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## ERIC WALROND

### Art and Propaganda (1921)

Ernest Boyd in the *Literary Review* criticizes the judges who awarded the coveted "Prix Goncourt" to Rene Marin, the Martiniquan Negro, whose "Batouala" they adjudged the best French novel of the year. Tied to the conventions of literature, Boyd found too many African words in the book; it is replete with crotchets and quavers and demisemiquavers. Ignoring the rules of rhetoric, the author plunges along at a desperate rate, forgetful of the landmarks of style, form, clarity. With all these things Mr. Boyd finds fault. Also, he sniffs at the introduction to the work, which is a carping, merciless indictment of the brutal colonial system of France. As far as Mr. Boyd can see, what on earth has all this to do with a work of art, a penetrating study of a savage chieftain? Incidentally, Mr. James Weldon Johnson throws a ray of light on the subject. Mr. Johnson tells us there is a tendency on the part of Negro poets to be propagandic. For this reason it is going to be

very difficult for the American Negro poet to create a lasting work of art. He must first purge himself of the feelings and sufferings and emotions of an outraged being, and think and write along colorless sectionless lines. Hate, rancor, vituperation—all these things he must cleanse himself of. But is this possible? The Negro, for centuries to come, will never be able to divorce himself from the feeling that he has not had a square deal from the rest of mankind. His music is a piercing, yelping cry against his cruel enslavement. What little he has accomplished in the field of literature is confined to the life he knows best—the life of the underdog in revolt. So far he has ignored the most potent form of literary expression, the form that brought Marin the Goncourt award. When he does take it up, it is not going to be in any half-hearted, wishy washy manner, but straight from the shoulder, slashing, murdering, disemboweling! In the manner of H. L. Mencken!