

‘a characteristic of Shakespeare is to confound tears and laughter’ (125) and illustrates Shakespeare’s interest in ‘the similarity between the physiological states of tears and laughter, and the ease with which one may be interchanged for the other’ (136). Among several examples, he notes that Bottom expects his onstage tears to move the audience to weep but receives only tears of laughter for his pains, and that *Titus Andronicus* features scenes in which the signs of one emotion are repeatedly used to indicate the other (127–8, 131). Steggle’s observations on Shakespeare typically start from well-worn premises — *Julius Caesar* is about politics as performance, *The Winter’s Tale* highlights the difficulty of reading emotions correctly — but he makes valuable connections between these interpretations and the findings of his book. For example, he shows how Mark Anthony’s success in moving an audience with his oratory is in part achieved through the use of onstage emotion: Anthony elicits tears from his audience by weeping as he performs, unlike Brutus who only *describes* his weeping (133). Hence, *Julius Caesar* is not just about the theatricality of politics but also about the ‘the reading, the moving of, and the ability to seem to be responding to, signs of external emotion in others’ (134).

Some readers may be disappointed by Steggle’s refusal to expound on the wider significance of his findings. Although he notes in his introduction the study’s intersection with two ‘grand narratives’ — of the gradual alienation of early modern drama from popular folk roots to elitism and of changing conceptions of the body (8–9) — he does not draw detailed conclusions about the relationship between these narratives and his work. However, this modesty of scope does not detract from the numerous insights that his study puts forward or from the usefulness of his work. Steggle’s book will be an immensely valuable resource for future scholarship in this area.

DAVID NICOL

**Virginia Mason Vaughan. *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500–1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp xii, 190.**

Virginia Mason Vaughan’s book fits most easily with comprehensive studies of black personas on the early modern stage: Eldred D. Jones’s *Othello’s*

*Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: OUP, 1965), Elliot H. Tokson's *The Popular Image of the Black Man in English Drama, 1550–1688* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1982), Anthony Gerard Barthelemy's *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1987), and Jack D'Amico's *The Moor in English Renaissance Drama* (Tampa: U of Florida P, 1991). It also engages the early modern and Shakespearean scholarship that has increasingly brought the subject of race into new critical and theoretical arenas over the past decade: work by Kim F. Hall, Margo Hendricks, Joyce Green Macdonald, Patricia Parker, Francesca T. Royster, and Ian Smith, among many others. However, as Vaughan's title is meant to signify, her study distinguishes itself by considering the theater's full exploitation of 'blackening', approaching the subject from a performative perspective instead of an ethnological one.

Vaughan examines blackface from the medieval period through the eighteenth century, teasing out the historical and cultural practices and ideas that variously transmogrify and collapse a range of disparate materials into the reification of 'what Judith Butler calls the "appearance of substance", the sense of "a natural sort of being"' (170). Opening up the issue of racial representation to the materiality of theatrical practice enables Vaughan to bring neglected plays into the conversation. She relates many issues in early modern representation to those raised by our own contemporary popular and critical debates over race, although, like a number of her predecessors, she carefully differentiates earlier constructions from our own. What remains most intriguing about Vaughan's project is the cumulative effect of her study as she shows drama acting as a 'receptor and creator' (18) of attitudes to blackness. By focusing her discussion on the phenomena and technologies of blackface as well as on audience response Vaughan broadens the scope of previous discussions, cogently demonstrating how race functions most critically as a discursive category rather than an essentialized one.

Not surprisingly, the phrase 'I tell my students' appears in the first line of Vaughan's book; throughout, she's a captivating scholar and teacher. The real strength of her project lies not in the playtexts she opens up for her readers but in the narratives through which she reads them: narratives deeply informed by close and multifaceted readings of cultural materials from a range of epochs. The historical specificity of her analysis remains exciting across ten chapters, of which the first is given to 'preliminaries' and the last to 'afterthoughts'. Vaughan's close readings of plays, however, fall short of this

excitement. At times they seem not to heed the dynamic implications of the contexts in which she places them.

Vaughan begins her historical narrative on a refreshing and promising note, arguing that blacking emerged not only out of medieval mystery cycles (as is generally critically accepted) but also out of other performance conventions: court pageantry, urban processions, and *commedia dell'arte*. She follows Anthony Barthelemy in arguing that from very early in the Middle Ages the chromatic symbolism of blackness was linked to Moors (26), but she tells a far more exciting story. She recounts, for example, how the painted black figure of the damned in the Drapers Company of Coventry's pageant of Doomsday (1561–79), already a carry-over from medieval performance conventions, feeds in the Tudor era into the transcodification of Lucifer as a political traitor in homiletic literature (23).

For scholars and students well-versed in the usual suspects of the critical literature on blackness, Africans, and Moors in early modern drama, chapter three covers fairly familiar territory. It focuses on George Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar*, Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, and Thomas Dekker's *Lust's Dominion*, examining the increased discursive contact between blacks (found especially in travel narratives) and England's homiletic traditions. In some instances, familiarity may lead readers to look for more here. For example, Vaughan's 'blacking' approach is poised to offer the most sustained reading to date of the metatheatrical complexities of *Titus Andronicus* and the character of Aaron but manages only to rehearse some rather conventional views of Aaron as evil. By setting up an argument that allows for Aaron's blackness to be less theatrically *real* (that is, more ethnological) than Othello's, Vaughan misses the interpretative possibilities of her own approach. Chapter four, 'Kings and Queens', discusses how commercial ventures, such as those of the Barbary Company (founded in 1585), led to increased contact between the English and the African (Vaughan instances Abd el-Quahed ben Messaoud ben Mohammed Anoun, Moroccan ambassador from Muly Hamet to Elizabeth). It also shows how the homiletic and the actual became more thoroughly enmeshed, leading eventually to works such as Thomas Middleton's *The Triumph of Truth* (1613) in which Vaughan sees a reflection of England's use of the conversion of Moors as a rationale for its colonial enterprises (70).

