EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES

Ayanna Thompson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). xviii + 280pp. ISBN 9781108710565.

David Loewenstein and Paul Stevens, eds, *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). xiv + 293 pp. ISBN 9781108464963.

Christopher Ivic
Bath Spa University
c.ivic@bathspa.ac.uk

Teachers and students of Shakespeare will be well served by the 2021 publication of two Cambridge Companions: one dedicated to Shakespeare and race, the other to Shakespeare and war. Both volumes combine rigorous historical scholarship and an awareness of how Shakespeare's plays have and continue to play a signal role in shaping cultural discourses.

The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race opens with a chapter by the editor, Ayanna Thompson, that sets the tone for the ensuing essays. Titled 'Did the Concept of Race Exist for Shakespeare and His Contemporaries?', this introductory piece looks back to a not-too-distant past when many Shakespeareans would have responded to this question with an emphatic 'no', citing anachronistic applications of nineteenth-century biological and scientific notions of race to early modern texts. Kwame Anthony Appiah's 'Race' entry in the hugely influential *Critical Terms for Literary Study* bears witness to this anachronism argument. Regarding Miranda's use of the word 'race' — her reference to Caliban's 'vile race' (1.2) — Appiah warned that 'an unprepared modern reader risks misunderstanding it'.[1] The 'misunderstanding' lies in the fact that 'race' here means 'natural or inherited disposition' (*OED* n^{6}.4b) — of the *OED*'s two examples (both from F1), the first is Miranda's 'vile race'. (Subsequent editors of the play tend to cite this specific definition from the *OED* when glossing

[1] Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Race', *in Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. by Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 274–87 (p. 279).

Miranda's 'vile race'.) To put it another way, Appiah reads Miranda's 'vile race' as designating an individual only, as opposed to an entire group of people. I offer this example not to suggest that Appiah is motivated by a desire to foreclose readings of *The Tempest* attentive to race, but rather to highlight the willingness of many scholars in the 1980s and 1990s to accept a standard narrative of 'race': that the word acquired its modern meaning at some point in the nineteenth century and therefore to consider race before this period is to engage in anachronistic scholarship. In his 'racial' entry in *Keywords*, Raymond Williams opens with the standard narrative, citing sixteenth-century definitions of 'race' that ground the word in notions of lineage, descent, stock. But he then adds '[r]ace has been used alongside both *genus* and *species* in classificatory biology, but all its difficulties begin when it is used to denote a group within a species'.[2] Whereas Williams cites the eighteenth century as the origin of such racial classificatory work, this volume argues for a time much closer to Shakespeare's, as its citation of a number of key dates documents: the arrival and enslavement of black Africans in Portugal (1444); the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople (1453); Columbus's arrival in 'the New World' (1492); the initial influx of Africans into Britain (1554); the appearance of the first black character on London's public stage (1587). Thus, Virginia Mason and Alden T. Vaughan's essay on *The Tempest* and early modern conceptions of race concludes that Caliban is condemned to 'a distinctly separate and inferior category from the Europeans who berate and abuse him' (p. 141), adding that Shakespeare was shaped by 'the increasingly racialized discourse of his own time' (p. 155). Thinking through race (the concept if not the word) in terms of the construction of human difference (or, to borrow terms used in this volume, 'racialized epistemologies', 'race-making') is an approach shared by this volume's impressive essays.

What makes this volume so valuable is its full coverage of Shakespeare and race. Consider, for example, Arthur L. Little Jr's concluding essay, which opens by listing the 'black (and blackened) others who grace the pages of Shakespeare: Aaron, Aaron's son, "Blackamoors with music", Caliban, Cleopatra, the Dark Lady (perhaps Lucy Negro), the Indian Changeling, the "Negro" impregnated by Launcelot, Othello, and the Prince of Morocco' (p. 268). However, Little makes the construction of whiteness or 'white-world-making', in particular the whiteness of *The Tempest*'s European characters and the whitening of Desdemona in opposition to a black (and blackened) Othello, the centrepiece of his essay. Readers will not be surprised to find that Othello and Caliban or *Othello* and *The Tempest* figure heavily throughout the volume. But much more ground is covered. The eighteen essays range from archival material to a focus on

[2] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and violence* (London: Fontana Press, 1983), p. 248.

Moors, Turks, Jews and native Americans to the performance of race on the early modern stage as well as later and geographically diverse stages. In keeping with the volume's attention to a wide geopolitical field and heterogeneous religious beliefs, a number of non-Shakespearean plays — Peele's *The Battle of Alcazar* (1592) and Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* (1587) — also receive attention.

