

SYCORAX'S HOOP

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In 1797, Francis Godolphin Waldron published *The Virgin Queen, A Drama in Five Acts*.¹ Waldron, considered in his own time as ‘an actor of very useful, rather than splendid, talents’, was also an occasional playwright.² The title page of his work describes itself as ‘a Sequel to Shakespeare’s *Tempest*’. Yet, despite the promising subject matter, Waldron’s play was roundly dismissed by contemporaries as a ‘bad imitation’, prompting one biographer to declare that it ‘is generally regarded as one of the worst pieces of drama inspired by Shakespeare’.³ Aesthetic judgements notwithstanding, *The Virgin Queen* holds a special place in the literary and historical afterlife of *The Tempest*, since it might well be the first adaptation in which Caliban’s mother, Sycorax – who is already dead in Shakespeare’s play – has a dramatic speaking part. Restoration-era revisions such as John Dryden and William Davenant’s *The Tempest* (1670), Thomas Shadwell’s dramatic opera based on the Dryden–Davenant play (1674) and Thomas Duffett’s *The Mock-Tempest* (1675) all feature an onstage character named Sycorax who is reimagined as Caliban’s sister or *amoureuse*. But in *The Virgin Queen*, Sycorax appears as a vengeful maternal spirit loosed from the depths of hell, intent on reuniting with her son and sabotaging the return of Prospero, Miranda and the other Italians home to Milan. Late in the play, Sycorax destroys their vessel, now marooned near Tunis, and her spirit is only vanquished after Prospero’s wand and book are magically restored.

The Virgin Queen (whose title refers to Claribel, Queen of Tunis) was never acted in the commercial playhouse. This is unfortunate, as it leaves us guessing how Waldron might have envisioned the Algerian witch in his mind’s eye. How, for that matter, did Shakespeare? These are not idle questions but inform the broad parameters of this inquiry: how corporal and cultural difference was constructed on Shakespeare’s stage – specifically, when there was nothing to see. Over the past several decades, scholars have been increasingly interested in theorizing and historicizing the representation of racial otherness in early modern theatre.⁴ Ayanna Thompson, for one, makes the point that race is performed even when it is

¹ Francis Godolphin Waldron, *The Virgin Queen, A Drama in Five Acts* (London, 1797).

² David Erskine Baker, Isaac Reed and Stephen Jones, eds., *Biographica Dramatica; or, a Companion to the Playhouse* (London, 1812), p. 731.

³ John Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage, from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830*, vol. 10 (Bath, 1832), p. 205; Trevor R. Griffiths, ‘Waldron, Francis Godolphin’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004: www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-28449.

⁴ See, for example, Farah Karim-Cooper, ‘The materials of race: staging the black and white binary in the early modern theatre’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (Cambridge, 2021), pp. 17–29; Matthieu Chapman, *Anti-Black Racism in Early Modern English Drama: The Other ‘Other’* (New York, 2017); and Noémie Ndiaye, *Scripts of Blackness: Early Modern Performance Culture and the Making of Race* (Philadelphia, 2022).

misrepresented – that is, when it is theatrically absent or does not conform to the audience's expectation of skin colour.⁵ Lauren Eriks Cline also argues that race is 'produced as much by what spectators can't see or choose not to see as by what they do see'.⁶ While recent appropriations such as Raquel Carrió and Flora Lauten's *Otra Tempestad* (1997, 1998), Susan Gayle Todd's *Sycorax* (2010, 2019) and Fengal Gael's *Sycorax: Cyber Queen of Qamara* (2018) have brought the character to life to voice feminist and anti-colonial experiences,⁷ in Shakespeare's play she primarily exists as a tale told by an aged Duke, full of sound and fury. For Waldron, Sycorax presumably has dark skin (though not necessarily so), since he adheres to his source and makes her 'native of dark Africk's clime'.⁸ What is more, her spirit escapes from 'a blue lake of fire',⁹ whose colour alludes to Shakespeare's 'blue-eyed hag' (1.2.270) (more on Sycorax's eyes later). But, in giving her an onstage presence, Waldron unwittingly draws attention to a representational problem in *The Tempest*.

In the First Folio (1623), Prospero describes her as the 'fowle Witch Sycorax, who with Age and Enuy / Was growne into a hoope' (TLN 384–5). Feminist and postcolonial scholars such as Ania Loomba have long noted that 'fowle Witch' draws upon the language of misogyny, racism and colonial oppression, while Irene Lara notes that the description resonates with Sycorax's sexual and moral 'foulness'.¹⁰ What has received less attention is the image of the hoop. Here Prospero identifies female old age with crippling scoliosis, employing what Dympna Callaghan calls 'the vituperative rhetoric of deformity',¹¹ and pushes the trope of 'crookèd age' (*Richard II*, 2.1.134) beyond the limits of representability – that is, beyond 'human shape' (*Tempest*, 1.2.285). Sycorax's tortuous (and tortured) spine further hints at an inevitable or predetermined monstrosity, as if inside the grotesque female body lies an older, more decrepit grotesquerie waiting to be exposed, giving a precise shape to what Kim F. Hall calls the 'disordered' African body: a 'fantasized physical difference [that] is only a more extreme embodied sign

of an entire set of actual differences by which Europeans constructed a vision of Africa'.¹² What images, then, of gendered, aged and raced deformity is a hoop meant to conjure? And to what extent can it function as an *embodied* sign of Sycorax's alterity if it only ever exists as a rhetorical construct?

In *Ariel's Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics*, Monique Allewaert argues that the environmental climate and slave-trading economy of the premodern Atlantic world produced a catastrophic 'disaggregation' of human bodies, whereby Africans and Afro-Americans experienced their physical selves as brutally invaded, dismembered and disorganized.¹³ For Allewaert, this transformation of African bodies and minds at the hands of white Europeans calls for a rethinking of ontological categories, since it created a type of personhood Allewaert refers to as *parahuman* – not quite human, nor fully inhuman either.¹⁴ While many scholars have written about the

⁵ Ayanna Thompson, 'When race is colored: abjection and racial characterization in *Titus Andronicus* and *Oroonoko*', in *Performing Race and Torture on the Early Modern Stage* (London, 2013), p. 51.

⁶ Lauren Eriks Cline, 'Shakespeare, spectators, and the meaning of race on stage', in *Shakespeare on Stage and Off*, ed. Kenneth Graham and Alysia Kolentis (Montreal, 2019), pp. 36–46; p. 40.

⁷ Carla Della Gatta, 'The island belongs to Sycorax: decolonial feminist storytelling and *The Tempest*', paper presented at the Women and Power Symposium, Shakespeare's Globe, 10 December 2021.

⁸ Waldron, *Virgin*, p. 23. ⁹ Waldron, *Virgin*, p. 22.

¹⁰ Ania Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (Manchester, 1989), p. 151; Irene Lara, 'Beyond Caliban's curses: the decolonial feminist literacy of Sycorax', *Journal of International Women's Studies* 9 (2007), 80–98; pp. 82–3.

¹¹ Dympna Callaghan, 'Irish memories in *The Tempest*', in *Shakespeare without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage* (London, 2000), pp. 97–138; p. 120.

¹² Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, 1995), pp. 26–7.

¹³ Monique Allewaert, *Ariel's Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (Minneapolis, 2013), p. 3.

¹⁴ Allewaert, *Ariel's*, p. 6.

degraded, monstrous and bestial nature of African bodies in colonial racist contexts, for Allewaert the ‘rendering of the body in parts did not signal the end of personhood’ so much as the emergence of a ‘minoritarian and anti-colonial mode’ of being.¹⁵ Allewaert’s conceptualization of disaggregated African bodies to provide an alternate account of agency and subjectivity offers a compelling approach to Sycorax’s hoop. To be clear, I am not suggesting that Shakespeare’s character is in any way equivalent to historical people or experiences. I am, however, intrigued by the idea that Sycorax’s bony fragment can tell a story – in fact, many stories – of the abject racialized crone, narratives of subjectivity that lie both within and beyond the European rational framing of a unified corporal self. Joining Lara and others interested in Sycorax’s ‘absent presence’ more than her theatrical unknowability,¹⁶ I examine the very contour by which the African female subject was envisioned on Shakespeare’s stage, because, while Sycorax’s body has been studied in terms of her blackness, pregnancy or the colour of her eyes, the cultural and iconographic contexts giving shape to her aged deformity have yet to be understood.

