Love And Marriage Across The ‘Borderline’: A journey through the multiethnic classics 1590-1950

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I first became interested in multiethnic texts – by which I mean texts which are multiethnic in content as well as setting – in the late 1960s while teaching in a multiethnic high school in the island port town of Mombasa shortly after Kenya gained independence. At that time literature syllabuses in English for the East African equivalents of GCE O and A Level were being revised to include texts by the first generation of black African writers – Achebe, Ngugi, Soyinka and their contemporaries – alongside well-established literary classics. Some, but by no means all, of these new texts were multiethnic in my sense. So also were a small number of the literary classics: for example, *The Merchant of Venice*, whose portrayal of the position and treatment of Jews in another island port, Venice, in the late Renaissance period invited comparison with the situation of Asians, and to a lesser extent Arabs, in 1960s Mombasa.

On my return to Britain in the 1970s I discovered that there were English teachers here too who were introducing multiethnic texts into their syllabuses – in their case, in response to the impact of large-scale Commonwealth immigration in the previous two decades. I was especially impressed by the work of Joan Goody and Hugh Knight in London, and a suggestion of theirs, later incorporated into articles in an issue of *English in Education* devoted to ‘English in a multi-cultural society’. They argued that multiethnic texts set in a ‘removed’ but analogous context to that of their students, like *The Merchant of Venice* for mine in Mombasa, had a role to play alongside more recent, and more obviously relevant, texts from countries of immigrant origin or set in newly multiethnic Britain. This role was, they suggested, to encourage students to take a more ‘objective look’ at their experiences by examining whether they might be similar to those others had undergone in earlier times or in different places and whether they might also therefore be in a sense ‘universal’.
After retiring from teaching one task I set myself was to identify other multiethnic classics which are ‘removed’ from the here and now yet relevant for discussion of today’s multiethnic issues. I am obviously no longer in a position to test the Goody and Knight hypothesis that they encourage a more ‘objective look’. My purpose here instead is to share with readers, whether teachers or students, my experience of following just one of these issues, interethnic love and marriage, as it unwinds through English literature over the years and across continents, in the hope that they might find my journey, and the comparison of texts intrinsic to it, illuminating on both the texts and the issue. There is a particular reason for choosing interethnic love and marriage for those who find the Goody and Knight hypothesis intuitively plausible. Not only is it an issue all teachers and students can relate to; it also provides them with an accessible way into the overarching and pressing debate over what kind of multiethnic society ours is to become. For its future will obviously be affected by the extent to which individuals choose partners from within or outside their own ethnic group.3.

I decided to begin my journey with the marriage of Jessica and Lorenzo in *The Merchant of Venice* and to finish before the upsurge in multiethnic texts from around the world in the last sixty years, rounding dates up or down to give me the manageable period from 1590 to 1950, which corresponds more or less to the years of British colonisation and colonial rule. My actual starting-point was not the relationship between Jessica and Lorenzo on its own but the comparison it invited with another interethnic marriage in Shakespeare, that between the tragic hero and Desdemona in *Othello*, which is also set in Venice in the late Renaissance period. I wondered why these two marriages, one between a Christian man and a Jewish woman and the other between a black man and a white woman, and the two plays to which they belong, offered such different perspectives on interethnic relations in Venice at roughly the same time. Whereas *The Merchant of Venice* seems today contaminated by the anti-Semitism it depicts, *Othello* has always struck me as surprisingly modern in its freedom from racism.

