

I FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Initial English Confrontation with Africans

WHEN THE ATLANTIC NATIONS OF EUROPE BEGAN EXPANDING overseas in the sixteenth century, Portugal led the way in Africa and to the east while Spain founded a great empire in America. It was not until the reign of Elizabeth that Englishmen came to realize that overseas exploration and plantations could bring home wealth, power, glory, and fascinating information. By the early years of the seventeenth century Englishmen had developed a taste for empire and for tales of adventure and discovery. More than is usual in human affairs, one man, the great chronicler Richard Hakluyt, had roused enthusiasm for western planting and had stirred the nation with his monumental compilation, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*. Here was a work to widen a people's horizons. Its exhilarating accounts of voyages to all quarters of the globe (some by foreigners, in translation) constituted a national hymn, a sermon, an adventure story, and a scientific treatise. It was these accounts, together with ones added during the first quarter of the seventeenth century by Hakluyt's successor Samuel Purchas, which first acquainted Englishmen at home with the newly discovered lands of Africa.

English voyagers did not touch upon the shores of West Africa until after 1550, nearly a century after Prince Henry the Navigator had mounted the sustained Portuguese thrust southward for a water passage to the Orient. Usually Englishmen came to Africa to trade goods *with* the natives; the principal hazards of these ventures proved to be climate, disease, and the jealous opposition of the "Portingals" who had long since entrenched themselves in forts along the coast. The earliest English descriptions of West Africa were written by adventurous traders, men who had no special interest in converting the natives or, except for the famous Hawkins

voyages, in otherwise laying hands on them. Extensive English participation in the slave trade did not develop until well into the seventeenth century. The first permanent English settlement on the African coast was at Kormantin in 1631, and the Royal African Company was not chartered for another forty years.¹ Initially, therefore, English contact with Africans did not take place primarily in a context which prejudged the Negro as a slave, at least not as a slave of Englishmen. Rather, Englishmen met Negroes merely as another sort of men.

Englishmen found the natives of Africa very different from themselves. Negroes looked different; their religion was un-Christian; their manner of living was anything but English; they seemed to be a particularly libidinous sort of people. All these clusters of perceptions were related to each other, though they may be spread apart for inspection, and they were related also to circumstances of contact in Africa, to previously accumulated traditions concerning that strange and distant continent, and to certain special qualities of English society on the eve of its expansion into the New World.

1. THE BLACKNESS WITHOUT

The most arresting characteristic of the newly discovered African was his color. Travelers rarely failed to comment upon it; indeed when describing Negroes they frequently began with complexion and then moved on to dress (or rather lack of it) and manners. At Cape Verde, "These people are all blacke, and are called Negros, without any apparell, saving before their privities."² Robert Baker's narrative poem recounting his two voyages to the West African coast in 1562 and 1563 first introduced the natives with these engaging lines:

And entering in [a river], we see
a number of blacke soules,

1. Kenneth G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (London, 1957), 38-46; John W. Blake, trans. and ed., *Europeans in West Africa, 1450-1560; Documents to Illustrate the Nature and Scope of Portuguese Enterprise in West Africa, the Abortive Attempt of Castilians to Create an Empire There, and the Early English Voyages to Barbary and Guinea (Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society, 2d Ser., 87 [1942])*, II, 254-60.

2. "The voyage made by M. John Hawkins . . . to the coast of Guinea and the Indies of Nova Hispania . . . 1564," in Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation . . .*, 12 vols., 1598 ed. (Glasgow, 1903-05), X, 15. See Katherine Beverly Oakes, *Social Theory in the Early Literature of Voyage and Exploration in Africa* (unpubl. Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1944), 120-23.

Whose likeliness seem'd men to be,
but all as blacke as coles.
Their Captaine comes to me
as naked as my naile,
Not having witte or honestie
to cover once his taile.³

Even more sympathetic observers seemed to find blackness a most salient quality in Negroes: "although the people were blacke and naked, yet they were civill."⁴

Englishmen actually described Negroes as *black*—an exaggerated term which in itself suggests that the Negro's complexion had powerful impact upon their perceptions. Even the peoples of northern Africa seemed so dark that Englishmen tended to call them "black" and let further refinements go by the board. Blackness became so generally associated with Africa that every African seemed a black man. In Shakespeare's day, the Moors, including Othello, were commonly portrayed as pitchy black and the terms *Moor* and *Negro* used almost interchangeably.⁵ With curious inconsistency, however, Englishmen recognized that Africans south of the Sahara were not at all the same people as the much more familiar Moors.⁶ Sometimes they referred to Negroes as "black Moors" to distinguish them from the peoples of North Africa. During the seventeenth century the distinction became more firmly established and indeed writers came to stress the difference in color, partly because they delighted in correcting their predecessors and partly because Negroes were being taken up as slaves and Moors, increasingly,

3. "The First Voyage of Robert Baker to Guinie . . . 1562," in Richard Hakluyt, *The Principall Navigations, Voiages and Discoveries of the English Nation . . .* (London, 1589), 132. The entire poem was omitted in the 1598 edition.

4. "The Voyage of M. George Fenner . . . Written by Walter Wren" (1566), Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, VI, 270. All ensuing references are to this reprinted 1598 edition unless otherwise indicated.

5. Warner Grenelle Rice, *Turk, Moor and Persian in English Literature from 1550-1660, with Particular Reference to the Drama* (unpubl. Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1926), 401-2n; Robert R. Cawley, *The Voyagers and Elizabethan Drama* (Boston, 1938), 31; Samuel C. Chew, *The Crescent and the Rose: Islam and England during the Renaissance* (N. Y., 1937), 521-24; Wylie Sypher, *Guinea's Captive Kings: British Anti-Slavery Literature of the XVIIth Century* (Chapel Hill, 1942), 26.

6. An early instance is in "The Second Voyage to Guinea . . ." (1554), in Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, VI, 167-68. See the associations made by Leo Africanus, *The History and Description of Africa and of the Notable Things Therein Contained . . .*, trans. John Pory [ca. 1600], ed. Robert Brown, 3 vols. (London, 1896), I, 130.

were not. In the more detailed and accurate reports about West Africa of the seventeenth century, moreover, Negroes in different regions were described as varying considerably in complexion. In England, however, the initial impression of Negroes was not appreciably modified: the firmest fact about the Negro was that he was "black."

The powerful impact which the Negro's color made upon Englishmen must have been partly owing to suddenness of contact. Though the Bible as well as the arts and literature of antiquity and the Middle Ages offered some slight introduction to the "Ethiophe," England's immediate acquaintance with black-skinned peoples came with relative rapidity. While the virtual monopoly held by Venetian ships in England's foreign trade prior to the sixteenth century meant that people much darker than Englishmen were not entirely unfamiliar, really black men were virtually unknown except as vaguely referred to in the hazy literature about the sub-Sahara which had filtered down from antiquity. Native West Africans probably first appeared in London in 1554; in that year five "Negroes," as the legitimate trader William Towrson reported, were taken to England, "kept till they could speake the language," and then brought back again "to be a helpe to Englishmen" who were engaged in trade with Negroes on the coast. Hakluyt's later discussion of these Negroes, who he said "could wel agree with our meates and drinkes" though "the colde and moyst aire doth somewhat offend them," suggests that these "blacke Moores" were a novelty to Englishmen.⁷ In this respect the English experience was markedly different from that of the Spanish and Portuguese who for centuries had been in close contact with North Africa and had actually been invaded and subjected by people both darker and more highly civilized than themselves. The impact of the Negro's color was the more powerful upon Englishmen, moreover, because England's principal contact with Africans came in West Africa and the Congo where men were not merely dark but almost literally black: one of the fairest-skinned nations suddenly came face to face with one of the darkest peoples on earth.

Viewed from one standpoint, Englishmen were merely participating in Europe's discovery that the strange men who stood revealed by European expansion overseas came in an astounding variety of

7. Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, VI, 176, 200, 217-18. Just how little Europeans knew about Africa prior to the Portuguese explorations is evident in T. Simar, "La géographie de l'Afrique central dans l'antiquité et au moyen âge," *La Revue Congolaise*, 3 (1912), 1-23, 81-102, 145-69, 225-52, 288-310, 440-41.

colors. A Spanish chronicle translated into English in 1555 was filled with wonder at this diversity: "One of the marveyulous thynges that god useth in the composition of man, is coloure: whiche doubtlesse can not bee consydered withowte great admiration in beholding one to be white and an other blacke, beinge coloures utterlye contrary. Sum lykewyse to be yelowē whiche is betwene blacke and white: and other of other colours as it were of dyvers liveres."⁸ As this passage suggests, the juxtaposition of black and white was the most striking marvel of all. And for Englishmen this juxtaposition was more than a curiosity.

In England perhaps more than in southern Europe, the concept of blackness was loaded with intense meaning. Long before they found that some men were black, Englishmen found in the idea of blackness a way of expressing some of their most ingrained values. No other color except white conveyed so much emotional impact. As described by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the meaning of *black* before the sixteenth century included, "Deeply stained with dirt; soiled, dirty, foul. . . . Having dark or deadly purposes, malignant; pertaining to or involving death, deadly; baneful, disastrous, sinister. . . . Foul, iniquitous, atrocious, horrible, wicked. . . . Indicating disgrace, censure, liability to punishment, etc." Black was an emotionally partisan color, the handmaid and symbol of baseness and evil, a sign of danger and repulsion.

Embedded in the concept of blackness was its direct opposite—whiteness. No other colors so clearly implied opposition, "beinge coloures utterlye contrary"; no others were so frequently used to denote polarization:

Everye white will have its blacke,
And everye sweete its sowre.⁹

White and black connoted purity and filthiness, virginity and sin, virtue and baseness, beauty and ugliness, beneficence and evil, God and the devil.¹⁰

8. Francisco López de Gómara, in Peter Martyr (D'Anghera), *The Decades of the Newe Worlde . . .*, trans. Richard Eden (London, 1555), in Edward Arber, ed., *The First Three English Books on America . . .* (Birmingham, Eng., 1885), 338.

9. Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry . . .*, ed. Robert A. Willmott (London, 1857), 27 (Sir Cauline, pt. 2, stanza 1).

10. Numerous examples in Middle English, Shakespeare, the Bible, and Milton are given by P. J. Heather, "Colour Symbolism," *Folk Lore*, 59 (1948), 169-70, 175-78, 182-83; 60 (1949), 208-16, 266-76. See also Harold R. Isaacs, "Blackness and Whiteness," *Encounter*, 21 (1963), 8-21; Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, *Shake-*

Whiteness, moreover, carried a special significance for Elizabethan Englishmen: it was, particularly when complemented by red, the color of perfect human beauty, especially *female* beauty. This ideal was already centuries old in Elizabeth's time,¹¹ and their fair Queen was its very embodiment: her cheeks were "roses in a bed of lillies." (Elizabeth was naturally pale but like many ladies then and since she freshened her "lillies" at the cosmetic table.)¹² An adoring nation knew precisely what a beautiful Queen looked like.

Her cheeke, her chinne, her neck, her nose,
This was a lillye, that was a rose;
Her hande so white as whales bone,
Her finger tipt with Cassidone;
Her bosome, sleeke as Paris plaster,
Held upp twoo bowles of Alabaster.¹³

Shakespeare himself found the lily and the rose a compelling natural coalition.

'Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white
Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on.¹⁴

By contrast, the Negro was ugly, by reason of his color and also his "horrid Curles" and "disfigured" lips and nose.¹⁵ As Shakespeare wrote apologetically of his black mistress,

speare's Imagery and What It Tells Us (Boston, 1958), 64, 66-69, 158; Arrah B. Everts, "Color Symbolism," *Psychoanalytic Review*, 6 (1919), 129-34; Don Cameron Allen, "Symbolic Color in the Literature of the English Renaissance," *Philological Quarterly*, 15 (1936), 81-92; and for a different perspective, Francis B. Gummere, "On the Symbolic Use of the Colors Black and White in Germanic Tradition," *Haverford College Studies*, 1 (1889), 112-62.

