

[*Editor's note:* This review was commissioned and edited by Jody Enders.]

***Blackface Cuba, 1840–1895.*** By Jill Lane. Rethinking the Americas. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005; pp. xi + 274. \$55.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Jean Graham-Jones, City University of New York

*Blackface Cuba, 1840–1895*, by Jill Lane, is a welcome addition to nineteenth-century Latin American cultural and theatre studies. Lane addresses the role of blackface performance in the development of Cuba's national identity: "Why and how was Cubanness imagined through blackface? How did blackface insinuate itself into the very center of Cuba's national 'soul'?" (2). This study of "the relation between writing, blackface performance, and racialized national identities" (ix) provides an intriguing view into the deeply ambivalent construction of an imagined Cuban nation as the island moved from Spanish colonial and slave-based economies to anticolonialism, the abolition of slavery, and eventual independence.

Following an Introduction, the book's first three chapters chronologically trace this move. Chapter 1, "Blackface *Costumbrismo*, 1840–1860," examines Cuba's "authentic" naturalistic sketches of local customs and types through the one-act *sainete*, the dominant *costumbrista* theatrical genre of Spain and Latin America, noted for its depictions of popular life. During Cuba's extended colonial history, *costumbrista* performances became allied with anticolonialism as white Cubans (and their slaves) attended performances where white actors performed in black- or brownface. *Costumbrista* arts remained firmly in the hands of the urban Cuban *criollo* classes (i.e., American-born of European origin), and racial impersonation informed virtually all cultural expression: the artist Víctor Patricio Landaluze created widely circulated illustrations of black Cubans. José Crespo y Borbón wrote as an African-born slave describing his visits to the theatre in the invented (and pejorative) African *bozal* dialect. Crespo's influential 1847 play, *A Cuban Stew; or, The Wedding of Pancho Jutía and Carruto Raspadura*, appropriated a popular culinary metaphor to bring Cuba's racialized plantation cultural mix to urban theatre audiences and initiated the process whereby popular theatre strategically used blackface to control "the degree to which Africans actually participate[d] in the developing Cuban stew" (43).

Chapter 2, "Anticolonial Blackface, 1868," looks closely at blackface performance's role on the eve of Cuba's first war of independence. Inspired by touring Spanish *ópera bufa* groups, local *teatro bufo* companies specialized in comic revue-style musical theatre. Their wildly successful first season ended abruptly at a performance on 22 January 1869, when armed Spanish soldiers fired into the audience and sent anticolonialist *bufo* performers into exile. In these early *bufo* performances, a new urban blackface stock character replaced the earlier plantation's *bozal*-slave. The *catedrático*—a pretentious, free-black professor without an apparent real-world referent—seemed to spring from white *criollos*' fear of becoming too "African" in the process of separating from Spain.

The *catedrático*'s racist ventriloquism "allowed white audiences unabashedly to project the fear of being African onto the African himself" (79).

Chapter 3, "Black(face) Public Spheres, 1880–1895," argues that the "technology of performance" (and not print culture) dominated Cuba's public expression during the period between the 1868–78 war and the later, successful war of independence. Notwithstanding a proliferation of newspapers and magazines, the public favored dances, baseball games (typically concluding with an evening of social dance), and theatrical performances. In 1879 returning *bufo* groups provided black- and brownface performances, more African-inspired music and dance, and a wealth of new plays. With slavery's abolition, in 1886, a distinctively black social performance also emerged. These mutual-aid-society-sponsored *veladas* were marathons of speeches, poetry, three-act plays, classical music, and social dance.

