

# Shakespeare, Race and Performance

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# Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*



THINGS  
*of*  
DARKNESS



ECONOMIES  
OF RACE  
AND  
GENDER  
IN EARLY  
MODERN  
ENGLAND



Kim F. Hall

# Margo Hendricks

‘. . . we are only the inheritors of an intellectual, critical and political tradition’ (‘Surveying “race” in Shakespeare’, in *Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Catherine Alexander and Stanley Wells; Oxford University Press, 2000)

‘. . . .continuing importance of the intellectual labours of a generation of scholars increasingly ignored or dismissed in the rush to “racialize” Shakespeare’s canon and/or Elizabethan England, and also reminds us of the work yet to be done’.

Vanessa Corredera, 'Not a Moor exactly": Shakespeare, Serial, and Modern Constructions of Race', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 67.1 (Spring 2016)

'If early modern studies ignores the presence of race in Renaissance literature, we may also be inadvertently entrenching white privilege by deterring scholars of color and scholars invested in race and social justice from work in our field'

# Dominic Cavendish- Daily Telegraph ‘Why “Problematic” Shakespeare is in danger of being cancelled’ 9 Feb, 2020

Over the past few years, Shakespeare performance has increasingly marched to a ‘woke’ drum. Some would say it has been galvanising, a corrective against conventionality and Bardolatry. We’ve seen greater diversity in casting and much gender-flipping. Fine, OK. A traditionally cast production is now a rarity, ever more unthinkable. That’s less fine. Doesn’t it suggest that those getting funds to promulgate his work are in some way embarrassed by it, or are so worried about being labelled reactionary – or worse – that they duck the fight?

