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THE READING OF SIR TOBY BELCH: A QUEER AND BLACK EXPLORATION  
OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *TWELFTH NIGHT*

By

Jahi Emaud Bogard  
B.A., Greensboro College, 2019  
M.F.A., University of Louisville, 2022

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in Theatre Arts

Department of Theatre Arts  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2022

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A Thesis Approved on

April 30, 2022

by the following Thesis Committee:

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Dr. Janna Segal

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## DEDICATION

This Thesis is dedicated to God,  
Grammy, Mama, and Auntie Shelly.  
Thank you for your unconditional love.  
I love you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my Department Chair, Nefertiti Burton for her support and foresight! I would like to thank my thesis committee. Dr. Janna Segal, for teaching me to always “play the danger”. Thank you for always pushing me towards greater. Professor Sidney Monroe Williams, thank you for always being extra, for better or for worse. You’ve modeled through example how to be “dat gurl”! Dr. S. Matthew Biberman, thank you for sharing your wealth of knowledge and wisdom with me. Thank you all for agreeing to guide me through this process. I would also like to thank my past and present professors: Professor Rachel Carter; Professor Johnny Jones; Dr. Russ Vandenbrouke; Jennifer Pennington; Jerome Wills; Blair Potter; Jessica Key; Melissa Shepherd; Professor Zhanna Goldentul; Professor Sidney Edwards; and Dr. Baron Kelly. I also want to thank the Theatre Arts staff: Blair Potter; Jessica Key; and Melissa Shepherd. I learned so much from each of you. I want to thank the first and second years in the UofL MFA in Performance program: Helen Brinich-Barnes; Tajleed Hardy; Nyazia Martin; Nicholas Wills; Allie Fireel; Sarah Chen-Elston; Sa’id Kelly; and Latrice Richardson. I want to thank my colleagues the 2022 MFA Gang: Candace Spencer, Lamar Hardy, and Brandi Threatt. Lastly, I would like to thank past MFA graduates Tyler Tate; Xavier Harris; Lashondra Hood; Casey Cole; and Paula Lockhart for their advice throughout this process. Thank you all for rocking with me!

## ABSTRACT

### THE READING OF SIR TOBY BELCH: A QUEER AND BLACK EXPLORATION OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *TWELFTH NIGHT*

Jahi E. Bogard

April 5, 2022

This MFA thesis explores queer, black representation in William Shakespeare's drama and in the University of Louisville's Department of Theatre Arts Fall 2021 production of an adaptation of *Twelfth Night* (1601). Directed by Jennifer Pennington, the repurposed script and non-traditional casting targeted a modern audience. Cast as Olivia's drunk uncle, Sir Toby Belch, I aimed to discover if my identity as a black, queer, cis man could be incorporated into Shakespeare's text. Sir Toby Belch's raucous, heterosexual, and sometimes violent, traits are often imagined today as innately masculine. I argue that Shakespeare's plays can be appropriated by queer, black actors to express their queer, black identity and to reject colonialist conceptions of sexuality and race. I detail how the relationship between Shakespeare, race, and sexuality informed my portrayal of a queer, black Sir Toby Belch. I offer a black, queer approach to performing Shakespeare to encourage queer, black actors to embrace their identity and challenge canonized texts that exclude them.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: SHAKESPERAE BLACK AF	12
CHAPTER 2: SHAKESPEARE GAY AF	29
CHAPTER 3: THIS AIN'T THAT	44
CHAPTER 4: TOBY BLACK AND GAY AF	63
CONCLUSION	78
REFERENCES	84
CURRICULUM VITAE	90

## INTRODUCTION

“Friends, drag queens, cunty men...I got something to say!”

-Pearl (season 7 of *RuPaul's Drag Race*)

My time in graduate school deepened my understanding of performance and performance's potential to enact social change as opposed to only entertaining. The performance work of Terrell Alvin McCraney, E. Patrick Johnson, and Marlon T. Riggs, to name a few, led to my development of an artistic praxis that revolves around queer, black theatre, and its capabilities of educating audiences on a culture that is sometimes taboo or mystified. Unfortunately, my thesis role was in William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. The play is absent of black culture and while it has characters that can be today read as queer, like Viola the cross-dressing protagonist, the homoerotic Antonio, Duke Orsino, who marries the cross-dressed Viola, or Lady Oliva, who falls in love with the cross-dressed Viola, it does not have characters that are queer and black. I wondered how Shakespeare, arguably one of the whitest playwrights still performed today, could be used for queer, black expression.

From November 11-21, 2021, the UofL Theatre Arts Department performed a production of an adaption of *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare. *Twelfth Night* revolves around Viola who is separated from her twin Sebastian. She dresses as a boy and works for the Duke Orsino, whom she falls in love with. Orsino is in love with the Countess Olivia, and sends Viola to court her for him, but Olivia falls for Viola instead. Sebastian arrives, causing a flood of mistaken identity, and marries Olivia. Viola then reveals she is a girl and marries Orsino.

UofL's production of *Twelfth Night* sought to build a production around the inclusion of all identities: cultural, sexual, gender, etc. The island of Illyria, the setting of *Twelfth Night*, was a mystical land whose inhabitants arrived by shipwreck and no longer adhered to gender norms. Characters' genders were not determined by the character's characterization but by the actors. In other words, the pronouns supplied by Shakespeare did not have to be the gender the actor assumed. This queer Illyria was further developed through costume designer, Zhanna Goldentul's makeup and costume design modeled after gender neutral high fashion, complete with false eyelashes, gold, glitter contour, and jaw dropping, gender bending *lewks*.

The production concept of director Jennifer Pennington was guided by her want to create an inclusive performance space. Pennington, a white woman, recognized that UofL's cast of *Twelfth Night* was mostly comprised of BIPOC and/or queer actors and believed the show should reflect the identity of the cast. Pennington did not encourage her actors to incorporate their black identity to exploit the black aesthetic but create a rehearsal space where all actors felt comfortable implementing their identity even if the identity is typically not welcomed in Shakespearean plays. Pennington's production concept allowed possibilities for queer, black expression using Shakespeare's text.

I was upset that my thesis role was *Twelfth Night* and not something by E. Patrick Johnson or Terrell Alvin McCraney and like my black and/or queer ancestors, I wanted to resist. I selected the role of Sir Toby Belch because Belch can be read as a disgustingly heterosexual character. Toby mocked models of masculinity that were not traditionally masculine, saw obedience from his love interest as an attractive trait, and sought to resolve his issues with violence. Lines like, "would though mightest never draw sword

again” (1.3.60-61), which Sir Toby tells his friend Sir Andrew Aguecheek after Aguecheek’s flirtatious advances are denied by Maria, Sir Toby’s love interest. With “sword” acting as a metaphor for Sir Andrew’s penis the line teases Andrew by suggesting his inability to talk to women is a sign of erectile dysfunction. Sir Toby also affectionately calls his love interest, Maria, his “beagle true bred” because she is obedient to him, like a dog (2.3.177). Lastly, Toby makes many threats/allusions to physical violence throughout the play including: “We will fool him black and blue” (2.5.8-9); “Does not Toby take you a blow o’ the lips then” (2.5.67-68); and “If you be an undertaker, I am for you” (3.4.332). Toby’s mocking of nontraditional concepts of masculinity, expectation of women’s obedience, and inclination towards violence represents a white, heteronormative, patriarchal concept of masculinity.

From Toby’s crude flirtatious sexual humor to his impulse for violence as a resolution tool, Toby wreaked with heteronormative toxicity, but that did not mean such toxicity could not be “queered.” It was time for the queer, black gods to give Toby a read! Thus began the process of “black queering” Sir Toby Belch, a phrase that means to examine and perform white, straight characters in white, colonialist texts through a queer, black lens. To “black queer” a text is to examine the text through a racial and sexual lens. The character and/or text can be “black queered” through script changes, and manipulation of an actor’s physicality and tonality, which are done to oppose white, colonialist ideals of race and sexuality.

Pennington’s production concept made the amalgamation of my racial and sexual identity as a gay, black, cis gendered man and Shakespeare’s text possible because of the production’s commitment to inclusivity. My queer black portrayal of Sir Toby created a

history for the character that better aligned with his queer, black identity. If Illyria's queer inhabitants arrived by shipwreck, Toby's ship crashed escaping the persecution traditional gender norms imposed. Toby, an alcoholic, no longer drank because Shakespeare wrote it so, but because Toby now had to reconcile with the rejection of his identity by others. Queer, black Toby was suddenly more interesting to me and aligned with my artistic praxis. Time would tell if the experiment would prove successful.

### The Black Queer is Here

This thesis will argue white, colonialist texts, like Shakespeare's, can be "black queered" to resist white, colonialist ideas of race and sexuality. A queer, black actor "black queering" a character allows them to incorporate their queer and black identities when developing their character. The work of Ayanna Thompson, Farrah Karim-Cooper, and Geraldine Heng substantiate reading Shakespeare's plays through a critically racial lens, but my black portrayal of Sir Toby Belch takes the theory out of the context of literature and into live performance.

How classical texts should be examined is a long-debated subject. Scholars like Judith Butler, Stephen Guy-Bray, and Madhavi Menon believe queer theory finds its agency when classical texts are read with skepticism to expose their hidden meanings, while scholars like Eve Sedgwick and Valerie Traub believe that while reading through this lens has its merits, it is redundant and can muddy queer theory. Queer theory can find its agency reading classical texts for face value. My portrayal of Sir Toby affirms Butler, Guy-Bray, and Menon's approach to classical texts because my queer portrayal of Sir

Toby found its agency through hidden meanings that were expressed through my physicality.

The first chapter will explain my process of black queering Toby and how my black queering of Shakespeare's character ensures the longevity of Shakespeare's text by adapting drama that has been used for racecraft (Fields and Fields 18-19) and serves as a symbol of whiteness for black, queer expression, a marginalized group not represented in Shakespeare's plays. Shakespeare's plays offer many valuable themes like love, treachery, honor, bravery, and political intrigue that still resonate today (Tumiel, par. 4), but while these themes may be universal, they are expressed through a text that is not. "Black queering" Shakespeare treats Shakespeare with less reverence and more critical analysis to make these themes applicable to more people.

College professor, Alan Craven, compares the presence of Shakespeare in America to that of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington (Tumiel, par. 3) but Abraham Lincoln did not agree with the immediate abolition of slavery ("Lincoln on Slavery") and George Washington owned slaves for fifty-six years ("Ten Facts About and Slavery"). However, unlike Lincoln and Washington, who do not have a series of published plays, Shakespeare can be offered redemption through the "black queering" of his plays which will work to include future generations of groups traditionally excluded from colonialist texts." Black queering" Shakespeare does not mean to diminish the worth of Shakespeare's plays but add value to them by making them more accessible to marginalized groups.

Shakespeare's plays are not ingrained with the capabilities to express black, queer identities; therefore, queer black actors must manipulate the text to work for them,

whether it be through script changes or portraying the character against the character's usual portrayal. The appropriation of the text makes room for black queerness and assists in bridging the gap between exclusive canonized Shakespeare and modern audiences that do not necessarily fit the Eurocentric and heterosexist mold. Chapter One will justify why black actors should "black queer" Shakespeare's plays through incorporation of their black identity. It will lay out the relationship between Shakespeare and race and examine what role race plays in Shakespeare's plays and played in early modern England. This will prove that queer, black actors can appropriate white, colonialist texts to express their queer, black identity. The modern concept of race, as it relates to skin color and biological factors that determines one's race did not exist for the Elizabethans.

As Ayanna Thompson, Farrah Karim-Cooper, and Geraldine Heng have shown, "race" was a broader term that could refer to a person's religion, ethnicity, country of origin, etc. (Thompson 7). The Elizabethan's concept of race did not mean that the Elizabethans were not racist. As will be shown, Shakespeare's plays are littered with racecraft that not only alienates a specific group through ridicule, but also teaches the audience how to feel about these groups and typically united audience members through humor (Fields and Fields 18-19; Perez 958; Ahkime 51).

Race as a biological trait existed before the early modern era but came into prominence in England towards the latter half of Shakespeare's career. The Mediterranean slave trade exposed Shakespeare to black people, and the argument that Shakespeare was unaware of the black race or slavery has been disproven through archival evidence (Thompson 9). Lastly, I supply examples of Shakespeare's plays like *Twelfth Night* that exclude black actors, but through acting methods exclusive to BIPOC

actors can begin to make the text reflect their cultural identity as opposed to adopting a default Eurocentric standard (Emeka 99).

Chapter Two examines the relationship between Shakespeare and sexuality to prove that Shakespeare's texts are not ingrained with queerness. Queer actors should queer the texts to resist oppressive, white, colonialist conceptions of sexuality. Kate Aughterson and Alisa Grant Ferguson prove early modern Englanders were afraid of female sexuality and blamed stage plays for defying traditional female codes of conduct with trickery (180). Though Shakespeare's plays resisted restrictive female modes of conduct, the plays are not inherently queer because they subscribe to the same restrictive female codes of conduct. Male actors cross-dressing for entertainment reaffirmed heterosexist societal norms; they did not resist them.

I reference Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, and Silvan Tomkins to compare strong and weak queer theory. I argue why queer actors should rely on strong queer theory to queer heteronormative classical texts, like Shakespeare. Strong queer theory asserts that queer oppression is more than homosexual oppression, but it includes the oppression of anyone who defies paradigmatic heteronormativity (Butler 228; Sedgwick 133; Tomkins 433). Weak queer theory only equates queerness with homosexuality which limits the political agency of queerness. Queering Shakespeare's plays through a strong queer theoretical lens expands the parameters of what is queer (Sedgwick 134; Tomkins 433). Queer actors can rely on queer coded gestures to queer characters/texts as the gestures are being performed.

I cite Jonathan Goldberg, my performance as Sir Toby Belch, and Shakespearean plays like *Coriolanus* and *Twelfth Night* to prove why queer actors should queer



colonialist texts through a strong theoretical lens versus queering through a weak theoretical lens. My portrayal of Toby was queered through physical performative actions like voguing and snapping. These coded actions echo prior queer meanings of the gestures thus queering the character as the acts were being performed. *Coriolanus* and *Twelfth Night* both include moments of homosocial behavior between its male characters that could be appropriated for queer meaning. What is gay today, like acts of sodomy, were expressed through “friendship and patronage” in early modern England (Goldberg 19). These sodomizing acts were used to stigmatize certain groups throughout time which allows for early modern texts, like Shakespeare’s plays, to be queered through a homosocial to homosexual lens.

Chapter Three unites Shakespeare, race, and sexuality to propose a method that black queers Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* and defends how this method opposes colonialist norms. I begin by explaining the origins of colonialist masculinity and how colonial masculinity was imposed on black men through colonization and slavery. Colonialist masculinity prides itself on domination and control. The adoption of this form of masculinity by black men led to the stereotype of black men being aggressive and temperamental when black men are usually less domineering than their white counterparts (hooks 3; Staples 5). The application of colonial masculinity to define black masculinity is the misapplication of unlike phenomena, and the continued misapplication by black men will lead to further convolution of conflicting identities (hooks 3; Staples 2). Queer, black, cis male actors can oppose colonial masculinity by presenting new forms of masculinity that are not defined through domination but defined through limitless, free expression.

