

## Moors, Social Anxiety and Horror in Thomas Rawlins's *The Rebellion*

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This article is a work-in-progress piece prompted by the discovery this past summer of a play that seems to have been overlooked by almost everyone studying race in the early modern period: Thomas Rawlins's *The Rebellion*. This is a curious oversight because it is the only play of the period to portray a married black couple in a European context, and give both partners strong speaking parts. It is also the only play to present a rationalization behind the banishment of the Moors from Spain.<sup>1</sup> Even though the account is highly fictionalized and has little claim to historical accuracy, the internal or domestic contextualization of the ban is itself of interest.<sup>2</sup> A brief look at the possibilities for critical analysis raised by *The Rebellion* will demonstrate that the narrative context incorporates broader domestic issues into racial prejudice. Blackness is, in fact, made to collude with and become a mask for a range of social concerns and horrors. I would argue that it is this social setting that reinforces and ensures the power of the racist rhetoric.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature* has a one-line reference to *The Rebellion* in relation to its connection to Spain: "The last two volumes of *Dodsley's Old Plays* contain several dramas of the restoration which are Spanish in theme. Of these, *The Rebellion* by Thomas Rawlins seems wholly fanciful with its hero disguised as a tailor and its crowded and improbable incident" (1907-21: 18). As will become apparent in this essay, I do not agree that this is a fair summation of the play; Khalid Bekkaoui includes *The Rebellion* in a Sheffield Hallam working paper entitled "The Moorish Figure and Figures of Resistance," but aside from listing it as containing Moroccan figures, Bekkaoui does not discuss or comment on the play. His focus is on Eleazar in Thomas Dekker's *Lust's Dominion*.

<sup>2</sup> The play blends elements of late fifteenth-early sixteenth century coastal raiding, with the rebellion of 1568-71 put down by Philip II (it exchanges the Ottoman Turks of the raids with French soldiers and makes the raiding into a seige). It glosses over the duration and blood spilled in the rebellion, and ties the uprising to the final expulsion of the Moors by Philip III in 1609-14.

In this article, I will introduce my thesis project but focus on Thomas Rawlins and his play. I will give a broad outline of the treatment of race in *The Rebellion*, before sketching how social horrors related to class and sexual contamination become entangled with race in the play. I will conclude by presenting an abbreviated argument that Rawlins sets nature against free will or self-fashioning in relation to the three issues of race, sex and class. In repeatedly reproducing this tension in his play Rawlins participates in the interrogation of the increasingly contested foundation of knowledge of human ontology during the seventeenth century. He also ties this epistemological tension to social and political anxieties and their realization as social horrors.

### *The project*

In my thesis, I am exploring the disruptive social contexts and the links to horror and to inter-racial relationships in four tragedies of blood. Rawlins's play is one of the four, and the others are Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Thomas Dekker's *Lust's Dominion*,<sup>3</sup> and William Rowley's *All's Lost by Lust*. The project is tentatively entitled, "Horror, Race, Sex: Miscegenation and Social Signification in Four Renaissance Plays." As I see it, the backdrop of horror and the entanglement of racial concerns with social fears, epistemological concerns, and entrenched prejudices against women are key to the power of the rhetoric of racism that the plays produce.

The most recent full-length study of the representation of Moors is Virginia Mason Vaughan's *Performing Blackness* (2005), in which she problematizes the idea of the stereotype and the blackface by emphasizing the difference between spectacle and talking characters. Her study usefully highlights theatrical conventions in performance, such as appearance, linguistic tropes, speech patterns and plot situations as dramatic signs. Vaughan argues for these signs as functioning as a system that shaped "the ways black characters were 'read' by white audiences" (2005: 3). Her central concern is with stereotyping patterns. My emphasis is broader in the sense that I am looking at thematic

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<sup>3</sup> *Lust's Dominion: or the Lascivious Queen* is usually identified with *The Spanish Moor's Tragedy*. Henslowe records a payment to "Thomas Decker" for a book with this title on 13 February 1598/99.

conventions of tragedies of blood and how they interact with racial signification and thus affect the reading of race.

