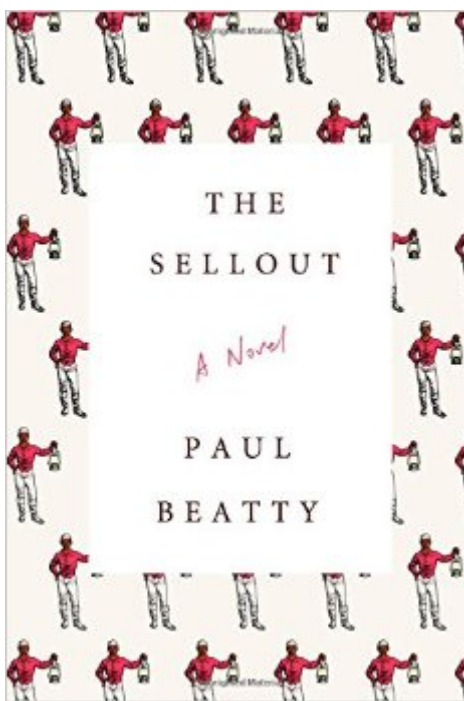


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The Sellout: A Novel



Synopsis

Winner of the 2015 National Book Critics Circle Award in Fiction Named one of the best books of 2015 by The New York Times Book Review and the Wall Street Journal A biting satire about a young man's isolated upbringing and the race trial that sends him to the Supreme Court, Paul Beatty's *The Sellout* showcases a comic genius at the top of his game. It challenges the sacred tenets of the United States Constitution, urban life, the civil rights movement, the father-son relationship, and the holy grail of racial equality •the black Chinese restaurant. Born in the "agrarian ghetto" of Dickens •on the southern outskirts of Los Angeles •the narrator of *The Sellout* resigns himself to the fate of lower-middle-class Californians: "I'd die in the same bedroom I'd grown up in, looking up at the cracks in the stucco ceiling that've been there since '68 quake." Raised by a single father, a controversial sociologist, he spent his childhood as the subject in racially charged psychological studies. He is led to believe that his father's pioneering work will result in a memoir that will solve his family's financial woes. But when his father is killed in a police shoot-out, he realizes there never was a memoir. All that's left is the bill for a drive-thru funeral. Fueled by this deceit and the general disrepair of his hometown, the narrator sets out to right another wrong: Dickens has literally been removed from the map to save California from further embarrassment. Enlisting the help of the town's most famous resident •the last surviving Little Rascal, Hominy Jenkins •he initiates the most outrageous action conceivable: reinstating slavery and segregating the local high school, which lands him in the Supreme Court.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Who writes like this? I asked myself, having been overwhelmed with satiric jabs after about 25 densely written pages. Ishmael Reed? And then why compare Beatty only to another black writer? Was that racist? Woody Allen wrote this densely, stories full of caricatures and outrageous situations, but New-York-Jewish in subject, and then only a few pages long, not an entire novel. Surely Beatty couldn't keep it up. But by page 227 his comic inventions were still going strong. Here the protagonist converts the "long out-of-business brushless car wash" in his L.A. ghetto into a "tunnel of whiteness" for the local children, with "several race wash options:" Regular Whiteness: Benefit of the Doubt Higher Life Expectancy Lower Insurance Premiums Deluxe Whiteness: Regular Whiteness Plus Warnings instead of Arrests from the Police Decent Seats at Concerts and Sporting Events World Revolves Around You and Your Concerns Super Deluxe Whiteness: Deluxe Whiteness Plus Jobs with Annual Bonuses Military Service Is for Suckers Legacy Admission to College of Your Choice Therapists That Listen Boats That You Never Use All Vices and Bad Habits Referred to as "Phases" Not Responsible for Scratches, Dents, and Items Left in the Subconscious

By "dense," I mean that almost every sentence contains a comic explosion, a twist, something that leaves you breathless or laughing out loud. Who does that? I thought of Barry Hannah, a Southern writer now gone. I think Hannah would have admired Beatty and recognized a literary kinsman.

Beatty explores what it's like to be black in "postracial" America with searing, acerbic, ceaseless, absurdist humor, and by turning the tables on bigotry by having the main characters, Me (or Bonbon) and Hominy Jenkins bring back slavery and discrimination and argue for them before the Supreme Court. This is not a novel as most understand the form. It is more of a long standup routine that rains down on you for a couple of hours, comprised of riffs on films, culture, psychology, gangs, territories, education, and Me's passion, horticulture in an urban desert. The storyline, which surfaces for sustaining air periodically, is the one line from my opening, an apparently absurd idea that illustrates how absurd what engenders it really is. Okay, so what kind of reading experience is *The Sellout*: A Novel? The best way to describe it, apart from imagining yourself at a meeting of the Dum Dum Donut Intellectuals (founded by Me's psychologist father, deceased but impossible for Me to forget, gunned down by police in the street) in which Me finally arouses himself enough to fire off his riff, like the black comedian who brings life to the club on the cusp of its demise. Or, view a few Diego Rivera murals of culture, oppression, history, and revolution to get a sense of how the frequent digressions mesh to paint a picture. Or, reach further back into art history and study Hieronymus Bosch's famous triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, depicting the delights (what's

beyond the barrio of Dickens) to the hell in places like Dickens.

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