home of fabulous creatures or wild, monstrous, and ferocious tribes, "the ancients did not stereotype all blacks as primitives defective in religion and culture," and "their view of blacks was [generally] positive" (58 & 59).

There is some merit in Snowden’s theory that the long-standing history of black-white contact in the Mediterranean world is responsible for the absence of bitter hostility towards Africans in that region where "the black man was seldom a strange, unknown being" (Snowden, 68) and where skin colour was not used as a measure for a person’s worth. In England, on the other hand, the initial impression of the African’s complexion, as Jordan remarks, "was not appreciably modified: the firmest fact about the Negro was that he was ‘black’" (Jordan, 6) and therefore different. The abruptness of the contact between the English and the Africans in the sixteenth century appears to have been at the heart of the Englishmen’s hostility:

The powerful impact which the Negro’s color made upon Englishmen must have been partly owing to suddenness of contact. Though the Bible as well as the arts and literature of antiquity and the Middle Ages offered some slight introduction to the "Ethiope," England’s immediate acquaintance with black-skinned peoples came with relative rapidity. While the virtual monopoly held by Venetian ships in England’s foreign trade prior to the sixteenth century meant that people much darker than Englishmen were not entirely unfamiliar, real black men were virtually unknown except as vaguely referred to in the hazy literature about the sub-Sahara which had filtered down from antiquity.
What the English were suddenly confronted with in the early to mid-sixteenth century were *homo sapiens* certainly, but the African skin colour was so different from their own that the English eye reduced the majority of Africans to objects of ambivalent fascination, as inferior humans or superior animals. Winthrop Jordan and James Walvin point out that when "one of the fairest-skinned nations suddenly came face to face with one of the darkest people on earth" (Jordan, 6), England almost automatically "placed Africans at the opposite physical and social poles to Elizabethan Englishmen, with the result that blacks came to be seen as a dramatic inversion of [England’s] most deeply cherished social and cultural values" (Walvin, 132).

Travel literature of the mid-sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in particular reveals that the English were horrified not only by the African skin colour, but also by what they perceived as the total lack of civilisation and refinement among Africans. It would appear that at a time when England was proud of her Protestantism and entertained a growing sense of nationalism, prejudice against Africans was more heightened than it had been in earlier periods. The African continent had become more accessible to the English during this era, and embellished rumours about Africa that came in the wake of this contact became more frequent. The era was marked by an equally heightened
stress on skin colour difference and on its (morally) negative associations, a stress which is clearly reflected in the fictional and non-fictional works of the time.

Though differences in skin colour appear to have fascinated English travel writers, underlying this fascination is also the English nation’s anxious need to shape its own cultural and national identity and to assert its unique civility by putting stress on the otherness of the other. This otherness included, among others, the anglocentric assumption that physical beauty and good, moral values can reside only in England. If Tudor and Stuart England was not obsessed with racial purity to the same extent that she, with the rest of Europe, would be two centuries later, she was obsessed with establishing a distinct as well as assumed superior cultural identity. This same assumption is symbolically and dramatically reproduced and explored, peripherally in Thomas Fletcher’s *The Knight of Malta*, and centrally in Ben Jonson’s *The Masque of Blackness* and *The Masque of Beauty*. As the next chapter will demonstrate, blackness in these texts is seen not only as a threat to the Christian purity of the English, but also as an inversion of England’s social and cultural values.

To the average sixteenth-century English traveller, Africa was a distant territory populated with inferior people of colour who were endowed with less than
aesthetically ideal physical attributes. During this early period of contact, Africans also struck the English as infidels, sinners, and miscreants, and their difference in physical appearance provided a significant basis for travel literature’s construction of the superior/inferior cultural divide between the two groups. Travel records abound with evidence that some Renaissance Englishmen looked down upon African blacks as nothing more than savage beasts or primitive barbarians: "English observers in West Africa... . resorted to [this] powerful metaphor with which to express their own sense of difference from [the African]. They knew perfectly well that Negroes were men [sic], yet they frequently described the Africans as 'brutish' or 'bestial' or 'beastly'" (Jordan, 28). "Knowledge" of the other was immediately directed towards his or her debasement and degradation. The riches that the continent had to offer, such as gold, silver, ivory, dates, cotton, and so on, provided a positive image of an exotic, idealized distant land, but the common assumptions occasioned by the physical appearance of the African produced strong, contemptuous negative stereotypes.

Travel literature’s construction of negative images of the black African was seldom based on reality; it was a conglomeration of fractured, fragmented body parts that echoed classical authors’ descriptions of black African people. The body of the African became less than
recognisably human. It was represented by travel writers as an impure, ugly, corporeal bulk composed of disfigured flat noses with broad nostrils; thick, everted, blabber lips; horrid, tightly coiled or woolly hair, "'the wooliest' of all mankind" according to Herodotus (Snowden, 5, 10), with a body drenched, as it were, in nakedness (Hakluyt, 6: 184). Combined with a dark skin, nakedness was a sign of savagery to European voyagers. Other African anomalous traits reported by classical writers include Mandeville’s exaggerated "knowledge" of some odd Ethiopians with one foot. According to him,

in Ethiopie are such men that have but one foote, and they go so fast that it is a great mervaire, and that is a large foote that the shadow thereof covereth the body from Sun or raine when they lye upon their backs, & when their children are first borne they looke like russet, and when they wax old then they bee all black. (cited by Vaughan, 22)

That the reality of Ethiopians Mandeville purports to know is bent out of shape is obvious to twentieth-century readership, but for centuries before, and for the period of the Elizabethan era, such reports had been taken literally and, as Vaughan puts it, had "shaped the expectations of many early explorers" (22).

Perhaps the most complete portrait of a black person from classical antiquity, according to Snowden, appears in "Moretum," a poem ascribed to Vergil by ancient authorities. The female figure of the poem is described as "African in race, her whole figure proof of her country--her hair
tightly curled, lips thick, colour dark, chest broad, breasts pendulous, belly somewhat pinched, legs thin, and feet broad and ample" (cited by Snowden, 10). Clearly, the subject is reduced to a symbolic image of parodic exaggeration and spectacle, set against the perceived antithetical normality of a light-skinned English person. That many black African characters in English Renaissance dramatic texts draw attention to their skin colour or to their tightly curled or woolly hair is indicative of the influence travel accounts had on the imagination of the dramatists.

It appears that different features, as well as differences of appearance caused by custom or lifestyle, provided an easy excuse for the English people's debasement of the black African. On one of his three voyages to Guinea, William Towerson observed how in one African tribe the only way one could tell a woman from a man, since they both dressed alike, was the peculiarity of the women's breasts. The breasts, he writes, were in the most part "very foule and long, hanging downe low like the udder of a goate" (Hakluyt, 6: 184), "such exceeding long breasts," he adds, "that some of them wil lay the same upon the ground and lie downe on them" (Hakluyt, 6: 187). Peter Heylyn's own view was that the breasts are so long that mothers can even "suckle their children over their shoulders" (cited in Tokson, 16). This obviously embellished reporting does not
only typecast all the women of the tribe in question as having this feature, but the exaggeration of the feature itself echoes myths about African monsters and man-eaters that go back to classical authors. These echoes tally with Margaret Hodgen’s assertion that descriptions of monstrous races by the ancients "were substantiated by the Moderns, who repeated their stories and their theories without bothering to question their truth" (Hodgen, 184-85). This point is further reinforced by Walvin who notes that even the presence of actual black Africans on the London scene in the sixteenth century did nothing to dispel myths about them that had been circulating over the years. As he comments, "truth fed the expansion rather than the expulsion of mythology, and rumour unshakably fastened itself on reality. From the 1550s growing knowledge of black Africa, far from flushing out the residue of centuries of ingrained mythology, in fact reinforced that mythology" (Walvin, 6). The African was thus consistently represented as the very picture of perverse negation.

This kind of stigmatisation of the other was no doubt geared towards promoting self-image at the expense of those perceived or constructed as Europe’s others. When English slave trading began on the West African coast in the sixteenth century, the traders are reported to have "handled Negroes the same way men in England handled beasts, herding and examining and buying" (Jordan, 28). Margaret Hodgen
perhaps captures best the English Renaissance's eurocentric attitude towards the majority of Africans during the early decades of confrontation between the so-called white and black ethnic groups, and especially during the period's scepticism over the humanity of dark-skinned people. There was a considerable confusion then among the English as to whether black African people were human beings or monsters:

It is often said that the Renaissance discovered man [sic], and that the perplexities associated with the discovery were profound. But even so, the man discovered was a familiar fellow, a white European. When, at about the same time, the explorers threw the spotlight of publicity upon backward, darker-skinned, non-Europeans, when they brought home and told their stories of naked cannibals, there was something more involved than the enlargement of the European sample of the genus Homo. Here, or so it seemed, was a different kind of man. Or was he a man? There were those to say he was not. (Hodgen, 358)

Hodgen uses the case of Antonio Malefante, a traveller to Africa who was writing in the second half of the sixteenth century, to demonstrate her point. She says that "according to [him], the folk south of the Sahara were animals: 'very wretched, very black, and very bad,' and 'if they were human at all, theirs was a degraded humanity'" (Hodgen, 363). Leo Africanus as well, whose well-known work was available to Englishmen in Latin from 1556 and was translated into English in 1600, describes Africans from "Negroland" in dehumanising terms: "the Negroes . . . leade a beastly kinde of life, being ytterly destitute of the use of reason, of dexteritie of wit, and of all artes. Yea they so behaue themselues, as if they had continually liued in a
forrest among wild beasts" (1: 187).

The power and endurance of these negative images and exaggerations are attested to by the echoes still reverberating down the corridors of later centuries, the passage of time not withstanding. Dabydeen and Wilson-Togo cite the British Lord Chesterfield’s anti-black polemics. His view of Africans was that they were "the most ignorant and unpolished people in the world, little better than lions, tigers, leopards, and other wild beasts" (84). By the late seventeenth century, when Africans had become part of the London scene, "it was alleged of the lady of fashion that 'she hath always two necessary impliments about her; a Blackamoor and a little dog.' Not for the first time (nor the last) the Black in England was to be placed on the level with the animal kingdom" (Walvin, 11).

This persistent debasement of the African so popular with Renaissance travel writers took other forms as well. Not only were black Africans equated with the lowest of the low creatures, but they were constantly identified with hell and with the devil. What was believed to be African devilry reflected, for the Christian Elizabethans, a fundamental defect which set black and white distinctly apart. Even the physical description of Africa rings loud with overtones of hell. As opposed to the "graded seasons of Europe," Africa is seen as one whole "veritable furnace" whose one season is a "long sweltering hell," to use Walvin’s revealing
expressions (18).

The image of Africa that Richard Eden conjures up is a "tempestuous," "smothering hote," "roasted" world where the rains fall in "hote showres" and the winds are "scorching" (Hakluyt, 6: 170); even the moon in Africa gives off heat. The people "seeme at certaine times to live as it were in fornaces, and in maner already halfe way in Purgotorie or hell" (Hakluyt, 6: 170). To the English person, devilish black Africans were no doubt in their proper setting. Because of the writers' common habit of basing their "knowledge" of Africa only on those parts they either visited or heard of, the existence of the diversity of climatic conditions on the African continent, ranging from the scorching heat of the deserts and lowlands to the very cool climates of the highlands, remained unknown, or was ignored.

Nowhere is the language so corrosively dehumanising to black Africans as in the strongly-worded moral stance taken up by a seventeenth-century traveller to Africa, Thomas Herbert. He was of the opinion that black Africans, "in colour so in condition are little others than Devils incarnate. The devil . . . has infused prodigious Idolatry into their hearts enough to relish his pallat and aggrandize their tortures when he gets power to fry their souls, as the raging Sun has already scorcht their cole-black carcasses" (cited by Tokson, 14). The cumulative
effect of such descriptions on what must surely have been an already credulous English population cannot be overestimated.

Within the context of Christian discourse, the English saw Africans as emblematic of paganism—of moral degeneration. The African did not worship the "true" Christian God as the English did. This was construed by the English as yet another "manifestation of a general refusal [on the part of the African] to measure up to proper standards . . . , [in other words,] a failure to be English or even civilized" (Jordan, 24). One of the earliest English accounts on Africa, Richard Eden’s in 1556, stresses the Africans’ lack of Christianity as an important mark that distinguished them from Englishmen while it linked them with the devil. Eden describes Africans in one sweeping statement: they are "a people of beastly living, without a God, lawe, religion, or commonwealth (Hakluyt, 6: 167). According to him, "all the regions of Guinea are pure Gentiles, and idolatrous, without profession of any religion, and other knowledge of God, then by the law of nature" (6: 144), which was to say, as Jordan puts it, that black Africans "were not Englishmen" (Jordan, 24). Thomas Middleton’s portrayal of the king of Moors in his pageant The Triumphs of Truth and George Peele’s representation of Muly Mahamet in The Battle of Alcazar reflect these religious biases, as will be illustrated in the next
chapter.

Travel accounts were so replete with astounding tales of the moral depravity of the black African that "long before the first English contact with West Africa, the inhabitants of virtually the entire continent stood confirmed in European literature as lustful and venerous" (Jordan, 33). In the minds of the English people, epithets such as "lascivious," "lecherous" and "lustful," were attributes that fitted well the bestial African. The English believed black Africans "were a lewd, lascivious, and wanton people" (Jordan, 32). Samuel Purchas' opinion of black Africans is representative of most Englishmen's feelings at the time: "[Africans] have no knowledge of God; those that traffique and are conversant among strange Countrey people are civiller then the common sort of people, they are very greedie eaters, and no lesse drinkers, and very lecherous, and theevish, and much addicted to uncleanenesse: one man hath as many wives as hee is able to keepe and maintaine" (Purchas, 6: 251).

Leo Africanus himself reports that "there is no nation under heaven more prone to venery" (1: 180), and "the Negroes . . . have great swarmes of harlots among them; whereupon a man may easily conjecture their manner of living" (1: 187). Jean Bodin reiterated the point: "in Ethiopia . . . the race of men is very keen and lustful" (cited by Jordan, 34). The myth of sexual prowess is one of
the many enduring stereotypes of the black African male that grew out of such embellished reports, and as Walvin points out, "the widespread support for this myth was perhaps one of the most powerful factors in the moulding of racial attitudes between the two sides" (Walvin, 53). Either these writers were too blinded by their sense of moral superiority to see parallels between the manner of living among the African groups they charge with immorality and the concubinage and extra-marital affairs rampant on all continents, including Europe, or they chose to suppress the knowledge. That a number of African cultures have powerful taboos against sexual promiscuity would not perhaps have been known by Renaissance travel writers, but even if it were, such knowledge has never prevented the promulgation of stereotypes by dominant discourses. On the contrary, stereotypes function to repress such knowledge so that the other can act as a screen for the repressed and projected ills of the self.

There are other presumed violations of standards of behaviour associated with Africans that are highlighted by travel writers. Melchior Petoney, a sixteenth-century trader in Africa, refers to black Africans as "the unconstant Negroes" who cannot be trusted (Hakluyt, 5: 49). Leo Africanus connects the Africans of the Zanfara region with "a disposition most sauage and brutish" (3: 831), and those of Numedia with being "principally addicted vnto
treaes, trecherie, murther, theft and robberie" (1: 187). In his introduction to Leo Africanus' text, John Pory speaks of black Africans as "idolators . . . [and] very barbarus" (1.91). The famous English trader, John Hawkins, bitterly condemns Africa as a nation in which "truth" is "seldom or never found" (Hakluyt, 7: 54). This kind of stigmatisation of the African was no doubt geared towards promoting the English image at the expense of those perceived or constructed as England's others, and some, if not most, of these stereotypes still linger today.

One could argue that these negative descriptive formulas are much ado about nothing, for, as some critics have asserted, they were not unique to black Africans. After all, similar epithets attributing savagery, beastliness, stupidity, wildness, uncleanness in clothing, food, and lodging, have also been applied to other socially marginalised groups whom the English viewed as their ethnological antithesis: the Irish papists, the Scots, the First Nations peoples of the New World, and so on. As Lynda Boose points out in her article, "The Getting of a Lawful Race," "the Englishman's overtly stated attitude toward almost all forms of cultural difference was unabashedly contemptuous" (37). However, through a number of thought-provoking questions that she raises about the discourse of race in early modern England, Boose also hints at the possibility that skin complexion was a critical
discriminating element in the discourse of difference.

Two of these questions are particularly pertinent to the skin colour issue. "Was skin colour the most defining feature for constructing Otherness in sixteenth-century England? Precisely how do the attitudes toward black African characters dramatized in Shakespeare’s plays or those of his contemporaries differ from the general contempt attached almost indiscriminately to the various aliens / foreigners / Others / outsiders of Elizabethan England?" (Boose, 36). According to what Ann Thompson says in her review of the Hendricks-Parker volume *Women, ‘Race,’ and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, "while the idea of ‘race’ came eventually to be associated with skin pigmentation, Anglocentric writers [of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries] were accustomed to demonize the Spanish, the Turks, the Irish and the Jews as different and inferior ‘races’ as much as (or even more than) they demonized black people" (Thompson, 29; see also Hodgen, 364–65).

The implication of Thompson’s statement is that skin pigmentation played little role, if any, in England’s demonisation of her others in the early modern period; that all those who were deemed ethnically different from the English were debased equally. This argument would be valid if it did not ignore complexion as the key aspect of differentiation between the English and the Africans in this
period. Skin colour may not have necessarily been the primary defining feature for constructing all England’s various others, especially since the other marginalised groups that Booze and Thompson cite were also white. While it is true that these groups had their fair share of peripheralisation as England’s low others, their demonisation was based only on their behaviour or common characteristics attributed to each group or on their measure (or lack) of civilisation as the English perceived it.

The demonisation of black Africans, on the other hand, was more contemptuous because it was specifically rooted in the colour of their skin and condemned them to the extreme end of the scale from the whites. As already indicated, of all agents of ethnic differentiation in the history of black-white contacts during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, none made an impression on the English so deeply and so permanently as the complexion of black African people. Black skin presented itself visibly as something foreign and terrifying; and largely because of it, "it was maintained by travelers to Africa that the natives of the Dark Continent were derived from an earlier and higher condition of barbarism" (Hodgen, 373) than were the rest of the peripheral groups popularly designated as barbarians. The problem is not so much that anglocentric writers of the period depict England’s other marginalised ethnic groups as demonic as, "or even more" demonic than,
black African people, but that there is more interest among Europeans to ground the otherness of Africans in the colour of their skin. The dark complexion of the majority of Africans was the single trait responsible for their being seen as possessing certain inherent characteristics distinct from even those white Europeans that England viewed as her inferiors.

Anglocentric representations of England's others were ordered around the view that the English were superior to others at large, black or white, by virtue of English civilisation and achievements, and all the other white groups were in turn deemed superior to Africans by virtue of their light skin colour. Both the Irish and the Africans, for example, are negated in English writing, but the appeal to visual immediacy between these two subject peoples determines their placement on the social or even human scale in any evaluation of difference. England's hierarchical ordering of her others, as well as her explicit and implicit attitudes towards them, is perhaps best reflected in a famous passage from the novelist Charles Kingsley's letter to his wife on his visit to Ireland. Kingsley wrote the letter in 1860, but the arrogance and prejudices camouflaged as "common sense" sentiments about black African and Irish people echo those of the early modern period:

I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I don't believe they are our fault. I believe there are not only many more of them than of old, but they are
happier, better, more comfortably fed and lodged under our rule than they ever were. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours. (Lloyd, 76; see also Innes, 12; Gibbons, 96)

This passage deceptively concurs with Boose’s view that "the terminology of primate behaviour developed to describe the Africans as inferior was applied to the Irish as well" (Boose, 37). This is not to say, however, that the Irish and the Africans were seen as co-equals. Although in this scenario of blatant ethnic and racial prejudice, both black Africans and the Irish are reduced to animal status, the English observer is obviously disconcerted by a complication in the orthodox system of differentiation, similitude, and order of identity long based on skin colour. The passage invites us to see the link between chimpanzees and black Africans as "natural" whereas that with the white Irish is deemed unnatural: "if they [the Irish] were black, one would not feel it so much."

Kingsley’s use of the chimpanzee image in this passage reflects his need to distance himself from the Irish who are clearly as white as himself, but in this very act of distancing, he also inadvertently constructs the image of "white negroes" (a derogatory term which Thomas Carlyle was fond of applying to the Irish) whose very sight disconcerts him because it is self-implicating. He is obviously scandalised by what he sees before him: a link between whiteness and ape. His discomfiture underscores the
significance invested in skin colour as a major factor in determining the status or degree in human relations, for implied in the passage is an assumed superiority of the English over the Irish, and of the white Irish over black Africans. It is the skin colour of the Africans that relegates them to the very bottom of the social and human scales. As G.K. Hunter notes, "the basic [English] common man's attitude [was] that all foreigners are curious and inferior--the more foreign the more inferior, in the sense of the proverb quoted by Purchas: 'Three Moors to a Portuguese; three Portuguese to an Englishman'. They had also the basic and ancient sense that black is the colour of sin and death" (Hunter, 33).

The preceding arguments are in no way meant to minimise the extent to which English accounts, both written and oral, demonised and classified as barbarians any other ethnic groups who failed to fit into the English scheme of things, but there is enough evidence to suggest that because of their skin colour, Africans in anglocentric writing are the most demonised spectre of England's others. The ranking of white and black African ethnic groups into superior and inferior positions was no doubt influenced by existing standard English definitions of blackness and whiteness. "Black," as a word in itself, already bore negative connotations. Walvin and Jordan share the view that in England, more than elsewhere in Europe, "the concept of
blackness was loaded with intense meaning." So too, was white, its symbolic opposite. "White and black connoted [polar opposites:] purity and filthiness, virginity and sin, virtue and baseness, beauty and ugliness, beneficence and evil, God and the devil" (Jordan, 7; see also Walvin, 23; Snowden, 179).

Walvin makes an even more interesting observation that highlights the English claim to superiority over nations and, specifically, over the black other: "Whiteness and purity had become even more important since the accession of . . . Queen [Elizabeth], for they were the symbols of the Queen's beauty, and a manifestation of the purity of virginal, queenly government. [Hers was] a reign when cultural values and norms of beauty had come to be expressed precisely in terms of colour" (Walvin, 23 & 27). Significantly, the exaltation of whiteness in relation to the Queen worked to confirm, validate, and reinforce the baseness of blackness with all its associations, and The Oxford English Dictionary, an authoritative text in the "Queen's language," solidifies it. According to the dictionary, even before the sixteenth century, "black" was partly understood as "deeply stained with dirt; soiled, dirty, foul. . . . Having dark or deadly purposes, malignant; pertaining to or involving death, deadly; baneful, disastrous, sinister. . . . [I]niquitous, atrocious, horrible, wicked. . . . Indicating disgrace,
censure, [and] liability to punishment."

In terms of the association of blackness with the majority of African people, it was Englishmen, according to Jordan, who actually described Africans as black, "an exaggerated term which in itself suggests that the Negro's complexion had powerful impact upon their perceptions. Even the peoples of northern Africa seemed so dark that Englishmen tended to call them 'black'.... Blackness became so generally associated with Africa that every African seemed a black man" [sic] (7). Among the English, therefore, black was "an emotionally partisan colour, the handmaid and symbol of baseness and evil, a sign of danger and repulsion" (Jordan, 7). This very idea is reproduced in Shakespeare's Love's Labor's Lost in which black is described as "the badge of Hell / The hue of dungeons and the school of night" (IV.iii.250-51). This definition of "black" in hellish terms automatically renders all its associations negative; that includes all dark-skinned African people. Over time, these associations also came to contain the germs of uneasy relations between black Africans and white Europeans since they provided an easy justification for claims to unequal relations between the two peoples.

For the majority of travel writers, therefore, black Africans did not appear to fit into the human category mainly because of their complexion. Black Africans thus
awakened in Englishmen an irresistible urge to speculate on the reasons for this phenomenon. Many Renaissance theories as to the origin of blackness in dark-skinned people were brought forward, and these were used later more to confirm than to disprove the natural inferiority of black Africans, while validating the superiority of Europeans. Among the most commonly cited explanations are the environmental and scriptural theories. It was generally believed that the African’s exposure to the hot sun by virtue of Africa’s geographical positioning near the equator was responsible for the people’s so-called "scorched" complexion, "so scorched and vexed with the heat of the sunne, that in many places they curse it when it riseth" (Hakluyt, 6: 167). This theory, reported by Eden in 1555, is traced back to Pliny’s Natural History by numerous sources¹ and to Ptolemy by Newman (146) and Jordan (12).

A number of early modern writers, among them George Best, questioned its logic. Best aptly pointed out that there were other equally hot regions in the world, but the people living in those regions were not black: "if the Ethiopians blacknesse came by the heate of the sune, why shoulde not those Americans and Indians also be as blacke as they, seying the sunne is equally distant from both" (Best, 53). In spite of this disclaimer, many writers clung to the

¹For more detailed accounts of this theory, see Best, 53-60; D’Amico, 58; Hakluyt, 7: 262; Hodgen, 276-90, 485-87; Jordan, 12-20; and Snowden, 85-87.
sun-theory with remarkable tenacity. The "truth" of the theory was also validated by biblical sources, for it could be traced back to the statement of the black woman in the Old Testament: I am black but comely . . . . Look not upon me because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me" (Song of Solomon, 1: 5-6).

Best's conclusion, likely shared by many Englishmen, was that the African's blackness was permanent and innate, and no amount of cold was ever going to change that: "I my selfe have seen an Ethiopian as blacke as a cole brought into Englande, who taking a faire Englishe woman to wife, begatte a sonne in all respects as blacke as the father was, although England were his native countrey and an English woman his mother" (Best, 54). This theory, one of the most reproduced in the drama of the period, was equally reinforced and legitimised by the holy scriptures: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" (Jeremiah, 13: 23). Karen Newman's suggestion that Best's account cited above does more than simply refute the environmental theory makes sense in view of Best's underscoring the black/fair, Ethiopian/English polarities repeatedly. Not only does Best's account "emphasize the contrariety of black and white, [but his] repetitions also betray the Englishman's ethnocentric preoccupation with his native isle" (Newman, 146). Best's own speculation on the origin of the African's dark skin was that the blackness
"proceedeth of some naturall infection of the first inhabitants of that countrey, and so all the whole progenie of them descended are still poluted with the same blot of infection" (Best, 54-55).

What Best’s idea of a "diseased" skin has in common with other Englishmen’s claim that blackness was nothing less than a curse, is that both looked to the story of Noah in Genesis to authenticate their claims that blackness was divinely inspired. Their own version of the Genesis story traces the origin of the black race to Noah’s curse on his grandson Canaan (Cain/Chus in other versions) and his descendants. Canaan was the son of Ham (Cham), who was the son of Noah. The original Genesis story is that Ham "saw the nakedness of his father" as he, Noah, lay asleep in his tent, drunk. Ham went to relay the news to his two brothers, Shem and Japheth, who immediately covered their father’s nakedness while averting their eyes so as not to see it. When Noah awoke, he cursed Canaan (Chus/Cain) and relegated him to become "a servant of servants" to his brothers as well as to his two uncles (Genesis, 9: 20-27).

In this original account, the absence of colour makes it appear less of an issue. Black or white is of no consequence. Some of the English travel accounts, however, deviated from this original narrative. Their reworking of it to include skin colour reflects Elizabethan England’s attitudes towards her others and imposes a dichotomous
relation between "us" and "them."

George Best's version, for example, does add complexion to the original narrative. He makes all Noah's three sons white, and argues that they and their wives "by course of nature should have begotten and brought forth white children" (Best, 55). But, Best goes on, the devil's envy of Adam caused this evil spirit to tempt one of Adam's sons, Ham (Cham), to transgress and disobey his father by being sexually intimate with his wife. Noah, "at the commandment of God," had forbidden his sons from engaging in "carnall copulation with their wives" (Best, 55),

for the which wicked and detestable fact, as an example for contempt of almitie God, and disobedience of parents, God would a sonne should bee borne whose name was Chus, who not onely it selfe, but all his posteritie after him should bee so blacke and loathsome, that it might remaine a spectacle of disobedience to all the worlde. And of this blacke and cursed Chus came all these blacke Moores which are in Africa. (Best, 56)

In his 1555 English translation of The Fardle of Facions, Johann Boemus reworked the scriptural version of Noah's curse as well. In his narrative, it was Ham who severed the Adamic bond and moved to Arabia until people became too many and dispersed into different places. Those who accompanied Ham are said to have fallen into error, so that in the end, many of those who went to Egypt "became so uncivil and barbarous 'as hardly any difference be descerned between them and brute beasts.'" Shem and Japheth, on the other hand, content to "live on their own limits" as they
had been instructed by their parents and elders, "handed on the Adamic tradition to their children and their children's children. They worshipped 'according to the older way,' a fact which explains . . . why the true God 'remained hidden in one onely people untill the tyme of Messias'" (cited by Hogden, 234-35). Both of these re-visions expose what Newman refers to as "stock prejudices against blacks in Elizabethan and Jacobean culture: the link between blackness and the devil, the myth of black sexuality, the problem of black subjection to authority, here displaced onto obedience owed to the father and to God" (Newman, 147). Boemus' version divides the human race into two clear categories: the civilized and the uncivilized, the advanced and the barbaric, the Christians and the heathens.

In the final analysis, none of these versions successfully establishes the actual origin of blackness. The biblical solution is based on a narrow, Euro-Christian system of beliefs and ideas; the Genesis story itself holds a bias in favour of one people. Ironically, in negating the black other, these writers subvert the very divinity of God in whose image the human race is believed to have been created, and in whose eyes all are supposed to be equal. They use the scriptures to legitimise their theories of the origin of blackness, for "through legitimation," as Dollimore aptly puts it, "the existing social order--that is, existing social relations--are 'naturalised,' thus
appearing to have the unalterable character of natural law" (Dollimore, 50). The two travel writers cited above plunder the Bible to validate the charge of a natural inferiority of black African people, but the very act itself also reveals an Elizabethan culture's collective anxiety about the power of the other.

All in all, the African skin colour was so diametrically opposed to their own that the English gaze reduced the Africans themselves to objects of ambivalent fascination: inferior humans or superior animals. The very designation of blackness involved what Edward Said, commenting on his Orientalist discourse, terms "an already pronounced evaluative judgment [on a visible] identity best described as lamentably alien" (Said, Orientalism, 207). To represent the black subject, therefore, is automatically to conceive the subject of difference. Such divisions are constantly structured and legitimated in the travel accounts as well as in the drama through the espousal of moral and aesthetic polarities of goodness and evil, beauty and ugliness. The representation of black Africans involves a reproduction of hierarchical yet interdependent relations between the dominant culture and its culturally subordinate others. To create and maintain the myth of a human race naturally divided into the superior and the inferior, the English travel writers had continually to define and redefine themselves through the marginalisation or exclusion
of the other. This very act of exclusion is also constitutive of their identity. The English cannot claim any kind of superiority unless they set themselves off against an object of inferiority. Such a distinction reinforces a system of extremities of the exalted and the base.

Nowhere is this so clearly demonstrated as in the period’s common practice of actually bringing back to England some of those people considered strange and marginal. As already mentioned in the Introduction, the period’s show-casing of England’s inferior others in all kinds of art forms was closely linked with England’s show-casing herself as the superior "us." Through trade and travel, the socially peripheral become symbolically central as the imperial wonders of England’s overseas expansionist policy. What was perceived as English uniqueness and supremacy, as the inferiority of England’s low others, as cultural difference and so on, were all on display for national consumption. The growing popularity of this display of "us" versus the "them" could partly explain why there appears to be more and crueller stereotyping in the Tudor/Stuart period than had earlier existed. That something heightened was going on is shown by the lengths the England went to, to define herself in opposition to her exotic others.

Between 1530 and 1557, for example, a collection of
foreign "curiosities" in human form invaded the London scene. A number of critics have noted an incident when a Brazilian "savage king" was brought back to London by William Frobisher and presented to King Henry VIII. He was received not as a king in his own right, but as a "marvel" for the consumption of King Henry and all the nobility. They were fascinated by the foreign king's "apparel, behaviour, and gesture," which they found "very strange." He died at sea on his way back to his native soil (Hampden, 21; see also Mullaney, 69). The English trader, John Lok, is reported to have brought back to London five "blacke Moores" or "black slaves" (Hakluyt, 6: 176) who were "kept till they could speak the language," and were later returned to their native land "to be a helpe to Englishmen," most likely as interpreters or translators (see Hakluyt, 6: 200-25). During their stay in London, they are reported to have been a novelty to Englishmen. Queen Elizabeth herself is reported to have desired to see this "spectacle of strangeness," to use Ben Jonson's term (The Masque of Queens, line 17), and Hodgen reports that "negroes and Indians, stolen by sailors or slavers, were often exhibited in European capitals side by side with apes and baboons" (417-18). The trend became so popular that the alien "curios" inevitably found their way into the drama of the day (Cawley, 357), a trend clearly reflected in Trinculo's remark in The Tempest referred to in the Introduction (see
Undoubtedly, such a display of otherness as spectacle not only reflects an on-going process of colonialism with a twist, but it also confirms an imposition of imperial superiority onto an unsuspecting other. As Greenblatt comments in reference to the "New World"'s natives taken to England as human curios, "the native seized as a token and then displayed, and embalmed is quite literally captured by and for European representation" (Marvellous Possessions, 119). The display serves to set off the "civilised" English from the "primitive" outsider who is even urged, as in the case cited above of the five black African interpreters-in-training, to mimic androcentric forms of culture. Furthermore, this public display of "human curiosities" was often temporary, "maintained and upheld" just long enough to validate the power and superiority of those who sought to showcase them as inferior, and to justify domination. The relations between the English and the black African in particular had an added angle: black Africans became central to a popular, lucrative trade in human cargo that later evolved into England's black African domestic slavery (see Walvin, 9). Once the cycle of debasement in slavery and prejudice in the mind was underway, as Jordan remarks, it was automatically self-reinforcing.

