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*Mastering Masques of Blackness: Jonson's Masque of
Blackness, The Windsor text of The Gypsies
Metamorphosed, and Brome's The English Moor*

Black all over my body, Max Factor 2880, then a lighter brown, then Negro No. 2, a stronger brown. Brown on black to give a rich mahogany. Then the great trick: that glorious half-yard of chiffon with which I polished myself all over until I shone . . . The lips blueberry, the tight curled wig, the white of the eyes, whiter than ever, and the black, black sheen that covered my flesh and bones, glistening in the dressing-room lights.

I am . . . I am I . . . I am Othello . . . but Olivier is in charge.¹

—Laurence Olivier, *On Acting* (1986)

Ben Jonson's "Masque of Blackness" was composed, as the author himself declares, at the express commandment of the Queen (Anne of Denmark), who had a desire to appear along with the fairest ladies of her court, as a negress. I doubt whether the most enthusiastic *amies des noirs* among our modern beauties, would willingly undergo such a transformation. What would the *Age* say, if our gracious Queen should play such a frolic? . . . It must not be supposed that these high-born masquers sooted their delicate complexions like the Wowskies of our barefaced stages. The masque of black velvet was as common as the black patches in the time of the *Spectator*.²

—Hartley Coleridge, *The Dramatic Works of
Massinger and Ford* (1859)

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1. Laurence Olivier, *On Acting* (New York, 1986), p. 158. Earlier in the discussion of Othello he writes "Black . . . I had to *be* black. I had to feel black down to my soul" (p. 153; original emphasis).

2. I found Hartley Coleridge's unexpected discussion of Ben Jonson in the introduction to his edited collection of the plays of Massinger and Ford. He comments at length on the masque

Only twice in his career does Ben Jonson use race-altering paint as a stage device, both times in masques for James's court. In *The Masque of Blackness* (1605), Queen Anne and eleven of her ladies are made up to resemble African nymphs from the "blackest nation of the world" (l. 16).³ Frequently pointing to Sir Dudley Carleton's dismissal of the spectacle as "loathsome," critics have labeled *Blackness* an apprentice piece showing Jonson not yet able to reconcile poetic form with masque spectacle—and reluctantly at the mercy of Anne's wish to be a "blackamore" (l. 18).⁴ Over fifteen years passed before Jonson attempted anything similar for the court or for the public stage. In *The Gypsies Metamorphosed* (1621), the Duke of Buckingham and friends appear as "tawny" gypsies of Egyptian origin. If *Blackness* did fail to please, *Gypsies* surely succeeded.⁵ Staged three times, this masque reportedly earned Jonson a pay raise and the promise of future honors.⁶

What distinguishes *The Masque of Blackness* is not the novelty of its representation of Moors, but its material methods: the masque simulates blackness with paint rather than with the masks, gloves, and leggings typically worn by performers in previous court masques of Moors; admittedly not known for his expertise in theater history, Hartley Coleridge in the passage cited above expresses shock at the mere possibility. *Gypsies* in turn provides one of the earliest (if not the earliest) records of a racial metamorphosis to take place during the

in a footnote, justifying the "length and apparent irrelevance" of his remarks by pointing out that the masque was presented in the household of Massinger's patron Philip Herbert, p. xv. See *The Dramatic Works of Massinger and Ford* (1859).

3. All citations to Jonson's masques refer to *The Complete Masques*, ed. Stephen Orgel (New Haven, 1969) with the exception (noted in the essay) of *Gypsies*, where I sometimes quote from W. W. Greg's side-by-side reproduction of all three texts of *Gypsies*: see Jonson's *Masque of Gypsies in the Burley, Belvoir, and Windsor Versions* (London, 1952).

4. See Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque* (Cambridge, Eng., 1967), p. 128. For Dudley Carleton's description, see his letter to John Chamberlain dated London, January 7, 1604/1605 in *Dudley Carleton to John Chamberlain, 1603–1624 Jacobean Letters*, ed. Maurice Lee (New Brunswick, 1972), p. 66. Other contemporary descriptions of the masque are more generous. Ottaviano Lott, secretary to the Florentine ambassador, mentions the masque's "sumptuousness"; the French ambassador called the masque "a superbe ballet." See Leeds Barroll, *Anna of Denmark, Queen of England: A Cultural Biography* (Philadelphia, 2001), p. 103.

5. See Orgel's article "Marginal Jonson" for a more nuanced discussion of *Blackness's* reported failure to please. In *The Politics of The Stuart Court Masque* (Cambridge, Eng., 1998), pp. 144–75.

6. Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque*, p. 70.

course of an English performance—in any venue.⁷ Whereas the daughters of Niger remain black at the masque's conclusion, Jonson's gypsies reappear triumphantly washed white. The two masques therefore represent important moments in the history of English blackface performance, and I begin this essay by addressing the material dimension of these masques' representation of blackness onstage: in both cases it is the cosmetic, as much as the poetic, dimension of the masques that shapes the impersonations. Put another way, the choice of make-up over masks allows Jonson to invoke a rich range of contexts, including female cosmetics and their significations within early modern culture.⁸

Although *Gypsies* has not received substantial critical discussion, a number of critics have discussed at length the way the 1605 masque figures blackness in relation to James's reign and an emerging British nationalism, most compellingly Mary Floyd-Wilson and Kim Hall.⁹ In this essay I consider instead the relationship of stage technology to racial representation, also discussing how the pressure of working with

7. I can find no record (extant) of a racial metamorphosis using paint to take place onstage before 1621 (at court or on the public stage)—that is, a play that features a racial quick change involving the donning, or doffing, of paint. The next earliest possibility is Massinger's play *The Parliament of Love* (1624). I address this explicitly in "'Assisted by a Barber:' The Court Apothecary, Special Effects, and *The Gypsies Metamorphosed*," *Theatre Notebook* 61 (2007) 2–11. This essay continues and extends that discussion.

8. Female cosmetics—their composition, their use on the stage, their association with actors, their signification within antitheatrical discourse and cosmetic tracts—provide an important context for my discussion. Frances Dolan and Annette Drew-Bear address, respectively, female self-fashioning through cosmetics and the moral significance of face-painting scenes in drama. "Taking the Pencil Out of God's Hand: Art, Nature, and the Face-Painting Debate in Early Modern England," *PMLA* 108:2 (March 1993), 224–39, and *Painted Faces on the Renaissance Stage: The Moral Significance of Face-Painting Conventions* (Lewisburg, 1994). In her wonderful *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (Edinburgh, 2006), Farah Karim-Cooper defines an early modern "culture of cosmetics" and traces its shaping influence on drama; Karim-Cooper's impressive primary research is also a valuable repository of information about cosmetic recipes and manuscripts. Similarly, Tanya Pollard discusses cosmetics in her *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2005), offering in one chapter an illuminating discussion of the "invasive" properties of cosmetics and throughout her book clearly establishing multiple connections among drugs, poisons, and paints. In Pollard's view various discourses position "cosmetics" and "theatricality" as equally invasive phenomena.

9. See Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge, Eng., 2003). See also also her article in this journal, "Temperature, Temperance, and Racial Difference in Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Blackness*," *English Literary Renaissance* 28.2 (Spring 1998), 183–209. See also Kim Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, 1995). For a more general discussion of blackness in English drama see Anthony Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* (Baton Rouge, 1987).

this sometimes unruly material affects questions of dramatic authority.¹⁰ Jonson's innovative deployment of paint furthers but also compromises his agenda. In 1605 it seems that his medium's composition prevented the masque's promise of racial conversion to be shown onstage. By 1621, Jonson evidently had a more supple paint at his disposal, a fact of staging that the poet himself acknowledges within the text of *Gypsies*. Commissioned by the Duke of Buckingham, *The Gypsies Metamorphosed* enacts the racial metamorphosis that *Blackness* promises but defers. The 1621 masque's theatrical conditions permit Jonson publicly to validate the controversial King's favorite before his critics: the masque's transformation implies that the stain of "gypsy" was only temporary, that Buckingham is always essentially a "gentleman."

