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The Disinterested and Fine: New Negro Renaissance Poetry and the Racial Formation of Modernist Studies

Michael Bibby

In 1932 Thomas Mabry, a white junior instructor in the Vanderbilt English department, sent out invitations for a party in honor of Langston Hughes and James Weldon Johnson, who were at that time both at nearby Fisk University. Mabry's senior colleague, Allen Tate refused to attend, writing in a public letter he sent to the department chair, to other faculty and alumni, and to a New York magazine that "he would gladly meet these 'very interesting writers' in New York, London, or Paris" but that like "the colored man who milks our cow" he believed "there should be no racial intercourse in the South, 'unless we are willing for that to lead to intermarriage.'"¹ According to Arnold Rampersad, Tate "compared attending [the] party . . . to meeting socially with his black cook." Tate wrote that while he believed Hughes and Johnson were his "intellectual equals" and that Mabry was "disinterested and fine," he preferred to respect the racial customs of Nashville and thought the event was beneath the dignity of Vanderbilt.² To assuage his colleague, Mabry suggested that Tate "bring a beautiful woman" with him to the event; Tate replied "that the most beautiful woman he knew was his colored cook, but that her sense of decorum would prevent her from coming." Tate's open letter led to a "flood of turn-downs" to Mabry's invitation, and the department chair informed Mabry that his position would not be renewed and that he would not be recommended for a position at any other institution unless the party was canceled.³

Tate's comments about "the colored man who milks our cow" and the "colored cook" with her "sense of decorum" not only

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486 assert that segregation is a “natural” position that even uneducated servants comprehend but also implicitly associate Hughes and Johnson with these black workers, both different from and subordinate to the “disinterested and fine” Mabry. Rhetorically the poets are also subordinate to Tate (“*our farm*”) and Vanderbilt, undermining Tate’s claim that he was sure Hughes and Johnson were his “intellectual equals.” Indeed, Hughes and Johnson are “placed” not only in the kitchen and on the farm but also in the racially mixed streets of the urbanscape. It’s one thing, apparently, to meet a black poet in Harlem, but quite another to have to meet him in the halls of one of the premier rural southern institutions.

I open with this infamous story not to call out Tate’s racism once again but rather to call attention to the central role of racism in the formation of the academy’s conception of modernism and its exclusion of New Negro writers.⁴ Since the emergence of scholarly work on modernist literature, the New Negro Renaissance has been conspicuously absent. Although contemporary research has shown that New Negro culture was integral to American modernism, research in modernist studies overwhelmingly focuses on white authors. New Negro literature is studied mainly in other disciplines, such as African American studies or American studies.⁵ Tate’s response to Mabry is usually cited to illustrate the segregationism of southern academic institutions, but the widespread response to Tate’s letter from academics outside of Vanderbilt suggests something more widespread.⁶ It seems indicative of an unexamined color line in modernist studies that has persisted ever since the field emerged in the midcentury.

Although the New Critics have often been attacked for their racism, I don’t want to reduce the exclusion of New Negro writers from “modernism” to personal prejudices. Ironically, the lack of scholarly attention to the New Negro Renaissance in modernist studies has persisted alongside growing efforts within the field to diversify the canon and the curriculum. African American poetry produced in the modernist era has until very recently been considered *not* modernist. The New Negro Renaissance is typically viewed as congruent with but distinct from modernism and, until the early 1970s, New Negro literature was most often addressed by scholars in sociological rather than literary journals.⁷ Indeed, a colleague of mine working on black poets in the late 1990s at a prestigious university told me how her senior colleague scorned such scholarship as merely “of sociological interest.” Where modernist studies attributes vanguardism, experimentalism, and innovation to the poetry of whites, the terms deployed to describe New Negro Renaissance poetry tend to focus on racial identity, exoticism, and authenticity. Formal innovation does not seem to be the determining factor: formally conventional poems of Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost, and even Edwin Arlington Robinson are typically canonized as “modernist,” yet the prevalence of conventional form in New Negro poetry is often cited as evidence of this poetry’s antimodernism. Modernism and the New Negro Renaissance are viewed as segregated spheres, with New Negro poetry being merely “of sociological interest,” out in the field with the cowhand or in the urban ghettos, while modernist poetry is enshrined in the old manse as the “disinterested and fine” art of the gentry.

My concern here is not to correct the nomenclature, or insist on terms like “Afro-modernist,” or reject the notion of modernism itself. Nor do I seek simply to broaden or diversify the canon, although this remains a necessary endeavor. Rather I seek to demonstrate how the academic discipline of modernist studies has organized itself around an object of knowledge that has been constituted so that it necessarily excludes the work of New Negro poetry. Like Tate’s response to inviting Hughes and Johnson to Vanderbilt, a conception of modernism as the “disinterested and fine” privileges the work of white authors over and against the work of New Negro writers. Despite individual scholars’ racial ideologies, and regardless of the historical evidence that reveals American modernism to be the product of a complex, diverse, and profoundly multicultural social moment, as a disciplinary field modernist studies has been organized around a persistent and coherent emphasis on the cultural production of whites. I argue in this article that the segregation of the New Negro Renaissance from modernist studies is not simply a problem of terminology or canonicity alone nor merely a racist conspiracy among academics—rather I believe it is *structural* to a disciplinary field that can be understood as a racial formation of whiteness.

