

and social aspects of slavery. Unfortunately, this approach suffers from the unequal quality and quantity of sources across the societies under investigation. Crucially, there is no Mamluk equivalent to the Genoese and Venetian archival collections which provide extensive demographic and commercial information. To sustain the Mamluk side of her argument, Barker draws on literary sources and a rather scattered selection of Mamluk contracts of sale. Despite this limitation, Barker succeeds in presenting a cohesive picture from a diverse collection of primary material.

The book's main argument is the existence of a common culture of slavery in the late medieval Mediterranean. While it would certainly be possible to complicate this argument by drawing further evidence from a Greek, Turkic, Berber, or Iberian cultural context, the similarities between the Italian and Arabic-speaking societies under investigation are striking. Barker does not neglect to point out differences, such as the legal status of children born to slave mothers and the use of eunuchs in Mamluk households. Her argument is strongest where Genoese, Venetian, and Mamluk cultural spheres overlap, in the realm of commerce. The shared space of a regional trading system offered many opportunities and incentives for cooperation and imitation. The societies at the receiving end of the slave trade were influenced by similar changes in the quantity and ethnicity of imported slaves as well as by commercial and legal conventions which formed in an intercultural environment. It is more difficult to argue for a common culture of slavery beyond the realm of commerce, however. Barker demonstrates that there was parallel cultural development in late medieval Mediterranean societies, which resulted in shared cultural elements. This constituted a common culture of slavery, though it may have been more pronounced in its commercial dimension than in its social and legal dimensions.

Overall, Hannah Barker's book is an innovative and well-written study of the slave trade and of slavery in the late medieval eastern Mediterranean. It demonstrates a mastery of a wide range of primary sources and extracts an impressive amount of relevant demographic and commercial data from them. While it is for the most part a work of economic history, it follows its sources to social and political history and remains accessible for both specialist and non-specialist readers. ■

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Cord J. Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019. 256 pp. ISBN 9780812251586. \$49.95, £41.00.

In Cord Whitaker's magisterial volume *Black Metaphors*, he tackles a question that grips current politics across the world, and most especially in the United States: how, when, and where did racism embed itself so deeply within our social, literary, and theological institutions? Almost every short blurb about the book states that it traces "rhetorical and theological moves" across time. This is certainly true; however, it does so much more than that. Whitaker's book employs the central grammar of blackness (and, conversely,

whiteness) to demonstrate the longstanding connection between medieval ways of considering race, the so-called scientific works on race that proliferated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and modern-day aggressive exclusionary tactics.<sup>1</sup> The book is a fundamental necessity for all university libraries to own and for all scholars of medieval literature to read.

Whitaker's introductory sentence sets the tone: "The evidence is overwhelming: race matters." (1). From here, he goes on to address the two-sided edge to that phrase. Race matters in that it is central to human interaction and shaping how we think about society and the world around us; the matters of race, in turn, shape everything about human history, literature, and theology. At its most fundamental, the book is about investigating the connections between blackness and sin, a twinning that continues into present day society, where whiteness stands for innocence and purity. The book investigates a trope that underlies Western society: "whiteness in the United States and in the Eurocentric West more broadly is *invisible*, the unmarked norm by which divergent racial, ethnic, and other forms of identity are judged." (3) Thus, unsurprisingly, whiteness is power. Beyond the obvious power of money, status, and education is the insidious reality that controlling the norm informs every system, every hierarchy, and every principle of community and collective life. Race may not be naturally derived, but such rhetorical twisting makes it seem so. Whitaker relies on several terms that are not new to literary studies but take on a new cast in his usages: polysemy (simultaneous existence of multiple meanings), mirage (reality moving toward the imaginary), and shimmer (shifting or vacillation) stand out among these and are explored in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 1 addresses a standard of medieval literature, a late Middle English romance, in this case, *The King of Tars* and its conversion narrative. Here Whitaker's introduction of the idea of black metaphors begin to truly take shape. Debunking the standard interpretation of white skin being required for a Christian identity, he demonstrates that the sultan's "whitening" actually occurs before his official conversion. The lines between white reader and black sultan therefore become blurred: in him, "blackness and whiteness shimmer, making it hard to pin him to one condition or the other" (23). Addressing the analogues to this romance, Whitaker next traces the rhetorical connections between metaphorical blackness and real blackness, particularly in theological texts. Another connection investigated here is the linkage of blackness with dogs and hounds as well as the impact of interreligious marriage and reproduction. The sultan embodies Whitaker's ideas of shimmer and polysemy because he is everything all at once—black, white, sultan, Christian, father, husband, sinner, redeemed. In this way, he is an excellent figure for instruction in faith.

