

Early Modern Rhetorics of Color

By

John Casey

B.A. (Hons.), Concordia University, 2012

M.A., Concordia University, 2014

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English

at Brown University

Providence, RI

May 2020

© Copyright 2020 by John Casey

This dissertation by John Casey is accepted in its present form
by the Department of English as satisfying the
dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Date_____

Karen Newman, Advisor

Recommended to the Graduate Council

Date_____

James Kuzner, Reader

Date_____

Jim Egan, Reader

Approved by the Graduate Council

Date_____

Andrew G. Campbell, Dean of the Graduate School

Curriculum Vitae

John Casey received his B.A. (Hons.) and M.A. in English Literature from Concordia University.

His writing on early modern literature has appeared in *Arcade* and *Early Modern Culture*.

Acknowledgments

I owe thanks, first of all, to my committee - Karen Newman, James Kuzner, and Jim Egan - for agreeing to supervise this dissertation. They have, each in their own way, served as invaluable examples of how to think, talk, and write about early modern literature and culture.

Completing this project would have been far more difficult were it not for the help and work of Lorraine Mazza, Ellen Viola, Marianne Costa, and Marilyn Netter.

I have had the privilege of working with and learning from too many remarkable people to name here. Were I forced to give an incomplete list of those from whom I have drawn inspiration, that list would need to include Susan Bernstein, Meredith Evans, Michael Gastiger, Phil Gould, Robin Graham, Judith Scherer Herz, Bill Keach, Kristen Maye, Rick Rambuss, Jonathan Sachs, Manish Sharma, Dorin Smith, and Anna Thomas.

Kevin Quashie has been a singular friend and interlocutor. Would that I had met him sooner.

I owe more than I can rightly describe to Cole Morgan.

The late Mick Gilliece would hate to see himself acknowledged here, but this dissertation and everything else I do is thanks to and for him.

I hope that Danielle Davidson, Sandra Casey, Dan Casey, Dee Casey, Russell Sidney, and Hannah Sidney do not need to read these acknowledgments to discover how grateful I am for their love and support.

Table of Contents

Introduction:

Writing about Colors in Black and White	1
---	---

Chapter One:

Attention and the Colors of Skin	6
----------------------------------	---

Chapter Two:

Sympathy and the Colors of Intention	47
--------------------------------------	----

Chapter Three:

Confusion and the Colors of Rhetoric	92
--------------------------------------	----

Chapter Four:

Value and the Colors of the 'New' World	130
---	-----

Conclusion:

A Semi-Scientific Postscript	174
------------------------------	-----

Introduction:

Writing About Color in Black and White

'Tis with our *Judgments* as our *Watches*, none
Go just *alike*, yet each believes his own.

-Alexander Pope

“Early Modern Rhetorics of Color” argues that color - whether used in nascent conceptualizations of race, deployed idiomatically to describe intentions, invoked figuratively to describe figurative language as such, or noted in passing as a visual aspect of the flora and fauna of the ‘New’ World - is more than a superficial, merely visual feature of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poetry, prose, and drama. As English worldviews shift away from scholasticism and towards empiricism, divest epistemological authority from classical authors and invest this authority in direct experience, color occupies a physical and metaphysical gray area. It is neither an essential, self-evident aspect of the world (as scholastics have it) nor is it some secondary, incidental fiction of the mind (as empiricists have it). By dint of this physical and metaphysical indeterminacy, colors inspire unpredictable sensual, emotional, and cognitive experiences. They work across a perceiver’s faculties and become entangled with values that belie their status as mere visual qualities or epiphenomena. “Early Modern Rhetorics of Color” shows that complex early modern ethical, ideological, aesthetic, and epistemic views are built up out of basic perceptual experiences. It intervenes in debates on early modern notions of race, selfhood/agency, poetics/rhetoric, and colonialism by homing in on the specifically experiential and pragmatic dimensions of those vexing issues.

Unlike some recent accounts of the sociocultural value of colors, “Early Modern Rhetorics of Color” is exclusively concerned with colors as they appear in writing.¹ To best demonstrate

¹ See David Scott Kastan, *On Colors* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018) or Kassia St. Clair, *The Secret Lives of Colors* (London: John Murray, 2018) for two recent works on the sociocultural value of colors.

color's semantic flexibility, I investigate how it shows up in discourses across domains, contexts, genres, and so on. I track color uses as they appear in the name of a bookshop (Chapter One), in a letter written by Elizabeth I to James VI (Chapter Two), in popular rhetorical manuals (Chapter Three), in travel narratives (Chapter Four), and in natural philosophy (Conclusion) to name only a few varieties of writing dealt with in the following. Just as I follow color across various non-literary contexts, so too do I attend to color across various literary genres (e.g. plays, masques, ballads, poems, prose narratives). By surveying the early modern discursive field as widely as possible we see that these "rhetorics of color," as I have called them, have everything to do with a historically and culturally specific mode of expression (or *episteme* if you must) and little to do with specific literary works, authors, or genres. As is announced by the chapter titles and evident through the wide swath of texts I survey in the chapters themselves, my concern is with specific instances of color over and above where these problems show up in any particular work by any particular author.

As stated above, the dissertation makes a single broad argument about what color is up to across early modern discourse, but that argument is built up out of more narrow engagements with particular instances of rhetorical color. The more narrow engagements with color complement each other, but they do not rely on each other argumentatively. Likewise, these narrow engagements follow a loose historical trajectory (i.e. the earliest historical material is mostly found in Chapter One, the latest in the Conclusion), but the historical argument being made is only in the vaguest sense linear.² I note these features of the dissertation only to say that you are welcome to read the chapters in whatever order might suit your fancy. To better help you follow that fancy, brief summary versions of each chapter are included below.

² This historical argument is tacit across the dissertation, but stated directly it reads: Between the Reformation and the Restoration, English writing avails itself of figurative and literal color to describe or inscribe experiential matters. Another version might be: Before Empiricism, English writers experiment with empiricist ideas.

Chapter One, “Attention and the Colors of Skin,” examines how skin color comes to attention as a significant and overdetermined feature of personal identity in literature set in England. While skin color is conceptually and etiologically fraught in certain discursive spheres, I argue that complexions play a commonplace, pragmatic role in the construction of identity in popular literature. Complexions “come before the footlights of consciousness,” to borrow William James’ turn of phrase, as an index of various social kinds (i.e. race, gender, nationality) for the sake of justifying or advocating relational attitudes. The chapter looks at how spurious and passing attention to skin color can have particular effects on one’s social position (e.g. Audrey, Celia, and Rosalind in *As You Like It*, “goodwives” in a ballad by Tarlton) and how more pronounced attention to complexion ostracizes and excludes figures from social worlds entire. By attending to booksellers operating “under the sign of the Black Boy” in London from 1555 onwards as well as figures referred to as “black boy[s]” in English drama (e.g. Peter in Lyly’s *Galatea*, Subtle in Jonson’s *The Alchemist*), I show that discursive attention to skin color not only works to determine who one is, but also the kinds of relationships one can have with others and the world at large.

In Chapter Two, “Sympathy and the Colors of Intention,” I investigate how people are said to act “under the color” of certain intentions. Looking first at how this idiom is elaborated in poetry by Wyatt and Petrarch as well as prose by Norton and Calvin, I argue that the attribution of color to intentions establishes a distinction between how one seems and how one is. Through readings of Duessa, one who “could forge all colours, saue the trew,” in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* and texts regarding Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, I contend that the colors of intention show us that intersubjective judgments are matters of perception and affect. Judging whether one merely *appears* sincere or truly *is* sincere is analogous to judging whether, say, turquoise is more green or more blue. By coloring intentions, writers represent and create what Hume calls sympathy or the “vivacity of the conception of another’s feeling.” Agents aspire to make their intentions “appear in the[ir] true

and proper colors,” as Elizabeth I puts it, but whether these colors are received as true or false, proper or improper, is contingent upon sympathetic responses, that is, on the emotional and perceptual intuitions of others.

“Confusion and the Colors of Rhetoric,” my third chapter, homes in on how early modern theories of rhetoric and poetry took up the classical view that figurative uses of language were best understood as “the colors of rhetoric.” Far from being mere discursive ornament, the colors of rhetoric are said to “beautifie the sence and very meaning of a sentence.” On this basis, Puttenham and other rhetoricians suggest that the colors of rhetoric “invegleth the judgement” of the reader. I argue that early modern rhetorical colors inspire “confusion” in Spinoza’s sense of the term. They create a “vacillation of mind which is [...] related to the affect” and instill “conclusions without premises.” By reading Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*, where semantic sense commingles with emotive and sensate experience to unreasonable ends at every turn, I show the generative confusions that follow from colorful rhetoric. These colorful confusions, I argue, prompt readers to suspend critical judgment and give themselves over to incipient affective and sensorial experiences.

In Chapter Four, “Value and the Colors of the ‘New’ World,” I turn to how writers attempt to “shew the truth” of their travels to the Americas by appealing to color. As colonial efforts gather steam at the turn of the seventeenth century, English writers like Harriot, Raleigh, John Smith, and others face a crisis whereby they must describe having “seene and knowne more than the ordinarie” in the Americas in concrete and vivid terms without being “scorned and accounted” as “idle Novellist[s].” I argue that, in having to capture “the colour of the lande” in writing, writers initially collapse the fact/value distinction. The conflation of fact and value, however, reaches an impasse when colonialist writers represent indigenous life and its own modes of valuation. Reading John Smith’s multiply revised accounts of trade in “blew beads” - valued greatly by Powhatan and meagerly by Smith - as well as his descriptions of a “Virginia Maske” - a spectacle of colorful

costumes and paints judged “excellent” and “ill” at once - we see that color gives rise to and accommodates diametrically opposed value judgments. I argue that colonialist writers self-consciously recognize not only that value is an imposition on the world rather than a natural feature of it, but also that what counts as a fact about the world is inextricably tied to (and born from) the particular value judgments of a given community.

My conclusion, “A Semi-Scientific Postscript,” is far more exploratory than it is conclusive. I question how (or if) one is to go about reconciling the views of seventeenth-century natural philosophers and the views of seventeenth-century lexicographers. In the mid-1600s, natural philosophers become increasingly committed to the notion that colors were mere “phantasms” of the senses divorced from the material world while lexicographers become increasingly committed to the notion that color terms are stable, rigid words that can be defined by reference to the material world. Trying to make sense of early modern color, on the one hand, and early modern color terms, on the other, prompts us to ask how historical sociolinguistics inform and are informed by historical ontologies. The disjunct between early modern color and early modern color terms forces us to ask to what extent semantic claims can, should, or must be squared with metaphysical ones.

By looking at the various ways color is used across early modern English poetry, prose, and drama, “Early Modern Rhetorics of Color” shows 1) how color comes to hold a fraught set of ethical, ideological, aesthetic, and epistemic values and 2) a growing recognition on the part of English authors that the truth or truths of the world may spring from the particular perceptions of embodied subjects. The project contributes to our understanding of how early modern literature intersects with the history of philosophy. It shows how the debates about sense experience and language that preoccupy philosophers from Aristotle onward play out in surprising and novel ways in early modern discursive contexts.

Chapter One:

Attention and the Colors of Skin

In everyday life the lives of others are neither
here nor there; they drift between their own
inexpressiveness and my inaccuracy in
responding to them.

- Stanley Cavell

We map our way with only the bearing

of surrounding life itself borderless
uncontrolled by the surface of our self.

- Ed Roberson

In Henry Porter's *Two Angrie Women of Abington* (1599), the figure referred to only as "boy" interjects as his master, Francis, discusses "the best" horse he has ever ridden.¹ Even better than the "gray hag" Francis is in the midst of praising is, the boy says, "[o]ne of my colour."² Francis is confused by the suggestion. He does not, he says, recall "one of *that* color."³ The boy clarifies. He means that the horse was of his "complexion." Francis is more confused still. "What's that ye call complexion in a horse?," Francis asks.⁴ The boy explains that by "complexion" he means "[t]he colour, Sir."⁵ While the audience might laugh at the boy's wit, Francis loses his temper. He demands to know more about this horse and offers to get the boy a pencil so that he might draw it for him. The boy, however, says he cannot "paint."⁶ Francis insults him, threatens to beat him, and convinces him to give a verbal description of the horse. The boy describes the horse, from its

¹ Henry Porter, *The pleasant history of the two angry women of Abington With the humorous mirth of Dicke Coomes and Nicholas Prouerbes, two seruingmen* (London: William Ferbrand, 1599), B1v. All citations of pre-1700 texts, unless otherwise noted, are to scanned editions made available via Early English Books Online (EEBO). I have silently modernized the typography of all quotations (i.e. "v" for "u," "j" for "i"), but the spelling and punctuation found in the original has been preserved.

² *Ibid.*

³ Porter, *Two Angry Women*, B2r. My emphasis.

⁴ *Ibid.* References to complexion are fairly commonplace in early modern books about horses, thus we should read Francis' confusion over the term to imply a lack of familiarity with horses in general.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

appearance to its behavior, in superlative terms. He does not mention the horse's color, but, of course, he need not mention it verbally since his own hue stood onstage as a singular example of it. While perfectly evident to early modern audiences, the boy's color is utterly inaccessible to us now.⁷ At best, we can say that the boy's self-referential mention of his skin color singles him out. The boy's words establish difference (between Francis and himself) and similarity (between himself and the horse) on the basis of a body's color. Whether that difference or similarity was stark or subtle, trivial or substantive is not registered textually. How the characters of *Two Angry Women* understood this boy's color or the attitudes they had in respect to it is left out of the play. The boy's color in *Two Angry Women* is not, on its face, a meaningful aspect of his character or personal identity in the moment he mentions it. That being said, it does position the boy in a particular way. His appearance in this moment does not flesh out our understanding of him as a person, but it does give us a sense of how he fits into the social world of the play. His body warrants visual attention in a way that no others do. As much as he is a part of the scene, he stands apart from the others in it. He is given no name, no history, and no principal part in the play's plot. He is, however, an excellent visual referent. His value in the play hangs solely on his skin color.

"My experience is what I agree to attend to," William James says. "Only those items which I notice shape my mind."⁸ Porter's scene guarantees that everyone's experience involves attending to skin color, but what kind of attention is being paid? The boy's color is one of "those items which I

⁷ The description is capped off with the suggestion that "A flea enamoured of her blood" made "many a crimson speck" on her neck which goes to show "her colour good." Perhaps the horse referred to is of "fleabitten" color. Gervaise Markham's *Cauelarice, or The English Horseman* (1607) notes that a horse of "fleabitten" color is "is moste commonlye an excellent Horse and of the best temper, as for the moste parte your Barbaries are." Whether this entails that a "fleabitten" horse is kind of Barbary horse or is merely akin to Barbary horses in terms of temperament is unclear. Edward Topsell's *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes* (1607) explains that the "cheefe colours" of horses are "bay, white, carnation, golden; russet, mouse-colour, fleabitten, spotted, pale and blacke." He notes that "among tame Horsses there are many good ones of Black, White, Browne, Red, and fleabitten colour." I can, at best, say that "fleabitten" is a color unlike the the rest that are listed. It is distinct from "spotted," but also from other typical horse colors. The boy's reference to an amorous flea might also not mean to suggest that the horse is "fleabitten" per se, but merely bitten by fleas.

⁸ William James, *Principles of Psychology: Volume One* (New York: Dover, 1950), 402. Emphasis in the original.

notice,” but how this item “shaped” the minds of early modern audiences or, in turn, how or if it ought to “shape” our own is hard to discern. Peter Erickson argues that “the concept of color as an ethnic marker” is present and operative in the early modern period, but if the boy’s reference to color is meant to highlight his ethnicity then it does so only obliquely.⁹ It is simple enough to demonstrate *that* skin color is significant in a particular circumstance, but it is hard to substantiate *what* is significant about it.

Early modern discourse attends to skin color for a variety of reasons and a plethora of contexts, but always as a potentially telling feature of identity that speaks to one’s place in the social world. It is a feature of the body whose mention highlights an aspect of a subject for the sake of determining intersubjective relationships. William Walter’s *Spectacle of Lovers*, for instance, suggests that a woman’s skin color indexes their age and health in particular and, more importantly, that color’s mutability ought to motivate a certain perspective towards them at all times.

In youth theyr coloure is fayre and florysshynge
By age and sycknesse it is soone faded
Where they were ruddy they be pale and lourynge
Theyr skynne in all places swarte and wrynkeled
There is nothyng ought more to be mystrusted
For it blyndeth the eye with such voluptuosyte
That from theyr daunger none escapeth fre.¹⁰

Walter at once takes skin color to be an attention grabbing, corruptive feature, thus suggests that men ought to bracket visual appearances, guarding themselves against the “daunger” of a woman’s “voluptuosyte.” In his *Courte of Virtue*, John Hall goes so far as to say that “[i]f men were bent the truth to tell” then they would admit that “beauty” is no “other thyng, then color in the skyn.”¹¹ It is

⁹ Peter Erickson, “British National Identity and the Emergence of White Self-Fashioning” in *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race, and Empire in Renaissance England*, edited by Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 315.

¹⁰ William Walter, *The spectacle of lovers* (London: Wykyn de Worde, [1533?]), np. See also No Lover, Nor Loved, an allegorical figure in John Heywood’s *A Play of Love* (1533), who remarks that he abandoned amorous pursuits wholly as a result of the incessant mutability of a woman’s color.

¹¹ John Hall, *The Courte of Virtue* (London: Thomas Marshe, 1565), 84r.

“much more brittle then is glasse,” it “fleteth faster then tyme.”¹² Beauty is naught, in Hall’s eyes, but “a thing most vayne” which will bring “Gods heavy wrath” upon those who delight in it.¹³ The aesthetic value of skin color is undeniable. It is, rather, the ethical stakes of that aesthetic value that authors are trying to suss out. Even when skin colors are not dismissed or derogated as vicious distractions, they carry tacit ethical consequences. Agrippa, for example, suggests that the “propre body of a woman” involves “a face moste fayre of all creatures” and that each part of a woman’s body ought to be a particular hue (e.g. her neck ought to be “white as milke”).¹⁴ Agrippa does not suggest that the aesthetic value of skin color is dangerous, but suggests that there is a bodily norm to be maintained. A woman insufficiently fair, whose neck is not milk white, is improper. This supposition not only tries to determine how one ought to judge a woman aesthetically, but determines how a woman’s own body measures up to a gender ideal. This complex admixture of aesthetic and ethical values found in skin color are often found in discussions of women, but this complex does not cut exclusively along gender lines.

In *Certain Questyons of kynge Bocthus*, an English translation of the enormously popular medieval French *Book of Sydrac*, Sydrac tells King Bocus that “the beste tokens to know a man by in all thynges” is *inter alia* that he “hath his skynne whytte.”¹⁵ A young woman’s white skin was, above, motivation for distrust and, here, we see that a man’s white skin ought to motivate trust. Skin color is evidently meant to tell you something about the person who is so colored and the proper response to them. This view extends beyond secular matters and features even in religious discourse. Levinus Lemnius, for example, describes the appearance of Jesus’s body as though it were a good in itself. Jesus’ visage had, he says, the power to “allureth and draweth every one by a sertayne secrete

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *A treatise of the nobilitie and excellencye of wwoman kynde*, translated by David Clapham (London: Thomae Bertheleti, 1542), B2v, B[3]r. This page is mispaginated as B4 in the text..

¹⁵ King Boccus, *Here be certayne questyons of kynge Bocthus* (London: Robert Wyer, 1550), C1v.

sympathie” because it was “steygned and dyed in a perfect hew of whyte and redde.”¹⁶ Jesus’ aesthetic goodness compliments his ethical goodness, but the two are discussed independently. The external qualities of a body alone determine allure. The “perfect hew” creates a community, prompts a sympathetic reaction. The aesthetic values of a person’s skin color and the ethical values of that person’s character sometimes coincide, but they might also conflict. B. G., for example, tells us he would “rather be a Collyer at Croyden than a Pope at Rome for in my judgement it is better to have a blacke body like a Collier than a blacke Soule like a Pope.”¹⁷ B.G., like others above, suggests that judgments regarding the state of the soul ought to take precedence over judgments regarding the state of the body. The significance attributed to the color of skin is negotiable even if the value attributed to that color is constant. For B. G., to be judged negatively by the eyes of other people is preferable to being judged negatively by the eyes of God. Just as people react a certain way to Jesus’ white and red coloring, so too do people react a certain way to a collier’s black skin.

“The Ethiopian thinketh the blacke colour to be the fayrer then white: And the white man thinketh otherwise,” Rycharde Eden writes in the epistle to the reader in his translation of Anghiera’s *Decades of the Newe Worlde or West India*.¹⁸ Eden is explicitly suggesting that “fairness” or aesthetic judgment is contextually contingent, but he is also making an implicit claim. Note how there is an asymmetry to the terms of Eden’s comparison. “Ethiopian,” an ostensible national nomination, is juxtaposed against “the white man.” Aesthetic judgments of color then are in one case predicated on nation and in another predicated on color. As much as Eden’s claim might invoke a kind of relativist view of aesthetic judgment, it also suggests a fixed view of certain social

¹⁶ Levinus Lemnius, *The touchstone of complexions*, translated by Thomas Newton (London: Thomas Marsh, 1576), 36v.

¹⁷ B. G., *A newyears gifte dedicated to the Popes Holiness* (London: Henry Bynneman, 1579), [¶4v]. Whether B. G.’s “like” asserts something substantive or not is an open question. We can parse that phrase as either “black like, for instance, a Collier” (i.e. appearing blackly) or “black in the same way as a Collier is black (i.e. by dint of circumstance).”

¹⁸ Pietro Martire d’Anghiera, *The decades of the newe worlde or west India*, translated by Richard Eden (London: Edwarde Sutton, 1555), 161r.

groupings. The white man, regardless of nationality, has certain aesthetic preferences. Skin color creates a social group that is evidently comprehensible without recourse to any other traits. It is, however, tough to say what Eden intends to articulate about skin color as a feature of social or personal identity. “As appetite therefore moveth,” he writes, “and not as reason perswadeth, men runne after vanities.”¹⁹ It is clear enough that judgments of fairness are the matters of appetite that Eden imagines propel men towards “vanities” like skin color, but these “vanities” help determine one’s social group. Just as being Ethiopian establishes nation explicitly, complexion implicitly, and speaks to aesthetic preferences, so too does “white” establish complexion explicitly, nation implicitly (i.e. not-Ethiopian), and speaks to aesthetic preferences. These vanities are far from merely vanities. Aesthetic judgment and ethical judgment are knit together in discussions of skin color, but they are not one and the same. Some take the colors of skin as a virtuous index of internal qualities while others take the colors of skin as a vicious distraction from them.

In a culture as fractious and schismatic as early modern England, it is unsurprising that no generic claim about how skin color was seen, valued, or understood holds true. That being said, we can say that early modern writers were attentive to skin color even when the quality of that attention is opaque to us now. Like the unknowable complexion of Porter’s boy, many mentions of skin color in early modern writing invoke attitudes or values that are implied, tacit, or unwritten. For instance, S. R. tells us in his *Choise of Change* that there are “[t]hree Sortes of men we must take hede of: A ruddie Etalian, a white Frenchman, and a black Almaine.”²⁰ This last figure obviously gestures in jest towards the popular dance and ballad tune, but the other two figures allude, as far as I can tell, to nothing other than men from Italy and France with particular complexions. One ought to “take hede” of people partially on the basis of how their color, gender, and nationality come to

¹⁹ Anghiera, *Decades of the newe worlde*, 161v. The last turn of phrase is attributed to Saint Jerome.

²⁰ S. R., *The choise of change* (London: Roger Warde, 1585), K1r.

create a particular identity. The reasoning behind the establishment of certain ethical relationships on the basis of how certain aesthetic qualities like skin color interact with other identity traits is, however, utterly unclear. Is a “white Frenchman” worrisome because he is of a certain class? Occupies a certain status? Hails from a particular region of France? Uses cosmetics? Early modern writers might see skin color as subsidiary or substantial component of some social kind (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, class), but it is hard to say definitively what social kind is being invoked. Skin color was a startlingly prominent and nuanced aspect of early modern identity, but the reasoning behind skin color’s discursive appearance often evades discursive capture.

Scholarship on early modern skin color tends to rely on concepts put forward in travel narratives and natural philosophy, then searches for specific literary instances where these concepts can be said to play an explanatory role.²¹ While it is reasonable to draw on narratives explicitly concerned with racial difference in order to build up an idea of what race entailed, this critical position comes at a cost. As Justin Smith remarks, “[W]riting about the history of racial thinking is [...] a difficult task, to the extent that (1) the thing itself, race, does not exist in a robust scientific or metaphysical way and (2) it is often entirely unclear, when looking at texts from the past, whether different authors are writing about one and the same unrobust, imaginary thing.”²² Relying on early forms of racial thinking at work in early modern ethnographies, physiologies, and the like has the unfortunate consequence of a) underwriting the biases that subtend such work, b) suggesting that early modern attention is always-already specifically theory-laden, and c) implying that all discussions of race or racialized traits like skin color are comparable or commensurate. Mary Floyd-Wilson, for instance, argues that “in sixteenth-century England humoralism is ethnology.”²³ It seems to me,

²¹ See, for instance, any of the articles featured in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 6.7 (2016) on “Rereading Early Modern Race”

²² Justin E. H. Smith, *Nature, Human Nature, and Human Difference: Race in Early Modern Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 68.

²³ Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 12.

however, that before one wonders whether a person is composed of a preponderance of phlegm or whether their family hails from the Gold Coast, attention must fall first on more basic features.

Before questions of humoral composition or ethnic heritage come to mind, early modern life traffics in mere visual qualities. Skin color is, first of all, just there. The question is how it accrues value in excess of this plain visual fact. Mistaken etiologies of skin color do not help us get a more accurate view of its manifestation, its aesthetic value, or the ethical consequences that follow therefrom.

My focus in this chapter is, first, on skin of any color that garners attention and, second, on how that attention determines a person's relationships with others. Avicenna suggest that "[...] the ignorance of the causes of the effects of the virtue of a magnet is not more marvelous than the ignorance of the causes disposing a thing to redness or yellowness [...] But wonder [*admiratio*] falls, indeed from ordinary things [*consuetis*] and the Soul neglects to inquire about them; but what rarely exists does excite wonder and induces inquiry and speculation about its causes."²⁴ My intention in what follows is to bracket "wonder" for a while and turn to ordinary things, to bracket causes for a while and turn to effects. Renaissance authors themselves saw the merit of such a strategy. "Let us leave aside the disputes of philosophers regarding the origins of colours," Alberti says, "For what help is it to the painter to know how color is made."²⁵ Likewise, for the critic invested in how personal identities and social relationships are constructed by way of how early modern writers simply attend to (rather than try to account for or explain) skin color. My hope is that by focusing on something as simple as "attention" and homing in on something as plain as "skin color," we get a better sense of the ethical stakes of how something so superficial can have effects so profound.

William James suggests that "each of us literally *chooses*, by his way of attending to things, what sort of a universe he shall appear to himself to inhabit," but this attributes undue power to the eyes of an

²⁴ Quoted in Bert Hansen, *Nicole Oresme and the Marvels of Nature: A Study of his de causis mirabilium with Critical Edition, Translation, and Commentary* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1985), 66.

²⁵ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, translated by Cecil Grayson (New York: Penguin, 1991), 45.

attentive agent.²⁶ How you attend to the world and others in it builds up “a sort of universe,” to be sure, but too does how the world and others attend to you. Investigating the way attention to skin color plays a role in the construction of personal identity and social relationships in the early modern world is my main aim across this chapter, but I also want to tacitly highlight how we, critics and scholars, construct a version of the early modern world on the basis of how we ourselves attend to mentions of skin color in early modern texts. My discussion of skin color will, thus, seize on moments that are not typically cited as instances where skin color is at issue. I want to turn first to a little discussed play that, in Robert Adger Law’s view, offers us “a seemingly exact representation of an actual crime that occurred in London, in August, 1594.”²⁷

Robert Yarrington’s *Two Lamentable Tragedies* is remarkable in part because of how straightforwardly it presents “the murther of Maister Beech A Chaundler in ‘Thamse-streete, and his boy, done by Thomas Merry.”²⁸ The Beech/Merry plot is a domestic tragedy in the vein of *Arden of Feversham*. Law notes that he “does not know any play which presents more literally one side of the life and interests of the London populace during Shakespeare’s young adulthood.”²⁹ There is, he says, both an “absolute realism” to the Merry/Beech plot’s stage directions and a “perfect literalism” to the plot as a whole.³⁰ Over and above the stage directions and plotting, even the dialogue is pared down to practical matters and mostly devoid of figurative flourish. Inspired by or dissatisfied with depictions of the crime in numerous broadside ballads (now lost), Yarrington’s primary concern

²⁶ James, *Principles of Psychology: Volume One*, 424.

²⁷ Robert Adger Law, “Yarrington’s Two Lamentable Tragedies,” *Modern Language Review* 5 (1910): 167.

²⁸ Robert Yarrington, *Two Lamentable Tragedies* (London: Mathew Lawe, 1601), np. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically. See Gemma Leggott’s introduction to her edition of the play on the generic complications of the play as whole (esp. pp. 19 ff.). See also Catherine Richardson, *Domestic Life and Domestic Tragedy in Early Modern England: The Material Life of the Household* for an account of domestic tragedy as a genre.

²⁹ Law, “Yarrington’s Two Lamentable Tragedies,” 167.

³⁰ Law, “Yarrington’s Two Lamentable Tragedies,” 168. The stage directions given for the murder of Beech’s boy, Thomas Winchester, are a good example of the kind of realism or literalism that Law finds: “When the boy goeth into the shoppe Merrie striketh six blowes on his head and with the seaventh leaves the hammer sticking in his head, the boy groaning must be heard by a maide who must crye to her maister.” (C4r)

seems to be to render this crime as true to life as possible.³¹ The murder of Beech is evidently a singular event that speaks more broadly to the vices of London as a whole.

Beech is immediately introduced as a generous, kind man. In the opening scene, he and a nameless neighbor have a conversation about Merry. Beech has nothing but kind words to say about him. The two head over to Merry's shop and Beech buys his neighbor a pint. When, over that pint, his neighbor and Merry begrudge the "English manner to affect / Strange things, and price them at a greater rate / Then home-bred things of better consequence," Beech stays quiet (A4r). He listens as Merry complains of his "poor estate" and blames "French merchants" for his troubles (A4r). Ignoring Merry's gripes about the state of London, Beech assures him that God "hath wealth in store / If [he] awaigh[t]s His will with patience" (A4r). He tells Merry that, in his own experience, "God's blessings have beene infinit / And farre beyond [his] expectations" (A4v). He has a shop that is well-stocked. He is not much in debt. Their pints finished, Beech and his neighbor leave Merry's shop and head home. Merry, now alone, is envious of and incredulous at Beech's financial standing and promptly resolves to murder him. In the next scene of this tragedy, he lures Beech back to his shop under false pretences, leads him to the upper room, and beats him to death with a hammer. Merry's sister, Rachell, and Merry's "man," Harry Williams, witness these two figures going upstairs from offstage. After the murder is done, the two enter and Williams asks who those people were. Rachell tells him that it was her brother and "a little man / Of black complexion" (B3r).

Lara Bovilsky argues that the word "black" is "always applied metaphorically (to selective parts of the body and populace) as an intensifier," but it is hard to see why it is that Rachell would be using "black complexion" either metaphorically or as an intensifier.³² Gemma Leggott suggests

³¹ See Walter Wilson Greg's commentary in *Henslowe's Diary* regarding these ballads.

³² Lara Bovilsky, *Barbarous Play: Race on the English Renaissance Stage* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 17. To be clear, Bovilsky is not suggesting that all descriptions of a person's blackness are only metaphorical and never

that one read “black complexion” as “frowning” by drawing on an *OED* definition of “to look black,” but Rachell is not asked *how* that man going upstairs appeared nor does “black” modify a verb in her response.³³ It is maybe tempting to take the phrase in a figurative sense because it occurs precisely when Beech is unknowingly headed towards his death. This particular blackness might be read as something like the shadow cast by mortality, but the context in which the phrase is uttered argues against such a reading. Rachell is responding to a direct question about *who* that man was that went up the stairs. The conversation has strictly pragmatic aims.³⁴ Not knowing his name or any other attributes, she refers to him in terms of his appearance. He is little.³⁵ He is black. Color is instrumental. It identifies someone in a particular way. For whatever reason, she seizes on this quality as one that might most readily reveal his identity to Williams.

“The possibility that Rachel could be referring to Beech’s skin colour as ‘black’ or just darker than most people she knows can be discarded because,” Leggott notes, “if this was the case, one would expect to see a lot more references to Beech’s skin colour.”³⁶ Without question, we have certain expectations about how skin color features in early modern texts, but these expectations should not delimit how we read the words on the page. The phrase “black complexion” is somewhat rare, but its meaning is consistent and established. It unambiguously describes the skin

literal, but one does wonder how she discerns which references are literal and which metaphorical in the absence of a known referent. Bovilsky might mean that “black” is only ever metaphorical insofar as it does not accurately describe the literal hue of bodies. Winthrop Jordan makes a similar claim about the extent to which “black” as an inaccurate descriptor is evidence of some kind of attitude towards the actual color that early modern white people saw. I am not sure, however, whether we should expect color pedantry or precision in most settings.

³³ Robert Yarington, *Two Lamentable Tragedies*, edited by Gemma Leggott (2011), 82n221. Leggott’s edition of the play is an online-only resource made available through *Early Modern Literary Studies*.

³⁴ Dramatically it highlights just that Rachell does not know this man for the sake of partly giving her some ethical ground to help her brother cover up his crime. A person acting immorally under obligation to a family member over acting morally under obligation to a stranger is a minimal justification, but it is understandable.

³⁵ It warrants noting that Beech’s littleness never prompts philological work despite the fact that the play makes nothing of it elsewhere, that is, whether “little” refers merely to below average height or to a kind of littleness that is unusual is passed over in silence. I note this only to highlight that critics are often eager to explain away color attributes, but perfectly content to let other attributes stand as self-evident. See Ian Smith’s article on Othello’s black handkerchief for some of the assumptions that undergird such interpretive strategies.

³⁶ Leggott, *Two Lamentable Tragedies*, 82n221.

color of people of African origin or descent. Hamlet, for example, refers to Pyrrhus' "dreade and black complexion."³⁷ Duarte Lopes' *A Report of the Kingdome of the Congo* writes that the Agagi or Giacchi people are "of a black complexion."³⁸ The only counterexample to this stable usage of the term is a description of a bruise as something that lends part of the skin a "black complexion."³⁹ While Yarrington's offhand remark on Beech's black complexion thwarts expectations, it does not seem to me that there is ground to read this blackness as figurative.

Sujata Iyengar suggests that "[p]rotoracialized rhetoric is omnipresent in early modern texts, even in those without any 'black' characters," but here we see the inverse.⁴⁰ A black character is presented almost wholly unaccompanied by racialized (proto- or otherwise) rhetoric of any kind. Before and after Rachell remarks on Beech's complexion, the play makes nothing explicit of it. In contrast to the attention lavished on skin color in certain discursive spheres (e.g. proto-ethnographies, natural philosophy), a "black complexion" does not warrant scrutiny or explanation in the less rarefied discursive context of a domestic tragedy. If we look only at the text, Beech's black complexion is seemingly characterologically and diegetically insignificant.

Irene Tucker argues that race is typically historicized and understood as "a kind of language" which has the consequence of directing scholarly inquiry towards "what race means or represents" over and above the ways in which "it works to organize our ways of knowing other people and the world."⁴¹ Beech's blackness does not seem to mean or represent anything within the confines of the play, but something about Beech meant something for Elizabethan Londoners. The sheer quantity

³⁷ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Cengage Learning, 2006), 2.2.393. See Andrea Ria Stevens, *Inventions of Skin: The Painted Body in Early English Drama, 1400-1642* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 1 for full reading of these lines.

³⁸ Oduardo Lopes, *A Reporte of the Kingdome of Congo, a Region of Africa*, translated by Abraham Hartwell (London: John Wolfe, 1597), 204.

³⁹ See, for examples of bruises of "black complexion," William Bullein, *Bulleins bulwarke of defence against all sickness, soarenesse, and woundes that doe dayly assaulte mankinde* (London: Thomas Marshe, 1579), CC3r.

⁴⁰ Sujata Iyengar, *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Color in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 15.

⁴¹ Irene Tucker, *The Moment of Racial Sight: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 4.

of attention given to his murder has few precursors. Not only were numerous broadside ballads published about the crime, but two dramatic reenactments were staged in short succession.⁴² This murder came to attention in a way that others evidently did not. Moreover, the play itself suggests at various junctures that “[t]he most here present” (i.e. the audience) already knew this tale well, knew Beech and/or Merry in a way that renders the play a supplement to their memories of the actual event (A3r). The prologue suggests that “the river Thames” itself “[d]oth strive to wash” the city of the “impuritie” of this crime, “But yet that silver streame can never wash, / The sad remembrance of that cursed deede” (A3r). The language here bears an uncanny resemblance to the proverbial impossibility of “washing the Ethiop white.”⁴³ London is, in this play’s account, stained by the acts of “cruell Merry on just Beech,” is cursed by the murder of an innocent black man by a covetous white (?) man (A3r). There is something almost frustratingly simple about the events of Yarrington’s play. Merry’s last words are merely “I never hated Beech in all my life, / Onely desire of money which he had” (K2r). Yarrington gives us a sidelong glance at everyday experiences that involved attention to skin color in some passing way. Beech’s complexion is one attribute amongst others that determines his place in the social world of London. That it was only passingly referred to in the play does not mean that it was only passingly significant.

George Puttenham gives us another view of how Londoners were attentive to skin color in his example of a “broade floute.”⁴⁴ Rather than citing a bit of poetry or drama, Puttenham depicts some quotidian instance of rhetoric on the street. The simplest way to demonstrate how to “deride by plain and flat contradiction” is to think of

⁴² The later version by Day and Haughton is now lost.

⁴³ See, of course, Karen Newman, “‘And Wash the Ethiop White’: Femininity and the Monstrous in *Othello*” in *Shakespeare Reproduced*, edited by Jean Howard and Marion F. O’Connor (New York: Methuen, 1987), 143-162 for an account of this phrase.

⁴⁴ George Puttenham, *The arte of English poesie* (London: Richard Field, 1589), 159.

he that saw a dwarfe go in the street [and] said to his companion that walked with him: See yonder gyant and to a Negro or woman blackemoore, in good sooth yeare a faire one.⁴⁵

Just as the little person's stature singles them out, this woman's complexion prompts attention.

Puttenham's example suggests at once that black women were sufficiently present in London to serve as examples for illustrating recondite rhetorical terms and that verbal harassment on the basis of skin color was commonplace. David Scott Kastan suggests that "in the complicated and often corrosive politics of pigmentation, color is almost always a social fact more than it is a visual one," but I am not sure that disentangling the social from the visual is feasible.⁴⁶ The society this woman experiences is attentive to her color. It uses words to emphasize her looks, to draw attention to her body's difference from certain ideals like "fairness." The social dynamics of the street are, in this brief moment, organized around her body's hue. Kim Hall refers to the appellation "fair one" as "frustratingly elusive."⁴⁷ It is elusive, however, only if we are looking for a robust concept behind "fair." As George Yancy puts it, race "is meaningfully lived as an embodied and messy phenomenon."⁴⁸ The messiness of this phenomenon is, to my eye, aggravated by focusing too narrowly on semantic concerns. Puttenham's casual indifference to terminology (i.e. "Negro or woman blackemoore") suggests that, here, higher-order concepts of racial, ethnic, or national belonging are of less import than skin color.

It is no doubt true that, as Bovilsky says, "Renaissance racial vocabulary presents interpretive difficulty, first of all, because names and categories of racial groups are unstable," but we should

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* The status of little people in early modern England is to the side of this chapter, but let me just note here that the rough equivalence that Puttenham establishes does tacitly suggest that visual qualities of the body are what he is honing in on. Interestingly, the modes of address differ across the examples. The little person is spoken about indirectly while the black woman is spoken to directly.

⁴⁶ David Scott Kastan with Stephen Farthing, *On Color* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 71.

⁴⁷ Kim F. Hall, "'These bastard signs of fair': Literary Whiteness in Shakespeare's Sonnets" in *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, edited by Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin (New York: Routledge, 1998), 68.

⁴⁸ George Yancy, "Looking at Whiteness: Finding Myself Much like a Mugger at a Boardwalk's End" in *Look, a White!: Philosophical Essays on Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 19.

bear in mind that the names and categories of social kinds as a whole are generally unstable.⁴⁹ What “woman,” “elderly,” “rich,” or “black” mean now are by no means more stable than they were in the Renaissance. Whether this is because of the character of social kinds as a phenomenon (i.e. social kinds as such are ontologically vague thus can only be spoken about in vague terms) or because of the character of our knowledge of the phenomena (i.e. we have not quite understood what social kinds are thus the concepts we attach to them are imperfect) is hard to suss out, but these nominal, epistemological, and/or ontological problems ought not preoccupy all our attention. As Cora Diamond notes, “so far as we keep one sort of difficulty in view we seem blocked from seeing the other.”⁵⁰ So far as we are concerned with conceptual difficulty of “fairness” or “Negro” or “blackamoore,” the ethical trouble encountered by those whose identities were informed by and whose relationships were affected by something as simple as complexions are blocked.⁵¹ In Puttenham, one Englishman cries out for the pleasure of another at the expense of a passerby. They understand what is being expressed by this cry as would the woman interpolated by it not simply because they would readily understand standard usage of the term “fair,” but because there is a clear pragmatic end to calling this woman “fair.” It is simply meant to establish a “plain” contradiction between fairness, whether we understand by this whiteness alone or beauty composed of whiteness amongst other qualities, and her black skin. Philology might reveal the many ways that “Negro” or “woman blackemoore” referred, but it does not disclose how in this quick moment a woman is set apart from a feminine virtue and stands vulnerable to unprovoked calls from men that position her as merely a body to behold. Puttenham’s example is not exceptional, but points to a commonplace

⁴⁹ Bovilsky, *Barbarous Play*, 14.

⁵⁰ Cora Diamond, “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy” in *Philosophy and Animal Life*, edited by Cary Wolfe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 55.

⁵¹ This is not to say that those lived experiences are by any means rendered transparently or immediately available to critics merely by dint of bracketing conceptual matters, but rather that by letting those concerns fall to the side we get closer to the practical, everyday ways that racialization and discrimination on that basis affected subjects.

suggestion across early modern English discourse that skin color of itself warrants attention as an aesthetically and ethically valued aspect of identity.

In *Palladis Tamia*, long before you arrive at his praise of “mellifluous and hony-tongued” Shakespeare, Francis Meres loosely translates a bit of Plutarch’s *Moralia* as one of a series of commonplace quotations under the section heading “A Wife.” Meres writes, “As she is a foole, that dare not wash her face, because she would not have her husband thinke she paints it so she is a [n****r].”⁵² This is not the only place in Meres’ commonplace book where skin color is brought to the reader’s attention, but this quotation marks the singular use of that epithet. The word’s present cultural weight renders its appearance arresting, but even when situated in its proper historical context Meres’ use of the epithet is striking. While scholars continue to debate whether what we now call race functioned as a distinct social kind in antiquity (or, for that matter, in the early modern period), that word has no place in Plutarch or in the classical world more broadly.⁵³ The term is coined in the sixteenth century, but Meres’ use is at odds with what the *OED* suggests is standard sixteenth-century usage. The *OED* says it refers to people of African descent and, in particular, “by people who are not black as a relatively neutral (or occasionally positive) term, with no specifically hostile intent.” There is, however, hostility here, but not only towards people of African descent. The word is used as a term of abuse that renders a (presumably white) woman abject as a result of her supposed foolishness and unclean visage. It suggests that wives are right not to use cosmetics,

⁵² Francis Meres, *Palladis tamia* (London: Cuthbert Burbie, 1598), 131r. Plutarch’s original reads:

Ἡ φοβουμένη γελάσαι πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα καὶ παῖζαί τι, μὴ φανῇ θρασέα καὶ ἀκόλαστος, οὐδὲν διαφέρει τῆς ἵνα μὴ δοκῇ μυρίζεσθαι τὴν κεφαλὴν μηδ’ ὠλειφομένης, καὶ ἵνα μὴ ψυκοῦσθαι τὸ πρόσωπον μηδὲ νιπτομένης.

[The woman who is afraid to laugh and jest a bit with her husband, lest possibly she appear bold and wanton, is no different from one who will not use oil on her head lest she be thought to use perfume, or from one who will not even wash her face lest she be thought to use rouge.]

Plutarch, *Moralia*, Volume 2, translated by Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1928), 318-9.

⁵³ These debates play out across Benjamin Isaac’s *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, Susan Mattern’s *Rome and the Enemy*, Frank Snowden’s *Blacks in Antiquity*, and Erich S. Gruen’s *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*.

but wrong to neglect their appearance. It suggests that wives are right to worry about their husband's judgment, but wrong to respond to it in certain ways. A certain complexion is established as normative, but only in negative terms. A wife should appear as she naturally is, but not black. Racial, gender, sexual and social identity are yoked together by skin color. How a wife's visage is colored and why it is so colored gives rise to aesthetic and ethical judgments at once.

Winthrop Jordan's canonical suggestion that "[b]lack was an emotionally partisan color, the handmaid and symbol of baseness and evil, a sign of danger and repulsion" during the early modern period might help us get a handle on Meres' prejudicial rewriting of Seneca, but Jordan's suggestion that certain colors are synonymous with other qualities does not hold up across the board.⁵⁴ The argument that "the concept of blackness was loaded with intense meaning" and that "no other color except for white conveyed so much emotional impact" is, perhaps, true enough in some contexts, but this "intense meaning" and "emotional impact" is predicated on matters other than colors themselves.⁵⁵ References to, say, a black kettle and a white teapot carry none of the "intense meaning" or "emotional impact" that Jordan highlights. This is not to say that "white" and "black" when used to describe skin are without "deeper" significance, but rather that what "white" or "black" skin connote about the person so described or the person doing the describing is not fixed. Jordan claims, for example, that whiteness was typically viewed as "the color of perfect human beauty, especially female beauty," but more complex views are evident across the archive. For example, Pamphilia, in Erasmus' *A Modest Meane of Marriage*, laments that her "pale wanne colour sheweth [her] to bee more bloudlesse than any shadowe."⁵⁶ Maria, her interlocutor and handmaid, tries to lift her spirits by suggesting that "this palenesse (thanked be to God) is died with some

⁵⁴ Winthrop D. Jordan, *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 6.

⁵⁵ Jordan, *White Man's Burden*, 6.