The Racial Formation of Modernist Studies

I use the term “modernist studies” to indicate an academic field of critical scholarship on the cultural productions of the period and movement commonly identified as modernism, widely seen as spanning the years from 1910 to 1945.⁸ By “academic field,” I mean the various forms of research, teaching, and writing produced in higher education on modernism. Relevant to our understanding of modernism as an academic field are attendant curricular regulations, such as requirements for degrees in literature; extracurricular venues, such as the conferences and scholarly associations that produce, circulate, and perpetuate knowledge about modernism; the various textbooks marketed for literature curricula; the way academic job postings for modernist positions are framed, and so forth.⁹

As a distinct area of scholarly research, modernist studies began to take shape in the mid-twentieth century, mainly as a result of New Criticism’s dominance. The Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren’s 1938 textbook *Understanding Poetry* established many of the central protocols for the explication of modernist poetry; by the 1950s, *Understanding Poetry* was the most widely used college textbook in the university-level study of poetry, and it would continue to dominate the market well into the 1970s.¹⁰ With the postwar generation swelling college classrooms, more students were taking courses in modernist literature than in any other period.¹¹

At the same time, textbook anthologies became increasingly exclusive, providing more in-depth explication of a few writers rather than surveying a diversity of writers.¹² Many academic critics were urging anthology editors to reject an encyclopedic, historical approach in favor of more exclusive, evaluative editorial practices. As early as 1930 a critic complained that Fred Lewis Pattee’s *The New American Literature*,

488 1890–1930: *A Survey* represented a “social quantitative estimate” of the reading tastes of an “uncultivated reading public” rather than “a restricted and fastidious aristocracy of culture.”¹³ Establishing and maintaining an “aristocracy of culture” was central to the assertion of a disciplinary dominance over the evaluation of literature against the tastes of the masses. While several anthologies of the early ’30s included poems by Phillis Wheatley, Paul Laurence Dunbar, James Weldon Johnson, and other poets of color, F. O. Matthiessen’s 1950 *Oxford Book of American Verse* included none.¹⁴ From its first edition in 1938 until its fourth edition in 1976, the Brooks and Warren anthology included no poets of color. In the introduction to his popular 1950 anthology *Mid-Century American Poets*, John Ciardi proclaimed that “no good poet writing today . . . feels compelled to [a] sort of catalogue of the melting pot, or of the sweat-soaked glories of barbaric America.”¹⁵

“Modernism” has long been a notoriously difficult term to define. It has been variously used to signify a general historical period, an aesthetic perspective, an artistic and literary movement, and a sociocultural phenomenon. According to the *OED*, the word designates a “usage, mode of expression, peculiarity of style, etc., characteristic of modern times,” but more specifically with regard to literature, it is “generally characterized by a deliberate break with classical and traditional forms or methods of expression.”¹⁶

The notion of a “break” with the past and the emphasis on the “new” have been key elements of the discourse on modernism. Scholars often catalogue the various historical ruptures of the early twentieth century; most often cited are industrialization, World War I, and the Russian Revolution. For example, the entry on “modernism” in *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* explains that “modernism exploded onto the international scene in the aftermath of World War I, a traumatic transcontinental event that physically devastated and psychologically disillusioned the West in an entirely unprecedented way.”¹⁷ The American Academy of Poets website asserts that modernism “was . . . a time when the avant-garde experiments that had preceded the war would, like the technological wonders of the airplane and the atom, inexorably establish a new dispensation, which we call modernism. Among the most instrumental of all artists in effecting this change were a handful of American poets.” The handful of poets listed are, not surprisingly, all white.¹⁸ The point here is that although the general definition of “modernist” is flexible enough that it could accommodate a wide variety of cultural forms and thus might easily be applied to both white and black producers of early twentieth-century literature, in most cases it is not—white writers are invariably listed as representative of “modernism.”

Defined historically, American modernism is often understood as an effect of not only global events, such as World War I, but also major shifts in society: massive industrialization, immigration, rapid urban population growth, suffragism, prohibition, consumerism, the rise of popular media, and the effects of the Great Migration are regularly cited. Although studies of modernist fiction have tended to dominate critical scholarship since the 1970s, poets and poetry are still usually accorded a central role in American modernism.¹⁹ According to *The Oxford Companion to United States History*, “American poets created the modernist style. Experimenting in free verse and

breaking with British verse forms and iambic rhythms, they sought to make a reality rather than merely describe or reflect it.”²⁰ *The Oxford Companion* further asserts that “modernist culture played a major role in determining how twentieth-century Americans understood and shaped their world. Far from being monopolized by a tiny intellectual and artistic elite, modernism exerted its influence everywhere, in areas ranging from architecture to literature to the visual arts to the social and natural sciences, as well as in popular culture. Indeed, some scholars view it as the dominant—though assuredly not the only—cultural sensibility of twentieth-century America.”²¹ From a historical perspective, then, modernism is related to poetry but also to new forms of social and cultural diversity.

While the types of cultural productions and genres studied have greatly diversified in recent years, I am most concerned with modernist studies’ articulation of American modernist poetry as an object of inquiry—both because poetry was central to the rise of New Criticism and because it is in the field’s approach to modernist poetry that its racial formation seems most evident. Several scholars have emphasized racial diversity and the importance of the New Negro Renaissance in the shaping of modernism. George Hutchinson describes the cultural field of American modernism during the early twentieth century as socially more complicated and diverse than its representation by later academic scholars, arguing that “since the late 1930s the institutionalization of ‘high’ and ‘lost generation’ brands of literary modernism has done much to obscure the affiliations between white American modernism and the Harlem Renaissance.”²² Aldon Nielsen writes that “seldom in our literary history has blackness so occupied the imaginations of white artists as during the rise of modernism. . . . [And] more works by and about blacks appeared [during the modernist era] than at any time since Reconstruction.”²³ Michael North describes a “homegrown avant-garde” of the 1920s “devoted . . . to American popular culture, to the multiracial heritage of the Americas” in which New Negro writers played a key role.²⁴ Mark A. Sanders has made an even stronger claim for the central role of New Negro literature in the production of American modernism: “What would come to be known as ‘high modernism’ robbed the era of the animating ideas and agendas that largely defined New Negro participation.”²⁵

According to Joseph Harrington, “poetry” as a social form was conceived by the emerging scholars of modernism as standing in opposition to “popular” and “middle-brow” cultural forms. Poetry enjoyed considerable attention in early twentieth-century newspapers, popular magazines, the literary small press, and major trade publishers—but New Critics’ insistence on “poetry” as an aesthetic object that could only be successfully elucidated by trained professionals of considerable “taste” and sensitivity—the “disinterested and fine,” as Allen Tate might put it—enabled their professional control over its interpretation in the academy. Poetry came to be seen as difficult, elite, avant-garde—it was “privatized” and made to seem antisocial. As John Crowe Ransom would proclaim in his 1937 essay “Criticism, Inc.,” the “university teacher of literature . . . should be the very professional we need to take charge” of the critical interpretation of poetry.²⁶ This reification of modernist poetry secured an academic professional hegemony for the New Critics over its interpretation; but it also dehistoricized it so

490 that it could be understood as transcending social contingencies, the masses, and the popular—a form beyond such crude social factors as “race.”

