

1623–2023: The First Folio Unbound

A Reckoning With and Within Early Modern Critical Race Studies

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I. “IT IS MY BIRTHDAY”¹

ANNIVERSARIES ARE OCCASIONS FOR CELEBRATION AND COLLECTIVE RECKONING: the quatercentenary of Shakespeare’s First Folio, “The Book that Gave Us Shakespeare,” is no exception to the rule.² “I had thought t’have held it poor, but since my lord / Is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra” (3.13.187–88): following Cleopatra’s lead, we shall celebrate this anniversary in style, bringing all of who we are to the party. When we are being all of who we are, the many threads of our lives are interwoven and anniversaries tend to connect to one another. Thus, for the many US-based Shakespeareans who have been reading and thinking with the landmark *1619 Project* for the past few years of what feels like a continuously worsening situation of racial emergency, the quatercentenary of 1623 can hardly be disentangled from that of 1619. The collaborative *1619 Project*, launched by Nikole Hannah-Jones in *The New York Times* in 2019, takes as its starting point the originary arrival of enslaved Africans in Jamestown and their purchase by white Virginians, and has popularized many key ideas developed in historical scholarship since the 1960s. Its central tenet is that “much about American identity, so many of our nation’s most vexing problems, our basest inclinations, and its celebrated and unique contributions spring not from the ideas of 1776 but from the realities of 1619, from the

¹ William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, 3.13.186. Unless otherwise specified, all Shakespeare quotations are from Stephen Greenblatt, gen. ed., *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2016).

² That title was chosen by the Folger Shakespeare Library for its First Folio tour, which brought the book to all fifty states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico between January 2016 and January 2017: “First Folio! The Book That Gave Us Shakespeare,” *Folgerpedia*, https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/First_Folio!_The_Book_that_Gave_Us_Shakespeare.

contradictions and the ideological struggles of a nation founded on both slavery and freedom.”³

Jamestown marks one of the American sites where Englishness began its colonial passages worldwide, which were quickly to be implicated with white world-making. Back in 1623, Shakespeare’s First Folio opens with, of all plays, *The Tempest*, a fable inspired by William Strachey’s account of the *Sea Venture*’s shipwreck on the island of Bermuda on its way to colonial Virginia—a romantic parable concerned with settler colonialism, racialized indenture, slavery, freedom, and what future world orders might emerge from them in the Atlantic world and beyond. The way in which the First Folio organized Shakespeare’s plays invites us to reckon with its enmeshment in the roots of the US’s ongoing history of racial strife and, by extension, the roots of white supremacy in the global anglosphere. The present anniversary issue of *Shakespeare Quarterly* avails itself of that invitation to think about how 1623 and 1619 are bound together across time. This approach illustrates the methods of the field now known as early modern critical race studies (henceforth EMCRS)—the branch of premodern critical race studies historically rooted in Shakespeare studies that focuses on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This anniversary issue is a celebration of and a reckoning with the current state and future orientation of that field.

II. “IT IS THE CAUSE”⁴

Although EMCRS is a well-established, complex, and dynamic field that has thrived for over sixty years now, its rise to high academic visibility in recent years would not have happened without a series of deliberate infrastructural developments.⁵ These include:

³ Nikole Hannah-Jones, Caitlin Roper, Ilena Silverman, and Jake Silverstein, eds., *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* (New York: One World, 2021), xliii.

⁴ William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*, 5.2.1.

⁵ The history of the field from 1965 onward is retraced in Peter Erickson and Kim F. Hall, “‘A New Scholarly Song’: Rereading Early Modern Race,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 67.1 (2016): 1–13. Erickson and Hall sketch a historiography of the field in three waves from 1965 to 2016 (3–4). Rather than repeating what they explained about the history of the field, the risk of depoliticization it faced back in 2016, or their final word on old disciplinary demons such as the fruitless and now-defunct “anachronism debate,” or the question of race’s “fluidity” in premodern times, I urge readers to return to Erickson and Hall’s luminous piece, which *Shakespeare Quarterly* has made freely accessible for consultation on the occasion of the present issue’s publication. For more on the historiography of the field from the vital perspective of the second wave, see also Francesca T. Royster, “The ‘End of Race’ and the Future of Early Modern Cultural Studies,” *Shakespeare Studies* 26 (1998): 59–69, and Peter Erickson, “The Moment of Race in Renaissance Studies,” *Shakespeare Studies* 26 (1998): 27–36. Many of the priorities guiding recent infrastructural developments are discussed in Kimberly Anne Coles, Kim F. Hall, and Ayanna Thompson, “BlackKKKShakespearean: A Call to Action for Medieval and Early Modern

- RB4R. The RaceB4Race research collective, first convened at Arizona State University by Ayanna Thompson in 2019, has been a transformative catalyst.⁶ Having received a \$3.5 million collaborative cross-institutional grant from the Mellon Foundation in 2021, RB4R has launched several initiatives beyond its signature series of symposia. Those initiatives include the Mentoring Network initiative, the First and Second Book Institutes (both directed by Patricia Akhimie), postdoctoral fellowships focused on the creation of premodern critical race curricula and anti-racist social media content, and the launch of workshops (directed by Dorothy Kim) preparing scholars for the risks of being public intellectuals. Farah Karim-Cooper has played a crucial role in extending the activities and spirit of RB4R to the UK, for instance with the Early Modern Scholars of Color Network.⁷
- Designation. At a RaceB4Race symposium hosted by the Folger Shakespeare Library also in 2019, Margo Hendricks produced another key piece of infrastructure by retroactively giving a name to a field that started reading itself as a field in the mid-1990s: premodern critical race studies (hereafter PCRS). *What's in a name?* For a field in expansion, a whole lot. A recognizable name, like a flag, is a precious tool that enables scholars to find their way into that field, as they work their way through bibliographies, book reviews, or social media posts. In contrast to race-centric scholarship (or premodern race studies sans critique), PCRS, "as part of the larger critical race theory practice and practices, actively pursues not only the study of race in the premodern . . . but the way those studies can effect a transformation of the academy and its relationship to our world."⁸ While different EMCRS scholars will bring different conceptual, focal, and substantive inflections to their working definitions of the field, Hendricks usefully

Studies," *Profession*, 2019, <https://profession.mla.org/blackkkshakespearean-a-call-to-action-for-medieval-and-early-modern-studies/>.