⁵⁶ Erasmus Roterodamus, *A modest mean to Mariage*, translated by N.L. (London: Henri Denham, 1568), np. This entire text is unpaginated.

Violet colour.”⁵⁷ Pamphilia is, Maria says, “even so pale as a Chery waxing ripe, or a Grape when he commeth to his purple skin.”⁵⁸ In this case, white is to be tempered with other colors.

Complications of meaning ensue even in cases where whiteness is desirable of its own accord. For instance, Hieronymus Brunschwig’s *The Vertuose boke of dystyllacion of the waters of all maner of herbes* provides multiple recipes for mixtures that purportedly whiten the skin, but this raises questions about how artificial kinds of whiteness were valued.⁵⁹

Colors of themselves *mean* nothing.⁶⁰ Jeanette White’s claim, unsupported by evidence of any kind, that “to the Elizabethans, in fact, blackness and evil were so synonymous that this notion spanned social attitudes predicated on the belief that black was always indicative of evil” is simply wrong.⁶¹ The night sky was not evil. The pupils of an eye were not evil. Colliers were not evil. The woman mentioned by Puttenham was not evil. Colors are instrumentalized in certain ways, but it will not do to suggest that colors are specifically burdened with certain meanings of themselves.⁶² Secondary qualities like colors are not culturally or semantically accompanied by a different set of secondary qualities outside of particular contexts and divorced from particular speakers. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot states, “There is no single view of blacks - or of any non-white group, for that matter - even within discrete European populations.”⁶³ Colors bring other matters into the fold

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Hieronymus Brunschwig, *The vertuose boke of dystyllacion of waters of all maner of herbes*, translated by Laurence Andrew (London: Laurence Andrew, 1527), *passim*.

⁶⁰ Indeed, “colors of themselves” might not even be at all.

⁶¹ Jeanette S. White, “‘Is Black so Base a Hue?’: Shakespeare’s Aaron and the Politics and Poetics of Race,” *CLA Journal* 40.3 (1997): 336.

⁶² Even a sympathetic reading of Jordan et al. runs up against problems. Say that what these critics “really mean” is that black skin and white skin are laden with meaning. This, too, is not true. The blackness of a Collier and the blackness of an African man are neither chromatically equivalent nor ideologically equivalent even if a certain discursive vagueness allows early modern authors to say that each has black skin in some sense. Further finessing the claim, suggesting that what is being said is that “black skin in the sense of the colors generically understood to apply to people of African descent are laden with meaning and emotional impact,” is essentially to have come full circle on the problem. Black people had meaning thrust upon their hue because people thrust meaning upon the hue of blackness insofar as it attached to people. While Jordan’s book is commendable, its opening moves are deeply flawed.

⁶³ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (New York: Penguin, 2015), 76.

depending on what they are attached to, how they are so attached, and to what end the subject or object to which they are attached has come to attention. There is no halfway reliable method that allows one to say that some color means some other quality. This is not my insight alone. Early modern poets themselves recognized the negotiable character of color's significance.

Midway through "A Fair Nymph Scorning a Black Boy Courting Her," John Cleveland's nymph draws attention to the color difference between herself and the black boy. "Thy ink, my Paper, make me guess / Our Nuptial-bed will prove a press."⁶⁴ This press, she says, could only produce "a wanton Epigram" out of their "Sports."⁶⁵ The nymph imagines that only something lewd and brief is possible from the meeting of the boy's blackness and her whiteness. But, of course, a press might well print anything. The very poem we are in the midst of reading, which is not a wanton epigram, is evidence of this. The black boy rightly takes exception to her reading of what readers might receive from their press. "Why should my Black thy love impair?," he asks, "Let the dark Shop commend the ware."⁶⁶ The boy sees no fixed outcome of their coupling. Neither a wanton epigram nor a triumphal epic is foretold. Rather than fixate on the kind of poetry they might produce together, he rather sets his sights on how the "dark Shop" speaks of the product. Like Frantz Fanon's declaration that "[his] black skin is not a repository of specific values," the boy of Cleveland's poem suggests that complexions of themselves do not have fixed properties or attributes.⁶⁷ Their coupling is open to differing judgments. Some, like the nymph, might cast aspersions on it. Others, like himself or the shop, might commend it. Cleveland shows us two different ways of attending to skin color. The nymph suggests that the meeting of black and white can only result in certain outcomes, certain foregone conclusions. The boy sees that not at all. The

⁶⁴ I am relying on the version of Cleveland's poem included in the Appendix to Kim Hall's *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 274-5.

⁶⁵ Lines 20-21.

⁶⁶ Lines 23-4.

⁶⁷ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 202.

fact of complexion is not in dispute, but rather the values and the means by which those values are accrued is. “The color black has no meaning,” Achille Mbembe makes clear, “It exists only in reference to the power that invented it, to an infrastructure that supports it, and, finally, a world that makes it a name and an axiom.”⁶⁸ There is nothing altogether axiomatic about skin color’s meaning around 1600. The names used to refer to color vary. The infrastructure that supports color as a determination of legal subject position is not yet fully in place. There are few better examples of the recalcitrant ways that skin color is a somehow meaningful and meaningless, important and trivial, aspect of personal identity than Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*.

Celia, after having decided to leave the court with Rosalind, suggests they both “smirch” their faces “with a kind of umber” before venturing into the forest of Arden.⁶⁹ Adopting this hue while wearing “poor and mean attire” will, she imagines, let them “pass along” amongst those who live in the forest (1.3.110, 112). Rosalind decides that being a man would be beneficial for their security and better suit her personally, but Celia follows through with her plan.⁷⁰ While much of *As You Like It* is borrowed from Lodge’s *Rosalynde*, Celia’s umber complexion is Shakespeare’s addition. Virginia Mason Vaughan argues that blackface was a “polyphonic signifier,” but Celia’s umberface is in no sense “polyphonic.”⁷¹ It is, as far as the people of Arden are concerned, not even a signifier worth uttering or manifestly noticing. Her plan to “pass along” was seemingly successful, but who she is “pass[ing] along” as is hard to pin down in any robust sense.

⁶⁸ Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, translated by Laurent Dubois (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 153.

⁶⁹ William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, edited by Alan Brissenden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1.3.111. Subsequent references are to this edition and will appear parenthetically. Perhaps Celia is here expressing a desire akin to Queen Anne’s when she requires Jonson to write a masque in which she can appear in blackface. This desire, while canonically cited in early modern studies of race, is strange to me given the state of Jacobean drama as we understand it. Where, I wonder, did Queen Anne get the idea for such a performance? Women of color, especially black women, are hardly popular figures represented even in pageants of the period.

⁷⁰ Whether Shakespeare designed Celia’s character with an actor of umber hue in mind or whether he intended the actor to perform in, as it were, umberface is obviously unknown.

⁷¹ Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

Celia's umber complexion is meant to establish a visual similarity to those she imagines live in Arden, but she also intends to inflect this visual similarity with nominal difference. Shakespeare cribs her chosen name, *Aliena*, from Lodge, but adds emphasis to it. Celia explains that the name is apt because it "hath reference to [her] state," but what Celia means by her "state" is unclear (1.3.126). Her state as exile? As disguised? As inhabitant of Arden? As low? As umber? As all of these? Whatever it is she might mean by her "state," *Aliena* is an uncommon name. Editors typically gloss it as Latin for "stranger" or "foreigner," but what kind of stranger or foreigner is implied by *aliena* is capacious. Seneca, for instance, tells us that "*aliena vitia in oculis habemus, a tergo nostra sunt*" ["the vices of others we have before our eyes, our own are behind our backs"].⁷² *Aliena* indicates mere otherness, a "they" who are not "us." Myrrha, in Book X of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, laments that her desire for Cinyrus is hampered by her filial proximity to him as a daughter, thus declares that "*aliena potentior essem*" [I should as a stranger be better off].⁷³ *Aliena* here implies a minimal sense of "stranger" meaning "not of the family." Proverbs 21:8 makes a stronger claim about *aliena*'s strangeness by stating that "*perversa via viri aliena est qui autem mundus est rectum opus eius*" which is rendered "The way of man is froward and strange: but as for the pure, his work is right" in the KJV. What it is that *Aliena* refers to in her state is a kind of difference from an implicit norm, but Shakespeare is evidently uninterested in delineating what this difference entails in any substantive way.

No one calls attention to the peculiarity of *Aliena*'s name and her umber complexion only comes up again late in the play. Orlando, after having saved his brother from a lion, gives Oliver certain features by which to recognize Ganymede and *Aliena*. Ganymede, Oliver relates back to us,

⁷² Seneca the Younger, *De Ira in Moral Essay, Volume One*, translated by John W. Basore (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), 228-9.

⁷³ Ovid, *Metamorphoses, Volume Two: Books 9-15*, translated by Frank Justus Miller, revised by G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University press, 1916), 88-9.

would be visible as a man that is “fair, / of female favour” while Aliena, his sister, would be “low / And browner than her brother” (4.3.86-9). Color plays an identificatory role for both characters. Ganymede’s fairness points at once to the color of his skin and to a certain gendered comportment. Aliena’s brownness points only to the color of her skin relative to Ganymede’s. It seems only to single her out visually.⁷⁴ It is unlikely that Shakespeare would go through the trouble of remarking twice upon Aliena’s color if it made no difference, but I am at pains to point to any part of the play where her complexion plays a distinct role in her character. Celia is typically taken to be simply imitating a shepherdess, but unlike Rosalind/Ganymede the apparent disparity between Celia’s actual identity and her adopted one is nowhere attended to in the play. The geographical location of Shakespeare’s Arden is utterly unclear. It might be in France. It might be in England. It might be nowhere exactly.⁷⁵ The national and ethnic identities typically invoked by darker complexions are, then, off the table. Umber complexion, then, might speak specifically to the work of shepherding, of being exposed to the sun over long days tending sheep. Does this, then, mean that Phoebe, Corin, and Silvius are likewise played in umberface?

Ganymede refers to Phoebe’s “cheek of cream,” but later also notes her “leathern hand, / A free-stone coloured hand” (4.3.25-6). The context for both of these statements, the former an instance where Ganymede aims to flatter her and the latter where he aims to insult her, do not allow us to say that either is altogether accurate as a description. Ganymede later tells us that Phoebe “defies” him “[l]ike Turk to Christian” and uses “Ethiop words” (4.3.34, 36). These are, however, figurative ways of speaking. They might tell us something about how Ganymede views Phoebe, but

⁷⁴ Where Ganymede is a man inclined towards a certain kind of femininity, one wonders if Celia is an umber woman inclined towards a certain kind of whiteness.

⁷⁵ Alan Brissenden notes in his introduction to the Oxford edition, some characters are notably French, others notably English, and still others have no distinct nationality. He suggests that to “confine” characters to a particular geographical location is “limiting and unnecessary” (41). I am not sure about this last point, but his account of the national trouble posed by the play stands.

they tell us little about Phoebe herself. Corin and Silvius' appearances go unremarked upon, but Phoebe does suggest that "the best thing in" Ganymede is "his complexion" (3.5.116-7). We can, then, say that Ganymede, in Phoebe's eyes, is "fairer" than Corin. But, again, this tells us little about Corin since Phoebe is, very clearly, infatuated with Ganymede. Skin color across these indeterminate descriptions gestures with equal ease towards gender, sexuality, station, religion, and nationality. It subtly brings the person whose color is in focus into line with a variety of social kinds. It is, as it were, inchoately intersectional. Skin color does not speak to any particular trait, but a multiplicity of traits. None of these identity traits, however, receives more than cursory attention across the play. The drama of *As You Like It* plays with color lines to no clear end. If the visual difference is merely between Aliena and the rest of the cast, then there is a surprising lack of attention to this singular figure's color. If the visual difference is between the white folks of the court and the umber folks of the forest, then this underlines some of the social distinctions discussed between Corin and Touchstone about how values, beliefs, and behaviors are predicated on where one lives and how one employs oneself. The play's conclusion ratifies that division by marrying courtly men to courtly ladies, shepherds to shepherdesses. Maintaining this status quo by marrying courtly man to courtly lady means that Oliver, who meets and desires to wed Aliena and initially leaves his estate to Orlando so he can stay in Arden to "live and die a shepherd," is wholly willing to wed Celia, a white courtly lady, without any explanation for this sudden change. Oliver is not only wholly indifferent to her complexion's alteration in the end, but mum about her newfound name and status. These differences are all evidently insignificant to him or, rather, their significance is lessened in the face of other interests. Perhaps Oliver saw through her disguise all along. Perhaps, through Hymen's words about love, superficial matters like skin color or names are cast aside. This, however, does not hold true for all couples.

The marriage of Touchstone and Audrey, a goatherd who asserts that she is “not fair,” presents the only instance where the court/forest (or white/umber) divide is bridged (3.3.29). Hymen marries these two like all the others, but suggests that there is something unpleasant about their coupling. They are “sure together / As the winter to foul weather” (5.4.130-1). Jaques de Boys, who has only just entered the play for the first time, also views their nuptials in a differing light from the rest. He commits them “to wrangling; for [their] loving voyage / Is but for two months victuall'd” then hastily sends them off to their “pleasures” (5.4.186-7). His view of their relationship resembles Cleveland’s fair nymph’s view of her “Sports” with the black boy. Their coupling will be necessarily brief and wanton. Touchstone, as evidenced throughout the play, has no interest in whether Audrey is fair or not. He places higher value on other attributes she has and activities they might enjoy once wed. Audrey, likewise, is uninterested in whatever “features” Touchstone may have. She does not recognize let alone appreciate his “features,” but desires to be “a woman of the world” and sees marrying Touchstone as a means to that end. Hymen tells everyone to “feed [them]selves with questioning, / That reason wonder may diminish” (5.4.133-4). We ought not, then, marvel at this conclusion. Skin color might be trivial from certain perspectives even when it is seen to be telling from others. Celia’s whiteness and Audrey’s lack of fairness are, for their respective husbands, not worth attending to. *As You Like It* hardly gives us much ground to build up a full picture of skin color, but it does emphasize that the value attributed to color are predicated on relational and perceptual experiences.⁷⁶

Richard Tarlton’s ballad, “Please One, Please All,” presents a similar view of how skin color can be attended to as an aspect that determines both identity and relationships.

⁷⁶ Rosalind’s epilogue makes a similar point about how perspective and relationships are co-determined. “I charge you, O women, for the love you bear to men, to like as much of this play as please you; and I charge you, O men, for the love you bear to women- as I perceive by your simp’ring none of you hates them- that between you and the women the play may please.” Who one is considered alongside who one loves, in turn, affects how one judges the world.

Please one and please all,
Be they great be they small,
Be they little be they lowe,
So pypeth the Crowe,
sitting vpon a wall:
please one and please all,
please one and please all.

BE they white be they black,
Haue they a smock on their back,
Or a kircher on her head,
Whether they spin silke or thred,
whatsoever they them call:
please one and please all,
please one and please all.⁷⁷

The ballad takes its time to clarify who it means by “they,” “one,” and “all,” but eventually we are told that “The goodwife I doo mean.” A great variety of attributes are discussed from features of a goodwife’s appearance to her social standing to her profession, but, according to the crow who relates the message, all of these aspects of identity ought to have no bearing on how “her goodman” treats her.⁷⁸

Let her haue her owne will,
Thus the Crowe pypeth still,
Whatsoever she command,
Sée that you doo it out of hand,
whensoever she dooth call:
please one and please all,
please one and please all.

Be they wanton be they wilde,
Be they gentle be they milde:
Be shée white be she browne,
Dooth she skould or dooth she frowne,
Let her doo what she shall:
please one and please all,
please one and please all.

⁷⁷ Richard Tarlton, *A prettie newe ballad, intytuled: The crowe sits vpon the wall* (London: Henry Kyrkham, 1592).

⁷⁸ Not for nothing, the figure of the crow is a classical example of color as an index of character in Ovid.

In the absence of an accompanying noun, what Tarlton attaches color to is indeterminate. It might refer to hair or skin. Leah S. Marcus writes that “both women and men in the period could be called ‘black’ in the sense of dark haired and/or olive complexioned,” but cites no sources for her claim.⁷⁹ This kind of reading is, however, dominant.⁸⁰ In the context of the ballad, whether color attaches to skin or hair makes little difference. A woman’s color (whether hair or skin) is understood as a predicate that typically determines ways of relating to them. Color identifies a person and prompts a certain kind of response. Color attributes are given as much weight as a goodwife’s other traits. To refer to a woman as “white” or “browne” is akin to referring to her as “wanton” or “gentle.” To speak of “white” or “black” goodwives is just like referring to their scolding or frowning.

Tarlton’s ballad tells us some identities and relationships were informed by color, but does not clue us into what those identities or relationships resembled in any full sense. Color, here, comes to attention in a way that other qualities do not (e.g. height), but it also comes to attention in way just like other qualities (e.g. mood). In some relationships, the visual qualities of a person have the same standing as psychological, social, or ethical ones. Traits at various levels equally inform a view of the person in question. That complexion can be placed on the same level as other attributes no matter their origin or cause (e.g. a person’s profession, their comportment, their nationality) suggests that causal explanations are sometimes insignificant. How traits were acquired or instilled in a person was of less importance than the attention provoked by the mere fact of them. Color might partially determine who and how “one” is, but it can or ought to be set aside for the sake of “pleas[ing] all.” While gender, sexuality, and social role are features that necessarily determine

⁷⁹ Leah S. Marcus, *How Shakespeare Became Colonial: Editorial Tradition and the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 44. I highlight the lack of sources not to cast aspersions on Marcus’ claim, but to suggest that a certain doxa surrounds discussions of skin color. I am not sure how it is one could possibly build up good textual authority that “black” by itself means “black hair.” Quine’s standard account of the indeterminacy of reference is worth noting here. My sense is that certain narrow understandings of the early modern period have been grandfathered into our thinking.

⁸⁰ The critical decision to take certain blanket ascriptions of color as lacking racial content is, most notably, how Hermia in *MND* is rendered a brunette rather than a woman of color.

relationships, color only contingently determines them in Tarlton's ballad. That said, it would be naive to suggest that these attributions of color are innocuous or inconsequential merely by dint of being contingent. Tarlton suggests that color differences between goodwives can be trivialized, but does that same hold true for unmarried women? For men? While color is explicitly devalued as a marker of identity and determiner of relationships in Tarlton, we find just outside the ballad, on the same broadside sheet, an instance where color is a particularly telling signifier of identity. At the end of the ballad, we find its publication details.

Imprinted at London for
Henry Kyrkham, dwelling
 at the little North doore of
Paules, at the signe of the
 blacke Boy.

In 1570, twenty two years before publishing Tarlton's ballad, Henry Kirkham set up shop under the sign of the Black Boy.⁸¹ He seems to have taken over for William Martyne who worked under "the sygne of the blacke boys" from 1561 to 1570 at the same location.⁸² Neither Martyne nor Kirkham were especially notable printers. Kirkham's Black Boy does, however, share its location at the little or middle north door of Paul's with Edmund White's Gun which had exclusive rights to sell all three of the *Titus Andronicus* quartos.⁸³ Were you interested in reading Aaron's vituperative words against Chiron and Demetrius, the "shallow-hearted boys" and "alehouse painted signs" who intend to kill his son solely for his black hue, you would have seen Kirkham's Black Boy.⁸⁴ Kirkham's sign would not, however, have been particularly remarkable in 1594 when Q1

⁸¹ Anon, *A ballad reioycinge the sodaine fall, of rebels that thought to deuouer vs all* (London: Henry Kirkham, 1570).

⁸² The first colophon I have found for Martyne is in John Bradford, *The hurte of hering masse* (London: Wyllyam Martyne, 1561), [F2v].

⁸³ See Nadia Bishai, "At the Signe of the Gunne: *Titus Andronicus*, the London Book Trade, and the Literature of Crime, 1590-1615" in *Titus out of Joint: Reading the Fragmented Titus Andronicus*, edited by Liberty Stanavage and Paxton Hehmeyer (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 7-48 for a discussion of White's import as a publisher, his interest in crime literature, and how all this ought to factor into our understanding of *Titus*.

⁸⁴ William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus* in *The Oxford Shakespeare*, 2nd edition, edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4.2.96-7.

Titus appeared. Kirkham's Black Boy merely participates in the long history of such signs. Henry Sutton, the earliest printer I have found working under the sign of the Black Boy, opens his shop in 1552, but his texts make no mention of a sign until 1555.⁸⁵ In 1555, he publishes Joannes' *Fardle of Facions*, a text explicitly concerned with the people of Asia and Africa, and later that year we see him locate himself under the sign of the "Black Moryane."⁸⁶ In 1559, he moves from Paul's churchyard to Pater Noster Row and alternates between the sign of "the blacke boy" and "the blacke Moryan" before settling on the former.⁸⁷ This nominal ambivalence quells ambiguity about both terms and suggests that the sign likely hung, at least initially, without written accompaniment. Had the sign borne a name, it seems unlikely he would vacillate on the matter. Henry Binneman takes over Sutton's shop in 1566 and continues to work under the sign of the Black Boy.

These signs presented a "Black Boy" visually in the streets of London, but Sutton and others would also have advertised their wares discursively. As Tiffany Stern notes, printers advertised by posting versions of title-pages on posts across the city.⁸⁸ Posters and flyers would also have announced the presence of "Black Boy[s]" legibly across the metropole.⁸⁹ The sign of the Black Boy was an everyday visual and discursive feature of London.⁹⁰ These signs were not even uniquely

⁸⁵ The STC notes an instance of a printer publishing under "the signe of the black Mores" in 1530, but I have been unable to substantiate this interpolation of the sign. See STC (2nd ed.) / 22924 for the reference. Likewise, the STC suggests that *Camelles conclusion*, printed by a "Hary Sutton" under "the sygne of the black boye," was published in 1552, but I have not been able to substantiate this either. See STC (2nd ed.) / 4527.2 for the reference.

⁸⁶ William Menyman, [*An homelie of Marye Magdalene*] (London: Henry Sutton, 1555), np.

⁸⁷ John Philpot, *The examination of the constante martir of Christ* (London: Henry Sutton, 1559), np. This is the earliest colophon to mark the move to Pater Noster Row and the "Black Boy" name.

⁸⁸ See Tiffany Stern, "'On each Wall and Corner Poast': Playbills, Title-pages, and Advertising in Early Modern London," *English Literary Renaissance* 36.1 (2006): 57-89.

⁸⁹ The terminological trouble of the signs falls less on what "Black" might mean and more on what "Boy" might mean. Boy, in typical early modern usage, is flexible enough to speak to an infant, adolescent, teenager, or twenty-something adult. The diminutive term is historically applied to Black men of all ages. One think of the title of Richard Wright's memoir or of the signs worn by Memphis sanitation workers in 1968 as attempts to respond and disrupt the invidious use of the term.

⁹⁰ A number of bookshops take it up during the civil war. Many more after the Restoration. No signs, to my knowledge, survive for us to scrutinize, but pubs across the UK - some of which date back to the early sixteenth century - still operate under the sign of the Black Boy. A silhouetted black figure adorns one particular pub in Wales that boasts its establishment circa 1511. The image of a Black Boy also served as a target for archers in Finsbury Park, see E.B., *Ayme*

associated with print culture. Foxe notes a merchant tailor who apprenticed under the sign of the Black Boy at Watling Street.⁹¹ Jonson, in *Bartholomew Fair*, mentions the Black Boy of Bucklersbury outside a tobacconist's.⁹² There was a certain quotidian ease with which early moderns took up the figure of the black boy. Given that literate and illiterate Londoners would have been able to see the sign and know how to refer to it, racial identity in this instance is perfectly straightforward. The signboard in London, as Andrew Gordon relates, is "an everyday visual artifact [that] focuses attention upon the activity of signification," but what the signifier, signified, or referent of the Black Boy resembled is not by any means easy to see.⁹³

James Raven notes that "the range of signs in the sixteenth century reveals wonderful whimsy," but this "whimsy" is not quite on display when Sutton hangs his sign in the 1550s.⁹⁴ During this period, one could buy books at the Hand and Star, the Rose, the Bible, the Sun, the George, the Holy Ghost, Saint Johan the Evangelyst, the Lamb, and the Brasen Serpent. Signage of the time uses religious and natural iconography exclusively. We are a far cry from the "daily Absurdities" of signs in 1711 that Addison discusses in "Spectator #28."⁹⁵ There are no "blue Boars, black Swans, and red Lions" and certainly no "flying pigs, and Hogs in Armour."⁹⁶ There are nonetheless signs "everywhere thrusting themselves out to the Eye, and endeavouring to become visible."⁹⁷ The Black Boy stands apart from others in the 1550s, but the sign survives in multiple

for *Finsburie Archers* (London, 1601). Targets seem to have been chosen based on the familiarity or identifiability of the image rather than by dint of a particular antipathy towards the figure represented.

⁹¹ John Foxe, *Christs victorie ouer Sathans tyrannie*, edited by Thomas Mason (London: George Eld and Ralph Blower, 1615), 357.

⁹² Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair* in *Five Plays*, edited by G. A. Wilkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.4.105. This is an odd passage to my eye. It is unclear that Jonson means a sign or a person in this instance. The exchange that follows, e.g. "There is such a one" only adds to the ambiguity. This might be the joke.

⁹³ Andrew Gordon, "'If my sign could speak': The Signboard and the Visual Culture of Early Modern London," *Early Theatre* 8.1 (2005), 48.

⁹⁴ James Raven, *The Business of Books: Booksellers and the English Book Trade, 1450-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 56.

⁹⁵ Joseph Addison, "2 April 1711" in *The Spectator*, Volume 1, edited by Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 115.

⁹⁶ Addison, "2 April 1711," 116.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

locations, hung outside a variety of businesses, through to the early 18th century when Addison writes these words.

“To a large extent,” Mbembe says, “race is an iconic currency.

It appears at the edges of commerce - of the gaze. It is a currency whose function is to convert what one sees (or what one chooses not to see) into a specie or symbol at the heart of a generalized economy of signs and images that one exchanges, circulates, attributes value to or not, and that authorizes a series of judgments and practical attitudes.⁹⁸

The historical position of these bookshops make the “signs and images” to which Mbembe refers strikingly literal. Sutton’s shop opens one year before John Windham brings enslaved Africans to England for the first (documented) time.⁹⁹ He advertises himself under the sign of the Black Boy in the same year of John Lok’s slave expedition. The use of iconographic representations of black figures in London mercantile trade historically coincides with the documented enslavement of black people by English traders. Lyndon Barrett suggests that “the conceit of racial blackness, which indiscriminately catalogues dark-skinned Africans and their descendants, can be understood as a powerful analogue of the complex of commodity fetishism.”¹⁰⁰ We might want to say that these signs fetishize black men or boys, but fair ladies were as subject to fetish in early modern English culture and yet we do not find people selling their wares under the sign of the Fair Lady.

Gordon argues that “the signboard presented a potent source for the production of meaning which resists easy codification for the cultural critic of today as it did for writers of the early modern period,” but “Black Boys” were evidently easily codified.¹⁰¹ Sutton’s image must have been, in some respect, as clearly meaningful as any other sign. “What characterizes the signboard of the city for

⁹⁸ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 110.

⁹⁹ Gerald Horne, *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism: The Roots of Slavery, White Supremacy, and Capitalism in Seventeenth-Century North America and the Caribbean* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017), 34.

¹⁰⁰ Lyndon Barrett, *Racial Blackness and the Discontinuity of Western Modernity*, edited by Justin A. Joyce, Dwight A. McBride, and John Carlos Rowe (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 8.

¹⁰¹ Gordon, “If my sign could speak,” 35.

the urban inhabitant is after all its availability to a host of different interpretive strategies,” Gordon suggests, but are book buyers or passersby in the habit of interpreting signage?¹⁰² Were one looking to buy a book sold at the Black Boy, then the sign would have told you that you had found the right place. Were you merely on the way elsewhere, would the sign have provoked interpretation at all?¹⁰³ In Gordon’s view, “What marks [the signboard] out for the critic is a consequent superfluity of meaning, and an irreducibility to textual formulae.”¹⁰⁴ What the sign of the Black Boy means about the mercantile landscape of London, Londoners’ attitudes towards black skin, or ideas of personal identity that include reference to skin color is hard if not impossible to recapture. At some level or another, the figure of the black boy prompted attention, but as James says “[a]ttention creates no idea; an idea must already be there before we can attend to it. Attention only fixes and retains, what the ordinary laws of association before the footlights of consciousness.”¹⁰⁵ What, then, were the “ordinary laws of association” that cast “black boys” before the consciousness of early modern Londoners?

In Anthony Barthelemy’s account, black figures in the Lord Mayor’s Pageant served as “exotic paraphernalia” that “increase[d] the air of extravagance surrounding a particular pageant car” and “serve[d] as visible reminders of British success in trade and exploration.”¹⁰⁶ Stevens notes that between 1533 and 1566 no fewer than five different “masques of moors” were staged during Christmas festivities.¹⁰⁷ Imtiaz Habib suggests that “black personhood” in early modern England is “phenomenologically cast in a fluctuating scale between the novelty of the exotic and the

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Think here of racist sport mascots that, in the eyes of many, were unproblematic, unquestioned, and unattended to for decades.

¹⁰⁴ Gordon, “If my sign could speak,” 35.

¹⁰⁵ James, *Principles of Psychology*, 426.

¹⁰⁶ Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, *Black Face Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 47.

¹⁰⁷ Stevens, *Inventions of the Skin*, 91. Stevens, here, is relying on Martin Wiggins’ catalogue.

repugnance of a difference that is as yet unknown,” but does the representation of black people work (phenomenologically) along the same lines?¹⁰⁸ The novelty of the sign’s purportedly exotic figure(s) would have faded over time and been diminished by the number of similar signs across the city. Likewise, if “repugnance” were a common or expected response, then it seems unlikely that such signs would be used at all. This is not to say that the xenophilic and xenophobic attitudes that Habib identifies are not in play, but rather that a) the representation of subjects and subjects themselves prompt different kinds of attention and b) there lies a vast set of responses between those two poles that correspond to everyday experiences of both.¹⁰⁹ Signs are not, Jeffrey Masten says, “evidence that is merely *evident* - simply to be ‘seen out’ in the etymological sense of that word.”¹¹⁰ In the most basic sense, the kinds of attention these signs warranted would differ depending on one’s own personal and social identity. There is no one way of looking at these signs. As Renzo Dubbini notes, “The city viewed from ground level, where its functions and forces are concentrated, is a city of fractured, autonomous, and localized views.”¹¹¹ From ground level, everyday life includes the visual representation of people distinguished by nothing other than their skin color. While I cannot say what these signs looked like or how they impacted Londoners of any distinct social kind, I can turn to the representation of “black boys” in English plays of the period. The first was in fact performed in the same building outside of which Kirkham’s Black Boy hung by the Children of Paul’s in 1588.

John Lyly’s *Galatea* is a postcolonial play and yet the kind of postcolonial vision it offers is tremendously strange. It is set in a version of Lincolnshire still suffering the residual effects of

¹⁰⁸ Imtiaz Habib, *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500-1677: Imprints of the Invisible* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 19.

¹⁰⁹ Whether we can say that over time the “Black Boy” was seen like “Three Wells” or any other more ethically anodyne signage is a difficult question to answer.

¹¹⁰ Jeffrey Masten, “Ben Jonson’s Head,” *Shakespeare Studies* 28 (2000): 164.

¹¹¹ Renzo Dubbini, *Geography of the Gaze: Urban and Rural Vision in Early Modern Europe*, translated by Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 189.

Danish colonizers. In the play's opening scene, Tityrus explains the village's awful history to his daughter, Galatea, in the shade of a "fair oak."¹¹² He gestures to the "heap of small pebbles" a ways away that once was "a stately temple of white marble" (1.1.15-6). The Danes, we are told, came ashore and "oppressed" the people (1.1.22). They tore down the temple and enraged the gods. To make recompense for the sacrilege of the Danes, this community must sacrifice "the fairest and chastest virgin in all the country" to Neptune's monster, the Agar (1.1.47). Galatea, in her father's eyes, is a likely candidate for the fairest and chastest, thus he disguises her as a boy. Later in the play, we find that Melibeus likewise thinks his daughter fairest and decides to disguise her as a boy. The main plot of the play concerns how these two women, disguised as boys, court each other in the forest away from the eyes of the community.

As Kent Cartwright notes, "Lyly's plays in general contain a critically underappreciated sense of human physicality" and in *Galatea* the physicality in question is whether or how one's skin says something about oneself.¹¹³ Galatea's name itself, Greek for "milk white," broadcasts the play's preoccupation. The only defining feature of Galatea and Phillida is that they are exceedingly fair. Their color partially determines their fate as sacrificial offerings to the Agar. When Hebe is offered up as a substitute sacrifice, it is not her chastity or virginity that bars her from satisfying the arrangement, but her fairness (5.2.65 ff.). While the primary plot circles around complexion, Cupid, in one of the play's many subplots, looks to test the mettle of Diana's nymphs. He wants, he says, to see "whether fair faces be always chaste" and disguises himself as a nymph to work his mischief (2.3.13). Diana recognizes that something is amiss when she sees that her nymphs have "stained" their "lovely faces" by thinking "loving thoughts" (3.4.43-4). She is saddened that their "eyes have

¹¹² John Lyly, *Galatea*, edited by Leah Scragg (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 1.1.2. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

¹¹³ Kent Cartwright, "The Confusions of *Gallathea*: John Lyly as Popular Dramatist," *Comparative Drama* 32.2 (1998): 209. That I take *Galatea* to be principally concerned with skin color is not meant to distract from the play's provocative treatment of sex. I would simply say that sex, in this play, is a less pressing physical matter than skin color.

come to love colours” when their “hearts are wont to loathe them” (3.4.59-60). Their “chaste hearts” should, she says, “resemble the onyx, which is hottest when it is whitest” and “think of love like Homer’s moly, a white leaf and a black root, a fair show and a bitter taste” (3.4.24-5, 27-8). Diana surmises that another goddess must be responsible for all these alterations. She tells her nymphs that they can identify the various gods by colorations on the skin. Medea, she says, has a “print on her back like a leaf” while Calypso has a “picture on her left breast like a bird” (3.4.10-4). Cupid is eventually identified as Cupid by dint of the burn mark on his shoulder and subsequently enslaved by Diana. The identity of Lyly’s characters, their emotional lives, and the circumstances in which they find themselves are a result of skin color. Lyly’s primary interest in skin color is in the cultural and social value of fairness. This almost singular focus on fairness is, however, interrupted in one scene.

Rafe is castaway with his brothers on the shores of Lincolnshire as a result of a shipwreck early in the play. He and his brothers are immediately established as comically ignorant men and decide to go their make their own way in this strange land. They each seek out fortunes and Rafe has a hard go of it in the forest. He is hounded by foxes, owls, frogs, adders, and hags throughout the woods, then spies Diana’s dancing and playing nymphs. He sees them as a way out of his presently dire circumstances since, he says, “so fair faces never can have such hard fortunes” (2.3.6-7). Before he can follow the nymphs, another figure appears. “What black boy is this?,” Rafe asks (2.3.7). The scene plays out as this “black boy” frets and complains about his vocation while Rafe, to the side, offers a running commentary. “What a life do I lead with my master!” Peter exclaims in exasperation (2.3.9). This as yet nameless character speaks of working in a “secret science” where “none almost can understand the language” (2.3.10-1). Peter’s mere mentions of “sublimation, almagination, calcination” prompt Rafe to “cross [him]self” (2.3.13, 17). Rafe is afraid both of the words said and the fact that a figure such as this is saying them. “I never heard so many devils in a

little monkey's mouth!," he exclaims (2.3.17-8). The many instruments needed in this "secret science," objects like "cucurbits" and "limbecks," are listed (2.3.19-20). Rafe cannot understand what he is hearing. "What language is this? Do they speak so?," he asks (2.3.23). By the time the "black boy" lists metals used in his master's practice, one imagines that it is sufficiently clear to the audience that he works in alchemy, but this is not at all clear to Rafe. "My hair beginneth to stand upright! Would the boy make an end!" (2.3.29-30). In the end, this boy laments his lack of gold, wit, and honesty. Rafe recognizes himself in this lack and jumps to introduce himself. "[M]ethinks, at a blush, thou shouldst be one of my occupation" since he, too, has neither gold nor wit nor honesty (2.3.38-9).

While we slowly learn about what being an apprentice for an alchemist entails and eventually learn that this "black boy" is named Peter, Peter's black appearance is never mentioned again or explained. Editors fill in the blank by suggesting that it is the result of soot from a furnace. Peter he tells us he had been hard at work "blowing bellows" with such intensity that he "feared [his] face would have been turned to silver" before he meets Rafe (2.3.109-110).¹¹⁴ Rafe however knows of no furnace or bellows when he spies Peter for the first time. Peter is, in Rafe's estimation, just a "black boy," a "little monkey," and a figure whose speech suggests a "they" that might "speak so." Leah Scragg and Cartwright suggest that Rafe imagines Peter to be somehow demonic, but his lines testify against this.¹¹⁵ Rafe's worry about "devils" is focused on Peter's words not his appearance. He asserts that he has "never heard" such language used by a figure such as Peter which suggests both passing familiarity with people who, to Rafe's eyes, resemble Peter as well as the kinds of language

¹¹⁴ To what extent this comment is obliquely related to Peter's complexion is hard to say. In alchemical terms, blackness was understood to be the starting point for any transmogrification. If one wanted to firm up this reading, then you would need to see what particular metals were frequently turned to silver and argue on that basis that Peter is likening his face to said metal, but even then there is nothing sure about the association.

¹¹⁵ Scragg ed., *Galatea*, 61n8; Cartwright, "The Confusions of *Gallathea*," 213. Whatever evil Rafe associates with Peter is hardly grave since, as soon as he sees a point of identification with him, he sets it aside completely.

people like him, to Rafe's ears, typically use. We gain few details about Peter other than the ones he offers himself or Rafe's reinterpretation of those details. He is not onstage for long and flees his master as soon as Rafe takes his place as an apprentice.¹¹⁶ He shows up again later in the play only to say that he has served a lawyer with Robin, one of Rafe's brothers, but is now masterless and miserable. While the vast majority of the characters in the play reappear in its conclusion, Peter does not.¹¹⁷

Peter's blackness is played for laughs. Its significance is fleeting, superficial. The racial tenor of Rafe's comments comes particularly to attention, but it is unclear what is to follow from that attention. It bolsters the point that Elizabethan England trafficked in skin color, onstage and off, as a telling feature of identity. This, however, is not much. The diegetic insignificance of Peter's blackness does not entail cultural insignificance, but how to read cultural significance into a text as protean as this? *Galatea* is written and staged in the 1580s, a historical moment poised between the first and second so-called Letters of Expulsion drafted by Elizabeth for the sake of deporting "negroes and blackamoors" from England.¹¹⁸ The country, in her view, had "too many" of "those kind of people." The play, however, can hardly be said to turn its eye to the "kind of people" Elizabeth considers burdensome even if it is preoccupied with skin color and thematically invested in slavery (i.e. Lovers are enthralled by beloveds. Cupid is whipped "like a slave" by Diana.). Lyly's sensitivity to topical matters is evidenced at various points by offhand remarks, but there is little substance to them. The woods are, on Rafe's view, a temporary feature of the landscape since they

¹¹⁶ See Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) for the commensurable insecurity suffered by apprentices, masterless men, and galley slaves. Fumerton's discussion is, however, woefully lacking in a discussion of chattel slavery during the period she has her eyes on.

¹¹⁷ Nor does Hebe.

¹¹⁸ See Emily C. Bartels, "Too Many Blackamoors: Deportation, Discrimination, and Elizabeth I," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 46.2 (2006): 305-22 and Emily Weissbourd, "'Those in Their Possession': Race, Slavery, and Queen Elizabeth's 'Edicts of Expulsion,'" *Huntington Library Quarterly* 78.1 (2015): 1-19 for discussions of these documents and their significance.

will soon be “made ships” which not-so-subtly points to Elizabeth’s naval ambitions (1.4.78-9). Rafe and his brothers announce themselves as “fortune tellers” at the play’s conclusion which cannot help but bring to mind the various Egyptian Acts which attempted to expel so-called Egyptians from the realm precisely for this kind of practice (5.3.193). Patricia J. Williams tells us that “[n]oninterpretive devices, extrinsic sources, and intuitive means of reading may be the only way to include the reality of the unwritten, unnamed, nontext of race,” but even with a text concerned with racial subtext the reality of the “unwritten, unnamed, nontext of race” stays out of reach.¹¹⁹ Lyly’s play is provocative, strange, but it gives us little insight into early modern culture at large. Peter, the alchemist’s apprentice, is too fugitive a figure to flesh out our view of early modern “black boys.” He may, however, have inspired a far more famous representation of an alchemist, a far more canonical (though unacknowledged as such) “black boy.”

Jonson suggests that at the end of *The Alchemist*, the play and all its characters will all vanish “*in fumo*,” but only Subtle and Face are associated with smoke.¹²⁰ At the play’s conclusion, Ananias refers to them both as “sons of fire.” They are also, however, referred to in terms of smoke’s color, its blackness. Mammon, for instance, calls them “a kind of choughs, / Or thievish daws.” The two are considered together in terms of their color, their visual relationship to smoke, but the way in which their color is discussed renders them distinct from each other. Kastil calls Face a “tobacco man” which brings to mind Jonson’s mention of the tobacconist working under the sign of the Black Boy of Bucklersbury in *Bartholomew Fair*, but elsewhere his pigmentation is more clearly explained as an impermanent feature (3.4.127). Mammon tells Surly that Face (or, as he knows him, Lungs) is Subtle’s “fire drake,” the one who “puffs his coals.” He promises Lungs that when he is

¹¹⁹ Patricia J. Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 117.

¹²⁰ Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist in Five Plays*, edited by G. A. Wilkes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 0.0.12. All subsequent references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

wealthy, he will “manumit [him], from the furnace” and “restore” him his “complexion” (2.2.18-19). Face’s color is the result of circumstances. It is unclear, however, if Subtle’s color is understood as the result or cause of his circumstances.

In the play’s opening scene, Face gives us some perspective on Subtle’s life and appearance prior to the play. Face recalls encountering him

... at Pie Corner,
Taking your meal of steam in, from cooks’ stalls,
Where, like the father of hunger, you did walk
Piteously costive, with your pinched-horn-nose,
And your complexion of the Roman wash,
Stuck full of black and melancholic worms,
Like powder corns, shot, at the artillery yard (1.1.25-31).

“Roman wash” is most readily understood as a kind of perfume.¹²¹ The reference is obscure not because the word “Roman” can be associated with a variety of other secondary qualities, but because we have no idea what color “Roman wash” was. The particular color of Subtle’s complexion is of less importance to me here than the fact that Face takes it to be somehow indicative of his lot. It is seen to be an explanatory feature of his destitution. Along with his gait and his nose, Subtle’s complexion is meant to tell us something about him. Something about Subtle’s color results in continual attention. Jonson, typically quite inventive with his insults, circles only around Subtle’s color. Face calls him a “smoky persecutor of nature” (1.3.100). Both Face and Mammon separately call Subtle a “collier” (5.5.11). Surly refers to him as Face’s “sooty, smoky-bearded compeer” (4.6.41). For Kastil, Subtle is a “rare man.” Ananias tells his fellows that Subtle “bears / The visible mark of the beast in his forehead” and suggest he is “a heathen” who “speaks the language of Canaan, truly” (3.1.5-9). For all these allusions to visual aspects of Subtle’s character, Face at one point refers to him bluntly as “black boy” (3.3.8).

¹²¹ Massinger’s *The Unnaturall Combat* mentions things “perfum’d[...] of the Roman wash.” William Cavendish’s *The Country Captaine* remarks on one “smelling toward the Roman Wash.” The usage is, as we might imagine, derogatory and meant to suggest falsity of a kind.

Subtle may literally be sooty like Face, but we should not make the mistake of imagining that one kind of blackness precludes the other. Whether Subtle is black or merely appears black are both viable options. Jonson is, in this play and more notoriously in his masques, perfectly comfortable playing with the representation of identity by way of skin color. Lovewit tells us that Surly “umber[ed] o’er his face” for the sake of playing a Spanish captain (5.5.52). Skin color is worth passing notice when Subtle notes that Abel Drugger’s “chestnut” or “olive-colored face / Does never fail” (1.3.46-7). Tribulation invokes the popular pseudoscientific view that climate plays a determining role in a person’s supposed nature when he suggests that Subtle’s constant proximity to heat has deleterious effects on his character. Jonson himself makes use of the same idea when he tells us that London’s “clime” is something that “breeds” persons of all kinds in the prologue (0.0.7). “Slave” is seemingly everyone’s favorite moniker of derision.¹²² The play makes light of colonialist attitudes through Mammon who, amongst other things, desires to render Devonshire and Cornwall “perfect Indies” (2.1.36).

There is no question that Jonson’s *Alchemist* is replete with colonialist discourse, is infatuated with identity difference and has some stake in skin color. The opening of the play foregrounds alchemical metaphor and language, but this quickly falls away to other plots and different discourses. Humors are rarely mentioned, thus one is hard pressed to suggest that humoralist views are Jonson’s chief interest. The play is almost too densely packed with allusions, associations, and references to suggest any singular frame for understanding what or how Subtle’s blackness is meant to signify. The play does not appear to me to be principally *about* Subtle’s blackness, but it is named after him and his blackness is the most consistent descriptor that affixes to him. That the play is named after Subtle ought to be telling, but *The Alchemist* concludes without the alchemist in sight. We do not

¹²² See Michael Guasco, *Slaves and Englishmen: Human Bondage in the Early Modern Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2014) on both the problems of defining slavery in an early modern English context as well as the referential frequency of “slave” as a term and concept throughout the period.

know where Subtle ends up after Jeremy (i.e. Face with a clean shave and a washed face) sneaks him and Dol out of harm's way. The only remnants of Subtle are "smoked" walls and a "ceiling filled with poesies of the candle" (5.5.39, 41). Perhaps he ends up at "Moorfields" among the "younkers" (5.5.79). Subtle's blackness might be read in any number of ways. It could be a gesture towards race, ethnicity, vice, the occult, class, hygiene, Galenic medicine, and any number of other qualities that might pertain to a person. The play's language is so flexible, Jonson's interests so diffuse, and color's significance so opaque that it is untenable to say anything final about Subtle's complexion or its significance. That said, Subtle's blackness shines a light on Jonson's London. At the very least, we see that this London is a polity ambivalently, multivalently, and obscurely attentive to color.