Superficially the two marriages are similar: both are freely contracted by the individuals concerned and without the prior consent of the father of the bride. There the similarity ends. Jessica and Lorenzo’s marriage is dependent on her conversion to Christianity, an anti-Semitic commonplace in medieval and Renaissance literature which is also to be found in Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta*, an influence on Shakespeare’s play. Without the conversion, it can be assumed the marriage would not have taken place. Together marriage and conversion therefore come across as another rod with which to beat Shylock rather than as a triumph of interethnic love over adversity. The impression that the approval of the Christian
characters is qualified is strengthened by the lukewarm reception Jessica receives at Belmont and her own muted response to it. Nor is this the play’s only example of the negative treatment of a possible interethnic union by its Christian characters. The supposedly noble Portia not only shares in the prevailing anti-Semitism; she greets Morocco’s failure to choose the right casket with, ‘Let all of his complexion choose me so’.

In Othello, on the other hand, a much-admired, well-integrated black man marries an equally virtuous and popular white woman for love and to general, if not quite unanimous, applause. Readers and audiences are clearly not expected to identify with the dissentient voices of Iago, Rodrigo and Brabantio, notwithstanding some critics’ claim that the way the plot unravels supports their racist views. How is this disparity between the two plays in their presentation of interethnic marriage and their overall moral orientation to be explained? Part of the answer perhaps lies in the fact that whereas anti-Semitic stereotypes were already entrenched in Europe by the time of the Renaissance, those concerning black people, with whom there had been far less contact, existed only in embryonic form. Another partial explanation is that Othello is less ‘strange’ in Elizabethan-Jacobean terms, less culturally different, not so much than Jessica as her father. Though a former slave and in origin, the textual clues suggest, a sub-Saharan African, his distant ethnic background is scarcely hinted at. He is, first and foremost, a Christian for whom the Muslim Turks are the enemy ‘other’ just as they, and the Jews in The Merchant of Venice, are for all Christian Venetians.3

The way these two versions of interethnic love and marriage – between black and white and Gentile and Jew – are revisited over my period is also noticeably different. The Othello-Desdemona version is in a sense not revisited at all. I have discovered no other story of mutual love between a black man and a white woman, even though contacts between the two races increased markedly, confirming my view of Othello as anticipating modern norms in its freedom from racism. The Jessica-Lorenzo version, on the other hand, is revisited, and rewritten, several times in the nineteenth century, usually in the context of challenging the portrayal of Shylock and the anti-Semitism of the play. The pro-Semitic texts on this literary path, which I shall retrace first, pointedly exclude the Jessica option of Jewish women, traditionally the carriers of Jewish identity, renouncing their religion as part of marrying ‘out’. The options they explore instead range from the complete rejection of intermarriage between Jew and non-Jew to embracing both Jewish males and Jewish females marrying ‘out’. The possible consequence of intermarriage, a half-Jewish child, also makes a first appearance.
The ground was prepared for these pro-Semitic texts by several important political and cultural developments in the previous two centuries. The first of these was the formal readmission of Jews into Britain in 1656 (they had been expelled by Edward 1 in 1290), followed by their naturalisation in the eighteenth century and full political emancipation in the nineteenth. Equally influential on educated opinion was the European Enlightenment with its emphasis on reason and universal human values and rights. A key text in the expression of these beliefs was the German writer GE Lessing’s dramatic poem *Nathan der Weise*, which I was fortunate enough to study for German A Level more than fifty years ago and to see revived in this country at the 2003 Chichester Festival. Set in Jerusalem in the twelfth century, its Jewish hero (inspired by the real life model of the German Enlightenment philosopher Moses Mendelssohn) and his adopted daughter Rachel are a world away from Shylock and Jessica, as is its eloquent plea for interfaith friendship between Jews, Christians and Muslims from the interfaith hatred of *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Jew of Malta*.