⁶ "RaceB4Race," Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, <https://acmrs.asu.edu/RaceB4Race>. In her essay in this volume, Jennifer Park discusses some of those initiatives in greater detail. Also notable is RaceB4Race's call to action against gatekeeping in academic publishing, which has been heeded by many journals in the humanities, including *Shakespeare Quarterly*. See "It's Time to End the Publishing Gatekeeping!: A Letter from RaceB4Race Executive Board," *Medium*, <https://medium.com/the-sundial-acmrs/its-time-to-end-the-publishing-gatekeeping-75207525f587>. The author wishes to disclose here, in the interest of transparency, that she was a RaceB4Race executive board member until April 2023.

⁷ "Anti-Racist Advocacy," Early Modern Scholars of Colour, <https://www.emsoc.co.uk/>.

⁸ Margo Hendricks, "Coloring the Past, Rewriting Our Future: RaceB4Race," Folger Shakespeare Library, September 2019, <https://www.folger.edu/institute/scholarly-programs/race-periodization/margo-hendricks>. Hendricks further developed some of the points made in her keynote in an article: "Coloring the Past, Considerations on Our Future: RaceB4Race," *New Literary History* 52.3–4 (2021): 365–84.

insisted on a shared, nonnegotiable political ethos for EMCRS, derived from EMCRS's foundational inscription within critical race studies at large.⁹ Here is what it means concretely: to be an EMCRS scholar requires treating race not solely as an interesting intellectual object but as a systemic lived reality that, in a global age of white supremacy, permeates *every* aspect of *everybody's* life, including the conditions in which we produce and receive scholarship. Expertise concerning the key features of the field (its history, critical race theory frameworks, methodologies, and critical genealogies) is necessary but not sufficient to support a sound EMCRS praxis: for EMCRS scholars, especially (but not exclusively) white ones, may neither ignore their own positionality nor forget the active political terrain in which their work is always already implicated.

- Community-building digital infrastructures. The ShakeRace listserv, Slack spaces, and Twitter all have, within the limits inherent in each platform, helped consolidate and expand the EMCRS community by providing spaces that can fuel productive conversations across geographic borders, institutional partitions, and career-stage separations. Those spaces are particularly known to have increased the visibility of early career scholars.
- Research opportunities. New book series have emerged (such as Penn Press's "Critical Race Studies of the Premodern" in 2021), while established book series have sought to commission volumes on EMCRS, and several edited volumes have striven, more or less felicitously, to include essays on race.¹⁰ Special issues dedicated to EMCRS in journals such as *Renaissance Quarterly*, *New Literary History*, *postmedieval*, *Literary Compass*, and *Journal of American Studies*, as well as *Shakespeare Quarterly* with this anniversary

⁹ "Critical race studies" designates the rich interdisciplinary body of work that has mobilized key concepts and formulations devised by critical race theorists since the 1990s. Critical race theory (CRT), a movement in legal studies, was founded as an offshoot of what had been known since the mid-1970s as "critical legal theory." CRT is premised upon the idea that the law is not neutral and instead supports the interests of those who make it, highlighting the role that race specifically plays in the legal apparatus. It emerged in the 1980s, when law professors of color and a handful of allies noticed that the civil rights movement had fallen short of its objective, in that racial discrimination and inequality had remained in place. They decided to examine the ways in which the law, hitherto conceived as the great force of equalization in American society, participated and still participates in the furthering of the status quo. Building on the pioneering work of Derrick A. Bell, Richard Delgado, and Alan David Freeman, key legal scholars including Kimberlé Crenshaw, Mari Matsuda, Cheryl I. Harris, and Patricia Williams have developed an influential field of inquiry.

¹⁰ On the dangers of the tokenistic practice of inserting race essays into volumes at the last minute, see Kim F. Hall's comment in "Race in Dialogue: Kim Hall and Noémie Ndiaye," Newberry Center for Renaissance Studies, November 13, 2020, interview streamed on YouTube, starting around 0:45:45, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ys2VBTgpyNs>.

issue, participate in that dynamic. Similarly, the Newberry Library and the Folger Shakespeare Library have committed to platforming EMCRS scholarship, while organizations such as the Shakespeare Association of America, the Renaissance Society of America, and—more recently—the British Shakespeare Association and the European Shakespeare Research Association have sought to make their programming more inclusive of EMCRS.¹¹

- Jobs. Although hiring trends can hardly elicit enthusiasm given the catastrophic general disappearance of tenure-track jobs on the one hand and the poor retention and promotion rates for BIPOC faculty at predominantly white institutions on the other, over the past few years, more and more departments seeking to hire scholars of early modern literature and culture have explicitly targeted EMCRS expertise.

While we should maintain a healthy skepticism toward institutions' commitments to any field founded on ideals of and demands for social justice, it seems fair to say that the structural conditions are met for EMCRS's spectacular growth to continue. Thus, the time is right for Shakespeare studies to reckon with the profoundly beneficial transformations it owes to EMCRS, and for EMCRS to reckon internally with its priorities. To what uses do we want to put the relatively favorable current conditions of the field?

