Our next speaker is Carol Mejia LaPerle who is an Associate Professor and Honors advisor for the Department of English. Her PhD in English Literature is from Arizona State. Her publications include articles on Shakespeare, John, Heywood, Webster, and the first original female playwright in English, Elizabeth Cary. While her current book project focuses on early modern depictions of race, she also publishes on foreign cinematic engagements with Shakespeare. Her work
has been supported by Wright State's Research Council College of Liberal Arts,


Thank you for that introduction and I just want to thank the dean's office for
this opportunity to present my work and also Stephanie for presenting for you

know, working with us. Also you know I'd like to acknowledge the work that

happens in the committee that chooses these you know these projects for

sabbatical and just let them know how much it means to scholars as we as we pursue our our passions so the title today is "Ben Johnson's Masque of Blackness."

and it's part of its a chapter in my
book racial properties of theatrical

production of foreign women in Jacobean drama in which I analyze the

representation of race by dramatists of early 17th century England. More

specifically I investigate early modern representations of foreign women and the

stage props that contribute to and complicate their embodiment of

difference. While tracing the performance history cultural influence and topical

residents of six early modern plays I
ask of each the following questions: what

25
00:02:09,060 --> 00:02:13,560
stage materials the dramatists to vote
for the purposes of cross gender &

26
00:02:13,560 --> 00:02:18,030
cross-racial impersonations? Because for
the most part there were no women on the

27
00:02:18,030 --> 00:02:22,500
English stage although the masques were a
specific and unique circumstance in

28
00:02:22,500 --> 00:02:26,610
which they were able to play. How do the
resulting performances of foreignness

29
00:02:26,610 --> 00:02:30,450
ascribe gendered racial difference in
the context of England's emergent

30
00:02:30,450 --> 00:02:35,069
imperialism? This project exposes in
examines of theatrical technologies

blackface being one of them and the
stage properties that comprise the

history of dramatic representations
which duration gender were performed and

today's presentation focuses on a
specific kind of theatrical mode the

masque, and so a little bit of background.
This is a print that shows a court masque

in 1617 presented to the Duke of Bavaria
and we have a real shortage of these
kinds of representations in print
because they were ephemeral. They were
incredibly expensive but they were
once-in-a-lifetime events where I guess the
equivalent of quite a lot of money were
made towards one night in which the
audience was basically odd into the
submission of the monarch's power and
influence. So this was a very common
expression of monarchical power and
sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe
and the rarity of the depictions really
stems from that ephemeral nature. They were elaborate and expensive and yet

they were kind of just for that one night and had a lot of different aspects

of it but the main point was to allegorize the power the benevolence of the monarch. It is also one of the few places in what was almost always a transvestite stage where young boys would play women that in fact women could play women on a masque because it wasn't public theater. It was imagine all the staging
technologies, materials, and costumes were for one night for the pleasure and the expense of a very elite a very aristocratic and dignified audience. To give you a sense of the extent of expenditure, The Masque of Blackness would have been designed by an architect. Right so we don't have actual pictures our prints of Inigo Jones is work on The Masque of Blackness but we have our descriptions of the setting which would have included
things like you know a trident and mermaids and a moving ocean as it goes into the shore of Britannia on a basically completely built stage for this one night. So this is famed you know since some of the work of Indigo Jones and he was commissioned to create a lot of these kind of moving parts and elaborate design of the stage. It's a whole other project to really think about the kind of technologies that
Jones brings to early modern theater,

including you know picture you know kind of picturing of water on the shore of a court at Whitehall and so these are the other two pictures on your right which is the inside and the outside of Whitehall in which The Masque of Blackness would have been played although much of the finishing touches have you know would have occurred a few years after James's reign. So in my discussion of The
Masque I focus on Queen Anne's racial impersonation, her use of blackface in

00:05:26,980 --> 00:05:31,450
the performance. She plays an African woman seeking the King's power to turn

00:05:31,450 --> 00:05:36,250
her and her ladies-in-waiting white but first to contextualize a uniqueness and

00:05:36,250 --> 00:05:40,840
import of the newly minted Queen of England painted black. What did it mean

00:05:40,840 --> 00:05:46,030
to represent black bodies in the early modern period? So just a little bit

00:05:46,030 --> 00:05:50,950
of background as you can see blackness and religious iconography oftentimes
represented villains or devils and you can see on your left, 12th century illuminated manuscript and on your right an orphrey which would have been a kind of strip sewn on to the fabric of you know a Catholic priest clothing ceremonial clothing and in both of these pictures you can see just visually how much it emphasizes the black body of the devil. In performance which we have very little once again in terms of actual sketches or pictures we do see that at
the very least historians have talked to us about how morality plays and mystery plays which are medieval church sponsored events conveying religious events of religious themes often would represent villains using stage props that blackened the actors body in one way or another and to sort of show make the point of how much illuminated manuscripts influence stage production of devils you can see how the use of blackface portraying the devil in
early modern performances was totally consistent with the forms of representation that would depict the devil as black in other contexts. So departing from that a little bit I also want to talk more about how the villainization of black bodies in public performance is one aspect of racial representation, but here's another one for um how Queen Anne being a queen would have been informed by different
aspects of how black bodies were used in