In this article, I read Sycorax’s hoop as the remainder of discursive violence, a vestige of corporal otherness manifesting a ‘stubborn materiality’, to borrow from Joyce Green MacDonald, that paradoxically reinscribes the body’s disappearance.¹⁷ Prospero’s evocation of a disarticulated spine calls to mind European travellers abroad who collected human and animal naturalia – skulls, teeth, bones, skin, hair, even organs – to display back home,¹⁸ deconstructing the bodies of non-Europeans into portable mementos that later could be reassembled into an imaginary whole through processes of writing or memory. The violence I have in mind took place in the period’s anatomical theatres, where the dismemberment, cutting open, display and interpretation of socially marginalized bodies (those of prostitutes, criminals, adolescents and paupers) were authorized and staged by men of science. My specific claim is that Prospero rehearses a type of

anatomical dissection by figuratively peering beneath Sycorax’s skin to visualize and narrate the parahuman contour of her aged, racialized and malformed core. Ian Smith writes that blackness in the early modern theatre was ‘the sign of denuded humanity’.¹⁹ In *The Tempest*, we find that the inverse is also true – denuded humanity, in the sense of being anatomically laid bare, is a sign of blackness. Perhaps a better way to think of Sycorax’s hoop is as what I call a quasi-body – one that does not (or cannot) fully materialize as flesh, yet performs the symbolic work of a body nonetheless.²⁰ In other words, a quasi-body, like a cadaver on a dissection table, is one that is read but cannot read itself. Prospero’s transmogrifying gaze thus enacts a virtual and ethnographic post-mortem, creating putative knowledge of Sycorax’s interior made possible only after her death.

According to Thompson, ‘a racialized epistemology does not necessarily have to be based on a semiotically charged interpretation of colour so much as a semiotically charged interpretation of bodiliness’.²¹ This is a key point because it helps us to recognize that corporal alterity in *The Tempest* is not solely reliant on what Frantz Fanon calls the ‘racial epidermal schema’ but is shown to penetrate right down

¹⁵ Allewaert, *Ariel’s*, p. 2.

¹⁶ For example, see Rachana Sachdev, ‘Sycorax in Algiers: cultural politics and gynecology in early modern England’, in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Dymphna Callaghan (Malden, MA, 2016), pp. 226–43; Abena P. A. Busia, ‘Silencing Sycorax: on African colonial discourse and the unvoiced female’, *Cultural Critique* 14 (1989–1990), 81–104.

¹⁷ Joyce Green MacDonald, *Women and Race in Early Modern Texts* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 5–6.

¹⁸ Elizabeth A. Sutton, *Early Modern Dutch Prints of Africa* (Farnham, 2012), p. 46.

¹⁹ Ian Smith, ‘Othello’s black handkerchief’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 64 (2013), 1–25; p. 23.

²⁰ I draw on Michel Serres’s concept of the quasi-object, taken up by Bruno Latour, and MacDonald on the ‘abstraction and displacement’ of the black female body (4).

²¹ Ayanna Thompson, ‘Interrogating torture and finding race’, in *Performing Race and Torture*, pp. 1–24; p. 4.

to the bone.²² To be sure, Shakespeare's hoop is literally nothing more than an outline. Yet it underwrites with great efficiency European ideals of youth, beauty, whiteness and virtue, as embodied by the 'fair' Miranda, whose name, from the Latin *miror* ('to marvel at' or 'admire'), calls attention to the spectacle of the female form.²³ Kimberly Anne Coles remarks (and Hall elucidated decades ago) that 'white Europeans become white against the production of racialized Black people'.²⁴ Extending this insight, I propose that Europeans became able-bodied against the production of disfigured Africans. In the field of early modern disability studies, Katherine Schaap Williams makes the case for a fuller understanding of the rhetoric of impairment beyond staged representation, since 'confining our attention to a character's theatrical embodiment actually narrows the premises of how we think about disability'.²⁵ This echoes the call made by Margo Hendricks to widen the 'parameters of conceptualizing early modern interpretations of the word race itself'.²⁶ Drawing from several critical fields and theoretical approaches, my aim is to tease out how discourses of gender, old age, race and disablement overlap to construct the body (if a hoop can be deemed that much) of the subjugated female.

OLD WORLD (DIS)FIGURATIONS

Shakespeare's rendering of Sycorax draws on the classical and medieval tradition of personifying the vices, specifically Envy (*Invidia*), whose insatiable need to possess what other people have was emblemized as a venomous, starved-looking old woman with drooping breasts – at times a demonic or witchy figure accompanied by her familiars.²⁷ Spenser's Envie in *The Faerie Queene* (1590/1596) is another example of a 'foul' and 'misshape[n]' old hag.²⁸ Early modern writers were heavily influenced by Ovid's portrayal of Envy in *Metamorphosis* (trans. 1567): 'Her lips were pale, her cheeks were wan, and all her face was swart: / Her body lean as any Rake'.²⁹ The word 'swart' in

the sixteenth century meant swarthy, dark in colour, or black.³⁰ Because early modern writers such as the cleric John Bale associated greed and jealousy with Eve's temptation by the 'old crooked Serpent',³¹ Envy was frequently shown with snakes coming out of her head or mouth, the latter to signify her treacherous or deviant speech. In Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (trans. 1603), Envy is 'old and ugly' because she 'is the ancient enemy of all virtue (which is beautiful)', and she 'literally consumes herself in the envy of others . . . she "eats her heart out"'.³² The portrait of a self-cannibalizing Envy eating a heart also appears in an engraving by Jacques de Gheyn II from the series *Allegorical*

²² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London, 1986), p. 112.

²³ See Kim F. Hall, "'These bastard signs of fair": literary whiteness in Shakespeare's Sonnets', in *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, ed. Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin (London, 1998), pp. 64–82; Farah Karim-Cooper, *Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama* (Edinburgh, 2019), especially the chapter 'Defining beauty in Renaissance culture', pp. 1–33.

²⁴ Kimberly Anne Coles, "'Undisciplined": early modern women's writing and the urgency of scholarly activism', *Criticism* 63 (2021), 55–62; p. 57.

²⁵ Katherine Schaap Williams, 'Demonstrable disability', *Early Theatre* 22 (2019), 185–98; p. 187.

²⁶ Margo Hendricks, 'Managing the barbarian: *The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage*', *Renaissance Drama* 23 (1992), 165–88; p. 184.

²⁷ Bradley J. Irish, 'Envy in early modern England', *ELH* 88 (2021), 845–78; p. 851.

²⁸ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (London, 2007), 5.7.28–35. For a discussion of Spenser's racialization of the 'hag' Duessa, see Mira 'Assaf Kafantaris, 'Desire, disgust, and the perils of strange queenship in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*', in *Race and Affect in Early Modern English Literature*, ed. Carol Mejia LaPerle (Chicago, 2022): https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers/1405.

²⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1567), fol. 26v.

³⁰ *OED Online*, 'swart, adj. and n.'

³¹ John Bale, *The Image of Both Churches* (London, 1570), fol. 42v.

³² Cesare Ripa, *Baroque and Rococo Pictorial Imagery: The 1758–60 Hertel Edition of Ripa's 'Iconologia'*, trans. Edward A. Maser (New York, 1971), p. 57.

Figures of Vicissitudes (1596–1597).³³ That she endlessly consumes and is consumed, the source of her own spiritual and corporal injury, recalls the ancient symbol of a serpent eating its tail, which is another kind of hoop. Geoffrey Whitney's *A Choice of Emblems* (1586) further describes Envy as having 'feeble limbs', needing a staff to 'stay' an otherwise bent body as she simultaneously rips out her heart in an act of anatomical self-mutilation.³⁴ Whitney's illustration calls to mind the lines spoken by Lear: 'Then let them anatomize Regan; see what breeds / About her heart' (*Lear* F, 3.6.34–5).³⁵ In Shakespeare's corpus, we find references to 'lean-faced envy in her loathsome cave' (*2 Henry VI*, 3.2.319), 'black envy' (*Henry VIII*, 2.1.86) and the 'monster envy' (*Pericles*, 15.12), further linking the vice to the witchy or monstrous crone, and to blackness as a symbol of the demonic. In *Troilus and Cressida*, Achilles evokes the idea of a malicious interior when he refers to Thersites's 'core of envy' (5.1.4).

