

Cristina Malcolmson. *Studies of Skin Color in the Early Royal Society: Boyle, Cavendish, and Swift*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013. xii + 233 pp. + 3 illustrations. \$99.95. Review by KAROL KOVALOVICH WEAVER, SUSQUEHANNA UNIVERSITY.

Cristina Malcolmson's *Studies of Skin Color in the Early Royal Society: Boyle, Cavendish, and Swift* considers how the Royal Society's interest in skin color contributed to the development of race theory and supported English colonialism. As her subtitle indicates, Malcolmson also analyzes fantasy authors, namely Margaret Cavendish and Jonathan Swift, who criticized the Royal Society's projects. Malcolmson's book is noteworthy for its clear argument, its excellent use of literary sources, its creative gender analysis, and its status as a metropolitan history in light of Atlantic studies.

The author clearly shows how the Royal Society made skin color an important topic of study and discussion in the seventeenth century, how this interest served the colonial agenda of England at the time, and how this focus influenced the elaboration of race. Malcolmson writes, "thus colonialism and science collaborated to focus attention on skin color, and the result was an increasing interest in race as inherent difference" (7). Furthermore, she notes that "the intertwined institutions of government, colonialism, the slave trade, and science were collaborating to usher [race] into public view" [5]. Specifically, Malcolmson concentrates on the work of Robert Boyle and she demonstrates that his study of skin color promoted the intellectual and colonial interests of men of science. The stress on skin color helped to formulate the experimental method and constructed the qualifications needed in order to be recognized as a skillful naturalist and scientist. Finally, debates over skin color shaped the treatment of slaves and the evolution of the slave trade.

In addition to presenting a clear argument, Malcolmson incorporates fascinating literary sources, including the works of Margaret Cavendish and Jonathan Swift. Specifically, the author analyzes the satirical fantasy novels written by Cavendish and Swift to highlight how these writers critiqued the Royal Society, its members, and its scientific projects, namely its skin color studies. Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, for example, exposes "the cultural bias of English scientists

in their observations of non-Europeans” (114). Moreover, Cavendish questioned the animal-human divide put forth by scientists. Malcolmson writes, “In *The Blazing World*, the ‘creatures’ are not passive objects to be observed, known, and manipulated; they are active participants in the development of knowledge” (130). Similarly, Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* mocks the skin color studies undertaken by members of the Royal Society. According to Malcolmson, Swift saw their work “as a form of cultural narcissism and an attempt at domination” (177).

Besides her innovative incorporation of literary sources, Malcolmson does a fine job examining skin color with reference to gender and race. She notes that scientists identified a difference between European and non-European women—namely, that mothers were responsible for the change of color in their children as a result of imagination, but that only white women possessed this ability. The author states, “This concept racializes a distinction between European women, for whom pregnancy and the birth process is fraught with difficulties, and non-European women, characterized in the literature as experiencing painless childbirth with no vulnerability to mental influences” (149). Malcolmson concludes that this gender and racial divide subordinated both white women, whose imagination needed to be policed to prevent any potential ill effects, and women of color, whose perceived physicality was used to justify the sexual, bodily, and social abuse to which they were subject.

Malcolmson closes the volume by emphasizing that her book is significant to the history of science even though it is outside “the new model for studying the center and periphery” (189) which focuses on knowledge development by both colonizers and colonized. She acknowledges, “Obviously, I have not followed that model in this book. This study focuses on the ‘gentlemanly natural philosopher,’ and on the development of European knowledge. However, I hope I have exposed the ‘dependencies and limits’ of that knowledge, especially as it was constructed about and at the cost of ... ‘radically different peoples’” (189). One wonders whether Malcolmson’s explanation was prompted by a manuscript reader or suggested by an editor. Whatever the case, no explanation seemed necessary. She didn’t need to justify her work or compare it to what Atlantic scholars are doing. Malcolmson’s text succeeded in what it set out to do: it investigated seventeenth-century

studies of skin color by members of the Royal Society and showed how these research projects supported the imperialistic plans of England.

Finally, a variety of scholars will be interested in her work. Historians of science will welcome her discussion of the Royal Society. Literary scholars will enjoy her analysis of Cavendish and Swift. Persons interested in women's studies will appreciate her investigation of how gender differences between European women and women of color shaped notions of race in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Sir Thomas Herbert. *Travels in Africa Persia, and Asia the Great*. Ed. and Intro. John Anthony Butler. Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2012. xcvi + 904 pp. + 18 illus. \$120.00. Review by M. G. AUNE, CALIFORNIA UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA.

Sir Thomas Herbert (1606-1682) is best known as a companion to Charles I in the last years of the monarch's life. Herbert was also one of a group of English and Scotsmen who emerged in the seventeenth century, journeying great distances and returning to write lengthy travel narratives about their experiences. Thomas Coryate (1579-1618), William Lithgow (1582-1645), and Henry Blount (1602-1682) among others, traveled east, alone or in small groups and returned to write accounts of their adventures with themselves at the center of their narratives. Their books were typically encyclopedic, indebted to humanist conventions of the previous century. Herbert's *Travels* was among the most popular, appearing in five printings between 1634 and 1677.

A distant relative of the earls of Pembroke, Herbert aspired to the bar attending Cambridge and Oxford. His family connections placed him in Sir Robert Sherley and Sir Dodmore Cotton's diplomatic mission to Persia in 1627. Upon his return three years later, Herbert was appointed esquire of the body to Charles I and supported the king during the English Civil War. One of the few men who served the king and then Parliament, Herbert spent the interregnum in Ireland as a commissioner. At the Restoration, Charles II made him a baronet. He spent the rest of his years writing about his experiences during and after the war.