the early modern period in this forum
in pictures. Oftentimes black servants

would be part of aristocratic self-fashioning and black bodies were in

some ways considered ornaments to highlight the power and prestige of

those represented on the pictures. So it's no surprise that we have evidence

of the presence of Africans in European courts often a sign of exotic beauty and
uniqueness, black performers showed a monarch sophisticated taste and access to global goods and that's oftentimes how they would be described as a particular kind of good in a household. In fact and just to kind of highlight the point of the role of you know Africans in aristocratic courts one of the documented festivities marking the marriage of James the Sixth of Scotland and Anne of Denmark who later take the English throne as James the First of
England and his queen is the documentation of six African men who were forced to dance in the snow during their festivities. This is a picture that would have been outside of the masque but in terms of public theaters and you can see it's one of the few sketches of a Shakespearean scene that we have at all and in it a black man who is captured as part of the goth army is represented here in the very first scene of Shakespeare's "Titus Andronicus" and I
think what's worth noting is how he is black from head to toe

which indicates and there's you know we can talk a little bit about that about

what the archives yield in terms of how black bodies were represented but it would have been very likely a blackened cork that would have sort of served as

paint or black mesh fabric and there's a lot of sort of documents of purchasing

of black leather to be kind of skin tight and would have been maybe used for
the legs here. So in summary for this little opening snippet racial

impersonation in early modern culture was rooted in various inconsistent and competing imaginaries. Religious iconography of the devil, commodification of black bodies to convey aristocratic status, monarchical expressions of global aspirations, and increasingly popular interest in foreign bodies as

inspired by non religious secular plays
like Titus Andronicus. What makes the

118
00:09:47,710 --> 00:09:53,200
1605 masque particularly intriguing is
that it was Queen Anne's idea to create

119
00:09:53,200 --> 00:09:57,750
a masque in which African princesses
played by her and her ladies-in-waiting

120
00:09:57,750 --> 00:10:04,390
migrate to Britannia and seek the ruler
who will turn them all white. And Ben

121
00:10:04,390 --> 00:10:09,670
Johnson makes a point of this when he
prints at the performance text in 1608

122
00:10:09,670 --> 00:10:14,710
he opens with a premise that it was
Queen Anne's idea not his, so this is an

123
00:10:14,710 --> 00:10:17,770
illustration of the costume and
blackface used by the Queen and her

ladies, Johnson makes note quote" because
it was her Majesty's will to have them

blackamores at first, the invention was
derived by me and presented thus."

Little bit more of the description in
the printing printed text reads this way

"the attire of the masquers was alike in
all without difference the colors azure

in silver but returned on the
top with a scroll and antique dressing
of feathers and jewels interlaced with ropes of pearl and for the front, ear,

neck, and wrists the ornament was of the most choice and orient pearl best

setting off from the black. How was the racial transformation received? In a word,

critically. In a letter to John Chamberlain, Dudley Carlton writes" Their faces and arms up to the elbows were painted black which was disguised sufficient for they were hard to be known and you cannot imagine a
more ugly sight than a troop of lean-cheeked Moores." This rare eyewitness account by Carlton has been incredibly influential in the 400 years since and in fact in some ways 20th century critics, this is where I sort of come in, 20th century critics sort of take for granted and develop this language of grotesque mockery for instance in the language of Hardin Assand who says "Within the masque, Queen Anne transmogrifies the typical allegorical
representation of royalty into a grotesque mockery of Orthodox ideology.

that threatens the conventional image of beauty and dominance" and I feel like

this is where I come in in my work this is one of the first things that I wanted to tackle in revisiting this text, which is that I think they get it wrong. Now

recall the definition of the masque. The masque is a once perform extravaganza of all with hours of ceremonial speeches, lavish music, stage effects, ornate
costumes, elaborate dancing, and overall pageantry. Why is blackness so often interpreted as artistically at odds with and frequently treated in isolation from the performance as many allegorical gestures and dramatic flourishes? All meant to delight and entertain. The functioning allegory of Johnson's masque is that beauty is underneath the black face disguise but this narrative Drive does not necessarily trump aesthetic
function. The revelation of beauty

underneath does not require its categorical opposite ugliness or unsavory us on the

surface in fact given the genre it's likely that the surface feature of the

masque this case black face is as grand and appealing as a powerful statecraft

it means to allegorize. As I outlined the ways throughout the chapter that

black face is not a deviation from the performances magnificent appeal but
rather constitutive of the mass
demonstration of beauty and invention of

pleasure. In other words what the what
the critics of The Masque of Blackness

have failed to acknowledge is the way
black face is part of the materials and
technologies deployed for the court masque's
magnificent appeal. When read in its
capacity to perform beauty and pleasure,
black face emerges as a catalyst for