Because body and soul were considered inter-related in early modern European culture, deviance from corporal norms was taken as a sign of moral corruption, while passions such as envy were thought capable of disfiguring the body.³⁶ As Bradley J. Irish discusses, Jean Taffin in *The Amendment of Life* (1595) asserts that envy 'breedeth in [man] a threatening look, a crooked countenance, a pale face, trembling lips, gnashing of teeth, furious speeches, excessive injuries, [and] a ready hand to mischief', while Robert Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) writes that 'envy [doth] consume a man: to be a living Anatomy, a Skeleton, to be a lean and pale carcass'.³⁷ The image of a person afflicted with envy being reduced to a bony corpse resonates with Shakespeare's description of Sycorax. Thus, to be hooped with old age and envy is to be spiritually and corporally maimed, a defect of nature, and disfavoured by God.

Biblical metaphors associating a straight back with moral rectitude, and a curved one with villainy or deceit, dominated discourses of the spine in the early modern period. The figure of the diabolical hunchback was exemplified by the historical

Richard III, whom Shakespeare portrayed as a murderer of children, among other atrocities.³⁸ In the Old Testament, the ability to walk upright was a sign of humanity's uniqueness, nobility and dominion among God's creatures, the very opposite of beastly servitude. Because of the spine's critical function in the skeletal organization of the body, deviations from corporal norms touching stature or mobility prohibited a person from serving in the early Church: 'For whosoever hath any blemish, shall not come near: as a man blind or lame, or that hath a flat nose, or that hath any misshapen member, Or, a man that hath a broken foot, or a broken hand, Or, is crookedbacked, or bleary-eyed.'³⁹ I will return to the close link between 'crookedbacked' and 'bleary-eyed' in my reading of *The Tempest*. Here I wish to highlight that the ideology of crookedness was also gendered, a fact Ester Sowernam calls attention to in *The Arraignment of Women* (1617): 'Woman was made of a crooked rib, so she is crooked of conditions.'⁴⁰

Spinal metaphors were used by religious reformers critiquing the 'old' Catholic Church in favour of the 'new' religion, which was adopted by more 'youthful', enlightened Protestants.⁴¹ Papists are 'olde sinners', writes Henry Smith in a sixteenth-century sermon. John Bale goes further to describe 'the olde crooked customs of [the] Papistry'.⁴² The

³³ Sutton, *Early Modern*, p. 133.

³⁴ Geoffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblems* (London, 1586), p. 94.

³⁵ *Lear* F is quoted from the *Oxford Shakespeare* second edition.

³⁶ Irish, 'Envy', p. 853.

³⁷ Jean Taffin, *The Amendment of Life* (London, 1595), pp. 258–9; Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (London, 1621), p. 136. Also in Irish, 'Envy', pp. 852–3.

³⁸ Herbert Covey, 'Shakespeare on old age and disability', *International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 50 (2000), 169–83; p. 172.

³⁹ Geneva Bible, Leviticus 21.18–23.

⁴⁰ Ester Sowernam, *The Arraignment of Women* (London, 1617), p. 3.

⁴¹ Christopher Martin, *Constituting Old Age in Early Modern English Literature from Queen Elizabeth to King Lear* (Amherst, 2012), pp. 141–4.

⁴² Henry Smith, *The Sermons of Master Henry Smith* (London, 1593), p. 464; John Bale, *A Mystery of Iniquity Contained*

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spiritual decay of the world was projected onto the ageing body, and the stooped elder became a convenient metaphor for the corruption of society itself. According to the parliamentarian Thomas Adams, 'Old age is Curvata, crooked: so the World is grovelling; and hath changed natural erection, to an unnatural minding of earthly things'; in addition, George Gascoigne's *The Drum of Doomsday* (1576) describes sin as 'a right crookedness, a wonderful deformity, a most filthy kind of monster'.⁴³ Hence, a physical trait not uncommon among older adults, which a lifetime of grinding poverty and physical labour would have exacerbated, was exploited by polemicists in the period's religious controversies.

In popular culture, a humped back was an outward sign of menopause – along with facial hair, a beaked nose, and toothless gums – and was used to caricature older, non-elite women like 'crooked' Mother Shipton in English mass-produced print.⁴⁴ According to parish records, titles such as 'Mother' or 'Old' were assigned to poorer women beginning around their fiftieth year, which coincides with the age most often cited in medical and legal texts as the upper limit of female fertility.⁴⁵ Charmian in *Antony and Cleopatra* says, 'Let me have a child at fifty' (1.2.24), suggesting that women would not have been expected to conceive at that age. In Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley's *The Witch of Edmonton* (1658), Elizabeth 'Mother' Sawyer, the play's titular witch, recounts how a male character 'broke'd'st my back with beating me', to which he responds, 'I'll break it worse.'⁴⁶ Given the stereotype of the crookbacked crone, we can be alert to the play's ageist and ableist violence directed towards women. 'Mother Joan' or 'old Joan' Trash in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1631) defends her business reputation by saying 'though I be a little crooked o' my body, I'll be found as upright in my dealings as any woman'.⁴⁷ Joan compares herself not to men but to other (presumably younger) members of her own sex, suggesting that the polarity of youth and age worked alongside gender difference to marginalize older women in English society.

According to disability studies scholar Rosemarie Garland Thomson, the concept of the monstrous or

freakish body 'depends not upon her absolute otherness, but rather upon the conflicting presence of radical differences and familiar traits'.⁴⁸ One of the contexts that would have rendered Sycorax's hoop intelligible to Shakespeare's audience was the association between old women, spinal deformity and witchcraft, which made having an anomalous body a potential matter of life or death.⁴⁹ In early modern Europe, women were most vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft between the ages of 40 and 60, corresponding with the onset of menopause.⁵⁰ While some writers considered this change beneficial to overall health, there was the competing view that older women simply lost the much needed ability to discharge monthly 'impurities', which resulted in their bodies becoming dangerously polluted.⁵¹ It was the accretion of toxic humours

within the *Heretical Genealogy of Ponce Pantolabus* (London, 1545), fol. 80r.

⁴³ Thomas Adams, *A Commentary or, Exposition Upon the Divine Second Epistle General* (London, 1633), p. 1137; George Gascoigne, *The Drum of Doomsday* (London, 1576), sig. F3r.

⁴⁴ Marsha Urban, *Seventeenth-Century Mother's Advice Books* (New York, 2006), p. 23.

⁴⁵ Lynn Botelho, 'The seventeenth century', in *The Long History of Old Age*, ed. Pat Thane (London, 2005), pp. 113–74; p. 115; Daniel Schäfer, *Old Age and Disease in Early Modern Medicine*, trans. Patrick Baker (London, 2011), p. 8.

⁴⁶ Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley, *The Witch of Edmonton*, ed. Lucy Munro (London, 2017), 4.1.60–1.

⁴⁷ Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, in *Drama of the English Renaissance, II: The Stuart Period*, ed. Russell A. Fraser and Norman Rabkin (New York, 1976), pp. 193–239; 2.2.25–7.

⁴⁸ Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York, 2017), p. 74.

⁴⁹ For a broader discussion of 'old world' versus 'new world' witches, and how Shakespeare drew from classical 'foreign' witches to create Sycorax, see Diane Purkiss, 'The witch on the margins of "race": Sycorax and others', in *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London, 1996), pp. 251–76.

⁵⁰ Alison Rowlands, 'Witchcraft and old women in early modern Germany', *Past & Present* 173 (2001), 50–89; p. 57.

⁵¹ Patricia Crawford, 'Attitudes to menstruation in seventeenth-century England', *Past & Present* 91 (1981), 47–73; p. 6; Sara Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England* (New York, 2013), pp. 147–51.

that made post-reproductive women physiologically predisposed to being – or believing themselves to be – malevolent powers.⁵² In *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603), a source for *King Lear* and possibly *The Tempest*, Samuel Harsnett claims that ‘the true Idea of a Witch [is] an old weather-beaten Crone, having her chin, and her knees meeting for age, walking like a bow leaning on a shaft’.⁵³ Elizabeth in *Witch of Edmonton* says she is accused of witchcraft ‘Cause I am poor, deform’d and ignorant, / And like a Bow buckl’d and bent together’.⁵⁴ These lines echo Henry Goodcole’s description of the historical Elizabeth Sawyer, executed for witchcraft in 1621, whose body was allegedly ‘crooked and deformed, even bending together’.⁵⁵ Though recent scholarship has challenged the prevailing view of witches as old, bent and poor,⁵⁶ the disproportionate number of non-elite post-menopausal women burned at the stake provides evidence of the period’s gender, age and class-based violence.