Remarkably, *Blackness* and *Gypsies* rarely have been considered together, despite their similar central conceit and the fact that, in the final version of *Gypsies*, Jonson deliberately summons the memory of his lady "Ethiops" (l. 1386). When Jonson revises *Gypsies* from its two initial performances at private homes for a performance at Windsor court, he adds an epilogue that explicitly positions the masque as a more technologically successful revision of *Blackness*, taking pains to explain the flexible properties of the paint that sustains the gypsy disguise: "it was fetched off with water and a ball, / And to our transformation this is all" (ll. 1391–92). Jonson's desire to explain the mechanical apparatus of the masque is striking, especially given his reputation as the "textual poet" with the antitheatrical prejudice; it seems the memory of his earlier failure to wash the women white "haunts," in Marvin Carlson's terms, the Windsor revisions.¹¹

The 1605 masque also haunts future plays about racial change. Although for the public stage Jonson never again used this trope of racial transformation, over the next fifteen years several plays feature Europeans in blackface disguise. All of these plays refer either obliquely or explicitly back to Jonson, indicating that the medium accrues

10. I am indebted to Virginia Vaughan's discussion of similar issues in *Performing Blackness* (Cambridge, Eng., 2005). As shall be evident below, my thinking about the medium departs from hers in crucial ways, as do my readings of individual texts. For a stimulating discussion of theatrical materials see also Dymphna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women* (New York, 1999). My thinking about props in general is influenced by Andrew Sofer's *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor, 2003).

11. Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor, 2001).

a specific intertextual (or indeed “intermaterial”) resonance. Most notably, Jonson’s former servant Richard Brome takes up the motif in *The English Moor* (1637) and pushes the convention in novel directions. In this comedy about a miscarried masque of blackness, Brome parodies Jonson’s experience with the medium, depicting the failure to manage racial transformations within a performance as a failure of theatrical and patriarchal authority.

II

Jonson’s annotations to the text of *Blackness* indicate Anne herself requested a masque of Moors: “hence, because it was her majesty’s will to have them blackamores at first, the invention was derived by me” (ll. 18–19). Costumed in diaphanous, free-flowing materials that were partly transparent, Anne and eleven of her ladies were painted black and fitted in wigs made to look like tightly curled black hair.¹² Earlier court “masques of moors” employed masks and fabric to simulate blackness. Court records from 1510 and 1547, for example, specify the use of “fine pleasaunce blacke” to cover “faces, neckes, armes, handes” and payments for “black velvet for gloves above the bow for mores” and “nether stockes of lether black for mores.”¹³ The use of blackface paint—or improvisatory face-blackening materials like soot and ash—was, however, common to English festive disguise practices like mumming, in which revelers blackened their faces to disguise their identities.¹⁴ Nothing in Jonson’s notes indicates who decreed that paint

12. For a reading of the masque’s costumes, see Lesley Mickel, “Glorious Spangs and Rich Embroidery: Costume in *The Masque of Blackness* and *Hymenai*,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 36.2 (Fall 2003), 41–59.

13. *Documents Relating to the Office of the Revels in the Time of King Edward VI and Queen Mary*, ed. Albert Feuillerat (Louvain, 1914).

14. The court specifically commissioned *Blackness* to commemorate Twelfth Night festivities; by 1605, face-blackening had long been a part of English festal disguising. Mummers, e.g., used cheap materials like burnt cork, ash, and soot to blacken their faces, as did stock characters like fools in the Morris dance. Such blackface disguise was sometimes linked to criminal activity, and civic proclamations banning “disgingynges with eny feynyd berdies, peyntid visers, diffourmyd or colourid visages” recur from the fourteenth century on. See E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage* (Oxford, Eng., 1903), 1.393–94: “Orders of the city of London in 1334, 1393, and 1405 forbid a practice of going about the streets at Christmas *ove visere ne faux visage*, and entering the houses of citizens to play at dice therein.” On the connection between blackface and criminality see Clare Sponsler, “Outlaw Masculinities: Drag, Blackface, and Late Medieval Laboring-Class Festivities,” in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages* ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and

rather than fabric be used, an omission many readers of the masque disregard in their desire to emphasize Anne's contribution. Thus Hardin Aasand cites her "deliberate request that her own 'carcase' become blackened"; Andrew Gurr credits Anne with having "paint supersede masks in the seventeenth century"; and Virginia Mason Vaughan declares that "what is radical in Anne's request is *her* desire to use black pigment."¹⁵ The decision is a crucial one—we might say the most crucial decision shaping the spectacle—and yet we cannot say for certain who made it. Opposing a willful monarch with "subversive intentions" to a playwright charged with a difficult conceit (an "insuperable task," in Anne Cline Kelly's terms), these approaches mislead as to the question of authorship and also distract attention from how the use of black paint informs the resulting impersonation.¹⁶

Blackness opens with a song emphasizing the precedence of form over surface color:

Sound, sound aloud
The welcome of the orient flood
Into the west;
Fair Niger, son to great Oceanus,
Now honored thus,
With all his beauteous race,
Who, though but black in face,

Bonnie Wheeler (New York, 1997), pp. 321–47. Sponsler suggests that blackface was one of a range of performative acts that "made and unmade criminal identity." Surviving guild accounts, moreover, list payments for black paint used in mystery plays, indicating that face-blackening agents number among the first known uses of theatrical paint altogether. Drapers' accounts from Coventry record payments for blacking the faces of devils and damned souls: "item payde for blackyng of the Sowles facys"; "Itm pd for Collering ye blacke Solls faces"; "payd for penttyng of the blake soles faces" (REED Coventry; entries for 1560s). Recognizing that blackface was used to create outlaws, fools, devils, or damned souls perhaps helps illuminate Carleton's objection to a blackface performance by courtly women.

15. Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge, Eng., 1992), p. 199. Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Performing Blackness*, p. 65. Hardin Aasand, "'To blanch an Ethiop, and revive a corse': Queen Anne and *The Masque of Blackness*," *Studies in English Literature* 32 (1992), 274. Floyd-Wilson acknowledges the "purposeful" use of paint but reads that purpose very differently, reading it in connection to Jonson's project, as she sees it, to address the question of Scottish assimilation. See her brilliant reading of the masque in *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama*.

16. Anne Cline Kelly, "The Challenge of the Impossible: Ben Jonson's *Masque of Blackness*," *College Language Association Journal* 20.3 (March 1977), 341–55. See especially Aasand on the question of Anne's deliberately subversive intentions.

Yet are they bright,
 And full of life and light,
 To prove that beauty best
 Which not the color but the feature
 Assures unto the creature. (l. 76–87)

Echoing the Song of Song's praise of the "black but comely" bride, this opening salvo reinforces the audience's awareness of stage materials by drawing attention to the (potentially jarring) combination of the women's white European features and black overlay.¹⁷ Dissatisfied with their blackness after learning foreign poets have slandered their beauty, the daughters of Niger travel north-west to "steep their bodies" in Britannia's whitewashing waters (l. 313). The masque, however, defers the desired metamorphosis for one full year: "So that, this night, the year gone round, / You do again salute this ground, / And in the beams of yond' bright sun / Your faces dry, and all is done" (ll. 325). Unlike an easily removable mask, the material of the presentation—blackface paint—prevented Jonson from fulfilling Anne's request to have them "blackamores" only "*at first*," thereby limiting the scope of the masque's metamorphosis.

Granting we must read such pictorial representations with caution, both the Inigo Jones drawing of the nymphs and the Peacham sketch of Aaron the Moor suggest that around the time of this performance a very dark pigment was used for blackface (see figure). Scottish court revels accounts perhaps provide a clue toward this paint's composition. Sarah Carpenter and Meg Twycross report that in 1554 a painter is compensated for "paynting of the hendsenye and the playaris facis' with no implication that either techniques or materials might differ between the two."¹⁸ The lack of distinction between scenery paint and face paint might account for the absence of any stage action corresponding to the masque's promise to wash the women white. In contrast, by 1621 Jonson had at his disposal a more flexible kind of paint. *Gypsies* jokily discloses the recipe used to stain the masquers dark, declaring a dye made from "walnuts and hog's grease" produces

17. On the early modern context of the Song of Songs with respect to racial representation, see Hall, *Things of Darkness*, (Ithaca, 1995).

18. *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 317. I'm indebted to Twycross and Carpenter's research into masking conditions and discussion of the different signifying valences of masks and facepaints. See in particular their "Ideas and Theories of Masking."



Fig I. Reproduced by permission of the Marquess of Bath, Longleat House, Warminster, Wiltshire, Great Britain.

the requisite color change and that “water and a ball” is enough to fetch the makeup off, a claim borne out by the men’s sudden, stage-worthy change from “gypsy to gentleman” (ll. 1122; 1391).¹⁹ Prior to 1621 I can find no evidence for the use of blackface paint as a disguise device—that is, for the use of blackface paint in the context of a racial transformation that occurs within the life of the play as part of the represented stage action.

