Book Reviews

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Lucas A. Dietrich. *Writing Across the Color Line: U.S. Print Culture and the Rise of Ethnic Literature, 1877–1920*. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2020. Paper, 199 p. $26.95. ISBN: 978-1-62534-487-8.

Dietrich's *Writing Across the Color Line* is one of the most recent titles from the University of Massachusetts Press' *Studies in Print Culture and the History of the Book* series. Employing archival research to historicize the first major period of publication of "ethnic authors [by] well-known trade publishers" (3), *Writing Across the Color Line* explores the networks between publisher and book, editor and author, and critic and reviewer. In five case studies presented across four chapters, Dietrich argues that the authors he discusses used their national platform to subvert stereotypes and racist uses of realism, regionalism, caricature, dialect, and other literary devices through satire, metacriticism, paratext, and direct critique. As Dietrich explains, these writers were engaged in antiracist writing, seeking to challenge the latent and overt racism of a national audience of white readers. Dietrich's conclusion, while unsurprising, is disappointing: despite the efforts of these authors and their editors and presses, white readers rejected the antiracist content of these books by either misinterpreting them or by refusing the purchase the books. Still, Dietrich argues provocatively, in a period where there had been no national conversation about antiracism published by major trade publishers, even rejection was a significant step forward. *Writing Across the Color Line* is an important contribution to the ongoing scholarly conversation around race, publishing, and archives.

Dietrich selects authors whose racial and ethnic identities, publishers, genres, and levels of contemporary popularity, notoriety, or obscurity help provide a wide view of publication and readership trends during this period, making his argument about patterns in antiracist writing, publication, and readership at the turn of the century convincing. The racial and ethnic identities of these writers were often part of the marketing of their books, as he shows. The color line can be crossed strategically by adopting a pen name (for instance, Chinese American Edith Eaton published under the name Sin Sui Far and Irish American Peter Dunne added "Finley" to his name to emphasize his Irishness) or by racial passing (as Charles Chesnutt did initially), eroding its potency.

One of the most important contributions of *Writing Across the Color Line* is the way in which it demonstrates how negotiating identity was an important part of the relationship between author and editor. Some authors worked closely with their editors and publishers to develop the paratexts and marketing of their books, as did Charles W. Chesnutt, the first African American author published by Houghton Mifflin. Through paratextual analysis, Dietrich demonstrates that the material and commercial conditions of his books were as important to Chesnutt as their contents, by showing that "Chesnutt worked with Houghton Mifflin to negotiate how his work would be manufactured and advertised, where it would be distributed, and the extent to which his racial background would be known to readers" (47). When Chesnutt revealed his status as an African American man through paratextual materials for *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), the book garnered the ire of critics and performed poorly in sales, ultimately ending his relationship with Houghton Mifflin. Other authors, like W.E.B. Du Bois, were sought out by their editor for publication, in this case Francis G. Browne of A. C. McClurg and Company. Similar to his approach to Chesnutt's work, Dietrich analyzes paratextual details to describe the first year of publication of Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), arguing that its paratexts "reappropriated benevolent fascinations with the racial other in an effort to lure the reader deeper within the veil of black experience" (118). Dietrich argues that white readers missed Du Bois's argument, but this meant his book sold, unlike Chesnutt's. By way of contrast, Dietrich argues that Browne also played a pivotal role in the publication of Edith Eaton/Sin Sui Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912), although in this case, Far's antiracist message was not commercially viable and the book quickly fell out of print, not to be recovered until the 1980s.

The road to publication can take many forms, and in a particularly interesting case study, Dietrich examines María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, the first Mexican American novelist to be published in English, who commissioned J.B. Lippincott, then the nation's largest book distributor, to publish her sensationalist novel *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872). Dietrich outlines a history of the novel's publication, sales, and

cost through research in the Lippincott archives, thought to have been destroyed in a building fire in 1899. The archives were recovered in 1999 and processed in 2016, making Dietrich one of the first scholars to study them. Ruiz de Burton's impact, however, was limited by the fact that *Who Would Have Thought It?* received poor reviews and did not sell well, and has only recently been recovered. In contrast, second-generation Irish American Finley Peter Dunne was the most commercially successful of the five authors considered. Dunne's syndicated Mr. Dooley newspaper columns (collected and published in book format in 1899), satirical depictions of South Side Chicago life written in the Irish vernacular, were "a metacritique of the genre" (94). Unlike Ruiz de Burton and Chesnutt, Dunne's ethnic otherness was a benefit—unsurprisingly, as Irish ethnicity would soon cross the color line and be understood as white in the national consciousness.

