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LITERATURE AND RACE

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1 Introduction

The philosophy of literature, like the rest of academic philosophy, is just beginning to establish its relationship to critical race theory. For this reason, there is no established body of questions, debates, texts, or figures that standardly trained practitioners of these specialties would agree to locate at the intersection of the two fields. Worse, there are few issues in either field that practitioners of the other would even recognize as obviously relevant to their work.

There are of course areas of overlap between the philosophic enterprises devoted to the study of race and to the study of literature, their mutual indifference notwithstanding. A properly comprehensive philosophy of race—which is to say, an enterprise constituted not just by questions in metaphysics ('what is race?') or normative ethics ('is affirmative action permissible?')—will take seriously the manifest and multiple connections between literature and race. And a properly grounded philosophy of literature—which is to say, an approach to literature that treats it as a worldly phenomenon, one bound up in the vicissitudes of human history and social life—will take seriously the thought that our literary practices, like so many of our other practices, are shot through with racial meanings.

Of course, one needn't focus in the first instance either on literature's status as a worldly phenomenon or on the interpenetration of racial formation and the literary enterprise. Race theorists obviously devote most of their time to thinking about things other than poems, novels, essays, and the like—things like employment discrimination and immigration restrictions. And most of the standard questions in the philosophy of literature are abstract enough to require very little appeal to social context.

This provisional segregation of race from literature is, however, only provisional, and is consistent with the determination to spend at least some time exploring their considerable philosophic overlap. As it happens, this overlap goes to the very heart of both domains. Modern racial formation processes have been intimately bound up with contests over the availability, meaning, and content of literary objects, practices, and traditions. And our conceptions of literary tradition, like our capacities to inherit the historic achievements of these traditions, depend heavily on racial factors.

This chapter will introduce some of the philosophic questions that emerge once we accept the challenge of examining race and literature together. There are many such questions, and a variety of ways to get to them. The best-traveled pathways run through

the domain of literary theory, especially where it abuts the fields of critical race theory, ethnic studies, queer theory, and postcolonial and decolonial theory. Rather than survey the results of those mostly post-structuralist and post-poststructuralist inquiries—a task better left for different sorts of books than this one—this chapter will sound a few broad themes that appear in that literature but that should register clearly even for people with little familiarity with it.

The next section will settle a few preliminary terminological and methodological issues, starting with the question of what 'race' means here. The section after that will fill in an important part of the conceptual background for this chapter: the idea of a race–aesthetics nexus. The remaining sections will introduce four basic problems that mark the connections between race and literature.

2 Definitions and Caveats

This piece cannot do its work without first offering a few clarifications. The most obvious preliminary issue to settle is what 'race' and 'literature' mean. The idea of literature will figure prominently in a later section, so this section will focus on race. As a prior matter, it will also be important to define the terms that would have to figure into any responsible account of race or literature—terms like 'modern' and 'Western'—and to stipulate to some terms of art and methodological principles, to lessen the expository burdens to come.

The enterprises that we use words like 'race' and 'literature' to denote first took the forms we now know during the emergence of the modern West. 'Modernity' and 'The West' are both notoriously slippery concepts, but their core connotations point clearly enough to the deep influence of (certain) European cultures and to the abiding impact of markets, advanced technology, reason, democracy, and other such things. This chapter will assume something like these common meanings of these terms, with one important proviso. The common meanings are informed by racial ideologies that a properly critical race theory will call into question, but that there's no room to interrogate here. Suffice it to say that European or north Atlantic modernity is not the only modernity, that the history of European modernity is not hermetically sealed off from the histories of 'non-Western' cultures, and that this history is not the seamless upward march (until World War I, at least) that it is often thought to be (Knauft 2002). All of this would be relevant to a fully developed account of the intersection of race and aesthetics.

A useful term of art and an important methodological principle have already made appearances here, but still require some elaboration. The term of art is 'enterprise,' which will appear in what follows as a gesture at the complex webs of practices, institutions, beliefs, traditions, and more that the terms 'race' and 'literature' implicate. The methodological principle follows from the assumption is that race is a 'glocal' phenomenon, which is to say that it manifests differently in different local contexts, but still manifests in one way or another in, and sometimes across, a wide variety of contexts worldwide. In order to accommodate this fact, this chapter will focus on a few local contexts—most often Anglophone settings, in or near the US, significantly involving white supremacy and Afro-American peoples. This focus is meant to achieve a level of detailed engagement that will yield conclusions generally applicable even in different contexts.

