

Resisting Displacement in Bernardine Evaristo's *The Emperor's Babe*

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*ain't no one never gonna write
about your life but you. Once you're dead,
you never existed, baby, so get to it.*
Venus to Zuleika in *The Emperor's Babe*¹

Bernardine Evaristo's *The Emperor's Babe* (2000) is a literal and literary remapping of London. Set in AD 210 in a fictionalized version of Roman Londinium, Evaristo's idea for the novel emerged after she read Peter Fryer's assertion that a "[black] presence ... [in England] goes back some 2000 years."^{2,3} Noting that the English landscape has "always been ... mixed racially and culturally," Evaristo predates her novel more than a millennium before British colonization.^{4,5} Londinium's global population is drawn from the Roman Empire, which "stretched ... over 9000 kilometers into Africa and Asia," and those who colonize the metropolis enslave Britannia's indigenous people.⁶

Zuleika, the black female protagonist charting this multicultural landscape, immigrates to Londinium as a child with her parents, former slaves to the King of Meroe.⁷ Her character is the establishment of

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black life on British soil well before any consanguineous presence to a present-day white English population. Zuleika's mapping of Londinium erases homogeneous depictions of the city, especially the "reign of 'Cool Britannia,' when [newly elected Prime Minister] Tony Blair's New Labor Party rebranded London as the global capital of coolness."⁸ The New Labor Party's view reinforced a white nostalgic imaginary of imperialism where coolness was cast as a by-product of colonialist expansionism.

Zuleika's narrative acuity pushes against this construction through an unsentimental brand of linguistic cool. She intersperses Latin and anachronistic references to London at the Millennium to subvert the couplet form of Roman epic and Romantic poetry—genres that elevate the heroic. She ignores the verse ascribed to gods, warriors, or artists in favor of the slang spoken by a merchant-class black female subject. At once a diary, a memoir, and a cultural history, Zuleika's writing includes copious expletives and fashion by Armani, Gucci, and Valentino.⁹ She references drinking "Dom Falernum," an allusion that at once recalls the twentieth century's popular champagne Dom Pérignon, a sweet syrup used in cocktails connected to the Caribbean during the height of British expansionism, and the name of a Roman wine popular during the Roman empire.^{10,11} Her epoch-smashing verse deflects notions of the black woman as object or mad and unearths the madness of institutions across time and space. Her detail of Londinium's cultural life shifts perspective from those with privilege to those caught on the margins of political and economic power.

In Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's now-iconic reading of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri's death by suicide, Bhaduri's cultural narrative casts suicide as a political act inherent to avoiding institutionally and culturally constructed erasure. Bhaduri asserts agency and control of her life and death within the madness of a postcolonial system that chooses to ignore her humanity, her actions, and her voice. Her death sounds a warning regarding any endemically flawed and illogical system. Listening becomes key, not for what is absent, but to what information, groups, or individuals are pushed aside. Cultural narratives like Bhaduri's signal a warning that moves beyond economic calculations. The cost of repression focuses on how alternative ideas to material wealth become obstructed due to a single-minded focus on economic rather than cultural traditions or gender roles. Like Bhaduri, Zuleika's action, in this case, her written account of her Londinium life, is her resistance to erasure. As James Baldwin suggests, "That victim who is able to articulate the situation of

the victim has ceased to be victim: he, or she, has become a threat.”¹² Zuleika’s writing is the means she uses to shift from an innate victimhood to a dangerous woman. Her anachronisms destabilize the couplet form of heroes and focus on the life of a black female subject who lays bare the madness of those who objectify her and close off any avenue of agency she cultivates. Her words inscribe the black female subject onto Londinium’s landscape while destabilizing notions of English purity and sanity in the present day global city.

THE ETHOS OF MADNESS

Jennifer DeVere Brody notes that male authors as diverse as Daniel Defoe, Lewis Carroll, and Salman Rushdie have each privileged a “muddled, muddled, and meddled with (hence impure)” English history.¹³ Brody also notes how “‘black’ ... women were indispensable to this construction of Englishness as a new form of ‘white’ male subjectivity.”¹⁴ These black females were not considered British subjects, but were subjugated. Their resistance was ignored, erased, or viewed as madness and/or hysteria. Western literature since the nineteenth century reinforces this view, according to Anne McClintock, with the casting of female characters as flawed objects. These women *are* mistakes who bring ruin and failure to privileged white males through what are deemed their “degenerative” and “*behavioural* flaws.”¹⁵ They are forced or coerced—especially those who are partly or wholly black—into internalizing personal and institutional abuses. Their “flaws,” viewed as “immoral” actions, become an obfuscation legitimizing dehumanization from miscegenation and slavery to unfair immigration policies.¹⁶

Hershini Bhana Young argues: “Illness must be seen as a logical consequence of the physical, epistemic, discursive, and linguistic violence of the colonial and postcolonial machine.”¹⁷ She draws from Fanon’s ideas regarding the *epidermalization* of the colonized so that those who are oppressed internalize feelings of inferiority made manifest through the oppressor’s language and actions. Their psychic pain is contextualized within the parameters of institutionalized racism and oppression. Contemporary feminist theorists have further “reinterpreted” notions of “hysteria” as “an expression of women’s anger [and] oppression,” according to Jane Ussher.¹⁸ In this view of hysteria, Lynette Goddard suggests that “women’s madness ... [is] a resistance to patriarchy, a refusal to enter into the symbolic world where the laws of the father

prevail.”¹⁹ In promoting agency, hysteria and madness become choices women make to battle against “cultural racism *and* (hetero-) sexism.”²⁰ These women are responding to cultural norms that view them as objects or ignore them completely. Their behavior is not an obfuscation of but a response to dehumanization and erasure. There is an inherent damage that these women bear, but the damage is recognized as an external force.

In *The Emperor's Babe*, the British Empire does not exist. Zuleika writes her life story to avoid erasure. In carving out that space, she destabilizes the familiar colonial and postcolonial tropes of the black female as blank canvas, muse, or madwoman in the attic.²¹ Zuleika is not marked impure or with a *behavioral* flaw. Her anger is not a strategic resistance to her husband's denial of her position. She is not a postcolonial subject stuck in what Homi Bhabha has marked the “in-between” of “the colonialist Self and the colonized Other.”²² Like Proserpine, the goddess snatched from her home by her uncle and taken to live in the underworld against her will, Zuleika is a child-woman who has no say in whom she marries or where she lives. Like Proserpine, she moves between two worlds, but Zuleika is not traveling between her husband's and her mother's homes, she is linguistically traveling between epochs.

Proserpine's story occurs in her silence.²³ In the earliest Greek and Roman texts, her abduction is told through her mother's grief or her uncle's privilege. Proserpine is a silent witness over whom the gods—brothers and sisters—fight. The goddess emerges as a silent archetype for abused women and the road between childhood and womanhood. Zuleika's narrative differs in that her experience and feelings are privileged. Her voice is loud and insistent as she critiques Londinium society. Zuleika's language upends dominant tales of a white British history. In establishing black female British presence in Britannia, Zuleika's narrative is a contrast not only to Charlotte Brontë's Bertha or Jean Rhys's Antoinette, women who embody the madness of the subjugated hybridized other, but also to white English embodied female protagonists like Elizabeth (Lizzie) Bennet.²⁴

Zuleika and Lizzie are connected, if not through London, then through their mercantile fathers and upwardly mobile marriages. They possess intellect and stubbornness that bring them strife. They offer incisive critiques of the lives they are forced to live. But in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Lizzie's commentary is focused on white English society and is used to find a man worthy of controlling her destiny.