I will also argue that camp performance of Shakespeare is a means by which to challenge social constructions of gender circulated by more traditional Shakespearean productions and offer new forms of gender expression. The use of “camp” or “love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration” (Sontag 1) displays the narrowness of dominant patriarchal gender roles. Coincidentally, or maybe not, camp has recently reached mainstream media with shows like *RuPaul’s Drag Race*. *RuPaul’s Drag Race* uses camp to oppose typical forms of masculinity and my black queering of Sir Toby does the same. If a queer, black, cis male actor uses Shakespeare’s text to present this limitless and free expression, queer, black, cis male actors are then using colonialist tools to subvert colonialist ideals.

In Chapter Four I breakdown my process of black queering Sir Toby Belch through my manipulation of the text, physicality, and vocal tonality. I will first argue the importance of queer, black actors using their racial and sexual identity to create an intersection of these identities that intervenes in white, colonialist texts, like Shakespeare’s. Doing so will invite audiences that are usually excluded from white, colonialist texts to attend performances, read, and maybe even appropriate the plays themselves. Next, I explain the difference between intelligibility and understandability and how queer, black actors should strive to make the text understandable, not just intelligible to audiences unfamiliar with white, colonialist text. As British actor John Barton argues, the actor should strive to be understandable, not just intelligible (5). While the actor should strive to be understandable, arcane words and references in Shakespeare’s texts can hinder the audience’s understanding of the play. This can be addressed by line changes, such as those made to *Twelfth Night* for U of L’s production.

I'll compare the line changes made for modern audience's understanding of an archaic script to the line changes I made to make this white, colonialist text more inclusive of marginalized groups. My description of how I used physicality and tonality of voice to create a black, queer Sir Toby shows how physicality and voice are integral to the queer black actor's expression of their racial and sexual identity through the text.

If queer, black, cis male actors are not aware of their habitual patterns and “misuse” of their body brought on by the misapplication of colonialist concepts of masculinity to black men, queer, black cis-male actors cannot intend to proficiently “use” their body to defy colonialist concepts of gender and heteronormativity (Polatin 17). Using my construction of Sir Toby as a case study, I will share the physical habits that I became aware of and documented in my journal during the rehearsal process, as well as how I utilized my habits to create a new “identification,” or “any pattern of behavior, personality, or movement that [a person] identifies with” (Polatin 137) that fit my queer, black Sir Toby. My queer, black interpretation of Sir Toby Belch through textual, vocal, and physical modifications supplies an example to queer, black actors of how to appropriate Shakespeare's texts to challenge colonialist conceptions of masculinity and sexuality.

My approach to “black queering” Shakespeare is by no means the only approach to appropriating colonialist texts to defy white supremacist, colonialist conceptions of race, masculinity, and sexuality. I hope this thesis acts as a valuable foundation for queer, black actors as they undertake white, colonialist texts. The expression of queer blackness through Shakespeare will not be smooth and will more than likely encounter flaws upon further development. I encourage those who read this thesis to rebut or build upon my

argument. Starting the conversation of if and how black queer performers belong in white, colonialist texts is a conversation that has not been had enough and is a revolutionary act. This is another step in the right direction.

CHAPTER 1  
SHAKESPEARE BLACK AF!

“Shakespeare wasn’t writing for no Niggas”

-Dave Harris (playwright of *Everybody Black*)

With the theatre community’s newfound commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, in response to the 2020 letter “Dear White American Theatre,” which condemned white American theatres for perpetuating anti-black theatre and took the first steps in ushering more anti-racist theatre, it is more important than ever to ask what place race has in theatre’s most canonized plays and playwrights, like Shakespeare. I never felt Shakespeare belonged to black people. I believed the only way black actors could exist in Shakespeare’s plays was through suspending their disbelief and adapting their acting to fit a white mold. In other words, an old white play written by an old white playwright called for white acting. Coincidentally, I worked backstage on a production of *Twelfth Night* at my alma mater, Archer High School, in 2012. The abbreviated, one-hour production consisted of one black actor out of the cast of ten, which was usual for the suburban Georgia high school.

Jaylen Newby’s casting as Duke Orsino was seen as progressive at the time. This is a testament to color-blind casting or casting an actor without regard to the actor’s race or ethnicity. I had never seen a Shakespearean play let alone seen a black person in a Shakespearean role before Newby. I thought Newby’s performance was the best piece of high school acting I had seen, but Newby would later confide that he did not feel “at home” in the role or in Shakespeare. Newby’s experience mirrors that of other black actors, but black actors deserve to feel included in all works. Black actors can and should incorporate

their cultural identity in Shakespearean roles and through incorporation of their black culture appropriate or “black queer” Shakespeare’s racist plays.

In this chapter I will dissect the relationship between Shakespeare and race to justify why black actors should appropriate Shakespeare’s plays through incorporation of their black identity to oppose white supremacist, colonialist concepts of race. First, I will dissect the historical relationship between Shakespeare and race using Ayanna Thompson’s “Did the Concept of Race Exist for Shakespeare and His Contemporaries?” Farah Karim-Cooper’s “The Materials of Race: Staging the Black and White Binary in the Early Modern Theatre,” and Ambereen Dadabhoy’s “Barbarian Moors: Documenting Racial Formation in Early Modern England,” and Imtiaz Habib’s *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500-1677: Imprints of the Invisible*.

Thompson argues that our modern concept of race was just starting to come into focus in the early modern era therefore the usual method of dividing Shakespeare from race does not make sense (5). Thompson also argues that our contemporary idea of race was not the same idea the Elizabethans had of race. “Race” in the early modern era referred to more than just a person’s skin color or ethnicity. Race could refer to a person’s class, gender, religion, country of origin, etc. This broad understanding of race also broadens the scope of what is considered “racist” in Shakespeare’s plays (7). Karim-Cooper breaks down how whiteness and blackness were constructed symbolically and materially in early modern literature and theatre, and how these constructions later materialized on stage with lead paint for whiteness and dyed clothes and burnt cork for blackness, clearly creating a discrepancy between the pure white and the dirty black (21). Dadabhoy explores how

“England’s national and imperial ambitions” were tied to “racializing epistemologies (31) which were instrumental in the construction of Englishness and whiteness.

Each of these methodological steps will prove why black actors should appropriate Shakespeare’s plays through incorporation of their black identity to oppose white supremacist, colonialist concepts of race. Using the work of Geraldine Heng, I explain how race is a construct and therefore has been created and recreated throughout history through “racecraft” (19). “Racecraft” can be seen in Shakespeare’s plays which proves that Shakespeare’s plays participated in the construction of conceptions of race. Then, I will supply evidence, using the work of Imtiaz Habib, that Shakespeare was exposed to black people and evidence of this exposure can be seen in Shakespeare’s plays.

Next, I use the work of Raul Perez and Patricia Ahkime to explain how Shakespearean comedies like *Twelfth Night* provide historical evidence of race-making. This racist humor sought to unite the audience through the ridicule of a minority “other.” Lastly, I challenge the method of colorblind casting and cite Justin Emeka’s “Seeing Shakespeare Through Brown Eyes”, which insists that black actors’ denial of their black identity in character development does a disservice to the actor and the production. As Emeka states, “The actor limits their acting choices when the actor does not utilize their identity” (100). Black actors should incorporate their cultural identity to appropriate Shakespeare’s plays to combat the “racecraft” and racist humor found in Shakespeare’s plays. Play’s that were used to construct white-supremacist, colonialist concepts of race.

## Shakespeare and Race

Shakespeare and the concept of “race” has a tumultuous history even though the concept of race as a biological trait came into focus long before the Elizabethan era (Cooper 21). Over thirty years ago, the study of racism in Shakespeare's plays was dismissed as ahistorical, yet today to think of Shakespeare’s plays devoid of race is to be oblivious to the evidence that lies on the page. Ayanna Thompson supports this change in thought when it comes to Shakespeare and the concept of race. Thompson argues, “If you ask today in the 2020s if the concept of race existed for Shakespeare and his contemporaries, the answer is an emphatic yes. Yes, the concept of race existed. Yes, racialized epistemologies existed and were employed and deployed. And, yes, Shakespeare himself engages in both the symbolic and materialistic elements that comprise race-making” (1). Thompson asserts that today, in the 2020s, most people agree that “the concept of race existed” for Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and that Shakespeare participated in “race-making.” The history of race and Shakespeare has not changed, but with the introduction of critical race theory, African American studies, and post-colonial studies, scholars have changed the lens through which they study the history.

It was previously believed that Shakespeare would not have seen, let alone known, any black people while he was living in England. In 1978, G.K. Hunter asserted in *Dramatic Identities and Cultural Tradition: Studies in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, “The Elizabethans also had a powerful sense of the economic threat posed by the foreign groups they had daily contact with-Flemings or Frenchmen-but they had little or no continued contact with ‘Moors,’ and no sense of economic threat from



them” (32). This assertion has been challenged and proven incorrect by scholars like Ambereen Dadabhoy and Imtiaz Habib.

Dadabhoy’s “Barbarian Moors: Documenting Racial Formation in Early Modern England” cites Queen Elizabeth I’s 1601 draft proclamation to exchange “Negros and blackamoors” for her “natural subjects” with Spain (30). The queen’s proclamation not only proves the Elizabethans had “contact” with “Moors” and had an overwhelming “sense of economic threat from them,” but that the “blackamoors” discussed are indeed being treated as commodities within an uncoded, but present, slave economy (32). Imtiaz Habib’s *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500-1677* also disproves Hunter, “The substantial archival evidence of black people in England between 1501 and 1676...contributes significant, irreversible, and hitherto unavailable materialities to current understandings of racial discourse in sixteenth- and seventeenth- century England. These records mark the empirical intimacy of the English construction of the racial other, and of the national-imperial drive that is its most immediate occasion” (19). The “empirical intimacy” supports my claim that black people did live in England and that “the English Construction of the racial other” through the exchange of captured Moors for English subjects was influential in the construction of the “national-imperial” identity of England. Habib also created a map for the cover of *Shakespeare Quarterly* that shows the proximity of specific black figures from the Tudor and Stuart periods to the freestanding early modern theatres on the South Bank of London. Habib’s evidence of black figures near the public theatres suggests that Shakespeare, who worked in the public and private theatres, may have known of those figures.

There are also more and more instances of slavery in the Mediterranean and the transatlantic. Thompson argues, “While it was once argued that the English did not participate in the slave trade until after Shakespeare’s death and there were no enslaved Africans in England, the new archival information about the number of blacks in early modern England coupled with the new historical data about the widespread use of slavery in premodern Europe allows one to read Shakespeare’s texts in a different way” (10). Archival proof that blacks existed in early modern England and that Shakespeare might have seen or even known a black person allows Shakespeare’s characters to be seen through a racial lens. While blacks may not have starred in Shakespeare’s plays, we know it is not because blacks did not exist, but the opportunity was not afforded.

Race, though a social construct, is significant in Shakespeare’s plays. To recognize that race is not innate is not to say that race/racism does not yield real effects for minorities; rather, it is to say that race is a social construct that has been created and recreated over time to decide which people have access to certain privileges (Thompson 7). The recent Black Live Matter Movement, whose mission is to “eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes,” (Black Lives Matter) is a great example of the real effects race has on society.

Race has nothing to do with skin color or DNA. The idea that race is a biological trait stems from pseudoscientific theories of the Enlightenment era (“The Disturbing Confidence of Ignorance” 00:30:17-19). This school of thought was adopted to create racialized identities imagined as essential differences. As Geraldine Heng writes in *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, “Race has no singular or stable referent

because race is a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences, rather than a substantive content” (19). There is no “stable referent” when discussing race. It is more than skin color or else light skinned or white passing black people would be considered white. What the construction of race does is “manage human differences” and what better way to manage these differences than through social events like theatre.

Shakespeare’s plays employ this method of managing differences and use race-making, often uniting the audience through ridicule of a character’s race. While race may be a social construct, it fuels racism, which is real and limits resources. An example of these limited resources can be external (education, employment, and living place) or psychological (self-efficacy, perceived control over life, anger control, and emotions). Both have beneficial health effects, but according to a study done by Shervin Asari, “Due to structural barriers that Blacks face in their daily lives, the very same resources and assets generate smaller health gain for Blacks compared to Whites” (2017). These “structural barriers” refer to limited resources that produce smaller health gain for racial minorities.

If race can be actively and imaginatively constructed, then Shakespeare’s plays can be actively and imaginatively used to create theatrical spaces inclusive of racial and cultural minorities. The creation of race manages who has access to these resources. This creation is called “racecraft,” a phrase coined by Karen J. Fields and Barbara J. Fields in *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*. Fields and Fields define racecraft and explain its relationship to human action: “[R]acecraft originates not in nature but in human action and imagination; it can exist no other way. The action and imagining are

collective yet individual, day-to-day yet historical, and consequential” (18-19).

“Racecraft” is the crafting of social constructions of race that exists in “human action and imagination” and does not “originate in nature.” If “human action and imagination” can create race, then “human action and imagination” can be utilized in Shakespeare’s plays to create a theatrical atmosphere that is inclusive of racial and cultural minorities. This means that Shakespeare’s works can be examined for signs of racecraft, or “the moments when exclusions based on those constructed inequalities are being performed” (Thompson 8).

Racecraft is used for “exclusion” based on “constructed inequalities.” The inequalities are not biological, but social constructs thus making them not innate. Inequalities can, however, be circulated in imaginative works, such as happens with Shakespeare’s plays. Evidence of race-making/racecraft in Shakespeare’s plays make race an integral component. While racemaking is conspicuous in tragedies like *Othello* and *Titus Andronicus*, plays that unite the audience against their black characters Othello and Aaron respectively, for the purpose of my thesis I will be focusing primarily on *Twelfth Night* and its use of racist humor to create racial inequalities.

### Racist Humor and *Twelfth Night*

Shakespeare’s plays contain elements of racecraft that were used to create white supremacist, colonialist concepts of race. These elements of racecraft are partially constructed rhetorically through, for example, rhetorical patterns, rhetorical “errors,” figures of speech, metaphors, colloquialisms, and/or idioms- and partially constructed materially- through, for example, costumes, prosthetics, wigs, moustaches, physical

gesture, vocal timbre, and/or accent (Ahkime 50). This rhetorical racecraft is especially seen in Shakespeare's comedies. In "Racist Humor and Shakespearean Comedy" Patricia Ahkime writes, "ridiculous figures whose skin color, religion, nationality, speech, clothing, or habits make them the butts of jokes, are staged purely for the purpose of eliciting on- and offstage audiences' laughter" (51). Ahkime cites not only "skin color" as a mode of racecraft; "religion, nationality, speech, clothing, and habits" were also used to ridicule these "ridiculous figures" to "elicit" "laughter".

