

Subject: Petites Nouvelles #1 - 09/21/2020
Date: Monday, September 21, 2020 5:14:34 PM



Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies
College of Arts and Sciences

Petites Nouvelles – Issue #1

September 21, 2020



The following table of contents includes shortcut links; click on a title and you will jump directly to that section's full information in the newsletter.

*Suggestions and submissions of content for future issues are always welcome! Please contact either cmrs@osu.edu or spitulski.1@osu.edu with your ideas. The deadline for submitting items for inclusion in the next issue will be **Friday, October 2**.*

Also, be sure to "like" us on [Facebook](#) and check out our [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) feeds for more news, links, & MedRen miscellany!

—

In This Issue:

- **Greetings**: A Welcome Message from the Director

- Mira Kafantaris, Dept. of English
"Why Race before Race Now?"

- [CMRS Upcoming Events](#)

- CMRS Lecture Series – Joshua Calhoun (U. Wisconsin-Madison, "'Mark but This Fungi': Legibility, Interdisciplinarity, and Labor" – October 3
- CMRS Symposium – Digital Archaeology – October 23, 24

- [Other Upcoming Events](#)

- MRGSA Symposium – Discipline and Interdisciplinarity – October 3

- [CMRS Accomplishments: Celebrating Our Affiliates](#)

- [News & Notes](#)

- Spring 2021 CMRS Courses
- Hill Museum and Manuscript Library Research Fellowships – October 15 Application Deadline

[Visit the Nouvelles Archive](#)

[Greetings: A Welcome Message from the Director](#)

—

Dear Affiliates and Friends:

We are now several weeks into a new school year that is presenting extraordinary challenges, but also a few opportunities. Like the other Centers that make up the Humanities Institute, CMRS has been hit hard by the COVID-related budget cuts. In

particular, we must do without the support of the Graduate Associate Assistants (GAAs) who we would normally rely upon to publish the *Nouvelles Nouvelles* newsletter. Thanks mainly to the ingenuity and hard work of Nick Spitulski, however, we are able to offer this *Petite Nouvelles* as a way of keeping you updated about Center happenings. We invite you to send us your news, ideas, and other contributions, including opinion pieces that might be of interest to our scholarly community. In this issue, we feature an essay by affiliate Dr. Mira Kafantaris on the timely topic of 'Why Race before Race Now?' We welcome less formal, blog-like, contributions about your research and teaching experiences during COVID. You might like to highlight a new assignment you've experimented with over Zoom or encourage your students to tell us about their projects. At a time when many of us feel isolated from friends and colleagues, it seems more important than ever to connect around our shared interests.

Thanks largely to the Discovery Theme grant that CMRS received last year, we will still have a full schedule of events. The grant will fund lectures, a symposium, and other events on the topic of Experimental Archaeology. Please mark your calendars for Friday, October 23 when we host a one-day symposium on Digital Archaeology. This will feature discussion of the interactive online Map of Early Modern London, a digital reconstruction of Oxford's Mendicant Houses, and the use of video games as portals into Medieval and Renaissance minds.

Before that we look forward to MRGSA's annual symposium on the topic of 'Discipline and Interdisciplinarity.' You can find the program here: <https://cmrs.osu.edu/sites/default/files/2020-09/MRGSA%20Symposium%202020-Program.pdf>. Professor Josh Calhoun of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, will be the keynote speaker. His talk, 'Mark but this Fungi: Legibility, Disciplinarity, and Labor' is scheduled for 4:00PM on Saturday, October 2. Like all CMRS events this semester, the MRGSA symposium will take place via Zoom – see the link in the event announcement below for login information.

With best wishes for a successful semester,

Chris Highley
Director, Center for Medieval and Renaissance

Studies

Why Race before Race Now?