19. Analyzing the changing convention of racial representation on the public stage, Virginia Mason Vaughan writes, “In the late 1580s when black Moors began to have speaking roles that a vizard would have impeded, actors probably concocted their own make-up materials. A black pigment could be made from a tallow base” (p. 10). Jonson’s 1605 masque raises some problems for Vaughan’s theory: for one, the lack of any corresponding stage action in *Blackness* indicates there was not at this time an easy way to wash the paint off during the production, although perhaps different conventions were observed at court and in the public theater in terms of theatrical paints. What is more, on the public stage we do not see the quick race-changes in the early part of the seventeenth century that we do in the mid-to-late seventeenth century, suggesting that the technology itself becomes more supple. See my article “Assisted by a Barber” for a more thorough discussion. More research needs to be done to determine what techniques were used in court productions and on the public stage, and whether indeed the self-same techniques were used in both arenas.

In *Gypsies* and in *Blackness* the resulting impersonations therefore depend upon whether the blackening agent is a dense paint or a cosmetic supple enough to be removed during the course of a performance.²⁰ A flexible paint greatly expands the stage's ability to make whiteness normative: only a readily removable black pigment can represent blackness as a disguise or a temporary deviation from an original whiteness (the latter a possibility Jonson exploits particularly well in *Gypsies*). But as I shall argue below, theatrical paint focuses attention on the performer's body—in particular, the skin—in ways that do not obtain when the method of costume is clothing or masks. Given early modern theories of embodiment that conceptualize the skin as a vulnerable, permeable place of passage (or in Claudia Benthien's terms a "milieu" traversable in multiple directions), the act of blacking up inevitably raises concerns about the potentially disruptive effects of cosmetic disguising. Most critical appraisals of English blackface performance have insufficiently considered this possibility, despite the general critical acceptance of what Gail Kern Paster identifies as the early modern conception of the body as "porous and volatile . . . with its faulty borders and penetrable stuff."²¹

Although paint is often numbered among the other theatrical "prosthetics" that indicate gender and ethnic difference on stage, paint is manifestly not a prosthetic in the way of other forms of costume and disguise. Wigs and clothing—Philip Henslowe mentions "the Moor's lymes" in a 1598 list of stage properties—are easily removable, readily exchanged from person to person, able to be catalogued and stored from performance to performance.²² These artificial additions have a life independent of the performer and a life independent of the performance. Not so paint: because it coats the performer's face and body, paint is an intimate and idiosyncratic medium that generates an effect specific to the performer himself. Two performers can each wear the same mask; two painted faces, while resembling each other if

20. See also Vaughan, p. 9.

21. See Paster, *Humoring the Body* (Chicago, 2004). See also Claudia Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border Between Self and the World* (New York, 2002). Thus far critics working on questions of early modern embodiment and early modern "psychological materialism" have largely ignored the painted body as a possible category of exploration, in particular the humoral implications of painting practices and large-scale cosmetic disguise. See, however, more general discussions of cosmetics, including Pollard's chapter "Cosmetic Theater" in her *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England*.

22. *Henslowe's Diary, Second Edition*, ed. R. A. Foakes (Cambridge, Eng., 2002), p. 318.

similarly made up, will nonetheless be unique. That is not to say that blackface paint cannot disguise or distort identities or indeed make two bodies resemble one another, a possibility acknowledged in each of the performances discussed below. While sometimes serving the same dramatic functions as masks, blackface reduces that distance by showcasing the features of the face while also requiring more labor than masks or fabric to remove, a potential challenge for which all blackface performances must account. This last point is critical: performances must be timed to accommodate the removal of paint. As a disguise device, blackface paint therefore carries with it the possibility for theatrical failure, as we shall see in both *Blackness* and *The English Moor*.

That black paint allows facial features to be seen does not imply that the resulting effect is “realistic” or “naturalistic,” contrary to Eldred Jones’s suggestion that in *Blackness* Jonson attempts to set “new standards of realism for the masque.”²³ While Anne’s and her ladies’ faces and bodies were visible—indeed, erotically charged given their sheer apparel and painted chests and limbs—the dense black paint evidently also disguised the women’s identities, combining the personal and the anonymous in a way that at least Dudley Carleton found problematic. In two different letters describing the masque Carleton calls the sight of the blackened women “strange” and “loathsome.” He further complains that the royal masquers were “hard to be known,” a serious criticism given the genre’s dependence on a fit between aristocratic performer and symbolic role.²⁴ Virginia Vaughan speculates that Anne “may have used black makeup to experience her own ‘to-be-looked-at-ness.’”²⁵ Although it is impossible to reconstruct Anne’s motivation for wanting to appear “a blackamore at first,” given the disguising element of blackface Anne might equally have been attracted to the prospect of being misrecognized, of temporarily negating her identity as much as “asserting” it.

Blackface paint, moreover, inspires particularly vivid fantasies about its effect on, and between, persons. When Anne dances with the Spanish ambassador as part of the masque, Carleton worries about the integrity of the disguise: “[The Spanish ambassador] took out the

23. Eldred Jones, *Othello’s Countrymen*. (London, 1965) p. 121.

24. For an insightful discussion of the relationship between female masquer and role, see Suzanne Gossett, “‘Man-Maid begone!’: Women in Masques,” *English Literary Renaissance* 18 (1988), 96–113.

25. Vaughan, p. 66.

Queen and forgot not to kiss her hand though there was danger it would have left a mark on his lips.” The song that follows this dance urges the masquers to “come away, come away” and immerse themselves in water, an injunction that seemingly limits prolonged contact between masquer and spectator. Similarly, in *Gypsies* the Patrico informs some female rustics (again, prospective dance partners) that the male gypsies will give them “no jaundice,” the reassurance nonetheless raising the possibility of contamination through touch (a possibility captured in the word “tincture,” meaning dye or cosmetic color but with the root “touch” or “trace”). Because of its transferability, paint in performance tells a specific story about the body: that the skin is porous and permeable; that selves are not discretely separate vessels.

Unlike masks or fabric, black paint is therefore an artificial addition with potentially troublesome effects on “essential” properties. Nowhere is this concern more evident than in theories of skin color difference attributing blackness to artificial painting practices. In *Anthropometamorphosis* (1653), John Bulwer credits the capacity of paint permanently to alter the person it adorns. Developing upon theories also propounded by Thomas Browne, Bulwer proposes that the Moors’ ancestors had an “affectation of painting” that led to the race becoming permanently black by a process of “artificial denigration.” When a person is subject to the force of the imagination (the “affectation”) and to habitual use, paint permanently alters the self, indeed the collective “selves” of an entire race. As a material manifestation of a theatrical impulse, the cosmetic theory of blackness endows paint with the ability to work permanent changes.²⁶ Fears of this sort recur throughout anticosmetic tracts attacking face paints in general for their corrosive effects on bodies and minds.²⁷ To cite two brief but representative examples, Thomas Tuke calls paint “very offensive to mans flesh” and Philip Stubbes accuses painted women of “turning trueth into falshoode, with painting and sibbersawces.”²⁸ We should consider this vast body of anticosmetic discourse—in particular its conflation of paint and poison and its specific fear of painting women—as an additional context for evaluating any controversy inherent in a spec-

26. John Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis, Man Transform'd: or, The Artificiall Changeling* (1653) pp. 468–69.

27. See also Pollard, Dolan, Karim-Cooper.

28. Thomas Tuke, *A Treatise Against Painting and Tincturing of Men and Women* (1616); Phillip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583).

tacle of black-painted lady masquers. Whether it was Anne or Jonson who specifically opted for paint rather than masks, we might consider whether the choice pushed the masque's representation beyond simple impersonation to something in which the masquers' bodies potentially risked a permanent "taint." These very contexts also make this medium particularly generative for theatrical explorations of masquerade and transformation, for focusing questions about the relationship between the depths and the surfaces of persons.²⁹

Such sentiments about the "deep making" capabilities of paint survive into the modern recreation of early modern performance.³⁰ As the first epigraph to this essay indicates, Laurence Olivier praised paint for its ability to help him inhabit, rather than merely indicate, the role of Othello in the celebrated 1964 National Theatre production. Leaving aside questions surrounding the ethical implications, in 1964, of such a costuming choice, Olivier's comments are noteworthy for their glorification of paint's material, even sensual properties, his praise of blackness' reflective brightness reminiscent of *Blackness*' opening song about black beauty's luster. Olivier emphasizes blackface paint's hue, texture, and most important its ability to cast into relief "whiteness," "the white of [his] eyes whiter than ever." His anxious assertion "but Olivier is in charge" points to the destabilizing consequences of his immersion in "Max Factor 2880," raising rather than settling questions as to the shifting relationships of "skin" and "within" in blackface performance.

