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Review of Samuel Otter's Philadelphia Stories: America's Literature of Race and Freedom

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Recommended Citation

Kerkering, J. "Review of Samuel Otter's Philadelphia Stories: America's Literature of Race and Freedom." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 66(2), 2011.

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that fully included African Americans” (p. 115). She takes these speeches as evidence of a cultural movement away from family protection rhetoric, even as the earlier chapter on Child points to the importance of such rhetoric to reform movements later in the century. The chapter itself seems misplaced, perhaps belonging in a different book. A consideration of Frances Harper’s *Iola Leroy* (1892) and Pauline Hopkins’s turn-of-the-century novels would have allowed for a fuller consideration of the importance and persistence of the family protection discourse at the center of Husband’s interesting but uneven study.

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SAMUEL OTTER, *Philadelphia Stories: America’s Literature of Race and Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. xii + 396. \$29.95.

Instead of using archival research as a way to challenge overarching theories of tradition, Samuel Otter’s *Philadelphia Stories: America’s Literature of Race and Freedom* turns to the archive to establish the existence of such a tradition, one localized in the City of Brotherly Love (p. 4). Otter does not overtly discuss what constitutes a tradition, although he suggests that writers’ awareness of each others’ works is a crucial determinant. Perhaps the most apparent instance of this intertextual awareness in the writings that Otter discusses is the focus of the first chapter, where a struggle over one “paragraph . . . on African American conduct” (p. 54) unfolds over several decades. At stake in this paragraph is the issue of African American character as demonstrated by the conduct of individuals during the Philadelphia yellow fever outbreak of 1793. Another strong example of this intertextual awareness is found in the set of documentary reports on the condition of the “Negro” in Philadelphia, a set of materials that W.E.B. Du Bois would later draw upon when composing his *The Philadelphia Negro* of 1899. This is not, however, either a black or a white tradition but, according to Otter, a mixed-race tradition assembled under the name of Philadelphia: “Philadelphia stories,” Otter writes, “are about the unsettled boundaries between freedom and slavery” (pp. 267–68), whether those stories be by black or white writers. Otter argues, then, for the centrality of Frank J. Webb’s novel *The Garies and Their Friends* to this Philadelphia tradition, while also noting this work’s absence from both the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* and the *Norton*

Anthology of African American Literature, an observation that underscores the autonomy of a Philadelphia tradition in which Webb's novel plays a central role.

Although it is Webb's novel that claims pride of place in Otter's Philadelphia literary tradition (Otter's fourth chapter is devoted to an extended reading of *The Garies and Their Friends*), Otter's definition of what counts as "literary" is expansive, for he notes that "we will find literature in unlikely places" (p. 24). Otter thus identifies what he calls "the Philadelphia genres: fictional tests of character, reports on the condition of the free people of color, sketches of manners and narratives of violence" (p. 224). What brings these genres together is not just the shared concern with what he calls "the Philadelphia social experiment" (p. 113) (i.e., the antebellum history of free African Americans living alongside whites in the city) but also Otter's own mode of close reading, and this mode of reading is familiar to literary critics insofar as it dwells on rhetorical excesses. As a result of this kind of reading, "we are alerted to the possibility that we may wish to read even more slowly and less transparently" (p. 265) than we might if we were treating these works merely as straightforward historical documents.

The book treats four main themes—"fever," "manners," "riot," and "freedom," which serve, respectively, as the titles of its four main chapters—that unfold roughly chronologically from the early national period up to the Civil War. The first chapter addresses the earliest historical material, that concerning the outbreak of yellow fever in Philadelphia in 1793. Otter's focus here is what he calls "fever narratives" (p. 59). Central here, for Otter, is the attention to individual "conduct" of African Americans and the corresponding evaluation of their racial "character." Otter's focus is on pamphlet writings, but his category of "fever narratives" also includes Charles Brockden Brown's "fever novel" *Arthur Mervyn* (1799, 1800) (p. 58). Otter discusses the fever pamphlets in order to provide a context for the events in Brown's novel; these works "all stage a debate about conduct during the fever" (p. 66) and thus about the character of the races to which those conducting themselves belong.