These prejudicial attitudes were picked up, nurtured, and transmitted by other artistic forms as well. The
English Renaissance pictorial tradition exploited existing stereotypes of the Moor and reinforced the idea that the black African occupied the lowest spot in the hierarchy of human beings. The sixteenth-century painting which William Cohen cites in his work, for example, is characteristic of this ordering by Europe, of her others. From Cohen's description, the painting "depicts Indians from Asia and North America and blacks from Africa. While the first two peoples are shown fully dressed, the Africans are represented as naked. In the background behind the Africans appears a snake curled around a tree. The Africans were thus perceived as closer to a life of lust and to Satan" (Cohen, 8) than were the other two marginalised groups.

This pictorial tradition extends to include similar stereotypical aspects of the black African based on the drama of the period. A woodcut illustration taken from the Folger Library copy of a broadside ballad based on Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus illustrates the point. The picture, reproduced in The Riverside Shakespeare (Fig. 1), depicts "several of the principal incidents in the play and ballad" (1022). The white characters are fully dressed, but the representation of Aaron the Moor, naked and buried waist-deep in the ground, involves exaggerated facial features often ascribed to black Africans: curly, woolly hair; large, flat nose; extreme blackness, nakedness, and visible difference (see Best, 53). Although in the Peacham
drawing of a sixteenth-century production of the same play, Aaron is dressed in gear similar to what Tamora’s Gothic sons are wearing (Fig. 2), he is the only one of the Gothic party depicted standing, wielding a sword (emblem of violence), pointing at its blade, and seemingly engaged in an exchange with the Roman soldiers. He is made to appear fully in command as the "chief architect and plotter of these woes," as Marcus accuses him of being at the end of the play (V.iii.122). If this drawing does not portray the Moor as naked and therefore as plausibly lascivious, it nevertheless associates him with violence and cruelty.

Another such picture is an illustration of the *Spanish Tragedy* produced in Roger Stilling’s *Love and Death in Renaissance Tragedy* (Fig. 3). Among the three characters in the drawing is a man whose black face identifies him with Africa, whose turbaned head suggests tokens of orientalism, and whose (clearly ungloved) white hands and style of clothing (other than the turban) locates him in the West. This picture contributes to the argument about the incompleteness in racial or cultural stereotyping or the distorted image of African reality. While such partial representation serves to highlight only the face of villainy, it also suggests synecdochic rather than naturalistic thinking on the artists’ or engravers’ part, and reflects the carelessness with which England transmitted a distorted view of her others.
Fig. 2. A Peacham drawing of a sixteenth-century production of *Titus Andronicus*, reproduced in Eldred Jones' *Othello's Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965) Plate 3.
Fig. 3. Roger Stilling's use of an illustration of a scene from *The Spanish Tragedy* in his *Love and Death in Renaissance Tragedy*. 
Perhaps one of the most recurring, widely circulated stereotypes of the Moor in the pictorial tradition as well as in the drama represents the African skin colour as either a curse or a permanent infection through the emblematic depiction of the impossible task of "wash[ing] an Ethiop white." An ancient saying, "to wash the Ethiop white," had been in use in early modern England, and even much earlier, to express the idea of an impossible task or of labouring in vain. Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists exploit it fully, as will be seen in later chapters. According to Karen Newman, "scholars speculate that it originated with Aesop, where the image of scrubbing an Aethiopian is used to demonstrate the power and permanence of nature" (142). This image, produced in Geoffrey Whitney’s *A Choice of Emblemes* (57) and reproduced in Newman (141), is meant to demonstrate emblematically, the impossibility of washing the Ethiop white (Fig. 4). There exists, as well, a drawing of a nineteenth-century Pears’ Soap advertisement (Newman, 142) based on the same proverb though with inverted meaning: the Pears soap is in the process of achieving the impossible (Fig. 5). While the public exhibition of England’s others and their pictorial representation in fragmented images inevitably helped preserve and fix in frame existing myths and negative assumptions, and encouraged the division of people into categorically separate groups according to skin colour, they also fired the imagination of Renaissance
LEAVE of with paine, the blackamore to showre,
With washinge ofte, and wipinge more then due:
For thou shalt finde, that Nature is of power,
Doe what thou canste, to kepe his former hue:
Though with a forke, wee Nature thriste away,
Shee turns againe, if wee withdrawe our hande:
And though, wee ofte to conquer her affaire,
Yet all in vaine, shee turns if full we be stande:
Then evermore, in what thou doest affaire,
Let reason rule, and doe the thinges thou naie.

--- equus,
Nunquam ex degenere sert generosum festo,
Et nunquam ex solidum cordium sert abs arte.

Fig. 4. A woodcut illustration of an emblem produced from
Geoffrey Whitney’s book, A Choice of Emblemes (57), in which
two white men are trying in vain to scrub a black African
man white. The poem printed beneath the woodcut moralises
the ancient proverb, "to wash an Ethiop white" or to labour
in vain.
Fig. 5. An illustration of a nineteenth-century advertisement for Pears Soap using the proverb, "to wash the Ethiop white" in order to demonstrate the power of the soap to achieve the impossible and wash a black skin almost white. The advertisement is reproduced in Karen Newman’s essay, "‘And Wash the Ethiop’: Femininity and the Monstrous in Othello," in Shakespeare Reproduced. Eds. Jean Howard and Marion F. O’Connor (New York: Methuen, 1987) 142.
writers and dramatists such as Ben Jonson whose *The Masque of Blackness* and *The Masque of Beauty* allegorically reenact the proverb of washing the Ethiop white.

On the whole, travel literature of the late sixteenth to the early seventeenth century is a mine of information from which dramatists and other artists freely drew persons and ideas, regardless of whether or not the information received was authentic. Texts written or compiled by such figures as Leo Africanus, and in particular, the English clergyman, Richard Hakluyt, came to be viewed, over the years, as authoritative and influential sources despite the scepticism surrounding most of them (see Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions*, 31-34). Consequently, any information they supplied was taken as empirically true and worked to validate and to consolidate the negation of the black other. This partly explains why such strong, almost venomously negative views of Africa and of Africans have received such wide credence in the West across the centuries. The English act of naming and displaying dark-skinned Africans "black" was inappropriate, but they had the privilege of owning the language and the power to name or to "christen."

The Africans, on the other hand, were passive objects of representation, spoken for, but never speaking. They were represented in accordance with a hegemonic impulse by which they were constructed as a stable and unitary entity.
As Edward Said argues, "the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xiii). Through the inferiorising process of reproducing stereotypes that warp African reality, the English culture exercises the kind of power defined by Stephen Greenblatt, a "power, whose quintessential sign is the ability to impose one's fictions upon the world: the more outrageous the fiction, the more impressive the manifestation of power" (Greenblatt, *Self-Fashioning*, 13).

All the more reason why one must keep in mind that while the written word of English travellers and chroniclers may have been regarded as authoritative by some readers, the extent of its "whole truth" must be taken with a grain of salt. This idea is based on three significant points summarised below. One, Europe developed the concept of black identity in the wake of its voyages of discovery and evangelism in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and imposed this concept on other people and other continents. Two, the travel literature itself was self-interested; it did not seek merely to record, but also to promote English cultural superiority as well as England's emerging nationalism and her imperial expansionist policy overseas. Three, the reliability of the authors and compilers of these accounts, as Greenblatt argues in relation to Mandeville's
credibility (*Marvellous Possessions* 30-34; 48-49), remains questionable.

Europe's imposition of her concept of black identity on the rest of the world had an enormous impact on the general perceptions of African blacks, but more significantly, it was a one-sided, eurocentric version. The total picture of black African people one gets from English Renaissance travel literature is created by and in the words of mainstream cultural groups with private agendas. The writers had one advantage over their objects of study: they controlled the history and the word. They owned not only the exclusive power to narrate (see also Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions*, 9-11), but also, and more importantly, the exclusive power to block other narratives from emerging. Leo Africanus' *History and Description of Africa*, for example, reveals that an African literary culture had evolved over the years, at least in those parts of Africa which his written account covers. Long before the Italians had inhabited Barbary and subdued "those provinces of Africa," and long before the Arabs had invaded Africa and "burnt all the African bookes . . . Africans in times past had their owne proper and peculiar letters, wherein they described their doings and exploites" (1: 165-66). They had orators and poets, books of their own (2: 305-306; 2: 473), and educational institutions such as the "most noble college" in Morocco (2: 267-68).
Yet the existence of some literate, enlightened people and regions in "the dark continent" was largely ignored or suppressed by most English travel accounts, or treated as peripheral after-thoughts. The only "good native" was a Christianised one, such as the legendary African emperor, Prestor John, who is believed to have presided over Christian colonies in Ethiopia (Hakluyt, 6: 144-45; 168-69). Such exclusion ignored the possibility that the Africans could possibly have represented their world from their own perspective, if only to neutralize contemporary European accounts. Consequently, travel accounts of the African by the European came to be accepted by the Elizabethans "as the principal authority, an active point of energy that made sense not just of colonizing activities but of exotic... peoples" (Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xxi) whose subjectivity is lost in their enforced muteness. Catherine Belsey's point that "to be a subject is to speak, to identify with the 'I' of an utterance, to be the agent of the action inscribed in the verb" (15) is a valid one. In the travel literature, however, African people are denied such subjectivity. They remain but constructs of a mainstream eurocentric version that promotes the dominant culture by undermining the culture under description.

The growing stature of England in world politics is well-reflected and celebrated in the travel literature of the time. The literature did not seek merely to record, but
also to promote England's imperial expansionist policy overseas and to boost her emerging spirit of nationalism. George Best patriotically writes, for example, that the English "are inferioure to no other nation, in making greate and long voyages by sea," then adds, "knowe I no nation comparable unto us in taking in hande long travels and voyages by lande" (41). It didn't seem to matter to Best that the Spanish and the Portuguese had been masters of the seas long before the English joined in. Hakluyt's famous The Principal Navigations as well could easily be read as English propaganda. The voyagers "praise England, promote colonization, rally support for the growing naval forces . . . and reveal the weaknesses of England's great enemy, Spain" (Blacker, 3). In his description of the achievements of English seamen, Irwin Blacker uses language that captures the spirit of England then as an emerging superior power. By 1600, he says, "English seamen . . . had probed Russia to Persia, had raped the Spanish colonies in the New World, raided the Spanish ports, and smashed the Armada" (Blacker, 1-2; emphasis mine).

Blacker's forceful rhetoric not only reflects on the English people's sense of superiority, but it also reveals that this superiority was built on the debasement of the others whom they needed to bring under their control in order to define themselves as superior. The whole idea of England's overseas expansion and rule over the so-called
inferior races carried with it, as Said argues, "a privileged status" within the English culture (Culture and Imperialism, xxiii). The negating of the black African in the English Renaissance travel accounts thus constitutes an advertisement of the self-proclaimed superior position of the English, inevitably producing the hierarchical relations of white dominance and black subjugation. Travel literature becomes inextricably linked with the imperial process as it unfolds a eurocentric world-view "capable of warping the perspectives of reader and author equally" (Said, Culture and Imperialism, xx; see also Bartels, xiv-xv, and Greenblatt, Marvellous Possessions, 9-10). The credibility of its representations is thus undermined by self-interested agendas, an idea well-explored by some of the dramatists of the day.

This questionable credibility extends to the authors and compilers of these accounts. The information about Africa and her inhabitants given by the group of voyagers in Hakluyt’s collection and by such other well-known figures as Samuel Purchas and Leo Africanus, covers only the north of Africa and the West African coast. Leo Africanus, for example, covers the interior of only parts of northern Africa. His work is called a Description of Africa, yet, as Robert Brown argues in his introduction to the text, it "is merely a description of those parts lying north of the Equator which were personally known to the author and his
informants . . . [T]he interior of the continent south of the old settled regions of the north, except for a short distance from the coast, was a terra incognita" (Brown, in Leo Africanus, lv-lvi). Furthermore, with the exception of Leo Africanus, the diversity of the continent and its people as a whole is largely ignored by these "authorities," and so are the distinctions in the skin complexion of Africans. The black Africans are generally treated as a homogeneous, collective entity with a monoculture, uniform features, and unvarying behaviours. The Africa the so-called authorities portray is not at all representative.

Besides Leo Africanus' Description of Africa, Richard Hakluyt's anthology was one of the best known and relied on as an authority on Africa during the Renaissance period. The collected materials are "the very papers of empire": the English people at large, including "the Queen, her ministers, her merchants, and her captains" looked to it to "prepare them psychologically for the empire." English merchant venturers "sought the necessary information from the Hakluyts." The Elizabethan government and the patriotic literati relied on it "to promote the emerging nationalism of England" (Blacker, 1-4). Yet the material Hakluyt had to work with raises questions concerning the authenticity of the anthology's account of territories and their inhabitants newly discovered by Europeans. As Walvin points out,

Hakluyt expanded and revised [his collection of travel accounts] continually [from 1589] until his
death in 1616. Unfortunately, some of the individual narrations which he passed on to an eager reading public contained serious flaws and distortions. For his material on the early English voyages to Guinea—Windham's to Benin in 1553 and John Lok's to Mina in 1554-55—Hakluyt was obliged to rely on the earlier manuscript produced by Richard Eden. Eden had embellished these narratives with fantasy. (Walvin, 17)

Samuel Purchas's travels as well "had never carried him more than two hundred miles from his birthplace," yet, as Hodgen suggests, he "was probably the first collector of religious rites on a world-wide scale" (Hodgen, 195). Furthermore, when Purchas set out to describe the radically divergent religious practices of other nations, he described them in terms of his own Christian world-view whereby a mosque or a temple could have no other name but a church, or a guru no other name but a priest. Johann Boemus too, was engaged in cataloguing the manners and customs of many nations in The Fardle of Fациons. According to Hodgen, however, he too had never travelled in those parts "nor been eyewitness to the things he describes" (135). The reliability and expertise of travel writers thus remain suspect, though not perhaps their sincerity of purpose. When one considers the overall African image in the travel literature, therefore, one is tempted to accept Brown's suggestion that what were then purported to be real portraits of African people in these travel accounts was in fact not. "The artist had nothing better than his imagination to go upon" (Brown, in Leo Africanus, lvi). It
is this unreliability of what were understood to be authoritative texts that partly "caused and perpetuated many errors" (Brown, in Leo Africanus, lviii) in the representation of African peoples.

When all is said and done, what the denigration of the African in English Renaissance travel literature clearly demonstrates is that more often than not, the English found it necessary to measure African standard practices with an English yardstick (Jordan, 25), denying in the process, the existence of an African reality. From the mid-sixteenth to the early seventeenth century, English travellers' written accounts acted as the dominant collective voice that put stress on difference between the so-called whites and blacks by constructing, overtly and otherwise, extremely oppositional and hierarchical definitions of superior and inferior subjects. As an evolving, powerful socio-economic group at the centre of England's cultural and political power, these English travellers gained, throughout their exchange with black African others, the privileged power and authority to define and hierarchise humanity. With themselves securely as the "us," they licensed the black African "them" to remain on the margins of culture. African blacks thus came to occupy an important, very powerful symbolic domain in the English mind in general, despite, and probably because of, their actual social marginalisation.

The influence of travel literature on the imaginations
of Tudor/Stuart fictional writers, and in particular, on the
dramatists, cannot be underestimated. As Winthrop Jordan
argues,

written records are not merely fossils of momentary
opinion but links in a chain of cultural
transmission. In varying measure, every written
expression of attitude and opinion exerts influence
on every reader. Insofar as they were widely
disseminated, then, written expressions concerning
the Negro (however indirectly) functioned as social
memory traces, as fixed points of reference and
departure. (Jordan, 587)

Indeed, the truth of Jordan’s argument is well
demonstrated in the fictional writings of the time, which
become a significant link in this chain of cultural
transmission. Travel literature and other artistic media
proved particularly influential in moulding English
perceptions as well as misconceptions of the black African
character. This is especially illustrated in the
reproductions of negative stereotypes of the black African
then in circulation in pageants and masques, and in the
dramatic works, either through symbolism or directly through
ccharacter and action. The next chapter will explore the
dominant discourse’s stereotypical valorisation of whiteness
and the debasement of blackness as a means of promoting, as
well as of fixing into the human psyche, the stereotypical
idea raised in the travel literature and circulating in
society, that beauty, both of soul and of body, lies only in
Europe. This will be demonstrated through a number of texts
which have been selected on the basis that they explore most
clearly the view of blackness and whiteness as antithetical metaphors for ugliness and beauty, goodness and evil, purity and sin.
Chapter Two


The increased "knowledge" about Africa, her people, and their blackness generated by the oral accounts and written records of English Renaissance travellers to foreign lands, effectively fed the creative imaginations of the time. Certain artists of the Tudor/Stuart period reproduce, in their writing, various stereotypes of the black African, and in the process reveal the stereotype functioning as a repressive as well as an enabling tool in the hands of a dominant English culture anxious to fashion and preserve its cultural uniqueness. The texts' insistence on difference between self and other by means of the stereotyping process becomes a necessary strategy on the part of the agents of dominant ideologies to exercise or to maintain power and a sense of cultural supremacy through the exclusion of the other.

The representation of blackness or of the black African character in Renaissance texts generally reveals an ideological sanctioning of essentialist claims to natural differences between self and other. The essentialising is achieved on two levels of representation. On one level, the subject for Chapter Three, are dramatic texts such as Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1594) and Thomas Dekker’s
Lust’s Dominion (1599), whose discourse of difference revolves around the representation of black African characters’ actions and behaviour in terms that demonstrate the way Africans are represented in stock types as a homogeneous entity with a monoculture, uniform features, and unchanging behaviour. This uniformity serves to propagate, validate, and confirm assumptions of assumed natural differences within the human race.

On another level is a representation of otherness by certain texts that exploit colours and characters in the form of images that reinforce traditional meanings of blackness and whiteness as diametrically opposed value systems both morally and aesthetically. This level of representation forms the focus for the present chapter, which grounds its discussion in certain texts that have been largely ignored in analyses of cultural impressions or of the black presence. These include George Peele’s The Battle of Alcazar (1588/89), Ben Jonson’s The Masque of Blackness (1606) and The Masque of Beauty (1608), John Marston’s Sophonisba (1606), Thomas Middleton’s pageant, The Triumphs of Truth (1613), and John Fletcher’s The Knight of Malta (1616). Although George Peele is of a different generation from these Jacobean writers, the difference of a decade underscores how little had actually changed in terms of extolling English Protestant values while devaluing other cultural beliefs and practices. The emblematic debasement
of blackness and elevation of whiteness, however, seem more intense in the Jacobean texts above than in Peele’s play, most likely because The Battle of Alcazar is based on actual historical events.

We have seen from the previous chapter some Renaissance travel accounts of theories that attempt to explain how blackness came to be associated with ugliness (black Africans are said to have been so angry with the sun for scorching their skin that they cursed it [Hakluyt, 6: 167]), with "some natural infection" in the blood, or with disobedience or sin (Best, 54-55). This chapter will demonstrate how the literary texts by Peele, Jonson, Marston, Middleton, and Fletcher explore traditional definitions, as well as associations of blackness and whiteness delineated by travel literature and current in the culture, to reproduce and maintain fixed impressions of blackness as symbolic of ugliness and moral degeneracy, and of whiteness as representing beauty and goodness, an ideal state to which others must aspire.

One of the key factors shaping and maintaining colour prejudices in the English Renaissance period is that traditional definitions of blackness and whiteness, which, as in the travel accounts, are shown to be heavily loaded with moral judgment, were extended to include people’s skin colour. Since the evaluation of skin-pigmentation moved along a continuum of light to dark, the so-called white and
black people came to stand at the opposite poles of the cultural and/or human value-systems. In the two sets of texts named above, conventional meanings of black and white are insisted on and boundaries of difference are secured along national, religious, and racial lines of demarcation.

The rhetoric of colour and of religious difference works to valorise England, Christianity, and whiteness as much as it works to negate Africa, religions other than Christianity, and blackness. The representation of the other thus involves a decidedly colour-prejudiced dynamic embedded in language, a powerful force that works to perpetuate existing cultural stereotypes and to reinforce the claim to natural differences between self and other. In general, the texts by Marston, Fletcher, Peele, Middleton, and Jonson deal not so much with rounded, black African characters as with what their skin colour symbolically represents in aesthetic and moral terms; they thus focus on manipulating stereotypical impressions of colour rather than character and action, to exalt one colour and debase the other.

Part of this exaltation of whiteness and debasement of blackness is transmitted through the language of difference embedded in the culture. The idea that language shapes a culture’s perspective and attitudes is well summarised in a statement relevant to this discussion made in an anonymous 1967 editorial in the Saturday Review entitled "The
Environment of Language" which Robert B. Moore cites in his article, "Racism in the English Language." Language, Moore quotes,

has as much to do with the philosophical and political conditioning of a society as geography or climate . . . . people in Western cultures do not realize the extent to which their racial attitudes have been conditioned since early childhood by the power of words to ennoble or condemn, augment or detract, glorify or demean. Negative language infects the subconscious of most Western people from the time they first learn to speak. Prejudice is not merely imparted or superimposed. It is metabolized in the bloodstream of society.

(cited in Moore, 340)

Although Moore is discussing racist language as it functions in the United States, the basic concept of the power of language to debase, elevate, empower, infect, or otherwise shape our perceptions is applicable to any discourse of difference, or to any relations of domination and subordination. Renaissance dramatists, for example, demonstrate in their plays, a full awareness of the constructive and destructive power of language. In Marston's The Wonder of Women or the Tragedy of Sophonisba, the heroine, Sophonisba, acknowledges the power of words invested in vows (the heavily misgendered speech from the wonder of women notwithstanding): "speach makes us men, and thers no other bond / Twixt man and man, but words" (II.i.119–20). Shakespeare's Benedict in Much Ado About Nothing complains to Don Pedro of the destructive element in Beatrice's sharp tongue:

She told me . . . that I was the Prince's jester, that
I was duller than a great thaw, huddling jest upon jest with such impossible conveyance upon me that I stood like a man at a mark, with a whole army shooting at me. She speaks poniards, and every word stabs. If her breath were as terrible as her terminations, there were no living near her, she would infect to the north star. (II.i.242-50)

Benedict's tongue-in-cheek complaint conveys the sense that language has the power to undermine one's sense of selfhood or dignity. The use of biased terminology in particular carries with it certain implications about those with whom it is being associated and, in the process, creates and/or perpetuates demeaning stereotypes.

The use of the term "black" within the colour discourse, for example, almost always evokes negative feelings. As Robert Moore says in his discussion on "a Short Play on 'Black' and 'White' Words," to blacken one's name is to defame. To denigrate is to darken. A black eye is a mark of shame or of violence. Black words imply hostility. To be black-hearted is to be mean or malevolent. Common descriptive phrases such as black cat, blacklist, black sheep, black lie, and blackmail all carry sinister or demeaning overtones, while more often than one cares to remember, we speak of how things are or are not seen in terms of black and white—in terms of what is entirely wrong or entirely right (Moore, 332). Research on the subject of blackness indicates that in languages other than English, negative values have also been assigned to the colour black. According to William Cohen examining the French encounter
with black Africans, among the Greeks, black was associated with dirt in both the physical and moral sense, and it also connoted sinister intent (14). Among the Romans, as Frank M. Snowden Jr. notes, black was a symbol of death and filth in contrast to white, which represented life and purity (179), and it is common knowledge that in Christian symbolism, the colour black signalled sinfulness and God’s curse on the children of Ham.

This type of black terminology currently present in everyday usage has the power to infect the subconscious as the treatment of black African characters in English Renaissance texts demonstrates. In Marston’s Sophonisba, Webster’s The White Devil, and Fletcher’s The Knight of Malta, the term black is used symbolically to heighten the evil that pervades either individuals or the society of the plays. The main plot of Sophonisba revolves around the constancy of Sophonisba’s love for her country and for her noble but much wronged husband, Massinissa. Her sacrificial death is occasioned by her determination to remain true to her marriage vows and to help her husband out of a conflicting situation that would have otherwise forced him to break his own. For this, she earns herself powerful patriarchal praise as "a female glory / (The wonder of a constancie so fixt / That Fate it selfe might well grow envious)" (Prologus, 20-22).

Sophonisba’s faith as well as her husband’s in their
love both for each other and for their country, is contrasted to the spineless Carthaginian senate's waffling in the face of a Roman invasion, and to the treasonous betrayal of the lustful Syphax. The loyalties of the opportunistic Carthaginian senate shift in favour of whatever side they deem is winning, even when it means siding with the enemy. Most of all, however, Sophonisba's and Massinissa's "constancy" in love and in patriotism is especially contrasted to the behaviour of the self-serving traitor, Syphax, who readily offers to join the invading Roman forces against his own country as he relentlessly pursues Sophonisba with the help of her serving maid, to gratify his lust. In this all-African cast and setting (except for the invading Romans) the play clearly does not concern itself with stock cultural stereotypes. For purposes of emphasising the prevalent evil, however, the play does indulge in the rhetoric of blackness that highlights the colour's symbolic associations.

The text contains such phrases as "blacke vexations" (I.i.15), "blackest actions" (II.i.33), "black knaves" (III.i.10), "darke windes" (IV.i.105), "blacke cloude" (106), "black rites" (113), "blacke . . . fumes" (137), and "black powers" (V.i.27). These expressions employ blackness as an adjective to heighten the Carthaginian senate's conspiratorial aura and betrayal of Massinissa and of Carthage, to highlight Syphax's evil intents, and to
intensify the witch Erichtho's demonic rites. In *The Knight of Malta* as well, phrases such as "dark deeds" (I.iii.246), "black cloud" (I.i.146), and "dark day" (II.v.140) are frequently used as forms of negation. Oriana, the heroine of the play, bemoans her fate in images of darkness and doom, speaking of "this black mansion, / The Image of my grave" (II.v.26-27), and of a place (as well as of her state of mind) that is "black as dark as hell" (II.vi.48). But perhaps it is in *The White Devil* that the term black is used most obsessively for all forms of deviousness, abuse, debasement, and degradation. Images of a "black cloud" (IV.iii.99), "black lake" (V.ii.83), "black charnel" (V.vi.268), "black deeds" (V.iii.252; V.v.12; V.vi.298), and "black fury" (V.vi.224) all act as a backdrop to the death, corruption, betrayal, and general moral decay that engulf this Italian society.

Besides the wholesale list of phrases in which black plays an active role of negation, characters exploit these traditional definitions of blackness by adopting existing phrases of blackness to undermine the reputation of anyone who is not favourable to them. Flamineo disapprovingly speaks of his brother-in-law, Camillo, as "a lousy slave that within this twenty years rode with the black-guard in the Duke's carriage 'mongst spits and dripping-pans" (I.ii.130-32). As Clifford Leech explains in the John Russell Brown's 1966 edition of *The White Devil*, black guard
is "a common term for the lowest menials of a noble household" (Webster, 132; 19n). Flamineo employs the term no doubt to demean Camillo by adopting a phrase commonly understood as a term of debasement. On a separate occasion, when Brachiano is defending Vittoria, he dismisses Francisco's accusations of her as a strumpet, as "black slander" (II.i.60), while Monticelso plans to publicise Vittoria's "black lust" so as to "make her infamous / To all our neighbouring kingdoms" (III.i.7-8). Monticelso's choice of black as a qualifier for lust, though not meant as a racial slur, is effectively used as a term of debasement. In this context, it is meant to conjure up images of lust's negative extremities--its morbidity--which are aimed at degrading Vittoria's personhood and at tarnishing her image.

Francisco draws on blackness as a negative term as well when he tries to convince Monticelso that the evidence against Vittoria is circumstantial; he does not believe Vittoria "hath a soul so black / To act a deed so bloody" (III.ii.183-85). In this case, blackness is equated with inner corruption. Furthermore, Monticelso has in his possession a book spoken of by those who know it as his "black book" (IV.i.33), so called because, "though it teach not / The art of conjuring, yet in it lurk / The names of many devils" (IV.i.34-36). The book earns its black adjective and its link with the devil from its infamous function of recording society's social outcasts--those
perceived or designated as social deviants. The book may not teach the "black art" of conjuring, as Monticelso puts it, but it is nevertheless connected with the devil and with unseemly deeds.

Again in the Brown edition of The White Devil, Leech explains that the phrase "black book" was "originally used of certain official books bound in black, among which was one used for recording abuses in monasteries under Henry VIII: later it was widely used of lists of rogues and villains" (Webster, 93; 33n). The staging of the black book, therefore, is also a staging of deviancy—a means of containment crucial to the exercise and maintenance of power represented by the corrupt Church and State, but the very act of staging also works to expose Monticelso as a cunning manipulator.

Blackness is also associated with degrading metaphors for ugliness and revulsion. Marcello, for instance, likens Zanche, Vittoria’s black African serving maid, to a scarecrow when he declares he "had rather she were pitch’d upon a stake / In some new-seeded garden, to affright / Her fellow crows thence" (V.i.196-98) rather than see her married to his brother, Flamineo. It is important to note here that in other respects, Webster represents Marcello as a sympathetic character, an innocent victim of Flamineo’s brutality. By putting anti-black invectives in Marcello’s mouth, therefore, he wants to show how the pervasive
language of prejudice infects the subconscious of even his sympathetic characters. Marcello’s dehumanising of Zanche reveals his social conditioning. Through him, Webster shows the extent to which colour prejudices have been "metabolized in the bloodstream of society" as Moore cites.

Webster also often invokes as degrading terms African images associated with blackness. In response to Brachiano’s expostulation about "ingrateful Rome," Flamineo draws on commonly held notions of Barbary as a simile for blackness, to belittle Rome. According to him, Rome "deserves to be call’d Barbary, for our villainous usage" (IV.ii.203-05). Barbary regularly appears in English Renaissance literature loosely as a name for North Africa along the Mediterranean sea, from Egypt to the Atlantic, and from the sea to the Sahara desert (Cawley, 92; see also Jones, 30; 134n). When Flamineo makes this statement, he is certainly not thinking of Barbary as the region Cawley speaks of as having been associated with gifts and with gold (93). Rather, he must have in mind a region commonly designated by some early travellers to Africa as a habitat for barbarians, intended here as a slur on Romans. He is not interested in the geography of Barbary so much as he is in the negative stereotypes which Barbary evokes: savagery and barbarity, the level to which Flamineo feels Rome has sunk. The rampant everyday usage of negative black terminology thus partly explains English society’s negative
stereotyping of the black African other and its influence on the artists’ creative imaginations.

English Renaissance writers not only use stereotypical terminology to underscore black African alienation, exclusion, and differentiation from mainstream culture, but they also use black characters as metaphors for evil, for the infidel, and for the ugly. Marston’s Sophonisba examines blackness primarily as an image for various forms of unacceptable behaviour through the frequent use of the term black and also through the exploration of the relationship between the evil King, Syphax, and his servant Vangue. The play is set in Carthage, Libya, and deals with a large African cast, but with the exception of Vangue who is directly referred to as an "Ethiopian negro," Marston’s other African characters are not distinguished or differentiated by colour. Viewed from a larger perspective of Rome’s military threat to Carthage, of the subsequent fragmentation of a self-serving Carthaginian body-politic, of intrigues, betrayals, treasonous acts, of tested loyalties and of patriotic heroisms, Vangue is but an insignificant speck, hardly worthy of notice in the grand scheme of things. However, although the play does not represent him as a rounded character, it nevertheless explores his blackness as a significant dramatic device.

Keeping in mind the evil associations historically linked to blackness, we can see the faithful servant Vangue
as the physical manifestation of King Syphax's commitment to evil in the play—a barometer of his master's moral degeneracy. Vangue, it seems, is Syphax's shadow, the only company Syphax keeps close to himself. The men operate as twin monsters, a point symbolically realised in the way Syphax finishes sentences which Vangue has begun in one long, sustained dialogue, as though to suggest that their minds are one (I.i.22-33). At the opening of the play, when the King has sunk into the depths of despair, Vangue's advice fires the evil engine in Syphax which propels him into acts of treason (I.i.22). Judging from the fact that over ninety percent of black African characters who appear in English Renaissance plays are villains, a colour-prejudiced Elizabethan/Jacobean audience would likely have viewed Vangue's blackness as befitting the dark machinations in which he involves himself.

