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Black Anger has often been misinterpreted as an irrational response of Black people to perceived injustices. Black anger is a response to the fear of possessing an endangered body by the constructed White body superior. In my thesis, I explore three contexts of Black anger: Aaron the Moor from Shakespeare's 1594 revenge tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*; Amiri Baraka's 1965 protest poem, "Black Art," and *Black Panther's* cinematic villain, Erik Killmonger. While Black anger is expressed in many ways, I argue that each context of Black anger is manifested to destroy White supremacy. Black anger is developed in Aaron throughout the play as his Blackness is constantly made visible, gradually becoming a political target of racist assault by the play's ethnic White characters, the Roman Andronici and the Goths. To understand Aaron as a figure of pre-colonial Black anger, I examine Baraka's "Black Art" poem as a post-colonial battle cry for decolonization of the Black body from the constructed White body superior and to destroy White supremacy to build a Black world. Killmonger similarly represents a contemporary Black anger because he seeks vengeance against structural supremacy and the global colonization of Black bodies on all continents, especially, North America and his native African homeland, Wakanda. Through these contexts of Black anger, I argue that Black anger is used as a catalyst to destroy the institution of White supremacy through protest or violence and to return the constructed Black inferior body to power.

SHAKESPEARE'S AARON AS A FIGURE OF BLACK ANGER

by

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To my parents,
Gwen J. Brown and Darryl Brown,
thank you for investing in me.

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Black anger has been viewed, erroneously, as an irrational, impassioned response to the pseudo-injustice that African Americans have—in their minds—experienced. *Black rage*, as it is sometimes referred to by scholars, has historically been presented in America through anti-Black imagery, most notably seen through the detrimental stock of Black caricatures cultivated for White entertainment, from Reconstruction to Jim Crow segregation during 1870-1960s (“Origins of Jim Crow”). Such caricatures have been demonized as a monstrous being: Brutal Black Buck, an extremely licentious and violent Black man (“The Brute”), fits the profile of the sexually intemperate African male of early modern climate theory, which held that different climatic regions influenced the temperament and physical appearance of its inhabitants (Floyd-Wilson 2-3). Brute is an uncontrolled man of passion, a savage barbarian; he is King Kong. Today, King T’Challa is unseating him. Sapphire, a caricature that constructed the “Angry Black Woman,” has demonized the image of the Black woman through film and television since 1928 (“Sapphire”); today, that image is being dethroned by a resurgence of empowering imagery of Black natural beauty and Black Girl Magic. Despite this cultural wave of Black beauty and Black excellence, African Americans are still recovering from a character assassination. bell hooks says that “[f]rom slavery on, white supremacists have recognized that control over images is central to the maintenance of any system of racial

domination” (hooks, *Black Looks* 2). Through their character recovery, Blacks not only had to fight for their civil rights since emancipation, but for their civility, for the right to live as respectable human beings. Black respectability has historically not eluded violence but has rather incentivized violence by white reaction against the Black body, to control the destiny of African Americans (Anderson 47). The monster that has been constructed as Black anger has been simultaneously dismissed as “racist” or “anti-American” by the structural system that produced it: white supremacy.

Because I will use the term “white supremacy” frequently in my argument, I acknowledge the various definitions of “white supremacy” contributed by many scholars, including hooks, who, from a feminist theory, says that the “very concept of white supremacy relies on the perpetuation of the white race. It is in the interest of continued white racist domination of the planet for white women to maintain control over all women’s bodies” (hooks, *Feminist Theory* 53). British research scholar, David Gillborn, contributes an inclusive critical race theory definition of white supremacy, as a “comprehensive condition whereby the interests and perceptions of white subjects are continually placed centre [sic] stage and assumed as ‘normal’” (Gillborn 318). To provide a comprehensive understanding of white supremacy, for my argument, I will refer to its academic definition derived by legal scholar, Frances Lee Ansley:

A political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority, and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings. (Ansley 592)

In Shakespeare's 1594 revenge tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*—which I argue is the fictional development of Black anger for its Black villain, Aaron the Moor—the Andronici represent White supremacy because they overwhelmingly control the power and material resources in Rome, and they remain conscious about their White superiority, which is represented in the play's characters' numerous allusions to other characters' skin color and distinctive physical traits (see Shakespeare 1.1.182, 263, 334; 2.3.72, 76, 78, 83, 110; 3.1.204; 3.2.66, 78; 4.2.67, 72, 177). While scholars have rightly measured the lack of discourse on whiteness in the early modern period, claiming the Andronici as a representation of White supremacy exposes whiteness as a construct of standardization for human beauty, values and virtue (see Floyd-Wilson, esp. 1-66, 89-110; Hall 64; Royster 433-436; White 346). For example, in the first scene of *Titus Andronicus*, Marcus Andronicus, the tribune of the Roman people and Titus's brother, addresses the “palliamment of white and spotless hue” (Shakespeare 1.1.182). Although Marcus refers to the white robe that is symbolically associated with empery, to equate whiteness with “spotless” is to designate all other racial bodies as impure and *spotted*. In this play, the Gothic body—whose racial implications I will further discuss later—and the Black body then become subordinate to the constructed White superior body.

The constructed White superior body represents the officer or any other state department responsible for maintaining order in a society. In a letter to his Black son, Tanehisi Coates explains how the Black body is systematically destroyed in *Between the World and Me*. Coates says that the constructed White superior body is more than an enforcer of law; it is “a force of nature, the helpless agent of our world's physical laws”

(Coates 83). As an agent of our world's physical laws, the constructed White superior body destroys the constructed Black inferior body as a method of control over the Black body and preservation of White superiority. The destruction of the Black body then becomes "incidental to the preservation of order" (84). Coates writes:

[T]he police departments of your country have been endowed to destroy your body. It does not matter if the destruction is the result of an unfortunate overreaction. It does not matter if it originates in a misunderstanding. It does not matter if the destruction springs from a foolish policy. . . . Resent the people trying to entrap your body and it can be destroyed. Turn into a dark stairwell and your body can be destroyed. The destroyers will rarely be held accountable. Mostly they will receive pensions. (Coates 9)

Coates directly identifies the source of contemporary Black anger: police brutality. Police are "endowed" to control the constructed Black inferior body to preserve the constructed White superior body; it is the unalterable reality of being Black in America. Coates illustrates the criteria for which the Black body can be destroyed, which are unyielding—whether it be an "unfortunate overreaction," a "misunderstanding," or a "foolish policy." Coates's last two instructions to his son punctures the wound that bleeds Black anger: resist or escape the destroyer's grasp and your body will still be destroyed. Essentially, Black respectability or "'appropriate' behavior doesn't seem to matter" (Anderson 159); Blackness is crucified no matter the circumstance in which the Black body resists.

Conversely, Black anger is not a monster, but rather a response to the monstrous destruction of the Black body. The term "Black anger" does not apply to a Black person who is simply angry, as a person who is angry expresses discontent with those things that affect his or her self-interests. The Oxford English Dictionary defines anger as "that

which pains or afflicts . . . [as] vexation, [and] sorrow” and “the active feeling provoked against the agent” (Oxford); this definitional anger is universal regardless of one's racial or ethnic background. Black anger is the fear of possessing an endangered body. Black anger expresses a collective interest in the endangerment of the Black body, in response to its systematic destruction by the constructed White superior body. Aude Lorde said that, as a woman, anger is her way of responding to “the anger of exclusion, of unquestioned privilege, of racial distortions, of silence, of ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and co-optation” (Lorde 124). Black anger functions in the same way, often responding with violence to destroy the constructed White body superior, which in lieu of Lorde’s quote, has destroyed the Black body in many ways: engineered exclusion; profited from white privilege; machinated racial distortions of Black bodies; silenced the Black body through destruction, and illegally and ill-mannerly used, stereotyped, misnamed, betrayed, and co-opted the Black body to build and defend the citadel that is White supremacy. Black anger is the spirit of resistance ingrained in Black people as a tool of survival. Black anger breeds resistance to the constructed White superior body, often through fictionalized representations of Black masculinity. This argument explores how contemporary Black anger can be understood through three contexts of Black masculine performance: one colonial figure, Aaron the Moor, and two postcolonial figures—Amiri Baraka and *Black Panther’s* Erik Killmonger.

My argument will analyze the two contemporary contexts of Black anger—Amiri Baraka and Killmonger—to understand the development of Aaron’s Black anger in *Titus Andronicus*. Aaron has been identified by many scholars as Machiavellian, melancholy,

diabolical, “Other,” and as a tutor in that he develops the Goths’ rise to power by instructing them in reading and writing and manipulating other characters for his own delight (Pearson 35). Aaron is inarguably a wise, intelligent villain, possessing qualities of early humoralist theory of Africans as wisdom-bearers (Floyd-Wilson 72). Although Aaron embodies all these roles, Black anger has not been articulated as a reason behind his violence and quest for vengeance. I argue that Black anger is developed through Aaron at different moments where the play’s white ethnic characters racially chastise his Black body. Emily Bartels explains that before Aaron ever speaks in the play, “the ‘raven-coloured’ Moor appears to be a self-contained, self-incriminating sign system—a darkness that seems undeniably visible” (Bartels 80). Ania Loomba describes the numerous racist associations to Othello, Shakespeare’s non-villainous Moor: “‘thick lips,’ ‘old black ram,’ ‘a Barbary horse,’ ‘devil’ and ‘lascivious Moor’” (Loomba 49). Aaron, similarly, is referred to as “swart Cimmerian” (Shakespeare 2.3.72), “barbarous Moor” (2.3.78), “raven-colored love” (2.3.83), “black ill-favored fly” (3.2.66), “coal-black Moor” (3.2.78), “fiend” (4.2.80), and “incarnate devil” (5.1.40) among the racist stereotypes of Titus’s white characters—the ultrawhite Goths and the medium-complexioned Romans. The most prominent moment of such racial vilification occurs in Act 4 when Aaron kills the ultrawhite Gothic Nurse after she attempts to kill his newborn son because he is a dark-skinned mixed-race baby, to which Aaron proclaims, “It shall not die” (Shakespeare 4.2.82).