The concern with conduct and character in the first chapter sets the stage for the second chapter's focus on "manners." Invoking Benjamin Franklin's famous demonstration in his *Autobiography* of the value of appearances and performances, Otter points to a larger body of nineteenth-century works that constitute a "literature of manners in Philadelphia" (p. 73). One such work is the multi-volume narrative *Modern Chivalry* by Hugh Henry Brackenridge, which stages "fictional

tests of character" (p. 74) for a central character, Teague O'Regan, the Irish servant to Captain John Farrago. Figuring even more prominently in this chapter is an extended close reading of Edward W. Clay's "Life in Philadelphia" series (1828–30), a set of images depicting scenes of everyday life in the city. One goal of these images was to provide a satirical account of the ambition on the part of African Americans who sought to comport themselves in a mode akin to whites. The "appeal of the prints," Otter argues, is that "they offer European American viewers the reassurance that their own performances are more successful and their own positions more secure" (pp. 82–83) than those of the African Americans whom Clay depicts. Otter sets Clay's caricatures alongside the silhouettes that were produced by the Charles Wilson Peale Museum in Philadelphia from 1802 into the 1820s. These images provide greater fidelity than the caricatures, concerned as they are with tracing the leading edges of individual faces. Otter turns next to Robert Montgomery Bird's *Sheppard Lee* (1836) to argue that it, too, shows an unstable concern with manners, especially as the protagonist's spirit, which moves from body to body over the course of the narrative, finds its way to the body of an African American slave named Tom.

Otter's third chapter, "Riot," focuses on five racial riots that occurred in Philadelphia between 1829 and 1849 and argues that "the Philadelphia novel in the 1840s and 1850s develops in the context of this violence" (p. 137). Otter's concern in this chapter, perhaps the most difficult chapter to summarize, is renderings of this violence, including several images and documents from *The History of Pennsylvania Hall* (1838), a "documentary collage" (p. 154) about a building that was burned during the 1838 riot. The goal of this discussion is to clear the way for a reading of George Lippard's city mysteries *The Quaker City* (1845), *The Nazarene* (1846), *The Killers* (1850), and *The Life and Adventures of Charles Anderson Chester* (1850). For Lippard, Philadelphia is "the domain of riot" (p. 179), and his work is "a search for forms that might adequately express riot" (p. 180). Otter contrasts Lippard's novels to John Beauchamp Jones's depiction of Philadelphia riot in his novel *The City Merchant* (1851), which treats the riots as consequences of the Philadelphia experiment in African American freedom.

The topic of freedom is the focus of Otter's final chapter, which, as I have observed, offers an extended reading of Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends*. It is with Webb's novel that Otter's interest in surfaces—an interest extending across the book—gets its most overt discussion, one taking the form of an extended close-reading of the banquet scenes at the beginning (p. 231) and especially the

end (p. 254) of *The Garies*. In his discussion of the final wedding banquet Otter dwells on the absence of bones from a turkey and wonders “what this absence signifies” (p. 255), going on to reproduce a contemporary recipe that describes how to prepare just such a boneless turkey (p. 256). Here the archival correspondences associated with excavating a tradition build in a way that overwhelms the argument about *The Garies*, making the search for symbols and emblems look a bit overwrought, but the point about surfaces is important to the book as a whole insofar as it establishes “Webb’s verbal still lifes” (p. 262) alongside other emphases on surfaces in the novel.

Throughout *Philadelphia Stories* Otter maintains a consistent emphasis on racial “character,” rigorously avoiding racial “identity”; indeed, only once in his discussion does the phrase “racial identity” appear (p. 75). In doing so, Otter avoids anachronism (since identity is more a twentieth-century than a nineteenth-century concern), but he does not discuss the difference between the two or how we as critics should differentiate between them. Further discussion of this issue would have helped place the argument of *Philadelphia Stories* in relation to the immediate post-bellum context (in which the shift in emphasis from character to identity takes place) instead of jumping, as Otter does, to the late twentieth century for his coda on John Edgar Wideman, who is presented as another writer in the Philadelphia tradition. Even though the tradition of interest to Otter is Philadelphian, the book will be of great interest to those who study African American literature insofar as it excavates “the continuing debate about whether ‘condition’ or ‘complexion’ was at the root of white intolerance” of blacks (p. 221). More generally, *Philadelphia Stories: America’s Literature of Race and Freedom* offers a welcome history of the (often severely limited) freedoms enjoyed by African Americans in antebellum Philadelphia.

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HOLLY FURNEAUX, *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. x + 282. \$99.

The image on the front jacket of *Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities*—a photograph of Charles Dickens taken in 1861 by John Watkins—conveys the impression of an author who has something hidden up his sleeve. This, as it soon emerges, is very much