In part this dehistoricized and “raceless” conception of poetry articulated by the New Critics and their followers in academe inherently privileges the poetry of whites, who, by virtue of the hegemony of whiteness in the United States, are presumed to be raceless.²⁷ The consistency of the various iterations of this concept of poetry in textbooks anthologies and critical scholarship of modernist poetry works to maintain the whiteness of modernist studies. A key instrument in this has been the various textbook anthologies produced in the wake of *Understanding Poetry*’s success. One of the most historically successful has been the Norton anthologies. In the 1,456 pages of poems by 157 poets in the 1973 first edition of *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, 14 are by African Americans, only 5 of whom published during the New Negro era (Anne Spencer, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, and Countee Cullen), while the remaining 9 published after the Second World War. The 1988 second edition increased its size to 1,865 pages, presenting works by 180 poets. Of these poets, 112 are Americans—but the total number of African American poets collected in this edition decreases from 14 to 11, with work by Spencer no longer appearing. The 2003 third edition tried to rectify this lack of diversity. Of the 70 total poets represented in the 1,136 pages of this edition’s first volume, 40 are American, and of that number, 6 are African American: Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Sterling Brown, Jean Toomer, and Melvin B. Tolson.

Interestingly, the percentage of African American poets relative to all poets represented as “modern” in the three editions has remained mostly unchanged. In the first edition, African American poets comprise about 8.3 percent; in the second edition this number fell to 6.3 percent; in the newest edition, it went back up to 8.6 percent. The third edition is now packaged in two volumes, with volume one covering 1900–45 and volume two encompassing 1945–2000; significantly more writers of color are included in the second volume, conveying the sense that white poets dominated the literary field prior to 1945. The consistency in numbers is striking, especially given a much larger collection of New Negro era poetry in the more comprehensive survey anthologies of American literature.²⁸ Unlike anthologies specifically identified as modernist, American literature anthologies represent New Negro poetry as a central feature of modernism.

The introduction to the second edition of the Norton offers a single paragraph on the New Negro era, asserting that the poets of this movement “sought revitalization by content rather than form. They adopted the devices of nineteenth-century verse in expressing their new theme of Black racial consciousness and culture.”²⁹ This perspective on the role of form persists in the third edition, whose introduction defines “modernist” as an “advocate of newness”: “Through its fragmentation, ellipses, and jagged edges, modernist poetry disrupts formal coherence, traditionally enforced by regular meter and rhyme, tonal and figural continuity.” The editors go on to note that “more formally conservative poets—such as the World War I poet Wilfred Owen, the Harlem Renaissance poet Claude McKay, and the New York traditionalist Edna St. Vincent Millay—brought inherited forms into fresh dialogue with ‘modern’ subjects,

such as mass warfare, racial lynching, and sexual liberation.”³⁰ In both editions New Negro conventional verse is represented as distinct from the “revitalization,” “newness,” and “modernity” of modernist poetry. Such verse may be new because of its content—its racial themes or its “fresh dialogue with ‘modern’ subjects”—but it is not represented as “modernist.”

This exclusion of New Negro-era poetry from the category “modernist poetry” has been replicated in the field’s scholarship. Surveying monographs and edited collections on modernist American poetry published since 1985, I found that well over 90 percent featured not a single chapter on issues of race or on the works of a poet of color.³¹ Charles Altieri’s 1989 study *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry*, for example, asserts that “we must situate the poetry in relation to its historical context” but never mentions a single New Negro poet nor acknowledges the racially diverse contexts for the development of painterly abstraction.³² Michael Davidson’s *Ghostlier Demarcation: Modern Poetry and the Material Word* (1997) does not include any reference to work by New Negro poets. More recently, Joel Nickels’s *Poetry of the Possible: Spontaneity, Modernism, and the Multitude* (2012) argues that concepts of multitudes, “not just crowds or mobs,” were central to modernist poetry’s modes of spontaneity; yet even though one might imagine that syncopation and jazz improvisation would figure in this claim, Nickels’s study addresses only William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, Wyndham Lewis, and Laura Riding and makes no reference to the New Negro era.³³

Even sociohistorically detailed research on modernist American poetry often overlooks or ignores New Negro poetry. John Timberman Newcomb’s *How Did Poetry Survive? The Making of Modern American Verse* (2012), for example, calls attention to the complex social dynamics of publishing in early twentieth-century urban areas but makes only a passing reference to Langston Hughes and William Stanley Braithwaite. My point is not that studies like these are racist, ignorant, or failed—rather my point is that the category “modernist poetry” has been constituted in modernist studies in such a way that it is possible to produce detailed, sophisticated research on this poetry without ever acknowledging the racial diversity of its history.

Reviewing the contents of major literary histories and surveys of modernist poetry reveals a similar pattern. The only reference to an African American poet in Roy Harvey Pearce’s *The Continuity of American Poetry* is to Paul Laurence Dunbar, whose work Pearce dismisses as “exercises in rhetoric, too-delicate evocations of the trivial or too-robust summonings-up of the ‘sublime.’”³⁴ Hyatt H. Waggoner’s *American Poets: From the Puritans to the Present* never mentions any work by an African American poet nor does it acknowledge the New Negro era, while David Perkins’s two-volume *History of Modern Poetry* relegates African American poetry to the eighteenth chapter in its first volume and to the twenty-fifth chapter of its second volume. The *Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (1999), Peter Childs’s *Modernism* (2000), Pericles Lewis’s *Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (2007)—none of these discusses race or writers of color. Lawrence Rainey’s 2005 Blackwell textbook, *Modernism: An Anthology* does not include any work by an African American author.