We can learn something about Black anger from Aaron, particularly the relationship between anger and bodies. We learn, for example, that anger—in the context

of violence—is expressed when the body feels that it is endangered. We can also understand Aaron’s anger from Baraka, who in his 1965 poem, “Black Art,” declares violence as a necessary action to destroy the constructed White superior body. Baraka calls for “poems that kill . . . [and] wrestle cops into alleys and take their weapons leaving them dead” (Baraka “Black Art” 219). Baraka seeks to destroy White supremacy through a complete removal of the constructed White superior body, which controls the racial hierarchical structure in America. Violence not only necessitates the destruction of White supremacy but establishes a “Black world” (220) which is created by a constructed Black superior body. Therefore, what we, hopefully, can learn from Shakespeare’s Aaron and Baraka is that Black anger can be used as a tool not only to disable White supremacy, but also to enable Black people to create a Black world, where the Black body can possess itself without the fear of endangerment.

We can further understand Aaron’s anger from Eric Killmonger, Marvel’s villain in the 2018 film adaption of its 1966 comic book, *Black Panther*. In the film, Killmonger vehemently proclaims world domination and necessitates the destruction of all colonizers—the constructed White superior body—to restore the colonized, particularly, the Black body, to power. He proclaims, “The world is going to start over. I’ma [sic] burn it all” (*Black Panther*). Killmonger makes no idle threats because he has already killed 3000 people by the time he travels to Wakanda, his father’s native land, to usurp the throne for which he believes the title of “king” should be bestowed to him because he seeks to arm colonized bodies with Wakanda’s powerful vibranium weapons and use Wakanda’s War Dogs to launch a global insurrection against all colonizers. Although

Wakanda and Killmonger are fictional and the constructed superior Black world that Baraka calls for has never materialized, Killmonger, as well as Baraka, are reacting to the real structural supremacy and extensive violence against the Black body that has created the world's perception, spectacle, and disregard for the Black body. Black anger is thus inherited from the historical erasure, corruption, and destruction of the Black body by the constructed White superior body.

Contemporary Black anger is constructed by a racial-epidermal schema, a concept introduced by Black psychiatrist and intellectual, Frantz Fanon, which refers to a body that is a "triple person" or three-person existence; within this schema, a person bears responsibility for one's body, one's race, and for one's ancestors (Fanon 112). This schema, which derives from Fanon's 1952 book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, is the sociological framework that I will use in my thesis to understand Baraka and Killmonger as contemporary figures of Black anger. Baraka and Killmonger both operate within this schema because as postcolonial Black figures, their bodies have been incorporated into the legacy of slavery, colonization, discrimination and resistance. As we will later see in my textual analysis of Baraka and Killmonger, there is an embodied "we" present in their call for the decolonization of the Black body and overthrow of the constructed White superior body. I note that Killmonger's situation is a little more nuanced, in that his quest for world domination is not only to overthrow the White colonizers ruling territories where Black bodies are colonized but also to overthrow the Black Wakandan African nation, which Killmonger resents for turning their backs on him and the rest of the two billion colonized Black bodies. From Killmonger and Baraka's positionality, we can

understand Aaron's Black anger as the motivation to destroy structural supremacy in *Titus Andronicus*. Each governmental body and empire where Aaron, Baraka and Killmonger are domiciled—Rome, America and Wakanda—represents an institution of structural dominance and cultural supremacy, which preserves the resources of its own people, to maintain their superiority, excluding all “outsiders” or “Other” bodies.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORY OF RACIAL SIGNIFYING IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

In this paper, I will make multiple references to racial signifiers that were well-developed during the Renaissance era in sixteenth-century Europe. The most common signifiers used include “Black,” “White,” “Fair,” and “Moor.” Before racial categories became fixed markers of physical difference, climate theory, or “humoralism” was an early descriptor of the differences in skin color and disposition among European writers, from Aristotle, to Hippocrates to Jean Bodin (Floyd-Wilson 1-2). Mary Floyd-Wilson unpacks the long history of climate theory, explaining these differences throughout classical, medieval and early modern writing in her book, *English, Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama*. Under geohumoralism—which attributed the temperature of a geographic region with the coolness or warmness of the bodies of the region’s inhabitants—people were classified based on their ancient climatic tripartite divisions: northern (“White” Scythia), southern (“Black” Ethiopia), and temperate (“modern complexioned” regions such as Greece and Italy) zones (Floyd-Wilson 2). Floyd-Wilson explains the categorizations: “The logic of inversion fixed the white northerner and the black southerner in an interdependent relationship: if the southern is hot and dry, then the northerner must be cold and moist; if the southerner is weak and wise, the northerner must be strong and witless (Floyd-Wilson). I underscore here that the “Black” southerner was equated with “wisdom” and “constancy” as opposed to the “White” northerner who

was equated with fragility and witlessness. The early modern constructs of Blackness and Whiteness were not only inverted geographically, but also temporally, as new social constructions of Blackness and Whiteness would be defined in the Renaissance period.

“Black” refers to the peoples of the African diaspora without the ascriptions of nationality and culture that have been erased from historical documents (Hall 8). It also encompasses Africans and African-descended people in England and North America (8). “Blackness” will also be used here to refer to the social practices and cultural categories of Black people. Before the first Black Africans arrived in England in 1554, Blackness was already ingrained in Western tradition as a symbol of evil (Barthelemy 1-2). One of the earliest written accounts of racial difference of Black Africans can be traced back to 1453 to Portuguese chronicler, Gomes Eanes de Zurara. In his account, Zurara notes that Black Africans—who were first explicitly sold in the trans-Atlantic slave trade by Portugal—were inherently a bestial and savage people.¹ The first systematic destruction of the Black body was through the dehumanizing racist categorizations of Black African people. Winthrop Jordan explains that for the first English travelers to Africa— notwithstanding those who were already trading with African people— Blackness became so synonymous with Africa that “every African seemed a Black man,” as many equatorial African countries, especially the Congo, had scores of native people whose skin was almost as dark as charcoal (Jordan 5). John Leo Africanus’s 1554 book, *A*

¹ Zurara, who was also Prince Henry the Navigator’s biographer and a member of the Military Order of Christ, further documented that Africans were also in need of salvation, and thus, “Christianizing”; slave-traders used this salvific conquest of African peoples as the primary justification for enslavement of the Black body. In his book, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, Dr. Ibram Kendi claims that Zurara’s 1453 account of his African is the origin of racist ideas.

Geographical Historie of Africa—one of the most authoritative sources on Africa—describes among one type of Moor, the bestiality of Black Africans (Barthelemy 5).

Jeannette White explains that in the Renaissance period, dark-skinned people were ultimately outcasts because their complexion marked them as “social undesirables,” devoid of humanity. She says: “The abhorrence of things Black was not in any sense unique to the Renaissance...the ideology of Blackness as detestable had its literary and linguistic antecedents in the ancient world, where Black became a powerful metaphor for every conceivable type of aberration” (White 337). Moreover, Jordan states that during Shakespeare’s era, the Moors—including Othello—were often portrayed as “pitchy Black,” and the racial signifiers, “Moor” and “Negro” were used “almost interchangeably” (Jordan 32). For example, Englishmen inconsistently distinguished North African natives from South African natives. These Englishmen sometimes referred to the African natives as “Black Moors” to distinguish them from the peoples of North Africa, while African natives south of the Sahara were distinguished from the Moor (Jordan 5). Because of these disparate accounts of the complexions of African peoples, Jordan says that England’s “initial impression of Negroes was not appreciably modified: the firmest fact about the Negro was that he was ‘Black’” (6). From this perspective, Blackness was unchangeable, which promptly made Black identity a fixed and permanent homogenous identity. Furthermore, in his book, *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne*, Anthony Gerard Barthelemy explains that sixteenth and seventeenth century literary and stage

representations of Black characters² reflected “real and imagined” English attitudes toward Blackness: attitudes that pervaded Christian Western Europe (Barthelemy 1). Within the Christian tradition, Barthelemy says, Blackness was associated with evil, condemnation, and the damned soul—while whiteness represented the color of the saved and the redeemed soul (3). This racialized reading of Blackness can be traced back to the theoretical origin of Africans—and all non-African Blacks—as descendants of Noah’s sinful son Ham³. The ancient Western world was then embedded with the traditional belief that Blackness was inherently evil (Barthelemy 2); the Black body became politically marked as an “evil” body. Kim F. Hall explains that although the binarism of Black and white racial difference preceded the Renaissance period⁴ – before *Titus Andronicus* was published – the Renaissance era was saturated with concerns over skin color, economics, and gender politics (Hall 2):

Even before the Renaissance, tropes of Blackness drew their primary force from the dualism of good and evil and its association with African cultures and peoples. The insistent association of “Black” as a negative signifier of different cultural and religious practices with physiognomy and skin color is precisely what pushes this language into the realm of racial discourse. (4)

Accordingly, while “Blackness” represented death, mourning, baseness, evil, sin and danger in early modern England, “whiteness” signified the color of purity, virginity, innocent, and perfect human beauty (Hall 9). These values were primarily attached to

² Barthelemy traces the English stage association of Blackness with evil to the medieval period. In medieval plays, the souls of the damned were portrayed by actors painted Black or wearing Black costumes (Barthelemy 4).

³ See Barthelemy, 3; see also Winthrop Jordan’s *White Over Black: Attitudes toward the Negro*, Chapel Hill, 1968, p. 18.

⁴ The Renaissance era was a cultural movement that occurred during the early modern period (Belschner).

women (Hall 9). “White” refers to physical appearance of a light or pale color.⁵ The Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of “white” lists twenty individual definitions of the term (“Oxford”).

