

ESSAY

Becoming Undisciplined: On Pathways to Environmental and Racial Justice in Early Modern Studies

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This essay is born of the belief that racial, social, and environmental justice are mutually entangled. Our project began as a traditional conference panel aiming to put premodern critical race studies and environmental humanities into a more direct conversation; while both subfields consider issues of justice in the human and nonhuman worlds, they have not been in dialogue with each other in our field. We are four early modern literature scholars who approach these topics from different academic and personal perspectives. Through our early planning, we realized that our individual perspectives—our respective training, reading, and assumptions about texts and categories of disciplinary inquiry—limited our individual approaches. Accordingly, we sought to build a shared basis of knowledge through several communal readings. These texts, by Patricia Akhimie, Frances E. Dolan, Saidiya Hartman, Sonya Posmentier, Christina Sharpe, Julietta Singh, Sylvia Wynter, Kathryn Yusoff, and others, unsettled many of our subdisciplinary habits, and through our discussions we began revising our perspectives.¹ Singh's *Unthinking Mastery*, in particular, offered a vocabulary for reconsidering traditional protocols and products of scholarly labor and the persistently individualized patterns of inquiry in the humanities. This essay, the product of our polyvocal panel session, is not argumentative in the traditional sense; rather, it enjoins our scholarly communities to loosen our habitual grip on individual expertise and unlearn our way to different possibilities.

Inspired by Sharpe's notion of becoming "undisciplined" (13), we jettisoned the notion that the output of our labors needed to be

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individual, and we embraced collaboration, a foundational feminist practice. We have applied this method of collective inquiry to reconsider some key terms and questions about racial and environmental justice. What texts contributed to, or challenged, moral justifications for colonialism, extractive capitalism, and the eradication of non-European, non-Christian, Indigenous lives? How does the early modern discourse about the violence toward—and extraction of resources from—the natural world intersect with violence directed toward humans in the period? How does the desire for mastery drive making and innovation, rendering certain bodies extractable and discardable along the way? Central to our collaboration, too, was asking, “Who is justice for? Humanity alone?”—questions originally posed by Kelsey Leonard, a water scientist, legal scholar, and citizen of the Shinnecock Nation. On the one hand, we must achieve justice for the historically dehumanized. We must begin with humanity, especially the black and brown people who have been denied justice since white settler colonialism invaded this continent. But on the other hand, if race is the greatest predictor for access to clean water and sanitation, can we tackle the inequities perpetuated on humans without also tackling the injustices we continue to perpetuate on the land?

As our experience has taught us, in order to create new scholarly futures, we must first look back with an eye toward unlearning. How do we unlearn knowledge systems that have created rifts in our thinking about the relationship between humans and the land? And how do we foster a system that values balance and equity among human animals, nonhuman animals, and the lands we inhabit? For attending simultaneously to matters of environmental and racial justice requires a type of thinking that we frequently espouse and promote but have yet to achieve in early modern literary studies. Such thinking requires deconstructing the thoughts, values, and even methodologies that derive from colonial mentalities and practices. It requires unlearning as much as it does learning anew.

So we have entered this project—an attempt to create pathways for racial and environmental justice

in early modern literary studies—with the premise that we must reimagine what scholarship can do. We have been asking ourselves how we ascribe worth to the literary texts we have been taught to value. We sit with Sharpe and are advised that “[w]e must become undisciplined” because we are “encountering a past that is not past” (13). We also sit with Therí Alyce Pickens and are advised that our aim “is not to trace an idea or prove an argument, but rather to open up two fields to each other” (x). Perhaps the past that is not past renders it difficult for us to answer if justice is solely for humanity alone, but that is a start.

For us, unlearning has posed two central challenges. One is methodological—how do we bring into conversation early modern ecocriticism’s centering of the nonhuman with the urgent issues of racial justice foregrounded by premodern critical race studies? Early modern ecocriticism has historically attended to nonhuman materiality in ways that do little to recognize the dehumanization of certain persons, let alone to elevate the status of those who are dehumanized. Yet Sharpe reminds us that “thinking needs care” (5). Where ecocriticism practices a deep yet selective care for the nonhuman, it risks the exclusion of minoritized and ecologically vulnerable persons from conversations of sustainability. However, as Singh insists, a just critical practice involves “radical dwelling in and with dehumanization through the narrative excesses and insufficiencies of the ‘good’ human” (4). We must reckon with those spaces and practices where literary studies has failed to care for the fullness of the world.

Another key challenge posed by unlearning is practical—how we actually produce knowledge. Unlearning invites us to move beyond the model of single-authored, scholarly *auteur*ship. Unlearning challenges us to create spaces, venues, and evaluation practices that emerge through collaboration. This has not been easy for us to put into practice: the eddies of our individual experiences, responsibilities, and scholarly habits have been hard to forgo. It was easier to make space for the conversation when the obligation to produce was a distant abstraction. Putting it into practice—first as a talk at the Shakespeare

Association of America meeting in 2021 and now in print—has shown us just how much effort, deliberation, and care unlearning requires.

In our attempt at care and carefulness, we found a potential model in the recursive rhetoric practiced by Sharpe and Singh: a presentation of ideas that is looping, polyvocal, and dynamic. Spinning with this recursive rhetorical approach, we recognized the need to cite capaciously, to widen our discursive community, all the while eschewing the temptation to privilege one theoretical paradigm. Our own recursive strategy works in tandem with the thinkers we cite. In placing phrases and concepts together in new combinations, we hope to collaborate in the creation of new meanings and practices. We hope to enjoin a multidimensional dialogue, engaging critical voices across temporal, geographic, and disciplinary fields. Thus, our essay is a provocation, our attempt to offer *a* model, not *the* model, for how to conduct a conversation, a collaboration, and an accumulation of ideas and experiences through the slow practice of unlearning. On a fundamental level, the act of unlearning requires that we move away from some of the key tenets that have driven various aspects of early modern studies: the totalizing legacies of humanism, the flattening lure of posthumanism, and the archival restrictions of new historicism.