11. Walter Clyde Curry, *The Middle English Ideal of Personal Beauty; As Found in the Metrical Romances, Chronicles, and Legends of the XIII, XIV, and XV Centuries* (Baltimore, 1916), 3, 80-98.

12. Elkin Calhoun Wilson, *England's Eliza* (Cambridge, Mass., 1939), 337; Charles Carroll Camden, *The Elizabethan Woman* (Houston, N. Y., and London, 1952), chap. 7; Cawley, *Voyagers and Elizabethan Drama*, 85; Elizabeth Jenkins, *Elizabeth the Great* (London, 1958), 62, 100, 159, 296; Gamaliel Bradford, *Elizabethan Women*, ed. Harold O. White (Boston, 1936), 82, 212; Violet A. Wilson, *Queen Elizabeth's Maids of Honour and Ladies of the Privy Chamber* (N. Y., n.d.), 4-5. Hugh Plat, *Delightes for Ladies, Written Originally by Sir Hugh Plat, First Printed in 1602, London, England*, ed. Violet and Hal W. Trovillion (Herrin, Ill., 1939), 87-94, 99, 102-3, contains advice on cosmetics.

13. [George Puttenham?], *Partheniades* (1579), quoted in Wilson, *England's Eliza*, 242.

14. *Twelfth Night*, I, v, 259-60, W. J. Craig, ed., *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (London, N. Y., Toronto, 1943). For other expressions of this ideal, *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, I, i, 128-29; III, i, 98-99; III, ii, 137-44.

15. *Love in Its Ecstasy*, quoted in Cawley, *Voyagers and Elizabethan Drama*, 86n; "A Letter written from Goa . . . by one Thomas Stevens . . . 1579,"

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks.¹⁶

Some Elizabethans found blackness an ugly mask, superficial but always demanding attention.

Is *Byrrha* browne? Who doth the question aske?
Her face is pure as Ebonie jeat blacke,
It's hard to know her face from her faire maske,
Beautie in her seemes beautie still to lacke.
Nay, she's snow-white, but for that russet skin,
Which like a vaile doth keep her whitenes in.¹⁷

A century later blackness still required apology and mitigation: one of the earliest attempts to delineate the West African Negro as a heroic character, Aphra Behn's popular story *Oroonoko* (1688), presented Negroes as capable of blushing and turning pale.¹⁸ It was important, if incalculably so, that English discovery of black Africans came at a time when the accepted standard of ideal beauty was a fair complexion of rose and white. Negroes not only failed to fit this ideal but seemed the very picture of perverse negation.¹⁹

From the first, however, many English observers displayed a certain sophistication about the Negro's color. Despite an ethnocentric tendency to find blackness repulsive, many writers were fully aware that Negroes themselves might have different tastes. As early as 1621 one writer told of the "Jetty coloured" Negroes, "Who in their

Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, VI, 384. Curry, *Middle English Ideal of Personal Beauty*, 64-66, 113-14, indirectly makes abundantly clear how very far Negro women were from matching prevalent English ideals for beautiful noses, lips, and breasts.

16. Sonnet CXXX; see also nos. CXXVII, CXXXI, CXXXII. Shakespeare's "Dark Lady" is discussed by George B. Harrison, *Shakespeare under Elizabeth* (N. Y., 1933), 64-67, 310.

17. Harrison, *Shakespeare*, 310-11, quoting Weever, *Epigrams* (1599), Third Week, Epig. 12, *In Byrrham*.

18. Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko; Or, the Royal Slave*, Montague Summers, ed., *The Works of Aphra Behn*, V (London, 1915), 145.

19. In the Middle Ages a man's "complexion" was conceived as revealing his temperament because it showed his particular blend of humors, each of which was associated with certain colors: Lynn Thorndike, "De Complexionibus," *Isis*, 49 (1958), 398-408. Yet Englishmen seem not to have made efforts to link the Negro's skin color specifically to his bile or dominant humor and hence to his temperament.

native beauty most delight,/And in contempt doe paint the Divell white"; this assertion became almost a commonplace and even turned up a hundred and fifty years later in Newport, Rhode Island.²⁰ Many accounts of Africa reported explicitly that the Negro's preference in colors was inverse to the European's.²¹ Even the Negro's features were conceded to be appealing to Negroes. By the late seventeenth century, in a changing social atmosphere, some observers decided that the Negro's jet blackness was more handsome than the lighter tawny hues; this budding appreciativeness was usually coupled, though, with expressions of distaste for "Large Breasts, thick Lips, and broad Nostrils" which many Negroes "recon'd the Beauties of the Country."²² As one traveler admiringly described an African queen, "She was indifferently tall and well shap'd, of a perfect black; had not big Lips nor was she flat Nos'd as most of the Natives are, but well featur'd and very comely."²³ By

20. P[eter] H[eylyn], *Microcosmus, or a Little Description of the Great World. A Treatise Historical, Geographical, Politicall, Theologicall* (Oxford, 1621), 379; Peter Heylyn, ΜΙΚΡΟΚΟΣΜΟΣ. *A Little Description of the Great World*, 3d ed. (Oxford, 1627), 735; *The Golden Coast, or a Description of Guinney . . . Together with a Relation of Such Persons, As Got Wonderful Estates by Their Trade Thither* (London, 1665), 3; Thomas Phillips, *A Journal of a Voyage Made in the Hannibal of London, Ann. 1693, 1694, from England to Cape Monseradoe, in Africa; and Thence Along the Coast of Guinney to Whidaw, the Island of St. Thomas, and So Forward to Barbadoes. With a Cursory Account of the Country, the People, Their Manners, Forts, Trade, etc.*, in John and Awsham Churchill, comps., *A Collection of Voyages and Travels, Some Now First Printed from Original Manuscripts. Others Translated Out of Foreign Languages, and Now First Published in English . . .*, 6 vols. (London, 1704-32), VI, 219; Thomas Browne, "Of the Blackness of Negroes," Charles Sayle, ed., *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, 3 vols. (London, 1904-07), II, 383-84; *Newport [R. I.] Mercury*, Jan. 11, 1768. See Karl Pearson, E. Nettleship, and C. H. Usher, *A Monograph on Albinism in Man* (Department of Applied Mathematics [or Statistics], University College, University of London, *Drapers' Company Research Memoirs*, Biometric Ser., 6, 8, 9 [6 vols.] [London, 1911-13]), I, 48.

21. Peter Martyr (D'Anghera), *De Orbe Novo: The Eight Decades of Peter Martyr D'Anghera*, trans. Francis A. MacNutt, 2 vols. (N. Y. and London, 1912), II, 39; Morgan Godwyn, *The Negro's and Indians Advocate . . .* (London, 1680), 21; *The Works of Michael Drayton, Esq.*, 4 vols. (London, 1753), III, 1177; W. Gifford, ed., *The Works of Ben Jonson*, 9 vols. (London, 1816), VII, 11; Cawley, *Voyagers and Elizabethan Drama*, 32n. Cf. Katherine George, "The Civilized West Looks at Primitive Africa; 1400-1800. A Study in Ethnocentrism," *Isis*, 49 (1958), 62-72.

22. Francis Moore, *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa: Containing a Description of the Several Nations for the Space of Six Hundred Miles up the River Gambia . . .* (London, 1738), 131.

23. Nathaniel Uring, *A History of the Voyages and Travels of Capt. Nathaniel Uring . . .* (London, 1726), 40-41. Also Behn, *Oroonoko*, 136; John Barbot, *A Description of the Coasts of North and South-Guinea; and of Ethiopia Inferior, Vulgarly Angola . . .*, in Churchill, comps., *Voyages*, V, 100; William Snelgrave, *A New Account of Some Parts of Guinea, and the Slave-Trade . . .* (London, 1734), 40-41; Moore, *Travels into the Inland Parts*, 29-30, 214.

this time, the development of the slave trade to America was beginning to transform the Negro's color from a marvel into an issue. In what was surely a remarkable complaint for the master of a slaving vessel, Captain Thomas Phillips wrote in 1694 that he could not "imagine why they should be despis'd for their colour, being what they cannot help, and the effect of the climate it has pleas'd God to appoint them. I can't think there is any intrinsick value in one colour more than another, nor that white is better than black, only we think it so because we are so, and are prone to judge favourably in our own case, as well as the blacks, who in odium of the colour, say, the devil is white, and so paint him."²⁴ During the eighteenth century the Negro's color was to come into service as an argument for "diversitarian" theories of beauty;²⁵ Europe's discovery of "blacks" and "tawnies" overseas helped nurture a novel relativism. More important so far as the Negro was concerned, his color was to remain for centuries what it had been from the first, a standing problem for natural philosophers.

2. THE CAUSES OF COMPLEXION

Black human beings were not only startling but extremely puzzling. The complexion of Negroes posed problems about its nature, especially its permanence and utility, its cause and origin, and its significance. Although these were rather separate questions, there was a pronounced tendency among Englishmen and other Europeans to formulate the problem in terms of causation alone, for if that nut could be cracked the other answers would be readily forthcoming; if the cause of human blackness could be explained, then its nature and significance would follow.

Not that the problem was completely novel. The ancient Greeks had touched upon it without ever really coming to grips with it. The story of Phaëton's driving the chariot sun wildly through the heavens apparently served as an explanation for the Ethiopian's blackness even before written records, and traces of this ancient fable were still drifting about during the seventeenth century.

The Æthiopians then were white and fayre,
Though by the worlds combustion since made black
When wanton Phaeton overthrew the Sun.²⁶

24. Phillips, *Journal*, in Churchill, comps., *Voyages*, VI, 219.

25. Sypher, *Guinea's Captive Kings*, 51.

26. R. Warwick Bond, ed., *The Poetical Works of William Basse (1602-1653)* (London, 1893), 279; Conway Zirkle, "The Early History of the Idea of the

Less fancifully, Ptolemy had made the important suggestion that the Negro's blackness and woolly hair were caused by exposure to the hot sun and had pointed out that people in northern climates were white and those in temperate areas an intermediate color.²⁷ Aristotle, Antigonus, Pliny, and Plutarch, an impressive battery of authorities, had passed along the familiar story of a black baby born into a white family (telltale trace of some Ethiopian ancestor), but this was scarcely much help as to original cause. The idea that black babies might result from maternal impressions during conception or pregnancy found credence during the Middle Ages and took centuries to die out, if indeed it ever has entirely.²⁸ Before the fifteenth century, though, the question of the Negro's color can hardly be said to have drawn the attention of Englishmen or indeed of Europeans generally.

The opening of West Africa and the development of Negro slavery, which for the first time brought Englishmen frequently into firsthand contact with really black Negroes, made the question far more urgent and provided an irresistible playground for awakening scientific curiosity. The range of possible answers was rigidly restricted, however, by the virtually universal assumption, dictated by church and Scripture, that all mankind stemmed from a single source. Giordano Bruno's statement in 1591 that "no sound thinking person will refer the Ethiopians to the same protoplast as the Jewish one" was unorthodox at best. Indeed it is impossible fully to understand the various efforts at explaining the Negro's complexion without bearing in mind the strength of the tradition which in 1614 made the chronicler, the Reverend Samuel Purchas, proclaim vehemently: "the tawney Moore, blacke Negro, duskie Libyan, ash-coloured Indian, olive-coloured American, should with the whiter European become *one sheep-fold*, under *one great Sheeheard*, till *this mortalitie being swallowed up of Life*, wee may all *be one*, as *he and the father are one* . . . without any more distinction of Colour,

Inheritance of Acquired Characters and of Pangenesis," American Philosophical Society, *Transactions*, New Ser., 35 (1945-46), Pt. ii, 145. The original story of Phaëton is in Thomas Bulfinch, *Bulfinch's Mythology* (N. Y.: Modern Library, n.d.), 36-42; Edith Hamilton, *Mythology* (N. Y.: Mentor, 1953), 131-34.