‘NEW WORLD’ ICONOGRAPHIES

The lexicon of aged female deformity – sagging breasts, buckled spine, hideousness, degenerate morality and deviant maternity – was brought to bear on the gendering of racial ideology in the expanding British empire. The comparison of ‘old world’ and ‘new world’ iconography is indeed important because the repetition of certain visual motifs had a profound impact on European epistemologies of Africa and Africans at a crucial moment in history.⁵⁷ In a study of disability within the context of the Caribbean slave trade, Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy examines the historical intersection between racism, ableism and labour, showing not only that the English drew on well-established notions of deformity and monstrosity to portray African people, but also that slavery transformed how the English perceived ‘defective’ bodies both at home and abroad. Expanding upon the work of other scholars such as Jennifer L. Morgan and Sasha Turner, Hunt-Kennedy discusses how the rhetoric of disability formed part of a larger moral discourse used to justify slavery – that is, claims that Africans’

‘natural’ deformity or ‘exceptional’ bodily difference made them uniquely suited for the most brutal forms of labour and lifelong servitude, a system which in turn produced disabled bodies.⁵⁸ While the meanings of monstrosity and deformity – not unlike race – shifted and overlapped in the early modern era, both terms contain elements that looked forward to our modern notions of disability.⁵⁹ There were, nonetheless, important differences in how the relation between disability and labour was perceived among the English in England. For instance, the prime characteristic that defined disability was a physical impairment that prevented a person from working, which was the ‘only legitimate exemption from productive labour’ among adults in Tudor and Stuart society.⁶⁰ So even as definitions of impairment differed across bodies and early modern geographies, Hunt-Kennedy’s analysis illuminates an emerging discourse of somatic otherness, to which we can add the representation of Sycorax’s hoop.

⁵² Nina Taunton, *Fictions of Old Age in Early Modern Literature and Culture* (New York, 2007), p. 104.

⁵³ Samuel Harsnett, *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (London, 1603), p. 136.

⁵⁴ Dekker, Ford and Rowley, *Witch*, 2.1.3–4.

⁵⁵ Henry Goodcole, *The Wonderful Discovery of Elizabeth Sawyer* (London, 1621), sig. A4v.

⁵⁶ Deborah Willis, ‘The witch-family in Elizabethan and Jacobean print culture’, *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 13 (2013), 4–31.

⁵⁷ This is also Sutton’s view in *Early Modern Dutch Prints*.

⁵⁸ Stefanie Hunt-Kennedy, *Between Fitness and Death: Disability and Slavery in the Caribbean* (Urbana, 2020). For a discussion of early modern disability outside European and American contexts, see Sara Scalenghe, ‘Disability in the premodern Arab world’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History*, ed. Michael Rembis, Catherine Kudlick and Kim E. Nielsen (Oxford, 2018), pp. 71–83.

⁵⁹ Hunt-Kennedy, *Between Fitness*, p. 5. Also Sujata Iyengar, ‘Introduction: Shakespeare’s “discourse of disability”’, in *Disability, Health, and Happiness in the Shakespearean Body*, ed. Sujata Iyengar (New York, 2015), pp. 9–13.

⁶⁰ Lindsey Row-Heyveld, ‘Disability and the work of performance in early modern England’, in *Performing Disability in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Leslie C. Dunn (Cham, 2021), pp. 31–50; p. 31.

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The imbrication of gender, race, disability and labour can be found in Richard Ligon's *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (1657). Plantation work was back-breaking – more so for women, who had added demands on their bodies. As Morgan finds, Ligon's account, and others by European settlers, drew upon fantasized, contradictory notions of 'black women's monstrous bodies', along with their exceptional 'ability to produce both crops and other laborers', effectively naturalizing an invariable difference between African and European morphology.⁶¹ Ligon describes how a female 'Negro' works 'with her Pickaninny at her back, as merry a soul as any is there'.⁶² In other words, African and Afro-American women were happily employed in the white man's cane fields while they simultaneously cared for – and carried – their children. Ligon recognizes that plantation labour is 'stooping work', especially for mothers, since their children 'sit astride upon their backs' in order to free their hands for the real work of harvesting. What is more, the woman is 'pleased' to perform 'her painful stooping posture, longer than she would do, rather than discompose her Jovial Pickaninny of his pleasure, so glad she is to see him merry'.⁶³ It is worth underscoring that Ligon frames the woman's physical agony as a mother's masochistic martyrdom.

Ligon goes on to recount how the maternal African body, after years of stooped labour and the experience of bearing multiple children, becomes grotesquely deformed, recalling the iconography of the white English crone and racist stereotypes of long-breasted Irish women:⁶⁴ 'when [the women] come to be old, and have had five or six Children, their breasts hang down below their navels, so that when they stoop at their common work of weeding, they hang almost down to the ground, that at a distance, you would think they had six legs'.⁶⁵ Ligon's account is particularly degrading: the aged African maternal body is still recognizable yet no longer appears fully human, bent to discursive and anatomical excess; moreover, the text can be understood as inflicting additional violence upon women deemed no

longer useful or sexually desirable in slavery's reproductive economy. While images of African women with elongated breasts were already familiar from travel literature such as Richard Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations* (1589), Susan D. Amussen comments that 'Ligon moves to imagining a new beast.'⁶⁶

The Tempest's earliest known performance was for King James in 1611 and was first published in the 1623 Folio. I do not claim that, in visualizing Sycorax's hoop, Shakespeare influenced the ethnographic views of later writers such as Ligon. My aim is simply to situate the representation of Sycorax's misshapeness in a longer symbolic tradition of gendered, raced and aged deformity, and to draw out the shared iconography of African femaleness and the malicious English crone at a time when the discovery and legitimization of all kinds of knowledge were undergoing rapid development throughout Europe. The multi-volume work *History of Animals* (1551–1558), compiled by the Swiss naturalist Conrad Gessner, was one of the period's most authoritative texts on zoology. Drawing from classical authorities such as Aristotle and Pliny, Gessner classifies and provides illustrations of all manner of 'exotic' creatures from lands beyond Europe, particularly Africa and the Americas. The engraving that interests me most is that of the satyr or *cercopithecus*, an ape-like beast

⁶¹ Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia, 2004), pp. 14, 8.

⁶² Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (London, 1657), p. 48. See also Morgan, *Laboring*, pp. 48–9.

⁶³ Ligon, *True and Exact History*, p. 48.

⁶⁴ John Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis* (London, 1653), pp. 311–12. See also Morgan, *Laboring*, pp. 21–4.

⁶⁵ Ligon, *True and Exact History*, p. 51.

⁶⁶ Susan D. Amussen, 'Violence, gender, and race in the seventeenth-century English Atlantic', in *Masculinities, Childhood, Violence: Attending to Early Modern Women – and Men: Proceedings of the 2006 Symposium*, ed. Amy E. Leonard and Karen L. Nelson (Newark, 2010), pp. 283–301; p. 290. For a discussion of long-breasted 'wild' women, see Morgan, *Laboring*, pp. 16–42.

with a long tail whose pendulous breasts resemble those of a mature human female; further, the stooped nature of its stance is accentuated by the walking stick held in its right hand.⁶⁷ If we compare the image of Gessner's *cercopithecus* with the personifications of Envy discussed earlier, the similarities are striking. The *cercopithecus*'s wild mane resembles the Medusa-like snakes of de Gheyn's Envy, while the drooping breasts on both figures are at odds with their distinct muscularity. The creature's hunched posture, staff and bare feet are also echoed in Whitney's engraving. Gessner's volumes were translated into English and included in Edward Topsell's *The History of Four-Footed Beasts* (1607), and the image of Gessner's *cercopithecus* appears next to an account of apes in India. Topsell writes that, by virtue of having a longer tail, the ape 'leapeth from bough to bough, and tree to tree, as if he flew'.⁶⁸ In medieval and early modern thought, the ability to fly was also attributed to witches.