Finally, what race means: 'race' and its cognate terms will appear here in ways that are consistent with the broad consensus that has recently emerged in philosophical race

theory (Taylor 2013, 87–8, drawing on Mallon 2006 and Blum 2010). Most race theorists now understand race *critically*, as a human *artifact* that is interestingly linked to European *modernity*, importantly *political* in its conditions and consequences, unavoidably *social* in its reach and structure, and essentially *synecdotal* in its operations.

1. To approach race critically is to refuse classical racialism, with its hierarchically ranked, naturally distinct human populations, reliably defined by clusters of physical and non-physical traits.
2. To approach race as an artifact is to accept that our race-talk refers to the products of human agency (which is *not* to say that there can be no biological or evolutionary component to raciogenesis). In deference to this commitment, this chapter will routinely refer to the processes of racial formation (Omi and Winant 1986).
3. To link race to modernity is to accept that the world's most influential racial practices are importantly—but of course not totally—discontinuous from their antecedents in the pre-modern world.
4. Race is politically significant not just in relation to the standard racial controversies, but also, and more importantly, because of its centrality to the modern world's basic political structures, from the growth of capitalism to the development of liberal ideas of freedom and democracy.
5. Race is socially significant in the sense that an agent's prospects in racialized settings are shaped to some degree—though of course not entirely or in isolation from other factors—by racializing structures not of our individual making. Race cannot be reduced to racial personal choices about individual identity.
6. Race is synecdotal in the sense that it involves assigning social meanings to human bodies and their histories. Classical racialism assumed that nature linked human bodies and bloodlines to social location; critical race theory recognizes that centuries of classical racialist practice have forged the links that make bodies and bloodlines into defeasible markers of social location.

This limited consensus in race theory allows us to frame the question of the race–literature relationship properly. We can set aside the reading of this question that a nineteenth-century classical racialist—writer Jack London, say—might have given, and instead take up something more nuanced. London might have asked how, or whether, the racial genius of various populations enabled them to orient themselves to the work of literature, or positioned them to use literary activity to express their essence and achieve some historic mission. We can instead ask how interestingly philosophical problematics can emerge from thoughts like this, from the institutions built around them, from the conditions that produced them, and from the liberatory practices devoted to resisting them.

3 Race and the Aesthetic

The philosophical links between race and literature will be easier to locate if we use racial formation theory to specify the wider connections between race and the aesthetic. According to a standard formulation of racial formation theory (Omi and Winant 1986), the racial enterprise takes shape under the pressure of social conflict. The relevant conflicts come in two broad, intertwined forms: one involving struggles over the distribution of social goods, and one involving struggles over racial meanings.

A particular iteration of these intertwined struggles, unfolding in a discrete discursive and ethical space, produces a racial project. So when an immigrant rights activist brandishes a sign that reads 'forget marijuana, legalize my mother,' she is engaged in a kind of racial project. She is reinterpreting the meaning of a racial category—refusing the hegemonic conflation of 'Latino/a' and 'illegal'—as a way of arguing that the social goods of citizenship be redistributed.

Understood in this way, race is already, one might say, an aesthetic phenomenon. This is evident in many familiar aspects of everyday racial politics, from the activist's sign above to the mobilization of immediate aversion that we find in racially charged campaigns for electoral office or for the passage of legislation. But this race–aesthetics nexus also informs the basic structures of modern civilization, with the ideas of race and of the aesthetic mutually implicating each other in deep ways (Roelofs 2005).

Each component of 'the modern system of the arts' provides its own examples of the deeper manifestations of the race-aesthetics nexus. The primitivism of modern painting, the orientalism of nineteenth-century opera, the conscription of Greek sculpture, and the burgeoning technologies of photography into the projects of white supremacist racial anthropometry all show the concepts of race, of art, and of modern civilization getting worked out together. With the possible exception of painting, literature may provide the best examples of the race–aesthetics nexus at work.

