

WOMEN AND RACE IN EARLY
MODERN TEXTS

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CHAPTER I

Cleopatra: whiteness and knowledge

In the course of an essay on multiculturalism, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., decries some Afrocentrist preoccupation with Egypt for its “unexpressed belief that deep continuities supervene on skin color. Beyond the heartfelt claim that Cleopatra was ‘black’ is the lurking conviction that if you traveled back in time and dropped the needle on a James Brown album, Cleo would instantly break out into the camel walk. The belief that we cherish is not so much a proposition about melanin and physiognomy; it’s the proposition that, through the mists of history, Cleopatra was a *sister*.”¹

In Gates’ negative example, the physical phenomenon of skin color is made to stand for a whole set of cultural and racial affiliations; color, race, and culture are in fact collapsed into the single same thing. Bodies – specifically the raced female body of the misappropriated Cleopatra – are used to stabilize cultural meanings which in fact continue to be formulated and reformulated within the shifting conditions of the African diaspora.

And yet, as a feminist reader of sixteenth and seventeenth-century texts who also reads for race, I know both that race and culture have been seen as strongly inhering in skin color, and that ideas about race were seen as underwriting larger theses about cultural identity. One early modern expression of this relationship can be observed in the 1578 anecdote reported by George Best about “an Ethiopian as blacke as a cole” who married an Englishwoman and fathered a child born in England “in all respects as blacke as the father was.”² For Best, this coal-black baby mysteriously born to a white mother in a temperate climate offers persuasive proof that black skin is about something other than mere proximity to the equator: “this blacknesse proceedeth of some

¹ “Beyond the Culture Wars: Identities in Dialogue,” *Profession* (1993), 6.

² *A True Discourse of the Late Voyages of Discoverie, For the Finding of a Passage to Cathaya* (London, 1578), p. 29. All subsequent references will be included in my text.

naturall infection of the first inhabitants of that Countrey, and so all the whole progeny of them descended, are still poluted with the same blot of infection" (30). The "infection" of dark skin originated in the disobedience of Noah's son Cham, who, contrary to God's word while the family was confined in the ark, had intercourse with his wife, hoping to father a child who might stand heir to the whole world revealed after the floodwaters receded. As punishment, Cham's son Chus and all his descendants were struck black, so that their color "might remaine a spectacle of disobedience to all the World. And of this blacke and cursed Chus came al these blacke Moores which are in Africa" (31). In Best, sexuality is a key part of what blackness means, and how and to what purpose it is transmitted.

If talk about skin color that treats it as a token of character or identity is not thus all strictly contemporary, neither is all such contemporary talk confined to Gates' Afrocentrists. On the far right of US cultural contestation, the link between color and culture is being reasserted with new vigor. A white racial fundamentalist like Jared Taylor, editor of *American Renaissance*, is clear on the existence of this connection: "Only white people read Shakespeare." Posing a rhetorical question about why people who aren't white should read or care about Shakespeare or Jane Austen, Taylor answers himself: "They don't. But I do." The *American Renaissance* web site describes the publication as "a literate, undeceived journal of race, immigration, and civility," a tag line which plainly verbalizes its sense of connection between color, nation, and civilization.³

Gates' invocation of Cleopatra questions both race's location in the body and the reliability of the colored body as a placeholder for cultural meanings. Concluding that biologically based notions of race are so wrongheaded that they can lead only to equally mistaken analyses of racial practice, Kwame Anthony Appiah has famously declared "[t]he truth" of the matter to be "that there are no races: there is nothing in the world that can do all we ask race to do for us."⁴ Appiah does not necessarily absolutely deny the existence of race; rather he sees the physical differences highlighted by biological notions of race achieving their greatest usefulness to the degree that they can become the basis of "constructing alliances" (180) rather than circling the wagons around any

³ The Shakespeare remark is quoted in David Heath, "Narrow Outlook on Race Belies Louisville's Broad Background," *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 28 April 1996, 1A. Apparently Taylor made the remark on another occasion than the interview with Heath, but I have been unable to trace it.

⁴ *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 45. I will include future references parenthetically in my text.

single artificially stabilized notion of self, given that “racial” or “social identities are complex and multiple and grow out of a history of changing responses to economic, political, and cultural forces” (178). For Appiah, racially distinguished bodies achieve social reality only as they are defined within such forces. The skin color of Gates’ Cleopatra is thus not racially significant in itself, but rather as it signifies something deeper, “the experience of life as a member of a group of people who experience themselves as – and are held by others to be – a community.”⁵

I am drawn to Appiah’s notion of the importance of shared experience as a meaningful construct of racial identity, suggesting as it might the employment of a “strategic essentialism”⁶ for the purposes of self-definition (rather than definition by and for the purposes of others). But I am finally convinced that biological definitions of race cannot be so easily derided into nonexistence, if only because of the historical importance they have held in the structures and practices of racial domination. If race as a biological given is a chimera, white supremacy is not: even if race is not a fixed physical essence, it does not logically follow that race does not exist, or that skin color is not socially significant, however scientifically useless it may be as a means of dividing up the human race.⁷ In what follows, I would like to return to Gates’ notionally black Cleopatra to argue that far from disappearing into larger and more publicly respectable efforts to write and rewrite culture than the Afrocentrist ones he mocks, her raced female body itself becomes the ground on which race, culture, and cultural affiliation can be promoted. Cleopatra’s race is made available for reading both with and without the help of skin color, an elasticity which adjusts Appiah’s characterization of the fullness of racial discourse as

⁵ Jayne Chong-Soon Lee quotes Appiah’s 1990 essay “Notes on Gender, ‘Race,’ and Ethnicity as Sources of Identity” in her own “Navigating the Topology of Race,” in Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas (eds.), *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement* (New York: The New Press, 1995), p. 443.

⁶ Gayatri Spivak uses this phrase in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 205. Terry Eagleton suggests something of the recuperative usefulness of ideas of “national character” in the review essay “Reviewing Ireland,” *Bullán* 3, 2 (1998): “[M]ost radicals or liberals . . . seem to assume without question that ‘national character’ is nothing more than a discursive construct . . . But this is surely quite mistaken, however unfashionable it may be to say so. For a materialist, it would be remarkable if men and women who for lengthy periods of time had shared roughly the same social conditions, with whatever divergences of region, gender, ethnic provenance and the rest, did not manifest some psychological patterns in common. There is no need to be intimidated here by the bugbear of ‘essentialism,’ let alone of racism” (137). Eagleton’s subject is Irish nationalism within its colonial context, but his insistence that shared experience shapes collective identity seconds Appiah’s remarks on culture’s construction along phenotypic lines.