The difference between my study and Vaughan's can be generalized, because although the stock figure of the Moor as a Machiavellian and/or erotic villain has been well-documented, the effects of the contextualization of race as blackness within different narrative structures has not been sufficiently studied beyond the stereotypical scenes, e.g. villainous bombast, horrific endings, deceptive use of lust, etc.<sup>4</sup> This is a seemingly understandable omission as the plays are more or less repetitions of the same tragic tale of lust, ambition or revenge, but there are other concerns reflected in these dramas, such as gender and class, epistemology and mood that deserve critical attention. In my thesis project on horror and miscegenation, I argue that race and racism are intertwined with these issues at a deep level. I take a pragmatic view: the likelihood that the study of the pervasive use of stock Moorish villains will result in an understanding of the justification for racist imperialism seems unlikely unless our own context of that study is broadened beyond the category of race. I believe that even though the descriptive analysis of early modern racial stereotypes has gone a long way towards explaining the iterative and ingrained character of what would later develop into imperialist racist rhetoric, it still cannot give a fully satisfactory explanation for it. The proliferation of the rhetoric outside the theatre and dramatic literature's connection to the development of imperialist racism are both issues that need to be further investigated. I would content that in order to understand the power of the rhetoric of, for

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<sup>4</sup> The most important books written about blacks in English drama in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are Eldred Jones, *Othello's Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama* (1965) and *The Elizabethan Image of Africa* (1971); Elliot H. Tokson, *The Popular Image of the Black Man in English Drama, 1550-1688* (1982); Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* (1987); Jack D'Amico, *The Moor in English Renaissance Drama* (1991); Ania Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (1989); Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (1995); and Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500-1800* (2005). Many others have also contributed significant work, such as Emily Bartels, Arthur Little, and Michael Neill.

example, the Moorish or black stereotypes,<sup>5</sup> literary analysts need to ask questions that probe and highlight the contextualization of race, and the juxtaposition of race, gender and class in the dramas themselves. My specific interest is the creation and effect of the generalized mood of horror in tragedies of blood, and horror's connection to sexuality and inter-racial relationships. Thomas Rawlins's play is at the core of a chapter that focuses on transgressions of class as a type of social horror which in turn has intricate ties with sexual and racial concerns.

Though tragedies of blood are often identified as identical with revenge tragedies, Fredson Bowers makes a useful distinction when he classes "tragedies of blood" as a broader category that includes both the early "Elizabethan *drama of revenge*" with its "tortured hero revenger," such as *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Hamlet* and *Antonio's Revenge*, and the later villain (and victim) tragedies, such as *Hoffman*, *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *Valentinian* (1940: 154-5, emphasis added). What makes Bowers's classification messy is that he tries to retain the interchangeability of "tragedies of blood" and "revenge tragedies," reserving the confusingly similar term "tragedy [or drama] of revenge" for the earlier Kydian or Elizabethan type.<sup>6</sup> I think that this undermines what can otherwise be seen as a useful distinction between a broader category of plays and three of its sub-categories or genres (revenge, and victim and villain tragedies). Seen in this light, the revenge sub-genre can instead be more straightforwardly delineated as temporally divisible into the Elizabethan plays that focus mainly on hero revengers and the Jacobean plays that emphasize revenge and focus on villains. The use of the designation of tragedies of blood as a broader genre category would

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<sup>5</sup> Because of the indeterminacy of the use of the term 'Moor' and the fact that it overlaps with other racial markers in many of the plays of the period, I use the term 'black' as an added reference. Admittedly, the term 'black' has its inaccuracies as well in relation to many plays of the period as several characters are referred to as both 'black' and 'Indian' making final determinations of racial heritage difficult.

