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Papermaking and Making Whiteness in *Othello*

On viewing a performance of *Othello* today, it is easy to overlook the succession of white objects and materials that enter the stage and, more subtly, our imaginations. It is, after all, a play fixated on blackness, and so less explicitly on whiteness. Although the handkerchief is hard to miss, the white linen bedsheets and 'smock' (5.2.271) that dominate the final scene are more easily overlooked as conventional domestic objects, and the white paper of the letters passed to and read by Othello have not previously been registered as meaningful objects.[1] This is exacerbated by the fact that some white substances that may have featured in an early performance of *Othello* are less commonly found in today's theatres: in particular, the white cosmetics that may have coated the face of the boy player playing Desdemona.[2] This article suggests that this network of white materials would not have been so easily overlooked on the early modern stage, and that it would have been particularly visible to a specific subsection of the audience: the women who performed or managed the work of cleaning and transforming the white linen, white paper and white skin in their own, or their employer's, households, and behind the scenes in early modern theatres.

For those attuned to the potential meanings and histories of these white materials, it is immediately clear that the linens, paper and actors' skin are interconnected both within and without the world of the play. The linen fabric that serves as the visual and conceptual centrepiece of the play, namely the handkerchief and the bedsheets, forms the raw material for making white paper, the substrate of Othello's letters. In turn, this white paper provides the raw material for the metaphor of Desdemona's 'fair paper' (4.2.72) or white skin. Next in the sequence of events, we imagine Desdemona wearing what is most likely a white linen 'smock' (5.2.271), entering her grave in a funeral shroud made from her white linen wedding sheets. Pursuing this pattern of whiteness in the play, three key elements emerge. The first is that the white objects and materials are constantly under threat of staining and losing their pristine whiteness. The second is that the white objects and materials are constantly being remade and reworked,

either imaginatively or literally. The third is the way in which whiteness' propensity to staining prompts male anxiety and violence in the play, with women bearing both the weight of this anxiety and the burden of cleaning and reworking the white materials on the stage and in the household. This article argues that as much as *Othello* is a play about early modern anxieties and formulations of blackness, and particularly black masculinity, it is also about the parallel anxieties of marring and making whiteness, and particularly, the role that the women of the period played in maintaining this precarious, malleable whiteness. A key subsection of the audience would have seen their own everyday work of manipulating the cleanliness and whiteness of domestic objects reflected in the racemaking taking place on stage during a performance of *Othello*. At the same time, they would have seen, through Desdemona, how the women of the period were freighted with the symbolic burden of whiteness. *Othello*, then, prompts recognition of early modern women's participation in upholding the work of racemaking through both their domestic labour and their status as racialised subjects and, in the same moment, prompts recognition of the contingency and fragility of this work.

White Linen

As Thomas Rymer famously noted in his 1693 commentary on *Othello*, there is 'So much ado, so much stress, so much passion and repetition about an Handkerchief!'[3] Rymer goes on to reimagine the play's tragic ending, suggesting that the handkerchief might not have been lost or stolen but, in fact, 'rumpl'd up with [Desdemona's] Wedding sheets'.[4] Here Rymer touches upon what was likely an instinctual response to the handkerchief: a sense of its kinship with the bedsheets that dominate the stage and Desdemona's imagination in acts 4 and 5 of the play.[5]

The handkerchief's trajectory is unmissable, from its first appearance in act 3 scene 3 as a proffered bandage for Othello's aching head to the hands of Emilia, to Iago, to Cassio, to Bianca, and finally, back to Cassio in act 4 scene 1 before Othello's green-monstered gaze. From this point onwards, the handkerchief does not reappear physically, but it continues to dominate Othello's imagination and that of the audience. Strikingly, one piece of white linen fabric is replaced by another, when in act 4 scene 2, part of the stage transforms into Desdemona's private chambers. From here until the end of the play, the marital bed takes centre stage. It is likely, though not certain, that white linen sheets or pillowcases, or 'bears', were visible on the stage bed, peeking out from beneath a coverlet. Such white material would certainly have populated

the audience's imagination, as Desdemona instructs Emilia to 'lay' her 'wedding sheets' on the bed (4.2.107), apparently as fixated on this fabric as her husband is on the handkerchief in the play's final scenes.