Sir Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*, once staple school and childhood reading and the first well-known pro-Semitic text in English literature, is also set in the twelfth century, at the time of the Crusades and of the brutal persecution of Jews in England. Its main subject is the conflict between Saxon and Norman. Generations of readers, however, have found much more to interest them in the Jewish sub-plot and its heroine Rebecca. Unlike her father Isaac whose portrayal is tarnished by vestiges of the medieval stereotype of the Jew, she is wholly admirable – intelligent, warm-hearted and courageous in the face of virulent anti-Semitism. But the reader’s expectation that she will marry the Anglo-Norman hero Wilfred of Ivanhoe, for whom she develops tender feelings after nursing his wounds, is confounded. He is not only destined for the insipid Saxon heroine Rowena, to symbolise ‘the future peace and harmony’ between their two peoples, but also shares in ‘the universal prejudices of his age and religion’ regarding Jews. Rebecca and her father flee instead to the more tolerant Muslim kingdom of southern Spain, where she vows to dedicate herself to her religion and acts of charity. ‘There is a gulf between us,’ she explains to Rowena. ‘Our breeding, our faith, alike forbid either to pass over it’. Scott defended his unpopular decision to reject a Christian-Jewish marriage in favour of a Norman-Saxon one on grounds of historical realism.

Marriage between Christian and Jew is also excluded in the ‘condition of England’ trilogy by the Jewish author and future Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, even though he had himself been baptised a Christian and later married ‘out’. This apparent contradiction is echoed in the views of the
Jewish character Sidonia, a deracinated multiculturalist and the author's mouthpiece on religion and interfaith relations. Introduced in the first novel *Coningsby*, and re-appearing in the last *Tancred*, he maintains both that Judaism and Christianity are 'incomplete' without one another and that the Jews are a 'pure race' and should remain so. His argument for a measure of separatism in the interests of ethnic maintenance is reinforced in the plot of *Tancred*. Its idealistic English hero Lord Montacute goes on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, becomes embroiled in its complex ethnic and political conflicts and falls in love with the proud young Jewess Eva, a reincarnation of Scott's Rebecca. She makes it plain that marriage between them is made impossible, as in Rebecca's case, by the difference of race and religion.

A similar view is present in *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot's last and most remarkable novel written when Disraeli was prime minister. The burden of its Jewish plot is that, once Deronda has discovered he is a Jew, he must marry the Jewess Mirah not Gwendolen Harleth, as the attempted integration of the two plots at one point half-suggests, and she, with her unwavering belief in her Jewishness ('I could not make myself not a Jewess') must marry him. Yet the novel speaks with more than one voice on the relationship of Jews to Gentile society. In opposition to the advocates of 'separateness with communication' are the integrationists. Deronda's mother is the principal exponent of this option, renouncing Judaism and concealing his Jewishness from her son. Another is the Jewish musician Klesmer who 'looks forward to a fusion of races' and marries the non-Jewish heiress Catherine Arrowpoint. Together they defy her parents' objections and threat to disinherit her; no mention is made, moreover, of religious conversion on his part or hers.

This was not the first fictional example of a Jewish man, rather than a Jewish woman, marrying, or contemplating marrying, 'out'. In *The Way We Live Now*, a novel published a year earlier by Eliot's friend Trollope, the possibility is discussed, though for mutual convenience not love, but then rejected. Two years before *Ivanhoe*, in Maria Edgeworth's *Harrington*, there is an instance of a Jewish man, the noble Montero, having married a Christian woman and of the consequence, his loving and dutiful half-Jewish Protestant daughter, Berenice, who subsequently marries the eponymous hero, a reformed anti-Semite. The novel criticises anti-Semitism in English society as well as making some attempt, though not on the scale of *Daniel Deronda*, to represent Jewish culture. Moses Mendelssohn appears as a character and there are references to *Nathan der Weise* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Indeed it is at a performance of the latter, with Charles Macklin playing Shylock, that Harrington meets Berenice.4
With *Daniel Deronda* the Jewish-Gentile story of interethnic love and marriage comes to an end; at least I have not come across a later substantial treatment of the topic. Turning to the Othello-Desdemona literary path, I mentioned above that I found no similar relationship in the texts of my period. What I found instead were two variations, mainly towards the end of it, by which time stereotypes of black sexuality were more fully developed than they had been in Shakespeare’s time. These variations I labelled respectively the Caliban-Miranda and Pocahontas-Rolfe themes. In the first a black, ‘coloured’ or native male makes sexual advances towards a white female or is violent towards her in a manner partly suggestive of sexual desire. A familiar example is what did or did not happen between Dr Aziz and Adela Quested in the Malabar Caves in *A Passage to India*. More clear-cut, in its action if not its motivation, is the murder of Mary Turner by Moses, one of her African servants, in Doris Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing*. An example of racial, sexual and class-based emotions becoming intertwined from American literature is Bigger Thomas’s murder of Mary Dalton, his employer’s daughter, in Richard Wright’s *Native Son*. Joe Christmas’s murder of Joanna Burden in William Faulkner’s *Light in August* is perhaps another which I discuss below.

