

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



Introduction: European Women in Early Modern English Drama

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At the 2015 European Shakespeare Research Association conference in Worcester, UK, Europe and Britain's place within it were frequent topics of discussion. This might be unsurprising given the conference theme of 'Shakespeare's Europe – Europe's Shakespeare(s)'.¹ However, with the seeds of the Brexit referendum already having been sown in May 2015, the conference's subject and location seemed timely and spawned many conversations beyond the usual scholarly debates. Two years on and Europe, national identity, borders, and migration remain pressing concerns. Despite Britain's likely impending departure from both the EU and the EEA, and geo-political divides aside, England and Europe would seem to be inseparable in the modern imagination. The two entities were inextricably connected in the early modern period too.

Tudor England experienced multiple waves of arrivals from the Continent, as well as internal migration from rural areas to London.² Historians' views on the precise social

¹ This Special Issue originated with the seminar 'European Women in Early Modern Drama' held at the European Shakespeare Research Association conference in 2015. The editors would like to thank the seminar participants, whose lively discussions helped shape this project. As the project developed, we invited contributors whose expertise has complemented the seminar papers, for which we are grateful. Our thanks too to the *EMLS* general editors and Daniel Cadman for their input and enthusiasm for this project.

² As Jean Howard reminds us, '[g]eographic representation on the early modern stage is important, then, in part because it is connected to real-world developments: England's rapid commercial expansion into distant parts of the globe, the spectacular demographic growth and physical expansion of London after 1550, the increasing consolidation of England from a medieval kingdom into an early modern nation-state, and the

and economic impact of these population movements have varied but they generally agree that the growth of incipient English nationalism in the second half of the sixteenth century, and particularly in its final two decades, was clearly related to these population trends.³ While the available data on foreign immigrants to England in this era, including their precise numbers, often remains tentative, the textual record shows that there was a common belief that there were too many foreigners within the nation's bounds.⁴ As recent discourse on immigration in the UK has shown, perceptions can be politically and culturally powerful and, in Elizabethan England, the presence of various groups of foreigners and their perceived threats to the local population helped prompt lively debates about 'Englishness'.⁵ Englishness, however, both then and now, would seem to be an identity that can meaningfully exist only in relation to others; England's Roman foundations bear upon sixteenth-century discussions of identity, as do English interactions with 'others' in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas.⁶ This Special Issue

changing composition and self-understanding of social groups in that nation-state' (p. 313). Jean E. Howard, 'Shakespeare, Geography, and the Work of Genre on the Early Modern Stage', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 64.3 (2003), 299-322.

³ For relevant historical studies which include detailed discussion of Continental Europeans present in early modern England see: R. M. Esser, *Frontiers, Regions, and Identities in Europe* (Pisa: U. of Pisa Press, 2009); Scott Oldenburg, *Alien Albion: Literature and Immigration in Early Modern England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014); Nigel Goose and Lien Luu, *Immigrants in Tudor and Stuart England* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2005); Laura Hunt Yungblut, *Strangers Settled Here Amongst Us: Policies, Perceptions and the Presence of Aliens in Elizabethan England* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Steve Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Jacob Selwood, *Diversity and Difference in Early Modern London* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010).

⁴ For discussions of expressions of xenophobia in Elizabethan and Jacobean England see: 'Shakespeare, Sir Thomas More and Asylum Seekers', *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespeare Studies and Production*, 57 (2008), 225-35; Eric Griffin, 'Shakespeare, Marlowe, and the Stranger Crisis of the Early 1590s', in *Shakespeare and Immigration*, ed. by Ruben Espinoza and David Ruitter (New York: Routledge, 2014), 13-36; Andrew Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth Century London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Roger Manning, *Village Revolts: Social Protest and Popular Disturbances in England 1509-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁵ See, for instance, studies by Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England*

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Lloyd Edward Kermode, *Aliens and Englishness in Elizabethan Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Marianne Novy, *Shakespeare and Outsiders* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Jane Pettegree, *Foreign and Native on the English Stage, 1588-1611: Metaphor and National Identity* (London: Palgrave, 2011); Marjorie Rubright, *Doppelgänger Dilemmas: Anglo-Dutch Relations in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Philip Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁶ Kermode, pp. 8-10.