The volume's first two essays perform crucial historical work. Farah Karim-Cooper traces the materiality of race on the early modern stage, noting that it was through 'costume, makeup, textiles, and fabrics [that] racial subjectivity became increasingly performable as more plays contained characters from a range of backgrounds' (p. 27). Ambereen Dadabhoy attends to the larger context of racial formation in the period, highlighting 'the ways the stage constructs race in the service of nation and empire' (p. 32). The next three essays take up genre: Patricia Akhimie's on racist humour in Shakespearean comedy and Andrew Hadfield's and Carol Mejia LaPerle's on race in the histories and tragedies, respectively. Discussing a number of comedies, Akhimie explores the psychosocial dynamics of communal laughter, especially its role in forging exclusive communities. Like many of the essays in this collection, Akhimie's is alert to the range of Shakespeare's representations: 'Shakespeare's attitudes toward race', she writes, 'include both a callous ridicule of those marked by physical or cultural differences and an apparent empathy for those so abused. That is, he sometimes asks audiences to laugh at racialized figures and sometimes asks them to weep with such figures' (p. 48). Hadfield reminds us that the dominant meanings of 'race' in English in the period were grounded in notions of blood, lineage, stock, etc. and thus were underpinned by notions of racial purity. But, as Hadfield points out, 'Shakespeare demonstrates throughout the history plays that not only are nations never inviolable fortresses with impenetrable borders, but also the peoples they contain are never pure either' (p. 73). LaPerle addresses symbolic associations with blackness. 'To be black', she writes, 'is to be a harbinger of social disaster' (p. 79). Given the larger context of Europe's enslavement of black Africans, Malcolm's figurative 'black Macbeth', therefore, should not be bracketed from the period's more literal 'modes of racialization' (p. 90).

The next five essays offer close, critical readings of five of Shakespeare's 'race plays': *Othello, The Merchant of Venice*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Tempest* and *Titus Andronicus*. Matthew Dimmock's essay considers the complexities of *Othello,* which brings the first Christian Moor to the early modern English stage and with its neologism 'Ottomites' introduces a 'newly racialized' term. Dennis Austin Britton's focus on flesh and blood in *The Merchant of Venice* marks a valuable contribution to the volume, for its tracing of Jewishness foregrounds the intersection of race in terms of lineage (as

Hadfield demonstrates) and race in terms of 'a developing understanding of race as a category that claims groups of people who share or have similar flesh and blood are also alike in character, aptitude, and behavior' (p. 111). Melissa E. Sanchez's is one of the few essays that situates early modern alongside classical ideas about 'sexual as well as racial purification' (p. 127), resulting in a fine exploration of the intersection of race, gender and sexuality. The next two essays place the respective plays in a larger race-making context: *The Tempest* in a transatlantic one and *Titus* in a global one, both concluding with thought-provoking reflections on the play's afterlives. Noémie Ndiaye's reading of *Titus* as reflecting early modern English anxieties about Englishness intersects nicely with Hadfield's reading of the history plays.

Four subsequent chapters explore performance: Scott Newstok's on the nineteenth-century African American actor Ira Aldridge; Urvashi Chakravarty's on Shakespearean actors of colour in the UK; Joyce Green MacDonald's on actresses of colour (illuminating the careers of Henrietta Vinton Davis and Adrienne McNeil Herndon) and Adrian Lester's reflective piece on performing the role of Othello in 2013 at London's National Theatre. All four of these essays offer a fascinating look at the intersection of theatre-craft and racecraft in both past and recent performances. Newstok's revelation that paintings formerly titled 'Slave', 'Negro' or 'Othello' have more recently been acknowledged to be depictions of Ira Aldridge bears witness to the crucial cultural work performed by scholars engaged in the topic of Shakespeare and race.

The final three essays concern themselves with the presence of Shakespeare in contemporary culture. Miles Grier's 'Are Shakespeare's Plays Racially Progressive?' argues that the answer is in our hands: that is, rather than 'prosecuting Shakespeare for racism', Grier wants to discern 'the strategies through which anti-racist projects have been pursued in, with, and against the industry that is Shakespeare' (p. 238). Informed by postcolonial theory and critical white studies, respectively, the final two essays — Sandra Young's 'How Have Post-Colonial Approaches Enriched Shakespeare's Works' and Little's — offer strategies for reading Shakespeare's plays against the grain of a social order, to quote Grier, 'in which whiteness [receives] a disproportionate share of social goods such as property, pleasure, prestige, and protection' (p. 238). As this quotation demonstrates, this impressive volume asks serious question of Shakespeare's plays and of Shakespeare's readers.