These racist jokes function as a unifying tool that unites the majority against the alienated minority. According to Raúl Pérez in "Racism without Hatred? Racist humor and the myth of 'Color Blindness'" in *Sociological Perspectives*, "jokes targeting racial and ethnic 'others' as stupid, buffoonish, dangerous, inferior, and so on, help facilitate social bonding practices among in-group members, which in turn can (re)produce an ethnocentric worldview" (958). The racist "jokes" in Shakespeare that "target racial and ethnic 'other'" are "dangerous" and "facilitates social bonding practices among in-groups" which assisted in the English "reproduction" of an "ethnocentric worldview." Racism expressed through rhetoric can be seen in *Twelfth Night* between Sir Toby Belch and Malvolio. Malvolio, the annoyingly strait-laced servant of Olivia, Sir Toby's cousin, desires respect and a better life for himself amongst the upper class. Toby takes advantage of Malvolio's ambition and orchestrates a prank that publicly shames Malvolio by forging a love letter from his cousin to Malvolio. It can be argued that Toby uses Malvolio as the subject of communal ridicule to distract his niece from his debauchery. Olivia is in mourning of her brother and expects her kinsman Toby to behave similarly. Maria, Olivia's chambermaid admonishes Toby, "By my troth Sir Toby, you must come

in earlier o' nights. Your cousin, my lady, takes great exceptions to your ill hours" (1.3.5-6). Toby's pranking of Malvolio shifts Olivia's antagonization from Toby to Malvolio thus leaving Toby to pursue his folly without interruption. Olivia tells Maria after suffering Malvolio's advances, "Why, this is very midsummer madness... Good Maria, let this fellow be looked to. Where's my Cousin Toby? Let some of my people have a special care of him. I would not have him miscarry for the half of my dowry" (3.4.65-69). Malvolio, the once trusted advisor, now falls out of favor with Olivia due to Sir Toby Belch's prank.

Sir Toby Belch also uses racialized language to mock Malvolio to Maria and Andrew. Toby calls Malvolio a "foul collier" (3.4.126), another name for a "coal miner" and implied "devil" because the devil was "commonly portrayed as pitch black" (The Norton Drama). Toby's calling Malvolio a "coal carrier" to insult him likens griminess or blackness with evil. In addition to Sir Toby's racist rhetoric, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Sir Toby's friend, also uses racist humor, with the line, "Methinks sometimes have no more wit than a Christian" (1.3.83-84). Aguecheek's statement assumes "Christians" as the only people who have wit, which discredits other religions. Both examples prove that Shakespeare's plays involved rhetoric that perpetuated white supremacist, colonialist conceptions of race.

### Shakespeare for Black Actors

The recognition of the racist rhetoric in Shakespeare means that black actors must develop a way to safely interact with Shakespeare's texts. Shakespeare is traditionally seen as being a staple of whiteness, but like the concept of race, whiteness is a social

construct and therefore not innate. A social construct is used within Shakespeare's works to segregate whiteness from the subpar "other." According to Thompson, "Shakespeare's works, in fact, provide fascinating snapshots of the ways that both whiteness and Englishness are created and recreated at different moments...to create the fantasy that whiteness or Englishness are real, stable. Biological, and essential" (9). Shakespeare's plays "create and recreate" the "fantasy" of "whiteness and Englishness" being "biological" and "essential."

This "fantasy" is demonstrated with a conversation the Captain has with Viola after being shipwrecked on the island of Illyria. In *Twelfth Night*, Viola's compliments the Captain's "behavior" by calling it "fair" after the Captain agrees to help her disguise herself so she can work for the Duke Orsino. Viola's compliment likens "fair"ness to goodness (1.2.50). In addition to Viola's compliment, Sir Andrew Aguecheek's previously stated line also offers "Snapshots" of "Englishness" and "whiteness" by calling "Christians," who were mostly white in Early Modern England (Karim-Cooper 31), "ordinary men" (1.3.84).

Shakespeare's use of racecraft to create whiteness and an "other" challenges Black actors to discover a way to safely navigate Shakespeare's texts. Methods like color-conscious casting have been used to combat Shakespeare's racecraft and effect the future of Shakespeare's plays by making them more inclusive to audiences that white, colonialist texts typically exclude. Michael MacMillan's "The black body and Shakespeare: Conversations with black actors" from *Shakespeare, Race, and Performance: The Diverse Bard* interviews five Black English actors who are experts of Shakespeare: Doña Croll, Claire Benedict, Ellen Thomas, Cyril Nri, and Vinta Morgan.

How those in power use Shakespeare corroborates Shakespeare's racism according to Doña Croll, "It isn't that the theatre establishment is racist as such, rather that it is governed from and through the lens of white people...Shakespeare is at the top of the English theatre canon and if black actors are allowed to play it then its canonical value somehow diminish" (123). Croll refers to the English "theatre establishment," which provides a slightly different context than African American actors with England being the home of William Shakespeare, but the fact remains that both "theatre establishments" are "governed from and through the lens of white people." "Black actors" being "allowed to play" Shakespeare increases Shakespeare's "canonical value," because doing so will introduce white, colonialist texts to marginalized groups who may be unfamiliar.

Graduate of the East 15 Drama School, Vinta Morgan corroborates Croll's statement with, "Few Black directors or black actors are given the opportunities to express themselves culturally. We're confined to these little boxes with symbolic gestures made maybe every decade" (123). Jaylen Newby and other black actors, including me, rarely are "given the opportunity to express" myself "culturally" in Shakespearean text. Black actors should not have to feel "confined" and instead should incorporate their cultural identity in Shakespeare's text to combat colonialist conceptions of race.

### Shakespeare and Colorblind Casting

In early 2000s the method of colorblind casting or casting an actor without regard to race or ethnicity was seen as being the most progressive method of approaching Shakespeare (Emeka 95), but colorblind casting instead creates a vacuum that tries to erase racial and cultural differences black actors may bring to the role, and instead creates



a white cultural experience using Black and Brown actors (Emeka 94). I suggest color-conscious casting, or casting that intentionally considers the race and ethnicity of actors and the characters they play to oppose racism (Swenson), as a more progressive alternative to colorblind casting.

Justin Emeka explains the harms of colorblind casting in his interview with Tony award winning producer Ron Simons. Emeka says, “When a Black actor is cast in a color-blind production if race is not addressed as it relates to character, they may be working without access to all the resources that will help them deliver an honest and successful performance...I am most concerned with leading a rehearsal process that allows and encourages all actors to do their best work” (Emeka 2020). “Black actors” are unable to “deliver an honest and successful performance” “in a color-blind production” because “race is not addressed as it relates to character.” In his essay, “Seeing Shakespeare Through Brown Eyes” Emeka declares, “Within the continuum of Black culture throughout the African diaspora, there is a long tradition of creating or transforming artistic forms in the new world by syncretizing African or “Black” aesthetics with European traditions... The Black aesthetic is a creative fire with an unrelenting commitment to expressing itself—redefining everything it touches” (99). I encourage black actors to use their “unrelenting commitment” to self-expression to “sync” their “Black culture” with “European traditions” to “transform” “artistic forms” like white supremacist, colonialist texts, like Shakespeare.

Shakespearean productions should follow the lead of Shakespearean scholars when it comes to thoughts on Shakespeare and race. While this new understanding of Shakespeare and race is more tolerant and inclusive, the theatre community’s more recent

attention to color-conscious casting instead of colorblind casting shows that this understanding has just begun to permeate the acting community. It has changed how theatre makers, directors, actors, producers, etc. approach Shakespeare's plays. Like scholars, theatre makers must change how they approach Shakespeare's plays to challenge them to combat the plays' racist constructions. These changes include incorporating a more color-conscious approach.

### Future of Shakespeare

If Shakespeare's works are to continue to endure time new acting methods must be applied and utilized if not Shakespeare's text will be seen as obsolete because of its tendency to highlight a white point of view instead of a multicultural point of view. Miles Grier addresses the question, "Are Shakespeare's Plays Racially Progressive?" in his essay of the same title in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*. The answer is not definitive. Grier mentions Shakespeare's plays can be progressive if the lens through which the plays are staged are progressive. Grier explains, "Shakespeare scholars of color do not typically call for [Shakespeare's] plays to be hidden... We do call for [the plays] to be approached differently: with less reverence and more attention to [the plays'] encoding and spreading of White supremacist and patriarchal relationships" (249). Shakespeare's plays need "less reverence" and "more attention to encoding and spreading of white supremacist and patriarchal relationships" if the plays are to continue to thrive in our diverse society.

This new inclusive method also creates new and exciting ways to interpret white, colonialist texts, like Shakespeare's. This new method was adopted by UofL's production

of *Twelfth Night*, most notably during the prologue of the show. Traditionally, *Twelfth Night* has no prologue, but dramaturg Dr. Janna Segal created one by adapting the *Twelfth Night*'s concluding song into a Prologue and an Epilogue. The lyrics were adapted to fit the non-gender binary production concept of the production. The cast first decided the prologue would be sung as a traditional sea shanty, but the cast being majority actors of color did not relate to this version of the prologue. Director, Jennifer Pennington, encouraged the cast to explore a new musical style for the prologue that better represented our cultural background. The result was a reggaeton prologue that sparked engagement amongst the cast. Had the cast and director decided to take a colorblind approach the discovery would not have been made.

Such changes to Shakespeare do not do a disservice to Shakespeare rather it reinvigorates Shakespeare for broader audiences. Sandra Young's "How have Post-Colonial Approaches Enriched Shakespeare's Works" declares, "To reimagine the play for each new staging *is* to be "true" to the art...Productions that are attuned to the politics of a new moment have helped to shift the cultural meanings attributed to Shakespeare" (254). U of L's production of *Twelfth Night* was "attuned to the politics of a new moment" in two ways. First, with a production concept that challenges colonialist views of sexuality. Every actor had the choice to decide the gender and pronoun of their character regardless of the gender the text prescribed. Second, the production allowed all actors to incorporate their cultural and sexual identities. These methods helped "shift the cultural meanings attributed to Shakespeare" by appropriating Shakespeare's texts to defy traditional, white supremacist, colonialist concepts of race. The reimagining/restaging of

Shakespeare's plays signal a need for a change to the way we perform Shakespeare's plays.

Methods of appropriating Shakespeare's plays have been in effect since the 1800's with actors like the great, black, Ira Aldridge, the first black Shakespearean actor to achieve international renown in the 1800's. Aldridge innovated Shakespearean roles. Scott Newstock affirms, "Some of Aldridge's most notable innovations derived from his drive to expand the range of Shakespearean roles he could perform" (181). Aldridge's most notable Shakespearean character innovation occurred in *Titus Andronicus*.

Newstock continues: "In Aldridge's performances of *Titus*, Aaron, [the Moor] became the hero...Scenes are expunged (including all of Act 3), and a scene was imported from the drama *Zaraffa, the Slave King*, which had been written for Aldridge" (182).

Sir. Toby is traditionally played white, as seen in the Globe Theatre's 2013 all male production with Colin Hurley as Sir Toby (IMDb), the National Theatre's 2017 production with Tim McMullan as Sir Toby (nationaltheatre.org.uk), and even the Public Theatre's musical adaptation of *Twelfth Night* with Shuler Hensley as Sir Toby Belch (Musbach). But experimenting with Toby's race to broaden Toby's character was akin to the "innovation" Aldridge used for his characters. Aldridge's changes to *Titus* inspired my line changes to Sir. Toby replacing words like "sir" and "lad" with "sis" and "chile" adapted the character to a black homosexual perspective.

Grier concludes, "There is no smooth story of 'progress', in which racist attitudes slowly and mysteriously... yield to enlightenment and egalitarianism... The challenge before us has to do with *decisions* we make together about how we determine... who is believed and who is discredited, whose reputation we protect and whose we disregard..."

(250). Cis-gendered gay Black actors receive few chances to express their authentic selves in Shakespearean works. My adaption of Sir Toby challenged white, colonialist conception of race by appropriating Shakespeare's plays through incorporation of my black identity. This revolutionary act opposes white supremacist, colonialist concepts of race and forges a new path for Black actors.

## CHAPTER 2

### SHAKESPEARE GAY AF!

“I’ve done Shakespeare plenty, and he liked it every time.”

-Ginger Minj (Season 7 of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*)

Plays like *Twelfth Night* are often read through the lens of queer theory.

Shakespeare’s tinkering with gender roles, with the cross-dressing protagonist, Viola/Cesario, suggests that queer expressivity is ingrained in Shakespeare’s texts. Highlighting of the presence of male actors portraying female characters on early modern English stages also tinkers with gender roles, but this does not prove Shakespeare’s inherent queerness. Instead, Shakespeare’s texts can and should be read through a strong queer theoretical lens. In this chapter I will argue why and how Shakespeare’s plays should be read through a strong queer theoretical lens to allow queer actors to incorporate their queer identity into the development of characters in classical texts. Queer actors’ incorporation of their queer identity into Shakespearean heteronormative characters resists traditional heteronormative standards of sexuality.

Using Kate Aughterson’s and Alisa Grant Ferguson’s *Shakespeare and Gender: Sexuality in Shakespeare’s Drama* I’ll contend that early modern English male actors reinscribed heteronormative ideals by cross-dressing to play female characters out of fear of female sexuality. I will explain how the early modern English feared and blamed female sexuality for London’s “chaotic” urban development (180). Then, I will cite examples from *Twelfth Night* to detail how early modern English plays agitated restrictive gender norms through male actors pretending to be female characters and female characters pretending be male. While these plays agitated societal gender norms,

they also subscribed to these gender norms which discredits Shakespeare's inherent queerness. Proving Shakespeare's texts are not inherently queer will prove the need for Shakespeare's plays to be read through a queer lens to give queer actors agency over their identity.

A weak form of queering confines queer theory to only homosexuality, but a strong theoretical lens expands queerness beyond just homosexual desire by examining instances in time that seem remote but have the same cause (Tomkins 433). In other words, strong queer theory gives agency to anyone who opposes traditional, oppressive ideals of sexuality. I lean on strong queer theory to unite my queer and black identities to "black queer" Sir Toby Belch and supply motivation that weak queer theory does not. I use Judith Butler's "Critically Queer" and Madhavi Menon's "Queer Shakes" to argue for the use of strong queer theory to mobilize queerness.

In addition, I also use Henry Minton's "Queer Theory: Historical Roots and Implications for Psychology" to explain Michel Foucault's theory on power and Eve Sedgwick's "Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*" to explain what "performance" is as it relates to queer theory. I also explain how "performatives" not only describe what is being done but asserts itself through the doing of the performative. I use Judith Butler's "Critically Queer" to assert that "queer performatives" not only receive their power through repetition, but through shame as well. All performatives rely on repetition to draw upon previous iterations of the performative, but "queer performatives" utilize "queer's" association with shame to queer classical, heteronormative texts (227). I cite examples of repetitive, physical performative acts, like voguing and snapping, that I used in portrayal of Sir Toby Belch.