of *EMLS* takes as its focus a figure that, in many early modern texts, is doubly other – not only European but also female.⁷

Although England's early modern drama presents us with a plethora of foreign female characters of Continental European background – Franceschina the eponymous villain in *The Dutch Courtesan*, Celia in *Volpone*, Marlowe's Catherine De Medici, the English-Portuguese sisters in *Englishmen for my Money*, or the displaced Bella-Franca in *Four Prentices of London* come readily to mind as do Shakespeare's Gertrude, Tamora, Katherina, Beatrice, Queen Katherine, and Joan la Pucelle – no single study has taken these pervasive and significant figures as its chief focus. In fact, while depictions of Anglo-American, Anglo-Eastern, and Anglo-Mediterranean interactions have been the focus of numerous critical discussions, Lloyd Edward Kermode notes that 'the white male and female have received more attention from historians' studies of migration and labour patterns and less attention from literary scholars interested in how alien figures are represented and used in imaginative and ideological ways'.⁸ The comparably scarcer scholarship dealing with Anglo-Continental interactions and non-English European figures in early modern English literary texts is nevertheless illuminating and diverse, even as it tends toward a methodologically necessary compartmentalisation of topics. Some scholars have focused on depictions of individual nations such as Italy, France, or the Celtic nations,⁹ others have produced more general studies of the dynamic between Englishness and Continental foreignness,¹⁰ while some studies have examined a specific

⁷ The concept of woman-as-other is, by now, a critical commonplace. For an overview of this notion in the early modern period see Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England 1500-1800* (London: Yale University Press, 1995).

⁸ Kermode, p. 10.

⁹ See for example: Rory Loughnane and Willy Maley (eds.), *Celtic Shakespeare: The Bard and the Borderers* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013); Michele Marrapodi, ed. *Shakespeare, Italy, and Intertextuality* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Michele Marrapodi (ed.), *Shakespeare and the Italian Renaissance: Appropriation, Transformation, Opposition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014); Michele Marrapodi (ed.), *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: Rewriting, Remaking, Refashioning* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Michele Marrapodi, A. J. Hoenselaars, Marcello Cappuzzo, L. Falzon Santucci, eds. *Shakespeare's Italy: Functions of Italian Locations in Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Jean-Christophe Mayer, *Representing France and the French in Early Modern English Drama* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008); Michael Saenger, *Shakespeare and the French Borders of English* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013).

¹⁰ See for example studies by L. E. Kermode, Novy, and Pettegree, along with John Michael Archer, *Citizen Shakespeare: Freeman and Aliens in the Language of the Plays* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005); Alison Findlay and Vassiliki Markidou, eds. *Shakespeare and Greece* (London: Arden 2017) Andrew Hadfield and Paul Hammond (eds.), *Shakespeare and Renaissance Europe* (London: Arden, 2004); Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson (eds.), *Transnational Exchange in Early Modern Theater* (New York: Routledge, 2008); A.J. Hoenselaars, *Images of Englishmen and Foreigners in the Drama of Shakespeare and His*

topic such as language, immigration, or geography.¹¹ Building on these studies and drawing on recent developments in studies of gender, race, and politics, this Special Issue seeks to begin a redressal of this gap in literary scholarship by exploring representations of European women in the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

Tudor and Stuart dramatists are particularly interested in fashioning female characters of distinct nationalities and using them as vehicles to reflect on English conceptions of national identity, ethnicity, hybridity, and miscegenation. Time and again, the early modern stage depicts the European woman as an agent of and conduit for social, sexual, political, economic, linguistic and cultural interchange. In a range of plays, foreign women are imagined as valuable links to European nations and as threatening apertures within the English nation. In *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore*, for instance, the Milanese courtesan is accused of spreading disease across national borders, while in Sharpham's *The Fleer* the Florentine noblewomen bring strange customs to London but find a place within the city by working as prostitutes. Conversely, in *Henry V*, the 'wooing' of Katherine is a moment for linguistic exchange and she is seen as the desirable conduit to unite England and France. In her study of early modern Anglo-Dutch relations, Marjorie Rubright notes that 'Dutch characters have been understood largely either as stereotypes that evince English xenophobia or as another Continental 'other,' interchangeable with French, Italian, or Spanish counterparts'.¹² To gain a full appreciation of the position and purpose of early modern depictions of European women it is necessary, like Rubright, to eschew neat answers and simplistic assumptions. As the essays in this collection demonstrate by focusing on specific European women, many of these characters go beyond the totalising dualisms of us/them, good/bad etc., resisting these restrictive categories to operate within and stand for a multinational middle ground.¹³ While a European woman's entire way of life – her language, customs,

Contemporaries: A Study of Stage Characters and National Character in English Renaissance Drama, 1558-1642 (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1992); Monica Matei-Chesnoiu, *Early Modern Drama and the Eastern European Elsewhere: Representations of Liminal Locality in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 2009).