492 Rainey's anthology is a particularly important case in point. In the introduction, Rainey asserts that "high modernism" is "both an extension of late Symbolism and an intransigent enactment of aesthetic aloofness." In surveying various recent views of modernism, Rainey dismisses attempts to tie it to the social and historical experiences of modernization, which he characterizes as "little more than a familiar catalogue often recited by sociologists of modernity." Rainey's approach opposes the "sociological" to the aesthetic, as if the two could never be understood in relation to each other. His introduction is silent on the contributions of New Negro writers; but in "A Note on the Selection, Texts, and Order of Presentation," he acknowledges this omission: "While it is self-evident that Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and others took up modernist themes and concerns, or engaged in various ways with the formal experimentalism sometimes thought to typify modernism, any attempt to include them in an anthology containing Joyce, Eliot, Woolf, and Stein would inevitably smack of tokenism." Rainey's claim is tautological: New Negro writers aren't included in his anthology of modernism because modernism doesn't include the New Negro.³⁵ His assertions bear a striking resemblance to Allen Tate's argument against inviting New Negro poets to Vanderbilt—among the "disinterested and fine" white authors he lists, including New Negro poets would be unnatural.

The whiteness of modernist poetry is ironically replicated in even the major national organization devoted to scholarship in the so-called new modernism, the Modernist Studies Association (MSA). Established in 1998, the MSA was organized partly as an intervention to combat the lack of diversity and the social conservatism of previous scholarly work on modernism, which tended to be dominated by single-author organizations. In this sense, the MSA strongly identified with the "new modernist studies" and with theoretically informed efforts to expand and diversify our understanding of modernism. Yet the MSA was also organized in response to the "scathing reappraisals of what was still called 'High Modernism'" resulting from the rise of poststructural theories and cultural studies, and has served an inherently conservative and reactionary function, attempting to defend the field of modernist studies against critique.³⁶

Each year since 1999, the MSA has held conventions at various sites in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, and each year's conference has featured, on average, twenty-four presentations making any reference in their titles to race or to writers of color; of these, about five indicate by title that the presentation focused on a New Negro writer.³⁷ The 2011 MSA conference, for example, featured 354 presentations, 5 of which were on New Negro writers, about 1.5 percent of the total. Overwhelmingly, it is New Negro fiction that has dominated paper presentations at the MSA conferences. Of course, the organizers had to work with what was submitted to them, but this pattern is consistent with the general field of modernist studies.

The relative absence of work on New Negro poetry at the MSA conferences is reflected in the contents of the MSA's own journal. Founded in 1994 by Robert von Hallberg and Lawrence Rainey, *Modernism/Modernity* became the journal of the MSA with the September 2001 issue. From its inception in 1994 through the 2011 volume, *Modernism/Modernity* has published 452 feature essays, with 48 focusing on topics

concerning race and/or writers of color, or about 10.6 percent of the total.³⁸ Of these articles, about a third deal specifically with racial issues in the American context—this includes articles discussing not only writers of color in the United States but also white writers. The majority of articles treating race in any thematic way focus on the works of white writers, and the majority of these focus on European writers. Ironically, the inaugural issue of the journal was devoted to race—but the featured articles of this issue comprise about 10 percent of the total articles addressing race in *Modernism/Modernity*. Since its inception, *Modernism/Modernity* has published only 13 articles whose titles indicate a focus on a New Negro writer. Especially significant is that of these, the majority focus on New Negro fiction—I found only 4 feature articles whose titles specifically address New Negro poetry, the first of which did not appear until the 2003 volume.³⁹ These numbers suggest that modernist studies scholarship in New Negro literature characterizes this work's contributions to modernism as primarily narrative and realist and/or neorealist. Although poetry is widely regarded as central to American modernism, New Negro poetry is not.

Since its emergence with the New Critics in the academy, “modernist poetry,” as an object of knowledge, has been discursively constituted in such a way as to elide the racial diversity of modernist history and reify an aesthetic implicitly understood as the property and production of whites. The formation of a dehistoricized and “raceless” conception of modernist poetry has meant that modernist studies views New Negro poetry as “naturally” not modernist. This racial formation takes place even in the face of ongoing and increased scholarly endeavors to diversify the field's understanding of modernism. Pointing to the obvious absence of African American poetry from the modernist canon, then, seems inadequate to the task. While many contemporary scholars have shown how New Criticism's promotion of Eliotic impersonalism and its rejection of sociohistorical contingencies support a dominant social order that privileges the cultural hegemony of whites, such analysis does not account for the persistence of demonstrably racialized conceptions of poetics in a field in which most scholars are personally antiracist. It may be obvious by now that Allen Tate and the midcentury critics who set the tone for the study of modernist poetry held racist views—but how do we account for the whiteness of modernist studies today?

As Michael Omi and Howard Winant describe it, racial formation is the “process by which social, economic and political forces determine the content and importance of racial categories, and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings.” Further they note that “in the cultural realm, dress, music, art, language and indeed the very concept of ‘taste’ has been shaped by racial consciousness and racial dynamics.”⁴⁰ Through its consistent representation of modernist poetry as both beyond racial classification and concomitantly the work of whites, modernist studies organizes itself around the reproduction of white cultural hegemony.

Understood from this perspective, we might better grasp how the outmoded and delegitimized racial ideologies of former Southern Agrarians have survived or ended up being rearticulated in modernist studies in an age that has supposedly moved past such ideologies.⁴¹ As my analysis of the field's scholarship, anthologies, conferences,

494 and journal contents indicate, modernist studies' disciplinary object is the poetry of whites—the “whiteness” of the discipline is normalized by the persistent, regular, and varied focus on the poetry of whites, and “modernist poetry” becomes synonymous with the work of whites. Understanding this phenomenon as a racial formation might allow us to move beyond simplistic attacks on individual scholars' racisms and consider how racial ideologies can survive and reproduce at a structural level even in the face of so much social pressure against racism.