This imaginative and literal kinship between handkerchief and bedsheet of course only makes sense if the former is in fact a white linen object. Ian Smith has argued that the handkerchief is, contrary to critical consensus, black, and so representative of Othello's rather than Desdemona's body and subjectivity.[6] It seems likely, however, that the blackness, or non-whiteness, of the 'napkin' is limited to its embroidery: Othello—himself a potentially unreliable authority when it comes to the origins of the handkerchief—claims that the object was sewn from the 'silk' of 'hallow'd' worms and 'dyed in mummy' (3.4.75-76). As Smith points out, mummy would stain the fabric a dark, murky colour—a colour not unlike the deep red of 'strawberries'.[7] Most handkerchiefs extant from the period held by the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Metropolitan Museum are made from white linen, and are either plain, bordered with lace, or with silk embroidery.[8] They look like miniature versions of the white linen bedsheets, often bordered with lace, from the period.[9] It seems likely, therefore, that *Othello*'s handkerchief was one such white linen object, embroidered with a reddish-brown pattern that may or may not have been visible to the audience. Smith's provocative claim for the handkerchief's blackness does, though, warn us against taking the primacy of whiteness for granted in early modern texts, and so 'reproduc[ing] a dominant 'white' ideology' in our critical work.[10] By paying close attention to the ways in which *Othello* highlights and laboriously maintains whiteness, however, we are able to critically examine, rather than 'reproduce', the creation of this 'dominant 'white' ideology'.[11]

As has often been observed, the idea of a handkerchief 'spotted with strawberries' (3.3.438) would have prompted the image of blood-stained bedding on a wedding night—or, as Othello puts it more murderously in act 5, a 'bed, lust-stained … with lust's blood … spotted' (5.1.36). The idea of the couple's sexual exploits is, after all, foregrounded from the very beginning of the play.[12] But throughout, a white material or surface is stained with black as often as it is with red, and the two colours and acts of staining become muddled. This is how Iago characterises the interracial relationship at the heart of the play: as 'an old black ram … tupping [Brabantio's] white ewe' (1.1.87-88). Othello later re-verbalises this pattern, describing Desdemona's 'fresh … visage' as 'begrimed and black' by her unfaithfulness (3.3.389-390). The black make-up of the actor playing Othello might have transferred onto the white make-up of the boy player playing Desdemona—or

at least have threatened to do so—during the performance, and therefore, in Othello's words, have become 'begrimed and black/As mine own face' (3.3.390-391). Similarly, so often prompted to think of Othello and Desdemona 'tupping' on their marital bed, an audience member's imagination might easily stray to the way in which Othello's black make up would also stain its white linen bedsheets. This image comes to life in act 5 scene 2 when Othello smothers Desdemona, pressing her into the bed and possibly leaving a residual trace of black paint on its sheets.

Desdemona's moral and physical purity is, therefore, closely connected to the cleanliness of her bedding throughout the play. This is nowhere more apparent than when her murder is being plotted and enacted. Lago instructs Othello to 'Do it not with poison', but to 'strangle her in her bed – even the bed she hath contaminated' (4.1.204-205). Here, Desdemona's morally dirty bedding is to be the site of her moral punishment, and Othello is, as ever, steered by Iago's words. His own plan is to 'not shed her blood/Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow/And smooth as monumental alabaster' (5.2.4-5), and he murders her on the marital bed. A side effect of maintaining Desdemona's pure whiteness, and not staining her skin with her own blood, is that her bedding will also remain unspotted by blood. Both the Quarto and Folio stage directions indicate that Othello follows through with his plan, either stifling or smothering her. This slight variation from Iago's instructions—smothering rather than strangulation—might indicate that yet another white linen object takes on a prominent role onstage: one of the pillows, likely in a white linen pillowcase, lifted from the bed, is perhaps the murder weapon. Othello draws attention to the whiteness of the final tableau when he describes Desdemona's corpse as 'Pale as thy smock' (5.2.271). The prominence of the white linen objects—certainly the smock worn by the boy player, and perhaps also visible bedsheets and pillowcases—stresses the moral purity that Desdemona has maintained throughout the play.[13] Desdemona's bed might have also maintained its literal purity, as T. G. A Nelson and Charles Haines influentially suggest that Othello and Desdemona might not in fact have found the time to consummate their marriage.[14] The 'bloody period' of Othello's suicide, stabbing himself as he 'die[s] upon a kiss' (5.2.357), might then be the only time that the marital bed is actually (within the reality of the play, if not on the stage) stained with red, at the same moment as black paint might again transfer onto Desdemona's white-painted face and bedding.