In the Pocahontas-Rolfe theme, named after the well-known real life story from the Elizabethan settlement of Virginia, white men fall in love with (or at least have sex with), and sometimes marry and have children by, black, ‘coloured’ or native women. Sometimes it is these mixed race children or their descendants, rather than the original interethnic relationships, that are the focus of the story. By the end of my period there had been many such relationships in the different parts of the world colonised by the European powers, resulting in large mixed race populations. Thanks to a memorable RSC revival in 2002, I encountered an early example of this theme in *The Island Princess* by Shakespeare’s collaborator John Fletcher. Set against the background of the colonisation of the ‘spice islands’ by the Portuguese, its plot turns on competition for the hand of Quisara, the beautiful and resourceful princess of the title, between colonialists and islanders. Although it is one of the former Armusia who is successful, causing Quisara to renounce her polytheistic faith for Christianity, the play speaks with a range of voices, including an anti-colonialist one.

The Pocahontas-Rolfe theme is not broached in American literature, so far as I know, until the Leatherstocking novels of Fenimore Cooper, the first sustained fictional engagement with multiethnic issues in the language and once, like the novels of Scott, with whom Cooper has often been compared, widely read. These ‘romances of the forest’, as Cooper called them, have as their subject the relationship between European settlers and
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native Americans during the final decades of colonialism and the early years of political independence. There is much to commend them to a modern readership: for example, their concern for the environment and for Indian rights but, above all perhaps, their choice of the uneducated ‘child of nature’ Natty Bumppo as hero and the celebration of his lifelong friendship with the Mohican chief Chingachgook. On interethnic love and marriage, however, the novels are less liberal-minded, if, that is, Bumppo’s own ‘simple creed’ is to be taken as the reader’s guide.

Brought up among Indians, familiar with their languages and cultures, later adopting two as his sons and finally dying among them, Bumppo is a living exemplum of biculturalism, [embodying] the virtues of both races but [belonging] to neither’ (The Prairie). His opinions on race and ethnicity are a paradoxical amalgam of the universalism of the Enlightenment - ‘the red man [is] quite as human as we are ourselves’ (The Deerslayer) - and the pluralism of the Romantic reaction - ‘each colour has its gifts, and its laws, and its traditions; and one is not to condemn another, because he does not exactly comprehend it’ (The Pathfinder). When it comes to interethnic sex, it is the pluralism, some might say racism, that prevails: ‘I am white, have a white heart, and can’t in reason have a red-skinned maiden, who must have a redskin heart and feelin’s … none but a woman of my own colour and gifts shall darken the door of my wigwam’ (The Deerslayer).