I use Jonathan Goldberg's *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* to explain how weak queer theory tracks the transition from what society considered homosocial to what we consider homosexual. This transition allows classical texts to be queered by appropriating classical homosocial behavior into homosexual behavior. This approach to queering classical texts diminishes a queer actor's agency as they incorporate their queer identity into classical, heteronormative characters because the approach only relies on homosexual acts. I cite examples of this weak theoretical approach to queering Shakespeare with Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* and *Twelfth Night* to prove why queer actors should use a strong theoretical lens to queer classical texts.

These steps will prove that Shakespeare's plays are not inherently queer, so queer actors need to queer the texts themselves if they want to incorporate their queer identity into classical texts. There is more than one way to queer classical texts, but only queering classical texts through a strong queer theoretical lens democratizes queerness and makes it available to anyone who opposes restrictive, heteronormative ideas of sexuality. The work on queer theory should always work to include instead of excluding.

### It Ain't Even Like That

It's known that early modern English theatre consisted of only male actors that played male and female characters. This cross-dressing may seem to resemble our modern day "drag" performance; however, whereas "drag" resists heterosexist gender norms (Butler 230) early modern English male actors cross-dressed to enforce heterosexist gender norms out of fear of female sexuality. Kate Aughterson's and Alisa Grant Ferguson's *Shakespeare and Gender: Sexuality in Shakespeare's Drama* cites



Stephen Gosson's 1579 *The Schoole of Abuse*, which states, 'Compare *London* to *Rome*...you shall find the Theatres of the one, the abuses of the other, to be rife among us...In our assemblies at playes in *London*, you shall see suche heaving, and shoving, suche itching and shouldring, too sitte by women...such manning them home, when the sportes are ended' (179). Gosson compares London "theatres" to the fall of "Rome" because mass "assemblies" of people caused men and women to be too close to one another due to the small size of urban early modern English theatre. The "heaving", "shoving", and "itching" of the men to "sit by women" is an example of how the early modern English held female sexuality in contempt.

Female sexuality tempted men, even if women were not actively seeking men. This temptation enforces oppressive heterosexist gender norms. As explained by Aughterson and Ferguson, "Gosson inveighed against theatres as a place for sexualized and gendered (female) freedoms...The novel phenomenon of an urban theatre that men and women attend in daytime was viewed as politically and socially threatening, signaled through language that blamed female sexuality for this perceived urban chaos" (180). London grew from about 50,000 people to 200,000 during Shakespeare's lifetime (180), and early modern Englishmen, considered this growth to be "urban chaos" caused by theatres' "sexualized and gendered freedoms." Theatres were "socially threatening" with activities like "masterless" men engaging in activities free of church, state, or city policing (180), or "politically threatening" with the plays' "unchaste matters and lascivious devices" like men imitating women and women characters challenging reiterated Protestant rules of female conduct (180).

Aughterson and Ferguson also cite 1598 letter from the Lord Mayor of London and the Aldermen to the Privy Council that demanded that play be banned from the city. The letter states, “[Stage-plays] are special cause of corrupting their youth, containing nothing but unchaste matters, lascivious devices, and other lewd and ungodly practices. They are the ordinary place for masterless men...cozeners, coney-catchers, contrivers of treason... Such young gentlemen as have small regard of credit...draw the same into imitation and not the avoiding the like vices which they represent” (181). A “cozener” is, “a person who uses clever means to cheat others out of something of value” (Merriam-Webster) and a “coney-catcher” is, “A swindler...a perpetrator of confidence tricks (Lexico). Both insults are associated with deceit and trickery. Stage-plays “corrupted their youth” because it showed “ungodly practices” like men “imitating” women, which is a form of trickery. Other “young gentlemen” could have imitated such “vices.”

In *Twelfth Night*, the protagonist Viola pretends to be Cesario to get closer to her love interest Duke Orsino and the plan works. Viola says to the Captain, “I’ll serve this duke. Thou shalt present me as a manservant to him... that will allow me very worth his service. What else may hap, to time I will commit” (1.2.58-63). Viola pretends to be a “manservant” to make her “worth[y]” enough to “service” Orsino. The image of a man pretending to be a woman pretending to be a man is filled with imitation that not only challenges societal standards with Cesario, a servant, deceiving his master, but with Viola, a woman, deceiving a man. In the end of the play, Viola/Cesario got what they wanted when they marry Orsino, which shows to an early modern English audience trickery and deceit can be useful.

Early modern English conceptions of theatres as places of sexualized and gender-exceeding behaviors (Aughterson and Ferguson 181), conflicted with newly reiterated protestant codes on female conduct. John Dod and Robert Cleaver's 1598 *A Godlie Forme of Household Gouernment* states, "S. Paule would haue a woman a good *home-keeper*. Towards her neighbours she is not sowre, but courteous, not angrie, but milde: not bold, but bashfull: not full of words, powring out al in her mind, & babling... but speaking vpon good occasion, and that with discretion" (qtd. In Aughterson and Ferguson 26). Cleaver and Dod's belief that women should be "bashful" and not "babel" what is "in her mind" echoes the early modern belief that a woman who openly speaks her mind and isn't a "home-keeper" is not a virtuous woman.

*Twelfth Night* centers around a character who challenges these ideals. Viola dressed as Cesario woos the Lady Olivia by confessing what they would say if they loved Olivia like their master, Duke Orsino. Viola/Cesario speaks for nearly twelve lines which contradicts the belief that women should not be "full of words." The speech also contains one period which implies Olivia/Cesario contradicts protestant female codes when she is "powring" out "her mind." Viola/Cesario even says, "Hallow your name to the reverberate hills and make the babbling gossip of the air, cry out "Olivia!" (1.5.277-80). Viola is "bold" and not "bashful." Viola would not be able to express herself this way if she was not imitating a man which still restricts gendered freedom.

It could be argued Shakespeare plays, like *Twelfth Night*, are inherently queer because their female characters resist constricting societal gender norms, but Shakespeare's plays subscribe to gender norms because female characters were played by male actors pretending to be females. Male actors did not have to submit to female

conduct codes therefore male actors did not perform with resistance in mind, but entertainment. Shakespeare's plays disrupted early modern English standards of gender with male actors pretending to be women and female characters challenging female conduct codes, but both examples restrict gender freedom which subscribes to oppressive colonialist gender norms. Shakespeare's use of these gender norms discredits Shakespeare's plays inherent queerness.

### You So Strong

There are two kinds of methods when reading texts, "paranoid reading" and "reparative reading," and these methods can be classified as strong theory or weak theory, respectively (Sedgwick 133-34). Both methodologies and theories have their strengths and weaknesses, but to queer Shakespeare's texts to defy traditional, colonialist ideas of sexuality queer actors should use strong queer theory. According to Sedgwick, "Paranoid reading is to read texts with skepticism to expose their purported repressed or hidden meanings" while reparative reading "identifies with a piece of text that offers nourishment and comfort in turn" (126). To say reparative reading "offers nourishment and comfort" neglects those who found nourishment and comfort through paranoid reading.

Shakespeare's texts should be read with "skepticism" otherwise we risk honoring the canonicity of Shakespeare's plays instead of challenging their heterosexist ideas. Strong queer theory partners with paranoid reading to enact this challenge. Reparative reading uses weak queer theory to subtract from queer theory's agency because it constricts the definition of queer to mean only homosexual behavior. Strong queer theory

gives queer theory its agency by expanding what it is to be queer to any marginalized group who resists traditional heterosexist social norms.

Strong queer theory gives agency to queer theory. Silvan Tomkins describes the difference between strong and weak theory: “Any theory of wide generality is capable of accounting for a wide spectrum of phenomena which appears to be very remote, one from the other, and from a common source. This is commonly accepted criterion” (433). The “commonly accepted” strong queer theory connects “remote phenomena” like homosexual and feminist oppression to a “common source” like the imposition of heterosexist social norms on those who defy such norms. The connection gives agency to queer theory because it recognizes the effect heterosexists social norms has on all marginalized groups. Weak queer theory diminishes queer theory’s influence by tying queer theory to mean only homosexual behavior. Tomkins continues, “To the extent to which the theory can account for “near” phenomena, it is a weak theory... As it orders more and more remote phenomena to a single formulation, its power grows” (434). Unlike strong queer theory, weak queer theory finds its “power” by aligning many “near phenomena” to a “single formulation”, with homosexuality being the “near phenomena” and heterosexist social norms being the “single formulation.” To declare heterosexist norms as the “single” cause of homosexual oppression transforms queer theory from being about inclusion to being about exclusion. No longer is queer theory the champion for all “queer” people, but only for the gays and lesbians.

Strong queer theory asserts that queerness is more than homosexual instead it is never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered, from a prior usage and in the direction of “urgent and expanding political purposes” (Butler 228). Judith

Butler writes, “As expansive as the term “queer” is meant to be, it is used in ways that enforce...overlapping divisions... Indeed, it may be that the critique of [queer] will initiate a resurgence of...anti-racist mobilization with lesbian and gay politics” (229). Like Butler, I believe that the term “queer” should be “expansive” and that when the term is only tied to mean one group it “enforces” “divisions” between “youth who resist institutionalized and reformist politics sometimes signified as gay and lesbian” (228) and non-white communities. My approach to “black queering” classical texts “critique[s]” what is queer and how “queer” should be examined to blur the dividing lines between two oppressed groups, blacks and queers. “Black queering” encourages queer, black actors to incorporate both black and queer identities as they read and perform classical texts. The incorporation of these identities into classical text is an example “resurgence” in “anti-racist mobilization with lesbian and gay politics.”

Queerness finds its importance through its opposition to the societal norm. Madhavi Menon states, “But the characteristic of queer that makes it at once attractive...and vulnerable...is that it can never define the queer...If queerness can be defined, then it is no longer queer- it strays away from its anti-normative stance to become the institutionalized norm” (7). To “define” “queerness” as only being homosexual diminishes the political power of queerness. “Queer” is about opposing the “institutionalized norm” which is done through more ways than just performing homosexual acts. “Black queering” is “anti-normative” not only to restrictive, heterosexist societal norms, but white supremacist, colonialist conceptions of blackness. If queer actors rely on the weak theory of “reparative reading” instead of adopting the strong theory of “paranoid reading” to analyze and perform classic texts, like

Shakespeare, queer actors confine themselves to only representing homosexual desire. My interpretation did not rely on homosexual performance, but “queer performance” to resist dominant, colonialist ideas of sexuality.

### It's Queer how Queer it is

“Performance” is more than theatrical in the context of queer theory.

Performance is defined through Michel Foucault’s theory of power as a relation as opposed to an object. Foucault’s theory constitutes political struggles as relations of power where “freedom can emerge”, but freedom cannot operate outside of power, nor can freedom be achieved through power (Minton 338). Therefore, the objective of oppositional politics should be resistance not liberation. With Foucault’s theory in mind Eve Sedgwick’s “Queer Performativity: Henry James’s *The Art of the Novel* defines performative acts as, “cluster of sentences...that to utter the sentence (in, of course the appropriate circumstances) is not to describe...doing...or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it” (3). Sedgwick’s definition of performative acts can be applied not only to “cluster[s] of sentences” but physical actions too because physical actions also do not “describe doing.” When a person performs physical actions, a person demonstrates their power just as they would when they speak. My portrayal of Sir Toby not only used words to express my queer identity, but I also used performative physical actions like voguing and snapping to “act” Toby’s sexuality.

Performative acts are given their power through repetition. Queer performance differs from homosexual performance in that queer performance does not rely on homosexual acts to display queerness, but “repetitive” coded actions (Butler 227). Butler

further contends, “There is no power, construed as a subject, that acts, but only, to repeat an earlier phrase, a reiterated acting that *is* power in its persistence...This is...a nexus of power that repeats or mimes the gestures of power” (225). Performative “power” does not “act” on its own, yet its “persistence” of “early phrases” “repeats or mimes the gestures of power.” Butler gives an example of a judge citing the law to prove her point. Butler writes, “The judge who authorizes and installs the situation he names invariably *cites* the law that he applies, and it is the power of this citation that gives the performative...power...It may appear that the...power is derived from the force of his will or from a prior authority, the opposite is more true” (225). The judge’s “authorization” is given by “citing the law” not by “his will” to enforce the law, nor by “prior authority”, like the judicial system that the judge operates in. Butler continues, “Power is to be found...in the citational legacy by which...a contemporary ‘act’ emerges (225). The “citational legacy” of “contemporary acts” implies that performatives must be repetitious and do not act on their own.

Like all performatives, queer performatives receive their power through repetition but specifically through shame. Butler asserts, “The term “queer” has operated as one... practice whose purpose has been the shaming of the subject it names or, rather, the producing of a subject *through* that shaming. “Queer” derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to...pathologization, insult. This is an invocation by which a social bond among homophobic communities is formed through time” (226). “Queer’s” association to “pathologization” and “insult” “shames” and “produces” a queer subject at the utterance of the term. The insulting “queer” is “repeated” “through time” to create a “social bond among homophobic communities.”



Butler's quote builds off strong queer theory because "queer's" repeated negative" invocation" does not only have to be linked to homosexual behavior as the term "queer" also means "strange; odd" (Oxford Languages) which means that a "queer" subject can just be an "odd" person who is shamed because they do not subscribe to paradigmatic heterosexist ideas.

My Sir Toby utilized the repetitive power of "queer performatives" to queer Shakespeare's text. As previously stated, I used physical queer performative actions like voguing and snapping to express Toby's queerness. Voguing and snapping are both performative acts that have been repeatedly used by those who identify as "queer" therefore, to oppose colonialist ideas of sexuality, these performative actions queer Shakespeare's texts when performed. Vogue "adopted a coded parody of white femininity, both glorifying and subverting ideals...of sexuality" (Schijen). The "coded" performance of vogue "subverts" "white" "ideals of sexuality. My Sir Toby vogue to encourage his friend Andrew Aguecheek, to stay in Illyria. As Toby stated the lines, "Your very walk should be a jig. You should not so much as make water but in a sink-a-pace" (1.3.126-27), he duck-walked and swished his wrists, both voguing dance moves. My choice to vogue was not only performing in the entertaining sense, but it also performed by "queering" text originally subscribes to restrictive heterosexist ideas. Toby's voguing relied on vogue's previous usage for resistance to find its resistive power.