In their introduction to a 2016 special issue of *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Peter Erickson and Kim F. Hall delineated a new critical direction with seven focal areas in which they wished to see the field grow over the next ten years, and that roadmap provides useful coordinates for assessing our current location, seven years later.¹² I will return shortly to the important work that remains to be done and that urgently demands our attention, but let me begin on a positive note. The most exciting news is that Erickson and Hall's overarching concern with what they perceived seven years ago as the risk of "loss of concentrated collective energy and, in particular, a specific curtailment or abandonment of political focus" has been heard loud and clear across the board.¹³ Indeed, of the seven

¹¹ The Folger Shakespeare Library hosted a series of "Critical Race Conversations" in 2020–2021 and has provided material support for the RB4R symposia on multiple occasions. "Critical Race Conversations," Folger Shakespeare Library, <https://www.folger.edu/critical-race-conversations>. In 2020, the Newberry Library launched its ongoing interdisciplinary series "Race in Dialogue," <https://www.newberry.org/calendar/race-in-dialogue>; it held workshops on PCRS in 2020 and 2021; and in fall 2023 it is hosting an exhibition titled *Seeing Race Before Race* curated by the present essay's author, available at <https://www.newberry.org/calendar/seeing-race-before-race>.

¹² Erickson and Hall, "A New Scholarly Song," 5–10.

¹³ Erickson and Hall, "A New Scholarly Song," 4.

focal areas they mentioned, the call to develop early modern critical whiteness studies—what Arthur L. Little, Jr., describes as the study of the “long and complicated history of white racial assemblaging, that is, the coming together, crisscrossing, clashes, infusions, and confusions, of various modalities and heterogeneous ideas, images, genres, genealogies, terms, elements, inter alia, to make something we can identify as ‘white people,’ something we can claim to be a thing of whiteness”—has been the most heeded so far.¹⁴ This important development is to be understood in its broader political context—particularly in relation to the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd in the summer of 2020, the national and global civil unrest under the aegis of Black Lives Matter that these murders precipitated, and the attempted coup of January 6, 2021.¹⁵ As the urgency of the threat that white nationalists pose to the safety of the nation as a whole and the lethal dimension of unexamined whiteness have finally become impossible to ignore, EMCRS scholars have increasingly drawn on the rich theoretical resources of critical whiteness studies to unearth the roots of the dangerous fiction that is racial whiteness.¹⁶ For instance, as the essays in this issue show in their frequent invocation of the term, the notion of “white property” put forth by critical race theorist Cheryl I. Harris has become part of a shared critical vocabulary.¹⁷ Harris demonstrates that white identity, historically construed as and through the allocation of specific property rights in American law, has survived the overturning of legal segregation as a structure of thought

¹⁴ Erickson and Hall, “A New Scholarly Song,” 7. Arthur L. Little, Jr., “Is It Possible to Read Shakespeare through Critical White Studies?,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2021), 268–80, 271. The roots of early modern critical whiteness studies were laid out in Kim F. Hall, “These Bastard Signs of Fair’: Literary Whiteness in Shakespeare’s Sonnets,” in *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, ed. Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin (London: Routledge, 1998), 64–68, and in Francesca T. Royster, “White-limed Walls: Whiteness and Gothic Extremism in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 51.4 (2000): 432–55, but recent and forthcoming work by Arthur L. Little, Jr., Ian Smith, Urvashi Chakravarty, Miles P. Grier, Ambereen Dadabhoy, Katherine Gillen, Jamie Paris, David Sterling Brown, Melissa E. Sanchez, and Christine Varnado, among others, promises to take that field further.

¹⁵ The movements of global solidarity that followed the murder of George Floyd that summer—in Amsterdam, Tunis, Tokyo, Seoul, London, Rio de Janeiro, Madrid, Pretoria, Rome, Sydney—often brought to light forms of anti-Black racism specific to the countries that produced them. I discuss the French case in detail in Noémie Ndiaye, *Scripts of Blackness: Early Modern Performance Culture and the Making of Race* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2022), 15–16.

¹⁶ Classics of modern critical whiteness studies include, among others, Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997); Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (London: Verso, 1994); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, eds., *Critical White Studies: Looking Behind the Mirror* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1997); and, more recently, Robin J. DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2018).

¹⁷ Cheryl I. Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 106.8 (1993): 1707–91.

anchoring white privilege to this day. The notion of “white property” is thus a powerful illustration of—and key tool for disrupting—the insidious ideological efficiency of unexamined racialized whiteness.

While salutary, the ongoing development of early modern critical whiteness studies is a necessary-but-not-sufficient condition for early modern critical race studies to reach its full potential.¹⁸ Simply put, it can very productively permeate but not substitute for research designed to enrich the field of EMCRS with new archives, whether their novelty concerns language (yielding fresh transnational and comparative insights), medium (yielding fresh insights into print, visual, musical, choreographic, and other sensory regimes of racialization), or the recovery of a more diverse European past (yielding fresh insights into the underexplored lives of premodern Europeans and Westerners of color). Let me insist upon the first area in particular: early modern racial formations were transnational and intercolonial in nature, emerging from collaborations, frictions, and circulations between various European and non-European cultures, which means that transnational and comparative methodologies are not a luxury but a necessity in EMCRS. And yet, too rare are the scholars and projects rooted in English studies that venture beyond English or anglophone early modern archives. Deconstructing whiteness or focusing on Shakespeare and the multifaceted question of social justice requires radical perspectival shifts, courage, and cutting-edge theoretical tool kits.¹⁹ What those projects do not necessarily require, however, are the significant material resources—that is, time and funding—necessary to the slow archival research and linguistic acquisition required to explore the other focal areas that actually came first on Erickson and Hall’s roadmap seven years ago: transnational and comparative EMCRS, interdisciplinary EMCRS, and the mining of untapped archival repositories of early modern racialized lives. This has left our field impoverished, and the structural reasons behind such impoverishment are clear: we know all too well that time and funding are in short supply in our age of tenure-track job scarcity, pandemic exhaustion, and general defunding of the humanities. While fixing the broken state of neoliberal academia at large is beyond the ambition of this essay, practical strategies to counter its stunting effect on EMCRS’s development in transnational, comparative, interdisciplinary, and fresh archival directions can and must be envisioned.

¹⁸ The same comment applies to early modern critical whiteness studies’ twin subfield, “Shakespeare and social justice,” which was also hailed by Erickson and Hall in 2016.