We collectively hold at the forefront of our thinking Geraldine Heng's proposal that "race" is used "*to demarcate human beings through differences . . . that are selectively essentialized as absolute and fundamental, in order to distribute positions and powers differentially*" (3). In emphasizing strategy over content, Heng encourages us to understand race and race-making as opportunistic endeavors that seek to create and sustain inequities. Moreover, one of the most pernicious capacities of race-making as a strategy is its elasticity. As Ann Laura Stoler argues, racial discourse is polyvalent and mobile: it can be molded to suit different structures and historical moments, at once "both new and renewed, well-worn and innovative, protective of the past and geared to limiting the entitlements of specific populations in the future" (191). Akhimie unfolds a key example that illustrates

Stoler's point, describing how race was constructed by distinguishing those populations who were imagined to be capable of self-improvement from those who were supposedly immune to change. Racialization was the cultivated product "of a conduct system in which social identity is understood as both fixed and fluid" (5). For too long, early modern scholars have considered the cultivation of peoples and lands separately.²

Our collaborative enterprise argues that any robust conversation on the intersections of social and environmental justice must grapple with the long histories of racism, colonialism, and slavery. In connecting the material and cultural operations of the early modern world to the unfolding pressures of the Anthropocene, we draw on Yusoff's argument that while "[t]he Anthropocene might seem to offer a dystopic future that laments the end of the world . . . imperialism and ongoing (settler) colonialisms have been ending worlds for as long as they have been in existence" (xiii). Yusoff follows Wynter in choosing 1452, the inception of the African slave trade, as the Anthropocene's inaugural moment, arguing that "[t]he racial categorization of Blackness shares its natality with mining the New World" (2). Like Heng's concept of race, Yusoff's concept of geology is a "category and praxis of dispossession" that fuels settler colonialism and its strategies of exclusion, from the extraction of minerals from the ground to the transformation of humans into things (67).

Unlearning Literary History: Expendability and Theatrical Form in *The Tempest*

Early modern literature abounds in examples of the world-ending pattern that Yusoff observes, moments where the exploitation of natural resources and of people goes hand in hand. Many of the literary moments that illustrate such entanglements are scenes of spectacle. Consider the beginning of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, where the staging of a man-made "natural" disaster—the "sea storm" that is a product of Prospero's "art" (1.2.177, 1)—is the entry point into the horrors of colonization. As Prospero

remakes both sea and land with his “art,” and as he controls the island’s inhabitants, he enacts the European colonial project’s civilizing mission, which is predicated not only on the cultivation of “nature” and of people but also on the violent unmaking—and subjugation—of both. Decentering such spectacles of power is vital to processes of unlearning. In early modern scholarship, where have we resisted the impulse to focus on the perpetrators of catastrophe? Where have we resisted the urge to merely recuperate exploited characters without challenging the underlying logics of mastery that trap them within binaries of master and slave, colonizer and colonized, human and nonhuman? Where have we resisted the desire to privilege nonhuman “nature” at the expense of those marginalized humans who have become merely collateral damage? To guide this process of unlearning, we channel Hartman’s “hope to illuminate the terror of the mundane and quotidian rather than exploit the shocking spectacle” (*Scenes of Subjection* 4). We begin this process by locating the crux of literary form and poetics not in spectacles of human suffering and environmental disaster but in the myriad “quotidian disasters,” to recall Sharpe’s words, of “ontological negation” (14). We wonder again, but with a modification: “Who is justice for [in early modern literature]?”

To this end, we ask how the theatrical form leaves in its wake innumerable “experiences of expendability,” to borrow Ruben Espinosa’s term (98). We understand “theatrical form” as a dynamic assemblage that includes the strategies of plot making, the poetics of the text, the mechanics of staging, and the play’s “work of performing bodily difference” (K. Williams 3). At first glance, Caliban might seem like the ideal character for our study. He has long been a touchstone in scholarship of the racialized and colonized other, and both his poetic discourse on the island’s sonic and affective aspects (Shakespeare 3.2.130–38) and his knowledge of “all the qualities o’ th’ isle” (1.2.340) invite us to examine his intimate relation to this terraqueous space. Yet Caliban too values the dynamic of rule and subjection enacted by Prospero, claiming ownership of the island (“This island’s mine, by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou tak’st from

me” [1.2.334–35]) and imagining an alternative dynastic politics that would have “peopled. . . / This isle with Calibans” (1.2.353–54). In other words, Caliban remains bound to the logics of mastery.

We turn instead to another “monstrous shape” in *The Tempest* (3.3.31): the “islander” imagined by the European travelers. This term is used twice in the play, once by Trinculo when he attempts to define Caliban’s ontology (“this is no fish, but an islander, that hath lately suffered by a thunderbolt” [2.2.34–35]) and then by Gonzalo as he makes sense of the vanishing banquet, in which “several strange shapes” perform an “inviting” dance “with gentle actions of salutations” (3.3.19sd). Gonzalo identifies these figures as “islanders”: “For, certes, these are people of the island” (3.3.29–30). Of course, neither Trinculo nor Gonzalo has met an “islander” yet. The stage direction “several strange shapes” does not suggest that these are “people”—indeed, Prospero has informed Miranda (and the audience) to expect the contrary, by declaring that the island was, “Save for the son” of Sycorax, “not honored with / A human shape” (1.2.283–85). The strange shapes might be the “spirits” that Prospero “by mine art” (4.1.120) has “from their confines called to enact” his “present fancies” (121, 122). Seeing an “islander” is pure fantasy. We propose that the term is invoked by the European characters to denote someone inextricably tied to a strange (foreign) location. The word, ostensibly a neutral descriptor, imprints European projections on unknowable—and, more dangerously from the European perspective, uncontrollable—beings, to fix native inhabitants of foreign locales as static and silent symbols; the “islander” translates the strange and unruly into an immutable and categorizable entity, serving as a linguistic instrument of race-making essential to “construct a hierarchy of peoples for differential treatment” (Heng 3).

