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Book Reviews

Rebecca Ann Bach. *Colonial Transformations: The Cultural Production of the New Atlantic World*. New York: Palgrave, 2000. Pp xiv, 290.

Since the 1980s, scholars from anthropology, geography, history, and sociology have been working increasingly often under the banner of Atlantic World studies. Their integrative aim has been to recover the degree to which the transoceanic projections of Europe's colonialist powers participated in an emerging global system, to which Europe, Africa, the Caribbean archipelago and the two Americas each contributed reciprocally. The influence of this reconceptualization has more recently registered in literary studies, where, in an attempt to avoid the problematic re-inscription of the nationalist genealogies upon which earlier generations tended to rely, a number of us now strive to re-imagine the writing of the colonial period in relation to this transoceanic network.[1] In *Colonial Transformations: The Cultural Production of the New Atlantic World*, Rebecca Ann Bach seeks to enter this dynamic conversation.

Chapter one's discussion of Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti* and *Epithalamium* moves from England across the Irish Sea, suggesting that 'his little love poems' are as 'deeply imbricated in his colonial career as his public epic poetry' (37). With chapter two Bach begins her transatlantic journey, charting connections between Fynes Morrison's *Itinerary*, various Virginia Company documents, William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and Richard Norwood's *Mapp of the Somer Ilands once called the Bermudas*. Chapter three continues along this tack, juxtaposing plays by Ben Jonson and various collaborators, including *Eastward Hoe*, *Bartholomew Fair*, *The New Inne*, *The Devil is an Asse*, and *The Staple of News*, with more Virginia-related documents, while chapter four frames a range of court and city entertainments by Jonson, Munday, Middleton, Heywood, Webster, Dekker, Campion and Davenant in relation to this developing colonial discourse. In what may be the book's most rewarding discussion, Bach's fifth chapter reads the 'Virginia Maske' represented in John Smith's *Generall Historie of Virginia* against the 1616 edition of Jonson's *Masques at Court*, demonstrating how its inscription as 'a formal entertainment' is made to carry 'all the cultural weight of the masque in Jacobean England' (197). The

range of texts collated in the study indicates both how richly this transoceanic field may be conceptualized in terms of sources, and how narrowly Bach has circumscribed it. Her source material also indicates that the subtitle of this book is a bit misleading: it ought to read 'the *English* Atlantic World'. For although the Spanish occasionally register in these pages, the Dutch, French, Italians and Portuguese, any of whom would have appeared to contemporary eyes more savvy participants in the Atlantic community, do not.

While emphasizing that 'England's colonial enterprises helped to define an Englishness that was always a constructed category' (3), Bach's major concern is to discover how 'England's interactions with Ireland, Virginia and Bermuda between 1580 and 1640 changed all four locations' shapes and forms . . . as human settlements and ecological environments' (3). At the same time, she wants to show that while 'colonizers attempted to and did transform the environments and people they encountered, they were themselves transformed by those encounters' (5). So, while 'attending to the complexity of "the colonized" and "the colonizers" as terms and as actual signified groups,' Bach seeks to 'carefully mark power differences that transcend hybridity to freeze difference in the interest of violent oppression' (6). In addition, she wants to draw our attention to 'the twentieth-century consequences of the colonial transformations planned and executed while Shakespeare, Spenser, and Jonson were writing drama and poetry for their largely metropolitan audiences' (23).

While these are worthy aims, several of the strategies through which Bach attempts to attain them work instead to undermine her argument. Early on in *Colonial Transformations* it becomes clear that the theoretical underpinnings upon which the study is raised (which are never clearly articulated), ride uneasily against its advertised emphasis on 'the material reality of cultural transformation' (26). Bach eschews the New Historicist practice of employing representative anecdotes in order to emphasize the structural features of early Atlantic society. Nor does her version of cultural materialism appear to pay its debt to any Marxian sense of economics or class struggle. Rather, Bach's epistemological support seems to rely mainly on a vague notion of 'Patriarchy', in relation to which she piles up examples from her wide-ranging sources that emphasize her chosen thematics. This cataloguing of topoi is then punctuated with occasional interpretive interventions, and it is at these moments that the limitations of Bach's approach become apparent. Appealing to the OED (or to less authoritative glossaries), she repeatedly privileges the particular senses she sees as holding interpretive keys to her various texts. Whether discussing diction in individual sonnets from the *Amoretti* sequence, particular episodes in *The Faerie Queene* (39, 51, 63), passages of Gaelic verse offered in English

translation (60), imperialist names as evidenced on period maps (105, 111), or in construing the diction of Elizabethan and Jacobean plays and masques (132, 148, 158, 179, 195, 215), Bach's method is the same: she simply insists that we must read selected signifiers her way. Only in chapter five, when Bach incorporates models borrowed from anthropologists and ethno-historians such as M. Annette James, Theresa Halsey, Clara Sue Kidwell, Valerie Shirer Mathes and Naomi Quinn does *Colonial Transformations* realize the interdisciplinary potential characteristic of the stronger work in Atlantic World studies.