4 Literacy, Orality and Civilization

Race and literature become linked quite early on, just when they both begin to take their modern forms. From nearly the moment of its emergence, modern racialism polices the boundary between the civilized and the uncivilized. When the modern idea of literature emerges somewhat later, it takes shape in part under the pressure of the roles it gets assigned in these civilizationist racial projects. What results is a race–literature nexus that marks the boundaries between peoples, between the civilized and the uncivilized, and between the human and the subhuman, and that frames attempts to contest literary racialism and rethink the category of the human.

The modern literary enterprise comes fully into focus only in the early nineteenth century. At this point four ideas come together (Pecora 2005). The first has to do with a distinctive form of writing, a form involving, as Samuel Johnson puts it, "imagination and elegance of language" (Pecora 2005, 1306). The second idea posits the producer of this imaginative writing as the occupant of a distinctive occupational niche in a market economy. The third idea links bodies of writing and political communities into mutually defining national relationships, so that the study of literature becomes both a resource for and a product of the ties that bind persons into peoples, and that distinguish peoples from each other. And the fourth idea locates this imaginative, sociogenetic, professional writing in the sphere of human striving marked out by the new idea of the aesthetic.

This new approach to the literary both reflected and reinforced the evolving dynamics of racialist modernity. For those in the grip of modern nationalist ideologies, to be a people was to have or aspire to have a polity and society organized around the language that your poets celebrated and that your schools taught (and that your state's monopoly on coercive force allowed, or forced, your schools to teach). And the key to having all of these things, and to having them develop in organic harmony, was for them all to flow from the same racial essence that also determined the people's physiognomy, moral status, and rational capacities.

The racialist commitments of the new literary enterprise were specifically bound up with European colonialism and white supremacy, which turned literature into a site for working out racially circumscribed ideas of human personhood. The civilization(s) created by (certain) white peoples in Europe just were civilizations, from which it followed that any peoples incapable of mapping their core practices onto the favored European analogues just could not count as civilized. This made the literary enterprise—understood as synonymous with the cultural functions of writing in high modern Europe—central not just to individuating Europe's peoples from each other, but also to marking the boundaries between civilization and barbarism.

Different modes of classical racialism posited different kinds of gaps between civilization and barbarism. Civilized peoples were supposed to have literatures, and have them the way the English and French had them. Peoples without literatures, then, without the sort of written traditions that modern nations carefully cultivated in the name of becoming modern, were not just different but inferior. Some modes of racialism posited that this inferiority was remediable, and existed just because the problem peoples were not as far along the linear path of human cultural progress as others. Other modes of racialism, though, encouraged the thought that peoples without literatures were inherently incapable of traversing the path of progress. They were, in the thickest, most value-laden sense of the term one can imagine, *illiterate*.

For a variety of historical and ideological reasons that we don't have space to explore here, the question of literacy has been pressed most clearly in connection with the modes of racialization involving Africanity and blackness. Henry Louis Gates' discussion of this is worth quoting at length. He writes:

> Unlike almost every other literary tradition, the Afro-American literary tradition was generated as a response to allegations that its authors did not, and *could not*, create 'literature.' Philosophers and literary critics, such as Hume, Kant, Jefferson, and Hegel, seemed to decide that the presence of a written literature was the signal measure of the potential, innate 'humanity' of a race. . . . So insistent did these racist allegations prove to be . . . that it is fair to describe the subtext of the history of black letters as this urge to refute the claim that because blacks had no written traditions, they were bearers of an 'inferior' culture.
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> (Gates 1987, 347)

The racialized impulse to equate literature with civilization and literacy with humanity raises a question of ethical praxis and social theory for anti-racist thinkers and activists. What is the proper response to the racialization of literacy? The question has often registered in the form of a dilemma. Should opponents of white supremacy accept the link between literacy and humanity and seek to demonstrate the humanity of non-whites by producing non-white writing? Or should they accept the link between whiteness and writing but deny the link between literacy and humanity, and therefore vindicate the denigrated races not by producing literature but by insisting on the equal or higher value of oral traditions, or 'orature'?

These two approaches figure prominently in various anti-racist traditions, but seem less promising than a third strategy. The third strategy has been less often followed, but is most consistent with contemporary convictions about the links between race and culture. It begins by criticizing certain racialist assumptions about the distribution and functions of literacy in world cultures, assumptions that the other two approaches share.