To borrow Rymer's phrasing, why is there 'So much ado, so much stress, so much passion and repetition about' *bedding*, whether dirty or clean, in *Othello*?[15] On the face of it, the answer is a simple one:

bedding is far more significant than a 'trifl[ing]' handkerchief because it is emblematic of sexual purity, and therefore the purity of a family line.[16] Male anxiety concerning female chastity is widespread in the period, and a theme obsessively returned to in its literature, particularly its tragic drama.[17] This is not, though, the only significance that *Othello*'s clean and stained bedding would have held and was perhaps not the most immediate concern in the minds of some audience members. A significant proportion of the women in the audience would have been intimately familiar with the ins and outs of dirty linen.[18] As Anthony Buxton's survey of Thame households in the period demonstrates, all but the poorest families owned multiple bedsheets and other linens of varying degrees of quality.[19] Linen made up one of the more valuable assets in most households, and it required frequent cleaning because of its intimate use next to the skin as bedding or underclothes.[20] As Gervase Markham's lengthy instructions to 'fetch out the spottes' of clean linen make clear, laundry was a highly physical and time-consuming process, involving several days' work and waste products such as wood ash and urine and faeces (or 'chamber lye').[21] This laborious and dirty process would culminate in the linens being hung outside and, ideally, bleaching in the sun, and so ending up whiter than they were prior to being 'spotte[d]'.[22] This work would have been performed by middling status women in their own households or outsourced to poorer women—either serving women in permanent employment, or the 'veri pore' widows and single women who, as Carole Rawcliffe notes, were often associated with 'dirt, prostitution, poverty and disorderly conduct'.[23]

In *Othello*, we catch glimpses of how domestic labour was demarcated along the lines of social status: as a noblewoman, Desdemona would not herself have physically performed housework, but she would have been expected to actively manage the storage and maintenance of domestic items such as linens.[24] Such management was considered an important signifier of a wife's moral purity and goodness.[25] We see this management in Desdemona's repeated instructions to Emilia in act 4 concerning her 'wedding sheets' (4.2.107), and we catch glimpses of the sort of ad hoc labour that poorer women would have performed in Cassio's instructions to Bianca concerning the handkerchief. He tells her to 'take out the work' or to copy the strawberry-spotted embroidery (4.1.149-150) onto another handkerchief. Bianca's social status in the play is uncertain, but it is frequently implied that she is a sex worker, and so her ad hoc domestic work and 'disorderly conduct' resembles that of the precariously employed laundresses and washerwomen—a fate an early modern audience might imagine awaiting a courtesan later in her life.[26]

In fact, all the play's women carry out some form of labour on its linen fabrics or, in Bianca's case, refuse to do so. This, alongside the play's frequent references to the 'contaminat[ion]' (4.1.205) and 'spott[ing]' (5.1.36) of these materials, means that women's work managing and maintaining the cleanliness of white linen would have been highly visible to attentive audience members. The tableau of Desdemona, white-faced and shrouded in white linen, certainly emblematises purity and cleanliness. At the same time, it would have evoked, for its laundry-literate viewers, thoughts of the labour involved in maintaining and—through time-consuming bleaching—increasing linen's whiteness.

We can contrast *Othello*'s linens with another linen object found on the early modern stage: the starched ruffs that Natasha Korda examines in her scholarship on laundry, costume and theatre.[27] Korda outlines how ruffs are the product of women's 'transformative' but fleeting and endlessly repeated work.[28] This labour, she argues, is inevitably overlooked by the audience because of the 'spectacular' nature of the end product—the striking and fragile ruffs that 'distance the body of the wearer and the mind of the spectator from the messy world of manual work'.[29] The bedding and handkerchief in *Othello* can be distinguished from these ruffs as they are decidedly mundane and non-spectacular domestic objects. As a result, they produce the opposite effect for the laundry-literate subsection of the audience, drawing attention to, rather than away from, the work of maintaining and endlessly reproducing their precariously pristine appearance. Korda's ruffs and *Othello*'s dirty linens do, though, share their origin in women's 'sweat, soil, and toil', and both demonstrate that women's work was 'never carried out' in early modern households and theatres.[30] Korda coins the term 'laundry time' to characterise this unending, difficult and dirty work.[31] In the context of *Othello*, the cyclical and repetitive nature of laundry time is inseparable from the sustenance and improvement of whiteness. The play's domestically sensitive viewers are reminded that spotting and staining is not permanent, but removeable through work, and that with each round of dirtying, washing, and drying in the sunlight, the linen becomes (in ideal circumstances) whiter than it was before.[32] Whiteness, *Othello*'s linens demonstrate, is something that is not irretrievably lost upon staining, just as the boy player playing Desdemona might have repaired and reapplied his white face paint, possibly 'begrimed' (3.3.390) by Othello's black paint, between scenes. It is simply the job of women such as Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca to manage and maintain this whiteness through constant attention and work, just as their bodies, and the bodies of early modern English women more