Themes of national belonging and racial otherness shape Shakespeare's work. From Aaron the Moor, to Cleopatra, Egypt's Queen, to Shylock, Venice's Jewish moneylender, Shakespeare's plays grapple with the ideologies that produced medieval and early modern systems of inclusion and exclusion. Before the high era of biological racism in the nineteenth century, the word "race" had not acquired its pseudoscientific valence but appears as an open-ended concept assembled and reassembled out of other modes of differentiation. The vast range of these concepts, or racial formations, were woven into the tapestry of premodern lives, including Shakespeare's, and encapsulated ideas about religion,

class, lineage, rank, gender, skin color, and so forth. Therefore, scholars of medieval and early modern culture ask two questions: what is race in this context, and how does it function as a sorting mechanism between dominant and minority groups? Using the vocabulary of critical race, indigenous, postcolonial, and feminist theories, premodern critical race scholars, to use [Margo Hendricks](#)'s apt distinction, vivify the field's understanding of the production of hierarchies within and beyond Europe. More importantly, they bring the past in conversation with the present, and by doing so, they are committed to mobilizing anti-racist and decolonial agendas in their institutions and communities.

The social and racial injustices of the first two decades of the twenty-first century, alongside ethnic conflicts globally, have coalesced to put race at the center of premodern studies. But this concentration on race is not a new trend, catalyzed by what the feminist writer and activist Sara Ahmed calls "[happy diversity](#)," or a performance of inclusion that does not attend to structural inequalities at the heart of institutions. More than two decades ago, the field-shifting work of Kim F. Hall, Ayanna Thompson, Peter Erickson, and Ania Loomba, in early modern studies, and medieval scholars, such as Geoffrey Jerome Cohen, Tamar Herzog, and Geraldine Heng, among others, laid strong foundational grounds that flesh out the racialized language and imagery shaping our understanding of the premodern past. In a field historically populated by white men, these trailblazers have acted as gate-openers, forging intellectual communities that are inclusive and political. A recent iteration of this model of activist scholarship is [Race Before Race](#), a bi-annual symposium organized by the Arizona Center of Medieval and Renaissance studies in collaboration with the Folger Shakespeare Library. The symposium brings together scholars of color, including Dorothy Kim, Jonathan Hsy, Cord Whitaker, Ruben Espinosa, Patricia Akhimie, and Carol Mejia LaPerle, to name a few, who are advancing the study of premodern critical race in new ways.

From its inaugural focus on premodern race (January 2019), to periodization (September 2019), to appropriation (January 2020), *Race Before Race* maps out an array of literary issues, historical questions, and critical methodologies, where premodern scholars explore a range of concepts that shaped literary and cultural production. Medievalists make legible the connection between the idea of a white cultural heritage, epitomized in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, for example, and the adoption of these literary fantasies of racial supremacy by neo-Nazi groups. For early modernists, *Race Before Race* explodes the cultural myth of Shakespeare as a preracial figure of universality and timeless heritage. As Michael Whitmore, the director of the Folger Shakespeare Library, observed at the opening of [Race and Periodization](#) in September 2019, *Race Before Race* is a conference that the library's first director, Joseph Quincy Adams, "had hoped would never happen." Whitmore was referring to Adams's inaugural statement at the opening of the Folger in 1932--a statement riddled with the vocabulary of white cultural supremacy: "[About] the time the forces of immigration became a menace to the preservation of our long-established English civilization" and "[Shakespeare] was made the cornerstone of cultural discipline... Not Homer, nor Dante, nor Goethe, nor Chaucer, nor Spenser, nor even Milton, but Shakespeare was made the chief object of [schoolchildren's] study and veneration." In Adams's formulation, the Folger's curriculum

carried a political mission: to counter the threat of cultural impurity that non-Christian and non-White immigrants embodied. As the draconian immigration acts of 1905 and 1924 show, and the two centuries of black enslavement that came before them, Adams's fear for the "long-established English civilization" was not a voice in the wilderness, but symptomatic of the historical and cultural contexts that have shaped our past and affect our present.

