

CHECK OUT THE BEST THEATER BOOKS OF THE MONTH FOR AUGUST 2023

MICHAEL GILTZ | AUGUST 25, 2023

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Broadway Direct spotlights the best theater books of the month, just for you.

Tom Lake

By Ann Patchett
\$30, Harper

The Great White Bard: How to Love Shakespeare While Talking About Race

By Farah Karim-Cooper
\$32, Viking

Fat Ham

By James Ijames
\$17.95, Theatre Communications Group

An acclaimed new novel, a work of piercing insight into Shakespeare, and a great play! In other words, another month of terrific books that celebrate theater.

Acclaimed author Ann Patchett knows her way around the arts. She co-founded the beloved Parnassus Books indie store in Nashville. And her best-selling novel *Bel Canto* centered on an opera singer who is held hostage during a terrorist attack in a South American country and falls in love with her captor. It was so successful, the story was parodied on an episode of the animated TV series *Archer*. With her latest novel, Patchett is unabashedly Chekhovian. *Tom Lake* centers on three daughters back home during a cherry harvest. (See, Patchett isn't messing around here.) Their mother was once a modestly successful actor and, long ago, she had a romance with a handsome man who became a *very* successful actor. *Tell us the story*, they implore. And she does. If you're so inclined, Meryl Streep narrates the audiobook, which allows you to savor every word as only a consummate actor like Streep can deliver them.

Chekhovian is a high compliment for drama of a certain sort, perhaps second only to the ultimate praise of *Shakespearean*. Yes, the Bard still fascinates, even as characters and passages and entire plays feel challenging to embrace, whether it's the money lender Shylock seeking revenge, the enslaved Caliban described as monstrous, and a thousand other examples. Shakespeare, like life, is complicated. Happily, so are the plays and the characters with all their perplexity and contradictions. Author Farah Karim-Cooper is the director of education at Shakespeare's Globe and a professor at King's College, London, which is impressive, but she had us at Shakespeare's Globe, because it's so bloody marvelous. In *The Great White Bard*, Karim-Cooper offers insight into Shakespeare and race and how each can illuminate the other. From color-blind casting to color-specific casting, from changing the setting and era of a story to understanding better the era in which the plays were written, or simply diving into each character's humanity, she reveals how you can love the Bard and not shy away from the issues of race his works raise both consciously and not.

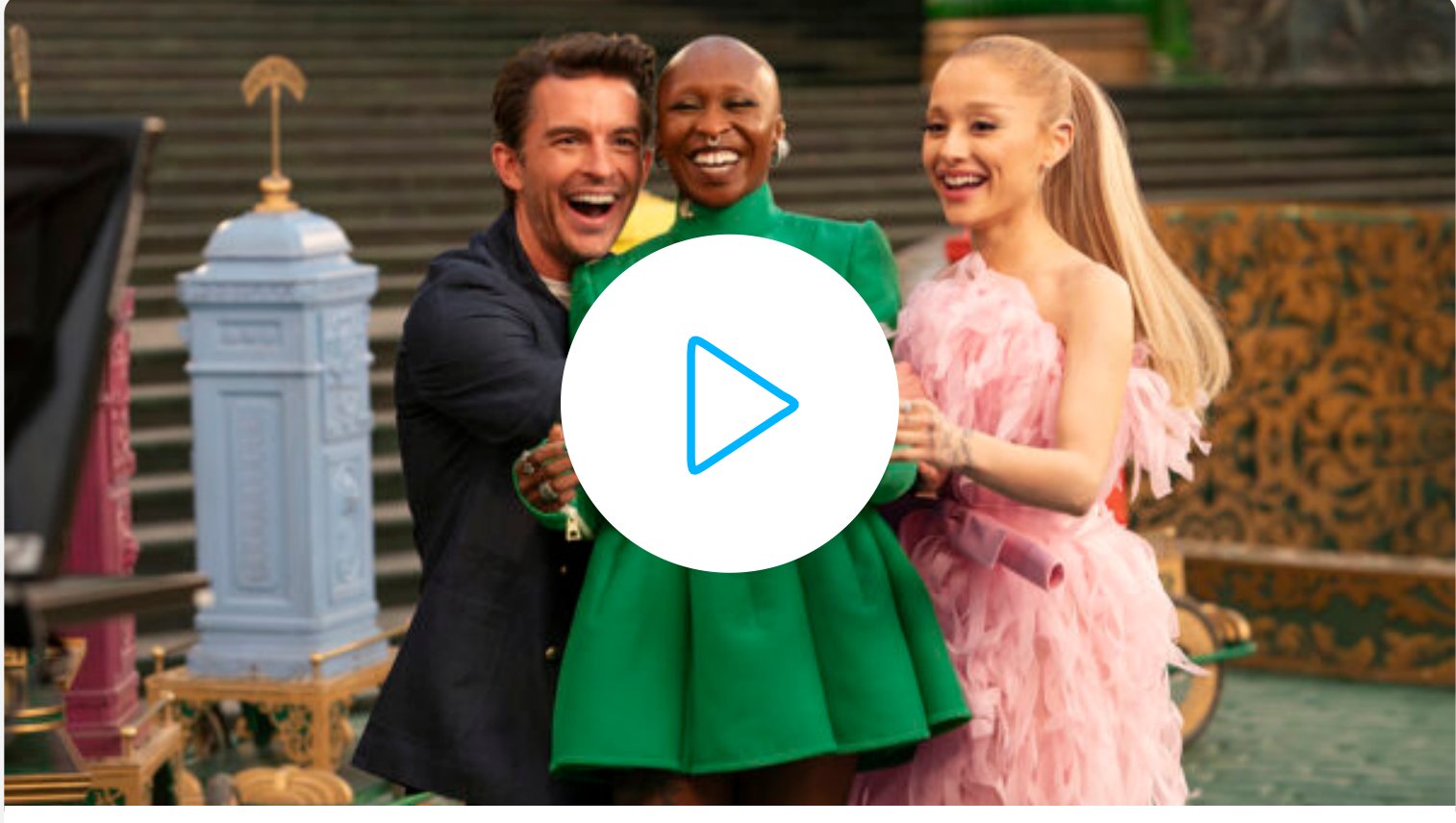
Tackling Shakespeare and race needn't feel like homework. Just look at the uproarious, sharp-edged, and insightful work of playwright James Ijames. He won the Pulitzer Prize with *Fat Ham*, his trenchant, hilarious reworking of *Hamlet* that moves the action to a family BBQ in the Deep South. (It's *always* deep in the South.) The melancholy Dane is now Juicy, a melancholy, queer young Black man who's trying to break the cycle of trauma and masculine toxicity he grew up with when his dad's ghost demands revenge. *Really, Dad?* he wonders. *Now you need me?* It's *Hamlet* with much better ribs and a serious rib-tickler to boot.

Michael Giltz is the cohost of the weekly entertainment podcast Showbiz Sandbox. He covers all areas of entertainment as a journalist, critic, feature writer, and analyst, contributing to numerous outlets, including the New York Daily News, New York Post, New York Magazine, the Los Angeles Times, Huffington Post, Entertainment Weekly, and The Advocate. When Michael's not attending the theater, he's reading about it.

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