The key realizations here are "that there is nothing intrinsically oral about Africa, that orality and writing have continually influenced each other" in Africa and elsewhere, and, correlatively, that there is nothing intrinsically or ontologically literary about Europe or Asia (Zeleza 2005, 387, citing Julien 1992). If literacy is neither a necessary condition for civilization *nor* a racial endowment, then there should be no pressure to find a corresponding racial endowment—orality—for non-literate peoples, though the pressure to take orality seriously as a mode of sociality should remain undiminished.

The veneration of orality as essentially African or non-Western cannot be a sufficient response to modern literary racialism—though it must be a part of any adequate response. The response must also include a genealogy of the idea of literacy, of the sort attempted here. This sort of inquiry is valuable for current purposes in part because it provides important background for the other basic issues that emerge from the intersection of race and literature. The racial roots of the literary enterprise continue to shape its contemporary manifestations. This will be easier to track now that the roots have been laid bare.

5 Language, Expression, and Theory: Ngugi's Question

Once we set aside the thought that some peoples are essentially oral while others are essentially literate, we come immediately to another question about the intersection of race and literature. If the literary enterprise has functioned as a technology of racial subjection and racial subject formation, then how should anti-racist subjects orient themselves not to the literary as such but to the particular literatures and languages that some have imposed on others?

I describe this as Ngugi's question to acknowledge the germinal formulation it received from Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiongo (Ngugi 1998, Ngugi 1986). Ngugi famously writes in Kikuyu and then translates his work into English, for straightforward anti-colonial reasons. He argues with Fanon, Biko, and many others that colonization is as much a psychological and cultural process as it is a political and economic arrangement. Colonial subjects writing in the colonial languages, he argues, are perpetuating neocolonial relations as surely as are the comprador elites who willingly enable the continued prostration of the people they profess to lead. This cultural neocolonialism facilitates oppression in two basic ways. It encourages subject peoples to think of their everyday practices as inferior, as inadequate to the hard work of truly lofty conceptualization and ambitious expression. And it separates the indigenous elites, trained in the colonizer's languages, from the communities they might otherwise join in struggle.

Ngugi's question challenges not just the colonial and neocolonial subjects who aspire to produce literature, but also the hegemonic modern modes of literary theory and criticism. The thought that literature can only be written in the colonizer's languages derives its authority from the critics and theorists who formulated, refined, and reinforced it. These authorities worked not as isolated individuals but as participants in a tradition, a tradition built in part on the systematic refusal of work that violates white supremacist expectations and norms. This fact presents aspiring decolonial or postcolonial students of literature with a version of the choice that Ngugi presents to his writers: immerse yourself in critical traditions that take no interest in your life-worlds, and that are constitutionally predisposed to ignore the depth and profundity of those worlds and the works they produce; or commit yourself to finding or creating alternative critical and

theoretical resources. This theoretical version of Ngugi's question has played itself out in, among other places, debates over the place of post-structuralist thought in anti-colonial and anti-racist criticism (Gates 1987, Joyce 1987), and in attempts during the US black arts movement to develop autochthonous critical principles and techniques (Christian 1988).

The various forms it takes notwithstanding, Ngugi's challenge registers an old puzzle in emancipatory cultural politics: should oppressed peoples assimilate to the dominant order or remain unassimilated? And what does non-assimilation look like? No final resolution of these questions is possible here, not least because the possible answers are too numerous to sort through in the available space. For current purposes it is enough to note that there are irreducibly practical questions at issue here, concerning the choices that writers and critics must make in particular racialized settings. These choices may bear on the prospects for the survival of neglected languages and literary traditions, for self-determination in marginalized communities, for the psychological and existential health of individual writers, and for the professional viability of writers working on the peripheries of 'mainstream' publishing industries. And they will draw on and reveal convictions about the links between race and culture, and about the relative plausibility of static and purist models of culture versus dynamic and creolized models.

6 Multiculturalism and its Discontents

Reflecting on the links between race and culture leads us to the next philosophic dimension of the race–literature nexus. Here the question at issue is not about the racialized meanings of literacy or about the availability of particular linguistic resources across racial boundaries, but about whether and how to open previously closed traditions to each other. This question actually opens onto a range of issues that were once at the center of what people in the US called 'the culture wars.' Those issues have since receded somewhat from public prominence, but still register in practical questions like these: Which texts get on our school reading lists? If we want to add something new to the canon to diversify it and diminish its whiteness, what do we take out? And how do we decide this without sacrificing excellence on the altar of diversity?