A profitable marriage for the Bennet family is the end game in Lizzie's social critique. Zuleika's reflection begins *after* she is married and becomes aware of the horrors that being a Londinium wife and subject of Rome entails. She may be marginalized like Lizzie, but she is not a map holder waiting to discover where she will wind up. Zuleika is a map-maker, "rewrite[ing]" Londinium history and etching the ignored and suppressed voice of the black female onto Britain's literary and historical archives.²⁵ She uses the analogy of Proserpine's marriage to Pluto to clarify her situation, but she rejects silence and suppression. She is the embodiment of Fanon's declaration: "I am not a potentiality of something; I am fully what I am."²⁶ Her verse illuminates the institutional, not personal, roots of madness and how privilege within this system allows her husband, the Roman senator; her father; and her lover, the Roman emperor, to behave abhorrently and reap benefits.

A MADDENING DISCOURSE

Since the *Windrush's* arrival at London's Tilbury Dock from Jamaica in 1948, lawmakers have worked to disenfranchise the black British population from citizenship rights in England. Kathleen Paul asserts lawmakers have refashioned policies continuously so that "residents of the United Kingdom [are viewed as] ... white, Christian, conservative, and true custodians and owners of the title 'British.'"²⁷ In 1978, Prime Minister Thatcher declared: "[P]eople are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture."²⁸ Those "rather afraid" were white and Thatcher's swamping metaphor was the precursor for the 1981 British Nationality Act, which kept black British citizens from migrating to England.²⁹

If policies like the 1981 British Nationality Act are the legal means to erase black British citizenry from England, London's Millennium celebrations are a cultural displacement of maddening proportions. *The Emperor's Babe* is a challenge, most directly, to the culturally myopic view that emanates from the rebranding effort of the New Labour Party in the 1990s. In *BritainTM: Renewing Our Identity*, Mark Leonard calls for a "renewal of identity," recasting the "enormous success" of the British Empire for a twenty-first-century global economic model.³⁰ Leonard argues for a return to how "our ancestors invented a new identity ... free from any sentimental attachment to the traditions they had inherited."³¹ This avoidance of sentimentality is attached solely to the violence of

British expansionism. The economic successes of colonialism and globalization are celebrated without any references to slavery or colonial expansionism and include a “‘living museum of the future’ ... or ‘Millennium City’ in Greenwich to act as a showcase of the future of health, learning, retailing, and democracy.”³² In contrast to the legal means used to disenfranchise the black British population, the branding of Cool Britannia reduces migrants’ heritages to a Disney-like theme park attraction. Multiculturalism and globalization become touchstones upon which to re-inscribe white hegemonic authority, both economically and culturally.

Formed in 1993, London’s Millennium Commission was tasked with creating “a national ‘festival’” that would recall the Great Exhibition of 1851 and the Festival of Britain in 1951, events that celebrated white British colonization.³³ These preparations were, according to Denis Cosgrove and Luciana Martins, “locally significant in terms of urban regeneration, [but more important to] London’s claims to global centrality: once represented through the figure of empire ... [and] exercised today largely through mastery of financial space/time in the City of London.”³⁴ The commission chose site-specific installations along the Thames leading to Greenwich, where the Millennium Dome—now called the O² Dome—would serve as the city’s centerpiece of the global future. Through Greenwich, which had been made the universal Prime Meridian in 1884, “London ... proclaim[ed] ... its centrality in the measurement of secular time and the representation of global space.”^{35,36} Blair played upon this notion of space and time when he declared that children who visited the Millennial Dome should have “an experience so powerful and memories so strong that it gives them that abiding sense of purpose and unity that stays with them through the rest of their lives.”³⁷ He pushed this sentimental notion by claiming that the exhibits would serve as a reminder that Britain was not only “a country with a glorious past,” but also one “with a powerful future.”³⁸ Blair’s *glorious past* normalizes objectification, subjugation, and erasure in the same way that Thatcher’s *swamping* does. Blair, embracing this sentimental notion of the past, focused on a homogeneous economic enterprise and ignored those who do not further a global agenda except as public relations or tourist board fodder.

In thinking through slavery and post-slavery discourses of sex, violence, and desire, Christina Sharpe argues “the everyday mundane horrors that aren’t acknowledged to be horrors” create a bridge between what is familiar and expected and what is violent and accepted.³⁹

She calls these connections “monstrous intimacies” and focuses on the subjugation and subjection of the black female subject from slavery to the present day. Like Sharpe’s construction of monstrous intimacies, Young suggests oppression is not a static or linear construction only affecting “the individual psyche in the present.”⁴⁰ Those in the present have ingrained in their DNA a history of “the hegemonic quotidian violations of people and spirits long embroiled in colonial and postcolonial struggle.”⁴¹ Thatcher’s rhetoric of a homogeneous England conflates the familiar and violent through a national narrative that normalizes the continued legal scrutiny that is meted out to its black British citizens. Blair’s sentimental proclamation of a unified London ignores not only political and economic disenfranchisement but also a cultural displacement of the global city’s black citizens and their ancestors.

In meeting new global paradigms for economic wealth, memories of slave trading that occurred on and fueled the economic success of the docks along the north side of the Thames, across from the Millennium Dome, were eliminated from the millennium map. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these docks had been “funded primarily by the commercial and mercantile classes.”⁴² In the last 31 years of the trade—from 1776 to 1807, “more than 40 docks investors are identifiable as slave traders, and between them they organized half of the identified slave voyages” from London.^{43,44} These docks are also where Sarah Baartman, infamously named the Hottentot Venus, arrived in London in 1810. According to Natasha Gordon-Chipembere, Baartman “has been the object of an external gaze (in body and text) for 200 years.”⁴⁵ Baartman’s body was used as an economic model of success, and, through “scientific objectification,” proof of the white race’s superiority.⁴⁶ As Janell Hobson notes, Baartman’s body “was turned over to scientists by her ‘animal trainer’ in Paris in 1815” so that her “brain” and “genitalia” could be “pickled.”⁴⁷ Like Spivak’s suggestion that Bhaduri’s suicide was a political act no one could read, any resistance on Baartman’s part was erased by the disavowal of her humanity.⁴⁸

Slavery, whether institutional or insinuated, is the paradigmatic clash between economics and ethics. Thatcher’s and Blair’s rhetoric suggest that they map Great Britain, and London especially, as sites of what Paul Gilroy names, “natural, inevitable events.”⁴⁹ Yes, slaveholding was terrible, just as Baartman’s *pickled* genitalia are terrible, but that is not the present where one worries about *swamping* or maintaining the illusion of a *glorious past*. During the Millennium celebrations, the Thames was

integral to branding London as a space of global innovation and economic growth and “‘race’ [was pushed] outside of history.”⁵⁰ The river as a site of degradation and enslavement was ignored to map Cool Britannia onto present day London as another mode of “England for the English.”^{51,52}

In *The Emperor’s Babe*, Zuleika’s language is a challenge to Blair’s suggestion that British citizens focus on the *glorious past* in order to create a *powerful future*. The *glorious past* Zuleika inhabits has no “English” citizens and those indigenous to the area are slaves fighting to return to the “jungle” of Britannia.⁵³ Like Proserpine or Walter Benjamin’s angel of history, who is witness to eternity’s ever-growing “pile of debris,” Zuleika cannot turn away from the storm that “irresistibly propels [her] into the future to which [her] back is turned.”⁵⁴ Zuleika sees the entirety of the past, not as “a chain of events” in a fixed linear story but as “one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of [her] feet.”⁵⁵ This wreckage is a reminder that history repeats itself, but there is more to this repetition than an endless cycle of chaotic destruction. The “pile of debris” is humanity’s disavowal of responsibility—humanity creates the wreckage and *is* the wreckage.⁵⁶ But unlike both the goddess and the angel of history, Zuleika is not a silent witness. She gives voice to how the debris manifests, and how her body is used to create that debris, and in that naming, she creates an expansive dialogic of the black female subject.