¹¹ See for instance: Ton Hoenselaars and Dirk Delabastita (eds.) *Multilingualism in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2015); Marianne Montgomery, *Europe's Languages on England's Stages, 1590–1620* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012); Ruben Espinoza and David Ruiter, eds. *Shakespeare and Immigration* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Monica Matei-Chesnoiu, *Re-imagining Western European Geography in English Renaissance Drama* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012); Monica Matei-Chesnoiu, *Geoparsing Early Modern English Drama* (London: Palgrave, 2015).

¹² Rubright, p. 39.

¹³ To complicate matters further, as Andrew Hadfield remarks, the boundaries of Europe were as debated in the early modern period as they are now and the borders between Europe and Russia and Europe and the Ottoman Empire in particular often defied cartographic exactitude (pp. 6-10).

appearance, relationships, interests – was not fully realisable on stage, it was recreated in a limited form by means of a theatrical vocabulary which included devices such as specific costumes or accents coding as foreign. Like their male counterparts, European women were sometimes portrayed as flat stereotypes and sometimes depicted with sympathy and degrees of accuracy. In staging these women, English dramatists perhaps sought to evoke laughter or fear, to marginalise foreigners, or to gain mastery over them, but they also strived to enlighten, to imagine mutually beneficial interactions, to integrate foreigners, to learn about and from them.

Thomas More's powerful speech in defence of immigrants to England, from the eponymous play possibly authored in part by Shakespeare, has been quoted in the media lately in the contexts of both the European refugee crisis and the Brexit referendum.¹⁴ The speech illustrates Shakespeare's uncanny knack for perpetual timeliness, or, in this case perhaps more specifically that, in Dennis Kennedy's words channelling Jan Kott's worldview, 'for Shakespeare the world was a cruel place and for us it is still a cruel place'.¹⁵ But More's haunting plea also helps justify this Issue's plea for foreign European women as a special and distinct category in early modern English drama. Women refugees or other female foreigners are notably absent from *Sir Thomas More*. Only three European 'strangers' explicitly appear in it, all men (Francis de Bard, Caveler, and Erasmus of Rotterdam).¹⁶ In More's speech, the hapless refugees whom the English rioters are asked to envisage are referred to only as *strangers* and *they*. Earlier in the play, when the foreigners manage to evade the xenophobic mob, they are identified by

¹⁴ See for example: Mark Brown, 'William Shakespeare's handwritten plea for refugees to go online' *Guardian*, 15 March 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/mar/15/william-shakespeare-handwritten-plea-for-refugees-online-sir-thomas-more-script-play-british-library-exhibition>> [accessed 1/2/2017]; Michael Hiltzik, 'Your mountainish inhumanity': Shakespeare's ringing defense of immigrants and refugees still resonates today', *LA Times*, 24 December 2016 <<http://www.latimes.com/business/hiltzik/la-fi-hiltzik-shakespeare-20161224-story.html>> [accessed 1/2/2017]. For a record of More's speech's online afterlives and its association with the contemporary refugee crisis see Stephen O'Neill, "'The Strangers' Case": Sir Thomas More, Social Media and the Refugee Crisis', *Storify*, September 2017 <<https://storify.com/mediaShakes/the-stranger-s-case-sir-thomas-more-social-media-a>> [accessed 18/10/2017].

¹⁵ Dennis Kennedy, *Foreign Shakespeare, Contemporary Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 10.

