

soliloquy. Ransping Ji and Wei Feng offer a similarly enlightening account of the availability of the image of Shakespeare in China.

Alexa Alice Joubin rounds the collection off by adducing that “translational differences draw attention to the instability of Shakespeare’s text as well as their variegated terrains that are open for interpretation” (306). It is sometimes difficult to identify the warp and woof of a collection so wide ranging in tone and content. This renders the consistent lucidity with which the interpretative pliability of Shakespeare’s works is conveyed even more startling. Those works shine bright across time, place, and the pages of a brilliant volume.

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*The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*. Ayanna Thompson, ed.  
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Reading *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race* is work. Prepare to fold back page corners and to highlight in high gear. From the outset, editor Ayanna Thompson audaciously challenges readers to “collectively learn to discern and analyze racecraft” that they might make the collection “seem as outdated as the way [she] was first taught Shakespeare” thirty years ago (10). Far from a banal sales pitch, Thompson’s hope offers a sobering reminder of the continued need for such publications and summons the audience into the authorship of the collection. In the present moment, the potent, insightful essays that the collection offers make it difficult to imagine such obsolescence on the horizon.

The contributors urgently immerse themselves in the weighty questions that undoubtedly flood the minds of readers when they see the words *Shakespeare* and *race* in bold type on a book cover. One such question forms the title of Miles Grier’s essay “Are Shakespeare’s Plays Racially Progressive?”—a question that seems to undergird the entirety of *Shakespeare and Race*. If any criticism may be levied at the collection, it is that it largely evades granular readings beyond the canon of race plays that might further hold Shakespeare’s racecraft accountable. But as Grier states in an addendum to Paul Robeson’s poignant identification with the character of Othello, activation of racial potentialities “is not guaranteed by Shakespeare’s text” (238) and “The Answer Is in Our Hands” (237). Overall, the collection thoughtfully embodies early modern critical race studies as “a product of the interaction among [Shakespeare’s] plays, the cultural prestige accorded them, and the racial regime of a particular time and scale” (238).

Loosely comprising four parts that form a sort of chronological arc, the book is a pedagogue’s dream and a critic’s mirror. Its exceptional pacing lends an eminent readability to difficult material that affords newcomers a way in and veterans a substantial yet engaging refresher. *Shakespeare and Race* can be said to move from the road map

stage, to the exhibit stage, to the interactive stage, and finally to the reflexive stage. One first wades into the historical overview and critical vocabulary of early modern race (“The Materials of Race: Staging the Black and White Binary in the Early Modern Theatre” by Farah Karim-Cooper and “Barbarian Moors: Documenting Racial Formation in Early Modern England” by Ambereen Dadabhoy), then deepens this understanding through readings of individual plays (“Experimental *Othello*” by Matthew Dimmock and “*The Tempest* and Early Modern Conceptions of Race” by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan), visualizes the more contemporary complexities of where and how such notions have come to life through performance and reception histories (“What Is the History of Actors of Color Performing in Shakespeare in the UK?” by Urvashi Chakravarty and “Actresses of Color and Shakespearean Performance: The Question of Reception” by Joyce Green MacDonald), and closes with critical evaluations of current approaches to Shakespearean critical race scholarship (“How Have Post-Colonial Approaches Enriched Shakespeare’s Works?” by Sandra Young).

Despite the clear objective of breadth, *Shakespeare and Race* truly shines in its pointed probing of whiteness as more than an inert pole of a racial binary (“Flesh and Blood: Race and Religion in *The Merchant of Venice*” by Dennis Austin Britton and “Was Sexuality Racialized for Shakespeare? *Antony and Cleopatra*” by Melissa E. Sanchez). One might be tempted to wince at the possibility that this practice or my appraisal gives whiteness permission to further take up space. However, culminating in Arthur L. Little Jr.’s “Is It Possible to Read Shakespeare through Critical White Studies?”, whiteness is here a witness, not a houseguest or a master of ceremonies. The essay provides a fitting bookend to the ethical futurism which Thompson raises in the book’s beginning and provocatively (and proactively) leaves us where race is often taken for granted. Little usefully explains whiteness in terms of “a property to be claimed” (271) in Shakespeare’s time and warns against now “uncritically” neglecting to question which Shakespearean characters are “actually white” (275). Whiteness becomes a matter of access for playwrights, playgoers, and hapless characters, taking us behind the curtain of the playhouse as a “virtual manual on how to go about constructing and laying claim to one’s embodiment of a racialized whiteness” (272). Emphasizing class and sexuality in this negotiation, the essay brilliantly binds a collection that is altogether a thesis against passivity.

The collection not only deserves a space on your syllabus and office shelf this year, but it also warrants a conversation about whether the books that surround it support the essential work carried out across its otherwise fragile pages.

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