broadly, were sites of cultural anxieties surrounding whiteness and moral purity.

The audiences' women would also have known that the cyclical nature of laundry time was not infinite. Although linens are cleaned and bleached in repeated washes and exposures to sunlight, there inevitably comes a time when linen fibres begin to disintegrate, and so sheets and clothing transform into rags. Ideas of whiteness and purity do not, however, disintegrate alongside the linen fibres: as we will see, decomposing and recycled linen remained capable of bearing the metaphorical weight of whiteness and performing the imaginative work of racemaking.

White Paper

Othello's linens are materially continuous with another of the play's stage properties: the white paper letters that appear in several scenes. Once used to the point of disintegration, linen rags were gathered and sold to papermakers, who rapidly accelerated the decomposition of the linen fibres to produce paper sheets.[33] High-quality rags that originated in a household such as Desdemona's would have been used to make the highest quality white paper, in a process that Thomas Churchyard eulogises as 'drosse and rags' made 'Paper white and cleane'.[34] *Othello* contains hints of this kinship between the handkerchief and paper sheets in particular; Cassio treats the linen napkin as a text when he instructs Bianca to 'cop[y]' its pattern (3.4.190), and the alternate phrasing 'take out the work' (4.1.149-150) might suggest the handkerchief's eventual fate after the embroidered pattern has been unpicked and removed.[35] Emilia may be motivated to unpick the pattern to conceal the provenance of the handkerchief she has stolen from Desdemona at the behest of her husband Iago, but this is also no doubt the sort of work that rag-collectors, who were usually poor women, would have carried out when handling high-quality linen rags.[36] Coloured embroidery would have been 'taken out' to prevent the contamination of the pulp for the best quality white paper. *Othello*'s handkerchief is, therefore, treated as a text to be copied in a manner befitting its future transformation.

The latent paperiness of the handkerchief becomes clearer with the arrival of a letter in act 4 scene 1. Letters are of course a very common prop, appearing 111 times in Shakespeare's plays and in over 400 stage directions in the period.[37] Most frequently, letters serve to progress the plot, and on the face of it letters serve no more significant function than this in *Othello*. In this scene, however, Lodovico grants particular significance to the letter that 'command[s]' Othello 'home, /Deputing Cassio in

his government' (4.1.234-236). Lodovico suggests that the letter 'moved him', and after Othello strikes Desdemona, naming her a 'Devil' (4.1.239), he asks, 'did the letters work upon his blood/And new-create this fault?' (4.1.275-276). In this scene, the effect of the letter becomes muddled with Othello's jealousy, which is firmly rooted in the peregrinations of the handkerchief. Both Desdemona's response to the news brought by the letter (she is 'glad on't' (4.1.237)) and the movements of the handkerchief are interpreted by Othello as signs of her infidelity. The similarities in shape, colour and material of the letter and the linen handkerchief become even more significant within the next 100 lines, when Othello reaches for a metaphor grounded in the paper object he has so recently handled. He asks of Desdemona, 'Was this fair paper, this most goodly book /Made to write 'whore' upon?' (4.2.72-73). In this moment, paper enters firmly into the network of the play's vulnerable white materials—linen handkerchief and bedding, the boy player's white-painted face and now, a textual sheet. The metaphor transforms Desdemona's white skin into a writing surface, and her immoral actions into an inky branding. It recalls Othello's earlier image of Desdemona's 'visage … begrimed and black/As [his] own face' (3.3.390-391), but now the blackening has transformed from dirt that can be washed off into a mark absorbed irreversibly by the page's fibres.