¹⁶ Both these characters are specified as Lombards (i.e. Italians). The early textual history of the play indicates that the playwrights originally intended the foreigners to be French but this detail was changed at the request of the censor to the less topical 'Lombards' in order not to suggest parallels with the anti-French (and anti-Dutch and anti-Flemish) sentiment in London of the mid-1590s. For more information on the complex censorship issue, see Anthony Munday et al, *Sir Thomas More*, ed. by Vittorio Gabrieli and Giorgio Melchiori (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp. 17-20. All subsequent quotations from the play are from this edition.

nationality but not gender: ‘Not a French Fleming nor a Fleming French / to be found, but all fled’ (2.1.67-8). This lack of concrete foreign women in the play should not come as a surprise since, just as male characters in general outnumber female characters in early modern English drama, so do figures of foreign men outnumber their foreign female counterparts. Yet More’s image of ‘the wretched strangers, / Their babies at their backs, with their poor luggage / Plodding to coasts and ports for transportation’ is at the same time evocative of entire families – children, women, men (2.3.80-82). It is easy to imagine in between these lines female refugees likely bearing the greater share of the burden of international displacement. We can imagine similarly unacknowledged foreign wives, daughters, mothers, sisters, widows, lovers – a sort of dramaturgically logical counterballast to the more commonly represented character of the male foreigner – metaphorically between the lines of many other plays from the period.

The plays discussed in this Issue, by Shakespeare, Fletcher, Ford, Chettle, Cary and others, stand out from the body of early modern England’s dramatic output in that they all choose to prominently represent foreign women. This is important because women who travelled to other countries, including those who arrived in Elizabethan or Jacobean England, would have faced distinct challenges in comparison to their male counterparts. Those women who travelled with husbands or other male family members were inevitably tied to these men’s economic and social fortunes in an unfamiliar environment with limited recourse to other supports. Women who ventured abroad alone or who subsequently found themselves outside the traditional patriarchal structures were more vulnerable to various forms of exploitation, including sexual violence. In *Sir Thomas More*, the Clown equates the impending chaos of an anti-immigrant riot with the opportunity for sexual assault on foreign women: ‘Dutch or French, / So it be a wench, / I’ll upon her’ (2.1.51-53). This is the only time the play refers specifically to a foreign woman. Tellingly, this sole potential foreign female character is designated a potential victim of rape as soon as she is mentioned. Both literature and folklore are full of girls and women confronting the assorted dangers lurking outside the immediate domestic sphere; those of them who find themselves literally abroad represent an especially acute instance of this common trope. While the female characters discussed in the essays are not all foreign visitors or immigrants to England (several, such as Mariam in *The Tragedy of Mariam*, are non-English women living outside of England) each of these figures could be described as a virtual immigrant to England in the sense that her foreign character was crafted by an English author for consumption primarily by English audiences and/or readers. London theatre-goers would have encountered the European foreigner in the cosmopolitan city’s streets, shops, ports, churches, as well as in theatres. Shakespeare and his contemporaries could learn about Europe by talking to immigrants, particularly in places such as “Petty France” in Bishopsgate ward, and “Petty Almaine” and “Petty

Flanders” in Thames Street’,¹⁷ by conversing with travellers and visitors to the city, and by reading the diverse fictional and factual literature from and on Europe. While the real-life foreigners would have naturally helped inspire these dramatic representations in the first place, it is reasonable to assume that the figures from the plays would have reciprocally helped shape English attitudes towards foreigners in real life.

With such a diverse subject matter and with its origin in a group of papers written for a conference seminar, this Issue cannot, by virtue of its format and size, aspire to an exhaustive coverage of its chosen topic. Nonetheless, the essays endeavour to cover the majority of European nationalities commonly represented in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama:¹⁸ Danish, Dutch, French, Italian, Saxon/German, Scottish, and Spanish, as well as Jewish.¹⁹ The essays also succeed in exploring many of the issues that foreign women present in early modern England dealt with including xenophobia, religious intolerance, linguistic barriers, material hardship, and failed intermarriage, as well as instances of successful co-existence, integration, and assimilation. This Special Issue is concerned therefore with how the staging of foreign women enabled English dramatists and their audiences to engage in debates about international relations, to deliberate on racial anxieties, to play out strategies of integration or exclusion, and to imagine England’s future vis-à-vis the rest of Europe. In considering such a diverse range of characters, this collection seeks to uncover points of commonality and difference in representations of European women, and to explore how these women – from different nations, with varied social, religious, economic, and political identities – constitute a distinct and important phenomenon in the drama of the period.