27. [Claudius] Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, trans. and ed. F. E. Robbins (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1940), 121-25, 439.

28. Conway Zirkle, "The Knowledge of Heredity before 1900," L. C. Dunn, ed., *Genetics in the 20th Century: Essays on the Progress of Genetics during Its First 50 Years* (N. Y., 1951), 42; Thornäike, "De Complexionibus," *Isis*, 49 (1958), 400; Don Cameron Allen, *The Legend of Noah: Renaissance Rationalism in Art, Science, and Letters* (Urbana, 1949), 119. For an interesting modification, Browne, "Of the Blackness of Negroes," Sayle, ed., *Works of Browne*, II, 375-76.

Nation, Language, Sexe, Condition, all may bee *One* in him that is *One*, and *onely blessed for ever*."²⁹

In general, the most satisfactory answer to the problem was some sort of reference to the action of the sun, whether the sun was assumed to have scorched the skin, drawn the bile, or blackened the blood. People living on the Line had obviously been getting too much of it; after all, even Englishmen were darkened by a little exposure. How much more, then, with the Negroes who were "so scorched and vexed with the heat of the sunne, that in many places they curse it when it riseth."³⁰ The sun's heat was itself sometimes described as a curse—a not unnatural reaction on the part of those Englishmen who visited the West African coast where the weather was "of such putrifying qualitie, that it rotted the coates of their backs."³¹ This association of the Negro's color with the sun became a commonplace in Elizabethan literature; as the Prince of Morocco apologized, "Mislike me not for my complexion,/ The shadow'd livery of the burnish'd sun,/ To whom I am a neighbour and near bred."³²

Unfortunately this theory ran headlong into a stubborn fact of nature which simply could not be overridden: if the equatorial inhabitants of Africa were blackened by the sun, why not the people living on the same line in America? Logic required them to be the same color. As Ptolemy's formidably authoritative *Geographia* stated this logic, "Reason herself asserts that all animals, and all plants likewise, have a similarity under the same kind of climate or under similar weather conditions, that is, when under the same parallels, or when situated at the same distance from either pole."³³

29. T[homas] Bendyshe, "The History of Anthropology," *Anthropological Society of London, Memoirs*, 1 (1863-64), 355; Samuel Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgrimage. Or Relations of the World and the Religions Observed in All Ages and Places Discovered, from the Creation unto This Present*, 2d ed. (London, 1614), 656.

30. "Second Voyage to Guinea," Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, VI, 167; Cawley, *Voyagers and Elizabethan Drama*, 88-89, 159-60. A remarkably early suggestion that sun-blackened skin afforded protection against the sun "as if naturaliz'd" was made by John Ogilby, *Africa: Being an Accurate Description of the Regions of Ægypt, Barbary, Lybia, and Billedulgerid, the Land of Negroes, Guinee, Æthiopia, and the Abyssines . . . Collected and Translated from Most Authentick Authors, and Augmented with Later Observations* (London, 1670), 445.

31. "The First Voyage to Guinea and Benin" (1553), Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, VI, 148.

32. *The Merchant of Venice*, II, i, 1-3; also Ben Jonson, "Masque of Blackness," Gifford, ed., *Works of Jonson*, VII, 12.

33. Edward L. Stevenson, trans. and ed., *Geography of Claudius Ptolemy* (N. Y., 1932), 31-32.

Yet by the middle of the sixteenth century it was becoming perfectly apparent that the Indians living in the hottest regions of the New World could by no stretch of the imagination be described as black. They were "olive" or "tawny," and moreover they had long hair rather than the curious wool of Negroes; clearly they were a different sort of men. Peter Martyr, the official Spanish court chronicler whose accounts Richard Eden translated in 1555, made the point as early as 1516, a trifle over-enthusiastically to be sure: "in all that navigation, he [Columbus] never wente oute of the paralelles of Ethiopie. . . . [Yet] the Ethiopians are all blacke, havinge theyr heare curld more lyke wulle then heare. But these people [in America] . . . are whyte, with longe heare, and of yellowe colour." Fortunately it did not take long to calm down this entrancing, overly Nordic presentation of the Indian. Toward the end of the century Richard Hakluyt picked up Eden's own account of a voyage of 1554 which had carefully noted that the Indians were "neither blacke, nor with curld and short wooll on their heads, as they of Africke have, but of the colour of an Olive, with long and blacke heare on their heads."³⁴ Clearly the method of accounting for human complexion by latitude just did not work. The worst of it was that the formula did not seem altogether wrong, since it was apparent that in general men in hot climates tended to be darker than in cold ones. The tenacity of the old logic was manifest in many writers who clung to the latitudinal explanation and maintained stoutly that for one or many reasons the actual climate on the ground was more temperate in America than in Guinea and men accordingly less dark.³⁵

Another difficulty with the climatic explanation of skin color arose as lengthening experience augmented knowledge about Negroes. If the heat of the sun caused the Negro's blackness, then his removal to cold northerly countries ought to result in his losing it; even if he did not himself surrender his peculiar color, surely his descendants must. By mid-seventeenth century it was becoming increasingly apparent that this expectation was ill founded: Negroes in Europe

34. Martyr, *Decades of Newe Worlde*, trans. Eden, 88, 387-88; "Second Voyage to Guinea," Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, VI, 176.

35. Both Martyr and Hakluyt did so in the preceding passages; James Spedding, Robert L. Ellis, Douglas D. Heath, eds., *The Works of Francis Bacon . . .*, 14 vols. (London, 1857-74), II, 473; John Selden's notes in *Works of Michael Drayton*, II, 675; John Ovington, *A Voyage to Suratt, in the Year 1869*, ed. H. G. Rawlinson (London, 1929), 285. For a more general statement of the influence of climate on complexion, Matthew Hale, *The Primitive Origination of Mankind, Considered and Examined According to the Light of Nature* (London, 1677), 200-201.

and northern America were simply not whitening up very noticeably. Still, the evidence on this matter was by no means entirely definite, and some observers felt that it was not yet all in hand. Though they conceded that lightening of black skin by mixture with Europeans should be ruled out of the experiment, these writers thought they detected a perceptible whitening of the unmixed African residing in colder climates, and they bolstered their case by emphasizing how long it was going to take to whiten up the African completely.³⁶

From the beginning, however, many Englishmen were certain that the Negro's blackness was permanent and innate and that no amount of cold was going to alter it. There was good authority in Jeremiah 13:23; "Can the Ethiopian change his skin/ or the leopard his spots?" Elizabethan dramatists used the stock expression "to wash an Ethiop white" as indicating sheer impossibility.³⁷ In 1578 a voyager and speculative geographer, George Best, announced that "I my self have seene an Ethiopian as blacke as cole brought into England, who taking a faire English woman to wife, begat a sonne in all respects as blacke as the father was . . . whereby it seemeth this blacknes proceedeth rather of some natural infection of that man, which was so strong, that neither the nature of the Clime, neither the good complexion of the mother concurring, coulde any thing alter, and therefore, wee cannot impute it to the nature of the Clime." The blackness of the Negroes, Best decided, "proceedeth of some naturall infection of the first inhabitants of that country, and so all the whole progenie of them descended, are still polluted with the same blot of infection."³⁸ The well-known physician Sir Thomas Browne put the matter this way in 1646:

If the fervour of the Sun, or intemperate heat of clime did solely occasion this complexion, surely a migration or change thereof might cause a sensible, if not a total mutation; which notwithstanding[,] experience will not admit. For *Negroes* transplanted, although into cold and phlegmatick habitations, continue their hue both in themselves, and also their generations; except they mix with different complexions; whereby notwithstanding there only succeeds a remission of their tinctures; there remaining

36. A widely popular work, [Thomas Burnet], *The Theory of the Earth . . . the First Two Books . . .*, 2d ed. (London, 1691), 191, bk. II, chap. 2, announced that "after some generations they become altogether like the people of the Country where they are." Ovington, *Voyage to Suratt*, ed. Rawlinson, 285, was at pains to deny this "current Opinion."

37. Cawley, *Voyagers and Elizabethan Drama*, 87-88.

38. "Experiences and reasons of the Sphere, to proove all partes of the worlde habitable, and thereby to confute the position of the five Zones," Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, VII, 262-63.

unto many descents a strong shadow of their Originals; and if they preserve their copulations entire, they still maintain their complexions. . . . And so likewise fair or white people translated in hotter Countries receive not impressions amounting to this complexion.

Browne was certain that blackness was permanent and that it was transmitted in the sperm ("even their abortions are also dusky"), but he was far from sure why this should have been so. One possible explanation, he suggested in a display of intellectual daring, was that Negroes had always been black, a possibility which, Browne noted, raised the troublesome problem of how animals got to America and many other questions on the origin of things. This was as far as he dared go, but he had firmly set forth a case for the innateness of blackness with a quasi-genetic explanation which confirmed the permanence of the color without, unfortunately, doing anything to explain its original cause.³⁹

Similar views were forwarded by a number of writers during the next hundred years. An essayist in 1695 declared that "for time out of mind" there had been black men with woolly hair and that it was "plain, their colour and wool are innate, or seminal from their first beginning"—precisely when that "beginning" had occurred the writer evidently did not care to say. Some points, however, seemed to him clear: "This colour (which appears to be as ingenite, and as original, as that in whites) could not proceed from any accident; because, when animals are accidentally black, they do not procreate constantly black ones, (as the negroes do)." "A negroe will always be a negroe," he concluded firmly, "carry him to Greenland, give him chalk, feed and manage him never so many ways."⁴⁰ By the first half of the eighteenth century the majority of writers were certain blackness in man was permanent. As an account published in the Churchills' *Voyages* in 1732 declared briskly, "Some suppose the reason [why Negroes are black] to be, because those people live betwixt the *tropicks* in the *torrid zones*, where the perpetual scorching heat of the sun blackens them, as it does the earth in some parts, which makes it look as if burnt by fire. But this vanishes presently, if we consider that *Europeans* living within the *tropicks*, tho' ever so long, will never turn black or sooty; and that *Blacks* living many years in *Europe*, will always breed black or sooty children. Besides

39. Browne, "Of the Blackness of Negroes," Sayle, ed., *Works of Browne*, II, 368-80.

40. *Two Essays, Sent in a Letter from Oxford, to a Nobleman in London. The First Concerning Some Errors About the Creation, General Flood, and the Peopling of the World . . .* By L. P. Master of Arts. 1695, in Walter Scott, ed., *Somers Tracts*, XII, 2d ed. (London, 1814), 27-28.

the *Americans* and *East-Indians*, tho' inhabiting the same parallel zones, are not black."⁴¹ Even as late as 1735 few men were willing to press the matter of causation so far as John Atkins, a naval surgeon, who declared bluntly that "tho' it be a little Heterodox, I am persuaded the black and white Race have, *ab origine*, sprung from different-coloured first Parents."⁴² To call this position "a little Heterodox" was like calling water a little wet.