Chapter 2 presents views on medieval grammar and rhetoric more broadly rather than providing a specific focus on a text. Whitaker notes that "while this study on the whole treats the role of medieval rhetorical and religious thought in the development of this lasting binary [blackness/whiteness], this chapter addresses the finer points of rhetorical, or, more precisely, *grammatician* thought and its role in fourteenth-century English

1. Whitaker's book does not capitalize Blackness and Whiteness; therefore, my review has followed suit.

writing” (48). Indeed, this chapter provides an interesting and important grounding in the specifics of the linguistic task undertaken more holistically in the parts tied directly to a literary example. Rhetoric is dynamic. The changes and balances reflect thoughts about race both in word and in kind. For instance, a number of philosophers and rhetoricians Whitaker cites suggest that both black and white are essential to humanity, the central parts of the natural world. The antithesis then, is necessary at least to some extent; the problems lie in lack of complexity and over-simplification. Instead of unity born from shimmer or slippage, instead metaphor turns into constant difference. “This is the mirage” (67).

Chapter 3 has as its basis an examination of Chaucer’s *Miller’s Tale*. Whitaker suggests an intersectional reading of Alisoun as a character in order to analyze her spiritual race. This is a particularly important part of the book because, as he notes, while many of the works addressed are read by medievalists, Chaucer is read by a wider audience; therefore, examinations of race and gender and how they are presented and/or crafted within such works has a broad impact. He examines pieces of blackness and whiteness in Alisoun (e.g. black brows above a pale face) as a way to unpack her Christianity—much as the shimmer of colors can help us understand the sultan. Whitaker concludes that “Alisoun in fact embodies all—white and black, impurity and purity, salvation and damnation” (86), which allows for her paradoxical positions throughout the Tale (e.g. adulteress and victim).

Whitaker devotes a good portion of Chapters 4 and 5 to examining the linkage between blackness and not only sin, but also more specifically hell. Blackness can thus be used as motivation for spiritual improvement while also having a space for its own problematic existence. It is necessary. It can even be good—one of the kings at the Nativity scene was Black, after all, and that tradition “meant that Christendom was global.” (105). And, of course, there were historically then, as now, a great many Christian Ethiopians and other Africans, for example—a point that gets rhetorically lost in the overuse of black metaphors for destruction and sin. Whitaker turns to Julian of Norwich, the fourteenth-century anchoress, to aptly untangle the complicated layers of metaphorical meaning in parables, further playing on her focus on the lord’s complexion. The whiteness of Jesus is assumed and celebrated, but also is presented as metaphorical not simply physical.

Chapter 6 returns to secular literature with a look at Mandeville and mirage. Focusing on enthymematic interpretation, or “deduction composed of propositions” (153), Whitaker notes that its “investment in oppositions” (154) makes it a good tool for investigating race. *Mandeville’s Travels*, which contains many an encounter with monsters, is also ripe for race-thinking. For example, Whitaker examines incidents such as Chapter 34, which takes place in Tibet, as a backdrop for black and white paired thought, with the reminder that “the Mandeville multitext confirms the resilience of enthymematic judgments and their ability to construct and maintain notions of racialized difference” (179). The inability to escape such restrictions is what leads to our current conundrums.

Whitaker’s conclusion again turns to the modern ramifications of the rhetoric he has examined throughout the rest of the book. Musings on Trump’s politics, the dedication

of some to the supposed glories of a Confederate past, and the rise of commonplace white nationalist rhetoric merge seamlessly with last thoughts about the *King of Tars* and Mandeville's travels. Overall, this is a most valuable text that provides not only a fresh perspective on the Middle Ages and later Middle English writing, but also on the simmering confluence of rhetorical danger that underlies modern political turmoil. The final reflection on "misuses of the Middle Ages" speaks loudly and clearly to members of our specific profession as well as academia more holistically—we are in danger of not only upholding but also of replicating the white supremacist ideas born from centuries of metaphorical misunderstanding.

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