III

In the text of *Blackness*, Jonson exploits the valences of black paint to refashion native English whiteness. Jonson addresses the masque's language specifically to the material facts of the spectacle—he writes a masque of black paint, not one of masks or fabric. The paint, however, both helps and hinders his goals. By articulating increasingly contra-

29. A question worth asking: why does paint become the primary method for signifying racial alterity onstage in the late sixteenth- and early-seventeenth centuries, given its drawbacks in terms of ease within performance? The most obvious answer, that paint allows speech where masks hinder speech, is only partially satisfactory. I suggest that the painted body puts into motion a particularly generative set of meanings for the theater in a way that the costumed body cannot.

30. For this phrase, see Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones's *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge, Eng., 2000) p. 5.

dictory definitions of blackness through the figure of Niger, Jonson attaches negative meaning to the black skin he then proposes to wash away, leaving in its wake a refined English beauty “scorched no more” (l. 233). Exploiting the connection between paint and theatricality helps him discredit the more positive significations of black skin and confirm whiteness as a temperate norm; at the same time, the limitation in 1605 of the paint itself (too dense to be removed for the performance) ultimately compromises the masque’s success.

The Masque of Blackness presents African women who “are” black but who long for a racial transformation. Thus blackness from the outset of the masque is identified as both fixed and capable of reversal, the body’s surface denoting essential truths and also belying them, as the opening song’s distinction between form and color suggests. The figure of Niger (father of the nymphs and the masque’s central voice) most forcefully articulates this multivalence. Defining blackness as both a superficial and an essential property and imbuing blackness with shifting moral and physiological significance, Niger comes to raise irresolvable questions about the relationship between the body’s external surfaces and its internal depths. The painted black-and-white female body becomes a focal point around which general cultural anxieties about female agency, duplicity, and theatricality coalesce—anxieties that washing the women white, it is hoped, will dispel.

Played by a professional actor whose skin was also painted black, Niger defends his daughters’ skin color on two distinct grounds: that blackness is a mark of the sun’s favor and that black coloration, unlike white coloration, is permanent. Suggesting that the sun is “the best judge and most formal cause / of all dames’ beauties,” Niger invokes the climatological explanation for blackness which relates skin color to exposure to the sun (ll. 116–17). The women are black because the sun loves them; to be sure, they are the “first-formed dames of the earth,” a claim Jonson attributes to Diodorus Siculus (l. 113). The masque then reverses the typical relationship between sun and complexion: basking in this English Sun-King’s “light sciential” will “blanch an Ethiop, and revive a corse” (ll. 225–26).

Incorporating classical and medieval sources, early modern climate theory links blackness to geography and environment rather than defining it as an unalterable property of the individual body. This notion of the body’s relationship to the world testifies to the transformative powers of environments, as for example in the frequently

repeated account of the New World Indians who, after spending time in England, “could not be discerned from Englishmen,” or the cases of Englishmen going native in the Americas.³¹ While climate theory permits ethnological distinctions between peoples to be drawn—for example, for Southerners to be considered subtle but physically weak and Northerners dull but hardy—these distinctions need not be regarded as essential and unchanging:³² “Invite them boldly to the shore; / Their beauties shall be scorched no more” (ll. 232–33). In other words, early modern climate theory defines blackness (and “race” more generally) as potentially fungible.

Niger, however, also praises black skin for its indelibility, a trope which recurs throughout such diverse discourses as anticosmetic writing and lyric poetry.³³ Early modern lyrics making use of this trope celebrate the superiority of black complexions over white complexions in that black coloration cannot be falsified by artificial embellishments. This trope reproduces some of the valuations of anticosmetic discourse: moralists who attack face painting similarly praise black skin as something that cannot be adulterated, black in anticosmetic terms therefore meaning “incapable of falsification” and implying an essential

31. See, for example, Linda Boose, “‘The Getting of a Lawful Race’: Racial Discourse in Early modern England and the Unrepresentable Black Woman,” in *Women, Race, and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, eds. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker, (New York, 2000), p. 35–54. See also Lionel Wafer’s first-person account in *A New Voyage and Description of the Isthmus of America* (London, 1699). Wafer discusses at length his time spent among the Panamanian Indians: “For at this time I went naked as the Salvages, and was painted by their Women; but I would not suffer them to prick my Skin, to rub the Paint in, as they use to do, but only to lay it on in little Specks” (p. 35). Later his shipmates mistake his identity: “The four Englishmen with me were presently known and caress’d by the Ships crew; but I sat a while cringing upon my Hams among the Indians, after their Fashion, painted as they were, and all naked but only about the Waist, and with my Nose-piece (of which more hereafter) banging over my Mouth. I was willing to try if they would know me in this Disguise, and ’twas the better part of an Hour before one of the crew, looking more marrowly upon me, cry’d out Here’s our Doctor . . . I did what I could presently to wash off my paint, but ’twas near a Month before I could get tolerably rid of it” (p. 41–42).

32. As Floyd-Wilson first makes clear in her essay “Temperature,” at the time of the masque’s production humoral and climate theory denigrated extreme Northern complexions as well as extreme Southern ones: “Following classical and medieval sources, early modern climate theory conventionally associates blackness with physical weakness, wisdom, and political subtlety, and whiteness with physical strength, barbarousness, and dull wits. Medium complexions suggest a balance of mental and physical attributes” p. 185. Jonson’s masque attempts to re-frame these distinctions by making whiteness stand for temperance and balance. For a more sustained articulation of these ideas, see Wilson, *English Ethnicity*.

33. On blackness and the anticosmetic debate, see Hall, pp. 85–92.

antitheatricity. Like the speaker of Edward Herbert's "Sonnet of Black Beauty," who praises blackness for its property of being "unvary'd to the sight," Niger lauds blackness for its changelessness:

That in their black the perfect'st beauty grows,
 Since the fixed color of their curled hair,
 Which is the highest grace of dames most fair,
 No cares, no age can change, or there display
 The fearful tincture of abhorred grey,
 Since Death herself (herself being pale and blue)
 Can never alter their most faithful hue;
 All which are arguments to prove how far
 Their beauties conquer in great beauty's war,
 And more, how near divinity they be
 That stand from passion or decay so free. (ll. 119–29)

Niger claims blackness' admirable constancy extends to the government of emotions: "and more, how near divinity they be / that stand from passion or decay so free." Classical, medieval, and early modern discussions of the connection between color and disposition similarly associate blackness with constancy, as Mary Floyd-Wilson points out in her nuanced discussion of shifting "geohumoralist" conceptions of ethnicity; it is only by the later seventeenth century that racial blackness comes to be associated with intemperance and, most characteristically, jealousy.³⁴ Of course, as the sole spokesperson for black beauty Niger risks overstating his case, as the length of his defensive speech (seventy-plus lines) makes clear.

Niger's authoritative praise of blackness raises questions, however, about the degree to which blackness expresses, or belies, truths about interior states. According to the masque's use of climatology, skin color indicates proximity to the sun (in which case "black" has some stable denotative value) but, as I suggested, such climatological meanings are capable of reversal. The opening song, moreover, draws a distinction between "true" beauty and outward form—the women are black but bright and comely. Niger also describes the women as temperamentally constant, as inwardly serene as their fixed, unalterable surfaces suggest. From this perspective, blackness outwardly embodies truths about inner states, the women black and therefore comely. The English public stage's early spectacles of black villainy similarly depend on a one-to-

34. Wilson, *English Ethnicity*, in particular her chapter "Othello's Jealousy:"

one relationship between blackness and interior states, as for example *The Battle of Alcazar's* Muly Mahamet, "Blacke in his looke, and bloudie in his deeds" or Shakespeare's demonic Aaron, his soul "black like his face" (1.1.19; 3.1.204). Ian Smith calls this correspondence between surface and depth in the case of black stage villains a "flatness of self that equates inside and outside in a spectacular plentitude of the surface: what you see is what you get."³⁵ Whether the subject is a conventional stage villain or the daughter of Niger, surface blackness provides a reliable guide to interior states.