¹⁹ See for instance David Ruiter, ed., *The Arden Research Handbook of Shakespeare and Social Justice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020); Hillary Eklund and Wendy Beth Hyman, eds., *Teaching Social Justice through Shakespeare: Why Renaissance Literature Matters Now* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2019).

Together with early modern critical whiteness studies and “Shakespeare and social justice,” Shakespeare performance studies have emerged as another dynamic EMCRS subfield—despite the widespread theater closures during the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. This subfield, which came into being in the wake of the foundational work done in the first decade of the twenty-first century by Ayanna Thompson on race in contemporary Shakespeare performance, has benefited from movements toward racial justice within the theater industry itself—movements best exemplified by the statement “Dear White American Theatre” collectively crafted by hundreds of BIPOC theater-makers across the US in the wake of the civil unrest in the summer of 2020.²⁰ In the domain of Shakespeare performance specifically, the conversations started by Keith Hamilton Cobb around the *American Moor* project in 2013 (yet another important anniversary) are bearing fruit, as Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company in the UK, The Public Theater in the US, and the Stratford Festival in Canada—among other notable classical theater companies—are now launching new initiatives.²¹ Scholarly events such as the Huntington Library’s “Imagining Shakespeare in 2050: Performance and Archives” (November 2022) focus on the fruitful changes that might emerge from the mutual imbrication of Shakespeare performance studies and the theater

²⁰ “Dear White American Theater,” We See You, White American Theater, <https://www.weseeyouwat.com/statement>. For Thompson’s foundational work, see Ayanna Thompson, ed., *Colorblind Shakespeare: New Perspectives on Race and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

²¹ Keith Hamilton Cobb, “American Moor,” <https://americanmoor.com/>. Cobb discusses his project at length in “Black Baroque Visiting Artist Interviews: Keith Hamilton Cobb,” University of Chicago, April 28, 2021, interview streamed on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20TKzjqPmZw>. Farah Karim-Cooper discusses in detail the various initiatives of the Globe Theatre (such as the annual “Shakespeare and Race” symposium launched in 2017 and the development of free “Antiracist Shakespeare” webinars in partnership with Cambridge University Press in 2021) in “Bringing Premodern Critical Race Consciousness to Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre,” in *Seeing Race Before Race: Visual Culture and the Racial Matrix in the Premodern World*, ed. Noémie Ndiaye and Lia Markey (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS Press, 2023), <https://asu.pressbooks.pub/seeing-race-before-race/chapter/note-from-the-field-3-bringing-premodern-critical-race-consciousness-to-shakespeares-globe/>. “Developing a diverse talent base” and “ensuring fairer access to and representation across the performing arts sector” now constitute some of the Royal Shakespeare Company’s official priorities as a newly formed Independent Research Organisation (IRO): “AHRC and Royal Shakespeare Company Announce Research Collaboration,” UK Research and Innovation, October 13, 2021, <https://www.ukri.org/news/ahrc-and-royal-shakespeare-company-announce-research-collaboration/>. The Public Theater’s “Anti-Racism and Cultural Transformation Plan” is available here: The Public, February 22, 2023, <https://publictheater.org/news-items/anti-racism-cultural-transformation-plan/anti-racism-cultural-transformation-plan/>. The Stratford Festival’s action plan is available here: “Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Update,” Stratford Festival, <https://www.stratfordfestival.ca/LandingPages/Anti-Racism>.

industry across the Atlantic.²² The circumstances surrounding the rise of EMCRS-oriented Shakespeare performance studies, like those surrounding the rise of early modern critical whiteness studies and “Shakespeare and social justice” as vibrant EMCRS subfields over the past seven years, are important reminders that no matter what roadmaps we may tentatively lay out for the field, in actuality, EMCRS will always grow in symbiosis with a political and institutional ecosystem that largely exceeds the scope of academia.

Until that complex ecosystem avails us of more material resources—of more funding for English studies scholars desirous to pick up linguistic skills and to do onsite archival work at any stage of their careers—I contend that the only way to mend the current two-speed nature of EMCRS’s growth and to secure its vital expansion in transnational, comparative, and interdisciplinary directions is to radically open the field’s infrastructure to scholars—especially early career scholars—trained in different languages and disciplines. Here are a few practical strategies we might envision to ensure the continued growth and necessary expansion of EMCRS:

- Those of us who teach EMCRS courses can recruit pre-modernist undergraduate and graduate students outside of English departments and make ourselves available to them as potential instructors and dissertation committee members. Indeed, those students might not be able to find EMCRS mentorship in their own humanities programs, given how little traction critical race studies still have in most of our cognate disciplines (with a few notable exceptions, such as early modern Iberian and colonial Latin American studies).²³
- Those of us who have the opportunity to either edit EMCRS collections or guest-edit EMCRS special issues of journals whose focus is not exclusively anglophone per their mission statement can ensure that 50 percent of the contributions come from scholars whose work falls outside of the English discipline traditionally defined, using their platforms as incubators for comparative and interdisciplinary thinking.
- Those of us who have tenure, regardless of specialization, can work within our home English departments to re-valorize the egregiously underestimated intellectual value of translation work both for doctoral dissertation projects and for the purposes of faculty hiring, appointment, tenure, and promotion. More comparative and transnational EMCRS work could be done if more

²² “Imagining Shakespeare in 2050: Performance and Archives,” Huntington Library, <https://huntington.org/imagining-shakespeare>.

²³ The recent spurt of race-focused scholarship in early modern Hispanic and Latin American studies is an exciting development, and it is urgent for EMCRS to foster conversations with those scholars and to work through differences in critical vocabularies to find our similarities.

translations were available to EMCRS scholars, and more scholars would produce such translations if that intellectual labor were recognized by their employers for what it is: analytical, critical, original, vital.

- Those of us who participate regularly or occasionally in reading groups, workshops, seminars, or conferences that have a stated interest in EMCRS can urge conveners to find and invite interested early modernists beyond the US, the UK, and Canada to join the group, at least for online sessions. Indeed, early career researchers outside of Anglo-American/Canadian academia are often isolated in their EMCRS interests and would benefit from joining a global, even if virtual, EMCRS community. In turn, those scholars would be particularly well positioned to expand EMCRS in new and comparative, transnational, archival, and theoretical directions that we cannot anticipate.