For male European writers, African women's elongated breasts were a sign of their envy, greed, lust and lasciviousness, which resulted in birthing multiple children.⁶⁹ In 1634, Thomas Herbert's 'A Description of the Cape of Good Hope in Aethiopia' offered a portrait of the Khoikhoi people of Africa, who started appearing in European travelogues during the first decade of the sixteenth century.⁷⁰ To the image of the stooped, long-breasted African woman nursing her child over the shoulder, Herbert adds the iconography of cannibalism, reinforcing the idea of the 'savage' body-in-parts.⁷¹ Herbert's Khoi woman also consumes human organs, not unlike representations of Envy. By the mid seventeenth century, the physically distorted African female was a well-established trope in European travelogues and scientific discourses, and the link between ethnographical and allegorical depictions of the African crone continued into the eighteenth century.⁷² For example, Willem Bosman, an employee of the West India Company who first arrived in West Africa in 1688, says of an aged female born of an African mother and

European father: 'If a Painter were obliged to paint Envy, I could wish him no better Original to draw than an old *Mulatto*-woman.'⁷³

ANATOMIES OF OLD AGE

When Shakespeare was writing *The Tempest*, the globe and human body were increasingly regarded as foreign domains to be opened, explored and narrativized, their resources exploited by elite European men. In *Microcosmographia, or a Description of the Body of Man* (1615), Helkiah Crooke describes his mission to uncover new knowledge of the body in imperialist terms:

In my Journey, if I have not made many new Discoveries; yet certainly I have sounded the Depths more truly, Entered farther into the Continents, Coasted the Shores, plied up the Firths, Discovered the Inhabitants, their Qualities, Tempers, Regiment of Life, their Diet, their Apparel, their Employments: And in a word, I have made it easy for thee to reap the profit of many men's Labors, and of mine Own.⁷⁴

According to Jonathan Sawday, early modern anatomists, in their quest to map the 'hidden' geography of the human body, undertook an epistemological project analogous to the journeys made by European voyagers and profiteers to chart

⁶⁷ Conrad Gessner, *Historiae animalium* (Zurich, 1620), p. 95. See Karl A. E. Enekel, 'The species and beyond: classification and the places of hybrids in early modern zoology', in *Zoology in Early Modern Culture: Intersections of Science, Theology, Philology, and Political and Religious Education*, ed. Karel A. E. Enekel and Paul J. Smith (Leiden, 2014), p. 96.

⁶⁸ Edward Topsell, *The History of Four-Footed Beasts* (London, 1607), p. 9.

⁶⁹ Sutton, *Early Modern*, p. 147.

⁷⁰ Thomas Herbert, *A Relation of Some Yeares Trauaille* (London, 1634), p. 17. See Sutton, *Early Modern*, p. 206. For a history of Khoikhoi images, see also Andrew B. Smith's 'Different facets of the crystal: early European images of the Khoikhoi at the Cape, South Africa', *Goodwin Series* 7 (1993), 8–20.

⁷¹ See Purkiss, 'Witch on the margins', for links between witchcraft and cannibalism.

⁷² Sutton, *Early Modern*, p. 145.

⁷³ Sutton, *Early Modern*, p. 219.

⁷⁴ Helkiah Crooke, *Microcosmographia* (London, 1615), p. 930.

the 'undiscovered' worlds of Africa, Asia and the Americas.⁷⁵ Hence, the objectives of the 'new science', featuring anatomy at the forefront of its inquiry, and colonial and slave-trading imperatives in the 'new world' can be regarded as violent enterprises, in their separate ways, that extended the European gaze farther within the body and farther without it, towards overseas lands and their people.

The Flemish anatomist Andreas Vesalius, in *On the Fabric of the Human Body* (1543), drew on the ancient medical writings of Galen to describe the spine in architectural terms: as the element that stabilizes and secures all the other parts of the body into their proper place, much like the keystone of an arch.⁷⁶ Since ageing was understood to be a drying-out process and bones the driest parts of the body, Vesalius writes that the ligaments separating the spinal bones wore away over time, so that 'in the elderly the vertebrae unite and grow together'.⁷⁷ This joining explains 'why old people cannot move their back as much, and why they cannot straighten it but are bent over'.⁷⁸ Decades later, Crooke declares that the human ability to act or possess any understanding of the world comes down to the power of locomotion:

if [man] had been made of one continual bone, how could he have bent or extended or compassed his body? how could he have apprehended any thing or moved himself forward to attain it? No; he must have stood like a trunk or a block, and the creature that was made to command all the rest would have been a . . . gazing stock to the rest.⁷⁹

Crooke's statement that humans need 'divers kinds' of bones essentially to possess agency in the world is a striking context for Sycorax's hoop.

Drawing from Vesalius, the Danish anatomist Thomas Bartholin writes that 'in decrepit old people . . . Vertebrae grow together into one, the moisture being dried up'.⁸⁰ He provides an account of a former porter, presumably someone with years of experience carrying heavy loads on their back, whose spine had grown into 'a cluster like a round ball'.⁸¹ Bartholin's image of an aged and over-worked spine fused into a bony sphere suggests an

anatomical corollary to Sycorax's hoop. For Bartholin, the hardness of bones is 'not with dryness in an healthy State, but with a shining fattiness'. Fat, in other words, gives bones their strength and density, and differentiates young healthy bodies from decrepit ones. Fat is also an aesthetic virtue: 'It fills up the empty spaces between the Muscles, Vessels, and Skin, and consequently renders the Body smooth, white, soft, fair, and beautiful. And therefore persons in a Consumption and decrepit old Women are deformed, for want of Fat.'⁸² Bartholin's text constructs health and beauty as not only young but also 'white' and 'fair', supporting – in a literal sense – Farah Karim-Cooper's point that in early modern texts 'whiteness is figured as an ideal in interior as well as exterior terms'.⁸³ Bartholin further suggests that female old age is itself a type of physical impairment.

Sawday maintains that, in literary contexts, the act of dissection does not involve 'the delicate separation of constituent structures' as one might expect, 'but a more violent "reduction" into parts: a brutal dismemberment of people, things, or ideas . . . undertaken in order to render powerless the structures which the dissector's knife is probing'.⁸⁴ Sawday makes an interesting point – that not only does the potential for violence inhere in the actual act of dissection (anatomists left knife marks on the bones),⁸⁵ but also violence informed the discourses that sought to represent or invoke its

⁷⁵ Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London, 1995), p. 25.

⁷⁶ Andreas Vesalius, *On the Fabric of the Human Body*, Book I, trans. William Frank Richardson and John Burd Carman (San Francisco, 1998), pp. 179–80.

⁷⁷ Vesalius, *Fabric*, p. 166. ⁷⁸ Vesalius, *Fabric*, p. 166.

⁷⁹ Crooke, *Microcosmographia*, p. 930.

⁸⁰ Thomas Bartholin, *Bartholinus Anatomy* (London, 1668), p. 349.

⁸¹ Bartholin, *Anatomy*, p. 349.

⁸² Bartholin, *Anatomy*, pp. 6–7.

⁸³ Karim-Cooper, 'Materials', p. 18.

⁸⁴ Sawday, *Body Emblazoned*, p. 1.

⁸⁵ Sarah Tarlow, *Ritual, Belief and the Dead in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2014), pp. 77–8.

practice. In a study of Leonardo da Vinci's anatomical drawings, Martin Clayton and Ronald Philo clarify that 'any representation of a part of the body requires a degree of stylization to be legible', and that Leonardo added white space in his drawings to make them 'as clear and communicative as possible'.⁸⁶ So not only were bodies forcefully handled by the anatomist, but the illustrations themselves were manipulated to render the interior body more readable.

