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## Review of Race and the Modern Artist

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spectively, and which were accused of moral ambivalence and awesome fascination with crime and low life. In the same period, Dickens also revealed a fascination with crime, taking his characters and scenes from the Newgate literature, from newspaper reports and his own observation. He stressed that his characters derived from what he saw around him, and that the depiction of their deformity would be of service to society. A history of the short story from Poe to Chesterton follows, with some interesting allusions to fraudulent commercial practices which might be of interest to students of white collar crime.

After a token chapter on French crime fiction, the golden age of crime fiction is identified, and this is given the name of Chesterton. The discussion moves then to the private eye or so-called hardboiled literature, with Hammett and Chandler inventing, along with new investigators, a new language and atmosphere. The extension of feminist thinking into popular mass thinking is shown to have determined, by the early 1970s, the appearance of female private eyes, though the genre can hardly be said to conform fully to its hardboiled male counterpart. Again, a British author, P. D. James, is said to have first produced a model for the genre in the figure of Cordelia Gray. One chapter is devoted to spy fiction, a close but distinct variation on the tale of detection. "The action is self-evidently political since it involves national rivalries and constantly veers towards a paranoid vision of violation by outside agencies" (115). The rise of these types of novels is linked with the growth of feelings of national insecurity in the face of international political issues. Chapters on the thriller, black crime fiction, crime in film and on TV complete a volume whose index lists E. C. Bentley many times, and Thomas Mann, Baudelaire, Brecht, Manzoni, Cervantes, Camus, Hugo not even once.

***Race and the Modern Artist.* Heather Hathaway, Josef Jařab, and Jeffrey Melnick, eds. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. Pp. xii + 266. \$55.00 (cloth); \$19.95 (paper).**

**Reviewed by John D. Kerkering, Loyola University Chicago**

Readers of this collection should bear in mind three primary points: its memorializing intent, its institutional source, and its belated release. In 1989, when affiliates of Harvard University's W. E. B. Du Bois Institute were preparing to compile a collection of essays, they decided to dedicate the proposed collection to Nathan Huggins, who had suddenly passed away after years of distinguished service as the Institute's director. Understood as a memorial tribute, the collection adheres to a view of scholarship consistent with the mission of the Institute, the directorship of which passed from Huggins to Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Indeed, Gates and another officer from the Institute co-edit the series of books in which this collection of essays appears, a series whose editorial priorities are closely tied to the Institute's programs: "The Institute series provides a publishing forum for outstanding work deriving from colloquia, research groups, and conferences sponsored by the Institute" (ii). So although published by Oxford, this collection is distinct from Oxford's *Race and American Culture Series*, reflecting the publishing mission not of that series but of the Du Bois Institute itself: "the books appearing in this series work to foster a stronger sense of national and international community and a better understanding of diasporic history" (ii). The scholarly "work" to which this series aspires ultimately privileges diplomacy over disagreement: avoiding debates about diaspora as a concept, it treats diaspora as a given with a "history" yet to be told. This collection's model of scholarship, then, is more archival than it is conceptual—it is disclosing history rather than debating concepts—so its belated release (due to the "Velvet Revolution" recalling Jařab to Czechoslovakia) seems, on first glance, to matter very little: by avoiding timely debate, it avoids appearing behind the times.

To be sure, some contributors do challenge existing scholarship, but the most compelling targets for debate are the terms in the collection's title—race, modern, and artist. Readers seeking discussion of these terms will, however, find this collection largely silent. While the introduction by Joseph Jařab embraces the general view of modernism as a response to modernity, it lists more specific debates about “modernist and postmodernist discourse” only to conclude that “there is reason to believe that such debates will go on for years and decades” (4). But if history will *prevent* consensus in the case of “modernism,” Jařab is confident that, with respect to the “racial artist,” history has *enabled* consensus: “Mobility, movement, journeys, uprooting, passing, becoming . . . all these manifestations of change brought about by modernity naturally became the subject matter of artistic works produced by minority artists who, however, were regularly, and also by the then-current definition of art and literature, considered parochial, provincial, and marginal. Or nonexistent. As a matter of fact, it took the country a good part of the century to fully realize and meaningfully interpret . . . its own history—that is, the history of all the people” (7). Having now been “fully realize[d],” this “history” provides a mandate to “the premise of this volume”: “These essays intend to further open up and dispute the uneasy relationship of modernity and modernism with the reality of American cultural diversity and plural ethnicity” through “critical treatments of specific authors and specific texts” (9). Contemporary hindsight having provided a clear sense of this “reality,” these essays can now convey that reality via analyses of “specific” authors and texts.