<sup>6</sup> Bowers classifies *Titus Andronicus* as a "tragedy of revenge," i.e. Titus as a hero revenger, but in recent criticism his characterization is taken to be much more ambiguous because the revenge cycle starts with Titus's approval of the sacrifice of Tamora's son Alarbus. To this can be added that the death of Titus's sons at the hands of a mistaken Roman justice has more in common with *Hoffman* than it does with *Hamlet*.

allow such plays as *Lust's Dominion*, *All's Lost by Lust and The Rebellion* to be classed with, for example, *Titus Andronicus* without dependence on revenge as a shared central motive.<sup>7</sup> Revenge plays a subordinate topical role in these later tragedies. Aside from cries of Vindicta! and brief references to a motive here and there, there is very little follow up on the centrality of revenge itself. If tragedies of blood is given a more meaningful definition based on its shared conventions: transgression, violence, excess, and the production of horror regardless of the prominence or obscurity of the revenge motive, then the commonalities between a revenge tragedy like *Titus Andronicus* and a play like *The Rebellion* become readily apparent. As stated, a central concern in my project is the effects of the commonalities in this broader genre on the depiction of race.

The increasingly complex theorization of horror by such critics as Mary Douglas, Noel Carroll, and Cynthia Freeland necessitates at least a working definition when applied to Renaissance or early modern drama. For the purpose of my study, I have chosen to view *horror* as representations that are designed to provoke repugnance or elicit fear. Repugnance or revulsion is incited by that which is deemed monstrous, whether it be physically or socially or psychically. Horror and the horror story are thus defined by the affect they engender,<sup>8</sup> and they thus encompass both the dramatic representation *of* the mutilation of Lavinia

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<sup>7</sup> An indication that Bowers was aware of this problematic regarding the revenge motive is apparent in that even though he includes all four of the plays in this study in his book, he only lists *Titus* in his theoretical discussions.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Carroll for a discussion of the horror genre as defined by the effect it is designed to elicit (1987: 52). Though “in the tradition of *The Poetics*,” Carroll’s theory opens up a ‘new’ category, the horror genre, and by extension the possibility to theorize or reevaluate tragedies of blood as a separate type of tragedy, as its own genre: horror tragedies (52). This is particularly relevant to a discussion of Renaissance drama and its association through most of its critical history with Aristotelian poetics and the privileging of a certain type of tragedy. A. C. Bradley’s elevation of in particular Shakespearean tragedy’s power to evoke pity and fear through individuation of character development, i.e. the refinement of the soliloquy and access to the psychic interior, successfully sidelined the study of other types of tragedy for much of the twentieth century. A reinterpretation of tragedies of blood as horror tragedies would usefully separate them from the Shakespearean type and allow them to be studied on their own terms.

in *Titus* and the effect of her mutilated body on her uncle, her father and her family—and the audience or reader. Horror can also be produced and represented at the cognitive level when Chiron and Demetrius make macabre jokes about hands after they have cut hers off. Much of the horror in tragedies of blood is physical, concrete, but an equally large share is social, religious or cognitive. Social horrors are transgressions, such as adultery, rape, usurpation of power, but also political and economic corruption. Religious horrors are evident in the use and invocation of dark powers but also church corruption and abuse of ecclesiastical authority, as well as images of hell and damnation. Cognitive horror is usually in the form of deception or feigned, real or ambiguous madness. In my work, I argue that cognitive horror is also produced by the plays as well as represented in them through the use of rumor and speculation. While *The Rebellion* has its share of physical and social horrors—including class transgression—I contend that their effect is to foment the anxiety of epistemological uncertainty, that is to emphasize the cognitive or psychic horror of doubt or rather receding clarity. What is the nature of class? of gender? of race? of the white privileged male?

#### *Rawlins and The Rebellion*

We do not know very much about either Thomas Rawlins or his play *The Rebellion*. W. Carew Hazlitt draws the conclusion from the eleven introductory verses to this play that the playwright was well off and respected, and that he wrote the play as a young man (1875: 4). As several of the writers of these verses were fellow poets and playwrights, Rawlins's respectability within his field and status seems to be confirmed. From Rawlins's own reference to a pre-existing engagement between himself and "the worshipful, and his honoured kinsman, Robert Ducie, of Aston" in the dedicatory opening to the printed copy of *The Rebellion*, it is clear that he had the patronage of this richer relative and that the play was written in part as fulfilment of a contract. During his lifetime, Rawlins only published one other play that is still extant, the pastoral comedy, *Extravagant Shepherd*, a translation from the French original by Thomas Corneille, in 1654. He did, however, publish an octavo volume of poems, *Calanthe*, in 1648, and there are two other

plays credited to him. They are both comedies and were printed after his death in 1670, *Tom Essence: or the Modish Wife*, which was licensed in 1676, and *Tun-bridge-Wells: or A Day's Courtship*, printed in London in 1678.