What complicates all such equations of "skin" and "within," is that stage blackness is so often accompanied by self-reflexive references to the paint that creates it.³⁶ In English blackface performance blackness always implies a more complex ontology than meets the eye. Even if the particular instantiation of the convention insists on the sympathy of outside with in—black in looks, bloody in deed; serene in hue, serene in mind—attention is inevitably called to disjunctions between felt interior and performed exterior. This is the paradox of blackness' relation to the interior: blackness is simultaneously held as a sign that confounds knowability, as in carnival revelry and blackface disguising, and pointed to as reliable evidence of interior states—of naturalness and authenticity, in anticosmetic discourse and lyric poetry; of villainy, damnation, or alienation, in the symbolic visual logic of the theater. The theatrical experience of blackness as a cosmetic and therefore ostensibly changeable surface integument directly undermines the representation of blackness as indicative of constancy or inward properties, most acutely in performances that imagine the possibility of racial transformation.

Jonson makes deliberate use of this tension between blackness' essential antitheatricity (so defined within anticosmetic and lyric discourse) and the obvious theatricality of a cosmetic disguise. Framed as it is in increasingly metadramatic language, Niger's association of blackness with divine permanence is difficult for the audience to accept. Talk of "tinctures," of death's palette of blues and grays failing to inscribe the black, certainly reminds those present that the women's skin color results from the application of paint. With the temporary and

35. Ian Smith, "White Skins, Black Masks: Racial Cross-Dressing on the Early Modern Stage," *Renaissance Drama* 32 (2003), 34. See Smith for the phrase "skin and within."

36. Many critics have noticed that blackface performance is inevitably accompanied by some form of metadramatic commentary on the makeup itself; see for example Vaughan, p. 54.

cosmetic nature of the masque's blackening device at the fore, Niger's praise of indelible black skin rings false: "And more, how near divinity they be / That stand from passion or decay so free" (ll. 128–29). By the masque's midpoint Niger has articulated separate epistemologies, the climatological and the anticosmetic or lyric, each of which casts doubt on the other.

The word "display," moreover, further undermines Niger's claims for his daughters' temperance and constancy by suggesting blackness might merely prevent the signs of inner passions from finding outward expression, the very changelessness of blackness placing interiority beyond the spectator's reach, a trope Philip Sidney deploys when he lauds Stella's "sweet blacke which veiles the heaven'ly eye."³⁷ Blackness, so the masque instructs, is something of a mystery—mysterious as to its origins, whether it arises from climate or biology, and mysterious as to what it might express or prevent from expressing. Blackness gets deeper, not flatter. Writing some years later in *Sylva Sylvarum*, Francis Bacon suggests that blackness obscures rather than reveals humoral truths: "As for the Aethiopes, as they are plump and fleshy, so (it may be) they are sanguine and ruddy coloured, *if their black skin would suffer it to be seen*" (my emphasis).³⁸ What you see is not what you get.

The cumulative effect of Niger's speech keeps the women's bodies firmly before the spectators' gaze, teaching the spectators that their blackness eludes interpretation and might make the women skilled at deception. In what may have played in performance as an ironic aside, Niger suggests his daughters might have "feigned" in order to convince their father of the truth of their quest:

To frustrate which strange error oft I sought
 Though most in vain, against a settled thought
 As women's are, till they confirmed at length
 By miracle I with so much strength
 Of argument resisted; else they feigned. (ll. 152–56)

Having fruitlessly used reason to counter his daughters' self-loathing, Niger is overmatched when the goddess "Aethiopia" appears in a vision with instructions to seek Britannia. In a moment that has received scant critical attention, Niger casts doubt on the truth of this

37. This reverses in interesting ways the argument that paint liberates the actor and permits him to demonstrate a greater expressivity.

38. Francis Bacon, *Sylva Sylvarum* (1627) p. 106.

report: “else they feigned.” Under the surface of Niger’s defense of blackness lurks the suspicion that women are jealous, unreasonable, incontinent, given the way the women’s despairing tears “swell” Niger’s boundaries; and now, possibly deceitful.³⁹ Niger’s reassurance some lines later—“And sure they saw’t, for Ethiops never dream”—seems designed to inflame the very suspicion it purports to calm (l. 160). Once more: what you see is not what you get.

And this is Jonson’s point. By putting into motion so many competing meanings of blackness, by using the associations that accrue to the wearing of paint itself, by taking blackness from a figure for readability to a figure for unknowability—and then by proposing to wash away that theatricalized blackness in salvific British waters—Jonson creates a positive signification for native whiteness. Destabilizing and then dispensing with the black surface helps to credit the white interior that remains behind, as one thing is made to look natural and transparent by contrast with something deemed artificial, theatrical, mysterious, shifting, and unstable. The reds and whites of English femininity (equally artificial when we see them presented emblematically in 1608’s *Masque of Beauty*) come to represent permanence, temperance, and authenticity as Jonson makes antic cosmetic discourse reverse its own investments in a blackness read as inimical to artifice. Representing blackness with paint allows Jonson to sever blackness from any source of positive meaning and redirect those meanings toward whiteness, mystifying blackness and clarifying whiteness in the process. If as some critics have argued, England’s expanding contact with foreign nations prompted the English more urgently to interrogate their own ethnicity at the beginning of the seventeenth century, then the very materials of blackface performance help redefine whiteness and blackness in the context of an emerging British nationalism.⁴⁰

39. Gosset reads this as evidence for Jonson’s “attitude toward women, an ambivalence verging on antipathy:” “Surface compliment in the early queens’ masques only slightly conceals fear and dislike of women. In *Blackness* the audience sees that the black daughters of Niger are ugly, petulant, and frivolous, “as women always are,” p. 99. See also Yumna Siddiqi, “Dark Incontinents: Discourses of Race and Gender in Three Renaissance Masques,” *Renaissance Drama* 23 (1992), 139–63.

40. See in particular Floyd-Wilson, “Temperature:” “As England increasingly perceived Africa in a colonial context, early modern ‘science’ transformed dark skin into a mystery that signified nothing outside a moral framework,” p. 186.

The Masque of Blackness concludes with what by now seems an utterly predictable valuation of white over black, but Jonson employs a complex set of representational, rhetorical, and technical strategies to achieve this valuation. His project is complicated by the curious paradox of paint, a medium that is at once temporary and cosmetic—temporary *because* it is cosmetic—and nevertheless stubbornly difficult to remove, at least in this 1605 performance. At this time the technology of blackface is such that no stage action can correspond to Jonson's narrative. A careful reading of the masque, however, shows Jonson purposefully working with the medium of paint and its multiple articulations of blackness, not in spite of it.

In *The Gypsies Metamorphosed* (1621), Jonson once again uses paint to create the effect of temporary blackness. *Gypsies* attempts to rehabilitate a specific national figure: George Villiers, the controversial Duke of Buckingham and the masque's patron. At the time of the masque's production, Buckingham had recently withstood a Parliamentary crisis over his family's involvement in scandals with monopolies and other abuses of political power. Given this context, Jonson's representation of the King's favorite as a roguish and thieving gypsy might have bordered on the offensive.⁴¹ When Jonson revised *Gypsies* for its only public performance at Windsor court (the first two performances of the masque were in Villiers family homes), he made a number of changes that "sanitize" some of the masque's humor and amplify its formal praise to the monarch.⁴² What has gone unnoticed about the Windsor revisions, however, is that its two major additions emphasize stage trickery involving paint. In the Windsor version of *Gypsies*, Jonson painstakingly explains the magic of the men's transformation from gypsy to gentleman and transfers responsibility for this metamorphosis to the court apothecary, whom Jonson credits with having made the "ointment" involved in the spectacle (l. 1387). Two compatible possibilities account for the Windsor revisions' emphasis on paint: first, that underscoring stage trickery distances Jonson and Buckingham both from the negative connotations of the gypsy disguise; second,

41. For an engaging but untenable argument suggesting that Jonson deliberately turned Buckingham into a gypsy in order to discredit him, see Dale Randall's *Jonson's Gypsies Unmasked* (Durham, 1975). See Butler below for a refutation of Randall.