But the threat to white Western culture, and the weaponization of Shakespeare as a tool of white supremacy, did not only come from across the oceans. It is important to acknowledge Shakespeare's role in one of the most brutal chapters of Native American history: the Indian boarding schools. In the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, as the research of [Scott Manning Stevens](#) shows, indigenous children of North America were voluntarily or involuntarily severed from their families and placed in schools away from their tribal communities. These boarding schools were designed to assimilate Native children into whiteness. Shakespeare's plays and sonnets were a staple in this curriculum of deculturation—a curriculum whose main object was the complete erasure of the rich native cultural, spiritual, and linguistic heritage and its replacement with English-language proficiency and domestic and manual labor skills. To Richard Henry Pratt, the founder of the first boarding school, the Carlisle Indian School, the infamous driving mantra was: "[Kill the Indian; Save the Man.](#)"

Therefore, it is not innocuous, in our troubled historical present as in Pratt and Adams's America, mired by social and racial injustices, local and global, to avoid a wide-ranging discussion of race. The same cultural fantasy that yearns for a post-racial America also lionizes an old-fashioned, universal Shakespeare. It is a logic that views race as significant for the oppressed only, one where whiteness or any other dominant idioms, such as the English language or Christianity, are rendered apolitical, invisible, or neutral.

[As a scholar of early modern literature](#), I study the stories that a nation tells itself about national belonging--stories that invariably hinge on practices of exclusion. My work on dynastic unions demonstrates that these international events are moments of nation-building that also invite intense scrutiny of the racial character of the commonwealth. In my work on the racial anxieties surrounding foreign queens, I find the example of what [Ania Loomba and Jonathan Burton](#) have called "travelling tropes" extremely helpful in thinking about the through line that connects the racial formations of the past to our lives in the present. Travelling tropes are stereotypes employed by a dominant group "to engage with, manage, and control peoples considered exotic, strange, or hostile," as Loomba and Burton note. These discursive archetypes form a vocabulary of control that undermines and contains cultural, ethnic, or racial minorities in the early modern period. This vocabulary travels in a variety of texts and across periods, reaching us in the twentieth century as narrative tools to reduce Native American, African-American, Muslim, Asian, and Latinx communities to dehumanizing stereotypes. Some examples include the pernicious tropes of the magical negro, the drunken/noble/relapsing savage, the model minority, and the welfare queen.

But uncovering the racist origins of worn-out tropes is only the beginning of anti-racist scholarship. How can readers and writers participate in this

methodological move towards social justice and inclusion? One avenue is applying the Gray Test--a citation test named for the black feminist scholar [Kishonna Gray-Denson](#). To pass the Gray Test, an academic or general-interests article must cite and meaningfully discuss two women and two non-white authors. The purpose of this test is to ensure that writers and readers do not replicate the erasures of the past in their examination of race and gender dynamics. Another avenue is taking to heart the moving provocation of Kim F. Hall's Shakespeare anniversary lecture, "[Othello Was My Grandfather](#)," delivered at the Folger in 2016. In her concluding remarks, Hall projects the liberatory potential of engaging with Shakespeare from the margins: "It is not our access to Shakespeare that marks our freedom. It is our ability to inhabit a new Shakespeare in our own terms, to offer him our love, but with our difference."

This is the Shakespeare of the future. This is the future of Shakespeare and premodern critical race studies. It is a Shakespeare without borders—without erasures, silences, and exclusions. Access and inclusion are the new cultural mainstream.

Mira Assaf Kafantaris
Senior Lecturer, Department of English

Upcoming CMRS Events

2020-2021 Lecture Series

'Mark but This Fungi': Legibility, Interdisciplinarity, and Labor

Joshua Calhoun

Associate Professor of English

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Saturday, October 3, 4:00 p.m., Zoom

How do we read the other forms of life that exist on and within a book—not just the metaphorical life forms such as that of the eponymous bloodsucking insect in John Donne’s “The Flea,” but also the material, microbial forms that persist on the page? This talk argues for the value of exploring book microbiomes and of making them more legible, but it also attends to the real, experiential, disciplinary challenges of that task. The work of interdisciplinary collaboration, like the work of close reading book fungi, is translational, so the latter part of this talk attends to the interpersonal and intellectual joys of collaborative scholarship as well as to the pitfalls and potential frustrations of such work.