These goals are achievable and will ensure that EMCRS becomes in the near future what its own nature demands that it be: the premier force for transnational thinking in Shakespeare studies.

While the heavy intergenerational collective labor that has powered the favorable infrastructural developments of EMCRS over the past seven years might not always be visible, the opportunities it has yielded are visible, in particular to the many graduate students who now feel empowered by the field and compelled by the political crises of our era to pursue their interest in the exploration of pre-modern racial formations. This is a moment of unprecedented potential growth for EMCRS, which means a moment when the field has to welcome newcomers willing to do the rigorous intellectual work indispensable to being in conversation and in community with EMCRS scholars, even as it wards off opportunistic attempts at both co-opting the recognition that it has earned and erasing its true critical genealogies.²⁴ Indeed, those newcomers' own expertise will ultimately diversify the field intellectually and enrich us all, ensuring the growth of EMCRS in those new comparative, transnational, and fresh archival directions in which it has, over the past seven years, simply missed the mark. Being in conversation and in community with EMCRS scholars is a slow, demanding, and often humbling process, especially for scholars who enter that process after (sometimes long after) completing their own graduate training. My hope is that more resources will become available to guide newcomers and allies. In the meantime, a good

²⁴ Those attempts, which often seek to reanimate defunct debates, are colloquially known as "Columbusing" the field. Margo Hendricks discusses the Columbusing of premodern race studies in "Coloring the Past," 369. So does Vanessa Corredera in "Where Are We in the Melody of the New Scholarly Song? A Reflection on the Present and Future of Shakespeare and Race," *Exemplaria: A Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 33.2 (2021): 184–96, 185.

starting point might be to articulate clearly and generously what binds EMCRS together.

III. "LET HIM LOOK TO HIS BOND"²⁵

Like all the essays in this anniversary issue, this introduction has a keyword, for we are availing ourselves, as Shakespeareans have done for the past four centuries, of all that the First Folio will give us. Indeed, the conceit of this anniversary issue is that the keywords we typically use to ask questions about the First Folio can also help us ask good questions about our field at large. This means that each featured essay tackles one of the key concepts at the core of our understanding of the First Folio and uses it to illuminate the current state of EMCRS within the ecology of Shakespeare studies. To illuminate the present, this anniversary issue uses the seasoned tools of Williamsian keywords, those "significant, binding words in certain activities and their interpretation" that are "indicative words in certain forms of thought." The present collection of EMCRS essays returns to Raymond Williams's sense that "certain uses bound together certain ways of seeing culture and society[;] . . . certain other uses seemed to me to open up issues and problems, in the same general area, of which we all needed to be very much more conscious," but replaces "culture and society" with "Shakespeare studies and our discipline."²⁶ This return to seasoned tools is combined with a concern for the present state of the field and a keen interest in its future, made manifest by the fact that all the essays featured in this anniversary issue are authored by early career EMCRS scholars who are about to publish or have just published their first monograph.

The keyword that I use here to chart the course of EMCRS in our moment is "BINDING" and its cognates. This is of course a playful reference to the materiality of the First Folio as the first book to bind together what was considered at the time to be Shakespeare's complete works. The metaphor has much to offer. As Emma Smith reminds us, "most copies of the First Folio were probably sold at Edward Blount's print shop in St Paul's Churchyard unbound."²⁷ New owners could thus choose among various binding options, making "the book's first binding . . . an act of customization to the buyer's specifications."²⁸ In other words, binding was always a personal choice, an investment, an emotionally

²⁵ William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, in Stephen Greenblatt, gen. ed., *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 3.1.38–39.

²⁶ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 1985), 15.

²⁷ Emma Smith, *Shakespeare's First Folio: Four Centuries of an Iconic Book* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2016), 288.

²⁸ Smith, *Shakespeare's First Folio*, 290.

charged way of laying claim and connecting to the Shakespearean corpus—and, as we contemplate what binds the field of EMCRS together, those notions remain at the forefront.

What is our bond in the field of EMCRS? A shared project to elucidate early modern racial formations in their literary and cultural manifestations around the globe, and to elucidate them simultaneously in their own historical terms and in conversation with our own times—from which any attempt to extract ourselves is futile at best, disingenuous at worst. This sophisticated way of navigating historicity constitutes what we may call the virtuous double temporal bind of EMCRS.

We are also bound by a shared intellectual genealogy that acknowledges our debt to the previous generations of EMCRS scholars who have worked hard to build this field since the 1990s. Dozens (note insistence on the plural form) of scholars have produced brilliant paradigm-shifting work: reading, citing, and building upon that work in all its variety is how we honor a bond that is both a debt to past scholarship and a promise to future generations of scholars.²⁹

Along the same lines, we are bound together by a shared map of cognate and adjacent fields upon which EMCRS has historically drawn for theoretical resources and with which it has always been in conversation: namely Black and Africana studies, postcolonialism, feminism, Black feminism, historical materialism, and critical race theory. That map is dynamic and grows over time as it also includes, in 2023, the more recent fields with which EMCRS is bound to be intimately in conversation from now on: those include, primarily, critical Indigenous (CI) studies, trans studies, queer studies, and disability studies.³⁰ Indeed, while

²⁹ A good starting place to take the full measure of the variety of the scholarship produced to this day in EMCRS is the annotated #ShakeRace bibliography launched by Hannah Ehrenberg with input from Kim F. Hall and Peter Erickson for the 2015 Shakespeare Association of America seminar “Early Modern Race/Ethnic/Diaspora Studies,” and collectively updated ever since: “Early Modern Race/Ethnic/Indigenous Studies: A (crowdsourced) Annotated Bibliography,” https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AaMp1a8y715FklUq1x5scqBHYS9QpzvMzgYU_ZyFow/edit.