'No one bored by war will be interested in *Henry V*', begins Gary Taylor's introduction to the Oxford Shakespeare edition of the play.[3] Given its expansive coverage of the

[3] *Henry V*, ed. by Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 1.

topic of war in Shakespeare, perhaps even those bored by war will find the stimulating essays that comprise *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and War* engaging. The volume's emphasis, the editors note, is firmly on the 'multiplicity of conflicting perspectives [Shakespeare's] dramas offer': namely, 'war depicted from chivalric, masculine, nationalistic, and imperial perspectives; war depicted as an exciting sport in which to kill; war depicted as a theatre of honor; war depicted from realistic or more skeptical perspectives that expose the butchery, suffering, illness, famine, degradation, and havoc it causes' (p. xiii). Throughout this volume, contributors reflect astutely on the various attitudes that Shakespeare's plays and characters, not to mention actors and directors, take toward war, past and present. Readers will come across a number of overarching pronouncements on Shakespeare and war in this volume; one that sums up the volume as a whole comes from Michael Hattaway, who argues that Shakespeare 'anatomizes wars rather than, in the manner of blockbuster movies, merely depicting battles' (p. 168.). This wonderful Cambridge Companion is very much an anatomy of Shakespeare and war.

Citing failed Spanish invasions (1588, 1596, 1597) and English military involvement in northern England, in Scotland, in the Low Countries, in Portugal, in France and, especially, in Ireland, David Scott Kastan reminds readers of the ubiquity of war throughout Shakespeare's life. As Catherine M. S. Alexander points out, from 1585 to 1603 over 100,000 men were conscripted for overseas military ventures. 'It is reasonable to assume', Alexander adds, 'that a significant number of audience members had immediate experience of warfare, military life, or its effects, and that stage representations of battles and hand-to-hand fighting had a particular resonance and relevance' (p. 260). This volume considers the matrix from which Shakespeare's representations of war emerged and upon which they reflect.

Not surprisingly, readers are first introduced to war within the period in which Shakespeare wrote. Paul E. J. Hammer's informative essay opens with *2 Henry IV*'s Justice Shallow and Silence to argue that the play's dubious recruitment scene 'reflects the practices of Shakespeare's own day, not those of Lancastrian England' (p. 1), and it is precisely those contemporary practices that Hammer's essay illuminates. His essay also reflects intelligently on the difference between Shakespeare's and Holinshed's *Chronicles*' depiction of the English victory over the French at Agincourt in *Henry V*. Whereas the *Chronicles* — which Kastan describes as 'a record of almost continuous warfare' (p. 93) — celebrate the use of the longbow by English soldiers, Shakespeare conspicuously downplays the crucial role of the longbow at this battle: a sign, we are told, of the Bard's rejection of the 'militarist nostalgia' (p. 6) deeply embedded in the prime source for his English history plays. A number of this volume's essays make the

key point that real and imagined warfare played a signal role in shaping English national identity. Consider, for example, the English nobility's invocation of the Battle of Crécy in *Henry V* (1.2) to 'rouse' Harry. Hammer's opening essay does well to remind readers that Shakespeare's English history plays portray 'war in a very different and morally ambiguous way than the authors of the *Chronicles*' (p. 14). Indeed, those plays' depictions of and commentary on war (e.g., Falstaff in *1 Henry IV*), it would be fair to say, often supply a serious interrogation of the myths of English nationhood. The diminution of battle scenes in the English histories — 'the only required dramatized fighting in the so-called second tetralogy is at Shrewsbury in *1 Henry IV* (p. 99) — bears witness to a playwright less interested in the 'drama of the battlefield' and more interested in 'the psychological and ethical issues that warfare raises' (p. 99).

Shakespeare's knowledge of and attitude to warfare was certainly informed by Holinshed's *Chronicles*, but it was also shaped by other contemporary as well as ancient ideas, as demonstrated by Franziska Quabeck's and Maggie Kilgour's respective essays on just war theory and war and the classical world. Quabeck attends to competing theories of war: pacificism, realism and just war theory. The conclusion is that Shakespeare's plays gravitate toward just war theory, as demonstrated in a scene that receives ample attention in this volume: act 4, scene 1 of *Henry V*, wherein the English soldier Williams confronts a disguised Harry with the line 'if the cause be not good'. Not unlike Falstaff's unsettling comment on his scraggy conscripts — 'food for powder, food for powder' (*1 Henry IV*) — Williams's statement reveals the multiplicity of voices and counter-voices that constitute Shakespeare's complex and contradictory inscriptions of warfare. In a refreshing break from Shakespeare's English history plays, Kilgour turns her attention to *Coriolanus*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Titus Andronicus* as well as *The Rape of Lucrece*. Noting that Virgil 'asks what it means to be a nation founded on killing and indeed fratricide' (p. 80), Kilgour traces a similar interrogative mode in Shakespeare, who, according to Kilgour, 'is most interested in the psychological impact of war on individual character' (p. 78). Speaking of which, Willy Maley's essay on *Macbeth* and trauma offers a rich reading of the 'Scottish play' as 'a play about war's aftermath — guilt, hallucinations, insomnia at the stage where the theatre of war becomes a drama of trauma' (p. 244). Maley's acute observation that *Macbeth* is the '"Soldiers' play" as well as the "Scottish play"' (p. 248) reminds me of another 'Soldiers' play', *Othello*. Oddly, *Othello* receives very little attention in this volume: the index lists just five references. In one of those references, Kastan states that in *Othello* 'war remains in the background' (p. 98), but given what Kilgour and Maley have to say about the psychological impact of war on characters and given the fact that Othello and Iago are shaped by their military experiences, professionally and psychologically, more work on this 'Soldiers' play' would have been welcome. There is