Both *Galatea* and *The Alchemist* end - as comedies often do - with a restoration of the status quo. Social discord leads inevitably to a new kind of social concord. Both plays also conclude without their respective black characters in sight. Peter and Subtle, it seems, have no place in the renewed English polity imagined by Lyly or Jonson. What skin color meant, what specific values it acquired and the means by which it acquired them may not be possible to explain in any complete sense, but this ought not dissuade us from seeing that it was valued, disvalued, revalued, and devalued constantly. As I have shown, the identities pointed to by skin color in early modern literature are too vague, too plural, too nascent to fix anything definite in place. We have seen, however, that mere visual differences registered on the surface of skin continually come to attention, merit notice and emphasis, and shape attitudes and communities practically and perceptibly during this period. Each of the figures I have looked at across this chapter are invariably caught up in the aesthetic and ethical judgments of others on the basis of their skin color. The consequences of this attention are variable, but they everywhere contribute to how these figures are not only seen by others in their respective contexts, but how they are seen (or not) by early modern readers and critics. While social kinds are difficult to track in any strong conceptual sense, my hope is that by

attending to the smaller, more basic matters out of which social kinds are made allows us to recapture the fact that skin color played a determinate role in early modern life.

While skin color points to various things and has various effects on the relationships between people, it invariably plays a role in the social world of early modern England quite apart from the dubious theories proffered by ethnographers, natural philosophers, and the like. In this early moment we see English popular literary culture subtly suggesting that appearance is a constitutive feature of identity, that the color of one's skin is personally and socially meaningful in excess of the aesthetic values attributed to it. We have, however, only half the picture. The figures I have focused on throughout this chapter are themselves outright mute about their relationship to their own color or the colors of others. How, say, Puttenham's exemplary black woman appreciated her own blackness or disposed herself in regards to the whiteness of the men who harassed her is a question left unasked and unanswered in the archive. How goodwives of color heard Tarlton's dismissal of color's import in his ballad is unknown. By attending to skin color (and bracketing abstract concepts like race as well as ideological presuppositions about how racialized subjects lived in early modern England) I think we come to see a more nuanced portrait of how visual difference has a substantive material and cultural impact on London circa 1600.

Chapter Two:

Sympathy and the Colors of Intention

His eyes, of the usual blue, were perhaps remarkably cold, and he certainly could make his glance fall on one as trenchant and heavy as an axe. But even at these times the rest of his person seemed to disclaim the intention. Otherwise there was only an indefinable, faint expression of his lips, something stealthy - a smile - not a smile - I remember it, but I can't explain.

- Joseph Conrad

She could be any woman at all,
caught off-guard on-guard.
With her hands stroking or strangling and maybe
with her intentions half-interred.
But she is as she is. Her gaze is always
filing away at its cord.

- Alice Oswald

John Stubbs lost his right hand for his efforts, but he had his finger firmly on the pulse of English politics in *The Gaping Gulf* when his initial anxiety about “the French Marriage” between Elizabeth and Monsieur spills over into worries about Mary Queen of Scots. All of a sudden, Stubbs cries out in capital letters, “TAKE HEED OH ELIZABETH OF ENGLAND, AND BEWARE OF SCOTTISH MARY.”¹ Mary Queen of Scots occupied a singular place in the early modern cultural imaginary. She is, as Elizabeth calls her, the “daughter of debate,” but the debates from which she was born are almost too numerous to recount.² Her place in the House of Guise, her first marriage to Francis II, and her trenchant Catholicism all serve as particular causes for Stubbs’ concern, but he could have just as easily seized on Rizzio’s assassination, the murder of Darnley, the so-called Casket Letters and Sonnets to Bothwell, or the Ridolfi plot. While the

¹ John Stubbs, *The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf* (London: H. Singleton, 1579), E6v.

² See John Guy, *Queen of Scots: The True Life of Mary Stuart* (London: Mariner, 2005) for a sympathetic and detailed look at the controversial life of Mary Stuart.

Scottish Queen was caught up in a litany of particular controversies, Stubbs takes her as the crux of a more generic problem facing Elizabethan society. “[T]hese tymes,” he writes, “have new falshodes, which we must encounter by new foreseeing wysedoms.”³ What requires a new kind of wisdom to foresee is the Duke of Anjou’s clandestine intention to “come for thys Mary” and create “some hurliburly in the lande.”⁴ The new falsehood that Stubbs identifies is how “the mind of Monsieur [is] so contrarily qualified.”⁵ Stubbs remarks, earlier in the tract, that “for most part the sweet and amiable or croked conditions of mind ben (as I may say) written in the lines of a lovely or ill shape of body or face,” but “contrariwise” it is also the case “that sometime a vertuous mind is meanelly lodged and dwels in a homely cottage” and vice versa.⁶ At issue is how to successfully read the qualities of a mind that are “written” in the body, how to interpret a person’s inward conditions from their outward shows.

For Stubbs, the correspondence between mind and body is “sometime” askew. The obscurity of the minds of others calls for “new foreseeing wysedoms,” modes of “encounter[ing]” others that look past appearances. “Dissembling, lying, and hypocrisy are [...] said to be at the heart of early modern European religion and society, politics, and culture,” as Markku Peltonen notes, but Stubbs is not concerned with the lies Monsieur may have told or any clearly dissembled acts.⁷ He is worried that the Duke of Anjou’s intentions in relation to Mary Queen of Scots, Elizabeth, and England are not what they seem. He does not seize on anything Monsieur has done, but rather on the mind that conditions all that Monsieur could do. Shifting our sights from a person’s actions to

³ Stubbs, *Gaping Gulf*, E6v.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Stubbs, *Gaping Gulf*, E1v.

⁷ Markku Peltonen, “Hypocrisy, Dissimulation, and Education for Civic Life in Pre-Revolutionary England” in *Forms of Hypocrisy in Early Modern England*, edited by Lucia Nigri and Naya Tsentourou (New York: Routledge, 2018), 16.

their intentions “proue[s] great likelihood of impossibilitie.”⁸ Stubbs suggests that when our attention falls on what lies behind or beneath appearances, the world and its people take on an air of unpredictability and uncertainty. What may seem impossible, might in fact be probable. What may seem probable, might in fact be preposterous. Luke Wilson argues that in early modern England there arose “a sense that the relation between selves and acts could be systematically adjusted (and, at times, strategically disconnected), and the realization that this required a language of intentional action and agency that in articulating intentional states made them at once necessary and possible to control.”⁹ For Stubbs, however, the accurate perception of the intentions of others is of greater concern than the necessity or possibility of self-reflexively controlling one’s own.

The trouble with intentions in Elizabethan discourse is relational rather than solipsistic. It arises from ethical and political problems rather than metaphysical or epistemological ones. As Barbara Kreps puts it, the problem is that “if we can’t take what people say at face value, then who people are (and the meaning of their actions) is no longer certain.”¹⁰ Stubbs’ argument rests on a basic epistemic uncertainty about what others intend by their actions, but he has no interest in investigating the causes for this uncertainty. He writes for the sake of making explicit to his readers the implicit threat he perceives in “the French Marriage.” Intentionality only becomes a matter of concern in the context of intersubjective situations where accurately perceiving the intentions of others have ethico-political consequences. It crops up in the daily life of common folk as much as it does in the political affairs of monarchs. Picking up on the quotidian, perceptual, and subtle character of intentions in social life, early modern discourse uses an idiom that mobilizes quotidian,

⁸ Stubbs, *Gaping Gulf*, E6v.

⁹ Luke Wilson, *Theaters of Intention: Drama and the Law in Early Modern England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 263.

¹⁰ Barbara Kreps, “Two-Sided Legal Narratives: Slander, Evidence, Proof, and Turnarounds in *Much Ado About Nothing* in *Taking Exception to the Law: Materializing Injustice in Early Modern English Literature*, edited by Donald Beecher, Travis DeCook, Andrew Wallace, and Grant Williams (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 166.

perceptual, and subtle features of lived experience to discuss it. Rather than discussing intention or intentionality as such, early modern discourse describes how actions are performed under a certain kind of color.

The representation of intention as somehow “colored” appears sporadically across discursive spheres. The *Bibliotheca Eliotae* (1542) tells us that “to speake colourably” is the English equivalent of the Latin *Praetexo*. It also adds “to cover and hyde” and “to make or ordeyne first” as viable translations.¹¹ To color speech, then, means to cover over or instill primacy, but what is hidden or placed second by color is nowhere disclosed. If we look to Elizabethan usage, we only get a loose sense of what color hides and how it hides it. Pelorus, in Greene’s *Anatomie of Fortune*, looks “to colour [...] his intent with a false shadowe.”¹² *Ovid his invective against Ibis* relates that Hypermnestra slept with her husband’s brother and murdered her maid as a “meanes [...] to colour hir owne mysdeade.”¹³ Captain Brett, in John Proctor’s *The historie of nyates rebellion*, comported himself “under colour of singular affection to Wyat” and looked constantly for “an apte occasion to avoyde suspicion” in order to overthrow him.¹⁴ Color appears to modify an action by bringing something like an agent’s intentions into play. It indexes a disjunction between what someone does and what they mean by so doing. We might say that a colored act is simply a dissembled or pretended act. J. L. Austin tells us that “pretending” and associated actions are “ways and varieties of *not exactly doing things*.”¹⁵ An action done under color is similar to a pretended one in that it is *not exactly* all it seemed, but acting under color and acting under a pretense are not exactly synonymous. Coloring the intentions that accompany actions marks more than the cognitive attitude of an agent. It highlights

¹¹ In *Huloets dictionarie* (1572), to “speake colorably” is defined likewise as *Praetexo*. Cf. Luke Wilson’s gloss of early modern definitions of “intention,” “pretence,” and associated terms in Wilson, *Theatres of Intention*, 265n3.

¹² Robert Greene, *Arbusto the anatomie of fortune* (London: H. Jackson, 1584), 8.

¹³ Ovid, *Ovid his Invective Against Ibis*, trans. Thomas Underdown (London: Henry Bynnenman, 1577), 47.

¹⁴ John Proctor, *The historie of nyates rebellion* (London: Robert Caly, 1554), 63.

¹⁵ J.L. Austin, “Pretending” in *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), 219. Emphasis in the original.

something about intentions that we perceive, that are rendered somehow visible in an act. For instance, the Princess, in Margaret Tyler's translation of Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra's *Mirror of princely deeds*, finds herself "not able to colour her affection" towards Rosicleer.¹⁶ Color's absence allows Tyler to gesture towards how sincerity is manifest. We see something like a strained earnestness in the Princess without being able to point to where that earnestness lies, from whence it arises, or how it even looked exactly.

Austin notes that the only way of distinguishing between the real and the fake, the genuine and the pretended, is by identifying some "special feature or complex of features."¹⁷ The authentic act will be endowed with features that the inauthentic one will lack. Early modern discourse, however, makes an opposing claim. Acts performed "contrariwise" to intentions, to use Stubbs' phrasing, are endowed with a special feature (i.e. color) in a way that authentic, real, or sincere acts are not. When hidden, ulterior intentions accompany an action and an additional perceptual quality shows up, but never in a way that can be discursively unpacked.¹⁸ Authors add color to the situation, but how this color is added varies. It is deployed as a verb (e.g. an agent colors their purportedly true intention), a noun (e.g. an agent hides their true intentions under some false color), and an adverb (e.g. an agent performs an action colorably). The idiom poses more questions than it

¹⁶ Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra, *The mirror of princely deedes* (London: Thomas East, 1578), 70.

¹⁷ J. L. Austin, "Other Minds" in *Philosophical Papers*, 50.

¹⁸ To illustrate the difficulty of discursively accounting for what exactly in a pretended or false situation makes it pretended or false, an example might be helpful. If one were to attend a child's tea party, we would readily identify the situation as a pretended one. However, what is it that makes the situation pretended? If we say that it is the absence of real tea, then we should say that the tea party is real and only the tea itself pretended. If we say that it is the states of mind of those involved, then that commits us to an internalist account of situations. If internal states determine external states of affairs, then we should also have to concede that if the child host of the tea party genuinely believes themselves to be hosting a tea party, then they are either actually hosting a tea party or hosting an actual tea party. This conclusion, then, points to further difficulty. Where does the "actual" part of things fall? On the action? The event? It is easy enough to know that the tea party is pretended, but quite hard to tease out how or why this is so. In brief, early modern discourse seems to have the right idea in treating this set of problems in loose terms. They get the gist of the trouble without getting lost in the analytic nitty gritty of it.

answers, but this is part of its strength. Color does not tell us exactly what we see when we see intentions or how it is we see intentions, but merely emphasizes that we see them.

The source, location, or the precise means by which color appears are vague, but so too are the sources, location, or means by which intentions arise. Speaking of colors presents intentions and actions on the same plane without giving primacy to either term. The invisible, to borrow Locke's adjective, interior lives of others shows in their visible behavior and/or their visible behavior shows their invisible interior lives.¹⁹ The use of color to describe intentions relies on neither a robust conception of intention nor a substantive conception of color. It avails itself of a vague scholastic idea that, as Franz Brentano summarizes it, intentionality "includes something as object within itself, although they do not all do so in the same way. In presentation something is presented, in judgement something is affirmed or denied, in love loved, in hate hated, in desire desired and so on."²⁰ Likewise, the idiom's sense of what color is or how it works is various. Sometimes color is something that arises from perception and other times it is a quality that inheres in an action or person. Color brings the concept of intention closer to the material world while still retaining some of its ineffability. It makes an abstraction more concrete and easier to grasp. It speaks of how an intention accompanies an action in a similar way as we speak of how a color accompanies an object.²¹ It is as hard to think of an intentional state of mind divorced from a particular instantiation in the same way as it is difficult to think of a color divorced from the particular objects that present

¹⁹ See "Of the Signification of Words" in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* for Locke's discussion of "invisible" minds. Locke suggests that "thoughts" are kept in the "breast" rather than in the head, mind, or any other rough synonym for brain here.

²⁰ Franz Brentano, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*, edited by L. McAlister and Kegan Paul (London: Routledge, 1995), 88. See Edmund Runggaldier, "On the Scholastic or Aristotelian Roots of 'Intentionality' in Brentano," *Topoi* 8 (1989): 97-103 on the influence of scholasticism on Brentano. See Luke Wilson on scholastic views of intentionality in early modern theater.

²¹ For example, "Dave seemed to ask a question in good faith during the Q&A" is like "The banana seemed quite green when I bought it at the market." Good faith as such or green as such are not at issue. What is at issues is how these features were instantiated and perceived as salient features of a situation in a given context.

it to our eyes. Loyalty, say, is as much of or in an act as orange is of or in an orange. Colors, like intentions, are for all practical intents and purposes emergent qualities of a situation that typically fall beneath attention. They only warrant investigation when something hinges on accurately perceiving them.

Calvin, in an English translation of his *Institution of the Christian Religion*, tells us that auricular confession came to an end in Constantinople when “a certain woman faining that she came to confession, was found so to have colored under that pretence the unhonest companie that she used with a certain Deacon.”²² Calvin does not draw our attention to this woman in order to indict her character, but rather to demonstrate that certain wayward institutions occasion colored intentions. The woman’s color was enabled by confession, thus confession had to cease. True intentions might go unobserved or hide themselves not solely by dint of a purposive set of actions, but through the complacency of outside eyes. Calvin’s anonymous woman may very well have gone to confession, but only did so for the sake of enjoying “unhonest companie.” What is being qualified is not exactly an act, but an agent’s comportment towards it. Wittgenstein notes that the impulse to speak of intentions is best explained as a desire to say something about that “which goes beyond what happens at the time.”²³ The color of intention contributes to the “what” that happens by forcing us to see what is “beyond” it. It gestures towards how interior lives, the perception of others, social context, and the passage of time define a situation. More importantly, color’s appearance is never value neutral. It adds an ethical cast to what is being described. While all agents harbor intentions that remain unseen to outside eyes, only some agents warrant being described with color. Color, then, is not only descriptive, but prescriptive.

²² Jean Calvin, *The Institution of Christian Religion*, translated by Thomas Norton (London: Reinolde Wolfe and Richarde Harison, 1591), 140v.

²³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Third Edition, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), §659.

To speak of an action performed under colored intentions is to represent it in two distinct aspects at once. The idiom depicts 1) how the intentions of a given act were perceived at the time and 2) how the intentions of said act ought to be perceived. The attribution of color asserts a normative dimension to perception, but that normative dimension is only rarely given in positive terms. To say that, for example, “Iago acted under the color of fidelity to Othello” does not tell us anything about Iago’s actual intentions (save that they may be not what they seem). The phrase, in effect, says something like “Iago was ~~faithful~~ to Othello.” Color obscures an apparent motivation, but offers nothing definitive in its stead. It acknowledges that something was sufficiently like a truly intended act to be misperceived as such, thus to call an agent’s actions colored is to insist not only on a division between intentions and actions, but to insist on two distinct ways of perceiving the very same actions. Donald Davidson argues that when adverbs like “intentionally” or “inadvertently” attach to actions they create “semantically opaque contexts.”²⁴ This holds true too for attributions of color, but colored actions create more than simply semantically opaque contexts. Recognizing the intentional dimension of actions and the ways in which it might be colored produces both semantic and perceptual opacity.²⁵ Perceiving the meaning of these colors, in the world or on the page, is easier done than said. Color makes manifest what cannot be made explicit.

Despite the indefinite sense in which color attaches to people, definite actions follow from its appearance. A 1581 proclamation by Elizabeth addresses those who are “beyond the seas under colour of studie, and yet living contrarie to the Lawes of God and of the Realme.”²⁶ These students, in Elizabeth’s eyes, may have been “perverted” and “made instruments in some wicked practices

²⁴ Donald Davidson, “Adverbs in Action” in *Essays on Actions and Events*, Second Edition, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 297.

²⁵ This point is perhaps best illustrated by imagining ourselves as, say, Othello’s interlocutor. If we told him that Iago colored his intentions, what would Othello understand by this? Moreover, what would we point to as proof that this was the case?

²⁶ Elizabeth I, *Proclamation for the Revocation of Sundrie her Majesties Subjects Remayning Beyond the Seas* (London: Christopher Barker, 1581), np.

tending to the disquiet of this Realme and other her Majesties dominions.”²⁷ Consequently, they must return to England and report to the authorities. Whether their “colour of studie” stands up to scrutiny and is seen to be, as it were, just plain study will determine whether they are criminally liable. The attribution of color to intentions is tentative, corrigible, applicable to groups of people, and practically consequential. On the basis of posited or supposed color, a community is coded as potentially perverse. Their (so-called?) study is interrupted and called into question. A colored intention does not speak directly to a particular state of mind held by an individual, but rather a loose set of desires or motives. Individuals may have personal reasons for going abroad to study, but these personal reasons are subsumed by a group’s supposed intent. By analogy, an individual’s intention is merely a particular shade of the generic color of a collective. Color instills doubt, but only does so on dubious grounds. Representing the colored intentions of others clearly is directed less towards altering the colorable behavior of others than of motivating a different view of them, that is, it aims to alter a reader’s perception rather than the actions of the subject perceived. Elizabeth’s proclamation does not address the students abroad she suspects of coloring their intention, but rather represents their colored intentions to the people at home. The inward state of students beyond the seas are doubly unavailable to the eyes of the English populace. This proclamation creates a rift between what appears to be the case and what is the case, but only by appealing to something beyond appearances. Color affects the intersubjective landscape by rendering certain subjects questionable and suggesting that it is only through perception that those questions can be resolved.

Thomas Norton’s *To the Quenes Majesties poore deceyved Subjectes in the North Countrey, drawn into rebellion by the Earles of Northumberland and Westmerland* tells us that “some of you [Northerners]

²⁷ *Ibid.*

perhaps, see nothing but the outward shewe and colour, bicause you loke to nothing else, which yet God wot is full il favoured.”²⁸ Too quickly taking appearances for reality, Northerners sympathetic to the rebellion are “as unapt to discern colors as he that is starke blinde.”²⁹ The color of rebels is altogether deceptive for Norton precisely because their falsity looks so like truth. What they do is what “all other traytours and rebelles have ever and ordinarily do, pretend themselves to be true subjectes, knowing otherwise that simple subjects would not follow them at all.”³⁰ The appearance of loyalty can be taken as an evident sign of disloyalty. The clearest indication of duplicitous color is its seeming absence, thus the tract hopes to inspire Northerners to “shake of the veyle or covering of wrongful affection and misunderstanding” by drawing attention to this fact.³¹ Color is distributed across agent and perceiver alike. Norton’s account suggests that rebels color their inward intentions otherwise, that certain people are blind to that color, and that still others see those colors through an emotional and epistemic screen that distorts their view. He is, however, certain that when readers look at Northumberland and Westmoreland’s actions in light of his tract they will show as “plain counterfait color.”³² He asks that his readers “consider the truthe of this colour,” meaning his tract, and revise their stance on rebels and rebellion.³³ In Norton’s hands, color conveys both truths and untruths. Color’s promiscuity does not allow for fine distinctions, but, truth be told, fine distinctions are rarely called for in circumstances such as these. For all their nebulousness, colors force us to stay close to the practical concerns that give rise to them. Broad questions like “What is an intention?” or “How do colors work?” certainly warrant posing, but such questions obscure as much as they reveal. Descartes, at the conclusion of the *Meditations*, argues that “the necessity of

²⁸ Thomas Norton, *To the Quenes Majesties poore deceived subjectes of the north countrey* (London: Henrie Bynneman, 1569), B1r.

²⁹ Norton, *To the Quenes Majesties*, B2r.

³⁰ Norton, *To the Quenes Majesties*, B4v.

³¹ Norton, *To the Quenes Majesties*, B2r.

³² Norton, *To the Quenes Majesties*, B4v.

³³ Norton, *To the Quenes Majesties*, D4r.

action” does not allow for the kind of philosophical investigation that he has engaged in and that consequently “we must acknowledge the [epistemic] frailties of our nature.”³⁴ What is perhaps most striking about the use of color to describe intentions is that it at once confirms epistemic frailties and affirms epistemic strengths at once. It suggests that perception is poor grounds for knowledge of an agent’s intentions, but also suggests that perception is the only grounds for knowledge of an agent’s intentions. Its rhetorical power lies in testifying to a writer’s trustworthy perception of misperceived events or, rather, asserting their sincere concern that suspicious acts have gone unnoticed.

The concepts of suspicion and sincerity are born in Elizabethan England, but these concepts are merely modes of registering a supervening or underlying concern with intentionality that is more commonly navigated discursively through color.³⁵ The metaphysical problems of “sincerity” or “suspicion” are, of course, somewhere in the background, but the problems foregrounded by color are only ever decidedly practical. Elizabeth’s instructions to Sir Thomas Smith and Dr. Wilson in 1571 suggest that the threat of torture is to be followed by actual torture if the accused “shall not seem to you to confess plainly their knowledge.”³⁶ Actually being sincere, forthright, or honest is of less importance than seeming sincere, forthright, or honest. Cognitive, affective, or psychological states are only important insofar as they can be gleaned from appearances. Richard Topcliffe, Elizabeth’s chief torturer, was, so to speak, an expert witness of the practical consequences of

³⁴ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, translated by Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 64.

³⁵ This is not to say that the affective attitude that we call “suspicious” or “sincere” were unavailable prior to Elizabethan England, but rather that these affective attitudes had not, prior to this point, been resolved discursively into concepts. Think, for example, of gravity prior to Newton. See Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 12–4; Jane Taylor, “‘Why do you tear me from myself’: Torture, Truth and the Arts of Counter-Reformation” in *The Rhetoric of Sincerity*, eds. Ernst Van Alphen, Mieke Bal, and Carel E. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 25; Lorna Hutson, *The Invention of Suspicion: Law and Mimesis in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 90.

³⁶ Elizabeth I, “Queen Elizabeth’s Warrant to Proceed, if Necessary, to Torture Two of the Duke of Norfolk’s Men, September 15, 1571” in *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, edited by Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 127.

perceiving or misperceiving the colors of intention. Charged with torturing the body until it seems to give up the mind, Topcliffe's marginalia demonstrates the impetus to make intentions visible to others. Bearing intimate witness to the apparently suspicious and the seemingly sincere, Topcliffe's remarks show a decidedly pragmatic concern with intentions.

*A false, Sedicious, & unadvised opinion, set forth by English Protestants
Abroad & some at home, Groaning for the Catholics, under Colours
of a TRVE,*

**SINCERE AND MOST
DEFENCE, OF ENGLISH
CATHOLIKES THAT SUFFER FOR THEIR
Faith both at home and abroad: against a false, se-
ditionous and slanderous Libel intituled;**

THE EXECUTION OF IUSTICE IN ENGLAND.

*Wherein is declared, howv uniuersallie the Protestants doe charge
Catholiques vvith treason; howv vntuallie they deny their
persecution for Religion; and howv deceitfullie they seeke
to abuse strangers about the cause, greatnes, and maner
of their sufferings, vvith diuers other matters
pertaining to this purpose.*

D : 6.

12.

*To bee read
Service of God, & vnder for y^e
the peace of Englande, &
for No other purpose. On*

Pfal. 62.

Vt obstruatur os loquentium iniqua.

That the mouth may be stopped of such as speake vniuersallie.

Pfal. 49.

Os tuum abundauit malitia, & lingua tua concinnabat dolos.

Thy mouth hath abounded in malice, and thy tongue hath
conninglie framed lies.

The Content is in the Ende:~

What was “a true, sincere and modest defence” for William Allen, the English Cardinal of the Catholic Church said to be behind the “perversion” of students abroad addressed by Elizabeth’s 1581 proclamation, is cast “under cullor and shaddowe” by Topcliffe.³⁷ The ascription of color displays sincerity and suspicion at once. Attributing color is meant to manifest Topcliffe’s sincere suspicion of Allen by rendering Allen’s sincerity suspect. Casting aspersions on the tract’s title, however, is an insufficient display of Topcliffe’s apparent intentions. Surrounding the emblem, he gives instructions on how others should take this text. It is “To be redd and used for the scripture of God, Q. Elizabethe, and the peace of Englande, and for No other purpose. Or cause.”³⁸ The purpose and cause for reading this book is delimited here, but the only purpose and cause to instruct the reading habits of others is to manifest the intentions behind Topcliffe’s possession of the book. There is no way to prescribe a way of reading or to ensure that a text is read a certain way, but there is a way to make one’s intent visible to suspicious eyes. Topcliffe’s marginalia can connote a suspicious attitude or a sincere one. We might find he protests too much, but we may also see cause for this kind of anxiety.³⁹ Whether we are sympathetic to Allen’s sincerity or Topcliffe’s suspicions comes down to something beyond the words on the page. The ways in which color brings intentions into our field of view, but also gestures towards something that can never quite be viewed is somewhat clarified when we look to, as Daniella Jancsó puts it, to the “*locus classicus* of debates on early modern interiority,” Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.⁴⁰

³⁷ Topcliffe’s annotations are found in the Huntington Library copy of William Allen, *A true, sincere, and modest defence of English Catholiques* (Rouen, Father Parsons’ Press, 1584). My thanks to the Huntington for photographing this page for me.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ See Louis Montrose, “Secrets of the Heart” in *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender, and Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) on Topcliffe’s inglorious end.

⁴⁰ Daniella Jancsó, “The Fallacy of ‘that within’: Hamlet Meets Wittgenstein” in *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture*, edited by Brian Cummings and Freya Sierhuis (New York: Routledge, 2016), 242.

At the outset of Act 1 Scene 2, we are told that the death of King Hamlet is still “green,” but only one figure at court wears black (1.2.2). The audience faces the young prince as Horatio had faced the host in Act 1 Scene 1. What Horatio calls “the sensible and true avouch” of the eyes disposes him to take the Ghost’s appearance as something that “bodes some strange eruption in [the] state” (1.1.56, 68). So too with us towards young Hamlet. Gertrude calls attention to Hamlet’s countenance by asking him to “cast [his] nighted colour off” (1.2.68). Hamlet’s distinction between the “trappings and suits of woe” and “that within which passeth show” arises by way of color, his clothing and comportment (1.2.86, 85).⁴¹ The deictic quality of color points to something unarticulated. It may not “denote” anything “truly,” but it nonetheless connotes something readily (1.2.83). To Gertrude’s eyes, Hamlet’s color stops him from “look[ing] like a friend on Denmark” both inside and out (1.2.69). Claudius, too, takes Hamlet’s mourning colors as an indication of something “sweet and commendable in [his] nature,” but to “persever” as he does is “unmanly grief” (1.2.87, 92, 94). It “shows a will most incorrect to heaven, / A heart unfortified, a mind impatient, / An understanding simple and unschooled” (1.2.95-7). Claudius does not need Hamlet to describe “that within” because heart, mind, will, understanding, and affect are outwardly evident. What Hamlet claims “passeth show” is hinted at, gleaned, and interpreted through color before he says a word. Gertrude and Claudius infer “that within” from the impression his color makes. The audience, too, sees something about that color that raises questions about what seems and what does not show. Hamlet’s color calls into question not only his own internal state, but the internal states of others and the circumstances that have allowed them to cast off their own “nighted” colors so quickly.

⁴¹ Reading Gertrude’s invocation of color to mean both the literal color of his clothes and his disposition is supported both by her later lines about looking (see below), but also by Q1 where the King, rather than Gertrude, asks “What means these sad and melancholy moods?” to which Hamlet replies that “tis not the sable sute I wear.” William Shakespeare, *The Tragical History of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark: The First Quarto (1603)* in *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Methuen Drama, 2006), 2.27, 34.

Wyatt offers us a more fleshed out view of how colors arise out of a tension between actions that a man might play and that within which passeth show. In his “Of Others’ Feigned Sorrow, and the Lover’s Feigned Mirth,” after presenting the reader with the pretended sadness of Caesar and Hannibal, the speaker turns to his own disposition.

So chanceth me, that every passion
The mind hideth by color contrary,
With feigned visage, now sad, now merry;
Whereby if that I laugh at any season,
It is because I have none other way
To cloke my care, but under sport and play.⁴²

“Color contrary” might be a result of how mind processes passion, the seeming social expectation that one “cloke” one’s care, or the bad luck of being a lover. These colors result from rational, emotional, and social processes.⁴³ The poem evinces a kind of torsion between how one’s internal world will strike the eyes of others, but there is no suggestion that that torsion can be undone. Wyatt sees no way to be plain, to appear other than colored. John Martin suggests that “[t]he experience of personhood in the Renaissance world was, in short, often the experience of a divided self, of a person who was frequently forced to erect a public façade that disguised his or her convictions, beliefs, or feelings.”⁴⁴ Wyatt’s colors diffuse the locus of the “force” that divides the internal from the external. Passions, minds, social conventions, and other people participate in the creation of “color contrary.” No single causal explanation stands out. What matters is that colors stand between agents and the world. Intersubjective experience is always potentially conditioned by color.

⁴² Sir Thomas Wyatt, “Of Others’ Feigned Sorrow, and the Lover’s Feigned Mirth” in *The Poetical Works of Sir Thomas Wyatt, with Memoir and Critical Dissertation*, edited by Rev. George Gilfillan (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1858), 5.

⁴³ Wyatt, in “The Lover Lamenteth his Estate with Suit for Grace,” tells us that “For want of will in woe I plain, / Under colour of soberness” which diffuses the cause of color in similar ways.

⁴⁴ John Martin, “Inventing Sincerity, Refashioning Prudence: The Discovery of the Individual in Renaissance Europe,” *The American Historical Review* 102.5 (1997): 1322.

William Perkins' *A Direction for the Government of the Tongue according to Gods Worde* warns that colors appear in everyday life with dispiriting frequency. People all over engage in and encounter what he calls "colored talebearing." This is when

"one speaketh evill of another, with fine prefaces and preambles, faining that he is verie sorie that his neighbour hath done such or such a thing: that he speaketh it not of malice but of a good mind: that hee is constrained to speak: that he speaketh not all he could speake: that the partie to whom the tale is told must keepe it secret."⁴⁵

Perkins is not, to be clear, reprimanding those who speak ill of others or candidly discuss a neighbour's faults in their absence. He consistently suggests that "admonishing" a person for their morally questionable behavior is always good form.⁴⁶ The problem is that stated intentions do not correspond to actual ones. The colors of a talebearer are more telling than the words they use to tell their tales. The ethical stakes of this communicative situation hinge on the intentions behind it. As far as Perkins is concerned, this is lamentably "the common table talke in England: and it is wonderful to see, how those who are otherwise godly, are overtaken with it."⁴⁷ The speakers, listeners, and subjects involved in colored talebearing are "overtaken with it" at once.⁴⁸ Despite spending more time on "colored talebearing" than any other sinful act of the tongue, Perkins is surprisingly quiet about how it is we are to spot the "colored" aspect of talebearing. Color indexes a possible gap between stated intentions and hidden ones, but how to identify and navigate that gap in ourselves or others is an open question. There is the tacit suggestion that Perkins' readers will

⁴⁵ Perkins, *A Direction for the Government of the Tongue according to Gods word* (Cambridge: John Legate, 1593), 50.

⁴⁶ Perkins, *A Direction*, passim.

⁴⁷ Perkins, *A Direction*, 52.

⁴⁸ Accounts of talebearing, outside of Perkins, are more emphatic about the moral parity between speaker and listener. As George Webbe tells us, in *his Arraignment of an Unruly Tongue*, "a Talebearer cannot rob a man of his good name, nor yet impair his credite, unlesse there be another to heare and to admit his slanders : wherefore Bernard doubteth not to affirm, that talebearers and talehearers are guilty alike." Erasmus goes one step further and spins the problem firmly towards listeners or, more precisely, what listeners do with what they have heard. He notes that "the olde proverbe saith, I hate a talebearer from the boorde: But I saie, I hate hym that remembreth what he hath sayd."

intuitively know when they face “evill” speech colored otherwise and be able to “interrupt it by other talke, as not regarding it.”⁴⁹ Just as Perkins leaves unelaborated how one might see the colors of others, he is silent on the topic of whether coloring is or must be deliberate. What, I wonder, would Perkins make of Calvin’s claim that people “with vayne colored deceyte do beguile other[s] or sometime themselves”?⁵⁰

In the anonymous *Holy Love of Heavenly Wisdom*, we learn that “falsehood, is the daughter of darkness” and “[a]ll kinds of fiction, coloured and counterfeit shewes and all leasings, are the craftie devises of the devill,” thus we are told to make certain that “all our actions” are “sincere and faithfull.”⁵¹ Sincere acts are the opposite of colored ones, but how the colorable acts of others might be discerned goes undiscussed. Sir Martyn Cognet’s *Politique Discourses Upon Trueth and Lying* asks us to “modestly behave ourselves, without any colour, or disguising our wordes, habites or anie other actions,” but this, he says, is only possible if we have acknowledged the “light of truth” which “take[s] from us the vaile which blemisheth our judgement.”⁵² Hobbes makes a similar claim when he tells us that “though the nature of what we conceive be the same, yet the diversity of the reception of it, in respect of different constitutions of the body and prejudices of opinion, gives everything a tincture of our different passions.”⁵³ There is a “tincture” of us on “everything.” The colors of the world are as much of us as of it, thus our judgment should acknowledge the various ways in which the world is adjudicated by our passions, opinions, constitutions of the body, and

⁴⁹ Perkins, *A Direction*, 52. “Evill” things entail, for Perkins, a rather broad assortment of things. Namely, mention of “all unseemely matters, all things unknowen, things which concerne us not, [and] things above reach.” Perkins, *A Direction*, 56.

⁵⁰ Calvin, *The Institution of Christian Religion*, 114r.

⁵¹ Anon., *The Holy Love of Heavenly Wisdome*, translated by Tho. Sto. (London: Richard Field, 1594), 72-3. Cf. Stanley Fish’s reading of Herbert wherein sincerity is precisely the opposite of faith. See Stanley Fish, “‘Void of storie’: The Struggle for Insincerity in Herbert’s Prose and Poetry” in *Versions of Antihumanism: Milton and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 147-68.

⁵² Matthieu Coignet, *Politique Discourses upon trueth and lying*, translated by Sir Edward Hoby (London: Ralfe Newberie, 1586), 29. The 1586 title page announces the author as “Martyn Cognet” rather than Matthieu Coignet.

⁵³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 31.

intentions. We are not privy to a neutral view of things, so Hobbes says, “in reasoning a [person] must take heed of words which, besides their signification also mean with regard to the nature, disposition, and interest of the speaker [...]”⁵⁴ The world and the words used to describe it are co-constitutive and invariably caught up with our individual “nature[s], disposition[s], and interest[s].” The colors we see in others and the various ways in which our perspective is itself colored are intractably tied up with each other, but Hobbes et al. suggest that there nonetheless exists some plain reality beneath all these subjective colors. Given the essentially perspectival and perceptual character of judging the intentions of others, we have to conclude that seeing the difference between colored intentions and plain ones is merely the contingent (if not outright accidental) outcome of a situation that can rely on no reliable method.

Color lies somewhere at the interstices of internal and external world, self and others, reason and passion, voluntary and involuntary behavior. It is an emergent quality that practically trivializes the nominal boundaries between distinct concepts. A self cannot color in the absence of another. A mind’s intention cannot be colored unless brought into the world through a body’s action. To purposively color an intention speaks to some kind of rationale, but also to some kind of impassioned disposition. This complex intersection and its import is brought out in Petrarch’s “Canzone 125.”

<i>Si'l pensier che mi strugge Com'è pungente et saldo Così vestisse d'un color conforme Forse tal m'arde et fugga Ch'avria parte del caldo Et desteriasi Amor là dov'or dorme;</i>	If this thought paining me, As it is sharp and constant, Were clothed in the right color, Perhaps that one who burns me And flees would feel some heat, And Love would be awakened where he sleeps. ⁵⁵
--	--

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Petrarch, “125” in *The Canzoniere or Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, translated by Mark Musa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 188-9

Color can possibly transmit a thought to another such that passions are awakened and senses are stimulated. If the color is *conforme*, it might have effects, be felt and understood, turn sharp and painful thoughts into those that stir Love, but what if it fails to be *conforme*? What do the “wrong” colors do? Thomas Reid argues that the perception of a person’s internal disposition is inherently reliable in the same way as the perception of the world’s qualities is.

A man in company, without doing good or evil, without uttering an articulate sound, may behave himself gracefully, civilly, politely; or, on the contrary, meanly, rudely, and impertinently. We see the dispositions of his mind, by their natural signs in his countenance and behavior, in the same manner as we perceive the figure and other qualities of bodies by the sensations which nature hath connected with them.”⁵⁶

But, as Petrarch shows, the “dispositions” of a mind manifest in the body are not reliable signs. Perceiving intention’s color is not quite identical to perceiving literal color. As Austin highlights, “We may be deceived by the appearance of an oasis, or misinterpret the signs of the weather, but the oasis cannot lie to us and we cannot misunderstand the storm in the way we misunderstand the man.”⁵⁷ We might incorrectly judge the weather, but there are various ways of correcting our mistaken judgment. There is, however, no way of prying into a person’s mind, gaining access to the truth of their intentions, and subsequently revising our judgment. We stand in relation to others differently than we stand in relation to the world or, rather, we make judgments about minds (our own or those of others) that are not verifiable or corrigible in the same way as we make judgments about the world. While the kinds of judgments differ, the practical effects that follow are similar. We make decisions for actions on the basis of these (mis)perceptions. We undoubtedly see something in countenance and behavior other than countenance and behavior, but what we see and

⁵⁶ Thomas Reid, *Inquiry into the Human Mind* in *The Works of Thomas Reid, Volume One*, edited by Sir William Hamilton (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1895), 195.

⁵⁷ Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, 80.

how it corresponds to the truth of things is questionable. If getting at the truth of intentions is untenable, then the attention given to them by color must have its sights set on other ends.

Color registers the sympathetic, perspectival, and perceptual character of our judgment of others. Hume tells us that “the principle of sympathy or communication” entails that we are struck by the “vivacity of the conception of another’s feeling.”⁵⁸ Another’s feeling or intention is latent within them and impresses itself upon a perceiver. This impression, Hume continues, is “not confin’d merely to [the] immediate object, but diffuses its influence over all the related ideas, and gives me a lively notion of all the circumstances of that person, whether past, present, or future; possible, probable, or certain.”⁵⁹ The agent, their circumstances across time, and all related topics are implicated and interconnected in a way that points beyond the situation at hand. The principle of sympathy broadens the scope of communicative acts by bringing what is not explicitly communicated into the fold. One’s reception of another is premised not only on what they do or say, but how it is we perceive their intentions and our imagined view of their circumstances.⁶⁰ Norton was attempting to correct Northerners’ sympathy towards rebels. Elizabeth aimed to arouse sympathy against students abroad. By transmitting no positive content, color simply tries to convey a “lively notion” of circumstances, to exert a diffuse influence over reception. Color describes a sympathetic reaction and prescribes one in turn.

⁵⁸ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2003), 303.

⁵⁹ Hume, *Treatise*, 274.

⁶⁰ On this account, the color of intention might be conceived as a marker of ethos in the sense of revealing a particular characteristic of the agent, but, as we will see, the usage of the idiom is far too loose for this account to work in all instances. Sometimes the attribution of the color of intention inclines us to infer a kind of character associated with intentional states of that kind, but often the attribution of the color of intention works to characterize an event, action, or situation over and above the agent themselves. That being said, bringing this idiom into contact with Nedra Reynolds and Susan Jarratt’s sophistic account of ethos might be an interesting extension of both their argument and my own. See their “The Splitting Image: Contemporary Feminisms and the Ethics of Ethos” in *Ethos: New Essays in Rhetorical and Critical Theory*. Edited by James S. Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1994), 37-69.

The perceived color of intentions has profound consequences not only on how we view that person, but who that person is. Hamlet's color partially defines him. The color of talebearers, once discerned, determines whether they are worth listening to or morally suspect. The color of students makes them Catholic conspirators. The attribution of color in effect creates a new perspective on people and events, but, as Nancy Bauer explains, this perspectival shift has consequences in excess of the perceiving subject.

It may be tempting to imagine that when a shift in perspective has occurred what has shifted is specifically (and only) the normative significance of the phenomena we saw all along. But it seems to me [...] that phenomenologically, at least, a new worldview transforms the phenomena themselves, that is, transforms not only our valuation of the phenomena but also what they *are* to us.⁶¹

What is replaced by the attribution of color is not the object of judgment, but the ontological and ethical status of the object itself. Husserl calls this act of ontological revision “retroactive crossing out.”⁶² To demonstrate this phenomenon he asks us to imagine viewing a “uniform, well-rounded red ball” which, as we change our perspective on it, comes to reveal itself as not uniformly red or well-rounded at all.⁶³ The side of the ball initially hidden from our view is, it turns out, green and indented. As a result, “we are still conscious of the previous sense, but as ‘painted over,’ and where the corresponding moments are concerned, crossed out.”⁶⁴ We retain both our original intuited belief that the ball is round and red (in the form of “~~the ball is round and red~~”) as well as the subsequent judgment that the ball is rounded and indented, red and green. This gives a decent picture of what is captured by the attribution of color to intention, but there is a notable difference between Husserl and Bauer's phenomenological interest in objects and the idiom's interest in

⁶¹ Nancy Bauer, *How to Do Things with Pornography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 29.

⁶² Edmund Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, translated by Anthony J. Steinbock (Dordrecht: Springer Science, 2001), 69.

⁶³ Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, 68-9.

⁶⁴ Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, 69.

people. Both Bauer and Husserl seem confident that a worldview or judgment can, at some point, rest easily on a set of conclusions. The red and green ball, once fully viewed, holds no more surprises. This is not true for other people. When we perceive the intentions of others we are, as it were, continually crossing out and overwriting them. Our views of others are dynamic, ongoing, unpredictable, and sympathetic in character. Spenser's Duessa is an object lesson of this complex intersubjective state of affairs.

To the reader and Redcrosse, Fidessa simply is "[a] goodly Lady."⁶⁵ Her ostentatious clothing - "scarlot red, / Purpled with gold and pearle in rich assay" - does not immediately arouse suspicion about her character, but does show us something about Redcrosse's (1.2.13). As she speaks of her (supposed) past, we see Redcrosse "busying his quicke eyes, / Her face to view" and failing to adequately tune "his dull eares, to hear what she did tell" (1.2.26). Only by small increments does Spenser intimate that Fidessa's colors are not innocent. She is called a "seeming simple maid," Redcrosse's fancy for her is described as "falsed," and her beauty is eventually said to be "forged" (1.2.27, 1.2.34, 1.2.36). Fradubio, a man turned tree, warns of a woman named Duessa who appeared much like a goodly lady, but it became apparent over time that she was only "seeming such" (1.2.37). When he happened upon her bathing, he says, he "chaunst to see her in her proper hew" (1.2.40). Rather than spy the beautiful woman he expected, he sees instead what he calls "[a] filthy foule old woman."

[Duessa's] neather parts misshapen, monstrous
Were hidd in water, that I could not see,
But they did seeme more foule and hideous,
Then womans shape man would beleewe to be (1.2.40).

⁶⁵ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, edited by Thomas P. Roche, Jr and C. Patrick O'Donnell, Jr (New York: Penguin, 1987), 1.2.13. All subsequent quotations are to this edition and will appear parenthetically.

Even when faced with Duessa in her “proper hew,” Fradubio can only speak to how she “seeme[s].” The context in which he finds her both discloses and hides her true colors. Fradubio’s tale is perhaps a corrupt byproduct of the “charmes and magick” she used on him to “bereave all [his] senses” and make him a tree, but this brief tale nonetheless suggests that both feigned colors and true hues are obdurately obscure. One does not merely encounter “seeming,” work through it, and uncover what is, but rather one finds only more that “seems.” Duessa can “maske” deceit in “visour faire,” is able to “cast her colours dyed deep in graine, / To seeme like Truth, whose shape she well can faine, / And fitting gestures to her purpose frame” (1.7.1). She has the capacity to act on “all [the] senses” of her victims through “subtill sleights” (1.7.51).⁶⁶ What makes Duessa particularly difficult to interpret for both Spenser’s characters and his readers is that no reason or cause for her actions or appearance is disclosed. We come to know that Fidessa is Duessa, but how this “true” identity becomes known is unclear. The effects that Fidessa/Duessa’s colors have on characters and readers also affect Spenser himself. Even Duessa’s own self-report, that “I that do seeme not I, Duessa am,” runs aground on the liar’s paradox (1.5.26).⁶⁷ Even to herself, Duessa is only ever ~~Duessa~~.

Duessa’s duplicity, her not-seeming-I, is total and constant, but it does not inspire uniform responses. Some, like Redcrosse, are moved by her outward show in a way that others, like the Dwarf, are not. Just as the causes of Duessa’s color are left unexplained, so too are the causes for its varied reception. When Duessa is somehow revealed to be Duessa, Una responds to the “weake” quality that she perceives in her and persuades Redcrosse to spare her life. Una suggests that

⁶⁶ See Fradubio above, but also Redcrosse in 1.8.14 for instances of sense trouble.