As troubling as this study's lack of theoretical clarity are its presentist leanings. Rejecting Mary Fuller's 'claim that "it was hardly possible to predict what happened later from reading the history of 1576–1624"' (28), Bach avers that 'Late-twentieth-century white-Indian antipathy in North America and violence between Protestants and Catholics in the two Irelands of the present have their historical roots in Shakespeare's world,' as do 'contemporary white-black struggles in the United States' (28–9). One of the purposes of *Colonial Transformations* is thus to trace 'early modern England's contributions to oppressions as well as the resistances recorded in the transformations that made a new Atlantic World' (31). It is certainly possible to construct a genealogy of oppressions, whether of ethnicity, race, gender or class, extending back to our early modern forbears. But Bach seems more interested in assigning blame than asking questions about how or why. Even readers sympathetic to this book's agenda – Bach casts herself among our era's 'ethical scholars' (31) – may find themselves put off by the inflection of its argument. In order to claim the moral high-ground, Bach appeals to authentic post-colonial voices such as those of Keetoowah Cherokee anthropologist Ward Churchill, Muskogee Creek poet Joy Harjo, and most especially, to the African-Antiguan prose stylist Jamaica Kinkaid, whose tone of 'courageous outrage' (79) she appropriates. Admiring the way Kinkaid's much anthologized essay, 'A Small Place', 'spits in the face of [colonial] hubris' by renaming English maritime heroes Drake, Hawkins, Rodney, Hood and Nelson 'maritime criminals' (78), Bach eschews the New Historicist practice of employing representative anecdotes, which might have helped her to emphasize the structural features of early Atlantic Society. The act of naming was certainly among the most important of the symbolic acts in which European colonizers engaged. The Amerindian, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French and English names written across the Atlantic speak volumes about more than five hundred years of historical and ideological interaction. But rather than reading this tapestry of signification as representing a highly complex web of mediations developing across time, Bach often lapses into a

version of the binary thinking she dismisses in her colonialist sources: the culturally insensitive past is 'them'; the culturally sympathetic present is 'us'.

And it is in this present that Bach seems to locate most of her resistance. Though she strives to be sensitive to the fact that 'Native American group identities [were] stripped away in the process of colonial transformation' (6), and laments the continuing homogenization and appropriation of Native American culture as represented in 'the struggle by Native American groups to change the names of sports teams like the Cleveland Indians and the Atlanta Braves' (70), Bach allows the Native Americans of early modernity little inter-cultural agency of their own. As several important studies have suggested, groups like the Powhatans of Virginia were not passive recipients of European culture; rather, they sought actively to incorporate the colonizers into their own societal structures, politico-economic rivalries, and belief systems.[2] But instead of examining these complexities in terms of their early modern dynamics, Bach applies Ward Churchill's appropriation of the Russell Means phrase, 'cultural genocide' (214), to Captain John Smith's efforts to represent the Amerindian culture of Virginia. The realization that the New World transformed the Old – even as the latter sought to subdue, convert, remake or exploit it – has been a commonplace of history almost since the *conquista* itself. Within a very few generations the physical and mental worlds of Europe, Africa and the Americas were inalterably and irreversibly changed. There is a growing body of important work that could have provided Bach with sufficient theoretical and historical buttressing to have enabled her to pose far more pointed questions about the relation of her colonial subjects to the highly complex transoceanic system her study seeks to explore.[3] But Bach's failure to survey even a corner of this field, in combination with the problematic methodological strategies and tone she deploys, gives her study a dilettantish air. *Colonial Transformations* does little either to illuminate the exchanges wrought in the convergence of the Atlantic's various cultures, or to modify our sense of its history. Although Bach's movingly written epilogue holds up a mirror to some of the contradictions in current public-history representational practices, the main body of her work fails to figure either the complexity, vitality, or indeed, the multi-cultural hybridity that analysts have come to see as defining the 'New Atlantic World'. In the end, and in spite of its aspirations to political intervention, *Colonial Transformations* seems to be more about fashionable packaging than substantive contribution to an increasingly vital field.

Eric Griffin

Notes

1 For a review of recent titles, see James E. Sanders, 'Creating the Early Atlantic World', *Renaissance Quarterly* 56 (2003): 139–49.
2 See for example, Frederic W. Gleach, *Powhatan's World and Colonial Virginia: A Conflict of Cultures* (Lincoln, 1997); and Helen C. Rountree, ed *Powhatan Foreign Relations, 1500–1722* (Charlottesville, 1993).
3 The following titles provide excellent introductions to the field: Peter A. Coclanis, '*Drang Nach Osten*: Bernard Bailyn, the World-Island, and the Idea of Atlantic History', *Journal of World History* 13, no. 1 (2002): 169–82; Bernard Bailyn, 'The Idea of Atlantic History', Harvard University: International Seminar on the History of the Atlantic World, 1500–1800, Working Paper No. 96-01, 1996; Daniel W. Howe, *American History in an Atlantic Context* (Oxford, 1993).

Pamela Allen Brown. *Better a Shrew Than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003. Pp xi, 263.

In *Better a Shrew Than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England,* Pamela Allen Brown places the witty, insubordinate roles frequently ascribed to women in jesting culture in dialogue with representations of women in conduct books, anti-feminist satire, and plays in England from the Tudor period to the Restoration. Moving fluidly between social rituals (such as skimmington rides and charivari) and cultural manifestations of lived experience in ballads and plays, Brown argues that jesting culture has been wrongly overlooked by previous scholars searching for clues about early modern women's lives. Brown offers a cogent argument for the evidence recorded jests provide about female resistance to the various prescriptions and proscriptions intended to govern their behavior, and compiles wonderfully revealing anecdotes about obstreperous early modern women who elected to play the shrew rather than the sheep.

Brown has conducted exhaustive archival research at Harvard as well as at the Huntington and British Libraries. Anyone interested in jest literature, regardless of the aim of their study, would be well served by the extensive