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HIV tells the story of Zero's life. HIV has become our latter day Scheherazade. In our 'highly coded culture' we invest HIV with the power to create the story of a life (merging AIDS and gay identity on one end, and on the other, providing those infected with a narrative to their lives – a beginning, a purpose for some, and an end) even while it takes lives away. A virus is meaningless, but representation gives it meaning. It requires a story to be understood, and so it can't help – we can't help but let it – produce stories.

Over the credits Michael Callen, Miss HIV, sings yet another rendition of the Scheherazade song. 'Tell the story of a virus', she sings, 'speak for me, Scheherazade'. HIV indeed has, as it perhaps will have from now on, the final word.

Notes

1. Jan Zita Grover, 'AIDS: Keywords,' *October*, 43 (Winter 1987), p. 18.
2. Alexandra Juhasz, *AIDS TV: Identity, Community, and Alternative Video*, Videography by Catherine Saalfield (London: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 296–297.

From the Vulgar to the Refined: American Vernacular and Blackface Minstrelsy in *Showboat*

Peter Stanfield

Discourses on national identity, European ethnic assimilation, and the problem of class division within the American Republic had been principally addressed for close on one hundred years in the popular arts through the agency of the black mask. When Hollywood introduced synchronised sound in the late 1920s, blackface minstrelsy, as a mass form of entertainment, had long been on the wane.[1] Yet, blackface performance maintained a limited public profile with the film industry's recruitment and promotion of Broadway blackface acts, such as Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor, and with the production of films based on nostalgic reconstructions of America's theatrical and musical past.[2] Although the performance of blackface decreased during the 1930s, its legacy continued to resonate in Hollywood's construction of an American vernacular. American cinema found itself in the paradoxical position of needing to evoke traditions of blackface minstrelsy so that a given film could bring these discourses into play, while simultaneously attempting to efface the influence of blackface, as the contradictions implied in its use became ever more apparent and therefore problematic; a type of play that oscillates between revelation and concealment.

In this essay I argue that the evocation of an American vernacular tradition inevitably leads into the fantasy world of blackness formed out of the conventions of blackface minstrelsy. I review how blackface in Hollywood is positioned as a symbol of America's theatrical and musical past and as a key element in the representation of an American vernacular tradition.

Despite *The Jazz Singer*'s (Alan Crosland, 1927) status as the most critically discussed example of Hollywood's use of blackface, it is actually something of an anomaly.[3] Set in the present and ending with Jolson's character in blackface, the film contravenes Hollywood's typical presentation of minstrelsy as a discrete performance or as a means to represent America's theatrical and musical past.[4] *Showboat* (James Whale, 1936), begins in the past with the heroine performing in blackface and ends in the present when she has long since left behind the mask of burnt-cork. It is in this latter formulation that blackface is most often encountered in American films of the 1930s.

Like so many of Hollywood's representations of America's past, *Showboat* shows how America has progressed from vulgar beginnings to a refined present. The vulgar is imagined as belonging to a vernacular American culture. Through the means of song, dance, and dialect the vernacular is signified as black. Sometimes this is achieved

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through the mask of blackface, but more often without the mask. Black American culture, mediated through blackface, is, I argue, a consistent signifier of an American vernacular.

The decline in popularity of the discrete minstrel show in the urban north during the latter part of the nineteenth century paralleled its diffusion into other forms, such as burlesque. Individual white blackface performers found spots in the growing vaudeville circuit, where minstrelsy maintained a popularity through its ability to influence and be adapted into new musical forms such as ragtime and, later, jazz.[5] By placing the blackface performer in a variety setting, vaudeville had the effect of containing and isolating the performance. Rather than the whole show, minstrelsy now became an attraction among many others and a familiar sight given back its novelty value. Minstrelsy had become a performance style that was locked into the past, a signifier of an American musical tradition. In nineteenth-century minstrelsy the disguise of burnt cork permitted European immigrant cultures to find a common language in their shared whiteness formed out of the negative construction of blackness. Blackface had acted as a syncretic form where ethnic markers such as Irish dance, Alpine yodelling, Shakespeare, Polish polkas and Italian opera would be performed through the Americanising mask of burnt cork. This is a construction of whiteness that David Roediger has likened to the doomed master in Hegel's celebrated essay 'Lordship and Bondage': 'blackfaced whites derived their consciousness by measuring themselves against a group they defined as largely worthless and ineffectual. . . the trajectory of minstrelsy was to create an ersatz whiteness and then to succumb to a mere emphasis on the vulgarity, grotesqueness and stupidity of the black characters it created.'[6]