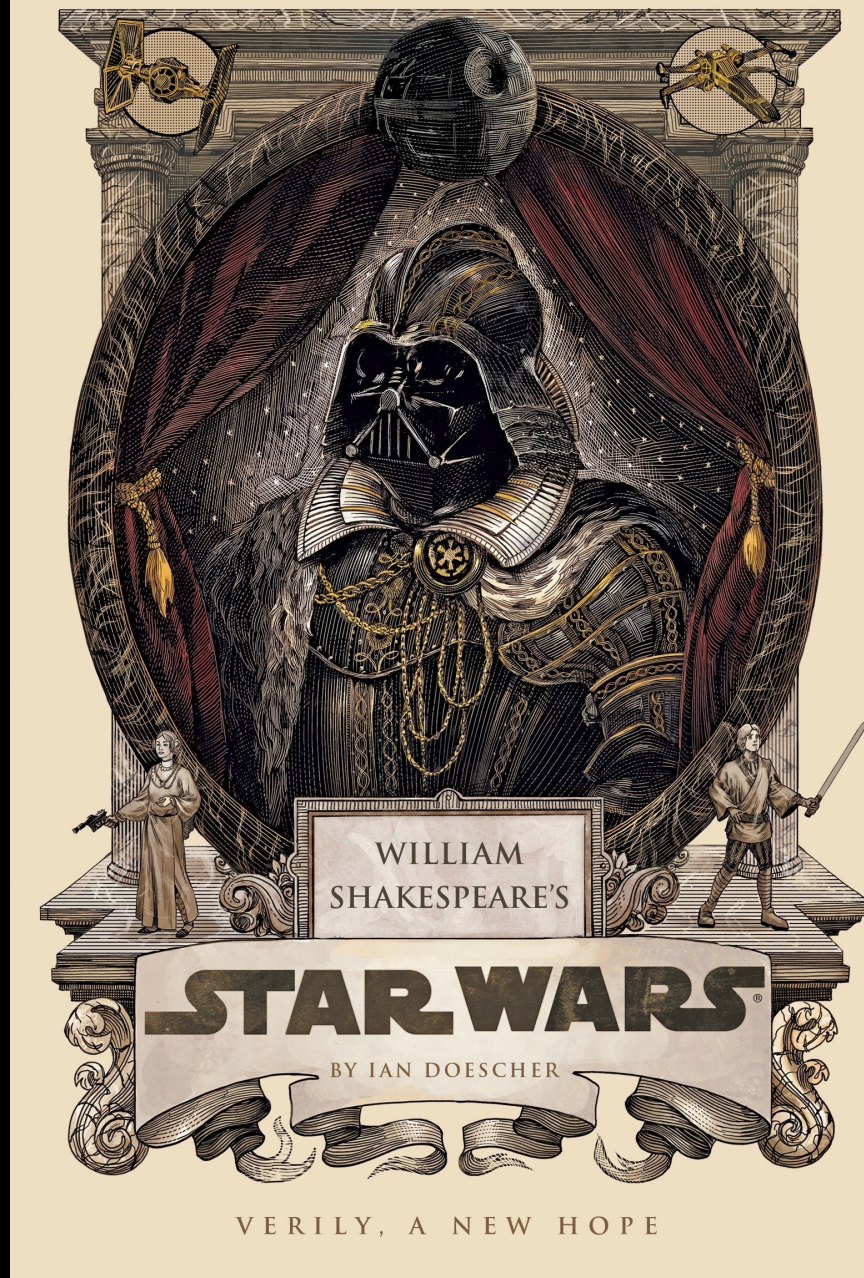
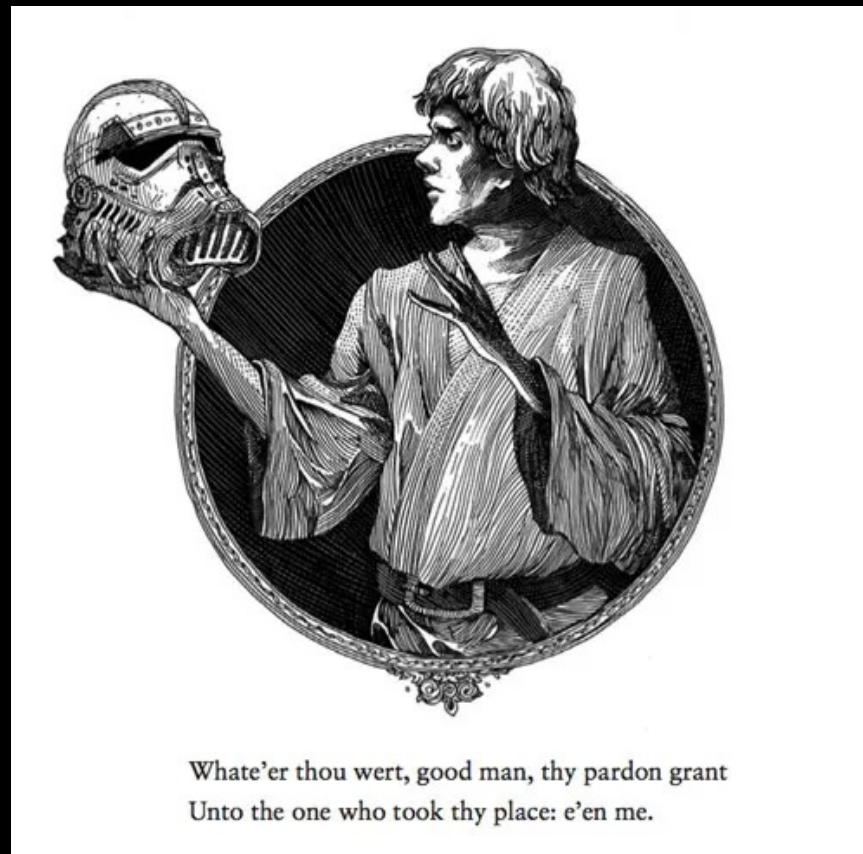
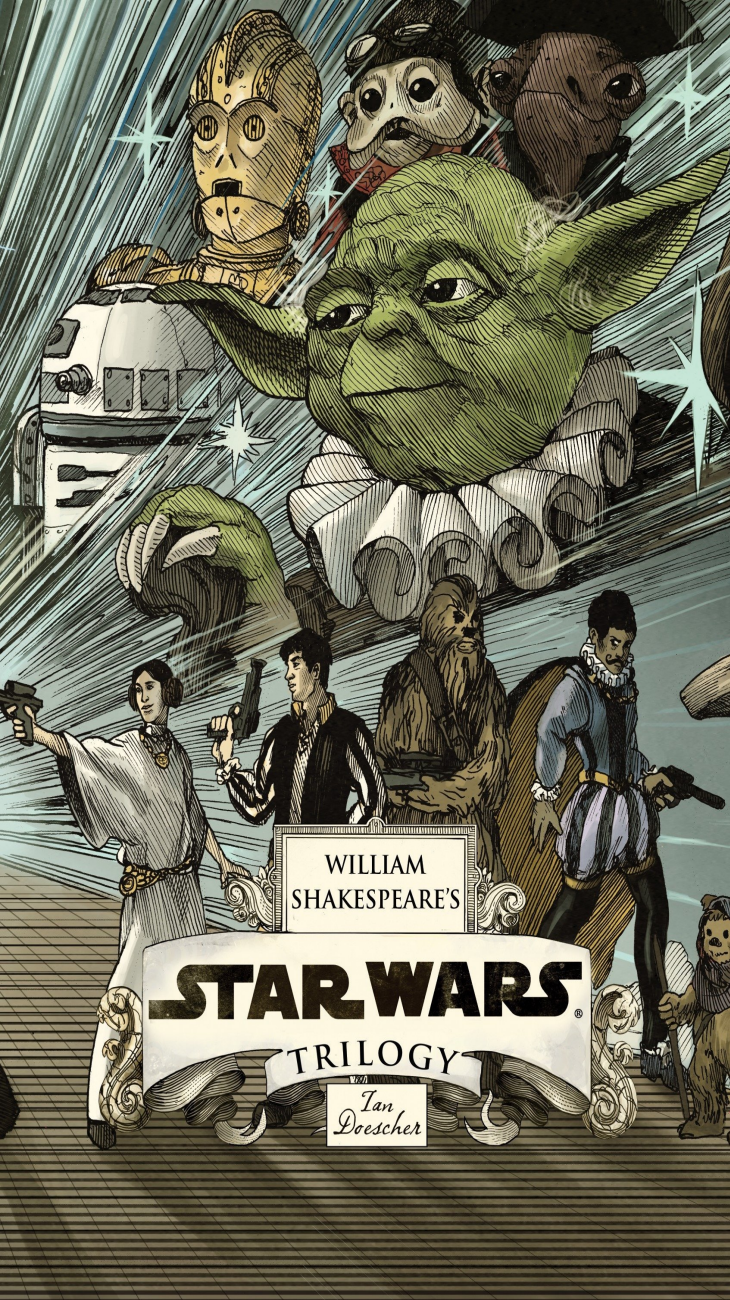
# WOKE