To support my claim, I argue that the first three definitions of “white” listed apply to the Andronici in *Titus Andronicus*: (1) referring to physical appearance; (2a) of a light or pale color; and (II. 7a) morally or spiritually pure; stainless, spotless or innocent. Because there is no focus on literary whiteness in America’s studies as Toni Morrison shares in her book, *Playing in the Dark* (see Hall 64), I argue, in accordance with Jeannette White, that all members of Rome—both the Goths and the Andronici and with the exception of Aaron—are White characters, primarily because they fall into either white category of skin color or purity. Francesca Royster says that Roman whiteness is a raced position in *Titus Andronicus*: “Whiteness has an agreed-upon function in the social structure, just as anyone reading an alehouse sign may deduce that ale may be obtained in its vicinity” (Royster 443). Although Tamora can be classified as “white” based on Webster’s second definition on skin color which is distinguished by her racial reference to Aaron as her “sweet Moor” (Shakespeare 2.3.51), she does not embody the virtues of “white.” Lavinia is the representation of the third definition: white purity. Like Hall’s description of “white,” Lavinia remains virginal and untouched by man—therefore, without a “spot or blemish”—until she is raped by brothers, Chiron and Demetrius, members of the Goths. Lavinia’s very white female body is a status symbol of Rome, as she is a woman who can “be wooed,” who can “be won,” and who, “therefore must be

⁵ See definitions 1 and 2a (“white, adj. (and adv.) and n.” *Oxford English Dictionary*).

loved” (Shakespeare 2.1.82-84). Saturninus and Bassianus quarrel over which of them could betroth her (see 2.1.271-315). Aaron’s body, on the other hand, is not a subject of negotiation until the end of the play when he is condemned to death after revealing to Lucius all his villainies committed in exchange to protect his son’s life. In this way, Rome can “claim superiority over the Black peoples” (Bevington 970). Despite Aaron’s heavy pedagogic influence over both Rome and the Goths, his color is “silent but distinctive” beside the ultrawhite Gothic queen, Tamora, his lover; Aaron remains an outsider, never incorporated into Rome like the Goths (Bartels 79-80).

While the Goths, “Scythia,” in *Titus Andronicus* can be classified as white in accordance with definitions (1) and (2a), they are neither “pure” nor “spotless.” The origin of the term “Goth” derives from one of several Germanic tribes of Germania⁶, which its people spread through Europe during the Age of the Great Migrations (Broude, 29). Other ethnic white groups that were classified as “Scythians” were classified as Picts, Celts, or Britons (Floyd-Wilson 15). Scythians are in fact, are a different ethnic group of white people from the Romans; the former are a fair-skinned people, particularly associated in early modern climate theory with having cold, moist bodies and pale complexions as opposed to the “medium-complexioned,” more temperate Roman bodies. Hippocrates, an early modern humoralist, describes northerners as “exceedingly, and unappealingly, pale and soft” as a result of their frigid surroundings in his work, *Airs, Waters, and Places* (Floyd-Wilson 25). Scythians were also purported by Hippocrates to

⁶ Although term “Goth” was often associated in Elizabethan vernacular with “German,” Broude says that the Elizabethans wrongly ascribed “Gothic” people as German. He explains that this confusion aroused from *De originie actibusque Getarum* (known today as the *Getica*, a work by Jordanes, a Goth and historian, whose significant work is referred by Broude as “an encomium of the Goths.” Broude, pp.28-29).

be uncomely men and women, of which the men were impotent and the women were fierce, like Amazonian women. Tamora and Lady Macbeth are two examples of Shakespeare's depictions of such northern women (Floyd-Wilson 26).

In his article, "Roman and Goth in Titus Andronicus," Ronald Broude points out that English antiquarianism popularized the identity of the Germanic or "Gothic" people; these people included Anglos, Saxons and Jutes (29). He explains that Shakespeare's portrayal of the Goths as savages and barbarians in *Titus* reflects Elizabethan attitudes toward the Goths rather than historical fact. However, Floyd-Wilson explains that predating the Elizabethan era, barbarism was associated with the "somatic differences" caused by different climate zones and how each zone affected a people's mood, or "temperance" (Floyd-Wilson 31). Goths or "Scyths," a northern-bodied people, would have been "barbaric" because they inhabited a cold climate, which, according to the climate theory, would produce intemperance, which would then produce barbarism. Floyd-Wilson writes: "For the ancient Greeks, any outsider to the *oikumene*, whether north or south, was identified as a barbarian. In the same way, for the Romans, those people living outside the *polis* inhabited inferior climates that defined the boundaries of civilization" (31). Gothic people were considered pure and notably civilized by Germanic writers, who stressed the virtues of the Gothic people. Therefore, Shakespeare, writing with this knowledge, intentionally plays off the stereotype of the Goths as cruel and stupid, which was perpetrated by Italian humanists.⁷ Broude says, "The Renaissance was

⁷ Broude references Samuel Klinger's *The Goths in England* (1952) which discusses Elizabethan attitudes toward the Goths.

well aware of the strength of pro-Germanic sentiment among writers of antiquity” (28). Such pro-Gothic sentiment was expressed among various writers such as Joannes Boemes⁸, Herodotus, Seneca, and Dionisius (28). Samuel Kliger also states that the conquest of the Roman Empire “could be seen as a world rejuvenation or rebirth due to the triumph of Gothic energy and moral purity over Roman torpor and depravity” (qtd. in Broude 28).

Broude suggests that Shakespeare does not intentionally depict Tamora, Chiron and Demetrius as barbarians who lack virtue — “vitality, valor, integrity and love of freedom”—as an affront to Germanic people (Broude 28). His evidence is attributed to the Goths’ acceptance of Lucius after his banishment and their effectiveness in waging “their campaign against Rome” which resulted in Lucius’s crowning as the new governor of Rome (28-29, 33). In other words, Broude says that the Goths’ acceptance of Lucius—who is their superior and a member of the Andronici—demonstrates that they are a people who are capable of virtue, valor, and integrity. I must disagree, however, with Broude’s point that Shakespeare unknowingly portrays the Goths as barbarians. Shakespeare intentionally plays off the stereotypes of Moors and Goths as barbaric. Particularly, his depiction of Aaron the Moor as villainous and demoralizing, for example, not only reflects Elizabethan attitudes about Moors dating back to English antiquarianism but he deliberately writes his play from an Elizabethan lens, which Broude acknowledges (30). The play of these stereotypes reveals the changeability of racial landscapes, particularly, with the Goths, who are as a racial subgroup of whiteness,

⁸ See *More, leges, et ritvs omnivm gentivm*.

are on the “margins of belonging,” as Royster says (Royster 443), to the dominant White superior group. However, I must note that the Goths’ pale complexion also denotes White privilege—an inherent advantage possessed by White people on the basis of their race in a society rooted in structural racism and injustice (*Oxford*). White privilege nearly destroys Aaron’s son’s life as seen in Act four when Tamora orders her and Aaron’s dark-skinned newborn baby to be killed: the “joyless, dismal, black, and sorrowful issue” that is her son (4.2.67). This is an instance where Shakespeare’s racial subordination of the Goths and Moors is deliberately done to play off the Elizabethan stereotypes of Moors and Goths. Shakespeare also—whether intentionally or inadvertently—illustrates how White supremacy maintains cultural subordination through the reinforcement of racial stereotypes. This shows that “continued membership in the white community is never unconditional. Everyone must learn to be white, must choose whiteness, and must accept white privilege. Whiteness . . . is not indivisible at all; White privilege carries ‘the pound of flesh exacted for the right to be excluded from the excluded’” (Royster 436; Thandeka qtd. in Royster 436). Whiteness in *Titus Andronicus* is then culturally fluid in that ethnic Whites, the Goths, are incorporated in the institution of whiteness, as the British, Irish, Welsh, Greek, Italian and the French can be considered “White” and incorporated into the structural supremacy of whiteness in the postcolonial West today. Aaron’s Blackness excludes him from this privilege; his outsider position as a Moor propels his anger against the Roman government into a string of villainies, as a rebellion against the so-called “white purity.” Like whiteness, “fairness” is another physical marker of White privilege.

The Oxford English Dictionary marks the first usage of the term “fair” to denote “complexion” and “hair” in Thomas Wilson’s *The Rule of Reason* (Hall 3). For example, typical Renaissance discourses characterized “Black” as not an opposition to “white” but to “beauty” or “fairness.” “Fair” refers to women who were not only beautiful and lighter in color but were “subject to the order of the patriarchy” (Hall 36). Because “fair” becomes obsolete during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, I will use this term to refer to white-skinned persons during the early modern period. Hall explains that “fairness” was often used to refer to the moral status of women and was used in contrast to the Black woman, who was viewed as the “opposite” of fair.⁹ For example, Tamora—unlike Lavinia—is neither pure nor virginal because she has birthed Chiron and Demetrius and is having an affair with Aaron, who is already despised by Rome because of his dark-skin and African features. Ania Loomba adds that Tamora, like Aaron, is “the embodiment of pure evil”: [Tamora] combines the attributes of the warrior woman—masculine prowess, military skill—and of the Amazon—usurping of male authority, sexual promiscuity . . . She is both the epitome of stereotypical female duplicity and the converse of stereotypical female subservience” (Loomba 47). Lavinia, by contrast, is “the compliant woman . . . to be embraced in the bosom of the civilised [sic] world and ‘closed in [Rome’s] household’s monument” (Shakespeare 5.3.194 qtd. in Loomba 47-48). Tamora and Lavinia then embody the “dark” and “light” polarity of early modern studies and importantly, they do so from within whiteness.

⁹ The semantic distinction between beauty being described as “fair” against “dark” occurred in the 1550s at the beginning of English interest in colonial travel and African trade (Hall 3, 9).

