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Noémie Ndiaye. Scripts of Blackness: Early Modern Performance Culture and the Making of Race. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022
Emily Weissbourd. Bad Blood: Staging Race Between Early Modern England and Spain. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023

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Noémie Ndiaye. *Scripts of Blackness: Early Modern Performance Culture and the Making of Race*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022. Pp 376. Hardback $64.95 USD. ISBN 9781512822632. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2gz3zr2.

Emily Weissbourd. *Bad Blood: Staging Race Between Early Modern England and Spain*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023. Pp 224. Hardback $55.00 USD. ISBN 9781512822908. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2v9fg38.

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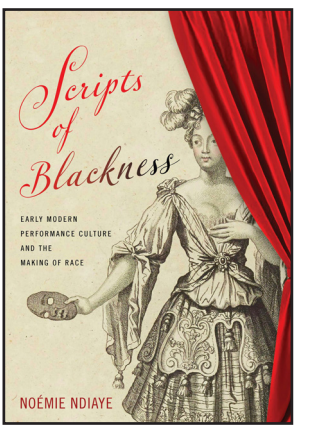

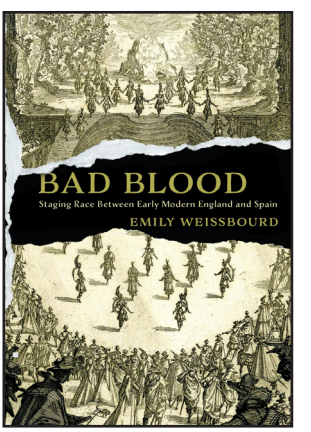

These two books, published in the series Race-B4Race: Critical Race Studies of the Premodern overseen by Geraldine Heng and Ayanna Thompson, pursue comparative approaches to 'the early modern racial matrix' using English, Spanish, and French sources. Focusing on performance — from court masques to stage plays to street processions — they challenge assumptions that have resulted from the disproportionate attention paid to English-language texts in critical race studies of the early modern period (primarily of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). They thus speak from and to early modern critical race studies — and to fields still resistant to race as a category of analysis — to open up new lines of investigation through deep historical research and detailed literary explications that stress how past paradigms of race, racialization, and racism continue to resonate in the present.

As the title *Bad Blood* suggests, Weissbourd revisits the widespread claim that the Spanish paradigm of *limpieza de sangre* [cleanliness of blood/purity of lineage] is at the root of the model of race based on white supremacy and anti-Blackness that

became increasingly dominant in the early modern period. She does so through chapters focusing on Spanish drama, (mis)translations of Spanish sources into early modern English, and English drama. In a salient example, Weissbourd disentangles racialized religion (based on the statutes that marked Jews and Muslims as 'tainted') and Blackness (the racial formation derived from western European enslavement of sub-Saharan Africans) to illuminate the motif of marriages across the colour line in plays such as Lope de Vega's *Servir a señor discreto* [To serve a wise lord] (1604–18) and *Amar, servir y esperar* [To love, serve, and hope/wait] (ca 1624). By contrast, contemporaneous English plays rarely featured marriages across the colour line, and when they did such unions were rendered as impossible (eg, Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice* [1604]) or as punishment (eg, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* [1596/7] and John Fletcher et al.'s *The Knight of Malta* [1618]).

In Spanish drama, particularly the comedia, these scenarios address the 'anxiety of sameness' (Christina Lee's phrase) provoked by the trace of Jewish or Moorish ancestry in otherwise indistinguishable 'white' Spaniards. 'Moor' (*moro* or *morisco*) in this context is not a synonym for Black (*negro*), as it became in the English tradition. The term 'Moor' also started to be distanced from Islam, as Weissbourd persuasively argues in her reading of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Class further complicates these marriages, given a suitor considered an old Christian (*cristiano viejo*, which required attestation of 'pure blood') might be penniless whereas a wealthy suitor might have a Jewish or Muslim forebear, however distant, as portrayed in Lope de Vega's *La villana de Getafe* [The peasant girl from Getafe] (1609–14, published 1620). Black characters are positioned as a safer choice in terms of the liabilities of such 'flawed' ancestry since their displacement through the slave trade ensured (at least in this imaginary) their distance from the tangled history of Christians, Jews, and Muslims on the Iberian peninsula. A variant appears in Lope de Vega's *El santo negro Rosambuco de la ciudad de Palermo* [The saintly Black man Rosambuco from the city of Palermo] (ca 1598–1607, published 1611–12), wherein the motif of the Black saint who repels the advances of women, Black and white alike, confirms his inner 'whiteness' in a logic that reinforces racist hierarchies. These hierarchies are further reinforced through the use of blackface for both the Black saint (played by a white actor) and the white villain (who disguises himself as a Black man). The triangulation of unstable whiteness, racialized religion for Jews and Muslims, and social death for sub-Saharan Africans, Weissbourd astutely concludes, produces a multivalent tension rather than any clearcut self-other opposition.