Snapping like voguing is also a queer performative act that I used in my portrayal of Sir Toby Belch. E. Patrick Johnson expounds, "The snap may be used by itself, in combination with words or with other nonverbals... Snapping was witnessed most often

among African-American women...and African-American gay men...I place snapping napping under the larger category of verbal and nonverbal art known as, signifying. Signifying incorporates either direct or indirect tactics in verbal dueling” (123-24). “Snapping” was used mostly among “African American women” and “African-American gay men” in “verbal duel, and my Sir Toby, as an “African-American gay man” used snapping to “signify.” Snapping can be used in conjunction with classical texts to signify. In preparation to trick Malvolio, Toby tells his friend Fabian, “Wouldst thou not be glad to have the rascally sheep-biter come by some notable shame...To anger him, we’ll have the bear again, and we will fool him black and blue” (2.5.4-9). The text carries bite with the “g” in “glad”, “anger”, “again” and the “b” in “sheep-biter”, “notable”, “bear”, and “black and blue, all of which are plosives which block the flow of air as it leaves the body (thesoundofenglish.org). The plosives can be used to verbally punch the listener, and I used snapping “in combination” with these plosives to “signify” to Fabian and the audience Toby’s disdain towards Malvolio.

My interpretation of Sir Toby resisted white, colonialist ideas of sexuality by relying on queer coded physical performative actions, like voguing and snapping. These performative actions in their doing repeat prior meanings of the same performative action which queers the individual. “Black queering” queers white, classical texts with repetitive queer performatives because queer performatives and not just homosexual acts, but acts that can be used by anyone to resist white, heterosexist conceptions of sexuality.

Shakespeare’s plays’ capability of a weak queer theoretical appropriation lies in the evolution from what the early modern English considered homosocial versus what we now consider to be homosexual. In early modern England you were only considered

homosexual if you engaged in sodomy, which included anal intercourse, fellatio, masturbation, and bestiality (Goldberg 19), but this does not mean sodomy was not being perpetrated by heterosexual people as well. Jonathan Goldberg explains, “If sodomy named sexual acts only in particularly stigmatizing contexts, there is no reason not to believe that such acts went on all the time...called...friendship or patronage” (19). The same way “queer” created a “queer” subject through shame, “sodomy” “named” created another through “stigmatizing contexts.” If “sexual acts” were not stigmatized, then they were done in the name of “friendship or patronage.”

As time continued more and more stigmatizing made sodomy synonymous with homosexuality, despite heterosexuals being capable of the same sexual acts. The transformation of these sexual acts from friendly gestures among heterosexuals to stigmatized gestures of homosexual deviance creates a way for queer actors to queer classical texts by appropriating classical homosocial behavior to modern homosexual behavior. Goldberg continues, “Reading Renaissance texts for sodomy...involves rather seeing the ways in which normative bonds...also allow for sexual relations” (23). To approach “Renaissance texts” through this lens supports performing the text through a weak queer theoretical lens because the approach transforms “normative bonds” into homo “sexual relation,” unlike a strong queer theoretical lens which expands queer performance beyond homosexual acts.

For queer actors to incorporate their queer identity into classical, heteronormative texts to oppose such texts enforcement of restrictive colonialist conceptions of sexuality they should queer the text through a strong queer theoretical lens. Queering the text using strong theory expands what and who is queer to give political mobilization to all groups

marginalized by dominant heteronormativity. Queering classical texts through a weak queer theoretical lens, while still successful in its ability to queer classical texts like Shakespeare, is not as divisive as a strong theoretical approach because a weak queer theoretical approach confines “queerness” to represent one marginalized group. Strong queer theory allows for moments of intersection between race and sexuality which makes “black queering” possible. Butler states, “At stake...will be the differential formation of homosexuality across racial boundaries, including the question of how racial and reproductive relations become articulated through one another” (229).

## CHAPTER 3

### THIS AIN'T THAT

“Tell ‘em this ain’t that and that ain’t this.”

- Ski Mask the Slump God (rapper)

The previously cited scholars examine Shakespeare and race and Shakespeare and sexuality; yet they do not attend to the intersection between Shakespeare, race, and sexuality. Shakespeare’s texts can be appropriated for black expressivity and queer expressivity; therefore, they can be appropriated for queer, black expressivity. My portrayal of Sir Toby Belch was an exploration of the potential relationships between Shakespeare, race, and sexuality. The process led to fresh, bold acting choices that exhibited my Toby’s Blackness and queerness. These fresh, bold acting choices acted as resistance to colonialist tools, like Shakespeare’s plays, which promote colonialist ideals about masculinity and patriarchy that are harmful to black men who subscribe to colonialist masculinity. This chapter will detail why colonialist masculinity is harmful to black cis-male actors and how appropriating Shakespeare’s plays offer new forms of masculinity for black cis male actors to explore.

First, I will use bell hooks’ *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* and Robert Staples’ *Black Masculinity: The Black Male’s Role in American Society*, among other sources, to delineate the difference between black cis men’s and white cis men’s conceptions of masculinity. These differences include black men’s denial of patriarchal domination (hooks 10) or failing to live up to the standards of manhood on one hand and being overly masculine on the other (Staples 2). Next, I will explain how misapplying white/colonialist masculinity concepts harms black men because it will inevitably lead to

black men feeling emasculated (hooks 12). Then, I will define camp using Susan Sontag's *Notes on Camp* and explore how queer, black actors can use camp to defy colonialist masculinity. I will then cite evidence of camp from my interpretation of Sir Toby and mainstream media, like *RuPaul's Drag Race*. I will use Carl Schottmiller's "Reading RuPaul's Drag Race: Queer Memory, Camp Capitalism, and RuPaul's Drag Empire" to explain RuPaul's use of camp to build community amongst their queer audience. *RuPaul's Drag Race* defies colonialist masculinity and offer forms of masculinity that is not characterized by domination. Lastly, I will incorporate Susan Sontag's "Notes on Camp" to justify the subversive potential of camp and how black cis male actors could use camp to appropriate Shakespeare's plays and offer new forms of masculinity to explore.

The use of Shakespeare's plays to express the intersection of race and sexuality for queer, black actors require acting methods that differ from those employed by queer, white actors because of the historic mistreatment of black men in America and its effects on Black men's masculinity. bell hooks dissects the "plantation patriarchy" of the Antebellum era in *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. hooks argues the teaching and consequential denial of white patriarchy to black men led to feelings of emasculation present today (3). Teachings like men being the primary provider of the home were consequentially denied by black men since black women usually earned more money doing domestic work (7). Though most black women gave their earnings directly to their husband black men felt emasculated because they were not the primary breadwinners of their home (9). Like hooks, in *Black Masculinity: The Black Man's Role in American Society*, Robert Staples argues that black men are at a disadvantage compared to their

white counterparts due to sociocultural forces that, “do not prepare [Black men] very well for the fulfillment of masculine roles” (8). Such “sociocultural forces “include the stereotype that black men are emasculated by black women due to black women’s greater education and economic contribution to the household (9). Despite the stereotype, Black families are generally more equalitarian than white families, which grants the father the authoritative role (9). hooks and Staples cite differences in the development of black and white men that stem from the psychohistory that represents black males as not real men. Differences like black men’s shift away from sexism (hooks 12) or the inability of lower income black men to support their children due to economic difficulties (Staples 16) cause queer, black male actors to adopt different methods than their white counterparts when using Shakespeare’s plays to express the intersection between race and sexuality.

### I Ain’t Your Sis: Black Masculinity

Black men, before European interaction, did not found their manhood on the conquering of others. The African explorers of the “new world’, predating Columbus, did not enslave the indigenous people they encountered. hooks claims, “African explorers coming to the ‘new world’ before Columbus were men. The fact that they did not seek to dominate and/or destroy the indigenous native people who were living on these shores reveals that their sense of masculinity was not defined by the will to dominate and colonize folks who were not like them” (2). hooks asserts the history of black people in America does not begin with slavery. hooks argues that black men held beliefs about masculinity that were later replaced by the lessons of their slave masters, “Transplanted African men...had to be taught to equate their higher status as men with the right to

dominate women, taught that it was acceptable to use violence to establish patriarchal power. The gender politics of slavery and white-supremest domination of free black men was the school (3). African, male slaves, even those from communities where sex roles shaped the division of labor, had to be “taught” to “equate” their status as men with the “right to dominate women.” Colonialist teaching taught enslaved African men that “violence” was how men “establish[ed] patriarchal power”. This “school” of “gender politics and white-supremest domination” while supplying black, male slaves with a method of survival, ultimately harmed the black male and led to problems that persist today. This “patriarchal masculinity” learned by African men created a paradox that continues to plague the black man to this day.

While black men were taught the strictures of patriarchal masculinity, slavery prevented black men from participating in “masculinity” the same way as their white counterparts. Robert Staples agrees, “As a starting point, I see the black male as being in conflict with the normative definition of masculinity. This is a status which few, if any, black males have been able to achieve. Masculinity, as defined in this culture, has always implied a certain autonomy over and mastery of one’s environment” (2). Black male slaves did not have “autonomy” or “mastery” of their own “environment,” thus emasculating them. Black men would use this gaining of “autonomy” and “mastery” to measure their manhood. In “Reconstructing Black Masculinity” hooks writes, “This notion of manhood did become a standard used to measure black male progress... Free [Black men] would be men able to provide for and take care of their families” (3). This white-supremest “notion of manhood” became a “standard” for black men to measure themselves by. “Free Black men” weren’t men if they were not able to “provide



for and take care of their families”. Black men gaged their masculinity on confrontation and domination. If a man was not able to protect his family, he was not a man.

This method of measuring masculinity continued after slavery, and pressured black men to prove their masculinity through the subjugation of black women, often using the same control strategies that white slave owners used. hooks argues, “They wanted to be recognized as ‘men’ by other men, including white men. Yet they could not assume this position if black women were not willing to conform to prevailing sexist gender norms” (7). Black men yearned to be “recognized as men,” by “white men” and to do so black men had to adopt domineering methods to make black women “conform to prevailing sexist gender norms.” To assume masculinity through domination is a continuation of white racist patriarchal values that harm the black community by continuing this dominating conception of masculinity by forcing black women to “willingly conform” to black men.

But not all black men adhered to dominating patriarchy after slavery. As hooks notes, some black men opposed patriarchal masculinity and instead chose to exhibit alternative forms of masculinity, “There was even in slavery those rare black males who repudiated the norms set by white oppressors... African folk...kept alive African culture retentions that also offered a subculture distinct from the culture imposed by whiteness” (4). “Rare black males” did “repudiate the norms set by white oppressors even in slavery”. “African folk” who either escaped slavery or joined the “renegade maroons once slavery ended” (hooks 4) “kept alive African culture retentions” and created a “subculture” that mirrored that of precolonial African gender norms and was “distinct” from “culture imposed by whiteness”.

“The Tradition of John” by Rudolph Byrd, co-editor of *Traps: African American Men on Gender and Sexuality*, also examines how some black men, like the figure of John, chose to alternatively express their masculinity to oppose the white supremacist patriarchal norm. Byrd describes how the figure of John resisted such constructions:

Committed to the overthrow of slavery and the ideology of white supremacy, John is the supreme antagonist of “Old Massa.” In John’s various acts of resistance are reflected his most exemplary values and attributes: motherwit, the power of laughter and song, self-assertion, self-examination, self-knowledge, a belief that life is process grounded in the fertile field of improvisation, hope, and most importantly, love (5).

These “values and attributes” supply non-patriarchal conceptions of masculinity because they expressed masculinity differently than “Old Massa.”

Sir Toby, Olivia’s uncle, should assume patriarchal responsibilities he instead avoids them (Rogers 3). According to the colonialist concept of masculinity Toby is not a “man” because Toby does not provide for his family, but Toby’s use of “motherwit” and his inclination towards “the power of laughter and song” “exemplifies” the same “various acts of resistance” as John. Toby’s wit is expressed through his play of words. Malvolio admonishes Toby for singing too loud too late at night, “Is there no respect of place, persons, nor time in you? (2.3.92-93). Toby responds with, “We did keep time, sir, in our songs” (2.3.94). Toby is witty enough to manipulate Malvolio’s words to his benefit. Toby exemplifies his “power of laughter and song” when he says to Feste, the fool, “Let’s have a song...A love song! A love song!” (2.3.18-37) and when Maria admonishes Toby and his friends for being too loud, he sings multiple songs to her to entice her to

join the fun (2.3.79-110). My interpretation of Sir Toby relied on these “attributes” to resist and offer new forms of masculinity that goes beyond the ability to provide, and instead relied on “self-assertion, self-examination, and self-knowledge.” My Toby asserted himself by singing loudly and without constriction. Toby’s confidence in his wit exhibits his self-examination and self-knowledge. Byrd supplies examples of masculinity that defy the norm of white supremest patriarchy. The black males who resisted white supremest patriarchy showcased masculinity that nurtured instead of controlled.

The argument that non domineering masculinity emasculates black men by making black women the “matriarchal leader” (Staples 9) is false because of the challenges that black women face that their privileged black male counterparts do not. Staples states, “Black families are generally more equalitarian than comparable white families... With the special problems black women face- such as early pregnancies, the burdens of supporting children alone, and inadequate incomes and job opportunities- it is difficult to imagine them as having castrated the slightly better-off male” (9-10). “Black families” being more “equalitarian” means black women will participate more in the running of the household, at least more so than “comparable white families.”

The difference in family dynamic is the reason black men are viewed as being “castrated” by black women, but black women cannot be dominant over black men because of “special problems” like: “early pregnancies,” as black women have the second highest birth rate for females aged 15-19 (cdc.gov); “supporting children alone,” since black people have the most children living in single parent families (census.gov); and “inadequate incomes and job opportunities,” women’s earnings ranging from 78% to 81% of men’s among workers aged 35 and older (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Black

men do not face these issues; therefore, they are “better-off” than their female counterparts. The cause of black men feeling emasculated is the misapplication of white concepts of masculinity to black men.

The myth of the matriarchy was exploited by the white-supremacist, capitalist state to ridicule black masculinity. Unlike their white counterparts’ black men did not feel manhood was achieved through work or family obligation. E. Franklin Frazier’s “Ethnic Family Patterns: The Negro Family in the United States” in 1948 called attention to how racist barriers to black people assuming sexist-defined roles disrupted marriage and black families because it led to lack of interest in sustaining two-parent households. Frazier reports, “It lacked an institutional basis...Both legal marriage and divorce were not generally observed...The family often grew out of unmarried motherhood and the common interests...developed from...the struggle for existence” (436). Black mothers were often “unmarried” because black families were not formed through “institutional basis” but through “common interests” of black men and women who “struggled” to “exist.” “Unlike white males,” hooks argues, “black males did not have an institutionalized, patriarchal-influenced morality to make them feel less manly if they abandoned families” (11). Black men’s lack of “patriarchal morality” makes black men seem unmanly to whites because it defies colonialist values of masculinity like working and providing for your family. hooks retorts, “Black men, who came from a slave history where work was compulsory and brutal, did not see work as crucial to their masculine identity” (11). Black men’s masculinity was not dependent upon labor because they spent over four hundred years doing “compulsory” and “brutal” “work”.