Furthermore, the interracial relationship between Aaron and Tamora – Queen of the Goths – signify “dark” and “light” polarities, as it primarily represents Black men and white women in early modern studies. Hall explains that this polarity is most commonly displayed between white femininity and Black masculinity “that is negotiated in artistic representation, discursive practices, and social modes” (9). In this way, the Goths exemplify the definition of “fair” because they are “ultrawhite” in complexion (Royster 432): In Act one, Saturninus, the new Roman emperor, tells his Gothic wife, Tamora, “Clean up fair queen, that faire countenance” (Shakespeare 1.1.263). Later in the scene, he refers to her as his “fair queen” (1.1.334). Royster argues Saturninus’s “suggestion that that Roman skin is deficient in beauty compared to Gothic skin makes Roman skin tones racially visible as well” (Royster 443). Although the Goths’ skin color is whiter in color than the Romans, the Goths remain ethnically subordinate to the Romans. The Andronici’s first example of this control is evidenced in the first scene, when Titus has Tamora’s son, Alarbus, sacrificially killed (Shakespeare 1.1.121-129) after losing his own sons in the war against the Goths. Having a “fair” complexion then does not protect the Goths from suffering at the hands of the constructed White superior body, Rome. Although they are not “half so barbarous” as Rome (1.1.131), the Goths cannot claim moral superiority either because the Andronici, as the superior body, dictates the morality and immorality of the people they govern because of their Roman sense of entitlement. Still, the fair-complexioned Goths retain a white privilege not bestowed to Moors in *Titus*; excluding Moors from being fully incorporated into Rome prevents the political structure of whiteness from crumbling. The Black body is only caveated by Rome when

made a scapegoat or a spectacle for punishment or crime as Aaron is when he is condemned to die by Lucius (see Shakespeare 5.3.184-190). In this way, Black anger responds to the silencing and exclusion of the Black body—Moors—from the governmental Roman body, which it serves.

The “Moor” designation originated in the early modern England period and often defined dark-skinned Africans,¹⁰ or the “ethnically, culturally, and religiously ‘strange’” (Hall 7). While “Moor” denotes a person from Mauretania, the misnomer of the term—which is often defined as “Black” or “dark-skinned” people—originated from the author of *Mandeville’s Travels* (Barthelemy 9). In her article, “Making More of the Moor”¹¹, Emily Bartels acknowledges that although Africanus presents a multi-dimensional Moor, he vilifies the Moor’s “exotic” customs, behaviors and appearances, thereby, denigrating the Moor’s traits as “otherness.”¹² In addition, White says that the *least* unsavory traits of the Renaissance Moor—brutishness, grossness, and “debauched sexual natures”—are indicative of his intrinsic animalistic disposition. White points out: “As a Moorish character, Aaron is supremely qualified to epitomize the contrariness and unloveliness associated with difference both in the Classical and Elizabethan worlds,” a fact that Shakespeare makes clear White says (White 346). In this paper, I will refer to Aaron’s racial identification as “Moor” to keep consistent Shakespeare’s association of “Moor” with a Black or dark-skinned person. My first exploration of contemporary Black anger

¹⁰ Hall notes that in early modern England, the term, “Moor,” also included Muslims, Native Americans, Indians, white North Africans, and Jews (p. 7); see Thompson’s *Making Moor of the Moor: Aaron, Othello, and Renaissance Refashionings of Race* 434.

¹¹ See Bartels “Making More of the Moor: Aaron, Othello, and Renaissance Refashionings of Race.”

¹² Bartels also references Hakluyt’s *A Geographical Historie of Africa* (1589) in her article.

begins in the mid- twentieth century with Baraka's "Black Art" poem as a symbol of Black resistance and condemnation of White supremacy.

CHAPTER III

BLACK ART: A POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXT OF BLACK ANGER

Poems are bullshit unless they are
 Teeth or trees or lemons piled
 On a step. Or Black ladies dying
 Of men leaving nickel hearts
 Beating them down. (“Black Art” 219)

Baraka’s poem “Black Art” is an urgent response to the assault on Black people and Black bodies. This controversial protest poem reflects a Black anger brewing in the wake of the assassination of slain Black human rights activist, Malcolm X, and the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which secured civil rights for Black voters. “Black Art” was published in a decade when the racial signifier, “Black,” became the new ascribed moniker for America’s marginalized descendants of African slaves. A new wave of Black anger then emerged in the 1960s, following the rampant terror and violence inflicted by enforcers of White supremacy against the Black body—namely local law enforcement officers and White nationalist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. The counterculture to that racial violence was established in 1965 by Baraka through the Black Arts Movement—a 10-year period of Black expression that gave Black artists, poets, writers, and musicians the power to create consciousness-raising art and achieve liberation for Black people (Buchanan; “The Black Arts Movement”). The movement not only encouraged Black, Latino and Asian Americans artists to produce their culturally-centered works, but it also created Black theater groups and Black journals. These

nationally distributed journals included *Black Dialogue*, *Journal of Black Poetry*, *Broadside Press* in Detroit and *Third World Press* in Chicago (Buchanan). While many of these vanguard works were innovative and forward-thinking, its embrace of violence often sowed division among both Black and White mainstream culture (“The Black Arts Movement”). Although the movement is often criticized for its hyper-masculine, misogynistic and anti-semitic works, many Black female writers influenced the movement as well, including Audre Lorde, Jayne Cortez, Nikki Giovanni, June Jordan, and Sonia Sanchez (Buchanan).

“Black Art” is a manifesto for Black Art. The talk about the criteria for Black Art is set out by the poem. First, the poem demands a complete decolonization of White supremacy from every institution that colonizes Black people; this is revealed in the last stanza of Baraka’s poem for which he calls for “a Black poem / And a Black world” after unleashing a barrage of anti-colonialism, anti-White, and anti-Semitic vitriol at the institution of White supremacy. Baraka also criticizes Negro leaders that obsequiously flock—or who “negotiate coolly for [their] people”—to the constructed White superior body for their civil rights (Baraka “Black Art” 219). Baraka then becomes the colonized Black body by proclaiming, “We want live / words of the hip world” (219). The first-person plural, “We” embodies Fanon’s racial epidermal schema in that Baraka is reclaiming not only himself as a Black man, but his ancestors still living and the entire Black race to whom call for a new institution of artistic standards and a new face—a Black face for the Black people. The “We” also implies a unity of Black people seeking to decolonize themselves and live in a “hip world”—one that is not a deoxygenated

environment reminiscent of White American contemporary theater: absent of feeling, emotions and pulsating words that transform humanity (Neal 2043). Black scholar, Larry Neal, explains: “The theatre of white America is escapist, refusing to confront concrete reality. Into this cultural emptiness come the musicals, an up-tempo version of the same stale lives” (2043). Baraka wants to decolonize the staleness of contemporary American theater, of contemporary American norms, which whiteness is the stated norm. Neal contends: “The Black Arts theatre of LeRoi Jones, is a radical alternative to the sterility of the American theatre. It is primarily a theatre of the Spirit, confronting the Black man in his interaction with his brothers and with the white thing” (Neal 2043). The “Spirit” that retains the Black Arts theatre shares in the association of Black with wisdom and constancy (Floyd-Wilson 3;72). The spirit of Black people is emotive, affirming, and truth-telling; its wisdom is reclaimed through the centralization of Black language, Black literature, Black anger, Black art, Black performance, and Black expression. The spirit is constant because it is culturally rich in speaking to the issues of the Black past, present and future, while celebrating the achievements, beauty, and the existence of Blackness; the spirit makes Black people resilient in that they are called to rise in their greatness despite the structural oppression and opposition designed to restrain them.

Baraka speaks commands the spirit of the Black man to rise in his free-verse Black nationalist poem, “It’s Nation Time”:

rise up
 future of the black genius spirit reality
 move
 from crushed roach back
 from dead snake head

from dancing teeth and coward tip
 from jibberjabber patme boss patme smmich. (Baraka, "It's Nation Time" 240)

Baraka urges the Black man to "move" from his constructed inferior position and decolonize himself from social immobility as the "crushed roach" and the "dead snake." Baraka's choosing of small capitalization for the first letters of each line demonstrates his own decolonization from formal poetry technique, which embodies his Black philosophy. Similarly, Fanon speaks of disembodiment of his own Black inferiority: "Negroes are savages, brutes, illiterates. But in my own case I knew that these statements were false. There was a myth of the Negro that had to be destroyed at all costs" (Fanon 117). Jordan expresses similar sentiments in her 1971 free-verse poem, "Who Look At Me," stating that "that white terrain / impossible for black America to thrive / that hostile soil to mazelike toil / backbreaking people into pain" (Jordan, "Who Look At Me" 14). Jordan speaks from a colonized body living among the "white terrain" white supremacy, sharing that under its suffocating system, it is "impossible" for Black people to thrive.

Later in her poem, Jordan orders a decolonization of this system:

Tell the whiplash helmets GO! . . .
 Set the wild dogs chewing up
 That pitiful capitulation
 Plastic flower plastic draperies
 To dust the dirt
 Break the clothesline
 Topple down the clotheslinepole . . .
 We will no longer wait for want for watch
 For what we will. (Jordan, "Who Look at Me" 36)

Jordan provides imagery necessary for destroying all structures of Black subordination, including setting the “wild dogs chewing up / That pitiful capitulation” and breaking and toppling “the clothesline” of servility. She declares that Black people will no longer “wait” for what they seek and will to obtain: decolonization of their bodies. In “Nation Time,” Baraka extends that the Black man must also divest himself of minstrelsy, destroying “dancing teeth,” and cowardice. Baraka condemns Black male cowardice in another poem, “A Poem for Black Hearts,” which beckons Black men to adopt the spirit of the recently assassinated, Malcolm X: “black man quit stuttering and shuffling, look up / black man quit whining and stooping for all of him” (Baraka “A Poem for Black Hearts” 218). Baraka emblemizes Malcolm X, the fearless leader of the Black race, as the standard for Black masculinity to not only decolonize one’s body from its constructed inferior status but to also decolonize one’s mind from assumed inferiority.