This analysis challenges critics who rehash the 'anachronism thesis' that religion — and not race, particularly as signified through Blackness — is the only relevant term of analysis for these Spanish plays. Concomitantly it challenges the privileging of 'the idea of Spain' in accounts of early modern racial formation as yet another variant of the 'Black Legend' of Spanish depravity (in this case resulting from racial mixing over the centuries). This fallacy, Weissbourd establishes, 'has become axiomatic for scholars of history, literature, and critical race studies' (3). Ultimately her comparative — indeed, contrapuntal — analysis of early modern Spanish and English modes of racial formation serves as an important corrective to 'a fantasy of whiteness' that 'undergirds not only English national identity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but also scholarly approaches to early modern English literature' (152).

While Weissbourd's and Ndiaye's studies overlap, with both scholars respectfully acknowledging each other's work, Ndiaye extends her study to 'performative blackness' in seventeenth-century (Baroque) France, which has not received the same attention as the English and Spanish cases. Drawing on archives of performance that range beyond the stage, she identifies a matrix 'in the full etymological sense of the word' (4), one that is generative of emerging modes of race based on physical colour and phenotype even as it retains the impress of residual modes of race linked to lineage and religion. At the same time, she attends to material practices of race-making with an emphasis on 'black-up (cosmetic blackness), blackspeak (acoustic blackness), and black dances (kinetic blackness)'; the 'metaphorical strains' associated with these practices constitute the project's 'titular *scripts of blackness*' (3). Her innovative method synthesizes the 'paranoid' modes of critique and 'reparative' modes of recovery into what she calls a 'reparanoid' reading practice, which brings together Saidya Hartman's 'critical fabulation' and Audre Lorde's 'biomythography' (25).

From the 1530s to the 1620s (the early Baroque period), Europeans associated Blackness with the Devil, who in the Christian worldview was transformed from white (Lucifer is the angel of light) to black as punishment for his transgressions. Hence hell, sin, evil, and associated terms became figured through semantic Blackness, which performance instantiated through black-up in what Ndiaye calls '*the diabolical script of blackness*, that is, a script of exclusion' and disruption exemplified by Shakespeare's *Othello* (35, her emphasis). In Spain, with its longer history of racial slavery, '*the commodifying script of blackness*' prevailed in this earlier period (39, her emphasis). Shifting to the height of the Baroque, which ran through the late seventeenth century, Ndiaye identifies 'the capacious notion of *the oblique aesthetics of Afro-diasporic women's desirability*' (84, her emphasis), which

she argues redirects the sexual violence perpetuated by European men motivated by colonial desires onto bifurcated representations of characters marked as Black. On the one hand, European writers mobilized Petrarchan discourses to obfuscate the harms that accompanied chattel slavery for Afro-diasporic people, with the 'slave of love' motif persisting for decades in Baroque dramatizations of Black men desiring white women even at the expense of their literal freedom. Black women, on the other hand, were routinely portrayed as succubi or demons who sexually abused men in their sleep and whose gender (like other spirits in this worldview) remained unfixed. William Davenant and John Dryden's *The Tempest, or The Enchanted Island* (1667), a remake of Shakespeare's earlier play, exemplifies this 'succuban hermeneutics of black-up' (86). To this catalogue Ndiaye adds 'the stock character of the pretty and witty brown-faced *mulata*' from Spanish drama who 'could infiltrate and potentially destabilize from within various institutions that *negras* could not' (134–5), highlighting the ideological contradictions inherent to racial formation.

Her chapter on the Iberian stage practice of signifying race through accent — *fala de preto* in Portuguese and *habla de negros* in Spanish — expands its reach as '*blackspeak*' voiced by white actors both on the stage and in the street. Starting with the Hermandad de los Negritos, a confraternity of Afro-Spanish men, and how their white antagonists deployed blackspeak against them, Ndiaye charts the efficacy of this 'acoustic blackness' for intercolonial projects that were realized (Spanish), projected (English), or effaced (French). In relation to other subaltern groups this way of using language becomes '*the script of ethnic conjuration*, an associative script that connects blackness with other paradigms or subparadigms in the racial matrix' (144, her emphasis), as seen with the mock Irish accents in Richard Brome's *The English Moor, or The Mock-Marriage* (1637).