The logical complement to the question of the Negro's change in color was whether the European by removing to a torrid climate would become darker or even black. Something of a consensus on this point emerged in the seventeenth century, since understandably Englishmen did not relish the prospect of turning into Negroes by prolonged residence in their expanding tropical empire. By the eighteenth century it was generally understood that European complexions would be darkened by tropical sun and weather, but that a return to cooler climates would restore the original color; even European children born in hot climates would be thoroughly white at first.⁴³

There was an alternative to these naturalistic explanations of the Negro's blackness. Some writers felt that God's curse on Ham (Cham), or upon his son Canaan, and all their descendants was entirely sufficient to account for the color of Negroes. This could be an appealing explanation, especially for men like George Best who wished to stress the "natural infection" of blackness and for those who hoped to incorporate the Negro's complexion securely within the accepted history of mankind. The original story in Genesis 9 and 10 was that after the Flood, Ham had looked upon his father's nakedness as Noah lay drunk in his tent, but the other two sons, Shem and Japheth, had covered their father without looking upon him; when Noah awoke he cursed Canaan, son of Ham, saying that he would be a "servant of servants" unto his brothers. Given this

41. Barbot, *Description of the Coasts*, Churchill, comps., *Voyages*, V, 8.

42. John Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brasil, and the West-Indies; In His Majesty's Ships, the Swallow and Weymouth . . .* (London, 1735), 39.

43. For representative opinions, *The Works of the Right Reverend Joseph Hall, D. D., Bishop of Exeter and Afterwards of Norwich*, 10 vols. (Oxford, 1863), I, 126; [John Watts], *A True Relation of the Inhuman and Unparalleled Actions, and Barbarous Murders, of Negroes or Moors: Committed on Three Englishmen in Old Calabar in Guiney . . .* [1672], in Thomas Osborne, *A Collection of Voyages and Travels . . .*, 2 vols. (London, 1745), II, 515; Godwyn, *Negro's and Indians Advocate*, 22; *Two Essays*, Scott, ed., *Somers Tracts*, XII, 28; George Roberts, *The Four Years Voyages of Capt. George Roberts; Being a Series of Uncommon Events, Which Befell Him in a Voyage to the Islands of the Canaries, Cape de Verde, and Barbadoes, from Whence He Was Bound to the Coast of Guiney . . .* (London, 1726), 180-81.

text, the question becomes why a tale which logically implied slavery but absolutely nothing about skin color should have become an autonomous and popular explanation of the Negro's blackness. Probably, over the very long run, this development was owing partly to the ancient association of heat with sensuality and with the fact that some Ethiopians had been enslaved by Europeans since ancient times.

What is more arresting, there did exist a specific textual basis for utilizing the curse as an explanation for blackness—but it was a specifically Jewish rather than a Christian one. The writings of the great church fathers such as St. Jerome and St. Augustine referred to the curse in connection with slavery but not with Negroes. They casually accepted the assumption that Africans were descended from one or several of Ham's four sons, an assumption which became universal in Christendom despite the obscurity of its origins. They were probably aware, moreover, that the term *Ham* originally connoted both "dark" and "hot," yet they failed to seize this obvious opportunity to help explain the Negro's complexion. In contrast the approximately contemporaneous Talmudic and Midrashic sources contained such suggestions as that "Ham was smitten in his skin," that Noah told Ham "your seed will be ugly and dark-skinned," and that Ham was father "of Canaan who brought curses into the world, of Canaan who was cursed, of Canaan who darkened the faces of mankind," of Canaan "the notorious world-darkener."

While it probably is not possible to trace a direct line of influence, it seems very likely that these observations affected some Christian writers during the late Medieval and Renaissance years of reviving Christian interest in Jewish writings. It is suggestive that the first Christian utilizations of this theme came during the sixteenth century—the first great century of overseas exploration. As should become clear in this chapter, there was reason for restless Englishmen to lay hold of a hand-me-down curse which had been expounded originally by a people who had themselves restlessly sought a land of freedom.⁴⁴

When the story of Ham's curse did become relatively common in the seventeenth century it was utilized almost entirely as an explanation of color rather than as justification for Negro slavery and as

44. The quotations are from I. Epstein *et al.*, trans., *The Babylonian Talmud*, 35 vols. (London, 1935-60), *Sanhedrin*, II, 745; H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, trans., *Midrash Rabbah*, 10 vols. (London, 1939), I, 293; Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, trans., *The Zohar*, 5 vols. (London, 1931), I, 246-47.

such it was probably denied more often than affirmed.⁴⁵ Sir Thomas Browne, the first Englishman to discuss the Negro's color in great detail, ruled out Ham's curse as well as simple climatic causation after explaining that these two explanations were the only ones "generally received." Yet Peter Heylyn was letting Ham's curse into court just when Browne was tossing it out: in three successive editions of his grandiose *Microcosmus* he ignored the story in 1621, called a slightly altered version of it a "foolish tale" in 1627, and repeated his denial in 1666 but at the last moment conceded that "possibly enough the Curse of God on *Cham* and on his posterity (though for some cause unknown to us) hath an influence on it."⁴⁶

The extraordinary persistence of this idea in the face of centuries of incessant refutation was probably sustained by a feeling that blackness could scarcely be anything *but* a curse and by the common need to confirm the facts of nature by specific reference to Scripture. In contrast to the climatic theory, God's curse provided a satisfying purposiveness which the sun's scorching heat could not match until the eighteenth century. The difficulty with the story of Ham's indiscretion was that extraordinarily strenuous exegesis was required in order to bring it to bear on the Negro's black skin. Faced with difficulties in both the climatic and Scriptural explanation, some seekers after truth threw up their hands in great humility and accounted blackness in the African another manifestation of God's omnipotent providence. This was Peter Heylyn's solution (at least in 1627).

45. For affirmations, Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade: Or, a Discovery of the River Gambia, and the Golden Trade of the Aethiopians* (1623), ed. Charles G. Kingsley (Teignmouth, Devonshire, 1904), 65-66; Thomas Herbert, *Some Years Travels into Divers Parts of Africa, and Asia the Great, Describing More Particularly the Empires of Persia and Industan . . .* [4th ed.] (London, 1677), 16. The only monograph on the subject mistakenly attributes the idea to Lutherans particularly and offers 1677 as the date of the first explicit statement; Albert Perbal, "La Race Nègre et la Malédiction de Cham," *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, 10 (1940), 157-59. It was denied in 1583, perhaps as early as 1566, by John Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, trans. Beatrice Reynolds (N. Y., 1945), 87. Allen, *Legend of Noah*, 119, shows that the idea was not unknown in the 16th century and suggests that it may have existed prior to the Renaissance. An important 14th-century English legal treatise referred to the curse on Ham in connection with slavery but not the Negro; Andrew Horne, *The Mirror of Justices . . .*, ed. William C. Robinson (Washington, D. C., 1903), 123-24.

46. Browne, "Of the Blackness of Negroes," Sayle, ed., *Works of Browne*, II, 368-85; H[eylyn], *Microcosmus*, 403; Heylyn, ΜΙΚΡΟΚΟΣΜΟΣ (1627), 771; Peter Heylyn, *Cosmographie, in Four Books. Containing the Chorographie and Historie of the Whole World . . .*, 3d ed. (London, 1666), 1016.

The inhabitants (though a great part of this country [America] lieth in the same parallell with *Ethiopia*, *Lybia*, and *Numidia*) are of a reasonable faire complexion, and very little (if at all) inclining to blacknesse. So that the extraordinary and continuall vicinity of the Sunne, is not (as some imagine) the efficient cause of blacknesse: though it may much further such a colour: as wee see in our country lasses, whose faces are alwaies exposed to winde and weather. Others, more wise in their owne conceite, though this conceit know no confederate; plainly conclude the generative seed of the *Africans* to be blacke, but of the *Americans* to be white: a foolish supposition, and convinced not only out of experience, but naturall Philosophie. As for that foolish tale of *Cham's* knowing his wife in the Arke. whereupon by divine curse his son *Chus* with all his posterity, (which they say are *Africans*) were all blacke: it is so vaine, that I will not endeavour to retell it. So that we must wholly refer it to Gods peculiar will and ordinance.⁴⁷

Fair enough perhaps, but this was scarcely an explanation to stand the test of centuries; the cause of the Negro's color was to remain a confusing mystery. Even Sir Thomas Browne's admirably ingenious and manful efforts at resolution, which were far in advance of his contemporaries', faltered badly once he had finished explaining what was *not* the cause of the Negro's blackness.

In the long run, of course, the Negro's color attained greatest significance not as a scientific problem but as a social fact. Englishmen found blackness in human beings a peculiar and important point of difference. The Negro's color set him radically *apart* from Englishmen. It also served as a highly visible label identifying the natives of a distant continent which for ages Christians had known as a land of men radically defective in religion.

3. DEFECTIVE RELIGION

While distinctive appearance set Africans over into a novel category of men, their religious condition set them apart from Englishmen in a more familiar way. Englishmen and Christians everywhere were sufficiently acquainted with the concept of heathenism that they confronted its living representatives without puzzlement. Certainly the rather sudden discovery that the world was teeming with heathen people made for heightened vividness and urgency in a long-standing problem; but it was the fact that this problem was already well formulated long before contact with Africa which proved important in shaping English reaction to the Negro's defective religious condition.

47. Heylyn, ΜΙΚΡÓΚΟΣΜΟΣ (1627), 771.

In one sense heathenism was less a "problem" for Christians than an exercise in self-definition: the heathen condition defined by negation the proper Christian life. In another sense, the presence of heathenism in the world constituted an imperative to intensification of religious commitment. From its origin Christianity was a universalist, proselytizing religion, and the sacred and secular histories of Christianity made manifest the necessity of bringing non-Christians into the fold. For Englishmen, then, the heathenism of Negroes was at once a counter-image of their own religion and a summons to eradicate an important distinction between the two peoples.

The interaction of these two facets of the concept of heathenism made for a peculiar difficulty. On the one hand, to act upon the felt necessity of converting Negroes would have been to eradicate the point of distinction which Englishmen found most familiar and most readily comprehensible. Yet if they did not act upon this necessity, continued heathenism among Negroes would remain an unwelcome reminder to Englishmen that they were not meeting their obligations to their own faith—nor to the benighted Negroes. Englishmen resolved this implicit dilemma by doing nothing.

Considering the strength of the Christian tradition, it is almost startling that Englishmen failed to respond to the discovery of heathenism in Africa with at least the rudiments of a campaign for conversion. Although the impulse to spread Christianity seems to have been weaker in Englishmen than, say, in the Catholic Portuguese, it cannot be said that Englishmen were indifferent to the obligation imposed upon them by the overseas discoveries of the sixteenth century. While they were badly out of practice at the business of conversion (again in contrast to the Portuguese) and while they had never before been faced with the practical difficulties involved in Christianizing entire continents, they nonetheless were able to contemplate with equanimity and even eagerness the prospect of converting the heathen. Indeed they went so far as to conclude that converting the natives in America was sufficiently important to demand English settlement there. As it turned out, the well-publicized English program for converting Indians produced very meager results, but the avowed intentions certainly were genuine. It was in marked contrast, therefore, that Englishmen did not avow similiar intentions concerning Africans until the late eighteenth century. Fully as much as with skin color, though less consciously, Englishmen distinguished between the heathenisms of Indians and of Negroes.

The suggestive congruence of these twin distinctions between

Negroes and Indians is not easy to account for. On the basis of the travelers' reports there was no reason for Englishmen to suppose Indians inherently superior to Negroes as candidates for conversion. While in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Englishmen who had first-hand contact with Africans were not, unlike many of the Portuguese, engaged in missionary efforts, the same may be said of most English contact with Indians. On the other hand, America was not Africa. Englishmen contemplated settling in America, where voyagers had established the King's claim and where supposedly the climate was temperate; in contrast, Englishmen did not envision settlement in Africa, which had quickly gained notoriety as a graveyard for Europeans and where the Portuguese had been first on the scene. Certainly these very different circumstances meant that Englishmen confronted Negroes and Indians in radically different social contexts and that Englishmen would find it far easier to contemplate converting Indians than Negroes. Yet it remains difficult to see why Negroes were not included, at least as a secondary target, by extension from the program actually directed at the Indians. The fact that English contact with Africans so frequently occurred in a context of slave dealing does not entirely explain the omission of Negroes, since in that same context the Portuguese and Spanish did sometimes attempt to minister to the souls of Negroes (somewhat perfunctorily, to be sure) and since Englishmen in America enslaved Indians when good occasion arose. Given these circumstances, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the distinction which Englishmen made as to conversion was at least in some small measure modeled after the difference they saw in skin color.