³⁰ On the need for sustained conversations and mutual acknowledgment between EMCRS and critical Indigenous studies, see Kim F. Hall, Scott Manning Stevens, and L. Lehua Yim’s “On Critical Indigenous Studies and Early Modern Critical Race Studies,” in *Seeing Race Before Race*, <https://asu.pressbooks.pub/seeing-race-before-race/back-matter/on-critical-indigenous-studies-and-early-modern-critical-race-studies-a-tri-interview/>. On the importance of EMCRS methodologies to early modern trans studies, see Simone Chess, Colby Gordon, and Will Fisher, “Introduction: Early Modern Trans Studies,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 19.4 (2019): 1–25, 3–5. In spring 2023, the Folger Shakespeare Library’s “Global Early Modern Trans Studies” symposium “consider[ed] the intersections of early modern trans studies and early modern race studies in a global context.” At the intersection of queer studies and EMCRS, Ian Smith, Melissa E. Sanchez and Abdulhamit Arvas are showing us the way. Promising critical intersections with disability studies include, for instance, Justin Shaw, “Rub Him about the Temples’: Othello, Disability, and the Failures of Care,” *Early Theatre* 22.2 (2019): 171–83.

interfaces with other critical paradigms (such as ecocriticism) also promise exciting developments, early modern CI, trans, queer, and disability studies share with EMCRS a clear political investment in liberation projects twinned with an aspiration, as analytics, to exceed identity politics narrowly defined; these self-conscious commonalities have established precious affinities.³¹ From the perspective of EMCRS, this is what we might call the neighborly care of the field, or its investment in cultivation at the site of its boundaries.

Finally, we are bound by a shared political commitment to interrogate the structures of production in which EMCRS operates within neoliberal academia, and to disseminate EMCRS knowledge beyond a small number of experts through the various platforms we may have at our disposal. This is EMCRS's binding commitment to put pressure on its own institutionally defined structural bounds.

In the First Folio, Shakespeare deploys the term "binding" in a manner that reminds us simultaneously of the human bondage that *The 1619 Project* takes as its starting point and of the notion of repair attached to that lexeme in early modernity. That ambivalence is particularly visible in *King John*, where the grieving and disheveled Constance, in response to the French King's injunction to "bind" her hair, states that when she unbound it, she wished that her hands

". . . could so redeem my son,
As they have given these hairs their liberty!"
But now I envy at their liberty,
And will again commit them to their bonds,
Because my poor child is a prisoner.
[*She binds up her hair.*]³²

Binding is simultaneously caught in epistemologies of violence and repair for Constance and for many others. Indeed, when Richard III starts out of his

³¹ Chess, Gordon, and Fisher explain particularly well what narrowly defined identity politics means, with the example of trans studies: "Early modern trans studies might take its cues from the development of trans studies itself. The first iteration of the field, what Susan Stryker and Aren Aizura call 'Trans Studies 1.0,' formulated 'the kind of identity politics necessary to gain speaking positions within discourse' (3). As the discipline has developed and expanded, however, it has moved away from a strict ethnographic focus on identity, subjectivity, and personal narrative. 'Trans Studies 2.0' has more readily embraced theoretical approaches that thread explorations of trans embodiment into animal studies, disability studies, biopolitics, phenomenology, affect studies, ecocriticism, critical race studies, indigenous studies, and posthumanism, among others"; "Introduction: Early Modern Trans Studies," 3; quoting Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura's introduction to their edited volume, *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

³² William Shakespeare, *King John*, 3.4.69, 71–75.

dreamed-of battle screaming, in a prophetic manner, “Bind up my wounds!” (5.3.175), he reminds us of the healing potentiality of binding as a medical act. Similarly, Richard II’s wise gardener knows that binding up “yond dangling apri-cots / Which like unruly children make their sire / Stoop with oppression of their prodigal weight” is the way to restore the garden and, by extension, the kingdom from their pitiful state of neglect (3.4.29–31); and Desdemona is hopeful that she can cure Othello’s metaphorical “pain upon [his] forehead” when she entreats “Let me but bind it hard, within this hour / It will be well” (3.3.282, 284–85).

Of course, in all those examples, the healing expected from the act of “binding up” never materializes. Richard II’s garden might bloom when he is deposed, but in the logic of history plays, the nation’s healing is always temporary; Richard III dies on the battlefield; Desdemona fails to cure Othello of his delusions of cuck-oldry. The hope that “binding (up)” might lead to healing is thus, in the Shakespearean corpus, repeatedly crushed by the world, even as it stubbornly reemerges at critical junctures when tragedy can still be avoided. In that sense, the keyword speaks to the critical affect that binds EMCRS together as a field that attends to vast early modern epistemologies of bondage that have a transhis-torical reach without any naïveté about the state of the world in which it oper-ates, but without ever losing hope either.

IV. “THEN I WILL BEGIN”³³

The essays in this anniversary issue show that “the fourth wave” of EMCRS that Peter Erickson and Kim F. Hall wished for in 2016 has arrived. Collectively, these essays seek to dismantle what Ambereen Dadabhoy has felici-tously called “the unbearable whiteness” of Shakespeare and Shakespeare studies by grappling with a common set of thorny issues—including Shakespeare’s pre-sumed universality, anti-racist pedagogy, and our field’s dynamic genealogies, present(s), and futures.³⁴ They do so through methodological lenses influenced by EMCRS’s vibrant set of cognate and adjacent fields, as well as by book his-tory, comparative literature, intellectual history, and critical university studies.

Working with the keyword “PUBLICATION,” Brandi K. Adams takes the striking rhetoric of enslavement that George Wither used in 1624 to denounce what he saw as the excessive power of booksellers over books and over other members of the publishing trade as an invitation to reflect on early modern book-sellers’ and publishers’ contribution to English racial formations. Focusing on the

³³ William Shakespeare, *The Most Lamentable Tragedy of Titus Andronicus*, 5.1.70.

³⁴ Ambereen Dadabhoy, “The Unbearable Whiteness of Being (in) Shakespeare,” *postme-dieval* 11.2–3 (2020): 228–35.