These questions arise when a particular social problem comes into being, and when a specific range of solutions to that problem becomes a going concern. The problem, crudely put, is the normalization of diversity: ethnoracial diversity has become ubiquitous, egalitarian, and normative. The world's ethical commonsense now holds that formerly stigmatized and excluded peoples—descendants of forced laborers, colonial subjects, and degraded castes; properly incorporated migrants from former colonies and properly established members of indigenous nations; and so on—must at least officially be accorded equal concern and respect. What's more, the world's recent history has established multiracial mixtures in societies all over of the world, through migrations both forced and variously encouraged. And the fact of mixture is often presented (again, officially) as a strength in these societies, and therefore as something not to eradicate but to cultivate.

Diversity in this sense—normative, egalitarian, and ubiquitous—becomes a problem in part because it shakes the foundations for aesthetic evaluation and cultural reproduction. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in the literary domain, thanks to the connections noted above between the idea of literature and the projects of ethnoracial nationalism. Works and figures that could once have been peremptorily

excluded—because we know that those people can't produce literature, which is to say, as a member of the Mexican elite told Richard Rodriguez to his face, *I think we do not have writers who look like you* (Rodriguez 2003)—now have to be considered, and someone has to make room in the reading lists and anthologies for them. Diversity is the problem, and multiculturalism is the solution.

There are of course many things to say about the problem of diversity and the limits of multiculturalism (see, e.g. Goldberg 1994, Willett 1998), but few that can profitably be said here. This is in part because the basic problem leads rather directly into a flurry of practical questions of social, cultural, and educational policy, of the sort that have to be worked out in connection with specific cases. And they lead from there into more general normative considerations too complicated to take up here (see Will Kymlicka 2003 or Charles Taylor 1994).

One general consideration that we can explore here has to do with the presuppositions that multiculturalism shares with the invidiously racialist vision that it means to replace. For both the standard nineteenth-century racialist and a garden-variety twenty-first-century multiculturalist, ethnoracial difference is a basic fact that must be dealt with, either by veneration and celebration or by repression and exclusion. The assumption behind both approaches is that peoples differ in deep ways, thanks either to nature or to the contingencies of history. And those differences manifest themselves in distinct literary traditions, each susceptible of analysis and understanding on its own terms. Call this 'literary racialism.' (Another widely shared assumption is that races are cultural units; this chapter will accept for the sake of argument that this is so, and will use terms like 'ethnoracial' to register this acceptance.) The main difference is that multiculturalism combines its literary racialism with a commitment to what we might call critical relativism—the assumption that we cannot deny in advance the aesthetic merit of a work based on its ethnoracial associations. Literary racialism in the classical mode assumes precisely the opposite.

The problem with the shared assumption of ethnoracial purity is that it obscures the degree to which our literary landscapes are constituted by ethnoracial mixture and border-crossings. The limitations of the classical racialist approach are legion, and well-documented. But the idea of purity also insinuates itself into crude forms of multiculturalism, in ways worth further comment.

As it operates in common forms of multiculturalism, the assumption of purity encourages a kind of 'add color and stir' approach to cultural diversity. On this approach, 'mainstream' cultural traditions are inviolate, free-standing structures, and we can accommodate the demands of diversity just by sprinkling in some work by 'minorities,' or by creating space for a parallel, if skimpier, tradition of such work. This additive vision of multiculturalism stands in stark contrast to a more transformative, hybridized vision of cultural difference, one that recognizes the dependence of mainstream traditions on the racial others that they try to suppress.

For an instructive example from the US, consider the racial roots of the tradition that came to be known as 'American Literature.' This tradition was built on assumptions about the inevitable sacrifice and extinction of the noble indigenous peoples on the altar of modern progress (Henderson 2006), and about the degradation of the enslaved African relative to the free white republican citizen (Morrison 1992). More than this, non-white writers have long been in conversation with, influencing and influenced by, their white counterparts, though their numbers were artificially suppressed by racist exclusions. For both these reasons, imagining that Native American, Afro-American,

and other peoples 'of color' are external to an already-complete, implicitly white American tradition—rather than constitutive elements in a wider, more diverse tradition that we have only begun to understand—distorts the history of our practices and blocks access to important resources for unlocking the real complexity and depth of particular works.