⁷ See, for example, Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1986), esp. pp. 21–24.

being chaotically unmeaningful by forcing attention – I hope – to the processes through which pigment, or its attested lack, becomes racially meaningful.

One such recent deployment of Cleopatra in talk about the vexed relationship between culture and race can be found in classicist Mary Lefkowitz's book *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), and I examine it as a way of clearing space for my own analysis of early modern racial deployments of the Egyptian queen.⁸ I am ultimately most interested in pursuing the link between race, color, and culture in stories about her, and in what these stories may have to tell about uses of the colored body as a marker of racial identity.

Lefkowitz's book is a document in the controversy following the publication of the first volume of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), and as such is instructive about how deeply entrenched the resistance to discussing operations of racial consciousness can be, both inside the academy and in society at large.⁹ Bernal's argument, that the degree to which ancient Greek culture was hybridized with Egyptian and Semitic sources has been minimized or suppressed by the modern discipline of classics, provoked an astonishing variety and intensity of response. By no means did all of this response reject Bernal's findings or the conduct of his argument outright; he has suggested that constituencies which feel themselves to be marginalized within classics were particularly receptive to his work.¹⁰ Yet, in public debate, Bernal's book – with its extensive scholarly apparatus, its grounding in etymology (he is by training a specialist in Near Eastern languages rather than a classicist), and its range over several ancient cultures – was repeatedly associated

⁸ Lefkowitz's discussion of Cleopatra can be found on pp. 34–52.

⁹ The academic controversy has been usefully recorded in a special issue of *Arethusa*, "The Challenge of *Black Athena*," Fall 1989, and in an *Arethusa* forum, "*Black Athena*: 'Race,' Bernal and Snowden," 26 (1993), 295–334. Daniel Tompkins and Bella Zweig chaired a three-year colloquium of the American Philological Association to seat panels on ethnicities in the ancient world at its annual meeting. A "Dialogue" on *Black Athena* by five scholars with a response by Bernal appears in the *Journal of Women's History* 4.3 (1995), 84–135.

¹⁰ In Walter Cohen, "An Interview with Martin Bernal," *Social Text* 35 (1993), Bernal remarks that he had "misjudged the field of Classics, seeing it as a hostile monolith. I hadn't noticed its internal tensions or dissident constituencies. One is a group I'd never considered – Latinists, who feel that Hellenists have been lording it over them for eighty years . . . Second, women in Classics are exploited, and they have a great deal of resentment . . . There's also the 'tyranny of philology.' Literary critics, art historians, and archaeologists are terrified of the philologists, who have a core position in the discipline" (10). Also see n. 23 below.

with Afrocentrism, while being positively distinguished from the kind of pop culture fantasies Gates finds so irresistibly easy to caricature in the quotation with which I began.¹¹ Particularly memorable in this popular representation of Bernal's critique of the structuring and transmission of knowledge of the ancient world, as an assault on western culture's origins in that world, was the jacket of Lefkowitz's book, which featured a white stone bust of a figure from antiquity – Socrates? Plato? – wearing a slightly askew black baseball cap emblazoned with an X.

This illustration seems worth discussing to me as an example of the phantom quality of race – is it primarily about skin color? is it a matter of more mysterious “deep continuities”? – in contemporary discussions of multiculturalism. The cover illustration uses a culturally loaded sign, the X that marks the spot where the merely contemporary attempts to impose itself upon and even replace the foundational and the timeless, to articulate some of the argument of Lefkowitz's book. Such a rendition identifies Bernal's painstakingly explicated contention of the existence of an ideology of knowledge production with a cartoon version of Afrocentrism, which term, Ann duCille notes, has been “used to include everything from food and fashion to racial fundamentalism.”¹² Here, the “Afrocentrism” of Lefkowitz's title is visually reduced to the status of a cultural commodity (the X emblem) whose visibility peaked around the 1995 premiere of the Spike Lee film *Malcolm X* but which had appeared and continues to appear “everywhere: [Malcolm is] on air fresheners, potato chip bags, on T-shirts, sneakers, and baseball caps. He's being ‘worn’ by whites in rich suburban enclaves” in the US and around the world.¹³ But the jacket illustration ignores this cacophony of appropriation. The cap's slightly tilted position in the illustration is meant, I think, specifically to recall what was originally a black and urban youth style of dress: baggy, oversized tops, sagging unbelted pants, unlaced bulky basketball shoes or hiking boots, sideways or backwards caps. I say “originally” here because the style has crossed over not only from black to white youth, city to suburb, America to the world, but

¹¹ Bernal, in his, “Interview,” notes that although he is not an Afrocentrist, he does agree with Afrocentrists who argue in favor of the cultural productivity and influence of African societies, and also “that there has been a systematic playing down of these contributions. On a political level, I believe that the dangers of Eurocentrism are far greater and more urgent than those of Afrocentrism” (7–8).

¹² duCille, *Skin Trade*, p. 122.

¹³ Tricia Rose, “A Symposium of Popular Culture and Political Correctness,” *Social Text* 36 (1993), 18. Also see Michael Eric Dyson, *Making Malcolm: The Myth and Meaning of Malcolm X* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

also (in more neatly tailored versions) from socially marginal youth to their more securely middle-class elders.¹⁴ This interchange falls outside the discursive purposes of the illustration and of Lefkowitz's argument: if the illustrator was even aware of the infiltration of the X and its associated styles into mass culture, he chooses to ignore it. The picture instead operates powerfully at the level of racial and class symbolism.¹⁵ As the picture has it, Afrocentrism is an outlaw methodology disordering the body of western thought, the black cap working a racial and class travesty on the coolly classical philosopher's head rendered in white marble.¹⁶

A cover illustration which thus visually implicates black people in the covering up of western knowledge seems at first a poor choice for Lefkowitz's book. After all, one cornerstone of her argument against Afrocentrist readings of ancient history is classicist Frank Snowden Jr.'s insistence that despite its awareness of differences in skin color the ancient world was without the color prejudice which has contributed so potently to modern American racism.¹⁷ Snowden's assertion that skin color did not racially signify in the ancient world has, in fact, been opened to some question.¹⁸ But even if his argument is correct, it does not necessarily lead

¹⁴ Here, see Constance C. R. James' wonderful essay, "From Kente to Kelly: An Overview of Blacks' Contribution to Fashion," in *Style Noir* (New York: Perigee Books, 1998), esp. pp. 58–67.