Anatomists often acquired cadavers through grave robbing, stealing or accepting the stolen corpses of newly executed criminals, and the theft of bodies can be regarded as another form of violent appropriation. The extra-legal process to procure cadavers was arguably at odds with science's 'morally sanctioned ambition' to deepen humanity's understanding of God's creation.⁸⁷ Andrew Cunningham comments on the irony whereby 'the body of the lowest form of human, an executed criminal, was used to show the highest handiwork of God'.⁸⁸ I want to emphasize that the classification of bodies according to their suitability for certain purposes chimes dangerously with the period's interest in other types of human and cultural taxonomies, specifically the rationales used to justify the transatlantic slave trade. At Oxford Castle, where archaeologists have uncovered the bodies of executed criminals who had been medically dissected in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in two cases the heads had been removed and placed inside the chest cavities.⁸⁹ This strangely recalls the portrait of the Blemmye in *The Voyages and Trauailes of Sir John Maundeuile* (c.1366 / printed 1582), where we find the image of an African body literally 'out of joint' and lacking other parts.⁹⁰

Regarding *The Tempest*, scholars have commented that Prospero plays the part of the magician, tyrant, artist, colonizer, stage director and 'arch-plotmaker'.⁹¹ To this list we can add anatomist, someone who, as Sawday suggests, was 'in possession of a privileged gaze which is able to pass beyond common experience, through surface structures, to encounter a reserved core of reality'.⁹² Or, as the physician John Bannister writes in 1578, it is the anatomist who discovers

'new shapes in nature'.⁹³ In the next section, I will discuss how Prospero employs similar rhetoric. Here I want to emphasize that Sycorax's 'core of reality' is only ever the product of Prospero's anatomizing and imperial gaze, and if we fail to interrogate this scopic regime we risk leaving intact an entire stock of gendered, aged and raced assumptions whereby European male authority sets the standard of health and human legitimacy.

PROSPERO'S HOOP

Feminist, postcolonial and premodern critical race scholars have addressed the many early modern concerns *The Tempest* evokes: anxieties about monstrous or 'wild' races in Africa and the Americas; English colonial interests in the Caribbean, Ireland and the eastern Mediterranean; kinship and lineage; North African and Islamic cultural contexts; the threat of miscegenation; and narratives of mastery and enforced service. In a foundational reading of *The Tempest*, Loomba writes that 'Prospero as colonialist consolidates power which is specifically white and male, and constructs Sycorax as black, wayward and wicked in order to legitimise it'.⁹⁴ Crucial to the Duke's consolidation of this power is Sycorax's absence from the island. According to Kate Chedgzoy, Caliban's mother is obscene in the sense of being 'both off-stage and demonised as

⁸⁶ Martin Clayton and Ronald Philo, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Mechanics of Man* (Los Angeles, 2010), p. 24.

⁸⁷ Howard Marchitello, 'Vesalius' *Fabrica* and Shakespeare's *Othello*: anatomy, gender and the narrative production of meaning', *Criticism* 35 (1993), 529–58; p. 536.

⁸⁸ Andrew Cunningham, *The Anatomical Renaissance: The Resurrection of the Anatomical Projects of the Ancients* (London, 2016), p. 43.

⁸⁹ Tarlow, *Ritual*, p. 76.

⁹⁰ *The Voyages and Trauailes of Sir John Maundeuile* (London, 1582), sig. O2v; Hall, *Things*, p. 26.

⁹¹ The phrase is Debapriya Sarkar's. See 'The *Tempest*'s other plots', *Shakespeare Studies* 45 (2017), 203–30; p. 204.

⁹² Sawday, *Body Emblazoned*, p. 2.

⁹³ John Bannister, *The Historie of Man, sucked from the sappe of the most approved Anathomistes* (London, 1578), sig. Biiijr.

⁹⁴ Loomba, *Gender*, p. 152.

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grotesque and repulsive'.⁹⁵ Elsewhere in Shakespeare, a hoop metaphorically binds like male bodies together. Polonius tells Laertes to 'grapple' friends 'to thy soul with hoops of steel' (*Hamlet*, 1.3.63). King Henry speaks of a 'hoop of gold to bind thy brothers in' (*2 Henry IV*, 4.3.43), while Caesar says a 'hoop should hold us staunch' (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 2.2.120), meaning tightly bound together like a leakproof barrel. In contrast, Sycorax's hoop suggests female exclusion rather than inclusion, and radically stigmatized difference.⁹⁶

Diane Purkiss contends that 'Sycorax is ethnically other ... not by virtue of the spectacle of otherness, skin colour, but by virtue of the kind of narrative in which she is inscribed: one of barbarity, sexual unruliness and devil-worship in another place'.⁹⁷ That narrative, of course, is dictated by Prospero, whose knowledge of Caliban's mother is wholly derived from Ariel. Since Prospero's authority is predicated upon Sycorax's banishment from the playworld, the hoop might be a political fiction to undermine her lingering authority on the isle. As such, the Duke's desire to gain from her alleged deformity parallels Trinculo's interest in financially profiting from the exhibition of Caliban's body – dead or alive – back in Italy: 'When they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian' (2.2.31–3). Shakespeare explicitly links European disability with the corpse of the 'monster' Caliban. The imputation of Sycorax's age and envy should therefore be understood as an exercise of power, one which attempts to naturalize the subordination of the gendered African subject.

According to Marina Warner, '[Sycorax's] story is evoked in a few scant lines that do not flesh out a full character or even tell a coherent tale; in fragments, like the siftings of an archaeological dig, her past is glimpsed, only to fade again'.⁹⁸ The fragmentary nature of Sycorax's history mirrors the fragmentary nature of her body. The Duke reminds Ariel that, after she had imprisoned him in a tree, the witch could not 'undo' her magic to free him. 'It was mine art', Prospero claims, 'When

I arrived and heard thee, that made gape / The pine and let thee out' (1.2.293–5). Prospero makes clear that *his* power of magic exceeded *hers*.⁹⁹ He later tells Caliban he was 'got by the devil himself / Upon thy wicked dam' (1.2.321–2). Shakespeare draws from the notion that older women's lack of sexual partners made them susceptible to intercourse with the devil, while African women were also reported to couple with demons.¹⁰⁰ Caliban is a 'freckled whelp, hag-born' (1.2.284), which underscores Sycorax's age, blackness and witchery, not to mention the brutish malformity she bestowed on her child. The hoop – more properly Prospero's than Sycorax's – can thus be understood as the Duke's attempt to circumscribe or impose order on the decay, waywardness and contamination the 'foul witch' represents, objectifying patriarchy's need to control an older woman's ambiguous power.

It is unclear how Prospero knows twelve years pass while Ariel is imprisoned in the tree. In one of the few extended commentaries on Sycorax's age, Warner writes:

Her ageing is somehow accelerated, moving faster than the pace of the other characters' stories; the suddenly

⁹⁵ Kate Chedgzoy, 'Rewriting the narratives of shame: women's transformations of *The Tempest*', in *Shakespeare's Queer Children: Sexual Politics and Contemporary Culture* (Manchester, 1995), pp. 94–134; p. 100.

⁹⁶ Yet modern editors have shown scant interest in 'hoop'. The word appears in Frank Kermode's (Arden, 1990) and Stephen Orgel's (Oxford, 2008) editions without annotation. Co-editors Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman (Norton Critical Edition, 2004) note 'bent, or doubled, over', while George Lyman Kittredge (New Kittredge Shakespeare, 2019) and Stephen Greenblatt (Norton, 2016) simply gloss 'bent over with age'.

⁹⁷ Purkiss, 'Witch on the margins', p. 267.

⁹⁸ Marina Warner, 'Circean mutations in the New World', in *The Tempest and Its Travels*, ed. Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman (London, 2000), pp. 97–113; p. 97.

⁹⁹ Melissa E. Sanchez, 'Seduction and service in *The Tempest*', *Studies in Philology* 105 (2008), 50–82; p. 60.