Baraka argues in “Black Art” for poems that kill that vacuous institution of White supremacy: “We want ‘poems that kill.’ . . . / With tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland . . . / Setting fire and death to whities ass” (Baraka “Black Art” 219). The removal of the tongue is a necessary step in the removal of White supremacy. The removal of the tongue can be read in not only a literal way in which “tongues” of ethnic Whites are pulled out to humiliate or destroy them. This is the intent of Aaron’s heart in *Titus Andronicus*: to destroy the constructed White superior body, Andronici, by removing tongues and limbs. While plotting Lavinia’s rape with Chiron and Demetrius in Act two, Aaron instructs the brothers, “The palace full of tongues, of eyes, and ears / . . . There speak and strike, brave boys, and take your turns; / . . . serve your lust, shadowed from heaven’s eye, / And revel

in Lavinia's treasury (Shakespeare 2.1.127, 129-131). The removal of Lavinia's tongue by Chiron and Demetrius (2.4.1-2; 7-8) as orchestrated by Aaron demonstrates Aaron's Black anger against Rome's constructed white purity. While Baraka's removal of White ethnic tongues can be narrowly assumed as a rhetoric of racial hatred, Baraka declares that to establish Black art in America, there needs to be an overhaul or subversion of the whitewashed creation of poems that has historically dominated American literature and society: poems which Baraka essentially says, are "bullshit."

This leads to the second judging criteria for Black Art, which requires that poems embody a physical realness. For example, poems must either grind like "teeth" grow, spread like "trees" or be reduced to a pulp like lemons "piled on a step" (Baraka "Black Art" 219). They must possess human emotions evoked from "Black ladies dying / of men leaving nickel hearts" (219). Here, Baraka suggests that poems--*real* poems--speak to the colonized bodies of Black women; it also speaks to the assault on the Black female body, "beating them down" (219). These poems are "useful," according to Baraka, if they would "shoot / come at you." In other words, poems should act like Baraka establishing a new genre of Black expression and intellectuality through the Black Arts Movement. Poems should "breathe like wrestlers"—heavy and forceful—or "shudder / strangely after pissing" (219). In addition, poems should "love what you are" meaning they should celebrate "you": The Black man and the Black woman, particularly. Within this decolonized space, Black people loving Blackness is possible (hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* 10). There are consequences if structural supremacy is not

overhauled. Jayne Cortez, a fellow Black Arts Movement poet, forewarned these consequences in her 1982 poem, “There It Is”:

And if we don't fight
 if we don't resist
 if we don't organize and unify and
 get the power to control our own lives
 Then we will wear the exaggerated look of captivity
 the stylized look of submission . . .
 the dehumanized look of fear . . .
 and the decomposed look of repression. (Cortez)

Cortez delivers a sense of urgency as Baraka does with “Black Art.” She repeats “if we don't” three lines in a row –the “we” meaning Black people— to illustrate the necessity of organizing as a race to control “our own lives” and most importantly, controlling their own Black bodies. hooks adds that “black folks who love ‘blackness,’ that is, who have decolonized our minds and broken with the kind of white supremacist thinking that suggests that we are inferior, inadequate, marked by victimization, etc., often find that we are punished by society for daring to break with the *status quo*” (hooks, *Black Looks* 17).

Ultimately, in calling for a “Black world,” Baraka shows us the need for Black anger in that it is required to preserve the consciousness and integrity of the Black world. Black anger is needed to protect the “lovers and the sons” and “warriors and sons” (Baraka, “Black Art” 220) of Black people. Neal says: “The poem comes to stand for the collective conscious and unconscious of Black America—the real impulse behind the Black Power movement, which is the will toward self-determination and nationhood, a radical reordering of the nature and function of both art and the artist” (Neal 2042). In this way, Black anger in contemporary performance is necessary to expose the violence

against the Black body and to allow Black people the position to express themselves without interjection from the constructed White superior body.

CHAPTER IV

AARON RESPONDS TO THE THREAT OF THE ENDANGERED BLACK BODY

Aaron expresses a collective interest in the corporeal Black body, most prominently when his son's life is in danger of extinction. In Act four, scene two, Aaron argues with the Gothic Nurse, after she threatens to kill Aaron's newborn son because of the child's Black complexion. After the Nurse calls Aaron's son a "joyless, Black and sorrowful issue" (Shakespeare 4.2.67), Aaron retorts, "[L]et no man but I / Do execution on my flesh and blood" (4.2.85). In this Act, Aaron acknowledges the vulnerability of the Black body and the "destroyers" (Coates 9) who seek to kill the Black body, as evidenced in his response to the threat to his son, in which Aaron pleads, "It shall not die!" (Shakespeare 4.2.1770). Aaron personalizes this threat by recognizing it as a threat to his Black body because of the extent to which his son acts as a proxy here: Aaron proclaims his son as his "flesh and blood" (4.2.85). Aaron's proclamation of "flesh and blood" represents a linguistic trope not only of biblical scripture but of Shakespeare's own dramaturgy. Shakespeare, for example, uses "flesh and blood" more than forty times in his dramatic works, with the phrase occurring on at least four or five occasions in one play (Koelb 107). By proclaiming that he is the only one who can kill his own "flesh and blood," Aaron affirms that to kill his son is to kill himself. Aaron's son's body has already been presented to Aaron endangered (Coates 82), vulnerable to Black infanticide;

killing the Nurse is Aaron killing the constructed White superior body that seeks to destroy his Black body and that of his offspring.

Aaron, after asking the Nurse, “[i]s Black so base a hue” (Shakespeare 4.2.72) in his son’s defense, kills the nurse instead of himself to demonstrate that Blackness is not, in fact, so “base a hue,” but is aristocratic and honorable in that it “scorns to bear another hue” (4.2.101). In Aaron’s eyes, Blackness is despised because it is enviable. Aaron affirms his “coal-Black” hue in Act four, scene 2:

Coal-Black is better than another hue;
For all the water in the ocean
Can never turn the swan’s Black legs to white,
Although she lave them hourly in the flood. (Shakespeare 4.2.100-104)

Here, some scholars have recognized this passage as Aaron’s intrinsic Black pride. C.P. Gause explains that Aaron’s pride here leans on his ability to communicate through human encounters, the most important information about himself: his prized hue, power, and strength – which is his Blackness (Gause 49). Royster point out that although “hue” is not commonly used in Shakespeare, its frequent usage in *Titus Andronicus* suggests that Shakespeare was concerned with racial issues (Royster 434). Md. Sikander Ali also argues that Shakespeare is “administering a rebuke to those who thought that a person born black was for that reason loathsome,” adding that Shakespeare has several white villains to his one Black villain in his plays (Ali 5). Thompson further says that Aaron is “like any other villain who embraces his own descent into evil, but he promotes his Blackness as the unfading and unwashable symbol of his villainy” (Thompson 328). If Aaron’s Blackness is an unfading and unwashable symbol of his villainy, then Aaron’s

son is the unwashable symbol of Aaron, which certifies Aaron's "proof of paternity" (Thompson 328-329). Royster says that Aaron proclaims that Blackness is a sign of permanence and constancy—reaffirming the climate theory perspective—and debunking the myth of whiteness as a natural, unchanging state (Royster 443). The caveat, Royster adds, affirms Thompson's point: Aaron's "changelessness of black skin" is lost to villainy and used to cover up wicked deeds (443). Royster says: "[B]lackness, Aaron boasts, does not function in the same way. In these lines Aaron destabilizes blackness as a functional signifier even while proclaiming its constancy. Blackness is constant in its resistance to reading. To be black is to have a natural aptitude for dissembling, to be born with a poker face. (Royster 443)." Blackness has a somatic privilege over whiteness in *Titus Andronicus* in that the Black body does not betray itself. Aaron's skin color does not betray him until he is forced to reveal his villainies to Lucius in Act 5. Although Aaron is later condemned to die because of his confessed prior villainies, Aaron simultaneously allows his son—his Black heir—to live on and succeed him. In this way, Aaron's son surpassing Aaron not only shows that the Black body is not an inferior body, but it also shows the love of a father for his child. Ali explains that Aaron is the "only parent" in the play that willingly privileges his child above all: "In a world where Titus kills two of his children onstage for no good reason, and Tamora orders Aaron to 'christen' her baby with a 'dagger's point,' Aaron's strong defense of his newborn baby seems admirable" (Ali 6). In this way, Aaron exercises the greatest compassion of all *Titus's* characters by proclaiming Blackness as beautiful, "better than another hue," and protecting the body of his Black son. Aaron, does acknowledge, however, the

vulnerability of the Black body, referring to his own son as a “black slave” (4.2.121). Here, Aaron is conscientious of the endangered Black body, because he knows that his son bears the great burden of not only having a colonized “slave” body but a colonized Black body that is corporeally owned by the constructed White superior body. Having a colonized “slave” body marks the Goths and Moors differently because Aaron himself recognizes that his son is not only born a slave but a “black” slave, which suggests that Aaron is cognizant of the double stigma of race and class discrimination that his son was born into. Even in defending his son’s life, Aaron is charged with the responsibility to inform his newborn son that his dark-skin and African features, which already define his endangered body, also belong to the Roman state.

Aaron is also aware that because Blackness is permanent and cannot be erased, the Black body is privileged above the constructed White superior body because it “scorns to bear another hue” (Shakespeare 4.2.101). In other words, Aaron declares that although the Black body is colonized, it is not inferior. Additionally, by crying out that his son “shall not die” (4.2.82), Aaron affirms not only the preservation of his son’s body, but the preservation of the Black body in general. Aaron understands that possessing a Black body is damnable as a possession of the constructed White superior body, who inherently, colonizes and controls the dictates of both Aaron and his son’s body. Aaron demonstrates that defending one’s offspring from the threat of racial violence is one component of Black anger; what we have read as “villainy” is Black anger. Aaron’s Black anger can also be read in his orchestration of the rape of Lavinia who is the symbol of White purity in *Titus*.