While black men's adaption to white supremacist constructions were necessary for survival, resistance continued. Most black men also were not upset about black women earning more than them. hooks continues, "Many black men adapted to the reality of white supremacy providing menial jobs to black women while denying employment to black men without internalizing the blame...or projecting it onto black women" (11). Black people "adapted" to "white supremacy" for their survival. For black women that meant taking "menial jobs" and for black men it was not "internalizing the blame" of "denied employment" or "projecting" that blame onto black women.

Julius Lester addresses this resistance to white norms in *Look Out, Whitey! Black Power's Gon' Get Your Mama*:

It is partially true that blacks have accepted the white man's image of themselves... However, it is also true they have resisted accepting this image.

That resistance has remained...unorganized, and thus the difficulty in recognizing the struggle that has been constantly taking place...The racism that exists in this country will not allow any other view of blacks to exist except the racist view (11-12).

Black men have "accepted" white masculinity, but they have also "resisted" white masculinity. The resistance, unfortunately, has been "unorganized," which makes it "difficult" to "recognize" that black men "struggle" with accepting "white images of themselves." Black men should work to develop a view of themselves that defies the "racist view" the "racism" "in this country" imposes. In other words, Lester argues that black men's refusal to adhere to conventional white patriarchy supplies an alternative view of masculinity that is unrecognized by the white majority.

It would discredit the white majority to credit black masculinity. “It has served the interest of racism for white people,” bell hooks writes, “to ignore the positive aspects of black life...It was vital to white male self-esteem to belittle unconventional black masculinity (12). If white men did not “ignore” the “positive aspects of black life” it would “belittle” white masculinity by supplying an alternate form of masculinity based in ideals contrary to the dominating colonialist standard. Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s, “The Negro Family” (1965) reported that black women had emasculated black males by being matriarchs and joining the military was one solution for black men to reclaim their patriarchal status, just in time for the Vietnam war. Moynihan reports, “The fundamental fact of Negro American life is the often-reversed roles of husband and wife” (30). Moynihan, a white man in his forties at the time the report was published, applied white patriarchal “roles of husband and wife” to examine black relationships, and then inappropriately passed this misapplication as a “fundamental fact” when white concepts are only factual when they are applied to white people.

### Why You So Suppressed?

If black men continue to measure their manhood by white patriarchy standards, they will continue to misrepresent themselves because of the misapplication of white social norms to black masculinity, and black male actors performing male characters in Shakespeare’s plays will continue this misrepresentation and misapplication. Queer, black actors can defy white patriarchal standards encoded in these plays by incorporating their queer and black identity into the role. Staples writes, “Black men face certain problems related to institutional racism and environments which often do not prepare

them very well for the fulfillment of masculine roles. In addition to... institutional and overt discrimination, they encounter the negative stereotyping that exists on all levels about them: being socially castrated, insecure in their male identity, and lacking in a positive self-concept. Most of these negative stereotypes...have stemmed from failure to understand the meaning and form of masculinity in black culture” (8). Black mens’ “problems” with “institutional racism” do not “prepare” black men to “fulfill” “masculine roles” like dominating one’s “environment” or developing one’s manhood through work. “Negative stereotypes” such as black men being viewed as lazy or emasculated “stem” from white society’s “failure” to “understand” black men’s belief that life is process grounded in improvisation, hope, and love (Byrd 5). These values are the “meaning and form” of black masculinity in “black culture” Staples refers to.

There are obstacles that black men face that their white counterparts do not. Staples highlights obstacles unique to black men like being overly represented in the statistics on violent crimes (12) or a higher unemployment rate for black men than white men (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Staples argues that study of black masculinity requires a different research methodology because of these obstacles. This different methodology, which recognizes and embraces the “meaning and form” of black masculinity in “black culture,” is rarely applied. hooks writes, “Patriarchal socialization... insists boys should not express emotions or have emotional caretaking [and] is... viciously and ruthlessly implicated in the early childhood socialization of black boys. The image of emasculated and castrated black males is so embedded in the cultural imagination that many black parents feel it is crucial to train boys to be ‘tough’” (86). “Patriarchal socialization” hinders boy’s early development. Black boys growing

up to be “emasculated and castrated” black men guides black parents who “train” black boys to be “tough,” however this training to suppress “emotions” contradicts black masculinity while reinforcing negative white patriarchal standards. Like Staples, hooks agrees that black boys are faced with the stereotype of social castration which leads black parents to raise their boys to suppress emotions to come off as more masculine thus “leveling” the playing field for black boys. This “leveling” of the playing field is at the expense of the healthy development of black boys.

I was told growing up that being a black man meant I was born with two strikes against me and that I couldn’t afford a third, this third strike being feminine expressivity. Like most black parents, my parents subscribed to what hooks defines as “soul murder” to ensure that I would not grow up “soft.” “Soul murder” is, “the psychological term that best describes this crushing of the male spirit in boyhood” (87). Houston A. Baker shares an example of “soul murder” in his autobiographical essay “On the Distinction of ‘Jr.’”:

I am eleven years old, giddy with the joy of fire and awed by the seeming invulnerability of my father. He is removing dead coals from the glowing bed of the furnace.... We are sharing...we are together...I begin dancing around the furnace with light abandon. My voice slides up the scale to a high falsetto... I feel joyful and secure. I am supremely happy, high voiced, fluid. Then I am suddenly flattened against a limestone wall, bolts of lightning and bright stars flashing in my head. I have been hard and viciously slapped in the mouth as a thunderous voice shout... ‘Stop acting like a sissy’” (87).

Baker enjoys himself while his father works; he is in “awe” of the “seeming invulnerability” expressed through his father’s manual labor. Baker expresses his



“giddiness” with “light abandon dance” and a “high falsetto” voice. Baker is, “happy, high voiced, and fluid” openly expressing his emotions and unaware of the expectation of having to seem tough until his father “flattens” him with a “hard” and “vicious” slap and tells him to “stop acting like a sissy.” Baker’s father’s assault on him crushed Baker’s boyhood spirit and socialized Baker to suppress his emotions out of fear of negative repercussions. Baker’s experience is not unlike experiences of other black boys. I also recall being verbally and sometimes physically admonished because my behavior was too feminine.

This suppression of feelings is harmful to black boys because black boys are forced to confine parts of themselves to achieve societal and sometimes familial acceptance. Terrence Real writes in *How Can I get Through to You*, “The latest research on boys and their development tells us that...boys today, no less than ever before, are permeated with an inescapable set of highly constricting rules” (87). The “constricting rules” do not offer boys the option of free self-expression. Real continues, “Our cultural tolerance for young men who deviate from what we deem masculine is limited” (87). A white colonialist patriarchal concept of masculinity is intolerant to boys who choose to “deviate” from what the dominant society considers “masculine.” Therefore, black men are seen as being incompatible with white masculine standards when black masculine methods like free self-expression is utilized.

Real also comments on the dangers of black boys who resist what is socially accepted as masculine, “Those boys who dare to ‘step out of the box’ place themselves in harm’s way since, even today, our cultural tolerance for young men who deviate from what we deem masculine is limited, and our intolerance expressed in singularly ugly

ways...The consequence of opposition is psychological and often physical brutality” (87). While white boys are also damaged by patriarchal socialization the damage is intensified for black boys because not only is society invested in patriarchal masculinity that demands black boys be socialized away from feeling and action, but they also are equipped with a psychohistory that represents black males as castrated and not real men (hooks 88).

The image of the castrated black male haunts the psyche of the black community and discourages forms of expression other than patriarchal expression, but homosexual men who defy patriarchal expression were found to be more satisfied with their lives. According to Alan Bell and Martin Weinberg’s *Homosexualities*, both black and white gay men claimed to have better, close friends than heterosexual men did, Black and white gay men expressed greater satisfaction with their jobs than did heterosexual men, and about half of the black and white male homosexuals stated they had no regret whatsoever about being homosexual (34-215). The above statistics do not suggest sexuality change improves quality of life but suggests that homosexual’s denial of traditional patriarchy norms allows for homosexuals to live their life fully without suppression as opposed to their heterosexual counterparts who must suppress their feelings to adhere to the traditional views of masculinity.

### The Revolution is Queer!

Open expression of sexuality can be used as a revolutionary act! In *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity* and *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love* hooks believes that black men recognizing and confronting the ways patriarchal masculinity has

suppressed them is the revolutionary act (hooks, *We Real Cool* 149). While hooks supplies a critical first step, I believe there are other forms of revolutionary acts, like camp, that can be utilized by queer or heterosexual black men. Queer, black actors' expression of queer blackness is a radical act because not only does this expression supply new ideas of black masculinity, advice bell hooks urges black men to heed, but also can draw inspiration from "camp," a "love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration" (Sontag 1), to upset the dominant sex/ gender system.

I disagree with Sontag's claim that camp is "not a natural mode" (1). Camp is "not a natural mode" to those who have not had to rebel against the societal norm i.e., homosexuals, feminists, and even black men. These marginalized groups have adopted camp's "love of the unnatural" to express what is natural to them. Sontag cites camp as being "artificial" or "exaggerated," but it is in this "exaggeration" marginalized groups can defy societal norms. My interpretation of Sir Toby was a great example of using camp for queer, black expression. My costume, fine linen trousers and a bustier with flowers on the breast topped by a wide-brimmed hat, and my performance, described as being "a full on queen" by a critic (Waits) focused on exaggeration to express what is "natural" to me.

Sontag's definition of camp limits camp to whiteness. Sontag continues, "The androgyne is certainly one of the great images of camp sensibility...sinuous Pre-Raphaelite painting and poetry...sexless bodies in Art Nouveau paintings...and the perfect beauty of Greta Garbo...draw on the...unacknowledged truth, the most refined form of sexual attractiveness consists in going against the grain of one's sex" (4). Sontag cites "Pre-Raphaelite painting and poetry," a group of English 19<sup>th</sup>-century artists

(Oxford Languages), “Art Nouveau,” a style of decorative art in western Europe (Oxford Languages), and “Greta Garbo,” a Swedish actress, as examples of “camp sensibility.” All of Sontag’s references are Eurocentric and absent of blackness. Sontag uses these white examples to prove “going against the grain of one’s sex” is the “most refined form of sexual attractiveness”; however, black men “going against the grain” is met with contempt by those who subscribe to the standard concept of colonialist patriarchal masculinity. Black men can participate in the expression of this “unacknowledged truth” by using the “androgynous” and “exaggeration” of camp.

The same is seen in mainstream media with shows like *RuPaul’s Drag Race*. *RuPaul’s Drag Race* is an internationally recognized drag competition created and run by RuPaul, a queer, black man. *RuPaul’s Drag Race*’s televised drag resists colonialist masculinity, but its use of community building through camp also acts as resistance (Schottmiller 59). *RuPaul’s Drag Race* includes multiple encoded camp references like *Friends*, *Designing Women*, *The Golden Girls*, *Sex and the City*, *The Jefferson’s*, *Will and Grace*, *Absolutely Fabulous*, and *Alice* (Schottmiller 56). All these once popular television shows, now require prior audience knowledge of the source material to decode the camp references. Without this knowledge, a spectator will be oblivious to the encoding of camp references. The camp references resist colonialist masculinity by acting as a shorthand to the queer community and excluding those who are not a part of the queer community.

According to hooks, most black men are not aware of or not interested in resisting the sexist, racist status quo; however, only by recognizing and embracing their true desires can black men begin to heal from the racist stereotypes thrust upon them (*We*

*Real Cool* 86). This embracing of true desires will lead to new forms of expression like camp to distance the black male from racist and sexist stereotypes. The radical potential of camp stems from Judith Butler's argument that all gender is "performative- that is, constituting the identity it is purporting to be" (25). In other words, we do not act out the gender we are; rather, we become gendered persons through actions. Butler writes in *Gender Trouble*, "In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" (25). Black men do not "preexist the deed" of "doing" the "gender" they were raised to embody which gives gender performance its revolutionary power.

The use of camp to disturb the sex/gender system was employed for the character Sir Toby Belch in UofL's production of *Twelfth Night*. Toby is a stock character that represents debauchery and gluttony that was first introduced in ancient roman theatre (Pieczonka 193). Shakespeare used this stock character trait in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* with the character of Falstaff. Both characters are traditionally portrayed as fat white men who subscribe to heteronormative and patriarchal ideals. Productions of *Twelfth Night* with the usual portrayal of Sir Toby include: the Globe Theatre's 2013 all male production with Colin Hurley as Sir Toby (IMDb); the National Theatre's 2017 production with Tim McMullan as Sir Toby ([nationaltheatre.org.uk](http://nationaltheatre.org.uk)); and even the Public Theatre's musical adaption of *Twelfth Night* with Shuler Hensley as Sir Toby Belch (Musbach). Though these productions are innovative, the character of Sir Toby is always played by a tall, hefty, white man who reinforces white standards of masculinity. My portrayal of Sir Toby incorporated the exaggeration of camp with queer coded actions, like limped wrists, snapping, and effeminate behavior. These coded actions highlighted

the performance of gender through exaggeration to counteract previous patriarchal ideas of Toby.

Not only was camping up Toby radical as it relates to disrupting sex/gender systems, but the act was also radical in that the portrayal supplied alternate ideas of the black male. My Toby did not rely on masculine actions like a deep voice or solid movement to express his power. Instead, he used limped wrists, a sliding vocal register, and his ability to contrive and enact schemes to show his power. My Toby fought against the image of the castrated black male by disregarding it. While Toby used patriarchal tactics like domination and intimidation to achieve his goals, my camping of Toby turned the image of the black aggressive male into an image of a black male that did not depend on aggression to express his manhood. In the play, Toby does utilize different forms of aggression and encourages other characters to be aggressive, especially towards Malvolio. My approach to these acts of aggression with effeminate tonality and gestures affirms Butler's theory that masculinity is maintained through the enactment of gendered behavior.

The intersectionality of Shakespeare, race, and sexuality can lead to exciting new methods of expression like camp that not only defy the traditional/harmful effects of patriarchy, but also challenges the ideals of white masculinity as it applies to black masculinity. Differences like black men's denial of patriarchal domination (hooks, *We Real Cool* 10) or failing to live up to the standards of manhood on one hand and being overly masculine on the other (Staples 2) are two examples of issues black men encounter white men do not. The misapplication of white/colonialist masculinity concepts harms black men because it will inevitably lead to black men feeling emasculated. Black cis

male actors could defy the misapplication of white/colonialist masculinity through enacting forms true to black masculinity in canonized texts that exclude them because the theatrical community will unlikely abandon these texts.

## CHAPTER 4

### TOBY BLACK AND GAY AF

“If you don’t live the only life you have...you won’t live any life at all.”