⁶⁷ Interestingly, both Elizabeth and Mary make similarly self-alienating claims. In “On Monsieur’s Departure,” the first stanza concludes with “I am, and not; I freeze and yet am burned / Since from myself another self I turned.” Mary, in a poem written in the margins of her Book of Hours, writes “Je ne suis plus ce que je fus.” Rosalind Smith brings these two instances of self-alienation together in her “Le pouvoir de faire dire: Marginalia in Mary Queen of Scots’ Book of Hours” in *Material Cultures of Early Modern Women’s Writing*, edited by Patricia Pender and Rosalind Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 63-65.

Redcrosse ought merely “spoil her of her scarlet robe” instead of executing her as he evidently desires to (1.8.45). In the absence of her “purple pall, / And ornaments,” Una declares that the naked Duessa, exposed as a creature composed of manifold animal parts, is “the face of falshood [...] when her borrowed light is laid away, and counterfesaunce known” (1.8.49). All doubts about Duessa’s true form are momentarily evacuated and replaced with amazement and wonder. Una, Redcrosse, and the reader see clearly the colorless truth of Duessa, but the appearance of true falsity is short lived. Duessa hides herself in caves, cloaks her true form in shadows, and eventually returns to the narrative. With Ate in tow from Hell, Duessa in Book 4

now had chang’d her former wonted hew:
For she could d’on so manie shapes in sight,
As ever could cameleon colours new;
So could she forge all colours, saue the trew (4.1.18).

The only thing known about Duessa’s colors is that they are not true, but knowing they are untrue is of little value since the opposite of truth is not singular, but plural. As Montaigne says, “If a lie, like truth, had only one face we could be on better terms, for certainty would be the reverse of what the liar said. But the reverse side of truth has a hundred thousand shapes and no defined limits.”⁶⁸ Spenser gives us no key to assess the veracity of appearances, no example of how to annul falsity, but simply places it and its effects before our eyes. In fact, Spenser appears to be committed to demonstrating that the sympathetic perception of a person’s colors is stubbornly indifferent to justification, explanation, or argument.

During Duessa’s trial, oral arguments made for and against her have no impact on Mercilla’s judgment. Mercilla, we are told, “plainely saw” Duessa’s guilt and wrongdoing, but (rightly or wrongly) finds that she can only respond sympathetically and let “fall / Few perling drops from her

⁶⁸ Michel de Montaigne, “On Liars” in *The Complete Essays*, translated and edited by M. A. Screech (New York: Penguin, 2003), 35.

faire lampes of light; / The which she couering with her purple pall / Would haue the passion hid” (5.9.50). Mercilla is “touched” by the “piteous ruth of [Duessa’s] so wretched plight” and can only cry in response (5.9.50). Neither Duessa nor Mercilla say a word. The drama of judgment in this stanza does not play out in the makeshift courtroom, but rather in the interior lives of these two women. Spenser presents us with Mercilla’s sympathetic response to Duessa through a dizzying array of feminine pronouns where the two women become grammatically tangled together.

But she, whose Princely breast was touched nere
 With piteous ruth of her so wretched plight,
 Though plaine she saw by all, that she did heare,
 That she of death was guiltie found by right,
 Yet would not let iust vengeance on her light;
 But rather let in stead thereof to fall
 Few perling drops from her faire lampes of light;
 The which she couering with her purple pall
 Would haue the passion hid, and vp arose withall (5.9.50).

The reader is hard pressed to track the referent of the “she” or “her” in each line until, at the end of the stanza, we see the “purple pall” that had formerly hidden Duessa’s true shape reappear as something that presently hides Mercilla’s “passion.” A color that pointed to Duessa’s shamelessness in Book 1 now points to Mercilla’s shamefastness in Book 5. Colors may be contagious, but they are not symptoms of the same underlying disease. We perceive this same “purple pall” differently in different contexts, but always as something that points to some unarticulated quality that shapes our view of things. Spenser preserves color’s ability to persist and create interpretive havoc by only alluding the Duessa’s death. Given her ability to evade the full knowledge of others, it comes as no surprise that her “fall” is beyond our ken. The problem of colored intentions is not quite resolvable, but the reader can at least see that these colors exist. Duessa’s ineradicable color gives us only a partial picture of the problem.

Duessa’s facility with colors make her like aameleon. Michael Renniger, in his *Treatise against Treasons*, also takes up the figure of the chameleon to elaborate the particular treachery of

Duessa's real world counterpart, Mary Queen of Scots. "That the Chamelion hath in nature by chaunging of so many colours," he explains, "the wicked have in continuall practise by chaunging all colours of hypocrisie and infidelitie."⁶⁹ While the chameleon and the traitor might share an ability to color themselves variably, the traitor's colors are of a different kind. Renniger insists that "the ougly sicknesse of treasons though it be rooted in the marrowes and bones, yet it sheweth it selfe in their very face and foreheads."⁷⁰ Renniger is confident that the body betrays the mind in a way that Redcrosse, Stubbs, Hamlet, and others we have seen thus far would argue against. There is, though, an important difference between the colors that Renniger perceives and the others we have encountered. The examples of color I have drawn on until now are muted by our perspective. We know, for instance, that Allen had treasonous intentions towards Elizabeth because we have information that was not widely available at the time. We know that Duessa only meant ill because we are afforded information unknown to Spenser's characters. We see that Hamlet's mourning is sincere because he soliloquizes. We have yet to experience color's effects in earnest. I conclude this chapter by putting us in the midst of colors that are not tempered by our privileged position. Mary Queen of Scots is a prime example not only of how early modern discourse utilized color to represent intentions, but that once colors are in play there is no reasonable way of setting them aside. Once we are talking about the color of intentions, our responses can only be colored by sympathetic responses. This is as true for us as it was for early modern authors and Elizabeth I who tried to come to terms with Mary's questionable intentions.

Cathy Shrank tells us that debates about Mary "centered on the extent to which a sovereign could be held legally accountable for their alleged misdeeds or whether their positions rendered them inviolable" or, as the question is posed in the *Defence of an honorable sentence and execution of the*

⁶⁹ Michael Renniger, *A Treatise containing two parts* (London: Thomas Dawson, 1587), Q3r.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Queene of Scots, whether sovereigns “can doe as they list without controlement, under colour of their kingly prerogative.”⁷¹ Within this legal debate arose another, namely, whether Mary’s alleged intentions to commit treason counted as treason *per se*. Before one can ask whether Mary could be held legally accountable for her actions, one needs an account of her intentions. If “in al criminal offences of the highest degree, the *affect* is punished, although no effect follow,” then judging Mary comes down to judging her affect, the intentions that guided her actions whether or not those actions came to fruition.⁷² As John D. Staines notes of Buchanan’s treatment of Mary, the “search for truth becomes an investigation into intention” and, as we will see, this “investigation into intention” runs into irresolvable trouble.⁷³ The search for truth by way of an investigation into intention is as fraught now as it was then. The quality of Mary Queen of Scots’ intentions, whether they were colored or not, is not available to our eyes. It is a live problem. The problem is not only that the truth of intentions is necessarily indeterminate (to others or themselves), but rather that the indeterminacy of intentions is rarely taken as indeterminacy. It is not that the intentions of others are always “open to interpretation” and thus cause trouble for judgment, but rather that intentions seem always to be beyond or beneath interpretation. Like colors, they rarely rise to the level of conscious scrutiny, but when they do we are left with a decision between possibilities premised on our perspectival and perceptual view.⁷⁴ We might weigh possibilities, consider what probable things

⁷¹ Cathy Shrank, “‘This fatall Medea,’ ‘this Clytemnestra’: Reading and the Detection of Mary Queen of Scots,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73.3 (2010): 524; Anon., *A defence of an honorable sentence and execution of the Queene of Scots* (London: John Windet, 1587), E4v.

⁷² Anon., *Honourable Sentence*, H3r-v.

⁷³ John D. Staines, *The Tragic Histories of Mary Queen of Scots, 1560-1690* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 39. Indeed, the problem of sussing out what Mary did, what motivated her to do it, and what she intended by so doing persists to such an extent that John Guy, in his 2004 biography of the Queen of Scots, must make it explicit that he aims “to get to the truth about [Mary], or as close to the truth as possible” and portray her “as a whole woman whose choices added up and whose decisions made sense.” I confess that I do not know what it means to get “close to the truth” about a person, but that Guy feels compelled to make a statement of this kind speaks volumes about Mary’s chronic opacity.

⁷⁴ Anscombe makes a similar claim when she argues that accounting for intentions is only ever a *post hoc* act predicated on a real or imagined interlocutor. The suggestion is that intentions as such do not exist prior to an action, but rather are synthetic and contingently cobbled together after the fact. In the absence of a social world where one is responsible

lie within or behind some apparent color, but this act of deliberation will always-already be colored by perception. We perceive things to be a certain way at the outset and this initial impression is as hard to shake as it is to account for. As Descartes says,

“[...] it is a very certain truth that, whenever we are unable to identify the most true opinions, we should follow the most probable, and even when we do not notice any more probability in one than in another, we should still choose some of them and think about them subsequently no longer as doubtful, in so far as they are relevant to our practical life, but as very certain and very true, because the reason that made us choose them as such.”⁷⁵

In instances of uncertainty or undecidability, we skip over doubt for the sake of what is relevant to “our practical life.” I want to suggest that sympathy is what motivates us to take for “very true” what is not even necessarily probable and what, subsequently, obscures the fact that we are merely taking something *as* true rather than holding onto something that *is* true. There is no way of getting clear of this problem, but we can at least get a clearer view of it.

Mary Queen of Scots may not have had the “hellish science” Duessa had to create a mist to “disfigure” people and turn them into trees, but she was said to be endowed with the ability to obscure vision by way of mist.⁷⁶ In Harrison’s *Great English Chronology*, we are told that Mary’s “sorcery (wherein it is supposed she was not unskilfull) [was such] that from her embarking to come into Scotland [from France] into her arrivall there was soche a mist sene upon the sea about her gallies, that divers english shipps then scattered on the narrow seas had no sight of her company.”⁷⁷ Stories like these show what Elizabeth Mazzola calls the “almost phantasmagoric shape” of Mary Stuart in the early modern imagination, but Mary’s purported ability to conceal herself and, as

for one’s behavior and intentions hold some kind of explanatory value, there is no such thing as intentions. I might be overstating her point here. See G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963).

⁷⁵ René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Related Writings*, translated by Desmond M. Clarke, 20.

⁷⁶ Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, 1.2.8.

⁷⁷ BL MS add. 70984 fol. 251r.

Spenser might put it, her “proper hew” was far less widely reported than other, more subtly, colored acts.⁷⁸ She was relentlessly scrutinized by the public despite the fact that she was, as Rosalind Smith says, “peculiarly confined to the private sphere.”⁷⁹ Mary’s colors not only play a central role in how she was represented, but also determined how she was treated in captivity for almost twenty years. In a letter to Mary’s jailer in 1585, Walsingham lays out instructions to follow if Mary is to be allowed to enter public spaces. He says that

You shall order that she shall not, in taking the air, pass through any towns, nor suffer the people to be in the way where she shall pass, appointing some always to go before to make them to withdraw themselves, for that heretofore, under colour of giving alms and other extraordinary courses used by her, she hath won the hearts of people [...]

Buchanan’s *Ane Detectioun* no doubt contributed to this perception of Mary’s actions as inherently colorful. His book is almost singularly focused on Mary’s malicious intentions over and above her malicious actions or character. He begins with a description of her “first inconstancie” shortly after her marriage to Darnley.⁸¹ We are told that after her wedding “her lightnes” in the proceedings appeared to her as “very hedlang and rash” thus there “sodaynly followed either inwart repentance, or at least outward tokens of change of her affection without any causes appearing.”⁸² Mary’s behavior is indicted on two fronts. She is explicitly called out for her disposition when entering the marriage and implicitly critiqued for her causeless and ambiguous change of affect. Both her intentions and their indecipherability paradoxically testify against her. Her marriage to Darnley is not condemned, but both her desire and distaste for it are. After Darnley’s death, colors proliferate.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Mazzola, *Women’s Wealth and Women’s Writing in Early Modern England: ‘Little Legacies’ and the Materials of Motherhood* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 54.

⁷⁹ Rosalind Smith, “Reading Mary Stuart’s Casket Sonnets: Reception, Authorship, and Early Modern Women’s Writing,” *Parergon* 29.2 (2012): 171.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Patrick Collinson, *The English Captivity of Mary Queen of Scots* (Sheffield History Pamphlets, 1987), 55.

⁸¹ George Buchanan, *Ane Detectioun of the Duinges of Marie Quene of Scottes*, translated by Thomas Wilson[?] (London: John Day, 1571), A2v.

⁸² *Ibid.*

Mary is able to “find a convenient colour to send for her brother: but the trew cause of hyr sending for hym was, that sche had a desire to throw the suspicioun [...] upon hym, and upon the Erle Moreton [...]”⁸³ Bothwell’s rape of Mary and their subsequent marriage is, Buchanan says, merely performed so that “the wrong of ravishment might be defaced with honest colour of marriage.”⁸⁴ Buchanan imports duplicity into otherwise common and readily comprehensible actions. Events that might not even merit remarking upon take on a sinister cast and doubts are sewn into the narrative. Buchanan aims to set the record straight by highlighting Mary’s color, but his account begs the question of how the record ever got so skewed. If Mary’s every act was colored, how is it that so many colors escaped the notice of so many?

Early in her marriage to Darnley, Buchanan claims, her “practises were secrit, sa as not onely commoun pepill, but alswa sic as were right familiar and present at the doing of many matters could not understand throughly, what thing the Quene than cheefly intended.”⁸⁵ Even those who were both literally and figuratively close to Mary could not figure out her intentions. Long before the Scottish Queen has performed an act that warrants scrutiny or indicates treasonous aims, the relationship between Mary’s intentions and her acts is problematic. The social space that Mary occupies is riven with uncertainty. Buchanan dilates further on the social problem caused by obscure intentions when he explains that

The commoun pepill, nat certainly knawing whether she laughed or lamented [at the death of Darnley], were divided into sondry imaginations, sith it was perilous dealing with the disguising of the court, either in knawing it to seme to mock it, or in nat cunnyngly dissemblyng to seme to knaw it.⁸⁶

⁸³ Buchanan, *Ane Detectioun*, D1v.

⁸⁴ Buchanan, *Ane Detectioun*, F2v.

⁸⁵ Buchanan, *Ane Detectioun*, A2v-A3r.

⁸⁶ Buchanan, *Ane Detectioun*, D4r-v.

This is perhaps the richest example of the semantic and perceptual opacity of colors that we have seen thus far. What exactly the people saw or how we are to understand the choice they faced is inordinately hard to comprehend. Buchanan places us in a crisis where people imagine possible states of affairs and possible reactions in kind, but cannot quite see their way through to any response without risk. Ought one show knowledge of seeming? Ought one seem not to know? The problem is not that Mary merely seems one way and is another, but that outside eyes cannot discern whether Mary is or is not seeming at all. Her colors are only minimally scrutable. No definite view of what *is* the case is available, thus people must rely only on “sondry imaginations” of what *might be* the case. There is the possibility of color, but one cannot respond to this possibility with merely possible actions. “[C]ommoun pepill” are led in circles by the opacity of the Queen’s intentions, but these cognitive circles must, somehow, “deal” with the “disguising of the court” and, in doing so, court “peril.” The problem of Mary’s possible color is in large part created discursively by tracts like Buchanan’s, but it is not abated by Mary’s defenders. Defenses of Mary do not drop the focus on color, but merely shift it onto others.

In his *Table Gathered*, John Leslie outlines his case for Mary in his dedicatory epistle to Elizabeth. The Queen of Scots is not a problem, but rather

two traitorous Counsaillors: who to worke more subtilly their mischevous intentions, and to kepe you from espying their terrible treasons, have misleaden you by a false show of other treasons, wich were never intended, and abused you under title of dutie, pretence of service, and colour of securitie to hold them unsuspected.⁸⁷

The concern is not whether there are treasons or not, but whether certain treasons are false and “never intended.” Leslie explains that conspirators intend to make James VI the King of England “though not to raigne for any long time, but only that under that colour, the Crowne may in the eyes

⁸⁷ John Leslie, *A Table Gathered Out of a booke named A treatise of treasons against Q. Elizabeth* (Antwerp: J. Fowler, 1572), *v-*2r.

and judgements of the world, descend more colourably upon that other childe the issue of Suff[olk].”⁸⁸ Suspect as we may be of Leslie’s theory, it does show the remarkable influence colors are perceived to have. The colors surrounding Mary bleed into the fabric of the world at large and occasion events. Color must be quelled, revealed for what it is, and the plain facts must be established. There is no procedure to follow for this task. Recall Hamlet’s difficulty proving that his colors were more than superficial displays. Wyatt’s lament that colors would always obscure his inward state. The only way of nullifying color once it has been attributed is to shift its source. If one cannot dispel it, one can at least displace it. Intentions, as we have seen, might seem colored as result of the perceiver and not the perceived.

Under the pseudonym of Morgan Philippes, Leslie is quick to highlight and reiterate the accusations levelled against the Queen of Scots in his *Concerning the Defence*. Rosalind Smith notes “the same acts and evidence recruited by Buchanan to her condemnation become for Leslie a marker of her feminine virtue, inscribed as a kind of weakness or openness to manipulation,” but a crucial dimension of Leslie’s rebuttal of Buchanan is an attack on his perspective.⁸⁹ It is just as much a matter of recasting Mary’s actions as it is of highlighting her accuser’s intentions. Mary’s accusers, he says, “measure these most commendable doings of the very vertuous and well-meaning Queene, by their owne depe and dubble dissembling craftie nature.”⁹⁰ Their perception is colored and consequently prejudiced. These accusers, Leslie says, “say: that al this curtesy, favour, love, and amitie [shown towards Darnley] was but a set matter on her part and coularable shew, and a dissembled drift and feined pretence by her colorably conveied.”⁹¹ Leslie does not intend to prove

⁸⁸ Leslie, *Table Gathered*, A3v.

⁸⁹ Smith, “Reading Mary Stuart’s Casket Sonnets,” 157.

⁹⁰ John Leslie, *A Treatis Concerning the Defence of the Honour of the Right High, Mightie and Noble Princesse, Marie Queene of Scotland* (Louvain: J. Fowler, 1571), B1r.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

that her love and courtesy were in fact love and courtesy nor does he argue that it is impossible that they might have been colored shows, but rather implies that the accusations are *prima facie* without merit or warrant.⁹² Both Mary's defenders and accusers agree that she performed "loving" and "courteous" actions towards Darnley. What is at stake is whether those acts merely appeared that way or actually were that way, but on Leslie's account the only reason to doubt the intentions of others is if your intentions are themselves dubious. These accusers, he says, "wel perceave and fully understand, that they altogether are unable, to beare it out and mainteine by reason, justice or law these their outrageous and seditious proceedings. And therefore they set upon them the best colour and countenance they can."⁹³ Leslie's argument is effective, but circular. If to suggest that people act under various colors is a sure sign that one's own intentions are somehow colored, then Leslie is as guilty as those he accuses. Richard Verstegan's *A Declaration of the True Causes* runs up against the same problem. The crisis in England is merely a "pretended one" and his tract will help "the indifferent reader" to "manifestly perceave" that this is so.⁹⁴ Cecil is, for Verstegan, the true traitor who "[t]o give more colour unto a more cruell persecution, the very author of all present and imaginarie feares, to drawe mennes consideration from greater calamities and miseries."⁹⁵ Cecil is a man whose "unjust accusing of innocent men of treason" aims to "colour his owne exceeding treasons."⁹⁶ Traitorous intentions can be obfuscated by accusing others of having traitorous intentions. Is this not precisely what Verstegan is doing?

⁹² He is, as it were, making Moore's anti-skeptical argument *avant la lettre*. Just as Moore could say "this is a hand" and come to the conclusion that external objects exist beyond doubt, so too does Leslie say that "this is an act of love" and come to the conclusion that sincere or uncolored actions took place beyond doubt.

⁹³ Leslie, *A Treatise Concerning the Defence*, C2v.

⁹⁴ Richard Verstegan, *A Declaration of the True Causes of the Great Troubles* (1592), np. This claim is part of the tract's full title.

⁹⁵ Verstegan, *A Declaration*, 42.

⁹⁶ Verstegan, *A Declaration*, 66.

Apologies for and attacks on Mary rely on describing the misperceptions of intentions, but how a reader is to assess the veracity of the claims is tricky. Writers on both sides of the debate intend to create sympathy in Hume's sense, making readers "sensible of pains and pleasures, which neither belong to [them]selves, nor at present instant have any real existence."⁹⁷ Using color (i.e. coloring one's true intentions and/or attributing color to the intentions of others) has the aim of managing sympathies by shifting perspectives, but sympathy is not easily managed nor are perspectives easily shifted. In his supplement to Buchanan's book, *The Copie of a Letter*, Cecil speaks directly to this fact. "Some of [Buchanan's readers]," he says, "whyle they lyke good sincere men forsooth, would fayne seeme very indifferent judges, say they will credit nothyn till they heare both parties [...] Some other more open fellowes, say flatly that all is false, the booke hath no credit, the aucthour is unknowne, obscure, the matter counterfaite, and all is nothyng."⁹⁸ The difference between these readers lies in whether they "would fayne seeme" neutral towards it or present themselves as "open[ly]" against it. Arguments for the adoption of a dispassionate or disinterested critical perspective are naught but the act of hiding subjective prejudice under the color of objectivity. For Cecil, once readers have been exposed to Mary's colors by way of Buchanan's book there are only two possible standpoints: 1) Mary's colors are truly brought out by Buchanan and one inclines against her or 2) Buchanan's depiction is itself colored and one inclines against him. Readers have a sympathetic response to both the person represented in the text and the person writing it.

Hume suggests that the most salient feature of reading lies in how one disposes or comports oneself towards a text *as* truth or *as* fiction. This perspective determines one's conception of the

⁹⁷ Hume, *A Treatise*, 274.

⁹⁸ Buchanan, *The Copie of a Letter* (London: John Day, 1572), A2v.

matter represented.⁹⁹ Truth, Hume says, “has a more lively conception” and the reader consequently “enters deeper into the persons: represents to [themselves] their actions, and characters, and friendships, and enmities: [The reader] even goes so far as to form a notion of their features, and air, and person.”¹⁰⁰ The fiction reader who “gives no credit to the testimony of the author, has a more faint and languid conception of all these particulars.”¹⁰¹ There is, however, no categorical distinction between fact and fiction in the sixteenth-century, thus all reading is reading *as* fact and fiction. The experience of reading then is an admixture of languid and lively conceptions predicated on the ongoing, dynamic relationship one has with the text. One’s sympathies are informed by both word and world, characters represented and the character of the writer. The reader sits before a text just like those who sat around the table listening to colored talebearing in Perkins. Some are overtaken by it and others disregard it depending on how they perceive both the tale-teller and their tale. How one perceives Mary and associated matters is built out of these texts, but how one perceives these texts is built on the basis of how one perceives Mary and associated matters.

The only thing proven by all of these reports is that the intentions of authors, readers, and the figures represented in discourse contribute to the reception of a text and the situation represented. The discourse surrounding Mary Queen of Scots demonstrates that typical evidentiary procedures falter when confronted with intentions. Danila Sokolov notes that the voice of a monarch “is never entirely his or her own; rather it is a product of negotiation, between representational and interpretive forces,” but it is more than merely a monarch’s voice that was

⁹⁹ Hume, *A Treatise*, 70. Cf. Rita Felski’s account of suspicion as “an orientation in the phenomenological sense, a constellation of attitudes and beliefs that expresses itself in a particular manner of approaching one’s object” and such an attitude, she notes, “colors the texts, endows them with certain qualities, places them in a given light” in *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 21. I am not certain that Felski is right that attitudes like suspicion can be easily adopted and cast off, but her point that attitudes color the world stands.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

subject to interpretive and representational negotiation.¹⁰² Who people are is a product of how they are perceived by others and a significant component of who they are is what they are seen to intend. If one aims to affect the perceptions of others, then, this means making one's intentions felt somehow. Elizabeth's speeches to parliament, addressing calls for Mary Queen of Scots' execution, are prime examples of having to at once negotiate the perception of one's own intentions and those of others in tandem. Her two speeches each exist in two versions. One corresponds to an oral presentation for parliament that may or may not have been delivered extempore. The other corresponds to a revised version of the oral remarks that were to be printed and published. There are a swath of hermeneutic hurdles to clear when trying to read multiple texts that ostensibly aspire to be one text (cf. *Hamlet*), but I will not engage with those problems here. I want merely to lay before you, side by side, what Elizabeth purportedly said and what she wrote. What she intended by crossing out certain words from the oral text and replacing them with others in the written one is, as with the problem of Mary's intentions, something only dimly available to our eyes, but gives rise all the same to a distinct set of judgments. Elizabeth's speeches are direct results of the necessity of action, but their most pointed effect is circumscribing intentions.

Elizabeth prefaces her remarks on Mary by telling us that her "good experience and triall of this ~~life~~, world" have taught her that the world is otherwise than it appears. Sometimes "treason is trust," "great benefitts little regarded," and "gratefulness, ~~contrary~~ courses of purpose to crosse."¹⁰³ Elizabeth knows seems, understands dissembling, and recognizes the ubiquity of misrecognition. Her "former remembraunces, present feeling, and future expectacion of evill" have "moved her" to

¹⁰² Danila Sokolov, "'Nat being (to my displeasure) your wife as she': The Politics and Poetics of Sovereign Marriage in the Casket Sonnets," *Modern Philology* 112.3 (2015): 461.

¹⁰³ Elizabeth I, "Version 2: Queen Elizabeth's First Reply to the Parliamentary Petitions Urging the Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, November 12, 1586" in *Elizabeth I: Autograph Compositions and Foreign Language Originals*, edited by Janel Mueller and Leah S. Marcus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 70.

think and act the way she now does.¹⁰⁴ It is on the basis of how past, present, and future circumstances - recall Hume's definition of sympathy - influence her "lively notion" of Mary that we need to understand her speeches. Elizabeth finds that "~~apparentlie~~ my life hath bin ~~most~~ ful dangerouslie sought" even though she is "~~thereof~~ so cleare from malice." The danger is no longer merely apparent. It becomes "ful" on the page. Elizabeth gives an account of what malice is before turning to those who might bear it towards her. Malice is, she says,

"a propertie to make menne gladde, ~~and rejoycefull~~ at the falls and faultes of their ~~enemies~~ Foes and make them seeme to do ~~things~~ for other cawses, when as with rancor is the ground ~~they are stirred to pursue their intention, as I protest it is to mee, and hate bene a thing most greivous, to thinke yet protest it is and hath bene my grevous thoght~~ that one note different in sex, of like estate and my nearre kinne, shold be ~~so voide of grace, or false in faith as now to seeke my death by whome so long her life hath bene preserved, with th'Intollerable perill of my own~~ fallen into so great a Crime."¹⁰⁵

Malice is something that "make[s]" people feel a certain way about their foes. It "make[s]" them seeme" to perform actions for "other cawses." Malice is an intentional state, a protestation, and a crime into which one falls. For this reason, Elizabeth deliberately clears herself of this "propertie." She declares that she

"had so litle purpose to pursue her with any coloure of malice that, as is not unkownen to some of my Lords here (for now I will play the blabb) I secretlie wrote her a lettre upon the discoverie of her sondry treasons, that if she ~~would repent her thoroughlie of her evill course,~~ would confesse it them and privatlie acknowledge ~~it them~~ by her lettres unto ~~mee,~~ my selfe shee never should nede be called for ~~it them~~ into so publike a question. Neither did I it of ~~any~~ minde to circumvent her, for then I knew as much as shee cold confesse, and so did I write."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth I, "First Reply," 70.

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth I, "First Reply," 68-9.

¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth I, "First Reply," 69. Quotations following this are all from p. 69 until noted otherwise.

Elizabeth claims she would not have disclosed Mary's treasons had they been confessed. She reports that she was without the color of malice, but in doing so suggests that she would happily have colored her knowledge of Mary's deeds had a confession been forthcoming. Elizabeth reveals a secret and promises that she can keep secrets at once. What Elizabeth seems to desire in this secret letter is neither information nor contrition, but a kind of acknowledgement that would be private and personal. Elizabeth goes on to note her surprise that, even under such conditions, Mary would not acknowledge treasonous intent even as "the matter is made but to apparant." She tells us she continued to believe Mary "trulie ~~were~~ wold repentant (as perhapps she wolde easely appeare in ~~outerward~~ sheowe to do)."

Elizabeth renders repentance an action, but these are actions that a woman might play. Elizabeth "play[ing] the blabb" suggests Mary might play the penitent. That within which passeth show keeps matters out of "publike question," but the "trappings and suits" of repentance are far from trivial.

After clearing herself of color and imputing color to Mary, Elizabeth insists that her readers "beleeve" her because, she says, "~~although~~ I may have many vices, I hope I have not accustomed my tongue to be an Instrument of untruthes." Her tongue is not an instrument of untruths, nor is it an instrument of truth in this speech. In place of truths or untruths, Elizabeth tells imagined and counterfactual tales about her and Mary. Elizabeth imagines that if she and Mary "were but as two milke maides, with pailles ~~under~~ upon oure armes," then she would "willinglie pardon" her actions. She claims that if "there were no more dependency upon us, ~~and~~ but myne owne life were onlie in ~~perill~~, danger and not the whole estate of youre religion and well doings," then Elizabeth could "remitt ~~her~~ this offence." Elizabeth even goes so far as to imagine a possible scenario in which her death might result in "this Realme" attaining "a ever prosperouse and flourishing estate." If this were the case, she says she would "gladlie give [her] life to th'end." The entire first half of this answer fabricates scenarios in which both Elizabeth and Mary could be answerless. These tales inspire

differing views of both Elizabeth and Mary. Mazzola suggests that Elizabeth “continually renders the conflict between her and Mary a personal matter” while Allison Heisch suggests that Elizabeth is committed to the “depersonalization” of Mary.¹⁰⁷ It is telling that these claims are diametrically opposed, but equally supported by the text. Elizabeth speaks of personal and intimate interactions with an imagined version of Mary while Mary herself is positioned impersonally at a distance. Personal pronouns are stripped away, thus Mary is grammatically depersonalized. Elizabeth essentially performs the opposite rhetorical move that we saw Spenser perform in Mercilla’s court. Numerous imagined tales are told, thus Mary’s relationship to Elizabeth is rendered personal or intimate in character. Mary’s influence on Elizabeth supplants Mary herself. We see a lively notion of these two monarchs divorced from any actual events. As with her secret letter, Elizabeth is appealing to what is “beyond what happened at the time,” events that have not taken place and will not take place. In order to frame our view of events, Elizabeth makes her sympathies explicit.

The speech continues to lay out possible courses of action, things Elizabeth might have done or could still do, but takes a brief pause from actions and intentions to contextualize all these imagined and possible states of affairs. “[W]ee Princes, I tell you are set on stages, in the sight and view, of all the worlde duly observed, th’eyes of many behold our actions, a spott is sone spied in our garments, a blemish quickly noted in our doinges. It behoveth us therefore to be carefull that our proceedings be Just and honorable.”¹⁰⁸ Spots and blemishes, disfiguring and distracting colors, are to be avoided. These colors are noted and spied quickly by audiences. Elizabeth may mean to speak only for herself, but “wee Princes” also implicates Mary. Their lives are both “set on stages.” Their colors are equally judged by the world. It is tempting to call this merely a moment of self-

¹⁰⁷ Elizabeth Mazzola, “The Renaissance Englishwoman in Code: ‘Blabbs’ and Cryptographers at Elizabeth I’s Court,” *Critical Survey* 22.3 (2010): 15; Allison Heisch, “Arguments for an Execution: Queen Elizabeth’s ‘White Paper’ and Lord Burghley’s ‘Blue Pencil,’ *Albion* 24.4 (1992): 601.

¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth, “First Reply,” 71.

fashioning or a reflexive recognition of the social construction of identity, but Elizabeth's language highlights the profoundly contingent and almost trivial accidents that thwart successful performances. Spots and blemishes are not under the control of an agent even if they are "carefull." Elizabeth's stage metaphor, moreover, is not localized on a self or subject, but rather a group - Princes - who are subject to circumstances and expectations beyond their control. The scrutiny of an audience is not predictable. It seizes on actions, appearances, intentions, contexts, and anything else that catches its eye. It is not that "all the world's a stage," but rather that all people are spectators.

Elizabeth's second speech amounts, in effect, to a soliloquy. It only serves to "acquaint you with [her] intentz."¹⁰⁹ She wants to show others her "willing minde and greate desire." She desires to make explicit how she tried to find "other means" of resolving "the accident." Her "intentz" were, she says, impartial and cautious as she listened to the "tale[s]" told to her about Mary.¹¹⁰ She explains that "we princes cannot heare ~~by~~ all causes ourselves" and thus relied on the tales told by others. She "boldly affirme[s]" that her "verdict went ~~ever~~ with the truth of [her] knowledg."¹¹¹ This bold affirmation is of *a* truth predicated on *her* knowledge built on the basis of tales. This can be seen as strategic posturing or genuine expression with equal ease. Reading it as the former seems cynical, but reading it as the latter seems naïve. In the first speech, she tells tales. In the second, she tells us how she listened to tales told by others.

Narrating her deliberations leads eventually to her "aunswere ~~without aunswe~~ ansWerles."¹¹² This iconic paradox does not, however, stand unmodified by further comment. Elisa

¹⁰⁹ Elizabeth I, "Version 2: Queen Elizabeth's Second Reply to the Parliamentary Petitions Urging the Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, November 24, 1586" in *Elizabeth I: Autograph Compositions*, 75.

¹¹⁰ Elizabeth I, "Second Reply," 76.

¹¹¹ Elizabeth I, "Second Reply," 76-7. The emendations in this section are all in Cecil's hand.

¹¹² Elizabeth I, "Second Reply," 77.

Oh notes that both “auditors and [Elizabeth] herself latched onto the memorable paradox” of her answer answerless “as something quintessentially expressive of her complex and conflicted intent.”¹¹³ Elizabeth’s expression of conflicted intentions is, however, tempered by ambiguous instructions for interpreting her paradoxical locution. Elizabeth, in the conclusion of the speech, comes back to her opening gesture of externalizing her reasoning through disjunctions. “[I]f I shold say it shold not be done, (by my faith) were more then I ment, to tel you. If I shold say it shall be done, it were more then I cold now assure or were convenient here to be declared.”¹¹⁴ She “protest[s]” that there has never been a prince “more willing to do youe good then I in my mynd, though I may fayle in the means.”¹¹⁵ Elizabeth, here, is not refusing to answer, as Oh has it, but refusing to answer explicitly. She delineates how her answerless answer is meant to be taken. She does not mean to say it should not be done. She cannot say it should be done in the present setting. She asks them to excuse her “doubtfullnes” and “take in good part” her answer answerless. Readers and listeners are intended to look to the “intentz” lying behind the careful wording of the speech. She is asking all concerned to read beyond or between the lines.

I shold say, I wold not doe what youe request, it might peradventure be more then I thought, and to say I wold do it, might perhaps breed perill of that youe labor to preserve; being more then in your owne wisdoms and discretions wold seeme convenient, circumstances of place and time being duely considered.¹¹⁶

To my eye, this set of potential instructions or possible outcomes colors the field of view, that is, Elizabeth is at no point talking about anything actual. The semantic situation is utterly opaque, but so too is our ability to imagine how it is she spoke those words, how parliament heard them, or how the English people eventually read them. Her locution is indecipherable, but the necessity of action,

¹¹³ Elisa Oh, “The Silences of Elizabeth I and Shakespeare’s Isabella,” *English Literary Renaissance* 45.3 (2015): 367.

¹¹⁴ Elizabeth I, “Second Reply,” 77.

¹¹⁵ Elizabeth I, “Second Reply,” 77.

¹¹⁶ Elizabeth I, “Second Reply,” 78.

to borrow Descartes' phrase, did not allow that indecipherability to stand. Elizabeth's speeches are performative, of course, but the aims of these performances are hard to discern. While Mary's behavior is difficult to account for because it largely comes down to us through secondhand accounts, Elizabeth's behavior is no less difficult to discern despite the fact that we have firsthand accounts of all kinds. Our view of this moment in history is only partially composed by the facts of the matter. The rest of the picture is filled out by our sympathies.

Mary was executed on February 8th, 1587. Who signed her death warrant and under what circumstances it reached Fotheringay are not available to us. The original document does not survive nor are accounts of the matter clear. For all the circumstantial evidence and rumor surrounding these two monarchs, one of the few indisputable facts available is that Elizabeth and Mary never met face to face. Their relationship, like ours to them, was navigated discursively. Whatever they gleaned about each other's interior was discerned from words on the page or the words of others.

In the aftermath of Mary's execution, colors remain a primary concern. Elizabeth, in a letter to James VI, promises to "never dissemble [her] Actions, but make them appear in the true and proper colours."¹¹⁷ Or, as the "minute" of this letter puts it, she will always "cause them show even as [she] meant them."¹¹⁸ Yet to eyes sympathetic to Mary, Elizabeth's actions before and after the execution amounted to nothing but the "*couleur de justice*" used "*pour voiler sa cruauté*."¹¹⁹ Linda Woodbridge notes that it is a "tricky business" to accurately judge intentions because both "'patent sincerity' and 'righteous indignation' can themselves be a sophisticated pose."¹²⁰ This "tricky

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Staines. *Tragic Histories*, 304.

¹¹⁸ Elizabeth I, "Elizabeth to James, February 14, 1587" in *Collected Works*, 296.

¹¹⁹ Adam Blackwood, *Martyre de la Royne d'Escosse* (Edimbourg: Jean Nafeild, 1587), 463. STC notes that the imprint is false and that the book was published in Paris.

¹²⁰ Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womanhood, 1540-1620* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 65.

business” has no simple solution. As Karen Jones warns, “[d]istrust puts in place a suspicious cognitive set that colors how we will interpret the words of another.”¹²¹ Likewise, trust puts in place a credulous cognitive set that colors things in kind. Evaluating intentions means tarrying with what Keith Lehrer refers to as “a circle of evaluation from which there is no exit.”¹²² Judging others or their acts to be sincere or suspect, plain or colored, depends on whether our own perceptions and judgments are sincere or suspect, warrant trust or distrust. As Reid notes,

“the anatomist of the mind cannot have the same advantage [as the anatomist of the body]. It is his own mind only that he can examine, with any degree of accuracy and distinctness. This is the only subject he can look into. He may from outward signs, collect the operations of other minds; but these signs are for the most part ambiguous, and must be interpreted by what he perceives in himself.”¹²³

Elizabeth I relies on the same anatomical analogy as Reid when she declares in an August 2, 1556 letter that

“among earthly things I chiefly wish this one: that there were as good surgeons for making anatomies of hearts that might show my thoughts to your majesty as there are expert physicians of the bodies, able to express the inward griefs of their maladies to their patient. For then I doubt not but know well that whatsoever others should suggest by malice, yet your majesty should be sure by knowledge, so that the more such misty clouds obfuscates the clear light of my truth, the more my tried thoughts should glisten to the dimming of their hidden malice.”¹²⁴

But, she concedes, such surgeons are hardly on the horizon and thus “I must crave that my deeds may supply that my thoughts cannot declare.”¹²⁵

¹²¹ Karen Jones, “The Politics of Credibility” in *A Mind of One’s Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, Second Edition, edited by Louise M. Antony and Charlotte E. Witt (New York: Routledge, 2018), 159.

¹²² Keith Lehrer, “Testimony and Trustworthiness” in *The Epistemology of Testimony*, edited by Jennifer Lackey and Ernest Sosa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 145. Lehrer’s solution to the vicious circle entails making it virtuous (i.e. the constant evaluation of ourselves and others as knowers yields something like epistemic ground by virtue of the procedural and repeated nature of evaluation).

¹²³ Reid, *Inquiry*, 98.

¹²⁴ Elizabeth I, “Princess Elizabeth to Queen Mary, August 2, 1556” in *Collected Works*, 44.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

What the colors of intention bring to the fore is that our understanding of others and the situations in which they and we are involved are motivated by perceptual, sympathetic responses that are dimly related to any purportedly objective state of affairs. Who Mary was, how Hamlet appears to us, or, ultimately, how we stand in relation to others is a mutable, dynamic matter that is captured by this early modern idiom. It subtly intimates that judgement is a personal act in the fullest sense of the word. It arises from how we see the world and how we see the world arises from the world itself. This feedback loop is vicious, but not deleterious. The colors of intention mark a moment in early modern discourse that registers the intersubjective and perceptual character of judgment that would, early in the 17th century, be attacked by Bacon and others with designs on changing epistemic standards. The rise of objectivity and empirical verifiability in early modern systems of knowledge can, then, be read as an attempt to cancel out the colors that determine what the world is and how we stand in relation to it. “Sympathy translates self-reference into sociability by connecting our minds - or more accurately, our feelings and inner lives - with those of others,” Nancy Hirschman explains, “And of course, in the process it reveals our feelings and inner lives, including our ‘imaginings’ and ‘beliefs,’ to be not inferior to knowledge, but *part* of it.”¹²⁶ This idiom intimates just this sympathetic situation. By taking this idiom seriously I have tried to recapture the complex affective, epistemic, and ethico-political consequences at stake in the discursive attention paid to intentions through color. We may not be able to get at the intentions of others or even our own, but we can acknowledge how these intentions color our understanding.

¹²⁶ Nancy J. Hirschman, “Sympathy, Empathy, and Obligation: A Feminist Rereading” in *Feminist Interpretations of David Hume*, edited by Anne Jaap Jacobson (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 184.

Chapter Three:

Confusion and the Colors of Rhetoric

To wash away old semi-discomfitures.
They re-teach purple and unsullen blue.
To wispy soils go. And uncertain
Half-havings have they clarified to sures.
- Gwendolyn Brooks

To be sure there is justification; but
justification comes to an end.
- Ludwig Wittgenstein

Adonis' sudden and nonsequitous exclamation, "Fie, no more of love! / The sun doth burn my face: I must remove," rarely gives rise to more than passing comment in criticism of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*.¹ Venus, herself, shrugs off his remark and takes it as naught but a "bare excuse," an example of the boy's "unkind" disposition towards her (188, 187). Critics typically read Adonis' fear of sunburn as evidence of his narcissism, thus Adonis' desire for literal shadow rhymes with Narcissus' desire for a figurative one.² The line's significance, however, is not exhausted by these readings. It is possible, too, that Adonis here enunciates something like Hamlet's frustration that he is "too much i' th' sun."³ Given that Adonis is in the midst of being lectured by a maternal figure, the sun/son pun is just as apt.⁴ He has had enough of both the topic of love and Love herself. This interpretation has the benefit of at least attempting to explain why his

¹ William Shakespeare, *The Poems*, Updated Edition, edited by John Roe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 185-6. All quotations of *Venus and Adonis* are taken from this edition. Subsequent quotations will appear parenthetically.

² See William Keach, *Elizabethan Erotic Narratives: Irony and Pathos in the Ovidian Poetry of Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Their Contemporaries* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1977), 68 and Madhavi Menon, "Spurning Teleology in *Venus and Adonis*," *GLQ* 11.4 (2005): 503 for examples of reading Adonis' disposition towards the sun as narcissism. Heather Dubrow resists pathologizing Adonis' worry, but nonetheless takes it as an instance of his "callowness" in *Captive Victors: Shakespeare's Narrative Poems and Sonnets* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1987), 43.

³ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.2.67 in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, Second Edition, edited by Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). All subsequent quotations of Shakespeare's works, other than *Venus and Adonis*, are from this edition.

⁴ See Karen Newman, "Myrrha's Revenge: Ovid and Shakespeare's Reluctant Adonis" in *Essaying Shakespeare* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 6 and Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 67 for discussions of the maternal dimension of Venus' characterization.

exasperation with love is juxtaposed with some anxiety about sunburn. A more convincing reading might involve bringing the passage into contact with the longstanding trope of “sunburn” as a metaphor for rhetoric’s effects on an audience. Shakespeare, here, may be drawing our attention to Venus’ argumentative prowess rather than Adonis’ vanity. Thomas Wilson tells us that just as “he that goeth in the sun shall be sunburnt, although he think not of it” so too they “that will read this or such like books shall in the end be as the books are.”⁵ We can, then, read Adonis’ worry as a sign that Venus’ arguments, her “old text” or “treatise” about love’s pleasures, are exerting a kind of influence that he finds discomfiting (805, 774). Sunburn is a metaphor for persuasion and Adonis’ sensitive skin a metaphor for his impressionable mind. There is also, of course, the possibility that the youthful Adonis is simply tired of standing in the sun which is, in the end, hardly unreasonable, but does make one wonder why it merits inclusion in the text at all. The sense expressed by each of these readings is similar (i.e. Adonis feels overexposed or otherwise vulnerable and seeks to protect himself), but each nonetheless sheds different light on the poem and its characters.

These lines are hardly pivotal to the text as whole, but they generate a superfluity of possible responses all the same. How sunburn strikes us, that is, how it gives rise to certain feelings or thoughts about the event transpiring, how it causes us to consider or reconsider what the text is trying to say, and even how we see or imagine this moment is, I contend, particular to each of us as individual readers. There is nothing in the text (either locally in the particular lines quoted or globally in the poem as a whole) that will precisely limit possible responses. Both whether and how to interpret the line and along what lines the interpretation should proceed is not a question the text itself can answer. Why read sunburn one way rather than the others? How to know if we have read it successfully? What is happening in the text, why it is happening, how we should feel, what we

⁵ Thomas Wilson, *The Art of Rhetoric (1560)*, edited by Peter E. Medine (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1994), 39. See E. Armstrong, *A Ciceronian Sunburn: A Tudor Dialogue on Humanistic Rhetoric and Civic Politics* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006) for a full account of the sunburn trope.

should see and understand by it are, in a rather surprising way, open questions.

Anthony Mortimer highlights a moment, like the sunburn passage, where interpretation is uncertain when Adonis “glides” like “a bright star shooteth from the sky” and Venus is left crestfallen on the ground (815 ff.).