The multiculturalist assumption of purity also infects the 'minority' traditions that it means to celebrate with a version of the 'add color and stir' approach. This adds to the idea of a free-standing mainstream the parallel idea of free-standing alternatives to the mainstream, explicable without reference to anything outside of themselves. Here as before, this approach often does violence to the histories of our practices and needlessly impoverishes the work of analysis and criticism. Or: it is much harder to understand Amiri Baraka without linking him to the beat poetry scene that he abandoned to go to Harlem, or to understand the New Negro or Negritude writers without linking them to the currents of literary modernism.

A final problem with the assumption of purity is that it is a recipe for ghettoization and for rebranding established hierarchies (Christian 1988). If taking diversity seriously means establishing publishing and scholarly niches for 'minority' literatures, it leaves in place the existing mechanisms for training and credentialing specialists in the mainstream tradition, which will still receive the lion's share of attention, of plum appointments, and so on. Even if some of the minority specialists are highly regarded and well-compensated, the structure of the literary enterprise, the mechanisms for producing and reproducing knowledge and other forms of culture, may remain largely unchanged for the rank and file participants in the practice. And the norms for aesthetic evaluation—the points at which questions about excellence and aesthetic merit get traction—may remain tacitly bound up with judgments about the kinds of people that we can reasonably expect to produce literature.

7 The Huck Finn Problem

The normalization of diversity in relation to the literary enterprise creates another problem with significant practical dimensions. Accepting cultural hybridity, anti-racist egalitarianism, and critical relativism means refusing purity, racist exclusions, and faux-universalism. It means, in short, refusing the cultural self-image that was hegemonic when the modern literary enterprise and its dominant traditions took shape. This in turn means adopting ethical postures that are diametrically opposed to the ones that significantly inform some of our greatest works of literature. And here lies the problem: what do we do with the embarrassing moral gaffes in these otherwise great works, like the distressing repetition of racial slurs in Mark Twain's classic novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*? (This novel famously presents other, deeper problems [Margolis 2001], but its problem language has been revived as a public issue lately ["Publisher Tinkers With Twain," *The New York Times*, January 5, 2011] and will therefore serve us well here.)

The problem of Twain's language opens onto a number of distinct questions, some in well-traveled precincts of philosophical inquiry. There are meta-axiological questions about the relationship between aesthetic criticism and ethical criticism, and about the status of the propositions that make up our anti-racist ethical commonsense. There are also normative and prudential questions, and questions of law, pedagogy, and social policy, about whether to redact, censor, or even rewrite the texts that violate this

commonsense. One could easily take more space than this article has been allotted just to map the discursive landscape that has taken shape around any one of these questions. Accordingly, they will play no further role in what follows.

Another kind of question has received less attention (in philosophy, if not elsewhere), and can be productively taken up in the remaining space. This is a social theoretic question about the meaning of our debates over the racial meanings of historic texts. To consider this question is to consider the relationship between the literary enterprise and some unfolding racial project. Suggestions about how to approach the racially insensitive moments in (otherwise) great works of literature are not just answers to first-order questions about how to deal with literary texts. They answer second order questions about the meaning of race, using literature as the interpretive key.

For example, one might suggest that we just ignore the problematic nature of *Huckleberry Finn* and treat it like any other book. Accepting this suggestion might mean assigning the book to students without redaction, editing, or any special 'politically correct' commentary (beyond, perhaps, 'people once used this sort of language to insult each other'). But this approach dovetails neatly with a mode of postracialist argument that many people find oversimple. According to this argument, the success of our recent anti-racist efforts has stripped race-talk of its power, and therefore effectively absolves us of the need to take any special care with racial vocabularies or symbols. Linking the suggestion about Twain's work with the wider racial project that seems to condition it sheds light on the plausible implications of the suggestion as well as on the state of our racial politics.