Yet given this collection's central concern—“American cultural diversity and plural ethnicity”—it would seem that a more accurate way to characterize the volume's focus is not in terms of its ability to see a “reality” unavailable to the early twentieth century but, instead, in terms of its acceptance of commitments that were just then gaining prominence, commitments that Walter Benn Michaels's *Our America* characterizes as “nativist modernism.”<sup>1</sup> This term gets no mention here, and its absence suggests, at first glance, that for the editors of the Du Bois Institute series, Michaels's conclusions simply go without saying. But this endorsement would be quite surprising given that, in a panel discussion featured in this very journal, Michaels was challenged to defend *Our America* in response to vigorous criticism.<sup>2</sup> Michaels responded that “although questions of form and representation need not be understood as questions of race[,] *Our America* argues that in modernism they were, that what distinguishes modernism is precisely its understanding of questions of form and representation as questions of race and identity” (125). His reply might seem to be supported by the conjunction “and” in the title of this essay collection: the “modern artist” is inseparable from the notion of identity understood in racial terms. But to suggest this is to characterize the collection as more engaged with these debates—and the Du Bois Institute as more in accord with Michaels's critique of racial and cultural identity—than actually seems to be the case. In fact, the collection finally seems to be symptomatic of the commitments Michaels describes, its promise of “dispute” with “high” modernism ultimately driven by its commitments to the identitarianism that nativist modernism helped institute.

Whether or not one grants the Du Bois Institute's presumed historical mandate—to expand “diasporic history” into the realm of literary modernism—the individual essays in this collection each make important contributions to scholarship of this period. Their contributions fall within four main categories. The least compelling set, which proposes various schematic typologies for characterizing modern artists' engagement with race, includes Werner Sollors isolating a populist radicalism within modernism, Adam Zachary Newton complicating the effects of hyphenating identities, and Fritz Gysin elaborating subcategories within the concept of the boundary. Another, more directly useful set of essays provides rich cultural context for the works of several writers; Jerrold Hirsch contrasts B. A. Botkin to T. S. Eliot, Daniel Terris explores the interactions between Waldo Frank and Jean Toomer, M. Lynn Weiss examines Gertrude Stein's representations of African Americans, and Jařab provides a two-part interview with Allen Ginsberg in which Ginsberg comments on the significance of race and ethnicity in his works and those of his

contemporaries. A third group of essays, similarly rich in social context, looks more particularly at the relationships between African Americans and Jews; Jeffrey Melnick examines the Jewish identifications of Fats Waller, Newton compares Jewish and African American accounts of passing, and Rachel Rubin examines the Jewish gangster figure. A final group of essays offers compelling close readings of poetry; Heather Hathaway examines Claude McKay's *Harlem Shadows*, James E. Smethurst addresses Sterling Brown's *Southern Road*, and Allesandro Portelli underscores the role of orality in Pedro Pietri's poetry. Each of these essays offers thoughtful analyses, thereby providing a fitting, if belated, tribute to Nathan Huggins.

### Notes

1. Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 2.

2. "Our America and Nativist Modernism: A Panel," *Modernism/Modernity* 3:3 (September 1996), 97–126; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.

**"A Half Caste" and Other Writings. Onoto Watanna. Linda Trinh Moser and Elizabeth Rooney eds. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003. Pp. xxiii + 184. \$34.95 (cloth); \$16.95 (paper).**

### Reviewed by Steven G. Yao, Hamilton College

The development and ongoing institutionalization of ethnic studies over the last thirty-five years or so has had a variety of positive, though sometimes controversial, effects across different academic fields. Within literary studies, one of the most interesting of these effects has been the drive to recover, and in some cases reassess, the achievements of writers of color from previous moments in history. Some of these writers, such as Charles Chesnutt, enjoyed a measure of popular success during the time that they wrote. But of course, such popularity typically came at the price of deploying racist stereotypes and confirming prejudiced assumptions and expectations of a dominant audience, at least on the surface. Consequently, their work has often generated a decidedly ambivalent response among more recent critics. On the one hand, there has been a desire to acknowledge these figures as important historical predecessors to contemporary minority writers; but on the other, there has been a simultaneous impulse to disavow the narrative strategies they employed, as well as the implicit cultural politics of their chosen subjects and methods of representation.

Within Asian American literary studies in particular, such ambivalence most clearly marks the critical response to Winnifred Maude Eaton (1875–1954), the first writer of Asian ancestry to publish a novel in the United States. Born to an English father and a Chinese mother, Eaton produced numerous novels, short stories and other writings under the pseudo-Japanese pen name Onoto Watanna. Her novels feature such exoticist titles as *Miss Numè: A Japanese-American Romance* (1899), *A Japanese Nightingale* (1902), *A Japanese Blossom* (1906), *The Honorable Miss Moonlight* (1912) and *Sunny-San* (1922). Generally they depict melodramatic romantic scenarios between passive Japanese women and boorish American men that follow the outlines of the more familiar tale of the genre, *Madame Butterfly*, the original version of which was published by John Luther Long in 1898 and subsequently made internationally renowned by Puccini in his opera of the same name that premiered in Milan in 1904. By contrast, Winnifred's sister, Edith Eaton (1865–1914), who chose the Chinese-sounding pen name Sui Sin Far, produced realistic and generally positive depictions of Chinese immigrant communities in the U.S.