   Blackness in the play is also associated with cruelty and horror, traits evoked by a number of European travel writers who transmitted the biased view that the extreme heat of Africa "draws warmth from the heart and other interior parts to the surface, leaving the dark Africans with scorched skin but inwardly cold" (see Vaughan, 23). When Syphax threatens Sophonisba with violence, therefore, its extreme severity is measured against the supposedly natural cruelty of two Moors who would execute this deed: "looke Ile tack thy head / To the low earth, whilst strength
of too black knaves, / Thy limbes all wide shall straine" (III.i.9-11). Although allusions to evil do not necessarily make Vangue a satanic figure, his blackness is associated with uncouthness and total lack of compassion as he complaisantly stands guard in full view of Syphax's attempt to violate Sophonisba (III.ii.24; 61). In one comic situation involving a strikingly sexual faux-pas, when Syphax discovers not Sophonisba but Vangue lying in his bed, he screams in horror: "Hah! Can any woman turne to such a Divell?" (III.i.187). This recalls part of what the seventeenth-century English traveller, Thomas Herbert, cited earlier, said about the link between black Africans and the devil: "Negroes in colour so in condition are little others than Devils incarnate" (cited by Tokson, 14). This association of blackness with the devil is made even more direct in Reginald Scot's attacks on several widespread beliefs in his Discoverie of Witchcraft (1584): "In our childhood, our mothers maids have . . . terrified us with an ouglie divell having hornes on his head, fier in his mouth, a taile in his breech, eies like a bason [bison], fanges like a dog, clawes like a beare, a skin like a Niger, and a voice roring like a lion" (cited by Vaughan, 28). Syphax's unexpected face-to-face encounter with the black Vangue lying in his bed is thus meant to be seen as a symbolic encounter not only with the devil, but also with his own evil, and the whole tableau stands as a metaphor for
Syphax’s degradation, debasement, and moral degeneracy.

Commenting on the common English Renaissance practice of identifying the black African character with the devil, Tokson says that "the final effect of linking demonism and blackness, directly or loosely, is to affirm an unholliness about the black man, an unholliness rendered ineluctably visible by his color" (56). This assertion is generally true, but in Sophonisba, Marston explores the link with an interesting twist. Syphax’s identification of Vangue with the devil is as much for affirming Vangue’s unholliness as it is for the dramatic purpose of defining Syphax’s own corruption for (symbolically) bedding the devil. The scene is also suggestive of a temporary subversion and transgression of class and sexual boundaries. Not only has a servant taken the place of a royal personage (III.i.195-97), but the fact that Syphax finds a man in his bed creates a situation that, from a heteronormative point of view, "only adds obscenity to the whole ludicrous scene" (Tokson, 58).

Syphax’s demonism manifests itself partly in his cold-blooded murder of Vangue. Though he gets rid of the physical manifestation of his evil, the evil remains. Not only does Syphax threaten to rape Sophonisba’s corpse (IV.i.58-62), but in a final act of humiliation, he beds the ultimate representative of evil, the sorceress Erichto (V.i.1-4). Blackness in Sophonisba, therefore, is used
symbolically to heighten the evil of the villain and to show the progression of his moral degeneracy. The play does not specifically explore cultural differences embedded in skin colour; whiteness, for example, and what it represents is not addressed, except perhaps indirectly through its opposite. The text uses blackness more to heighten evil or unacceptable behaviour than to construct difference, but by doing so, it reinforces moral evaluations of blackness, and by extension, of black African people.

Winthrop Jordan gives a useful summary of English attitudes towards the two skin colours during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, particularly, towards the white complexion, and though he connects the idea of white beauty to the praise of the Queen, it is also symbolically reproduced in the Jacobean texts to connect the idea of beauty to the praise of England.

Whiteness . . . carried a special significance for Elizabethan Englishmen: it was, particularly when complimented by red, the color of perfect human beauty, especially female beauty. This ideal was already centuries old in Elizabeth’s time, and their fair Queen was its very embodiment: her cheeks were "roses in a bed of lillies." (Elizabeth was naturally pale but like many ladies then and since she freshened her "lillies" at the cosmetic table). (8)

While blackness is the standard sign of ugliness in the Tudor/Stuart literature, whiteness—or rather that blend of the lily and the rose—is the ideal picture of female beauty. A number of Renaissance literary works comment on women’s use of cosmetics with the view of achieving a
perfect blend of white and red, particularly if the women were pale. In *The Knight of Malta*, the response of the black African Zanthia alias Abdella (hereafter referred to as Zanthia/Abdella) to Mounteferrat’s flattery is designed as much to declare her pride in the authenticity of her skin colour as it is to discredit the white women’s use of make-up to attain society’s ideal of beauty: "my black Cheeke [cannot] put on a feigned blush, / To make me seeme more modest then I am. / This ground-worke will not beare adulterate red, / Nor artificiall white, to cozen love" (I.i.173-76). Similarly, Shakespeare’s works often reveal his awareness of black/white polar opposites to denote beauty or ugliness. In *Twelfth Night*, Viola, disguised as a man and commenting on Olivia’s beauty, tells Olivia: "‘Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white / Nature’s own sweet and cunning hand laid on" (I.v.239-40).

Although Shakespeare’s allusion to blackness in his "dark Lady" sonnets is specifically to brown-eyed brunettes rather than to African blackness, his inversion of the English standard view of beauty nevertheless reflects an awareness of his society’s measure of beauty according to degrees or shades of complexion: the darker the skin tone, the less appealing, and the fairer, the more attractive. In Sonnet 127, "In the old age black was not counted fair" (a poem that attacks women’s use of cosmetics), the speaker bemoans the age-old notion that dark-eyed, dark-haired women
were never considered beautiful: "black was not counted fair / Or if it were, it bore not beauty's name" (lines 1-2). He is saddened by the excessive pressure brought to bear on dark women to wear make-up because of the increased stress on the blue-eyed blonde as the standard model of beauty, a stress which leads to women's use of cosmetics to obtain such an ideal. His critique is directed at "false identities that pass for real and real ones that seem false" (Booth, 436).

In defence of his beloved dark lady, the speaker asserts that "my mistress' eyes are raven black, / Her eyes so suited, and they mourners seem / At such who, not born fair, no beauty lack / Sland'ring creation with a false esteem" (9-12). According to Stephen Booth, the "dark lady" sonnets are "specifically concerned with the speaker's relationship to a brunette, who is, therefore, not 'fair' in that she is not blonde, and who is also not 'fair' in that she is morally foul" (Booth, 434). Blackness is again here equated with physical and moral ugliness, but the speaker sees his dark mistress as naturally beautiful because she is free from the artificiality of cosmetics, of "art's false borrow'd face" (line 6). For him, blackness stands in for genuine, unadulterated, natural beauty, but like her, he is sad that "every tongue says beauty should" be blonde and blue-eyed. In Sonnet 130, "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun," the speaker sees his dark mistress as rarely
beautiful, diverging from the clichés of fairness of Petrarchan poets. Although neither sonnet is written in defence of African black skin-tone, in their tilting the balance by treating blackness as beautiful, they nevertheless reveal the English society's traditional, standard attitudes to black and white or dark and fair associations.

According to Jordan, "it was important, if incalculably so, that English discovery of black Africans came at a time when the accepted standard ideal beauty was a fair complexion of rose and white. Negroes not only failed to fit this ideal but seemed the very picture of perverse negation" (Jordan, 9. See also Walvin, 22-27; Cawley, 85). This view is insisted on by a number of the Tudor/Stuart literary texts in which whiteness is not, in general, subjected to the same derogatory or abusive characterisations that blackness receives on the English stage. In The Knight of Malta, for example, whiteness and blackness take on their traditional meanings of pure perfection and utter demonism respectively, through the oppositional representation of white Oriana and her black African maid servant Zanthia/Abdella, except where stress on their difference does not suit the purposes of white patriarchy. The play is about aesthetics as well as socio-political dynamics. It clearly reflects English attitudes about beauty, particularly female beauty, through the
attitudes expressed towards the black Moor servant Zanthia/Abdella and her white mistress Oriana, a pairing which is at the heart of the aesthetic discourse in the play.

Through the two characters, *The Knight of Malta* presents the binary oppositions of beauty and ugliness, goodness and evil, saint and devil. The distinctions are based purely on skin colour differences, setting aside the characters' common gender. Oriana is depicted in Petrarchan terms as almost an unattainable goddess, a beauty beyond compare. She is referred to by several characters in the play as "Juno" (I.i.165), "the fairest flesh" (167), "sweet Lady" (I.i.209), "the matchless Oriana" (I.iii.118), and a "faire sweet banke of flowers" (I.iii.166) whose soul is "faire" (I.iii.142). Miranda is tormented by his having been absent when Oriana was wronged, and describes her in such glowing terms as "vertue," "innocence and sweetnesse" (II.ii.10-12). He constructs her in the image of a goddess so that when his sentences and phrases are pieced together, they read like courtly love poetry with Oriana as the beloved lady and Miranda, the worshipping lover:

Ye have a Lady in your cause, a faire one,
A gentler never trod on ground, a Nobler . . .
The Sunne nere saw a sweeter . . . .
[S]o much sweetnesse,
So great a magazine of all things precious,
A mind so heavenly made. (II.iii.31-44)

Although in praising his beloved, Miranda does not adhere to the literary tradition of reversing the conventional sexual hierarchy of courtly love "to give dominance to the woman"
(Woodbridge, 184), he nevertheless plays the role of "the knight [who] humble[s] himself in chivalrous devotion to the lady" (Woodbridge, 104), when he switches places with the cowardly Mountferrat to fight for Oriana's honour (II.v.143-58).

Whiteness thus retains its traditional meaning in the text; it is linked with beauty, goodness, virtue, and purity. Several characters, including Oriana herself, use the word "spotlesse" to describe Oriana. In defence of her own innocence when the patriarchal tables turn against her, Oriana calls attention to "this spotlesse white I weare, / The Embleme of my life, of all my actions" (II.v.35-36). Norandine urges her to "Give me your faire hands . . . / As white as this I see your innocence, / As spotlesse, and as pure" (69-71). Gomera claims to have "preserv'd her spotlesse worth from black destruction, / Her white name to eternity delivered, / Her youth, and sweetnesse, from a timelesse ruin" (117-19). In praise of Miranda, Oriana compares the purity of his actions to the purity of her fame: "Mirandas deeds / Have been as white, as Orianas fame / From the beginning, to this point of time" (V.i.80-91). In short, except for a brief spell when she is falsely accused of dishonour by men who deem their self-interests threatened, Oriana is depicted as the standard paragon of beauty throughout the play. Part of the patriarchal whitening of her character is due to her submissive
acceptance of the passive role assigned to her by a system that wants to keep women's voices trapped in silence (II.v.38-61). Various male figures take it upon themselves to determine the direction her life will take, and she accepts it as her fate, rather than assuming "any power / Which I can call mine own" (III.ii.120-21).

The play is constant in its reproduction of black and white as binary oppositions, and because of its insistence on exploring contrasts rather than convergences, the text hardly ever blurs the cultural demarcation lines that separate the "us" from the "other." Besides its exploration of white beauty through Oriana, the play also includes several other references that point to whiteness as the symbol of a vibrant, uplifting positivity. Mountferrat's cross of knighthood is described as a "white innocent signe" (I.i.156) that is belied by his villainous behaviour as a knight. The phrase identifies whiteness with innocence. The text also proposes whiteness as the standard against which beauty is measured. In a speech designed to flatter the black African maid, Zanthia/Abdella, Mountferrat tells her: "thou art more soft / And full of dalliance then the fairest flesh" (I.i.165-66).

This speech recalls another of a similar vein in Othello when the Duke is reassuring Brabantio that Othello is a good match for Desdemona: "If virtue no delighted beauty lack, / Your son-in-law is far more fair than black"
(I.iii.289-90). Just as this complement to Othello by the Duke plays into the hands of traditional practices when it inadvertently debases the character it is designed to exalt, so does Mountferrat's flattery of Zanthia/Abdella unconsciously reinforce cultural differences. Embedded within the seemingly positive evaluations of blackness in both these speeches is also a privileging of European standards of beauty--fair skin--which underscores the traditional view of blackness as wholly unattractive. Productions of double-effect meanings such as these inevitably serve as powerful forces in perpetuating cultural stereotypes.

Heightened negative views of blackness as ugly and revolting are particularly demonstrated in the text's representation of Zanthia/Abdella as a living reversal of prevailing English values of beauty and goodness. In contrast to Oriana's spotlessness, Zanthia/Abdella's blackness brands her as repulsive. She is a "black swoln pitchie cloud," a "night hag" (IV.ii.136-137), a "baconface," a "branded bitch," a "chimney sweeper," a "black jill" (V.ii.149-54; 184-87), and many such debasing and dehumanising terms. She is represented as the very antithesis of the exemplary "spotlessness" of Oriana, a contrast which reveals conflicting attitudes towards differing value systems of the Beauty and the Beast phenomenon.
Besides their representation of blackness and whiteness in terms of the aesthetic, English Renaissance texts explore the two colours in moral terms as well, by foregrounding differences in skin colour and in religious affiliation of certain characters. These are fully explored in George Peele’s *The Battle of Alcazar* (1588–9), the earliest play to give extensive treatment to a black African character, and in Thomas Middleton’s pageant, *The Triumphs of Truth* (1613). Although historically these texts are a generation apart and even though *The Battle of Alcazar* is based on an actual historical event, the moral evaluations they attach to blackness are similar in many ways, revealing unchanging attitudes to the black skin colour question across time. These texts ground the otherness of black Africans in a combination of colour and religious differences whereby they posit Christianity as morally and culturally opposed to other beliefs. This is achieved through the characters of Muly Mahamet the Moor and Sebastian the white King of Portugal in *The Battle of Alcazar*, and the King of Moors and the English Protestant populace in *The Triumphs of Truth*. Muly Mahamet’s Islamic otherness and the King of Moor’s paganism are at the heart of their differentiation and exclusion from mainstream European Christian culture.

The King of Moors’ and Muly Mahamet’s non-Christian background elicits from white characters similar, indeed, enduring attitudes expressed by such Renaissance travel
writers as William Strachey: "what country soever the children of Cham happened to possesse, there biganne both the Ignorance of true godlinessse . . . and the Ignorance of the true worship of God . . . the Inventions of Heathenisme, and adoration of falce godes, and the Devil" (54-55). Similar attitudes are reproduced in the dramatic works as well. In their representation of African otherness, both The Triumphs of Truth and The Battle of Alcazar imply that "not only [is the] European culture . . . superior, but that it is the only kind of culture there can be; by exclusion from it the non-European is necessarily non-human, barbaric and animalistic" (Loomba, 19). Though Ania Loomba’s argument does not specifically refer to either The Battle of Alcazar or to The Triumphs of Truth, it nevertheless makes sense of the texts' oppositional representation of the black Islamic Moor and the white Christian. Muly Mahamet is fixed as inferior and non-human because he is a black Moslem who is not like "us." The combination of his blackness and his Islamic faith doubly alienates him from the mainstream cultural ideal. He is cast in a "non-human, barbaric" mould because his blackness and his non-Christianity are the right ingredients for villainy and barbarity. His identity thus renders him evil to English Protestant sensibilities, earning him a long list of demeaning epithets (I.i.6; 10; 14; 25; 40; 32).

In a play based on the historical reality of the Battle
of Alcazar of 1578, its exploration of blackness and non-Christianity as agents of cultural differentiation is achieved through Peele's fictional creation of the character of the Presenter, whose speeches and prejudices frame the action. The Presenter opens the play in a eurocentric tone and point of view, contrasting Sebastian the "honorable and courageous king" (I.i.4), the "fierce and manly king of Portugall," with "the barbarous Moore" (I.i.6). That Muly Mahamet, like his historical counterpart, is a cruel and ambitious tyrant is undeniable. He commits atrocious murders against his kith and kin (I.i.24; 26; 138-39), unabashedly supervises the strangling of his uncle, gets rid of all potential claimants to the throne of Barbary so he can usurp the crown (I.i.1-20), and makes pompous oratory and bloodthirsty speeches that highlight the depth of his bloody-mindedness, though more in word than in deed. Like Lust's Dominion's Eleazar and Titus Andronicus's Aaron, Muly Mahamet is cast in the stereotypical role of a barbaric, though cowardly, Moor, the very antithesis of Christian civilisation, but unlike them (they are more complexly drawn and are given their own alternative narratives), Muly Mahamet's voice is lost in his battle cries. The text demonstrates the colour prejudices it explores mainly through the narration of the fictional Presenter.

The Presenter's role as the chorus, as the voice of the dominant cultural viewpoint, enhances his eurocentric
perspective. Not only does he offer a background report to coming events and a running commentary on the moral aspects of certain scenes in the play, but more significantly, he persistently draws attention to Muly’s blackness. For him, as perhaps for the colour-prejudiced component of the English audience, black "remains the adjective appropriate to the ugly and the frightening, to the devil and his children, the wicked and the infidel" (Hunter, 35). At a time when England, and Europe in general, held Christianity to be the only true religion, blackness became a key factor in defining the otherness of non-Christians, whether their skin colour was black or not. The introduction of the Islamic Muly Mahamet "the Moor" involves an immediate link between his "bloudie . . . deeds," and his colour, while his black African followers are linked with hell:

\begin{quote}
this tyrant king,  
Of whome we treate sprung from the Arabian moore  
Blacke in his looke, and bloudie in his deeds,  
And in his shirt staind with a cloud of gore,  
Presents himselfe with naked sword in hand,  
Accompanied as now you may behold,  
With devils coted in the shapes of men. (I.i.14-20)
\end{quote}

The passage not only links blackness with cruelty, but it also alludes to diabolical attributes long associated with black African people.

Among the many black African characters that populate this play-world, it is only Muly Mahamet whom the Presenter repeatedly identifies with skin colour and with non-Christianity. Muly Mahamet is referred to as "the Moor" in
the play, a title which, as Eldred Jones comments, "is in itself significant in a play in which most characters are Moors" (43). The Presenter's concept of Muly is nothing more than the cruel, irreligious Moor, usually portrayed in the drama of the period as black. To the Presenter, Muly is but a "barborous" and "accursed" "Negro" (I.6; 29; 40; 47; II.3; 307; III.742; III.ii.851) who is also an "unbeleieving" (I.32) and "haplesse heathen prince" (IV.978) with a face "full of fraud and villainie" (V.i.1262-263). The Presenter of Peele's imagination clearly serves the purpose of emphatically highlighting what the historical account of the battle could not: the stereotypical link between the Moor's villainy, cruelty, and underworld associations, with blackness.

There is enough evidence in the play to suggest that its emphasis on Muly's blackness is meant to serve a deeper function of pitting "heathenism" against Christianity, black against white, than simply a dramatisation of historical facts or even a mere "extension of exotic costuming" as D'Amico suggests (45). In an age when English Protestant fervour was at its height, Muly Mahamet's ignoble behaviour serves to justify Sebastian's Christian intervention. Just as Peele de-emphasises Stukley's ambition and his role in betraying England when he aligns himself with the Papal expedition to Ireland, he also underplays the fact that Sebastian is as much of a Catholic as is King Philip of
Spain. Peele presents Philip unfavourably, choosing to offer his audience a sympathetic view of the Portuguese king whose defence of the English queen extends into a glorification of Protestant England and a castigation of Catholic Rome (II.iv.669-702).

It is important to note that while the Presenter emphasises Muly Mahamet's blackness, he is significantly silent on the complexion or external appearance of Mahamet's blood-relative, his uncle Abdelmelec. This omission achieves two things. One, it makes it possible for Abdelmelec to be viewed as one of those rare good black Africans who are not only deemed white inside, but are also designed to put to shame the floundering popish Spaniards or Italians. Two, not mentioning Abdelmelec's complexion demonstrates that the play implicitly promotes the traditional association of blackness with evil, as if a link between blackness and the positive racial qualities of a good, Islamic black African person would upset the traditional definition of blackness or the balance of socially constructed cultural hierarchies made to appear as common-sense givens.

Some critics have attributed Peele's deferential treatment of uncle and nephew to the fact that the historical source for his play, Polemon's The Second Booke of Battels, recorded Muly Mahamet's historical counterpart as having been born "of a Negro mother" (Jones, 43; 138,
23n; see also Tokson, 71), hence the emphasis on his blackness. However, Tokson’s argument that "historical accuracy does not account for the concentrated effort to make the point" that Muly is black (71), makes sense. Muly Mahamat is meant to be sharply contrasted not with his uncle, but with the white Sebastian who helps him usurp the throne of Barbary. In an age when being a non-Christian was equated with heathenism and barbarism, the conceptualisation of Muly Mahamat as a barbaric Moslem infidel is likely to have appeared normal in some English eyes, and Sebastian’s Christian character serves to underscore this characterisation of the Moorish other.

In direct contrast to Muly Mahamat, Sebastian is introduced by the Presenter as "an honorable and courageous king" (I.3), a "brave king of Portugall" (II.323; III.738) and a "sweet" prince (III.744). The "sweet Sebastian" enlists the help of an Englishman to assist "these accursed Moores" (IV.ii.1081) and "men of little faith" (III.i.776-77). He does so not because Muly Mahamat is a fellow prince per se, with whom he identifies, but because he is after fame and power (III.i.766; IV.ii.1119). He claims, however, that his missionary zeal prompts him to "justly ... fight for Christ" (III.i.789), "to inlarge the bounds of Christendome," and "plant the Christian faith in Africa" (II.iv.732-34; see also III.iii.872-73).

Jack D’Amico argues that the text emphasises in Muly
Mahamet, a "romantic allure," "nobility," "valor and a capacity for policy" demonstrated by his "having braved a lioness for his queen" (44). "That kind of characterisation," D’Amico adds, "has little or nothing to do with the fact that [Muly Mahamet] is a Moor: he thinks, acts, and is meant to be regarded as a prince, albeit a dark and rather demonstrative one whose queen is also none too squeamish" (44). D’Amico sees what he calls the nobility of Muly Mahamet as a point of identification with, rather than differentiation from, mainstream English culture: "clearly nobility means much the same thing for a Muly as it does for the English audience. The values the audience shares with these fictional foreigners (even the villains) often count for more in the representation than racial, cultural, or religious differences" (44).

D’Amico bases his evaluation of Muly Mahamet’s "nobility" and "princely behaviour" on the latter’s bravery when he snatches raw meat from a lioness to feed his fainting wife (II.iii.537-65; see Tokson, 44). To be sure, Muly Mahamet’s act of providing for his wife and son is conducted in good faith and out of dire need. However, at a time when "the Islamic other was still portrayed as barbaric, degenerate and tyrannical" (Miles, 18), Muly’s action of bursting on stage casually brandishing on his sword a piece of bloody raw meat savagely snatched from a lioness is not one which most members of an English audience
would have readily identified as princely or noble. If anything, in their eyes, the act would confirm Muly’s uncouth behaviour and reflect his barbarity. This attitude is mirrored in the Presenter’s unflattering comment on Muly: "this barbarous Moore... lives forlone among the mountaine shrubs, / And makes his food the flesh of savage beasts" (II.307-10). The Presenter echoes the description given by Richard Eden of barbarous and monstrous Ethiopian tribes who dwelt in caves and dens and ate "the flesh of serpents" (Hakluyt, 6: 159-70). Besides, Muly’s fleeing from the battlefield to escape "Amuraths power, and Abdelmelecs threats" (I.ii.260-75) proves him more of a coward than a brave king.

One would presume, therefore, that the majority of an English Protestant audience would more readily identify with Sebastian’s Christian duty of converting the "heathen infidels" to the "true" faith, especially since Sebastian’s long apostrophe to the English queen (II.iv.670-702) confirms England, not his native Portugal, as "the idealized center of cultural and political values" (D’Amico, 83). It is important to reiterate that Sebastian and Muly Mahamet are both royal princes fighting on the same side during the battle of Alcazar, but because Sebastian is a Christian, he is set up as the means by which God could be glorified, while Muly Mahamet’s tendency towards violence and cruelty is held up as a sign of the demonic among people of his
kind. Commenting on this imbalanced representation, Elliot Tokson remarks:

there [is no] valid explanation why Sebastian, who fought and died for Muly’s unholy cause of usurpation (and, in addition, was an intervening power with little justice supporting his efforts), comes through without blemish on his memory. The play’s action does not justify his glorification at all, unless what is really being judged is Sebastian’s goal—the propagation of the Christian faith. Muly’s only concern is personal power. Whatever the reason, by the same acts of killing and attempted usurpation, the Christian is ennobled and the Moor degraded. (72)

The reason perhaps lies in the fact that King Sebastian is white and Christian, and for that reason alone, he comes out far better than the black Moslem Muly Mahamet. The differentiation between these two people who are in very similar situations is imposed by an ideological agenda: the legitimation of English or European cultural supremacy.

Though tyrannical in his ways, the ambitious Muly Mahamet is as much a born prince as the equally ambitious Sebastian, but Muly Mahamet’s religion and his Africanness make him what the European is not. To the English hegemony, the concepts of blackness and non-Christianity were more than wonder-cabinet curiosities. They were part of a struggle to advance the popular conception of the African Moslem as uncivilised, a conception which places the African far below the English on the scale of human progress. The play’s representation of African otherness, however metaphorical, depended on the general assumption that the African character’s qualities were inherently different from
those of the European, and the dark complexion was there to prove it. The play supports the idea that African otherness was closely tied to non-Christian beliefs and to blackness, both of which are associated with moral concerns. *The Battle of Alcazar* thus demonstrates that in the Tudor period as well, blackness assumed great moral significance.

Jonson’s masques and Middleton’s pageant exemplify English Renaissance texts’ penchant for representing the way negative evaluations of blackness as a colour, carried over to the skin colour of the African people to the point of building into the black African characters themselves a colour consciousness and a sense of inadequacy that often resulted in self-abnegation or effacement. Middleton’s *The Triumphs of Truth* (1613) is a celebration and a display of English cultural impressions and values revealed through the text’s brief exploration of the stereotype of the black African as an ungodly, inferior human being. The King of Moors’ entry is marked by a self-conscious assumption that the Christian eyes of the English multitude are fixed on him because he is a black king:

> I see amazement set upon the faces Of these white people, wonderings and strange gazes; Is it at me? does my complexion draw So many Christian eyes, that never saw A king so black before? (247-48)

Colour and religion are again shown to be the criteria for the construction of human categories and difference: he is black, they are white; he is a convert, they are
Christian from birth. More significantly, the amazement turns out to be not theirs but his. He suddenly realises that, king or not, his arrival has aroused little interest. In the eyes of the English spectators, his blackness is equated with inferiority and consequently dwarfs his stature as king. The English city-governor, as the King soon discovers, is apparently the "entire object" of the citizens' collective gaze. The King and his Queen attract only passing glances. They are marginalised by the averted gazes of an English multitude that reduce them to mere "powerless aliens at the bottom of the heap" (Drake, 72). What must surely be the King’s awareness of white society’s prejudice against black Africans awakens in him instinctive defence mechanisms:

I must confess, many wild thoughts may rise,  
Opinions, common murmers, and fix’d eyes,  
At my so strange arrival . . . .
I being a Moor, then, in opinion’s lightness,  
As far from sanctity as my face from whiteness,  
. . . . However darkness dwells upon my face,  
Truth in my soul sets up the light of grace. (248)

Middleton’s pageant reveals that the traditional framework of assumptions (theological and otherwise) about black Africans provides the controlling principle in the text’s representation of African otherness. All the theories on causes of African blackness then in circulation "shared the assumption," as William Cohen remarks, "that there was something special in the creation of Africans that set them apart from white people," as the King’s preceding
speech suggests. "This special, separate creation denoted some form of disadvantage to Africans, a trait of inferiority" (Cohen, 13) that has also been passively accepted by black African characters themselves. Not only is the King of Moors identified with paganism and depravity, but his grovelling is meant to highlight his supposed internalised sense of inferiority as well before "these white people."

The King at first resists the image of the irreligious Moor constructed for him by what he refers to as "the judging of th’ unwise, / Whose censures ever quicken in their eyes, / Only begot of outward form and show" (248). Yet in his resistance, he is represented as doing nothing to promote or to enhance his own cultural values or practices. Instead, he is made to promote the Christian faith by whiting out his own history, his own culture, and his own gods. The objects of his traditional worship (the sun, moon, and stars) are collapsed into "creatures base and poor" which he identifies with his "days of error," opting instead, to replace them with "their Creator"—the God of Protestant England (248).

Likewise, Jonson’s Masque of Blackness, an emblematic representation of the climatic theory that presumed all black Africans were once white, propagates and reinforces the discrediting stereotype that black was a form of degeneration, a departure from the norm. The representation
of the daughters of Niger as moving through progressive stages of darkness to light is suggestive of this desire. They are set up to be seen as moving from black Mauretania, through swarth Lusitania, to Albion the fair. Like the King of Moors in The Triumphs of Truth, the daughters of Niger are also represented as participating in a self-abnegation that serves to underscore the superiority of white culture while it undermines the authenticity of their own.

In her discussion of the reproduction of Africa in Marlowe's plays, Emily Bartels comments that "in the representations of Africa that were most popular and most widely circulated during the early modern period . . . , in instance after instance, as the 'dark continent' was brought into the light before European eyes, the perspective was always singular and singularly that of Europe" (30). To a large extent, this was true of most fictional and non-fictional works that dealt with Africa and its people. In certain texts, however, alternative voices are allowed to emerge, but they are too quickly suppressed to make a lasting impression.

In The Masque of Blackness (1605), for example, Ben Jonson allows one of the African characters, Niger, a competing voice that presents an African aesthetic perspective. Niger proudly announces that his daughters were "the first formed dames of the earth," "in whose sparkling and refulgent eyes / The glorious sun did still
delight to rise," revealing "That in their black the perfect'st beauty grows" (lines 113-19). Niger’s voice, however, is obscured by his daughters’ already blurred vision of self. In their eyes, the African sun is malevolent and destructive. They entertain a contrary view embedded in the climatic theory (a view which Niger attributes to the pernicious influence of Western poets) that the sun had "shone / On their scorched cheeks with such intemperate fires" (line 150) as to have stamped them with the badge of ugliness. By reducing the idea that African skin was scorched by the heat of the sun to mere fancies of Western poets, Niger challenges the myth propagated by several Renaissance travel accounts.

That Niger’s daughters develop an aversion to their black complexion, and reject their cultural past is symbolically illustrated in their cursing of the sun "with volleys of revilings" (lines 142-51). Their sense of inferiority as black Africans is manifested in the way they are drawn to, and long for, white Britannia, the "blessed isle . . . ruled by a sun . . . / Whose beams shine day and night, and are of force / To blanch an Ethiop, and revive a corpse" (lines 208; 223-25). The whole metamorphic process which Niger’s daughters undergo advances a eurocentric version of whiteness as the ideal symbol of beauty, privileging and promoting in the process a Western aesthetic as the norm. The daughters’ movement from Ethiopia to the
"calm and blessed shores" of Brittania (line 109), Niger’s plea to the Ethiopian moon goddess to help his daughters find a place to "beautify them" (line 201), the suggestion that Africa’s sun scorches while England’s sun refines, and the fact that the daughters are instructed "to leave / Their blackness [in waves], and true beauty to receive" (The Masque of Beauty, lines 43-47) all reveal too well the ranking of white over black, England over Africa, the ennobled over the wretched of the earth.

Of particular relevance to this argument is Stephen Orgel’s comment, in his introduction to Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques, on how Jonson’s employing of royal personages to participate in the masque as black nymphs "was considered to border on the scandalous" (4). This eurocentric judgment is best reflected by Dudley Carleton in his epistolary account of the first production of The Masque of Blackness cited by Orgel, a judgment which recalls Charles Kingsley’s own prejudiced evaluation of the poor Irish in a passage cited in the first chapter:

[The female masquers’] Apparel was rich, but too light and Curtizan-like for such great ones. Instead of Vizzards, their Faces, and Arms up to the Elbows, were painted black, which was Disguise sufficient, for they were hard to be known: but it became them nothing so well as their red and white, and you cannot imagine a more ugly Sight, then a Troop of lean-cheek’d Moors. [Carleton writes again later: it] was a very loathsome sight, and I am sorry that strangers should see owr court so strangely disguised. (4; emphasis mine)

On Carleton’s appalled reaction, Orgel comments that
although "the masquers appeared in blackface by the queen's own command, Carleton cannot forget that however much they are the nymphs of the poet's fiction, they are also the queen and her ladies," and their parading as "black" nymphs was not considered a valid part "royalty could play without ceasing to be royal" (5). Carleton's negative response to a black disguise by the Queen and her ladies shows that not only is blackness derogated in the fictional production of the masque itself, but it is also considered base enough, in the reality of the likes of Carleton during the early modern period, to cause alarm.

The representation of blackness in the masques and in the pageant, therefore, involves a public display of the Moor figure as a naturally ugly, degenerate other. Blackness is constructed as a "rude defect" in nature (Masque of Blackness, line 227), identified with "luckless creatures" (line 141) from a distant land whose supposed ugliness physically and spiritually draws them to "the place / Which long their longings urged their eyes to see" (lines 199-200). Ironically, in spite of Niger's confident claim to the authenticity of black African beauty in The Masque of Blackness, he nevertheless is represented as actively seeking out the moon goddess to help his daughters find a place "to beautify them" (line 201), perpetuating in the process, a strong eurocentric conviction of black Africans' radical divergence from the European norm such as the one
espoused by Carleton.