Seventeenth-century readers would have encountered varied descriptions of real and imagined islanders in works ranging from travel narratives to utopian fiction. In Gonzalo’s words, we see how such figures get instrumentalized. On seeing the “strange shapes,” Gonzalo declares,

If in Naples

I should report this now, would they believe me
 If I should say I saw such islanders?
 For, certes, these are people of the island,
 Who, though they are of monstrous shape, yet note,
 Their manners are more gentle, kind, than of
 Our human generation you shall find
 Many, nay, almost any. (Shakespeare 3.3.27–34)

Gonzalo's language classifies the islander as simultaneously human ("certes, these are people") and of "monstrous shape." This final phrase reminds us how the term *monster* is deployed to encode the dynamism of anomalous bodies as static symbols (see Cohen). It is used repeatedly in the play to try (unsuccessfully) to fix Caliban's meaning. Yet Caliban exemplifies, in Katherine Schaefer Williams's words, early modern theater's "ideological incoherence of monstrosity," a character who is "made up" into a "monster" within the constraints of the theatrical apparatus (189). Caliban's "indeterminacy" has been crucial to anticolonial artists and scholars (Hall, *Things of Darkness* 142), who locate in his slipperiness a powerful locus of resistance against colonial and racial violence. The mention of "islander" erases such indeterminacy and introduces contingency in the staged action, threatening to take over both island and plot. The imagined islander paradoxically embodies the absolute otherness visible in Caliban's "monstrous shape," yet remains distinct from his resistant and disruptive behavior. Never accessible as an individual character, the islander is a cipher that offers no resistance.

The islanders' dualistic ontology is key to this imposition of meaning. Gonzalo's backhanded compliments separate those of "monstrous shape" from "our" (that is, the Europeans') humanity and define them as docile natives whose accommodating "manners" indicate that they will bend to Gonzalo's will. Race-making unfolds onstage through a linguistic performance that lays bare how a "*structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences*" comes into being (Heng 3). Gonzalo's "differences" from the islanders become "*absolute and fundamental,*"

to borrow Heng's words (3), when Gonzalo interlinks their racialization to a naturalized monstrosity. While audiences might initially have perceived the "strange shapes" at the banquet as products of Prospero's art—perhaps the island's "spirits" are conjurations of the creative mind—Gonzalo's speech racializes them through their permanent association with the island.

Gonzalo's strategy of fixing what it means to be an islander, ultimately, relies on a kind of environmental remaking, as Gonzalo imprints on these figures the dualism—of strangeness and familiarity—that the characters have already assigned to the island. The newly arrived Europeans mark its strangeness and uselessness: Adrian declares that "this island seem[s] to be desert," a place "[u]nhabitable and almost inaccessible" (2.1.36, 39). Gonzalo counters these descriptions—which signify that it is either "barren or merely uninhabited" (Akhimie 159)—by declaring the place to be habitable and productive: "Here is everything advantageous to life"; "How lush and lusty the grass looks! How green!" (2.1.50, 53). Gonzalo remakes the environment to reflect his fantasies, and the place's qualities manifest his desire to have "plantation of this isle" (2.1.140). Thus, when Gonzalo toggles between the islander's strange ontology and familiar behavior, he transfers the Europeans' dualistic understanding of place—and linguistic strategies of environmental remaking—into the arena of race-making. Such conflicting descriptions demarcate this place, and by extension its inhabitant, the "islander," as entities that can be profited from, exploited, and then discarded. In a colonial economy where the use value of native inhabitants, whether as informers, interpreters, or laborers, determines their overall value, this fixing of the island's inhabitant into a symbol fulfills a fantasy of absolute control. This is not to suggest that the "strange shapes" onstage cannot serve as figures of potential resistance in performance. But Gonzalo's speech exposes the process through which the European imaginary marks "islanders" as racialized and dehumanized entities, their strangeness at one with the "qualities o' th' isle." The play binds their identities to its

singular world in Gonzalo's speech, intimating that "monstrous shapes" are meant to remain trapped on the island, excluded from the transformations, redemptions, and freedoms afforded to the European characters.

In constructing an islander who can be summoned and dismissed at will from stage and polity, the theater participates in the early modern project of race-making. More specifically, the theatrical form enacts a particular kind of violence in its dramatization of abstraction, when it transforms complex, varied—although stereotypical—images circulating in other media and art into static symbols. This violence of abstraction is an embodied form of allegorization, which Joseph Campana reminds us elicits a "violent disfiguring of the human" (280; see also Teskey). The tussle between presence (of bodies onstage) and absence (of spectral beings and historical figures), and between immediacy (of events, spectacle) and privation (off-stage occurrences, dreams, and so on), is crucial to the form of early modern drama (see Walsh). By putting pressure on the invocation of the "islander," we can expose the ideology underpinning such mediations: through juxtapositions of race-making and environmental remaking, Gonzalo's mention of "islander" in *The Tempest* overcomes the difficulty of controlling contingencies of action and the impossibility of fixing the meanings of characters whose presence affects the staged plot. If the alterity of a "made up" "monster" like Caliban can never be fully shown, as Katherine Schaap Williams argues (since the body of the actor is always at risk of undercutting the fixity of monstrous properties), the fantasy of the islander becomes even more important, because it is an idea of that which is fully materializable, yet fully controllable through extreme discipline. Gonzalo's words allow us to momentarily glimpse the fantasy of the deployable and dispensable native that lurks behind all the confrontations between Caliban, Prospero, and Ariel.