Although Englishmen failed to incorporate Negroes into the proselytizing effort which was enjoined by the Christian heritage, that heritage did much to shape the English reaction to Negroes as a people. Paradoxically, Christianity worked to make Englishmen think of Negroes as being both very much like themselves and very different. The emphasis on similarity derived directly from the emphatic Christian doctrine which affirmed that mankind was one. The Old Testament, most notably the book of Genesis, seemed absolutely firm on this point: all men derived from the same act of creation and had at first shared a common experience. So too the New Testament declared all nations to be of one blood. The strength of this universalist strain in Christianity was evident in the assurances offered by a number of English travelers in Africa that they had discovered rudiments of the Word among the most barbarous heathens. In 1623 Richard Jobson exclaimed that "they have a

wonderous reference, to the leviticall law, as it is in our holy Bible related; the principalls whereof they are not ignorant in, for they do report concerning *Adam* and *Eve*, whom they call *Adama* and *Evahaha*, talking of *Noahs* flood, and of *Moses*, with many other things our sacred History makes mention of." Another commentator hinted at covert Calvinism in the jungle: "They keep their *Fetissoes* [Fetish] day, one day in seven, and that Tuesday (a Sabbath it seems is natural) more solemnly and strictly than the *Hollanders* do their Sunday."⁴⁸ To call the Sabbath "natural" among heathens was an invitation to the missionary to harvest the seed planted everywhere by God. Such a description also serves to demonstrate how powerfully the Christian tradition operated to make Englishmen and other Europeans consider the new peoples of the freshly opened world as being inherently similar to themselves.

At the same time, Christianity militated against the unity of man. Because Englishmen were Christians, heathenism in Negroes was a fundamental defect which set them distinctly apart. However much Englishmen disapproved of Popery and Mahometanism, they were accustomed to these perversions. Yet they were not accustomed to dealing face to face with people who appeared, so far as many travelers could tell, to have no religion at all.⁴⁹ Steeped in the legacy and trappings of their own religion, Englishmen were ill prepared to see any legitimacy in African religious practices. Judged by Christian cosmology, Negroes stood in a separate category of men.

Perhaps the ambivalence inherent in Christian assessment of heathenism played a part in muting the importance of the Negro's heathenism in the eyes of Englishmen. Probably the increasingly Protestant character of English religious belief also had the same effect, for the Portuguese and Spanish seem to have found the heathenism of Negroes and Indians a more salient and distinct quality than the English did; in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this differing reaction among Protestants and Catholics was to become still more obvious upon the slave plantations of the Americas. At any rate, it is clear that during the early period of contact with Africa heathenism was far from being *the* critical attribute which caused Englishmen to view Negroes as a separate kind of people.

Indeed the most important aspect of English reaction to Negro

48. Jobson, *Golden Trade*, ed. Kingsley, 78 (probably there was good basis for Jobson's contention since the Negroes he referred to were Muslims); *The Golden Coast*, 80.

49. For example, Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, VI. 144.

heathenism was that Englishmen evidently did not regard it as separable from the Negro's other attributes. Heathenism was treated not so much as a specifically religious defect but as one manifestation of a general refusal to measure up to proper standards, as a failure to be English or even civilized. There was every reason for Englishmen to fuse the various attributes they found in Africans. During the first century of English contact with Africa, Protestant Christianity was an important element in English patriotism; especially during the struggle against Spain the Elizabethan's special Christianity was interwoven into his conception of his own nationality, and he was therefore inclined to regard the Negroes' lack of true religion as part of theirs. Being a Christian was not merely a matter of subscribing to certain doctrines; it was a quality inherent in oneself and in one's society. It was interconnected with all the other attributes of normal and proper men: as one of the earliest English accounts distinguished Negroes from Englishmen, they were "a people of beastly living, without a God, lawe, religion, or common wealth"⁵⁰—which was to say that Negroes were not Englishmen. Far from isolating African heathenism as a separate characteristic, English travelers sometimes linked it explicitly with barbarity and blackness. They already had in hand a mediating term among these impinging concepts—the *devil*. As one observer declared, Negroes "in colour so in condition are little other than Devils incarnate," and, further, "the Devil . . . has infused prodigious Idolatry into their hearts, enough to relish his pallat and aggrandize their tortures when he gets power to fry their souls, as the raging Sun has already scorcht their cole-black carcasses."⁵¹ "Idolatry" was indeed a serious failing, but English travelers in West Africa tended to regard defect of true religion as an aspect of the Negro's "condition." In an important sense, then, heathenism was for Englishmen one inherent characteristic of savage men.

4. SAVAGE BEHAVIOR

The condition of savagery—the failure to be civilized—set Negroes apart from Englishmen in an ill-defined but crucial fashion. Africans were *different* from Englishmen in so many ways: in their clothing, huts, farming, warfare, language, government, morals, and (not least important) in their table manners. Englishmen were fully aware that Negroes living at different parts of the coast were not all alike; it was not merely different reactions

50. "Second Voyage to Guinea," *ibid.*, 167.

51. Herbert, *Some Years Travels*, 10, 7.

in the observers which led one to describe a town as "marveilous artificially builded with mudde walles . . . and kept very cleane as well in their streetes as in their houses" and another to relate how "they doe eate" each other "alive" in some places but dead in others "as we wolde befe or mutton."⁵² No matter how great the actual and observed differences among Negroes, though, none of these black men seemed to live like Englishmen.

To judge from the comments of voyagers, Englishmen had an unquenchable thirst for the details of savage life. Partly their curiosity was a matter of scientific interest in the "natural productions" of the newly opened world overseas. To the public at large, the details of savage behavior appealed to an interest which was not radically different from the scientist's; an appetite for the "wonderful" seems to have been built into Western culture. It is scarcely surprising that civilized Englishmen should have taken an interest in reports about cosmetic mutilation, polygamy, infanticide, ritual murder and the like—of course *English* men did not really *do* any of these things themselves. Finally, reports about savages began arriving at a time when Englishmen very much needed to be able to translate their apprehensive interest in an uncontrollable world out of medieval, religious terms. The discovery of savages overseas enabled them to make this translation easily, to move from miracles to verifiable monstrosities, from heaven to earth.

As with skin color, English reporting of African customs constituted an exercise in self-inspection by means of comparison. The necessity of continuously measuring African practices with an English yardstick of course tended to emphasize the differences between the two groups, but it also made for heightened sensitivity to instances of similarity. Thus the Englishman's ethnocentrism tended to distort his perception of African culture in two opposite directions. While it led him to emphasize differences and to condemn deviations from the English norm, it led him also to seek out similarities (where perhaps none existed) and to applaud every instance of conformity to the appropriate standard. Though African clothing and personal etiquette were regarded as absurd, equivalents to European practices were at times detected in other aspects

52. Both seem to be eyewitness reports. "Voyage of Thomas Candish," Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, XI, 293; anonymous author on Hawkins' third voyage quoted in James A. Williamson, *Sir John Hawkins: The Time and the Man* (Oxford, 1927), 509. There is an interesting description of (almost certainly) the now well-known symbiotic relationship between Negroes and Pygmies in *The Golden Coast*, 66-67, "I have not found so much faith, nor faithfulness, no not in Israel."

of African culture. Particularly, Englishmen were inclined to see the structures of African societies as analogous to their own, complete with kings, counselors, gentlemen, and the baser sort. Here especially they found Africans like themselves, partly because they knew no other way to describe a society and partly because there was actually good basis for such a view in the social organization of West African communities.⁵³

Most English commentators seem to have felt that Negroes would behave better under improved circumstances; a minority thought the Africans naturally wicked, but even these observers often used "natural" only to mean "ingrained." (English accounts of West Africa did not emphasize ingrained stupidity in the natives; defect of "Reason" was seen as a function of savagery.)⁵⁴ Until well into the eighteenth century there was no debate as to whether the Negro's non-physical characteristics were inborn and unalterable; such a question was never posed with anything like sufficient clarity for men to debate it. There was no precise meaning in such statements about the Africans as, "Another (as it were) innate quality they have [is] to Steal any thing they lay hands of, especially from Foreigners. . . this vicious humor [runs] through the whole race of Blacks," or in another comment, that "it would be very surprizing if upon a scrutiny into their Lives we should find any of them whose perverse Nature would not break out sometimes; for they indeed seem to be born and bred Villains: All sorts of Baseness having got such sure-footing in them, that 'tis impossible to lye concealed."⁵⁵ These two vague suggestions concerning innate qualities in the Negro were among the most precise in all the English accounts of West Africa. It was sufficient to depict and describe. There might be disagreement as to the exact measure of tenacity with which the African clung to his present savage character, but this problem would yield to time and accurate description.

Despite the fascination and self-instruction Englishmen derived from expatiating upon the savage behavior of Africans, they never

53. An early instance is in Clements R. Markham, ed., *The Hawkins' Voyages during the Reigns of Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth, and James I (Works Issued by the Hakluyt Soc., 1st Ser., 57 [1878])*, 19.

54. For example, H[eylyn], *Microcosmus*, 379. But compare a later and precursively environmentalist argument that culturally dictated lack of mental and moral exercise had literally weakened the African brain: John Atkins, *The Navy Surgeon . . . and Physical Observations on the Coast of Guiney*, 2d ed. (London, 1742), 366-67; also his *Voyage to Guinea*, 80-88.

55. Ogilby, *Africa*, 452; William Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea, Divided into the Gold, the Slave, and the Ivory Coasts . . .*, trans. from the Dutch (London, 1705), 117.

felt that savagery was as important a quality in Africans as it was in the American Indians. Two sets of circumstances made for this distinction in the minds of Englishmen. As was the case with heathenism, contrasting social contexts played an important role in shaping the English response to savagery in the two peoples. Inevitably, the savagery of the Indians assumed a special significance in the minds of those actively engaged in a program of bringing civilization into the American wilderness. The case with the African was different: the English errand into Africa was not a new or a perfect community but a business trip. No hope was entertained for civilizing the Negro's steaming continent, and Englishmen lacked compelling reason to develop a program for remodeling the African natives. The most compelling necessity was that of pressing forward the business of buying Negroes from other Negroes. It was not until the slave trade came to require justification, in the eighteenth century, that some Englishmen found special reason to lay emphasis on the Negro's savagery.

From the beginning, also, the importance of the Negro's savagery was muted by the Negro's color. Englishmen could go a long way toward expressing their sense of being different from Negroes merely by calling them black. By contrast, the aboriginals in America did not have the appearance of being radically distinct from Europeans except in religion and savage behavior. English voyagers placed much less emphasis upon the Indian's color than upon the Negro's, and they never permitted the Indian's physiognomy to distract their attention from what they regarded as his essential quality, his savagery. Even in the eighteenth century, when the savages of the world were being promoted to "nobility" by Europeans as an aid to self-scrutiny and reform at home, the Negro was not customarily thought of as embodying all the qualities of the noble savage. Certainly he never attained the status of the Indian's primitive nobility. It was not merely that Negroes had by then become pre-eminently the slaves of Europeans in the Americas. The Negro's appearance remained a barrier to acceptance as the noble type. In one of the earliest attempts to dramatize the nobility of the primitive man (1688), Aphra Behn described her hero Oroonoko in terms which made clear the conditions under which the Negro could be admitted as a candidate for admiration:

The most famous Statuary could not form the Figure of a Man more admirably turn'd from Head to Foot. His Face was not of that brown rusty Black which most of that Nation are, but a perfect Ebony, or polished Jet. His Eyes were the most awful that could be seen, and very piercing; the

White of 'em being like Snow, as were his Teeth. His nose was rising and *Roman*, instead of *African* and flat: His Mouth the finest shaped that could be seen; far from those great turn'd Lips, which are so natural to the rest of the Negroes. The whole Proportion and Air of his Face was so nobly and exactly form'd, that bating his Colour, there could be nothing in Nature more beautiful, agreeable and handsome.⁵⁶

As this description makes clear, the Negro might attain savage nobility only by approximating (as best he could) the appearance of a white man.