The Color-Blindness of Modernist Racial Ideology

The persistent whiteness of modernist studies, in my view, was made possible partly by the promotion of “raceless” and “color-blind” values in the midcentury that were specific to that era's liberal consensus on race. As Omi and Winant explain, the ethnicity paradigm that characterized sociological and civil rights discourses from the 1930s to the 1950s and that was influential in the shaping of a midcentury liberal consensus tended to cast racial differences as effects of culture and socialization. Peggy Pascoe has shown how the “commonsense” view of race relations and racism among mid-twentieth century liberals was organized around “the single, powerfully persuasive belief that the eradication of racism depends on the deliberate nonrecognition of race.” Pascoe calls this belief “a modernist racial ideology” in an attempt “to echo the self-conscious ‘modernism’ of social scientists, writers, artists, and cultural rebels of the early twentieth century.”⁴²

This nonrecognition of race is epistemic in the discourse of modernist poetry criticism and serves as a unifying force in the racial formation of modernist studies. As an aesthetic, the modernism of modernist poetry is understood by modernist studies as an impulse to “make it new” that cannot be reduced to historical or social forces. The “it” to be made new, in other words, is not necessarily racial relations, for example, and the “new” is not synonymous with merely the newness of, say, racial diversity in the urban north that was a consequence of the Great Migration. This impulse is, instead, understood as primarily aesthetic, related to particular kinds of innovations in an Anglo-European literary tradition. The formation of an aestheticized rather than historicized modernism is, in other words, a means of ensuring that the “disinterested and fine” remains separate from the “colored man who milks our cow.” The whiteness of modernist studies is secured not simply through overt or covert prohibitions against acknowledging writers of color but more specifically by a “deliberate nonrecognition” of race. More than in any other genre, poetry has been conceived in modernist studies as a “raceless” form, and modernist innovation in poetry tends to be a matter mainly of theoretical discussion, not historical analysis.

The scandal over Ezra Pound's Bollingen Prize demonstrates how modernist racial ideology's nonrecognition of race worked to secure the disciplinary integrity of “modernist poetry.” As is well known, the Library of Congress Bollingen fellows awarding of its 1949 prize to Ezra Pound for his *Pisan Cantos* led to a jingoistic firestorm in

the national press that attacked the perceived elitism of the fellows and all they represented. Although this episode is widely cited as a contest between “highbrow” and “middlebrow,” it also explicitly gave voice to anxieties about race and racism in postwar American culture, exemplified by allusion in the title of Robert Hillyer’s infamous *Saturday Review* article attacking the award, “Treason’s Strange Fruit,” to the song “Strange Fruit,” which Billie Holiday had recorded in 1939.⁴³

Despite the obvious racial implications of the controversy, many committee members rationalized their votes by separating race from poetics. Allen Tate wrote to fellow committee member Luther Evans: “If a democratic society is going to justify itself, it has got to maintain distinctions and standards, and allow for decisions which are above politics. Pressure groups and popular hysteria have nothing to do with intellectual standards.”⁴⁴ Writing to Léonie Adams, Karl Shapiro explained that he “did not wish to raise the anti-Semitic question among those who considered it irrelevant to the case.”⁴⁵ A decade later in a 1959 essay, Tate characterized Pound’s anti-Semitism as “disagreeable” and “irresponsible” but defended his vote on awarding the prize by claiming that “the specific task of the man of letters is to attend to the health of society *not at large* but *through literature*.”⁴⁶ Throughout the debate, arguments in favor of awarding the Bollingen to Pound hinged on an articulation of poetics as separable from race and racism. This incident and its treatment by the Bollingen Fellows exemplify, I maintain, a deliberate nonrecognition of race necessary to the canonization of Pound’s *Pisan Cantos* at a foundational moment in the formation of modernist studies.

Throughout the mid-twentieth century, a deliberate nonrecognition of race inflected critical judgments of poetry. Rolfe Humphries, for example, criticized racialism in Gwendolyn Brooks’s *A Street in Bronzeville* as sentimental, obvious, and quaint, favoring instead those poems in which “the idiom may be local but the language is universal.”⁴⁷ In praising Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps’s anthology *The Poetry of the Negro*, Hubert Creekmore concluded that it “demonstrates the thoughtful development of Negro talent to the point where one questions the necessity (other than for its social evidence) of the specialization of ‘Negro’ in the title.”⁴⁸ In a 1946 review of Countee Cullen, Charles I. Glicksberg asserted that with “the exception of a few poems, his work, rooted in the American and English poetic tradition and universal in theme, gives no indication that it was written by a Negro.”⁴⁹

Such views resonate with Allen Tate’s infamous introduction to Melvin B. Tolson’s *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia*: “The main thing is the poetry, if one is a poet, whatever one’s color may be.”⁵⁰ Yet it should be emphasized that this nonrecognition of race was also evident in the work of such early postwar poetry African American critics as John S. Lash, J. Saunders Redding, and Arthur P. Davis. Lash, for example, argued that “if the work of a Negro author is noteworthy only because it was written by a Negro author, then it has no real significance and no real place in the concept of an integrated national literature.”⁵¹ The midcentury nonrecognition of race supplied black literary scholars with a means of circumventing the color line, but it was also consistent with the New Critical color-blind poetics that reified the implicit whiteness of modernism.