An Anglo-Hispanic union which surmounts barriers of religion is implicitly approved in The Prairie but the nearest Cooper approaches to a red-white one is the love between one of Bumppo’s adopted sons, the Mohican Uncas, and the half-British, half West Indian Creole, Cora in The Last of the Mohicans; and they are killed off in the end because, or so it seems, he cannot reconcile himself to a mixed race marriage. Had it been consummated, it would not, of course, have been an instance of the Pocahontas-Rolfe theme but its reverse and the closest to a replication of the Othello-Desdemona relationship in my period. By the middle of the nineteenth century such an eventuality — a black or ‘coloured’ male making love to a white female — was perceived as deeply threatening in predominantly white or white-dominated societies. Interestingly, DH Lawrence, who wrote so perceptively about Cooper in his Studies in Classic American Literature, overcame his own doubts in his Mexican novel The Plumed Serpent, which shows traces of Cooper’s influence, to bring together Kate Leslie and the American Indian Cipriano in a mixed race marriage.

The third of the ‘three naturally distinct, and I might almost say enemy, races’ of America identified by Cooper’s contemporary, the French writer Alexis de Tocqueville, barely figures in the Leatherstocking world. The first significant fictional appearance of African-Americans occurs in the
slightly later, and nowadays unjustly neglected, anti-slavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. None of the relationships Harriet Beecher Stowe describes between black and white involves sex, love or marriage, but a number of the characters, including several prominent ones, are the children or descendants of relationships between white plantation owners, members of their families or their white employees and African slaves. In marked contrast to the pejorative references to ‘half-breeds’ in Cooper’s novels are the very positive references to mulattoes and quadroons – ‘a handsome, bright-eyed mulatto’, ‘the pretty young quadroon’ etc – in this one. The uneasy position they occupy in a racially segregated and discriminatory society is also apparent. Of particular interest are the quadroon couple George and Eliza Harris who escape to Canada and at the end embark for Liberia, the African colony established for emancipated slaves. Despite being able to ‘pass for white’, George identifies strongly with his African ancestry, even wishing he were ‘two shades darker’.

Being of mixed race is a recurrent motif in the southern American fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The taint of colour in white society under the ‘one drop rule’, according to which someone who is a quadroon or even an octofoon and can ‘pass for white’ is labelled ‘black’ or ‘coloured’, and its sometimes tragic consequences, are the subject of Kate Chopin’s story ‘Desirée’s Baby’, whilst African-American attitudes to being ‘mingled’ are examined in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. But it is in the novels of William Faulkner that this motif is almost obsessively pursued, nowhere more so than in two of his most brilliant, contorted and maddening, *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!*. I have already referred to the main character in the former, Joe Christmas, a foundling who believes, but does not know, himself to be ‘part Negro’, and in his search for his racial identity takes an older white woman, Joanna Burden, as his lover, murders her and is hunted down and brutally lynched by a racist state trooper. In the latter, a convoluted generational saga covering a hundred years of Deep South history, it is possible to identify in its tangle of relationships, with assistance from Faulkner’s chronological and genealogical appendices, five mixed race offspring among the characters.

The ethnic diversity of the United States plays little part in the fiction of the other great novelist of the American Renaissance, Herman Melville, except as a characteristic of the crews of American ships. It is for his accounts of their encounters with indigenous populations overseas that Melville is mainly relevant here. His first two autobiographical novels *Typee* and *Omoo*, based on his experiences as a whale-man in Polynesia, made important contributions to the debate about ‘savagery’ and ‘civilisation’ inaugurated by navigators like James Cook in the previous
century. In *Typee*, set in the Marquesas islands, Melville’s narrator attempts a broadly sympathetic portrayal of a relatively untouched native culture and criticises French colonisers and missionaries for ‘denationalizing’ the islanders. He is equally critical of his fellow crewmen for ‘debauching’ native girls, while at the same time giving an idyllic and sensuous account of his own relationship with one of them Fayaway in the ‘happy valley’ of the Typees where love is free. That Melville was also liberal-minded about interethnic relationships the other way round is suggested by a comment in *Redburn*, another early autobiographical novel based on his first voyage across the Atlantic. The narrator observes, on seeing black American sailors accompanying white girls in Liverpool, that such an occurrence would not have been tolerated back home, adding that in this respect the ideals of the Declaration of American Independence had still to be realised.