“What response is being sought here - aesthetic satisfaction at the aptness of the simile, vindictive laughter at the goddess’s physical indignity or sympathy for her distress? It is not helpful to say that we should respond with a combination of all three. *Venus and Adonis* is a disturbing poem because it proceeds through juxtaposition rather than blending, leaving the reader to work out his [sic] own eventual amalgamation.”⁶

Mortimer’s conclusion to the problem of response - a reader “work[s] out” their own “eventual amalgamation” despite the fact that plural possible readings inhere in the passage - is question-begging. How exactly does that work take place? On what grounds does one establish an amalgam of divergent responses? Furthermore, why and how is it that *Venus and Adonis* avoids “blending”? How does it force something like a response that is proper to the singular reader? All readings seem viable while none seem altogether correct, stable, or necessary. I contend that Shakespeare’s poem consistently generates, to borrow from Spinoza’s terminology, confused ideas as a direct result of its rhetoric, its use of figurative language.⁷ It inspires “conclusions without premises” in the reader, something like the seemingly causeless adumbration that Mortimer suggests.⁸ These ideas are, more often than not, confused in the sense that they do not follow necessarily from any

⁶ Anthony Mortimer, *Variable Passions: A Reading of Shakespeare’s Venus and Adonis* (New York: AMS Press, 2000), 44.

⁷ Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, edited and translated by Edwin Curley (London: Penguin, 1996), 51. Citations of Spinoza will use the standard abbreviations going forward (e.g. 3p14s for Book 3 Proposition 14 Scholium). The introduction of “confusion” is found in 2p28. A full account of what confusion is and how it works in Spinoza may be desirable here, but for the sake of this essay we need only rely on a rudimentary definition of “confused ideas,” namely, that they fail to achieve adequacy. Steven Nadler’s account of adequacy, taken from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, should be sufficient: “The adequate idea of a thing clearly and distinctly situates its object in all of its causal nexuses and shows not just *that* it is, but *how* and *why* it is. The person who truly knows a thing sees the reasons why the thing was determined to be and could not have been otherwise.” Confusion is, then, any attitude that does not acquire a clear and distinct account of what an agent holds to be the case. I endorse Spinoza’s account of confusion without being convinced of his account of clear and distinct ideas.

⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p28d.

particular problem and do not yield to any full justification. The result of our having to hold confused idea after confused idea as we are subjected to Shakespeare's inordinately dense rhetoric is that, as Spinoza says, "the mind is more liable to passions the more it has inadequate ideas."⁹ What we understand (however imperfectly) and what we feel (however incipiently) about the poem are mutually informative and commingled experiences. Rather than presuming, as Mortimer does, that these confused ideas "eventually" lead to some coherent response, I would like rather to linger on the confusion that results from reading *Venus and Adonis* closely and spend some time with the moments before anything like "adumbration" takes place.¹⁰

If Shakespeare establishes the basis for a kind of deflationary or muted rhetoric in "Sonnet 130" as a result of the fact that the speaker's mistress is *not* a goddess, then speaking of a goddess (and her beloved) opens up different potential avenues for rhetoric. In "Sonnet 130," the speaker's mistress' eyes are "nothing like the sun," whereas Venus herself "upheaveth, / Like the fair sun in his fresh array" (1, 482-3). Note not only that she is rendered a celestial body, but that her femininity is sufficiently labile such that it incorporates the masculine sun's splendor. Adonis' eyes are more glorious still. They are, Venus says, "eyes that taught all other eyes to see" (952). Lucy Gent takes "the relation between hyperbole and reality" to be the central issue in the poem, but it is unclear how either hyperbole or reality factor into the realm of myth.¹¹ Hyperbole presumes that some limit can be discerned and subsequently overthrown. It does not seem altogether likely that

⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3p1c. I am using confused and inadequate ideas as more or less synonymous. For a more detailed account of the complex relationship between confusion and inadequacy see Michael Della Rocca, "The Mind-Relativity of Content" in *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), esp. 58-68.

¹⁰ Let me note here that confusion in the face of the text is far more prevalent in the critical tradition than anything like adumbration. The text is explicitly referred to as "confusing" in Subha Mukherji, "The Disorienting Narrative of *Venus and Adonis*" in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare's Poetry*, edited by Jonathan F. S. Post (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 412. When readerly or critical adumbration is manifest it often seems rather unconvincing or weak. For instance, Hereward T. Price's statement that he has "found the text full of meaning" is, if nothing else, suspect by dint of its very enunciation.

¹¹ Lucy Gent, "*Venus and Adonis*: The Triumph of Rhetoric," *The Modern Language Review* 69.4 (1974): 721.

the beauty of Beauty himself or the love of Love herself is circumscribed in any reasonable sense.¹² Since neither truth nor falsity adhere to myth, we can say that the idea of “false compare” likewise has no place in *Venus and Adonis*. There is, by dint of the subjects represented and the themes taken up, no obligation or expectation to accurately represent some anterior referent. Speaking of Venus and Adonis aligns Shakespeare with a mythical and classical tradition, but it does not commit him to any particular poetic or representational practice. Rhetorical propriety has no bearing in this fantastical encounter between Love and Beauty or, rather, rhetoric’s proper function in *Venus and Adonis* bends to the outsize demands of these figures. The poem’s rhetoric is excessive and uncommon, but so too are the figures it tries to capture.

Within what Francis Meres calls Shakespeare’s “mellifluous & hony-tongued” style, experiences of discordance and difficulty come to the surface when attempting to interpret the text.¹³ As Karen Newman notes, Adonis’ beauty is immediately coded as fundamentally unnatural. It is a kind of beauty that “upsets the cosmological order.”¹⁴ Yet Venus also tells us that “beauty dead, black chaos comes again” (1020). Beauty paradoxically disrupts the cosmos and guarantees against chaos. One’s response to beauty must accommodate its capacity to arrange and derange the world. Our readings must somehow be sensitive to order and disorder simultaneously. This is not, I do not think, a matter of choosing or deliberating. Golding’s translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* tells us that the story of Venus and Adonis, like the others in Book 10, “dooth show / That beauty (will they nill they) aye dooth men in daunger throw.”¹⁵ Responding autonomously to beauty is not

¹² Furthermore, Shakespeare’s descriptions of Venus or Adonis are not only amplificatory or laudatory. He is equally interested in diminishing their stature (e.g. reference to eyes like “lamps” or, as I will discuss later in this chapter, making Venus one of “the world’s poor people.”). There are neither upper nor lower bounds on figuration.

¹³ Francis Meres, *Palladis Tamia* in *The Shakspeare Allusion-Book; a Collection of Allusions to Shakspeare from 1591 to 1700*, edited by John Munro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), 46-8.

¹⁴ Newman, “Myrrha’s Revenge,” 12.

¹⁵ Arthur Golding, *Ovid’s Metamorphoses: The Arthur Golding Translation 1567*, edited by John Frederick Nims (Philadelphia: Paul Dry, 2000), 218-9.

tenable. The danger is that aesthetic experiences disturb our faculties; our ability to reason properly, sense clearly, or feel coherently is troubled. The rhetoric of *Venus and Adonis* (will we nill we) is what throws us into such danger. Shakespeare's beautiful rhetoric leaves both the text and one's response to it confusing.

Early modern rhetors principally took up the same antecedent figures (e.g. Cicero, Quintilian, Ramus) to impose order on how speech and writing were presented, but, as Richard Sherry explains, while the "proper use of speach is to utter the meaning of our mynd with as playne wordes as maye be [...] it so chaunseth [that] som tyme ether of necessitie, or to set out the matter more plai[n]ly we be compelled to speake otherwyse then after common facion."¹⁶ Catherine Nicholson highlights that "from its inception within the rhetorical theory of ancient Greece, eloquence has had as much to do with estrangement as with intimacy and familiarity."¹⁷ As Sherry remarks, rhetorical ornament, the estranging and beautifying part of speech, is "a fyne polyshynge of words and sentences [achieved] by disseveryng them with diverse goodly colours and tropes of chaungings of speach."¹⁸ The most exhaustive account of rhetoric in early modern England, George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie*, distinguishes between "the ordinarie prose, which we use in our daily talke" and verse which is "more eloquent and rhetoricall."¹⁹ The distinction between these two forms of communication, for Puttenham, is that the "more eloquent" verse is "decked and set out with all maner of fresh colours and figures, which maketh it sooner inuegleth the iudgement of man."²⁰ Having more directly, more immediately, seized hold of the reader or listener, verse then

¹⁶ Richard Sherry, *A Treatise of Schemes and Tropes* (1550), edited by Herbert W. Hildebrandt (Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimile Editions, 1961), 13.

¹⁷ Catherine Nicholson, *Uncommon Tongues: Eloquence and Eccentricity in the English Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 3. See also Jenny C. Mann, *Outlaw Rhetoric: Figuring Vernacular Eloquence in Shakespeare's England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012) for an account of the various alterations that classical rhetoric underwent as it was brought into the English vernacular.

¹⁸ Sherry, *A Treatise of Schemes and Tropes*, 39.

¹⁹ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, edited by Gladys Doidge Willcock and Alice Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 8.

²⁰ Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie*, 8.

“carrieth his opinion this way and that, whither so ever the heart by impression of the eare shalbe most affectionately beat and directed.”²¹ There is a chain of effects prompted by the colors of rhetoric that begins with sensation, proceeds through reason, and ends with feeling. The body and mind respond variously to color’s work. Note that no one faculty is prioritized or valued over others and that it is not altogether clear that these different experiences are dissociable from each other.

The capacity for colors to confuse comes down in part to how the sense of a sentence is made extraordinary or unusual. Wilson says, for instance, that when the colors of rhetoric are employed “reason seemeth to be clad in purple” whereas without them it would be “both bare and naked.”²² The meaning of purple will occupy us at length later in this chapter, but suffice it to say for now that “purple” adds sense experience to reason. The colors of rhetoric modify how the sense of a line strikes us. It calls for a response guided by something other than rational thought *sensu stricto*. Johannes Sturmius uses a different analogy to explain how understanding is complicated by colorful rhetoric, but the effects remain the same. “[A]s the eye sight is often glimsed by the beames of the Sunne: so is the sharpenesse of the witte sometimes dulled with the brightnesse of the sentence being amply adourned and beautifully set forth.”²³ Sturmius’ mixed metaphor suggests that our ability to “see” “witte” is obstructed at times by that sentence’s color. It is worth noting that this mixed metaphor highlights that even descriptions of the colors of rhetoric themselves often end up confused and confusing. Dudley Fenner, too, has trouble keeping his figures straight. He describes the colors of rhetoric as “maydenly” in parts and full of a “manly majestie” in others.²⁴

²¹ Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie*, 8.

²² Wilson, *The Art of Rhetoric*, 187.

²³ John Sturmius, *A Rich Storehouse or Treasure for Nobilitye & Gentlemen, which in Latine is called Nobilitas literata* (Lincoln’s Inn: Thomas Browne, 1570), 10. Accessed via Early English Books Online.

²⁴ Dudley Fenner, *The Artes of Logike and Rethorike (1584)* in *Four Tudor Books on Education*, edited by Robert D. Pepper (Gainesville: Scholars’ Facsimiles, 1966), 168, 173.

There is a sense in which the colors of rhetoric are, to borrow from *Venus and Adonis*, “in th[eir] own law forlorn” (251). Defining colors means relying on colors themselves. There is no ground upon which to give a common language account of uncommon language. Robust and purely reasonable explanation inevitably includes something extra that confuses or complicates things. The *explanans* is simultaneously clarified and distorted by the *explanandum*. The crux of the matter is that figuration is at best a compliment to sense (e.g. “as precious stones are set in a ring to commend the gold”) and at worst a distraction (e.g. akin to a woman who wears blush on her forehead).²⁵

The colors of rhetoric depend on knitting semantic and sense content together. Puttenham tells us that “[e]xcesses or defectes or confusion and disorders in the sensible objectes [represented] are deformities and unseemely to the sence.”²⁶ Fenner, in more positive terms, tells us that the colors of rhetoric “beautifie the sence and very meaning of a sentence.”²⁷ The colors of rhetoric effectuate the connection between sensing, feeling, and understanding. This is how, in Wilson’s account, they evade satiety and “quicken with grace the dullness of man’s brain.”²⁸ Abraham Fraunce tells us that the most “florishing” rhetorical colors are those that are “applied to the senses, and among the senses chiefly to the eie, which is the quickest of all the senses.”²⁹ This posited speed of the visual is likewise discussed by Ascham. He tells us that “wyt doth not so sone signifye a thyng by the eye.”³⁰ What happens on the page is, in these accounts, no different from what happens in the world. We are always newly satisfied or dissatisfied, impressed or unimpressed, because our faculties are always differently disposed to the figures on the page. The text works

²⁵ Wilson, *Art of Rhetoric*, 191; Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie*, 138.

²⁶ Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie*, 261.

²⁷ Dudley Fenner, *The Artes of Logike and Rethorike (1584)* in *Four Tudor Books on Education*, edited by Robert D. Pepper (Gainesville: Scholars’ Facsimiles, 1966), 173.

²⁸ Wilson, *Art of Rhetoric*, 205.

²⁹ Abraham Fraunce, *The Aradian Rhetorike (1588)* (Oxford: Luttrell Society Reprints, 1950), 15.

³⁰ Roger Ascham, *Toxophilus (1545)*, edited by Peter E. Medine (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002), 139

dynamically because we are ourselves everchanging. How to discern whether any given turn of phrase is complimentary or distracting, whether the thing is seemly or unseemly, is not delineated by these rhetors. Just as the world opens itself to differing possible responses, so too do the colors of rhetoric. John Rainolds highlights the crucial distinction between “good” uses of color and “bad” ones with recourse to an analogy. There is, he says, a difference between “the luster [*ornamenta*] of God and the luster of money,” but leaves the issue of discerning which is which and deciding between the two unexplored.³¹ The colors of rhetoric add something to the semantic meaning of a phrase, but whether that addition clarifies or obscures the sense of the line, whether it allows us to “see” what is said more quickly or slowly can only be identified on an *ad hoc* basis. For all the attempts to give a general account of rhetoric’s colors, our appreciation of their work ultimately comes down to particular and direct encounters with them, but in these direct encounters we find that our faculties are often at odds with each other and the means by which they interact is opaque.

The colors of rhetoric act not only on the reader, but have effects on the text and the world it describes. Montaigne tells us that “rhetoricians pride themselves on deceiving not our eyes but our judgment, bastardizing and corrupting things in their very essence.”³² *Venus and Adonis* is all diverse color and changings of speech. As William Reynolds, author of the first documented reading of the poem, puts it, Shakespeare’s text is full of “stufte” that “daessles the matter.”³³ *Venus and Adonis* is almost singularly focused on bringing the beautiful, the accidental, and the unexpected before our eyes. Figurative and literal color is an obvious feature of every page of *Venus and Adonis*, yet what or how it means is difficult to account for.

The elaborate rhetoric employed by Shakespeare rarely goes unnoticed and, as we might

³¹ John Rainolds, *John Rainolds’s Oxford Lectures on Aristotle’s Rhetoric*, edited by Lawrence D. Green (Newark: University of Delaware, 1986), 238/239.

³² Michel de Montaigne, “On the Vanity of Words” in *The Complete Essays*, translated by M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2003), 341.

³³ BL MS Lansdowne 99/31 Folio 86 Recto. Available in digital facsimile online via Shakespeare Documented.

expect, reactions to it vary immensely. Getting to the content of the poem itself means that critics must grapple with or gloss over what William Keach refers to as the poem's "extreme artificiality" of style and the "extraordinarily dense artificial order" that it presents to the reader.³⁴ Pauline Kiernan points out that critics often "find themselves feeling uncomfortable with [the poem's] rhetorical excesses."³⁵ Jonathan Bate suggests that the "rhetorical cunning" of the poem is where "the pleasure of the Elizabethan reader" is to be located, but readers at some remove from Elizabethan England, like W. B. C. Watkins, often find Shakespeare's rhetoric rather "disconcerting."³⁶ The pleasures and displeasures of *Venus and Adonis*' rhetoric are not altogether attributable to simple changes in taste across history nor are divisive responses restricted to the terms of enjoyment. Douglas Bush suggests that the stylistic problem of *Venus and Adonis* is that it "seems to waver between cool rhetorical contrivance and impassioned engagement."³⁷ But where Bush sees a disconnect between dispassionate stylistic strategy and emotional depth, Heather Dubrow sees a connection. *Venus and Adonis*, she notes, is akin to an expressionist painting where "our initial consciousness of its stylization quickly yields to a recognition of the ways in which it accords with our deepest experiences."³⁸ Thus its stylistic excess, what Hallett Smith might call its too copious "rhetorical involutions," gives rise to profound emotional identification.³⁹ John Roe goes even further than Dubrow in linking rhetoric to "deep" feeling. "The rhetorical, self-conscious, and artificial style of *Venus and Adonis* succeeds in rendering instinct more instinctual and life more lively than our

³⁴ Keach, *Elizabethan Erotic Narratives*, 72.

³⁵ Pauline Kiernan, "Death by Rhetorical Trope: Poetry Metamorphosed in *Venus and Adonis* and the *Sonnets*," *The Review of English Studies* 46.184 (1995): 476.

³⁶ Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), 50. W. B. C. Watkins q. in Philip C. Kolin, "Venus and/or Adonis Among the Critics" in *Venus and Adonis: Critical Essays* (New York: Garland, 1997), 15.

³⁷ Douglas Bush, *Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition in English Poetry*, New Revised Edition (New York: Norton, 1963), 148.

³⁸ Dubrow, *Captive Victors*, 60.

³⁹ Hallett Smith, *Elizabethan Poetry: A Study in Conventions, Meaning, and Expression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 88.

inchoate responses perceive it to be.”⁴⁰ Shakespeare, then, manages to translate perception into something more rich, more stunning than our “deepest experiences.” Hazlitt disagrees. The world of *Venus and Adonis*, for him, is not so much a fully realized world where style makes “life more lively,” but rather a “patchwork” full of figures that appear “like detached substances, painted and varnished over.”⁴¹ Shakespeare’s style is evidently “artificial” in all accounts, but what that artifice does for the poem and its readers does not reach consensus. For all these divergent responses, each with its own merits and justifications, none hold sway over the others. All critics, however, would seem to agree that, as Gent puts it, rhetoric “dominates the poem.”⁴²

If all poems are inherently and necessarily works of rhetoric, then there appears to be something in this particular poem that makes us stand up and take notice of just how “rhetorical” it is. *Hero and Leander*, for the sake of contrast, rarely gives rise to such remarks. Its rhetorical strategies are, for some reason, less confrontational. Shakespeare’s style seems to demand comment or critique because rhetoric is a feature in the narrative just as much as it is what enables the narrative to exist. Venus’ rhetoric, for example, has been likened to that of the sophists who, as far as Plato was concerned, taught argumentative prowess at the expense of truth.⁴³ Dubrow and Enterline, in a similar vein, both identify Venus’ desire to persuade (one of classical rhetoric’s constitutive aims) whatever the costs to veracity or sound logic.⁴⁴ Adonis’ frustrations with Venus are couched in explicitly rhetorical terms. He chides her for her “idle over-handled theme” and “bootless chat” (770, 422). By dramatizing the use of rhetoric through both Venus and Adonis,

⁴⁰ John Roe, “Introduction” in Shakespeare, *The Poems*, edited by John Roe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 12.

⁴¹ William Hazlitt, *Characters in Shakespeare’s Plays* in *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, edited by A.R. Waller and Arnold Glover (London: J.M. Dent & Co., 1902-4). I am unable to locate the specific page reference due to the closure of libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁴² Lucy Gent, “*Venus and Adonis*: The Triumph of Rhetoric,” *The Modern Language Review* 69.4 (1974): 721-9.

⁴³ Gent, “The Triumph of Rhetoric,” 725.

⁴⁴ Dubrow, *Captive Victors*, 31 and Enterline, *Shakespeare’s Schoolroom*, 66.

Dubrow suggests that Shakespeare aims to “encourage us to question patterns of speech and thought that we might too readily accept,” but the narrator’s use of rhetoric stands equally in need of questioning.⁴⁵ The narrator’s suggestion that Adonis “laugh’d to scorn” love is at odds with Adonis’ later suggestion that he “hates not love, but [Venus] device in love” (4, 789). Neither statement can be taken at face value. Our appreciation of *Venus and Adonis* comes down to how we handle its rhetoric or, rather, how its rhetoric handles us. There is no place from which to view the poem’s language or action without feeling rhetoric’s incursion. *Venus and Adonis*’ investment in rhetoric is, however, not strictly attributable to Shakespeare. There is an obscure precedent for the apparent tie between Beauty, Love, and the art of rhetoric itself.

Richard Rainolde’s *The Foundacion of Rhetorike* (1563), “the first recorded formulary rhetoric written in English,” puts Venus and Adonis at the heart of a vernacular definition of “the poetically.”⁴⁶ This mode of rhetoric is, in Rainolde’s definition, an “exposicion fained, set forth by invention of Poetes, or other.”⁴⁷ More striking than the positive terms Rainolde uses to explain “poetically” writing are the lacunae in his text. The poetically is not said to have a distinct purpose. Why a writer might write poetically or why a reader would read the poetically is undisclosed. Indeed, norms for “poetically” writing are uniformly absent save that the narration be “not obscure.”⁴⁸ Hoping, one presumes, to clarify the matter with an illustration, Rainolde presents us with “A narracion Poetically on a Rose.”

Who so doeth maruaile at the beautee and goodly colour of the
redde Rose, he must consider the blood, that came out of Venus the
Goddess foot. The Goddess Venus, as foolish Poetes dooe feigne,
beyng the authour of Love: loved Adnois the soonne of Cynara
kyng of Cypres. But Mars called the God of battaile, loued Venus,
beyng nothyng loued of Venus : but Mars loued Venus as feruently,

⁴⁵ Dubrow, *Captive Victors*, 46.

⁴⁶ R. C. Alston, “Introduction,” in Richard Rainolde, *The Foundacion of Rhetoric* (1563) (Yorkshire: Scholar Editions, ND), np.

⁴⁷ Rainolde, *The Foundacion of Rhetoric*, xijV.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

as Venus loued Adnois. Mars byng a God, loued Venus a goddes,
 but Venus onely was inflamed with the love of Adonis, a mortall
 man. Their loue was feruent, and extremely set on fire in bothe, but
 their kinde and nature were contrary, whereupon Mars beyng in
 gelousie, fought meanes to destroie, faire amiable, and beautifull
 Adnois, thinkyng by his death, the loue of Venus to be slaked:
 Adonis and Mars fell to fighting Venus as a louer, ranne to helpe
 Adonis her louer, and by chaunce she fell into a Rose bushe, and
 pricked with it her foote, the blood then ran out of her tender foote,
 did colour the Rose redde: whereupon the Rose beyng white before,
 is upon that cause chaunged into redde.⁴⁹

It is unclear to me why this story in particular was chosen, but, as J. Hillis Miller notes, “[n]o choice of an example is innocent. Each carries with it a whole set of perhaps question-begging assumptions.”⁵⁰ Rainolde assumes Venus and Adonis are the best figures to illustrate “the poetically” and that poetry or myth is the best site to offer an etiological account of the world’s colors. Its explicit aim, other than to demonstrate what poetical narration resembles, is to temper a pleasurable feeling with displeasure while its tacit message is that the features of our shared world are contingent and mutable rather than necessary and fixed. The poetically, here, unsettles what we take for granted. It complicates both our feelings about the world and our understanding of the world itself through an account of the fortuity of sense data. The tale is meant to be immediately demonstrative, thus a reader, having seen the poetic enacted, need not linger unduly on what exactly the lines mean. Its context gives us a frame for appreciating what it does or tries to do. We cannot, however, say the same thing for Shakespeare’s version of the tale. Rainolde reigns in the possibilities of response by couching it in terms of an explanation. Shakespeare provides us with no such guidelines. The narrator of *Venus and Adonis*, as Mortimer points out, “gives us no hint as to why he has decided to tell this story or what we are expected to learn from it.”⁵¹ The telos and occasion for the poem are

⁴⁹ Rainolde, *The Foundation of Rhetoric*, xvjR.

⁵⁰ J. Hillis Miller, “Parabolic Exemplarity: The Example of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra*” in *Unruly Examples: On the Rhetoric of Exemplarity*, edited by Alexander Gelley (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 162.

⁵¹ Mortimer, *Variable Passions*, 44.

left unsaid diegetically, but perhaps we can take up Shakespeare's dedicatory epistle to this end. The aim of *Venus and Adonis* may simply be to display the young author's capacity for "invention," but even reading for "invention" opens us up to interpretive possibilities and indeterminacy. As Roland Greene explains, "invention" in the late sixteenth century meant both discovery and creation.⁵² Simply seizing on a singular word leaves the reader's ideas of what the text is and does confused. We cannot merely say with reference to Rainolde that Shakespeare follows on a distinct tradition of bringing Venus, Adonis, and rhetoric together, but nor can we say that he shirks this antecedent altogether and makes something wholly novel. Likewise, we cannot call *Venus and Adonis* exactly a recapitulation of Ovid, nor can we say that it is radically original. The poem is generic and *sui generis*, pure "invention."

The experience of confusion when confronted by the uncommon or extraordinary is dramatized within the text when Venus and Adonis stand together observing the horse broken free from his tether.

Sometime he scuds far off and there he stares;
Anon he starts at stirring of a feather;
To bid the wind a base he now prepares,
And whether he run or fly they know not whether;
For through his mane and tail the high wind sings,
Fanning the hairs, who wave like feather'd wings (301-6).

We are presented here with an "invention" in its fullest sense. The beauty of the passage hinges on the intersection of the mundane and the mythical, the rhetorically commonplace (e.g. the use of the proverbial "As wavering as feathers in the wind") and the rhetorically extravagant (e.g. the figure of the feather is first used to illustrate sensitivity then comes to describe appearance). The beauty of Shakespeare's stanza, the playful and complex semantic variation on what a feather is to the horse

⁵² Roland Greene, "Invention" in *Five Words: Critical Semantics in the Age of Shakespeare and Cervantes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 15-40.

and does to his audience, makes this unlikely vision (a horse poised between gallop and flight) vivid, palpable. This is one of the only scenes where Venus and Adonis are not in the midst of some kind of struggle. Both are rendered a quiet “they” that stand in uncertainty and wonder.⁵³ The vision seizes hold of its viewers, suspends their prior dispositions (i.e. interrupts their quarrel), and inspires mute response.⁵⁴ The silence, uncertainty, and awe in this moment is something we share in. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht says that the experience of reading Shakespeare’s poetry is that sometimes “semantic density forces us to shirk a line’s rhythm” and at other times “[p]rosody [...] carries us sensually and we fail to grasp the semantics” of the lines.⁵⁵ It seems to me, however, that the experience is less clear cut than that. Our response to the sensations and the semantics of the line does not force us to choose between one or the other initially.

The object on view is neither exactly jennet nor altogether Pegasus which prompts Venus, Adonis, and the reader to “tremble at th’imagination” (668). All faculties are activated, but their work is partial to each of us. Stuart Clark notes that the imagination in early modern thought “was positioned as a crucial borderline” between sensation and intellect.⁵⁶ The imagination moves us mentally and somatically, as Montaigne says, “without the consent of our will or even our very thoughts.”⁵⁷ We lose control and, Montaigne continues, “our tongues can fail, our voices congeal, when *they* want to.”⁵⁸ Spinoza uses the very experience of thinking one sees a winged horse to demonstrate that the suspension of judgment “is really a perception, not (an act) of free will,” that is,

⁵³ cf. the later description of when “face grows to face” and “[i]ncorporate then they seem” (540). I would contend that as observers of the horse they are, in a certain sense, not only seemingly incorporate, but actually incorporate *qua* members of an audience.

⁵⁴ cf. Sidney’s note that as a result of Edward Wotton’s rhetoric he almost wishes himself a horse in *A Defence of Poetry* in *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan Van Dorsten (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 73.

⁵⁵ Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 48.

⁵⁶ Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 44.

⁵⁷ Montaigne, “On the Power of the Imagination” in *Complete Essays*, 115.

⁵⁸ Montaigne, “On the Power of the Imagination” in *Complete Essays*, 115.

that an incapacity to judge clearly is not chosen but thrust upon the agent.⁵⁹ These moments of being suspended in or by confusion do not last long. Recall Mortimer's pronouncement that "eventually" we give way to a response that is less complex. The danger of the being confronted by the uncommon or spectacular is frequently resolved by a decision to forge connections amongst the faculties that create order where there was once disorder.

After Venus (rightly) infers that Adonis is dead after seeing the boar's mouth "bepainted all with red, / Like milk and blood being mingled both together," she scrambles to grasp the event (901-2). Interrupting her pained reaction to this sight, the narrator tells us to

Look how the world's poor people are amazèd
At apparitions, signs, and prodigies,
Whereon with fearful eyes they long have gazèd,
Infusing them with dreadful prophecies (925-8).

Despite the fact that Venus' inference is correct, we are still warned that "signs" are naught but objects "infus[ed]" with meaning as a result of some emotional and sensorial comportment (e.g. "fearful eyes"). The narrator uses Venus' reaction as an example of an act practiced by "the world's poor people" as a whole. Again, the mundane and the mythical commingle. The epigraph of the poem, taken from Ovid's *Amores*, states that "*Vilia miretur vulgus*" and it is with some surprise that we find Venus belonging with us to the *vulgus* here.⁶⁰ The passage highlights that the world is "infused" with import as a result of some kneejerk act of conglomerate faculties. We see, feel, and understand amazedly at apparitions. That we *miretur* is not a problem, but rather when we take those wonders as necessarily pointing to some determinate state of affairs (i.e. make them "prophetic") we run into trouble. In this poem, the problem is both mistaking signs for wonders and mistaking wonders for signs. The trouble is compounded by the fact Shakespeare's rhetorical flourishes, their sheer

⁵⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 2p49sIII.B.(ii).

⁶⁰ Adam G. Hooks casts some doubt on the idea that Shakespeare himself chose this epigraph in "Shakespeare at the White Greyhound," *Shakespeare Survey* 64 (2001): 260-75. He suggests, rather, that this was a common practice of the printing house.

abundance, make it inordinately difficult to discern which is which.

Venus and Adonis's opening lines appear as just such a wonder/sign. Our experience of how "the sun with purple-coloured face / Had tane his last leave of the weeping morn," might proceed in a variety of directions (1-2). This purple sunrise might allude to the litany of purples that appear in Virgil and Homer. It might be intended to situate us in a circumstance unlike the quotidian since typically we would say that the sky at dawn is a reddish-purple while the sun's face is strictly speaking not. It might also be the case that one's lived experience of dawn confirms that, in fact, purple is a perfectly accurate descriptor and that, other than the personification, there is nothing especially noteworthy about the passage at all. We cannot know where Shakespeare would like to direct our attention, what semantic weight we should feel in or through this description of dawn. Whatever our particular reading of the opening couplet is, we are all thrown immediately into the midst of a literal and figurative purple patch. As with the sunburn allusion, the purple opening is an occasion wherein Shakespeare invites us to consider his debts to the rhetorical tradition.

Horace's "purple patches" are those parts of a text that "make a great show."⁶¹ While Horace gestures towards another time where a full definition of the idea of *purpureus* poesis will be proffered, that explanation never arrives. Instead, we must look at either the quick list of examples he provides (e.g. the altar of Diana, the Rhine, the rainbow) or at the opening chimera of the *Ars Poetica*.⁶²

If a painter chose to join a human head to the neck of a horse, and to spread feathers of many a hue over limbs picked up now here now there, so that what at the top is a lovely woman ends below in a black and ugly fish, could you, my friends, if favoured with a private view, refrain from laughing?⁶³

⁶¹ Horace, *Satires, Epistles, and Ars Poetica*, translated by H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 451.

⁶² Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 451.

⁶³ Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 451.

This passage strikes me not for its imaginative fancy in depicting a multicolored monster, but rather for its description of the imagined response of the viewer. Could we refrain from laughing at the depiction of this mermaid-pegasus? Yes, I think so. Or, rather, I can imagine untold responses to this creation. Horace's question shows us that the colorful flights of an artist's fancy give rise first to an emotional response and that the kind of response elicited is questionable. Horace does not tell us that we will laugh, but only notes that we might. "Purple patches" or potentially perverse uses of the colors of rhetoric open a space for varied and varying responses, but what those responses are is not delimited or circumscribed. These polished or dazzling parts of writing do not signify universally or even generally. While a metaphor is a metaphor is a metaphor, the effect and efficacy of metaphor are inconstant and uncertain. One person's laughable multihued horse-fish is another's nightmarish cryptid. "[O]ne and the same object can be the cause of many and contrary affects," Spinoza says.⁶⁴ This results in what he calls "vacillation of mind, which is [...] related to the affect as doubt is to the imagination."⁶⁵ Shakespeare's inaugural purple patch primes us to attend to this kind of vacillation. The confusion that subtends our experience is deliberately provoked. Our inability to give a complete account of what the lines mean, why or how they mean it, is not a sign of our failure as critics or of critique's deficiencies, but rather a feature of the text's generative rhetoric, its willful desire to confound and amaze. *Venus and Adonis* shows us in its pages just what this confusion is like when "variable passions" vie for primacy in Venus (967-8). None of the affects that "throng her constant woe" prevails and, in the end, "[j]oin they all together / Like many clouds" (971-2). There is no reason to presuppose that this confused response is solely the result of negative experiences. It is, I contend, a continual aspect of any reader's response.

Unlike Horace's purple patch, Shakespeare's does not stand in isolation. The purple

⁶⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3p17s.

⁶⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 3p17s. Note that doubting and vacillating minds differ only in degree not in kind.

sunrise is clearly meant to be a striking figure, but whether it is “merely” an adornment or ornament is put into question by the recurrence of both figurative and literal sunrises throughout the text.

Adonis’ mouth, for instance, is called a “ruby-coloured portal” that

[...] to his speech did honey passage yield,
Like a red morn that ever yet betokened
Wrack to the seaman, tempest to the field,
Sorrow to the shepherds, woe unto the birds,
Gusts and foul flaws to herdsmen and herds (451-6).

Shakespeare reanimates the proverbial “red morn” by making it speak to pastoral and georgic life.⁶⁶

The all-too-familiar turn of phrase appears somewhat novel to our eyes, but through this elaboration the object meant to be clarified is complicated. The wrack of a red morn does not quite fit with the sweet words promised by Adonis’ mouth. The later description of a sunrise where “cedar tops and hills seem burnished gold” seems in greater harmony with the “honey passage” of Adonis’ words (858). More troubling than this *discordia concors* of “honey wrack” is the fact that comparing Adonis’ mouth with a sunrise strains our visual faculties. How like a sunrise is a mouth? How are we meant to see or experience this simile at any level? Sweetness and sorrow are conjoined as are lips and the horizon. To focus on only one side of the equation is untenable, but so too is keeping both sides in focus at once. Rita Felski tells us that “metaphors are orientation devices that yoke abstract ideas to more tangible or graspable phenomena, intertwining the less familiar with the already known.”⁶⁷ Shakespeare’s use of figuration, however, accomplishes something different. It intertwines graspable phenomena in unlikely ways such that the juxtaposition disorients us on multiple levels.

The production of disorientation in the reader, according to Dubrow, is precisely what

⁶⁶ See Robert William Dent, *Shakespeare’s Proverbial Language: An Index*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), M1175. Shakespeare’s allusion is clearly proverbial, but a more involved reading might require bringing it into direct contact with Matthew 16.2 and Gabriel Harvey’s record of a diametrically opposed idiom in his commonplace book: “The crimson, and purple morning, a souerain frende of ye animal, and reasonable powers.” *Gabriel Harvey’s Marginalia*, edited by G. C. Moore Smith (Stratford-Upon-Avon: Shakespeare Head Press, 1913), 100.

⁶⁷ Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 52.

characterizes the English epyllia.⁶⁸ Keach, in turn, notes that our attitude towards Venus is “never allow[ed] to settle into an established position,” but this seems also to hold true for our attitude towards every aspect of the text.⁶⁹ Even in the dedicatory epistle to Henry Wriothesley, Shakespeare’s rhetoric is figuratively rich. “[I]f the first heir of my invention prove deformed,” he writes, “I shall be sorry it had so noble a godfather, and never after ear so barren a land for fear it yield me still so bad a harvest” (86). *Venus and Adonis* is Shakespeare’s invention’s heir at the beginning of the sentence and a potentially infertile field by its end. The metamorphosis of the metaphor suggests that the text’s mutability deforms “proper” figures. The description of the text mimics the plight of one of its central characters. Even purportedly denotative language in the poem has a tendency to open itself up to interpretive possibility. The narrator’s early interjection, “(O how quick is love!),” for instance, makes the straightforward “fastening” of Adonis’ horse by Venus an opportunity for both a frivolous pun, a telling reminder that love makes haste, and an invitation to consider what Shakespeare wants us to understand by his use of parentheses (38).

The way the poem’s rhetoric opens up a space for contingent responses is borne out by *Venus and Adonis*’ reception history. Despite various cultural changes from Elizabethan to Jacobean England, a consistency of response adheres. The text is seen to act on those who are especially subject to spontaneity or mutability and it inspires in them something like what I have been calling confusion (i.e. responses that are neither purely intellectual, sensorial, nor emotional, but rather an amalgam of all three that does not lead readily to adequate explanation). While the particular readership for *Venus and Adonis* shifts from the young to the feminine and the poem’s aim shifts from frivolous pleasure to wanton delight, the effects of the poem on its readers arguably stay the same.

⁶⁸ Dubrow, *Captive Victors*, 51.

⁶⁹ Keach, *Elizabethan Erotic Narratives*, 64.

Gabriel Harvey notes, circa 1598, that “the younger sort” took “delight” in *Venus and Adonis* while “the wiser sort” looked elsewhere for pleasure.⁷⁰ This remark echoes lines from the 1567 translation of Horace’s *Ars Poetica* where we are told that

Unprofitable poesies,
The sage sort will not heare
And austere woorkes, the youthfull sorte
will ouerlooke them cleare.”⁷¹

This does not exactly give us a clear picture of why the young avoid the austere and enjoy the unprofitable. Levinas Lemnius, in *The Touchstone of Complexions*, gives us a more robust sense of how the young are seen to be the sort who took part in

vayne ioyfulnes, where ther is no cause, immoderate myrth,
disordered sysaing [*seesawing*] up and downe, and uncertayne motion
and gate: all which do signify a sbuttle [*siu*] waueryng nature, and a
mynde subject to great mutability and unconstancy [...].⁷²

Juveniles experience causeless joy and disorderly moodswings. They are subjects of uncertain comportment and inconstant minds. They trespass against expectations of behavior without reason. They are, in essence, manifestations of mutability. “[V]ayne woordes doo woork no small thinge in vayne, ignoraint, and younge mindes, specially yf they be gyven any thyng ther unto theyr owne nature,” Roger Ascham tells us, thus it stands to reason that epyllia, which Dymphna Callaghan describes as “dedicated to frivolity and delight,” prey on frivolous youths particularly.⁷³ The question of readership is not merely a matter of taste, but seems rather to carry with it a certain ethical valence. T.N., the translator of Matteo Bandello’s *Straunge, Lamentable, and Tragicall Histories*

⁷⁰ Gabriel Harvey, *Gabriel Harvey’s Marginalia*, np. I am relying on the facsimile of the marginalia provided separately as a supplement to the book.

⁷¹ Horace *his art of poetrie, pistles, and satyrs*, translated by Thomas Drant (London: Thomas Marshe, 1567), np.

⁷² Levinas Lemnias, *The Touchstone of Complexions*, translated by Thomas Newton (London: Thomas Marsh, 1576), np.

⁷³ Roger Ascham, *Toxophilus (1545)*, edited by Peter E. Medine (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002), 41; Dymphna Callaghan, “(Un)natural Loving: Swine, Pets and Flowers in *Venus and Adonis*” in *Textures of Renaissance Knowledge*, edited by Philippa Berry and Margaret Tudeau-Clayton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 75.

(1577), stresses that the younger sort are morally vulnerable as a result of their varied and varying natures. He notes that the younger sort are in the “moste daunger” because they “stand tottering and balauncing in the scales of advysement, uncertayne which way to wende, or what path to trace,” they are figures driven by “their wilful affections and inordinate appetites.”⁷⁴ The young are those who may alter when they alteration find, are a never-fixèd mark.⁷⁵ Recall that Puttenham’s account of the colors of rhetoric charted the same effects. One totters uncertainly in the face of figurative language just as the younger sort’s disposition positions them in a similar state unbidden. All those who are subject to the colors of rhetoric are *de facto* positioned like the younger sort, that is, particularly vulnerable to spontaneous and unpredictable responses. When *Venus and Adonis*’ readership becomes more closely associated with women than the young, the same effects and qualities obtain.

John Davies’ mention of *Venus and Adonis* in his *Paper’s Complaint* highlights that

Fine wit is shew’n therein: but finer twere
 If not attired in such bawdy Geare.
 But be it as it will: the coyest Dames
 In private read it for their Closet-games:
 For, sooth to say, the Lines so draw them on,
 To the venerian speculation,
 That will they, nill they (if of flesh they bee)
 They will think of it, sith *loose* Thought is free.⁷⁶

Davies’ depicts how *Venus and Adonis* acts on its readers’ bodies and minds. Readers of a particular kind (i.e. feminine, coy) take the text up to particular ends.⁷⁷ They use it for the sake of “Closet-

⁷⁴ Thomas Newton, “T.N. to the curteous, friendlye, and indifferent Reader” in Matteo Bandello, *Strauunge, Lamentable, and Tragical Histories*, translated by Thomas Newton (London: Hugh Jackson, 1577), np.

⁷⁵ In *One Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, George Gascoigne remarks that his book was “verie much inquired for by the younger sort” and critics consequently, according to him, falsely took it to “stirre in all yong Readers a venemous desire of vanitie.” Might be interesting to look at “young” as delineating not only a kind of reader, but a kind of text that a reader is disposed towards, that is, something like the contemporary genre of “YA” or “young adult literature.” George Gascoigne, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, edited by G. W. Agman III (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 366.

⁷⁶ John Davies, *A scourge for paper-persecutors. Or Papers complaint, compil’d in ruthfull rimes, against the paper-spylers of these times* (London: H. H. and G. G., 1625), 3.

⁷⁷ Pace Richard Halpern, it seems to me that one’s disposition has as much to do with the text’s effects as one’s gender. See George Peele’s account of the tapster who reads *Venus and Adonis* in *Allusion-Book*, 171. For Halpern’s argument for

games” and are “draw[n]” on to a particular kind of thinking (i.e. “venerian speculation”). We hear an echo of Golding’s Ovid when Davies emphasizes the involuntary effects of the text. *Venus and Adonis* addresses the flesh and the flesh gives rise to “loose Thought.” While “loose” connotes a kind of moral lassitude, we can also infer a more general unorthodoxy to the thinking that follows from reading the poem. The lines of *Venus and Adonis* jostle thought in varied and unfixed directions. All this is, we see, a consequence of the poem’s “Geare,” its colorful rhetoric. The speaker of the poem, unlike the closet-game playing dames, is inspired in a different direction. He takes the text as an occasion to comment on coy women’s strategies of reading. The speaker’s critical speculation constitutes itself as a kind of “venerian speculation.” He considers flesh and coy games. *Venus and Adonis* inspires differing responses from reader to reader, but despite these differences there is a similarity in how certain readers (e.g. Harvey, the speaker in *Paper’s Complaint*) view the text with suspicion or disinterest while other readers are almost wholly overwhelmed sensually, emotionally, and rationally by it. What these two kinds of reader share is that the text seems to force a response that cannot be helped, that is, the responses registered have the appearance of being inevitable or immediately given. Having so far spoken in broad terms about the confused ideas that the poem’s readers and characters experience, I would like now to look at certain instances in the text where the poem’s “Geare” or color presents itself most forcefully and see how exactly Shakespeare disallows us from forming adequate ideas (in Spinoza’s sense of the term).

The frequently quoted description of Venus taking Adonis’ hand shows how Shakespeare uses figurative and literal color in tandem. Adonis’ hand is described as “A lily prisoned in a gaol of snow, / Or ivory in an alabaster band” (362-3). This “beauteous combat” looks, we are told, like “two silver doves that sit a-billing” (365, 366). We are clearly meant to imagine white next to white,

the gendered dimensions of reading, see “Pining Their Maws”: Female Readers and the Erotic Ontology of the Text in Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*” in *Venus and Adonis: Critical Essays*, edited by Philip C. Kolin (New York: Garland, 1997), 377-88.

but how and to what end? The difficulty of visualizing a lily in a gaol of snow or ivory in an alabaster band argues against calling these similes simply “images” even if they obtusely appeal to the eyes. The juxtaposition enacted sullies rather than amplifies whiteness. As Wittgenstein notes, “If I say a piece of paper is pure white, and if snow were placed next to it and it then appeared grey, in its normal surroundings I would still be right in calling it white and not light grey.”⁷⁸ Thus, this passage speaks to language’s power to essentialize certain accidental properties (e.g. white things stay “white” even if visual experience testifies otherwise), but also that visual phenomena are subject to contingent circumstances that relativise them. Senses testify against reason (i.e. I know that both objects are white, yet I nonetheless see evidence that speaks against identity) and reason prohibits sense experience from overindulging in specifics.⁷⁹ Our response is poised between the particularity of the white things and generic whiteness.

Sujata Iyengar argues that this series of similes makes Venus and Adonis “indistinguishable,” but we can readily distinguish “two silver doves” as long as they are “sat a-billing.”⁸⁰ We can, at least, say that one is not the other. These similes are unlike, say, Ronsard’s description of two lovers holding hands appearing like “*marbre sur marbre*.”⁸¹ The difference between Venus and Adonis is minimal, but discernable. The hands’ colors are described in proverbial terms, but by bringing these shopworn terms together Shakespeare alienates us from our received ideas, but the question of why he estranges us from hands or their appearance is unclear. Are the complexities of whiteness put on display for the sake of, as Badiou suggests in his reading of Malevich’s *White on White*, illustrating

⁷⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe, translated by Linda L. McAlister and Margaret Schättle (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 2e.

⁷⁹ The problem of color constancy in perception is a separate set of problems that I cannot, unfortunately, attend to in full here, but for an insightful discussion of the literature surrounding the problem as well as an attempt to account for the trouble, see Alva Noë, “Colors Enacted” in *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 123-62.

⁸⁰ Sujata Iyengar, *Shades of Difference: Mythologies of Skin Color in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 149.

⁸¹ Pierre de Ronsard, “Livre 2. Ode III” in *Les Oeuvres de Pierre de Ronsard. Texte de 1587*, Volume 3, edited by Isidore Silver (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 130. Even this, we should note, would be a “distinguishable” image although the repetition of *marbre* does semantic work to emphasize identity rather than difference.