¹⁵ On the employment of photographic "cover stories" to "simultaneously mask and reveal political power and its manipulations," see Wahneema Lubiano, "Black Ladies, Welfare Queens and State Minstrels: Ideological War by Narrative Means," in Toni Morrison (ed.), *Race-ing Justice, En-Gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), p. 324. Ann duCille, *Skin Trade*, is similarly concerned with mass media manipulations of visual images surrounding the O. J. Simpson murder trial so as to articulate "the unspoken, unwritten, perpetually present racial narrative" (p. 149).

¹⁶ I am thinking of Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's *The Poetics and Politics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), which emphasizes the interdependence of "cultural categories of high and low, social and aesthetic . . . The ranking of literary genres or authors in a hierarchy analogous to social classes is a particularly clear example of a much broader and more complex cultural process whereby the human body, psychic forms, geographic space, and the social formation are all constructed within interrelating and dependent hierarchies of high and low" (p. 2). The illustration's defense of classical culture depends on a representation of the threat posed to it by (black) mass culture, and so also works to denominate high culture as the province of whiteness. I am also tempted to read the cover illustration against the photograph of Lefkowitz inside the back cover, where she appears neatly dressed in pleated khaki pants (or a skirt), a shirt and a dark blazer with a scarf tied around her neck; her hair is short and parted on one side, and she wears round horn-rimmed glasses. Her outfit is the stylistic antithesis of the kind of outfit the cover illustration luridly imagines as being topped off by a black baseball cap marked with an X.

¹⁷ *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), and *Before Color Prejudice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983). Also see his contribution to the *Arethusa* forum, 319–327.

¹⁸ Notably by Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 177–179. Also see James Walvin, *Questioning Slavery* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 72–74. Walvin notes that while skin color did not function racially in

to the logical conclusion that race and racism always and everywhere mean only skin color, as Lefkowitz's pursuit of Afrocentric scholars' use of the word "black" to describe people of the ancient world implies. Joel A. Rogers (who died in 1956, well before the modern development of Afrocentric thought) "Appears to think that anyone who was born on the continent of Africa was black, and uses the term black to describe anyone who has African blood, or who can by virtue of location be presumed to possess it." The territory which became Roman Africa "was colonized by Phoenicians, Greeks, and finally by Romans. For that reason it is unlikely that most natives of what was called 'Africa' in antiquity . . . were 'black' in the modern sense of the word."¹⁹

But what "modern sense" does Lefkowitz mean? There must be very few people anywhere who have literally black skin. Her literal reading of the word "black" as referring primarily to skin color strategically divests race of any cultural component, significantly misrepresenting the arguments of even the most extreme African nationalists, at the same time as it invokes the colored body as the most salient marker of the racial identity whose relevance to her concerns she is elsewhere ready to discount entirely. Her repudiation of the significance Rogers attaches to "African blood" also indicates ignorance – either real or strategic – of the ways in which possession of the minutest portion of Negro blood has been enough, at least in the American context which also bred Afrocentrism, to dictate racial identity, whatever the color of the possessor's skin. The very use of the term "African blood" may suggest a belief in the embodied racial essences whose existence she elsewhere regards as illusory.

Lefkowitz's resolute narrowing of the idea of race allows her to refuse to engage with Afrocentrism as an intellectual endeavor aimed at exploring the consequences of "literally placing African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior." According to the scholar who coined the term, such a reorientation of knowledge does

ancient slavery as it was to do in the New World, it figured strongly as a marker of "the ethnic difference between slave owners and slaves" (p. 74).

¹⁹ Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa*, p. 30 here. Subsequent references included parenthetically in the text. Cheryl Johnson-Odim, an historian whose field is Africa, faults Africanists for having contributed to belief in the sharp racial and cultural division thought to exist between Egypt and the rest of the African continent in "The Debate Over 'Black Athena,'" *Journal of Women's History* 4.3 (1993), 87: "Many Africanists in the United States and Europe have operated within a paradigm of African history that divided the continent between Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa. This division has often come to be a euphemism for 'black' and 'non-black' Africa rather than a useful geographical or regional distinction." Just as Lefkowitz regrets that "most of the writers who have raised and discussed the question about Cleopatra's ethnicity are not ancient historians," (*Not Out of Africa*, p. 36) Johnson-Odim believes that the abandonment of ancient Egyptian history to "non-Africanists . . . is part of the problem" ("Debate," 88).

not stem from a refusal to recognize “the validity of the Eurocentric tradition within its context: I am simply stating that such a view must not seek an ungrounded aggrandizement by claiming a universal hegemony.” Molefi Kete Asante further remarks that “many today find it difficult to cease viewing European culture as the center of the social universe. Thus the work they produce seldom considers the possibilities of other realities or, indeed, shared realities.”²⁰ For her polemical purposes, Lefkowitz cannot even accurately characterize the political and philosophical concepts that cleared the ground for development of Afrocentrism, associating the theory, for example, with “a current tendency, at least among academics, to regard history as a form of fiction that can and should be written differently by each nation or ethnic group” (xiv). Post-formalist reading practices, anticolonial politics, gender and race as it may exist beyond skin color – a social existence of which the cover illustration has no doubt – disappear into Lefkowitz’s denial of the contingencies of knowledge production. The result is a book purporting to be about Afrocentrism whose author claims not to find “the topic of ‘race’ particularly interesting or important,” (14) and who insists that race does not significantly figure in her argument.²¹ Here, race is absent and pervasively present, invisible in the social body (of traditional classical knowledge), but always ready to be called on to serve its polemical ends. Lefkowitz states that “Afrocentrists are demanding that *ordinary* historical methodology be discarded in favor of a *system of their own choosing*” (7, emphases mine).²² She is ready to characterize all practitioners of non-“ordinary” methodologies as racist; what she conceives of as the

²⁰ Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), pp. 6, 4, 7.