The title-page of *The Rebellion* states that it is a tragedy and that “it was acted nine dayes together, and divers times since, with good applause, by his Majesties Company of Revells. Written by Thomas Rawlins. London: Printed by I. Okes, for Daniell Frere, and are to be sold at the Signe of the Red Bull in Little Brittain. 1640” (Hazlitt 1875: 2). The editors of *The Revels History* bring to light an interesting aspect of the Revels Company: “In the winter season of 1635-1635/6 the Salisbury Court players performed three times at Hampton Court and at St. James, but this is the last known record of them. They did not survive the long plague closing of May 1636 to November 1637” (1981: 108).<sup>9</sup> Apparently several actors joined Queen Henrietta’s company at Salisbury Court after the plague but the title page suggests that *The Rebellion* was in fact performed by the Company of Revels while it still existed. This points to the play being written prior to the outbreak of the plague in 1636. This would have made Rawlins a very young man when he wrote this work. If the dating of his birth in Hunter (c. 1617) is correct Rawlins would have been about nineteen years of age.

The play was reprinted in 1654 and then not reissued until Sir Walter Scott and Robert Dodsley included it in their three volume set of *Ancient British Drama* in 1810. As editor, Hazlitt included it again in the fourth edition of *A Select Collection of Old English Plays* published in 1875, a reissue and reworking of Dodsley’s original selection from 1744. Since then it has largely suffered neglect. It receives only a listing in Gerald E. Bentley (1941: 301) and a footnote by G. K. Hunter (1990: 490). The editors of *The Revels History* list the play as belonging to the Salisbury Court players but they do not discuss the play at all (1981: 108). The

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<sup>9</sup> ‘His Majesty’s Company of Revels’ was also known as ‘The Children of the Revels’ and was organized in 1629 by Richard Gunnell, an actor and friend of Edward Alleyn as well as manager of the Fortune theatre with William Blagrave, deputy to the Master of Revels, Sir Henry Herbert. The editors of *The Revels History* refer to the troupe interchangeably as ‘the Salisbury players’ (1981: 105-8). Gunnell and Blagrave converted a barn into the Salisbury Court theatre and set up a troupe with at least fourteen boys, but things changed around 1634 when nine adult actors are listed on the company roster.

only real discussion of the play is in Bowers, but it is brief and focuses on its place among revenge tragedies, stating that it is “remorseless” in its demand for penalty for bloodshed (1940: 221). Bowers’s emphasis is solely on the white characters, and as a consequence, he fails to make any mention of even the banishment of the Moors at the end of the play. This results in an unbalanced analysis given the space allotted to the black characters in the actual text of the drama.

### *Race*

*The Rebellion* deserves much more recognition and critical attention than it has received, not least for its representation of Moors. This is not to say that it does not—unfortunately—live down to the two major failings of early modern portraits of Moors: it lacks historical and religious accuracy and it is racist.<sup>10</sup> I tend, however, to agree with Peter Hyland that to see *only* racism or religious discrimination in dramas of the period that contain blacks or Muslims or Jews, is to undervalue the plays. In his article on *The Battle of Alcazar*, Hyland argues for the depiction of Muly Mahamet as based on the dramatic need for conflict on the stage, and as a product of the material provided by stories circulating about the actual Mohammed el-Mesloukh—the historical counterpart to George Peele’s Muly Mahamet. In Hyland’s view, Peele, as a playwright, exploited the opportunity to portray a villain for dramatic effect rather than specifically as an excuse for a racist polemic. Hyland’s point is not, however, that the racism is not there but that it is important to not over-generalize the individual characters and that critics should accept that there are features in the characters and the plays that fracture the vituperative narrative of race. In her study, Vaughan proposes that we can learn about early modern English self-construction, and about ourselves from early modern plays that deal with race because the gender and racial attitudes in them are far from obsolete. I agree with Vaughan that understanding the past is a step toward creating a different, better future.