In *Showboat*, blackface is used as a sign of a theatrical past, but it is also a marker against which the characters are able to judge their social progress.[7] This process is significantly aided by the presence of African Americans in the cast. Where in *The Jazz Singer*, the signified of blackface, the African American, is absent, in *Showboat*, blackface is performed in front of a cast that includes African Americans. The film produces the dual display of African American actors conforming to character stereotypes developed in minstrelsy, such as Uncle Tom and Mammy, while white actors in or out of blackface help to reinforce these negative representations. Just as profoundly, the presence of African Americans distances the white actors from the images of blackness they assume by blacking up, through emphasising the performance's artificiality and fabrication.

During preproduction the film's producers had hoped to cast white actress Tess Gardella in the role of Queenie. Gardella, who specialised in blackface acts and who was better known by her stage name, Aunt Jemima, had played the role in the New York stage productions of 1927 and 1932. But the difficulties of having her share scenes in the film adaptation with the black actor Paul Robeson proved insurmountable. Joe Breen, head of the Production Code Administration, in correspondence with Universal who had asked him for advice, noted:

> I think you should be extremely careful, however, not to indicate any physical contact between a white woman and a Negro man for the reason that many people will know that Aunt Jemima is a white woman and might be repulsed by the sight of her being fondled by a man who is a Negro.[8]

Eventually the role was given to the black actress, Hattie McDaniel. Regardless of whether a white or black actress played Queenie, part of the character's function is to distance the white actors from the minstrel roles they were playing and to throw the emphasis squarely onto the artifice of the white masquerade. This in turn naturalises the minstrel types the African American actors have assumed.[9]

The scene that best exemplifies the potential for racial confusion and the attempt to keep a sense of dramatic separation between representations of white and black is where Magnolia (Irene Dunne) learns the song, 'Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man'. The Mammy character, Queenie, overhears Miss Julie (Helen Morgan) singing to Magnolia, and wants to know how Julie learned that 'coloured folks' song'. Julie, as we are soon to discover, is a mulatto, but before this is revealed to audience and cast alike, she further puts her race into question when, in answer to Queenie, she turns the song into a 'blues'. With this change, the song's recital turns into a full-blown performance with Queenie and Joe (Paul Robeson) singing it as a duet. Magnolia, now stage front, turns herself 'black' by puffing out her cheeks, sticking out her backside, and sashaying her pelvic region inside her long dress, as a chorus of blacks gather alongside the showboat. Magnolia then leads the 'troupe' out on to deck for an impromptu cakewalk (a high-stepping ragtime dance), which is abruptly terminated by Magnolia's snooty and self-regarding mother (Helen Westley), who fails to recognise the contradiction between her distaste for riverboat life and the vulgar

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performances of blackface and cheap melodrama , and the fact that this is how her family earns its living.

Magnolia's move from her humble Southern origins into Northern society is, at all points in the film, marked through the signs of blackface performance. When Julie and her husband are forced to leave the showboat, Magnolia and Ravenal (Allan Jones) take their place in the cast. Magnolia now adds black grease paint and white lips to aid her minstrel performances. She marries Ravenal and before long falls pregnant. Ravenal meanwhile reveals his shady side as a gambler and a lucky streak takes him, his wife and child to the good life in Chicago. It does not last. Ravenal, almost destitute, deserts his family. Magnolia, without the means to support herself, is forced back on to the stage. At an audition, the impresario asks her what she does. 'I do Negro songs' is her reply, 'A coon shouter, huh?' he responds. Nervously, and without a hint of blue notes, she sings 'Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man'. Miss Julie, who, unknown to Magnolia, is the star of the show, secretly hears the performance and, realising that Magnolia must be desperate for a job, disappears from the theatre and the narrative, doomed forever to play out the role of the loyal Negro. Like Queenie and Joe, she defers her own needs and desires to help her 'Little sister,' her white 'family', the 'family' which the narrative, minstrelsy and racism work repeatedly to exclude her from.

Julie does not hear the 'professor' at the piano transform her song into a ragtime number, and although Magnolia gets the job, she does not perform Negro songs or

even a 'raggy' rendition of 'Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man'. Instead, she treats the audience to an 'old favourite', 'After the Ball'. Years pass and her acclaim grows. She retires and her daughter follows in her footsteps; a theatrical dynasty is born. Magnolia has progressed from the vulgar, and from what is now marked as a vernacular and nostalgic tradition of blackface, to the refinement and modernity of the New York stage. Here, as if to rhyme with her changed circumstances, blackface is turned into a ballet, and her daughter into a Southern belle.