²¹ Johnson-Odim notes that race “is still a passionately defended sociopolitical category” (“Debate,” 86) despite its obscurity in the body, and charges that Lefkowitz – despite her rejection of skin color as a meaningful analytical category in the ancient world – is “obsessed” (87) in her February 1992 *New Republic* review of the first volume of *Black Athena* with pinning down the role dark-skinned Africans may or may not have played in Greek civilization. In support of what she characterizes as the lack of interest in facts shared by Afrocentrists, post-structuralists, and/or Bernal’s partisans, Lefkowitz quotes Johnson-Odim’s remark in “Debate” that on skin color, “What we are really talking about here is symbolism anyway, is it not?” (“Debate,” 86; *Not Out of Africa*, p. 52). In fairness (no pun intended), the context for Johnson-Odim’s statement is her assertion of race’s identity as a “sociopolitical category” which is not necessarily dependent on skin color for its definition.

²² Here, the definition of literary tradition that Raymond Williams advances in *Marxism and Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977) was useful to me. He defines “tradition” (Lefkowitz’s “ordinary methodology”) as a deliberately selective and connecting process which offers a historical and cultural ratification of a contemporary order,” (p. 117) thus insisting that the intellectual contingencies Lefkowitz denies are a necessary part of the critical process. At this point in her argument, Lefkowitz is in effect refusing a critical practice which works to deselect the underpinnings of her reconstruction of the intellectual issues at stake.

methods of New Historicism, for example, “can . . . lead right back to fictive history of the kind developed to serve the Third Reich” (50).

As a Shakespearean, I understand quite well how apprehensions of the conditions under which proper meanings can be legitimately formed structure the transmission of knowledge, and how deeply shaping of culture these apprehensions and their enforcements can be. Because of this training, I am also ready to accept Lefkowitz’s conviction as a Hellenist of the informing significance of her field to the foundations of US political culture: “Any attempt to question the authenticity of ancient Greek civilization is of direct concern even to people who ordinarily have little interest in the remote past. Since the founding of this country, ancient Greece has been intimately connected with the ideals of American democracy” (6). For her, ways of reading dictate the kinds of knowledge which can be taken away from those readings, and so assume critical importance in establishing and acknowledging cultural genealogies.²³ But it is only by rhetorically minimizing the effects and even the existence of socially determined racial differences (again, an attempt which the cover illustration has no interest in making) that she can conduct her own argument. A belief in the existence of these socially determined racial differences is, of course, the place from which Afrocentrism launches itself. “Ordinary” in Lefkowitz’s formulation may thus actually be closer in meaning to something like “compulsory.” Indeed, this compulsoriness is an explicit part of the conservative cultural program of which *Not Out of Africa* is an outpost.²⁴

²³ Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz, in her introduction to *Feminist Theory and the Classics*, edited by Rabinowitz and Amy Richlin (New York: Routledge, 1993), sees a traditional classics’ “devaluation of theory” as enabling its “devaluation of issues of power, race, and gender, which theory would ‘import’ to a consideration of ‘the text pure and simple’.” Classics’ “philological bent is consistent with a lack of interest in attracting women or people of color to the discipline. If point of view is irrelevant, what difference does it make who is doing the editing, translating, or interpreting?” (p. 4). Rabinowitz’s observation about philology’s centrality in her discipline recapitulates Bernal, n. 10 above, and also points to a disembodiment of cultural meaning – a disembodiment which is revoked by the cover illustration of *Not Out of Africa*, with its invocation of a disorderly black body.

²⁴ Eileen Messer-Davidow’s brilliant “Manufacturing the Attack on Liberalized Higher Education,” *Social Text* 36 (1993), 40–80, cites William S. Lind’s assertion of “a necessary, unbreakable, and causal relationship between traditional Western, Judeo-Christian values, definitions of right and wrong, ways of thinking, and ways of living . . . and the secular success of Western societies: their prosperity, their liberties, and the opportunities they offer their citizens to lead fulfilling, rewarding lives. If the former are abandoned, the latter will be lost” (46). Messer-Davidow notes that conservative attacks on multiculturalism published in such journals as *Commentary*, *National Review*, and *The New Republic* (where Lefkowitz published a condensed version of what became *Not Out of Africa*’s thesis in 1992) have been one of the “broadest” (42) manifestations of a conservative cultural program.

Having insisted that it is the cause of methodological soundness and not race which drives her argument against Afrocentrism, Lefkowitz's book devotes nineteen pages to refutation of Shelley Haley's and others' identification of Cleopatra as black.²⁵ Lefkowitz characterizes Haley's discussion of Cleopatra's race in particular and more general assertions about the roles played by black people in the ancient world as "myths," mistakenly regarded as harmless by some of her colleagues who "have argued that teaching that Cleopatra is black can do no harm, particularly if it helps to instill pride in students who have been mistreated by the majority society" (42). I don't quite know what to make of the present tense here ("Cleopatra *is* black"), which would seem to contradict the distinction Lefkowitz elsewhere insists on maintaining between ancient and modern meanings, but I do note her implicit reduction of all attempts to reconstruct racial identities in past societies to a kind of social therapy administered to students by well-meaning, if deluded, professors. (Presumably the "mistreatment" these students will have endured is racial in nature, although Lefkowitz's race-free rhetoric cannot allow her to specify that.) A growing body of work among classicists, mostly, but not exclusively, appearing since *Black Athena*, has in fact begun to delineate ways in which a consciousness of cultural difference used as the basis for social discrimination which has nothing to do with skin color can be identified in the ancient world.²⁶ "How reasonable is it," Lefkowitz asks, "to require the ancients to have shared our definitions of race or our concern with oppression of women and minorities?" (49). Such a requirement is, of course, not reasonable at all, especially when she misconstrues what "our" definitions of race are, elides the (questionable) establishment of the ancients' disregard of skin color into a notion of a raceless ancient world, and projects this peaceful diversity onto the contemporary screen of multicultural Babel.

