

# Crossroads Modernism: Descent And Emergence In African-American Literary Culture

Edward M. Pavlic



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In the African-American encounter with modernism, all was not confrontation. Rather, as Edward M. Pavli'c demonstrates here, African-American artists negotiated the intersection of high modernism in Europe and American discourse to fashion their own distinctive response to American modernity. A deft repositioning of black literature and culture, Pavli'c's book re-envisions the potentials and dilemmas where the different traditions of modernism meet and firmly establishes African-American modernism at this cultural crossroads.

Offering new insights into the work of a variety of African-American artists-including Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, Robert Hayden, David Bradley, Yusef Komunyakaa, Romare Bearden, and John Coltrane-Pavli´c explores the complex ways in which key modernist philosophical ideas and creative techniques have informed black culture. Crossroads Modernism also provides an in-depth look at how West African cultural legacies are brought to bear in the structure of a truly African-American Modernist creative process. The book brings to light two interrelated strains of black modernism: Afro-Modernism, which employs established modernist concerns and conceits to illuminate internal and psychological experience; and Diasporic Modernism, which places greater emphasis on shared cultural space and builds upon traditions rooted in West African cultures.

Whereas much has been said about the (generally racist) use of "blackness" in constituting modernism, Crossroads Modernism is the first book to expose the key role that modernism has played in the constitution of "blackness" in African-American aesthetics. In light of this work, canonical texts in African-American literature can no longer be read as devoid of their own singular contribution to international modernism.

Edward M. Pavli'c is assistant professor of English and Africana Studies at Union College in Schenectady, New York. His book of poems, Paraph of Bone & Other Kinds of Blue (2001) was selected by Adrienne Rich for the American Poetry Review/Honickman First Book Prize.

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