Part of that understanding is working with the divergence in opinion between our era and the Renaissance regarding obligations to historical

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<sup>10</sup> For discussions of religious inaccuracy see, for example, Ben Rejeb 1982: 345-355; D’Amico 1991: 75-97, 120-5; Matar’s *Turks, Moors and Englishmen* (1999) and Vitkus’s *Turning Turk* (2003).

events. Or rather the fact that Renaissance playwrights appeared to have felt no obligation to an objective historical truth but worked rather from a dual position of political prudence and dramatic (and hence it was hoped commercial) viability. There is, for instance, no mention of the final battle in Granada in *The Rebellion*. The play blends elements of late fifteenth-early sixteenth century coastal raiding, with the rebellion of the Moriscos in 1568-71 (put down by Philip II). The aid given by Moors to Ottoman Turks, who raided the coasts of the Iberian peninsula is changed to aid given to French soldiers. And the raiding itself is changed to a siege (thus enlarging its horror). The play glosses over the duration and blood spilled in the uprising and sews it together with the final expulsion of the Moors by Philip III in 1609-14. In the play, the French have a Moor as their lead general. The Moors are thus not fighting for themselves but for Europeans. Is this distortion of history a reflection on attitudes toward Moors? Is it politically motivated? Or is it motivated again by dramatic concerns and audience expectation? It is hard to say what its intent was, but it probably did contribute to misunderstandings about the actual historical events, and I would argue that it produces an image of horror in relation to the idea of cooperating with blacks and living alongside them. This is compounded by the composite picture of the Moors, which can be read as conforming to the black stereotype, the "Black Devil," who is "hel-begotten" in the words of Philip in *Lust's Dominion* (2.3.5; 1.2.124)—though we are spared Dekker's explicit and repetitive reference to the black man as devil theme.<sup>11</sup>

Rawlins does something different and something more with race. He does not make General Raymond the prototypical black Machiavellian villain. He is neither cruel nor particularly cunning. These attributes are given instead to his strong black wife, Philippa. Raymond is composed instead of equal parts military prowess, ambition and a sexuality that is

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<sup>11</sup> I am aware that while this is a fair description of *Lust's Dominion*, it is also an unsatisfactory analysis of what Dekker does. He actually takes the simile 'like a devil' and gradually literalizes it in until he arrives at a description of Eleazar as *being* a devil. He uses several rhetorical figures in the process. A study of this phenomenon will be included in the project I am working on. I believe that Dekker's play is an important document and an example of the conscious structuring process behind racist thought.

suspect.<sup>12</sup> Rawlins also includes a white Count Machiavel, and gives him an equally strong white wife, Auristella. There are also two white male heroes, Giovanni, who has an ambiguous relationship with the white sexually assertive Nurse while pursuing the noble Evadne, and Antonio, who is a “modest” soldier and target of Count Machiavel’s evil plotting (17).<sup>13</sup> Because Rawlins includes so many white doubles of the Raymond-Philippa pair, he makes things much less straightforward racially speaking than a play like *Lust’s Dominion*, which is superficially less complicated. And each white pair has its own agenda or conflict and relationship to Raymond and Philippa.

Racially, Philippa is an interesting portrait on her own because she is the rare example of a black Lady Macbeth encouraging her husband’s ambition. Her counter-parts in other plays are few though there is Abdella in *The Knight of Malta* (1616-19) and, more ambiguously, Tota

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<sup>12</sup> Raymond is portrayed as lusty though not lusting outside the bounds of his marriage. It is easy to get carried away as a modern reader by the equality of Raymond’s relationship with his wife. They are both sexually assertive and accept each other as such. In this respect as in others, *The Rebellion* differs from its predecessors but not as much historically as it does for a twenty-first century Western reader—though this aspect of the play makes it fascinating to imagine what a modern response would be to it if it was actually staged. Culturally and historically speaking, the black man’s relationship to the ordered institution of marriage is always represented as in some manner transgressive. Aaron in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* and Eleazar in *Lust’s Dominion* are involved in adulterous relationships with Tamora and Eugenia. Mulymumen in *All’s Lost by Lust* is Jacinta’s suitor but after she has been raped by King Rodericke. And he is rudely rejected, and responds with violence. Along the same lines, Raymond is pleased with Philippa but she does not conform to a ‘white’ scheme of appropriate female behavior (she is too aggressive and she is sexually assertive) making his marital satisfaction suspect. This pattern of somehow falling outside the accepted is repeated without exception in early modern drama. Even Othello recognizes that his marriage to Desdemona falls outside the norm because he is black. Desdemona’s virtuous status and desire for her husband is unique. More commonly when there are black suitors for white women, the woman is either given a morally equivocal status—Tamora and Eugenia—or she rejects the offer like Cleopatra in Fletcher’s *The False One* and Portia’s rejection of the Prince of Morocco in *The Merchant of Venice*.