Her final chapter on 'black moves' considers a repertoire of French ballets that early modern critical race studies have bracketed, instead focusing on English-language texts and treating English court masques as textual productions rather than as records of movement in relation to race-making. Although Ndiaye acknowledges the possibility that Afro-diasporic people used these dances, even with their distortions, to carve out some space for affirmation and advancement as individuals and communities in hostile European settings, she pushes back against facile arguments for 'black dance' in Spanish drama as a site of agency for Afro-diasporic people. She says their names as a gesture of historical repair if not reparation — the Hermandad de los Negritos, Afro-Spanish professional dancers and dance teachers such as Francisco Menesez and Hernando de Rivera, Afro-British women called Catelina, and the dancer Mingo (Domingo) who found his

way to late seventeenth-century England — even as she critiques the 'scripts of blackness' that constrained their lives. These scripts resonate with Ndiaye's own experiences as a spectator and performer, which she dramatizes in her opening scenes.

Both Weissbourd and Ndiaye offer brief codas that excavate past harms to clear space for new formations in the direction of freedom without minimizing the continuing impact of these cultural logics and scripts. Weissbourd, in 'Conclusion: Beyond English Whiteness / Another Idea of Spain', reactivates the literary history of African American Hispanists from the beginning of the twentieth century to propose an alternative critical practice to the one that persists in early modern literary studies. The canonical 'idea of Spain', she summarizes, tended 'to avoid engaging with the history of racialized slavery, often by using the idea of Spain to argue that Blackness functions primarily as a metaphor for religious difference' (154). Starting with Velaurez B. Spratlin, a professor at Howard University and author of *Juan Latino: Slave and Humanist* (New York, 1938), she charts 'a genealogy of Black intellectuals in the twentieth century whose interest in Afro-diasporic history and cultural production led them to early modern Spanish' (154). While Spratlin's ground-breaking book was never republished and the contributions of these scholars were ignored by the (white, male) canon-makers in the same era, they underscore the imperative to go beyond English-language sources in the investigation of Shakespeare and related drama of the period. Weissbourd does not simply join the chorus acknowledging that 'The canon of texts we read, write about, and teach our students is still shaped by the structure of linguistic and national isolationism inherited from a model of study built on explicitly ethnonationalist (and implicitly white) supremacy' (157); rather, she lays an archival trail so that scholars might return to these African American Hispanists as a revitalized foundation for the field.

Ndiaye, in 'Post/Script: Ecologies of Racial Performance', constellates an implicit series of metaphors from her chapters — which had explicitly addressed 'demonizing, commodifying, excluding, animalizing, infantilizing, associative, and sexualizing tropes' — to 'point toward the ecology of harm, or toward the garden of torments that was early modern racecraft' (236). These vehicles of racecraft, embedded in her prior analysis and rendered operative in this postscript, include the sun, a tree, underground aquifers, the waterline of an iceberg, and fungi. Theorizing this alternative 'ecological poetics', she concludes, 'foregrounds the ways in which a historiographic recording of racecraft must reconcile our critical drive toward freedom with the recognition that the early modern culture of racial impersonation functioned as a powerful system' (236). This system, she

elaborates, 'obeys an imperious internal logic, which operates across space and time and ultimately delimitates the possible' (236). Closing with an explication of a familiar face in a late seventeenth-century French series of engravings, Ndiaye mobilizes the second-person voice to trace this iterative figure ('a Greek-nosed, button-mouthed white woman with bright eyes, round cheeks, light brown hair, and a slim waist') and her hitherto unnoticed association with black-up, black-speak, and blackdance (237). Ndiaye's insight comes through embodied engagement with this source informed by the theoretical acumen encoded in her book, one she wrote to refuse the 'performative blackness' that her own teachers had imposed on her (34). Her 'reparanoid' reading — 'You click, you zoom out, and in the light of the piercing African sun that floods the engraving, the "awful monstrosity" of the virtuosic allegorical performer suddenly becomes visible' (238) — registers a resounding critique of this racism, then and now, and acts as an elegant reparative gesture that enables new scripts to emerge.

In the end, reading these books together opens up new archives, methods, and interpretations for our study of early modern performance culture in Spain, France, and England in relation to race-making and how these histories continue to impinge on the present.