¹⁷ Michael G. Brennan, ‘English contact with Europe’, in *Shakespeare and Renaissance Europe*, ed. by Andrew Hadfield and Paul Hammond (London: Arden, 2004), pp. 53-97 (p. 89).

¹⁸ According to *An Index of Characters in Early Modern English Drama: Printed Plays, 1500-1660*, ed. by Thomas Berger, William Bradford, and Sidney Sonderegard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), the non-English characters most commonly represented in extant plays from the period are Italians (if counting those designated by regional affiliations), who appear in well over 150 texts; followed by the French and Spaniards (around 80 texts each); and then by the Dutch/Flemish, Scots, Welsh, Jews, and Turks (between 30-40 texts each). Please note that these counts are only approximate and the methodology for compiling this information is complicated by issues of nomenclature as illustrated by the note about Italians above.

¹⁹ Hadfield calls the Jews ‘an important European people’ (p. 12). A. J. Hoenselaars observes that the Irish, Scots, and Welsh can be seen as “British ‘foreigners’” (p. 13) and Lloyd Edward Kermode has similarly stated that the Scots and Irish were often considered to be ‘aliens’, people from a foreign country (pp. 2-3). We have however, as noted above, endeavoured to examine representations of a range of European women, who can be read as virtual immigrants to the English stage.

In a wide-ranging essay entitled ‘The Danish Romance Play: *Fair Em, Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes, and Hoffman*’, Lisa Hopkins provides a fascinating account of how early modern English plays connected Baltic women with classical mythology to a variety of ends. The essay argues that the three plays of its title are Danish romances which bring to the fore self-determined, adaptable, and compelling female characters. According to Hopkins, classical templates – tales of Troy, mythical figures such as Philomel, Dido, and Clytemnesta – are used in these plays to provide audiences with examples of strong female rulers and to showcase the important and useful connections between the Baltic and British histories and identities. Whereas plays such as *Hamlet* present the Danes as a threat, through women from Sweden, Denmark, and its islands, these romances recuperate and romanticise the Danes.

In contrast to the historical focus of the plays discussed in the previous essay, Marianne Montgomery’s ‘Wife, Whore, and/or Dutchwoman: Shifting Female Roles in *The London Prodigal*’ discusses the anonymous comedy steeped in the cosmopolitan spirit of early Jacobean London. While the play’s female protagonist Luce is English and only pretends to be a Dutch maid in order to survive after her husband abandons her, the essay demonstrates how this vicariously foreign character can be used to explore the representation of Dutch immigrants on English stages as well as to analyse the distinct socio-economic position of women servants in early modern England. Montgomery concludes that the Dutch maid disguise proves to be a versatile empowering tool for Luce and in the process the play communicates a positive attitude towards London’s Dutch community.

Focusing on two atypical history plays, Steven Veerapen’s essay ‘European Unions: The Spanish Wife and the Scottish Widow in Shakespeare and Fletcher’s *Henry VIII* and Ford’s *Perkin Warbeck*’ examines women from several European nations – Katherine of Aragon, Anne Bullen, the Scotswoman Katherine Gordon, and Margaret of Burgundy. These two early modern dramas, Veerapen suggests, sought to debate the benefits, efficacy, and impact of royal marriages across borders and often display mixed feelings about these supposedly beneficial alliances. Ultimately Veerapen finds that, in staging European women, the plays reveal a deep-seated concern over England’s relationship with the Continent and English nationalism.

Elizabeth Pentland’s essay ‘I cannot speak your England: French Women in *King John* and *Henry V*’ discusses the intersection of national and gender stereotyping in the two perhaps most strongly French-themed of Shakespeare’s plays. Pentland argues that in contrast to the plays’ male characters, who often actively contribute to the polarisations of the respective Anglo-French political climates, the female characters more typically

act as negotiators. The women's national identities likewise prove to be more fluid compared to their more jingoistically disposed male counterparts. The essay ultimately comes to the tantalising conclusion that it is worth asking whether the categories of 'native' and 'foreign' are even relevant to the subset of female characters with European aristocratic backgrounds and peripatetic lifestyles.