Zuleika is not a warrior like Virgil’s Aeneas, who establishes an empire, nor is she a postcolonial subject caught in the *in-between* like Gibreel Farishta and Saladin Chamcha in Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* (1988). She is a young and inconsequential black female whose self-reflection and observations linguistically transform Londinium. She rejects sentimentality as a mode of discourse or survival and recognizes she must inscribe her place in Londinium. Her resistance is formed by what she can manage to control: her “magna opera of words.”⁵⁷ Her voice remains flexible and mobile, shifting as her circumstances change. She moves from self-identification as one of the “wild girls of Londinium” to her husband’s “*Illa Bella Negreetta*,” her declaration as *The Emperor’s Babe*, and her final naming that she is “*Zuleika, / Who in her final summer/ Lived a life fuller than any other.*”⁵⁸ Her words reinforce not only her existence but also her agency. Her perspective is an antidote to branding efforts that maintain the status quo.

Zuleika pins herself with the moniker: "Londinium Tour Guide (Unofficial)."⁵⁹ She is neither Lizzie Bennet nor Mary Poppins, dressed in a prim outfit, carrying an umbrella, and pointing out the monuments; instead, she roams Cheapside with her "porcelain" skinned friend Alba.⁶⁰ These pre-teens "tour the tenements / of Aldersgate," "raid" a local bakery after closing where they find the owner dead "in a cloud of flour," and "go to the [Thames], / sit on the beach, look out towards the marshy islands of Southwark, / and beyond to the jungle that was Britannia."⁶¹ She and Alba are friends with Venus, *néé* Rufus, a Camulodunum-born transgender who owns "Spank ... / a shop for the lady with a prick and no tits."^{62,63} The trio interact with "the fucking Scots, Pict and Saxon Bastards" and the employees of Zuleika's father's shop, who are "Syrian, Tunisian, Jew, Persian, / hopefuls just off the olive barge from Gaul, / ... anyone who'll work for pebbles."⁶⁴

Zuleika's tour offers nothing that is found in Thatcher's or Blair's speeches, or a *Baedekers*. She knows the out-of-the-way restaurants and shops touted in a *Lonely Planet* guide, not as someone who is searching for those places as an exotic experience of the local, but as a local who is claiming ownership of her space. She engages in discriminatory language regarding Britannia's indigenous people, but Zuleika views her neighborhood as an adventure with a rotating cast of zany, but not especially dangerous, characters. She operates as a free agent and privileges an impure torrent of interaction as the foundation of the globalized metropolis. She is neither sentimental nor naïve enough to believe that anyone, except her friends Alba and Venus, are interested in her opinion. Her freedom of movement reveals how people use each other to gain access to goods, jobs, and sex.

Her understanding emanates from the knowledge, learned by "aged three," that her brother, Catullus, would "inherit the key to the Kingdom of Pops."⁶⁵ She may be envious of her brother's position as son and successor, but she also likes her unfettered independence since her parents do not pay much attention to her shenanigans. Zuleika's only sense of herself as an object arrives by way of the neighborhood brothel's pimp, "a Gaul with a wet donkey's tail / of a moustache," who tells her he "need[s] a Blackie" to complete "the Woppy, [the] Chinky, [the] Honky, [the] Paki, / [the] Gingery, [and the] Araby" prostitutes he already employs.⁶⁶ His list reads like the possibilities on a contemporary overseas sex tour, and Zuleika's presence would round out his exotic product line.

When the Roman patrician Felix “thrice [her] age and thrice [her] girth” spies Zuleika “at the baths of Cheapside,” he claims her for a more high-end and legal means of prostitution.⁶⁷ Like a slave being looked over for flaws at the docks, Felix examines Zuleika and deems her a perfect specimen. She is a commodity to be sold by her father, who has waited for her to ripen like a prized vegetable. When she returns to her old block as Felix’s new bride, the local pimp is dumbfounded by her transformation into a “real uptown chick.”⁶⁸ Her newly manicured body and the haute couture she wears remove her from his sphere on the cheap brothel circuit. Zuleika becomes the ultimate and untouchable commodity. The 11-year-old bride begins her confrontation with subjugation. Upward mobility comes at a cost to those not in a position to negotiate, and Zuleika pushes against this tide throughout her life. Naming herself a tour guide on the trip of her life gives her a measure of control as to how her story unfolds. She insists she is the explorer, not the object being explored.

Late twentieth-century Cool Britannia rebranding is undone by Zuleika’s role as witness and actor and “unsettles” what Gabriele Griffin argues is “the imaginary which nostalgically retains coloniality.”⁶⁹ Zuleika inserts her black body and voice into the annals of British history. Her writing reveals how the madness of power cannot be hidden by exhibits, laws, or sentimental declarations of the *glorious past*. That madness, whether locally, nationally, or globally controlled, resides not within black women’s psyches but is palpably expressed in, on, and about her body and the body of Londinium/London.

RECASTING TIME AND MADNESS IN THE GLOBAL CITY

Zuleika’s husband Felix views Londinium as a “less than dazzling little colonia,” but when he spies the 11-year-old Zuleika at the baths, after years of “enjoy[ing] bachelorhood,” he is reminded “of the girls back in Ægyptus, / where [he] spent most of his teenage years” during his father’s reign as “governor.”⁷⁰ He remembers these girls as “mysterious, dark ones” who “oil[ed] his limbs” and “waft[ed] soundlessly around him” as they did their duties.⁷¹ His is an exotic and sentimental rendering of the other. Like Thatcher and Blair, he has a mono-cultural and myopic view of history, connections, and rights. Felix’s needs supersede everyone else’s humanity.

His possession of his "*Illa Bella Negreeta*" has to do with maintaining an illusion of youth, virility, and desirability.⁷² Zuleika names Felix's objectification of her an "awful desire," and unlike Elizabeth Bennet, Zuleika is not destined for a blissful ending.⁷³ Felix traps her within a "white stucco villa [in] Cheapside" that he inhabits only "three months a year."⁷⁴ When he is home, he uses her sexually without thought for her desire or physical limitation. She regularly "pass[es] ... out" during intercourse, but Felix continues to pleasure himself with her body.⁷⁵ Zuleika likens the "villa with its very own latrina" to the underworld and Felix is a Pluto who demands his child bride is compliant.⁷⁶

Like Proserpine's mother Ceres, Zuleika's mother has no say in Zuleika's fate. Her father, acting as Jupiter, eagerly accepts Felix's marriage proposal since the suitor is a "hot-shot senator in Rome."⁷⁷ This union will elevate the merchant to the position of "father-in-law to Lucius Aurelius Felix, no less."⁷⁸ As a merchant and an immigrant, he focuses on selling product and investing wisely. Zuleika's father will allow nothing to stand in his way of becoming a top tier merchant along the Thames. The phrase "no less" tagged onto his son-in-law's title suggests Zuleika's father has been hopeful that his daughter would bring a good price. His exploitation of her is a business transaction to enlarge his mercantile territory. He risks his daughter's well-being for economic stability and status.

Felix's sister Antistia reinforces Zuleika's place as possession with the warning, after 3 years of marriage, that Zuleika is "no longer a novelty."⁷⁹ She reminds the now-teenage wife that "[she] will never be one of us" and her position is limited by how long she continues to delight Felix.⁸⁰ The phrase "never be one of us" echoes Thatcher's *swamping* metaphor but also recalls more emphatically Enoch Powell's 1968 speech to the London Rotary Club where he ended with his assessment that "the West Indian or Asian does not, by being born in England, become an Englishman. In law, he becomes a United Kingdom Citizen by birth; in fact he is a West Indian or an Asian still."⁸¹ In suggesting Zuleika can never be Roman, Antistia's rhetoric echoes Powell's and Thatcher's sentimental constructions of national identity, ownership, and race.