what I would be calling an effective
experience. I don't have
quite as much time to go into that but
the idea of affect is something that is

you know the generates particular kinds
of emotional and visceral responses and

that this engages the participation of
those racially marked as different. In

its depiction of encounters across
racial identities the masque fictionally

portrays the interactions between
English subjects and black migrants in

ways that depart from prevailing theory
typical representations or opaque
historical archives. Silence absent ignored account of black lives in England are short shrift enough. Accounts of black and white interactions are limited to the impersonal and terse records of state regulations of those denied their full personhood, but in the mass narrative of the migrating Africans arriving at Britannia shores and it's allegorical performance of black women dancing with English men it not only brings to the fore the varied effective
experiences of racialized figures it
furthermore positions blackness as the

companion and at times the catalyst to a
series of complex sentiments from desire

to pay those two celebration. The mass
performs a fantasy of idealized monarchy

and they all do all masque have a fantasy
of idealizing power in this way but what

makes this unique is that it anticipates
a kind of idealized incorporation. An

instance of what I sort of theorize
is pleasurable mixing and that's

language that I borrow throughout the
text to develop in more theoretical

terms. That is ideologically powerful
precisely because it is primarily an

aestheticized effective experience.

Beyond a sensible trope of racial

transformation, Johnson presents pleasure
as a precondition for Britannia's

absorption of migrant bodies, and this is
a passage that sort of takes you know I
wanted to have just an example of the way the masque imagines the power of the

king. In this case so who so the king here James the sixth Scotland the Sixth and

James the First of England is described as one who's being shine day and night

and are forced to blanch an Ethiop and revive a corse. His light sciential is,

and past mere nature, can salve the rude defects of every creature.

The pleasurable mixing across racial identities is an argument for the
sovereigns power of unification, underwriting what was a largely unfulfilled and controversial political agenda. The coalition of realms under the aegis of Great Britain and it's James because he was a Scottish King who generates this new language of unification with all of the realms of England. Blackness here is a visual reminder of an indelible difference that can be absorbed, incorporated, salved by the monarchy Monarchs faculties of
conversion. So nevermind that the King can accomplish is impossible feat of blanching the Ethiop right. It means here that there is throughout the text a kind of language of the desire for these racialized migrants to become white and so the representation of black woman's desire for whiteness is essential to the depiction of James's omnipotence. Not solely to prove his supremacy but also to imagine racial normativity as a pleasurable choice for those who bow to
his Dominion, and since this pleasure is depict and experience shared by African

women and a sense of Britannia it becomes a condition to which the black

person's effacement is represented as the fulfillment of submissive desire.

Thus justifies it justifying a larger claim of the Kings ability to consolidate power across racial identities and erase doubts about that unification agenda. It's a political
statement in other words about the range

and nature of James's power. The very indelibility of the black women is the

main argument for the rulers ability to purge differences, underwriting a factious

realms resolution to a Scottish King inheriting the English throne. So by

representing so this is just some language about overnight United

Britannia, so read alongside a unification controversy the employment
of blackface emerges as an ambitious proposal for the King's ability to

dispense unlimited bounty. To put this another way at the very inception of a united kingdom of Britannia at the center of its originally narrative is

the black woman imagined compliance. And I think I'll end there. Thank you.

(Unintelligible) (We squared lumiere problems sort of the book of hearts named in his will focus

of your unit remnant slave trade frp of destination and feeding around the 15)
Yeah, I mean that's a great question because you're capturing a kind of

transition that really happens right around this time and in face the Ottoman

Empire is the most powerful Empire in terms of its global power is commercial influence and it's you know it's just you know its control of the

Mediterranean which is the main trading group so in fact in some ways the

English are aspirational tours a kind of Ottoman power. The beginning of the slave
trade is still appears down the road but there's certainly a lot more exploration

229
00:18:41,750 --> 00:18:46,030
with that and I think what makes this period really interesting is

230
00:18:46,030 --> 00:18:49,870
anticipating the role of England that even if it is in fact completely

231
00:18:49,870 --> 00:18:53,870
unimaginative dissipation but instead of bringing in those two different ways

232
00:18:53,870 --> 00:18:57,650
that increasingly bodies are represented on the stagers actually a lot more

233
00:18:57,650 --> 00:19:01,610
Moorish characters. Moore is a kind of early modern term for those who
represented well it's basically anyone who isn't a white Christian, right? So it could actually also means whites who converted into Islam because you know of them living in the Mediterranean all the different ways that would beneficial. Alright? So yeah, thank you. Great question. (Unintelligible)

Sure so it actually, at least in England, becomes incredibly popular in the stuart court right so not just James, but his son used the masque in some
ways to it's almost my way to see it is
almost a way to differentiate this

aristocratic taste for what was
an incredibly popular public fear. So

partly it's an answer to that. It has
a very long history but vary with various

uses throughout Europe but
certainly comes into its height in the 16th and 17th century.

Thank you. Thanks!