The Rape of Lavinia: Aaron's Dismantling of White Supremacy

Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand,
 Blood and revenge are hammering in my head. . .
 This is the day of doom for Bassianus:
 His Philomel must lose her tongue today,
 Thy sons make pillage of her chastity.
 (Shakespeare 2.3.37-43)

Here, Aaron's "Vengeance" has been interpreted by different scholars, including as expressions of Aaron's melancholy as Eldred Jones says, in which Aaron's Blackness and villainy are inextricably linked to his vengeance (Jones 179). Paxton Hehmeyer suggests that Aaron's vengeance has neither motive nor grievance; Aaron is simply a Machiavellian figure who attributes his "outrageous morality" to his own Blackness (Hehmeyer 169, 173). However, the first line, "Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand / Blood and revenge are *hammering* in my head" reveals Aaron's anguish. Jeannette White says that Aaron's vengeance is directly related to his race, in that not only does his skin color "predispose him to ignoble deeds" but Aaron's vengeance is a response to the vilifying of his Black body (White 336). Bartels affirms that "[Aaron] himself will later articulate the negative connotations of his blackness and acknowledge, indeed celebrate, the potential congruity of having (he says 'Aaron will have') 'his soul black like his face' and therefore standing in bold-faced contrast to 'fair men' who 'call for grace'" (Bartels "Incorporate" 79). Ayanna Thompson concurs that as Shakespeare intentionally depicts racist Elizabethan stereotypes against Aaron, Aaron conveniently incorporates race politics into his conversations with the plays' White characters (Thompson 328), perhaps most tellingly while defending the life of his son. Aaron's Black anger, I argue, is first

illustrated through the rape of Lavinia. His anger is “vengeance” because Lavinia is not only the symbol of White purity in this play, but “Rome’s rich ornament” (Shakespeare 1.1.52). Aaron is strategic in orchestrating Lavinia’s rape as his first crime. He understands that the first criteria in deconstructing the constructed White superior body is to have a White woman—Rome’s “rich” ornament—dismantled first. In this way, Aaron seeks to make the constructed White superior body an inferior body by revoking the power from its status-symbol White woman. Although the audience is given no backstory as to why Aaron is seeking vengeance, I read this scene as Aaron seeking vengeance against Rome, because he possesses a body that, in accord with Christianized Western Europe, and the characters in the play, Aaron’s has been permanently racially marked as evil and vile. For example, in Act two, after Aaron leaves Tamora in the forest alone to trap Lavinia for her rape and Bassianus’s murder, the betrothed Lavinia and Bassianus both make racially-charged remarks to Tamora about Aaron’s Blackness. Bassianus first refers to Aaron as Tamora’s “swart Cimmerian,” adding that Aaron’s dark complexion has stained Tamora’s honor and made it “[s]potted, detested, and abominable” (2.3.72-74). He further vilifies Aaron by calling him a “barbarous Moor” (2.3.78). This shows Bassianus’s own prejudice toward Aaron, because even without motive or action, Aaron’s Black body is viewed as a culpable body. As we read earlier, Aaron’s son’s Black body is viewed culpably immediately following his birth. The child’s entry into the world is met with prejudice from his own brothers and especially, his own ultra-white Gothic mother, Tamora. Prejudice against the Black body and the threat of violence against even the smallest members of the Black family—including mixed-race children

like Aaron's son—emboldens Aaron to express Black anger. In this way, Aaron is conscious of his Black body being viewed from a prejudicial lens from the play's White characters in that he intentionally chooses not to rape Lavinia himself, but rather executes this assault vicariously through the play's two White inferior bodies: Chiron and Demetrius. For example, early in the play, when plotting Lavinia's rape with Chiron and Demetrius, Aaron tells the brothers that "To villainy and vengeance consecrate, / Will we acquaint withal what we intend . . . / [T]o your wishes' height advance you both" (Shakespeare 2.1.121-122, 125). The rape of Lavinia consecrates the union between the Moors and the Goths as vandals of Roman order.

In a later scene, Aaron tells Tamora, "This is the day of doom for Bassianus . . . / Thy sons make pillage of [Lavinia's] chastity / And wash their hands in Bassianus' blood" (2.3.42, 44-45). At this moment, Bassianus has no knowledge that Aaron has already conspired to have him killed and have Lavinia destroyed. Similarly, Lavinia's description of Aaron as Tamora's "raven-colored love" (2.3.83) directs both insult and compliment toward Aaron: he cannot simply be "Tamora's lover" without bearing an animalistic semblance to a Black-colored species. Furthermore, as members of the constructed White superior body, both Lavinia and Bassianus reinforce Elizabethan racial stereotypes of Black bodies as not only savage and detestable, but most importantly, inferior. Bartels explains: "Despite Aaron's ability to insinuate himself inscrutably into the structures of the Roman court, it is simultaneously, even ironically, clear that Rome is well-equipped for discrimination against the Moor—so equipped that negative associations emerge within the language as part of the cultures' inherited, proverbial lore" (Bartels

“Incorporate” 87). In this way, Rome, the constructed White superior body, re-colonizes Aaron’s body using derogatory racial signifiers. Because Aaron is an outsider to Rome—as an African Moor—he cannot be so easily adopted into Roman civilization as the Goths (Royster 437). Chiron and Demetrius, whose only authority is their whiteness, are used by Aaron as his subordinates to carry out his vengeance on Lavinia and Bassianus. This interconnection between Aaron, the African outsider, and the disenfranchised Goths, enables Aaron, as tutor of the Goths, to use villainy as his “instrument of empowerment” to weaken the power of the constructed White body superior, Rome (White 343). In this way, Aaron can not only be read as a racial stereotype, but also a Black man seeking to advance himself within the racial hierarchy of Rome (White 346-347). Despite my postcolonial perspectives on *Titus*’s hierarchical structure, Bartels argues that Aaron has no established position of power in the play but rather a “notably flexible social position” (Bartels, “Incorporate” 82). Bartels extends that Aaron’s social position is both “unclear and fixed”, stating that Aaron’s identity and history has been both assigned to and integrated with the Goths (81-82). Although Aaron has a political fluidity that licenses him to a degree of power and agency with the Romans and Goths (Bartels “Incorporate” 82), his Blackness still places him in the category of racial otherness.

Aaron, who besides his racial heritage (White 347), possesses a heritage composed only of villainy. Because Aaron eventually confesses to having been a rapist in the past—“I curse the day—and yet I think . . . /Wherein I did not some notorious ill, . . . / [As] Ravish a maid, or plot the way to do it” (Shakespeare 5.1.125, 127, 129), he creates a “kind of vicarious Black rape that still plays into racialist fears about Moorish lust”

(Royster 446). Racialist fears about Moorish lust for White women is perhaps the greatest offense to the White male body superior, for which Black men have historically suffered great punishment for in North America. In the United States, the perpetuated racist stereotypical images of “savage” Black men attacking “innocent” virginal White women was never more greatly exploited than in D.W. Griffith’s 1915 culturally iconic, yet blatantly racist, satirical film, *Birth of a Nation*, in which one character—the renegade Negro, Gus—aggressively chases the scared young, white southern belle, Flora Cameron, to her death. The politics of race in this film overtly addresses anti-Black and anti-integration propagandist sentiments—although other film critics, including the late director, Griffith, himself casually denied any intentional acts of misrepresenting Black Americans. Unlike Aaron, however, Gus is completely ignorant to the politics of race dealing, especially with Black-White relations, because he, as a Black man (a white man in Blackface), is already declared guilty by the White supremacist, KKK for pursuing a White woman in the first place. Gus is the Brute caricature of the Black male; he is a complete savage, lacking all wit and intellect of Aaron and is the inverse of humoralism and Shakespeare’s construction of Aaron as an intelligent, strategic villain. The shared commonality between Gus and Aaron is that both recognize the White woman as a valuable, “rich ornament” (Shakespeare 1.1.52), as someone who “can be wooed” (2.1.82) and whose body “can be won” (2.1.83). Apart from Aaron, Gus is neither aware that his Black body is a danger to the constructed White superior body nor that his own body is endangered. In this way, the placement of the White woman in the path of the

Black man—by the constructed White superior body, Griffith—is a necessary criterion for the destruction of the Black body.

Aaron both understands and incorporates himself within the politics of race in *Titus Andronicus*. In this way, I argue that Aaron's orchestrated rape of Lavinia is a mark of his Black anger because it destroys the most valuable asset to White supremacy—the White woman. I turn to scene two in the play in this passage from Aaron and his instructions to Chiron and Demetrius to literally ravage Lavinia's body, each taking his turn:

The palace full of tongues, of eyes, and ears; . . .
There speak and strike, brave boys, and take your turns;
There serve your lust, shadowed from heaven's eye,
Revel in Lavinia's treasury. (Shakespeare 2.1.127-131)

Here, Aaron serves his own lusts of reveling in the destruction of Rome's most valuable entity. Although committed indirectly, Aaron conquers Lavinia, and in doing so, conquers the Goths on the racial hierarchy ladder. For example, as their tutor, Aaron encourages the lower class of Roman citizens, the Goths, to enjoy literally feeling powerful inside of a nation's gates—inside of Lavinia's bodily gates, which is essentially, her womanly "treasury." In this way, the very discussion of committing rape signifies dominance of one body of power over another. The removal of the tongue as a silencing of a powerful voice or entity. Moreover, Lavinia is the only character in *Titus Andronicus* to have her tongue removed, which demonstrates that the silencing of the White woman dismantles the power of the constructed White superior body, Rome. Although Chiron and Demetrius are the literal dominators over Lavinia's body, Aaron, is the chief villain

being served in the destruction of Lavinia's body. In this play, rape is not only a key technique in warfare and nation-building (Royster 436), but is also used as a tool of Aaron's Black anger to make the constructed White superior body impotent and make the constructed Black inferior body powerful. Shakespeare, therefore, uses the master schemer, Aaron, to desecrate all the values of Roman society of purity, virginity, and innocence (Hall 9)—most notably through Rome's beloved White daughter.