“the null difference between white and white, the difference of the Same - what we could call the vanishing difference?”⁸² If so, why offer a list of whites on whites? Is Shakespeare hoping we will act on what Freud refers to as “the narcissism of minor differences” and, in the process, lose sight of the similarity between these two figures?⁸³ White’s complexities cannot even be said to amplify or highlight Adonis’ particular beauty. His hands are now “lily” just as Venus’ fingers were earlier (228). Whiteness is not even discriminately associated with Venus and Adonis. It speaks more broadly. When Venus waxes amorous about Adonis’ horse, the same color problems recur. The jennet is imagined to act as though he were one “Who sees his true-love in her naked bed, / Teaching the sheets a whiter hue than white” (397-8). What, if anything, are we to make out of this emphatic whiteness? Are the similes wonders or signs? Is it an invitation to “infuse” the passage with meaning? We could home in on “ivory” and elaborate Shakespeare’s understanding of elephants and Africa, international trade and foreign commodities. We could take the mention of the “silver doves” as an invitation to link this moment with the poem’s end, that is, to bring this appearance of doves into contact with their role as agents who remove Venus from view. We could, as M. C. Bradbrook does, drop the chromatic similarity between figures and instead seize on other sensate qualities they share in common (e.g. all are colder than flesh).⁸⁴ Despite these possible interpretive paths, I remain uncertain how to take the passage.

“[H]ow is mortal man to account for [whiteness]?” Melville asks.⁸⁵ “To analyse it would seem impossible,” yet in its manifest appearance, he says, there is “a dumb blankness, full of meaning.”⁸⁶ Shakespeare effectively depicts a simple act in such a way that it never settles into

⁸² Alain Badiou, *The Century*, translated by Alberto Toscano (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 55.

⁸³ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, edited by Todd Dufresne, translated by Gregory C. Richter (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2016), 88.

⁸⁴ M. C. Bradbrook, *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry: A Study of His Earlier Work in Relation to the Poetry of the Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 64.

⁸⁵ Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick, or The Whale* (London: Vintage, 2007), 212.

⁸⁶ Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 216.

descriptive stability. Our response, as the disjunctions and conjunctions impose themselves on us, mimics the restless hands depicted. We may never “get it,” but we do, I think, experience the complexity of the event just as fleetingly as Venus and Adonis. We are led from hands to some ineffable experience, a confusion of feeling, sensation, and intellect.⁸⁷ We are within Adonis’ reticence and Venus’ insistence at once. The lines place us between the intense rewards of touching the beloved and the equally intense repugnance at being untowardly touched by another. Our reading accommodates contraries only insofar as we let the ideas that follow from literal and figurative colors stand insufficiently explained. Our confused ideas are generative, are part of the aesthetic experience of the text, and need not be mitigated against.

Nietzsche tells us that one’s desire to “impose upon chaos only as much regularity and form as our practical needs require” is an act that has little to do with the acquisition of knowledge *per se* and more to do with satisfying a felt need “to subsume, to schematize, for the purpose of intelligibility and calculation.”⁸⁸ The quest for clarity or adequacy in our ideas is more the result of anxiety in the face of wonders than curiosity in the face of signs. Indeed, even the decision to codify the world in terms of either wonder or sign, either chaos or cosmos, is evidence of a basic unwillingness to let confusion stand. Establishing a schema means diminishing the complexity of this beautiful passage for the sake of unarticulated “practical needs” without conceding that the reader of a poem has, strictly speaking, nothing necessarily “practical” guiding their actions at all. As both Rainolde and Shakespeare imply by omission, there is no pragmatic purpose for poetry or this poem in particular. Rendering the conflicting experience into something propositional rather than associative and evocative is to strip the text of its dynamism. It is to make a decision regarding what

⁸⁷ These instances of beautiful, but hermeneutically troubling images ironically speak against Venus’ argument to Adonis that pleasurable and beautiful things must have an end other than themselves.

⁸⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, edited by Walter Kaufmann, translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), 278. This passage in Nietzsche was brought to my attention by way of Jack Halberstam, “Go Gaga: Anarchy, Chaos, and the Wild,” *Social Text* 31.3 (2013): 123-134.

in the text has value and what those values are. On the page there are merely differences and our reading responds to those differences without recourse to a set of concrete norms or expectations. Our lack of clarity in respect to colorful rhetoric is not a deficiency, but a benefit. It leaves us free to lose control and revel in idiosyncrasy. Briefly put, confusion asks us to appreciate the act of reading holistically as an emotional, sensorial, and intellectual experience that is ours alone. “[D]espite all explications about its conditions,” Gumbrecht says, “the moment of aesthetic experience remains an individual event, which cannot be induced or guaranteed. There is no proof of such events other than the empirical certainty of those who experience them.”⁸⁹

Shakespeare tries in various ways to keep us confused, to insure that our reactions to his lines never resolve into anything coherent or inflexible. We see this when he uses disjunctive sequences where similes are not exactly “heaped” one upon the other, but tried on and cast off. The narrator’s illustration of how Adonis’ “meaning struck [Venus] ere his words begun” takes four attempts (462). Adonis’ comportment appears

Even as the wind is hushed before it raineth,
Or as the wolf doth grin before he barketh,
Or as the berry breaks before it staineth,
Or like the deadly bullet of a gun (458-61).

Golding’s Ovid uses a similar strategy, but the disjunctions are semantically closer and more limited.

For instance, Hermaphrodite’s face “waxt red” and “appeared like the same

That is in Apples which doe hang upon the Sunnie side:
Or Ivorie shadowed with a red: or such as is espide
Of white and scarlet colours mixt appearing in the Moone.”⁹⁰

Each simile uses a particular object in a particular venue to specify the hue seen. There are subtle differences, but each object is a natural feature of the world and each color is roughly commensurate

⁸⁹ Gumbrecht, *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 49.

⁹⁰ Ovid, *Ovid’s Metamorphoses: The Arthur Golding Translation of 1567*, edited by John Frederick Nims (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2000), 4.403-9.

with the next. We imagine a red-paleness, a bright rosy display. The similarity between Shakespeare's similes, however, is less precise. Each line shows the relation between a sign and an eventual effect, but does not include an account of cause. Despite the similarity between each simile, the connotations of each figure vary importantly. The "ill presage" that Venus marks oscillates between unpleasant (e.g. rain, stain) to disturbing and dangerous (e.g. a barking wolf, a fired gun). This *copia* does not bring equivalent impressions the eye, nor does it overwhelm us with radical difference. The narrator strives for clarity, but also sews obscurity. We are left overwhelmed by small, but significant distinctions that throw us off balance. As Sidney remarks abundant similitudes strung together have the effect of "*over-swaying* the memory from the purpose whereto they were applied [...]."⁹¹ We are tasked with keeping competing figures and their attendant associations in view. Shakespeare renders Venus' impression of Adonis and Adonis himself vividly present and nebulous. The narrator can only imperfectly express what this moment resembles, thus our impression of it is diffuse. So, too, with Shakespeare's descriptions of more quotidian experiences, ones that are seemingly less portentous, like blushing.

Blushes are, as Theresa M. Krier notes, recurrent in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* because they are themselves "a tiny, passing bodily metamorphosis," thus they carry immediate thematic resonance.⁹² These small natural metamorphoses bear a proleptic relation to the fantastic metamorphoses that arrive at the conclusion of each of Ovid's tales. Reddening cheeks, moreover, stand as "a proffer of intimacy, even against the consent of the blusher."⁹³ They are feeling made visible involuntarily, manifestations, as Patricia Cahill puts it, of the "permeable boundary between inner and outer domains."⁹⁴ That a blushing face says something is not, however, to say that anyone can read a

⁹¹ Sidney, *Defence*, 118.

⁹² Theresa M. Krier, *Gazing on Secret Sights: Spenser, Classical Imitation, and the Decorum of Vision* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 59.

⁹³ Krier, *Gazing on Secret Sights*, 59.

⁹⁴ Patricia Cahill, "The Play of Skin in *The Changeling*," *postmedieval* 3.4 (2012): 393.

blush unproblematically. As with the wonders mistaken for signs, Shakespeare is adamant that reddening or whitening faces are not connected to any one particular experience. Adonis is “red for shame” while Venus is “red” with heat (36, 35). Anger can be “ashy pale,” but horror also presents itself through pallor (76, 589). Not only can the face succumb to alteration as a result of internal processes, but it may just as quickly vary as a consequence of external acts. Adonis’ attempt to revive Venus by slapping her cheeks yields the same visual admixture of red and white (468).⁹⁵ As Iyengar highlights, “the truly legible blush can belong only to the realm of the imaginary,” that is, it is only within an imagined world where appearance and truth immediately and transparently correspond that color can be interpreted without trouble.⁹⁶ Steven Swarbrick makes clear that blushing frequently “raised acute anxieties” in early modern England over “the representational opacity of certain identities (most often female and/or of color).”⁹⁷ The anxiety in the face of this opacity is something the reader experiences, but not the blushing figures on display. Both Venus and Adonis invariably misread or ignore what a face’s color means. Adonis, much to Venus’ dismay, does not read her sudden wanness as significant (589). Venus, much to Adonis’ frustration, finds his angry and shameful redness attractive and is spurred on by its display. We can never be wholly certain of what appearance is trying to say.⁹⁸ Nor can we say without doubt that our responses to appearance are called for. Blushing is, according to Paul White, “perhaps the only expression that could not be feigned,” but despite its authenticity or immediate veracity it is nonetheless unavailable to definite interpretation.⁹⁹ The manner in which the blush shows the confluence of internal and

⁹⁵ Whether this act of slapping carries with it a particular sexual dimension is left to the reader. For an account of other sexual acts in the poem depicted discretely, see Will Fisher, “The Erotics of Chin Chucking in Seventeenth-Century England” in *Sex Before Sex: Figuring the Act in Early Modern England*, edited by James M. Bromley and Will Stockton (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 141-70.

⁹⁶ Iyengar, *Shades of Difference*, 127.

⁹⁷ Steven Swarbrick, “Shakespeare’s Blush, or ‘The Animal’ in *Othello*,” *Exemplaria* 28.1 (2016): 81.

⁹⁸ Or, rather, our felt certainty in regards to appearances is built, as it were, on sand. See Hume, *An Enquiry*, 34-7.

⁹⁹ Paul White, “Reading the Blush,” *Configurations* 24.3 (2016): 282.

external states mimics, in effect, the manner in which the colors of rhetoric affect the body and mind of the reader. It is a somatic example of “open responsiveness” which Duncan-Jones tells us was a constitutive feature of the experience of reading *Venus and Adonis* in early modern England.¹⁰⁰ It is an involuntary effect of an indescribable cause that succumbs imperfectly to singular *post hoc* explanation.

The notorious crux wherein Venus enthuses over Adonis’ kiss of life presents an interpretive problem even greater than whiteness or blushing, purple sunrises or shooting stars. Desirous of an extension of this pseudo-kiss, Venus makes an incongruous statement about the color of lips. She hopes that, rather than “crimson liveries,” Adonis’ lips’ “verdure still endure” (506-7). The curative power of Adonis’ “kiss” inspires unlikely figuration. Lips, which have thus far been alternately pale or red, are here green with life.¹⁰¹ This turn of phrase coincides nicely with Sherry’s definition of *improprietas* which is “when a worde nothyng at all in hys proper significacion is brought into a sentence as a cloude.”¹⁰² How lips actually appear is shunted aside. The colors of rhetoric, in this instance, mangle color, they mismatch vehicle and tenor in certain respects, and consequently mangle our ability to “see” the sense of the line clearly. Goran Stanivukovic argues that Shakespeare “treats figures and tropes as vehicles through which the material world is invoked in order to search for meaning that transcends these objects,” but it seems more accurate to say that Shakespeare’s use of figuration gestures rather towards something immanent to the material world invoked.¹⁰³ No abstractions, transcendent or otherwise, follow from this figure, but rather a kind of haecceity develops in it. The claims it makes are inchoate.¹⁰⁴ The verdure wished for has the effect of

¹⁰⁰ Katherine Duncan-Jones, “Much Ado with Red and White: The Earliest Readers of Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*,” *The Review of English Studies* 44.176 (1993): 501.

¹⁰¹ cf. Venus’ tears later in this chapter.

¹⁰² Sherry, *A Treatise of Schemes and Tropes*, 32.

¹⁰³ Goran Stanivukovic, “Shakespeare’s Style in the 1590s” in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare’s Poetry*, edited by Jonathan F. S. Post (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 27.

¹⁰⁴ I am reminded here of Adorno’s statement that artworks “become eloquent by the force of the kindling of thing and

troubling our eyes, but also fleshing out Venus' desire that Adonis enjoy perpetual youth or abundant fertility. Venus' desires inspire a nonsensical image that makes a kind of sense. The poem tells us that "eye mistakes" are a result of "the brain being troubled" (1068). Brain-trouble is near constant when paying attention to Shakespeare's colors.

That Venus' cheeks are an arena "where white and red each other did destroy" does not impede the narrator from conjuring up a scene where dark gray cloud is briefly illuminated by white lightning. Despite the surprising shift in scale, the remembrance made between the "fighting conflict" of her hue and a stormy sky that "flash[es] forth fire" appears apt and odd (345, 348). The unrequited desire represented speaks beyond mere personal distress. Venus' cheeks, like Adonis' mouth, can only be mimicked by the heavens themselves. Like the lips' verdure, stormy cheeks present us with a sense of what it feels like to look on them. We are positioned before Venus' blushing cheeks as we are positioned before the tempestuous firmament. There is no intuitive link between tenor and vehicle. We cannot infer the latter from the former. Shakespeare's figures, when they are not strung together in a disjunctive sequence, work something like a film montage. As Deleuze explains, the montage functions not because there is an "organic link" between two instants presented, but rather because the juxtaposition enacts "a pathetic jump, in which the second instant gains a new power since the first has passed into it."¹⁰⁵ Certain figures force a kind of leap on the reader's part.¹⁰⁶ The pathetic, Deleuze explains, is "simultaneously the transition from one term to another, from one quality to another, and the sudden upsurge of the new quality which is born from

appearance. They are things whose power it is to appear [...] It is not through a higher perfection that artworks separate from the fallibly existent but rather by becoming actual, like fireworks, incandescently in an expressive appearance. They are not only the other of the empirical world: Everything in them becomes other." Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, edited and translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2004), 106-7.

¹⁰⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 35.

¹⁰⁶ The same thing happens when we encounter Venus' deer park simile (230-40). The passage is often quoted, but critics seem to pass over how the "pale" pun makes the image chromatically weird.

the transition which has been accomplished. It is both ‘compression’ and ‘explosion.’”¹⁰⁷ The small work of capillaries in the cheeks and the grand display of earth’s atmosphere combine to disorient. The confusion we experience reading the poem reaches its summa with the poem’s conclusion. Adonis’ transformation into a checkered flower opens itself up to curious infusions of meaning in the criticism of the poem. What are we to do with the purple and white flower?

Coppélia Kahn, among others, tells us that Adonis’ metamorphosis presents itself as “a purple (from the Latin *purpureus*, a variety of red) and white flower.”¹⁰⁸ This reading, however, means opting for the Latin root of a word over its English blossom.¹⁰⁹ Even if we allow this preference for the Latin *purpureus* in favor of the English “purple” to stand, it does not allow us to read the word as signifying “red” with any surety.¹¹⁰ Mary Hazard tells us that “it is usually impossible to ascertain any precise meaning of a color given in either word or image,” but it is equally difficult to ascertain the precise color referred to by any color word (especially at four centuries’ remove).¹¹¹ Before tarrying with purple’s meaning, we must ask whether purple is purple at all. Elyot’s *Dictionary* defines “purpureus” straightforwardly as “of purple color.”¹¹² George Joye, in *The Prophete Isaye Translated* writes of sins “as redde as purple.”¹¹³ A translation of Dyonysius’ *The Surveye of the World* discloses

¹⁰⁷ Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, 35.

¹⁰⁸ Coppélia Kahn, *Man’s Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 44. See also Robert J. Griffin who tells us that “purple” is “actually a member of the red family” in “‘These Contraries Such Unity Do Hold’: Patterned Imagery in Shakespeare’s Narrative Poems,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 4.1 (1964): 48-9, Clark Hulse who notes that “nowhere else [in other versions of the Venus and Adonis myth] is the flower red and white” in *Metamorphic Verse: The Elizabethan Minor Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 168, and Keach who notes that the “purple and white” flower aims “to recall the red and white of Adonis’s complexion” in *Elizabethan Erotic Narratives*, 82.

¹⁰⁹ If we read “purple” as the Latin *purpureus* and see “red”, why should we not also read “white” as the Old English *hwit* and see “clear”? This is a genuine question. What are the grounds upon which we establish that etymology informs one word rather than another? A broader version of this question would be: What is it about a given phrase that asks us to read closely?

¹¹⁰ Even classicists have trouble with “*purpureus*,” see Robert J. Edgeworth, “Does ‘Purpureus’ Mean ‘Bright’?,” *Glotta* 57 (1979): 281-291.

¹¹¹ Mary E. Hazard, *Elizabethan Silent Language* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 96.

¹¹² Associated words broaden the palette. “Purpurisso” is a pigment that gives the face a “ruddy” complexion. “Purpurissa” is “redde payntyng” expressly used by “harlottes.”

¹¹³ George Joye, *The prophete Isaye, translated into enghyshe* (Straszburg: Balthassar Beckenth, 1531), B3r.

that amethysts are “of coloure purple, or lyke bloude.”¹¹⁴ Henry Lyte’s translation of Rembert Dodoens’ *A Nieuwe Herball* considers the *Amaranthus Purpureus* to be “of Crimson purple colour.”¹¹⁵ Purple, then, is not far removed from red, but they are nonetheless distinct hues. There are also notable signs that “purple” was a still more capacious descriptor. William Fulke’s *A Goodly Gallerye*, for instance, tells us that the rainbow is “of purple collour.”¹¹⁶ Not, to be clear, that a rainbow contains purple, but rather that the full spectrum of colors from red to violet, for Fulke, is best called purple. Purple can be, in the eyes of some, a useful synecdoche for all colors.¹¹⁷

Shakespeare himself is of little help in this matter. Oberon, describing the creation of love-in-idleness as a result of Cupid’s bolt, notes that this flower was “[b]efore milk-white, now purple with love’s wound” (*MND* 2.1.167). Henry VI alludes to the Tudor rose:

The red rose and the white are on his face,
The fatal colours of our striving houses:
The one his purple blood right well resembles;
The other his pale cheeks, methinks, presenteth (*3H6* 2.5.97-101)

Yet the chromatic proximity of blood and purple is hardly stable. The “long purples” mentioned in Gertrude’s account of Ophelia’s bloodless death are *Orchis mascula* which appear uncomplicatedly purple to my eye (*H* 4.7.171). Likewise, Falstaff’s reference to Dives, the man who “lived in purple,” leads us to Luke 16:19 and the Greek *πορφύρεον* which is unproblematically rendered “purple” across Biblical translations (*1H4* 3.3.31). In *Pericles*, Marina refers to “purple violets” while we are told in *Venus and Adonis* that violets are “blue-veined” (4.1.8). While “purple violets” can certainly also be “blue-veined,” that the color worth emphasizing is subject to change suggests that

¹¹⁴ Periegetes Dionysius, *The surveye of the world*, translated by Thomas Twyne (London: Henrie Bynneman, 1572), E8r.

¹¹⁵ Rembert Dodoens, *A nieuwe herball*, translated by Henry Lyte (London: Gerard Dewes, 1578), 168.

¹¹⁶ William Fulke, *A goodly gallerye with a most pleasaunt prospect* (London: William Griffith, 1563), E4r.

¹¹⁷ This reference is originally in Propertius. Whether the citation of some prior color description ought to indicate that that color description coincides with perception or whether said citation is meant to testify to something else is uncertain to me. A contemporary version of this would be “Roses are red, / Violets are blue, etc.” Using this form says, I think, more about our desire to quote rather than our desire to affirm that violets are blue.

salient secondary qualities are not, in any sense, fixed. Given that neither red nor purple is endowed with any consistent meaning across *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare's oeuvre, or early modern English writing, the only thing we can say with any certainty is that "purple" is lexically distinct from "red." Tempting as it is to look for a synthesis of the red and white motif here, it died with the "blood and milk" of the boar's mouth. We cannot even take it for granted that all readers are looking for the concluding synthesis of the same color pattern. Charles Forker experiences the metamorphosis as one that "neatly encapsulates the unresolved antithesis between the green and the red."¹¹⁸ What we see or want to see in the Adonis flower is determined idiosyncratically.

John Klause, writing in 1988, argues that readings attempt to demonstrate that "the poem embodies a multivalency of meanings leading nowhere beyond itself," but the opposite problem now obtains.¹¹⁹ Readings of the text sometimes overwrite (e.g. purple is red) and other times underwrite (e.g. the flower has a precise and knowable referent) the Adonis flower.¹²⁰ Both interpretive strategies annul the novelty and opacity of this concluding metamorphosis. Kahn cites the tudor rose as an image that would have provided Shakespeare with "ample precedent" and Miriam Jacobson locates a Turkish bulb as the source of this "checkered" flower.¹²¹ These are particular instances where a wonder is deftly and persuasively turned into a sign. As we saw before, there is no inherent problem with seeing wonders as signs or even signs as wonders, but I do think that to continue to experience the text as an aesthetic phenomenon entails suspending decisions that narrow the field of possible readings. I am trying to reclaim a kind of interaction with the text that is not singularly or exclusively attached to "figuring it out," of unveiling what it says for the sake of

¹¹⁸ Charles R. Forker, "The Green Underworld of Early Shakespearean Tragedy," *Shakespeare Studies* 17 (1985): 41.

¹¹⁹ John Klause, "*Venus and Adonis*: Can We Forgive Them?," *Studies in Philology* 85.3 (1988), 353.

¹²⁰ See also efforts to incorporate Titian's painting into the explanatory fold of the poem.

¹²¹ Kahn, *Man's Estate*, 44n24; Miriam Jacobson, "Breeding Fame: Horses and Bulbs in *Venus and Adonis*" in *Barbarous Antiquity: Reorienting the Past in the Poetry of Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 114-145.

what we think it means. “Our task is not to find the maximum amount of content in a work of art, much less to squeeze more content out of the work than is already there. Our task is to cut back content so that we can see the thing at all,” Susan Sontag tells us. The point is to show “*how it is what it is*, even *that it is what it is*, rather than to show *what it means*.”¹²²

Affirming that purple is purple and that the text does not offer us ground to tie “purple” to any particular meaning or referent allows us to avoid what Elaine Freedgood and Cannon Schmitt describe as our critical habit of “gliding rapidly and hazily from words to concepts.”¹²³ As I have shown, the poem constantly argues against tying any effect to a singular and simple cause. Shakespeare’s rhetoric guarantees against straightforward understanding uninflected by the complexity of feeling and sense. There are no adequate ideas to be had in *Venus and Adonis*. However provisionally or tenuously we seize hold of a referent outside the text or a cause for the particularities of the text, we dampen or otherwise disturb generative confusion Shakespeare orchestrates. The reconfiguration of the poem’s color palette is purposive. The shock and surprise of Adonis’ death is emphasized by our shock and surprise at the flower’s unanticipated color. It takes up earlier innocuous passages and amplifies them. It is, as it were, a reprise. It is resonant without being merely an act of synthesis. Furthermore, the particular weirdness of the scenes does not stop at purple. Shakespeare goes so far as to invert the background/foreground relationship between purple and white. How these colors appear in Adonis’ face and in the Adonis flower requires rhetorical change. We are told that the flower is “check’red with white” while blood “upon [his cheeks] whiteness stood” (1167-70). This modification may make no drastic visual difference, but it is nonetheless a noticeable rhetorical alteration. The narrator cannot or does not render the color pattern of the flower in the same terms as he renders the color pattern of the dead Adonis.

¹²² Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation” in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 1966), 14. Italics in the original. Contra Sontag, I do not think that these are mutually exclusive approaches.

¹²³ Elaine Freedgood and Cannon Schmitt, “Denotatively, Technically, Literally,” *Representations* 125 (2014): 1.

This is not all. The flower “well resembles” both Adonis *and* Venus. We are told, just a few lines before the flower sprouts, that Venus “stains her face with his congealèd blood” (1122). Venus’ proclamation, at the poem’s outset, that Adonis was a figurative “stain to all nymphs” in life is made literal with his death. What this concatenation of purple and white represents other than itself is not provided. The last act of comparison enacted by Venus likewise leaves us open to contingent responses.

“She crops the stalk,” we are told, “and in the breach appears, / Green-dropping sap, which she compares to tears” (1175-6). Venus’ tears, prior to this moment, have appeared to us as a “crystal tide,” “silver rain,” and “pearls in glass,” but none of these descriptions prepare us for their present similarity to green sap (957, 959, 980). The emphasis on the sap’s color might prompt us to treat the image as primarily an allusion (i.e. the relationship between sap and tears calls to mind, as Newman points out, Adonis’ mother, Myrrha).¹²⁴ It might also be taken as an instance where Adonis’ “verdure” is shown not to endure. It could be simply another opportunity to endow the natural world with an emotive vitality through prosopopeia. The purple and green motif, striking as it is, is not wholly unanticipated. “Before I know myself, seek not to know me,” Adonis says and likens his “unripe years” to the fall of “the mellow plum” to which “the green sticks fast” (527). This antecedent image rhymes with the final tableau, it underlines the point that Adonis was cut down before his prime, but there seems little cause to suddenly turn recurrent reds into purple or crystalline tears into green unless Shakespeare aims to draw our attention to the alterations.

The language of the text is metamorphosed in and through Adonis’ death. Like Adonis’ transformation, the alteration is causally unexplained. Why it happens how it happens is less important than the blunt fact that it happens. Venus is faced with a phenomenon to which she must

¹²⁴ Newman, “Myrrha’s Revenge,” 5.

react and so are we. The phantasmagoric image of green tears on a pale face covered in purple blood moves opinion “this way and that,” gives rise to the “disordered sysaing up and downe” of the heart. Love and beauty are intimate in this mournful moment, but what we are to do or make of this intimacy cannot be said for certain. The semantic and semiotic vagueness of the image does not impede our responses to the scene. In fact, our nebulous sense of what these figurative and literal colors mean exactly may intensify how we experience the finale. “In reality,” Edmund Burke tells us, “great clearness helps but little towards affecting the passions, as it is in some sort an enemy to all enthusiasms whatsoever [...] We yield to sympathy, what we refuse to description.”¹²⁵ The poem’s finale and especially its final couplet, where Venus “means to immure herself and not be seen,” is an emphatic refusal on Shakespeare’s part to adequately describe. It leaves the poem’s completion to us, to our own feelings and thoughts and senses.¹²⁶

“It is not *a priori* certain that literature is a reliable source of information about anything but its own language,” Paul de Man notes.¹²⁷ Shakespeare, it seems, goes a step further. It is not *a priori* or *a posteriori* certain that *Venus and Adonis* is a reliable source of information about anything, even or especially its own language. The colors of rhetoric hold us in suspense and offer only the kind of closure we impose upon it. The poem is left open to us. While I have focused throughout this chapter on instances where literal and figurative color coincide, our confusion is not relegated to these moments. Equally troubling for interpretation are the recurrent birds, tombs, echoes, and serpents. A litany of other lines of inquiry can be delineated. What are we to make of the sudden inclusion of a hunter’s voice in what is otherwise a narrative *pas de deux*? How are we to read the

¹²⁵ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, edited by James T. Boulton (London: Routledge, 2008), 174.

¹²⁶ As Nietzsche notes, “we do not always keep our eyes from rounding off something and, as it were, finishing the poem,” the rhythm of verse “engenders an unconquerable urge to yield and join in.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science with a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 163, 139.

¹²⁷ Paul De Man, “Resistance to Theory” in *Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 11.

moments where history, in the form of plague and civil strife, intrudes on this mythical world? Venus' last monologue gestures at scenes we have not witnessed. If Adonis' eyes are actually a place where Venus "herself herself beheld / A thousand times" (1129-30), then the vast majority of their courtship stands outside of our ken. The colors of rhetoric guarantee continual change in how we take the poem and asks us to leave final answers to one side. Just as I cannot describe my perception of the color purple so too can I not describe my experience of *Venus and Adonis*' colorful work. This is not something to overcome, but something to celebrate and linger over.¹²⁸ What the poem means is of less importance than attempting to appreciate all that it does and allows us to experience in response.

¹²⁸ I am taking my cue here in part from Toril Moi's argument for treating the act of reading as an act of acknowledgement and adventure: "To be open to adventure is to be attentive, to be illuminated by the text, to assume that it can work the 'miracle of literature' and show us something new. Reading as a practice of acknowledgment requires full attention to particulars. It requires us to emerge from our shell and open ourselves up to the experience offered by the text. It requires us to take our own experience seriously, and to trust it." Toril Moi, "Reading as a Practice of Acknowledgment: The Text as Action and Expression" in *The Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 221. If this seems to point to a kind of critical relativism, then I would point to Barbara Cassin's *L'Effet Sophistique* (and her account of "logologie" more broadly) as offering a more than adequate defense of a less conservative approach to understanding language's work.

Chapter Four:

Value and the Colors of the 'New' World¹

One afternoon of summer rain
my hand skimmed a shelf and I found
an old florin. Ireland, 1950.

We say *like* or *as* and the world is
a fish minted in silver and alloy [...]
- Eavan Boland

Truth lives, in fact, for the most part on a
credit system.
- William James

Poems and plays circa 1600 only infrequently allude to Virginia, to “Indians,” or to America writ large. When these topics crop up, we catch little more than a glimpse of early modern views of the so-called New World. Donne, in “To His Mistress Going to Bed,” refers to the titular mistress’s body as “America,” but the reference might well be to any “new-found-land.”² The mention of America may be topical, but it is hardly particular.³ Anthony Munday, in his Euphucist romance *Zelauto* (1580), likewise treats America as merely one land amongst many when he yokes the Orkney Islands, the East and West Indies, and “the golden American countrey” together. They are all one, all merely places where “wealth [is] adorn’d abundantly.”⁴ Seagull, in Chapman, Jonson, and

¹ There are problems with the title of this chapter that point to critical problems that arise when writing about the development of colonialism and imperialism more broadly. One such problem has to do with reference, namely, how to refer to parts of the world whose nomination was itself a matter of negotiation and played a crucial role in colonialist discursive strategies. Rather than meet these issues head on, I deliberately refer to the landmass to the west of Ireland variously. I adopt European names, indigenous names, and descriptive maneuvers for the sake of emphasizing the nebulosity of early modern understandings of this geographic expanse. I use the same strategy when referring to the respective tribes and names of indigenous peoples (i.e. I use the terms “indigenous people” or “people native to” some given location where only pejorative, generic terms are used in early modern texts, but also use the names of individuals and tribes where they are explicitly mentioned by English writers). My hope is that by mimicking these practices one gets the sense of the limited ken and flexible discursive practices on display in early colonialist writing.

² John Donne, “Elegy 2: To His Mistress Going to Bed” in *The Major Works*, edited by John Carey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 12.

³ What I mean by this is that it is hard to imagine that Donne means that this woman’s body is particularly America-like as opposed to generically like any “undiscovered country.”

⁴ Anthony Munday, *Zelauto* (London: John Charlewood, 1580), 38.

Marston's *Eastward Hoe*, ties Virginia to sexual conquest and feminine virginity like Donne - Virginia, he says, "longs till we share the rest of her Maiden-head" - but quickly turns his attention towards all the gold that is promised on those shores.⁵ Dromio in Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* mocks the poetic trope of equating parts of a woman to parts of the globe. He maligns a woman by saying that "America" is "upon her nose" for it is "all o'er embellished with rubies, carbuncles, sapphires, declining their rich aspect to the hot breath of Spain" (3.2.125-7). America stands as a place whose riches are distractingly displayed and open to all comers.

These passing references tell us that America figured as a land adorned with beautiful gems and glittering riches in early modern writing, but they shed little light on the sociopolitical circumstances that brought America itself into English affairs. In the above texts, America and her goods are already culturally known, but the means by which these goods came to be known is ellided. John Beaumont, in his *Metamorphosis of Tobacco*, suggests that America came into English ken because Queen Elizabeth "stretcht out her mightie hand / Over Virginia, the New-Found land, / And spread the Colours of our *English* Rose," but declines to describe what the spread of such colors resembled.⁶ What colonialism looks like on the ground is occluded, but people indigenous to this land now under "the Colours of [an] English rose" occasionally merit being alluded to.⁷ Richard Niccols' *The Cuckow* includes a character disguised with "Indian-like" paint, but does nothing to explain what makes this paint particularly "Indian-like" or why this particular kind of disguise is

⁵ George Chapman, Ben Jonson, and John Marston, *Eastward hoe* (London: George Eld, 1605), 3.2. See Rebecca Ann Bach, "Ben Jonson's 'Civil Savages,'" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 37.2 (1997): 277-93 for an account of Jonson's satirical view of English fantasies about Virginia.

⁶ John Beaumont, *The Metamorphosis of Tobacco* (London: John Flasket, 1602), E3v.

⁷ The rarity of poetic references to people indigenous to the Americas partly has to do with the generic vagueness of the terms used to refer to these people. There are, of course, no shortage of mentions of "Indians" or "Salvages," but these references are more often than not figurative and thus not circumscribed to any one locale, cf. "Indians" in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and in Sidney's *Apologie*.

called for.⁸ The mention of people indigenous to America is as vague and seemingly incidental as the references to America itself.

Masques represent indigenous people in a more sustained way than poems or plays of the period, but only further emphasize the notion that America's chief cultural value lies in the spectacle of its appearance. George Chapman's *Memorable Maske*, performed at White Hall for King James in 1613 on the occasion of Princess Elizabeth's nuptials, includes "chiefe Maskers, in Indian habits, all of a resemblance" in many-colored feathers.⁹ During the procession to White Hall, each of the chief masquers on horseback is accompanied by "two Moores, attir'd like Indian slaves" and followed by torchbearers whose "habits were likewise of the Indian garb, but more stravaɡant than those of the maskers; all showfully garnisht with several-hewd fethers."¹⁰ The scene at White Hall includes prop suns "imitating Indian worke" and an enormous gold boulder representing a gold mine.¹¹ As the masque unfolds, the "Virginian Priests" sing a "superstitious hymn" in praise of the sun and, by the end of it all direct their devotion to "Love and Bewty, and our Britan Sun."¹² People native to Virginia are, in Chapman, all brightly colored feathers and pagan beliefs.

In *The Maske of Flowers*, an indigenous figure named Kawasha enters the scene "borne upon two Indians shoulders attired like Floridans."¹³ Unlike Chapman's many-hued "Virginians," Kawasha singularly covered in "pide stuffe," "Olive-coloure stuff," and "Tobacco-colour stuffe cut like Tobacco leaves."¹⁴ Kawasha, as you might imagine, is a stand-in for the vice of smoking

⁸ Richard Niccols, *The Cuckow* (London: Felix Kingston, 1607), 16. I take this reference to be specifically about people in the Americas because of the association with paint. There is, as you will see later in this chapter, a consistent emphasis on the practice of body painting that is more or less unique to writings about people indigenous to the Americas (contra other people who may be referred to as "Indians").

⁹ George Chapman, *The Memorable Maske* (London: George Eld, 1613), A1v-A2r.

¹⁰ Chapman, *The Memorable Maske*, A2v-A3r.

¹¹ Chapman, *The Memorable Maske*, A2r.

¹² Chapman, *The Memorable Maske*, a2r. The printer's decision to use a lowercase "a" to paginate the pages "inserted" by Chapman after the publication was in process is an interesting feature of this text, but not one I can pause on here.

¹³ John Coperario, *The Maske of Flowers* (London: Nicholas Okes, 1614), B3r.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

tobacco. He sings briefly of the pleasure of smoking, but we mostly learn about him from others. People are warned that Kawasha “come[s] from a far Countrey, / To make our noses a chimney.”¹⁵ Towards the masque’s conclusion, Kawasha dances with the allegorical stand-in for the English vice of drunkenness. Smoking and drinking are tangled together, American and English vices are rendered roughly equivalent, and the masque concludes.¹⁶

Thomas Campion’s *Description of A Maske* opts not to stage indigenous people individually or *en masse*, but makes America herself allegorically present. She is shown “in a skin coate of the colour of the juyce of Mulberries, on her head a large round brim of many coloured feathers, an in the midst of it a small crowne.”¹⁷ She performs no notable actions over the course of the masque, but is - in comparison to allegorical Europe, Asia, and Africa - visually striking, colorful, while she stands onstage.

The Americas and people indigenous to that continent serve as something like an aesthetic trope. The land and its people are visually striking, desired, but also morally questionable. Everything to do with the land to the west of Ireland is golden, painted, adorned, and embellished. America, in the English aesthetic imagination, has at most surface value.¹⁸ These aesthetic treatments of American and indigenous people each draw on some aspect of English colonial discourse.¹⁹ The costumes called “Indian-like” roughly correspond, as we will see, to descriptions of indigenous apparel by English writers. Various colored feathers and animal skins were, in fact, worn by indigenous people. Likewise, tobacco was a crop native to America and smoking tobacco

¹⁵ Coperario, *Maske of Flowers*, B4r.

¹⁶ On this basis of James’ particular distaste for smoking (see his *Counterblaste to Tobacco*), it is hard to judge whether the association of smoking with vice in Jacobean entertainments was principally because James so disliked it or because there was a prejudice against indigenous practices themselves.

¹⁷ Thomas Campion, *The description of A Maske* (London: E. Alde, 1614), B1r.

¹⁸ cf. the way “the Turks” and the Ottoman Empire more broadly are depicted for the sake of showcasing different moral, spiritual, and/or political values in early modern aesthetic works.

¹⁹ For a more thorough accounting of how each of these masques adopt and adapt factive information to their own particular ends, see Rebecca Ann Bach, “Colonial Transformations in Court and City Entertainments” in *Colonial Transformations: The Cultural Production of the New Atlantic World, 1580-1640* (London: Palgrave, 2000), 149-90.

was (and is) an indigenous cultural practice.²⁰ While the specific contours of indigenous modes of life might be badly drawn and inaccurate, these mentions and representations are not fabricated out of whole cloth.²¹ These aesthetic representations of the world across the Atlantic aim to spur the imaginations and interests of their audience through the adoption of ostensibly factual accounts by colonialist authors.²² These aesthetic works traffic in a kind of truth about America while simultaneously underlining the good of colonization.

When beauty, truth, and goodness conspire in particular ways, Du Bois argues, “all art is propaganda.”²³ The broad reach of the claim may be debatable, but the substance of it - that art propagates or can be made to propagate certain views of the world by instrumentalizing the true and the good - is unquestionably borne out when we look, at least, to early modern aesthetic representations of the so-called New World. When writers represent the American continent and the people indigenous to it, we see them deploy the features of the artist *cum* propagandist that Du Bois highlights. We see that truth is never pursued for its own sake, but only as “the highest handmaid of the imagination, as the one great vehicle of universal understanding.”²⁴ We see that goodness, likewise, is never an end in itself, but only ever utilized “as the one true method of gaining sympathy and human interest.”²⁵ The reductive view of America and indigenous people in early

²⁰ See Lauren Working, “Locating Colonization at the Jacobean Inns of Court,” *The Historical Journal* 61.1 (2018): 29-51 for the ways that smoking tobacco and its association to indigeneity shows up in Jacobean entertainments.

²¹ This is not to say that misrepresentations or representational inaccuracies are morally or politically neutral, but only to suggest that in regards to America (as opposed to, say, Africa) English writers do not seem to be concocting things *ex nihilo*.

²² I use the term “colonialist” to refer to writers and writings that specifically advocate for English expansion into the Americas. Francis Drake and Plymouth are, thus, unaddressed in this chapter on the grounds that the former had no interest in establishing long-term settlement in “New Albion” and Plymouth was in its early years only tenuously and complicatedly associated with the English state.

²³ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Criteria for Negro Art” in *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader*, edited by David Levering Lewis (New York: Penguin, 1995), 103.

²⁴ Du Bois, “Criteria for Negro Art,” 102-3.

²⁵ Du Bois, “Criteria for Negro Art,” 103.

modern art underlines and highlights only the features that recommend encounter, adventure, and colonization.

To say that early modern masques are propaganda is to say nothing new. Whatever the subject represented in a masque, these entertainments principally serve to demonstrate the wealth and ideological potency of a monarch.²⁶ One wonders, though, to what extent the representation of America and indigenous life in aesthetic contexts differs in kind from the description of America and indigenous life in ostensibly factual ones. Du Bois suggests that a document containing fictions and a document containing facts differ insofar as they *use* truth and value to different ends. A poem and a discourse on natural philosophy both have designs on the true and the good, but differ in respect to how they pursue these things and the ends to which they put them. How, though, to identify that difference on the page? What distinction is to be made, say, between the people decked out in many-colored feathers in a masque advocating colonialism and the description of people decked out in many-colored feathers in a pamphlet advocating colonialism?

One chief distinction between outright aesthetic representations of indigenous life and the merits of colonialism and reportorial or documentary presentations of indigenous life and the merits of colonialism lies in the latter's dogged and explicit insistence on truth-telling. Not only do colonialist tracts advertise their veracity by way of their titles (e.g. Harriot's *A Briefe and True Report*, Strachey's *True Reportory*, Smith's *True Relation*), but much of the prefatory material in these tracts is devoted to emphasizing the truth of these writings as well as offering arguments for the grounds upon which readers ought to take them as truthful. These assertions, though, betray an anxiety about the ground upon which truth stands and the ways it might be judged. Ralph Lane, for

²⁶ See, say, Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), Martin Butler, *The Stuart Court Masque and Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), and Julie Sanders, *The Cultural Geography of Early Modern Drama, 1620-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

example, prefaces Hariot's account of Virginia by vowing that only "true enformation" is inscribed within.²⁷ He stakes his reputation on this claim. "I dare boldly avouch it may very well passe with credit of truth even amongst the most true relations of the age."²⁸ It is not that Hariot's account is simply true or factual, but that it ought to "passe with credit of truth," that is, it ought to be seen as valuable by dint of its truthfulness alongside "the most true relations." Truth, it seems, functions on a sliding scale. There are more true and less true relations. Truth, thus, needs to be accredited or attributed to a work. Lane tacitly acknowledges that things may well be true without "passing" with such "credit."

Accounts of Christopher Columbus are used as a prime example of how ostensibly factive writing can be mis- or disvalued, purported truth can be discredited. George Peckham, for instance, notes that some readers "judged him [Columbus] by his garments and others by his looke and countenance, but none entered into consideration of the inward man," thus his testimony, the purported knowledge he attempted to share about this "New" World, were "accounted a fantastickall imagination, and a drowsie dreame."²⁹ If a reader only judges appearances, then they are prone to "accounting" poorly. In *A Good Speed to Virginia*, Robert Gray declares that Columbus "was (of us English especially) scorned and accounted for an idle Novellist" despite all his efforts to speak truly.³⁰ Truth is not immediately discernible or self-evident, but is rather a good amongst others. It must be given value, recognized as valuable, if it is to circulate intact. Value judgments, however, are not necessarily beholden to the facts of things. The line between "true enformation" and an "idle Novel" has more to do with what occurs in a mind than what happens on a page. How, then, are we now meant to judge the truths and values in colonialist discourse? How are we to see how

²⁷ Thomas Hariot, *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (London: R. Robinson, 1588), A2r.

²⁸ Hariot, *A Briefe and True Report*, A2v.

²⁹ George Peckham, *A True Reporte, of the Late Discoveries* (London: John Charlewood, 1583), B4v.

³⁰ Robert Gray, *A Good Speed to Virginia* (London: Felix Kyngston, 1609), B1v.

writers and readers alike judged, credited, or otherwise valued the stuff in these missives? At a distance of four hundred years, the ways that truth, goodness, and beauty conspire with each other in colonial discourse are harder to chart than the ways these same values conspire with each other in aesthetic objects around the same time. What makes colonial discourse especially difficult to analyze is that truth, goodness, and beauty are often indistinguishable from each other in these texts.

Disentangling what is a statement of fact from what is a judgment of value, what is a claim about the truth of America and what is a claim about the good of America, is a complicated affair, in part, because there is nothing like a formal axiology or theory of value in the early modern world.³¹

Between Aquinas and Hobbes, we see no full attempts to account for whether value is an intrinsic or extrinsic feature of the world.³² No debates revolve around whether the goodness of artworks is the same quality and arises from the same sources as, say, the goodness of saints.³³ This lack of axiology does not mean the question of value was a settled matter in the early modern world, but rather that the question of value was a practical concern over and above a theoretical one. While the Bible and commentaries upon it shaped early modern worldviews about moral goodness and badness, religious texts offered a tenuous ground (at best) upon which to base other kinds of value judgment.³⁴ In colonialist discourse in particular, the question of what value is, how it adheres, and what it does shows up constantly. In fact, it is tempting to say that all colonialist writing is guided by

³¹ To be sure, there is hardly a formal consensus regarding “truth” or “fact” either. Religious schisms account for some of why this is so, but other factors (e.g. the rise of print) no doubt contribute.

³² For Aquinas, all value is ultimately moral value and said moral value is transcendent. For Hobbes, all value is ultimately hedonistic/sensual value and said hedonistic/sensual value is subjective. For the sake of this chapter, this cursory view of the effective boundary cases should suffice. To be clear, I am not saying that values are not addressed in early modern writing, but just that they are not addressed in any systematic or full sense.

³³ See, for example, the way that Montaigne discusses value in a vague, pragmatic sense across the *Essays*. Note the lack of trouble he faces moving among moral virtue, aesthetic value, and other kinds of value. These are, for him, neither participants in one universal type of value nor are they utterly distinct atomic units. For a fuller consideration of Montaigne’s view of value, see David Lewis Schaeffer, “The Good, The Beautiful, and the Useful: Montaigne’s Transvaluation of Values,” *The American Political Science Review* 73.1 (1979): 139-154.

³⁴ Even in regards to moral goodness and badness, religious doctrine is hardly straightforward. For example, Protestants and Catholics alike might wholeheartedly agree that lying is morally bad, but they might - as is evident in the controversy regarding drama around the turn of the seventeenth-century - differ on what exactly constitutes a lie or hold differing views toward equivocation.

a broad assertion of value (i.e. America is good) and accompanied by (seeming) factual evidence in support of this judgment. The problem, then, is in understanding the distinction between values and facts. This problem is felt acutely when we look at how color crops up in colonialist writing.

More than any other quality or aspect of America, writers consistently note its colors without describing or explaining why they are noting these colors at all.³⁵ Undisclosed antecedent values motivate the documentation of colors, but once documented these colors lead to heterogeneous value judgments. Color might be mentioned as a simple fact, a mere aspect of visual experience, but the mere presence of the mention never forecloses judgements of its value along various axes (e.g. aesthetic, ethical, sensual). Colors effectively force writers and readers alike to confront the fact/value distinction *avant la lettre*.³⁶ The fact/value problem of color crops up in various forms across colonialist discourse - from the simple use of color as an adjective to more fleshed out descriptions of how colors are valued/disvalued by indigenous people - but across all these types of color usage we see that values and judgments of value are radically contingent. Such contingency or uncertainty suggests that the distinction between truth and falsity, between fact and fiction, in early modern writing lies less in the way representations correspond to the world and more in the way values are attributed to or arise from such representations.