The film's source novel, written by Edna Ferber and published in 1926, offers a different but complementary construction of Magnolia's move from vulgarity to refinement. Despite Magnolia's lowly beginnings on a showboat, her imitations of black song are shown to be more authentic than those found in the then emerging vaudeville culture of turn-of-the-century America. At her Chicago audition she gives the following performance:

> She threw back her head then as Jo had taught her, half closed her eyes, tapped time with the right foot, smartly. Imitative in this, she managed, too, to get into her voice that soft and husky Negro quality which for years she had heard on river boats, bayous, landings. I got wings. You got-a wings. All God's chillun got-a wings.[10]

Magnolia's performance is marked out as an authentic and essential evocation of the South, a vernacular folk music uncorrupted by vulgar commercial imperatives.

> 'What kind of a coon song do you call that?' inquired the gray derby. 'Why, it's a Negro melody - they sing them in the South.' 'Sounds like a church hymn to me.' He paused. His pale shrewd eyes searched her face. 'You a nigger?'[11]

Irene Dunne's Magnolia is never so racially confused. However, the reader of the novel knows that the only cross in Magnolia's blood comes from the Basque region in France via her father, which gives her the fire in her dark eyes and a liking for good food. It is not Magnolia's racial pedigree that is at stake (her whiteness is confirmed by the scarlet colour that rises to her cheeks in response to the 'gray derby's' question), but her authenticity.

Magnolia, and by extension the showboat, its inhabitants and audiences, are a nostalgic and sentimental construction of a lost authentic America, evoked through its theatrical history. Kim, Magnolia's daughter, carries the burden of modern America. Her marriage and acting are shown to lack the authenticity of earlier days. For Magnolia, Kim's three years at acting school represent a refinement of the profession that is wholly alien to her: 'Her performance had been clear-cut, modern, deft, convincing. She was fresh, but finished. She was intelligent, successful, workmanlike, intuitive, vigorous, adaptable. . . There was about her . . . nothing of genius, of greatness, of the divine fire.'[12] This 'lifeless' approach to theatre is echoed in Kim's marriage:

> Her marriage with Kenneth Cameron was successful and happy and very nice. Separate bedrooms . . . Personal liberty and privacy of thought and action . . . Magnolia wondered

> . . . seeing this well-ordered and respectful union, if Kim was not, after all, missing something. Wasn't marriage, like life, unstimulating and unprofitable and somewhat empty when too well ordered and protected and guarded? Wasn't it finer, more splendid, more nourishing, when it was, like life itself, a mixture of the sordid and the magnificent . . . ?[13]

Through its construction as authentic, the vernacular culture of the South is made to work in distinction to the refined, sterile and nice world that Kim inhabits and to the vulgar roots of vaudeville exemplified in the coon song.

Magnolia's Chicago audition is rhymed with an earlier scene when she first comes into contact with her husband's gambling cronies. In an act of saving face, she plays the banjo and sings the same songs that she would later perform at her audition. The response of these Yahoos complements those of the 'gray derby': 'You call that a coon song and maybe it is. I don't dispute you, mind. But I never heard any song like *that* called a coon song, and I heard a good many coon songs in my day.'[14] Magnolia's 'Negro Spirituals' come to offer an authentic, albeit sentimental, mediating ground between the urban lowlife of gambling and prostitution that is carried by the coon song and the metropolitan refinement and professionalism of modern theatre. The original showboat environment also works to move Magnolia's sentimentality away from its usual generation through the plantation myth that the film version tacitly evokes in its closing moments, and instead locates it within a novel setting.

According to Charles Hamm, an historian of popular American music, coon songs were the fifth and last stage in the development of the minstrel song. The first stage was the antebellum nigger song such as 'Old Dan Tucker' and 'Jump Jim Crow'. This was followed by the plantation song of which Stephen Foster is the prime exponent. The third stage was the post-war song styles exemplified by the nostalgic sentiments of 'Carry Me Back to Old Virginny' and 'The Old Home Ain't What it Used To Be'. The fourth stage, the minstrel-spiritual, was popularised by the Fisk Jubilee Singers in the 1870s and speedily appropriated by white performers.[15] Magnolia sings in this latter style in the novel and 'Old Man River' in the film version draws upon this tradition. The coon song was in some respects a return to the nigger song. It eschewed both nostalgia and any notion of spiritual uplift. According to Hamm, 'The coon song is usually in dialect, with a text somewhat less than complimentary to blacks.'[16] This is a rather understated criticism of a song type that plumbs the depths of racial caricature unseen before or since in American popular culture.