Several characters in the literature of the early modern period, including the daughters of Niger, are made to draw attention to their "scorched" complexion from the heat of the sun with either pride, or apology. In Dekker's *Lust's Dominion*, Eleazar swears by "the proud complexion of [his] cheeks, / Tan'e from the kisses of the amorous sun" (III.ii.164-65) and asks the Spaniards not to "value [him] / . . . by [his] sun burnt cheek" (III.ii.205-06). The Prince of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice*, asks Portia not to "mislike [him] . . . for [his] complexion, / The shadowed livery of the burnish'd sun, / To whom [he is] a neighbor and near bred" (II.i.1-3). Cleopatra, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, mourns Antony's absence from Egypt saying, "Think on me, / That am with Phoebus' amorous pinches black" (I.v.28-29). These statements, made to appear as coming from the horses' own mouths, combine with allegorical reenactments of the climatic theory and of pagan souls searching for grace in *The Masque of Blackness* and in *The Triumphs of Truth* to validate eurocentric claims of blackness as an anomaly. There is no evidence to suggest that white Europeans were ever concerned about explanations for their own skin colour. Their euro-cultivated sense of superiority to the African black complexion presumably dictated their view of whiteness as the original ideal to which others must aspire.
The above English Renaissance texts thus represent African characters in terms of fixed polarities involving a preference for white (beauty or virtue) over black (ugliness or sin). Reflecting the anglocentric view that the cradle of civilisation lay in England, Jonson's masques and Middleton's pageant demonstrate the necessities, respectively, for the transformation of the daughters of Niger from their black complexion back to what was claimed to be their original white beauty, and the conversion of the King of Moors from paganism to Christianity. These two texts represent what Paul Brown refers to, in a different context, as "visible evidence of the power of civility to transform the other" into its own kind (Brown, 50). Inherent in the texts' polarisation of blackness and whiteness as distinct categories of difference is a value system suggestive of hierarchical relations and difference that relegate black Africans to positions of inferiority.

In the two plays discussed in this chapter, The Knight of Malta and The Battle of Alcazar, the lines of cultural demarcation remain distinctly apart as the black African other is inferiorised to the point of erasure. In The Masque of Blackness, The Masque of Beauty, and The Triumphs of Truth as well, black African characters are confirmed in their otherness by being represented as aspiring to and becoming absorbed into the white ideal. In the masques and pageant, African traditional beliefs, practices, and deities
are deprived of their symbolic value as legitimate and venerable in their own right. The African characters themselves are symbolically co-opted into a process of "whitening," not necessarily as insurance for their inclusion into the European culture, but as a means of constructing and reaffirming them in their otherness. What the Marston, Fletcher, Peele, Jonson, and Middleton texts reveal in their use of colour as a dramatic device is that the aesthetic degradation and devaluation of the black skin of African people goes hand in hand with the moral devaluation of blackness in the religious domain.

Commenting on Christianity's goal of "washing the Ethiopian white . . . implicit in [Christian Europe's] concept of spreading the gospel throughout the world," St. Clair Drake observes: "in becoming Christians sub-Saharan Africans had to be persuaded to conceive of their own cultures as depraved and of themselves as needing 'cleansing', symbolically by baptism, from the contamination of their pagan societies. In theological parlance they had to be 'born again of the spirit and the water'" (Drake II, 63-64). This idea is demonstrated both in the self-devaluation, self-negation, and final conversions of the King of Moors and of the daughters of Niger in The Triumphs of Truth and in The Masque of Blackness respectively. The representation of the King of Moors' and the daughters of Niger as selling themselves short, as longing to "blanch"
themselves physically and spiritually, also inadvertently justifies domination. In *The Masque of Beauty*, Night is "mad to see an Ethiop washed white" and seeks to prevent the Niger daughters from doing so, "lest men should deem / [Their] color, if thus changed, of small esteem" (lines 67-69).

In the world of the masques and pageant, as in *The Battle of Alcazar*, Christianity is posited as the true and beautiful faith which "oft hath the power to convert infidels" (*Triumphs*, p.248), just as England's sun-beams "are of force / To blanch an Ethiop" (*Blackness*, lines 224-25). At a time when the notion of Britain as a separate and specially favoured world was a popular one, England is depicted as a place "where true religion and her temple stand," where "the true Christian faith" resides, and "where those good spirits were bred" (*Triumphs*, 248). It is also a "blessed isle," "a world divided from the world" and "ruled by a sun that to this height doth grace it, / Whose beams shine day and night" (*Blackness*, lines 216-217; 223-24).

The depiction of black African characters gravitating towards England's shores, therefore, dramatically serves the purpose of highlighting and celebrating England's primacy politically, culturally and spiritually, over the rest of the globe. As in *The Battle of Alcazar*, the world of the masques and pageant is also portrayed as one that insists on producing the African figure as definitively and
indisputably England's other.

Even though in The Triumphs of Truth the King of Moors and his people have been converted into the "true" faith, the King is still constituted as only marginally human, in fact, as demonic (249). The inclusion of the other suggested in the King's apparent belief in a Christian egalitarian ideal that posits a convert as co-equal before God is revealed as unstable. The King and his small entourage of black Africans join the rest of Christian London in the local celebrations at the temple of St. Paul "to do that mistress service, in the prime / Of these her spotless triumphs, and t'attend / That honourable man, her late-sworn friend" (Triumphs, 249). For all intents and purposes, as newly won Christian converts, they should be one with the "mother country." The text, however, appears to resist this view, insisting instead on maintaining the black African difference from what was perceived as the norm.

The Triumphs of Truth thus exploits the stereotypical view of blackness as a sign of damnation and reenacts the common assumption about natural differences between black Africans and whites. The sense that the African black is definitely not "one of our kind" is reflected in Error's attitude when the King of Moors appeals to his African companions to "do reverence, Moors, bow low, and kiss your hands: / Behold, our queen" (249). "Error smiling,"
patronisingly, "betwixt scorn and anger, to see such a devout humility take hold of that complexion" says: "What, have my sweet-fac'd devils forsook me too?" (249). In one sweeping movement, the King of Moors is reduced from a King to a less-than-human figure: a black devil. Not only is his human identity erased, but his total exclusion from mainstream culture is symbolically realised by his almost unnoticed disappearance from the pages of the text.

In The Battle of Alcazar as well, Muly Mahamet is reduced to a mere sign of the grotesque: a straw-stuffed scarecrow. After the Christian-backed "true succeeding prince," Muly Mahamet Seth is crowned King of Barbary, he proclaims that he will turn his brother's corpse into a terrifying spectacle: a mannequin made of Muly Mahamet's "stifned out" black skin "stufit with strawe" which he plans to place on public display ostensibly "to deterre and feare the lookers on, / From anie such foule fact or bad attempt" to usurp the throne (V.i.1443-446). What is being reaffirmed in this King's "wonder cabinet" is not so much Muly Mahamet's treason as it is the otherness of the black Islamic other. In addition, this ritual of public humiliation performed on an already dead body is supposedly for the good of restoring the social order brought to the edge of chaos by the evil black man, but embedded in this new King's theatrical display of Muly's flayed body is also a display of his own power and authority (see Foucault, 51).
Following Foucault, Leonard Tennenhouse refers to a time in history when "the representation of punishment was itself an important form of power. Performed in public places . . ., the criminal’s torture was carefully designed to be spectacularly horrible, out of all proportion to the crime. Such a scene was supposed to create a visible emblem of the King’s absolute authority over the body of the condemned" (13). King Muly Mahamet Seth’s nonchalant pronouncement of an almost ritualistic performance on Muly Muhamet’s corpse in the grimmest of details surely represents a self-authorising form of power.

Ironically, however, these details of the punishment also serve to re-affirm the barbarity of even the victorious side. Combined with the earlier terrible act of Muly Mahamet’s ambassadors to Spain thrusting their hands into a "blasing brand of fire" (II.592) to prove to King Sebastian their seriousness of purpose (II.601-06), these terrible, gruesome rituals probably draw on existing myths and vaguely conceptualised alleged truths of atrocities and cruelty associated with African Moors by Europe. Equally significant is the fate of the black African characters in The Masque of Beauty. While difference is effaced and whiteness re/established as the norm by the text, blackness is reduced to a powerful sign of the abnormal, and African identity once again suffers erasure.

Overall, therefore, cultural differences in English
Renaissance texts are constantly moulded by the language that grew out of the English people's conditioned response to skin colour and to the myths and other associations attached to it across centuries. In these texts, black African characters' skin colour automatically stamps them with a mark of damnation. Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness* and *The Masque of Beauty* and Middleton's *The Triumphs of Truth* seem to suggest that these characters can be redeemed from this damnation only through a symbolic process of conversion to whiteness or to anglo-religious values. Most of the dramatic texts, however, condemn the black African other to eternal difference from the white norm through expulsion or death, ostensibly to rid the nation of an evil presence—to separate the wheat from the chaff as it were.

Getting rid of the alien other through physical expulsion or death is presented as a restoration of order from a chaos for which the foreigner is often made responsible, a symbolic purging of the white, Christian culture from foreign contamination. Behind this cultural cleansing, however, is a hidden agenda which includes getting rid of foreign elements perceived as threatening, politically and otherwise, to the nation, just as the hidden agenda behind the conversion of non-Christians is a self-authorising valorisation of the white, Christian culture. By excluding the other, agents of the status quo are able to reaffirm its simulated superior position, authority, and
power. As William Cohen comments, "what made the tradition of black [inferiority] so pervasive and persistent, was that it was anchored firmly within the general sociopolitical context" (xix).

This idea is elaborately demonstrated in most English Renaissance dramatic texts in which black African characters appear. In plays such as Thomas Dekker’s *Lust’s Dominion* and Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*, the display of difference moves beyond the sign to include a reworking of negative stereotypes through the representation of characters’ actions and behaviour. The next chapter will explore the ways in which the two plays exploit fully black African stock types that serve to confirm and maintain difference between the dominant culture and what it deems as its subordinate other.
Chapter Three

Re/prodicing the Stock Type: The Black African Villain in Elizabethan Drama

The representation of black African characters as inexorably other in English Renaissance texts is not just limited to the literature’s manipulation of the stereotype invested in colour symbolism and rhetoric. A number of dramatic texts also represent African characters as other through the characters’ own actions and behaviour. The plays are remarkably consistent in depicting these characters as possessing common, unvarying characteristics and attitudes which are reproduced in fixed impressions or stock types inherited from the past. Just as in Renaissance travel accounts, the fictional worlds of dramatic texts such as the two representative plays, Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* (1594) and Thomas Dekker’s *Lust’s Dominion* (1599), select and edit African reality to conform to or to portray popular beliefs about the African as an inferior "them" while fostering the illusion of a superior "us." The inherent evaluative judgment invested in the stereotype is based on skin colour, which is also closely linked with the character, action, and behaviour of the black African villains.

In general, the drama of the period functions to propagate existing negative impressions of African characters whenever they appear by reproducing the black
African mainly in terms that ignore individual traits in favour of types. While the African female in the Jacobean plays usually appears as a highly sexualized serving maid to a white heroine, the male counterpart is almost always an overly ambitious military man who is also calculatingly cruel, wholly committed to evil, and sexually involved with a white woman of rank. Lust’s Dominion’s Eleazar and Titus Andronicus’ Aaron exemplify the latter type. The consistency with which the stereotype of the villainous black African is reproduced reveals that it is closely tied to ideological concerns. It is perpetuated either to deflect attention from self-interested power, as in the case of Lust’s Dominion, or to distance society’s ills by pointing a finger at those far removed from the centre, as in Titus Andronicus.

According to Eldred Jones, when Francis Kirkman published Lust’s Dominion in 1657, he ascribed it to Christopher Marlowe, but this idea was rejected by several critics who saw in the play’s structure and characterisation, striking similarities to Titus Andronicus. Jones concludes that "comparisons with Aaron are inevitable in an examination of the portrayal of Eleazar, not only for obvious similarities, but for some significant differences. For, while copying the main features of the earlier character, the author of Lust’s Dominion tried to improve on certain of them" (Jones, 60-61). That Dekker may have
copied the main features of Aaron for Eleazar should not overshadow the individuality of the two plays. Aaron and Eleazar exemplify best the stereotype of the villainous black African, as opposed to the alien Moor aesthetically produced to enhance the spectacle of pageants, masques, and some plays, or the noble Moor of The Merchant of Venice and Othello, a rare type during the early modern period.

From the outset, both plays construct, distort, and re/produce the "reality" of black African characters in terms that appear to privilege dominant ideologies and interests, especially since their endings insistently conform to fixed, conventional views of the black African character as a threatening other who must be excluded from the mainstream. Lust's Dominion, like Titus Andronicus, reproduces negative stereotypes of the African character, but unlike the latter play which teases us in some instances with potentially subversive elements that serve to question or to destabilise the fixity of certain assumptions and perceptions about African reality, Lust's Dominion conforms wholly to orthodox views.

There are ways in which Lust's Dominion appears to present Eleazar as part of, rather than apart from, white Spanish society. Eleazar is a military man who has distinguished himself in defence of Spain alongside white Spanish soldiers. He is also a prince in his own right, is married to a Spanish nobleman's daughter, and is beloved of
his father-in-law, Alvero. Although the dying old King of Spain cautions against Eleazar's upstart nature and vaulting ambition, he nevertheless commends him to his heir apparent, Fernando, as "a man / Both wise and warlike" (I.i.i.65-66). Eleazar is also favoured by the Queen Mother with whom he has an illicit affair, and in this relationship, she is an equal, willing, and indeed aggressive partner. While it is true that Eleazar is vilified throughout the text as a black, ambitious devil because of his skin colour, it does not seem to follow that the white Spanish courtiers are ennobled either, for they are not any less ambitious or evil. Eleazar is no more a villain than the Spanish cardinal Mendoza, whose full participation in conspiracies of murder and lust indeed "dy[e]s [his] soule, as Inky as [Eleazar's] face" (I.i.i.191).

With but a few exceptions, the white Spanish court is as lusty and as corrupt as the black African Eleazar. The queen aggressively pursues Eleazar, earning herself the label of "Moor's Concubine" (I.i.i.139; II.i.58). She is Eleazar's willing accomplice in crime, as well as the Cardinal's and Philip's when loyalties shift. Not only does the Cardinal lust after Eugenia, but, as Fernando says of him, he is dangerously ambitious as well (II.i.ii.112-15). King Fernando is no innocent bystander either. At the risk of his reputation, his kingdom, and his marriage, he is in hot pursuit of the virtuous Maria, wife to Eleazar
(I.ii.206-20; II.iii.130-31). All the characters are equally culpable, whether black or white, African or European, foreigner or citizen. These should be definite signs that Eleazar is part and parcel of the corrupt Spanish world that has adopted him. However, although the text produces all these signals for Eleazar's inclusion, the Spanish society stubbornly resists, refusing to incorporate him permanently or to see beyond his dark exterior.

Likewise, the physical features of the black African character in Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus define his identity as other to the Western norm, but unlike Lust's Dominion's representation of Eleazar, Shakespeare's text gives no signals for his inclusion into mainstream society. From the beginning, Aaron aligns himself with the Goths, to whom he is very loyal. He fights with the Goths against Rome and is very protective of Tamora and her sons. Like a father, he chides Chiron and Demetrius for making a public spectacle of themselves fighting over Lavinia (II.i.49-53), warns them against inciting Romans to fury (II.i.75-77), and swears by the Gothic gods (II.i.61-62). When his baby boy's life is at stake, it is "to the Goths" that he directs his steps "there to dispose this treasure in mine arms" and to bring it up "to be a warrior and command a camp" (IV.ii.172-80). Aaron especially identifies with the Goths after Tamora has established herself as the indisputable empress of Rome. He self-confidently confides in Chiron and
Demetrius:

And now, young lords, was't not a happy star,
Led us to Rome, strangers, and more than so,
Captive, to be advanced to this height?
It did me good, before the palace gate
To brave the tribune in his brother's hearing.

(IV.ii.32-36)

No matter how much Aaron sees himself as one of the
white Goths, however, he remains a double foreigner on the
outside looking in. He is never made to feel anything more
than the repulsive black lover of the empress. He is
ostracised by the Roman world as the chief architect of
evil, and he is also rudely reminded by the Goths of his
marginality as a black man when they turn against his black
son. Much as Aaron may attempt to combat his alienation by
aligning himself with the Goths, he is in a Rome that also
treats Goths as barbaric others, and because of his
difference in skin colour, he is doubly alienated even as he
functions as an "insider" in courtly circles as the queen's
consort in sex and crime.

On a more general level, Aaron is represented as having
no origins, and even the one name he bears suggests a
Western, Christian extraction. His cultural roots, unlike
those of Eleazar, Othello, or the Prince of Morocco, are
obscure. Neither Roman nor Goth, he is depicted as an
eloquent personification of black otherness, a cultural
hybrid who has internalised Western cultural values as much
as he has internalised a distorted view of his own cultural
roots. The African world he knows is populated not by
equivalents to the Olympus, Prometheus, Caucusus, or Semiramis from the Western classical mythology he knows so well (II.i.1-24; II.iii.30-31; 43; 75-79), but by bears and lionesses, lambs and goats, berries and roots, curds and whey, cabins in caves, and warriors and camps (IV.ii.137-39; 175-80). In brief, his is a world devoid of humans and of heroes.

Aaron’s position in the predominantly white world is not as ambivalently conceived as that of Eleazar, who is at once part of, and yet apart from, the Spanish world. Aaron’s alienation and isolation are total and are emphasised throughout the text. In the opening scene of the play, for example, when the Romans squabble, kill, and seize brides and when his paramour, the Queen of the Goths, loses a son and gains a husband, Aaron is but a silent black presence in her entourage. No one mentions or addresses him except in stage directions, and even then, it is only in connection with his dark hue. Aaron is so aware of his social marginalisation that when he does finally speak at the beginning of act two, it is clearly as an outsider whose survival in mainstream society depends on the rising fortunes of his mistress (II.i.1-24).

Significantly, Aaron’s zealous commitment to assist Tamora in her sworn revenge against the Andronici (I.i.450-55) is compounded by his knowledge that her social climbing to the throne of Rome guarantees his upward mobility as well
(II.i.1-24). His confidence that in her new position Tamora will be better able to execute her revenge against Rome is rooted in his faith in the queen’s ingenuity or "wit" (II.i.10-11; 23-24; 120-25; IV.i.25-30; 44). Aaron’s obvious admiration for Tamora’s perfected art of crime and deception is further manifested in the way he proudly cheers himself on after every "excellent piece of villainy " (II.iii.7) that he successfully executes on behalf of the emperor and empress (III.i.150-205). His perverse delight in acts of savagery and the clever manipulations he calls wit, however, fail to raise his social position in Rome in the way that Tamora’s manipulation of situations does for her, nor does it earn him recognition as anything but a vile monster. If anything, his actions succeed only in forcing him deeper into the stereotype of the diabolical, lawless, and godless black African who can be nothing more than a queen’s sexual playmate.

In producing the black African character as other, Lust’s Dominion and Titus Andronicus reveal that neither Eleazar’s princely nobility nor his involvement in the defence of Spain impresses the colour-prejudiced Spanish population sufficiently to accept him as one of them, and neither Aaron’s loyalty nor his protection of Tamora and his sons is good enough to stop the Goths from deserting and alienating him, or even from wanting to murder his son, whose only crime is an accident of birth. The inclusion of
Eleazar and partial inclusion of Aaron into the inner circles of court life as black African men is not only temporary, but it also forms the basis for their later exclusion from the royal court and from the larger society. Eleazar's "similarity" to the white Spanish world in particular, whether in status or in crime, is suppressed in favour of difference, while Aaron’s perceived difference from the norm is insisted on and maintained throughout.

The marginalisation of Eleazar and of Aaron and their eventual exclusion from the mainstream society involve their systematic reproduction in negative stereotypes that serve to normalise differences in humankind. Through the stereotyping process, Eleazar and Aaron remain outsiders, excluded and ostracised because of their skin colour. As we have seen, the stereotype concept calls for a duplication or reproduction of already fixed impressions about the other which work to legitimise difference as they deny the individual his or her human identity. The mainstream culture’s refusal to incorporate Eleazar and Aaron, reproducing instead, negative stereotypes of the other, demonstrates how there is, within the stereotype, an element of active agency exploited by the drama, an agency that is able to turn diversity into uniformity and similarity into difference.

Christopher Geist and Angela Nelson recognise this active engagement of the stereotype in misrepresenting the
other. As they point out, the "stereotype develops, exaggerates, exploits one or two attributes of a given group or class of people and applies those attributes to all members of that group or class without distinction" (Geist et al., 263). Qualities that are commonly credited to Africans, such as barbarity, demonism, cruelty, fierceness, insensitivity, lustfulness, or paganism, appear and reappear with predictable consistency whenever a black African character comes on stage. Thomas Heywood’s black African king, Mullisheg, gives voice to this observation in the second part of The Fair Maid of the West (1630) when he complains:

Shall lust in me have chief predominance?  
And virtuous deeds, for which in Fez  
I have been long renown’d, be quite exil’d?  
Shall Christians have the honour  
To be sole heirs of goodness, and we Moors  
Barbarous and bloody?" (III.iii.139-44)

The stereotype thus becomes a significant tool in the construction of otherness, since it functions to organise human beings into categories by stamping them with a set of characteristics that work to simplify, if not falsify, reality, creating in the process an impression of uniformity, stability, naturalness, or permanence.

One of the more popular methods for "stamping" the black African character is repetition. English Renaissance drama reveals that repetition is a key ideological strategy in fixing the image of black African otherness as an indisputable truth. Lust’s Dominion’s Eleazar and Titus
Andronicus' Aaron represent the many, almost interchangeable dramatic portrayals of black Africans in the early modern period (including the less interesting ones) who typify characteristics and are assigned uniform roles popularly perceived as appropriate to the alleged nature of black Africans. Both Lust's Dominion and Titus Andronicus appear to participate in a simulation of an African reality, a simulation that not only conforms to the dominant culture's perception of its African other, but also endorses, promotes, and validates reductive African stereotypes, as though these stereotypes were a mirror image of what all men and women of African descent naturally are.

Through their persistent reproduction of fixed impressions of the black African character, the texts invite us to see the putative African reality they depict in terms of essentialist assumptions as normal as plain common sense. Such subliminal espousal of the essentialist claim to the supposed naturalness of certain deficiencies "inevitably functions to perpetuate dominant power relations or English hegemonic ideologies that project the dominant viewpoint as universally true, transcendentally valid and nonpolitical," as Loomba persuasively argues (19). What Loomba's assertion underscores is that such claims to universal truth act as a mystifying strategy that serves the interests only of particular, privileged groups of humankind. In some ways, Titus Andronicus demonstrates this point in the text's
destabilisation of the fixity of such assumptions.

Loomba points out further that "a central feature of hegemonic ideologies is their . . . claim to represent all humanity and fix their 'others' as inferior and finally non-human" (19). This statement is not only true, but it also calls attention to the fact that the version of humanity these ideologies claim to represent is not representative at all, for excluded from it are those deemed inferior to the white euroculture--those whose voice and agency are silenced and denied in the general scheme of things, except where the voice is supposedly self-implicating. Jean Howard and Marion O'Connor remark that "when texts are said to speak for humankind, humankind often shrinks radically to include only those within a traditional pale of privilege" (4). This argument holds true not only of dominant cultures but of dominant ideologies as well, with the exception that unlike texts, ideologies don’t speak out loud but rather locate themselves in the interstices of the unstated. This is what makes them so insidious.

The dehumanisation and subsequent marginalisation of Eleazar and Aaron serve to illustrate the anxious need by the status quo to divide humankind into the "human us" and the "in/sub/human them" dualities. The drama’s reproduction of the stereotype thus designates a whole series of practices that seek to manipulate and to ensnare responses to the black African character as inferior. Lust’s Domonion
and *Titus Andronicus* capitalize on an active reproduction of negative stereotypes that render the black African character as other through three loosely designated but intertwined areas of cultural differentiation: societal judgments and evaluations of, and prejudiced attitudes to, the black African character based on existing stereotypes; the black African character’s self-evaluation and self-referential testimonies; and the actions and behaviour of the black African character.

Influences on dramatists’ imaginative reconstructions of Elizabethan travel accounts are clearly discernible in both plays in which the villains are depicted in terms close to Richard Eden’s description of Africans: "a people of beastly living, without a God, love, religion, or common wealth" (Hakluyt, 6: 167). Their cruel actions sometimes echo the charge levelled against Africans by Johann Boemus, that they "carry the shape of men, but live like beasts." They "be very barbarous," and cannot discern "any difference betwixt good and bad, honesty and dishonesty" (49). The plays’ depictions of Aaron and Eleazar appear to reflect these views already ingrained in mainstream white society. In both plays, villainy, demonism, unmitigated cruelty, and moral degeneracy are frequently associated with black skin.

One of the poems prefaced to the 1961 Fredson Bowers edition of *Lust’s Dominion*, "To my honoured Friend Mr. F.K. on publishing this Tragedie," sets the stage for cultural
conflict by highlighting skin colour as well as sexist prejudices that exist in Spanish society and dog the footsteps of the two marginalised characters in the play, one of them a woman (the Queen Mother), the other a black African. As F.K.'s friend puts it,

A Queen is Pictur'd here, whose lustful Flame
Was so Insatiate, that it wants a Name
To Speak it forth, Seeking to Bastardize
Her Royal Issue that a MOOR might Rise.
He Flatter'd Her, on purpose to Obtain
His Ends to Sit on th' Royal Throne of Spain.
Black as his Face his Deeds appear'd at last. (130)

The issues here are threefold. One, that a queen should be insatiably lustful is embarrassing to the patriarchal state and to the royal throne of Spain. Two, that she should bear a black African man's bastards is scandalous since her "sin" is made public by the visibility of her "young bauds" (I.i.71) and suggests the danger this bastardization presents to the "purity" of the white culture. Three, the main fault is placed on the African, whose black face is already proof of inappropriate behaviour, for flattering the Queen, thereby drawing her into his lascivious ways.

The play proper reiterates the colour prejudice raised by the dedicatory poem, insisting on attributing Eleazar's villainy not to his ambition to sit on the throne of Spain and avenge his father's death and loss of a kingdom as he says (I.i.157-98), but to an inherent evil, natural to his kind. Eleazar, like Aaron, is clearly one of a long list of worldly, ambitious, unscrupulous villains, such as Lorenzo
and Balthazar in *The Spanish Tragedy* (1586/87), Barabas in *The Jew of Malta* (1589), Richard in *Richard III* (1597), Iago in *Othello* (1604), Edmund in *King Lear* (1605), Fransisco and Flamineo in *The White Devil* (1611), and the Cardinal and Ferdinand in *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614). Whereas the wickedness and atrocities committed by the white villains are generally seen as rooted in everything else but their complexion, *Titus Andronicus* (1594) and *Lust’s Dominion* (1599) insist on locating the black villains’ wickedness, lust, and malignity largely in the colour of their skin. Eleazar’s unmitigated evil, for example, is repeatedly linked by others not to his Islamic faith—though the play gives him an Islamic background (I.2.111–14; V.i.91–93)—but to his blackness. His complexion, and to a certain extent, his foreignness, form the necessary basis for his exclusion from mainstream society, and the same goes for Aaron. Unlike the white villains, black African villains wear the "badge of hell" in their faces.

This is demonstrated through the stereotypical view of the African as the demonic other expressed by the colour-prejudiced characters in the plays. The stereotype of the black African as a devil is based on the long-held view that the devil is a black man. As G.K. Hunter says, according to historical sources a "powerful and ancient tradition [existed,] associating black-faced men with wickedness." It was commonly believed then that "'a damned soul may and doth
take the shape of a blackamoore,' a belief which "came right up to Shakespeare's own day" (Hunter, 34-35). This view offers one of the best organising principles for the inscription of cultural difference in early modern drama. The blackness of Aaron and Eleazar is almost exclusively linked to the devil and to hell as a symbol of damnation, and it is often used elsewhere as a means of dehumanising and degrading other black African characters as well.

For instance, in answer to Eleazar's question as to why he and Crab are staring, Friar Cole of Lust's Dominion spontaneously replies: "seeing your face, we thought of hell" (II.ii.125). King Fernando exposes his colour prejudices when he attempts to persuade Maria to leave her husband Eleazar and marry him instead: "on thy husband's face / Eternall night in gloomy shades doth dwel" (III.ii.23-4). In order to smooth Philip's and Hortenzo's way to murder, Isabella advises them to rob the dead black men, Baltazar and Zarack, of their clothes, put them on, and, to complete the disguise, "paint your faces with the oil of hell" (V.ii.170-71). This black disguise, as well as the hideous crime it enables the pair to commit, symbolically evokes the traditional link of blackness to acts of violence. Similar biases are expressed by young Philip, who addresses Eleazar, "Thou true stamp'd son of hell, / Thy pedigree is written in thy face" (IV.i.40-1). Hortenzo's angry retort against Zarack and Baltazar, is
couched in racial slurs that reduce them to non-human categories: "You damned Ministers of villainy, / Sworn to damnation by the book of hell; / You maps of night, you element of Devills" (V.ii.1-3). Eleazar is crowned King of Castille, and on hearing the news, Alvero mourns: "Here hell must be when the Divel governs you" (III.ii.244).

The stereotype of the African as the devil personified has had a long history, and Lust's Dominion is replete with derogatory epithets that demonise Eleazar. Prince Philip refers to him several times as a "hel-begotten fiend," a "Black Devill," and other variations of the prince of hell (I.i.123, 128; I.ii.145, 153; II.iii.7, 35). Roderigo sees Eleazar as a "damn . . . black feind" (III.ii.178), while the defeated King of Portugal matter-of-factly concludes that "the Moor's a Devill," a "horrid feind," the "Prince of hell," and a "damned Negro" (IV.ii.29-34). Perhaps the most symbolic demonisation of the black African in the text is enacted by the Cardinal, whose speech in reference to Eleazar is emblematic of an exorcism ritual:

Bell, book and candle, holy water, praier,
Shal all chime vengeance to the Court of Spain
Till they have power to conjure down that feind That damned Moor, that Devil, that Lucifer.

(II.i.49-52)

Often in these cases, the demonisation of the black African other comes about without conscious thought and in the wake of discontent, revealing the self-interestedness of those who exercise power, or of those whose power and privilege
are deemed threatened by the elements of sameness in the other.

Not only *Lust’s Dominion*, but also *Titus Andronicus* is replete with images that reduce the black African to animal and/or demonic levels. Aaron is variously termed a "ravenous tiger" (V.iii.4), an "inhuman dog" (V.iii.14), an "accursed devil" (V.iii.5), and an "unhallowed slave" (V.iii.14) to cite but a few. To the Roman world, as to the Elizabethans, Aaron is everything and anything but human, and his black complexion, like that of Muly Mahamet and Eleazar, is repeatedly linked by others to the presence of evil. One of the ways Titus can express the extent of Tamora’s and her sons’ demonic machinations, for example, is to link them to the stereotype of the black African figure as evil personified. Upon his encounter with the disguised Tamora and her sons, Titus says to them:

> Welcome, dread Fury, to my woeful house;  
> Rapine and Murther, you are welcome too.  
> How like the Empress and her sons you are!  
> Well are you fitted, had you but a Moor.  
> Could not all hell afford you such a devil?  
> For well I wot the Empress never wags  
> But in her company there is a Moor;  
> And would you represent our queen aright,  
> It were convinient you had such a devil.  
> (II.iii.72-79)

Besides shifting all blame for his family’s and Rome’s misery onto the alien other, he also draws on the stereotype of the black African as a devil to enhance the monstrosity of Tamora’s and her sons’ evil intents.

Blackness in this text is also represented as a form of
abuse and debasement. When Bassianus meets Tamora in the forest, he expresses his contempt for her by suggesting that her relationship with the "[swart] Cimmerian" Aaron is corrupting and contaminating, thereby revealing his deep-seated racial biases. According to Homer, Cimmerians were black men who "lived in the land of darkness" (Titus Andronicus, 1031, 72n), and the way Bassianus sees it and tells Tamora to her face, Aaron

Doth make your honor of his body's hue
Spotted, detested, and abominable.
Why are you sequest'ed from all your train,
Dismounted from your snow-white goodly steed,
And wand'red hither to an obscure plot,
Accompanied but with a barbarous Moor,
If foul desire had not conducted you?
(II.iii.72-79)

Bassianus' contempt for Tamora, like that of young Philip for his mother in Lust's Dominion, is likely provoked by her clandestine affair with a black African man, a liaison looked on by the Elizabethan white society as threatening to dissolve fixed racial boundaries as well as rendering white culture impure. The playwrights in general fully exploited the stereotype of the African as excessively sexual, a belief repeatedly reproduced in the travel accounts of the day (see Jordan, 34-35; Boemus, 34, 37; Leo Africanus, 1: 180, 187; Purchas, 5: 353). Just like Othello's relationship to Desdemona or Eleazar's to Queen Eugenia, the very sight of Aaron, a black African man, in a sexual involvement with a white woman, threatens to break down the understood barriers between self and other, to make
difference seem similar, the strange familiar, and the alleged superiority of the white man less than self-evident.

The racial anxieties with which a Tudor audience evidently identified are even better demonstrated by the colour prejudices of the Spanish society in Lust's Dominion. The Spanish populace is not pleased that a black man is having an affair with their Queen. For this reason alone, and in spite of his having been adopted into the Spanish society, Eleazar is ostracised and alienated from the mainstream. As he himself complains to the queen of his constant harrassment, he is subjected to the killing looks, hissing tongues, and pointing fingers of a Spanish populace that is fidgety about the inter-racial relationship:

I cannot ride through the Castilian streets
But . . . every hissing tongue cries, There's the Moor,
That's he that makes a Cuckold of our King,
There go's the Minion of the Spanish Queen;
That's the black Prince of Divels, there go's hee
That on smooth boies, on Masks and Revelings
Spends the Revenues of the King of Spain.
(I.i.83-92)

The hostile Spanish population represents Eleazar in terms which inevitably fix and (re)produce him as an outsider, a black other. Not only is he perceived in the stereotypical role of an insatiably lascivious black African, a trait commonly associated with blacks in the early modern period, and made the scapegoat of the queen's lust and of Spain's economic malaise, but the imputation of pederasty is also heaped on to the rest of his vices. The sexual affairs
between Eleazar and Eugenia, Aaron and Tamora can only be understood by the early modern English society "as a radical assault on the whole system of differences from which the [Tudor] world was constructed" (Neill, 410), differences the society seeks desperately to maintain.