<sup>13</sup> The version of the play that I am working with is the latest edition edited by Hazlitt in 1875. It does not have line numbering. Because of this, I can only give page numbers.

in the second part of *The Fair Maid of the West* (1631). Queen Isabel in *The Death of Robert Earl of Huntingdon* (1601) is an important anomaly because she begins as a villain but recants and lives without losing her position or status. She does, however, lose the interest of the playwright and lines in the play, i.e. she is rarely seen after she ceases to entertain thoughts of revenge.<sup>14</sup> Phillipa has more lines than her husband and kills both his murderer and her white counterpart. As critics have pointed out regarding Fidella in *All's Lost by Lust*, Phillipa is compromised by her willingness to do black deeds even as she revenges her husband. And in killing Auristella, Phillipa outdoes Auristella's evil and can be read as usurping her place in Rawlins's play and thus in the minds of the audience or reader. This is especially true as Auristella repents where Phillipa does not.

#### *Class and epistemological anxiety*

In *The Rebellion*, class is conceptualized in terms of two opposing sets of imagery that correspond to two opposing world views: plants and clothing. Antonio, a nobleman, is horrified to find that his sister Evadne is trysting with Giovanni, a tailor:

*Degenerate* girl, lighter than wind or air!  
Canst thou forget thy birth? or, cause thou'rt fair,  
Art privileg'd, dost think, which such a zeal  
To grasp an *undershrub*? dare you exchange  
Breath with your tailors without fear of vengeance  
From the disturbed ghosts of our dead parents,  
for their *blood's injury*? (37, emphasis added)

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<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately this play suffers from being very poorly written, more so in the first half though than in the second, where Queen Isabel plays a more prominent role. The quality of the writing is so different between these two sections—before and after the Earl is killed—that it raises immediate suspicion that they were not penned by the same hand. Critics confirm this, ascribing the first half to Anthony Munday and the second to, either primarily or exclusively, Henry Chettle (Brown 1967: viii). A comparison of the second half with Chettle's *Hoffman* confirms that the language and style are similar.

This passage gives a strong feel for the tone and emotion with which Antonio sees the “killing sight” of his sister as she kisses Giovanni (37). He is horrified, and feels that her actions are cause for both his own and their parents’ wrath and revenge. She has dishonored them. The term “degenerate” suggests a fall or change in nature, a debasement. The OED defines it specifically in terms of a loss of “qualities proper to the race or kind.”<sup>15</sup> His perception is that something in his sister has materially changed and that it reflects badly on her family. She is no longer what she was. Her nature has changed.

He compares Giovanni to not just a plant but the lower of low-growing shrubs. Two things are implicit in this comparison. First, it is an organic image that suggests the natural and unchangeable nature of Giovanni’s status. Second, in the hierarchy of nature, Giovanni is very below even what is already considered naturally low. Antonio’s contempt for both his sister and Giovanni is explicit.

Giovanni’s reaction is to say:

You are too rash to censure. My unworthiness,  
That makes me seem so ugly in your eyes,  
Perhaps hangs in these clothes, and’s shifted off with them.  
I am as noble, but that I hate to make  
Comparisons, as any you can think worthy  
To be call’d her husband. (37)

Giovanni is speaking the truth. He is a nobleman underneath his artisan clothes but Antonio vehemently denies that it is possible, calling him both a liar and a “Shred of a slave” (38). In the strength of his negative reaction, Antonio is a reminder of the status of tailors and the other mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Shakespeare’s tailor is suggestively named Starveling indicating the hand-to-mouth status of his profession. Tailors, and artisans generally, were very low on the social scale. In Antonio’s world, it is impossible that a man that looks like an artisan can be a nobleman. He is again compared to the lowest of human categories, the slave, and found to be beneath even them: he is only a “shred.” Wendy Griswold’s theory of horror in relation to revenge tragedies—a genre that is encompassed by the broader category of tragedies of blood—would support a reading of Antonio’s reaction as

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.oed.com>, December 13, 2006.

justified social horror (at least in relation to his world view).<sup>16</sup> She defines the archetype of horror as precisely this type of mixing of cultural categories in ways that violate expectations.