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The “color-blind” articulation of poetics central to the racial formation of modernist studies represents “modernist poetry” as synonymous with formal innovation, avant-gardism, and experimentation so that the predominance of conventional verse form in New Negro poetry necessarily invalidates it as modernist. White poets whose work relies on conventional verse forms, such as Frost, Robinson, Stevens, or even Eliot escape this, but African American poets do not. Only New Negro poets who experiment with black vernacular styles are considered “modernist,” such styles being viewed as consistent with the field’s definitions of modernist innovation specific to white poetic traditions. While the black vernacular styles of Langston Hughes or Sterling Brown often dominate current modernist studies’ conception of the modernism of the New Negro era, the vast majority of poetry written and published by African Americans during this period was written in traditional verse forms. As Gary Smith notes, this fact has led many later critics to question “the discrepancy between theory and practice,” suggesting that the New Negro Renaissance’s race-assertive theories were somehow undermined by the predominance of conventional verse.⁵²

During the New Negro era, of course, debate over poetic form was considerable and deeply inflected by racial politics, as demonstrated by Langston Hughes’s “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” where he decried the “urge within the race toward whiteness,” and claimed that the dominance of conventional verse forms thwarted the realization of a “true Negro art.”⁵³ At the same time, though, Hughes’s claim was disputed by writers like Countee Cullen, who told Hughes he wanted to be known as a poet, not a Negro poet. As Nathan Irvin Huggins points out, “Cullen wanted to be acknowledged as a poet so that he would not be condescended to as a Negro, so that he could be an example of Negro potential, successfully competing on the white man’s ground.”⁵⁴ Houston Baker has argued that criticism of New Negro formalism “proceeds somewhat in ignorance of the full discursive field marking Afro-American national possibilities.” For Baker, the “mastery of form” in New Negro conventional verse made possible a “deformation of mastery.”⁵⁵

The prevalence of conventional verse form in New Negro poetry suggests an especially revealing case for how modernist studies’ articulation of modernist poetry reifies its whiteness. If modernist studies often identifies “modernist poetry” in terms of a break with the neo-Victorian styles of the late nineteenth century, New Negro conventional verse might be better understood as a break from contexts more salient for African American writers, who had been historically closed out of the generational, social antagonisms fostered among whites schooled at elite universities.

Attaining mastery in literary forms historically barred to them may have been more crucial to New Negro poets than rejecting such forms. Further, insofar as whites have historically read blacks as synecdochic of the “real,” New Negro poetry’s use of the self-conscious artifice of romantic and Victorian poetic forms that had historically structured white cultural hegemony during the postbellum era might be viewed as an important mode of resistance in a period when literal and figurative access to such conventions

was not only tangibly fraught but historically novel. Indeed black poets' appropriations of the "master's tools" through poetic form may have had a more revolutionary impact in the period than has been often considered. As Du Bois recognized, blacks' attainment and performance of skill in "high" cultural practices often made early twentieth-century whites much more anxious than minstrelsy.⁵⁶

Yet to assess the work of New Negro-era conventional verse only in terms of its relations to white cultural hegemony threatens to reinscribe that hegemony by ignoring this work's value in an African American cultural field formed primarily under conditions of segregation. Rather than simply a means of demonstrating racial achievement to whites, black poets' work in conventional forms may have also served to generate cultural capital among an audience formed by a relatively heterogeneous and shifting set of newly emergent class structures. Willard B. Gatewood's study of the black elite at the turn of the century shows that, while "the person with 'naught but wealth' rarely won admission to high society, those with naught but education, such as honor graduates from well-known colleges and universities, often did. In fact, those with such educational credentials were in large measure responsible for the expansion in the ranks of the aristocracy of color."⁵⁷

Writing conventional verse forms, a skill obtained through higher education and demonstrative of one's cultural achievement, could not only serve to advance the New Negro poet's status among whites and assert a "mastery of form"; it could also advance the poet's status in the historically new formation of a college-educated middle-class black cultural field. As many studies have shown, black intellectuals of the New Negro era saw the mastery of high cultural forms as signs of progress and a new age.⁵⁸ In fact, the mastery of conventional verse forms was often cited as a sign of black modernization and cultural advancement.

Perhaps one of the most emblematic poetic forms of the New Negro era was the sonnet. In both James Weldon Johnson's *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922) and Alain Locke's *The New Negro* (1925), sonnets comprise more than 10 percent of the total poems.⁵⁹ Yet New Negro sonnets have been often cited as examples of the movement's antimodernism or its failure to develop a race-assertive poetics. All three editions of *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* characterize sonnets by McKay, for example, as primarily protest poems whose content—not their form—distinguishes them.⁶⁰ Responses to sonnets in studies of the New Negro era, on the other hand, tend to criticize their limitations, as when Huggins claims that McKay's sonnets fail "to reduce to crystalline purity the emotional center of experience—they are strangled by the arbitrary restraints of form which McKay could not master."⁶¹

The sociocultural and historical struggle to obtain and assert a "mastery of form" in poetics among African American writers and intellectuals of the early twentieth-century is specific to the conditions of black life—yet it is also consistent with broader contests animating the emergence of American modernist poetry. And while the recuperation of black vernacular styles must be recognized as central to American modernism, to limit New Negro poetry to this project implicitly asserts conventional poetic form is the sole province of whites—black poets' modernism is only exhibited in forms racially

498 identifiable to white readers. My claim here is not that New Negro formally conventional verse was necessarily more legitimate; rather I want to suggest how the critical reception of such verse has been racialized in ways that define the object of modernist poetry studies as implicitly the formally innovative work of whites. The “color-blind” articulation of modernist poetics, by failing to account for the social work of conventional verse forms, perpetuates a blindness to New Negro poetry’s modernism.

William Stanley Braithwaite, who saw work in conventional lyric form as a central means of combating racist attitudes, was deeply insulted when a white man dismissed his literary ambitions by telling him, “Young man, it is no disgrace to hoe potatoes.”⁶² And although Booker T. Washington argued that it was foolish for blacks to study Greek while working in the fields, W. E. B. Du Bois saw cultural enrichment as essential to the African American struggle for equality. In one of his most famous passages, Du Bois writes, “I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not.”⁶³ In juxtaposing the image of black field labor with the work of such conventional lyric forms as the sonnet it might be well to consider that while Wordsworth’s “scanty plot of ground” may represent for land-owning whites the idealized English garden, for early twentieth-century African American poets it may signify something like the lost promise of forty acres and a mule.⁶⁴ By interrogating modernist studies as a racial formation we may find ways to rethink the lost promise of modernism’s racially diverse moment.