First Folio publishers' transformation of Shakespeare, via its prefatory materials, into a "human-book," a vendible commodity soon to become white property, Adams traces the resurgence of that logic in the "rhetoric of capture, prize-winning, and conquest" pervasively used to lament or celebrate the massive purchases of First Folios by American collectors around the book's 1923 tercentenary. Indeed, at that time, the perceived Americanization of the First Folio started destabilizing long-entrenched ideas about who could own and study it, a destabilization that spoke, in particular, to Black Americans whose "connection to Shakespeare, his writing, and the material book" is evidenced by his "persistent cultural imprint in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Black newspapers, which also occasionally featured stories concerning the sales of 1623 Shakespeare Folios." Book historical approaches to the First Folio must, Adams argues, reckon from now on with those long-neglected Shakespearean archives created by Black Americans. Studying the First Folio's tercentenary celebrations thus invites us to think proactively about all the kinds of shifts and destabilizations that we want the quatercentenary celebrations to orchestrate.

Emily Weissbourd's essay offers a fundamental destabilization of Anglo-centric readings of Shakespeare. Thinking with the keyword "FOUNDATION," Weissbourd unpacks the First Folio's paratext to show that the foundational status that it conferred upon Shakespeare in relation to the English canon relies on a paradox: the explicit myth of Shakespeare's universality derives its real power from its implicit pairing with racialized Englishness, which expanded with Britain's growing imperial power into "transnational whiteness." The jingoistic racialization of Shakespeare as English-and-thus-white in the First Folio's paratext, which compensates for Shakespeare's plebeian origins, Weissbourd shows, actually operates in striking isolation from the cosmopolitan world of his plays and from the transnational European network of textual transmission that constitutes the true foundation of a corpus less interesting for its "universal" themes than for "Shakespeare's dense and specific observations of the world he himself moved through." Ultimately, Weissbourd offers strategies to help us resist both the urge to imitate the First Folio's jingoistic framing and the temptation of easy universalism in our own pedagogical practices, and she offers a queer reconceptualization of Shakespeare as *fundament*—that is, "as a site of *reception* of a range of transnational texts, histories, and afterlives as well as a site of origin, creation, and mastery."

Focusing on the keyword "INSTITUTION," Urvashi Chakravarty also mines the paratext of the First Folio to excavate the work of institutionalization that it does around the figure of Shakespeare. She then takes that work as a cipher to understand how institutions at large function and to grasp the fictions upon which they rely. "The paradox of the institution," she argues, "is that it

appears to be driven by historical self-sufficiency even as it relies for its very survival on strategies of succession that masquerade as parthenogenesis and on fictions of the past that secure selected racial futures." Showing how inheriting Shakespeare (a notion Chakravarty approaches with a queer analytic shared with Weissbourd) is framed along racialized lines and illusions of timelessness in the First Folio, she gives us tools to think through the fraught questions of succession, instruction, and the disciplining of subjects into whiteness as they pertain to institutions such as *Shakespeare Quarterly*, the Folger Shakespeare Library, or the Renaissance studies programs at our own academic "home institutions." Reading *The Tempest* through the lens of Sara Ahmed, Chakravarty alerts us to the canny ways in which institutions "enfold and encompass complaint and dissent," including EMCRS dissent, so as to resist meaningful destabilization—and she urges us, instead, to practice EMCRS dissent as the work of "horizontal networks of community, sometimes bound by grief, but always working collectively toward justice."

Nedda Mehdizadeh's essay analyzes another key mechanism that can stifle EMCRS. Working with the keyword "COLLABORATION," she warns us that although the First Folio's authority derives from the collaboration between actors, printers, and promoters that yielded the book in 1623 and from the many cross-generational collaborations that form its reception history, collaboration must be critically scrutinized as we turn our attention to those "whose humanity is ignored or erased" in the process and study of collaboration. Those devalued collaborators' vulnerability, she argues, is often intersectionally compounded by their race, gender, and non-tenure-track status. Mehdizadeh powerfully illustrates her point by offering an extended close-reading of *The Tempest's* coercive, usually unjust, and always hierarchical economy of material and epistemological *co-laboring* between Ariel, Caliban, Stefano, Trinculo, Ferdinand, Miranda, and even the play's spectators under Prospero's regime of settler colonialism. She reads the play as an allegorical framework for exposing both the overt and the insidious dynamics of coercion that operate invisibly within institutional systems and hinder progress toward real equity in academia in general and Shakespeare studies in particular.

Miles P. Grier's essay celebrates EMCRS by offering a new and radically expanded genealogy for our field. Under the aegis of the keyword "ICON," he first retraces "the transformation of Shakespeare into Scripture in the post-secular present": the gradual evolution of the early modern "rejection of idolatry to an embrace of Bardolatry of Shakespeare as *the icon*" in the US from the nineteenth century onward. Grier reckons with the many ways in which Shakespeare fashioned himself—and then was retroactively fashioned by others as the icon of American white nationalism under the guise of universalism. As a corrective, he

offers to redirect the benefits of iconicity, such as transmissibility and staying power, from Shakespeare to the “sets of protocols” of Black studies and, by extension, of the other subaltern epistemologies that animate EMCRS. Grier’s intervention in intellectual history counters a long tradition that started with what he theorizes as “inkface”: a discourse hinging on metaphors of writing that informed yet exceeded early modern theatrical practices of impersonation and rigidly framed Black subjects as the object of knowledge and white subjects as producers of that knowledge. In so doing, he follows in the footsteps of early Black Atlantic intellectuals such as Phillis Wheatley and Ottobah Cugoano, who understood the epistemic injustice that inkface had unleashed into the world of print that they entered and consequently sought to “overturn the habits of thought and social rituals designed to make them icons in someone else’s semiotic system.” For that very reason, he hails those intellectuals as early Black Shakespeareans—the ancestors of EMCRS.