- 'stay woke, keep your eyes open'-Lead Belly



Kimberley Coles, Kim F. Hall, Ayanna Thompson  
'BlackKKShakespearean: A Call to Action for  
Medieval and Early Modern Studies', *MLA  
Profession*

'The colonial project is stitched in and through the language and literatures of the pre- and early modern periods; the politics and economics that ultimately produced settler colonialism, chattel slavery, the forced migration of peoples, and the development of the British empire animate these early English texts'



# Shakespeare, Race and Performance

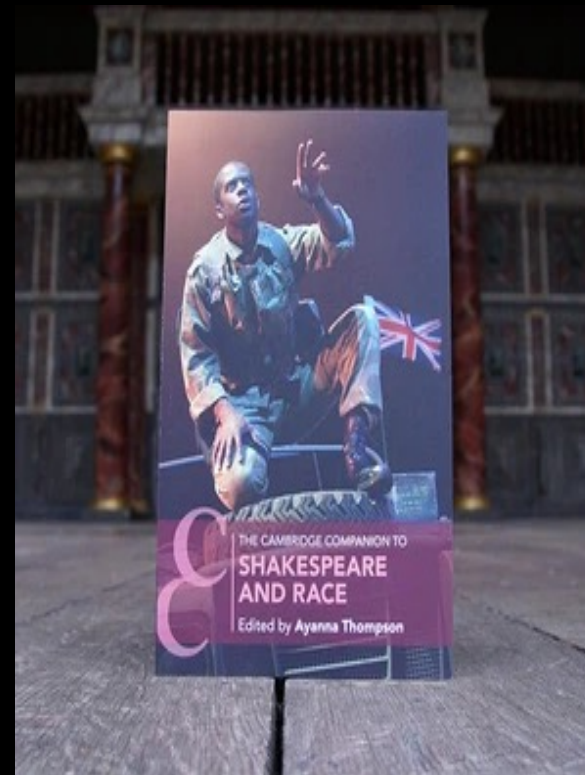
1. What do we mean by 'race'?
2. Do Shakespeare's plays speak of race?
3. Race in theatre today



# *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (2021)

Thompson (Introduction):  
Anachronistic argument often  
cited:

‘to look at race in early modern  
texts is to misapply modern  
concepts to them’