By focusing on the "islander" in *The Tempest*, we resist the logics of mobility driving the plot and instead linger with those marginalized figures who are permanently fixed to landscapes. This

focus allows us to see how literary form is implicated in the construction of racialized ecologies; recovering these constructions requires a reevaluation of the politics of poetics and theatrical form. But this study also invites us to challenge literary and critical histories that obfuscate their own aspirations to mastery through appeals to objectivity and disinterestedness. For instance, Gonzalo embodies, and his speech exemplifies, instruments vital to new historicist scholarship. He is the European traveler who offers to the modern critic an anecdote. Anecdotes were key elements "of a culture's representational technology, mediators between the undifferentiated succession of local moments and a larger strategy toward which they can only gesture" (Greenblatt 3). As we put pressure on Gonzalo's self-interested collapse of race-making and environmental remaking, we also confront how influential scholarship in new historicism has refused to grapple with a "larger strategy" that the mediating anecdote serves—the construction of race as a "*structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences*" (Heng 3). By privileging representational mechanisms and symbolic technologies that document the European's "encounter with difference" through the experience of "intense wonder" (Greenblatt 3, 14), such studies inevitably recuperate the forms of "ravishment" and "ecstatic joy" that undergird colonial and environmental violence (16). To enact more just critical futures, we must avoid temptations: to use the early modern archive to exoticize the racialized other; to center the European writer without acknowledging the racist underpinnings of early modern texts, and instead recognize that these instances are never about the colonized, but about "European representations of the New World" (Greenblatt 7); and to marshal the "representational technology" of early modern European writing to claim one's own access to universal knowledge, so that the archive provides a cover and perpetuates the myth that criticism does not come from a particular place and that critics do not embody particular identities.

Predicated on lack, rather than on extant record, *The Tempest's* "islander" thus exposes

lacunae in our critical approaches that a new historicist study of “wonder” steps in to fill with its own set of meanings, hierarchies, and values. Subsequently, the term *islander*, omnipresent in early modern texts, does not draw the attention of scholars working on language, place, and identity. Reflecting Gonzalo’s usage, *islander* becomes a static—and seemingly value-neutral—signifier of difference. Ecocritical scholarship, for all its focus on relations of humans and nonhumans, likewise seems to have found no resonance in this figure whose ontology is inseparable from their habitat. To confront this linguistic violence that inaugurates both physical and ideological exploitations, we must revisit both how such terms are mobilized in early modern texts and how they continue to escape our interpretive practices. To this end, we must ask not only how the apparatus of narrative, drama, and poetics was complicit in colonial regimes but also how literary histories and critical practices replicate colonial and racial logics. Who gets to tell stories, both in early modern drama and in modern scholarship? Whose lives are narratable? Whose reduced to symbols? And whose erased?

Unlearning Humanism: “Opposite Voices” in Ben Jonson’s *Masque of Queens*

The fleeting figure of the islander in *The Tempest* exemplifies the commonplace linkage of persons to the locales they inhabit. In the broader geography of *The Tempest*’s island, a wetland ecotone affords another link. When Caliban calls on the “wicked dew” of the “unwholesome fen” to punish Prospero (Shakespeare 1.2.324, 25), he not only objects to the conditions of his servitude but also identifies the “fen,” or the wetland, as a site for resisting the mastery that Prospero enacts on him and the island. Similarly, Ben Jonson’s *Masque of Queens* famously opens with an antimasque in which a troop of hags emerge “From the lakes and from the fens, / From the rocks and from the dens” ([2005] lines 60–61) to “overthrow” the pageant of Heroic Virtue and his “white-winged” daughter, Fame (117, 464).

The association of wetlands with stagnation, corruption, and resistant speech and action is widespread in the period, as the uncultivated wilds of the world garnered increasing, often negative, attention. Opening our ears to their resistant utterances can help us trace, as well as challenge, the interlinked forms of ecological and colonial mastery imposed on these spaces and their inhabitants. As Vittoria di Palma notes, “England’s barren and mountainous tracts, and the uncolonized areas of the globe were equally identified as wastelands—a formulation that ultimately was used to legitimize both enclosure and the colonial enterprise” (39). The voices of these howling wildernesses—often represented by a nonnormative figure such as the hag—articulate attitudes that challenge the period’s pervasive calls for agrarian reform, the devaluation and displacement of Indigenous people, and the undermining of local knowledge. Further, they embrace disorder and often refuse to cohere with ideological paradigms, thwarting interpretive practices both then and now.

Jonson’s earlier *Masque of Blackness* establishes a link between racial alterity and terraqueous spaces, as “the Ethiop’s river” Niger (line 91), also called the “orient flood” (78), pays tribute to Oceanus’s “empire” (94). In her reading of this masque, Kim F. Hall demonstrates how James I’s desire to unite England and Scotland, and thus to “efface an entire history of cultural and religious factionalism,” participates in “a larger vision of colonization and assimilation that underlies England’s imperial ambitions” (*Things of Darkness* 124). To this yoking of colonial assimilation and categorical purity we want to add environmental stability. For even as the nascent imperial power turned its conquering eye to the “wastes” of America, it struggled to assimilate both its own “savage” past and its geographically and culturally heterogeneous present. In *The Masque of Queens*, Jonson signals his own part in this struggle when he glosses the witches’ wild origins as “dire, and dismall” places, “the fittest fro[m] whence such persons should come” ([1609] B1r).

The hags’ wetland origins underlie both their moral depravity and their associations with tropes

of darkness (see Korell). They use their occult powers to “set the elements at wars,” creating unwholesome mixtures of day and night, water and earth (Jonson, *Masque of Queens* [2005], line 237). They foul what is good with “rites profane” (249) and invoke spirits to “Darken all this roof / With present fogs. Exhale Earth’s rott’nest vapors” (250–51). Black is both the substance and the product of their incantations, as they chant:

Black go in and blacker come out;
 At thy going down, we give thee a shout.
 Hoo!