Just as male anxieties concerning the 'contamination' of the marriage bed are widespread in the period, the idea of woman as text is a pervasive trope in early modern literature.[38] Both paper and women's bodies are frequently idealised as pure, white surfaces, ripe for pressing by the male pen. In addition to this sexualised fantasy of inscription, the trope is tied up with male anxieties concerning the difficulty of deciphering a woman's honesty and purity.[39] Othello's imagined inscription of 'whore' is one of many examples of male wish-fulfilment, in which a woman's true nature is immediately legible on the outside of her body, most often her forehead or brow. The direct inverse of this is the idea of the white devil, whose immoral interior is concealed by a beautiful white exterior, and by implication, a layer of cosmetics.[40] Othello inevitably reaches for this trope, often naming Desdemona a 'devil' in his fits of jealous rage, and specifically a 'fair devil' when he first decides to murder her (3.3.481). As Kim Hall has argued, this racialised rhetoric 'allows white men to lump all 'others' (male and female) into another, less valued group', and so establishes 'secondary positions that reinforce European hegemony'.[41] In the same moment, Desdemona is black on the inside (a fair devil) and black on the outside ('whore'-marked), and so slotted, via the metaphor of 'inkface', into what Miles Grier has described as the 'elastic category' of denigrated and legible blackness.[42] Othello,

therefore, internalises and reiterates the dominant early modern binarisation of blackness and whiteness as he defines and denigrates Desdemona in these terms throughout the play. He draws attention to Desdemona's white make up, fixing its meaning as a deceptive surface that is vulnerable to marking, making legible the foulness beneath.[43] Her skin is a white sheet of paper, permanently bearing the text 'whore': although she is physically fair and white, her immorality has made her metaphorically foul and inky black.

Desdemona constructs her own identity through another paper-related object in the final scenes of the play. As we have seen, she is fixated on her wedding sheets, at one point directing Emilia to 'shroud' her in them (4.3.22-23). As Sarah Wall-Randell points out, the relationship between winding sheets and paper sheets is a paradoxical one: 'since their owners never finished using them, never wore them out, winding sheets were perhaps the only category of household or personal linen that would not have ended up sold to a ragpicker to be turned into paper.'[44] But, Wall-Randell continues, the decomposition of the winding sheet in the grave resembles the disintegration that is central to the conversion of linen rags into paper.[45] This understanding of decomposition and the afterlife was, after all, connected with the papermaking process by some religious writers: Henry Valentine describes how 'the body when it rots in the grave, is as linen worn to rags, and cast upon the dunghill: but at the resurrection, it is like those rags gathered up, and made into paper, which many times becomes gilt, and capable of noble and divine impressions.'[46] For Valentine and Marlowe, the decomposition of bodies and linens is often combined, and results in memorialising paper objects.

Desdemona's shroud can similarly be read in the context of paper and papermaking. In managing their household linens, women in Desdemona's position would have determined when older fabrics were worn enough to be given to servants—the first step in a lengthy process at the end of which the linens would become rags, and so be collected by even poorer women and sold to the papermaker.[47] If used as winding sheets, Desdemona's bed linen would of course not be sold to the papermaker, as Wall-Randell points out. The winding sheets, however, enter into a recycling economy that incorporates the reuse of linen, and they are imagined as 'co-decompos[ing]' alongside her body in the grave, in a manner resembling the fate of linen rags in the papermaker's vats.[48] Desdemona's impurities and potential blackness will be washed away in the process of rotting, as, to borrow Valentine's description, 'the body' and 'rags' are transformed and so made 'capable of noble and divine impressions.'[49] Desdemona's shrouding is, like laundry and

papermaking, women's work that maintains and improves whiteness. Paradoxically, however, the 'noble and divine impressions' on this metaphorically papery skin are inky black ones, and so Desdemona's instructions also hint towards future potential re-blackenings, and the repeated staining of white surfaces, that have so characterised the play. In death, she will continue to serve as a sheet of 'fair paper' (4.2.72) to be written on by either men's noble, 'blazoning pens' (2.1.63) or be marked by their jealousy.[50] In the play, the domestic cycle of laundry time in combination with the latent images of papermaking and textual inscription create a nonlinear material logic in which whiteness can be restored and improved but easily re-stained. In the final tableau, Desdemona is reinstated as a white surface on which men can project their sexual and racial anxieties, but this white surface is also visibly vulnerable to further corruption and blackening. Her whiteness is akin to that of linen fabric, repeatedly stained, washed, and bleached, or sullied linen rags purified in papermakers' vats, ready, in this tangled material logic, to once again be blackened by men's anxious ink.