Shelley Haley's essay appeals to me as an acknowledgment of the place occupied within shifting ideas of racial value by the Egyptian queen who is, as Lefkowitz acknowledges, "a legendary figure" (36) and a powerfully

²⁵ Shelley Haley, "Black Feminist Thought and Classics: Re-membering, Re-claiming, Re-empowering," in Rabinowitz and Richlin (eds.), *Feminist Theory*, pp. 23–43.

²⁶ See, for example, Hans Volkmann, *Cleopatra: A Study of Politics and Propaganda*, tr. T. J. Cadoux (London: Elek Books, 1978); M. P. Charlesworth, "The Fear of the Orient in the Roman Empire," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 2 (1926), 9–16; Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition Through Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), esp. ch. 2, "Inventing Persia," pp. 56–100, and ch. 3, "The Barbarian Enters Myth," pp. 101–159; Ellen O'Gorman, "Return of the Living Dead: Carthage and Roman Ethnic Identity," paper presented at the 1996 meeting of the American Philological Association (APA); and Karen Bassi, "Maternity and Ethnicity in Herodotus' Scythian Logos," paper presented at the 1997 meeting of the APA.

rhetorically charged one in current attempts to determine ways of establishing knowledge about the ancient world and its cultural relations to the contemporary one.²⁷ Haley's essay contextualizes her own reconsiderations of what slim evidence survives about Cleopatra's race within a larger narrative about her own acculturation within the field of classics as a black person, as a woman, and as a black woman. The essay places her reconsideration of Cleopatra inside other stories about her reasons for choosing an academic career, for choosing classics as a field of study, and about her experiences in learning how to "do" classics as a graduate student and a teacher. Thus, it narrates a kind of crossing: from the nurturing family and community of black teachers where she grew up into the competitive world of pre-professional training where other black people were invisible, whose capacity for contributing to the field was publicly denigrated by some of her teachers, and where the possibility of women's intellectual contribution was considered highly unlikely. Haley's account invokes the "social universe" of Asante's remarks: the social universe she entered as a student and professor were very different from the one she had left, and she frequently experienced her acculturation to its methods and presuppositions as alienating, frustrating, and humiliating – terms at striking variance from Lefkowitz's invocation of a normative, "ordinary" universe of discourse and method. Indeed, Lefkowitz's endorsement of "ordinary" method makes reorientations of knowledge, such as those presented by the theory of Afrocentrism, or by Bernal's revised disciplinary history, or by Haley's speculations about the place of race and gender in the edifice of classical studies, unthinkable.

Haley's reconsideration of Cleopatra's origins occurs within a climate in which her students, as well as she herself through her own feminist scholarship in the classics, are beginning to ask questions Lefkowitz would consider to be out of the "ordinary." She comes to see Cleopatra as cultural property (or to see her again as such, noting that the educated black people of her childhood had always assumed a black identity for the Egyptian queen which went far beyond the color they believed her skin was), and to resubmit questions about her racial identity as part of her own coming to consciousness as a black feminist classicist, not the classicist she had been trained to be. In effect, she wants to establish a scholarly reconnection with Cleopatra as she was thought of by the race men and race women of her youth: a figure of iconic resonance. For her, this iconicity is a function of race – race perhaps symbolized by, but

²⁷ For more on this topic, see Mary Hamer, *Signs of Cleopatra: History, Politics, Representation* (London: Routledge, 1993), which, disappointingly, has nothing to say about the early modern Cleopatra.

which cannot be reduced to, skin color. I am moved by Haley's account of her coming into a sense of herself as a practitioner in her field, the way in which her essay invests her sense of her scholarship with a self-conscious history of struggle and recovery. This sense of struggle echoes in other essays in the volume where her paper appears, in other women's narrations of learning to value and to articulate alternative or oppositional reading practices in their discipline.²⁸ For Haley, the question of Cleopatra's race comes to crystallize that moment of insight where it began to seem to her as though classical scholars and the "Greek and Roman authors they consulted had been willing – eager – to erase" the possibility that the Egyptian queen had non-Greek ancestors as part of their project of claiming "the beautiful Cleopatra for Europe" (29, 30). Reclaiming her becomes a powerful disruption of "ordinary" practice in classics.

The extent to which such "ordinary" conduct and construction of a body of knowledge may itself be vulnerable to confusion of its racial terms is suggested in an essay by C. Loring Brace, "Clines and Clusters versus 'Race': A Test in Ancient Egypt and the Case of a Death on the Nile," included in the collection *Black Athena Revisited* that Lefkowitz co-edited with Guy MacLean Rogers. In *Not Out of Africa*, I have argued, Lefkowitz simultaneously denies that race was embodied in the classical world and implies that race is visible only in the body, thus both misconstruing what race is (and was) and artificially narrowing – so as more easily to dismiss – the grounds of discussion about links between race and culture. In the *Black Athena Revisited* essay, a group of physical anthropologists similarly declare that "The 'race' concept did not exist in Egypt, and it is not mentioned in Herodotus, the Bible, or any of the other writings of classical antiquity . . . Because it has neither biological nor social justification, we should strive to see that it is eliminated from both public and private usage. Its absence will be missed by no one, and we shall all be better off without it."²⁹ Instead of using the scientific falsity of ideas of race to dismiss the idea that race or self-racialized subjectivity has anything to do with building culture, however, the essay authors seem to want to get

²⁸ Commenting on Haley's essay and the volume in which it appears, Lefkowitz notes that editors Rabinowitz and Richlin "are themselves critical of traditional methodology and ideology," and can only suppose that the articles they chose were "included on the basis of the rightness of their ideology and motives" (*Not Out of Africa*, p. 48).

²⁹ C. Loring Brace, with David P. Tracer, Lucia Allen Yaroch, John Robb, Kari Brandt, and A. Russell Nelson, "Clines and Clusters versus 'Race': A Test in Ancient Egypt and the Case of a Death on the Nile," in Mary Lefkowitz and Guy MacLean Rogers (eds.), *Black Athena Revisited* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 162.

rid of race and somehow keep it, too. Their commitment to the project of returning to the cranial measurements which were the basis of the worst nineteenth-century racist pseudoscience, but this time “adjusting our theoretical explanations, asking the right questions, and then applying the increasingly powerful arsenal of methods that are at our disposal,” (131) might well indicate some reluctance to dispense altogether with the idea of connection between bodies and races, however insistent their ultimate disavowals.³⁰ This time, presumably, the result of a new inquiry would be a scientifically “real” notion of race, as opposed to merely “chimerical” (162) and anachronistic notions of race – real, because embodied, at least in skeletal remains.