 Hoo! Har! Har! Hoo! (323–30)

Such utterances bind the witches’ native habitat to a disordering and self-regenerating darkness that marks them, in their own words, as “faithful opposites to Fame and Glory” (140–41). In his annotation to “*Hoo!*” in the 1609 quarto, Jonson at once expounds on and obfuscates the hags’ disordering potential:

These shouts and clamors, as also the voice *Har. Har.* are very particular with them, by the testimony of *Bodin Remig. Delrio.* and *M. Phil. Ludwigus, Elich.* who out of them reports it, thus. *Tota turba colluviesque pessima fescenninos in honorem Dæmonum cantat obscœnissimos: Hæc canit Har. Har. Illa, Diabolo, Diabole, salta huc, salta illuc; Altera, lude hic, lude illic; Alia, Sabaath, Sabaath, &c. Imò clamoribus, sibilis, ululatibus, popysmis furit, ac debacchatur. . . .*

(*Masque of Queens* [1609] D1r–v)³

Jonson determines that the female utterance “*Hoo. Har. Har. Hoo!*” warrants explication (D1r), but in ascribing meaning to it through a Latin quotation that leaves the syllable “*Har*” still un glossed, he paradoxically withholds meaning. The annotation—that historical cornerstone of humanistic practice with its attendant assumptions about mastery—repeats and literally circumscribes “*Har*” in both English and Latin, restricting any meaning the witches’ shouts might transmit. It thus performs a specific kind of mastery (without actually revealing

the meaning of the utterance) and implicitly assumes a readership that participates equally in that mastery.

While some of the witches’ speech may elude translation, Jonson presents their blackness as conspicuously self-evident. Following Hall, we can read such “conceit[s] of blackness” in court masques with respect to the imperial vision of the early Jacobean moment, where racial difference is produced in the service of patriarchal structures. In *Queens*, the hags’ embodied blackness in the anti-masque upholds the complicated construction of whiteness in the masque proper, through a transnational pantheon of incredibly violent queens. The queens are, of course, voiceless, named in performance only by Heroic Virtue, who pronounces that each be “crowned the choice / Of womankind, and ’gainst all opposite voice / Made good to time” (*Masque of Queens* [2005], lines 413–15). Virtue’s terse descriptions of the queens extol their moral excellence yet elide their individual histories of violence. Only in the author’s paratextual annotations do we find mention of these histories. When Virtue announces “Victorious Thomyris of Scythia,” for instance (404), the performance relies on its audience to infer what Jonson later makes plain. Citing Herodotus and Justinian, he describes how Thomyris avenged her only son’s death by slaughtering Cyrus’s entire army, leaving “not a messenger surviving . . . to report the massacre” (529–30). In addition to eliding the queens’ violence, Virtue’s litany flattens their racial particularities. While the masque’s first audience might recall the Egyptian queen Berenice for her namesake constellation, *Coma Berenices*, they likely did not imagine her famous hair as “fair,” as Virtue suggests (406). As each queen takes her place in the House of Fame, her cultural uniqueness dissolves into the whiteness emblazoned on the figure of Fame, who is “attired in white, with white wings” (451–52).

The assimilation of multinational queens into whiteness relies on two simultaneous gestures: a humanistic gathering of diverse legends from the classical past into a corpus of stories that underwrite whiteness, and the witches’ presentation as dark others, native to the uncultivated spaces that

lie outside the scope of humanist history and therefore excluded from the embodied traditions assembled in the House of Fame. As Katja Pilhuj argues, *Queens* “brings together disparate lands, times, and people into a metaphorical atlas of queenly power over which Anna reigns supreme” (5). Yet Jonson’s selective elaboration of geographic detail disrupts the smooth assimilation of the queens’ particularities to Anna’s supreme authority. Moreover, as Lynn Meskill has proposed, we might also read *Queens* “as a grotesque version of the humanist text and its scholarly gloss,” where marginal descriptions, quotations, and commentary form a “border of *characters* or typographical signs” that mirrors the grotesque elements of the antimasque figured in the hags (120). While the masque as performed reflects the center of power to itself (Goldberg 56–65), the annotated text invites a more critical interrogation of both its and our humanist practices in order to hear the echoes of its opposite voices clearly enough to discover what is left in the wake. “Who is justice for? Humanity alone?” One queen in particular, we propose, suggests a way to answer this question—the one Heroic Virtue calls “The Britain honour, Voadicea” (Jonson, *Masque of Queens* [2005], line 409).

Boadicea was a British queen of the Iceni tribe who led a massive and nearly successful revolt against Roman rule in the first century CE. She was eventually defeated and died from illness or perhaps suicide. Numerous adaptations of this legend appeared in the seventeenth century, including Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher’s *Bonduca*, first performed in 1613. As English writers repeatedly compared the Roman invasion of Britain to English colonial enterprise in North America, “the humanist historiographical revolution” conscripted the figure of Boadicea as an ambiguous symbol of both ancient British savagery and ancient British patriotism (Mikalachki 2). Whereas Jonson’s annotations tend to Latinize the violence of the other queens, his gloss on Boadicea is distinctly vernacular. Jonson first adds to the story of Boadicea’s revolt an uncharacteristic level of geographic detail, noting that the Iceni were “[a]

people that inhabited that part of the island which was called East Anglia, and comprehended *Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridge, and Huntingdon Shires*” (*Masque of Queens* [2005], lines 601–05). Then, before turning to classical sources (Tacitus and Dion), he remarks that “[s]ince she was born here at home, we will first honor her with a home-born testimony; from the grave and diligent *Spenser*” (605–07). By deferring his typical resort to classical texts, and instead quoting from Edmund Spenser’s *Ruins of Time*, Jonson draws specific attention to Boadicea’s “home-grown” status. Boadicea needs no vernacular translation.

