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Book Review

Newstok, Scott L., and Ayanna Thompson, eds. *Weyward Macbeth: Intersections of Race and Performance*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 308 pp. \$29.

Ayanna Thompson, one of the editors of this excellent collection of essays, acknowledges early on that, at least superficially, *Macbeth* hardly seems the best choice from Shakespeare's canon for an investigation of race and performance. The quality of this collection, however, belies that assumption, establishing without doubt the "wayward" nature of *Macbeth* through its complexly-raced dramatic production history as well as its deployment as a rhetorical trope for a wide variety of political and cultural purposes throughout American history and in contemporary culture.

Divided into seven sections, the collection begins with an explanation of the title, which is based on the First Folio typographic representation of the witches as "wayward" or "weyard" rather than "weird," as most editions do. Noting with Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass that "'a simple vowel shift' transposes 'the sisters from the world of witchcraft and prophecy ... to one of perversion and vagrancy,'" Thompson launches the collection as an exploration of ambivalence and waywardness in the "racialized re-stagings, adaptations, and allusions to *Macbeth*" that characterize the play's "historical transmission" (3, 10). The second essay, by Celia R. Daileader, examines the vexed authorship of *Macbeth*, drawing conclusions about what its "rhetoric of blackness" reveals regarding Shakespeare and Middleton (17). The rhetorical deployment of *Macbeth* is addressed from a variety of perspectives throughout the remaining sections, including the politicized use of allusions to and quotes from *Macbeth* from around the time of the Civil War and its role in Duke Ellington's "Lady Mac" as an expression of the beauty and tragedy of aspiration. Todd Landon Barnes explores a fusion of performance history and up-to-the minute contemporary culture in his essay on the hip-hop inspired intersection of *Macbeth*, the minstrel tradition, and the digitized classroom.

The fascinating tropic use of *Macbeth* in American culture notwithstanding, the non-traditional production history of *Macbeth* remains the focus of the majority of the contributors. For many readers, the third section of the collection may actually be the most accessible, as it boldly confronts the ghost that haunts the entire project, and indeed any attempt to address race and *Macbeth* at the same time: Orson Welles's 1936 "Voodoo" *Macbeth*, produced in Harlem for the Negro Theatre Unit of the WPA. Welles's production was not the first with an all-black cast, as Lisa N. Simmons points out in the first essay of the section, but its importance to any discussion of race and *Macbeth* can be measured by the fact that it shakes its gory locks at the reader through direct references in more than half of the essays, as the subject of the cover photo, and as the object of allusion in the Langston Hughes epigraph that opens the collection. Set in Haiti and dominated by a male Hecate, "'voodoo' witches,'" and an African drum ensemble, this production was a "commingling [of] African, Afro-Caribbean, and African American cultural referents to produce a fantasy of black culture" (89). For good or ill, the "Voodoo" *Macbeth* exemplifies the very essence of *waywardness* that is the subject of the volume: justly criticized for its racist stereotypes, it is nevertheless "celebrated for showcasing a black-cast *Macbeth* on a national tour when segregation was still dominant," and it continues to induce ambivalent responses just as it did when it was first produced (89). The two remaining essays in this section explore the inescapable impact of the "Voodoo" *Macbeth* on subsequent attempts to produce the play with an all-black cast. Lenwood Sloan's narrative of an (unfortunately) failed collaborative attempt to create and produce *The Vo-Du Macbeth* between 2000 and 2005, however, demonstrates the hopeful possibility of an all-black production freed from the penumbra of its depression-era predecessor.

In spite of the long shadow cast by Welles's *Macbeth*, this collection still manages to explore raced and non-traditional *Macbeth* on its own terms and through an extraordinary diversity of perspectives. The variety of views from section two on early American use of *Macbeth*, both as rhetorical trope and in performance, span the play's place in the career of Ira Aldridge, one of America's first professional black actors, to its use in traditional minstrel shows. The final essay of this section highlights the problematic role of allusions to *Macbeth* in works by and about African-Americans in the first half of the twentieth century. Here Nick Moschovakis distinguishes between "dualistic and problematic" allusions, the first being those that "expose [...ethical] paradoxes, decry them, and call for righting of manifest wrongs," and the second acknowledging "moral conflict and ambiguity as an effect of competing social interests" (66). Section four of the collection walks the reader through a fascinating variety of *wayward* productions, including an all-black production in Los Angeles in 2007, a production of the 1985 adaptation *Shogun Macbeth* by the Pan Asian Repertory in 2008, a Native American production by the Tlingit in Alaska in 2003, and the futuristic, Teatro LA TEA's *Macbeth 2029* produced in 2008. Perhaps most unusual of the group is the University of Hawai'i's multi-lingual production in 2008 that deliberately "erects language barriers as a way of revealing cultural and racial divides, yet is able...to bridge these barriers even while emphasizing them" (140).

Screen versions of *Macbeth* are the focus of the sixth section, where Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* and Nina Menkes's *The Bloody Child: An Interior of Violence* are examined in two of the essays. The third essay in this section is Amy Scott-Douglass's "Shades of Shakespeare: Colorblind Casting and Interracial Couples in *Macbeth* in *Manhattan*, *Grey's Anatomy*, and *Prison Macbeth*," a thought-provoking exploration into the possibilities and problematics of "color-blind casting." In the final section, Charita Gainey-O'Toole and Elizabeth Alexander examine the use of *Macbeth* by African-American poets including Langston Hughes, Rita Dove, and Lucille Clifton, while Philip C. Kolin discusses various techniques used by African-American playwrights to appropriate and even "assault" the play to "penetrate its murky landscape" (220). In the final selection of this section, and arguably the most *weyward* essay of the volume, Peter Erickson questions the need for any such appropriation or assault, asserting that for African-Americans "the path to freedom may go through Shakespeare, but it may also go around Shakespeare" (231). Richard Burt's epilogue again reveals the importance of Welles's "Voodoo" *Macbeth* to the continued popular and political understanding of race and culture in the United States, noting that the immediate post-inauguration article from *Newsweek* calling on President Obama to reform the NEA included both an image of the Federal Theatre Project's advertisement of that production and a full-page photo of its lead actor, Jack Carter, in costume as Macbeth. Burt points out that Welles's project and its legacy demonstrate "the traumatic underpinnings of supposedly progressive politics" and asserts that even the peaceful transfer of power constituted by the presidential inauguration of Barak Obama was "as haunted as Macbeth's banquet, and as equivocal as the porter" (237). The collection ends with a helpful appendix listing of selected productions of *Macbeth* with non-traditional casting from 1821-2010.

The only flaws in *Weyward Macbeth: Intersections of Race and Performance* lie in two areas. The first is the tendency in a few of the essays to conflate the use and production of Shakespeare's plays in general with the specific deployment of *Macbeth* in racially marked ways. The second is the disconcerting brevity of some of the essays. Some are long and well-developed enough to satisfy, but many leave the reader without the sense that the topic has been fully examined, and a few seem unnaturally and disconcertingly truncated. Creating a desire in the reader to go further into one's subject matter, however, is a small flaw, indeed, and in some circles might be considered a virtue. For a collection such as this, perhaps it seemed best to follow the colloquial advice given to performers to "leave them wanting more."

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