In the collection's first essay on Italian women, entitled "'A Whore You Are, Madam'", or the Binary that Wasn't: Female Dyads and Doubling in John Fletcher's *The Chances* and *Women Pleased*', Celia R. Caputi explores Fletcher's persistent interest in gender and foreign settings. In both plays, she argues, the playwright's proto-feminism is often palpable through his Italian settings and his presentation of groups and pairs of Italian women. While the treatment of the two Constantias and conclusion of *The Chances* is ambiguous, *Women Pleased* shows off the wit of the Florentine duchess and her daughter and, exposing male inadequacies along the way, ends with their desires satisfied. Drawing a contrast between the two dramatists, Caputi also fruitfully considers how Fletcher responds in these two plays, as he did in *The Tamer Tamed*, to Shakespeare's Paduan comedy *The Taming of the Shrew*.

In his essay "'She speaks poniards": Shakespearean Drama and the Italianate Leading Lady as Verbal Duellist', Eric Nicholson carefully considers the verbal dexterity of three of Shakespeare's Italian leading ladies – *Much Ado's* Beatrice, *Shrew's* Katherina, and *Othello's* Desdemona. Nicholson looks to courtly manuals, such as those by Castiglione and Guazzo, and the divas of Italy's stage like Isabella Andreini, to examine the opportunities and perils of verbal duelling for Shakespeare's Italian women. He finds that in sparring with their male competitors, much of the women's power lies in their wit and their ability to deliver the last word. However, while some female duellists, like Beatrice, triumph in verbal battle, others, like Desdemona, pay the ultimate price in the war between the sexes.

Evelyn Gajowski in 'Intersecting Discourses of Race and Gender in Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam*' looks at how the closet play deploys tropes of whiteness and blackness in order to dramatise and topicalise the divergent fates of its two main female protagonists, Mariam and Salome. By referencing both early modern and medieval discourses about race and female beauty, Gajowski establishes how Mariam is 'Europeanised' while Salome is 'de-Europeanised' and presented as her foil. The essay then argues that through much of the play the depictions of Mariam and Salome conform to the traditional association of whiteness with virtue and blackness with evil, but this dynamic is reversed by the ending reverses when Mariam is executed (unjustly) for

adultery while Salome survives. Overall, Gajowski concludes, Cary's drama works hard to question and disturb the period's long-held paradigms of 'whiteness' and 'blackness'.

The author of the Afterword, Sujata Iyengar, has suggested in her earlier work on *The Tragedy of Mariam* that the combination of gender, race, physical appearance, and religious identity in the play gives rise to a potent force which spills over from its domestic sphere into its public realm and beyond, with the implied (if not quite realised within the play itself) potential to bring about 'the end of a world order'.²⁰ In the context of the Special Issue, the cataclysmic twist of Iyengar's reading brings to mind the permeability of the various 'worlds' we as literary scholars engage with – the fictional worlds of the texts we read, the historical worlds of the periods we study, and the world of the here and now in which we are living, teaching, writing. Andrew Hadfield's remark that 'Shakespeare was always aware that he belonged not only to Europe but also to a wider world beyond its boundaries' seems pertinent²¹ – at this juncture, as it is a timely reminder for us all about the multiple identities we inhabit and the potential for new affiliations as our world develops. At a point in time when major changes in European and North American societies appear inevitable, when political anxiety is high, and economic conditions (especially within higher education in many countries) are unstable, the future of academic collaborations and meetings remains uncertain. They are, however, necessary more than ever. It is no coincidence that this Special Issue includes contributors from across the globe and that the conference from which it originated brought together scholars from the UK, Ireland, Europe, Asia, North America and Australasia. The geographic diversity of the female figures discussed in the essays is thus mirrored by the even greater geographic diversity of the scholars writing about them. As we have found, the study of local, national, and global figures on the early modern English stage provides a point of commonality and opens up the possibility of exchanging ideas across many kinds of borders. It is indeed hard to imagine a similarly rich treatment of this topic without international collaboration. We hope that this Special Issue will not only contribute to an important field of study but will also continue to foster scholarly networks and conversations, especially since it is available, like previous issues of *EMLS*, in open-access format.

²⁰ Sujata Iyengar, 'Race and Skin Color in Early Modern Women's Writing' in *The History of British Women's Writing, 1500-1610*, ed. by Caroline Bicks and Jennifer Summit (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), pp. 277-95 (p. 287).

²¹ Hadfield, p. 20.