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Weyward Macbeth: Intersections of Race and Performance.

Edited by Scott L. Newstok and Ayanna Thompson. Palgrave MacMillan, 2010. Pp. 288.

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by Glenda E. Gill

For those who think they know something about non-traditional casting, this book of essays defies the imagination with its scope and comprehensiveness. Focusing mainly on many different productions of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* since the 19th century, the two-dozen contributors examine how *Macbeth* informs film, theatre, hip-hop, music, history, politics, poetry, posters, essays, drama, acting, and directing. The chapters are grouped under several parts: PART I: Beginnings; PART II: Early American Intersections; Part III: Federal Theatre Project (s); PART IV: Further Stages; PART V: Music; PART VI: Screen; PART VII: Shakespearean (A) Versions. There is an epilogue and an excellent appendix of selected productions. The bibliography is rich and long. Ayanna Thompson in the opening chapter answers the question, "What is a "weyward" *Macbeth*?"

The non-traditional productions covered also include Asian, Native American, Hispanic, and African-American forays into an interpretation of The Bard. Orson Welles's famed 1936 Federal Theatre production of the voodoo *Macbeth* is placed in

iconic context. There is also an excellent appendix of performances including dates, directors and other important ephemera. Essays come from undergraduate students, graduate students, younger faculty, seasoned professors, theatre practitioners, a composer, one adjunct professor and emeriti. Several striking visuals enhance the book, including the 1977 signed Romare Bearden poster of Woodie King Jr.'s revival of the 1936 *Macbeth*.

Several bits of information intrigued me. As a person who grew up on a historically black college campus, I was struck with how many performances of *Macbeth* occurred on those stages from the very early twentieth century into the twenty-first: Spelman College in Atlanta, Atlanta University, Dillard in New Orleans, Talladega College in Talladega, Alabama; Howard University in Washington, D. C., Florida A. and M. University in Tallahassee, Tennessee State University in Nashville, and Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. In historically black colleges, some of the directors are legendary: Lillian Voorhees, James W. Butcher, Anne Cook, and Owen Dodson.

"Part II: Early American Intersections" features five compelling chapters. Heather S. Nathans in "'Blood Will Have Blood' Violence, Slavery and *Macbeth* in the Antebellum Imagination" states, "The play (*Macbeth*) was ubiquitous in antebellum American culture." In the Civil War, Nathans informs us that northern abolitionists

invoked the play against southern slaveholders. She gives much discussion to the Astor Place Riot of May 10, 1849 where British actor William Macready was appearing in the title role of *Macbeth*. American actor, Edwin Forrest, Macready's rival, had protested Macready's performance. Violence occurred among Forrest's fans, and 100 people died in the worst theatre riot in American history. John Briggs analyses how Frederick Douglass frequently appropriated Shakespeare, including *Macbeth*. Bernth Lindfors writes about how the great nineteenth century actor of color Ira Aldridge played *Macbeth* often to critical acclaim. Joyce Green MacDonald tells of a "Minstrel Show *Macbeth*" and Nick Moschovakis observes allusions to *Macbeth* in W. E. B. DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, Ida B. Wells's speeches, Claude McKay's "If We Must Die," Countee Cullen's "Mood," and Leslie Pinckney Hill's *Toussaint L'Ouverture: A Dramatic History*.

Readers will be pleased to know that there is a Shakespeare Behind Bars. While a great deal of non-traditional casting is emphasized from the perspective of minority racial groups, Roman Polanski's film of *Macbeth* focused on whiteness. Readers probably are familiar with the 1936 Federal Theatre *Macbeth*, but probably not the 1935 one in Boston.

How *Macbeth* connected to music would be of interest to many readers, from various performances of Verdi's *Macbeth* featuring Simon Estes, George Shirley, Shirley Verrett, Grace Bumbry and other African American opera singers to Duke Ellington's *Lady Mac*

and *Such Sweet Thunder*. There are a number of hip-hop *Macbeths* in and out of the digital world.

Intersections between various genres of literature and *Macbeth* are also examined. Philip C. Kolin “explores how *Macbeth* has, paradoxically, both repressed and represented an African American experience in plays by Adrienne Kennedy, Ntozake Shange, August Wilson, and Suzan-Lori Parks” (212). Repeatedly invoked are the words of poet Langston Hughes in “Note on Commercial Theatre”: “You’ve taken my blues and gone. . . You put me in *Macbeth*. . . And in everything but what’s about me.”

This extraordinary collection of essays is essential for every student and teacher of Shakespeare. It is exceptional reading with astonishing new information for anyone wishing to keep remarkably abreast of what is happening in American culture.