

particular case studies from the construction of (self-)image and status in drama to the role that the developing publishing industry played in the cultural formations of the period.

I enjoyed Warren Boutcher's broad historical overview of the interrelation between new social literacies and traditional hierarchies that focuses on celebrated vernacular texts by Michel de Montaigne and Shakespeare while inviting us to rethink and explore this connection in different locations, including the Americas. I also found Jane Stevenson's examination of the remarkable case of Latin poet Maria Marchina, and the mesh of circumstances that enabled her to climb up the social ladder by means of skill, talent, and education, to be an enticing invitation to further inspect the association between knowledge and social standing among other so-called "women prodigies" (140) of the period. In this same manner, Susan Wiseman's exploration of the "formation of a set of ideas, images, and expectations making the entity of the 'Gypsy'" (182) opens up the conversation for more discriminating approaches in the field of Romani studies to study a social group that has often been superseded by its literary stereotype. Colin Furrow's closing chapter on publishing houses and the construction of authorship was particularly illuminating because of its comparative approach to a question that is often addressed in an individualized manner for specific conspicuous authors of the period. As a whole, the publication manages aptly to do just what the editor pointed out as its main aim: it, indeed, opens up doors through which, hopefully, many other future researchers will wish to pass (4).

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Scripts of Blackness: Early Modern Performance Culture and the Making of Race.
Noémie Ndiaye.

RaceB4Race: Critical Race Studies of the Premodern. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022. 613 pp. \$64.95.

Working transnationally and across disciplines, this book makes a compelling argument for how foundationally theater participated in early modern racecraft. Its chapters discuss three types of performed blackness: visual black-up, acoustic blackspeak, and kinetic black dance. Such performances repeatedly activated the titular "scripts of blackness" that served Spanish, French, and English ideological needs as those societies contended with their colonialist ambitions, color-based slavery, and the presence of non-white Afro-diasporic peoples in the body politic and social realm. Theatrical practices operated materially and rhetorically to shape cultural perceptions of Afro-diasporic peoples.

The first two chapters on black-up identify scripts that hum throughout subsequent chapters: the diabolical script inherited from medieval stage devils, and the commodity

script. Chapter 2 elaborates on female expressions of these, redressing the erasure of blacked-up female characters who have been occluded from archives, the critical tradition, and, in the case of France, the early modern stage itself. The diabolical script dominated French and English stages and reflected growing colonialist concerns about integrating Afro-diasporic subjects and the moral implications of slavery. In England, the script was inflected into female succubae figures. With their seduction of involuntary or vulnerable victims, succubae inverted white male colonial practices of sexually assaulting and enslaving Afro-diasporic women and girls. In France, the repression of this trauma led to the representation of Afro-diasporic men only, typically in ballets, as willing Petrarchan slaves to love, pledging allegiance to white female spectators.

The objectifying commodity script better served seventeenth-century Spain, where the color-based slave trade had existed since the fifteenth century. The animal commodity script excluded Afro-diasporic peoples from humankind and authorized the denial of their human rights. It implied stunted intellect and the need for taming and domestication. The food commodity script suggested the use of Afro-diasporic bodies and labor as available, pleasurable to consume, and necessary to the body politic. The more positive luxury script recognized a small number of individuals as exceptional, as if color-based slavery were a meritocracy. One notable manifestation of all three appeared in the desirable (cue the luxury script) brown-skinned *mulata*, whose mixed heritage threatened Spanish racial and social hierarchies (cue the food and animal scripts to firmly ally her with blackness).

Chapter 3 grapples with a particularly elusive aspect of the archive: acoustic blackness. As artificial as black-up, blackspeak involved European vernaculars articulated with accents, and “Africanese,” which integrated African or pseudo-African words and habits of speech. These forms activated scripts of ethnic conjuration, animalization, degeneration, and infantilization. They could exist independently from black-up and/or black dances, or in conjunction with them as mutually reinforcing or to blacken the seemingly neutral second form. Blackspeak flourished in Spain. In France, blackspeaking characters are temporary visitors, and English evidence is scant but potent.

The fourth chapter uniquely identifies reparative potential in black dances. While black dancing functioned parodically, too, Afro-diasporic peoples historically used dance to strategically reclaim physical, geographic, and social mobility in the face of slavery’s forced mobilities and immobilities. White aristocrats co-opted this emboldening aspect to publicly speak their own truths to power. Identifying the rhetorical work of underacknowledged dance sequences in canonical works offers compelling new readings. Molière’s *Le malade imaginaire* contains dances between the first and second acts. The scripts of animalization and of the Petrarchan slave to love allegorically portray the white bourgeois protagonist’s daughter as an Afro-diasporic woman and ape disenfranchised from self-ownership when disallowed her own choice of suitor. Queen Anne likewise appropriates that animality script against the misogynist Jacobean court through dances in black-up within Ben Jonson’s *Masque of Blackness*.

Of notable utility are an appendix with a chronological chart of English, French, and Spanish plays/ballets containing characters coded as black, and a vocabulary not dependent on terms that have become shorthand for present-day racial formations. Very occasionally, the reader out of field could use some clarifying information on the contours of a genre (e.g., French ballet), or a stronger sense of the actors involved in a performance tradition. A deeper engagement with animal and food studies will further fill out claims about the period's imagined human-animal/plant continua. This study lays the groundwork for similar interrogations of Portuguese, Dutch, and Italian theater. In bringing into conversation a range of materials—anonymous or no longer extant plays and ballets; works by both lesser-known playwrights and dominant authors like Jonson, Molière, Shakespeare, and de Vega—amidst a rich supporting backdrop of archival materials and cultural discourses, the path breaking *Scripts of Blackness* entreats more comparative work in early modern critical race studies.

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Boccaccio and the Consolation of Literature. Gur Zak.

Studies and Texts 229. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2022. x + 216 pp. \$90.

As Gur Zak notes in the opening paragraph, while the world suffers, adapts, and tentatively seeks to rediscover joy in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, a study on Boccaccio and consolation seems to be “unexpectedly, even uncannily, timely” (ix). The most obvious point of reference for coping with wide-scale trauma in Boccaccio’s oeuvre is, naturally, the *Decameron*, which the author presents as a collection of stories told for pleasurable distraction from the plague. Zak observes that studies on Boccaccio and consolation have been heretofore almost exclusively focused on this most famous of his works. Moreover, Boccaccio’s associations of consolation with pleasure and distraction have generally served as the basis for excluding it from “the serious ‘business’ of life” (5). *Boccaccio and the Consolation of Literature*, however, demonstrates that the literary representation of consolation extends far beyond his *capolavoro* and that the ethical-literary questions to which it is central are decidedly serious.

By considering how Boccaccio’s writings come into contact with philosophical and literary consolatory paradigms, Zak offers a fresh and enlightening critical lens that results in innovative readings even of works that have received extensive scholarly attention. For example, in his analysis of the *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta* in chapter 2, he diverges from the widely adopted interpretation of Fiammetta as a “negative example” (79) and the nurse as “the voice of reason” (84) in matters of love. Instead, Zak demonstrates how the latter serves as a parody of Stoic-Boethian wisdom. Through