In paying careful attention to the white objects onstage in *Othello*, a sensitive viewer will see how whiteness is laboriously managed and remade by the women in the play. This whiteness extends from the linen and paper objects to the potentially white make-up of the boy players playing the women, and so to the idea of the white skin of all the actors and white audience members. Racialised and corporeal whiteness is, by extension, as vulnerable, unstable, and requiring of constant work as the play's linen and rag-based sheets, and it can be either lost through careless staining or improved through hard work. In her analysis of Desdemona's whiteface, Noémie Ndiaye argues that the 'artificiality of this rhetoric and ideology' of binarised whiteness and blackness is made visible in *Othello*, and so the 'white male gaze' is potentially 'critiqued'.[51] Ndiaye is certainly correct, however, when she concludes that this 'critique … does not cast any doubt on the power of the white male gaze, whose domination … remains absolute.'[52] The play's concluding tableau, is, after all, Desdemona, 'Pale as [her] smock' (5.2.271) on her bedsheets in her white make up, pressed by her husband, the 'black ram' (1.1.87-88), in black make up. The white linen-bound corpse is imagined decomposing in her wedding sheets in her grave and returning as fair paper. Although Desdemona's whiteness is haunted by its vulnerability to staining and marking, the play ends with this whiteness buttressed and restored. The play's moral and physical blackness is expelled, and we have faith in the ability of the play's women and the playhouse labourers to clean and whiten its linen, recycle its rags and restore the boy players' white faces ready for the next performance.

Notes

1 William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. by Ayanna Thompson (Arden: London, 2016).

2 See Farah Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 146-147 and Kimberly Poitevin, 'Inventing Whiteness: Cosmetics, Race, and Women in Early Modern England', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 11:1 (2011), 59–89, esp. 73.

3 Thomas Rymer, *A Short View of Tragedy* (London: Richard Baldwin, 1693), 138.

4 Ibid., 138.

5 For other explorations of this kinship, see Lynda E. Boose, 'Othello's Handkerchief: "The Recognizance and Pledge of Love", *English Literary Renaissance* 5:3 (1975), 360–374; and Sujata Iyengar, 'Beds, Handkerchiefs, and Moving Objects in *Othello*', *Borrowers and Lenders* 11:1 (2017) https://borrowers-ojs-azsu.tdl.org/borrowers/article/view/261

6 Ian Smith, 'Othello's Black Handkerchief', *Shakespeare Quarterly,* 64:1 (2013), 1–25.

7 Ibid., 16-20.

8 For instance, V&A T.151-1960 (English linen handkerchief c. 1600) and T.99-1954 (English linen handkerchief, embroidered with yellow silk, 1,600-1,630; Met 39.123.1 (Italian linen handkerchief embroidered with white silk, 17th century).

9 For instance, the white, linen bedsheet with lace, and the embroidered initials EH (Elizabeth Hathaway?), Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, STRST: SBT 1993-31/654a.

10 Smith, 24-25. See also Ian Smith, *Black Shakespeare: Reading and Misreading Race* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

11 Smith, 24-25. On the importance of analysing whiteness, see, as a starting point, Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997).

12 Boose, 360-374.

13 For a smock, see V&A T.2-1956 (English, linen with pink silk embroidery, 1,615-1,630); for pillow-beres (pillow cases, see V&A T.298B-1965 (English, plain woven linen, 17th century).

14 T. G. A Nelson and Charles Haines, 'Othello's Unconsummated Marriage', *Essays in Criticism* 33.1 (1983): 1-18.

15 Rymer, 138.

16 Rymer, 138.

17 See, for example, Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

18 For another interpretation of the linen in *Othello*, see Susan Frye, *Pens and Needles: Women's Textualities in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 160–190. In contrast to the argument presented here, Frye sees women's work being usurped by the play's men, and so resulting in tragedy.

19 Anthony Buxton, *Domestic Culture in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015), 184–195.

20 Buxton, *Domestic Culture*, 190.

21 Gervase Markham, quoted in Natasha Korda, 'Much Ado About Ruffs: Laundry Time in Feminist Counter-Archives', in Kristen Poole and Owen Willian, *Early Modern Histories of Time: The Periodizations of Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 124–142, 130–131; Carole Rawcliffe, 'A Marginal Occupation? The Medieval Laundress and her Work,' *Gender & History,* 21:1 (2009), 147-169, 153.