The fifth chapter focuses on the ways blackness and blacking assume a constitutive role in many dramatic plots of bedtrickery. More than any other, this chapter speaks to the efficacy of deploying blackness in early modern imagined (and imaginary) communities. Vaughan links domestic and sex-

ual intimacy to the heightened anxiety of interracial realities brought on by more frequent English contact with America and the Mediterranean and by the growing population of black servants in England, especially in London. This chapter is the true centerpiece of Vaughan's study; though she doesn't explicitly state its broader implications, it acts as a nexus for what comes before and after.

Vaughan devotes the sixth chapter to *Othello*. She avoids the broad historical contextualization that characterizes most of this book and that has already featured in her *Othello: A Contextual History* (1994), and instead focuses on the history of 'blackface impersonation' (93) with respect to the play. In the end this chapter seems the book's most ideologically fraught as Vaughan struggles to prove that her objective is historical rather than political — a struggle that seems to worry the project throughout. I'm sympathetic to Vaughan's agreement with the African-Anglo actor Hugh Quarshie that perhaps the role of Othello should not 'be portrayed by a black actor at all' (105). Though she gestures towards it a few times throughout the book (5, 92, 106, and 109–10), however, Vaughan misses an opportunity here to grapple with the complex project of reading the staging of whiteness. Given the general subject matter of her book one might reasonably expect her to explore the space between Sheila Rose Bland's description of Shakespeare's original *Othello* as a 'minstrel show' (94–5) and the artistic opportunities afforded by the role. But Vaughan focuses wholly upon the latter, offering as the impassioned centerpiece of this chapter a defense of Laurence Olivier's 1960s 'masterful impersonation' in blackface (102). She definitively concludes that Olivier's 'interest was not in public policy but in acting' (102). The chapter finally feels more quietly polemical than critically (or culturally) astute.

The seventh chapter examines plays written particularly in the twenty-six years before the 1642 closing of the playhouses, mainly for the elite audiences of such theaters as Blackfriars and Salisbury Court. In the plots of these plays blacking is predominantly the province of Europeans disguising themselves as black Moors. Both this and the following chapter, 'Avenging Villains', are in the relatively conventional vein of chapter three. Even so, the contextualizing material in 'Avenging Villains', which studies plays written in the 1670s, is quite useful. Vaughan's subject in this chapter is slavery, which was in full operation in England by this time. She makes critical use here of the paradigmatic shift of the black dramatic persona from 'devil' to 'slave' (141). She also stresses the fact that the trading company, The Royal African Company (founded in 1672), had some distinguished shareholders, including the Duke

of York, members of the royal family, lord mayors, sheriffs, and aldermen (130–1). Extending this argument, chapter nine, ‘Royal Slaves’, concentrates on the two most popular blackface plays of the eighteenth century, Edward Young’s *The Revenge* and Thomas Southerne’s *Oroonoko* (his adaptation of Aphra Behn’s novella, which was performed almost every year between 1695 and 1800). One of the fascinating cultural conventions Vaughan traces here is that of blacks’ inability to blush. Read in earlier eras as a sign of their sub-human inability to feel shame, this trope transcodifies in the abolitionist theatre of the eighteenth century into a sign of their innocence and victimization. The ability of whites *to* blush becomes a sign of their shame: an indictment of their inhumane support for a system of enslaving Africans.

In many respects, Vaughan is a meticulous scholar, as befits the project she undertakes here. However, her attentiveness occasionally lapses. For example, she uses the term ‘double consciousness’ without making reference to W.E.B. DuBois or his particularized use of the term; she makes free use of the expression ‘spectacles of strangeness’ but does not once make attribution to the title of Emily C. Bartels’s Marlovian study which critically popularized it; and she implicitly credits the quote ‘Othello was a white man’ to a 1996 essay by Dymphna Callaghan even though the quote belongs to a rather exclamatory nineteenth-century Mary Preston.

While Vaughan’s theatrically-driven contextualizing narrative convinces and certainly warrants the emphasis she brings to it, her approach ultimately does a disservice to many of the critically exciting possibilities that arise along the way. For example, her discussion of kings and queens in chapter four and her discussion of women as villainous and virtuous in the second and third sections of chapter eight both beg for some kind of critical acknowledgment of Cleopatra, who inexplicably is not once mentioned in Vaughan’s book. Her study of bedtricksters in chapter five focuses on interracial anxiety but passes on a potentially very productive discussion of how these same plays exploit (at times quite voyeuristically) interracial homosexuality. When Vaughan casually suggests that when playing Othello the African-American actor ‘[Laurence] Fishburne does not have to pretend to be black’ (103), she works against the very evidence her project has so astutely drawn out and particularly against the ways it works to interrogate presumptions about non-performative whiteness.

In the end, Vaughan’s book is a very good introduction to the study of race in early modern English theatre as well as a wonderful resource for those more familiar with the field. Its great strength lies in the cogency and bold evidence

she brings to her story of the English exploitation of blackface. Her close readings of dramatic texts are a bit too careful for the narrative structures she plots, and with ten chapters but fewer than two hundred pages it feels as though the book hasn't really found its most critically productive structure. Nevertheless, Vaughan's study should prove to be one of the most informed, suggestive, and comprehensive studies of black personas on the early modern stage.

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