The dominant culture's need to maintain difference between self and other is particularly evident in the way alternative voices are never allowed to emerge or to be heard in public. Eleazar tells his story only in asides and soliloquies. It is a story which attempts to counteract the Spanish society's biased evaluations of him on grounds of his skin colour. Whereas the Spaniards readily associate Eleazar's villainy with evil generally attributed to black African people, Eleazar himself gives alternative and clear motives for his demonic behaviour, though it is a behaviour with which we are clearly not meant to sympathize. As he says, he is compelled to avenge the death of his father and the loss of his father's kingdom of Barbary to a Spanish tyrant, to avenge his own captivity and subsequent enforced residence in Spain (I.i.156-61), and to avenge the slights to which he has been subjected by the "many headed beast" of a Spanish populace (I.i.83-93).

Significantly, some of these complaints are made to be seen as justified by the prejudices exhibited against him by his white Spanish peers. However, while the play allows Eleazar sufficient voice to protest against the restrictive
image constructed for him by the dominant culture, it also
invites us to share his experiences as a black African in
the repressive world of Christian Spain. In a dominant
culture that sees him as nothing but different from itself,
Eleazar’s own narrative is suppressed, and the court is too
blinded by its prejudices as well as its self-interests to
notice any analogues between itself and a black African.
The Spanish populace insists on foregrounding Eleazar’s
difference from, not similarity to, them.

The Spanish people place blame for the adulterous
affair with the Queen Mother only on Eleazar. What they
underscore in this relationship is not the queen’s so
obvious erotic aggression (I.i.8-18) nor Eleazar’s unwilling
response to it later, but the insatiable lust and male
sexual potency commonly associated with black Africans
during the early modern period. While Eleazar is enamoured
of the Queen Mother, she is evidently the sexual aggressor.
She demands that he kiss her (I.i.32-35), imposes her kisses
on him (I.i.43-45), and exhibits erotic behaviour too
forward for a queen (I.i.20-21; 41-60). Eleazar, on the
other hand, though obviously a willing recipient of these
attentions previously, is shown trying hard to ward off
further advances from her by repeatedly telling her to go
"away" (I.i.15), and he complains to her (though perhaps
with an exaggerated sense of self-sacrifice), of her sexual
insatiability:
there's here
Within this hollow cistern of thy breast
A spring of hot blood: have not I to cool it
Made an extraction to the quintessence
Even of my soul: melted all my spirits,
Ravish'd my youth, deflour'd my lovely cheeks,
And dried this, this to an anatomy
Only to feed your lust. (I.i.74-81)

The Spanish populace, however, puts the blame for
turning the king into a cuckold only on Eleazar, ignoring
the queen’s agency in this situation, preferring to cast her
in the passive female role. To Prince Philip, Eleazar is
the aggressor whose natural "leachers armes" (I.ii.121)
entrap and defile the queen. Like Bassianus commenting on
Aaron’s relationship to Tamora in Titus Andronicus, Philip
also associates black skin colour with dirt and
contamination. After learning of his mother’s affair with a
black African, he addresses her as "sweet mother," but
immediately regrets giving "one so foul so fair a name"
(I.ii.106). Though his use of the word "foul" could also
refer to her adultery, the fact that he angrily addresses
Eleazar as a "hel-begotten fiend" (I.ii.124) carries with it
embedded racial prejudices, as does the Cardinal’s hateful
comment about the African prince as a messenger from hell:
"why stires this Divell thus, as if pale death / Had made
his eyes the dreadfull messengers / To carry black
destruction to the world" (II.i.1-3).

Throughout his attack on the Spanish court assembly for
neglecting their moral duty to the king and state, Philip
insists on underlining Eleazar’s difference from white
Christian Spain by drawing on such oppositions as "christian armour" (I.ii.112) and "damned Infidels" (I.i.114), "warlike stratagems" of Spain (113) and the "leachers armes" of "this Divell" (120; 128). Having been away from Spain, Philip is horrified that the Spanish court could betray his father's name "to everlasting infamy" (116) by suffering his queen to be "a Moor's Concubine" (139). In spite of his knowledge that the Queen was not only a willing paramour to the black African but that together, the Queen and the African "rip't up the entrails of [the King's] treasury: / With Masques and antick Revellings" (I.ii.141-42), Philip chooses to downplay his mother's responsibility in bringing the state to ruin, insisting instead on isolating Eleazar as the sole culprit: "stand you all still, yet let this divell stand here" (I.ii.145).

Through the language of exclusion, Philip engages in a discourse of difference which effectively displaces Eleazar from the centre of court life to the margins of culture. First, Eleazar is deprived of his property and threatened with banishment "to beg with Indian slaves" by the equally villainous, corrupt, and luscious Cardinal Mendoza, and second, Eleazar is the only one of the corrupt Spanish court who is pointed out as a "damne[d] . . . "feind" (I.ii.153) and a "villain" (125). As Philip reassures his (equally guilty) mother, it is Eleazar who "dishonours you and me, dishonours Spain, / Dishonours all these Lords, this Divell
is he" (I.ii.127-28). What Lust's Dominion reveals in its representation of otherness, therefore, is that any similarities between the African and the dominant white culture are ignored in favour of maintaining difference. Alternative voices are suppressed, and assumptions that have been taken for granted by the dominant culture tend to prevail over those which threaten to challenge the status quo.

This imperative by the mainstream to uphold difference is also demonstrated in the attempted murder of Aaron and Tamora's baby boy in Titus Andronicus. Tamora's secret plot to get rid of her cultural hybrid simply because of its black complexion serves as an unpleasant reminder of how black Africans were popularly regarded as cultural misfits. The baby's half-brothers and the nurse reveal entrenched racial prejudices in their hysterical reactions to the sight of a black Gothic-Roman-prince. The nurse curses it as a "joyless, dismal, black, and sorrowful issue" as she contemptuously hands it to Aaron saying, "Here is the babe, as loathsome as a toad / Amongst the fair-faced breeders of our clime" (IV.ii.66-68). The nurse's association of the baby's complexion with a "loathsome . . . toad" and "a devil" (63) and the half-brothers' references to the baby as "a tadpole" (85) and "the offspring of so foul a fiend" (79) not only reduces the baby to the level of an animal, but it also suggests to these racially prejudiced speakers the
baby's evil propensities. Hence they feel a desperate collective need to "hide [it] from heaven's eye," before "our Empress' shame, and stately Rome's disgrace" is discovered (59-60).

The baby's dark complexion is certainly seen as a threat of great magnitude. While the nurse is afraid for Rome, Chiron and Demetrius' concern is for their mother's reputation, and for their own threatened position in Rome should her status change once her indiscretion is made public: "By this our mother is forever sham'd" (112), says Demetrius; "Rome will despise her for this foul escape" (113), mourns Chiron; and "The Emperor in his rage will doom her death" (114), predicts the nurse. The combined attack by these racially prejudiced white Romans and Goths on the Aaron-Tamora issue brings into sharper focus the distinction and permanency of black otherness and isolation. The fears of possible repercussions to the queen and to Rome as a whole expressed by the nurse and the two brothers expose the workings of racial and sexual ideologies in the service of state power. Much like George Best's narrative cited in an earlier chapter in which blackness was seen as an infection (Best, 54-55), the blackness of Aaron and Tamora's baby too is reconstituted into a sign of the abnormal and presented as threatening to upset the hitherto established hierarchies on the human scale.

The baby's complexion also threatens to dismantle the
ranks in the *status quo*. The dominance of the dark complexion in the black-white mixed breed inevitably serves as an advertisement of the queen's indiscretion, and presents a threat not only to the Roman empery, but also to the hitherto implicit acceptance of a white supremacy. The death sentence quietly pronounced on the baby becomes an ideologically necessary step to conceal the shame of the queen and of Rome, and to contain the general threat to the purity of white culture. In exchange for power and privilege, Tamora is willing to turn her little prince into a dead tadpole on grounds that it is an unnatural issue, with the full support of her other sons and the bay's nurse. This self-interested act not only reduces the black African character to the mere sign of an expendable other (blood-ties notwithstanding), but it also reveals cultural space as highly negotiable.

This cultural negotiation is further demonstrated, albeit in the lowest of registers, on a fly. In the fly-killing scene, Titus, in a state of madness, takes pity on a "poor harmless fly" that his brother Marcus kills, but his compassion turns sour as soon as he learns it was but "a black ill-favour'd fly, / Like to the Empress' Moor" (III.ii.66-67). When he later asks for a knife to kill the fly he had wanted spared in the first place, it is only because it bears the "likeness of a coal-black Moor" (III.ii.78). Titus conjures up the cruel image of Aaron to
justify his wanting to kill the fly, because the blackness of the fly transforms it into a personification of evil. Since blackness and cruelty here merge, in Titus’ clouded thinking the fly becomes guilty by association. Such personifying ways of thinking and subsequent negotiations embedded in the unwritten codes of culture come as a natural response to stereotypes of the black African that were already rooted in the culture.

Similar responses are revealed in the hunting scene when the court party converges in the forest for the day’s sport. The forest is described as a perfect pastoral setting. The morning is "bright" and joyful. "The fields are fragrant and the woods are green" (III.ii.1-2). From the perspective of white, colour-prejudiced characters, however, Aaron’s presence transforms this beauty into hell’s kingdom as his blackness conjures up in Lavinia’s mind the image of a raven. By extension, Aaron and Tamora’s affair becomes, for Lavinia, a "raven-colored love" (II.iii.83). Just as Webster, in the White Devil, portrays his sympathetic character, Marcello, as having racist tendencies (V.i.188; vi.227) in order to show that even the good characters could not avoid internalising racial biases arising from social conditioning, so Shakespeare allows Lavinia, his otherwise sympathetically-drawn character, to use the racial slurs she has internalised.

Besides the fact that the black complexion of the
African seems to provoke automatic colour-prejudiced responses from some white characters, dramatic depictions of the absolute wickedness of the black African villains themselves through what they say, works to justify and to validate these general negative responses, and to protect users of racial slurs like Lavinia, from any moral condemnation. The popular myth of viewing the skin colour of black Africans as an outer manifestation of innate evil is reproduced in the drama and demonstrated not only through the responses of prejudiced white characters, but also through individual testimonies of black characters themselves. Eleazar, for example, is made to swear to cause havoc in Spain, and part of his revenge strategy is aimed at Cardinal Mendoza, who has banished him from the court and confiscated his property.

The threat to the Cardinal involves what is meant to seem as an unconscious equation of a black complexion to inner evil, thus making the evil appear natural in a black person: "Cardinall, this disgrace, / Shall dye thy soule, as Inky as my face" (I.ii. 191-92). Eleazar is made to reiterate this connection between blackness and evil several times in the play with an aggressive pride in his black complexion, a pride which is also by and large, self-negating. He orders Baltazar to murder Prince Philip and the Cardinal in the dark. He calls upon "Murder" to "ride in triumph; darknesse, horror, / Thus I invoke your aid,
your Act begin; / Night is glorious roab, for th' ugliest
sin" (II.ii.164-6). He instructs the two black Africans to
"see me no more till night; / Your cheeks are black, let not your souls look white" (II.ii.80-1), and with misplaced pride, he refers to his now murderous self as "thee that never blushes, thou thy cheeks / Are full of blood"
(V.iii.55-6). Eleazar is also made to present his African physical features as threatening when he awaits an opportunity to contrive his revenge on Spain:

I’le stil wake,
And wast these bals of sight by tossing them,
In busie observations upon thee.
Sweet opportunity I’le bind my self
To thee in base apprentice-hood so long,
Till on thy naked scalp grow hair as thick
As mine, and all hands shall lay hold on thee.

(I.i.183-89)

In a similar vein, Aaron, in Titus Andronicus, is made to reproduce proudly, negative connotations of his black complexion as though they were a natural given: "O how this villainy / Doth fat me with the very thoughts of it! / Let fools do good, and fair men call for grace, / Aaron will have his soul black like his face" (III.i.202-05). As he declares his revenge to no one in particular, Aaron appears readily to augment the horror of his strategy by linking it to his physical features, which he represents as utterly menacing:

What signifis my deadly-standing eye,
My silence, an’ my cloudy melancholy,
My fleece of woolly hair that now uncurls,
Even as an adder when she doth unroll
To do some fatal execution? (II.iii.32-36)
By being represented as using racialised verbal violence himself, Aaron’s speech also appears to support the English Renaissance culture’s common practice of associating African physical features with actions perceived as monstrous or evil, thus seemingly reaffirming himself as indisputably other. The fact that Aaron and Eleazar are made to highlight physical features (other than skin colour) that were often associated with black African people, features such as the thick, woolly hair, the cloudy melancholy, and the murderous stare (see Hakluyt, 6: 176; 7: 261), serves to lay emphasis on, as much as it validates, the two men’s difference from the European norm. These features, and the fact that they are made to be voiced by black African characters themselves, work not only to enhance the evil of the villains’ intent, but also to naturalise it.

The enormous delight Aaron and Eleazar seem to take in their singular role as villains not only puts emphasis on the way black Africans were perceived by mainstream English society, but it also inevitably creates the impression that their thirst for destruction is rooted in an innate evil common to their kind. Their apparent self-conception in negative terms necessarily echoes and confirms the English traditional view of Africans as essentially evil. However, it does not follow that they are themselves ignorant of their marginal status in a dominant white society; the
problem is that this knowledge is often suppressed in favour of extolling the virtues of the dominant culture by depreciating its opposite.

In *Lust's Dominion*, for example, Eleazar’s cynicism and awareness of his disadvantaged position in the white Spanish society is obscured by the immense enjoyment he seems to derive from his demonic behaviour, an enjoyment which is meant to authenticate what he is made to present as inborn evil:

I thank thee provident creation,  
That seeing in moulding me thou did'st intend,  
I should prove villain, thanks to thee and nature  
That skilful workman; thanks for my face,  
Thanks that I have not wit to blush. (II.ii.66-70)

Eleazar’s boast of his inability to blush ironically implies his shamelessness, and his and Aaron’s apparent delight in the role of the devilish black African inevitably validates the idea of ingrained rather than acquired villainy, for implicit in the self-condemning passages put in their mouths is also an acceptance of a disposition to villainy made to appear as a natural part of their behaviour as Africans. Such implications serve, first, to reproduce and to legitimise claims to the supremacy of white culture and the inferiority of others, and second, to justify white domination over its subjugated others.

These stifling essentialisms in which the white playwrights trap the black African characters promote difference, especially since they are made manifest not only
through the black African villains’ own self-negating testimonies put in their mouths by the dramatists, but also through their being made to engage in horrendous acts of evil. *Titus Andronicus* and *Lust’s Dominion* uniformly reproduce the black African figure as a barbaric and cruel other so as to make the image appear fixed in frame. Neither Aaron nor Eleazar appears to have any qualms of conscience when they execute acts of cruelty, which are naturalised in two effective ways. One, Aaron’s resolve to unleash revenge on the Andronici is made to seem purposeless because, as a number of critics have noted, the motives for his evil actions are not made clear. This lack of a clear motive effectively contributes to the standard impression of black Africans as possessing an inherent malignity. Two, in cases where the motives are clear, alternative voices are stopped from emerging into the public discourse of the play in favour of foregrounding eurocentric versions of the other. Eleazar is a case in point. The text makes clear that he engages in acts of evil because of socio-political factors. However, his individual, alternative narrative outlining motives for his behaviour is restricted to asides and soliloquies, privileging only the dominant or collective view that sees Eleazar’s evil actions inscribed in his face (I.i.19).

Eleazar’s sharp awareness of the injustices heaped on him by a prejudiced white society had awakened in him a
strong determination to avenge these wrongs, for he feels betrayed by Spain, in whose defence he had shed his blood, and more especially, by the court of Castille (I.ii.180-91; 240-42). His burning desire to climb to the Spanish throne becomes part of his more general mission relentlessly to pursue revenge for his belittlement (I.ii.180-91). He thus plots "to cut down all that stand within [his] wrongs [and his] revenge" (I.i.191-92), and in this single pursuit, Eleazar becomes extremely malevolent to friends and foes alike, perpetuating as he does so, the stereotypical image of the black African as naturally cruel. It is worth noting here that however justifiable Eleazar's motives for his actions may be, the extent of his cruelty overshadows the reasons for his behaviour and drains any sympathy one may have entertained for him.

Like any self-proclaimed villain, Eleazar will stop at nothing to climb to the top, and does not care in the least who gets hurt in the process (II.ii.60-64). He ingeniously manipulates his way to the throne of Spain and shows no mercy for political opponents who stand in the way of his reaching the top. As he eliminates friend and foe without a shred of remorse, he vows "by one, and one, [to] ship [them] all to hell" indiscriminately (II.iii.189). Almost gleefully, he threatens to drown Spain with its "own proud blood," to "make an ark of carcasses" with dead Spaniards, and then "Revenge and [he] will sail in blood to hell"
(II.iii.190-92). His underworld rhetoric identifies him with the powers of hell, while his actions confirm the validity of the Spaniards' conceptions of him. The text represents Eleazar as so cruel that he has no qualms about getting rid even of his wife if the end-result is having his way: "Had I a thousand wives, down go they all: / She dies, I'le cut her off" (II.ii.151-53). He betrays, manipulates, and imprisons his paramour, the Queen Mother; makes a cuckold of King Philip who loved him; maliciously murders King Fernando; and attempts to eliminate his arch enemies, Prince Philip and Cardinal Mendoza.

With a dexterity equalled only by Aaron, Eleazar exploits relationships to attain his own ends. As Eldred Jones points out, Eleazar "makes use of the Queen's lust for him, of Fernando's lust for Maria, [and] of Mendoza's lust for the Queen" (Jones, 66). His unflinching cruelty is unleashed even on those who intercede to save him from banishment, including King Fernando and his own wife (I.ii.150-54; 240-44). Although we are not meant to sympathize with him or to excuse his horrendous actions, the text provides enough evidence to suggest that Eleazar's villainy is solely motivated by ambition and by his thirst for revenge as he himself confesses, not by inherent evil. But however justifiable his complaints of the prejudices heaped on him by the Spanish society are, the type of revenge he pursues is extreme, especially when it includes
those who care for him. His undaunted cruelty defeats rationality, and for a hegemonic group anxious to distance its own malevolence, such irrational behaviour is located in the only supposedly natural explanation for such inhumanity: his complexion.

In Titus Andronicus as well, the stereotype of the black African as barbaric and cruel is made manifest through Aaron’s unscrupulous behaviour. Aaron’s malignity not only surpasses Eleazar’s, but it is also compounded by the lack of clear motives for his actions, a lack which, as Bartels argues in her essay, "Making More of the Moor," makes his ignoble behaviour "all the more insidious" and "unique" (445). Although Tamora’s master plan for destroying the Andronic clan is equally insidious in its secretive operation, it has a purpose. She comes out not as the "chief architect" of the tragic events, a title reserved for Aaron, but as the invisible ally of a visible demon whose sadistic enjoyment in causing destruction is meant to reflect essential evil. Aaron is represented as a master-demon of cunning deceit (III.i.202-05). His satanic behaviour is elaborately demonstrated through a series of atrocities that fit the image of a black African often portrayed in Renaissance travel accounts as a beastly, godless, lawless savage—a degenerate creature.

Aaron’s actions, like those of Eleazar, are made to appear so calculatingly cruel that other people’s treatment
of both men as devils incarnate seem altogether justified. With a self-congratulatory pat on the back, for example, he is made blatantly to boast of having done "a thousand dreadful things / As willingly as one would kill a fly" (V.i.141-42), and curses those days "wherein [he] did not some notorious ill: / As kill a man or else devise his death, / Ravish a maid or plot the way to do it" (V.ii.127-29). He unleashes Tamora's sons like dogs to "serve [their] lust" on Lavinia's chaste body (II.i.104-31), causes Titus' two sons to be imprisoned and later executed, deceives Titus and unflinchingly chops off his hand (III.150-56; 188-91), and crowns it all with his repeated displays of sadistic pleasure at the success of every crime he commits (II.iii.7; II.i.202-03). Tamora's addresses to him as "lovely Aaron," "sweet Moor," and "lovely Moor" (II.iii.9; 51; 90) remain but smooth words coating lustful intent, and are undermined by Aaron's own actions that expose him as anything but "lovely" or "sweet."

Aaron's and Eleazar's total lack of moral fibre compounds the general perceptions of them as indeed different. Through their exploitation of existing negative stereotypes of black Africans, the two dramatic texts expose the power of these stereotypes to keep the African image securely fixed in an unchanging racial and cultural frame. In representing Eleazar's and Aaron's marginal status, the drama reveals how the stereotype can function as a key
ideological strategy in the discourse of difference. In both texts, the stereotype works to support and to validate the supposed truth espoused by the dominant culture, of an alleged aesthetic and moral superiority of white Europeans to black Africans, even though this supposed truth is unarguably constructed from inherited transmissions of simplified, ethnocentric versions of reality.

As an inherently evaluative concept, the stereotype thrives on the inclusion-exclusion principle, a principle crucial to the representation of a wide range of differences that inform political practices that reproduce and maintain racial and cultural hierarchies. While representing black African characters in reductive formulas made to appear permanent, the texts reveal that by the same token, the mainstream culture constructs in itself a subliminal superiority. As Edward Said has aptly commented, "the European culture gains strength and identity by setting itself off against the [other]" (Said, 7). The resultant "us"/"them" dichotomy inevitably works to constitute what Peter Stallybrass refers to as "a nexus of power . . . which regularly reappears in the ideological construction of the low-Other" (Stallybrass, 5). Repetitions of such notions on the English stage secure these assumptions, effectively authenticating and validating derogatory stereotypes, while making more rigid the sense of difference between the dominant culture and its others.
By representing Eleazar and Aaron as indisputably other to mainstream society, the worlds of Lust's Dominion and Titus Andronicus provide strong evidence of what blackness and euro-superiority meant to the English Renaissance world. The prejudiced white characters' evaluations of Eleazar and of Aaron appear justified by these two black men's singular devotion to projecting themselves as devils incarnate. However, it is important also to point out that, just as with Lust's Dominion, the world that defines Aaron is itself not as monologic, orderly, and stable as it makes itself appear to be. In many ways, Titus Andronicus also shows that the cruel machinations Aaron carries out are a part of, and facilitated by, weak elements in a Roman world depicted as internally divided, much as in Lust's Dominion. Warring factions, self-serving and ambitious personalities, blind pursuit of honour, patriotism, lust, weak but tyrannical rule of a first son, and pitiless revenge, combine to implicate all in turning Rome and Spain into worlds devoid of values worth emulating. Aaron and Eleazar operate in and are part of these dysfunctional white worlds whose value systems have turned upside down.

In Lust's Dominion, the Spanish world is at the mercy of a self-serving, hypocritical, "silken" court defined by lust and hunger for power. In Titus Andronicus, acts of barbarism are confused with acts of honour, impious actions are interpreted as religious piety, and murder is but
religious sacrifice (I.i.96-131). However, despite the fact that people in power and positions of authority also contribute to turning Rome into a "wilderness of tigers" and Spain into a dominion of lust, the legitimation of power and authority through mystification works to distance their own evil, and to project it instead onto men whose dark skin qualifies them as embodiments of the symbol. In this way, the stereotype inevitably gives rise to an ideological fixity and uniformity of notions of naturalness of black inferiority and white superiority.

Eleazar and Aaron reveal a self-conscious sense of the disadvantages visited upon them by their skin-colour. For Eleazar, this awareness is at first manifested through his protests against the restrictive image constructed for him by the dominant culture. As he becomes increasingly aware of his limitations as a suppressed outsider and as a black man, however, his protests turn into defensive, self-deprecating postures. One of Eleazar's self-defense mechanisms against the prejudices of the Spanish society takes the form of accusing his accusers of racial prejudice: "because my face is in nights colour dy'd, / Think you my conscience and my soul is so, / Black faces may have hearts as white as snow; / And 'tis a general rule in morall rows, / The whitest faces have the blackest souls" (V.iii.6-11). In other words, as Duncun argues with reference to trust in Macbeth, "there's no art / To find the mind's construction
in the face" (I.iv.12-13), and for Eleazar as well, goodness and evil know no colour.

However correct the general flow of Eleazar’s argument may be given the extent of the Spanish court’s lasciviousness and general corruption, it rings hollow because of the horrible deeds we know he has already committed. His protests are born out of his awareness of what white society expects in a black African, but these are also measured against his actions which, ironically, bring into sharper focus the validity of these expectations and confirm him in his otherness. Eleazar’s other defensive form of protest involves laying claim to a common humanity with the white Spaniards: "in my veins, / Runs blood as red, and royal as the best / And proud’st in Spain" (I.i.155-57).

True as this assertion may be, as D’Amico observes, Eleazar "can never hope to be the social equal of the Spaniards, even though he has married a gentlewoman and has served the state; because of his race he is less than human (a dog), or other than human (a devil)" (110). The play repeatedly refuses him an identification with a mainstream culture that insistently resists accepting the idea of a common humanity between blacks and whites. The popular view of Eleazar, as of Aaron, continues to be little more than his black face. Differences in physiognomy determine his and Aaron’s representation as a different category of people
whose identity oscillates between human, bestial, and demonic.

The stereotype of the black African as a devil incarnate who also harbours natural aggression, uncontrolled libido, and bestiality is repeated without challenge, and with such regularity as to acquire the appearance of truth. Repetition of negative epithets fixes Eleazar in a distinct social role as a black villain-devil and collapses his human identity and royal status into the role the Spanish "silken courtiers" have constructed for him: "a Devill, / A Slave of Barbary, a dog" (I.i.151-54). Like almost all African villains that populate the English Renaissance stage, Eleazar is identified by all Spaniards either with the devil or with the animal world of toads and serpents, and this is repeated with increasing frequency towards the close of the play (V.ii.28; 38; 46; 49-53; 75).

As the play approaches its end, Eleazar also begins to see himself through their eyes, eyes that steadfastly reduce him to an "inhumane slave" (V.ii.107-08) and a demon who must of necessity be "thrust ... down to act amongst the devills" (V.iii.147). More significantly, with the realization that he is forever entrapped in, and condemned by his black skin, Eleazar also progressively aligns himself with the emblems of hell (II.iii.189; 190-92; IV.ii.57) until his human identity is ultimately erased, and he acknowledges himself as one with the kingdom of hell:
"Devills come claim your right, and when I am / Confin'd within your kingdom then shall I / Out-act you all in perfect villainy" (V.iii.164-66). Through a complex process of cultural stereotyping, therefore, by the end of the play, Eleazar is finally made to conform to the very image others have constructed for him. His last breath is marked by a total identification with the devil as he confirms himself in the role mainstream society claims is assigned to him by nature: the black devil.

Eleazar is thus gradually reduced to a type, and his expulsion from Spain serves as "strong evidence of what blackness meant to the white English world of the Renaissance" (Tokson, 43). Prince Philip's imperious banishment from Spain of "this Barborous Moor, and his black train" in the closing sentence of the play demonstrates best this all-inclusive judgment on the African/foreign other who must be excluded from all that is deemed civil, good, and human. The banishment inevitably works to fix in the public's consciousness the otherness of the African character whose exclusion as an emblematic figure of chaos is symbolically demonstrated by the expulsion of all Africans from Spain. The Africans are perceived as savage threats, and their expulsion becomes a symbolic statement of Spanish intent for the whole of "uncivil" Africa.

Prince Philip's narrow perception of a restoration of order involves pardoning only Spaniards of all crimes they
committed, and these in turn, support his expulsion edict. This discriminatory act reveals that it is only in the face of a perceived threat to its power and privilege that the hegemonic group recognises the necessity for solidarity, as the Spanish courtiers demonstrate in the final act of the play. As a governing class recognising their common position, they mobilise to banish the threatening black Africans. Even though Eleazar’s actions, like Aaron’s, bear testimony to the stereotype of the cruel dark-skinned African, he is not the only disorderly element in Spain, but as an alien black African man, he provides the best emblem of what is presented as the evil that must be purged.

It is important to note here that Lust’s Domonion neither interrogates nor challenges racial stereotypes in its representation of the black African character as other; it merely stages them. The world of the text is deeply invested in supporting the idea of European superiority in its insistence on the inferiority of the black African character. The total expulsion from Spain of all Africans supports the view of European domination over all its others. Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus, however, goes beyond the production of the stereotype to interrogate the validity of its fixity. In her article, "Making More of the Moor: Aaron, Othello, and Renaissance Refashionings of Race," Emily Bartels argues that although Titus Andronicus "creates a chaos in which distinctions between right and
wrong, insider and outsider, self and other are problematically obscured, it does not challenge the racial stereotype" (442). Admittedly, Shakespeare reproduces popular racial stereotypes to feed the prejudices of some of his audience, but contra Bartels, Titus Andronicus does go beyond the mere exposure of these stereotypes as a sign of racial otherness, to destabilise and to challenge, albeit in a limited way, fixed racial categories revealed as no longer adequate to explain the reality of Europe’s others. This is nowhere better demonstrated than in the scene where Aaron comes to the defence of his son.

Like Eleazar, Aaron recognises the alienating factor of his blackness and the reality of white privilege, but unlike Eleazar towards the end of the play, he will not succumb to others’ definitions of him, preferring instead, to reserve the right to define himself even if that means doing so in hellish terms as his reaction to Lucius’ reference to him as a devil reveals: "If there be devils, would I were a devil, / To live and burn in everlasting fire, / So I might have your company in hell" (V.i.147-49; emphasis mine). In his use of the conditional "if" and the subjunctive "were," Aaron rejects the image of a devil imposed on him by others at the same time as he challenges the dominant culture’s self-confirming presumptions and conditioned responses to non-Europeans that had hitherto been taken for granted. Furthermore, unlike the daughters of Niger (Masque of
Blackness) and the King of Moors (Triumphs of Truth) who offer the best instances of self-abnegation, Aaron will not accept being forced to look at his own or his son’s blackness as a mark of inferiority. He is represented as frequently demonstrating that his choice of the route to evil is self-willed not inborn or colour-determined, and the scene with his son provides him with enough provocation and with a platform to fight with all the energies he can master, against a misrepresentation of blackness and of black people.

The prejudiced characters in the play react contemptuously to Aaron’s and Tamora’s baby (IV.i.66-68). The condemnation of the child to death provokes Aaron to attack racial stereotypes as he furiously defends black Africans. His sharp retort and poignant question to the Nurse: "is black so base a hue?" (IV.i.71) questions not only the nurse’s and Tamora’s sons’ right to judge an innocent child purely on the basis of his skin-colour, but also the whole notion of received cultural evaluations of whiteness and blackness in terms of the binary oppositions of good and evil. The futility and frustration occasioned by Aaron’s awareness of his limitations in a repressive dominant white society and his lack of power to change his situation is manifested in his feeble attempt to give Chiron and Demetrius a taste of their own medicine in his negation of whiteness: "ye sanguine, shallow-hearted boys! / Ye
white-lined walls! ye alehouse painted signs!" (V.ii.97-98). Aaron reconstitutes whiteness here into a sign of the negative and abnormal, and in an impassioned speech, extols blackness as he defends it against the charges of the racially prejudiced characters in the play:

Coal-black is better than any other hue,  
In that it scorns to bear another hue;  
For all the water in the ocean  
Can never turn the swan’s black legs to white,  
Although she lave them hourly in the flood.  
(V.i.99-103)

Aaron reconstructs blackness in part from materials of travel literature, specifically, from George Best’s narrative cited in Chapter One in which Best recalls his encounter in England with a child born of a white woman and a black man whose blackness "was so strong, that neyther ye nature of ye clime neyther the good complexion of the mother concurring coulde any thing alter" (Best, 54). Whereas Best’s narrative posits blackness as a sign of infection ("it seemeth this blacknesse proceedeth rather of some natural infection"), Aaron reconstructs it into a sign of dominance as he proudly asserts that blackness "scorns to bear another hue" (V.i.100). This assertion must have been altogether disturbing to some of the Elizabethan audience for its subversive and transgressive potential. It inverts and challenges the hitherto understood claims to hierarchical relations of white superiority and black inferiority. The baby is symbolic of a threat of black "genetic dominance," to use Boose’s phrase (Boose, 46). Its
dark complexion suggests that blackness is so powerful that it is capable of absorbing and dis/mis/colouring whiteness, a point implicit in Aaron's assertion. Furthermore, Chiron's comment that he "blush[es] to think upon this ignomy" of a black half-brother (V.ii.115) elicits from Aaron his assessment of white privilege: "Why, there is the privilege your beauty bears" (116). Aaron's remark is not meant to be taken merely as a casual observation on his part on how lucky white people are to be able to blush; rather, it is meant to draw attention in a way, to the racial inequalities that marginalise black Africans and deny them legitimate power on account of their black skin.

The challenge is nowhere made clearer and sharper than in the debate between Aaron on one hand, and Chiron, Demetrius and the Nurse on the other over the value or valuelessness of a black human being. Challenges to racial stereotypes are lodged in such rhetorical questions as "is black so base a hue?" (IV.ii.71), or "will you kill your brother?" (87). They are also embedded in firm statements addressed not only to Chiron and Demetrius, who would deny a brother because his colour is a source of embarrassment, but also to those members of the white world whose prejudices Chiron and Demetrius represent. Aaron impresses on the two brothers the superficiality of colour and the importance of blood relations: this "young lad fram'd of another leer," this "black slave [who] smiles upon the father . . . is your
brother." He is "sensibly fed / Of that self blood that
first gave life to you . . . , he is your brother by the
surer side, / Although my seal be stamped in his face"
(IV.ii.119-27).

