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.
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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

unsympathetic and self-contradictory counsel, the nurse ultimately fails to console the protagonist, suggesting "the inability of rational arguments to eradicate the passions of love and grief" (53). Rather, the *Elegia* implies the efficacy of "companionship in sorrow"—that is, empathy—while simultaneously remaining "open ended" (87).

The open-ended, flexible nature of Boccaccio's vision of consolation is in fact the crux of the "striking continuity" (186) that Zak identifies throughout the author's literary production. In each of the five chapters—beginning with a close reading of the *Filocolo* (1336–38) and concluding with the *Epistola consolatoria a Pino de' Rossi* (1361–62)—Zak illustrates how Boccaccio rejects the notion of "one overarching and universal solution to hardships" (54). Rather than subscribing to the "largely authoritarian and monolithic consolatory mode" (185) encapsulated in Boethius's *Consolatio philosophiae* and perpetuated by Dante and Petrarch, Boccaccio favors a "context-specific consolation" (55) inspired by Aristotle's concept of practical wisdom in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Especially illuminating in this regard is Zak's analysis of the *Corbaccio* in chapter 4, where his attention to Boccaccio's literary interlocutors leads once again to a creative departure from conventional interpretations. Zak presents the *Corbaccio* as a sophisticated and strategic revision of the Dantean concept of salvific love that, however, is not "a *universal* repudiation of love and women" (148), as many scholars have maintained. Instead, Zak argues, Boccaccio "tasks his audience with the responsibility of being sensitive to context" (136) and ultimately leaves it to the reader to decide if the author-narrator is an appropriate model for them. In essence, Zak argues, Boccaccio recognizes that the most effective approach to suffering is the one chosen with discernment by the sufferer themself, in response to their specific circumstances.

This kind of interpretive wisdom is emphasized in the *Decameron*, analyzed in chapter 3. For example, in his unique analysis of an often-overlooked character, Zak illustrates how, in contrast with Beritola (the protagonist of day 2, story 6 who literally turns feral in her grief), her nurse embodies a modified model of Boethian *patientia*. By remaining hopeful about the future and trusting in the changeability of fortune, the nurse exemplifies "the cultivation of calculated patience, as well as interpretive and emotional flexibility" (190) necessary for surviving life's inevitable heartaches. The cultivation of this discernment in the reader is also central to the *Decameron*. Boccaccio's masterwork is not a mere compendium of possible coping mechanisms. Rather, in presenting readers with a "polyphony of consolation"—as Zak poetically describes it throughout the book—Boccaccio guides them in an extended exercise in "develop[ing] the reader's emotional intelligence and capacity to make discerning choices" (189).

Zak concludes with a definition of Boccaccio's consolation of literature as "one which is empathetic rather than judgmental, polyphonic rather than one dimensional, open ended rather than authoritarian" (187). Thus, while *Boccaccio and the Consolation of Literature* clearly demonstrates that Boccaccio's strategy for confronting life's hardships is in close dialogue with his philosophical and literary antecedents as well

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as late medieval contemporaries, this insightful study reveals that it is also remarkably modern.

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The Divine Vision of Dante's "Paradiso": The Metaphysics of Representation. William Franke.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. xx + 304 pp. $29.99.

William Franke's latest monograph is a relative novelty in Dante studies: an intensive study on a single episode, the manifestation of Scripture in *Paradiso* 18: "Love justice, you who rule the earth" (18.70–136). His core thesis is that this textual appearance functions as a theophany, anticipating the *visio Dei* while negotiating the representation of divine presence through a written text. The study is ultimately an examination of Dante's metaphysics of representation, raising questions of mediation that can serve as a point of inquiry for scholars in other fields across the humanities and social sciences. This is consistent with Franke's entire oeuvre, which seeks to understand the ramifications Dante's thought can have for us today "in the broad horizon of our intellectual traditions and cultural heritage" (xi).

These two aims guide the structure of the book, which is split into two parts. Part 1, "The Literary Vision," provides a literary-critical study of the passage. Chapter 1 examines the basis for Franke's argument of the scriptural writing as theophany from Christ as *logos*. As the Incarnation mediates the human and the divine, the written medium of the passage is the only true presence of the divine possible in a poem. Chapter 2 delves into the nexus of speaking, writing, and contingency, wherein Dante's focus on the parts of language as part of a larger implicit order reveals divine order. Chapter 3 uses the speculative grammar of Dante's time to show this order as a microcosm of unity in diversity in the *Paradiso*. In chapter 4, Franke shows how Dante uses language and images to point to infinity by the limits of mediation itself, which then further connects to the heaven of Jupiter's association with justice, the focus of chapter 5. This rich chapter argues for Dante's understanding of language as transcendent. For Dante, God is infinite excess and glimpsed in the breakdown of signification, yet only God is ontologically self-sufficient. Franke argues that the interplaying mechanics of image and language in the scene are meant to draw the reader into a similar sort of self-reflection to open oneself up to divinity. Chapter 6 focuses on God as the source of all mediation, but that he is only visible when mediation fails, pointing to that which cannot be mediated.

Part 2, "Philosophical Reflections," is composed of six chapters, or excursus. Excursus 1 rehashes the main arguments in part 1 about language vis-à-vis more recent