However, the reticence in Hamm's criticism needs to be measured against the still fairly widespread understanding of Stephen Foster's work, despite the evidence of the songs, to quote from one recent scholarly work on the musical, as 'stereotyped yet sympathetic approaches to Black song.'[17] The full version of 'Oh! Susanna' contains the following couplet: 'I jumped aboard de telegraph,/And trabbelled down de ribber,/ De Lectrie fluid magnified,/And killed five hundred Nigger.'[18] The coon song managed to make even this characterisation of the African American seem polite:

> I was standin' down the Mobile Buck just to cut a shine
> Some coon across my smeller swiped a watermelon rin'
> I drawed my steel dat gemmen to fin'
> I riz up like a black cloud and took a look aroun'
> There was dat new bully standin' on the ground.
> I've been lookin' for you nigger and I've got you found.
>
> Razors 'gun a -flyin', niggers 'gun to squawk,
> I lit upon that bully just like a sparrow hawk,
> And dat nigger was just a-dyin' to take a walk.
> When I got through with bully, a doctor and a nurse
> Wa'nt no good to dat nigger, so they put him in a hearse,
> A cyclone couldn't have tore him up much worse.
>
> 'Bully Song', performed by May Irwin c1895[19]

The fad for coon songs lasted almost 40 years, between 1880 and 1920, and became synonymous with a number of vaudeville's greatest stars. Among those who carried the epithet 'Coon Shouter' were Sophie Tucker, May Irwin, Norah Bayes, Dolly Connolly, Billy Murray, Bert Williams (the first African American Broadway star), and Al Jolson. For the most part the songs are delivered as comedies, because without this distancing effect of humour the listener is confronted with the frightening image of the African American at his most vicious and bestial. The coon song has no saving graces, and many historians of popular song prefer to concentrate their studies of the era on the parallel development of ragtime that allows them to make a much less problematic transition to discussions on the development of jazz.[20] Yet the coon song entered all walks of American cultural life, as well as creating a very influential space for itself in English music hall. The coon song's influence on African-American song would also be profound, not least because African Americans were major contributors in writing some of the most popular songs of the genre; for example, Ernest Hogan's 'All Coons Look Alike To Me'. The coon song would also find its way into the most 'authentic' of African- American musical forms, the blues; a process of assimilation and adaptation that Paul Oliver, the blues historian, has studiously traced.[21]

At the close of *Showboat*, Magnolia and Ravenal are reunited: from the vantage of their box in the theatre they look down upon the stage where the play their daughter has performed in is also drawing to a close. The scene is frozen as if it were a tableau. In front of a plantation house, in a pool of light, the white actors look across the stage where, shrouded in shadow, a group of black actors who have played the role of slaves entertaining their masters help form a balanced composition. The space that divides the two groups of actors appears chasmic. Yet, the drama of Magnolia's life suggests that this divide has been crossed many times.

Hollywood's representation of blackface as a signifier of nostalgia helped to undercut whatever relevance the form still had for a contemporary audience, but in doing so it also made blackface an essential element in the evocation of an American vernacular, a cultural miscegenation at once recognised and denied. In an early scene

in *Showboat*, two hillbillies go to see their first theatrical performance. They pay for their tickets with Confederate currency. The money is worthless, but it is still in circulation. Blackface is like that worthless currency. Its time has apparently long passed, yet it refuses to disappear, returning whenever American culture needs to express a vernacular tradition.

This essay is a revised extract from 'An Octoroon in the Kindling': AmericanVernacular and Blackface Minstrelsy in 1930s Hollywood' in Journal of American Studies, 31, part 3 (December 1997), 407-438. I would like to offer my belated thanks to Richard Maltby and Esther Sonnet for their advice during the writing of that essay. Interested readers might also search out a companion essay, 'Extremely Dangerous Material': Hollywood and the Ballad of Frankie and Johnny' in Daniel Bernardi (ed), Classic Race and the Hollywood Studio System (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,1999).