42. See Martin Butler, "'We Are One Mans All': Jonson's *Gypsies Metamorphosed*," *Yearbook of English Studies* 21 (1991), 252–73. For a general discussion of Buckingham and his life, see Roger Lockyer's excellent biography *Buckingham, the Life and Political Career of George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham* (London, 1981).

and more important, the legacy of *Blackness* and its failure to wash the women white prompts Jonson self-consciously to address his re-engagement (now successful) with this particular technology.

IV

Performed in late summer 1621, *Gypsies* casts Buckingham, friends, and family members as dark-skinned gypsies of supposedly Egyptian origins. The actual pedigree of early modern gypsies is wildly indeterminate, as were the criteria that determined who counted as “gypsy.” Frequently the target of antivagrancy legislation but also protected by various statutes as a separate culture with their own laws, gypsies were loosely associated with Egypt and known for thievery and face-blackening: “They are a people more scattered than Jews, and more hated: beggarly in apparel, barbarous in condition, beastly in behaviour, and bloody if they meet advantage. A man that sees them would swear they had all the yellow jaundice, or that they were tawny Moors’ bastards, for no red-ochre man carries a face of a more filthy complexion. Yet they are not born so, neither had the sun burnt them so, but they are painted so: yet they are not good painters neither, for they do not make faces, but mar faces. By a by-name they are called gypsies; they call themselves Egyptians; others in mockery call them moon-men.” Taken from Thomas Dekker’s antivagrancy pamphlet *Lantern and Candlelight* (1608), the passage above reiterates the familiar explanations for skin color difference: heredity, environment, and fakery. Certainly Dekker interprets the gypsies’ color as expressive of their essential villainy, even if the paint is an affectation; the gypsies’ theatricality links, rather than severs, essence and surface, the obviousness of the “marred face” providing astute observers legible enough signs with which to discern character. For the purpose of his masque, Jonson seizes upon skin color as the gypsy’s most striking feature, repeatedly noting the performers’ “olive,” brown,” “dark”, and “tawny faces.”⁴³ While the color of Jonson’s gypsies evidently was lighter in tone than the daughters of Niger, I nonetheless regard it as an iteration of the same convention of blackface representation (especially given the gypsies’ supposedly African origin).

43. For an explanation of early modern gypsy culture in connection to this masque, including how native English would try to “pass” as gypsies for a variety of reasons, see Mark Netzloff, “Counterfeit Egyptians and Imagined Borders: Jonson’s *The Gypsies Metamorphosed*,” *ELH* 68 (2001), 763–93.

The gypsy masquers read the fortunes of the audience members, rob some country folk played by professional actors, and then exit during the bawdy Devil's Arse song in order to re-enter washed white:

“The gypsies were here
Like lords to appear,
With such their attenders
As you thought offenders,
Who now become new men,
You'll know 'em for true men” (ll. 1171–76).

By the masque's conclusion whiteness is restored along with the rustics' goods, and physical darkness—like thievery—is shown to be a temporary deviation from an otherwise upright norm.

Jonson tailored the masque to each of its performance venues. The first two performances took place at Burley, Buckingham's own seat, and Belvoir, the estate of his father-in-law. The most substantial revisions were made for the masque's final and most public performance at court. Martin Butler rightly points out that this Windsor audience would have been the masque's most hostile, the “court grandees” having good reason to be skeptical of Buckingham, who just a few months prior to the masque faced public criticism about various abuses of power.⁴⁴ According to Buckingham's biographer Roger Lockyer, when the Parliament of 1621 met the Commons' anger about abuse of monopolies came to be focused “directly on Buckingham's family and indirectly on himself.”⁴⁵ King James defended his favorite in front of the Lords but stipulated that if Buckingham were indeed found guilty of an ethical violation, he was to be regarded “as he was when he came to me, as poor George Villiers; and if he prove not himself a white crow, he shall be called a black crow.”⁴⁶ A narrative that accuses Buckingham of theft—however playfully—only to redeem him at the last minute certainly seems to address this recent conflict.

Butler proposes that Jonson manages the court's potential skepticism of Buckingham by shifting the focus of the Windsor performance to James. Certainly some of the Windsor changes temper the masque's more risqué humor and amplify the formal praise to the monarch (one such passage of praise involves a lengthy “blessing of the sovereign's

44. See Butler, and also Greg's discussion of the revisions to the Windsor text.

45. Lockyer, p. 90.

46. Lockyer, p. 94.

senses”). A curiosity that Butler and other readers of this masque have failed to address, however, is that the Windsor version’s lengthiest additions metadramatically address the painted nature of the gypsy disguise and so dismantle the theatrical wonder of the masque’s sudden revelation of whiteness. At Windsor the rustics who dance in the antimasque ask how they themselves might become gypsies.⁴⁷ The Patrico responds that becoming a gypsy depends upon having the right materials, in this case dye made from walnut juice added to a tallow base:

If your hand be light,
I’ll show ye the slight
Of our Ptolemy’s knot;
It is, and ‘tis not;
To change your complexion
With the noble confection
Of walnuts and hog’s grease,
Better than dog’s grease (ll. 1081; 1116–23).

The informal, homely nature of the ingredients suggests that the gypsy identity is one readily available; this “Ptolemy’s knot” is not too difficult to unravel. At Burley and Belvoir the response to this question is “O, hee would chirpe in a pair of stocks sumptuously.” The Patrico then replying as follows:

Is this worth your wonder
Nay then you shall understand more of my skill
For I can (and I will)
Give you all your fill
Each Jacke with his Gill,
And shew you the King,
The Prince, too, and bring
The Gypsies were here
Like Lords to appeare,
With such their attenders,
As you thought offenders,
Who now become new men
Youle know ‘hem for true men. (ll. 895–907)

The Burley and Belvoir texts emphasize the spectacle of metamorphosis, which is to say the magical reappearance of the “offenders” as “new men” without any advance explanation as to *how* this might have been

47. For a scheme of the main Windsor revisions, see Greg, p. 47.

achieved, or what artificial additions (and subtractions) might have been necessary to execute the change. At Windsor the wonder of the sight is dispelled, or rather, materialized.

The Windsor epilogue continues even further with Jonson's project of demystification, and once again stage materials are central. Here, The Patrico explains even more precisely how the playwright engineered the masque's change of face:

At Burley, Bever, and now last at Windsor
 (Which shows we are gypsies of no common kind, sir),
 You have beheld, and with delight, their change,
 And how they came transformed may think it strange,
 It being a thing not touched at by our poet;
 Good Ben slept there, or else forgot to show it.
 But lest it prove like wonder to the sight
 To see a gypsy, as an Ethiop, white,
 Know that what dyed our faces was an ointment
 Made and laid on by Master Wolf's appointment,
 The court *lycanthropos*, yet without spells,
 By a mere barber, and no magic else.
 It was fetched off with water and a ball,
 And to our transformation this is all,
 Save what the master fashioner calls his;
 For to a gypsy's metamorphosis
 Who doth disguise his habit and his face,
 And takes on a false person by his place,
 The power of poetry can never fail her,
 Assisted by a barber and a tailor. (ll. 1379–98)

The epilogue attributes the men's transformation to a removable cosmetic tincture made and applied by the King's apothecary, John Wolfgang Rumler. The reference to the "Ethiop" resurrects the memory of *The Masque of Blackness*, pointedly contrasting its failure to wash its women white with *Gypsies's* successful metamorphosis. Lingering on this paint's happy tractability, Jonson works hard to dispel anxieties of his own influence; this epilogue, moreover, marks a very rare occasion in which Jonson inserts his own name into the masque's text. Crucially, Jonson distributes credit for the spectacle among several others: the court apothecary, who because of his office has expertise in cosmetics; the tailor; the "master fashioner," King James; and the poet himself. The wondrous spectacle just witnessed therefore arises from

the collaboration of multiple bodies, notwithstanding the debt everyone assembled owes to the King.