It would be a mistake, however, to slight the importance of the Negro's savagery, since it fascinated Englishmen from the very first. English observers in West Africa were sometimes so profoundly impressed by the Negro's deviant behavior that they resorted to a powerful metaphor with which to express their own sense of difference from him. They knew perfectly well that Negroes were men, yet they frequently described the Africans as "brutish" or "bestial" or "beastly." The hideous tortures, the cannibalism, the rapacious warfare, the revolting diet (and so forth page after page) seemed somehow to place the Negro among the beasts. The circumstances of the Englishman's confrontation with the Negro served to strengthen this feeling. Slave traders in Africa handled Negroes the same way men in England handled beasts, herding and examining and buying. The Guinea Company instructed Bartholomew Haward in 1651 "to buy and put aboard you so many negers as yo'r ship can cary, and for what shalbe wanting to supply with Cattel, as also to furnish you with victualls and provisions for the said negers and Cattel."⁵⁷ Africa, moreover, teemed with strange and wonderful animals, and men that killed like tigers, ate like vultures, and grunted like hogs seemed indeed to merit comparison with beasts. In making this instinctive analogy, Englishmen unwittingly demonstrated how powerfully the African's different culture—for Englishmen, his "savagery"—operated to make Negroes seem to Englishmen a radically different kind of men.

5. THE APES OF AFRICA

If Negroes were likened to beasts, there was in Africa a beast which was likened to men. It was a strange and eventually

56. Behn, *Oroonoko*, 136. For later developments especially, see Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850* (Madison, Wis., 1964).

57. Elizabeth Donnan, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, 4 vols. (Washington, D. C., 1930-35), I, 129.

tragic happenstance of nature that the Negro's homeland was the habitat of the animal which in appearance most resembles man. The animal called "orang-outang" by contemporaries (actually the chimpanzee) was native to those parts of western Africa where the early slave trade was heavily concentrated. Though Englishmen were acquainted (for the most part vicariously) with monkeys and baboons, they were unfamiliar with tailless apes who walked about like men.⁵⁸ Accordingly, it happened that Englishmen were introduced to the anthropoid apes and to Negroes at the same time and in the same place. The startlingly human appearance and movements of the "ape"—a generic term though often used as a synonym for the "orang outang"—aroused some curious speculations.

In large measure these speculations derived from traditions which had been accumulating in Western culture since ancient times. Medieval bestiaries contained rosters of strange creatures who in one way or another seemed disturbingly to resemble men. There were the *simia* and the *cynocephali* and the *satyri* and the others, all variously described and related to one another, all jumbled in a characteristic amalgam of ancient reports and medieval morality. The confusion was not easily nor rapidly dispelled, and many of the traditions established by this literature were very much alive during the seventeenth century.

The section on apes in Edward Topsell's *Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes* (1607) serves to illustrate how certain seemingly trivial traditions and associations persisted in such form that they were bound to affect the way in which Englishmen would perceive the natives of Africa.⁵⁹ Topsell, who built principally upon the work of the great Swiss naturalist Konrad von Gesner (1516-65), was

58. H. W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London, 1952), chap. 11; also Robert M. and Ada W. Yerkes, *The Great Apes: A Study of Anthropoid Life* (New Haven, 1929), 1-26; John C. Greene, *The Death of Adam: Evolution and Its Impact on Western Thought* (Ames, Iowa, 1959), chap. 6. I have oversimplified the confused state of terminology concerning simians; see M. F. Ashley Montagu, *Edward Tyson, M. D., F. R. S., 1650-1708, and the Rise of Human and Comparative Anatomy in England; A Study in the History of Science* (Phila., 1943), 228, 244-49. By 1600 "baboons," "marmosets," "monkies," "apes" were common in literature; several (probably baboons) were on show in London. Yet a foreign visitor in 1598 did not list any sort of "apes" in the Tower menagerie, though there were lions there. W. Strunk, Jr., "The Elizabethan Showman's Ape," *Modern Language Notes*, 32 (1917), 215-21; Emma Phipson, *The Animal-Lore of Shakespeare's Time . . .* (London, 1883), 5.

59. Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes . . . Collected out of All the Volumes of Conradus Gesner, and All Other Writers to This Present Day* (London, 1607), 2-20.

careful to distinguish tailless apes from monkeys. They were to be found in three regions: south of the Caucasus, India, and "Lybia and all that desert Woods betwixt Egypt, Æthiopia and Libia." When he came to describe the various kinds of "apes," however, Topsell was far less definite as to location than as to their general character: above all else, "apes" were venerous. In India the red apes were "so venerous that they will ravish their Women." Baboons were "as lustful and venerous as goats"; a baboon which had been "brought to the French king . . . above all loved the companie of women, and young maidens; his genitall member was greater than might match the quantity of his other parts." Pictures of two varieties of apes, a "Satyre" and an "Ægopithecus," graphically emphasized the "virile member."

In addition to stressing the "lustful disposition" of the ape kind, Topsell's compilation contained suggestions concerning the character of simian facial features. "Men that have low and flat nostrils," readers were told in the section on apes, "are Libidinous as Apes that attempt women, and having thicke lippes the upper hanging over the neather, they are deemed fooles, like the lips of Asses and Apes." This rather explicit association was the persistent connection made between apes and devils. In a not altogether successful attempt to distinguish the "Satyre-apes" from the mythical creatures of that name, Topsell straightened everything out by explaining that it was "probable, that Devils take not any dænomination or shape from Satyres, but rather the Apes themselves from Devils whome they resemble, for there are many things common to the Satyre-apes and devilish Satyres." Association of apes and/or satyrs with devils was common in England: James I linked them in his *Daemonology* (1597).⁶⁰ The inner logic of this association derived from uneasiness concerning the ape's "indecent likenesse and imitation of man"; it revolved around evil and sexual sin; and, rather tenuously, it connected apes with blackness.

Given this tradition and the coincidence of contact, it was virtually inevitable that Englishmen should discern similarity between the man-like beasts and the beast-like men of Africa.⁶¹ A few commentators went so far as to suggest that Negroes had sprung from the generation of ape-kind or that apes were themselves the

60. G. B. Harrison, ed., *King James the First Daemonologie* (1597) . . . (London, 1924), 19.

61. Jobson, *Golden Trade*, ed. Kingsley, 186; Thomas Herbert, *A Relation of Some Yeares Travaile, Begunne Anno 1626. Into Afriqve and the Greater Asia, Especially the Territories of the Persian Monarchie* . . . (London, 1634), 16-17; Herbert, *Some Years Travels* (1677), 16-17.

offspring of Negroes and some unknown African beast.⁶² These contentions were squarely in line with the ancient tradition that Africa was a land "bringing dailie foorth newe monsters" because, as Aristotle himself had suggested, many different species came into proximity at the scarce watering places. Jean Bodin, the famous sixteenth-century French political theorist, summarized this wisdom of the ages with the categorical remark that "promiscuous coition of men and animals took place, wherefore the regions of Africa produce for us so many monsters."⁶³ Despite all these monsters out of Africa, the notion that Negroes stemmed from beasts in a literal sense did not receive wide credence; even the writers who advanced it did not suggest that the Negro himself was now a beast.

Far more common and persistent was the notion that there sometimes occurred "a beastly copulation or conjuncture" between apes and Negroes, and especially that apes were inclined wantonly to attack Negro women.⁶⁴ The very explicit idea that apes assaulted female human beings was not new; Negroes were merely being asked to demonstrate what Europeans had known for centuries. Englishmen seemed ready to credit the tales about bestial connections, and even as late as the 1730's a well-traveled, intelligent naval surgeon, John Atkins, was not at all certain that the stories were false: "At some Places the *Negroes* have been suspected of Bestiality with them [apes and monkeys], and by the Boldness and Affection they are known under some Circumstances to express to our Females; the Ignorance and Stupidity on the other side, to guide or control Lust; but more from the near resemblances are sometimes met to the Human Species would tempt one to suspect the Fact." Atkins went on to voice the generally received opinion that if offspring were ever produced by such mixtures they would themselves be infertile: "Altho' by the way, this, like other *Hebridous* Productions, could never go no farther; and as such a monstrous

62. Herbert, *Some Years Travels*, 18; Zirkle, "Knowledge of Heredity," Dunn, ed., *Genetics in the 20th Century*, 39-40.

63. Quotation from Alexander B. Grosart, ed., *The Complete Works of Thomas Nashe*, 6 vols. (London and Aylesbury, 1883-85), I, 160; Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, trans. D'Arcy W. Thompson, in J. A. Smith and W. D. Ross, eds., *The Works of Aristotle*, IV (Oxford, 1910), 606b; Bodin, *Method for Easy Comprehension of History*, 105.

64. Quotation from Herbert, *Some Years Travels*, 18. Montagu, *Edward Tyson*, 250-52; John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2 vols. in 1 (London, 1721), II, 53 (Bk. III, chap. 6, sec. 23); Phillips, *Journal*, Churchill, comps., *Voyages*, VI, 211; William Smith, *A New Voyage to Guinea* . . . (London, 1744), 52; Zirkle, "Knowledge of Heredity," Dunn, ed., *Genetics in the 20th Century*, 39-40; Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore*, 267-76.

Generation would be more casual and subject to Fatality, the Case must be uncommon and rare." 65

By the time Atkins addressed himself to this evidently fascinating problem, some of the confusion arising from the resemblance of apes to men had been dispelled. In 1699 the web of legend and unverified fact was disentangled by Edward Tyson, whose comparative study of a young "orang-outang" was a masterwork of critical scientific investigation. Throughout his dissection of the chimpanzee, Tyson meticulously compared the animal with human beings in every anatomical detail, and he established beyond question both the close relationship and the non-identity of ape and man.⁶⁶ Here was a step forward; the question of the ape's proper place in nature was now grounded upon much firmer knowledge of the facts. Despite their scientific importance, Tyson's conclusions did nothing to weaken the vigorous tradition which linked the Negro with the ape. The supposed affinity between apes and men had as frequently been expressed in sexual as in anatomical terms, and his findings did not effectively rule out the possibility of unnatural sexual unions. Tyson himself remarked that oranges were especially given to vengery.⁶⁷

The sexual association of apes with Negroes had an inner logic which kept it alive without much or even any factual sustenance.⁶⁸ Sexual union seemed to prove a certain affinity without going so far as to indicate actual identity—which was what Englishmen really thought was the case. By forging a sexual link between Negroes and apes, furthermore, Englishmen were able to give vent to their feeling that Negroes were a lewd, lascivious, and wanton people.

6. LIBIDINOUS MEN

It was no accident that this affinity between Negroes and apes was so frequently regarded as sexual, for undertones of sexu-

65. Atkins, *Voyage to Guinea*, 108; also his *Navy Surgeon*, 369.

66. Edward Tyson, *Orang-Outang, Sive Homo Sylvestris: Or, the Anatomy of a Pygmie Compared with That of a Monkey, an Ape, and a Man. To Which is Added, A Philological Essay Concerning the Pygmies, the Cynocephali, the Satyrs, and Sphinges of the Ancients. Wherein It will Appear That They Are All Either Apes or Monkeys; and Not Men, As Formerly Pretended* (London, 1699); Montagu, *Edward Tyson*, 225-321.