From Melville’s Polynesian novels developed the colonial literature of the South Seas, which includes the fiction and non-fiction of one of his admirers, RL Stevenson, in his final Samoan phase. Stevenson shared Melville’s hostility to colonialism, calling it ‘this dance of folly and injustice and unconscious rapacity’. He is not normally noted for his interest in sexual relationships but the novella *The Beach of Falesa*, a kind of parable of colonialism, is an exception. Its ‘unreliable’ narrator is an unsophisticated copra trader, Wiltshire, who holds patronising, if relatively benign, views of *kanakas* (natives), while its moral centre is occupied by his relationship with the independent-minded island girl, Uma. Initially joined in a fraudulent marriage of convenience, later legitimised by a missionary, they grow to love one another, although only Wiltshire’s feelings are made fully explicit – ‘I never had anything so near me as this little brown bit of a girl’. The novella concludes on a half-optimistic note with Wiltshire’s ambivalent feelings about their mixed-race children:

I’m stuck here, I fancy. I don’t like to leave the kids, you see: and … they’re better here than what they would be in a white man’s country … But what bothers me is the girls. They’re only half-castes … and there’s nobody thinks less of half-castes than I do; but they’re mine, and about all I’ve got. I can’t reconcile my mind to their taking up with Kanakas, and I’d like to know where I’m to find the whites?’

Ambivalence is a hallmark of the treatment of interethnic love and marriage in the Anglo-Indian fiction and verse of Rudyard Kipling. In his case it reflected the wider ambivalence of a writer who was both ardent
imperialist and ardent multiculturalist – an ambivalence he epitomised in one of the chapter epigraphs in *Kim* in which he thanked ‘Allah’ for giving him ‘two /Separate sides to my head’. Relationships between British men and Indian women had been numerous before the ideology of Empire intervened, as the number of Eurasians visibly demonstrated. Kipling’s discomfort about the relationships and their consequences perhaps explains the tendency in the stories which deal with them towards unhappy outcomes. In ‘Lisbeth’ an orphaned hill-girl who works for Christian missionaries falls in love with a visiting English botanist. He trifles with her affections, having a fiancée at home, and leaves promising to return and marry her without any intention of doing so. Reluctantly persuaded of his perfidy, she abandons Christianity and goes back to her people, complaining ‘You are all liars, you English’, only to reappear as her rediscovered original self in a minor role, the Woman of Shamlegh, in *Kim*, a novel notable for its celebration of ethnic diversity and interethnic friendship.

The tragic conclusions to three other stories by Kipling about relationships between British men and young native girls – ‘Beyond The Pale’, ‘Without Benefit Of Clergy’ and ‘Georgie Porgie’ – seem equally pessimistic about their prospects. But the nature of the relationships while they last encourages the reader to recoil from the inhuman moral the sahib narrator arrives at in ‘Beyond The Pale’: ‘A man should, whatever happens, keep to his own caste, race and breed’, just as he or she is encouraged to recoil from the ironic endorsement of arranged marriages in ‘Kidnapped’, in which a young civil servant is physically prevented from marrying a Eurasian girl. Another story ‘Yoked with an Unbeliever’ actually turns the denouement of ‘Lisbeth’ upside down. This time the local hill-girl marries her British lover, a tea planter, who renounces his fiancée in England. The soldier narrators of two early poems, ‘The Ladies’ and ‘Mandalay’, have a positive view of their interethnic love affairs, while the Eurasian hero of ‘His Chance in Life’ takes advantage of the one ‘chance’ his ‘borderline’ racial status gives him to gain promotion and a wife. There is even a never-to-be-answered query over whether the status of no less a hero than Kim might be ‘borderline’ too.