Failure to convince Chiron and Demetrius that their
black baby brother has a rightful place in their hearts as
well as in the palace leads to Aaron's ploy of suggesting a
baby-switch in order to save his own. Whether this other
baby is a fabrication or not, it is also, ironically, of
mixed parentage of his own countryman Muliteus, and his
white wife. The significant difference is that Chiron and
Demetrius agree to the plan only because Muliteus' child, as
Aaron reassures them, is, like its mother, "fair as you
are," and so should "be advanc'd" and "received for the
Emperor's heir, / And substituted in the place of mine, / To
calm this tempest whirling in the court, / And let the
Emperor dandle him for his own" (IV.ii.152-61). It is in
the rejection of the "coal-black," "thick lipp'd" but blood-
related baby and the ready acceptance of a "fair" but alien
one that Shakespeare partly grounds his challenge to racial
stereotypes by exposing the inherent hypocrisy embedded in
existing ideologies and power structures. In this scene in
particular, "the fair breed of our clime" are presented
ironically, for Aaron shows far more insight and human
compassion than the prejudiced characters in the play. In
addition, by transgressing established rules, Aaron also
creates some questions about the legitimacy of these rules.

Aaron's defence of his son's blackness constitutes a form of resistance to white privilege and domination. His defiance of the establishment manifests itself nowhere so clearly as when the baby's life is threatened. The death sentence pronounced on the little boy sounds the death knell of Aaron's unservile relationship with his paramour queen. In his address to Tamora's "murderous villains" who will not hesitate to "kill [their] brother" (IV.ii.88), Aaron instructs them to "Tell the Empress from me, I am of age / To keep my own, excuse it how she can. . . . My mistress is my mistress, this myself" (IV.ii.104-107). Aaron's stand by his "first-born son and heir" (IV.ii.92) constitutes a valid challenge to racist ideology and cultural values by exposing them as deeply flawed. We are presented with a white "civilisation" whose politically ambitious and calculating matriarch will kill her child to save and maintain her social status and privilege, whose body politic is split from the start by power struggles and an adherence to sacred but ironically destructive traditions, whose barbaric murder of kin is but a show of religious piety and whose "entire community, in a chaos of kin-killing and self-mutilation, turns on itself in the ultimate pattern of annihilation" (Liebler, 276).

Aaron's speech extolling the value of his baby (IV.ii.83-96) is one of the most moving in the play. His
paternal warmth as he fights to preserve his son's life undermines as it challenges the rigidity of such binaries as civilisation and barbarity, Roman values and "other" values, whiteness and blackness. His care for his son is anything but uncivilized as he lovingly offers up his life to save him. Aaron and his magnanimous self-sacrifice are sharply contrasted to Tamora and Titus—the only other parents in the play aside from Lucius—who would kill their children to save or preserve their public image. Titus's killing of his son and daughter, which, for all intents and purposes, is cold-blooded murder and "irreligious piety," is ostensibly done for honour and for the public good.

The Andronici patriarch obviously espouses the Machiavellian tenet that "anything may be done if the welfare of the community is in question, that cruelties in a prince may be justified if the ultimate aim is the restoration of order and the safety of society, and that it is justifiable to deceive the enemy with whom you are at war" (Butterfield, 108). In the case of killing a blood relation for the public good, Machiavelli felt (according to Butterfield), that "no wise man would ever reprove an extraordinary action taken for such a purpose" (108). There are those who would say, however, that such killings of one's flesh and blood in the interest of the public good are acts of murder motivated purely by selfish interests either to preserve positions of power and authority (Tamora) or for
honor (Titus).

In his discussion of honor and policy in *Radical Tragedy*, Jonathan Dollimore argues that "honor pretends to integrity—to be thought to possess it is enough . . . . It is a kind of political strategy" (Dollimore, 213). The Roman honor Titus evinces has everything to do with the politics of the so-called patriotic integrity (I.i.64-156) as opposed to barbarity. As Liebler asks, "how else does a culture define itself? It distinguishes ‘self’ from ‘other,’ ‘them’ from ‘us,’ citizen from alien, and does so along both national and racial lines of demarcation. But the Rome we encounter . . . has no unifying ideology" (Liebler, 278), especially since its central leadership is a hybrid of sorts. It is headed by a Roman and run by a matriarch Goth assisted by a black African. Although honor is privileged in the Roman world, it is an honor divorced from ethical considerations and possible consequences. This is a world in which the "distinction between man and beast" or "Gothic horde and Roman civilisation" becomes progressively obliterated," as William Slights correctly points out (25), and where the same act of child-murder is either irreligious and barbarous or pious and sacred depending on who looks at it or on who performs it.

For Aaron, however, Shakespeare makes the interests of the child come first. It is true that the compassion Aaron reveals as he protects his son is only momentary and does
not in any way exonerate him from "his most wicked life" (V.iii.145), but Shakespeare introduces a compassionate side of a black African, rare in the drama of the time, to challenge the racial stereotype that posited black African people as totally devoid of human emotion. This brief but positive aspect of the representation of the black African is, however, suppressed in favour of foregrounding an evil whose proportions defy rationality. Although Aaron is indeed operating in a world turned upside down, his blackness is insisted on, for it makes him an easier scapegoat to attract blame. For the Romans, as for the Elizabethans, the one sure thing about Aaron is that he is black and a consummate devil.

Homi Bhabha correctly states, in a different context, that "to represent the colonial subject is to conceive of the subject of difference" ("Representation," 98). The same idea can be applied to African characters in relation to English Renaissance drama: to represent the black African character on the English Renaissance stage is, indeed, "to conceive of the subject of difference." Despite the fact that Titus Andronicus subjects the whole mechanism behind the functioning of state ideologies and power to sceptical interrogation, the Roman political world insists on targeting the black African as pathologically evil and as thus totally responsible for what befalls Rome. At the end of the play, it is Aaron who emerges as the man whose
physical features best qualify to fit the label of the
"chief architect and plotter of these woes" (V.iii.122), the
"execrable wretch" and "breeder of these dire events" (177-78). The stereotype of the African black as an irreligious
infidel is anxiously reconstructed at the end of the play
(V.iii.121; 143), and Titus is honoured as an innocent
victim of Aaron's evil machinations. That it should be
Marcus, one of the more sympathetic characters, who
reconstitutes the stereotype of the irreligious black
African, works to validate the charge against Aaron and more
specifically, to justify the production of Aaron as a clear
threat to Roman value systems. This condemnation also
serves to distance Rome's own active role in turning the
state into a wilderness of tigers (III.i.54), disclosing in
the process the manner in which power is legitimated through
mystification, since claims to restoration of order by Roman
power brokers (and Spanish ones in the case of Lust's
Dominion) are only attempts to efface discrepancies and
contradictions.

G.K. Hunter and Emily Bartels have indicated that by
the end of Titus Andronicus, justice has been served and
order restored with the capture and punishment of Aaron,
although Bartels is sceptical about Lucius' rule, the
stability of which she sees as uncertain (Bartels, 446).
Order as it is reasserted at the end of the play, however,
is relative. The evidence for order is that a new Roman
emperor is chosen and a form of justice is seen to be done. More importantly, however, the play closes with its own version of a wonder-cabinet emblem: a grand public display of a spectacle of difference comprising a black African—a visual marker of skin colour difference three-quarters buried in the soil of Rome—and a female outsider whose body is left at the mercy of beasts of prey. Crucial to the display of black African barbarity and female deviance in this final tableau is also a necessary expression of the power and self-authorization of the new body politic anxious to contain its visible signs of disorder, but this expression is also punctured by possible future instabilities from problems the play leaves unresolved.

Liebler’s pessimistic view that the restoration of order in Rome is not possible with such a conglomeration of uncertainties (227) and contradictions sounds persuasive. Contrary to Lucius’ optimistic vision for Rome, the future polity is too fractured "to heal Rome’s harms, and wipe away her woe" (V.iii.148). In the first instance, the same orthodox rules that govern Rome still apply. The sacrificial violence sanctioned by Roman law and applied to Tamora’s son at the beginning of the play is a large part of what sets in motion a chain of revenge against the Andronici in the first place, and it is also the same sacrificial violence enacted at the end by Titus on Tamora’s other sons (see also Slights, 18-32). At the sight of his two sons’
severed heads earlier in the play, Titus had promised himself that he "shall never come to bliss / Till all these mischiefs be return'd again, / Even in their throats that hath committed them" (III.i.272-74). At the end of the play, Titus feeds Tamora on her sons' cooked flesh in a cannibalistic ceremony of retribution, forcing the "mischiefs" as it were, down their mother's throat.

Although the authoritative closure produced by Rome's new governing body acts ostensibly to restore order and to contain subversion, the play points to some potentially subversive elements that mock this order. First, Tamora's baby with Aaron casts a looming shadow over the future of Rome, for its spared life raises possibilities of another cycle of revenge or retribution to appease its dead parents. Second, Aaron's live-burial breast-deep in Roman soil is emblematically subversive. It suggestively fulfills parliament's earlier request "to set a head on headless Rome" (I.i.179-86). That the head at the end should be a black one constitutes, from a eurocentric point of view, the ultimate act of transgression.

The representation of black African characters and the discourse of difference in Lust's Dominion and Titus Andronicus, therefore, reveal how the stereotype becomes an institutionalised form of representation of the other which, in Loomba's terms (used in a different context), "seeks precisely to efface contradictions by claiming universality,
naturalness and an objective and therefore true representation of 'facts'" (26). At the end of both of these plays, evil is seemingly exposed and purged through the burying alive of Aaron (Titus, V.iii.179), the starving to death of Tamora, the death of Eleazar, and the expulsion from Spain of all Africans. In all these cases, through an edict of state, evil is officially located outside Roman and Spanish frontiers, but whereas Lust’s Dominion ends on a note of conformity to orthodox views that appear to naturalise the otherness of the other, the ending of Titus Andronicus destabilises orthodoxy even as it appears to uphold it. The new Emperor, Lucius, seems to have no claim to order and civility after the type of sentencing he imposes on the two foreigners to Rome. Although a Renaissance audience would have likely experienced the ending quite differently, the state of renewed order is called into question, at least for contemporary audiences, by the public display of state barbarity unleashed on Aaron and Tamora.
Chapter Four

Challenging the Stereotype and

Destabilising Difference

The English Renaissance texts discussed so far are deeply invested in supporting the idea of English if not European superiority to and domination over those it marginalizes. Through the stereotype process, the texts on the whole insist on representing the other in negating, marginalising terms. This is not to say, however, that all dramatists that give full treatment to African characters totally disregard their positive traits. The drama allows a number of these characters a measure of humanity which nevertheless cannot be sustained due to contradictions produced by overlaps in gender, race, and social position.

Though these positive portrayals must compete with the heavy weight of existing negative stereotypes lodged too deeply in the culture’s psyche to make a difference in attitudes, they nevertheless serve an important function. They bring under sceptical interrogation the dominant culture’s "knowledge" of the black African other, and reveal fractures within the aesthetic and moral discourses that posit blackness as symbolic of all that is ugly and evil. The positive portrayals thus serve to expose negative constructs of the black African other as unstable and conflicted.

As opposed to the monstrosity of Muly Mahamet in The
Battle of Alcazar, for example, Calypolis is the picture of patience, practicality, tenderness, and quiet integrity, while Abdelmelec is an honest, dignified, considerate, humane, respected and god-fearing man. His strongest virtue is his patriotism. In The Masque of Blackness and The Triumphs of Truth, the daughters of Niger and the king of Moors are represented with a dignity and grace, splendour and magnificence commonly absent in representations of African characters (Blackness, pp.48-50; Triumphs, p.247). The extravagant, colourful Eastern garb the characters wear is no doubt for theatrical as well as aesthetic purposes, although this garb also contributes to enhancing the fractured and dislocated identity of the African other; Indian, Negro, Moor, Black-a-moor, Ethiopian, and even Turk all collapse in one figure. In addition, as a momentary spokesperson for African traditional values in The Masque of Blackness, Niger disclaims the eurocentric view of blackness as a mark of punishment on the African people, offering an alternative, positive interpretation of what it means to be black (lines 113-29).

Even Aaron and Eleazar, who are represented as dehumanised personifications of evil, are revealed as having a softer, humane side. The depth of Aaron’s humanity is briefly revealed through an ultimate act of self-sacrifice when he offers his own life in exchange for his son’s (Titus Andronicus, IV.ii.67-112). A similar touch of humanity is
also given to Eleazar in *Lust’s Dominion*. Much like Aaron, Eleazar is portrayed as having a measure of human decency when he declines to fight a disadvantaged enemy who is armed with only a broken sword (IV.ii.1042-047). Eleazar is also depicted as briefly exhibiting a sense of honour, compassion and tenderness during his eulogy to one of his black African soldiers who is slain during the fierce battle against Eleazar’s political foes (IV.ii.66-70). Morocco, in *The Merchant of Venice*, is not only a gentleman worthy of Portia’s hand and a respected and eloquent prince, but his African identity is also shown to be grounded in strong cultural roots. *Othello* portrays its hero largely in positive terms which Iago devotes his life to undermining. *Othello* is a noble black African with definite cultural origins, royal ancestry, soldierly and gentlemanly dignity, and distinctly humane impulses, at least before he allows Iago to penetrate his defenses.

With the exception of those who appear in masques and pageants, most of the African dramatic characters are warriors and soldiers who are praised and respected for their bravery, or who boast of it themselves. Physical bravery was evidently the one significant virtue allowed a black African male. In certain cases, however, this trait may not always have been a positive one. As Elliot Tokson cautions, "conceding this quality to the Moor did not necessarily mean that his humanity was enlarged, for courage
is so easily defined as a trait shared with animals and is not limited to or definitive of human beings of a civilized society" (Tokson, 122). So, although these characters are portrayed in a somewhat favourable light, the positive portrayals have to be properly contextualised since, as Shakespeare demonstrates in The Merchant of Venice and in Othello, they often compete with the repeated pejorative terms that define the black African in stock types.

In general, The Merchant of Venice represents the black African character as a dignified, well-bred, decent, noble prince. The text allows him not only a voice, but also an equal participation with other suitors in the hazarding game for Portia's hand. Morocco also exhibits a measure of confidence denied other black African characters such as the King of Moors in The Triumphs of Truths and the daughters of Niger in The Masque of Blackness, both of whom reveal signs of having internalised a sense of cultural inferiority. His self-assuredness is reflected in his determination not to sell himself short: "to be afeard of my deserving / Were but a weak disabbling of myself," he tells Portia (II.vii. 29-30). This positive reality of the African prince, however, is at times obscured by the negative responses his blackness excites.

Morocco is all too aware of the dominance of white over black in Venetian society, and this knowledge makes him somewhat vulnerable. This is indicated in his first meeting
with Portia for, prince or not, he feels compelled to apologize for his complexion, which he knows puts him at a disadvantage to "the fairest creature[s] northward born" (II.i.4). Morocco's plea for acceptance, like Eleazar's, further reinforces existing notions of essential differences between self and other. Drawing on one of the myths of the origin of blackness then in circulation, he blames the heat of the African sun for scorching his skin (II.i.1-3) as he also defensively points out that his difference in skin colour does not in the least alter the reality of a common humanity between him and Portia. Like many other black African characters in the literature of the period, Morocco argues that the same red blood as Portia's runs through his veins (II.i.4-7), and insists he is as deserving of her as any, if not better than some white suitors: "I do in birth deserve her, and in fortunes, / In graces, and in qualities of breeding," he boasts (II.vii.32-33). The effect of this plea, however, is nothing short of pathos, for underneath Portia's polite exterior is an undercurrent of internalised prejudice that refuses to see beyond Morocco's dark complexion.

That Morocco's vulnerability is rooted in his experiences as a black African is particularly revealed through Portia's conscious or unconscious biases. Her first reaction to the announcement of the Prince of Morocco's arrival is that he will be a black devil: "If he have the
condition of a saint and the complexion of a devil, I had rather he should shrieve me than wive me" (I.ii.129-30). Portia's quip indicates that even if the prince were a good man, his colour would be cause enough to reject him. Her revulsion from and jeering at the alien black African sharply contrast with her warm reception and encouragement of fellow Venetian Bassanio (III.ii.1-62). Whereas in her dismissal of the other white suitors earlier Portia had poked fun at their behaviour, mannerisms, or temperaments, in the case of the Prince of Morocco, her repudiation of him is based primarily on his difference in complexion, the result of her conditioned response to people who are not like "us." When the Prince of Morocco chooses the wrong casket, for example, Portia is genuinely relieved: "A gentle riddance. Draw the curtains, go. Let all of his complexion choose me so" (II.vii.78-79). Morocco is thus reviled for what he is not: white.

Despite the fact that Portia receives the Spanish prince, Arragon, with curt politeness and that Arragon actually comes out looking less deserving of her than Morocco, Portia judges the former only by his demeanour as "a blinking idiot," but she explicitly evaluates Morocco on the basis of his skin-colour. Morocco's attempt to assert a common humanity is thus undermined by Portia's language, which is quietly marked with prejudiced ideas and cultural judgments that are left unchallenged as Morocco marches off
stage into the sunset, branded a celibate for life. In its representation of the African alien as other, The Merchant of Venice explores the power of the stereotype to marginalise and exclude, even as it works to impede alternative, positive narratives such as that of Morocco, from emerging. Such an impediment also serves to expose supposedly fixed notions of difference as simply social constructs.

While in The Merchant of Venice the positive portrayal of the black African competes for space with the undercurrent of colour-prejudice that leads to Portia’s quiet rejection of Morocco, in Othello, the prejudices of some of the white characters work systematically to undermine and distort Othello’s identity as a noble black African to the point he takes on the attributes of the derogated black man. Shakespeare represents in Othello a complex and positive black African character and grants him greater possibilities than are often projected by a black African in the literature of the time. That the reports on Africa by classical and Renaissance travel writers did fire the imagination of dramatists can be further attested to by Othello’s reproduction of Pliny’s wild stories of African Cannibals that eat each other, the Anthropophagi, and men whose heads grew beneath their shoulders (I.iii.143-45; see also Hakluyt, 6: 169; Cawley, Unpathed Waters, 100-04).

Despite his narrative engagement with Pliny’s
sensationalized account, unlike most of the other black
African characters in English Renaissance drama, Othello is
represented as a bona fide member of humankind, with human
emotions and with faults and virtues alike. However, his
personality as he and other characters present it is heavily
counteracted by the racial prejudices of those who construct
him in negative images that serve to undermine and
eventually destroy his good reputation and erode his
humanness.

From the moment he steps on stage, Othello is a self-
assured, dignified man. In every other aspect except in
colour, he is a Venetian insider, a credible human being
with admirable qualities, who is capable of being understood
more than any other black African dramatic character in
early modern drama. By giving a more equitable, humane
portrayal of a black African character and setting it
against the dominant culture’s dehumanising discourse, the
play invites us to see that the seemingly natural divisions
within the human race are not so much biological phenomena
as they are social constructs. Othello is not represented
from the outset with the negative traits ascribed to such
black African characters as Muly Mahamet, Eleazar, and
Aaron. He is a civilised, dignified, self-respecting
individual, as self-assured and imposing as he is proud. He
knows that his personal integrity speaks for itself
(I.i.ii.30-31). Part of his composure is based on a solid
sense of his origins, a heritage of which he is proud (I.ii.21-24), and on his services as a faithful general to the state of Venice, which he has come to regard as his home (I.ii.18-24).

Besides the good reputation he enjoys with such people as the Duke (I.iii.48), Montano (II.i.30-38), some of the Duke’s officers (I.ii.83-84), other outstanding citizens like Lodovico and Cassio, and even (privately) Iago (I.i.147-53; II.i.288-91), Othello has also adopted a Venetian lifestyle. He is a Christian convert who seems comfortable with the local Venetian dialect, has been loved by Brabantio and often invited to his home, has married into a respectable Venetian family, and is loved by his wife, respected by the Venetian senate, and entrusted by the Duke with a generalship to lead the defence of Venice against outside invaders. As Lynda Boose duly notes, "in terms of the theological and cultural categories, Othello is a Venetian" (Boose, 38).

Othello’s blackness, however, puts his identity at stake, for it is a constant marker of his otherness. It is true that Othello operates competitively on the same level as any white Venetian of similar social, religious, political, or military status, but Shakespeare shows that Othello’s black skin colour makes him vulnerable to the wiles of racist white characters such as Brabantio, Roderigo, and more significantly, Iago, who insist on seeing
him as no more than "an extravagant and wheeling stranger / Of here and everywhere" (I.i.133-37). This assertion is in a sense rooted in the idea of Othello’s foreignness, of his having wandered outside his boundaries. In spite of Othello’s noble character, attested to by the gentle Desdemona’s choice of him for a husband, the biased characters construct an identity for Othello out of materials of classical as well as contemporary travel accounts to reflect the stereotype of the black African as a loathsome, irrational, jealous, and lascivious black man, incapable of reason or compassion. One of Johann Boemus’ assessments of Africans, for example, was of a people "neither touched with any feeling of pleasure or grief, other than what is naturall" (49).

The image of the black African as uncontrollably lustful was not only popular in Renaissance travel accounts, but it was also repeatedly invoked in various dramatic texts. Among the travel writers, Leo Africanus remarks on the black African’s unbridled sexuality (1: 180, 187); so does Samuel Purchas (5:353), and one Renaissance dramatist after another exploits this sexual reputation of Africans almost relentlessly. In the representation of Othello as a black African, this reputation is invoked by several white characters in the play, but especially by Iago (I.i.88-117), and it goes hand in hand with other loathsome traits associated with blackness. Following Iago’s lead, for
example, Roderigo not only mentions Othello's "thick-lips" (I.i.66) as a mark of differentiation, but he also tells Brabantio that his "fair daughter" has been "transported . . . to the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor" (I.i.122-26). Brabantio accuses Othello of using magic to seduce his daughter (I.ii.72-81; I.iii.60-64; 105-06), and his contempt for their union reflects the general view of Renaissance white culture that black-white marriages were detestable and went against all that was deemed natural (Newman, 144-45). Brabantio sees the Othello-Desdemona union as going "against all rules of nature" (I.iii.101), expressing his disbelief and his contempt for Othello's blackness when he pointedly tells Othello:

I'll refer me to all things of sense,  
... Whether a maid, so tender, fair, and happy,  
So opposite to marriage that she shunn'd  
The wealthy curled [darlings] of our nation,  
Would ever have, t' incur a general mock,  
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom  
Of such a thing as thou. (I.ii.64-71)

Brabantio's designation of Othello as a "sooty . . . thing" significantly comes after Othello involves himself with Brabantio's daughter. Before that, Brabantio ostensibly respected Othello as an equal, "lov'd [and] oft invited" him into his home (I.iii.128). As Jyotsna Singh aptly observes, Brabantio and the Venetian senate as a whole view Othello "as a 'civilized' Christian citizen [only] in so far as he is the pliant servant of the Venetian State, [but] as Desdemona's husband he cannot escape the racist
stereotypes pervasive in the culture" (Singh, 289). The black African subject is arbitrarily racialized and thereafter excluded from the mainstream according to the dictates of the powerful and privileged. Iago and Brabantio are set against a marriage between the fair Desdemona and the black Othello, and their insistence on the unnaturalness of the union is part of their politics of exclusion, which they weave into clever insinuations of what is "ours" and "theirs."

Iago feigns a "visage of duty" (I.ii.50) and knowledge as he builds his case around a false impression of male bonding by cautioning Othello, seemingly from one man to another, against the sexual wiles of Venetian women that he feels Othello, as an outsider, needs to know about (III.iii.201-203). In so doing, however, he also raises the question of Othello's difference from the norm. Iago highlights Othello's blackness and its common association with malignity when he suggests to him that Desdemona "seem'd to shake and fear your looks" (III.iii.207), a culturally biased sentiment already raised by Brabantio when he accuses his daughter of falling in love "with what she fear'd to look on" (I.iii.98). Perhaps Iago's most pointed reference to cultural difference and to the unnaturalness of a black-white marriage is when he tells Othello:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{(to be bold with you)} \\
&\text{Not to affect many proposed matches} \\
&\text{Of her own cline, complexion, and degree,} \\
&\text{Whereto, we see, in all things nature tends--}
\end{align*}
\]
Foh! one may smell in such, a will most rank,
Foul disproportion, thoughts unnatural.
But (pardon me) I do not in position
Distinctly speak of her, though I may fear
Her will, recoiling to her better judgment,
May fall to match you with her country forms,
And happily repent. (III.iii.228-38)

Iago carefully orchestrates this moment of shared masculine loyalties in the "temptation" scene to keep Othello from deciphering the truth behind his divisive machinations, and more importantly, to keep Othello from seeing his own exclusion, embedded in Iago’s use of such terms of difference as "our," "in Venice," "clime, complexion, and degree," all of which actively produce Othello as a racialized other.

Brabantio and Iago play the race card with gusto, emphasising Othello’s lusty nature and his deficiency in qualities that distinguish civilised beings from the rest: "loveliness in favor, sympathy in years, manners and beauties" (II.i.226-31). Iago in particular is determined to exploit skin colour difference and the stereotype of the black African as prone to excessive jealousy (see Leo Africanus, 1: 154; 2: 233) not only to break up Othello’s otherwise good relations with Desdemona, but also to break Othello from within. He carefully plots to "poison" Othello’s mind (III.iii.322) and to provoke him "into a jealousy so strong / That judgment cannot cure" (II.i.300-02) if only to prove that the coupling of "an old black ram" and a "white ewe" (I.i.85-86) is unnatural. Iago’s attack
on Othello involves a double-edged assault on his manhood and on his blackness, both of which render him vulnerable to Iago’s cunning manipulations. Othello’s gullibility facilitates his fall into the trap Iago carefully sets for him. Iago’s evocation of a sexualized Desdemona, for instance, works Othello up into an uncontrollable rage, an emotional state crucial to his production in the stereotypical image of a wild and jealous black African man, unfit to marry the "fair" Desdemona.

Part of Iago’s strategy is to get Othello to trust him to the point where Othello believes that Iago is an honest man who "sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds" (III.iii.243). Iago warns Othello against Desdemona and against Venetian women in general (III.iii.201-04). Othello’s blind trust in Iago as a fellow man makes him accept this generalisation about the morality of Venetian women at face value and makes him believe the charge of his wife’s infidelity on such flimsy evidence as a lost handkerchief (III.iii.322-24). Othello also assumes that as a Venetian born and bred, Iago would know more about Venetian females’ duplicity than an outsider such as he would. Initially, Othello resists Iago’s insinuations against his wife, arguing for Desdemona’s honesty (III.ii.225). This resistance, however, is a feeble one, as his reactions to Iago’s slander of her reveal (III.ii.205; 209; 215). Even later on, when Emilia denies Othello’s
accusations about Desdemona, Othello does not believe her, dismissing her as a "simple bawd" (IV.ii.20). These instances reveal that Othello is motivated by a strong masculine identity with Iago, enough to trust him blindly and to adopt indiscriminately his attitudes towards women.

Iago builds on the initial doubts he plants in Othello’s head by cleverly playing with Othello’s mind and causing him to imagine situations that do not exist. He conjures up images of copulation between Desdemona and Cassio by casually mentioning a "kiss in private" (IV.i.3), alluding to "naked[ness] . . . in bed" (IV.i.4), and asking Othello to imagine Desdemona "topped" by Cassio (III.iii.393). These images are pure fantasy, but they nevertheless contribute to Othello’s growing jealousy and rage, allowing Iago to destroy Othello’s image of his wife as a chaste and pure bride (Driscoll, 82) and his own public reputation as a man of honour and integrity. Iago knows what incessant harping on Desdemona’s conjured-up infidelity and on Othello’s blackness is likely to do to Othello’s already suspicious and vulnerable mind.

When, for instance, Othello demands from Iago "living reason" for Desdemona’s infidelity, Iago recites Cassio’s "dream" (III.iii.407-23). This "reason," based on a dream, proves nothing. Othello, however, believes the dream "denote[s] a foregone conclusion" (III.iii.425). Whenever Othello demands "ocular proof" of his wife’s unfaithfulness,
Iago shows Othello things that appear to be what they are not. He plants the handkerchief, well aware that "trifles light as air / Are to the jealous confirmations strong / As proofs of holy writ" (III.iii.322-24). Such "trifles" also include Iago's effective use of double entendre to deceive Othello. By casually using the word "lie" in connection to Desdemona and Cassio (IV.i.33-45), Iago feeds Othello's already highly strung jealousy and active imagination. The image of Cassio and Desdemona lying together makes the hitherto noble, self-assured general degenerate into a furiously abusive and incoherently raging husband (III.iv.474-75; IV.i.36-45). Iago has managed gradually to prove Desdemona's infidelity without proof, and Othello cannot ignore what Iago wants him to hear, for behind the image of a whore-wife lurks the fearful label of cuckold, which Iago makes sure Othello recognises.

More importantly, although Othello himself does not show it, there is reason to believe that negative remarks about his blackness make him more aware of his difference from the dominant white society, an awareness which creates in him increasing insecurities as a marginalised citizen. At a certain point in the play, Othello shows signs of having internalised Iago's and other colour-prejudiced characters' insinuations that he is not only different in age from Desdemona, but that he is also of an inferior race. This is particularly true when he starts wondering why
Desdemona should turn him into a cuckold. The only seemingly rational explanation Othello can imagine involves an unconscious regurgitation of racially-prejudiced ideas reminiscent of those propagated by Iago and Brabantio: "Haply for I am black / And have not these soft parts of conversation / That chamberers have, or for I am declined / Into the vale of years" (III.iii.262-65). Othello has been introduced by the racially-biased characters to the idea that his blackness is a disadvantage that has the power to affect his relationship with his wife (III.iii.207).

Determined to use the politics of colour difference to break up Othello’s marriage to Desdemona, Iago continually refers to Othello’s foreignness and his blackness, compounding the alleged disadvantages of his advanced age (II.i.226-31). His psychological assault is so successful that "credulous fools" like Othello and Roderigo are "caught" in his web of deceit (IV.i.47-48).

By the end of the play, Othello comes to embody the stereotype of the black African as a demonic and cruel other prepared to "furnish [himself with] some swift means of death for the fair devil," Desdemona (III.iv.474-75). He threatens to "tear her all to pieces" (III.iii.432) and to "chop her into messes" (IV.i.200). Othello’s slowly but surely poisoned mind ends up accepting Iago’s degraded portrait of his wife and succumbing to the image of his own degradation. When Lodovico finally asks, "where is this
rash and most unfortunate man?" Othello answers, "that was Othello; here I am" (V.ii.283-84). In the sober and contrite state of mind that marks his final appearance in the play, Othello sees himself as the "I" who is no better than the "malignant and . . . turbarn’d Turk [who] / Beat a Venetian and traduc’d the state" (V.ii.353-54). Indeed, his act of murder amounts to traducing the state.

The final speech in which Othello seeks to redeem himself as a human being capable of error (V.ii.345), as a great soldier (V.ii.339; 352-56) and a loving husband (V.ii.344; 347-48), is ironically the very speech that serves to confirm him in his otherness, as he unconsciously aligns himself with the non-Christian figure of the malign and barbarous Turk so often represented as an image of negativity in eurocentric discourses of difference of the early modern period. Significantly, Othello’s last speech is besieged and perforated by Western cultural values and reveals him as a split personality straddling the roles of "faithful Venetian general and Turkish ‘infidel’" (Parker, 97). His contrite narrative involves judging his own actions in terms of negative images with which Europe popularly defined her others, while his positive achievements too are measured "in terms of qualities that are considered Western, Venetian, Christian, and ‘civilized’" (Singh, 289).

As a typical cultural hybrid, Othello has internalised prejudicial ideologies that have produced and continued to
shape him as the other, and no masculine bonding will free him from the entrapment occasioned by his connection to his cultural roots. The text’s disclosure of Othello’s ambivalent position in Venice complicates as it questions the dominant culture’s claims to the fixity of cultural boundaries otherwise determined by the social and ideological systems in force, and problematizes claims to natural differences based on skin colour, revealing as it does so, deep-seated contradictions in representations of difference. At the end of the play, after Emilia tells him that Iago has played him for a fool, Othello believes he can assert his freedom by stalling state punishment and sentencing himself to death, but as a black man and as an ideological product of complex relations of power in society, he is shown to be remarkably unfree.

Othello’s suicide is, for him, a physical manifestation of free choice and of honour and integrity restored, but the powers-that-be look upon his dead face as nothing more than a rude defect in nature; not even his plea that he had loved "not wisely but too well" can save him from Venice’s ultimate condemnation of him as "an object [that] poisons sight [and must] be hid" from view (V.ii.360-61). In spite of Othello’s pleas for understanding and his elaborate self-defence for killing the "fair" Venetian (V.ii.294-356), the noble black African man does not even receive a token eulogy from the scandalised Venetians who, unable to reconcile
Othello’s blackness with humanity, are anxious to avert their eyes from the "loading" of the "tragic bed," and more importantly, from the subversive emblem of racial transgression displayed on stage for all to see (see also Neill, 391).

The ending of Othello thus suggests a good but fallen hero who is trapped in the stereotype of the savage black African. Despite his superior credentials, Othello is identified by the colour-prejudiced characters with popular epithets that generally worked to undermine the humanity of black African people. Among other demeaning, descriptive epithets, "lusty," "lascivious," "cruel," "dull," "sooty," "dirty," and "black devil" crop up throughout the text in reference to Othello by one colour-prejudiced character or another, who, knowingly or in ignorance, refuse to recognize Othello’s fine qualities, inevitably denying him all normality. It is worth noting that while the play represents a black African figure against the grain by endowing him with positive but systematically undermined qualities, it also destabilises fixed categories of difference by exposing these boundaries as shifting at will. Othello is dehumanised by some of the white characters because of his blackness, but it does not follow that Desdemona’s whiteness necessarily shields her from male domination, black or white.

