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# The Mediterranean Apprenticeship of British Slavery, by Gustav Ungerer. Madrid: Editorial Verbum, 2008 (Book Review)

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**The Mediterranean Apprenticeship of British Slavery**, by Gustav Ungerer. Madrid: Editorial Verbum, 2008. 148 pp. Paper. 12.00€

**Reviewer: IMTIAZ HABIB**

This slim book by Gustav Ungerer is a valuable contribution to race studies of early modern England. Empirical archival research on the subject, however, is still in its infancy, despite the tentative explorations of Eldred Jones, Ruth Cowhig, James Walvin, and Peter Fryer, among others several decades ago. Documentary studies of English involvement in African slave trading *before* the 1660s in particular are still virtually unknown, notwithstanding Roslyn Knutson's very helpful essay in the early 1990s. The only exceptions are a chapter in a book on Africans in Renaissance Europe, this reviewer's recent book, a recent doctoral dissertation at Oxford University, and one journal essay.<sup>1</sup> Ungerer's book joins this new scholarly field and significantly extends its findings.

In four brief chapters the book traces the shadowy subject of expatriate English merchants in the Iberian peninsula trading in African slaves in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. After two introductory chapters that sketch late medieval Portuguese maritime history and the particular role of the Duke of Medina Sidonia's family in that history, it identifies several early Tudor merchants in Iberia: William de la Founte in Andalusia between 1485 and 1491, and between 1508 and 1516, Thomas Malliard, John Waters, John Jennings, Nicholas Arnold, and Francis Bawdwyn acting through his agent Robert Thorne. Several others—James Edingward, William Fabian, John Tintam, and Roger Barlow—are also identified in passing, to comprise a total of more than fifty such merchants. These were English merchants, some such as William de La Founte from prominent sea trading and slave trafficking Bristol communities, while others such as the London draper Bawdwyn from elsewhere in England. Encouraged by the Duke of Sidonia's support for expatriate English merchant settlement, they were all comfortably resident in Sanlucar, and embedded in the colonial Spanish Portuguese societies there, sometimes even in official positions as were de la Founte, Thomas Malliard, and Robert Thorne. Their active participation in the slave dealings of their hosts are illuminated through a series of documents from the Portuguese and Spanish archives. That the Iberian residence of these English merchants was cynically expedient is also evident in their eventual abandonment of their businesses and families and return to England. In another chapter the book documents illicitly possessed enslaved Africans in Elizabethan England. At the book's very end Ungerer examines black figures in several paintings of the Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch to show what Ungerer believes is the painter's progressive view of black people.

Of immediate value here are the Spanish documents from the archives at Simancas, Seville, and Tenerife, pertaining to clandestine English slave trad-

ing activity in the Iberian peninsula in the early and late sixteenth century. These archival materials provide an important Portuguese-Spanish documentary counterpart generally to the new, empirical English race studies mentioned above. Also attractive are the detailed and fairly in-depth examinations of all documents, together with their ancillary references and sources. Methodologically, such examinations are of exemplary value for early modern English black history and slavery studies, where most archival sources are so obscure, arcane, and even physically fragmentary that they are impossible to pursue by anyone other than the most determined and innovative researcher.

In particular, Ungerer complements and confirms a particular argument made by this reviewer (in the Introduction to *Black Lives*), that English colonial instincts, including slave trading, *were* operative in the sixteenth century and earlier and not just in the seventeenth. These instincts were manifested in the exploitation by English merchants of the Iberian contacts of Dom Antonio, the pretender to the Spanish throne maintained in London by Elizabeth, and of Dr. Hector Nuñez, the prominent London Marrano Jewish physician and trader; they also took shape, as Ungerer suggests, in Elizabeth's 1588 Guinea slaving contract, and, as I have shown, in many other informal and surreptitious activities. The presence of English merchants in Andalusia from as early as the Yorkist regime of Edward IV (of which there have been some traces in earlier scholarship) through the early Tudor decades, and involved in African slave trafficking not only confirms that English colonizing and slaving tendencies did not suddenly emerge full-grown in the later seventeenth century as has been traditionally believed, but also reveals the extent of Anglo-Portuguese/Spanish trading connections in the early sixteenth century (18). This too is a subject poorly known in studies of the period but which hopefully will now be seen as a logical undertow of Catherine of Aragon's marriage to Henry VII's eldest son in 1501, as this reviewer has also suggested (*Black Lives*), and accordingly will be investigated more fully.