Culturally, the play is a reminder of the existence during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of sumptuary laws. The sartorial encoding of status, rank and class (as well as trades) provided legibility and the laws were designed, at least in part, to ensure the observation of such social distinctions:

The ideal scenario—from the point of view of the regulators—was one in which a person’s social station, social role, gender and other indicators of identity in the world could be read, without ambiguity or uncertainty. The threat to this legibility was ‘confusion’: ‘when as men of inferiour degree and calling, cannot be by their attire discerned from men of higher estate.’” (Garber 1996: 26)<sup>17</sup>

The confusion produced by the transgression of social dress codes thus created unease, public debate, and regulation. In relation to the theatre, Stephen Gosson, John Rainolds, William Gager and others objected specifically to men dressing as women on the stage and to the fact that actors would wear costlier garments than befitted their station in real life. Rainolds, for example, denounced the former as evil and an infringement of moral law, and the second as “riotous and unmodest behavior” (Pollard 2004: 172-173).<sup>18</sup>

The image in Giovanni’s speech reflects the unthinkable, that a man would deliberately dress down, and the possibility of a marked discrepancy between appearance and reality in relation to class as hiding something of value. This image exists in tension with the idea that runs through the play that clothes can not only change the way a man—or woman—is perceived but “correct nature,” that is improve it (20).

The difference at the core of the two sets of imagery given by Antonio and Giovanni is significant because it illustrates two different

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<sup>16</sup> Griswold’s study examines the persistent popularity of revenge tragedy, noting that it was “extraordinarily robust” as a genre and survived from when the theatres first opened their doors in London (the first English tragedy, Norton and Sackville’s *Gorboduc*, is arguably a revenge tragedy) until the theatres closed at the outbreak of the English civil war in 1642.

<sup>17</sup> Garber is citing William Perkins’s *Cases of Conscience* from 1608.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Gosson’s *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582); Rainold’s *The Overthrow of Stage Plays* (1599) and Gager’s *Letter to Dr. Rainolds* (1592).

and opposing world views. One in which there is a natural hierarchy, while the other admits to malleability and thus that hierarchies can change. It is in the crosscurrent suggesting social malleability that Count Machiavel and Raymond repeatedly intersect with the image of the tailors. The two men both want to improve their stations. So do their wives.

What complicates Rawlins's play and further entangles the sub-plot with the main story is that he ties concerns with social mobility and class to sexuality. There is a misogynistic cruel comic episode where Evadne is dragged back and forth on the stage and threatened with rape by bandits, only the chief is impotent or at least has self-admitted sexual performance difficulties. Giovanni rescues her. Her clothes are ripped but recognizing her beloved tailor she encourages him to "receive me to your arms not alter'd in my heart, though in my clothes" (63). Her words suggest, as the tailor image has done, the possibility that outer appearance does not necessarily reflect reality. Yet, where the discrepancy in Giovanni's case was an obvious one between his actual and pretended social status, hers is between the connotations of the situation she has escaped—it raises the possibility that she has been sexually compromised—and the fact that she was not raped. Giovanni's problem is that he cannot reconcile her appearance with his doubts:

How fair she looks after so foul a deed!  
 It cannot be she should be false to me:  
 ...  
 ... Did she  
 Retain the substance of a sinner—for she is none—  
 Her breath would then be sour, and betray  
 The rankness of the act: but her chaste sighs  
 Beget as sweet a dew as that of May. (64)

What is significant in this passage is that Rawlins makes Evadne's own beauty and appeal suspect. The reader and the audience know that she is as she appears, innocent, but the text emphasizes how doubts, nonetheless, produce anxiety. Giovanni's doubts ironically allude to the earlier scene where Antonio felt that his sister had materially changed because she was letting herself be courted by a tailor, i.e. Giovanni himself. There is in both the implication that attribute properties pertaining to class and sexuality should be inalienable, that is stable and non-transferable. To the extent that they are not, or give the impression

of being malleable and interchangeable—for example that Evadne as a noble can engage in a relationship with an artisan or be among bandits and expect to remain unchanged—is cause for horror and suspicion. In this way Evadne’s role functions to connect social anxieties about mobility with anxieties about female sexuality.