The didactic cue for the reader to ponder the geography of East Anglia (among England’s wettest regions), combined with the temporal elision between the ancient “home” of the Iceni and the immediate “here at home,” invites a critical reterritorialization of the figure of Boadicea. Posmentier describes critical reterritorialization as an investigation of the dynamic relationships between text, form, place, and time, showing how, for example, plantation geographies inform figures of cultivation in modern black literature (69–70). What happens when we situate the queen of the Iceni back in the ancestral home that would soon become the target of large-scale drainage projects? What happens when we explore the possibility of her neighborly proximity, or even kinship, to the hags “from the lakes and from the fens”?

Boadicea’s fenland origin, already blackened through its association with the witches, is further racialized by seventeenth-century poets like Michael Drayton, who writes of “infernal Flood[s]” (25.34), “water blacke as *Stix*” (25.86), and “plump thig’d moore[s]” (3.325). Emerging from both Britain’s savage past and the swampy reaches of East Anglia, Boadicea effectively breaks down the rhetorical opposition between the ancient queens and the hags whose utterances suggest alternative modes of community formation, storytelling, and habitation. The masque would seem to leave no place for these alternatives—for female sovereignty, resistance to colonial incursion, or armed refusal of the racialized violence that so

many of the ancient queens suffered. But the text's apparatus for containment is incomplete.

If in performance Jonson's masques relied on their audiences to supply context for various classical allusions, the printed text extravagantly displays the humanistic practices of collection, assimilation, and vernacularization. Jonson's vernacular annotations on the famous Britoness reveal what his erudition elsewhere obscures: geographic specificity, local knowledge, and an embodied sense of history. Likewise, the untranslatability of the syllables "Hoo! Har! Har! Hoo!" exposes how no amount of annotation can fully contain possible meanings. On the one hand, Jonson's scholarly performance prefigures the demonstration of scholarly expertise in our own context, where citational practices can short-circuit more nuanced thought and make certain modes of authority seem value neutral. As Margo Hendricks argues, the "scholarly Whiteness" of the academic footnote "mediates the narrative by insisting on the sanctity of White-centric ideologies, genres, and, of course, the privilege of engagement: who gets cited, who doesn't." On the other hand, his "grotesque" humanistic gestures bring our attention to the limitations of this practice and send us seeking other interpretive strategies.

One such strategy that seems especially apt here is Singh's *dehumanism*: "a practice of recuperation, of stripping away the violent foundations (always structural and ideological) of colonial and neocolonial mastery that continue to render some beings more human than others" (4). Through the wet East Anglian "home" of Jonson's note on Boadicea surge memories of both the hags' "rage and spite" and the queens' racially heterogeneous and antipatriarchal histories. Listening dehumanistically to these opposite voices, we hear, as Audre Lorde says, that "[e]very woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being." And these expressions, we suggest, might help us forge new alliances and clarify visions of a more liberating critical future.

Unlearning Philology: Metaphors of Mastery from Early Modern Recipe Culture

Just as we must look beyond Jonson's humanistic annotations to recover alternative modes of storytelling—for the stories of racial and ecological resistance to colonial violence—so too we must reconsider our approaches to the language of stories that otherwise obscure their racially and ecologically fraught underpinnings. As Katherine McKittrick reminds us, "stories make place," which means that "the metaphoric, allegorical, symbolic, and other devices that shape stories also move us and make place" (*Dear Science* 9). Given this shaping power, too heavy a dependence on metaphoric concepts in the abstract "removes social actors from the production of space and other infrastructure" (10). In this section, we propose that we must unlearn what have long been our traditionally philological approaches to metaphor—as McKittrick puts it, "to take seriously how metaphors are . . . structured by and through . . . the complex groundedness of black life," and to recognize metaphor's extralinguistic material histories (10).

Crucially, when metaphors are "delinked from their material underpinnings or histories," the violence that they can depict "risks being cast and/or read as figurative" (11). For example, Francis Bacon reimagines "Nature" through a metaphor grounded in his assumptions of gendered, racial, and ecological mastery: "Nature" is "constrained and molded by art and human ministry" and thus acquires the persona of a female servant; she "takes orders from man and works under his authority" (191). The metaphoric gendering of "Nature" articulates the human right to environmental domination in the language of sexual violence, ravaging Nature's or the Earth's "womb" for resources and echoing the masculinist desire to reveal the "secrets of women," as Katharine Park has demonstrated (37).

What would happen if we unlearned metaphor—and thereby unlearned the historically philological processes of reading metaphor that elide the violences of their "material and experiential and embodied underpinnings" (McKittrick, *Dear Science* 11)? What if, instead, we attended to those

very real material and embodied underpinnings of the language of, and metaphors for, not only gendered but also racial and ecological mastery? After all, Singh points out that the idea of mastering a body of knowledge cannot be separated from the idea of mastering the body of another person. The language of mastery in early modern knowledge-making—which at its most explicit explained the natural world in metaphors of sexual violence—additionally crept beyond the metaphors used in natural history and natural philosophy into the material practices of recipes and kitchens, in domestic processes often considered to be the purview of English women. Domestic recipe practices, in fact, were already implicated in the enslavement of laborers producing the sugar used in household preserves and confections, as Hall’s powerful work on sugar and empire demonstrates (“Culinary Spaces”). Additionally, early modern English recipe practitioners and consumers were implicated in the desire to consume “difference,” as Gitanjali G. Shahani argues, in forms that included foreign, imported spices as well as imported beverages (2).

In an example that might at first seem innocuous, the recipe, or receipt as it was called in the period, derived its name from the Latin *recipere*, “to receive.” But in its translation into English, the action of the recipe signifies hand in hand with the action, *to take*, which so often appears as the first instruction, and even the first word, of a recipe. The recipe directive “take,” along with its extractive connotations, constructs and rationalizes what Mel Y. Chen calls an “animacy hierarchy, which conceptually arranges human life, disabled life, animal life, plant life, and forms of nonliving material in orders of value and priority” (13). Reading this language through Chen’s engagement of recent debates on race, environment, sexuality, and affect highlights how recipe instructions police the categorical distinctions early modern English culture makes between matter that is considered “insensate, immobile, deathly” and matter that is granted life, animacy, and the purported rights thereof (2).