67. Tyson, *Orang-Outang*, 42.

68. Perhaps there was some slight basis in fact for the association, for certain kinds of sexual contact (though surely not consummation) between apes and human beings are known to be possible and even likely under some circumstances. Earnest Hooton, *Man's Poor Relations* (Garden City, N. Y., 1942), 19, 84-85.

ality run throughout many English accounts of West Africa. To liken Africans—any human beings—to beasts was to stress the animal within the man. Indeed the sexual connotations embodied in the terms *bestial* and *bestly* were considerably stronger in Elizabethan English than they are today, and when the Elizabethan traveler pinned these epithets upon the behavior of Negroes he was frequently as much registering a sense of sexual shock as describing swinish manners: "They are bestly in their living," young Andrew Battell wrote, "for they have men in women's apparel, whom they keep among their wives." 69

Lecherousness among the Negroes was at times merely another attribute which one would expect to find among heathen, savage, beast-like men. A passage in Samuel Purchas's collection makes evident how closely interrelated all these attributes were in the minds of Englishmen: "They have no knowledge of God; those that traffique and are conversant among strange Countrey people are civiller then the common sort of people, they are very greedie eaters, and no lesse drinkers, and very lecherous, and theevis, and much addicted to uncleanness: one man hath as many wives as hee is able to keepe and maintaine." 70 Sexuality was what one expected of savages.

Clearly, however, the association of Africans with potent sexuality represented more than an incidental appendage to the concept of savagery. Long before first English contact with West Africa, the inhabitants of virtually the entire continent stood confirmed in European literature as lustful and venerous. About 1526 Leo Africanus (a Spanish Moroccan Moor converted to Christianity) supplied the most authoritative and influential description of the little-known lands of "Barbary," "Libya," "Numedia," and "Land of Negroes"; and Leo was as explicit as he was imaginative. In the English translation (ca. 1600) readers were informed concerning the "Negros" that "there is no Nation under Heaven more prone to Venery." Having reduced the "Numedians" to being "principally addicted unto Treason, Treacherie, Murther, Theft and Robberie"

69. Ernest George Ravenstein, ed., *The Strange Adventures of Andrew Battell of Leigh, in Angola and the Adjoining Regions. Reprinted from "Purchas His Pilgrimes" (ca. 1607) (Works Issued by the Hakluyt Soc., 2d Ser., 6 [London, 1901])*, 18. The term *bestiality* was first used to denote sexual relations with animals early in the 17th century; it was thus used frequently only for about 150 years!

70. "A Description . . . of Guinea . . ." in Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes, Contayning a History of the World in Sea Voyages and Lande Travells by Englishmen and Others*, 20 vols. (Glasgow, 1905-07), VI, 251.

and the inhabitants of Libya to living a "brutish kind of life" destitute of "any Religion, any Lawes, or any good form of living," Leo went on to disclose that "the Negroes likewise leade a beastly kind of life, being utterly destitute of the use of reason, of dexteritie of wit, and of all arts. Yea, they so behave themselves, as if they had continually lived in a Forrest among wild beasts. They have great swarmes of Harlots among them; whereupon a man may easily conjecture their manner of living."⁷¹ Nor was Leo Africanus the only scholar to elaborate upon the classical sources concerning Africa. In a highly eclectic work first published in 1566, Jean Bodin sifted the writings of ancient authorities and concluded that heat and lust went hand in hand and that "in Ethiopia . . . the race of men is very keen and lustful." Bodin announced in a thoroughly characteristic sentence, "Ptolemy reported that on account of southern sensuality Venus chiefly is worshiped in Africa and that the constellation of Scorpion, which pertains to the pudenda, dominates that continent."⁷²

Depiction of the Negro as a lustful creature was not radically new, therefore, when Englishmen first met Negroes face to face. Seizing upon and reconfirming these long-standing and apparently common notions about Africa, Elizabethan travelers and literati spoke very explicitly of Negroes as being especially sexual. Othello's embraces were "the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor." Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (ca. 1624) referred to "an holy hermit" who "desired to see the Spirit of Fornication; and there appeared to him a little foul ugly Æthiop." Negro men, reported a seventeenth-century traveler, sported "large Propagators."⁷³ In 1623 Richard Jobson, a sympathetic observer, reported that Mandingo men were "furnisht with such members as are after a sort burthen-some unto them"; it was the custom in that tribe not to have intercourse during pregnancy so as not to "destroy what is conceived." During this abstinence, Jobson explained, the man "hath allowance of other women, for necessities sake," though this was not to be considered "overstrange" since in the twenty-third chapter of Ezekiel two incontinent sisters were "said to doate upon those people

71. Leo Africanus, *History and Description of Africa*, trans. Pory, ed. Brown, I, 180, 187. Leo continues concerning the Negroes, "except their conversation perhaps bee somewhat more tolerable, who dwell in the principall Townes and Cities: for it is like that they are somewhat more addicted to Civillitie." Leo's work was available to Englishmen in Latin from 1556.

72. Bodin, *Method for Easy Comprehension of History*, 103-6, 143.

73. Rice, Turk, Moor, and Persian, 401; *Othello*, I, i, 127; Spedding, Ellis, and Heath, eds., *Works of Francis Bacon*, III, 152; Ogilby, *Africa*, 451.

whose members were as the members of Asses." Jobson's explanation for the unusual size of these men was incorporated neatly into the context of Scriptural anthropology. "Undoubtedly," he wrote, "these people originally sprung from the race of *Canaan*, the sonne of *Ham*, who discovered his father *Noahs* secrets, for which *Noah* awakening cursed *Canaan* as our holy Scripture testifieth[;] the curse as by Scholemen hath been disputed, extended to his ensuing race, in laying hold upon the same place, where the originall cause began, whereof these people are witness." ⁷⁴

The neatness of Jobson's exegesis was unusual, but his initial observation was not. Another commentator, the anonymous author of *The Golden Coast* (1665), thought Negroes "very lustful and impudent, especially, when they come to hide their nakedness, (for a *Negroes* hiding his Members, their extraordinary greatness) is a token of their Lust, and therefore much troubled with the Pox."⁷⁵ By the eighteenth century a report on the sexual aggressiveness of Negro women was virtually *de rigueur* for the African commentator. By then, of course, with many Englishmen actively participating in the slave trade, there were pressures making for descriptions of "hot constitution'd Ladies" possessed of a "temper hot and lascivious, making no scruple to prostitute themselves to the *Europeans* for a very slender profit, so great is their inclination to white men."⁷⁶ And surely it was the Negro women who were responsible for lapses from propriety: "If they can come to the Place the Man sleeps in, they lay themselves softly down by him, soon wake him, and use all their little Arts to move the darling Passion."⁷⁷

While the animus underlying these and similar remarks becomes sufficiently obvious once Englishmen began active participation in the slave trade, it is less easy to see why Englishmen should have fastened upon Negroes a pronounced sexuality virtually upon first sight. Certainly the ancient notions distilled in the alembics of Bodin and Leo Africanus must have helped pattern initial English perceptions. Yet it is scarcely possible that these notions were fully responsible for the picture of Negro sexuality which developed so rapidly and in such explicit terms in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Another tradition was of possible relevance—the curse upon

74. Jobson, *Golden Trade*, ed. Kingsley, 65-67.

75. *The Golden Coast*, 75-76.

76. Smith, *New Voyage to Guinea*, 146; Barbot, *Description of the Coasts*, Churchill, comps., *Voyages*, V, 34.

77. Smith, *New Voyage to Guinea*, 221-22, clearly based on Bosman, *New and Accurate Description*, 206-7.

Ham's son Canaan. According to the Scriptural account Ham's offense was that he had "looked upon the nakedness of his father." To the post-Freudian ear this suggests castration. To early Jewish commentators it suggested not merely castration but other sexual offenses as well. The Hebraic literature of ca. 200-600 A.D. which saw the posterity of Ham and Canaan as smitten in the skin speculated as to whether Ham's offense was (variously) castrating his father Noah (described in the Midrash Rabbah as Noah's saying "You have prevented me from doing something in the dark"), and (in the same source) as copulating "in the Ark," and (again) copulating "with a dog . . . therefore Ham came forth black-skinned while the dog publicly exposes its copulation." The depth and diffuse pervasiveness of these explosive associations are dramatized in the mystic Zohar of the thirteenth century, where Ham, it was said, "represents the refuse and dross of the gold, the stirring and rousing of the unclean spirit of the ancient serpent."

What is especially striking in these commentaries is that for centuries they remained peculiar though not secret to Jewish scholars. Although some Christian writers in the early centuries of the church seem to have been aware of sexual connotations in Ham's offense, they appear never to have dilated upon them. With the onset of European expansion in the sixteenth century, some Christian commentators, or rather some commentators who were Christians, suddenly began speaking in the same mode which Jews had employed a thousand years and more before. Though the genealogy of Noah's descendants was always somewhat tangled, Ham always represented for the ancient Jews the southward peoples *including* the Canaanites, whom the Jews drove from the promised land and upon whom they fastened the millstone of sexual offenses which are repeatedly and so adamantly condemned and guarded against in the Pentateuch. More than two thousand years later a similar disquietude seems to have come over Europeans and Englishmen as they embarked upon a program of outward migration and displacement and exploitation of other peoples. The curse upon Ham's posterity took on for Christian Englishmen a potential immediacy and relevance which it could never have had if Englishmen had not as a people been undergoing an experience which they half sensed was in some measure analogous to that of the ancient special people of God's word.⁷⁸

78. I hope to discuss this complex matter more fully on another occasion and in the meantime cite only the sources directly quoted. Freedman and Simon, trans., *Midrash Rabbah*, I, 293; Sperl and Simon, trans., *Zohar*, I, 246.

The measure of influence exerted upon English commentators by these Hebraic traditions is problematical, but it is certain that the presumption of heightened sexuality in black men was far from being an incidental or casual association in the minds of Englishmen. How very deeply this association operated is obvious in *Othello*, a drama which loses most of its power and several of its central points if it is read with the assumption that because the black man was the hero English audiences were friendly or perhaps indifferent to his blackness.⁷⁹ Shakespeare was writing both about and to his countrymen's feelings concerning physical distinctions between kinds of people; the play is shot through with the language of blackness and sex. Iago goes out of his way to soliloquize upon his own motives: "I hate the Moor,/ And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets/ He has done my office." Later, he becomes more direct, "For that I do suspect the lusty Moor hath leaped into my seat." It was upon this so obviously absurd suspicion that Iago based his resolve to "turn her virtue into pitch." Such was his success, of course, that Othello finally rushes off "to furnish me with some means of death for the fair devil." With this contorted denomination of Desdemona, Othello unwittingly revealed how deeply Iago's promptings about Desdemona's "own clime, complexion, and degree" had eaten into his consciousness. Othello was driven into accepting the premise that the physical distinction *matters*: "For she had eyes," he has to reassure himself, "and chose me." Then, as his suspicions give way to certainty, he equates her character with his own complexion:

Her name, that was as fresh,
As Dian's visage, is now begrim'd and black
As mine own face.

This important aspect of Iago's triumph over the noble Moor was a subtly inverted reflection of the propositions which Iago, hidden in darkness, worked upon the fair lady's father. No one knew better than Iago how to play upon hidden strings of emotion. Not content with the straight-forward crudity that "your daughter and the Moor

79. See Philip Mason, *Prospero's Magic: Some Thoughts on Class and Race* (London, 1962), chap. 3. The following quotations from *Othello* may be found in I, i, 88-89, 111-12, 117-18, 143; I, ii, 66, 69-71; I, iii, 101, 392-94; II, i, 307-8; II, iii, 369; III, iii, 189, 230, 387-89, 478-79; V, ii, 128-29, 155, 161-62. Shakespeare's play was based on an Italian drama in which Iago told "the Moor" that Desdemona had committed adultery, partly because she was tired of the Moor's color: Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare's Sources: Comedies and Tragedies* (London, 1957), 124.

are now making the beast with two backs," Iago told the agitated Brabantio that "an old black ram/ Is tuppung your white ewe" and alluded politely to "your daughter cover'd with a Barbary horse." This was not merely the language of (as we say) a "dirty" mind: it was the integrated imagery of blackness and whiteness, of Africa, of the sexuality of beasts and the bestiality of sex. And of course Iago was entirely successful in persuading Brabantio, who had initially welcomed Othello into his house, that the marriage was "against all rules of nature." Brabantio's first reaction betrayed a lurking fear: "This accident is not unlike my dream." Then, as he pondered the prospect, he could only conclude that witchcraft—the unnatural—was responsible; he demanded of Othello what other cause could have brought a girl "so tender, fair, and happy"

To incur a general mock
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
Of such a thing as thou.