Antistia and Felix's privilege is an exhibition of "*behavioural* flaws" reserved in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western discourse for those of Zuleika's station.⁸² When Antistia visits, Felix "bolt[s] Zuleika's bedroom] door" after dinner.⁸³ He is not protecting her; he is monopolizing his favorite "*objet d'art*."⁸⁴ He wants no one else to possess

Zuleika. When she hears children's "screams" from behind the door, Zuleika empathizes.⁸⁵ Like the painful sex she endures with Felix, she recognizes their pain is for others' entertainment.

Zuleika views sex as a duty to be performed and to recover from. She believes she has a choice, even if the children she hears do not. Once she meets the emperor Severus, who wears Armani and shouts "Basta" to his adoring masses, Zuleika recasts her notions of sex and desire.⁸⁶ She names *the emperor* as her sexual object in spite of Alba and Venus's admonishments: "He'll be having a different townie tart every night."⁸⁷ Though Zuleika's desire objectifies him in the way contemporary culture objectifies and elevates celebrities, the emperor's view of Zuleika is similar to Felix's. She reminds Severus of a "desert girl in Londinium. So beautiful," and he feels a nostalgic connection to home in her presence.⁸⁸ He promises Zuleika that he will "take [her] out of the city, many times" to "Greenwich," "Hyde "Park," and "the jungle of Notting Hill," but he can offer her nothing beyond a quick affair, leaving her vulnerable to Felix's jealousy and rage.⁸⁹ Zuleika blinds herself to danger even as her verse reveals the emperor's objectification of her. She thinks Severus will make her "world larger," but this expansion is contingent upon her sexual availability.⁹⁰ If Felix views her as his personal exotic re-creation of home, the emperor casts Zuleika as a sentimental vision of home. Felix and Severus cannot imagine who Zuleika is in their absence.

When Severus takes her to the opening of the new "Mithras Gladiators Training Academia" in Greenwich, the event is a boring job for him, but to Zuleika the suppression, submission, and sacrifice in the arena is a metaphor for the collective madness in her life.⁹¹ Zuleika's perspective is a reclamation of Greenwich, not as a site of Great Britain's control of global space and time, but as the place where the attempt to control time and space can most blatantly be viewed as depraved and mad. The opening is a chaotic event where the "ecstatic crowds" roar "*Vivat Emperor Sevvva!*" to garner attention and feel part of the emperor's visit.⁹² Like any good politician, Severus "smil[es] indulgently" and "swish[es] his toga like a toreador" at his constituents.⁹³ Zuleika, part of "[h]is posse of the great, good and yours truly," lives vicariously through the crowd's adoration of their emperor.⁹⁴ Her epoch-hopping slang recalls the chaos that ensues whenever Princess Diana or One Direction makes a public appearance. The horde's uproar elevates everyone's status and concretizes positions of power. Everyone is a supporting character in

the emperor's visit—an appearance legitimizing the Roman colony as an important global metropolis.

Zuleika desires to “straddle [the emperor, and] send the masses into a frenzy” in order to concretize her own position.⁹⁵ Her choice of the word “frenzy” does not signal the “degenerative” and “*behavioural* flaws” found in women of the British empire, but does suggest that the ability to create a frenzy in others is one way to be noticed.⁹⁶ This “frenzy” garners attention if not remembrance. Zuleika imagines her exhibitionism as a declaration of ownership, her “shiny, black, shimmering arse” hanging out for the entire arena to witness.⁹⁷ This exposure of her backside, a sly recognition of Baartman, reveals her desire to be seen and the impossibility of that occurring. She craves the power she imagines her husband, her father, and her emperor possess, but she is unable to imagine a powerful female persona beyond sex or commodity.

In casting herself as an “*objet d’art*,” she declares her desire to legitimate her connection to the emperor.⁹⁸ She wants to “SHOCK [THE] NATION” in order to receive “recognition” and “commitment.”⁹⁹ She wants to “straddle him” in public in order to see her name “sprawled all over the *Daily Looking Glass*,” an anachronistic reference to London’s *Daily Mirror*.¹⁰⁰ The gossip and half-truths found in tabloids are a means of safety, even if an infamous act causes her visibility. Her daydream reveals her fear. She is not the emperor’s “official consort.”¹⁰¹ Whether visible or invisible, legitimate affair or not, she has been in danger from the moment Severus’s “desert eyes ... roam[ed] over / [her] voluptuous corpus.”¹⁰² He made her body his temple during his stay in Londinium, which he views as “pigs’ ca ca in comparison” to the beauty of his home: the Sahara.¹⁰³ He is, like Felix, solipsistic and does not recognize or care about the danger Zuleika faces once he leaves the Roman colony of Londinium.

When the gladiators are “marched / into the arena,” Zuleika learns the truth hidden from readers in tabloids, historical accounts, and branding initiatives.¹⁰⁴ The well-oiled “Über-hunks” who were “Guests of Honor at feasts” are absent. Zuleika sees “old slaves, convicts, / Christians, prisoners of war and the poor.”^{105,106} She is surprised by “the back row [of] female[s],” “beast-fodder, several noticeably pregnant.”¹⁰⁷ There is nothing *glorious* about what happens to “beast-fodder.”¹⁰⁸ These women’s appearances are not a marker of individual “degenerative” and “*behavioural* flaws,” but society’s collective fear and depravity.¹⁰⁹

Zuleika has learned to internalize the irrational rationality of the power dynamic. She embraces her ability to dress as she wants and has happily purchased personal slaves—Valeria and Aemilia, “two ginger girls ... captured / up north the freckled sort (typical / of Caledonians)” — who resent her attempts to have them conform.¹¹⁰ But the women in the arena compromise Zuleika’s ability to hide behind the limited privilege of her marriage and her affair.

At the end of the games, “five pacing lions were rolled noisily / across the sand by mules,” before the “five naked women,” like Proserpine emerging from the underworld, are led out of a trapdoor.¹¹¹ They do not speak; they cannot since they are “gagged,” “chained at the wrists and ankles ... [and] heavy with child.”¹¹² Unlike the goddess, there will be no return for these women. They are not deity or human but animals led to the slaughter. They cannot compete against the lions; they are not meant to be a challenge. These women are the ultimate construction of devocalization and erasure. Only Zuleika’s phrasing, “heavy with child” is a reminder that the women are human.¹¹³ They would give birth to another human being: an infant, not a cub or a calf. Their “wild-eyed” demeanor is the only clue they are terrified.¹¹⁴ This fear is legitimate. There is no recourse or escape from the hungry lions. The crowd too is trapped—everyone must conform to and accept this equation. Sacrificing these women means survival for another day, especially for those at the margins of power like Zuleika.

The women’s annihilation occurs during the hottest portion of the day, when “[t]he amphitheatre was a brazier, / [making] it ... too hot to look up at the sky.”¹¹⁵ The heat of the sun forces the crowd to set their gaze onto center stage. The entire arena, including the musicians, is silent for the first time since the games begin. The lion’s lunch could be an engrossing puppet show or temple ritual. No longer locked behind a bedroom door, Zuleika, like the masses, must watch as the lions devour the women. Only the lions chomping on “chunks // for the butcher’s block: raw tenderloin/ breast, brain, liver, heart” break this silence.¹¹⁶ These women may be reduced to beef stew, but under the blazing sun Zuleika names their humanity. She transgresses what is normally hidden behind flowery language like *glorious past* and *swamping*. She details what remains of these women’s human features: “breast, brain, liver, and heart.”¹¹⁷ She names those body parts and organs that allow these women to nurture, to think and to feel. The last detail of their living has to do with their hearts, the organ that opens itself to love. Their deaths,

a phantasmagoria of horror and human remains, shore up her lover's position and keep those who would climb higher in place.