Interethnic love and marriage are less prominent in the work of the other great British author of Empire, Joseph Conrad. Where they crop up, in his early fiction set in the Dutch East Indies (Fletcher’s ‘spice islands’), their prospects often seem, as in Kipling, bleak, but then his perspective on interethnic relationships in colonial contexts was generally pessimistic because of his opposition, in contrast to Kipling, to imperialism. Interethnic hatred and conflict dominate, with conclusions inclining towards loss, separation and violent death. In the first two novels of his
‘trilogy-in-reverse’, *Almayer’s Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, relationships between Dutch men and native women founder to the accompaniment of anti-colonialist invective. In the first, Almayer’s Malay wife hates her husband and looks forward to the time when whites who ‘come to us to trade, with prayers on their lips and loaded guns in their hands’ are driven from the islands. Their daughter Nina rejects her father too at the end as well as ‘the white side of her descent’ she had been educated to identify with. Willems in *An Outcast of the Islands* is rejected by both his mixed race wife Joanna and his mixed race lover Aissa who refers to his country of origin as ‘a land of lies and of evil from which nothing but misfortune ever comes to us who are not white’.

Yet there are glimmers of hope too. In his artistic credo, as set out in the preface to *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*, Conrad refers to the artist as speaking to ‘the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation … the solidarity … which binds together all humanity’. A version of this vision of human fellowship and solidarity in a multiethnic world free from imperialism is to be found in an early story of the East, ‘Karain’:

> to him who does not come to teach or to rule, to him who asks for nothing and accepts all things, words are spoken by the camp fires, in the shared solitude of the sea, in riverside villages, in resting-places surrounded by forests – words are spoken that take no account of race or colour.

A more concrete example is the friendship between Jim and the Malay Dain Waris in *Lord Jim* which is described as ‘one of those strange, profound, rare friendships between brown and white, in which the very difference of race seems to draw two human beings closer by some mystic element of sympathy’. The elopement of the half-Dutch Nina with her Malay lover at the end of *Almayer’s Folly* is arguably another. It is certainly another approximation to the relationship between Othello and Desdemona.

In ‘His Chance in Life’ Kipling’s sahib narrator anticipates a time when the people of the ‘borderline’ such as its Eurasian hero ‘will turn out a writer or poet; and then we shall know how they live and what they feel’. The two African-American writers from my period whom I have mentioned, Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright, let us know something of ‘what they feel’ about interethnic relationships and their mixed race offspring but I have found no counterparts in British or Commonwealth literature. The nearest to one is the Indian writer GV Desani in his novel *All About H Hatterer*, a hilarious multilingual, multiethnic extravaganza with a Eurasian hero, which was much admired
on its publication after the Second World War by EM Forster among other western writers and has clearly influenced several of the many authors of multiethnic texts (Salman Rushdie and Zadie Smith are examples) who have emerged since the end of my period.

In the last 60 years attitudes towards interethnic relationships, and towards their offspring, have undergone a major transformation. They might even be said to have come full circle in the sense that such relationships now seem as socially unremarkable as were those, according to my reading at least, between Othello and Desdemona, and, in so far as one can tell, Pocahontas and John Rolfe, 400 years ago. They are also, of course, considerably more common; and the number of people describing themselves as ethnically ‘mixed’ in census returns and research studies has increased accordingly. At the same time, they remain controversial, even unacceptable, to some, and not just to the modern counterparts of Iago, Roderigo and Brabantio. Intermarriage is still a contested issue within Britain’s Jewish community, for example, as it is within other more recently settled ethnic minorities. Whereas the secular Jewish majority increasingly marry ‘out’, the orthodox religious minority continue to set great store by marrying ‘in’ to preserve ethnic identity.8 The need for the kind of ‘objective look’ Joan Goody and Hugh Knight so rightly valued all those years ago therefore also remains. Whether the study of some of the classic texts I have referred to might help to promote it, I leave to others to investigate.