¹⁰⁰ Patricia Parker, 'Fantasies of "race" and "gender": Africa, *Othello* and bringing to light', in *Women, "Race", and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (London, 1994), pp. 84–110; p. 84.

raging, bent old hag then dies during Ariel's twelve years' captivity in the pine. From swollen-bellied mother, she turns into a crone; all within twenty-six years at the most, since Prospero and Miranda arrived fourteen years before the action of the play.¹⁰¹

Warner's insight that Sycorax's life seems to hurtle towards death resonates with Prospero's own concern, since throughout *The Tempest* he is obsessed with the pathology of ageing and old age.¹⁰² The Duke bids Ferdinand, 'Bear with my weakness. My old brain is troubled. / Be not disturbed by my infirmity' (4.1.159–60). He identifies the same condition in Caliban, albeit in a more caustic register: 'And, as with age his body uglier grows, / So his mind cankers' (4.1.191–2). In the epilogue, Prospero describes his 'strength' as 'most faint' (Epilogue.2–3). When cursing his enemies, the Duke's punishment takes the form of age-associated pains. He says to Caliban, 'I'll rack thee with old cramps, / Fill all thy bones with aches' (1.2.371–2), and he charges his ministers to 'grind their joints / With dry convulsions, shorten up their sinews / With agèd cramps' (4.1.256–8). The lines recall Timon's curse of the elders: 'Thou cold sciatica, / Cripple our senators, that their limbs may halt / As lamely as their manners!' (*Timon*, 4.1.23–5). The 'strange drowsiness' (*Tempest*, 2.1.204) that overcomes members of the shipwrecked party in the opening scene further suggests a palsy, while the storm itself is a reminder that death can come at any age. Even Gonzalo, the 'lord of weak remembrance' (2.1.237) who muddles Tunis with Carthage, complains, 'My old bones ache' (3.3.2), and he refers to young men as 'suppler joints' (3.3.107). It becomes evident that, before one is 'rounded with a sleep' (4.1.158) – the image of life collapsing in on itself like a hoop – the human body is variously threatened with physical and mental impairment. So, in addition to constructing Sycorax's aged and racialized malformity, we can interpret Prospero's deployment of 'hoop' as evidence of anxiety over his own ageing self, produced as a defence against some of the patriarchal losses (of body, mind, creativity, power) associated with growing old. The link between male mortality and

skeletal change finds lyrical expression in Ariel's song: 'Full fathom five thy father lies. / Of his bones are coral made' (1.2.399–400).

What is more, Prospero is preoccupied with physical forms and repeatedly dictates the terms of his subjects' embodiment. He commands Ariel, 'Go take this shape' (1.2.305), or else 'Thy shape invisible retain' (4.1.185). When Miranda sees Ferdinand for the first time, her father says to her, 'Thou think'st there is no more such shapes as he' (1.2.481). Ferdinand, the handsome, young Italian prince, is contrasted with Caliban, the 'salvage and deformed slave' as he is described in the First Folio's *dramatis personae*. Prospero also claims that Caliban is 'as disproportioned in his manners / As in his shape' (5.1.294–5). In light of the Duke's portrayal of Sycorax's body, we might be wary of taking his description of Caliban at face value.¹⁰³ Patricia Akhimie makes the further point that 'Caliban's shape is changed as the direct result of Prospero's punishments', which take the form of pinches, squeezes and nips.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, in *The Tempest*, the word 'shape' appears with greater frequency than in any other play by Shakespeare. While Loomba shows how Sycorax functions as 'Prospero's "other"' and a 'powerful contrast to Miranda',¹⁰⁵ I suggest that the social body Sycorax's hoop ultimately guarantees is that of Ferdinand, the African witch's corporal and cultural inverse: a healthy, young, virile male of the European ruling class, of whom Miranda says 'nothing ill can dwell in such a temple' (1.2.460). We find a similar move in *Othello*, where a male black Moor makes visible the virtue and fairness of a white Italian woman.¹⁰⁶ If Miranda regards

¹⁰¹ Warner, *Circean*, p. 97.

¹⁰² Anthony Ellis, *Old Age, Masculinity, and Early Modern Drama: Comic Elders on the Italian and Shakespearean Stage* (Farnham, 2009), p. 157. Sachdev finds fears of aged women like Sycorax in the writings of Leo Africanus. See 'Sycorax', p. 228.

¹⁰³ Loomba, *Gender*, p. 152.

¹⁰⁴ Patricia Akhimie, *Shakespeare and the Cultivation of Difference: Race and Conduct in the Early Modern World* (New York, 2018), p. 172.

¹⁰⁵ Loomba, *Gender*, pp. 151–2. ¹⁰⁶ Hall, *Things*, p. 9.

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Ferdinand as the ideal 'shape' of youthful European manhood, what is the shape of aged African womanhood?

CROOKBACKED AND BLEARY-EYED

Sycorax hails from Algiers, neighbour to Tunis, where Ferdinand's newly wedded sister Claribel now resides – a land certainly closer to Naples than the other side of the Atlantic yet 'so far from Italy removed' that Alonso says he will never see his daughter again (2.1.116).¹⁰⁷ Antonio, too, exaggerates the remoteness of North Africa from southern Europe:

She that is Queen of Tunis; she that dwells
Ten leagues beyond man's life; she that from Naples
Can have no note – unless the sun were post –
The man i'th' moon's too slow – till new-born chins
Be rough and razorable

(2.1.251–5)

Antonio suggests it would take the same amount of time for a baby to mature into a young man as it would for an Italian letter to reach Claribel. It is an odd image that Shakespeare produces to emphasize the psychic distance between Africa and Europe, and by extension the difference of their people. The play is partially located in an English-Caribbean context Ariel refers to as 'the still-vexed Bermudas' (1.2.230), and scholars have noted that Caliban is an anagram of cannibal (spelled 'canibal' in the period), a name derived from the Carib people.¹⁰⁸ It has been argued that parts of the play were lifted almost verbatim from John Florio's translation of Montaigne's essay 'Of cannibals'.¹⁰⁹ To the best of my knowledge, an aspect of Shakespeare's appropriation yet to be recognized is from Montaigne's passage on 'natural man' in the same essay:

they live in a country of so exceeding pleasant and temperate situation, that as my testimonies have told me, it is very rare to see a sick-body amongst them; and they have further assured me, they never saw any man there, either shaking with the palsy, toothless, with eyes drooping, or *crooked and stooping with age*.¹¹⁰

The land Montaigne describes is remarkable for practically eliminating the most common afflictions associated with growing old, notably the condition of being 'crooked and stooping with age'. Shakespeare may have had the passage in mind when creating Sycorax, since he gives her a more radical version of the body described in Montaigne's essay.

In *The Tempest*, the discourse of the spine is made explicit around the theme of enforced servitude. Describing Antonio's allegiance to the King of Naples, Prospero says:

To give him annual tribute, do him homage,
Subject his coronet to his crown, and bend
The dukedom, yet unbowed – alas, poor Milan –
To most ignoble stooping.

(1.2.113–16)

The risk of subjugation – or what Prospero calls 'keep[ing] in service' (1.2.288) – is most apparent in the scenes where the 'slave' Caliban and Ferdinand are forced to move wood for the ageing Duke, which is acknowledged as potentially disabling work.¹¹¹ When Miranda offers to carry logs for Ferdinand, he promptly declines with the following words:

No, precious creature.
I had rather crack my sinews, break my back,
Than you should such dishonour undergo
While I sit lazy by.

(3.1.25–8)

¹⁰⁷ For a discussion of Claribel's match, see Jyotsna G. Singh, 'Caliban versus Miranda: race and gender conflicts in post-colonial rewritings of *The Tempest*', in *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects*, ed. Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan and Dymphna Callaghan (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 191–209; pp. 201–2.

¹⁰⁸ Stephen Orgel, 'Shakespeare and the cannibals', in *Cannibals, Witches, and Divorce: Estranging the Renaissance*, ed. Marjorie Garber (Baltimore, 1987), pp. 40–66; p. 56; Singh, 'Caliban', p. 191.

¹⁰⁹ See Richard Halpern, "'The picture of nobody': white cannibalism in *The Tempest*", in *The Production of English Renaissance Culture*, ed. David Lee Miller, Sharon O'Dair and Harold Weber (Ithaca, 1994), pp. 262–92; pp. 267–8.

¹¹⁰ Michel de Montaigne, *The Essays*, trans. John Florio (London, 1603), p. 102 (emphasis mine).

¹¹¹ Sanchez says of Ariel: 'Service to Prospero is the antithesis of liberty' ('Seduction and service', p. 59).