Aaron's interracial affair with Tamora is Aaron's rebellion against White supremacy. Aaron remains outside of the cultural boundaries of Rome upon which Tamora's marriage to Saturninus has already instituted a new culturally-mixed Rome (Bartels 78). Bartels says: "[Aaron's] illicit liaison with the Gothic queen provides an exposing antitype of her legitimating marriage to the Roman emperor, and the parallel draws attention to the fact that the incorporation possible for her seems to be contrastingly impossible for him" (80). Aaron understands that his Blackness can never be incorporated into Rome (Bartels 80); it would disrupt the Goths and Romans maintenance of Rome's structural supremacy of whiteness. Aaron plots his upending of this structure in his opening soliloquy in Act 2:

To wait, said I? To wanton with this queen,
 This goddess, this Semiramis, this nymph,
 This siren that will charm Rome's Saturnine
 And see his shipwreck and his commonweal's
 Holla! What storm is this? (Shakespeare 2.1.19-25)

Aaron describes Tamora in semi-amorous descriptions: "goddess," "Semiramis," a reference to the mythical, wicked lustful Queen of Assyria (Shakespeare 978 n22), "this

nymph” and “this siren.” Aaron both affirms Tamora’s physical beauty, which is “above pale envy” (Shakespeare 2.1.4) using two mythical constructions of whiteness—goddess and nymph—and affirms her cruelty, in her likeness to the mythical Queen of Assyria and a “siren” that will charm Saturninus. By “siren,” Aaron alludes to the Greek mythological portrait of Tamora as a woman “whose singing lured away unwary sailors on to rocks” (“siren,” *Oxford* n2) or “a woman who is considered to be fascinating or alluring but is dangerous in some way” (n2.1). Aaron forewarns Tamora’s betrayal of both Saturninus—notwithstanding her affair with Aaron—and her betrayal of the Roman commonweal. Bartels says that because Saturninus and Tamora’s marriage is “neither productive nor reproductive,” the absence of progeny within their union is a particularly ominous sign in Shakespeare: “it is not their mixed union that sets the revenge play in motion, but Titus’s inability to read and reach across cultures, to recognize the problem of the Gothic sacrifice and the potential of the Gothic threat” (Bartels 79). The Gothic threat is emboldened by Aaron’s involvement with Tamora, in that he is licensed to penetrate the walls of Rome (82).

Enloe and Yuval-Davis explain that this “Black / White opposition” creates a special relationship between white femininity and Black masculinity:

Concern over the whiteness of English women and the Blackness of African men (and the mixture of both) projects on to the bodies of white women the anxieties of an evolving monarchial nationstate in which women are the repository of the symbolic boundaries of the nation. (qtd. in Hall 9)

Although Tamora is not classified as “White” like the Andronici, her pale-skin is still a stamp of whiteness that maintains a racial hierarchy above Aaron and a racial

fluidity with Rome. In the case of her unwanted mixed-race child with Aaron, Tamora can choose “White” as her racial category and deny motherhood to the infant. This is the one power that the Goths maintain over Aaron: skin color. Although the Goths are more uneducated and are too, prisoners with Aaron, their pale skin color still privileges them in the Roman government. Therefore, many readers can agree that Tamora and Aaron’s interracial union threatens Rome’s “racial purity” (Royster 450). I agree with Royster in that their relationship not only threatens Rome’s racial purity, but threatens White supremacy in general. Ania Loomba says that the idea of white women desiring Black men was “especially threatening for white patriarchy . . . their desire for Black lovers is feared, forbidden, but always imminent . . . combin[ing] Black and female insubordination, [which] ‘threatens to undermine white manhood and the Empire at stroke’” (Loomba 52; Errol Lawrence qtd. in Loomba 52). By sustaining a relationship with the Gothic empress, Aaron undermines the White manhood of Tamora’s husband, Saturninus, and simultaneously weakens the White nationhood of the Roman empire by engaging in sexual relations with the play’s only other White female body. White explains that by refuting the Roman government’s restrictions against Aaron— as I consider his inability to become a decolonized body—Aaron is determined not to become an unhappy “prisoner of his skin tone” (White 341). Although Aaron seemingly dominates Tamora sexually, Tamora still maintains power in her White womanhood, which is not affected by neither birthing a dark-skinned infant son, whom she almost has killed, nor her continued affair with Aaron, which is privy to the Roman empire. Because Tamora, unlike Aaron, is still privileged Aaron shows that he, like his son, is a “black

slave” to his environment, which is governed by the constructed White superior body. Even though Tamora does not own him, Aaron still “serves her lusts” in ways that gratify her sexually but imprisons Aaron corporeally. Fanon says “Coitus is an occasion to call on the gods of the clan. It is a sacred act, pure, absolute, bringing invisible forces into action. What is one to think of all these manifestations, all these initiations, all these acts? From very direction I am assaulted by the obscenity of dances and of words” (Fanon 126). In this sense, sex, “coitus,” is not a sacred act to Aaron as to Tamora because Aaron notably resists “arousal and control[s] his passions” whereas Tamora’s sexuality “is out of control,” according to Royster (447). I note Act 2 scene 3 when Aaron promptly tells a lustful Tamora, “Madam, though Venus govern your desires, / Saturn is dominator over mine . . . / My fleece of woolly hair that now uncurls / . . . No madam, these are no venereal signs” (Shakespeare 2.3.30-31; 34, 37). Saturn does not make Aaron amorous but rather “cold” and “sullen” (980 n31). He is not as enticed by the act of sex as by his act of vengeance, which is executed through Lavinia’s rape.

Thompson explains that by Aaron alluding to himself as one being “fettered in amorous chains” (Shakespeare 2.1.15), he is referring to Tamora as his slave; however, Aaron subverts the audience’s expectations by admitting that he is, in fact, the “true slave” (Thompson 333). I add that by admitting that he is the “true slave” of the play, Aaron acknowledges that, contrasting Royster’s claim, he remains at the bottom of the racial hierarchy of Rome because despite his reputation as a villainous mastermind, his Blackness still makes him Rome’s social pariah. Because he “Hast prisoner held, fettered in amorous chains,” Aaron is manifesting his anger as a Black man held in bondage to the

white Roman institution: not by his literal bondage but, rather, his political bondage as a Black-skinned Moor. Aaron, who is already despised by Rome because of his union with Tamora—which Shakespeare draws upon in this play—is seduced by his fair Gothic lover (Royster 447), which makes his interracial union less “amorous” and more imprisoning like “chains.” This shows Aaron’s acute understanding of himself not only as a physical Black man, but also his constructed inferior subject position in a society that cannot receive his presence without implicitly acknowledging his dark skin and African features. Aaron cannot be incorporated into Rome because his Black body is otherized and such reality makes his body endangered. Aaron performs Black anger to both defend himself from the constructed White superior body and to attack the constructed White superior body through villainy, which his his heritage is built on villainy and constructed by race. Enter Eric Killmonger.

CHAPTER V

ERIC KILLMONGER: A CONTEMPORARY FIGURE OF BLACK ANGER

I argue that Eric “Killmonger” Stevens, the villain in Marvel’s film adaptation of the *Black Panther* comic book is a contemporary symbol of Black Anger. In *Black Panther*, T’Challa returns home to Wakanda—a highly technologically advanced hidden African nation—to take the throne as king after his father, King T’Chaka, is killed in a bombing. Soon after taking throne, T’Challa is threatened by Killmonger, a U.S. spy and the American-born son of N’Jobu, T’challa’s uncle, whom T’Chaka kills after discovering that N’Jobu, a War Dog for Wakanda, had stolen vibranium—the nation’s most powerful substance. Eric Killmonger is the most important performance of the film because he raises pertinent social concerns affecting African Americans: colonization, identity, and inheritance. Killmonger is born in Oakland, Ca, as the son of N’Jobu, a Wakandan prince and an American woman, who abandoned him; Killmonger grows up a Black boy, yet occupies a unique position within the film because he is the only living descendant of Wakanda who possesses both African blood and American blood. As the film unfolds, we can trace Killmonger’s Black anger to his father’s death and the cause for which he sought to die for. When N’Jobu is confronted by T’Chaka earlier in the film on his betrayal of Wakandan security intelligence, N’Jobu focuses on the urgency of arming Black citizens of America against structural oppression, a concern that is deeply

embedded in Killmonger's philosophy and is a great source of his anger. N'Jobu explains:

I observed for as long as I could. Their leaders have been assassinated. Communities flooded with drugs and weapons. They are overly policed and incarcerated. All over the planet, our people suffer because they don't have the tools to fight back. With vibranium weapons they can overthrow all countries, and Wakanda can rule them all, the right way! (*Black Panther*)

Carolyn Anderson extensively records the root and maintenance of structural racism in America in her book, *White Rage: The Untold Truth of Our Racial Divide*. Although weapons are not her solution to dismantling structural opposition to Black advancement, Anderson calls for all Americans—Black, White, Latino, Native American, and Asian American—to “step out of the shadow of white rage, deny its power, understand its unseemly goals, and refuse to be seduced by its buzzwords, dog whistles, and sophistry” (Anderson 178). Like Lorde, Anderson responds to the anger of racial exclusion, manipulation, and unquestioned privilege designed by the constructed White superior body. N'Jobu betrayed Wakanda to destroy the structural oppression plaguing Black communities. After T'Chaka kills N'Jobu, T'Chaka abandons young Eric Killmonger in his return to Wakanda, refusing to jeopardize the cultural purity of Wakanda by bringing in a half-blooded American to raise.