As a pendant to Grier’s reflection on EMCRS’s pasts, Jennifer Park uses her manifesto on the keyword “LEGACY” to meditate on the futurity of EMCRS and Shakespeare studies. Park first uses Cleopatra’s anxieties about the erasure of her own legacy to point out the continued erasure of the work of Black feminist scholars who founded our field—an erasure that EMCRS has vowed to counter. Park then activates the contemporary philological contours of “legacy” as, on the one hand, referring to a certain type of US college student, the “preferred applicant,” to think through questions of access in Shakespeare studies. Like Patricia Akhimie, she asks: “Who is cultivated as the inheritors of our discipline?” On the other hand, “legacy” designates an outdated software system in need of replacement, and Park notes that “the models and procedures and ‘ways of doing’ that were built on white supremacy,” including those in Shakespeare studies, “imagine that their legacies are under threat in just this way.” Rather than a threat, though, EMCRS is best understood through a cognate of “legacy”: the legate, a messenger “sent ahead to prepare the way,” a word that signals EMCRS’s ability “to reorient, and undiscipline, the legacies of Shakespeare and Shakespeare studies from its foundations in white supremacy and imperialism.”

Because this anniversary issue as a whole shares Grier’s and Park’s sense that the exciting futures of EMCRS are indissolubly bound to the field’s roots, its book review section, operating under the keyword “CLASSIC,” revisits and offers fresh insights into some of the books that made what would follow possible—some of the classics, old and new, that bind the field together. Of course, the list is not exhaustive by any means: the canon of EMCRS is much larger than five monographs, as even the briefest glance at this introduction’s footnotes will show. Within the length constraints of a *Shakespeare Quarterly* book review

section, each of the five EMCRS scholars who were invited to serve as book reviewers simply selected for themselves one book that had importantly influenced their own thinking, and they used their review to explain why. Thus, Dennis Austin Britton reviewed Kim F. Hall's 1995 *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*; Katherine Gillen reviewed Arthur L. Little, Jr.'s 2000 *Shakespeare Jungle Fever: National-Imperial Re-Visions of Race, Rape, and Sacrifice*; Carol Mejia LaPerle reviewed Ian Smith's 2009 *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance: Barbarian Errors*; Ruben Espinosa reviewed Ayanna Thompson's 2011 *Passing Strange: Shakespeare, Race, and Contemporary America*; and Kimberly A. Coles reviewed Patricia Akhimie's 2018 *Shakespeare and the Cultivation of Difference: Race and Conduct in the Early Modern World*.

The reviewers' selections signal, beyond any doubt, that EMCRS has been, from the 1990s onward, a product of American academia: the field simply would not exist today in the global anglosphere were it not for its deep and strong roots in distinctively American and/or American-nurtured traditions of Black and post-/anti-colonial thought. EMCRS's incipient growth in the global anglosphere and beyond, which I urge us all to make a concrete priority of the field for the years to come, is a testament, on the one hand, to the remarkable critical efficacy of those American traditions, and on the other hand, to the talent of global EMCRS agents for translating, comparing, adapting, and appropriating, within those American traditions, the discursive elements that best illuminate the long reach of early modern racial formations in their own diverse global locations. Indeed, what makes global and globally minded EMCRS scholars uniquely positioned to study the transnational dimensions of early modern formations is precisely, to use (Canada-based) Black studies scholar Katherine McKittrick's phrase, the fact that they know "where they know *from*," and they know that this complex "*from*" cannot be contained by national borders, for it is deeply relational: "Diaspora geography is not the act of making maps; rather, it is the act of sharing ideas about where liberation is and might be."³⁵

Thinking of our field as a bountiful tree, it is my hope that ten years from now, book reviewers' "CLASSIC" selections will simultaneously showcase EMCRS's American roots, more vibrant and productive than ever, and the new fruit-bearing branches of EMCRS's incipient transnational, global, and diasporic growth. That vision for the future of our field informs the cover of this issue of

³⁵ Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2021), 182. She adds, "Black diaspora and diasporic communities engender poetic spaces that redraw and remap the landscape. Part of this redrawing and remapping offers a black sense of place: the sustained production of multiple and overlapping (past and present) liberation praxes that are not legible on cartographic maps but, instead, notice black ways of being" (182).

Shakespeare Quarterly, which is graced with a photograph of British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare's sculpture *Girl Balancing Knowledge* (2015). The sculpture features a fiberglass mannequin (179 × 139 × 89 cm) whose dress, made of bright Ankara wax fabric, reflects late nineteenth-century European female child fashion, and whose head is a lustrous fitted black globe.³⁶ The mannequin carries, in a manner equally playful and assured, a teetering pile of books that seems to capture European knowledge-making at its tipping point. I see Shonibare's sculpture as an allegory for EMCRS as the field enters a new phase in 2023. In the most literal sense, the "girl" is globally minded: she wears her non-Western epistemologies on her sleeves, she is absorbed in the task of "balancing the knowledge" that European colonization has de facto put in her hands—and the future is hers.

Let us celebrate then, without naïveté or cynicism, and let us ensure that the quatercentenary celebrations of the First Folio perform a profoundly beneficial destabilization of Shakespeare studies by centering a field in expansion, EMCRS, that has, for over sixty years, done much more than simply revamp or infuse with trendy theoretical energies what is often referred to in English departments as "the historical fields." What has EMCRS done? In closing, let me answer this question by invoking Nikole Hannah-Jones's opening statement to *The 1619 Project*. Just as "our democracy's founding ideals [of freedom and equality] were false when they were written" and "Black Americans have fought to make them true," so Shakespeare studies' founding ideals of humanism and inclusiveness were false when they started, and early modern critical race scholars have fought to make them true.³⁷

Happy anniversary to all of us.

³⁶ Yinka Shonibare, *Girl Balancing Knowledge* (2015), available online at <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6127994>.

³⁷ Nikole Hannah-Jones, "Our Democracy's Founding Ideals Were False When They Were Written: Black Americans Have Fought to Make Them True," in *The 1619 Project*, *The New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html>.