The apparatus Jonson adds to the Windsor performance works overtime to insist that the masque's special effects are not really special at all. Both additions reduce stage magic to household materials and prosaic offstage ablutions. These reductive moves are necessary to Jonson's project of exonerating Buckingham before his most critical audience. The dismantling of one layer of illusion is used to sustain the masque's more important fiction: these gypsies are really gentlemen, and have been so all the while. To insist on the paint's temporariness is to insist on the stability of the performers' underlying identities, specifically upon Buckingham's underlying "whiteness" represented in the masque as moral probity and gentlemanly honor. In *Blackness*, the women "are" African nymphs seeking to alter their complexion. The masque's promised metamorphosis requires paint to be a vehicle for mystery, the blackening agent pressed to signify both truth (blackness as fixed and innate) and disguise (blackness allied to artifice and theatricality). Jonson tries to yoke together these significations as part of his strategy to glorify English whiteness, but for the reasons identified above, the project ends up being qualified. In *Gypsies*, Jonson openly acknowledges the stage device that temporarily simulates the gypsy identity. In marked contrast to *Blackness*, therefore, the success of *Gypsies* requires the audience to be aware of the illusion as illusion. Buckingham's exoneration thus occurs independently of James's munificence: Buckingham does not need magic to prove himself "white." All three performances are Buckingham events, and the court performance, by focusing on stage materials, makes its point the most forcefully.

The Windsor additions nonetheless reveal Jonson's residual anxiety with his medium. In both of his masques of racial change Jonson distributes authority for the spectacle elsewhere: in the case of *Blackness* he credits Anne with at least the desire (if not the choice of methods) to appear as a "blackamore," and in *Gypsies* he invokes the involvement of a quasi-medical authority, Rumler, in addition to crediting the labor of the tailor. This need to cite an authority in the context of blackface performance points to worries that inhere in the spectacle of racial masquerade itself, worries I attribute to early modern conceptions of the body's "passibility" but also to the medium's sometime intractability within a live performance. These very concerns, however, also make paint a fruitful vehicle for demonstrating theatrical prowess.

If the memory of *Blackness* shaped Jonson's subsequent engagement with the trope of racial change, so too does the 1605 masque affect future iterations of the convention. In what follows, I discuss Richard Brome's parodic account of a failed masque of blackness; Brome's play figures theatrical mastery or authority as the successful management of racial change within a performance.

v

Written for the re-formed Queen Henrietta's Men, *The English Moor* may have been among the first plays performed for the new Salisbury Court Theater in the fall of 1637.⁴⁸ The play features an "Old usurer," Quicksands, who disguises his young bride as a black serving maid. Quicksands' onstage painting of his wife Millicent provides the dramatic focus of the third act, and his orchestration of a lavish "shew of blackamores", clearly modeled on Jonson's *Blackness* and *Gypsies Metamorphosed*, figures prominently in the fourth. The masque, however, goes comically awry. Whereas his fictional maker of masques sees his theatrical ambitions frustrated, Brome pushes the convention of racial disguise in an innovative direction. I suggest Brome uses the technology of racial transformation to confront his theatrical predecessor: in contrast to Jonson's more fraught experience managing racial transformations, Brome successfully delivers several dramatic transformations from whiteness to blackness to whiteness again. Put another way, *The English Moor* shows Brome adopting the very "parodic strategy" Robert N. Watson associates with Jonson: the subsumption of a rival playwright's use of theatrical conventions for his own "exaltation."⁴⁹

Suspecting that the town gallants plan to seduce his wife, Quicksands believes the blackface disguise will make his wife unrecognizable and, more important, sexually unattractive: "after this tincture's laid upon thy face, / 'Twil cool their kidnies and allay their heats" (3.1.70–71). No doubt Brome's audience anticipated the flaws in this plan.

48. Throughout I have quoted from the text of *Moor* printed in the octavo collection *Five New Plays* (1659). Because my argument also depends upon noting exits and entrances, I have also referred to the play by act, scene, and line, and have done so according to Sara Jayne Steen's edition *The English Moore; Or The Mock Mariage* (Columbia, 1983). Steen bases her text on Brome's presentation copy of the manuscript (Lichfield MS. 68), whereas the 1659 octavo text provides more complete stage directions. Steen, however, notes all variations between the two texts.

49. Robert N. Watson, *Ben Jonson's Parodic Strategy* (Cambridge, mass., 1987) p. 1.

In plays such as John Webster's *The White Devil* (1612), Moorish serving maids are negatively portrayed as unchaste, their blackness thought to invite rather than repel sexual attention. It soon becomes clear that Quicksands makes a poor reader of black bodies and a worse manager of racial masquerade. Exploiting the unrecognizability that blackness affords—the very eradication of identity Queen Anne may have pursued—Millicent uses the occasion of the disguise to substitute another body in her place and escape her husband's custody altogether.

In 3.1, “a box of black painting” is brought forth (3.1.71).⁵⁰ The gesture invites us to see blackness as a prop motivating stage action, as a “discrete, material” object rather than an element of theatrical illusion that functions more transparently.⁵¹ Millicent reacts to the appearance of this prop with fear: “Bless me! you fright me, Sir. Can jealousy / Creep into such a shape? Would you blot out / Heavens workmanship?” To assuage her anxiety about the substance itself and indeed about racial change more generally, Quicksands invokes the legitimizing precedent of Queen Anne's performance in the *Masque of Blackness*:

Why think'st thou, fearful Beauty,
Has heaven no part in Aegypt? Pray thee tell me,
Is not an Ethiopes face his workmanship
As well as the fair'st Ladies? nay, more too.
Then hers, that daubs and makes adulterate beauty?
Some can be pleas'd to lye in oyles and paste,
At sins appointments, which is thrice more wicked.
This (which is sacred) is for sins prevention.
Illustrious persons, nay, even Queens themselves
Have, for the glory of a nights presentment,
To grace the work, suffered as much as this. (3.1.75–85)

This mention of Queen Anne encourages the audience to view Quicksands' own theatrical activities as grandiosely Jonsonian; it also reminds us that the memory of a single “nights presentment” persists more than twenty years later. Further solidifying the allusion to the 1605 masque, Quicksands repeats Niger's defense of blackness in terms of anticomic discourse, despite his initial suggestion that blackness will banish

50. Alan Dessen pointed out at least one potential precedent for this moment. In *The Three Ladies of London* (1581), “Conscience” is spotted onstage by means of a “painted box of ink.”

51. See Sofer, p. 14.

lust. Here again black skin is praised for its resistance to the “adulterations” of paint, namely the “daubs,” “oyles,” and “pastes” of female cosmetics. All such praise of the essential antitheatricity of blackness works ironically in performance, given that its dramatic realization necessarily requires artifice. In his masque for Queen Anne, Jonson recognized and acknowledged this tension, but nonetheless intended for Niger’s defense of black beauty to be taken seriously. Brome exploits the convention’s multivalence for its comic potential: Quicksands is out of his depth, his dramatic ambitions suspect from their inception.

In the convention of racial disguise Brome therefore finds an opportunity both for comedy and for theatrical one-upmanship. What Jonson failed to show in *Blackness* (even if for reasons beyond his control) and what Jonson over-explained in *Gypsies*, Brome agilely stages: the process by which the actor’s body changes from white to black. Quicksands “*begins to paint*” Millicent in front of the audience, his actions taking place over the course of several lines. By showing Millicent’s transformation unfold in real theatrical time, Brome depicts a method of theatrical preparation that otherwise took place “behind the arras” and out of the public eye—a location Brome knew well, if indeed he served as Jonson’s prompter.⁵² In plays of static racial identity the actor’s blackening process would not belong to the spectacle proper—early modern audiences would not watch the actor get into costume prior to performing the part of, say, Othello. Virginia Vaughan argues, moreover, that in plays of racial masquerade dating to this period “the application of black make-up is not nearly so important as the moment of its removal.”⁵³ In this play the reverse is true, and this emphasis on application pushes the convention in a novel direction.

It should also be noted that the spectacle of Millicent being painted black involves an additional, albeit partial, displacement of stage gender. Presumably the audience watched, fascinated, as the emblematic “red

52. See Tiffany Stern, “Behind the Arras: The Prompter’s Place in the Shakespearean Theatre,” *Theatre Notebook* 55.3 (2001), 110–18. For practical reasons Quicksands needs a speech to cover the time it takes to paint Millicent; note the passage’s internal performance cues and the gestures they suggest about stage action (“let me kiss ye;” “up into your Ebon Casket”). Millicent is told to exit in order to “perfect what’s amiss.” She re-enters “her face black” some scenes later at 4.2. That the process is begun but not entirely finished onstage does not undermine my argument that this is an unusual deployment of the trope—in fact, the inability to complete the transformation onstage further reinforces the device’s inherent difficulty to manage in performance, as opposed to a mask or other disguise token.

