nial Women, with its reading of how Restoration drama staged issues of both gender and colonialism, makes clear the benefits of bringing a “New World” more centrally into our analysis of early modern English literature.


From the striking opening anecdote about tournaments involving “the wild knight and the black lady” at the court of King James VI of Scotland in 1507 and 1508 to her concluding comments on the “cultural work” of race, MacDonald seeks to discover how “raced,” “sexual” bodies are used to delineate and define culture, as well as how they can also appear as “political bodies” whose “sexual motions dictate[c] civic destinies” (165-166). Her commentary mainly covers use of race in texts from the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, as well as issues of race in Britain and various colonies during this period.

In general, MacDonald writes about aspects of race and culture that are of great interest in contemporary early modern studies, and she does so from a particularly personal point of view, which is evident throughout but especially underscored in the conclusion where she recounts her own journey with writing about race during her career. The book is written in emphatic first person through which MacDonald primarily argues the importance of approaching race and gender together. In Chapter One, “Cleopatra: Whiteness and Knowledge,” which is less about Cleopatra than it is a survey of what other critics have to say about race, MacDonald articulates her own theoretical approach by engaging with those of numerous critics ranging from Henry Louis Gates, Spike Lee, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Shelley Haley to Jared Taylor. She also focuses a great deal of attention on Mary Lefkowitz’s book, *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History* (1996), including a long discussion of Lefkowitz’s cover
illustration. Referring to these critics and others, MacDonald meshes examples from popular culture with examples from the period in question to present a wide array of judgments as she carves out the territory of her own critical discourse. Ultimately, she argues that skin color, while very significant, is not the only racial issue that matters in the early modern period and that skin color should be studied in relation to “region, gender, sexuality, and religion”(44) over the course of the period.

What follows in the ensuing chapters is a series of detailed interrogations of the texts in question regarding raced and sexual bodies and how those bodies function in the shaping of cultural and authorial identity. One of MacDonald’s most striking observations is that the characters who are raced, sexual, and political appear most often in pre-Restoration texts, presumably because these texts were “written during a precolonial, or protocolonial, period” during which the “structures of an overseas empire supported by slavery were not yet fully in place, so that textual reproductions of the consequences of exogamous encounters were freer to imagine these encounters in much larger terms than they were after the lines of the triangle trade and hardening racial regulations in the colonies were laid down” (166). Regarding the characterization of raced characters in the later texts, MacDonald suggests, based on her examination of Pompey and Abdelazer, that “English women writers produced both female characters who more consistently conform to the dominant culture’s notions of proper femininity, and non-European characters, male and female, who are more firmly contained and suppressed”(89). Both of these lines of thought would be intriguing to explore in more texts from the period. They also resonate with and expand on Kim Hall’s discussion of how England’s “movement from geographic isolation into military and mercantile contest with other countries . . . sets the stage for the longer process by which preexisting literary tropes of blackness profoundly interacted with the fast-changing economic relations of white Europeans and their darker ‘others’ during the Renaissance” (Things of Darkness, 1995, 3-4).
The book is divided into two parts, with the first part focusing on nonwhite women of the classical world and the second part addressing nonwhite women in early modern Britain. MacDonald states that the book has six chapters (18), but it actually has seven, excluding the introduction and conclusion. The first three chapters focus on Rome and Egypt. First, MacDonald looks at how the figure of Cleopatra “may figure in contemporary and Renaissance attempts to reclaim or deny a non-European cultural identity.” Second, she addresses Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, arguing that it “significantly refuses many of the majoritarian sexual, racial, and imperial biases many Renaissance readers extracted from stories of Rome’s encounters with Egypt.” Third, she explores how images of Dido figure “in narrations of empire’s relations to race and sexuality” (18-19). The discussions in Part One especially illustrate the complexities inherent in portrayals of Cleopatra, as well as markers of racial difference regarding issues of dynasty, as exemplified in the legends of the founding of Rome.

Part two, the final four chapters, addresses subjects related to Britain’s “New World empire supported by slavery.” First, MacDonald examines white-skinned versions of Aphra Behn’s black heroine, Imoinda, in the eighteenth-century dramatizations of *Oroonoko*. Second, continuing this discussion, she looks at the white Weldon sisters and the white Imoinda in Thomas Southerne’s version of *Oroonoko*. Third, she interrogates the “writing and unwriting” of race in Katherine Philips’ *Pompey*, and fourth, she explores sexual and racial difference in Behn’s *Abdelazer*. One of the most interesting aspects of the second part of the book is MacDonald’s synthesis of historical issues regarding race in the colonies in America and Surinam as she explores the links between “whites’ racial authority, black women’s sexuality, and white women’s social repression” (96), which she then connects to eighteenth-century adaptations of *Oroonoko*. MacDonald also extends this discussion to include issues of sentimentality and *préciosité* in light of the “modesty, blamelessness, and chastity” (128) intrinsic to the self-fashioning of Katherine Philips and her circle.
All things considered, *Women and Race in Early Modern England* provides a thought-provoking look at race in texts and culture in the early modern period. MacDonald’s attention to historical and cultural backdrops for the texts in question especially illuminates her arguments.


For the last ten years or so, those who work with early women writers have understood that, in spite of what Dorothy Osborne wrote to William Temple, Margaret Cavendish was not “distracted” and did not belong in Bedlam. This is not to deny that Cavendish was flamboyant in dress or odd in behavior but only to assert that her writing, which was once ridiculed, is now taken seriously. Plays by Cavendish are understood these days as having fascinating, if equivocal, protofeminist elements. Her autobiography is often discussed within the context of women’s life writing, and her romances are studied in light of Royalist political theory. Two biographies have appeared in the last five years. She also is studied by historians of science, but, for those who are not well versed in seventeenth-century and classical philosophy, Cavendish’s scientific speculation has remained almost impenetrable. Eileen O’Neill’s edition of *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666) will go a long way towards making what Cavendish had to say on a variety of scientific subjects understandable for those whose main interests in Cavendish lie elsewhere. Fortunately for those scholars, O’Neill’s introduction is lucidly written and manages to treat highly technical philosophical questions without resorting to a great deal of jargon. Historians of science, of course, will be pleased to find that what O’Neill takes to be Cavendish’s most important single volume on natural philosophy is once again available in print.