In addition, Iago’s divide-and-rule policy motivates
him to construct imaginary cultural differences between white Venice and black Africa by harping on and reproducing existing negative stereotypes of the black African in order to undermine Othello’s credibility, but in the process of constructing Othello as an uncivilized barbarian, Iago also exhibits his own monstrous incivility. Towards the end of the play, in an interesting inversion of the stereotype of the demonic black African in a one-wicked-turn-deserves-another moment, Othello constructs Iago in the image of a white devil, saying, "I look down towards his feet; but that’s a fable. / If that thou be’st a devil, I cannot kill thee" (V.ii.286-87). The fluidity of boundaries of difference is further revealed when gender roles come into play and alliances are seen to shift perilously. At one point in the play, the most unlikely pair, Othello and Iago, bond against womankind, a bond symbolically realised in the temptation scene during which Iago and Othello’s minds become one in their resolve to kill Desdemona "else she’ll betray more men" (V.ii.6).

Othello is unable to see that this male bonding is built on shifting sands. Iago’s and Othello’s common difference from women makes them similar, but this similarity is simultaneously compromised by Othello’s difference from Iago as a racialized other on the margins of mainstream white culture. It is easy enough for the racializing Iago to make his bond with Othello appear as a
defensive alliance of men against treacherous women, but Othello’s credulity prevents him from realising that behind this facade of brotherly concern and sympathy lies the naked truth: that Iago, not Desdemona, is the real aggressor against Othello’s black personhood. It is no wonder that Othello’s too trusting nature earns him Emilia’s incisive censure: "what should such a fool / Do with so good a wife?" (V.ii.233). The positive representation of Othello is thus undermined by contradictions arising out of existing hierarchical relations of race and gender. His masculine and military identities allow him to occupy a moderately privileged position in Venice’s patriarchal order, in which he is both a female oppressor and a victim of racist bigotry. In terms of social hierarchy, not even his privileged male position can save him from his final condemnation as an African whose blackness is made to sink into oblivion.

This interplay of race, gender, and social positioning is nowhere more fully explored than in the Jacobean drama’s challenge to fixed categories of difference. Many of the African characters who appear in the Jacobean drama are triply-disadvantaged others: black women of low rank. The representation of black Africans in the Elizabethan texts examined so far involved male figures who play major roles as either protagonists or antagonists, are of royal descent (even though Aaron is not a prince in his own right, he is a
queen’s consort), and are, in most cases, involved in illicit liaisons with sexually-aggressive white women of rank. The driving force behind the actions of most of these black African male characters is their ambition and revenge. Stereotypical traits such as cruelty, demonism, savagery, and lust that construct the black African’s image as other are premised upon a masculinist tradition of militarism, ambition, aggression, and revenge that is consonant with the historical aggressiveness of England’s expansionist policy during the Elizabethan era.

Motivated by revenge, the black African male characters’ relationships with the white women in their lives (the Othello-Desdemona relationship excepted) also include their urge to conquer and possess their bodies so as to facilitate either their revenge plans or their upward social mobility, while they satisfy the appetites of their sexually aggressive mistresses. Eleazar in Lust’s Dominion (I.i.192-98) and Aaron in Titus Andronicus (II.i.12-13) demonstrate such motives clearly. The texts represent the women who associate with these black African male characters, with the possible exception of Desdemona, as social deviants who break the rules of expected female conduct. More significantly, the women’s explicit erotic aggressiveness shows them to be unwittingly complicit in the men’s machinations.

The Queen Mother and Tamora practically beg to be
possessed by oddly reluctant black African lovers whose primary interest in the women is non-sexual exploitation to further their own private agendas (Lust’s Dominion, I.i.14-60; Titus Andronicus, II.iii.16-29). Through the black male/white female sexual relations in these texts, the racial stereotype of the black African man’s cruelty and demonism goes hand in hand with the gender stereotype of the Jezebel/Amazon female figure, like the Queen Mother and Tamora, or of the dual saint/whore image of Desdemona. These relations generate, on one hand, a patriarchal discourse that insists on presenting women as objects of use and male possession, and, on the other, a discourse of difference based on colour that insists on negating black Africanness through the implicit suggestion that the only white women with whom black African men can hope to be linked are deviants.

Though marginalised as Europe’s other, ironically, the black African male characters, when they appear at all, generally occupy centre stage in Elizabethan dramatic texts. Black African female characters, on the other hand, hardly appear during the same period, not even marginally. Yet, as we learn from Amina Mama and James Walvin, not only were black Africans "present in Britain from Roman times or earlier" (Mama, 90), but also their number had dramatically increased in the course of the sixteenth century, and a number of them were employed as servants or retainers
(Walvin, 7). Mama and Walvin observe that because of their exotic nature and curiosity value, black slave-domestics began to figure prominently in more and more noble households as the possessions of Englishmen. They imparted status to their owners, and later, employers, and were viewed as "a colourful appendage to the fashionable lady or gentleman" (Walvin, 7-12; Mama, 94).

Queen Elizabeth’s father, as well as the Queen herself, are said to have employed Africans at court, including two African women, Ellen and Margaret Moore (Mama, 90-91), and by the accession of James I, African domestic servants had become "part of that . . . conspicuous fashionable consumption" of court life that was often flaunted, so much so that "royal patronage of black servants set a social style reflected even later at other levels of early Stuart society" (Walvin, 9). By the late sixteenth century, more and more black Africans found themselves filling the ranks of the domestic class, a position imposed on them by the social whims of English society. This probably explains the popularity of black African female servants in those Jacobean texts that have black African characters in their cast.

Yet in Elizabethan drama, the black African woman is either a muted presence, as in the case of the unnamed black African woman in The Merchant of Venice (III.v.40-43), or is totally absent. As Ania Loomba comments, "although two-
thirds of European slaves were female, the female slave is not proportionately visible in the drama of the period" (Loomba, 27). In Jacobean drama, however, the few black African characters are mainly maidservants to the white heroine, with such exceptions as the male servant Vangue in Marston’s Sophonisba, whose blackness is to be read as primarily symbolic. The literary response of the early modern period to the female black African reveals a strong tendency to dehumanize, degrade, and debase her in at least three different ways. One, at the heart of the representation of the black African female is the patriarchal view of female waywardness and inconstancy used by the dominant order to justify women’s general exclusion from projected ideals of self-fulfilment. Two, the racist view of black Africans’ unrestrained sexuality leads to representing the black African female almost exclusively as a sexualized object. Three, a measure of self-conscious social positioning results in attempts to preserve the superiority of the white woman, who is often paired off with her antithetical other, the black woman servant, whose representation is wholly negative.

This last point involves the aesthetic dimension based on the beauty/ugliness criteria discussed in Chapter Two. The visual distinction between the ideals of Western beauty and the deliberately debased representation of the black other is explored, on the one hand, through the attitude of
the dominant culture to the white heroine and to her black African female servant, and, on the other, through the ambivalent love-hate relations between the white villain and the black African servant. The white villain’s relationship with the black maid is based purely on physical lust, and his attitude to her is often marked by an odd mixture of compulsive libidinal attraction and repulsion. Thus the perceived inferiority of blacks, of women, and of the servant class combines to disadvantage the black female character’s position in the dominant culture. The treatment of these characters in the few extant dramatic representations from the period bears out this hypothesis.

The narrative of the black African woman does not surface noticeably until the Jacobean era. When it does, it is to reveal the character not only as positioned on the margins of culture racially, sexually, and socially, but also as having her limited potential for disruption ideologically contained. This is demonstrated particularly in John Webster’s The White Devil (1611) and in John Fletcher’s The Knight of Malta (1616). These two texts feature female black African characters who function solely as maidservants. Like the male characters discussed earlier, the one feature that distinguishes the women as cultural and social inferiors is their blackness, but the perceived inferiority imposed on them by their dark complexion is exacerbated by gender and class differences.
The two African female characters, Zanche and Zanthia/Abdella in *The White Devil* and in *The Knight of Malta* respectively, are assigned the minor but significant role of female servant, a role that inevitably locks them into the domestic enclosure. Assigning this role to a single group of people reveals the dominant culture’s unwillingness to acknowledge the cultural and social diversity of Africans. The texts also reveal that whereas the blackness of the two women seldom goes unnoticed, whiteness is never subjected to the same scrutiny that blackness receives on the English stage. Even when white characters are demonised, as they are in *The White Devil* and, to a lesser extent, in *The Knight of Malta*, blackness is used as the standard against which the white characters’ level of debasement is measured.

In *The White Devil*, Brachiano’s suspicions of Vittoria transform her into a devil: "I’ll give you the bells / And let you fly to the devil" (IV.ii.82-83). Pointing to Vittoria, Monticelso reckons that "were there a second paradise to lose / This devil would betray it" (III.ii.68-69), and again in reference to Vittoria, he comments, "If the devil / Did ever take good shape behold his picture" (III.ii.215-16). This construction of her as demonic not only evokes the biblical image in 2 Corinthians, 11:14, of "Satan himself . . . transformed into an angel of light," but it also works to mystify power and to obscure Monticelso’s own evil by transferring it onto the
marginalised other.

The idea that the abuse of power through mystifying strategies works to cloud reality is revealed and emphasised through Webster's unflattering representation of a highly patriarchal order composed of misogynists and racist males, a representation that serves to challenge common perceptions of female and black African otherness. The play's whole Italian society is rotten to the core. Statesmen and churchmen alike are morally bankrupt, but the machinery of patriarchal church and state power combines to transfer the rampant evil onto Vittoria, whose black maid is made to stand in as the physical manifestation of Vittoria's inner corruption. Zanche personifies Vittoria's evil. The idea that whiteness hides evil emerges several times in the play, though interestingly (but not surprisingly) only in connection with deviant womanhood. The patriarchal forces surround Vittoria with a calculated design to deflect attention from themselves as the main source of evil onto her and her black maid. Flamineo tells Vittoria, "Come sister, darkness hides your blush; women are like curs'd dogs, civility keeps them tied all daytime, but they are let loose at midnight; then they do most good or most mischief" (I.ii.198-201).

That the black maid Zanthia moves in the shadow of her white mistress as a servant and especially as a black person is in itself emblematic of this idea. Although Flamineo's
misogynistic speech is primarily meant to underscore white women's hypocrisy (since black ones were known to be incapable of blushing), it covertly reinforces the white/black, good/evil binaries in the way references to daytime, whiteness, and civility are made to contrast with shame, darkness, and mischief. The inability to blush was extrapolated to signify the inability to feel shame; by extension, therefore, dark-skinned people supposedly have no shame. The idea of whiteness concealing inner evil is also invoked by both the Lawyer and Monticelso at Vittoria's arraignment. The eccentric Lawyer goes beyond Vittoria's white exterior to find "a debauch'd and diversivolent woman / Who such a black concatenation / Of mischief hath effected" (III.ii.28-30). Monticelso calls upon the gathered ambassadors to

    see my lords what goodly fruit she seems,
    Yet like those apples travellers report
    To grow where Sodom and Gomorrah stood,
    I will but touch her and you straight shall see
    She'll fall to soot and ashes. (III.ii.63-67)

This pervasive view of blackness and womanhood as images of rottenness, corruption, and sin is rampant in the Jacobean drama.

The Knight of Malta explores the theme as well, particularly when the patriarchal tables briefly turn against Oriana. Whereas before she had been Valetta's "sweet sister" and "spotlesse Sister" (II.v.162-63), he does not hesitate to denounce her as a "faire sweet banke of
flowers, / Under whose beauty Scorpions lie, and kill"
(I.iii.166-67) when she is perceived by the patriarchal
order as "a false, a base, and treacherous woman" (II.v.13).
When Mountferrat fails to have her, he sets out to undermine
her in language designed to "blacken" her reputation: "she
is as foule, as heaven is beauteous" (II.iii.56). It is
significant that the patriarchal demonization of white women
characters in the two plays involves their (re)construction
in images of blackness or its negative associations.
Monticelso refers to Vittoria’s "black lust" that "shall
make her infamous / To all our neighbouring kingdoms"
(III.i.7-8).

The patriarchal order, then, mobilises the discourse of
"blackness" in *The White Devil* for the self-serving purpose
of displaying female deviancy as though it were a natural
feature of the female sex, black or white. This causes
overlaps to occur between the construction of Vittoria as
deviant woman and of Zanche as cultural other, blurring in
the process established boundaries between self and other.
Vittoria and Zanche share the patriarchal stereotype of
woman as "whore" and "strumpet." The male world demonises
the two women equally, referring to Vittoria repeatedly as
"black." Monticelso draws upon a wide range of analogies to
define Vittoria as a "whore" (III.ii.77-101) and as "a most
notorious strumpet" (III.ii.243). Lodovico throws it in
Flamineo’s face that his sister "is a damnable whore"
(III.iii.108), and Brachiano’s jealousy prompts him to turn from wishing "time would stand still / And never end this interview, this hour" with Vittoria (I.ii.201-02) to branding her "a stately and advanced whore" three acts later (IV.ii.76).

Zanche as well is named "a strumpet" by Marcello, who is embarrassed for Flamineo that he would entertain a black mistress (V.i.195-98), a "black fury" (V.vi.227). Finally, Zanche is condemned by her own forward behaviour (V.i.215-32). Behind the construction of deviant womanhood are white male anxieties calculatedly transferred onto the marginalised others. Vittoria and Zanche are constructed as deviant in sexualized and racialized rhetoric that is sanctioned by both Church and State to better control female sexuality. However, while Vittoria’s deviancy, her "blackness," is constructed by language, Zanche’s is stamped on her face, making her an easier target not only as the physical manifestation of evil, but as one whose evil is inherent.

In contrast to The Knight of Malta in which the text upholds traditional meanings of black and white skin colours as distinct marks of differentiation, in The White Devil, black and white mesh uneasily to the point of destabilising fixed categories of difference. Zanche, for instance, occupies contradictory positions in relation to her mistress. As a black person and a servant, Zanche is
Vittoria's subordinate. As a woman, however, she is as much a victim of patriarchal oppression as her mistress. Vittoria's privileged position as a white woman of rank does not immunise her against the sexist and misogynist men who systematically demonise and "blacken" her to the point of identification with her black maid. Despite her white skin colour, the text insists on presenting Vittoria as a "black soul," as directly linked to the devil. This link is symbolically realised through her relations with Zanche, whose physical blackness alone qualifies her, from the dominant culture's perspective, as a natural "devil" (V.i.86-90).

The link is further illustrated when white male characters' misogynist diatribes momentarily obliterate racial and class differences between the two women in order to construct not just black but black and white female predators. According to Brachiano, "Woman to man / Is either a god or a wolf" (IV.ii.91-92), and since the text makes clear that neither Vittoria nor Zanche is cut out to wear a halo, they are represented both as devils and wolves, the black-devil-wolf image being used to underscore Vittoria's degeneracy and Zanche's inborn evil. Flamineo confesses that he loves Zanche, but only "just as a man holds a wolf by the ears" (V.i.154-55). In reference to Zanche and her black skin colour, Flamineo claims that conjuring a devil is not such a challenging task after all,
since there is one up already (Zanche), but then he expands the image to include all women when Marcello suggests Zanche is Flamineo's "shame" (V.i.91): "I prethee, pardon her. / In faith you see, women are like to burs; / Where their affection throws them, there they'll stick" (92-94).

The text thus destabilizes racial categories of difference by representing Vittoria and Zanche in similar terms. Terms used to construct women and blacks overlap, blurring traditional categories of difference, and this blurring is manifested in the text in several ways. One, Vittoria and Zanche share between them the negating terms of "black," "devil," and "strumpet/ whore." Two, when Flamineo finds himself pitted against their mutual intent to kill him, he sees the women as "a couple of braches" (V.vi.133) and "cunning devils" (146). Three, Monticelso sentences Vittoria to be "confin'd / Unto a house of convertites" of "penitent whores," but he also sentences along with her, her "bawd . . . the Moor" (III.ii.262-65). He ignores completely the obvious fact that Flamineo is Vittoria's main, self-confessed pimp (III.ii.264) and that Zanche is only his assistant. Monticelso's naming of Zanche as the bawd and allowing Flamineo to go scot-free make Zanche or her blackness the ultimate "ocular proof" of Vittoria's inner evil. Four, the two female devils--black and white--bond in the only scene of the play in which we see them actually together, plotting to kill their worst and common
abuser, Flamineo.

Although the two women's different experiences as white mistress and black servant reveal Zanche as the more worldly-wise of the two as she initiates Vittoria into the art of psychological verbal confrontation, they nevertheless act as a team. In reply to Vittoria's remark that Flamineo is "distracted," Zanche tells her he is not distracted, "he's desperate-/ [And] for your own safety give him gentle language" (V.vi.22-23). Soon after, she cautions her mistress: "Gentle madam / Seem to consent, only persuade him teach / The way to death; let him die first" (V.vi.70-72). Just as in Marston's Sophonisba, in which the master, Syphanx, symbolically acts as an extension of his black servant Vangue by completing sentences Vangue begins (I.i.22-33), Vittoria and Zanche speak with one mind and answer Flamineo with one voice (V.vi.98; 104).

This bonding against manhood, as well as other suggestions of similarity between the two women, temporarily obliterate their differences. Webster seems to suggest, however, that such bondings are never quite free of the tensions occasioned by race and social class. For instance, in order for him to plot his revenge on Brachiano for the murder of his sister Isabella, the Duke of Florence disguises himself as the Moor Mullinassar, who is looking for employment at court. Judging from the way other courtiers relate to him, Mullinassar is easily accepted at
court (V.i.44-60) because he has, like Othello, fought for the Venetian state against the Turk, and turned Christian (V.i.5-60). Much as he is commended for his civility and distinction and is therefore one of "us," he is, nevertheless, still defined and excluded by his colour as the "sunburnt gentleman" (V.i.186). Flamineo is presumably of the same social rank as Mullinassar (a courtier and a soldier-turned-courtier), but he cannot hide his amazement that a "black" man, one with such "a stern bold look / [Should] wear more command, nor in a lofty phrase / Express more knowing" (V.i.34-36). Though there is a white Duke behind the mask, Florence's black disguise allows Flamineo's racial prejudices to emerge unconsciously.

In addition, Vittoria's alliance with Zanche is precarious in its temporariness, for outside their momentary bonding, Vittoria takes Zanche as no more than a symbol of her own status and dignity. When Lodovico threatens Vittoria that he'll "cut off your train [and] kill the Moor first" (V.vi.213), she protests against killing Zanche first, not because she cares so much that she wants to spare herself the pain of watching her servant suffer, but because she wants to "be waited on in death; my servant / Shall never go before me" (V.vi.215-16). Zanche herself is fully conscious of the disadvantages her position as a servant occasions when she is struck and kicked at will (V.i.187-88). Commenting on the morally indignant Cornelia after she
(Cornelia) strikes her, Zanche observes: "she's good for nothing but to make her maids / Catch cold a' nights; they dare not use a bed-staff, / For fear of her light fingers" (V.i.189-91). She also bemoans the lot of "poor maids [like herself who] get more lovers than husbands" (V.i.220).

Zanche's servant position is compounded by her skin colour difference and by her gender, all of which work to render her vulnerable to repeated abuse. Lodovico looks past her humanity only to see the stereotype of the bestial, lascivious black African: "yon's the infernal, that would make sport" (V.iii.218). Later, he comments that "she simpers like the sud's / A collier hath been wash'd in" (242-43). The equating of Zanche to the coal-miner's dirty bath water makes her nothing more than the waste from the process of washing the collier clean. Supposed unworthy as a black woman and a servant, she elicits from white men only verbal abuse and a conditional sexual interest; with her, there is no possibility of any relationship beyond physical, animal passion.

Both Vittoria and Zanche are accused of lasciviousness by the various men in the play. Vittoria has to face public humiliation in a sham execution of justice for a crime she has obviously not committed by herself. Zanche's skin colour automatically links her to the supposed natural promiscuity of her race. While these descendants of Eve and of Ham are condemned to the "house of penitent whores" as
female deviants, ostensibly for purposes of restoring order in a world turned upside down, the men who were involved in their crimes are not punished. If Vittoria is a "strumpet," Brachiano is a whoremaster, and if Zanche is a "bawd," Flamineo is a pimp. Statesmen and churchmen alike cheat, lie, murder, bribe, and ravish justice without a twinge. The world of the play is presented as totally degenerate. Adultery, murder, and avarice compete for space in the heart of the society. Yet Vittoria and her black maid find themselves arbitrarily condemned by a kangaroo court that reduces the racial and female other into the single image of female deviancy.

The representation of the black African other in The White Devil reveals Zanche as operating within various categories of difference which produce contradictions and exacerbate her vulnerability. As women in a highly patriarchal world, Zanche and Vittoria speak the same language, just as Zanche and Flamineo speak the same language of survival in their equally marginalised social positions in a world governed by dependency relations. The text reveals, however, that an alliance with other marginalised groups represented by Vittoria (gender) and Flamineo (class) is precarious and tentative. When push comes to shove, Zanche is to Vittoria and Flamineo only an expendable servant and a sex object. As Ania Loomba convincingly argues, such tensions between various "others"
serve as a crucial check against confusing intersections with parallels; against simply mapping various forms of oppression upon each other, cataloguing endless "overlaps" to the point where the specificity of each is blurred . . . . Because there are cultural explanations for both racism and sexism does not mean that they deal with the same phenomenon . . . the oppression of black women undercuts the usefulness of the "parallels" exercise. (Loomba, 29)

Thus there is a sense in which the text seeks to destabilise fixed categories of difference by problematizing traditional meanings of black and white. Every "natural truth" about whiteness finds another that contradicts it or at least puts a limitation on its validity, starting with the paradoxical title of The White Devil which, as a marked term, also reinforces the unmarked (read normative) term: black devil.

Unlike The White Devil, The Knight of Malta is constructed out of a tradition that presents women in ambivalent terms as either saints or sinners, beautiful or ugly. Oriana's and Zanthia/Abdella's colour difference generates a racial and gender discourse in which the white mistress and the black African maid appear to split between them the stereotype of woman as saint or devil. Since women in Reformation England were generally associated with Eve's transgression and with bodily dirt and contamination, a combination of blackness and of femaleness would invoke common images of sin, revulsion, and ugliness. William Cohen provides useful though scanty documentation on ancient attitudes to blackness and to women. Cohen offers the information as background material to the French experience
with Africans. However, the documentation is worth reproducing, especially since it reflects on the general European attitudes to black African women even as far back as the fifth century. In connection with the Christian association of blackness with sin, Cohen states that

one of the oldest and most widespread manuscript accounts of the early church fathers was written by a fifth century monk, John Cassian [and deals] with the problem of temptation. The account depicted a hermit being tormented by the devil in the guise of "a Negro woman ill-smelling and ugly." In the Christian tradition blackness has been considered ugly and revolting; the story is told of Saint Benedict of Palermo, who, afraid of temptation by women, prayed to God that he might be made ugly. God obliged and turned him black, thus transforming him into Saint Benedict the Moor. (14)

This passage makes clear that even as early as the fifth century, blackness, though not used as a mark for differentiation, was posited as repellant and synonymous with evil. Although the association between blackness and ugliness occurs long before the dawn of the English Renaissance, this view of black African womanhood intensifies in the Jacobean period. In various ways, Renaissance dramatists explore the idea of blackness not only as aesthetically unappealing but also as symbolic of inner depravity that manifests itself in several ways.

As in the case of other black African dramatic characters, Zanthia/Abdella’s black skin signals the idea of inherent evil; it is a symbol of her damnation and her power to damn others. Its capacity to conceal a blush is taken as evidence of moral duplicity. Whereas in the plays discussed
in earlier chapters, the devil epithet is associated with black African males simply as a mark of difference, in the later plays which deal with black African females, it is also connected to the image of woman as a corrupting and contaminating temptress. Gomera demands of Zanthia/Abdella: "thou sinfull usher / Bred from that rotenesse, thou bawd to mischiefe, / Doe you blush through all your blacknesse? will not that hide it?" (IV.ii.211-13).

In an earlier scene, Zanthia/Abdella had boldly challenged Mountferrat to swallow his conscience (not that he has any), be brave, act like a man, and "be happy" (II.iii.16-17). His reply reveals that his association of her black skin with evil is almost automatic. He also hints at the corrupting nature of blackness as though it were an infectious disease: "No, most unhappy wretch, as thou hast made me, / More devil than thy selfe, I am" (II.iii.18-19). But such constructions of otherness are also shown to be arbitrary. In spite of the charge that Zanthia has turned him into a worse devil than herself, later on in the play, Mountferrat says just the opposite when he suggests that Zanthia/Abdella outdoes him in his art of devilry: "And thou, in thy black shape, and blacker actions / Being hels perfect character, art delighted / To do what I, though infinitely wicked, / Tremble to hear" (IV.i.63-66). Whatever contradictory positions he takes vis-à-vis who is the better or worse devil, the fact remains that Mountferrat's
evaluation of Zanthia/Abdella is provoked mainly by what he perceives as her failure to procure Oriana for his sexual satiation, but he grounds it in her skin colour.

Mountferrat’s anger at finding Oriana gone from the monument elicits from him a torrent of abuse grounded in Zanthia/Abdella’s blackness. His racist language raises the question of Zanthia/Abdella’s human status:

Thou black swoln pitchie cloud, of all my afflictions, Thou night hag, gotten when the bright Moone suffer’d, Thou hell it self confin’d in flesh: what trick now?" . . . . [B]y this holy place
This sword shall cut thee into thousand peeces,
A thousand thousand, strow thee ore the Temple
A sacrifice to thy black sire, the Devill.
(IV.ii.136-44)

Zanthia/Abdella’s actions and language do not come close to Aaron’s or Eleazar’s consummate evil, but she receives a more sustained, corrosive verbal attack from white characters than any other black African character in the texts under discussion. The anti-black sentiments expressed by such characters as Norandine appear to be based purely on racial prejudice. At the close of the play, when the mystery surrounding Oriana’s supposed death is unravelled, Valetta merely announces that the confession the black African woman made was true. Norandine’s response to this confirms him in his role as a most "vociferous exponent of white culture and its imbedded biases" (Tokson, 61). In an irrational torrent of degrading and dehumanising invectives, he launches into one of the most vindictive attacks on blackness in the drama of the period:
Mary was it sir; the only truth that ever issued out of hell, which her black jawes resemble; a plague o’ your bacon-face, you must be giving drinks with a vengeance; ah thou branded bitch: do’ye stare, gogles? I hope to make winter bootes o’ thy hide yet; she feares not damning; hell fire cannot parch her blacker then she is: do’ye grin, chimney sweeper? . . . . Wee’l call [Mountferrat] Cacodemon, with his black gib there, his Succuba, his devils seed, his spawn of Phlegeton, that o’ my conscience was bred o’ the spume of Cocitus; do ye snarle you black jill? she looks like the Picture of America. (V.ii.149-54; 184-87)

This speech portrays Zanthia/Abdella as nothing more than a subhuman creature. The drama’s use of one language for the exalted and another for the base would inevitably have made an English Renaissance spectator aware of the infinite difference between self and other both in the world of the text and in the larger society.

Norandine’s use of the phrase, the "Picture of America," to describe the black African woman is intriguing. It is used here as a term of abuse and a symbol of great mythic potency. The image elicits negative connotations embedded in the Renaissance concept of "the natural depravity of New-World populations" (Orgel, 35), particularly manifested in Philippe Galle’s 1600 picture of America personified as a woman (see Fig. 6). That the woman is naked and is carrying a spear in one hand and a severed head in the other suggests traits of lust, aggressiveness, wickedness, and monstrosity (also commonly associated with the Amazon figure) as the defining features of Europe’s others during the early modern period. Nakedness in
particular signified bestiality. Leo Africanus, for example, describes the African people of Gaoga as "most rusticall and savage people, and especially those that inhabite the mountaines, who go all naked save their privities" (3: 823-34). Fletcher probably had this idea in mind when he made Norandine appropriate the "Picture of America" as an analogue for Zanthia/Abdella’s depravity.

The language of The White Devil and The Knight of Malta thus generally reveals that the blackness of the African woman makes her an easy target for white men who see her simply as a devalued object to be used at will, a base creature deserving only the white man’s lust if not his scorn and contempt. Mountferrat treats Zanthia/Abdella as nothing more than a female organ, an exploitable, expendable other (I.i.89-91). Her woman’s body commands no respect whatsoever; it is, instead, reduced to a colourless anatomy in the dark. This is revealed in a scene where Mountferrat finds it necessary to justify--almost to apologize for--copulating with a black African:

It is not love, but strong Libidinous will
That triumphs o’re me, and to satiat that,
What difference twixt this Moore, and her faire
    Dame?

Night makes their news alike, their use is so,
Whose hand so subtile, he can colours name,
If he do winck, and touch’ em? lust being blind,
Never in women did distinction find. (I.i.219-25)

Not only is the black African female’s identity erased here, but womanhood is clearly shrunk to a mere sexual vessel to be used at will by men of Mountferrat’s calibre.
Fig. 6. Philippe Galle's 1600 personified and feminised picture of America, reproduced in Arthur G. Miller, *In the Eye of the Beholder: Contemporary Issues in Stereotyping* (New York: Praeger, 1982), 33.
If in *The Knight of Malta* Mountferrat’s excuse to "mate" with a black African is his insatiable lust, in *The White Devil*, Flamineo’s excuse for keeping Zanche as his mistress is so he can prevent her from revealing his major role in pandering for his own sister. When Hortensio calls Zanche Flamineo’s "sweet mistress," Flamineo loudly and defensively protests: "I do love that Moor, that witch, very constrainedly: she knows some villainy; I do love her, just as a man holds a wolf by the ears. But for fear of turning upon me, and pulling out my throat, I would let her go to the devil" (V.i.152-56). Mountferrat’s strong libido can serve itself freely and without bias only in the dark where all women are alike and where he does not have to see what, to him, is Zanthia/Abdella’s revolting skin colour. His sentiments reveal that he shares his culture’s tendency to view black Africans not only as inferior beings, but, as an additional slur to their reputation, as so repulsive that they need to be hidden from view.

Mountferrat’s heightened sexual drives and Flamineo’s politics of self-preservation make them seem to pay less attention to cultural taboos as they allow themselves to seduce blackamoors, but the blackness of both Zanthia/Abdella and Zanche are hauntingly present. These men have sexual affairs with them, but Mountferrat must first obliterate Zanthia/Abdella’s blackness by absorbing it in darkness, and Flamineo must demonize Zanche to distance
himself from her. Generally, the marginalisation of black African and white women characters as seen through the misogynist and sexist rhetoric in the play places them structurally in the same subordinate position.

However, the privileging of white over black often obscures the black African female’s experience as a woman, outside the stereotypical role assigned to her as lascivious dark skinned African. The language of ugliness excludes both Zanche and Zanthia/Abdella from the possibility of being perceived as "black and comely" like the black woman of The Song of Solomon. There is also a tendency among certain white characters in the plays to share their culture’s view of black Africans as non-human, or as marginal creatures. The two gentlewomen that attend on Oriana draw our attention to the intensity of female bonding and friendships of the early modern period. Their obvious intimacy as they discuss an issue of common concern—the subjugation of women through the "yoak" of the marriage institution (I.ii.1-59)—creates a kind of female subculture.

This subculture, however, has no room for a black African female. The two Gentlewomen share a woman-to-woman moment from which Zanthia is obviously excluded. As she enters to give them a message from Oriana, all they see of her is her skin colour; they do not go beyond their perception of her as an object of colour, a "black pudding"
(I.ii.62). In this instance, Zanthia’s blackness not only de-womanizes her, but it also reduces her to an undefinable, mythical nonentity: a "little labour in vaine" (I.ii.63) whose fixed difference is lodged in the impossibility of her ever being washed white! Both of these identity tags refer to skin colour, implicitly proclaiming Zanthia/Abdella’s inferiority. The Gentlewomen and Zanthia/ Abdella both serve Oriana, yet because of Zanthia/Abdella’s blackness, the two white women distance themselves from what they perceive as the very dregs of the social order.

Overall, the discourse of difference in The White Devil and The Knight of Malta, with its many contradictory strands, draws on an increasingly common Renaissance topos that black Africans are unattractive. What is crucial in the representation of the black African other is that the negative connotations that accompany the black colour are reflecting beliefs, attitudes, or assumptions that cannot have existed in a vacuum. As the travel accounts reveal, Tudor/Stuart England harboured strong prejudices against black Africans, prejudices which are faithfully reproduced on the Elizabethan stage to construct an image of the African not only as black in skin colour and therefore unbecoming, but also as obnoxious in character. More often than not, these prejudices are reinforced by the represented behaviour of both those who are prejudiced, and the targets of their prejudice. The idea that black Africans are
repulsive is prominent in many white characters' responses (especially male responses) to black women. Such responses manifest sheer erotic desire (Mountferrat for Zanthia/Abdella and Flamineo for Zanche) complicated by the fear of difference enunciated in the men’s justifications for bedding black African domestics.