In its methodology, this book grapples with the problem of archival excess: how does a researcher make sense of voluminous business records, or materials not directly related to literary study? What are the benefits for literary study of a book history perspective, and vice versa? How can the archives present vital new perspectives and confront limiting narratives about literary and book history? A major strength of the book is Dietrich's archival research and use of publishers' archives, which are often overlooked as important sources. In describing the social history of a book through the archives, from the relationship between author and publisher, to how the book was marketed, distributed, and sold, to its reception by critics and general readers, Dietrich is able to show the kinds of conversations about race, identity, and nation that were happening (and that were stifled) around turn of the century BIPOC writing. He looks at correspondence between authors and editors, as well as more peripheral archival materials like ledgers detailing expenses, royalties, sales, and other financial and budgetary information. This archival focus allows him to make novel claims about the contributions of editors to this work—labor that is often overlooked in scholarship. For instance, Dietrich argues that *The Souls of Black Folk* "was an experimental project for both the author *and* publisher as they sought strategies to popularize Du Bois's sociological essays" (129).

Dietrich also confronts the problem of archival silences: while the final chapter uses the archives for McClurg and Company, its plentiful resources on Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk* are not matched by those on the publication history of Sui Sin Far's *Mrs. Spring Fragrance*, which, Dietrich admits, are virtually nonexistent, limiting the scope of his claims. Likewise, the Lippincott archives do not reveal the relationship between Ruiz de Burton and the publisher, nor why the book was selected for publication, but Dietrich creatively uses business records to reconstruct the social history of its publication. In another archival gap, Dietrich relies on published reviews to extrapolate the readership and reception of these books, but the lack of reader

responses and allowing the critic to stand in for the average reader is unsatisfying.

Most of the books discussed in *Writing Across the Color Line* had fallen out of print shortly after publication and have been rediscovered by scholars in the last 30 or 40 years, and the book opens up many questions for future scholars about the full possibilities and interpretations of paratextual and archival analysis. This book has been supported by the University of New Hampshire, the Northeast Modern Language Institute, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and portions have been published in *MELUS, Book History,* and *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*. Book history has traditionally under-studied BIPOC publishing history, and one hopes that projects like *Writing Across the Color Line* continue to receive institutional and publication support to address this gap. The book joins other recent scholarship and editorial projects, as well as work by curators, librarians, archivists, and other cultural heritage professionals working to amplify BIPOC voices in literary study and book history, and in our museums, libraries, and archives. Situating its argument more strongly within the larger context of this existing work, and answering more precisely the question of what were the wider results of the publication projects undertaken by these pioneering authors and editors on the later history of twentieth-century American book history and literature, would have made for a more satisfying conclusion.

While the primary readership of this book will be scholars of turn of the century literature and book history, *Writing Across the Color Line* shows cultural heritage professionals some of the ways in which the materials in our collections benefits research and addresses gaps in the scholarly record. It shows us materials that we and the scholars who use our collections might not think to consult, allowing us to provide better research services. In directing its attention to the ephemeral, understudied corners of collections, this book shifts our focus, helping us reevaluate what is important in our collections, and therefore what might be worth prioritizing for processing, acquisitions, or outreach. —*Alison Fraser, the Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, University at Buffalo*

Ballantyne, Tony, Lachy Paterson, and Angela Wanhalla, eds. *Indigenous Textual Cultures: Reading and Writing in the Age of Global Empire*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2020. Paperback, 368 p. $28.95 (978-1-4780-1081-4); cloth, $104.95 (978-1-4780-0976-4).

Indigenous Textual Cultures is a cohesive, well-edited collection of twelve articles written by an international community of experts in indigenous cultures and colonialism. Its geographic scope includes indigenous cultures from Australasia, North America, and the Pacific and is further enhanced with the inclusion of Africa, which has not received the same attention as recent work on indigenous