

Ramón E. Soto-Crespo. *The White Trash Menace and Hemispheric Fiction.* Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2020. 212 pages. EISBN: 978-0814277621.

Soto-Crespo's book discusses white trash as both a literary genre and figuration in the United States and the rest of the Western hemisphere, especially the Caribbean. The author remarks that "[w]hite trash is a stigmatype that is generally understood to refer to impoverished whites in the US" (3), but his scrutiny is not confined to geographical borders or individual identities. Instead, Soto-Crespo mobilizes the concept by showing how white trash fictions and their characters travel to and from the US and the circum-Caribbean in a vast catalogue of texts ranging from Faulkner to popular romance fiction in the twentieth century. The main argument is clear: the racialized category of financially inferior white trash figures powerfully in fiction canonical and popular across the Anglophone global south. The cultural concept of white underclass circulates in this minutely researched study across a massive corpus of fiction in a multi-island or archipelagic American Studies approach, which shows how one carefully and well-developed concept can carry a whole book. Furthermore, the different shades of whiteness emerging from this study of decapitalized white subjectivity, like other critical whiteness studies, may serve the political purpose of disabling the use of whiteness as a category of dominance at a time when such tools are very much needed (a motivation only discreetly disclosed in a footnote on page 8).

The book is divided into four main chapters, of which the first shows how William Faulkner's white trash characters function as important precursors to white trash subjects emerging in postwar fiction in the Caribbean. As Soto-Crespo explains, some of Faulkner's poor white trash characters travel to the Caribbean in an attempt to transcend their financially inferior racial status. Setting oneself up as a plantation owner or overseer provided an opportunity to do so but with varying degrees of success: what was undertaken by Brits a century earlier was not necessarily achievable for their US counterparts, like Faulkner's Sutpen in his 1936 novel, *Absalom, Absalom!*. The cycle of poverty is hard to break and the white trash social status tends to remain static despite the opportunities offered by the Caribbean plantocracy's flexibility compared to the US South.

The second chapter probes the curious genre of post-war pulp fiction recounting plantation family sagas, once again signaling how indebted the

Atlantic world remains to the Caribbean in its relentless search for literary inspiration. White skin in plantocracy was a sign of privilege, yet this notion is challenged in the commodity genre of historical plantation fiction, where dynasties are dying and whiteness becomes challenged due to the mass boom in paperback writing allowing experimentation with unexpected literary elements. Popular from roughly the 1950s to the early 1980s, this genre deals with dislocated, decapitalized white subjects made trash by their fall from social privilege at the end of slavery. The most famous example of these novels might be Kyle Onstott's *Mandingo* (1957), as its 1975 film adaptation became a controversial box office success in no small part due to its brutal ending, where the slave owner Hammond kills his slave Ganymede by both shooting and drowning him in boiling water. The writer argues that the emergence of this trashy genre nevertheless helped pave the way for masterpieces, such as Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, as the plantation sagas' post-emancipation context created a paradigm for anti-foundationalist fiction in an era where nation-building projects were very much the norm in Caribbean literature and other arts.

The third chapter looks at the various metaphors, such as the "white cockroach" or the "white nigger", used to represent white trash. The backbone of this chapter's material logically follows the previous one, which touched upon the fiction of Jean Rhys. Soto-Crespo argues that Rhys' metaphor of the "white cockroach" is seminal to a genealogy of white trash and a body of canonical Caribbean literature by authors like Caryl Phillips and Rosario Ferré. The novelty of this chapter lies in its consideration of these authors' works (including some non-fiction material) through whiteness as a racialized class category: The bulk of research on canonical Caribbean literature has, understandably, been more invested in questions of gender, sexuality, and (non-white) race than whiteness and poverty as class devaluation. The idea of white trash as a despised form of subjectivity is fascinating in this frame, as it reveals the "many shades of Caribbean whiteness" (127).

In the final chapter, Soto-Crespo focuses on popular historical romances set in the Leeward Caribbean (the island chain east of Puerto Rico), where the figure of the indentured (read: kidnapped) white servant, the disguised nobleman, was often used in romance narratives of the 1960s and the 1970s onwards. These texts emerged in a stark contrast to their contemporary writers' (such as Merle Hodge) nationalist and socially conscious focus of developing a specifically (Afro-)Caribbean mode of expression. These paperbacks, instead, were all about white trash subjects wrongfully thrown

into turmoil in the smaller archipelago. By way of their trope-like existence in this genre of literature, the figure of the decapitalized white lord or lady shows how deep the networks and links between the hemispheres are and how they circulate throughout the post-independence decades all over the wider Caribbean. Furthermore, the chapter's conclusion aptly calls for a flexible view of literary history, which emphasizes connections between the Americas and the Caribbean through a hemispheric understanding of white trash subjects roaming those areas in the past and the present.

The book ends in a postscript with thirteen concluding tenets on white trash should one have missed its main arguments (which is doubtful). This is a textbook example of lucid academic writing: the book takes the reader by the hand and carefully leads them through its argumentation. The vast archive of white trash as collected by the author becomes elegantly elucidated as its own, distinct, analytical category well worth pursuing. Furthermore, the writer does credit to the unknown "trash writers" in his corpus, whose bio-bibliographies are appended at the end of the book in an effort to once again highlight the main point: Trash is a productive notion circulating across the Americas and its literary production.

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Roy Morris Jr. *Gertrude Stein Has Arrived: The Homecoming of a Literary Legend*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019. 252 pages. ISBN: 978-4214-3153-6.

Gertrude Stein stands as a contradictory if not controversial figure in American literary history, a figure repeatedly biographized and whose private life and personality often overshadow her writing. Roy Morris Jr.'s *Gertrude Stein Has Arrived* contributes to the archive of Stein scholarship by simultaneously presenting a story of Gertrude Stein re-discovering her home country and constructing an historical account of a literary work—*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (first published in 1933).

Although the biography contributes to the construction of Stein as an icon or public personality, rather than to literary scholarship on her works, *Gertrude Stein Has Arrived* differs from other luminous biographies such as a Linda Wagner-Martin's *Favored Strangers*: *Gertrude Stein and Her*