Seamus Deane is discussing Irish and not black nationalism when he remarks that because colonialist and imperialist regimes “universalize themselves, they regard any insurgency against themselves as necessarily provincial. In response, insurgent nationalisms attempt to create a version of history for themselves in which their intrinsic essence has always manifested itself, thereby producing readings of the past which are as monolithic as that which they are trying to supplant. They are usually . . . under the additional disadvantage that much of their past has been destroyed, silenced, erased. Therefore, the amalgam they produce is susceptible to attack and derision.”³¹ Deane here recapitulates Gates’ rejection of a vulgar Afrocentrism’s obsession with racial essences, but also, unlike either Gates or Lefkowitz, emphasizes its roots in a legitimate struggle for political and cultural liberation. What Lefkowitz represents as a question of how to reconstruct knowledge of the historical past should also be understood, at least in part, as a fight for discursive power to shape political agendas in the present and future as well. Race – whether understood as a bodily or a social phenomenon – is a central weapon in this discursive struggle. On this, Gates’ witty putdown of black essentialism and Lefkowitz’s impassioned defense of her discipline from the assaults she rhetorically associates with Afrocentrism are in agreement.

Not Out of Africa, its jacket, and the *Black Athena Revisited* essay demonstrate a vertiginous confusion about what race is and does: race did not mean skin color, race means only skin color now, race is an empty category, the existence of race is (possibly) scientifically verifiable, race is not

³⁰ Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (1965; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), discusses nineteenth-century craniology and phrenology, pp. 69–77.

³¹ In his “Introduction” to Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, and Edward Said, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. 9.

particularly interesting, race has been put to deeply threatening cultural purposes. My interest in the racing of bodies – both human female bodies and bodies of knowledge – was at least partially stimulated by my observation of such confusion. Much far-right rhetoric about raced bodies seems to be aimed at resolving this confusion in such a way as to leave no doubt about either the physical evidence of racial identity or of its social consequences. On its web site, *American Renaissance* sells tapes from its third biennial conference, featuring such speakers as J. Philippe Rushton of the University of Western Ontario, whose presentation suggested that ethnic identity is “hard-wired” into our genes as a preference against dissimilar genes and Glayde Whitney of Florida State University, who addressed the topic “The Biological Reality of Race.”³² Taylor and his fellows (*American Renaissance* may have female members, but the journal’s editorial board and the speakers at its conferences have been, as far as I have been able to discover, all male) repeatedly identify race as the centrally important factor in what they perceive as western civilization’s threatening “embrace from large numbers of non-whites.”³³ Echoing Best centuries later, Taylor believes that nonwhiteness is an ineradicable social stain, one which in and of itself renders its possessor incapable of and probably even unfit for assimilation into western society: “The unpalatable truth is that race largely governs assimilation. Blacks and Indians have been here since colonial times, but many are still at the margins of society.” Taylor sees race as almost mechanistically determined, a bodily essence controlling who can and cannot become civilized.

Before I go any farther here, I want to state that I am asserting no contact whatever between Mary Lefkowitz and *American Renaissance*. Lefkowitz attributes what she considers the intellectually bankrupt doctrine of Afrocentrism as applied to the classics to mistaken apprehensions of race’s historical existence and nature, while Taylor and *American Renaissance* believe that racial pluralism will result not in mere intellectual bankruptcy, but in the virtual extinction of European culture and the white race. I employ *American Renaissance*’s talk about differently colored bodies and their implications for the progress of civilization because it makes clear what Lefkowitz’s production of an Afrocentrism without black people cannot: that the social construction of bodies of knowledge can depend on and be enabled by the social construction of race. It is

³² <http://www.amren.com/tapes99.htm> (6 February 2001).

³³ Jared Taylor, “‘Normal,’ ‘natural’ to seek ‘people like oneself,’” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 19 May 1996, 3D.

true that both *Not Out of Africa* and American Renaissance think of race in terms of what is visible, observable, quantifiable: Rushton's and Whitney's biology and social science, Lefkowitz's assumption that skin color alone determines racial identity. The difference is that while Lefkowitz wants to pin race down physically so as to more easily eliminate it from her discussion about the practice and conduct of a discipline, Taylor and American Renaissance want to quantify race in order to admit it to a central place in that discussion.

While, as I noted above, there is some reason to doubt Snowden and Lefkowitz's insistence that skin color did not contribute to racial judgments in the ancient world, there is no reason to believe that skin color was the sole or even primary contributor to the ancients' sense of cultural difference. Roman sources for the lives of Cleopatra, Caesar, and Antony, and for the civil wars of which Caesar's defeat of Pompey the Great and Rome's annexation of Egypt formed the climax are distinctly hostile toward Cleopatra and distinctly conscious of her and her country's divergence from a Roman cultural norm. Thus, they emphasize the existence of a history of conflict and contradiction that both Lefkowitz's and Gates' reconstructions of the classical past tend to ignore.³⁴ But I am not an Afrocentrist, either: I resist Asante's attempts to replace one monolithic way of reading with another, and reject the degree to which his system, like much nationalism white and black, reimagines the social body as exclusively and originally male. Concerned as I am with strategies of representation, I want to return once again to the Cleopatra who figures so prominently in both liberal and conservative critiques of attempts to produce a raced self. I do insist that race and culture are linked, although not in the way Gates finds it so easy to scoff at for being insufficiently postmodern, and that Lefkowitz dismisses as an outcropping of a strange modern invention called "identity politics" (46). I share Gates' objection to a transhistorical obsession with dark skin as the primary marker both of race and of an unchanging cultural affiliation, but I also want to move beyond Lefkowitz's intellectual deafness to the significance of representation³⁵ to recognize that skin color, especially as it

³⁴ Shelley Haley, "Livy's Sophoniba," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 40 (1989), 178–181; Haley, "Livy, Passion, and Cultural Stereotypes," *Historia* 39 (1990), 375–381; Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Women in Hellenistic Egypt*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), pp. 24–28. Lefkowitz notes the pro-Augustus bias of Roman historiography, *Not Out of Africa*, pp. 35–36.