A final issue to raise here about racially problematic texts has to do with whether the problems with these texts are interestingly related to literature or to race per se. After all, ethically problematic works are not unique to literature, and the problems with those works don't arise solely from race. Works in other idioms – like the film *Birth of a Nation*—are famously problematic for their racial politics. Similarly, problems of identity-based oppression arise not just in connection with race but also in relation to all the familiar axes of social differentiation, with gender and sexuality as the clearest cases.

Despite these overlaps, racially problematic writings remain distinctively interesting *qua* literary works because the race–literature nexus generates its problems in especially pronounced forms. This is the case thanks to the tight relationship between the literary enterprise and the mechanisms for producing and reproducing public culture. Literature is more closely tied to modernity's racial projects than the other main expressive idioms, as noted above in the discussions of nationalism and colonialism. And this is true in part because literature is also more closely related to modern regimes of public education than the other expressive idioms, which is to say that schools at all levels have long been much more concerned with promoting literacy than with promoting, say, 'picturacy.' For reasons like these, the history of Huck Finn problems is longer in literature, and the works that present the problems are often central to the conception and cultivation of public cultures in ways that we tend not to find, until very recently, with works in other media. Think here, for Anglophone readers, of Kipling's "The White Man's Burden,' or the Tarzan narratives, or *The Last of the Mohicans*.

Just as Huck Finn problems needn't be uniquely related to literature to be distinctively interesting, they needn't be uniquely related to race in order for race to remain a useful category of analysis. This follows from certain basic and now widely accepted principles of intersectional analysis (Crenshaw 1991). The nationalist and colonial adventures with which the literary enterprise was so intimately connected were not just

racial projects; they were multidimensional campaigns to fix social identities quite comprehensively. Modernity formulated and revised its reigning conceptions of gender, sexuality, class and much else while also working through, and by means of, its conceptions of race. So Huck Finn problems in literature are rarely if ever just about race. They are also about manhood, or sexual desire, or the privileges and problems of bourgeois status. Excavating the racial aspects of these problems can be a first step toward thinking more comprehensively about post-supremacist strategies for producing and engaging culture work.

8 Conclusion

A number of interesting and relevant topics could not find their way into this chapter, beginning with recent work on racial slurs (Anderson and Lepore 2013) and older studies of creolization (Bernabé *et al.* 1990). The purpose of the chapter has been to introduce some of the questions that emerge from the intersection of race and literature, and to explore a framework for thinking about them outside of the proprietary languages of post-structuralism and literary theory. Given this purpose, a lack of comprehensiveness or breadth should be a temporary condition, susceptible of resolution by additional work.

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LITERATURE AND GENDER

Mary Bittner Wiseman

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

<div align="right">W. B. Yeats, "Among School Children"</div>

Obviously, Yeats's point is that you can't tell the dancer from the dance, because . . .
there's no difference between the words on a page and the way they might be read, or
"performed," by any given reader.

<div align="right">Geoffrey Hartman</div>

The question of the relation between literature and gender points in many directions, but I will focus on the *experience* of reading literature and the promise that holds for women. Two different conceptions of literature yield two strategies of reading; one celebrates the complexity of language, the other of the reader. Gender is on the scene because each of us is gendered and literature is preeminently about us. However, what it is to be a man or a woman and the difference between them is something to be learned. So too is the role gender plays in one's sense of oneself. Literature and its popular cousins help to teach us this. Moreover, evoking certain responses and not others, literature *reads us* by showing how we stand with respect to its presentations of the feminine and of woman-ness. Literature is rife with examples of its power to change its character's lives. Desdemona fell in love with Othello when she heard his stories of war; Emma Bovary was moved by tales of romance to yearn for a different life; Don Quixote tilted at windmills having been set afire by stories of heroes. Literature's power to change its readers' lives by changing their beliefs is as great.

Part I looks at post-structuralism to show how attention to the materiality of language and the instability of meaning invites a slow and laborious personal reading that can free the reader from certain constraints embedded in received meanings. For example, it can free women from the idea that " woman" is defined as lacking something men have, like the ability to act from reason as Aristotle claimed or to act on principle as Kant did. Whoever cannot find oneself in the words one reads has reason to read them for what the words hide—when "man" is used to mean "human being," "male" is there nonetheless—and for their feints, their ambiguities, their other sides without which they could not signify—no concept of sin without a concept of good.