The pregnant women's sacrifice reveals the vulnerable position in which everyone lives. Their deaths are an acknowledgement of the power constructions that force the crowd to worship the emperor no matter what he does or does not do. No one turns away or raises a voice in horror or consternation—no one attempts to stop the killings. It is a collective madness designed to maintain the status quo. To negate the women's presence as life and life force acknowledges the crowd's position both as decision-makers and the negation of real decision-making. The emperor's presence forces everyone, including Severus, into a submissive posture.

This scene is devoid of Zuleika's joyous anachronistic declarations of a *cool* Londinium. Her couplets throw back the veil on the dehumanization of females in and through global time and space. As the angel of history and kindred spirit of Proserpine, Queen of the Dead, Zuleika's recording of this scene can be piled onto the endless number of slaves who have been erased from the annals of British history. No names, no histories, and in the case of slavery, no final scene or tableau—only the internalization of what has been lost by those who continue to lose.

Brody suggests that "the unspeakable cannot be rendered forever inexpressible; the most persistent mode of forgetting is memory imperfectly deferred."¹¹⁸ Until the scene in the arena, Zuleika's recollections minimize what has happened to her and what occurs around her. She has placed uncomfortable feelings in her "Pandora's Box."¹¹⁹ These women's end unleashes Zuleika's suppressed memories. The pregnant women's total debasement and objectification mirrors Zuleika's relationship with her husband—how her father sold her, how her sister-in-law Antistia views her, how Felix and his sister treat their entertainment, and how she treats her personal slaves.

She recognizes in their deaths her fear of erasure. When the orchestra breaks the silence, the crowd, including Zuleika, "stood / and roared."¹²⁰ The sassy girl disappears behind "boiling red drops" of tears as she remembers "the girl / who so long ago had been stillborn // inside the woman."¹²¹ Like these women, she has been dehumanized. She has pretended that painful, violent sex is the only price for living in the "villa with its very own latrina."¹²² When Felix returns home after each of his trips, she needs "months of recuperation" after the doctor's "sewing is undone" from her husband's tearing of her genitalia.¹²³

In the arena, Zuleika understands Felix will never recognize her humanity. As a Roman citizen, he does not need to humanize or empathize with her. Recalling the collective sexual abuse meted out by her husband as one endless string of nights where she “woke up ... in the Kingdom of the Dad, Dead, Father,” Zuleika cries for the first time since her wedding night.¹²⁴ More than the empathetic stance she takes upon hearing the children crying in her home, Zuleika understands how the lions’ appetite mirrors those around her. She is everyone’s prey.

Through her tears, Zuleika recognizes she cannot escape her husband’s depravity any more than those women could have triumphed over the lions. She wants to believe the emperor will protect her and disregards his inability or desire to intervene for the pregnant women. She ignores the emperor’s view of her. Theirs is a public affair—they meet at the theater, he invites himself to her home, he takes her to the arena—all of these things amuse him. She amuses him. Sexual intimacy allows him to indulge nostalgically for a place to which he will never return. He is a lion, momentarily sated. She will be forgotten the moment he leaves Londinium.

After the arena, he whisks her from Greenwich to Notting Hill for an overnight. This Notting Hill is not an affluent and upscale neighborhood filled with trendy high-end shops and restaurants but an untamed “jungle” where the surrounding area must be cleared by the emperor’s “soldiers [who] ... cut ... a path with axes.”¹²⁵ Severus is “Pluto,” driving “four furious stallions” “in an open carriage” “down the Strand,” “[up] the winding path of Haymarket,” “over the sloping grassland of Mayfair,” and “across the wheatfields of Hyde Park.”¹²⁶ This shift in how she views her lover is the only indication of her doubt with regard to his intentions. Like Felix, Severus is god of the underworld. They arrive to a quiet domestic setup of a Bedouin tent with accouterments for a prolonged sexual encounter. There are soldier camps “stationed at every stage // of the journey ... // and beyond to Kensington High and way out to Fulham.”¹²⁷ The implications are clear—wherever the emperor travels, he sets aside time for extracurricular activities and makes sure he is safe and satisfied.

If Zuleika is Severus’s return to a nostalgic imaginary of home, she is also a receptacle for his sexual needs. She “squeeze[s]” and “massage[s]” his “tension” away—a tension perhaps created by the arena’s games.¹²⁸ Her witnessing of the women’s deaths shifts her demeanor and she becomes aggressive, tying the emperor’s hands. Severus views Zuleika’s action as a game of “*slap and tickle*.”¹²⁹ His smile pushes his lover to

more aggressive actions and she “slap[s]” him, “kick[s him] hard in the ribs,” and forces him to crawl on his “tied hands and knees” through the mud.¹³⁰ His response to her heightened aggression is to call her a “silly girl” and “laugh... / hysterically like a naughty child.”¹³¹ He cannot acknowledge Zuleika’s anger as hers, but views it as an act to heighten his sexual pleasure. Zuleika’s perspective reveals his edge; the emperor becomes hysterical when he is not in control. She forces Severus into a state of feminized disempowerment—the position the women in the arena held, the space Zuleika holds in her marriage. On the margins of the metropolis and in the wilds of Britannia, Zuleika refuses erasure.

If Greenwich is the site of death and destruction on a global scale, Zuleika inscribes Notting Hill as the site where she claims the fullness of her emotional expression. She moves from the margins of power to the central power, although it cannot be maintained. She repeats the question “who’s the boss now?” until the emperor stops laughing. Only when he cries, “you are the boss ... // Don’t leave me now, come home / with me, // maman, take me home,” does she offer him sexual completion.¹³² Zuleika, as Proserpine, unleashes her rage. Her fury reveals the god Pluto to be a lost boy searching for home. The emperor, the ultimate symbol of imperial and political power, only maintains control if he is not challenged. Zuleika, the symbol of the marginalized and erased black British female, acts out violently in the manner others have acted upon her. As the couple orgasms, their bodies covered in mud, Zuleika fantasizes a married life with the emperor “on the Palatine Hill” complete with a daughter named “Claudia.”¹³³ Under her aggressive, angry stance is her fantasy, never spoken, of being loved. This feeling is, perhaps, the first emotion hidden in her “Pandora’s box.”¹³⁴ Growing up with parents who did not love each other, witnessing the lack of love in the relationships around her, and being married to man who views her as a possession, Zuleika suppresses any need for love. Her disorientation and confusion in Notting Hill emanates from her knowledge that Severus, like Felix, is a Pluto who would dismiss her vulnerability and desire. Her rage is grounded in the knowledge that she is lovable and deserves to be seen and heard.

RESITUATING THE WORD

In *The Emperor’s Babe*, Zuleika responds to madness, but that madness is not in and of itself hers. Her insistence on her right to exist and act is not a psychological instability due to “degenerative” or “*behavioural*

flaws.”¹³⁵ She may, for a time, internalize the notions of inferiority pushed upon her, but even before she expresses her rage on the emperor, she has already asserted: “Civis Romana sum”—I am a Roman citizen.¹³⁶ This statement is legally untrue, but in mapping her history, she concretizes her place as a female of the Roman Empire and a black woman of British history.

Zuleika’s use of the Proserpine myth foregrounds her freedom before marriage and details how a child-woman negotiates the space of marriage when she is subjugated. Zuleika’s narrative departs from Proserpine’s story not only by privileging the subjugated individual’s perspective but also by detailing her relationship with her mother. Ceres is a fertility goddess and sister to Pluto and Jupiter, Proserpine’s father. She searches for and fights to rescue her daughter from an untenable situation. She engages with her brothers in a battle, forcing them to return Proserpine to her. In fighting for Proserpine, Ceres expresses her agency. Zuleika’s mother is no Ceres. Her grief is a miasma of unending sorrow connected to the loss of her homeland.