Notes

1. Little historical work has been done on minstrel performers and shows of the first half of the twentieth century. This area is covered in my forthcoming book on Hollywood and the making of an American performance vernacular. However, Nick Tosches' work on the blackface performer Emmett Miller provides a wealth of contextual material on the last of the minstrel troupes and the slow 'death' of minstrelsy as a staple in variety and vaudeville shows. See Nick Tosches, *Country: the Twisted Roots of Rock 'n' Roll* (New York: DaCapo, 1996), pp102–108, 118–119, 239–268. Nick Tosches, 'The Strange and Hermetical Case of Emmett Miller'. In *Journal of Country Music* Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 39-47. Nick Tosches, 'Emmett Miller: The Final Chapter', *Journal of Country Music*, Vol. 18 No. 3, pp. 27–37. Nick Tosches, 'Emmett Miller and Jimmie Rogers in Asheville', *Journal of Country Music*, Vol. 19 No. 2, pp. 26–30.
2. For insight into Hollywood's recruitment of Broadway and vaudeville stars, see Henry Jenkins, *What Made Pistachio Nuts? Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press,1992). pp.153–84. And Donald Crafton, *The Talkies:American Cinema'sTransition to Sound 1926–1931* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1997).
3. See Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). Rogin offers the most comprehensive assessment of Blackface and Hollywood, but as I have argued in the *Journal of American Studies* his project is essentially ahistorical and his claims for the status of certain films are often preposterous: as an antidote see Crafton (1997) pp. 516–531 on *The Jazz Singer*'s reception.
4. Eddie Cantor's discrete blackface performances, unlike Jolson's in *The Jazz Singer*, operate within a broader set of dramatic imperatives. For example, in *Palmy Days* (A. Edward Sutherland, UA, 1931) Cantor blacks up to attract more customers to the restaurant in the bakery where he works. It is an isolated use of blackface, and its principal function is to confirm the star persona Cantor formed on Broadway, where his novelty was the introduction of the fey, spectacle-wearing minstrel.
5. See Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque & American Culture* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 158–178. For a vivid and contemporary representation of a vaudeville show read, Frank Norris, *McTeague* (1899, reprint New York: Norton, 1997), pp. 57–64: 'The performance went on. Now it was the "musicalmarvels", two men extravagantly made up as negro minstrels, with immense shoes and plaid vests. They seemed to be able to wrestle a tune out of almost anything - glass bottles, cigarbox fiddles, strings of sleigh-bells, even graduated brasstubes, which they rubbed with resin fingers. McTeague was stupefied with admiration. "That's what you call musicians", he announced

gravely. "Home Sweet Home", played upon the trombone. Think of that! Art could go no further.'

6. David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race & the Making of theAmerican Working Class* (London:Verso, 1991), p. 118. For a complementary analysis see, Alexander Saxton, *The Rise & Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in 19th Century America* (London: Verso, 1990). For a broad overview of the history of minstrelsy see Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974). However, the historical generalities of Toll's study have since been challenged by two important works, Eric Lott, *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy & the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) and Dale Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and their World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1997). Cockrell's brilliant study is particularly germane to this essay, arguing that, even as early as the 1840s, blackface began a project of refinement, symbolised by the appropriation of the noun 'minstrel' to suggest a more melodically refined delivery of song within a more structured performance context. This was a disavowal of the more vulgar and anarchic forms on which it was based. Anne Marie Bean, James V. Hatch, Brooks McNamara (eds), *Inside the Minstrel Mask: Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy* (Hanover & London: WesleyanUniversity Press, 1996) is a very useful collection of essays. Two studies that consider the effects of minstrelsy into the twentieth-century are, Susan Gubar, *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and W. T. Lhamon Jr., *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998),a superlative narrative that challenges many commonly held assumptions.
7. In *Dante's Inferno* (20th Century-Fox, Harry Lachman, 1935) Spencer Tracy's character, having been sacked from his job as chief stoker in the merchant navy and unable to find any other form of employment, accepts a job as the target in a 'Hit the Nigger' carnival sideshow. The film unambiguously offers Tracy's character's appearance in blackface as a sign of his absolute destitution: he has all but left the white world behind. This blackface performance marks and measures his rise, fall, and eventual redemption. His rise is witnessed through the control he eventually exerts over the carnival, which he turns into a huge theme park built around rollercoaster rides. His fall occurs after he refuses to fund the necessary safety measures, his hubris and greed lead eventually to disaster. But, even this fall from grace does not take him as low down the social and moral scale that is implied by his initial appearance in blackface.
8. See correspondence in PCA file on *Showboat*, Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), Beverly Hills, Calif..Letter dated 17 October, 1935. On the casting of white actresses and black actors on New York stages during the 1920s, see Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (London: Picador, 1996), pp. 101–103. Douglas writes: 'When Eugene O'Neill cast the white actress Mary Blair as the female lead opposite Paul Robeson in his 1924 drama of miscegenation, *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, he was breaking a centuries-long taboo. Before the play opened, a furor swept New York and, from New York much of the nation. The New York *American* gleefully warned of the 'RIOT' *God's Chillun*, a "DIRECT BID FOR DISORDERS", was sure to produce; various city groups lobbied to stop the play from opening'. p. 102.
9. See also the Marx Brothers performance in blackface played out against a cast of African American dancers and singers in *A Day at the Races* (MGM, Sam Wood, 1937)
10. Edna Ferber, *Showboat* (New York: Signet Classic, 1994), p. 275.
11. Ferber, p. 275..
12. Ferber, p. 297.
13. Ferber, p. 299.

