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Review of *Imagining the primitive in naturalist and modernist literature* by Gina M. Rossetti

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Humanities

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Rossetti, Gina M. **Imagining the primitive in naturalist and modernist literature.** Missouri, 2006. 196p bibl index afp ISBN 0826216250, $37.50

Rossetti (St. Xavier Univ.) argues that representations of characters as "primitives" in late-19th- and early-20th-century literary texts served to "limn the boundaries of American identity." Much like Walter Benn Michaels in *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (CH, Mar'96, 33-3775), she focuses primarily on ways that literary representations seek to constitute the national family as white in the face of increasing numbers of ethnic and racial Others. Rossetti brings an interesting set of nonliterary texts to this conversation, namely writings by late-19th- and early-20th-century sociologists and other cultural analysts, and the juxtapositions these provide allow interesting readings of such authors as Norris, Dreiser, O'Neill, Eliot, Cather, and Fauset. However, the author's broader claims—about how attention to the primitive breaks down artificial boundaries between naturalism and modernism as literary movements—are weak and poorly conceptualized, and her engagements with published criticism on the authors she labels as "modernist" are sometimes exceedingly thin. The writing is clear and accessible, for the most part, but Rossetti sometimes brings in theoretical terminology without explanation or contextualization. **Summing Up:** Recommended. Upper-division undergraduates through faculty.—*M. J. Homestead, University of Nebraska—Lincoln*

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