Colonial discourse – by which I mean writing about the ‘New’ World that articulate some clear desire to erect colonies in that world - has two related motives, namely, 1) explain what the

³⁵ As a case in point, George Peckham urges all writers who describe the American continent to “alweis” note “the difference of Colour” Peckham provides no explanation of why color difference ought to have such pride of place in descriptions, but nonetheless it is seemingly of greater value than any other trait. The “quantitie” of things ought also be noted, but only after color differences. See Daniela Hacke, “Colonial Scenescapes: Thomas Hariot and the Production of Knowledge” in *Empire of the Senses: Sensory Practices of Colonialism in Early America*, edited by Daniela Hacke and Paul Musselwhite (Boston: Brill, 2018) for further context on typical notation practices in early modern natural philosophy. Authors are insistent across the board *that* visual information be recorded without offering an account of why or under what circumstances said visual data is significant.

³⁶ Hume’s statement of the problem is perhaps the most famous - one cannot infer an “ought” from an “is” - but later versions (esp. Putnam’s prolonged engagement) are perhaps closer to what I am referring to here, namely, the problem of distinguishing what is merely the case and what in or about the case has value.

Americas are like and 2) encourage people to participate in English colonial and/or trade endeavors. The weight given to each of these motives differs across texts (i.e. some explain little and encourage a lot, others explain much and encourage little), but we never find one without the other in some form. To effectively explain and inspire encouraging views of the ‘New’ World to the ‘Old’ World, writers must bridge the gap between what is unknown or novel about this world and what is known or familiar at home. Just as the Atlantic must be navigated in order to arrive in America, so too must epistemic and emotional anxieties be navigated in order to convince people that such a potentially dangerous endeavor is worthwhile. For the sake of alleviating worry and quelling ignorance or, in more positive terms, inspiring hope and instilling knowledge, writers alternately diminish and amplify the novelty of the ‘New’ World. America writ large is at once utterly unlike and profoundly like England. One of color’s values lies in its use as a semantic and phenomenological hinge to render the world familiar and exotic, approachable and alluring at once.³⁷

For example, Thomas Hariot tells us that in Virginia one will find a new kind of fruit called “Medlars.” One will know that they are medlars because they are “as red as cherries,” but differ in taste.³⁸ One will also see “Maize” which has exactly the same “forme and shape” as “English peaze,” but appears, unlike “English peaze,” in “divers colours: some white, some red, some yellow, and some blew.”³⁹ Describing unknown objects means anchoring those descriptions in known qualities like colors. Hariot foregrounds color’s instrumental epistemic value, but other writers include color to less clear ends. John Brereton, for instance, explains that in America there are “[s]trawberries, red and white.”⁴⁰ The inclusion of the colors of strawberries seems superfluous

³⁷ A brief explanation of why I place “semantic” and “phenomenological” side by side in respect to color: Color has a clear semantic role (as adjective) while being semantically empty (i.e. individual color terms are not definable), thus color’s use in language must (and only can) capture and/or seek to inspire some phenomenological experience.

³⁸ Hariot, *A Briefe and True Report*, D1r.

³⁹ Hariot, *A Briefe and True Report*, C1r.

⁴⁰ John Brereton, *A Briefe and True Relation of the Discoverie of the North Part of Virginia* (London: George Bishop, 1602), 5.

since to say that there are strawberries just is to say that there are red and white strawberries. The mention of the familiar, known colors of a familiar, known fruit curiously brings novelty into the fold implicitly. Brereton is, as it were, anticipating a cautious mind, a reader who might be skeptical or uncertain about whether these American “strawberries” are identical to English strawberries proper. Whether color is used to assert similarity or difference, its mention is never neutral.

Two descriptions of forested areas show us that color and visual experience can be relied on to render things familiar and exotic in tandem. Brereton describes “woody places” at length. He notes that in these places trees grow “so distinct and apart one [...] from another, upon green grassie ground.”⁴¹ The scene described is hardly a foreign or exotic one. In the woods, trees stand next to each other and grass coats the earth. The green of the grass, like the red of the strawberries, strikes one as an unnecessary addition. It explains nothing, but the inclusion of that detail presents a quotidian feature of the world as though it were remarkable. There is something, it seems, about *these* trees, their distinction each from another, and *this* green grass that is remarkable. These particular woods somehow strike Brereton as though “Nature would shew her selfe above her power, artificial.”⁴² There is nothing in Brereton’s description of the woods that gives cause for such a superlative judgment, but that he takes the time to describe this woods, to mark the visual contrast between the trees and the ground, the trees and themselves, brings before our eyes a sight at once quotidian and exceptional. It is not that the natural world in America necessarily differs in kind from the natural world in England (i.e. woods are still called woods, strawberries are still called strawberries), but rather that it strikes the eye a certain way. A peculiar and novel sensual or aesthetic value creeps into common and known things. George Percy makes a similar claim when,

⁴¹ Brereton, *A Briefe and True Relation*, 8.

⁴² *Ibid.*

venturing to the south of Virginia, he happens upon “a path-way like to an Irish pace.”⁴³ Following along this path, he finds “the ground all flowing over with faire flowers of sundry colours and kindes, as though it had beene in any Garden or Orchard in England.”⁴⁴ The colorful array of flowers is at once surprising and familiar. In England, one would have to labor to produce such an arrangement of natural beauty, but in America it is a spontaneous feature of the landscape. Nature, again, would seem to strive to show herself “above her power, artificial.” This insistence that the natural landscape verges on artifice, that natural goods and cultural goods are substantively entangled in America, extends into other more explicit discussions of value.

Through the writing of eight travelers/adventurers, Hakluyt’s *Divers Voyages* presents close to a century of “discoveries” and manages to touch on territories from Florida to modern day Newfoundland. As a result of the broad historical and geographical sweep of Hakluyt’s texts, an index or catalogue of “certaine commodities growing in part of America, not presently inhabited by any Christians from Florida Northward” is provided in the book’s final few pages.⁴⁵ The commodities are categorized into generic groups (e.g. “Beastes,” “Trees”). Reference are made to known things (e.g. stags, oak trees) as well as only loosely known or outright unknown things (e.g. “a kinde of beast like a Conny,” “many sortes of herbes differing from ours”). Reading the catalogue in isolation, one gets the sense that America is a great storehouse of familiar and foreign goods. The catalogue, however, is not a value neutral or strictly factive list of goods. In a few entries we find descriptions supplemented by value judgments. There are, we find, “Filbirdtress better than ours” and “a fish like a grayhound good meate” in America. This list, its emphasis on natural objects and judgments of their value, reduces the American continent to commodities, to goods *in potentia* with

⁴³ George Percy, “Observations gathered out of a Discourse of the Plantation of the Southerne Colonie in Virginia by the English, 1606” in Samuel Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgrimes in Five Bookes* (London: William Stansby, 1625), 1688.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Richard Hakluyt, *Divers Voyages Touching the Discoverie of America* (London: Thomas Dawson, 1582), K4r.

ready utility and discernable value.⁴⁶ If the landscape above resembled artworks on display, the flora and fauna here resemble goods on a shop's shelf. These writings loosely follow Francis Bacon's suggestion that all writers, all inquirers after knowledge, ought "as well discern the riches of nature's warehouse as the beauty of her shop."⁴⁷

Beneath a few "Other Stones" (which include "Quarries of glistening stones" and "Marble very hard"), one finds a rather abstract heading.⁴⁸

Colours.
 Belowe. } Redde.
 Blewe. } Scarlet.
 } Roane colour.

There are "Colours" in America, but the material sense in which these colors are there is occluded. Hakluyt obviously does not mean to suggest "Redde" as such continues to exist across the Atlantic, but rather that there are substances such that "Redde" pigment for painting and dying can be made. What those substances are exactly is immaterial here. Hakluyt's elision of what, specifically, makes "Roane colour" available as a commodity might simply be abbreviated for the sake of brevity or clarity, but this abbreviation is meaningful. It suggests that what is of exchange or market value in America is already set aside or parceled out. We can presume that no reader of this index is naive enough to imagine that the shores of the eastern part of America are lined with goods to be taken without labor, but Hakluyt does seem to suggest just that. On his list, we find that one item "growing in part of America" is "Bagges of Red colours."⁴⁹ If before the aesthetic value of America was perfectly clear at a glance, now the market value - indeed the market readiness - of America is unmistakable. Hakluyt's matter of fact list implies profit.

⁴⁶ Shannon Miller suggests that this catalogue (and others like it) elide the particularity of the region, thus transform the continent into some generic land of plenty. See *Invested with Meaning: The Raleigh Circle in the New World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998) for a comparison of Hakluyt's index with other similar catalogues.

⁴⁷ Francis Bacon, "The Praise of Knowledge" in *The Major Works*, edited by Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 35.

⁴⁸ Hakluyt, *Divers Voyages*, K4v.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

While Hakluyt can reduce this land of plenty to goods, a series of nouns without much accompanying description or commentary, other writers have a harder time expressing what it is like to be presented with such rich sights. Ribault - the man gifted with “Bagges of red colours” by indigenous people elided by Hakluyt - finds that it is

unspeakable to consider the thinges that bee seene there [in America],
and shalbe founde more and more in this incomparable lande, which
never yet broke with plough yrons, bringeth forth all things according
to his first nature, where the eternall God indued it.⁵⁰

In some respects, these comments about the visual features of the natural world accord with Stephen Greenblatt’s claim that “the early modern discourse of discovery [...] is a superbly powerful register of the characteristic claims and limits of European representational practice.”⁵¹ Save that, in the above, there is nothing altogether “powerful” about the claims advanced by Hariot, Brereton, et al. The ways in which their acts of describing America stitch banal fact and implicit value together are easily overlooked. Moreover, colonialist writers never altogether run up against a representational limit. The splendor and novelty of this world is everywhere translated into picturable or at least cognizable stuff. Even when we see writers come up against a seeming limit, that limit serves a valuable representational role. It may well be “unspeakable to consider” the sights of America for Ribault, but it is quite evidently writable. The land is like unto Eden, its utter goodness is mysterious and awesome in a religious sense. It is not that America must be seen or experienced to be believed nor is it that America cannot be represented, but rather that it participates in some kind of primitive, prelapsarian perfection. Moreover, invoking the limits of speech or comparison is, by the time the English cross the Atlantic with some regularity, an old aesthetic trope. To say, as Arthur Barlowe does, that the New World is replete with “such

⁵⁰ John Ribault, “The True and Last Discoverie of Florida” in Hakluyt, *Divers Voyages*, F2v.

⁵¹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 23.

difference” that it would be “incredible to be written” is to participate in longstanding European representational practices and to find no limits therein.⁵² The idea of incomparable beauty is the stuff of sonnets. While colonialist writing may rely on known aesthetic or rhetorical practices, there is a significant pragmatic difference between the representational acts of the sonneteer and those of the colonialist.

While poetry and other explicitly aesthetic representational practices can describe the beloved’s “beauty without compare” for the sake of instruction and delight, the colonialist must instruct, delight, and establish somehow that some “beauty without compare” is real, extant, truly there. Neither Astrophil nor Stella need be substantively real entities for Sidney’s verse to motivate certain views of love or amorous behavior. America, though, must be properly grounded in the world itself if colonialist discourse is going to succeed in motivating favorable views and subsequent actions on its basis. Raleigh’s claim that Guiana is “the most beautiful country that ever mine eies beheld” because it is full of “passages of very rare colours and forms, not elsewhere to be found” such that it is “as if they [these colours and forms] had been by all the art and labour in the world so made of purpose” is not merely an appraisal of Guiana, is not merely some act of representing how the land struck him for the delight of readers, but rather an act of representing a world that is valuable, demands to be recognized as valuable on multiple levels, and is worth pursuing.⁵³ Raleigh hopes his high esteem of the world moves others to hold that world in high esteem in turn. The “purpose” of such colors is in Raleigh’s experience aesthetic, but more broadly it speaks to some kind of cosmic splendor, some sort of transcendent design. The inclusion of such value judgments

⁵² Arthur Barlowe, “The first voyage made to the coasts of America, with two barks, where in were Captaines M. Philip Amadas, and M. Arthur Barlowe, who discovered part of the Countrey now called Virginia, Anno 1584” in Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (London: George Bishop, Ralph Newberie, and Robert Barker, 1599), 246.

⁵³ Walter Raleigh, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empire of Guiana* (London: Robert Robinson, 1596), 48, 42, 48.

is motivational. Aesthetic representations (e.g. paintings, plays, poems) are beautiful things of themselves, but colonialist discourse must always emphasize the object of representation, what exists in the world prior to being described or explained in discourse. Colors direct viewers away from the imperfect text, the narrative that can only say “very rare colors” or enumerate some handful of hues, and focuses attention back on the lived, visual experience of colors themselves. The discursive value of color, then, sometimes lies in its being discursively uncapturable, undefinable, but immanently and immediately experienceable.

Experience is typically taken as a rhetorical and epistemic cornerstone of early colonialist writing. Colonialist writing, as critics highlight, coincides historically with early modern worldviews shifting away from scholasticism and towards a kind of empiricism.⁵⁴ This shift in worldviews entails divesting epistemic authority from writing and investing said authority in direct encounters with the empirical world.⁵⁵ This turn creates an especially aggravating problem for colonialist writers who are tasked with having to transmit experience in writing to a community of readers without any shared experiences. Writers are forced to question whether language can map on to experience faithfully. They are tasked with determining how individual, private experiences can be generalized and shared. Experience as such presents discursive problems that are unsolvable. The problem with placing strong emphasis on how colonialist authors understood experience as such is that experience *as such* is never really a concern. While mentions of direct experience and its import occur, there is little depth to them.⁵⁶ Nor do these mentions of direct experience’s import stand

⁵⁴ See Jim Egan, *Authorizing Experience: Refigurations of the Body Politic in Seventeenth-Century New England Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) for both an overview of this critical schema and for a compelling interpretation of just how we ought to see the concept of experience working in the colonial project more broadly.

⁵⁵ This claim needs to be nuanced in various ways when we look specifically to the confluence of colonialism and theology. For such nuancing, see Sarah Rivett’s *The Science of the Soul in Colonial New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

⁵⁶ The most frequent mentions emphasize “eye-witnessing,” but there is no indication in these writings that “eye-witnessing” differs epistemically in kind from, say, learning by (credible) secondhand report. There is, to be sure, a difference intimated, but of what that difference consists is undisclosed.

unchallenged. Ralph Hamor, for instance, rails against “the perversenes of mankinde, such their incredulity of every thing, save what their eies tell them to be true” even though, as he sees it, “every line of writing” regarding Virginia should be taken as “reall encouragement.”⁵⁷ John Rolfe, likewise, warns readers to be wary of “incredulous wordlinges such as beleive not unles they feeles the goodness of the Lord sensibly to touche them.”⁵⁸

The proper issue with experience in early modern writing is more localized and narrow than is typically acknowledged. That colonialist discourse, without exception, does not labor over explaining, describing, or elucidating the experience of crossing the Atlantic on a ship (an experience as novel to the majority of readers as wandering around Virginia) suggests that the specific problems faced by colonialist writers are set more squarely on specific instances of experience, particular aspects of encountering the world.⁵⁹ By looking at color, we see that the chief question is not whether experience has some profound epistemic value, but what kind of value attains to certain parts of experience. The parts of experience most epistemically and emotionally fraught are frequently visual ones. What colors mean, what they can be understood as signs of, and how they transmit or hold values is an especially taxing aspect of this issue. Colors make up visual experience, they make sense of the world, but the experience of color is not unproblematically shareable. To write of color is to underline direct experience, but to read of color is feel oneself at a remove from the experience of others. The value of color surely lies in part on its place in experience, but colonialist writers also use color to make claims that exceed experience.

John Verarzanus notes that while his explorations were limited, he nonetheless believes that territories that are as-yet unexplored by Europeans will yield up “drugs, or spicerie, or other richesse

⁵⁷ Ralph Hamor, *A True Discourse of the Present State of Virginia* (London: John Beale, 1615), A2r.

⁵⁸ John Rolfe, *A True Relation of the State of Virginia* in *Captain John Smith: Writings with other Narratives of Roanoke, Jamestown, and the First English Settlement of America*, edited by James Horn (New York: Library Classics, 2007), 1175.

⁵⁹ Accounts of crossing the Atlantic do come to be included in colonial narratives over time, but they are not a feature early on.

of golde, seeing the colour of the lande doth so much argue it.”⁶⁰ Visual qualities not only bridge the epistemic gap between what is known at home and unknown abroad, but even suggest that what is unknown to and unexperienced by the English abroad is already of value. The color of this land does not just inspire value judgments in colonists, but it seems to make claims of its own. It “argue[s]” for profits to come, goods housed in some vague place in some future time. Color is inherently and instrumentally valuable. Raleigh, too, registers a similar coincidence of beauty and utility, inherent and instrumental value, when he and his men drift along a river, disheartened and low on supplies. At the end of their rope, Raleigh and his men spy

birds of all colours some carnation, some crimson, orange tawny, purple and mixt, as it was unto us a great good passing of the time to behould them, besides the reliefe we found by killing some store of them without fouling peeces.⁶¹

By calling attention to all of the birds’ varied colors to the exclusion of all other qualities, Raleigh makes the scene kaleidoscopic. He and his men delight in the spectacular, vibrant diversity of colors and the reader is moved to delight in kind, but this “great good passing of time” is not solely a good in itself. It stands with the “reliefe” of killing and eating these beautiful creatures. Raleigh seems to notice that juxtaposing a reverential attitude and a violently practical one in such quick succession may be jarring to a reader, thus offers some (cold) comfort by adding that the “killing” was done “without fouling peeces.” This impulse to preserve the initial beauty of the natural world in writing while also exploiting it for practical ends further highlights the peculiar place color occupies in the colonial imaginary. It is valuable of itself, worth recognizing and recording as its own species of good, but always also stands as a sign of some other good, an index of some other nonvisual value.

⁶⁰ John Verarzanus, “To the Most Christian King of Fraunce, Fraunces the first. The Relation of John Verarzanus a Florentine, of the lande by him discovered in the name of his Majestie, written in Diepe the eight of July 1524” in Hakluyt, *Divers Voyages*, A2v.

⁶¹ Raleigh, *Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bentiful*, 45.

At this juncture, color might seem simply too semantically and phenomenologically flexible to parse meaningfully. It functions to establish similarity and difference between objects. It is used to point out how nature cannot quite be represented, but also used to represent said nature. It is an index of the unsullied, paradisiacal quality of the Americas, but also a consistent reminder that America is already commodified and fits readily into worldly markets. It attests to the near sublimity of organic nature, but also calls to mind an artist's handiwork. At its most basic, color is a semantic and phenomenological object that sees its value change contextually and continually. One easy way out of this complexity would be to argue that color in colonialist discourse is a secondary quality. Colonialist writers might take color as an inherent part of experience (hence, worthy of passing remark), but an incidental part of the world (hence, unworthy of sustained consideration). Besides the fact that the distinction between primary and secondary qualities only enters properly into the philosophical canon late in the seventeenth century, colonialist writers are moreover only rarely inspired to draw a hard line between experience and the world experienced. The view of color on offer in colonialist discourse does not accord with the idea of secondary qualities, but rather speaks more specifically to the nebulous place color (and visual experience) occupied in natural philosophical views contemporaneous with it. Natural philosophers working around 1600 are on the whole less sure about what might be essential and what might be accidental empirical features of the world. What might have substantial, real value or superficial, merely sensual value is something of an open question. One reason that color is and can be indiscriminately valued in early colonialist discourse is because colors, as such, are metaphysically and empirically unfixed at the time. Various accounts of color's ontological status are offered up, but only Francis Bacon proffers a method for dealing with colors whatever their metaphysical status.

In his *New Organon*, Bacon proposes one way of navigating the vagaries of experience such that empirical truth might be derived. He suggests that when inquiring after the world, one ought to

be sensitive to “solitary instances” or “*ferales* [wild ones]” of experience. These, he explains, are instances of experience that

exhibit the nature under investigation in subjects which have nothing in common with other subjects but that very nature; or again which do not exhibit the nature under investigation, in subjects which are similar in all things to other subjects except in that nature.⁶²

Perhaps recognizing the obscurity of his definition, Bacon mercifully offers two examples of just what *ferales* might be. In effect, there are two kinds of solitary instance or *ferale*. There are, he writes, those that have to do with resemblance.

For example: in an investigation of the nature of *colour*. Prisms and crystals, and also dew and such things, which make colours in themselves and throw them outside themselves on a wall, are solitary instances. For they have nothing in common with the inherent colours in flowers, coloured gems, metals, woods etc. except colour itself. Hence it is easy to infer that colour is nothing other than the modification of a ray of light admitted and received, in the first case through different degrees of incidence, in the second through various textures and structures of body.⁶³

The resemblance between colors, for Bacon, serves as a way of distinguishing the appearance of color from its empirical basis. Under the aspect of a solitary instance substantially different things can appear similar. To complement solitary instances of resemblance, there are also solitary instances of difference:

Again, in the same inquiry [i.e. into the nature of color], distinct veins of black and white in marble, and variations of colour in flowers of the same species, are *solitary instances*. For the white and the black in marble and the patches of red and white in carnations agree in almost everything except in the color itself. Hence the easy conclusion that colour does not have much in common with the intrinsic natures of a body but lies only in the grosser, quasi-mechanical positioning of the parts.⁶⁴

⁶² Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, edited by Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 136.

⁶³ Bacon, *New Organon*, 136.

⁶⁴ Bacon, *New Organon*, 136-7.

What solitary instances of difference highlight is that things differing in one aspect ought not discount the idea that they share some underlying empirical basis.

Ferales are properly so-called because it is not clear where they fit into the scheme of things. Any investigator into the nature of things should be alert to the possibility (if not outright probability) of mistaking how something appears with how something is, between an experience of the world and the world itself. *Ferales* of resemblance show us that just because two things look similar does not mean they are substantially the same while *ferales* of difference show us the obverse. Unlike the notion of secondary qualities as put forward later by Locke, *ferales* are not used as a means of metaphysically carving up the world. The category does not altogether assert some ontological claim about what entities exist or how they exist, but rather serves as a heuristic. This heuristic, however, is not ideal. One cannot *a priori* establish whether some quality is a solitary instance. Even suspecting that some quality is, in fact, a solitary instance necessitates further inquiries in order to establish whether said solitary instance is one of resemblance or difference.⁶⁵

From any person's perspective, the world is crowded with apparent similarities and differences.⁶⁶ The relationship between visual phenomena and empirical truth is never an experiential given. Bacon's suggestion (especially in regards to color) is that some parts of experience might be merely in our heads and other parts of experience might be veridically tied to the world. In more technically terms, Bacon is arguing that only by way of rational deliberation regarding a large swath of experiences can one begin to see whether such and such a thing is situated

⁶⁵ One can think of it as a skeptical speedbump. It is meant to keep one from jumping too quickly to either extreme conclusions about experience (i.e. that experience has no insight into how things are or that experience has perfect insight into how things are).

⁶⁶ Foucault's *Order of Things* might be worth noting at this point since, in the chapter on "Representing," a few of the same topics I am addressing are discussed. I do not rely on Foucault for a number of reasons, but mostly because I think the story he tells about the development of different historical *epistemes* only works if you (as he does) selectively ignore large parts of the philosophical tradition. For instance, the work of Aristotle, Augustine, and Averroes does not factor into his analysis at all. The genealogical claims he makes do not stand if we even acknowledge in a cursory fashion these figures (not to mention others like Anselm, Boethius, William of Ockham, Duns Scotus).

primarily in the world or primarily in the subject. This procedure must, for it to work, be guided by focused inquiry. Unless you are looking to discern the nature of something in particular, solitary instances are conceptual nonstarters. Not for nothing, the nature of color is Bacon's prime example of the kind of inquiry that would benefit from his notion of solitary instances. Color might play a valuable epistemic role in discerning the truth of things, but it also might only hold hedonistic or sensual value that leads good reason astray.

Even with Bacon's help and a cornucopia of colorful examples, accounting for color's value still causes trouble. Does it, at root, say something definitive about the nature of America? Or does it, rather, only say something about the experience of those who have ventured westward? Is it a feature of the world that, as Verarzanus has it, "argues" for its nature? Or is it, as Raleigh has it, simply a "great good passing of time"? Or perhaps both? How one is meant to visit value judgments on aspects of experience is just as much a problem for those whose encounter with the Americas is had indirectly through words as it for those whose encounter with this land is had directly through sense data. As Raleigh attests, what to do with the qualities that strike the eye is no simple task.

"[E]very stone that we stooped to take up, promised eyther gold or silver by his complexion," Raleigh remarks.⁶⁷ An experience of a stone's complexion can guarantee the empirical presence of a valuable mineral, but it also might not. Some of his men, he writes, brought back to the ship

severall sorts of stones that appeared very faire, but were such as they found loose on the ground, and were for the most part but cullored, and had not any gold fixed in them, yet such as had no judgement or experience kept all that glittered and would not be perswaded but it was rich because of its lustre.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Raleigh, *Discoverie*, 68.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Neither color nor experience can be taken for granted here. Raleigh, in the earlier passage, suggests that appearances can faithfully index substances and, in this later passage, suggests that appearances are sometimes just appearances. Bacon's *ferales* are very much in play as Raleigh and his men comb through stones. Raleigh suggests that direct experience is never of itself veridical. "Judgement or experience" must somehow supplement direct experience. America "promises" wealth and tricks the eye with "lustre" depending on the kind of judgment that accompanies experience. What is learned about the world through sight depends as much on what the world is like as it does on what a perceiver is like. What is a reader, though, to make of this granular distinction? These comments by Raleigh do nothing to explain the world he encounters. There is no need to read about novel territories or venture across oceans to learn that all that glisters is not gold.

Raleigh's anecdote is not included for explanatory purposes, but rather for other ends. The dual suggestion that some see the fact of gold while others misrecognize merely stones with a gold-like glister shows Raleigh mitigating the epistemic problem of color by asserting its aesthetic or sensual value. It might be unclear, without good judgment, whether a perceiver experiences gold or something merely like it, but ultimately this place is holistically full of "very faire" things. Whether readers, then, seize on color as a substantial part of things or superficial part of things, there is a net positive outcome. Either there is beauty *and* utility found via American colors or there is *only* beauty in American colors. Colonial discourse can, in sum, bring up color without risk. It only ever holds positive, promissory value of some kind. As Bacon puts it, "the eye is the most affecting sense" and colors, for colonialist writers, are the most effective means of affecting readers, of inspiring positive value judgments of America.⁶⁹ Colonialist discourse uses color bivalently to render the world aesthetically pleasing and empirically knowable. The facts are essentially the values. To speak

⁶⁹ Bacon, "The Praise of Love" in *The Major Works*, 34.

“truly” of America is to speak of the value America holds for colonialist authors. The easy conflation of fact and value, however, reaches something of an impasse when colonialist writers come to represent indigenous life.

Returning to Hakluyt’s index and the items under the heading “Colours,” we are told that one can find “[d]ear skinnes wrought like branched Damaske” and “harts skinnes paynted and died in divers colours” north of Florida.⁷⁰ Under the heading of colors, otherwise unseen agents enter the picture. Whereas the fish, metals, spices, and other natural objects stand alone, are presented as though always-already commodified and “growing” unperturbed by human hands, colors gesture towards the work of indigenous people. There are no “dear of damaske color” or “harts of divers colors” under the heading “Beastes,” but only “deare skinnes” rendered in such a pattern and “hart skinnes” dyed and painted by indigenous people. There is also “A roote called Awaty that they dye red withall in Florida.”⁷¹ This last item on the list renders the presence of indigenous people explicit through the use of a pronoun. Not only does this pronoun suggest that there are indigenous aesthetic practices, but that there are fixed indigenous nominal practices. Indigenous nominal and cultural practices entail indigenous values. When indigenous people and their cultural practices are brought into the colonialist fold, the relationship between the fact of things and their values receives new emphasis. Writers can no longer unproblematically assert that facts coincide with universal values or inspire uniform value judgments especially when indigenous acts of valuation are represented explicitly.

When Verarzanus encounters indigenous people for the first time in his account of his 1524 voyage, he tells us that “some of them [indigenous people] came hard to the Sea to rejoyce very much at the sight of us marveiling greatly at our apparell, shape and whitenes.”⁷² Before any visual

⁷⁰ Hakluyt, *Divers Voyages*, K4v.

⁷¹ Hakluyt, *Divers Voyages*, K2r.

⁷² Verarzanus, “To the Most Christian King,” A1v.

information is provided about “them,” the indiscriminate people of America, Verarzanus draws attention to himself and other European colonists as visibly, colorfully distinct. He notes the effect their appearance has, how it causes people to “seem” to “rejoyce.”⁷³ White skin is marked out in a way such that some value is attributed to it by indigenous people in the course of first contact. Without the ability to communicate linguistically with each other, color seems so powerfully present to indigenous people that European colonists can see its significance registered. Barlowe, too, finds his and other European settlers’ color to be a quality seized upon by indigenous people. He remarks that the Sequotan people “wondred mervelously when we were amongst them at the whitenes of our skinnes, coveting to touch our breasts, and view the same.”⁷⁴ White skin, undeserving of remark in European contexts, merits mention in America.⁷⁵ It may frequently fall beneath notice in England, but it gains special value across the Atlantic. It is not only that America is host to a variety of beautiful colors, but it manages to make quotidian European ones briefly marvelous. A reader can see how whiteness gains value through the description of indigenous reactions to it. Unlike Verarzanus, Barlowe’s account of marvelous whiteness does not stand solely as an instance where aesthetic and perhaps moral judgment is visited on colonists’ skin, but rather uses this purported fact as a basis to infer that the people he meets had neither met nor even heard of “people apparelled, or white of colour” before.⁷⁶ Whiteness’ status as a marvel is transitory. Barlowe intimates that after meeting white people, whiteness ceases to amaze. Whiteness is valuable along two axes. It is apparently esteemed by indigenous people - thus establishes sociality on good ground - and this

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Barlowe, “The First Voyage” in *Captain John Smith: Writings*, 828.

⁷⁵ This claim might work more broadly (i.e. contact with people of color in the world makes European whiteness an issue), but the emphasis on European whiteness comes out mostly in discussions of the Americas. See, for instance, the inclusion of prefatory poems “To the White Reader” in Beaumont’s *Metamorphosis of Tobacco*.

⁷⁶ Barlowe, “The First Voyage” in *Captain John Smith: Writings*, 828.

visible esteem shown to whiteness is, in a second-order way, a practical indication of whether or not said people have encountered white people before.

While European whiteness prompts reactions, indigenous skin color does not. It is always described plainly, shorn of any particular experience of it. Verarzanus, for instance, declares simply that “the people [in the Americas] are of colour russet, and not much unlike the Saracens, their hayre blacke.”⁷⁷ We are presented with a people’s color in a generic sense. As we saw elsewhere, Verarzanus appeals to known entities of a similar color to establish some basis for understanding or at least picturing unknown ones. His comparative act is, however, subtly different from those we saw before. Verarzanus does not establish an equivalence between America and Europe, but rather between America and the Middle East via color. Note, also, how the comparison is a qualified double negative. It is not that indigenous people are simply “like” Saracens or even “not unlike,” but rather “not much unlike.” If the earlier use of color was meant to quickly diminish the epistemic gap between unknown and known things, quell any particular affective disquiet regarding the stuff of the American continent, but in regards to indigenous people the mention of color is less semantically and pragmatically surefooted.

After having met this group of indigenous people, Verarzanus eschews external comparison and simply refers to his text. The second group he meets are “of colour enclining to Black as the other were, their fleshe shining” and a third group are “almost like unto the others, and clad with the fethers of foules of divers colours.”⁷⁸ Verarzanus’ insistence on distinguishing between each group, remarking to the reader anew their visual features each time, suggests an ambivalence about whether the people he encounters are, in fact, a people or diverse peoples. Each group is “like” the others, but if each group were identical to the others then no such resemblance would warrant stating.

⁷⁷ Verarzanus, “To the Most Christian King,” A1v.

⁷⁸ Verarzanus, “To the Most Christian King,” A3r-v, A4v.

Accounting for his experience means delicately towing the line between asserting skin color as a substantial or as a superficial feature of people. His account of one final group, then, complicates things still further. This last group is, he says, “of the colour of brasse, some of them encline more to whitnes: others of yellow colour, of comely visage with long and blacke heire.”⁷⁹ Where the three prior groups were distinct from each other but share respectively similar colors, this last group is heterogeneously colored yet coherent as a group unto themselves. This group of “brasse” people are, as far as Verarzanus is concerned, “the goodliest” of all they met and their living conditions “the fairest.”⁸⁰ Since no other traits are listed, what makes them “goodliest” might well come down only to their color and its similarity to his.

Perhaps because it is one of the earliest (European) accounts of indigenous life in America, Verarzanus is more attentive to the color of people than later writers. Colonists closer to the seventeenth century find no cause to note reactions to European whiteness nor is much space devoted to the skin color of indigenous peoples. We find, for example, in Ribault that indigenous people are simply “of tauny colour” and “of pleasant countenance,” but further scrutiny of appearances is uncalled for.⁸¹ Brereton, for his part, remarks only that some of the people he meets are “of black swarte complexion” and others are “of complexion or colour much like a darke Olive; their eie-browes and haire black.”⁸² Barlowe, likewise, sees people that seem to him “of colour yellowish, and their haire blacke for the most.”⁸³ James Rosier includes color almost as an afterthought and hones in exclusively on indigenous women. They are, he remarks, “very well favoured in proportion of countenance, though coloured blacke.”⁸⁴ On the whole, colonialist

⁷⁹ Verarzanus, “To the Most Christian King,” B1r.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Ribault, “The True and Last Discoverie of Florida,” F1v.

⁸² Brereton, *A Briefe and True Relation*, 11.

⁸³ Barlowe, “The First Voyage,” 823.

⁸⁴ James Rosier, *A True Relation of the Most Prosperous Voyage Made this Present Yeere 1605, by Captaine George Weymouth, in the Discovery of the land of Virginia* (London: George Bishop, 1605), C2r. Cf. Song of Songs.

discourse seems to take skin color as a feature worth noting, but not one worth laboring on. Unlike the goods of the natural world that require similes and comparisons, skin color (for the most part) is simply stated. Skin color seems like a simple, observable fact. The value of this fact is never rendered explicit. The judgments that follow from the fact of skin color, unarticulated by writers, are left to readers. It is not that writers are indifferent to skin color - it is, after all, noted consistently - but rather that it does not seem to be more noteworthy than anything else. Two encounters, one early and another late, show how easily indigenous skin color seems to fall so far beneath notice that its status as even a plain visual difference is obscure.

In a 1498 letter to Henry VII, included in Robert Fabian's *Chronicle* and published in Hakluyt's *Voyages*, Sebastian Gabotes writes of indigenous men brought across the Atlantic to England. These men arrive, we are told,

clothed in beastes skins, and ate rawe fleshe, and spake such speech that no man could understand them, and in their demeanor like to brute beasts, [...] two yeares past after I saw two apparelled after the maner of Englishmen in Westminster pallace, which at the time I could not discerne from Englishe men, till I was learned what they were.⁸⁵

Clothes make the Englishman. The difference between being indigenous and being English are cultural. In Gabotes view, there is nothing visibly indigenous that survives assimilation into English culture. That said, Gabotes still maintains that there is some kind of difference. “[W]hat they [are]” might not be visually discernable, but it is still somehow distinct from simple Englishness. What this ineffable remainder of indigeneity might consist is undisclosed to the reader, but the gist of the passage is that “beastly” practices can be overwritten in the span of a couple years and that practices

⁸⁵ “A Note of Sebastian Gabotes voyage of discoverie, taken out of an old Chronicle written by Robert Fabian” in Hakluyt, *Divers Voyages*, A3v. There are too many potential authors vying for position (i.e. Gabotes, Fabian, John Stowe, and Hakluyt), so I have decided to attribute it to no one.

are what is most notable about indigenous life. For Gabotes, wearing “beastes skins” is a more telling feature of identity than skin color.

Raleigh, nearly a century after Gabotes, makes a similar claim about the visual resemblance or minimal discernability between European and indigenous people. In the West Indies, he tells us that a certain shipmaster, John Douglas, takes a group of indigenous people captive to sell as slaves.

[O]f those hee brought, here was one as well favoured, and as well shaped as ever I sawe anie in England, and afterwarde I sawe many of them, which but for their tawnie colour may bee compared to anie of Europe.⁸⁶

Where Gabotes saw indigenous people come to seem English over time through acculturation, Raleigh skips over cultural differences entirely and suggests parity. Aesthetic beauty - being “well favoured” and “well shaped” - is equally available to indigenous people and European people. The distinction lies only in color. This is the sole trait that bars indigenous people from straightforward comparison to “anie of Europe.” The phrasing of Raleigh’s caveat, however, renders the weight of this distinction somewhat vague. Is “their tawnie colour” meant to strike us as a trivial or substantial trait? That the inclusion of skin color comes well after the praise of favor and shape suggests that color is backgrounded to these things. Raleigh voices no objection to the violent capture and intention to sell these people, so we ought not take his seeming ambivalence about color’s value as an indication of some even keeled recognition of the inherent dignity of all people. That said, color does not seem to stand as an explanatory feature for the treatment of indigenous people as potential slaves. Color is evidently indelible, but the particular value it holds for Raleigh is ambiguous. This ambiguity is more forcefully seen in another passage where his gaze fixes again on an indigenous woman.

⁸⁶ Raleigh, *Discoverie*, 34.

Meeting the wife of a cassique (a local lord), Raleigh praises her appearance and comportment at length.

[I]n all my life [I have] seldome seene a better favored woman: She was of good stature with black eies, fat of bodie, of an excellent countenance, her hair almost as long as hir selfe, tied up againe in prettie knots, and it seemed she stood not in that aw of her husband, as the rest, for she spake and discourst, and dranke among the gentlemen and captaines, and was very pleasant, knowing her owne comelines, and taking great pride therein.⁸⁷

The woman's skin color does not enter the picture, but every other identity trait - from hairstyle to behavior to psychology - does. Her color, however, does come up when he recounts an experience he had back in England. He mentions that, upon returning, he saw "a Lady in England so like her, as but for the difference of colour I would have sworne might have beene the same."⁸⁸ It is not that an indigenous woman resembles an English woman, but rather that an English woman in all but color might have been "the same" as the indigenous woman he once knew. In this more elaborate account, color is the sole difference between English women and indigenous women. It is not, however, the indigenous woman's color that stands out, but the English woman's whiteness. The visual difference between people is seemingly unshakeable, but what kinds of value judgment are meant to follow from it are opaque. One is left with the idea that, top to bottom, there is a difference in color, but whether this color is - to return to Bacon - a solitary instance or *ferale* of resemblance or difference is undecided.

Compared to travel narratives to other reaches of the globe, colonial writers in the Americas show a relative disinterest in the visual difference between English bodies and indigenous ones. The notion of racial difference arises obliquely in colonial discourse while the notion of ethnic or cultural difference takes center stage. Accounting for why this is so might well have everything to

⁸⁷ Raleigh, *Discoverie*, 55.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

do with the geopolitical motivations of these writings, namely, to encourage settlement rather than merely explain the locale and its people. As I argued in Chapter One, the mere mention of skin color suggests it is an aesthetically and ethically valued aspect of personal and social identity, but in colonial discourse no immediate pragmatic consequences seem to follow from its recognition. Skin color seems neither to altogether corrupt aesthetic judgment nor pervert ethical comportment towards people who do not share one's color. Instead of the colors of skin, colonialist writers seem far more fixated on a different manifestation of color in America. More than some inherent feature of a body, it is a contingent feature of a body that gives writers pause, namely, the indigenous practice of adorning oneself with paint of various colors.

At times, this practice is passed over as quickly as skin color. For instance, Rosier tells the reader that "they [indigenous people in Virginia] paint their bodies with blacke, their faces, some with red, some with blacke, and some with blewe," but shies away from speculating about the reasons behind this practice or the reasons for the color variance.⁸⁹ He refrains, too, from judging these appearances or elucidating his experience of them. Rosier, who prefaces his text by articulating his aim "to observe (as much as [he] could) whatsoever was materiall or of consequence in the business [of colonizing Virginia]," evidently sees the artificially colored faces and bodies as "materiall" and "of consequence" yet decides against teasing out what was material or consequential about it.⁹⁰ The fact of color, rather than the causes for or values of it, is what matters.

Ribault, on the other hand, describes the act of coloring enacted by people native to Florida in 1562 and also ventures to judge its aesthetic value. He notes that "[t]he fore part of their body and armes, bee painted with pretie devised workes, of Azure, red, and blacke, so well and so properly as the best painter of Europe could not amende it."⁹¹ While the colors used - blue, red, and

⁸⁹ Rosier, *A True Relation*, B3v.

⁹⁰ Rosier, *A True Relation*, A2r.

⁹¹ Ribault, "The True and Last Discoverie," F1v.

black - in Florida around 1562 and in Virginia around 1600 are the same, they seem to strike writers differently. Floridian colors are described by Rosier as simply present, but Virginian colors are used to render “pretie devised workes.”⁹² Where the former reference seems to point to a cultural practice novel to the Americas, the latter reference points to a cultural practices quite like European ones. The value of these pretty devised works is, for Ribault, straightforwardly aesthetic. It is, moreover, something that is achieved “so properly” that it could not be bettered by European painters at the top of their craft. European painters may use canvases and American painters may use bodies, but there is a parity between them. Raleigh, too, remarks on how such vibrant painting is uniquely and particularly found in the Americas - “all France, Italy, or the East Indies yeeld none such,” he says.⁹³ Colonialist discourse tends to emphasize that painted bodies have simply aesthetic value. Their place within a larger set of cultural practices is never probed. Even when permanent acts of tattooing or scarification are described, where women “with a sharpe Iron” draw “the proportion of Fowles, Fish, or Beasts, then with paintings of sundry lively colours, they rub it into the stampe which will never be taken away,” English writers do not tend to make grand inferences about indigenous culture on their basis.⁹⁴ These painted bodies, whatever the rationale that may lie behind them, strike authors often only as “very beautiful and pleasing to the eye.”⁹⁵

Not all colonial writers judge indigenous painting in equally superlative terms. John Nicholl remarks that indigenous people in Guiana

did seem most strange and ugly, by reason they are all naked, with long blacke haire hanging down their shoulders, their bodies all painted with red, and from their eares to their eyes, they do make three strokes with red, which makes them looke like divels or Anticke faces, wherein they take great pride.⁹⁶

⁹² Ribault, “The True and Last Discoverie,” F2r.

⁹³ Raleigh, *Discoverie*, 95.

⁹⁴ Percy, “Observations Gathered out of Discourse of the Plantation of the Southerne Colonie in Virginia,” 1689.

⁹⁵ Percy, “Observations,” 1687.

⁹⁶ John Nicholl, *An Houre Glasse of Indian Neues* (London: Edward Allde, 1607), B3r.

The same people whose painting Raleigh esteemed above those in Italy, France, and elsewhere are now judged to be “strange and ugly.” The people who take such paints to be good are, more importantly, said to be morally corrupt by dint of such a judgment. This painting is, as before, seen as a principally aesthetic practice, but one that also has - in Nicholl’s view - moral value. Mimicking devils or “Anticke faces” renders indigenous people morally suspect, but more than that is the idea that such mimicry is a point of pride. This brief passage from Nicholl shows, on the one side, his act of valuing appearances aesthetically and morally as well as, on the other side, a (speculative) account of indigenous acts of valuing. The facts of the matter are not up for debate, but the kinds of judgment to be visited on those facts are. While Nicholl disvalues the appearance of indigenous people, his comments do not suggest some strong or categorical distinction between English and indigenous people. Their “strange” appearances are describable in familiar enough terms (i.e. “devils”) and their vice is a recognizably Christian one (i.e. pride).

That the difference between indigenous people and European people is merely superficial, is not even skin deep, is most clearly on display in William Strachey’s suggestion that even the seemingly unpainted skin of indigenous people is, in fact, yet another act of painting. He notes that while “[t]hey are generally of a Coulour browne or rather tawnye” it is only because

the Mothers cast them [the children] into [it] with a kind of Arsenick-stone [...] or rather with redd tempered oyntments of earth, and the juyce of certayne scrused rootes, so sone as they ar borne, and this they does (keeping themselves still so smudged and besmeared) either for the Custome of the Country, or better to defend them (synce they goe most what naked) from the stinging of Muskeetoos.⁹⁷

Undecided about the precise reasoning for this coloring practice, Strachey is nonetheless convinced that indigenous appearances are, head to foot, mere artifice. Strachey shares Nicholl’s distaste for certain colors, but proffers an explanation (beyond aesthetics) for why such colors are used. Rather

⁹⁷ William Strachey, “From *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania*” in *Captain John Smith: Writings*, 1054.

than underlining the moral status of using colors in certain ways, Strachey emphasizes their practical or customary good. He underlines the point several times. Speaking of women in particular, he notes that they are “of the same hue” as men and, likewise, are not

naturally borne so discoloured, for Captayne Smith (living
sometyme amongst them) affirmeth, how they are from the woumb
indifferent white, but as the men and so doe the women dye and
disguise themselves, unto this tawny colour, esteeming yt the best
beauty, to be neerest such a kind of Murrey, as a sodden Quince is of,
(to lyken yt to the neerest coulour I can) for which they daylie
annoynt both face and bodye all over.⁹⁸

Color, now, is also a matter of aesthetic value where before it was either simply customary or practical. Strachey goes on to compare this practice of quotidian coloring, aiming at “a kind of Murrey,” to that of “Greek-women” and “the Britaynes.”⁹⁹ We are to understand this practice, then, as an ancient one. It is a cultural antique, it seems, rather than upsettingly “Anticke” (as Nicholl has it). The practice, curiously, establishes a deep resemblance between contemporaneous indigenous life and English life prior to 1066. A direct comparison between indigenous practices and contemporaneous English ones is made later when Strachey notes that those who obtain “the perfectest art in the tempering of this Coulour [...] preserves yt not yet so secrett, and pretious unto her self, as doe our great Ladies their oyle of Talchum, or other Payntyn white and redd, but they freindly communicate the secrett, and teach yt one another.”¹⁰⁰ A similarity is drawn between women on both sides of the Atlantic in aesthetic terms, but a moral or social difference is stated as well. The use of artificial tinctures is shared, but the willingness to share the means of making such tinctures is more “freindly” in indigenous communities.