also fruitful overlap between Kilgour's essay and Alexander's on *Coriolanus*, for Kilgour's focus on the ancient world is echoed by Alexander's attention to Shakespeare's appropriation of Plutarch/North.

If Shakespeare's plays explore various theories of war, then they also depict various kinds of war. David Bevington explores the civil and dynastic wars that pervade the English history plays, especially the so-called first tetralogy. As much as these 'intestine wars' reflect moments of collective shame, they also register contemporary anxieties around the succession as an aged and childless queen refused to name her successor. As historians point out, many Elizabethans expected an outbreak of war upon Elizabeth's death fuelled by competing factions. Moving away from civil but not necessarily dynastic wars, Claire McEachern's essay focusses on foreign wars, taking in *Henry V*, *King John* and *Macbeth*. Her essay situates Shakespeare's foreign wars within the context of nation and state formation, especially in relation to the islanding of England in the face of foreign invasion and threat. The reading of *Macbeth* is interesting: 'The gloriousness of fighting to the death in the defense of one's country is something the play celebrates' (p. 73). Does it? Does Macbeth ever really voice a defence of his country? He speaks of defending the object with which he is obsessed for much of the play, the crown, but as the construct of an English playwright he is, not surprisingly, no William Wallace. Another essay that takes war and nationhood as its central focus is Paul Stevens's excellent examination of a secular 'political theology' in *Henry V*. Like many of the contributors to this volume, Stevens is alert to how the play incorporates sceptical attitudes to war, but this essay's strength is its close, critical reading of the play's aestheticization of warfare, especially as that aestheticization underpins the 'affective force […] of the newly imagined nation' (p. 232). Although, as noted, the play-text of *Henry V* is barren of battle scenes, Stevens considers how the play's (biblical) language, imagery and allusions work to render war a pleasurable act. Indeed, as Lynne Magnusson remarks in her essay on Shakespeare's language and the rhetoric of war, 'wars in Shakespeare remain primarily linguistic constructs' (p. 146).

Henry V receives a lot of attention in this volume. According to the index, discussion of this play occupies seventy-one pages, much more coverage than any other play. One could argue that this is excessive (as mentioned, *Othello* invites more scrutiny); however, the essays approach *Henry V* from a range of angles. Take, for instance, Gail Kern Paster's chapter, which explores anger within the context of early modern humoralism. Shakespeare, Paster notes, 'understands anger in Aristotelian terms as a social, gendered, and hierarchical emotion, a privilege reserved for elite men tasked with the maintenance or restoration of social order' (p. 115), adding anger 'invokes a larger ethical purpose' and 'thus becomes a duty' (p. 119). *Henry V* is also addressed in

Michael Hattaway's essay on staging Shakespeare's wars in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in Greg Semenza's piece on the filmic representation of Shakespeare's wars and in Garret Sullivan's wide-ranging coverage of the uses of Shakespeare in Britain during World War II. These essays explore *Henry V* (and other plays and films) less as Shakespeare's play-text than, say, Frank Benson's and Laurence Olivier's. Of course, *Henry V* could be appropriated for propagandist purposes during World War II, as Olivier's film version attests, but just as Olivier's film was offered to the public, Sullivan notes, 'references to the playwright or his works also exposed rifts or contradictions within the national culture he was called upon to embody' (p. 205). What Alexander says of productions of *Coriolanus* — they often 'ignore the [play's] complexities, Shakespeare's subtleties, the ambivalence' (p. 265) — cannot be said of the multiple perspectives that this volume provides on Shakespeare's depictions of war.

Finally, a few errors crop up in the two volumes: Adrian Lester mistakenly labels Thomas Rymer (1641-1713) an 'Elizabethan literary critic' (*Shakespeare and Race*, p. 224); Claire McEachern refers to *Hamlet*'s Prince of Norway as 'the Polish young Fortinbras' (*Shakespeare and War*, p. 55); and Gail Kern Paster names Nym rather than Pistol as the character who terrifies the French soldier (Monsieur le Fer) at Agincourt in *Henry V* (*Shakespeare and War*, p. 123-4).