Notes

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1. David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 269–70.

2. Arnold Rampersad, *I, Too, Sing America*, vol. 1 of *The Life of Langston Hughes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 231; Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 270.

3. Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 270. Also see Mark Royden Winchell, *Where No Flag Flies: Donald Davidson and the Southern Resistance* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 190.

4. I use the term “New Negro” rather than the more often used “Harlem Renaissance” not only to emphasize the transregional character of this period but also to honor Locke’s notion of the “new” in black culture of the early twentieth century and thus underscore my insistence that this historically new productivity in black literature should be viewed as modernist. See Evie Shockley, *Renegade Poetics: Black Aesthetics and Formal Innovation in African American Poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011), 220n6.

5. See especially Aldon Lynn Nielsen, *Reading Race: White American Poets and the Racial Discourse in the Twentieth Century* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), and Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry, 1908–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

6. For examples of this story as one of southern segregationism, see Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 269–70, Rampersad, *I, Too, Sing America*, 231, Winchell, *Where No Flag Flies*, 190–91, and Laurie F. Leach, *Langston Hughes: A Biography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004), 68.

7. For example, the major scholarly literary journals of the 1920s–60s, such as *American Literature*, *PMLA*, and *College English* published no feature articles on the New Negro Renaissance writers or the movement.

8. For recent critiques of modernist periodization, see Susan Stanford Friedman, “Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies,” *Modernism/Modernity* 13, no. 3 (2006): 425–43, and Laura Doyle and Laura A. Winkiel, eds., *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

9. I am drawing on the concept of a cultural field from Pierre Bourdieu: see, for example, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 162–64.

10. See Harlan W. Hamilton, “Current Trends in the English Major,” *College English* 15, no. 6 (1954): 341; see also Alan Golding, *From Outlaw to Classic: Canons in American Poetry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 102–3.

11. See John C. McGalliard, “The Literature ‘Core’ at the State University of Iowa,” *Journal of General Education* 2, no. 3 (1948): 205; see also Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 196–97.

12. See H. Bruce Franklin, *Prison Literature in America: The Victim as Criminal and Artist*, expanded ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), xxvi, and Golding, *From Outlaw to Classic*, 3–40.

13. Quoted in David R. Shumway, *Creating American Civilization: A Genealogy of American Literature as an Academic Discipline* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 188.

14. See Robert E. Morsberger, “Segregated Surveys: American Literature,” *Negro American Literature Forum* 4, no. 1 (1970): 3–8.

15. John Ciardi, foreword to *Mid-Century American Poets*, ed. John Ciardi (New York: Twayne, 1950), xi.

16. *OED Online*, June 2013, s.v., “modernism, n.”

17. Ross Murfin and Supriya M. Ray, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* (Boston: Bedford, 1997), 220–21.

18. “A Brief Guide to Modernism,” www.poets.org, n.d., www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5664.

19. See Joseph Harrington, “Why American Poetry Is Not American Literature,” *American Literary History* 8, no. 3 (1996): 496–515; see also W. B. Carnochan “The English Curriculum: Past and Present,” *PMLA* 115, no. 7 (2000): 1958–60.

20. Everett Emerson, Gary Ashwill, Gordon Hutner, and Thomas H. Schaub, “Literature,” in *The Oxford Companion to United States History*, ed. Paul S. Boyer (Oxford University Press, 2001), 457.

21. Daniel J. Singal, “Modernist Culture,” in *The Oxford Companion to United States History*, 510.

22. Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance*, 30.

23. Nielsen, *Reading Race*, 49–50.

24. North, *Dialect of Modernism*, 128.

25. Mark A. Sanders, “American Modernism and the New Negro Renaissance,” in *The Cambridge Companion to American Modernism*, ed. Walter B. Kalaidjian (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 129. See also Geoffrey Jacques, *A Change in the Weather: Modernist Imagination, African American Imaginary* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), and Kevin Young, *The Grey Album: On the Blackness of Blackness* (Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2012).

26. Quoted in Harrington, “Why American Poetry,” 505.

27. See Richard Dyer, “White,” *Screen* 29, no. 4 (1988): 44–65.

28. In the latest edition of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* (2012), twenty-two poets are featured in the volume covering 1914–45, with six of these being New Negro-era poets, totaling about 27 percent. In *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* (2006), nine African American poets are featured out of the thirty-nine total in the 1910–45 volume, representing about 23 percent. *The Bedford Anthology of American Literature* (2008) features forty-six poets in its post-1865 volume, fourteen of which are African American, equaling about 31 percent. Twenty-nine of the poets in this anthology are included in the pre-1945 section of the volume, with eight of these being African American, representing about 28 percent.

29. Richard Ellman and Robert O'Clair, introduction to *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, 2nd ed., ed. Richard Ellman and Robert O'Clair, 9.

30. Jahan Ramazani, Richard Ellman, and Robert O'Clair, introduction to *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, vol. 1, *Modern Poetry*, 3rd ed., ed. Jahan Ramazani, Richard Ellman, and Robert O'Clair, xxxix, xl.

31. Running a search on the Library of Congress online catalog for books with the subjects "modernism" and "poetry" produced a list of 156 books focused all or in part on American poets. Among these, sixteen books featured one or more chapters on at least one poet of color.

32. Charles Altieri, *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry: The Contemporaneity of Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 6.

33. Joel Nickels, *Poetry of the Possible: Spontaneity, Modernism, and the Multitude* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 44.

34. Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Continuity of American Poetry* (1961, rpt.; Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 256.

35. Lawrence Rainey, introduction to *Modernism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), xxii, xxiii, xxxi.