Altogether a curious way for a senator to address a successful general.

These and similar remarks in the play *Othello* suggest that Shakespeare and presumably his audiences were not totally indifferent to the sexual union of "black" men and "white" women. Shakespeare did not condemn such union; rather, he played upon an inner theme of black and white sexuality, showing how the poisonous mind of a white man perverted and destroyed the noblest of loves by means of bringing to the surface (from the darkness, whence Iago spoke) the lurking shadows of animal sex to assault the whiteness of chastity. Never did "dirty" words more dramatically "blacken" a "fair" name. At the play's climax, standing stunned by the realization that the wife he has murdered was innocent, Othello groans to Emilia, "'Twas I that killed her"; and Emilia responds with a torrent of condemnation or, rather, of expulsive repudiation: "O! the more angel she,/ And you the blacker devil." Of Desdemona: "She was too fond of her filthy bargain." To Othello: "O gull! O dolt!/ As ignorant as dirt!" Shakespeare's genius lay precisely in juxtaposing these two pairs: inner blackness and inner whiteness. The drama would have seemed odd indeed if his audiences had felt no response to this cross-inversion and to the deeply turbulent double meaning of black *over* white.

It required a very great dramatist to expose some of the more inward biocultural values which led—or drove—Englishmen to accept readily the notion that Negroes were peculiarly sexual men.

Probably these values and the ancient reputation of Africa upon which they built were of primary importance in determining the response of Englishmen to Negroes. Whatever the importance of biologic elements in these values—whatever the effects of long northern nights, of living in a cool climate, of possessing light-colored bodies which excreted contrasting lumps of darkness—these values by Shakespeare's time were interlocked with the accretions of English history and, more immediately, with the circumstances of contact with Africans and the social upheaval of Tudor England.⁸⁰

The most obvious of these circumstances was that Englishmen were unaccustomed to West African standards concerning suitable public attire. Many Negroes were (or perhaps merely appeared to trousered Englishmen) utterly "naked."⁸¹ Fully as important were African matrimonial practices, which in fact frequently failed to match the accepted norm for Christian Englishmen. It may be that Englishmen found Negroes free in a primitive way and found this freedom somehow provocative; many chroniclers made a point of discussing the Negro women's long breasts and ease of

80. The power of these values may be seen in Thomas Adams, *The White Devil, or the Hypocrite Uncased* . . . (London, 1614), 1-2: "A Devill he was, blacke within and full of rancour, but white without, and skinned over with hypocrisie; therefore to use *Luthers* word, wee will call him the white *Devill*."

There seem to be no cross-cultural studies of the meaning of color. It clearly would be a mistake to take the English valuations as representing responses to northern (versus Mediterranean) climate or to assume that these valuations were peculiarly Judeo-Christian.

On the Day when
Some faces will be (lit up
With) white, and some faces
Will be (in the gloom of) black:
To those whose faces
Will be black, (will be said):
"Did ye reject Faith
After accepting it?
Taste then the Penalty
For rejecting Faith."

But those whose faces
Will be (lit with) white,—
They will be in (the light
Of) God's mercy: therein
To dwell (for ever) .

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., *The Holy Qur-an* (Lahore, 1937), Sûrah III, 106-7, where the (Muslim) editor comments, "The 'face' (*wajh*) expresses our Personality, our inmost being. . . . Black is the colour of darkness, sin, rebellion, misery; removal from the grace and light of God."

81. "The First Voyage Made by Master William Towrson . . ." (1555), Hakluyt, *Principal Navigations*, VI, 184; "A voyage to Benin . . . Written by James Welsh . . ." (1589), *ibid.*, 457.

childbearing.⁸² The life of "savages" had attractions, even if civilized white men were not entirely aware what these attractions were. No doubt these differences between the two colliding cultures helped support the notion that Africans were highly sexed; yet Europeans have not everywhere and always made so much of nudity and polygamy among other peoples, and it seems necessary to inquire briefly concerning certain qualities of thought and feeling in Tudor England which may help account for what seems an unusual hypersensitivity to another people's sexuality.

7. THE BLACKNESS WITHIN

The Protestant Reformation in England was a complex development, but certainly it may be said that during the century between Henry VIII and Oliver Cromwell the content and tone of English Christianity were altered in the direction of Biblicism, personal piety, individual judgment, and more intense self-scrutiny and internalized control. Many pious Englishmen, not all of them "Puritans," came to approach life as if conducting an examination and to approach Scripture as if peering in a mirror. As a result, their inner energies were brought unusually close to the surface, more frequently into the almost rational world of legend, myth, and literature. The taut Puritan and the bawdy Elizabethan were not enemies but partners in this adventure which we usually think of in terms of great literature—of Milton and Shakespeare—and social conflict—of Saints and Cavaliers. The age was driven by the twin spirits of adventure and control, and while "adventurous Elizabethans" embarked upon voyages of discovery overseas, many others embarked upon inward voyages of discovery. Some men, like William Bradford and John Winthrop, were to do both.

Given this charged atmosphere of (self-) discovery, it is scarcely surprising that Englishmen should have used peoples overseas as social mirrors and that they were especially inclined to discover attributes in savages which they found first but could not speak of in themselves.

Nowhere is the way in which certain of these cultural attributes came to bear upon Negroes more clearly illustrated than in a passage by George Best, an Elizabethan adventurer who sailed with Martin Frobisher in 1577 in search of the Northwest Passage. In his discourse demonstrating the habitability of all parts of the world,

82. An early example is "First Voyage by William Towrson" (1555), *ibid.*, 187.

Best veered off to the problem of the color of Negroes. The cause of their blackness, he decided, was explained in Scripture. Noah and his sons and their wives were "white" and "by course of nature should have begotten . . . white children. But the envie of our great and continuall enemie the wicked Spirite is such, that as hee coulde not suffer our olde father Adam to live in the felicitie and Angelike state wherein he was first created, . . . so againe, finding at this flood none but a father and three sons living, hee so caused one of them to disobey his fathers commandment, that after him all his posteritie should bee accursed." The "fact" of this "disobedience," Best continued, was this: Noah "commanded" his sons and their wives to behold God "with reverence and feare," and that "while they remained in the Arke, they should use continencie, and abstaine from carnall copulation with their wives: . . . which good instructions and exhortations notwithstanding his wicked sonne Cham disobeyed, and being perswaded that the first childe borne after the flood . . . should inherite . . . all the dominions of the earth, hee . . . used company with his wife, and craftily went about thereby to dis-inherite the off-spring of his other two brethren." To punish this "wicked and detestable fact," God willed that "a sonne should bee born whose name was Chus, who not onely it selfe, but all his posteritie after him should bee so blacke and lothsome, that it might remain a spectacle of disobedience to all the worlde. And of this blacke and cursed Chus came all these blacke Moores which are in Africa."⁸³

The inner themes running throughout this extraordinary exegesis testify eloquently to the completeness with which English perceptions could integrate sexuality with blackness, the devil, and the judgment of a God who had originally created man not only "Angelike" but "white." These running equations lay embedded at a deep and almost inaccessible level of Elizabethan culture; only occasionally do they appear in complete clarity, as when evil dreams

. . . hale me from my sleepe like forked Devils,
Midnight, thou Æthiope, Empresse of Black Soules, Thou general
Bawde to the whole world.⁸⁴

But what is still more arresting about George Best's discourse is the shaft of light it throws upon the dark mood of strain and control in

83. *Ibid.*, VII, 263-64. Best's discourse was published separately in 1578.

84. John Day, *Law-Tricks or, Who Would Have Thought It* (London, 1608), Act V, scene i.

Elizabethan culture. In an important sense, Best's remarks are not about Negroes; rather they play upon a theme of external discipline exercised upon the man who fails to discipline himself. The linkages he established—"disobedience" with "carnall copulation" with something "black and lothsome"—were not his alone; the term *dirt* first began to acquire its meaning of moral impurity, of smuttiness, at the very end of the sixteenth century. Perhaps the key term, though, is "disobedience"—to God and parents—and perhaps, therefore, the passage echoes one of the central concerns of Englishmen of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Tudor England was undergoing social ferment, generated by an increasingly commercialized economy and reflected in such legislative monuments as the Statute of Apprentices and the Elizabethan vagrancy and poor laws. Overseas mercantile expansion brought profits and adventure but also a sense, in some men, of disquietude. One commentator declared that the merchants, "whose number is so increased in these our daies," had "in times past" traded chiefly with European countries but "now in these daies, as men not contented with these journies, they have sought out the east and west Indies, and made now and then suspicious voiages."⁸⁵ Literate Englishmen generally (again not merely the Puritans) were concerned with the apparent disintegration of social and moral controls at home; they fretted endlessly over the "masterless men" who had once had a proper place in the social order but who were now wandering about, begging, robbing, raping. They fretted also about the absence of a spirit of due subordination—of children to parents and servants to masters. They assailed what seemed a burgeoning spirit of avariciousness, a spirit which one social critic described revealingly as "a barbarous or slavish desire to turne the penie."⁸⁶ They decried the laborers who demanded too high wages, the masters who would squeeze their servants, and the landed gentlemen who valued

85. [William Harrison], *An Historicall Description of the Iland of Britaine* . . . (1577), in *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, 6 vols. (London, 1807-08), I, 274. A similar sense of the necessity of ordering and controlling the spreading migrations of peoples underlay Sir Walter Raleigh's revealing notation that "first, we are to consider that the world after the flood was not planted by imagination, neither had the children of *Noah* wings, to fly from *Shinaar* to the uttermost border of *Europe*, *Africa*, and *Asia* in haste, but that these children were directed by a wise father, who knew those parts of the world before the flood, to which he disposed his children after it, and sent them not as discoverers, or at all adventure, but assigned and allotted to every son, and their issues, their proper parts." Sir Walter Raleigh, *The History of the World*, in *Five Books*, 11th ed., 2 vols. (London, 1736), I, 75-76.

86. [Harrison], *Historicall Description of Britaine* (1577), in *Holinshed's Chronicles*, I, 276.

sheep more than men—in short, the spirit of George Best's Cham, who aimed to have his son "inherit and possesse all the dominions of the earth."

It was the case with English confrontation with Negroes, then, that a society in a state of rapid flux, undergoing important changes in religious values, and comprised of men who were energetically on the make and acutely and often uncomfortably self-conscious of being so, came upon a people less technologically advanced, markedly different in appearance and culture. From the first, Englishmen tended to set Negroes over against themselves, to stress what they conceived to be radically contrasting qualities of color, religion, and style of life, as well as animality and a peculiarly potent sexuality. What Englishmen did not at first fully realize was that Negroes were potentially subjects for a special kind of obedience and subordination which was to arise as adventurous Englishmen sought to possess for themselves and their children one of the most bountiful dominions of the earth. When they came to plant themselves in the New World, they were to find that they had not entirely left behind the spirit of avarice and insubordination. Nor does it appear, in light of attitudes which developed during their first two centuries in America, that they left behind all the impressions initially gathered of the *Negro* before he became pre-eminently the *slave*.