Notes and References

1. Goody, J and Knight, H (1977) Classroom Interaction in the Multi-racial School; Books for Younger Secondary School Children in a Multi-racial Classroom, English in Education, 11/1, pp 2-18. One example of multiethnic texts set in a ‘removed’ context which they cite and has always seemed to me particularly pertinent is the historical fiction written by Rosemary Sutcliff in the 1950s and set in the Romano-British period.

2. In the original talk delivered to the annual conference of TESOL Italy at the University of Naples in November 2006, to which this article is a sequel, I took the theme of cultural identity as an illustration. Jeffcoate, R (2006) Choosing and Teaching Multiethnic Texts, Perspectives, 33/1, pp. 9-22.

3. For what can be deduced about Elizabethan-Jacobean attitudes to ‘strangers’, see Hunter, GK (1978) Elizabethans and Foreigners; Othello and Colour Prejudice in Dramatic Identities and Cultural Tradition (Liverpool University Press) pp 3-59. For attitudes towards Jews in particular, see

4. This novel has an interesting history. It was expressly written to meet the complaint of an American Jewish correspondent Rachel Mordecai about anti-Semitic stereotypes in Edgeworth’s earlier work, including her best known novel Castle Rackrent—a complaint which led to a lifelong friendship by correspondence between the two women. See Edgeworth, M Harrington (2004) (ed. S Manly) (Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press) pp 7-12, 297-303. I should add that the portrayal of Sir Kit’s Jewish wife in Castle Rackrent seems to me wholly innocuous and indeed a positive feature of this fine novel.

5. African-American attitudes to being of mixed race are also represented in two autobiographies: Booker T. Washington, Up From Slavery; and Richard Wright, Black Boy.

6. For a fascinating insight into the ‘wholesale interracial sexual exploration’ and ‘widespread cultural assimilation and hybridity’ in British India before the Raj imposed the dogma of ethnic segregation, see Dalrymple, W (2002) White Mughals, (London: Harper Collins). One of the descendants of interethnic relationships there, according to Dalrymple, was no less a person than Lord Liverpool, British prime minister 1812-27.

7. Ambivalence about interethnic relationships is also evident in two of the novels Kipling’s friend Rider Haggard set in sub-Saharan Africa—King Solomon’s Mines and She. Like Kipling in ‘Without benefit of clergy’ and Cooper in The Last of the Mohicans, he chooses death as a fictional solution.

8. Just how divisive an issue interethnic marriage remains among British Jews was illustrated by a case which came before the courts in 2009. The Jewish Free School, an oversubscribed state school in London, was judged to have contravened the Race Relations Act by refusing to accept a boy as a pupil because his mother was a convert to Judaism, having been born an Irish Catholic, and not ethnically Jewish according to the rules set by the Chief Rabbi. The Times June 26, December 17 and 19, 2009.

Appendix: Multiethnic Texts Discussed 1590-1950

British Isles and Commonwealth

Marlowe The Jew of Malta (c.1590); Shakespeare The Merchant of Venice (c.1596), Othello (c.1604); John Fletcher The Island Princess (1621); Maria Edgeworth Castle Rackrent (1800), Harrington (1817); Walter Scott Ivanhoe (1819); Benjamin Disraeli Coningsby (1844), Tancred (1847); Anthony Trollope The Way We Live Now (1875); George Eliot Daniel Deronda (1876); Rider Haggard King Solomon’s Mines (1885), She (1887); Rudyard Kipling Departmental Ditties (1886), Plain Tales From The Hills (1888), Life’s Handicap (1891), Barrack-Room Ballads (1892), Kim (1901); R. L. Stevenson The Beach of Falesá (1892); Joseph Conrad Almayer’s Folly (1895), An Outcast of the Islands
The Use of English

(1896), The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’ (1897), ‘Karain’ (1898), Lord Jim (1900); EM Forster A Passage to India (1924); DH Lawrence The Plumed Serpent (1926); GV Desani All About H Hatterer (1948); Doris Lessing The Grass is Singing (1950).

United States of America

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