*Blackface Cuba*'s remaining chapters turn to twin phenomena of this interwar period—the musical *danzón* and the *mulata* character type—thus weaving into their discussion of racial impersonation the gendering of the Cuban social body. Chapter 4, "National Rhythm, Racial Adulteration, and the *Danzón*, 1881–1882," examines the controversy arising from the music-dance craze of the *danzón*, a staple of *teatro bufó* as well as of public entertainments. Accused of "Africanizing" young white women (yet commended by black leaders for "progressively" departing from African drums), *Danzón* comes to his own defense in Ramón Morales Álvarez's 1882 play, *The Trial of "El Oso,"* and proudly asserts his status as a natural-born child of Dance and an unknown (but probably colonial Spanish) father. Chapter 5, "Racial Ethnography and Literate Sex, 1888," studies another mixed-parentage offspring, the *mulata*. In late nineteenth-century *bufó* performances, the biracial *mulata* supplanted the *bozal* and the *catedrático* to become the "central figure through which emergent notions of social, sexual, racial, and ultimately national purity were negotiated in an emergent Cuban public sphere" (180–1). While early Cuban ethnographers denigrated the *mulata* as the white social body's source of infection, black women created their own forms of public representation, specifically in the biweekly magazine *Minerva*, Cuba's first publication by and for women of color. And the *bufó* stage celebrated the impersonated *mulata*: the beautiful *mulata de rumbo* living to dance her nights away, and the equally beautiful *mulata de rango* enjoying the "protection" of a wealthy white lover. Performed in brownface by white actresses, the onstage *mulata* became "a palatable fantasy of liberal Cuba herself: a white, virgin, patriot, and erotic Cuban *rumbera*, all in one" (207).

Lane's study concludes with two remarkable *bufó* plays: Ignacio Saragacha's *Bufos in Africa* (1882) and Raimundo Cabrera's *From the Park to the Moon* (1888). In the former, Havana's leading *bufó* actors perform themselves, shipwrecked in Africa en route to a gig in Spain, captured (in blackface!), and condemned by the very imagined Africans they've made a career of impersonating. Cabrera's play sends a cross section of desperate Cubans to the moon, a tropical paradise populated by nymphs where the Cubans replay their own colonial history before returning to an equally imaginary Cuba. For Lane, both plays are "cartographic fantasies" that "map and remap the coordinates of

national belonging in deceptively literal ways, constituting the shape and direction of national desire in the process" (226). As each play "spatializes" the Othering so essential to nineteenth-century *bufo* performance, it imagines other colonial histories and rehearses Cuban nation building.

*Blackface Cuba* is a fascinating analysis of what is now a textual archive. My quibbles are few: although I appreciate Lane's refusal—eloquently argued in her brief Preface—to treat as translation equivalencies the racialized dialects of U.S. blackface minstrelsy and Cuban blackface *bufo* performance, I found myself seeking more nuanced translations of the quoted plays, still largely unavailable to the Anglophone reader. The *bufo* wordplay and puns—as well as the performances' ferocious humor—disappear in the author's "literal" translations. Some typographical inconsistencies in the reproduction of Spanish names (e.g., Morales Alvarez's name is incorrectly spelled on pages 151, 172, and 177) may confuse unfamiliar readers. Lane has carefully centered her project on the "specificity of the Cuban criollo experience" (x); I second her hope that future projects will expand upon her important groundwork to explore the intersections of Creole colonial experiences in the Caribbean.



***Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory and Urban Performance in India since 1947.*** By Aparna Bhargava Dharwadker. Studies in Theatre History and Culture. Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 2005; pp. 540, 20 illus., 2 maps. \$49.95 cloth.

Reviewed by Cobina Gillitt, New York University

Aparna Dharwadker's *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory and Urban Performance in India since 1947* is as monumental as its subject. Bringing together an "unconventional fusion of drama and theatre history, performance contexts, theoretical analysis, and literary interpretation" (3), Dharwadker not only produces a comprehensive history of multicultural, multilingual, and divergent postcolonial urban Indian theatres, but also provides an impressive model and framework for an epistemology of postcolonial identity construction and *practice* in South Asia. Her direct engagement with both literary drama and theatrical performance enriches this study and makes it a valuable contribution to a wide array of fields from performance and theatre studies to postcolonial studies of drama and literature.

Chapter 1 launches directly into an exhaustive positioning of her project, both historically and theoretically, in relation to the existing scholarship. Dharwadker boldly takes previous studies to task for their "ideological erasure" (6) and their effective marginalization of modern Indian theatrical practice for their failure to engage in the intricacies inherent in postcolonial nation building. She details the complexity of Indian theatre history as well as the multiple voices that have contributed to the construction of an Indian theatre history and their