53. See Vaughan, p. 109: “the application of black make-up is not nearly so important as the moment of its removal.” Here, obviously, the reverse is true.

and white” of female beauty disappeared before their eyes, the boy actor’s cosmetic femininity buried under a layer of blackness:

Take pleasure in the scent first; smell to’t fearlesly,
 And taste my care in that, how comfortable
 ‘Tis to the nostril, and no foe to feature.
 Now red and white those two united houses,
 Whence beauty takes her fair name and descent,
 Like peaceful Sisters under one Roof dwelling
 For a small time; farewell. Oh let me kiss ye
 Before I part with you—Now Jewels up
 Into your Ebon Casket. (3.1.98–106)

In the Windsor revisions to *Gypsies*, Jonson self-consciously commented on theatrical materials in order to demystify, for a variety of reasons, the spectacle of racial change. Here the audience’s attunement to stage materials creates an effect of “theatrical vibrancy,” to borrow Michael Shapiro’s term for the rich self-reflexivity of cross-gender disguise.⁵⁴ The metadramatic spectacle of Millicent’s public blackening requires the audience simultaneously to remain immersed in the fiction, contemplate the artifice of theatrical illusion, and appreciate the paint itself as an object of sensory “pleasure”—as well as anxiety, given Millicent’s instinctive recoil from “the box of black painting” and Quicksands’ admission that the disguise is a form of “suffering” or “murder” (this anxiety might also be thrilling for the audience; they are watching something potentially dangerous or taboo).

In 4.5, Quicksands invites his rivals to an elaborate masque clearly modeled on Jonson’s *Blackness* and *Gypsies* (as well as Heliodorus’ *Aethiopica*). The masque begins with the cue “*Florish enter Inductor like a Moor leading Phillis (black and) gorgeously deck’t with jewels,*” after which the Inductor explains the masque’s central conceit:

The Queen of Ethiop dreamt upon a night
 Her black womb should bring forth a virgin white.
 . . . Till this white dream fil’d their blackheads with fear,
 For tis no better then a Prodegy
 To have white children in a black country.
 So ‘twas decreed that if the child prov’d white,
 It should be made away. O cruel spight!
 The Queen cry’d out, and was delivered

54. Michael Shapiro, *Gender and Play on the Shakespearean Stage* (Ann Arbor, 1993), p. 7.

Of child black as you see: Yet Wizards sed
 That if this damsel liv'd married to be
 To a white man, she should be white as he
 The careful Queen, conclusion for to try,
 Sent her to merry England charily
 The fairest Nation man yet ever saw
 To take a husband: such as I shall draw,
 Being an Aegyptian Prophet (4.5.11-37).

This curiously mundane premise repeats the notion of failed transformation—that is, the prodigy of a white birth to a black mother fails to take place. Instead, the usual event happens—a black child is born to a black mother—but nonetheless the daughter is dispatched to England to seek whiteness. The masque also includes a palmistry sequence, only where Jonson flattered his audience by scripting positive fortunes, Quicksands mocks the assembled gallants: “You must not have her: For I find by your hand / You have forfeited the mortgage of your land” (4.5.41-42).

The masque’s poetry (such as it is) is less important than the spectacle it is supposed to deliver: the revelation that the black “Catalyna” is in fact the white Millicent, a revelation that Quicksands hopes will affirm his own authority and humiliate his rivals. The masque, however, does not function according to its author’s intentions, and becomes instead an occasion for misrecognition, failure, and theatrical “labour in vain.” Unknown to her husband, Millicent has blackened her maid Phillis and has substituted the other woman in her place. Crucially, the audience watches the masque aware that it has already miscarried, having just seen Millicent reappear “*white-fac’d & in her own habit*” in the scene immediately prior to the masque (4.4.184). The body trick plays with the notion that all black bodies are the same, a racist iteration of the misogynist “bed trick” that assumes all women resemble each other in the dark. Quicksands fails to perceive his medium’s capacity to unmake identities even as he fails to anticipate his wife’s rival theatrics. And since Phillis herself is spirited away during the dance portion of the masque (a gallant makes off with her in the direction of the nearest bedroom), no transformation of any kind occurs.

By contrast, Brome’s deployment of growing numbers of cosmetically transformed actors displays an astuteness about how this convention works in performance. Although my terminology risks conflating Brome’s authority as playwright with the authority of a “director”—a

role that did not exist as such in the early modern period—Brome is nonetheless responsible for scripting the play's complicated timing, if not solely responsible for its execution.⁵⁵ The preface to the 1659 text of *The English Moor* (the quarto collection *Five New Plays*) praises him for this very sensitivity to action as much as language: "To the Readers, or rather to the Spectators, if the Fates so pleas'd, these Comedies exactly being dressed for the Stage; and the often-tried Author (better than many who can but Scribble) Understood the Proportions and Beauties of a Scene" (sig. A3). In performances of racial change, timing is everything (far easier simply to remove more detachable prosthetics such as a patch, a cloak, a false beard). Millicent exits around 4.4.95 or so and returns white at 4.4.175. Phillis exits at 4.4.31; returns in blackface at the beginning of 4.5 for the masque sequence; and remains so disguised until her exit at 5.3.39 ("Remove her, and let instant trial be made / to take the blackness off"), whereupon she returns washed white at 5.3.73. In addition to Millicent and Phillis, the play requires a speaking Inductor "like a Moor" and a number of non-speaking actors whose jeering dance provides the cover for Phillis' departure: "*Enter the rest of the Moors. They Dance an Antique in which they use action of Mockery and derision to the three Gentlemen.*"⁵⁶

Brome, then, supercharges the convention of racial disguise. He openly shows the application of blackface makeup, scripts not one but two racial transformations, and then fills the space of the stage with yet a further complement of dancing Moors. Brome's former master and sometime rival Jonson died in August of 1637, some months prior to this play's first performance. Despite Brome's popular success, literary history has entwined the two names to Brome's disadvantage, possibly because, as has been frequently noted, Brome began his career as Jonson's servant. Although he never refers explicitly to Brome, Stephen Orgel's essay, "Marginal Jonson," speaks nicely to the motivation behind Brome's invention of a failed masque of blackness: "Theatrical magic, then, is both a quality of language and a way of establishing oneself, of rising in society; a way for servants (or employees of theatrical companies) to become masters."⁵⁷ With "theatrical magic" Orgel primarily has in mind the shaping power of poetry. In *The English Moor* we see a

55. See Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford, 2000).

56. The 1659 octavo is open-ended about numbers; the Lichfield MS reads at this juncture "Enter 6 Blackamoors." See Steen's edition for a discussion of this and other textual variations.

57. Orgel, "Marginal Jonson," *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque* p. 145.

mastery achieved in more tangible terms, by means of a sometimes-unruly stage material—blackface paint—as much as language.

The Masque of Blackness puts into motion a story of theatrical failure. In the Windsor revisions to *Gypsies* Jonson displays unresolved anxiety about the 1605 masque's lack of transformation; Brome takes up the motif as a method of parody, characterizing the mishandling of blackface in performance as theatrical and sexual ineptitude. It has been my contention that the device of blackface paint possesses a rich range of significations that have been insufficiently elaborated in studies that focus exclusively on the broader cultural and political ramifications of racial representation; in particular, I have in mind black paint's provocative and paradoxical status as a figure for antitheatricity. The medium's materiality, moreover, exerts particular pressures within a performance. When used as a device for disguise, blackface carries with it the possibility of aborted transformations, of misrecognition, of theatrical unpredictability—and, given early modern conceptions of the body, of worrisome physiological change. Granting its superficiality, paint is nonetheless not a prosthetic in the way of other corporeal additions. Paint sits too close to the skin, is too much *like* the skin, to be easily detachable; as Steven Connor says, "the skin always takes the body with it."⁵⁸

Ultimately, the most interesting questions surrounding the convention of blackface disguise have to do with forms of theatrical authority. Who bears the primary responsibility for the success or failure of blackface to work within a performance—who, in short, is the convention's "author"? The playwright who scripts the stage action requiring its use? The specialist who concocted it in the first place, unusually in the case of *Gypsies* explicitly named in the text? Or rather the actor who applies it and removes it, who bears its marks on his, or in Anne's case, on her, body? Critics of early modern drama might well consider certain aspects of dramatic spectacle in relation to these issues of attribution, collaboration, authorship, and autonomy.

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58. Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (Ithaca, 2004), p. 29.