As Michelle DiMeo and Rebecca Laroche have demonstrated, recipes for an “oil of swallows” were

prevalent in early modern recipe books. Lady Ayscough’s provides a surprisingly violent example, which instructs the practitioner to “[t]ake . . . 16 or 20 young Swallows alive with their feathers” and to “beat those all together till they be Small” (13). The process of “taking” the young swallows and “beating” them yields an expected result: “till they be Small.” But to what, at this point in the process, does the pronoun “they” refer? At what point do the swallows cease being individual swallows and become unrecognizable in their original forms, to be signified in whatever mass has resulted from their having been beaten all together into an abstracted “they” that becomes “small”? We can see at work both the implicit and the explicit ways that the English language demonstrates the slippage of an animacy hierarchy that the recipe instructions betray. The collaborative and egalitarian practices of an early modern culture of recipes are yet complicit in the language that replicates the masterful logic of colonial sciences. Upon a turn of the language, the nonhuman life of the swallows is rendered into an ingredient.

This recipe’s insistence that living and nonliving matter are merely ingredients in the service of another outcome reveals the violence of recipe culture. Some recipes from the period even transform human bodies into insensate ingredients. Metaphors that turn on one such recipe, for a medicine termed *mummy*, were deployed by various early modern English writers. Mummy was a substance made from human material that was extracted, according to early modern English and Continental texts, primarily from bodies found in Syria and Egypt. Mummy, as a medicinal ingredient, was listed and illustrated alongside plants like mint in pre- and early modern botanicals and books of medicinal simples that detailed the various “virtues” of these “natural” ingredients for English and European consumers. As a spectacle of potential cannibalistic violence, mummy therefore was used to particular effect by English writers like John Webster, who in *The White Devil* provides a graphic metaphor of making and extracting mummy from someone’s body, a process that requires the preparer, as Isabella describes,

To dig the strumpet's eyes out, let her lie
 Some twenty months a-dying, to cut off
 Her nose and lips, pull out her rotten teeth,
 Preserve her flesh like mummia, for trophies
 Of my just anger! (2.1.245–49)

In this revenge fantasy, Isabella figuratively kills and processes her husband's mistress, Vittoria, into mummy. Despite the graphic violence of Isabella's "receipt" for dismembering and preserving her sexual rival, an action she claims is "just," her use of mummy as metaphor elides the material history of mummy as the product of racial and ecological violence.

Taking seriously McKittrick's emphasis on the material and embodied underpinnings of the metaphor, however, we can connect the metaphoric violence of Isabella's diatribe to the physical violence to which non-English and non-European bodies were subjected. Webster's passage also has striking echoes of a process for making mummy reported in Samuel Purchas's description of Ethiopia. Like a recipe, it begins with that first direction, to *take*: "take a captive Moor, of the best complexion," and subject "him" to decapitation and mutilation before treating the body with spices (849). The "recipe" here is clearly intended as a spectacle for the European reader's entertainment, rather than a practical guide, but it deploys the recipe's directives for taking and making to position, and normalize, the English and European reader as "master" over the body being made into medicine.

If language "helps to coerce certain figures into nonbeing," as Chen points out, "then what are the modes of revival, return, or rejoinder?" (14). Chen's question prompts us to consider how we might begin to revive black and brown human bodies from their coercion into nonbeing as ingredients in early modern recipe culture. As McKittrick argues, quoting Hortense Spillers, "black people are . . . conceived through 'mythical prepossession'" (*Dear Science* 10):

What happens when we, black people, are read or analyzed as pure metaphor? And what kind of metaphors are we? I suspect, in some cases, we are metaphorically

unliving. In terms of geography, our sense of place is often preconceptualized as dead and dying and this lifelessness extends outward, from that death and deadliness, toward extinction. (10–11)

As we interrogate the animacy hierarchy constructed in the language of early modern English natural philosophy and its resulting recipe culture, we can identify how the collapse of slave, environment, and body within texts perpetuates mastery not only in the practices of scientific knowledge-making but also in the language of literary craft. If a philological focus attends to the history of the language that constructs the ideas that early modern texts describe, what focus might attend to the material underpinnings of that language? Given that the metaphors of science and medicine replicate the practices of mastery in the language of recipes and experimental history, we must seek out an antiracist and ecologically sustaining approach to studying the material behind the metaphor. Such an approach must grapple with the complex relationship between the philological study of language in early knowledge-making and the material practices of European mastery, domination, and subjugation of the natural environment and of racialized "others."

Our work, then, as McKittrick encourages, is to liberate the "recursive logic" that, without care and without justice, attempts to keep "our present normative mode of existence"—our "presently ecocidal and genocidal world"—"as is . . . as normal and unalterable" (*Dear Science* 2). It is also to notice how such a logic gets perpetuated in strictly philological approaches to the early modern texts we read, study, and teach. Our work, ultimately, is to breach that logic. Once again, we must ask, "Who is justice for?" If traditional aspects of philological training have replicated the violences that undergird metaphors and their material histories—precisely by obscuring or leaving those material violences unattended to—we must find possibilities for justice in newer methodologies for our study of language and its ability to shape material realities.