This movement in the sub-plot is reinforced in the main story by the opening of the play as three colonels argue that getting married is for a man the same as signing “a warrant for the Grafting of horns” (15). And modesty in women is only a cover to “enrich their husbands’ brows with cornucopias” (16). Female sexuality is highlighted as always suspect and believing otherwise is to agree to be emasculated. Sexuality and a heightened anxiety is also tied to the first scene in which Raymond and Philippa are introduced. At the end of Act 1, they engage in a public sexual flirtation that celebrates the violence of anticipated war. Raymond says to his wife:

So,  
go pitch our tent, we’ll  
Have a combat i’ th’ field of love with thee  
Philippa, ere we meet the foe ...  
How say you, lords?  
Does not my love appear  
Like to the issue of the brain of Jove,  
Governess of arms and arts, Minerva!  
Or a selected beauty from a troop of Amazons? (27)

Philippa responds by promising to “make the foe / Of France and us crouch like a whelp” and that “Death has bequeath’d his office to my steel.” Raymond rejoices that his wife “loves no parley like the sword.” The burlesque potential pun in his celebration of his wife underscores a suspect sexuality in them both. Thus, while an image of anxiety is connected to the sexuality of white women from the first scene of the play, as it progresses female sexuality becomes entangled with the threat of violence through the black Philippa and her black husband Raymond, who in turn are mirrored by their white counter-parts Count Machiavel and Auristella—whose relationship is also marked by sexual assertiveness by both parties.

Through the use of this doubling, racial color becomes a third site for the epistemological tension between nature and culture and deeply entangled with cultural concerns about stability as both couples strive for

political power through social maneuvering. Raymond and Philippa consent to Count Machiavel's and Auristella's plan to overthrow the King as a chance at drastic upward mobility, they believe that they will rule with the Count and his wife. They are like the white villain couple ambitious, but simultaneously the white couple is like them. The black couple thus functions to distance the white couple from whiteness. Philippa actually calls Count Machiavel and Auristella "sooty fiends" and Auristella a "spotted tiger" when they betray their co-conspirators (86). At the same time, Raymond remarks that Philippa herself was made "pale" by her captivity (44).

Count Machiavel and Raymond are figuratively bonded together as "twins of treason" and in a relationship to the devil (83). Where Raymond is "the devil's cousin-german: for he wears the same complexion," Count Machiavel is "a right devil" even though he is white (83). The proverbial reference to the inability to wash the Ethiop white is ambiguous in *The Rebellion* as it is the white Count that stabs Antonio and says "So weeps the *Egyptian* monster when it kills, / Wash'd in a flood of tears; couldst ever think / Machi'vel's repentance could come from his heart?" (87, emphasis added). His self-designation as Egyptian and the inability of any amount of tears to result in a change both allude to blackness, yet he is white. And still it is he, Machiavel, who is the "tainted sheep" of Spain that mars its flock (77). Machiavel contradicts any theory of racial color as determining character even as Raymond and Philippa are presented as confirming it.

Race is about race as Ania Loomba has pointed out, but Rawlins's *The Rebellion* is also about social anxieties related to female sexuality, and upward social mobility. The three issues are distinct but become entangled. The racist rhetoric becomes enmeshed with a sexist discourse against female assertiveness and open sexuality, and both become masks for social anxieties that are actually domestic and gender biased: the fear of social change, of loss of privilege, and of rebellion. Class and female sexuality, as well as race in *The Rebellion* are arenas of epistemological tension between two opposing world views: is the human condition predetermined and fixed? Or is it malleable?

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