-James Baldwin

Queer Black actors can find themselves feeling removed from Shakespeare’s plays due to the absence of queer black culture in Shakespeare’s plays, yet the goal of any actor is to embody the character. As theatre practitioner Uta Hagen puts it in *Respect for Acting*, “You must find your own sense of identity, enlarge this sense of self, and learn to see how that knowledge can be put to use in the characters you will portray” (22). Uta Hagen’s words ring true for queer black actors, though doubtful a fifty-four-year-old German white woman in nineteen seventy-three thought black queers would be “enlarging” their “sense of self” and “putting it to use” in the characters they portray. The incorporation of queer black identity in Shakespeare’s plays “black queers”, a phrase that means to examine and perform white, straight characters in white, colonialist text through a queer, black lens, Shakespeare’s plays and expands the conversation on whose identity gets to be “put to use”.

The appropriation of Shakespeare’s plays to express black queerness through the modification of text, physicality, and vocal tonality is a radical act because it defies colonialist conceptions of masculinity, race, and sexuality by “black queering” a colonialist text. Such an appropriation will disrupt white supremacy and heteronormativity by supplying a character interpretation that counters the white supremacy and heteronormativity in the text, in addition to inviting a more inclusive audience. In this chapter I will detail the approach to the script modification, physicality,



and tonality I used in my construction of my queer, black Sir Toby. I do so as a guide for queer, black actors to incorporate their racial and sexual identity into their character; to resist white supremacist patriarchy; and to invite an audience that is typically excluded from white colonialist texts.

Since the canonization of Shakespeare his plays have been adapted hundreds if not thousands of times; yet my method of text modification of Shakespeare's plays, like most dramatic texts of the early modern period, did not rely on subtext, "the underlying message being conveyed by a piece of dialogue" (nyfa.edu), to achieve an objective, a goal that the character wants (actingcoleeges.org). I will first use John's Barton's *Playing Shakespeare: An Actor's Guide* to argue the importance of the audience's understanding of the text and how the actor, amongst other artists a part of the production, is the bridge between actor and text. Next, I explain the difference between intelligibility and understandability and how queer, black actors should strive to make the text understandable, not just intelligible to audiences unfamiliar with white, colonialist text. This can be addressed by line changes, such as those made to *Twelfth Night* for UofL's production. Later, I'll explain how the method of line changes for better understanding of script can also be used for the actor's and audiences' better understanding of character.

I will then use Betsy Polatin's *The Actor's Secret: Techniques for Transforming Habitual Patterns and Improving Performance* to argue how physicality and tonality of voice is integral to queer, black actors' expression of their racial and sexual identity through the text. I will prove this by first defining what habitual patterns are then clarifying "use" and "misuse" of the body (17). Next, I'll prove the importance of the actor's awareness of their body. If the actor is not aware of their habitual patterns and

“misuse” of their body the actor cannot intend to proficiently “use” their body. I’ll clarify how physicality and vocal tonality inform one another and, discuss “identification.”

Using my construction of Sir Toby for the UofL Fall 2021 production of *Twelfth Night* as a case study, I will share the physical habits that I became aware of and documented in my journal during the rehearsal process, as well as how I inhibited my habits to create new habits that defy colonialist conceptions of masculinity, race, and sexuality by “black queering” colonialist text.

### The *Twelfth Night* Text

What makes Shakespeare plays so brilliant is their ability to direct actors from beyond the grave. This is not to say Shakespeare is supernatural, but that Shakespeare’s texts incorporate direction for the actor that is hidden in the lines. While Elizabethan actors were more aware of this, modern actors can discover this hidden direction as well (Barton 4). Barton’s *Playing Shakespeare* stresses the importance of making Shakespeare’s meaning understandable to the audience: “If we don’t reach our audience, we fail...to make them listen... share and follow the story. It’s too easy for an audience not to listen, particularly with a knotty and difficult text... the actors make them do so” (5). I agree it is the job of the actor to “reach” the audience; but the method an actor takes to “make them listen” differs depending on the audience.

Barton is a white English man that directed for the Royal Shakespeare Company and was even an associate director of the RSC for more than thirty-five years (i). The RSC’s audience is typically lacking in black, queer patrons and is likely familiar with Shakespeare’s “knotty and difficult” texts. To make Shakespeare’s plays more inclusive

and easier to “share and follow the story” to queer, black audiences, queer, black actors should make an effort to appropriate Shakespeare’s plays to “reach” a broader audience. As Barton emphasizes, if the audience cannot understand what the text is saying there is no point in speaking the text.

Queer, black actors should help queer audiences understand the text by incorporating their queer, black identity into their performance. The actor’s performance should aim to not only make the text intelligible to audiences, but also make the text understandable. Intelligibility is not the same as understandability. Barton says it best when he writes, “I know that it’s too easy for me to get the general gist and feeling of a speech, but just because I get the gist I often don’t listen to the lines in detail. Not unless the actor makes me” (5). Audience’s unfamiliar with Shakespeare’s plays, like some queer, black audiences, can understand the “general gist” of a speech, but queer, black audiences deserve to “listen to lines in detail” like audiences who are familiar with Shakespeare. While other theatrical elements come in to play to make Shakespeare’s plays understandable, the actor must also “make” the audience understand. Barton’s comprehension of the “general gist” is the intelligibility of the script, but the listening to the lines in detail is understanding the text.

Shakespeare and his audience likely put more of an emphasis on the words that were being said in their plays than modern audiences who are more attuned to visual forms of entertainment like tv and cinema; therefore, queer, black actors should use the words to express their queer, black identity. One cause of this is the freshness of the English language in the early modern era, meaning words were still being created and implemented (Barton 16). Shakespeare alone is credited with the invention/introduction

of over seventeen hundred words (Shakespeare.org.uk). Barton explains how the English language was early in development, which left room for Shakespeare to experiment with the sound of words and how these words can express character, “The nature of the language tells us about the nature of the character, or maybe we should say the language is the character...character is all-important to an actor, and it is dangerous to split” (71). The interpretation of Shakespeare’s language is a big component of appropriating Shakespeare’s plays because the “nature of the language” informs the audience about “the nature of the character.” In other words, the character is developed through “language.” If Shakespeare’s “language” does not accurately convey a queer, black actor’s interpretation of a “character” the “language” should be modified to do so.

The text creates an intimate relationship between language and character development. Toby’s last name, Belch, which means to emit gas noisily from the stomach through the mouth (Oxford Languages), shows Toby’s boisterous drunkenness. Toby responds to being told he must confine himself with, “Confine? I’ll confine myself no finer than I am. These clothes are good enough to drink in” (1.3.10-11). The line is not the line of a demure person. The use of the assonance in the word “confine,” “myself,” “finer,” and “I” expresses Toby’s grandiose sense of self. Toby’s clothes are “good enough” to “drink “in which shows that Toby does not care about his appearance if he is able to get drunk. Another example of the way language develops Toby’s boisterous character is with Toby’s advice to his friend, Sir Andrew Aguecheek; “Your very walk should be a jig...not so much as make water but in a sink-a-pace. Is it a world to hide virtues in?” (1.3.126-29) Toby’s advice that ordinary tasks such as “walking” and “making water”/peeing should not be done without a “jig” or dance implies that Toby

enjoys life, more specifically the improvisation of life. Toby builds on this improvisation by playing with the rhythm of his speech with the phrase “sink-a-pace” before finally encouraging not to “hide” his gifts, or in other words self-assert himself. Improvisation of life, laughter and song, and self-assertion are a few of the several characteristics of black masculinity (Byrd 5).

There are a couple ways queer, black actors can radically interpret Toby. They could use Toby’s aversion to “confinement” as commentary on the “Patriarchal socialization” that “insists” black boys suppress their emotions out of fear of appearing weak (hooks 87) and use Shakespeare’s language to express these characteristics of black masculinity. These radical interpretations supply a method of resistance to colonialist patriarchy and masculinity through “black queering.” The exclusion of queer, black language in Shakespeare’s plays often lead queer, black actors to adopt a “language” that “splits” “character” from “language” which is “dangerous”. Barton’s warning against separation of character and language should be heeded, more so for queer, black actors manipulating the language to incorporate their queer, black identity into their character.

In addition to the characteristics above, Shakespeare’s language could also resist the dominant patriarchal standard by expressing Toby’s wit. Toby is involved in pranks throughout the play, and the success of the pranks rely on Toby’s slyness and evasion of authority. Toby’s cunning is displayed through his play of words. Toby uses words to confuse his drunk friend, Sir Andrew Aguecheek so Aguecheek will continue to finance their night of drinking. Toby responds to Aguecheek’s complaint of their being out too late with, “To be up after midnight and to go to bed then, is early, so that to go to bed after midnight is to go to bed betimes. Does not our lives consist of the four elements?”

(2.3.6-10). The repetition of the plosive “t” and “b” makes the text hard to follow aurally; not only confusing Aguecheek, who complies with Toby’s assertion, but also the audience, who the actor should always guide in understanding of the text. The word is, as Barton describes it, “doing the work” (59).

Each word an actor speaks should seem spontaneous yet spoken with a purpose. Barton explains how the script “does the work” while coaching actor David Suchet on a chorus speech from *Henry V*, “Find the language at the moment that you speak it. The words must be *found* or *coined* or *fresh minted* at the moment you utter them” (60). Toby struggles to “find the language” as he drunkenly tries to convince his friend to stay up which results in Toby’s repetition of plosives and phrases like “after midnight” and “go to bed”. Toby’s concluding rhetorical question after his rambling swindles Sir Andrew into thinking what Toby said made sense. Like the chorus in *Henry V* Toby uses the words he uses “because he needs them”. These words are not accidents in the sense that they were randomly selected. Each word has a specific purpose and should be used to achieve that purpose. This is not to suggest that an actor should plan their delivery of the words or worse, plan how their partner should react to their words. The intention of the line is better understood if the words do work that yield “spontaneous” results.

Sometimes Shakespeare’s words fail to be understandable to audiences due to time and the evolution of meanings of certain words. The changing of the word “brine” to “tears” (1.2.32) or “Cataian” to “countess” (2.3.76) by dramaturg Dr. Janna Segal for UofL’s production of *Twelfth Night* are good examples of line substitutions for archaic terms. It is the actor’s responsibility, in addition to the other artists involved, to make the text understandable for audiences, but time can make the transition from intelligible to

understandable tricky for actors. The modification of Shakespeare's text to use words more familiar to a contemporary audience makes the script easier for the actor to interpret and makes listening easier for the audience. In another example of line substitution in the interest of better audience understanding Toby aims to provoke Viola/Cesario to fight with Aguecheek with, "Dismount thy tuck, be yare in thy preparation, for thy assailant is quick, skillful, and deadly" (3.4.232-34). Toby means for Viola/Cesario to draw their sword and prepare to fight, but "dismount thy tuck" was substituted with "post up", a term used to take up a position against a defender in basketball. Whether they be basketball fans or not, modern audiences will more than likely understand the meaning of "post up" before "dismount thy tuck".

Line changes do not have to be confined to only being used for clarification of meaning; yet line changes can also be used for clarification of character. Like substitution of outdated terms for more relevant terms to help the audience better understand the plot, the substitution of Shakespeare's text with colloquialisms specific to the actor's racial and sexual culture assists the actor in their interpretation of the script. Substitutions also generate a more inclusive audience by incorporating vernacular from groups typically excluded from colonialist texts. Toby often refers to his friends as "lad," "man," and even "sot," which is old English for "foolish person" (Oxford Languages). I substituted "lad" with "sis" and "chile," "man" with "gurl," and though it could not be said in the show, I would have substituted "sot" for "nigga." The substitution was appropriate because of the incorporation of my racial and sexual identity. "Sis" is a slang term for sister. Often used like a female equivalent to "bro", with close friends rather than relatives and has become popular amongst women and gay men (slang.org). The slang term "chile" or "Whew

chile” is usually said by black people when they have a lot of information or when the information, they have is intense, and “nigga” is used by some black people to show comradery. Toby, being gay and black, is more likely to use these terms to refer to his friends rather than “lad”, “man”, or “sot”. The incorporation of these terms assists with the actor’s portrayal of Toby’s black and queer expression and the audience’s understanding of the actor’s/character’s identity. Incorporating colloquialisms makes white, colonialist texts more inclusive for audience’s that are typically excluded. Line substitution “black queers” Shakespeare’s plays because line substitutions shift the lens from a white, heteronormative, racist lens to a Black, queer one.

Just like scholars of today changed the lens through which Shakespeare’s work is examined, theatre practitioners must also change who Shakespeare’s plays center around. As Mary Louise Pratt’s “Arts of the Contact Zone” in *New Ways of Reading* states, “Ethnographic texts are those in which European metropolitan subjects represent to themselves their others (usually their conquered others), autoethnographic texts are representations that the so-defined others construct in response to or in dialogue with those texts...A text people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made by them” (62). Through the modification of the script, physicality, and vocal tonality, black actors can make Shakespeare’s plays “autoethnographic.” When black actors do so they “construct” “representations” that are in “dialogue with “ethnographic texts.” Black actors should use white, colonialist text to “describe themselves” in a way that “engages with” white, colonialist, “representations” of race. In other words, Pratt urges the “other” to take agency over the narrative that may have been written without them but is not absent of their presence.



## Physicality and Vocal Tonality

The modification of text is not the only way to express queer blackness to resist colonialist white supremacist patriarchy and invite an audience that is typically excluded from white colonialist texts. A queer, black actor's manipulation of their physicality can also assist in the radical act. Habitual patterns as defined in Betsy Polatin's *The Actor's Secret*, are "physical and psychological habits. Habits that interfere with the manifestation of innate raw talent and skill are in the way. Habits of body tension, fear, emotional response, and survival are in the way. These habits, often formed long ago, were appropriate at that moment for your survival" (xiii). Black boys who were taught in guidance with white patriarchal masculinity to suppress their emotions in effort to look strong can develop "Physical and psychological habits" that hinder their "innate raw talent and skill."

Though these habits were "formed long ago" and "appropriate for survival" queer, black actors should learn to first, recognize these habits, then attempt to inhibit these habits. Here's a personal example. I am a shy person and have been since childhood. My shy and demure personality made making friends with the other more rowdy and rough boys my age a struggle. My mother used to have to introduce me other children because I was afraid to speak to them myself. My mindset was shy, so my body defended with tense shoulders that rise to my ears if I get anxious enough. This habit was not formed purposely, but a response to my surroundings. Though adopting my habit of tense shoulders began in childhood I didn't become aware of the habit until I was twenty-three. Until I became aware of my habit, I couldn't hope to change my habit. Polatin asserts, "The first step in your process of discovery of an expanded self is to...learn to recognize,

your own patterns of use and misuse” (17). Queer, black actors must “learn to recognize” how white patriarchal concepts of masculinity have created “patterns of use and misuse” that hinders them from “discovering” their “expanded self.”

The queer, black actors’ awareness of their body is the integral first step in using physicality and vocal tonality to appropriate Shakespeare’s plays for queer, black expression. Doing so defies white supremacy and heteronormativity and invites a more inclusive audience. The talent of the actor lies in their choices. The more queer, black actors discover their “expanded self” through awareness the more choices an actor has. Polatin further explains how crucial the actor’s body is in conveying the story:

“In performance, every word, gesture, and movement of an actor tells a piece of the story to the audience...An actor asks the questions, ‘Do I believe I have full body, mind, and spirit living in the life of this play’... ‘Do my body movements accurately convey the situation’...If the answer to any of these questions is no, something needs attention” (xii).