22 Markham in Korda, 'Much Ado About Ruffs', 130–131.

23 Rawcliffe, 'A Marginal Occupation?', 151.

24 Veronica Sekules, 'Spinning Yarns: Clean Linen and Domestic Values in Late Medieval French Culture', in *The Material Culture of Sex, Procreation, and Marriage in Premodern Europe*, ed. Anne L. McClanan and Karen Rosoff Encarnación (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 79–91, 87–88.

25 Sekules, 'Spinning Yarns', 87–88.

26 Rawcliffe, 'A Marginal Occupation?', 151.

27 Natasha Korda, *Labors Lost: Women's Work and the Early Modern English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), esp. 95–102, and 'Much Ado About Ruffs', 124–142.

28 Korda, *Labors Lost*, 97.

29 Ibid, 97.

30 Ibid, 97.

31 Ibid, 97; Korda, 'Much Ado About Ruffs', 129.

32 Korda, *Labors Lost*, 97.

33 See Joshua Calhoun, *The Nature of the Page: Poetry, Papermaking, and the Ecology of Texts in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), esp. pp. 28–73; on rag collecting, see Heidi Craig, 'English Rag-Women and Early Modern Paper Production', in *Women's Labour and the History of the Book in Early Modern England*, ed. by Valerie Wayne (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 29–46.

34 Thomas Churchyard, *A Sparke of Frendship and Warme Goodwill*, STC 5257 (London: [T. Orwin], 1588), D3r-v. It is worth noting that John Taylor's description of "The linnen of some Countesse or some Queene" lying "on the dunghill, bare and poore/Mix'd with the rags of some baud, theefe, of whore" is poetic license and not the economic reality of the best quality rags being used for the best quality paper (*All the Workes of Iohn Taylor the Water Poet*, STC 23725 (London: I[ohn] B[eale], Elizabeth Allde, Bernard Alsop, and Thomas Fawcet for Iames Boler, 1630), 70).

35 Churchyard, *A Sparke of Frendship*, D3r.

36 Craig, 29–46.

37 Alan Stewart, *Shakespeare's Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 4; Alan Dessen and Leslie Thomson's *Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama, 1580–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 131.

38 See Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the Renaissance* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1993), esp. 23–110.

39 See, for example, Miranda Garno Nesler, 'Closeted Authority in the *Tragedy of Mariam*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900,* 52:2 (2012), 363–385.

40 See Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 180. Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam*, alongside John Webster's *The White Devil*, offers the most comprehensive exploration of this trope on the early modern stage. For instance, when Herod says of Salome, "Now doe I know thy falshood, painted Devil/Thou white Inchantress. Oh thou art so foule,/That Ysop cannot clense thee worst of evil./A beauteous body hides a loathsome soul."

41 Ibid., 182.

42 Miles P. Grier, *Inkface: Othello and White Authority in the Era of Atlantic Slavery* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2023).

43 On Desdemona's whiteface 'as the iconic sign whose meaning is being indexically closed' in the play, see Noémie Ndiaye, *Scripts of Blackness: Early Modern Performance Culture and the Making of Race* (Pennsylvania: Philadelphia University Press, 2022), 38.

44 Sarah Wall-Randell, 'Marlowe's Lucan: Winding-Sheets and Scattered Leaves', in *Christopher Marlowe, Theatrical Commerce, and the Book Trade*, ed. by Kirk Melnikoff and Roslyn Knutson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 11–25, 15.

45 Ibid., 16-18.

46 Henry Valentine, *Private Devotions, Digested into Six Letanies*, Wing 24576.3 (London: [M. Flesher] for John Marriot, [1635]), 256–257.

47 Sekules, 81.

48 Wall-Randell, 16.

49 Valentine, 357.

50 On this idea, see Cassio's speech borrowing from the language of love poetry at 2.1.61-64 and Desdemona's question, "What wouldst thou write of me?" to Iago at 2.1.117. This conforms to Ian Smith's understanding of the play as one centrally concerned with storytelling: *Black Shakespeare*, 163.

51 Ndiaye, 60.

52 Ndiaye, 61.

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