³⁵ An example of this can be found in her remarks on the question of Cleopatra's beauty. Refusing the implications of her own identification of Cleopatra as a "legendary" as well as a strictly historical figure, Lefkowitz's response to Haley's comment about classics' reclamation of the beautiful Cleopatra for Europe is that "the notion of a beautiful Cleopatra is not a construction

is linked to gender, can indeed manage to connote racial identity in the early modern period. The difference is that the color I mean is white. I want to take up the implications of the whiteness of the classical bust on Lefkowitz's book jacket, of the lengths she goes to in order to deny the existence of race (while possibly readmitting it to discussion in the *Black Athena Revisited* essay) and of the participation of people who might have been physically "black" in the building of Hellenic culture. The significance of her argument is not so much that dark-skinned people did not participate in the establishment and transmission of her field of knowledge as it is the conclusion that everyone who did so, as far as can be properly ascertained, was white.

Now again, the skin color Cleopatra or Socrates (or Mary Lefkowitz or Jared Taylor) had is not my primary pursuit here. What interests me is the conclusions people draw from flattened racial identifications, the processes they go through to establish them, what they put at stake. Reading Lefkowitz against the biological essentialism of American Renaissance helps to excavate the roles whiteness may play in accounts of the building and destruction of cultures; American Renaissance has the virtue of laying down a trail which is easy to follow, while the visual presentation of Lefkowitz's book asserts the negative connection her written text goes to some lengths to deny. How does whiteness – as opposed both to an essentialized Afrocentrist notion of "blackness" and to Lefkowitz's equally notional raceless and genderless conduct of classical knowledge – operate in early modern productions of Cleopatra?

Much contemporary academic theory of whiteness begins by describing it as phantom, evanescent, remaining unvoiced while insinuating itself into such various areas of social life as the administration of justice, the formulation of standards of feminine beauty and sexuality, and popular culture.³⁶ Whiteness thus paradoxically emerges as a practice to the degree it remains socially unmarked and unremarkable (Lefkowitz's "ordinary historical methodology"). The more it remains unannounced, unarticulated, the more it may be said to be in operation. Not merely

of ancient historians but of writers like Shakespeare. Plutarch . . . explicitly says that Cleopatra was not beautiful, nor is she shown with idealized features on ancient portrait coins" (p. 47). Apparently allure, like race, is also visible only in the body.

³⁶ The classic text here is Richard Dyer, "White," *Screen* 29 (1988), 45–64. Also see bell hooks, "Representations of Whiteness," in *Black Looks*, pp. 165–178; Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, 2 vols. (London: Verso, 1994); and David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991). Reviews of scholarship include Shelly Fisher Fishkin, "Interrogating 'Whiteness,' Complicating 'Blackness': Remapping American Culture," *American Quarterly* 47 (1995), 428–466.

about skin color, early modern whiteness works to naturalize and normalize the operations of existing hierarchies of race, nation, and sexuality. Whiteness articulates cultural authority.

One clear assertion of the value of early modern whiteness in English retellings of the Cleopatra legend may be found in Mary Sidney, the Countess of Pembroke's translation of Garnier's *Antonie*. Eve Rachele Sanders has brought to our attention how radically Pembroke revises her French original as she translates it, creating a virtually new work which emphasizes and vindicates the power of Cleopatra's sexuality.³⁷ In Pembroke, for example, and not in Garnier, it is Antony's memory of "the long intermitting love of *Cleopatra*" which draws him back to Egypt and away from his wife Octavia.³⁸ Before her suicide, after drawing the dead Antony up to her monument with her own "strong armes," (M4 verso) this newly physical Cleopatra would bid him farewell with "A thousand kisses":

Let you my mouth for honors farewell give:
That in this office weake my limmes may growe,
Fainting on you, and fourth my soule may flow.
(O2 verso)

She will die not as a queen but as a lover, virtually in the act of orgasm, claiming and ennobling the passion that Antony's Roman compatriots can view only as disabling lust.³⁹ But this sensual, energetic Cleopatra is also, and emphatically, white-skinned. In the aftermath of disaster at Actium, she asks that her and Antony's children be sent for their safety to "distant lands" where "Black *Aethiopes*" show their "freezed locks" to a harsh sun (N4). She believes that if only she had not taken the field at Actium, an undistracted Antony would have won and that even "tawny nations scorched with the Sunne" (H1 verso) would have yielded to their joint domination of the world. Her maid Eras wonders why she mars the "faire alablaster" (H1) of her face with tears. Diomed sees her in classically Petrarchan terms, complete with "Allablaster" skin, "corall"

³⁷ Eve Rachele Sanders, *Gender and Literacy on Stage in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 103–117.

³⁸ I cite the "Argument" of *Antonius* as it appears in its first edition, where it was published in a volume with Pembroke's translation of Philippe Mornay's *A Discourse of Life and Death* (London, 1592); here, F1 verso. Subsequent references will be provided in my text.

³⁹ For his friend Lucilius, Antony's love has transformed him into the image of his ancestor Hercules who, bewitched by Omphale, "Slept in hir lapp, hir bosome kist and kiste,/With base unseemly service bought her love,/Spinning at distaffe, and with sinewy hand/Winding on spindles threde, in maides attire" (L3).

lips, “beamic” eyes like “Sunnes,” and “faire haire” of “fine and flaming golde” (I2).

The Petrarchan whiteness of the body which will reclaim Antony at the moment of her own death is the enabling vehicle of Pembroke’s bold reimagination of Cleopatra. The Europeanizing of Cleopatra, queen of a country which Roman historians recognized as being organized under disturbingly Hellenistic notions of *tryphe*, or magnificence – as being, in fact, quite different from the kinds of would-be subject countries Rome was used to encountering – works to refocus the attention to cultural and imperial conflict contained in so many Roman accounts of relations between Rome and Egypt.⁴⁰ The considerable erotic authority of this Cleopatra, in other texts so strongly implicated in her imperial designs, is in Pembroke firmly linked to a sense of guilt over the disastrous effects of Antony’s devotion to her. She blames her beauty’s power for causing him to flee Actium – “I am sole cause. I did it, only I” (H1 verso) – and admits that she insisted on being present at the battle only because she was worried he would leave her and return to his wife Octavia. Despite her courage and vigor, she reads her affair with Antony conservatively, as a violation of monogamous standards. Her whiteness also traditionalizes her, muting the historical sense of her distance from Roman values and of her opposition to Roman political strategy. Her white skin is just as normatively instrumental as her sexual guilt to Pembroke’s project of recreating Cleopatra as an heroic subject.