We find helpful models in recent approaches that rethink the philological underpinnings of literary study. For example, Jeffrey Masten draws

critical attention to how philology's "manifold methods and rhetorics of investigation" are "often themselves thoroughly implicated in the languages of sex, gender, and the body" (18). Similarly, as we see it, the rhetorics of traditional philology are implicated in the masterful logics that have justified, and continue to justify, racial and ecological violence. To unlearn philological methods—to unlearn the logics of mastery, white supremacy, settler colonialism, and ecological domination that formed the context of philology's construction as a discipline—we might turn also to critical studies of justice and ways of learning about the possibilities of collectivity. Kyle Whyte, for instance, conceptualizes the "collective continuance" (133) of Indigenous peoples as

an ecological system, of interacting humans, nonhuman beings (animals, plants, etc.) and entities (spiritual, inanimate, etc.), and landscapes (climate regions, boreal zones, etc.) that are conceptualized and operate purposefully to facilitate a collective's (such as an Indigenous people) adaptation to changes. (133–34)

Such a process of rethinking and unlearning also invites us, following Marisa J. Fuentes's charge, to attend to the truths of erasures, dispossessions, and distortions in archival research, troubling "the machinations of archival power" that have silenced enslaved black women and continue to silence marginalized persons in academic research (1). After all, as Singh elaborates, as lifelong learners, teachers, students, and scholars, "[w]e must with increasing urgency revise the very idea of (and the *languages we use to describe*) our work as intellectuals" (9). We must attend to the language we use in our commitments to racial and environmental justice, for it is that language that comprises the metaphors and the stories we tell that shape the material realities, violences, and possibilities of our world.

Unlocking Early Modern Studies

The stories we repeat, teach, and canonize are inherently political. The ways in which we construct

our field matter not only theoretically and methodologically, but also materially. McKittrick attests to this in characterizing her mix of methods, citational practices, and theoretical frameworks as "a series of stories . . . a way to hold on to the rebellious methodological work of sharing ideas in an unkind world" (*Dear Science* 7). Hartman too describes her methodology as an attempt "to exhume the open rebellion from the case file, to untether waywardness, refusal, mutual aid, and free love from their identification as deviance, criminality, and pathology" (*Wayward Lives* xiv). Is it possible to bring such rebellious methodological work—of mixing methods, citational practices, and theoretical frameworks—into early modern ecocriticism and premodern critical race studies? The answer must be yes so that we can begin to approach Leonard's questions—"Who is justice for? Humanity alone?"—with a new set of stories, frameworks, and guiding principles.

Part of our rebellious methodological work brings us back to Patricia J. Williams when she challenges contemporary society to reconceptualize rights. Although Williams does not use the rhetoric of unlearning, she emphasizes that giving rights away will allow us to practice radical equity among peoples and lands. She argues that we can "unlock" rights "from reification by giving them to slaves. Give them to trees. Give them to cows. Give them to history. Give them to rivers and rocks . . . so that we may say not that we own gold but that a luminous golden spirit owns us" (165). For Williams there is no distance between those whom society has dehumanized and the rivers and rocks that are never permitted to escape the rightless position of the object. Perhaps the future of early modern ecocriticism and premodern critical race studies returns us recursively to a black feminist's claims made thirty years ago. We must "wash away the shrouds of inanimate-object status" that cover both the black and brown people who have been denied humanity and justice, and the land that has only ever been objectified by settler colonialism (165).

Our colleague Scott Manning Stevens, a citizen of the Akwesasne Mohawk Nation, recounts his visit to

a university during which he noticed an engraving written above the door to the historic building that housed the geology department. The engraving read, “the control of nature is earned, not given.” The notion of controlling nature, as Stevens expresses, is decidedly a “non-Indigenous thought.” “I know of no Indigenous nation,” Stevens elaborates, “that comes at the relationship to the land, to nature, the distinction between us and nature, [with] that notion of ‘be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over the earth and rule all things’” (00:43:50–44:40). Stevens’s reflection complements Williams’s suggestion that we “unlock” rights to dis sever the association between knowing and mastery, which has been key to ideas of “dominion,” domination, and inherently inequitable hierarchical structures for human animals, nonhuman animals, and the land.

To enact a critical unlearning requires a measure of disorientation: a reformatting of the relationship between ourselves and our objects of study—including texts, histories, and environments—such that we approach them less as objects and more like a dynamic series of events, experiences, and effects. For us, one compelling aspect of the commonality between premodern critical race studies and the environmental humanities is how both demand alternative modes of reckoning time through narrative and memory. In the course of our conversations, we have come to realize that in seeking modes that must be undisciplined and dynamic in order to be liberatory, we have to eschew the totalizing potential that resides within traditional humanistic approaches to the past. We have to resist the lies that get fixed as part of our epistemic heritage. Our ongoing process of unlearning seeks more dynamic, just futures for premodern studies that are methodologically and materially undisciplined.

NOTES

1. For Wynter, see the essays in McKittrick’s edition *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*.

2. Through their collaborations, Rebecca Laroche and Jennifer Munroe have exposed a fundamental tension that underlies post-humanist studies of the natural and material world and

demonstrated how ecofeminist practices can put pressure on ostensibly universal and value-neutral concepts ranging from “Nature” to the “Anthropocene.”

3. The Latin in this passage reads, “The entire crowd and most wicked rabble are singing obscene Fescennine verses in honor of the devils. The crowd chants these things: ‘Har! Har!’ That crowd [chants]: ‘To the devil! Devil, dance here, dance there.’ Another group [chants]: ‘Play here, play there!’ A different group [chants]: ‘Sabbath, Sabbath!’ etc. Indeed, the crowd rages and raves with shouts, hisses, howls, and clucking (with their tongues). . . .” Great thanks to Elizabeth Watkins for this translation.

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Abstract: This essay is born of the belief that racial justice, social justice, and environmental justice are mutually entangled. Despite their shared commitments to justice, early modern ecocriticism and premodern critical race studies have rarely been in conversation with each other. We address this aporia here and ponder how such intersections can create pathways to more inclusive futures for early modern studies, and for literary studies more broadly. We begin with a brief reflection about how we came to these topics; we then turn to literary and critical works that illustrate the interconnectedness of these issues in premodern literature and explore how those connections persist and haunt our own thinking and writing. This essay is not argumentative in the traditional sense, but rather invites our scholarly communities to unlearn our way to different possibilities.