In contrast to Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), where Sethe, as a combination of Ceres and Medea, is the main figure searching for understanding and forgiveness, Zuleika’s mother is a shadow figure who has no power or influence over her daughter. In *Beloved*, Sethe insists she did not abandon her daughter Beloved or her sons but commits infanticide to save them from the degradation of slavery. Sethe’s grief is central to Beloved’s visibility. Without Sethe, Beloved cannot and would not have anyone to whom she could return. Once Sethe connects to her community and receives forgiveness for her actions, Beloved literally combusts. Beloved is the articulation of her mother’s need for forgiveness from her community. She is a ghost who haunts everyone’s freedom. In *The Emperor’s Babe*, Zuleika’s mother has no community to help her navigate her grief and isolation. She becomes a shadow figure in Zuleika’s narrative.

If Ceres weeps until her daughter returns to her, Zuleika’s mother gives her a “loving embrace” at her wedding.¹³⁷ Zuleika calls this last show of affection “a performance.”¹³⁸ If her mother is distraught, Zuleika will never know. Her mother is caught in the underworld, married to her brother, both children to one of King Meroe’s concubines. They are “a human chain, belonging to King Meroe, / with no breakages for generations.”¹³⁹ Zuleika cannot unwind if her mother is “[her] aunt,” if she is her mother’s “daughter and niece,” or “[her] own

cousin.”¹⁴⁰ The mother/daughter relationship has been tainted by the imperial construction of Meroe, but her mother is grief-stricken at the loss of that lineage. She is psychically damaged, which causes her to dismiss the needs and the safety of her daughter.

As a child, Zuleika watches as her father uses her mother’s “sweet cakes” to set up his first “kerb[-side]” business.¹⁴¹ Like Ceres, her mother is analogous to nurturance. In addition to mothering two children, she feeds the people through her cakes. She receives no credit for her work and recognizes she cannot care about Zuleika since her daughter is a commodity to be sold by her husband. The only time Zuleika’s mother relaxes or shows affection is when “she rocked [her son] Catullus / to sleep.”¹⁴² Zuleika cannot turn to this damaged woman, a victim who has internalized the inferiority of a maddened system, any more than her mother can reach out to her daughter.

Zuleika is left alone to negotiate how to survive the lion’s den of Londinium, but this solitude forces her to claim her place in the metropolis. Zuleika, at 11 years of age, cannot comprehend the psychic devastation from which she and her mother suffer. Her mother is married to her brother in a loveless marriage, far from anything or anyone who is familiar. She hides behind “voluminous / black robes over her head, slumped / into a corner, still as a sack of potatoes.”¹⁴³ She is caught in the *in-between* and “yearn[s]” ceaselessly “for the city of Meroe, and safety.”¹⁴⁴ She cannot comprehend how Meroe is not a safe space any more than Zuleika is able to ask for help. Only her father—who states: “When you’re a slave you dream of either / owning slaves or freeing them”—is glad for his ability to create his own destiny after “a famine, plague or flood,” killed the king and allowed him and his wife/sister to migrate with Zuleika.¹⁴⁵ As a freed male, that is her father’s birthright, but Zuleika and her mother’s choices are narrower.

Zuleika maintains a practicality regarding her marriage. She views it as a business transaction for her husband’s pleasure and her father’s economic gain. This male privilege highlights how those with institutional power are cognizant only of their “desire,” whether carnal, materialistic or political.¹⁴⁶ The women become minor voices in the weaving of the dominant script. Like Proserpine, her arranged marriage forces her to mature quickly. The upward mobility of which she and Alba dreamed turns out to be far from fact. They imagined that they “were gonna steal from the rich, // give to the poor ... // live in one of them mansions // with a thousand slaves feeding us cakes.”¹⁴⁷ Instead,

Zuleika's married life clamps down on her freedom. She cannot spend money, take a walk, or visit with friends without Felix's permission. She doesn't have a thousand slaves who wait on her lovingly. She wants her personal slaves, Valeria and Aemilia, to be her "devotees," but instead Valeria insists that her "Mammy an Faither were chieftens."¹⁴⁸ Zuleika dismisses her claims with a "where had I heard *that* before," but worries that "these wretched girls will play [her] / like a lyre."¹⁴⁹ After she denies their request for "manumission," she feels "pure odium oozing out of every freckled pore / in their bodies."¹⁵⁰ They view her as "Public Enemy Numerus Primus" and they turn on her once her lover, the emperor, is dead (*The Emperor's Babe* 209). In exchanging information with Felix about her affair with Severus, these women gain their freedom and flee Londinium. They refuse to play by Zuleika's rules and reject her view that "life began for the girls when we met."¹⁵¹ If Zuleika embraces her role as their master out of some sense of wanting to control someone's life, they refuse to accept her colonization of them. Zuleika uses these females to give herself a sense of privilege, but she forgets that her position is a temporary one gained, ostensibly, through her body, like theirs, being sold to the highest bidder. For her slaves, Zuleika's affair becomes information to be traded for freedom.

Felix's discovery of her affair unleashes a misogynistic and classist rant. He believes that he "created a lady / out of a sewer rat" and her affair has made him a "laughing stock."¹⁵² His outrage echoes Enoch Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech where Powell suggests that in order to avoid a "preventable evil"—"a black man [having] the whip hand over the white man"—it would be best if Commonwealth Black citizens did not migrate to England since allowing them any legal sanctions was akin to giving them the upper hand.¹⁵³ Gilroy argues, "[Powell's] horror was at the prospect of blacks being afforded limited legal protection and it was this debasement of the legal sanctions which appalled him rather than the issues of mass migration itself."¹⁵⁴ Similarly, Felix rethinks his placement of Zuleika in a high position within *his* household. His idea of trust, like Powell's desire to control the movements of the Black Commonwealth citizen, is to lock Zuleika away and allow her in public only when he deems necessary. He is "*utterly* humiliated" when he realizes his cage has not held her.¹⁵⁵ He has no understanding of how she was able to gain closer access to the emperor than he ever did. Zuleika has learned what it means to be a "victim," she refuses the trope and now she is a "threat" to Felix's manhood and privilege.¹⁵⁶

Antistia has made Zuleika feel subordinate since the Roman siblings “had dined with the emperor’s children, [while Zuleika’s] father spoke pidgin-Latin, / [and they] ate off [their] laps in the doorway,” but this couplet belies the fact that Felix has never met the emperor.¹⁵⁷ Felix recognizes too late that the Libyan born emperor Severus has played him a fool and sent him “to lead a trading / expedition to India” in order to fuck his “*Illa Bella Negreetta*.”¹⁵⁸ His rage is directed not at the affair proper, but at his lack of control over her person and his awareness of misreading his wife’s character. Despite his “selfish[ness],” emanating from the fear he has married beneath him, he feels he has been bested.¹⁵⁹ If he had set up their meeting and orchestrated the emperor sleeping with Zuleika for profit, he would not be angry. It is not about the sex. Felix has not recognized that his “knock-out *objet d’art*” has a power and intellect separate from him.¹⁶⁰ She has been able to reach further, without the proper pedigree, than he ever could.