Among his many salutary corrections to contemporary early modern race and slavery studies, Ungerer is able to address the economic contributions made by enslaved Africans (37 and n. 67). Traditionally denied and dismissed, this aspect of the subject will perhaps now begin to receive the acknowledgment it deserves. Another way in which Ungerer breaks new ground is his attempt to read black representations—in painting—as real historical figures experienced by the painter (Hieronymous Bosch) rather than as metaphors. This approach has been scrupulously avoided by traditional historians as a way of ignoring and denying evidence of black presence.

The lack of English translations of Spanish and Portuguese documents is odd however, in a book written for an English audience. Also missing is an interpretative connection between the book's discussion of the Iberian documents of English slaving and its survey of illicit black slave ownership in England. Sketching such a connection would have given the documents cited a more telling impact. Similarly, the way Ungerer makes the historical con-

nection between Bosch's paintings and historical black presence is rather cavalier—he cheerfully assumes that simply because Bosch was contemporary to the English merchant Nicolas Arnold and his slave dealings the former's representations must have been cued by black figures. A more careful historical tracing of Bosch (a lifetime native of Brabant, specifically of the small Dutch town of Hertogenbosch) in these years in order to locate him within credible proximity of recorded slave dealings of the sort Ungerer numerously documents in his book would have made the connection far more compelling. In fact, Bosch may have been cued not by the Iberian black presence at all, but by historical African slaves in the Netherlands itself, as Albrecht Dürer was. Thus it is a loss that Ungerer's bold assertion that Bosch was criticizing and questioning slavery (142) remains only that—a well meaning assertion—and nothing more. There are more instances of these kinds of defensive leaps of faith, including Ungerer's reading of the judges in the black diver case as "fair minded" (26); in his reading of Simon Forman's treatment of the black maid Polonia as a "rapprochement" (77); in his rebuttal of the negative portrayal of blackamoor maids on the popular English stage (78); and in his assertion that Hector Novimeis is Hector Nuñez (94 n.106); all of which are done without supporting explanations.

Overall, though, this a very useful book and it will open up new directions of inquiry in race studies of early modern England.

### Notes

1. T. F. Earle and K. J. P. Lowe, eds., *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Imtiaz Habib, *Black Lives in the English Archives (1500–1677): Imprints of the Invisible* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008). The doctoral dissertation is Miranda Kaufmann's at Christ Church College, Oxford, 2009. The journal essay is by Duncan Salkeld, "The Elizabethan Bridewell Hospital Minute Books," (2010). Electronic essay at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/28017565/The-Elizabethan-Bridewell-Hospital-Minute-Books-Duncan> 7.26.2010. Duncan Salkeld's earlier essays are also worth mentioning: "Alien Desires: Travellers and Sexuality in Early Modern Europe," in Thomas Betteridge, ed., *Borders and Travelers* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 35–52; and "Black Luce and the 'Kurtizans' of Shakespeare's London," *Signatures*, an electronic journal at [www.chiuni.ac.uk/info/signatures.cfm](http://www.chiuni.ac.uk/info/signatures.cfm) 2 (2000): 1.1—1.10.

**English Renaissance Drama and the Specter of Spain: Ethnopoetics and Empire**, by Eric Griffin. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009. Pp. xii + 304. Cloth \$59.95.

*Reviewer:* OLGA L. VALBUENA

Eric Griffin's *English Renaissance Drama and the Specter of Spain* offers a significantly new perspective on the subject of early modern England and