⁹⁸ Strachey, “From *The Historie of Travell into Virginia Britania*,” 1054-5.

⁹⁹ Cf. John White’s inclusion of portraits of ancient Britons following indigenous peoples and De Bry’s reproduction of same in *Divers Voyages*.

¹⁰⁰ Strachey, “From *The Historie of Travell*,” 1055.

While America might be, as Percy puts it, full of “Fowles and Birdes of divers and sundrie collours of crimson, Watchet, Yellow, Greene, Murray, and of divers other hewes *naturally without any art using*,” the people who inhabit this natural, artless, landscape are supremely caught up in artifice.¹⁰¹ This distinction extends even to facial hair. Brereton notes that indigenous people are incapable of growing beards of their own and rather “make beards of the haire of beasts.” In one instance, an indigenous man “offered a beard of [his] making to one of our sailers, for his that grew on his face, which because it was of a red colour, they judged to be none of his owne.”¹⁰² Indigenous life is represented as deeply rooted in artifice, in cultural practices of representation that allude to a set of aesthetic and moral values that are (if not shared) readily identifiable to European eyes. Natural colors and artificial ones recommend America to English settlers. Colonialist discourse has a particular facility with arranging and rearranging the kinds of value that adhere to colors in its favor. There exist different systems of value in indigenous communities, but they cause no conflict or trouble. Indigenous values are simply cast as the opposite of English ones.

Verarzanus notes that indigenous people have “plates of wrought copper which they esteem more then golde, which for the colour they make no accompt of, for that among all other it is counted the basest, they make the most accompt of Azure and red.”¹⁰³ What is most valuable in Europe is least valuable in America. This apposition of value is, for the sake of trade, advantageous to both parties. Some trouble does, however, follow from the recognition that indigenous people disvalue what English people value. Are we to understand, on this basis, that the judgments of indigenous people are incorrect or simply different? Are we to see that gold’s value is intrinsic (thus indigenous people mistakenly disvalue it) or that gold’s value is extrinsic (thus European and American assertions of value differ)? You might argue that, of course, early modern authors would

¹⁰¹ Percy, “Observations,” 1688. My emphasis.

¹⁰² Brereton, *A Briefe and True Relation*, 10-1.

¹⁰³ Verarzanus, “To the Most Christian King,” B1v.

have attributed any and all differences in value judgments to basic cultural or religious differences. The English, for example, see themselves as “civilized” while indigenous people are perceived as “Salvages” and, thus, all value judgments cut along these lines. There are three problems with this argument: 1) there are, as seen above, a variety of instances where English value judgments and indigenous value judgments coincide (or are said to coincide), 2) writers do not regularly appeal to the hard distinction between indigenous culture and English culture to explain differing (nonreligious) values, and 3) so-called civilized values are hardly codified in all domains, thus even if we are to understand all differences to be readily attributable to the difference between “civilized” and “Salvage” cultural mores, there still stands a large swath of the world where value is not so determined.

John Smith’s writings are, perhaps, the most forceful demonstration that the facts and values of the Americas are transitory, unfixed, and malleable. His work also shows us that this was self-consciously recognized. His published output is constituted by the writings of multiple authors (each perhaps silently amended by Smith) as well as, with each new publication, significant revisions of the earlier work. Within one Smith narrative, multiple perspectives on the same event are on offer. Across many Smith narratives, multiple revisions of multiple perspectives are on offer. The work’s palimpsestic character makes its truth value suspect, but - by dint of being plurivocal and overdetermined - offers us a singularly useful lens through which to view early colonialism. The same features that detract from its claim to truth allow us to get closer to the perceived value of things. By including multiple perspectives, we see how different judgments follow from the same facts. By revising ostensibly factual stuff, we see how both ostensible facts and judgments thereof are subject to change. Smith, to be clear, rarely alters events whole cloth. He rather makes small alterations to certain details. This commitment to quietly rewriting, retooling, certain details in the description of certain events allows us to discern what, for him, was an integral part of things and

what was only an accidental feature of them. By looking at Smith's iterative account, differing views of the act of valuation shine out in particular.

Smith prefaces the first act of trade with an indigenous leader by describing a gift exchange. "I presented him a sute of red cloath, a white Greyhound, and a Hatte; as jewels he esteemed them," Smith writes.¹⁰⁴ Smith does not go so far as to claim that these gifts are merely toys or trifles, but nonetheless suggests that this man values non-jewels in a jewel-like way. Value is foregrounded as relative prior to trading, but without explanation. We are to see that indigenous acts of valuation differ from English ones, but that is all. After this gift exchange, Smith and his men sit down to trade properly. Smith trades "bunches" of "blew Beades" for corn.¹⁰⁵ The werowance "much desired [these blue beads], and seeing so few, he offered me a basket of two pecks, and that which I drew to be three pecks at the least, and yet he seemed contented and desired more" (TR 25). The trade agreement is mutually advantageous. A desire for corn is met with a desire for blue beads. What value lies in the blue beads for the werowance is unstated, but so too is Smith's disvalue of them. The blueness of these beads stands as an index of their perceived lack of value to the English. They are merely blue rather than of some mineral or stone that might have notable exchange value. Left with so little information, we might simply say that blue beads are scarce in America, thus they are desirable. Scarcity alone, though, is not the prime motivation for the trade. Desire for these blue beads, in Smith's account, is primary while the scarcity of them determines the rate of exchange. Smith's suggestion that despite negotiating a higher price for the blue beads, the werowance still "seemed contented and desired more" suggests that Smith takes the exchange to be

¹⁰⁴ John Smith, *Captain John Smith: Writings and Other Narratives*, 22. All subsequent citations of Smith are to this edition and will appear parenthetically after the initialized title of the work being quoted (i.e. TR for *A True Relation*, P for *Proceedings of the English Colonie in Virginia*, and GH for *Generall Historie of Virginia*).

¹⁰⁵ These blue beads, whether Smith knows it at this point or not, would likely have seemed to Powhatan like wampum. I note this only to say that Smith is describing valued indigenous goods, but either discounting why they are so valued. The history of wampum, colonialism, and trade is complicated. See Birgit Brander Rasmussen, *Queequeg's Coffin: Indigenous Literacies and Early American Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), esp. 72-3.

an unfair one, but, in any event, it is fortuitous that Smith's desire for indigenous goods and the werowance's desire for colonial goods are in line with each other. On its own, this account of trade seems unremarkable. It resembles any basic transaction in which relative scarcity and antecedent desire for some good motivates bartering. Smith, though, lavishes uncommon attention to this seemingly common transaction by revising it across his oeuvre. What blue beads are worth was subject to change in an American context, but also in an English discursive one.

In the second telling of this first trade, we are told that Captain Newport and Smith are at odds with each other over how best to negotiate this trade agreement. We are told explicitly that corn, in this case, is valued too highly for their liking. Newport, we are told, is found "seeking to please the humor of the unsatiable Salvage" while Smith looks "to cause the Salvage to please him" (P 54). Smith, then,

smothering his distaste (to avoid the Salvages suspicion) glanced in the eies of Powhatan many Trifles who fixed his humour upon a few blew beads; A long time he importunately desired them, but Smith seemed so much the more to affect them, so that ere we departed, for a pound or two of blew beads he brought over my king for 2 or 300 bushels of corne, yet parted good friends. The like entertainment we found in Opechanchynough King of Pamauke whom also he in like manner fitted, (at the like rates) with blew beads (P 54).¹⁰⁶

A more complex psychological picture of just how desire is spurred and value attributed is depicted in this version. In contrast to the earlier account, here we are told explicitly that the blue beads are naught but "Trifles." Likewise, we are told not only that Powhatan desired these beads, but that said desire was a matter of having "fixed his humor" to them. Where before we might be left wondering whether, perhaps, these blue beads held some communal import or some potentially undisclosed exchange value, here we see an affective, personal desire on Powhatan's part. Yet despite having

¹⁰⁶ We might say, to return to the topic of my second chapter, that Smith is operating "under the color of desire" here.

fixed his humor, Powhatan is initially unwilling to trade corn for blue beads. The blue beads are evidently valued by Powhatan, but that value is insufficient to motivate trade until Smith, in turn, is perceived to value them greatly. Powhatan's value judgment is dynamic and intersubjective. While the blue beads sit materially unaltered, through a series of glances (Smith looking at Powhatan looking at blue beads, Powhatan looking at blue beads then looking at Smith looking at blue beads) we see the value of these blue beads altered. The dynamic character of valuation, though, seems to fall away quickly. Somehow, blue beads acquire a fixed rate of exchange by the time Smith and others arrive at Pamauke. A pound or two of blue beads comes to be equivalent to two or three hundred bushels of corn. These seemingly mundane objects, neither said to be particularly beautiful nor at all ugly, are just blue bits of glass that somehow seem to gain exchange value.¹⁰⁷ I stress this point only to highlight that value seems tautological in Smith's account. These blue beads are valued because they are seen to be valued. This circular view of value is, however, revised in yet another recounting of the event.

The event is retold verbatim initially, but the act of valuation is clarified further. Smith, as before, "glanced in the eyes of Powhatan many trifles, who fixed his humor upon a few blew beades" (*GH* 327). Then,

A long time he importunately desired them, but Smith seemed so much the more to affect them, as being composed of a most rare substance of the color of the sky and not to be worne by the greatest kinds in the world. This madde him [Powhatan] halfe madde to be the owner of such strange Jewells: so that ere we departed for a pound or two of blew beads he brought over my king for 2 or 300 Bushells of corne; yet parted good friends (*GH* 327).

The value of blue beads no longer seems to depend simply on the transitive force of desire, but rather on additional qualities attributed to the object. Where the blue of the blue beads was simply

¹⁰⁷ As mentioned above, this "seeming to gain value" is only from the perspective of the English. Beads of various colors already had value in the Americas. Whether Smith is utterly ignorant of wampum or feigning ignorance at this juncture is hard to say.

some visual feature that may have pleased the eye, now it gains a mystical and social value. They are a material instantiation of the heavens and an index of political power. Recall, though, that this is the first act of trade between Smith and Powhatan, thus the means of clear communication are (at best) hampered. We ought not, then, read this as a more fleshed out account (and thus truer) version of the event so sparsely told in the earlier versions of the narrative. What these iterations and reiterations of exchange demonstrate is a shifting sense, on Smith's part, of what grounds value judgments. The difference in value is remarked upon for practical ends, namely, to suggest that indigenous people are somehow ignorant of the "true" value of things, the "proper" values that ought to coincide with certain sights and objects. The problem is, however, that such a stark difference in value undermines the notion that values are inherent or guaranteed somehow. Color's seeming ability to give rise to and accommodate diametrically opposed judgments suggests that values might simply be impositions on the world rather than natural features of it. These events show us not only that Smith recognized the profound contingency of value, but that the mechanism of judging value was also profoundly contingent.

On one level, each of these accounts is meant to bolster the reader's view of Smith's prowess as an adventurer. His ability to negotiate to English advantage, to render seeming trifles into outright treasures, is portrayed not so much to undermine indigenous value judgments (though it certainly does that), but to emphasize Smith's particular import to the colonial project. Yet it is hard to restrict our view of what transpires in these accounts to Smith's character alone. The blue bead episodes show us that value fluctuates in various ways by dint of various circumstances, but more importantly suggests that value is more a matter of belief than a matter of fact. The material and social value of the blue beads, in the last version, show us that utterly fictive descriptions functionally instill value just as well as any other kind. Blue, so to speak, will hold whatever value you like. On top of this, we see that regardless of what endows something with value (e.g. desire,

the desire of another, material qualities, social qualities), that value can become fixed. All of these different facets of color's acquisition of value, all the many ways it is used or deployed in discourse, suggest that it must be made valuable and that nothing seems to guide or circumscribes how such value is so made or of what it consists. The particular value of color is, as Smith shows us, something so unsecured, so unrestricted, that one can perceive in it antithetical values at once.

Awaiting for Powhatan's arrival, Smith and his men are led to a field and asked to sit. Upon sitting, they wait. Then,

[s]uddainly amongst the woods was heard such a hideous noise and shrieking, that they [the English] betooke them to their armes, supposing Powhatan with all his power came to surprise them; but the beholders which were many, men, women, and children, satisfied the Captaine there was no such matter, being presently presented with this anticke, 30 young women came naked out of the woods (only covered behind and before with a few greene leaves) their bodies al painted, some white, some red, some black, some partie colour, but every one different" (*P* 72).

Note how Smith and his men initially infer that the noises they hear are threatening and then recast their judgment of the situation on the basis of the other "beholders." Indigenous men, women, and children show somehow that there is no threat. While seemingly "hideous" to the English, this "shrieking" is nothing of the sort to indigenous people. The fact of this noise does not change - its sound remains the same - but the inferences drawn from it change on the basis of an unspoken, intersubjective experience. If what something *is* depends on how others are seen to behold it, then how something is judged must be similarly intersubjective, dynamic, and open-ended.

More than any other aspect of this "anticke," Smith stresses the visual qualities on display. Green leaves cover up otherwise naked bodies. Many colored paints are used to adorn the skin. What these colorful bodies "presently presented" exactly is only described in cursory terms, but at the end of it all Smith judges it to be a display of "excellent ill varietie" (*P* 72). In contrast to the pseudo-ethnographic remarks regarding body paint by others elsewhere, we see no appeal to generic

practices here. 'There is something particular transpiring at the edge of the forest. 'These thirty women are each singularly different. 'There are almost too many colors to recount, to many variations to describe. It strikes the eye as excellent, superlative, and ill, distasteful, at one and the same time.¹⁰⁸

Retelling this story, Smith tells us that Pocahontas herself (as well as indigenous men, women, and children) quells Smith's anxiety about the sounds in the woods. Smith also simplifies his description of the visual display in this version. No longer does he list the many colors, but now only notes that "their bodies [were] all painted, some of one colour, some of another, but all differing [...]" (*GH* 357). As before, though, this scene "presently presented" is judged to be "excellent ill varietie." The most notable difference is found, rather, in the margins of the account. The whole episode is marked out as "A Virginia Maske."

By way of the marginal annotation, the reader can see the events unfold peacefully. The misrecognition at the scene's beginning can be read immediately as a misrecognition. Readers are, as it were, primed to expect an entertainment in a way that the men represented in the text are not. On the first telling, a reader's experience would coincide with Smith's. They would hear hideous noises as hideous noises, be encouraged to settle down by indigenous beholders, enjoy the "anticke" spectacle of many colored bodies, and - for lack of any other angle on the scene - take Smith's judgment of it all as "excellent ill varietie" at face value. On the second telling, the experiential distance between reader and written events is increased. The reader knows what to expect, is prepared for a spectacle. The "maske" the Virginians perform for Smith not only, then, carries with it certain aesthetic values, but also imports certain social values. Without the "maske" marginal comment, the scene is just sound and color. The first account leaves one wondering what

¹⁰⁸ In the context of Smith's writing, it is clear he means "excellent ill" to be contradictory. He elsewhere notes that certain acts of painting are at once "handsome" and "ugly."

happened, what it meant, and with little recourse to judge its significance. The second account fits readily into English cultural mores. It is a masque. It is opulent, outrageously colorful and full of song. It is, moreover, a performance exclusively meant for the powerful. The Virginians, then, must see Smith as just such a figure. Does the masque mean that Powhatan's court functions like James' court? If so, does a reader judge indigenous culture to be elevated? Excessive? Are we meant to see profound difference between English masques and Virginian ones or deep similarity? Is the notation that this is a "masque" meant to mock, deride, or otherwise diminish the colorful spectacle at the edge of the forest? Is it, perhaps, meant to mock, deride, or otherwise diminish the colorful spectacles put on at court in England? All of these questions are open. They ask after the values that lead into and follow out from seeming facts.

If the distinction between art and propaganda, between aesthetic and non-aesthetic modes of representation, was hard to draw at the outset of this chapter, now we see that such a distinction is untenable. Propaganda involves art, involves both aesthetic presentations and aesthetic judgments. It instructs and tries to delight. It mixes truth with fiction, uses good for the service of the imagination. Smith, as critics are quick to point out, did not in fact see a "Virginia Maske" because no such aesthetic practice was extant amongst the Powhatan. He did, however, see something full of color, song, and dance. Whatever it was he actually saw, it moved him to value it contrarily. He experienced conflicting values. His ability to judge what was occurring, what it meant, and the good of it was overwhelmed. Smith's judgment of this event leads one to wonder whether Pocahontas judged Jonson's *Vision of Delight* in similar terms when she was in England in 1617.¹⁰⁹ Whether English masquers dancing, singing, costumed elaborately, and situated in some fantastical world

¹⁰⁹ See Karen Robertson, "Pocahontas at the Masque," *SIGNS* 21.3 (1996): 551-83 for more detail about Pocahontas' experiences in England.

designed by Inigo Jones would have made her think, in her own kind of way, that all this was itself “excellent ill varietie.”

Looking at color in colonialist discourse shows that there is no such thing as a value-neutral fact. Even the documentation of seemingly innocuous, apparently self-evident visual features is motivated by values of various kinds and motivates, in turn, value judgments of various kinds. That said, colors also show us the radical openness of the world to the imposition of value. The coincidence of these two things - the world is always-already overlaid with value and the world is of itself without fixed value - is somewhat bittersweet. It suggests, in sum, that getting at the objective facts of the world divorced from subjective judgment is perhaps untenable. The only texts we have that capture life in the Americas are overwritten by ideological, ethical, aesthetic, and other kinds of value impositions. We have no facts untouched by assertions of value. That we have no means of corroborating the claims made in these writings means that only value judgments are available as objects for analysis. Having only value judgments available to us, means that we are free to revisit, revise, and revalue the assertions made. The early modern world captured discursively, like so many blue beads, is open to endless value judgments (now as then). Where once these values could masquerade as facts, they now can be seen to stand only as corrigible impositions. Colors help us see this clearly. Using color as an analytic enables us to navigate descriptions of the world (whether fictive or factual) according to the good, the true, and the beautiful in them even when such good, truth, and beauty is embedded within pernicious, damaging, and unjust ideological projects. There is “excellent ill varietie” everywhere on offer in these texts, the trick is seeing it rightly and valuing it justly.

Conclusion:

A Semi-Scientific Postscript

Magpie beauty.

One more poem, one more book in which you figure out
how to make something out of not knowing enough.
-Frank Bidart

Color - as a property of the physical world - and color terms - as semantic integers - develop along diverging paths in the early- to mid-seventeenth century. While natural philosophers become increasingly committed to the view that “color” is nothing other than a subjective, perceptual fiction imposed on the world, lexicographers become increasingly committed to proffering stable, rigid definitions of color terms and the color terms employed to define objects. During this period, we begin to see a schism between the physical world as it is understood by science and the physical world as it is described by language. This particular problem gains traction in the early modern period, but it is by no means relegated to it. Mazviita Chirimuuta suggests that “a central tension and difficulty” persists in contemporary philosophical approaches to color, namely, the problem of “reconcil[ing], in one ontology, the divergent requirements of perceptual science and ordinary language.”¹ This problem with color is, as Jonathan Cohen puts it, best viewed as “a specific instance of the general question about whether and how we can reconcile the description of the world given to us by our ordinary perceptual experience, on the one hand, and the description of the world given to us by scientific and philosophical inquiry, on the other.”² The problem of reconciling ordinary descriptions of the world and scientific or philosophical descriptions of the world as they invoke perceptual experiences is particularly troubling when we are engaged in historical inquiry. When looking back at the early modern world, it is never entirely clear whether

¹ M. Chirimuuta, *Outside Color: Perceptual Science and the Puzzle of Color in Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 213.

² Jonathan Cohen, *The Red and the Real: An Essay on Color Ontology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), viii.

descriptions that invoke color are ordinary, as Cohen calls them, or philosophical in character. Moreover, it is hard to say whether the difficulty we face when looking back to these ordinary and/or philosophical accounts of the world is primarily a linguistic one or a perceptual one.

For example, when Edward Philips defines "Pink" in his *The New World of English Words*, he provides us with the following:

Pink: [is] a kinde of yellow colour used in painting.³

The definition is, on first pass, difficult to parse. Ought we understand this difficulty to lie in the words being used - for example, does "pink" perhaps refer differently in 1658 than it does in 2019? Or maybe "yellow" is the term that has a different extension in the seventeenth-century? Since it would be highly unusual for a speaker in 2019 to say that "Pink is a kind of yellow," we operate under the presumption that one of these 1658 color terms must differ dramatically from our own color terms. But what guides this presumption? Might it not be the case that "pink" as it was perceived by eyes in 1658 was, unproblematically, a token of "yellow."⁴ This, though, raises a different set of problems. Our present perceptual experiences of "pink" and "yellow" do not accord with this view. Even when faced with a color gradient, we want to say that "seeing pink" and "seeing yellow" differ sufficiently that the former is not just a token of the latter type.



³ For ease of reference and comparison, I have relied on the University of Toronto's *Lexicons of Early Modern English* (LEME) for all early modern dictionary entries. This tool is available at <http://leme.library.utoronto.ca/>

⁴ Recall that, in Chapter Three, we saw early modern rainbows described as uniformly or predominantly "purple."

As with the linguistic problem, the perceptual problem highlights some gap between how things are seen to be now and how things were (perhaps) seen to be in the past. If we wanted to work towards solving this problem - namely, answering the question: “How is pink a kind of yellow?” - we will need to decide what track to follow. We will have to find some grounds to argue that this is either a linguistic issue or a perceptual issue. In this one example, we can start to see what Wittgenstein meant when he wrote in one of his notebooks that “colors spur us to philosophize [...] Colors seem to present us with a riddle, a riddle that stimulates us - not one that disturbs us.”⁵ This riddle, though, is not an inherent feature of color, but rather a historical development that is seemingly circumscribed by certain discursive contexts. Color might now spur philosophers to philosophize, but no such specifically philosophical spur seems to have been felt in the sixteenth-century.

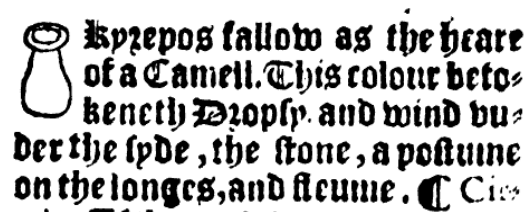
Despite appearing in a vast array of different contexts and causing a plethora of troubles, sixteenth-century colors never seem to give rise to linguistic or perceptual problems. When Elizabeth I resurrects Henry VIII's sumptuary laws in 1562 and several further times over the course of her reign, we find fairly nuanced prohibitions regarding the wearing of “blew,” “violet,” “purpure,” “purple,” and “crimson.”⁶ These statutes operate on the presumption that a) color terms are readily understandable, b) these terms refer rigidly for all readers or hearers of the statute and c) that said colors can be identified on sight by the relevant authorities. While these statutes were rarely enforced, we do not imagine that the difficulty of enforcing these laws came down to arguments about whether, say, some garment was really perceptually purple or whether, say, the

⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, edited by G. H. Von Wright and Heikki Nyman, translated by Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 66e-67e.

⁶ The degree of specificity in these statutes changes over time. The most baroque version I have looked at is “Whereas the Queenes Maiestie, for auoyding of the great inconuenience that hath growen and dayly doeth increase within this her realme, by the inordinate excesse in apparel” (London: Christopher Barker, 1597).

word “purple” rigidly referred to the color of some particular garment.⁷ That such laws are put into place suggests there was some pragmatic, straightforward, clear understanding of how colors and color terms related to each other.

The Seynge of Urynes, a popular physiological manual reprinted in numerous editions from the early sixteenth century through to the 1620s, makes a similar case for the relationship between color terms and colors. This manual purported to diagnose bodily ailments by recourse to the color of urine and, thus, its success hung on accurately describing these colors. We see, in the 1575 edition, that urine that is “like Saffron of the garden” means that a person has “a fever of corrupt bloud or a vayne broken in the back.”⁸ The manual provides blank chamber pots such that an owner of the book might paint the corresponding color next to the description.



Not only are colors and color terms easily related, but an analogous paint color can be picked out. This demands, then, an understanding of color as an abstract quality that does not inhere only in some given object or mind. There is a quality that, in the above example, is shared by “the heare of a Camell”, the urine of those with dropsy, and some given variety of paint. While certain ontological commitments seem to undergird this kind of diagnostic procedure, no substantive philosophical inquiries or propositions accompany or follow from this physiological tract.

⁷ My inference about the enforcement of these statutes is derived from the relative paucity of court proceedings and the regular publication of statutes circling around the same sumptuary issues.

⁸ Anon, *Here beginneth the seing of urynes* (London: J. Awdley, 1575), np.

You might say here that the practical character of both sumptuary laws and physiological manuals precludes philosophical inquiry. Foucault, say, might argue that different discursive formations restrict the kinds of things that can be said about any given object.⁹ Color and color terms, then, on this account fail to become an issue because these discursive formations have a particular target in mind and said target does not (explicitly) involve or depend on ontological, semantic, or perceptual considerations. We can, though, dispute this objection by looking to discussions of color that have a more vested interest in philosophical matters.

Philip Stubbes' *Anatomy of Abuses* takes aim at the vices of England. While principally interested in anchoring English behaviors and attitudes to moral error, Stubbes raises some issues about metaphysics more broadly. For example, he tells us that women

are not simply content with their own hair, but buy other hair, dying it of what color they list themselves and this they wear [...] as though it were their own natural hair: and upon the other side, if any have hair, which is not fair enough, then will they dye it into dyverse colors almost changing substance into accidents by their devilish and more than thrice cursed devices.¹⁰

A number of issues come to the fore in this discussion of women's hair. We see that the purported immorality of these practices involve matters of intention (that is, wearing hair that is not one's own as though it were one's own) and perception (that is, the indistinguishability of artificial color from authentic hair color). The problem with these acts and attitudes are, moreover, grounded in Aristotelian language. Dying one's hair or wearing a wig is, in Stubbes' view, an act that attempts to "change substance into accident." The charge, then, is that wig-wearers and hair-dyers are doing ontological violence to things through their actions and attitudes. Making certain decisions about one's hair resembles the act of making what is metaphysically primary into something secondary.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Routledge, 2008), 35.

¹⁰ Phillip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses* (London: John Kingston, 1583), F2v-F3r.

Stubbes, elsewhere, suggests a similar vice is on display with the colors of men's cloaks. Men manifest pride and vainglory when they wear, he notes cloaks of “diverse and sundry colors, white, red, tawnie, black, greene yellowe, russet, purple, violet, and infinite other colors.”¹¹ The problem is not the colors themselves, but by showing such concern for colors one makes a category mistake of treating what is accidental as though it were substantial which, in turn, suggests an overvaluation of the physical world at the expense of metaphysical or transcendental things like God or the good. We come close to seeing how color can spur philosophizing here, but Stubbes razes the field. All colors are simply, as Aristotle, Aquinas, and the scholastics who follow them claim, accidental features of things. One ought not concern oneself, on this account, with what color is, how color is perceived, or how color terms refer. Here the philosophical problem of color has already been put to rest by Aristotle and those who followed his lead.

Thus far we have seen how color and color terms either remain a practical, folk issue that never gains philosophical steam. On both accounts, color and color terms coincide. There is no perceptual or linguistic issue. Even when we see authors taking issue with the scholastic understanding of things, color problems cause no profound metaphysical worries. In the 1597 English translation of Duarte Lopes' *A Report of the Kingdom of Congo*, the prefatory material underlines that the particular importance of this text (alongside the pseudo-ethnographical material it offers the reader about this region of Africa) is that it upends received scholastic opinions about the causes of skin color variation. Lopes argues that “the heat of the sun is not the cause of whiteness or blackness in the skins of men” which, as the translator puts it, is a proposition that can be

defended against all Philosophers, by virtue of the reasons he hath vouched in this report [...] But because neither any ancient writer before this age nor [Lopes] himself hath ever been able to declare the

¹¹ Stubbes, *Anatomie of Abuses*, E6r.

true cause of these colours in human bodies, very honestly and modestly he leaveth it undecided, and referreth it to some secret of Nature.¹²

Even when negative views about color are developed, reasoned through, and seen to stand as valid arguments against scholasticism - color as a philosophical issue is hemmed in and color terms never quite become an issue. Part of what Lopes shows in his report is that color variation in human bodies has no direct correspondence to geographical variation in human populations. Since color variation does not correspond to geographical variation, then the climatological view of skin color must be wrong. By charting the incredible variety of human colors on his way to proving this point, you would imagine that the color terms used to describe these populations would become semantically looser. The idea that populations divide amongst "black" and "white" people would, presumably, be contested both through perceptual experience and linguistic necessity. Yet no such semantic loosening occurs. No such perceptual problems come to the fore. Moreover, rendering the causal factors undergirding the variation of human skin colors has no practical impact on conceptualizing different human populations along color lines. Elizabeth I's 1601 draft proclamation speaks, for example, of "the great number of Negroes and Blackamoors" in England and demands that this "kind of people shall be with all speed avoided and discharged out of this her majesty's realms" without making an argument for why certain people constitute a kind of their own or how it is that said terminologies ought to correspond to people presently living and working in England.¹³

As this dissertation has shown, the early modern world is preoccupied with color - in a variety of ways and to a variety of ends - but never quite preoccupied with it in the way we presently are. Despite a number of instances where matters of perception, semantics, and metaphysics are

¹² "Abraham Hartwell, "The Translator to the Reader" in Duarte Lopes, *A Report of the Kingdome of Congo*, translated by Abraham Hartwell (London: John Wolfe, 1597), *3v.

¹³ *Op. cit.*

brought up implicitly or explicitly, color never seems to cause much of a problem. In the sixteenth-century, one can describe colors and see colors (it seems) without encountering any vexing difficulties. While Galen and other scholastics debate the nature of human vision, the nature of color itself never seems to call for significant inquiry.

There are a number of ways of accounting for why it is that metaphysical, perceptual, and associated philosophical concerns fail to gain practical or cultural traction in the sixteenth century, but, when it comes to discussions of color, the main reason the matter of color perception and color semantics are something of a non-starter has everything to do with the operating supposition of scholasticism, namely, that what we experience (and, by extension, how we talk about what we experience) has a veridical relationship to what is. One's perceptual experience of the world, the acts of description that follow from or guide that perceptual experience, and the world as it actually is are ultimately harmonious in the sixteenth-century. The metaphysics underlying that harmony might differ, but these metaphysical differences do not (for the most part) yield phenomenological or epistemological fruit except, perhaps, when we look outside of ostensibly factive descriptions of color and look to ostensibly fictive ones. When we turn from the discourses that invoke color as a quality out there in the world and deploy it in a practical register to fictive discourses whose color descriptions have, at best, a nebulous relationship to the world as we experience it and have no such clear practical aims, we see some tension between color perception, language, and the world. Take Shakespeare's "Sonnet 130" as an illustration of this tension.

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know

That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

“Sonnet 130” tends to be read as a sonnet that, rather than developing a view of the beloved and the speaker's love of said beloved, takes aim at other sonneteers and the poetic conventions upon which they rely. In broad strokes, critics take this poem as evidence of Shakespeare's distrust or frustration with Petrarchanism.¹⁴ The opening line, for instance, that declares that this mistress' eyes are “nothing like the sun” can be read as rebuttal to, say, Petrarch's desire to “run towards the sunlight of [his beloved's] eyes” in his 141st sonnet or Petrarch's description of his beloved's "two lovely eyes" that "made the sun a thousand times jealous" in his 156th.¹⁵ Or, rather than aiming at Petrarch himself, Shakespeare can be said to take issue with how Petrarchan conventions have been taken up *ad nauseum* by his English peers. The lines - "I love to hear her speak, yet well I know / That music hath a far more pleasing sound" - can be read against, for example, Thomas Watson's insistence that his beloved's “words are musicke all of silver sound.”¹⁶ Reading “Sonnet 130” as a poem about poetry and poetic conventions is, to be sure, persuasive, but this reading falls short of capturing all that is happening in these lines. Reading Shakespeare's suggestion that “coral is far more red than [his mistress'] lips' red” against Watson's promise that his beloved's “lips [are] more red then any Corall stone” brings Shakespeare's verse into sharp contrast with Watson's. It also brings the two women described into sharp contrast with each other. However, it leaves unresolved what either poet means to suggest by red lips being “more red” than red coral. That is, how are we meant to understand that one red object is *more* red than another red object? How is it that redness, here, is a quantitative rather than a qualitative matter?

¹⁴ See, for instance, Stephen Booth's reading in his edition of the *Sonnets* (New Haven: Yale, 1977).

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*

¹⁶ Thomas Watson, “VII” in *The Hekatompathia* (London: John Wolfe, 1582), np.

More than solely mocking poetic convention, Shakespeare here seems to be taking aim at the feasibility of properly describing sense experience. This problem, moreover, seems to have less to do with the nature of his beloved and more to do with the nature of the speaker. It is not that his mistress is indescribable, but rather that the speaker is struggling to find a way to bring his particular perceptual experiences into line with poetic language. The speaker is not only laying out a list of ways his mistress is not, but also showing us that the grounds for comparison are predicated on the speaker's perception. Note that as the sonnet goes along, the terms of comparison change. The objective claims in the first two lines give way to a set of conditionals in lines 3 and 4. Shakespeare is not explicitly endorsing the claim that his mistress' breasts are dun, but suggesting that his mistress' breasts fall short of "whiteness" if by "whiteness" we mean the quality that accompanies snow. These conditionals, then, give way to reports about the speaker's experience of certain objects. Sense experiences of specific objects like roses impede comparison. Cheeks are just not like roses. Breath is just not like perfume. In the absence of seeing an extant goddess go, his mistress's walk is best described as treading on the ground. These negative acts of comparison point to a stumbling block between, as Shakespeare calls it in the concluding couplet, the "rarity" of the perception of his love (by this he means both his being in love and his love interest) and linguistic descriptions. Note that he "thinks" (rather than knows it certainly) that his love is as "rare" as any other "she." This suggestion that the "rarity" of one's love is a matter of thought cements the idea that the trouble the speaker is having has everything to do with how his mind is inclined in certain ways. This point is underlined by the concluding suggestion that the positive version of all of the sonnet's descriptions amount to acts of "belying" by "false compare."

What, though, about the poetic convention of comparing cheeks to damasked roses makes it "false"? How is the color of cheeks "belied" by such a comparison? One way of making sense of this is to suggest that Shakespeare holds a pedantically and staunchly literal view of the aptness of

poetic comparison. On this account, comparing eyes to the sun is “false” because eyes are not heavenly bodies, there are two eyes and only one sun, eyes do not provide literal warmth to the earth, and so on. This, though, is unsatisfying. Not only do we imagine that Shakespeare could see endless ways of making eyes like suns (he, himself, invokes such a comparison in “Sonnet 49”), but that there is good metaphoric ground to compare certain objects to other objects. One can, as Shakespeare does in “Sonnet 18” (“Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?”), even get good poetic mileage out of negative comparisons without their seeming at all “false.” Shakespeare, then, cannot be attacking poetic convention or comparison as such. When we consider perceptual “rarity,” that is, the particular way one perceives one’s beloved, the peculiarly singular, subjective experience of being lovingly oriented towards someone out in the world, then linguistic acts of comparison fall short of truth. Shakespeare is suggesting that there is something about how a subject’s perception of the world and the language we rely upon to capture that perception is not veridical, is not a trustworthy measure of the “rarity” of experience. The way coral appears red differs somehow from the way lips appear red even if both are recognizably and unarguably red. Shakespeare is suggesting here that sense experiences are not only internal to the subject, but that externalizing these sense experiences in positive language lead invariably to misdescription and falsity.

Galileo’s *Assayer* makes a similar, but more radical claim about the relationship between the world outside us, our sense experiences of that world, and the language we use to describe things. Like the philosophers who came before him, Galileo aims to describe the universe and everything in it accurately. Unlike these philosophers, Galileo is not convinced that our sense experience of the world gives us an accurate picture of things as they really are. He remarks that when he

conceive[s] of a corporal substance or material, [he] feel[s] indeed drawn by the necessity of also conceiving that it is bounded and has this or that shape; that it is large or small in relation to other things; that it is in this or that location and exists at this or that time; that it moves or stands still; that it touches or does not touch another body;

that it is one, a few, or many [...] However, my mind does not feel forced to regard it as necessarily accompanied by such conditions as the following: that it is white or red, bitter or sweet, noisy or quiet, and pleasantly or unpleasantly smelling; on the contrary, if we did not have the assistance of our senses, perhaps the intellect and the imagination by themselves would never conceive of them. Thus, from the point of view of the subject in which they seem to inhere, these tastes, odors, colors, etc. are nothing but empty names; rather they inhere only in the sensitive body such that if one removes the animal, then all these qualities are taken away and annihilated.¹⁷

This oft-quoted passage marks the beginning of the philosophical problem of color. As Chirimuuta puts it, Galileo's position “is an exact reversal of the scholastic scheme, where the red of a strawberry is as real as the matter that it belongs to.”¹⁸ With Galileo, we see color metaphysically moved. While color used to inhere in things, color now inheres in minds. Galileo's error theory (i.e. that we are profoundly misled by our senses about the world) marks the beginning of antirealism about color (and sense experience more broadly).¹⁹ What is often overlooked in discussions of this passage, however, is Galileo's explanation of how we have been so misled. The problem is, as he explains, that “since we have given [sense experiences] particular names different from those of the primary and real attributes, we have a tendency to believe that these qualities are truly and really different from the primary ones.”²⁰ The problem with color is attributable to the way we discuss color. We attribute color to objects, we speak about “red” or “blue” as qualities that can be divorced from red things and blue things, thus we “have a tendency to believe” that these things are as real as anything else. Linguistic concerns feed directly into metaphysical ones.

It is unclear, however, how Galileo expects us to proceed. If merely talking about color as a quality separable from the objects that (appear to be) colored reinforces the (mistaken) notion that

¹⁷ Galileo Galilei, “From *The Assayer*” in *The Essential Galileo*, edited and translated by Maurice A. Finocchiaro (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008), 185.

¹⁸ Chirimuuta, *Outside Color*, 23.

¹⁹ Democritus' comment about convention and atoms notwithstanding.

²⁰ Galileo, *The Assayer*, 185.

color is really real, is objectively present, then Galileo is demanding not only a reorganization of the way we understand the world, but the way we describe it. In a discussion of how best to describe the sun in light of his discovery of sunspots, Galileo insists that we reform our ways of speaking. “Names and attributes must be accommodated to the essence of things, and not the essence to the names, since things come first and names afterwards,” he says.²¹ The goal of reforming how we use names and attributes is, however, an uphill battle. Talking about colors, about colored objects and colorful experiences, is a hard habit to shake. Francis Bacon emphasizes the trouble we get into with language in his *Novum Organum*.

The way we speak with each other about the world, Bacon says, is often “the biggest nuisance of all” because “men believe their reason controls words. But it is also true that words retort and turn back upon the understanding.”²² The language we use, Bacon suggests, is something that “resists” being corrected or realigned by “sharper understanding.”²³ The best we can do to combat the errors we import into the understanding through language is “by means of definitions. However, these definitions cannot cure this fault. For the definitions themselves consist of words, and words beget words.”²⁴ We are, then, stuck with “illusions which are imposed on the understanding by words.” We traffic in “names of things that do not exist” as well as “the names of things which exist but are confused and badly defined.”²⁵ The “faultiest class” of words are “the names of [sensible] qualities.”²⁶

At the beginning of what we call the scientific revolution, we see that color is not only an index of a radical disjunction between how we perceive the world and how the world objectively is,

²¹ Galileo Galilei and Christoph Scheiner, *On Sunspots*, translated by Eileen Reeves and Albert Van Helden (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 91.

²² Bacon, *New Organon*, 48.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Bacon, *New Organon*, 48-9.

²⁶ Bacon, *New Organon*, 49.

but is also an index of how language complicates the relationship between perceivers and the world perceived. As far as Galileo and Bacon are concerned, clarifying our understanding hinges on clarifying our language. Outside the discourse of natural philosophy, early lexicographers believe very much the same thing. The publication of the first monolingual English dictionaries are chiefly concerned with so-called “hard words” which are, alternately, either words from other languages that have been absorbed into English usage or technical jargon from specific disciplines like logic, physics, and law. The aim of these dictionaries is to help readers, as Henry Cockeram puts it on the title page of his *English Dictionarie*, understand “the more difficult authors already printed in our Language.”²⁷ Or, as Thomas Blount puts it on the title page of his *Glossographia*, a dictionary is “very useful for all such as desire to understand what they read.”²⁸ These lexicographical endeavors should dovetail perfectly with the works of natural philosophy published by Bacon and Hobbes or translations of Galileo and Descartes. A reader might, say, pick up Hobbes’s *Leviathan* and read that “sensible qualities” are nothing but a “fancy” or phantasm and have no substantial basis in the world around us.²⁹ “Sensible” being a fairly unusual word, this reader would then turn to a dictionary and find that “Sensible” means “That may bee felt or perceived” according to Bullokar’s *English Expositor* (1616) or what is “easily felt or perceived” according to Cawdrey’s *Table Alphabetical* (1617). What was linguistically obscure in Hobbes is clarified by recourse to the dictionary and, as a result of getting linguistically clear about what “sensible” means, one can then clarify what Hobbes is telling us about the world at large. These books insist on what Thomas Blount calls “Galen’s axiom,” namely, that “Who ever is ignorant of words shall never judge well of things.”³⁰ By clarifying words, lexicographers are helping people become better judges of things. But the process of clarifying

²⁷ Henry Cockeram, *The English dictionarie* (London: Eliot’s Court Press, 1623), np.

²⁸ Thomas Blount, *Glossographia: or A Dictionary* (London: Thomas Newcomb, 1656), np.

²⁹ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited by Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 6.

³⁰ Blount, “To the Reader” in *Glossographia*, A4v.

words entails already having judged said things and found simpler or simply other means of describing said things. This is not a fatal problem for the work of lexicography, but it does prove problematic when we consider what Galileo calls the “empty names” we use to talk about sense experience. These dictionaries alternately fill up those empty names with referents that tether them to the world at large or rely on empty names to gloss other objects that persist within this world.

Not only are sensible qualities invoked in these early dictionaries, but the relationship between colors and the world is strengthened. Colors are defined with recourse to other colors, but also with recourse to objects of perception. “Azure,” for example, is “a sky-colour, a light blue.” The sky, now, is definitionally blue. This expanse above our heads is a reliable referent for both “light blue” and “Azure.” We find descriptions of animals on the basis of how our sense experiences respond to them. A “chameleon” is best identified as a “little beast” whose skin is “rough” and “changeth itself into any color that he sitteth upon, except white and red.” There are also definitions that only further obscure understanding by making vague appeals to sense experience. “Carnation,” for example, is almost uniformly and simply described as “flesh color,” but flesh is - if we are willing to say it is colored at all - a many colored thing. We also meet descriptions that compound subjective qualities to describe external stuff. Blount defines “umber,” for example, as “a sad yellow color.” We also see what might be Bacon's worst fear, namely, definitions of words that refer to nonexistent things that invoke nonexistent qualities. A basilisk, for instance, is “of color between black and yellow.”³¹

Around the middle of the seventeenth-century, then, we have two ongoing projects that seem to agree that, as Edward Phillips puts it in his *New World of English Words*, “the very sum and

³¹ As before, these definitions are drawn from the LEME. While there is interesting linguistic work to be done by sourcing and comparing each lexicographers’ particular definitions of things, for the purpose of this postscript the provenance of these definitions is irrelevant. Suffice it to say, each dictionary author relies on color at various points. The above examples are those I find most interesting, but countless other examples could be used in their place.

comprehension of all learning in general, is chiefly reducible into these two grand heads, Words and Things.”³² The problem is that the lexicographical understandings of words is pulling in the opposite direction as the scientific understanding of things. This problem is compounded by the fact that, as Phillips goes on to say, the project of understanding words and the project of understanding things are intractably bound together.³³ If linguistic considerations of color and philosophical considerations of color are diametrically opposed, then how do we make sense of colors as they appear in writing?

When we see a color ascription in, say, some line of verse, we are forced to make a set of decisions about where the poet’s commitments lie. Are they merely presenting us with words upon words that never touch down on the world beyond the page? Or are they putting forward a set of propositions about the world, our perceptions, and everything in between? Marvell, in “The Garden,” writes of falling in the grass and losing track of his thoughts.

The mind, that ocean where each kind
Does straight its own resemblance find,
Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other worlds, and other seas;
Annihilating all that’s made
To a green thought in a green shade.³⁴

It is hard not to read the kind of annihilation Marvell imagines against the kind of annihilation Galileo imagined. Galileo insisted that if one “removes the animal” from the world, then all sense qualities are “taken away and annihilated.” Marvell suggests the obverse. That the mind, over and above its ability to use reason and draw resemblances between things (as lexicographers and scientists are both in the business of doing), has the ability to transcend the external world, can imagine another world that is made up of naught but sensation. This “green thought in a green

³² Edward Phillips, *The New World of English Words* (London: E. Tyler, 1658), b3r.

³³ See, in particular, his remarks concerning “Science” in “A Brief and Familiar Advertisement to the Reader,” np.

³⁴ Andrew Marvell, “The Garden” in *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, Revised Edition, edited by Nigel Smith (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2007), 152.

shade” is inordinately difficult to understand semantically and nigh unperceivable despite relying only on subjective qualities of perception. This, then, is an instance where color presents a linguistic and a perceptual problem. How to reconcile this problem is, I would suggest, down to the commitments we believe undergird these descriptive acts. Are poets merely using empty names to describe imaginary fancies? Or are these names and the things described endowed with a metaphysical heft denied them in scientific discourse?

Hume suggests in his *Treatise* that the problem with philosophy's “abstruse reasoning” - especially when it seeks to overturn seemingly straightforward things like sense experience and perception - is that these hard won truths and the work of making sense of those truths seem to make little practical difference and maintain little clear value when we conduct ourselves in the day to day business of living.³⁵ “When we leave our closet, and engage in the common affairs of life,” Hume writes, “[philosophy's] conclusions seem to vanish, like the phantoms of the night on the appearance of the morning.”³⁶ Literature, though, - and I mean “literature” in the most expansive sense - can and does bring these phantoms back into view. By representing the common affairs of life in decidedly uncommon ways or, alternately, representing uncommon matters using common language, literature’s reliance on and invocation of perceptual experience occasions a kind of abstruse reasoning about not only what the world is like and could be, but how (or if) we - as perceptual agents - contribute to or figure into what that world is.

³⁵ Hume, *A Treatise*, 324.

³⁶ *Ibid.*