He reasserts the only control he has ever had over her—the power of life and death. He forces his servant Tranio to poison Zuleika with “arsenicum hidden in spicy sauces.”¹⁶¹ Like Proserpine, Zuleika unwittingly eats food that will send her to the land of the dead. Felix’s privilege allows him to run away and clothe himself in the falsity that he is the one who has been wronged. He leaves before the poison takes full effect, rendering him innocent of Zuleika’s murder and travels to Severus’s funeral in Rome. Felix must act as if he is ignorant to the emperor’s cuckolding of him, but he is not the victim as Mr. Darcy is constructed. Felix’s behavioral flaws of pride, selfishness, and depravity are presented as a counter to Zuleika’s integrity. She refuses to ask her friends Alba or Venus for assistance in escaping since she knows: “Felix would hunt [her] down and make them pay.”¹⁶² She cannot “be angry with [Tranio]. ... Because he had not spilled the beans, / as he should have” (*The Emperor’s Babe* 243). She refuses to escape her “fate” and views “the actual act of dying [as] mere procedure.”¹⁶³ She suggests, “Felix isn’t a bad man He’s the person he was brought up to be,” which is, ironically, a bad man and a mad man.¹⁶⁴ Her ability to place her friends’ and servants needs over her own and to have compassion for her husband, negates Felix’s passive aggressive reassertion of his power over her. His right has nothing to do with Zuleika’s humanity. When he sees that she is not mere ornamentation, and that he could have a real relationship with her as his partner, the lifeblood of Londinium, he instead views her agency and self-definition as an insult to his position. He chooses to destroy her.

Zuleika avoids the “crisis of genesis narratives” where contamination is connected to “the race that strays too far from its proper place.”¹⁶⁵ She has not strayed from imperial constructions of power; her husband has not seen her humanity—he is the one who is mad. She has not strayed, but accepts her place as a trophy wife and mistress to the emperor; her husband has ignored her humanity—he is the one who is mad. He cannot fathom how high she has flown within the imperial construction of power. Her residence in the “villa, grander than any [she] and Alba / imagined” is a place of outward beauty, but inward degeneration.¹⁶⁶ Greenwich and the arena are the eye of the storm, but what occurs on the block with the “white stucco villas” is marked on Zuleika’s map of Londinium as the dark side of town. The heart of Londinium is not where the expensive houses and pampered people reside; it is located where people, in all their permutations commingle. Her remapping of the city forces Felix to recognize her humanity or destroy her. Like Proserpine, Zuleika’s “metamorphosis,” initiated by her abductor and acted out with her lover, acknowledges the madness of desire—her husband’s, the emperor’s, and, by proxy, the Roman empire’s.¹⁶⁷

In *The Emperor’s Babe*, Zuleika cannot avoid the psychic devastation of ongoing abuse and marginalization. Once she “articulates” her position within her husband’s household and becomes cognizant of her rage and need for love, she succumbs to some of the pleasures her position enables, but this agency compromises her husband’s sense of control.¹⁶⁸

Zuleika’s negotiation of the power dynamics within her household reveals the depravity and double-dealing necessary to maintain hierarchical models of success. At the same time, her epoch-skipping verse upends notions of present-day homogenization and purity in London. As Londinium’s mapmaker, Zuleika decimates the false strength of those in power in Rome, but as the angel of history, she smashes notions of Cool Britannia and London’s role in the continued oppression of the Commonwealth’s black citizens. Her narrative is a transgressive and radical act of self-formation pushing against erasure and marginalization. Her life is an indictment of those, like Thatcher and Blair, who view history through a monochromatic, sentimental lens of lies and obfuscation. She upends Millennium celebrations that whitewash British expansionism and writes herself into the annals of British history. She maps her life—a life that may not change legal policy but serves as the lifeblood of the global metropolis.

NOTES

1. Bernardine Evaristo, *The Emperor's Babe* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2002), 45.
2. Peter Fryer, *Black People in the British Empire: An Introduction* (London: Pluto Press, 1988), xiv.
3. Evaristo was also "inspired by" Ivan Van Sertima's *African Presence in Early Europe*, J. A. Rogers's *Sex and Race*, and Florence Dupont's *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*. Bernardine Evaristo, "Alastair Niven in Conversation" *Wasafiri* 16, no. 34 (2001): 15.
4. Evaristo, "Alastair Niven in Conversation," 19.
5. The Anglo-Saxon migration did not begin until the fifth century AD, and the Normans' win at the Battle of Hastings occurred on October 14, 1066 AD. Queen Elizabeth II is a direct descendent of William II of Normandy.
6. Bernardine Evaristo, "On the Road: Bernardine Evaristo Interviewed by Karen Hooper." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 41, no. 3 (2006): 6.
7. Meroe is present day Sudan.
8. Ken Urban, "Cruel Britannia," in *Cool Britannia? British Political Drama in the 1990s*, ed. Rebecca D'Monté and Graham Saunders (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 39.
9. For Evaristo's use of "Romanness" as "a clever stand-in for 'Englishness'" see Pilar Cuder-Domínguez, "Ethnic Cartographies of London in Bernardine Evaristo and Zadie Smith" *European Journal of English Studies* 8, no. 2 (2004): 178.
10. Evaristo, *The Emperor's Babe*, 170.
11. According to Andrew Dalby, "In Roman literature of the late Republic and early Empire, Falernian is the almost ubiquitous symbol of fine wine and convivial pleasures." Andrew Dalby, *Food in the Ancient World from A to Z* (London: Routledge, 2003), 138.
12. James Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work* (New York: Random House, 2000), 115.
13. Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 6.
14. Brody, *Impossible Purities*, 7.
15. Anne McClintock, *Double Crossings: Madness, Sexuality, and Imperialism* (Vancouver, Canada: Ronsdale, 2001), 10.
16. McClintock, *Double Crossings*, 11.
17. Hershini Bhana Young, *Haunting Capital: Memory, Text, and the Black Diasporic Body* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2006), 28.
18. Jane Ussher, *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 75.

18. Lynette Goddard, "Middle-Class Aspirations and Black Women's Mental (Ill) Health in Zindika's *Leonora's Dance*, and Bonnie Greer's *Munda Negra* and *Dancing on Blackwater*," in *Cool Britannia? British Political Drama in the 1990s*, ed. Rebecca D'Monté and Graham Saunders (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 99.
20. Goddard, "Middle-Class Aspirations," 99.
21. See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); Susan Gubar, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 2 (1981): 243–263; Ussher, *Women's Madness*; and Goddard, "Middle-Class Aspirations," 96–113.
22. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 64.
23. On Prosperine, known as Persephone in Greek mythology, see Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*, Vol. 1 (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); and Kathie Carlson, *Life's Daughter/Death's Bride: Inner Transformation through the Goddess Demeter/Persephone* (Boston: Shambala, 1997).
24. In *Jane Eyre* (1847), Charlotte Brontë uses the trope of the madwoman in the attic to throw a chink in the romance between a rich and arrogant Mr. Rochester, and a poor, but honorable Jane Eyre. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Jean Rhys reimagines Brontë's minor character, Bertha Mason, as the protagonist Antoinette, a Caribbean creole whose mental state deteriorates after her marriage to an Englishman. Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1897, Project Gutenberg, 2013), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1260/1260-h/1260-h.htm>; and Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, ed. Judith L. Raskin (New York: Norton Critical Editions, 1998).
25. Evaristo, *The Emperor's Babe*, vii.
26. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1967), 114.
27. Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 22.
28. Margaret Thatcher, "Interview by Gordon Burns," *World in Action*, aired January 27, 1968 (Granada TV).
29. The 1981 British Nationality Act ostensibly divided the British Commonwealth into three tiers of nationality: "British citizenship, British Dependent Territories citizenship, and British Overseas citizenship. ... All three categories of citizen created by the 1981 act may travel on a British passport; all three may seek British consular protection; yet only the first enjoys the right to live in the United Kingdom." Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, 182–183.