36. "About," Modernist Studies Association, msa.press.jhu.edu/about/index.html. Also see Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, "The New Modernist Studies," *PMLA* 123, no. 3 (2008): 737–48, as well as Max Brzezinski's critique of this article, "The New Modernist Studies: What's Left of Political Formalism?," *Minnesota Review* 76 (Summer 2011): 109–25.

37. In at least one year's convention—MSA 5 in Birmingham, UK (2003)—none of the titles suggested that a New Negro writer was featured. Some years' conventions featured more than others: the MSA 12 conference in Victoria, BC (2010), had the most, with ten presentations; besides the Birmingham conference, the MSA 7 conference in Chicago (2005) had the least, with just three presentations on New Negro writers. I did not count seminars or roundtables, as paper titles in these sessions are not published in the MSA conference programs; however, most conferences featured at least one seminar on New Negro literature. MSA convention programs are available online at msa.press.jhu.edu/conferences/archive.html.

38. These figures represent only feature articles; they not include review essays, imaginative or primary sources, short responses, or editorial introductions.

39. Mark Whalan, "'Taking Myself in Hand': Jean Toomer and Physical Culture," *Modernism/Modernity* 10, no. 4 (2003): 597–615; Leah Rosenberg, "Caribbean Models for Modernism in the Work of Claude McKay and Jean Rhys," *Modernism/Modernity* 11, no. 2 (2004): 219–38; Jane Kuenz, "Modernism, Mass Culture, and the Harlem Renaissance: The Case of Countee Cullen," *Modernism/Modernity* 14, no. 3 (2007): 505–15; Katherine R. Lynes, "'A real honest-to-cripe jungle': Contested Authenticities in Helene Johnson's 'Bottled,'" *Modernism/Modernity* 14, no. 3 (2007): 517–25. These represent the total feature articles whose titles reference New Negro poets and poetry published between volume 1 (1994) and volume 20 (2013). I should note that there were some articles that addressed New Negro poetry more broadly under the rubrics of other topics; but these are the only articles whose titles clearly indicate a focus on New Negro poetry.

40. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1986), 55, 67.

41. See, for example, Eugenia Shanklin, "The Profession of the Color Blind: Sociocultural Anthropology and Racism in the 21st Century," *American Anthropologist*, n.s., 100, no. 3 (1998): 669–79. Also see Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's "History of Sexuality" and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995).

42. Peggy Pascoe, "Miscegenation Law, Court Cases, and Ideologies of 'Race' in Twentieth-Century America," *Journal of American History* 83, no. 1 (1996): 53, 48.

43. See Robert Hillyer, "Treason's Strange Fruit," *Saturday Review of Literature*, June 11, 1949, 28, and Robert Hillyer, "Poetry's New Priesthood," *Saturday Review of Literature*, June 18, 1949, 38. Also see Harrison Smith and Norman Cousins, "Ezra Pound and the Bollingen Award," *Saturday Review of Literature*, June 11, 1949, 20–21. For an overview of the controversy, see Karen Leick, "Ezra Pound v. *The Saturday Review of Literature*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 25, no. 2 (2001–02): 19–37.

44. Quoted in Leick, "Ezra Pound," 24.
45. Quoted in Leick, "Ezra Pound," 23.
46. Allen Tate, "Ezra Pound and the Bollingen Prize," *Ezra Pound Perspectives: Essays in Honor of His Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Noel Stock (Chicago: Regnery, 1965), 86–89, emphasis added.
47. Rolfe Humphries, "Bronzeville," review of *A Street in Bronzeville*, by Gwendolyn Brooks, *New York Times Book Review*, November 4, 1945, 14.
48. Hubert Creekmore, "Two Rewarding Volumes of Verse," review of *One-Way Ticket* by Langston Hughes and *The Poetry of the Negro*, ed. Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes, *New York Times Book Review*, January 30, 1949, 19.
49. Charles I. Glicksberg, "Negro Poets and the American Tradition," *Antioch Review* 6, no. 2 (1946): 246, 253.
50. Allen Tate, preface to *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia*, by Melvin B. Tolson (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1953, 1970), 10–12.
51. John S. Lash, "On Negro Literature," *Phylon* 6, no. 3 (1945): 245.
52. Gary Smith, "The Black Protest Sonnet," *American Poetry* 2, no. 1 (1984): 2.
53. Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," *Nation*, June 23, 1926, 692. Similar criticism of conventional verse form in New Negro poetry as racially inauthentic has characterized most post-'60s African American assessments of the era. See James Emanuel, "Renaissance Sonneteers," *Black World*, September 1975, 32–45, 92–97, and Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).
54. Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, updated ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 209.
55. Houston Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 86–87.
56. See, for example, W. E. B. Du Bois, "Criteria of Negro Art," *Crisis* 32, no. 6 (1926): 290–97.
57. Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880–1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 11, 247.
58. Nathan Huggins, for example, points out that "most Harlem intellectuals aspired to *high* culture as opposed to that of the common man. . . . [S]uch achievement, because it was elite in character, was a source of race pride and an argument against continued discrimination" (*Harlem Renaissance*, 5–6, emphasis in original).
59. Both collections feature a range of poetry in conventional forms, with variations on ballad stanza being the most prevalent. Sonnets do not comprise the majority of conventional forms deployed, but my argument has to do with the perception of the sonnet form in modernist poetry studies.
60. To reiterate, the editors of the anthology claim that New Negro poets "sought revitalization by content rather than form" (*Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, 2nd ed., 9).
61. Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 220.
62. Edward Everett Hale, quoted in Lisa Szefer, "Encouraging Verse: William S. Braithwaite and the Poetics of Race," *New England Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (2001): 38.
63. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; rpt., New York: Vintage/Library of America, 1990), 82.
64. This phrase comes from Wordsworth's "Nuns Fret Not at Their Convent's Narrow Room": "And hence for me, / In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound / Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground" (*English Romantic Writers*, ed. David Perkins [New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1967], 290, ll. 9–11).