Written in response to the work of his friend and patron Pembroke, Samuel Daniel’s *Letter from Octavia to Marcus Antonius* and his *Tragedie of Cleopatra* second her play’s conviction of the corrosive effects of the Egyptian queen’s sexuality, but without insisting on the truth of her love for Antony. Indeed, Daniel introduces his Cleopatra, who will insist that her hold on Antony has been entirely destructive, as having been elicited by Pembroke’s portrait of Antony’s and Cleopatra’s suicides. The play’s dedication to the Countess of Pembroke insists that he would have been content to continue working in the private, self-referential world of his sonnet sequence *Delia* – to have “Made musique to my selfe that pleased me best” – “had not thy well grac’t *Antony*/Required his *Cleopatras* company.”⁴¹ But the story he feels required to tell about Antony and

⁴⁰ On *tryphe* in the Hellenic world and Roman culture shock in Egypt, see Robert S. Bianchi, “Ptolemaic Egypt and Rome: An Overview,” in *Cleopatra’s Egypt: Age of the Ptolemies* (The Brooklyn Museum, 1988), pp. 13–20.

⁴¹ I cite *The Tragedie of Cleopatra* as it appears in *The Works of Samuel Daniel Newly Augmented* (London, 1602); here, lines 10, 14, and 16 of the unpaginated dedicatory poem. Subsequent references will be provided parenthetically in my text.

Cleopatra differs markedly from Pembroke's account. Perhaps the first place their differences in tone and emphasis become visible is in the argument of Daniel's tragedy. Pembroke's *précis* sets the scene for Cleopatra's last declaration of passion: "she trussed up *Antonius* halfe dead, & so got him into the monument" (A2 verso). Daniel's account ends instead with a somber reminder of the eventual extinction of her bloodline: "*Cesario* her sonne, which she had by *Julius Caesar* (conveyed before unto India, out of the danger of the warres) was about the same time of her death, murdered at Rhodes . . . And so, hereby came the race of the Ptolemies to be wholly extinct, and the flourishing rich kingdome of Egypt utterly overthrowne and subdued" (F2 verso). The histrionic fervor of Pembroke's queen will not be allowed to stand as a reader's final memory of the story.

If Pembroke uses Cleopatra's sexuality to efface the existence of racial difference between Roman and Egyptian, Daniel uses it to proclaim and indict difference. Here, her children with Antony are the "lucklesse issue of a wofull mother,/The wretched pledges of a wanton bed," (F5) condemned by their very birth. As does Pembroke's Cleopatra, Daniel's queen decries her sexual effect on Antony, but more explicitly and at greater length assigns their joint downfall to her own vanity and lust:

For whilst my glory in her greatnesse stooode,
 And that I saw my state, and knew my beautie,
 Saw how the world admir'd me, how they woo'd,
 I then thought all men must love me of duetie;
 And I love none: for my lascivious Court,
 Fertile in ever fresh and new-choise pleasure,
 Affoorded me so bountifull disport,
 That I to stay on Love had never leisure:
 My vagabond desires no limites found,
 For lust is endless, pleasure hath no bound.
 Thou coming from the strictnesse of thy Citty,
 And never this loose pompe of monarchs learnest,
 Inur'd to warres, in women's wiles unwitty,
 Whilst others faind, thou fell'st in love in earnest.

(F7–F8)

Explicit in this Cleopatra's remorse is a contrast between her own "lascivious Court" and the "strictnesse" of Antony's native Rome. The play perceives Romans and Egyptians as having two separate and unalterably opposed identities. Octavius accuses her and all Egyptians of nursing an "innated hatred" against Rome, which she expressed by attacking the "league and love of blood" (H1 verso) between Antony and

Octavia – here, her attachment to Antony is more the product of sheer vindictiveness than of love. The lustful self-indulgence which drove her to seduce and ruin Antony is not merely a personal failing, but a manifestation of cultural alterity:

Misterious Egipt, wonder breeder,
 Strict religions strange observer,
 State-ordrer zeale, the best rule-keeper,
 Fostring still in temp'rate fervor:
 O how cam'st thou to lose so wholly
 All religion, law and order?
 And thus become the most unholy
 Of all Lands, that *Nylus* border?

With Cleopatra a prisoner, the country's only hope of survival is that the "sumptuous treasure" it contains will cause the Romans to "learne our way of weaknes,/. . . and carry home/Enough from us to ruine Rome" (I4–I4 verso).

In Daniel's *Cleopatra*, the queen's unbridled sexuality is centrally expressive of her country's corruption and disorder. Its luxury embodies Egypt's difference from, and poses the greatest danger to, Rome. Her sexuality is thus acculturated and racialized, just as the whiteness of Pembroke's Cleopatra occurs within a context of sexual guilt for having lured Antony away from his Roman obligations. Daniel's *Letter from Octavia to Marcus Antonius* dilates on the ways in which Cleopatra's sexuality might be racially linked, despite the fact that – like his *Cleopatra* – it nowhere assigns her a skin color. In the *Letter*, Octavia describes her absent husband as "disloyall," kept by his "impious love" in "a barbarous land."⁴² In Roman terms, an impious love would be one which violates the standards of Roman *pietas*: devotion to the good name of one's family and to the welfare of Rome, and submission to the will of the gods. By staying with Cleopatra, Octavia writes, Antony demonstrates that he "despise(s) his children, *Rome*, and me" (6:5–6). If she had strayed from her marriage bed the way he has, she wonders,

What mixture of strange generations would
 Succeede the fortunes of uncertaine Sires?
 What foule confusion in your bloud and race
 To your immortal shame, and our disgrace?
 (19:5–8)

⁴² I cite the *Letter* as it appears in *The Works of Samuel Daniel Newly Augmented*; here, 1:1–2. Subsequent references will be provided parenthetically in my text.