30. Mark Leonard, *BritishTM: Renewing Our Identity* (London: Demos, 1997), 5.
31. *Ibid.*, 1; 5.
32. *Ibid.*, 5.
33. Clive Gray, "The Millennium Dome: 'Falling From Grace,'" *Parliamentary Affairs* 56 (2003): 442.
34. Denis Cosgrove and Luciana L. Martins, "Millennial Geographics," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90, no. 1 (2000): 102–103.
35. *Ibid.*, 99.
36. The Millennium Dome cost the government both in resources and reputation. According to Clive Gray, "By the time [the Dome] closed for business, it had cost £628 million in grants from the government, the Millennium Commission and the National Lottery." Cosgrove and Martins state other structures built for the celebrations included the Millennial Bridge, "the city's first new river crossing in a century, [which] connect[ed] the financial heart of London ... to a new Tate Gallery of Modern Art at Bankside." Gray, "The Millennium Dome", 441–442; and Cosgrove and Martins, "Millennial Geographics," 102.
37. Quoted in Cosgrove and Martins, "Millennial Geographics," 102.
38. Quoted in *The Economist*, "All Mod Cons," September 27, 1997, 61, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/224108165?accountid+28991>.
39. Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.
40. Young, *Haunting Capital*, 28.
41. *Ibid.*, 28.
42. N. Draper, "The City of London and Slavery: Evidence from the First Dock Companies, 1795–1800," *Economic History Review* 61, no. 2 (2008): 437.
43. Draper, "The City of London," 442.
44. According to James A. Rawley, by the time the slave trade ended in 1807, "more than 2500 ships [had] cleared the port of London for Africa." James A. Rawley, *London: Metropolis of Slave Trade*. (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 19.
45. Natasha Gordon-Chipembere, "Introduction: Claiming Sarah Baartman, a Legacy to Grasp," in *Representation and Black Womanhood: The Legacy of Sarah Baartman*, ed. Natasha Gordon-Chipembere (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 12.
46. Janell Hobson, *Body as Evidence: Mediating Race, Globalizing Gender* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2012), 67.

47. Ibid., 67.
48. For ways in which Baartman's resistance is read today, see Natasha Gordon-Chipembere, ed., *Representation and Black Womanhood: The Legacy of Sarah Baartman* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
49. Paul Gilroy, *'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 11.
50. Ibid., 11.
51. David Morrissey, "The National Front Disco," *Your Arsenal*, Warner Off Roster ASIN B000002LUL, 1992, compact disc.
52. Morrissey insisted "The National Front Disco" was not racist. In an interview for *Q*, he did admit: "[B]lack people and white people will never really get on." In 2007, he reiterated his stance: "Although I don't have anything against people from other countries, the higher the influx into England the more the British identity disappears." Deevoy, Adrian. "Morrissey: Taking Up Your Arsenal/Ooh I say!," *The Q Interview*, *Q: The Modern Guide to Music and More*, September 1992, <http://motorcycleaupairboy.com/interviews/1992/isay.htm>; and Oliver Duff, "Morrissey Blames Immigration for 'Disappearance' of British Identity," *The Independent*, November 29, 2007, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/morrissey-blames-immigration-for-disappearance-of-british-identity-760825.html>.
53. Evaristo, *The Emperor's Babe*, 12.
54. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 260.
55. Ibid., 259.
56. Ibid., 260.
57. Evaristo, *The Emperor's Babe*, 159.
58. Ibid., 9; 3; 249.
59. Ibid., 9.
60. Ibid., 93.
61. Ibid., 12.
62. Ibid., 48.
63. Camulodunum is the Roman name for the Celtic settlement known today as Colchester.
64. Ibid., 42; 4.
65. Ibid., 20.
66. Ibid., 45.
67. Ibid., 4.
68. Ibid., 46.
69. Gabrielle Griffin, *Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7.

70. Evaristo, *The Emperor's Babe*, 15.
71. Ibid., 15.
72. Ibid., 3.
73. Ibid., 19.
74. Ibid., 17; 156.
75. Ibid., 29.
76. Ibid., 27.
77. Ibid., 3.
78. Ibid., 4.
79. Ibid., 53.
80. Ibid., 53.
81. Enoch Powell, "Speech to London Rotary Club, Eastbourne." *Enoch Powell: Life and Views*, November 16, 1968, <http://www.enochpowell.net/fr-83.html>.
82. McClintock, *Double Crossings*, 10.
83. Evaristo, *The Emperor's Babe*, 52.
84. Ibid., 75.
85. Ibid., 53.
86. Ibid., 171.
87. Ibid., 118.
88. Ibid., 220.
89. Ibid., 158.
90. Ibid., 220.
91. Ibid., 169.
92. Ibid., 171.
93. Ibid., 171.
94. Ibid., 171.
95. Ibid., 174.
96. McClintock, *Double Crossings*, 10.
97. Evaristo, *The Emperor's Babe*, 174.
98. Ibid., 75.
99. Ibid., 174; 175.
100. Ibid., 174.
101. Ibid., 174.
102. Ibid., 114.
103. Ibid., 221.
104. Ibid., 175.
105. Ibid., 175; 176.
106. There have been numerous iterations of the noble gladiator, including Howard Fast's 1951 historical fiction *Spartacus*, upon which the 1960 film starring Kirk Douglas and Laurence Olivier was based. The New Zealand-based popular Starz television series *Spartacus* (2010–2013) is

a purposefully anachronistic tale where gladiators are eye candy. Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000) focuses on the warrior mentality found in and out of the arena, but the titled character is a proper Roman citizen who has been unfairly enslaved. *Gladiator*, released in the same year when *The Emperor's Babe* was published, makes no room in the arena for women, especially women of color, and only white women appear as spectators. The one series to examine other cultural narratives besides the ruling or gladiator classes is the HBO series *Rome*, but in this construction, there are few people of color and females play subordinate roles to male dominance. They are victims who can be saved only if they are pure and then only by their loving men. These series follow most British renderings of the Roman Empire—those in charge sound and act like the ruling members of the British Empire.

107. Ibid., 176.
108. Ibid., 176.
109. McClintock, *Double Crossings*, 10.
110. Evaristo, *The Emperor's Babe*, 55.
111. Ibid., 178.
112. Ibid., 178.
113. Ibid., 178.
114. Ibid., 178.
115. Ibid., 178.
116. Ibid., 178–179.
117. Ibid., 179.
118. Brody, *Impossible Purities*, 7.
119. Evaristo, *The Emperor's Babe*, 180.
120. Ibid., 179.
121. Ibid., 179–180.
122. Ibid., 27.
123. Ibid., 33.
124. Ibid., 179.
125. Ibid., 218.
126. Ibid., 217–218.
127. Ibid., 219.
128. Ibid., 222.
129. Ibid., 224.
130. Ibid., 225.
131. Ibid., 225.
132. Ibid., 227.
133. Ibid., 229.
134. Ibid., 180.
135. McClintock, *Double Crossings*, 10.
136. Evaristo, *The Emperor's Babe*, 54.

137. Ibid., 29.
138. Ibid., 29.
139. Ibid., 24.
140. Ibid., 24.
141. Ibid., 4.
142. Ibid., 20.
143. Ibid., 19.
144. Ibid., 27; 25.
145. Ibid., 25.
146. Ibid., 22.
147. Ibid., 9–10.
148. Ibid., 56; 57.
149. Ibid., 57; 108.
150. Ibid., 206; 208.
151. Ibid., 207.
152. Ibid., 241.
153. Enoch Powell, “‘Rivers of Blood’ Birmingham speech,” Midland Hotel, April 20, 1968, *The Telegraph*, November 6, 2007, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/3643823/Enoch-Powells-Rivers-of-Blood-speech.html>.
154. Gilroy, ‘*There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*,’ (86).
155. Evaristo, *The Emperor’s Babe*, 241.
156. Baldwin, *The Devil*, 115.
157. Evaristo, *The Emperor’s Babe*, 54.
158. Ibid., 238; 3.
159. Ibid., 33.
160. Ibid., 75.
161. Ibid., 243.
162. Ibid., 242.
163. Ibid., 244; 245.
164. Ibid., 247.
165. McClintock, *Double Crossings*, 9; 12.
166. Evaristo, *The Emperor’s Babe*, 33.
167. Ibid., 33.
168. Baldwin, *The Devil*, 115.

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