Sexual licence is one common stereotype which defines these two principal black African female characters, Zanche and Zanthia/Abdella. Not only are they almost automatically associated with sexuality because of their blackness, but their actions and behaviour are made to appear as legitimising the stereotype. Both women are represented as aligning themselves with the subject positions assigned to them by the dominant culture, and in doing so, they naturalise the cultural construction of black African females as sexually loose. The association of Zanche with lasciviousness is almost immediate. She enters the stage equipped with sexually-suggestive furniture: a carpet and two "fair cushions." As she spreads these out in readiness for Vittoria and Brachiano’s sexual encounter, she stands by to watch them make love and lewdly announces, "see now they close" (I.ii.213), thus inviting the audience to participate in her voyeurism.

Zanche herself has an ongoing illicit affair with Flamineo, but as soon as she realises that his "love rather cools than heats" (V.i.163), she turns her attentions to
seducing a fellow "Moor," Mullinassar, with aggressive, animal passion. She asks him not to blame her "that this passion I reveal; / Lovers die inward that their flames conceal" (V.i.231-32), and proceeds later to relate for him a highly eroticized dream concerning the two of them in bed (V.iii.225-36), a dream that confirms her in the role of libidinous black African. In The Knight of Malta, Zanthia/Abdella asserts the superiority of her complexion, but her assertion is seriously undercut by the erotic rhetoric she uses to express it:

I am as full of pleasure in the touch,
As ere a white fac’d puppet of ‘em all,
Juicy, and firme; unfledge ’em of their tyres,
Their wyres, their partlets, pins, and perriwigs,
And they appeare like bald cootes, in the nest;
I can as blithly work in my loves bed,
And deck thy faire neck, with these jetty chains,
Sing thee asleep, being wearied, and, refresh’d
With the same organ, steale sleep off againe.

(I.i.181-89)

In a period when women’s options were more limited and less disputed than in our own, this assertion would sound subversive if spoken by a white woman. That the erotic speech is delivered by a black African woman could not have come as a surprise to a Jacobean audience. Assertive as she may be, Zanthia/Abdella’s speech shows she cannot go beyond the barriers of race, gender, and social class, or escape from the stereotypes that have always defined her and through which she is made to define herself. Her self-projection as an over-sexed being confirms euro-cultural representations of black Africans that have often linked
blackness, and especially black womanhood, with lewdness.

This point is further illustrated by Zanthia/Abdella's sexualized version of encouragement to Mountferrat to fight like a man: "Am not I here / As lovely in my blacke to entertain thee, / As high, and full of heat, to meet thy pleasures?" (II.iii.11-13; see also III.ii.52-54; IV.i.48-50). Aside from what they say in relation to sexuality, Zanche and Zanthia/Abdella are also shown to be easily corruptible because of their lustful inclinations, for they are depicted as mere time-servers in relation to their mistresses. Zanche willingly assists Flameo to act as pander for his sister in exchange for what she calls his love, while Zanthia/Abdella will go to any lengths to procure Oriana for Mountferrat as long as he agrees that after he has "enjoy'd" Oriana, he will proceed to kill her (IV.ii.125-28) so that Zanthia/Abdella can have him all to herself.

Significantly, in spite of the drama's representation of black African women as lascivious in essence and action, these characters, like their male counterparts, generally reveal a heightened awareness of the social construction of difference. Unlike their male counterparts, however, they are also sites of resistance or agency. They struggle against culturally constructed limitations on their lives as the triply-disadvantaged other. Webster's Zanche, for example, sees her social status as a serving maid as not
good enough to provide her with fine clothes and as standing in the way of her self-fulfilment as a woman who needs to love and to be loved. She feels insecure about Flamineo's love, wondering whether it has cooled off because "a little painting and gay clothes make [him] loathe [her]" (V.i.171-72).

Zanche is definitely aware of her undesirability as a wife because of her blackness and her lack of wealth. She reasons, in the first place, that "poor maids get more lovers than husbands" (V.i.220), but she also demonstrates her vulnerability as a black woman when she turns to a fellow "countryman" to express her cultural and sexual identity. Having repeatedly been told she is nothing but an outsider and a "shame" to white manhood, she quickly identifies with Mullinassar: "That is my countryman, a goodly person; / When he's at leisure I'll discourse with him / In our own language" (V.i.94-96). Their own language involves, among other things, a freedom to express matters of the heart without the stigma of cultural difference: "I ne'er lov'd my complexion till now, / Cause I may boldly say without a blush, / I love you" (V.i.215-17). Zanche identifies with the disguised Francisco/Mullinassar because of what she perceives as potential common interests and shared experiences as racial others. However, she also quickly realises that her racial acceptability is not enough.
What makes Zanche’s position particularly difficult is her being forced to occupy multiple subordinate positions that limit her access to power and resources. She opts to "buy" respectability, to turn herself into someone valued, by negotiating her way up the class ladder. She thus courts the "Moor" with "a dowry, / [she thinks], should make that sunburnt proverb false, / And wash the Ethiop white" (V.iii.261-64). Ania Loomba argues that in this statement, we see "an internalization of the discourse of 'whiteness' on Zanche's part--there is still the desire to be washed of her color," a "desire to be white" (Loomba, 29). Although it is true that Zanche has somewhat internalised "the discourse of 'whiteness'," I do not necessarily agree that she desires to be any other colour but her own. She thinks, erroneously or not, that one of the advantages of being white is having money that would enable her to leave behind her dependency and be upwardly mobile. Equating money with social position exposes not only the power relations operative in class divisions, but also the material conditions governing racial inequalities.

As a worthy Christian soldier, Mullinassar is also easily accepted in Rome's high circles, or so it would seem to Zanche. Zanche rejects the notion that her skin colour is naturally inferior; if anything, she is very proud of being black, even as she is aware of its disadvantages for herself. Evidently, Zanche knows of the contradictions of
her position as a woman, a servant, and a black person in relation to social structures, contradictions she also knows are easily obscured by the ideologies of a dominant culture that seeks to posit her as essentially inferior. Her awareness of the culturally constructed limits placed on women, on black Africans, and on the lower stratum of society is set against the language of control by a patriarchal white culture that finally forces her into silence.

The means Zanche chooses to escape from social restraint—seducing a man and revealing a potentially explosive secret—validates the stereotype of the black African as a cunning and lascivious devil and of the servant as loose-tongued, the type Sophonisba warns against in Marston’s play:

O feare a servants toung,
Like such as onely for their gaine do serve.
Within the vast capacite of place
I know no vilenes so most truly base,
Their Lordes, their gaine. (III.i.110-14)

Zanche’s "servants toung" (her revelation of Isabella’s and Camillo’s murderers) does not even "gaine" her the "lorde" she hoped to get because of her difference in race and social status; but in her death, she does not allow her accusers to have the last laugh. When Carlo calls her a "black fury," she defiantly retaliates: "I have blood / As red as either of theirs: wilt drink some? / 'Tis good for the falling sickness: I am proud / Death cannot alter my
complexion, / For I shall ne’er look pale" (V.vi.225-29). Although Zanche’s self-assertion does not necessarily save her from death, it nevertheless offers a possible alternative to the dominant culture’s construction of her.

In The Knight of Malta, Zanthia/Abdella also voices her awareness of the precarious position she occupies, but in spite of this knowledge, she actively participates in the cultural processes that work to legitimise her otherness in the first place. She refuses to accept Mountferrat’s flattery at face value (I.i.163-65) and confronts him with the truth behind his words: "I, you say so now, / But like a property, when I have serv’d / Your turnes, you’ll cast me off, or hang me up / For a signe, somewhere" (I.i.166-69). And she is right. As soon as Mountferrat falls for Zanthia/Abdella’s lie that she has poisoned Oriana (IV.i.83-84), he erupts into dehumanising racial invectives and immediately transforms his earlier "pearl, that scorne[d] a staine" (I.i.164) into a lusty creature (IV.i.77-78) and a grinning "devil" (83) whose "damnation" is "most assur’d" (76).

This reaction confirms Zanthia/Abdella’s earlier suspicions that she "know[s] / [she’s] us’d only for property" (IV.i.86-87). Her constant testing of Mountferrat’s feelings for her and her repeated reminders that he should not forget his sworn oath to marry her reveal her vulnerability, especially since she allows herself to
fall into his trap over and over again despite what she
knows of his treatment of her. Opting for a confrontational
stand, she tells him:

    if anything crosse ye
    I am the devill, and the devils heire,
    All plagues, all mischiefes . . . .
    [But] if I be a devill, you created me,
    I never knew those arts, nor bloody practices.
      (IV.ii.155-61)

Unfortunately her open defiance is short lived. She is
willing to help procure Oriana for him in spite of her
knowledge that Mountferrat uses her simply as a piece of
property and an easy scapegoat for his own ills: "he hath
fearfully, and basely / Betray’d his own cause; yet to free
himselfe / He now ascribes the fault to me" (III.ii.1-3).
Yet she agrees to help him, again, blaming it on the "power
he holds, / Over my mad affections" (III.ii.6-7).

Zanthia/Abdella’s potentially radical critique of the
arbitrariness of social and cultural constructs of identity
is undermined and obscured by her wilful, lustful commitment
to Mountferrat. Her aggressiveness is particularly
amplified in the speech in which she invites him to

    joyne thy foote to mine, and let our hearts
    Meet with our hands; the contract that is made
    And cemented with blood, as this of ours is,
    Is a more holy sanction, and much surer,
    Then all the superstitious ceremonies
    You Christians use. (IV.iv.29-34)

This peculiar discourse constitutes a form of political
resistance and subversion, but it is undercut by Zanthia/
Abdella’s representation in conventional negative
stereotypes of the black African other. Her assertion of the superiority of her cultural rituals does not necessarily draw on African reality and experience in the first place. It draws, instead, on the image of the mythical African heathen/barbarian, and her dark complexion acts as an outward sign of a debased attachment to primitivity. Her speech is not only, in itself, potentially subversive of Christian marriage vows, but it is also suggestive of what the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English culture would likely have interpreted as barbaric rituals. As well, her deliberate choice to pursue and serve a man who openly scorns her advances whenever it suits him serves only to validate existing assumptions about so-called naturally lascivious black African women.

The speech reveals further that Zanthia/Abdella's representation is moulded out of the stereotype of the savage and unbelieving black African, "the impious mid-wife to abortive birthes, / And cruell instrument to [Mounferrat's] decrees" (V.ii.27-28). In the eyes of the state, she and her villainous paramour are "rotten, / Corrupted, and contagious member[s]" (V.ii.214-15) who must be "Chas'd from our company, and cut away" as "infectious putrified limb[s]" (V.ii.265-66). The disgust exhibited by the high ranking knights of Malta for the black African other is underscored by the final doom they choose to unleash on Mountferrat, meant to be understood as an even
worse punishment than the banishment he gets: to have "to marry" a blackamoor (V.ii.274-76).

Norandine is only too happy to execute his prejudiced form of justice: "Away French stallion, now you have a Barbary mare of your own, go leap her, and engender young devillings" (V.ii.279-80). By harnessing him with a black African woman, Norandine is putting an official stamp on Mountferrat's moral depravity. Much like the ending of Dekker's Lust's Dominion, the exclusion and dehumanization of the other in The Knight of Malta could not have been better executed in the name of restoring order to the state, a seemingly patriotic gesture that works to mystify cultural, racial, and political ideologies. The black African character thus serves an important cultural function: the dominant culture reduces and homogenises domestic complexities by displacing them onto the foreign, easily disposable other.

Of the two main black African female characters that Jacobean drama represents, Webster's Zanche is the one whose minor but significant assertive stances may not be considered altogether futile; her final stand can be seen as both liberating and enabling, however temporary. Her awareness of her black African self enables her to reject the negative and to embrace what she sees as potentially positive in her black experience. Her attempts to reject an inferior position imposed on her by her social and cultural
milieu go hand in hand with contradictions inevitably produced by the internalised residues of racial prejudices, sexist practices, and social inequalities circulating in the wider society. Zanche's identification with her "countryman" with whom she speaks the same "language" is her alternative source for self-affirmation where none is readily available for her in white-dominated cultural, social, and political contexts. Her attempt to embrace her African identity as she faces her death shows a desire to insert her voice into public (white) discourse in an alternative, black discourse, but her end also suggests that she cannot escape from the tensions between herself as a black African woman servant and her social environment.

The representation of the black African female character in Jacobean drama thus attests to the prevalence of the mythological construction of the black African other as the repository of a sensual animality. Like her male counterpart in Elizabethan drama, the Jacobean black female subject occupies an indeterminate position; her "identity" is buried beneath the dominant culture’s construction of her in a variety of inherited negative stereotypes from which she is unable to escape. Even the positive portrayals of the few black African characters in the Elizabethan and Jacobean plays, masques, and pageants are heavily overshadowed by the overwhelming racial tirades against their humanity which help to advance careless assumptions
about black African people during the early modern period. The more popular, seemingly fixed negative attitudes about the African other refuse to be silenced. However credible the positive portrayals may be, they do not atone for the disparaging negative diatribes which construct black characters as unchangingly other. When all is said and done, discourses of difference based on black stereotypes conspire to keep black African characters in "their" place by circumventing the positive and presenting their blackness as the visible and irreducible sign of difference from the assumed positive white norm.
Conclusion

The Politics of Skin Colour and the Legacy of Cracked Mirror-Reflections

The representation of black African characters in English Renaissance dramatic texts shows that as foreigners, non-whites, non-Christians, and in some cases, as women or/and servants, these characters occupy not one but various marginal positions that complicate their inclusion into the mainstream culture as bona fide members of the human race. Despite their individual and group differences, their common differentiation from the European ideal confers upon them a uniform identity as Europe’s others, cast in a mould of Europe’s own making. Certainly, there are some positive portrayals of Africans in the drama’s depiction of admirable traits in some of the African characters, but overall, the image of the African in the plays as well as in the masques and pageants is one-sided, and decidedly negative. Dramatic depictions of black African characters show little interest in their individuality or in the African cultures themselves. The dramatists project onto the characters what seem to be the English society’s own cultural perceptions and misconceptions of foreigners.

The few critics who survey the image of the black African dramatic character in Renaissance drama, such as Eldred Jones, Elliot Tokson, Anthony Barthelemy, and Jack D’Amico, all agree that in their representation of black
Africans, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dramatists largely follow classical and Renaissance travel accounts of Africa and Africans. The plays frequently allude to assumptions and opinions of the other that were transmitted largely through the language of classical and Renaissance travel writings. Even though, according to Frank Snowden Jr., the ancient world's view of black Africans was generally positive, throughout the history of classical literature, elements of unreality appear in some descriptions of distant peoples, including "Ethiopians" (Snowden, 56). Some of these later found their way into the drama.

These descriptions were rarely based on reality or on historical fact. Just as James Walvin questions the authenticity of Hakluyt's anthology (Walvin, 12) or Margaret Hodgen implicitly wonders about the reliability of Samuel Purchas' or Johann Boemus' accounts of African beliefs and practices when they had not witnessed them first hand (Hodgen, 135; 195), so does Stephen Greenblatt dismiss categorically, "anything Europeans wrote or drew as an accurate and reliable account" of the people they encountered during the age of "discovery" (Marvellous Possessions, 7). As he says in no uncertain terms, these authors "were liars--few of them steady liars, as it were, like Mandeville, but frequent and cunning liars none the less, whose position virtually required the strategic
manipulation and distortion and outright suppression of the truth" (Marvellous Possessions, 7). Whether one refers to these authors bluntly but accurately as liars, as Greenblatt does or, in the milder language of diplomacy, as distorters of truth, the fact remains that the classical writers' wild stories of ferocious African tribes and monstrous creatures did have an impact on the general English attitudes toward black Africans, on curious audiences hungry for sensational news from exotic places, and on Renaissance artists' creative imaginations.

It is important to note that whereas the general classical view was that "certain peoples, both black and white, inhabiting the fringes of the earth were physically bizarre" (Snowden, 128, 87n), in the Renaissance, it became the norm to construct hierarchies of black and white in terms of the inferior/superior, ugliness/beauty binaries. As Kim Hall notes, it is these binary oppositions that became "the conduit through which the English began to formulate the notions of 'self' and 'other'" (Hall, Things of Darkness, 2). Renaissance travel writers were thus among the significant influences on the Tudor or/and Stuart dramatists' creative imaginations. The black Africans whom the non-fictional accounts represented through euro-tinted lenses were generally unrecognizable as human beings. Their depiction not only reflected inherited biases and perceptions of the other already ingrained in the culture,
but it also provided fertile ground for imaginative writers to explore and exploit.

What helped to augment a eurocentric view of black Africans in Elizabethan England in particular, to twist the African reality out of shape, and to confirm the natural polarization of humanity into the superior/inferior dichotomy were, first, the shock subsequent to the suddenness of contact between the fair-skinned and haired English and the darkest people in the world, the dark skin of Africans immediately provoking in those early English travellers contempt, curiosity, and marvel, but little admiration; second, the self-interested, biased reporting of travel writers about Africa and her people in the wake of England’s expansion abroad through trade, evangelism, and travel; and third, the cultural displays of foreign, human curios in England’s wonder-cabinets that were as much for power, for self-fashioning, and for masking fears of a perceived threat posed by the other as for love of the exotic.

The English Renaissance desire for establishing a distinct place and character on the world map, as well as the self-aggrandisement of individual English travellers and adventurers, fostered the popularity of fictionalised travel accounts about people beyond England’s borders. The dark complexion of Africans, in particular, seemed to relegate them to the very opposite end of the moral, social, and
cultural scale from the English's own. There thus appears
to be a connection between African skin colour and England's
self-representation. There is enough evidence to suggest
that the emerging spirit of an English quest for a national
identity in the sixteenth century largely contributed to the
mainstream society's grounding of euro-african cultural
differences in skin colour—that standard symbol of moral,
cultural, and aesthetic differences—and hence to the
period's production of Africans as irrevocably Europe's
antithetical other.

African skin colour increasingly became an important
cultural and ideological issue. Invested as it was with
moral and social meaning, colour became the primary
signifier of cultural distinction, definition, and
evaluation. As a site for the inscriptions of ideology and
power, African dark complexion became far more than simply a
stain that cannot be washed away. It could not be
disengaged from Europe's hierarchical representation of
humanity in gradations of colour, which she sought to
achieve through the stereotyping process. Implicit in all
the theories of origins of blackness are suggestions of
human hierarchies sanctioned by God and nature, an idea
which encouraged justifications by self-interested elements
in the culture for claims to the natural inferiority of
black Africa and the superiority of white Europe. African
religion, or, rather, the absence of Christianity, was also
invested with strong moral connotations. The combination of the presence of black skin colour and the absence of Christianity was seen as a sign of inherent spiritual chaos and a reflection of all forms of degeneracy, among them ambition, cunning and deceit, godlessness or demonism, lasciviousness, savagery, destructive jealousy, and the ability to contaminate. It is such moralised stereotypes, current in the culture, that English Renaissance dramatists exploit in representing black African characters on the stage.

All the literary texts in this study explore colour rhetoric, in one form or other, as a means of valorising Christian, white England and debasing non-Christian, black Africa. The exaltation of England and the English is thus dependent upon the debasement of Africa and of Africans. Within the context of the aesthetic discourse, the texts exploit the black/white binary to dramatize ugliness or beauty as physical and spiritual states. The experiences of the daughters of Niger and the King of Moors in Jonson’s masques (The Masque of Blackness and The Masque of Beauty) and in Middleton’s pageant (The Triumphs of Truth) respectively illustrate this type of dramatic conflict. Beauty of body and soul is found only in the land of "--tania" whose sun not only never sets but also has the exclusive power to achieve the impossible: to blanche an Ethiop, physically and spiritually. In these texts,
therefore, skin colour is appropriated for purposes of aesthetic expression and moral evaluation, and the result is to foreground England’s uniqueness and to derogate African identity which, in both the masques and the pageant, finally suffers erasure.

Renaissance plays invest black African characters with the moral trappings that the society associated with blackness and non-Christianity. Thus, there is a general stress on the personality of the black villain-hero and the black female servant. The drama often reproduces black male characters who are true to type. Muly Mahamet, Aaron, and Eleazar are either tyrants or consummate villains, while Iago (though not Shakespeare) exploits the stereotype of Africans’ imputed destructive jealousy to represent Othello in a similar vein. These black African characters’ actions and self-referential speeches make them appear to conform, at one time or other, to the stereotype of black Africans’ imputed inherent malignity. This image serves to justify culturally transmitted assumptions about the ambitious, cruel, and jealous African infidel. The representation of black female characters involves, in turn, the characters’ apparent conformity to the stereotype of African women as a willing sexual objects.

On the whole, in these texts, the dramatists reveal the hegemony as insisting on projecting society’s ills onto the black African other, in spite of some contesting and
competing assertions that point to other possibilities. Attempts to insinuate Africans into the mainstream culture through rank (the Prince of Morocco, Othello, Eleazar), conversions to Christianity (the daughters of Niger, the King of Moors, and Othello), and military service to the state (all the African male characters so far mentioned, with the exception of the Prince of Morocco), are often thwarted by the negative valence that the characters’ black skin colour carries. The alternative to partial assimilation is the prospect of excluding the other from mainstream society as "an infectious putrified limb" that must be cut off (Fletcher, V.ii.265-66), or as a disease organism that must be expelled. This act of surgically or medically cleansing the nation is, in reality, the ruling power’s attempt to control the visible threat to England’s purported cultural purity, a threat often emblematized in the nervous tensions, anxieties, and conflicts that accompany the black man-white woman sexual relations in most of these plays. This control involves establishing a stable order that can be created and maintained only through the exclusion of the other.

Yet while these claims take shape under the pretext of re-establishing a stable and culturally pure order, the purity and order are also shown to be conflicted and unstable. Negative stereotypes of Africans associated with their black complexion remain the only constant and central
feature in which the society empirically grounds the marginalising of black characters and the validating of essential difference. According to Jack D’Amico, even when plays bring negative images of Africans sharply into focus in order to exploit the cultural stereotype, "the drama is also open enough to force some reflection on the assumptions that underlie judgment" (2). The image of the black African, he argues, can "provide an opportunity to reshape the spectator’s understanding of overly simplified oppositions between Christianity and Islam, fair Western standards and the dark barbarian, civilization and the savage, or humankind and the monstrous" (2-3). Implicit in this assertion is the suggestion that an Elizabethan audience could identify with the sameness of the other, for, according to D’Amico, the drama could have forced the audience to see in the stereotypical image of the black African a reflection of "those desires and energies that work from within" themselves (2), and this reshaped their understanding of Africans.

Perhaps this is true, but while in some cases the plays flirt with the idea of sameness, what they work to foreground is the society’s insistence on difference. An English audience’s recognition of common "desires and energies that work from within" themselves and within black Africans would also suggest an acceptance of a common humanity as well as common human weaknesses, which is not
the case here. The drama on the whole reveals mainstream societal resistance against seeing or accepting dark-skinned people as part of the human race. Elliot Tokson’s closing argument seems more persuasive. According to Tokson, "most of the evidence that lies in the creative literature of the earliest period of confrontation strongly suggests that the writers not only failed to evoke . . . positive feelings" of "'sympathy and understanding across the enormous gulf that divided' white and black men [sic],&dquo; but that they also, "in ways indicative of a broad racism, widened the distance between the two peoples" (Tokson, 138).

Tokson raises a valid point. The drama depicts an English society with such fixed opinions of foreigners that any possibility of recognising, understanding, or identifying with the sameness of the other is resisted at every turn. Any possible identification with, or understanding of, the other would likely defeat the purpose of the dominant culture’s urgent need to distance its own ills by projecting them to those it seeks to portray, through systematic productions of the stereotype, as irrefutably different.

English society’s resistance to recognising, understanding, or identifying with the sameness of the other thus highlights one of the salient points underscored by this study, that one cannot underestimate the power of the stereotype to mislead, to polarize and to paralyse society
into an eternal "us"/"them" dichotomy. The cumulative effect of negative stereotyping of African characters, of presenting them on the stage in unscrupulously distorted images so as to make these images seem plausible, is powerful enough to have caused an English audience to feel comfortable in the knowledge that savagery, barbarity, godlessness, and moral corruption—all assumed to be accurate depictions of the other—are distanced from them. Judging from the exclusion of all black African characters from mainstream society at the ends of the plays, it appears that the dramatists generally portray an English Renaissance culture that sees the ills associated with African people and other outsiders not only as real, but also as residing everywhere else but in England. Repeated productions of African otherness becomes a convenient shield for England’s hidden insecurities and vulnerability attendant upon a fast-changing political, social, and cultural scene.

The attitudes of English travellers to Africa delineated in Chapter One, and referred to elsewhere in the study, were bound to have played a significant role in the transmissions of African stereotypes that encouraged difference and allowed the privileging of the English culture at the expense of other cultural groups. This process of differentiation enables us to see, as Edward Said argues, "the extent to which cultures are humanly made structures of both authority and participation, benevolent
in what they include, incorporate, and validate, less benevolent in what they exclude and demote" (Culture and Imperialism, 15). Skin colour, in this case, was a ready-made dividing line between self and other, offering ocular proof of difference.

In the Jacobean drama in particular, justification for the exclusion of black female characters involves a combination of gender stereotypes, social status, and skin colour. Not surprisingly, given that they are servants and female, the women, unlike their male counterparts, are represented as making their final exits in servile, allegedly female fashion. It is important to note that black African male characters in the Elizabethan texts not only have distinguished careers and titles, but they also die, however ignobly, in conventional masculine style. Though the cowardly Muly Mahamet flees from battle, he and Eleazar meet their end while engaged in military service. Even as Aaron is buried waist-deep in Roman soil, he is still able to speak forcefully in direct defiance of the next generation of Roman rulers, and he almost has the last word. The Prince of Morocco loses the guessing game, but he is allowed a dignified exit. Othello, despite his costly gullibility, dies in good Roman fashion, by his own sword.

The black African female characters, on the other hand, are only domestic maids whose lives are sacrificed at the altar of a self-serving, racist and misogynist patriarchal
hegemony. Zanche dies senselessly, no more than a symbol of her mistress' social status. She is killed by vengeful courtiers who see in her murder a way of degrading her mistress after they threaten to cut off Vittoria's train and kill her "Moor first" (Webster, V.i.212-13). Though Fletcher's Zanthia/Abdella is not killed, she is driven out of Malta, labelled a "Barbary mare," and joined in marriage with the villainous "French stallion," Mountferrat, as his punishment for breaking the vows of knightly order. Church and state banish her and her sexual partner from Malta, casting them away as "infectious putrified limb[s]" (Fletcher, V.ii.265-66).

The two serving maids are eliminated not because of what they have or have not done but because of the worthlessness signalled by their gender, their colour, and their relationships to their master or mistress. Their lives are overwhelmed by an oppressive, predominantly high-ranking white-male authority and class structure, and their vulnerability is heightened by the silence of their departures. Their voices are either ignored as they sink into silence, or are totally denied. Unlike their black male counterparts, the women are not allowed even the voice of self-incrimination. While the reasons for the gendered endings of black African characters can, at this juncture, only be guessed at, the one sure thing in the drama's representation of their otherness as Africans is the colour
of their skin, which insures Europe’s immunity from the scourge of blackness.

The drama persistently projects the superiority of the English and the inferiority of Africans through a selective inclusion/exclusion principle, based mainly on skin colour differences. Not only do the texts reveal colour-prejudices projected through the attitudes of some white characters to black Africans, but we are also meant to catch a whiff of the spirit of an English uniqueness that separates the alleged authentic self from the other. This is particularly evident in the moral and aesthetic rhetoric, in the allegories of the masques and pageant, in the plays’ settings that serve to distance evil, and in the rationalisations for eliminating black characters as sources of disorder in mainstream culture. Black Africans emerge as barbaric or civil depending on the state of mind of those who evaluate them, but the general trend is to insist on a stereotypical, negative characterization.

In the world of the plays, the ruling order relies on the power of the stereotype as much to elevate the self as to debase the other. Any culture engaged in representing itself as superior will inevitably produce the other as inferior. As Sally Robinson aptly argues in her book, *Engendering the Subject*, the existence of a superior culture is structurally dependent on the existence of an inferior. This dialectical/hierarchical conception of cultural
relations ultimately serves to rationalize and to naturalize existing configurations of power. A "static representation of the disempowered Other," according to Robinson, "is necessary to the coherence of a certain discursive universe mobilized by a desire to rationalize the oppression of an entire social group by producing that group as Other to itself" (Robinson, 185). The drama shows the centrality of this idea to the dominant culture's reproduction of African characters as Europe's other.

A major finding of this study, therefore, is that even though in certain texts assertions of the superiority of Christian white Europe are contested internally and some of the African characters are portrayed positively, the ideas of African inferiority and English cultural supremacy remains relatively secure. Black African characters are either partly brought into the mainstream through conversion to Christianity, which entails rejecting their identity and cultural values through an act of self-abnegation or military service to the State, or they are killed or expelled, which generally confirms their subhumanity while raising the flag of English cultural purity. Such endings underscore the absence of serious challenges to this view in Renaissance drama.

This is not to say that the dramatists themselves were unaware of existing racial prejudices in their society. Judging from the few positive portrayals of black African
characters, and especially from what the authors put in the mouths of those characters who either express their blackness in positive ways or protest against their degradation because of it, one can conclude that Renaissance authors were sufficiently aware of the racial prejudice ingrained in the culture to single it out and dramatize it. Attitudes arising out of particular situations involving black-white interactions are challenged by individual characters in some of the plays, even though racial prejudice had not yet become as glaringly evident an issue then as it is to us now.

Practically every play ends, however, with a restoration of order marked by the denunciation of the black African character as a source of evil that must be purged. The absence of serious challenges to claims of natural distinctions between England and her African others in Renaissance dramatic texts can perhaps be attributed to the dramatists' self-censorship, motivated by their need to adopt certain strategies of representation that responded to changing contemporary political and cultural demands. Although the material of their dramatic discourse often appears to highlight forms which give substance to England's nascent nationalistic feelings of superiority, the dramatists reveal that lurking behind this sense of English supremacy are also political, social, and cultural insecurities, often masked by a grandiose eloquence about
averting a disaster attributed to foreign elements.

The plays, masques, and pageant covered by this study end with flattering representations of England as superior to her others. There are also ways, however, in which the works covertly encourage scepticism over claims to English cultural purity and order without openly challenging these claims. In most of the plays, for instance, the status quo, whose agents claim to have restored order and plan to maintain it, is itself shown to be deeply flawed. The hegemony projects its fears and anxieties onto the foreigner, excludes him/her from the mainstream culture, and seeks to legitimize this exclusion by making the purging ritual seem central to the restoration of order. In addition, within the plays, certain aspects of what can be construed as the black characters’ struggle against marginalisation, however minor these may be, reveal possibilities that expose rather than confirm the dominant’s culture’s illusory assumptions about order and about England’s others. In the larger scheme of things, the black African character can be viewed not as just transgressing established rules, but as possibly questioning their legitimacy.

The supposedly neat endings, therefore, are marked by conflicting strategies that make these endings vulnerable to interrogation. Fear, grounded in Renaissance social, political, and cultural changes, plays an important function
in forming and nurturing racist and other prejudicial attitudes and, more importantly, in perpetuating their hold upon the society. The drama subtly reveals that the struggle by agents of the status quo to mask these fears by naturalising difference is at the heart of the representing and transmitting of African identity in distorted images that appear to be fixed in frame. English Renaissance dramatic texts thus reveal that the period's insistence on producing the other in terms of difference from the self is ideologically determined, for what is created is a distorted view of the other which slowly but surely gains hold. The frequently overblown stereotypes depicting black Africans as inferior in English Renaissance travel literature and in the plays become widely assumed to be accurate, even though they bear little relation to reality. The power of the stereotype is such that it "seems to fix the other, to consolidate all we know about that other and all we need to know. . . . [T]hese constructs take and give shape under the pretense of precision, fixity, and singularity" (Bhabha, 6).

It is this consolidating function that makes the stereotype a useful critical category. We need to recognize in the stereotype a powerful and dangerous tool in literary interpretations as well as in human relations. The stereotype pretends to knowledge and takes on a life of its own. It produces, authorizes, and disseminates a distorted image of the other and subsequent categories of difference
that can readily be embraced as truths even by marginalised groups, without question or challenge. In her essay, "A Future for Materialist Feminist Criticism," Catherine Belsey disturbingly points out that "the readiness with which we reach for categories can be worrying: classification is dangerous to the degree that it creates an illusion of clarity" (Belsey, 257).

As a critical activity, therefore, the interrogation of stereotypes can serve an important function for literary commentators and theatrical practitioners who will otherwise continue to be misinformed by, and to misinform through, one-sided representations. As we continue to enjoy older literatures, it is a human responsibility to look more closely at the far-reaching implications of the stereotype in human interactions and their artistic representations. While appreciating the aesthetic in art, we should not ignore the political, social, and cultural implications invested in such seemingly innocent signs as black and white within productions of racial stereotypes.

At the end of her valuable and sensitive overview of the black/white discourse in chapter three of her *Othello: A Contextual History*, Virginia Mason Vaughan concludes that "to be totally free of racism [in our culture], one would have to invent a new language with no loaded words, no color discriminations, and no associations of blackness with evil, whiteness with good" (Vaughan, *Othello*, 70). While this
could be a feasible but distant ideal, an immediate and important step in this direction is first to become more conscious of the power of language to distort imaginations as well as images. As Robert Moore argues, "we can avoid using words that degrade people. We can make a conscious effort to use terminology that reflects a progressive perspective, as opposed to a distorting perspective," and to learn "terminology that is positive and does not perpetuate negative human values" (Moore, 340). Only then can we be freed from the legacy of cracked-mirror reflections.
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