Queer, black actors need to be aware because “every word, gesture, and movement” that they use tells “a piece of the story to the audience”. If queer, black actors find that white patriarchal concepts of masculinity impede “full body, mind, and spirit” and their “body movements” do not “accurately convey” their queer, black identity then “something needs attention”. Queer, black actors need to have access to every part of themselves to tell a story that defies white supremacy and heteronormativity.

Queer, black actors should work to repair any disconnect, either psychological or physical, that hinders them from being understood by typically excluded audiences. The body parts work in conjunction with one another not independently; when you stand

leaning on one leg, your shoulder drops, you exert more pressure into one heel (17). But, as Polatin explains, there is good use and misuse of the body that the actor must strive to become aware of: “There is a basic distinction between “use” and “misuse”. Good use allows us the use ourselves in empowering ways that open and expand channels of expression, so that each movement and gesture become a conscious manifestation of full spirit, mind, and body (17). In short “good use” is the “conscious manifestation of full spirit, mind, and body”. “Conscious manifestation” implies the actor puts forth purposeful effort in using their whole body to make acting choices that inches the character closer to their objective, but also ensures the audience understands what the character wants and can allow themselves to be impacted by the character. “Misuse”, on the other hand, “blocks, constricts, and confuses expression” (17). “Misuse” is often unconscious like my tense shoulder habit. Tensing my shoulder blocks off my shoulders from the rest of my body lessening my ability to use my whole self; the physicality and tonality of the actor. The Oxford definition of Physicality is, “the awareness of the body or of bodily sensation; a bodily function or experience” (Oxford Languages). Oxford’s definition cites “awareness” as being an integral component of physicality. Without an actor’s awareness of their habitual patterns and the ability to decipher whether these habits serve the actor (“use” or “misuse”), queer, black actors cannot develop physical habits that defy white patriarchal masculinity and invite a more inclusive audience that white colonialist texts like Shakespeare exclude. These physical habits include “bodily functions” like speaking.

Physicality and vocal tonality are integral in a queer, black person’s intersection of their racial and sexual identities to defy white colonialist texts. Just as the intersection

of racial and sexual identity impacts the text, the intersection of these identities impacts the physicality and vocal tonality of the character as well. These identities are tied to what Polatin terms “Identifications”: “any pattern of behavior, personality, or movement that [a person] identifies with” (137). Examples are thinking you’re not good enough or you’re always right. These identifications influence a character’s walk as well as their voice.

I expressed Toby’s identifications with a physicality that contradicted what was typically done, and instead suited my body. Toby’s behavior as expressed through the text suggests that Toby identifies with having few worries. For instance, he says, “What a plague means my niece to take the death of her brother thus? I am sure care’s an enemy to life?” (1.3.1-4). Toby’s niece’s mourning of her brother is a “plague” to Toby which implies Toby chooses to not “care” about life because “care” is an “enemy to life”. Though, Toby’s lack of concern implies Toby’s physicality is slow and lackadaisical, typical of the traditional casting of Sir Toby mentioned in Chapter Three, that “identification” did not match my slender and energetic build, so I appropriated the line to match my “identification” as a slim, energetic, black male. I did so in the construction of Toby’s walk. I wrote in my rehearsal journal “As far as physicality goes, I have found the looseness in my pelvis for Sir Toby. He leads with his pelvis and walks freely almost like he is dancing” (Bogard). My “loose pelvis” and “free walking” created a walk for Toby that always kept him moving. My interpretation of Toby Belch was active which was contrary to a lackadaisical, white, colonialist interpretation of Sir Toby. The loosening of my pelvis is an example of the actor making what Polatin calls a “conscious

manifestation” of the full body. I created a walk that honored my identifications while also “black queering” a white patriarchal concept of masculinity, laziness.

A queer, black actor’s identification can impact their vocal tonality, or the way they use their voice to achieve their objective. Polatin explains the importance of the voice with, “Now we will see that people with different identifications breathe in different patterns...The breath of your character distinguishes and identifies your character. An anxious character will often breathe quicker, shorter breaths, A more relaxed character will have longer, more flowing breaths” (144). As previously stated, actors’ traditional approaches to the role of Sir Toby are “relaxed” and therefore would breathe a “longer, more flowing” breath. But just as Toby’s physicality did not match my slender, athletic build, the traditional identification by actors of Toby did not match my “quicker, shorter” breathing pattern. My interpretation of Toby was built with “sociocultural forces” (Staples, *Black Masculinity* 8) in mind like black men being viewed as weak and on the other hand aggressive. These forces led me to create a more “anxious” Toby due to the intersection between racial and sexual identity.

The text suggests Toby relishes words and does not rush to deliver them. An example of this relish is found in Toby’s play of words. When Maria, Toby’s niece’s chambermaid, tell Toby his niece takes “ill exceptions” to his “ill hours” Toby responds with repetition with, “let her except before excepted” (1.3.5-7). This line not only exemplifies Toby’s wittiness, but his gift for word play which as well supports the effect queer, black actor’s identifications has on their voice. Another example of Toby’s love for words is when Toby defends Sir Andrew Auguecheek’s marital eligibility to Maria with, “He...speaks three of four languages, and hath all the good gifts of nature” (1.3.25-

26). The word “languages” cannot be rushed out of the mouth and instead must be drawn out to be understood. The plosive “g” is not only used in “languages” but in “good gifts” as well. The alliteration of “good gifts” supplies the identification that Toby likes to play with the sound of words.

### Conclusion

When a queer, black actor utilizes their racial and sexual identity to appropriate white colonialist text to express their queer, black identity they must modify the text, and the character’s physicality and tonality to express these identities. Queer, black actors should always strive to be understood by marginalized groups typically excluded from white, colonialist texts when intersecting their racial and sexual identities. If audiences less familiar with classical, white, racist texts do not understand the text a more inclusive audience cannot be created. Subtext was not used by Shakespeare and his contemporaries who valued auditory as opposed to visual storytelling. The Elizabethans’ emphasis on auditory storytelling means queer, black actors should add affectations to the words to make the story more understandable to audiences less familiar with white colonialist text. Line substitutions are encouraged to not only better facilitate script to audience understanding, but to bridge the gap between race and sexual orientation as well.

## CONCLUSION

### SHAKESPEARE'S FUTURE LOOKS BLACK AND GAY AF

“So... What now?”

– Azealia Banks (Rapper)

I began my investigation into the intersection of queer blackness and Shakespeare uncertain if an intersection existed. My experience with Shakespeare led me to believe that the canonized status of Shakespeare's plays makes queer, black expression impossible and portraying Sir Toby Belch, one of Shakespeare's most notable characters, as a flamboyant black queer man wouldn't make sense. Upon conclusion of my investigation, I can say Shakespeare's plays can and should be appropriated by queer black actors for queer black expression to challenge the racial exclusivity Shakespeare's plays represents and challenge imposed colonial standards of sexuality and gender.

Colorblind casting was initially thought to be a culturally progressive method of casting in Shakespeare plays and one that guaranteed to meet any diversity concerns. Colorblind casting asks the actor to set aside their cultural identity and adopt a Eurocentric standard of the character. When black actors are not able to pull from their own cultural experiences the development of the character is hindered because the actor shallows their pool of knowledge/experiences that could be used (Emeka 99). To quote Method acting teacher Sanford Meisner, “To be an interesting actor – hell, to be an interesting human being – you must be authentic and for you to be authentic you must embrace who you really are, warts and all” (31). Black, queer actors' denial of the inclusion of their “authentic” selves leads to uninteresting characters because black actors are not embracing all their identity. It's all about the realness.

The relationship between Shakespeare and race is old, yet new. It is old because race and racemaking has always been a factor in Shakespeare's plays. As discussed in Chapter One, Shakespeare's plays are one of the earliest examples of racecraft (Fields and Fields 18-19). Whether it was through distinctions based on class, religion, skin tone, or country of origin, Shakespeare's plays circulated stereotypes about "races" that taught and united the audience through racialized humor (Akhime 51). As the Trans-Atlantic slave trade began, Shakespeare's plays became a tool to affirm racial pseudoscience that supports the subjugation of darker skinned people (Dadabhoy 30). The relationship is new because just over thirty years ago, it was considered ahistorical to view Shakespeare's theatre through the lens of racism. However, exploring Shakespeare with a recognition of conceptions of race in early modern England and today opens the door to black actors' incorporation of their cultural identity into Shakespeare's text.

As stated in Chapter Two, Shakespeare's relationship with queer theory isn't as contested. Shakespeare's use of cross-dressed characters and boy actors playing female roles is generally used as evidence of Shakespeare's play's queerness; but Shakespeare's cross-dressed characters differ from modern drag because it was then an established convention for young boys to play female characters. Moreover, this was done, not in opposition to gender norms, but to verify them (Aughterson and Ferguson 98). Women were not able to perform in the context Shakespeare was writing because it was feared that the female body on stage would be too tempting for male audience members (Aughterson and Ferguson 98). The Elizabethans feared and wanted to avoid sexuality, so female impersonation was not revolutionary but necessary (Aughterson and Ferguson 101).



Queer actors should queer classical texts through a strong queer theoretical lens as opposed to a weak queer theoretical lens because strong queer theory expands what it means to be queer. This expansion gives agency to queerness because it includes not just homosexuals, but any person who resists dominant heteronormative norms. On the other hand, queering classical texts through a weak queer theoretical lens equates queerness to homosexuality. This only allows queer actors to queer classical texts through homosexual behavior which subtracts from the democratizing power of queerness.

As argued in Chapter Three, the appropriation of Sir Toby created an intersection between Shakespeare, race, and sexuality that is the real revolutionary act. Colonial ideas of masculinity skew black men's view of themselves by introducing and imposing domination methods as a means of masculine expression (hooks 7). Adopting dominating masculinity dehumanizes black men by reaffirming harmful stereotypes of black men as aggressive, callous, or dangerous (hooks 9). Forms of black masculinity that don't rely on the domination of others reject colonialist masculinity. The appropriation of Shakespeare's plays, which have been used as a colonialist tool, to supply examples of alternative forms of black masculinity undermines racist and heteronormative uses of those texts.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, my queer, black interpretation of Sir Toby Belch, which was activated through script changes, vocal work, and physicality exemplifies an appropriation of Shakespeare's plays for queer, black expression to resist white colonialist concepts of masculinity and heteronormativity. Queer, black actors should strive to make the text understandable, not just intelligible to audiences unfamiliar with white, colonialist text. Queer, black actors can gain and express this understandability by

manipulating the character clues given in the text to reflect their racial and sexual identity. But first, queer, black cis male actors must become aware of their habitual patterns created by the misapplication of white colonialist concepts of masculinity to black men if they want to use their whole body efficiently. Once awareness of these habitual patterns is recognized, the queer, black actor can begin to select which pattern best represents their queer, black identities within the character.

My methods can be applied to other Shakespearean characters to yield similarly subversive results. A black, queer Prince Don John from *Much Ado About Nothing* would detail a character motivation that goes beyond just being a bastard that no one likes. Don John, a bastard who lost a battle against his half-brother Don Pedro before the play's action, is the antagonist. Shakespeare's lack of detail for Don John's motivations supplies space for queer, black actors to incorporate their identities, both queer and black, as motivation for Don John's revenge. Don John is revamped from a generally "disagreeable and iniquitous" (Richter 1) bastard brother to a queer black bastard brother who is ignored/shunned because of his blackness/queerness. It could be argued that making the villain of the show queer and black is problematic. I agree, if the villain is the only black body onstage. If the cast is black, then multiple forms of blackness are being showed thus debunking myths that typically are imposed upon marginalized identities. Shakespeare's characters do not have to be virtuous to incorporate black queerness because not all black queers are virtuous. It is problematic to assume black, queer characters should have favorable qualities to make the audience more sympathetic to the character. Don Pedro's lament about his brother, "That young start-up hath all the glory of my overthrow. If I can cross him anyway, I bless myself every way" (1.3.64-65), is

suddenly full of subtext that not only serves the queer black actor in their character development but tells a story of familial neglect that attempts to justify the actions of Don John who after scheming and almost destroying a marriage is still perceived as an outsider unworthy of attention. Benedick dismisses Don Jon with this concluding line, “Think not on him till tomorrow...—Strike up, pipers” (5.4.131-33). Don John isn’t even worthy of punishment. This could be because of Don Pedro’s queer, black identity which could lead the audience to grapple with the negative consequences of marginalizing black, queer people.

This should go without saying, but nowadays I choose not to assume so I will say, my method of offering a black, queer interpretation of a Shakespeare character is for queer black actors not straight white actors. This method was developed out of the necessity to incorporate identities that are typically unrecognized or unwelcomed in the realm of Shakespeare. Shakespearean productions have traditionally catered to white actors and audiences and denial to include other cultural identities in Shakespeare’s plays will render the playwright’s work obsolete. Miles Grier addresses the question, “Are Shakespeare’s Plays Racially Progressive?”. Grier states, “Shakespeare scholars of color do not typically call for [Shakespeare’s] plays to be hidden...We do call for [the plays] to be approached differently: with less reverence and more attention to [the plays’] encoding and spreading of White supremacist and patriarchal relationships” (249). My queer, black interpretation of Toby Belch gave “less reverence” to the Bard’s plays and “more attention” to his “encoding” by “black queering” one of Shakespeare’s white, colonialist, heterosexual characters.

Shakespeare shouldn't be "hidden" and a different approach to Shakespeare's plays will ensure Shakespeare's longevity. Shakespeare's plays are used from grade school to college and are one of the most produced in the world. The plays are useful for script analysis, character dissection, and history analysis, and a future with a cancelled Shakespeare is not a bright future at all. Shakespeare's texts are not inherently inclusive due to its encoding of "white supremacist and patriarchal" relationships, but manipulation of the text can create inclusion where exclusion has thrived.

Ira Aldridge's, the first black Shakespearean actor to reach international renown in the 1800's, most notable innovations "derived from his drive to expand the range of Shakespearean roles he could perform" (Newstock 181). Queer black actors should continue to make innovations to Shakespeare's scripts that utilize their queer, black identity. Grier concludes, "There is no smooth story of 'progress', in which racist attitudes slowly and mysteriously... yield to enlightenment and egalitarianism... The challenge before us has to do with *decisions* we make together about how we determine... who is believed and who is discredited, whose reputation we protect and whose we disregard..." (250). The expression of queer blackness through Shakespeare will not be "smooth" and will more than likely encounter flaws through further development. Offering a black, queer performance of Shakespearean characters is without a doubt a positive step toward determining whose "reputation" "we" as a society "protect" and whose "we disregard."

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