Ferdinand frames the resistance to, or rejection of, forced labour as something dishonourable, an indication of sloth and negligence, while doing the master's work under disabling conditions is the noble choice. Akhimie makes a keen distinction between the types of labour embodied by Ferdinand and Caliban. For the Italian prince, gathering logs becomes 'a test of his strength, obedience, and chastity', which he easily passes to win Miranda's hand.¹¹² In contrast, for Caliban it 'transform[s] him into something even more base, a "villain", "slave", "tortoise", and "earth", words that describe an abject and agricultural laborer'.¹¹³

The discourse of crookedness is also hinted at in the name Sycorax itself. Editors have offered several hypotheses regarding the origin of her name: that it is derived from the Greek *sus* (pig) and *korax* (raven); a reference to Circe from the Coraxi tribe; or an allusion to Medea, 'the Scythian raven'.¹¹⁴ Absent a definitive theory, Purkiss argues that the 'unreadability or meaninglessness of Sycorax's name suggests the inscrutability of New World peoples'.¹¹⁵ As an alternative hypothesis, I trace 'sy' to the curved blade of a scythe (spelled 'sythe', 'sithe', 'scith' and 'sieth' in Shakespeare's day), which was an iconographic symbol of Time or Death.¹¹⁶ Sycorax, we are told, is old, bent and dead. The couplet in Shakespeare's Sonnet 100 in the 1609 Quarto reads: 'Giue my loue fame faster than time wasts life, / So thou preuent his sieth, and crooked knife'.¹¹⁷ Here Shakespeare explicitly yokes scythe and crookedness together. Sycorax's name also contains the Latin prefix 'co-' meaning 'together', and the verb 'rax' meaning 'to stretch, grow', or 'become longer or broader, especially by being pulled'.¹¹⁸ The idea that old age is the state of being physically lengthened by time appears in *King Lear*, where Kent says of the dying king: 'He hates him / That would upon the rack of this tough world / Stretch him out longer' (5.3.289–91). Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida* refers to the aged Nestor's 'stretched-out life' (1.3.60). Sycorax thus aptly names the allegory of her aged and crooked body.

Earlier, I mentioned the biblical connection between crookedness and being bleary-eyed. In

the Folio, Sycorax is a 'blew ey'd hag' (TLN 396), which appears as 'blue-eyed hag' in most modern editions.¹¹⁹ Editors typically gloss this description as a reference to blue eyelids, which was associated with pregnancy.¹²⁰ Leah Marcus has questioned the cultural bias that assumes a North African witch could not have blue-coloured irises. Marcus dismisses the theory that 'blew ey'd' may have been a compositor's misreading of 'blear ey'd', since the idea that the final *r* was mistaken for a *w* is only possible 'if we have already accepted [the] assumption that Sycorax could not possibly be blue eyed'.¹²¹ While Marcus makes an important intervention, I join Claire R. Waters in renewing the case for 'blear-eyed hag'.¹²² Harold Staunton's nineteenth-century edition of *The Tempest* was the first to suggest 'blear-ey'd' 'as a more appropriate epithet for the damn'd witch'.¹²³ A decade or so after Staunton, Daniel Wilson also emended the text to 'blear-eyed'. Marcus observes that most editors have not followed Staunton and Wilson's change, though Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke commented in the nineteenth century that

¹¹² Akhimie, *Shakespeare*, p. 152.

¹¹³ Akhimie, *Shakespeare*, pp. 162–3. See also Urvashi Chakravarty, "'Of a bondslaue I made thee my free man": servitude, manumission, and the *macula seruitutis* in *The Tempest* and its early American afterlife', in *Fictions of Consent: Slavery, Servitude, and Free Service in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, 2022), pp. 171–97.

¹¹⁴ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Oxford, 2008), p. 19; Purkiss, 'Witch on the margins', pp. 260–6.

¹¹⁵ Purkiss, 'Witch on the margins', p. 266.

¹¹⁶ *OED Online*, 'scythe, n.'

¹¹⁷ *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (London, 1609), sig. Gv (100.13–14).

¹¹⁸ *OED Online*, 'rax, v.'

¹¹⁹ See Sachdev for a reading of 'hag' ('Sycorax in Algiers', p. 239).

¹²⁰ Leah Marcus, 'Introduction: the blue-eyed witch', in *Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe and Milton* (London, 1996), pp. 1–37, p. 7; Purkiss, 'Witch on the margins', p. 266.

¹²¹ Marcus, 'Blue-eyed', p. 7.

¹²² Claire R. Waters, 'The *Tempest's* Sycorax as "blew eye'd hag": a note toward a reassessment', *Notes and Queries* 56 (2009), 604–5.

¹²³ Marcus, 'Blue-eyed', p. 8.

SYCORAX'S HOOP

Shakespeare intended the blue of Sycorax's eyes to be 'the dull, bleared, neutral colour seen in the eyes of old crones'.¹²⁴

Given the many associations of bleary or watery eyes with senescence in the period's literature, there is ample reason to support the case for 'bler ey'd hag'. Roger Bacon wrote in the thirteenth century that farsightedness, common among the aged, was caused by excess moisture: 'When therefore the moisture is scanty the vision passing through it is immediately set free from it, and is thus able quickly to see distinctly an object appearing close at hand; but when there is an abundance of accidental moisture the eye is confused, and is not so quickly freed on account of the quantity of the moisture.'¹²⁵

In *The History of Life and Death* (1638), Francis Bacon included the following description of old men: 'They were dry skinned and impudent, hard bowelled, and unmerciful: blear-eyed, and envious; downlooking, and stooping . . . trembling limbs, wavering, and unconstant; crooked fingered, greedy, and covetous.'¹²⁶ Bacon explicitly links being blear-eyed with envy, which is the vice associated with Sycorax, not to mention 'stooping'. Burton, in his treatise on melancholy, describes old men as 'decrepit, hoary, harsh, writhen, burstenbelied and crooked, toothless, bald, blear-eyed, impotent, rotten', while Zachary Boyd's prose manual for the sick, *The Last Battle of the Soul in Death* (1629), states: 'Here is thy portraiture for the days of old age that is to come . . . thy bald head, and thy bleared eyes, and thy deaf ear, and thy wrinkled face, and thy rotten teeth, and thy stinking breath.'¹²⁷ In Shakespeare's drama, Brutus refers to the 'blearèd sights' of old people who need spectacles to see Coriolanus (2.1.202–3).

Male elders were routinely denigrated for their failing eyesight, but the most vicious accounts were aimed at aged women. John Dean's *The Merry Dutch Miller and New Invented Windmill* (1672) is a fanciful narrative about a novel device that can cure any woman of ugliness, and the title is worth quoting in full: 'Wherewith [the miller] undertaketh to grind all sorts of women, as the old, decrepit, wrinkled, *blear-eyed*, long-nosed, blind,

lame, scolds, jealous, angry, poor, drunkards, whores, sluts; or all others whatsoever. They shall come out of his mill, young, active, pleasant, handsome, wise, loving, virtuous and rich; without any deformity, and just suitable to their husbands humors' (emphasis mine).¹²⁸ Old women are identified as the first group in need of the miller's treatment, for whom being 'blear-eyed' is just one trait among a long list of physical impairments. Reginald Scot in *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) states that allegations of witchcraft are directed towards women who are 'commonly old, lame, bleare-eyed, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles', while Whitney writes of Envy in *A Choice of Emblems*: 'What means her eyes? so bleared, sore, and red.'¹²⁹ If we prioritize Sycorax's old age, envy and her association with witchcraft, the case for 'blear-eyed hag' is compelling.

Sycorax's hoop ultimately functions as an adaptable screen for various projections of the monstrous, racialized and pathological old crone. The ending of *The Tempest*, as Jan Kott argues, is not so different from the time just preceding it: Prospero is once again the Duke of Milan, Alonso has his son, and Ariel is free. I would add that Sycorax is still dead. According to Kott, 'Life begins again, in the same way as before the tempest, before the performance, for characters and audience alike.'¹³⁰ For Sycorax, however, her life cannot begin again. That the ending of *The Tempest* suggests a return to the beginning is Shakespeare's final hoop.

¹²⁴ Marcus, 'Blue-eyed', p. 9.

¹²⁵ Roger Bacon, *The 'Opus Majus' of Roger Bacon*, trans. Robert Belle (Philadelphia, 1928), p. 503.

¹²⁶ Francis Bacon, *The History of Life and Death, With Observations Natural and Experimental for the Prolonging of Life* (London, 1638), pp. 279–80.

¹²⁷ Burton, *Anatomy*, p. 541; Zachary Boyd, *The Last Battle of the Soul in Death* (London, 1629), pp. 528–9.

¹²⁸ Anon., *The Merry Dutch Miller and New Invented Windmill* (London, 1672).

¹²⁹ Reginald Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London, 1584), sig. Ciiij; Whitney, *Emblems*, p. 94. Waters also cites Scot and Whitney in 'The Tempest's Sycorax'.

¹³⁰ Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, trans. Bolesław Taborski (Garden City, NJ, 1964), pp. 163–5.