In this way, Killmonger has experienced a double dispossession of his identity. First, he is born outside of Wakanda, and is therefore, a foreigner and outsider, not a native. Second, his father's murder was devastating in that it severed Killmonger's cultural history by cutting off his direct access to Wakanda, which includes inheritance,

customs and culture. A final example, which creates a triple dispossession for Killmonger, is young Eric's abandonment by his uncle, T'Chaka, which is a proven pernicious effect on Killmonger because T'Chaka's abandonment prohibits Killmonger from reconciling his Black American heritage with his Wakandan (African) heritage. Killmonger has instead developed a resentment for the nation that killed his father—their own progeny—and that disowned him, and that has been inactive in protecting Black people globally from structural oppression. Killmonger's cross-cultural identity as both an African and Black American provides him a firsthand knowledge of what it means to possess an endangered body, which King T'Challa, his blood cousin, and the kingdom of Wakanda are not privy to. Killmonger punctuates this reality of colonized people in his first appearance before the Wakandan throne when he excoriates the monarchy for ignoring the plight of colonized Black bodies across the world: "I want the throne. You are all sitting up here comfortable. Must feel good. There's about two billion people around the world who look like us and their lives are a lot harder. Wakanda has the tools to liberate them all" (*Black Panther*). Killmonger's Black anger that has become deeply entrenched into the national conscience of Black Americans. He has been reared in a society of fixed racial categories, where its social, political, and economic structures have been systematically designed to prohibit Black advancement.

Although Killmonger "advanced" through these ranks with his intellectual adroitness and military strategy as an MIT graduate and Navy SEAL, he is pursuant in his vendetta against Wakanda for the murder of his father, N'Jobu, and the subsequent abandonment of young Eric. David Betancourt of *The Washington Post* writes:

After his time as an American spy, when he witnessed black suffering all across the world, N'Jobu wanted to arm those that were suffering from racial inequality with the technology that Wakanda had used to be an invincible, unconquerable land for centuries. It was a radicalized compassion that he passed down to his son — right up until the moment he died at the claws of his Black Panther brother, King T'Chaka. (Betancourt)

Once he enters Wakanda, Killmonger has already killed 3000 people during his time as a military spy—each fatality represented by a body scar. He is the “monster” that Wakanda has created, according to T'Challa (*Black Panther*). Killmonger's insatiable quest is to conquer Wakanda and arm colonized peoples with vibranium weapons of Wakanda, to overthrow all colonizers, to “use their own strategy against them” is his, perceivably, due inheritance. Once Killmonger is crowned King of Wakanda after overpowering T'Challa for the birthright challenge to the throne, Killmonger orders that all vibranium—the source of Wakanda's power strength and symbol of the former kingship— be destroyed. The long-shot of Killmonger standing amid the sight of burning vibranium not only represents his “burning” of the memory of T'Challa's reign, but it also articulates the African proverb that “The child who is not embraced by its village will burn it down to feel its warmth” (Savage). In this way, Killmonger, who was not initially embraced by the Wakandan kingdom because of his outsider status, burns the vibranium to feel the warmth of the nation that rejected him. Burning is also a form of silent protest for Black anger as an act of resistance. Within today's culture of political brutality, the peculiar question of “Why?” often emerges within public forums as to why some Black protestors burn properties in their own communities in response to cases of racial injustice and police brutality. To answer this question, we would have to trace the history of racial

violence in this country to see the pattern of state-sanctioned violence against the Black body, which was enacted to stultify Black progress or Black rebellion when fighting racially discriminatory laws or pernicious public policies (Anderson 159). In twenty-first century America, there have been some cases of the burning of properties in response to police violence against Black bodies, most recently, 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri following the killing of Michael Brown and the acquittal of Darren Wilson, the officer charged with his death. Earlier cases of city burnings include the 1992 L.A. riots and the Detroit Race Riots of 1968, 1967, and 1943. For Killmonger, the act of burning then becomes both a symbol of insurrection and conquest. There is also a reclamation of one's identity in burning: it reflects Black anger by destroying old systems of power while, simultaneously, empowering Black bodies to repossess their bodies as leaders and rulers in a colonized land. In the final battle scene between Killmonger and T'Challa, Killmonger chooses death as an emblem of freedom and preservation of his Black body.

In this fight scene, upon which Killmonger is wounded, Killmonger rejects T'Challa's offer to heal him to escape from becoming a colonized body. Killmonger obstinately replies to T'Challa: "Why? So you can just lock me up? Nah . . . Bury me in the ocean with my ancestors who jumped from ships because they knew death was better than bondage" (*Black Panther*). Killmonger acknowledges here that if he does live, his body will become Wakandan property. His father's betrayal of Wakanda and his own insurrection against the kingdom marks Killmonger as an exile in his own "native" land. He understands that T'Challa's reclamation of the throne precludes Killmonger from having any further access to the throne. That means that Killmonger's vision to globally

empower colonized Black bodies with vibranium weapons will not be executed under his terms. For Killmonger, Wakanda is no longer a place of liberation but a place of bondage. Fanon articulates how he came to understand his Black body as possessing a similar captivity:

All I wanted to be a man among other men . . . to come lithe and young into a world that was our sand to help to build it together. But I rejected all immunization of the emotions. I wanted to be a man, nothing but a man. Some identified me with ancestors of mine who had been enslaved or lynched: I decided to accept this. It was on the universal level of the intellect that I understood this inner kinship. (Fanon 111-112)

I argue that Killmonger did not want to merely be a “man among other men” but a conqueror of all colonizers worldwide. He could very well become the dictator that he so despised, but on his own terms, he would equip billions of Black bodies across the diaspora with the tools to decimate their colonizers “and [the colonizers’] kids,” as Killmonger formerly roused to the Wakandan monarchy (Black Panther). In his last words to T’Challa, Killmonger reclaims his identity with the “ancestors of mine who have been enslaved,” his Black American ancestors. Killmonger, like Fanon, accepts and understands the “inner kinship” of his identity. Killmonger’s association with his enslaved ancestors underscores the identity burdens residing in some African Americans today, which is (1) the quest for incorporation into the native African continent and (2) the psychological preservation of the blood of their ancestors who were sold off the continent and incorporated into a foreign land, which has greatly cultivated their cultural identity and understanding of what “Blackness” signifies in America, today, which in Killmonger’s case, is resistance. Killmonger is then incorporated within the narrative of

Black anger as an extension of Baraka and a manifestation of Aaron in the postcolonial New World.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The categorizations of Black anger share generational experiences that are predominately rooted in unwelcomed violence, erasure, corruption or destruction of the Black body by the constructed White superior body. Villainy is one categorization of Black anger in which the person's violent or retaliatory acts becomes a lifestyle. In this way, Aaron's occupation could be classified as a professional villain. Protest is probably the most common category of Black anger, where participants channel their anger into activism, whether it be street activism—such as boycotts, sit-ins, or marches—or social media activism, which created and popularized the Black Lives Matter Global Network movement. Protesting is a great platform by its accessibility to people from all professions, backgrounds, nationalities, and ages. Moreover, performing arts and visual arts are another category where Black anger is exhibited, as seen in Amiri Baraka's large volumes of work, along with fellow Black Arts Movement performing artists, Jayne Cortez, Audre Lorde, Larry Neal and June Jordan. Black anger responds to the threat of possessing a constructed and endangered inferior body. By inferior, I do not mean "weak" or "less than." Inferior refers to a body that has been historically vulnerable to widespread abuse and brutality by the classified "superior" body. America has historically been upheld by Black and marginalized citizens of color to mean "white" and everything else as branded "other." In 2018, the Black body is still considered "other."

Even in his father's native land of Wakanda, Erik Killmonger is still considered an "outsider" and foreigner, a threat by extension by his royal African bloodline. This is because Killmonger's ascension into the Wakandan throne was attributed to his strategic, vengeful plan to overthrow the cultural supremacy of Wakanda and restore power back to the colonized Black bodies across the world. Even in fictional settings like *Black Panther*, Black anger has become a coping mechanism for the peoples of Black diaspora to gut the soul and dispense pain into creative and literary outlets, to still be heard, to still retain the spirit.

Black anger is inherited, which is why 371-year gap between Shakespeare's Aaron and Baraka does not diminish the resonances of Black anger that remain throughout one's ancestral line. I consider Aaron and Baraka literary ancestors, and that is why I believe that Black anger is inherited: racial memory prevents us as humans from escaping our past. Even with progression, we always have footprints. Black anger does not imply that White people must be destroyed for the Black body to live in peace. As bell hooks says, "White Americans could have prejudicial feelings about blacks and leave us alone" (hooks, *Black Looks* 15). Black anger dismantles the racialized ideology of "White purity" and White supremacy through real expressions of vulnerability, fear, or rage in possessing an endangered body. Aaron performs this exact dismantling of White supremacy through the removal of the White woman—an important symbol of White power and destruction of the Black male body. Aaron demonstrates this removal of the White woman's power through his interracial affair with Tamora, the orchestrated rape of Lavinia, Rome's "rich [White] ornament," and through the killing of the white, Gothic

Nurse. In this way, Aaron subverts the authority of White supremacy, by depowering the White female body—through sex, rape, and second-degree killing—as separate acts of resistance to the structural power of White supremacy and its destruction of the Black body; Aaron’s body is eventually condemned to death, which shows that the Black body, even after triumph—saving his son’s life—is always in danger of destruction.

Through proactive engagement, expressions of Black anger defend and preserve the life of its Black men and women, “daughters” and “sons” as Baraka says. Baraka and Killmonger show us both fictional and real-life representations of Black anger through a contemporary lens that allows us to take a deeper look behind Aaron’s villainy. The structural White and cultural supremacy that Killmonger and Baraka respond to in post-colonial contexts can help us understand Aaron’s rebellion against the nascent structural White supremacy in an early modern context. Black performance can be then considered a catalyst for Black anger to both combat and deconstruct White supremacy from its structural design as a controller of racial hierarchy and subordination.

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