14. Ferber, p. 243.
15. Charles Hamm, *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America* (New York: Norton & Co., 1983), p. 271. For a more precise analysis of the distinction between antebellum and post war nostalgia in the minstrel song see, Lee Glazer & Susan Key, 'Carry Me Back: Nostalgia for the Old South in 19th Century Popular Culture', *Journal of American Studies* , 30, Part 1, April 1996, 1-24.
16. Hamm, p. 321
17. Robert Lawson-Peebles (ed), *Approaches to the American Musical* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996). p. 2.
18. Complete lyrics quoted in Lott, p. 204.
19. Quoted in Allen Woll, *Black Musical Theatre: From Coontown to Dreamgirls*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1989), pp. 2–3.
20. On coon songs and coon performers see, Janet Brown, 'The "Coon-Singer" and the "Coon-Song": A Case Study of the Performer Character Relationship' in *Journal of American Culture*, Vol. 7, Nos. 1/2 (Spring/Summer, 1984), pp. 1–8; and James H. Dormon, 'Reshaping the Popular Image of Post-Reconstruction American Blacks: The "Coon Song" Phenomenon of the Guild Age' in *American Quarterly*, 40, no. 4, (1988), 440–477.
21. Paul Oliver, *Songsters & Saints: Vocal Traditions on Race Records* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 47–77.

Memory, Magic and the Musical in Derek Jarman's *The Tempest* and *Edward II*

Maggie Taylor

Derek Jarman died in 1994, and in May 1996, when a major Jarman retrospective opened at the Barbican, there was a sudden influx of writing about his work. One critic suggested that Jarman, while 'ever so artistic...made no art...and his films too, are no more than invitations into the queer world of Derek Jarman'.[1] On the other hand, others such as Barry Norman argued that 'to regard Jarman's films simply as homosexual proselytising or attention-seeking experiments...is seriously to misjudge both them and him'.[2]

To see Jarman's work only in the light of a gay landscape is to ignore his concern for people who were marginalised because of their race, sexuality, disability or gender. As a recognised film-maker who struggled to get financial commitment for his offbeat films (*Wittgenstein*, for example, required the participation of four different production companies), Jarman's avant-garde reputation arose partly because he played with dominant cinematic codes – ignoring for example the classic shot/reverse-shot technique – in order to highlight difference.

I will explore the way in which Jarman's subversion of cinematic codes - and especially those of the Hollywood musical - creates a *vox populis* and a community of compassion which celebrates difference in British cinema. And it is interesting to note that at the Edinburgh International Film Festival in August 1998 the award for the best film went to *Love is the Devil* directed by John Maybury, a former Jarman aficionado. At the same festival, *Get Real*, a first feature film by Simon Shore, won the most popular film award. Homosexuality was the focus of both films. Fortunately Jarman has much to answer for!

I will argue that Jarman invokes irony, parody and pastiche to play with the codes, to invert the model of the Hollywood musical and in particular to undermine the musical's 'myth of integration'.[3] I will suggest that he does so in order to highlight the dearth, in his Thatcherite filmic lifetime, of alternative voices in British cinema, and British culture.

For example, he frequently gives the best lines to those usually pushed out onto the periphery of society. Consider, for example in *The Tempest* (1979), the stunning gaze he gives to Miranda as she stares through the keyhole at her father, and the power of black singer Elisabeth Welch's closing chords in the 'Stormy Weather' finale. In other films, the focused nonsense of the small hunchbacked Martian in *Wittgenstein*, and young Wittgenstein's deadpan comments on his family, also serve to emphasise in