



Richard Bruce Nugent's "Smoke, Lilies and Jade": The Relation to the Oscar Wilde Tradition and its Significance for "Fire!!"

Christoph Ruffing

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Seminar paper from the year 2006 in the subject American Studies - Literature, grade: 13, Saarland University (Philosophische Fakultät II: Fachrichtung 4.3. :Anglistik, Amerikanistik und Anglophone Kulturen), course: Proseminar "Harlem Renaissance", 14 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: Langston Hughes, probably the most famous of all Harlem Renaissance writers, played an very important role in Richard Bruce Nugent's life, especially in regard to his career as an artist. He introduced him to Harlem's artistic circles; through Hughes, Nugent made acquaintance with many contemporary luminaries, was introduced to the movement's elite (Wirth, 4). Hughes, amongst others, an temporary inhabitant of "Niggeratti manor" and also directly involved in the creation of Fire!!, made the following remark about the Niggeratti's landmark publication (Wirth, 15):

None of the older Negro intellectuals would have anything to do with Fire [sic]. Dr. Du Bois in the Crisis roasted it. The negro press called it all sorts of bad names, largely because of a green and purple story by Bruce Nugent, in the Oscar Wilde tradition, which we had included. (Wirth, 83, emphasis added)

Hughes quintessential statement about Fire!! clearly places the responsibility for the reception of the magazine on Nugent. But did Fire!!/Smoke, Lilies and Jade really have such a negative impact on the black community? Is it due to the fact, that Nugent's short story stands in the Oscar Wilde tradition? In how far does it actually stand in the Oscar Wilde tradition? In order to fully comprehend the statement by Hughes, these questions need to be answered. Thus, I will point out the consequences of the publication of Fire!! with special regard to Nugent's short story. In doing so, I will arrange the paper starting from the quotation above. Hence, I will first explain the components of the quote, meaning to give an definition of the Oscar Wilde tradition, as well as some background information and contextualizaing Fire!!; moreover a live and work account on Richard Bruce Nugent, limited to the information that is necessary for the scope of this paper. Having established this information, I will return to the quote again and discuss the literary influence on and the significance of Smoke, Liles and Jade, as well as the reception of Fire!! and Smoke,Lilies and Jade in relation to the results obtained by analyzing the short story.

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