This talk will also serve as the keynote lecture for this year's Medieval and Renaissance Graduate Student Association [symposium](#) on “Discipline and Interdisciplinarity”.

*****Free and Open to the Public*****

If you require an accommodation such as live captioning or interpretation to participate in this event, please contact cmrs@osu.edu or mrgsaosu@gmail.com. Requests made by about 10 days before the event will generally allow us to provide seamless access, but the university will make every effort to meet requests made after this date.

**Additional
Information**

SAVE THE DATE:

**2020-2021 Symposium on Digital
Archaeology**

Friday, October 23, Times TBD, Zoom

Presenters - Janelle Jenstad (University of Victoria), Anthony Masinton (Independent Scholar), Jim Knowles (North Carolina State)

*****Free and Open to the Public*****

If you require an accommodation such as live captioning or interpretation to participate in this event, please contact cmrs@osu.edu. Requests made by about 10 days before the event will generally allow us to provide seamless access, but the university will make every effort to meet requests made after this date.

Medieval & Renaissance
Graduate Student Association
2020 Graduate Symposium

Other Upcoming Events

October 3 – Medieval and
Renaissance Graduate
Student Association 2020
Symposium – Discipline and
Interdisciplinarity

[Program Link](#)



CMRS Affiliate Accomplishments

CMRS and Dept. of English alum Dr. Mark Rankin

(Ph.D., 2007) has received a \$159,005 grant from the [National Endowment for the Humanities](#) to run a seminar on "Printing and the Book During the Reformation: 1450–1650." The grant will fund a four-week seminar for 16 higher-education faculty on the history of the production and reception of books during the Reformation. Dr. Rankin was collaborating on the grant with his mentor and friend Dr. John N. King (OSU Emeritus Distinguished Professor of English), until the latter's sudden death earlier this summer. Professor Chris Highley is helping to administer the grant through the Center.

A festschrift honoring Arts and Humanities Distinguished Professor Frank Coulson (Dept. of Classics) was published in July: [Between the Text and the Page: Studies on the Transmission of Medieval Ideas in Honour of Frank T. Coulson](#), edited by Harald Anderson and David T. Gura.

Izzy Desantis (CMRS minor) and Rose McCandless (CMRS major) were on the winning team in this summer's [La Sfera Challenge](#), a two-week competition pitting international teams of scholars against each other in a race to transcribe multiple copies of one text, Goro Dati's fifteenth-century geographic treatise, *La Sfera*. Look for a feature on Izzy's and Rose's experiences in the next issue!

Mira Kafantaris (Dept. of English) will give a talk on December 2 as part of the yearlong Primary Source Symposium on "[Race in the Archives](#)" organized by the Center for Medieval and Early Modern Studies at Stanford University: "White Futurity and Racialized Reproduction in the Reception of Catherine of Braganza in England."



MEDREN course listings for Spring 2021 should be fully available and posted by about the end of September; the list of affiliated courses is expected to be compiled and posted by early October.

[**CMRS Courses Page**](#)

Research fellowships are offered twice a year by the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library at Saint John's University. The deadline for the upcoming application cycle is October 15, 2020:

- Heckman Stipends;
- Nicky B. Carpenter Fellowship in Manuscript Studies;
- Swenson Family Fellowships in Eastern Christian Manuscript Studies for Junior Scholars.

[**Additional Information**](#)

Next Issue: October 5 Submission Deadline: October 2



© 2020 | Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies
455 Hagerty Hall, 1775 S. College Rd., Columbus, Ohio 43210

Center for Medieval and
Renaissance Studies



The Ohio State University

cmrs@osu.edu
osu.edu



--



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Nick Spitulski

Administrative Coordinator

[Humanities Institute](#)

454 Hagerty Hall, 1775 College Rd., Columbus, OH 43210
Phone: 614-292-6591