# What do we mean by 'race'?

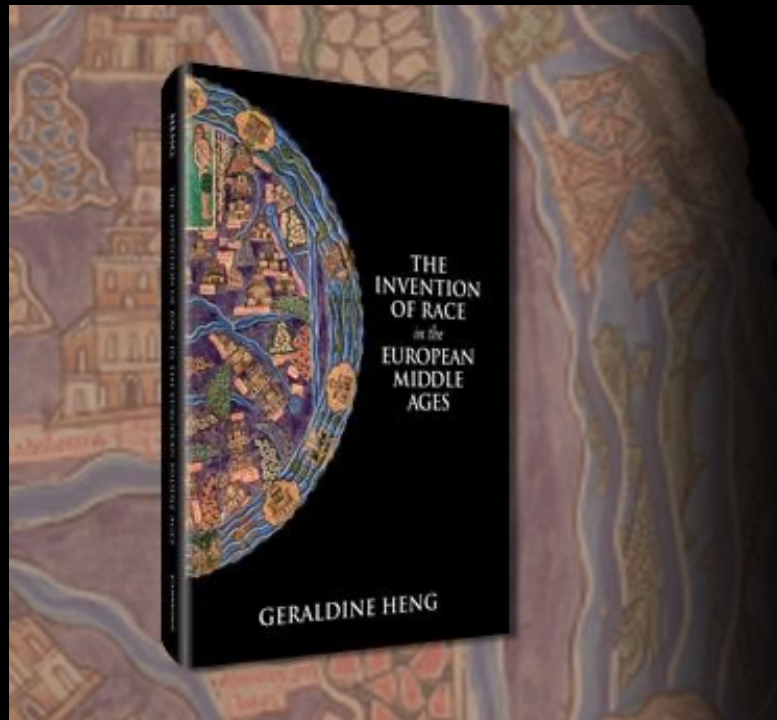
Race – lineage, breed, common ancestry [OED]

MYTH: race is a 'science' or biological fact [according to 18<sup>th</sup>-century anthropology]

FACT: race is a myth and fabrication

Race-making –the creation of **race** in culture as a social entity, a category we use to assign difference, value and laws

‘Race is a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences, rather than a substantive content’.



THE  
INVENTION  
OF RACE  
*in the*  
EUROPEAN  
MIDDLE  
AGES

GERALDINE HENG

Lee Anne Bell, in  
*Teaching Diversity and Social Justice*, ed. Maurianne  
Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin

‘Race is **not a biological category but an idea**, a social construction – created to interpret human differences and used to justify socioeconomic arrangements in ways that accrue to the benefit of the dominant social group’

# Racism – Lee Anne Bell

‘a system of advantage based on race and supported by institutional structures, policies, and practices that create and sustain benefits for the dominant white group’.



# Camara Phyllis Jones

‘Prejudice and discrimination, where prejudice means differential assumptions about the abilities, motives, and intentions of others according to their race, and discrimination means differential actions towards others according to their race’

From: ‘Levels of Racism: A Theoretic Framework and a Gardener’s Tale’  
*American Journal of Public Health*, 90.8 (August 2000)

# Historical questions:

What was Shakespeare's world like? What did they know? What didn't they know? How did they understand the body? Its biology, its fluidity? What did they think of gender, race, sexuality- identity and character? What political discourses of the day were circulating? Who was on the throne? How did they get there? What global encounters were taking place? What books were published? Who were they for? What other plays were written? Who was in the audience? Who made up that society? What frightened them? What thrilled them?



# WHITE

TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

RICHARD DYER

With a new introductory essay  
"Looking into the light: Whiteness, racism and regimes of representation"  
by Maxime Cervulle

As long as whiteness is felt to be the human condition, then it alone both defines normality and fully inhabits it. . . the equation of being white with being human secures a position of power. White people have power and believe what they think, feel and act like and for all people; white people, unable to see their peculiarity, cannot take account of other people's; white people create the dominant images of the world and don't quite see that they thus construct the world in their own image; white people set standards of humanity by which they are bound to success and others bound to fail'.

'Whiteness needs to be made strange'

# Ambereen Dadabhoy, 'Skin in the Game: Teaching Race in Early modern Literature'

'How do we explain the operations of race in texts that we have not identified as being explicitly about race?'

'...race occupies an *other* space, locale and geography, and that the remainder of the Shakespearean corpus is somehow immunized from such concerns'.

'race and racism are the problems of those who occupy racialized identities. Within this schema, white people have no experience of race in their own bodies'.



Zoe Tapper as Desdemona and Aaron Wiley as Othello at Shakespeare's Globe



Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (1995)

‘Descriptions of dark and light, rather than being mere indications of Elizabethan beauty standards or markers of moral categories, became in the early modern period the conduit through which the English began to formulate the notions of “self” and “other” so well known in Anglo-American discourse’.

# ANTIRACIST THEATRE

- Choice of directors
- Casting consciously, with care
- Who is in the casting room?
- How to welcome actors and creatives in the building
- Are support and diversity officers accessible?
- Production/design/lighting - taking into account racial diversity
- Conversation welcome
- Actors involved in publicity
- Who is reviewing?